JANICE L. HANEY

"Shadow-Hunting": Romantic Irony, Sartor Resartus, and Victorian Romanticism

The man who allows himself to be poetically produced also has a specific given context to which he must accommodate himself, and hence is not a word without meaning for having been divested of connection and context. (Kierkegaard, The Concept of Irony)

If one text creates Victorian Romanticism as both a formal and historical moment, then that text is Carlyle’s Sartor Resartus. In the classroom or in our literary histories, we often use Sartor to introduce the Victorian way and then to relate that way to an earlier Romanticism. Indeed, Sartor seems to capture an historical moment; at the same time, it creates it. Consequently, it functions in two ways: as a transitional text that helps us navigate the passage between those literary historical periods we call Romantic and Victorian and as a founding text that initiates us into a Victorian frame of mind. Something about Sartor makes it historically significant.

Perhaps that historical significance is related to Sartor’s fictional extravagance or formal complexity. Sartor seems an overdetermined fiction, a text that lays fiction upon fiction as if it wanted to stop interpretation or at least make reading a problem. Do we listen to Teufelsdröckh? If so, which Teufelsdröckh? But what about the editor? Or for that matter Heuschrecke or Oliver Yorke? Even if we do manage to choose one of these voices as a guide, what is it that we hear? A philosophy? A history? A life story? The more we read, the more our problems multiply. But those problems do not undermine Sartor’s historical significance; rather, they turn history into a question of formal interpretation.

To help us understand Sartor’s formal and historical significance, critics have called upon such contexts as the persuasive essay, German transcendental philosophy, and the Romantic circuitous journey.1 But all these contexts

1. Gerry H. Brookes, The Rhetorical Form of Carlyle’s Sartor Resartus (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1972); Charles Frederick Harrold, Carlyle and German Thought, Yale

SiR, 17 (Summer 1978)

307
make too little of the irony that leavened Carlyle’s private announcement of his literary majority: “I am going to write—Nonsense. It is on ‘Clothes. Heaven be my Comforter!’”2 That same irony permeates Carlyle’s public proclamation: Sartor Resartus. If we want to relate Sartor’s formal extravagance to its historical significance, we must begin to make more of the book’s irony. But first we must recognize Sartor’s particular kind of irony: Romantic Irony.

At least one critic has recognized Sartor’s Romantic Irony: G. B. Tennyson.3 But Tennyson’s discussion is limited by his conception of both irony and Romantic Irony. Tennyson conceives Romantic Irony as a series of formal “hallmarks” culminating in the disruption of artistic illusion. But Romantic Irony is more than one or two formal devices designed to disturb a representational illusion. Both the formal devices and the ambiguous status of artistic illusion signal a reinterpretation of existence and creation, a reinterpretation that has both philosophical and historical significance. If we are to probe that significance, then we must read Romantic Irony as a context rather than as a series of isolated techniques. In this paper, I emphasize Sartor’s irony in hopes that such an emphasis will allow us a glimpse of Victorian Romanticism in the making. Moreover, I suggest that Sartor’s historical significance can be grasped only after we acknowledge Romantic Irony as the “given context” to which Carlyle accommodated himself.4

I. THE IRONIC CONTEXT: THEORY AND HISTORY

One way to make more of Sartor’s irony is to assume a theoretical perspective. Some contemporary narrative theorists insist that all fiction is ironic or at least must be read ironically.5 Given this theoretical perspective, we need not argue for Sartor’s use of an ironic context—let alone a Romantic Ironic context. Instead, we just assume an ironic text and then read it as such. But that’s where our real theoretical problems begin. Assuming for the moment that

---

4. I borrow this phrasing from Kierkegaard’s The Concept of Irony, trans. Lee M. Capel (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1965); see epigraph to this paper.
Sartor is ironic, what do we make of this irony? According to contemporary theories of literary irony, we have two choices: reconstruction or deconstruction.

In his recent *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), Wayne Booth champions a reconstructive reading of ironic texts. In opposition to the New Critical reading of irony as self-enclosed aesthetic play and to the more recent critical reading of irony as a continual deferment of meaning, Booth proposes that we read irony as rhetorically functional. There is a stable center that underwrites even the most ironic of surfaces and a good reader reconstructs that meaningful center or statement. Booth contends that all literature is interpretable: it has an intentionality which we can recover. Although this recovery may be difficult in the case of irony, it is still possible. But it is possible precisely because Booth believes that both language and literature have a stable and meaningful center.

In the face of irony, Booth reconstructs. But, taking his point of departure from linguistic philosophy, Paul de Man deconstructs. Deconstruction has pretensions. It purports to be more than just another way of reading since it comes in response to the “closure of metaphysics.” Backed by Derrida’s exposition of Western metaphysics and language, de Man announces the impossibility of a “true” interpretation or meaning. Meaning—that stable center—is at most an illusion, a left-over from an antiquated metaphysics that seeks to center all play, even the play of language. Beginning with a definition of irony as “dedoublement” in the service of a self, de Man ends by un-defining irony. In performance, irony’s permanent parabasis generates a grammar or textual system that continually denies us the possibility of meaning. From this theoretical perspective, interpretation must become the irony of ironies, a continual deconstruction of the structures we critics have built upon texts.

Such then are our theoretical choices. Nor do these choices surprise us once we remember how the eighteenth century renamed God as reason or sense. Once God is defined in this way, meaning and interpretation become the problems, and irony one arena for continual speculation. Our most recent speculators—Booth on the one hand and de Man on the other—reiterate our options and demand that we choose. But if we are to understand our choices as well as the peculiar demands of Sartor’s irony, some history is called for. A purely theoretical option does not answer to our demands for significance.

Booth, we might say, begins reading irony with an eighteenth-century faith in reason and its building blocks (topoi). These truths we hold to be self-evident: so said even the most outrageously ironic eighteenth-century texts like Swift’s “A Modest Proposal.” Whether local or general, neoclassical irony is made meaningful by a faithful reference to a doctrine and its formulas. If not doctrine, then surely character. Booth extends his eighteenth-century faith in meaning to include a faith in character as a unifying center. In doing so, Booth allows for a Romantic anxiety about meaning. But he also turns that anxiety back into faith—a faith in a unitary or doctrinal self. Thus irony’s form is read as rhetorical, its demands as reconstructive. Irony is not metaphysics; rather it is a way of talking. In function, it is polemical; in tendency, satiric.

Booth begins with an eighteenth-century faith and then accommodates a nineteenth-century anxiety. But Paul de Man begins with a Romantic anxiety which he soon turns into the most modern of gay sciences: Nietzschean affirmation. In the “Rhetoric of Temporality,” de Man reads Romantic Irony’s dialectic of self as a play designed to aggrandize the freedom and power of consciousness (p. 203). But no sooner has he allowed for this “positive poetic self” than he turns self-engendering irony into the “narrowing spiral of a linguistic sign that becomes more and more remote from its meaning” (p. 203). Like Nietzsche, de Man now explodes a Romantic consciousness in irony: “we first imagine an act that does not exist, ‘thinking,’ and second we imagine as substratum of this act a subject in which every act of thought and nothing else originates: this means that the deed as well as the doer are fictions (sowohl das Tun, als der Täter sind fingiert).”7 In this turn, de Man begins to read Romantic Irony as a Nietzschean affirmation or continual deconstruction. Thus Romantic Irony is turned into that modern gay science of grammatology—the study of a spiraling linguistic sign.

Both de Man and Booth agree that irony says “No.” But when reading Romantic Irony, these two critics read it respectively backwards and forwards. Booth admits a Romantic Ironist’s “No” in order to repeat an eighteenth-century “Yes.” De Man, on the other hand, welcomes the Romantic Ironist’s “No” in order to repeat a modern “No.” In either case Romantic Irony is being used—and perhaps abused. It is not being read as a context with its own peculiar demands and historical relevance. Moreover, a purely theoretical approach to Sartor’s irony gives us an impossible choice. Sartor’s irony is neither an eighteenth-century polemic nor a modern deconstruction; rather, it is a Romantic irony.

What then is Romantic Irony? If those of us interested in English Romanti-

civism have failed to raise this question, it is because “irony” seems exactly the wrong word to use when reading Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley. Even Byron doesn’t raise the question in us for we usually read him by way of these other Romantics; we look for Byron’s “myth” or his vision. English Romanticism may seem allegorical, mythic, or visionary: anything but ironic.

Where then do we go for Romantic Irony? If we want to know more about Romantic Irony, we’ll have to go to Carlyle’s favorites: the German Romantics. Although Fichte, Tieck, and Richter confront irony, Friedrich Schlegel gives us the clearest account of a Romantic ironic philosophy and aesthetic. So it is from Schlegel—whom Carlyle had read with anxious sympathy for his spiritual quest and its concluding inconclusiveness—that I will derive the context I am calling Romantic Irony. But first some general remarks to help us locate our position. From the beginning, we must recognize that Romantic Irony is essentially aesthetic and metaphysical—not rhetorical, nor grammatical. As Schlegel puts it, ideal Romantic Irony “originates in the union of a sense of an art of living and a scientific intellect, in the meeting of accomplished natural philosophy and accomplished philosophy of art.” Or again, Schlegel writes that philosophy is the “true home of irony” and then carefully distinguishes this true Romantic Irony from a rhetorical irony whose function is polemical. Rather than polemics, Romantic Irony offers us metaphysics. Indeed, its roots are transcendental, even though it radically reinterpret an idealist metaphysic. It is that metaphysical and aesthetic reinterpretation which concerns me.

Like so many German Romantics, Schlegel takes his philosophical departure from Kant and his aesthetic beginning from Schiller. From Kant, Schlegel inherited the antinomy of the Infinite (Reason, Noumenon) and the finite (Understanding, Phenomenon); from Schiller, the antinomy of the naive and sentimental. With his inheritance in hand—an inheritance which apotheosizes the mind as creative—Schlegel set out to resolve these antinomies

---


9. Some of Schlegel’s aphorisms first printed in the Lyceum and Athenaeum have been translated and collected by Ernst Behler and Roman Struc in Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms (University Park: Pennsylvania State U. Press, 1968). All references to the aphorisms will be to this text. In order to distinguish those fragments published in the Lyceum, I add a “1” to my citation; similarly, to distinguish those published in the Athenaeum, I add a “2” to my citation. In this case, the first quotation is from Aphorisms 1, no. 108, p. 131. I should also point out that Schlegel is here describing “Socratic irony”; however, he makes Socratic irony the ideal for a Romantic Irony. The second quotations are from Aphorisms 1, no. 42, p. 126.
by reinterpreting the nature of reality and art. This reinter-pretation he sometimes called irony, and sometimes, Romanticism; in short, "absolute Romanticism, Romantic Irony."\textsuperscript{11}

Philosophically, Romantic Irony posited an abundant chaos as the ultimate metaphysical reality. As Schlegel reasoned, Kant's disjunction of the infinite and finite had validity only insofar as a substantial and absolute identity constituted reality. If man accepts this Aristotelian postulate, then he has only two alternatives: either he can define absolute reality as the Infinite or as the finite. In the first case, matter, man, and phenomenal experience would be lies—phantasms of nothingness: the result, a deadly spiritualism. But if absolute reality were defined as finite, man would still be condemned to an unin-habitable universe; in this case, a world of material necessity and mechanical bondage. Like so many other post-Kantians, Schlegel refuses this double damnation. Going back to the crux of Kant's disjunction—the assumption of absolute identity as the ground of reality—Schlegel revised Kantian metaphysics:

Reluctantly do I miss in Kant's genealogical tree of rudimentary concepts the category "nearly," which surely was as effective in the world and in literature and has done as much harm as any other category. In the spirit of natural sceptics, this category tingles all the other concepts and views. (\textit{Aphorisms} 1, no. 89, p. 129)

Although he never doubted the creative centrality of the self, Schlegel did posit an alternative conception of reality: not being but becoming. In becoming, change and growth are the ground of substance; or in metaphorical terms, an abundant chaos, the ocean from which \textit{Calypso} islands of stability emerge. Schlegel thus framed the problem of the infinite and finite in terms of both/and rather than either/or.\textsuperscript{12} Infinity becomes an ever-increasing

\textsuperscript{10} Until his conversion to Catholicism, Schlegel did not try to reconcile the antinomies. But even in the early fragments, he desires resolution, a metaphysical point of view. Unlike Nietzsche, who questions the metaphysical project in order to expose its failure, Schlegel questions metaphysics in order to redefine it. Consequently his remarks on irony, reality, and art still respect metaphysical categories. Such respect allows us to speak of his irony as metaphysical rather than purely discursive as de Man would have it. In probing the metaphysics of Schlegel's irony, I make liberal use of Leonard P. Wessell's "The Antinomic Structure of Friedrich Schlegel's Romanticism," \textit{SiR}, 12 (1973), 648-69.


\textsuperscript{12} In becoming, the principle of contradiction is no longer applicable. Therefore, anything can be both itself and not itself; "a" can be "a" and "not-a" at any given moment. Becoming, however, does not negate the project of being; it simply opens it to motion and change. Schlegel thus replaces the center; he is not a Nietzsche who decenters.
manifold of finite expressions and finitude a momentarily limited infinity.

In reinterpreting being as becoming, Schlegel revised the telos of the Ego’s spiritual activity: the achievement of a static goal or identity gives way to the primacy of process or continual creation. Man never is; he is always “a-being.” Consequently, meaning centers in the I’s never-ending quest for full self-realization through the positing of finite objects—be they philosophical systems, works of art, self-conceptions, or material objects. Yet self-realization also mandates that the Ego continually surpass such circumscribed islands. If reality is a chaotic, incomprehensible becoming, so too is man’s experience one of unceasing growth and change, of creation and destruction. The formulations man makes can never contain truth; mythoi can be used, but never believed.

Man as Ego is thus poised between two psychological drives: the one for absolute being, identity, and order, and the other for the freedom and possibility of a chaos that knows no finality of perfection. “The play of communicating and approaching is the business and the force of life; absolute perfection exists only in death.” For Schlegel, life persisted and developed by means of a continual reversal of order and disorder, system and chaos, enthusiasm and skepticism. Such interplay mandates a double vision for man; he must be aware of his limited knowledge in any one moment of time and aware of his ability to transcend these limits through self-conscious acknowledgment of them. Like Socrates, modern man had to admit that he knew nothing. But in so admitting, he left himself open to change, growth, and self-transcendence. Man thereby emerges victorious over a world that threatens to reduce him to the butt of a cosmic joke.

In this self-transcendence, Romantic Irony found its ultimate value. As Muecke points out, Schlegel’s irony is a version of that subjective idealism that offers triumph to the self. Taking Fichte’s Philosophical Ego, Schlegel revised it until it became an aesthetic self. This revision then made it possible for Schlegel to claim that man can achieve a degree of superiority over and independence from the world. Romantic Irony is a process in service of the self—an ultimately creative self that hovers.

Schlegel’s reliance on a creative ego turns his metaphysics into an aesthetic. Indeed, it is questionable which came first: the aesthetic or the philosophy. Art could mediate the finite and infinite for mankind precisely because it repeated an infinite creator’s relationship to his finite creation. Taking an-


14. Although Schlegel always confirmed the chaotic cosmos, later ironists tended to see the universal joke in less positive ways. Muecke concentrates on this more modern development.
other hint from Fichte, Schlegel transformed a metaphysical problem into an aesthetic one: the relationship between an infinitively striving artist and his determinate production. If art was to realize its authentic potential, it had to incorporate the antinomic tensions at the heart of reality and man. In its finite determination art was to display, through irony, the internal fullness of an infinite striving; the writer must be immanent in his creation and yet transcend its limitations. In creating, he must hover between an enthusiastic self-creation or creation of systems (fictions) and a skeptical self-destruction or intrinsic questioning of his own production. In playing with his own commitment and its artistic form, the artist escapes a systematic imprisonment and realizes self-transcendence. Only through continual inversions of vision and doubt could art achieve the progression of becoming that characterized true Romantic poetry: “The Romantic type of poetry is still becoming; indeed, its peculiar essence is that it is always becoming and that it can never be completed” (Aphorisms 2, no. 116, p. 141).

This becoming makes all Aristotelian notions of artistic representation (art as product) problematical: “All the classical genres are now ridiculous in their rigorous purity” (Aphorisms 1, no. 60, p. 127). Genres based on an Aristotelian conception of mimesis no longer suffice and are amongst the first literary traditions questioned. Not only are drama, lyric, and epic confounded, but even the lines distinguishing poetry from prose and fiction from nonfiction blur. There is no stable reality to be mirrored without taking account of the observer’s lamp. Consequently, perspectivism and the process of making meaning dominate this Romantic art wherein form and form engage in a continual struggle. Moreover, this struggle bespeaks the tensions of the center: chaos and system, belief and disbelief, enthusiasm and skepticism. Now the literary game becomes a game of possibility. From Schlegel’s perspective, it was equally deadly for the Romantic ironist to have a system or to have none (Aphorisms 2, no. 53, p. 136). Art must combine both within a “transcendental buffoonery” whose objective form was an arabesque: “this artfully ordered confusion, this charming symmetry of contradictions, this wonderfully perennial alternation of enthusiasm and irony which lives even in the smallest parts of the whole” (Dialogue, p. 86).

By using fragments, a variety of literary forms, unreconciled perspectives, intricate narrative frames, disruptions of cause and effect, and confessional interpolations, the Romantic ironist generously gave to his audience both a renewed “consciousness of an eternal agility, of the infinitely abundant chaos” (Aphorisms 2, no. 69, p. 155) and an optimistic assurance of man’s never-ending quest for meaning. Romantic Irony thus became a metaphysic and an aesthetic that affirmed multiplicity, growth, and change while recognizing the momentary need for unity, stability, system, and illusory substance. In this way, Romantic Irony aspires to ideal significance: its meaning
is contradictory; its structure, dialectical; its medium, the language of reflection; its style, antithetical; and its aim, self-discovery through transcendence. 15

It is Romantic Irony's metaphysical cast and its stress on the creative ego that make it peculiarly Romantic. We would be wrong to consider it a rejection of that allegorical, mythic, or visionary mode of making meaning so common to the English Romantics. Rather, it is a German way of keeping alive that creative genius and its revolutionary possibility. Like English Romanticism, the German strain adopts a cosmic scene and then apotheosizes literature and philosophy as authentic discourses. But most importantly, both the English and German versions of Romanticism make meaning by reference to transcendental categories.

Here, however, we must make some distinctions. Allegorical Romanticism usually assumes an ideal form; it refers our meaning making to a relatively stable transcendental pattern. Sometimes this transcendental realm is called Nature; but this nature will never be the chaotic force it is for the Romantic Ironist. Rather, Nature is presented as an order, a Being, a mind—even a God. This Nature has law, purpose, and stability. At other times, the transcendental reference for meaning may be the self; but again, this self will be ordered into a character or an ideal consciousness. This ideal self has identity and knowledge, and he demands our trust precisely because he can present himself as unified—as at one with himself. Besides Nature and self, allegorical Romanticism often calls upon time to ratify the meaning-making quest. But time is also presented as ideal and prefigured; whether it is the time of the mind or the time of the world, the story line presents time as providential. All three of these Romantic appeals refer us to a stable transcendental realm, a realm that assures us of a meaning. However, this assurance necessitates a studied neglect of an empirical referent—be it a "real" tree, a "real" Wordsworth, or a "true" story. Instead of a tree, we get "of many, one"; instead of Wordsworth, we read a philosophical or poetic character; and instead of a true story, we follow the line of allegory or a purely literary temporality.

The case is a bit different with Romantic Irony. Although Schlegel also appeals to transcendental intelligibility, the transcendental is conceived of as a process rather than as a being, a state, or a pattern. Consequently, meaning is always in the making and process is apotheosized. Metaphysically, this process appeals to an idea: becoming. This idea may appear in the guise of nature and, when it does so, it is called organicism; "real" nature is imaged as an abundant chaos in which creation and destruction are equally at work.

15. I borrow this summary of Romantic Irony from Lee M. Capel's introduction to Kierkegaard's The Concept of Irony, p. 32. Because I have changed the syntax and added the phrase "through transcendence," I have not put quotation marks around my borrowing.
But this nature is clearly a self-created fiction, a metaphor based upon the revolutionary capacity of the self:

But we should not care for a transcendental philosophy unless it were critical, unless it portrayed the producer along with the product, unless it embraced in its system of transcendental thoughts a characterization of transcendental thinking: in the same way, that poetry which is not infrequently encountered in modern poets should combine those transcendental materials and preliminary exercises for a poetic theory of the creative power with the artistic reflection and beautiful self-mirroring, which is present in Pindar. (*Aphorisms* 2, no. 238, p. 145)

In Romantic Irony, the creating self is neither unified nor stable; rather, it is in the process of creating itself.

Schlegel usually conceives this process of self-creation as an intra-subjective doubling ("beautiful self-mirroring") which alternates between enthusiasm and doubt. First, the self projects an image of itself: "The inward vision can become clearer to itself and quite vivid only through externalized representation" (*Dialogue*, p. 77). But as it images itself, the Ego gets caught in a representational system; it falls. Now the creating Ego may become possessed—either by its own enthusiastic image or by the coincident representational system:

Nothing is more piquant than when a man of genius possesses mannerisms; to be sure, when he possesses them, but not at all, if they possess him; this leads to spiritual petrifaction. (*Aphorisms* 1, no. 88, p. 129)

As long as the artist invents and is inspired, he remains in a constrained state of mind, at least for the purposes of communication. He then wants to say everything, which is the wrong tendency of young geniuses or the right prejudice of old bunglers. Thus, he fails to recognize the value and dignity of self-restraint, which is indeed for both the artist and the man, the first and the last, the most necessary and the highest goal. The most necessary: for wherever we do not restrain ourselves, the world will restrain us; and thus we will become its slave. (*Aphorisms* 1, no. 37, pp. 124–25)

In order to escape its own death and the death of meaning, the self transcends its own image and representational system. Self-consciously, the text disrupts the illusion of a unified speaker and presents us with another self, a hovering aesthetic self:

In such poems there lives a real transcendental buffoonery. Their interior is permeated by the mood which surveys everything and rises infinitely above everything limited, even above the poet's own art, virtue, and
genius; and their exterior form by the histrionic style of an ordinary
good Italian buffo. ( Aphorisms 1, no. 42, p. 126)

By “conscious dissimulation,” the self continually engages in self-parody in
order to maintain the “freest of all liberties”: the freedom “to rise above [its]
own self” (Aphorisms 1, no. 108, p. 131).

This Romantic Ironic self proclaims its freedom by calling on the revolu-
tionary potential of time. Unlike the time of an allegorical Romanticism, the
time of Romantic Irony is momentary and subjective: in a moment, man can
change his mind and stand everything on its head. Such reversals are guaran-
teed by the contradictory postings in the idea of becoming. But the reversal
is carried out by a self that has the infinite agility and absolute power of
invention. More clearly than in the English Romantic tradition, the German
Ironic self is lord and master. Moreover, that self is always in process, always
glorifying its own self-activity.

Schlegel’s fragmentary notes on an ironic intelligibility clearly indicate that
self-consciousness is the preferred way; self-consciousness is preferred because
it transcendentally ratifies the Ego’s quest for meaning. But as anyone who
has toyed with self-consciousness knows, it is an endless process that implic-
ates the creating self in a new problem: egocentricity. Schlegel also recog-
nized this new danger, calling it excessive sentimentality. But even though
he admitted risk, Schlegel believed that sentimentality was the inescapable
law of the Romantic “epoch.” Nothing but intra-subjective doubling seemed
possible—unless, perhaps, “symphilosophy and sympoetry”:

Perhaps a completely new epoch of sciences and arts would arise, if
symphilosophy and sympoetry became so universal and intimate that it
would no longer be unusual if several characters who complement each other
would produce common works. Sometimes one can scarcely resist the idea
that two minds might actually belong together like separate halves, and
that only in union could they be what they might be. Were there an art
of fusing individuals, or could postulating criticism do somewhat more
than just postulate. . . . ( Aphorisms 2, no. 125, p. 141)

In this fragment, Schlegel suggests another route for irony: not intra-sub-
jective doubling but inter-subjective composing. However, Schlegel also admits
that such a form would initiate a new “epoch” in the arts and sciences, for it
interrupts the infinite regress of self-consciousness without returning to an
allegorical or transcendental stability. Such an irony would create a new time.
In consequence, it would be both a version and a revision of Romantic Irony.

But the German Romantic Ironists did not attempt “symphilosophy and
sympoetry”; instead, they remained committed to self-consciousness, ironic
reversal, and becoming. In so doing, these Romantic ironists differentiated
themselves from the English allegorical Romantics. Yet both make meaning by reference to transcendental categories, even though the categories are different. English Romanticism appeals to a transcendental pattern while German Romantic Irony calls on a transcendental process. Of these two Romanticisms, Carlyle favored the German, but he also found it disturbing. What is missing in Romantic Irony is what Kierkegaard called "actuality": a sense for the historical and social scene of the creating self. As my reading of Sartor suggests, Carlyle was finally disturbed by Romantic Irony's refusal of an historical and social scene. Consequently, Sartor Resartus both translates and transforms a Romantic Ironic context. In his book, Carlyle attempts to make Romantic Irony a text of the times, perhaps even a Victorian text.

II. THE TEXT: "SARTOR RESARTUS" AND ROMANTIC IRONY

Although Carlyle had read Schlegel, he never proclaimed himself either a follower of Schlegel or a Romantic Ironist. Still, there are some suggestive parallels between Schlegel and Carlyle. First we could cite similarities between the Jena circle's sense of their social and historical situation and Carlyle's reading of nineteenth-century England. Both coupled revolutionary zeal with the recognition that "to reform a world, to reform a nation, no wise man will undertake." Then we might note the parallel philosophical problem: how to combine the finite and the infinite in a dynamic way that captured both man's inerminable striving and nature's chaotic abundance:

We, the whole species of Mankind, and our whole existence and history, are but a floating speck in the illimitable ocean of the All; yet in that ocean; indissoluble portion thereof; partaking of its infinite tendencies: borne this way and that by its deep swelling tides, and grand ocean currents;—of which what faintest chance is there that we should ever exhaust the significance, ascertain the goings and comings? ("Characteristics," p. 25)

Or we might remark the temperamental resemblances. Like the German Ironists, Carlyle both desired system and yet deeply distrusted all systematic determinations: "Few men have the secret of being at once determinate (destinum) and open; of knowing what they do know, and yet lying ready for further knowledge" (Two Note Books, pp. 77-78). Finally we might want to compare Carlyle's distaste for mechanical cause-and-effect fictions with Schlegel's rejection of an unselconscious narrative form. Both dismissed narratives that fixed reality into "argument" or linear chains of one-surface dimension.

But our most convincing argument for Carlyle as a Romantic Ironist is

16. See Kierkegaard's critique of Romantic Irony in The Concept of Irony.
Sartor Resartus and Victorian Romanticism

Sartor itself. Here is a book that seems to fulfill Schlegel's demand for an arabesque. It makes use of fragments, intricate narrative frames, multiple voices, disruptions of cause and effect, and confessional interpolations; the whole seems an "artfully ordered confusion, [a] charming symmetry of contradictions, [and a] wonderfully perennial alternation of enthusiasm and irony" (Schlegel, Dialogue, p. 86). From Teufelsdröckh's prophetic frenzies to the editor's critical play, Sartor demands that we admit irony. But the problem is how to read this ironic surface. On the one hand, Gerrry Brookes would have us read it rhetorically—as one tool Carlyle uses to persuade us of Teufelsdröckh's truth: the Clothes Philosophy. On the other hand, LaValley reads it as an expression of modern anxiety and humanistic pessimism.18 Using our theoretical terms, we might say that Brookes like Booth is of the reconstructive faith while LaValley tends towards the deconstructive affirmation. We are now back to our old quandary. But before we choose our method, we need to recognize Sartor's particular brand of irony. Neither Brookes nor LaValley deals with Sartor's relationship to a Romantic ironic context; instead, they project Sartor backwards or forwards. But Carlyle is not quite a Swift, nor quite a Nietzsche. His irony is more Romantic.

That Romantic Irony begins with Carlyle's use of multiple levels of fiction. These fictions reflect and refract each other as in a series of oblique mirrors. As if following Schlegel's mandate for "beautiful self-mirroring" and "poetic reflection," Carlyle writes a book about a man who is writing a book about a man who has written a book called Die Kleider, ihr Werden und Wirken. Although Romantic Irony is also implicated in Sartor's imagery—particularly that of ocean and island, substance and shadow—it is the form of the work with its multi-leveled fictions and fragmented style that creates an ironic surface. As in Romantic Irony these fictions turn irony into a questioning of the relations between self and system and between versions of a self. Sartor presents a system: the Clothes Philosophy. Yet it escapes argument by focusing on the relation of both the editor and Teufelsdröckh to this clothes fiction.

To insure even more ironic dynamism, Carlyle also pits self against self: we have an empirical self, the editor, facing a metaphysical and aesthetic self, Teufelsdröckh. Together these two compose a book about the quest for meaning. This inter-subjective narrative frame has often perplexed those critics who would like to equate Teufelsdröckh and his Clothes Volume with Carlyle and Sartor Resartus. But the editor who appropriates one-half of Sartor cannot be so easily effaced. In a very important sense, he is the primary fiction. Only through his attempts to order the chaotic Clothes Volume and the autobiographical fragments is Teufelsdröckh allowed his say. To the

enthusiastic self-creation of Teufelsdröckh, the editor adds self-restraint, permitting Carlyle coyly to offer a system while transcending its limitations. Like Teufelsdröckh, the editor dedicates himself to a quest for meaning: “to evolve printed Creation out of a German printed and written Chaos.” But in doing so, he modifies the telos of Teufelsdröckh’s journey, providing us with a truer index of Carlyle’s intentions than Teufelsdröckh alone can offer. The editor’s modifications keep Sartor within an ironic Weltanschauung and maintain the double vision which the final phases of Teufelsdröckh’s autobiography and philosophy seek to surpass.

Although in its uppermost regions it attempts the single vision of the mystic, in its main movement the Clothes Philosophy expresses an ironic metaphysic. At its center is the doctrine of symbols which asserts that reality is always a dynamic interplay of the finite and the infinite:

In the Symbol proper, what we can call a Symbol, there is ever, more or less distinctly and directly, some embodiment and revelation of the Infinite; the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite, to stand visible, and as it were, attainable there. By Symbols, accordingly, is man guided and commanded, made happy, made wretched. (SR, p. 175)

“More or less” and “some” are the important words here. Although symbols speak to the fantasy and intimate a sense of the whole, the vision is always imperfect. No direct communication results; symbols both reveal and conceal so that man and his works remain both god-born and devil’s-dung.

Already with this acknowledgement of “nearly” the ironic perspective is implicated. But when this symbolism is wedded to organicism, the first phase of the Clothes Philosophy emerges, a phase which proclaims becoming as the basis of reality. Being finite, symbols are perforce “time figures,” necessary supports and encouragers of dynamism but also inhibitors or clothes screens. In the inner fullness of symbols, the chaotic All churns, throwing out organic filaments for the future. All symbols are perpetually undergoing “metamorphosis”; the infinite surpasses its self-imposed limits, sloughing off its old forms while appropriating new ones. Suspect now is the primacy of substance or absolute being; all reality is in the process of creation and de-

20. Normally we associate symbolism with visionary Romanticism. However, Romantic Irony also allows for symbolism—albeit of a different variety. Visionary Romanticism hankers after an accomplished symbolism, one in which a stable Absolute is incarnated in a natural referent. In Romantic Irony, symbols are not conceived of as natural signs; they are social constructs or the works of men. As such they are time-figures rather than spots of time. Moreover, Romantic Irony makes the Infinite dynamic rather than stable. All this distinguishes a Romantic Ironic appeal to symbol from a visionary appeal. But also I should note that in “Natural Supernaturalism” Teufelsdröckh’s appeal to symbol turns visionary.
struction, a “so solid-seeming World, which nevertheless is in continual restless flux” (SR, p. 158).

At this point in the Clothes Philosophy, man’s orientation towards the symbolic must be ambivalent; he must have a double vision. At one extreme, he approaches symbols with the wonder they demand as a shadowing forth of an infinite becoming. And yet, because all clothes conceal and distort, man must become a demystifier, suspecting and destroying his own reverence:

“Custom,” continues the Professor, “doth make dotards of us all. Consider well, thou wilt find that Custom is the greatest of Weavers; and weaves air-riaiment for all the Spirits of the Universe; whereby indeed these dwell with us visibly, as ministering servants, in our houses and workshops; but their spiritual nature becomes, to the most, forever hidden. Philosophy complains that Custom has hoodwinked us, from the first. . . . Nay, what is Philosophy throughout but a continual battle against Custom; an ever-renewed effort to transcend the sphere of blind Custom, and so become Transcendental?” (SR, p. 206)

Similarly, as a creator of symbols, man is ironically situated. He necessarily creates systems for himself and yet above all his finite creations hovers a shadow. The systems are inevitably flawed:

A certain inarticulate Self-consciousness dwells dimly in us; which only our Works can render articulate and decisively discernible. (SR, p. 132)

Man’s Unhappiness as I construe, comes of his Greatness; it is because there is an Infinite in him, which with all his cunning he cannot quite bury under the Finite. . . . Always there is a black spot in our sunshine: it is even, as I said, the Shadow of Ourselves. (SR, pp. 151–52)

Thus, this form of the Clothes Philosophy holds in balance two conceptions of man and reality—as finite and infinite—and, like Romantic Irony, commands two masks for man’s earthly quest: destroyer and creator. To play these roles, man must understand the Socratic dictum that “they only are wise who know that they know nothing” (SR, p. 42). Only with double vision and struggle can the organicist imperative be fulfilled.

If the Clothes Philosophy ended with this vision of eternal process, there could be little doubt of its similarity to Schlegel’s reformulation of existence and creation. But the Clothes Philosophy ends by transforming change, time, and flux into phenomena; in the end, it asserts the primacy of an absolute stable Eternity, knowable through “pure Reason” in moments of mystical splendor. In this light, man and his chaotic reality become ghostly apparitions, meaningless moments of an undifferentiated unity:
Then sawest thou that this fair Universe, were it in the meanest province thereof, is in very deed the star-doomed City of God; that through every star, through every grass-blade, and most through every Living Soul, the glory of a present God still beams. (SR, p. 210)

"O Heaven, it is mysterious, it is awful to consider that we not only carry each a future Ghost within Him; but are, in very deed, Ghosts!" (SR, p. 211; italics mine)

Here the double vision demanded by the "more or less" of symbolism and the becoming of organicism dissolves into a single unmediated vision of total communication. In seeing all, man also sees nothing.

In the editor's fragmented presentation of the Clothes Volume, this philosophy gradually unfolds. In accordance with the double vision necessary to the ironic movement of the philosophy, Teufelsdröckh's work falls into two sections: Historical-Descriptive and Philosophical-Meditative. However, to the editor's consternation, it "falls unhappily by no firm line of demarcation; in that labyrinthic combination, each Part overlaps, and indents, and indeed runs quite through the other" (SR, pp. 26-27). Even though our editor may find this perpetual dialectic between history and philosophy a problem, that doubling does not truly confuse him or the reader. Why? Because it realizes the double vision of an ironic perspective. What does confuse, however, is Teufelsdröckh's attempt to superimpose a tri-partite pattern on the doubled structure of his Clothes Volume. Teufelsdröckh wants a third part precisely because he wants to move beyond irony into visionary apocalypse. So, taking time as his fair seedbed and using clothes as his optics, Teufelsdröckh courses over the past and present; he then strains for a third: a prophecy.

In the first section of his volume, Teufelsdröckh offers his readers an "Orbis-Vestitus," a skeptical account of the reigning fashions from the time of paradise to the time of the modern. Clothes, as Teufelsdröckh observes, originate in man's spiritual excess; tattoos, printing, and modern steam engines are all temporary fashions put on for a space of time and then discarded. With the humor of a mature satirist, Teufelsdröckh exposes man to reveal him as "by nature a Naked Animal" who "masks himself in clothes." But in divesting man of his "clothes thatch," Teufelsdröckh prepares the way for his codicil to historical criticism: "yet also a spirit, and unutterable Mystery of Mysteries" (SR, p. 45).

The latter section of Die Kleider, the Philosophical-Meditative section, takes up the second aspect of the Clothes Philosophy: transcendentalism. It moves, however, through the fantastic and symbolic (double vision) intuition of an ironic "yet also" towards the "pure reason" that knows all as absolute spirit, "light sparkles floating in the aether of Diety!" (SR, p. 43).
With this last movement, a prophecy emerges: soon will come an era of social palingenesis brought about by the reincarnation of belief in a new mythos which reunites man, man and his world, and man and his God. Rather than a "time figure," clothing now appears to Teufelsdröckh as our link with Infinitude: the "forms whereby Spirit manifests itself to sense, whether outwardly or in the imagination" (SR, p. 215). They are "visible emblems" of the mystical bonds through which man "is revealed to his like, and dwells with them in Union and Division" (SR, p. 51). But for all Teufelsdröckh's promises, he too must admit that division always accompanies union; the prophecy of a total communication after "two centuries of convulsion and conflagration" seems almost parodic in its frenzied attempt on an absolute faith. The writing of the Palingenesie der menschlichen Gesellschaft is put off for another day. Teufelsdröckh remains a flawed prophet, unable to speak the ultimate word which would dispense with those intractable veils: space and time. He is reduced to magic: the Fortunatus Hat. "O, could I (with the Time-annihilating Hat) transport thee direct from the Beginnings to the Endings, how were thy eyesight unsealed, and thy heart set flaming in the Light-sea of celestial wonder!" (SR, p. 210). The contradictions of double vision, with its "authentic Revelations of a God and a Devil" and its equally authentic processes of destruction and creation, remain unresolved, straining towards the mystic harmonic whole, but never accomplishing the resolved cadence of an apocalypse that is more than a promise—a desire of the heart.

This gradual expansion of the Clothes Philosophy is interrupted by Teufelsdröckh's autobiographical-biography, the third level of fiction. Like the interruptions on which Sartor's style generally depends, this interpolation both reflects and refracts meaning. As an expression of the Romantic Ironic attitude, the autobiography qualifies the philosophy, removing it from the realm of argument and reinforcing its status as a perspective. But perspectivism also suggests self-transcendence. After numerous readings, the Clothes Volume begins to harden into a system, or so says our editor. Yet the coloring of the Infinite remains; Teufelsdröckh's enigmatic character transcends his volume, thereby perplexing and inciting the editor's continuing quest for meaning. Like Carlyle, who believed that "no Poem is equal to its Poet," the editor welcomes the irony of art and the artistic process. Still, he attempts to go beyond irony to stabilize the shadow hovering above the written word. He tries his hand at biography. The result, however, is another mystification.

As a reflection of the Clothes Philosophy, Teufelsdröckh's quest for meaning falls into three stages which mimic the Clothes Volume's movement from descendentalism through organic filaments towards palingenesis. From the idyllic world of childhood where clothes are of a piece with man and nature, Teufelsdröckh enters the modern world, a wilderness wherein the monster Utilitaria dwells. As his innocent hold on an indestructible Good loosens and
fails, Teufelsdröckh and his "indivisible case of yellow serge" are torn apart, piece by piece. First there is the bitter fruit of rationalism; then, the inconstancy of love and friendship; and finally a deceiving mother Nature who would like us to believe that we are one with her. Naked, bereft of father and mother, Teufelsdröckh aligns himself with the Devil and aids in his own denuding by murdering all hope, rest, and faith in his own "strength" and "worth." At the end of this reductionist journey, the maw of meaninglessness opens: the Everlasting No's abyss. But, in the face of Golgotha, man asserts his own freedom and strength; he thereby recognizes himself as also a "spirit" and "almost a god." With assertion, man matures: "perhaps I directly thereupon began to be a Man" (SR, p. 135).

After this Baphometic Fire Baptism, Teufelsdröckh begins the second leg of his journey, a time of exploration wherein the ceaseless chaos of life is tempered by "little secular wells, whereby from time to time some alleviation is ministered" (SR, p. 136). In this Center of Indifference, the wells that punctuate the wilderness flow from the self and its ability to further its own "spiritual culture" through the systole and diastole of action and thought: "Internally, there is the most momentous instructive Course of Practical Philosophy, with Experiments, going on; towards the right comprehension of which his Peripatetic habits, favorable to Meditation, might help him rather than hinder" (SR, p. 141). Here, as in the organic filaments portion of the Clothes Philosophy, Teufelsdröckh accepts and celebrates change, perpetual metamorphosis, and growth as the ground of self and other. In this progressive becoming or "Shadow-Hunting," the world and self continually realize and purify themselves in a never ending movement towards meaning. Although at each step along the way self-knowledge and knowledge of the other increases, Teufelsdröckh, deprived of an absolute in which to repose, grows "way-weary and life-weary"; instead of making meaning, he desires to find meaning. From the battle of finite and infinite, Teufelsdröckh seeks a "Victory," an absolute communication beyond irony.

The Everlasting Yea fulfills Teufelsdröckh's demand for a total communication with a stable and unified Absolute Being. Lying down in a mystic trance, he discovers the "azure of Eternity" wherein "all contradiction is solved," and awakens to a "new Heaven and a new Earth." His conversion leads to prophecy: Teufelsdröckh announces an imminent palingenesis. This assertion is at one with Teufelsdröckh's recognition of his own "apostolic" role; after his Everlasting Yea experience, Teufelsdröckh sees himself as Diogenes and banishes his Teufelsdröckh-self to a blinded past. But in the paean to work which closes Teufelsdröckh's journey, the ironist's recognition of the limits of self-creation once again slips in to suggest a little less than the absolute faith Teufelsdröckh would like: "I too could now say to myself: Be no longer a Chaos, but a world, or even Worldkin. Produce! Produce!
Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it in God's name!'' (SR, p. 157).

Although Teufelsdröckh sometimes tempers his own visionary enthusiasm, there is little question that the end he desires—that of absolute unity, order, and myth—lies beyond change, flux, and becoming. He admits that

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 habitable flowery Earth-rind. (SR, p. 207)

But his accent progressively falls more on the "wisdom" or myth and less on the chaos that ironically challenges it. Teufelsdröckh would be a Romantic Visionary rather than a Romantic Ironist. Both the Clothes Philosophy and Teufelsdröckh's autobiography seek to establish a pattern: an allegory or myth. With this attempt, meaning is once again referred to a stable and unified transcendental state: either a Diogenes self or a providential story. In consequence, neither the parodic moments in the Clothes Philosophy nor those in the autobiography truly challenge that visionary mode of making meaning so common to the English Romantics. Instead, the true challenge to vision is articulated by another kind of fiction: that of the nameless editor who is co-authoring the text. This founding fiction usurps a Romantic allegory in favor of that ironic process that is producing Sartor. That ironic process is writing, an activity that Carlyle conceives of as an inter-subjective struggle or "sympoetry."

As if fulfilling Schlegel's demand for an interplay of self-creation and self-destruction, our unidentified editor maintains a healthy skepticism in the face of Teufelsdröckh's enthusiasm. Unlike the un-ideal reader Heuschrecke—a reader who makes Teufelsdröckh his god and swallows whole the mystifications of the Clothes Volume and life—the English editor keeps his distance. Pointing out Teufelsdröckh's failures as well as successes, the editor suggests the need for a certain critical perspective in both reader and writer. We are not to become imprisoned in narrative mystifications, neither those of the philosophy nor those of the life:

Our theory begins to be that, in receiving as literally authentic what was but hieroglyphically so, Hofrath Heuschrecke . . . was made a fool of, and set adrift to make fools of others. 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 German Hofrath; and not rather deceptively inlock both Editor and Hofrath in the labyrinthic tortuositics and covered-ways of said citadel (having
enticed them thither), to see, in his half-devilish way, how the fools would look? (SR, p. 161)

With “half-devilish” epithets, the editor reminds us of the problems Teufelsdröckh claims to transcend. Teufelsdröckh would see himself as Diogenes; but his editor is not convinced. Instead the editor uses double vision to explore both Teufelsdröckh and his philosophy. In doing so, the editor casts a problematic shadow over the text’s substantial allegory. He suggests that the transcendental intelligibility of a Romantic allegory may be outmoded—too innocent for the times.

Moreover, the editor’s interruptions, whether approving or disapproving, add to the general fragmentation of the whole. Even Book 1, the most allegorical of books, shows this interruption at work. Here the editor becomes something of a gossipy omniscient narrator, unable to stay out of his work. He continually interprets, criticizes, conjectures, and questions; yet all the time he claims that Teufelsdröckh is telling the story. Such ironic play can make us quite giddy; but it also encourages us to question the order imposed on the chaotic paper bags. The editor just doesn’t seem convinced of the story he’s helping to write.

But the ironic function of the editorial fiction goes beyond muted destruction or skepticism. Just as the autobiography both qualifies and reflects the Clothes Volume, so too does the editorial fiction serve the purposes of “beautiful self-mirroring.” We recall the title: Sator Resartus, the tailor retailed. Here in the interplay of English editor and German visionary is a realization of Schlegel’s dream: “sympathesis and sympoetry.” Like Teufelsdröckh, the editor undertakes a journey. Although the chaos he contends with is that of Teufelsdröckh’s Die Kleider, his quest for meaning mimes and modifies Teufelsdröckh’s pilgrimage through life and letters. From an innocent ignorance—“that never, till these last months did . . . our total want of a Philosophy of Clothes occur to him” (SR, pp. 4–5)—the editor enters the chaos of modern thought and modern authorship. Although his problems may seem minor when compared to Teufelsdröckh’s, the editor’s journey is really much more difficult. Unlike Teufelsdröckh, the enigmatic editor must make meaning without the help of any “supernatural force”:

Over such a universal medley of high and low, of hot, cold, moist, and dry, is he here struggling (by union of like with like, which is Method) to build a firm Bridge for British travellers. . . . nor is there any supernatural force to do it with; but simply the Diligence and feeble thinking Faculty of an English Editor, endeavouring to evolve printed Creation out of a German written and printed Chaos, wherein as he shoots to and fro in it, gathering, clutching, piecing, the Why to the far-distant Wherefore, his whole Faculty and Self are like to be swallowed up. (SR, pp. 62–63)
If the maw of meaninglessness threatens Teufelsdröckh in the Wilderness, an equally ravenous maw threatens our editor.

In constructing his bridge, our editor never fails to remind us of the incomprehensible chaos he tries to systematize. And at the end of his labor, he surveys his creation and admits its imperfection: "No firm arch, overspanning the Impassable with paved highway, could the Editor construct; only, as was said, some zigzag series of rafts floating tumultuously thereon" (SR, p. 214). Unlike Teufelsdröckh who offers total communication and absolute meaning, the editor gives no such assurance to man. But the imperfections of his work do not unduly frustrate him. From the beginning, he displaces the telos of man's quest: our end is not total communication but "self-activity" (SR, p. 21). Why self-activity? Because it encourages "changes in our way of thought." Along his way, the editor recognizes and accepts the imperfect nature of order and keeps alive the sense of multiplicity, excess, and contradiction which is life itself. Consequently, his journey qualifies Teufelsdröckh's; they travel only in "partial sight" of one another, agreeing in the end on one primary value — working — a value that ratifies process instead of product. To work, man must be open; he must have said to "Cant, Begone." And through work, man realizes something other than Teufelsdröckh's absolute Infinity. Nevertheless, this other is unconditionally affirmed: "Infinite is the help man can yield to man" (SR, p. 235). This help is the real which falls short of Teufelsdröckh's archetypal ideal; yet it is the value of becoming, the fruit of an irony that recognizes an unceasing struggle between necessity and freedom, system and chaos, enthusiasm and skepticism.

In the end, Sartor Resartus affirms a dynamic process and with it the possibility of making meaning; it affirms a metaphysical becoming and a literary self in the process of creating itself by means of "self-culture." All this is still transcendental, but not in Teufelsdröckh's way. Certainly the scene is still philosophical and aesthetic; and surely, the desired goal is some sort of unity between an "accomplished natural philosophy and philosophy of art." But when all is said and done, Sartor makes its meaning not by reference to a stable allegorical pattern but rather by reference to a concept of irony that turns becoming into the transcendental category. In his "Circumspектив," the editor has the last word; and that word is "work" defined as self-activity.

But is this really the last word? What about those last three chapters of Sartor? What about "The Dandiacaal Body," "Tailors," and "Farewell?"

III. A TEXT OF THE TIMES:
"SARTOR" AND VICTORIAN ROMANTICISM

As most commentators on Sartor insist, the last three chapters collapse the imaginative donnée of the book. First they introduce a recalcitrant social actuality by way of an analysis of England's unstable class division: rich and
poor. We read this searing analysis of contemporary society as a fall from what we had supposed might be the end: a fall from the heights of that penultimate chapter, "Natural Supernaturalism." In "Natural Supernaturalism," the Clothes Philosophy accomplishes its absolute desire: a perfected transcendentalism that lies beyond irony. More significantly, these seeming afterthoughts also collapse the distance between the editor and Teufelsdröckh; the editor supposes that Teufelsdröckh is lurking in London. What are we to make of these final interruptions?

For those readers who claim that Carlyle uses the editor as a rhetorical tool—a tool designed to point out Teufelsdröckh's truth and encourage us to accept it—these supplementary chapters serve as ultimate evidence. Clearly, they say, Carlyle brings Teufelsdröckh to London in order to affirm his system at the expense of an editor who might be read as having a word or two of his own. Moreover, they claim that the editor and Teufelsdröckh become one in these last few chapters. In thus collapsing the editorial fiction, Carlyle demands that we take seriously the German visionary's victory. In these last chapters we are supposed to read Carlyle's full commitment to Teufelsdröckh's perfected transcendentalism and to an allegorical Romanticism.

Interestingly, Sartor's most deconstructive reader agrees with the faithful on this point. LaValley also claims that these last few chapters collapse the editorial fiction and allow Teufelsdröckh to emerge as victorious. Teufelsdröckh is freed from all editorial restraint; he is unleashed to do what he can with the modern world. Where LaValley differs, however, is in what he sees as unleashed. The reconstructionists would have the Clothes Philosophy affirmed; LaValley's reading affirms only the "personality of the prophet."21

But is a Teufelsdröckhian "victory" really so evident in those final chapters? Can Carlyle so easily forget the ironic qualifications he has written into Sartor? I think not. Certainly these last three chapters turn the book one last time. But they don't collapse the imaginative donnée. Only if we think of the donnée as Teufelsdröckh or his philosophy do these last chapters seem a collapse. Only if we read "Natural Supernaturalism" as the last word can we feel that the end is a fall. I have suggested that neither Teufelsdröckh nor his perfected philosophy is the imaginative donnée. Moreover, I have also

21. LaValley, p. 105. As for the reconstructionists, I refer the reader once more to Gerry Brookes. Also, Jerry Allen Dibble is a reconstructionist in his "Carlyle's 'British Reader' and the Structure of Sartor Resartus," TSLL, 16 (1974), 293–304, and again in "Strategies of the Mental War: Carlyle and Hegel and the Rhetoric of Idealism," BNYPL, 80 (1976), 84–104. G. B. Tennyson was one of the first to claim that these last chapters destroy the imaginative donnée; he too is mainly a reconstructionist. For a different kind of reading of these last chapters—a reading which explores the problem of collapse—see Walter Reed's "The Pattern of Conversion in Sartor Resartus," ELH, 38 (1971), 413–31.
claimed that the last word belongs to the editor in his "Circumspектив." In short, I have claimed that Romantic Irony is the imaginative donnée. And from that perspective, we can read these last chapters as a revision rather than a collapse—as a turning towards a Victorian scene rather than as a retreat into an outmoded Romantic vision. The victory here is not Teufelsdröckh's; rather it is a victory for social actuality and history. In the end, Sartor turns the quest for meaning away from both self and system. In place of these two, Carlyle gives us social actuality and demands that we work in it. In this way, Carlyle frees his text from a determinedly Romantic context: be it either a providential allegory or a problematic self-conscious irony. In his first turn, Carlyle frees his text from a visionary Romanticism by creating a Romantic Ironic work. But in this last reversal, Carlyle turns away from an irony that apotheosizes self-activity. Yet this final turn to social actuality frees the text only to bind it to the times—to an emerging Victorian mode of making meaning. In this way, Carlyle's text creates Victorian Romanticism as both a formal and historical moment.

Although the end may seem a victory for Teufelsdröckh, we should note that this is only a seeming. The editor does not go to Teufelsdröckh in Weissnichtwo. Rather, Teufelsdröckh comes to the editor in London. Moreover when he comes, he comes not as a German metaphysician but as a political revolutionary. He has come to work; consequently, he has given up that Olympian serenity so characteristic of the accomplished transcendentalist who sees all social struggle from the safe distance of allegory:

Upwards of five-hundred-thousand two-legged animals without feathers lie around us, in horizontal positions; their heads all in nightcaps, and full of the foolishest dreams. Riot cries aloud, and staggers and swaggers in his rank dens of shame. . . . All these . . . crammed in, like salted fish in their barrel;—or wertering, shall I say, like an Egyptian pitcher of tamed vipers, each struggling to get its head above the others: such work goes on under that smoke-counterpane!—But I, mein Werther, sit above it all; I am alone with the Stars. (SR, p. 17)

In his tower, Teufelsdröckh sits above it all; he lacks a feel for the human and the empirical.

But in coming to London, Teufelsdröckh renews his journey, a renewal that reminds us of his wanderings in the Center of Indifference. Furthermore, as he approaches the editor, Teufelsdröckh assumes some of the characteristics of an editorial or empirical consciousness. Throughout the text, our editor keeps the immediate social situation in view. From the beginning he knows that the times are "revolutionary"; he even treats us to a list of contemporary events. And he also grasps, as Teufelsdröckh never could, the actual publishing scene: a scene of political struggles among "Whig, Tory, and Radical."
nally, the editor consistently stresses his "historical and critical capacity." Claiming that he is safe in the stronghold of "Historical Fidelity" the editor questions Teufelsdröckh's metaphysical and aesthetic pretensions, almost forcing Teufelsdröckh down from his tower.

From the beginning, Teufelsdröckh speaks the language of an accomplished idealism. Indeed, he seems so unreal that we almost believe that he is an idea that has been promoted to a Name. From the idea of a "Professor of Things in General," Teufelsdröckh emerges; but he never gives a public lecture. He seems a substantial illusion; a fiction that keeps a safe distance from actuality.22

But, ironically, it is precisely Teufelsdröckh's distance from actuality that the editor praises as well as blames:

It is, after all, a blessing that, in these revolutionary times, there should be one country where abstract Thought can still take shelter; . . . the German can stand peaceful on his scientific watchtower; and, to the raging, struggling multitude here and elsewhere, solemnly, from hour to hour, . . . tell the Universe, which so often forgets the fact, what o'clock it really is. (SR, p. 3)

What are we to make of this contradiction? Are we to assume that the editor is being used as a rhetorical tool to ease the British public into an accomplished transcendentalism? No. As the editor suggests, man is not the tool Teufelsdröckh would have him be. Rather, man is a humorous animal and is not to be used (SR, p. 32). In the face-off between Teufelsdröckh and the editor, the editor does not capitulate. Rather he chases after Teufelsdröckh for an ironic reason: self-activity and a continuing "change of thought." As I have suggested, this is the function of Romantic Irony; and its result is not a system nor a unitive self. Romantic Irony ends in a spiraling self-consciousness.

However, when Carlyle closes the distance between Teufelsdröckh and the editor, he tempers the philosophical and aesthetic glorification of self-consciousness. Neither the editor's irony nor Teufelsdröckh's vision will do. The latter has content but no dynamism, while the former has process but no actual scene for the work it claims to value. Finally, it is the scene rather than self-activity which concerns Carlyle. In bringing Teufelsdröckh to London, Carlyle undercuts an irony that grants most meaning to self-activity. In doing so, he revises his imaginative donnée: Romantic Irony. Carlyle gives work a social and historical scene—industrial London—and, with that scene, he encourages a new form of making meaning.

22. As if to emphasize as soon as possible the difference between Teufelsdröckh's sense of reality and the editor's, Carlyle juxtaposes Teufelsdröckh's archetypal description of self and world and the editor's almost empirical rendering of Teufelsdröckh's tower life (see SR, pp. 16-19).
As I have noted before, both Romantic allegory and Romantic Irony are basically metaphysical and aesthetic. Their scene is reality, but reality is defined by philosophical ideas or aesthetic forms, not by history or society. Indeed, so central are the philosophical and aesthetic to Romanticism that Gerald Bruns defines Romanticism as an attempt to locate intelligibility in an order that exists beyond time.23 The Romantics knew metaphysics and art, but they had at best only a tenuous feel for the empirical—be it empirical history or empirical society. Bruns goes on to suggest that the Victorian writer differs from the Romantic because he sees himself constituted historically and socially. Unlike the English Romantic—say, Wordsworth—the Victorian writer develops meaning by reference to history rather than consciousness or nature. The Victorian world is a world of culture and society; not a world of philosophy and aesthetics. This seems to me a good exposition of the difference between the Romantic and the Victorian mode of making meaning. But how do we get from one to the other? And when we arrive on the Victorian scene, how do we reconstruct the nature of their historical and social thinking?

This is precisely where Sartor Resartus can help us. In those last three chapters, Carlyle revises his imaginative donnée in order to assert the primacy of a socio-historical perspective. If we read these chapters from the heights of “Natural Supernaturalism” then they seem an utter collapse and we are left without mediations between visionary Romanticism and the socio-historical concerns of an emerging Victorian writer. However, if we read these last chapters as they were written—that is following the editor’s “Circumspective”—then we get another perspective, a revisionist perspective.

“Circumspective” calls again on Romantic Irony, the mediation between an accomplished transcendentalism and a Victorian frame in the making. Romantic Irony offers a new kind of transcendental meaning: becoming. And, in so doing, it modifies visionary Romanticism. By calling on organicism, self-consciousness, and a revolutionary temporality, Romantic Irony goes some way towards evolving a scene that is more actual than the world of

23. Gerald L. Bruns, “The Formal Nature of Victorian Thinking,” *PMLA*, 90 (1975), 904–18. I am using Bruns’s essay as the most cogent statement of how the Victorians make meaning and as the clearest attempt to distinguish a Victorian making from a Romantic one. Although I think Bruns’s distinctions important, I also think they are a bit too simple to be useful. To be useful, Bruns’s explication of Romantic meaning-making needs to be supplemented. First we must recognize that English Romanticism does appeal to time; however, time is conceived as providential or prefigured. Then we must also add that Romantic Irony uses another time: the revolutionary moment. But in Romantic Irony, this revolutionary moment is subjective; it is a matter of self-consciousness or changing one’s mind. What makes allegorical Romanticism and Romantic Irony versions of the same meaning-making venture is the appeal to transcendental categories and the creation of a cosmic or aesthetic scene for the venture.
allegory. But not actual enough to satisfy Carlyle. Work and self-activity need some content to have any significance. So Carlyle turns our attention away from both the editor and Teufelsdröckh. He turns us towards London and its “unfinished public history.” Instead of writing a meaningful text, Carlyle ends up writing a significant text: a text that needs to be read historically.

If Romantic Irony provides the mediation between Romantic allegory and Victorian historicism, can it help us understand how to reconstruct the nature of Victorian socio-cultural thinking? Perhaps. When social actuality interrupts Sarton, it does so ironically and not organically. In the Clothes Philosophy, history is presented under the guise of an accomplished natural philosophy: organicism. Consequently, history is conceived in evolutionary terms. But the current state of London society is not conceived of as organic in the final chapters of Sarton. Instead, it is conceived of as contradictory, if not dialectical. Just as Romantic Irony presents a doubled self, Victorian texts tend to present history and society as a dynamic interplay of opposing forces: expansion and contraction, Hebraism and Hellenism, feudalism and democracy. Nothing is created ex nihilo. When the Victorians turn to a socio-cultural scene to make meaning, they often bring along earlier categories of thinking.

In Sarton’s case, revision leads to an ironic reading of society and history. As Carlyle works himself out of a Romantic allegory and into a socio-cultural scene, he passes through a formal extravagance called Romantic Irony. But even ironic extravagance needs some formal principles: opposition, doubling, a revolutionary temporality, and struggle. If we can agree that men must give the empirical some conceptual framework in order to grasp it as actual, then we can begin to read Carlyle’s creation of an ironic social scene and ironic public history as historically significant. Perhaps whenever history and culture are called upon to form a Victorian text, they will be conceived ironically. If so, then Sarton’s Victorian Romanticism becomes more than just a moment; it would then become a framework. With this framework, we might begin to analyze both the form and the content of nineteenth-century socio-cultural thinking, rather than limiting ourselves to an account of Victorian ideas or Victorian aesthetics.

Whether or not Sarton Resartus can help us understand the structure of Victorian socio-cultural thinking is open to debate. But less debatable is the text’s mediatory or revisionist nature. Sarton Resartus self-consciously prevents

24 For an interesting meditation on the historical and cultural significance of formal extravagance (“revel of forms”), see Geoffrey Hartman’s “History Writing as Answerable Style,” *NLH*, 2 (1970), 73–83. Hartman links art’s “revel of forms” to ritual liminality or rites de passage. Thus, in another key, he suggests the same connection as I am making between formal extravagance and historical significance.
us from using an unproblematical reconstructive mode of reading—either in terms of ideas or character. But in doing so, the text does not encourage a modern deconstruction. Carlyle limits metaphysical and aesthetic play by calling on social actuality. In consequence, the reader must be agile; when we finally come back to a reconstructive reading of Sartor, we must turn our attention away from philosophical or aesthetic meaning and towards historical and social significance. The transition may be difficult; but it is not as "break-neck" as the fall from Teufelsdröckh's "dread watch-tower" to the streets of London would have been without Sartor Resartus and its busy editor. If there is such a thing as Victorian Romanticism, then Sartor Resartus must be its text—a text of the times.

The University of Texas at Austin