Chapter One

Carlyle on Literature: Conflicting Views

We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.—W. B. Yeats

For the student of Victorian prose, drawn to Carlyle by the early essays and *Sartor Resartus*, there are few antidotes more effective than *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. In *Sartor*, the hero’s struggles are subjects for poetic rhapsody and outrageous humor; in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, Peel’s problems inspire only tedious invective. In 1831, Carlyle’s landscape is fabulous and obscure, his style “jeanpaulian,” his irony playful; in 1850, he focuses only moral heat upon the prosaic, in a voice that is remarkable for its shrillness and redundancy.

This apparent contrast of early and late Carlyle disturbed his contemporaries as much as it does the modern reader. Despite an initially poor reception in England, *Sartor* had circulated widely among British artists and intellectuals by the 1840s. Mrs. Tillotson points out Arnold’s liberal borrowings from the Teufelsdröckh saga, borrowings that enriched such poems as *Empedocles on Etna*. Browning also valued the buoyant artistry of *Sartor*—an approval he manifested not only in his verse but in personal friendship. Even minor romantic novelists of the period adapted the steps of Teufelsdröckh’s mystical ascension—Everlast-
ing No, Centre of Indifference, Everlasting Yea—to fit their narrative fictions. The vogue was as intense as it was general: “An American man of letters, Mr. C. G. Leland, writes in his Memoirs that he bought Carlyle’s Sartor Resartus, first edition, and read it through forty times, of which he kept count, before he left college.” Mill, Tyndall, even Huxley found the nonutilitarian Carlyle to be a “wholesome influence” who held them by the sheer “force of his genius.” It was from this quarter, understandably, that critical hostility first came. In 1846, Mill and Carlyle quarreled over the justice of Cromwell’s Irish massacres and their friendship “was practically at an end.” With the serial publication of “The Nigger Question” and the other Latter-Day Pamphlets, Carlyle’s popularity fell sharply with the young Radicals and poets. Arnold later said, “I never much liked Carlyle,” and he made the reasons for his revulsion explicit in Culture and Anarchy. The ties with Browning grew increasingly casual—loosened in part by Carlyle’s impolitic advice to him to rewrite The Ring and the Book in prose. Browning criticized his friend’s moral pragmatism in “Red Cotton Nightcap Country” and regretted that the older Carlyle saw “the poet in a social, rather than an aesthetic context.”

The sense of betrayal felt in the literary community was justified by their reading of the individual texts. In Sartor, Carlyle finds art sufficient unto itself:

Another matter it is, however, when your Symbol has intrinsic meaning, and is of itself fit that men should unite round it. . . . Of this latter sort are all true Works of Art; in them. . . . wilt thou discern Eternity looking through Time; the Godlike rendered visible.

But in Latter-Day Pamphlets, he has lost all trust in eloquence, spoken or written:

With horror and amazement, one perceives that this much celebrated “art,” so diligently practised in all corners of the
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world just now, is the chief destroyer of whatever good is born in us. . . . Know this: there never was a talent even for real Literature, not to speak of talents lost, and damned in doing sham Literature, but was primarily a talent for something infinitely better of the silent kind. Of Literature, in all ways, be shy rather than otherwise, at present!12

Carlyle's apostasy is a matter of tone as well as creed, and his followers found the didacticism of Latter-Day Pamphlets unreasonably strident. In these serial tracts, the comic strain of Sartor gives way to obsessive earnestness: imaginative coloring shrivels into flat, journalistic commonplace. Yet perhaps it is unfair to set Carlyle's only complete "novel"13 against an anomalous piece of political propaganda in order to point up a shift from artist to "anti-poet." Whatever case there is for Carlyle's declining opinion of literature, poetry, and the poet grows more justly out of a general survey of his works. Let us look briefly at some of the arguments and evidence that support such a claim for simple, chronological disjunction in Carlyle's view of literature.

Before 1838, the titles alone are sufficient to indicate his preoccupation with artists and men of letters: Wilhelm Meister (1824), Life of Schiller (1825), German Romance (1827), "Jean Paul Friedrich Richter," "Goethe," "Burns," "Voltaire," "Novalis," "Boswell's Life of Johnson," "Diderot," (1827–33), Lectures on the History of Literature, "Sir Walter Scott" (1838). After 1838, Carlyle's attention appears to have turned abruptly toward moral practitioners of the political sort and toward issues that are primarily social: "Chartism," "Petition on the Copyright Bill" (1839), "Dr. Francia" (1848), Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches (1845), "Shooting Niagara: and After?" (1867), "The Portraits of John Knox" (1875). Superficially at least, the writings reinforce such a dichotomy between aesthetic and moral, literary and practical, advocacy.

In the 1824 sketch of Goethe, prefatory to Wilhelm Meister, Carlyle is effusive in his praise of the poet and the poet's role:
Poetry . . . exists not in time or place, but in the spirit of man; and Art, with Nature, is now to perform for the poet, what Nature alone performed of old . . . for the fiction of the poet is not falsehood, but the purest truth.\textsuperscript{14}

The hero of the age, as of all ages, is neither king nor conqueror, but the novelist and poet who can lift us toward sublimity and truth:

If he [the reader] know and believe that poetry is the essence of all science, and requires the purest of all studies . . . he will find that in this Goethe there is a . . . temple for the Spirit of our age, as the Shakespeares and Spensers have raised for the Spirit of theirs. . . . If it seem that I advocate this cause too warmly . . . I may be allowed to remind my readers, that the existence or non-existence of a new Poet for the World in our own time, of a new Instructor and Preacher of truth to all men, is really a question of more importance to us than many that are agitated with far greater noise.\textsuperscript{15}

Yet \textit{Past and Present}, written in a mere seven weeks, and published in 1843 amidst Carlyle's research on Cromwell, indicates a new and radically different allegiance. Earlier standards have been juggled, and action has got the upper hand of eloquence: "The spoken word, the written Poem, is said to be an epitome of the man; how much more the done work."\textsuperscript{16} And in a passage that endorses both the indecorous and the anti-intellectual, he equates practicality with divinity:

How one loves to see the burly figure of . . . this thick-skinned, seemingly opaque, perhaps sulky, almost stupid \textit{Man of Practice}, pitted against some light adroit \textit{Man of Theory}. . . . The cloudy-browed, thick-soled, opaque Practicality, with no logical utterance, in silence mainly, with here or there a low grunt or growl, has in him what transcends all logic-utterance: a Congruity with the Unuttered.
Certainly Carlyle's antagonist here, the "adroit Man of Theory," is meant primarily as a caricature of Bentham, James Mill, and other mathematical hedonists, but it is difficult to imagine the poet or the aesthetcian in league with a "sulky, almost stupid Man of Practice."

The artist's sympathy with Carlyle is further strained in reading The History of Frederick. In the first volume he makes little attempt to disguise or condemn the insensitivity of Frederick's father—a man notable only for his cruelty. In order to justify Friedrich Wilhelm's preoccupation with "War Sciences," and his mistrust of the arts, Carlyle is compelled to ridicule literature as fictitious, idle nonsense:

"The wild man has discerned, with his rugged natural intelligence (not wasted away in the idle element of speaking and of being spoken to, but kept wholesomely silent for the most part), that human education is not, and cannot be, a thing of vocables." 18

In judging the effects on Frederick of his father's severity, Carlyle is contemptuous of literary enthusiasts:

"However it may go with Literature, and satisfaction to readers of romantic appetites, this young soul promises to become a successful Worker one day, and to do something under the Sun. For work is of an extremely un-fictitious nature; and no man can roof his house with clouds and moonshine, so as to turn the rain from him." 19

But 1858 and the character of Frederick the Great are a far cry indeed from the sentiments of Novalis and of his expositor in 1829. In that earlier essay, Carlyle displays a reverence for poets that is
nearly excessive. Considering the passage just quoted, one is hard put to credit what follows to the same pen:

Novalis' poems are breathings of a high, devout soul . . . his pure religious temper, and heartfelt love of Nature, bring him into true poetic relation both with the spiritual and the material World, and perhaps constitute his chief worth as a Poet . . . He, alone among the moderns, resembles the lofty Dante; and sings us, like him, an unfathornable mystic song. 20

Moreover, Carlyle sees Novalis's meditative intensity as "the highest and sole duty of man"—a view of things that would elicit growls of disgust from the semi-articulate Friedrich Wilhelm. 21 Two years after the "Novalis" essay, Carlyle still favors an education in the arts as the soundest approach to virtuous behavior. Schiller, his subject in 1831, is a familiar one, and the young Carlyle has few doubts of the efficacy of poetry:

That high purpose after spiritual perfection, which with him was a love of Poetry, and an unwearied active love, is itself, when pure and supreme, the necessary parent of good conduct, as of noble feeling. With all men it should be pure and supreme, for in one or the other shape it is the true end of man's life. 22

There can be little question that such sympathetic criticism of German aesthetics is in baffling contrast to Carlyle's later militarism: only fourteen years after "Schiller," he writes in defense of Cromwell's rough-hewn letters:

The Intelligence that can, with full satisfaction to itself, come out in eloquent speaking, in musical singing, is, after all, a small Intelligence. He that works and does some Poem, not he that merely says one, is worthy of the name of Poet. Cromwell, emblem of the dumb English, is interesting to me by the very inadequacy of his speech. Heroic insight,
valour and belief, without words—how noble is it in comparison to the adroitest flow of words without insight!\textsuperscript{23}

One readily seconds Carlyle’s last statement, but of all the appellations appropriate to Cromwell, certainly the least of these is “Poet.” It is not, however, the first time Carlyle indicates a preference for active, silent heroes. Five years earlier, in the 1840 lecture on “Hero as King,” he places Cromwell’s genius ahead of the poetic kind. Once again, his praise of the soldier-monarch is heightened by a dismissive attitude toward the “vocables”:

The rugged outcast Cromwell, he is the man of them all in whom one still finds human stuff. The great savage Baresark: he could write no euphemistic Monarchy of Men: did not speak, did not work with glib regularity; had no straight story to tell for himself anywhere. But he stood bare, not cased in euphemistic coat-of-mail; he grappled like a giant, face to face, heart to heart, with the naked truth of things! That, after all, is the sort of man for one. I plead guilty to valuing such a man beyond all other sorts of men.\textsuperscript{24}

The value of a man appears to be measured by his moral utility—his ability to “accomplish” truth, to perform practical, righteous deeds. For the most part, Carlyle has deserted verbal and literary heroes as morally ineffectual; the poet has no worth unless he ruthlessly subordinates the delineation of the beautiful to the preaching of virtue. Even then, he would be more usefully occupied in “doing” some poem. Speaking of the older Carlyle, Julian Symons agrees with Arnold in labeling him a “Philistine”:

His remarks about art were now those of a self-satisfied Philistine. His earlier doubts about the validity of literary art . . . had extended and changed. Now, at an intemperate moment, he said curtly to Espinasse that his attempts to popularize German Literature had only increased contemporary confusion; it was not literature at all, he often implied and sometimes said, that was wanted . . . at the best
his view of art was now ordered wholly by its usefulness—a word which he interpreted in the most limited sense.  

What makes his altered allegiance exceptionally ironic is the use Carlyle had earlier made of the very word "Philistine." In a footnote to the 1824 Goethe essay he attacks the critic Nicolai, who "wrote against Kant's philosophy, without comprehending it; and judged of poetry as he judged of Brunswick mum, by its utility . . . a man of such spiritual habitudes is now called by the Germans . . . Philistine." The early Carlyle does not limit his aestheticism to the fine print at the bottom of pages; in "The State of German Literature" (1827), he openly condemns those who would apply the standard of moral pragmatism to the works of an artist:

Art is to be loved, not because of its effects, but because of itself; not because it is useful for spiritual pleasure, or even for moral culture, but because it is Art, and the highest in man, and the soul of all Beauty. To inquire after its utility, would be like inquiring after the utility of a God, or . . . the utility of Virtue and Religion.

The shift, then, from sympathy to antagonism looks explicit, thorough-going, and, it would appear, fairly rapid. Carlyle's affection for Goethe and the German Romantics is still very warm in 1832, but by 1840 many of his writings begin to reflect the crotchet tones of a hardened moralist. It is difficult to find the precise watershed in these years, but most critics agree that there is a gradual decline in Carlyle's opinion of poetry and prose fiction throughout the 1830s. Symons links the change to his distrust of story-telling: "As Carlyle grew older he became more and more inclined to place the making of verses with the writing of fiction as a trivial occupation in a serious age." He finds this disaffection most marked in thoughts and writings after 1838, but Harrold believes the break from aesthetics and "things German" is not completed until the end of 1842, with the writing of Past and
Present. Wellek speaks of his "desertion" of literary criticism after 1840, and G. B. Tennyson concludes his discussion of Carlyle's poetry at the same year. Tennyson's chronology of the poems, which are few and generally insignificant, covers only the decades of the 1820s and 1830s: "As he aged, and as his opinions and strictures on art became more severe, his own output diminished." Lehman, too, although his investigations are limited to Carlyle's heroes, sees the decay of a poetic standard and the substitution of a moral one. This is not to say that Carlyle ever divorces the beautiful from the good, but merely that over the years his priorities change. It is significant in this regard that Carlyle repeatedly misquotes Goethe's exhortation to live in die Schöne as a call to live in "[dem] Wahren." But altering the thrust of a poet's message is the least of Carlyle's artistic heresies. More often the man who had campaigned for literature in his youth dismisses it altogether in old age: "The fact that he at one time or another advised practically every poet of his day to write prose and that in moments when he was given to wild exaggeration he even deplored the fact that the poets of the past had written poetry is so well known it has become a kind of joke." That the high-minded enthusiast for German aesthetics should soon achieve a reputation as a bitter opponent of the arts may seem inconceivable, yet even his close friends began to call him "a gigantic anti-poet."

Carlyle's letters, as well as his essays, testify to a waning faith in literature. He writes to von Ense in 1842: "There is now for me very little speculation and almost nothing of the so-called Poetry that I can bear to read at all." A few years later, when he is understandably preoccupied with the Puritan Revolution, he tells his wife: "When I think of an Oliver Cromwell . . . and other such phenomena, I am very indifferent on the Book side. Greater, I often think, is he that can hold his peace; that can do his bit of Light instead of speaking it!" Here Carlyle's private opinion is almost a paraphrase of his public one in the Cromwell preface, except that in writing to Jane he has chosen to corrupt the mean-
ing of “light” rather than “Poet.” In the period from 1852 to 1865, which his wife familiarly called “the Thirteen-Years'-War” with Frederick the Great, Carlyle’s irascibility ripened. Art and literature seemed to him then worse than useless; in fact, he argued, they were insidious pursuits that sapped the mind of vital energies. Part of his discouragement was in the nature of his subject, for he saw that Frederick was an “unfortunate” choice, hardly “worth doing.” Carlyle’s disillusionment deepened as he neared the end of the project: “Writing books is a task without proper encouragement in these times.”

When a young man sent him a manuscript play in 1862, hoping for preferment or at least constructive criticism, he received a sharp rebuke:

> It is my standing advice to all young persons who trace in themselves a superior capacity of mind, to select, beyond all other conditions, a silent course of activity; and to disbelieve totally the babble of reviews and newspapers, and loud clamor of Nonsense, everywhere prevalent, that “Literature” (even if one were qualified) is the truly noble human career. Far other, very far! since you ask my opinion, the greatest minds I have known, or have authentically heard of, have not been the speaking ones at all—much less in these loud times—raging with palaver, and with so little else from sea to sea.

Such rhetoric notwithstanding, the minds Carlyle knew were almost exclusively literary, and excepting Mazzini, Buller, and perhaps Robert Peel, his acquaintance with political heroes was severely limited. One feels some sympathy for the young man in question, who, knowing something of Carlyle’s circle of friends and of his early essays on literature, expected a more genial response.

The early letters and notebooks do, in fact, underscore the young Carlyle’s dominant trust in the arts and his eagerness for a literary career. In 1831, he admits to himself, “The only Sovereigns
of the world in these days are the Literary men.” To worship one of his poet-heroes at close range, he had established, seven years before, a correspondence with Goethe. Although their exchanges often turned on mere trivia, the epistolary friendship was rooted in a mutual respect for art as a source of spiritual elevation. Again and again Carlyle is comforted by the apparent awakening among his contemporaries of what Goethe calls a “new World-Literature”:

For your ideas on the tendency of modern poetry to promote a freer spiritual intercourse among nations, I must also thank you . . . they command my entire assent; nay, perhaps express for me much which I might otherwise have wanted words for . . . under you and Schiller, I should say, a Third grand Period had evolved itself, as yet fairly developed in no other Literature, but full of the richest prospects for all; namely a period of New Spirituality and Belief . . . a new revelation of Nature, and the Freedom and Infinitude of Man, wherein Reverence is again rendered compatible with Knowledge, and Art and Religion are one.

For Carlyle, as late as 1831, there is still no higher vocation than poetry: “Literature is now nearly all in all to us; not our speech only but our Worship and Lawgiving; our best Priest must henceforth be our Poet.” Even during his precarious career as translator, reviewer, and would-be novelist, he seems content to spend the rest of his years in writing: “I look forward with cheerfulness to a life spent in Literature, with such fortune and such strength as may be granted me; hoping little and fearing nothing from the world.” Carlyle often conceived of the artist as the ultimate hero: as early as 1814 he wrote in the margin of a textbook his ambition that “unseduced by the world’s smiles, and unbending to its frowns, I may attain to literary fame. And though starvation be my lot I will smile that I have not been born a king!” Despite the adolescent bravado in this—defiant romanticism glorying in its
own vicissitudes—it is nonetheless a position that Carlyle holds in practice all his life and, in theory, for at least another twenty years.

By contrast, half a century later, in his "Inaugural Address" as rector of Edinburgh University, he sternly repudiates the attractions of literature. No longer is poetry the "purest truth" or art the theme of modern heroes. For the young men of Scotland in 1866, Carlyle sees no "use" in their exploiting whatever genius they may have for articulation, no practical purpose in books of any kind:

Keep out of Literature, I should say also, as a general rule.... It would be much safer and better for many a reader, that he had no concern with books at all. There is a number, a frightfully increasing number, of books that are decidedly, to the readers of them, not useful.... speech, in the case even of Demosthenes, does not seem on the whole, to have turned to almost any good account. He advised next to nothing that proved practicable; much of the reverse. 47

Are these what they immediately appear to be—the rantings of a bitter old man? Are they, as many critics have suggested, the product of impatience nurtured on disappointment? There is no doubt that Carlyle grew restive in later years, and fame was no comfort to him after his wife's death. He complained to Froude that although men called him a "great man," no one did what he had told them. 48 Perhaps his strictures on literature rise out of a commonplace frustration: the inability to realize a personal creed in a social context. It is, in part, such an evangelical urge that led Ruskin from art into politics and finally into madness. 49 Similarly, the stridency of later Carlyle is, at least in some degree, born of the pessimism of an artist who finds his audience sincere in nothing but its complacency. Like Ruskin, he sees that for most men the only sentiment is self-pity; the only wealth is money. G. M. Trevelyan voices the view that many readers of Carlyle privately
entertain when he looks at the writings as a descent toward the no-man's-land of irrationality:

His early writings . . . seem to me eminently sane. Perhaps the fact that they were written for reviews kept his genius in bounds, like the form of a Sonnet. And both Sartor and the French Revolution though strange in style, seem to me wise and sane both in thought and feeling. With certain reservations I should say the same of Past and Present and Cromwell. It was after 1851 that his genius declined. Like Wordsworth, he wrote very little that was first rate in the last thirty years of his long life, except his Reminiscences. And with his powers of writing, his powers of thought and feeling deteriorated.50

Considered in this light, Carlyle's apparently declining opinion of literature is directly attributable to blunted sensitivity; that is, to his age and a kind of chilled humanity. The shift from artist to humbug, from aesthete to Hebraic prophet is then no more than the usual movement from a liberal youth to a conservative dotage. Spontaneity and humor are, over the years, supplanted by emphatic self-righteousness. We have only to compare the outlandish, Swiftian comedy of Sartor Resartus to the rigorous epigraph that opens Past and Present—"Ernst ist das Leben"—to feel the limits that experience and earnestness have raised around the aging Carlyle.51 Look to the pomposity of Wordsworth's later poetry, or to the shrillness of Emerson's last essays if you would understand the diminution of Carlyle's talent, and the unpalatable nature of his final words on art.

Such, at least, is the commonly accepted answer to the conflicting opinions that Carlyle at one time or another holds on literature. There is certainly, as we have seen, a great weight of evidence from his works and from his correspondence to support the view Trevelyan, Harrold, and others have put forward. Their solution, however, depends upon some degree of internal consistency at
each stage of Carlyle’s development. That is to say, the “progress” toward rejection of artistic values should be gradual, and there ought not to be included within a given period or work those violent contradictions which are manifest in a comprehensive survey of his writings. If, on the contrary, Carlyle displays a consistent ambivalence toward art, at every age, then the theory of deteriorating sensibilities will not answer at all.

A reappraisal of his opinions, both public and private, does indeed indicate a divided allegiance, but it is not one that will submit to a chronological solution. At closer range, those writings of Carlyle after 1838, which we have loosely classed as unsympathetic to literature and often anti-intellectual, reveal a peculiar loyalty to the arts. The Edinburgh Address of 1866, in which Carlyle warns students to stay clear not only of a literary career and books in general but even of academic rhetoric, nonetheless acknowledges a debt to poetry. There is surely an obvious inconsistency in closing a speech that has dismissed literature as uninstructive with a long poem of Goethe’s; but Carlyle’s paradoxical approach surfaces explicitly a few pages earlier. He decries the modern age as wholly irreverent, and believes it to need, beyond all other reforms, a new education in devoutness. In a paraphrase of Wilhelm Meister, Carlyle stands with Goethe in his commitment to an aesthetic ultimate:

The highest outcome, and most precious of all the fruits that are to spring from this ideal mode of educating, is what Goethe calls Art . . . music, painting, poetry . . . . He considers this as the highest pitch to which human culture can go; infinitely valuable and ennobling.82

Another curious, and perhaps subtler, example of Carlyle’s complicated attitude toward the artist appears in a letter to his wife in July, 1865. The circumstances that evoke his unusual response need some explanation: Trollope had just written an unfavorable review of Ruskin’s Sesame and Lilies, condemning its prose as effeminately “graceful” and unsuited to questions of high moral
Balanced sentences of finely wrought delicacy have, so Trollope argued, no place in a discussion of social evils. In his attempt to follow Carlyle as a prophet and moralist, Ruskin fails, and would be wise to reapply his talents to womanish subjects like the criticism of painting. Trollope concludes by praising Carlyle’s unpolished haranguing as the best manner in which to attack the immorality of the present age. In short, unconcern for felicitous phrasing is held up as the touchstone of sincerity and practicality. Trollope’s verdict closely corresponds to Carlyle’s judgment of the Cromwell letters twenty years earlier, and one would expect no censure of such a review from an “opaque Practicality.” Yet he writes to Jane, in the mood of a provoked aesthete:

Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies* must be a pretty little thing. Trollope, in reviewing it with considerable insolence, stupidity and vulgarity, produces little specimens far beyond any Trollope sphere of speculation. A distylish little pug, that Trollope. . . . Don’t you return his love; nasty, gritty creature, with no eye for “the Beautiful.”

Moreover, since Carlyle had apparently not yet read *Sesame and Lilies*, his attack on Trollope’s philistinism must have been purely instinctual.

Even in the *History of Frederick*, literature is not always scorned as mere “clouds and moonshine.” Carlyle does approve the emphasis placed on practical military education by Frederick’s father, but there is also a curious sympathy for the “effeminate” elements in the prince’s nature. Frederick’s mother and his tutor encourage the boy’s interest in Latin and the fine arts—a practice which Carlyle considers a humanizing influence on the young Prussian. It is such training, in fact, that later equips Frederick to entertain poets and *philosophes* at court, for scattered among the battle plans and troop movements that dominate Carlyle’s life of the king are accounts of regular and extended visits from Voltaire. Carlyle gives them full play, quoting copiously from the letters and conversations of the Frenchman whom he has, in another work,
derided as the chief of "Persifleurs." In a moment of what can only be called romantic indulgence, Carlyle transcribes three rather dainty little madrigals of Voltaire, calling them "really incomparable in their kind; not equalled in graceful felicity even by Goethe, and by him alone of Poets approached in that respect." It is startling, perhaps, to find phrases like "graceful felicity" in the mouth of a "thick-skinned" "self-satisfied Philistine," yet the aging Carlyle often rises to defend the poetic temperament. His "Sketch of Edward Irving," finished in January 1867, includes the caustic parody of a practical Scotsman, in a tone that recalls the comment on Nicolai forty years before: "a hard-headed fellow, Utilitarian to the bone, who had defined poetry to Irving once as 'the prodooction of a rude aage.'" Thus, amidst the clatter of Prussian cannon and roundhead musketry that fills the pages of Carlyle's later work, there is a quiet, insistent counter-melody.

Nowhere is this other voice given finer or fuller expression than in *The Life of John Sterling*. Less than a year after the publication of *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, at a time when Carlyle was frustrated and belligerent over the condition-of-England question, he composed an evenly paced, well-turned biography of a literary friend. The impetus for the *Life* was not a rush of uncontrolled grief, for Sterling had been dead seven years—years during which Carlyle had apparently grown antagonistic toward writers and contemplative men in general. Six years earlier, in *Cromwell*, he had classed poets as a people of "small Intelligence," and only months before had called eloquence "the chief destroyer of whatever good is born in us." His choice of Sterling is made stranger still by his subject's ineptitude as an artist, for the man was little more than a dabbler in romantic prose, and a poetaster in verse. Carlyle certainly numbered many more consequential persons among his literary heroes; a biography of Goethe or Byron or Burns (for all of whom he had an almost irrational affection) might be easier to explain at this stage of his life. Most critics are unable to reconcile
Carlyle's sympathetic picture of Sterling with his usually vigorous condemnation of the dilettante class. H. D. Traill despairs of a schematic answer to Carlyle's sentiments and looks at the book as a genuine anomaly:

After all, we are thrown back upon the assumption of a "personal magnetism" exercised by Sterling over a few distinguished minds, and associated probably in this particular case with some subtle appeal to that curious vein of tenderness which lay among the deeper stratifications of Carlyle's rugged nature.62

The "vein of tenderness" is here, as always, alloyed with criticism: Carlyle maintains throughout an ambivalent attitude toward art and literature, alternately approving and censuring Sterling's activities. At one stage the two men debated the problem of whether to write in prose or in verse; Carlyle argued hotly against the "fiddling talent," dismissing it in favor of "plain speech":

My own advice was, as it had always been, steady against Poetry. . . . Why sing your bits of thought, if you can contrive to speak them? By your own thoughts, not by your mode of delivering it, [sic] you must live or die.63

Poetry is then no more than self-conscious artifice, to be abjured by forthright thinkers and honest men. But Carlyle suddenly changes his tack, and advises Sterling against versifying not because it is beneath his abilities but because it is beyond them:

Besides, I had to observe there was in Sterling intrinsically no depth of tune; which surely is the real test of a Poet or Singer, as distinguished from a Speaker? . . . Sterling's verses had a monotonous rub-a-dub, instead of tune; no trace of music deeper than that of a well-beaten drum; to which limited range of excellence the substance also corresponded; being intrinsically always a . . . slightly rhythmical speech, not a song.64
Since Carlyle had begun the debate by attaching pejorative connotations to "songs," it is not surprising that his conclusions confused Sterling. Carlyle, it seems, was himself confused—poetry was either very grand or very false. Sterling, at any rate, rejected Carlyle's advice and continued to tap his "monotonous, well-beaten drum." The result was two volumes of trifling tales and verses. In criticizing them, Carlyle makes an abrupt about-face, finding the poems

graceful, ingenious and illuminative reading, of their sort, for all manner of inquiring souls. A little verdant flowery island of poetic intellect, of melodious, human verity; sunlit island founded on the rocks.  

Odd indeed to hear the rugged moralist talking of "little verdant flowery" islands of poetry—and such insubstantial islands, after all. His estimate of the graphic arts also suffers from internal contradiction. The worship of statues, paintings, and Roman architecture seems to him, at one time, a meaningless, "windy Gospel"; the "temporary dilettante cloudland of our poor Century." It is a pursuit "which all earnest men, abhorrent of hypocrisy" should avoid. Yet Carlyle, in a gentler mood, enjoys "fashionable persons and manners" and welcomes a friend of Sterling's who "loved art, was a great collector of drawings . . . and was, in short, every way a very human, lovable, good and nimble man." He goes so far as to excuse Sterling's highly mannered excesses of speech: "If perceptibly or imperceptibly there is a touch of ostentation in him, blame it not: it is so innocent, so good and childlike." In fact Carlyle is not beneath ridiculing men of unrefined affections, those "Philistines . . . dullards, Children of Darkness" who occasionally came into his circle of literary friends. At such times, he passed a not intolerable evening in "borebaiting." In 1838, the Sterling Club was founded to strengthen and formalize the literary rapprochement that Carlyle and others had achieved. Despite his strictures on "Talking-Apparatuses" and cliques of
chattering aesthetes, Carlyle speaks with noticeable pride of his charter membership in this organization. In another passage, he reveals a most un-Carlylean love of French elegance, which he finds "a perpetual banquet for the young soul." And finally, although he has elsewhere condemned as "airy Nothingness" the nebulous language of the romanticist, Carlyle employs the same hazy terms to beatify Sterling: "a radiant child of the empyrean, clad in bright auroral hues." The biography closes in a mood of controlled and elevated melancholy, in a country of the soul very far from the cacophony of *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. There is no querulousness or bombast now, only a joy in what is lovely and a delicate sense of loss:

 Poor Sterling, he was by nature appointed for a Poet . . . a recognizer and delineator of the Beautiful. . . . A man of infinite susceptibility; who caught everywhere, more than others, the colour of the element he lived in, the infection of all that was or appeared honourable, beautiful and manful in the tendencies of his Time. . . . Here visible to myself, for some while, was a brilliant human presence . . . among the million little beautiful, once more a beautiful human soul: whom I, among others, recognized and lovingly walked with, while the years and hours were.

In a contemporary review, George Eliot speaks of the *Life* as proof of the continued vitality of Carlyle's "sunny side":

 We no longer see him breathing out threatenings and slaughter as in the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, but moving among the charities and amenities of life, loving and beloved . . . the conditions required for the perfection of life writing—personal intimacy, a loving and poetic nature which sees the beauty and the depth of familiar things, and the artistic power which seizes characteristic points and renders them with life-like effect,—are seldom found in combination. "The Life of Sterling" is an instance of this rare conjunction.
Carlyle never manages elsewhere, before or after, such an evocation of the gentler passions, but in *Past and Present* he champions the poet with as much conviction, though without the poignancy of his portrait of Sterling. Again the context reveals a man strangely divided in his loyalties. On the one hand, Carlyle disclaims poetry in favor of "fact," disowning men of serene intelligence for an army of "cloudy-browed, thick-soled workers." On the other hand, he sees literature as a "better . . . perhaps also nobler" profession than the one Abbot Samson has chosen, and defends poets as the greatest heroes in any country: "for what usefuller, I say not nobler and heavenlier thing could the gods, doing their very kindest, send to any tribe or nation, in any time or circumstances?" The poet is, without exception, useful in every era: Carlyle has even discarded his doctrine of heroic "controversitivity." A great man, at least if he is by nature poetical, does not have to adjust his talents to suit the temper of the times. Carlyle assumes such an unequivocal and uncharacteristic position because, at the moment he is writing, poetry constitutes for him the only sacred mission. In 1843, as in 1824, "the fiction of the poet is not falsehood, but the purest truth":

An inspired Soul once more vouchsafed us, direct from Nature's own great fire-heart, to see the Truth, and speak it and do it; Nature's own sacred voice heard once more athwart the dreary boundless element of hearsaying and cant . . . a voice from the inner Light-sea and Flame-sea, Nature's own heart.

The poet has become the very angel of God, in whose utterance is the sublime confluence of truth and beauty; for Carlyle as for Goethe, reverence for "Art" is still "infinitely enobling."

In the years after 1838, he often looked on poetry with a sympathy that reached almost to preferential esteem. Although he had pleaded guilty, in the *Heroes* lectures, to favoring the soldier-king "beyond all other sorts of men," Carlyle still devoted two of those six lectures to poets and men of letters. In fact, in "The Hero as
Poet,” he does more than tolerate great men who cultivate their aesthetic powers: he concedes them the primary place in the moral culture of every nation. As it is true that the refinement of taste and the apprehension of the beautiful are the “highest outcome” of reverence, so also is it true that a sense of what is lovely must precede and inform all other activities, whether philosophical or practical:

The *Vates* Prophet, we might say, has seized that sacred mystery rather on the moral side... the *Vates* Poet on what the Germans call the aesthetic side, as Beautiful, and the like. The one we may call a revealer of what we are to do, the other of what we are to love. But... the Prophet too has his eye on what we are to love: how else shall he know what it is we are to do?78

The prophet thus grounds all his exhortations on his own poetical faculties; and aesthetic standards are not only the final gloss on civilization but the first step toward it. Carlyle goes as far as Goethe in deriving man’s moral nature from his ideas of beauty:

The lilies of the field,—dressed finer than earthly princes, spring-up there in the humble furrow field; a beautiful eye looking out on you, from the great inner Sea of Beauty! How could the rude Earth make these, if her essence, rugged as she looks and is, were not inwardly Beauty? In this point of view, too, a saying of Goethe’s which has staggered several, may have meaning: “The Beautiful,” he intimates, “is higher than the Good; the Beautiful includes in it the Good.”79

It seems that if we grant the later Carlyle (of *Heroes* and after) the tone of a zealot and the views of a practical historian, we must also be prepared to grant him, more often than is comfortable, the almost contradictory sentiments of an artist. The evidence of inconsistency after 1840 is sufficient not only to raise strong objections to the cry of “Philistine!” but to indicate a deep and recur-
rent tension in Carlyle’s attitude toward the value of literature. He seems always to mistrust his own judgment, to affirm the efficacy of the poetic intellect with one breath while denying it with the next. In the “Hero as Poet,” he qualifies his belief in the supremacy of “the Beautiful” with an immediate suspicion: “The true Beautiful; which however, I have said somewhere, ‘differs from the false as Heaven does from Vauxhall!’”

Carlyle apparently feels compelled to make a moral distinction that is not in Goethe and that, coming when it does, reduces the whole passage to circular absurdity.

Such contradictory notions baffled Carlyle’s friends as well as his readers. Emerson, during his second visit to England in 1847, came away from his talks with Carlyle in a daze of disappointment and anger. He writes to his wife, comparing the “Sage of Chelsea” to their gardener in Concord:

> Suppose that Hugh Whelan had had leisure enough in addition to all his daily work, to read Plato & Shakespeare, and Calvin and, remaining Hugh Whelan all the time, should talk scornfully of all this nonsense of books that he had been bothered with,—and you shall have just the tone and talk & laughter of Carlyle.81

For Emerson, the state of Carlyle’s opinions was too confused to make any of his intentions clear: “I find C always cunning: he denies the books he reads; denies the friends he has just visited; denies his own acts & purposes;—By God, I do not know them.”82 Many of Carlyle’s literary correspondents, impatient of his testiness, turned to other sources for spiritual guidance. Emerson often put off replying to his letters for as much as a year. Yet however alienated his friends may have felt from his practical views, Carlyle was never far from acknowledging the unique significance of the artist, or the genius of the poet:

> Poetry . . . is musical Thought. The Poet is he who thinks in that manner . . . it is a man’s sincerity and depth of vi-
sion that makes him a Poet. See deep enough, and you see
musically; the heart of Nature being everywhere music, if
you can only reach it.\textsuperscript{83}

In a letter to Robert Browning in 1856, he praises the intermittent
eloquence of \textit{Men and Women}, and plainly encourages the poet
to cultivate his rhyming talent:

\begin{quote}
It is certain there is an excellent opulence of intellect in
these two rhymed volumes \ldots The keenest just insight
into men and things \ldots Rhythm there is too, endless
poetic fancy, symbolical help to express; and if not melody
always or often \textit{(for that would mean finish and perfection}
[italics added]), there is what the Germans call \textit{Takt}—fine
dancing, if to the music only of drums.

Such a faculty of talent, "genius" if you like the name
better, seems to me \textit{worth} cultivating, worth sacrificing one-
self to tame and subdue into perfection.\textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

This ambivalence toward literature, which strongly affects Car-
lyle's criticism during the last forty years of his life, is no less active
in his early writing. Just as age is unable to make of him a
thorough-going Philistine, so youth does not submerge him utterly
in the sometimes flaccid optimism of German poetics. Despite the
almost exclusive attention that he gives to Goethe, Schiller, No-
valis, and others of the Romantic school in the 1820s, there is a
strain of nagging practicality in his evaluation of them. Carlyle's
sentiments, in these early years of book reviews and translation,
are ultimately on the side of the artist, but he suffers profound
doubts along the way. \textit{The Life of Schiller}, his first full-length
effort of an original sort, is for the most part (and predictably, per-
haps), a eulogy of the literary idealist. With some of the callowness
of his adolescent dream of martyrdom, Carlyle descants on the
stern glories of a poet's calling:

\begin{quote}
If to know wisdom were to practise it; if fame brought true
dignity and peace of mind; or happiness consisted in nour-
ishing the intellect with its appropriate food, and surround-
ing the imagination with ideal beauty, a literary life would
be the most enviable which the lot of this world affords.
But the truth is far otherwise. The Man of Letters . . . is
always hovering between the empyrean of his fancy and the
squalid desert of reality. . . . Yet among these men are to
be found the brightest specimens and the chief benefactors
of mankind! It is they that keep awake the finer parts of our
souls. . . . They are the vanguard in the march of mind.
. . . Such men are the flower of this lower world: to such
alone can the epithet of great be applied with its true
emphasis.85

The book impresses one as a paean to Schiller's purity of motive,
to his "refinement of taste" in the "creation of intellectual beauty."
Carlyle sympathizes with the "loftiest thoughts" of his imagination
and the "affecting" graces of his lyricism. The characters in Schil-
er's dramas may seem unreal, even "staid," but no matter:

He transports us into a holier and higher world than our
own; everything around us breathes of force and solemn
beauty. . . . The enchantments of the poets are strong
enough to silence our scepticism; we forbear to inquire
whether it is true or false.86

Carlyle is nonetheless slightly uncomfortable in Schiller's world of
pure forms, and heaps conspicuous praise upon his subject's more
practical literary efforts. Although Schiller's career as a historian
was short-lived and his output meager (one volume and some frag-
ments), Carlyle sees the attempt as a significant advance over his
imaginative writings:

Schiller was, in fact, growing tired of fictitious writing. Imagi-
nation was with him a strong, not an exclusive, perhaps not
even a predominating faculty . . . in one so earnest, the
love of truth was sure to be among its stronger passions.
Even while revelling, with unworn ardour, in the dreamy
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scenes of the Imagination, he had often cast a longing look . . . into the calmer provinces of reason . . . the love of contemplating or painting things as they should be, began to yield to the love of knowing things as they are.87

Somehow Schiller's imagination did not "yield" enough to forestall the writing of Wallenstein, Maid of Orleans, or William Tell, and one suspects that the "longing look" toward actuality is being taken, not by the poet, but by his critic.

Again, in writing of Novalis in 1829, Carlyle's forbearance is overtaxed by his subject's uncompromising aestheticism. Although Novalis "resembles the lofty Dante," and has contrived to live in the "light of Reason," Carlyle distrusts his passivity and what he suspects to be an amoral tolerance of nature and man. Carlyle concedes that in "his belief in Love" Novalis has realized "the highest and sole duty of man," but he cannot accept the effeminacy of such an approach to the rigors of life:

His chief fault, again, figures itself to us as a certain undue softness. . . . There is a tenderness in Novalis, a purity, a clearness, almost as of a woman, but he has not . . . the emphasis and resolute force of a man. . . . [he] is too lax in separating the true from the doubtful, is not even at the trouble to express his truth with any laborious accuracy.88

This charge of moral lassitude is more startling when seen in the midst of indulgent criticism that surrounds it, for Carlyle has otherwise defended Novalis's most pacific maxims. The outburst, apparently a temperamental one, reveals that same tension in Carlyle's early view of the artist that colors all his later judgments.

Unlike his relationship with Schiller and Novalis, which was purely that of biographer and critic, Carlyle's attachment to Goethe was cemented by personal friendship. In a correspondence made warmer and more sentimental by Goethe's extreme age, the two men exchanged elaborate compliments over a period of eight years. Carlyle's essays during the 1820s, on Goethe and
Goethe's *Faust*, echo the worshipful tone of his letters to the German poet; and the last of these essays, written in 1832, is unquestionably an attempt to apotheosize its subject. Carlyle describes Goethe's writings as “Pure works of Art” full of “serenely smiling wisdom”; he is the “Wise Man” come into our “Time-element,” the “World-Poet” created to lead us back to light.

The true poet is ever, as of old, the Seer; whose eye has been gifted to discern the god-like Mystery of God's Universe, and decipher some new lines of celestial writing... he sees into this greatest of secrets, “the open secret”... thereby are his words in very truth prophetic; what he has spoken of shall be done... The true Sovereign of the world, who moulds the world like soft wax, according to his pleasure, is he who lovingly sees into the world; the “inspired Thinker,” whom in these days we name Poet.

The torrent of unbridled praise is sustained to the very end, but there is one small crack in Carlyle's regard. He closes with what is purported to be a line of Goethe's: “*Im Ganzen, Guten, Wahren resolut zu leben!*” But Carlyle substitutes, as he continued to do in all later instances, “True” where the poet had written the German for “Beautiful.” As in his criticism of Schiller, Novalis, and the “Hero as Poet,” he cannot resist inflicting an explicit moral standard on the aesthetic world-view with which he is confronted.

Although Carlyle's public view of Goethe was very much that of a disciple, his private opinion was touched with corrosive doubts. True, he spoke of the poet as “Master” and mourned, in a letter to his brother, the passing of “Venerable, dear Goethe,” but as early as 1828 he wrote to John Carlyle:

> You must come round by Weimar as you return, and see this World's-wonder, and tell us... what manner of man he is, for daily he grows more inexplicable to me. One letter is written like an oracle, the next shall be too redolent of twaddle.
Carlyle's misgivings about the "World-Poet" were matched by a wavering allegiance to the craft of literature itself. In March, 1831, he advises John: "Neither would I have you quit Literature. . . . Hold fast to your talent that way as the most precious of your possessions."54 Only two months later he warns his brother away from the "idle" pursuit: "I would have you throw out Literature altogether."55 And Carlyle underscores his disparagement both of Goethe and of literature in another letter to his brother, two years later:

In my own heterodox heart there is yearly growing up the strangest crabbed one-sided persuasion, that all Art is but a reminiscence now, that for us in these days Prophecy (well understood) not Poetry is the thing wanted; how can we sing and paint when we do not yet believe and see? . . . Now what under such point of view is all existing Art and the study of Art? What was the great Goethe himself? The greatest of contemporary men; who however is not to have any follower, and should not have any.56

Goethe and his kind thus appear, in Carlyle's darker thoughts, as misdirected leaders with their feet planted, if not in Hell, at least in a purgatory of moral uselessness.

The early struggle to explain away that "strange crabbed one-sided persuasion" is painfully detailed in Carlyle's notebooks for the years 1822 to 1832. To the theories and tendencies of German aestheticism he raises continual objections, working cautiously to understand its tenets. Carlyle's honesty in recognizing his own ambivalence toward art is impressive in these jottings; there is no doubt that for some years he probed his conscience for a resolution of the tension. In 1831, for example, he is baffled by the interdependence of the beautiful and the good:

I wish I could define to myself the true relation of moral genius to poetic genius; of Religion to Poetry. Are they one and the same, different forms of the same, and if so which is
to stand higher, the Beautiful or the Good? Schiller and Goethe seem to say the former, as if it included the latter, and might supersede it: how truly I can never well see.97

Even in such a dialogue of the mind with itself, Carlyle achieves no final answers, although he argues the problem with a directness and informality that his critical prose does not permit. Contradictions proliferate in the notebooks, as elsewhere: on the positive side, literary men are the “only Sovereigns of the world,” the poet is “not only a Priest but a High-Priest”; Novalis, for example, is “a deep man; the most perfect of modern spirit-seekers”; yet, at the same time poetry is no more than the “jingle of maudlin persons” and Carlyle is “tired to death with [Schiller’s] and Goethe’s palabra about the nature of the fine arts.”98 For every intimation of the sublime, in which art seems “higher than Religion,” Carlyle suffers an offsetting vision of poetry as mere “Stuff and nonsense.”89

At times literature disgusts him: “A few general ideas . . . a few descriptions of our feelings—the whole repeated in ten thousand times ten thousand forms.”100 Carlyle records this last bit of skepticism in 1822, during those days of supposed high optimism that followed the “Everlasting Yea.” For the next ten years, as the notebooks show, he repeatedly put the questions: “What is Poetry? Do I really love Poetry?”101 All his later writings indicate that he never found satisfactory answers. Carlyle may not have resolved or understood the confusion in his values, but he freely admitted to the frustration it brought him. In 1830, after a long spate of criticism and editing, he cried out against the perversity of his own nature, “Why cannot I be a kind of Artist!”102

Certainly Carlyle never tried harder to “be a kind of Artist” than in Sartor Resartus, begun that same year. Of course, the dramatic effects in The French Revolution and part two of Past and Present are of a novelistic sort, but these later “flashes of lightning” illuminate monastic records and political history. Abbot Samson, Marat, and Robespierre may assume exaggerated dimensions in Carlyle’s portraiture, but Teufelsdörrch is a creature of
pure invention. The "Editor" and his "six paper bags," the town of "Weissnichtwo" and its eccentric professor exist only in a Shandy-world of comic fiction, manipulated by the strings of Carlyle's fancy. Here, as Goethe and Schiller do, he has created a context—instead of exploiting an extant one—for the expression of higher truths. Although he lacks the Germans' disciplined artistry, he has nonetheless submitted to the control of his imagination and, in so doing, affirmed the first principle of romantic art.

Yet Sartor is not free from that strange contrariety we have seen in Carlyle's other works. In one passage, "Eternity looks through Time" in works of art; poems are windows on "the All"; musical thought reaches to the Platonic substance of "Infinitude itself." But in another passage art's beneficence is illusory; like woman, it is "all Soul and Form," an ocean of weak "Aesthetic Tea." Carlyle says in praise of literature and the power of written language:

Wondrous indeed is the virtue of a true Book ... like a spiritual tree ... it stands from year to year, and from age to age. ... O thou who art able to write a Book ... envy not him whom they name City-builder, and inexpressibly pity him whom they name Conqueror or City-burner! Thou too art a Conqueror and Victor, but of the true sort, namely over the Devil: thou too hast built what will outlast all marble and metal, and be a wonder-bringing City of the Mind!

And again, recognizing the omnipotence of the "vocables" he admits:

Greater than all recorded miracles have been performed by Pens. For strangely in this so solid-seeming World ... it is appointed that Sound, to appearance the most fleeting, should be the most continuing of all things. The WORD is well said to be omnipotent in this world.

Here, Carlyle seems to contradict his contention, in Past and Present and Cromwell, that the "done Poem" is greater than the
But there is no need to look ahead ten years to discover the inconsistency, for Carlyle exalts the silent worker to preeminence in the next book of *Sartor*:

SILENCE and SECRECY! Altars might still be raised to them . . . for universal worship. Silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves together. . . . Speech too is great, but not the greatest. . . . Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth! Neither shalt thou prate even to thy own heart of "those secrets known to all."

Carlyle's argument against literature appears here as distaste for the self-consciousness of writers and speakers who articulate what they already know. In *Characteristics*, finished in the same year as *Sartor*, he amplifies this objection: the rise of "Reviewing" (in which Carlyle played an appreciable part), the conscious structuring of poetry (which Carlyle recommends to Browning and others) are symptoms of modern man's diseased imagination. Carlyle lumps the purest forms of verse with that "mother of Abominations" known popularly as "periodical Literature." All art is full of "Error," "like a sick thing" listening to itself: "Which melodious Singer forgets that he is singing melodiously? We have not the love of greatness, but the love of the love of greatness."

Carlyle is seldom more vituperative in treating the literature of his day, yet he prefaces even this attack with what is for him, as prophet, the ultimate flattery: "Literature is but a branch of Religion, and always participates in its character: however, in our time, it is the only branch that still shows any greenness; and, as some think, must one day become the main stem." But what begins favorably, ends opprobriously, for, like other contemporary organisms, the "greenness" of literature soon yellows in the heat of his invective.

Several years after *Sartor* and *Characteristics*, Carlyle gave elaborate form to his ideas of literary self-consciousness in a series of twelve lectures. Denigration of artistic values was probably not intended in the plan of *The History of Literature*, but it turns out,
perversely perhaps, to be a major theme of the course. Although Carlyle praises almost every important poet from Homer to Goethe and compliments Cervantes and Johnson along the way, there is reluctance and suspicion in the eulogies. The “music” of Homer, the “intensity” of Dante, the “comic vision” of Cervantes, the “wisdom” of Goethe are offset by a historical perspective from which Carlyle sees literature as the by-product of cultural decadence. The Romans, whose “whole genius was practical,” rank above the “dreaming,” speculative Greeks; and the Dark Ages are “healthy” because they are inarticulate, unconscious times: “In these ages it is not to be expected that there was any literature. It was a healthy age. We have remarked in the last lecture that the appearance of literature is a sign that the age which produced it is not far from decline and decay.” Again Carlyle prefers the opaque “Man of Practice,” the “Conqueror” and the “City-builder”: “Actions only will be found to have been preserved when writers are forgotten. Homer will one day be swallowed up in time. . . . But actions will not be destroyed.” Despite its sincerity and its beauty, apparently the best of European literature is but a signal of national illness, for art grows out of pride, and pride out of self-consciousness. Carlyle’s exposition of literary history is thus backhandedly sympathetic, since the charms it delineates are fatal.

After surveying the welter of Carlyle’s conflicting views on literature, from Schiller to Frederick and beyond, one is tempted to say, with Emerson, “By God, I do not know them!” Only one thing is certain: Carlyle cared little for balanced evaluation. His opinions are usually unqualified. Poetry is either “trivial” or “sovereign,” prose is either “powerless” or “omnipotent,” and art is either a “superficial film” or “the soul of man.” His unconscious desire to live up to the reputation he was gaining as a “sage” may partially explain Carlyle’s intemperate judgments, but it does nothing to justify his chronic inconsistency. As we have seen, the works of his “artistic” youth are riddled with crude pragmatism, and those “rugged” products of his moralistic old age include the
prettiest kinds of aestheticism. He could say, almost simultaneously, that German Literature was a source of confusion out of which nothing valuable could be got and that he was "endlessly indebted to Goethe" for whatever peace of mind he had.\textsuperscript{114} Literature was "little other than a Newspaper," yet it was "all in all to us . . . our Worship and Lawgiving."\textsuperscript{115} As he aged, the emphasis in Carlyle's writing did indeed shift from art to ethics, and his strictures on literature grew more severe and more frequent. But the passing of the years answers only the matter of degree or dominance; we are still faced with a strong and unresolved tension in Carlyle's view of the arts which is sustained, in public and in private, throughout the whole of his life.

1. Among the many articles tracing Carlyle's stylistic debt to Richter, see especially J. Smeed, "Thomas Carlyle and Jean Paul Richter."


3. For his poetic treatment, see C. Watkins, "Browning's 'Red Cotton Night-Cap Country' and Carlyle."


13. An earlier work of fiction, \textit{Wotton Reinfred}, was left unfinished in 1827. See \textit{Last Words of Thomas Carlyle}, pp. 1-148, and, for Carlyle's discussion of the work at the time of composition, \textit{Letters of Thomas Carlyle, 1826-1836}. As a term for either \textit{Sartor} or \textit{Wotton}, "novel" should of course be understood in its loosest sense, i.e., full-length prose invention. It helps primarily to distinguish two works of Carlyle fundamentally different from the rest. On this problem of genre (Carlyle himself called \textit{Sartor} a "Didactic Novel"), see G. Levine, \textit{The Boundaries of Fiction} (Princeton, N.J., 1968), pp. 21-23, and G. B. Tennyson, \textit{Sartor Called Resartus}. 
17. *PP*, p. 159.
18. *The History of Frederick II of Prussia*, Works, I, 434 (hereafter cited as *HFG*).
22. Ibid., p. 185.
23. *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, Works, I, 78 (hereafter cited as *Cromwell*).
32. B. H. Lehman, *Carlyle's Theory of the Hero*, p. 194. I do not suggest that all critics see the shift from aesthetic to moral preoccupations as a diminution of Carlyle's value—for his contemporaries or for us.
33. Adapted from Goethe's *Generalbeichte*, Werke, I, 140. The line should read: "Im Ganzen, Guten, Schönen resolut zu Leben!"
35. From a letter of Sterling's, quoted in ibid., p. 53.
36. Quoted in ibid., p. 54.
38. Gavan Duffy, *Conversations with Carlyle*, p. 221.
39. Facsimile letter, dated 25 June 1862, and appended to the last pages of *Two Note Books of Thomas Carlyle, from 23rd March, 1822 to 16th May, 1832* (hereafter cited as *Note Books*). The apparent distinction between the needs of "these loud times" and those of another age becomes hopelessly blurred when we consider other similar passages in Carlyle: see below, pp. 192–96.
40. His literary acquaintances included Browning, Clough, Coleridge, Dickens, Emerson, Goethe, Hunt, Geraldine Jewsbury, Kingsley, Lamb, DeQuincey, Allingham, Margaret Fuller, Harriet Martineau, Forster, Espinasse, Ruskin, Sterling, Tennyson, Thackeray, and Wordsworth. He was notably distant toward Gladstone and Disraeli.
42. Among its lighter aspects was the gift of a lock of Jane's hair, which Goethe, pleading baldness, declined to repay in kind. See *Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle*, pp. 160–61 and 206–7 (hereafter cited as *Goethe Letters*).
43. *Goethe Letters*, pp. 32–33.
44. Ibid., p. 256.
45. Ibid., pp. 34–35.
49. And surely the same shift in sensibilities that provoked Ruskin to declare *Hard Times* Dicken's greatest novel.
51. From the prologue to Schiller's *Wallenstein*. Carlyle distorts the meaning by neglecting to quote the last half of the line: "heiter ist die Kunst."
52. *Essays*, IV, 475.
54. Nor, one is tempted to infer from the often careless diction of Trollope's novels, does it have a place in contemporary fiction.
55. Bliss, *Letters to His Wife*, p. 381. Again in 1877, Carlyle expressed his sympathy with the aesthetic qualities of Ruskin's prose: "A celestial brightness is in him. His description of the wings of birds the most beautiful thing of the kind that can possibly be. His morality too, is the highest and the purest" (Allingham, *A Diary*, p. 263).
56. Loyalty to Ruskin is no factor here. See Bliss, *Letters to His Wife*, p. 370. Trollope had, admittedly, waged an intermittent, but wholly unilateral, combat with Carlyle since 1855—not on the point of style, however, but of philosophical skepticism. See "Dr. Pessimist Anticant," chapter 15 of *The Warden* (a remarkably slack piece of satire); "Essay on Carlylism" (1868); and an entry in his *Autobiography* for 1876, p. 185. M. Sadlier, in his *Trollope: A Commentary* (1947), confirms Carlyle's charge of philistinism (see pp. 187–89).
63. Ibid., p. 195.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid., p. 156.
66. Ibid., pp. 174, 175.
67. Ibid., p. 154.
68. Ibid., p. 46.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid., p. 159. Among its members were Tennyson and Monckton Milnes.
72. Ibid., p. 2.
73. Ibid., pp. 266-68.
74. From Westminster Review, January 1852, collected in Essays of George Eliot, ed. T. Pinney, p. 49. On the manner of the biography, she is equally emphatic: “The style of the work, too, is for the most part at once pure and rich; there are passages of deep pathos which come upon the reader like a strain of solemn music” (p. 51).
75. PP, pp. 46-159.
76. Ibid., pp. 104, 86.
77. Ibid., p. 86.
78. Heroes, p. 81.
79. Ibid., pp. 81-82.
80. Ibid.
82. Emerson Letters, p. 38.
85. The Life of Schiller, Works, pp. 42-44 (hereafter cited as LS).
86. Ibid., p. 78.
87. Ibid., p. 84.
90. Ibid., pp. 380, 379, 375.
91. Ibid., p. 377.
92. See above, footnote 33.
95. Ibid., I, 283.
96. 1 October 1833, in J. A. Froude, Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life: 1795-1835, I, 385-86 (hereafter cited as First Forty Years).
97. Note Books, p. 188.
98. Ibid., pp. 184, 180, 140, 151, 41.
99. Ibid., pp. 204, 42. David Masson agrees that these private papers reveal a persistent strain of pessimism in the young Carlyle—an attitude that most of his critics associate only with the embitterment of his last years: “[The early journals] break down, for one thing, that kind of apology for Carlyle’s grimness and gloominess which would maintain that, like Timon’s misanthropy, it belonged only or mainly to his ‘latter spirits,’ the final fifteen years of his extreme old age and widowhood. . . . There was certainly an accession of dolefulness in this final period of his life; but essentially the same vein of gloom, grimness, lamentation . . . as the posthumous letters and papers now prove, had been perpetual in his life from the very first” (Carlyle Personally and in His Writings, p. 35).
100. Note Books, p. 33.
101. Ibid., p. 150.
102. Ibid., p. 225.
103. SR, pp. 198, 56–57.
104. Ibid., p. 108.
105. Ibid., p. 138.
106. Ibid., p. 158.
108. The quoted phrases that follow occur in Essays, III, 23–25.
109. Ibid., p. 23.
110. Ibid.
111. Lectures on the History of Literature, p. 98 (hereafter cited as Lectures); they were delivered April–July 1838.
112. Ibid., p. 69.
113. Ibid., p. 72.
115. MSB Letters, p. 192; and Goethe Letters, p. 256.