

# “Vocables, Still Vocables”: Linguistic and Religious Despair in Thomas Carlyle’s *Latter-Day Pamphlets*

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Reading Thomas Carlyle’s *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850) is hard, distasteful even, especially for readers persuaded of the deep, complex humanity of *Sartor Resartus* (1833–34), *The French Revolution* (1837), and *Past and Present* (1843). Carlyle in his works of the 1830s and early 1840s could be impatient and irascible: he never suffered fools gladly. But *Latter-Day Pamphlets* is different—vehement but not ebullient, vituperative but not corrective, strident but not persuasive. As Chris Vanden Bossche and others have observed, with the serial publication of the eight pamphlets in the winter, spring, and summer of 1850, Carlyle managed to shock and offend nearly everyone; indeed, Carlyle seemed willing and even eager to alienate his readers if he could not persuade them to accept his positions on democracy, Ireland, Jamaica, the state of the world at large (130–31, 140–41).<sup>1</sup> “By way of finish to this offensive and alarming set of Pamphlets,” Carlyle announces (with seemingly equal measures of pride and belligerence) at the outset of “Jesuitism,” “I have still one crowning offence and alarm to try if I can give” (295)—and give it he did. Selective reading of Carlyle’s earlier

<sup>1</sup>Fred Kaplan (354), Jules P. Seigel (“Latter-Day” 271), and Mark Cumming (273) also argue this point.

prose had allowed his readers to construct the man each of them wanted: Carlyle the Radical; Carlyle the compassionate Conservative, the Tory with a heart; Carlyle the friend of Irish nationalism and English labor; even (though with more difficulty) Carlyle the Liberal. *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, following closely the publication of “The Negro Question” (retitled *The Nigger Question* in 1853 in an attempt to be more offensive still), revealed what seemed to be a different man altogether. Most of Carlyle’s contemporaries noted, and many deplored, the violent shift in tone and meaning that they perceived in these polemics. Even sympathetic critics at the time puzzled over the transformation, wondering why? and how?

Almost thirty years ago Michael Goldberg asked that these questions be reopened, unwilling to accept the judgment of Carlyle’s first readers that the pamphlets in fact marked a stark transformation of Carlyle’s opinions or style. In his essay Goldberg argues with some justice that the reaction of contemporary readers was extreme and in at least two ways mistaken: first, the views expressed in *Latter-Day Pamphlets* were not an abrupt break with the past but had been adumbrated, and in some instances openly expressed, in Carlyle’s earlier works; and second, despite the desire on the part of many to find a way to explain away Carlyle’s intemperance, the pamphlets were not composed in great haste, did not bear the marks of botched artistry.

Goldberg is right, of course. Even a casual acquaintance with Carlyle’s works of the 1820s and 1830s reveals substantial continuity in theme between them and *Latter-Day Pamphlets*; and familiarity with Carlyle’s letters and notebooks makes one doubt the claim that the composition of the *Pamphlets* was exceptionally hectic or traumatic: Carlyle was *always* writing in haste, always struggling—and (in his own mind, at least) always failing, to greater or lesser degree—to mold language to his purpose. Goldberg rightly disabuses one of explanations that effectively sweep the scandal of the *Pamphlets* under the rug—for example, that private emotional or physical torments twist Carlyle’s prose, or that Carlyle’s rage at contemporary events outstrips the artistry necessary to transmute his thought and experience into literature (133–34). And Goldberg’s discussion allows one to dismiss H. D. Traill’s damning but

ultimately unhelpful description of *Latter-Day Pamphlets* as “journalism—that and nothing else: glorified journalism if we like, but bearing such traces of their originating spirit as no drapery of imagination or rhetoric or humour can altogether conceal” (Introduction vii)—as if that description sufficiently differentiates *Latter-Day Pamphlets* from *Chartism* (1839) or *Past and Present*, both of which can with equal justice be described as “glorified journalism.” But there Goldberg leaves one, certain that “in many ways the *Latter-Day Pamphlets* are the Carlyle problem,” certain that they “deserve a fate better than simple hostility or indifference” (147); the scope of his reception history does not allow a close analysis of this sequence of troubling pamphlets that Carlyle more than once referred to—in an ironic homage to William Cobbett—as his “Twopenny Trash” (see, for example, *Collected Letters* 23:136–37). Not surprisingly, given the absence of other explanations, speculations about Carlyle’s rage and unhappiness are still presented as if they explained the book: Fred Kaplan, in his 1983 biography of Carlyle, asserts that the “crucial failure” of the *Latter-Day Pamphlets* “is not that of substance but of literary form. . . . Carlyle’s anger overwhelmed his artistry” (356).

Despite the continuities in subject matter that Goldberg and others have perceived between *Latter-Day Pamphlets* and Carlyle’s earlier work, many critics agree with those of Carlyle’s contemporaries who sensed in the pamphlets a new, worrisome, even appalling phenomenon, but not because they represent merely an innovation in style, a ratcheting-up of rhetorical intensity and offensiveness, as if for Carlyle it were ever possible to separate that which he says from the language which bodies it forth. Vanden Bossche rightly links rhetorical and stylistic changes in *Latter-Day Pamphlets* to particular ideological shifts—for example, Carlyle’s loss of sympathy for the working classes and the poor at the close of the 1840s. But such local shifts in Carlyle’s thinking do not in themselves sufficiently account for the offensiveness of the book. The harshness of *Latter-Day Pamphlets* may express itself through style and ideological statement, but it is grounded in an important metaphysical and epistemological shift that has been insufficiently explored.

To explain: as is well-known to readers of *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle as a young man lost his traditional faith in orthodox Christianity. Though he could respect the “old clothes” of the Hebrew and Christian *mythos*, he could not believe in their literal truth. But Carlyle never lost his be-

lief—more accurately, his *desire* for belief—in an ontological certainty that stands outside time and place. Carlyle’s powerful desire for firm ontological foundations, his need for a divine order that imbues the phenomenal world with meaning, coexisted awkwardly with a skeptical, rationalist temperament that refused the easy consolations of fable. Tormented by a desire for certainty and by an equally strong inability ever to find it, Carlyle developed a rich, complex, unsettled attitude toward the mysteries of human existence, a stance that places him in the company of such thinkers and writers as Søren Kierkegaard, George Eliot, Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche. With some justice, and with a nod to Jacques Derrida, one can describe Carlyle as a skeptic driven to unravel—to deconstruct—the self-contradictions of tattered belief systems, only to discover that he could not do entirely without the solace of metaphysics. And so in the 1820s and early 1830s, out of an intense psychic conflict that is dramatized in *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle constructed a self and a means of situating that self in a world of contingency and contradiction. Like his fictional spokesman Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, Carlyle stood up and rejected the “Everlasting Nay” by means of will alone and affirmed a belief in an orderly, meaningful world.

The act of affirming the existence of order and meaning, however, given the lack of unassailable evidence for such a belief, entangled Carlyle in a never-ending attempt to shadow forth in language what he knew he could never grasp but only glimpse by fits and starts. The very necessity of voicing affirmation *in language* is, as Carlyle knew, deeply unsatisfying to one who seeks certainty: the very nature of a system of signs is to point toward something that is not and cannot be fully present. No matter how many times Carlyle asserted the existence of universal meaning, he could never get behind or beyond language to the thing itself. He could never know, finally, whether he *discovered* an order that existed independently of him or whether he *constructed* the patterns on which he relied as a guarantor of meaning and purpose. For Carlyle, the difference was important. Like the chaplain in Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* (1961), Carlyle “was perspiringly in the epistemological dilemma of the skeptic, unable to accept solu-

tions to problems he was unwilling to dismiss as unsolvable. He was never without misery, and never without hope” (275).

What makes Carlyle of lasting interest—and what, in retrospect, accounts in large part for his cultural significance in nineteenth-century Britain—is the richly inventive linguistic and rhetorical means he devised, the epistemological sleight-of-hand he performed, to satisfy his need to affirm without at the same time outraging his skeptical intelligence. In the course of his career, Carlyle employed a number of strategies to help him poise these conflicting impulses. Like Dostoevsky after him, Carlyle dramatized but did not resolve the tensions of his own mind by poisoning disparate characters and voices in his narratives, most famously *Teufelsdröckh* and the *English Editor*. *Sartor Resartus*, *The French Revolution, Past and Present*, and *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* (1845) are profoundly dialogic in form and style. Like Friedrich Schlegel or Kierkegaard, Carlyle also fashioned an overarching philosophical irony that allowed him to evade the deadening effects of spurious closure. Perhaps most importantly, Carlyle reinvented metaphor in a way that became the signature of his style. In Carlyle's hands, metaphor is invested with a function beyond the merely illustrative or diagrammatical (in which the trope offers a concrete example of a relation that would otherwise have to be explained abstractly); for Carlyle, metaphor becomes a trope of ambivalence, a figure of speech and a manner of seeing in which identity of terms is simultaneously affirmed and denied. Stripped of a prosaic descriptive function—what Carlyle scorns as mere “haberdashery ornament” (“Goethe's” 438)—metaphor becomes a tension of opposites, determinate yet open. As Paul Ricoeur states, “the metaphorical ‘is’ at once signifies both ‘is not’ and ‘is like.’” As a result, “we are allowed to speak of metaphoric truth, but in an equally tensive sense of the word truth” (7).

The tension of opposites, not their fusion or dissolution or resolution, is at the heart, linguistically and therefore epistemologically, of the metaphoric act; as Ricoeur notes, “literal contradiction [for example, love is a rose] preserves difference within the metaphoric statement; ‘same’ and ‘different’ are not just mixed together, they also remain opposed” (196). Metaphor dramatizes confrontation, the clash between

sameness and difference; it does not obliterate difference in verbal unity. Furthermore, the tension produced by the juxtaposition of terms in metaphor is one not merely in “relational function” (the clash of identity and difference) but in what Ricoeur calls “existential function” (the clash of being and not being). That is, in metaphor the “is” contains implicit within it an “is not,” and the ontological vehemence of the “is” is matched and balanced by the power of the concomitant “is not” (247, 249). A certain epistemological indeterminacy therefore clings stubbornly to metaphor. In metaphor so conceived, Carlyle found a way to say yes and no, true and not true—not sequentially but simultaneously. Metaphor thus signals linguistically the vital coexistence of faith and doubt; it is a mode of expression suited to embody a fundamental epistemological uncertainty, the inability ever to know conclusively. Metaphor allowed Carlyle the psychological satisfaction produced by the vehement affirmation of patterned relationship and ordered meaning, but it also allowed him to temper that affirmation with a recognition of disjuncture and chaos. With metaphor—what Teufelsdröckh calls the “muscles and tissues and living integuments” of language (*Sartor* 56)—people “flesh out” their perceptions of self and other. Were they not able to express ideas and perceptions in metaphor, Carlyle suggests, those ideas would be *disembodied*—in a radical sense they would not exist at all.

It is the emotional, intellectual, and moral tension between affirmation and denial, belief and unbelief, that generates the energy in Carlyle’s best prose. Until the end of the 1840s, Carlyle registered (by means of metaphor and irony as well as a profusion of invented personae) the complexity of experience as he perceived it; his response to what he termed the “Chaos of Being” may best be described as doubt consciously controlled but never eradicated by willed conviction. In the 1820s and 1830s, in other words, Carlyle was willing to accept, and even at times to celebrate, complexity and ambiguity. During this time, he praises the quality of being at the same time determinate (*bestimmt*) and open (*Two* 77–78); not surprisingly, his letters and notebooks of the time praise tolerance as a leading intellectual and moral virtue.

By the time Carlyle published *Latter-Day Pamphlets* between February and August 1850, however, he had turned his back on ambiguity and had spurned tolerance as nothing more than “indifferentism.” But paradoxically, the more Carlyle strove for decision and clarity in his thinking and his prose, the more certainty receded before him. And without the invigorating tension of doubt, without a Bakhtinian carnival of voices, each one expressive of partial truths, Carlyle’s prose grew strident and bullying where it had once been imbued with a deep humanity. This epistemological and stylistic transformation is evident throughout *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. Readers of the pamphlets are familiar with Carlyle’s harsh words for black slaves and Irish paupers, his diatribes against parliamentary democracy and feel-good benevolence. Beyond such particular political or ideological stances, however, *Latter-Day Pamphlets* is an indictment of the slipperiness and unreliability of language altogether, especially when wielded by people who are unwilling to use it with care and integrity. In the first pamphlet Carlyle introduces the characteristic figure of “The Present Time”: the Stump-Orator in whom eloquence is divorced from substance, words alienated from action (6–7). In “Model Prisons” Carlyle derides the “sugary disastrous jargon of philanthropy” (65), which substitutes wishful thinking and illusion for solid fact. “Downing Street” charges that because men must be elected to Parliament before they can serve as cabinet secretaries, “mere” rhetoric—the ability to make fine speeches and so to dazzle the voters with verbal brilliance—has replaced wisdom as the currency of government.

Carlyle’s critique of language reaches its climax in the fifth pamphlet, “Stump-Orator,” which appeared in May 1850. In “Stump-Orator”—the very name suggests diminution and truncation—Carlyle laments the incalculable “spiritual detriment we suffer, in every province of our affairs, from this our prostrate respect to power of speech” (175). He decries the debasement of language in an age awash in language:

What now concerns us most is the circumstance that here too the demand is, Vocables, still vocables. In all appointed courses of activity and paved careers for human genius, and in this unpaved, unap-

pointed, broadest career of Literature, broad way that leadeth to destruction for so many, the one duty laid upon you is still Talk, talk. Talk well with pen or tongue, and it shall be well with you; do not talk well, it shall be ill with you. To wag the tongue with dextrous acceptability, there is for human worth and faculty, in our England of the Nineteenth Century, that one method of emergence and no other. Silence, you would say, means annihilation for the Englishman of the Nineteenth Century. The worth that has not spoken itself, is not; or is potentially only, and as if it were not. Vox is the God of this Universe. (192)

People fill the air with *vocables*, sounds to be uttered, but not *words* to be understood. Rather than the sacred incarnate Word-made-flesh, either of the gospel or of *Sartor Resartus*, they now have only “blasphemous wind-eloquence” (182). Carlyle’s disenchantment with “the present time,” and especially its volubility, its addiction to commercial and political puffery, drives him to reconceptualize language in a way that merely exacerbates his discontent and undermines his vocation as a writer.

In 1831 Carlyle had claimed, in a letter to his brother John, that “order arises out of speech especially out of writing. Attempt to explain what you do know, and you already know something more” (CL 5:213). Suggested here is the view that *ideas* are coextensive with the language in which they are fleshed: if one wants to *know* something, one must *articulate* it—arrange it, piece it together, string it along an armature until the dry bones are clothed in “muscles and tissues and living integuments” and animated before one’s eyes. In *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, however, Carlyle, like Plato long before him, insists that *speaking well* is not the same as *knowing* and that, in fact, the one virtually precludes the other: “No mortal can both work and do good talking in Parliament, or out of it: the feat is impossible as that of serving two hostile masters” (116). In the *Pamphlets*, idea is prior and primary, while language is secondary in every sense.

In 1850 Carlyle no longer seems able to believe that “order rises out of speech”; on the contrary, speech now actively prevents the realization of an order that must have its origin in silence, an idea that appears ear-



lier in Carlyle's work (one thinks of Abbot Samson in *Past and Present*, for example) but that now becomes the keynote. In the past, Carlyle asserts, speech was "the tangible sign of what other faculties the man had in the silent state" (178). In those palmy days, Carlyle would have one believe, substance preceded words, and language was no more than the "banknote for an inward capital of culture, of insight and noble human worth" (179). But language no longer is tied to a gold standard of stable meaning and worth; instead, the banknote of language is a *signifier* unhitched from its *signified*, to borrow Saussure's and Derrida's vocabulary once again. The banknote is forged, Carlyle says, "passing freely current in the market; but bringing damages to the receiver, to the payer, and to all the world" (179), because there is no treasury of meaning and truth to which language immediately and clearly refers. Elsewhere in his writing—and especially in "Count Cagliostro," "The Diamond Necklace," and *The French Revolution*—Carlyle charges that people live in an age of counterfeits, of paper, of simulacra, but now he seems to have lost all faith in the communicative capacity of language. Even

the faithfulest, most glowing word of a man is but an imperfect image of the thought, such as it is, that dwells within him; his best word will never but with error convey his thought to other minds: and then between *his* poor thought and Nature's Fact, which is the Thought of the Eternal, there may be supposed to lie some discrepancies, some shortcomings! (*Latter-Day* 203)

One is condemned to use language in the absence of other, better tools, but a chasm yawns between words and things, words and meanings, words and action, and Carlyle in "Stump-Orator" does not know how to bridge the gap.

In talking of signs, the endless deferral of meaning, the impossibility of ever rejoining words and meanings, Carlyle anticipates not only the vocabulary but also, therefore, the perspectives of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida. But at the same time these passages in "Stump-Orator" are precisely the point at which Carlyle veers away from these later thinkers. He seems overcome by the desire for what Derrida calls the

metaphysics of presence, the recurrent myth of the center that stands outside history and so can provide a fixed reference point and stable ground for all human action. Clearly, Carlyle worries that such a center does not exist: otherwise, he could not speak as he does about language. But whereas Nietzsche confronts with joy the prospect of a universe in which one constructs one's own meanings, and whereas Derrida long after happily bids goodbye to the tyranny of univocal meaning, Carlyle in 1850 cannot bring himself to shoot this particular Niagara.

Ironically, for a writer whose collected works run to thirty volumes, and whose collected letters promise to fill another forty, Carlyle in *Later-Day Pamphlets* seems to despair of words altogether—the fact that he had to *write* his discontent in order to express it must have been galling! Meaning, Carlyle now asserts, has its being in a pre-lingual silence; it can and should remain in silence, for voicing an idea leaves its author desolate:

The idea you have once spoken, if it were even an idea, is no longer yours; it is gone from you, so much life and virtue is gone, and the vital circulations of your self and your destiny and activity are henceforth deprived of it. . . . Better keep your idea while you can: let it still circulate in your blood, and there fructify; inarticulately inciting you to good activities; giving to your whole spiritual life a ruddier health. (211)

Verbal expression is here a diminution of the self: broadcast ideas, Carlyle warns, and they can no longer “fructify” healthfully within the speaker. Having thus argued for the hoarding of ideas and words, Carlyle proceeds to rail against incontinence, the inability to *contain* or *control* one's impulses: “Incontinence is half of all the sins of man,” he avers; “And among the many kinds of that base vice, I know none baser, or at present half so fell and fatal, as that same Incontinence of Tongue” (212). Luckily, Carlyle has a remedy even for this modern vice:

A benevolent man once proposed to me, but without pointing out the methods how, this plan of reform for our benighted world: To cut from one generation, whether the current one or the next, all the tongues away, prohibiting Literature too; and ap-

point at least one generation to pass its life in silence. . . . Good Heavens, if such a plan were practicable, how the chaff might be winnowed out of every man, and out of all human things. . . . All the lies blown away, and some skeleton of a spiritual and practical Universe left standing for us which were *true*: O Heavens, is it forever impossible, then? (209–10)

Since words at best “are only a feeble echo and shadow” (185) of the Platonic Idea to which they refer—since the act of speaking diminishes both the speaker and the language used—better not to speak at all. Paradoxically, this linguistic Platonism itself ossifies idea and degrades language as effectively as the misuse of language that Carlyle deplures, for language becomes merely a lifeless vehicle for pre-existent, inert ideas. Nostalgic for stable meanings, for a world in which there is no epistemological gap between words and things, Carlyle in *Latter-Day Pamphlets* abandons the messiness of human discourse. It is as if Teufelsdröckh, frightened by the crowds in the street, retreats again to his tower in Weissnichtwo.

By granting meaning and idea an eternal existence independent of their incarnation in language and expression, Carlyle makes the task of the writer peculiarly mechanical: he need only find the right website, so to speak, and download an appropriate file—he need only take dictation from the Eternal, provided that he can *know* when the Eternal is speaking. Writers in this construction are conduits, not creators. The truth of what they say is unquestionable and so unquestioned. Without any doubt about the provenance of the message—and Carlyle no longer seems willing to admit doubt about what he considers essential truths—the message becomes brutally univocal: no down-to-earth Editor dares interrupt the transcendental sermon. As Jules P. Seigel astutely noted years ago, Carlyle in *Latter-Day Pamphlets* offers many personae, but all of them speak in “the same voice—authoritative, satirical, and aggressive” (“*Latter-Day*” 156). It is as if one were listening to a bad, and bad-tempered, ventriloquist.

At least one of Carlyle’s contemporaries noticed and objected to his new theory of language. In a long, sympathetic review clearly designed to blunt criticisms of Carlyle occasioned by the publication of

*Latter-Day Pamphlets*, David Masson notes that

Mr. Carlyle seems . . . to have regarded speech or expression only as a mode of intellectual presentation, whereas it is, in fact, also a mode of intellectual production. . . . The art of speech is noble and divine, not only as being the last finish of human education, but also as being one of the permanent methods of that education; not only as showing what a glorious world may exist in a man, but as conspicuous among the agencies whereby such a world may be created. . . . Speech, then, we hold to be the gift of the gods, not for representing noble thought merely, but also for attaining it. . . . For if the gift of speech be not independent of the power of thought, but in a manner bound up with it in our present state of being; if this gift be intended not merely as a means of publishing what we have learnt out of Nature, but also as a mechanism whereby we as men may seize upon Nature and weave forth from her those higher existences called truths, conceptions, imaginations, [then we ought not only to permit but to encourage writers to write, and we should honor them as] followers of a calling more specifically human than any other. (38-40)

In this remarkable passage Masson gently schools Carlyle in the value of the “hero as man of letters,” Carlyle’s own formulation of a decade before.

But the heroism of a writer lies in the active, imaginative construction of an order that is then communicated to a receptive audience willing and able to act on what it learns. *Latter-Day Pamphlets* blocks that possibility, for if one posits that meaning exists independently of expression, and if the role of the writer becomes a mechanical agency, and if truth becomes, therefore, self-evident and univocal, then there is no further need to explain or persuade. In *Latter-Day Pamphlets* Carlyle adapts Plato’s own examples to bolster the claim that rhetoric—the art of persuasion—is nothing but sophistry, a form of trickery in which the ability to speak cleverly renders unnecessary a knowledge of the truth, at least so far as worldly success is concerned. In rejecting rhetoric, however, along with

the parliaments and newspapers and journals in which rhetoric is employed, Carlyle need no longer consider how best to reach his audience, with the perhaps predictable result that *Latter-Day Pamphlets* is rife with brutal language and violent imaginings. The collapse of rhetoric—that ancient humane discipline that teaches citizens how to persuade their fellows—ultimately dehumanizes *Latter-Day Pamphlets* and makes possible Carlyle’s fantasy of cutting the tongues out of an entire generation so as to free the world from “the vain jargon of babble” (209–10). Invective and darkly satiric diatribe shoulder persuasion aside: Carlyle wishes to scourge, not to teach, anyone patient enough to read his pamphlets.

As Vanden Bossche observes, Carlyle “was now writing as if he possessed transcendental authority” (133), and with the assumption of that voice—without the countervailing voice of a befuddled, down-to-earth English Editor to balance or humanize it—the language of *Latter-Day Pamphlets* slides past genuine *authority* and becomes stridently *authoritarian*. As Mikhail Bakhtin notes (using a word translated as *authoritative* but carrying strong negative connotations),

the authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. . . . It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already *acknowledged* in the past. It is a *prior* discourse. . . . It is not a free appropriation and assimilation of the word itself that authoritative discourse seeks to elicit from us; rather, it demands our unconditional allegiance. Therefore authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it. It enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it. It is indissolubly fused with its authority—with political power, an institution, a person—and it stands and falls together with that authority. . . . Authoritative discourse can not be represented—it is only transmitted. Its inertia, its semantic finiteness and calcification, the degree to which it is

hard-edged, a thing in its own right, the impermissibility of any free stylistic development in relation to it—all this renders the artistic representation of authoritative discourse impossible. . . . It is by its very nature incapable of being double-voiced; it cannot enter into hybrid constructions. (342-44)

No play? No spontaneously creative stylizing? No double voice? No hybrid constructions? There is more than a bit of sad irony here, when one reflects on Carlyle and *Latter-Day Pamphlets*: the more unambiguously Carlyle speaks, the more he strives for verbal authority, the less richly he writes, the further he alienates himself from the language and vision of *Sartor Resartus*. Strenuously attempting to force his readers to see things the way he does, in *Latter-Day Pamphlets* Carlyle abandons the unique lesson he had to teach his nation, the lesson he modeled in all the best of his work: how to poise oneself honorably in a confusing world of complex contingency without lapsing into the madness of debilitating indecision on the one hand—or the inhumanity of aggressive certainty on the other.

The belligerent, authoritarian style of *Latter-Day Pamphlets* did not issue merely from personal rage and unhappiness but rather is the outward sign and embodiment of a linguistic despair grounded in an epistemological and ontological shift. As Carlyle lamented in a letter of September 1847, “Ireland, England, indeed the whole world, is growing more and more a bewildering horror to me” (CL 22:90); the failed European revolutions of 1848 and an eye-opening visit to distressed Ireland in the summer of 1849 destroyed the last remnants of hope Carlyle might have had that existing governments would or could address social crises effectively. Years later, reflecting in his *Reminiscences* (1881) on the composition of *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, Carlyle recalled “an interval of deep gloom and bottomless dubitation” in which “my heart was long overloaded with the meanings at length uttered [in the pamphlets], and no way of getting them set forth would answer” (103, 149). Despair at the course of public events, coupled with a loss of faith in the power of language to effect change, led Carlyle to use language as a hammer. He *willed* himself to say unpleasant things, as he reveals in his *Reminiscences*, and the resulting intellectual inflexibility

gave rise to a style similarly inflexible.

For Carlyle, the root cause of all the problems *Latter-Day Pamphlets* addresses is broadly religious and spiritual:

The Spiritual, it is still often said, but is not now sufficiently considered, is the parent and first-cause of the Practical. The Spiritual everywhere originates the Practical, models it, makes it: so that the saddest external condition of affairs, among men, is but evidence of a still sadder internal one. . . . Do you ask why misery abounds among us? I bid you look into the notion we have formed for ourselves of this Universe, and of our duties and destinies there. (296)

This view, implicit throughout the first seven pamphlets, becomes explicit in the final one, "Jesuitism," published on August 1, 1850. "Jesuitism" is the most forthright of Carlyle's many critiques of the Christian *mythos*. In this essay Carlyle uses the camouflage afforded by a noisy anti-Catholicism to excoriate all versions of Christianity, but British Protestantism receives the brunt of his scorn because "we ourselves . . . , deeply detesting the name of St. Ignatius, did nevertheless gradually adopt his gospel as the real revelation of God's will, and the solid rule of living in this world" (293). What is new here is not the collapse of an orthodox Christian faith—Carlyle had famously dramatized the loss of that faith and the fabrication of a new one in *Sartor Resartus* twenty years before—but rather the extent of his exasperation with those who continue to cling to what he considered an outmoded, and now debased, mythology.

In "Jesuitism," Carlyle's crowning indictment of his age, Ignatius Loyola and the Society of Jesus function more as a symbol than as an actual historical figure and institution. It is the principle of Jesuitism, as Carlyle defines it, that infects modern Christianity. *Jesuitism*, according to Carlyle, is a "reverent or quasi-reverent faith in the dead human formulas, and somnolent contempt of the divine ever-living facts, such as reigns now, consecrated and supreme, in all commonwealths and countries, and hearts of men" (299); it is the notion

that to please the supreme Fountain of Truth our readiest method . . . was to persist in believing what your whole soul found to be doubtful or incredible. That poor human symbols were higher than the God Almighty's facts they symbolized; that formulas, with or without the facts symbolized by them, were sacred and salutary; that formulas, well persisted in, could still save us when the facts were all fled! . . . Under that thrice-stygian gospel we have all of us, Papist and at length Protestant too, this long while sat; a 'doctrine of devils,' I do think, if there ever was one;—and are now, ever since 1789, with endless misery and astonishment, confusedly awakening out of the same, uncertain whether towards swift agony of social death, or towards slow martyrdom of recovery into spiritual and social life. (294)

Loyola did not poison the world's faith himself; he is merely "the historical symbol to us of its being done" (294). Carlyle even tells how to recognize a Jesuit in any guise—here he satirically manipulates the historical fact that the Jesuits, when outlawed in England and elsewhere, disguised themselves so as to disappear among the populace: "Where you meet a man believing in the salutary nature of falsehoods, or the divine authority of things doubtful, and fancying that to serve the Good Cause he must call the Devil to his aid, there is a follower of Un-saint Ignatius" (305). The first target of Carlyle's invective is the Christian clergy, Catholic or Protestant, for they are by profession committed to the perpetuation of falsehood. But by extension every Christian is implicated in a lie because a Christian by definition, for Carlyle, is one who believes in stories and doctrines that are now known to be untrue. In an unforgettable image that the text attributes to "the celebrated Gathercoal, a Yankee friend of mine," humans are likened to apes who sit "round a fire in the woods, but know not how to feed it with fresh sticks." Soon the fire (the sense of the divine) will burn out for lack of new fuel (a new religious mythos), and they will have to leave that warm place "and march—into Chaos, as I conjecture" (331). In other words, all are now Jesuits to the extent that all persist in professing themselves



Christian. In an interesting paradox, the more overtly religious nineteenth-century Britain seemed to be—with its High-Church Oxford Movement and its Broad Church evangelicalism—the more Britain entangled itself in a skein of lies and dissembling: “What we have to complain of is, that all men are become Jesuits! That no man speaks the truth to you or to himself, but that every man lies,—with blasphemous audacity, and does not know that he is lying,—before God and man, in regard to almost all manner of things” (309).

In previous works Carlyle had always honored the deep-seated Christian beliefs of his fellows. It pained him greatly to distance himself from the stern Christian piety of his mother and father, and in doing so he never treated their beliefs contemptuously. But in 1850 his parents were dead, and Carlyle—tormented increasingly both by his desire for certainty and the feeling that no one would listen to him—no longer felt he could call a fable anything other than a lie: “My friend, I have to speak in crude language, the wretched times being dumb and deaf: and if thou find no truth under this but the phantom of an extinct Hebrew one, I at present cannot help it” (325). If there is to be any hope for people, Carlyle asserts, they have to recognize and save what is valuable in Judaism and Christianity and then have the courage to jettison the rest:

If it please Heaven, we shall yet make our *Exodus* from Houndsditch [the area of London where used-clothes merchants, many of them Jewish, sold their wares], and bid the sordid continents, of once rich apparel now grown poisonous *Ou'clo'* [Carlyle's rendition of the call of a used-clothing seller], a mild farewell. *Exodus* into wider horizons, into God's daylight once more; where eternal skies, measuring *more* than three ells, shall again overarch us; and men, immeasurably richer for having dwelt among the Hebrews, shall pursue their *human* pilgrimage, St. Ignatius and much other saintship, and superstitious terror and lumber, lying safe behind us, like the nightmares of a sleep that is past!— (329–30).

*If*—and Carlyle means *only if*—the British can find the courage to put

aside their tattered Hebrew and Christian “old clothes” and weave a new set of myths in which to clothe the Divine, they may hope for a brighter future, a better congruence between what Carlyle considered eternal facts and their historical embodiments.

Carlyle must have known, of course, that the British would do no such thing, that people would cling to their traditional beliefs, no matter how tattered and threadbare he perceived them to be. That knowledge drove Carlyle once again to an authoritarian discourse that makes still less likely the transformation he hoped for. Among the most compelling passages of *Sartor Resartus* are those in which Teufelsdröckh narrates his struggle with doubt, the desire to believe poised against an analytic intelligence that could find no way to believe. In *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, especially “Jesuitism,” Carlyle rejects doubt as useless vacillation; having forced himself to move beyond doubt to willed conviction, he insists that everyone else do the same. Carlyle thereby substitutes a new *dogma* for the rich human *experience* of uncertainty:

A man’s ‘religion’ consists not of the many things he is in doubt of and tries to believe, but of the few he is assured of, and has no need of effort for believing. His religion, whatever it may be, is a discerned fact, and coherent system of discerned facts to him; he stands fronting the worlds and the eternities upon it: to doubt of it is not permissible at all! He must verify or expel his doubts, convert them into certainty of Yes or No; or they will be the death of his religion. (313)

These are among the saddest lines in Carlyle’s work, for they represent a rejection of the very qualities that in the past had made his writing and thinking vivid and compelling and an inspiration to a generation of writers and thinkers who also found themselves wandering alone along the Rue Saint-Thomas de l’Enfer. One wonders whether Carlyle recognized that by eliminating doubt, by refusing any longer to poise yes and no, belief and unbelief, he would transform his own prose so drastically. Carlyle certainly knew that the world disliked his book—but he blamed the world, not the book. What might

he have thought when he read the following lines, as he surely must have done?

Perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds  
At last he beat his music out.  
There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds. (Tennyson ll. 1949-52)

These now-famous lines from Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, newly published in 1850, might have stirred within Carlyle a recognition of a view he once shared, before he responded to the allure of moral and stylistic authoritarianism.

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