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THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY *HISTORY AS WHIG VIA MEDIA*

That the two most acclaimed historical artists of their era, Thomas Babington Macaulay and Thomas Carlyle, could be so emphatically different provides an important commentary on the Victorian frame of mind. If Thomas Carlyle was the prophet most opposed to his age, Thomas Macaulay was, in Leslie Stephen's words, the very Prince of Philistines.¹ If Carlyle epitomized the Victorians' yearning for a natural supernaturalism, Macaulay epitomized their pragmatism and dogmatic common sense. Where Carlyle illuminated the mystery of the past with romantic imagination, Macaulay flooded its shadows with enlightened rationality. While Carlyle enacted his age's painful transcendence of the Everlasting No, Macaulay sidestepped its most painful moral and intellectual dilemmas. No wonder Carlyle found Macaulay "unhappily without divine idea," and Macaulay considered him a "charlatan."² Yet Macaulay's tendency to yoke rather than to reconcile the dichotomies of his age makes him the more powerful a spokesman for the Victorian middle classes whose historical tastes he consciously shaped. His startling literary success argues that his vision of history satisfied powerful and widely felt needs even for those who fully acknowledged his limitations.

Macaulay no less than Arnold and Carlyle tried to reconcile the demands of reason and imagination in a form of history both scientifically sound and artistically compelling. He too sought in the past a

stable center for a diversifying society. But his version of the "Whig view of history" sought not so much to locate a source of moral value in history as to substitute a political order for that moral one. He institutionalized an interpretation and infused it with a patriotic self-satisfaction that cut across party lines. By showing how English institutions reconciled tradition and innovation, Macaulay provided a secularized source of meaning and stability. Shaped by a yearning for order no less powerful than Carlyle's, his view of history proved more useful because it co-opted rather than tried to subvert democracy. He used the past to endow Victorian success with ethical value and, in so doing, provided a focus for national pride and identity. His overwhelming popularity resulted as much from his reassuring view of progress and permanence as from the brilliant style that reinforced it, a style making as few demands on understanding as his explanation of history did on faith. The shallowness of his response to the intellectual crises of his time should not detract from his importance as a barometer of Victorian taste and thought. He reveals the trouble spots of nineteenth-century consciousness no less because he tried to sidestep where he could not transcend. The theoretical incongruities beneath the monotonous lucidity of his style yield important insights into the transitional state of Victorian historiography.

John Clive and others have helped clarify how Macaulay's early years contributed to the "making of the historian."³ He shook off much more easily than did Arnold and Carlyle the effects of his stern religious upbringing in the Clapham sect. His father's typically evangelical disapproval did little to decrease Macaulay's lifelong passion for novels and other imaginative literature. As early as his Cambridge days, his continuing respect for evangelical codes of conduct was no longer matched by a similar doctrinal orthodoxy. With orthodoxy he discarded any reliance on a moral truth transcending time and place—the kind of reliance that focused Carlyle's and Arnold's historical consciousness. His own focus was always more political than religious. His Whig view defined itself against the backdrop of the Napoleonic wars abroad and the continuing potential for revolution at home. As pressure for reform mounted in the twenties, he like Arnold became convinced of the inevitability of change and looked to history to justify the accommodations it required. The early essays and his fragmentary *History of France* articulated ideas that coalesced in his parliamentary speeches in support of the first Reform Bill.⁴ The extension of the franchise became part of a tradition of change

that preserved by progressing and ordered by expanding the privileges necessary to maintain balance. These views would become the pattern for all his further thought on history and the state.

The characteristic bent of his literary temperament formed early as well. Cambridge debating encouraged the versatility of imagination and rhetorical acuity that would become as crucial to the historian as to the M. P. His work on the Indian legal code further sharpened his facility for marshalling historical examples to support general principles. The *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842), whose publication Arnold encouraged, proved even more dramatically than the *Essays* Macaulay's skill in reconstructing the mind of the past. That same skill combined with his highly gratifying view of the English past to make the first two volumes of the *History* best sellers in 1849 and to secure the triumphant success of the third and fourth volumes in 1855. Although when he died in 1859 the *History* covered barely one fourth of his original prospectus, it was no less suitable a monument to his rhetorical genius and to his complacent vision of Victorian success.

Macaulay's use of history mediated specific conflicts in a mind marked by pronounced contrasts. At first glance his intense imaginative devotion to the past matches oddly with his bumptious enthusiasm for progress. His sternly empirical rationalism seems scarcely compatible with his romantic love of time-traveling, of imagining himself "in Greece, in Rome, in the midst of the French Revolution" or in conversation with famous historical figures.⁵ In fact, the peculiarly quantitative nature of his imaginative capacities allowed him to indulge his fancy while still satisfying the demands of reason. As he explained to his sister Margaret, it was his very love of "castle-building" that encouraged the accuracy with which he retained facts: "Precision in dates, the day or hour in which a man was born or died, becomes absolutely necessary. A slight fact, a sentence, a word, are of importance in my romance" (LM, 1:171). Although Macaulay valued the conscious fantasies of "romance" too much to be a mere rationalist, he used imaginative detail in a thoroughly practical and quantitative way to increase the reality of what he knew was only an illusion.

If anything, his particular exercise of imagination ended by more effectively divorcing fact from fantasy. As Margaret Macaulay pointed out, she and Tom were imaginative without being "romantic"; their reveries allowed them to escape into a fantasy world but "would never make us do a foolish thing, or indulge very extravagant expectations, in which we should not be borne out by what we see passing in the

world around us."⁶ History was in this respect a perfect outlet. It provided a fully-formed imaginative world while remaining true to the laws of experience; it indulged the fancy while remaining firmly rooted in fact. Macaulay's handling of the *Lays* reinforces this distinction. The mythic part of ancient history appealed to him because it possessed that "peculiar character, more easily understood than defined, which distinguishes the creations of the imagination from the realities of the world in which we live."⁷ The boundaries between the real and the unreal were so clearly marked that there was no chance of confusing them; one could escape completely into the latter without jeopardizing one's status in the former. Arnold, too, had expected the "poetic" quality of the myths to distinguish them from "real history," but for him the poetic also gave access to a spiritual insight closed to Macaulay.

Macaulay's distance from Carlyle is even greater. Carlyle valued facts over fiction because facts were a means of transcending the limits of mortal experience and gaining access to a higher truth; Macaulay valued facts because they more clearly defined those limits. Where both felt *a priori* deduction to be an inadequate means of accounting for reality, Carlyle opposed "formulas" because they intervened between man and divine reality, while Macaulay in effect replaced faith in any such reality with faith in facts alone.⁸ Where Carlyle attempted to interpret events by seizing on the revelatory details and illuminating their spiritual significance, Macaulay argued by piling up examples of similar circumstances and generalizing from them. Jane Millgate calls his process of reasoning "illustrative and analogical rather than analytic."⁹ It determined truth not through a cognitive leap to a higher reality but by the sheer weight of similar cases.

Even had Macaulay's characteristic intellectual biases not drawn him to history, his more complex emotional needs would have, as George Levine and others have shown.¹⁰ He took up the *History* after his return from India and the loss of his two favorite sisters, Hannah to marriage, Margaret to death. He was frustrated by the opposition his legal reforms had aroused and disenchanted with public office. The "desertion" of the sisters upon whom he had concentrated his strong affections intensified his desire to retreat from active life. In a telling letter to Margaret, he confessed that his disappointment over Hannah's engagement had intensified his "passion for holding converse with the greatest minds of all ages and nations, my power of forgetting what surrounds me, and of living with the past, the future,

the distant, and the unreal."¹¹ The writing of history became far more than an avocation: it became a way of establishing an ideal world that guaranteed him protection from the emotional risks and losses of real life: a controlled world of reason and experience, a source of emotional sustenance and intellectual stability more dependable than anything his own life afforded. In this sense Macaulay represents another variation on that Victorian pattern of outer confidence and inner doubt. His reiterated conviction that the present was superior to the past did not prevent history from offering a static retreat from the disequilibrium that change and progress necessarily caused.

His desire to balance the claims of reason and imagination and of change and permanence shapes his theorizing. Although he did not possess a coherent philosophy of history, certain ideas first articulated in the 1828 essays "History" and "Hallam's Constitutional History" provide a working definition: history should combine reason and imagination, it should use particular examples to identify general principles of human conduct, and it should document not just public events, but the "silent revolutions" in thought and taste of which those events were only the outward signs. "History, at least in its state of ideal perfection, is a compound of poetry and philosophy," wrote Macaulay in the Hallam essay: "It impresses general truths on the mind by a vivid representation of particular characters and incidents" (W, 5:162). Unfortunately, in his own day poetry and philosophy were treated as "hostile elements": historical fiction invested the past with flesh and blood, but the historical essayist had "to extract the philosophy of history, . . . to trace the connexion of causes and effects, and to draw from the occurrences of former times general lessons of moral and political wisdom" (W, 5:162). Macaulay's ideal historian would combine the sculptor's eye for external reality possessed by Sir Walter Scott with the anatomist's eye for structure and causality possessed by Hallam; ideal history would join the coloring of a "painted landscape" with the "exact information as to the bearings of the various points" supplied by a map (W, 5:163). Only thus could history provide instruction "of a vivid and practical character" that would be not merely "traced" on the mind, but "branded into it" (W, 5:160). Macaulay's ideal history was to perform a task that in "Milton" (1825) he had considered impossible in a modern age: to unite "the incompatible advantages of reality and deception, the clear discernment of truth and the exquisite enjoyment of fiction" (W, 5:7).

In other words it was to accomplish what Macaulay himself did in his highly factual fantasy world.

Macaulay's insistence on the mutual exclusivity of reason and imagination proceeded as much from his belief that "as civilisation advances, poetry almost necessarily declines" (W, 5:4) as from his attempt to be imaginative without being "romantic." The very factors that made history more "scientific" decreased its imaginative vigor. For Macaulay as for Arnold, history became "philosophical" insofar as it identified those principles of conduct that comprised "the science of government." Like other "experimental sciences" that arrived at generalizations through induction, historical interpretation was generally in a "state of progression" (W, 5:145). Because the modern historian had a wider inventory of experience on which to base his reasoning, he surpassed the ancient in the ability to distinguish "what is local from what is universal; what is transitory from what is eternal; to discriminate between exceptions and rules; to trace the operation of disturbing causes; to separate those general principles which are always true and everywhere applicable from the accidental circumstances with which . . . they are blended" (W, 5:151). However, this march of mind robbed history of its "picturesque" qualities; the generalizations necessary to advance knowledge blunted the particularity necessary to "brand" them into the imagination. Macaulay wished to restore this imaginative vividness to history while remaining faithful to its "scientific" purposes. As Levine has argued, he sought in history what many Victorian writers sought in realistic fiction: "a genre which allowed critical intelligence and a greater fidelity to the possibilities of real experience to combine with what remained of modern man's enfeebled imaginative powers."¹²

To achieve this reconciliation, Macaulay, like Carlyle, reversed the relationship of creativity in fiction and history, although with significantly different effect. He did not share the realist novelist's belief that fiction could—and should—test and explore reality. He considered fiction "essentially imitative. Its merit consists in its resemblance to a model with which we are already familiar." Fiction was in effect deductive, history inductive: "In fiction, the principles are given, to find the facts; in history, the facts are given, to find the principles." As a result behavior that ran contrary to expectations was "shocking and incongruous" in novels, but "delightful as history, because it contradicts our previous notion of human nature, and of

the connections of causes and effects." "What is called the romantic part of history is in fact the least romantic" (W, 5:131), for it could serve to enlarge and correct one's expectations about human nature. History could thus satisfy the demands of both the imagination and the reason: it allowed one to indulge one's propensity for the exotic, the improbable, the fantastic, while retaining its didactic function.

In actual practice Macaulay succeeded in reconciling imagination and reason in history only by severely limiting both. For him the transforming creativity of the romantic artist was not just unnecessary to the historian, but positively inappropriate. It was rather a "lower kind of imagination" that the historian required: "The object of [his] imitation is not within him; it is furnished from without. It is not a vision of beauty and grandeur discernible only by the eye of his own mind, but a real model which he did not make, and which he cannot alter" (W, 6:83). Since Macaulay's reality did not possess the spiritual dimensions of Arnold's and Carlyle's, reconstructing it was a matter of imitating the seen, not intuiting the unseen. Carlyle would of course have dismissed the results of Macaulay's historical inductions as lying "formulas." For him and for Arnold, the aim of shaping detail into narrative was to break the tyranny of appearances. They relied on the eye of the spirit to illuminate the pattern beyond the facts. For Macaulay narration created an accurate illusion of an unquestioned reality. It selected and arranged such parts of the truth as most nearly "produce the effect of the whole" (W, 6:83). This process depended wholly upon the eye of the senses; Macaulay's conception of the true gave him no cause to seek further testimony.

Macaulay's conception of science was as mechanical as his conception of imagination, and it depreciated fact in a way equally contrary to the romantic temperament. At first glance his hostility to deductive reasoning and his enthusiasm for concrete detail might seem to undermine the character types and behavioral "laws" that obstructed a historicist appreciation of individuality. In practice treating historical facts as merely the "materials for the construction of a science" (W, 6:259) prevented Macaulay from valuing or completely comprehending any fact or event for its own sake. Despite his keen eye for telling detail, he still believed that "facts are the mere dross of history. It is from the abstract truth which interpenetrates them . . . that the mass derives its whole value" (W, 5:131). To him no past event was intrinsically significant; it was valuable "only as it leads us to form just calculations with respect to the future" (W, 5:155) or reveals "a

general truth" about human nature (W, 6:260). This of course is significantly different from Ranke's belief that all ages were immediate to God, or even Carlyle's dedication to ideas that still bore spiritual fruit in the present. For Macaulay, the legacy of history was a set of generalizations by which likely outcomes could be calculated; for Carlyle, a set of spiritual absolutes that no man or nation could transgress with impunity.

Macaulay's reductively pragmatic approach to historical laws effectively ruled out any absolute, political or moral. Notwithstanding his early attacks on the Utilitarians for their dependence on "abstract" theory, he shared their goals—to provide the greatest good for the greatest number—and he favored whatever political strategies would bring this about. He might use scientific analogies to describe the "laws" of political science or talk about the "philosophy of history" (W, 5:543),¹³ but his own laws designated neither universal relationships nor a philosophical basis for government. They were, at most, thoroughly pragmatic rules of thumb. The declaration that "a good government, like a good coat, is that which fits the body for which it is designed" (W, 7:687) summed up the extent of Macaulay's "philosophy." All other values yielded to utility. Constitutions were evaluated not by ideals served or traditions preserved, but by how well they suited the needs and interests—and thus increased the happiness—of those subject to them. A "wise man" valued liberty itself not as something "eternally and intrinsically good" but rather for the "blessings" of political stability and progress that resulted from it (W, 7:686). Even party allegiances paled before such worldly wisdom. Joseph Hamburger demonstrates that as both politician and historian Macaulay was less a Whig than a trimmer.¹⁴ He favored not a consistent party line, but rather those forces that stabilized opposing political interests in order to achieve the balance necessary for prosperity and progress. The illogic of political positions was irrelevant so long as they achieved their ends (see, e.g., W, 2:367). Macaulay was in a sense more ruthlessly utilitarian than the Utilitarians themselves.

The gap between Macaulay's conception of the "laws of political science" and Arnold's was of course even more profound. Arnold assumed that the political order mirrored the ethical order and that its laws confirmed the "undoubted truths" of morality. For Macaulay, "all questions in morals and politics are questions of comparison and degree" (W, 5:152). The landscape of political action was not a path marked by absolutes, but rather a shadowy "frontier where virtue and

vice fade into each other" (W, 2:189). In this territory the exigencies of political expedience shaped "laws," not timeless standards of right and wrong. His belief that "no man ought to be severely censured for not being beyond his age in virtue" (W, 6:18) might point toward a relativism not characteristically Victorian, but it also revealed a profound disillusionment with the possibility that any permanent ideals transcended ordinary experience the way Arnold's Christianity or Carlyle's Natural Supernaturalism did. Macaulay was largely spared from imposing alien standards of conduct on other ages because he acknowledged the value of no ideal standard.

Although in their dominant sense, "laws" merely described logical expectations about behavior, there was one law that possessed a prescriptive authority amounting to divine decree: the overall progress of human civilization. Macaulay in places treated society's advance as simply the logical outcome of the development of experimental science and of the individual's drive to better his position. But elsewhere he added the sanction of God and Nature as well. He took the "natural tendency of the human intellect to truth" and of "society to improvement" as evidence of those "general laws which it has pleased [God] to establish in the physical and in the moral world" (W, 5:365). It was no more logical to expect to stem progress than to "change the courses of the seasons and of the tides" (W, 8:73). The necessary and predictable advance of civilization in this sense attained a status Macaulay accorded to no other phenomenon in his world of transient values. And, John Clive points out, Macaulay had sound reasons for these conclusions. Looking around him he saw a world that *was* demonstrably better—in morals, in social consciousness, in religious zeal—than the age that preceded it, largely as a result of reforming impulses like those that inspired the Clapham sect. Evidence of material progress would thus merely have "reinforced the lesson taught by the confident Evangelicalism of Macaulay's youth" and gained for itself a quasi-religious authority. The man who found the Crystal Palace a sight "beyond the dreams of the Arabian romances" (LM, 2:226) did not merely welcome the material advances of the industrial revolution, but found in them "the source of something akin to what the Romantic poets were finding in nature."¹⁵ This significantly shifted the emotional fulcrum for Macaulay's assessment of history. For Carlyle the persistence of tradition sanctified the present. Macaulay, on the other hand, revered tradition because of the present successes it had made possible.

The full implications of this reorientation were to an extent masked by Macaulay's rhetoric. His argument for progress gained strength from organic analogies similar to Arnold's and Carlyle's. Comparing the development of nations to that of individuals in "Milton" allowed him to argue for a cultural as well as an individual maturation toward logic and abstract reasoning. In the *History* this analogy insured continuity in national identity: "the groundwork of [national] character" had remained "the same through many generations, in the sense in which the groundwork of the character of an individual may be said to be the same when he is a rude and thoughtless schoolboy and when he is a refined and accomplished man" (W, 1:330-31). More importantly, this developmental model allowed Macaulay to argue that nations, like individuals, needed forms of government adapted to their relative stage of maturity: "The very means by which the human mind is, in one stage of its progress, supported and propelled, may, in another stage, be mere hindrances" (W, 1:37). Like Arnold he supported reform because the "law of growth" governing societies decreed that as the people's strength and experience increased, government could "no longer confine them within the swaddling bands . . . of their infancy" (W, 8:75). They must be accorded political power commensurate with their increased intellectual and economic strength in order to bring "the legal order of society into something like harmony with the natural order" (W, 8:84).

Like the natural order, the pattern of history was also governed by cycles. For Macaulay this meant that societies advanced through a series of actions and reactions in politics and public opinion. It also meant that for no nation was development without limit. The fact of decay gave cause for optimism, because the death of social organisms contributed to new birth. Here the metaphors are distinctly Carlylean: "The corruption of death" after Charlemagne's fall ultimately "ferment[ed] into new forms of life" (W, 6:389); the Reformation and French Revolution had acted like volcanoes whose fiery deluges ended by fertilizing the soil they devastated (W, 5:595). But there was cause for melancholy as well. For all his commitment to the march of mind, Macaulay did not see England forever in its vanguard. Arnold looked in vain for new races to carry on the next stage of development; Macaulay could envision a time "when some traveler from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's" (W, 6:455). More often, however, he took the shorter view, assuring his audience

that despite the "recoil which regularly follows every advance," the great tide of progress was steadily coming in on English shores (W, 6:97).

The rhetoric of organic change is deceptive, for beneath it lay assumptions that significantly distanced Macaulay's position from Arnold's and Carlyle's. His enthusiasm for the present was only one distinguishing factor. His model of progress was actually closer to that of the Utilitarians and the Scottish conjectural historians. The notion of developmental stages he derived from the latter allowed him to dismiss as primitive whatever challenged his norm for civilization.¹⁶ By measuring all societies on one and the same scale he ruled out Arnold's appreciation of how different nations could translate a common pattern of development into terms appropriate to themselves. Praising the ancients at the moderns' expense irritated him because by virtue of their very modernity his contemporaries occupied a higher rung on the ladder of progress. There was, after all, no "well authenticated instance of a people which has decidedly retrograded in civilisation and prosperity" without the agency of external calamity (W, 5:366). More importantly, his measure of "civilization" ruled out the moral growth that Carlyle and Arnold considered essential to the social organism. Improvement in the physical realm meant the increase of material prosperity and population; in the intellectual realm, it meant the dispersion of superstition and the march of mind toward scientific rationalism. By moral improvement Macaulay meant little more than the change in manners from rude to refined, barbarous to humane. Once he contrasts the modern gentry's polish and accomplishments with the "unrefined sensuality" of their swilling, swearing counterparts in 1685, it does not occur to him to look for further proof of moral advance (W, 1:250). Not only did he ignore spiritual progress in the sense Arnold intended—he saw it as impossible: "A Christian of the fifth century with a Bible is neither better nor worse situated than a Christian in the nineteenth century with a Bible" (W, 6:457-58).

Macaulay epitomized that "faith in machinery" that Matthew Arnold would later single out as the "besetting danger" of Victorian society. His concept of cycles reinforced not the organic integrity of all social organisms but a mechanical cause and effect. Situations are not so much evolved as provoked by opposite extremes. The license of the Restoration was caused by the prudery of Puritanism, the violence of revolutions corresponded to the degree of misgovernment that

brought them about. That is why the balancing hand of the trimmer was so necessary. The whole logic of trimming was averse to the kinds of catastrophic destruction of the old that Carlyle deemed necessary to purify society. For Macaulay the goal was to effect change through a series of accommodations between old and new, action and reaction. For the sake of social stability he was quite willing to tolerate much of the corruption that Carlyle was eager to purge. Compromise, not conversion, was always his desideratum.

Macaulay's attitude toward the individual distanced him farthest from Arnold and Carlyle. To the "cool and philosophical" observer like Macaulay, the human nature that drove all men amounted to little more than enlightened self-interest responding quite predictably to pain and pleasure. Believing that "man . . . is always the same," he also assumed that marked differences between two generations could be explained solely by the differences in "their respective circumstances" (W, 5:217). The mainspring of historical change was for him neither ideals nor heroes, but an externalized "spirit of the age." Macaulay declared unequivocally that the age formed the man, not the man the age. Just as no man should be expected to rise above the morality of his time, neither could he escape its prevailing mental climate. The progress of society in all its forms—political, economic, cultural, and intellectual—operated with a momentum and an inevitability of its own. Changes destined to occur would do so independently of specific men, great or small. He declared that

without Copernicus we should have been Copernicans,—that without Columbus America would have been discovered,—that without Locke we should have possessed a just theory of the origin of human ideas. Society indeed has its great men and its little men, as the earth has its mountains and its valleys. But the inequalities of intellect, like the inequalities of the surface of our globe, bear so small a proportion to the mass, that, in calculating its great revolutions, they may safely be neglected. (W, 5:85)

There was little room for Carlylean hero-worship in such a fundamentally deterministic view of change, or even for the recognition of original genius. Even in the arts the laws of progress "operate with little less certainty than those which regulate the periodical returns of heat and cold, of fertility and barrenness." The "electric impulse of change" reduced Shakespeare to a shock wave of the Reformation, Wordsworth to a spark of the French Revolution. There was no Carlylean transmutation in this galvanic current, no reciprocity in the

social organism. No man could resist "the influence which the vast mass, in which he is but an atom, must exercise on him" (W, 6:353). Those who appeared to lead society "are, in fact, only whirled along before it; those who attempt to resist it, are beaten down and crushed beneath it" (W, 8:73).

Macaulay's complacency with the modern, his celebration of both progress and continuity, and his faith in the "laws" of history all come together in the "Whig view of history" he epitomized. As Herbert Butterfield demonstrated,¹⁷ the Whig view denotes an attitude toward the past as much as a particular political affiliation: the tendency to judge events by the degree to which they led toward the condition of the present. The major drawbacks to this view lay in its tendency to fashion precedents where there were only superficial resemblances and to attribute causality where only sequence existed. Macaulay was aware of how this bias could operate, particularly in England where the appeal to precedent had always played so large a role in political debate. And yet so clear to him were questions of correct and incorrect political action, of improvement and regression, that he could not see when he was himself guilty of judging the past by the present. Like Arnold he did not think that making allowance for the past state of political science and morality precluded "looking at ancient transactions by the light of modern knowledge." It was in fact "among the first duties of a historian to point out the faults of the eminent men of former generations" (W, 6:94). His comments on Halifax in the *History* make clear his most significant criterion for judgment. What distinguished Halifax from other contemporary statesmen was that "through a long public life, and through frequent and violent revolutions of public feeling, he almost invariably took that view of the great questions of his time which history has finally adopted" (W, 4:127). Macaulay might try to re-create in loving detail the circumstances that produced the thoughts and feelings of his ancestors, but finally only those men whose judgments were vindicated by later developments earned the historian's full esteem and sympathy. His praise for James Mill's histories reveals the goals of his own as well:

We know of no writer who takes so much pleasure in the truly useful, noble, and philosophical employment of tracing the progress of sound opinions from their embryo state to their full maturity. He eagerly culls from old despatches and minutes every expression in which he can dis-

cern the imperfect germ of any truth which has since been fully developed. He never fails to bestow praise on those who, though far from coming up to his standard of perfection, yet rose in a small degree above the common level of their contemporaries. It is thus that the annals of past times ought to be written. It is thus, especially, that the annals of our own country ought to be written. (W, 6:95)

J. W. Burrow illuminates the tensions in traditional Whiggism that Macaulay tried to reconcile.¹⁸ Nineteenth-century Whigs needed to steer between the conservative's "antiquarian" insistence on precedent and the radical's repudiation of it, to balance a reverence for tradition against the practical need to adapt political institutions to changing social and economic reality. Macaulay largely adopted the "Whig compromise," which looked for precedent not in an "ancient constitution" but in the thirteenth-century parliament and which held that the Glorious Revolution reaffirmed norms more ancient than the aberrant Stuart despotism. Lest Tories block further change by viewing 1688 as a new and final precedent, it was also important to make further progress traditional as well. "In the very act of innovating," England had "constantly appealed to ancient prescription," Macaulay argued (W, 5:634); this helped make her revolutions defensive, her reforms preservative. The argument for continuity was still crucial, but this continuity demanded accommodation to social and economic progress as the polity matured. By claiming that "the present constitution of our country is, to the constitution under which she flourished five hundred years ago, what the tree is to the sapling, what the man is to the boy" (W, 1:20), Macaulay could make the trimming and compromise he advocated essential to the "natural" development of the political organism.

Macaulay's interpretation had a peculiar appeal in the early years of the century, marked by the agitation for reform and the fear of revolution. John Clive points out that in the years preceding the first Reform Bill, political positions were often so overlapping and amorphous that history became "an enkindling agent, supplying touchstones and confrontations lacking in the contemporary situation."¹⁹ For Macaulay England's seventeenth-century vindication of both popular representation and ancient tradition provided a paradigm for the change he wished to see in the present. By lifting the civil wars to the level of a "great conflict between . . . liberty and despotism, reason and prejudice," in which "the destinies of the human race

were staked on the same cast with the freedom of the English people" (W, 5:23), Macaulay gained additional rhetorical leverage on his audience. He could then capitalize on patriotic pride by stressing the parallels between the nineteenth and the seventeenth centuries:

It will soon again be necessary to reform that we may preserve, to save the fundamental principles of the Constitution by alterations in the subordinate parts. It will then be possible, as it was possible two hundred years ago, to protect vested rights, to secure every useful institution, every institution endeared by antiquity and noble associations, and, at the same time, to introduce into the system improvements harmonizing with the original plan. It remains to be seen whether two hundred years have made us wiser. (W, 5:237)

In this way what might have been a subversion of ancient authority was transformed into the fulfillment of a noble tradition. What might have represented a threat to stability and prosperity manifested the type of political behavior that, by insuring domestic stability, had been responsible for the march of mind and material progress in the last two hundred years. Macaulay brought the argument full circle after 1832 by claiming that the English had been able to effect a reform amounting to a revolution "by the force of reason, and under the forms of law" because their "moderation and humanity" were themselves "the fruits of a hundred and fifty years of liberty" (W, 5:624-25).

Macaulay's version of the Whig view also allayed fears that England might be pulled into the tides of revolution sweeping the continent in the first half of the century. The threat of revolution, should accommodation through reform fail, was an important argument for change. Macaulay held up the organic continuity of English institutions as proof that England would not go the way of France. This continuity made England quite different "from those polities which have, during the last eighty years, been methodically constructed, digested into articles, and ratified by constituent assemblies" (W, 3:465)—and which, he need not have added, endured bloody revolutions to put those constitutions into force. The strength of the English lay in the fact that they "have seldom looked abroad for models; they have seldom troubled themselves with Utopian theories; they have not been anxious to prove that liberty is the natural right of men; they have been content to regard it as the lawful birthright of Englishmen" (W, 5:634). In short they had been able to depend on history rather than abstract theory to sanction government, and had been

able to accommodate change without completely breaking with the past. Completing chapter 10 of the *History* in November 1848, when "all around us the world is convulsed by the agonies of great nations," Macaulay drove his point home: "Now, if ever," he wrote, "we ought to be able to appreciate the whole importance of the stand which was made by our forefathers against the House of Stuart." England remained a center of calm because the English had "never lost what others are wildly and blindly seeking to regain. It is because we had a preserving revolution in the seventeenth century that we have not had a destroying revolution in the nineteenth" (W, 2:397-98).

The Whig tradition, Burrow notes, allowed the English "to cherish the past while denying it binding force."²⁰ In Macaulay's hands this tradition became a powerful device for mediating between the need for permanence and the inevitability of change in the Victorian period. Macaulay took major credit not only for popularizing this view of government, but for endowing it with a quasi-religious intensity all Englishmen could share. What he could not find in human relationships or public life—a source of permanent value that could still accommodate change—he found in his interpretation of history.

II

If Macaulay bore the impress of Enlightenment thought far more deeply than did Arnold or Carlyle, the ways he redefined the scope and nature of historical writing showed that romantic influences also marked his work. He wanted the historian to reclaim those details appropriated by the novelist in order to illustrate the history of the people as well as the history of government: "to call up our ancestors before us with all their peculiarities of language, manners, and garb, to show us over their houses, to seat us at their tables, to rummage their old fashioned wardrobes, to explain the uses of their ponderous furniture" (W, 5:162). He expressed the same interest in sociological detail that animated Carlyle and the same contempt for the "dignity of history" because it had led earlier historians, "for fear of alluding to the vulgar concerns of private life . . . [to] take no notice of the circumstances which deeply affect the happiness of nations" (L, 2:56). The circumstances that most influenced this happiness, "the changes of manners and morals, the transitions of communities from poverty to wealth, from knowledge to ignorance, from ferocity to humanity," Macaulay defined as "noiseless revolutions" whose "progress is

rarely indicated by what historians are pleased to call important events" (W, 5:156). That he intended to rectify such errors in his own *History* he makes clear in its opening pages:

It will be my endeavour to relate the history of the people as well as the history of the government, to trace the progress of useful and ornamental arts, to describe the rise of religious sects and the changes of literary taste, to portray the manners of successive generations, and not to pass by with neglect even the revolutions which have taken place in dress, furniture, repasts, and public amusements. I shall cheerfully bear the reproach of having descended below the dignity of history, if I can succeed in placing before the English of the nineteenth century a true picture of the life of their ancestors. (W, 1:2-3)

The famous third chapter of the *History* offers the clearest example of how he achieved this end. The survey of everything from agriculture to urban growth, literature to economics, entertains readers with curious detail but also resuscitates for them an otherwise alien past. Interwoven throughout the rest of the work one also finds commentary on everything from the rise of newspaper printing to the ingenious stockjobbing swindles induced by the glut of middle-class wealth (W, 3:612-13; 4:171). Most often his source was the literature—popular more so than belletristic—of the period. In the discussion of stockjobbing, Macaulay refers to the parodies of such swindlers in Shadwell's plays; in another instance, Tom Brown's *Descriptions of a Country Life* (1692), he documents the hardship of the middle classes by noting that "in this year, wine ceased to be put on many hospitable tables where [Brown] had been accustomed to see it, and that its place was supplied by punch" (W, 3:592). Macaulay was scarcely exaggerating when he replied to critics that only someone who had also "soaked his mind with the transitory literature of the day" was capable of judging the accuracy of his portrayals in chapter 3 (LM, 2:162n.).

In addition to supplying and corroborating specific details, literary sources were used by Macaulay as they were by Carlyle and Arnold, to document the values and beliefs of an age or nation. He defended even the most licentious Restoration comedy for "the light it throws on the history, polity, and manners of nations" (W, 6:491). In the spirit of Carlyle's celebration of Boswell, Macaulay pronounced a set of love letters to be worth their weight in state papers for illustrating the mind of the time (W, 6:261). He too advocated a process of "reading oneself into" a period and often spent hours in the British Museum,

turning over seventeenth-century pamphlets, tracts, and newspapers; in doing so, he wrote, "The mind is transported back a century and a half, and gets familiar with the ways of thinking, and with the habits, of a past generation" (LM, 2:196).

A random scan of his footnotes suggests further the breadth and diversity of his research: architectural and geographical detail, notes of visits to historical locations, lists of sources collated into one account, extrapolations from population and industrial statistics, notes from foreign sources, ballads, old maps, manuscripts recently published by antiquarian societies, all can be found there and in the text itself. He also pored over manuscripts in the Archives of the House of Lords with a zest only a fellow parliamentarian could share, and underlined their authenticity with references to parchments "embrowned with the dust of a hundred and sixty years" and cancellations and emendations on the original (W, 2:468; 3:626). This journal entry made shortly after the publication of volumes 1 and 2 suggests the amount of research he considered necessary before sitting down to write:

I have now made up my mind to change my plan about my History. I will first set myself to know the whole subject:—to get, by reading and travelling, a full acquaintance with William's reign. I reckon that it will take me eighteen months to do this. I must visit Holland, Belgium, Scotland, Ireland, France. The Dutch archives and French archives must be ransacked. I will see whether anything is to be got from other diplomatic collections. I must see Londonderry, the Boyne, Aghrim, Limerick, Kinsale, Namur again, Landen, Steinkirk. I must turn over hundreds, thousands, of pamphlets. Lambeth, the Bodleian and the other Oxford Libraries, the Devonshire Papers, the British Museum, must be explored, and notes made: and then I shall go to work. (LM, 2:157-58)

As did Carlyle he considered field research essential to take in the atmosphere of historical places like Turnham Green (site of the assassination attempt in Chapter 21) and to collect concrete detail that could be found nowhere else (LM, 2:234-35). Trevelyan claimed that "the notes made during his fortnight's tour through the scenes of the Irish war are equal in bulk to a first-class article in the *Edinburgh or Quarterly Reviews*" (LM, 2:159). On-the-spot research also provided an opportunity to investigate fortifications, to sketch ground plans of city streets, and to interview any "inhabitant who was acquainted with any tradition worth the hearing" (LM, 2:159).

Macaulay's shrewd and sceptical temperament proved a keen weapon in determining the credibility of his sources, although that shrewdness also proved susceptible to partisan misuse. He was adept at singling out the reliable parts of a given account—St. Germain's *Life of James the Second*, for instance—by distinguishing between sections based on personal memoir and the self-interested revisions of James's son or the later work of an "ignorant compiler" (W, 2:313n.). In other cases he uses discrepancies in the different accounts of an incident to argue against the credibility of certain sources (e.g., W, 2:413n.). Although most contemporary critics acknowledged his vast learning, some challenged him on specific points. James Spedding charged with some accuracy that Macaulay willfully ignored published refutations and corrections of his *History*, or at best corrected only errors of detail while leaving substantially inaccurate interpretations standing.²¹ More damaging charges were made by John Paget, who showed that Macaulay often overgeneralized from literary sources, applying casual or obviously biased comments to an entire country or group and selectively ignoring contradictory evidence, even in the same source. Paget was the chief defender of Marlborough, one of Macaulay's blackest villains, and he refuted Macaulay's defamation with copious evidence. He also made clear how Macaulay's biases make the same faults—conjugal infidelity, for instance—venial in the good William, detestable in the evil James. Identical virtues were respected in one and condemned in the other, and sources discarded as unreliable when they refuted Macaulay's prejudices were willingly appropriated when they concurred.²²

In the hands of his most thorough critic, Sir Charles Firth, Macaulay came off reasonably well in accuracy and breadth of documentation, especially considering the limitations of the data available in his time. In his *Commentary on Macaulay's History of England* (1938), Firth gave Macaulay credit for having rested his narrative on a greater mass of evidence than could be claimed by any of his predecessors. He admitted, however, that compared with Ranke's, Macaulay's treatment of his sources was relatively superficial: Macaulay stood completely outside "one of the great achievements of the nineteenth century," the "development of a more scientific method of treating historical evidence." Firth echoed Paget's criticism that Macaulay was less critical with those sources that corroborated him than with those who questioned his interpretations.²³ Macaulay was always too much the rhetorician to be a sober judge. His analysis of data, while

possessing the outward trappings of thoroughness, left his fundamental prejudices untouched.

Although it was most often the brilliance of the rhetorician and not the insight of the poet that Macaulay brought to the creative part of the historian's task, he approached his artistic responsibilities with quite as much gravity as Carlyle. He repeatedly stressed the ephemerality of his review essays as works of art, but he sat down to write the *History* with "the year 2,000, even the year 3,000, often in [his] mind" and believed he "sacrificed nothing to temporary fashions of thought and style."²⁴ At the same time, he frankly sought wide popular success, as his famous claim indicates: "I shall not be satisfied unless I produce something which shall for a few days supersede the last fashionable novel on the tables of young ladies" (LM, 2:52). His desire to reach a wide audience was grounded in intentions no less serious than those of Arnold and Carlyle. Macaulay considered novelistic techniques, in particular the illustration of general conditions with "appropriate images," essential to "branding" practical instruction on the mind. He desired popular success not as an end in itself, but as the sign that he had reached a significant portion of the new and rapidly growing reading public of the mid-nineteenth century. Too few of those "who read for amusement" could be attracted by the gravity of a Mill or the obscurity of a Niebuhr.²⁵ Macaulay intended to interest and to please those readers "whom ordinary histories repel" (LM, 2:210).

His purposes in gaining the ear of this public were manifold. Macaulay chose his subjects with the express purpose of filling in gaps in his countrymen's knowledge of the success story of their own empire. He likewise hoped the *History* would illuminate a portion of their past that was "even to educated people almost a terra incognita" in the 1840s (LM, 2:52). Apart from the better understanding of human nature or specific arguments for political precedent to be gained from the *History*, Macaulay felt that England deserved an account of her heritage consistent with her modern stature. As we have seen, for him the imaginative value of the past gained force from the imaginative power of the present. Who else could have gone to the Great Exhibition and "felt a glow of eloquence, or something like it" that inspired "some touches which will greatly improve my [account of] Steinkirk" in the *History* (LM, 2:166)? Believing, as did Arnold and Carlyle, that "a people which takes no pride in the noble achievements of remote ancestors will never achieve anything worthy to be remembered with

pride by remote descendants" (W, 2:585), Macaulay set out to justify that pride in a way all his contemporaries could appreciate.

His unique style owes much to this concern to make his writing widely accessible. Trevelyan attributed its great clarity to "an honest wish to increase the enjoyment, and smooth the difficulties, of those who did him the honour to buy his books" (LM, 2:169). Indeed, the biography is filled with references to making transitions without distracting the reader, to arranging ideas so as most effectively to illuminate complex relationships, to fashioning passages that "read as if they had been spoken off, and may seem to flow as easily as table talk" (LM, 2:182, 211, 213). According to his nephew, "He thought little of recasting a chapter in order to obtain a more lucid arrangement, and nothing whatever of reconstructing a paragraph for the sake of one happy stroke or apt illustration" (LM, 2:165). However, this preoccupation with ease and effect had its drawbacks: too often ideas were tailored to fit the demands of style, rather than vice versa. His was a prose that asserted rather than persuaded, that tried to convince with the sheer weight of accumulated effects—highly patterned word pairs and repetitions, periodic phrasing, biblical and poetic cadences, assonance, alliteration—rather than the careful working out of a complex argument.²⁶ His recurrent patterns of allusion, point, and antithesis provided an influential model for "high popularisation" later in the century, but its very adaptability to the prose of "opinion, information" and "political persuasion" blunted his style's effectiveness in dealing with any subject requiring subtler and more even-handed consideration.²⁷ Macaulay's stylistic trademark, the balanced antithesis ("It is because we had freedom in the midst of servitude that we have order in the midst of anarchy" W, 2:398), inevitably encouraged pat formulas rather than fine distinctions. His much vaunted clarity was the appropriate counterpart of his "unquestioned faith in the obviousness of truth" and of his impatience with all that was not accessible to reason, logic, and common sense.²⁸

The larger narrative structure of his major work is shaped by a similar concern for entertaining and instructing and by similar limitations in perspective and insight. For all its "propulsive" drive forward, there is a peculiarly static quality to the *History*.²⁹ Macaulay effectively renounces the tension of suspense in the majestic opening paragraphs: we read on, safe in the knowledge that this historical romance will have the archetypal happy ending. Once he has established the essential pattern of obstacles overcome, contraries recon-

ciled, crimes punished and virtues rewarded, it remains for us simply to sit back and enjoy the way he can dramatize and particularize the story. Macaulay clearly wanted to control this narrative as completely as he did his private historical "romances," and he knew that for all its excesses, melodrama had safer limits than genuine drama. Suggesting alternative outcomes to specific events as he periodically does only heightens "the reader's sense of the fatality of events which have actually occurred," in William Madden's words; we have the sense of watching characters "enact their appointed destinies" rather than exercising free will.³⁰ The dynamic of the narrative is controlled by the same pull of opposites that renders his phrasal antitheses so brittle. J. W. Burrow maps the *History* as "the agony of the constitution followed by deliverance and partial renewal."³¹ The same general pattern is duplicated in intermediate cycles of factiousness and reconciliation that advance the action. The outcome is perhaps no less inevitable than in Carlyle's histories; for both men the archetypal need in human history was for order to master disorder. But where Carlyle knew the daemonic had to take its course, Macaulay constantly tried to control it. He polarizes the dynamic of experience where Carlyle celebrates its multiformity. With Macaulay we feel the limits, not the potentiality, of the possible. Conflict and tension may arise, but Macaulay manages them in a predictable way: opposing extremes are reconciled in compromise, basic laws of political science and human nature are vindicated, justice—be it divine or secular—is satisfied. The overall arrangement of the *History* indulges the imagination, while never leaving any doubt that the "laws of reason and experience" will be confirmed.

Macaulay's management of detail also reflects his characteristic intellectual biases. His passion for concrete examples (the exact facts and dates that were crucial to his historical "romances") sharpened his eye for telling detail and made his use of it in the *History* particularly effective. Never content with a generalization, he always strove to gather together a representative sampling of concrete examples to make it explicit. He drives home the "barbarism" of the northern shires in 1685 with the ferocious bloodhounds, the fortified farmhouses, the stones and boiling water ready to meet the plunderer (W, 1:223-24), and makes palpable the economic chaos caused by James's issuance of base money in "a mortgage for a thousand pounds . . . cleared off by a bag of counters made out of old kettles" (W, 2:566). Detail could also imply moral judgments. Macaulay accomplishes

two ends by bringing before us the fine paintings, Japanese cabinets, and Parisian tapestries that filled the apartments of the Duchess of Portsmouth. He makes vividly particular Charles's extravagant indulgence of his favorite, while tacitly commenting on the vanity of human wishes when she collapses in grief over his death "in the midst of this splendour" (W, 1:337).

This elaboration of detail was clearly in keeping with Macaulay's dislike of abstractions and his tendency to define by examples rather than by analysis. It also widened the appeal and accessibility of the past by demonstrating the impact of major events on a quotidian reality recognizable to every reader. Macaulay's motivation, however, is less George Eliot's commitment to "the faithful representing of commonplace things" than the desire to reinforce his own claim that the welfare of the state was based on the well-being of individuals. To allow his readers to "enter into the feelings" of British exultation when the French fleet was routed at La Hogue, Macaulay attributes them not just to national pride, but to a sense of relief that he renders tangible: "The island was safe. The pleasant pastures, cornfields and commons of Hampshire and Surrey would not be the seat of war. The houses and gardens, the kitchens and dairies, the cellars and plate chests, the wives and daughters of our gentry and clergy would not be at the mercy of the Irish Rapparees . . . or of French dragoons" (W, 3:552). In a similar vein, to show how little misgovernment affected the common people, he summons up a crowd of tactile, sensuous images: "Whether Whigs or Tories, Protestants or Jesuits were uppermost, the grazier drove his beasts to market: the grocer weighed out his currants: . . . the harvest home was celebrated as joyously as ever in the hamlets: the cream overflowed the pails of Cheshire: the apple juice foamed in the presses of Herefordshire" (W, 4:189). The examples are so appealing that it is easy to overlook the materialistic assumptions that inspire them: that economic well-being and physical security are the measure of all things.

Analogous biases characterize his treatment of place, notwithstanding Macaulay's fascination with historical sites. He manipulates detail not just to re-create scenes, but to exact judgment. His sketch of Covent Garden in the seventeenth century gains impact from well-placed specifics, but also from the proximity of high to low: "Fruit women screamed, carters fought, cabbage stalks and rotten apples accumulated in heaps at the thresholds of the Countess of Berkshire and of the Bishop of Durham." The disorder that was in

itself a sign of social backwardness is summed up in the haranguing mountebanks and dancing bears who congregated each night within yards of Winchester House (W, 1:280). Usually comparisons between past and present are much more explicit. Macaulay's attempts to reinforce the differentness of the past almost always end by congratulating the materially better present:

We should greatly err if we imagined that the road by which [James II] entered that city bore any resemblance to the stately approach which strikes the traveller of the nineteenth century with admiration. At present Cork . . . holds no mean place among the ports of the empire. The shipping is more than half what the shipping of London was at the time of the Revolution. The customs exceed the whole revenue which the whole kingdom of Ireland, in the most peaceful and prosperous times, yielded to the Stuarts. The town is adorned by broad and well built streets. . . . In 1689, the city extended over about one tenth part of the space it now covers . . . a desolate marsh . . . covered the areas now occupied by stately buildings. . . . There was only a single street in which two wheeled carriages could pass each other. (W, 2:531-32)

The "gigmanity" Carlyle scorned becomes Macaulay's measure of success: the Manchester without a single coach in 1688 supported twenty coachmakers in 1841; the Leeds of seven thousand souls now numbered its people one hundred fifty thousand (W, 1:267). The "facts" speak for themselves. Macaulay's "stereoscopic" vision propelled readers toward the present rather than engaging them more fully in the past. When Carlyle looks around Samson's Bury St. Edmunds, he sees water not yet polluted by the dyer's chemistry, land not yet possessed by the Steam Demon. He mourns Time as both a bearer and a devourer. Macaulay faces resolutely forward. He senses the factories, the gins, the market emporium not yet there as a loss, a disorienting absence (W, 1:266-67).

Macaulay lacked any romantic sensitivity to landscape that might have provided other dimensions to place. He could wax eloquent about the pastoral idyll of modern Killiecrankie, where fine summer days find the "angler casting his fly on the foam of the river . . . or some party of pleasure banqueting on the turf in the fretwork of shade and sunshine." His object, however, is only to heighten the barbarity of the ravine in William's day, when the river suggested to "our ancestors thoughts of murderous ambushes, and of bodies stripped, gashed, and abandoned to the birds of prey" (W, 3:82-83). He dryly comments that modern ecstasies over the Highlands' sublimity

were made possible only by civilization's advance: "A traveler must be freed from all apprehension of being murdered or starved before he can be charmed by the bold outlines and rich tints of the hills" (W, 3:42). But his limitations go beyond this. Even in his cityscapes we are allowed to indulge in quaint and picturesque detail only so that we feel the presentness of the modern day more fully. Macaulay lacked what Burrow calls "a kind of imaginative archaeology, a sense of man's shaping and penetration of the landscape through many generations."³² This sense allowed Carlyle to see the past as both containing and nourishing the present. Macaulay did not deny the heritage of the past, but he did impoverish its complexity. In all other realms but the political, the uncouth oddity of former societies was indulged only because it was outgrown, and in that sense, denied. Macaulay condescended where Carlyle revered; to him the facts argued not for the continuing reality of habit but for its outdatedness.

The same kind of condescension diminishes his success in recreating the mind of the past. Macaulay defends popular literature and lore as worthy evidence notwithstanding the "large mixture of fable" found in such materials. Whether true or false, such tales "were heard by our ancestors with eagerness and faith," and thus furnished important insights into the mind of the past (W, 1:300). Too often, however, psychological insight gives way to celebrations of the march of mind. To Macaulay the rumors that circulated at Charles's death furnish

a measure of the intelligence and virtue of the generation which eagerly devoured them. That no rumour of the same kind has ever, in the present age, found credit among us, even when lives on which great interests depended have been terminated by unforeseen attacks of disease, is to be attributed partly to the progress of medical and chemical science, but partly also, it may be hoped, to the progress which the nation has made in good sense, justice, and humanity. (W, 1:345)

Macaulay is always too busy propagandizing to sympathize. As George Levine points out, he includes the superstitions of the vulgar because they indulged the reader's taste for the exotic, the fantastic, the fictional, while not transgressing the dictates of reason maintained by the "mature" mind.³³ He could exploit their affective potential as evidence of a more primitive form of consciousness without losing the modern perspective.

He uses representative social types in similar ways. Purporting to demonstrate that no natural inferiority existed between Celt and

Saxon, Macaulay exploits the apparent inferiority and simultaneously celebrates the virtues of modern civilization. He first titillates his audience with all the lurid detail of Highland savagery—huts swarming with vermin, men smeared with tar, meals of grain and dried blood. But he redeems himself from mere sensationalism by pointing out that “an enlightened and dispassionate observer” would even then have predicted that the civilizing influence of Protestantism, English, and a good police force would make the clans the Saxons’ equal (W, 3:46-48). The uncouth country squire of chapter 3 is a similar exaggeration intended to congratulate contemporaries on one hundred and fifty years of social progress.

Macaulay’s condescension to the uncouth and the irrational, combined with his mechanistic conception of human nature and his subordination of the man to his age, limit severely his powers of characterization. Just as major events unfold in a preestablished pattern, individual actions conform to an essentially static conception of character. Jane Millgate identifies this approach with that of the seventeenth-century genre of Character. The individual is perceived as a “whole rather than as something developing in time; qualities and actions are treated of in essence rather than in sequence; works and opinions are invoked as illustrations in the service of a static judgment and not as the motive power by which a dramatic presentation is moved forward.”³⁴ Since major changes in consciousness or government come about of their own accord, Macaulay’s characters need only typify the spirit of the age. For this purpose individual complexities merely get in the way: stereotypes throw the real forces of change into higher relief. Hence, those portraits that round out the sociological contours of his narrative are marked by the distortion of caricature rather than the faithfulness of miniatures. Even his major characters are too externalized: we know William’s “bitter and cynical smile” (W, 2:222), and the meager, wrinkled face that betrayed Danby’s ambition (W, 2:194), but the internal man eludes us. No wonder Carlyle found Macaulay’s characters “a series of empty *clockcases*.”³⁵

Macaulay’s characterizations are flattened by the paradoxical linking of opposing qualities. This was more than a stylistic tic, although obviously his balanced antitheses made such contrasts irresistible: “The Puritan was made up of two different men, the one all self-abasement, penitence, gratitude, passion, the other proud, calm, inflexible, sagacious. He prostrated himself in the dust before his Maker; but he set his foot on the neck of his king” (W, 5:38-39). He

might deplore the two equally distorted views of the Highlander, one a "coarse caricature" by scornful Cavaliers, the other a "masterpiece of flattery" by romanticizing moderns (W, 3:52). But his own portraits thrived on the same kind of contrasts. The Highlanders combined sordid barbarity with admirable valor. The country gentleman "spoke with the accent of a carter," but "was ready to risk his life rather than see a stain cast on the honour of his house" (W, 1:252). Even major characters are inconsistent rather than complex. His James I is "two men, a witty well-read scholar, who wrote, disputed, and harangued, and a nervous, drivelling idiot, who acted" (W, 6:167).

Macaulay has no real patience with, or insight into, psychological complexity. Leslie Stephen was among the first to note his resulting tendency to reduce individuals to "bundles of contradictions" rather than trying (as Carlyle would have) to find some underlying organic unity that would integrate disparate personality traits.³⁶ He has no appreciation for a devotion to ideals that could unify character or transcend self-interest. He shares none of Arnold's trust in the purifying power of heroism, none of Carlyle's belief in the ways faith transforms the man. The spiritual ideals that draw Carlyle to the seventeenth century are to Macaulay merely fanaticism: a manifestation of mental imbalance dangerous to the state.

The realist novelist, the Eliot or the Trollope, might similarly deflate the pretensions and posturing of romantic heroism by exposing the all-too-human foibles of their protagonists. But their purpose is to deepen our sympathy by confronting us with evidence of a shared fallibility. Macaulay wishes us to assume the superiority of that "cool and philosophical observer" who frankly acknowledges the absurd inconsistencies of human nature. He had found himself all too vulnerable to betrayed ideals and contradictions between emotion and reason. His way of controlling these is to adopt an attitude of complete cynicism. He criticizes the tendency of earlier historians to make individuals overly consistent personifications of good or bad because he claims that no such purity of motive or character could survive the assault of circumstance or betrayal by one's passions. After all, had not everyone seen "a hero in the gout, a democrat in the church, a pedant in love, or a philosopher in liquor" (W, 7:685)? He professes only scorn for those who would think otherwise: "as if history were not made up of the bad actions of extraordinary men . . . as if nine-tenths of the calamities which have befallen the human race

had any other origin than the union of high intelligence with low desires" (W, 6:175). It is because Macaulay knows that "the line of demarcation between good and bad men is so faintly marked as often to elude the most careful investigation," and not because he appreciates the ambiguities of human personality, that he sees character as black and white, but without shades of grey (W, 7:685). To expect consistency from individuals is as unreasonable as to expect prediction from "abstract" theory: the laws of experience prove that in personality as in political action, all is just rough give-and-take between extremes.

His theory of *Zeitgeist* and his far-reaching cynicism make it difficult to talk of heroes in his work. William and James dominate the *History*, but as embodiments of political vice and virtue moving toward inevitable rewards and punishments, not as men. In keeping with the Whig view, those men who supported the triumphant cause were by definition heroic in the broader scope of history. The *Essays* suggest that "the great body of the middle class" would have become in a sense the collective hero of the *History*. They shared leadership in the march of progress that summed up his vision of English history: "The higher and middling orders are the natural representatives of the human race. Their interest may be opposed in some things to that of their poorer contemporaries, but it is identical with that of the innumerable generations which are to follow" (W, 5:265). Cromwell succeeded not because of his Puritan zeal, but because "no sovereign ever carried to the throne so large a portion of the best qualities of the middling orders" as he did (W, 5:214). Chief among these qualities is the instinct for order and self-control so important to Macaulay personally. Burrow characterizes Macaulay's Hastings and Clive as other middle-class conquerors whose manly energies mold an effeminate, decadent east into empire. The bourgeois respectability of Macaulay's own day depended upon the same concern for manliness and order; such respectability connoted not manners alone, but opposition to the revolutionary "state of nature" that for Burrow represents Macaulay's deepest fears for society: the unleashing of lawless ambition, the riot of fanatical delusions, "the negligence or hatred of all boundaries to will, passion and appetite." The "middling orders" continued to offer the clearest examples of the traits Macaulay had historically associated with the Whig balance between absolutism and radicalism: rational control of feeling, openness, accountability, decorum, propriety.³⁷ Seen in this light, the *Essays* and the *History* become at-

tempts to provide the Victorian middle classes with a history of their own rise to power over the preceding two centuries—the process by which they shed the backward ways of the seventeenth century and aligned themselves with values and behavior that insured the triumphs of constitutional and social order in the present.

The very desire for control and clarity that stunted Macaulay's rendering of character made him a highly effective narrator. He rivaled the latest novel by borrowing many of its techniques. If his narrative "I" is less obtrusive than Eliot's or Trollope's, its coercing presence is felt throughout. It summarizes Macaulay's didactic intentions at the outset and allies the reader with it in the "we" whose proper reactions—pride, shame, awe—it is constantly prescribing. Macaulay carefully controlled the pace of dramatization, narrative, and transition for maximum effect. He alternates chapters of exposition with those of action and intensifies the sense of endings by closing chapters and volumes with climactic events: the fall of the Hydes, the flight of James, the proclamation of William and Mary. By his own admission he embellished his account with "grand purple patches" (LM, 2:204) that catered to his audience's taste for high drama and memorable tableaux. Like Carlyle, he emphasized peaks in the action—Charles on his deathbed ("And do not let poor Nelly starve"), Jeffries on the Bloody Circuit ("Show me a Presbyterian, and I'll show thee a lying knave")—by rendering his sources in direct address.³⁸

Although Macaulay lacked Carlyle's profound capacity for empathy, he found ample opportunities for identification, particularly in political debate. From a wide range of debates and documents concerning James's deposition, he constructs speeches that he puts into the mouths of the statesmen of the day: "If, these politicians said, we once admit that the throne is vacant, we admit that it is elective" (W, 2:375). As he proceeds tags like "so the politicians said" recede into the background and Macaulay seems to place himself among the "we" he paraphrases (see also W, 2:310). Shifts into the present tense and first person work in similar ways to pull the reader into the train of events leading up to the Popish plot:

The reigning King seemed far more inclined to show favour to [the Catholics] than to the Presbyterians. . . . The Catholics had begun to talk a bolder language than formerly. . . . At this juncture, it is rumoured that a Popish plot is discovered. A distinguished Catholic is arrested on suspicion. It appears that he has destroyed almost all his papers. A few letters, however, have escaped the flames. (W, 6:107)

And yet, where Carlyle's use of the present tense helps to dissolve the artifice of linear narrative, Macaulay's always reminds us of the showman behind the scenes. Those paraphrased speeches are too contrivedly Macaulayean in their balance and tension. He may rightly claim to restore the voice of "a whole literature which is mouldering in old libraries" when he reconstructs Tory or Whig positions, but the tonal ironies are distinctly his own: "The sycophants, who were legally punishable, enjoyed impunity. The King, who was not legally punishable, was punished with merciless severity" (W, 2:405-7). Macaulay's art is finally an ingenious ventriloquism, not Carlyle's transforming magic.

Still, as a showman, his histrionic talents were considerable. As we would expect from one who tended naturally to frame even his own experiences as historical set pieces,³⁹ he remains keenly attuned to the literary potential of events that, like the trial of the Bishops, retained "all the interest of a drama" even when "coolly perused after the lapse of more than a century and a half" (W, 2:171). He carefully orchestrates this event to join high drama with human interest, historical immediacy with historical perspective. After assembling the cast of characters—the prosecution and defense teams—he reconstructs the legal maneuvering with a barrister's eye. Arguments over technicalities are ticked off and dispensed with one by one, with the pivotal exchanges rendered in dialogue. All seems in order. The bishops are on the point of being acquitted when the importunity of one of their own counsel delays the proceedings just long enough to bring the Lord President with damning evidence against them. Macaulay quotes from contemporary letters to authenticate the "intense anxiety" that prevails that night as the jury deliberates. Although voices "high in altercation" are heard within the jury room, "nothing certain was known" until, in the "breathless stillness" of the courtroom the next morning, the verdict of "Not Guilty" is delivered (W, 2:177).

The action ranges from the most personal to the most symbolic. We have human interest. One of the jurymen, the King's brewer, comes alive again in his bitter complaints: "If I say Not Guilty, I shall brew no more for the King; and if I say Guilty, I shall brew no more for anybody else" (W, 2:171). We learn that Thomas Austin's stout resistance ("I will stay till I am no bigger than a tobacco pipe" W, 2:177) personally faced down the last hold-out for a guilty verdict. We have melodrama. As his people and his troops celebrate his defeat, James, the villain of the piece, slinks away with an ominous, "So much the

worse for them" (W, 2:179). We have epic scale. By tracing the crowd's reactions to the verdict, Macaulay enlarges the stage on which the drama is acted and underscores its status as a national event. He follows the shouts of triumph as they echo from the benches and galleries, to the great hall, to the throng outside, to the boats covering the Thames, until it seems that all London reacts with one voice. We get sensational detail in the guise of historical curiosity. Surveying the "spectacles" that drew the "common people" that night provides him a characteristic way of informing and entertaining at the same time. While tacitly deploring the "grotesque rites" involved in burning effigies of the Pope, Macaulay takes this opportunity to refresh his readers on the more colorful aspects of this "once familiar pageant" (W, 2:181). And we get a moral. The account ends as do most of his set pieces, with an elongation of historical perspective. This event stands alone in English history as the one time when love of Church and love of Freedom were in harmony. Macaulay is thus able to close with another variation on that favored pattern of reconciled opposites, as Tories and Whigs, Dissenters and Churchmen, join symbolically in the "vast phalanx" against the government.

Although wars of ideas interest him more than wars of arms, Macaulay as fully exploits the dramatic interest of his battle pieces. He increases their immediacy with conventional techniques—quoted battle cries, details of weather, references to terrain he has himself visited. He paces and orders action for maximum effect, duplicating the mounting tension at crucial junctures in terse, declarative sentences, or rapidly shifting from one part of the fighting to another. Military life includes elements of pure spectacle he finds irresistible. Under the pretext of the recording sights "well fitted to gratify the vulgar appetite for the marvelous" in William's entry into Exeter, he converts the procession into a brilliant mummary. Clearly he expected the exotic Africans in turbans and feathers and the Swedish horsemen in black armor and fur to dazzle his own audience as much as they did the simple throng at Exeter (W, 2:258). The story of the old woman who dodges through the drawn swords and curvetting horses to touch the hand of the deliverer is another concession to the anecdotal, although it also affords him an opportunity to drive home the historical significance of the moment: perhaps, he speculates, she is a zealous Puritan who had waited twenty-eight years for this deliverance, or perhaps she had lost a son to Sedgemoor or the Bloody Cir-

cuit. Here as elsewhere the roll call of famous warriors in William's train provides an opportunity to commemorate their other famous exploits. The immediacy of such scenes is thus enriched with the deeper resonance of a noble tradition.

Like other historians of his era, Macaulay surveyed warfare with a civilian's eye. Technical maneuvers recede in favor of details that enliven and humanize the scene. What we remember about Steinkirk is less the fighting than the carefully disordered neckerchiefs that took their name from it—a reference to the “glittering . . . lace and embroidery hastily thrown on and half fastened” by the French princes roused from “their couches or their revels” to head their army (W, 3:581). A man's tactics are less important than his mettle; each account includes closeups on selected heroes and cowards (e.g., W, 3:295-96). William is always at his best in battle: “Danger acted on him like wine, opened his heart, loosened his tongue, and took away all appearance of constraint from his manner” (W, 3:296). He inspires the Eniskilleners with touching gratitude at the Boyne. The light of memory softens his features still further at Landen: “Many years later grey-headed old pensioners who crept about the arcades and alleys of Chelsea Hospital used to relate how he charged at the head of Galway's horse, how he dismounted four times to put heart into the infantry, how he rallied one corps which seemed to be shrinking: ‘That is not the way to fight, gentlemen. You must stand up close to them. Thus, gentlemen, thus’ ” (W, 4:23). These eye witness accounts convey William's personality and suggest the human element in military experience far more convincingly than a technical account could have.

Macaulay pulls out all the stops to bring the first half of the *History* to a rousing close with the siege of Londonderry. He first intensifies the desperation of the besieged inhabitants with grisly detail. As famine spreads, dogs “battered on the blood of the slain” become luxuries and rats are eagerly hunted and greedily devoured (W, 2:579-80). Although even in their extremity the general cry remains “no surrender,” there are not wanting voices that murmur, “First the horses and the hides; and then the prisoners; and then each other.”⁴⁰ Having brought the people to the verge of atrocity, Macaulay steps back to reveal relief finally at hand. English ships attack the boom that blockades the river. The action seesaws back and forth in spare, paralleled exchanges:

The huge barricade cracked and gave way: but the shock was such that the Mountjoy rebounded, and stuck in the mud. A yell of triumph rose from the banks: The Irish rushed to their boats, and were preparing to board: but the Dartmouth poured on them a well directed broadside which threw them into disorder. . . . The Mountjoy began to move, and soon passed safe through the broken stakes and floating spars. But her brave master was no more. (W, 2:582)

The use of detail here makes the people's relief no less palpable than their desperation. To replace the dogs and rats come "great cheeses, casks of beef . . . kegs of butter . . . ankers of brandy." "It is easy" for the historian "to imagine with what tears grace was said" by men who the preceding night had dined on tallow and salted hides (W, 2:582).

Such human drama prevails throughout. Its "peculiar interest" lies not in the military maneuvers, which would have "moved the great warriors of the Continent to laughter," but to the fact that it was a contest "not between engineers, but between nations; and the victory remained with the nation which, though inferior in numbers, was superior in civilisation, in capacity for selfgovernment, and in stubbornness of resolution" (W, 2:583). The reality of this account gains amplitude from Macaulay's visits to the site. We can easily imagine him reliving the siege as he roamed Londonderry in search of landmarks that anchored his personal "romance" at the time and certified the authenticity of the scene in the *History*. He has talked to people who tasted the fruit of the pear tree by which Lunday escaped (W, 2:547); he knows that gardeners still find skulls and thighbones beneath the flowers in what was once the besiegers' burial ground (W, 2:555).⁴¹ At the end of the piece, we walk the walls and streets of the city with him, reverencing the relics found there and calling to mind the annual commemoration of the siege. Although deploring the racial animosities such ceremonies keep alive, Macaulay considers this respect for the past fundamental to national greatness. The *History* itself, of course, is dedicated to the same consecration of memory.

Macaulay's brilliant management of detail and action is rightly acclaimed. In the final analysis, however, there is something oddly distancing about his style, for all the vivid life in the panorama, for all the force of the argument. Macaulay's richly quantitative imagination ends by constricting rather than by expanding the multidimensionality of the past. For Carlyle detail symbolizes the whole. For Macaulay detail sums it up. The weight of detail is always pressing

toward judgments that too much imaginative sympathy might subvert. Macaulay's desire to control experience works against the surrender that such sympathy demands; his commitment to empiricism impoverishes other dimensions of reality. The surface of the action is so highly polished that the reader must remain an observer. As theater it is incomparable, as argument overbearing. Yet even Macaulay's contemporaries left it without that deeper emotional assent that genuine imaginative participation brings.⁴²

The rise and fall of Macaulay's stock as an historian is no less representative of Victorian tastes than the man himself. Opinion was always divided about the vices and virtues of his style. Early reviewers like Thackeray, Bagehot, and William Greg agreed in admiring Macaulay's brand of "intellectual entertainment," his ability to combine "conscientious and minute research" with a style as "irresistible as the most absorbing novel."⁴³ The perils of that style were nonetheless clear: it oversimplified issues and turned analysis into polemic. Archibald Alison and Margaret Oliphant were particularly apprehensive about the way "the power of the rhetorician" overpowered the "reflection of the sage" in his pages.⁴⁴

At the same time, there was striking agreement with the essence of Macaulay's interpretation of British history. James Moncrieff claimed the *History* as a "great national work" that had for the first time illustrated the true nature of the Constitution. David Brewster wished that an abridged version might be prepared as "the safest expositor of our civil and religious liberties" for the schools. Despite Mrs. Oliphant's qualms about Macaulay's exaggerations, she too rejoiced that "a story so brilliant, lifelike, and vivid, a chronicle so dignified and able, should mirror forth to the public of England the beginning of the modern era of national history—the groundwork and foundation of the liberties and blessings of our own time." Even John Croker, long Macaulay's political and literary adversary, declined to dispute the *History's* account of "the progress of the constitution." His very dismissal of this interpretation as commonplace shows how widely shared was the Whig view.⁴⁵ The chorus of praise for Macaulay's celebration of English history predictably reached a crescendo at his death in 1859. One expects to find the *Edinburgh* reviewers applauding his expansion of Whig principles until "they embraced the noblest destinies of man." It is more surprising, particularly considering the *Saturday's* stern standards for historical writing, to find J. F. Stephen in qualified agreement. Whatever the limitations in Whig

principles of continuity and precedent, Stephen wrote, "It is an unquestionable truth that their assertion has been closely allied, not only with a course of national greatness and prosperity unequalled in human history, but also with a spirit of reverence and affection for the past which in other countries has hardly ever been separated from a love for despotism and bigotry."⁴⁶

By 1876 when the *Life and Letters* was reviewed, attitudes toward historical writing were changing, and a second generation of Victorians was ready to condemn as Philistine what their fathers had praised as art. Macaulay's very representativeness proved his limitations. Froude identified "the key to his extraordinary popularity" as the fact that "what his own age said and felt, whether it was wise or foolish, Macaulay said and felt." John Morley and Leslie Stephen dealt the most telling blows. For Morley it was "Macaulay's substantially commonplace" ideas that made him so "universally popular" with the new generation of middle class readers: "His Essays were as good as a library: they made an incomparable manual and vade-mecum for a busy uneducated man, who has curiosity and enlightenment enough to wish to know a little about the great lives and great thoughts, the shining words and many-coloured complexities of action, that have marked the journey of man through the ages." Macaulay succeeded by his unparalleled skill in offering "incense" to the popular idols of patriotism and freedom; his "unanalytical turn of mind kept him free of any temptation to think of love of country as a prejudice, or a passion for freedom as an illusion." Stephen broadened these criticisms by linking Macaulay's "contempt of the higher intellectual interests" to the pervasive Whiggism and Philistinism of the middle classes. He found in Macaulay no genuine "experiential philosophy," only common sense and a "crude empiricism." Nevertheless, like Morley, Stephen could not deny that the successes of his age were due largely to those "deep-seated tendencies of the national character" that Macaulay epitomized. He might deplore the narrowness of Macaulay's patriotism, but he admitted that "it implies faith in the really good qualities, the manliness, the spirit of justice, and the strong moral sense of his countrymen." Macaulay's "manliness," that Victorian code word for rectitude, common sense, blunt straightforwardness, and transparent honesty, found admirers among many of Macaulay's critics in an age increasingly given over to aestheticism, doubt, and compromise.⁴⁷

With increasing frequency Macaulay was also held up as a prime

example of those offenses to which "literary" historians were particularly prone. Morley found his "habitual recourse to strenuous superlatives . . . fundamentally unscientific and untrue." Oliphant chided audiences taken in by his style: "To see Macaulay followed by Froude should have been a sharp lesson to such lovers of the picturesque." Cotter Morison blamed Macaulay's indifference to "the most important reform in historical studies ever made," the application of "a critical method to the study of the past," on the fact that he "cared for little beside his own success as an historical artist." Like Morison, Stephen felt that Macaulay's "unscientific" approach obscured the true "causes and nature of great social movements."⁴⁸

But Macaulay found defenders, too. Far from finding impartiality necessary, the *Eclectic* reviewer considered it the historian's duty to judge characters and events from a clear position—"the more liberal and expansive indeed the better." In view of her earlier criticism, it is noteworthy that by 1892 Mrs. Oliphant was recommending Macaulay as a healthy antidote for the latest casualty of professionalized history, the "lecture-dried student, whose interest in history only tends to the answering of questions at an examination, or . . . to endowing posterity with a set of cut and dried annals."⁴⁹ Several critics had begun to defend the differences between Macaulay's kind of popular history, which brought "the matured results of scholars to the man in the street in a form that he can remember and enjoy," and that scientific scholarship which was by definition more restrained in style and more restricted in appeal.⁵⁰ Others renewed claims that his services to British patriotism more than compensated for his scholarly failings.⁵¹ As late as the 1920s, the *History* was still being recommended as "one of the best instruments we possess for beginning the education of future citizens."⁵² Macaulay was finally so representative as to become a national institution despite his limitations.

But those limitations remain. Despite the breadth of his experiences in the world—far wider than those of Carlyle and Arnold—Macaulay never overcame the limits of his singularly "inexperiencing nature," as Bagehot called it.⁵³ He was essentially the same man at 59 that he had been at 20; if the circumstances of his own life had not penetrated his biases, there was little reason to expect the circumstances of the past to do so. His imaginative impartiality was not matched by a similar impartiality of sympathy. He could depict the past in vivid detail but was incapable of reaching beyond its surface realities. For him human nature was too uniform, self-interest too much stronger than

principles, to allow any reality beneath the surface. The style was indeed the man: it was capable of great clarity and force, but little subtlety or insight. It conveyed vigor without passion, light without heat. His ability to produce clear contours from masses of evidence, to assert narrative control over vast quantities of information, amounted to a kind of genius, but was achieved at the cost of an oversimplification which to many minds denied the highest purposes of historical writing.

Herein lie his greatest differences from Carlyle. Gladstone noted that despite their radical political and philosophical differences they were both honest if highly partisan, more powerful in expression than in thought. But there was nothing in Macaulay to correspond to the spiritual dimension Carlyle created in history.⁵⁴ To be sure, some contemporaries angered by Carlyle's denigration of the present or bewildered by his "riot of the imagination" valued Macaulay for being pedestrian.⁵⁵ But Stephen knew that to gain "clearness and definition Macaulay has dropped the element of mystery" in human life. He could make the past come alive, but he lacked the ability "to emancipate us from the tyranny of the present . . . to raise us to a point at which we feel that we too are almost as dreamlike as the men of old time."⁵⁶ Even in an increasingly secularized age, there remained a longing for some kind of transcendence that Macaulay's historical writings could not fulfill.

And yet, despite Macaulay's emotional and imaginative limitations, it is incorrect to say that his mind issued "straight from the eighteenth century, completely untouched by the Romantic movement."⁵⁷ It is true that his dominant traits were Augustan. His cynical and mechanistic view of human nature, his materialistic and rationalistic conception of progress, his complacency with the present, precluded the empathy that could grasp the spirit as well as the substance of the past, or could appreciate its passions as well as its appearances. His "science" stressed classification and prediction, not discovery and induction. His foregone conclusions about the inevitability of progress and the dominance of self-interest and inconsistency in human nature were as tyrannical as any of the "abstract theories" for which he had so much scorn. They precluded an objective view of the past, they blunted an appreciation of the fact for its own sake, just as much as Arnold's and Carlyle's quite different moral assumptions. Still, Macaulay was undeniably touched by the romantic spirit of his age. His avid interest in evidence of popular culture, his desire to

broaden the sociological dimensions of history, his fascination for time traveling, his vivid particularity in re-creating the past, his ability to make his readers spectators, if not participants, in historical moments, all register the influence of romantic historiography on his work. If romantic thought had relatively little impact on his metaphysical assumptions, it still opened up to his readers a new and immensely influential relationship with the past.

I would argue that his amalgamation of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historiography was more representative of the transitional state of many Victorian minds than was Carlyle's transcendental union of the two. Macaulay offered his contemporaries all the romantic strangeness of the past while reassuring them that they still lived in a world accessible to reason and common sense. Just as his own work as an historian provided a psychic retreat from the risks and disorder of real life, so too his historical writings offered his readers an emotionally satisfying portrait of their past without challenging their beliefs or disturbing their prejudices. The Whig view of continuity reconciled progress with permanence and reassured his contemporaries that, far from sacrificing tradition to progress, their present achievements represented the vindication of the most vital principles of their national identity. By substituting the ideals of political and intellectual liberty for more conventional religious or chivalric ones,⁵⁸ he provided a secularized source of value that retained its usefulness even as traditional orthodoxies began to crumble. If he did not attain the vision of the Victorian sage, neither did he incur its dangers. Discipleship to Macaulay never meant risking the security of belief for a leap of faith one might not be able to complete. Although his conventionality might be a limitation in the eyes of posterity, it constituted his chief value for many contemporaries. If he led his readers into new territory, it was not a wilderness of vaporous or exploded ideals, but a past as familiar as the present, because he reconstructed it in the same image. From its dim reaches emerged the familiar contours of national character and political structure so dear to the present. His genealogy of bourgeois liberalism gave the Victorian middle classes a stabilizing sense of identity while lending all the authority of history to continued development in the future.

Macaulay was the greatest of the nineteenth-century popularizers. He was instrumental in fostering the taste for history in a rapidly widening audience and in shaping their expectations about its purposes. Demonstrating the humanizing force of patriotism, he gave the

historian as man of letters new stature in the public eye and made historical writing part of the national literature. His historical narratives retain their brilliance as works of art even while many of their assumptions mark them as artifacts of a world view already breaking down at his death. They epitomize the realistic romances dear to the Victorian historical imagination and illuminate its longing for both order and progress.