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Ian Campbell

Peter Lithgow: New Fiction by Thomas Carlyle

There is a moment when the present-day A701 road from Edinburgh South to Ecclefechan crosses the high watershed between the rivers Tweed, Annan and Clyde, makes a short level dash across high moors, then drops precipitously towards Moffat and the more distant Annandale, Lockerbie, Ecclefechan, the English border, Carlisle. To the left, as the drop begins, is an extraordinary natural hole carved in the hillside, dark, brooding, dangerous to travelers in mist and fog before the modern road: the Devil's Beeftub. Into it, legend has it, stolen cattle were driven to their deaths on murky nights. Today, it is a place to pause and consider the countryside ahead, the distant view of Annandale and of England beyond. In the early nineteenth century it must have been with relief that the walker (or carter) reached the end of the long days of effort from Edinburgh, and contemplated an easier journey ahead once the steep sides of the Beeftub (for then there was no easy road) had been negotiated.

The recently-discovered *Peter Lithgow*, acquired by the National Library of Scotland in 1995 and reproduced by the permission of the Trustees,¹ is Carlyle's obvious recalling of this moment of emotion when in 1830,² in his impe-

¹Thanks are due to the Trustees of the National Library, and to Drs. Ian Cunningham and Iain Brown for their assistance. The manuscript is 9pp. folio, and is catalogued as Accession 11254.

²The fragment is dated from the draft on the verso of one page of Carlyle's introduction to Jean-Paul's review of Mme de Staël's *Allemagne*, published in *Fraser's Magazine*, February

curious Craigenputtoch years, he sat down to try his hand again at fiction, to draw on memories of his student days and his long walks to and from home, and see if he could perhaps make something better than the abandoned *Wotton Reinfred* or *Illudo Chartis* or even *Cruthers and Jonson* which was to find its way into print in his lifetime. It was a time when *Sartor* was taking shape, and Carlyle was to learn there to handle autobiographical experience skillfully by interposing the narrator, the double interposition of Teufelsdröckh and editor re-arranging the paper bags of scribblings; while later claiming that *Sartor* as more “symbolical myth” than autobiography,³ Carlyle ensured that the early story of Teufelsdröckh and Blumine had urgency and authenticity by drawing obviously and heavily on his own unhappy affair with Margaret Gordon in Kirkcaldy. Likewise *Peter Lithgow* gains its undoubted authenticity by drawing on a number of identifiable parts of Carlyle’s early life.

It is a strange feeling that will now and the come over the traveller when, turning some hill in his desert road, he sees lying far below, enbosomed among its groves and green natural bulwarks and all diminished to a toy-box, the fair Town, where so many busy souls, as it were, seen and yet unseen, are driving their multifarious traffic. Its steeple is then truly a starward-pointing finger: the canopy of blue smoke seems to him like a sort of life-breath; for he thinks how for a thousand years some glow of material Fire, kept alive from day to day from hearth to hearth, has not gone out in that little circuit, and of immaterial Fire no less, as generation after generation ‘has seized and transmitted like the Lamp of Life’ so that this little Dwelling-place of men attains for itself a separate existence and we count it as an individual thing, yet fancy lending it a sort of feeling and almost personality and we love it in its remote contractedness and wish it well. The place indeed is but a congeries of stones and mortar; it is *we*, our manner of conceiving, that make it *one*, and weave the disconnected incidents it has passively witnessed into a continuous Romance of History for it.

How much livelier more intimately present are such thoughts, if the place has been or must be to us the gazers on it an arena of joyous or mournful experiences; if we have longed and lived in that little spot, if our Loving ones still dwell there, or our Buried rest there, and the natural hues and shadows of the scene are deepened a thousand-fold by the many-coloured, spiritual hues of memory or hope!

Some such feelings might be Peter Lithgow’s, as he checked his horse, or rather garron, on the shoulder of Pendrake Fell, where the brave borough of Drumbrash first meets the sight as you journey from Edinburgh, not by the mail, but by the moorland road. Peter, as we said, checked his garron, a flame-coloured nag, seemingly of Irish birth and nurture, who paused nothing loth, as Peter with earnest eye looked down over the prospect. It was a grand June morning, some

1830. The manuscript of the final version is not traced, but this draft is close to it. Carlyle’s self-disgust is expressed in his apostrophe half-way through but the manuscript, though resumed, breaks off in mid-sentence and the page is unfinished.

³*Two Reminiscences of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. J. Clubbe (Durham, NC, 1974), p. 49.

half-hour after sunrise; Day stood flaming on the mountain-tops, calling to the Earth, once more arise be busy, be happy; but as yet only the heath and heath-fowl and a few inferior creatures had begun to hear his voice; of the children of men, all lay deaf, wrapped in thick of sleep, from hut or hall no smoke ascended. Is there any many alas there are many) that has never heard sphere-music of this Universe, let him climb the nearest mountain, alone, after prayer, at sunrise, and listen thro' that deep gorgeous summer solitude; if he hear it not, no tone of it, no faintest echo, let him return weeping, that he is indeed without an ear for this sphere music, and till the fleshly coil be unrolled from him his soul's sense must even let the narrow bone-and-cleaver melody of this manufactured week-day existence suffice him.

Peter had an outward and an inner ear for all concord of sweet sounds; a heart wherein, as in some clear still well all heavenly appearance were softly mirrored back. And had it not been so, this borough of Drumbrash was his birthplace, and he had not seen it for twenty years!

"There thou liest, said he, still shone on by the sun, still visited by the skyey Painless Summer! Silent clear art thou as a Flemish picture; No kettle yet hisses on thy hearth, thy many-voiced clerks and traffickers writers are mute, the new light faintly struggling thro' rests idle on their desks and inkstands: no Sin or Sorrow is yet awake, for men are still sleeping. That they cannot always sleep then mightest though remain in very deed a picture, little birth-town! But the malady of Life is in thee, thou art even as a whited wall; fair to look on from without, inwardly full of deceit and contradiction, longing with disappointment, envying, uncharitableness. Drumbrash Drumbrash, or rather, O Earth Earth, how I love thee and how I hate thee!"—Peter spurred his garron which again set forth at a shambling trot.

Peter had business of moment in Drumbrash that day, he had been appointed thither from a far country; and looked forward to the issue with an interest to which his heart, time-worn and grief-worn, had for many years been a stranger. "What is it that thou hidest from me," said he; "thou scurvy little spot? It is as if I could carry thee about on my head like an Italian Hawker, so tiny seemest thou, yet to me thou are a very Urn of Destiny, and there may lie within thee wherewith to gladden or sadden all my remaining days. Give a prize though ware little urn! And yet I know thou wilt not; for to me thou has none to give".

Could we paint out Peter, as he was and seemed at this moment, plodding forward on his Irish garron, at the rate of five miles an hour, it is certain there are few courteous readers but would take an interest in him. A long, spare, sinewy man, of an adust, tough, vehement, half-grim, half-loving aspect, in neat, yet coarse if not mean equipment, at the first glance you all but overlooked him, at the second you knew not in the least what to make of such a figure. For Peter's face irregularly shaded with thick locks of grizzled auburn, had once been rather handsome; not tanned in many climates and furrowed perhaps with many cares he still looked fearlessly and even cheerfully abroad, less in scorn than in pity: his large thin nose was arched into a form of real mildness, the lips lay gently yet perfectly compressed, and in those fine grey eyes dwelt a lambent fire full of love and quick clear understanding. All this bespoke a man of culture, an intellectual, and polished man. And then what to make of his apparel, that cream-coloured large-brimmed hat, those antique drab vestments, and the stout leathern belt that girt

him? No less strange a multangular beast with little flesh, but that little hard as oak, with untrimmed fetlocks, tail that had acknowledged no scissors but the scissors of Tear-and-wear. There was a saddle of the strongest leather, but made in no civilized district, for it was shod on a exposed places with clear brass, and a broad deep expanse of saddle-bags (*horresco referens*) hung behind and before, in which as in those of Sir Hudibras, it might be the strangest ingredients lay concealed. In short both horse and man seemed accoutred for rough service, and with a total disregard for what did not tend thitherward.

Many were the theories which passing travellers, hostlers of inns, and other idlers on the public highways formed of Peter. Coopers, Smiths, and other artisans who work with open doors were attentive observers of him; sometimes in passing through weaving villages he has suspended every shuttle in the quarter, and a hundred fallow faces have poked out of as many windows to scrutinize him. Some took Peter for a Yorkshire wool-stapler, a sheep-dealer, horse-dealer, cattle-dealer, or other jobber in live stock: but the instant he spoke, or even looked, that theory vanished. Nature had written a wondrous record on Peter's face, and the very ostler saw well that could he read them the words would mean something far different from theirs. Others again thought him a itinerant preacher, and that his saddle-bags held Methodist sermons. But was not Peter a man of secular appearance or might he not be as some thought him a tuner of pianos a jesuit a spy—some mad-nondescript. To all which theories, even when expressed in word or act, Peter answered only with a smile. "He is a wise man", said Peter, "that knows what himself is: no wonder fools should misknow what their neighbour is."

In truth, Peter's history had been as wayward and heteroclit as his appearance and accoutrement now were. Strange it seemed that John Lithgow, whilom Laird of Priestpans, and Provost of Drumbrash, a man noted only for his quiet sense, his resolute honesty, and skill in all manner of shipping traffic, should with his wife Margaret, a women in like manner of quiet still and household nature, have produced such a son as Peter. For the boy, who moreover was their only child, seemed to inherit simply no single feature of one or the other parent either in body or in mind. He was of a lath figure as we have hinted, with long neck and nose; whereas both John and his spouse Margaret were squat-shaped, nay in their latter years verging towards pudding-shape. In temper and general inward endowment, also, nothing could be more unlike these two. Peter in fact was like nothing: only himself could be his parallel. The parents were of common disposition, or if varying therefrom, varying only in superior perfection of it: the boy again was the strangest mixture of wit and sheer ineptitude, of weeping despondent timidity and choleric vehemence; he walked stooping and slouching, all expositions and inflictions notwithstanding; he excelled or delighted in no boyish sport; associated with few other boys; never fought except in uttermost extremities, and then with uttermost impetuosity more like a demon than a boy; at one time he would learn school-learning with the clear intelligence of a seraph, at another, insolence inapprehension had irrecoverably laid hold of him, he was dull as the fat weed that roots on Lethe's wharf. All which made men shake their heads over Peter, and bode no good of him; as indeed, if good mean money-making, or other temporal prosperity, the sequel had in fair measure justified. Nevertheless, Provost Lithgow, in his still way, had remarked that the boy was of a generous and even deep affection, nowise without courage or active resolution in season of necessity,

and at times manifesting in many a pithy little speech, which would burst like sunshine from his usual dreamy haze a sense, an accuracy and extent of reflexion far beyond his years. "Let him alone", said Provost Lithgow, "there is much in the boy. I have never known a true heart that had not or did not make for itself a clear head." Wherein we cannot but partly agree with Provost Lithgow; for it is in spirit as in matter: Fire always exhibits or promises Light; tho' not *vice versa*; nay in some poor dry-rotten souls we have seen a kind of Light (sufficient for calculating that four farthings make a penny) which, as in the material case, only indicated that we were near decayed timber, or some viler instance.

Peter was in his fifteenth year before I knew him; and truly then all these sorrowful predictions of his childhood had well nigh vanished or charged their charge downbent; for the boy was not erecting himself into a youth, and one of more than common capabilities, in whose clear genial soul lay singular attractions for those he could comport them to. The isolation, and partial persecution of his younger years had indeed left traces in him, for indeed the causes still there, his whole nature and demeanour (now that I understand it) was a mixture of burning love checked by the most immeasurable self-distrust: he was shy, bashful as a school-maiden, till you reassured him, or provoked him; and then, indeed in either case, he had fire enough. The strangest turns of fancy, the softest, highest breathings of feeling; an impetuous enthusiasm that could have longed to mount the chariot of the thunder, or flow abroad with the whirlwinds, yet trembled responsively to every faintest tone in the music of creation: read no poetry in thought, and deed; the hatching sparrow the meadow floweret was a poem to him, in the poorest moorland rivulet he found a transit to Infinity; he viewed its scant water with thoughts that wandered from Eternity to Eternity. At the time, I was far too young to know whither much of this was tending; and how dangerous an Empire of the Air Nature had made my friend Lord over: I felt only that in all moods, meditative or idle, in summer glory or winter desolation, in sadness or joy, he was the choicest companion, the truest social heart I had ever known. Peter also seemed to love me: I was his chief or rather his sole intimate; his acquaintance among other young men was slight and rare; with young women, except the transient courtesies of social life he had no acquaintance, or rather I should say no other than a speculative acquaintance; for little as we spoke on that subject, each of us I believe had already paradise opening within him, cheered by some fairest Eve, where amid the longdrawn, green vistas, and stately foliage and flowerage of that Garden, the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil rose beautiful and awful in the midst thereof. Perhaps, too the whole was but the lovelier that cherubim and a flaming sword divided it from the footsteps of men, and left us only the sight not the entrance of the scene. Happy scene of youth, where Shame is still an impassable, mysterious celestial barrier, and the air-cities of Hope have not shrunk into the mean, clay-hamlets of Reality, and man by his nature is yet infinite and free! Of first love we often hear that it is the only love: with my friend if ever with anyone of it was likely to prove so; he was a man to love not wisely but too well.

We walked together to the College of Edinburgh; in high, copious discourse, full of strange expectations, and passing thro' manifold adventures, such as in these poor days of mail-coaches no one can look for; of all which, it may be, the world shall one day have some notice. Only I shall mention that on Pendrake Fell we both turned round to take our last look of Drumbrash, some fifteen mile from

us; and there, in mock inspiration, not unmingled with real heartsickness, which indeed this oratory mainly strove to hid, he delivered a poetico-satirical farewell to that loved burgh, characterising its chief aspects, edifices, inhabitants with light humorous touches, and calling on the Lares and Lemures and Penates, and especially any god or gods that might preside over cattle-dealing to guard it benignly till his return. Since that bright October morning, Peter has never to my knowledge seen it again. For two years Peter was my mess-mate, my fellow-student, I may say my bosom friend. We had no secrets from each other; indeed our whole purposes and businesses were so simple that we needed little secrecy. The third year, our pursuits, and with them our abodes, came to be divided: Peter was following what is named a liberal course of study, that is, studying with the views of a man of fortune; so John Lithgow, strangely enough for such a person, had arranged it: I again was to earn bread by these studies, and so found myself seated by a Lawyer's desk, listening to orders, where now thank Heaven I can stand and give them.

About the middle of this winter he became estranged from me, I knew not how. Our evening or rather midnight conversations could no longer have place, these trustful meetings, all that taking of sweet counsel together, was at an end. When I hastened to his lodgings, by late lamplight, when my day's work was over, Peter was not there: he had gone out early, it was not known when he would return. If by happy chance I met him abroad, he wore an eager absent look; overwhelmed me with confused salutations and apologies, appointed meetings which he did not keep, and seemed in haste to be away. Once or twice he even hurried past me with a nod. My pride was hurt for one is too proud at that age, as at all ages, and I determined to seek him no more. Yet it was a sad determination, and my heart longed in sadness for the friend it had lost. Nay might not he too be in pain, in distress, as surely he was in error? A good genius whispered me to accost him again the first day we might meet. It was shortly afterwards, in one of the public walks I saw him; he was against a tree, and looking with a wistful abstracted gaze into the bleared "February sky." "*Petre noster!*" said I, with a half struggling voice: it was one of our old hearth titles of address; and there was a strange compression about my breast. He started, and blushed deep, yet more as it seemed in shame than in anger. "Peter Lithgow", said I more calmly, and taking his hand which however returned me no pressure, "what is this? how have I lost all trust from you: what thought word or deed has deserved this that from being friends we are no longer so much as acquaintances?"—Is it evil that I have done, evil that you suffer. Tell me, if you should never *speak* to me more. Peter's eyes and face were on fire and in tears, a grand benignant thunderstorm in the dog days. He almost clasped me in his arms, tho' the place was public, and the country Scotland. "Forgive me, my Brother, my own Brother," said he, "and may God forgive me! But I am the maddest and miserablest of all men." I answered only by exclamations and interrogations. "Question me not", said he, "for I must not answer thee, must not answer myself."

[Verdammt. But I *must* finish it, and will finish it — see next sheet!]

"My father has been here," continued Peter, "we have quarrelled; I am a lost soul. I hasten from Edinburgh, hasten into unknown regions; thou wilt never see

me more!" The young man seemed moved to the heart: he burst into tears, but dashed them, haughtily away. Astonishment held me speechless, as he continued: "Justify me!" cried he: "Tell my Father, tell the world, that I had an honest heart. Tell *her*, too! — O farewell!" said he in a hurried voice grasping my hand with both his, "I linger too long."

"Good heavens!" cried I detaining him, "what *is* all this?"—"Ask me not", repeated he: "thou wilt hear it all. Farewell! Be happy! But stay, wear this for my sake," said he, and hastily loosened the silver shirt-clasp, or double button from his left wristband, and exchanged it with mine which was of brass; then clasping me in his arms, nay kissing my cheek, he said in a low fervent voice: "Think of me, Brother love me, and God bless thee forever!" With these words he snatched himself away; dashed hastily into a neighbouring alley, and was gone. Gone without return! It was moments before I recovered my consciousness, so rapid, so stupefying was the whole scene: I too hurried up the Alley; saw my Friend with long steps emerging from the end of it, into a crowded street; I hurried still faster but in vain; once more I thought I saw his head among the shifting multitude, but lost it next instant, and that glimpse, if it was one, proved the last. At his old lodgings, no one could give tidings of him, he had formally left the place two days ago, the people knew not why or whither. Equally fruitless were all other inquiries: at his old haunts no trace of him could be found. I wandered the streets, hoping I might meet him. It began to rain, it grew dark, I continued wandering. My thoughts were in a whirl, I felt as one dreaming. Not till late at night, did I find myself in my own chamber: Peter's shirt-clasp was still in my hand, I had held it clenched there for many hours, as if in this poor relic, still lay some tie with my Friend. I confess that I wept over it, and fondly wore it, nay still wear it, tho' the fashion of these things is long gone. It is a silver button that I would not give for any diamond one.

In the course of time, somewhat of this mystery cleared away. Peter Lithgow had indeed left Scotland; and his friends to wonder and mourn over him; for it was years before they could learn even so much as that he was in life. His father had no tidings of him; seemed unwilling to speak at all on the subject; yet on the whole bore his loss with more equanimity than could have been expected. 'It was a forward boy', said John; 'but if he live, time will teach him a thing or two.' For the next six months, Drumbrash in general, and that part of Edinburgh which held of Drumbrash (for every Scottish district has its colony in Edinburgh) abounded in censures, inquiries, theories on this obscure event; which after all would nowise fully disclose itself. So much only was clear, that unreason, on one or on all sides, had been at work; a fact which the moral censors of Drumbrash, that is to say, ninety-nine hundredths of all the articulate-speaking mortals in the place, did not fail to comment on with emphasis; for man has such an innate reverence of virtue, that he cannot even see his neighbour transgress in any point without giving the alarm, without acting, a thing he otherwise hated, the character of spy. It came to light also that Love had been concerned in the matter: a young Englishwoman had won the young Scotchman and been won by him; they had met that winter in Edinburgh; had sworn eternal constancy; blind to all insuperable barriers, for Jane Seymore was of rank, and mingled by right in those circles to which Peter Lithgow had been admitted, much to the suspicion of his acquaintance, as a matter of favour. It was conjectured that John Lithgow hearing of this adventure, had dealt

sharply with his son; had exacted some promise from him which he would not give; nay it was said that the young Lady too, after an interview with John, had resolutely taken his view of the question, and forbid the young man her presence. To me it seemed not improbably; so much as this, I well knew acting on the passionate heart of my friend, might have driven him into utter despair. I myself saw [the young Lady] soon afterwards, once and only once: she was very young of a blonde, meek, most graceful aspect, and indeed tho' pale, and seeming to suffer much, one of the loveliest figures I had or have ever beheld. Me she did not know; it was in a prim circle where we met, so that except some poor formalities I could have no speech with her. Soon afterwards, as I was told, she had returned to England, to Norfolk her native country; and never afterwards did her high path cross my low one in this world. I felt deeply for the fair being: she was with hard cold people; with some half of them a boarder in some poor proud dowager's establishment, and seemed to have no counsellor or friend. I noticed a quiver in her face when my birthplace chanced to be named: I now doubted not, but the name Lithgow which however I could not mention, would have produced still greater agitation.

On the whole business, as hinted above, John Lithgow himself declined throwing almost any light; and with such meagre outlines of a hypothesis the public could obtain no rest. However, it chanced about this time, fortunately for the Lithgows, that not only a bankruptcy but also an irregular marriage occurred in the burgh; whereby the channels of public speculation diverted; and other scenes in the little Drama of Life at Drumbrash displaced this scene of the Lithgows, and it ceased to be more than a remembrance, growing fainter from year to year. John Lithgow, as we said, nay even his wife Margaret seemed to bear the matter with patience: in the long run it was understood that from time to time they got tidings of their son, who still led a wandering life in remote regions of the world; but they spoke not of him, except darkly and afar off, and did not seem to hope, nor even to wish that they might see him again. Nay words had once dropped from the Provost, in the warmth of some trustful moment, which led to strange inferences, little spoken of except among his friends. Some remembered a high Lady said to be from London, who more than once, for what reason no mortal could ascertain, had visited the Provost: it was noted too that Peter Lithgow did not in the least resemble either of his parents; so that hints were given as if a strange mystery hung over the birth as well as the fate of this young man; which however, as no one had the means of clearing it up, remained a mystery, and grew at last a half unheeded one, related now and then with seriousness by the old, and listened to as interesting fable domestic *mährchen* by the young. In a good old age, John Lithgow died, his wife having gone before him; their possessions went to children of distant cousins: Peter returned not; and now all memory of him had well nigh faded away at Drumbrash.

In such circumstances had I parted with my early friend; and little did I imagine that I was this morning to meet with him again. For the reader is to understand⁴

⁴No attempt has been made to normalize Carlyle's draft, which is transcribed literally from the MS.

The moment's relief at the Beeftub will have been familiar enough to him from his early walks home in Springtime from Edinburgh University: when he could afford a horse, he would still have paused to take in the view. On occasion, he had used one of the farm's horses to ride North from Ecclefechan to the foot of the Beeftub to pick up transport to Edinburgh and he writes to his brother Alexander (who had ridden with him) that if the weather South of the Beeftub had been as bad as it was North,

you and the mares would be in a sorrowful condition. It rained upon us heavily from the time we approached the summit of that mountain, till we had arrived within twenty miles of Edin^r; and one of my chief employments was picturing out the situation of poor Alick, *fronting* the tempest from which I was lucky enough to be retiring. . . .⁵

This was 1820 when he could afford the coach. In 1817, "Sandy accompanied me to Moffat," and left him to climb the Beeftub to his own, and "I looked down through the long & deep vale of the Annan, remembered my friends upon the dim horizon, and half-uttering the wish that rose within me for their welfare, I turned me round & pursued the tenor of my way."⁶ It is not hard to read into the early part of *Peter Lithgow* literal memory: the last view of home on the way North, the first enjoying view on the return.⁷

Nor is it hard to read more biography into the whole business of Peter Lithgow and Jane Seymore. Of course, there is obfuscation: by the time *Peter Lithgow* was written Edward Irving, one of the obvious originals, was married to Isabella Martin (though he would probably have been more than interested in marrying Jane Welsh had he been able to); though Irving was in Kirkcaldy while Thomas Carlyle and Margaret Gordon had their brief affair⁸ he was not (so far as we know) concerned. Undeniably social class played a part in Margaret Gordon's aunt forbidding the affair with an impecunious Carlyle.

While the chaotic years of teaching and freelance writing which Carlyle spent in close contact with Irving (1818 onwards) were spent in Kirkcaldy and

⁵*The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, Duke-Edinburgh edition, ed. C. R. Sanders, K. J. Fielding, C. deL. Ryals, et al. (Durham, NC, 1970—), I, 287.

⁶*Collected Letters*, I, 106.

⁷Carlyle remembers his last view of Ecclefechan from the Beeftub on his way to Edinburgh University, and his joy at his father meeting him on his first return from Edinburgh on the Langlands Road out of Ecclefechan—today a quiet road to Middlebie, but at the time the way in to Ecclefechan from the high road. See *Reminiscences*, ed. Ian Campbell (London, 1972), pp. 309, 30. A new edition in the World's Classics is due for publication in 1997.

⁸See *Collected Letters*, I, 159, and R.C. Archibald, *Carlyle's First Love: Margaret Gordon Lady Bannerman* (London, 1910).

Edinburgh, and while both men saw one another very often and enjoyed a close friendship before distance and the development of the careers parted them, many of the features attributed by this narrator (who physically resembles Carlyle) to Peter Lithgow are in fact Carlyle's—the nervous impetuosity, the difficult relations with a strong father and pious mother, the gloom, the sudden self-absorbed disappearance. It was Irving who was the sunnier of the two, seeking out the reclusive Carlyle, “quiet, cheerful, genial” in their earlier years⁹; during the worst years, when Irving was sinking into premature senility and death in London, it was Carlyle who had to seek him out. In 1830, when *Peter Lithgow* was being written, both Carlyle and Irving could have reined their horse at the scene described, and looked down on a native countryside where their parents still lived, Carlyle's in Ecclefechan and Irving's in Annan.

If we assume that the sketch is dated in 1830, then he is developing material which will take shape in *Sartor*: legal training is literally behind him (as it was behind the narrator of *Peter Lithgow*), along with a long period of poverty and uncertainty. While Carlyle in 1830 was far from secure financially, he was clearly on the way to a career of some kind, and only months from his extended visit to London with the manuscript of *Sartor* in his pocket, seeking the publisher he was not to find in the Reform-troubled literary circles of London. The atmosphere of troubles endured with uncertainty ahead which permeates *Peter Lithgow* is very much connected with its author's state of mind.

So, too, is the recurrent theme of the changing relationship between two strong characters whose relationship is at a crucial moment. When he wrote Irving's obituary, Carlyle noted he had been

beaten-on from without, undermined from within, he has had to sink over-wearied, as at nightfall, when it was yet but the mid-season of day. Irving was forty-two years and some months old: Scotland sent him forth a Herculean man; our mad Babylon wore him and wasted him, with all her engines; and it took her twelve years. He sleeps with his fathers, in that loved birth-land: Babylon with its deafening inanity rages on; but to him henceforth innocuous, unheeded—forever.

“Death of Edward Irving” was published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1835: it is an eloquent tribute to a friend now lost, lost indeed several years earlier when his religious obsession with the “gift of tongues,” and his involvement with the Apostolic Church in London, broke what had been the closest of friendships since 1816: “But for Irving, I had never known what the communion of man with man means. His was the freest, brotherliest, bravest human soul mine ever came in contact with: I call him, on the whole, the best man I have ever, after trial enough, found in this world, or now hope to find.”¹⁰ Traits of identifiable

⁹*Reminiscences*, p. 229.

¹⁰“Death of Edward Irving,” *Fraser's Magazine*, 61 (January, 1835), 99-103.

character are found in Carlyle's *Reminiscences* of Irving: "My friend was kind to me as possible; and bore with my gloomy humours (for I was ill and miserable to a degree), nay perhaps as foil to the radiancy of his own sunshine he almost enjoyed them."¹¹ "From the first we honestly liked one another, and grew intimate; nor was there ever, while we both lived, any cloud or grudge between us, or an interruption for a day or two. Blessed conquest, of a Friend in this world!"¹² Or, annotating Althaus' biographical sketch of 1866, Carlyle was to say categorically that Irving "was a brother to me and a friend, then and elsewhere afterwards, at heart constant till he died." "He was as the sun in my firmament, where all else was become so wintry. We were in constant correspondence, & he knew all my secrets."¹³ Clearly, Carlyle writes *Peter Lithgow* with the intensity of memory of such a friendship, intimate, unprotected--and the hurt of such a friendship broken through unilateral withdrawal.

Other less clearly identifiable autobiography can be adduced: Gavin, Irving's father, was a figure of modest public importance in Annan (though hardly provost), but Irving's mother "had developed the modest prosperity of her household into something of a decidedly 'genteel' (Annan 'gentility'). . . her Gavin was never careful of gentility, a roomy simplicity and freedom . . . his chief aim."¹⁴ Edward's marriage to Isabella Martin, a minister's daughter of Kirkcaldy, would doubtless have given her satisfaction, as would a marriage to Dr. Welsh of Haddington's daughter. While social ambition never caused a rift in either household, the Irvings or the Carlyles, it may have been in Carlyle's mind when he wrote *Peter Lithgow*. Certainly the first description of Irving in the *Reminiscences* carries the memory of a certain enviousness, the young rustic Carlyle in 1808 surveying the richer and more traveled young man, on holiday from University, revisiting his old school where Carlyle was still a pupil, "scrupulously dressed, black coat, ditto tight pantaloons in the fashion of the day; clerical black his prevailing hue and looked very neat, self-possessed, and enviable; a flourishing slip of a youth . . ."¹⁵

Peter Lithgow is a trial run of something larger never finished: it bears signs of autobiography uncertainly expressed, and like *Sartor* an obvious indebtedness to Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* (1771) with its observer of heightened emotions in friends and family, its narrator interpreting that emotion in a social context, its deliberate use of missing information and absent years of

¹¹*Reminiscences*, p. 238.

¹²*Reminiscences*, p. 186

¹³*Two Reminiscences*, p. 38.

¹⁴*Reminiscences*, p. 172.

¹⁵*Reminiscences*, p. 180

the plot—Mackenzie’s device of a partly-destroyed original manuscript being a fairly obvious source for some of Carlyle’s narratorial games-playing in *Sartor*. Many other literary antecedents could be suggested: in addition to the physical resemblance to Thomas Carlyle, Peter Lithgow’s exterior (and horse) have debts to Cervantes and to Fielding, and Goethe’s *Bildungsroman* influences on Carlyle have a clear bearing on the handling of Peter Lithgow’s absence in the world while he learns from his earlier experience and mistakes—then returns to his native countryside to face his responsibility. Had Carlyle continued writing a little longer, *Peter Lithgow* might have been a more clearly Goethean piece of fiction: as it is, it carries a measure of wish-fulfillment that Irving should return to his native country, as Carlyle had done in Craigenputtoch, and that both men should come to terms with a past left behind, but by no means outgrown.

Carlyle was to be touched when, in 1834, he heard that the dying Irving had said to Henry Drummond he regretted he had been “so estranged from his old friend Carlyle of late years.” Carlyle goes on to say “It was indeed a pity for him; a great loss for me, who like yourself owed him much; more, I may say, than man usually owes to man.”¹⁶ In 1830 (probably about the time he was writing *Peter Lithgow*) he was to write with some envy to his brother John who was staying in London with Irving, “whose like, take him for all I all, I have not yet looked upon. Tell him that none more honestly desires his welfare—O were I but joined to such a man! . . . With one such man I feel as if I could defy the earth.”¹⁷ Clearly at the time of writing *Peter Lithgow*, Carlyle’s feelings for Irving were still strong: there is a touching portrait in the *Reminiscences* (also of about this time) of Irving’s visit to Craigenputtoch, and how glad Carlyle was to see his friend out of London, and restored to something of his Dumfriesshire vigor.

He was again on some kind of Church business, but it seemed to be of cheerfuller and wider scope than that of Scriptural-Prophecy . . . I brought him up to Craigenputtoch; where he was quite alone with us, and franker and happier than I had seen him for a long time. It was beautiful summer weather; pleasant to saunter in, with old friends, in the safe green solitudes, no sound audible but that of our own voices and of the birds and woods . . . In Scotland I never saw him again.¹⁸

Perhaps not: but the fragment we now have is a revealing insight into how Carlyle saw his past, and Irving’s, and how he thought he might fictionalize it into the present. When he wrote the *Reminiscences* in 1866, he may well have

¹⁶*Collected Letters*, VII, 350.

¹⁷*Collected Letters*, V, 145-6.

¹⁸*Reminiscences*, pp. 287-8.

forgotten *Peter Lithgow* when he described his parting from Irving after a walking-tour together,

... on the top of a hill, commanding all Upper Annandale and the grand mass of Moffat Hills, where we paused thoughtful a few moments. The blue sky was beautifully spotted with white clouds, which, and their shadows on the wide landscape, the wind was beautifully chasing: 'Like Life!' I said, with a kind of emotion; on which Irving silently pressed my arm, with the hand near it or perhaps on it, — and, a moment after, with no word but his farewell and ours, strode swiftly away.¹⁹

The emotion survived in 1830, and from it the writing of *Peter Lithgow*. We can only regret Carlyle did not persevere, for we will never know what meetings, and what reunions, he planned for Peter Lithgow when he rode down Annandale to confront his past.

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¹⁹*Reminiscences*, p. 208.