THREE

Revolution and Authority: 1830–1837

When Carlyle began authoring his own works in the 1830s, he made the search for authority in an era of revolution his major theme. His first attempt to resolve the problem, Sartor Resartus, led to the crisis of authority displayed in “The Reminiscence of James Carlyle.” In reaction, he reformulated his poetics and produced a work that directly addressed the problem of authority in an era of revolution, The French Revolution. But this masterpiece in turn opened up a new realm of revolutionary discourse, leading him to the conclusion that writing alone would never recover the domestic idyll.

Sartor Resartus and the Revolution of 1830

Carlyle watched with interest when, on July 27, 1830, a second French revolution overturned the Bourbon monarchy. In England, parliamentary elections earlier the same month had begun to raise the issues that led to the passage of the Reform Bill in 1832. Throughout the month of August, almost certainly inspired by his reflections on the sansculottes—“men without trousers”—Carlyle began to develop in his letters and notebooks the clothing metaphor of Sartor Resartus. On August 6, less than two weeks after the revolution began, he was advising his brother that “Men are but poor spindle-shanked wiffling wonners [wonders] when you clutch them thro’ the mass of drapery they wear” (CL, 5:130; see 133). By September, he had begun writing the first draft of Sartor Resartus, “Thoughts on Clothes” (see TNB, 176, 177).

Carlyle completed the long essay that was eventually to become Sartor Resartus on October 28, just two weeks before Wellington re-
signed as prime minister, making way for a Whig ministry and parliamentary reform. The July elections had returned the Tories, but Wellington could not suppress the demand for reform in Parliament. The events in France convinced many that reform was the only alternative to revolution. When Grey succeeded Wellington that autumn, Carlyle shared the general expectation that radical change was imminent: “The Whigs in office, and Baron Brougham Lord Chancellor! Hay-stacks and corn-stacks burning over all the South and Middle of England! Where will it end? Revolution on the back of Revolution for a century yet?” (TNB, 178–79).

If Carlyle had reservations about Whig reform, it was because it did not go far enough, not because, as the Tories argued, it was too revolutionary (Briggs, 237). Carlyle, who considered that the Whigs, like the Tories, were already “done” for, agreed with the radicals that England required a more fundamental, a more truly revolutionary, alteration of its social structure: “All Europe is in a state of disturbance, of Revolution. . . . Their Parl. Reforms, and all that, are of small moment; a beginning . . . nothing more. The whole frame of Society is rotten and must go for fuel-wood” (TNB, 186, 183–84). Although he distrusted the utilitarian principles of the philosophic radicals, he shared their desire for radical reform, following the course of events in the Examiner, which he considered the “cleverest of all Radicals” (CL, 5:201; see 249, 270).

In January, Carlyle read the first of a series of articles in the Examiner, entitled “Spirit of the Age,” that seemed to support the ideas he had set forth in the first draft of “Thoughts on Clothes.” Like Carlyle, its author was concerned with the problem of finding “authority which commands confidence” during an “era of transition” (Newspaper Writings, 244). He also shared Carlyle’s sense that they were living in an era of revolution, that “the times are pregnant with change; and that the nineteenth century will be known to posterity as the era of one of the greatest revolutions of which history has preserved the remembrance” (230). He even employed the clothing metaphor to make the point that revolution is the process by which society throws off outmoded institutions and “renovate[s]” itself: “Mankind have outgrown old institutions and old doctrines, and have not yet acquired new ones. When we say outgrown, we intend to prejudge nothing. A man may not be either better or happier at six-and-twenty, than he was at six years of age: but the same jacket which fitted him then, will not fit
him now” (230). On January 21 (the article appeared on January 9), Carlyle wrote his brother praising “Spirit of the Age”—he discovered in reply that its author was John Stuart Mill—and outlining for the first time his plans for extensively revising his essay on clothes (CL, 5:215–16, 235). Mill’s essay seems to have encouraged him to expand “Thoughts on Clothes” and to seek a more serious outlet for it than Fraser’s satirical literary magazine, to which he had originally submitted it. In March, while Parliament began considering the reform bill, he began to rework “Thoughts on Clothes,” and in late July, while Parliament still sat in a state of indecision, he took the revised manuscript to London.

Like “The Spirit of the Age,” Sartor Resartus addresses itself to and analyzes Carlyle’s “revolutionary times,” its opening chapter alluding directly to the Revolt of Paris and the British agitation for Reform (6). Sartor Resartus inscribes its origins in the Paris Revolt in its fictional frame where the “British Editor,” who transcribes and narrates the life and opinions of Diogenes Teufelsdrockh, completes his work just at the moment when the “Parisian Three Days” begins (296). Furthermore, its central figure, the German clothes philosopher, is a “Radical” “Sansculottist” (63, 59). Sartor Resartus represents a world in which ideas can “overturn . . . the whole old system of Society,” in which a sansculottic philosopher can tailor or author a new suit of social clothing (118).

Carlyle could hardly have chosen a more appropriate figure than clothing to represent an era of revolution. Not only did the metaphor have a long religious and literary history and an association with political revolution through the term sansculotte, but clothing was also the chief product of the industrial revolution. The textile industry was the first to be extensively mechanized and brought under the factory system, and the social disruptions wrought by these changes played a major role in producing the social unrest that led to the movement for reform. Hard hit by the decline in the value of their labor—between 1814 and 1829, the price of a piece of handmade calico dropped from 6s. 6d. to 1s. 1d.—hand-loom weavers were among the most active participants in the intermittent riots and mob activities of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Ashton, 81; Logue, 194). Carlyle perceived the fine irony that the glut of cloth produced by the industrial revolution would not serve to clothe the nation but to strip it naked, that weavers of cloth were being pushed toward sansculottism.
Carlyle, via his clothes philosopher Teufelsdörrckh, uses the weaving of cloth, or the sewing of a suit of clothes, to represent the process of authoring beliefs and institutions. His emphasis on clothing as woven textile plays on the root of the word text—texere, to weave. Transcendental authority authors, weaves, or sews together the institutions and beliefs that constitute human society. Clothes are the medium through which the transcendental becomes visible in the finite world of human history: “Church-Clothes are, in our vocabulary, the Forms, the Vesture, under which men have at various periods embodied and represented for themselves the Religious Principle” (214). At the moment of their creation, clothes adequately represent or reveal the transcendental. Insofar as beliefs and institutions possess transcendental authority, they unite the authority to compel belief and to compel obedience, but because clothes, beliefs, and institutions are historical, they gradually lose their ability to manifest or represent transcendental authority. Carlyle represents this aspect of clothing by emphasizing that cloth is an organic material subject to wear and decay. The rags of old customs must be discarded in the “laystall,” where they will decompose and become fertilizer for the “organic filaments” from which new cloth can be woven.

The clothing metaphor thus represents the fundamental historicity of cultural institutions and the inevitability of periodic revolution (see Dale, Victorian Critic, 299; Vanden Bossche, “Revolution and Authority,” 277). Since nothing can prevent the processes of decay that destroy old clothing, Sartor’s pervasive organic imagery suggests that revolution and historical change are natural, noncataclysmic processes. Carlyle was aware, however, that many of his contemporaries thought it possible to patch up the old suits of clothing, to revive old beliefs and institutions instead of creating new ones. This patching up, however, would only repress the forces of change that would eventually break out in violent, rather than peaceful, revolution. Carlyle also uses the clothing metaphor to suggest the dangers that arise when clothing becomes customary or habitual. While clothing is theoretically transparent to the authority it reveals, it also covers and conceals it. Sartor Resartus suggests that the organic process that wears out clothes increases their opacity. When clothes become impediments to the recognition of authority rather than revelations of it, one is justified in stripping away and destroying them so that they can be replaced with new clothing. Teufelsdörrckh does not flinch at the thought of destroying worn-out
clothing. In fact, he positively delights in the sansculottic vision in which “the Clothes fly off the whole dramatic corps; and Dukes, Grandees, Bishops, Generals, Anointed Presence itself, every mother’s son of them, stand straddling there, not a shirt on them” (61).

Yet vision in *Sartor Resartus* seeks to make the transcendental manifest through new clothes, not just to pierce through and destroy clothing. One might expect that stripping away the clothing that conceals transcendental authority would be the surest way of recovering that authority. This is the position of “Adamites,” antinomian sects that seek to recover paradise by living, like Adam, without clothes and without laws. But, for the Carlyle of *Sartor Resartus*, the fall into history makes the divine inaccessible except through clothing. Consequently, while Teufelsdröckh is a “Sansculottist,” he is no “Adamite” (60). The antinomian Adamites of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had argued that human law cannot displace divine law and therefore wanted to discard human law, to go naked; but Teufelsdröckh insists that only through clothing can we produce social order, that “Society is founded upon Cloth,” that “without clothes” there would be no “Politeness, Polity, or even Police” (51, 64; see 41, 60). In fact, the sansculottes, modern-day Adamites, have left society naked, stripped of the beliefs and institutions that constitute the social order. Organic clothing, alive with transcendental presence, produces just social relationships in a world otherwise subject to the amoral and purely mechanical laws of raw nature, a universe that is “one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind [one] limb from limb. O the vast, gloomy, solitary Golgotha, and Mill of Death” (164; emphasis added). The metaphor of the mill—punning on the name of the leading utilitarian philosopher, James Mill, a “Motive-Millwright”—connects the natural order to the laissez-faire economics espoused by the utilitarians (159, 220–21; see 68, 117, 232). Human beings, without the social order provided by custom, would tear one another to pieces. When human law no longer manifests transcendental authority, it cannot simply be destroyed: it must be replaced. Voltaire rightly destroys the “Mythus of the Christian Religion” because it is no longer a vital system of belief, but he falls into the Adamite heresy when he fails to “embody the divine Spirit of” Christianity “in a new Mythus, in a new vehicle and vesture” (163, 194).

When it comes to discovering who has authority to make new clothing, however, *Sartor Resartus* becomes ambiguous, divided between a
Goethe who would author a new mythus and a Napoleon who preaches his doctrine "through the cannon's throat" (178). The figure of the king, whose "authority from God" enables him to rule by "divine right," combines the authority to compel belief and to compel obedience because he excels in "Ken-ning (Cunning), or which is the same thing, Can-ning" (249). Because *Sartor Resartus* privileges "kenning," that is, knowledge and belief, from which "canning," social action and law, derives, the king is more likely to be a man of letters like Goethe than a politician like Napoleon. Indeed, in his notebook, Carlyle had claimed that the "only Sovereigns in this world in these days are the Literary men," and when he introduces the idea of "Hero-worship" in *Sartor Resartus*, he gives as an example of the hero, not a political figure, but Voltaire (TNB, 184; SR, 251).

Yet the figure of Voltaire raises the problem of how the man of letters can act ("can") as well as know ("ken"). Throughout *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle expresses the anxiety that Teufelsdröckh's vocation will lead him to emulate, not Goethe, but Voltaire and Byron (192, 194). Employing the metaphor of building to describe the creation of a new social structure, *Sartor Resartus* articulates an opposition between those writers who create and those who destroy. While England needs a "Rebuilder" or an "Architect," not a "hodman," English utilitarianism is "calculated for destroying . . . not for rebuilding" (248, 105, 234). Similarly, Voltaire fails because he possesses "Only a torch for burning, no hammer for building" (163). This suggests that already in *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle was beginning to doubt whether the man of letters could build, could replace the man of religion. To become a man of letters was to participate in the industrial revolution—journalism as the industry of literature—that was undermining rather than establishing authority.

Because the man of letters "kens" but cannot "can," Carlyle is attracted to the political hero, the Napoleon, who "can" but does not "ken." Although a sansculotte, Teufelsdröckh is also concerned with social control, with the ability to enforce belief in order to guarantee a just social order. This tendency of hero-worship to slide toward authoritarianism, or at least hierarchy, remains muted in *Sartor Resartus* because *Sartor* frames its analysis of the era of revolution in terms of the problem of religious belief, not, as the later works would, in terms of the institution of democracy. Although Teufelsdröckh is a sansculotte interested in social reform, he articulates his concern for
reform through a religious medium, the problem of the loss and recovery of faith. Although Carlyle became increasingly concerned with discovering heroic leadership rather than establishing religious belief, he would never fully abandon the idea that there could be "no permanent beneficent arrangement of affairs" until "Religion, the cement of Society," was reestablished (TNB, 179). Furthermore, he would always be haunted by the question that arose even as he introduced the idea of hero-worship in Sartor Resartus: "Kings do reign by divine right, or not at all. The King that were God-appointed, would be an emblem of God, and could demand all obedience from us. But where is that King?" (TNB, 185; emphasis added in last sentence).

The Author as Sansculotte

While Sartor Resartus represents Diogenes Teufelsdröckh as a sansculotte who becomes an authority, its first readers were more ready to perceive its author as a revolutionary than an authority. The London publishers found it so unconventional that they would not risk publishing it while the political scene remained unsettled. This rejection led Carlyle to doubt whether the man of letters could become an authority. The reaction of the publishers anticipated the reaction of friends like John Sterling, who objected that Sartor's style was "barbarous" and "lawless," that its neologisms were "without any authority" (SR, 309–11). Carlyle responded to the charge in the terms he had used to discuss revolution in Sartor Resartus itself: "If one has thoughts not hitherto uttered in English Books, I see nothing for it but that you must use words not found there, must make words." Arguing that "revolution" had already undermined "the whole structure of our Johnsonian English," he defended a style that attempted to forge a new language in its place (CL, 8:135; see TNB, 264). Although born of his desire to "prophesy," to "make men hear [his] voice," Sartor Resartus remained unheard for two years while he worked toward a new conception of literature (CL, 5:43, TNB, 152).

What Sterling and the other critics sought was a point of reference, a shared or standard language, from outside of the text. Carlyle, too, sought a shared language, but found it necessary to create a new one because the old shared language had become meaningless. Consequently, the Carlylean hero is self-authorizing. Teufelsdröckh casts
off the clothes, the profession and worldview, conferred on him by society, and determines to make his own clothes, to author his own myths. Whereas royal authority had been established with reference to a system of primogeniture external to itself, the hero’s authority is established through his own ability.

As a result, *Sartor Resartus*, loaded with neologism and metaphor, is not only “hyper-metaphorical” but highly self-referential (293). Neologism and metaphor, a new word and the substitution of a new word or image for another, are both attempts to represent what cannot be represented through the existing vocabulary. Since Teufelsdröckh’s language is, at least theoretically, entirely new, since it cannot obtain meaning by reference to any previous text, it must become entirely self-referential. The network of clothing metaphors in *Sartor Resartus* defines itself in relation to the network of organic metaphors, which in turn defines itself in relation to other networks of imagery, until they all become one vast, self-defining network. In fact, the web or network—as in the figure of weaving—is one of the principal metaphors of the book. Furthermore, any object or place that might appear to refer to some literal object outside of the symbolical pattern ultimately tends to be absorbed into the metaphorical network. Finally, many of the textual practices that readers have found characteristic of *Sartor Resartus*—the dislocation of chronology, the use of character as “motif” or “general concept,” the elaboration of binary oppositions, and the “multi-levelled fiction” in which the principal narrator edits and comments on writings by Teufelsdröckh and Hofrath Heuschrecke—all serve to intensify *Sartor*’s self-referentiality.

Carlyle’s early readers seemed to have been most concerned about this hermetic tendency of *Sartor Resartus*. A reader for one of the publishers that rejected it thought it “doubtful” that the work “would take with the public” (*CL*, 6:6, n. 1). Sterling complained that instead of employing familiar metaphors and fables, instead of using “Old” figures to present “New” ideas, Carlyle persisted in confronting the reader with tropes and figures that “the common reader must find perfectly bewildering” (*SR*, 311—12). Emerson, although among the earliest admirers of *Sartor*, reinforced Sterling’s objections when he complained that its unfathomable diction seemed to indicate that the “Prophet . . . despair[ed] of finding a contemporary audience” (*RWE*, 98). Carlyle acknowledged to both Emerson and Mill (who had made similar criticisms) that he had not gauged his audience adequately, concluding, “I
never know or can even guess what or who my audience is, or whether I have any audience” (CL, 6:449; see 7:264–66).17

If authors are self-authorizing and their texts self-referential, they risk enclosing themselves in a private world cut off from their audience. Furthermore, because authors can provide no external signs of their authority, an audience has no way of distinguishing between an author with transcendental authority and a fraud. In Sartor Resartus, Carlyle appropriately uses George Fox, the founder of the Quakers (one of his encyclopedia articles was about them), to represent the self-authorizing author. Fox, like Teufelsdröckh, is a rebel who casts off “[m]ountains of encumbrance,” the old clothes that constrain him, and stitches together his own “perennial suit of Leather . . . into one continuous all-including Case” that recuperates the “vesture . . . one and indivisible” of Teufelsdröckh’s youth (210–11; 92). Fox’s attempt to regain prelapsarian innocence represents Carlyle’s desire to recover a transcendental language. But, although rebellion liberates Fox from his “Prison” into “lands of true Liberty,” the language he speaks does not become a shared belief, a constitutive mythus; it remains private (211). Indeed, as early as “The State of German Literature,” Carlyle had argued that mystics like Jacob Böhme and George Fox were “ignorant” of the state of their fellow human beings, speaking “not in the language of men, but of one man who had not learned the language of men” (CME, 1:73). An inheritor of the Enlightenment, Carlyle was well aware that the sincere mystic who claimed divine inspiration could just as easily be a deluded madman.

Carlyle saw this fate in the career of his close friend Edward Irving, a career that paralleled his own. Irving’s more conventional vocation initially provided him with the authority that Carlyle longed for. His sermons so powerfully affected his listeners that in 1821, when Carlyle had not even begun his career as a writer, Irving was invited to London, where he found a large and enthusiastic audience. His ability to communicate with this audience seemed to expand when members of his congregation began speaking in tongues, the Old Testament image of the ideal shared language. But, in fact, the language was shared only by a small minority of Irving’s followers, the majority deserting the congregation. No philosophe could have been more suspicious of religious “enthusiasts”—he identified Irving with the “ranters,” a sect related to Fox’s Quakers—than the Carlyle who concluded that speaking in tongues “was no special work of the Holy Spirit, or any Spirit
save of that black frightful unclean one that dwells in Bedlam”; Irving must be self-deceived or a deceiver (CL, 6:41). Carlyle concluded in his obituary notice of 1835 that, instead of bringing religious belief to the public, Irving had “shut himself up in a lesser world of ideas and persons, and lived isolated there” (CME, 3:322; see CL, 6:65).

It is only a short step from the self-deluded, like Irving and Fox, to those who intentionally delude others. If the James Carlyle of “The Reminiscence of James Carlyle” represents the author who possesses transcendental authority, Cagliostro, in an essay written one year later, represents the author who dupes his contemporaries with false claims of transcendental authority. Carlyle proposed the topic of “Count Cagliostro” to the editor of the Edinburgh Review just four months after his father’s death (CL, 6:167). His interest in the topic must have been special, for it was one of the rare times in his early career that he was able to write for a review on a topic of his own choosing rather than one assigned by an editor. “Count Cagliostro” reflects on, even satirizes, Teufelsdröckh’s discovery of authority in Sartor Resartus, suggesting that, while Teufelsdröckh seeks to become an “architect” who can build like the mason James Carlyle, he is in danger of becoming a charlatan “freemason” like Cagliostro.

Cagliostro’s career parodies the career narrative Carlyle had constructed in his earlier writings. Cagliostro’s family, against his will, arranges for him to become a monk, just as Carlyle’s parents hoped he would become a minister. Like Carlyle, Cagliostro rejects this vocation, deciding instead to become an artist; but his only talent is for forgery, writing that deceives. Exiled from Palermo after the discovery of his crimes, Cagliostro becomes, like Teufelsdröckh, a wanderer in the eighteenth-century world of atheism and democracy. Just as Teufelsdröckh takes his nightly cup of beer at a coffee-house named “Zur Grünen Gans,” Cagliostro spends a night at a fictitious inn named the “Green Goose” (SR, 15; CME, 3:279). Driven by hunger to seek a profession, both become professors and discourse on “Things in General,” though Teufelsdröckh is a “Professor of Things in General” and Cagliostro a “Professor of Swindlery” (SR, 120, 18; CME, 3:268, 292). Both observe the world from a metaphorical “watch-tower,” and just as Teufelsdröckh promises a “new mythus,” the Palingensia that will bring a “Newbirth of Society,” Cagliostro claims that he brings a new “Evangel” that will “Renovat[e] . . . the Universe” (SR, 6, 20, 217; CME, 3:262, 286). Yet Sartor, playful as it is, never questions Teufels-
dröckh's sincerity, or even his ability to author a *Palingensia*, while "Count Cagliostro" never permits us to believe its hero is anything but a quack.

Nonetheless, in ridiculing Cagliostro's claims to possess the authority of a James Carlyle and emphasizing his similarity to Teufelsdröckh, the essay implicitly questions Teufelsdröckh's project, suggesting that he may be as self-deluded as Irving or Fox. Insisting on his transcendental authority, Cagliostro claims to be God's "chosen . . . apostle," to possess "authority over the Angels," and to act by "the power of God" (*CME*, 3:293, 287). As "Renovator of the Universe," he promises to restore the world to a "primitive state of innocence, lost by original sin," a transcendental idyll (286). But, whereas James Carlyle had built his idyllic home out of stone, Cagliostro builds his "Masonic hall" of "gilt-pasteboard"; whereas Carlyle represents his father's creations as permanent and substantial, he represents Cagliostro's as theatrical illusions no more substantial than "foam" or "soap-bubble[s]" (*CME*, 3:291, 285; see Campbell, "Edward Irving").

Most importantly, the representation of Cagliostro's language parodies Teufelsdröckh's, revealing how distant Teufelsdröckh is from James Carlyle. Just as Cagliostro's theatrical freemasonry is the opposite of James Carlyle's substantial masonry, his "froth-speeches" are the opposite of the elder Carlyle's potent words (*CME*, 3:285). As opposed to the unitary prelapsarian language of James Carlyle, Cagliostro's dialect, composed of "Sicilian-Italian, and Laquais-de-Place French, garnished with shreds from all European dialects," seems almost a parody of *Sartor* and its heavy doses of German (*CME*, 3:293). His speech is simply a parody of Teufelsdröckh's "sleeping and soporific passages; circumlocutions, repetitions, touches even of pure doting jargon": Cagliostro "babble[s] in long-winded diffusions, chaotic circumvolutions tending nowhither . . . a Tower-of-Babel jargon . . . . His whole thought is confused, inextricable; what thought, what resemblance of thought he has, cannot deliver itself, except in gasps, blustering gushes, spasmodic refluences, which make bad worse" (*SR*, 31; *CME*, 3:293; emphasis added). Both speak the fragmented language of a post-Babelian era of unbelief.

Cagliostro's inverse creation, "working the mighty chaos, into a creation—of ready-money," similarly parodies Teufelsdröckh's intention to imitate the god of Genesis who creates paradise out of the primordial chaos (*CME*, 3:291; *SR*, 197). Cagliostro is a counterfeit prophet:
"If the ancient Father was named Chrysostom, or Mouth-of-Gold, be the modern Quack named Pinchbecko-stom, or Mouth-of-Pinchbeck" (CME, 3:296). Saint John Chrysostom, who was reputed to be the greatest orator of the early church, was persecuted for speaking plainly about the faults of governors and wrote biblical commentaries that emphasized literal meaning and practical applications. Whereas Chrysostom's words, as his name indicates, have the value of gold, Cagliostro's are pinchbeck—that is to say, counterfeit. Instead of using his mouth to act upon the world creatively, Cagliostro survives through "Eatableness, and Similitude of Doing"; he is a "raven," a "bustard," a "jackal," a predator who feeds on the victims drawn to him by his delusive words (CME, 3:318, 269, 284, 306; see 261, 263, 274, 300). "Count Cagliostro" represents Carlyle's anxiety that instead of leading his readers into the promised land, he was leading them to a "gilt-pasteboard" paradise.20

From Craigenputtoch to London

In 1828, Carlyle had attempted to recover the domestic idyll by moving from Edinburgh to Craigenputtoch, a farm on the remote moors of southwest Scotland. Edinburgh represented urban exile, exclusion from the family and its religious faith, even loss of health. His chronic dyspepsia—probably a psychosomatic manifestation of his spiritual crisis—first developed while he was living there, and he came to feel that he could only recover physical as well as spiritual health by returning to the country. He had been reduced to hackwork and prevented from pursuing the higher calling of literature. From this time, Carlyle tended to identify English literature as the hack production of urban industry—he depicted the literary men of London as a "rascal rout, [a] dirty rabble" (CL, 3:234)—while idealizing the literature of Germany. His preference for calling advertising "puffery" emphasized his conception of it as giving a false illusion of significance to what was in reality without meaning or value. Yet he, too, was enmeshed in the network of commerce. When he saw his own name advertised in the windows of the Athenæum offices, he chided himself in his notebook for contributing to the journal: "Why yield even half a hair's-breadth to Puffing? Abhor it, utterly divorce it, and kick it to the Devil!" (TNB, 233; see CME, 3:101). Indeed, the treatment of
literature as a mere commodity was nowhere more evident than in the pages of the *Athenaeum*, where advertisements for books appeared alongside those for hair oil and patent medicines.\footnote{21}

Yet escape from the toils of urban industry was not easy. Carlyle had already attempted to recover the childhood idyll in 1825, the year he spent on a farm at Hoddam Hill. Symbolically reunited with his family—his mother spent part of the year there—he felt as if he was in his “second boyhood,” able to escape time and recover the oceanic timelessness that Teufelsdröckh would ascribe to his “Idylic” childhood: “Time no longer hurries past me like a mountain flood, the channel of which is soon to lie dead and empty: it spreads around me like a placid sea” (CL, 3:330, 349; SR, 90; see Kaplan, 111ff.). Late the following year he married Jane Welsh, and they settled in Edinburgh, where he tried but failed to write the two novels “Illudo Chartis” and *Wotton Reinfred*. By 1828, Edinburgh had come to represent not only the loss of family, faith, and health, but the corruption of literature by the publishing industry.

Unable to write a work of his own and wracked with dyspepsia, both moral and physical, he began to insist that only the country could cure him (CL, 4:198—99, 233, 359). Craigenputtoch, like Hoddam Hill, would be an Eden, a “green oasis,” where he could recapture health and become an authority. Because they could live at Craigenputtoch cheaply—Jane Carlyle had inherited the property from her father—he would “not be tempted to tell lies for money” and could “cultivate Literature” (CL, 4:407—8). He became fond of comparing Craigenputtoch to Patmos, the island in the Aegean where Saint John wrote the book of Revelations, a place to write “mystical Reviews” and to begin “prophesying” (CL, 4:434). In a more sportive mood, he suggested that it might even become an idyll for literary men, like the one he had imagined as the House in the Wold in *Wotton Reinfred* (see CL, 5:433). Although this proposal to create an idyll populated by writers rather than shepherds was partly tongue-in-cheek, Carlyle was serious when he insisted that in his “rustic solitude . . . the business of magazine-writing and the profits and disprofits of magazine conducting are utterly alien” (CL, 4:106).\footnote{22}

But he came to associate the very conditions that made writing *Sartor Resartus* possible—social isolation and freedom from the marketplace—with its transcendental solipsism. Jane Carlyle hated Craigenputtoch because of its social isolation, and Carlyle came to regard it
less as a refuge than as a prison. During his visit to London in 1831–32, he had still been able to look back to Craigenputtoch as a fortress within which he could retreat to safety from the Babylonian city (CL, 5:429–30, 6:64). When he failed to sell *Sartor Resartus*, he began to disparage Craigenputtoch and to contemplate a move to London. The country had not cured him of his urban dyspepsia, and by January 1833 he had decided that Craigenputtoch was no longer a "wholesome" abode (CL, 6:291, 308, 330). By the time he and Jane decided to move to London in 1834, he saw the change as his "last chance . . . to redeem [his] existence from Pain and Imprisonment," as breaking out of a "Bastille" (CL, 7:104, 124).

Carlyle had come to regard Craigenputtoch, not as withstanding the invading world of commerce as his childhood home had done, but as imprisoning him, preventing his prophecies from reaching the world because it isolated him from the social community represented by the people he met during his stay in London. When Mill, Emerson, and Sterling complained that he did not seem to take his audience into account, he blamed the solitude of Craigenputtoch, where he had been unable to envision his audience because he had "no known public" and was "alone under the Heavens" (CL, 7:265). He no longer depicted Craigenputtoch as a land of plenty but as a barren place incapable of producing literature: "Nothing ever was more ungenial than the soil that poor Teufelsdrockhish seedcorn has been thrown on here" (CL, 7:264). The "green oasis" he had described to Goethe in 1828 had by 1834 turned into the "Dunscore Desert . . . a place doomed, even in my memory, to silence, obstruction, and the dispiritment of motionless desolation; a place I care not if I never see again!" (CL, 4:407, 7:280). It would seem the problem with Craigenputtoch was precisely its idyllic timelessness, an "everlasting Solitude" in which there was "no human soul with which to commune" (CL, 7:112; 6:210).

So, instead of escaping the constraints of the literary marketplace, Carlyle had only cut himself off from the source of his income. He still needed to write reviews to survive, and, in spite of economies, found in February 1831, as he set out to revise *Sartor Resartus*, that he had only "some £5 to front the world with" (TNB, 183). His realization that he was writing for an urban market impelled him to take the manuscript of *Sartor Resartus* to London, and his experience there made even clearer to him the importance of staying in contact with the editors who controlled the publishing industry. Although *Sartor* was
rejected, he returned to Craigenputtoch with “plenty” of commissions from editors he had met during his stay (CL, 6:131). In the immensely productive year between his father’s death in January 1832 and his decision to leave Craigenputtoch in January 1833, he wrote eight articles, translated Goethe’s “Novelle,” and wrote an introduction to his translation of Goethe’s “Das Märchen,” these pieces appearing in Fraser’s, the Edinburgh Review, the Foreign Quarterly Review, the Monthly Magazine, and the New Monthly Magazine. With “Characteristics,” which was “approved seemingly by every one whose approval was wanted,” he seemed finally to have discovered his audience (CL, 6:132).

As the year drew on, however, Carlyle’s distance from London told (CL, 6:138). After the first round of articles, he received no further commissions, except from Fraser, who published six of his pieces in 1832 and would be the only editor to publish his work in 1833. “My whole trade is to think and speak,” he complained to Mill, “but as the world goes, I have absolutely no permission to speak! Think of poor me and poor Fraser’s Magazine! Yet such is my best speaking-mechanism at this moment; for aught I know, it is my only one” (CL, 7:25). He considered Fraser’s, which always took his work but paid poorly, a “Dog’s-meat Cart,” “a chaotic, fermenting, dung-hill heap of compost” that had “nothing to do” with “Literature” (TNB, 232, 259, 170). He longed to free himself not only from Fraser’s, but from all connection with journalism, yet, with Sartor Resartus languishing in manuscript, he was forced to continue with it: “One must write ‘Articles’,” he lamented, “write and curse” (CL, 6:265).

At this point, London came to represent the possibility of producing for an audience that acknowledged his authority. While he might still regard London as a “Phlegethon-Fleetditch,” he now concluded that literature could not “be carried on elsewhere by an Englishman” (CL, 7:142). During his 1831–32 visit to London, he had found “great respect, even love from some few.” As he recalled these admirers in the isolation of Craigenputtoch, London began to look “more and more poetic,” a more “natural” situation than the rural “wilderness” (CL, 7:177, 280; see 6:126).

Yet, if moving to London brought him into contact with his audience and the marketplace, Carlyle still needed to discover a literary form through which to address them. Like Schiller, in addition to moving to the commercial center, he turned to history, a form that “would... afford him... the necessary competence of income” (LS, 85). Whereas
he had sought publishers for *Sartor Resartus* and his book on German literature for years without success, it took only one month to settle with a publisher for his history of the French Revolution even though he had not yet written a word of it.

**From Transcendental Novel to Epic History**

At the same time that he was moving from Craigenputtoch to London, Carlyle was shifting his concept of the literary text from the transcendental novel toward epic history. After the crisis of 1832, he began to seek a new form that would enable him to overcome the shortcomings of *Sartor Resartus*. The “great maxim” of his father’s philosophy, he had written in “The Reminiscence of James Carlyle,” was “That man was created to work, not to speculate, or feel, or dream” (5). Yet in *Sartor Resartus* he had written a book founded on dreams and speculation rather than the “practical and real” enjoined by his father (18). In “On Biography,” the first essay he wrote after the death of his father, he criticized novelists for revealing “Nothing but a pitiful Image of their own pitiful Self, with its vanities, and grudgings, and ravenous hunger of all kinds” (*CME*, 3:58; see 49).23 Since he had always thought of the artwork he longed to create as a novel—he once described *Sartor* as a “Didactic Novel”—this statement marks a significant alteration in his conception of the literary work (*CL*, 6:396). Instead, he would now create an epic, for epics, in contrast to novels, were “Histories, and understood to be narratives of facts” (*CME*, 3:49–50).24

Carlyle’s representation of epic had as much to do with contemporary Homeric scholarship as with Homer’s works and the epic tradition.25 In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, scholars were seeking to replace the conception of Homer as the “ideal ancient sage” with the “historically plausible ancient poet: a representative or even a colletive name for the Greek people in their most primitive stage of development” (Grafton et al., 10). Like biblical scholars and students of folk literature, they were abandoning the idea that these texts were authored by individuals, as modern poems were.26 When Carlyle compared the *Iliad* to a collection of “ballad delineations” like the legends of Robin Hood (which had been edited by Ritson in 1795), he was only echoing what was by then the commonplace that Homer’s writings were collections of “songs and rhapsodies” produced by gen-
erations of “folk” (*HL*, 16). Friedrich Wolf, who was at the forefront of this movement, argued further that the *Iliad* had been created by collecting songs composed in a preliterate era (*Turner*, 138–47; see *Foerster*, 59–60, 72–73). Consequently, the collectors who gathered the songs were more like editors than authors, as the materials came from a body of already existing folk material, not from their own imaginations (*Myres*, 49, 86). Under the influence of this movement, the idea that the Homeric epics were, like the Bible, not works of imaginative fiction but repositories of folk beliefs about the nature of the universe and a history of a people, became commonplace (*Turner*, 140, 154; *Jenkyns*, 197, 204; *Myres*, 81). Typical was Wolf’s mentor, Christian Heyne, who, as Carlyle observed, “read in the writings of the Ancients . . . their spirit and character, their way of life and thought” (*CME*, 1:351). This understanding of Homer underlay Carlyle’s assertion in “On Biography” that “All Mythologies were once Philosophies; were believed: the Epic Poems of old time, so long as they continued *epic . . .* were Histories, and understood to be narratives of *facts*” (*CME*, 3:49–50). Epic, as Carlyle represents it, fulfills his claim that literature could replace religion. The canons by which Carlyle decided that a text was an epic had more to do with whether the text functioned as a sacred work than with whether it possessed all the formal characteristics of epic. In “On Biography,” he claimed that, along with the *Iliad*, the Hindu scriptures (the *Shaster*) and the Koran were the most authentic epics (*CME*, 3:51). He considered a text like the *Nibelungenlied* a “Northern Epos” or “German Iliad” because it was “common property and plebian,” a foundational cultural text that was widely read and believed (*CME*, 2:270, 218). He did not attempt to explain how the people acquired this belief or the process of inspiration that gave these texts transcendental authority, but, by extending the scholarly analogy between the *Iliad* and the Bible, he suggested that epic history is a form of revelation.

The second half of Carlyle’s statement in “On Biography,” that epics were “histories”—a statement in keeping with the widely held belief that the Homeric poems were historical—suggests that epics manifest belief as it is enacted in history (*Turner*, 136–37). He argued that we discover the beliefs of the Greeks not in what they said, but in how they acted, the history of their actions in the war with Troy. The epic poet would be a historian who records not what he imagines, like the
novelist, but the history of his culture, like Homer. By the time Carlyle wrote “The Diamond Necklace” in 1833, he had redefined poetry, particularly epic poetry, as history, and history as poetry: “The story of the Diamond Necklace is all told . . . with the strictest fidelity; yet in a kind of musical way: it seems to me there is no Epic possible that does not first of all ground itself on Belief” (CL, 7:61; see CME, 3:329).

Carlyle had not always regarded history as epic or revelation. His youthful enthusiasm for history reflected little more than a cultural bias against fiction shared by Calvinists and utilitarians alike (see CL, 1:354–55). In the early 1820s, he did not even consider history a literary form. After the Leith Walk experience of 1822 and his discovery of Goethe and Schiller, literature completely replaced history in his praises; from 1823 until he began reading up on the French Revolution in 1832, his letters, which had previously recommended long lists of histories, hardly mention them. By 1830, when he wrote “Thoughts on History,” however, he had begun to consider history an art. His second essay on history (“Quae Cogitavit” [1833], now known as “On History Again”) went further, arguing, under the influence of the Germans, that history was the primary form of knowledge: “All Books, therefore, were they but Song-books or treatises on Mathematics, are in the long run historical documents. . . . History is not only the fittest study, but the only study, and includes all others whatsoever” (CME, 3:167–68). Carlyle no longer regarded history as an alternative to fiction or literature, but as the fundamental literary form.

Carlyle’s model for the epic historian is the editor or collector who gathers songs and rhapsodies together in a single text. In On Heroes and Hero-Worship, he was to argue that Dante did not create his epic through a private act of imagination, but set down the beliefs of his culture: the Divine Comedy, he wrote, “belongs to ten Christian centuries, only the finishing of it is Dante’s” (HHW, 98). Similarly, Reinecke Fuchs is a collective myth “fashion[ed]... together” from two centuries of European culture (CME, 2:322, 275). Just as there was no single Homer or Moses who authored the Iliad and the Pentateuch, so there was “no single author” who created Reinecke Fuchs or the mythus of Christianity embodied in The Divine Comedy. The single author who sets out self-consciously to create an epic by employing epic machinery and epic form, but does not believe in the epic myth, will fail. Carlyle’s principal criterion for inclusion in or exclusion from the epic canon is whether or not the author is “fatal[ly] conscious” that he is writing an
epic (HL, 52). On this basis, he includes the Bible, the Iliad, the Shaster, the Koran, the Nibelungenlied, Reinecke Fuchs, The Divine Comedy, and Ebenezer Elliot's "Enoch Wray," but excludes the Aeneid, the Lusiad, the Epigoniad, and Paradise Lost. In fact, for Carlyle, epics begin to lose their epic status once they are written down. When editors decide to collect and record epic songs, they have become conscious that an epic exists; only when epic retains its origins as unselfconscious song, when it remains musical (i.e., oral), can a poem be truly epic (HGL, 63; HL, 22).38

Thus, Carlyle attempted to solve the hermeneutic dilemma of historical interpretation through the figure of the historian as editor who composes an epic out of a collection of songs and rhapsodies. In "On History," he had argued that the Enlightenment idea of history as "philosophy teaching by experience" assumed that experience presents no problems of interpretation, and countered that "Before philosophy can teach by Experience, the Philosophy has to be in readiness, the Experience be gathered and intelligibly recorded" (CME, 2:85). Since experience requires interpretation, writing history becomes the process of interpreting the texts that constitute the historical record. In "On History Again," he represents historians as continuously interpreting and reinterpreting the historical record: "Thus, do not the records of a Tacitus acquire new meaning, after seventeen hundred years, in the hands of a Montesquieu?" (CME, 3:175). Whereas the fictitious Editor of Sartor Resartus had patched together the life and opinions of Teufelsdröckh out of his own speculations like a novelist, the historian, like Dante or Homer, patches together epic history out of the recorded experiences and activities of a culture. As he put it in "Cagliostro," the quack works in "the element of Wonder" and the "infinitude of the Unknown"; the "Genuine . . . artist or artisan, works in the finitude of the Known" (CME, 3:296).

The drive toward transcendence as a recuperation of home in Sartor Resartus had instead returned Carlyle to the prison of solipsism. Paradoxically, in order to commune with fellow human beings, he had to become alienated from the transcendental totality of the family idyll, to discover himself as historically contingent. This is not to say, however, that Carlyle's move to London and his subsequent writings enabled him to avoid the potential authoritarianism that may cause individuals seeking to force others to accept their transcendental authority to turn against one another. The drive to achieve transcendence in Sartor Resartus would persist in his histories (see Ragland-Sullivan, 272).
Carlyle's idealist conception of history as revelation tends to negate historical time. Since history records enacted belief, and beliefs are authored by transcendental authority, Carlyle represented history as revelation (CME, 2:94, 3:53–54, 176, 250; SR, 177, 254; see Moore, “Carlyle and Fiction” 135ff.; Shine, Carlyle's Fusion of Poetry, 55–56; Baker, 35–37; Sigman, 252; J. Rosenberg, 49–51; McGowan, chap. 3). Yet epic history can possess transcendental authority only insofar as it coincides with a divine order that is itself ahistorical. This coincidence would exist for only a moment because the historical development of beliefs and institutions always moves away from ahistorical authority. Nonetheless, Carlyle never took the final step leading him to a more radical historicism that would regard even temporary coincidence of transcendental authority and historical form illusory.

Rather, he shared with his contemporaries a tendency to regard history as moving toward a state of ahistorical transcendence. Even in Mill's "Spirit of the Age," as well as the St. Simonian writings on which it was based, Carlyle found corroboration for the cyclical model of history that he had found in the writings of the Germans, a temporal cycle in which "transitional" and "natural" states of society alternate (Newspaper Writings, 252). These models of history are not dialectical; they hypostatize the elements of cultural consensus of certain eras in order to posit epochs of "nature," "belief," or "culture," while they treat historical change as characteristic only of intermediate periods of "transition," "unbelief," or "anarchy." The former are idyllic and timeless states, like Teufelsdrockh's childhood or his transcendence of time and space in the Everlasting Yea. History is confined to the transitional period that by its nature is regarded as having no coherence or center. This model tends to posit three stages, a period of unbelief or transition coming between periods of belief or nature; one never finds the cycle represented in the converse manner, as a period of cultural consensus sandwiched between two periods of change. Carlyle and his contemporaries universally considered themselves to be living in a period of transition; in effect, they felt that they lived in an era saturated with history, overwhelmed by time. Able to discover transcendence only in the past, they envisioned history as moving out of itself toward a future belief, nature, culture—a renewed transcendence that escapes history (see Houghton, Victorian Frame, 1–4).

In the essays following "On Biography"—"Boswell's Life of Johnson," "Diderot," "Count Cagliostro," and "The Diamond Necklace"—
Carlyle followed Schiller's path from "the love of contemplating or painting things as they should be"—the metaphysical speculations of Sartor Resartus—to "the love of knowing things as they are"—to history (LS, 84). Since epic must record the beliefs of an epoch as they are enacted in its history, Carlyle would turn to the history of his own era, more specifically, the eighteenth century, the era in which history and revolution asserted themselves and destroyed the transcendental idyll. The sequence of essays he wrote during this period moves from Johnson, who nearly escapes history, to Cagliostro and the principals of the Diamond Necklace affair, who are at one with the era.

The essay on Johnson, written soon after James Carlyle's death, was virtually a tribute to Carlyle's father. Both Johnson and James Carlyle, as Carlyle represents them, resisted the historical tendencies of their time, sustaining religious belief in an atheistic era (Rem., 10; CME, 3:89, 105). The anecdote in which Carlyle recalls how Johnson had atoned for slighting his father also represents Carlyle's desire to atone for writing fiction, which his father had considered "false and criminal" (CME, 3:129–30; Rem., 9). When he writes that Johnson never rose into "the region of Poetic art," he is not demeaning his literary achievements but shifting allegiance from poetry to prose; the only "Poetry" his father liked, the reminiscence records, was "Truth and the Wisdom of Reality" (CME, 3:126; Rem., 8). Just two months after finishing "Boswell's Johnson," Carlyle was advising Ebenezer Elliot to exchange his rhymes for prose, and from this time forward he recommended prose, the medium of "reality," over verse, the medium of speculation (CME, 3:165).

After the essay on Johnson, Carlyle turned to figures who are embedded in the history of the French eighteenth century. Whereas Johnson resisted the process of historical change, his contemporary Diderot contributed to the general progress of decay. Rather than a godlike authority who pierces through immediate circumstances to the transcendental, Diderot is constituted by and limited to his own historical circumstances: the "most gifted soul appearing in France of the Eighteenth Century . . . thinks of the things belonging to the French eighteenth century, and in the dialect he has learned there" (CME, 3:229). Cagliostro is not only determined by historical circumstances, he has no self apart from them (see Vanden Bossche, "Fictive Text"). The lives of empty illusion led by Cagliostro, Cardinal de Rohan, Marie Antoinette, the Countess Lamotte, and the other
participants in the Diamond Necklace affair reflect an era in which substance has disappeared and only the surface of history remains. “The Diamond Necklace” concludes with an apocalyptic vision of the destruction of this history-bound world of imposture, a prophecy of the French Revolution.

Just four days after he announced his intention to leave Craigenputtoch while working on “Cagliostro” in January 1833, Carlyle sent Mill a request for a long list of books on the French Revolution (CL, 6:302). Throughout 1833, he read extensively on the revolution, steadily becoming convinced that he should write a history of it. In September, he wrote to Mill that it seemed to him “as if the right History . . . of the French Revolution were the grand Poem of our Time; as if the man who could write the truth of that, were worth all other writers and singers” (CL, 6:446). In October, he further expanded his idea of epic history: “One of the questions that oftenest presents itself, is How Ideals do and ought to adjust themselves with the Actual? . . . my value for the Actual (in all senses), for what has realized itself continues and increases: and often I ask myself, Is not all Poetry the essence of Reality . . . and true History the only possible Epic?” (CL, 7:24). His history of the French Revolution would attempt to represent the process through which, as the title of the second chapter of his history (“Realised Ideals”) was to indicate, a people tried to realize a new ideal, a new belief. Two months later, while working on “The Diamond Necklace,” his “first . . . experiment” at writing poetical history, he claimed that he was trying to see “whether by sticking actually to the Realities of the thing with as much tenacity and punctuality as the merest Hallam, one could not in a small way make a kind of Poem of it” (CL, 7:266, 57; see 61).

Having determined to write an epic history, he now sought to prepare himself by a close study of the Iliad, which Schiller had deemed a “model” epic (LS, 119). During the first four months of 1834, he read four books of the Iliad, perhaps more, in Greek, and the entire poem in Johann Voss’s German translation along with the commentaries of Christian Heyne, Richard Payne Knight, and Thomas Blackwell. As he began his Homer studies, he heard that Sartor Resartus was meeting “with the most unqualified disapproval” and subsequently learned that one of Fraser’s oldest subscribers threatened to cancel his subscription “If there [was] any more of that d——d stuff” (CL, 7:81, 175; see 125, 139). If Carlyle had had any doubts about the change of direction he
had taken, he now set them aside. He moved to London in May 1834 and soon after began working on *The French Revolution*. Writing now with an eye toward his audience, he observed happily that Jane found it a "more readable kind of Book" than *Sartor Resartus* and became confident it would be "Quite an Epic Poem of the Revolution" (*CL*, 7:314, 306).

**The French Revolution** as Symbolic History

Carlyle’s ascription of the authorship of "On History Again" to Diogenes Teufelsdröckh suggests that the *Palingenesia*, a mythus intended to enable the rebirth of his society, would take the form of epic history. The French Revolution manifested the fundamental beliefs of Carlyle’s own era just as the Trojan wars manifested the beliefs of the Greeks. Yet this subject was problematical because the revolution did more to destroy antiquated beliefs than to bring new beliefs to life; the only belief his society retained was the belief in unbelief that prevented him from authoring the new mythus promised in *Sartor Resartus*. Instead of creating a text that would bring about the birth of a new society, he would demonstrate how the revolution continued to be reborn in his own era, in the Paris Revolt of 1830 and the Reform Bill of 1832. Sansculottism “still lives,” he was to write in the conclusion of *The French Revolution*, “still works far and wide . . . as is the way of Cunning Time with his New-Births” (3:311). By concluding his history of the revolution with the events of October 1795, just two months before his birth on December 4, 1795, Carlyle suggested that he himself was the first rebirth of the revolution, that it had indeed invaded the households of the lowly (*Rem.*, 30).³⁹ If it was an "unhappiness to be born" in such an era, to be a rebirth of its spirit, a history of the revolution would at least help one figure out “what to make of” the "age," what it means to be born of revolution (*FR*, 1:11; *HHW*, 201).

Carlyle’s problem in writing *The French Revolution* was how to make it epic rather than novelistic in the sense that he used these terms in "On Biography." He wanted to avoid the problems raised by *Sartor Resartus*, especially that of his own authority, but he could not solve this problem simply by effacing the authorial ego. Indeed, the narrator of *The French Revolution* is every bit as prominent as the Editor of *Sartor Resartus*. Instead, Carlyle made himself into a narrator who
interprets a society. He did not write *The French Revolution* as a factual chronology of political events but as a sequence of symbolic episodes through which the narrator, and the reader, discover the meaning of their own era. For this purpose, he shaped a unique historical narrator who speaks in the first person and present tense, represents the voices of the historical actors, and interprets symbols in order to create a double narrative, both epic and mock epic, of the revolution.40

The Editor of *Sartor Resartus* and the narrator of *The French Revolution* both represent themselves as interpreters. The Editor of *Sartor* must make sense of the “chaos” of the clothes volume and the six paper bags filled with random autobiographical fragments; the narrator of *The French Revolution* must contend with an intransigent imbroglio of historical documents. Each addresses the reader directly, setting himself the task of enabling the reader to make sense of this material. Yet *The French Revolution* reverses the procedure of *Sartor Resartus*. While the Editor begins with random symbols that he situates in a narrative framework of his own devising, the narrator of *The French Revolution* begins with a narrative chronology in which he must discover symbols.

The Editor attempts to explain the clothes philosophy and the life of Teufelsdrockh through narrative even though, as he represents it, the basic material of *Sartor Resartus* resists chronological narration. *Sartor* does not present a logical argument that develops from chapter to chapter; material from the first book could even be interchanged with material from the last (Levine, *Boundaries*, 41–43; see Gilbert, 433–36; Vanden Bossche, “Prophetic Closure,” 212–13). The autobiographical fragments, from which the Editor constructs book 2, arrive in hardly any chronological, certainly no narrative, order. The patterns that the Editor uses to organize these materials do not inhere in them, but are familiar narrative paradigms that he imposes on them. To represent the process of coming to understand the clothes volume, for example, he employs the convention of the journey. Similarly, he fits the random autobiographical fragments to the conventional pattern of spiritual autobiography (see Peterson, 49–57). To the Editor, both the clothes volume and the life of Teufelsdrockh are a chaos that must be interpreted, but the interpretation appears to come from the preexisting narrative patterns he employs rather than from the materials themselves. Like the novelist in “On Biography,” the Editor creates narratives that are “Nothing but a pitiful Image of [his] own pitiful Self” (*CME*, 3:58). Because there is no original text, only an in-
terpretation of a fictitious text, *Sartor Resartus* represents the tendency of interpretation to overwhelm the interpreted text.

The narrator of *The French Revolution* finds most of his historical materials already arranged in chronological order in collections like the *Histoire Parlementaire* and the volumes of the *Moniteur*, but simply composing a chronological narrative would not enable him to discover the meaning of those events. He complains, furthermore, that the editors of the *Histoire Parlementaire* have already imposed a narrative depicting the recuperation of Christianity and counters: “But what if History were to admit, for once, that all the Names and Theorems yet known to her fall short? ... In that case, History, renouncing the pretension to name it at present, will look honestly at it, and name what she can of it!” (3:204). Although Carlyle's history also has a thesis, he claims that he discovers it in the symbolic structure of the revolution itself. As opposed to *Sartor*'s Editor and the editors of the *Histoire Parlementaire* who derive their narrative patterns from preexisting narratives, Carlyle's narrator attempts to derive his interpretation from something outside of himself, from the historical material itself.

Because the narrator of *The French Revolution* can be regarded as a character whose role it is to interpret the history of the revolution, Carlyle does not employ the omniscient mode of historical narration, but a first-person mode that dramatizes the continuing process of interpretation. The conventional omniscient mode—using the third person and past tense to make history seem to "speak itself"—creates the illusion of objectivity by treating the past as fixed and the narrator's interpretation of it as exhaustive (Barthes, "Le Discours de l'histoire," 68). In fact, omniscient narrative only disguises the presence of a first-person narrator and that narrator's ideological assumptions. Carlyle's use of the first person and present tense makes his presence explicit. We can see the difference between these two modes of history in the following narratives of the procession of the Assembly of Notables on May 4, 1789, the first from Archibald Alison's *History of Europe from the Commencement of the French Revolution in 1789 to the Restoration of the Bourbons in 1815* (1833) and the second from Carlyle's *French Revolution*:

On the evening before [May 5, 1789], a religious ceremony preceded the installation of the Estates. The King, his family, his ministers, and the deputies of the three orders, walked in procession from the
church of Notre Dame to that of St. Louis, to hear mass. The appearance of the assembled bodies, and the reflection that a national solemnity, so long fallen into disuse, was about to be revived, excited the most lively enthusiasm in the multitude. The weather was fine; the benevolent and dignified air of the King, the graceful manners of the Queen, the pomp and splendour of the ceremony, and the undefined hopes which it excited, exalted the spirits of all who witnessed it. But the reflecting observed with pain, that the sullen lines of feudal etiquette were preserved with rigid formality, and they augured ill of the national representation which commenced its labours with such distinction. First marched the clergy in grand costume, with violet robes; next the noblesse, in black dresses, with gold vests, lace cravats, and hats adorned with white plumes; last, the Tiers Etat, dressed in black, with short cloaks, muslin cravats, and hats without feathers. But the friends of the people consoled themselves with the observation, that, however humble their attire, the numbers of this class greatly preponderated over those of the other orders. (1:181-82)

Behold, however! The doors of St. Louis Church flung open; and the Procession of Processions advancing towards Notre-Dame! Shouts rend the air; one shout, at which Grecian birds might drop dead. It is indeed a stately, solemn sight. The Elected of France, and then the Court of France; they are marshalled and march there, all in prescribed place and Costume. Our Commons 'in plain black mantle and white cravat'; Noblesse, in gold-worked, bright-dyed cloaks of velvet, resplendent, rustling with laces, waving with plumes; the Clergy in rochet, alb, or other best pontificalibus: lastly comes the King himself, and King's Household, also in their brightest blaze of pomp,—their brightest and final one. Some Fourteen Hundred Men blown together from all winds, on the deepest errand.

Yes, in that silent-marching mass there lies Futurity enough. No symbolic Ark, like the old Hebrews, do these men bear: yet with them too is a Covenant; they too preside at a new Era in the History of Men. (FR, 1:134)
he seems to be nowhere—whereas Carlyle situates himself and his readers in the midst of the crowd watching the procession. Carlyle begins by exhorting the reader, in an exclamatory apostrophe—"Behold, however!"—to observe the scene he is describing. The second paragraph of the passage from The French Revolution (of which I have included only one-quarter) consists entirely of the narrator’s commentary on the meaning of the event and contains no narrative of the event itself. Throughout the passage, Carlyle's language draws attention to itself through the use of such rhetorical and literary devices as apostrophe, repetition and variation, alliteration, metaphor, and allusion (note the "Grecian birds" and the Ark of the Covenant). Most importantly, Carlyle devotes a whole chapter to this episode because of its symbolic importance—for him it foreshadows the whole course of the revolution—while Alison gives only one paragraph to a ceremony that, for him, has little significance in the chain of political events.

Carlyle’s use of present-tense narration collapses the distance between past and present, emphasizing that meaning is not fixed in the past but is always in the process of being made. In a narrative that treats events as if they were taking place before the narrator’s and reader’s eyes, past and present are not separate, since the beliefs and actions that had constituted the revolution also constitute the lives of the narrator and his readers. Further, Carlyle dramatizes the revolution as it lives on in the present in moments when the time of narration—the moment of writing—converges with the time of historical events. When, for example, he writes of d’Artois that he “now, as a grey timeworn man, sits desolate at Grätz” and informs us in a footnote that “now” means “A.D. 1834,” the year in which he is writing the passage, he abruptly brings the historical actor from the past into the present (1:33). The “now” of this passage is itself ever-shifting; the footnotes accompanying similar passages always indicate the moment at which he writes, at least one such note appearing for each of the three years (1834, 1835, 1836) during which he worked on the history (1:224, 3:47, 312).

The first-person plural (for example, “Our commons” in the quotation above) also telescopes the distance between past and present, narrator and narrated (see Vanden Bossche, “Revolution and Authority,” 284–85; J. Rosenberg, 77–78). In the following passage, the referent of the word we shifts as the narrator comments on Danton’s defense of the September massacres:
When applied to by an official person, about the Orléans Prisoners, and the risks they ran, [Danton] answered gloomily, twice over, 'Are not these men guilty?'—When pressed, he 'answered in a terrible voice,' and turned his back. Two Thousand slain in the prisons; horrible if you will: but Brunswick is within a day's journey of us; and there are Five-and-twenty Millions yet, to slay or save. Some men have tasks,—frightfuller than ours! It seems strange, but is not strange, that this Minister of Moloch-Justice, when any suppliant for a friend's life got access to him, was found to have human compassion. (3:47; emphasis added)

The first-person plural ("us") in the third sentence (beginning "Two Thousand slain . . .") refers to Danton. Because there are no quotation marks to set Danton's speech off from the historical narrative (as in the first sentence), however, the speech merges with the narration, the narrated with the narrator. This elision continues in the concluding sentences, as the principal location of the speaking voice slides from Danton and the past to Carlyle and the present, the final sentence belonging only to the latter. The sentence that comes between ("Some men have . . .") may be attributed to either man and thus further merges them. If we read it together with the previous sentence, it becomes a continuation of Danton's speech, "ours" referring to the patriots who speak in the first person in that sentence. But if we read it together with the final sentence, it becomes part of Carlyle's commentary, suggesting that the "task" of the patriots in 1792 was more frightful than "ours" in the 1830s.

Carlyle also employs this technique to represent the revolution as a multiplicity of speakers and points of view. By merging with the historical actors, he is able to sympathize with each of them and to speak in all of their voices. He represents history as the interaction of groups, as dialogues between personifications like "universal Patriotism" and the "Legislative." In the following passage, he uses dashes to indicate an exchange of speeches between Parisian patriots and the revolutionary authorities:

Twelve Hundred slain Patriots, do they not, from their dark catacombs there, in Death's dumb-show, plead (O ye Legislators) for vengeance? . . . Nay, apart from vengeance, and with an eye to Public Salvation only, are there not still, in this Paris (in round numbers) "Thirty thousand Aristocrats," of the most malignant humour;
driven now to their last trump-card?—Be patient, ye Patriots: our New High Court, "Tribunal of the Seventeenth," sits . . . and Dan­ton, extinguishing improper judges, improper practices whereso­ever found, is "the same man you have known at the Cordeliers." With such a Minister of Justice, shall not Justice be done?—Let it be swift, then, answers universal Patriotism; swift and sure!—(3:8–9)

While the quotations within the speeches assure us that the scene is based on documentary evidence, the dialogue compresses a long course of discussion and debate. These compressed dialogues seek to represent, not the literal event, but its symbolic meaning. Because the narrator merges with these voices rather than distinguishing them as part of a past action, the text gives the impression that the narrator is not the manipulator of the voices but the product of them. In Sartor Resartus, the personae, who all sound like Carlyle, may be regarded as avatars of the different aspects of his personality. In The French Revo­lution, he tries to get beyond the authorial ego in order to represent the full range of historical figures (see Bakhtin, 299).44

The narrator of The French Revolution, a narrator who belongs to the world he narrates, seeks to interpret this world by discovering its symbols. He suggests, in a chapter entitled “Symbolic,” that pub­lic events are “Symbolic Representation[s]” of belief (2:47). Whereas Alison’s narrative is organized in terms of the day-by-day chronology of events, virtually every subdivision of Carlyle’s history, which often disregards chronology, focuses on the discovery of the symbolic im­port of events.45 At every level of the narrative, titles refer to literal events in which Carlyle discovers a symbolic import. The titles of the three volumes of the history reveal its basic structure, the initial rebel­lion against the old imprisoning order (“The Bastille”), the attempt to author a new social order (“The Constitution”), and the descent into complete destruction (“The Guillotine”). The same is true for the other subdivisions of the history; for example, the storming of the Bas­tille represents the determination of the French people to break down the old social structure; “Viaticum” represents not only the death of Louis XV but the last rites of monarchy; “The Paper Age,” not just the proliferation of printed matter but the ephemerality of its paper productions; and “Dishonoured Bills,” not just the depletion of the treasury but the figurative bankruptcy of the old order. Carlyle’s depic­tion of the royal family’s unsuccessful attempt to flee France is almost allegorical. The royal family flees in an overburdened and oversized
berline that consequently moves so slowly—indeed, Carlyle exaggerated its slowness—that it can be captured by a handful of peasants and retired dragoons. Carlyle finds in the berline a symbol of the accretions of privilege and meaningless tradition with which monarchy had become encrusted and which made its downfall inevitable. Symbols of power, they in fact have made the monarch powerless and given the upper hand to the people.

In addition to discovering the symbolic import of individual events, Carlyle creates ironic contrasts through juxtaposition, often discovering that the symbolic import of one event undermines the intended symbolic message of another. The French intend the Feast of Pikes to express their belief in the principle of fraternity. But Carlyle is suspicious of such “theatrical” displays, contrasting them unfavorably with the ritual oaths they imitate, such as the Puritan “Solemn League and Covenant” and the “Hebrew Feast of Tabernacles,” in which “A whole Nation gathered, in the name of the Highest” (2:47, 42). More significantly, however, the narrative that ensues in the following section, which represents a mutiny in the army, reveals that a violent feast of “pikes” will lead to anarchy, not fraternity. Similarly, Carlyle plays on the idiomatic and literal meanings of the French verb marcher (“to be in working order,” but literally “to march”) in order to contrast the failure of the constitution with the success of the troops from Marseilles. While “believing Patriots” think “that the Constitution will march, marcher,—had it once legs to stand on,” Carlyle ironically contrasts their enfeebled constitution, which grows “rheumatic,” “stagger[s]” and finally “will not march,” with the vigorous Marseillais and their cry of “Let Us March” that brings about the insurrection of August 1792 (2:5, 223, 237; see 227).

If an epic represents the belief of a people as manifested in its actions, then the French Revolution, which manifested a nation’s unbelief, provides problematic material for epic. Within his epic framework, Carlyle represents the actions of the French people as mock-epic. The French need a deus ex machina (Carlyle’s use of the English equivalent of this phrase, “god from the machine,” already tends to deflate it) but get only an ineffectual “Mars de Broglie” and a royal usher “Mercury . . . de Brézé” (1:160). The epic machinery that motivates the action of the history becomes mere “preternatural suspicion” (1:126–27). Homer’s “wine-dark sea” gets adapted as the mock-heroic epithet “sea-green” to describe Robespierre. Finally, Carlyle
echoes "The Rape of the Lock" in his depiction of the queen preparing to flee as an epic heroine outfitting her hero: "New Clothes are needed; as usual, in all Epic transactions, were it in the grimmest iron ages; consider 'Queen Chrimhilde, with her sixty sempstresses,' in that iron Nibelungen Song! No queen can stir without new clothes" (2:157). Unlike Chrimhilde, who married the indomitable Siegfried and wreaked terrible revenge on the enemies who killed him, however, Marie Antoinette, married to the ineffectual Louis XVI, is absurdly concerned with "perfumes" and "toilette-implements" that burden the cumbersome "Argosy" in which the royal family insists on traveling (2:157, 168; see CME, 2:238). Whereas Homer had been able to "sing" the belief of a society in an epic poem, Carlyle can only express unbelief through "prose." Echoing the traditional epic invocation, he writes: "The 'destructive wrath' of Sansculottism: this is what we speak, having unhappily no voice for singing" (1:212; emphasis added). In a work that persistently satirizes speech-making, it is particularly ironic that his epic must be spoken.47

Just as The French Revolution's epic aspirations are undermined by mock-epic elements, so its overt narrative structure, which represents a circular movement from the institution of monarchical order through a period of transition following its destruction and concluding in the constitution of democratic order, is undermined by a parallel narrative that represents an uninterrupted current of accelerating destruction and anarchy. The former narrative represents the desire to recover authority while the latter suggests that the revolution can do nothing but destroy it.

Both narratives share the same starting point in volume 1, the destruction of the monarchy as symbolized by "The Bastille." Carlyle represents the bankrupt authority of the monarchy through the inability of successive finance ministers to avert financial default. Emptied of authority, the institution of monarchy produces a king who can no longer create social order. Although initially Louis compels obedience—he attempts to govern by royal edict—he cannot compel belief. This situation cannot last long, and, with the storming of the Bastille, power begins to shift to the people.

With volume 2, "The Constitution," the two narratives diverge, the one representing the National Assembly's attempt to author a constitution and the other the increasing anarchy that undermines this enterprise. An "incipient New Order of Society" appears to emerge
when the French express their beliefs through the grand ritual oath of allegiance celebrated in “The Feast of Pikes” (2:34). But the royalist mutiny in the army at Nanci exposes the absence of loyalty, the “unsightly wrong-side of that thrice glorious Feast of Pikes” (2:100). With the destruction of royal authority, no single authority can establish itself, and the army, which is “the very implement of rule and restraint, whereby all the rest was managed and held in order,” becomes “precisely the frightfullest immeasurable implement of misrule” (2:73).

In September 1791, the assembly completes a constitution intended to produce a new social order. But the constitutional monarchy that gives the king the power to veto all legislation only institutionalizes the conflict between the monarchy and the middle class. Louis attempts to assert his authority by vetoing all legislation, and, because authority is now fragmented, neither Louis nor the assembly can govern. Anarchy increases and overpowers the assembly’s attempts to establish order, and, on August 10, 1792, a new uprising overturns the constitutional monarchy. Just as the storming of the Bastille had overturned the old regime, so the insurrection of the tenth of August overturns the constitutional monarchy. Instead of discovering authority, the constitution has further undermined it.

In the final volume of the history, “The Guillotine,” the attempt to author a second constitution becomes completely submerged in the growing anarchy of the Terror. Having discovered that authority could not be divided between the monarchy and the people, the assembly proceeds to abolish the institution of monarchy itself. “Regicide” completes the abolition of authority that began with the storming of the Bastille: “a King himself, or say rather Kinghood in his person, is to expire here” (3:107). However, when the people assume the authority formerly held by monarchy, they fail to establish social order and anarchy engulfs the nation.

Rebuilding the Social Structure

Carlyle represents the revolution as burning down the old social structure and attempting to build a new one by writing a constitution. *Sartor Resartus* had already employed the metaphor of masonry to represent the process of writing. The Editor of *Sartor* depicts himself as a bridge-builder spanning the sea that separates British readers from
the German clothes philosopher. As in “The Reminiscence of James Carlyle,” the bridge-maker connects heaven and earth; he is the pontiff and the Prometheus who “can bring new fire from Heaven” (225). As translator of Teufelsdröckh’s philosophy, the Editor transmits the authority of German transcendentalism to the land of British empiricism. Or, to put it another way, he builds a bridge that enables us to pass from ordinary existence into the “promised land” (255).

But the Editor’s metaphors ultimately suggest that his bridge leads us into an infernal chaos, not a transcendental idyll. He compares it, not to a bridge like Tieck’s that leads to a land of faery, but to the bridge between hell and earth built by Sin and Death in Paradise Lost (79). Furthermore, he can only “conclude” but “not complete” it: “No firm arch, over-spanning the Impassible with paved Highway, could the Editor construct; only, as was said, some zigzag series of rafts floating tumultuously thereon” (268). Since this bridge is the Editor’s metaphor for his project of transmitting in writing the life and opinions of Teufelsdröckh, that project appears to be a failure. As the Editor fails in his attempt to build a bridge to heaven, instead building one to hell, so the French fail to “build” a utopian social structure and instead create the Terror.

In Carlyle’s history, the Bastille is the building, a metaphor for the entire social edifice of the ancien regime. Bastille is the generic name for a fortress, derived from the verb bâtir, to build: “they name [it] Bastille, or Building, as if there were no other building” (1:131). Carlyle calls the Bastille, along with other medieval buildings, a “realised ideal”; it is an expression of the feudal social order and of the structures of belief in which the nation resides. He further contends that, while the kings of France have passed away, the physical and social structures they “realised” remain, and names among these “realised ideals” both “Cathedrals” and a “Creed (or memory of a creed) in them,” both “Palaces, and a State and Law” (1:8).

The metaphor of the social order as a house or building was already well established in political writing when Carlyle wrote The French Revolution (see Arac, Commissioned Spirits, 124). Burke uses it throughout his Reflections on the Revolution, arguing that although the old order suffered “waste and dilapidation,” it still possessed “the foundations of a noble and venerable castle” that might have been “repaired” (40; see 24, 40, 56, 66, 79, 99, 105, 196–97). Carlyle takes up the same metaphor, but he treats it differently, finding that the social structure that
had once served as a home—a protective "castle" as in "The Reminis­cence of James Carlyle"—had become a prison, a Bastille. In fact, the Bastille had been built during the feudal era to protect the people of Paris from invasion, but by the eighteenth century, it was used only to imprison them and to suppress popular disturbances. The only solution is to destroy it and rebuild the social order.

Carlyle emphasizes that beliefs, not physical force, create and de­stroy these social structures. The destruction of the Bastille only sym­bolically enacts the destruction of "Old Feudal France" by philosophes like Voltaire and Diderot (FR, 2:201). In "Diderot," Carlyle describes the "End of a Social System . . . which for above a thousand years had been building itself together" as the destruction of a building, clearly the Bastille:

active hands drive in their wedges, set to their crowbars; there is a comfortable appearance of work going on. Instead of here and there a stone falling out, here and there a handful of dust, whole masses tumble down, whole clouds and whirlwinds of dust: torches too are applied, and the rotten easily takes fire: so, what with flame-whirlwind, what with dust-whirlwind, and the crash of falling towers, the concern grows eminently interesting; and our assiduous craftsmen can encourage one another with Vivats, and cries of Speed the work. (CME, 3:179-80)

Carlyle interprets the attack on the Bastille as an attempt to destroy the old social order, the blows of the axes on the drawbridge aimed at "Tyranny" and its "whole accursed Edifice" (FR, 1:190). He deempha­sizes the role of physical force by noting that only one Parisian died in the storming and concluding that the Bastille, "like the City of Jericho, was overturned by miraculous sound," a reversal of the Orphic music that built Thebes (1:210; see SR, 263).

Carlyle's concern is that the processes of destruction, once unleashed, are difficult to control. Revolution, he writes, is: "the open violent Rebellion, and Victory, of disimprisoned Anarchy against corrupt worn-out Authority; how Anarchy breaks prison; bursts up from the infinite Deep, and rages uncontrollable, immeasurable, enveloping a world; in phasis after phasis of fever-frenzy;—till the frenzy burning itself out and what elements of new Order it held (since all Force holds such) developing themselves, the Uncontrollable be got, if not reimprisoned, yet harnessed, and its mad forces made to work towards
their object as sane regulated ones” (1:211-12).48 Fire is the most common and prominent metaphor in The French Revolution, almost always representing the uncontrolled spread of destruction: “Feudalism is struck dead . . . by fire; say, by self-combustion . . . in visible material combustion, château after château mounts up; in spiritual invisible combustion, one authority after another” (1:231, 2:107; see 227). The problem for the revolutionaries is how to “re-imprison” this revolutionary force.49 The title of the chapter in which this passage appears, “Make the Constitution,” points toward the next phase of the revolution; the attempt to “build” a new social edifice will be the subject of volume 2, “The Constitution.” In the conclusion of this chapter, Carlyle introduces an analogy between the attempt to author the constitution and the project of building a social structure with a comment that suggests the difficulties and failures that lie ahead: “A Constitution can be built, Constitutions enough à la Sieyes” (1:215).

While the cathedrals and fortresses of the old social order had been, like James Carlyle’s houses, constructed of lasting stone, however, the constitution built to house the new social order is made of ephemeral paper. None of the three constitutions Sieyes sets out to “build” lasts as long as a year. The first is a mere house of cards, a “card-castle” with a “top-paper” instead of a “top-stone”: the “Edifice of the Constitution” or the “Constitutional Fabric, built with . . . explosive Federation Oaths, and its top-stone brought out with dancing and variegated radiance, went to pieces, like frail crockery . . . in eleven short months” (1:215, 221, 2:195, 203-4).50 The second constitution, raised on the unstable “rubbish and boulders” of the first, also suffers “frequent perilous downrushing of scaffolding and rubble-work” and never even goes into effect (3:69). It is the quintessential paper constitution: “Further than paper it never got, nor ever will get” (3:186; emphasis added). The final constitution is just as fragile as its predecessors; it is another “paper-fabric” constructed by the hitherto unsuccessful “Architect,” Sieyes. It only brings the process of writing constitutions to an end because it formalizes the social order that Napoleon imposes by force rather than providing a system of belief.

The metaphor of the paper building is an extension of Carlyle’s representation of the eighteenth century as “The Paper Age,” an era of “Book-paper, splendid with Theories, Philosophies, Sensibilities” (1:29). The philosophes have opened a “Pandora’s box” of “printed paper”: “street ballads,” “epigrams,” “Manuscript Newspapers,” “pam-
phlets,” and novels like “Saint-Pierre’s Paul et Virginie, and Louvet’s Chevalier de Faublas” (1:59, 55, 56, 60). After the storming of the Bastille, the proliferation of paper accelerates: “Committees of the Constitution, of Reports, of Researches . . . yield mountains of Printed Paper”; “Twelve Hundred pamphleteers” drone forth “perpetual pamphlets”; and “Placard Journal[s]” make their appeal to the penniless who cannot afford newspapers (1:219, 222, 28). The same inflationary process forces the government to pay its debts with devalued “Bank-paper,” “Dishonoured Bills” (1:29; see 109).

These metaphors interact in two ways to develop Carlyle’s argument about the failure to author a constitution. First, the French build their constitutions out of combustible material vulnerable to the fires with which they have destroyed the old order. Since a paper constitution cannot adequately confine the forces that overturned the old social order, it is not “worth much more than the waste-paper it is written on” (1:215). Second, the revolutionaries fail to transform the fire with which they have destroyed the old order into a creative tool for producing a permanent and substantial social order. They cannot find a “Prometheus” who bears, not the fire of destruction, but a divine spark that can “draw thunder and lightning out of Heaven to sanction” the Constitution (2:5, 1:215; see 2:64). Like Burke, Carlyle fears that the revolutionaries can only destroy, that their fire will produce only a “fire-consummation,” not a “fire-creation” (FR, 1:213; see 3:297–98; SR, 244; Reflections, 79). Instead of building a heavenly city that recuperates paradise, they build a Tower of Babel—or, in a variant of this figure, “an overturned pyramid, on its vertex”—that produces only social fragmentation (FR, 2:189, 195, 198).

Carlyle’s history argues that a written document cannot produce social order unless it reflects the very structure of national life: “The Constitution, the set of Laws, or prescribed Habits of Acting, that men will live under, is the one which images their Convictions,—their Faith as to this wondrous Universe.” It is not enough to build a constitutional structure, Carlyle adds, you must build it so that people will “come and live in” it (1:215). The idea that a written document could be used to articulate a body of fundamental principles through which a state is constituted was a new one. The “British constitution” was a set of principles established by tradition and precedent, not a written document like the constitutions of the United States and France. While the unwritten constitution corresponds to the oral tra-
dition of Homer and the Bible, Carlyle treats the written constitution as he does self-conscious epic. Like the oral epic, the unwritten constitution is unself-conscious and therefore authoritative. Carlyle makes this distinction explicit in an early chapter of *The French Revolution*: “Herein too, in this its System of Habits, acquired, retained how you will, lies the true Law-Code and Constitution of a Society; the only Code, though an unwritten one, which it can in nowise disobey. The thing we call written Code, Constitution, Form of Government, and the like, what is it but some miniature image, and solemnly expressed summary of this unwritten Code? Is,—or rather, alas, is not; but only should be, and always tends to be!” (i:38).

Without divine sanction, the legislative cannot produce a constitution that corresponds to the constitution that already exists unconsciously; its constitution corresponds only to theories that serve particular interest groups, not the nation as a whole (see 1:219). The paper constitution represents the historicity of all writing, and therefore its inability, in Carlyle’s view, to provide the foundation for social order.

Authoring the Constitution: The Problem of Closure

*The French Revolution* posits the problem of how to “reimprison” or re-enclose anarchy once it has been “disimprisoned.” “Closure” has two conventional senses. First, it refers to the way in which a narrative is given a sense of ending, of completion. Second, it refers to the aim of a text to enclose its meaning, its aspiration to be a complete and total representation. Both kinds of closure may be regarded as illusory, but this has never prevented authors from seeking to achieve it (see Barthes, “Work to Text”; Derrida; D. Miller; Lotman, 232–39; Vanden Bossche, “Desire and Deferral of Closure”). Carlyle’s texts dramatize both the desire for closure and the difficulty of achieving it. *Sartor Resartus*, “Characteristics,” and *The French Revolution* each represents an attempt to achieve closure by creating a totalizing text, as mythus, philosophy of life, or constitution. Carlyle’s later explorations of the problem of closure in “Characteristics” and *The French Revolution* question the optimism with which he had imagined Teufelsdröckh’s achievement of closure when he set out to write a new mythus, and shed light on Carlyle’s own effort to create a totalizing epic.

“Characteristics” (1831), the first essay Carlyle wrote after comple-
ing Sartor Resartus, took shape after he suggested to the editor of the Edinburgh Review that several recent books—Thomas Hope's An Essay on the Origin and Prospects of Man (1831), Friedrich Schlegel's Philosophische Vorlesungen (1830), William Godwin's Thoughts on Man (1831), and a new work by Coleridge, probably Aids to Reflection (1831)—were attempts to create totalizing philosophies of life, the equivalent of the Palingenesia that Teufelsdrockh was supposed to be writing at that moment (CL, 6:13). The essay transposes Teufelsdrockh's development into a representation of the development of contemporary society and examines the writings of Hope and Schlegel as products of that development. Like Teufelsdrockh, society has lost the freedom of its idyllic youth and is now locked away in a "prison-house of the soul" (CME, 3:2); both become wanderers, suffering the "fever of Scepticism," the "fever-paroxysms of Doubt" (CME, 3:40; SR, 114); society is crushed by "the Juggernaut wheels" of a "dead mechanical idol" just as Teufelsdrockh encounters a "huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind [him] limb from limb" (CME, 3:29; SR, 164); Teufelsdrockh is caught in the Centre of Indifference between the Everlasting No and the Everlasting Yea, and the current era has "dared to say No and cannot yet say Yea" (CME, 3:31); having completed the process of destroying "worn-out Symbols," it must, like Teufelsdrockh, begin to "construct" new ones, to author a new Genesis (CME, 3:31, 33; see 26ff.).

While Carlyle discovers signs that society has begun to create new mythuses, he does not ultimately find much hope for Teufelsdrockh's project in the totalizing schemes of Hope and Schlegel. At first, he thinks that there are some hopeful signs: German literature is taking over the functions of religion; the English Utilitarians—he undoubtedly has J. S. Mill in mind—are looking beyond the limits of Utilitarianism; and the French appear to be turning from destruction to the creation of a new religion—a clear reference to the St. Simonians (CME, 3:40–42). But when Carlyle examines the writings of Hope and Schlegel, he discovers that they are products of the era of revolutionary change rather than means of enabling it to achieve transcendent closure. His description of Hope's book as a "painful, confused stammering, and struggling" that "maunders, low, long-winded . . . in . . . endless convolutions" anticipates his description of Cagliostro's Babelian discourse (CME, 3:34). Like Teufelsdrockh and Cagliostro, Hope speaks in confused "circumvolutions," opening up an "end-
less” discourse that reinforces revolution rather than achieving closure (CME, 3:293; see SR, 31). Although Carlyle has greater hopes for Schlegel’s “clear . . . precise and vivid” language, he, too, fails to achieve closure, his lectures literally ending in mid-sentence “with an ‘Aber—–,’ with a ‘But——!’” (CME, 3:34, 35). Carlyle concludes that any philosophy or “theorem of the world” that claims to provide a totalizing representation but lacks transcendental authority will be “found wanting”; after all, he concludes, “what Theorem of the Infinite can the Finite render complete?” (CME, 3:6, 25; see 38). Writing only produces more writing; it does not achieve closure.

*The French Revolution* explores the problem of closure in two writing projects that echo two similar projects in *Sartor Resartus*. The revolutionaries’ project of writing the constitution in *The French Revolution* repeats and revises both the Editor’s project of writing the life and opinions of Diogenes Teufelsdröckh and Teufelsdröckh’s project of writing the *Clothes Volume* and the *Palingenesia*. *Sartor Resartus* problematizes the possibility of closure but holds open the possibility that closure can be achieved, while *The French Revolution* undermines the possibilities that *Sartor Resartus* offers. All of the projects in turn reflect on Carlyle’s (or his narrator’s) project of writing an epic history of the revolution.

The narratives of Teufelsdröckh’s life and of the French Revolution run parallel courses, and both have problematic closures. Teufelsdröckh becomes a prisoner of time and eighteenth-century mechanistic philosophy; the French people are prisoners of outworn feudal monarchy. The “sansculotte” Diogenes Teufelsdröckh “breaks-off his neck-halter”; the French people “break prison.” After they destroy the old social structures, both Teufelsdröckh and the French people find themselves without any fixed points of reference, without access to transcendental authority. Like sailors with no “Loadstar,” both must wander aimlessly, and endlessly (SR, 154; see Landow, “Swim or Drown,” *Images of Crisis*, 59–63).

The Editor of *Sartor* and the French legislature both attempt to use writing to produce closure, defining a moment when authority is recovered and the new social order inaugurated. For the Editor of *Sartor*, this moment comes when Teufelsdröckh decides to author a new mythus, and for the French legislature when they author their constitution. Both depict this as a moment that brings wandering to an end; Teufelsdröckh reaches a celestial summit and the French reach
“harbor.” It also brings the endless motion of revolution to a close; the Editor of Sartor declares that Teufelsdröckh’s character is now fixed and “no new revolution . . . is to be looked for,” and the constituent assembly concludes that “the glorious . . . Revolution is complete” (SR, 204; FR, 2:197).

In their quest for closure, however, the revolutionaries have proceeded a step further than Teufelsdröckh, actually writing the constitution whereas Teufelsdröckh has not yet begun to author his new mythus, but this constitution merely reveals the shortcomings of all totalizing texts. The fact that these moments of closure occur only about two-thirds of the way through each work, well before the narrative itself is complete, suggests that they will be problematic. In Sartor Resartus, closure at this point does not at first appear to be problematic because it coincides with the end of the biographical narrative that constitutes book 2. But when the analogous moment of closure arrives in The French Revolution, the narrative is far from complete. Whereas the Editor of Sartor Resartus validates Teufelsdröckh’s moment of closure, the narrator of The French Revolution challenges the legislative’s claim that it has ended the revolution: “The Revolution is finished, then? . . . Your Revolution, like jelly sufficiently boiled, needs only to be poured into shapes, of Constitution, and ‘consolidated’ therein?” (1:234). The narrator’s doubts are soon confirmed when the constitution “bursts in pieces.” A closer examination of Sartor Resartus will reveal that it too questions, though less directly, the Editor’s discovery of closure.

In order to comprehend the nature of closure in these texts, we must examine them structurally as well as thematically. Carlyle could not reconcile himself to the narrative structure he found in the writings of Goethe, the structure dictated by bildung. In these narratives, each adventure that moves the exiled hero farther away from home also brings him or her one step closer to it, but the home to which the hero returns is not exactly the same place from which he or she departed because the hero has been changed by the process of the journey. Carlyle attempts to escape this dialectic by keeping its terms oppositional rather than letting them be synthesized in the return home. Because he cannot regard a step away from home as a step back toward it, his heroes move steadily away from home until they suddenly find themselves back again. The home is exactly the same as the one they left behind because it is a perfect idyll that cannot be improved. Yet because
heroes are fallen and exiled, they can never be certain that the home regained really is the same as the home lost. Whereas the hero of bildung seems to move upward in a rising spiral, Carlyle's heroes, unable to escape history, travel in an endless circle. Nimmo studies endlessly; Werner, and even Schiller, wander endlessly; Coleridge and Dalbrook speak endlessly; but none of them gets anywhere. Of all the moderns, only Goethe is able to return to his "inward home" and achieve rest, and Carlyle eventually came to doubt even this achievement.

The fundamental structure of Sartor Resartus is endless circling. Teufelsdrockh's final words, "Es geht an (It is beginning)," in addition to evoking the revolutionary Ça ira, suggest that, at the very end of the narrative, the privileged moment of closure, he is embarking once again on a quest for authority. Similarly, the Everlasting Yea turns out to be a beginning—the beginning absent from the opening of the biographical section of Sartor, rather than a moment of closure. Although the Editor entitles the first chapter of book 2 "Genesis" in order to stress origins and beginnings, he concedes that Teufelsdrockh's first appearance on earth is an "Exodus" (81). Teufelsdrockh's Genesis, or beginning, occurs instead at the conclusion of the biographical narrative when he is reborn as an author who exclaims, "Let there be Light!" (197). Even the Everlasting Yea is undercut. Borrowing the traditional imagery of closure from spiritual autobiography, the Editor dramatically concludes the biographical section of Sartor Resartus with Teufelsdrockh ascending "the higher sunlight slopes... of that Mountain which has no summit, or whose summit is in heaven only" (184; see Peterson, 39). But the framing sections of Sartor Resartus, books 1 and 3, comically deflate this closure. Book 1 reduces the sublime summit to the comically finite heights of the "highest house in the Wahngasse" while also transferring it from the celestial realms to urban Weissnichtwo. In the final chapter of book 3, Teufelsdrockh abandons even this "watchtower." In spite of the Editor's earlier assertion that "no new revolution" is to be anticipated in Teufelsdrockh's life, Teufelsdrockh has reportedly fomented a sedition of tailors and appears to be journeying toward Paris at the moment of the July Revolution.

One might suppose that Teufelsdrockh is more successful at achieving closure than the Editor of Sartor Resartus is at representing it. Certainly, Carlyle projects his own desire for a totalizing myth into
his characterization of Teufelsdröckh's project. The fate of Teufelsdröckh's *Palingenesia*, however, seems to be written in the fate of totalizing texts, like the philosophies of Hope and Schlegel and the French constitutions, that Carlyle represented in later works. In *Sartor Resartus* itself, we are left doubting whether the *Palingenesia* can ever be written. Some readers have argued that *Sartor* itself is the *Palingenesia*, but it is useful to insist on *Sartor*'s fiction that *Die Kleider, ihr Werden und Wirken* (Clothes, their Origin and Influence) is only Teufelsdröckh's first step toward producing a new cultural mythus. *Die Kleider*, he tells us, is preliminary to the "Transcendent or ultimate portion" of his work, and the *Palingenesia* remains unpublished, perhaps unfinished, when Teufelsdröckh disappears at the end of *Sartor Resartus* (199, 217, 297). *Die Kleider* only brings him to the end of a historical cycle; rebirth will not begin until he publishes the *Palingenesia*. Since Carlyle turned away from speculative philosophy after *Sartor Resartus*, this mythus for the new era could not take the form imagined in *Sartor*. It must turn to fact and history; the rebirth of society will not be represented in the *Palingenesia* but in *The French Revolution*.

In *The French Revolution*, the French, like Teufelsdröckh, seek to achieve closure but circle endlessly without getting anywhere. The three volumes of the history all offer and then undercut a moment of closure. This structural circling, further reinforced by the pervasive imagery of circling, puts into question not only the possibility that the French can create a new social order but that writing can ever achieve closure.

In the first volume of *The French Revolution*, the legislative intends to conclude the revolution by writing a constitution, but the process of authoring it extends rather than concludes the revolution. The revolution again appears to come to an end at the climax of volume 2, when the king accepts the constitution, but at the conclusion of this volume, the constitution bursts in pieces. Although volume 3 brings the history to a close, its closure does not resolve the problems raised in the first two volumes. By rapidly repeating a sequence of events parallel to those in volumes 1 and 2, it suggests that, instead of achieving closure, the revolution is accelerating toward total destruction. The final volume begins with a book entitled "September" (in reference to the September massacres) and circles round to conclude with "Vendémiaire," the month that corresponds to September in the revolutionary
calendar. Both represent France in an autumnal state, trapped in the endless movement toward wintry death that is never completed, never brought fully round to the season of rebirth. The conclusion of the history, a fictitious ex post facto prophecy, predicts the course of the revolution that has been the subject of Carlyle's history, thus circling us back through the history of the revolution, just as the narrator circles endlessly between the historical moment in which he is writing and the historical moment he records.

While the aim of authoring the constitution is to enable the French people to escape revolution and history, the final volume insists that the revolution continues, that "the end is not yet" (3:314). The end of the Terror does not end revolution but is itself a "new glorious Revolution"; only the "body of Sansculottism" dies, its soul "still lives, and is not dead, but changed . . . still works far and wide, through one bodily shape into another less amorphous" (3:286, 310–11). Just as Teufelsdröckh's disappearance at the end of Sartor Resartus leaves him once again wandering Europe—is he in Paris, is he in London?—the French fail to achieve the repose of closure, the "blind brute Force" of the revolution offering "no rest . . . but in the grave" (3:249). At the conclusion of the history, the French have not returned to the prerevolutionary idyll, but have circled back to the moment at which the old order disintegrated. In 1795, Napoleon's "whiff of grapeshot" gratuitously succeeds where Broglie's had failed in 1789; the French people are still demanding "bread, not bursts of Parliamentary eloquence"; and France is still ruled by the "Aristocracy," albeit an "Aristocracy of the Moneybag" rather than an "Aristocracy of Feudal Parchment" (3:303, 320). The topos of impossible closure is reinforced throughout The French Revolution by the imagery of endless circling. It should not be surprising that the revolution—the word revolution itself originally denoted the circular orbit of celestial bodies, and then the general notion of cyclical periodicity—spreads in ever-widening circles. Whirlpools of Society, whirlpools of Babylonish confusion, regurgitating whirlpools of men and women, World-Whirlpools, whirlblasts, waste vortices, red blazing whirlwinds, fire-whirlwinds, clashing whirlwinds, whirlwinds of military fire and of human passions, and tornadoes of fatalism "spin" through the pages of the history (1:65, 2:121, 192, 1:169, 2:151, 1:219, 2:299, 222, 3:151, 2:170, 3:70, 122, 212). If the narrative spirals, it spirals downward, not upward; but, most im-
portantly, it spirals without end, descending into "endless Conflagration[s]" and "bottomless cataracts" (2:152, 251).

In *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle held out the hope that authors who work with words, like laborers who till the soil, could produce something outside themselves, could create a world (see 227–28). Yet Teufelsdröckh the author also believes that "Conviction, were it never so excellent, is worthless till it convert itself into Conduct. Nay, properly Conviction is not possible till then; inasmuch as all Speculation is by nature endless, formless, a vortex amid vortices" (195). In "Characteristics," Carlyle complains that in this "age of Metaphysics" during which "the arena of free Activity has long been narrowing, that of sceptical Inquiry becoming more and more universal. . . . our best effort must be unproductively spent not in working, but in ascertaining our mere Whereabout, and so much as whether we are to work at all" (*CME*, 3:27–28; emphasis added). Since knowledge is never complete, action tends to be deferred endlessly.

In "Characteristics," Carlyle had condemned contemporary society for its reliance on metaphysical theory or speculation that remains locked in language and cannot be realized in action or social structures. Because society has fallen from the idyll of shared unconscious unity into Babelian fragmentation—"Religion splitting itself into Philosophies"—each individual is locked into a self-created universe of private belief in which language necessarily turns in upon itself (*CME*, 3:15, 33). This inward-turning tendency manifests itself as autophagy: "self-devouring" reviews feed off literature, and in turn a "Review of Reviews" feeds off other reviews (*CME*, 3:25). Carlyle brilliantly expresses Victorian anxiety about the autophagic tendency of self-conscious philosophy in the image of the Irish saint who carries his head in his mouth: "Consider it well, Metaphysics is the attempt of the mind to rise above the mind; to environ and shut in, or as we say, comprehend the mind. Hopeless struggle, for the wisest, as for the foolishest! What strength of sinew, or athletic skill, will enable the stoutest athlete to fold his own body in his arms, and, by lifting, lift up himself? The Irish Saint swam the Channel, 'carrying his head in his teeth;' but the feat has never been imitated" (*CME*, 3:27; see Hartman).

Because the attempt to establish belief through metaphysical speculation can never achieve closure, one can never stop speculating and
begin acting. Anticipating the imagery of The French Revolution, Carlyle depicts speculation "circulat[ing] in endless vortices," "wander[ing] homeless" and declining into "endless realms of Denial" (CME, 3:27, 30, 26). It is appropriate that he contemplated including Coleridge among the authors he might discuss in "Characteristics," for he had long associated the poet and philosopher with the treachery of speech and metaphysical speculation. The letters Carlyle wrote after his first meeting with Coleridge in 1824 describe him as grotesquely overweight—one is reminded of the appetite of Cagliostro—and addicted to endless "tawlk" (CL, 3:228, 300). Unable to achieve closure—"He is without beginning or middle or end . . . speaks incessantly . . . there is no method in his talk; he wanders like a man sailing among many currents"—he cannot realize his aimless talk in writing, let alone in action (CL, 3:139, 91; see 90, 351-52). The philosopher Dalbrook in Wotton Reinfred, patterned on these portrayals of Coleridge, has the same tendency to make language circle back on itself until its endless self-reflections make it meaningless: "The whole day long, if you do not check him, he will pour forth floods of speech, and the richest, noblest speech, only that you find no purpose, tendency, or meaning in it!" (WR, 80). Like Coleridge, Dalbrook does not realize his speech in writing or action; although he "has the loftiest idea of what is to be done, he does and feels that he can do nothing" and so "only talks the more" (WR, 81).

The French Revolution provides a similar critique of theoretical speculation. The French, too, have fragmented belief and authority. First, "Twelve Hundred Kings"—the legislative—replace the single monarch; then the entire nation replaces the legislative and "there is properly no Constituted Authority, but every man is his own King" (2:35, 3:40; see 59). The execution of the king, which destroys the last vestige of hierarchical authority, is "the last act these men ever did with concert" (3:112). Instead of social order there is a "duel of Authority with Authority," "as many Parties as there are Opinions" (1:84, 3:116).

This collapse of authority leads once again to autophagic self-destruction. To Burke's lament that the "age of chivalry is gone," Carlyle replies that the "Age of Hunger" has come (2:228, 263). Hunger represents the fundamental human needs that are no longer satisfied when the ethical system that ensures the just satisfaction of those needs collapses (see 1:130-31). While chivalry and theocracy had served that function, hunger, from Carlyle's point of view, is simply what remains
when the ethical system breaks down. The principles of the *philosophes*, who believe in political economy, do not provide a satisfactory system of justice: “What bonds that ever held a human society happily together, or held it together at all, are in force here?” Carlyle asks them; their only belief, he concludes, is “that Pleasure is pleasant. Hunger they have for all sweet things; and the law of Hunger: but what other law?” (1:36–37; see 31).

In the absence of any moral system, society reverts to “fact,” its “lowest, least blessed fact” being “the primitive one of Cannibalism: That I can devour Thee” (1:55). Cannibalism, as Carlyle suggests, is social autophagy. Having killed off the royal father, the revolutionary “brothers” swear a “fraternal oath,” but without a father to keep order, they turn on one another, becoming a “Brotherhood of Cain” (3:263; see 256). When the revolutionaries send each other to the guillotine during the Terror, the revolution begins “devouring its own children” (3:201, 254). The connotations of devouring in the word *consume* give a special resonance to Carlyle’s repeated description of the Terror as the apocalyptic “Consummation of Sansculottism” (3:202, 222, 236, 243). The imagery of cannibalism pervades the history: Foulon is beheaded and his mouth stuffed with grass after he suggests that the starving people eat grass (1:112); the guillotine devours its victims (1:56, 3:253); a “Thyestes” feast precipitates the insurrection of women (1:247–48); and the revolutionaries reportedly make wigs from the hair of executed women and leather from the skin of men (3:246–47; see also 2:70, 231, 241, 3:71, 205, 253–54; J. Rosenberg, 91–100; Sterrenburg, passim; Brantlinger, 69). Because the revolution “has the property of growing by . . . Hunger,” it consumes virtually every figure who plays a major role in it: Louis XVI and the royal family, Mirabeau, Danton, the leading Girondists, Marat, and Robespierre, who becomes the appropriate symbol of the revolutionary government that “has to consume itself, suicidally” when he attempts suicide after his arrest (2:17, 3:71; see 3:174, 231, 254, 273).

As in “Cagliostro” and “Characteristics,” cannibalistic hunger, which can never be satisfied because speech never achieves closure, represents the oral activity that annihilates the other by absorbing it to itself. Carlyle notes that the majority of the leaders of the revolution were “eloquent” lawyers “skilful in Advocate-fence” who, believing that “Society might become *methodic*, demonstrable by logic,” attempt to found a social system on the basis of theoretical specula-
tion, but, as in "Characteristics," he objects that "all theories, were they never so earnest, painfully elaborated, are . . . incomplete" (3:123, 1:54; see 148–51). Their principles do not provide an ethical system like chivalry; hence their "constitution" does not provide "bread to eat," that is, a just distribution of basic goods (1:226). Instead, the legislative, preoccupied with "debating, denouncing, objurgating" and "bursts of parliamentary eloquence," can produce nothing outside of itself, must feed on and "devour itself" (2:237). Like Coleridge and Dalbrook, parliaments—literally places of speaking—are unsuited to action; sending "your fifty-thousandth part of a new Tongue-fencer into National Debating-club" or "National Palaver" will produce only "talk" (2:26, 198). For Carlyle, parliamentary or legislative "acts" are not true actions; they are only documents sealed off from the world of social activity. The sansculottes never establish their authority; their ideas never get beyond paper.

Although Carlyle is suspicious of theories, his history has its own implicit theory of why the revolution occurred, why it failed, and how its course might have been altered. Implicitly, he also seeks to demonstrate how to reestablish social order in the present. The revolution occurred because the monarchy had lost authority; it had broken down "after long rough tear and wear" (1:7). The existing aristocracy inaugurated the era of cannibalism and consumption; Louis XVI is, like his father, a "Donothing and Eatall" whose court contents itself with shooting "partridges and grouse" (1:12, 22). But, while Carlyle therefore concludes that the French people were justified in overturning the government, he does not believe them capable of establishing a new social order.

The people have a kind of authority, but it is an inverse authority capable of producing only an "inverse order," an "organised . . . Anarchy" (3:231; see 3:4). While the overindulging aristocracy no longer understands basic human needs, the people, who understand hunger, are a "genuine outburst of Nature," even "transcendental" (1:251, 3:2). The "creative Mountain" becomes a "great Authority" that can get the sansculottic nation "accoutred" again (3:123, 122, 180, 140; see 2:249). But Carlyle ultimately distinguishes this knowledge of human need from knowledge of how to justly satisfy human need. While both kinds of knowledge require that one look beyond the surface, an action that the existing aristocracy was incapable of performing, the sansculottes do not discover the transcendental, but the "dread foundations" and "subterranean deeps" of "Madness and Tophet" (3:2, 2:279, 3:1;
see 1:80, 2:279). Since the people would never be anything more than an anarchic mass, France needed a leader with transcendental authority.59

Although *The French Revolution* does not explicitly invoke the idea of hero-worship (which Carlyle had already introduced in *Sartor Resartus*), its epic framework enables it to suggest the unfulfilled alternative to popular authority and a paper constitution, the discovery of a hero who could create a new hierarchy. In 1789, he writes, the French aristocracy was "still a graduated Hierarchy of Authorities, or the accredited Similitude of such: they sat there, uniting King with Commonalty; transmitting and translating gradually, from degree to degree, the command of one into the Obedience of the other" (2:232). As opposed to an-archy—the absence of arche or rule—there had formerly been a mon-arch—a single ruler and "reverend Hierarchies" (1:9). Whereas hier-archy, holy-rule, transmits authority from the divinity to the people, now "One reverend thing after another ceases to meet reverence . . . one authority after another" (2:106–7; emphasis added; see 2:262, 3:3, 40). Carlyle seeks throughout his history a hero who could reestablish this hierarchy.

Carlyle attempts to represent Mirabeau, whom he compares throughout the history to Hercules, as a potential epic hero; but he fails to fill even this tenuous role. Carlyle argues that Mirabeau, the sole revolutionary to possess a transcendental "sacred spark," might have become "king" if he had lived another year (2:134). Although he is a "world-compeller" who turns aside from the endless convolutions of parliamentary debate in order to engage in concrete action, it is not at all clear that his attempt to save the monarchy by establishing it on a constitutional basis would have succeeded, even if he had lived. More importantly, Carlyle's representation of Mirabeau as a man who disdains words and theoretical systems in favor of action, based on the elder Mirabeau's assertion that his son has "made away with (hume, swallowed) all Formulas" turns out to be problematic (2:137, 1:125; see 137). Carlyle's translation of humé as "made away with" suggests that Mirabeau has discarded formulas and theories, but the more exact translation, cited in parentheses, suggests that he has gullibly accepted, or "swallowed," them. Mirabeau the swallower turns out to be another cannibalistic revolutionary rather than a creative hero. Unable to make Mirabeau an epic hero, Carlyle must relegate his history to the domain of "tragedy" (2:147; see Farrell, 215–31).

Napoleon comes closer to enacting the role of the hero as a man
of action. Unlike the leaders who preceded him—Mirabeau, Danton, Robespierre—Napoleon does not serve in the legislative and is not a man of words. He is a man of action who uses physical force—sansculottism "drilled now into Soldiership"—to create the "first germ of returning Order for France" (3:297, 54). He ends the revolution, not by writing a constitution, but by subduing the insurrection of Vendémiaire with a "whiff of grapeshot." Whereas Mirabeau failed to restore monarchy, Napoleon becomes the modern "Citizen King" (3:322).

Yet whereas Mirabeau and Danton may have compelled belief—they "ken"—but were unable to compel obedience, Napoleon compels obedience—he "cans"—but cannot compel belief. Napoleon's actions produce order only in the sense that they impose a legal structure, military discipline; they do not realize a transcendental ideal or the belief of the French people. His failure to reclothe the society stripped naked by the sansculottes becomes manifest when women wearing "flesh-coloured drawers" beneath their sheer empire gowns make nakedness the latest fashion. The social order that emerges at the end of the history is not a new system of belief but a return to the injustices with which it originated, the new "Evangel of Mammon" replacing the aristocratic feudal order with a "baser sort of Aristocracy" that is no better than the "Evangel of Jean Jacques" (3:314—15). The revolution clears the ground for the hegemony of political economy, the concern of Carlyle's next major works, Chartist and Past and Present, in which, like the French people, he asks, "Can the human stomach satisfy itself with lectures on Free-trade?" (3:136).

The argument of The French Revolution, that all attempts to author a totalizing text in an era that has undermined authority will fail, ultimately applies to The French Revolution itself. The book is not an epic as Carlyle defined the genre in "On Biography" but demonstrates the impossibility of epic. Any pretense of closure would be false. Just as the Editor of Sartor Resartus could only "conclude if not complete" his narrative, so the narrator of The French Revolution acknowledges that his history "does not conclude, but merely ceases" (3:321). Throughout the history, Carlyle persistently questions his own ability to discover the meaning of a phenomenon that undermines all meaning. Indeed, he undermines closure in his conclusion by introducing, in spite of his insistence that he is producing factual history, a patent fiction spoken by a notorious liar, a prophecy by the "Archquack" Cagliostro
What makes *The French Revolution* great is precisely Carlyle's openness to the heterogeneity of the history he was recording and the brilliantly heterogeneous vehicle he created to represent it. His history radically reshaped epic, but he sought in epic something other than what he created in *The French Revolution*: he sought a text that would reenclose the forces set loose by the revolution and dazzlingly represented in his history of it.

While *The French Revolution* seems to teach the lesson that one must stop talking and begin to act, Carlyle clearly prefers men of words like Mirabeau and Danton to men of action like Napoleon. Nor did he give up words himself. Instead, he tried to use writing to get to the end of writing. A typical pattern began to emerge in his letters and journals. While he was working on a project, he would long to finish writing so that he could return home to Scotland and rest, demonstrating his longing for closure and an affirmation that writing can achieve it. But the closures Carlyle achieved through writing never satisfied him for long. No sooner had he completed a project and made his way to Scotland than he would begin to grow restless and feel the need to write again. In the works that followed, he sought a way out of this dilemma by searching for authority in the acts of political leaders rather than in the writings of poets—the poetic king rather than the legislating poet. Napoleon and Mirabeau did not finally fulfill his vision of the active hero—but another political leader might. Furthermore, Carlyle could no longer be satisfied with merely analyzing society; he must somehow seek to change it. His writings to this point had sought to *know* the forces that had created modern society; they would now attempt to *act* upon it.