Idealism can be talked and even felt; it cannot be lived.—C. S. Lewis

Without question, transcendental doctrine encouraged Carlyle’s trust in the power of an aesthetically based morality. The positive influence of Kant and Goethe figured as strongly in a comment he made to Espinasse in 1868 as it had in the early German essays: “[Carlyle] talked to me of the ultimate supremacy of the beautiful. ... In time, he prophesied, beauty would be all-in-all.” In later life he remembered, with particular affection, his association with the writers of German romance: “Those were among my happiest hours spent in the company of poetic, genial men.”¹ Not surprisingly, such sentiments won Carlyle the friendship and respect of the contemporary reading public. As late as 1885, one critic, unconscious of any hyperbole, declared Carlyle to be “the venerated Patriarch of British Literature, an acknowledged sovereign among the British men of letters.”²

Yet in spite of his professions of benevolent aestheticism—which naturally ingratiated him among the literati—Carlyle was often vilified by writers and poets. Swinburne, after a visit to Cheyne Row, remembered only “the dung-dropping mouth of Carlyle.”³
The Sage of Chelsea seemed, to men with an ear for consonance and harmony, to be at best an "inarticulate poet"; at worst, "a virulent old sophist." According to Allingham, Tennyson was frequently put off by Carlyle's disdainful opinion of poets: "[He] said he had read part of Carlyle's Frederick till he came to, 'they did not strive to build the lofty rhyme,' and then flung the book into a corner. . . . [Tennyson] referred to Carlyle's contemptuous way of speaking of poets, saying, 'We are all tadpoles in a pool, one a little larger or smaller than others.'" Goldwin Smith remembered him only as crabbed and peevish, without any of the sympathy or mildness that idealism should have fostered in his views: "Carlyle . . . was a universal cynic; he criticized everything and everybody, he criticized a person for taking up a certain position, he criticized him for changing it." Dr. Garth Wilkinson, in a letter of February 1850 to Henry James, Sr., repudiates Carlyle's behavior with as much vehemence:

Carlyle came up here on Monday. . . . He was suffering dreadfully from malaise and indigestion and gave with his usual force his usual putrid theory of the universe. All great men were miserable; the day on which any man could say he was not miserable, that day he was a scoundrel. . . . All this was interpolated with convulsive laughter, showing that joy would come in to him were it even by the path of hysteria and disease. To me he is an unprofitable man, and though he gave me a kind invitation, I have too much respect for my stomach to go much into his company. . . . By the next boat I will endeavor to send you over my thoughts on his recent pamphlet, the first of a series of Latter-Day-Tracts. He is very rapidly falling out with all his present admirers, for which I like them all the better.

Harriet Martineau was baffled by the paradox of his restiveness: he was "the most woeful complainer while glorifying fortitude,—the most uncertain and gloomy in mood, while holding forth serenity as the greatest good within the reach of Man." To Leslie
Stephen, Carlyle's advice seemed a strange mixture of sublimity and irrationality: "I see the prophet pretty often myself, and . . . I am almost equally repelled and attracted by him . . . he talks a good deal of arrant and rather pestilent nonsense." After listening to one of Carlyle's blustering diatribes, in which he had reviled Keats for "wanting a world of treacle," and Keats's achievements as "fricassee of dead-dog," Allingham concluded sadly that "His is the least judicial of minds. . . . If equanimity be the mark of a Philosopher, he is, of all great-minded men, the least of a Philosopher." Allingham was sufficiently unnerved by the frequency of these splenetic outbursts to speak of him elsewhere as "Carlylus Tyrannus." Espinasse, too, found Carlyle's antagonism toward the arts out of keeping with his literary orientation: "Against metre and fiction he waged perpetual war, although Goethe had been a poet, dramatist and novelist, Schiller a poet and dramatist much more than a historian, and Jean Paul, from first to last, a writer of fiction chiefly." To this same friend and observer, Carlyle's imprecations against poetry seemed not only rash, they were symptoms of an ungenerous spirit. Despite his charitable pretensions, Carlyle continually displayed "an anti-philanthropic temper of mind."

Clearly then, against the current of transcendental optimism in Carlyle's character, there ran an equally forceful stream of virulence and melancholy that seems to have dictated his antipathy toward literature. David Masson recalls that "strange constitutional grimness and gloominess of his through all the external changes of his life," and Emerson, distressed on a second visit to England by "Carlyle's vehement denunciations of authorship," notes as "depressing any spiritual influence that Carlyle exerted on those who sat at his feet." As early as 1843, in a review of Past and Present, Emerson spoke of its author as a "sick giant." In an aside to Emerson at their 1848 meeting, Carlyle admitted the extent of his disillusionment when he described his "feeling towards his fellow men as 'abhorrence mingled with pity.'" How does one explain such a carping, intolerant strain in Carlyle's
thought? In Chapter Two, we considered and discarded a number of possible sources for what in Carlyle amounted, at times, to outright misanthropy. The only credible suggestion left in abeyance was that of a religious dilemma. Touching on that neglected possibility, at least one of his critics has declared it to be the source of Carlyle's gloomy temperament: his "melancholy, even in its fiercest rages and paroxysms . . . was essentially a religious melancholy, touching the metaphysical on all sides." If such is indeed the case, the question next arises, What sort of religious creed to which Carlyle was exposed might have exerted so "depressing" a spiritual influence on his view of literature and the world?

Calvinism, most of his biographers suggest, or Knoxian Puritanism, quickened Carlyle's intemperate dislikes. Even though he lost his childhood belief in the literal truth of the Bible and the miraculous theology of Christianity, Carlyle apparently retained until death the instincts and prejudices that accompany and reinforce the dogmas of the Scottish Puritan. Cazamian sees his religious development as at least in part retrogressive:

The march of his mind brought Carlyle far beyond the precise particulars of his parents' faith; but the impress of their spirit was never effaced from his. . . . The shape and quality of his moral being, if not all of its traits, were those of Scottish Puritanism. . . . The influences which engraved the deepest marks upon his spirit were those of his childhood, the home in which he grew up, the severe, peculiar ways of his parents, the temper of life in his native village.

Froude says that Carlyle's religion was simply "Calvinism without the theology," and Frederick Harrison, with something less than compassion, elaborates on that definition: "Discarding the creed, the practice, and the language of Puritanism, Carlyle still retains its narrowness, its self-righteousness, its intolerance, and its savagery." One twentieth-century critic goes so far as to assert that "no one familiar with the character of the two men will doubt that John Knox had much to do with the shaping of Carlyle."
Allingham implies that Carlyle’s excoriations were not so much the result of Puritanism alone, as of the tension between that inbred faith and the more sophisticated world-view that his intellect had led him to adopt: “Carlyle’s Scottish dogmatic breeding . . . was burned and branded into his youthful conscience and imagination—It could not be made to fit in with facts—Hence, what sufferings! what rages! He was contemptuous to those who held to Christian dogmas; he was angry with those who gave them up.” A similar idea about the inner conflict of religious sentiments seems to operate behind Masson’s verdict: “the real misery, so far as there was misery, was wholly of internal origin. It was the fretting of such a sword in such a scabbard . . . it was that ‘rall mental awgony in my ain inside’ about which Carlyle and his wife used to jest with each other to the last as his sole incurable ailment.” Clearly, most of his contemporaries agreed that Calvinist prejudices contributed as much to Carlyle’s outlook as transcendentalism had, and some even suggested this early training was the source of his intermittent quarrel with literary values. A dialogue between Tennyson and Allingham on James Carlyle’s view of literature represents that attitude fairly: “A: ‘Carlyle declares his father was the strongest-minded man he knew, yet he would admit no poetry into his house. . . . Nor fiction of any sort.’ T: ‘There he was wrong. But I suppose he was an old Puritan.’” Cazamian, too, adheres to this popular assumption of hostility between Carlyle’s Calvinism and his dedication to literature: “despite his sense of the beautiful . . . his Puritanism was too insurgent against the sacred sensuousness of art.”

It is possible then, in view of these critical asseverations, that in the doctrines and temper of Calvinist Scotland, we may find the prime source for Carlyle’s contemptuous opinion of literature. Let us therefore proceed with what none of his critics and biographers have undertaken, namely, an analysis at close range, of those principles set out in Calvin, Knox, and the mainstream of Puritan preaching that may have—through the authority of his father—colored Carlyle’s view of the arts.
No belief figures more prominently in Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* than the doctrine of original sin. Other Christian sects, following Saint Augustine’s example, incorporate the concept in their theologies, but none give it the critical emphasis of Calvin. For him, it is the crucial event in the history of mankind—far more significant, in fact, than the incarnation of the Son of God. The single inescapable fact about man as he sees him is the corruption he has inherited from Adam; each of us is necessarily tainted, as it were, to his very boot-soles with evil:

Every descendent . . . from the impure source is born infected with the contagion of sin; and even before we behold the Light of life, we are in the sight of God defiled and polluted. . . . From a putrefied root . . . have sprung putrid branches. . . . Original sin, therefore, appears to be an hereditary pravity and corruption of our nature, diffused through all the parts of the soul, rendering us obnoxious to the Divine wrath. . . . [Adam] involved us in guilt.80

Much of the gloom and pessimism that attached itself to later generations of Puritans arises here, in Calvin’s sense of the omnipresence of evil. But Calvin is not satisfied with an acknowledgement of the darker side of man’s nature; he is personally convinced that, of our own accord, we are incapable of behaving virtuously; that, in effect, we are totally depraved: “Man, having been corrupted by his fall, sins voluntarily, not with reluctance or restraint . . . with the strongest propensity of disposition, not with violent coercion . . . such is the pravity of his nature, that he cannot be excited and biased to anything but what is evil.”81 Unlike Kant, who sees our salvation in the desire for good, Calvin denies to man even the wish to act rightly: “The will . . . is fettered by depraved and inordinate desires, so that it cannot aspire after anything that is good.”82 Thus, because of the permanence of sin and our total impotence in the accomplishment of divine truth, we ought to mistrust all our affections—even what we take to be genuine reverence or moral striving. Poets and philosophers who mar-
vel that man is "in apprehension . . . like a god," have forgotten what is crucial and obvious to the radical Christian; namely, the inherent weakness of every human soul. We cannot, by any sublime insights or energy of will, partake of divine glory; considered as individual intelligences, we are under contract to the devil.

It follows naturally from such a conviction of human depravity that Calvin would counsel his brethren to deny the self in all its manifestations, whether internal or external: "We are not our own; therefore neither our reason nor our will should predominate in our deliberations and actions . . . therefore let us, as far as possible, forget ourselves and all things that are ours." In so far as Calvin admonishes man to deemphasize the value of his material possessions, transcendentalists would have shared his view; but the Genevan reformer carries his asceticism beyond the self as an object, to a renunciation of the inner self as thinking being. Introspection for the purpose of cultivating the moral and aesthetic faculties is to Calvin fruitless and perhaps blasphemous; there is but one legitimate excuse for self-examination, one reason for considering our own consciousness, and that is to quicken our "due sense" of personal unworthiness and sin:

We should contemplate our miserable condition since the fall of Adam, the sense of which tends to destroy all boasting and confidence, to overwhelm us with shame. . . . The truth of God directs us to seek in the examination of ourselves . . . a knowledge that will abstract us from all confidence in our own ability . . . and reduce us to submission.

And since he denies the existence of an indwelling divinity in man, Calvin takes immediate issue with the pantheists of his day (in many ways, forerunners of German idealism). The error of these spiritual thinkers, he contends, is their ignorance of the unbridgeable distance between man's corrupt nature and God's perfection:

They supposed that the soul was an emanation from the
substance of God; as though some portion of the infinite Deity had been conveyed into man. But . . . if the soul of man be an emanation from the essence of God, it will follow that the divine nature is not only mutable and subject to passions, but also to ignorance, desires, and vices of every kind. Nothing is more inconstant than man, because his soul is agitated and variously distracted by contrary notions; he frequently mistakes through ignorance; he is vanquished by some of the smallest temptations; we know that the soul is the receptacle of every kind of impurity;—all of which we must ascribe to the Divine nature, if we believe the soul to be part of the essence of God, or a secret influx of the Deity.85

The transcendentalist does not, of course, as Calvin claims, neglect the vagaries of human thought and behavior; but he does divide them from that inviolable part of the soul, namely, the “higher Reason” or the “mind of the supersensible.” Idealists do acknowledge the existence of the “Understanding” or the “mind of the flesh,” but they choose to concentrate upon what is lovely in the spirit of man; Calvin, on the other hand, convinced of the pervasiveness of sin, distrusts self-consciousness in any form whatever, and particularly when it involves an assertion of personal divinity. He would argue that to construct religious belief upon the assurances we derive from our individual consciences and imaginations is to put more faith in the corrupted mind of man than in the received word of God. Calvin is altogether intolerant of poets, pantheists, and anyone else who builds his images of God out of his private fancy:

The office of the Spirit . . . which is promised to us, is not to feign new and unheard of revelations, or to coin a new system of doctrine, which would seduce us from the received doctrine of the Gospel, but to seal to our minds the same doctrine which the Gospel delivers. . . . [Beware] those proud fanatics, who think themselves possessed of the only valuable illumination, when, neglecting and forsaking the
Divine word, they, with equal confidence and temerity, greedily embrace every reverie which their distempered imaginations may have conceived.\(^{36}\)

The exercise of man's spiritual imagination is, for Calvin, an assertion of that pride and confidence in self that the sin of Adam has made unsightly in the eyes of God.

Again, because our perceptions are clouded with evil thoughts, the world of nature affords us no intelligible clue to divine glory. Calvin agrees with the pantheist that natural phenomena are symbols of Godhead, but to the founder of Puritanism—lacking faith in the interpretive powers of man—they are insufficient signs:

Notwithstanding the clear representations given by God in the mirror of his works . . . we derive no advantage from them. . . . Vain, therefore, is the light afforded us in the formation of the world to illustrate the glory of its Author, which, though its rays be diffused all around us, is insufficient to conduct us into the right way. . . . For as soon as a survey of the world has just shown us a deity, neglecting the true God, we set up in his stead the dreams and phantasms of our own brains; and confer on them the praise of righteousness, wisdom, goodness, and power due to him.\(^{37}\)

Thus, because our natural perversity will always intervene, there is nothing of profound spiritual value to be gained by a refinement of taste or an accumulation of aesthetic experience. On the contrary, we have much to fear if we covet the unencumbered self-consciousness of the artist.

Since, of ourselves, we are blind to the manifest will and glory of God in the works of nature, Calvin argues further that man must rely wholly upon the Bible as a literal guide in matters of divine enlightenment and in the regulation of his conduct:

The Scripture, collecting in our minds the otherwise confused notions of Deity, dispels the darkness, and gives us a clear view of the true God. . . . God, foreseeing the ineffi-
cacy of his manifestation of himself in the exquisite struc­
ture of the world, hath afforded the assistance of his
word. . . . We must come, I say, to the word, which con­
tains a just and lively description of God as he appears in
his works. . . . If we deviate from it . . . we shall never
reach the goal."

It is not so much Calvin’s attachment to the Scriptures (which,
after all, contain a good deal of poetry) that prejudiced his follow­
ers against the generality of imaginative literature, as it is his be­
lief in their exclusive and literal truth.

Another corollary of this allegiance to the Bible removes the
dogmatic Puritan one step farther from the sentiments of the
literary artist. Because of Calvin’s preoccupation with man’s un­
worthiness, he tended to emphasize the Old Testament stories of
punishment, fear, and obedience rather than the milder, more
compassionate lessons of Christ. Theoretically, of course, the God
of the Puritans is to be loved as well as feared: “Our knowledge
of God should rather tend, first, to teach us fear and rever­
ence. . . . The nature of pure and genuine religion . . . consists
in faith, united with a serious fear of God.” But the fact of our
sinfulness convinces Calvin that the uncomfortable emotions of
guilt and terror are more acceptable to an outraged Deity than
the complacency of love:

We represent repentance as proceeding from a serious fear
of God. For before the mind of a sinner can be inclined to
repentance, it must be excited by a knowledge of the Divine
Judgment. . . . Fear denotes that trepidation with which
our minds are penetrated whenever we reflect upon our de­
merits, and on the terrible severity of the Divine wrath
against sinners.

The Calvinist God enters most often into the affairs of men to
punish their wickedness or to try their faith; seldom, if ever, can
one expect His reassurance or the blessing of a tranquil life. We
should, in fact, welcome a world of torment and struggle, since it illustrates the immanence of God and the unsettled destiny of our spirit:

The Lord, by continual lessons of miseries, teaches his children the vanity of the present life, that they may not promise themselves profound and secure peace in it... frequently disquieted and infested with tumults... We learn that this life, considered in itself, is... adulterated with a mixture of many evils; and in consequence of this at once conclude, that nothing can be sought or expected on earth but conflict.\footnote{41}

This endless battle is undoubtedly a moral one, a war of good and evil forces, and a lesson can be read from the conclusion of each skirmish, however unjust the result may appear: if, for example, the Philistines are defeated, God's justice has carried the day; if the soldiers of the true faith have fallen, the Lord has punished their halfheartedness. There is always, for the Calvinist, a literal meaning in the face of events, a reenactment in modern history and the present age of those righteous wars and clear judgments of the Old Testament. Unlike the transcendentalist, who is content to contemplate the "weak glances" into the supersensible that the beauty of nature and his own imagination afford him, the Puritan is an active moralist, spurred on by his guilt and his fear of the terrible vengeance of God. In this sense he is profoundly Hebraic; that is, he prefers, as Matthew Arnold says, "doing to thinking."\footnote{42} And because his faith stems from the doctrine of original sin rather than any gentler or more positive persuasion, Calvin himself believes the surest way to serve God is to expose and vilify the wickedness of man: "Every one should study to admonish his brother, whenever occasion shall require... [And] it is the duty of the Church, on the occasion of any notorious scandal, immediately to summon the offender, and to punish him in proportion to his crime."\footnote{43} Most of Calvin's disciples unfortunately understood him to mean that "it is the main business of
our lives to hate and oppose." Hence the severity of utterance and the studied strictness of conduct in Calvinist communities.

Finally, the antinomian doctrine of election, set out in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, enforced the Hebraic temper of Puritanism. Already favoring an active, blindly obedient worship of God and disavowing the reflective approach of idealists and poets, the followers of Calvin and Knox were bolstered in their mindless toiling after righteousness by the concept of predestination. God, they were taught to believe, had elected certain of their brethren to everlasting life, but upon a basis so arbitrary and so incomprehensible to man that their "distempered imaginations" could not hope to find the key. Thus did election by grace contrive to double man's sense of awe, "true humilitie" and submission before the will of his Creator. As Knox said in a defense of predestination: "No other doctrine maketh man carefull to obey God according to his commandement, but that doctrine only which so spoileth man of all power and vertue, that no portion of his salvation consisteth within himself." It served, then, as a further justification for that radical asceticism which makes Calvinism so hostile to the arts. But what of the Hebraic principle of work and action as the central fact of Puritan life? Superficially, it appears that predestination freed man from the necessity of good works; but in fact, it has the opposite effect on Calvin's disciples. According to the formulators of the doctrine, those who are the elect of God give evidence of their salvation in the performance of good works, and those who are damned exhibit their unholiness in their idleness and disobedience of Scriptural commands: "After man be made just by Faith, and possesseth Jesus Christ in his hart, then can he not be idle. For with true Faith is also given the Holie Spirite, which suffereth not man to be idle, but moveth him to al godly exercise of good workes." Thus the industry of the Puritan in the service of his God, although it could not, of itself, save him, was nonetheless the surest sign of his having been saved.

From this brief look at the *Institutes*, it is obvious that Calvin
deduced a set of principles diametrically opposed to the aesthetic and literary values of religious idealism: he condemns man, his imagination, and every manifestation of self-consciousness; he belittles the revelatory power of natural beauty; he distrusts passivity, reflection, contentment, and spiritual joy, believing instead that "the life of man is a perpetual batell upon earth," in which we are best employed in censuring sin, reading Scripture, obeying without question the authorities that God has set up over us, and renewing daily our sense of personal guilt in the suffering and conflict that plague the world.

As these precepts came out of sixteenth-century Geneva, they were already such as would discourage a follower from attendance upon contemporary literature, but through the vigorous expansion of Calvin’s severe principles in John Knox’s ministry, generations of Puritans, particularly in Scotland, took an increasingly sour view of the uses of the imagination. For a number of reasons, an analysis of the character and writings of Knox should help us to understand important aspects of Carlyle’s make-up: first of all, because Knox established the temper of that Scottish Calvinism in which Carlyle was exclusively schooled until the age of fourteen; second, because Carlyle often wrote of him as the heroic ideal of priesthood and the saviour of Scotland; fourth, because many of Carlyle’s biographers have suggested strong parallels between the natures of the two men.

Knox embraced, unquestioningly, the doctrine of man’s depravity and meanness: "Of nature we ar so dead, so blynd and so perverse, that neather can we feill when we are pricked, see the lycht when it schynes, nor assent to the will of God when it is reveilled. . . . Of our selves we ar nott sufficient to think ane good thought." And because he believed so strongly in the corruptibility of men’s minds, Knox became an active opponent of individualism in religion, whether pantheistic, Anabaptist, or Catholic. Only Calvinism, he said, was founded on the objective commandments of God; all others were tricks of Satan to flatter our vanity. The Anabaptist and even the Lutheran—certainly the
artist—were guilty in Knox's eyes of "fylthy lustes" and "insatiable covetousnes" since they relied on their own consciences and spiritual aspirations for a revelation of God's truth: "Many maketh an idoll of their owne wisdome or fantasye: more trusting to that which thy think good, nor unto God, who plainly sayeth, not that things which seemeth good in thy eyes, do unto thy God, but what thy Lord hath commanded." Thus Knox, like Calvin, enjoined men to act and to obey rather than to think; to suppress their personal visions and self-consciousness, since "All wirschipping, honoring, or service inventit by the braine of man in the religioun of God, without his own express commandment, is Idolatrie." There was, of course, no more contemptible sin in Knox's lexicon than "idolatrie"; against every branch of the "false Kirk" built on men's "vain imaginations" the Scottish Reformer directed his wrath. As Carlyle says in an 1875 essay, Knox manifested "complete incompatibility with whatever is false in word or conduct; inexorable contempt and detestation of what in modern speech is called humbug." Knox's energies, more than Calvin's, were of the destructive, denunciatory sort; he advocated not only obedience and hard work but warfare and iconoclasm, believing that "whenever God put the sword into the hands of His elect, they were bound to punish enormities." He trusted to the "efficacy of true hatred," condemning "all honoring of God not contained in his holie Word," especially that worship which relied, for its insights, upon the sensual beauties of nature. Unlike Calvin, who merely found the aesthetic experience "insufficient," Knox warned that "Sathan" tries to ravish our senses "with gazing upon the visible creatures." Our consciousness of beauty in the objects of this world, so vital to poets and transcendentalists, represented to Knox but another evidence of our corruption. The "aesthetic sense" was no more than a weapon of idolaters, a tool of those "conjured ennemys of veritie" who smother the voice of God under painted vestments, statuary, and stained glass. Knox clearly included the sensual imaginings of the artist in his indictment of Catholic "harlotrie" and Anglican complacency:
Like Calvin, Knox disparaged not only self-consciousness but the temperamental equanimity of men unacquainted with the gravity of their sins.

Further, Knox’s assurances of the divine presence were in no way symbolic, “mystical,” or fantastic, but rather, he believed, preeminently empirical. Scriptural law and the very facts of the world demanded that he approach life as a conflict of moral forces, an actual struggle for righteousness in which much that is practically efficacious should be done and much that is speculative and useless should be abjured. The Puritan’s world is not one of “hieroglyphs” or “appearances” but one of common, obvious truths: “The factis of men aggrie with the law of God.” Divine justice is acted out in the history of man in simple, intelligible events. Knox, for example, read the will of God into the defeat of Scottish Catholics by an army of outnumbered English protestants: “Agane we say, that such as in that sudden dejectioun behold-is not the hand of God, fighting against pride, for freedom of his awin litill flock, unjustly persecutted, does willingly and mali-tiouslie obscure the glorie of God.” In such a way does Calvinism promote a literal, commonsensical view of political history and daily life.

For the Scots, this spare, practical faith fitted well with the rigors of their native clime. As one ungentle critic of Puritanism puts it: “These stiff and austere people were attracted by the stiff and austere character of the creed, and their character was made thereby still more stiff and austere by being confirmed in its natural bent.” Knox plainly imprinted on Calvinism the dour, rude, unmusical, even savage qualities of his race. But he was much more
than a man impatient of decoration and fancy, prophesying doom to "craftie flatterers" and "pestilent prelattis": he believed in active resistance to false authority. On the question of conscience versus obedience, he fell out with Calvin, maintaining that it is more righteous to overcome an idolatrous ruler than, by submission to tyranny, to expiate our racial guilt. Knox argued that the "power of spiritual hatred" ought to be vented, in open warfare, against "the accursed kingdome of that Romane Antichrist." It is Knox, rather than Calvin, who is responsible for the image of the Puritan as a zealous "soldier of God," intolerant of every vanity; it is the spirit of Knox that inspired the tumults and fanaticism of the Cromwellian period. Finally, as a man dedicated to censure and to furious activity, it is ironically characteristic of Knox that, at his death, he should confess his own chief failings to be "lacke of fervencye in reproving synne . . . and lacke of diligence in the execution of myne office." From the preceding picture of Calvin's hostility toward the works of the imagination, Knox's exclusive sympathy with practical reforms in church and state, and the overriding pessimism of both men, it seems reasonable to conclude that Carlyle's intermittent outbursts against literature might have had their origin in the temper of his native Puritanism. For confirmation, let us look first at a cross-section of orthodox opinions of literature written in Scotland and England during the years of Carlyle's childhood. These reflect the continued currency of Puritan principles among protestant critics of the early nineteenth century and give us a clue to the climate of thought in which James Carlyle raised his eldest son.

Some of these latter-day Calvinists raised the old cry that "novels exalt imagination at the expense of judgment," others that they "idealize" life, replacing the hard truths of error and sin with "transport, rapture, bliss and ecstatic joy." One Edinburgh critic, writing in 1805, spoke condescendingly of poetry as "an elegant and charming amusement." But, for influencing the active principles, for guiding our conduct in the ordinary affairs of life,
it does not seem so very well suited." One is reminded of Cotton Mather's view of poetry as "Sauce rather than Food," as "a little Recreation . . . in the midst of more painful Studies." Puritan critics of the nineteenth century continued to disparage the works of the imagination for their "vicious doctrine of goodness of heart," their "fantastic and visionary speculations," and their tendency to ignore "duty, justice, prudence and economy . . . in behalf of love, generosity, benevolence, and compassion." The recurrent fear of vanity and self-assertion underlay much of the orthodox Scotsman's opposition; his Calvinist instincts assured him that exposure to fictions rendered the reader "dissatisfied with that more humble station which Providence has assigned him." But of all the necessary virtues the nineteenth-century Puritan saw literature working against, none figured so strongly in his criticism as the simple urge for action, duty, and obedience. Again and again, his Hebraic temper balked at the passivity and impracticality of the artists' world: writing "ought not to be of a romantic or visionary nature. It must be adapted to the actual conditions of human life, and such as . . . is capable of being reduced to practice"; the novel consumes "time that might be given to more useful reading or to serious exercise"; the benevolence that literature promotes "has been stigmatized rightly, as rather an indolent kind of sympathy, not much to be depended on when any vigorous exertion is required"; "those who jog on the plain paths of duty have little need for the heroics of fiction"; "Sensation, not action, is the natural state [of literary heroes]. They are governed chiefly by occasional and transient impulses, and incapable of that regular and consistent system of conduct which can alone render a man respectable and useful." It appears, then, that even more than the doctrines of depravity, self-denial, suffering, and silence, the work-ethic of the radical Protestant—that desire for a "regular and consistent system of conduct"—interposes itself between the dogmatic Puritan mind and the spirit of literature.

Yet in order to justify the claim that Calvinist standards dictated the negative pull in Carlyle's ambivalent view of the arts, we must
show further that such prejudices were indeed impressed upon him as a child, and that they recurred in his writing at every stage of his development.

The best, and certainly the most authoritative account we have of Carlyle's earliest years is that which he himself has provided in *Reminiscences*. There appears there a sketch of his father (written at the time of James's funeral in 1832) that gives us an adequate picture of the temper of family life in the Ecclefechan environment of Carlyle's youth.\(^7^5\) Apparently, much of the pessimism and intolerance that animated Knox's pronouncements had found its way into the personality of the Carlyle clan: Thomas's grandfather "did not drink, but his stroke was ever as ready as his word. . . . He was a fiery man, irascible, indomitable";\(^7^6\) his father had from an early age displayed a predilection for violence and for caustic invective;\(^7^7\) one old man of the village, in an interview with Espinasse, recalled with distaste the behaviour of the Carlyles: "There was not the like o' them. Pithy, bitter-speaking bodies, and awfu' fighters."\(^7^8\) In this fanatical, reforming spirit of his father's family, rooted as it was in the Calvinist preoccupation with sin, lies an obvious source for Carlyle's virulence. That "cynical," "gloomy," "anti-philanthropic," "injudicious" mood which for so many years embarrassed Carlyle's literary friends was surely a legacy from the Scotland of Knox. Carlyle had been taught from an early age to respect the efficacy of hatred, righteously directed; for despite the fact that his father was "choleric and we all dreaded his wrath," his indignation nevertheless appeared to be "grounded on the sense of right and in resistance to wrong . . . rending asunder official sophisms."\(^7^9\) Like most children of Puritan parentage, Carlyle learned to look at life as a kind of endless moral warfare and to accept the zeal and outrage of his father as but one aspect of that battle. For the rest of his life, Carlyle himself often acted as though the reproving of sin and the denunciation of "shams" and "un-verities" were more of a virtue than the delineation and promotion of the beautiful.

At least it would seem he scorned Aristotelian decorum and
Virgilian sonorities in the manner of his writing. This is not the place, while discussing the sources of Carlyle's literary ideology, for a close study of his stylistic models, yet his father's rough-cut Burgher diction was clearly a principal influence. Surely the sudden, arhythmic explosions of contumely, the unexpected clusters of morbid imagery, the spasms of dissonance and vituperation that flame out with such dark fire from the continuum of Carlyle's prose owe as much to the Puritan preference for excited, unlovely speech as to the Rabelaisian eccentricities of Richter.80

James Carlyle represented to his son a number of other Calvinist ideals of conduct, especially those that encouraged the habit of material self-denial: "He was thrifty, Spartan . . . abstemious"; "Frugality and assiduity, a certain grave composure, an earnestness . . . were the order of our household."83 And since Carlyle's father believed primarily in the God of the Old Testament, he naturally attached more significance to the masculine precepts of command and obedience than to the feminine instincts of love and forgiveness. As Carlyle remembers it, his childhood was "wholesome" rather than "joyful," for "an inflexible element of authority surrounded us all."82 The Hebrew deity, embodied in Carlyle's father, asked but one thing of his earthly children: unquestioning labor in the service of His will. Again and again, work, in the sense of physical action, was offered to Carlyle as the only good: "as a man wholly for action . . . [my father] admired [us] for our 'activity,' our practical valour and skill";89 "we were particularly taught that work . . . was the only thing we had to do";84 "food and all else were simply and solely there as the means for doing work."85 As far as James Carlyle was concerned, any other indulgence—of the speaking or writing talents especially—was mere self-consciousness and therefore, by Calvinist lights, vanity. Perhaps because of the Puritan tendency to think in terms of moral contrasts, Carlyle's father condemned unequivocally whatever appeared to distract men from their practical duties. Like many Calvinists before him, he believed that his words should be "wary and few," as became the humble and guilty creature of an outraged
God. According to Carlyle, his father's policy in this regard amounted almost to a gospel of silence; "he had the most entire and open contempt for all idle tattle; what he called clatter"; "he behaved with prudent resolution, not like a vain braggart but like a practically brave man . . . I must admire now his silence. . . . He spoke nothing . . . except only what had practical meaning in it, and in a practical tone. . . . [He was] there not to talk, but to work." And at the same time the young Carlyle was being trained to avoid "flourishes of Rhetoricke," he was also learning to cultivate his common sense. As Puritans, James and Margaret Carlyle had accepted the Bible and the world in literal terms—the facts of sin, punishment, and struggle left them no choice.

Their son, in consequence, was taught to suspect those uncommon worlds of fancy or appearance, such as the literary artist or the speculative philosopher devised. His father put it simply: "Man was created to work—not to speculate, or feel, or dream."

In Carlyle's recollections of his childhood, as in the sources of Puritanism itself, we are presented with repeated examples of Calvinist hostility toward the products of the imagination. During the whole of his early life, Carlyle learned nothing of poetry or fiction from his father. As he confessed to Allingham in 1876: "I never heard of Shakespeare there: my father never, I believe, read a word of him in his life." James Carlyle even denied himself and his family any acquaintance with the songs of Burns, although the poet had once been his neighbor. In discussing the differences between these two Scotsmen, Carlyle again touches on that radical Hebraism in his father's nature which alienated him from the world of literature:

He had never . . . read three pages of Burns' poems. . . . The poetry he liked (he did not call it poetry) was truth. . . . Burns had an infinitely wider education, my father a far wholesomer. Besides, the one was a man of musical utterance; the other wholly a man of action, with speech subservient thereto. As a man of speculation—had culture ever unfolded him—he must have gone wild and desperate
The whole weight of Calvinist tradition came down against the artist. Scottish Puritans had for centuries found little room in their scheme of things for painting, music, verse, or any of those arts that seemed to them only to please the "carnal appetites." James Carlyle was no exception, and his children grew up under the shadow of his prejudices: "Poetry, fiction in general, he had universally seen treated as not only idle, but false and criminal. This was the spiritual element he lived in." And, we might also observe, it was the spiritual element in which his oldest son lived for fourteen years.

I should qualify, if only slightly, this indictment of Calvinist doctrine as the culprit in Carlyle's schizophrenic view of literature. The prejudices he inherited from his father were in part those of the peasant class in Scotland, regardless of its religion. Carlyle's parents, like most Puritans, were simple people, with little education, living in a hard climate. It was thus natural, as well as spiritually fitting, that James Carlyle should be a man "singularly free from affectation" and wholeheartedly dedicated to the business of stonemasonry. That "there was little place for love and the other tenderer elements of Christianity," in the Burgher creed was as much a reflection of the lowlanders' primitive environment as a dogmatic loyalty to the precepts of Calvin. So far as literary attitudes were concerned, Puritan preachers only condemned what was already unfamiliar and suspect among the greatest part of their brethren, thereby confirming the unread in their ignorance. Scottish Calvinism offered, in many ways, a set of principles adapted to the instincts of "the plain man, unversed in literature as such and unable to grasp either intricate rhetoric . . . or complicated imagery."

Be that as it may, by the time this apparently natural asceticism had affected the character of Carlyle and his parents, it had long since been overlaid by the justification of religious principle.
Carlyle understood his father’s prejudices not as symptoms of ignorance or provincialism but as the necessary corollaries of a traditional faith.

In the years between 1809 and 1832, Carlyle moved gradually but firmly away from this miraculous, dogmatic theology of his parents. We have seen, in the last chapter, the way in which his intellectual and philosophical inquiries led him toward German idealism and a set of values radically different from his father’s. More importantly, we have explored the significant connection between his adopted faith of transcendentalism and his advocacy of literature. Now, seeing that his native faith—based on a body of principles quite contrary to those of transcendentalism—encouraged him to vilify the arts, it is my contention that Carlyle’s intermittent disparagement of literature represents a reassertion of these Calvinist prejudices. Certainly, since the evidence indicates that Carlyle maintained an ambivalent attitude toward poetry and fiction throughout the whole of his life, it is of crucial importance to trace the course of his instinctive Puritanism after 1809, and to prove that it acted as a counterweight to idealism in all his thought and writing.

There is little question that in the first ten years of his literary career Carlyle, more often than not, defended the artist as the “most perfect of modern spirit-seekers.” Yet even in this period of high optimism—as we have seen in chapter one—Carlyle frequently denigrated literature as a wasteful and dangerous pursuit. In letters, notes, and essays written before 1832, he scorned aesthetics as “palabra,” Goethe’s advice as “twaddle,” and literature itself as mere “babble” or the “loud clamour of Nonsense.” He offsets his praise of Schiller in the Life with his sudden antagonism toward the “impractical,” imaginative works of the German poet; his impassioned portrait of Novalis with his nagging distrust of the passivity and effeminacy of the artist; his advice to his brother to cultivate literature as “the most precious of your possessions,” with his letter denouncing “all Art” as “mere Reminiscence.” Clearly, despite the restorative influence of transcendental
faith, and the fundamental allegiance to aesthetic experience that it demanded, Carlyle was not yet free of religious tension nor had he gained a settled view of the value of the imagination.

The Hebraic temper of his native Calvinism, I suggest, worked even here, in the first flush of creative affirmation, against the idealism he had adopted. Carlyle's first project, in 1822, was not, after all, to write a novel or poem in the vein of his German mentors but to reappraise the life and work of Oliver Cromwell. Although the scope of the research eventually forced a postponement of the history, Carlyle's notebook entries for that year indicate his eagerness to study the soldierly character of Puritan reformers. He pored over Clarendon's "excellent descriptions" of religious warfare and felt, much as his father might, that Cromwell was a "very curious person" who had been mistreated by Anglican historians. Like the last literary interest of his life—the portraits of Knox—Carlyle's earliest concern as a writer was not with imaginative truth but with the political, religious figures of whom his parents approved. Again, in the early notebooks, he echoes the conventional Scottish attitude toward the imagination when he asks "whether there ought to be . . . any class of purely speculative men? Whether all men should not be of active employment and habitue; their speculation . . . incidental thereto." In fact, it appears that although transcendental aesthetics mark the limit of Carlyle's spiritual and intellectual independence during these years, his distrust of beauty and his insistent activism indicate the extent to which his sympathies were still traceable to Calvinist doctrine. It is as the son of a Puritan father that Carlyle can say, in 1823, that idealistic poetry is "enveloped in clouds and darkness, shadowed forth in types and symbols of unknown and fantastic derivation" or that "a playhouse shows but indifferently as an arena for the Moralist," or that literary distinctions are "folly," "blarney," or simply "futile, very futile." Carlyle surely recalls the ingrained Hebraism of his parents and prefigures the intolerant temper of his own later work when, in 1825, he writes in his notes of Sir William Temple: "He was no Artist or speculative
Philosopher, but a man of action." Like other Puritans before him, Carlyle faulted the literary man for putting thought ahead of duty, love ahead of strength, talk ahead of silent obedience, the world of his "diseased" fancy ahead of the world of fact, and self-consciousness ahead of self-denial. Although by his own confession the 1820s were among his happiest years, Carlyle's opinions were characterized, then as later, by the chronic unrest of a divided world-view. As Cazamian, in discussing the antipathy between Carlyle's native faith and his adopted transcendentalism, rather theatrically puts it: "The Calvinist's obsession with conduct and the instinctive need for activity in Carlyle lay in wait for this alien individualism." Thus, despite the balm of Kant and Goethe, he did not achieve genuine equanimity in these years; he quarreled with his friends, complained bitterly of his dyspepsia, and was, in short—very much like Knox himself—in incapable of living in peace.

Nowhere in the period before 1832 do Carlyle's Puritan prejudices manifest themselves more clearly than in Characteristics. It is in this essay that Carlyle first advocates a kind of self-denial that is explicitly austere and Calvinistic, and thus removed in degree and type from Goethe's Entsagen. Elsewhere, in "The State of German Literature" and Sartor, he appears to accept the less severe German version of renunciation that allows space for imaginative self-consciousness. But that which to the Romantic poet and the Fichtean idealist represents the core of religious experience—namely the "I"s' consciousness of itself—seems to the writer of Characteristics to be art's unpardonable sin, her crucial "Error." Certainly transcendentalism does not inspire Carlyle's assertion that through modern literature's self-consciousness, worship of divine truth has been distorted into vanity. No, it is upon an entirely different set of principles, preeminently puritanical ones, that Carlyle condemns the egotism of the arts. Like his father and every dogmatic Protestant since Calvin himself, Carlyle takes issue with the pride of men in their personal creations. The thrust of his argument in Characteristics is but a recapitulation of Knox's
warning two hundred and seventy years before: "Whosoever boast themselves of the meritis of their awin workis . . . they boast of thame selfis of that whiche is not, and putt thair trust in damnable idolatrie." Even Carlyle's diction resembles that of the Calvinist reformer, for in the context of such phrases as "mother of Abominations," Knox would surely have been comfortable. We see here, revealed in Carlyle's thought as early as 1831, his father's proscription of literature not only for its idleness but for its self-flattery. In the ensuing years, this call of Carlyle's for "annihilation of the self" resolved itself into an appeal for straightforward asceticism. By degrees, as Cazamian says, "Carlyle twists Goethe's teaching toward the Puritan austerity of his own instincts."

As the analysis of Calvin indicated, the Protestant fear of self-indulgence arises directly out of the doctrine of man's depravity; that is, out of a profound sense of sin. Insincerity, "fleshly longings," and general corruption (contends the Puritan) infect, and will continue to infect, the nature of man; in the name of these evils certain of us constantly challenge the sovereignty of God and are constantly rebuked. This belief in the eternal conflict of virtue and vice is an essential element in the personality of Calvinism, and Carlyle, in many of his early works, acknowledges such an antagonism. He illustrates it most vividly in Sartor Resartus. The world picture he paints there is as stern and "everlasting" in its contrasts as any that Knox or Calvin devised: transcendentalism may have determined the general philosophy of the novel, but its frequent moral dichotomies are reminiscent not so much of Kant's speculations as of Puritan sermonizing. Nothing is more familiar to the radical Protestant than the polarities of "elect" and "damned," grace and sin, affectation and truth; by the same token, nothing absorbs Carlyle's interest in Sartor so much as "shams" and "verities," "Nos" and "Yeas," "dandies" and "poor-slaves," Byronic demonism and Goethean calm. In Sartor as in "Signs of the Times," he feels compelled to break the world into mechanism and dynamism, into the enemies of God and the sons of Light; like
Knox declaiming against the “idolatrous” trappings of the Catholic church, Carlyle is at his best when he is reviling the “self-worship” and “Mammonisms” of the English Christian gentleman. Tutored by his father to admonish his fellow men “whenever occasion shall require,” Carlyle was naturally more adept at fault-finding than at panegyric. The world of *Sartor Resartus* is not, after all, simply the untroubled realm of the idealist’s dreaming; it is, as well, a universe split into the stern antimonies of the Calvinist creed; imbued, as Holloway says, with “Carlyle’s sense of a cosmic fissure between good and bad, real and sham.”

Teufelsdrockh’s name itself suggests the corruption of the flesh and the depravity of our natural state. One critic sees Carlyle’s consciousness of evil not only as an adjunct to the Clothes-Philosophy but as the focus of the author’s interest:

The Demon, the Puritan devil, is everywhere in *Sartor Resartus*. . . . By the circumstances of his education and by the atmosphere of his father’s home and the habits of speech in the circle where he had lived, as well as by the authority of the Bible, the Evil Spirit came to take in [Carlyle’s] thought the part of an obsessing reality.

Furthermore, Carlyle has begun, even in *Sartor*, to associate imaginative literature with the idleness and vanity of the degenerate Christian, much as the Puritan ministers had linked the theater and poetry to those “nocturnal dissipations” and “boastful imaginings” of the ungodly. Admittedly, it is the “fashionable novel” of literary “half-men” like Bulwer-Lytton that Carlyle here condemns, but his critical position is one that, distorted by the Calvinist instinct for absolute judgments, will later evolve into an intolerance of the serious artist as well. He has, in a sense, reached a kind of balance in *Sartor*, between German aestheticism and the prejudices of his native faith: on the one hand, he appreciates the “rude,” active Craftsman toiling after righteousness and “daily bread”; on the other, he exalts the Artist whose labors are internal and whose fruit is the “spiritually indispensable.” For the mo-
merit at least, Carlyle speaks for the stonemason and the poet, for the Puritan and the idealist without denigrating either: “Two men I honour, and no third.”

Throughout the whole of the novel Carlyle’s inherent Hebraism rises through the ether of his professed transcendentalism. Paraphrases from the Old Testament, like echoes from the orthodoxy of his childhood, mingle with the more sophisticated rhetoric of Kantian idealism. In a single page of Sartor, Holloway points out no fewer than thirty-six biblical references, most of them from Isaiah, Ezekiel, or the Books of Moses. Probably the clearest example, in this early period, of Carlyle’s undiminished faith in the Puritan work-ethic of his father occurs at the end of the “Everlast­ing Yea” section of Sartor. Again, almost instinctively, his hero appeals to the authority of Scriptures—this time, to Ecclesiastes:

I too could now say to myself: Be no longer a Chaos, but a World, or even a Worldkin. Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it, in God’s name! “Tis the utmost thou hast in thee: out with it then. . . . Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy whole might. Work while it is called Today; for the Night cometh, wherein no man can work.

There is then sufficient evidence in Carlyle’s early writings to suggest that he maintained many of the prejudices of Scottish Calvinism despite his efforts to articulate a more “up-to-date” philosophical creed. Certainly in the first ten years of his career, the German influence was the stronger of the two, and in deference to its aesthetic bias, Carlyle generally took a charitable view of literature. But after 1832, his vocational interest shifted rather abruptly from imaginative writing to history and the conflicts in his attitude toward the arts became more pronounced. Without doubt, ambivalence toward poetry and fiction can be traced through the whole of his life, yet Carlyle clearly took issue with literature more openly and more often after the completion of Sartor Resartus. If, as it appears, Calvinist instincts are at the root of his negative opinion
of literature, then we must locate that event of the early 1830s
that encouraged the ascendancy of his Puritanism.

In January 1832, only a few months after Carlyle had offered
the manuscript of *Sartor* to various London publishers, his father
died. No other event, with the possible exception of Jane's death
thirty-three years later, had such a marked effect upon the charac­
ter of Carlyle's thought. The direction of his life and his work
had been, since his first years in Edinburgh, away from the teach­
ings of James Carlyle. He had rebelled against the literalism of the
Burgher religion, against a career in the ministry, against the plain,
unspeculative atmosphere of his parents' home. Even in *Sartor*,
when Teufelsdröckh claims to honor the "coarse" Craftsman, it
is honor tempered with the condescension of the philosopher who
has risen above the simple dogmas of his earliest teachers. "We
must," he says, "pity as well as love thee!" As long as Carlyle
looked down at his father's toilings from the "Highest" plane of
"inspired Thinker," there was only an occasional danger that his
inherent Hebraism would conflict with the cultural values of Ger­
man idealism. But the death of James Carlyle weakened, consid­
erably, his son's sense of having followed a superior calling. In
the weeks after the funeral, as the mood of the sketch in *Reminis­
cences* makes clear, Carlyle underwent a profound guilt-reaction
over his neglect of the principles by which his father had lived.
The pressure of this guilt forced from him a declaration not only
to tolerate but to promote the world-view of his puritanical par­
ent; he hoped, perhaps, by doing so to earn forgiveness for his
apostasy while justifying the diligence and obscurity of his fa­
ther's efforts. Again and again, in *Reminiscences*, Carlyle praises
the active virtues of his father at the expense of his own more
sedentary pursuits: "His life was no 'idle Tale' . . . an earnest
toilsome life"; "The force that had been lent my father he
honourably expended in manful well-doing. A portion of this
planet bears beneficent traces of his strong hand and strong head.
Nothing he undertook to do but he did it faithfully and like a
ture man. . . . No one that comes after him will ever say, 'Here
was the finger of a hollow eye-servant’ ”; “Like a healthy man, he wanted only to get along with his task”; “he was among the last of the true men. . . . diligently working on God’s earth”; “I call a man remarkable who becomes a true workman in this vineyard of the Highest.” The implication of these statements is, of course, that tale-telling, in contrast to “real” labor, constitutes the idle, unremarkable, unhealthy, even “false” occupation of mere “eye-servants.” But Carlyle did more than recognize, in Puritan terms, the moral discrepancy between his own career and that of his father; he resolved to close the gap between them by the re-direction of his intellectual energies:

I owe him a noble inspiring example . . . let me do worthily of him. So shall he live even here in me. . . . I can see my dear father’s life in some measure as the sunk pillar on which mine was to rise and be built . . . I might almost say his spirit seems to have entered into me (so clearly do I discern and love him); I seem to myself only the continuation and second volume of my father.

It was obvious to Carlyle, under the influence of this new determination, that there was a specific way in which the spirit of his father might manifest itself in his own writing: “I had the example of a real Man. . . . Let me learn of him. Let me write my books as he built his houses.” Clearly, James Carlyle had expended the whole force of his genius on concrete externals, on the literal “fact of things.” Thus this new commitment behooved his son to follow a similar course in the world of letters—to wrestle, in fact, with the actual, providentially significant problems of political history, rather than to dissipate his powers (as he had been doing) in “vain” eloquence and “idle” story-telling. After 1832, Carlyle consequently made the outer world his primary study. David Masson was the first critic to pinpoint this link between Calvinist determinism and Carlyle’s “new,” obsessive interest in historical justice (and, by the way, the first to distinguish discretely internal and external biases in his religion):
Carlyle's religion . . . was a compound of two elements, one furnished from within, the other found without . . . . The world without was . . . God working . . . . The superiority of the right and noble over the wrong and ignoble, the conquering power of the right and noble in the long run, and the futility or nothingness of evil, were evident in the actual rule and history of the world, preached in disaster, ruin, retribution. Divine justice stared up at you out of the very fact of things . . . Hence his preference of History over all other forms of Literature.  

Although the reminiscence of 1832 did not come to light until Carlyle's death, it proves conclusively that his declining opinion of aesthetic literature and his increasing interest in history were, in large measure, the result of a Puritan reaction occasioned by the death of his father. That is not to say that the decisions taken in January 1832 resolved Carlyle's religious schizophrenia: theologically, he remained as undogmatic and idealistic as he had been since first reading Wilhelm Meister; literarily, he continued to subject his material to a highly wrought, impressionistic style; critically, he still claimed, with intermittent conviction, that the aesthetic writer occupied the first place among the chosen of God. What the crisis of his father's death did do was to join the battle more openly in Carlyle's mind between the spirit of his parents' faith and the spirit of his own adopted creed. From then on, he felt fully justified in promoting, unapologetically, the ascetic, authoritarian, gloomy, pragmatic prejudices of his Puritan ancestry.

Another event of 1832 may have encouraged Carlyle to articulate the Calvinist sentiments that he had thus far muted in his writing. Goethe's death followed close on his father's, but, unlike his father's, it did not rouse in Carlyle any sense of guilt; on the contrary, the passing of the "venerable" poet signified the "innocent" loss of a father-figure to whom Carlyle had openly and unstintingly directed his admiration for eight years. The coincidence of the deaths of the two men must, if anything, have made Carlyle more acutely aware of having transferred his spiritual allegiance
from his natural father. At all events, the death of Goethe broke the strongest personal tie Carlyle had with German literature; without that special influence to reinforce his idealism, Carlyle retreated, at frequent intervals, into the simplistic, instinctual world of his childhood.

We should also take account of the profound watershed that 1832 signified in the political and social life of England. Few men of Carlyle’s generation or younger failed to respond: the Saint-Simonians proselytized, Mill agitated for democracy, and Dickens reported the great parliamentary debates; Arnold, Ruskin, Morris, and most later Victorians looked back upon the early 1830s as the seedbed of the major political controversies of the century. Undoubtedly the universal excitement surrounding the continental revolutions of 1830, the Reform Bill of 1832, the abolition of slavery in 1833, and the Poor Law Reforms of 1834 conspired with the deaths of James Carlyle and Goethe to launch Carlyle toward less romantic, more matter-of-fact horizons.

However that may be, after 1832 his works confirm his enlarged sympathy with the precepts of Scottish Calvinism. In *The French Revolution*, Carlyle sees that upheaval as one of those inevitable, even providential, clashes between the simple truth of things and the aberrations of our depraved reason; in his 1838 *Lectures*, he asserts that the great ages of literature correspond to eras of “decadent” self-consciousness and impracticality; in *Past and Present*, he offers the disciplined authority of Abbot Samson’s regime to his own complacent century as an example of the benefits to be gained by hard work and pious obedience; in *Heroes*, he claims that the “fervency” of Knox and the often unforgiving rule of Cromwell were as constructive morally and, in many ways, more heroic than the delicacy and perspicuity of poets. Certainly the “Gospel of Work” and the militant aspects of the hero-theory that Carlyle developed in the 1840s appear to be extensions of orthodox Hebraism and the doctrine of election by grace. As he said in a letter to a friend about this time, Calvinism “is at bottom my religion, too.” A short while later, in his partisan study of
Cromwell’s letters and speeches, Carlyle publicly declared himself an apologist for the Puritan spirit. This exhaustive work was followed, in 1850, by a less careful but even more strident defense of Calvinist values: the terrible impatience and severity of “Model Prisons,” “The Nigger Question,” and “Jesuitism” among the Latter-Day Pamphlets parallel in tone—more closely than anything else Carlyle wrote—the denunciatory “trumpet blasts” of Calvin and Knox. After 1850, probably the least savory aspects of Carlyle’s recurrent Hebraism was a disturbing tendency to equate the Puritan action-principle with outright warfare. He had, of course, sufficient authority for such an equation in the battles of the Old Testament, Knox’s doctrinal defense of political revolution, and Cromwell’s successful application of violent reforms. It is nonetheless unfortunate that in the writings of Carlyle’s last years the bogey of militarism intrudes: the “drill-sergeant” and the “City-burner” often overshadow the “spirit-seeker” and the architect of the mind; might, rather than beauty, frequently makes right. Along with Goethe, Kant, and Shakespeare, Carlyle holds up as equivalent heroes Frederick, Dr. Francia, and Governor Eyre.

Throughout the final forty years of Carlyle’s career, this antagonism between idealistic values and Puritan prejudices continued to provoke a consistent ambivalence in his attitude toward literature. As we have already seen in the opening chapter, Carlyle frequently juxtaposed paradoxical opinions of the arts in the space of a single essay, a single letter, or even a single conversation. Our concern in the next chapter will be to locate the specific religious bias behind each of these statements, but for now it may be instructive to look briefly at one such cause-and-effect relationship.

During the 1840s, Carlyle was preoccupied with his research into Oliver Cromwell. Like James Carlyle, Cromwell had taught his fellow Puritans that man was created not to love or to dream but to act. Cazamian points out the insistent Hebraism in Cromwell’s letters and sermons: “He is dominated by a faith which..."
tempers men for action. . . . Just as the weakening of their ac-
tivity was the work of sin, the reflux of divine grace was a torrent
which bore them toward activity." Carlyle, predisposed by his
father’s example, entered with shrill enthusiasm into the spirit of
his Calvinist subject. He was chiefly attracted, it appears, by a man
who seemed a “natural Governor,” a man determined to apply
“force till right is ready,” a man anxious to instruct people in
what was good for them, not in what they wanted. That Crom-
well’s Calvinism was discrete from the fanatical Presbyterian faith
of the Burghers seems a distinction lost on Carlyle (as earlier he
had blurred the differences between Hume and the philosophes
or Goethe’s aesthetics and those of Fichte). In his introduction
to the Letters and Speeches, he makes a virtue of Cromwell’s verbal
“Inadequacy” while at the same time disparaging those who value
“musical singing” more highly than “manful” labor: “He that
works and does some Poem, not he that merely says one, is worthy
of the name of Poet.” It is an essential ingredient of the Puritan
creed to denounce all forms of idleness, and Carlyle, galvanized
by the fervor of Cromwell, turned against literature as against an
enemy of righteousness. “Goethe,” he said to Espinasse in 1846,
“was the most successful speaker of the century, but I would have
been better pleased if he had done something.” In 1847, the
second meeting between Emerson and Carlyle was less congenial
than the first, largely for the same reason: Carlyle, under the in-
fluence of Cromwell’s example, was uncomfortable with “specula-
tive men.” In place of the compassionate idealist he had met at
Craigieputtock, Emerson sat down in Chelsea with an inhospita-
ble, thoroughly intemperate Calvinist. One account of their re-
union records that “Carlyle, still full of Cromwell, resented with
needless heat Emerson’s refusal to fall down and worship the Pu-
ritan hero.” And it was certainly no coincidence that at the
same meeting Emerson was saddened by Carlyle’s “vehement de-
nunciations of authorship.” To accept the spirit of Calvinism
was, for Carlyle, to take a dim view of the value of literature. All
writing that was not specifically practical, that did not contribute
materially to the service of God, was of no consequence; as far as Carlyle was concerned, the poetry and novels of the nineteenth century were part of some gigantic "intellectual prostitution." The arts, he argued, ought to be not a free expression of the individual's concept of beauty but a strictly organized discipline, dedicated—like the reformer pamphlets of the Cromwellian period—to religious utility. Under the Puritan influence, Carlyle's oft-repeated opposition to the Protestant zealots of his own day weakened as well: "[He] might then be heard declaring that among Evangelicals were to be found some of the best people in England." Even the resolve he had made to stay clear of contemporary politics paled in the strong light of Calvinist activism: "Cromwell for a long time coloured his thoughts and waking dreams. . . . I can see him now. . . . Pouring forth in the strongest possible of Scotch accents, an oral Latter-Day Pamphlet, contrasting Cromwell and his Puritans with contemporary English politicians and the multitudes whom they were leading by the nose to the abyss." But more significantly, from the practical, contentious perspective of Puritanism, Carlyle could see little point in the quietism of aesthetic literature. It appeared, in fact, as his father had warned, to be a following "not only idle, but false and criminal," for in its tranquility it bespoke a kind of spiritual pride. At the end of a discussion with Jane and Espinasse on the merits of Cromwell's religion, Carlyle invoked the characteristically Calvinist objection to the artist as vain and self-satisfied: as Espinasse records the incident, "Mrs. Carlyle pointed out to me a portrait of Jean Paul Richter. . . . 'His nose is put out of joint,' Carlyle remarked significantly. German Literature, and a great deal else, was being effaced from him by the Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, 'the best fellow I have fallen in with,' I once heard him say." We may conclude from this sampling of Carlyle's opinions that, in the 1840s at least, the prejudices of his father's faith dictated his hostility to the arts.

The evidence in this and the preceding chapter demonstrates
that those transcendental and Puritan precepts to which Carlyle owed a dual allegiance, represented, in almost every way, antithetical views of life. In particular, they encouraged opposite and irreconcilable attitudes toward literature. Worst of all, against the current of transcendental optimism, Carlyle as Puritan was bound to set the Calvinist obsession with guilt and evil. In doing so, he ran against his own espousal of "natural supernaturalism" and found himself condemning the very vision of aesthetic unity that he had taken such pains to articulate. With the transcendental Artist's appeal to the ultimate through the sensuous "his Puritan character was acutely uncomfortable. . . . His loathing for shams, for cant . . . stifled in him the taste and joy of the beautiful."  

2. Masson, Carlyle Personally and in His Writings, p. 209.
4. Ibid., II, 83, 102.
5. Allingham, A Diary, p. 119.
6. A. Haultain, Goldwin Smith, His Life and Opinions, p. 44. This verdict undoubtedly owed much to the vicious controversy over Governor Eyre in the 1860's, during which Carlyle and Smith had become prominent antagonists.
7. Henry James, Notes of a Son and Brother, p. 185.
10. Allingham, A Diary, p. 206.
11. Espinasse, Literary Recollections, p. 228.
13. Ibid., p. 106.
15. Ibid., p. 180.
16. Carlyle Personally and in His Writings, p. 53.
17. Espinasse, Literary Recollections, p. 159.
18. Ibid., p. 265. Amy Cruse discusses at some length the mixed reaction of Carlyle's contemporaries to his later works, especially Latter-Day Pamphlets (The Victorians and Their Books, pp. 134-50).
22. *Carlyle*, pp. 6, 3.
23. *First Forty Years*, II, 256. See also ibid., I, 200, on the “offense” German aestheticism gave to Carlyle’s Calvinistic sensibilities.
27. *Carlyle Personally and in His Writings*, p. 33.
31. Ibid., p. 49.
32. Ibid., p. 48.
33. Ibid., p. 101.
34. Ibid., p. 41.
35. Ibid., p. 38.
36. Ibid., p. 18.
37. Ibid., pp. 11-12.
38. Ibid., pp. 13-14.
39. Ibid., p. 6.
40. Ibid., pp. 96-97.
41. Ibid., pp. 104-5.
42. *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. D. Wilson, p. 129.
44. Wilson, *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 135.
45. *The Works of John Knox*, ed., D. Laing, V, 90. This six-volume edition was a favorite of Carlyle in his last years; he kept it within arm’s reach of his writing desk in the attic study, where it can be seen today.
46. Ibid., III, 23.
47. The Calvinist attitude toward election should not be confused with eighteenth-century Methodism, in which the doctrine of salvation by faith was often invoked as an excuse for misconduct.
50. Ibid., III, 196.
51. Ibid., III, 54.
55. Ibid., pp. 252-53.
56. Ibid., I, 100.
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57. Ibid., III, 169.
58. Ibid., II, 449.
59. Ibid., I, 88-89.

60. Andrew MacPhail, Essays in Puritanism, p. 16. For more detailed criticism of the effect Calvinism had upon the culture of Scotland, see two articles by D. H. Fleming in the Scottish Historical Review: "The Influence of Knox," and "The Influence of the Reformation on Social and Cultural Life in Scotland." On the same subject, Edwin Muir remarks significantly: "What did Calvinist Scotland produce? . . . In philosophy, profane poetry, the drama, music, painting, architecture, nothing. Whatever was done in literature . . . came from the opponents of Calvinism or from men out of sympathy with it . . . It frowned on all prose and poetry which was not sacred. For its imaginative literature it was confined more and more to the Old Testament" (Portrait of a Calvinist, pp. 307-8). Carlyle himself points out the barrenness of Scottish culture before Burns and, comparing it to that of Geneva, blames their mutual backwardness on too much "theological ink" (Essays, I, 288).


62. Not so much in Cromwell himself, who distrusted rampant religious enthusiasm, as in those dissenting sects of the era that claimed in their monopoly of "true religion" a right to monopolize political authority: namely, Presbyterians, Fifth Monarchy Men, Diggers, Levellers, doctrinaire Republicans, and so on.


64. Quoted in W. F. Gallaway, "The Conservative Attitude toward Fiction, 1770-1830," pp. 1044, 1047. R. J. Cruickshank, in his study of early Victorian England, believes that in the Sunday sermon, the Puritan permitted himself his only surrogate for the drama and "narrative power" of literature: "Among strict Evangelical and Nonconformist families who regarded the playhouse as being under Satan's management and the novel as a corrupter of the young, the pulpit was in some part a moral substitute for both" (quoted in Nicholas Bentley, The Victorian Scene, 1837-1901, p. 192).


66. Cotton Mather, Manudctio ad Ministerium, pp. 38, 42.

67. Henry Fielding was one of the first novelists to be accused of propounding such an uncritical morality, especially in the creation of heroes like Tom Jones.


70. Ibid., p. 26.


75. Cazamian, who is more aware than most critics of the Puritanism in Carlyle's character, says plainly: "The touching tribute to his father in the
"Reminiscences" is among the essential texts for the understanding of Carlyle" (Carlyle, p. 5).

77. Ibid., p. 39.
78. Espinasse, Literary Recollections, p. 262.
80. G. B. Tennyson reviews the peculiarities and chief sources of Carlyle's style succinctly in his introduction to A Carlyle Reader, pp. xxxi-xxxviii.
81. Reminiscences, I, 26, 55.
82. Ibid., p. 55.
83. Ibid., pp. 23, 25.
84. Ibid., p. 55.
86. Ibid., pp. 12, 62.
87. See Harrold, Carlyle and German Thought, p. 29.
88. Reminiscences, I, 10.
89. This fact invites a comparison with Mill's early circumstances (see Autobiography, chap. 5), and supports the commonly held opinion that Puritanism is but religious Utilitarianism (or vice versa).
90. Allingham, A Diary, p. 247.
91. Reminiscences, I, 17, 19.
92. Ibid., p. 19.
93. Harrold, Carlyle and German Thought, p. 27.
95. Note Books, p. 140.
96. Harrold sees a number of contradictory strains in Carlyle's opinions at this time: "In dealing with this early reflective period . . . it is necessary constantly to bear in mind the very sturdy unmystical aspects of Carlyle's genius. For his work reveals a curious blend of stoicism, Hebraism, Calvinism, and transcendentalism" ("The Mystical Element in Carlyle, 1827-34," p. 484).
97. Note Books, pp. 5, 17. A preliminary view that, it later developed, was perfectly just.
98. Ibid., p. 263.
99. Ibid., pp. 42, 41, 46, 47.
100. Ibid., p. 84.
102. Harrold points to Carlyle's unrest as a sign of his dissatisfaction with transcendental values: "The absence of harmony and joy from his life and writings argues a dissonance in such mysticism as he did profess. . . . He . . . never ceased to show, in the tumult of his prose . . . how little joy and peace . . . he ever attained" ("The Mystical Element in Carlyle," p. 483).
103. Carlyle also restates the Goethean ideal in his first essay on Richter: "The great law of culture is: Let each become all that he was created capable
of being . . . casting off all foreign, especially all noxious adhesions” (Essays, I, 19).

104. Essays, III, 23.


106. Cazamian, Carlyle, p. 91. Elsewhere, he speaks of the perversion of Entsagen per se: Carlyle “colors with Christian asceticism Goethe's favorite precept of renunciation: instead of a sacrifice, he interprets it as a mutilation, an amputation from the spirit of a number of its faculties” (p. 44).

107. John Holloway, The Victorian Sage, p. 57. This is, of course, an archetypal distinction hardly exclusive to Puritanism.


109. See SR, pp. 220–22. In her study The Dandy: From Brummell to Beerbohm, Ellen Moers suggests that the vehicle of the Clothes-Philosophy may have been adopted as a result of Carlyle’s introduction to Bulwer-Lytton’s novels (see chapter 8, “England in 1830 and the Anti-Dandiacals”). See also Carlyle’s journal entry for December 1831, in which he speaks of Bulwer-Lytton as “the mystagogue of the dandiacal body” (Froude, First Forty Years, II, 253). Sterne, Swift, even Shakespeare, nevertheless are more likely antecedents.

110. SR, p. 81. G. Levine, in “‘Sartor Resartus’ and the Balance of Fiction,” has remarked on this state of equilibrium: “Sartor exhibits a tension between a commitment to speculative philosophy and a commitment to unself-conscious work” (p. 136). It displays “his dual impulses (toward self-consciousness . . . self-assertion, for example, as well as work, humility, and self-denial)” (p. 147).

111. SR, p. 81.

112. Or conversely, as Harrold perorates: “His mysticism shines like a golden gleam through the darker texture of his Calvinism” (“The Mystical Element in Carlyle,” p. 475).


115. It is a curious feature of Carlyle's temperament, and perhaps a further proof of his Puritan morbidity, that he was apparently most deeply stirred by the emotions of guilt and remorse.


118. Ibid., pp. 5–6.

119. Ibid., p. 10.

120. Ibid., p. 9.

121. Ibid., p. 7.

122. Ibid., pp. 6, 65.

123. Ibid., p. 15.

124. Masson, Carlyle Personally and in His Writings, pp. 88–90.

125. See also his paean to Knox in an article on Scott in 1838 (Essays, IV, 42–44) and “Baillie the Covenanter,” a review printed in 1841 (Essays, IV, 226–60).

127. Though perhaps at the time it was a necessary overcompensation for the partisan studies it superseded.


130. *Cromwell*, I, 78. It is a sure mark of the extent of Carlyle’s ambivalence that, despite his Puritan mood, he holds on to the word “Poet” as a synonym for the worthiest kind of man.


132. Ibid., p. 156.

133. Ibid., p. 159.

134. Ibid., pp. 87–88.

135. Ibid., p. 75. Albert Potter, who died at 94, just after World War II, also told of how Carlyle listened at the porch of a Methodist church near his Chelsea home and was heard to comment, “They talk sense, these Methodists” (anecdote reported to me by Harold Brooks, 21 July 1969).

136. Ibid., p. 82.

137. Ibid., p. 69.