

On Thomas Carlyle's Early Writings

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Thomas Carlyle was an influential critic in the Victorian age who had a tremendous impact on many social reformers, although today, in the age of the triumph of liberalism, his fame is largely undermined because of his reactionary political positions. Certainly, the nationalistic and racialistic tones inherent in his works are very discomfiting and objectionable in our age. In addition, there is little doubt that his writings made some contribution to the formation of national identity and the justification of colonial slavery. On the other hand, however, it is an obvious fact that Carlyle seriously or tenaciously attacked the soul-deadening effect of rapid industrialization and tried to solve various social contradictions. We cannot ignore his true intention and moral seriousness. In this paper, I shall reconsider Carlyle's philosophical and historical thinking by applying some of our contemporary critical methods to his early writings.

Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill

In 1829 Thomas Carlyle published his seminal essay "Signs of the Times" in the *Edinburgh Review*. Two years after Carlyle, in 1831, John Stuart Mill attempted to embody his new thoughts in a series of articles entitled "The Spirit of the Age," which appeared in the *Examiner*. It seems to me very interesting that Carlyle and Mill, rival and representative Victorian philosophers, published these essays within three years of one another, both of them analyzing and criticizing aspects of their era. Mill's essay made a good impression on Carlyle, and they met for the first time in 1831. After that, they deepened their friendship, but not for long. Mill came to be directly opposed to Carlyle in

philosophical and political beliefs.¹¹ In the 1820s and 1830s, however, both Carlyle and Mill shared a common view of society and history: "It was not that their paths crossed but rather that they converged for a moment and then moved apart again" (Culler 1985: 129). Both of them apparently rejected "the English tendency in describing the history of morality in terms of a linear development in reducing its entire history and genesis to an exclusive concern for utility" (Foucault 1977: 139).¹² For them, history was not a gradual process toward perfection. The character of their historical thinking lies in tenacious examination and criticism of the evils of the age. Carlyle made a famous declaration in "Signs of the Times": "Were we required to characterise this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it, . . . above all others, the Mechanical Age" (59). In the "Mechanical Age," "[n]ot the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also" (60). In addition, "[n]ot for internal perfection, but for external combinations and arrangements, for institutions, constitutions, for Mechanism of one sort or other, do [men] hope and struggle" (63). We can find the fundamental framework of Carlyle's thinking in these passages. He defends, that is, the autonomy of man's internal spirit and the concept of the free individual, while wishing to prevent "the mechanical necessity" from permeating into the internal and spiritual sphere. On the other hand, Mill also formulated his Saint-Simonian historical view clearly, which he saw as consisting of "natural" and "transitional" states (Feb 6 1831: 82). The present age, he writes, is a transitional period. The era is in the midst of "one of the greatest revolutions of which history has preserved the remembrance, in the human mind, and in the whole

constitution of human society" (Jan 9 1831: 20), and both the political institutions and dominant classes have already become totally out of date, lacking authority. "Now, it is self-evident that no fixed opinions have yet generally established themselves in the place of those which we have abandoned" (Jan 9 1831: 21). Mill thus points out that the present state has yet to produce a new systematic thought because "worldly power" is not exercised by those most fitted to exercise it.

We can notice in these quoted passages the similarity and difference between Carlyle and Mill. Both of them criticize the situation of the age. Yet Carlyle rejects the "Mechanical" trend and emphasizes man's "free-will" in our internal and spiritual sphere. In "Signs of the Times," Carlyle frequently employs words like "God," "spirit," "inward," "intellect" and "truth." He puts a great emphasis on these terms as indicating "the imperishable dignity of man" (80). He sees it as essential to cultivate the internal and invisible spirit in our souls, in order to make progress in society, while he seems strikingly indifferent such concerns as political movement and law reform in the external sphere. Carlyle requires us to respect our "free will" against the necessity of external circumstances.

mechanical thinking	dynamic thinking
political arrangements	the inward world / spirit
logic	intellect
argument	meditation
power	truth
public opinion (police)	virtue
the outward	the inward
determinism	free will
Binary Oppositions in Thomas Carlyle's "Signs of the Times"	

Yet Mill, in his "Spirit of the Age," stresses that we should be prompt to establish new political institutions in harmony with the new situation. His major concern is to consider the transition of social organizations and dominant classes. Mill thus demands that our "external" sphere should be improved, which

will necessarily influence and permeate into our "internal" mind. This is why secular words frequently appear in his essay, such as "politics," "authority," "power," and "class."

They take up different positions, however, even in their apparent similarities. Mill seemingly insists like Carlyle that people should need a leader as a guide to the "natural" state:

It is, . . . one of the necessary conditions of humanity, that the majority must either have wrong opinions, or no fixed opinions, or must place the degree of reliance warranted by reason, in the authority of those who have made moral and social philosophy their peculiar study. . . . [R]eason itself will teach most men that they must, in the last resort, fall back upon the authority of still more cultivated minds, as the ultimate sanction of the convictions of their reason itself. (Jan 23 1831:52)

This passage seems at first to insist that the majority of mankind must be subject to the authority of a leader because the mass tends to be unenlightened and uncivilized. Yet Mill's purpose here is to question the thinking concerning "free will." The point he wants to make is that people should be governed by elected leaders. Our free will, in his view, is regarded as "dogmatism in disguise, imposing its sentiments upon others under cover of sounding expressions which convey no reason for the sentiment, but set up the sentiment as its own reason" (Mill 1873: 54). Mill's leaders emerge from this point. The position of the leader is guaranteed by and inseparable from the electorate. Social progress is achieved by the mutual relationship of reliance between the governor and the governed. Like James Mill, his son also seems to think that the government should be "a descriptive microcosm of the population it governs."³⁾ In the natural state, "the holders of power are chosen by the people for their supposed fitness" (Apr3 1831: 210). The government is therefore the epitomized form of the population. So it can be said that values (=government) are equated with facts (=people). Values are produced and inseparable from facts. From this point of view, Mill attacks the

inadequacies of the political system, which prevents the compete leader from emerging, and advocates the First Reform Bill.⁴¹

In contrast to Mill's image of the leader, the Carlylean hero has not been clarified concretely yet in his "Signs of the Times." In this essay, Carlyle only reveals his own sense of values, as that which we should pursue and follow:

The wisdom, the heroic worth of our forefathers, which we have lost, we can recover. That admiration of old nobleness, which now so often shows itself as a faint dilettantism, will one day become a generous emulation, and man may again be all that he has been, and more than he has been. Nor are these the mere daydreams of fancy; they are clear possibilities; nay, in this time they are even amusing the character of hopes. (81)

In the passage quoted above, it would be a mistake to think that Carlyle calls to the aristocracy for the right exercise of power, as in his *Past and Present*. Rather, he insists that we should try to return to the "old nobleness," which we have lost. "Old nobleness" is not the private possession of the aristocracy. We can recover the dignity and the heroic worth, which have not been lost completely in the "Mechanical Age": "Not the invisible world is wanting, for it dwells in man's soul, and this last is still here" (81). Heroic worth, as our absolute origin, remains "in man's soul." It also exists in "Nature." However, we have lost our way in this mechanical age, so that we can not perceive the divinity in Nature. For this reason, we have a fallacious view that Nature can be perfectly mechanized by man. It is "our spiritual malady" for Carlyle to throw doubt on heroic worth in Nature: "This deep, paralysed subjection to physical objects comes not from Nature, but from our own unwise mode of viewing Nature" (80 - 81). God exists in Nature, but we cannot immediately perceive God. God is revealed through our "wise" mode of viewing Nature. Namely, if we corrected "our own unwise mode of viewing Nature," we would have "our spiritual malady" healed, and recover "the imperishable dignity of man" as our absolute origin. This could be

achieved by cultivating our internal spirit through the power of free will, and we could turn the "Mechanical Age" into the "Dynamic Age."

It seems natural to Carlyle, with his belief in the supreme autonomy of the inward, that he is not directly involved in contemporary political problems. Certainly, both Mill and Carlyle started their critical thinking from social problems in their age. However, whereas Mill, from the external realm, has elaborated his own practical theory about political institutions, Carlyle, from the internal realm, has developed his spiritual thinking. For Carlyle, political institutions remain in "the outward." We should be more concerned with "the inward" than "the outward":

Political freedom is hitherto the object of these efforts; but they will not and cannot stop there. It is towards a higher freedom than mere freedom from oppression by his fellow-mortal, that man dimly aims. (82)

It is in this respect that we can mark the difference between Mill and Carlyle. Mill's "Spirit of the Age" is a political essay. Carlyle's "Signs of the Times," on the other hand, is a spiritual essay. Mill will pursue political freedom afterwards, in contrast with Carlyle, who will seek a "higher" freedom in the inward.

As I have described, Carlyle takes a completely different step from Mill. In his "Signs of the Times," however, Carlyle's vision of the future seems very optimistic like Mill. We will be able to return to our lost divinity, our absolute origin, sooner or later: "Doubtless this age also is advancing" (80); "[A] new and brighter spiritual era is slowly evolving itself for all men" (81). In addition, although Carlyle rejects the mechanical world, he keeps us from escaping from reality and indulging in the inward., because "[u]ndue cultivation of the inward or Dynamical province leads to idle, visionary, impracticable courses, and especially in rude eras, to Superstition and Fanaticism, with their long train of baleful and well-known evils" (73). It is important for Carlyle that we should coordinate the two realms, the inward and the outward, appropriately. In short, as both realms are inseparable from each other,

we need to preserve the balance of power between them. From this viewpoint, we may say that Carlyle's remarks on the age, in "Signs of the Times," are well balanced between theory and reality. When we think of his later reactionary and idealistic tendency, we may be surprised to understand that, as can be seen in Raymond Williams' remarks, "there is genuine balance in this essay, as well as a fine, and now rare, unity of insight and determination" (Williams 1958 76). Nevertheless, Williams goes on to say:

[H]e is a victim of the situation which, in "Signs of the Times", he had described. "This veneration for the physically strongest has spread itself through Literature. . . . In all senses, we worship and follow after Power": these are the marks of the sickness which Carlyle observed, and to which he himself succumbed. (Williams: 76)

There is much justice in this view. As Williams says, Carlyle's criticism of "Power" in the outward, would lead to his belief in "Hero-worship" afterwards, in an ironical and reactionary way. Yet what brought Carlyle to reactionary thinking? Is it a "false construction of basic issues of relationship" (Williams: 76)? Or the fact that "Goethe . . . died in 1832" (Culler 1985: 153), whose writings Carlyle emphasized as the dawn of "a new and brighter spiritual era"? I agree with Williams' view, in that Carlyle's reactionary thought was only to be expected from his early writings. We come now to the point at which it is necessary to deal more carefully with the binary opposition between "the inward" and "the outward" in Carlyle's formulation. In the next section, I shall examine a feature of Carlyle's philosophy in detail through his theory of symbols.

Carlyle's Concept of Symbols: the Social and Temporal Process

As I have described, Thomas Carlyle establishes the autonomy of the internal realm, where we could cultivate and enlighten our mind through the power of free will, as opposed to the "mechanized," "reified"

realm of external necessity. The separation of both realms leads to dissociate "facts" from "values." The world of "facts" is simply meaningless, a veritable chaos, although it is full of unlimited energy. "Facts" should be meaningfully directed by the internal realm. If we ignore "values" in the inward, we will be subject to the oppressive and fierce force of machinery, sooner or later. "Facts" become recognizable and effective for us only in so far as they are directed by "transcendental values." How, then, can we acquire such values? Although values (=divinity, truth) are regarded as transcendental and universal, we cannot immediately approach and perceive them. That is to say, values can be approached only through external objects. We have to decipher and interpret such objects around us, in a figurative way. Only the "right" interpretation could lead us to truth.

	the external realm (=facts)	symbol	signifier	superstructure
—↑	—————(↓)——	=	- -↑-(↓)-	= ————— = —————
	the internal realm (=values)	divinity	signified	infrastructure

From this point of view, Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34) can be understood. In the book, he regards all external things as symbols: "All visible things are Emblems. . . . Matter exists only spiritually, and to represent some Idea, and body it forth. . . . [A]ll Emblematic things are properly Clothes, thought-woven or hand-woven" (56). "All visible things" are considered as "Clothes" which God wears, wherein divinity is revealed. In this sense, needless to say, "the Universe is but one vast Symbol of God; nay, if thou wilt have it, what is man himself but a Symbol of God" (166-167). Carlyle, in the chapter titled "Symbols," defines the quality of symbols in detail. What has to be noticed here is the equivocal nature of symbols: "In a Symbol there is concealment and yet revelation" (166). Because of this ambiguous quality of symbols, it is very difficult for us to interpret symbols appropriately. On the one hand, if we are led to a right interpretation, we can grasp "truth." On the other hand, a wrong interpretation would involve us in the world of machinery: "And now the Genius of Mechanism smothers him worse than any Nightmare did; till the

Soul is nigh choked out of him, and only a kind of Digestive, Mechanic life remains" (167). Catherine Gallagher comments on this question as follows:

This "double significance" [concealment and revelation] defines the opacity of all symbols and admits a possibility that Coleridge could never have entertained: the possibility that symbols can have ironic significance. This potential irony of the symbol is an outgrowth of its social origin.⁶⁵ (Gallagher 1985: 196)

The fact that the symbol is "an outgrowth of its social origin" means that it cannot at all transparently designate values (divinity) behind its appearance. As a matter of fact, this ironic nature has the possibility of dissolving the autonomy of the internal realm, because we can approach the inward only through external things. We must, at first, have a relationship to some social process, through which, then, a certain meaning is obtained. Values inherent in the inward have something to do with facts in the mechanical world. Carlylean symbols thus take on an ambiguous character. Carlyle, however, cannot but accept the ironic potentials of symbols, because he needs to refute the utilitarian stress on the isolated individual, regarded as "interchangeable economic units who could be dispersed and reassembled into new temporary groupings by the pressure of wages and profits" (Cazamian 1973: 16).⁶⁶ His theory must recover the organic relationship of men in this fragmented society, by directly stepping into the outward.

The ironic qualities of symbols can be also observed in that Carlyle had to discriminate between symbols with "extrinsic value" and "intrinsic value." Symbols with merely "extrinsic value" are meaningless in themselves unless they are correctly interpreted through their social origins. Carlyle takes "that clouded Shoe" for example, which the peasants regarded as "ensign" in their Peasants' War:

Intrinsic significance [this] had none: only extrinsic; as the accidental Standards of multitudes more or less sacredly uniting together; in which

union itself, . . . there is ever something mystical and borrowing of the Godlike. (168)

"That clouded Shoe" can take on meaning only in so far as it embodies "sacred" combinations of men. The process through which symbols represent their extrinsic values is thus both socially determined and arbitrary. These symbols need a proper interpretation in order to acquire meaning and value.

In contrast, symbols with "intrinsic value" could directly designate eternal truth. "Values" are not produced through the equivocal social process, but from "the internal realm." Carlyle regards "all true Works of Art" as intrinsically valuable symbols: "in them . . . wilt thou discern Eternity looking through Time; the Godlike rendered visible" (169). However, we should not overlook that even such transparent representations of truth could not necessarily avoid the possibility of opaque signification. Such possibility happens when the temporal process intervenes into the signification of symbols with intrinsic values. Carlyle describes the matter like this:

But, on the whole, as Time adds much to the sacredness of Symbols, so likewise in his progress he at length defaces, or even desecrates them; and Symbols, like all terrestrial Garments wax old. (170)

Both the intrinsically and extrinsically valuable symbols may devolve into meaninglessness with the temporal process. All symbols change with time, and "turn out to be partly divine, but also perishable" (Gallagher 1985: 198). A symbol with intrinsic value, which once expressed the truth, may degenerate into a mere "sign of the times." Here we are confronted with the conundrum not only of the social process, but also of the temporal process. It is difficult for us to find the transcendental signified in the transitional symbol, because Carlyle says: "Alas, move whithersoever you may, are not the tatters and rags of superannuated worn-out Symbols . . . dropping off everywhere, to hoodwink, to halter, to tether you; nay, if you shake them not aside, threatening to accumulate, and perhaps produce suffocation!" (171)

The Carlylean Symbol is being distanced from its own origin, by the intervention of the social and temporal process. Yet Carlyle persists in recovering the identification of the symbol with its origin, its divinity, which has been gradually obscured with time. Separation from origins causes "reification," wherein man becomes "a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system" (Lukács 1971: 89). In other words, it can be said that the Carlylean symbol takes on an "allegorical" aspect, which Paul de Man defines in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" as follows:

Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference. In so doing, it prevents the self from an illusory identification with the non-self, which is now fully, though painfully, recognized as a non-self. (de Man 1983: 207)

Needless to say, Carlyle cannot recognize the self as a "non-self." Yet, at the same time, he cannot but recognize the temporal erosion, for which his symbol is prevented from a transparent identification with its own origin. We can think of the case of Carlyle as "a conflict between a conception of the self seen in its authentically temporal predicament and a defensive strategy that tries to hide from this negative self-knowledge" (de Man: 208).

Hero-worship, Essentialism and Expressive Causality

What, then, is the one way left open to Carlyle, in order to avoid such "allegorization" of the symbol? How can the symbol transparently designate our divine origin, which has been distanced from ourselves and eroded by the social and temporal process of signification? How can we get the essence hidden behind the phenomenal appearance? Carlyle's solution is, of course, to establish the realm of "Hero-worship."

The hero is, for Carlyle, a transcendental being, beyond the social and temporal process:

Before no faintest revelation of the Godlike did he [man] ever stand irreverent; least of all, when the Godlike showed itself revealed in his fellow-man. . . . In which fact, that Hero-worship exists, has existed, and will forever exist, universally among Mankind, mayest thou discern the corner-stone of living-rock, whereon all Politics for the remotest time stand secure. (228)

Hero-worship enables us to find the eternal truth through temporally and socially changeable symbols. The hero represents the divine essence, in a sense, "Natural Supernaturalism." He serves as a conduit for the underlying origins of human existence, and fills out the void between symbols and origins. It is almost impossible for us to acquire by ourselves the eternal truth, the absolute origin, in the mechanized world. Man has to render life meaningful by submerging the self in a higher purpose, manifest in the realm of Hero-worship. The hero is thus allowed to give absolute authority over us:

. . . [H]e who is to be my Ruler, whose will is to be higher than my will, was chosen for me in Heaven. Neither except in such Obedience to the Heaven-chosen is Freedom so much as conceivable. (225-226).

It is the hero who can associate facts with values, signifiers with signifieds, preventing symbols from being "allegorized." He forces his principle on all who behold and obey him. We can escape from the mechanical world only in so far as we are guided by and subject to the orders of the hero, because "the hero is as great in his refusal to submit to human rules as he is in his submission to the eternal laws of the universe" (Reed 1989: 100).

Carlyle's theory of symbols is undoubtedly based on a certain type of causality, so-called "expressive causality," which Louis Althusser enumerates as the second form of causality (or "effectivity").¹⁷ Althusser

defines the notion of “expressive causality,” as can be seen in the following passage:

[The second concept of effectivity, that of expressive causality, is], one conceived precisely in order to deal with the effectivity of a whole on its elements: the Leibnizian concept of *expression*. This is the model that dominates all Hegel’s thought. But it presupposes in principle that the whole in question be reducible to an *inner essence*, of which the elements of the whole are then no more than the phenomenal forms of expression, the inner principle of the essence being present at each point in the whole, such that at each moment it is possible to write the immediately adequate equation: such and such an element (economic, political, legal, literary, religious, etc., in Hegel) = the inner essence of the whole.⁶⁹

This notion is applicable everywhere to Carlyle’s philosophy: “All visible things are Emblems; . . . Matter exists only spiritually, and to represent some Idea, and *body* it forth” (Carlyle 1833 – 34: 56). “All visible things” should be reduced to the absolute essence, origin, center, that is, the divinity. Such expressive causality has dominated traditional Western metaphysics. Especially, Carlyle is bound up and fascinated with essentialism and spiritualism. However, how can we explain the definition of the Carlylean essence? To put it briefly, what is the essence? It is, needless to say, God. Carlyle places God in the center of all phenomenal appearance. It is well known that the Carlylean God does not necessarily coincide with the Christian God. Yet the Carlylean God is given absolute authority, since it is the essence behind the curtain. Only by the grace of God could we escape from the destructive force of “mechanization” or “reification,” and the age would be organically integrated. However, the word “God,” the essence itself, is very ambiguous. Nothing could limit and contaminate the essence, origin, center. What does the word precisely mean? Jacques Derrida says that the center constitutes “that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality” (Derrida 1978: 279).

The center governs us, while outside us: “[T]he center is, paradoxically, within the structure and *outside it*” (ibid.). Our contemporary post-structuralist critique of “expressive causality” would demystify and deconstruct the ambiguous notion of essence, origin, center:

[T]he unity or “organic wholeness” of a period or epoch will be precisely something we have conjured into existence with the very notion of hidden essence our analysis supplied at the outset. (Dowling 1984: 64)

According to this view, the essence (= center, origin) is nothing but an “artificial construction.” To govern a structure, a whole, it is something “we have conjured into existence” arbitrarily, artificially and retroactively (*après-coup*). The Carlylean transcendental essence is therefore the artifact, which he himself has constructed. Moreover, the Carlylean hero, who deciphers the essence hidden behind the appearance, is none other than Carlyle himself, a projection of himself. The essence, the transcendental signified is nothing but a void, an empty place, which he fills out by the arbitrary projection of himself.⁷⁰ He finds in supreme “God” the inverse reflection of his own essence.

The paradoxical position occupied by the hero is, nevertheless, regarded as a kind of “frame of reference” through which we can understand the truth and solve various problems of modern industrialized society. By introducing a “rigid designator” (the hero) into social disorders, Carlyle tries to recover organic human relations. Slavoj Žižek gives us an interesting account of the role of “rigid designator,” as follows:

[T]he ‘rigid designator’, which totalizes an ideology by bringing to a halt the metonymic sliding of its signified, is not a point of supreme density of Meaning, a kind of Guarantee which, by being itself excepted from the differential interplay of elements, would serve as a stable and fixed point of reference. On the contrary, it is the element which represents the agency of the signifier within the field of the signified. In itself it is nothing but a ‘pure difference’: its role is purely

structural, its nature is purely performative - its signification coincides with its own act of enunciation; in short, it is a 'signifier without the signified'. (Žižek 1989: 99)

I think that Žižek's account applies in principle to Carlyle's notion of Hero-worship. The Carlylean hero is not a point of plenitude of meaning, but only a pure void, "a signifier without the signified." Yet paradoxically, this empty place can "totalize" the field of ideological meaning, as an absolute "frame of reference". It is retroactively that Carlyle gives to the empty place the status of the transcendental essence, by use of the notion of expressive causality.

In Lacanian terms, the function of the hero coincides with that of the Name-of-the-Father (le nom / non du père). The Name-of-the-Father, the father of Law, regulates the symbolic world. The advent of the Name-of-the-Father prohibits the subject from being caught in the (incestuous) desire of the (m)other by the threat of castration. By referring to this paternal metaphor, the subject can enter the symbolic order from the imaginary dual relationship. In addition, the paradoxical status of the Name-of-the-Father is that it is only a "dead" or "pure" signifier; "a sublation [Aufhebung] of the real father in its Name which is 'more father than father himself'" (Žižek 1991: 134). It is a "dead father" as long as it is reduced to a figure of symbolic authority. As Sigmund Freud says in Totem and Taboo, "the dead father became stronger than the living one had been" (Freud 1913: 204). The Name-of-the-Father governs the symbolic order with authority, whereas it is nothing but an empty place, a dead signifier.

The Violent Effect of Expressive Causality

How, then, do we understand Carlyle's reactionary ideology inherent in his writings? The Carlylean hero, as the Name-of-the-Father, gives us a principle that guides our life. We are guaranteed to survive the industrial age by obeying the superior will of the hero. In the symbolic dimension, the hero serves as what

Lacan calls "a quilting point," which totalizes the field of meaning, although he occupies an empty place. In Carlyle's case, however, the supreme power of the hero is derived from the notion of expressive causality. Expressive causality sometimes exerts a centripetal force that produces a violent effect. Žižek regards expressive causality as belonging to the level of the Imaginary, because "it designates the logic of an identical imago which leaves its imprint at different levels of material content" (Žižek 1993: 140). Namely, the symbolic function of the hero, which keeps the subject off the imaginary relationship, is clearly contradictory to the concept of expressive causality. As is well known, the Imaginary is inseparable from the mirror stage. When an infant peers into the mirror for the first time, he or she discovers a unified image of him/herself and identified with it. The mirror image is in this sense nothing but the image of the other (a'); "the imaginary relationship is a perpetual war against the other due to the fact that the other usurps my place" (J-A. Miller 1996: 21). It seems possible to understand that the violent effect of expressive causality grows out of this imaginary relationship.

Expressive causality forges a consolidated essence out of the elements of a whole. Yet because such essence is nothing but an arbitrary artifact, it needs constant justification. How? The authority of essence is guaranteed by "the perpetual war against the other"; the act of circumscribing, excluding, oppressing the other. In this violent process, the difference and multiplicity of people(s) are oppressed and reduced to their essential identity. Expressive causality has been, more or less, a dominant concept throughout the history of Western metaphysics. The stable identity presupposed by expressive causality, undoubtedly, reinforces modern imperialism. The principle of imperialism is both consolidation of stereotyped images and marginalization of the minority. One side gathers more dominance and centrality, the other is pushed further from the center. We can clearly find in Carlyle the illustration of such imperialist process. The divinity, the transcendental essence, which Carlyle fortifies, must be connected with the establishment of national identity: "[T]he triumph of identity by one culture or state almost always is

implicated directly or indirectly in the denial, or the suppression of equal identity for *other* groups, states, or cultures" (Said 1988: 356).

Carlyle's vision of Hero-Worship constitutes "a complete hierarchy of Nobles" (Marx and Engels 1850: 310), while excluding and marginalizing the weak and the minority. Carlyle's essay "The Nigger Question," published in 1849, is notorious for its justification of colonial slavery. Yet actually, what he emphasized is the worship of power and the discrimination of men: "I never thought the "rights of the Negroes" worth much discussing, nor the rights of men in any form; the grand point, as I once said, is the might of men, — what portion of their "rights" they have a chance of getting sorted out, and realised, in this confused world" (372–373). Important is not the "rights" of men, but the "might" of men. From this viewpoint, the status of the Black is decreed by the Carlylean law: "That he [the Black] be "hired for life," — really here is the essence of the position he now holds!" (368). The construction of "the essence" is easily associated with the establishment of national identity: "Any poor idle Black man, any idle White man, rich or poor, is a mere eye-sorrow to the State; a perpetual blister on the skin of the State" (378). Nationalism achieves its identity by the obliteration of difference through violent force. Vincent J. Cheng, in his book on James Joyce, gives us a useful account of the violent effect inherent in expressive causality:

We may wish to believe, . . . that if we can name — and define, circumscribe, classify — something "objectively," we can understand it and thus capture its essence . . . But since all those essences and words are themselves social constructions based on the collective desire of the culture and on the particular needs of the interpreting individual, those names can never accurately pin down the actual difference / *différance* of the particular. It is through collective versions of such linguistic slippage that people(s) get stereotyped, without careful accounting for actual and specific differences. (Cheng 1995: 237)

Carlyle's reactionary movement, his so-called "neo-fascism,"¹⁰ seems to result from his essentialism, spiritualism, and expressive causality. The idea of balance seen in his "Sign of the Times" has been gradually lost, and his construction of essence (=origin, center) has taken on a totalitarian and fascistic aspect little by little. His theory has been more and more separated from the actual situation; conversely, reality has been subordinated to theory. It is the final result of "a false construction of basic issues of relationship" (Williams 1958: 76). It may be also said that, as Williams suggests, Carlyle himself succumbed to the sickness of the age, the worship of "Power," which he once criticized. To oppose the external power, paradoxically, he was tempted to internalize the spiritual power in the inward. To resist the mechanical world, he recognized the need to establish the transcendental realm of Hero-worship, which governs all phenomena, material and mental. Strangely, the self is free and valuable only when man is subject to the superior will of the heroic man. After all, as opposed to the "external (material) necessity," Carlyle stressed the "internal (spiritual) necessity" instead. From this point, in Carlyle, the distinction between the inward and the outward is very ambiguous. We may deconstruct the supreme autonomy of the inward because the inward is parasitically dependent upon the outward and the act of excluding and subordinating it. The autonomy of "the inward" is established only in so far as there is a radical entanglement between both realms.

History and Fiction

I have examined some features of Carlyle's philosophy and pointed out several problems inherent in his writings. Despite his reactionary ideology, we should admit that he seriously hoped to cure the evils of industrial society. Yet, as Raymond Williams remarks, Carlyle's genuine insight may be "dragged down by the very situation, . . . to which it was opposed" (Williams 1958: 77). Finally in this section, I will take a closer look at his historical view, which had a great influence on the narrative techniques of many Victorian novelists.

For Carlyle, needless to say, expressive causality is a central notion again in history. He regards history as a manifestation of the divine, the essence. Yet an important question he cannot ignore appears when he tries to write historical narrative. Is any evidence of past events reliable to us? How do we narrate the “real” history without a distortion of reality? Consequently, he cannot but admit the limitation of historical narrative. Carlyle, in his early years, published two short essays, “On History” (1830) and “On History Again” (1833), and clearly defined his notion of history. First of all, he rejects a teleological, utilitarian tendency in historical narration. For him, history is nothing but a “Chaos of Being”:

[E]very single event is the offspring not of one, but of all other events, prior or contemporaneous, and will in its turn combine with all others to give birth to new: it is an ever-living, ever-working Chaos of Being, wherein shape after shape bodies itself from innumerable elements. (Carlyle 1830: 88)

Carlyle thus regards history as “a Palimpsest” (1830: 89). We cannot directly approach and represent historical events. In Lacanian terms, history may be called “the Real,” the pre-symbolic substance. History obtains its consistency only by use of the symbolization of the Real. Yet, as Carlyle admits, an unsettled question still remains: Is it really possible to represent history as a narrative? Carlyle answers this question as follows:

[A]ll Narrative is, by its nature, of only one dimension; only travels forward towards one, or towards successive points: Narrative is *linear*, Action is *solid*. (Carlyle 1830: 89)

Although this is a famous, frequently quoted passage, it seems to be often misunderstood: For example, Carlyle refused to reduce history into linear narrative. Yet what we should notice here in the quoted passage is that all narrative is linear, and that it is totally impossible for us to avoid such a crucial feature of narrative when we try to write a historical narrative. That is to say, Carlyle

painfully accepts the “fictionalization,” or “symbolization” of history. It is not until we “fictionalize” history that we can understand it. Carlyle regards the role of fiction as “compression” and “epitomization”: “History, then, before it can become Universal History, needs of all things to be compressed. Were there no epitomising of History, one could not remember beyond a week” (Carlyle 1833: 172). The process of historical narration must entail “compression” and “epitomization.” The problem arising from fictionalization is not whether we should compress and epitomize history, but “whether such contraction and epitome is always wisely formed” (1833: 173). On this level, we encounter Carlyle’s use of expressive causality: “History, . . . is also the first distinct product of man’s spiritual nature” (1830: 83): “Social life is the aggregate of all the individual men’s Lives who constitute society; History is the essence of innumerable Biographies” (1830: 86). Carlylean History is therefore the manifestation of Hero-worship, that is, of Biographies of the great heroes. In “Biography” (1832), Carlyle describes the struggle of the hero as the essence of biography:

[The] struggle of human Freewill against material Necessity, which every man’s Life, by the mere circumstance that the man continues alive, will more or less victoriously exhibit, — is that which above all else, or rather inclusive all else, calls the Sympathy of mortal hearts into action; and whether as acted, or as represented and written of, not only is Poetry, but the sole Poetry possible. (Carlyle 1832: 44–45)

The crucial point is that we grasp this struggle of the hero in the form of fiction.

Interestingly, Carlyle admits that even his central vision of Hero-worship is nothing but a kind of fictitious symbolization. Even when he discusses the superior will of the heroic man, he never forgets the chaotic Real swirling behind our symbolic reality. In *Sartor Resartus*, he comments on the relationship between our symbolic world and a world of “internal Madness,” as follows:

Ever as before, does Madness remain a mysterious-terrific, altogether infernal boiling-up the Nether Chaotic Deep, through this fair-painted Vision of Creation, which swims thereon, which we name the Real ⁽¹⁾ In every the wisest Soul lies a whole world of internal Madness, an authentic Demon-Empire; out of which, indeed, his world of Wisdom has been creatively built together, and now rests there, as on its dark foundations does a habitual flowery Earth-rind. (Carlyle 1833-34: 197)

Carlyle exerts his powers to recover the "world of Wisdom" from the "authentic Demon-Empire." Yet at the same time, he seems to betray a kind of horrified fascination with the hidden realm of "Madness." Although the Real (authentic Demon-Empire) is a disordered and chaotic realm, it is full of unlimited energy and power. Carlyle's Hero-worship is also born out of this pre-symbolic "Demon-Empire." However, he legitimates the vision of Hero-worship because it is beyond the limits of our phenomenal experience. In other words, the hero is transcendental because he is closely connected with the Real. Only the hero can know the existence of the world beyond our perception, and therefore, reveal to us "wisely formed" symbolization. The Carlylean hero is placed on the border which distances the Real from the Symbolic. He fills out the gap between the Symbolic and the Real. Our perception of reality would fall apart without him.

The superiority of the heroic mind is undoubtedly authoritative for Carlyle because the hero clearly recognizes how "wisely" the Real is symbolized. At the same time, Carlyle "wisely" notices the importance of fiction: we perceive reality only in so far as it is structured like a fiction. By means of symbolizations of the world, we will lose reality as the Thing-Itself, but we can get a grip of our position. Slavoj Žižek emphasizes this crucial feature of fiction:

The fundamental paradox of symbolic fiction is therefore that, in one and the same move, they bring about the "loss of reality" and provide the

only possible access to reality: true, fictions are a semblance which occludes reality, but if we renounce fictions, reality itself dissolves. (Žižek 1993: 91)

Carlyle rightly understands this "equivocality" of fiction. Perhaps he might have thought as follows, (to borrow Winston Churchill's famous phrase): "Fiction is the worst of all possible ways of perceiving reality, the only problem is that none of the others is better."

Carlyle's recognition that history is nothing but a fictionalization seems to me very important, because his recognition is also concerned with the role of literary texts. We can recognize our position in the world only through the "symbolization" ("fictionalization") of reality. Like the Althusserian concept of ideology, it can be said that fiction "interpellates individuals as subjects."⁽²⁾ Literary texts offer us a way to recognize reality, to endure and lesser the disorder of industrial society. In addition, literary works invent imaginary solutions to unresolvable social contradiction. In this sense, fiction plays an ideological role in our perception of reality. That is to say, fiction transforms the chaotic Real (or History as a "Chaos of Being") into the symbolically recognizable, representable and approachable. In our lives, we must be completely dependent upon the function of fiction. Especially, in the Victorian age, literary texts deeply defined and expressed "the way individuals live the imaginary relationship between themselves and their real conditions of existence."⁽³⁾ Novels present us with what can be thought to seem internally coherent, while negating and excluding the truth of social inconsistencies.

Notes

- (1) For detailed accounts of the relationship and confrontation between Carlyle and Mill, see John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (1873); Emery Neff, *Carlyle and Mill* (Columbia, 1926).
- (2) There may be room for argument on this point. Michel Foucault, in his "Nietzsche,

Genealogy, History,” severely attacks a “teleological” tendency in historical views since the 19th century, suggesting his “genealogical” analysis instead and trying to subvert the traditional ways of historical narrative. Indeed, we cannot admit that Carlyle and Mill perfectly escape the trap of teleological or dialectical tendency in history, in the Foucauldian sense. Nonetheless, they clearly rejected the contemporary English approach to history as the device for an affirmation of the present state. This approach is too arbitrary and teleological for them. For example, Mill writes on this matter, in the manner illustrated by the following quotation: “There is one very easy, and very pleasant way of accounting for this general departure from the modes of thinking of our ancestors. . . . This explanation is that which ascribes the altered state of opinion and feeling to the growth of the human understanding. . . . I am unable to adopt this theory” (Mill Jan 9th 1831: 21).

- (3) See Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction* (Chicago, 1985), p189.
- (4) In his late years, Mill elaborated his thinking of the ideal form of government which had been presented in “The Spirit of the Age” in 1831. In *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), he describes his basic view of government as follows:

The meaning of representative government is, that the whole people, . . . exercise through deputies periodically elected by themselves, the ultimate controlling power, which, in every constitution, must reside somewhere. This ultimate power they must possess in all its completeness. They must be masters, whenever they please, of all the operations of government. (269)

For Mill, the governor is only a “deputy.”

Concerning the free will versus

determinism controversy, Mill was dissatisfied with the concept of deterministic “necessity” afterwards. He developed a new thinking of his own, “the doctrine of circumstances,” in which he acknowledged the theory of free will partially. See Mill, *Autobiography*, pp143–144.

- (5) I am indebted in part for my discussion in this section to Catherine Gallagher’s analysis of Carlyle in *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, pp187–200.
- (6) In the nineteenth century, the advocates of free will, above all, criticized the fact that the organic relationship between men had been gradually lost under the pursuit of profits. For example, Friedrich Engels observes the condition of “the great towns” as follows:

After roaming the streets of the capital a day or two, . . . one realizes for the first time that these Londoners have been forced to sacrifice the best qualities of their human nature, . . . The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space. . . . [T]his isolation of the individual, this narrow self-seeking is the fundamental principle of our society elsewhere, . . . The dissolution of mankind into monads, of which each one has a separate principle and a separate purpose, the world of atoms, is here carried out to its utmost extreme. (Engels 1845: 36–37)

From the view of free will, it is totally intolerable to dissolve mankind into “monads”, experience “the world of atoms.”

- (7) For useful discussions of the notion of “expressive causality,” see Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, 1981), pp23–58; William C. Dowling, *Jameson, Althusser, Marx* (Ithaca, 1984), pp55–75. Althusser’s three forms of causality are “mechanical causality,” “expressive causality,” and “structural causality.”

- (8) Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital*, qtd. in Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p24.
- (9) It is the arbitrariness of the Carlylean hero that Marx and Engels sneered at, in their review of Carlyle's *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. They mention Carlyle's Model Prisons, as follows:

Just as in the first pamphlet Carlyle erects a complete hierarchy of Nobles and seeks out the Noblest of the Noble, so here he arranges an equally complete hierarchy of scoundrels and villains and exerts himself in hunting down the *worst of the bad*, the *supreme scoundrel* in England, for the exquisite pleasure of hanging him. Assuming he were to catch him and hang him; then another will be our Worst and must be hanged in turn, and then another again, until the turn of the Noble and then the more Noble is reached and finally no one is left but Carlyle, the noblest, . . . (Marx and Engels 1850: 310)

- (10) For a detailed discussion of "the neo-fascism of Thomas Carlyle," see Eric Williams, *British Historians and the West Indies* (New York, 1966), chapter 4. Williams says as follows: "In less than a hundred years the world was to see the Carlylean vision of society in practice and in fact. That Hitlerism should have such powerful antecedents in England, . . . — that is the mystery of Carlyle in the great age of British economic domination of the world, of British political democracy, of British historical writing" (75).
- (11) Needless to say, Carlyle's expression — the Real, designates our symbolic reality in this passage. It does not mean the Real, but the Symbolic, in the Lacanian sense.
- (12) See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Essays on Ideology* (London, 1984), p44.
- (13) *Ibid.*, pp36–44.

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