Thomas Carlyle confronted his century in an uneasy relationship: as a prophet he spoke directly to the Victorian spiritual dilemma, but his preachings grew increasingly incompatible with the actual direction of change in his day. Despite their resistance to many of his views, the Victorians heard in Carlyle one of the most eloquent testimonies to their will to believe. He voiced their own desire for a source of permanent value capable of sustaining human community on earth and their longings for transcendence beyond it—sustaining these against the slow erosion of the orthodoxy and authority that had formerly ordered their world. His historical writings provide the core of this testimony, because history—that is, Carlyle's mystically conceived history—became this source of value. Even as they denounced the status quo, his major works (The French Revolution, 1837; Past and Present, 1843; Cromwell’s Letters and Speeches, 1845; and Frederick the Great, 1858-1865) affirmed sustaining bonds between old and new. And for all their idiosyncrasies, his histories both formed and reflected influential historiographical traditions.

Their political and religious differences make Carlyle's and Arnold's agreements about historical study more significant. Carlyle too yearned to forge a consciousness in which the religious, the intellectual, and the practical were one. Like Arnold's, his resounding conviction that history was the revelation of God's will moving in the
world of man increased his sense of urgency about turning history from escapist to practical ends. This belief also created high expectations for the historian, whose job it was to rescue from oblivion proof of the supernaturalism of daily life. Central to human history was man's attempt to create order out of chaos; likewise, the historian's chief task was to create meaning out of the randomness of the historical record. Lacking the orthodoxy of Arnold's religious belief, however, Carlyle also lacked his confidence in the ultimate unity of all truths. His search for order entailed greater risks and his prophecies concealed deeper anxieties.

Arnold's confidence in this unity allowed him to adapt the systematizing instincts of the Enlightenment to romantic and Christian ends. Carlyle's romanticism—the most radical of any Victorian historian's—was fundamentally antisystematic. His transcendentalism made no compromise with material fact. He also stood in the most profound opposition to the developing tradition of "scientific" historiography in his day. It would not be fair to say that his unparalleled success at forging a sympathetic communion between reader and past was achieved at the expense of accuracy; his scholarship was far more scrupulous than he is often given credit for. But his historical understanding was essentially metaphorical and symbolic, making it not so much incompatible as incommensurate with the goals and methods of more traditional historiography. His scholarship served the ends of a visionary, not a scientific truth. The laws he acknowledged were of a different order than those conceived by the philosophical historian of the past or the "political scientist" of the future. Their purpose, however, was the same: to affirm that some deeper regularity patterned the disparate phenomena of human life.

Carlyle's early lapse from orthodoxy left him far more vulnerable than Arnold to the tyranny of fact and reason. His "fusion of poetry, history, and religion" represented an attempt to salvage the tenor of belief from its discredited vehicles and to break the hold of a merely mechanistic rationality. "Natural Supernaturalism" provided a secularized way of retaining intact Calvinist notions of God and individual duty. The conception of history that he adapted from the German romantics provided a secular scripture, an alternative testimony to God's presence in the world. History also provided a means to reconcile the poetic to the factual. Like Arnold, Carlyle realized that empiricism could be satisfactorily answered not by substituting a higher fictional reality but by obliterating the distinction between the
poetic and the real. He redefined history to do just this. Although he began by believing that poetry most suitably embodied the ideal in human life, the biographical gradually edged out the fictional in significance as his developing transcendentalism drew his attention from the invented to the actual. He came to prefer "any fact, relating especially to man," for being able to reveal truth in a way works of mere poetic "sensibility" could not. He demoted fiction to no more than man's attempt to substitute his paltry history for God's. The "smallest historical fact" was superior to the "grandest fictitious event" because it "did actually occur; was, in very truth, an element in the system of the All, whereof I too form part." History was a "perpetual Evangel," the record of mankind's "whole spiritual life" (E, 2:84). "Genuine poetry" became "the right interpretation of Reality and History" (E, 3:79). Like Arnold, Carlyle transformed history into a genre that could exploit the creative talents of the artist while disarming Victorian suspicions against frivolous or misleading fictions; his history was real and visionary at the same time.

Carlyle also wished to make the historian the master scientist as well as the master poet. In an 1831 notebook entry, he revealed his hopes that history might provide a truly "scientific" and "philosophical" way of grasping the "whole" of divine reality formerly accessible only to poetry:

I see some vague outline of what a Whole is; also how an individual Delineation may be "informed with the Infinite"; may appear hanging in the universe of Time and Space (partly): in which case is it a Poem and a Whole? Therefore, are the true Heroic Poems of these times to be written with the ink of Science? Were a correct philosophic Biography of Man (meaning by philosophic all that the name can include) the only method of celebrating him? The true History (had we any such) the true Epic Poem?—I partly begin to surmise so.  

Carlyle needed a "science" far more transcendental than Arnold's to find the infinite in the finite, however. He meant for the "historical scientific fact" to oppose not just fictions, but the "formulas" used by the mechanistic sciences of the early nineteenth century to "dispense with God" and to scale down the mystery of creation to easily quantified limits. The implications of such formulas had proved too threatening to allow him to share Arnold's confidence that the regularity of law guaranteed the meaningfulness of facts. Carlyle had fallen back from orthodoxy onto the premise that facts at least were created by God and inviolable. Lest man's systematizing admit the
possibility of rival realities, he had to deny “formulas” the power to do more than “label,” “compound,” and “separate” data. Finally, only a science that promised an unmediated contact with facts could preserve their integrity for him. Far from entailing the scientist’s detachment, this contact presupposed a commitment to seeing the “infinite” spiritual reality behind the phenomena of this world.

The *philosophes* offered Carlyle the historiographical counterpart to this false science. Finding intolerable the conclusions offered by their “death’s-head Philosophies ‘teaching by example,’” he denounced their method of writing history. History was not philosophy teaching by examples but “an address (literally out of Heaven, for did not God order it all?) to our whole inner man.” The first step toward realizing its miraculous nature “is that we see the things transacted, and picture them out wholly as if they stood before our eyes;—and this, alas, of all considerations, is the one that ‘dignity of History’ least thinks of.” The *philosophes* had not only refused to “look fixedly at the Thing” itself—they had substituted a “wretched politico-metaphysical Abstraction” for it (E, 3:326). No wonder that for them the past was not a soul-sustaining reality but a “godless Impossibility” (PP, 239).

Carlyle redefined history so that its meaningfulness depended upon coherences beyond the reach of formula, on patterns invisible to the merely empirical eye. It took the talents of a poet-seer to reconstitute the organic relationships that united the parts into a harmonious whole. Dryasdust, “being himself galvanic merely,” could produce only “Chaos,” “Dungheaps,” “Shot-rubbish,” and “dust Whirlwinds”—pointless compendia of inert data. He was but an antiquarian, an artisan—one of those men “who labor mechanically in a department, without eye for the Whole” (E, 2:90). Carlyle’s ideal historian, on the other hand, was a “Psalmist,” an “Iliadist,” “the highest Shakespeare producible.” He was an artist whose “rhythmic nature”—his ear for the deeper harmonies and internal correspondences—allowed him to “inform and ennoble the humblest department with an Idea of the Whole, and habitually know that only in the Whole is the Partial to be truly discerned” (E, 2:90). False science could only dissect and atomize; it could not discern the interrelating of parts through which history, like poetry, like nature itself, became meaningful and vital. Society was an organism, not a machine; the wholeness of its history was that of a reticulation, not of a calculus. Each of us was a thread woven by the “Loom of Time” into a "magic
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web" of historical phenomena, held fixed in a pattern on a "warp of mystic darkness" (E, 3:181), knitted into the "Enormous Tissue of Existence never yet broken."11 We owed our sense of belonging—indeed, our very identities—to the relationships that thus enmeshed us. This network also maintained the continuity of ideas and beliefs so that some could "continually gravitate back to us" and, in a new form, "enrich and nourish us again" (FG, 1:16). Truths that had stood the test of time emerged in the "beatified bodily form" of tradition. Man remained "socially" and "spiritually alive" because he was able to breathe the "life-element" of these accumulated truths (HS, 316). Not all parts of the past possessed this vital power. The true "Art of History, the grand difference between a Dryasdust and a sacred Poet," lay in the ability "to distinguish well what does still reach to the surface, and is alive and frondent for us."12

The historian's privileged vision gave him great power over the "eyeless" manipulators of fact. He could free the fact from dead abstractions and restore it to the living process that gave it meaning. He could rejuvenate "the Thing itself" where others built only painted waxworks (E, 3:326). He could discern which beliefs were permanently vital and could translate the "mystic heaven-written Sanscrit" into a "Bible of World-History" (E, 3:251). But with great power went even greater risks for one who thus bore the responsibility for history's meaningfulness. Carlyle might proclaim as loudly as Arnold that the permanent verities endured and manifested themselves to any who had (spiritual) eyes to see, but he was much more anxious that the facts might elude him. His peevish attacks on the Dryasdusts who reduced history to an "infinite grey void" sprang from his own alarm at finding the past melting into "sheer formlessness" and "unintelligible maundering" (OC, 1:10) as he groped for meaning. Those individual events that he could prove to have been real served as no more than the kindling of a "wooden lucifer" in the "void night"—only a moment of illumination for the spiritual eye to see into the heart of the mystery.

For Carlyle as for Arnold, human identity was sustained by its connectedness to a palpable past; "man was still man" only so long as he could identify a continuous and vital history with which to refute the Everlasting No. If it were impossible to prove that heroes had once existed, it would be "as if we had done no brave thing at all in this Earth;—as if not Men but Nightmares had written of our History!" (OC, 1:6). If the historian could not make the past "melodious"—
resonant with a deep organic unity—"it must be forgotten, as good as annihilated; and we rove like aimless exiles that have no ancestors, whose world began only yesterday."¹³ Without historical proof of filiation, Carlyle would have left a spiritual orphan; without concrete verification of the infinite truth, he would have lost his grip on those spiritual moorings he had so carefully constructed to replace defunct orthodoxy, and drifted once more into that confused whirlpool of values in which so many Victorian minds would flounder.

Like many of his contemporaries, Carlyle found a willed belief better than none at all. For all his exaltation of the authority of fact, he was no more truly scientific or historicist than Arnold. Too much depended on the outcome of investigation to allow him to risk his poetic vision to empirical proof. George Levine aptly calls his turn to history and to the "primacy of 'fact'" after Sartor "probably not so much an expression of willingness to trust experience as an escape from the need to trust it."¹⁴ Carlyle saw only those facts that confirmed the lessons he needed to make sense of his own world. René Wellek argues persuasively that "Carlyle was never able to keep consistently to the historical point of view... he always introduced a set of ethical standards which are not derived from history itself and which prevent him from judging the individuality of a man or time by its own inherent criteria."¹⁵ Despite his political differences with the Whigs, Carlyle agreed with them that "there is no use of writing of things past, unless they can be made in fact things present."¹⁶ His polemical purposes similarly undermined sympathy and obscured the historical context of the event. Like the Whigs he deduced the "facts" of the past from the moral and political order he wished to impose upon the Victorian present.

Carlyle's conception of change offered a powerful reinforcement to the patterns he saw in history and to the reordering he desired for the present. In change as in unity, his model was an organic one. This allowed for the inevitable transformation of social structures and for the persistent vitality of essential truths. The analogy between human history and nature began as a speculation in an early notebook ("Has the mind its cycles and seasons like Nature, varying from the fermentation of weren; to the clearness of seyn; and this again and again; so that the history of man is like the history of the world he lives in?"¹⁷) and achieved certainty in The French Revolution, where civilization is an organism progressing through cycles of growth, decay, and rebirth. Earlier essays had elaborated on the nature of these cycles. Ages
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of scepticism alternated with those of faith, didacticism with poetry, stability with revolution. In his "Early German Literature," Carlyle also drew explicit comparisons (not unlike Macaulay's) between the "history of the universal mind" and that of the individual: youth was a time of "poetic recognition" that must inevitably give way to "scientific examination" (E, 2:288).

He dealt more literally than Arnold with the threat of decay built into this cyclical model. Arnold and the Whigs stressed the continuity of progress, the improvement that survived collapse. Although Carlyle's belief in a purposeful universe unfolding according to a divine, if inscrutable, will also implied that cycles spiraled upward, his system was more a series of renewals than a continuum. Destruction was not only inevitable but salutary. Only through decay could "a prurient element, rich with nutritive influences," be formed to nourish new life. Only after conflagration could the Phoenix rise from its ashes, and only when the "deserted edifices" were torn down could people go forward down the "thoroughfare" of human progress.

Where other historians used organic cycles to lend a scientific regularity to history, Carlyle's theories of change were finally "consciously unscientific and even anti-scientific." For Arnold, the fact that all nations went through the same stages of development made possible the derivation of standard principles governing their growth: lessons from one stage of development could be applied with equal justice to corresponding stages in the lives of other organisms. Carlyle's cycles proceeded according to no law except that of the inevitability of change itself. The fact of periodic change was clear, but his periods were far less uniform than Arnold's, and he was far more likely to stress their uniqueness. Still less did Carlyle share any real sympathy with the positivists' attempts to reduce history to laws capable of predicting the future, despite parallels between St. Simonian theories and his own. Carlyle's insistence on the fundamentally irrational and uncontrollable nature of historical change was his means of refuting just such "mechanical" philosophies. History's unpredictable energy defied simplistic "cause and effect speculators" who attempted to read "the inscrutable Book of Nature as if it were a Merchant's Ledger" (E, 2:91). In that "web" of history, causation was conceived not as a "chain" or line, but rather as a tissue, or superficies of innumerable lines, extending in breadth as well as in length, and with a complexity, which will foil and utterly bewilder the most assiduous computation" (E, 1:399).
The unpredictability built into Carlyle’s system finally made continuity problematic, and progress even more so. Arnold and the Whigs used the organic metaphor to emphasize conservative, orderly progress. They tried to make the very process of innovating traditional, arguing that accommodating the new when times were ripe was the best means of preserving continuity. For Carlyle change was fundamentally catastrophic rather than gradualist, having more in common with the conversion experience than with uniformitarianism. Carlyle’s idea of history was not a linear progression, not an accommodation of old to new, but a constant reassertion of the permanently and transcendently true. This required renewal, not preservation, and could not be achieved without a complete destruction and purgation of the old. There could be no compromise with what was already dying; only apocalypse could cleanse the old world of its corruption.

This vision could reassure Victorians that although change might be violent, catastrophic, and unpredictable, it ended by resurrecting those ideas and beliefs most essential to human life. The destruction of old forms they saw around them need not mean simply loss, but loss preparatory to greater gain. More important, however, were the uses of Carlyle’s theory of change as a weapon against a recalcitrant society. Insisting on the unpredictability of change disqualified the “computators” of the mechanistic world view and moved historical analysis to moral ground, accessible only to believers. The only real “law” governing change was that God’s decrees could not long be transgressed without retribution, and that only what conformed to eternal truth would survive. History’s one lesson was to cleave to the good and abhor evil. The historian used his privileged vision to choose his own manifestations of this law. The theory of cyclical destruction gave Carlyle a deus ex machina to rid society of those institutions he could not tolerate, a means of imposing poetic justice where the rationalist saw only random process or mechanical cause and effect. This model plausibly interpreted the French Revolution’s destruction of the ancien régime, but fell increasingly short of the new reality that followed. Fundamentally out of sympathy with the advance of democracy in a way Arnold (or the Whig) was not, Carlyle looked in vain in his own day for proof of progress toward the truth that his theories insisted upon. He locked himself into a more and more rigid resistance to advances that contradicted his desired order.
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By the time he wrote *Frederick the Great*, that rigidity had already started to constrict his confidence about history itself.

Carlyle's organicism finally justified only a faith in process, not a certainty of its end. He left progress explicitly open-ended. He had early on adopted Schiller's dictum that truth "*immer wird, nie est,*** that truth is never an achieved absolute, but rather an infinitely changing, infinitely progressing entity. This left the human soul free to "develop itself into all sorts of opinions, doctrines, which go on nearer and nearer to the truth." But it also left the process permanently unresolved: "All theories approximate more or less to the great Theory, which remains itself always unknown." Only on the largest scale and in the most general terms did progress occur, and even then, since complete knowledge was God's alone, this process never reached a specific fulfillment in time. Denied the assurance of arrival, Carlyle clung instead to the importance of movement. In "Signs of the Times" he took ferment as a sign of vitality and of advance:

> However it may be with individual nations, ... the happiness and greatness of mankind at large have been continually progressive. Doubtless this age also is advancing. Its very unrest, its ceaseless activity, its discontent contains matter of promise. ... This is as it should be; for not in turning back, not in resisting, but only in resolutely struggling forward, does our life consist. (E, 2:80)

As that promise of advance was not fulfilled, "work" became for Carlyle an end in itself: the continual struggle of the soul never sure of its election—sure only of the damnation that awaited the idle or despairing, the death that succeeded "passive inertness" in the organism.

Some critics have also considered Carlyle's heroes *dei ex machina* that allowed him to ignore the role of groups and institutions in historical change. In truth, he acknowledged the contributions of all three, although he weighted them differently. Given his conviction that true history lay in the engagement of the individual with the infinite, it was inevitable that the biographical interest would dominate. As he explained in "Biography," the life of any human being possessed a "scientific interest" insofar as it instructed others how to cope with the "Problem of Existence." As the struggle of "human Freewill against material Necessity" called "the Sympathy of mortal hearts into action," it also became "the sole Poetry possible" (E, 3:44-45). A vivid likeness of human life was not in itself enough to make biography poetic, however. Although he complimented Scott for
demonstrating that "the bygone ages of the world were actually filled by living men, not by protocols, state-papers, controversies and abstractions of men," Carlyle considered the Waverley novels lacking in any interest deeper than that aroused by "contrasts of Costume" (E, 4:76-77). He was still harsher on Robertson's History of Scotland for providing only a "little Scandalous Chronicle" of Mary Stuart, "a Beauty," and Henry Darnley, "A Booby who had fine legs" (E, 3:82), when the historian should have been chronicling the effects of the Reformation. The biograpical was not an end in itself, but a means of illuminating the individual's engagement in the cosmic struggle between good and evil.

The power of heroic free-will against necessity is complicated by the fact that Carlyle depicted change, especially revolutionary change, as operating on a scale far greater than that of any individual and believed that "the strongest man can but retard the current partially and for a short hour" (E, 3:122). Although he claimed that "not by material, but by moral power, are men and their actions governed" (E, 1:400), in "Diderot" he gave both sides their due:

It is a great truth, one side of a great truth, that the Man makes the Circumstances, and spiritually as well as economically is the artificer of his own fortune. But there is another side of the same truth, that the man's circumstances are the element he is appointed to live and work in; that he by necessity takes his complexion, vesture, embodiment, from these, and is in all practical manifestations modified by them almost without limit; so that in another no less genuine sense, it can be said Circumstances make the Man. (E, 3:229)

In this essay he concluded that men had to be judged by the conditions of their own time, although these never absolved them from the supreme duty of recognizing and furthering the right. Nonetheless, Carlyle's heroes were preeminently suited to serve these ends because of their ability to see through circumstances to the essentials at their core. They were "original men" who could "converse with this universe at first-hand" (HS, 345). Like Frederick, they swept aside sham; like Johnson, they believed where others only supposed; like Cromwell, they discerned the "inarticulate divineness" of present and future "beyond the letter and the rubric" (OC, 2:169). For these reasons they were in the best position to "determine, not what others do, but what it is right to do" (E, 3:89). They were "modellers, patterns," "revealers" of God's purposes, whose role it was to "articulate" for lesser men the best way "to conform themselves to the Eternal Laws"
of the universe (HS, 1-2). They played the key role in social change and stability. Carlyle's histories show that only the action of an individual hero—like Napoleon, or Abbot Samson, or Frederick—could recompose social chaos into new order. Heroes were responsible for institutionalizing the "law of habit that makes roads everywhere through the pathless in this universe" (HS, 177); they were the chief objects of "imitation, that all-important peculiar gift of man, whereby Mankind is not only held socially together in the present time, but connected in like union with the past and the future" (E, 2:394). They were custodians of the Traditions that gave meaning to human life; in worshipping heroes man celebrated his own need for, and understanding of, a divinely appointed order.

Notwithstanding the preponderant importance of heroes in human history, Carlyle did not entirely neglect lesser men, as is shown by his proposal that "the Court, the Senate and the Battlefield" recede in favor of "the Temple, the Workshop and Social Hearth" (E, 3:83). He found the conventional stuff of history—"empty invoice-lists of Pitched Battles and Changes of Ministry"—as barren as "Philosophy teaching by Experience" and sought instead to restore "the innumerable peopled luminous Days" in all their fullness (E, 3:325; PP 49-50). The corollary of his belief that "history is the essence of innumerable Biographies" was that "Social Life is the aggregate of all the individual men's lives who constitute society":

The inventions and traditions, and daily habits that regulate and support our existence, are the work not of Dracos and Hampdens, but of Phoenician mariners, of Italian masons and Saxon metallurgists, of philosophers, alchymists, prophets, and all the long-forgotten train of artists and artisans; who from the first have been jointly teaching us how to think and how to act, how to rule over spiritual and over physical Nature. (E, 2:86-87)

These men were at least as relevant an object of the historian's attention as the Dracos and Hampdens themselves. In principle this recognition of the life of the "common man" suggests the democratizing influence of the romantic historians and their efforts to write the "biography" of whole nations and peoples. In actual practice Carlyle's conception of historical development limited his attention to lesser men as much as did his individualizing brand of hero-worship. The real value of mariners and masons lay in their very obscurity: their work contributed to the silent growth of a healthy social organism. When minor figures do find a place in his writings, they func-
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tion as "emblems" of historical phenomena beyond their control. They are effects, not causes, of cosmic change.

The same point might be made about Carlyle's handling of institutional, political, and sociological forces. He might have agreed with Arnold that the way people were governed gauged the moral health of their society, but he lacked all interest in the political machinery by which this governing was accomplished. He scornfully dismissed "Redbook Lists, and Court Calendars, and Parliamentary Registers" as but "eddies" in the "Life-Current" (E, 3:81). Laws and constitutions were not the "life of man" but merely the house in which it was led. His attitude in The French Revolution is typical: the Constituent Assembly could devise no more than "a theory of irregular verbs," for any constitution that "images" the conviction of real men (FR, 1:215) was sanctioned by a cosmic Necessity, and could never be produced by parliamentary debate. He gives little attention to the constitutional issues involved in Cromwell and skims over Frederick's peacetime accomplishments to return to his battles (FG, 5:198). On the other hand, he did acknowledge the specific class issues operating in the French Revolution. The Girondes had in his eyes tried to exploit the Sansculottes in their attempts to bring about a republic of "Respectabilities and Decencies," in which the "Moneybag of Mammon" would replace the "Feudal Fleur-de-lys" (FR, 3:115). Naturally their pitiful attempt to mount a government based on sham was incapable of controlling the organic force of the mob, who represented a genuine and necessary outburst of nature, the embodiment of anarchy capable of destroying the old order but not of building a new. Carlyle's symbolic treatment of class finally precluded any more literal probing of the issues involved, however. He saw a hierarchical class structure as a biological imperative of the social organism and dealt with social groups only in terms of the role he prescribed for each. The "Twenty-five Millions," "the Sanscullotism," are never more than personified abstractions, their needs not differentiated beyond the primal imperatives for food and leadership.

For Carlyle society denoted not so much a set of institutions as the structure of belief embodied in institutional forms. His approach was designed explicitly to refute those who had mistaken the materials of purely "local" history—politics, battles, laws, etc.—for the spiritual realities appropriate to "universal" history. In reacting against the conventional approach, however, Carlyle tended to lose sight of the actual weave of institutions, politics, economic and legal systems in
his haste to get beyond them to the forces of which they were merely
the vesture. G. M. Trevelyan defended him by claiming that he accu­
rately understood and portrayed the effects of these factors on the
people involved, but this does not compensate for neglecting their
structure.

The strengths and weaknesses of Carlyle's theorizing spring from
the fact that it is essentially metaphistorical. He wished to use the au-
thority of history to go beyond history. He focused on the cosmic
realities behind historical appearances and enjoined his readers to
look through facts to higher truths that redeemed the failures of the
phenomenal world. The alternative to traditional faith he thus of­
fered had the same vulnerability as the old one. Assent was finally a
matter of belief, not of proof. By treating phenomena as merely ap­
pearances, he ruled out verification by fact alone. He simply refused
to fight on the same ground as those who read the "facts" differently.
The emotional power of his vision was enough to draw many across
with him in a leap of faith. Yet if his willed belief delivered many
from "Descendentalism," it abandoned to the limits of rationalism
still more who could not make that leap, since he left no middle
ground between his vision and blindness.

II

To obtain the assent that transcended reason, Carlyle needed to
create a past so experientially real that it compelled the reader's pres­
ence in his vision. His desire to capture both the spiritual essence and
the fact that embodied it, to reconstruct the very "life of man," posed
new challenges to the researcher. The historian had both to see and to
divine; he had to be the scientist as well as the artist to make history
disclose its meaning: "'Stern Accuracy in inquiry, bold Imagination
in expounding and filling-up; these,' says friend Sauerteig, 'are the
two pinions on which History soars' " (E, 3:259-60). We must ask
then how "stern" were Carlyle's own standards. On the face of them,
his research methods seem as unconventional as his narrative tech­
niques. He claimed that after trying various approaches, involving
everything from note books and bundles to paper bags filled with
slips of paper, he resolved to avoid taking notes at all by simply mark­
ing relevant passages in his sources. As he explained in an 1845 letter:

On the whole [I] try to keep the whole matter simmering in the living
mind and memory rather than laid up in paper bundles or otherwise
laid up in the inert way. For this certainly turns out to be a truth: Only
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what you at last have living in your own memory and heart is worth putting down to be printed; this alone has much chance to get into the living heart and memory of other men. 24

If "The Guises" can be taken as typical of a work in progress, this process meant that the construction of the main narrative line took precedence over the validation of exact names, dates, and quotations. Parenthetical notes mark the places where these are to be inserted, if indeed they could ever be found. Despite this somewhat fragmentary approach, Carlyle was keenly aware of the importance of solid factual data, prizing even insignificant primary sources that could make the event "luminous" far more than he did the "sifting and straightening out of . . . old cobwebs" in more comprehensive secondary accounts. 25 He also acknowledged high standards of thoroughness and accuracy. In writing The French Revolution, he took full advantage of the source materials just coming into print and probably used twice as many books as he cited. 26 When he found that he had included an incorrect account of the French warship "Vengeur," whose crew supposedly refused to surrender and went down shouting "Vive la République!", he published a full account of his investigation of the error in Fraser's Magazine (E, 4:208-25). Elsewhere he showed himself capable of a Rankeian cross-examination of sources, and offered to lay his interpretations open to comparison with the primary sources (FG, 2:235).

But it must finally be said that his earnestness to find the truth was simply not strong enough to counterbalance his ambivalence about the scholarly side of historiography. When he compared the historian to Orpheus returning to the underworld, he was doing more than striking a pose: he really did feel that "he that would investigate the Past must be prepared for encountering things unpleasant, things dreary, nay, ghastly [for] the Past is the dwelling of the Dead" (HS, 314). His constant lamentation over the difficulty of his task and his vituperative outbursts against earlier historians sprang from his anxiety to prove his view of the past correct. The more elusive his epic portrayal became, the more he blamed the Dryasdusts for not having the vision to provide the materials he needed. Also, the more likely he was to resort to "abridgment" and "immense omission" in an effort to suppress "large tracts" of "mere pedantisms, diplomatic cobwebberies, . . . and inhuman matter" (FG, 3:309). Arguing that if " 'wise memory' is ever to prevail, there is need of much 'wise oblivion' first" (OC, 1:41) too often meant that what did not fire his imagi-
nation, like the details of political, legal, or ecclesiastical squabbles, or what threatened to diminish the epic stature of his heroes, was simply dismissed or sloughed over with a few elliptical metaphors. It also meant that the authenticity of what fit with his own conception of a movement or hero was not tested so rigorously as that which was unfavorable. Arnold made this point about the "Vengeur" case, claiming that Carlyle should have been more wary, knowing the unreliability of his source. Wellek sees a similar gullibility in the matter of the Squire papers, a set of letters and documents allegedly written by Cromwell, of which "copies" were sent to Carlyle by an extremely eccentric retired sea captain.

Cromwell's Letters and Speeches offers other examples of the way Carlyle's preconceptions could compromise scholarly standards. After publishing what purported to be a complete edition, he was deluged with various new materials, some privately held, but others that he had overlooked in published sources. Carlyle asserted that as a rule "the new Contributions to any Edition have been slight" (OC, 1:vii), notwithstanding his addition of more than thirty new letters in the Appendix alone. Even had he integrated these into the text, it is apparent that Carlyle would have refused to sacrifice the synthetic form he had already given his "Cromwelliad." A biographer, he proclaimed, should worry less about whether later interpolations might improve his book "as a practical Representation of Cromwell's Existence" than about whether it would be "swollen out of shape by superfluous details, defaced with dilettante antiquarianisms, nugatory tag-rags" (OC, 1:viii). The priorities of hero-worship and artistic harmony clearly outweighed those of scholarship. Carlyle's concern for eliminating any trace of pedantry that might hinder the general reader explains in part some editorial changes in what he called "the authentic utterances of the man Oliver himself." In order to make the materials easier to read and understand, he alleviated the "encumbrance" of Cromwell's spelling and tried to help "bring out the struggling sense" (OC, 1:79) by adding words (in brackets) here and there. But despite Carlyle's lofty claim that he considered it his supreme duty "to avoid altering, in any respect, not only the sense, but the smallest feature in the physiognomy, of the Original" (OC, 1:79), Reginald Palgrave ably demonstrated that he was neither thorough nor entirely forthright about his scholarship. Judging him according to the standards of the new "scientific" historiography in 1887, Palgrave faulted him for inaccurate transcriptions, misrepresentation of
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his sources, and failure to consult the manuscript version of some speeches or to compare modern versions with ones of higher authority. Damning by any standard is Palgrave's evidence that Carlyle added misleading interpolations and punctuation, that he omitted words, phrases, and even whole sentences, and that he suppressed several passages unfavorable to his heroic view of the Protector. 29

It is not enough to excuse such failings by saying that Carlyle's purposes were more poetic than historical; he himself would have rejected the implications of this distinction. Criticism is warranted precisely because he portrayed himself as a heroic truth-seeker, wrestling with cosmic forces that threatened to doom men to oblivion. But then again, if he was little different in these respects from the partisan historians of his own and earlier ages, the truly innovative aspects of his approach to research should not be ignored. In his attempts to hear the voice and feel the pulse of the past, he embraced the same wider conception of evidence as Arnold and Macaulay. He too advised the beginning historian to "read himself into the century he studies" (E, 4:237), no mean feat considering that for him "all Books, . . . were they but Song-books or treatises on Mathematics, are in the long-run historical documents" (E, 3:167). Even the sheet music of the Çai­ira could contribute its spark to the rekindling of past consciousness. Carlyle also valued portraits and memoirs for their insight into the human side of history. He relished the gossipy accounts of a Boswell, a Jocelin de Brakelond, or a Princess Wilhemina because they viewed the world with the real "human eyes" that history books did not possess (FG, 1:378). Although he deplored the subjectivity of such sources, their glimpses into historical reality fitted his own episodic, anecdotal style too congenially for him to be highly discriminating in their use.

Like Arnold he prized geographical evidence as much as imaginative. Geography was one of the "two windows of history" because for him too familiarity with the physical setting of an event allowed him to possess it imaginatively. 39 Driven by the demands of his pictorial imagination, he sent Mill to look at the sites important to "The Diamond Necklace," and his brother to report back on Versailles and on the Place de Grève, where the Tree of Liberty had stood. Maps of Paris, groundplans of the Bastille, technical accounts of the embankment of the fens in Cromwell's day, all allowed him to locate himself, both figuratively and literally, in past experience. The same craving for empathy encouraged several "pilgrimages" to "Cromwell-
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land,” where he emotionally relived the experience of his hero in Ely Cathedral, in his farmyard, and at Dunbar field on the anniversary of Cromwell’s triumph there. Carlyle considered the topography of battle sites particularly essential to studies of wartime: Richard Brooks has amply documented the extent of his 1858 tour of German battlefields and the process whereby its results were worked into the narrative of *Frederick the Great*. No fact, provided that it could illuminate some corner of a past reality, was beneath the “Dignity of History” for Carlyle.

The brilliant eccentricity of Carlyle’s style may obscure the objectives he held in common with fellow historians: resuscitation, identification, sympathy, and conversion—in that order. Fearing that “till we become Believers and Puritans in our way, no result will be arrived at” in the attempt to reform society, he aimed to convince his quack- and cant-ridden contemporaries that the belief and moral purpose they lacked had been realities in the past, and to provide them with the opportunity to “connect” themselves imaginatively with those same feelings once again (OC, 1:1). Carlyle’s peculiar obsession with the symbolic immanent in the actual did make him the most stylistically innovative of the six historians. He became convinced early that the historian needed to invent a new “language,” one “melodious,” “musical,” and “poetic” enough to turn fragments into wholes, documents into experiences. He needed a spectrum of frankly fictive techniques to create a narrative that destroyed the intervening lapse of time, immersed the reader in the event, and allowed him to enter directly into the spiritual dimension of historical reality.

*The French Revolution* introduced a range of effects to achieve these ends. Its very allusiveness—to Merovingian Kings, to Boston Harbors black with tea, to Feasts of Morals mounted by Philosophers—draws readers into the narrative by implying their preexisting intimacy with a more densely populated historical realm. Carlyle forgoes a discursive analysis of issues and antecedents in favor of impressionistic evocations of mood and conjurations of symbols. The oracular tone of his digressive sermons and incantations encourages the sense that his narrative operates above the level of prosaic and limited reality. The nominalization and pluralizing of names and beliefs—the “Courtierisms, Conquering Heroisms, Most Christian Grand Monarque-isms, Well-beloved Pompadourisms” that obscured the inevitable arrival of revolution, for instance—signal the reader that individual men and events are being translated
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into those abstract truths and spiritual realities that coursed beneath the appearances of life. The frequent use of the present tense reinforces the immediacy and dynamism of events and draws in the audience as living witnesses.

The obstacles to restoring a contemporary understanding of events preoccupied Carlyle. As his hypothetical researcher "Smelfungus" explained it, past events were like living plants that eventually decayed into layers of peat: the higher generations pressed upon the lower, "squeezing them ever thinner" (HS, 64) and obscuring the original contours of significance. One hoped that this process would leave standing some "high peaks," some major events, that could give their name to the entire region. More often great actions proved "historically barren," while the smallest took root in the moral soil and grew to cover "whole quarters of the world."34 To complicate the historian's task still further, in retrospect he often failed to distinguish between "the real historical Transaction" and the "more or less plausible scheme and theory of the Transaction" that tried to "account" for it in the present.

In order to rediscover the meaning of the event for himself, the historian had in effect to abandon any attempt at artificial historical perspective, any theory about the event. His goal was to attain vision from an internal perspective by achieving complete sympathy and identification with past actions. Hedva Ben-Israel calls the process of creating true history for Carlyle "as subconscious as the process of creating poetry was in Wordsworth's theory. To promote a genuine reaction, a historian makes sure that the picture that gives the stimulus is authentic. Once the right reaction has been brought about, it is this which directs the recreation of reality."35 Historical art, Carlyle explained to Sterling, thus began with a "thorough intelligence of the fact to be painted. . . . This once blazing within one . . . one has to take the whole dexterity of adaptation one is master of" and "contrive to exhibit it one way or other."36 To allow the reader a correct appreciation of historical relationships required "the best insight, seeking light from all possible sources, shifting its point of vision withersoever vision or glimpse of vision can be had" (FR, 1:214). In his "exhibition" of the event, the historian needed in particular to overcome the fact that "narrative is linear, Action is solid" (E, 2:89). The continuity of linear narrative, with no more than mechanical cause and effect explanations at its disposal, could not be
true to the chaotic interplay of historical forces or the multidimensionality of historical experience.

Carlyle tried to compensate for the distorting linearity of narrative by consciously manipulating perspectives. In what C. F. Harrold called his "synoptic view," he was constantly juxtaposing the present condition of an event with its past and future condition. H. M. Leicester analyzes this same process by dividing Carlyle's modes of presentation into "prospective" and "retrospective" points of view. In the first the historian's *ex post facto* knowledge about the event was suppressed, so that the experience of it was limited to the immediate and excluded knowledge of the event's outcome or of alternative possibilities. The retrospective view superimposed the missing dimensions of the event—the causes, results, and future significances that only time could reveal. The advantage of the "prospective" view lay in its ability to duplicate the immediacy of an experience unfolding on the spot, making the reader a witness and, in some cases, a participant.

For instance, in recounting the royal family's attempted escape to Varennes in *The French Revolution*, Carlyle positions himself with the reader as a contemporary observer with no privileged knowledge or hindsight to elucidate the scene. Present tense verbs subvert the linearity of narrative by evoking a perpetual present. "We observe" Count Fersen often using his Ticket of Entry without realizing what it means (FR, 2:158). On the night of 20 June 1791, we watch anonymous figures enter the glass coach in the Rue de L'Echelle: hooded dames with children, "a thickset Individual, in round hat and perioue," who springs a shoe buckle and stoops to reclasp it, a "Lady shaded in a broad gypsy-hat" who touches her *badine* to the spoke of Lafayette's carriage. Even when the Lady is revealed as the Queen, the indeterminacy of the event is prolonged by questions that leave open its outcome: "But is Fersen on the right road?" "If we reach Bouillé? If we do not reach him?" In the process the point of view also shifts so that the reader shares the feelings of the royal party. Carlyle often forged this kind of identification for the narrator, increasing the immediacy of the action and the authenticity of his voice by merging himself with participants. Thus he is alternately a seventeenth-century courtier ("I myself . . . have often assisted at Ben's Masques . . . and endeavoured to make acquaintance with a fair friend or two" HS, 75), a gossipy neighbor of Cromwell ("Doctor Simcock has
told friends of mine that he suffered under terrible hypochondria, and had fancies about the Town-Cross” (HS, 203), or a foot soldier on the rainy eve of the battle of Dunbar (“We English have some tents; the Scots have none” OC, 2:205). This abandonment of the omniscient voice forced the reader to sacrifice pat explanations that tried to “account” for the event and instead to try to experience it for himself.

The “retrospective” view, on the other hand, revealed that every occurrence was part of a broader network of significance, full of immanent meaning. As Leicester points out, the procession of the States General in volume 1 of The French Revolution was not just the description of a concrete event: it introduces all those figures who will emerge as important in the ensuing narrative. By the end of the chapter, “the brief moment of the procession has been filled up with references, images and significances that were not actually available at the time of occurrence, but that body forth the hidden meanings which even then, Carlyle would maintain, were present.” Elsewhere Carlyle employs slightly different techniques to implicate seemingly minor facts in larger patterns of meaning and to reveal the interweavings of history’s web, invisible to the eye fixed only on one nexus. He often depended upon a panoramic sweep of vision that came to rest, prophetically, on those objects that were or that would become most pregnant with significance. A geological explanation of the Bog of Lindsey opened up to include a survey of all the famous men who had dwelt there, starting with King Cnut and funneling down to Cromwell (HS, 58-60). The account of Cromwell’s early biography (OC, 1: chap. 4) includes not just incidents in Oliver’s life, but milestones in the religious controversy that shaped his later career: the Hampden Court Conference, the Gunpowder Plot, the collapse of the Spanish Match. Carlyle also notes the coincidence of Shakespeare’s death—ending the first “World-great Thing” of English History—with the beginning of the second “World-great Thing,” the “Armed Appeal of Puritanism,” in the form of Oliver’s admission to Cambridge. Such a lamination of events makes clear that history possesses not a linear causality but a layered solidity of meanings, in which each moment expands outward in all directions to influence others.

Carlyle’s other answer to the limitations of linear narrative was to make his method purposefully fragmentary. Substituting for the conventional continuity of major events a series of close-ups on the most suggestive occurrences achieved several ends. Like the manipulation of points of view, it too defied conventional causality and the
flattening perspective induced by *ex post facto* theories about events. More importantly, his preference for the "minor" details afforded a way of demonstrating the fecundity of even the smallest germ of historical reality and of exalting the luminous God-made fact. As he pointed out in *Past and Present*, the very "intermittence" of Jocelin's record duplicated the mingled inscrutability and certainty of Nature itself (PP, 46). This quality guaranteed the superiority of his account to fictions that invented what they could not authenticate and to annals that buried the significant fact in a deluge of shot-rubbish. The prosaic detail was particularly useful in helping the reader "domesticate himself" in scenes foreign to his own sceptical age; "Dryasdust Torpedoism" could never convince him that the seventeenth century had been "an actual flesh-and-blood fact" with "colour in its cheeks" and a belief worth dying for in its heart (OC, 1:79-80). In the escape to Varennes, Louis's shoe buckle and Marie's *badine* function in a similar way: their very insignificance convinces the reader of the authenticity of the scene. Carlyle most often relied upon the telling detail to epitomize a whole range of sociocultural phenomena. For instance, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Paul et Virginie*, and *The Chevalier de Faublas* offers the final indictment of the advanced decay of French morality (FR, 1:59-60); the new style of Empire dandyism in dress and dance signifies the "reclothing" of French culture after the Terror (FR, 3:292-93).

On a larger scale, this fragmentary method often approximates the approach Carlyle praised in Schiller's *History of the Revolt of the United Netherlands*: "The work is not stretched out into a continuous narrative; but gathered up into masses, which are successively exhibited to view, the minor facts being grouped around some leading one, to which, as to the central object, our attention is chiefly directed. This method of combining the details of events, of proceeding as it were, *per saltum*, from eminence to eminence, and thence surveying the surrounding scene, is undoubtedly the most philosophical of any."46 "Philosophical," that is, in that it allowed the historian to show the contours of "Universal History" while still exploiting the particularized factuality of events. The volume subtitles of *The French Revolution*, for instance, locate its "eminences": the Bastille, the Constitution, and the Guillotine. Likewise, each book takes its name from the major event, locale, or body highlighted within: "The Feast of Pikes," "Varennes," "Parliament First." Volume 3 offers the most forthright examples of what Carlyle also referred to as
his "compendious, grandiose-massive way" of summing up events. There his avowed intention was to "splash down what I know in large masses of colours, that it may look like a smoke-and-flame conflagration in the distance." Throughout these elliptical passages, repeated epithets, phrases, labels, and personifications act as leitmotifs to remind the reader of emerging themes and to create a degree of cohesion in an otherwise fragmentary account. On one level the fragmentary method works to convince the reader that the relationship between historical facts is that of metaphor, not of cause; actions are not the "effects" of one another, but are rather linked by their common significations of a larger implied historical whole, inaccessible by direct observation.

On another level the fragmentary method forces the reader to confront the very process of understanding history, particularly in Frederick the Great. There Carlyle also passes over large areas, providing only "glimpses"—selected incidents presented "as if caught-up by some sudden photograph apparatus" (FG, 3:41)—that allowed the reader to "conceive" the "actuality of this business" for himself. Elsewhere his attempts to force the reader into imaginative participation become even more insistent: he rapidly sketches in the outline of the action, then invites the reader to complete it with his own details (FG, 3:134-35). In the process the reader begins to share in the historian's endeavor to interpret and reconstruct the past. As the massive work proceeds, the growing heaps of undigested data and the broader gaps in narrative continuity put more and more responsibility on the reader. In this sense John Clive has described Frederick the Great as a bildungsgeschichte, in which the reader as protagonist gains self-knowledge and insight by sharing the same experiences the historian underwent in his search for truth. To Morse Peckham, however, the eventual breakdown of narrative coherence in later volumes reveals Carlyle's gradual loss of faith in the possibility of penetrating sham to read the world as a symbol of the divine. Thus a narrative method that began as a search for more profound explanations of historical truth ended in Carlyle's tacit admission that all historical explanation was at best illusory.

Notwithstanding their ultimate subversion of narrative integrity, Carlyle's methods were highly effective in realizing specific people and events. His treatment of character makes good use of the telling detail. Indeed, minor characters themselves function as such details, synecdoche for larger phenomena. The angry old women in Past and
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Present, their property confiscated in lieu of reaping silver, brandish their distaffs not just against the Cellararius, but against all the misrule of Hugo’s tenure (PP, 64). Jenny Geddes takes aim at all decayed sacramentalism when she pitches her stool at the Anglican priest (OC, 1:96). The vividly specific types who labor to complete the Field of Mars for the Feast of Pikes make palpable the way “Patriotism” inspired and leveled an entire society. Carlyle presents a mosaic in which “long-frocked tonsured Monks, with short-skirted Water-carriers, with swallow-tailed well-frizzled Incroyables of a Patriot turn” labor side by side, where “snowy linen and delicate pantaloon” alternate with the “soiled check-shirt and bushel-breeches.” “Does one distrust his brothers?” answers “a certain person” of wealth when warned against leaving his watches unguarded; at once anonymous and specific, he exposes the beautiful but flimsy “noble-sentiment” that only hastens collapse in a society incapable of weaving sentiment into duty (FR, 2:57-59). The “antiquarian” clothing of Cromwell’s cousins is used to somewhat different effect. Their “fringed trouser-breeches” and “starched ruff,” vividly real again for the moment of the historian’s notice, only underline the disintegrating power of time, which has rendered their “soul’s furniture” as quaintly antiquated as their “spanish boots and lappet caps” (OC, 1:102).

The figurative significance of such characters and details finally works against the very literalness of their portrayal. All their luminous uniqueness is a means to an end. Like metaphors, their importance lies not in the image itself but in the relationships it reveals. In this context H. M. Leicester has argued that “there are really two sets of characters going under a single set of names” in Carlyle’s histories: “the actual men, whose real nature is lost in the past and therefore unknowable; and Carlyle’s leitmotifs, which act out the parts allotted to them” in the drama of Universal history. Characters embody not individual personalities but historical purposes: the historian’s “compressive imagination” concentrates the entire Reign of Terror in Marat, the spiritual bankruptcy of all France in the Arch-Quack Cagliostro. In the process John Holloway has said, “Their individuality is volatized and disintegrated by the abstractions of which they are the vehicles.” Carlyle breathes life into minor characters so that they can give their testimony to the reality of attitudes, beliefs, phenomena, but after their task has been accomplished, he as easily exchanges them for other “emblems” that serve his purpose just as well.

Major characters are realized more fully as individuals, although
their individuality is finally subordinated in similar ways to figurative ends. Like others of his contemporaries, Carlyle believed that sympathy with the public man rested on a humanity shared with the private one within. Here the commonplace detail played an important role in helping the audience to recognize in even the most legendary beings kindred worthy of sympathy and compassion, while at the same time offering its own tacit commentary on the significance of human actions. Queen Sophie Charlotte’s smuggled pinch of snuff at Friedrich Wilhelm’s coronation is not only in character with the familiar, down-to-earth woman Carlyle earlier “reads” in her portrait; that “symbolic pinch of snuff” also represents a quiet protest against cant and ostentation, a grasp of realities that her son inherits (FG, 1:53). Carlyle passes over the fifty-seven questions asked at Louis’s trial in favor of the bit of bread he begs of Chaumette after withdrawing from the Salle de Convention: “The King eats of the Crust . . . asks now, What he shall do with the crumb? Chaumette’s clerk takes it from him; flings it out into the street. Louis says, It is pity to fling out bread, in a time of dearth.” The muted pathos of this exchange invites our sympathy for the “poor innocent mortal” who “so quietly . . . waits the drawing of the lot,” but Carlyle expects us also to sense the irony in this solicitude for mere crumbs, come too late to a monarch unseated by Twenty-five Hungry Millions (FR, 3:93-94).

Carlyle took most literally the romantic injunction to resuscitate the past. He advised readers to “repress . . . that too insatiable scientific curiosity” about the details of history so that their “aesthetic feeling” could free their imaginations (E, 3:360), and relied himself on techniques frankly dramatic and at times fictional to restore characters to a fully credible humanity. Dialogue fashioned from source documents is a standard device in his histories; his choice of Cromwell’s letters and speeches confirms his regard for authentic speech. His desire to make his dramatizations serve his own didactic and artistic ends increasingly blurs the boundaries of his evidence. In Frederick the Great he will sometimes fashion exposition into his own version of quoted dialogue, claiming, “that or something equivalent, indisputably was” (FG, 4:118), or will cite as actually spoken what he allows might be only “a mere French epigram, . . . put down for fact” (FG, 6:273). Sometimes he even renders the commentary of his source historians in a colloquial voice, as when he makes Henry Lloyd (History of the Late War) reply to hopes of an easy French
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victory, "No general will permit himself to be taken in flank with his
eyes open; and the King of Prussia is the unlikeliest you could try it
with!" (FG, 6:273). In addition to personalizing his narrative, Carlyle
thus makes Lloyd reinforce precisely the characterization he is creat­
ing; like Arnold, he uses invention to flesh out the full dimensions of
heroism.

His artistic license extends farther yet in the battle of Hohenfried­
berg. There he translates Frederick's actual words into distinctly Car­
lylean turns of phrase ("You see the ranks beginning to shake, and
jumble towards indistinctness"), phrases that project onto Frederick
the historian's own contempt for the French (FG, 5:125). The sources
barely mention Frederick's irritation at Adjutant Gaudi's discompo­
sure as the enemy approaches. From them Carlyle extrapolates a
pungently specific vignette that epitomizes the plain-speaking Fred­
erick of his imagination:

"Well, and if he do? No flurry needed Captain!" answered Friedrich,—
(not in these precise words; but rebuking Gaudi, with a look not of
laughter wholly, and with a certain question, as to the state of Gaudi's
stomachic part, which is still known in traditionary circles, but is not
mentionable here). (FG, 6:273-74)

Such fictive techniques make palpable Carlyle's claim that the eye of
the imagination often saw more deeply into the essence of the man
than the eye of the pedant, for all his data. Sometimes he also took
literally his comment that the historian must become a Shakespeare,
resorting to frankly histrionic devices in order to recapture the drama
inherent in historic encounters. Rather than follow verbatim the ac­
count of an audience with Frederick "reported by the faithful pen" of
the English Ambassador, Robinson, Carlyle "compresses" it in order
to make the King's character "vividly significant." Moreover, he
stages the reenactment as a one-act play, starring the young Frederick
who easily punctures the hot-air balloons of diplomacy with the in­
flexible steel of Realpolitik. The frame combines the appeal of spec­
tacle (complete with dramatis personae, costumes, stage directions,
and lines) with parenthetical insights that illuminate the real feelings
and thoughts of each participant (FG, 4:231 ff.). No State Paper could
allow the reader to experience the past as a dramatic transaction, to
see it from the inside out. Carlyle similarly restores the dynamic di­
mension to history in his "extensions" of Cromwell's speeches. He
scatters stage directions in brackets throughout the text, here indicat-
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ing the audience’s response—“hear! hear!” “a grim smile on some faces”—there the mode of delivery—“Oliver’s voice somewhat rising”—even stopping occasionally to correct the misapprehensions that “Groans from Dryasdust” indicate (OC, 3:46-59). These devices pull three-dimensional characters from the linear narrative, set into motion the drama frozen by time into tableaux. And yet we must to a large extent agree with Emerson: “We have men in your story and not names merely; always men, though I may doubt sometimes whether I have the historic men.”

Carlyle defied the limitations of time and memory by creating a credible humanity to plead for belief and assert, but their testimony supports his vision of the past, not necessarily their own.

We find the same concerns and devices in Carlyle’s treatment of action, particularly in his battle scenes. Although he might profess to esteem “the Social Hearth” over “the Battlefield,” military history loomed large, particularly in Cromwell and Frederick. In fact it served Carlyle’s purposes just as well if not better than domestic history. Like Arnold, Carlyle did not find warfare indiscriminately interesting. Battles deserved to be remembered when they proved to have been the “travail-throes of great or considerable changes” (FG, 4:144). It was not necessary to furnish the strategist with materials for study, however; just enough detail “to assist the reader’s fancy in conceiving it a little” for himself (FG, 5:120) would do. Rich in action, emotion, and heroism, battle scenes provided direct opportunities to forge an imaginative link between the reader and his ancestors, and thus to reconnect him with the values they found worth fighting for. Carlyle consciously appeals to the layman’s eye and the brother’s heart. Battles emerge from the dusty pages of the tacticians with a human face and compelling verisimilitude.

The main intention of his version of the storming of the Bastille, for instance (FR, 1:186-95), is to duplicate the experiential reality of the scene rather than to provide an exact account of military maneuvers: the fact that the cannon of the Gardes Françaises played the key tactical role in taking the Bastille is obscured in the jumble and rush of events. Throughout the account, Carlyle maintains a tension between the imaginative and the moral by shifting back and forth between the vividly immediate and the ultimately symbolic impact of events—the prospective and the retrospective views. Present tense verbs, speech set in dialogue, syntax as choppy as the action itself, draw the reader into the action until he and the historian merge with
the participants: “We fall, shot; and make no impression!” Against a chaotic background, Carlyle’s focus skips from individual to individual, closing in just long enough to grasp their personal response to these events or to prefigure their role in later ones. Concurrently, the voice of Carlyle the moralist is pealing out its judgment: “Wo to thee, DeLaunay, in such an hour, if thou canst not, taking some one firm decision, rule circumstances.” Typically, events seem to accomplish themselves: “straw is burnt,” “blood flows,” and, at the crucial moment, “sinks the drawbridge . . . rushes-in the living deluge: the Bastille is fallen!” Each individual action is propelled by the same relentless inevitability possessed by the Revolution as a whole, because this “Fire-Mahlstrom” is the instrument of divine judgment on a corrupt France.

In the battle scenes of Cromwell and Frederick, Carlyle goes out of his way to restore human interest and draw the reader into the action. By translating source documents into direct address and slipping into present tense verbs and first person pronouns, he converts the reader from spectator into participant. He is more successful than Arnold in exploiting his firsthand knowledge of battle sites: by shifting from his modern day impressions to the field’s appearance on the day of a famous battle he achieved what Emerson called a “stereoscopical” time-effect, drawing the reader from present into past. In Cromwell Carlyle often drops the formal and omniscient voice and lets one or two eye-witness narratives suffice for the battle account (OC, 1:175-77). Their insight into authentic human emotion is more important to him than their military accuracy or completeness. Elsewhere, Carlyle simply hands over full responsibility to the reader, advising him to imagine a battle for himself as “the most enormous hurlyburly, of fire and smoke, and steel-flashings and death-tumult, ever seen in those regions” (OC, 1:187). Carlyle’s account of Dunbar battle (OC, 2:197-209) furnishes a useful illustration of these techniques in action. He begins with present day Dunbar, then invites the spectator to look landward to “a barren heath of Hills.” In front of them we find Oliver’s tents, pitched on a “very uneven tract of ground; now in our time all yellow with wheat and barley . . . but at that date only partially tilled . . . [and] terribly beaten by showery winds that day, so that your tent will hardly stand.” In the space between “our times” and “your tent,” Carlyle has already merged the Victorian with the Roundhead. He dwells on one relatively insignificant event: Lesley’s capture of a one-armed Puritan musketeer on the day before the bat-
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tle. He quotes the man’s defiant answers to Lesley because Carlyle sees in this “most dogged handfast man” a symbol of Puritan tenacity. Carlyle then closes in on the battlefield itself, conjuring his readers to “look even with unmilitary eyes at the ground as it now is” until some “small glimmerings of distinct features,” “some spectrum of the Fact,” become visible, and they can see that “the footprint of a Hero, not yet quite indistinguishable, is here!” The reader’s participation is further reinforced as Carlyle surveys the battle lines on the rainy eve of Dunbar—“We English have some tents; the Scots have none”—and as he continues to refer to Cromwell’s troops as “we” for the rest of the account. The fighting itself he conveys in one rapid-fire paragraph that sacrifices exact detail to achieve a sense of confused movement and emotion. The action shifts in short present tense sentences from one side to the other, from men’s thoughts to their actions, until we “break them, beat them, drive them all adrift” and the Scottish army is “shivered to utter ruin.”

Like characterization, battle scenes in Frederick exercise even greater dramatic license to achieve drama and identification. Brooks demonstrates how Carlyle combed his travel notebooks and his sources for picturesque, anecdotal details to personalize and highlight individuals in the major battle scenes in this work. Straining for a plausible reality, he actually invented emotions, actions, and likely dialogue to flesh out the human shapes dessicated by his military sources. For instance, by furnishing thought, action, and speech he helps us to “fancy” Niepperg’s reaction when Frederick’s attack surprises him at dinner: “Quick, your Plan of Battle, then? Witherward; How; What? answer or perish! Niepperg was infinitely struck; dropt knife and fork: ‘Send for Römer, General of the Horse!’ ” (FG, 4:121). Later in the same account of Mollwitz, he invents dialogue to suggest the frustration of Römer’s troops—“Are we to stand here like milestones, then, and be all shot without a stroke struck?” (FG, 4:124)—and to imply the comradery among the men whom Winterfield encourages with, “Steady, meine Kinder; fix bayonets, handle ramrods!” (FG, 4:127-28). Admitting that “no human pen can describe” nor intellect discern how the Prussians triumphed at Sterbohol, he substitutes instead a brief vignette that imagines Field Marshall Schwerin turning back his retreating troops with a “Haran, meine Kinder,” the cry they take up “with hot tears” as he falls: “Haran, On!” until “they manage to do the work at Sterbohol” (FG, 6:134-35). The mousetrap image in the battle of Hohenfriedberg and the “Theseus and the Mi-
notaur over again” at Zorndorf are other inventions like the “Heran” that organize and focus an event for the reader. Carlyle’s narratives proclaim that the emotional reality of an event is more important than its literal occurrences; they attempt to make his reader understand the past by experiencing it with contemporaries. At their best his techniques create a comprehension beyond the merely historical, but they are controlled by and finally limited to a past he invented to make sense of the present. The more his confidence in his own vision faltered, the more insistently he imposed his fictions on an uncooperative or fragmentary reality. As a result we wind up agreeing with contemporary reviewers, who found the work “a curious psychological study, more interesting and valuable perhaps in a History of Thomas Carlyle than a History of Frederick the Great.”

The idiosyncrasies of Carlyle’s style always made his reputation as an historian controversial. He never succeeded in convincing his contemporaries that the created and the historical were one and the same. In fact his works played an important role in defining the split between “scientific” and “literary” history from its beginnings. The Saturday Review began to distinguish between the two as early as 1858, when J. F. Stephen used The French Revolution to exemplify “the especial advantages and disadvantages of the literary temperament” in the historian. Pointing out the ways imaginative excess could falsify history, Stephen expressed a fear common among defenders of “scientific” history: that the more powerful the historian’s literary ability, the greater the potential for misleading readers. Robert Vaughan had similarly criticized Cromwell for sacrificing “proof” to “vivacity.” Frederick of course deviated farther and farther from what reviewers expected in a history, distorting perspective and obscuring the leading facts of the epoch in an effort to entertain. Because they considered it a particular abuse of his genius to glorify might as right, reviewers claimed Frederick as proof that the “literary” historian was as dangerous a moral teacher as he was unreliable a scholar. By the 1880s, when the battle lines between “men of science” and “men of style” had been clearly drawn, Carlyle was almost uniformly condemned by defenders of professionalism as “a literary historian pure and simple.” Oscar Browning’s analysis of Carlyle’s factual errors in the flight to Varennes exemplified the attack of the academic historian on the artistic license of his “literary” rivals. Looking back in 1886 on The French Revolution, Frederic Harrison noted the change in critical climate: “A generation ago the
influence of it was great; it is now seen to be a poem, with the vision, the movement, the exaggeration of poetry, but without the one indispensable quality for history, solid historical science and true social philosophy."55 With the general public, however, Carlyle's influence remained great. In the closing decades of the century, he was held up as a paradigm for the strengths as well as weakness of "literary" history.

Taking Carlyle's measure as an historian is no simple matter. Like Arnold he combined elements of various historiographic traditions. His theory of history was romantic in its organic concept of change, in its focus on the process of spiritual revolution, and in its recognition of the contributions of the life of the common man to the life of nations. He also borrowed techniques and attitudes characteristic of the romantic poet. The prophetic role he assigned to the historian, the merging of historian and event that preceded the act of imaginative reconstruction, and his attempt at forging a new language that could portray the spiritual dimension of events, all link him to romanticism. But in practice his sternly moralistic purposes prevented him from escaping the judgmental tendencies of preceding historians, and thus restricted the process of empathetic identification so fundamental to romantic historicism. The overriding purpose of his histories was to impress upon his readers the lesson learned in the history of the Jews: all men must keep God's commandments or become the instruments of His wrath. His Calvinistic biases were constantly imposing on events and characters a set of ethical standards not derived from history itself.

If Carlyle's elevation of human history to the level of cosmic drama gave his work a timelessness that other historians may not be able to claim, it also entailed serious drawbacks. Because his interest in events was essentially metaphorical or allegorical, he rarely gave them the close analysis that they demanded. He largely ignored his own collectivistic and developmental theories about the way history operated. Unlike Arnold he tended to reduce any epoch to a kind of psychomachia in which institutions, law, economics, politics, or class were only effects, not causes, of change. While asserting that custom, convention, and tradition played a vital role in human activity and thought, Carlyle seldom went beyond a symbolic explanation of their interrelationship. With characters as with institutions, his sins were usually those of omission. The allegorical function he attributed to individuals always limited the depth of their characteriza-
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tion. When faced with evidence incongruous to his own formulation of a character's importance, he did not misrepresent so much as he simply ignored. Undeniably he possessed a rare ability for bringing historical characters back to life, but they walked as the ghosts of his own prejudices and not as self-validating personalities.

Out of his very weaknesses, however, come some strengths. If he was insufficiently critical of those men who represented the forces of good, he escaped the cynicism of utilitarian theories that reduced all motivation to the level of pleasure or pain. If he allowed a metaphorical view of an event or character to preclude rigorous analysis, at least in the case of Cromwell and The French Revolution he provided a much-needed corrective to prevailing prejudices. If he depended too heavily on moral absolutes as standards of judgment, they did save him from what were later recognized as the dangers of excessive historical relativism: a refusal to judge, a blind trust or equally blind fatalism concerning the course of history. If his techniques drew more heavily on the subjectivity of the poet rather than on the professionalism of the scholar, they allowed for a dimension in historical writing rare in later days of overspecialization. Carlyle, in James Russell Lowell's phrase, saw "history, as it were, by flashes of lightning"; the luminous clarity and insight of his best passages more than atone for the intervening obscurity.

We should also keep in mind that Carlyle's conception of history, whatever its limits, suited the needs and interests of the Victorians. Without making them feel they were escaping from their duty in the present, he offered them reconnection with the "vigorous whole-life" of "rough strong times, wherein those maladies of ours had not yet arisen" (E, 4:56). His view of change acknowledged the mutability of material things that was so constant a reality to them while offering reassurance that the "organic filaments" of spiritual continuity still survived destruction of the familiar. He devoted his major works to the most thorough changes in modern Europe, seeking ways to interpret the changes of his own day. These works acted as both a warning to his own age to follow God's laws and a reassurance that in the long run Good would triumph. His transcendental conception of time and history satisfied Victorian hunger for moral uplift while allowing his readers to forget the specific theological dilemmas of their own age. The theory of hero-worship, however repugnant its objects, offered a heartening denial of the diminution of individual stature in a randomly determined universe and a means of obtaining secular saints.
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for a generation now forced to live by "Admiration, Hope, and Love." Natural Supernaturalism held out the promise of spiritual transcendence without requiring a repudiation of the facts of this world, thus suggesting a means of unifying the scientific, the religious, and the imaginative, faculties that seemed to many to operate at cross purposes.

That Carlyle's teachings could not retain their original credibility tells us as much about the times as the man. In one respect he—unlike Arnold—simply outlived that generation for which the contradictory pulls of science and religion could be balanced without fragmentation of belief. He had made a leap of faith to conquer scepticism, but in the latter half of the century that leap simply fell short of the realities of the age. As the century wore on, the scientific conception of change and progress silently refuted claims that history was governed by divine purpose and direction. The progress of religious scepticism made Natural Supernaturalism all the more attractive as an inspiring, if vague, alternative, but one that either failed to provide practical objects for worship, or that expressed itself in a worship of force repellent to the Victorian moral sense. The changing social fabric most decisively distanced Carlyle from his times. The sage seemed an atavism in an age of professionalism and specialization, the hero-worshipper an anomaly in an age of democracy and mass culture. Carlyle's refusal to acknowledge democracy's strength in the modern world was his most unhistorical blindspot. With the repudiation of his social teachings implicit in the political drift of the latter nineteenth century, what had begun in him as an appreciation for individual excellence and wise guidance hardened into a blind absolutism and worship of force that repelled readers otherwise quite receptive to the moral quality of his message.

That Carlyle could be so wrong-headed about the actual course of change in his own day only underlines the fact that his strengths and weaknesses were those of the visionary. He was a powerful critic of his own society, but an inadequate reformer, because in the long run he wanted not to confront time and change so much as to overleap them into a world of eternal verities. He had a keen insight into the spiritual malaise of his age and a profound understanding of man's spiritual needs. However else they may have failed, his histories succeeded admirably in nourishing these. One reviewer noted that in failing to realize his own version of utopia, Carlyle had also failed in his wish to make "himself . . . the hero of this modern age."57 One suspects,
however, that it was precisely his example—as one voice struggling with incomparable eloquence to express man’s continuing need to reaffirm the possibilities for faith, order, excellence, and transcendence—that assured his heroic value even for an age that outgrew his teachings.