The Decadence of Style: Symbolic Structure in Carlyle's Later Prose

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It is possible to consider Carlyle's career in three stages, an arbitrary but helpful illustration of his continuous development. His books are all masks, their structure mediating between author and material, presenting characteristic yet varied faces to their readers from stage to stage. The first stage culminates with The French Revolution; his work to this point is a personal interpretation which his audience accepted as their own. The second stage produced Heroes and Hero-Worship and Past and Present; continuing his personal interpretation, Carlyle still found a receptive audience as worried as he was about the manifest problems of the times. The third stage is that of Latter-Day Pamphlets; the personal interpretation has now become so idiosyncratic that his readers reversed their opinion of Carlyle's work. The present study concerns these last two stances of the prophetic role.

I

In the opening stage of his career Carlyle perfected a style of remarkable appropriateness. It was both a private and a public symbolism. There was yet to develop the basic clash between the prophet and the evil times on which he had fallen. That clash began to appear in Heroes and Hero-Worship and Past and Present and was made to serve a didactic end in Latter-Day Pamphlets. It would seem that the initial divergence arose from Carlyle's view of the social role of literature. He was a prophet first, and disclaimed any aesthetic intention in his manipulation of reality. His style began to separate itself from reality, first unconsciously, then willingly, when the times had so altered as to deprive the style of its representational role of art and to throw the style ever more dogmatically into its role of symbolism.

Carlyle was at one with his times, earnest and puritanical. His chosen audience influenced his choice of diction. Although the diction was unconventional, it was calculated to capture the minds of a literate, prosperous middle class, convinced of the importance of individual duty and social commitment. At once Carlyle divested his readers of anachron-
istic evangelical terms and invested their bourgeois code with a refreshing religiosity. And when the middle class betrayed his morality, Carlyle elevated his audience with his style, addressing ever more sacerdotal terms to a narrowing circle of the political aristocracy.

The most significant feature of the style would be an ironic reversal of values. As a philosophic radical, Carlyle would claim not to understand conduct of which he disapproved. Adopting a pose of ignorance, he would gain the satiric perspective of *Gulliver's Travels* or *Rasselas,* and would fall back on his own prepared symbols. The unity of his works would not be the expected unity of his ostensible topics but the dogmatic unity of a symbolic point of view, a unity of verbal consistency, metaphorical coherence, and structural analogies.

But with a double irony, as soon as Carlyle self-consciously employs his style for satiric perspective, he has lost the immediate inspiration of his style. He has given up imaginative description of his times in preference to egotistic prescription of the course his times ought to take. The shape of things to come will alter from the configurations of the prophetic mask prepared to receive them, and the prophet will fail of his communion, having lost the instinctive artistry that formed his prophetic style. So in Carlyle’s later prose, the style achieves brilliance in public address, but the stylist is addressing a social void.

II

*Heroes* and *Hero-Worship* addresses itself to social problems through the medium of individual heroism. Heroism is the public dimension of the private personality. The book is directed toward the future, making an immediate ethical appeal to change present abuses. History is only important as a source of heroic models, an arena of the hero’s conflict with the conventions of his particular era. But though history is little more than a series of static stages, the series as a whole illustrates an inverted progress of greater moral decay as people in the successive stages fail to emulate their heroes, whose energies gradually contract from public effect to introverted individualism as they strive to assert their intuitions of greatness.

The titling of the chapters explains this process of decadence. *Heroes* devolves from medieval paganism to modern revolutionism, and the book limits itself to the thousand years of modern history. The moral is clear. Two general themes unify *Heroes,* and exchange dominant roles in an X-plan, their ascendancies crossing as one theme rises and another falls in the course of the book. The first theme is the chronology from feudalism to revolution, and the second one, the important and paradoxical one, is the fact that his time forces the hero to move from the unself-
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conscious actions of the god to the intellectual words of the man of letters, until the hero as king brings the cycle to a close by crashing through formulas and compelling an obedience which had once been a spontaneous tribute.

The hero defines himself unconsciously in any era by his instinctive wonder and reverence. Nature figures to him as an apocalypse. He is inspired to preach a conservative evangel of return to pristine virtues. In every chapter, the natural apocalypse "glares in upon" the hero, fire-imagery burns through shams, and images of light convey the prophetic message. In his own person, every hero is sincere and sympathetic and convinced of the value of suffering to teach virtue; that is, he believes in the painful necessity of rejecting easy councils and accustomed mores. His personal sympathy combines with his intuition of perpetual values to make him a hero, larger than life, the gigantic collective embodiment of the emotions of all men in his time.

The opening of each essay explicitly links the hero of one era with those preceding, until the structure of the book builds a chain of epiphanies in history, symbolic moments among lesser affairs. Each essay then gives a brief biography stressing the hero's intellectual and moral qualities, and concludes with the relevance of the hero to Carlyle's audience. The cumulative structure builds a belief in the predominance of heroic virtue in the past, the decadence of heroic virtue in the present, and an implicit but powerful reproach.

Introducing Odin, or the hero as divinity, Carlyle opens his lecture with a metaphysical lesson drawn directly from popular interest in the theories of Comte. Pagan mythology, rather than being the superstitious allegory which rationalists think it, was actual faith, a faith that is our reproach to have forgotten: "What in such a time as ours it requires a Prophet or Poet to teach us, namely, the stripping-off of those poor undevevout wrappages, nomenclatures and scientific hearsays,—this, the ancient earnest soul, as yet unencumbered with these things, did for itself." So much for positivism. Carlyle substitutes his own religion of reversed progress——that man, in some sense or other, worships Heroes...this is, to me, the living rock amid all rushings-down whatsoever;—the one fixed point in modern revolutionary history." (V, 15)

Whether or not there was a historic Odin is irrelevant in the symbolic realm. Odin's divinity sprang less from himself than from the admiration of his fellows: "what others take him for, and what he guesses that he

—All citations are to the Centenary Edition of Carlyle's works edited by H. D. Traill and published by Chapman and Hall, London, 1896. This quotation is from Heroes and Hero-Worship, p. 9. All subsequent citations will give the volume and page of the Traill edition in the text.
may be; these two items strangely act on one another, help to determine one another.” (V, 25) The concept of divinity is social. If there were not such a god-man, it was inevitable that men should believe him into being, because civilization springs from the urge of a culture toward a principle of order: "this light, kindled in the great dark vortex of the Norse mind, dark but living . . . is to me the center of the whole. How such light will then shine out . . . depends not on it, so much as on the National Mind recipient of it." (V, 26)

"Given your Hero, is he to become Conqueror, King, Philosopher, Poet? It is an inexplicably complex controversial-calculation between the world and him!" (V, 80) The hero remains unconscious and imminent in his private self, but in his urge to prophesy and in the sympathetic response he excites, he will find himself invested in shifting public roles. Beginning with "The Hero as Poet," two heroes appear in each essay, and here also begins a deliberate anachronism—both being devices for more adequate symbolic representation of increasingly diverse modern history. Poet, not priest, follows prophet, because "they have penetrated both of them into the sacred mystery of the Universe . . . The one [prophet] we may call a revealer of what we are to do, the other [poet] of what we are to love." (V, 80, 81) Both prophet and poet are closer to God than the priest, and poetry is more influential than formal religion. Next in symbolic order though chronologically prior to Dante and Shakespeare come Luther and Knox, whose work was longer in being felt than that of the poets. From the Reformation grew modern nations with strong kings. When they abused their power, it was the role of men of letters like Johnson and Burns to adjust opinion between authority and liberty, and when that conflict of opinion bred violence, the hero as king imposed order, wisely in accord with primitive virtue like archaic Cromwell, or wickedly for personal glory like modern Napoleon. So Heroes and Hero-Worship makes an Epimethean and a Prometheus pause halfway through. Gods, prophets, and poets are of the mighty past; priests, men of letters, and kings are though heroic yet much diminished, all too human. Prophesy must now make its way by tradition rather than instinct, words more than action. We are in the modern world.

"The Hero as Priest" turns back in time to Luther because "Protestantism is the grand root from which our whole subsequent European History branches out. For the spiritual will always body itself forth in the temporal history of men." (V, 123) The paradox begins here, that all modern revolution is a punishment for failure to practice the virtues of god, prophet, and poet: "I find Protestantism . . . to be the beginning of a new genuine sovereignty . . . a return to all old sayings." (V, 124-125) The development of separate nations, apparently radical, is the
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outward form of an inner regeneration: “Theocracy...is precisely the thing to be struggled for!” (V, 152)

“The Hero as Man of Letters...is altogether a product of these new ages.” (V, 154) Of the three unexpected colleagues—Johnson, Rousseau, Burns—Johnson is the most noble, but his best is a maimed, hagridden heroism striving against the deism and atheism of his epoch. The eighteenth century, called a paper age in *The French Revolution*, has turned entirely from realities to formulas, and the hero's prophecy is forced into authorship—his actions must be books.

The symbolic appreciation of Johnson is among the most effective passages of *Heroes*. Johnson was his age in person, his very diseases and morbidities being appropriate to the "chronic atrophy and disease of the whole soul" (V, 174) in a skeptical time. His disabilities result from the inadequate hero-worship he receives. "Nature, in return for his nobleness, had said to him, Live in an element of diseased sorrow." (V, 178) Johnson's worst faults become virtues; his greediness and bigotry are his despair of virtue in his own time, and he completely fulfills the heroic qualifications: "Was there ever soul more tenderly affectionate, loyally submissive to what was really higher than he?...Johnson believed altogether in the old...The great Fact of this Universe glared-in...upon this man too!" (V, 179-180) Carlyle takes leave reluctantly of such a sympathetic symbol: "in his poverty, in his dust and dimness, with the sick body and the rusty coat....Brave old Samuel: *ultimus Romanorum!*” (V, 184)

"The Commander over Men; he to whose will our wills are to be subordinated...may be reckoned the most important of Great Men. He is practically the summary for us of all the various figures of Heroism.” (V, 196) Participating in the distraught demands of the anarchic public, the kingly hero is the dominant figure in a reactionary counter-revolution, the final degradation and primary exaltation of the prophet. Carlyle's audience still considered Cromwell the "brave, bad man" of Clarendon's history, and in returning Cromwell's reputation to the historic facts, Carlyle again finds a highly appropriate symbol—the reluctant leader compelled to reform his evil times. The Civil War was part "of that great universal war which alone makes up the History of the World,—the war of Belief and Unbelief!” (V, 204) The Restoration was an arbitrary anachronism. "Puritanism was hung on gibbets,—like the bones of the leading Puritan. Its work nevertheless went on accomplishing itself." (V, 207) With Burke and with Macaulay, Carlyle understands modern English history to have begun in 1688, the inevitable resurgence of morality and intellect in politics.

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Cromwell's moral biography parallels the political fortunes of Puritanism. He had the indispensable trinity of heroic traits, sincerity, sympathy, and sorrow over his times. He "spoke always without premeditation of the words he was to use," (V, 219) and far from following a premeditated progress to the Protectorate, he rose only because of the recitation of each pragmatic decision. His own sense of duty, combined with his knowledge of men and his genius for action, made Cromwell "the one available Authority left in England, nothing between England and utter Anarchy but him alone." (V, 233) Sober scholars—Gardiner, Firth, Wedgwood, and Abbott—all concur in Carlyle's symbolic judgment. Probably the only dictator in history to call a free election, Cromwell almost wept as he dismissed his third Parliament; "You have had such an opportunity as no Parliament in England ever had... God be judge between you and me!" (V, 234)

Carlyle finishes his lecture-series in a noble yet modest tone. He has always had his audience in mind and ends with words that at least momentarily must have thrilled his listeners with the present consciousness that a hero stood before them: "The accomplished and distinguished, the beautiful, the wise, something of what is best in England, have listened patiently to my rude words. With many feelings, I heartily thank you all; and say, Good be with you all!" (V, 244) Carlyle's confidence in his own mission as prophet finds its best expression in words of supreme good will.

Past and Present reverses the approach of Heroes and Hero-Worship. Rather than make an individual appeal, it speaks to a whole class, the working mammonites or captains of industry, and rather than offer separate heroes to emulate, it contrasts the whole present with the whole past.

The style of Past and Present is as effective as its earlier versions because the times wanted a prophet. Writing in the winter of 1839-1840, Thomas Arnold is perplexed and shocked:

It fills me with astonishment to see antislavery and missionary societies so busy with the ends of the earth, and yet all the worst evils of slavery and heathenism are existing among ourselves. But no man seems so gifted, or to speak more properly, so endowed by God, with the spirit of wisdom, as to read this fearful riddle truly; which most Sphinx-like, if not read truly, will most surely be the destruction of us all.2

These words might be the sermon-text for Past and Present, especially the Sphinx-metaphor, which appears in "Proem" of the book. We know from a letter of May 19, 1842, that "Carlyle dined, and slept here on

2 Quoted by Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold (New York, 1903), II, 125-126.
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Friday last” and visited Naseby field with Arnold. It would seem plausible that they discussed “the condition-of-England question,” more especially as Carlyle had published “Chartism” in 1839, and could give as reason for beginning Past and Present: “My heart is sick and sore in behalf of my own poor generation.” Once again and then no more, his times will applaud Carlyle in his role of sympathetic sorrowing hero and his book will gain in power from his confidence of that willing hero-worship.

Explicitly prophetic devices become very prominent—a parable on almost every page like Balaam and his ass or the Dead Sea apes or the stuffed goose in its magic circle; a concluding moral at the end of every chapter; frequent self-quotations or transparent personae like Sauerteig; invented epithets like Sir Jabesh Windbag, or Choctaw and buccaneer capitalism. It seems very clear that Carlyle is no longer careful to find an equivalence between subject and style but chooses his topics to suit his tone.

Instead of the X-plan of themes in Heroes, Past and Present develops a quincunx in both diction and structure. Carlyle invents five groups of terms to arrest the complexity of English society in a quincunx of diction:

Joe-Manton Aristocracy

Millocracy (Dilettantism)  Fact (The Condition of England)  Working Aristocracy (Mammonism)  Democracy

He varies this tension of opposites with a constellation of dyslogisms—galvanism, animalism, asphyxia, enchantment—taken from his description of the eighteenth century in The French Revolution. And the structural quincunx appears in the titling:

Horoscope
(Book IV)

The Ancient Monk (Book II)  Tools and the Man (announced theme)  The Modern Worker (Book III)  Poem
(Book I)

The quincunx is a static device, and the book does not argue but presents a series of perspectives. Each chapter elaborates its title and repeats all of the prophetic diction of previous chapters in the special context of the new chapter. The growth of subject is internal and symbolic.

1 The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1834-1872, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (New York, 1883 and 1884), II, 10.
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Upon closer reading of the text, the most striking member of the quincunx of diction is the central term—Fact. It functions in the style as a juggernaut-term around which deploy the terms for the various class levels. Tools and the Man is the central theme in the book corresponding to Fact in the diction. It is the reality for the modern worker to face, who may use the ancient monk as a model. Fact, or the theme of Tools and the Man, remains imperturbable to the frame of other terms in the quincunx and leaves the frame of the quincunx behind like a lion leaping through a series of paper hoops. The structural quincunx of the actual book, both diction and theme, is the most recent attempt to capture Fact.

"The condition of England" (X, 1) is unable to master the Fact of the times. The chapter "Midas" is a metaphor of economic deadlock. "The workhouse Bastille," "they sit there," "we sit enchanted here" (X, 2) weave through the pages to create a stylistic version of enchantment: "in the midst of plethoric plenty, the people perish." (X, 6) Alliteration adds to the effect of repeated words. And a moral recapitulates: "Midas had insulted Apollo and the gods... What a truth in these old Fables!" (X, 6) "The Sphinx" follows Midas-enchantment with a demand for justice, being no less than "Nature, Universe, Destiny, Existence, however we name this grand unnamable Fact in the midst of which we live and struggle." (X, 7)

When Carlyle turns to the past for an authentic example of hero-worship, the book moves forward in faith as it moves backward in time. "The Ancient Monk" found a better accommodation to Fact than did "The Modern Worker." A study of style has no place for more than a few words about Carlyle's philosophy of history, but "Jocelin of Brakelond" is one of the most emphatic and persuasive passages in Carlyle's work; he expend his genius for stylistic splendor on the evocation of past heroism: "covered deeper than Pompeii with the lava-ashes and inarticulate wreck of seven hundred years!" (X, 40) It is heroism that is buried, not just men and buildings, and the detritus of the burial is not even remoteness in time and space; but rather the ashes and wreck refer to spiritual decadence, more effective than ever Vesuvius was in choking off the lives of men. "But fancy a deep-buried Mastodon, some fossil Megatherion, Ichthyosaurus, were to begin to speak from amid its rock-swathings, never so indistinctly!" (X, 43) Carlyle exhorts the vanished Jocelin to leave more than his fragmentary chronicle of the giants in the earth of his day, for such a feeble tradition of heroic virtue poses a greater riddle than ever the fossils did about the origins of human greatness."

In Bleak House a megatherium wallows up Ludgate Hill. In Hereward the Wake Kingsley praises the courage and endurance of "the last Englishman" in "The Fens." In the idealist tradition, material progress may mean moral decadence.
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"Phenomena," the first chapter in "The Modern Worker," repeats the diction of "Midas" and "The Sphinx" as a shocking contrast to the brave old world of "The Ancient Monk"—"enchanted St. Ives' Workhouses and Joe-Manton Aristocracies; giant Working, Mammonism near strangled in the partridge-nets of giant-looking Idle Dilettantism." (X, 137) Here is a political cartoon in words, varied with social absurdities reported at random, the stuffed figure of a kneeling pope, a champion in tin armor, a seven-foot hat, cheek by jowl with equal absurdities of Corn Laws and Sliding Scales. (X, 144)

"Gospel of Mammonism" and "Gospel of Dilettantism" are tours de force of satiric literalism. The naïve pedant Sauerteig establishes English worship of money with the instructive metaphors of capitalists like stuffed geese within a chalked circle, and legislators like apes who have lost their souls in chatter.

From the apotheosis of "The English" as "the stupidest in speech, the wisest in action," (X, 160) Carlyle addresses his book to the middle class. He wishes to inspire a whole segment of the public to heroism. Every new chapter varies this basic appeal. Like Cromwell addressing Parliament, Carlyle believes the captains of industry can alter history if they respond to the challenge of Fact. Sir Jabesh Windbag and Plugson of Undershot alike are humor characters, but no more ludicrous than the selfish classes they represent. Here occurs a parable on Columbus, no digression, but another model from the past. (X, 199) "Labour" and "Reward" are shot through with syntactical references to Columbus and to Norse gods—all heroic, prophetic men of action—to prepare the climax of the book: "May it please your Serene Highness . . . the proper Epic of this world is not now 'Arms and the Man'; how much less, 'Shirt-frills and the Man'; no, it is now 'Tools and the Man!'" (X, 209)

"Horoscope" echoes "Proem" in repeated metaphors, reiterated diction of social decay, but with the effect of the immediately preceding contrast between past and present, so that Fact gathers around itself a new frame of terms—"Aristocracies" of true merit, "The One Institution" of Parliament willing to "interfere" for justice, "Captains of Industry" and "the Landed" now by love united with the workers and themselves, not isolated by cash and privilege. The opening quincunx, viewed retrospectively through the moral kaleidoscope of the book, has changed the import of its terms.

Latter-Day Pamphlets no longer observes any distinction between diction and theme. The unity of one chapter is the unity of the whole book, or the book as a whole has no unity, no relationship between parts, and consequently no recognition of an external world to be adapted
to the book. The only reality is the integrity of the diction. In short, Carlyle is no longer playing a role. He thinks of himself as a genuine prophet delivering divine oracles. The circle of his friends contracts. Indeed, he has no friends, only disciples. But the question of madness does not arise. He still controls his meaning as well as ever. Though he may live in a private world, he feels his insecurity as painfully as the sanest of anxious men. Every chapter rebuilds a symbolic whole as in-defatigably as does every separate poem of Browning, another sane man whose diction became his theme, or, perhaps more to the point, as does every new letter in *Fors Clavigera*, where, as Rosenberg has said in *The Darkening Glass*, the music of the style is the music of consciousness itself.⁸

The enchanted unemployed in their workhouse Bastilles in *Past and Present* are no more than expressive metaphors of social reality. Everyone knew that it was so. But times had changed from 1843 to 1850. The Corn Laws and Sugar Duties had been repealed at the same time that Europe was convulsed with revolutions; and Sir Robert Peel in accepting Richard Cobden as a gentleman had changed the Whig party beyond recognition. England could congratulate herself for achieving a Great Exhibition and leading world commerce away from regional loyalties while her European contemporaries had as yet hardly achieved the status of nations.

*Latter-Day Pamphlets* then was poorly timed and impolitically titled for popular acceptance. It earned Carlyle his first public caricature as Dr. Pessimus Anticant in Trollope's *The Warden*. "They have had immense reading," wrote W. E. Forster, "but probably less effect than almost any of his writings." "When I speak of the Latter Day Prophet," wrote Fitzgerald to Frederick Tennyson, "I conclude you have read, or heard of, Carlyle's pamphlets so designed. People are tired of them and of him: he only foams, snaps, and howls, and no progress, people say: this is almost true: and yet there is vital good in all he has written." A hostile review in *Blackwood's*² accuses Carlyle of arrogating the prophetic mantle which only popular accolade can give: "What is Mr. Carlyle himself but a Phantasm of the species which he is pleased to denounce? ...In short, we pass from the Latter-day Pamphlets with the sincere conviction that the author as a politician is shallow and un-

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sound, obscure and fantastic in his philosophy, and very much to be reprehended for his obstinate attempt to inculcate a bad style."

To all of these animadversions and many more Carlyle would have us believe he shrugged an indifferent shoulder. His Reminiscences display him somewhat self-consciously adjusting his rumpled costume of gearskins:

In 1850, after an interval of deep gloom and bottomless dubitation, came Latter-Day Pamphlets, which uneasily astonished everybody; set the world upon the strangest suppositions ("Carlyle got deep into whiskey!") said some, ruined my 'reputation' (according to the friendliest voices), and, in effect, divided me altogether from the mob of 'Progress-of-the-Species' and other vulgar—but were a great relief to my own conscience as a faithful citizen, and have been ever since."

The epithet vulgar and the stress on individual relief of conscience (even as a citizen) betray the increasing privacy of his symbols and his desire for a select audience though few.

He found one such aristocrat in his literary executor, who ironically hurt Carlyle's reputation more by indiscreet editing than Carlyle could have done with still more excrementitious excess than in Latter-Day Pamphlets. Yet Carlyle probably smiled with grim approval from his repose in Abraham's bosom, for he had taught Froude to overlook facts in quest of Fact. "The question which Carlyle asked," wrote Froude, "... was not, Is it true? but Is it alive? Life is not truth, but the embodiment in time and in mortality of a spiritual or animating principle." When he exposed his mentor's frailty, and did it out of duty, Froude finally accomplished what Carlyle had despised of doing even in the violent literalism of Latter-Day Pamphlets—the transmutation of words into deeds.

Latter-Day Pamphlets is a tiresome book. Inversion as a means has passed into inversion as an end, and the irony has become impertinent. Carlyle deliberately makes the worse into the better cause. He might be said to write on a topic the opposite of the title of the pamphlet.

8 Blackwood's, pp. 642, 638. A retrospective review, "Mr. Carlyle," Fraser's Magazine, LXXII (1865), 779-810, upon publication of Frederick the Great, understands the stylistic problems of the prophet: "each book has its own object and its own unity; and their author is much too considerable a writer, and far too great an artist, to...strain them...to any special purpose. Still this general vein [symbolic structure] does run through them all...those views...run...into poetry and metaphor." (pp. 779, 781) The reviewer calls the Schaeferische Philosophie a lamentable and unfiir use of a brilliant style.


10 From an autobiographical memoir printed by Waldo Hilary Dunn in his James Anthony Froude (Oxford, 1961), p. 73.
A discussion may consist of what might be called ‘nodal’ propositions, [Holloway writes of Carlyle] with a sort from immediately plain sense, but introduced, familiarized, made easier for the reader to grasp, by a variety of techniques that would indeed be sophistical, if their interpretation could be nothing but logical; but not otherwise.... What is a paradox at one extreme, interpreted in a perfectly straightforward sense, is a truism at the other, when the special sense given to some crucial word is made fully explicit.15

The “crucial word” in Latter-Day Pamphlets is always an image of corruption modulated from paradox to truism to nauseate the reader with his seeming-comfortable world.

Because there is no thematic progression in the book, one pamphlet demonstrates the method, and “Jesuitism” demonstrates it best because it is last and serves as peroration. The inversion of “Jesuitism” is to make a truism of a paradox comprising all of the paradoxes in the book—that the most cherished formulas of social welfare are the surest means to social ruin. The essay rises to a paired climax, first of diseased inanity, then of prophetic faith, as Carlyle pursues his method of assertion and counterassertion, the only means of development left to him in his despair of finding order in life. “Like the valley of Jehoshaphat, it lies round us, one nightmare wilderness, and wreck of deadmen’s bones, this false modern world.” (XX, 313) The perfection of modern Jesuitism is the famous pig-philosophy, or Schwein’sche Weltanschauung, another product of the literal pedant Sauerteig. Benthamites are Carlyle’s Yahoons. The pig-philosophy in this essay is analogous to a series of impromptu addresses in the preceding pamphlets, addresses by a despairing hero to an audience who, Carlyle’s stage-directions tell us, jeer and desert the hall.

Yet no man is happy in mere pursuit of pleasure, “restless gnawing ennui,” (XX, 335) Carlyle arrives at saying after pages of reiterated images of sensualism, and Latter-Day Pamphlets concludes with eloquent pity for a country that has driven itself into a dumb intimation of faith by its very excess of prosperity:

You are fed, clothed, lodged as men never were before; every day in new variety of magnificence are you equipped and attended to; such wealth of material means as is now yours was never dreamed of by man before:—and to do any noble thing, with all this mountain of implements, is forever denied you. ...Mount into your railways; whirl from place to place, at the rate of fifty, or if you like of five hundred miles an hour.... if you would mount to the stars.... [t]hat prophetic Sermon from the Deeps will continue with you, till you wisely interpret it and do it, or else till the Crack of Doom swallow it and you. Adieu: Au revoir. (XX, 337)

If such heaped hyperboles of prophesy have become daily headlines, and they have, it is possible that the style of the prophesy is as immediate as its fulfillment. Carlyle has ended with Adieu, but also with Au revoir.

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III

Who is decadent—society or the man who says it is? There is no necessary connection. It only seems that Carlyle created his most vigorous and persuasive expression in response to a society that seemed decadent to him. In judging the adequacy of that style, it is important to remember that Carlyle’s purpose was expressive rather than expository. As a historian, he was an interpreter, not a discoverer nor an orderer like his contemporaries Gardiner and Green. He conceived of his task like a Greek dramatist, re-working familiar material for a didactic moral.\(^\text{13}\) As a social critic, he never explained new principles but returned to old ones. His work accommodated the complexity of human events to large symbols of “natural supernaturalism,” and the symbols at their best were susceptible to a flexible interweaving of themes.

To consider the relevance of his style to our own time, Carlyle suggests opposite contrasts with James Joyce, a modern stylist of great power. His influence on Joyce is a critical commonplace, both in the invention of metaphorical catalogues and in the parody of literary forms. But the difference is more striking. Those passages of metaphorical mastery of the face of reality that we find in Carlyle, so similar to passages in *Ulysses*, never develop into the aesthetic reduplication of reality of *Finnegans Wake*, not even in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. In the metaphor of a compass, with the artist at the apex, Joyce’s compass had one foot in society and one in his conception of artistic creation, and he tried to bring the feet together; but Carlyle’s compass had one foot in society and one foot in his transcendental faith, and he tried to spread his compass to infinity. Elman’s biography presents Joyce as a Freudian sick man who invested his traumas with his works, but Carlyle appears to have invested himself with the ills of his era. Before he grew into a disappointed egotist, Carlyle had the courage of a responsible citizen confident of his ability to have an effect on the world around him. And if great writers are representative, we may read a lesson for our times in the contrast between these men.

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\(^{13}\) In *The French Revolution*, Carlyle explicitly develops the death of Robespierre as a mock-heroic Greek tragedy; "The Insurrection of Women" as mock-epic; the death of the Girondins as a serious tragedy with Homeric epithets.