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THE UNRELIABLE EDITOR:

CARLYLE'S *SARTOR RESARTUS*

AND THE ART OF BIOGRAPHY

BY VANESSA L. RYAN

In 1831 John Wilson Croker's new edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* sparked a debate about the nature of biography: is it a branch of history, recording the life of its subject, or is it a constructive and thus literary effort on the part of the biographer? Croker's grand claim to have surpassed all previous editors inadvertently raised the question of whether the greatness of the *Life of Johnson* was due to its subject or to the genius of its author. In a review of Croker's edition, published as two separate essays, 'Biography' and 'Boswell's Life of Johnson', Carlyle seized on this question, offering a largely unprecedented defence of biography as a literary and creative genre. At the same time as Carlyle wrote this review he was also completing *Sartor Resartus*. The two-year gap between the debate over Croker's edition and the first publication of *Sartor Resartus* in *Fraser's Magazine* (1833–4) has tended to obscure the extent to which Carlyle's book can helpfully be seen in the context of this earlier controversy about the nature of biography. This essay argues that the relationship between the Editor's Heuschrecke's Teufelsdröckh in *Sartor Resartus* strongly resembles the relationship between Croker's Boswell's Johnson.

Sometimes it takes a scholarly issue to inspire the literary thinking of a generation. It may have taken something as apparently minor as a periodical debate about proper editorial practice to inspire the final form of Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, one of the most eccentric and original works of its age. The work is notoriously difficult and complex: a half-mystical rhapsody, it is composed by turns of fragments of biography, autobiography, philosophic fantasy, satire, and apocalyptic prose-poetry. Yet it began as a much more straightforward periodical essay, 'Thoughts on Clothes'. One of the unanswered questions of Carlyle scholarship is 'What intervened between its first conception as an essay in 1830 and its serial publication in its final unclassifiable form in 1833–4?' Above all, why did Carlyle add the elaborate framing device of the confused 'English Editor'? The clue to this mystery lies in Carlyle's review essays, 'Biography' and 'Boswell's Life of Johnson'.¹ Originally one continuous piece, they consider the recent publication of a new edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791), edited by John Wilson Croker,

1 'Biography: Introduction to Croker's Edition of Boswell's Life of Johnson', *Fraser's Magazine*, 27 (Apr. 1832), 253–60; 'Boswell's Life of Johnson', *Fraser's Magazine*, 28 (May 1832), 379–413.

which was published in the summer of 1831.² Croker's grand claims to have surpassed all previous editors of the *Life* inspired a periodical debate about the nature of biography: is it a branch of history recording the life of its subject, or is it a constructive effort, a literary creation on the part of the biographer? And what role does the editor of biography play in either of these possibilities? This essay will argue that these questions were in part the inspiration for Carlyle's invention of the English Editor, the complex narrative embedding, and the biographical fragments, all of which are added to his original 'Thoughts on Clothes' to make *Sartor Resartus*. The final work thus gives new shape not just to German philosophy, as a generation of Carlyle scholars have shown, but also to a uniquely British discussion about the nature of biography.

The importance of Croker's 1831 edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* for *Sartor Resartus* has been easy to overlook. *Sartor Resartus* was published in 1833–4, yet the completed manuscript had remained largely untouched for two years before Carlyle could find a publisher: 'after various hitherings and thitherings', Carlyle wrote, 'it lies quiet in its drawer; waiting for better days'.³ Having begun it in 1830, Carlyle was again working on it intensely in 1831, but to his disappointment (and financial distress), it initially failed to find a publisher. Recognizing this delay in publication is crucial to understanding *Sartor*—it belongs to the time and conditions of 1831 and reflects the influence of the debate that raged that year in the periodicals. It has been equally easy to neglect the fact that Carlyle's essays 'Biography' and 'Boswell's Life of Johnson' are contributions to this debate. Like many Victorian essays now read as more or less autonomous pieces, they were originally review essays. Unfortunately, most reprints (including that in the *Centenary Edition*) omit the subtitle to the first essay, 'Introduction to Croker's Edition of Boswell's Life of Johnson'. In this instance, however, it is important to reconstruct the immediate occasion for the essays. Furthermore, since there are no extant manuscripts of *Sartor Resartus* or its initial version, 'Thoughts on Clothes', it is hard to make claims about Carlyle's process of revision with certainty. Yet a careful reading of his letters and journals shows that at the same time as Carlyle was doing his most intense work on revising *Sartor Resartus* he was following the periodical debate surrounding Croker's edition and planning his own piece on the subject.

Patrick Brantlinger is, I believe, the only critic to examine Carlyle's essays on biography together with *Sartor Resartus*.⁴ He discusses the essays as

2 J. Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. including a Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, ed. J. W. Croker, 5 vols. (London, 1831). R. Altick lists the Croker edition of Boswell in his 'Best-seller list' as having sold 50,000 copies by 1891: *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (Columbus, Ohio, 1957), 387.

3 Letter to Allan Cunningham, 13 Oct. 1831, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, 28 vols. (Durham, NC, 1976–2000), vi. 14.

4 P. Brantlinger, "'Romance', 'Biography', and the Making of *Sartor Resartus*", *Philosophical Quarterly*, 52 (1973), 108–18.

examples of Carlyle's 'theory of biography' and makes a convincing argument for the importance of that theory for *Sartor*. Strangely, he does not address the way in which they are part of a larger debate, and he mentions Boswell only in passing. David Amigoni presents a strong case for reading Boswell's *Life of Johnson* as an intertext for *Sartor Resartus*, focusing on Boswell's role as both narrator and character within his own narrative as a model for *Sartor Resartus*.⁵ Yet Amigoni does not discuss Carlyle's review essays, nor does he acknowledge the importance to *Sartor* of Croker's particular edition. Reading *Sartor Resartus* in the historical context of the debates surrounding Croker's edition, however, brings these two readings together. It helps show how *Sartor Resartus* engages questions of biography by recreating the personalities that provoked the periodical debate and interrogates Boswellian biographical conventions by making an absurd game of its pretensions.

The relations between Croker, Dr Johnson, and James Boswell—not just as historical figures, but also as competing voices in the new edition—are quite possibly the germ of the structure of *Sartor Resartus*. The work opens with our narrator, an unnamed 'English Editor', telling us that he has received from Germany a new work of philosophy: a 'remarkable treatise', called *Die Kleider, ihr Werden und Wirken* (Clothes, their Origin and Influence) by a German 'Professor Diogenes Teufelsdröckh' (Devil's-Dirt) living in the German town of 'Weissnichtwo' (Know-Not-Where). But how, asks the Editor, shall he 'make known Teufelsdröckh and his Book to English readers; especially *such* a book?'⁶ He decides that the best way is to give the philosophy along with the philosopher: to write a biography of the author. He is overjoyed when he unexpectedly receives a letter from 'Herr Hofrath Heuschrecke' (Councillor Grasshopper), a friend and associate of the great philosopher Teufelsdröckh. Heuschrecke mentions that, 'should the present Editor feel disposed to undertake a Biography of Teufelsdröckh, he, Hofrath Heuschrecke, has it in his power to furnish the requisite Documents. . . . Not for a Biography only, but an Autobiography' (I. ii. 12). The English Editor is thus incredulous when,

in the place of this same Autobiography with 'fullest insight', we find Six considerable PAPER-BAGS, carefully sealed, and marked successively, in gilt China-ink, with the symbols of the Six southern Zodiacal Signs, beginning at Libra, in the inside of which sealed Bags lie miscellaneous masses of Sheets, and oftener Shreds and Snips. (I. xi. 77)

The Professor's 'Auto-Biography' is nothing more than 'masses of Sheets' that fly around the room 'like Sibylline leaves', out of which our Editor realizes he 'must evolve printed Creation' from 'German printed and written Chaos' (I. xi. 78–80). *Sartor Resartus*, then, which can be translated as 'The Tailor Retailored', is a patchwork of excerpts from Teufelsdröckh's philosophy of

5 D. Amigoni, *Victorian Biography* (New York, 1993), 53–7.

6 Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh*, ed. C. F. Harrold (Indianapolis, 1937), I. ii. 9; subsequent references are given in the text.

clothes, Heuschrecke's anecdotal reminiscences, and the English Editor's copious commentary, interspersed with attempts at biography.

In *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle recreates the tensions between the pedantic editor, the self-deprecating biographer, and the admired biographical subject of Croker's controversial edition in the interactions between the sharply differentiated personae of the English Editor, his subject Professor Teufelsdröckh, and the admiring friend Hofrath Heuschrecke. The parallel is not always exact, however: Carlyle's fallible English Editor, alternately excessively innocent, overly sophisticated, and conspicuously obtuse, draws on both Boswell's persona in the *Life of Johnson* and the equally fallible and pronounced persona of Boswell's editor, Croker. All the same, just as the new edition of the *Life of Johnson* tells the biography of Johnson simultaneously through Boswell's heroizing perspective and Croker's anti-Boswellian and corrective commentary, *Sartor Resartus* ostensibly presents the *Life and Opinions* of Teufelsdröckh by way of Teufelsdröckh's own writings, the limited materials and anecdotes provided by his admiring friend Heuschrecke, and the English Editor's corrective commentary on both. Of course, Carlyle recreates the relationships between editor, biographer, and biographical subject within a quite different literary mode—one that allows for a bizarre and often playful mix of fantasy, philosophy, satire, and exhortation. The importance of Carlyle's engagement with the debate over Croker's edition nonetheless rests in the unmistakable resemblance between Croker's Boswell's Johnson and the English Editor's Heuschrecke's Teufelsdröckh. The English Editor makes the parallel explicit when he remarks that Heuschrecke stands in relation to Teufelsdröckh as Boswell stood to Johnson: 'We are enabled to assert that he hung on the Professor with the fondness of a Boswell for his Johnson' (I. ii. 26).

One of the most unusual devices of *Sartor Resartus* is the English Editor, who, self-consciously referring to his own 'Editorial Difficulties' (I. ii), takes up more than half of the work. Just as the 'unreliable narrator' in late nineteenth-century fiction shifts attention from the story narrated to the mode of narration, the 'unreliable editor' of *Sartor Resartus* gives dramatic form to questions of authenticity, veracity, and imaginative invention in the art of biography. As the 'unreliable narrator' emphasizes the fictionality rather than the historical reliability of a narrated story, Carlyle's 'unreliable editor' emphasizes the artistic and literary aspect of biography, rather than its claim to be the authentic representation of historical facts. Teufelsdröckh's 'Philosophy of Clothes', presumably the core of Carlyle's initial version 'Thoughts on Clothes', points to a closely related concern. The 'Philosophy of Clothes' argues that institutional beliefs, customs, and conventions are but the 'clothes' of man and society. The central problem is one of distance: what, then, is substance and what is mere garment? The debate over Croker's biography helped Carlyle take this question to a further level. The editor's and biographer's overt role of mediation in Croker's edition similarly turns on

the distinction between original and commentary: is the greatness of the *Life of Johnson* due to the greatness of Johnson or the genius of Boswell, or even, as Croker seemed to claim, to the editor's reconstruction of the 'original' Johnson? The edition offered Carlyle a way to combine his philosophical reflections on 'clothes' with his interest in biography.

The critical clamour over Croker's new edition of Boswell was so intense that Carlyle apostrophized, 'What a dust thou dost raise! Boswell's Book had a noiseless birth, compared with the Edition of Boswell's Book.'⁷ Croker had triggered the debate with a long justification of his new edition of the *Life*. In the early nineteenth century, biography was based on a kind of transparency or epistemological innocence: the role of the biographer was to record what he saw. As Joseph W. Reed puts it, 'if there was an art to biography at all, it was the subject's art in designing his life'.⁸ So readers of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* 'admired the reflection of Johnson in the mirror and ignored, vilified, or denigrated the mirror itself'.⁹ Ideally, the biographer would disappear behind his subject; and yet the validity of the biographical enterprise was guaranteed by this same biographer. This paradox was particularly difficult to avoid for contemporary readers of the *Life*, for while they saw in Boswell a byword for the authority of the biography, the strong persona he manifests in the *Life* raised critical concerns about the intrusive presence of the biographer.¹⁰ By emphasizing the need for his interpretative and often revisionist annotations to Boswell's work, and adding the role of the editor, Croker heightened the tension between biographical authority and constructive work: in addition to the protagonist Johnson, two quite distinct personalities govern the development of the book, the biographer Boswell and the editor Croker.

Croker explicitly sought to remedy what he saw as the 'weaknesses' of Boswell's original; in essence, his edition is a sustained attack on Boswell. To be sure, the simplest kind of annotation made by Croker is in line with today's editorial practice: historical personages left unidentified are named, allusions to historical events are explained, and social customs are described. But the majority of Croker's editorial work goes much further than tactful editing: he splices in other texts about Johnson and offers nearly 2,500 notes of his own extensive commentary and interpretation, most of it contemptuous of Boswell. His aim is to fill gaps in Boswell's narrative, and to 'complete the history of Johnson's Life' by blending Boswell's text with 'other authentic works

7 Carlyle, 'Boswell's Life of Johnson', in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle in 30 Volumes, Centenary Edition*, xxviii: *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays in Five Volumes* (London, 1899), iii. 63; subsequent references are given in the text.

8 J. W. Reed Jr., *English Biography in the Early Nineteenth Century, 1802–1838* (New Haven, 1966).

9 *Ibid.* 5.

10 F. R. Hart compares the principal reviews—Macaulay's, Lockhart's, and Carlyle's—of Croker's edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* in 'Boswell and the Romantics: A Chapter in the History of Biographical Theory', *English Literary History*, 27 (1960), 44–65.

connected with the biography of Johnson'. He wanted to incorporate the non-Boswellian material to produce something like an encyclopedia of Johnson biography. Croker attaches, often tenuously and without clear identification of sources, material from the snapshots in Fanny Burney's *Diary* (1778), the intimate domestic portrait in Hester Thrale Piozzi's *Anecdotes of Johnson* (1786), and the stiff and grudgingly respectful tribute in Sir John Hawkins's *Life of Johnson* (1787), creating what one Victorian critic called a 'monstrous medley'.¹¹ Croker not only throws out Boswell's prefaces, advertisements, and dedications, but, most importantly, he also continually calls attention to his own efforts to correct and amend Boswell's text. All the same, he claims only to have added material, 'so that the worst that can happen is that all the present editor has contributed may, if the reader so pleases, be rejected as *surplusage*'.¹² Yet, as some of his critics noticed, he also made many idiosyncratic and silent omissions, revisions, and substitutions. Most contemporary reviewers of Croker's edition nonetheless defended his editorial work as a necessary improvement. The contemporary belief was that Boswell had a conspicuously inadequate understanding of Johnson. Croker's disregard for the integrity of Boswell's text was in keeping with the contemporary consensus that the value of biography lay in the subject, not the biographer's art.

By 1880, when Percy Fitzgerald, author of a full-length study of the various editions of the *Life of Johnson*, described the result of Croker's editorial techniques, the concept of biographical validity had basically shifted in favour of the biographer's art. Fitzgerald is also author of the first biography of Boswell and himself the publisher of a new edition of the *Life*, so he unsurprisingly evaluates Croker's work rather unfavourably. Representing a new interest in Boswell, Fitzgerald emphasizes the corrupting effect of Croker's work on Boswell's original text:

Mr. Croker thought it was orthodox to insert large batches of foreign matter wherever he could find an opening, to rough-hew his author; reshape, transpose, and omit where it seemed good to him; to reprove sentiments that were unpalatable, correct the various speakers in the dialogue, substitute proper words for improper ones; and generally maul, trim, and restore according to his whims and prejudices.¹³

Fitzgerald's description is critical in tone; nonetheless it is a fairly accurate summary of Croker's editorial practice. An 'unreliable editor', Croker assumes a strong and apparently objective presence that is nonetheless conspicuously biased. His strong presence inevitably shifts attention away, at least in part, from the substance to the point of view from which it is related. This is true not only because of the way in which his expansive annotations and additions inadvertently emphasize his own efforts at construction, but also because his

11 *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. G. B. Hill [1887], rev. L. F. Powell, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1934–50), vol. 1, p. xli.

12 Croker, preface to *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, p. x.

13 P. Fitzgerald, *Croker's Boswell and Boswell: Studies in the 'Life of Johnson'* (London, 1880), 22.

attempts to improve upon Boswell single out for criticism Boswell's creative impulse to turn unremarkable events into compelling stories.

In the 1830s, however, most of the reviewers sided with Croker. Even one of Boswell's successors in the art of biography, John Gibson Lockhart, whose *Life of Scott* was to appear in 1837, reflects contemporary scepticism about Boswell's biographical success: 'Never did any man tell a story with such liveliness and fidelity, and yet contrive to leave so strong an impression that he did not understand it . . . unconscious, all the while, of the real gist and bearing of the facts he is narrating.'¹⁴ Writing for the *Quarterly Review*, which he also edited, Lockhart claims that Croker compensates for Boswell's failings and praises the newly edited work highly, calling it 'one of the best edited books in the English language'.¹⁵ An anonymous reviewer in the *Monthly Review* goes so far as to claim that Croker had succeeded 'in arresting the progress which one of the most entertaining memoirs in our language was making toward the regions, not indeed of oblivion, but of obscurity'.¹⁶ While Boswell's inadequacy is regretted, Croker is repeatedly singled out for praise: a review for the *Literary Gazette* calls Croker 'one of the ablest and most delightful annotators of our time', and the *Westminster Review* ambiguously wrote that 'The praise is not one, perhaps, of a very high kind, but still it is due to Mr. Croker, that the world should know that he is the Editor of the best *variorum* edition of a work, that has been published since the revival of letters.'¹⁷

The central assumption shared by the reviewers is that the place of the biographer is simply to record as transparently as possible the life of his biographical subject. At issue in the critical clamour over Croker's Boswell is the dominance of the biographer's personality. While the 1831 reviewers realize that the *Life* depends on Boswell's presence as observer and writer, each wants a *Life* void of Boswell's presence—they see the constant intrusion of the biographer as marring an otherwise exemplary biography. In this context, to come to the defence of Johnson's biographer, as Carlyle was to do six months later in 1832, was to fly in the face of all literary opinion. General opinion had not changed much since Thomas Gray said in 1768, commenting on Boswell's early book on Corsica, that 'any fool may write a most valuable book by chance if he will only tell what he heard and saw with veracity'.¹⁸ Until Carlyle's review, Boswell's only title to public recognition seems to have been his folly.

Thomas Babington Macaulay takes this peculiar fact about Boswell's fame and turns it into the punchline of his argument. Presenting a more complex position on Boswell's inadequacy than Lockhart or the other periodical

14 *Quarterly Review*, 46 (Nov. 1831), 8.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Monthly Review*, 4 (1831), 453.

17 *Literary Gazette* (1831), 403; *Westminster Review*, 15 (Oct. 1831), 392; *Edinburgh Literary Journal*, 6 (1831), 32.

18 *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, ed. P. Toynbee, L. Whibley, and H. W. Starr, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1971), iii. 310.

reviewers, Macaulay argues that Boswell's folly paradoxically made him the ideal biographer. He writes that Boswell 'would infallibly have made his hero as contemptible as he has made himself, had not his hero really possessed some moral and intellectual qualities of a very high order'.¹⁹ Yet the central paradox of his argument is that Boswell wrote the greatest biography precisely because he was a 'dunce, a parasite, and a coxcomb'. 'Poor Bozzy', Macaulay argues, exhibited himself as a fool, yet did so all for the sake of the biographical project. The 'greatest of biographies' was made possible by the fact that Boswell maintains a clearly secondary role: shameless and indiscreet, servile and impertinent, Boswell is yet wholly dedicated to recording the life of his subject. 'If he [Boswell] had not been a great fool, he would never have been a great writer . . . without the officiousness, the inquisitiveness, the effrontery, the toad-eating, the insensibility to all reproof, he could never have produced so excellent a book.'²⁰ Macaulay claims that even Johnson saw Boswell in much the same light, citing his remark that Boswell missed immortality only because he had not been alive when Pope's *Dunciad* was composed. If Boswell was worth canonizing in the ranks of supreme 'dullness', as the remarks imply, neither Johnson nor Croker seems to fare much better in his review.

Macaulay's notoriously uncomplimentary review of Croker's edition helped cast it into immediate disrepute. 'For every reader of Johnson's works', wrote Walter Raleigh in 1910, 'there have been perhaps fifty readers of Boswell's Life, and a hundred of Macaulay's Essays.'²¹ Macaulay's review—reprinted innumerable times in the nineteenth century, often under the title of 'Macaulay's Life of Johnson'—consists of an exposé of Croker's editorial blunders, a caricature of Boswell, and a sketch of Johnson's life. Opening with the simple statement, 'This work has greatly displeased us', this scathing review is well described by Donald Greene as a 'hilarious and brilliantly readable diatribe against an incompetent editor of a moronic biographer's treatment of a worthless or at best ludicrously overrated subject'.²² Although Macaulay later wrote the article on Samuel Johnson in the eighth (1856) and subsequent editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, his depiction of Johnson in the review is far from flattering.

Macaulay reserves the brunt of his criticism, however, for Croker, his personal animosity against whom was no secret. Fitzgerald traces the mutual animosity between Macaulay and Croker to a confrontation in the House of Commons on the Reform Bill. 'See whether I do not dust that varlet's jacket for him in the next number of the Blue and Yellow [i.e. the September issue of the *Edinburgh Review*]. I detest him more than cold boiled veal', Macaulay

19 *The Edinburgh Review*, 54 (Sept. 1831), 20.

20 *Ibid.* 17–18.

21 W. Raleigh, *Six Essays on Johnson* (Oxford, 1910), 174.

22 D. Greene, 'Samuel Johnson', in J. Meyers (ed.), *The Craft of Literary Biography* (London, 1985), 21.

wrote to his sister after the debate.²³ Croker was a Tory MP and an opponent of the Reform Bill, eventually passed in 1832, of which the Whig Macaulay was a voluble proponent. Aside from the personal attack on Croker, however, Macaulay's review contains a ringing denunciation of Croker's editorial practices. He painstakingly traces innumerable errors, ridicules Croker's mistranslations from the Greek, and highlights any number of what he calls Croker's unlikely 'surmises'. He particularly objects to Croker's dilution of Boswell's text with the inferior work of Hawkins and Piozzi. Parodying Johnson's comment about a bad leg of mutton served to him at an inn—'It is as bad as bad can be: it is ill-fed, ill-killed, ill-kept, and ill-drest'²⁴—Macaulay writes in his last sentence, 'This edition is ill compiled, ill arranged, ill written, and ill printed.'

Six months after Macaulay's review appeared, Carlyle wrote a two-part review of the edition for *Fraser's Magazine*. The last to join the debate, Carlyle could look back on the earlier essays and write what is in many ways an answer to Macaulay's essay. Carlyle did not generally think highly of Macaulay, finding him 'unhappily without a divine idea'.²⁵ Macaulay seems to have returned the dislike, calling Carlyle a 'charlatan'.²⁶ This rivalry of sorts must have been fuelled when the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, Macvey Napier, chose Macaulay to write the review. In August 1831 Carlyle had written to Napier to suggest, apparently for the second time, that he be the one to write it.²⁷

The position that Carlyle takes on Croker's edition is unusual: he breaks decisively with his contemporaries' attempts to discount Boswell's role in shaping the *Life of Johnson*. Instead, he presents a pro-Boswellian defence of biography as a creative form. He had already developed a personal stake in the role of the biographer: not only had he taken on this role himself in his *Life of Schiller* (1825) and in his short biographical sketches of Goethe, Jean Paul Richter, Heine, Burns, Novalis, and Voltaire, but from its first issue in February 1830 onwards, he contributed regularly to *Fraser's Magazine*, which above all explored the biographical mode.²⁸ His review of Croker's edition is in some ways a self-defence, a rebuttal of Macaulay, and the culmination of an extended engagement with the question of biography.

23 Quoted in Fitzgerald, *Croker's Boswell*, 40. Cf. M. F. Brightfield, *John Wilson Croker* (Berkeley, 1940), 369 ff.; R. C. Beatty, *Lord Macaulay: Victorian Liberal* (Norman, Okla., 1938), ch. 8.

24 Boswell, *Life*, iv. 1784.

25 J. A. Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of his Life, 1795–1835*, 2 vols. (London, 1882), ii. 31.

26 Quoted in R. C. Beatty, 'Carlyle and Macaulay', *Philological Quarterly*, 18 (1939), 32.

27 *Letters*, v. 311.

28 Some of his earliest writing also includes twenty biographical entries for Brewster's *Edinburgh Encyclopedia*, repr. in *Montaigne and Other Essays, Chiefly Biographical*, ed. S. R. Crockett (London, 1897).

Implicitly responding to Macaulay's essay, Carlyle heightens the tone of mockery, but shifts the object from Boswell to Croker. What Lockhart, Macaulay, and even Croker had said about Boswell, Carlyle now applies to Croker. His ridicule turns Croker's own unflattering depiction of 'poor Boswell' on himself:

The Editor [Croker] will punctually explain what is already sun-clear; and then anon, not without frankness, declare frequently enough that 'the Editor does not understand', that 'the Editor cannot guess',—while, for the most part, the Reader cannot help both guessing and seeing. . . . Indeed it, from a very early stage of the business, becomes afflictively apparent, how much the Editor, so well furnished with all external appliances and means is from within unfurnished with means for forming to himself any just notion of Johnson or of Johnson's Life; and therefore of speaking on that subject with much hope of edifying. (*Essays*, iii. 66)

While Croker and his reviewers see Boswell as remarkable for his folly, Carlyle shows that it is instead Croker who displays conspicuous dimwittedness. Just as Lockhart had described Boswell as leaving a 'strong impression that he did not understand' his friend Johnson, Carlyle argues that it is in fact Croker who lacks understanding. When he playfully acknowledges Croker's 'external appliances and means', Carlyle ironically echoes Croker's own grudging praise of Boswell's labour of collection, annotation, and transcription. Throughout the review, Carlyle shows that the editor Croker is subject to the same criticism as the biographer Boswell.

While the earlier reviewers valued the *Life of Johnson* because they valued Johnson, Carlyle values the biographical enterprise itself. He portrays biography as fulfilling a basic human need and as an expression of man's fundamentally social nature. The biographer's art is the only medium, Carlyle insists, that can reveal the subject's greatest work. He begins his essay 'Biography' with a Pope-like claim, for example, that makes the case for the centrality of biography: 'Man is perennially interesting to man; nay, if we look strictly to it, there is nothing else interesting' (*Essays*, iii. 44).²⁹ Not only does Carlyle quote the same sentence, originally from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, in *Sartor Resartus*, but the same stress on the centrality of biography is suggested when Heuschrecke writes that 'in Weissnichtwo our whole conversation is little or nothing else but Biography or Autobiography . . . Biography is by nature the most universally profitable, universally pleasant of all things; especially Biography of distinguished individuals' (I. xi. 75–6). Answering his own rhetorical question, 'is not the whole purport [of

29 'Der Mensch ist dem Menschen das Interessanteste und sollte ihn vielleicht ganz allein interessieren', from J. W. Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, ed. E. Bahr (Stuttgart, 1982), bk. II, ch. 4, 102. Carlyle uses this sentence in *Sartor* in slightly different form: 'Man is properly the only object that interests man'. In his own translation of *Wilhelm Meister* (1824), Carlyle gives it most accurately, though least elegantly, as 'man is ever the most interesting object to man, and perhaps should be the only one that interests': Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, trans. T. Carlyle, ed. H. D. Traill, 2 vols. (London, 1896–9), i. 131.

History] Biographic?', Carlyle writes in his review that history is, or at least should be, 'the essence of innumerable Biographies' (*Essays*, iii. 46).

If biography, however, is thought to require the skill of an artist, as Carlyle argues, it is vulnerable to the charge that it has as much in common with fiction as it does with history. Carlyle is careful to resolve the possible tension between his defence of the imaginative art of biography and his claim that history is but 'innumerable Biographies'. Fiction, he writes, is 'mimic Biography', yet our appetite cannot be fulfilled by such 'Fictitious Narratives', since such biographical stories are only satisfying when they are grounded in reality. In a gesture reminiscent of *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle offers an attack on fiction placed in the mouth of his fictional expert, Professor Gottfried Sauerteig. 'Fiction', writes Sauerteig in his *Aesthetische Springwurzeln*, 'while the feigner of it knows that he is feigning, partakes, more than we suspect, of the nature of *lying*' (*Essays*, iii. 49). Sauerteig's rigid differentiation between fact and fiction enables Carlyle to introduce a third term, one that is the true subject of his essay: namely, what Ruskin would later call an 'imaginative sense of fact', which Carlyle describes as the kind of invention that is 'an invention of a new Truth, what we can call a Revelation' (*Essays*, iii. 54).

In some respects Carlyle harks back to a much older view of the relationship of biography, most famously expressed by Plutarch: 'I am writing BIOGRAPHY, not HISTORY, and the truth is that the most brilliant exploits often tell us nothing of the virtues or vices of the men who performed them, while on the other hand a chance remark or a joke may reveal far more of A MAN'S CHARACTER than the mere feat of winning battles in which thousands fall.'³⁰ Carlyle's aim is to show us how impressive the 'smallest historical *fact* may become, as contrasted with the grandest *fictitious event*' (*Essays*, iii. 54) when it is presented with skill and art:

It is well worth the Artist's while to examine for himself what it is that gives such pitiable incidents their memorableness . . . Half the effect, as we already perceive, depends on the object; on its being *real*, on its being really *seen*. The other half will depend on the observer; and the question now is: How are real objects *so* seen; on what quality of observing, or of style in describing, does this so intense pictorial power depend? Often a slight circumstance contributes curiously to the result: some little, and perhaps to appearance accidental, feature is presented; a light-gleam, which instantaneously *excites* the mind, and urges it to complete the picture, and evolve the meaning thereof for itself. . . . The power to produce such [light-gleams], to select such features as will produce them, is generally treated as a knack, or trick of the trade, a secret for being 'graphic'; whereas these magical feats are, in truth, rather inspirations; and the gift of performing them, which acts unconsciously, without forethought, and as if by nature alone, is properly a *genius* for description. (*Essays*, iii. 57)³¹

30 'Alexander', in *The Age of Alexander: Nine Great Lives by Plutarch*, trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert (New York, 1973), 252.

31 In his earlier review of Lockhart's *Life of Burns*, Carlyle had already emphasized that the simple recording of facts was far from the art of biography: *The Edinburgh Review*, 48 (1828), 268-9.

The biographer's mirror must, as Lockhart and Macaulay also claim, be clear; yet for Carlyle the mirror must not only be capable of receiving the whole image of his subject, but, for the 'light-gleams' to be real, of reflecting the subject's vividness and concreteness selectively. The biographer is thus a 'living' mirror, whose clarity requires that it do more than simply reflect, that it have a life of its own. The biographer's art—signalled as such by the words 'inspiration' and 'genius'—is contrasted with the work of the multitude of British authors, which appears instead, not as reflection, but as some 'magic-lantern shadow' of the 'Image of their own pitiful Self' (*Essays*, iii. 58). The successful biographer urges the reader 'to complete the picture', to take on for himself, in other words, the editorial function. Carlyle's final judgement puts Boswell's talent as a writer in the *Life of Johnson* not only on a level with Johnson, but above him: 'In worth as a Book we have rated it beyond any other product of the eighteenth century: all Johnson's Writings stand on a quite inferior level to it.' It is a strong statement, especially considering that Johnson raised biography to a new level as an English literary form in *The Lives of the Poets* (1779–81). Nonetheless, Johnson later figures among the most sympathetically portrayed of the 'heroes as men of letters' in Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1841).

Carlyle's engagement with the questions about biography that Croker's edition raised finds its heightened expression in *Sartor Resartus*. His journals and letters suggest that he was closely following the 1831 periodical debate and planning a piece on Croker's Boswell during the composition of *Sartor Resartus*. His most intense and substantial work on *Sartor Resartus* took place between March and August of 1831.³² Although he only began writing his review essays a few months after finishing his draft of *Sartor Resartus*, not only would he have been following the reviews of Croker's Boswell from July to August 1831, but as early as March he mentions that he is interested in the edition because he wants to write a piece on Johnson. In a letter to his brother of 4 March 1831, Carlyle writes: 'Teufelsdreck, I hege and pflege, night and day' with a few lines further in a postscript, 'Also mention, if you can, when Croker's *Boswell's Life of Johnson* comes out. I have a great mind to write something on Samuel, of considerable length . . .'.³³ The forthcoming publication of Croker's edition of Boswell had been advertised in *Bent's Monthly Literary Advertiser* as early as January 1831, and was listed again in the May issue as 'in press', before it was listed as published in the June edition.³⁴ It seems fair to assume that Carlyle must have received Croker's

32 For the complicated composition history of *Sartor Resartus*, see G. B. Tennyson, *Sartor Called Resartus: The Genesis, Structure, and Style of Thomas Carlyle's First Major Work* (Princeton, 1965), and R. L. Tarr, introduction to *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh in Three Books*, ed. M. Engel and R. L. Tarr (Berkeley, 2000).

33 *Letters*, v. 245.

34 In early March Carlyle's brother John mentions the Croker's edition in two letters. See *Letters*, v. 245.

edition soon after it was published in June and that he followed the reviews in the periodical press, most of which were published from July to August, at the same time as he was working on *Sartor Resartus*. Writing in August to Macvey Napier, the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, Carlyle suggests that he write something on ‘Boswell[’]s Johnson, which work I had (and in that shape or another still have) something to say on’.³⁵ Carlyle seems to have begun work on the planned piece on Johnson in early January 1832, when he notes in his journal that he has ‘spent nearly three weeks in reading Croker’s Boswell’s Johnson; on which I have now (and had) some purpose of writing an Essay’.³⁶

Sartor Resartus itself offers the strongest evidence of the influence of Croker’s Boswell’s Johnson. As early as its subtitle, *The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh*, the reader is led to expect a biography in the tradition of the *Life of Johnson*.³⁷ *Sartor Resartus* is ostensibly an attempt to translate a system of philosophy by constructing a biography. Often read, in part, as Carlyle’s fictionalized autobiography, it develops consciously and clearly the rhetorical and formal aspects and functions of biography. As in Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*, we are faced with a patchwork of anecdotes, conversations, and writings relating to the biographical subject. When the Editor, for example, decides to undertake the daunting task of emplotting Teufelsdröckh’s life, he gives us its soon-to-be-constructed stages: ‘Genesis, Growth, Entanglement, Unbelief, Reprobation, and Conversion’ (I. xi. 78). Before the reader meets with the Editor’s attempt at a biography, the narrative stages thus enumerated have already suggested that Teufelsdröckh’s life will take on the form of a highly conventional ‘spiritual autobiography’.³⁸ The conventions governing the progress of Book II are indeed superficially those of biography; yet they are also an ironic inversion of them, since Teufelsdröckh’s decision to enter the world of work is scarcely a turning-point of the same calibre as a spiritual conversion. The narrative of transformation and conversion, a commonplace in the ‘spiritual autobiography’, is ironically displaced by the Editor’s metatextual commentary. *Sartor Resartus* is, thus, at once a fictionalization and an interrogation of the biographical project. Boswell’s example is both applauded and mocked. While Carlyle defends Boswell and Johnson from the contempt of Macaulay and the high-handedness of Croker in the review

35 Ibid. 311.

36 Ibid. vi. 85. Cf. *Two Note Books*, 230, and *Letters*, vi. 72, 112.

37 Fraser’s text lists the date of *Die Kleider* as 1833 (*Fraser’s Magazine*, 8 (1833)), but most modern editions follow the text of the first London edition of *Sartor* (1838), in which *Die Kleider* is dated back to 1831, presumably by Carlyle, who alone would have known when it was written. Carlyle also added a note to the 1869 Library Edition of *Sartor*, saying: ‘This questionable little book was undoubtedly written among the mountain solitudes, in 1831.’ Both emendations suggest that for Carlyle *Sartor Resartus* clearly belonged to the time and conditions of 1831.

38 Joseph Hartwell Barrett, an early critic of *Sartor Resartus*, calls the book, in fact, ‘a sort of spiritual autobiography’: *American Review*, 9 (1849), 121.

essays, in *Sartor Resartus* their biographical ambitions are also sources for the book's rich parody.

Carlyle dramatizes the issues at stake in the debate surrounding Croker's edition by recreating the tensions between the different personae. The layered and competing personae of Croker, Boswell, and Johnson are closely echoed by the relationships between the English Editor, Heuschrecke, and Teufelsdröckh. The English Editor likes to compare Teufelsdröckh to the 'English Johnson' (III. vi. 239; III. viii. 264), implying that Teufelsdröckh is the German equivalent. And, as previously quoted, he calls attention to the parallel, remarking that Heuschrecke stands in relation to Teufelsdröckh as Boswell stood to Johnson: 'We are enabled to assert that he hung on the Professor with the fondness of a Boswell for his Johnson. And perhaps with the like return; for Teufelsdröckh treated his gaunt admirer with little outward regard, as some half-rational or altogether irrational friend, and at best loved him out of gratitude and by habit' (I. ii. 26).³⁹ But this parallel attends to only two layers in the text's tripartite structure. If Heuschrecke and Teufelsdröckh's friendship mimics Boswell and Johnson's relationship, then the English Editor also parallels the editor Croker.

The Editor indeed sounds at times like a version of Croker. Carlyle's description in his review of Croker's well-intentioned, but at times misconceived, editorial commentary could in fact just as well serve as a strikingly accurate portrait of the often too literal-minded Editor of *Sartor*: 'The Editor will punctually explain what is already sun-clear; and then anon, not without frankness, declare frequently enough that "the Editor does not understand", that "the Editor cannot guess",—while, for the most part, the Reader cannot help both guessing and seeing . . .'. Carlyle's playful use of the editorial voice often parodies just the kind of overly serious and self-satisfied editorial mode that Croker represented. The book review form of the opening chapters mocks the serious book review essay that had been developed chiefly in the *Edinburgh Review* by Francis Jeffrey and imitated in other literary periodicals, such as Croker's *Quarterly Review*. As soon as the presence and credibility of the Editor has been firmly established, for example, it is undermined by a sly footnote observing that the Editor conceals his identity and that not even the publisher, 'O.Y.', knows it (I. ii. 13). Carlyle here takes advantage of his strategic choice of *Fraser's Magazine*: 'O.Y.' stood for the journal's fictitious publisher 'Oliver Yorke'. *Fraser's* modelled itself on *Blackwood's Magazine*, which had transformed the use of fictional editors, commentators, and narrators into a highly developed convention.⁴⁰ *Fraser's* 'Oliver Yorke', like *Blackwood's* 'Christopher North', was not a person, but an editorial persona. The name was used by many of

39 Carlyle makes a similar gesture in *Past and Present* (1843), referring several times to Jocelin of Brakelond as Abott Samson's 'Bozzy': *Past and Present*, ed. R. Altick (New York, 1965), 47.

40 On *Fraser's Magazine*, see M. M. H. Thrall, *Rebellious Fraser's: Nol Yorke's Magazine in the Days of Maginn, Thackeray, and Carlyle* (New York, 1934).

Fraser's contributors, including Carlyle himself. When the English Editor remarks on the suitability of the publishing agreement he has reached with *Fraser's* 'singular man' Oliver Yorke, the joke is in part that 'Oliver Yorke' was in fact many men (I. ii. 11–12).⁴¹ Simply by choosing to place *Sartor Resartus* in *Fraser's Magazine*, which could not be further from the editorial authority exercised by Jeffrey at the *Edinburgh Review* or Croker at the *Quarterly Review*, Carlyle added a level of parody to the character of his 'English Editor'.

Carlyle's letters suggest that between the first inception of *Sartor Resartus* as 'Thoughts on Clothes' and its final version he added more biography and more framing material. These additions heightened its engagement with the debate over Croker's edition and also strengthened its affinities with *Fraser's*. In a letter to his brother John of 21 January 1831, Carlyle writes that he aims to expand on the 'Philosophy of Clothes' mainly using biography: 'I can devise some more biography for Teufelsdröck; give a second deeper part, in the same vein, leading through Religion and the nature of Society, and Lord knows what.'⁴² Carlyle embarked on a second series of additional (possibly minor) revisions before submitting it in 1833. In addition to dividing up the manuscript for serial publication, it was at this time (June and July 1833) that he must have added the direct references to *Fraser's*.

Fraser's was highly suited to *Sartor Resartus*, not just for its characteristic use of editorial personae, but also for its emphasis on biographical criticism. *Fraser's* most popular and widely imitated feature, the biographical series 'The Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters', is another likely source for Carlyle's engagement with biographical form. The 'Portrait Gallery', as *Fraser's* proudly termed the series, was 'an innovation, the first attempt which any English magazine had made to give informative, intimate accounts of the more prominent living men of letters'.⁴³ In September 1831, at the height of the debate over the new edition of Boswell, Croker had himself been the subject of the 'Portrait Gallery'. In its use of the mock-editorial style and its interest in biographical form, it is likely that *Fraser's Magazine* had more influence on the unusual shape and substance of *Sartor* than is usually thought: its parodic approach to standard critical and editorial practice was especially useful to Carlyle, since it offered him a model for his inventive treatment of the critical apparatus surrounding biography.

With its highly innovative and complex use of layered editorial personae, *Sartor Resartus*, like *Fraser's Magazine*, self-consciously pursued the effect that

41 *Letters*, vi. 397. Tarr (introduction, p. lxxiii) interprets the reference to 'O.Y.' as a sign of Carlyle's willingness to satisfy William Maginn. William Maginn, the editor of *Fraser's*, was most often the voice behind the fictional persona of Oliver Yorke, yet it is imprecise to identify Oliver Yorke with Maginn.

42 *Letters*, v. 215. On Carlyle's revisions, see C. F. Harrold, introduction to *Sartor Resartus*, p. xxv; G. B. Tennyson, *Sartor Called Resartus*, 142.

43 Thrall, *Rebellious Fraser's*, 19.

the competing voices in Croker's edition had unintentionally created: the multiple independent narrative voices dispel the possibility of a stable biographical subject, representable by an impartial observer. As Vivienne Rundle notes, before the reader encounters any of Teufelsdröckh's work, *Die Kleider*, the English Editor cites a review of the work from the fictitious *Weissnichtwo'sche Anzeiger*—'a masterpiece of boldness, lynx-eyed acuteness, and rugged independent Germanism and Philanthropy' (I. i. 9)—as well as a letter from Hofrath Heuschrecke describing the positive reception of *Die Kleider* in Germany.⁴⁴ The first British publication of *Sartor Resartus* in book form (1838) appended the actual reviewers' comments, thereby adding yet another layer of textual framing and furthering the mixture of authentic and fictitious. These interpolated texts provide multiple perspectives on the laborious process from which the text has emerged, challenging the possibility of any kind of straightforward authentic biographical narrative. Instead, the emphasis is on an intersubjective narrative frame, as the Editor himself suggests at the outset of the work: 'Biography or Autobiography of Teufelsdröckh there is, clearly enough, none to be gleaned here: at most some sketchy, shadowy fugitive likeness of him may, by unheard-of efforts, partly of intellect, partly of imagination, on the side of the Editor and of the Reader, rise up between them' (I. xi. 79). The reader of *Sartor Resartus*, knowing that the text is overtly constructed, is nonetheless implicated in the creative process. Carlyle thus tempts his readers to assume the mantle of authority and take on the editorial role themselves.

This is, in fact, what readers of *Sartor Resartus* have done, often trying to edit out the English Editor in much the same way that Croker sought to edit out Boswell. The English Editor is, however, hard to overlook. His active process of construction becomes a part of the larger narrative of *Sartor*, beginning unsurprisingly with the chapter 'Editorial Difficulties'. Rarely is the reader given more than a paragraph or two of Teufelsdröckh's own writings before the Editor interjects with questions such as 'what, for example, are we to make of such sentences as the following?' and 'has it often been the lot of our readers to read such stuff as we shall now quote?' (I. vi. 42–3). In the constant oscillation between Editor and Teufelsdröckh, the reader only gets fragments of selected autobiography. The Editor's commentary becomes so copious that the distinction between the act of interpretation and the object of interpretation collapses. As Jonathan Loesberg argues, only the combination of the text and the gloss constitutes the text: 'Every text is itself a gloss, every gloss is also an integral text.'⁴⁵ The interchangeability between gloss and text is literalized

44 V. Rundle, "'Devising New Means": *Sartor Resartus* and the Devoted Reader', *Victorian Newsletter*, 82 (1992), 12–22.

45 J. Loesberg, *Fictions of Consciousness: Mill, Newman, and the Reading of Victorian Prose* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1986), 189. Jonathan Swift's *Tale of a Tub* (1704), which has been cited as a source for Carlyle's clothes metaphor, is also a clear model for the extensive interpolations of imaginary editorial commentary alongside a fictitious text.

when the Editor focuses not on Heuschrecke's Malthusian pamphlet, but on Teufelsdröckh's marginalia on the pamphlet.

The Editor seems far from Carlyle's ideal biographer, a 'living mirror' who can offer us a clear and vivid reflection of Teufelsdröckh. Nonetheless, it is tempting to read *Sartor* as if the English Editor were primarily an aid to understanding the 'Philosophy of Clothes'. In a letter to Fraser, Carlyle suggests something of the kind when he calls *Sartor Resartus* 'a kind of Didactic Novel, but indeed properly *like* nothing yet extant'.⁴⁶ Many critics accept this essentially didactic purpose of the editorial and biographical framing device and see the Editor as a rhetorical tool that helps make Teufelsdröckh's clothes philosophy more convincing. The real subject matter of *Sartor*, then, is Teufelsdröckh's ideas, with the English Editor playing a largely secondary role: the Editor is seen as a heuristic, ironic, or self-critical distancing or masking device that helps us understand the clothes philosophy of the cerebral Professor Teufelsdröckh. Gerry H. Brookes, for example, maintains that 'our interest is in coming to know the Clothes Philosophy, not the fate of the Editor'.⁴⁷

Such a reading of *Sartor Resartus*, however, parallels the way in which Carlyle's contemporaries read Boswell's *Life of Johnson* primarily for its portrait of Johnson. To regard the Editor of *Sartor Resartus* as merely a communicator of Teufelsdröckh is to understand his function as Lockhart and Macaulay understood the role of the ideal biographer; namely, as subsidiary to the person whose life is narrated. But the Editor of *Sartor Resartus* is certainly not respectfully inconspicuous: he calls attention again and again to his perplexity, conspicuously narrating—like Croker—his difficulties in assembling an adequate biography. Although *Sartor Resartus* presents itself as a supposed commentary on the life and works of the German Professor, Teufelsdröckh is, in the words of one nineteenth-century reviewer, 'about as real a personage as Tristram Shandy's Father, Captain Gulliver, or Donquixote'.⁴⁸ The question remains, why has Carlyle not only invented a source—Teufelsdröckh's work of German transcendentalism, *Die Kleider*—but also one that requires an editor—translator—interpreter? The simultaneous invention of a source and its interpreter places the role of mediation centre-stage; yet readers have always been divided about how to understand the aim of the mediation.

The prominent presence of the English Editor can hardly be fully explained as merely mediating between Teufelsdröckh and the reader of *Sartor Resartus*.

46 Letter to James Fraser, 27 May 1833, *Letters*, vi. 396.

47 G. H. Brookes, *The Rhetorical Form of Carlyle's 'Sartor Resartus'* (Berkeley, 1972), 48. Cf. M. Peckham, *Beyond the Tragic Vision: The Quest for Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1962), 180. For a summary of the different critical views of the Editor, see L. C. R. Baker, 'The Open Secret of *Sartor Resartus*: Carlyle's Method of Converting his Reader', *Studies in Philology*, 83 (1986), 218–35: 222.

48 *Edinburgh Magazine*, 5 (Sept. 1838), 612.

When one considers how Carlyle could have instructed his readers by adopting a more straightforward method of presenting his ideas, one realizes that the editorial devices are important in their own right. The hypothetical existence and fabricated character of Teufelsdröckh, the history of his life, the exalted description of the scenes familiar to him, the elaborate critical discussions of the English Editor concerning the value of the philosopher's strange notions, and the chaotic contents of the 'six PAPER-BAGS' hardly help explain the philosophy of clothes.

To see the Editor's role as wholly supportive of Teufelsdröckh's clothes philosophy fails to account not only for the sheer expansiveness of the editorial comments that undermine the primacy of Teufelsdröckh's text, but also for the Editor's frequent distaste and frustration with both Heuschrecke and Teufelsdröckh. At one point the Editor, for example, becomes increasingly suspicious that Teufelsdröckh is perpetrating a hoax on both the Editor and Heuschrecke—'it ever remains doubtful whether he is laughing in his sleeve at these autobiographical times of ours, or writing from the abundance of his own fond ineptitude'—when he discovers a slip of paper on which Teufelsdröckh has written,

What are your historical Facts; still more your biographical? Wilt thou know a Man, above all, a Mankind, by stringing together beadrolls of what thou namest Facts? The Man is the spirit he worked in; not what he did, but what he became. (II. x. 203)

This series of questions is often quoted as Carlyle's challenge to unimaginative history, but in the context of the work they are fuel to the Editor's insecurities about his own reliability. Certainly his effort in reconstructing a biography from the 'six considerable PAPER-BAGS' is rendered absurd if those documents are themselves inauthentic. Not so much a statement of faith in imaginative history, the questions reflect the Editor's concern with the difficulty of authenticity. Throughout *Sartor Resartus*, biographical authority is portrayed as partial, limited, and subject to constant revision. As a narration in which the past is reconstructed from ambiguous evidence, the work foregrounds the biographical project as a problematic enterprise.

The Editor maintains a certain amount of scepticism about Teufelsdröckh to the end: 'Of Professor Teufelsdröckh it seems impossible to take leave without a mingled feeling of astonishment, gratitude, and disapproval' (III. xii. 292). Assuming that Teufelsdröckh is essentially a mouthpiece for Carlyle, critics see the Editor as a technique of self-defence that ultimately serves to reveal the author's self: a mask that helps lead us through the difficult material. As Vanden Bossche puts it, while Carlyle 'insists on the importance of being *realistic*, he practices an art that *fictionalizes*, revealing the biographical object through ironic negation rather than through positive representation'.⁴⁹ Some critics emphasize this tension between the Editor and Teufelsdröckh as

49 C. R. Vanden Bossche, 'Fictive Text and Transcendental Self: Carlyle's Art of Biography', *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, 10 (1987), 116–28: 116.

evidence of Carlyle's own divided consciousness. Gillian Beer, for example, asserts that 'Carlyle likes to have things several ways and for this purpose he projects multiple personae in his works'.⁵⁰ While each of these critical perspectives recognizes the tensions that result from the complex narrative framing, each tries to resolve those tensions. Readers of Croker's *Boswell* had similarly tried to make the various framing personae in the biography cohere. Carlyle, however, emphasizes their difference and gives them independent voices: the parallel between the tensions of Croker, Boswell, and Johnson and those of the personae of the English Editor, Hofrath Heuschrecke, and Teufelsdröckh represents Carlyle's exploration of the complicated relationship between veracity, authenticity, and imaginative fact in biographical writing.

To be sure, for all the interest of the Editor, it is the ideas attributed to Teufelsdröckh on 'Natural Supernaturalism', on the Dandaical body, and on the 'Philosophy of Clothes' that have always been the main interest of *Sartor Resartus*. These were, after all, the 'ideas' in *Sartor* that George Eliot said marked 'an epoch in the history of the minds' of her generation. But while Victorian readers read *Sartor* much as if it were *Die Kleider*, many modern readers have gone to the other extreme, with Teufelsdröckh and *Die Kleider* all but forgotten. Attention to the content of *Die Kleider* has been superseded by concerns with method and form—as in J. Hillis Miller's description of *Sartor* as 'a hieroglyphical work about hieroglyphs'.⁵¹ Such recent criticism emphasizes the work's self-reflexivity. Yet to focus on the form and structure of *Sartor Resartus* is certainly not new. As G. B. Tennyson's classic work on the 'Genesis, Structure, and Style' of Carlyle's first major work demonstrates, one of the central questions about *Sartor* has always been to understand the way in which Carlyle's complex style and structure affect the way in which we interpret the 'opinions' of Herr Teufelsdröckh. The problem has always been, to some extent, structural: how much weight should be given to the ideas of the clothes philosophy and how much to the questions raised by the editorial commentary?

Reading *Sartor* in the context of the periodical debate reveals new ways in which the work itself addresses the question of the relationship between the clothes philosophy and the editorial commentary. The complicated narrative machinery of *Sartor Resartus* is not only important as a heuristic device, but the way in which it parallels the contemporary discussion about Croker's *Life of Johnson* also shows how the editorial commentary engages many of the same questions of authenticity that are at the heart of the clothes philosophy. The clothes philosophy reveals itself as a metaphor for the book's elaborate form.

50 G. Beer, 'Carlylean Transports', in *Arguing with the Past: Essays in Narrative from Woolf to Sidney* (London, 1989), 80. Cf. R. W. Emerson, 'Thomas Carlyle', in *Natural History of Intellect and Other Papers* (Boston, 1904), 246; G. Levine, *The Boundaries of Fiction: Carlyle, Macaulay, Newman* (Princeton, 1968), 57.

51 J. H. Miller, "'Hieroglyphical Truth" in *Sartor Resartus: Carlyle and the Language of Parable*', in J. Clubbe and J. Meckier (edd.), *Victorian Perspectives* (Newark, 1989), 8.

The title, 'The Tailor Retailored', not only encapsulates this narrative of transformation, but reinforces the tripartite structure recreated in the personae of the Editor, Heuschrecke, and Teufelsdröckh: Teufelsdröckh and his clothes philosophy are the original material tailored first by Heuschrecke and then retailored by the English Editor. The fictional structure thus becomes representative of the book's ideas. Dramatizing the biographical project, the book depicts both the transformation of a self and the construction of a text of the self. Both the Editor and Teufelsdröckh are consciously involved in a constructive project of shaping: Teufelsdröckh's material is that of the chaos of 'things in general', out of which he tries to form a system; the editor's materials are the chaotic 'six PAPER-BAGS' and the mystifying *Die Kleider*. As Peter Allan Dale observes, 'we have here a book, *Sartor Resartus*, the express purpose of which is to re-form the confusion of another book, which is itself attempting to reform the confusion of reality'.⁵²

The competing voices in Croker's *Life of Johnson* and the debates that it inspired are source texts and intertexts for the tensions between the roles of editor, biographer, and biographical subject in *Sartor Resartus*. Yet the parallel between *Sartor* and Croker's *Life of Johnson*, has two—almost contradictory and decidedly uncomfortable—effects. On the one hand, it makes us more critical of taking on a role akin to that of editor and repeating both Croker's and the English Editor's well-intentioned but questionable search for an 'authentic' original. Instead of focusing on Teufelsdröckh (the stand-in for Johnson), we should take our cue from Carlyle's defence of Boswell as the real hero of the *Life of Johnson*, and also respect the Editor's demonstration of the inventive and creative aspect of biography. On the other hand, the contrast between *Sartor* and Croker's edition heightens our desire to re-enact the search for an original: while the three principals in Croker's edition interact as competing narrative voices in the work, they remain individual historical figures, whereas Carlyle's three principal figures are immediately recognizable as highly constructed characters. Like the English Editor, who is compelled to construct an 'authentic diary' out of the chaos of his materials, we seek a fourth and far more powerful presence in *Sartor*, the 'implicit author' who pulls the strings of the three principal characters. If the Editor's Heuschrecke's Teufelsdröckh is like Croker's Boswell's Johnson, where do we place Carlyle?

What Shoshana Felman says of the critical responses to James's *Turn of the Screw* is true of *Sartor Resartus* on two levels: 'The scene of the critical debate is thus a repetition of the scene dramatized in the text. The critical interpretation, in other words, not only elucidates the text but also reproduces it dramatically, unwittingly participates in it.'⁵³ *Sartor Resartus* spins out in narrative form the tension between Croker's self-involved defence of the

52 P. A. Dale, 'Sartor Resartus and the Inverse Sublime: The Art of Humorous Deconstruction', in M. W. Bloomfield (ed.), *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol* (Cambridge, 1981), 293–312.

53 S. Felman, 'Turning the Screw of Interpretation', in S. Felman (ed.), *Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise* (Baltimore, 1982), 101.

editor's role and his denial of the importance of the biographer's role. The work is itself a literary dramatization of the debate over Croker's edition of Boswell, while our standard readings of the work at times perpetuate the English Editor's quest for an 'authentic diary'. The final twist, or turn of the screw, then, is that when we focus exclusively on Teufelsdröckh and his 'Philosophy of Clothes', while dismissing the Editor as a mere mediator, we repeat the failings of Croker—failings that *Sartor's* English Editor has called our attention to by egregiously repeating them.

The parallel between Croker's *Life of Johnson* and *Sartor Resartus* does, however, suggest that Carlyle's major work is part of an ongoing debate over biography and that it is just as much a defence of the art of biography as his essays 'Biography' and 'Boswell's Life of Johnson'. By revealing the layers of construction involved in a biography, while also dramatizing the fiction of authority that accompanies each layer, Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* makes the claim that writing biography is an art.

Yale University