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Michael Goldberg

"Demigods and Philistines":  
Macaulay and Carlyle—A Study in Contrasts



During their lives, and at the end of the century when both were dead, the names of the Whig historian Thomas Babington Macaulay, and Thomas Carlyle, the radical chronicler of revolutions, invited comparison. The comparison was perhaps inevitable for both writers traversed much of the same literary and historical ground and their styles were as antithetical as their opinions. Both wrote on the English Civil War and Cromwell, on Boswell and Johnson, Frederick the Great, and more or less extensively on Luther, Napoleon, Pitt, Mirabeau, the Fourth Estate, the Utilitarians, and Ireland. They were the "two greatest writers of history in nineteenth century England," and that, it has been said, "is all they had in common."<sup>1</sup>

There is no little irony in the persistent conjunction of their names by later critics, for throughout their lives they were animated by mutual antipathy. It is "no wonder," Carlyle wrote of Macaulay, that "he and I are mutually abhorrent," his "notions differ from mine as ice from fire."<sup>2</sup> Carlyle's initial view of Macaulay was quickly formed in 1832 and never subsequently modified. A "short squat thickset man of vulgar but resolute en-

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<sup>1</sup>A.J.P. Taylor, *Englishmen and Others* (London, 1956), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>*The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle* (Durham, N.C., 1985), 12, 207, 216.

ergetic appearance... I likened him, in my own mind, to a managing Iron-master...with vigorous talent for that or some such business ... with little look of talent for anything higher."<sup>3</sup>

Macaulay remained in Carlyle's view a "forcible person" but one who, lacking vision, would "neither see nor do any great thing, but be a poor Holland House unbeliever, with spectacles instead of eyes, to the end of him."<sup>4</sup>

Though they did not seek each other's company they were inevitably drawn together in society from time to time. In 1851 as guests of Lady Ashburton, Carlyle found Macaulay "a real acquisition while he lasted" and praised his "truly wonderful historical memory." For the rest he found Macaulay lacked originality or any kind of "superior merit" save "neatness of expression" and was "definable as the sublime of commonplace."<sup>5</sup>

Earlier that same year they had met at Malvern. "Carlyle is here undergoing the water cure," wrote Macaulay. "I have not seen him. But his doctor said...the other day, 'you wonder at his eccentric opinions, and style. It is all stomach. I shall set him to rights. He will go away quite a different person.' If he goes away writing common sense in good English, I shall declare myself a convert to hydropathy. At present I believe that Doctor and patient are quacks alike."<sup>6</sup>

Carlylese was clearly one source of offense to Macaulay. "As to Carlyle, Carlisle, or whatever his name may be," he wrote in 1832, in reference to "Characteristics," "he might as well write in Irving's unknown tongue at once."<sup>7</sup> Popular taste for Carlyle, Macaulay decided, was due to immaturity. "There is an age at which we are disposed to think that whatever is odd and extravagant is great," and "to be taken in by such essayists as Carlyle, such orators as Irving, such painters as Fuseli."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>*Two Note Books of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (New York, 1898), pp. 276-7. Henceforth *TN* in the text.

<sup>4</sup>James Anthony Froude *Thomas Carlyle. A History of his life in London* (London, 1884) 1, 192. *TN*, p. 231.

<sup>5</sup>*New Letters of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. Alexander Carlyle (London, 1904) 2, 120.

<sup>6</sup>*Letters of Thomas Babington Macaulay*, ed. Thomas Pinney (Cambridge, 1981), 5, 182.

<sup>7</sup>*Letters*, 2, 113.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 5, 194.

Time did little to improve their understanding of each other; rather it exacerbated their differences. "At the Athenaeum I read Carlyle's trash— Latter day something or other," Macaulay noted in 1850. "Beneath criticism," he snorted, and to his journal for April 2, 1850 he confided that he found Carlyle "an empty headed bombastic dunce."<sup>9</sup> As for Carlyle's *Fredrick the Great*, Macaulay judged the philosophy "nonsense and the style gibberish."<sup>10</sup>

What appeals most strongly in a comparative study of the two Victorians is the way they took turns contemplating the same subjects, usually from opposite directions. For instance, to Carlyle, hero-worship was a profound social and religious truth; to Macaulay it was a sure sign of weakness of intellect. Macaulay saw the Victorian era as a bourgeois "golden age," England having become "the richest and the most highly civilised spot in the world," and he could see no end to its growing prosperity and Empire.<sup>11</sup> To Carlyle Victorian society was teetering on the brink of extinction in desperate need of new birth if it was to avoid being flung over Niagara into total anarchy. To Macaulay, England's history was "emphatically the history of progress" (2, 223). To Carlyle the golden age lay in the past and hope for future improvement lay not in the assurance of steady progress but in radical change and palingenetic renewal. Both writers were dogmatic, though the dogmas they asserted were different and their form of expression diametrically opposed. Macaulay's stately commonplaces, epigrammatic summaries, and periodically balanced sentences look back to the stylistic conventions of the Augustans, while Carlyle's revolutionary prose, clotted with neologisms, Germanic locutions and oracular pronouncements was iconoclastic and self-consciously revolutionary, and looks forward to some linguistic features of modernism. Macaulay was an unstoppable talker, the taciturn Carlyle advocated the virtues of silence "in thirty volumes" of dense prose.<sup>12</sup>

These are some of the broad features which separate them. Within such larger disagreements, they found many smaller areas of accord and were often in partial agreement even when they differed in general. Thus Carlyle's pessimistic view of modern times could accommodate something

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<sup>9</sup>*Journal*, 2, 280.

<sup>10</sup>Cited by John D. Rosenberg *Carlyle and the Burden of History* (Oxford, 1985), p. 117.

<sup>11</sup>Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays* (London, 1889), 1, 260, 266. All further references are given in the text.

<sup>12</sup>*Works of Lord Morley* (London, 1921), 6, 181.

of Macaulay's optimism for material progress. His English John Bull, as the author of an unsung epic of "sea-moles, cotton-trades, railways, fleets and cities," who had conquered "the largest Empire the Sun ever saw,"<sup>13</sup> embodied the very elements Macaulay found to praise in Victorian progress. In fact, Macaulay himself with "more force and emphasis" than any other of Carlyle's contemporaries was a Carlylean John Bull in character, to whom had been superadded "a university education and a flair for oratory."<sup>14</sup>

However, a spirit of utility, which Carlyle rejected, underlay Macaulay's optimism. He was a confirmed pragmatist to whom the "object of knowledge" was not "theory, but application." For him the aim of research and study was to diminish pain, augment comfort, ameliorate the condition of man. The "labours of the laboratory and the cabinet" received their "sanction and value only through the use made of them by workshops and mills."<sup>15</sup> One has only to recall Carlyle's denunciation of the mechanical nature of the age in *Signs of the Times*, and the ironic sighs his one-time disciple Matthew Arnold breathed over the ineradicable practicality of the English mind and its failure to acquire the virtues of critical disinterestedness, to recognize the philosophical gulf which separated the two thinkers.

They stand on either side of an imaginary spectrum reflecting Victorian intellectual life. To "reach the English intellect" of that period, wrote Taine, the French voyager must make two journeys. The first leads him to Macaulay, who belongs in a classical and Latin category, the second to Carlyle, who belongs in a Romantic and German one.<sup>16</sup>

Subtle differences in response are perhaps most clearly brought out in a brief survey of some of the subjects they both tackled. Both reviewed John Croker's new edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, Macaulay in 1831 and Carlyle in 1832. Both later wrote biographical accounts of Johnson, Macaulay in 1856 and Carlyle in his lecture in 1840 which formed the penultimate section of *On Heroes and Hero Worship*.

Both reviewers found flaws in Croker's edition. Macaulay, whose criticisms are more extensive and more punitive, assailed Croker's "scandalous inaccuracy" and "monstrous blunders." He also attacked Cro-

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<sup>13</sup>*Past and Present*, Bk. 3, Ch. 5, p. 138.

<sup>14</sup>Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (New Haven, 1957), p. 197.

<sup>15</sup>H. A. Taine, *History of English Literature* (London, 1906), p. 230.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 284, 308-9.

ker's "unintelligible prudery" in deciding to omit passages considered indecorous (1, 383). When Carlyle traversed the same ground he made visible efforts to praise, where possible, Croker's "diligence, fidelity and decency." Where Macaulay had found in Croker's classical references "a rich abundance of the strangest errors," (1, 377) Carlyle happily noted that any "little Latin or even Greek phrase is rendered into English, in general with perfect accuracy."<sup>17</sup>

On the subject of Johnson both were aware of his limitations but saw them differently. The judgments "which Johnson passed on books were," says Macaulay, "in his own time, regarded with superstitious veneration, and, in our time, are generally treated with indiscriminate contempt." They are, he decided, "the judgments of a strong but enslaved understanding," a mind hedged in with prejudices and superstition (1, 409). To Carlyle, Johnson was hedged in not by superstition but the cramped philosophy of his time. Few men "have seen more clearly into the motives, the interests...of the living busy world as it lay before him; but farther than this busy, and...rather prosaic world, he seldom looked." As a result his "instruction is for men of business...Prudence is the highest Virtue he can inculcate; and for that portion of our nature...where our highest feelings, our best joys and keenest sorrows, our Doubt, our Love, our Religion reside, he has no word to utter...or at most, if like poor Boswell, the patient is importunate, will answer: 'My dear Sir, endeavour to clear your mind of Cant'" (CME, 1, 186).

Macaulay found Johnson something of a religious bigot, while Carlyle praised his devotion and his steadfast adherence to the established religious formulae to which he clung in an age of skepticism and disbelief.

The estimate of Johnson's *Life* led both writers inevitably to a consideration of its author, and nothing illustrates more clearly the relationship of the two thinkers to each other than their response to Boswell. To both Macaulay and Carlyle the phenomenon of Boswell lay in the contrast between the brilliance of the writer and the wretchedness of the man. While Boswell's "Life of Johnson is assuredly a great, a very great work," wrote Macaulay, Boswell was "one of the smallest men that ever lived." Many persons, he conceded, who have "conducted themselves foolishly in active life ... have left us valuable works," but these men "attained literary eminence in spite of their weaknesses. Boswell attained it by reason of his weakness. If he had not been a great fool, he would never have been a great writer." (1, 388-9) The logic of Macaulay's argument is obviously

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<sup>17</sup>*Critical & Miscellaneous Essays* (London, 1869) 4, 69. All further references as CME in the text.

strained, and Frederick Harrison was surely right to condemn it for "tearing a paradox to tatters."<sup>18</sup>

Carlyle also acknowledged Boswell's blemishes of character but he looked deeper into their nature than Macaulay and interpreted them in an entirely different light. While he agreed with Macaulay that Boswell was "by nature and habit, vain; a sycophant-coxcomb," he questioned whether vanity was sufficient motive to account for his attachment to Johnson. When Johnson was "a poor rusty-coated scholar...were there not chancellors and prime ministers enough; graceful gentlemen, the glass of fashion; honour-giving noblemen; dinner-giving rich men...any one of whom bulked much larger in the world's eye than Johnson ever did?" (*CME*, 4, 76) Boswell's discipleship of Johnson might seem to the world nothing more than "mean Spanielship," but Carlyle saw him as a "practical witness, or real martyr" to the everlasting truth of hero-worship. The "foolish Laird" was a strong illustration of Carlyle's thesis that hero-worship was a deep and enduring emotional need and the cornerstone of religious and social life. Macaulay, by way of contrast, rejected it as a sign of mental feebleness, there being, he said, "no more certain indication of a weak and ill-regulated intellect than that propensity which...we will venture to christen Boswellism" (1, 60). What is hero-worship to Carlyle is parasitism to Macaulay. For him, Boswell's mind "resembled those creepers which the botanists call parasites, and which can subsist only by clinging round the stems and imbibing the juices of stronger plants. He must have fastened himself on somebody. He might have fastened himself on Wilkes, and have become the fiercest patriot in the Bill of Rights Society. He might have fastened himself on Whitfield, and have become the loudest field preacher among the Calvinistic Methodists. In a happy hour he fastened himself on Johnson" (2, 89). To Macaulay the process which led Boswell to Johnson was merely the fulfillment of the irresistible urge of the parasite for a host. Boswell must gain no credit for actually choosing to attach himself to a poor "pedant in a rusty coat" as Carlyle calls him.

On the whole Macaulay's explanation of the phenomenon turns out to be no explanation at all. To say that Boswell produced a great book because he was a great fool is to place witticism before analysis. Carlyle's attitude toward Boswell is certainly more generous; it is also more serious in its attempt to get to the underlying causes of Boswell's literary power. In his review of Croker's edition of the *Life*, which appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* the year following Macaulay's piece in the *Edinburgh Review*, Carlyle may be seen to be making a specific rebuttal of what he saw as the weakness of Macaulay's position. He questions the strange and false hypothesis

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<sup>18</sup>Frederic Harrison, *Studies in Early Victorian Literature* (London, 1895), p. 80.

that it was "in virtue" of Boswell's "bad qualities that he did his good work ... Boswell wrote a good Book because he had a heart and an eye to discern Wisdom, and an utterance to render it forth; because of his free insight, his lively talent, above all, of his Love and...Open-mindedness. His sneaking sycophancies, his greediness and forwardness, whatever was bestial and earthy in him, are so many blemishes in his Book...wholly hindrances, not helps" (*CME*, 4, 79-80). Carlyle's response more than a decade later in *Heroes and Hero-Worship* was unchanged and his references to Boswell's relationship to Johnson read like a gloss on Macaulay offering corrections on almost every point.

Just as Carlyle tried to repair Boswell's damaged reputation, in his lecture on May 22, 1840, he made even greater efforts on behalf of Cromwell who, alone among the anti-Royalists of the Civil War, seemed "to hang yet on the gibbet" of popular infamy and to find no "hearty apologist anywhere."<sup>19</sup>

Carlyle claimed to be "among the first to pronounce" Cromwell "not a knave and liar, but a genuinely honest man!" (*HHW*, 217) It was probably the first time since Milton that a voice of undisputed literary genius had been heard in support of the Puritans, for the simple truth is that the history of the civil war was written best by Cromwell's enemies. Though the Puritans were, in Macaulay's succinct phrase, "the conquerors, their enemies were the painters" (1, 31).

For Carlyle it was the eighteenth-century which had done most to enshrine the view of Cromwell as a falsity, hated alike by the Tories of the period because he overthrew the king, and by the Whigs because he overthrew Parliament. Popular historians of that century followed the Royalist party line, whether the fabrications of James Heath's *Flagellum* (1663) or the Earl of Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion* (1702). This hostile view of Cromwell persisted well into the nineteenth century. As late as 1839, the year before Carlyle's lecture, John Forster asserted it to be "indisputably true" that Cromwell had "lived a hypocrite and died a traitor." After reading Carlyle's edition of *Cromwell's Letters* six years later, Forster acknowledged that "Cromwell was as far removed on the one hand from fanaticism as on the other from hypocrisy." Only "an author of genius," as Maurice Ashley remarks of Carlyle, "could have succeeded in disturbing" so broadly based and tirelessly repeated a verdict as that reflected in Forster's earlier statement.<sup>20</sup> But Carlyle's own view of

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<sup>19</sup>*On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, (London, 1890), pp. 191-2. Hereafter *HHW* in text.

<sup>20</sup>Maurice Ashley, *The Greatness of Oliver Cromwell* (London, 1969), p. 14.



Cromwell had changed as dramatically as Forster's. In March 1822, while he was reading Clarendon's history with some thoughts of writing his own account of the civil war, he shared entirely the estimates of the earlier writer. Charles, he thought, was "a very good man, though weakish and ill-brought up," while Cromwell and his Puritans looked "like a pack of fanatical knaves...a compound of religious enthusiasm and of barbarous selfishness" (*TN*, 17).

Somewhere between 1822 and 1840 he completely reversed this estimate and directed his energies to counteracting the "fanatic" theory. There is no direct evidence of what caused this change, but it is significant that Macaulay anticipated Carlyle's later judgement by twenty years. In his 1825 essay on Milton, which Carlyle admired more than anything Macaulay wrote, and in his review of Hallam's *Constitutional History* (1822), Macaulay strove to rectify the bias in historical reports of Cromwell, though "every device" had been used "to blacken" his reputation (1, 184-5).

Since most nineteenth-century readers derived their view of the civil war from Hume, Macaulay's defense of Cromwell led him to attack the earlier historian who had "pleaded the cause of tyranny with the dexterity of an advocate while affecting the impartiality of a judge" (1, 31). Carlyle similarly attacked Hume as one of the principal exponents of the "Fanatic-Hypocrite" theory which he sought to contradict particularly in his second and sixth lectures on *Heroes*.<sup>21</sup>

In his 1840 Cromwell lecture, Carlyle was breaking new ground though his position was not perhaps as novel as he claimed. However, although Macaulay preceded Carlyle in his defense of Cromwell, his view of the great Puritan lacked, as Carlyle claimed, a necessary passion. Though Macaulay was bred in an evangelical circle which more than any other resembled that of the Puritans, according to Bagehot, he shows an "utter want of sympathy with the Puritan disposition." Bagehot contrasts the estimates of Cromwell by Macaulay and Carlyle to reveal "the enormous discrepancy" between their two views. Macaulay's lack of an "anxious or passionate religious nature" explains his failure to prize

the essential excellences of the Puritan character. He is defective in the one point in which they were very great; he is eminent in the very point in which they were most defective. A spirit of easy cheerfulness pervades his writings, a pleasant geniality overflows his history: the rigid asceticism, the pain for pain's sake of the Puritan is altogether alien to him. Retribution he would deny; sin is

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<sup>21</sup>Lytton Strachey later praised what Carlyle condemned, finding in Hume's "measured cynicism" a "corrective to the O, altitudo! sentimentalities of Carlyle." see Lytton Strachey, *Portraits in Miniature* (London, 1931), p. 149.

hardly a part of his creed. His religion is one of thanksgiving. His notion of philosophy—it would be a better notion of his writing—is *illustrans commoda vitae*.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps nothing more clearly points up the difference in their notions of historiography than the opening of Macaulay's *History* which begins with a flourish to historical progress.

Unless I greatly deceive myself, the general effect of this chequered narrative will be to excite thankfulness in all religious minds, and hope in the breasts of all patriots. For the history of our country during the last hundred and sixty years is eminently the history of physical, of moral, and of intellectual improvement. Those who compare the age on which their lot has fallen with a golden age which exists only in their imagination may talk of degeneracy and decay: but no man who is correctly informed as to the past will be disposed to take a morose or desponding view of the present (2-3).

Macaulay's *History* was published in 1848, the very year which seemed to Carlyle one of "endless calamity, disruption, dislocation."<sup>23</sup> As Carlyle brooded over the revolutions sweeping Europe, 1848 presented to his mind "one of the most singular, disastrous, amazing, and, on the whole humiliating years the European world ever saw. Not since the irruption of the Northern Barbarians has there been the like. Everywhere immeasurable Democracy rose monstrous, loud, blatant, inarticulate as the voice of Chaos" (*LDP*, 9).

Aside from the pessimism-optimism contrast, Carlyle deviated from at least two further strands of Macaulay's conception of history. He spurned the idea of "progress of the species," the evolutionary notions with which Macaulay began his *History*. For Carlyle, "all this that we hear, for the last generation or two, about Improvement of the Age, the Spirit of the Age, Destruction of Prejudice, Progress of the Species, and the March of Intellect," was no more than an "unhealthy state of self-sentience, self-survey, the precursor and prognostic of still worse health" (*CME*, 4, 16). Indeed, he declared "Progress of the species is a thing I can get no good of at all."<sup>24</sup> He also resisted Macaulay's emphasis that placed more stress on the *topoi* of time and place than on the individual. In rejecting materialis-

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<sup>22</sup>Walter Bagehot, *Literary Studies* (London, 1879), p. 239.

<sup>23</sup>*Carlyle's Latter-Day Pamphlets*, ed. M. K. Goldberg & J. P. Seigel (CFH, 1983), p. 5. Hereafter *LDP* in text.

<sup>24</sup>*The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, ed. Joseph Slater (New York, 1964), p. 165.

tic theories of history he stressed the importance of the individual, though he was not blind to the fact that the hero was restricted by the forces around him. The Carlylean hero does not create history exclusively out of Titanic will, he responds to the monitions and the forces alive in his world. The "Reformation simply could not help coming," and would have come without Luther (*HHW*, 125). But Luther was its voice and its instrument. Before a prophet such as Muhammad could arise "many men must have begun dimly to doubt" the value of old forms of worship (113). What the hero says, "all men were not far from saying" (19). He sums up and completes a general will and impulse, and his actions authenticate a commonly held sentiment. In *On Heroes*, Carlyle may not have had Macaulay specifically in mind, but he addressed Macaulay's general attitude in denouncing those critics who would explain history by theories about "force of circumstances, the creature of the time, balancing of motives, and who knows what melancholy stuff to the like purport." He preferred to believe that "man is heaven-born, not the thrall of Circumstances, of Necessity, but the victorious subduer thereof" (*CME*, 4, 92).

In writing history both discerned the need to merge the pleasure of reading fiction with the satisfaction of knowing fact. For Macaulay the "perfect historian," by his selection and arrangement of authenticated facts, provided "those attractions which have been usurped by fiction" (1, 103). Seeking a precedent for livelier forms of historical writing, Macaulay turned to Sir Walter Scott who "used those fragments of truth which historians have scornfully thrown behind them." He has "constructed out of their gleanings works which, even considered as histories, are scarcely less valuable than theirs," (1, 104) and a "truly great historian would reclaim those materials which the novelist has appropriated." Carlyle similarly found that Scott's historical fictions "resuscitated" the past "not as a dead tradition, but as a palpable presence" (*CME*, 6, 46). Scott pointed away from Dryasdust, mummified accounts of the historical past, and Carlyle in crediting him with "major innovations in historiography" suggests how fluid were the "boundaries between history and fiction."<sup>25</sup> Despite reservations about Scott's failure as a prophet, Carlyle acknowledged that his historical novels had "taught all men this truth, which ... was as good as unknown to writers of history ... till so taught: that the bygone ages of the world were actually filled by living men, not by protocols, state-papers, controversies and abstractions of men." History, he decided, would "henceforth have to take thought" of Scott's example (*CME*, 6, 71-2).

Despite the messages they wished to deliver to their contemporaries, later criticism has often focused less on what they said than on how they

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<sup>25</sup>Rosenberg, p. 34.

said it. Macaulay and Carlyle are both held to have owed their ascendancy to their styles. Even though in this they shared the qualities of vigor and emphasis, nothing separates them more. Macaulay's style implies an audience who can be urged or hurried into agreement by reasonable arguments, strenuously advanced, and reinforced by facts. As Strachey puts it, "the hard points are driven home like nails with unfailing dexterity; it is useless to hope for subtlety or refinement; one cannot hammer with delicacy" (175). Macaulay's knockdown energy aims at an imagined audience which resembles a Parliamentary or Debating society. His diction "is of flawless lucidity, slightly touched with an amplitude which reminds us that the speaker was born in the eighteenth century, when 'every point of senatorial deliberation was duly observed.'"<sup>26</sup> If his thinking was unoriginal, and his genius lay essentially "in making strikingly obvious the obviously striking," he had an "unequalled capacity for organisation and clarity. His role, as he himself fully recognized, was not critical or innovative but didactic and expository."<sup>27</sup>

Carlyle's manner is bantering and mocking, he assails dullness, exhorts his audience and attempts to startle it into new awareness by suddenly revealed insights and surprising juxtapositions. He "ends a dithyramb with a caricature: he bespatters magnificence with eccentric and coarse language: he couples poetry with puns."<sup>28</sup> His imagined audience is a group of lost souls needing to be aroused from error by prophetic inspiration or whipped out of folly by satiric scorn. Both writers hector and bully, but Macaulay seeks to coerce, Carlyle to convert. Macaulay expects to convince by the weight and effectiveness of argument, Carlyle to stir up the hearts and minds of his readers.

Macaulay's models are the great classical orators and more recent heroes like the elder Pitt. His prose wears the careful polish of traditional oratory. Carlyle's prose has a roughened surface. His models are the great handicapped prophets from Moses to Cromwell. Caroline Fox's description of him as a lecturer in 1840, as one "convinced of what he utters, and who had much—very much in him that was quite unutterable,"<sup>29</sup> closely resembles the portrait Carlyle himself drew of Cromwell in *Heroes*,

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<sup>26</sup>G. M. Young, *Victorian Essays* (London, 1962), p. 39.

<sup>27</sup>Francis Thompson, *Prose Works* (London, 1913), p. 223; Jane Millgate, *Macaulay* (London, 1973), p. 193.

<sup>28</sup>Taine, p. 290.

<sup>29</sup>Caroline Fox, *Memories of Old Friends*, ed. Horace Pym (London, 1883), p. 120.

the poor "dumb prophet" struggling "to utter himself, with his savage depth, with his wild sincerity" who speaks through an outer hull of confusion, nervous dreams and semi-madness," yet shows a "clear determinate...energy working in the heart" of him (*HHW*, 200). Cromwell's speeches are difficult to read, but that for Carlyle is their merit, their guarantee of authenticity. "Practical heroes...do not speak in blank verse...Useless to look here for a Greek Temple with its porticoes, entablatures and styles." One finds rather the "Alp Mountain, with its chasms and cataracts and shaggy pine forests,"<sup>30</sup> just as Carlyle had earlier found in Luther's "rugged, broken" speech "something like the sound of Alpine avalanches" (*CME*, 3,62).

Such images glance backward most immediately to the Romantic crags and chasms of The Prelude and Gray's Alpine torrents and cliffs "pregnant with religion and poetry."<sup>31</sup> Through such images Carlyle formulates an aesthetic doctrine that shuns facility as much as classical grace. In such a doctrine the central criteria are roughness, organic form and veracity not conventional polish, fluency or grace.

Like Carlyle himself, the Carlylean hero finds it difficult to speak his mind. His message is revelatory and, therefore, there can be nothing rehearsed about it, the speaker being as much astounded by his message as his auditors. Because of its nature the message can have none of the reassuring familiarity of proverbial or generalized wisdom "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." Such a definition of language, of course, excludes self-conscious oratory, the elegant formulation and the bon mot. Carlyle's theory of language as an organic outgrowth of the thinking mind, rather than a decorative embellishment of ideas already formed, requires him to reject the possibility that "a style can be put off or on" like a coat.<sup>32</sup>

Carlyle's style was a deliberate revolutionary fabrication, for nothing was "more calculated to break the smooth classical reign than this Gothic and Gaelic confection." He fully realized that his style was sounding "a blast against the strongholds of decorum." But as he wrote to Sterling, "do you reckon this really a time for Purism of Style." He saw the whole

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<sup>30</sup>Oliver Cromwell's Letter & Speeches (London, 1890), 4, 80-81.

<sup>31</sup>Correspondence of Thomas Gray, ed. Paget Toynbee (Oxford, 1935), p. 128.

<sup>32</sup>James Anthony Froude, *Thomas Carlyle. A History of his Life in London* (London, 1884), I, 42.

"structure of our Johnsonian English" breaking up "revolution there as visible as anywhere else!"<sup>33</sup>

Those still attached to entrenched values were quick to see the point, and equally to reject it. To Thackeray, like Macaulay, Carlyle's prose was an affront "to admirers of Addisonian English, to those who love history as it gracefully runs in Hume, or struts pompously in Gibbon."<sup>34</sup> Indeed Macaulay's objections to Carlyle's oddities of style and his departure from eighteenth-century stylistic norms have persisted in Carlyle criticism ever since. On the other hand, Carlyle's view of Macaulay as a talented mediocrity has equally imposed itself on subsequent criticism. By the 1890's, when both men were dead, Frederic Harrison estimated that they spoke to a different posterity. Macaulay had become a great popular author while Carlyle was cherished by "the critics and the philosophers" (67).

Some of what divided them in life, critics have imaginatively conjectured, might persist beyond the grave. On the top of Olympus, said Francis Thompson, Macaulay would have "wielded middle-class majesties, and ordered his thunderbolts from Whitworth's," while pointing out how much things had improved since the days when "the gods were unbreeched savages, content with a monotonous diet of ambrosia, and drinking doubtful nectar in place of Madiera." If he is "not an authentic god, he is at least a demigod, the most brilliant of Philistines...."<sup>35</sup> Some twenty years later Lytton Strachey agreed that Macaulay "the Philistine was also an artist," and imagined him "squat, square and perpetually talking—on Parnassus."<sup>36</sup> What comparable image can one find for his rival, who was also something of a Philistine, and yet not unworthy of a place on Parnassus? Perhaps, recalling Taine's Classical-Teutonic antithesis for the two historians, Carlyle would have preferred to sit out his afterlife in the doom-laden halls of Asgard listening to the raucous shouts and laughter of his heroic Norsemen.

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<sup>33</sup>V. S. Pritchett, *Books in General* (London, 1953), pp. 65-6; George H. Ford, *Dickens and his Readers. Aspects of Novel Criticism since 1863* (New York, 1965), p. 113; *Letters of Thomas Carlyle to John Stuart Mill, John Sterling and Robert Browning*, ed. Alexander Carlyle (London, 1924), p. 192.

<sup>34</sup>*The Times*, April 3, 1837.

<sup>35</sup>*The Works of Francis Thompson* (London, 1913), 3: 223-4 and 230.

<sup>36</sup>Lytton Strachey, *Portraits in Miniature* (London, 1931), p. 180.