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of the novel by Disraeli the politician: a study of
reciprocity*

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

The Use of Politics by Disraeli the Novelist and The Use of the Novel by Disraeli the Politician: A Study of Reciprocity.

R.H. Hay-will.

Disraeli was all of a piece...His novels are part of his politics and his politics at times seem to be an emanation of his novels. (R. Blake, Disraeli, (London, 1966), 220).

Disraeli's fame as a politician is well recognised: his Premiership under Queen Victoria and his Parliamentary duels with Peel and Gladstone, amongst others, are established in history. But, with the exception perhaps of Coningsby and Sybil, his novels are not well known, even to students of literature. This thesis seeks to redress the balance, by showing that Disraeli's career as a whole was shaped as much by his literary nature as by his political ambitions. So it is a mistake to argue that he should have confined himself to one pursuit or to the other; because both were psychologically essential to him - two ambitions exerting a reciprocal influence on each other. In some instances these 'two natures' can be accused of diluting his energies, but as a rule their interaction was a dynamic which prevented introverted and self-defeating absorption in one of them.

So, although Disraeli never achieved great fame as a novelist, he actually wrote more successfully after entering Parliament, than before. And this was not entirely due to the interest aroused in a politician taking his experiences into print. In themselves, the tone of his works became less self-concerned, and the style sharper: less self-conscious and ponderous. The early novels were too autobiographical and introverted: they lacked an objective outside of themselves, and political issues were to provide this. Coningsby and Sybil, written in the heat of frustrated political ambition, veered to the opposite and polemical extreme. They were rooted in the active world of politicians and political struggles, and read at times like Parliamentary reports or speeches rather than novels. The basic elements of most novels: an historical/social context, a meaningful structuring or commenting upon it, and a suitable 'plot', are certainly present, but not always satisfactorily integrated. Nevertheless, Disraeli's position in politics gave him some unique advantages of access to, and familiarity with, the world of government. Thus in time he learnt to incorporate his perspective on the political world into more balanced works: Lothair and Endymion. Without the challenge of presenting political subjects, however, his writing would probably have tailed off into irrelevant and self-indulgent autobiography.

Conversely, although Disraeli wrote few novels after entering Parliament, considering the length of his career, he still acknowledged a debt to the literary side of his nature, in the policies and speeches he initiated. Some of his moves were to fulfil the apparently wild prophecies of the earlier novels with almost uncanny fidelity. And he retained a dramatic self-consciousness and a symbolic sense, even after adopting the sober dress and impassive manner of the Conservative leader. Whether one calls his approach romantic, or spiritual, or simply sentimental, the novelist in Disraeli was borne out in a number of acts which seem to have come not from the committee-room, but from the pages of his quixotic romances.

The Use of Politics by Disraeli the Novelist and
the Use of the Novel by Disraeli the Politician:
A Study of Reciprocity.

Submitted for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
in the University of Durham.

By

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January, 1983.

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27. APR. 1984

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is the result of my independent investigation, carried out under the guidance of my tutor, Dr. G. Ivy, Phd., to whom I owe a debt far exceeding the bounds of academic duty. All indebtedness to other sources is acknowledged by explicit reference in the text or in footnotes.

I declare further that this dissertation has not already been accepted in whole or in part for any degree, and is not being submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed

Raglan H. Hay-will

January, 1983.

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CHAPTER ONE

1. Biographical: Neither Novelist nor Politician

all his days he was haunted, more than most men, by a longing to escape from the sordid details of commonplace life into spacious historical atmospheres.¹

The young Disraeli was dominated by ambition. Possessed by great but undirected energies, he made urgent grasps at fame in a variety of fields; like the titular hero of his first novel, Vivian Grey, it mattered little how it was to be achieved, so long as it came soon. After a series of abortive attempts at instant success, invariably concluding in ignominious failure, he was through time and circumstance to resolve his efforts into two distinct channels: the world of politics and that of letters. Whilst Disraeli may be remembered as the embodiment of Victorian statesmanship, he was influenced as much by the sphere of literature as by that of politics in the early and formative years.

Disraeli's ambition sprang from a sense of innate disadvantage in several fields, and he fought a personal political campaign to redress the balance almost from birth. In 1848 he wrote of his paternal grandfather and namesake:

My grandfather retired from active business on the eve of that great financial epoch, to grapple with which his talents were well adapted; and when the wars and loans of the Revolution were about to create those families of millionaires, in which he might probably have enrolled his own. That, however, was not our destiny.²

Their name proclaimed the Disraeli clan to be of Judaic origin. The isolation this could cause was one of young Benjamin's earliest lessons. Until he was thirteen he attended a school at Blackheath run by the Reverend John Potticanny. There he found himself one of only two Jewish pupils present, the other being a character with whom he had nothing in common. The two received instruction from a Rabbi in Hebrew, while the rest of the school attended Sunday Service.³ Such episodes were to Disraeli what the blacking factory was to Dickens: they brought humiliation and, in consequence, an indiscriminate hunger for success.

Disraeli left school at about the age of sixteen⁴, and added a lack of university education to his other handicaps. Thereafter followed a period of self-study at home, reflected in Vivian Grey⁵.



He read widely in the classics, but was already developing a particular taste for the satirists and orators amongst them, notably Lucian, and Demosthenes, with whom he was entranced, as he recorded in a fervent passage in his diary:

In my lesson of today is included that magnificent passage in which the Athenian Orator swears by the warriors of Marathon and the day of Salamis, and a more eloquent and enchanting passage mortal hand never penned, mortal ear never heard...and even I, I who have been obliged to wade through his beauties, with a hateful lexicon at my side, have often wished to have lived in the olden time, when Philip was King of Macedon and Demosthenes demagogue of Athens.⁶

Oratory held a unique position for Disraeli in that it bridges the worlds of the written and the spoken word. It signifies power of expression, and through it power over men; and it was these two facilities which he sought to develop in himself.

They figured in his thinking even in the necessarily humdrum course of his early career. From 1821 to 1824 he worked as a private secretary to one of the partners of Messrs. Swain, Stevens, Maples, Pearse and Hunt, solicitors, of Frederick's Place, Old Jewry. Although one of his colleagues later described him as: "most assiduous in his attention to business and showing great ability in the transaction of it"⁷, the legal world did not appeal to Disraeli ("The Bar - pooh! law and bad jokes till we are forty", says Vivian Grey⁸) and his departure from it in 1824 was to be final. There is no record of his ever regretting the decision, but he wrote later in his Mutilated Diary: "it gave me great facility with my pen, and no inconsiderable knowledge of human nature".⁹ Monypenny observes:

It is the supreme interest of his character that he combined in such high degree the qualities that make for greatness in either sphere, the brooding temperament and glowing imagination of the poet with the practical energy, compelling will, and daring initiative of the man of action.¹⁰

It is questionable whether Disraeli really did possess the qualities demanded of a poet, but he did display an expert ability with words which he developed almost to an art-form. However, behind the study of oratory there was for Disraeli a pragmatic aspiration to worldly success rather than the idealistic aim of poetic excellence for its own sake. The problem was to find an outlet for those talents he knew himself to possess. Thus we find the hero of Contarini Fleming alternating between phases of romantic contemplation and of action, without the ability to harmonise them. Des-

cribing the varied moods, and the different images in which the hero of Contarini Fleming projects his idea of himself, Monypenny conjectures reasonably: "Through all these phases or something like them, the young Disraeli no doubt passed".¹¹

Paradoxically, of course, in Contarini Fleming and elsewhere Disraeli was indeed exploiting his situation as a young man hesitating between alternative lifestyles by making it one of his literary themes. (In which respect he exemplified the situation of post-Romantic writers who sought to relate their own predicament to the real world thereby: a process which led to the aesthetic mode of the end of the century). Disraeli was gifted with a vivid but not an original imagination.

Unable therefore to create from wholly original inspiration, he never freed himself from dependence upon autobiographical or borrowed experience. And, lacking the self-sufficiency of the Romantic ideal, he craved for some romantic realisation of his dreams in the world outside of his imagination. In his letters and tracts Disraeli is often to be found airing his grievances or recording his ambitions, a way of seeking relief. In a more subtle but no less therapeutic manner, his novels fulfilled the same role as Contarini Fleming's self-exposé and satire, 'Manstein', written in haste (over-riding artistic or social niceties) to ease his own mind. He replayed episodes from the past and rehearsed scenes in which he was to figure in the future, both to muse over his situation and at times to give it that dramatic quality he felt it lacked. The same synthesis operates between the aims of Disraeli the politician and Disraeli the novelist in the later works. As his interest increasingly centered on the field of politics, his abilities as novelist and as politician came in a natural way to complement each other.

In May, 1824, Disraeli produced a short manuscript intended as "a satire on 'the present state of society'" which shows him already combining the stirrings of political interest with the literary presumptions proper to his background. But a month later he asked the prospective publisher, Murray, to destroy the draft.¹² The work was called Aylmer Papillon, and was later to reappear as The Voyage of Captain Popanilla.¹³

In the same year Disraeli made a tour of the continent with his father Isaac and a family friend, William Meredith, just down from Oxford. On his return he confirmed his aversion to a career in

law. He had already speculated on the stock-market with a fellow-clerk from Frederick's Place, T.M. Evans, and in November they began transactions in the South American mining interest (the current craze based on re-opening the mines of Spain's former colonies).¹⁴ By June, 1825, they had acquired a third partner, the son of a rich stockbroker, and a debt of £7,000. One of their advisers was John Diston Powles, the head of a financial house involved in South America, and a client of Messrs. Swain and Stevens. A partnership was formed between Disraeli and Powles, and when talk arose of curbing the speculating mania by legislation, Disraeli was encouraged to defend "the spirit of commercial enterprise". Thus in March, 1825, he produced An Inquiry Into the Plans, Progress and Policy of the American Mining Companies, followed by Lawyers and Legislators - or - notes on the American Mining Companies in the same year.¹⁵

These pamphlets can be compared - if not in quality - to the works of classical oratory which Disraeli had admired five years earlier. They were primarily works of persuasion, developing his powers as both a writer and an embryo-politician, and were in a sense his earliest political speeches. It was this style of writing to which Disraeli's imagination (recreative rather than original) was best suited: not so much creating a scheme as drawing upon existing material to re-work it. Occasionally he ventures into flights of fancy, but seldom with success, as in the grotesque Supernaculum drinking ceremony in the second part of Vivian Grey.¹⁶ Disraeli's subsequent writings were best linked to the world of public affairs, incorporating political material, and being directed also to some political end which provided a thematic focus. Thus in the Inquiry he refers to the case of Count Regla, owner of the mines of Biscaina, whose reputed wealth had been questioned by a contributor to the Quarterly Review. Disraeli then gives an account of Count Regla from his own chosen source, concluding:

Here is a gorgeous account! why, 'the Stock Exchange history of this wonderful mine' is mere prose to this!...We anticipate the questions of our readers - From what authority is this taken? from some contemporary writer? from some fond chronicler of the glories of the Regla family? Oh no! It is derived from a very different source. It is not put forth by 'republican governments, the permanency and honesty of which remain to be proved'; it is not promulgated by the agents of 'the pretended associations to work the mines of Mexico and the other South American states'. This glowing account, this magnificent statement, may be found detailed as indubitable fact in the Quarterly Review itself, for last April!!!¹⁷

Such an elaborate refutation bears out the showman in Disraeli, or, indeed, the politician. It could almost be an excerpt from Hansard. In his political career Disraeli was to take up causes which flouted public opinion, and often it was this verbal dexterity which saw him through. Words were to become another front which the vulnerable Disraeli interposed between himself and his 'public', like the dandified clothes he wore. Like his clothes, he altered his verbal image to suit the occasion. The correlative to the sombre attire and impassive expression which he adopted as a statesman was the deceptive neutrality of his speaking style. We see also in these pamphlets the self-righteous tone inseparable from the politician's riposte. In Lawyers and Legislators he hits back at a severe critic of the South American schemes, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Eldon:

'Rumour says', added his Lordship, 'that persons circulate projects of great benefit, and extract from the avarice and credulity of persons large sums of money.' Rumour! The poet painted Rumour with a hundred tongues:—is Lord Eldon, who 'will not know of the existence of the government of Peru;— is he, of all others, to be the victim of its multiplied garrulity? Rumour made the Earl of Grosvenor the gainer of half a million by his mine shares; Rumour made Mr. Adam the confident possessor of half Mexico; Rumour made Sir Wm. Adams a still great magnifico! Rumour has revolutionized kingdoms that never existed, has killed beings that never breathed; Rumour is the secretary of grand inquisitors and secret councils; Rumour is the evidence of despotic states; it sits in the divans of Soldans, it counsels in the courts of Austrian Caesars.— And will Lord Eldon...whose very prejudices grow out of his reverence of our ancient principles and ancient institutions, who would regulate the commerce of the nineteenth century by the common law of the ninth, — will he legislate for his country's weal on the tale of an hour, and the whisper of a day?¹⁸

The delineation of Lord Eldon as the man "who would regulate the commerce of the nineteenth century by the common law of the ninth" is an early example of Disraeli's facility with epigram which made him famous both as politician and a novelist. The idea was also expanded in Coningsby into the semi-fictional portrait of Lord Past-Century.

Disraeli's novels were verbal collages, drawing deliberately upon social and political material, without abandoning their claim to fictional status. A collage takes fragments of visual or documentary evidence and combines them according to a theme of its own. Its success depends upon a principle of selection — how appropriately ^{the author} chooses and arranges his material. Ideally, the finished work

refers back with heightened perception to the real world from which those fragments originally came. Disraeli took his from the world of politics and the form of the novel as the medium for their arrangement. The technique first appears in these pamphlets where, knowing nothing of the situation at first hand, Disraeli had to draw on the mining reports and prospectuses for information, and then arrange his material to support his argument as effectively as possible. But the wise politician knows how to relieve his thesis with some lighter touches (the nearest that Disraeli approaches 'fiction' in these works). The politician Disraeli was to delight his followers and torment opponents with illustrative or satiric devices, which enlivened dull stretches of debate. Since Lawyers and Legislators takes the form of a series of letters to individual officials or MP.'s, it gave him the opportunity to summarise characters in succinct vignettes, which again was invaluable stock-in-trade in Parliament. Hence a piece in Lawyers and Legislators entitled 'Delusion continued. Mr. Robertson. Steam Engines - Mining Schools':

This honourable gentleman is a great orator in a small way. He speaks often but shortly; he is strong in a philippic of three lines, and will destroy you with the logic of epithets. He calls Unitarians, Mahometans, political economists, political charlatans, and he looks upon the usury laws as something scarcely inferior to Magna Charta. He sits down, always, as if he had settled the question, and soon rises with an explanation twice as long as the original speech, as an awkward man will pay you a morning visit of five minutes, and then return to spend ten more, in looking for his hat, which he has left behind.¹⁹

The Inquiry contains a vivid set-piece description of society stirred out of its habitual scepticism as the speculative fever began to grip:

Then began the game. We heard of Lord Knows-Who lounging upon 'Change, of Sir Frederick Fashion's Colombian curricule, and of the Honourable Mr. - condescending to become a Director of 'the New Company'. The mines were la chose; they were the sujet at concert^s, conversaziones, and clubs. 'The University' looked with that supercilious yet anxious air with which its members, chiefly young barristers and 'alternate evening lecturers', are so conversant with [sic], on the mining article in 'the Courier'; - 'the Union' was suspiciously acquainted with 'how shares left off', and scandalous stories were told of puffing and panting Members gaining Pall Mall East with the latest intelligence; and the hebdomadal assemblée of 'the Athenaeum' diversified their usual topics of conversation, strictures on modern literature, and their own execrable wines, by an occasional inquiry 'after the state of the

market'...A mining story was as regularly expected with the second glass of Johannisberg, as a dissertation on the operatic legalities, or the latest piece of scandal served up with the sauce piquante of modern exaggeration... 20

This was the technique which made Coningsby and Sybil successful stimulants to public debate. Dealing with unalterable aspects of public affairs, there is no scope for pure invention. Instead, Disraeli sought to capture the essential features of an affair, but leave room to give his own interpretation of it, and present it in a graphic manner. And more than fifty years later the same set-piece style appears in Endymion, describing the railway boom of the 1840's. 21

The Inquiry and Lawyers and Legislators were therefore the product of both the future politician and the novelist, drawing upon respective skills in the two fields, and ultimately of relevance to both. It is significant/^{that} the Lawyers and Legislators should have been dedicated by Disraeli to George Canning: "who is not more eminent for his brilliant wit, and classic eloquence, than for that sedate sublimity of conception, which distinguishes the practical statesman, from the political theorist". 22

Disraeli's efforts on behalf of the mining companies were in vain; the South American 'bubble' burst in that same year, 1825. Many were ruined, and Disraeli himself saddled with debts which remained with him almost to his death. He turned instead to another project: the creation of a Canningite conservative newspaper to rival The Times, with Powles and Murray as partners. They fixed upon Walter Scott's son-in-law, Lockhart, as editor, and Disraeli was sent north to Edinburgh to conduct the negotiations. One could call this his first venture into practical politics, and, as with his political dealings in later life, he invested his experiences with a tint of glamorous adventure, casting himself as the fictional hero, as Blake records:

Disraeli kept Murray informed of negotiations in a series of letters which only add to the mystery of the story. He devised a code (which he sometimes forgot to keep). 'M from Melrose' was Lockhart, 'The Chevalier' Sir Walter, 'O' was 'The Political Puck', ie. Disraeli himself...In his third letter to Murray, probably written on September 21 he launched into what seems a world of pure fantasy. Lockhart is to be found a seat in Parliament. He must when he comes to town be convinced that 'through Powles all America and the Commercial Interest is at our back... that the Ch./Church/ is firm; that the West India Interest will pledge themselves; that such men as Barrow & C are

distinctly in our power...' Lockhart is 'not to be an Editor of a Newspaper but the Directeur General of an immense organ, and at the head of a band of high bred gentlemen and important interests...' There are references to 'X' and to Disraeli's ability to organize 'in the interest with which I am now engaged, a most immense party and a most serviceable one'. This sounds as if some sort of Canningite faction was envisaged, but, it may well have existed only in Disraeli's imagination.²³

Lockhart, however, was reluctant to leave Edinburgh for the post of newspaper editor, which involved as he saw it "losing caste in society".²⁴ Eventually a compromise was reached whereby he took the editorship of the Quarterly Review and at the same time undertook "'by all other means consistent with his rank in life to promote the sale and character' of the said newspaper".²⁵ Even then, however, the partners had to fight off an attempt by John Wilson Croker, Secretary to the Admiralty (and one of a group of long-standing contributors to the Quarterly Review) to block Lockhart's appointment as editor. The newspaper was officially named in December, 1826, but the stock-market crash soon after effectively removed Disraeli from the venture. It limped on without success for six months and eventually folded at a cost to Murray of £26,000.

But Disraeli's conception of the dramatic potential of the episode was not wasted. His mission to Scotland is mirrored in Vivian Grey, when the hero travels to Wales to persuade Cleveland out of misanthropic retirement to head the new Carabas faction.²⁶ The Representative (as the short-lived newspaper was known) affair is reflected in a number of other details.²⁷ Lockhart's satiric gifts had caused a rift between himself and Blackwood's magazine six years earlier: hence the old feud between Cleveland and Carabas. One of Croker's objections to Lockhart's appointment lay in the duel fought four years earlier between one of the latter's henchmen and John Scott, editor of the London Magazine, which resulted in Scott's death. Vivian Grey features a duel between Cleveland and Vivian himself, in which the former is killed.²⁸ Croker is perhaps represented as Stapylton Toad; he reappears in Coningsby as Monmouth's right-hand man, Rigby. Book IV, Chapter i of Vivian Grey also features a conversation on Byron's ageing condition taken from one of Murray's famous literary dinners.²⁹ The dinners themselves are satirised in those given by Carabas. Sir John Murray, grandson to the publisher, wrote in this respect:

I believe the real cause of my grandfather's resentment was not The Representative affair nor the loss of his money, but the feeling that he had been caricatured and that his confidence had been betrayed by Disraeli in Vivian Grey. So my father always told me.³⁰

The exact date of the composition of Vivian Grey is disputed, but is generally placed between late 1825 and early 1826, soon after the events it appears to recreate. In the novel Disraeli projected two images of himself, as writer and as adventurer-politician, which are reflected in each other. The central core of the work is an abortive attempt at political stardom by a talented but inexperienced youth, all narrated in the first person by Vivian Grey himself, in a tone which parallels the tenor of the action: initially impudent, later bitter and melancholic, breaking into anguished soliloquy. The narrator is a fusion of Disraeli and Vivian Grey, an image of himself as a world-weary adventurer, turning to his pen for solace. Behind this is the personality of the author, acknowledging the failure of his schemes. Through ^{the personality of} Vivian Grey he laughs at his former pretensions, meditates on the causes of his failure, and vows ultimate revenge. The novel is therefore an extension of his battle with society for acceptance and admiration, on the one hand, and an expression of his inner conflicts on the other.

Vivian Grey was also an attempt at literary success, despite its frivolous air. Subsequent efforts to suppress the work³¹ (until Disraeli admitted defeat and permitted a reprint in 1853) support this view; one is only ashamed of a scheme in which one has cherished some hope of success. There was no doubt a part of Disraeli which hoped ^{that} the successful publication of the work would confirm his talent in another field, for sensational if not poetic literature. His desire for anonymous publication was a shield not only from the objects of his satire but also from the critics, who wielded a strictly literary power. Moreover, Disraeli thereby imitated the example of R.P. Ward, in whose residence, Hyde House, near Amersham, he stayed during the autumn of 1825. Thus M.W. Rosa suggests two further motives behind the anonymity: "a love of mystification on Disraeli's part, or a desire to follow the authors of Tremaine and Waverley".³² Disraeli's confidante in the clandestine publication was Sarah Austen, whose husband Benjamin was the Disraeli family solicitor. Like all Disraeli's activities, Vivian Grey reflected a complicated 'chinese box' of inter-related motives.

Public reaction to the novel was a similar blend: it was ac-

cepted so long as it was believed that the author really was a part of the social world he satirised. When the truth emerged that he was in fact a boy of twenty-one, the critics were more concerned with the author than with the novel's intrinsic faults. 'Christopher North' in Blackwood's described it as "a paltry catchpenny" by "an obscure person for whom nobody cares a straw".³³ The Literary Magnet, in an article entitled 'The New Unknown', attacked "his most ludicrous affectation of good breeding".³⁴

Meanwhile, from April 19th to June 7th, 1826, there appeared in London a satirical magazine called The Star Chamber, printed by William Marsh. The authors kept themselves anonymous, but are generally believed to have been Peter Hall, William Meredith, and Disraeli himself. M. Sadleir makes a convincing argument for Disraeli's involvement in the magazine, in the introduction to his edition of 'The Dunciad of Today' and 'The Modern Aesop' (which are taken from numbers five and seven of The Star Chamber respectively).³⁵ There are certainly striking reflections not only of Disraeli's satirical style, but also of the issues which concerned him at the time. In the background was the collapse of the South American mining boom. The Representative episode still rankled. Part One of Vivian Grey had just been published, but the author's true identity had yet to be revealed, and Disraeli can be seen in The Star Chamber enjoying the luxury of that situation. When the storm broke over Vivian Grey, the magazine had already folded, and a month later in July, 1826, Disraeli left England for a tour of Switzerland and Italy with the Austens.

In The Star Chamber Disraeli is similarly to be found giving vent to feelings of frustration and failure, generally in the self-righteous tone of the moral satirist. He creates an image of himself as the castigator of society's weaknesses. For example, no time is wasted in mounting revenge upon John Murray. In 'No. 112, Pall Mall' Hilary Dart (Murray himself), Mr. Babel and Mr. Fitzeldon are found discussing contributions for a proposed literary and social journal. (With obvious reference to The Representative). They are seated in a sumptuous chamber amidst the debris of an epicurean spread; the décor and the projects under discussion alike mock the owner's pretensions.³⁶

Two major tendencies of Disraeli's later novels are much in evidence, therefore: the habit of writing in short bursts of satire or rhapsody rather than sustaining a theme, and of portraying fig-

ures in society with a minimum of disguise. In the sixth number of the magazine, however, there is an opportunistic reminder to Murray of services rendered:

(b) On p. 105 of The Star Chamber (in No. 6) is a very laudatory review of the second edition of Croker's Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland, just published by Murray. The publisher is lavishly complimented on his taste and liberality in thus furnishing forth an admirable work; Maclise's illustrations are applauded and the book itself is declared one which 'everybody must purchase'. It was on Disraeli's advice that Murray in 1825 accepted this book for publication. It sold well, and Disraeli would not be loth to remind the publisher ^{wife whom he had quarrelled} of one of the few results of their ^{former} intimacy which had not involved Albemarle Street in loss.³⁷

So The Star Chamber was used as a personal weapon, just as in later political novels and speeches Disraeli was to conduct private campaigns under the cloak of party. Sir Walter Scott, who had advised Lockhart against involvement in The Representative, is taken to task in the words of Mr. Fitzeldon:

The Baronet seems to imagine that improvising a dozen octavos per annum, and editing and writing prefaces to fifty more, is enough employment for his grey goose quill. Sadly changed ^{must he be} since last I breathed in his fair castle of Abbotsford.³⁸

And throughout The Star Chamber there is a relentless strain of satire on Stewart Rose, one of Murray's readers.³⁹

In no. 7 of The Star Chamber Disraeli defends the magazine against evidently mounting public criticism, under the title 'Vindiciae Judiciales. The Authority of the Great Tribunal Asserted', which shows him encased in the protective image of the moral satirist. An indiscriminate attack on the Press of the day contains dark references to neglected responsibilities and vested interests. The Star Chamber is seen as a moral correction for those offences which the Law cannot, or will not, interdict and its origin "that a sudden and decisive blow should be struck in defence of British spirit and integrity".⁴⁰ The piece builds up to an absurdly inflated climax:

NO CITY SHOULD BE WITHOUT ITS SATIRIST. Fashionable frivolities are soon succeeded by fashionable vices, and few are the misdemeanours in society, which may not be numbered under this head, and are more likely to be extirpated by ridicule, than subdued by any sense of moral or religious obligation...We will at least make the attempt, and should we eventually affect the METROPOLIS, we hope one day to influence the EMPIRE.⁴¹

The final number of The Star Chamber dedicates the magazine to criticism of an almost indiscriminate range of public ills:

The corruptions of ministerial influence, especially so far as appertains to our commercial and agricultural interests, to the fallacious enthusiasm of Grecian independence, to the impositions of parliamentary candidates and their dishonest practices, to the emaciated debility of our poetical, and to the craft of our periodical literature.⁴²

Disraeli's part earlier in boosting the South American mining interest does not inhibit him from condemning its representatives after the collapse:

Mr. Alderman Thompson surely can scarcely be refused the votes of those fathers whose sons have been ruined by the precious associations which the worthy Alderman has introduced to public notice, - has puffed to private "friends", - and which we believe, are all now on the point of dissolution or despair!

...Mr. Pasco Grenfell, will perhaps be so good as to transmit us an account of the Colombian Mining Company; we understand that the mines of this company change character every week, producing copper and silver alternately.

...Brazilian-Mining-Joshua-Walker requires only this notice.⁴³

We can also imagine Disraeli therapeutically ridding himself of a sense of guilt and failure by exposing these schemes, albeit late in the day.

The Star Chamber also contains political observations which anticipate Disraeli's later views. There is a prophetic jibe at Peel put into Hilary Dart's mouth:

Let him have prepared immediately a luminous resumé of his "Consolidation Career". His private secretary, or one of his working barristers, can draw it up, and he can afterwards throw his eye over it. ⁴⁴ The public want it, and we'll insert it in an early number.

'Parliamentary Logic, No. 1' debates the request of the President of the Board of Trade for an increase in salary on the grounds of his secondary responsibilities as Treasurer of the Navy. Disraeli dubs the incumbent, Mr. Huskisson, "that magnus Apollo of finance and sinecures", and ironically points up his declaration that he could not adequately fulfil both posts ("a candid confession of incompetency"), observing: "we must admire the effrontery of a man who continues in an office, the duties of which he has actually confessed himself unable to perform".⁴⁵

As a climax to this article Disraeli touches on a theme cen-

tral to his later speeches and writings, that the true Tories will rise up against the "strange pilots" who hold "the specious titles of Tories". He concludes in a peroration worthy of his days as leader of the Protectionists:

When the people of England find that the morrow only dawns to witness the introduction of destructive novelties, or the destruction of antient [sic] interests and recognised rights - when they find, moreover, that, by a political juggle, at this moment no opposition exists in the House of Commons to watch over their rights, we ask, whether they will not unanimously rise, and find once more in the now reviled power, and prerogative of the Crown, a refuge and a salvation⁴⁶ from the unprincipled conduct of a desperate cabal.

Venturing into foreign politics, we find Disraeli giving outlet to views on the question of Turkey and Greek independence, which again accord with sentiments he expressed later; both on his Eastern travels, and later in his conduct of foreign affairs. He could not ignore the part played by his hero, Byron, in the struggle for Greek independence, but ridicules in 'The Dunciad of Today' those who followed blindly in his footsteps.⁴⁷

As a contributor to The Star Chamber, Disraeli was neither a novelist nor a politician. But these pieces reveal how the interests of the writer and the embryo-politician were already in evidence, and how the skills of both were being turned to mutual advantage, culminating eventually in Coningsby and Sybil, and in his political speeches in the House of Commons.

After the closure of The Star Chamber (for reasons which are not documented) Disraeli accepted an invitation from the Austens to holiday with them in Switzerland and Northern Italy, leaving in July, 1826. The years after his return, in the autumn of that year, are largely a blank to biographers. His health, never robust, may have enforced a quieter life than usual. In late spring, 1828, what had been The Adventures of Aylmer Papillon was published as The Voyage of Captain Popanilla.⁴⁸ Monypenny describes it as "Disraeli's first political essay", but admits that, in ridiculing the Corn Laws and the Colonial system, he revealed a distinctly different political stance from that which was to make his fame in later years.⁴⁹ At this stage Disraeli was less concerned with actual political questions than with a more generalised satire of fashionable and utilitarian elements in society.

He also became interested in David Alroy, Jewish hero of the

twelfth century, and set out to record his legend in literary form. He urged his father Isaac to support him on a journey to the East, but without success. Reporting the sad news to Benjamin Austen, he added the playful postscript: "By the bye, I advise you to take care of my letters, for if I become half as famous as I intend to be you may sell them for ten guineas apiece to the Keepsake for 1840..."⁵⁰

Having failed to achieve success as a speculator, journalist and author, Disraeli resorted to making an impression in fashionable society. Meredith records in his diary for March 29, 1830:

'B.D. to dine with me. He came up Regent Street, when it was crowded, in his blue surtout, a pair of military light blue trousers, black stockings with red stripes, and shoes!"The people", he said, "quite made way for me as I passed. It was like the opening of the Red Sea, which I now perfectly believe from experience. Even well-dressed people stopped to look at me". I should think so!⁵¹

Thus Monypenny states that the Duke of St. James, hero of the novel on which Disraeli was currently working, The Young Duke,

possesses certain qualities which appear again and again in the heroes of Disraeli's novels, and appear because they are reflected from the author's own personality. 'He was a sublime coxcomb, one of those rare characters whose finished manner and shrewd sense, combined prevent their conceit from being contemptible.'⁵²

Some serious concerns do appear in the novel despite the predominantly 'fashionable' interest. The climax is the hero's awakening to social and political responsibility, when he makes an impassioned speech in favour of Catholic Emancipation.⁵³ But as the Young Duke prepared to face his responsibilities, Disraeli was planning to escape his own. In 1830 he departed for the East with Meredith (now engaged to Sarah Disraeli), not to return until late in the following year. Meredith did not return with him; stricken with smallpox, he died in Cairo on July 19, 1831.⁵⁴ Sarah never fully recovered, nor did she marry, but devoted herself instead to her elder brother.

Contarini Fleming was published in May, 1832, and Alroy in March, 1833, although both works had been virtually complete on his return. Even in one of his active phases he did not neglect the more literary side of his nature, but did justice to his travel experiences in the letters and novels on which he continued to work throughout. Thus ended a stage in his life in which he saw his hopes of distinction, literary or otherwise, temporarily defeated.

- He was yet to learn that he must curb his multifarious aspirations and harmonise the two for which he had real talent - as a novelist and as a politician - before he could achieve success in either.

References.

1. W.F. Monypenny and G.E. Buckle, The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield (2 vols, 1929) I, 8.
2. MB., I, 8; Memoir of Isaac Disraeli, x-xi.
3. MB., I, 23.
4. MB., I, 29.
5. Vivian Grey (Colburn, 1826-7), 13.
6. MB., I, 33.
7. MB., I, 37.
8. VG., 18.
9. MB., I, 37.
10. MB., I, 39.
11. MB., I, 39-40.
12. MB., I, 44.
13. The Voyage of Captain Popanilla (Colburn, 1828).
14. MB., I, 59.
15. Both published by Murray in 1825. My references to the Inquiry are to the third edition (also 1825).
16. VG., 266-288.
17. Inquiry, 116-117.
18. Lawyers and Legislators, 19-20.
19. Lawyers and Legislators, 70.
20. Inquiry, 99.
21. Endymion (Longmans, 1880), 352-360.
22. Preface to Lawyers and Legislators.
23. R. Blake, Disraeli (1966), 28; for the whole of this episode see Blake, 27-34, and MB., I, 65-82.
24. MB., I, 69.
25. MB., I, 72-73.
26. VG.; Book III, Chapters i and ii, 89-95.
27. See C.C. Nickerson, 'Disraeli, Lockhart, and Murray: An Episode in the history of the 'Quarterly Review'', Victorian Studies, XV, no. 3 (March 1972), 279-306.

28. VG., Book IV, Chapter v.
29. C.C. Nickerson, Disraeli as a Novelist (Phd. Thesis, Oxford, 1971), 4; MB., I, 37-38.
30. MB., I, 78; see also Blake, 42-43.
31. MB., I, 89.
32. M.W. Rosa, The Silver-Fork School (New York, 1936), 101.
33. Blackwood's Magazine, 'Noctes Ambrosianae', XX, no. 27 (July 1826), 98.
34. The Literary Magnet, 'The New Unknown', X, ns. II (July 1826), 3.
35. M. Sadleir (ed), The Dunciad of Today & The Modern Aesop (1928). In this connection it is also worth noting the discovery of another work strongly believed to have been written by Disraeli (and his sister Sarah), A Year at Hartlebury, or the Election. (Published under the pseudonyms 'Cherry and Fair Star' by Saunders and Otley in 1834). As with The Star Chamber identification is based on strong echoes of characteristically Disraelian concerns, as revealed in his other works, and upon stylistic similarities. Progress in this field unfortunately came too late for consideration in this thesis. See the Disraeli Newsletter, IV, no. 2 (Fall, 1979), which is devoted to this topic.
36. The Star Chamber, no. 1 (April 19, 1826), 1-11.
37. M. Sadleir, Dunciad, 13-14.
38. The Star Chamber, no. 1, 5.
39. M. Sadleir, Dunciad, 8-10.
40. The Star Chamber, no. 7 (May 24, 1826), 112.
41. *ibid.*, 113.
42. The Star Chamber, no. 9 and last (June 7, 1826), 149.
43. The Star Chamber, no.s 2 and 3 (April 26, 1826), 27-28.
44. The Star Chamber, no. 1, 3.
45. The Star Chamber, no.s 2 and 3, 25.
46. *ibid.*, 26-27.
47. The Star Chamber, no. 5 (May 10, 1826), 75-84.
48. See MB., I, 121-124.
49. MB., I, 123.
50. MB., I, 125-126.
51. MB., I, 128.
52. MB., I, 132; referring to The Young Duke (Colburn and Bentley, 1831).

53. YD, 303.

54. MB., I, 181.

2. Travels:

Every person I saw, and every place I observed, seemed strange and new: I felt in a far land. And for adventures, my own consciousness was surely a sufficient one, for was I not a nobleman incognito, going on a pilgrimage to Venice? To say nothing of the adventures that might then occur; here were materials for the novelist!¹

In July, 1824, Disraeli set off with his father Isaac and William Meredith on a tour of the continent. The party travelled by steamer to Ostend, then through Belgium to Cologne, and toured along the Rhine valley as far as Mannheim, Heidelberg and Coblenz. In September they made their way up the valley of the Moselle to Luxembourg and returned to England via Calais. By November Disraeli was involved in those financial speculations which replaced his legal career.²

His experiences on the holiday are preserved in an unfinished diary and in a series of letters to his sister Sarah (extracts of which are printed by Monypenny).³ They reveal a reciprocal relation already at work between the outgoing young traveller and the descriptive writer. He threw himself wholeheartedly into tasting the life of each city through which they passed, but also recorded the details at length, often in lyrical or exuberant set-pieces whose writing, one may imagine, was as much a part of the enjoyment as the original experience. "Here were materials for the novelist" indeed. Conversely, he liked to view his activities in the light of a Romantic novel, with himself as the hero: a tendency which was heightened by the atmosphere of travel. A similar relationship was to operate later between his bona fide careers as a politician and novelist, producing on the one hand novels which somehow bridged the worlds of politics and of his own idiosyncratic imagination; and on the other hand, as Prime Minister, a series of highly unconventional acts which belied his status as the representative of sober Tory statesmanship. For Disraeli, travelling was not a digression in his life, but was an aspect of his self-advertisement and search for a lifestyle. Nor did he entirely abandon his interest in politics whilst abroad. Monypenny records what is "probably his first political observation", made while travelling between Spa and Aix in August, 1824, on the antipathy of the Belgians to their Dutch masters.⁴ Two years later he wrote home from Geneva: "Tell Jim and Ralph Disraeli's younger brothers I'd give anything for an election".⁵ In 1831 he made observations on the Turkish conduct of pol-

itics, improvements in their army, and the difficulty of the Sultan's constitutional position, at the same time commenting on the domestic political scene in England, disturbed by the progress of the Reform Bill. The influence of these travels in the East on his later career can be traced in his conduct of foreign policy from 1874 to 1880. His approach to the Eastern question, India and Suez was to show a strong oriental bias.

A letter from Cologne of August 14th, 1824, brings out Disraeli's tendency to treat his experiences as the material of a picturesque novel:

pen and ink, and particularly the miserable material with which I am scratching, can give you no idea of our rich adventures...We were asleep when we entered the Prussian frontier, and the governor mistook the officer for an innkeeper and kindly informed him that he had taken refreshment at Limburg. The rest of this scene, which was exquisite, when we meet...We slept on Thursday at Juliers, and had rich adventures at a country inn.⁶

Blake comments: "The letters show a sharpness of observation and a satirical eye which anticipate the author of Vivian Grey".⁷ But the future author was more directly indebted to these experiences. Part two of the novel, written in 1826, draws extensively on details taken from the trip. For example, Disraeli wrote to Sarah from Mainz, describing the hospitality they received: "The governor allows us to debauch to the utmost, and Hochheimer, Johannisberg, Rudesheimer, Assmannshausen, and a thousand other varieties are unsealed and floored with equal rapidity".⁸ This is reflected in the grotesque scene of the Supernaculum drinking ritual.⁹ Inspiration for the episode may also have come from their stay in Coblenz, where, as Meredith records, they were shown a collection of unusual drinking vessels.¹⁰

The same letter describes their journey to Ems, in the principality of Nassau, and the establishment catering for the famous baths there, which Disraeli calls "the very Castle of Indolence". All this is faithfully echoed in Book V, Chapter v of Vivian Grey, even to the number of rooms in the hotel and baths at the Spa. The countryside of Nassau is represented in the setting of the picnic made by Vivian Grey and his acquaintances at the resort in Book V, Chapter xv. On August 23rd Disraeli wrote from Heidelberg to give a glowing account of a performance of Otello by the famous Darmstadt opera.¹¹ Thus in Book V, Chapter iii of Vivian Grey Von Konigstein masterminds a pseudo-diplomatic attempt to prise an opera-singer,

"the Signora", from the Darmstadt house.

Blake adds a strange footnote to this catalogue of literary borrowings which shows the process in reverse. In Book V, Chapter xi of Vivian Grey we are told how Von Konigstein inveigled Violet Fane's "unhappy brother" into deeper and deeper involvement with a gambling clique, leading eventually to his death. In fact, as transpires, the Baron had no part in the plot, and had tried indeed to save the unfortunate young man. Six years after writing Vivian Grey, returning from Egypt in 1832, Disraeli struck up a friendship with Henry Stanley, younger brother of the future 14th Earl of Derby. They went to London together, and then Henry disappeared:

"he was eventually run to earth at Effie Bond's, the Keeper of the Hell in St. James' Street where he had taken up his quarters and to which it was alleged Disraeli had introduced him" the charge being that Disraeli had some pecuniary interest in bringing a young man of high family to be fleeced by the proprietor.¹²

For a long time Edward Stanley refused to accept Disraeli's innocence, and the fact that, like Von Konigstein, he had actually tried to dissuade young Henry from his course of folly. Thus did life copy art.

In July, 1826, Disraeli left for a holiday in Switzerland and northern Italy with the Austens, returning through France in October.¹³ His letters show the same tendency to write himself into the pages of a novel:

We reached Paris Sunday afternoon, and are now in the Rue de Rivoli, the best situation here, having obtained these apartments in a manner which would make an excellent chapter in Gil Blas, and beat the adventure of the Hotel Garni hollow.¹⁴

On August 21st he wrote from Geneva describing one of those Romantic 'spots of time', a first glimpse of the High Alps with Mont Blanc in the centre.¹⁵ A passage in his diary describes the effect of sunrise and sunset upon the peaks, while the rest of the world remained in twilight.¹⁶ Both these pieces of observation reappear in Contarini Fleming.¹⁷

Geneva was of course hallowed for Disraeli through Byronic associations, and in the same letter he remarked: "I take a row/ every night with Maurice, Lord Byron's/boatman".¹⁸ From Maurice he collected many anecdotes of his hero, including that of Byron's famous night out on the lake in a storm which is described in the third Canto of Childe Harold. Hence a letter from Milan on September 2nd

reports that on the night before leaving Geneva Disraeli went out on the lake with Austen and Maurice, after the latter had indicated that there would be a good storm: "I would willingly have staid out all night".¹⁹ In Italy itself Disraeli continued to follow in Byron's footsteps, particularly in Venice, where the poet lived on the island of San Lazzarro for a time to undertake the study of Armenian. "In short, Disraeli's Italian/^{trip}involved playing the part of another Childe Harold".²⁰ But, true to the reciprocal quality of his two natures, he also plundered extensively to obtain material for a novel which was not written for over a decade, Venetia.

Disraeli's most formative tour began in May, 1830, when he had dashed off The Young Duke to raise the necessary funds. Again, however, he took his writing with him:

The letters written to his family during the journey have been published since his death; and after the lapse of eighty years they retain their freshness and interest in a way that is rare with such compositions. Keen observation, a graphic and vivacious style, the power of concentrating a picture into a phrase, and a strain of joyous raillery running through all are the elements of their charm...Meredith, Disraeli's companion, was much better educated, much more methodical, and much more conscientiously laborious in profiting by the opportunities of the journey; but his diary and letters...help one to realise how easily the scenes and incidents to which the man of imagination can lend an abiding interest may become in the hands of ²¹another the subject of a prosy and lifeless chronicle.

It was Meredith himself who observed, in making that description of Disraeli's dandified appearance in 1830 which we have noticed above²²: "He was in excellent spirits, full of schemes for the projected journey to Stamboul and Jerusalem; full, as usual, also of capital stories, but he could make a story out of nothing".²³

The two sailed by the mail packet to Gibraltar, and soon Disraeli was writing to Austen of his enchantment with the Spanish atmosphere:

I entered Spain a sceptic with regard to their robbers, and listened to all their romances with a smile. I lived to change my opinion. I at length found a country where ²⁴adventure is the common course of existence.

Of Cadiz he observed: "Figaro is in every street; Rosina in every balcony".²⁵ Disraeli describes how they were invited by "a grand lady of Madrid" to join her escort to Granada ("It was a truly Gil Blas scene") and recreated their moonlit journey in "a

scene that might have been written by Dickens".²⁶

The moon rises on our course: for the first two leagues all is anxiety, as it was well known that a strong band was lying in wait for the 'great lady'. After two leagues we began to hope, when suddenly our guide informs us that he hears a trampling of horses in the distance. Ave Maria! A cold perspiration came over me... The band turned out to be a company of actors travelling to Cordova...²⁷

The graphic present tense indicates his absorption in the tale. He added characteristically: "All this irresistibly reminded me of Cervantes".

At Granada Disraeli visited the Alhambra, and although the reality was itself impressive, he could not resist entering imaginatively into a reconstruction of its former glory:

But conceive it in the times of the Boabdils; conceive it with all its courtly decoration, all the gilding, all the imperial purple, all the violet relief, all the scarlet borders, all the glittering inscriptions and costly mosaics, burnished, bright and fresh; conceive it full of still greater ornaments, the living groups with their rich and vivid and picturesque costume, and, above all, their shining arms; some standing in groups conversing, some smoking in sedate silence, some telling their beads, some squatting round a storier. Then the bustle and the rush, and the arming horsemen all in motion, and all glancing in the most brilliant sun.²⁸

Returning to Gibraltar on the way to Malta, Disraeli paid his final compliment to the peninsula: "This is the country for a national novelist" he told Sarah.²⁹

On the island of Malta itself Disraeli made an unforgettable impression on the garrison community with his "buffooneries", although not always a favourable one ("that damned bumptious Jew boy" as one designated him).³⁰ He also made use of his experiences in writing Henrietta Temple, representing the hero Ferdinand Armine as a cadet of the garrison.³¹

The pair were joined on Malta by an old friend, James Clay, whose glamorous adventures Disraeli stressed in describing him to Isaac:

Really he has turned out a most agreeable personage, and has had that advantage of society in which he had been deficient, and led a life which for splendid adventure would beat any young gentleman's yet published in three vols. post 8vo.³²

With Clay came another living witness to the Byronic legend, his valet, Tita, who had been gondolier to the great man in Venice,

and was with him at Misolonghi when he died.³³ Tita accompanied the trio on the remainder of their travels in the Levant, and was given a post at the Disraeli family home, Bradenham, on return to England.

Disraeli tried to indulge further in the Byronic mode by venturing to Corfu to join - not the Greek forces - but those of her bitter foe, Turkey, occupied with an insurrection in Albania. By the time he arrived, however, the crisis was over, and the party made a tour of the ravaged province instead. Disraeli records an episode on the journey from Arta to Yanina, in the middle of which they were stranded in a "vast but dilapidated khan as big as a gothic castle". The young Bey in command was unable to understand Tita's Greek, and the comic description centres on attempts to overcome the language barrier:

it occurred to us that we had some brandy, and that we would offer our host a glass, as it might be a hint for what should follow, ^{so} so vehement a schnapps. Mashallah! Had the effect only taken place 1830 years ago, instead of in the present age of scepticism, it would have been instantly voted a first-rate miracle. Our mild friend smacked his lips and instantly asked for another cup; we drank it in coffee cups. By the time that Meredith had returned, who had left the house on pretence of shooting, Clay, our host, and myself had despatched a bottle of brandy in quicker time and fairer proportions than I ever did a bottle of Burgundy, and were extremely gay.

...At last we insisted upon Giovanni's Tita communicating our wants and asking for bread. The Bey gravely bowed and said, "Leave it to me; take no thought", and nothing more occurred. We prepared ourselves for hungry dreams, when to our ^{great} delight a most capital supper was brought in, accompanied, to our great horror, by - wine. We ate, we drank, we ate with our fingers, we drank in a manner I never recollect. The wine was not bad, but if it ^{had been} poison we must drink; it was such a compliment for a Moslem; we quaffed it in rivers. The Bey called for the brandy; he drank it all. The room turned round; the wild attendants who sat at our feet seemed dancing in strange and fantastic whirls; the Bey shook hands with me; he shouted English - I Greek. "Very good" he had caught up from us. "Kalo, kalo" was my rejoinder. He roared; I smacked him on the back. I remember no more. In the middle of the night I woke. I found myself sleeping on the divan, rolled up in ^{its} sacred carpet; the Bey had ^{wisely} reeled to the fire.³⁴

It was in Albania and Turkey that Disraeli developed that taste for the oriental style and culture which had a permanent effect on him. But the immediate result was a wealth of material for his next novel, Contarini Fleming. For example, the scene described above

appears with little alteration in the novel.³⁵ So do many other of Disraeli's experiences on the trip, including an interview with the Grand Vizier³⁶ and an excited description of Constantinople.³⁷

Book V draws extensively upon Disraeli's experiences in Spain in the early chapters and on impressions of Greece, the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus in the later chapters. Book VI faithfully follows the course of the party after they left Turkey, down the coast of Asia Minor, through Syria to Jerusalem, the high point of the tour.³⁸ Disraeli's impressions of the Holy City also furnish the central scenes of Tancred³⁹ and, later, Lothair.⁴⁰ In making an observation on the dangers of wearing the Frankish dress in this alien culture, Disraeli subsequently appended a note in Contarini Fleming which makes the link explicit: "The reader will be kind enough to remember that these observations were made in Syria in the year 1830. Since that period the Levant has undergone great vicissitudes".⁴¹ In March, 1831, the party arrived in Egypt; their progress is reflected elliptically in Contarini Fleming.⁴² Disraeli's Eastern travels also inspired another work which, as we have seen,⁴³ was long in his mind, a tale of the Jewish hero, David Alroy. So the novelist was indebted for a significant element of four of his works to his career of wandering: "he certainly could not have written Contarini, Alroy, Tancred or even Lothair but for the sense of atmosphere which he absorbed during these sixteen months of travel".⁴⁴

Even those works which owe no direct debt to the travels have the signs of a similar method of composition. Coningsby and Sybil were the successful productions of a keen observer and commentator, making the most of a range of borrowed material, from autobiographical incidents to government Blue-books. At the same time, the instincts of the novelist for sympathising with and imaginatively working upon the situations in which he found himself, acting a part in a self-created drama, were to have their effect both in the later novels and, more importantly, in the fulfilment of as yet unarticulated ambitions. Blake continues:

The significance of the Eastern tour lies rather in the way that it affected his attitude on critical issues of foreign and imperial policy, which, as chance would have it, were to dominate public affairs during his premiership forty-four years later.⁴⁵

References.

1. Contarini Fleming (Murray, 1832), 63.
2. MB., I, 59; see Chapter 1, Section 1, above.
3. For an account of the holiday, see MB., I, 46-57; and Blake, 21-22.
4. MB., I, 52.
5. MB., I, 102.
6. MB., I, 51-52.
7. Blake, 22.
8. MB., I, 53.
9. VG., 266-288.
10. W.G. Meredith, A Tour to the Rhine (1825), 53.
11. MB., I, 55-56.
12. Blake, 71; quoting Sir Philip Rose.
13. MB., I, 98-115; Blake, 51-53.
14. MB., I, 99.
15. MB., I, 100.
16. MB., I, 102-103.
17. CF., 191,195.
18. MB., I, 100-101.
19. MB., I, 103.
20. J.A. Lovat-Fraser, 'With Disraeli in Italy', Cornhill Magazine, CXXXVIII (August 1930), 192.
21. MB., I, 140-141.
22. See above, Chapter 1, Section 1.
23. MB., I, 128.
24. MB., I, 147.
25. loc. cit.
26. D.E. Sultana, Benjamin Disraeli in Spain, Malta and Albania, 1830-32 (1976), 25-26.
27. MB., I, 150-151.
28. MB., I, 152.
29. MB., I, 156.

30. MB., I, 159.
31. Henrietta Temple (Colburn, 1837), 57-64.
32. MB., I, 158.
33. MB., I, 161; and Appendix 'A', 'Tita', 387-389.
34. MB., I, 163-165.
35. CF., 310-313.
36. MB., I, 166; CF., 316-319.
37. MB., I, ¹⁷²⁻173; CF., 332-333.
38. CF., 350-352.
39. Tancred, or, The New Crusade (Colburn, 1847), Book III, 167-235.
40. Lothair (Longmans, 1870), 398-423.
41. CF., 352.
42. CF., 357-359.
43. The Wondrous Tale of Alroy (Saunders and Otley, 1833); see above, Chapter 1; Section 1.
44. Blake, 59.
45. loc. cit.

3. The 'Autobiographical' Trilogy.

Monypenny's designation of Popanilla as "Disraeli's first political essay"¹ suggests it as the starting-point for a study of the use of the novel by the emerging politician Disraeli. Paradoxically, however, it tells us less about the relationship between the politician and the novelist in this early period than the other works which are not so obviously 'political' in tone. Popanilla had its origins in its prototype, The Adventures of Mr. Aylmer Papillon, and in the pamphleteering of 1824 to 1826, and yet it belongs spiritually to the later period 1833 to 1836, when Disraeli wrote a number of semi-political satires as part of his overall campaign to establish himself in political life. Being overtly orientated towards politics, however, it does not show the way in which Disraeli's growing interest in politics began to pervade apparently divorced aspects of his life. The 'Autobiographical' Trilogy, on the other hand, is far more revealing of the way in which he was already (and often unconsciously) developing interests and techniques which were later to be influential in harmonising the demands of the politician and the novelist. Where politics does appear as a theme, it is an unprompted expression of personal aspiration, rather than being included as part of a formula, which is often the case in Popanilla:

In Vivian Grey I have portrayed my active and real ambition: in Alroy my ideal ambition. The Psychological Romance is a development of my poetic character. This trilogy is the secret history of my feelings - I shall write no more about myself.²

This excerpt from Disraeli's 'Mutilated Diary' indicates how strong and varied were his ambitions at this time. Each novel, in addition, takes a colour from the circumstances of its writing. Vivian Grey, written after the collapse of the Representative newspaper scheme, shows a desire for success in public affairs, as the Frontispiece affirms: "Why then the world's mine oyster / Which I with sword will open". Not only is ambition a theme within the work, but as we have seen,³ Vivian Grey was itself an attempt at fame, of a sensationalist variety: "a bold bid for personal distinction, which the author easily perceived already to be 'the only passport to the society of the great in England' ".⁴ By contrast Contarini Fleming was an attempt at literary perfection, in part a reaction to the hasty composition of Disraeli's previous novel, The Young Duke. The preface to Contarini Fleming states Disraeli's intention

to explore the development of the poetic character, "a subject... which is virgin in the imaginative literature of every country".⁵ Again, therefore, ambition is both a theme within the book, and the motivation for its writing. Contarini Fleming does not confine itself to a study of the poetic character, but deals with its active counterpart as well. Disraeli's twin priorities may be divined from a strongly autobiographical claim made by the hero: "At an age when some have scarcely entered upon their career, I can look back upon past years spent in versatile adventure and long meditation".⁶ Alroy, too, is not confined to a celebration of the title-hero, but has obvious relevance to the predicament of Jews generally, and to Disraeli's personal situation. That it was also a bid for literary distinction is evident from the style: a self-conscious prose-poetry rhythm, strong in biblical echoes, and a narrative structure modelled also on biblical and classical archetypes. At the end, Miriam draws some comfort from the ruin of her brother's empire, and his impending execution:

within whose veins our sacred blood may flow,
 perchance some poet, in some distant age, / his fancy fired
 with ~~the~~ national theme, may strike his harp to Alroy's
 wild career, and consecrate a name too long forgotten?

The early novels are not limited to a single theme, just as at this stage in his life Disraeli would not compromise his many ambitions. But they do reveal two goals - the literary and the 'political' - emerging into joint pre-eminence. Disraeli's other aspirations came to be grouped around these poles, or expressed through a form of them: his love of costume and pageantry, his respect for tradition, his affinity with oriental customs, a sense of alienation from English society and pride in his Jewish heritage, an intermittent revolutionary spirit, and a developing interest in social and political affairs.

In Book II, Chapter xiv of Vivian Grey, the hero outlines to Mrs. Million his ideal situation in life: he would be born in the middle class or lower, so as to have a character "impartially developed", and "no hereditary prejudices, no hereditary passions"; he would have great wealth, but acquired neither by commerce nor by inheritance. Thus "I would experience the same passions and be subject to the same feelings, only they should be exercised ^{and influential} in a wider sphere... Such a lot would indeed be princely!"⁸ Contarini Fleming, laying claim to "the unimpassioned spirit which the philosopher can alone command", expresses the hope:

Yet if I am to be remembered, let me be remembered as one who, in a sad night of gloomy ignorance and savage bigotry was prescient of the flaming morning-break of bright philosophy, as one who ^{deeply} sympathised with his fellow-men, and felt a proud and profound conviction of their perfectibility; as one who devoted himself to the amelioration of his kind, by the destruction of error and the propagation of truth.⁹

These are 'political' manifestos⁸ of a sort. The hero aspires to be an almost Renaissance figure in his freedom from the interests of any one class, and in styling himself a philosopher he annexes a monopoly of wisdom, and the right to criticize without restriction. By putting these fantasies into a novel, Disraeli went some way to 'creating' his ideal world, although in so doing he betrayed his immaturity. Yet almost twenty years later he was laying the same stress on his impartiality in writing Coningsby and Sybil, through a conception of 'the writer as prophet' which informs these works.

In Vivian Grey, however, this impartiality appears rather as egocentricity: a straightforward venting of Disraeli's feelings of frustrated ambition. "The only significant point of contact", says D.E. Painting of the hero, "between his outlook and that of Coningsby, Egremont and the later political heroes is a steadfastness of purpose which makes him as earnest in his egotism as they are in their altruism".¹⁰ The hero and the author are virtually indistinguishable, particularly in an outburst such as abruptly opens Chapter vii of Book I: "...certain it is, to enter high society, a man must either have blood, a million, or a genius". Turning then to his own situation, he exclaims: "Curse on my lot! that the want of a few rascal counters, and the possession of a little rascal blood, should mar my fortunes!"¹¹ In an openly authorial soliloquy in The Young Duke, he cites unfulfilled ambition as an agony even greater than failure:

Think of unrecognised Caesar, with his wasting youth, weeping over the Macedonian's young career! Could Pharsalia compensate for those withering pangs? View the obscure Napoleon starving in the streets of Paris! What was St. Helena to the bitterness of such existence?¹²

And not forgetting other manifestations of ambition, he adds, significantly: "Lo! Byron bending o'er his shattered lyre, with inspiration in his very rage".

In compensation for his frustration, Disraeli/Vivian Grey develops a blueprint plan to attain the success hitherto denied. In

Book I, Chapter viii he reckons up his assets: "I can perform right skillfully upon the most splendid of musical instruments, the human voice, to make those conceptions beloved by others".¹³

The political techniques of later years are displayed in Vivian's triumphant appearance at Horace Grey's dinner-table. He defends his future patron, Carabas, by reference to Bolingbroke's political thought - improved and misquoted, of course, as it was to be on several later occasions in his hands. ("He possessed also the singular faculty of being able to improvise quotations".)¹⁴ He earns further gratitude by tactfully representing this defence as emanating from Carabas himself, and thereby develops the first of many precepts: "It was a rule with Vivian Grey never to advance any opinion as his own [but] as that of some eminent and considered personage".¹⁵ Hence also: "A smile for a friend, and a sneer for the world, is the way to govern mankind, and such was the motto of Vivian Grey";¹⁶ and: "If you wish to win a man's heart, allow him to confute you".¹⁷

The hero's tactics at Chateau Desir are part of Vivian Grey's formulation of the code by which he intends to rise in the world. Ostensibly concerned with social manipulation, it is as much a part of the hero's personal-political campaign (particularly in view of the close identification which existed at the time of writing between the worlds of politics and of country-house society).¹⁸ Irrespective of Disraeli's own interest in a parliamentary career, politics appealed to the novelist as the natural sphere in which to represent ambition: "When Shakespeare, master of all hearts and springs of action, desired supreme expression of great personal ambition, he entered the field of politics for his material".¹⁹

When Vivian Grey advises Carabas to seek out a band of similarly disaffected politicians as the basis of his new party, he prefigures Disraeli's own course when, in 1845, he organised a party from those alienated by Sir Robert Peel's betrayal of them over the Corn Laws. In Book III, Chapter i, Vivian Grey confesses frankly to Cleveland:

I see this, sir; I, a young man, uncommitted in political principles, unconnected in public life, feeling some confidence, I confess, in my own abilities, but desirous of availing myself, at the same time, of the powers of others. Thus situated, I find myself working for the same end as my Lord Carabas and twenty other men of similar calibre, mental and moral; and, sir, am I to play the hermit in the drama of life because, perchance, my fellow-actors may be sometimes fools, and occasionally knaves?²⁰

Disraeli was to be easily the most talented amongst the Protectionists, yet, like Vivian Grey he had to curb himself under the guise of conformity to compensate for his lack of social connections. Cleveland is made to encourage him thus:

I really think, that if any man of average ability dare rise in the House, and rescue many of the great questions of the day from what Dugald Stuart or Disraeli would call the spirit of Political Religionism, . . . he would not fail to make a great impressi^on upon the House, and a still greater one upon the country.²¹

The 'artist-in-the-canvas' / ^{reference to Disraeli himself} (which it must be, since Isaac Disraeli was no political animal) is to be a frequent motif in Disraeli's novels, as if thereby the author was inscribing his name in the annals of public affairs.

In Part Two of Vivian Grey, after the reconciliation of the Prince of Little Lilliput and the Grand Duke, Sievers asks the hero what post he will take in the new administration: "I fear Mr. B will not resign in my favour, and my ambition is so exalted that I cannot condescend to take anything under the Premiership", he replies.²² Whilst we should not take such an expression too seriously, it points the way Disraeli was thinking. "Disraeli revealed the serious political ambitions that already controlled him".²³ But as early as the writing of Vivian Grey he knew better than to reveal his ambition too openly:

Yes! we must mix with the herd; we must enter into their feelings; we must humour their weaknesses; we must sympathise with the sorrows that we do not feel; and share the merriment of fools.²⁴

These were not idle words. In The Crisis Examined, written in 1834, this had become a part of his political method:

The people have their passions, and it is even the duty of public men occasionally to adopt sentiments with which they do not sympathise, because the people must have leaders.²⁵

Still later, in carrying the Second Reform Bill of 1867 through Parliament, Disraeli was to behave in like manner: acting as the voice of popular aspirations to justify some remarkable political dealing, all under the paradoxical umbrella of Tory democracy.

Quiller-Couch points out that even in Vivian Grey the hero speaks with the tongue of a born rhetorician. Thus he apologises for his failing powers of storytelling: "I have too much presumed upon an attention which I am not able to command".²⁶ In The Young

Duke Disraeli makes a remarkable expression of his oratorical ambitions, amidst a review of the great parliamentary speakers of the day:

One thing is clear, that a man may speak very well in the House of Commons, and fail very completely in the House of Lords. There are two distinct styles requisite: I intend, in the course of my career, ^{if I have time,} to give a specimen of both. In the Lower House Don Juan may perhaps be our model; in the Upper House, Paradise Lost.²⁷

It is significant that he should resort to literary examples for his oratorical models.

Through Vivian Grey Disraeli gave expression to his stifling ambition, finding a relief denied him in the active sphere. Coningsby and Sybil were to fulfil the same function (amongst others), but in a more overtly political sphere, and on behalf of a party. In Vivian Grey, even where there is no explicit manifestation of ambition, it is present in the figure of the hero himself. Through him the author lives a kind of surrogate life, or else glorifies attributes he believes himself to possess. Thus Vivian enjoys the school career denied to Disraeli ("in a very few days Vivian Grey was decidedly the most popular fellow in the school")²⁸ yet almost rejoices in his lack of university education (a feature which he shared with Disraeli). Thus he is compared to Cleveland: "It was impossible, therefore, for two minds to have been cultivated on more contrary systems than those of Frederick Cleveland and Vivian Grey".²⁹ At Chateau Desir Vivian's success with the guests is immediate and absolute.³⁰ But as the novel develops, the criteria for a hero appear to change - we see him as an almost moral ideal in the Conyers episode,³¹ in saving his friend Clay from financial disaster,³² and exposing the gaming fraud of Von Konigstein and de Boeffleurs in Part Two, a scene which ends with the Baron clasping Vivian's hand in a show of abject gratitude when he is given a reprieve from public exposure.³³ Essper George strikes the same attitude when Vivian gently rejects his offer of service,³⁴ and it is when Essper destroys the negotiations between Beckendorff and the Prince of Little Lilliput that we see a Vivian Grey most unlike his earlier appearances: "It was impossible for a man like Vivian Grey to cherish an irritated feeling for a second".³⁵ The author's changing priorities are mirrored in the involuntary development of his hero's character, and by the end of the novel Vivian Grey is a fully-fledged political figure, rather than a selfish opportunist. Beckendorff,

sensing a formidable adversary, seizes his opportunity:

A man like Beckendorff soon discovered that Vivian Grey's was no common mind. His conversation with him of the last night had given him some notion of his powers, and the moment that Beckendorff saw Esaper George enter the house he determined that he should be the cause of Vivian leaving it.³⁶

Although Vivian Grey refuses an offer of a place at the enhanced Court of Reisenberg, "doubtless, had he been willing, [he] might in time have become^a Lord Chamberlain, or perhaps even a Field Marshal".³⁷

In Contarini Fleming Disraeli continued to express his craving for recognised success, and it was no less fierce. The young Contarini looks back on the humiliations of his lonely upbringing:

I entertained at this time a deep conviction that life must be intolerable unless I were the greatest of men. It seemed that I felt within me the power that could influence my kind. I longed to wave my inspiring sword at the head of armies, or dash into the very heat and blaze of eloquent faction...When I contrasted my feelings and my situation I grew mad. The constant jar³⁸ between my conduct and my conceptions was intolerable.

...existence was intolerable, and I should have killed myself had I not been supported by my ambition, which now each day became more quickening...When I recollected that, at the soonest, many years must elapse before I could realise my ideas, I gnashed my teeth in silent rage, and cursed my existence.³⁹

But it is also evident from the references to "eloquent faction" and to realising "ideas" that the urge has taken on another dimension, one more appropriate to the poetic character. Ideas can be realised in art or in active affairs. Contarini never discovers which course is for him, because, like Disraeli, the alternatives were of equal importance. Both options hinged upon the use of words in which Disraeli/Contarini Fleming's chief talent lay. Contarini Fleming dwells dramatically upon the radically different directions in which the one facility could lead. In the first instance, the hero is prompted to self-expression in the knowledge that his friend Musaeus is cooling in love for him:

For the first time in my life I composed. I grew intoxicated with my own eloquence. A new desire arose in my mind, novel aspirations which threw light upon old and often-experienced feelings. I began to ponder over the music of language; I studied the collocation of sweet words, and constructed elaborate sentences in lonely walks.⁴⁰

Yet just a little earlier, put on his mettle by alien and an-

tagonistic schoolfellows, he saw eloquence in a different light:

On a sudden I seemed endowed with new powers, and blessed with the gift of tongues. I spoke to them with a levity⁴¹ which was quite strange to me, a most unnatural ease.

Contarini never resolves the conflict between his poetic and active aspirations, but he does suggest why in Disraeli's life the political and active component came to predominate for a considerable period: "I do not think that I should find life tolerable, unless I were in an eminent position, and conscious that I deserved it".⁴² He is himself taking cue from a stronger expression of his father:

A man of great energies aspires that they should be felt in his lifetime, that his existence should be rendered more intensely vital by the constant consciousness of his multiplied and multiplying power. Is posthumous fame a substitute for all this?...We are active beings, and our sympathy, above all other sympathies, is with great action.⁴³

After the collapse of his literary hopes with the disappointing reception of Contarini Fleming and Alroy, politics offered Disraeli a more immediate reward for his composing, as well as his other, talents. The characteristics of the full politician are externalised in Contarini Fleming in the Baron (Fleming) himself, just as those of the poet - or artist - are found in Peter Winter. It is through the Baron that Disraeli voices his personal-political manifesto, extolling the same attributes for which Vivian Grey yearned, but now with a sharper political bias. He advises Contarini on the art of conversation, on the importance of women, and their refined criticism; on suitable reading ("Read no history, nothing but biography, for that is life without theory"),^{43a} and on the proper social qualifications for the aspiring politician: "He constantly impressed upon me that society was a politician's chief tool, and the paramount necessity of cultivating its good graces".⁴⁴

In Peter Winter Disraeli embodies his conviction that the man of poetic genius also has his path to eminence. Soon after Contarini embarks on his public career he attends one of his father's dinner-parties and, if he is conscious of a transformation in himself, he is even more struck by the change in Winter:

The door opened; the Chevalier de Winter was announced. My fellow-traveller entered the room, though I could scarcely recognise him in his rich and even fanciful dress, and adorned with his brilliant order. I was struck with his fine person, his noble carriage, and his highly-polished manner.⁴⁵ Except my father, I had never seen so true a nobleman.

Winter, therefore, reminds Contarini that the artistic vocations can be equally as ennobling (literally, in his case) as the political, and that: "higher accomplishments and qualities existed than a mere acquaintance with etiquette".⁴⁶ But this conviction is not borne out in the novel, for Disraeli never convincingly depicts the hero's artistic talent. His poetic ambitions - like the political - do not go beyond a fascination with the prestige which each could bring, and a personal admiration for their respective exponents, Winter and Baron Fleming. This explains why Disraeli's own conviction of the literary merits of Contarini Fleming could not recompense him for its relative failure on publication. He wrote in disgust in 1833: "I shall always consider The Psychological as the perfection of English prose and a chef d'œuvre. It has not paid its expenses".⁴⁷ In demanding so much and so soon from his alternative careers Disraeli, like Contarini, was inevitably bound to alternate between the two, recoiling from one to the other in turn with each successive failure.

In his portrayal of Beckendorff in Vivian Grey Disraeli begins to transfer his thirst for power of any kind to a fascination with its exercise in the political sphere. Contarini Fleming further refines his aspirations into the two ideal figures of Winter and Baron Fleming. All three representative characters are in part projections of Disraeli himself, but also go far beyond him, and therefore act as surrogates. Beckendorff himself acknowledges that in Vivian Grey he has found a person of like mind and talents,⁴⁸ and in appearance they share the feminine quality which accompanies dedication to culture and intellect. Yet Beckendorff is obviously Vivian Grey's superior - if only by virtue of greater age and experience - and therefore a figure to be admired. This is still more true of Alroy, in whom Disraeli expressed his oriental and judaic yearnings, intensified by the atmosphere of the Eastern travels, during which much of the work was written. Alroy does not represent a relaxation of the drives which we find in Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming - it incorporates them into a different context, and it is certainly not a less 'political' work:

As he stood in the Tombs of the Kings, ^{at Jerusalem} or gazed on Mount Zion, the thought may have passed through his mind that the true aim of the political ambition which was beginning to shape itself within him should be to win back the Holy Land for the chosen people and restore the sceptre to Judah.⁴⁹

So Alroy is a work of self-enquiry: should Disraeli direct his energies into another 'crusade' rather than to domestic politics in England? And as a writer, would it not be better to celebrate the glories of his race - as the hero's sister herself hopes will be the case?⁵⁰ By fulfilling his ambition on paper first, however, Disraeli was able to explore these possibilities without having to enact them in reality; just as in Coningsby and Sybil he could proffer the code of 'Young England' without having to present it to a sceptical Parliament as a serious political initiative. Disraeli would have to return to the oriental theme and setting in Tancred (and to a lesser extent in Lothair), but meanwhile its expression in Alroy took it temporarily out of his system.

As in Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming, however, the political element of Alroy is involved with some very personal concerns. Disraeli is clearly thinking of his own misfortunes when the humiliated protagonist resolves:

The gibe and jest, the curse, perchance the blow, Israel now must bear, and with a calm or even smiling visage. What then? For every gibe and jest, for every curse, I'll have a dirhem; and for every blow, let him look to it who is my debtor, or wills to be so.⁵¹

There is the same almost mystical belief in the efficacy of recording ambitions which pervades all Disraeli's novels; thus Alroy declares: "It is the will that is the father to the deed, and he who broods over some long idea, however wild, will find his dream was but the prophecy of coming fate".⁵² In a discussion of Jabaster's prophetic skill, Honain utters one of Disraeli's most famous maxims: "We make our fortunes, and we call them Fate".⁵³

So the oriental nature of Alroy cannot disguise a significant political element, albeit involved with a blend of racial, social, and wholly personal drives.

Conversely, the themes of Alroy appear in its companion-works too. At school Contarini Fleming is isolated from his colleagues, and must fight for his integrity ("indeed I would not have waited for their silly rules of mock combat");⁵⁴ he is converted to Catholicism, while all around him are Protestants; he lives in a country "which each day I more detested",⁵⁵ and one effect of reading Voltaire is that: "I trembled with indignation at the fortunes of my race".⁵⁶ Even Baron Fleming suffers from racial prejudice.⁵⁷ Vivian Grey is called a "seditious stranger" at school,⁵⁸ and Mrs. Felix Lorraine comments on the irony that Carabas' fate should rest in

the hands of two characters: "one of them a foreigner, unconnected in blood, or connected ^{only} in hatred; and the other a young adventurer alike unconnected with his race, in blood or in love".⁵⁹ Each novel therefore gives its own colour to a basic theme: in Alroy, for example, it is the bitter fortune of an unjustly despised race; in Vivian Grey a sense of personal failure; in Contarini Fleming the predicament of the romantic isolé. The 'alienation' theme was both a complaint and Disraeli's way of reserving the right to view the affairs of England and of the "flat-nosed Franks"⁶⁰ as one born in the "cradle of civilization". In Vivian Grey the satire is largely indiscriminate, in the manner of The Star Chamber: an arch comment on Cabinet Dinners and Vestry Dinners ("certain it is that very often, after the dinner, an appointment is made for the transaction of the business on the following morning");⁶¹ some scathing descriptions of the guests at Ems;⁶² mockery of the English predilection for travel: "You all travel now, it appears, to look at mountains and catch cold in spouting trash on lakes by moonlight".⁶³ Even more akin to the spirit of The Star Chamber are some digs at colleagues in the literary world, represented, for example, by the fashionable novelist, Mr. Thomas Smith, at Horace Grey's dinner.⁶⁴ Von Chronicle's historical-fashionable novels are exposed in Part Two, when he proudly announces that his latest work, Rienzi, contains no names, only oaths.⁶⁵ There is some light-hearted criticism of Tremaine, which might ^{be} termed the parent-work for Vivian Grey, in Book III, Chapter vii, when the distinguished ornithologist from South America, Mr. Mackaw, is handed a copy, and cannot puzzle out what kind of work it is, so pretentious and all-embracing is its apparent reference. The veil drops, however, when we come to Stewart Rose (continuing the attack mounted in The Star Chamber), who is characterised as Parthenopex Puff. In Cleveland's words Disraeli observes:

Mr. Puff is a man destitute of poetical powers, possessing no vigour of language, and gifted with no happiness of expression...I am amused to see the excellent tact with which the public has determined not to read his volumes.⁶⁶

The Reviews at whose hands Disraeli suffered so severely are reflected in Reisenberg's two rival ventures; the one which arranges for authors to be reviewed by personal friends, the other which employs their bitterest enemy.⁶⁷ Both are successful, but an attempt to found an impartial magazine never paid the expenses of the first

number. We see Vivian Grey being directed, then, if not to politics as such, then to the politics of the literary world with which Disraeli was inevitably more familiar at this stage.

For, although Vivian Grey lights upon THE STUDY OF POLITICS in Book I, Chapter viii,⁶⁸ the topic never outgrows a naive spirit of intrigue which begins with the episode of the secret play put on at school, largely at Vivian's instigation.⁶⁹ Disraeli's knowledge of the world could not hope to be, as he said himself in the Advertisement to the 1853 edition of Vivian Grey, more than "the results of imagination acting upon knowledge not acquired by experience".⁷⁰ There is a note of irresponsibility lurking in Vivian Grey, particularly when it travels abroad; at times the affairs of English society concern the author no more than as the object of mocking unconcern. In the spirit of a Carlylean 'reductio ad absurdum' he pictures Von Konigstein's departure from Ems after his exposure as a card-cheat as initiating a series of alarming rumours in diplomatic circles, which soon spread to the commercial world and cause panic and ruin on the stock-market.⁷¹ For one who had himself suffered in such a disaster, Disraeli approaches the topic with remarkable frivolity. Through Essper George (who derives from the comic fool of the theatre) Disraeli utters a vein of fundamentalist satire reminiscent of Jacobean drama:

My family, sir, are nothing more nor less than what all of us must be counted, worms of five feet long, mortal angels, the world's epitome, heaps of atoms,⁷² which Nature has kneaded with blood into solid flesh...

Disraeli was already learning to exploit dramatic devices in deploying a range of characters who can express often extreme views, and take responsibility for them away from the author (a technique he used with success in the social satire of Sybil, or the portrayal of rival continental movements in Lothair).

In his presentation of fashionable society (the nearest that Disraeli could hope to approach to the world of politics at this stage) we see already a keen eye for the social transformations taking place in the pre-Reform era. Mrs. Million, for example, represents a new moneyed class threatening the aristocratic monopoly:

All fell back. Gartered peers, and starred ambassadors, and baronets with blood older than the creation, and squires, to the antiquity of whose veins chaos was a novelty; all retreated.⁷³

Stapylton Toad has a similar representative function, and his

rise is charted in terms of externals which accentuate this: first the addition of a storey to his house in Jermyn Street, then the whole house is refurbished; he moves to Cavendish Square, finally acquires a villa in Surrey. All this for a lawyer who has never conducted a case in the courts. His unparalleled success is partly explained by the indolence of the aristocrats to whom he owes his fortune, such as Lord Mounteney, whom Stapylton once "got out of difficulties". Mounteney "was something of a man of business, remembered once looking over his accounts".⁷⁴ The eventual elevation of Stapylton's son to the peerage⁷⁵ sounds another warning note to the aristocracy; a theme to be picked up again in Sybil. Earnest Clay's letter to Vivian Grey describes a reception at Mr. Premium's and although he mocks the pretensions of these nouveaux-riches, he cannot help admiring their energy: "Everyone at Premium's looked full of some great plan, as if the fate of empires was on his very breath".⁷⁶ Stapylton Toad himself makes a repeat appearance as Rigby in Coningsby, with a more strictly political function, just as Gusset and Dr. Sly might be described as pre-political Tadpoles and Tapers.⁷⁷ In studying the world of fashion, Disraeli was not so far in any case from venturing into that of politics, considering their closeness at this time. It is almost a theme of Vivian Grey in itself that political advancement should depend so little on administrative talents and so much on manoeuvring in society. (Not that Disraeli was an habitué of the upper reaches of the fashionable world, but they were at least more accessible through the medium of the fashionable journals of the day, whose function he wittily delineates in The Young Duke⁷⁸). And, as B.F. Murphy points out, it is almost a theme of Vivian Grey - as it certainly was in the later novels - that, try as Vivian might, one cannot escape the effects of politics, however much one may feel outside their sphere.⁷⁹ This is first illustrated in Book II, Chapter xi,⁸⁰ where Vivian Grey visits one of Carabas' former tenants, John Conyers, recently made destitute after transfer to the estate of Lord Mounteney, whose new agent, Stapylton Toad, has changed the old tenant system. We see for the first time a disturbing awareness that 'politics' is more than a game, but ultimately regulates human lives; and we see also an abruptly matured and responsible Vivian Grey. Some neat formal devices are used to exploit the episode: it occurs just after the announcement of Mrs. Million's impending stay at Chateau Desir, and the first words of the following chapter are: "Mrs. Million arrived

and kept her promise; only three carriages-and-four!"⁸¹ The transfer of Conyers to Lord Mounteney's estate is referred to in Carabas' pleasantries to his guests as they enter for the house party: "Good Mr. Stapylton Toad, so that little change was effected!"⁸² The discipline of a social purpose sharpens the technique of the novelist as well. In his review of *Reisenberg* Disraeli is able to make 'back-hand' criticism of British institutions by analogy, articulating his method thus:

The circle of the public gardens of *Reisenberg* exhibited exactly, although upon a smaller scale, the same fashions and the same frivolities, the same characters and the same affectations, as the Hyde Park of London, or the Champs Elysées of Paris.⁸³

But observations of this nature in *Vivian Grey* are left as a rule in thematic isolation. The Conyers episode, for example, is not linked to other areas of the novel, nor even referred to again. The hero is given a radically different role from that of the cynical adventurer we have known up to now. *The Literary Gazette* described *Vivian Grey* as: "Simply the formulation of a political intrigue, evidently only devised for conveying the author's views on life, character, and society".⁸⁴ It was when Disraeli had reversed his priorities, and presented intrigue as part of his review of politics, that he improved also as a writer. That lack of a sense of responsibility in *Vivian Grey* makes for observations thrown out on a personal basis and without harmonisation. It was only when Disraeli began to think in terms of implementing his policies in a practical sense that he discovered his true theme, and how to express it.

But if *Vivian Grey* lacks a coherent overall world-view, Disraeli was often equally inconsistent and elusive as an established politician. Thus he presented himself at the hustings as a Tory, a Radical-Tory, a Tory-Radical, and a Radical on four separate occasions. In these early novels sentiments of revolutionary fervour/are found alongside traditional platitudes. Beckendorff combines both supposed extremes in his political outlook: himself a man of the people and the *subject* of a diatribe against the evils of nepotism in *Reisenberg*,⁸⁵ he still imposes a regime of benevolent but unyielding autocracy on his people. Contarini is by turns a revolutionary poet and the epitome of the pragmatic politician. Alroy is both a rebel against the present order, and yet the champion of an older and prouder tradition. These novels therefore reflect a dichotomy which

Disraeli never solved in his later career.

The Young Duke reflects Disraeli's absorption with the fashionable world at the time of its writing (1829-1830) and was duly castigated by The Westminster Review: "To parasites, sycophants, toad-eaters, tuft-hunters, and humble companions, it will be a book full of comfort and instruction in their callings".⁸⁶ The practice of palming off superficial essays in the fashionable mode as exposés of cultured vice has been well documented⁸⁷ and Colburn's 'puff' of The Young Duke in his own magazine, the New Monthly, seems to bear out this interpretation of its writer's fraudulent intentions:

...and the occasion is thereby given him to unveil many scenes of splendid dissipation, and to show, in their true colours, many charlatans, in different spheres of society, who, at the present moment, infest London, and prey on the young, the wealthy, and the unsuspecting.⁸⁸

The views of The Westminster Review may be fairly endorsed as regards the early chapters of The Young Duke, but ironically as it progresses it does indeed venture into social comment as the advertisement claimed. Hazlitt made a famous criticism of the fashionable syndrome: "A writer of this accomplished stamp, comes forward to tell you, not how his hero feels on any occasion, but how he was dressed, and makes him a mere lay-figure of fashion with a few pert, current phrases in his mouth".⁸⁹ But this could not fairly be applied to Disraeli's use of the genre. Although he seems to follow its dictates in the early part of The Young Duke, the conclusion only exploits 'fashion' insofar as the hero rejects its false values in favour of social and political responsibility.⁹⁰

The Young Duke is therefore "a caricature rather than an original specimen"⁹¹ of the silver-fork genre, and marks the process by which Disraeli and others were able to effect a transition in the novel of fashion to a work which **seeks** to evaluate the gilded society it depicts. In Disraeli's works the dandy was given a streak of iron determination which is barely masked by the requisite nonchalant manner. "Not only Pelham, but also Vivian Grey are surprisingly earnest when studied by anyone not prepossessed with the notion that a dandy must necessarily be a mental lightweight, devoted only to the cultivation of the sillier formalities of social intercourse".⁹² Alternatively, the dandy became a symbol of indolence and irresponsibility, as in Sybil's famous opening chapter.⁹³ In The Young Duke we are first introduced to the dandy Charles Annesley with no attempt to understand his actions or motivations -

instead we have a consideration of whether the term 'beau' or 'dandy' would best describe him.⁹⁴ But in time even he is caught up by the new spirit of responsibility and enters Parliament.⁹⁵ In Coningsby and Sybil the dandy therefore has a political function either as a symbol of neglected responsibility (eg. Mountchesney), or, like Egremont in Sybil, as a 'returned prodigal': "He realised, in short, how simple it would be to endow Mrs. Gore's dandiacal heroes with some of Carlyle's prophetic insights".⁹⁶ Arundel Dacre's entry into The Young Duke revives its flagging momentum by introducing politics-proper into the theme.⁹⁷

Disraeli's flirtation with Catholicism in the novel has a sentimental streak, but also a political relevance. In Book II, Chapter ii he condemns the Catholic disabilities when applied to persons of such moral integrity as the Dacres,⁹⁸ and in the quasi-comic figures of "Sir Chetwode Chetwode of Chetwode" and "Sir Tichborne Tichborne of Tichborne" he asserts that Catholicism need not conflict with patriotism: "It was not easy to see two men less calculated to be the slaves of a foreign and despotic power, which we all know Catholics are".⁹⁹ May Dacre's charitable rounds on the estate point to the 'Young England' code of Coningsby and Sybil and act as a political-moral inspiration to the Young Duke himself.¹⁰⁰

Utilitarianism is condemned as the creed of hypocrites in the figure of Duncan MacMorrogh who is as much a toady of the aristocracy as those he so virulently criticizes.¹⁰¹ Practical benevolence is preferred to rarified theory; another lesson to be stressed in the later novels:

[the Duke's] life is passed in the agreeable discharge of all the important duties of his exalted station, and his present career is by far a better answer to the lucubrations of young Duncan MacMorrogh than all the abstract arguments, in favour of the existence of an Aristocracy.¹⁰²

Ironically, this acceptance of responsibility was followed in Disraeli's case by a largely self-indulgent escape from problems at home on his Eastern tour. But, just as in Alroy he could temporarily lay to rest an ambition by enacting it in literary form, so The Young Duke allowed his ideal to go in one direction, whilst he slipped away in the other.

In Contarini Fleming Disraeli was experimenting with several ideals, chiefly but not exclusively the poetic and the political. Politics is just one option open to the hero; conversely, one can

argue that as it grows in importance to him, a 'political' tint is discernible in most of the other activities. So Contarini is first inspired "to muse upon this idea of political greatness" by a personal admiration for his father,¹⁰³ and it is on Baron Fleming's advice that he begins to read Voltaire's Zadig.¹⁰⁴ Significantly, Zadig impresses Contarini as much by its fantasy as by its profound truths, and it precipitates a Voltairean revolt amongst Contarini's fellow students, which is based on a similarly confused blend of motives: frustration with the authority of parents and tutors, and hence by association with that of society as a whole; romantic idealism; and intellectual arrogance.

Insofar as politics as such figure in Contarini Fleming, they take the most stimulating form of foreign affairs, embodied by the charismatic Baron Fleming. The prospect is adorned with all the imaginative trappings which were as important to the author as the nature of politics itself: "Foreign Policy opened a dazzling vista of splendid incident. It was enchanting to be acquainted with the secrets of European cabinets, and to control or influence their fortunes".¹⁰⁵ As we have seen, Disraeli was enthralled by his oriental travel experiences, on aesthetic rather than practical grounds, and wrote many of them into the novel. In turn there is an attempt at direct political comment in Book V, Chapter xxiv, where he reports an interview with the Sultan in the sympathetic terms which characterised his attitude to Turkey thereafter:

He added that he had only done what Peter the Great had done before him...The Padishah then abruptly said that all his subjects should have equal rights; that there should be no difference between Moslem and infidel; that all who contributed to the government had a right to the same protection.¹⁰⁶

Another of those isolated, formally inconsequential, yet strangely apposite and prophetic examples of quasi-political thought occurs on Contarini's voyage from the Iberian peninsula to the East. Passing by Corcyra, he is reminded of "one of the longest, most celebrated, and most fatal of ancient wars", occasioned by "a feeling of colonial jealousy".¹⁰⁷ He compares the utilitarian spirit of modern colonialism with the ancient practice: the "principles of ancient polity", which could well describe Disraeli's own colonial policy in his political maturity. The essential ingredient of both is a basis in criteria beyond the merely pragmatic.

Direct references to politics back in England are rare in Con-

tarini Fleming. Towards the end of the novel the Reform Bill begins to impinge, and Contarini apologises for the low-key reaction to his Athenian wanderings: "I regret [the reader's] disappointment, but I have arrived at an age when I can think only of the future. A mighty era, prepared by the blunders of long centuries, is at hand".¹⁰⁸

Disraeli does not indicate his own attitude to the Reform question; the focus of Contarini Fleming is not yet sufficiently centered on politics for that. The novel seeks not to discuss individual political questions, but to question the role of the active, 'political' vocation as a whole in relation to the alternatives. The dilemma is externalised in the contrary advice of Peter Winter and Baron Fleming. From Winter: "Never apologise for showing feeling, my friend";¹⁰⁹ as against the Baron: "Never give way to your feelings".¹¹⁰ The question is not resolved, as Disraeli was never to resolve them in his own life; both elements were essential to his character. Instead, the novel dramatises the problem, as Contarini oscillates between alternatives. His aloofness prompts his colleagues at school to condemn his neglect of Musaeus, and a bitter fight ensues:

For the first time in my life I had acted. Hitherto I had been a creature of dreams; but within the last month I found myself a stirrer in existence. I perceived that I had suddenly become a responsible agent.

Later, however, he feels the need to add those imaginative touches which his poetic nature suggests:

I was conscious of much that had been omitted both in conversation and conduct, of much that might have been finely expressed and dexterously achieved. And to introduce all this I indulged in imaginary scenes.

When his brief career as a robber-baron closes with the ignominious flight of the Secret Union for the Amelioration of Society from the castle where they had taken refuge, Contarini is supported by his poetic nature in the collapse of his active schemes:

I poured forth my passionate farewell to the wild scene of my wilder life. I found a fierce solace in this expression of my heart. I discovered a substitute for the excitement of action in the excitement of thought. Deprived of my castle and my followers, I fled to my ideal world for refuge. There I found them, a forest far wilder and more extensive, a castle far more picturesque and awful, a band infinitely more courageous and true. My imagination supported me under my overwhelming mortification.

How often Disraeli was to use his novels in this way, finding a "fierce solace" for the disappointments of his political career

in his writings, irrespective of their place in his literary ambitions. Thus Contarini awakens the next morning: "I rose with the sun, and the first thought that occurred to me was to write a tragedy".¹¹⁴ Detained by some soldiers, his confident manner carries him through the danger: "This was the groundwork for a new incident, and in the third act I instantly introduced a visit in disguise to the camp of the enemy".¹¹⁵ But then Baron Fleming's advice prevails: "This same evening I consigned my tragedy to the flames".¹¹⁶ Thus ends an adventure which was inspired in the first place by a novel. But thereafter, even in the triumph of his diplomatic coup, Contarini continues to live in his imagination:

There seemed to me no achievement of which I was not capable, and of which I was not ambitious. In imagination I shook thrones and founded empires. I felt myself a being born to breathe in an atmosphere of revolution.¹¹⁷

In accordance with the reciprocal nature of Disraeli's activities, even the most active passages of Contarini Fleming nevertheless occur within the context of a novel which celebrates the development of the poetic temperament. Yet Contarini Fleming was itself composed in one of Disraeli's active phases, the travels of 1830 and 1831. There is a whimsical spirit of self-mockery in the way he portrays Contarini hopelessly divided between two identities, even in those moments when he feels certain that he has discovered his true vocation. The Secret Union for the Amelioration of Society betray their own cause even before it begins by taking up refuge in the deserted castle, declaring at the same time: "Let us fly from the feudal system".¹¹⁸ It was this awareness of the potential for self-betrayal in all human endeavours that prompted Disraeli to put his own aspirations under the microscope in these novels. The paradoxical result is a vein of self-criticism almost simultaneous with the act itself. In Contarini Fleming the hero's poetic nature acts as a check to his political ambitions, and vice versa; whilst the whole scheme is part of the author's internal debate on the value of both ambitions. When not gripped by enthusiasm for one of his many goals, the hero is prone to sober reflections organised thematically into a counterbalance to the prevailing mood. Book I, Chapter xii records with amused irony Contarini's first literary effort, his ruthless self-criticism of the piece the next morning, and his flight to the hunting-field by way of reaction.¹¹⁹ In Book I, Chapter xv Contarini falls in with a troupe of itinerant actors, and,

in an academic, pontifical manner, begins to dilate on the aesthetic quality of acting relative to the other arts. Eventually one of the girls pinches him under the table.¹²⁰

Looking back on his first bouts of political ambition, an older narrating Contarini can see that the images he so admired at the time represented in reality "the short-sighted gratification of an irrational and outrageous selfism".¹²¹ An excruciatingly pompous Contarini bids farewell to Peter Winter as he leaves the Baron's reception, revelling in his new-found 'diplomatic' role, despite the advice of Baron Fleming himself:

Young men are apt to get a little abstracted, and occasionally to think that there is something singular in their nature, when the fact is, if they were better acquainted with their fellow creatures, they would find they were mistaken. This is a common error, indeed the commonest.¹²²

In which he echoes Horace Grey:

Ardent youths in their closets, Vivian, too often fancy that they are peculiar beings; and I have no reason to believe that you are an exception to the general rule... thousands have done the same; and, what is of still more importance, thousands are doing, and will do, the same.¹²³

In Vivian Grey, Book III, Chapter iv Mrs. Felix Lorraine attempts to poison the hero; and this prompts a soliloquy in the following chapter in which he looks at his career of intrigue, and is terrified by the implications. It is crude and melodramatic, but has a ring of sincerity, as if coming as much from the mouth of Disraeli himself as from his hero. Mrs. Lorraine adds her comment in Chapter vi: "Shrined in the secret chamber of your soul there is an image before which you bow down in adoration, and that image is YOURSELF".¹²⁴ What do we make of a comment from Horace Grey: "Let me warn you not to fall into the usual error of youth in fancying that the circle you move in is precisely the world itself"?¹²⁵ The writer of those words is himself a youth, committing the very error he so exactly describes, and continuing to live in its delusion. The relationship between hero and author is so close that moral or psychological doubts are not cast (as generally in Contarini Fleming) as the wiser reflections of a maturer man, but reflect changes of mood in the author even as he writes. The novel is therefore an intimate psychological self-study, enacting projected manoeuvres or musing on past failures in the comparative safety of a fictional model. In Book VII, Chapter i Vivian Grey compares himself to Beckendorff,

and asks himself why he failed in his political ventures, where the latter succeeded. He concludes that success demands more than sheer ability, but the long and patient preparation which he had neglected: a reflection on his own impatience which Disraeli could recognise but not entirely cure.¹²⁶ Vivian Grey refers to his betrayal by the Carabas faction, but Disraeli has in mind the disasters over the South American mines and The Representative newspaper. In moments of recoil from the pursuit/^{of}ambition, Nature is used as a Romantic symbol of purer values, in the same way that the poetic values in Contarini Fleming are opposed to political opportunism. In an abstracted and solitary mood Vivian Grey gazes upon the moonlit landscape at Chateau Desir:

It is in these moments that men find in Nature that congeniality of spirit which they seek for in vain in their own species. It is in these moments that we sit by the side of a waterfall and listen to its music the live-long day...¹²⁷ It is in these moments that Nature becomes our Egeria.

Although an element/^{of policy}soon reappears as he adds: "refreshed and renovated by this beautiful communion, we return to the world better enabled to fight our parts in the hot war of passions".

In Alroy the hero's consort, Schirene, finds consolation in gazing on the night sky and stars: "what was the brightness of our palaces compared to these? All is left to us that man should covet, freedom, beauty, and youth..."¹²⁸ But Disraeli could not be so philosophical about his own situation. As Alroy himself anticipates an agonising death, the author expresses a very personal fear: that his own ambitions will lead to a similar defeat:

Slow, indeed, is such a mind to credit that the never-failing resource can at least [sic] be wanting. But so it is. Like a dried-up fountain, the perennial flow and bright fertility have ceased, and ceased for ever. Then comes the madness of retrospection.

Draw a curtain! draw a curtain! and fling it over this agonising anatomy.¹²⁹

This introspective function of Vivian Grey, Contarini Fleming and Alroy is applied mainly to personal concerns, although political ambition grows in importance within it. The chief significance of The 'Autobiographical' Trilogy however is in its technique. The man of action was learning to use his writing as a form of constructive contemplation. He portrays his situation (with considerable honesty) and criticizes faults, either authorially, or by exploiting

the novel's dramatic attributes. Later he took this internal debate into the world of politics, making the same use of his 'Political' Trilogy. Expressions of ambition became political manifesto, observations and satire on the foibles of society were related to party policy, and the restless self-assertion of the would-be poet and alien produced a spirit of original and sometimes disturbing radicalism.

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CHAPTER TWO

1. Biographical: In Society.

He was still engrossed in literature, and he would have to be rejected by it before he would become serious about anything else; he would have to be rejected by politics many times, before Parliament would become an obsession with him.¹

Disraeli's ambitions began to centre on politics in the years following the relative failure of Contarini Fleming and Alroy, but by no means immediately or exclusively so. To find his vocation he endured five years of experiment and setbacks. "Poetry is the safety valve of my passions, but I wish to act what I write", he observed in the Autumn of 1833.² Perhaps more than he foresaw, Disraeli was to have to act out the debate which he had depicted in Contarini Fleming between the poet and the politician. It was his nature no less than Contarini's that he could not advance in one field without also taking a proportionate step forward in its complement. In Coningsby he criticized the administration of Sir Robert Peel, because it "would not permit the mind of the nation to work through the inevitable phases that awaited it".³ An individual also has inevitable psychological phases through which he has to pass if he is to progress, as a man climbing a spiral staircase has to describe lateral circles if he is to ascend. If, on the one hand, Disraeli was bound to act what he had written, he also needed to prepare himself for future struggles in the comparative freedom and safety which the medium of writing offered. In formulating a political programme in a literary medium, he invariably produced works as esoteric and original as anything which the 'Contarini' in him might have written. In this as in other respects he never outlived the tendency to carry the novelist's creative originality into the realms of politics.

After his return from the East in November 1831, Disraeli spent most of the winter at Bradenham, working on Contarini Fleming. But by February, 1832, he had moved into Duke Street, and he began his assault on London Society. On February 18th, for example, he described to his sister Sarah a reunion at Bulwer Lytton's, which reflected the comparative exclusiveness of fashionable society in the 1830's (a strong theme of Disraeli's last novel, Endymion), which drew together men of a wide variety of talents.⁴ He was introduced to (amongst others) Mrs Gore, and the prince of dandies, Comte D'Orsay. Although he could look back on this period

as the first step in his political career, it was hardly such a conscious decision. He was attracted by society, and sought its approbation. One aspect of that society which grew in importance in the struggles of the Reform era (1832) was the political; thus he was swept up with it.

Whether it was ambition or pride which pushed him towards politics does not greatly matter. It was probably both, and added to them was the desire to make a splash. "We came here for fame", he told Bright many years later. To create a sensation, to occupy the lime-light, to act a part on the greatest stage in the world, these were the springs of action that thrust Disraeli onwards. Obscurity, mediocrity, failure, were what he dreaded. To be in Parliament was to be someone.⁷

But his less-than-serious attitude to the practical details of politics is indicated in a letter to Sarah of February 22nd:

Charley Gore called upon me, and said that Lord John Russell often asked how I was getting on at Wycombe. He fished as to whether I should support them. I answered, "They had no claim upon my support; they needed it, and no more."

When he engaged in politics more seriously, Disraeli still refused to be tied to a consistent policy. He flirted with every shade of political affiliation from Tory to Radical (sometimes both), while still making forthright protestations of his political sincerity. However, his interest at this stage was still distributed between politics, fashion, and literary prestige. A letter to Sarah of March 5th, 1832 discusses the Reform Bill, some plans to visit his "constituents" of High Wycombe, and the probability of a dissolution. Almost in the same breath he continues: "The critic has responded, and beyond all our hopes".⁷ This was Milman, Murray's reader, who reported enthusiastically on his first view of Contarini Fleming. Disraeli then returns to the theme of politics with speculation on the fate of Lord Grey.⁸ On May 12th we find a similar blend of interests: "This morning will settle the fate of the Ministry 'Contarini' published next week. The review in the 'Literary Gazette' is by LEL Letitia Elizabeth Landon, so Bulwer says."⁹

Lying somewhere between Disraeli's two chief fields of interest were a number of disquisitions on political or related topics which he produced in these years, the first in April, 1832. England and

France; or, a Cure for ^{the} Ministerial Gallomania¹⁰ reflected the contempt for French institutions which characterised Disraeli's thought at this time. It shows politics entering his writing more directly to produce a more polemical work, yet still a tendency to invest his activities with a dash of mystery more appropriate to the romantic novelist:

His chief coadjutors appear to have been Baron d'Haussez, a legitimist exile, who had been Minister of Marine in the last Ministry of Charles X, and Baron de Haber, 'a mysterious German gentleman of Jewish extraction', as Dr. Smiles describes him (Smiles, Life of Murray, II, p 344). 'Beware, my dear, of secret agents,' wrote Isaac Disraeli to his son, who had told him that he was about to startle Europe; 'beware of forgeries and delusions'. His son had all his life a certain weakness for mystery and intrigue, and disregarded the warning.¹¹

One could not call Gallomania itself a wholly serious political work. Disraeli's protestations of freedom from sectarian affiliation invariably betray withdrawal from responsibility rather than broad-mindedness: "I am neither Whig nor Tory. My politics are described by one word, and that word is ENGLAND".¹² The habits of the novelist are equally in evidence. For example, he reconstructs the "three glorious days" at Paris, which brought about the abdication of Charles X, often with full dialogue and dramatic effects, as in 'Private Meeting of the Deputies'. Disraeli revels too in the atmosphere of intrigue, revealing that M. Casimir Perier was still negotiating with Charles X even as with the other Deputies he put himself at the head of the people: "I do not deal in on dits. I will mention the name of the individual through whom he communicated with the King: it was M. Ginardin, the master of the stag-hounds".¹³

Disraeli's domestic political programme at this time was no less bewildering and elusive. Isaac wrote to him as he approached his first election, at High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire: "You are probably acquiring an European name, but invention and imagination are not the qualities for a representative of our modern patriots."¹⁴ Young Benjamin, however, was probably more interested in the European name. With the Reform Bill dominating political talk, he went down to High Wycombe to address his constituents, writing in rather negative terms of his mission to Benjamin Austen: "I start on the high Radical interest, and take down strong recommendatory epistles from O'Connell, Hume, Burdett, and hoc genus. Toryism is worn out, and I cannot condescend to be a Whig".¹⁵

Disraeli was opposed by Colonel Grey, second son of the Prime Minister, who was vastly inferior as a public speaker. Thus Disraeli wrote to Mrs. Austen on June 10th:

After parading the town with his paid voices, he made a stammering speech of ten minutes from his phaeton. All Wycombe was assembled. Feeling it was the Crisis, I jumped up on the portico of the Red Lion and gave it to them for an hour and a quarter. I can give you no idea of the effect. I made them all mad. A great many absolutely cried.¹⁶

He also paid careful attention to his appearance (the correlative to his ornate oratory) in striving for sensational effect. With a mass of jet-black hair, and adorned with lace and Cambric, "he must have seemed to the spectators better fitted for his rôle of fashionable novelist than ^{for} that of strenuous politician."¹⁷ The electors seem to have agreed with this judgement; Disraeli lost by twelve votes to twenty. In a post-Reform election in December he was defeated a second time. He wrote to Sarah Disraeli after a compensatory visit to the House of Commons.

Heard Macaulay's best speech, Sheil and Charles Grant. Macaulay admirable; but, between ourselves, I could floor them all. This entre nous; I was never more confident ^{of anything} than that I could carry everything before me in that House. The time will come ... Grey spoke highly of my oratorical powers to Blywer, said he never heard 'finer command of words.'¹⁸

Significantly, and, without preamble, he alludes in the same context of his speaking abilities: "Ixion is thought the best thing I ever wrote, and two volumes of Alroy are printed."¹⁹

After the death of Sarah's fiancé William Meredith in 1831, the relationship between Disraeli and his sister became even closer (reflected in the bond between the hero and his sister Myra in Endymion) and he has left us a record of these his apprentice years in the intimate letters he wrote to her. Like his novels, they are full of anecdotes, observation, character analysis and pent-up revelations of the powerful ambitions which he could not express in any other way at this time. In part, these letters were the journal of an aspiring politician, but they also contained sketch-plans for the scenes of novels to come, capturing a social milieu which was to disappear with the onset of mid-Victorian respectability.

In the autumn of 1833 Disraeli began his 'Mutilated Diary', where again he used the discipline of writing to record often disjointed thoughts. For example: "The Utilitarians in politics are

like the Unitarians in religion; both omit imagination in their systems, and imagination governs mankind."²⁰

Ixion in Heaven appeared in Colburn's New Monthly Magazine in early 1833 and The Infernal Marriage was published the following year.²¹ They were both a development of the satirical strain of Disraeli's earlier years. They show personal issues still at the forefront of Disraeli's mind. We hear that the literary critics in Hell "'are all to a man against our author', but 'That speaks more to his credit than his own self-opinion'!", comes the reply.²² The Infernal Marriage shows a development to more strictly political reference, being in part an allegory of the affairs at Court in the confusion of the Reform era. Not that this made it a more mundane work, as Disraeli brought with him the original and often irreverent style of his early squibs. The allegory is notable for its exuberant spirit rather than its academic subtlety ("The sanguine Furies were for fighting it out at once, and talked bravely of the strong conservative spirit only dormant in Tartarus. Even the Radicals themselves are dissatisfied...."²³)

What is He?, published in 1833 and appropriately ascribed to "the author of Vivian Grey", was supposedly an attempt to explain his quixotic political position, but for the most part the title - question remains unanswered, as one is left hardly the wiser after reading. Monypenny describes the tract as: "a characteristically Disraelian blend of eloquence and bathos, of sincerity and pose, of insight and fantasy."²⁴ Disraeli defends his wavering affiliations ("A Tory and a Radical I understand; a Whig - a democratic aristocrat - I cannot comprehend") and retorts:

He is a mean-spirited wretch who is restrained from doing his duty by the fear of being held up as insincere and inconsistent by those who are incapable of forming an opinion on public affairs. A great mind that thinks and feels is never inconsistent, and never insincere'.²⁵

But the actual political solutions proposed in the pamphlet are disappointingly shallow: repeal of the Septennial Act, introduction of election by ballot, and immediate dissolution of Parliament.

The yoking of contraries continued in Disraeli's next work, The Revolutionary Epick,²⁶ an heroic poem based on the French Revolution. Its inspiration, as he stated in the preface, was such as to appeal to both novelist and politician:

Wandering over that illustrious scene [of Troy], surrounded by the tombs of heroes and by the confluence of poetic streams, my musings thoughts clustered round the memory of that immortal song [of Homer]. 'What!! I exclaimed, 'is the revolution of France a less important event than the siege of Troy...For me remains the Revolutionary Epick!'²⁷

Thus a literary inspiration and poetic form were employed on a political-historical subject, and with the pragmatic motive of achieving public recognition, as the attempted dedication to the Duke of Wellington bears out.²⁸ Still, he played the poet's role to the full, and gave a recitation of the work to an assembly at the Austens' on the 16th January, 1834. So affected were his manner and dress, however, that the performance was a failure, whatever the merits of the poetry. Far from confirming Disraeli as a second Byron, the audience could hardly control their rising laughter. Sir Henry Layard, nephew to the Austens, wrote an account in the Quarterly Review for January, 1889: "There was something irresistibly comic in the young man dressed in the fantastic, coxcombical costume that he then affected...announcing himself as the Homer or Dante of the age".²⁹

Disraeli thirsted for recognition, but literary success lacked the immediacy of reaction to be found in elections or in Parliament. Submitting the first instalment of the poem to public consideration he declared:

Whatever may be their decision I shall bow to it without a murmur; for I am not one who find [sic] consolation for the neglect of my contemporaries in the imaginary plaudits of a more sympathetic posterity.³⁰

Monypenny comments:

He carried into the field, ^{of action} indeed, a good deal of the spirit of the poet and the artist, but action was his true province all the same...where we look for poetry we find only the dull and cloudy rhetoric into which a man invariably falls who writes poetry not because he must, but because he thinks it a fine thing to do.³¹

Disraeli needed the excitement of immediate and concrete issues. Without some 'political' objective even his writing degenerated into shapeless effusion and bombast. He was more effective reacting to a given set of events, than in inventing imaginary ones. In this manner he wrote to Lord Durham on November 17th, 1834:

What do you think of the Tories! at a moment when decision and energy would be pearls and diamonds to them, they have formed a provisional government! 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the - Lords!' Such is Wellington's solitary cry; a Baptist worthy of such a Messiah as - Peel.³²

After the collapse of the Reform Ministry, Disraeli went down for the third time in December, 1834, to contest the High Wycombe seat against Colonel Grey. Again he outshone him in oratory, and his speech has the originality which only the creative imagination can produce, albeit one which fashioned from a borrowed model than out of 'airy nothingness':

The Reform Ministry! I dare say, now, some of you have heard of Mr. Ducrow, that celebrated gentleman who rides upon six horses. What a prodigious achievement! It seems impossible; but you have confidence in Ducrow. You fly to witness it; unfortunately, one of the horses is ill, and a donkey is substituted in its place. But Ducrow is still admirable; there he is, bounding along in a spangled jacket and cork slippers! The whole town is mad to see Ducrow riding at the same time on six horses. But now two more of the steeds are seized with the staggers, and lo! three jackasses in their stead! Still Ducrow persists, and still announces to the public that he will ride round the circus every night on his six steeds. At last all the horses are knocked up, and now there are half a dozen donkeys. What a change! Behold the hero in the amphitheatre, the spangled jacket thrown on one side, the cork slippers on the other. Puffing, panting, and perspiring, he pokes one sullen brute, thwacks another, cuffs a third, and curses a fourth, while one brays to the audience, and another rolls in the sawdust. Behold the late Prime Minister and the Reform Ministry - the spirited and snow-white steeds have gradually changed into an equal number of sullen and obstinate donkeys; while Mr. Merryman, who, like the Lord Chancellor, was once the very life of the ring, now lies his despairing length in the middle of the stage, with his jokes exhausted and his bottle empty!³³

Monypenny describes the speech:

a characteristic specimen of Disraeli's early political eloquence, full of the broad humour which appeals effectively to the mob and yet with the indefinable quality which suggests the born man of letters.³⁴

The famous Disraelian wit was making his name in society as well as in his published pieces. In a letter to Sarah of April 28, 1832, he recounts a conversation with one Colonel Webster, who warned of the fatal effect of smoking on romance: "It has prevented more liaisons than the dread of a duel or Doctors' Commons". To which Disraeli replied: "You have proved that it is a very moral habit". In the same letter Disraeli describes his first encounter with Mrs. Wyndham Lewis, his future wife:

a pretty little woman, a flirt, and a rattle; indeed, gifted with a volubility I should think unequalled, and of which I can convey no idea. She told me that she liked 'silent, melancholy men'. I answered that I had no doubt of it'.³⁵

Another famous example is recounted in the words of Lady Dufferin:

He was once dining with my insufferable brother-in-law, Mr. Norton, when the host begged him to drink a particular kind of wine, saying he had never tasted anything so good before. Disraeli agreed that the wine was very good. "Well", said Norton, "I have got wine twenty times as good in my cellar". "No doubt, no doubt", said Disraeli, looking round the table; "but, my dear fellow, this is quite good enough for such canaille as you have got today".³⁶

In April, 1835, Disraeli went down to contest a by-election at Taunton, a lost cause almost before he arrived, but he took consolation in his evident popularity:

As for Taunton itself, the enthusiasm of Wycombe is a miniature to it; and I believe in point of energy, eloquence and effect I have far exceeded all my former efforts. Had I arrived twenty hours sooner the result might have been in my favour.³⁷

One other result of the election was a row with the Irish MP. Daniel O'Connell, arising from remarks made by Disraeli on the unlikely alliance between O'Connell and the Whigs. Disraeli even challenged O'Connell's son, Morgan, to a duel (O'Connell himself having forsworn them after once killing a man in one). No doubt Disraeli basked in the romance of the grand gesture: he issued his challenge, consulted the Comte D'Orsay as to points of etiquette, dressed, and went to the opera: "and everyone says I have done it in first-rate style".³⁸ The exchange then moved to the newspapers. In a letter to The Times of December 31st, 1835, we find a characteristic flash of humour: "I will not say, with Macbeth, that I shall fall by 'none of woman born', but this I will declare, that the Whig Samson shall never silence me by 'the jaw of an ass'". After the affair he reviewed his part in it, with as much attention to the literary-satirical aspect of it as the political:

I do not regret the letter: the expressions were well weighed, and without it the affair was but clever pamphleteering. Critics you must always meet. W [sic - identity not certain] told me the last letter was the finest thing in the English language, but that the letter to Dan was too long; others think that perfect. One does not like the Yahgo as coarse, others think it worthy of Swift, and so on.³⁹

Only Disraeli could pause in the turmoil of political events to carry out practical criticism on a letter to a political opponent.

The following year, in April, 1836, The Times carried a report

of Disraeli's speech at a banquet at Lewes, describing him in terms which indicated how little his reputation depended upon purely political credentials: "Mr. Disraeli, already well known for his literary talents and his opposition to the O'Connell influence in the government".⁴⁰

Still, hovering on the fringes of political life, Disraeli was able to realise some of the fantasies of high-level intrigue which up to now had been confined to his novels. At this time William IV, seeking to oust the Whig ministers he disliked, negotiated with Lord Lyndhurst (with whom Disraeli was in touch throughout) to form a government, in case Peel should refuse. The idea eventually came to nothing, but Disraeli the novelist profited instead, writing up the episode in a memorandum of 1836 which for style and subject matter could come straight from the pages of Coningsby:

The D/uke of W/ellington would have been firm in spite of Peel and accepted office if Wharncliffe and his friends had not seceded. The secession was only private. L/yndhurst's final speech at the close of the business, and Brougham's complimentary oration to him, surprised everybody, but the truth is there was an understanding between B. and L. After the debates they generally went home together, and once B said: "You and I, Lyndhurst, can rule this country if we like". Before L's final speech B. took him aside and shook hands with him with great feeling and said: "Let us embrace. We are both Ex-Chancellors and have both been thrown over by our party".⁴¹

Amongst these papers are found several accounts of dealings 'behind the scenes', a tribute to Disraeli's enthusiasm for political manoeuvring and for taking away an artist's impression. He was certainly aware of the potential of his privileged position. Thus he wrote to Isaac Disraeli, describing an attempt by "the old constitutional aristocratic Whigs" to form a coalition with Peel and Lyndhurst, in April, 1835: "You now know all the secrets of affairs which not ten people do in the realm, and you must burn this letter when read".⁴²

After the disappointing reception of The Revolutionary Epick Disraeli's letters to Sarah from 1834 reflected the increasing importance of politics to him. Only two years since his second election failure at High Wycombe, the Reform Ministry was suffering its famous break-up, and he reported the consternation caused by Lord Durham's demands:

Triennial Parliaments to be a Cabinet measure, and an extension of the constituency, the ballot to stand on its merits - in short, a revolution; for this must lead to a fatal collision with the House of Lords.⁴³

November brought the collapse of the administration and the recall of Peel. The events were faithfully reported in Disraeli's letters and memoranda.⁴⁴ From there they went on to become the raw material for Coningsby(1844) and Sybil(1845), which owe much of their power to the sharp analysis of political movements which Disraeli practised during these pre-Parliamentary days, almost as a substitute for the real thing. Political journalism was the nearest he could approach to politics itself. On August 20th, 1835, he wrote coyly to Sarah:

I have sent you the Morning Post every day, which is the only paper now read, and in whose columns some great unknown has suddenly risen, whose exploits form almost the sole staple of political conversation, and all conversation is now political. The back numbers for the last week cannot be obtained for love or money, and the sale has increased nearly one-third. All attempts at discovering the writer have been baffled, and the mystery adds to the keen interest which the articles excite.⁴⁵

One can sense Disraeli's dilemma between wishing to preserve the "mystery" and a desire to acknowledge himself as the "great unknown". In all, fourteen letters were published from August to September, 1835.⁴⁶ Like all Disraeli's political writings, they were as much jeu d'esprits as campaign manifestoes. Disraeli describes an attempt at humour in a parliamentary speech by the normally sedate Sir John Campbell, the Attorney-General:

Fancy an ourang-outang of unusual magnitude dancing under a banana-tree, and licking its hairy chaps, and winking with exultation its cunning eyes as it beholds the delicious and impending fruit, and one may form a tolerable idea of Sir John Campbell's appearance in the House of Commons on Friday night when he tried to be jocular about the Imprisonment for Debt Bill.⁴⁷

Also significant is that remark above:"and all conversation is now political". The society in which Disraeli was moving was diverse in its talents and its aspirations, but in the post-Reform era it centered increasingly on politics. Thus he found himself caught up in the current, less through an innate predilection for the life of a politician than a taste for its presumed glamour.

But Disraeli continued to write even in the heat of his political campaigns, both for the discipline of ordering his ideas on paper, and to announce to the world the emergence of a new political star. In December, 1835, his Vindication of the English Constitution was published:"the fullest exposition of his political creed that pre-

ceded Coningsby".⁴⁸ Denied the opportunity to speak in the House itself, these works were Disraeli's political speeches. In Chapter xx, for example, he makes a parallel "between passing Events and the Reign of Charles the First", and denounces the rule of the People after the latter's demise in a spirited catalogue of their crimes.⁴⁹ Even Peel commented that he was "gratified and surprised to find that a familiar and apparently exhausted topic could be treated with so much of original force of argument and novelty of illustration".⁵⁰ Isaac Disraeli wrote proudly to his son: "You now have a positive name and a being in the great political world, which you had not ten days ago".⁵¹

In the new year, 1836, Disraeli's developing relationship with The Times and its editor, Barnes, bore fruit in a series of nineteen public letters on political topics over the signature 'Runnymede',⁵² as he once again indulged in anonymity:

The Letters of Runnymede are the only things talked of in London, especially the latter ones. The author is unknown, and will probably so remain. One or two papers have foolishly ascribed them to me. There is certainly some imitation₃ of my style, and the writer is familiar with my works.

But on February 5th the author in him triumphed, unable to resist the proud acknowledgement of his creative skills:

"Fraser, which is making some noise, is the highest eulogy I ever received, saying: 'Swift observes, the appearance of a great genius in the world may always be known by the virulence of the dunces, and that this has been singularly illustrated in my case, &c"...⁵⁴

The letters were republished in the summer of 1836, along with a short tract summarising the argument of the Vindication, entitled The Spirit of Whiggism.⁵⁵ 'Runnymede' shows signs of the same witty and pungent style of Disraeli's satirical works. In Letter VIII ('To the People'; February 2nd, 1836) he declares: "Lucian once amused the ancients with an auction of their gods", and decides himself to auction the present Cabinet:

A Prime Minister in an easy-chair, reading a French novel. What think you of that lot? Three Secretaries of State, one odious, another contemptible, the third both! They have their price, yet I would not be their purchaser. A new Lord Chancellor, like a new cheese, crude and flavourless...As we are still a naval nation, our First Lord of the Admiralty should be worth something; but, unfortunately, nobody knows his name. The President of the Council has always indicated a tendency to join any Government, and

therefore should be a marketable article enough. In Egypt, where their favourite food are pumpkins that have run to seed, such a solid and mature intelligence might be worth exporting to the Divan.⁵⁶

In Letter XV (March 30, 1836), to the Prime Minister Viscount Melbourne himself, Disraeli makes the famous comparison of the Cabinet to a cricket xi, each member being allotted a suitable allegorical role in the drama.⁵⁷

A further four leading articles were published in similar manner in The Times in August 1836. On the 20th of that month Disraeli wrote to Sarah: "I suppose you have recognised four bolts of veritable Olympian thunder in The Times. It is considered worthy of Jove, and nobody can discover behind what cloud the god is shrouded".⁵⁸

As well as simply giving him an outlet, these political tracts enabled Disraeli to test his views and develop them by repetition; similar ideas are found in all these works, and they reappear in later political speeches. "Disraeli was indeed a confirmed self-plagiarist".⁵⁹ Monypenny observes of Disraeli's speech at Lewes in 1836:

The report is worth reading even now for the skill with which the history and constitutional theory of the Vindication are woven into a speech that was yet supremely effective as a piece of platform oratory, as is proved by the fact that when the orator sat down 'the most deafening applause prevailed for the space of several minutes'.⁶⁰

Meanwhile Disraeli was also working on a novel, published at the end of 1836 as Henrietta Temple.⁶¹ He had made a start on the book in the summer of 1834, and only now resumed it. The opening chapters were therefore written before Disraeli was gripped by the political ambition which killed his attachment for Henrietta Sykes, the model for the novel's heroine, and which obviously grows in significance in the latter section. Ultimately Henrietta Temple is a comedy, a novel of society rather than of romance. It fails to sustain the early passionate fervour and yet lacks a full political objective. The book has not earned lasting fame, although some interest lies in those sections depicting the hero's struggles with debt, a perennial problem for Disraeli himself.⁶² It was ironic that he should have been thrown into the writing of Henrietta Temple to extricate himself from financial commitments in which his first steps were products of an extraordinary capacity for manipulation, based largely on his eloquent tongue:

From those early days in which he took Evans, his fellow clerk, for partner in a speculation in South American shares he showed a notable capacity for enlisting the good offices of friends, for inspiring them with confidence in his future, and winning and retaining their affection.⁶³

Venetia was published in May, 1837.⁶⁴ It evinced an ambivalent attitude to Disraeli's approaching political career. On one hand there is a shrinking from the mould of allegiance to the orthodox Tory party, a piece of psychological truancy:

But it would almost appear as if now that he had become a good Conservative something in the depths of his passionate and romantic nature revolted against the dominion of a prosaic political creed and an uninspiring political leader;...By choosing as his heroes the two greatest revolutionary figures that England had produced /Byron and Shelley/ he made proclamation in no uncertain tones that as an artist at all events he was determined to retain his freedom and not to bow down before the idols of the Philistines.⁶⁵

However, it is not quite so simple. Within Venetia itself Cadurcis and Herbert are themselves brought back into the fold of political orthodoxy. If they reflect aspects of the lives of Byron and Shelley, they also refer to Disraeli's own situation as he prepared himself for Parliament. In picturing their political maturation, was not the author acknowledging the same in himself?

Two months later Disraeli was elected to Parliament as the colleague of Wyndham Lewis. Ironically, however, this first step in politics was to lead seven years later to what was arguably Disraeli's best novel: Coningsby.⁶⁶

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2. Henrietta Temple and Venetia.

Henrietta Temple was begun in 1834 as a celebration of Disraeli's love affair with Henrietta Sykes (the wife of Sir Francis Sykes, third baronet of Basildon in Berkshire), whom he first met in the summer of 1833.¹ The autobiographical sincerity is evident in the early chapters of the novel. Here the hero, Ferdinand Armine, catches sight of Henrietta for the first time:

There is no love but love at first sight. This is the transcendent and surpassing offspring of sheer and unpolluted sympathy. All other is the illegitimate result of observation, of reflection, of compromise, of comparison, of expediency. The passions that endure flash like the lightning: they scorch the soul, but it is warmed for ever. Miserable man whose² love rises by degrees upon the frigid morning of his mind!

It must indeed have been a powerful passion, strong enough, as Ferdinand goes on to affirm: "to feel our flaunty ambition fade away like a shrivelled gourd". It was therefore characteristic of Disraeli to pay tribute to the heroine and to the quality of love in the abstract, in literary form. But Henrietta Temple was also to record the inevitable reaction, as Disraeli's political concerns reasserted their influence, and a note amongst the Hughenden Papers carries this epitaph:

Autumn of 1836 - Parted for ever from Henrietta. Returned to Bradenham at the latter end of August; concluded Henrietta Temple, of which one volume had been written three years. It was published early in December and was very successful.³

In the same spirit of thoughtful introspection Disraeli portrays his hero moved by his misfortunes to hatred of his former lover: "Terrible moment when we first dare to view with feelings of repugnance the being that our soul has long idolised! It is the most awful of revelations".⁴

Ferdinand was to be reconciled to his Henrietta, but never with the intensity of their first passion. Indeed, the romantic fervour is on the wane from the first ecstatic moment onwards. By Book III love has become already a nostalgic memory:

Whatever may be the harsher course of his career...he may yet consider himself thrice blessed to whom this graceful destiny has fallen, and amid the storms and troubles of after-life may look back to these hours, fair as the dawn, beautiful as the twilight, with solace and satisfaction.⁵

When Henrietta exhorts Ferdinand to an united effort to restore the house of Armine, love has become a form of inspiration for something outside itself (significantly, of both a material and an artistic nature): "it encourages to great deeds, and develops the creative faculty of our nature".⁶ Henrietta joins the ranks of Disraelian women who are valued rather as inspirers to a political or literary career, than as romantic objects:

How many an official portfolio would never have been carried, had it not been for her sanguine spirit and assiduous love! How many a depressed and despairing advocate has clutched the Great Seal, and taken his precedence before princes, borne onward by the breeze of her inspiring hope, and illumined by the sunshine of her prophetic smile! A female friend, amiable, clever, and devoted, is a possession more valuable than parks and palaces; and, without⁷ such a muse, few men can succeed in life, none be content.

Thus Disraeli describes implicitly the development of his own attitude to romantic love. When he finally married, it was to the widow of his Parliamentary colleague, and an heiress. A simple function of Henrietta Temple, therefore, which it shared with his other novels, was to record and to analyse an event of heightened impact in his life. If not as psychologically revealing as the 'Autobiographical' Trilogy, nor yet a political work, it has elements of both.

In turn, the novelist did not rely on inspiration (artistic or romantic) for the dynamic of his work, but drew upon fragments of his own or others' experiences. As well as describing Disraeli's affair with Henrietta Sykes, his brief but notorious career on the island of Malta as part of his Eastern tour in 1830 is reflected in the hero's spell as a cadet in the Malta garrison.⁸ The influence of Disraeli's tour of Switzerland and Italy with the Austens in 1826 is evident in Book V, when Digby Montfort plays host and incipient suitor to the heroine.⁹ Digby's views on the Italian character and way of life are combined, sometimes awkwardly, with those of the author: "He maintained that there was no existing people who more completely fulfilled the social duties than this much scandalised nation..." at which point Disraeli clearly steps in himself: "respecting whom so many silly prejudices are entertained by the English, whose travelling fellow-countrymen, by the bye, seldom enter into any society but that tainted circle that must exist in all capitals".¹⁰

In Henrietta Temple Disraeli for the first time successfully

portrayed characters from the life, without the element of personal bitterness and mockery found in Vivian Grey. Lady Bellair is an amusing representation of the Lady Cork who was the doyen of society in the 1830's. Her famous advice to Henrietta was no doubt one of those gems which the novelist Disraeli seized upon even in the midst of his hectic social life:

Pretty women, my sweet child, should never be alone. Not that I was very pretty, but I was always with pretty women¹¹ and at last the men began to think that I was pretty too.¹¹

Comte de Mirabel and Bond Sharpe are also taken from the life: the Comte D'Orsay and Crockford respectively. The appearance of these characters signals the moving of the novel (which shows signs of beginning to flag) out 'into society'. With the virtual exhaustion of the love-theme by the end of Book IV, only this widening of interest can save the author from bringing the novel to a close, as he did Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming, for lack of anything more to say. Admittedly, Disraeli had additional reasons for this portraiture. His publisher, Colburn, wrote while Henrietta Temple was being produced: "I hope you will have a dozen more originals to draw from besides old Lady C[ork]; an exhibition of two or three leading political characters would not be amiss..."¹² Political characters as such are not represented in the book, but the technique of incorporating originals was being developed in preparation for Coningsby and Sybil. And Disraeli's observation of social affairs is evident even at this early stage. Bond Sharpe himself represents a new class emerging in society, without birth or land, but confident in his self-made fortune. He exposes the hypocrisy of those who scorn the new avenues to power opening up at this stage in the nineteenth-century:

It is true I am an usurer. My dear sir, if all the usurers in this great metropolis could only pass in procession before you at this moment, how you would start! You might find some Right Honourables among them; many a grave functionary, many a grave magistrate; fathers of families, the very models of respectable characters, patrons and presidents of charitable institutions, and subscribers for the suppression of those very gaming-houses, whose victims,¹³ in nine cases out of ten, are their principal customers.

'Morris and Levison', the coal-merchants-cum-money-lenders, also represent a new class to whom the aristocracy are rapidly becoming symbolically and actually indebted. Mr. Blandford is in some ways a prototype for Mr. Ormsby in Coningsby and Sybil: a deliberately

unremarkable figure in society, dedicated instead to the amassing and cultivation of his fortune. Meanwhile the aristocracy fritter away their lives, like Charles Doricourt:

The world admired him, and called him Charley, from which it will be inferred that he was a privileged person, and was applauded for a thousand actions, which in anyone else would have been met with decided reprobation.¹⁴

Thus even in Henrietta Temple the beginnings of a socio-political interest help to save the novel from exhausting itself in introspection. A change of tone is revealed in the hero's attitude to his grandfather, old Sir Ferdinand. In Book I, Chapter i his legendary career is held up as an ideal. Like Disraeli, he is conscious of his alien religion, seeks consolatory adventures in the East, and by sheer force of will and lack of principle achieves **notoriety wherever** his craving for adventure takes him. But this belongs to a past age, and in the young Ferdinand - with whom Disraeli also identifies in part - are represented those virtues of diligence and filial piety which are more appropriate to the nineteenth-century. His faults, unlike those of his grandfather, are not portrayed as amiable weaknesses, but as sources of ultimate suffering. Young Ferdinand comes to curse his namesake both in his example, and his **dissipating** of the family fortune, which forces him to make suit to his cousin and lose the beloved Henrietta.¹⁵ The romantic relics of the Armine family inheritance now appear pathetically irrelevant to the economic realities of maintaining a landed estate in the nineteenth-century.

Instead, resolution of the best of ancient and modern ways of life is articulated in the heroine's charitable missions on the Ducie Bowers estate, which hint at the neo-feudalistic creed developed later in Sybil. The implication is that, if one must indulge in romance, let it be expressed in a practical spirit. Henrietta Temple casts off the role of the lover and puts on that of Sybil, or of May Dacre in The Young Duke:

The aged were solaced by her visit; the sick forgot their pains; and, as she listened with sympathising patience to long narratives of rheumatic griefs, it seemed her presence in each old chair, her tender enquiries and sanguine hopes, brought even more comfort than her plenteous promises of succour from the Bowers, in the shape of arrowroot and gruel, port wine and flannel petticoats.¹⁶

Catholicism, which is used initially to lend an extra exotic quality to some of the characters, becomes a theme in itself. Digby

Montfort's outstanding personal character, for example, is set against the stern rule which forbids one of his faith "occupying the seat of his ancestors in the senate".¹⁷ The comic climax of the twin marriages in Henrietta Temple has an echo in the Catholic Emancipation Act (1828), which symbolises the spirit of reconciliation on a political level. The predominantly Catholic cast resume their /rightful responsibilities. The novel concludes on a confident note which shows Disraeli casting an eye at his own political future:

and there is little doubt that they will ultimately support that British and national administration which Providence has doubtless in store for these outraged and distracted realms. At least this is Mr. Temple's more than hope, who is also in the House, and acts entirely with Lord Stanley.¹⁸

Venetia also moves from concentration on a severely limited cast of characters to a resolution of a near-political nature. The novel opens at Cherbury, isolated both by its location and by the deliberate preference of its occupiers, Lady Annabel and her daughter, the heroine Venetia herself. One of the themes of the work is that Lady Annabel must release Venetia from perpetual childhood, to take her place in society. By degrees the outside world encroaches on their pastoral existence. Cadurcis, Venetia's neighbour and playmate, goes away to school.¹⁹ Then we see his guardian planning the youth's introduction to political life, as one "calculated to confer so much credit on his tutor, and shed so much lustre on his party".²⁰ The author himself steps in with a political review in Book IV: the state of the Whig party "immediately subsequent to the expulsion of the Coalition Ministry".²¹ As in Endymion, he pays tribute to the influence of women in politics, the hostesses of party functions, preeminent amongst whom is Lady Monteagle, "the Muse of the Whig party, at whose shrine every man of wit and fashion was proud to offer his flattering incense".²² We now see events from the point of view of a wider society, and hear Lady Annabel and Dr. Masham discussed in almost patronising terms by the sophisticated city dwellers.

At university Cadurcis is moved by the same spirit of free-thinking as Contarini Fleming, but in this case it is ascribed to the political doctrine of the Liberal party of the time.²³ When Lady Annabel and Dr. Masham are eventually drawn into that society they have hitherto avoided, the latter has undergone a transformation. Elevated (by royal command) from an eighteenth-century Tory parson²⁴ to a subtle and politically aware bishop, he gives up his

country pursuits to attend to his duties in the House of Lords. When he and Cadurcis renew acquaintance in London, they discuss the latter's love for Venetia, and Masham adds a touch of delicate badinage to his advice:

'I think you do love Venetia, at this moment", replied Masham; "and I think", he continued, smiling, "that you may probably continue very much in love with her, even during the rest of the week".²⁵

Cadurcis' initial notoriety on entering society is due not to his political pretensions but to his living what is obviously a thinly disguised representation of the career of Byron.²⁶ This includes a number of faithfully recreated biographical details: "He amused himself by eating only biscuits, and calling for soda water, while we quaffed our Burgundy".²⁷

In Book IV, Chapter xvi Lady Monteagle attempts to force her affections on Cadurcis, gaining an entry to his quarters by dressing up as one of his young estate-workers.²⁸ It is an amusing scene, but a cruel play on the relationship between Byron and Lady Caroline Lamb. She herself was dead, but her husband, the Whig Prime Minister Lord Melbourne, was still very much alive. In Chapter xviii Cadurcis' career catches up with him, and he is driven out by the same public who had hitherto applauded his every action. He renounces his country in disgust, as Byron did before him, and we may imagine that the Byronic side of Disraeli went with him too: "He left his native shores in a blaze of glory, but with the accents of scorn still quivering on his lip".²⁹ In several ways Cadurcis/Byron was Disraeli's ideal: poet, peer, social lion, and a resolute man of action, too, as his conduct during the challenge and ensuing duel with Lady Monteagle's husband after the episode referred to above bears out.³⁰

But his departure does not confirm Cadurcis in his self-imposed exile; it leads to a state approaching acceptance of his background and responsibilities. He (and Disraeli) learn to supersede immature Byronism. Having flirted alternately with sentiments of unthinking orthodoxy at one extreme (under Lady Annabel's influence) or shallow rebellion (at university, for example), Cadurcis passes through those 'inevitable phases' of contrasting enthusiasms which are inseparable from maturation. Reunited with the Herberts in Italy, he makes extravagant protestations of his desire for revenge on the society which had recently rejected him. Significantly, it is the

influence of a woman which cuts off this childish vein. Venetia retorts: "You have no cause to complain of the world, and you magnify a petty squabble with a contemptible coterie into a quarrel with a nation".³¹ Insofar as Disraeli identified with Cadurcis, he was delivering this reproof to himself too, as part of the internal debate which Venetia dramatises. In place of the self-pitying poet, a new ideal is found in both Herbert (an approximate portrait of Shelley) and Cadurcis' cousin George, who have learnt to accept the limitations and responsibilities of their position. All the characters in Venetia have to tread the same path as Cadurcis to some extent: Masham is not allowed to remain a parochial parson, and Venetia must accept her role in society, the equivalent of a man's political function. Lady Annabel is presented initially as the model of loving motherhood and heroic self-sacrifice,³² but in time she is seen to exert a "despotic influence", forcing from Venetia a promise that she will never marry without her mother's consent.³³ At the same time Lady Annabel imposes a rigid political code on Cadurcis; when he returns to Cherbury after five years away at Eton, Disraeli observes, with just a hint of irony:

When she met him again after so long an interval, and found her early prognostics so fairly, so completely fulfilled, and watched his conduct and conversation, exhibiting alike a well-informed mind, an obliging temper, and, what Lady Annabel valued even above all gifts and blessings, a profound conviction of the truth of all her own opinions, moral, political, and religious, she was quite charmed...³⁴

Cadurcis' career seems to be prefigured in that of Herbert, although the latter lacks the younger man's egoism.³⁵ In Herbert Disraeli annexed the Shelley myth and applied it to his own semi-political thesis.³⁶ The idea for using the lives of Shelley and Byron is likely to have come from a number of works published about this time: Moore's Letters and Journals of Lord Byron,³⁷ Thomas Medwin's Memoir of Shelley,³⁸ his Shelley Papers,³⁹ and Conversations of Lord Byron;⁴⁰ and Leigh Hunt's Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries.⁴¹ Byron's personality goes largely to Cadurcis, but his disastrous marriage is reflected in the estrangement of Herbert and Lady Annabel. Herbert's personality is based on details from that Memoir of Shelley: his lively imagination as a child, repressed by the cramming regimen at Eton, and his eventual departure abroad in 'scandalous' circumstances.⁴² But Shelley's youthful relation-

ship with "Harriet G" is given to Venetia and Cadurcis, while Byron's mercenary career is enacted rather inappropriately by Herbert. That Disraeli had studied Shelley's poetry is evident from The Revolutionary Epick. 'Tita' supplied some of the details,⁴³ and Disraeli had met Trelawney, who with Byron had burned Shelley's body on the Tuscan shore.⁴⁴ There are some direct plagiarisms too: from Medwin's reprint of Shelley's 'Essay on Love' in the Memoir⁴⁵ and from a piece entitled 'Love' in the section 'Reflections'⁴⁶. Herbert compliments Cadurcis' poetic skill in book VI, Chapter viii, closely following a sonnet in praise of Byron by Shelley: "My soul/Marks his creations rise as fast and fair/As perfect worlds at the Creator's will".⁴⁷ Cadurcis echoes Don Juan in his demands for vengeance on the complacent British public.⁴⁸ The final tragedy in which both Herbert and Cadurcis are drowned is based on the account in Medwin's Memoir of the drowning of Shelley and his friend Williams in the gulf of Genoa;

Williams was a good swimmer, and had no doubt made strong efforts for his life, having been washed on the beach partly undressed; but Shelley had his hand locked in his waistcoat, where⁴⁹ he had in his haste thrust a volume of Keats' poems...

Apart from tapping the Byron/Shelley legend, Venetia also draws on Disraeli's holiday in Italy in 1826 for much of Book V, when the travellers are found - like the author - visiting the home of the arts in Europe, including a pilgrimage to Petrarch's house and tomb,⁵⁰ and a spell in Venice in its happier days.⁵¹

The discussions between Herbert and Cadurcis derive in part from Shelley's Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks, but they have an additional function as part of Disraeli's own self-enquiry. The theme lies somewhere between Contarini Fleming and Coningsby, both in content and technique. Two characters are now employed, instead of as in Contarini one introspective waverer flanked by two obviously polarised figures. The discussion does not centre so much on the relative merits of poetic and more orthodox social values as on how the relative merits of both must each be accepted by Herbert and Cadurcis, and on how they can be harmonised. Even at university Cadurcis' admiration for Herbert's reputation is based on the breadth of his talents, which span several fields: "The courage, the boldness, the eloquence, the imagination, the strange and romantic career of Herbert, carried the spirit of Cadurcis captive".⁵² Fraser's Magazine praised Venetia: "in this work as in his

political essays and speeches, he strives for the diffusion of sound constitutional views with characteristic zeal", and dismissed apolitical literature as "pure fudge".⁵³ R. Garnett, on the other hand, treats the acceptance of orthodox social values with which Venetia appears to conclude as largely superficial, and more an accident of history. He speculates on Disraeli's likely course had his family remained orthodox Jews, and thus debarred his entry to the House of Commons:

Debarred from practical politics, Disraeli might have given free course to those revolutionary tendencies of his nature which the necessities of political life suppressed, and been famous as the keen, steady, and ruthless assailant of many things which, as matters turned out, his destiny enlisted him to defend.⁵⁴

Whilst there was this 'Shelleyan' aspect to Disraeli's character, there was also a more genuinely conforming side, and the interest of Venetia is to see him using the novel to weigh up the two. Venetia is not simply a last despairing flirtation with rebellion, a refusal to bow to the orthodoxy which Disraeli's political career now demanded. Nor is it a work of capitulation in which he abandons his former eccentric career, as represented in these revolutionary heroes, by picturing them 'tamed' by time and circumstances. It is not in the nature of the work to come to a firm statement either one way or the other. (Even the more 'political' Coningsby refuses to commit its hero to any definite political course, and ends on a wholly open note). Venetia is a tribute to two of England's greatest minds, and a consideration of how to benefit from their example and noble principles, without at the same time falling into their errors. For this reason Herbert is an older and wiser Shelley, able to ruminate meaningfully on his career, and the tenor of his conclusions centres on that most characteristic of Victorian concepts: duty. Even those acts which had earned him the detestation of the British public, such as his engagement in the American War of Independence, are seen to proceed from noble intentions:

Doubtless it was not without a struggle, perhaps a pang, that Herbert resolved upon a line of conduct to which it must assuredly have required the strongest throb of his cosmopolitan sympathy, and his amplest definition of philanthropy to have impelled him. But without any vindictive feelings towards England, for he ever professed and exercised charity towards his enemies, attributing their conduct entirely to their ignorance and prejudice, upon this step he nevertheless felt it his duty to decide.⁵⁵

Cadurcis' poem in praise of Herbert therefore pays tribute not only to the latter's "immortal verse" but also to his "god-like deeds".⁵⁶ Elements of Disraeli himself inevitably surface in Herbert's career: the enforced self-study, and the interaction within him of 'two natures':

Then it was that the two passions which seemed to share the being of Herbert appeared simultaneously to assert their sway, and he resolved to call in his Muse to the assistance of his Philosophy.⁵⁷

Like Disraeli, Herbert's public humiliation extends to both his literary and his polemical careers:

The critics were always hard at work, proving that he was no poet, and demonstrating in the most logical manner that he was quite incapable of reasoning on the commonest topic.⁵⁸

So, in making Herbert an older figure, Disraeli was setting up a desired projection of himself in the future. In this respect Venetia is a statement of ambition, but one more altruistic than in Disraeli's earlier novels. Herbert's plea for reconciliation to Lady Annabel reflects a deep humility, a shrinking from any claim to superior knowledge, which is of course the most eloquent statement in his favour.⁵⁹ He rejects Cadurcis' cynicism,⁶⁰ and puts forward his own (and Disraeli's) response to the 'two natures' dilemma:

'We exist', said Herbert, 'because we sympathise...It is sympathy that makes you a poet...therefore, a misanthropical poet is a contradiction in terms'.⁶¹

And Cadurcis himself begins to learn from Herbert the paradoxical lesson that to be wise is to be aware of your own ignorance.

"After all, what is truth?" he asks, a question no doubt in Disraeli's mind at this crucial juncture in his career.⁶²

In Henrietta Temple and Venetia Disraeli was evaluating two aspects of his life which needed to be reconciled in preparation for his entry into politics. There is no neat resolution, but in the very act of writing he went some way towards achieving a balance. In future he would direct his romantic leanings into politics, and look to women for encouragement rather than passion. And he would use his literary talents in sympathy with his fellow men rather than in selfish isolation from them.

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3. Hughenden Papers, Box II, A/III/C; no date, but Blake (page 136) puts it after August 1837.
4. HT., 349.
5. HT., 151.
6. HT., 173.
7. HT., 173-174.
8. HT., 57-64; see D.E. Sultana, Disraeli in Spain, Malta and Albania, 9.
9. MB., I, 98-115; Blake, 51-53.
10. HT., 289.
11. HT., 222.
12. MB., I, 348.
13. HT., 383.
14. HT., 373.
15. HT., 115.
16. HT., 116.
17. HT., 272.
18. HT., 464.
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22. loc. cit.
23. Venetia, 229.
24. Eg., Venetia, 12-17.
25. Venetia, 239.
26. See, for example, D.E. Painting, / Disraeli's Contribution to the Political Novel, 112-124; B. McCabe, From Vivian Grey to Tancred: A Critical Study of Disraeli's Development as a Novelist (Phd. Thesis, Stanford, 1972), 168-192.
27. Venetia, 211.
28. Venetia, 309-315.

29. Venetia, 331.
30. Venetia, 319.
31. Venetia, 424.
32. Venetia, 105.
33. Venetia, 300.
34. Venetia, 176-177.
35. Venetia, 212-224.
36. See R.A. Duerksen, 'Disraeli's use of Shelley in Venetia', Victorian Newsletter, no. 26 (Fall 1964), 19-22.
37. T. Moore, 1830; see also T. Moore, The Works of Lord Byron, with his Letters and Journals, and his life by TM, 1835, etc.
38. Athenaeum, 1832; reprinted 1833.
39. 1833.
40. Colburn, 1824.
41. Colburn, 1828.
42. Venetia, 220.
43. See above, Chapter 1, Section 2, 27.
44. MB., I, 366.
45. Medwin's Memoir of Shelley, 21-24.
46. ibid., 156-157.
47. ibid., 37.
48. Venetia, 414n.
49. Memoir of Shelley, 80.
50. Venetia, 344.
51. Venetia, 372ff.
52. Venetia, 229.
53. 'Disraeli's Venetia', Fraser's Magazine, XV, no. 90 (June 1837), 776.
54. R. Garnett, 'Shelley and Lord Beaconsfield', in Essays of an ex-Librarian, (1901, pp. 99-125), 102.
55. Venetia, 222.
56. Venetia, 276-279.
57. Venetia, 215.

58. Venetia, 219.
59. Venetia, 382.
60. Eg., Venetia, 415.
61. Venetia, 428-429.
62. Venetia, 434.

3. Disraeli and Romanticism.

A succinct definition of Romanticism would be difficult to reach, as L. Furst demonstrates in her work by that title, quoting a multitude of attempts.¹ Furst herself points out some aspects which strike her: "its individualism, its idealism, the primacy of the creative imagination, the subjective perception of nature, the importance of feeling, the use of symbolic imagery".²

It is perhaps that stress on the creative imagination which most distinguishes Romanticism from the culture which preceded it, although one must be careful not to over-emphasise the break, since as M. Praz argues, one milieu tends to flow into another more smoothly than categories of literary history might suggest.³ The new movement ranged from those who relegated 'Reason' to a lowly place in artistic creation, to those who merely sought a proper balance between the artist's faculties, however they defined that. With the reaction against Reason came a return to belief in mystical and ideal values. The objects and artefacts of this world, including literature, were seen as expressions of a semi-Platonic realm of the ideal beyond, and hence acquired a new symbolic value. Ceremony and ritual had a role in reflecting the workings of a higher law than was apparent to merely rational faculties. The study of Nature, therefore, could lead the observer to higher truths (although he might in practice never advance beyond nature-worship of a simplistic kind). Transcendental strivings sometimes took the form of religious faith, and Catholicism enjoyed an enhanced respect, particularly the Catholic culture supposed (perhaps often rather idealistically) to have existed in the middle ages. Mediaeval romances were again in vogue, imbued with myth, folklore and legend, and supernatural events were accepted within 'natural' settings. The religious tone found its civil complement in the complex of chivalric values. The folklore and traditions of northern Europe reasserted themselves against classical modes. H.A. Beers defines Romanticism as: "pertaining to the style of the Christian and popular literature of the Middle Ages".⁴

Men began to find their fulfilment once more in 'Nature', some in simple celebration of our undeniable part in it, others in its inspiration to more transcendental values. Institutions and societies were again seen as naturally developing organisms, not to be regulated by prescriptive rules, but rather revered in their rich-

ness and diversity. Rousseau's Discours Sur L'Origine De L'Inégalité Parmi Les Hommes (1755) is one of the first examples of a new type of thinking which questioned established social gradations. Man's natural goodness, and the value of natural promptings, began to find a place in political and philosophical thought. Hence an acceptance in political thought of individual self-determination, and in literature of originality and freedom from norms of creativity. Thus Young's Conjectures On Original Composition (1759) envisaged an organic model of artistic creation:

An original may be said to be of a vegetable nature, it rises spontaneously from the vital root of genius; it grows, it is not made; imitations are often of a sort of manufacture wrought up by those mechanics, art and labour, out of pre-existent materials not their own.⁵

Not only were human feelings now admitted and respected, but also individual perceptions of reality. By acknowledging the necessarily subjective nature of perception, it was felt that at least a kind of honesty - and hence, even, almost objectivity - had been achieved. The political consequence of this is evident in some of the revolutionary theories of the time, although paradoxically it found its way into a whole spectrum of creeds from anarchism to utilitarianism. And Romanticism could work in the opposite, centrist direction too; by restoring the feudal ideal and respect for local cultures, it significantly influenced the rise of nationalism (especially in nineteenth-century Germany) against the old dynastic order.

The effects of Romanticism can be grouped into four main trends. Firstly, the restoration of the imagination in art, along with faith, idealism, transcendentalism and mysticism; secondly, the chivalric and religious ideals of the middle ages; thirdly, a return to an appreciation of Nature, natural feelings and of original thought; and finally, a tolerance of individuality and delight in diversity.

Disraeli's debt to the Byron and Shelley legends has already been detailed above,⁶ but the influence of Romanticism on him went beyond a fascination with two of its leading characters. Reverence for transcendental faith and mysticism would have had special appeal for one who never forgot that he was of the Chosen Race, and coined the term of the 'Semitic Principle' as his shorthand for the spiritual source of many contemporary institutions. As with many aspects of Romanticism, they appear in Disraeli's novels partly because he was genuinely influenced by the movement, and partly be-

cause he found many of them harmonised with a (sometimes idealised) conception of his own situation. The narrative structures of the novels seldom follow a logical path, and this betrays his impatience and frequent lack of care as a writer; but yet he could claim allegiance to a more transcendental dynamic than is to be found in everyday causality. Hence that scene in Contarini Fleming where the hero emerges from the forest at the end of his adventure as leader of a robber-band ('The Secret Union for the Amelioration of Society'), musing upon 'female influence', when at that moment a coach approaches with the adored Christiana of his boyhood inside.⁷ Later in the same novel he experiences a wholly dream-like love-affair with Alcesté, the daughter of a Venetian house from which Contarini himself traces descent. The episode is brought to an end by Alcesté's equally unreal death in childbirth.⁸ In Coningsby, the hero meets with the enigmatic Sidonia when both men have to shelter from a storm. They converse on the lack of faith and heroism in a materialistic age, and the eventual result is that Coningsby makes his first visit to the capital of modern industrialism, Manchester, to begin his mission to integrate England's fragmented social interests. Far from apologetising for the unusual train of events, Disraeli uses it to show how the most significant achievements may proceed from the least obvious causes, because a higher providential law is behind the bare events of this world. In Coningsby's case, therefore, it is something to wonder at that the hero's education in social realities was initiated: "Because a being, whose name even was unknown to him, had met him in a hedge ale house during a thunder-storm, and told him that the Age of Ruins was past".⁹

Since Disraeli's time we have had the teaching of Freud and experienced the 'stream-of-consciousness' technique; hence it is easier for us to appreciate a narrative logic based on the mind as mediator of perception, rather than on a supposedly objective train of events. Romanticism at least feels able to assert the 'reality of illusion'. Thus in Venetia, Herbert praises Don Quixote for its celebration of the Golden Age:

'But he did not ever live', said Lady Annabel, smiling.
 'He lives to us', said Herbert. 'He is the same to this age as if he had absolutely wandered over the plains of Castile and watched in the Sierra Morena. We cannot, indeed, find his tomb; but he has left us his great example'.¹⁰

J. Barzun stresses that the romanticists were concerned with truth, but they also acknowledged our necessarily subjective ap-

proach to it:

The union of factuality and truth - truth being fact seen from a point of view - is what many romanticists meant by the Imagination (Coleridge distinguished it as the Secondary Imagination), the faculty that creates, or re-creates, reality, and to which we owe all art.¹¹

Not only is truth perceived subjectively, but in certain instances it is only accessible to the imagination: "The Romanticists [sic] were realists precisely because they admitted the widest possible range of experience as real".¹² Taking the argument into the moral sphere, it enabled Shelley to proclaim in his Defence of Poetry: "The great instrument of moral good is the imagination".

If this was to put the Romantic imagination in its best light, the same spirit could be used to justify purely gratuitous tricks of melodrama or supernatural incident. The second part of Vivian Grey relies heavily on the stock-in-trade of the Gothic novel, taking the hero through a series of improbable adventures in stagey surroundings. Even in Part One there are scenes between Vivian and Mrs. Felix Lorraine, his patron's vengeful daughter-in-law, which strive too self-consciously for effect and so jar with the main narrative. In Contarini Fleming the hero is subject to frequent visions: of 'Emerica'; of Mary Magdalen in the chapel by the Brents; and of the strangely similar Alcesté, both at their first meeting and after her death.¹³ These scenes offend not in featuring visions so much as in the over-dramatic atmosphere which is worked up. In Lothair the reader is left in confusion after the hero emphatically refutes a rumour that the Virgin Mary had appeared at the battle of Mentana, yet soon after is himself visited by the ghost of Theodora.¹⁴

The Romantic stress upon nature in its transcendental aspect had clearly neo-Platonic affinities and saw material creation as a living symbol of infinite values beyond. William Cowper was one such proponent of this 'natural supernaturalism', as R. Harris observes:

To Cowper...the whole universe was a miracle. He recognised what the philosophers called the laws of nature, but these to him were proof of the existence of God. He was more impressed by the regularity of nature than by any deviations from the norm.¹⁵

Blake's dictum that, "All Deities reside in the Human breast", and his conception of the imagination as a link to the divine, were in the same spirit, although they also show how the same approach

could lead to a conclusion almost opposed to that of Colver above. The same ambiguity potentially implicit in 'natural supernaturalism' is found in Disraeli's works. Carlyle, in, for example, Sartor Resartus, had to strive hard to assert material forms as of no value purely in themselves, and yet as supremely important as the 'spiritual clothes' of the ideal. Wordsworth found his God in Man, Nature and the Universe, but many would argue that he became too engrossed with natural beauty and lost his link to the transcendental. There is a tension between declaring, with Wordsworth, that credence in supernatural need not depend upon the obviously extraordinary, and between asserting that the extraordinary does in fact work through the ordinary. One approach draws our attention to the wonder of everyday things, such as a daisy or a skylark; the other confronts scepticism by presenting wondrous events unashamedly within a recognisable scenario. This latter was Disraeli's more usual course, and it fell in with the 'myth-logic' of his narrative structures. But he was generally careful to preserve an enigmatic authorial stance. Where visions or portents take place, we are left unsure whether the author himself gives them credit, or whether they are to be ascribed to the feverish imaginations of the protagonists. The technical example of Walter Scott is evident here. From Scott, too, Disraeli would have learnt how an author can assert respect for history and can bring to life elements of local myth and folklore without falling into bathos. When we are presented with past customs and beliefs we are not urged to reverence them as they once were revered, but to accept the importance they did hold for a particular human culture. And we are advised that rituals and customs - albeit not the same ones - do have a place in our culture to-day. Thus Contarini Fleming bemoans the sceptical attitude which society takes towards the adventures of its hero as a latter-day robber-baron: "In this age we are as prone to disbelieve in the extraordinary as we were once eager to credit it".¹⁶

Contarini Fleming's youthful band of philosopher-robbers had a distinguished heritage in literature. Schiller's Die Räuber (1781) contrasted the 'natural justice' of its robber-band to the hypocritical notions of justice found in contemporary government. Bulwer's Paul Clifford (1830) and Godwin's Caleb Williams (1794) also seek to challenge orthodox notions of moral respectability. Thus Caleb seems doomed from birth to a fugitive career, and one cannot help sympathizing with the sentiments of the outlaw chief whom he

meets:

'Our profession is a profession of justice. We, who are thieves without a licence, are at open war with another set of men who are thieves according to law'.¹⁷

In Venetia, the young runaway Cadurcis falls among a band of gypsies, and they are arrested for abducting him. The ensuing court case brings out the prejudice against them, as well as the bi-polar opinions of the magistrate, Squire Mountmeadow, on all supposed enemies of the Realm.¹⁸ Sybil presents a whole town, Wodgate, which is a virtual law unto itself. It has its own hierarchy based on technical craftsmanship which at least rewards merit more faithfully than the rest of society outside.¹⁹

Disraeli's heroes observe the stricter conventions of their society, but they seldom identify with it. They are almost 'natural men', often literally orphans, and so do not have - or are subsequently deprived of - any stake in the present system. They may be marked out by some feature, and one can see here how the genre appealed to Disraeli's own sense of being a partial alien in English society. Vivian Grey is called a "seditious stranger" within days of first going to school, and Contarini Fleming declares himself to be: "...without country, without kindred, and without friends".²⁰ Coningsby is contrasted to the 'society man', Mr. Melton, in that his manners are: "...nature's pure gift, the reflex of his feelings".²¹ Disraelian heroes are often lacking in education as society understands it, and they learn instead in the 'school of life', a concept which was popularized by Carlyle's translation of Wilhelm Meister in 1824. Learning by experience, they are not free from mistakes, but they acquire thereby 'felt' rather than 'borrowed' knowledge. It is the view we find in Rousseau's Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse: "They talk of everything; they are wrong about everything; they know nothing but themselves; yet...their errors are worth more than the knowledge of the wise man".²² Thus Vivian Grey may chafe at his disadvantages, but he glories in the challenge they pose, comparing himself to the great politician-in-recluse, Frederick Cleveland: "It was impossible, therefore, for two minds to have been cultivated on more contrary systems than those of Frederick Cleveland and Vivian Grey".²³ When fortune is favouring him, he celebrates the life of unpredictable experience which travelling symbolises, as it did in so many Romantic works:

But your traveller, your adventurous traveller, careless of the future, reckless of the past, with a mind interested by the world, from the immense and varied character which that world presents to him, and not by his own stake in any petty or particular contingency; wearied by delightful fatigue, daily occasioned by varying means and from varying causes; with the consciousness that no prudence can regulate the fortunes of the morrow, and with no curiosity to discover what those fortunes may be..."²⁴

The stress on the individual's battle with experience led to two divergent tendencies in the Romantic hero. The apprentice in the school of Goethe learnt that "Die Tat ist alles", just as Contarini Fleming is urged by the artist Peter Winter: "Act, act, act; act without ceasing, and you will no longer talk of the vanity of life".²⁵ On the other hand there came the protagonists exemplified in Scott's novels: more passive, usually buffeted between political or cultural extremes, and forced into action very often against their temperament. In each case the hero's development involves working his way to a more balanced approach: the impetuous spirit must learn prudence and wisdom; and the over-cautious, a stronger belief in himself and a deeper sense of responsibility in human affairs. There are no guidelines for this: the Romantic hero grows to maturity precisely by developing his own lifestyle. J. Barzun contrasts this existential approach with the more prescriptive classical view of education, and finds a greater integrity in the former: 'feeling' and 'action', and 'conception' and 'execution' are more closely harmonised. Eighteenth-century society regulated so much of men's social activities that natural impulses frequently found expression only in perverted forms, and passionate feelings emerged as sentimentality:

Unlike the sentimentalist who has a compartmentalised existence, the romantic realist does not blink his weakness, but exerts his power.²⁶

Contarini Fleming exhibits both tendencies of the Romantic hero, but only in alternate fits of action and passivity, and he (and Disraeli) had yet to integrate the two. In Venetia, Herbert shows Cadurcis that the poet has a social duty which he must incorporate with artistic expression. The protagonists of the Political Trilogy have each to learn that there is a time for humble acceptance of orthodoxy, and occasions when the divine spark in them must be asserted against all the precepts of society. Like Contarini, Lothair passes through phases of self-deprecation and of assertion. He is largely content to be guided by his seniors throughout the attainment of his majority, but when a higher duty

calls he is found serving in the ranks of Theodora's revolutionary army. Cast down after her death, military duties rouse him to action again; meeting Phoebus, he confesses himself a "dreaming psychologist", but the latter advises another dose of experience; he returns home to "plunge into affairs", but grateful for the wisdom which recent events have brought him. Disraeli thus took a Romantic motif, adapted it to the autobiographical function fulfilled by all his writings, and made it the model for his view of political development. As his novels became more political in tone, the individual's struggle became a battle with blind party allegiance and an often repressive political establishment. And since the works portrayed so much of Disraeli's own situation, or an idealisation of it, he built up a renewed faith in himself thereby. He was hardly the only one indebted to Romanticism for this means of exploring his situation. Schlegel wrote in Fragment 116 of Athenaion: "Some artists, who only wanted to write a novel, have more or less portrayed themselves".²⁷ This suggests an unconscious lapse into autobiography, but then it may be questioned in Disraeli's case, too, how conscious he was of putting himself into the narrative, and how much - like many psychological or artistic needs - it was simply part of the process of expression. Romanticism was in part the response of a generation who no longer shared such a consensus of literary and social values as the preceding 'classical' age. One reaction was to reach back to an age which if anything represented an even greater integrity of culture, such as the mediaeval period. Another reaction was to carry out the process in oneself, as J.B. Gordon observes:

If neo-feudalism is one nineteenth-century solution to the crisis of history, surely there is another way of 'living' time, to borrow from Bergson: the autobiography ...private or subjective history made public...overcoming the gap between the history of art and the history of one's life.²⁸

Faced with the loss of widely-accepted beliefs, one could either return to the communal ideal of the middle ages (as in the Arts and Crafts movement of the later nineteenth-century), or else defiantly assert one's own experience and make it a work of art in itself. Since it is through art that an epoch is captured and kept alive against the dimming process of time, autobiography almost seemed to answer the individual's desire for immortality. Through art the romanticists upheld the primacy of the individual against

society and against the diminishing effect of history. Thus for Disraeli his works were in part: "a way in which people live their mythologies".²⁹ In places this leads to mere travelogue; as when in Book I, chapter xii of Contarini Fleming Disraeli transcribes almost verbatim from his diary the account of a Catholic High Mass he witnessed in Ghent cathedral in 1824. And yet in the more political novels the autobiographical vein became more effective, because the statement of faith involved was not directed just to the author but to an ideal or community beyond himself. In the political novels Disraeli could also use his ambivalent relationship with the hero to make statements on chosen issues, which he might not have felt free to make on his own behalf. Both the acceptance of a subjective viewpoint, and the encouragement by the romanticists of hyperbole and passionate expression to dislodge the prejudices of custom, enabled Disraeli to try out some of his boldest political theories in his novels first, before exposing them in serious initiatives.

But Disraeli was also influenced by the alternate response to the 'crisis of faith': a form of neo-feudalism. At its worst this came out in self-consciously archaic and rhetorical tricks of style. In Venetia he refers to the 'peasants' at Cherbury, and berails the introduction of the term 'labourer',³⁰ whilst in Coningsby a house-party is described thus: "Brilliant cavaliers, including Mr. Walton, addressed a band of beautiful damsels propped on a large ottoman".³¹ In Sybil the 'Saxon' Walter Gerard declares: "I would sooner listen than read any time. Indeed I should be right glad to see the minstrel and the storyteller going their rounds again".³² Such purely formal evocations tend to jar, but there was a value in holding up the spirit of the feudal age against the onslaught of nineteenth-century utilitarianism. Thus in Venetia the young Cadurcis is stirred by his family's noble achievements:

His thoughts flew to his ancestry. They had conquered in France and Palestine, and left a memorable name to the annalist of his country. Those days were past, and yet Cadurcis felt within him the desire, perhaps the power, of emulating them; but what remained? What career was open in this mechanical age to the chivalric genius of his race?³³

It is left to Herbert later in the novel to show how Cadurcis can indeed emulate his forbears, in a more philanthropic role. In the same spirit, Nigel Penruddock speaks of the Eglinton Tournament

in Endymion:

But it is a pageant only to the uninitiated. There is not a ceremony, a form, a phrase, a costume, which is not symbolic of a great truth or a high purpose.³⁴

As a convert to Catholicism, who rises to be Archbishop at the end of the novel, the speaker is himself significant. The Catholic Church was often identified with the values which the romanticists revered in the middleages. Catholicism appears in Disraeli's early novels largely for its ritual and colour, and also as something slightly foreign and exotic (thus marking out figures such as Constanini Fleming or the leading characters of Henrietta Temple). In the Political Trilogy, Catholicism symbolises a revived social ideal against the utilitarianism or simple negligence of many of the authorities. In Book III, chapter iv of Coningsby, Eustace Lyle carries out a rather self-conscious alms-giving ceremony, but nevertheless it offers an alternative to the workhouse. Sybil is even more imbued with Catholic sentiment: the heroine is first seen in the habit of a nun (albeit borrowed), in the setting of the ruined Warney Abbey, and it is the Anglo-Catholic clergyman, St. Lys, who fulfils many of the urgent social duties around Mowbray in which his political counterparts so obviously fail. As C. Brinton says: "Sybil without a ruined Abbey would be impossible".³⁵

But Disraeli had too detached an intellect to give himself wholly to Catholic ritual or to celebration of knightly prowess. Yet that ruined Abbey nevertheless stood for many of the values dominating his political thought at the time, notably the 'Young England' movement, a group within the Tory party who sought to revive a more feudal political ideal against the pragmatic approach enshrined in Peel's leadership. (See below, Chapter 3, Section 1). 'Young England' was unlikely to survive for long, as J.L. Talmon observes:

A Nation which owed its glory to free institutions and its power to world-wide trade was not likely to lend much attention to the kind of Romanticism which Disraeli's "Young England" movement tried to spread in England.³⁶

But in practice the Romantic movement had itself begun to flow into new forms by this time, a process described by M. Praz as "Romanticism Turns Bourgeois".³⁷ For Wordsworth, Nature became "the symbol of law", and the change was still more marked in the more politically-orientated Coleridge:

He rejects revolution and is for a gradual, natural evolution of the life of the State: and it was exactly in this direction that English politics in the Victorian era were to develop.

This was very much the case with Disraeli also, and is one more instance of his being influenced by romanticism as much in his political as in his literary development. Indeed, one might say that he was touched by Romanticism only insofar as it appealed to that complex dual nature that made up the politician and novelist.

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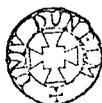
4. The Influence of Byron.

Leaving aside his aristocratic background, one can see in Byron a number of characteristics which would have caught the eye of Disraeli. He had an early sense of being different from his fellows; a nervous sensibility which led both to self-doubt and yet also to fierce ambition; a leaning to reading and writing literature, both as a means of escape and of articulating his personal situation. Both men suffered, or felt they suffered, from an unhappy relationship with their mother, and this seems to have affected their emotional attitude to women in later life, even though they were extremely attractive to them. They sought either a mistress or a confidente rather than a partner. Disraeli depended on his sister Sarah and later his wife Mary Anne for almost maternal support throughout his political career. When he wrote in 1831 to announce the bitter news of the death of William Meredith, Sarah's fiancé, he begged her to: "Live then, my heart's treasure, for one who has ever loved you with a surpassing love".¹ So we find Byron addressing his half-sister Augusta in 1816:

Though the day of my destiny's over
And the star of my fate hath declined,
Thy soft heart refused to discover
The faults which so many could find;²

Neither man was happy in male company, unless it were with very close friends. Both had at times an exaggerated sense of inferiority: Byron because of his lameness and his inability to share the unthinking assumptions of his fellows, Disraeli because of his social and racial origins, which similarly gave him a different outlook. They needed therefore to dominate their society in order to feel happy in it at all. But in their younger days this was too much to hope for, and literature provided them with an outlet for ambition and with a feminine 'muse'. This is evident in Disraeli's early works, particularly Vivian Grey, Contarini Fleming and Alroy. (cf. Chapter 1, Section 3). He projected much of himself into his heroes, both dramatising and yet also partly revelling in his position as a social isolé, as Byron had done before him, notably in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage:

I stood
Among them, but not of them; in a shroud
Of thoughts which were not their thoughts, and still could,
Had I not filed my mind, which thus itself subdued.³



In the same poem Byron expressed his sense of bearing an exceptional fate:

Have I not had to wrestle with my lot?
 Have I not suffer'd things to be forgiven?
 Have I not had my brain sear'd, my heart riven,
 Hopes sapp'd, name blighted, Life's life lied away?
 And only not to desperation driven,
 Because not altogether of such clay
 As rots into the souls of those whom I survey.⁴

The hero of The Corsair, Conrad, also shares many of the author's characteristics, both physically and psychologically: "That man of loneliness and mystery, Scarce seen to smile, and seldom heard to sigh".⁵ Byron never came to terms with the British 'establishment' and its values, and he expressed this sense of *alienation* in his Eastern travels and writings, extending his social isolation into a cultural form. Another of his heroes, Lara: "Stood a stranger in this breathing world/
 An erring spirit from another hurl'd".⁶ Also, protagonist of The Siege of Corinth, still further accentuates this theme, in being an actual traitor to his background:

Nor his, what burning patriots feel,
 The stern exaltedness of zeal,
 ...He stood alone - a renegade
 Against the country he betray'd;⁷

In Manfred Byron returned to a more personal and fatalistic sense of isolation:

From my youth upwards
 My spirit walk'd not with the souls of men,
 Nor looked upon the earth with human eyes;⁸
 The thirst of their ambition was not mine.

And there is a feeling, which appeared also in Byron's personal writings, of being old before his time:

There is an order
 Of mortals on the earth, who do become
 Old in their youth, and die ere middle age...⁹

This sense of time rushing on, *and* of their separation from other men, accentuated the ambitions of Byron and Disraeli, and so we find their greatest fear is that of wasted abilities. Hence, in Byron's The Giaour:

The keenest pangs the wretched find
 Are rapture to the dreary void,
 The leafless desert of the mind,¹⁰
 The waste of feelings unemploy'd.

It is worth quoting again a passage from Disraeli's The Young Duke for the affinity it bears:

Think of unrecognised Caesar, with his wasting youth, weeping over the Macedonian's young career! Could Pharsalia compensate for those withering bangs? View the obscure Napoleon starving in the streets of Paris! What was St. Helena to the bitterness of such existence? ...Lo! Byron bending o'er his¹¹ shattered lyre, with inspiration in his very rage.

Although the autobiographical vein is present in most of Byron's poems, it is in Don Juan that the theme of personal development is most evident. Hence one can see how that poem shaped all Disraeli's novels, and not just the earlier of them, for he never wholly outgrew the bildungsroman structure. Rather, he was to adapt it to a political context.

Unusual talents and powerful ambitions clashed in both men with self-doubt, and the frustrations of convention and of a narrow social code. Their sense of being alien was both a source of fear and of triumph, and they reacted by both rejecting their society and yet also seeking its acclaim. They seem almost to have indulged this schizophrenia, and were famed for a bewildering tendency to exhibit both cynicism and imaginative fervour, sometimes on one and the same issue. Byron's imaginative breadth enabled him to see through many of the sham conventions of politics, so that he could never tamely conform to a party line. But at the same time, he felt - as Disraeli did after him - that it was precisely this quality of imagination which would make his contribution to public affairs so valuable. In a study of 'Byron's Political Realism', P. Trueblood shows^{how} he saw his literary talents as also giving him an unique qualification for oratory:

From early youth Byron prepared himself for what he conceived to be his inherited place in history - the role of orator and statesman. As David Erdman points out, not only were some of his juvenile poems the product of his political loyalties, but he even regarded the very act of poetic¹² composition as preliminary practice for later oratory.

In the same way, Disraeli declared that the statesman with literary gifts wielded a double-edged weapon. He was contemptuous of Gladstone's unexceptional literary attempts, and still more so of Peel's pragmatic approach.

Yet there was a tendency to play down the value of literature as an activity for its own sake. Hence an entry in Disraeli's 'Anti-

lated Diary' for 1833: "Poetry is the safety valve of my passions, but I wish to act what I write".¹³ Byron wrote to his sister Augusta on November 10th, 1813:

I by no means rank poetry or poets high in the scale of intellect. This may look like affectation, but it is my real opinion. It is the lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earthquake...I prefer the talents of action - of war, or the senate, or even of science, - to all the speculations of these mere dreamers.¹⁴

Quite apart from the pull of their other aspirations, even within literature both Byron and Disraeli found themselves poised between movements, unable to give themselves unreservedly to Romantic fervour:

As Byron was the child of two centuries, so was he the meeting place of two personalities, the one immediate, spontaneous, emotional, partly self-conscious and partly naive - in a word, contemporary - and the other rational, sophisticated, conservative, partly naive and partly self-conscious - a man of traditions to which he must sometimes, even by force of will, return.¹⁵

C. Brinton shows how Byron perceived the Romantic movement degenerating into middle-class sentimentalism. Since 'faith' was fast becoming 'cant', he returned to a position of greater respect for the place of 'reason' in literature, and hence his admiration of Pope.¹⁶

But ultimately it was only by exercising his talents in fields other than literature altogether, that Byron could preserve that elusive quality which was his protection. It was also a way for both him and Disraeli to build up faith in themselves as men with more than one string to their bow.

Byron did indeed reverse the process of autobiographical writing, by carrying fictional example into his active career. E.F. Boyd sees this as a mark of integrity: "Don Juan was to have died for human freedom. Byron left the word and took up the deed: he completed Don Juan in action".¹⁷ But, like Disraeli after him, he did so always with an eye to the figure he was cutting. Setting off on that fatal expedition, he told Trelawney: "If things are farcical, they will do for Don Juan; if heroic, you shall have another Canto of Childe Harold".¹⁸ The fame of the Byronic hero lay not in his having been created by Byron - for many elements existed already in the Romantic tradition. But Byron went further in the reciprocal process of realising the type in his own life, albeit

self-consciously, as P. Thorslev observes: "Byron did not project life into literature nearly so much as he projected literature into life".¹⁹ In his study of 'The Metamorphoses of Satan', M. Praz states that it was Byron who "brought to perfection the rebel type", not only in literature, but in his own life:

Who can be sure that he may not have studied every detail in front of a mirror, even to the terrible oblique look with which he frightened people, particularly his mistresses?²⁰

In the case of both Byron and Disraeli, one can over-emphasise the degree to which they lived their heroes' lives. And yet both men found themselves forced sometimes into the mould they had themselves created. The notoriety of Childe Harold was due partly to widespread identification of the author with his hero, and Byron's own attempts to play this down were not successful. He could hardly deny a feature which was a major factor in his achievement, as Lady Caroline Lamb herself observed: "Whenever he may speak of himself Lord Byron will succeed... What he feels he can describe extravagantly well".²¹ In the same way, Disraeli became 'the lion of the Congress' at Berlin in 1878, partly because the public were intrigued with his earlier romances and flocked to meet the character they suggested.²² The adulation was fitting compensation for Disraeli, for his novels had often had a detrimental effect on his political career in the past, saddling him with the reputation of a Byronic adventurer.

In each case the public's fascination with the author-hero was due largely to his refusal to deny one aspect of his dual nature. This meant facing a number of tensions, which might never be resolved satisfactorily, but which they knew would not be answered by a facile compromise either. First, as we have seen, a highly sensitive, almost feminine nature, and literary talent, existed alongside a more direct, 'masculine' thirst for adventure. The two were partly reconciled by that reciprocal process of autobiographical projection into literature, and an active career inspired by self-conscious dramatic criteria. Hence Byron told his confidante, Lady Blessington:

I seem to have two states of existence, one purely contemplative, during which the crimes, faults and follies of mankind are laid open to my view (my own forming a prominent object in the picture), and the other active, when I play my part in the drama of life, as if compelled by some power over which I have no control, though the consciousness of doing wrong remains.²³

With Disraeli the tendency was so marked that it became itself a theme of his early autobiographical works, particularly Contarini Fleming.

One cause of this duality seems to have been a heightened sense in Byron and Disraeli of 'the Romantic agony': that awareness of Man's transcendental potential, coupled with an all-too-obvious personal insignificance and weakness. Thus Manfred defines the human situation:

But we, who name ourselves /the world's/ sovereigns, we
Half dust, half deity, alike unfit,
To sink or soar, with our mix'd essence make
A conflict of its elements, and breathe
The breath of degradation and of pride,
Contending with low wants and lofty will...²⁴

Similarly, Contarini expresses a feeling which must have gripped Disraeli for many years, until the fulfilment of his political ambitions:

I entertained at this time a deep conviction that life must be intolerable unless I were the greatest of men. It seemed that I felt within me the power that could influence my kind. I longed to wave my inspiring sword at the head of armies, or dash into the very heat and blaze of eloquent faction.

When I contrasted my feelings and my situation I grew mad. The constant jar between my conduct and my conceptions was intolerable.²⁵

For both men, literature formed part of an attempt to idealise their life, by making of it a work of art; yet their intellect was too keen for this to be ultimately successful. Hence L.A. Marchand speaks of Byron's: "need to veil the physique of his pleasures in some ideal essence in order to escape from the grossness of reality, and...the realistic earthiness that prevented him from ever achieving that goal".²⁶

Thus both men experienced bouts of effusive enthusiasm and of sharp cynicism. Byron's commitment to the cause of human liberty displays his more fervent nature. He was loud in praise of Napoleon, and on the latter's abdication published an Ode to Napoleon Buonaparté (1814). Disraeli's only attempt at the epic style, his Revolutionary Epick (1834), was on the theme of the French Revolution. Byron's capacity to wish himself into idealism is brought out by his attitude to religion. He remained intellectually a sceptic, and the notoriety of Childe Harold was partly due to its deprecation of the hopes of the religious believer: "Vainly his incense soars..."²⁷

But he could not resist the emotional and psychological attraction of a call to belief, and wrote to Thomas Moore of his attitude to Catholicism in 1822:

...by far the most elegant worship, hardly excepting the Greek mythology. What with incense, pictures, statues, altars, shrines, relics, and the real presence, confession, absolution, - there is something sensible to grasp at.²⁸

Occasionally his poems betray an interest at least in the hope presented by religious faith, and he wrote in Lara of the dying hero's obliviousness to immortal possibilities:

Nor seem'd to know his life but then began,
That life of Immortality, secure
To none, save them whose faith in Christ is sure.²⁹

The Siege of Corinth and Manfred both depict the protagonist powerfully urged to accept religious faith, and, Faustus-like, prevented by a paradoxical combination of pride and despair. In The Prisoner of Chillon there is evident admiration for what was martyrdom of a kind:

I had no earthly hope but faith,
And that forbade a selfish death.³⁰

It would be wrong to exaggerate such oblique comments, yet Byron clearly had a sufficient sense of the mystery of life to be unable to reject the extra-rational credentials of religion altogether:

Byron had an almost superstitious awe of the sincerely religious mind. Though he was tough-minded enough to reject the shams of religious pretence and theological inconsistencies, he had not the conviction of his scepticism. He had too great and too obsessive a sense of the mysteries of life to be quite happy in his negative beliefs.³¹

Disraeli was also given to admire a spiritual commitment which he could not share so wholeheartedly himself. In his Political Trilogy, and Sybil in particular, he indulged in a wistful evocation of the days when the mediaeval Catholic Church was a powerful source of spiritual values, as well as a Trust for the poor. It behoved the poet and the man of superior imagination to show respect for laws and logic superior to mere rationality. It was also appropriate to Disraeli's self-conception as a politician concerned with higher spiritual truths. And he could not forget that he was of the Chosen Race, and heir to its inspired tradition. If worldly necessities

forced him to devote himself to more mundane concerns, he could at least follow Byron's example in giving expression to his more ideal transcendental nature in his writing. Tancred says: "It seems to me that [the present order] cannot last, as nothing can endure, or ought to endure, that is not founded upon principle".³² In the person of Tancred, Disraeli was able to reject a Parliamentary career on principle, which he could not afford to do in reality. In Lothair the Catholic archbishop Grandison tells the hero: "I know not a grander or a nobler career for a young man of talents and position in this age, than to be the champion and asserter of Divine truth".³³

It is tempting to try to resolve ambivalent expressions in famous characters, and 'define' their stance once and for all, but with Byron it would be distorting, because 'duality' was his nature. It was the same with Disraeli, and although one cannot say Byron influenced him in this, for it was innate, it is another example of the affinity between the two men which rendered Byron's influence in other aspects that much more compelling. Disraeli had before him the example of a man with a similar predicament and a similar nature, and thus could not help following many of the paths which Byron had taken. Lady Blessington visited Byron in Genoa in 1822:

Like many others Lady Blessington was baffled by Byron's dual personality. She was perhaps too lacking in 'mobility' to believe that he was sincere in both his sentimental and his cynical expressions, that his ineffable longings and his ironic recognition of the unideal nature of the world and himself were but two sides of the same coin.³⁴

Whilst in Italy, Byron had become interested in the freedom struggles of the Carbonari movement, especially after the Naples uprising, but he was not sufficiently narrow-minded to become a fanatic. On one occasion in Ravenna in 1820 he rescued their opponent, the Commandant of the guard, after he was fatally injured in a riot. His humane breadth was even more evident in his championship of Greek freedom in 1823 and 1824. It soon became obvious that the Greeks were ridden with factionalism, that many of them were pursuing blatant self-interest, and that some would continue drawing upon him for as much money as they could get. Yet precisely because Byron's realistic streak had never slept, he did not become violently disillusioned with the whole enterprise. Instead, he tolerantly ascribed many of the Greeks' sharp practices to the deceptions they had learnt as slaves for many years to the Turks.³⁵

Likewise Disraeli could launch an attack in Lothair on the

growing menace of revolutionism in Europe, yet still make Theodora, representative of the Secret Societies, the most attractive personality in the novel. In 'Disraeli's "Revolutionary Mind" from Buddha to Bakunin', D. Painting shows how in 1880 Disraeli could hark back to 'Old England' in the manner of "a fallen Tory Premier", and yet at the same time contemplate a novel [Falconet] "whose putative hero looks forward to the day when the whole world will tumble to piécés, and hails the prospect as a consummation devoutly to be wished".³⁶

Byron also prefigured Disraeli in his ambivalence to domestic political issues. There do seem to have been periods in his life when he was seriously set on a political career. At the end of 1808, planning a tour of the East, he wrote to Hanson, his legal guardian: "I am determined to take a wider field than is customary with travelers. If I return, my judgement will be more mature, and I shall still be young enough for politics".³⁷ He prepared himself for entry to the Lords on his majority by an impressive course of reading: Holinshed's Chronicles, Cobbett's Debates and Parliamentary History, and forty-five volumes of the British Essayists. In 1812, after returning to England, he took up the cause of the stocking-weavers of Nottingham, who were striking and frame-breaking. The response of the Tory administration until then had been to send in troops; now they introduced a Bill imposing the death-penalty for frame-breakers. Whereas the moderate Whigs concentrated their attack upon the inefficacy of such a Bill, Byron took the more radical line of sympathy for "the industrious poor", and wrote to Lord Holland on February 25th, calling the affair "a disgrace to a civilized country".³⁸ On February 27th he spoke upon the Second Reading of the Bill, comparing the treatment of the wretched weavers at home with the slavery found in despotisms abroad, just as Disraeli was so often to treat political questions in a wholly novel light by introducing comparisons with foreign models and cultures. Byron sat on a Committee to amend the Bill, substituting a fine or imprisonment for the death penalty, but this was thrown out in the Commons. Increasingly he began to betray impatience with what he called "Parliamentary mummeries":

Had it not been for the feeling, imposed half by his own pride and half by the conventions of the time, that writing could not be the serious or main occupation of a gentleman, he might have turned at once to poetry or journalism.⁴⁰

As it was, he published on March 2nd an anonymous satiric Ode to the Framers of the Frame Bill, in the Morning Chronicle. His political approach began to look beyond Parliament, and in this he betrayed both a progressive and yet also a very traditional tendency:

His whole concept of political life was that of the orator with independent liberal or radical views whose voice would carry, by its rhetoric and good sense, over the heads of the House to sway the nation as a whole.

When frustrated in political issues, Disraeli also tended to look outside Parliament. Characteristically he put one of his more extreme comments into the mouth of Tancred:

In this age it is not Parliament that does the real work. ...If the manufacturers want to change a tariff, they form a commercial league, and they effect their purpose.

He was equally capable of circumventing Parliament (at least in imagination) by a return to the past, looking to the restoration of an almost feudal landed squirearchy, the remedial and spiritual agency of the mediaeval church, and the impartial leadership of the Monarch. It was such aspirations as these, rather than Parliamentary proposals, which form the substance of the Political Trilogy.

Disraeli's refusal to comply with commonplace notions of consistency was based on his sense of a superior quality of mind and of imagination. In 1833 he wrote in What Is He?:

He is a mean-spirited wretch who is restrained from doing his duty by the fear of being held up as insincere and inconsistent by those who are incapable of forming an opinion on public affairs...A great mind that thinks and feels is never inconsistent, and never insincere.

Before him lay Byron's example, as J.D. Symon expresses it:

Byron could see no reason at all why his opinions should be consistent. Consistency, in his view...was one of those so-called virtues which of right belonged to the humdrum.

Moreover, both Byron and Disraeli found themselves in situations of divided loyalties which accentuated the doubtful appearance of their views. P. Trueblood comments:

Though Byron's views on domestic politics sometimes vary, this may be attributed, as Andrew Rutherford rightly observes, to the understandable ambivalence of the poet's attitude toward English political affairs - his genuine concern for reform and his ineluctable loyalty to his aristocratic class. He sympathised strongly with the

politically oppressed both in England and on the Continent. But he was essentially pragmatic in that he had "no desire to see the social structure overthrown" by agitators and demagogues.⁴⁵

The same could well have been said of Disraeli.

In her study of The Political Career of Lord Byron, D.N. Raymond blames the moral cowardice of the establishment for much of Byron's eventual abandonment of a political career. They lacked the strength to tackle many abuses which were rife after the Napoleonic wars:

Correction would have involved a change. But they wished, also, to be told that they were youthful, daring, vigorous, that their wars and victories were glorious; and that the Church which prayed for them was the repository of all sanctity...Byron's grey eye saw clearly, and his lips and his pen spoke what he saw...He had no faith that he could turn them to a better way and he knew that he could never bring himself to join their orderly procession.⁴⁶

A particular combination of hereditary and temperamental factors brought Byron to that painful state of being both part of, and yet detached from, his social context. P. Thorslev:

First, Byron was a cosmopolitan aristocrat, not only by birth, but by temperament; and second, he was probably more open to heterogeneous influences, both intellectual and emotional, than was any other of the major English romantic poets.⁴⁷

As L. Marchand observes, Byron was never wholly at ease in either political or literary society, and preferred that of the dandies, paradoxically more sincere in that unconventionality and pose were taken for granted.⁴⁸ Disraeli was also unable to give himself completely to the conventions of literary or political society. D. Painting goes so far as to root this contradiction between ambition and personal inclination in his Byronic aspirations;

Caught up by his Byronic ambitions in a political battle fought on alien territory he never mastered the Conservative ethos, and from his obscure beginning to his illustrious end remained an outsider both socially and ideologically, ably governing his tracks with a veneer of ironic ambiguity.⁴⁹

It might be more accurate to say that Disraeli found himself in a similarly false position as Byron, and so had an impressive example before him of the career of an 'alien patriot'. The circumstances in Disraeli's case were different: a modest social back-

ground and Jewish origins rather than aristocratic lineage. But the effect was the same: to force him to have a foot in both camps, sometimes craving acceptance from his fellows, at others proudly asserting his independence and superiority. Both Byron and Disraeli had an ability to look upon English conventions and aspirations with a detached eye. In The Curse of Minerva Byron vented his fury at Lord Elgin's despoliation of the treasures of Greece, symbolic of Britain's overbearing attitude to foreign cultures, and he darkly warned:

Look to the East, where Ganges' swarthy race
 Shall shake your tyrant empire to its base;
 Lo! there Rebellion rears her ghastly head,
 And glares the Nemesis of native dead.⁵⁰

When the Indian Mutiny broke out in 1857, Disraeli was one of the first to suggest that the cause lay not simply in "greased cartridges", but in an Administration largely blind to the sensitivities of its colonial subjects.⁵¹ He was contemptuous of the high-handed approach which imperial administrators often adopted toward cultures of far greater antiquity and refinement than their own, no doubt retaining always a sense of his own descent from the proud Semitic tradition.

In the same year, an affair of piracy led Palmerston, as Foreign Secretary, to call the Mandarin who governed Canton, "an insolent barbarian". Disraeli was disgusted not only by Palmerston's jingoism, but by the obvious popularity of this approach with many electors.⁵² It typified the attitude of the "Flat-nosed Franks", which he had mocked in alter ego in the pages of Contarini Fleming and Tancred.

Travelling in Spain, Byron had been prompted to write into Childe Harold:

When shall her Olive-Branch be free from blight?
 When shall she breathe her from the blushing toil?
 How many a doubtful day shall sink in night,
 Ere the Frank robber turn him from his spoil,
 And Freedom's stranger-tree grow native of the soil!⁵³

Later, passing Albania, he records how they were given hospitality after a storm by some supposedly barbaric tribesmen, and this also went into Childe Harold:

These did shelter him beneath their roof,
 When less barbarians would have cheer'd him less,
 And fellow-countrymen have stood aloof -⁵⁴

In the fourth Canto of Childe Harold Byron draws upon reflections prompted by a visit to Rome's Coliseum. There is a bitter identification with the fate of the Dacian gladiator, at the mercy of his brutal masters: "Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday".⁵⁵ Byron's strongest commitment was to the struggle for Greek freedom, and of course this not only colours much of his poetry, but ultimately claimed his life, in 1824. His witness to the cause of freedom did not end there, however, as P. Trueblood points out:

Byron's service to Liberty did not end with his death in April 1824. Rather, his powerful influence continued increasingly to be felt in the struggle for political freedom throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Even Russia did not escape his liberating influence. The first revolutionary effort against the Tsars, the Decembrist rising of 1825, was largely inspired by Byron's poetry of freedom. The poet, Pyleyev, a leader of the Decembrists, went to his execution with a volume of Byron's poetry in his hands.⁵⁶

Both Byron and Disraeli suffered from the grip of not one but several tensions: a sense of *alienation*, against genuine political convictions; an inclination to sensitive and literary pursuits, against stirrings to action; bursts of transcendent aspiration, against cynical acknowledgement of realities. One way to express, if not resolve, these conflicts, was in the exercise of their satiric gifts. In Hints From Horace Byron mocked the pretensions of the growing nineteenth-^{century} middle-class:

Hence the pert shopkeeper, whose throbbing ear⁵⁷
Aches with orchestras which he pays to hear.

The satiric vein was not simply frivolous, but could voice genuine political objections. Thus Byron attacked the Convention of Cintra in Childe Harold:

Britannia sickens, Cintra! at thy name;
And folks in office at the mention fret,
And fain would blush, if blush they could, for shame.
How will posterity the deed proclaim!⁵⁸

In The Age of Bronze he exposed a tribe of "uncountry gentlemen" who profited from the Napoleonic wars:

The last to bid the cry of warfare cease,
The first to make a melody of peace;
For what were all these country patriots born?
To hunt, and vote, and raise the price of corn?
...Safe in their barns, these Sabine tillers sent
Their brethren out to battle - why? for rent!⁵⁹

In Don Juan Byron makes it clear that to speak truth at all in a hypocritical society will lead to conflict:

But now I'm going to be immoral; now
I mean to show things really as they are. 60

Thus, when political and legal institutions are themselves corrupt, satire is one means to break the straitjacket. As early as in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, he declared his commitment to the role of satirist:

E'en then the boldest start from public sneers,
Afraid of shame, unknown to other fears,
More darkly sin, by satire kept in awe,
And shrink from ridicule, though not from law. 61

Disraeli also wrote a considerable amount of satire in his early career, on political or at least public affairs. In The Voyage of Captain Popanilla (1828) he satirised extremes of utilitarianism, which like all forms of abstract system was anathema to the man of imagination. Byron, too, was contemptuous of its drier forms, and so detested Jeremy Bentham that the latter's presence on the London Greek Committee in 1823 was a recurring source of irritation. L. Marchand records that when Colonel Leicester Stanhope went out to Greece as agent of the Committee, he and Byron had endless arguments on the question of Benthamite utilitarianism. 62

In Ixion in Heaven (1832-33) Disraeli used the situation of an intruder into Olympus to poke fun at contemporary personalities and institutions, and The Infernal Marriage (1834) dealt with the history of Queen Caroline's stormy relationship with George IV, and the Court intrigues of the time. There were also more strictly political satires such as Gallomania (1832), articles in The Morning Post (1835), and, in The Times, the Letters of Runnymede (1836). Before all these Disraeli is assumed to have been a major contributor to The Star Chamber (1826), which combined literary and political satire (See above, Chapter 1, Section 1). An entry in The Star Chamber for May 24, 1826, justifies the satirist in much the same terms as Byron used:

NO CITY SHOULD BE WITHOUT ITS SATIRIST. Fashionable frivolities are soon succeeded by fashionable vices, and few are the misdemeanours in society, which may not be numbered under this head, and are more likely to be extirpated by ridicule, than subdued by any sense of moral or religious obligation. 63

Travel was another means by which Byron expressed his literary and political aspirations, his love of adventure, and his preference for Eastern culture. From 1809 to 1811 he made his Grand Tour of the Iberian peninsula, Malta, Turkey, Greece and Albania, and set an example for Disraeli to follow in playing off literature and life. Thus he was writing throughout the tour, and Childe Harold in particular follows his progress. As we have seen above, disgust at Lord Elgin's acquisition of Greek art treasures prompted an outburst in The Curse of Minerva (1811). In reverse, he could not resist acting in the style of some literary tradition, and for example was determined, on reaching the Hellespont, to emulate the feat of Leander. He succeeded in swimming the gulf at his second attempt, on May 3rd, 1810.

In 1816 Byron left England, never to return, and travelled through northern Europe (visiting the field of Waterloo^{and} Switzerland on his way to Italy. There he mourned over the decline of Venice, and visited the tombs of Petrarch and Ariosto at Arqua and Ferrara respectively, as well as Tasso's cell. Travel was not simply a source of change and diversion, but a Romantic symbol:

The excitement of travel stirred up in him again the impalpable longings of his youth, which he now associated with the wild freedom of nature and the landscapes and skies beyond the horizon.⁶⁴

As we have seen in Chapter 1, Section 2, Disraeli's travels consciously followed Byron, both in itinerary and in spirit. Disraeli also wrote many of his experiences into his novels, principally Vivian Grey, Contarini Fleming, Henrietta Temple, Tancred and Lothair. He too tried to live up to the lifestyle of a Romantic hero. On the way he noted items of political interest. Holidaying with the Austens in 1826, the party followed in Byron's footsteps through Switzerland and into Italy, though not before an extended stay in Geneva, where Disraeli went so far as to "take a row^{on the lake} every night with Maurice, Lord Byron's boatman".⁶⁵ The Byronic pilgrimage continued in Italy, and concentrated on the great man's beloved Venice in particular.

Disraeli's Eastern tour of 1830-31 followed Byron into Spain, Malta, Turkey, Albania and Greece, before continuing into the Holy Land and Egypt. In Albania Disraeli tried unsuccessfully to emulate Byron - albeit in reverse - by joining the Turkish forces quelling an insurrection.

It was in fulfilling his political ambitions that Disraeli went beyond the Byronic legend. But he continued to fight a rearguard action against wholehearted commitment to orthodoxy. In his Parliamentary speeches he found an outlet for his satire, and his novels carried on making comments on British politics which would perhaps have been too strong to voice in his own person. In thus retaining his detached and enigmatic integrity, Disraeli fully lived up to the Byronic example.

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CHAPTER THREE

1. Biographical: In Parliament.

Disraeli wrote to his sister Sarah on June 19th, 1837:

I have just seen a very interesting letter from Munster dated 11 last night. The King dies like an old lion. He said yesterday to his physicians, 'Only let me live through this glorious day!' This suggested to Munster to bring the tri-color flag which had just arrived from the Duke of Wellington, and show it to the King. William IV, said, 'Right, right', and afterwards, 'Unfurl it and let me feel it'; then he pressed the eagle and said, 'Glorious day'. This may be depended on. He still lives.¹

Disraeli's elevation to the political world was to give him access to many glimpses of drama in the making such as this. He did not fail to appreciate their value, not only in themselves, but in their potential for literary treatment. Even when absorbed in the struggle for political advancement, he had an eye for the dramatic quality of the scenes before him, or for the little scraps of anecdote and gossip which came his way. This letter to Sarah is one of literally hundreds written over the period, many of which are worthy of note as vignettes in themselves. Disraeli no longer had the time or the ambition to devote himself to a novel, but these letters and other incidental writings filled the vacuum, and Sarah was his 'reading public' as well as his political supporter. This explains Disraeli's comment when Sir Philip Rose congratulated him on becoming Prime Minister, and his thoughts turned to his dead sister for whom it would have been such a proud day: "Ah, poor Sa! poor Sa! we've lost our audience, we've lost our audience..."²

King William died in the course of the night, and the new Queen, Victoria, convened her first council the next morning. Disraeli accompanied Lord Lyndhurst to Kensington Palace, and obtained from him an account of the event which he reproduced in vivid detail in Sybil.³ The scene is described so intimately that it is hard to believe that Disraeli was not in fact a witness to it. But he was a pastmaster at creating an impression of reality out of secondhand materials.

In the election caused by the succession Disraeli was eventually chosen to go down to Maidstone in the Conservative interest as a colleague of Wyndham Lewis. On July 27th, 1837, he wrote to Sarah to announce their joint election.⁴ The new Parliament opened on November 5th, and Disraeli was not too intoxicated with the trappings of power to make a vivid description of the swearing-in

ceremony, which does full justice to the hectic scene: "...Abercromby himself nearly thrown down and trampled upon, and his mace-bearer banging the members' heads with his gorgeous weapon, and cracking skulls with impunity..."⁵ His maiden speech followed on December 7th, and even he had to admit: "my *début* was a failure"; although this was caused as much by his extravagant dress and manner and the opposition of the Irish members (including his old enemy, O'Connell) as by deficiencies in his speaking.

As the Queen's coronation approached, Disraeli was able to observe the cream of continental society converging upon London for it, and to collect details for his 'common-place book'. Thus he described the Duke of Ossuna, a self-exiled Spanish nobleman:

He is a great dandy and looks like Philip II, but though the only living descendant of the Borgias, he has the reputation of being very amiable. When he was last at Paris he attended a representation of Victor Hugo's Lucrezia Borgia. She says in one of *the* scenes, 'Great crimes are in our blood'. All his friends looked at him with an expression of fear; 'but the blood has degenerated', he said; 'for I have committed only weaknesses'.⁶

Disraeli attended the ceremony and wrote approvingly to Sarah of the Queen's comportment in comparison to "the other performers" (a revealing comment on his attitude to constitutional formalities).⁷ It did not require such occasional events to stimulate him to composition, however; throughout these years his political role, and the enhanced social status it brought, were amassing for him a wealth of material for the 'society' scenes of his later novels. Often these were details of such little significance as only to catch the eye of the trained observer. A memorandum written about 1863 recalls his canvassing in 1837 on behalf of a Parliamentary colleague, Sir Francis Burdett:

There was one street in our *district* entirely filled with cooks, chiefly foreigners. Ten years afterwards, writing Tancred, I availed myself of the experience then obtained, and it formed my first chapter.

And as Monypenny himself points out: "Burdett reappears, with many of the features of this sketch reproduced, as Sir Fraunceys Scrope in Endymion".⁹

Wyndham Lewis, Disraeli's colleague, died suddenly in March, 1838. Disraeli sent a letter of condolence to his widow, Mary Anne, the following month, and continued to correspond thereafter in a tone which soon became one of admiration. By October he was suf-

efficiently affected by her departure after a long stay at Bradenham
 / (the Disraeli country home) to exclaim: "But what future joy and prosperity, what fortune, even
 what fame, can compensate for this anguish?"¹⁰ A stream of letters
 in similarly impassioned manner - not always recording a smooth
 courtship - were to follow.¹¹ How seriously should we take them?
 Mrs. Wyndham Lewis was forty-five, twelve years older than Disraeli,
 and one of her chief attractions may have been her sizeable fortune.¹²
 One senses that part of Disraeli, at least, was indulging in a com-
 positional exercise as the 'distracted lover', exhibiting the re-
 quired symptoms of passion ("I am mad with love. My passion is
 frenzy"¹³) and jealousy ("My heart outraged, my pride wounded, my
 honor nearly tainted"¹⁴) with all the polished skill of the Roman-
 tic novelist. If so, it served him in good stead; they were married
 on August 28th, 1839, and enjoyed an exemplary if unusual marriage
 until Mary Anne's death in 1872.

As if still under the Romantic spell, Disraeli began work in
 October 1838 on a drama, The Tragedy of Count Alarcos, which, how-
 ever, was to owe what success it enjoyed to the politician's re-
 putation rather than to its intrinsic merits. Thus, after a suc-
 cessful speech on Lord John Russell's scheme for a Central Education
 Board, "Colburn, on the strength of the speech I suppose, advertises
 it this morning as 'Mr. Disraeli's Tragedy' ".¹⁵ When Alarcos fin-
 ally reached the stage in 1868, it owed a respectable five-week run
 largely to its author's status as Prime Minister.

1839 was a year of rising Chartist agitation, and Disraeli
 made a speech in the House sympathetic to their cause, which he re-
 produced in the mouth of Egremont in Sybil.¹⁶ This was not the only
 occasion on which he was to draw attention to himself by his dis-
 tinctive political philosophy. As in Sybil, he advocated a union of
 "aristocracy and the labouring population",¹⁷ and corresponded with
 Radicals and politicians of other hues to negotiate a common ap-
 proach to the 'Condition of England' question. Thus he gave notice
 that the restraints of Parliamentary custom would not dampen his
 political spirit. He needed to see politics in terms of noble and
 heroic aspirations rather than mere machination. Thus when a legal
 member spoke up in reference to the tyranny of the courts in the
 time of Charles I, Disraeli struck back: "in a speech of great elo-
 quence and vigour", as the newspapers described it, in which he gave
 a vivid account of the tyranny of Parliament in the same troubled
 age, and showed that the tyranny of the courts was nothing in com-

parison".¹⁸ In that debate on the Central Education Board,¹⁹ Disraeli opposed the scheme of Lord John Russell on precisely those imaginative and individualistic principles which were the novelist's contribution to his political outlook:

By their system of state education all would be thrown into the same mint, and all would come out with the same impress and superscription. They might make money, they might make railroads; but when the age of passion came, when those interests were in motion, and those feelings stirring, which would shake society to its centre, then... they would see whether the people had received the same sort of education which had been advocated and supported by William of Wykeham...²⁰

When the Duke of Wellington was accused in the House of lethargy, in failing to oust the tottering Whig government, Disraeli defended him in a characteristically novel manner. Deeply conscious of history, and of the heroic names and acts which (like Carlyle) he saw as its chief constituent, he compared the Duke to other great figures who carried their energy well into old age:

An octogenarian Doge of Venice scaled the walls of Constantinople; Marius had completed his seventieth year when he defeated the elder Pompey and quelled the most powerful of aristocracies; white hairs shaded the bold brain of Julius II...²¹

Only by means of occasional flights of fancy on the theme of political events in supposedly grander ages and cultures, could Disraeli reconcile himself to the basically pragmatic realities of contemporary politics. His schemes, as Blake remarks, seemed often "the product of the study or the library, rather than of the Cabinet room or the House of Commons."²²

The Whig government finally resigned in 1841, and Peel became Prime Minister. Disraeli hoped to gain office under him, and after waiting some time in vain, wrote to remind his leader of his services to the party. Meanwhile Mrs. Disraeli, a friend of Peel's sister, sent a letter on her own account to draw attention to her husband's claims: "Literature he has abandoned for politics. Do not destroy all his hopes, and make him feel his life has been a mistake."²³ It is intriguing to question how much Disraeli was troubled by his decision, even if it was never as deliberate as Mrs. Disraeli implied. Certainly Disraeli's approach to political issues and frequent recourse to writing of one form or another betray the frustrated novelist: he never did wholly abandon a 'literary' career. In this instance, for example, his disgust at the intrigues which he saw as depriving him of office was to produce an unique picture of the sor-

did realities of political life in Coningsby, written three years ^{advancing} later. It was another of those setbacks which prevented him/too fast in one particular field, and forced him to fall back on its complement, obeying the rule of his "two natures". But for Peel's refusal to give Disraeli office, as H. d'Avigdor-Goldsmid asserts, "his literary career might have ended for ever".²⁴ Disraeli's literary career may have had a hand in his failure to obtain office in the first place, for it saddled him with the reputation of an adventurer and a dilettante, particularly, of course, ^{his authorship of} Vivian Grey. The production of the political novel required a fine balance, achieved, paradoxically, by the frustration of both Disraeli the politician and of Disraeli the novelist:

all he needed now was a more intimate experience of parliamentary organization and, on the debit side, sufficient lack of material success to prevent him from totally severing his connexion with the world of literature.²⁵

Disraeli's first reaction was to make his most successful parliamentary speech so far, on the amalgamation of the consular and the diplomatic services. Reporting to Mrs. Disraeli the congratulations which rained on him from all sides, he observed: "All young England, the new members, &c., were deeply interested..."; and in a later dispatch: "I already find myself without effort the leader of a party, chiefly of the youth and new members".²⁶

This was a group within the Tory party which came to be known as 'Young England': men such as George Smythe, afterwards 7th Viscount Strangford, who figured as the hero in Coningsby, and later (and perhaps more accurately) as Waldershare in Endymion. Also in the group were Lord John Manners, 2nd son of the Duke of Rutland (Lord Henry Sydney in Coningsby and Tancred), and Alexander Baillie Cochrane (the "fiery and generous Buckhurst" of Coningsby). The movement took its name from similar groups on the continent and in Ireland, but they never became a party as such, nor did they formalise a political doctrine. Rather, they embodied a new approach, a counter to the prevailing spirit of utilitarianism and commercial laissez-faire. Their outlook was a striking combination of Romanticism, traditionalism, hero-worship, veneration for the Catholic Church, and aristocratic concern for the poor, which coalesced roughly into a form of 'neo-feudalism'. They looked to a Monarch restored in prestige and guided by a responsible aristocracy, to exercise an impartial rule over her people. They harked back to the

Church in its mediaeval splendour, as a creation of beauty in itself, a remedial agency, and, particularly for Disraeli, "as the thing most opposed to Whiggery".²⁷ They sought once more the almost spiritual bond which was supposed to have existed between master and man in the feudal system, although they also looked to certain aspects of the Industrial Revolution as examples of their 'progressive traditionalism'. Hence Lord John Manners, a poet of sorts, could look approvingly on the hierarchical system of the mills (see, for example, Trafford's mill in Sybil²⁸) as: "a feudal system, ...and ...not at all a bad state of society".²⁹ 'Young England's' brand of Romanticism was partly a political antidote to utilitarianism, and partly a development in the Romantic movement itself: "When Disraeli was a youth, Romanticism had been flowing in the revolutionary channel prepared for it by Byron; it was now flowing strongly in the channel of reaction".³⁰ The group embodied a new political spirit but they asserted at the same time that political methods alone were insufficient to achieve the re-invigoration of society they sought. 'Young England' had its literary influences too: Clarendon's History, Kenelm Digby's Broadstone of Honour, the novels of Walter Scott, Tracts for the Times, and Bolingbroke's Patriot King. The latter had written more than a century earlier, to one of 'the Boys': "I expect little from the principal actors which tread the stage at present: I turn my eyes from the generation that is going off to the generation that is coming on".³¹ It was part of the doctrine of hero-worship that 'Young England' should have its minor deities, of whom Bolingbroke was one, and we may imagine that Disraeli cast himself in the same role as Bolingbroke in relation to his protégés. How seriously he took the movement is less certain. It virtually died in 1845 when he found himself opposed to the rest of 'Young England' (largely for the sake of his own career) over Peel's measure to endow the Roman Catholic seminary of Maynooth.³² Although there was a genuine reforming zeal in his outlook, Disraeli was loyal to 'Young England' only so long as it suited his own personal-political campaign.

The movement also appealed to the novelist's taste for the picturesque in him: "The journals daily descant", he wrote to Sarah shortly afterwards, "on the 'new party' that has arisen to give a new color to modern politics".³³

Disraeli's eagerness to lift politics from mere administration to something in line with his imaginative nature led him also at

this time to absorption **in** foreign affairs (of which that speech on the consular and diplomatic services was the first manifestation). Like the code of 'Young England', foreign politics appealed to Disraeli on two counts:

It provided him with opportunities for attacking the Whigs, and it enabled him to escape from the dull and unenlightening detail of economic discussion into a more spacious atmosphere, where his vision had wider range. Whatever the starting-point of debate, Disraeli soon contrived to rise into the region of foreign affairs. He deeply disliked the income-tax, but when the Bill came up for second reading, instead of blaming the Minister, he ingeniously connected the tax with the disasters in Afghanistan..

Similarly, Disraeli attacked Palmerston's aggressive pose towards Russia (asserting that he had sent agents of his to the shores of the Black Sea), whose natural response had been to send agents likewise into Central Asia.³⁵

Irish affairs dominated public interest in 1844, and Disraeli, who had earlier advocated governing the province "according to the policy of Charles I, and not of Oliver Cromwell", made a speech in which he put forward his own version of Irish history (including a romanticised picture of Stafford's administration) and thereby extended his struggle against Whiggery to the misleading Whig historians. He did not underestimate the power of literature within politics itself: "Literary men exercise great power, often an irresistible power", he said in a debate on Talfourd's Copyright Bill in 1838.³⁶ Meanwhile he was again planning to exploit that power himself after a break of seven years: "But Coningsby itself, to which we now come, did far more than the social successes of its hero, or even the speeches of its author, brilliant as they were, to awaken interest in Young England".³⁷ "You have had your history written by the Venetian party", says Coningsby;³⁸ now Disraeli set out to redress the balance.

Coningsby was rated by many of his contemporaries as Disraeli's finest work, and the opinion holds largely today. That his most 'political' work should also have been the most successful as a novel bears out that judgement of Dr. Leavis on Jane Austen: "Without her intense moral preoccupation she wouldn't have been a great novelist".³⁹ For Disraeli, one can read "political" in place of "moral". Sarah wrote proudly to her brother: "Papa says the man who has made the finest speech of the session has written the best book that ever was written".⁴⁰ And Disraeli went down to his constituents at the end of the session, reporting complacently to Mary Anne:

"They seem all of them ^{quite} to appreciate my start this year, both literary and political".⁴¹ Disraeli yearned fiercely for success and cared ~~little~~ where it came from: in his present political frustration he would have valued the publishing success of Coningsby particularly. In the novel he paid tribute to the nobility of ambition,⁴² just as in a speech to his constituents he made the candid admission: "I love fame; I love public reputation; I love to live in the eyes of the country; and it is a glorious thing for a man to do who has had my difficulties to contend against".⁴³

In the summer break Disraeli made a tour of the industrial centres of the north of England, collecting material for his next novel, Sybil, published in the following year, 1845. Again it was a successful work in its own right, as well as a political effort and a counter-argument to the Whig view of history. With that Hebraic respect for literature, Disraeli needed to establish his political credentials before taking the next step in his active career.

In the session of 1845 there was open hostility between Peel and Disraeli, whose attacks on his leader included slighting references to his lack of creative powers as well as his political failings:

The right hon. gentleman caught the Whigs bathing, and walked away with their clothes...He has left them in the full enjoyment of their liberal position, and ^{he} is himself a strict conservative of their garments...he is sure to be successful, partly because he never quotes a passage that has not ^{previously} received the meed of Parliamentary approbation...⁴⁴

In Lord George Bentinck⁴⁵ he speaks of Peel having "a peculiarity which is perhaps natural with men of very great talents who have not the creative faculty; he had a dangerous sympathy with the creations of others":⁴⁶

my idea of a great statesman is of one who represents a great idea - an idea which may lead him to power, an idea with which he may connect himself, an idea which he may develop, an ^{idea} which he may ^{and} can impress on the mind and conscience of a nation.⁴⁷

Disraeli never lacked for ideas himself, and, as his speeches of the time attest, he was earning distinction for the famous style in which he gave them out, either startling the House with novel associations, or convulsing them with his wit. In the autumn, his government shaken by bad harvests and a potato blight, Peel decided upon the abolition of the Corn Laws. In a spirited set-piece, and

to "Tremendous Tory Cheering", Disraeli compared his conduct to that of the Lord High Admiral of the Sultan of Turkey, who steered directly into the enemy's port, acknowledging the treachery quite openly: "that I might terminate the contest by betraying my master".⁴⁸ On June 25th, 1846, the Corn and Customs Bills passed the House of Lords, and a Coercion Bill (to secure peace in Ireland in the interim) came up for division in the Commons. The issue ^{was}/finely balanced, but ultimately brought triumph for the Protectionist revolt headed by Disraeli and Lord George Bentinck. The main wing of the Conservative party was defeated and Peel's public career finished, as "the men of metal and large-acred squires" trooped out in the opposition ranks. It was one of those dramatic scenes which Disraeli took away with him to reproduce later in Lord George Bentinck.⁴⁹

Credit for the triumph should go to both Bentinck and Disraeli, but the former was no speaker, and the success of the new party in actual debate was due mainly to Disraeli's oratory. Something of The Star Chamber satirist survived in his cruel ability to transfix both the character and words of his opponents. At one point in the session Peel, irritated by the rebellion of his subordinate, quoted the lines of Canning: "But of all plagues, good Heaven, Thy wrath can send / Save me, O save me, from the candid friend!" Disraeli seized upon the incongruity of quoting a man whose career Peel had himself destroyed. A week later his opportunity came. Casually dropping the name of Canning into his speech, Disraeli worked up to a devastating exposure of Peel's unfortunate choice of quotation:

- Canning, for example. That is a name never to be mentioned, I am sure, in the House of Commons without emotion. We all admire his genius. We all, at least most of us, deplore his untimely end; and we all sympathise with him in his fierce struggle with supreme prejudice and sublime mediocrity - with inveterate foes and with candid friends. (Loud cheering). The right hon. gentleman may be sure that a quotation from such an authority will always tell. Some lines, for example, upon friendship, written by Mr. Canning, and quoted by the right hon. gentleman! The theme,⁵⁰ the poet, the speaker - what a felicitous combination!

It was indeed a double triumph:

At Bradenham, when the news arrived, Isaac D'Israeli, blind and feeble, sat muttering again and again the biting triplet of the climax. His long experience of literature taught him how consummate was the art which had brought the innuendo to that most dexterous pitch of perfection: his father's heart must have told him that there was now, humanly speaking, no limit to the political prospects of his first-born son.⁵¹

However, Disraeli's position at the head of the Protectionists was opposed by some of his more straitlaced colleagues, on the grounds of that doubtful reputation of which his literary career was a part. But his speaking ability made him indispensable, particularly when Bentinck died of a heart attack in 1848. "He found himself almost the only figure on his side capable of putting up the oratorical display essential for a parliamentary leader".⁵² It was the Bentinck family who enabled Disraeli to buy his country seat at Hughenden, thus effectively "financing a parliamentary genius who seemed to understand the true interests of the aristocracy better than they did themselves".⁵³

In the autumn and winter of 1846 Disraeli wrote the last in his 'Political' Trilogy, Tancred. Ostensibly the last instalment of his review of the state of the nation, it fails to stay on course, and veers off instead into a self-indulgent vindication of the Jewish faith and race. Without the focus of a political objective, the book fails as a novel too; it bears all the signs of having been written in a vacuum, to a superseded formula.

Two other works were published in these years, neither of them novels, but both so colourful and subjective as almost to earn that title. Isaac Disraeli died in 1848, and his son's tribute to his memory was to publish a collected edition of his works; prefacing them with a memoir in which he painted an idealised picture of the fortunes of the Disraeli family since the days of their aristocratic eminence in Spain. The death of Lord George Bentinck in the same year also prompted a literary response (although not published until 1852), containing again an idealisation of the protagonist, and a dramatic reconstruction of the circumstances surrounding the Protectionist victory in 1846. It was his final word on the subject (just as Coningsby had been his call to arms), putting straight the record on both the literary and political level. He then turned his attention to parliament once more, and the long years of opposition to which his revolt against Peel had condemned his party.

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2. The Novelist and Politics.

We have seen in Chapter 1, Section 3, that politics and literature began to focus Disraeli's many ambitions from an early stage in his career. But he craved recognition even more impatiently than most men of his age, and in trying to snatch it too eagerly, only ensured that it eluded his grasp. Coningsby marks a turning-point. Disraeli had to impress his readers with a convincing political viewpoint, whilst keeping their interest in the novel itself. He could not afford the self-indulgent caprices of his earlier works, and even if he were only paying lip-service to the demand for a coherent political philosophy, it had to be made convincing. As it was, Disraeli himself needed the confidence it would give to have articulated his approach in that form, and to have put it before the public. His ultimate aim was still success - for whom is it not? - but he had a finer perception of how to set about it. He could not transform himself into a wholly altruistic crusader, but he had to be less pre-occupied with himself, and more concerned with his readers, and with the issues he wrote about. Thus his situation, and a maturer mind, combined to give a natural form to the new novel. Another simple but vital difference was that after some years in Parliament, he had experience of his subject-matter. To see the effect of all these factors, it is worth looking at the absence of them in the earlier novels, particularly where they purport to deal with the same theme of politics.

In Vivian Grey the hero is involved in power-struggles even at school; after he is expelled he pursues a relentless course of self-improvement, and lights upon "THE STUDY OF POLITICS".¹ The scenes which follow are full of lively satire (sharpened by Disraeli's experience of writing those pamphlets in defence of the South American mining companies (1825), and contributing to the short-lived Star Chamber). The intensity of the hero's ambition (reflecting also no doubt the mood of his author) ensures that the narrative does not flag. But when the Vivian Grey/Carabas plot collapses, so does the novel. If, on the other hand, Disraeli had portrayed Vivian Grey successfully conquering the political world, this would have required a knowledge of it which he did not have. He was not so much interested in the workings of politics, still less in contributing a political philosophy, so much as in indulging a fantasy of machination. His actual 'political' experience was really no more than that disastrous venture on the

Stock Exchange in 1825², and so Vivian Grey's career was likely to be equally limited. Relying heavily on autobiography, Disraeli was inevitably restricted by it too. His hero reflects this self-preoccupation: the bitter railing against his modest social background is not directed at social inequalities in general, but at the fact that he is not himself among the privileged few: "Curse on my lot! that the want of a few rascal counters, and the possession of a little rascal blood, should mar my fortunes! - ".³

He therefore anticipates a political career as a form of revenge, with no manifesto but that of self-advancement:

Yes, we must mix with the herd; we must enter into their feelings; we must humour their weaknesses; we must sympathise with the sorrows that we do not feel; and share the merriment of fools.⁴

Mrs. Felix Lorraine tells Vivian: "Shrined in the secret chamber of your soul there is an image before which you bow down in adoration, and that image is YOURSELF".⁵ These and other expressions of self-criticism⁶ are paradoxical. They show the author/hero aware of faults, but not learning from this awareness, and still engrossed in himself.

After Disraeli's satire has skated over the worlds of politics, literature and 'society', his experience is exhausted. Increasing bitterness and flippancy in the second part of the novel are evidence of how much of its writing derived from Disraeli's own wounded pride. There are some unoriginal comments on R.P. Ward's recently-published Tremaine;⁷ a jibe at Southey in the style of Byron: "The most philosophical of bigots, and the most poetical of prose writers"⁸; and descriptions of the guests at Ems and of the Court at Reisenberg which seem to be satire merely for the sake of satire.⁹ In these scenes, based on Disraeli's travels in northern Europe in 1824, the rhythm of the first part is lost. When not upheld by autobiography, the narrative veers off into fantasy: for example, the tale of left-handed Hans, and the Supernaculum drinking episode.¹⁰ Melodrama and forced 'Romantic' effusions show how much Disraeli is relying on stock modes to try to maintain effect. But, on the rare occasions he is possessed by a theme outside of himself, there is a marked difference. The episode between Vivian Grey and John Conyers, Carabas' former gamekeeper, shows real concern for Conyers' destitution.¹¹ The cause of Conyers' ruin, it is suggested, is really the ruthless efficiency of Carabas' agent, Stapylton Toad, whom the author evidently intends as representative of a new predatory class in society, and in this respect a

fererunner of Coningsby's Rigby:

Mr. Toad's career in the House was as correct as his conduct out of it. After ten years' regular attendance, the boldest conjecturer would not have dared to define his political principles. It was a rule with Stapylton Toad never to commit himself. Once, indeed, he wrote an able pamphlet on the Corn Laws, which excited the dire indignation of the Political Economy Club. But Stapylton cared little for their subtle confutations and their loudly expressed contempt. He had obliged the country gentlemen of England, and ensured the return, at the next election, of Lord Mounteney's brother for the county. At this general election, also, Stapylton Toad's purpose in entering the House became rather more manifest; for it was found, to the surprise of the whole country, that there was scarcely a place in England; county, town, or borough, in which Mr. Stapylton Toad did not possess some influence. In short, it was discovered, that Mr. Stapylton Toad had 'a first-rate Parliamentary business'; that nothing could be done without his cooperation, and everything with it. In spite of his prosperity, Stapylton had the good sense never to retire from business, and even to refuse a baronetcy; on condition, however, that it should be offered to his son.¹²

The piece has a fluency and coherence because Disraeli is for once concerned more with capturing a phenomenon than with the effect he is making on his 'audience'.

The final chapters of Vivian Grey, in Reisenberg, have some further backhand references to society and public affairs back in England, but we are too often reminded of a Vivian Grey/Disraeli comparing himself to the awesome figure of Beckendorff, against whom he analyses past errors in the hope of mapping out an irrevocably successful future.

The Young Duke has a structure akin to a Morality Play: lively depiction of the young hero's extravagant adventures, which evidently holds the author's imagination far more than the crisis of moral conversion to which the narrative ostensibly leads. The young Duke's early career is devoted to ever-more indulgent exercises in fashionable self-advertisement, and although they are accompanied by observations on the futility of his self-centred lifestyle, nevertheless the novel remains faithfully devoted to it. Thus we find the hero reproaching himself for long neglect of his guardian, Mr. Dacre, after a glimpse of his beautiful daughter, May:

Now aid me, ye heroes of my house! On the sands of Palestine, on the plains of France, ye were not in a more difficult situation, than is your descendant in a ballroom in his own country.¹³

The contrast only brings out the comparative frivolity of his preoccupations, yet the lack of purpose seems to grip the novel itself rather than being a theme within it. Like the other characters, the narrative exists to dance attendance upon the young Duke, lacking any more worthwhile field for the author's talents as a social observer and novelist. Hence, after another of the hero's bathetic adventures, he observes:

If the meeting between the Young Duke and Sir Lucius Grafton had been occasioned by any other cause than the real one, it is difficult to say what might have been the fate of this proposition. Our own opinion is, that this work would have been only in two volumes.¹⁴

Some isolated comments point to Disraeli's subsequent political approach, although they are still observations on himself with regard to a planned career, than directly on a political question. Hence a reaction against utilitarianism, embodied in the political economist who shares the young Duke's coach in Book V, chapter vii. He looks forward to a new mechanical race of men, "got by a steam-engine on a spinning-jenny".¹⁵

But just as often the author gives voice to purely personal cries: on frustrated ambition;¹⁶ on passing from youth to "the age of retrospection";¹⁷ on social behaviour (rather flippantly: "Wine, like woman, in our opinion, should not be too old",¹⁸). Although the novel leads up to the young Duke's acceptance of a political rôle, there is little attempt to tell us actually what policy this entails, still less to persuade us of its importance. The novel ends by advocating an ideal of political involvement without giving it any content. Nor could the author follow his own advice; for, entrusting the manuscript to his publisher, Colburn, he disappeared in the opposite direction, on his Eastern travels.

Contarini Fleming follows closely upon the progression of ideas inside the hero's consciousness, and therefore, by reason of their close identification, that of the author. Therefore it is far from the format of a political novel, which should demonstrate the reciprocal action of external events and a character's inner development upon each other. The political hero may eventually triumph over circumstances, but the struggle is there. With Contarini, the struggle remains within himself, and neither does the novel as a whole seek to urge any convictions on *public affairs*—just recognition from the reader of the author/hero's status as a misunderstood poet and prop-

het. This absorption in Contarini's feelings produces at times an unreal narrative logic. Thus, for example, he is left in a reflective mood after the collapse of his career as a robber-baron, at the head of the self-styled Secret Union for the Amelioration of Society. His musings take him back to his childhood passion, Christiana, when just at that moment a carriage draws up, with Christiana herself inside.¹⁹ Contarini's tragic romance with Alceste is of the same mould: it belongs to a fantasy-world.²⁰

From the very beginning of Contarini Fleming there is an air of aggressive self-sufficiency: "When I search into my own breast, and trace the development of my own intellect, all is light and order".²¹ The detached air of much of the writing may be partly ascribed to its being written on Disraeli's Eastern travels in 1830: "in a beautiful and distant land, with nothing in it to attract the passions of the hour".²² Contarini rather revels in his sense of isolation, "without country, without kindred, and without friends",²³ so that his attitude to society is one of suspicion and a desire for revenge. At school, Contarini tells us, "I perceived only beings whom I was determined to control".²⁴ We can imagine this of the early Disraeli also, and it suggests why he lacked the patience to master literature, once it did not bring the immediate triumph he sought. Baron Fleming's remark is significant here: "A man of great energies aspires that they should be felt in his lifetime",²⁵ so it was in this spirit of hunger for personal prestige that Contarini/Disraeli first approached politics, viewing it simply in terms of self-aggrandizement. He is therefore both fascinated and repelled by the prospect.

It is really the figure of Baron Fleming who fires Contarini's enthusiasm for public life, and so even the most 'political' parts of the novel retain an atmosphere of private fantasy. The Baron turns politics into a personal campaign, urging on Contarini a single-minded course of social cultivation and private study: "Read no history, nothing but biography, for that is life without theory".²⁶ The delight Contarini takes in this new career is self-regarding: "It was enchanting to be acquainted with the secrets of European cabinets, and to control or influence their fortunes".²⁷ Writing ostensibly from a perspective of hindsight, he comments: "When I look back upon myself at this period, I have difficulty in conceiving a more unamiable character".²⁸ Yet the Disraeli who wrote this was to behave in just such a manner as he approached his own political career. As

in Vivian Grey, the self-criticism is both persistently self-regarding, and apparently ineffectual. It is hardly self-criticism so much as introspection, analysing the mistakes of the past and weighing up his ambitions for the future. Contarini Fleming describes a real, not a fictional, situation, and so it remains static and self-absorbed. It is not enough to give voice to the predicament of the romantic isolé by writing a self-obsessed work; one must try to transcend it, and make it meaningful for others. Even in literature one must strive for a concern with society, and try to offer a perspective on it, even if only through entertainment. Disraeli was more concerned with the scorn he had earned as author of Vivian Grey. So, trying to prove that he was a true writer, it is really to that earlier ^{work} he refers when Contarini looks back on his first literary effort, Manstein: "I am convinced that, with all its errors, the spark of ^{true} creation animated its fiery page".²⁹ Disraeli shared Contarini's tendency to look back upon himself, and the effect he was creating, in even the most active situations:

...was I not a nobleman incognito, going on a pilgrimage to Venice? To say nothing of the adventures that might then occur; here were materials for the novelist!³⁰

The writing itself is often falsely effusive, as in Contarini's vision of Egeria:

The sky was of a radiant purple, and the earth was streaming with a golden light. And there were blue mountains, and bright fields, and glittering vineyards".³¹

True politics hardly appear in Contarini Fleming: only a comparison of ancient and modern concepts of colonialism,³² and oblique references to the progress of the Reform Bill back in England.³³

Contarini attempts his own epitaph on the failure of his ambitions:

Yet if I am to be remembered, let me be remembered as one who, in a sad night of gloomy ignorance and savage bigotry, was prescient of the flaming morning-break of bright philosophy, as one who deeply sympathised with his fellow-men, and felt a proud and profound conviction of their perfectibility; as one who devoted himself to the amelioration of his kind, by the destruction of error and the propagation of truth.³⁴

But the very progress - or lack of it - of Contarini Fleming belies all this. If Contarini's response to his philanthropic duty is any guide to Disraeli's commitment, it is not surprising that

he was not yet able to escape from the prison of his self-concern.

The Wondrous Tale of Alroy was also much inspired by Disraeli's Eastern tour, after visiting Jerusalem and the traditional tombs of the kings of Israel in 1831. Again, there is an evident detachment from the concerns of Disraeli's English readers. The very choice of the twelfth-century legend of the Jewish prince-in-captivity was hardly likely to have wide appeal. There is a clear identification with the sufferings and humiliations of the hero.³⁵ Insofar as Disraeli was not just thinking of himself, but of his ancestral faith and race, he was obviously still marking himself out from the greater part of his readers. There is a conscious striving for a 'Hebraic' tone in Alroy, as when the hero and his companions comment on their tribute-day assembly:

It is not as the visit of Sheba unto Solomon; nevertheless the glory has not yet departed... That last flourish was bravely done. It was not as the blasts before Jericho; nevertheless, it told that the Lord of Hosts was for us... It was not as the great shout in the camp when the ark returned; nevertheless, it was boldly done, and showed that the glory had not yet departed.³⁶

It is a forced effort, and in the struggle to maintain an elevated tone, Disraeli fell back on some devices borrowed from other literary genres too. There is an attempt at a Virgilian simile:

The water column, ^{wildly} rising from the breast of summer ocean, in some warm tropic clime, when the sudden clouds too well discover that the holiday of heaven is over, and the shrieking sea-birds tell a time of fierce commotion, the column rising from the sea, it was not so wild as he, the young Alroy.³⁷

Similarly, Alroy's visit to the Hall of the Kings echoes Aeneas' descent to the underworld in Book VI of the Aeneid.³⁸ His arrival at Jerusalem suggests the 'knocking-on-the-gate' scene in Macbeth, even to the language: "Wretched driveller, I am ashamed to lose my patience with such a dotard".³⁹ Alroy's vision of Jabaster ("MEET ME ON THE PLAIN OF NEHAUEND") is reminiscent of the haunting of Brutus by the ghost of Caesar ("Then shalt see me at Philippi").⁴⁰

Since the initial inspiration for Henrietta Temple was so autobiographical (the love affair between Disraeli and Mrs. Henrietta Sykes lasting from 1833 to 1836; see above, Chapter 2, Section 2),⁴¹ so too are its main themes: young love, debt, the conventional demands of society. There are some perceptive comments on human nature

passing from the aspirations of youth to the concerns that come with age and responsibility, but these are written mainly out of Disraeli's own introspection. The early part of the book, which he put down in 1834, celebrates the height of his passion, and is almost an extension of Disraeli's 'Mutilated Diary'. In 1836 his debts caused him to pick up the writing again, but he parted from Henrietta in the same year.⁴² This is reflected in that latter half of the novel: it is more light-hearted, outward-looking, and closer to a comedy of manners. Thus the movement of the novel depends upon a combination of the situation of its author at the time of writing, and on the stage reached by the hero. Such themes as there are have an inherent interest only whilst one is reading, and there is little continuity or development amongst them.

For Ferdinand Armine's youthful career as a cadet, the narrative draws upon Disraeli's experiences in Malta on his Eastern tour in 1830-1, and the scenes in Italy similarly reflect his holiday there with the Austens in 1826. When not drawing chiefly upon autobiographical material, the events are still largely products of Disraeli's personal fantasies, especially the early chapters depicting the elder Ferdinand Armine's spectacularly unprincipled career. Thereafter the novel is heavily reliant upon the introduction of new characters to move the narrative along: mainly reacting to the hero himself, but figures like Bond Sharpe and Lady Bellair are given their brief period in the limelight. There is little interaction between the characters and the events of the novel, and this is apparently a deliberate 'negligence'; as the author suggests by describing how the younger Ferdinand begins inevitably to follow the path of his grandfather:

The conduct of men depends upon their temperament, not upon a bunch of musty maxims. No one had been educated with more care than Ferdinand Armine; in no heart had stricter precepts of moral conduct ever been instilled. But he was lively and impetuous, with a fiery imagination, violent passions, and a daring soul.⁴³

This view leads to a concentration upon character, and can fail to put him in the context of the institutions and other members of his society. The conclusion to Henrietta Temple betrays the hand of the puppet-master in the way that Katherine Grandison and Digby Montfort cheerfully renounce their respective fiancés and accept each other instead. Since the novel has no other objective

than to bring itself to this tidy conclusion, it becomes a comic ritual, and Katherine utters herself what is perhaps the best epilogue: "Well, the comedy is nearly concluded. We shall join hands, and the curtain will drop".⁴⁴

Venetia puts forward for the first time an ideal of altruism as not merely a romantic dream, but as essential to civilization. Cadurcis' development takes him through stages of orthodoxy and rebellion, popularity and disgrace, but always characterised by a selfish egocentricity. His 'Byronic' example is compared to the 'Shelleyan' career of Marmion Herbert, who is cast as an older man to enhance his exemplary status:

Far from being the victim of those frigid and indifferent feelings which must ever be the portion of the mere doubter, Herbert, on the contrary, looked forward with ardent and sanguine enthusiasm to a glorious and ameliorating future, which should amply compensate and console a misguided and unhappy race.⁴⁵

Technical skill and satirical wit come to be valued less than simple humanity: "It is sympathy that makes you a poet... a misanthropical poet is a contradiction in terms".⁴⁶ The desire for popularity at any price is dangerous, as Cadurcis learns: "I have written like a boy... I found the public bite, and so I baited on with tainted meat".⁴⁷ Transcendence of one's egocentricity is a life's work, and fraught with false turns. Thus Cadurcis reacts against the unquestioning orthodoxy of his boyhood by taking up equally extreme political and philosophical positions, demonstrating how self-regarding in fact so many so-called principles can be. This is the lesson which has struck Herbert when he is reunited with his wife and daughter:

His heart melted to his daughter, nor did he care to live without her love and presence. His philosophical theories all vanished. He felt how dependent we are in this world on our natural ties, and how limited, with all his arrogance, is the sphere of man. Dreaming of philanthropy, he had broken his wife's heart, and bruised, perhaps irreparably, the spirit of his child.⁴⁸

One should strive therefore for a philosophy with no rigid principle at all (if that is not too paradoxical), so much as a spirit or response. This remained a strong theme even in the political atmospheres of Coningsby and Sybil, in both of which the hero learns to overcome the social barriers, through dialogue with representatives of the working and manufacturing classes, and in-

deed to forget personal timidity to launch into Parliamentary careers. Their concern for those beyond their own class or coterie makes them that much more engaging even for the modern reader. They do still have a political initiative to offer: that near-paradoxical but vital affirmation of simple human values, over blind adherence to political creeds.

This sense of mission makes only an untested and therefore brittle appearance in Venetia; the novel acknowledges that one must have a regard for and attitude towards other men, but it does not go into what in Disraeli's case this will actually involve. There is little direct reflection on social or political issues, and Venetia remains heavily dependant on the sub-structure of the Byron and Shelley legends, and on some obviously second-hand opinions. For Cadurcis' expulsion from society, Disraeli draws upon Macaulay: "It has been well observed, that no spectacle is so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodical fits of morality". After some further remarks, there is the lame conclusion: "These observations of a celebrated writer apply to the instance of Lord Cadurcis".⁴⁹

Although he was to advocate the ideal of self-transcendence in Venetia, Disraeli was to betray it often in his imminent political career. Rejection of rigid structures was frequently used to justify mere opportunism; whilst on other occasions his political ambitions prompted him to sacrifice all other concerns in the name of loyalty to party or movement. Yet Venetia did at least confront the tension which is essential to any achievement: between having a goal, a 'mission', and ensuring that one does not become fanatically blind to broader, more fundamental, social duty. And so the novel begins to answer the question which frustrates the boy Cadurcis, and, we may imagine, the aspiring Disraeli too: "What career was open in this mechanical age to the chivalric genius of his race?".⁵⁰ The answer for both lay in a political career, and, moreover, 'political' in the original sense of having a concern beyond purely personal advancement, to serve the 'polis'.

By the time Coningsby was published in 1844, Disraeli had been in Parliament for nearly seven years. Personal factors had inevitably played a large part in his approach. His Jewish background, lack of orthodox social and educational credentials, and leaning towards a 'Byronic' lifestyle caused him sometimes to es-

pouse radical initiatives, and at other times to reach out to the security offered by the opposite extreme of orthodoxy. Much personal ambition lay behind Disraeli's political acts and novels: this we accept of any politician. But we would also hope to find elements of genuine social concern. In Disraeli's case, there was authentic spirit within the short-lived dream of 'Young England' (See above, Chapter 3, Section 1). Failure to obtain office under Peel in 1841 no doubt fuelled disillusion with the whole system of party politics. He showed more sympathy than the majority of his Parliamentary colleagues to the Chartist agitation and the calls for reform of the 'hungry forties'. And even when he was framing a policy in the pages of Coningsby, in large part to persuade his readers that he did have some initiative to offer, this could have a value in itself. Paying a necessary lip-service to the conventional expectation of sincere public sentiments can often be the starting-point for developing these sentiments in reality. The formulation and the articulation of proposals are a reciprocal process, and we can imagine that in trying to enunciate a programme, Disraeli actually discovered some ideas barely apparent even to himself until then. The pattern of most of his novels - of the individual's growth to maturity through a number of conflicting influences bearing upon him - reappears in Coningsby, however now it is set in a more strictly political context.⁵¹ The young hero is taken abruptly from his familiar environment at Eton to meet his grandfather, Lord Monmouth, who has himself returned from the continent, alarmed by the implications of the Reform Bill. Although the Tory Monmouth is casting an eye on his heir as a political prospect, Coningsby's 'debut' is a failure. Overawed by the strange and splendid atmosphere, he bursts into tears. Yet this inauspicious beginning seems to matter less as the novel progresses, because in the meantime we are shown that the grand political world which so overcomes Coningsby is in reality corrupt and without direction. Our first introduction to it is through his eyes, and we share his bewilderment, inseparable from any novel experience. Chapter ii then embarks on Disraeli's stated intention to study, "The derivation and character of political parties".⁵² If Coningsby's naivety is to be regretted, so much more is the naked opportunism of political parasites such as Tadpole and Taper, whom we see with other members of an expectant opposition thronging Carlton Terrace to see

the result of Wellington's acceptance of the Ministry. The passages on the history and character of politics which follow are contrasted to the career of Coningsby and his friends at Eton: a society relatively free from intrigue and false privilege, based on achievement, and offering an optimistic alternative to the jaded practice of the Great World in the enthusiasm and moral innocence of Youth. "I would give his Wellington's fame, if I had it, and my wealth, to be sixteen", says Lord Monmouth, attending Eton's Montem ceremony.⁵³

The 'political' chapters also serve to imply the passage of time, so that we can return to Eton prepared to find Coningsby and his colleagues growing up to be the leaders of their school generation. In time the developments in the political world begin to impinge on the more serious-minded boys at Eton, but the approach of Coningsby and his friends to current issues is based on duty (albeit in a naively enthusiastic light) rather than the instinctive self-interest of their elders. This theme is to be developed in Sybil, and is the *raison d'être* for the whole 'Political' Trilogy: that we cannot afford to treat politics as an arcane ceremony shut away inside the House of Commons and irrelevant to society outside. Political affairs affect every individual to some degree, and this must be recognised, along with the consequent rights and responsibilities of those individuals.

So Coningsby cannot remain a schoolboy forever. In turn, his career and that of his colleagues at Eton grows in significance: we are looking at the next generation of administrators in microcosm. Hence the friendship which develops between Coningsby and Oswald Millbank, who has been regarded with suspicion up to this point as a member of the new class of industrialists, takes on a greater symbolic function. The same is true later on of Coningsby's encounters with Millbank's father, with Sidonia, and with Eustace Lyle. Each represents a class wrongfully denied a stake in the political system: industrialists, Jews/financiers, and Catholics respectively. It is Coningsby's personal qualities which make him receptive to the advice of others, and his winning manner which disposes them to instruct him. One cannot therefore make a distinction between the would-be politician's personal and political attributes in this novel, which is a form of Pilgrim's Progress of the political world, with mentors such as Sidonia as guides on the way. Strictly speaking, as A.H. Frietzche points out, the introduction

of the Rothschildian figure of Sidonia is superfluous to the plot:

It comes as a shock, then, to realize that Sidonia has no firm connection with the story of the novel. His place in Coningsby is that of an advisor to the hero, not that of a mover of the plot. Only twice, on unimportant matters, does Coningsby act on Sidonia's advice, and the result is neither good nor bad for the hero.⁵⁴

This is perhaps too harsh. Their meeting is almost deliberately cast in an unreal atmosphere: the two are thrown together by a storm in a wild forest setting, and take refuge in an isolated inn. It is their ensuing conversation which is important in permanently influencing Coningsby's maturation. Sidonia is essential to the hero's education, if not to his immediate conduct, as to a lesser extent are Eustace Lyle and the elder Millbank. And it is on Sidonia's advice that Coningsby visits Manchester, the heart of industrial progress. Disraeli makes a virtue of Sidonia's elusive personality and the unreal encounter to appeal to a narrative logic beyond simple cause and event. Why did Coningsby go to Manchester? "Because a being, whose name even was unknown to him, had met him in a hedge ale house during a thunderstorm, and told him that the Age of Ruins was past".⁵⁵ **But in earlier novels such episodes were usually lapses, the result of hasty planning, rather than being conscious devices.**

Coningsby's initiation continues thereafter in the social functions at Coningsby Castle, and the education proper to a future representative of his country is completed by a spell in France. Meanwhile he goes up to Cambridge full of noble ambition, and distinguishes himself from undergraduate colleagues by his serious approach to study. With his ex-Eton friends he takes part in the political campaign of the local Conservative candidate, and only after its successful conclusion do they realize how little they had considered the principles which that party was supposed to embody. Recognising this as their "last schoolboy weakness", they decide to be more discerning in future. In another gesture of symbolic significance Coningsby persuades de Vere, heir to an established Whig family, to adopt the same stance.

Success must not come too easily to Coningsby, because it must be seen to be earned, and because Disraeli needs to keep him a reasonably credible figure rather than a prig. At intervals therefore we are reminded of his difficulties: inferior in social graces to the refined Mr. Melton at Beaumanoir, awkward at times in the grand atmosphere of Coningsby Castle, and thwarted in love for Edith

Millbank, sister to his Eton friend. Political contingencies are intertwined however even with this personal situation; for it is primarily the political feud between the two families which divides the lovers. Coningsby seeks solace in travelling to Greece, but once again is not permitted to escape his responsibilities, for the likelihood of an election in 1840 to replace the shaky Whig administration recalls him to England. But it is partly his disgust at the feud *with the Millbank family*, and the resolution made after the Cambridge election, which enables him (in an obvious reversal of Chapter i) to oppose his grandfather's political plans for him. Coningsby refuses to follow the dictates of his family and party by standing for election at Darlford against the elder Millbank. As a result, when Monmouth dies, he finds himself disinherited. Thus follows his most severe test yet, applying himself to the hard alternative of a career in law whilst all around him are chasing the spoils of the elections. A moral dimension is thereby added to the qualities demanded of a politician:

Coningsby felt at this moment a profound conviction which never again deserted him, that the *conduct which would violate the affections of the heart, or the dictates of the con-*science, however it may lead to immediate success, is a fatal error.⁵⁶

After sacrifice comes reward: Millbank withdraws from the election to make way for Coningsby, who triumphantly defeats Monmouth's corrupt former agent, Rigby, and gains permission to marry Edith Millbank after all. It is a sentimental conclusion, but one achieved by effort and moral sacrifice. Coningsby therefore stands mid-way between presenting the rise to undreamt-of good fortune, as in the popular nineteenth-century Romantic novel, and the tale of duty-properly-rewarded of the mid-Victorian period. The narrative and the themes it carries are carefully shown to have a political significance. It is as a result of political reverberations that the stages of the hero's maturation are initiated; and the qualities demanded (whether intellectual, emotional, or moral) are related to political necessities. The reader of Coningsby emerges with two related impressions: that politics is as demanding in the attributes required of its true exponents as it is a calling vital to the well-being of the country to which it owes a heavy responsibility.

Sybil, published the following year, 1845, continues the attack on those members of the aristocracy who obviously shirk their political responsibilities. The opening scenes depict the luxurious

lack of purpose in London's exclusive clubland, where the sole topic of current interest is the prospects for the forthcoming Derby. Amusing as this exercise in the "fashionable" style may be, it has a serious implication: that in place of these purposeless dandies, other elements in society will emerge to assume the controls of power. They might be worthy inheritors, but equally demagogues or parvenus, and who eventually fills this political vacuum is the question which Sybil poses. Chapter iii presents the pedigree of the Marney family, descended through a line of ambitious social climbers from Honest Baldwin Greymount, an expropriator of Church property under Henry VIII. In the same way, the Mowbrays are traced back to John Warren, a coffee-house waiter raised to fortune by patronage in India. Meanwhile, political and personal factors begin to work together upon the novel's hero, Egremont (the younger of the Marney brothers), who up to this point has pursued the career of thoughtless self-indulgence common to his colleagues at school and university. With the death of King William IV, and heightened interest in politics caused by the Reform Bill, his mother prevails on him (as a younger son with no occupation) to stand for Parliament. The opportunism inseparable from election time is demonstrated again by Tadpole and Taper of Coningsby fame, in Chapter vi. It is one of several attempts (not all successful) to confirm Sybil as the next instalment of an integrated Trilogy.

That politics have an impact beyond divisions and rarefied debate is borne out in Book II, Chapter *iii*, where we are given a detailed (thanks to the Bluebooks) and horrifying picture of conditions in the town of Marney, which so contrasts with a superficial first impression of pastoral content. Egremont's duties as a Justice of the Peace introduce him to a symptom of unrest in the form of rick-burning.⁵⁷ These are, however, the only manifestations of agrarian (as opposed to urban) unrest presented in the novel: Disraeli did not wish to stress an aspect which threatened his neo-feudal political doctrine. Nevertheless, the incident is at the back of Egremont's mind when he meets the trio of Morley (self-educated writer and socialist), Gerard (a mill foreman and leader of the People), and his daughter, the heroine Sybil herself; a meeting which takes place in the symbolic setting of the ruined Abbey of Marney. Their disturbing comments on the gulf between rich and poor - England's 'Two Nations' - initiate Egremont's growth to moral maturity in earnest. Again, personal factors play their part: an argument with

his brother over funding for his political campaign deepens Egremont's sense of isolation from his class. His brother is the Lord Marney whom we must hold responsible for the picture of rural poverty we have just seen; a selfish individual, insensitive to his wife, and politically a Tory of the hard school, favouring the New Poor Law.

There follow a number of largely static scenes presenting "the Condition of the People".⁵⁸ The manufacturers are treated less sympathetically than in Coningsby, for we see the effects of their labour monopoly in the town of Mowbray: infanticide, drunkenness, moral and physical degradation, and the Truck system. It is a breeding-ground for the discontent which the author wishes to dramatise as a danger to the very basis of society. The vicar of Mowbray, Aubrey St. Lys, tries vainly to alleviate the situation. St. Lys is a more Anglo-Catholic version of Eustace Lyle in Coningsby, and voices similar sentiments on the importance of ritual and ceremony in everyday life. One of his visits, in company with Egremont, is to the weaver, Philip Warner, one victim of the unjust socio-economic system. With a wife and baby to support, abandoned by his wage-earning daughter, he tries hopelessly to support the family on piecework at the rate of a penny an hour. In Book III, Chapter i it is the turn of the mining community, who give a lucid account of their sufferings to Morley.⁵⁹ Not least of these is the obligation to spend a part of their wages at the Truck-shop, owned by the employers, and run by a malicious father and son team who exploit and torment their reluctant customers. Most vivid of all are the chapters on Wodgate, based on Willenhall, the home of the locksmiths.⁶⁰ It is a deliberate attempt to frighten readers out of their complacency: Wodgate exhausts superlatives of violence and degradation, and the scene plays on the concept of a journey undertaken (by Morley) to a foreign setting, which however must be acknowledged a part of England. Wodgate is a symbol of pagan and violent values, wholly unchecked by municipal authority, organised instead according to its own cruel law, exercised by a mock-aristocracy of master craftsmen. At its head is the grotesque 'Bishop' Hatton, and his equally tyrannous wife.

But the picture is not wholly one of despair, and in Book III, Chapter viii an alternative is offered in Trafford's mill, an idealised glimpse of master and man working in harmony.⁶¹ In depicting Millbank's establishment in Coningsby, the stress was on his energy

and initiative,⁶² but Trafford is praised chiefly for his concern to create a community (with all municipal facilities), which both looks back to the feudal system for its inspiration, and prefigures the arts and crafts movement of the end of the century. It is also a tangible alternative to the barren intellectual creed proposed by Morley (whom we suspect of an attempt on Egremont's life at the end of Book III, Chapter x.⁶³)

The focus then moves to the world of politics proper, which we find largely ignorant of or indifferent to the plight of the country. The absurd parliamentary intrigues, the Jamaica Bill, and the Bed-chamber Plot dominate interest instead. By way of a parallel, the People mount their own counter-rituals: a torchlit congress on Mowbray Moor, and at the other extreme a secret Trade Union initiation ceremony with a strongly masonic air. The climax to this popular movement is the National Convention of Chartists in London. As part of the attempt to cross barriers of fear and prejudice, Gerard and Morley go canvassing support in the capital amongst representatives of the aristocracy, who prove largely unresponsive. But one of their calls is upon Egremont himself, hitherto *known only to them* as 'Franklin'. It is a crisis of personality and of faith which forces Egremont out of his schizophrenic state. When the moral blindness of the politicians has its inevitable consequence - riots in Birmingham and several northern towns - the author presents a thinly disguised Peel meeting the situation with formulaic and wholly inadequate measures. But Egremont replays the part exercised in real life by Disraeli himself, in making a parliamentary speech sympathetic to the Chartists' cause. He is rewarded on a personal level by reconciliation with Sybil, who had earlier rejected his declaration of love because she could not accept an aristocrat bridging the divide between the Two Nations. Morley makes a similar advance to Sybil at this time, and is rejected. As in Coningsby, there is some attempt to harmonise the sentimental theme with the political (although this demands some abrupt shifts in thematic emphasis). Just previously Gerard has come to condemn Morley's political creed (his "joint-stock felicity") which shows Disraeli beginning to make distinctions between the popular leaders. In his frustration, however, with the failure of political expedients, Gerard turns to revolutionary alternatives. To restrain him, Sybil travels to the plotters' lair in London's slum-land, and her appalled reaction to life in Seven Dials shows how the erstwhile dar-

ling of the people has become almost middle-class in the author's desire to secure for her the sympathy of his readers. The whole party are surprised and arrested, however, and Sybil is only rescued (by Egremont) after a night of humiliation at the police station. Gerard goes to goal, and we next see him at a huge open-air assembly to welcome him back to Mowbray after serving sentence.

But Gerard's status as a popular leader is already under threat from a different quarter: the demands of the novel's sentimental conclusion. 'Baptist' Hatton, brother of the Wodgate dictator, is a lawyer who specialises in raising ambitious parvenus to the peerage through his expertise in heraldic law. Now he plans to repay an old debt to Gerard's family by pursuing their claim to the seat of Mowbray, stolen from them by ancestors of the present incumbents. The solution lies in some documents held in the castle itself. The opportunity to get these back occurs when the whole area is threatened by violent uprisings, headed by the Wodgate 'Hellcats'. By now a careful distinction is being made between those members of the people who respond to genuine grievances in restrained fashion, and the savages - primarily from Wodgate - who exploit the situation for a drunken and violent orgy. Thus St. Lys, Gerard, and the otherwise committed iconoclast, Devilsdust, all speak against the invading mob, and Sybil is trapped by them in Mowbray Castle with its (falsely) aristocratic hosts. Egremont comes again to the rescue, at the head of his troop of yeomanry. Gerard and Lord Marney meet in a skirmish and both are killed. Morley takes the chance to rifle the muniments room of Mowbray Castle for Gerard's family deeds, but is then killed himself by a member of Egremont's troop.

The conclusion to Sybil is a triumph of the Victorian compromise. Dandy Mick and Devilsdust, formerly in the vanguard of political awareness in Mowbray, become contented capitalists. Egremont and Sybil (the latter 'restored' to the nobility in her own right through Baptist Hatton's efforts) are united in marriage. In this last respect the intended theme of the novel - healing the breach between the Two Nations - is undercut, for Egremont is merely joining with one of his own class anyway. It is also manifestly unjust, for example, that Morley should die at the very moment that he virtually presents Egremont with a noble bride. Politics give way to the demands of publishing taste; and, one suspects, to Disraeli's own predilection for an idealised conclusion.

But if one is not to be doctrinaire, one can allow that the conclusions to both Coningsby and Sybil convey that spirit of reconciliation and hope which Disraeli wished to evoke. And they succeed in showing at least as great a preoccupation with the society they depict as with the author's own aspirations. This was due not only to a new motivation, but also to the reciprocal demands of their chosen area of debate. A simple benefit of Disraeli's years on 'the inside' of politics was in the practical details and the day-to-day administrative procedures he came to know so well. These gave weight to the subject-matter of his works, even alongside the more imaginative and 'mythical' elements. And simply by virtue of the formal demands they presented to the novelist, they forced him to think and write beyond his personal experience and concerns. It is this factor which will be studied in the Section which follows.

References.

1. VG, 17.
2. Chapter 1, Section 1; esp. pp. 14ff.
3. VG, 18.
4. VG, 18.
5. VG, 113.
6. See, for example, the admonitions of Vivian's father, Horace Grey, in Book I, chapters vi & ix.
7. VG, Book III, chapter vii.
8. VG, 138.
9. VG, Book V, chapters v-viii.
10. VG, Book VI, chapter i.
11. VG, Book II, chapter x.
12. VG, 67-68.
13. YD, 54.
14. YD, 191.
15. YD, 297.
16. YD, 82.
17. YD, 89.
18. YH, 109.
19. CF, 142.
20. CF, Book III, chapters ix-xxii, 218-253.
21. CF, 3.
22. CF, Preface, vii.
23. CF, 4.
24. CF, 23-24.
25. CF, 155.
26. CF, 113.
27. CF, 157.
28. CF, 159.

29. CF, 170.
30. CF, 63.
31. CF, 20.
32. CF, 306.
33. CF, 330 and 372.
34. CF, 373.
35. Alroy, 4; see above, Chapter 1, Section 3, note 51.
36. Alroy, 1-2.
37. Alroy, 15.
38. Alroy, Book VI, chapters vi-vii.
39. Alroy, 78; Macbeth, Act II, scene iii.
40. Alroy, 203; Julius Caesar, Act IV, scene iii.
41. See above, Chapter 2, Section 2.
42. MB, I, 343.
43. HT, 62.
44. HT, 460.
45. Venetia, 212-3
46. Venetia, 428-9.
47. Venetia, 438.
48. Venetia, 365.
49. Venetia, 320.
50. Venetia, 193.
51. For a fuller treatment of this aspect, see: P. Mitchell, 'The Initiation Motif in Disraeli's Coningsby', Southern Quarterly, IX, (1970-1971), 223-230.
52. General Preface, xii.
53. Coningsby, 59.
54. A.H. Frietsche, 'Action Is Not For Me, Disraeli's Sideria and the Dream of Power', Proceedings of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, XXVII (1960), 48.
55. Coningsby, 154.
56. Coningsby, 415.

57. Sybil, 60-64.
58. General Preface, xii.
59. Sybil, 160-168.
60. Sybil, 186-193 and 204-208.
61. Sybil, 208-220.
62. Ceningsby, 159-164.
63. Sybil, 232.

3. Politics in the Novel.

Disraeli's subsequent criticism of Vivian Grey, that such works: "can be, at the best, but the results of imagination acting on knowledge not acquired by experience",¹ could be applied to the greater part of his early works. His entry into Parliament in 1837 was to give him that essential experience of the political world:

by the time he came to write Coningsby Disraeli knew the life of the London salons and the country houses intimately. Politics and dandyism were² more effective passports to those circles than literature.

It was not simply a question of observing striking or entertaining scenes to spice the next novel. Like all writers, Disraeli needed to strike a balance in the process of composing itself between writing from his own resources (ie. his imagination) and a concern with the objective realities of human affairs, to make the novel relevant to the interests of the reading public at large. In his case politics provided the external focus to draw him out of self-absorption; just as Hardy based his treatment of the human situation on 'Wessex'; or Conrad, on the microcosm of a sea-faring society. But unlike Hardy or Conrad, Disraeli's subject would be at first impression more remote to most of his readers, paradoxical though that may sound:

To be able to wed politics to art and bring about a con-summation where neither the first became tractarian^{or statistical}, nor the other too honey-sweet, required not only an imagination of a particularly high order, but a knowledge of material which had been gathered at first hand.³

Without active knowledge of politics, Disraeli could only have produced novels which were both inaccurate and of little value even as literature; or, he would have turned from political subjects altogether, and been confined to the self-obsession which mars the early works. Leslie Stephen may lament "the degradation of a promising novelist into a Prime Minister",⁴ but with no political objective, there would have been no novels to speak of either.

In using his political experiences, the novelist Disraeli was not necessarily condemning himself to produce glorified polemical tracts. As we have seen,⁵ the habit of observation was an instinctive part of him. His letters, particularly on the travels, are miniature vignettes, showing a concern for detail irrespective of the context. The memoranda he wrote on political subjects were composed as much with a view to capturing an episode in its essence as to summarising

transactions. This instinct is applied to political subjects in Coningsby and Sybil, but without exclusive concentration on parliamentary scenes, and without losing a feel for the richness of apparently mundane details. In Coningsby, for example, the build-up to the Darlford election in Book V, Chapter iv is relieved by a sketch which portrays the united forces of an election team vainly trying to persuade a non-committal elector to pronounce in their favour.⁶ Actual 'House of Commons' scenes are comparatively rare, even in Coningsby: Disraeli was more interested in politics as it affects people. For this reason the satire is extended beyond the strictly political arena to include the social world with which it is linked. In Sybil it is directed to an even wider range of abuses and characters, in the realisation that one cannot distinguish between evils in the political world and their manifestations in society generally. And as opposed to his practice in his early novels, Disraeli was now satirising abuses of which he had had actual experience. Sybil goes so far as to question the structure of the political system itself, not in a spirit of nihilistic irresponsibility, but because it was apparent that neither the current administration nor the opposition could cope with the questions facing the country.

But in Coningsby Disraeli was feeling his way in the new genre of the political novel, and he presents us with some heavy passages of political history and analysis, hardly distinguishable from his more strictly political works. This is partly because at Eton Coningsby is not in a position to participate in public affairs, and must look passively on them as we do. (In any case the Eton scenes have their own function as 'politics in embryo', as we have seen.⁷)

Too often, however, the political analysis 'chokes' the narrative, and contrived attempts to blend the two strains of plot only point this up. The first chapter of Coningsby shows the hero bewildered upon his introduction to the Great World; Chapter ii switches abruptly to an account of the political agitation in early 1832, and Lord Grey's resignation; there is then an awkward attempt to revert to 'Coningsby's story':

Before the result of this appeal to the Sovereign was known, for its effects were not immediate, on the second morning after the vote in the House of Lords, Mr. Rigby had made that visit to Eton which had summonsd very unexpectedly the youthful Coningsby to London.⁸

In Book I, Chapter vii Coningsby is only brought to our notice to observe how little he is affected by the tumultuous events occurring around him.⁹ A slightly less tenuous connection serves to transport us from the Montem ceremony at Eton¹⁰ to a shooting party at Beaumanoir, on the basis that it was, "the seat of that great nobleman, who was the father of Lord Henry Sidney" / Coningsby's Eton colleague / .¹¹ But this is itself only a single-paragraph prelude to an authorial discussion of the fatally-strong Reform Ministry.¹²

After an entire chapter of this, there is a bland attempt to return us to the original scene-setting tone: "Beaumanoir was one of those Palladian palaces, vast and ornate, such as the genius of Kent and Campbell delighted in at the beginning of the eighteenth-century".¹³

Book II, Chapter vii abruptly reverts to the sub-plot of Coningsby's Eton career: "Amid the contentions of party, the fierce struggles of ambition, and the intricacies of political intrigue, let us not forget our Eton friends".¹⁴

This is an inevitable product, however, of the demands forced on Disraeli by his attempting to incorporate such an influx of 'raw material'. In Sybil, the measure of his progress is the greater neatness with which analytical, historical and fictional strains are blended. Writing Coningsby, Disraeli subjected himself for the first time to the discipline of tailoring his creation to a publicly-recorded and fixed set of events: the political convulsion leading up to the Reform Bill in 1832 to the election of a Conservative majority in July, 1841. Inevitably he failed at times to assimilate this satisfactorily. But he learnt rapidly how to set his own characters against this historical backdrop. After an account of the death of Lord Liverpool,¹⁵ we hear of four men who aspire to power in his place: Peel, Canning, Wellington and Huskisson. At this point the arch-intriguer, Mr. Rigby, is judiciously inserted, writing articles for a notorious evening paper in which it was "most slashingly" shown, that the son of an actress / i.e. Canning / could never be tolerated as the Prime Minister of England".¹⁶ When in fact despite these efforts Canning succeeds to the Premiership, Rigby makes immediately for the Foreign Office to break the news personally: "I have convinced the King that the First Minister must be in the House of Commons".¹⁷

In Book II, Chapter iv Tadpole and Taper find a similar niche in history. After the collapse of the Whig administration in 1834, Peel is recalled from Italy to form a new government. He is delayed,

however, and this prompts painful uncertainty and confusion in political circles: "He is halfway by this time," said Tadpole, "send an extract from a private letter to the Standard, dated Augsburg, and say he will be here in four days".¹⁸

The unavoidable division between the 'factual' and fictional worlds in Coningsby is exploited, too, to demonstrate the all-pervasive impact of political affairs on seemingly unrelated fields. Coningsby is summoned out of his familiar schoolboy environment by his grandfather after the latter crosses the Alps in the spring of 1832 to take part in resistance to the Reform Bill. Thereafter, even the carefree world of Eton is disturbed by increasing political discussion, affirming that however removed it may appear from the effects of politics, Coningsby and his friends cannot afford to ignore the greater events occurring beyond their little world. In Book VIII, Chapter i, it is Coningsby's turn to be summoned back to London from Greece, when in 1840 the Whig Cabinet appeared again to be falling apart.¹⁹ Both Coningsby and Egremont begin their fictional careers as political innocents and typically unthinking representatives of their class. The familiar theme of Disraeli's novels, the development of the individual, is now cast on two levels: a personal and a political combined. At Eton, Coningsby and his friends learn to overcome prejudices in accepting Oswald Millbank as a friend, and are induced by events to ponder on political issues. At Cambridge they take part in an election largely as a high-spirited adventure, but it prompts them to consider seriously the value of Conservative principles.²⁰ His disinheritance is a test both of Coningsby's political principle and his personal integrity.

The stages of Egremont's growth to awareness are a similar reciprocal development, even if now the political focus is on "the Condition of the People". They begin with his mother's desire that he stand for Parliament, if only because it is considered the 'correct' thing for one of his position. There follows the refusal of his brother to support him financially; the meeting with Morley, Gerard and Sybil (which also initiates a growing personal admiration for the heroine); the gathering momentum of civil unrest; and the patent inability of the present administration to do anything about it. The necessity for the novelist of harmonising the 'inherited' and the created strains of his work is dramatised as a dynamic of individuals learning to assume their proper responsibilities in society. The thematic impulse for this is provided at each stage by

some more distant but irresistible political event, somewhere along the framework of contemporary history with which the author was presented. As Coningsby progresses, Disraeli learns not so much to apologise for the awkward juxtaposition of the two theatres of action so much as to exploit it as a dramatic instance of his conviction that politics must not be seen as an esoteric sport, but as the focus for debate in society to which each individual should contribute his share.

In Sybil we are made familiar with representatives of the Whig dames of politics before they figure as leading personalities in the Bedchamber Plot of 1839.²¹ As befits the broader scope of this novel - social and historical - the same process of 'insertion' noted in Coningsby now operates on a grander scale. The Marneys and the de Mowbrays are grafted into history by means of lengthy accounts of their respective founder-figures, "Honest Baldwin Grey-mount", plunderer of Church estates in the Reformation, and John Warren, a coffee-house waiter boosted to fortune by service in India. The continuing prosperity of their descendants is symptomatic of the infidelity bedevilling recent history. Not only are they thereby incorporated into the novel, but the 'grafting' is a theme in itself: they represent a class of such pseudo-aristocrats who have suppressed more rightful claims to their privileged status (eg. Gerard's). Disraeli thus turned a potential artistic weakness to advantage, and does not miss an opportunity to ^{mock the} inevitable pretensions of these usurpers.

In the same way Sybil exploits the inevitable hiatus between the grand political world and that of the People, which can also be termed the 'factual' and the 'fictional' elements respectively, insofar as the latter both demanded and offered greater scope for artistic invention. There is indeed a gulf between the two groups. "Terrible news from Birmingham", says Mr. Egerton in the comfort of Brooks', an understatement which captures the inability of the administrators to confront their responsibilities.²² In Book VI, Chapter i we see Peel merely playing with solutions in the rarefied atmosphere of Downing Street, advising his assistant Mr. Hoaxem to placate two separate deputations with two exactly contrary explanations of their complaints.²³

Of course, the incorporation of public figures without apology into a fictional matrix can upset the artistic balance of the novels. But by that process of insinuating his fictional representatives

into the affairs of these public figures, Disraeli robs them to some extent of their stiffness. As M.W. Rosa points out, they take on an air of fiction themselves, and far from tying down the novel to sober reality, often create an even greater spirit of make-believe.²⁴ Directly-named figures such as Peel, Wellington and Russell are in any case comparatively rare, but achieved a notoriety amongst the critics out of all proportion to the attention allotted them, as M. Fido demonstrates.²⁵ And their inclusion declines as the Trilogy advances. When we meet Peel in Sybil, as in the episode noted just above, for example, we are more concerned with an exuberant depiction of political hypocrisy.²⁶ There is no attempt to exploit Peel's public status as such for some cheap sensational advantage.

Next to these figures are disguised originals from public life or from Disraeli's personal acquaintance: convincingly attested by the many 'keys' produced at the time and since.²⁷ This was the same technique which made Vivian Grey notorious and one cannot therefore lay all blame for it at the door of politics: "Disraeli was a roman-a-clef writer before he was a politician, and doubtless would have continued as one, had he never been returned to Parliament".²⁸

Whilst admitting with M. Fido that ^{the portrayal of public figures} intellectual grave/indolence on Disraeli's part",²⁹ one need not go as far as Markton Milnes:

The moment a character is known to represent Lord - or Mr. - , it loses all power as a work of art. The 'historical picture' becomes 'the portrait of a gentleman'; the fidelity of the likeness is the only object of attention, not the moral fitness, the entireness, the beauty or the grandeur of the character.³⁰

Disraeli was rather exhibiting the art of the stage-producer, who is given the essential outline of a character, but realises him on stage in a convincing and meaningful manner within the context created for him. Insofar as Vivian Grey was concerned with the exposure of real-life characters rather than with their interest as types of human nature, it was fairly condemned. Coningsby and Sybil have the partial justification of a thematic purpose, but, more importantly, recreate for each figure a suitable atmosphere and credible motives. For example, Lord Monmouth in Coningsby, drawing upon the Marquis of Hertford, a psychological type who so fascinated Disraeli that he reappears as Lord Montfort in Endymion. The skill is demonstrated in taking a figure whose lifestyle was so unusual, and yet keeping him a convincing character in

the novel. (Compare Thackeray's Lord Steyne in Vanity Fair, based on the same original). Monmouth is not an exaggerated grotesque, but retains urbanity and frigid correctness appropriate to his "eighteenth-century" nature, even in the dénouement with Coningsby.³¹ Disraeli's concern with the overall political theme suppressed any *desire to* indulge in a melodramatic clash of personalities, which would be far more detrimental to the scene as art than the fact that these characters are based on real originals. His ultimate defence must be that these 'borrowed' characters were not only undeniable successes with the contemporary reading public (if not always the critics) but also with the reader of today, for whom there is no topical incentive.

Rigby, for example, is given in many keys as a revenge-portrait of Croker, Disraeli's *bête noire* since the days of The Representative newspaper.³² But there is more than personal spite in his creation. He represents not just 'Croker in costume' but a class of political opportunists: "The class of Rigby's indeed at this period...greatly distinguished themselves".³³ He is both a delineated individual and a flexible representative who can be inset into the train of public events, *literally* enacting his role as a political vulture. Whether Vavasour Firebrace represents Monckton Milnes or Sir Richard Broun is less important than his function within the novel to embody another class worshipping false gods: the outraged rights of the Order of the Baronets.³⁴

Disraeli's characterisation in Coningsby and Sybil is not perfect, but as he made his way in the new medium he approached a state of balance. His early novels depended heavily on autobiographical recreations of himself, or unreal products of his introverted imagination. Coningsby and Sybil, on the other hand, tend at times for political objectives to present near-allegorical ciphers, two-dimensional figures, or else undisguised copies from the life. But it was in writing the 'Political' Trilogy, attempting both to convey a political message and to exploit his experience of the real political world, that Disraeli the novelist began to harmonise three tendencies which in some form apply to all writers. In his case these were distortion for political effect, indolent use of material from life without assimilation, or excessive reliance on his own imagination. Somewhere between them lay a happy medium: Lothair (1870) and Endymion (1880) were to show how close he came to it.

Appendix: Sybil and the Bluebooks.

In addition to using his own political experiences, Disraeli drew extensively in Sybil on government reports, often incorporated directly into the narrative. The novel is concerned with a wider sweep of society than is Coningsby, and Disraeli's tour of the industrial north in 1844 could only give a glimpse of the alien world he was to explore. These reports therefore became the basis of Disraeli's 'collage' as far as the industrial scenes of Sybil are concerned, replacing the autobiographical matter of, say, Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming, the fashionable world as depicted in The Young Duke, or the Byron and Shelley legends in Venetia. The 'Condition of England' question produced a flood of reports on political and social questions, and Disraeli was one of many novelists to use them both as part of serious social inquiry and for their vivid accounts of largely alien scenes. Sybil therefore makes use of the 1839 Factory Inspectors' Report;³⁵ the seven-part Report of the Commissioners on Hand-Loom Weavers;³⁶ the Children's Employment Commission First Report (Mines);³⁷ and the Second Report (Trades and Manufactures);³⁸ the Report of the Select Committee on the Payment of Wages (Truck Report);³⁹ Edwin Chadwick's Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population;⁴⁰ and the Reports of the Special Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture.⁴¹ In addition, his friend (and Radical MP) Thomas Duncombe obtained for him the correspondence of the Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor.⁴²

Hence the description of Marney's wretched state in Book II, Chapter iii draws on Chadwick's report, in particular a passage on some cottages at Tiverton by Chadwick's assistant for Devon and Cornwall, W.J. Gilbert. At one point, as M. Fido notes, Disraeli repeats what is already a plagiarism, using Chadwick's description of some rotten thatch roofs: "more like the top of a dunghill than a cottage", which is itself taken from the Revd. W.S. Gilly's work, The Peasantry of the Border: An Appeal on their Behalf.⁴³

Moving into mining country in Book III, Chapter i, Disraeli was indebted to James Mitchell's report on South Durham and South Staffordshire, using two separate passages for the opening landscape. The nightmarish account of Wodgate derives partly from a report on "the iron manufacturing district of Staffordshire and the contiguous counties", by Richard Henry Horne, a sub-commissioner for the Children's Employment Commission.⁴⁴ (Horne was an associate

of Charles Dickens, and later on the staff of Household Words). From this report came details of the town's wasted inhabitants, the absence of normal facilities, and that ignorance of Christianity which made Wodgate a powerful symbol of the pagan violence Disraeli wished to evoke.

Disraeli did not merely plagiarise: he knew what he was looking for, and he was prepared to cover considerable distance to find it:

Disraeli used facts from Horne's accounts of various towns in South Staffordshire, Worcestershire, and Shropshire to make up the composite town, Wodgate. Moreover, he was not content to utilize only the final summarized Report made by the Commissioners, but also used the ample evidence supplied by the sub-commissioner Horne in the Appendix because he wanted detailed and striking incidents and descriptions.⁴⁵

As S.M. Smith points out, there were no girls in Willenhall,⁴⁶ so the "youth's" Tummas wife, Sue, is taken from Wolverhampton, where it was noticed that the girls developed 'grasshopper backs' in the manufacture of tips (heel-taps) and washers.⁴⁷ In Marney the reeking dung-heaps by each door which served as manure are taken from two separate observations in Chadwick, of Toddington and Truro.⁴⁸ From John Fox's report on Calne in Dorset Disraeli took the remark that Synochus abounded in the damp hovels, with their muddy floors,⁴⁹ and of another parish: "I have often seen the springs bursting through the mud floor of the cottages".⁵⁰ These are combined in Sybil:

The dwelling-rooms were neither boarded nor paved; and whether it were that some were situate in low and damp places, occasionally flooded by the river, and usually much below the level of the road; or that the springs, as was often the case, would burst through the ^{mud} floor; the ground was at no time better than so much clay, while sometimes you might see little channels cut from the centre under the doorways to carry off ^{the} water, the door itself removed from its hinges; a resting-place for infancy in its deluged home.⁵¹

That last flourish, as M. Fido notes, is typical of Disraeli: stamping his own character on the piece, when the original report more mundanely observed that the door was used as a rest for the children making buttons.⁵² The living conditions of families are based on several reports, particularly Alfred Austin's *observations on their crowded living conditions*.⁵³

Disraeli alters the rhythm for his oratorical purpose,

speaking of the one room, "in which the whole family, however numerous, were obliged to sleep, without distinction of age, or sex, or suffering".⁵⁴ He then pictures the additional agonies in such circumstances of the mother giving birth to another inheritor of misery. M. Fido observes:

It is characteristic of Disraeli to seize upon the possibility for an idealised panegyric of affronted womanhood, where most of his contemporaries would have held forth on moral dangers and corruption.⁵⁵

True, but even the inspiration for this is Sidney Godolphin's comment that a woman had to lie in the middle of the only room whilst in labour, this being the most "painful part of that hour of trial".⁵⁶ Still, Disraeli cannot resist some stylistic embroidery: "the virtuous mother in the sacred pangs of childbirth".⁵⁷ Only Disraeli, too, could have observed of the masters of Wodgate that they treated their apprentices, "as the *Mamlouks* treated the Egyptians".⁵⁸ Bishop Hatton's workplace is taken from "Hemingsley's nail and tip manufactory", in Wolverhampton, but Disraeli improvises to have Hatton call up to his wife through those same chinks in the ceiling which Horne only remarked in passing.

The description of the miners leaving work in Book III, Chapter i is based on Mitchell's account of the daily routine of the "trappers", the infants who minded the air-lock doors in the subterranean passages.⁵⁹ Mitchell described some miners in South Staffordshire:

It is a fine sight to see miners congregated at dinner. There they sit, naked from the middle upwards, as black as blackamoor savages, showing their fine vigorous, muscular persons, eating, drinking, and laughing.⁶⁰

This reappears in two separate passages in Sybil, with embellishments:

Bands of stalwart men, broad-chested and muscular, wet with toil, and black as the children of the tropics...

With hunches of white bread in their black hands, and grinning with their sable countenances and ivory teeth, they really looked like a gang of negroes at a revel.⁶¹

Disraeli had a 'magpie' memory, and even when not directly extracting, frequently drew upon isolated motifs which set off his brand of imagination. Henry James cited this as one of his prerequisites for a novelist:

I remember an English novelist, a woman of genius, telling me that she was much commended for the impression she had managed to give in one of her tales of the nature and way of life of the French Protestant youth. She had been asked where she learned so much about this recondite being, she had been congratulated on her peculiar opportunities. These opportunities consisted in her having once, in Paris, as she ascended a staircase, passed an open door when, in the household of a pasteur, some of the young Protestants were seated at table round a finished meal. The glimpse made a picture; it lasted only a moment, but that moment was experience.

To the aspiring novelist, therefore, James would say: "Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!"⁶²

Disraeli had this ability to fasten onto snatches of experience, enabling him to make full use of his travels;⁶³ or, as here, applying the technique to documentary sources. For example, the nickname 'Hell-house Yard' came from a district in Wolverhampton,⁶⁴ and the march of the Hellcats themselves is based on the Plug Plot strikes. Even the observation that the people of Wodgate suffered from simple absence of moral and mental processes rather than innate immorality derives from two separate comments in Horne's report.⁶⁵ The technique of contrasting Marney's beautiful appearance with the ugly reality came from Chadwick's description of Colerne in Wiltshire.⁶⁶ It was Gilbert's account of Truro which observed that it was rare for a family to occupy less than two rooms. Disraeli took this, but reversed the sense for effect: "These wretched tenements seldom consisted of more than two rooms".⁶⁷ As we have seen,⁶⁸ his outline of the ventilation system in Trafford's mill reveals its source: "an ingenious process, not unlike that which is practised in the House of Commons".⁶⁹ The mill itself was based upon Mr. Greg's establishment near Manchester, 'Quarrybank', which may have been responsible for the name "Millbank" in Coningsby. That embodiment of emerging political consciousness, Devilsdust, might well have owed his name to an incident in Parliament when William Busfield Ferrand (a Yorkshire squire associated with 'Young England' in his outspoken calls for reform) ripped up a piece of cloth in the House because, as a product of sweated labour, it was adulterated with 'Devilsdust'.⁷⁰ Disraeli may have taken the title for his next hero and novel after Sybil not so much from a mediaeval nobleman as from one Thomas Tancred, Esq., whose report for the Children's Employment Commission on "the collieries and iron works of the West of Scotland" appeared in the same volume as the report by James Mitchell.⁷¹

Many borrowings were probably unconscious, instinctive to the novelist. Blake describes an incident in 1852 when Disraeli as Leader of the House had to pronounce an eulogium on the Duke of Wellington, and: "by a curious trick of memory he used for part of his speech words almost identical with those of a passage by Thiers in an obituary article on Marshal St. Cyr". Liberal journalists seized upon this to embarrass him, but it was probably undeserved: "There is no need to doubt that the plagiarism was unconscious. Apart from anything else, he would never have been such a fool as to do it on purpose".⁷²

Thus, when judging Disraeli's use of fragments from personal or political experience, we cannot condemn the practice in itself, unless at the same time it destroys the integrity of the work of art; as, for example, when the weaver, Philip Warner, merely summarises the report on Handloom Weavers in detailing his grievances.⁷³ Devilsdust's life history⁷⁴ glibly condenses contemporary reports, repeating points (eg. the administering of treacle and laudanum as an opiate to starving infants) already more effectively made in the dramatic context of the previous chapter.⁷⁵ The youth whom Morley encounters on entering Wodgate reveals perfect familiarity with the Bluebooks in his obligingly comprehensive survey of the town.⁷⁶ An attempt to squeeze in Horne's observation that the Wolverhampton children "play and sleep in the dirt", results only in a ludicrous mock-casualness: "As you advanced, leaving behind you long lines of little dingy tenements, with infants lying about the road..."⁷⁷

Disraeli also exhibits his new-found knowledge of industrial life in some self-conscious asides: "A child was wanting in the Wadding Hole, a place for the manufacture of waste and damaged cotton, the refuse of the mills, which is here worked up into counterpanes and coverlets".⁷⁸ In Book III, Chapter i he even appends an explanation of key terms at the foot of the page:

A Butty in the mining districts is a middleman: a Doggy is his manager. The Butty generally keeps a Tommy or Truck shop, and pays the wages of his labourers in goods. When miners and colliers strike, they term it 'going to play'.⁷⁹

When drawing upon different sources for the same episode, the dangers of inconsistency are of course multiplied: Disraeli goes out of his way to banish chapels and churches from Wodgate, but still leaves Sue a member of the Baptist School religion. He was governed by two sometimes conflicting intentions in portraying Wod-

gate: to emphasise the ^{pitiiful} savage nature of the town, and yet to affirm the solidarity and the glimmerings of moral consciousness of its inhabitants.

Yet if Disraeli was tripped up both stylistically and thematically by his use of the Bluebooks, the fault lies often with his own attempts to 'improve' them than with the original. Thus in Book II, Chapter iii he slips into a passage from Chadwick, phrases such as: "penury and disease fed upon the vitals of a miserable population"; "animal and vegetable refuse, decomposing into disease", which, like many of Disraeli's descriptions, lack any physical quality.⁸⁰ (And bear out, perhaps, the short-sightedness by which he was afflicted from an early age). He took Horne's remarks on Willenhall: "It seemed a reservoir of leprosy and plague... There were enough marsh exhalations from it to fill a whole country with fever", and adapted *them* thus for Wodgate: "reservoirs of leprosy and plague, whose exhalations were sufficient to taint the atmosphere of the whole kingdom, and fill the country with fever and pestilence".⁸¹ The plural, "reservoirs", and rhetorical substitution of "taint" for "fill", and "pestilence" for "plague" aim at a more grandiose effect, but ring hollow. Falling back on linguistic devices only weakened the original. Perhaps Disraeli wanted to avoid too-obvious plagiarism, but he cannot always be said to have made an improvement.

The characters Disraeli invented to embody the more generalised themes of the reports also compare if anything unfavourably with some he took direct from life. His depiction of the Truck system in Book III, Chapter iii adds powerfully to the novel's veracity in its convincing detail, but the grotesque figure of Joseph Diggs largely destroys the spell.⁸² And the ogre Bishop Hatton fails as both art and social comment: the evils of his Wodgate are left without any conclusion as to the causes, and the odium is taken instead by an unreal figure who is killed in any case, while the real culprits - the administrators who fail their responsibilities - go unpunished.

To achieve a heightened effect Disraeli exaggerated the Bluebooks at times; a dangerous practice in the case of Wodgate, for example, because as Horne observes, Willenhall was a special case in the first instance. By removing all public buildings and churches from Wodgate, for example, he produced a less striking effect than Horne, who found a pitiful few. By the truism that truth can often be more striking than fiction, Disraeli was often more effective when emulating the Bluebooks' fidelity to detail: wage-earning ad-

olescents abandoning their families;⁸³ "Shuffle and Screw" issuing 'bate tickets, or unmerited rent demands;⁸⁴ the depleted goods on Mother Carey's stall, indicative of growing shortages.⁸⁵ These observations give the political themes a local and tangible impact, and replace authorial speechmaking by dramatic implication: "if the novelist writes with the purpose of revealing one nation to another, he must document his revelations with some exactness; he will otherwise hardly be believed".⁸⁶ It is in this respect that Sybil has the edge over Coningsby, although we must allow for the fact that the theme of "the Condition of the People" lends itself to concrete demonstration more readily than does the main theme of Coningsby.

The Bluebooks themselves were more than lifeless catalogues: their authors seem often to have had literary pretensions on their own account, to judge from their more inspired passages. Thus Mitchell's account of a day in the life of a 'trapper' slips into the narrative present tense for graphic effect, and could easily take its place in a novel.⁸⁷

Sybil was written when Disraeli's political status opened a mine of new material for the novelist to explore. He had to learn how to assimilate this; and in many instances he failed. But in terms of his overall development as a novelist, both Coningsby and Sybil represented a crucial stage. A political focus and political 'materials' forced him to adapt, and look beyond thinly-disguised autobiography for the structuring of the novels. And comparing the 'Political' Trilogy with the later novels, Blake asserts:

[the later novels] do not mark any new development in his art. They are in a sense predictable. In contrast the trilogy made up by Coningsby, Sybil and Tancred is quite different from anything he had written before.⁸⁸

It is the most eloquent assertion of the reciprocity of Disraeli's 'two natures' that his most political works should also be successful literature. Coningsby and Sybil do not luxuriate in autobiography, nor tail off inconclusively for lack of purpose, whereas Tancred, like the early novels again, does - for lack of an objective. E. Forcade, in a review of Coningsby, cited the following condition for the use of political experience in the novel:

it must borrow from politics in the same way that it borrows from other branches of human activity, namely, by distillation, by giving general import to the observations it has culled, so as to prepare some pleasureable instruction for mankind through the ages.⁸⁹

The political objectives of Coningsby and Sybil ensured this distillation, and curbed Disraeli's self-indulgent tendencies. Yet it did not limit him to being a mere parliamentary reporter. As B.F. Murphy points out, 'politics' for Disraeli was to be identified with 'civilization': it was the means by which men organise themselves into a society.⁹⁰ Hence we accept that most aspects of these novels have a political relevance, even the dandies in Sybil's first chapter. A discussion between Lord Mowbray and Lord Marney on the disposition of their respective estates ("and how do you find the people about you") is as relevant to the political stability of the country as the manoeuvring in the House of Commons.⁹¹ The episode of John Conyers in Vivian Grey is wasted, politically speaking, through not being followed up; this could not occur in Sybil, which if anything veers to the opposite extreme. But its writing was essential to the development of the novelist as well as the politician. If he could not yet claim mastery over the new material, the lesson was to bear fruit later:

Speaking largely, any original effort at the imaginative translation of actuality must increase the interest of the art-form which receives it. The formal ordering of ideas into narrative, the presentation of 'views' through persons, the creating of a world which bore a strangely close relation to the actual contemporary world and was nevertheless really created - all these were problems which exercised the novelist's art to the utmost; the finer his artistic conscience, the less he would be content to 'think aloud', the more concerned to 'make something' of this new, raw, and redalcitrant material.⁹²

Like Phoebus in Lothair, Disraeli could argue that to be original one need not be the sole author of every idea and observation so much as a creative organiser: "the originality of a subject is in its treatment".⁹³

Not just in this respect, but in several ways these last novels testify Disraeli's debt to politics and to the political novels. It is evident in the greater respect he shows to institutions and characters, even when ultimately rejecting their position. In Parliament one may not agree with another Member, but one stays in dialogue, and certainly avoids the trap of underestimating him. In Disraeli's first novels, he so clearly identified with some figures, whilst mocking others, and leaving them often as unrealistic caricatures. Often, one suspects, they represented bodies whom he considered to pose a threat, or to be beyond his capabilities. But years in Parliament taught Disraeli to take seriously a range of political forces

even when ^{it} is widely different to his own. In Lothair, for example, a sympathetic context is given to a spectrum of viewpoints from near-fanatical Roman Catholicism to Continental revolutionism. This breadth of approach combined with Disraeli's enduring tendency to maintain a romantic attachment to causes which strictly speaking he should have deplored. A theme in itself of Lothair and Endymion is the need to avoid labelling persons or movements, and to deal with each on its own merits. But even where Disraeli does satirise, he does so now from the inside, attempting to understand his subject. It is one of the lessons of Sybil, where Lord Marney, for instance, is a chilling figure precisely because he does not become a caricature: his outburst against 'pampering' of the poor is passionate but strictly 'reasonable'.

The protagonists, Lothair and Endymion themselves, are more passive than their forerunners. This partly reflects a lighter authorial pressure on the narrative: they are realistically subject to other, more forceful characters, and to public events. Thus we focus more on the ideological alternatives before them, than on their process of decision and development therein. If they appear to have less of a 'mission' than, say, Coningsby, it is partly because the social forces of the time are more powerful. In Endymion it is public figures rather than ideologies who take the stage, but they do represent institutions or statesmen of formative influence in nineteenth-century Europe. If we do not allow history to be wholly a 'biography of its great men', we can accept Baron Sergius' point: "The first requisite in the successful conduct of public affairs is a personal acquaintance with the statesmen engaged". In thereby projecting less of himself into the novels, Disraeli showed himself accepting the role of a producer rather than an actor.

The Political Trilogy did not only re-shape Disraeli's outlook as a novelist and improve his technique, but *was* an effective means to advocate an alternative policy, particularly once he found that Parliament would not offer the platform he needed as soon as he desired. It is this aspect of his reciprocal career which the next Section will explore.

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4. Novels of a Politician.

An author may influence the fortunes of the world to as great an extent as a statesman or a warrior.¹

Since his failure to achieve office under Peel in 1841, Disraeli knew that his future lay outside the orthodox course of his party, and the frustration of his ambition found its outlet in Coningsby and Sybil, both written in that period when he was working up to open break with his leader: "it was natural enough that, being cheated of the power to act, he should seek compensation in an art for which he had already shown a remarkable talent".² As we have seen, these novels are partly an attempt to give a 'proper' account of political history: "you have had your history written by the Venetian party", says Coningsby.³ Disraeli asserts in his own voice in Sybil: "The written history of our country for the last ten has been a mere phantasma".⁴ The early chapters of Coningsby, in particular, are studded with passages of political history and analysis: a weighty consideration of the administration of the 'Arch-Mediocrity', Lord Liverpool;⁵ a review of Peel's Tamworth Manifesto of 1834;⁶ Wellington's failure to secure his administration in 1832, followed by a disquisition on the Reform Bill, familiar to readers of the Vindication of the English Constitution and witnesses to his political speeches alike. These are not simply academic exercises, but an extension of Disraeli's political career: thus he condemns the "pseudo-Tories" who had exacerbated Peel's tendency to put tactics before principles, with all the force of an election speech:

They rode into power on a spring tide of all the rampant prejudices and rancorous passions of their time. From the King to the boor their policy was a mere pandering to public ignorance. Impudently usurping the name of that party of which nationality, and therefore universality, is the essence, these pseudo-Tories made Exclusion the principle of their political constitution, and Restriction the genius of their commercial code.⁷

The argument is at times characteristically esoteric: Disraeli exploits his remarkable persuasive skills to show that a range of current distresses may all be traced back to the Reformation, in which the plundering of the Church created a surplus booty and raised up a factitious aristocracy, who then created political religionism to secure their position: "sectarian religion led to political exclusion, and political exclusion was soon accompanied by

commercial restraint".⁸ Disraeli remained a writer of limited 'stamina', working most happily in the framework of one chapter, and with a clear objective. Just as Blake designated his novels "a series of scenes rather than a story",⁹ so one could call these sections of the political novels "a series of pamphlets". One might say the same of other Victorian novelists, notably Hardy. But in Disraeli's case the effect is more obvious, both because the passages are more polemical and concentrate very much on the issue of the moment, and because, writing a semi-tractarian work, there is greater onus on him to relate the thematic parts to the whole. In a consideration of the politician using the novel, the question centres on the point at which 'use' becomes mere exploitation, to the detriment of art. We must of course recognize that at this point in the nineteenth century, without the opportunities offered by the media nowadays, the novel was a primary focus for public debate. In an age keenly occupied with the 'Condition of England' question, some indeed preferred the analytical tone. Hence the Christian Remembrancer observed: "The most amusing parts of this novel are the political conversations".¹⁰

But a work of art must do more than exhibit clever reasoning. Whilst we may not agree with Engels that: "the more the author's views are concealed the better for the work of art",¹¹ we may fairly demand integration of the two. In Sybil, as an example where this is lacking, Egremont strolls into Westminster Abbey, seeking solace after the harrowing scene with Gerard and Morley, the representatives of the National Convention, who recognize him as the 'Franklin' of their Mowbray days. Dilating upon the Abbey's role in history as a haven of peace amidst the eternal struggle of human affairs all around, Disraeli goes on to consider the crimes - actual and political - which have occurred in its shadow, including, of course, the Reformation, and "the mortgaging of the industry of the country to enrich and to protect property".¹² Not the least of these crimes, he argues, was the execution of Charles I:

Rightly was King Charles surnamed the *Martyr*; for he was the holocaust of direct taxation. Never yet did man lay down his heroic life for so great a cause: the cause of the Church and the cause of the Poor.¹³

Although this is relevant to the theme of Sybil - the Condition of the People - and in tune with the ecclesiastical atmosphere, Disraeli has wrenched a conclusion out of proportion to its original

context, for the sake of a personal conviction:

It was simple arithmetic. His frivolous novels had been read. His serious political tracts and pamphlets had not. If he were to join the one with the other, he would have a means by which the reading public would hear him. Colburn thus became his bawd again.¹⁴

The social commentary in Sybil is also slanted so as to focus attention on urban deprivation rather than on its counterpart in the country. It did not suit the quasi-feudal spirit of Disraeli's political programme to highlight rural unrest. Thus, as M. Fido remarks,¹⁵ there is just one description of conditions in a country-town; that of Marney, in Book II, Chapter iii,¹⁶ and it is soon effaced by scenes of industrial squalor. The labourers take no part in the riots at the end of Sybil, and are not individualised, beyond the "hind" who holds Egremont's horse in Book II, Chapter iv. The tenant-farmers (eg. Mr. Bingley at Abbey Farm) are shown in support of authority, which was not always the case in reality. The narrator asserts: "The torch of the incendiary had for the first time been introduced into the parish of Marney",¹⁷ as if rick-burning began in 1837 (the novel's 'time'), whereas in fact it dated from considerably earlier. The only attempt to understand rural unrest simply ascribes it to the New Poor Law.

The bias may not have been so calculated: Disraeli's now dominant political interest inevitably coloured the writing without conscious direction. But there is no such excuse for a remark which follows that passage set in Westminster Abbey, in which the author goes out of his way to have a dig at Peel:

Even now, in the quiet times in which we live, when public robbery is out of fashion and takes the milder title of a commission of inquiry, and when there is no treason except voting against a Minister, who, though he may have changed all the policy which you have been elected to support, expects your vote and confidence all the same /concluding tortuously/ it is something...to enter the old Abbey and listen to an anthem!¹⁸

Even in Coningsby, written before open breach with Peel, Disraeli pauses in a consideration of Peel's career to remark on his withdrawal from public life on the appointment of Canning as Prime Minister. There is a sly tone of mock-justification which suggests the same sarcastic manner he employed so effectively in the House itself:

Peel's statement in Parliament of the determining circumstances of his conduct, coupled with his subsequent and almost immediate policy, may perhaps ^{always} leave this a painful and ambiguous passage in his career; but in passing judgement on public men, it behoves us ¹⁹ ever to take large and extended views of their conduct.

Although Lord John Russell was on the opposite side of the House, he, by contrast, is handled sympathetically. At this time Disraeli was considering an alliance with the Whig leader against Peel himself, and so used the novel as an extension of his overtures, speaking of Russell's "expression of ^{those} noble truths that flash across the fancy, and rise spontaneously to the lip, of men of poetic temperament when addressing popular assemblies".²⁰

Even if not speaking in his own voice, the author may too often be heard behind his characters. This does not matter so long as their dramatic integrity is not distorted. But, in the case of Coningsby for instance, to make him too much of a political prodigy both turns a credible hero into a prig, and alienates the reader's sympathy from the point the author is trying to make: a failure both in art and in propaganda at the same time. In Book VII, Chapter ii Coningsby and Oswald Millbank are reunited after three years at Cambridge and Oxford respectively. After talking of the past, the conversation turns political. Millbank leads:

Now tell me, Coningsby, exactly what you conceive to be the state of parties in this country, for it seems to me that if we penetrate the surface, the classification ^{must} be more simple than their many names would intimate.²¹

Coningsby needs no further invitation to launch into a fierce and comprehensive review of the demoralised state of the entire political system, which, however relevant to the novel's theme, comes across too glibly. In the same way, in Sybil, the handloom weaver Philip Warner summarises the contents of a government Blue-book in a lucid consideration of the rights of Capital and Labour whilst detailing the plight of himself and his colleagues.²²

The task Disraeli set himself in the Trilogy was considerable, in dealing with: "The origin and character of our political parties, their influence on the Condition of the People of this country, some picture of the moral and physical condition of that people, and some intimation of the means by which it might be elevated and improved..."²³ To find characters on whom to base such a review without overburdening them was an increasingly difficult task for the novelist, considering the vastly more extensive and diverse

society he had to cope with compared, for example, with that of which Jane Austen treats. Not only was it greater in sheer numbers by this time, but by their very nature Coningsby and Sybil sought to reveal hitherto unknown or ignored sections of the population.

J. Bayley therefore regards Jane Austen as "the prisoner" of her society, and so free "to say what she likes about it". Disraeli had to select the characters he wished to embody his social themes, and the very act of selection became therefore a creative decision, imposing additional responsibility on him:

This would be a way of saying that society as portrayed by George Eliot and Henry James is in many ways a visionary and imagined society... Society has become too vast and vague to be a prison, and the novelist cannot incarcerate himself voluntarily - that would be no substitute for the real thing. Any constraint must come from elsewhere, and it comes from the novelist himself, from the involuntary abnegation of the "plastic" and the "irresponsible". Patterns of relation and of morality must now really mean something. They must stand up on their own, and they must support the imaginative structure of the whole work.²⁴

It was a responsibility, therefore, which Disraeli *shirked* at times.

Apart from the undisguised appearance of public figures such as Peel and Lord John Russell, and obvious manipulation of 'puppet' characters, the reader of Coningsby must also accustom himself to allegorical figures representing tendencies in the political world. Of these, Tadpole and Taper are the most successful; their barren regurgitation of stock ideas and phrases and their deliberate colourlessness compared with the great names we find in the same work, are all part of the theme of a lost political inspiration. As M.W. Rosa observes: "would Tadpole and Taper become a whit more alive under the possible appellations of Smith and Brown?"²⁵ Nevertheless, their alliterative titles show that the author's mind is on their function as part of the political landscape (see also, for example "Shuffle and Screw" and "Truck and Trett" in Sybil) and little more. When the National Convention delegates, Gerard and Morley, go canvassing for support in London,²⁶ they are met by a succession of unhelpful ciphers: "Mr. Kremlin", "Mr. Thorough-Base", "Mr. Wriggle", etc., who are products of the same lazy and inartistic hand which produced the grotesque figures in the Supernaculum drinking scene in Vivian Grey.²⁷ In Sybil, similarly, Disraeli's desire to shock the reader produces at times parodies of depraved humanity, particularly in his depiction of Wodgate.²⁸ K. Tillotson shows how he contrasts to Mrs. Gaskell (apropos of Mary Barton) in this respect. He is some-

times so concerned with recording facts of social suffering as to neglect the human element, and thus he fails to draw on the reader's sympathy. The life-story of the orphan Devilsdust, for example, "could easily be a case-history - and an extreme, not a representative case, selected with a manifestly propagandist purpose".²⁹

G. Goodin observes of Scott's characters: "The first criterion for judging them is not their truth but their appropriateness".³⁰ If one can accept a character's function within the context which has been created for him, the novel's dramatic integrity has not been violated. Otherwise, and particularly alongside characters for whom an effort has been made to breathe life and details into them, one must conclude that once again political purpose has been allowed to override artistic principles.

The political theme makes heavy demands on Disraeli's heroes, given, in addition, his conviction of the illimitable potential of the individual will. Hence a series of protagonists who are demi-gods rather than men. Sidonia, the intellectual if not the sentimental hero of Coningsby, exhibits every possible accomplishment, even to excelling, we are told, in dissipation!³¹ "He differs from the counsellors of the earlier novels only in the superlative degree to which he succeeds".³² Jan B. Gordon identifies two competing tendencies in nineteenth century autobiography, which is in effect what Coningsby and all Disraeli's novels really were;

At one pole, there was the organic ideal which insists that the self must be allowed to grow with as little interference as possible, assumes an analogy between human development and plant development, and requires that institutions recognize the naturalness of the subject. The other scheme envisions growth as a dialectical process, involving mediation with institutions and individuals who provide the subject with imaginative models; education thus involves a departure from the unique or natural self so that human nature might realize its potential in experience...In one, the child within a hortus conclusus is guided into receiving reflected images from the real world (Newman's university); in the other, the child grows through socialization and engagement; and this often involves the mediation of a competing value system.³³

The Eton scenes therefore enable Coningsby to display his exceptional qualities without the dubious honour of exercising them in a false (ie. corrupt) system. Disraeli continued, therefore, like other nineteenth century authors, to obtain for his hero: "the best of both worlds: the eternal flower of perpetual childhood, and the gregarious socialization of the dandy".³⁴

Coningsby's mythical quality is enhanced by his being an orphan; at Eton he is soon the school hero;³⁵ at Cambridge he already looks fixedly ahead to a political career;³⁶ and at the conclusion to that conversation with Millbank which we have already noticed, the latter addresses him in unfortunately bathetic terms:

'And I say to you as Nathan said unto David, "Thou art the man!" You were our leader at Eton...'³⁷

To avoid making his representative of the New Order too great a success in that society which is itself in decay, Coningsby suffers ritual humiliations: he is brought to tears by his grandfather on introduction;³⁸ eclipsed socially by Mr. Melton;³⁹ deprived on a point of political principle of his inheritance;⁴⁰ and he emerges a godlike figure to confirm the dictum of Sidonia ("Man is made to adore and to obey"⁴¹) by his election at Darlford: "Darlford believed in Coningsby: and a very good creed".⁴² There is the same unreal air about Egremont in Sybil, culminating in his symbolic marriage to the heroine. "His heroes, when they are not himself, are always Galahads", observes W. Allen.⁴³

The sometimes improbable coincidences required to bring Coningsby and Sybil to their triumphant conclusions must be accepted as part of the novels' symbolic tint, for it is the logic of myth rather than that of everyday reality which operates. Indeed, the contrived events bear witness to the action of a higher power than is conceivable by men. Based on that mythical pattern of Fall and Redemption which we have noted above,⁴⁴ each novel deprives the hero of the advantages of civilization in order ^{for him} to make an objective appraisal of it, and emancipate himself from its thralls. Coningsby and Egremont are disinherited, and make pilgrimages to Manchester and the haunts of the People respectively; Tancred makes the flight from supposed civilization a physical reality. As a rule, myth presents an often preternatural series of events in a vague legendary setting, with figures rich in symbolic associations. It is generally set back in antiquity, and in place of scientific or historical accounts, is used to suggest an explanation for phenomena in the present day. Disraeli reversed this: we begin with a familiar setting, and recognizable characters. In time, however, they reveal exceptional qualities, and the novels tail off into the misty future with just a suggestion of the epic deeds to be accomplished there. Disraeli cannot foretell the future, but he can use the novel to imply a better future by inserting his prepared heroes into the

political system ("They stand now on the threshold of public life"⁴⁵), a technique which becomes clear in a meaningful comment on the Darlford election, which betrays an interesting juxtaposition of tenses:

an intelligent spectator on the movements of political parties might have detected in these public declarations some intimation of new views, and of a tone of political feeling that has unfortunately been⁴⁶ too long absent from the *public* life of this country.

To both describe the present and make out a blueprint for reform in the future with assurance was beyond the scope even of the nineteenth century novel. One can only isolate evils in the present which need attending to, alongside pointers to better things already in evidence. Disraeli thus took the inevitable ingredients of the political novel - the political/historical essay and the novel (with its debt to the tale of high life and the Victorian romance), to create a form as best suited to the new demand as possible. D.E. Painting observes: "His peculiar merit as a political novelist lies in his ability to fuse things as they are with things as they might be..."⁴⁷ A novel combines the potential to advance a theory of an abstract nature with some scope to create a living plan of that idea, more comprehensively and in finer detail than other forms of literature:

When the novelist goes forward into time he need not be confined to a mathematical extrapolation of birth dates, trade balances, or electoral trends. Instead, he can create, whole and entire, the world which he thinks will grow⁴⁸ out of the one in which he lives or which he sees emerging.

Dramatic devices are exploited to give the novel a suitable preternatural air. "Why was Coningsby induced to go to Manchester? "Because a being, whose name even was unknown to him, had met him in a hedge ale house during a thunderstorm, and told him that the Age of Ruins was past".⁴⁹ There we see a blasted landscape, "dingy as the entrance of Hades", "smoking chimneys taller than Egyptian obelisks", and Coningsby "entered chambers vaster than are told of in Arabian fable, and peopled with habitants more wondrous than Afrite or Peri".⁵⁰ There are obvious references to the myth elements of classical epic: for example, Aeneas' descent to the underworld in the Aeneid.

Not only, as we have seen, does this reflect a destiny superior to human will, but it creates a strain of fantasy contrasted to more serious episodes, which are then more likely to be taken at

face value. Thus Coningsby's meeting with Sidonia,⁵¹ Sybil's hymn to the Virgin,⁵² and Tancred's interview with the Queen of the An-sarey, dressed in the full regalia of the Bellamont cavalry,⁵³ prevent too insistent a theme, and "provide^{for} a margin of disagreement within the frame of ^a general agreement".⁵⁴

The creed put forward by Disraeli's heroes was largely that of 'Young England', stressing imagination as the divine gift which the present administration lacked.⁵⁵ The Cabinet of Lord Liverpool shrank from "the courageous promulgation of great historical truths";⁵⁶ "the necessities of the age" for Tadpole and Taper were that "they ^{themselves} / should be in office";⁵⁷ and Peel's attempt to distil his own political credo resulted only in the Tamworth Manifesto of 1834, uninspired alike as a piece of prose and as a political initiative.⁵⁸ Thus, even in writing the Trilogy, Disraeli was establishing his claim to resolve the questions which baffled his more pedestrian colleagues. Despite the political concerns of Coningsby and Sybil, there is a strong sense (particularly in Sybil) that simply tinkering with laws is not enough. In his current state of frustration and disillusionment, Disraeli needed to carry his enquiry beyond the confines of parliamentary processes. The novel boasted a comprehensiveness which no political tract could match. It was therefore natural to express this spirit of deep-rooted concern and disillusion by asserting his literary talent, which he regarded as the passport to a higher, imaginative wisdom. Disraeli's unique position in English society both impelled him - and instilled in him an arrogant conviction of his especial fitness - to combine this expression of poetic truth, with a programme for political action. (One is reminded in this context of Wordsworth's, "truth carried alive into the heart by passion".) Disraeli was operating in a borderland between fiction and reality denied, since the Renaissance, to either poet or politician. His fierce optimism made Disraeli almost a caricature of Blake's dictum: "all Divinities reside within the human breast".

The effect of Coningsby's encounter with Sidonia in Book III, Chapter i is compared to that of reading an inspiring book: "There are some books, when we close them; - one or two in the course of our life difficult as it may be to analyse as ascertain the cause our minds seem to have made a great leap".⁵⁹ By contrast, immediately afterwards Coningsby applies to Mr. Rigby for an answer to some questions perplexing him, and is advised to, "make himself master of Mr.

Wordy's History of the late War, in twenty volumes, a capital work, which proves that Providence was on the side of the Tories".⁶⁰ In Sybil we are told of Lord Shelburne, who, "shut out from Parliament, found vent in those writings which recalled to the English people the inherent blessings of their old free monarchy, and painted in immortal hues his picture of a patriot king".⁶¹ Allowing for the hyperbole of adulation, it is evident that for Disraeli literature had a power beyond that of mere factual instruction. As S.M. Smith argues, Coningsby and Sybil need not be negated by the fact that their programmes could not be fulfilled in strict reality: they remain spiritual counter-blasts to the prevailing temper of the age.⁶² "Nobody who has handled masses supposes they can be moved by reason", said Professor Bonamy Dobree,⁶³ echoed by St. Lys in Sybil:

What you call forms and ceremonies represent the divinest instincts of our nature. Push your aversion to forms and ceremonies to a legitimate conclusion, and you would prefer kneeling in a barn rather than in a cathedral. Your tenets would strike at the very⁶⁴ existence of all art, which is essentially spiritual.

In the absence of any strong documented religious conviction (as opposed to a political-religious sense), one can readily believe that his particular art, the novel, represented for Disraeli creativity of a potentially spiritual nature.⁶⁵ This need not conflict with a view of the 'Political' Trilogy as a pragmatic work of persuasion. As M.E. Speare pointed out: "The underlying idea of all Disraeli's political novels is the power of the Imagination to do the greatest practical things".⁶⁶ And - by the time of writing Sybil if not before - he could see ahead a stormy and possibly conscience-troubling course: rebellion against his own party. The Trilogy was in part his Bible, setting out the justification for his actions in advance, in the printed medium for which he had such respect: "Disraeli continually asserted dogma to convince himself of its value, although...the nature of the dogma was constantly in flux".⁶⁷ As well as an almost psychological act of preparation, Disraeli used the novel as a witness to his beliefs, casting himself in the role of the misunderstood prophet. At the conclusion to Sybil he observes of his unusual convictions:

They have been misunderstood, as is ^{ever} for a season the fate of Truth...But Time, that brings all things, has ^{brought} ^{also} to the mind of England some suspicion that the idols they have so long worshipped, and the oracles that

have so long deluded them, are not the true ones.⁶⁸

In the novel itself Egremont is Disraeli's counterpart: he makes the same speech of sympathy with the gréiviances of the Chartists,⁶⁹ and is equally misunderstood. In Book V, Chapter i the political commentators cannot fathom his intentions, and so write him off as "crotchety", an epithet Disraeli must have earned himself on many occasions by refusing to follow "the beaten track of a fallacious custom".⁷⁰

As a 'verbal ceremony', the novel can be used to work by dramatic implication as well as by prescription. Disraeli set out to "eschew the abstractions" of the Vindication of the English Constitution. The Eton scenes of Coningsby, for example, apparently divorced from political events, depict a refreshingly classless society, where aristocrats and representatives of new classes are found on almost equal terms:

A gracious presence, noble sentiments, or a happy talent, make their way ^{there} at once, without preliminary inquiries as to what set they are in, or what family they ^{are} of, how much they have a-year, or where they live.⁷¹

At Cambridge the friends draw a moral from their enthusiastic but thoughtless campaign in support of their Conservative candidate: "it was our last schoolboy weakness", says Coningsby. In the ensuing debate de Vere, representative of a Whig family, is persuaded to take a like-minded stance of inquiring neutrality: the scene is prophetic of the new extra-factional movement Disraeli advocated. And it is obviously more effective to dramatise the shortcomings of the country's representational system - religious, economic, and political - in three articulate and sympathetic characters such as Eustace Lyle, Millbank, and Sidonia, who retain their individuality whilst yet reflecting a class.

In Sybil Book IV, Chapter i opens with a characteristic plunge into politics: the progress of the Jamaica Bill in 1839, set against growing tension as the National Convention assemble in London. The issues are discussed no longer in the author's voice, but through a debate between dramatic characters, and later developments are filtered in; as in the words of Mr. Egerton:

When we see a regular Convention assembled in London and holding its daily meetings in Palace Yard, and a general inclination ^{throughout the country} to refrain from the consumption of excisable articles, I cannot help thinking that affairs are more serious than you imagine.⁷²

The reference to "excisable articles" reminds us of Devilsdust's steadfast abstention from any such articles which are part of the political system he is bent on changing. The time and effort devoted to the Jamaica Bill is compared to that given to the Chartists' grievances. And, for the speakers at least, the activities of the Convention rate equal interest with news of Lady Joan Fitz-Warene's engagement to Alfred Mountchesney.

The opening chapter to Sybil suggests Disraeli's continuing fascination with the cult of the dandy, in its portrayal of jaded young aristocrats so surfeited with luxury as to prefer bad to good wine.⁷³ It is more, however, than a virtuoso performance in the fashionable style.⁷⁴ It initiates the theme of a corrupt aristocracy neglecting their proper responsibilities. In making the dandy a political symbol, Disraeli turned the 'silver-fork' mode on its head, although, as M.W. Rosa points out, he was only one of a group of 'fashionable' writers who began at this time to display a greater realization of the responsibilities of the ruling classes they portrayed.⁷⁵ It was in part a necessity to continue paying lip-service to the appetite for 'fashionable' writing. As K. Tillotson points out, Mrs. Gore continued writing prolifically in the 1840's, and the public were slow to be weaned from their former tastes.⁷⁶ But Disraeli made a virtue of a necessity, exploiting the genre:

His novels, especially Tancred (and the much later Lothair) exhibit his skill in making the best of two worlds: for the first half of the book the aristocratic hero is shown in fashionable society, in the second half in flight from it. That at bottom is the pattern of his novels from Coningsby onwards.⁷⁷

Throughout Sybil, scenes of luxury are contrasted with disturbing pictures of deprivation, often in contrapuntal alternation. After the pathetically amusing scene in Book II, Chapter ii, in which Sir Vavasour Firebrace seeks support for the cause of the Order of Baronets, which he designates "the question of the day",⁷⁸ we pass immediately to a horrifying picture of Marney's demoralised state in Chapter iii.⁷⁹ Dandy Mick concludes Book II, Chapter x with a dramatic call to strike: "We'll have the rights of labour yet",⁸⁰ as Chapter xi opens in the petrified calm of Mowbray Castle: "Your lordship's dinner is served", announced the groom",⁸¹ an implicit presentation of the theme of 'Two Nations'.

Sending a draft of The Adventures of Mr. Aylmer Papillon to Murray in May, 1824, Disraeli wrote:

My plan has been in these few pages to mix up any observations I had to make on the present state of society with the bustle and hurry of a story,⁸² that my satire should never be protruded on my reader.

Sybil shows how he had progressed in this respect. But a political novel must do more than this: it should suggest a positive ideal. Disraeli's heroes fulfil this on the level of character, adding "an emotional appeal to the intellectual one".⁸³ In themselves, however, high-souled heroes or vague protestations of a new political spirit are not enough. Sybil therefore casts both social criticism and its opposed ideal in a practical form. Trafford's mill, for example, is a working model of the neo-feudal dream applied to industry, a vast hierarchy: "the child works under the eye of the parent, the parent under that of the superior workman; the inspector or employer at a glance can behold all".⁸⁴ Trafford himself "recognized the baronial principle, reviving in a new form", by keeping his house in the midst of the village. Detail is perhaps taken too far, down to the measurements of the roof-arches, and the ventilation system copied from the House of Commons. But it is a welcome change from abstraction.

The medium of the novel enabled Disraeli to ride personal 'hobby-horses', some of them detrimental to his political message and his art alike. In Coningsby this is largely confined to the inevitable vindication of the Jewish cause in the person of Sidonia,⁸⁵ and to the self-conscious revival of feudal forms, such as the Christmas revels at St. Genevieve.⁸⁶ In Sybil, the accent is on the Catholic church in its mediaeval glory, and the degradation of a Saxon race which Disraeli declares flourished at that time, before its subjugation by a race of Norman parvenus. Tancred focusses almost wholly on the Jewish question.

But if the form of the novel exacerbated such indulgences, it could be used to check them too. Coningsby is called away from the Christmas festivities at St. Genevieve by his grandfather's death, and we are reminded of responsibilities which take precedence over a nostalgic ritual.⁸⁷ In his apparently most earnest moments, there is a vein of self-satire in Disraeli's writing, which qualifies the prevailing theme. Sybil celebrates mediaeval forms alike in doctrine and often in its style, but also acknowledges that this can be taken to an extreme. When Sybil and Gerard are surprised by the police at the secret meeting of the Chartist plotters in London, the latter defends the heroine:

'Look to yourself. Advance and touch this maiden, and I will fell you and your minions like oxen at their pasture'.

But his gesture is as antiquated as his language:

The inspector took a pistol from his pocket, and pointed it at Gerard. 'You see', he said, 'resistance is quite
vain'.

Sir Vavasour Firebrace's obsession with the Order of the Barons is another aspect of the unhealthy side of this revivalism. Sybil herself is gently corrected for bemoaning the unpicturesque nature of the railways: "Had it not been for the railway, we should never have made our visit to Marney Abbey".⁸⁹ The novel has this scope to present issues in a balanced manner, qualifying its own statements. The author obviously has his own attitude to a question, but should not force it on us: "The debate, whether it is in his own mind or with recognized opponents, takes shape outside him; no doubt he takes sides, but that is less important than that he shows sides".⁹⁰

A successful example of this occurs when Gerard and Morley make their canvas for the National Convention, and are confronted in Lord Valentine not by a cipher, but by an articulate and convincing apologist for his class. A discussion follows which (unlike that between Oswald Millbank and Coningsby,⁹¹ which serves just to reinforce a single viewpoint) fairly opposes two arguments. Valentine details the noble ventures and sufferings of his ancient family, and their role as inspired leaders, while his visitors gently expose his outdated notions of chivalric prestige, and stress the essential part played by the people in those same enterprises. Neither party triumphs, nor is either obviously identified with the sentiments of the author, and the episode is left so finely balanced that the two delegates themselves cannot agree as to the merits of Valentine's aristocratic code.⁹²

The novels therefore offer the same framework for internal debate as Disraeli's earlier works. In Tancred he is already able to look back on his earlier efforts, and declare of the Henry Sidney we first met in Coningsby: "The boy, whom we have traced intent upon the revival of the pastimes of the people, had expanded into the statesman... What had been a picturesque emotion had now become a statistical argument".⁹³ But the debate is not always retrospective:

The truth is that in this novel [Coningsby] Disraeli seems to be feeling his way and arguing with himself, rather than putting forward a completed system of ideas, and the book finishes, not on a note of affirmation, but with a large question mark.⁹⁴

The 'Autobiographical' Trilogy conducts a search for personal fulfilment; now it is transferred to the political sphere: "What ought I to DO, and what ought I to BELIEVE", asks Tancred.⁹⁵ The question has disturbing implications for the reader of Coningsby and Sybil. As B. McCabe points out, when Monmouth dismisses Coningsby's 'Young England' ideals as "fantastical puerilities", a part of Disraeli was acknowledging that for himself, too, such notions would not stand the test of political necessities.⁹⁶ The naive enthusiasm of the New Generation is gently exposed when Coningsby picks up a newspaper, and reads an election speech of Buckhurst: "denouncing the Venetian Constitution, to the amazement of several thousand persons, apparently not a little terrified by this unknown danger, now first introduced to their notice".⁹⁷ M. Fido also observes that Tadpole's election cry, "our young Queen, and out old Institutions", was hardly distinguishable from Disraeli's own position on many questions, a subtle acknowledgement of the potential for hypocrisy in all political "cries".⁹⁸ There is an element of Disraeli in many of the characters, enacting a psychological rehearsal for the struggles ahead:

These novels, in short, reflect the mind of a man of public affairs, they are the imaginative means, adopted by a politician, who is also a man of letters, of thinking his way through to a 'public' attitude, and to a political programme.⁹⁹

The debate-structure was one aspect of the greater comprehensiveness which the political novels enjoyed, as compared with Disraeli's speeches. Another advantage was their ability to put the political themes in their social context. J. Halperin criticizes Coningsby for failing to do this, as compared with Sybil which is more effective at presenting a composite social picture:

A political novel that deals almost exclusively with politics...tells us very little indeed about the political process if it is not careful to place its subjects in the social contexts from which, after all, it cannot really be separated...Coningsby fails as fiction precisely because it is so exclusively political; its other scant materials remain unassimilated.¹⁰⁰

However, Coningsby is from the start concerned with the state of the parties in England rather than the people: it should be taken with Sybil as the first part of a larger work as the General Preface states:

The perverse deviation of political parties from their original significance may at first sight seem only a subject of historical curiosity, but they assume a different character when they practically result in the degradation of a people.¹⁰¹

Each novel is therefore successively broader in scope. Historically, Coningsby refers back to relevant passages of political history, and is able thereby to project its vision of the "New Generation" implicitly into the future. Sybil takes in the stages by which the people were enslaved from the time of the Norman Conquest. Tancred, unfortunately, carries this to excess, and attempts to revert almost to the origin of civilization itself. The same is true of the social foci: Coningsby primarily rooted in the political world, Sybil ranging more freely over English society, and Tancred going literally overseas. This reflects Disraeli's growing confidence in handling the political novel; in the case of Tancred it results finally in a form of overconfidence, but an overconfidence produced rather by the lack of a disciplining political objective than the presence of it.

The novel is also better equipped to present a complex set of values than simple polemic, through dramatic subtleties and the interaction of a range of characters. Coningsby does not exploit this as perhaps it might: we have embodiments of the old and new generations in political life; representatives of classes wrongfully excluded from it; the petty manipulators who are an unfortunate part of it; and a glimpse of the allied social world. There is a growing sophistication evident, as D.E. Painting remarks, in the manner in which precepts originally given in the authorial voice are subsequently modulated: passed by Sidonia to his protégé, Coningsby, who in turn hands them down to his colleagues.^{101a} But as a rule a character in Coningsby fulfils a relatively simple function, and the author's doctrinal approval either rests on him or does not, notwithstanding a certain psychological fascination with an otherwise unsympathetic figure such as Lord Monmouth. Sybil has a more difficult task in advocating that doctrine of 'Peers and People' which was part of the 'Young England' code. One lesson is that classes must outgrow their prejudices and look beyond social labels: a process which begins for Sybil and the de Mowbrays when they are trapped together in Mowbray Castle by an enraged mob. Disraeli wishes to condemn the destructive elements and yet preserve those that were essential to his new order: whether aristocrats, bour-

geoisie, or of the people. To do this in a facile manner, however, would be to imply that there was no real cause for alarm, that England's grave social problems would ultimately resolve themselves, which was manifestly what he did not wish to suggest. From a relatively early stage, therefore, we are prepared to accept a breach between Gerard and Morley: the latter an admirable figure in his dedication, but dangerous as a proponent of socialism. Thus Gerard confutes him: "It is all very fine, ...and I dare say you are right, Stephen; but I like stretching my feet on my own hearth".¹⁰² In the final denouement the 'worthy' characters on both sides are prevented from direct conflict: Sybil finds her appeals to the mob outside Mowbray Castle useless, because, as Mr. Mountchesney warns: "They are not Mowbray people. It would not be safe".¹⁰³ In any case, most of them are drunk. Relief is brought by Egremont and his troop of yeomanry; insofar as he has to engage any remotely sympathetic figure, it is Morley, ransacking the muniments room of the castle. He is not killed by Egremont himself, but by an anonymous member of the troop. It is the oppressive Lord Marney who meets the people of Mowbray, and is killed by them; Gerard dies in the same struggle. Thus all impediments to the symbolic union of Egremont and Sybil are carefully removed, without leaving a cause for rancour. In their two figures and with the addition of an industrialist such as Trafford, Disraeli carefully isolates his ideals. It is more than simple sentimentalism, in that it reflects the values on which Disraeli was to champion the landed interest within the Conservative party in the years to come. His task, as M.E. Speare defines it, was:

"so to suggest the argument, that both the expert and the popular consciousness might feel its force - to do this without overstepping the bounds of fiction; ^{without} turning it into mere ratiocination."¹⁰⁴

In this he largely succeeded, by using the 'chess-board' scope of the novel to be both complex and clear. We are unlikely to derive a false sense of security from the conclusion of Sybil, because we are left with vivid pictures of poverty in Marney and Mowbray, and of the explosion of violence headed by the frighteningly alien Wodgate 'Hellcats'. Disraeli wanted to shock his readers. There was enough of the Radical left in the Conservative member - particularly after his disappointment in 1841 in failing to receive office - to be disgusted still with that section of the aristocracy who failed in their traditional responsibilities, and whose effete indifference to the urgent questions of the day he satirises biting in the

opening chapter:

Disraeli was writing partly to please his Young England friends, partly to assuage his own feelings as a disappointed place-seeker - the political satire is at times very bitter - but above all to puncture the balloon of early Victorian complacency, and by deliberate paradoxes to make people think.¹⁰⁵

When the Wodgate 'Hellcats' go on the rampage, therefore, a part of Disraeli goes with them, and although they burn to death in the fire of their own making, we are nevertheless left with a vision of their destructive potential. In addition, the shades of Morley, Lord Marney, and the infamous Truck-shop proprietors, the DiggseS, continue to haunt us, and point to the dangers threatening society still, if no solution is found to its problems.

Yet even in making his attack upon the aristocracy, Disraeli carefully picked out a race of parvenus - mere upstarts of the Norman race transplanted by the Conquest - without therefore calling in question the traditional, feudal ideals on which much of his political programme rested.

Sybil's greater breadth is indicated by the fact that it has a second hero, Devilsdust, who also enjoys a mysterious orphaned status, after suffering the modern equivalent of exposure at birth. Through him Disraeli can make comments which he could not utter on his own behalf. Devilsdust has a succinct answer for those Chartists who were of the more pacific, 'moral force' persuasion:

'I never heard that moral force won the battle of Waterloo... I wish the Capitalists would try moral force a little, and see whether it would keep the thing going. If the Capitalists will give up their red-coats, I would be a moral force man to-morrow'.¹⁰⁶

Disraeli could make a speech broadly sympathetic to the Chartists in Parliament, but he could not, as here, suggest that the very machinery of law and order constituted an injustice. In the same way, the presentation of Wodgate not only terrifies the reader with a glimpse of an alien and violent society on his doorstep, but it makes one telling point: "In the first place, it is a real aristocracy; it is privileged, but it does something for its privileges".¹⁰⁷ The end of the novel kills off many of these stalking-horses, but in the meantime they have served their purpose.

Thus Disraeli used the protection of a dramatic context for both the negative aspect of his thesis - the social criticism - and

for the positive, visionary element in it. It is never clear when he is writing tongue-in-cheek, and when he is genuinely taken by the expansive sentiments and episodes of his novels; perhaps both at the same time:

Like many men of a Romantic temperament, Disraeli needed to protect his ideals from the threat of disillusion. The tableaux of great houses and magnificent feasts, the wit and the verbal dexterity gave him this protection. Within that framework, he could insinuate his ideals without being exposed to immediate rejection.¹⁰⁸

One final aspect of the author's 'use' of the political novel should be remarked, but not dwelt upon. Like all his novels, they are to some extent expressions of personal concerns and psychological outlets for frustrations, political or otherwise. Disraeli identified with Coningsby in humiliation, with Millbank, Lyle and Sidonia; and with the 'People' in Sybil. He knew the bitterness of social inferiority and injustice. Sidonia carries Disraeli's vindication of Judaism a stage further,¹⁰⁹ and his life-history so parallels that given to Isaac Disraeli in the 1848 Memoir to him that the identification is obvious.¹¹⁰ In Sybil Disraeli uses the enslaved 'Saxon' race instead as a correlative of his own feelings. Neither the racial nor the religious theories are important in themselves, so much as being, "the rationalization of his own peculiar psychological dilemma".¹¹¹ With the flimsiest preface: "Sidonia was well aware that...", Disraeli launches his own theories on the position of an "unmixed race" amongst the "aristocracy of nature", and likewise their ingeniously-argued claim to a pivotal position at the fountain-head of both the Jewish and Christian religions.¹¹² In Book IV, Chapter xv Sidonia recites a list of the geni of Europe in the fields of art and public affairs: all of them, he argues (with dubious accuracy) are Jews.¹¹³

When not identifying with oppressed/ groups, Disraeli enjoys a surrogate life in the illustrations of power and magnificent living which in real life he could still only admire at a distance. Through Sidonia he revels in the secret life of a figure who is deprived of political recognition, yet still makes kings and cabinets tremble on his decision.

But to emphasise these aspects of Coningsby and Sybil would be to give a false picture of the progress Disraeli made as both politician and novelist even in the writing of them, developing objectivity and discipline, along with a growing confidence in exploiting

the novel without being obviously a polemicist. But in Tancred he no longer had an immediate political objective, nor a need to establish and hold his readers' attention. Without this focus he loses himself in rambling narrative; the personal/jewish vindication goes wholly unchecked and takes over the novel. It was in the first two instalments of the 'Political' Trilogy that he developed a reciprocal determination to convey a message in literary form. Thus 'A Mechanic's Wife' wrote in appreciation of Sybil:

I speak in no idle praise of the author for though you have received great gifts until now you have never really used them. The classic eloquence of your former works, the satirical wit, the impassioned fervour of your descriptions, though they have gained you admirers amongst men of refinement and cultivated minds, were to the People as sealed books.¹¹⁴

In turn, as S.M. Smith observes, Disraeli's correspondent underscores the fact that:"in abandoning the romantic fantasy of his earlier novels and taking as his subject the people and their problems Disraeli is writing better than he has ever done".¹¹⁵

Unfortunately he attempted to complete his Trilogy in the writing of Tancred (1847), on a more ambitious scale than either of its predecessors. In a return to first principles, he sought to investigate the divine origin of government:

It seemed to me that the time had arrived when it became my duty to ascend to the origin of that great ecclesiastical corporation, and consider the position of the descendants of that race who had been the founders of Christianity.¹¹⁶

But since, in the Preface to Tancred, Disraeli defines the Anglican Church as:"a sacred corporation for the promulgation and maintenance in Europe of certain Asian principles",¹¹⁷ it is unlikely to receive a fair hearing. It soon becomes a convenient starting-point from which to revert to a Judaic pilgrimage, and on a largely personal rather than scholarly basis. As such, it showed little concern for Disraeli's English readers, particularly in dismissive comments such as Fakredeen utters of Tancred's culture:

It is not a pilgrimage, because the English are really neither Jews nor Christians, but follow a sort of religion of their own, which is made every year by their bishops.¹¹⁸

Like Coningsby and Egremont, Tancred is the son of a noble family, who stands out from most of his class in questioning the

basis of their privileged position. His perplexed parents try to steer him back into the orthodox channels of Parliament and a suitable marriage. But Tancred remains unmoved by the advice of his tutor, or of his mother's adviser, who is merely designated 'The Bishop'. The latter provides the only opportunity for serious consideration of the Anglican Church. But his character is never developed; Disraeli rejects the dramatic potential of the novel to give a figure life of his own and thus embody a theme. Instead, he gives his own authorial and dismissive verdict:

The oracle was always dark. Placed in a high post in an age of political analysis, the bustling intermeddler was unable to supply society with a single solution. Enunciating second-hand, with characteristic precipitation, some big principle in vogue, as if he were a discoverer, he invariably shrank from its subsequent application, the moment that he found it might be unpopular and inconvenient. 119

Having made its hurried appearance, this theme hardly reappears, as if Disraeli was too much bent on joining Tancred on his Eastern 'crusade'.

For Tancred seeks truly first principles, more radical even than those of Coningsby and Egremont: the original inspiration of the Hebraeo-Christian Church. But in his case it is a weakness of the narrative that he must choose his exile, whereas both his predecessor-pilgrims were subjected to a form of disinheritance partly by circumstances, and partly by their own adherence to principle. In their case, therefore, the effect was to restore a sense of what was truly essential in their culture, as any genuine deprivation tends to do. Tancred, on the other hand, so completely abandons his society that one wonders if he can ever return to it. Coningsby made a tour of the new centres of industry, and refused to accept a political career on his grandfather's terms. Egremont broke from his family to try to understand the needs and aspirations of the people around them in Marney and Mowbray. But Tancred must go to Jerusalem, although he is paradoxically ambivalent as to whether this will be a pilgrimage or a crusade. Disraeli continues to assert that Tancred is the authentic final instalment of his Trilog^y. He apologises for the fact that we have not previously met Tancred's parents, the Duke and Duchess of Bellamont, by casting them as confirmed social recluses. We meet the heroes of Coningsby and Sybil, notably Sidonia, who is eminently well qualified as a Jew and as a traveller to ad-

vise the new pilgrim. Less sympathetic figures from the past appear, too, such as the Flouncys, still pursuing their career of determined social climbing. Tancred does go out into society for a short time, although this is largely a period of preparation for the great journey East. He is soon the centre of every social function, outdoing even the polished Mr. Melton, who had humiliated the young Coningsby at Beaumanoir by his superior social talents. There is some danger that Tancred will be diverted from his course by the wiles of Lady Bertie and Bellair, but when he discovers that her interest is in his inheritance rather than his ideals, he reverts in disgust to the Eastern scheme.

So Parliamentary politics hardly appear in Tancred; the Jew and idealist in Disraeli assert themselves in a critical look back at English society: its commercial narrow-mindedness, and cultural poverty. Hence that comment by the hero:

In this age it is not Parliament that does the real work... If the manufacturers want to change a tariff, they form a commercial league, and they effect their purpose.¹²⁰

Evidently the situation in Disraeli's own political career played a part in this. Peel had been defeated, and the Conservative party split. Years of work lay ahead before Disraeli was to become Prime Minister, but for the most part it was no longer necessary to express his frustrated ambition through the form of the novel. His literary nature continued to play an important role, but more in the speeches he was to make in the House (cf. Chapter 4, Section 1). And immediately, in 1846-7, the pressure was off: this is reflected in Tancred's quixotic disregard for its English readers, their culture and institutions. Whereas Coningsby and Sybil attacked abuses or individuals in public affairs, here the whole system is mocked. Disraeli has no interest in urging a policy on the public, unless we allow as one, Tancred's pursuit of 'The Great Asian Mystery'. But it remains a mystery to the end, and he has no effective mission to fulfil. He arrives at Jerusalem, supported by Sidenia's advice and a letter of credit, and is soon involved in debate with Eva, daughter of the noble Jewish house of Sheehab. She puts an eloquent case for her people, based on their role in the Christian resurrection mystery: "The holy race supplied the victim and the immolators".¹²¹

There is further criticism of the European way of life, by the guests at the house of Besso the merchant. One of these is Fakredeem,

Eva's half-brother, who is in part an idealisation of the oriental side of Disraeli: a political adventurer, but on a grander scale and in a more glamorous context than any English politician. With him, Tancred makes a journey out into the desert, eventually coming to Mount Sinai. This, one feels, must be the novel's climax, yet it leaves us little wiser: "Announce the sublime and solacing doctrine of theocratic equality", urges the angel who appears there.¹²² Tancred concludes in despair that the true medium of Divine revelation must not only be of the chosen and completed Faith, but of the chosen Race too; the final humiliating lesson for Disraeli's gentile readers.

Thereafter Fakredeen and Tancred are involved in a quasi-diplomatic scheme to secure the reconciliation of the Maronite and Druse tribes in Syria, which is presented as a bastion of feudalism, but again in an Eastern context. The two heroes then visit an isolated tribe called the Ansarey, who practise a form of the classical Greek cults, with their own statues of the Olympian gods. But if the justification for the episode is a continuation of Disraeli's review of the religious scene, it has strayed some way from anything relevant to his English readers. The novel has reverted to the track of Disraeli's own fantasies, and just as Tancred represented that side of him that longed to escape from England to more exotic fields, so Fakredeen is partly the Disraeli who has successfully made the break:

Moral worth had no abstract charms for him, and he could sympathise with a dazzling reprobate; but virtue in an heroic form, lofty principle, and sovereign duty invested with all the attributes calculated to captivate his rapid and refined perception, exercised over him a resistless and transcendent spell.¹²³

Whereas Coningsby and Egremont demonstrated their moral worth by maintaining principles despite adverse events and the pressures of society, neither of Tancred's two heroes have any particular mission, nor are they obviously subject to influences outside their self-will. They are not tested. After some further artificial adventures designed to bring out his dazzling qualities, Tancred returns to Jerusalem, and the novel ends in mid-stream: "The Duke and Duchess of Bellamont had arrived at Jerusalem".¹²⁴ With no purpose beyond self-expression and the enactment of personal fantasies, Disraeli had nothing further to say. Once again, the lack of a truly political objective robbed his novel of its dynamic.

27. VG⁻, 266-288.
28. Sybil, 186-193 and 204-208.
29. Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties, 209.
30. G. Goodin (ed), 'Walter Scott and the Tradition of the Political Novel', The English Novel in the Nineteenth Century, 17.
31. Coningsby, 215.
32. Frietzche, Action Is Not For Me, 47.
33. J.B. Gordon, 'Decadent Spaces: Notes for a Phenomenology of the Fin de Siecle', in Ian Fletcher (ed), Decadence and the 1890's, (Stratford upon Avon Studies, no. 17, 1979), 33-34.
34. *ibid.*, 34.
35. Coningsby, 49.
36. Coningsby, 259.
37. Coningsby, 360.
38. Coningsby, 19.
39. Coningsby, 150.
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CHAPTER FOUR

1. Biographical: Art into Life.

I must say that in spite of his fantastic novel-writing he is a capable statesman. (Bismark; on seeing his own portrait as the Count of Ferroll in Endymion.)¹

After Tancred in 1847, Disraeli produced only two further novels: Lothair in 1870 and Endymion in 1880. Yet although politics came to dominate his attention, he continued to regard himself as a writer, and prided himself on it. Thus he wrote a contemptuous description of his rival Gladstone in a letter to Lady Bradford of October 3rd, 1877:

His vanitas vanitatum is to be a literary character, like Cardinal Richelieu, who was a great statesman, but never content unless he was writing a tragedy, sure to be applauded by his parasites. Now, there is not a form of literature wh. /ich/ this man is not attempting, except a work of fiction - the test of all talents - for the greatest books are works of fiction, and the worst; as for instance Don Quixote, Gil Blas, Wilhelm Meister - and Mrs. /sic/ Braddon, and the endless fry who imitate even her.

Gladstone, like Richelieu, can't write. Nothing can be more unmusical, more involved, or more uncouth than all his scribblement; he has not produced a page wh. /ich/ you can put on yr. library shelves...²

Not only did Disraeli see his undeniable literary talent as an asset in itself, but the quality of imagination it implied was also a political virtue. Hence those criticisms in the 'Political' Trilogy and in Lord George Bentinck of the cramped imagination of Peel and his party: "Thus gifted and thus accomplished, Sir Robert Peel had a great deficiency; he was without imagination. Wanting imagination, he wanted prescience".³

Disraeli could not have devoted himself to a parliamentary career in the manner of those who "see politics as the indispensable but tedious regulator", as V.S. Pritchett termed it:

Politics are a method, a humane technique of adjustment, and, in general, it must be said that this has been the English view throughout the nineteenth century and after. To Disraeli, the Jew and alien, such a theory was pragmatic and despicable.⁴

Disraeli needed to feel an almost religious enthusiasm for his vocation: "if government is not divine, it is nothing".⁵ He therefore invested it with the quality of romance, casting himself in an heroic role; even if in another more pragmatic part of himself he might be approaching the same issue with cynical calculation. It

was therefore natural for him to make a vivid record of the critical events of 1846 in Lord George Bentinck (published in 1852). Although advertised as a 'Political Biography', it does not bind itself to be historically accurate, and could therefore be considered as one of Disraeli's novels: "as a vivid story of one of the great parliamentary dramas in our history it is unsurpassed".⁶ Details were altered so as to create a more striking impression. On March 31st, 1846, Bentinck wrote to Disraeli in delight at the government's discomfiture over the Irish Coercion Bill, for which they had lost the support of the Irish members: "the TAIL appear to be doing our work to admiration...We have now fairly set them [the Government] and the TAIL by the ears". This was changed in Bentinck to read, "at loggerheads", which sounded less awkward.⁷

Reciprocally this 'novel' was used for political propaganda like all of Disraeli's works. Even on publication a storm arose because, in all his references to the Protectionist victory over Peel in 1846, Disraeli made no mention of the part played in it by Derby, Granby, or the Agricultural Protection Society. "With Disraeli history was not only past politics but present politics, too".⁸ Bentinck himself is often no more than a mouthpiece for the author:

As for the industrial question, he was sincerely opposed to the Manchester scheme, because he thought that its full development would impair and might subvert our territorial constitution, which he held to be the real security of our freedom, and because he believed that it would greatly injure Ireland, and certainly dissolve our colonial empire.

As the book progresses, Disraeli grows bolder in voicing his own topics, either authorially, or as a "follower" or "friend" of Bentinck. For example, he refers to the contemporary obsession with material progress and ends with a characteristic non-sequitur: "All is race".¹⁰ There follows a glorification of the Saxon strain in the English population reminiscent of Sybil. Chapter xxiv boldly repeats the author's theories on the Jewish question, introduced flimsily by reference to Baron Rothschild's disqualification from Parliament in 1847 on the grounds of his faith. We hear again the author of Tancred: "The immolators were pre-ordained like the victim, and the holy race supplied both. Could that be a crime which secured for all mankind eternal joy?"¹¹ The next chapter returns to the main theme with a candid lack of apology:

The views expressed in the preceding chapter were not those which influenced Lord George Bentinck in ^{forming} his opinion that the civil disabilities of those subjects of her majesty who profess that limited belief in divine revelation which is commonly called the Jewish religion, should be removed.¹²

Bentinck died in 1848, and Disraeli paid tribute to him in the following session: "He has left us the legacy of heroes: the memory of his great name, and the inspiration of his great example". But he remarked privately to Greville of Bentinck's deficiencies: "as it had been proved that he could not lead an Opposition still less would he have been able to lead a Government".¹³ Bentinck was therefore an idealisation, enrolling another hero in the political annals in a medium which was for Disraeli the most appropriate:

Bentinck rose, long past the noon of night, at the end of this memorable debate, to undertake an office from which the most successful and most experienced rhetoricians of parliament would have shrunk with intuitive discretion. But duty scorns prudence, and criticism has few terrors for a man with a great purpose.¹⁴

Like all Disraeli's heroes, Bentinck had to have his nadir. On the 22nd May, 1847, he suffered a severe setback in Parliament, and two days later the Derby was won by Surplice, the horse he had sold along with the rest of his stud to concentrate on politics:

He had nothing to console him, and nothing to sustain him except his pride. Even that deserted him before a heart which he knew at least could yield him sympathy. He gave a sort of superb groan:

'All my life I have been trying for this, and for what have I sacrificed it!' he murmured.

It was in vain to offer solace.

'You do not know what the Derby is', he moaned out.

'Yes, I do; it is the blue ribbon of the turf'.

'It is the blue ribbon of the turf', he slowly repeated to himself, and sitting down at the table, he buried himself in a folio of statistics.¹⁵

Disraeli's dramatic attitude to politics is borne out by the parliamentary scenes of Bentinck, which, far from being tedious recapitulation, are some of its most exciting episodes:

None but a master could interweave pages of Hansard, 'the Dunciad of Downing Street', into the substance of his book, and make every chapter interesting. Sternly political though it be, the biography is always dramatic.¹⁶

Chapter xvi describes the scene when the Corn Bills were brought back from the Lords on June 25th, 1846: a speech by Sheil: "the last great Irish harangue of the most brilliant of modern rhetoricians";

a speech by Cobden, and a maiden effort by Lord Chandos; conflicting rumours as to the Protectionists' strength; finally a division at 1.30 am. Then the famous show of force by the protectionist rebels which finished Peel's career:

They trooped on: all the men of metal and large-acred squires, whose spirit he had so often quickened and whose counsel he had so often solicited in his fine conservative speeches in Whitehall gardens.¹⁷

In defeat, Peel is compared to Napoleon without an army, after Moscow. But less obviously sensational aspects of parliamentary life also caught the novelist's eye: an incident, for example, after an earlier debate when the Conservative leader found his ascendancy checked for the first time:

The Minister, plunged in profound and perhaps painful reverie, was unconscious of the termination of the proceedings of the night, and remained in his seat unmoved...His colleagues, lingering for a while, followed the other members and left the house, and those on whom, from the intimacy of their official relations with Sir Robert, the office of rousing him would have devolved, hesitated from some sympathy with his unusual susceptibility to perform that duty, though they [sic] remained watching their chief behind the speaker's chair. The benches had become empty, the lights were about to be extinguished, it is the duty of a clerk of the house to examine the chamber before the doors are closed, and tonight it was also the strange lot of this gentleman to disturb the reverie of a statesman.¹⁸

Disraeli's habits of observing and writing continued in a variety of ways even between Bentinck in 1852 and Lothair in 1870:

The flat calm into which the ship of state had drifted was perhaps a reason why Disraeli in the early 1860s had time to assemble a number of autobiographical sketches, observations, anecdotes, character studies. It is not clear what his purpose was.¹⁹

There was probably no definite purpose except an instinctive desire to do justice to his experiences in public life, converting them into some semi-permanent form. For example, an account of Disraeli's first visit to the French King Louis Philippe after his deposition in 1848, who made a pathetic attempt to preserve the illusion of power in the 'court' he collected around him at Claremont.²⁰ There are several pieces on 'the stories behind politics' in the 1850's and 1860's, including one on Peel's death from a fall in 1850, where Disraeli hopefully conjectures that his former leader sought a reconciliation after their break.²¹ We can see Disraeli

using these private jottings to come to terms with episodes in his past, just as Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming nursed the wounds of his early career.

In one passage, on the attempt ^{to form} a government in 1851, Disraeli is so carried away as to refer in the dramatic third-person to his own part in it: "Mr. Disraeli had been ten years in Parliament..."²² In the same context there is a humorous record of Stanley's interviews with prospective colleagues, whilst Disraeli hid throughout in an adjoining bedroom.²³

In another exuberant passage he describes an Opposition collapse in 1858:

I can liken it only to one of those earthquakes in Calabria or Peru, of which we sometimes read. There was a rumbling murmur, a groan, a shriek, distant thunder; and nobody knew whether it came from the top or the bottom of the House. There was a rent, a fissure in the ground. Then a village disappeared. Then a tall tower toppled down. And then the whole of the Opposition benches became one great dissolving view of anarchy!²⁴

Conscious of the privileges afforded by his political career, Disraeli followed an ^{eye-witness} account of the Prince of Wales' marriage in 1863 with the remark: "This is a genuine anecdote, which you will not find in the Illustrated News".²⁵ Soon after came a still greater honour, a private audience at Windsor, where, as Blake observes, we already find the myth of the 'Faery' queen being born.²⁶

There are some non-political subjects amongst these papers, centering generally on the delights of the country at Hughenden, and one in particular on the picturesque life of the woodmen.²⁷ In another we find Disraeli pondering in whimsical fashion: "What did Jesus do before he was thirty?"²⁸ But as a rule political life dominates, not only because it was all-absorbing, but because Disraeli saw it as an adventure rather than a trade: "He was not only a participant in politics but an observer fascinated by the people and scenes that he encountered there".²⁹

Despite the black suit and sober image Disraeli adopted after 1846, his creative energy found an outlet still, in his parliamentary speeches. E.T. Raymond even compares them with his novels on a point of concern - or lack of it - for factual accuracy: "In his House of Commons speeches he dealt largely in audacious myth".³⁰ Stylistically, Disraeli became famed for the impassive manner in which he delivered his biting and witty observations; just as the satirist couches his most scathing comments in studiedly polite

terms: "Disraeli was all of a piece. This was the same technique that he used in Parliament. His novels are part of his politics and his politics at times seem ^{to be} an emanation of his novels".³¹ Fraser's Magazine for February, 1847, made this description of his demeanour:

while all around him are convulsed with merriment or excitement at some of his finely-wrought sarcasms, he holds himself, seemingly, in total suspension, as though he had no existence for the ordinary feelings and passions of humanity.³²

Disraeli learnt through his writing to put expression into the words themselves, rather than rely on gesture and tone. There were other skills, too, which he brought from his novel-writing days:

Besides a *fine* voice and skill in managing it, Disraeli, owing to his long apprenticeship to literature, had a great and varied command of language; knew how to select the suggestive epithet, how to turn the appropriate phrase... Demosthenes and Cicero among the ancients, Canning and Macaulay among the moderns, show what a powerful reinforcement literary graces may bring to argument, invective, and exhortation. Disraeli's most marked literary quality was the power of phrase-making and phrase-adaptation, of illuminating collocations of words, now in the shape of ironical aphorism, now of convincing epigram, now of audacious paradox, now of stinging satire.³³

Even as a novelist he found it difficult to sustain one theme for long, and was happier in short set-pieces of dramatic intensity or polemic; an orator rather than a philosopher. His powers of epigram, for example, fixed his argument in the imagination as well as the mind of his listeners. During the debate on the Corn Laws in 1846 he coined a term, "the School of Manchester", for the group which collected itself around Cobden and Bright.³⁴ Three years later, in a speech on the State of the Nation, he drew attention to his right of authorship: "I say the Manchester School. I have a right to use that phrase, for I gave them that name".³⁵

Gladstone testified to the disproportionate power of words to settle political questions when he reviewed Disraeli's successful Second Reform Bill in 1867. Although the latter's position was considerably weaker on strictly practical grounds, the magic of the 'cry', "household suffrage", won the day. As Gladstone remarked: "the Government, it must be admitted, bowled us over by the force of the phrase".³⁶

Disraeli had a weakness for exotic simile which often led him away into 'purple passages' of novelistic digression. In a speech at the Manchester Free Trade Hall in 1872 he denounced the Cabinet:

As I sat opposite the Treasury Bench the Ministers reminded me of one of those marine landscapes not very uncommon on the coasts of South America. You behold a range of exhausted volcanoes. Not a flame flickers on a single pallid crest. But the situation is still dangerous. There are occasional earthquakes, and ever and anon the dark rumbling of the sea.

Replying to criticism of his 1867 Reform Bill in the Quarterly and the Edinburgh reviews, Disraeli made an elaborate period, comparing the magazines to two post-houses eclipsed by the railway era: "The boots of the 'Blue Boar' and the chamber-maid of the 'Red Lion' embrace and are quite in accord in this - in denouncing the infamy of railroads."³⁸ Summing up the session in 1848, he likened the ministerial vacillation in the recent financial crisis to the periodic rite in Tarento of the liquefaction of St. Januarius' blood: "in both cases the remedy is equally efficient and equally a hoax".³⁹ The session's four budgets were compared to Don Quixote's expeditions, each of which only saw him return home even further disillusioned and broken in spirit.⁴⁰ Such devices could also be used to hold up the main thread of argument and hence prepare for a stinging climax.⁴¹

In Disraeli's attacks on other characters in the House we can also catch a glimpse of the youthful contributor to The Star Chamber. As the Crimean War loomed in 1853, he condemned Lord Aberdeen thus:

The curse of 'antiquated imbecility' has fallen, in all its fullness, on Lord Aberdeen. His temper, naturally morose, has become licentiously peevish. Crossed in his Cabinet, he insults the House of Lords, and plagues the most eminent of his colleagues with the crabbed malice of a maundering witch!⁴²

Disraeli's advantage over Gladstone as a literary man was therefore more than a source of pride, but a practical gift. Gladstone might produce vastly more authoritative arguments, but Disraeli's version frequently prevailed because it caught the ear of the House or of the journals. As T.E. Kebbel observes in his introduction to an edition of Disraeli's speeches: "A brilliant repartee, a happy illustration, a choice metaphor, remain embedded in the popular memory, when longer and even higher flights of oratory are forgotten".⁴³

Disraeli also 'published' his peculiar views and some engaging accounts of his experiences, in the mass of letters he wrote during these years to his sister Sarah, to his wife, to Mrs. Brydges-Williams, to Lady Londonderry, to Ladies Bradford and Chesterfield, and, most famous of all, to Queen Victoria herself.⁴⁴ This was in

addition to more businesslike communications to his parliamentary colleagues. That visit to Claremont in 1848⁴⁵ was also set out in a letter to Lady Londonderry, although, as Monypenny points out, with several details altered.⁴⁶ There is a description of the state visit of the Emperor and Empress of the French in 1855,⁴⁷ and of a dinner at Lord Jersey's where Disraeli sat next to the French Ambassador, who led the company in nervous anticipation of a birth of an imperial son and heir to the French dynasty.⁴⁸

The occasional absurdities which caught his eye in public life were Disraeli's favourite prey. During the Indian Mutiny there was hot debate about the mutilations of Europeans rumoured to have occurred, and Disraeli described in a letter to Mrs. Brydges-Williams the activities of one doctor who proclaimed himself an expert in artificial noses: "He then gave a tariff of prices, and offered to supply noses for English ladies by the dozen, and, I believe, even by the gross".⁴⁹

The richness of Lothair and Endymion can be attributed in part to Disraeli's maintaining the habits of a novelist throughout the years when he could not spare himself for full-time writing. Thus we find the newly-elected leader of the Tories in the Commons writing in 1849:

Lola Montes' marriage makes a sensation. I believe he [One Lieutenant Heald] has only 3,000l per annum, not 13,000l. It was an affair of a few days. She sent to ask the refusal of his dog, which she understood was for sale. Of course it wasn't, being very beautiful, but he sent it as a present; she rejoined, he called, and they were married in a week...as for the King of Bavaria (who, by the bye, allows her 1,500l a year, and to whom she really writes every day), that was only a malheureuse passion.⁵⁰

Or at the Great Exhibition of 1851: "Lady Elizabeth Tollemache's maid...A religious family, and coming in, organ sounding, &c., she looked around, exclaimed 'The Day of Judgement!' and bolted in a fright".⁵¹

When Sarah died in 1859, and Mrs. Brydges-Williams in 1863, Disraeli lost a major part of his "audience"; but soon began that famous correspondence with Queen Victoria. From 1868 to 1870 he was occupied with Lothair, and from 1873 onwards he wrote a stream of letters to the sisters Lady Bradford and Lady Chesterfield. (Chiefly the former; she was married, but this did not prevent Disraeli expressing a passion for her as ardently as the situation allowed). Thus in one way or another his writing did not slacken, and he wrote

in 1874: "If my letters during the last few months to my three fair correspondents were collected, they would make as much as three volumes of Lothair".⁵² He took the literary finish of his letters seriously, writing for instance to Lady Londonderry in 1854: "In such a state and with such gloomy uninteresting materials...I could not venture ^{to attempt} to write to Lady Londonderry".⁵³ Twenty years later he was making the same apology to Lady Bradford:

You must consider my letters since the Longleat batch as, in diplomatic language, non avenues. They are weak, inconsistent, ^{incoherent} and without meaning it, insincere, the reflex of a restless, ^{perplexed, hampered} and most unhappy spirit.⁵⁴

Disraeli's special relationship with Queen Victoria can be dated from the death of Prince Albert in 1862, when he pleased her by his public tribute to the Consort (which was itself a masterpiece of eulogium). Disraeli took his rôle as her correspondent so seriously that even at the Berlin Congress of 1878, when so much depended on his personal appearances at an exhausting round of receptions, as well as day-long meetings, he maintained the flow:

Yet in spite of all this he found time to write lengthy accounts of each day to Queen Victoria in his most scintillating vein, packed with vivid pictures, incisive pen portraits and amusing stories. Nor, it need scarcely be said, did his correspondence with Lady Bradford and Lady Chesterfield ever flag.⁵⁵

It was with his enchanting pen that Disraeli first won the Queen to his side, particularly in the earlier years when personal contact was more limited. As leader of the Commons in 1852 he wrote to report events in the House, and Victoria told her uncle on March 30th: "Mr. Disraeli (alias Dizzy) writes very curious reports to me of the House of Commons proceedings - much in the style of his books."⁵⁶

Not only did Disraeli lay it on, as he himself is said to have admitted, 'with a trowel', but he wrote letters which must have been far more entertaining than anything which the Queen received from ^{any of} her other ministers. The pen of the novelist can be discerned again and again.⁵⁷

For example, an amused sketch of the eccentric Duke of Portland;⁵⁸ a dry observation on the fuss created by the trampling of Hyde Park flower-beds in the Reform Riots;⁵⁹ and some unabashed gossip.⁶⁰ Disraeli "magnetised" Victoria, as Fakredaan had urged the young hero in Tancred.⁶¹ Verbally, at least, he was doing justice to the rôle he had created for her in Sybil.⁶² But he had no illusions as to her real position. In 1866 Victoria was prompted to

intercede with the Liberals for the sake of Disraeli's Reform Bill, but, as he wrote to Derby on October 21st: "The royal project of gracious interposition with our rivals is a mere phantom. It pleases the vanity of a court deprived of substantial power".⁶³ In reality their association was, as Blake describes it: "an elaborate comedy of manners in which he was author, actor and spectator, with the Queen cast in the other principal rôle".⁶⁴ Both parties knew it for a charade, an aspect of Disraeli's tendency to view his situation in the light of a Romantic novel, and his sincerity resided less in what he said than in the imaginative effort he devoted to saying it. "To Disraeli his whole life was a romance: and nothing in it seemed to him more romantic than his relation to Queen Victoria".⁶⁵ In proof of this, Monypenny records Disraeli's reaction on receiving a gift of flowers from Windsor: his fear that "it might all be an enchantment, and that, perhaps, it was a Faery gift, and came from another monarch: Queen Titania...", with the implicit allusion to Spenser in the spelling of "Faery".

Just occasionally the novelist in Disraeli lost control, and he misled the Queen as to the extent of her powers. Foreign politics in particular brought out his expansive spirit, and during the Eastern crisis in 1877 he suggested, with a revealing ignorance of geography: "the Empress of India should order her armies to clear Central Asia of the Muscovites and drive them into the Caspian Sea".⁶⁶ "It was the author of Tancred speaking, not the Prime Minister of England".⁶⁷ Aggravated by the conduct of the Cabinet over the same Eastern question, the Queen was informed by Disraeli: "your Majesty has the clear constitutional right to dismiss them".⁶⁸ Appointing as Viceroy to India the second Lord Lytton, Bulwer's son (among his other credentials, he was a poet), Disraeli subsequently described Lytton's visit to him in 1876:

He told me his first remembrance of me was calling on me [sic] at a little school he was at - at Twickenham, and I 'tipped him'. It was the first tip he ever had; and now I have tipped him again and put a crown on his head! It's like meeting the first character of a play in the last scene.⁶⁹

Lytton's appointment proved a disaster in several respects, but as Blake observes, Disraeli "could forgive a great deal in a man whom he believed to have 'imagination.' 'We wanted', he told Salisbury, 'a man of ambition, imagination, some vanity and much will - and we have got him'.⁷⁰

When Disraeli adopted a more sober image in 1846, this did not herald the end of his romantic spirit. It was in itself the self-conscious adoption of a new 'persona', that of the 'model English statesman'. "The British People being subject to fogs and possessing a powerful Middle Class require grave statesmen".⁷¹ This sense of acting to an audience ran through his parliamentary career. "Pose and sincerity are inextricably interwoven. What begins as a theatrical gesture becomes a real expression of feeling, and even the sincerest sentiments take on an air of the stage when Disraeli utters them", comments Blake;⁷² and Sir A.W. Ward also stresses his extreme self-consciousness:

Nothing that Disraeli ever did, said or wrote was done, said or written without self-consciousness, everything worked together in the scheme of his life, between the public and private aspects of which it is often difficult to draw a line, and which stands freely self-revealed in his books as it does in the extraordinary story of his career.⁷³

So henceforward Disraeli transferred much of his imaginative perfectionism to his political career. In effect, his 'two natures' were going beyond simply echoing each other to a deeper integration, as A.H. Frietzche indicates: "Disraeli intended his life to be a work of art, just as he intended each of his novels to be".⁷⁴ R. Hamilton relates this more specifically to the Conservative cause which he represented:

The Conservative ideal for which Disraeli stood is rooted in human psychology, and regards politics as an art...His life and books were one, because his life was, in the truest sense, a work of art.⁷⁵

At the same time, the idealised and autobiographical elements which still appear in these later novels after Disraeli had become a fully-fledged politician reflect a tendency in himself and in other nineteenth-century authors to confront a sense of growing division between aesthetic values and the increasingly impersonal and technological realities of the time. By writing autobiography and at the same time seeking to realise aesthetic values in their own lives, they sought to heal the breach. Disraeli's brand of neo-feudalism looked ahead to the theories of Ruskin and Morris and the arts and crafts movement of the turn of the century. In this respect he was part of the development which was to take the Romantic movement before his time into that of aestheticism after his death:

Autobiography is private or subjective history made public. Whereas the romantic artist typically conceived of the imagination as working analogously to some pre-tuned Aeolian harp situated in an imaginative window to the world, the fin-de-siècle artist was more interested in transforming himself into a work of art or some aesthetic instrument, as a way of overcoming the gap between the history of art and the history of one's life.⁷⁶

As a projection of himself, Disraeli's heroes were the aesthetic instrument by which he overcame that gap to which Jan B. Gordon refers above. He created for them a role which he then assumed himself in his active political career. Consequently he saw his vocation as a politician as certainly of equal creative potential to the literary one, and no less a test of imaginative abilities. Thus he wrote to Lady Bradford in 1879:

What Bismark says that he could not properly devote himself to more than one field is perfectly true. I have told you the same thing. I never cd. do two things at the same time, at least two wh. ich required the creative power.⁷⁷

This confirms Disraeli's respect for the creative potential of politics, but would seem to contradict the idea of his career as a reciprocal by-play between his two chief talents. Yet it was precisely because he could not exercise them at the same time, and yet continued to find them both essential to his nature, that he was bound to hover between the two. He used them in tandem rather than in unison, as a man walking must take a step forward with each foot in turn in order to advance at all.

In return, Disraeli saw the career of an author as potentially as stirring as that of the public man. He wrote to Metternich in 1848, of Isaac Disraeli's struggles as a writer:

The life of an author, indeed, is not uneventful, though it is the fashion to think it so; for every book is a battle lost or won, and fame, after all, in his, as in all other careers, must be the result of brilliant achievement, and well-sustained effort.⁷⁸

In Contarini Fleming the hero already shows a distaste for the posthumous fame literature can bring, preferring something more immediate. It was the more tangible rewards which politics appeared to offer which caused Disraeli to throw himself into a parliamentary career, rather than any factor intrinsic to it. He wrote to Mrs. Brydges-Williams in 1861: "Sacheverell's sermon...was nothing till it was preached, and then nearly set the Thames on fire".⁷⁹

Parliament was a stage for Disraeli's acting and oratorical abilities, and he often made allusion to the world of the theatre in his references to it. Describing a debate on the Suez question in 1874 to Lady Chesterfield, he picked out Gladstone's part in it as:

Stagey, overdone, and full of false feeling and false taste - trying to assume the position of Scipio Africanus, accused by a country which he had saved. But between Smollett and Whalley, it was a provincial Hamlet between Clown and Pantaloon.⁸⁰

Reporting some hurried preparations for a debate in 1875: "I did not get things really right - in order - until 4 o' ck. on Thursday afternoon, so that they were painting the scenes as the curtain drew up".⁸¹ Blake describes his elaborate refutation of a vote of censure in 1878, opening haltingly with all the appearance of guilt, before throwing off the cloak in a spirited defence:

Where Disraeli excelled was in the art of presentation. He was an impresario and an actor manager. He was a superb parliamentarian, one of the half dozen greatest in our history. He knew how much depends upon impression, style, colour; and how small a part is played in politics by logic, cool reason, calm appraisal of alternatives...Form can at times be more important than content.⁸²

For Disraeli, all the events of political life were potential romances. He wrote to Mrs. Brydges-Williams in 1860:

It is our privilege to live in a wonderful age of rapid and stirring events;...we have got Italian and Austrian Revolutions, and a great many others coming; and Eastern wars, whether in India, China, or Japan, which beat all the marvels of the Arabian Nights...⁸³

Two years later he reported the "dazzling adventure" of the offer of the Greek throne to Lord Stanley: "It is a privilege to live in this age of rapid and brilliant events. What an error to consider it an utilitarian age! It is one of infinite romance. Thrones tumble down and crowns are offered, like a fairy tale..."⁸⁴ On the same subject he declared exuberantly the following year: "This beats any novel".⁸⁵

If a situation lacked drama, Disraeli provided it. Lord George Bentinck contains the first references to the menace of revolutionary conspiracy which Disraeli felt was creeping through Europe. He commented on the fall of the French King in 1848: "the throne was surprised by the secret societies, ever prepared to ravage Europe";⁸⁶ and he extended this to a vision of Europe doomed "to the alternate sway of disciplined armies or secret societies; the camp or the conven-

tion".⁸⁷ In 1849 he wrote to Lady Londonderry of his twin fears of Russia and revolutionary violence:

Once destroy the English aristocracy, and enthrone the commercial principle as omnipotent in this island, and there will be no repelling force which will prevent the Slavonians conquering the whole of the South of Europe.⁸⁸

"For the last three months", Disraeli told Mrs. Brydges-Williams in 1863, "it has been a struggle between the secret societies and ^{the} European millionaires".⁸⁹ This apocalyptic strain was to be a major theme of Lothair.

"Poetry is the safety valve of my passions, but I wish to act what I write", wrote Disraeli in his 'Mutilated Diary' in 1833.⁹⁰ Politics gave him this opportunity. His earliest aspirations were based on a love of intrigue, which he indulged both in the early novels - chiefly Vivian Grey - and in his first attempts at a spectacular public career.⁹¹ Even before entering Parliament he was involved in political schemes, as we have seen.⁹² But now he could spread himself in a grander field. During the Crimean War he secured an agent in the (opposition) Cabinet, as Blake describes:

It is not clear who the person was,⁹³ but from time to time he seems to have passed on news of their latest plans. Disraeli loved this kind of thing. Letters signed 'X', secret messages, code names, and all the paraphernalia of melodrama ever appealed to the author of Vivian Grey. On November 20 /1855/ he wrote to Derby at Knowsley without any super-description:

'Secret & Most Confidential

...Palmerston is for blowing up Cronstadt having got a discoverer who builds submarine ships worked by submarine crews, & who are practising on the Thames with, they say, complete success.

...My hand is too cold to write more.

You know who'.⁹⁴

Through foreign policy, Disraeli was enacting the fantasies of Contarini Fleming, Tancred, and Alroy, in a more tangible field, yet without surrendering his imaginative approach: "England is the Israel of his imagination",⁹⁵ said Sir John Skelton. Disraeli could not sympathise with the more pragmatic approach of his Cabinet colleagues, and it was this fundamental difference of approach which eventually caused a breach with the younger Derby.⁹⁶ Dreams of high diplomacy (eg. see Contarini Fleming, Book II, Chapter xiii⁹⁷) were realised at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Disraeli, "the lion of the Congress", vindicated his dicta on continental negotiations, which laid stress on the personal impact of the leading participants.

And he enjoyed a peculiar status as the literary politician:

Everyone wanted to see ^{him} and talk to him. His extraordinary career and mysterious origins fascinated the whole of the cosmopolitan world assembled at Berlin. Stories of the long-vanished romance of his youth were revived again and Henrietta Temple became the rage in the fashionable world.⁹⁸

One of Disraeli's greatest coups as Prime Minister was the purchase in 1875 of the Khedive of Egypt's interest in the Suez canal.⁹⁹ Fighting off competition from French syndicates, he secured the Khedive's agreement to sell and, if his private secretary Montagu Corry is to be believed, kept Corry himself outside the door of the Cabinet until they too assented. Corry then sped to Baron Rothschild who supplied the purchase money with a readiness worthy of Sidonia. Disraeli lost no time setting the affair in a properly dramatic light, reporting thus to Lady Bradford on November 25th:

We have had all the gamblers, capitalists, financiers of the world organized and platooned in bands of plunderers, arrayed against us, and secret emissaries in every corner, and ¹⁰⁰ have baffled them all, and have never been suspected.

However, Disraeli still had not secured a controlling interest in the company, and his exuberant reaction contrasted with the more sober appraisal of his colleagues. Derby declared in a speech at Edinburgh: "We were ^[he said] acting, simply to prevent a great highway filled with our shipping coming under the exclusive control of the foreign shareholders of a foreign company".¹⁰¹ But Disraeli had the edge in presenting the adventurous light he wanted: "And so a new historical myth came into being half consciously fabricated by the most potent myth-maker in British history",¹⁰² says Blake; and E.T. Raymond puts it more strongly: "It was, indeed, a novel; a corrected proof of Vivian Grey".¹⁰³

The following year saw fulfilment of another 'prophecy', when Disraeli had Queen Victoria crowned Empress of India by the Royal Titles Act, just as Fakredeen advised in Tancred: "Let the Queen of the English...transfer the seat of her empire from London to Delhi".¹⁰⁴ Even the 'practical' reason for this was to give the Queen a permanent position in the imagination of her Indian subjects (after the Indian Mutiny) and a prestige equal to that of the Russian Tsar: "It is only by the amplification of titles that you can often touch and satisfy the imagination of nations; and that is an element which Governments must not despise".¹⁰⁵ Disraeli even invoked Spenser in

his cause, since he had dedicated the Faerie Queen, "To the most mightie and magnificent Empresse, Elizabeth".

Whilst we may not agree with Georg Brandes that Tancred was "a veritable palimpsest of Disraeli's later foreign policy",¹⁰⁶ there are some uncanny resonances. Also foreshadowed in that novel was the takeover of Cyprus in 1878: "The English want Cyprus, and they will take it as compensation", says one of the oracles at Jerusalem.¹⁰⁷

Similarly, domestic issues were both susceptible to Romantic colouring, and offered scope to turn the dreams of the novelist into reality - political necessities allowing. Disraeli's approach was part of a broader Romantic revival affecting his whole generation: "Mr. Disraeli was stirred by the wave as well as others; and as to others it came in a feudal or^{an} ecclesiastical shape, to him it came in a political".¹⁰⁸ He experimented with a variety of bizarre schemes in his middle parliamentary period, which betrayed, "a somewhat visionary quality, the product of the study or the library, rather than of the Cabinet room or the House of Commons".¹⁰⁹ As a social reformer no less than a diplomatist, he was drawn to the emotive issues: "He could feel for the wretchedness of the poor. The contrast between the two nations appealed to his Byronic sense of drama, and he tried, within limits, to do something about it".¹¹⁰

Some commentators have given Disraeli rather too much credit for realising the aspirations he voiced in his early career, such as J. Cooke and L. Stevenson: "Not only did Disraeli's novels serve as propaganda for his doctrines; they were also put into practical effect".¹¹¹ M.E. Speare goes further:

The key to the acts of the Ministry from the years 1874 to 1880, not alone of social and economic welfare but also as they concern foreign policy^{and English Imperialism} must be sought in the years 1844, 1845, and 1847 - in Coningsby, Sybil, and Tancred.¹¹²

If Disraeli was influenced by the Romantic spirit embodied in his novels, it was expressed in a taste for the trappings of power as much as the realities. One of his tasks after the election victory of 1874 was to make selections for the Royal Household, which, as Blake remarks, probably gave him even more pleasure than forming his Cabinet: "Here was the world of Coningsby and Sybil".¹¹³ At the dinner of the Royal Literary Fund in 1852, Thackeray made amends for his stinging review of Coningsby eight years earlier:¹¹⁴

Could a romance writer in after years have a better or more wondrous hero than that of an individual who at twenty years of age wrote Vivian Grey, and a little while afterwards The Wondrous Tale of Alroy; who then explained to a breathless and listening world the great Asian mystery; who then went into politics, faced, fought and conquered the great political giant of those days; and who subsequently led thanes and earls to battle, while he caused reluctant squires to carry his lance? What a hero would not that be for some future novelist, and what a magnificent climax for the third volume of his story, when he led him, in his gold coat of office, to kiss the Queen's hand as the Chancellor of the Exchequer!¹¹⁵

It was an elaborate compliment, not a serious hypothesis, but Disraeli himself was not slow to invoke his novels as prophetic mysteries. He wrote to Lord Henry Lennox on July 18, 1852:

When you commence your studies, and read Coningsby, which I will give you in a single volume, you will see how I have treated those exclusive and limited principles, clearly unfitted for a great and expanding country, of various elements, like this of ours".¹¹⁶

And in similar vein to Mrs. Brydges-Williams:

You will receive tomorrow, or Monday, Tancred, which, notwithstanding it is in the form of a novel, I hope you will read, and read even with attention, as it is a vindication, and, I hope, a complete one, of the race from which we alike spring".¹¹⁷

In 1860 he reverted to the same note of ponderous self-justification, in reference to the Italian Revolution: "Once I said, in Coningsby, there is nothing like Race: it comprises all truths. The world will now comprehend that awful truth".¹¹⁸

In practice Disraeli was governed as much by expediency and the demands of his own career.¹¹⁹ Yet it was essential to his nature to fulfil at least the formal appearances of his political 'faith'. There was no strict need for his theatrical relationship with Queen Victoria, for many aspects of his foreign and imperial policy, for the tricks of speech and manner he employed in the House. But, in laying such stress on the importance of the imagination, he was bound to pay his debt to it in return. He shaped his career in draft in the pages of his novels, particularly the 'Political' Trilogy; and for a long time thereafter, deprived of real power, these were his chief influences:

Consider the influence of the novelist on the politician. There was a very long gap between the time when Disraeli was first elected to a seat in Parliament (27th July 1837) and the date (29th February 1868) on which he took up the reins of power as Prime Minister for the first time.¹²⁰

Ultimately, whatever we may think of Disraeli's pseudo-religious belief in the efficacy of the imaginative power as embodied in his literary nature, we must acknowledge that in a strange fashion it worked - in Disraeli's case at least. B. Cracroft reviewed the new Prime Minister's fortunes in 1868:

he must see, as well as idle outsiders, with what a curious irony the rising sun of his own imagination threw the long shadow of his own ideal of success before him.¹²¹

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2. Life as Art: Lothair, Endymion and Falconet.

'I know nothing about Whigs or Tories or Liberals, or any other new names which they invent', said Nigel. 'Nor do I know, or care to know, what Low Church means. There is but one Church, and it is catholic and apostolic; and if we act on its principles, there will be no need, and there ought to be no need, for any other form of government'.¹

For novels written by a Prime Minister, both Lothair and Endymion are, in some respects, remarkably apolitical. In place of the political analysis and polemic of Coningsby and Sybil, Endymion ponders on political affairs with almost academic detachment. Although the old themes are evident (eg. the notorious break-up of the Reform Ministry in 1834²), Disraeli, from the security of his position at the 'top of the greasy pole', could afford to dilate on them as a Victorian sage rather than as a politician who must convince us of his point of view. He had seen enough of politics to strip away its mystique, and, like Baron Sergius in Endymion, could pontificate patronisingly on the folly of ambition:

'The most powerful men are not public men', said the baron. 'A public man is responsible, and a responsible man is a slave...You will find this out some day'.³

Endymion brings politics within our reach by two contradictory processes. The political world of the early nineteenth-century is portrayed as a restricted affair, the plaything of the more exclusive society of the time. Thus one of the great political hostesses, Zenobia, reassures the elder Mr. Ferrars:

'Never mind Lord Waverley and such addlebrains...So long as we have the court, the Duke, and Lord Lyndhurst on our side, we can afford to laugh at such conceited poltroons. His mother was my dearest friend, and I know he used to have fits'.⁴

The Bedchamber Plot of 1839 is headed by an individual already familiar to the reader before the episode begins:

But it was true; there was a hitch, and in four-and-twenty hours the cause of the hitch was known. It seemed that the ministry really had resigned, but Berengaria, Countess of Montfort, had not followed their example.⁵

The same Lady Montfort, frustrated by unobliging party officials, exclaims petulantly of her attempts to find a Parliamentary seat for her protegee Endymion: "When I go to them and ask for a seat, I expect a seat, as I would a shawl at Howell and James' if I asked for one. Instead of that they only make difficulties".⁶

With the passing of time, however, the political world is

opened up to new classes, but here again Disraeli had prepared representative characters to embody the process: the Beaumarises, the Rodneys, Endymion's colleagues at Somerset House and in the Union Society; Job Thornberry, Jorrocks and Mr. Vigo. So when Endymion travels north "to the great scenes of national labour", and attends an Anti-Corn-Law meeting, he finds that his old neighbour, Job Thornberry, is the star speaker of the night.⁷ The same 'election' which secures the hero's seat in Parliament sees most of his acquaintances in the House too, a far cry from the agonising reversals of fortune which preceded Coningsby's first step in his political career.⁸ Even party divisions count for less than old loyalties, for although Mr. Rodney sits opposite Endymion with the Tories, we are told: "It became gradually understood, that if ever the government was in difficulties, Mr. Rodney's vote might be counted on".⁹ Thus Disraeli softened political realities to safeguard the mellow conclusion of his last full novel.

Disraeli's earlier novels expressed an ideal political faith which was doomed to be frustrated by political necessities even at the time of writing. But in these last works he could create a 'might-have-been' career for himself without fear of compromise. Endymion is both a surrogate figure and autobiography: climbing from obscurity, his ultimate success is even grander than that of earlier Disraelian heroes, of whom he is the distillation. It is an unashamed romance, an irreversible rise in fortune, as Endymion is 'set up' as a gentleman by Mr. Vigo, adopted by the Neuchatels (representatives of the growing power of finance), tutored by women and famous statesmen, and finally guided by Lady Montfort to that sphere of politics which captivated Disraeli himself - foreign affairs.¹⁰

Lothair is fêted and fabulously wealthy from the outset, a surrogate of a different kind: when he wishes to influence the religious tone of the country, he does not simply contribute to local causes, but plans a metropolitan cathedral. Minor doctrinal points concern him less than "the reconciliation of Christendom and the influence of architecture on religion".¹¹ In Italy he achieves that military adventure denied to Disraeli in 1831 (when he sought to enlist in the Turkish army in their Albanian campaign). Lothair's majority celebrations outdo those even of Tancred. He is lacking in just one respect - artistic talent - thus it is in Phoebus that Disraeli indulges himself in a picture of the fabulous and refined lifestyle which is the reward of the successful artist. Lothair is

not troubled by the political responsibilities of Disraeli's other heroes, for his conscience stretches over a wider field altogether. 'Political' struggles in Lothair are sublimated into the manoeuvrings within ecclesiastical circles for the hero's allegiance, and the conflict between the forces of orthodoxy and of revolutionary liberalism. Thus Monsignor Berwick forecasts the 'conquest' of Scotland:

'We sent two of our best men into Scotland some time ago, and they have invented a new church, called the United Presbyterians. John Knox himself was never more violent, or more mischievous. The United Presbyterians will do the business: they will render Scotland simply impossible to live in; and then, when the crisis arrives, the distracted and despairing millions will find refuge in the bosom of their only mother.'¹²

Disraeli's regard for the power of the Press is reflected in Monsignor Catesby's triumph as he reads an article in "an Ultramontane organ", which floated the idea of Lothair's conversion to Rome even as it described the conjecture as "premature". The same piece announces Cardinal Grandison's intention to turn the flank of his Anglican colleague by celebrating High Mass in the episcopal capital. Throughout the celebration of Lothair's majority, rival clerics intrigue for his confidence with a ruthlessness hardly befitting their profession. Lothair is not a serious treatise on church affairs, but an infinitely more entertaining dynamic of political-religious scheming conducted, however, with strict regard for the forms of polite society in which it is set. It is more relaxed than Coningsby or Sybil. In both Lothair and Endymion the political focus has been broadened: the result is two works which are less intense than the earlier novels, but better as pure fiction. M.E. Spears says of Lothair:

It is not a novel with any expressed or premeditated purpose, but it is rather the comment of a statesman...And being a novelist and not a biographer or^{er} historian, Disraeli chose only to reflect out of the critical years in European history upon which this novel is based, those historical and political phenomena which interested him as a novelist.¹³

Despite the hero's implicit acceptance at the end of the novel of orthodox values (represented in his betrothal to Lady Corisande), it is the intervening phases through which he passes which interest us. The 'divine' Theodora and her revolutionary colleagues are much more compelling than the 'establishment' figures. The qualities of

the mercenary are captured in Captain Bruges, who combines a glamorous lifestyle with strict self-discipline, and Disraeli's identification with him is obvious. When Bruges subsequently meets Lothair journeying to Jerusalem, he praises his current employers in unison with Disraeli himself: "The Turks are a brave people, and there is nothing in their system, political or religious, which jars with my convictions".¹⁴ It is Bruges who declares to Mirandola: "There are more secret societies in France at this moment than at any period since '85, though you hear nothing of them".¹⁵ Theodora declares before Viterbo: "It is a mighty struggle; it is a struggle between the Church and the secret societies; and it is a death struggle".¹⁶ In Endymion Baron Sergius dwells on the 'three glorious days' at Paris, adding: "I know these people; it is a fraternity, not a nation. Europe is honeycombed with their secret societies. They are spread all over Spain. Italy is entirely mined."¹⁷ If the novelist was again drawing upon politics for inspiration, he chose to reflect a highly-coloured and idiosyncratic aspect of it. And if he was haunted by this apocalyptic vision, he was fascinated by it too:

Speaking as a fallen Tory Premier he deprecated the situation in which the country found itself in 1880: 'Old England seems to be tumbling to pieces; he complained to his confidante Lady Chesterfield, and at the same time contemplated a novel Falconet whose putative hero looks forward to the day when the whole world will tumble to pieces and hails the prospect as a consummation devoutly to be wished.'¹⁸

Once again, therefore, these last novels fulfilled a rôle as Disraeli's 'secret life'.

he found political extremism at once repulsive in practice and yet irresistibly attractive as a speculative theory on which a creative writer could build an intellectual drama second to none in human interest.¹⁹

As D.E. Painting goes on to point out, Disraeli was an avid reader of secret-service reports. He was fascinated by the literary potential of events such as Garibaldi's visit to London in 1864, or the looming threat of Fenian terrorism in 1867. The International Association of Working Men was formed in the same year. In 1869 he was struck by Sergei Nechaev's murder of a fellow-nihilist, Ivanov, in Moscow. His last visit to the Lords on the 15th March, 1881, was to second a vote of condolence to the Queen on Alexander II's violent death in St. Petersburg some days earlier. "The novels are his release from impassive calm", said F. Swinnerton;²⁰ that impassivity

which was the mask he imposed on himself in creating an image of the Tory statesman. The more orthodox the mask, the more he felt the need to question the values he was required to endorse:

All his novels at every stage of his chequered career reveal a similarly independent outlook, a similar refusal to conform in depth to the established pattern in Church, State, or Society. Time and again his novels tend to subtly undermine the reader's faith in the attitudes they seek to affirm.²¹

This was true to some extent of all Disraeli's novels. But the early works had no experience of political or social life to have any framework against which to rebel: rather, they reveal a hungering for acceptance. Coningsby and Sybil proclaim a new statement of faith, but it is to operate within the existing - albeit revitalised - political system. With Lothair and Endymion the greater demands of his political responsibilities produced in Disraeli a correspondingly more extravagant tendency to reject orthodox values altogether. There is also the offhand attitude of a successful man afflicted by the reaction which almost inevitably follows the fulfilment of ambitions. In a study of Conrad, Ian Watt cites this as a characteristic of many great authors, particularly in a civilization which has lost any concept of an universally-accepted objective:

we must be on our guard against the criteria of the historian of ideas, which naturally place most value on literary works which are ideologically representative; whereas the greatest authors actually seem not so much to reflect the intellectual system of their age as to express more or less directly its inherent contradictions, or the very partial nature of its capacity for dealing with the facts of experience. This seems to be true of Chaucer and Shakespeare; and it tends to become truer as we come down to the modern world, in which no single intellectual system/ has commanded anything like general acceptance.²²

One might stop short of enrolling Disraeli as one of the "greatest" of authors. But he had a great mind, in the sense that his social position and his own highly original mental powers gave him a far greater perspective on his society than most of his contemporaries, as F. Espinasse affirms: "I remarked particularly that when he spoke of his Conservative colleagues and followers he always said 'they' and not 'we' as if he regarded himself as with them, not of them".²³ In this vein Disraeli, with tongue in cheek, has Phoebus say in Lothair in praise of the English aristocracy: "they/^{most} resemble the old Hellenic race; excelling in athletic sports, speaking no other language than their own, and never reading".²⁴ In

Endymion, when old Mr. Ferrars protests at young Job Thornberry's radical social views, we feel the latter has the better of the exchange:

'Oh! my respectable parent will do very well without me, sir. Only let him be able to drive into Bamford on market day, and get two or three linendrapers to take their hats off to him, and he will be happy enough, and always ready to die for our glorious Constitution'.²⁵

In time, Job is himself upstaged by his subordinate, Enoch Craggs, who describes him succinctly: "He is the most inveterate capitalist of the whole lot".²⁶

The cant of the English commercial ethic is gently mocked when Prince Florestan regains his imperial throne and, to general relief, declares for the English alliance: "and the English people were very pleased by his declaration, which in their apprehension meant national progress, the amelioration of society, and increased exports".²⁷

At the other ideological extreme from the 'revolutionary' party in Lothair are the Catholics, headed by Cardinal Grandison. They are also treated with considerable sympathy, expressing some opinions on contemporary ideas of civilization which are clearly identifiable with those of Disraeli himself. Citing the loss of respect for the sacrament of marriage, the tolerance of divorce, and the decline of religious education, Grandison remarks:

And this system, which would substitute for domestic sentiment and Divine belief the unlimited and licentious action of human intellect and human will, is called progress. What is it but a revolt against God!²⁸

In the same chapter he says: "if the Church were to be destroyed, Europe would be divided between the Atheist and the Communist".²⁹ Later he prophesies with startling accuracy the course this 'progress' will take: the alienation of civil government from the Church; the destruction of belief in the family; and the introduction of secular education.³⁰ Monsignor Catesby maintains the assault on evolutionism first mounted in Tancred:

'Instead of Adam, our ancestry is traced to the most grotesque of creatures; thought is phosphorous, the soul complex nerves, and our moral sense a secretion of sugar. Do you want these views in England? Rest assured they are coming!'.³¹

The aspirations of the 'Catholic party' must ultimately be rejected, like those of the revolutionaries, for the sake of a rather colourless Anglicanism. But, in both cases, not before they can give

vent to ideas which Disraeli might not have wished to acknowledge in his own name. As in Coningsby and Sybil, but now on a wider scale, the novelist went out to an enlarged political world for his subject matter in Lothair and Endymion, whilst the politician in turn used the novel to comment on aspects of that world. Since the political world which Disraeli chooses to encompass in these last novels is that much more widely defined, they are correspondingly better balanced and more comprehensive. The author continues to express his own opinions, but less insistently. All this makes them better novels from the purely literary point of view.

But even as Disraeli's immediate political concerns became less urgent, and he could afford to adopt a more detached attitude, there were personal issues which demanded expression and which now correspondingly rose in importance. The question of his ancestral race and faith is brought up again, often at the most unlikely moments. When in Lothair the republican army threatens Rome, Disraeli pictures the Jews in the city exulting at the prospect of a revenge delayed by 2,000 years: "The Jews, in their quarter, spoke nothing, but exchanged a curious glance, as if to say, 'Has it come at last? And will they indeed serve her as she served Sion?'"³² Yet the republicans themselves are dedicated to the eradication of "Semitic influence", which they identify with the religions they oppose. From a different standpoint Phoebus declares: "But nothing can be done until the ~~Ayran~~ race are extricated from Semitism".³³ When one of Disraeli's characters criticizes things Jewish he thereby condemns himself authorially, so that however much both Phoebus and the republicans carry Disraeli's approval in other respects, they stumble as regards the question dearest to his heart.

The pattern of Tancred reappears in Lothair, in the hero's desire "to visit the cradle of my faith";³⁴ and there he meets one 'Paraclete', who raises the issues of the earlier novel.³⁵ The theme makes a brief but inevitable appearance in Endymion, when Baron Sergius, who is something of a political oracle, advises the hero:

As you advance in life, and get experience in affairs, the Jews will cross you everywhere. They have long been stealing into our secret diplomacy, which they have almost appropriated; in another quarter of a century they will claim their share of open government.³⁶

Disraeli also uses Endymion to pay some personal tributes as part of his political farewell, in place of the tribute to his party which is notably lacking. A central theme of the novel is the subtle

influence of women in public affairs; in itself a compliment to a succession of women to whom he was indebted in his own political career. These included Sarah Austen, his own sister Sarah, his wife Mary Anne, Lady Londonderry, Mrs. Brydges-Williams and Queen Victoria, but also many other hostesses whose favour was particularly important in the early years. With premature foresight Myra Endymion tells her brother: "You will find friends in life, and they will be women", even before he departs for London.³⁷ In the course of the novel the women around Endymion rise to positions of influence. Imogene Rodney finds herself in the Tory camp as Lady Beaumaris, but this does not prevent her continued support:

'She is Countess of Beaumaris', added Myra, dwelling slowly and with some unction on the title, 'and may be a powerful friend to you; and I am Countess of Roehampton, and am your friend, also not quite devoid of power. And there are other countesses, I suspect, on whose good wishes you may rely.'³⁸

Endymion appears almost apathetic beside his more determined patronesses. In Chapter lxxv Lady Montfort warns him of the dissolution of Parliament, and urges:

'All you have got to do is to make up your mind that you will be in the next parliament, and you will succeed; for everything in this world depends upon will'.

'I think everything in this world depends upon woman', said Endymion.

'It is the same thing' said Berengaria.³⁹

Disraeli also pays an oblique tribute to his devoted private secretary, Montagu Corry, for whom he secured the title of Lord Rowton as a reward for his services. Ostensibly referring to Endymion and Sidney Wilton he declares: "The relations between a minister and his secretary are, or at least should be, among the finest that can subsist between two individuals".⁴⁰ Many other figures from Disraeli's 50 years in public life are passed in review for the last time. In Chapter xxii there is an epitaph upon George Smythe, Disraeli's former 'Young England' associate, whose reincarnation as Waldershare in the novel omits the tragedy of his wayward life-style and early death, but gives a fairer picture than the idealisation of Smythe as the hero of Coningsby:

Waldershare was profligate, but sentimental; unprincipled, but romantic; the child of whim, and the slave of an imagination so freakish and deceptive, that it was always impossible to foretell his course.⁴¹

But as a rule the satire of figures Disraeli had known is more

in evidence than the tributes: the author of Vivian Grey rather than that of Henrietta Temple. Thus the politician continued to use the novel for 'personal-political' purpose to the end of his dual career, although now with greater discernment and urbanity. In Lothair's Cardinal Grandison, for example, Disraeli took his revenge on Cardinal Manning, with whom he was in touch in 1868 over the proposal to grant a charter and financial support to a Roman Catholic University in Dublin. Disraeli was looking to Manning to reconcile the Irish hierarchy to the scheme. But when Gladstone went further and proposed the total disestablishment of the Anglican hierarchy in Ireland, Manning dropped Disraeli immediately. But, as Blake says: "literary statesmen have a means of getting their own back denied to their less articulate brethren. The character of Cardinal Grandison in Lothair was Disraeli's revenge".⁴² Grandison is credited for his dedication to the Catholic cause, but we are left also with the impression of a dangerous and at times hypocritical schemer. Ten years later, in Endymion, Disraeli redressed the balance by portraying Manning as the admirable Nigel Penruddock, but again there was a political cause even for this. Manning had quarrelled with Gladstone over the Vatican Decrees, and told Disraeli that he thought Gladstone "the most revengeful man he ever knew".⁴³

Grandison's opposite number in the Anglican hierarchy, 'The Bishop', is a hardly more flattering portrait of 'Soapy' Samuel Wilberforce, a firm enemy from the time Disraeli passed him over for the See of London for his own candidate, Bishop Jackson, a far less eminent figure.

On a different satirical tack, the 'Oxford Professor' in Chapter xxiv of Lothair provoked a letter of complaint (and hence of tacit acknowledgement) from Goldwin Smith of Cornell University, former Regius Professor of History at Oxford: "Disraeli was delighted. He was getting his own back for the anonymous abuse heaped on him by Goldwin Smith some twenty years earlier in the Morning Chronicle".⁴⁴ The Professor is brought into the novel only as a passing acquaintance of Colonel Campian and Theodora, and the author's purpose is relatively unsubtle criticism which he launches with a minimum of preamble:

He was clever, extremely well-informed, so far as books can make a man knowing, but unable to profit even by that limited experience of life from a restless vanity and overflowing conceit, which prevented him from ever observing or thinking of anything but himself. He was gifted with a

great command of words, which took the form of endless exposition, varied by sarcasm and passages of ornate jargon. He was the last person one would have expected to recognise, in an Oxford Professor; but we live in times of transition.⁴⁵

Endymion contains the standard criticism of Peel, albeit almost thirty years after his death. In Chapter lxxix, designated simply as 'The Minister', he steals the right of reply on a question of foreign policy from his under-secretary, Waldershare. The element of autobiography is clear:

The Minister was wrong. He was not fond of trusting youth, but it is a confidence which should be exercised, particularly in the conduct of a popular assembly...he made a personal enemy of one who naturally might have ripened into a devoted follower.⁴⁶

Although the relationship between Endymion and Sidney Wilton at one point reflects that of Montagu Corry to the author himself, in Chapter c it is used to refer to Disraeli's frustrations/^{with}the elder Lord Derby in his earlier career. It is proposed that Florestan, now Emperor of France, should be invited to England on a state visit:

There had arisen a public feeling, that the ally who had served us so well should be invited to visit again a country wherein he had so long sojourned, and where he was so much appreciated. The only evidence that the Prime Minister gave that he was conscious of this feeling was an attack of gout.⁴⁷

It had been Derby's standard ploy to retire from taxing or awkward issues on the excuse of his gout.

Most harshly treated in Endymion, however, is St. Barbe, the hero's colleague at Somerset House, who is almost the personification of jealousy. Blake takes him for a malicious representation of Thackeray, in return for his parody of Disraeli and Coningsby in 'Punch's Prize Novelists' in 1847.⁴⁸ St. Barbe stands unsuccessfully for the Athenaeum, just as Thackeray failed to secure election in 1850.⁴⁹ He is so suspicious, and so resentful of the success of others, that at times the satire defeats itself in its crudity. Thus St. Barbe dilates on Mrs. Neuchatel to Endymion after his introduction to Hainault House: "She praised one of my works she thought I wrote, but between ourselves it was written by that fellow Seymour Hicks, who *imitates* me; but I would not put her right, as dinner might have been announced every moment".⁵⁰ In Chapter lxxvii, invited by Endymion to dine with Lord Montfort, he rapidly reverses his opinion of the aristocracy:

'I will dine with Lord Montfort. There is no one who appreciates so completely and so highly the old nobility of Eng-

land as myself. They are a real aristocracy. None of the pinchbeck pedigrees and ormolu titles of the continent... Sympathy from such a class is to be valued.⁵¹

Thackeray may also have offended Disraeli in purely literary terms, taking aspects of Lord Steyne in Vanity Fair (a scheming agent, Italian mistress and parasitical hanger-on), from Lord Monmouth rather than directly from the original, the Marquis of Hertford.

In some respects, however, Thackeray's cap does not fit St. Barbe, as J.D. Merritt has pointed out.⁵² Thackeray had been dead many years, and that review by him in Punch was a quarter of a century old when Disraeli began the writing of Endymion. After that, in 1851, Thackeray had made that speech in praise of Disraeli at the Royal Literary Fund dinner, sending a copy to Mrs. Disraeli to show, "that some authors can praise other authors behind their backs".⁵³ In Chapter c Endymion secures a pension for a now-impooverished St. Barbe, which does not square with Thackeray, but does fit the case of Carlyle, who humbly accepted a stipend from Disraeli in 1874, although up to that time he had been implacably hostile, as he said himself of his benefactor:

He is the only man I almost never spoke of except with contempt; and if there is anything of scurrility anywhere chargeable against me, he is the subject of it; and yet see, here he comes with a pan of hot coals for my guilty head.⁵⁴

Yet five years later as Disraeli wrote Endymion, Carlyle called him: "a cursed old Jew, not worth his weight in cold bacon", and: "an accursed being, the worst man who ever lived".⁵⁵ Hence, in Endymion, Chapter c:

Notwithstanding these great plans, it came in time to Endymion's ear, that poor St. Barbe was in terrible straits. Endymion delicately helped him and then obtained for him a pension, and not an inconsiderable one. Relieved from anxiety, St. Barbe resumed his ancient and natural vein. He passed his days in decrying his friend and patron...⁵⁶

The same reciprocity is at work in this period as in Disraeli's earlier life, in his using the novel as an outlet for expression, whilst at the same time drawing on the experiences of the public man for much of its content. This is evident not only in that vision of a Continent threatened by revolutionary turmoil, but simply in the range of fictional characters, most of whom, however, are based on originals. Only a proportion of these appear as the subject of tributes or satires: the rest are used simply to give life and in-

dividualising details - those elements that did not come so readily to Disraeli's imagination - to his panorama of public affairs. Lothair himself had a prototype in the 3rd Marquis of Bute, who really was converted to Catholicism, and travelled to Jerusalem. By another curious instance of Disraeli's semi-prophetic knack, Bute was married not long afterwards by Cardinal Manning:

There was a sequel even stranger than anything in the novel. On 16 April 1872, the Marquess of Bute was married at Brompton oratory. The ceremony was performed by Cardinal Manning. Mass was said by Monsignor Capel. One of the five witnesses to the ceremony was B. Disraeli.⁵⁷

Behind Captain Bruges we find Paul Cluseret, mercenary and republican, who also went on to fulfil aspects of the fictional career given to him by Disraeli, by taking service with the Turks. Phoebus was based on Frederick (later 1st Baron) Leighton, a court painter and a noted admirer of neoclassical art. In Endymion the gallery is extended to include the great figures of continental politics: Metternich (Baron Sergius), Napoleon III (Prince Florestan) and Bismark (the Count of Ferroll), who prophesies the unification of Germany, "by blood and iron".⁵⁸ The Marquis of Hertford, after figuring in Coningsby as Lord Monmouth, reappears as Lord Montfort, the epitome of stately egocentricity. The owner of Brentham was based on the Duke of Abercorn, a peer Disraeli created in real life as well as in fiction. Bertie Tremaine and his brother Tremaine Bertie were perhaps intended for Edward Bulwer Lytton and his brother, Lytton Bulwer, respectively.

The critics seized on this aspect of Endymion as a resumption of Disraeli's old roman à clef writing habits: "the author of Endymion is but the maturer parent of Vivian Grey...what he did at twenty-five, he is doing at seventy-five, only doing it better".⁵⁹ The technique is indeed found throughout Disraeli's novels, but in Lothair and Endymion he deployed it with greater skill. The interest of these characters is not in mere representation of the original, or in book-making. Having passed through the phase of the 'Political' Trilogy, where characters all too often acted as political ciphers, Disraeli reverts partially to a more balanced course in which a figure concerns us both in himself and for some general values he represents. His role now lies between the function he might have had in Coningsby or in Sybil, and the limited and purely individual identity he would have had in Vivian Grey, for example, where Dis-

raeli could only represent figures who impinged on him through (limited) personal acquaintance. Phoebus, therefore, reflects the Victorian reaction against utilitarian and puritan ethics, in favour of Matthew Arnold's 'Hellenic' principle. In glorifying Aryan values at the expense of the Semitic (if we again credit Disraeli with the gift of prophecy) he also prefigures the rise of Naziism. The balance of authorial approval between the characters in these final novels enabled Disraeli to explore a range of personal issues without (as previously) annexing figures as mouthpieces. There is something of him in each. So Phoebus also hits back at the critics who had assailed Disraeli from the publication of Vivian Grey onwards. After the unveiling of his picture in Chapter xxxv, the artist prophesies gloomily: "Tomorrow...the critics will commence. You know who the critics are? The men who have failed in literature and art".⁶⁰ Not that the so-called successes escape either. In Chapter lxxii he remarks in passing: "If you want to know what envy is you should live among artists".⁶¹ It is a markedly more effective method of criticism than, for example, the use of St. Barbe, whose obviously satirical function puts the reader on his guard immediately.

Theodora similarly is both an individual and the adored embodiment of republicanism. Even the satirical portrait of Goldwin Smith is aimed not just at an individual but at the strong reforming pressure on the universities of the time. As early as 1854 Disraeli had defended Oxford against Gladstone's attempted reforms: "Give me Oxford, free and independent, with all its anomalies and imperfections".⁶²

Grandison, of course, reflects the contemporary resurgence of Catholic sentiment generally, as well as the individual Cardinal Manning. If indeed he was recast as Nigel Penruddock in Endymion, we can also see in Penruddock aspects of associated figures; D.G. Paz suggests that he is an amalgam of Newmann, Manning and Wiseman.⁶³

Endymion is in some respects Disraeli himself, but a Whig Disraeli. He was purportedly based on Charles Dilke, a rising young politician of the 1870's, who, however, lacked Endymion's altruism and figured five years later in a scandalous divorce case.⁶⁴ The Endymion/Sidney Wilton connection reflects aspects of Disraeli's relationships with Lord Lyndhurst, Derby and Montagu Corry, as we have seen above.⁶⁵ Myra Endymion is both Disraeli's sister Sarah, who devoted herself to his political ambitions after the death of her fiancé William Meredith in 1831, and, as Lady Roehampton, the hostess whose receptions were such an important part of Palmerston's

career. Although some of the peripheral characters are taken almost directly from eminent figures of the day, it is not done in the crudely exploitative manner of Vivian Grey. The Saturday Review referred to his "favourite reproduction of real personages in a more or less transparent mask",⁶⁶ but others felt that Endymion could have gone further in this respect. Montagu Corry received a letter from the publishers, Longmans, on the 9th February, 1880:

Some have remarked the author's object was to portray some of the chief incidents [sic] and characters which have already passed from the scene. Might I go so far as to say that these reminiscences constitute the charm of the work and if Lord B could see his way to state that it was from them he drew the inspiration of his tale, it would be adding a fresh interest of considerable importance to the cause of Endymion.⁶⁷

But this was not done in fact. The Daily Telegraph reported that readers "must prepare for a deep disappointment if they expected political revelations, official confessions, or the more exciting material of personal polemics".⁶⁸ The Observer remarked:

It is the portraiture of personages and of society that confers yet more interest on these papers; though readers will vainly look for absolute portraits. Here and there one thinks to catch a feature of some public bore or block-head. But suddenly his aspect changes, and the cap seems to fit some other head.⁶⁹

In his earlier works Disraeli displayed an assortment of character 'types' moving sometimes awkwardly in the same context: from autobiograph/^{ical} recreations of himself or of acquaintances, through thinly disguised portraits, to creations of his often grotesque imagination (particularly in Vivian Grey, part two). In the 'Political' Trilogy there was a tendency to subjugate characterisation to political principles, which at its worst produces figures like Mr. Kremlin, Mr. Wriggle and Mr. Thorough-Base, etc. (which fail on both artistic and political grounds, since we are not inclined to take them seriously as symptoms of the disease in the body-politic). To some extent these conflicting tendencies were harmonised in Lothair and Endymion. A figure may draw on the individualising characteristics of an original, but also represent a movement or social trend of which he is a part. Between copying from life, and creating a these, passing meanwhile through the inevitable phases of each extreme, Disraeli found a balance in these last works. It was both the experiences and the demands alike of his political career which did much to take Disraeli the novelist through these stages in his

literary apprenticeship. Politics provided both the original subjects on which Disraeli's limited (in the original, creative sense) imagination could work, and the essential discipline of a political purpose. In Coningsby and Sybil the situation of each character is shown as an interdependent part of the wider domain of public affairs with increasing assurance: now this is carried even further. Lothair's betrothal to Corisande at the end of that novel signifies acceptance of a range of values consistent with the English establishment. In Endymion the characters' lives are ruled by politics, simply because the political sphere is no longer just a matter of Parliament, but is central to the whole social system. Compare Contarini Fleming, where politics is another world, an option open to the hero, which he can taste and then put down again. In Sybil political life is both less important in itself, and yet of considerably greater importance as the catalyst at the heart of human affairs. In Endymion the process of 'osmosis' between public and personal affairs has advanced. In the early part of the novel Disraeli struggles rather obviously, as in Coningsby, to link the fortunes of the Ferrars family with the political events. For example, the O'Connell election has the side-effect of displacing "one of the new ministers who had been preferred to a place which Mr. Ferrars might have filled".⁷⁰ But a more convincing connection is established in Chapter ix, with Wellington's failure to form a government in 1830. Ferrars is just one of many adherents to whom the news spells ruin, as "individual misfortunes are merged in the greater catastrophe of the country".⁷¹ Hope returns in Chapter xviii with the recall of Peel from Italy in 1834. But: "The general election in 1834-5, though it restored the balance of parties, did not secure to Sir Robert Peel a majority, and the anxiety of the family at Hurstley was proportionate to the occasion".⁷²

Discussion on political affairs in Endymion takes place between the characters rather than in the authorial voice, and it is that much broader when they are linked by ties other than the purely political, or, indeed, belong to opposite camps. In Chapter xl Waldershare and his uncle Sidney Wilton cover a spectrum of political opinions in their tour d'horizon of the current scene, which significantly concludes with the visit incognito of the French pretender, Prince Florestan.⁷³ In Chapter lxiv Lord Roehampton's "great coup in foreign affairs", long prophesied by Lady Montfort, revives the flagging fortunes of the government, secures their adherents a

"right merrie Christmas", and infuriates the hostesses of the opposite party such as Zenobia.⁷⁴ Disraeli now knew the political world well enough to see it as no more than the interaction of human beings on a grander scale. Wilton offers a secretaryship to Endymion, and with it a rise in income and prestige, but much depends on the overall fortunes of the government, which is struggling to conciliate the wayward Mountain faction, led by the radical Jorrocks.⁷⁵ This interdependence is also seen to operate in reverse, when Myra's betrothal to (the now) Emperor Florestan shatters the lifelong dream of Sidney Wilton to marry her himself, and he is driven to melancholic despair and early death. Hence the post of Premier is left vacant for Endymion eventually to take over.

Disraeli could execute such manoeuvres even with public history because he was writing with hindsight; after many years in Parliament he could map out a political novel with some assurance. He not only had a wealth of material to draw upon, but *fortunately history cannot be treated with total freedom, and this prevented excessive autobiography or fantasy.* He worked backwards to weave the events of fifty years into his fictional scheme, and for the first time was able to create in Endymion several separate but related strains of narrative. We are introduced, for example, to the Rodneys before their full significance becomes apparent: in time they play host to the hero, a Tory MP. (Waldershare), and the Pretender to the French throne (Florestan).⁷⁶ Through the Rodneys we meet Mr. Vigo, who is to make that generous offer of financial support to Endymion in Chapter xxiii, and later heads the railway boom of the 1840's. Florestan first appears in Chapter iv when his mother, Agrippina, prepares for death and entrusts his education to Mr. Wilton. It is an apparently isolated episode, easily passed over in its lack of obvious relevance, just as frequently in life itself we only learn the full significance of an event long after its occurrence. Similarly, Myra Endymion's introduction to the Neuchatels in Chapter xxx is the first link in a chain bringing her from her father's tragic suicide to a part in society as Adriana Neuchatel's companion and thence to a position of social and political influence as Lady Roehampton, finally crowning her Empress of France. Fairytale it may be, but it is at least developed with considerable skill.

Had Disraeli not been a politician, he would not have survived as a writer either. Politics gave him what Dr. Leavis termed in The Great Tradition:⁷⁷ "a principle of organization, and a principle of development".⁷⁷ As S.M. Smith said: "The urgency of a pressing contem-

porary problem and its importance to the society for whom the novelist is writing can give a directing purpose to the book and help to give it unity and a significant form".⁷⁸

Part two of Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming exemplify Disraeli's course when he had no objective purpose to absorb him, degenerating into barely-disguised autobiography and introspection, hung on a loose string of picaresque adventures, and featuring unrealistic and sometimes grotesque figures. In Coningsby and Sybil he matured by applying his talents to a subject outside of himself, although this is taken to extremes in parts, with passages of pure polemic or regurgitation of government reports. The novelist must steer a course between "The belief that factual accuracy produces artistic truth", and "the novelist's temptation of ignoring facts of human nature and experience in order to present his case".⁷⁹ Having assimilated these tendencies, Disraeli was able in Lothair and Endymion to produce his most balanced works: "being a novelist, and not a biographer, Disraeli chose to reflect out of the critical years of European history upon which the novel is based, those historical and political phenomena which interested him as a novelist".⁸⁰ Freed from the immediate pressure of political purpose, we see a more relaxed Disraeli in both the progress of the narrative and the characterisation, producing two works which deserve the title of art in their own right:

Lothair is perhaps the best of all Disraeli's novels. Coningsby is the nearest rival, but it is too much of a novel-with-a-purpose to come off quite so successfully. In Lothair, too, we are spared the Dis-Rothschildishness which can be so tiresome elsewhere.⁸¹

for all its defects, Endymion remains one of the most charming and readable of Disraeli's novels - and it is readable not simply because of what it tells us about the author but for its own sake, an enchanting fantasy, witty, gay, and good-humoured.⁸²

Disraeli's best novels, Lothair and Endymion, were the result of a very long apprenticeship in the course of which he had to learn to subordinate a whole mass of private preoccupations to the legitimate demands of the art of novel writing...on the whole, he is inclined to depend upon sources rather too heavily until, with Lothair and Endymion, he breaks free and produces sustained works written directly from his own experience and imagination.⁸³

But Disraeli had one further task in his political-literary career to fulfil, and he set about it in a work left unfinished at his death, and published in The Times in 1905. Critics assume that

the title would have been taken from the emerging 'hero', Joseph Toplady Falconet, who is a satire on the one figure Disraeli had conspicuously failed to deal with in literary form so far, his rival Gladstone. To judge from Falconet's background and temperament, the allusion is not hard to detect: "With all his abilities and acquirements, Joseph Toplady Falconet was essentially a prig, and among prigs there is a freemasonry which never fails. All the prigs spoke of him as the coming man."⁸⁵

Falconet enters Parliament almost by default, taking over a seat vacated by a noble family who are indebted to the Falconet business. Thereafter his career is cut short by the end of the fragment itself. The same themes of revolutionary conspiracy and nihilism feature in Lothair, however, embodied in figures such as the 'Unknown', who is dedicated to "the destruction of the species".⁸⁶ The political reference has broadened along with the spirit of scepticism. Gaston, heir to the Disraelian tradition of self-willed young noblemen, declares, "Parliaments are worn out", and almost grudgingly allows: "I do not suppose that because man is worn out even this little planet which we call ours has not yet some future".⁸⁷

Hence that process of 'osmosis' goes one stage further. The mingling of Disraeli's personal and political concerns produces a diverging interest in world affairs (and even in the future of earth itself), along with greater concentration on some few issues which preoccupied him still as an individual. In this case the 'issue' was Gladstone himself. The wheel came full circle and once again we see the author of Vivian Grey. But in the meantime Disraeli had achieved firm status as both politician and novelist.

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7. Endymion, 273-277.
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3. Disraeli's Conservative Ideal.

Disraeli's political record might not fall within the scope of the student of literature, but for the fact that it cannot be separated from his literary nature. He was unusually self-conscious, having some regard always for the dramatic effect of his actions, as if the hero of a novel. Thus, as R.B. Hamilton's definition of his attitude to politics as an art (see above, Chapter 4, Section 1, note 75) suggests, he carried his fictional shadow with him even into Parliament. This certainly affected his handling of political issues - we may also question how it structured the content of his political principles; and, indeed, whether it left room for any principles at all. The danger of such flexibility is of justifying a total lack of policy on the pretext of eschewing abstract systems. By over-stressing a 'politics of spirit' one might rob it of any authentic form altogether.

An ideal involves a necessary tension: between the inevitable and valuable influence of one's own nature, and the situation or disposition one works towards. Disraeli's Conservative ideal reflects the extreme case of a former dandy and novelist, of unorthodox education and partly alien origins, and without political connections, attempting to lead and form the English political party which represented and sought to preserve the spirit at least of much that was traditional. His idealism therefore took two directions: sometimes reflecting the elitist triumph of an individual who fought his own way to political leadership by superior talent and sheer will-power; at other times exhibiting an excessive taste for orthodox values as if to compensate for his own lack of the usual social credentials. Sometimes, then, Disraeli strove to beat the 'establishment', and sometimes he rushed to join it.

There was a tradition even before him, however, which exhibited the same ambivalent tendency. These were the traditionalist radicals, although their roots were very different from Disraeli's. They pre-figured him, however, in basing their utopia of the future on the restoration of some values taken from the past. Among these 'Early English Radicals', F. Hearnshaw cites John Cartwright (1740-1824):

For all his radicalism, his mind, like that of many another English reformer, was veined with conservatism, even with antiquarianism. He justified his hope for the future by his conception of the past. Thus he sought to revive 'the antient practice of the constitution'.

The career of Edmund Burke also offers an interesting comparison to that of Disraeli. He was also a literary^{figure}, and similarly forced by debt to follow the line of faction for several years. His break in 1791 from the New Whigs (principally Fox and Sheridan), over the French Revolution, destroyed the party and significantly shaped the eventual Conservative party. His insistence on the natural rights of Man, and an individualistic, contractual view of society, gave way in later life to a more mystic and organic conception of the State, in which civil laws embodied (ideally) the working of a higher Divine law. Burke regarded the body-politic, "with a sense of awe as a sublime mystery, the product of centuries of corporate life in society...[in which] anomalies were natural".² This acceptance of diversity characterised Disraeli's approach to political administration:

The by-product of real living, not the fabrication of unimpeded intellect...To discover the order which inheres in things rather than to impose an order upon them...to legislate along the grain of human nature rather than against it.³

In Disraeli's case, however, political flexibility manifested itself in a more pragmatic ability to take each issue largely on its own merits, a decisive combination of, "Burke's imaginative grasp of ideas" with "Peel's sense of the necessary".⁴

Behind both Burke and Disraeli lay the figure of Bolingbroke, whom Disraeli often cited when asserting the right of superior minds (amongst which he included his own) to carry out their mission unimpeded by commonplace notions of consistency. He put this clearly in that passage from What Is He? which we have already noted above (Chapter 2, Section 4):

He is a mean-spirited wretch who is restrained from doing his duty by the fear of being held up as insincere and inconsistent by those who are incapable of forming an opinion on public affairs...A great mind that thinks and feels is never inconsistent and never insincere.⁵

Disraeli's depiction of Bolingbroke's misunderstood career in the Vindication of the English Constitution (1835) shows how much he modelled himself upon him. It was not an historical portrait, so much as ^{an attempt} "to show the need for another Bolingbroke in the circumstances of the hour".⁶ There is a Carlylean sense that politics is better seen in terms of the heroes of each age, with a concomitant stress upon the importance of Race. Disraeli's view of the present

was always conditioned by a glance back into the past, and it was characteristic of him in Coningsby to condemn the "pseudo-Tories" who placed their trust in purely material advancement by saying: "Assuredly the genius of Bolingbroke and the sagacity of Walpole, would have recoiled from such men and such measures".⁷ The later Liverpool cabinet is praised, however, for "a partial recurrence to those frank principles of government which Mr. Pitt had revived during the latter part of the last century".⁸

This approach coincided with, rather than contradicting, that organic conception of the State. Just as each state has its peculiar character, so certain individuals within it are marked out as natural leaders, with special missions to fulfil. Thus Disraeli would have approved Coleridge's remark:

All the great - the permanently great - things that have been achieved in the world, have been achieved by individuals working from the instinct of genius or goodness.⁹

These individuals are pre-eminent because uniquely able to divine the Idea which is the soul of any institution. It is their quality of imagination which reveals this Idea to them, and it is thus we can see how Coleridge and Disraeli viewed their literary gifts as part of the formation and realisation of their political philosophies. So Coleridge's approach is summed up by Murray:

Fixed institutions there must be, and it is the object of the statesman to divine the leading Idea of every one of them.¹⁰

To reach the Idea of an institution one had necessarily to appreciate its history and development, since they obeyed an organic rather than prescriptive law. Only on that understanding could one act with insight in the present, as Disraeli stated in Sybil: "It is the past alone that can explain the present, and it is youth that alone can mould the remedial future".¹¹

Imagination was also seen as essential to accept the antiquated or anomalous aspects of past institutions, and still appreciate their relevance to the present and future. The lack of such a gift was treated by Disraeli as a fatal flaw, and so he wrote of Peel: "Wanting imagination, he wanted prescience".¹²

Another reason for Disraeli's identification with Bolingbroke was his turning to his pen when baulked in political life, although, as with Disraeli himself, this was largely prompted by self-interest,

as R. Faber points out:

All Bolingbroke's political writings had a practical end in view. They were weapons in his political struggle and, in spite of their elegant style, should really be judged as tracts or superior journalism.¹⁵

Another hero in the same tradition was Lord Shelburne, who is praised in Sybil:

Shot out from Parliament, he found vent in those writings which recalled to the English¹⁴ people the inherent blessings of their old free monarchy...

It was a natural reaction for those frustrated by the Parliamentary system to place their faith instead in the 'People' (however one defines them), or in the Monarch - sometimes both. Thus William Cobbett declared in 1802:

The Crown is the guardian of the people, but more especially is its Guardianship necessary to those who are destitute of rank and of wealth. The King gives the weakest and poorest of us some degree of consequence.¹⁵

In the same way, in Sybil, Disraeli heralded the accession of Queen Victoria as the beginning of a new age, in which the people would look to an impartial Monarch as the champion of their liberty and rights. In Coningsby he declared hopefully: "It is not impossible that the political movements of our time, which seem on the surface to have a tendency to democracy, have in reality a monarchical bias".¹⁶ He alluded to this hope again in 1858, when attempting to carry a Reform Bill, and as R. Blake points out, time has shown that it was not so fantastic:

he now declared that he had no fear of the artisan class: he was confident that they would not vote Radical, but would support the Monarchy and the Empire. Thus early Disraeli recognised a possibility which was appreciated in the Continent before it was ever accepted in England: given suitable safeguards, universal suffrage might be a conservative not a revolutionary measure.¹⁷

In Cobbett we can see the same condemnation of the new commercial spirit which was to be echoed in Coningsby and Sybil:

The ancient nobility and gentry of the kingdom have, with a very few exceptions, been thrust out of all public employments...A race of merchants and manufacturers, and bankers and loan-jobbers and contractors, have usurped their place, and the government is fast becoming what it must be expected to become in such hands.¹⁸

In the scramble for the new sources of wealth being opened up by government contracts, commerce and systematic farming, he foresaw the polarisation of society, and this actually became the theme of Disraeli's Sybil: that England was fast becoming 'Two Nations'. Cobbett had written in 1806: "We are daily advancing to that state in which there are but two classes of men, masters and abject dependants".¹⁹ He advocated a policy of returning to the land, of allowing only sufficient manufacture for home consumption, and severe restriction of the commercial system, which he considered unpatriotic.

Another theme of Disraeli's Political Trilogy, that amidst the social and economic revolution taking place, the gentry of England were abandoning their traditional responsibilities, also finds itself anticipated by Cobbett:

The gentlemen of England seem to have given up the country to the minister of the day...The natural magistracy, as Hume calls it, is extinguished. All authority now proceeds immediately from the government. There is not a village in England where the Surveyor of Taxes²⁰ is not a more powerful man than the Lord of the Manor.

Neither Cobbett nor Disraeli seriously sought a revival of the feudal system. As R.J. White says: "The organic and aristocratic society simply could not survive the impact of the steam-engine. But the values of the older society could, and must survive. That is what Disraeli saw".²¹ He defined the spirit of feudalism in the General Preface to the 1870 Collected edition of his works: "its main principle, that the tenure of property should be the fulfilment of duty".²² P.E. More points out that this stress on the past was not empty nostalgia, but included a perceptive awareness of the necessary discipline provided by tradition. It is sometimes only a respect for custom, despite its anomalies, which checks impulsiveness or excessive systemisation, and thus prevents 'improvements' which might be worse than the faults they seek to correct.²³

Even more familiar to the student of Disraeli is a condemnation by Cobbett of the factional "oligarchy" who had gained political power in the country by all forms of manipulation and intrigue:

It is neither a monarchy, an aristocracy, nor a democracy: it is a band of great nobles, who by sham elections, and by means of all sorts of bribery and corruption, have obtained an absolute sway in the country.²⁴

Cobbett also set Disraeli an example by waging his battles in print as well as in person; not only in the newspapers, but in extensive political tracts, of which the best remembered are the Political Register, and its cheaper version, the Twopenny Pamphlets; Parliamentary Debates (forerunner of Hansard); Rural Rides (arising out of his tours of the country beginning in 1821-2, first published as a whole in 1830); and the History of the Protestant Reformation (1824-6). This last work anticipated Disraeli both in its views on the Reformation and in its polemical tendency, treating even the history of 'past politics' as 'present politics':

It was his way to see clearly just that aspect of the truth that served his end, and to remain utterly blind to that which did not serve him. He was none of your "impartial historians", but he was a first-rate controversialist and pamphleteer.²⁵

In 1829-30 Cobbett made a tour of the new industrial centres of the North, as did Disraeli after him in 1844, and his fictional heroes, Coningsby and Egremont. The experience hardened Cobbett's attitude to those Whigs who stole the Radicals' thunder by offering moderate Reform: "This was not the first, or last, time that Cobbett's views would anticipate Disraeli's".²⁶ And like Disraeli, he kept one eye on the past even whilst tackling questions of the future:

Yet, for all his fighting on the side of the new popular forces which the Industrial Revolution had called into being, Cobbett took his stand to the last on the ground of the past, far more readily harking back to the old England of his boyhood than forward to the new England of the enclosures and the factory towns.²⁷

In The Poor Man's Friend (1826) he argued that good government lay not in abstract political innovations, but first in ensuring that the people had sufficient food and clothing, and this was very much the spirit of the 'Young England' movement of which Disraeli was to be a leading member,²⁸ and of the passages in Coningsby and Sybil which celebrate the mediaeval ethic of charity. When Cobbett took over a farm at Barn Elms, Surrey, in October 1827, he went so far as to hire day-labourers, and pay them in food rather than money, thereby earning the accusation of reviving serfdom. Rural Rides also bewailed the destruction of the old mediaeval culture by a post-Reformation tribe of profiteers. Like the adherents of 'Young England' after him, he tended to idealise the role of the Monarch and of the Church in exercising a paternalistic care for all classes.

Cobbett fought against the Malthusian reform of the Poor Law in 1834, and whilst he certainly supported negro-slave emancipation, was quick to draw attention to the factory-slaves closer to home. Again he carried the struggle into print, publishing in 1831 a satire of Malthusianism in the Political Register, entitled Surplus Polulation, A Comedy (reprinted as a pamphlet in 1834). One can see his influence on Disraeli, both in the manner and the thought of his political campaigns, as many of Disraeli's early satires (notably The Voyage of Captain Popanilla, 1828) testify.

Where Cobbett most foreshadowed the Conservatism of Disraeli was in his stress upon a politics of spirit rather than of system. He reacted by instinct to many issues, just as Disraeli was to justify a remarkable flexibility on political questions by that higher imaginative quality he felt he possessed. Like Bolingbroke and Disraeli, Cobbett was contemptuous of criteria of consistency:

That doctrine of Consistency, as now in vogue, is the most absurd that ever was broached. It teaches, that, if you once think well of any person or thing, you must always think well of that person or thing.²⁹

His instinctive approach is summed up by C. Brinton: "He actually felt about ideas the way most men - and none more strongly than Cobbett - felt about food and drink. He disliked paper money exactly as he disliked tea".³⁰ Brinton finds the same quality, or fault, in Disraeli: "Disraeli had none of that vegetable adhesion to immediacies which makes most men seem sincere".³¹

However much Disraeli had to become an orthodox party member in his later career, he nevertheless left almost as much room for movement within the version of Conservatism he created, and to some extent maintained the ideal first stated in Gallomania: "I am neither Whig nor Tory. My politics are described by one word, and that word is ENGLAND".³² But, as R. Blake points out, Disraeli's achievement lay in successfully making this spirit the keynote of the new Conservative party he built, rather than letting the two principles divide him: "That, then, is Disraeli's most lasting contribution to the success of his party. He made it the 'national party'".³³

No doubt Disraeli's marked 'flexibility' in politics was partly due to the twists and turns he made for the sake of an unusually powerful ambition, and partly the product of a truly exceptional and courageous talent, which preferred to take each issue on its merits rather than shelter behind pre-determined policy. But, either

way, this was to mark out a lonely path for him, as Monypenny observes:

In his guiding principles and ideas he had changed far less than most of his judges and critics, but the world, which looks only to externals, saw that he had been in communication, if not in cooperation, with men at the opposite poles of politics, and drew its conclusions accordingly. He had been too eager in his desire for tangible and immediate success, too reckless ⁱⁿ his disregard for the conventions of political life.³⁴

Hence Disraeli's political and semi-political writings acted to confirm and shape his ideas, as much as to express them: "It was necessary ^{for him} to justify his faith both to himself and to the world".³⁵ Certainly he had a Judaic respect for the power of words in themselves which partly explains the importance of his writing to his political career: "He can repeat a phrase till he is persuaded that it is more than words, and has acquired some sovereign virtue of its own".³⁶ And since Disraeli's Conservatism was above all a politics of spirit and imagination rather than system, it has its natural genesis in the novels, whatever one may feel about the actual policies embodied:

When we read the acid analysis of Peel's Conservatism in Coningsby we cannot forget the overthrow of Peel, largely at Disraeli's hands, only two years later. When we read Fakredeen's advice to Tancred to persuade the Queen of England to sail away to India with her fleet and her treasure and make Delhi her capital instead of London, we cannot forget that it was Disraeli who put through the Royal Titles Act making Queen Victoria Empress of India.³⁷

Thus Disraeli looked back to his political novels when writing the General Preface to the 1870 editions of his novels: "They recognised imagination in the government of nations as a quality not less important than reason".³⁸ R.B. Hamilton's comment that Disraeli's Conservative ideal "regarded politics as an art",³⁹ points in fact to its realism: it was concerned above all with the complex art of managing human beings. Sidonia declares in Coningsby: "Man is only truly great when he acts from the passions, never irresistible but when he appeals to the imagination".⁴⁰ This sounds odd in the mouth of one so enigmatically controlled as Sidonia, but it shows that the kind of imagination Disraeli was indicating was of a spiritual and symbolic rather than emotional kind. Disraeli's utilitarian contemporaries tended to discount it:

Their trust in human nature as a purely economic machine was combined with a blindness to the finer feelings and all those less⁴¹ ponderable forces we sum up under the name of spiritual.

But if Disraeli had regard for the spiritual side of Man, it was partly because he did not have the utilitarians' faith in his 'logical perfectibility'. Man for him had an angelic aspect, but also at times the character of a fallen angel, embodied moreover within a very material and animal form. Thus C. Brinton characterises his brand of Tory-Democracy: "One half distrusts the human animal, the other half trusts him".⁴² Much of Disraeli's emphasis on the necessity for politicians to take into account the complex reactions of the creature for whom they legislated, derived from this almost cynical realism. His most naked assertion of this attitude to politics in The Crisis Examined of 1834 seems to reduce politics to sheer manipulation: "It is even the duty of public men occasionally to adopt sentiments with which they do not sympathise, because the people must have leaders".⁴³ In practice however, his own approach to political questions could be just as much the product of sentiment or spiritual aspiration, as of cool appraisal. As Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1866-7, harassed by the Fenian danger, he showed himself almost a 'little Englander' in his cautious attitude to Britain's foreign military commitments and her empire. But when the issue concerned areas more appealing to him, he reacted differently:

Disraeli's imperialism was a later development, and essentially concerned with India, which appealed to something in his imagination, in a sense that the 'colonies' did not".⁴⁴

During the controversy aroused by the Royal Titles Bill of 1876, to make Queen Victoria Empress of India, Disraeli showed that not only was he given to extravagantly ornamental *gestures*, but that others were at least sympathetic enough to accept them. St. Lys says in Sybil: "What you call forms and ceremonies represent the divinest instincts of our nature".⁴⁵ In having regard for these instincts, Disraeli was acknowledging the role of 'spiritual' criteria even in political questions. In his famous 'Crystal Palace' speech on June 24th, 1872, he made a reference to: "Those moral and political considerations which make nations great, and by the influence of which men are distinguished from animals".⁴⁶

Disraeli's own policies often fell short of that ideal. Most of us are governed more by pragmatism than we would care to admit. One of

His strictest critics, P. Smith, comments:

The political practice of Disraeli seems, on close examination to be largely 'Peelite' in spirit⁴⁷. It was Peel's Liberal-Conservatism, drawing in the bourgeoisie, not Disraeli's faded Popular Toryism, looking to the masses, that was to be the basis of its adaptation to social change.⁴⁸

This is perhaps too critical: Disraeli did draw in many of the artisan class to the Conservative cause, as well as the bourgeoisie. But the manner of his doing so was hardly the result of a coolly pre-conceived political strategy. Few major innovations are, and therefore one should not conclude that pragmatism necessarily means insincerity. P. Smith goes on to assert: "His political ideas were not the motive force of his performance, but rather the costume which he wore in deference to the susceptibilities of his audience".⁴⁹ In practice, Disraeli's ideas were very much the motive force of his actions, but we look in vain for an obvious pattern or development to them. His background and his irrepressible imagination gave him a distaste for anything remotely prescriptive or systematised. And the self-doubting, elusive tendency of his youth never fully disappeared. Thus we find him in 1853, attempting to create support for the progressive Tory line, founding a newspaper called The Press which appeared first on May 7th. Disraeli himself contributed to it, but in total secrecy, so that the editor destroyed his copy, and Disraeli even made adverse comments elsewhere on his anonymous contributions.

R. Blake:

To be both leader of a party and at the same time not only proprietor of, but anonymous contributor to, a polemical organ well to the⁵⁰ left of party centre, was essentially a false position...

It was a false position, but characteristic of Disraeli. To some extent he was bound by political necessities, which caused strange combinations of policies. In the 1850 session he could support Lord Ashley's new Factories Bill, but his affiliations to the landed interest preventing him endorsing a Bill for the compulsory inspection of mines, then still largely the property of the landowners.⁵¹

Disraeli's horror of dehumanising 'systems' is evidenced by his reaction to a proposed Liberal Reform Bill in 1851: "If so, it is all up with Old England, and American principles will have gained the day".⁵² This is not to deny that he had himself, "the speculative, a priori, mind which finds pleasure in the exercise of fitting facts to theories".⁵³

But Disraeli never felt constrained to maintain his theories beyond the limit of their useful life, a legacy partly of the alien background which continued to affect his approach. But again we must also return to the influence of his literary nature on Disraeli's political ideas. Since there was always an urge to make "a work of art" of his career, it follows that purely Parliamentary politics could never be the whole focus of his ambition, and that even when engaged in politics he was prompted by different goals and methods than the wholly unselfconscious statesman. It is not a case of which ideas Disraeli professed, and whether he really believed in them, because they were not formulated by conscious logical development. Rather, we should find his uniqueness in how he conceived and shaped political ideas, for, as P. Smith says: "Their author believed in them as an artist in the artifact, not as a mathematician in the theorem".⁵⁴

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CONCLUSION

The one consistent element of Disraeli's career was his refusal to be tied down to a single role or identity. From the start he pursued an elusive course, oscillating between speculations on the Stock Exchange, writing semi-political pamphlets, attempting to found a newspaper, and writing novels. He travelled abroad, and back in England threw himself into the fashionable social scene. These varied activities were partly opposed to each other, and were often taken up as a reaction after some setback or failure. Yet they were linked as well, and in two main ways. Firstly, they appealed to that romantic and even idealistic, yet also cynical and outwardly nonchalant, disposition which Disraeli derived from his partly alien and certainly modest background, and the social conventions of the time. Secondly, these multifarious aspirations depended upon each other, even if only as part of a process of reaction and counter-reaction, so that one finds elements of Disraeli's different enterprises echoed or pre-figured even in their apparently most opposed counterparts.

How serious was his interest in any one of these endeavours? He was probably sincere in one thing: his ambition, but his idea of how and where to fulfil that ambition changed frequently. His own talents and tastes, and many often bitter experiences, were to guide him to eventual political success, but it was a process of trial and error, and took considerably longer than he hoped at the outset.

Along the way, Disraeli began to concentrate his energies, primarily into public affairs and creativity with words: whether expressed in satires, novels or speeches. Even in his first pamphlets, written in the heat of speculations on the Stock Exchange, one can find hints of his political speeches, not only in style, but in their catering for his dual aspirations. The early novels brought relief amidst continuing failures, and enabled Disraeli to rebuild his self-respect in plotting out the triumph he planned for himself ultimately.

Approaching Parliament, Disraeli explored his political identity not only through negotiation and electioneering, but, characteristically, in a number of often highly-coloured tracts and satires.

After another setback - denial of office in Peel's administration in 1841 - he wrote Coningsby and Sybil to persuade himself and others that he did have a political creed to offer.

Finally, in Lothair and Endymion, Disraeli put into perspective his own career and the political events of half a century.

Even when actively engaged in politics, Disraeli remained highly self-conscious, viewing himself almost in the light of a fictional hero. So although he did not write novels continuously, he was still making a tale out of his own life. And the pamphlets, letters and speeches he wrote whilst in Parliament are often as imaginative - and as fictional - as any novel. At the height of his power and responsibility he was yet given to initiatives which suggest the author of Tancred or Lothair rather than the Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative party.

Disraeli's political career was not always wholly altruistic or consistently principled. This is to be accepted in political life, since all politicians have to look to their own advancement in order to be 'in the game' at all. But Disraeli's personal circumstances made him more ambitious than most. He was not the man to believe in literature purely for its own sake, and this is where his susceptibility to the Romantic movement ended. Ultimately, as with all his faculties, literature served his pursuit of success. But it did not do so in a wholly utilitarian manner. It was the means by which he explored his identity and ideas, restored faith in his political mission, and bore witness to a sense that even the most pragmatic aims require something more than merely rational methods.

For, whatever his attitude to formal religion, Disraeli had a strong sense of spiritual values, and literature was for him the repository of symbol and myth which he felt were lacking in a contemporary culture devoted to material advancement.

And in Disraeli's case, he wrote better novels when absorbed in issues outside of himself. Thus one could say that he was a serious writer of literature, but in the same way that an artist may be serious about painting: partly for his instinctive satisfaction in exercising his talent, partly because something worth doing is worth doing well, and also for the fame and prosperity it could bring.

As to the nature of Disraeli's literary imagination, it was often fantastic, melodramatic, and self-consciously symbolic. He played upon a notion that his Jewish background, and his personal talents, brought him an unique creativity and quality of imagination. But in his case he had the integrity and courage to carry his fantasy, melodrama and symbolism into his active career. Paradoxically, then, he was a true Romanticist: relating his art to life, and his life to art. Had he not thus had the strength to acknowledge his two natures, he

would not have been, as many critics assert, either a better politician or a better novelist: he would have been neither.

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1) This bibliography gives only those works which have been mentioned in the text or in footnote references. For a fuller list I can do no better than cite R.W. Stewart's bibliography of Disraeli, A list of writings by him, and writings about him, with notes (Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, N.J., 1972).

2) The publication details of a work are not generally given if in London.

3) Two works to which extensive reference is made are:

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All page and chapter references are taken from this edition, although the first footnote reference to a novel gives the first edition publishing details in brackets.

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Title	Vol. no. in Hughenden Ed.	First edition	Abbreviation
<u>Vivian Grey</u>	I	Colburn, 1826 (Part II, 1827)	VG
<u>The Voyage of Captain Popanilla</u>	IV	Colburn, 1828	<u>Popanilla</u>
<u>The Young Duke</u>	II	Colburn and Bentley, 1831	YD
<u>Contarini Fleming</u>	III	Murray, 1832	CF
<u>Ixion in Heaven</u>	IV	New Monthly Magazine, Dec 1832 and Feb 1833	-
<u>The Infernal Marriage</u>	IV	New Monthly Magazine, July to October 1834	<u>Infernal Marriage</u>
<u>The Wondrous Tale of Alroy</u>	IV	Saunders and Otley, 1833	<u>Alroy</u>
<u>The Revolutionary Epick</u>	-	Moxon, 1834	-
<u>Henrietta Temple</u>	V	Colburn, 1837	HT
<u>Venetia</u>	VI	Colburn, 1837	<u>Venetia</u>
<u>Coningsby, or, the New Generation</u>	VII	Colburn, 1844	<u>Coningsby</u>
<u>Sybil, or, The Two Nations</u>	VIII	Colburn, 1845	<u>Sybil</u>

Title	Vol. no. in Hughenden Ed.	First edition	Abbreviation
<u>Tancred, or, The New Crusade</u>	IX	Colburn, 1847	<u>Tancred</u>
<u>Lothair</u>	X	Longmans, 1870	<u>Lothair</u>
<u>Endymion</u>	XI	Longmans, 1880	<u>Endymion</u>
<u>Falconet</u> (supposed title)	-	The Times, 20, 21, and 23 January, 1905 Also in Monypenny, II, 1521-1550	-

Two further terms: The 'Autobiographical' Trilogy -
for Vivian Grey, Contarini Fleming, Alroy.

The 'Political' Trilogy -
for Coningsby, Sybil, Tancred.

Pamphlets and Political Writings:

Title	Abbreviation
<u>An Inquiry in the Plans, Progress, and Policy of the American Mining Companies</u> (3rd ed. Murray, 1825)	<u>Inquiry</u>
<u>Lawyers and Legislators, or, Notes on the American Mining Companies</u> (Murray, 1825)	<u>Lawyers and Legislators</u>
<u>England and France, or, a Cure for the Ministerial Gallomania</u> (Murray, anon., 1832)	<u>Gallomania</u>
<u>What Is He?</u> * (Ridgeway, 1833)	<u>What Is He?</u>
<u>The Crisis Examined</u> * (Saunders and Otley, 1834)	<u>The Crisis Examined</u>
<u>Vindication of the English Constitution</u> * (Saunders and Otley, 1835)	<u>Vindication</u>
<u>Leading Articles</u> [†] , 14 articles in <u>The Morning Post</u> , 22 August to 7 September, 1835.	<u>Peers and People</u>
<u>The Letters of Runnymede</u> * 19 letters to <u>The Times</u> , 18 January to 15 May, 1836.	<u>Runnymede</u>

*Reprinted in Whigs and Whiggism as 'Peers and People'

†References to these works give their own title as indicated, but all page numbers are taken from the one edition of W. Hutcheon (ed), Whigs and Whiggism: Political Writings of B. Disraeli (Murray, 1913), as follows:

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