TWO

Ecce Homo: Symbols Make the Man

A Topical Falsification of a Symbolic Reading?

There was a day when I believed that I would have to retract my reading of the John Wallace image on the cover of John Ruskin on Himself and Things in General. As I had presented this reading at one conference, had promised to present it at another, and was planning to use it to open a book, the reader can easily believe that I was not amused.

On May 23, 2000, I received an e-mail missive from Christine Holden. She asserted, emphatically, that the image must be read topically. The “dragon’s” face was that of a real person who was not Negro. That is a fact. In the twenty-nine years I have known her, she has never been wrong on an important matter of fact.

So why had I single-mindedly pursued a symbolic interpretation? There are two reasons: one good and one not so good. The good one is that I had spent the last five years immersed in the language community, in which the “dismal science” had meaning. The not so good reason is that as an American who specializes in the history of economic theory I have no idea what most of the debaters look like. Thomas Carlyle and J. S. Mill are familiar, of course, but I am not sure, for instance, that I would have recognized the image on the winged horse as Ruskin without the label. If I remember it correctly, when I first saw the image, I read the title of the cartoon book before looking elsewhere.

It would not be good to give up a theory without developing its implications, so what might be said in favor of a symbolic interpretation? In fact, there is something that I had not noticed before. The Cope’s tobacco advertisements themselves contain symbolic opposition! On the rear cover of Smoke Room Booklet number 5 (Carlyle 1890), there appears an advertisement for Cope’s Golden Cloud brand in which the oppositional figure that Richard Altick had noted appears.1 The same figure of a wowser—to use that invaluable Aus-

1. “A clergyman with umbrella, long ulster, gaiter, big feet, and pious mien” complete with a leaflet in his pocket upon which one can read “Anti-Tobac” (Altick 1951, 341). The broad-brimmed hat suggests a Quaker.
tralian term, which entered the language two decades later appears on the rear of the James Thomson (1889) entry in the series. There he seems shocked by an advertisement for the Smoke Room Booklets series itself, as he gazes at a list that features a Smoker’s Text Book as well as the Thomson, Charles Lamb, and Carlyle entries.

Moreover, the St. George image is neither the first nor the only instance in which Cope’s features Ruskin himself doing violence to the symbolic enemies of the Carlyleans. One of Cope’s major promotions was a colored sheet described with characteristic wit as the Peerless Pilgrimage to Saint Nicotine of the Holy Herb—sized 17.5 x 22 inches and priced at sixpence for 1878 subscribers to Cope’s Tobacco Plant and one shilling for others (fig. 2).

It features what seem to be naturalistic caricatures of literary and political figures. Along with this massive color sheet, there is a booklet entitled Cope’s Key and a sepia decoding card with numbers. Here we easily find an image of the mounted Carlyle (numbered 7 in the figure) followed by Ruskin (9). Ruskin’s horse is trampling a sorry sort of person who is labeled Cant. The easily identifiable broad-brimmed hat, which has been kicked off his head, and the tract in his hand, unreadable on the card but proclaiming “Anti-Tobac” in the original painting, identifies him as the dread wowser. The suggestion of horns indicates perhaps the reason why he is being crushed. The “verse” I quote explains why Ruskin is doing violence to this demonic enemy. Ruskin is introduced with broad enough hints as tagging along behind Carlyle. Carlyle himself is simply identified:

he is called Carlyle,
That is, the doughtiest carle in all our isle.
Him followeth his loyal Squire (9); and he
Hath wrought brave things in Venice of the Sea,
..........................................................
He rideth ramping like a new St. George,
..........................................................
Beneath his horse a scurvy wretch is sprawling,

2. The OED entry for wowser, which describes a latter-day Puritan with an authoritarian ideology, does not allow for the existence of a free market wowser. The difference, as illustrated by a homey example, is important and might help explain certain gaps in this book. The OED wowser, who as a University of California at Berkeley student in the 1960s, when invited to a party promising drugs, sex and rock and roll, would have (1) declined or (2) informed the authorities. The free market variant would attend in search of an argument but, expecting to be episodically bored, would take a book along for amusement.

3. The watercolor original has neither numbers nor lettering other than that attached to the wowser (Wallace 1878).

4. A smaller version of the image is included in as a plate in Thomson 1889. The poster’s tract is “Political Economy.”
Fig. 2. Cope's modern pilgrims. (From Cope's Key.)
With vast jaws open for a monstrous bawling;
A lank and long-eared mar-joy, mainly bent
On shuffling through the sloughs of discontent;
Incapable of pleasure even in pelf,

A blatant brawler, bilious and bad-blooded,
With heart, mind, soul and sense all muddle-muddied;
An Anti sour ’gainst all things sweet and good,
Who’d make earth ante-hell an if he could,
Whose head is wooden and himself stark wood;\(^5\)
A puny infidel to our sweet Saint;
There let the horses kick him till he faint;
Why should he come a-lying by the way
In hopes to disarrange our fair array? (Cope’s Key 1878, 18–19)

Thus, there is actually something to be said for a symbolic reading of the Ruskin image. The Cope’s Smoke Room Booklets are full of symbolic opposition. And Ruskin himself as St. George is set against the common enemy, demonic forces that threaten Englishmen.

There are topical references in the Pilgrimage also that may provide a context for the racial violence in the Smoke Room Booklet image. Consider the three diminished human figures—numbers 31, 32, and 33—sitting on a potato in the lower left corner and the two similarly sized figures—numbers 34 and 35—being held in a bottle. At this distance, who but a specialist might glance at the image and tell us who these figures represent and why they are so imagined?\(^7\) No matter. This Pilgrimage is designed precisely to puzzle even its contemporaries; the Key is provided to open all these mysteries to anyone who wishes to read it:

That insects who believe their country is well served when she is made contemptible should drop by the way and be transformed, as Parnell (33), Biggar (32), and O’Connor Power (31)—the Colorado Beetles who devour the metaphorical potato; or bottled for exhibition—as Nolan (34) and Gray (35), over whom the compatriot O’Sullivan (36) keeps watch—is not wonderful. The congratulation arises on the happy circumstance that no orisons of theirs can reach the shrine of Nicotinus.\(^8\)

---

5. Here the “printer’s devil” adds in a note: “Wood here means mad.” This is certainly a novel way to meet the demands of the rhyme scheme!
6. This section owes its existence to a chance visit from Maria Pia Paganelli. She saw everything first, including the need to look up Colorado beetle.
7. In the color original (Wallace 1878), the sense is easier to spot.
8. The OED entry for Colorado beetle informs us that in the larval stage it is the dangerous potato bug and provides this quotation from 1877 (the year before the image was printed): “Act 40
The subhumanization of the Irish nationalists, putting humans-insects on a potato or in bottles for display, is pretty clear. The public’s health demands their extermination. But it is not over yet. The nastiest part, the aspect that persuades me that this is no joke, requires that one know that an “orison” is a prayer and the “happy circumstance” is not simply the death that comes to all of us but, in this Christian language community, death without hope. Hamlet saw his chance to kill Claudius at prayer but passed it over, thinking that Claudius deserved death and Hell, not death and hope. More than 120 years have passed; still, read the words and the hate screams: life in a bottle for the subhuman and a death suitable only for beasts, one without Christian hope, for those who threaten the public health. Like Hamlet itself, we who have survived the twentieth century know how this story ends. 

Thus, Cope’s practice has both topical and symbolic opposition. How interesting. The reader, who has surely figured out the next step, will perhaps wonder what has taken me so long to get around to it. Adam Smith’s sympathetic principle, which explains this asymmetry, does not allow exchange of minds, only positions, and the reader has not been rattled.

Behold, the Man

Now, I’ve caught up with the reader. What if the Ruskin image is both topical and symbolic? That is surely what Holden meant: the symbols are instantiated in a real person. Can the symbols lead us to the man? If so, the symbolic reading is made more nearly complete along the lines required by Holden.

We can collect the important symbolic elements from above. (1) He must be known as an economist. (2) He must be involved in the general racial debates on Mill’s side. (3) He must be on the Jamaica Committee and against Eyre. The topical requirements seem to me to add the following elements to the list. (4) His face must be recognizable in 1893 without a label. (5) He must be viewed by the Carlyleans as an oppositional figure perhaps as important as Mill himself. (6) From the violence in the picture, he must have been the subject of deep hatred. (7) He has a broad face, without much hair on the front of his head, with neither beard nor mustache. Together the first six elements of this list point to a very small number of public figures or they point to no one at all.

The first six elements of the list suggest one and only one person to me: John Bright.10 Before we see what Bright actually looked like, I shall move through the list, checking those requirements that are satisfied.

& 41 Vict. c 68 Sect. 1 The Privy Council may make such orders as they think expedient to prevent the introduction into Great Britain of the Doryphora Decemlineata or Colorado Beetle.”

9. Zyklon-B, the agent of the final solution, is an insecticide. The OED gives the following edification: “1944 Chem. Abstr. XXXVIII. 3416 The application of Cyclon B (0.4 g./cc.) for 24 hrs. destroyed all insects but imparted a peculiar taste to the tobaccos.”

10. I actually thought of John Bright for 1, 2, 4, and 5. Items 3 and 6 occurred to me as I was checking. The reader has to remember that I was rattled!
1. Economist? A leading member of the Anti–Corn Law League and the cohead of the “Manchester School of Economics” (Grampp 1960).

Check!

2 and 5. Antiracism? In the following paragraph, the cofounder of the British eugenics movement, W. R. Greg, attacks Mill and Bright for race-blind theorizing.

“Purchase the estates of English and absentee landlords, and then re-sell them to Irish middle-class tenants in decent-sized farms,” says Mr. Bright, who, again, like Mr. Mill, fancies that an Irishman is an English or a Scotch or a Swiss or Belgian cultivator. (1869, 79)\textsuperscript{11}

Check!

3 and 5. Anti-Eyre? Bernard Semmel tells us this from the inside of Jamaica Committee debates:

John Stuart Mill, strongly supported by John Bright, was the most forceful advocate of prosecution. This was a matter he was determined to see through to its end, he asserted. If Eyre were not prosecuted, Mill argued, every rascally colonial official would be given a free hand to perform mischief, and a horrible precedent affecting the liberties of Englishmen would be set. (1962, 69–70)

The 1866 Fraser’s article by James Archer quoted next is so vile that the editor prefaced the piece with this information:

The writer of this article has been personally connected with the scenes which he describes; a temperate expression of \textit{white} opinion from Jamaica itself will not be unwelcome at the present crisis, although of evidence of the intended rebellion it will be seen that he contributes nothing, and appears to be unaware of the necessity for such a thing. (Archer 1866, 161)

Archer tells us what we need to know about Bright:

The Governor, constantly on the move, had arrested Mr. G. W. Gordon, the supposed instigator of these disasters, and conveyed him on board H. M. S. Wolverine, whence he was removed to Morant Bay, tried by a court-martial, and executed within three days after its sentence. On the

\textsuperscript{11} Peart and Levy (2000) consider Greg’s role in the Carlylean-eugenics enterprise and quote the paragraph attacking Mill. For Greg’s role in the Anti-Corn Law campaign, see Grampp 1960, 107, 110–11.
legality or necessity of this “murder,” as it is described by Mr. Bright, we offer no opinion pending the report of Sir Henry Storks. (176–77)

At this point, the editor interjects the following telling footnote:

After perusing the reports of the court-martial, the reader will probably be less forbearing. The evidence on which Mr. Gordon was convicted was not enough to hang a dog upon. (177)

Check!

4. Familiar face? For reasons that are beyond my competence, Bright’s face seems to have been difficult to draw well.12 No matter, there is a grand statute available for inspection at the Birmingham Art Gallery, Albert Square, in Manchester and the Houses of Parliament (Bright 1930, 538).

Check!

5. Opposition? Perhaps the best statement of the comparative public importance of Bright and J. S. Mill comes in the 1867 Punch cartoon used as the frontispiece in a collection of Bright cartoons (Punch 1878). In it, we see Mill himself as cupbearer to a brass-knuckled Bright, who is exercising on a crowned punching bag we are encouraged to read as “Aristocracy.”

Let me provide two addition examples of Carlylean opposition in a literary context, which seem to me to illustrate the depth of the hostility. In 1855, a year after returning from his adventures in Mecca, Richard Burton published a pseudo-Arabic poem, The Kasidah which contains the following stanza:

See not that something in Mankind
That rouses hate or scorn or strife,
Better the worm of Izraîl
Than Death that walks in the form of life.
(Burton 1926, bk. 9, stanza 29)

Burton glosses Izraîl as “The Angel of Death.” 13 This is surely a reference to Bright’s 1853 “Angel of Death” speech protesting the carnage of the Crimean War. 14

12. Bright 1930, 433: “To Mr. Millais. Gave him an hour and a half. Progress; but he is not well satisﬁed. He ﬁnds the ‘mouth’ the diﬃcult feature, as other artists have found it.” This is, of course, “Mr J. E. Millais, the great painter” (Bright, 428).

13. At Yom Kippur, by tradition, two scapegoats are selected and lots are drawn, one for the Lord and one for Azazel, an angel of death.

14. “The Angel of Death has been abroad throughout the land; you may almost hear the beating of his wings. There is no one, as when the ﬁrst-born were slain of old, to sprinkle with blood the lintel and the two side-posts of our doors, that he may spare and pass on; he takes his victims from the castle of the noble, the mansion of the wealthy and the cottage of the poor and lowly, and it is on behalf of all these classes that I make this solemn appeal” (Bright 1930, 190).
In Anthony Trollope’s little-studied novel *The Fixed Period*, the colony’s perfectly reasonable plan to exterminate the old people is thwarted by the untimely arrival of a gunboat sent by the British Minister of Benevolence. The gunboat’s name is the *H. M. S. John Bright* (Trollope 1993, 116).

Check!

6. Violence toward Bright? Bright’s overarching political radicalism has been described in the standard account of the Manchester School as “subversive.” But was there violence in a racial context? Here we can appeal to Bright’s diary from the time of Eyre:

To *Star* office: talk about Jamaica prosecutions with Mr. Gorrie and Chesson. Received note warning me of plot to assassinate me on Tuesday next! My letters contain many that are curious, and some that are insulting and offensive.” (1930, 295)

And from the other side let us read Carlyle’s *Shooting Niagara* as he whoops up his fellow “progressives.” The words I emphasize in the passage suggest that Eyre’s opponents have taken leave of their human status. They have lost the ability to cry havoc and unleash the dogs of war; they are the disease-ridden dogs of war:

[R]eal and fundamental, anterior to all written laws and first making written laws possible, there must have been, and is, and will be coeval, with Human Society, from its first beginnings to its ultimate end, an actual *Martial Law*, of more validity than any other law whatever. Lordship, if there is no written law that three and three shall be six, do you wonder at the Statute-Book for that omission? . . .

Truly one knows not whether less to venerate the Majesty’s Ministers, who, instead of rewarding their Governor Eyre, throw him out of window to a small loud group, small as now appears, and nothing but a group or knot of *rabid Nigger-Philanthropists*, barking furiously in the gutter, and threatening one’s Reform Bill with loss of certain friends and votes. (1867, 13–14; my emphasis).

15. Trollope 1993, 123. The text’s modern editor, David Skilton (in Trollope 1993, x–xvi), argues against a nonironic reading. For example, Trollope “is reported to have angrily told an enquirer, an ‘intimate friend,’ that he meant ‘every word’ of the *Fixed Period*. His retort is grandly unhelpful.” Skilton is silent about Carlyle.

16. “His ideas were called ‘democratic’ or ‘republican,’ at a time when those words had a subversive connotation” (Grampp 1960, 128). “He came to be regarded as an opponent of the monarchy, and occasionally was spoken of, only half in humor, as the first President of Great Britain” (129).
Thus, we find a public health justification for exterminationism. Is there an earlier one?

Americans living months after the Civil War may have had a somewhat more intimate relationship with violence than British readers of that era. Here is a quote from an 1866 issue of the Boston reprint journal, the *Living Age*. The article, which originally appeared in the *Saturday Review*, is entitled “Philosophers and Negroes.” In it, we are introduced sarcastically to Carlyle’s position on human worth:

And, though a Jamaica negro’s life may be a sham from the point of view of the Immensities, still it is a sort of reality to the creature himself. But then, of course, Mr. Carlyle is a great humourist, and on the humouristic side there is a good deal to be got out of the noise and fuss that has been made about a few “two-forked radishes,” black radishes, strung up in the air. If one is given up to listening to the Heavenly Sphere-Music, why the shrieks and yells of a score of niggers, under the lashes of a scourge made of pianoforte wire, naturally fall on deaf, inattentive ears. . . . Besides, Mr. Carlyle has propounded a universal poser which makes very short work of any tearful claim for sympathy on the part alike of negroes and white folk. Rights! he exclaims somewhere, Why what right had’st thou even to be? (“Philosophers and Negroes” 1866, 181)17

His disciple’s characteristic position on the relative worth of black and white is then explained in the context of statements expressed at a meeting in support of Eyre. Blacks are afflicted with slavery; whites with a railroad. As we have already encountered Ruskin’s “analysis” of the racial transformation wrought by the iron agent of industrialization, it is easy to guess which for Ruskin is the greater affliction:

Mr. Ruskin’s anger against the disfigurements inflicted on London and the suburbs by railways is very hot indeed. The connection between the London, Chatham, and Dover Railway and negroes was not easy for a plain man to see, but Mr. Ruskin is not to be baffled by any difficulties of this sort. So it appears that he began by saying that he hated all cruelty and injustice, by whomsoever inflicted or suffered, and from this he advances straight into the Metropolitan Extensions. “He would sternly reprobate,” he said, “the crime which dragged a black family from their home to dig your fields; and more sternly the crime which turned a white family out of

---

17. I do not know the original source of Carlyle’s “two-forked radishes” reference, but the Ruskin quotation is accurate.
their home, that you might drive by a shorter road over their hearth.” That is to say, metropolitan extension is positively a worse crime than slavery. The promoter whose line obliges a working-man to go and live somewhere else is actually more guilty than if he were a slave-trader. The horrors of the Middle Passage were less worthy of reprobation than the horrors of having to move from here to the street round the corner. (182)

In 1869, a writer in *Putnam’s* puts the specific statements justifying Eyre in the wider context of Carlyle’s philosophy, linking his antieconomics with his proviolence:

> It is always anti-democratic, anti-economical, and anti-philanthropic; its notes are force displayed in war or arbitrary government—a contempt for political economy and every thing akin to it—a readiness to shed blood. (“Thomas Carlyle as a Practical Guide” 1869, 522)

Then the target of the violence at home—the dogs of war—is suggested:

> Mr. Carlyle and his chief imitators did not fail to exhibit their personal “force” on the occasion. Mr. Carlyle called the Jamaica Committee, the leading names on which were those of John Bright, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Hughes, “a group or knot of nigger philanthropists, barking furiously in the gutter. . . .” Mr. Ruskin, who here displayed again the manly vigor which he had exhibited in applauding the butcheries which followed the Indian mutiny, published his “more than contempt” for men whose his contempt alone would scarcely crush. (528)

*Check!*

7. Pictures of the real John Bright are easy to find. The National Portrait Gallery has a lovely collection available for inspection. We see a representation of a broad-faced Bright with more forehead than hair, no beard, and no mustache, only an elegant set of mutton chops.

What if we require a Bright imagined in cartoon form? That wish is easy to grant. In the *Pilgrimage*, Bright is identified as number 44 (*Cope’s Key* 1878, 14). His broad, gruff face, vacant forehead, and wisp of mutton chops—this is how he is identified:

> John Bright (44), always a man of peace—save when Ottoman barbarism calls for a new Crusade—is happy in a smoker’s reverie of “auld lang-syne.”

---

18. Wendy Motooka asked this question.
Fig. 3. Dr. Dulcamara in Dublin. (From *Punch* 1878.)
Perhaps an even more informative cartoon of Bright (fig. 3) was published in *Punch* on November 10, 1866 (Punch 1878). Here, portrayed as a vendor of patent medicines, he is hawking “Radical Reform” to Irish listeners. Note the apelike teeth and jaws. Nonhuman teeth we have seen before.

*Check?* If I did not think so, this section would not exist. However, the reader will have opinions on the matter of this correspondence between prediction and fact.

**Conclusion**

This solution I believe satisfies the Holden challenge: find the man. Bright, and as far as I know Bright alone, fits the symbols. This solution also satisfies James Buchanan’s worry that the face—when one looks closely—does not match the cartoon stereotype, with which Buchanan, as an American of southern extraction, is all too familiar. Perhaps this is the cartoon of what Carlyle in his pleasant way labeled the “Nigger-philanthropist”: one who carries with him the dismal science and has taken leave of his human status. Symbols of race and hatred merge in opposition to the dismal science.