literatura”). The most recent (and extensive) discussion is that of Thomás G. Escaladillo, “Para leer a Mariátegui: 2 tesis de los 7 ensayos,” in Romero and others, Siete ensayos: 50 años en la historia, pp. 57-138. Of special interest is Escaladillo’s discussion of Mariátegui and Enrique López Albájar (pp. 83-87).

70. According to María Wiesse (Sabogal’s wife) in her biography, José Carlos Mariátegui: etapas de su vida (Lima: Ediciones Hora del Hombre, 1945).

71. Mariátegui, “José Sabogal,” Amauta, No. 6 (February 1927), pp. 9-10.

72. Abelardo Solís, “La cuestión del quechua,” Amauta, No. 29 (February-March 1930), p. 32. However, Solís’s Ante el problema agrario peruano (1928) was given a favorable review by Mariátegui in Amauta, No. 20 (January 1929), pp. 100-02.


74. See especially Orrego’s “El gran destino de América,” Amauta, No. 12 (February 1928), pp. 13-14, and his “¿Cuál es la cultura que creará América?” in Amauta, No 14 (April 1928), pp. 3-4; No 17 (September 1928), pp. 14-16; and No. 18 (October 1928), pp. 8-9.

Thomas Carlyle on Dr. Francia: The Functional Role of the Carlylean Hero

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This essay explores Carlyle’s representation of social and cultural change by focussing on his essay “Dr. Francia” (1843). The essay on Francia, who was the Perpetual Dictator of Paraguay from 1814 until his death in 1840, was Carlyle’s first study of a modern “hero” and was written at the time Carlyle was struggling to formulate a coherent social theory consistent with his effort to combine the roles of literary critic and social critic.1 The change in Carlyle’s approach to historical study has been described and documented, but neither its analytical significance nor its ideological purpose has been adequately delineated.2 By looking closely at the “Dr. Francia” essay, which illustrates the new directions of Carlyle’s thinking with exceptional clarity, and placing the article in the context of his earlier work, I argue that we can come to terms with Carlyle’s historical method in a new and fruitful way.

My first section discusses the evolution of Carlyle’s conception of social and cultural change, emphasizing the increasing importance of the individual leader to the coherence of his commentary. In the second section I deal with the “Dr. Francia” essay, and in the third I consider some more general aspects of Carlyle’s method and its historical meaning.

I

In such early essays as “Signs of the Times” (1928) and “Count Cagliostro” (1833), Carlyle’s holistic conception of social and cultural change is apparent: he viewed social and cultural change in a general, evolving historical process. In “Count Cagliostro,” although the periodization is dubious (i.e., feudalism’s decline in the eighteenth century), he explicitly identified the ultimate cause of social tensions and moral decay to Europe’s being in a period of transition — the demise of feudalism and the emergence of a new, industrial order.3
“Signs of the Times” is an even more important statement of this kind, for in this essay interdependencies of different dimensions of social life are central to his understanding of sweeping changes in contemporary England. He decries most of these changes, but he has no doubt as to their source: throughout the essay Carlyle considered industrialism, or more specifically, mechanization of production as the underlying cause. It promoted far reaching changes in practically every aspect of social life and elevated “the great art of adapting means to ends” to the point of intellectual dominance. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply it faster.” (p. 59)

This sentence (and the paragraph from which it is drawn) indicates Carlyle’s sympathy with the ruined artisans, but Carlyle immediately proceeds to stress how important it was that the iron fingers did indeed ply the shuttle faster. Carlyle’s acknowledgment, even celebration, of the material benefits from raising the productivity of human labor through mechanization distinguishes him from the main stream of Victorian criticism, including that of his disciple Ruskin. The lauding of economic progress was not a causal, incidental statement; it was a consistent theme in Carlyle’s thought at this time and its recognition is crucial for understanding the development of his historical method.

Nevertheless, it is the negative aspects, the social, cultural, and spiritual costs of mechanization, which dominated the remainder of “Signs of the Times.” Industrialism had rent the fabric of society, “strangely altering old relations, and increasing the distance between the rich and poor,” and introduced new tensions and conflicts. Individual initiative, creativity, and accomplishment were being subordinated to formal institutions which were organized in a mechanical fashion and produced art, music, literature, philosophy, and even governance in a manner not unlike that of a cotton textile factory.

Taken together, “Cagliostro” and “Signs of the Times” clearly indicate some important features of Carlyle’s thinking. First of all there are his preferences: the economic progress of industrialism and the social, cultural, and spiritual qualities he saw in Europe’s pre-industrial past. Second, he perceived and clearly stated that the rise of industrialism, with its social and ideational consequences, was the reason for the disintegration of those aspects of social and cultural life he valued. His linking of the material and moral spheres of social life is more intuitive than analytical, but the means by which he became convinced that the two were inextricably connected made the conviction neither less real nor less damaging to his role as a critic and prophet. How could he be taken seriously if he were to champion goals which his own writings recognized as being mutually incompatible?

Carlyle’s response to this quandry was to retreat from attempts to identify the sources of what he considered to be the spiritual and cultural malaise of contemporary England and to focus more narrowly on what earlier had been seen as the consequences of social and economic change. Understanding the nature of social change in its full complexity was no longer central to Carlyle’s work, and although this retreat deprived his social commentary of the historical force of “Signs of the Times,” it freed him to applaud economic progress and simultaneously to advocate the re-establishment of pre-industrial institutions and values.

While Carlyle had managed in his thinking to sever the relationship between the rise of industrialism and the ascendance of undesirable social and cultural forms, the need remained for some force capable of mediating material and moral spheres of life in Carlyle’s work. This was the function of the Carlylian hero. The hero’s charismatic nature and stance was crucial to the flow of his narrative and to give it an historical dynamic; it was the hero, by the strength of his personal authority and will, who could further economic activity while recreating the organic, harmonious, and ethical society that Carlyle saw in Europe’s past. This social and spiritual leader, then, linked together, and even embodied, the different facets of social life that Carlyle as a writer and social critic was no longer willing to relate through broader social analysis. Thus the Carlylian hero became “the man in the middle who orders the muddle of his society.”

II

The elevation of the hero was not as sudden as perhaps I have implied; Carlyle’s earlier writings contained many references to heroes and to the value of individual initiative and the force of individual personality. On the other hand, the hero for Carlyle became more than a convenient means to avoid a logical contradiction; the importance of heroes in his later writings transcended this functional quality and became an end in themselves. But I am arguing that Carlyle’s first fully developed heroes did indeed play this particular role and that understanding this role is vital for comprehending Carlyle’s method of historical interpretation.

In 1843, Carlyle presented two heroes to the English public. One was Abbot Samson, the 12th century monk of Past and Present (1843). Harsh but paternalistic, conservative socially but rational
and progressive in economic manners, Abbot Samson brought order and prosperity to his abbey in northern England. It appears to be precisely these characteristics which interested Carlyle in the fragmentary reports available in England about The Perpetual Dictator of Paraguay and stimulated him to write "Doctor Francia" and to publish it in the same year as Past and Present.

For the detail of Francia's reign, Carlyle relied most heavily on a short book by two Swiss naturalists, Messrs. Johann R. Rengger and Lonchamps on, and a two volume work by Scottish merchants, the Robertson brothers, but throughout the essay, Carlyle was scathingly critical of the historical materials available to him. Clearly the major irritant was not the paucity of factual material; indeed, it is striking how closely Carlyle's narrative corresponds to modern accounts of Francia's life. The main problem, as Carlyle saw it, was the democratic bias with the resulting outrage, "a running shriek of constitutional denunciation" that dominated the sources. Certainly, there were some sympathetic treatments of Francia and his policies which had appeared in English language journals at the time Carlyle was working on "Dr. Francia," but they were generally short and uninspired, and Carlyle repeatedly implored some talented writer, possibly a Paraguayan, to write a "real life of Francia."  

Carlyle deeply admired Francia's ability to isolate Paraguay from the turbulence and disruption experienced by other Spanish American nations in the immediate post-independence period. Unlike the other nations, which Carlyle likened to kennels of rabid dogs, Paraguay had not "brought in the reign of liberty and driven out the reign of law and regularity" but rather, through Francia, had avoided the "agonies of republican reform" and experienced a "reign of rigour." But this was not a static rigor; according to Carlyle, stability was but the necessary first step in a far reaching but not clearly defined program of moral reform. Depicting the life of the Paraguayan people as rude, drowsy, sluttish, and full of nomadic idleness and Jesuit superstition, Carlyle celebrated Francia's suppression of corruption in government and criticism of his government, promotion of a work ethic, and erection of a Workman's Gallows as a guarantor of quality work. Furthermore, Carlyle reproduced long anecdotes from his sources to establish Francia's personal integrity and sense of justice, and he quotes Rengger's description of Francia's daily schedule to emphasize his extremely austere personal habits even after assuming absolute power. (pp. 288-293, 306, 314-317).

But Francia was more than a moral reformer; he was acquainted with and valued rational, scientific methods and applied them to material problems. Carlyle praises the dictator's achievements in proving that Paraguay's agriculture could produce two rather than the traditional one crop a year, drastically simplifying worship, and relaying the city of Asunción along geometric lines with Francia personally wielding the theodolite. On the last point, Carlyle spends almost a full page of his essay arguing with the interpretation of the brothers Robertson, who maintained that it was the fear of assassination, not an abstract sense of efficiency and regularity, that had led Francia to restructure Asunción's confused jumble of streets, paths, buildings and hedges into straight lines. (pp. 310-311).

So here we have the ideal Carlylean hero: social conservative, rational and progressive in economic affairs, and morally above reproach in his personal life. Or do we? Carlyle's candor in openly disagreeing with his sources about the matter of redesigning Asunción is not consistent with his use of his sources in other matters. In his praise of Francia's rationalism, Carlyle states that Francia "introduced schools, boarding schools, and others on which Rengger has a chapter; everywhere he promoted education as he could, repressed superstition as he could." (pp. 305-306). This is a cavalier disregard of fact; Rengger's two and a half page chapter clearly states that Francia's only act in regard to education was to close a forty year old college of theology. Education was an important part of Carlyle's view of the hero as an authoritarian teacher of his people, and the falsity of his claim about Francia's promotion of education certainly weakens Francia's position as a true Carlylean hero.

Even more damaging, however, were Francia's motivations. Throughout the essay, Carlyle criticizes his sources for not more fully developing the inner Francia — his thoughts, beliefs, aspirations, etc. — yet he does not include in his essay one of the most revealing passages available in his sources. J. P. Robertson quotes Francia as saying:

Now, without entering upon the discussion, as to whether this continent is ripe for popular institutions (you know, I think, it is not), it cannot be denied that, in an old and civilized country like Britain, where these institutions have gradually and practically (not theoretically) superseded forms of government originally feudal, till they have forced themselves upon legislative notice, in a ratio proportional to the growing education of the majority, they are those best adapted to secure the greatness and stability of a nation.  

Suppressing this material was vital for Carlyle's presentation of Francia as a hero. First, the Carlylian hero was not supposed to be
aware of his role, as we can see from Carlyle's sardonic criticism in the "Dr. Francia" essay of San Martin's hanging his own portrait between those of Napoleon and the Duke of Wellington (263-264, 267) and from "The Diamond Necklace" (1837): "Your true hero, your true Roland, is ever unconscious that he is a hero; this is the condition of all greatness." More serious than the problem of consciousness is that which Francia was consciously trying to do. From the above quotation and from other discussions in the primary sources, the clear implication emerges that Francia not only admired England's groping toward republican institutions but that he considered himself preparing Paraguay for them in his own particular style, a style that involved measures necessary for Paraguay but not for England. This is directly contrary to the lessons which Carlyle, speaking through Sauerteig, derives from the essay for England. (p. 304).

In "Dr. Francia" then, we see Carlyle constructing a hero to demonstrate to his English audience the modern possibility of economic advance without overturning what Carlyle considered to be the virtues residing in traditional institutions and values. In the course of such construction, however, Carlyle manipulated means to achieve a didactic end and thereby practiced the "unveracity" against which he continually flailed. Carlyle's selection of Francia as a hero and the way he was fabricated for the English audience reveal with startling clarity the structural role of the hero in Carlyle's thinking and the ideological purpose of his method.

III

Apart from Francia's personal qualities, there were very definite limits on what Francia could do in Paraguay, limits that Carlyle does not recognize. For example, Francia's pursuit of social and political stability, so lavishly praised by Carlyle, was self-defeating within a time horizon that extended beyond the dictator's lifetime. The intensely personal nature of Francia's rule in Paraguay necessitated destroying any important intermediate political institutions that might have diluted the dictator's direct exercise of power, suppressing secondary social institutions (including the propertied class), and neutralizing, by exile and prison if necessary, outstanding individuals who might challenge him. As a result, when Francia died, Paraguayan society had neither the institutional structure to give it continuity and stability independent of the dictator's personal charisma and authority, nor a sufficient number of able, knowledgeable, and experienced individuals who could fill the vacuum. Potential effective successors and the strata most likely to generate them had, for the safety of the dictator during his lifetime, been suppressed. In Carlyle's view this suppression would not have affected the rise of a true hero who could draw on divine inspiration for support, but the broader social view of politics would seem to have been borne out by subsequent events. Paraguay's political history in the century after Francia was marked by frequent and turbulent personal power struggles that devastated the country and eventually led it into two major wars which were disasters, ruining it economically, smashing whatever institutional structure it had, and killing almost half of the male population. The legacy of Francia's policies was chaos and disaster, and this was already readily apparent in 1841-1842 when Carlyle was writing the "Dr. Francia" essay.

Furthermore, returning to my earlier theme, Francia apparently did encourage economic growth but he could do so only within very narrow limits. Like Abbot Samson, Francia was in absolute control of a small, simple agrarian society, and advancing beyond the levels of productivity possible in a self-sufficient agricultural economy would have entailed substantial transformations and the emergence of a considerably more complex and differentiated society requiring mechanisms of economic co-ordination and political control more compatible with class rather than individual preeminence. This is precisely the kind of analysis which Carlyle suggested in "Signs of the Times," and he dealt with the issue of industrialization and class formation in "Chartism" (1839) and Latter-Day Pamphlets (1850) by nominating the new "Captains of Industry" as the most likely source of leaders with the needed qualities and perceptions to reinstitute traditional social forms. This indicates how far Carlyle had come from "Signs of the Times;" in these essays Carlyle represents the very agents of industrialism, those individuals most closely associated with Machinery, as the heroes who could free not only themselves but all society from the influence of the new economic order. Marx and Engels, probably with Carlyle's 1829 essay still in mind, were incredulous that he could hate bourgeois society while lionizing the bourgeoisie. But this was to miss how far Carlyle was from the earlier essay's logic and implications; Carlyle was not looking to the class itself for leadership, but to individuals from that class though not representative of it. The hero was to be as independent of his own past as the malleable society which he was to remake was from its history. The ideological intention of this effort is especially clear in "Dr. Francia" where we see Carlyle engaged in fiction-making on two levels. He endowed an historical figure with fictional qualities in
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order to construct a hero, and he placed the fictional hero in a fictionally malleable social milieu.

With the advantage of over 100 years of hindsight, it is remarkable, even superbly ironical, that Carlyle’s prescriptive vision of a conservative society of material abundance, a synthesis of industrialism with pre-industrial validity that transcends, even negates, the literary fictions he developed to give the vision reality. Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, the experience of Germany and Japan demonstrated that the process of industrialization did not have to seriously disrupt pre-existing social, political, and cultural forms. The changed nature of industrial technology, allowing centralized control of the new source of economic power, is probably one of the principal reasons later industrializations could succeed without the accompanying decentralization of social control, liberalization of political authority, and general “individualization” of values. Even in England, by the turn of the twentieth century social critics were describing English government and society in terms that would have encouraged Carlyle.

Perhaps this is where we see the consequences of Carlyle’s romanticism and witness the triumph of his unreason: to understand why Carlyle was in some ways a truer prophet than, say, Marx, one must use a framework of social analysis more like that used by Marx than the fictions upon which Carlyle eventually based his prophecy.

Notes

1. Philip Rosenberg, The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974) is an excellent study of Carlyle’s pioneering effort to resolve the conflicting demands of the dual roles. Ernst Cassirer, Myth of the State (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1946), pp. 189-223, and Mark Roberts, “Carlyle and the Rhetoric of Unreason,” Essays in Criticism, Vol. 18 (October 1968), pp. 397-419 are more typical studies of Carlyle’s social thought in that they dismiss it as rhetorical, unreason, fiction, etc. without sufficiently considering why it took on its particular character.


4. Works, XXVII, p. 59. On p. 74, Carlyle laments that “Cause and effect is almost the only category under which we look at, and work with, all Nature . . .”

5. Herbert Sussman, Victorians and the Machine: The Literary Response to Technology (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), particularly pages 15-40, stresses how Carlyle’s acceptance of industrialism as a method of commodity production was distinguished from the pastoral ideal which haunted so much of contemporary social criticism.

6. On Pages 60 and 62-63 of “Signs of the Times” Carlyle summarizes his view of these changes:
Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also.

These things . . . are . . . of deep import, and indicate a mighty change in our whole manner of existence. For the same habit regulates not our modes of action alone, but our modes of thought and feeling. Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand. They have lost faith in individual endeavour, and in natural force, of any kind. Not for internal perfection, but for external combinations and arrangements, for institutions, constitutions,—for Mechanism of one sort or other, do they hope and struggle. Their whole efforts, attachments, opinions, turn on mechanism, and are of a mechanical character.


12. The Reign of Dr. Joseph Gaspard Roderick de Francia, p. 185-188.


