

*The Carlyles at Home and Abroad.* Edited by David R. Sorensen and Rodger L. Tarr. Aldershot, Eng. and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004. 255 pp. \$99.95.

A STATUE OF Thomas Carlyle stands in Kelvingrove Park near Glasgow University—a stern old Thomas; authoritarian, granite-faced, emerging from hewn rock—and it has been, and still is, local sport to knock off the nose of this reactionary old Calvinist. This collection of essays on the Carlyles, particularly in the case of Thomas, does much to combat the myths, the assumptions-turned-facts, and the simplified responses that are encapsulated in that terrible, nose-less statue in Glasgow.

Fittingly, the collection begins with a dedication by David Sorensen to the late Kenneth J. Fielding. Sorensen reminds us that Fielding's work on "the rockface," as he used to enjoy calling it, provides an antidote to Carlyle research that too-often ignores the facts, or does not bother looking for them, in preference for theoretical, and often spurious, readings. In complying with the dedication, Fielding's own contribution to the volume, "Justice to Carlyle's Memory: The Later Carlyle," reveals "a warmer and gentler side" (9) of Carlyle than is usually found, here in his relationships with close friends such as John Forster and Louisa Lady Ashburton. Suggesting also the expanding range of possibilities in Carlyle studies, Fielding makes clear that there is still much to be learned about this most complex of figures—"the later Carlyle has still to be revealed" (12).

With Fielding's contribution as its most poignant light, this collection reveals bright prospects for the longevity of Carlyle research. In its breadth of topics, which span his influence throughout Scotland, England, Europe, and America; in its indication of the shifting scope of that influence; and in its reassessment of entrenched ideas about Carlyle, Fielding's contention, that the best is yet to come in terms of Carlyle studies, rings true indeed. The barometer of Carlyle's reputation, of course, is often taken to be the responses among English (and sometimes American) commentators, many of them liberal and most of them offended by his writings of the 1850s. However, as

David R. Sorensen argues in “‘A Scotch Proudhon’: Carlyle, Herzen, and the French Revolutions of 1789 and 1848,” that the later Carlyle appealed to “a diverse group of European political activists” (40) and that this appeal rested in his ability to transcend the noisy blather of English politics. The conventional image of the “authoritarian ‘Calvinist prophet’” (40) here gives way to a vision of a writer whose work continued to inform and to engage the politics of revolution in both its positive and negative manifestations.

Any desire to categorize Carlyle as Transcendentalist, Calvinist, authoritarian, or prophet, must soon collide with the very complexity of his responses to the world and to those around him. As Sheila McIntosh points out in her essay on the paradox of Carlyle’s attacks on the aristocracy in the context of his friendship with Lord and Lady Ashburton, “as with all complicated people inconsistency is not always a betrayal of the ‘true self’” (160). The inconsistencies, ambiguities, and obfuscations that mark Carlyle’s work reveal a writer who articulates the dangers that are inherent in adhering to any one view of a world that we can never fully know. The range of his thought, shown in this collection, inspired many even where there were differences. Brent E. Kinser gives an entertaining account of Mark Twain’s responses to *Shooting Niagara: and After?* and *The French Revolution*, using text from both writers that serves to highlight their mutual love of playful rhetoric. Kinser also suggests that Twain’s rejoinder to *Shooting Niagara* exudes an optimism about democracy that later gave way to a darker, Carlylean vision.

Owen Dudley Edwards’s contribution on “Carlyle, Young Ireland, and the Legacy of Millennialism” not only provides an illuminating account of the complexity of the Irish Question and of the internal differences between Charles Gavan Duffy and John Mitchel, but it also explains their paradoxical admiration for Carlyle, which, given some of his attacks on the Celts, “might seem odd, racially and spiritually” (61). Edwards shows, however, that it was Carlyle’s ambiguous rejection of revolution that gave the Young Irelanders “the right to strike matches and to decide where they should be struck” (67). Indeed, it is Carlyle’s celebration of “blood sacrifice” that Edwards sees as inexorably linked, through Mitchel, to the “hari-kari element in Irish Republican violence since then” (67).

It is in the variety of responses to Carlyle and his complexity that this collection is most valuable—Ruth apRoberts identifies the Shandean humour in *The History of Frederick the Great*, a relatively neglected work more often considered under the banner of Carlyle's glorification of Prussian aggression and the doctrine of might is right. ApRoberts, however, suggests a new way into the work through which "one can come closest to knowing Carlyle" (15). Her assessment of the shifting relationship among author, subject, and of Carlyle's Sterne-like effort to explore the mysteries of truth, affirms the importance of *Frederick* in understanding Carlyle's thought and work. Vanessa Dickerson investigates Carlyle's style in her essay, "Performing Blackness: Carlyle and 'The Nigger Question.'" In it she offers an intriguing discussion of the similarities between "Carlylese" and African American expression. Of course, there are other ways in which one might consider Carlyle's style, not least his Scottishness, but in an unconventional twist, Dickerson finds something beyond the perceived racism of "The Nigger Question," even if it is a note "unwittingly" struck by Carlyle (157). Given recent academic controversy over Scottish influences on American slave plantations, for instance Willie Ruff's work on the Gaelic psalmistry's connection with Baptist gospel call-and-response worship, or "lining out," perhaps there is more to be said on the translation of Scottish idiom into African American discourse. Carlyle's style is also a central issue for Andrew Taylor as he investigates the complaints of Henry James, Sr., who found Carlyle's idiosyncratic writing an affectation for its own sake rather than an integral component of his thought. Taylor suggests that the ironic style of both Henry, Sr. and his novelist son may have originated in their critical attitudes toward Carlyle's "love of paradox" (134).

Because there is simply less of Jane Welsh Carlyle's writing to consider, too often critical attention focuses on her personal life, in particular her marriage. However, Aileen Christianson continues her project to examine Jane as a writer, and in this collection she focuses not on her letters but on her travel narratives, which demonstrate Jane's ability to reject satirically the traditions of the picturesque in favor of something more "natural" (212). Similarly, Kathy Chamberlain explores Jane's desire to write novels for public consumption. Her discussion of Jane centers on the fact that she did not fulfil her potential as a

public writer, a result too often blamed on her role as the wife of Thomas. In his eminently readable and sensible account of what is known and what is conjectured about Jane, Rodger L. Tarr begins by stating that “the alleged tragedy of Jane Welsh Carlyle’s life is one built upon ignorance and founded upon falsehood” (196). Tarr addresses these untruths by giving Jane back her agency and by attacking those who cast her as victim. On the subject of writing, and as a pertinent response to Chamberlain’s essay, Tarr rightly points out that “other women in difficult situations managed to write novels” (205). He reminds us that we cannot and perhaps should not know the real details of past lives, especially those lived in times more reticent than our own. Further, both Thomas and Jane were high-strung individuals, and even a multitude of pronouncements in letters or diaries do not yield up the whole person. However, as Tarr’s essay does suggest, the more we go to sources, the larger and truer the picture will be, and for Tarr, this picture will vindicate Jane. On cue, in his “Geraldine Jewsbury: Jane Welsh Carlyle’s ‘best friend’?,” Ian Campbell reveals two new sources for further discussion. Returning to Tarr, he accounts for the oft-plowed field of Jewsbury’s part in the Froude controversy, but more importantly, and wittily, he bemoans Froude’s unsupported observation that Carlyle’s destruction of a flower garden at Comely Bank on the day after his wedding proved his impotence: “the implication is clear: men who despoil flower-gardens after their wedding-night are confirming their sexual impotence” (200). Never mind, as Tarr points out, Comely Bank had no flower garden. Again we find ourselves back at Fielding’s “rockface.” Tarr unswervingly takes on “psychoanalytic twaddle” (201), as he dismisses the work of Gilbert and Gubar as “embarrassing as well as inaccurate” (204). Norma Clarke garners more muted criticism from Tarr, but it is a pity that her piece in the collection on Rousseau is marred by such psycho-feminist assumptions as “the daughter’s erotic feelings for her father” (222). Rosemary Ashton’s “The Uses of German Literature in the Carlyle’s Courtship” provides a more measured account of the Carlyles’ intellectual relationship, as well as their romantic attachment. Ashton recognizes Jane’s frustrations in her marriage, but also stresses her pride in Thomas’s achievements.

*The Carlyle’s at Home and Abroad* represents a fine and varied

collection, covering further areas such as Carlyle's often damning attitude to the fine arts, in David DeLaura's "Carlyle and the 'Insane' Fine Arts"; a French perspective in Alain Jumeau's "Translating Carlyle's French Revolution"; Marylu Hill's perceptive essay on "Vision and Truth in Carlyle's Early Histories"; Cairns Craigs's examination of Carlyle's relationship with the Symbolist Movement, including a particularly welcome comment on Derrida's relevance to Carlyle and language; Ronald C. Wendling's unravelling of the complex relationship between Coleridge and Carlyle's notions of reflection, particularly in view of their mutual misreading of Kant; further assessment of Carlyle's attitude to race, and its relationship with his views on Ireland in Chris Vanden Bossche's "Race in Past and Present"; and the revelation of the meticulous nature of the editor's job in "Collating Carlyle" by Mark Engel. Not only does this collection of essays represent the fecundity of Carlyle research being undertaken now, but it also foretells a promising future for the study of the Carlyles, both of whom, as Fielding remarks, wait "still to be revealed." Perhaps, if this calibre of scholarship continues to find its way into print, the good citizens of Glasgow will stop knocking off Thomas's nose.

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