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*The Carlyle Encyclopedia*. Edited by Mark Cumming. Madison and Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004. 521pp., \$99.50.

THE EARLY LETTERS OF THOMAS CARLYLE ARE PUNCTUATED by periodic references to encyclopedias. While in his twenties, Carlyle embarked on an extensive self-study program built around readings from *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, itself always mentioned approvingly in *The Collected Letters*. At the same time, after growing disillusioned with teaching, Carlyle began what he described to his brother Aleck as his “apprenticeship” in the publishing world by writing what would amount to twenty articles for David Brewster’s *Edinburgh Encyclopedia*. In subsequent letters, he referred to this work as “trifling,” “silly,” “not worth room,” “trash,” “miserable compilations,” and “foolish Encyclopedical farragos.” Listed in chronological order, these increasingly vituperative judgments reveal Carlyle’s frustration with the limitations imposed by a form that required him to perform in writing the very role of private tutor that he was trying to escape by becoming an author.

Carlyle’s own decidedly mixed experience with encyclopedias makes perspicuous the primary challenge posed by editing a volume like Mark Cumming’s *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*, namely, how to achieve authoritative coverage without becoming a random aggregation of trivia. Cumming acknowledges this dilemma in his Preface, which explains that the volume will concentrate on the “central topics in Carlyle studies,” and especially on Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle’s “many and varied friendships and personal encounters,” while directing readers “towards the fuller accounts that can be found elsewhere.” The

result of even this appropriate limitation to the subject matter was ten years in the making, an impressive logistical achievement that largely succeeds in its goal of becoming “the first port of call for students and scholars” of all things Carlylean.



*The Carlyle Encyclopedia* contains 521 pages; the first fourteen include standard publication information, a portrait of Thomas Carlyle, a two-page list of abbreviations, and Cumming’s one-page Preface; the final sixteen pages consist of an index that enables readers to locate most entries amenable to cross-listing; the middle 491 double-columned pages offer 459 entries—the vast majority focused on Thomas Carlyle—arranged alphabetically from Amos Bronson Alcott through Elizur Wright. The entries are the work of 58 contributors, many of them quite prominent in Carlyle studies: Cumming has written 232 of the entries; five other scholars—Kenneth J. Fielding, Ralph Jessop, David R. Sorensen, Margaret Rundle, and Gregory Maertz—contribute ten or more entries each; and another fifteen writers, among them the other four members of the Advisory Board—Lowell T. Frye, Anne M. Skabarnicki, D. J. Trela, and Chris R. Vanden Bossche—offer between five and nine entries per person. The entries themselves range in length from brief paragraphs of approximately fifty words to full essays of over six pages. In an effort to indicate those “fuller accounts” alluded to in the preface, many of the lengthier entries are accompanied by more or less expansive bibliographies of further reading.

The entries may be subdivided into three major and a handful of minor categories. In keeping with Carlyle’s dicta that, “Biography is almost the one thing needful,” fully 236 of the 459 entries in the *Encyclopedia* are biographical. The individuals covered fall into one of three general subcategories: the personal, the professional, and the political/historical. Friends, family members, and other acquaintances of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle unlikely to feature prominently in their nations’ dictionaries of national biography, occupy between 40 and 50 biographies of the first subcategory. Although minor figures, many of these individuals have stories that shed fascinating light on one or both Carlyles. For example, Richard Fusco’s brief contribution on John Reuben Thompson, a Confederate dandy convalescing and producing

Southern propaganda in England, offers a personal vignette that explains Carlyle's shifting sympathies during the US Civil War. Individuals with some claim to literary, artistic, philosophical or cultural prominence dominate the biographical entries. Between 160 and 170 of the entries offer background material on these persons who exerted influence upon, were themselves influenced by, or became the subjects of the writings of Thomas Carlyle; also included in this group are prominent writers and thinkers with whom the Carlyles interacted socially. Some of the finest entries in the volume fall under this subgroup, which promises to appeal to the broadest range of potential readers by showing Carlyle's intellectual centrality in the Victorian period. David Latané's two-and-one-half-page account of the relationship between Carlyle and Robert Browning, for instance, reveals both men vexed by one another's work, which they nevertheless felt compelled to keep reading. Latané traces Carlyle's influence on the younger man—including his early advice, apparently delivered without irony, to express "with articulate clearness the thought in him"—and offers an ample list of secondary sources in his bibliography. The final 20 to 30 biographical entries concern prominent political or historical figures about whom Thomas Carlyle wrote or expressed a strong recorded opinion, or who themselves commented on or were influenced by his works. Occasionally, biographical entries from the latter two subcategories may also include information about minor publications by Thomas Carlyle concerning the individual under discussion. Thus G. Ross Roy's lucid and well-documented contribution on Robert Burns also discusses Carlyle's widely-read 1828 essay on Burns, just as Cumming's shorter entries on Jeanna Baillie and Robert Baillie also provide the only references in the volume to Carlyle's essays "Metrical Legends of Exalted Characters" (1821) and "Baillie the Covenanter" (1841).

The second major category of entries might most productively be categorized as topical. The roughly 100 entries in this category range broadly from recurrent subjects in Thomas Carlyle's writing to the characters, phrases, and symbols that make up such a prominent part of Carlyle's distinctive style. The third and final major category of entries, 88 in total, provides brief summaries and publication information about individual works by Thomas Carlyle. As a rule, shorter works already

discussed in a biographical entry do not also receive specifically publication-focused entries. Longer works, on the other hand, like *Frederick the Great* (1865) or *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850) are often the subject of two entries, one devoted to summarizing Carlyle's argument and the other to providing composition and publication information. In a curious oversight, none of Carlyle's extra-biographical entries for Brewster's *Edinburgh Encyclopedia* receive notice in *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*; even Cumming's entry on Brewster only refers readers to *The Collected Letters* for a complete list of Carlyle's contributions. Admittedly, these early texts on "Mungo Park," "Newfoundland," "Persia," and other subjects appear insubstantial when compared with Carlyle's more mature works, but as Cumming himself notes in his entry on Jacques Necker—both the subject of an entry for Brewster and a significant figure in *The French Revolution* (1837)—"it is fascinating to compare the lucid encyclopedia style of the first treatment with the pyrotechnic prose of the later and grander effort."

The 35 to 40 remaining entries resist easy categorization and seem designed to appeal to a myriad of constituencies. Those primarily researching Thomas Carlyle will be well served by Cumming's entry on "Bibliographies of Thomas Carlyle"; Rodger L. Tarr's account of "Editions" of Thomas Carlyle's works; Abigail Burnham Bloom's detailed survey of "Portraits and Photographs" of both Carlyles; the three entries on "Reputation" by Cumming, Peter Zenzinger and Roy; and Fielding's contribution on the "Wills of Thomas Carlyle," which helpfully directs those with further interest to the executors' papers at the National Library of Scotland. Literary biographers, those investigating the circumstances of composition of Carlyle's works, and readers of *The Collected Letters* seeking more information about where, exactly, the Carlyles were at the time of writing, will be interested in the nine entries on the Carlyles' residences—in alphabetical order, Cheyne Row, Comely Bank, Craigenputtoch, Ecclefechan, Edinburgh, Hoddam Hill, Mainhill, Scotsbrig, and Templand—although the lack of a cross-referenced entry in the Index on "Houses" or "Residences" makes it less likely that those not already familiar with the Carlyles peregrinations will be able to find all of these geographical entries. Particularly fascinating, and amusing, for many readers should be Doris

Meriwether's "Drama, the Carlyles in" and "Fiction, the Carlyles in," along with Cumming's "Parodies of Thomas Carlyle," which collectively recount the afterlife, not always flattering, of the Carlyles in literary and popular culture.



One measure of a project like this one is the readiness with which it acknowledges the controversies surrounding its subject. In the case of Carlyle studies the most persistent and troubling topics remain the relationship between Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle (including whether or not Jane's intellectual and literary achievements were suppressed by the circumstances of her marriage), the recurrent bigotry evident in Thomas Carlyle's published works, and the ease with which Thomas Carlyle's Teutono-philia was embraced by the Nazis in the years leading up to World War II. It is entirely appropriate, therefore, that Jane receives considerable attention in *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*; she is the only one of these potentially volatile subjects explicitly acknowledged in both the publisher's website and Cumming's Preface, which promises "to give a balanced assessment which avoids either belittling her or overestimating her achievement" and to resist "the reductive (and contradictory) stereotypes of her which were offered by early biographers." Aileen Christianson's impressive biographical entry on Jane—one of the longest in the book, and accompanied by both an early illustration of Jane and a lengthy bibliography of further reading—is a model of this effort at balance. The origins of the controversy surrounding Jane are explored with similar thoughtfulness in Trev Lynn Broughton's entry on James Anthony Froude and Anne Skabarnicki's contribution on *Reminiscences*. Readers interested in Jane as a personality may also wish to consult entries by Jude Nixon on Charles and Erasmus Darwin, Ian Brockie on Giuseppe Mazzini, and Fielding on Elizabeth Paulet. Jane's literary potential and output are discussed in greater detail in entries by Christianson on Jane's amusing "Budget of a Femme Incomprise," her Journals and her Letters; Burham Bloom on Jane's Poems; and Mary Werner on *The Rival Brothers* and "The Simple Story of My Own First Love." In his entry on Virginia Woolf, Mark Reger exemplifies the attitude adopted by the volume as a whole towards Jane's now-contentious place in Carlyle studies: Reger

pronounces as “one of the sanest and most sympathetic judgments in that overheated controversy” Woolf’s own assessment of the relationship between Thomas and Jane, that “the more we see the less we can label, and both praise and blame become strangely irrelevant.”

The volume is equally expansive in its exploration of the problem of Carlyle’s racism. Carlyle wrote and said infamously intolerant things about Britain’s Irish, Jewish and West-Indian subjects, all three of whom are the subjects of one or more independent entries in *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*. T. Peter Park’s contributions, “Ireland” and “Jews,” are forthright in acknowledging that Carlyle was a “man of strong prejudices” who combined strong friendships with individuals and sweeping, bigoted generalizations about the ethnic groups to which these friends belonged. Somewhat more troubling as a group, because they show Carlyle at his worst, are the five entries devoted to Carlyle’s derogatory pronouncements on those of African descent. Cumming writes on both of Carlyle’s “Occasional Discourses,” which he judges have been “justly criticized for [their] disgusting bestial caricatures of blacks and [their] moral blindness to the evils of slavery” even as he reminds readers that Carlyle’s motive for writing was his outrage over the lack of attention being paid to distress in Ireland. Cumming also contributes entries on “Shooting Niagara: And After” and on Harriet Beecher Stowe. Jude Nixon offers a notably well-documented contribution on Slavery, which acknowledges unapologetically that Carlyle “advanced extreme and simplistic views on slavery . . . shaped by his acceptance of prevailing notions of racial hierarchies.” Nixon also coauthors, with Kirsten Escobar, an entry on Carlyle’s most distasteful fictional creation, Quashee, whom, they reveal, Carlyle may have borrowed from earlier sources like Philip Thicknesse’s *A Years’s Journey Through France and Part of Spain* (1777) and Charles Waterton’s *Wanderings in South America* (1825).

Appropriately, *The Carlyle Encyclopedia* devotes less space to Carlyle’s later cooptation by Germany’s National Socialist party. Damning evidence against Carlyle’s reputation in the middle of the twentieth century, this issue has seemed less pressing and certainly has received less critical attention in recent years. Read in conjunction, Brockie’s entry on Adolf Hitler and

Zenzinger's survey of Carlyle's reputation in Germany provide a sufficient introduction for those interested in revisiting this earlier debate. Considered collectively, these entries on the controversies in Carlyle studies help to forestall the tendency towards hagiography too often present in projects like this one, and, by presenting Carlyle not as a saint but as an unavoidably flawed human being, add an air of intellectual honesty to Cumming's volume.



Unfortunately, readers for whom *The Carlyle Encyclopedia* serves as their "first port of call" may not be able either to appreciate fully or to place in context this effort at intellectual honesty. All but a handful of contributions to the volume lack any mechanism for cross-referencing, and the Index demands a degree of familiarity with the Carlyles to imagine the larger terms under which individual entries might be located. Even with such knowledge, readers who trust too implicitly in the comprehensiveness of the Index may miss entries relevant to their interests. What the volume requires is a substantive introduction that identifies the "central topics in Carlyle studies" alluded to in the Preface, and perhaps explains how those topics have changed over time, and that identifies some of the major subject threads that one might productively follow throughout the text. Also welcome would be a list of Carlyle's works, arranged chronologically by date of publication, to help especially first-time readers locate a given work in Carlyle's corpus and to appreciate the historical moment in which it originally appeared.

The fecundity of Carlyle's allusions, together with the consistency with which he recurred to the same subjects and techniques throughout his career, make one feel particularly keenly the absence of such editorial apparatus. There are, for example, a number of fascinating entries on the subject of Carlyle and religion that incidental readers simply will not find. Read together, entries by Ruth apRoberts on the Bible; Cumming on the phrase "Calvinist without the Theology," as well as on Church of England, God, Hell, Jesus, John Knox, Henry Manning, Muhammad, John Henry Newman, Pantheism and Pattheism, and Roman Catholicism; Stubbs Smith on Martin Luther, and Clyde de L. Ryals on the Mormons; comprise an

extended essay on Carlyle's complex religious opinions and how they relate to the age in which he lived. Two of Carlyle's most recognizable rhetorical techniques—his reliance on allegorized characters and highly evocative phrases and images, many borrowed from two of his own favorite writers, Goethe and Scott—also receive extended attention that may go unnoticed by casual readers, many of whom could find themselves revising the often simplistic overviews of Carlyle provided in many literary anthologies. Those who think of Carlyle strictly as a writer of nonfiction prose, for example, might be prompted to complicate their generic categories if directed to the 25 entries on characters that he created in his published works.

If relatively new students of Carlyle might wish for further guidance than that provided in the Preface, more experienced scholars may at times wonder about the choice of content included in and omitted from *The Carlyle Encyclopedia*. Despite George Eliot's judgment, that the reading of *Sartor Resartus* served as "an epoch in the history of [the] minds" of nearly every Victorian who read it, the text is the subject of a disproportionate number of entries, many of which, like the single sentence on Leith Walk, simply reproduce material already found in even lightly-annotated editions. At the same time, the focus on *Sartor Resartus* reveals significant absences: in the third chapter of book three, "Symbols," Teufelsdröckh rhapsodizes over "SILENCE AND SECRECY," yet only the first of these terms is the subject of an entry. Cumming's helpful, but relatively short entry on Muhammad also makes one wish for a more comprehensive account of Carlyle's response to and effect on popular perceptions of the Arab-Islamic world. Finally, readers of Fielding and Sorensen's recent *Jane Carlyle: Newly Selected Letters* (Ashgate, 2004) might also legitimately wonder about the absence of entries on Americans such as General Baird, Charlotte Cushman, and John Greig.



As he graduated from apprentice encyclopedist to journeyman reviewer, Carlyle grew both more zealous in his execution of biographically-grounded projects like the one Cumming has undertaken and less sanguine about the possibility of recovering the whole truth of an individual's life, even his own. "How

inexpressibly comfortable to know our fellow-creature; to see into him, understand his goings forth, decipher the whole heart of his mystery," Carlyle wrote in "Biography" (1832), even though, as he had already noted in "On History" (1830), "one Biography, nay our own Biography, study and recapitulate it as we may, remains in so many points unintelligible to us." Due in no small measure to the ongoing Strouse edition of Carlyle's works and the Duke-Edinburgh edition of *The Collected Letters*, the number of "unintelligible" points in Carlyle studies continues to decline. In the breadth and fair-mindedness of its entries, Cumming's *Carlyle Encyclopedia* should help in this process of making Carlyle more intelligible, and therefore more productively debatable, for a wide range of readers. First-time students and scholars will find the volume a useful point of entry into Carlyle studies and a quick source of reliable information on a myriad of discreet subjects. Those with the leisure to delve more deeply into the *Encyclopedia* by reading the entire volume, whether first-time students or long-time Carlyleans, will also be rewarded by the depth and versatility with which topics central to Carlyle studies are explored throughout the entries.

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