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Ralph Jessop

“A Strange Apartment”: The Watch-Tower
in Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*

What if many a so-called Fact were little better than a Fiction; if here we had no direct Camera-obscura Picture of the Professor’s History; but only some more or less fantastic adumbration, symbolically, perhaps significantly enough, shadowing forth the same! [. . .] Could it be expected, indeed, that a man so known for impenetrable reticence as Teufelsdröckh, would all at once frankly unlock his private citadel to an English Editor and a German Hofrath; and not rather deceptively *in-lock* both Editor and Hofrath, in the labyrinthic tortuosities and covered ways of said citadel (having enticed them thither), to see, in his half-devilish way, how the fools would look?¹

Sartor Resartus teems with wit, irony, fun, either in the guise of, or gently mocking from beneath, its seriousness and downright difficulty. It also playfully generates uncertainties between fiction and fact, disguise and the naked truth. The text’s humor, often lurking in obscure absurdities and a Sterne-like play with its own fictionality, tends to give way to a gravitas and profundity which many nineteenth-century readers, particularly at first in America, found both fascinating and a solace for their evanescent religious faith. Carlyle’s mathematical prowess (acquired during his studentship at Edinburgh University), his keen interests in astronomy, the years of the 1820s and early 30s spent working

¹*Sartor Resartus*, p. 161. References are to *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. H. D. Traill, The Centenary Edition, 30 vols. (London, 1896-9). Subsequent references to this work will be in the text, cited as *SR*. References to other Carlyle texts will be to this edition, cited as *Works*.

in Edinburgh and Craigenputtoch as a translator and reviewer for David Brewster, Francis Jeffrey, and Macvey Napier, and his wide reading all assisted toward enriching this dense and densely allusive text which Jane Welsh famously declared was a work of genius, and yet which so many readers today, overawed by or insensitive to its complexities, find dull or virtually unintelligible. And yet it is a text that rewards exploration, beckons its readers to play with it as scholars and thinkers play, a text that provides clues and hints that take the reader back into the world of its predominantly Scottish intellectual origins and which voices perennial concerns about the nature of human existence.

In this article I shall pursue just one interpretative journey that begins by noticing something strange about the place in which the text's central figure, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, lived and wrote his philosophical treatise on Clothes. The strangeness of this place, coupled with some other tantalizing hints and correspondences with historical details from Carlyle's life and some important fragments from philosophical discourse, seems to invite the reader to treat the Teufelsdröckh's watch-tower apartment as a metaphor or symbol for the mind of Teufelsdröckh and thus humankind. If one accepts this as at least a possibility, the model or metaphor for the mind to which the watch-tower most likely refers is the antecedent of the modern camera, the camera-obscura, a model used by Locke for describing the mind's perceptual operations and later adopted and adapted by Hume in his formulation of the theory of ideas, the basis of his skeptical epistemology. However, as will become clear later, this metaphor of the camera obscura to which the watch-tower initially seems to refer, or which the reader may be led into thinking it suggests, through sheer vagueness and the pressure of a multiplicity of possible interpretations, ultimately defies one's attempt to secure the watch-tower as Carlyle's own adoption of this physicalist metaphor of the mind. Fascinatingly the text seems to allow the reader to commence a journey of interpretation and research which suggests that Teufelsdröckh's watch-tower symbolizes his mind and that this symbol incorporates eighteenth-century mechanical metaphors for the mind, most notably the camera obscura and its constituents of a mirror to reflect images from the external world admitted through an inlet or tiny window. Such metaphoric descriptions of the mind were known by writers whom Carlyle either knew personally or may have read. But ultimately interpretation of the watch-tower as some kind of observatory tower housing a camera obscura, and all this as symbolizing Teufelsdröckh's mind, is defeated, a defeat, however, that meshes nicely with Carlyle's own hostility to materialism and the insistences in *Sartor Resartus* that human existence, human identity, the mind, soul, or spirit, is unfathomable, unknowable, mysterious. If the questions, what does the watch-tower symbolize? and, does it symbolize the mind? begin with a puzzle, they also end as a puzzle, a mystery. But so to end in puzzlement, mystery, wonder, is a crucial part of Carlyle's aim in attempting to recover wonderment in an age of increasingly austere materialism, utilitarianism, and the rationalist dogmatism that envisaged a brave new world of limitless progress in

the physical sciences. That the text prompts the reader to make such interpretative journeys is itself one of the distinguishing characteristics of *Sartor* and it is to such prompting that we must first attend if we are to venture beyond mundane interpretation.

Sartor Resartus was first published in *Fraser's Magazine* from November 1833 to August 1834. Though much of the humor of Carlyle's parodying of the review article style is now thwarted by its topicality, there is abundant amusement in the Clothes Philosophy's attention to details of dress, habit of seeing into the significance and influence of clothes, and incongruous juxtaposing of humble garments with abstract thought all delivered with a Germanic high-seriousness. However, the reader is repeatedly made aware that the Clothes Philosophy addresses some of the most serious and fundamental issues concerning human existence, that, as one gradually discovers, it writes a poetry of metaphysics utterly hostile to the advancing materialism of the nineteenth century. Construed as an epic metaphysical poem in prose, the text is open to a wide range of interpretative possibilities, something to which it repeatedly draws the reader's attention.

The text includes a seemingly disordered biography of the German Professor of Things in General, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh. This biography is presented as a translation and constructed account which the Editor has labored to produce from a chaotic jumble, the contents of six paper bags. These bags—the Biographic Documents—include everything from fragments of the Professor's writings to his laundry bills. Containing the shreds and tatters of a life, the six paper bags are provided for the Editor to sort and interpret by the shadowy figure of Hofrath Heuschrecke, Teufelsdröckh's disciple. The Editor himself claims to have met Teufelsdröckh and provides his own reminiscences of this strange, wild-looking, unaccountable man. With a curious attention to detail, the Editor also describes Teufelsdröckh's watch-tower, the place in which he wrote his philosophical treatise on clothes. The Editor, who so often suggests our role as readers of *Sartor Resartus*, struggles to understand this Philosophy of Clothes and to convey it to the British reader through the periodical press. Sorting, connecting disparate threads, weaving them together into a linguistic garment that we have then to interpret as signifying meaning are some of the processes that *Sartor's* Editor suggests are involved in our activity as readers.

The Editor forewarns the reader at the end of the "Reminiscences" chapter's account of the watch-tower to dig deep in the forthcoming sections from the Clothes Volume since Teufelsdröckh's soul is there enclosed or buried beneath the surface.² Is something hidden in the description of the watch-tower also? The Editor suspects Heuschrecke of failing to provide a "direct Camera-obscura Picture of the Professor's History." Has the Editor, on behalf of the reader, done what he suspects Heuschrecke of doing? Has he received "as lit-

²See the allusion to *Gil Blas* (*SR*, p. 21).

erally authentic what was but hieroglyphically so" (*SR*, p. 161)? If at the end of the "Reminiscences" chapter, after having described Teufelsdröckh's appearance and his watch-tower, Teufelsdröckh's "Life, Fortunes, and Bodily Presence, are *as yet* hidden from us" (emphasis mine), has the watch-tower both revealed and hidden something about Teufelsdröckh's mind or non-bodily presence (*SR*, p. 21)? Is the watch-tower, like the Biographic Documents, "only some more or less fantastic Adumbration, symbolically, perhaps significantly enough, shadowing forth" some facts about Teufelsdröckh's perceptual apparatus or abilities, about the workings of his mind in perceiving the world from his watch-tower (*SR*, p. 161)?

Apart from the huge fun of underlining the fictive status of the text by placing Teufelsdröckh in the highest house (the watch-tower) in the Wahngasse (Delusion Lane), at "that considerable City," Weissnichtwo (Know-not-where), and calling his publishers Stillschweigen und Co^{gnie} (Silence and Company), each of these names contains another possible signification relevant to Teufelsdröckh's mind.³ The text indicates that "thought" is signified by "Silence" (*SR*, p. 174). Teufelsdröckh suffers many delusions such as the "sick ophthalmia and hallucination . . . brought on" by "Mechanical Profit-and-Loss Philosophies" (*SR*, p. 131). Weissnichtwo itself reflects an important aspect of the text's philosophy of Mind. When Teufelsdröckh, searching for his essential self asks, "Who am I; what is this ME?" and later, after claiming that Space and Time are not realities but merely modes of Sense, answers, "WE are—we know not what;—light-sparkles floating in the æther of Deity," he is claiming that the soul/spirit/intelligence/mind is not a spatial or temporal entity (*SR*, pp. A1, A3).⁴ If the mind is an immaterial substance, unbounded by Space and Time and hence invisible, its place unknowable, then the Mind is a Know-not-where, a

³The McSweeney and Sabor edition of *Sartor* translates "Wahngasse" as "Fantasy Lane"—see, *Sartor Resartus*, ed. with an introd. and notes by Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor, *The World's Classics* (Oxford, 1987), p. 251n. This seems quite unaccountable as the German word "Wahn" means delusion or illusion. Barrett's edition gives "Illusion Lane"; Perry's "Dream Alley" (p. xvi.); Sussman's "Delusion Lane"; and Wood, perhaps following Frothingham's "Whimsey Street" (see, Nathaniel L. Frothingham, "*Sartor Resartus*", *Christian Examiner*, 21 (1836), 74-84 (p. 74), gives "Private-whim Street". G. B. Tennyson, *Sartor Called Resartus: The Genesis, Structure, and Style of Thomas Carlyle's First Major Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 190, gives "Dream Lane." Harrold's edition gives "Dream-lane, illusion street, etc." and notes that *Grüne Gans* and *Wahngasse* were actual places in Munich which Carlyle's brother John visited and described (see, p. 20 n.1). Carlyle himself translated this word as delusion in "German Playwrights," *Works*, XXVI, 386.

⁴Tennyson, p. 190 n.28, claims that "Weissnichtwo is evidently Carlyle's translation into German of Kennaquhair from Scott's *The Monastery*"—as also in Harrold's edition of *Sartor*, p. 8 n.1.

Weissnichtwo. But Teufelsdröckh's watch-tower apartment in Weissnichtwo, since located within this non-spatial or spatially indeterminable realm, is therefore itself conspicuously a non-spatial entity.

Carlyle devotes some four pages to the description of the watch-tower and what is "for the most part visible there" and it is briefly mentioned later in the text (see *SR*, pp. 15, 236).⁵ In addition to the strangeness and playful humor of situating Teufelsdröckh at the top of a tower in the Wahngasse, the watch-tower itself "was a strange apartment" (*SR*, p. 18).⁶ So private is this place that the Editor assures the reader that, "We enjoyed, what not three men in Weissnichtwo could boast of, a certain degree of access to the Professor's private domicile" (*SR*, p. 15). As Teufelsdröckh's mental operations in working out the Clothes philosophy were described as the workings of a loom, the tower itself re-replaces those mental operations, for it is "Here . . . in his . . . watch-tower . . . that the indomitable Inquirer fought all his battles with Dulness and Darkness; here, in all probability, that he wrote this surprising Volume on *Clothes*" (see *SR*, pp. 12, 20). The watch-tower is that private place in which Teufelsdröckh composed his Philosophical discourse, a place whose named location sets itself in a non-spatial realm, the realm of fiction, and, for the anti-materialist, the realm of the mind.

Carlyle's anti-materialism in *Sartor* was not a new concern nor was it unique to him. In several of his writings pre-dating the publication of *Sartor*, he attacked descriptions of the mind which used a physicalist or mechanistic language, metaphors which seemed to endanger moral liberty as they ossified into a literally understood terminology. His most notable direct attack on Materialist philosophy's mechanistic construal of the mind was stated in "Signs of the Times" (1829).⁷ Prior to this Carlyle had written his aborted and posthumously published novel "Wotton Reinfred," an attempt to write fiction which, though allegedly committed to the flames, was reborn with the radically different *Sartor*. As I have argued elsewhere, in vehemently attacking materialistic philosophy one of the main characters in "Wotton Reinfred," Dalbrook, provides just one strand of evidence which suggests that, far from being drenched in German idealism as many have believed, Carlyle's writing embroidered upon the vital canvas of the major philosophical debates of the Scottish Enlightenment.

⁵In addition there are various, more elliptical, possible allusions to the watch-tower. For example, compare "scientific watch-tower" (*SR*, p. 3) and "Architectural Idea" (*SR*, p. 27).

⁶Lore Metzger, "Sartor Resartus: A Victorian Faust," *Comparative Literature*, 13 (1961), 316-331 claims that the watch-tower "closely resembles Faust's study" (p. 322).

⁷For example see *Works*, XXVII, 66.

Notably Dalbrook laments the results of the mechanistic ideal theory or theory of ideas.⁸

The theory of ideas was the most prevalent theory of mind in the eighteenth century and beyond.⁹ Excepting earlier manifestations, including Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, its more immediate and controversial enunciation is to be found in Hume's brief outline at the beginning of the *Treatise*.¹⁰ The theory of ideas attempts to explain how the mind, given that it is ontologically distinct from the body, can perceive/know physical entities (body)—that is, how can matter enter mind, how can the mind know that which is distinct from and external to it? A physicalist language of impressions causally determining ideas in a mechanistic sequence of events that prioritized matter over mind loosely characterizes this persuasive theory which formed the basis of Hume's skeptical metaphysics. Taken as the premises of a highly destructive skepticism which threatened to fragment everything into nothingness and which began with a physicalist/mechanistic description of the mind and the process of perception, the theory of ideas and its whole tendency to result in an absurd absolute skepticism was directly countered by its strongest eighteenth-century opponent, the Scottish philosopher and founding father of the so-called Scottish school of Common-Sense, Thomas Reid.

To crush this infamous thing—the theory of ideas—which described the mind as nothing more than a machine, the human intellectual powers of perception as riven by delusions, became Reid's principal task and achievement. His work, by striking contrast to that of the infidel Hume, earned him the chair of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University in 1764. Though modified and subjected to major criticisms and transformations throughout years of continued intellectual debate, Reid's philosophy had an immense influence in both Scotland and America. In Scotland, Reidian Common Sense persisted as the dominant system of philosophy well into the 1850s, mainly through the work of philosophers based at Edinburgh University—Dugald Stewart, Thomas Brown, and Sir William Hamilton. In the nineteenth century, as Philip Flynn argues, "Common sense . . . [philosophy] was Scotland's *genius loci*."¹¹

Having attended some of Brown's lectures as a young student, by the time Carlyle came to write *Sartor Resartus* he had read philosophical works by

⁸See Ralph Jessop, "Carlyle's 'Wotton Reinfred': They Talked of Scotch Philosophy," *Carlyle Annual*, 12, New Series 3 (1991), 9-15.

⁹See Foreword by Hilary Putnam, in Norman Daniels, *Thomas Reid's Inquiry: The Geometry of Visibles and the Case for Realism* (New York, 1974), p. x.

¹⁰David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1978), I.i.i, pp. 1-7.

¹¹Philip Flynn, *Francis Jeffrey* (Newark, DE, 1978), p. 54.

Hamilton, Stewart, Reid, and Hume. He had also read an extensive range of articles in the philosophically literate *Edinburgh Review*. Friends and acquaintances included several writers who had written about Reid's philosophy—in particular Francis Jeffrey and Sir William Hamilton (perhaps the last major champion of Reid's philosophy in the nineteenth century). Within certain articles in the *Edinburgh Review* and more importantly as a central strand of Reid's arguments opposing Hume's skepticism, a preoccupation germane to Carlyle's writing emerges: an awareness of the metaphoricity of language which, in Reid's philosophy, played a crucial role in his attempts to reveal the spurious and dangerous nature of the theory of ideas.

Reid argued against the way of analogy, the use of metaphors, to reach the truth about the mind. He claimed that "Analogies will be apt . . . to lead . . . [philosophers and the vulgar] to materialize the mind and its faculties."¹² Present also in Reid's philosophy was a strong insistence on our ignorance concerning the relationship between mind and body in the act of perception, an ignorance which the theory of ideas purportedly aimed to enlighten and remove.¹³ This strand of thought in Reid's work concerning our ignorance of precisely how the mind can know that which is external to it became conspicuous in Hamilton's influential doctrine of nescience which he first promulgated in an *Edinburgh Review* article extolling the virtue of acquiring "a 'learned ignorance' [as] the most difficult acquirement—perhaps, indeed, the consummation of knowledge."¹⁴ The article was read by Carlyle in 1829 shortly after its publication.¹⁵ Hamilton would later claim that "the recognition of human ignorance, is not only the one highest, but the one true, knowledge; and its first fruit . . . is—*humility*."¹⁶ For Hamilton, to know that one did not know and to know the vast extent of one's ignorance conduced one to be humble, but the acquirement of this humility and wisdom was immensely difficult for it involved learning and the discovery of one's ignorance.

¹²*Inquiry*, VII, 202Ra. All references to Reid's *Inquiry* and *Intellectual Powers* are to Thomas Reid, *The Works of Thomas Reid*, with Preface, Notes and Supplementary Dissertations by Sir William Hamilton (Edinburgh, 1846).

¹³For example, see *Inquiry*, VI.xxi, 187 Ld.

¹⁴Sir William Hamilton, "Philosophy of the Unconditioned," in *Discussions on Philosophy and Literature, Education and University Reform*, 2nd edn. (London, 1853), p. 38. First publ. as 'M. Cousin's Course of Philosophy," in *Edinburgh Review*, 50 (1829), 194-221.

¹⁵*The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. Charles Richard Sanders, Kenneth J. Fielding, et al. (Durham, NC, 1970—), V, 43. Further references will be to this edition.

¹⁶Hamilton, *Discussions*, p. 634.

The materializing tendency in metaphorical mind terminology was evident in Hume's outline of the theory of ideas and, according to Reid, in some ancient philosophies of mind and perception. Some of the analogies or metaphors used to describe the mind and its processes, as indicated by Reid, sound closely similar to those pinpointed by Carlyle. For example, sketching the Peripatetics' "general theory of perception" (which Reid attempted to refute and which he linked with Hume's version of the theory of ideas), Reid claimed that according to this theory, "The objects of sense are perceived only by certain images, or shadows of them let into the mind, as into a *camera obscura*."¹⁷ Alluding to Hartley's theory of vibrations (which Reid also attacked), Dalbrook, in Carlyle's "Wotton Reinfred," claims that in these mechanistic times "thought is some vibration, or at best some camera-obscura picturing in the brain."¹⁸

Whether this is a specific allusion to Reid's *Intellectual Powers* is perhaps impossible to determine since the camera-obscura metaphor is a fairly obvious mechanical model for the visual apparatus of the eye and, by extension, for the mind's acquisition of knowledge through the senses. Furthermore, it appeared in other literature available to Carlyle. For example, one of several analogical descriptions of the mind listed as such by Sir William Drummond in his *Academical Questions* (1805) is of "a garret in a castle" which provides "a peep at the country through a hole in the shutter."¹⁹ Henry Laurie's interpretation of Locke, in his *Scottish Philosophy*, provides an indication that the camera obscura had become a fairly well-known mechanical model for the mind in the nineteenth century. Laurie claimed that Locke had used a camera obscura as a "more effective simile" for describing the mind than the well-known sheet of white paper.²⁰ Certainly, after describing the mind as a "dark room," Locke does seem to be indicating some similitude between the mind and a primitive camera obscura:

The understanding is not much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little opening left, to let in external visible resemblances, or ideas of things without: would the pictures coming into such a dark room but stay there, and lie so

¹⁷*Intellectual Powers*, II.iv, 255, Ld-Ra.

¹⁸Carlyle, "Wotton Reinfred," in *Last Words of Thomas Carlyle* (London, 1892), Introd. K. J. Fielding (Farnborough, 1971), p. 102. For some other examples of resonances of Reid in Carlyle's "Wotton Reinfred" see Jessop, p. 13.

¹⁹Drummond, quoted by Francis Jeffrey, "Drummond's *Academical Questions*," *Edinburgh Review*, 7 (1805), 169.

²⁰Henry Laurie, *Scottish Philosophy in its National Development* (Glasgow, 1902), pp. 53-4.

orderly as to be found upon occasion, it would very much resemble the understanding of a man, in reference to all objects of sight, and the ideas of them.²¹

In 1852, some twenty years after writing *Sartor*, Carlyle himself wrote in his "Spiritual Optics" that "The effects of *optics* in this strange camera obscura of our existence, are most of all singular!"²²

In *Sartor Resartus*, observing "the whole life-circulation of that considerable City," Teufelsdröckh's watch-tower provides a wholeness of vision similar to that of the camera obscura. It was a fairly common feature of observatory towers of the time to include a camera obscura for observing the ground beneath along with a telescope for observing the stars above. For Professor Teufelsdröckh, his watch-tower is that place where, as he says, sitting "above it all; I am alone with the Stars" (*SR*, p. 17). As *Sartor Resartus* was first being published in 1834, Carlyle, pursuing his interests in astronomy and need for employment, applied for the new post of Astronomical Professor and Observer at the Royal Observatory on Calton Hill, Edinburgh.²³ He was unsuccessful but it would seem that he was by no means an unsuitable candidate.²⁴ According to John H. Hammond, Edinburgh had two camera obscuras both of which were situated on Calton Hill.²⁵ The camera obscura in the so-called Old Gothic Tower dated from around 1818 and the other, in the Royal Observatory, from 1830.²⁶ One of *Sartor's* nineteenth-century editors suggested that the view from Teufelsdröckh's watch-tower is "Perhaps reminiscent of the view of Edinburgh from the Calton Hill."²⁷

²¹John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, abridged and ed. with an introd. by A. D. Woozley, 5th edn. (Glasgow, 1964), II.xi, p. 131.

²²Carlyle, "Spiritual Optics," in James Anthony Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life 1795-1835*, 2 vols. (London, 1908), II, 10.

²³*Collected Letters*, VII, 79.

²⁴On this, see Ian Campbell, "Carlyle, Pictet, and Jeffrey Again," *Bibliothek*, 7 (1974), 1-15.

²⁵John H. Hammond, *The Camera Obscura: A Chronicle* (Bristol, 1981), p. 111.

²⁶Eventually one of these was closed and the other was moved to the Outlook Tower on Castle Hill where an overhauled version is at present open to the public. Hammond notes that in July 1836, the Dumfries and Maxwelltown Astronomical Society opened to the public a camera obscura in their new observatory and that Carlyle "signed the visitor's book several times during the first few weeks after the opening" (p. 109).

²⁷*Sartor Resartus*, ed. with introd. by J. A. S. Barrett (London, 1897), p. 63 n.1. In a letter from around 1822, Jane Baillie Welsh wrote to Eliza Stodart, to "look about for a nice pleas-

Given that the camera obscura was used by some philosophers as a model for the mind (more particularly for the processes of perception), and that Carlyle's Dalbrook in "Wotton Reinfred" sneeringly characterizes mechanical philosophy's description of "thought [as] . . . at best some camera-obscura picturing in the brain," is it possible that Teufelsdröckh's watch-tower is modeled on Calton Hill's Royal Observatory and that it incorporates a camera obscura which metaphorically describes the workings of Teufelsdröckh's perceptual/cognitive apparatus, his mind? Certainly the text's heightened awareness of the metaphoricity of language, its obvious preoccupation with the mind, and its repeated invitations to the reader to *rede* the text and the world as sign and symbol laden may justifiably predispose the reader to read Teufelsdröckh's watch-tower as a metaphor or symbol for the mind.

The text's language describing the Professor's physical appearance also supports this notion. Teufelsdröckh's "thick locks . . . so long and lank" overlap his grave face "*roof-wise*" (*SR*, p. 11—emphasis mine). The Editor also mentions Teufelsdröckh's "broad-brimmed *steeple-hat*" (*SR*, p. 21—emphasis mine).²⁸ The description of Teufelsdröckh's physical appearance is inscribed with a language that encases him within the pinnacle of Weissnichtwo, within the steepled watch-tower. A large part of the Editor's presentation of Teufelsdröckh in the "Reminiscences" chapter is constituted by a language of hard physical objects, of buildings, machine, mountain rocks, and sculpture (see *SR*, pp. 12, 13, 14-15). But as we get closer to the description of the watch-tower itself, there seems to be even stronger grounds for treating it as modeled on an observatory tower housing a camera-obscura. Furthermore, given Locke's use of the camera-obscura metaphor and the other points mentioned above, there also seem to be good grounds for claiming that the watch-tower somehow provides a metaphorical description of Teufelsdröckh's/Man's mind.

Teufelsdröckh's domicile in the Wahngasse is a "speculum or watch-tower" from which he views all the surrounding "life-circulation" (*SR*, p. 15). Clearly, since the Professor's domicile has windows and is "the pinnacle of Weissnichtwo" it is a watch-tower or outlook (*SR*, p. 15). In what sense is it a speculum? The Latin for watch-tower is "specula" and thus the McSweeney and Sabor edition of *Sartor* suggests that the use of "speculum" (mirror) may

ant little garret [in Edinburgh] that has a fine view unclouded by the town smoke and out of reach of the camera obscura" (*CL*, II, 18).

²⁸Also compare: Heuschrecke's mouth, described as "a free door-way" (*SR*, p. 20); and the Donnean "pair of Compasses" (*SR*, p. 141). The "Steeple-hat" may also emblemize the dual aspect of Teufelsdröckh's religiosity and wizardry. Compare also, as an emblem of his Prospero-wizardry and Pilgrim-religiosity, Teufelsdröckh's "Pilgerstab (Pilgrim-staff)" (*SR*, p. 119).

be an error.²⁹ However, these may be alternatives and not synonyms—Teufelsdröckh's watch-tower may be a place that either reflects light *or* admits it. If Teufelsdröckh's Wahngasse domicile symbolizes the mind, its description as a "speculum [mirror] or watch-tower [inlet or window]" may suggest that, following Dugald Stewart's advice, opposing metaphors are being used in order to keep their metaphorical status in focus, that the speculum/mirror and watch-tower/window metaphors are being used as conflicting descriptive devices for what is ultimately beyond the limits of human knowledge but which may be adumbrated by self-announcing symbolism.³⁰ Another possibility: the sense of "or" is inclusive and therefore this place (Teufelsdröckh's mind) may be both a watch-tower (inlet or window) *and* a speculum (mirror). Notably the camera obscura combines the functions of both mirror (speculum) and window (inlet) and the typical site of this scientific instrument was a watch-tower or observatory.

For Hume, the mind was entirely constituted by perceptions. In outlining his version of the theory of ideas, Hume divided all perceptions into "two distinct kinds . . . IMPRESSIONS and IDEAS," further dividing them into those of sensation and reflection.³¹ Though his elucidation of the theory of ideas can be given a considerably more complex interpretation, for Hume all simple ideas copy or mirror corresponding simple impressions or sensations—the pain sensed when a needle pierces the flesh is copied in the mind by an idea of this pain and such correspondences between ideas and impressions coupled with an ability to combine ideas in the imagination entirely furnishes the dark room of the mind.

Informing the watch-tower with a Humean theory of ideas, itself imaginable in the physical form of a camera obscura, Teufelsdröckh's mind becomes a physical thing constituted by two main functions, one that assimilates or experiences the external world through its inletting windows (the sensory apparatus) and one that mirrors/reflects (and reflects upon) these sensory experiences like a mirror (the ideas of the sensations admitted through their inletting windows). Teufelsdröckh's watch-tower might thus be read as (or as containing) a figurative camera obscura which re-presents Hume's version of the theory of ideas

²⁹See McSweeney and Sabor edn., p. 251, as also in Harrold's edition of *Sartor*, p. 20 n.3. For an alternative interpretation of the watch-tower's windows, see Wood's edition of *Sartor*, p. 52. Wood clearly reads "speculum" as not erroneous.

³⁰Dugald Stewart, *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart*, ed. Sir William Hamilton, 11 vols. (Edinburgh, 1854-60), V, 173. Of course there is possibly also a play on "speculation." Compare: "Speculation should have free course, and look fearlessly towards all thirty-two points of the compass" or four "Airts" (*SR*, p. 15).

³¹Hume, I.i.i, p. 1; see also, p. 7.

and therefore signifies the mind's mechanically construed functions—it admits impressions and contains ideas both of reflection and sensation.

When first introduced, the watch-tower's six windows are detailed with particular care. Though used in a variety of ways, the window as a metaphor for the sensory apparatus was something of a philosophical commonplace.³² Locke described the sensory apparatus as “the windows by which light is let into this *dark room*,” the mind.³³ Another philosophical commonplace is the mirror metaphor. Leibniz's monads mirror the universe and both Locke and Hume talked of ideas of *reflection*.³⁴ In “The Everlasting No” chapter, describing the reality of his despair as a form of both sensory and intellectual deprivation, Teufelsdröckh says, “How beautiful to die of broken-heart, on Paper! Quite another thing in Practice; every window of your Feeling, even of your Intellect, as it were, begrimed and mud-bespattered, so that no pure ray can enter” (*SR*, p. 133). Thus the text uses “window” as a metaphor for both sensations/“Feeling” and, though more tenuously so here, reflection/“Intellect.” A somewhat more certain use of “window” as a metaphor for reflection/intellect occurs later in the text: “The Understanding is indeed thy window . . . but Fantasy is thy eye” (*SR*, p. 177).

Thus it is that as Hume's version of the theory of ideas, largely borrowed from Locke, appears to be originally modeled on the camera obscura's literal and mechanical combination of the functions of inletting and reflecting, the watch-tower may act as a metaphor for the mind which combines the functions of inletting impressions of sense and reflecting upon these in the production of ideas of sensation and reflection. Teufelsdröckh mirrors the external and internal worlds in his descriptions of “the whole life-circulation of that considerable City,” passages of a reported speech that slides with angelic freedom across all social and physical boundaries and moves between the general and the particular, merging everything much as the contents of the apartment are “united in a common element of dust” (see *SR*, pp. 15-17, 18; cf. p. 81). This mirroring brings together in his watch-tower a myriad of impressions (received through the windows as inlets) upon which he also reflects. But such merging is hardly the narrative product of a physicalist/mechanistic model of the mind.

³²Compare, M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 57-69. Abrams traces several analogical descriptions of the mind, principally focusing on the mirror and lamp metaphors. In *Sartor*, the Editor remarks that there is “a single tallow-light” in Teufelsdröckh's watch-tower which is unilluminating since it is “far enough from the window” (*SR*, pp. 17-18).

³³Locke, II.xi, p. 131.

³⁴For example, see Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. G. H. R. Parkinson, trans. Mary Morris and G. H. R. Parkinson (London, 1973), pp. 176-7, 196.

However, regardless of whether the watch-tower is modeled on a sophisticated camera obscura's dual operations of inletting and reflecting, a close scrutiny of the possibility that its windows act as metaphors for Teufelsdröckh's *inletting* sensory apparatus alone, and thus that the watch-tower is modeled on a simple (mirrorless) camera obscura, tantalizingly pushes towards this possibility and then destroys it:

It was the attic floor of the highest house in the Wahngasse; and might truly be called the pinnacle of Weissnichtwo, for it rose sheer up above the contiguous roofs, themselves rising from elevated ground. Moreover, with its windows, it looked towards all the four *Orte*, or as the Scotch say, and we ought to say, *Airts*: the Sitting-room itself commanded three; another came to view in the *Schlafgemach* (Bedroom) at the opposite end; to say nothing of the Kitchen, which offered two, as it were, *duplicates*, and showing nothing new. So that it was in fact the speculum or watch-tower of Teufelsdröckh; wherefrom, sitting at ease, he might see the whole life-circulation of that considerable City; the streets and lanes of which, with all their doing and driving (*Thun und Trieben*) were for the most part visible there (*SR*, p. 15).

Using the windows as metaphors for sensation, so many permutations are possible that successful literalization collapses. The inletting windows may be placed in several positions. On one distribution, there are six windows that provide five views, one of which duplicates one of these views. Correspondence with the customary enumeration of the senses as five may be forced. However, other correspondences may also be forced. Reid suggested that there were really only four generically distinguishable senses: sight, touch, hearing, and tasting-and-smelling.³⁵ Taking the kitchen's duplicating windows as duplicating both themselves and one view from, say, the sitting-room, the four views may map onto Reid's notion of five nominally/four generically distinct senses.

But this by no means exhausts all the possible interpretations. Democritus had suggested that there was basically only one sense, touch, and others again had attempted to reduce the number of senses to two or expand them to six.³⁶ *Sartor* itself includes mention of a sixth sense of hunger (see *SR*, pp. 70, 97). Leaving aside Democritus' reduction of the number of senses to modifications of touch, whether six, five, four, or two senses, Teufelsdröckh's watch-tower windows may be placed in positions that correspond to each of these different numbers of the senses.

³⁵See, *Inquiry*, III, 116 Lc.

³⁶See, Sir William Hamilton, *Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic*, ed. H. L. Mansel and John Veitch, 4 vols. (Edinburgh and London, 1859-60), II, xxvii, 152-65.

With these possibilities and the further possibilities of treating "window" as either a metaphor for sensation or reflection or both (the camera obscura model), the watch-tower's window metaphor becomes radically indeterminate. After having unlocked Teufelsdröckh's "private citadel" (which the text entices one to do) the reader may become *in*locked in its "labyrinthic tortuosities and covered ways" (SR, p. 161) and must admit to a nescience about what, in the physical domain, its signs for the Mind signify. As *Sartor* achieves this imprisonment and abandonment of the reader it realizes itself on its own terms as a true book, becoming a "wonder-bringing City of the Mind" (SR, p. 138). Unless, that is, its numerological device for inlocking is merely a hoax (or 'hum') that laughs in its sleeve "to see . . . how the fools would look?" (SR, p. 161).³⁷ To crush the terms of the watch-tower symbol merely into a closed physicalist description of the mind is to become a Malvolio. To seek and yet admit something unknown, some mystery, is to embark on a playful adventure with the text which begins and ends in wonder. Such a journey begins and ends in ignorance concerning ultimate realities and eschews the vanity of materialism through conducting *belief* in the existence of the incognizable. Carlyle's text therefore is its own guarantor of the reader's nescience.

Though interpretation (construed as the literalization of metaphor) begins to collapse through vagueness and under the pressure of the number of variables, interestingly this does not imply hermeneutic failure. Rather, in this instance it suggests its very success. Whether the watch-tower is intentionally a symbol for Mind or a hoax, the collapse of certain interpretative possibilities and the mystification which ensues may be intentional. However, to escape this dilemma of intentionality, even if the watch-tower is neither an intentionally constructed symbol for Mind, nor a hoax, the text beckons the reader to treat it as a symbol, as a strange entity demanding that we *rede* it and perceive its signification behind its description, behind the garment of language and, as a symbol for the mind, it enables a highly complex literalization which it defeats. However, prompted by some of the text's suggestions and possible hints, once the reader has taken the watch-tower as a mechanical or physical metaphor for Teufelsdröckh's/Man's Mind and has realized the futility of following this way of analogy toward a literal truth about the mind, it becomes clear that it exemplifies, or can be read as exemplifying, what it symbolizes: a place in the city of Weissnichtwo; the indeterminable nature and non-spatial ontological status of the mind and of fictional entities; a deconstruction of analogical descriptions of the mind; a dissolution of the theory of ideas' construal of mind as machine; and in all this, an imaginary re-tailoring of the driving force of anti-materialist argument in the Scottish philosophy of Common Sense. The watch-tower's indeterminacy, defying the reader's attempts to literalize satisfactorily the fluidity

³⁷Cf. Steven Helmling, *The Esoteric Comedies of Carlyle, Newman, and Yeats* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 53.

and self-sufficiency of its metaphors, underscores the text's insistence that, although Teufelsdröckh/Man may be regarded as "a Thing," he is also ultimately unaccountable, an "unutterable Mystery of Mysteries" (*SR*, pp. 13, 45).

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