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Authorized Secrecy:
The Figure of Freemasonry,
Carlyle’s Clothes Philosophy and an
Alternative to Democracy

“T"o what extent Democracy has now reached, how it advances irresistible with
ominous, ever-increasing speed, he that will open his eyes on any province of
human affairs may discern,” writes Thomas Carlyle in Past and Present (1843). He con-
tinues, “Democracy is everywhere the inexorable demand of these ages, swiftly ful-
filling itself. From the thunder of Napoleon battles, to the jabberings of Open-vestry
in St. Mary Axe, all things announce Democracy” (Works, 10: 215). For Carlyle, the
problem with the “Morrison’s Pill” of democracy is that it proposes an exclusively politi-
cal solution to what he perceives as a fundamentally spiritual problem. Democracy’s
universal panacea of the vote will not give people the intellectual, moral and spiritual
development that he believes they so desperately need. Much of Carlyle’s own writ-
ing can be seen as an attempt to impart and justify the value of such extra-political
attributes, and thereby to secure for himself a degree of social authority that the Victorian
period’s overwhelming focus on democracy would prevent him from gaining.

As the example of De Quincey makes evident, Carlyle is hardly alone in his attempt
to establish his own authority by shifting from a political to an aesthetic/spiritual reg-
ister. In fact, Carlyle’s frequent reliance on a discourse of secretive interiority
rhetorically links him to the practices of Victorian England’s single most prominent
exception to the general distrust of clandestine organizations, namely English
Freemasonry. Although an avowed secret society, Freemasonry remained something
of an accepted institution throughout the Victorian period. Just how accepted can be
seen from the Unlawful Societies Act of 1799, which contains a clause specifically
exempting English Freemasonry from the otherwise universal prohibition of oath-taking. Inserted largely as a result of efforts by the Duke of Atholl and the Earl of Moira, the Grand Masters of the two branches of English Freemasonry operative at the time, this clause not only allowed English Masons to continue practicing their craft, it also granted them official recognition from the Crown, and therefore an unusual degree of authorized secrecy.1

The Masons worked hard to retain this authority by projecting a combination of divinely inspired mystery and apolitical respectability to the general public. Since throughout the nineteenth century Freemasonry was the subject of numerous exposés like those by Abbé Barruel and John Robison, many of them written by former members and therefore offering detailed descriptions of Masonic “mysteries,” the “fact” of Freemasonry was something of an open secret; at the same time, partly as a result of this publicity and partly due to the Masons’ preservation of ritualistic practices that they claimed were designed to preserve and perpetuate certain divine truths of which they were the guardians, the “figure” of Freemasonry continued to evoke a sense of aesthetically pleasurable secrecy and spiritual authority among the general public. The Masons then supplemented this aura of figurative secrecy with an image of institutional respectability. Unlike their counterparts on the Continent, English Freemasons always remained scrupulously apolitical, concentrating their energies on public parades and charitable causes. In addition, like the many professional organizations from which it drew its members, English Masonry published a number of “trade” journals, including the Sentimental and Masonic Magazine (est. 1792–94), the Freemasons’ Journal; or Paley’s Universal Intelligence (est. 1795), the Free-Mason’s Magazine (est. 1793–98), the Freemasons’ Quarterly Review (est. 1834–49), the Freemasons’ Quarterly Magazine and Review (est. 1850–52), the Freemasons’ Quarterly Magazine (est. 1853–54), the Freemason’s Monthly Magazine (est. 1855–58), and the Freemasons’ Magazine and Masonic Mirror (est. 1859–71).2

The success of English Freemasonry’s campaign for institutional respectability suggests that the discourse of interiority that they shared with De Quincey and Carlyle has the rhetorical power to reveal another dimension of the period’s middle-class ethos of transparent openness. In this chapter I use the Freemasons’ exceptional acceptance as a point of entry into this more positive side to Victorian England’s dynamic rhetoric of secrecy. I examine how several Victorian authors invoke the figure of Freemasonry in an attempt to establish an alternative set of standards according to which institutional forms of secrecy might not be just acceptable but even attractive. I then turn to the secret practices of English Freemasonry itself in order to illustrate how a careful manipulation of political, aesthetic and spiritual registers of meaning contributed to the Masons’ respectable status. However, although the English Freemasons are the most recognizable beneficiaries of the period’s intersubjective valuation of secrecy, they
are not principally responsible for establishing a theoretical defense of secretive practices; that role belongs to Thomas Carlyle, whose complex metaphysics of heroic signification, first fully articulated in *Sartor Resartus* (1833–34), offers one of Victorian England’s strongest arguments for embracing the aesthetic and spiritual value of secrecy. The majority of this chapter is devoted, therefore, to an extended close reading of *Sartor Resartus* that traces the subtle nuances and hyperbolic expressions of Carlyle’s theory of heroic signification and its contribution to the Victorians’ dialectical attitude towards secrecy. The chapter concludes by connecting Carlyle’s theory of signification in *Sartor* with his more overtly political version of heroism and hero-worship in his later work. The ease with which Carlyle adapts his early radical aesthetics to his later reactionary politics leads me to reconsider the Victorian democratic theorists discussed in the Introduction in light of the issue of apparently extra-political authority raised by Carlyle and the Freemasons. I contend that, despite their ostensible support for some version of democracy, these theorists and the Liberal English culture that produced them retained a degree of authoritarianism that was uncomfortably similar to Carlyle’s, and that this predilection for select forms of authority helps to explain why the century’s many organized calls for radical social and political equality met with accusations that they were products of a secret conspiracy.

I. Figuring F/freemasonry

It is not difficult to find either incidental allusions or more in-depth references to the figure of Freemasonry in a wide range of Victorian writing. In fact, such prominent nineteenth-century novelists as George Eliot, Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray all make opportunistic use of the Masons’ publicity. These three authors deploy the figure of Freemasonry with a healthy dose of irony, even as they allow for the aesthetic attractiveness Freemasonry might generate by virtue of its connections to the practice of art, the profession of law and the mysterious inner workings of “the great world.” Thomas De Quincey manifests a similar dialectical relationship to the figure of Freemasonry in his two non-fiction prose essays, “Historico-Critical Inquiry Into the Origin of the Rosicrucians and Free-Masons” and “Secret Societies.” Both cast doubt on the Masons’ public respectability, “Historico-Critical Inquiry” by debunking their pretensions to pre-seventeenth-century origins, and “Secret Societies” by lightheartedly arguing that “The great and illustrious humbug of Modern History—of the History which boasts a present and a future, as well as a past—is FREEMASONRY” (191). At the same time, however, De Quincey does admit to a certain intersubjective sympathy for Freemasonry, especially in “Secret Societies,” where in the midst of his playful depiction of a Masonic initiation rite as
an elaborate excuse to drink he declines to reveal what he knows of the actual rit-
uals of membership because doing so would violate his own oath of secrecy. These
authors’ acceptance of Masonic secrecy hinges on the connection between the Masons
and the elite public, reflected both in the professional and high-society associations
made by the novelists and by De Quincey’s appeal to the period’s valuation of integrity
through his unwillingness to violate his oath.

Finally, Dr. Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby School, adds an aura of
respectability and social authority to the figure of Freemasonry in his private corre-
spondence on the topic. Arnold’s yearning for “a sort of masonry” has already been
documented by Adams in Dandies and Desert Saints and has been related to various
conceptions of Victorian manliness, but Arnold’s thoughts on the subject deserve a
second look in the context of the more public references to Freemasonry outlined
above. Written five years apart, Arnold’s two recorded comments on the Masons reveal
his deeply conflicting feelings towards them and the broader practices of secrecy they
had come to represent. On the one hand, Arnold appears thoroughly opposed to the
Freemasons themselves. Writing to Reverend Trevenen Penrose (10 April 1841), he
declares, “The half-heathen clubs, including, above all, Freemasonry, are, I think, utterly
unlawful for a Christian man: they are close brotherhoods, formed with those who
are not in a close sense our brethren” (Stanley, Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold,
2: 230). It is difficult to pinpoint what exactly Arnold objects to, whether it is Freemasonry’s
ecumensicism, although English Freemasonry was almost entirely Anglican, or the ways
in which the society’s commitment to equality prompts improper connections
across class lines, although again most English Masons were members of the middle
and upper classes. In either case, it seems evident that Arnold finds them wanting
according to public middle-class notions of propriety; however, one should also note
that, in this letter at least, Arnold does not overtly oppose Masonic secrecy.

In fact, in an earlier letter to Sir Thomas S. Pasley (11 May 1836), Arnold seems
friendly to what we might call freemasonry divorced from the Freemasons. His com-
ments, though lengthy, are worth quoting in full because they help to dramatize the
ways in which one might authorize one’s own exercise of secrecy by appealing to a
discourse of interiority:

I meet with a great many persons in the course of the year, and with many whom
I admire and like; but what I feel daily more and more to need, as life every year
rises before me in its true reality, is to have intercourse with those who take life in
earnest. It is very painful to me to be always on the surface of things; and I think
that literature, science, politics—many topics of far greater interest than mere gos-
sip or talking about the weather—are yet, as they are generally talked about, still
on the surface; they do not touch the real depths of life. It is not that I want much
of what is called religious conversation,—that, I believe, is often on the surface, like other conversation; but I want a sign, which one catches as by a sort of masonry, that a man knows what he is about in life,—whither tending and in what cause engaged; and when I find this, it seems to open my heart as thoroughly, and with as fresh a sympathy, as when I was twenty years younger. (Stanley, Correspondence, 2: 42)

Arnold begins by asserting that he feels he is acquiring an increasingly complete access to Truth, or life “in its true reality.” This information encourages him to establish a binary opposition between “the surface of things,” or those things that most people ordinarily talk about and the manner in which they talk about them, and “the depths of life,” in which life “in its true reality” resides. Since this binary division clearly privileges “the depths of life,” it seems implicit that the division between surfaces and depths is itself one of the facets of “true reality.” If everyone could see the difference between the two types of conversation, all would choose to operate on a deeper level rather than merely at the surface. The perception of surfaces and depths, then, becomes a sort of initiating mechanism into the fraternity of earnest like-minded men with whom Arnold would like to have dialogue. Most of the time, these men would interact with others on the surface-level of middle-class virtues, concealing their knowledge of life’s true reality, its secret of interiority, until another of similar perception gave them a sign, “which one catches as by a sort of masonry,” and which would signal to all those qualified by their earnestness and superior knowledge that a more meaningful discussion of life’s depths, of Truth, could begin. Presumably, such a depth-level discussion could even take place in mixed company, since only the initiate would know that it had begun and could thus conduct it “beneath the surface” of ordinary conversation. For Arnold, these depth-level discussions, initiated by a secret sign, and dedicated to the unearthing of Truth, would be not only meaningful, but distinctly pleasurable, even intimate. Arnold thus links truth, privilege, and pleasure together under his intersubjective endorsement of a select form of secrecy.

English Freemasons would have made claims similar to Arnold’s about their own “sort of masonry.” Indeed, Masonic secrecy was justified by the Freemasons’ supposed access to sacred truths that they claimed to guard from corruption and potential misuse in the world at large. They did so by a carefully controlled method of recruitment, an internal hierarchy and an elaborate system of allegory and symbol. In order to become a Mason, the prospective applicant had to first find two members willing to sponsor him, a deceptively difficult task since active Masons were sworn to neither reveal their membership nor to recruit new members. After finding his sponsors, the applicant would then have his application reviewed by the officers of the Lodge; upon their approval he would undergo an elaborate initiation ceremony,
during which he would be partially disrobed, blindfolded, placed at sword-point, and made to swear that he would keep the secrets of the Lodge or suffer horrible, though probably figurative, penalties. Only then, with the force of secrecy already impressed upon him, would the new Mason be initiated into the elementary secrets of the Masonic step, handclasp and password. The acquisition of more esoteric and significant truths would have to wait until the Entered Apprentice had attained more advanced degrees and titles within the Masonic hierarchy, which in English United Grand Lodge Freemasonry was composed of over thirty distinct positions. Masonic historian A. E. Waite explains that in thus subdividing themselves, English Freemasons ensured that “there are always Mysteries behind the Mysteries and a more withdrawn adytum behind the Holy of Holies” (2: 208).

These “Mysteries behind the Mysteries” were kept veiled by a complex range of symbols, the most prominent of which were a builder’s square interlaced with two compasses, the architecture of the Lodge itself, and the Masonic apron. The precise meanings of these items in Victorian English Masonry is difficult to fully recover today. However, in 1922 Master Mason W. L. Wilmhurst published his The Meaning of Masonry in an attempt to revive Masonic traditions he felt were disappearing, and his conservative account of Freemasonry’s more esoteric side gives an adequate idea of the symbolic significance these items possessed. According to Wilmhurst, the compass and square design most readily associated with the Masons represents the triadic human soul, which combines within itself the divine Word, the passive reception of that word and the active embodiment of its principles. The architecture of the Lodge is a bit more complex, but is founded on the belief that “the four sides of the Lodge point to four different, yet progressive, modes of consciousness available to us. Sense-impression (North), reason (West), intellectual ideation (South), and spiritual intuition (East); making up our four ways of knowledge” (93). These points of the compass take on special significance during rites of initiation and promotion, with the principle officers of the Lodge occupying strategic positions reflecting their role in the ceremony—the Chief Officer, for example, stands in the East, the most privileged direction, reflecting his high degree of knowledge—and candidates progress from the west end to the northeast corner to the southeast corner to the center of the room as they advance in degrees. During this progression from Entered Apprentice to Master Mason, the candidates’ aprons also undergo a number of symbolic transformations. According to Wilmhurst, the apron represents “our body of mortality . . . the real ‘badge of innocence,’ the common ‘bond of friendship,’ with which the Great Architect has been pleased to invest us all” (31), with its triangular top and square bottom signifying the spiritual and physical sides of that body respectively. When a Mason progresses from Entered Apprentice to Fellow-Craft, the triangular section is folded down onto the square section, symbolizing the union of these
two sides, and the apron is decorated with pale blue rosettes, indicating the first blossoming of his true nature. Wilmhurst becomes almost enraptured when describing the installation of a Master Mason, whose apron, he says,

is garnished with a light blue border and rosettes, indicating that a higher than the natural light now permeates his being and radiates from his person, and that the wilderness of the natural man is now blossoming as the rose, in the flowers and graces incident to his regenerate nature; whilst upon either side of the apron are seen two columns of light descending from above, streaming into the depths of his whole being, and terminating in the seven-fold tassels which typify the seven-fold prismatic spectrum of the supernal Light. . . . He also wears the triple Tau, which comprises the form of a level, but is also the Hebrew form of the Cross. (45–46)

It is doubtful whether every Fellow of the Craft in Victorian England would have seen his installation in quite this way, but the important thing to note is that the sense of Wilmhurst’s almost mystical account bears a remarkable semblance to Arnold’s admission that meeting a like-minded man with whom to plumb the depths of Truth opens his heart with fresh sympathy and pleasure. In other words, Arnold’s yearning for a “sort of masonry” may have been precisely the feeling that led many Victorian men to actual Masonry, which combined a claim to spiritual Truth with a feeling of privileged belonging and, in the case of Wilmhurst, an obvious aesthetic pleasure.

In addition to their multivalent appeal to a standard of interior value, the Masons also offered prospective members an institutional history that lent political value to their practices of secrecy. After being officially recognized in the Unlawful Societies Act, English Masons embarked upon a period of consolidation and expansion that continued largely unabated for the rest of the century. The fifty years prior to the Act had been ones of internal division, with Freemasonry in England divided into the Antient and Modern factions.8 These two groups were brought together in 1813 by their mutual agreement to the 21 Articles of Union and the formation of the United Grand Lodge of England. This centralization and normalization of Freemasonry then allowed for the society’s rapid expansion throughout the burgeoning British Empire. Grand Lodges had already been founded in Ireland (1717), Scotland (1729), and a handful of British colonies at this time; they were joined after unification by Grand Lodges in Bengal (1813), Malta (1815), Brazil (1821), Bombay (1843), Canada (1857), Nigeria (1867), New South Wales (1888), New Zealand (1890), and Tasmania (1890), not to mention the numerous lodges of English origin in Europe and the United States. In sum, English Freemasonry and British colonialism went hand-in-hand, increasing the financial and cultural influence of England throughout the world. As a result, Freemasonry
came to be seen as a distinctly “English” organization whose secretive practices could be legitimately differentiated from those of less acceptable secret societies by virtue of their complicity within Britain’s global empire.

This process of expansion took place under the leadership of a number of socially prominent men whose connection to English Freemasonry increased its public acceptance. Freemasonry’s ranks had long been composed almost exclusively of the wealthy middle classes, but its leaders, beginning with the fourth Grand Master, the Duke of Montague (1721), have often been members of the landed nobility. In the nineteenth century, Freemasonry counted among its leaders George, Prince of Wales (1805; later George IV), The Duke of Sussex (1813), the Earl of Zetland (1843), Earl de Gray and Ripon (1870), and Edward, Prince of Wales (1875; later Edward VII). Even Queen Victoria’s father, the Duke of Kent, had been elected the leader of the Antients in 1813; it was he who nominated the Duke of Sussex as the first Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge. In a period that placed significant stress on social deference and aristocratic rank, these leaders gave English Freemasonry enormous prestige and public endorsement; how could one question whether or not the society was acceptable when it was being led by some of the same men who governed the nation?

The final historical reason for Freemasonry’s acceptance in England was provided almost independently of the Masons themselves by the Roman Catholic Church. Since 1738, when Pope Clement XII issued the Bull In Eminenti, Masonry was publicly condemned by a long succession of Popes. In Eminenti was renewed by Pius VII in 1814, and was followed by two similar Papal Bulls in 1825 and 1884, as well as by anti-Masonic Papal Allocutions or Encyclicals in 1821, 1829, 1832, 1846, 1849, and 1856. Given the long tradition of English anti-Catholicism, such an adversarial relation to Rome was an asset in the minds of many Englishmen. Rome’s animosity provided a public religious reason to go along with the private spiritual, aesthetic, intersubjective, imperial and deferential reasons for granting English Freemasons’ institutional secrecy an exceptional degree of social acceptance. That this acceptance was forthcoming at all also shows that secrecy could be valued so long as it was connected to the correct mix of social strata and nationalist ideology.

II. Carlyle’s Clothes Philosophy

Although the Masons serve as the most prominent practical example of the ways in which public distrust of secretive behavior could be dialectically mollified by appeals to the attractiveness of secrecy, they do not provide the most theoretically sophisticated rationale for how practices of secrecy might enhance one’s own extra-
political authority. In *Sartor Resartus*, Thomas Carlyle proposes just such a theory of authorized secrecy. Carlyle’s championing of the heroic status of society’s “tailors” is grounded on a metaphysics of signification that centrally relies on the practice of secrecy. In fact, secrecy and silence become the hallmarks of spiritual and aesthetic authority in *Sartor*, which offers itself to the reader as a kind of justification-by-example for the value of these attributes.

Significantly, Carlyle presents his idiosyncratic defense of secrecy even as he makes a peculiar contribution to the field of allusive references to English Freemasonry. The most explicit allusion to the Masons in *Sartor* appears in book two, where Teufelsdröckh lists, among “the everstreaming currents of Sights, Hearings, Feelings for Pain or Pleasure, whereby, as in a Magic Hall, young Gneschen [himself] went about envi-roned” (II.2.73), a family of swallows for whom his father had provided a nesting location:

The hospitable Father (for cleanliness’ sake) had fixed a little bracket, plumb under their nest: there they built, and caught flies, and twittered, and bred; and all, I chiefly, from the heart loved them. Bright nimble creatures, who taught you the mason-craft; nay, stranger still, gave you a masonic incorporation, almost social police? For if, by ill chance, and when time pressed, your house fell, have I not seen five neighborly Helpers appear next day; and swashing to and fro, with animated, loud, long-drawn chirpings, and activity almost super-hirundine, complete it again before nightfall? (II.2.74)

Interestingly, Teufelsdröckh’s swallows lack two crucial masonic attributes, secrecy and authority: these “bright nimble creatures” keep nothing hidden from the “young Gneschen,” nesting openly at the sufferance of Teufelsdröckh’s father. Such a lack of freemasonry in this allusion to the Masons is an important rhetorical move since it preemptorily eliminates any Masonic connotations from his later linkage of secrecy, heroism and authority, thereby allowing Carlyle to attach his own meanings to these terms.

The sense of this bizarrely non-Masonic allusion to Freemasonry is difficult to discern at the moment it appears, however, because of Teufelsdröckh’s ironic stance towards his own remembrance. As the English Editor notes, “it remains ever doubtful whether he is laughing in his sleeve at the Autobiographical times of ours, or writing from the abundance of his own fond ineptitude” (I.2.73). This central doubt about whether or not Teufelsdröckh should be taken seriously, and the Editor’s unflagging insistence that the reader should be made continuously aware of this doubt, led to a great deal of confusion, if not outright condemnation, among the first readers of *Sartor Resartus*. American reviews were generally less vituperative than their British counterparts, but
even they did not know what to make of the book.\textsuperscript{10} An article in the \textit{Southern Literary Journal}, for example, judged, “In this work with a singular name, and based on such a singular fiction, there is, nevertheless, much deep thought, much eloquence of expression, much high feeling, much even of exalted religious conception” (“Carlyle’s \textit{Sartor Resartus},” 1). However, this judgment should be tempered by the fact that the article spends the majority of its time using \textit{Sartor Resartus} as a platform from which to launch proposals for proper university instruction, with the result that the actual philosophy of clothes goes almost unmentioned in the review. A similarly incomplete article in the \textit{North American Review} seemed largely content to prove the factual basis of \textit{Sartor Resartus} “a hum” and to conclude rather vaguely that the text “contains, under a quaint and singular form, a great deal of deep thought, sound principle, and fine writing” ([Everett], “Thomas Carlyle,” 456, 481). In contrast to these two reviews, which hide their own confusion behind platitudinous praise, Joseph H. Barrett’s article in the \textit{American Whig Review} attacked Carlyle’s apparent impenetrability, dismissing Teufelsdröckh’s philosophy of clothes as “the purest abstraction” (128), “cant” (130), and even as evidence of “mental disease” (131), and noting throughout the book “an inexcusable, if not, as would sometimes appear, an intentional ambiguity” (133).

For the purposes of this study, however, the most insightful expression of confusion came from an anonymous notice in \textit{Tait’s Edinburgh Review}, which wondered “By what fatality was it that the most radically Radical speculation upon men and things, which has appeared for many years, should have first come abroad in a violent Tory periodical?” (\textit{Tait’s} 611). By applying the labels “Radical” and “Tory” to Carlyle’s text, \textit{Tait’s} places \textit{Sartor Resartus} squarely within the political realm and suggests that it may have a certain amount of relevance to the nineteenth century’s debate over democracy. What the text’s relationship to that debate might be is difficult to determine, though, since \textit{Sartor} largely avoids explicitly political language in favor of a discourse of aesthetic and spiritual authority. This rhetorical shift to an alternative standard of interior value has significant, if tacit, political implications, however, especially when considered in light of Carlyle’s later work. In other words, even though \textit{Sartor} is in many ways “the most radically Radical speculation upon men and things, which has appeared in many years,” its politics are ultimately well-suited for “a violent Tory periodical.”\textsuperscript{11}

One can see Carlyle echo the Masons in his attempt to shift his readers’ standards of value from the political to the aesthetic when a single passage, Teufelsdröckh’s disquisition on Emblems, is subjected to close inspection. Since this paragraph succinctly captures a significant portion of the argument and the rhetoric of Teufelsdröckh’s philosophy of clothes, it can serve as a sufficiently representative example of both the content and the style of \textit{Sartor Resartus} as a whole.\textsuperscript{12} The passage on Emblems is as follows:
All visible things are Emblems; what thou seest is not there on its own account; strictly taken, is not there at all: Matter exists only spiritually, and to represent some Idea, and body it forth. Hence Clothes, as despicable as we think them, are so unspeakably significant. Clothes, from the King’s mantle downwards, are Emblematic, not of want only, but of a manifold cunning Victory over Want. On the other hand, all Emblematic things are properly Clothes, thought-woven or hand-woven: must not Imagination weave Garments, visible Bodies, wherein the else invisible creations and inspirations of our Reason are, like Spirits, revealed, and first become all powerful;—the rather if, as we often see, the Hand too aid her, and (by wool Clothes or otherwise) reveal such even to the outward eye? (I.11.55–56)

This paragraph neatly turns what could be taken as a highly charged political comment on the monarchy—the almost casual example of “the King’s mantle”—into a radical aesthetic reflection on the making of meaning. “Matter,” according to Teufelsdröckh, does not exist except as a physical manifestation of an already extant “Idea” that fills it with meaning. This obvious act of homage to “learned, indefatigable, deep-thinking Germany” effectively undercuts the authority invested in appearance, politics and the material realm by the Scottish Common Sense school and the then-dominant Utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill and replaces it with an authority grounded in an aesthetic discourse of interiority.

In the second half of the paragraph, Teufelsdröckh adds a spiritual dimension to his argument as well. These last few sentences preserve the idea that all meaning is constructed through visible emblems even as they identify the agency behind this construction in increasingly sacred terms. The impersonal attributes of Imagination and Reason turn out to be the weavers of society’s Clothes, and even these intellectual categories do not act alone. They, too, are directed by “else invisible creations and inspirations” to reveal meanings that, “like Spirits,” are already there. The religious overtones of this formulation are difficult to ignore, and their presence subtly shifts the original political register implied by “the King’s mantle” into more spiritual terms by theorizing that all Emblems come from a higher authority to which the only proper response is “the reverential wonder inspired by the immeasurable and the incomprehensible” (Deen 439). At the level of content, then, Teufelsdröckh’s paragraph on Emblems at once enacts a move from political to aesthetic/spiritual standards of value and offers the beginnings of an implicit justification of authorized secrecy: if this secrecy can legitimately claim superior Imagination, Reason, and/or divine inspiration, then accepting it is the highest form of consistency for a faithful people.

At the level of form, this paragraph further reinforces Teufelsdröckh’s appeal to
an interior standard of value. For example, the text rewards those readers willing to look beyond its surface with a good laugh. As G. B. Tennyson rather boldly states, “He who has never laughed at Sartor has missed a substantial part of its appeal” (273), an appeal most obviously manifested by the somewhat blasphemous English translation of Diogenes Teufelsdröckh’s own name as “God-born devil’s dung.” More serious rewards appear to beckon these same readers if they are willing to contend with the paragraph’s formal obscurity—its opaque declarations, fragmentary clauses, unfamiliar patterns of capitalization and unusual syntax. However, I would agree with G. B. Tennyson that the emblems passage is less concerned with rewarding readers than it is with securing a kind of textual authority for Teufelsdröckh, and by extension for Carlyle, through deliberate rhetorical obfuscation. Referring specifically to this passage, Tennyson writes, “Carlyle’s kind of statement grasps and entwines, and we struggle as the fly in marmalade” (246). This simile is particularly apt since, on a first reading, the paragraph seductively appears to have all of the elements of a logically balanced argument: it begins with a short proposition, which is subsequently expanded upon in a series of curt clauses; the next sentence progresses onward with “Hence”; an “On the other hand” two sentences later signals the end of the first part of the argument and the beginning of an alternative; these two sides are then logically reconciled after the final dash and this synthetic position stated in the form of a question that invites readerly activity.

Those readers who take up Teufelsdröckh’s invitation and pause for a closer look, however, are sucked into a rhetoric so thick that they may never get free. What, for example, are the relations between the four clauses in sentence one, and how does this relation logically permit the substitution of “Matter” for “all visible things,” not to mention the blatant contradiction that this Matter is simultaneously “not there at all” and able to “represent some idea and body it forth”? Also, “Hence” implies that a sort of proof has taken place, but what is the exact nature of this proof? Similarly, where is “the one hand” that balances out “the other hand” of sentence four? Finally, although the terminal question is rhetorical, and therefore interested in prompting passive agreement from the thoroughly stuck reader, what, other than its impressive and somnambulistic length, would prevent a negative answer? The fact that the paragraph has been prefaced by the English Editor’s amused question only adds to its power of persuasion, since, by chummily preparing the British Reader for more airy sailing, the Editor’s comments encourage him to pardon Teufelsdröckh any obscurity and to “study and enjoy, in simplicity of heart, what is here presented him, and with whatever metaphysical acumen, and talent for Meditation he is possessed of” (I.2.10).

In one of the most theoretically supple and compelling articles written on Sartor in recent years, “Devising New Means: Sartor Resartus and the Devoted Reader,” Vivienne Rundle begins to show how Carlyle’s careful use of rhetorical obscurity,
or textual secrecy, serves to elevate Carlyle to a position of aesthetic and spiritual authority over the reader. Bringing together theoretical work by Derrida, Lacan, and, implicitly, Barthes, she investigates the readerly role that emerges from the unconventional structure of Carlyle’s text. Rundle begins by asserting that the contemporary negative reaction to *Sartor Resartus* “derives in fact from the text’s action upon its reader: an action that oversteps the bounds of the conventional contract between text and reader in ways which may be considered unfair, underhanded or even unethical” (13). This unethical treatment consists primarily of “forcing the reader to abandon conventional notions of narrative structure and authority” in order to incite “a readerly revolution” (14). Unlike the solely radical revolution implied by Brian Cowlishaw and other critics, however, Rundle’s “readerly revolution” is far less liberating because it relies on a bivalent definition of revolution as both upheaval and stasis. Like Cowlishaw, she argues that Carlyle’s difficult style goads a reader into activity; however, for Rundle this activity takes the form of an endless circling around a “truth of the text” that, if it exists at all, is never revealed. Instead the various narrative voices all adopt “the persona of the ultimate subject-presumed-to-know, alternately flaunting his presumed knowledge and withholding it from the frustrated and subjugated reader” (20). Connecting this explicitly to practices of secrecy and their role in structures of authority, Rundle continues, “both Teufelsdröckh and the Editor finally refuse to divulge their secret knowledge: to do so would necessitate the surrender of the only authority they possess. For all the figures of textual authority in *Sartor Resartus*, mystery—which involves submission to a truth beyond human reason—is a necessary element of mastery” (20). In Rundle’s sophisticated argument, then, Carlyle assumes a position of extra-political authority over the reader by means of a textual freemasonry of his own.

In order to fully understand how Carlyle’s appeals to aesthetic and spiritual authority centrally rely on his own practice of secrecy, one must turn from Teufelsdröckh’s single paragraph on Emblems to his larger Philosophy of Clothes. At the heart of this extended theory of signification is the English Editor’s cunningly “practical” arrangement of Teufelsdröckh’s “speculations on Symbols” (III.3.161). Curiously, these speculations do not begin with symbols at all, but with the larger topic of Concealment:

“The benignant efficacies of Concealment,” cries our Professor, “who shall speak or sing? SILENCE and SECRECY! Altars might still be raised to them (were this an altar-building time) for universal worship. Silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves together; that at length they may emerge, full-formed and majestic, into the daylight of Life, which they are thenceforth to rule.” (III.3.161)

Here is De Quincey’s praise of the sublimity of secret societies written over fifteen years earlier. Carlyle’s version contains two intriguing extra elements, however:
rulership, and, implicitly, virtue. This tacit connection of secrecy and virtue is reinforced by Teufelsdröckh’s allusion to the Gospel of Matthew 6:3 in the next paragraph: “Thought will not work except in Silence: neither will Virtue work except in Secrecy. Let not thy right hand know what thy left hand doeth!” (III.3.162). Like the Freemasons, Teufelsdröckh insinuates that secrecy, insofar as it derives from a privileged access to Truth, is a perfectly legitimate, even a praiseworthy, practice.

It is only after this initial panegyric on concealment and secrecy that the chapter turns to “the wondrous agency of Symbols” (III.3.162). Teufelsdröckh divides symbols into two categories, the extrinsically valuable and the intrinsically valuable. Symbols of the first category appeal to humanity’s “shallow superficial faculties . . . Self-love and Arithmetical Understanding” and tend to last only so long as those “accidental Standards of multitudes” that originally produced them (III.3.166, 164). Although within an extrinsically valuable symbol “there glimmers something of a Divine Idea” (III.3.164), this Idea is warped by the historical contingency of its symbol and therefore is likely to be unrecognized or at least imperfectly actualized before the symbol becomes obsolete. Teufelsdröckh gives as his first two examples of extrinsically valuable symbols “that clouted Shoe which the Peasants bore aloft with them as ensign in their Bauernkrieg (Peasants’War)” and “the Wallet-and-staff round which the Netherland Gueux, glorying in that nickname of Beggars, heroically rallied and prevailed, though against King Philip himself” (III.3.164). Though not without a plebeian sort of power, then, extrinsically valuable symbols retain their authority for a very short time. By contrast, intrinsically valuable symbols last far longer. Building on humanity’s “deep infinite faculties . . . Fantasy and Heart” (III.3.168), this second category of symbols manifests more than just a glimmer of the “Godlike.” In fact, intrinsically valuable symbols show “Eternity looking through Time” (III.3.165). Among these symbols of “the Godlike rendered visible” are “all true Works of Art” and those religions in which “all men can recognize a present God” (III.3.165). As the supreme example of an intrinsically valuable symbol, Teufelsdröckh cites “Jesus of Nazareth, and his Life, and his Biography, and what followed therefrom” (III.3.165).

However, since “Jesus of Nazareth, and his Life, and his Biography” can only be known indirectly through contextually dependent translations of the Gospels, this final example begins to break down the firm distinction between historically contingent extrinsic symbols and eternally viable intrinsic symbols. This collapse of categories is hinted at by Teufelsdröckh himself, who admits that Christianity’s “significance will ever demand to be anew inquired into, and anew made manifest” (III.3.165). Even the most enduring symbol of Christianity, the Cross, originally “had no meaning saving an accidental extrinsic one” (III.3.164), and so cannot escape the process of resignification and the burden of historical contingency. For Teufelsdröckh the idea of the Divine itself remains unchanged and unchangeable, but the manifestations of this sacred
realm are always subject to their historical contexts. As Catherine Gallagher succinctly observes, this contingency means that “symbols, like all other representations, have a partially oppositional relationship to the content they signify” and are therefore “at least partially socially determined, arbitrary and potentially ironic” (195, 196). This potential irony, or the gap between the sacred realm and its manifestation in a particular symbol, connects symbols to Teufelsdröckh’s earlier comments on concealment and secrecy. It turns out that “In a Symbol there is concealment and yet revelation: here, therefore, by Silence and by Speech acting together, comes a doubled significance. And if both the Speech be itself high, and the Silence fit and noble, how expressive will their union be!” (III.3.162). In other words, in the right hands performative extra-political secrecy itself may be as close to an intrinsically valuable symbol as one can get, since by thus making secrecy a figure one simultaneously speaks, “I have a secret,” and remains silent about that secret’s aesthetic and/or spiritual contents, thereby protecting it from historical contingency.

Since it is “in and through Symbols that man, consciously or unconsciously, lives, works, and has his being” (III.3.164), the question of authorized secrecy—of who can legitimately practice secrecy and who cannot—becomes increasingly important. In other words, who is qualified to ensure that practices of secrecy preserve virtuous rulership? In a gesture towards Carlyle’s later work, Teufelsdröckh responds that this is the task of the hero. Among his examples of intrinsically valuable symbols he includes “‘the Lives of heroic, god-inspired Men’” (III.3.165), a theme also taken up later in the chapter.23 After declaring that all symbols fade with time, Teufelsdröckh prophesies the need for new symbols and for heroic poet-prophets to craft them: “‘A Hierarch, therefore, and Pontiff of the World will we call him, the Poet and inspired Maker; who, Prometheus-like, can shape new Symbols, and bring new Fire from Heaven to fix it there. Such too will not always be wanting: neither perhaps now are’” (III.3.166). The final clause of this exhortation suggests that these heroic makers and guardians of the transcendentally symbolic are already in the world, though perhaps unrecognized by most people.

In order to help his readers to detect these heroes already in their midst, Teufelsdröckh presents three groups with a sufficient connection to Clothes to lay claim to heroic status. The first two of these groups, Dandies and Poor-Slaves, are represented as falsely heroic secret societies in “The Dandiacal Body.” “A Dandy,” the English Editor explains, “is a Clothes-wearing Man, a Man whose trade, office and existence consists in the wearing of Clothes” (III.10.200). Teufelsdröckh waxes more metaphorical when he describes the Dandy as a member of a quasi-religious “Sect” composed of “moon-calves and monstrosities” and dedicated to “that primeval Superstition, Self-Worship” (III.10.202). Striving “to maintain a true Nazarene deportment,” these self-worshippers gather in the Temple of “Almack’s,” where they read sacred “Fashionable
Novels” and practice rites which, though “by some supposed to be of the Menadic sort, or perhaps with an Eleusian or Cabiric character, are held strictly secret” (III.10.203). Teufelsdröckh purports to expose “the true secret, the Religious physiognomy and physiology of the Dandiacal Body” by outlining the “Seven distinct Articles” of the Dandies’ creed as follows:

1. Coats should have nothing of the triangle about them; at the same time, wrinkles should be carefully avoided.
2. The collar is a very important point: it should be low behind, and slightly rolled.
3. No licence of fashion can allow a man of delicate taste to adopt the posterior luxuriance of a Hottentot.
4. There is safety in a swallow-tail.
5. The good sense of a gentleman is nowhere more finely developed than in his rings.
6. It is permitted to mankind, under certain restrictions, to wear white waistcoats.
7. The trowsers must be exceedingly tight across the hips. (III.10.204–05)

As these Articles of Faith make clear, although the Dandy does have an intimate connection with Clothes and strives to project a dignified mien, his self-absorption and willfully extrinsic values make him utterly unsuited to be a heroic and god-inspired man. Likewise, his “Sect,” with all of its secretive practices, is an unacceptable secret society because, even though it does maintain privilege and doubtless produce pleasure for its members, it does not have a legitimate claim to transcendental Truth.

Like their counterparts, the Dandies, the Poor-Slaves also fall short of heroic status. Chiefly composed of the Irish poor, though rapidly spreading throughout the British Isles, this alternative Sect has a bivalent connection to Clothes. On the one hand, “they appear to imitate the Dandiacal Sect in their grand principle of wearing a peculiar Costume,” which consists of “innumerable skirts, lappets, and irregular wings, of all cloths and of all colours; through the labyrinthic intricacies of which their bodies are introduced by some unknown process” (III.10.206). On the other hand, though Teufelsdröckh never says so directly, his description of the Poor-Slaves, also known as the Drudge Sect, implicitly includes the poorest of clothes-makers, British textile workers. Rather than being understood as narcissistic Self-Worshippers, Poor Slaves might be better fancied “worshippers of Hertha, or the Earth: for they dig and affectionately work continually in her bosom; or else, shut up in private Oratories, meditate and manipulate the substances derived from her” (III.10.206). Teufelsdröckh confesses his ignorance of any common Articles of Faith
among the Poor-Slaves, saying that his lack of information can be attributed to their lack of “Canonical Books” (III.10.205). However, the fact that he includes among their ranks “Ribbonsmen,” “Peep-of-day-Boys,” “Babes of the Wood” and “Rockites” (III.10.205), and predicts that they will one day also absorb “Radicals” (III.10.209), implies that, if they did exist, these Articles would be politically radical, distinctly lower class, and potentially unlawful. In other words, the Poor-Slaves are too extrinsic, in terms of both ideology and class, to be either true heroes or members of an acceptable secret society.

Standing in contrast to both of these falsely heroic Sects are tailors. “‘The Tailor,’” says Teufelsdröckh, “is not only a Man, but something of a Creator or Divinity” (III.11.212), and this connection to intrinsic Truth makes him the only legitimate maker, mender and guardian of society’s Clothes. Preeminent among Tailors are the poets, about whom Teufelsdröckh quotes Goethe as saying “‘Nay, if thou wilt have it, who but the Poet first made Gods for men; brought them down to us; and raised us up to them?’” (III.11.212). The world, Teufelsdröckh triumphantly predicts, “will recognize that the Tailor is its Hierophant, and Hierarch, or even its God” (III.11.213). As the title of Carlyle’s text, Sartor Resartus (The Tailor Retailed), makes clear, Teufelsdröckh is himself the primary example of a “Metaphorical Tailor,” or poet-prophet. His grounding in German metaphysics connects him with a transcendental realm of intrinsic value that he manifests, or clothes, in his Die Kleider ihr Werden und Wirken (Clothes, their Origin and Influence). Teufelsdröckh’s connection with Divine Truth and his position of social privilege are simultaneously reflected by the Professor’s private domicile. It was the attic floor of the highest house in the Wahngasse; and might truly be called the pinnacle of Weisnichtwo, for it rose sheer up above the contiguous roofs, themselves rising from elevated ground. . . . So that it was in fact the speculum or watch-tower of Teufelsdröckh; wherefrom, sitting at ease, he might see the whole life-circulation of that considerable City; the streets and lanes of which, with all their doing and driving (Thun und Trieben) were for most part visible there. (I.3.16).

This ability to see and subtly direct the world while sitting at ease outside of its doing and driving is precisely the point of the text’s endorsement of the heroic. Only when secreted in his celestial apartment can Teufelsdröckh access the intrinsically symbolic and establish his own aesthetic and spiritual authority by writing Die Kleider.

When coupled with his earlier comments on Symbols, Teufelsdröckh’s final location of the divine in the heroic offers an answer to the question of authorized secrecy with important political implications. Much like Teufelsdröckh’s attic room in Weisnichtwo,
heroism provides a moral and spiritual high ground that remains above the level of logic, where political problems can be solved by an appeal to “intrinsic value” and proximity to a realm of divinity whose authority is absolute. From this vantage point above the extrinsic chaos of everyday life, one can remain unperturbed by pressures for social change, since, as Vanden Bossche lucidly notes, “The clothing metaphor . . . represents the fundamental historicity of cultural institutions and the inevitability of periodic revolution. Since nothing can prevent the processes of decay that destroy old clothing, Sartor’s pervasive organic imagery suggests that revolution and historical change are natural, noncataclysmic processes” (Carlyle and the Search for Authority, 43). Once accepted, the necessity of organic change can actually forestall potentially disastrous revolutions, like the French Revolution, by allowing them to be guided, or guarded, by poet-prophets and other heroes. These heroes enjoy a privileged connection with super-social values that most people, especially those of the extrinsically laboring classes, simply cannot perceive, and so not only is their authoritative role divinely sanctioned, it is also effectively kept secret.

This divine naturalization of the aesthetically and spiritually authorized secrecy of the hero in Sartor Resartus thus provides an argument for accepting some forms of secrecy while condemning others. However, this argument hinges on Teufelsdröckh, author of Die Klieder and proponent of the doctrine of heroism, being a true hero himself. If he is not a hero and therefore does not have privileged access to a realm of intrinsic values, then his whole clothes philosophy becomes simply “the tatters and rags of superannuated worn-out Symbols (in this Ragfair of a World) dropping off every where, to hoodwink, to halter, to tether you; nay if you shake them not aside, threatening to accumulate, and perhaps produce suffocation!” (III.3.166). In fact, the English Editor himself explores this possibility at some length in the text’s final chapter, where he identifies three possible reasons for doubting Teufelsdröckh’s heroic status: 1) a problem of style: “How could a man occasionally of keen insight, not without keen sense of propriety, who had real Thoughts to communicate, resolve to emit them in a shape bordering so closely on the absurd?” (III.12.215); 2) a problem of intent: “Teufelsdröckh is not without some touch of the universal feeling, a wish to proselytise” (III.12.215); and 3) a problem of commitment: “Professor Teufelsdröckh, be it known, is no longer visibly present at Weissnichtwo, but again to all appearance lost in Space!” (III.12.216). Although the Editor offers little or no response to these potential reasons for doubt—the best he can manage is a vague assertion that Teufelsdröckh is not “made like other men” (III.12.216)—it is the third of these reasons that is perhaps the most damaging. Teufelsdröckh’s friend, Hofrath Heuschrecke, in a “copious Epistle,” suggests that he might no longer be at Weissnichttwo because he has joined the “Saint-Simonian Society” or one of the other revolutionary “Sects that convulse our Era” (III.12.217). In other words,
Teufelsdröckh may have gone against his own theory of interiority and joined a group of extrinsic radicals.

At least one critic, Stephen Franklin, has proposed that whether or not Teufelsdröckh is a hero is unimportant, since the true hero of *Sartor Resartus* is the English Editor. In Franklin’s reading, Teufelsdröckh is himself “emblematic of those things incapable of reconstructing themselves and in want of reconstruction” (36). He symbolically arrives in the Editor’s hands as the *Die Kleider*—an “enormous, amorphous Plump pudding, more like a Scottish Haggis” (III.12.214)—and

Six considerable PAPER-BAGS, carefully sealed, and marked successively, in gilt China-ink, with the symbols of the Six southern Zodiacal Signs, beginning at Libra; in the inside of which sealed Bags, lie miscellaneous masses of Sheets, and oftener Shreds and Snips, written in Professor Teufelsdröckh’s scarce-legible *cursiv-schrift*; and treating of all imaginable things under the Zodiac and above it, but of his own personal history only at rare intervals, and then in the most enigmatic manner!

(I.11.59)

These the Editor heroically retailors into the meaningful form of *Sartor Resartus* itself, thus indicating that he, not Teufelsdröckh, is the true tailor of the text.

The problem with making the English Editor into the hero is that his connection to the heroic has not been biographically established. As his own painstaking reconstruction of “Teufelsdröckh, his Life and his Biography” indicates, the Editor clearly endorses the text’s emphasis on the biographies of “heroic, god-inspired men” as the primary means of accessing the intrinsically symbolic. However, other than periodically deprecating his own fitness for the job, the Editor provides no biographical information about himself, leaving the reader unable to judge whether the Editor’s rewriting of Teufelsdröckh’s *Die Kleider* is itself intrinsically or extrinsically valuable. This indecision about the transcendental status of *Sartor Resartus* is not helped by the Editor’s assurance that he has given a “practical,” and therefore implicitly extrinsic, summary of Teufelsdröckh’s doctrine of Symbols, leaving the reader to wonder if the extrinsic/intrinsic division is historically contingent and therefore itself extrinsic.

### III. Conclusions

Despite its tendency towards solipsism—the hero’s practice of secrecy serves as both his warrant of authority and his chief authorized activity—Carlyle’s theory of heroic signification retains a prominent place in his later works; this longevity makes perspicuous the tacit political implications of Carlyle’s attempts to use the heroic to
secure aesthetic and spiritual authority in *Sartor*. Certainly the progression in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1840) from “The Hero as Divinity” through “The Hero as Poet” and “The Hero as Man-of-Letters” to “The Hero as King” suggests that for all his apparent efforts to replace political authority with spiritual and aesthetic authority, Carlyle still seeks to construct a “great man” philosophy of history that favors autocratic monarchs over democratic reformers. In other words, his definition in *On Heroes* of the hero as “he who lives in the inward sphere of things” ultimately lends spiritual and aesthetic authority to political autocrats like Cromwell and Napoleon I (134). Carlyle is much clearer about the specific implications of *Sartor* for contemporary democratic debate in *Past and Present* (1843). Immediately following the assertion of democracy’s ubiquity quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Carlyle scathingly defines democracy as closely akin to “Atheism,” using as evidence a lengthy quotation from Teufelsdröckh (*Works*, 10: 215–17)!

For Carlyle, then, advocating and demonstrating the aesthetic and spiritual value of secrecy not only grants him an unusual degree of textual authority over his readers, it also supports his political opposition to democracy in favor of political authoritarianism. One can recognize similar authoritarian leanings in the writings of many advocates of limited democratic reform, including Thomas Macaulay, Walter Bagehot, W. R. Greg and J. S. Mill. Such reliance on select forms of authority is most clearly visible in the works of Macaulay and Bagehot, both relatively conservative advocates of the “pro-democracy” position. Macaulay, for example, supports a limited degree of representation for the middle classes in *The History of England*, but argues that expanding the franchise will only upset the delicate balance that guards the general public’s interests. Although this position appears marginally democratic, in the sense that everyone is being at least indirectly represented, it is actually devoted to a rigidly stratified definition of equality, in which everyone deserves semi-representational rule but in which only some are ever qualified to be rulers. According to *The History of England*, the monarchy, the aristocracy, the commons, and the people are ideal categories whose relationship to one another is forever fixed according to a definition of Truth that Macaulay locates in the semi-divine Constitution of 1688. Since this document conveniently remains unavailable because it is unwritten, those who may wish to reform these categories can be silenced by Macaulay’s authoritative invocation of tradition.

Walter Bagehot provides a similar role for the idealized Constitution of 1688 in his *The English Constitution*. Even more than Macaulay, Bagehot explicitly supports representation for the “lower” orders in the House of Commons. This separation of the lower orders from the “educated ten thousand” who are meant to actually rule the nation appeals to a standard of personal cultivation that was set, maintained, and to a certain extent concealed by those already in power. Authority is most selec-
tively exercised in *The English Constitution* by what Bagehot describes as the “efficient secret” of the cabinet, which derives its power precisely from its practice of authorized secrecy. Bagehot even slyly provides a role for heroes as the “dignified” elements of government whose apparent connection to Truth pacifies the masses into following the dictates of government. In other words, for the lower orders the aristocratic elements of government, the queen and the House of Lords, serve as a spectacle worthy of hero-worship while the true heroes—the cabinet—preserve their connection to the Truth of the Constitution and virtuously rule the nation in secret.

More so than Macaulay and Bagehot, W. R. Greg and J. S. Mill support truly representative institutions for the English people; however, even their advocacy of limited democratic reform linked to education in “Representative Reform” and *Considerations on Representative Government* remains uncomfortably close to an anti-democratic conception of authority. Their causal connection between education and the right to vote implicitly relies on both a static conception of the Truth of, in Mill’s words, “individual mental superiority,” and a stratified notion of individual equality. Everyone, according to Greg and Mill, deserves to be represented, but only the educated deserve to be fully enfranchised by electing and serving as those representatives. Moreover, these same “educated ten thousand,” to borrow an appropriate phrase from Bagehot, also get to set the educational standards required to vote, allowing them to use themselves as the model for citizenship. By requiring others to think like themselves, the already enfranchised members of the “élite” therefore preserve their aristocratic influence over elections by inculcating the masses into their own standard of Truth.

This widespread investment in selective notions of aristocratic authority among even liberal advocates of limited democratic reform explains why a conservative secret society like the Masons could enjoy a high degree of social acceptance even as more radical groups were being publicly condemned by accusations that they employed secretive practices. Domestically, such condemnatory strategies were directed at trade unions and English Catholics, while abroad rebellious colonial subjects were targeted. Ironically, all of these underenfranchised constituencies appealed to the same ideal of equality officially subscribed to by the Masons, and yet their attempts to raise themselves to the status of full citizens were denounced by many who already enjoyed that respectable station because they allegedly relied on institutional secrecy. Such denunciations were made possible by the strategic deployment of the figure of the secret society. In the following chapters I will trace the productive appearance of this figure through several moments of democratic stress in order to demonstrate its important and hitherto neglected place in the larger construction of national identity taking place in Victorian England.