In 1866, the year after Carlyle completed *Frederick the Great*, he triumphantly assumed the office of rector of the University of Edinburgh. But three weeks later, when Jane Carlyle died, he plunged into depression. In the following months, he divided his activities between the private project of endeavoring to recover the domestic idyll, in *The Reminiscences*, and the public attempt to restore the theocratic idyll through his defense of Governor Eyre and his opposition to the Second Reform Bill, in "Shooting Niagara." During the last decade of Carlyle's life, the debilities of old age, especially the palsy in his right hand, made writing more and more difficult, and his literary output slowed to a trickle. But the silence of his last years was not the repose he had always sought, the safe enclosure in the domestic idyll of tranquility; it brought him no nearer the end of writing. On the contrary, his continued yearning for the transcendental idyll left intact, even made possible, the public world of economy he sought to escape.

Closing Failures in *The Reminiscences* and "Shooting Niagara"

Just a month after Jane Carlyle's death, Thomas began to write a series of reminiscences, first of Jane herself; then of men they both knew well, Edward Irving and Francis Jeffrey; and finally of two poets Carlyle had known only slightly, William Wordsworth and Robert Southey. Written privately—whether or not he intended them to remain private was a point of controversy after his death—they sought, more directly than any of his writings since the reminiscence of James Carlyle, to recapture the domestic idyll. They contrast a pastoral vision of Scotland with the metropolis of London, and they make the process of narrating a means of escape from present pain—his wife's death, the chaos of contemporary society—into the past of memory.
Carlyle dwells insistently on the Scottish scenes in *The Reminiscences*, clearly preferring them to the “London bits of memorabilia,” which do “not disengage themselves from the general mass, as the earlier Craigenputtock ones” do (114). Using the contrast with London throughout *The Reminiscences*, always to the advantage of Scotland and Craigenputtoch, he revives the dream that the latter had been more congenial to literary production, that he could “do fully twice as much work in a given time there” (58). The Irving and Jeffrey of *The Reminiscences* both achieve their greatest successes in their native land and are ruined by London. Irving is “genially happy” in the “sunny islets” of Annandale, and Jeffrey achieves acclaim as the editor of the *Edinburgh Review* (229, 244). Each goes to London in search of greater success but only finds failure. Irving falls into heresy, loses his congregation, and dies; Jeffrey, forced to spend many “unwholesome hours” in the “noisy hubbub of St. Stephen’s,” fails in Parliament, becomes “completely miserable,” and is forced to return to Scotland to recover his health (331). By contrast, Carlyle, recognizing, during his 1824 sojourn, that London is “worse than Tartarus, with all its Phlegethons and Stygian quagmires,” rejects the city in favor of the “russet-coated Idyll” at Hoddam Hill (281—82). Yet, by implying that in spirit he had never really left Scotland, that by remaining within the idyll of literature he had sustained the idyll even in London, he suppresses the reverse possibility: that he can never escape the alienation of urban economy. In fact, although Carlyle frequently visited Scotland, he never found permanent rest there, and he lived out the last years of his life in London. Like the heroes he had so often described, he could only achieve rest in death, and it was only in death that, according to his wishes, he returned permanently to Scotland and joined his parents in the Ecclefechan churchyard (Froude, *My Relations with Carlyle*, 71).

Carlyle’s contradictory desires and aims in writing *The Reminiscences* are manifest in the contrast between his representation of Jane Carlyle as the center of the Scottish idyll and the pain he knew she suffered there. She is both the idyll itself—an “Eldorado” that “screen[s] [him] from pain”—and its creator—transforming darkness into light and creating “a little Eden round her” (163, 125, 70; see 305). Carlyle had looked forward to Craigenputtoch in 1828 as a “green oasis,” but had left it when the oasis withered and became a “Dunscore Desert”
In the reminiscence of Jane Carlyle, it takes Jane to make “the Desert blossom,” to transform their “wild moorland home” into a “fairy palace” where they spent their “happiest days” (57). Through Jane, he suggests, the Scottish idyll could be made to bloom even in the deserts of London.

In writing *The Reminiscences*, Carlyle was not simply struggling to escape the alienations of literary commerce, however; he also sought, through the process of writing, relief from the guilt and remorse that followed Jane Carlyle’s death. Although *The Reminiscences* are putatively about her and those who knew her, they frequently stray from her in order to dwell on genealogies, anecdotes, and chronologies related to her only tangentially, if at all. But he finds so much “solace” in the “refuge” of writing them that he cannot persuade himself to stop, even though he frequently chides himself for “defrauding” Jane (114; see 49, 55, 79, 167–69). Reluctant to reach the end of the narrative, he is driven to write the subsequent reminiscences, especially “Wordsworth” and “Southey,” for which he had little enthusiasm—as much by the desire to sustain the solacing process of writing as to commemorate the lives of his mere acquaintances (307, 343). Yet this desire to expand the narrative is at odds with the desire for closure represented by the Scottish idyll. Indeed, Carlyle expands the idyllic narrative, in which he represents Jane Carlyle as fundamentally happy, as a way of suppressing his guilty knowledge of the pain and sorrow he had in fact caused her (e.g., 125, 156).

But if Carlyle narrated in order to forget the misery he had caused, he also wrote the reminiscence as a “religious course of worship” and a “little ‘Shrine of pious Memory.’” in order to “expiate” it (89, 139; see 111, 155, 159, 275). Transferring his guilt about the pain he had caused Jane into guilt at indulging in “idle work” that has no public purpose, he makes his need to expiate a motive for more writing and for public action (79; see 90). The idealized image of Jane Carlyle he has created will inspire him to take part once again in public affairs. “I am gone, loved one,” he imagines her saying to him, “work a little longer, if thou still canst; if not, follow!” (128; see 89, 157, 167). To imagine that Jane would command him to work—work that would inevitably take the form of writing, since “writing is [the] one thing [he] can do”—was to imagine that she forgave him for having been so obsessed with his own problems that he did not recognize her suffering
It was as much for himself as in obedience to her that he became advisor to the Eyre Defense Committee and wrote “Shooting Niagara.”

The Eyre controversy and the question of reform were closely related in the public mind, and both were major topics of parliamentary debate in the spring of 1866, when England was disturbed by social unrest of a kind not seen since 1848. The Jamaica rebellion, brutally suppressed by Eyre, had taken place in the autumn of 1865; throughout 1866 there were Fenian disturbances both in Ireland and in England; and in July a riot broke out when public officials tried to prevent a public meeting in Hyde Park. In these circumstances, Disraeli, perceiving that reform was inevitable, introduced the bill that, after considerable modification, became law in August 1867.

“Shooting Niagara” responds directly to the Second Reform Bill—it was published in August 1867, the month in which it received its third and final reading—but also deals with the social unrest represented by the Hyde Park riots and the Jamaica rebellion. Like Latter-Day Pamphlets, “Shooting Niagara” is a bitter and despairing polemic in reaction to events both personal and public; its tone is altogether different from the mood of the inaugural address, delivered just two years earlier, that had concluded, like Past and Present, with the optimistic words from Goethe’s “Symbolum”: “We bid you be of hope!” (CME, 4:482). Although the criticisms in “Shooting Niagara” are directed against the reform bill, which it regards as symptomatic of England’s social problems, it did not seek to reverse the bill (it appeared too late to affect the outcome of the parliamentary debate) but to urge a yet more radical reform that would bypass Parliament altogether. Even this was not entirely new, and Carlyle’s analysis of England’s social problems here remains fundamentally what it had been in Chartism, Past and Present, and Latter-Day Pamphlets. But he significantly altered his proposals by recasting them in terms of the shift from ideal to real that he had made in Frederick the Great and in response to the Eyre controversy.

In the first part of the essay, Carlyle appears to return to an earlier phase of his social criticism when he calls on a speculative (i.e., literary-religious) aristocracy to “restor[e] God and whatever was Godlike in the traditions and recorded doings of Mankind” (CME, 5:30); an industrial aristocracy to restore justice and honesty by “build[ing]” an
economy based, not on temporary contracts, but on relationships that
will “stand till the Day of Judgment” (CME, 5:34); and a titled aris­
tocracy to restore hierarchy and reign as kings on their estates. He
imagines these religious, economic, and political aristocracies work­
ing quietly together, outside of the formal institutions of government,
until they rise in the public esteem and their authority is acknowl­
edged. The aim would be to change social institutions by changing the
beliefs of the people; the public would obey these aristocracies, not
because it was coerced, but because it had come to believe in them.
But, as the essay proceeds, it becomes clear that the Carlyle of Latter-
Day Pamphlets and Frederick the Great, who believes that no “argument
of human intellect” can change his contemporaries, has not disap­
peared (CME, 5:4). Speculative aristocrats, he concludes, will continue
to “waste themselves” in “Literature” (which in fifty years will sink
“to the rank of street-fiddling”); the industrial aristocracy will con­
tinue producing “cheap and nasty” goods, despoiling the cities, and
exploiting labor; and the political aristocracy, even the conservatives
(he is thinking of the followers of Disraeli who supported the reform
bill), will continue to confine themselves to self-serving parliamentary
politics (CME, 5:24, 26).

As in Frederick the Great, the ideal gives way to the real, and Carlyle
turns to war, rather than art, as the means to transform the nation,
imagining a scenario in which social disturbances like the Jamaican
rebellion and the Hyde Park riots will multiply until England plunges
into open civil war. In these circumstances, the literary aristocracy,
which has no power, and the economic aristocracy, which has no ethos,
will both be powerless, so it will be left to the political aristocracy to
restore social order through military force. In contrast to the peaceful
aristocrat, whom he initially depicts as “mould[ing] and manag[ing]
everything, till both his people and his dominion correspond gradually
to the ideal he has formed. . . . Till the whole surroundings of a noble­
man [are] made noble like himself,” he envisions a saving remnant
of titled warriors turning their estates into training grounds where
they establish order through military discipline (CME, 5:37; empha­
sis added).

Drawing on his portrait of Frederick and his defense of Governor
Eyre, Carlyle thus envisions a radical transformation of society. When
he argues that England cannot survive under common law, that it must
embrace martial law, which, he claims, is “anterior to all written laws”
and "coeval with Human Society," he is referring directly to the Eyre case and responding to Chief Justice Alexander Cockburn's six-hour peroration arguing that "the law of England knew no such thing as 'Martial law'" (CME, 5:12; Semmel, 153). Several hundred people had been executed and many more flogged when Edward Eyre, the governor of Jamaica, declared martial law in response to a local uprising. Among those executed was George Gordon, an outspoken critic of the colonial government, who was illegally transported into the area where martial law was in effect and executed with Eyre's approval.

The issue that concerned many was that if Eyre could use martial law to punish Gordon, then martial law could also be declared in England to deprive citizens of their legitimate rights. Carlyle, too, considered the case relevant to England—the reference to the Eyre case is preceded by a discussion of the Hyde Park riots—but he reverses the terms; whereas others argued that, since what Eyre did would have been intolerable and illegal in England it was wrong to do it in Jamaica, Carlyle argues that the English aristocracy will need to act as Eyre had in Jamaica, that only military discipline can produce social order. As in Frederick the Great, he no longer imagines that the poetic hero can create a belief that will produce a social order, but insists that social order must be produced by coercive political power. Indeed, interweaving the various strands of his argument, he imagines Frederick the Great and Friedrich Wilhelm turning the Caribbean island of Dominica—a stand-in for Jamaica or even the British Isles—into a fertile kingdom that would embody his ideal of a martial and hierarchical society, the lower ground worked by a million black slaves and the upper portion of the island—"salubrious and delightful for the European"—occupied by a hundred thousand white slave masters (CME, 5:17). There was nothing in the politics of the day to drive Carlyle to this abhorrent vision; it was simply his inability to imagine any alternative—in particular, his inability to find a source of authority in literature and the processes of cultural formation.

The Eyre Controversy and the Dilemma of Literature

Like the Huxley-Wilberforce debate that signaled the victory of science over traditional religion despite much popular sentiment to the contrary, the Eyre controversy played out a conflict between literature
and economy in which the men of letters won only a Pyrrhic victory over the advocates of classical liberalism. Even though Carlyle had turned to the institution of monarchy, rather than literature, as the means to oppose political economy and produce a social ethos with transcendental authority, he continued to write as a man of letters. In spite of the fact that he always considered it incapable of producing belief, it was increasingly the discourse of political economy, rather than literary discourse, that compelled belief. Because literature had withdrawn from the realm of political action into the transcendental idyll, it had not only failed as a worthy opponent to political economy, it had left political economy in possession of the realm of politics, thus helping to establish its authority.

In June of 1866, after a government commission removed Governor Eyre from office though arguing that his actions had been justified, John S. Mill and the Jamaica Committee decided to prosecute him for murder. When, in response, the Eyre Defense Committee was formed, Carlyle was the first prominent individual to join it. Since Mill was accompanied by a formidable group of public figures—Thomas Huxley, Frederic Harrison, Thomas Hughes, Herbert Spencer, John Bright, Charles Darwin, and Leslie Stephen—Carlyle felt it necessary to enlist an equally prominent group on the other side—John Ruskin, John Tyndall, Charles Dickens, Alfred Tennyson, and Henry Kingsley (see Ford; Workman; August, xxvii—xxxi; and Hall). The men on Mill's Jamaica Committee wrote in the scientific mode of economic discourse, the discourse of rationalized efficiency, while the authors on the Eyre Defense Committee employed the religiously inflected discourse of literature. Chief Justice Cockburn wrote his directions to the jury in the former mode, leaving little doubt that he thought Eyre should stand trial; but the grand jury, apparently more persuaded by the latter mode of discourse and reflecting widespread public sentiment, dismissed the case. The public could afford to follow the men of letters for, even setting aside other issues such as racial prejudice, they had no immediate interest in the case—which, however, did not stop them from embracing the fundamental principles espoused by Mill and taking the primacy of their own individual rights for granted. The same public that would allow the rights of a mulatto to be ignored already accepted many of the principles Mill put forward in respect of them.
Rather than regarding the discourses of literature and economy as diametrically opposed, it would be more accurate to see them as complementary, Mill's discourse providing the ideological ground for the dominant mode of conflictual social relations, and Carlyle's providing the middle classes with a compensatory vision of a secure social order. The discourse of economy claims to describe things as they are, while that of literature claims to describe things as they ought to be. Literature concedes that economy correctly analyzes and describes the world in history but insists that the world need not be in history, that if we were to return to the transcendental idyll, literature, not economy, would provide the "right" representation of reality. By confining its ability to define ethos to the transcendental or even to the private domestic sphere, literature legitimates economy, for the time being, in the public sphere. Carlyle could imagine ethos as a function of the social ideal, but he could not imagine it as part of a historical process; Mill could conceive of ethos as a social process, but could only see it in terms of the limits of the individual, not as the function of a social ideal.

The summer before the Jamaica rebellion, Mill had been elected to Parliament and sentiment in favor of a new reform bill was on the increase, but the prospects for passage remained slight because Palmerston resolutely opposed it. On the day Palmerston died (October 18, 1865), Carlyle, recognizing like his contemporaries that reform was now inevitable, sat down to draft a reply to Mill's *On Liberty*, the text that codified the classic principles of liberal individualism that would be embodied in the bill. Although Carlyle had been disturbed by the book when he first read it upon its appearance in 1859, it was only when Mill appeared to be on the verge of turning his principles into law that he felt compelled to respond. The central issue that Carlyle's fragmentary response to *On Liberty* sought to address was the problem of ethos, how one controls the behavior of the self-interested individual. Defining justice in terms of the rights of individuals, Mill had insisted that individuals can be suppressed only when their actions infringe on the rights of others: "Advice, instruction, persuasion, and avoidance by other people if thought necessary for their own good, are the only measures by which society can justifiably express its dislike or disapprobation" (87). Carlyle attempted to refute Mill by arguing that this limitation of individual action does not provide a true ethos, that Mill's principle allows an individual to act wrongly so long as that
wrong action does not affect anyone else. He concludes, as one might expect, that the solution is to discover a transcendental standard: “All turns on his course being verily Hellward, and of your persuasions, if they articulated themselves in the form of regulation, observable by human care & prudence and coercions and compulsions, being verily Heavenward” (Trela, “Review of Mill’s Liberty,” 25).

The Eyre case provided a symbolic arena for debating this conflict between the need for social and individual justice. Mill argued that it was a case of Gordon’s individual rights under English law, and that English law did not allow martial law to displace common law. Carlyle argued that it was a matter of the social order as a whole: that it was “as if a ship had been on fire; the captain [i.e., Eyre] by immediate and bold exertion, had put the fire out, and had been called to account for having flung a bucket or two of water in the hold beyond what was necessary. He had damaged some of the cargo, perhaps, but he had saved the ship” (LL, 2:351–52). In the more positive form of his argument, Mill would make the forming of social consensus the historical process of defining social justice. But by taking the individual as the basis of his description of ethos, he provides a picture of society in perpetual conflict, individuals walled off from one another in self-defense. Carlyle attempts to provide a corrective by making society as a whole the basis of his analysis, but when, instead of seeking consensus as a historical and social process, he insists that governors and ruling classes have transcendental authority, he merely justifies authoritarian coercion.11

In his reminiscences of Edward Irving and Francis Jeffrey, written while he was working on the Eyre case, Carlyle represents the dilemma of literature situated midway between Irving’s religious domain, in which he no longer believes, and Jeffrey’s economic domain, in which he cannot bear to reside. In “Edward Irving,” he assumes the position of the Voltairean skeptic in order to reject speaking in tongues and transcendental religion; in “Francis Jeffrey,” he assumes the position of “mystic” in order to reject “dead Edinburgh Whiggism, Scepticism, and Materialism” (Rem., 320; see 344). When Irving opposes the Reform Bill of 1832 as a “thing forbidden,” Carlyle supports it (293); when Jeffrey assumes that Whig reform will truly transform society, Carlyle claims to become skeptical and to harbor a secret sympathy for John Croker Wilson and the Tory Blackwood’s Magazine (328, 330). Because the law, consistent with the discourse of economy, is a self-
referential system that ignores the question of real guilt or innocence in favor of its own processes, Jeffrey's "advocate morality" permits him to obtain acquittal for a murderer whose guilt seems certain. Carlyle concludes that the law is no longer concerned with justice, but has become enfolded in the economic system, the lawyer allowing his "intellect, [his] highest heavenly gift, [to be] hung up in the shop-window... for sale" (313). But Irving offers no alternative, his transcendental authority collapsing when he becomes isolated in a private world of Cole-ridgean moonshine. Both, for Carlyle, become self-enclosed, unable to author a social ethos.12

When in 1832 Carlyle discovered that he was becoming isolated in the private world of art at Craigenputtoch, he might have concluded that literature should engage in the public construction of values; but instead he decided to subordinate literature to the transcendental hero, who would discover, and compel society to accept, transcendental values. Carlyle's authoritarianism derived from the same division between private and public, transcendence and history, that underlay his early belief in literature. Because he continued to assume that the public domain consists of self-interested individuals, he always regarded the social process as fundamentally anarchic and therefore could never acknowledge that a just social order might be based on anything other than an apprehension of absolute and transcendental values. If the man of letters could not transmit those values peaceably through visionary insight, then the political dictator as divinely authorized hero would do it by force.

The alliance of literary culture and political authority against the depredations of political economy inevitably made its way into the works of Carlyle's contemporaries and successors even though they, more often than not, rejected his authoritarianism as well as his later anti-aestheticism. This alliance manifests itself directly in Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, which, like "Shooting Niagara," was written in response to the Hyde Park riots and the Reform Bill of 1867. Although Arnold seems to have preferred the first alternative offered by Carlyle in "Shooting Niagara"—using the authority of culture (i.e., literature) to create social order—he went even further, suggesting that culture can confer on the state the authority to coerce obedience from the masses (*Culture and Anarchy*, 96; see Wolf; Lloyd; Arac, *Critical Genealogies*, 135–36). Arnold means to say that culture will provide
the state with the transcendental authority which will ensure that its laws are just—that, as Carlyle puts it, its course is "Heavenward."

But if culture does not truly possess transcendental authority—and it has been the thrust of this study to show that Carlyle and the Victorians were never able to establish how to verify such authority—then it merely serves to encourage the people to accept state coercion. Indeed, the Arnoldian principle of "disinterestedness"—his insistence that culture separate itself from the public domain and the political process—does not so much lend authority to the state as make the ethical imperatives of culture appear irrelevant to it. Like Carlyle's, Arnold's implicitly pastoral and idyllic notion of culture fails to become part of the process of creating social values, because it denies human history. It is of a piece with many other nineteenth-century visions of an idyll in which all human relationships are just and a haven from which the public domain can be disinterestedly criticized—for example, Dickens's "Christmas," Ruskin's "Gothic Eden," Tennyson's Round Table, Newman's primitive church, and the many versions of the preindustrial countryside, from Cobbett and Coleridge to Dickens and Eliot. But these idyllic communities finally fail as models for human society precisely because, as private transcendental spaces, they deny the historical process through which social consensus is continuously shaped and reshaped. With the possible exception of the later George Eliot, none of these writers—it is no coincidence that several joined Carlyle in the defense of Edward Eyre—was able to imagine that a community could create its own standards.

Literary culture, claiming that it can enable one to escape the alienations created by economy, still remains a retreat from the public sphere. If literature is to have public meaning, however, it must neither adopt the value-free discourse of economic efficiency nor continue to mimic the transcendental discourse of religious mysticism. Rather, it must enter the public domain of social dialogue and become genuinely critical. The idyllic vision of the nineteenth century did have a critical purpose; although its idylls were often retreats from society, they were also vantage points from which to criticize existing social structures (see Williams, *Culture and Society*, 43). Unfortunately, this critical method tended to reinforce the existing structures by setting up absolute polarities—implicit in the oppositions of transcendence and history, public and private—rather than dialectical contraries. Victo-
rian social critics often portrayed the very voices of criticism as the source or sign of social fragmentation, the "dissidence of dissent" as the din of Babel. These critics, paradoxically, disliked criticism because they sought, like Carlyle, to achieve silence by silencing the opposition rather than by seeking ways to mediate among dissenting voices. Because its object was to make culture static, literature's participation in the process of cultural formation tended to be negative and limited. Only if literature can relinquish its claims to transcendental authority and enter into the collective historical process through which beliefs and laws are shaped can it eventually fulfill the mission that Carlyle and his contemporaries envisioned for it.