

DISRAELIANISM:  
The Political Philosophy of Benjamin Disraeli as Exhibited in his Novels

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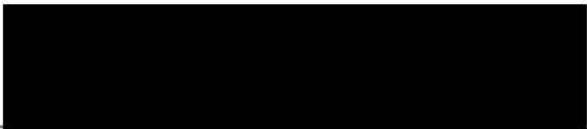
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### ABSTRACT

This study takes the position that Benjamin Disraeli was sincere in his adherence to a coherent political philosophy, and was as consistent in its application as any politician could be. This is not a common assessment of Disraeli. He is most often thought of a cynical opportunist who climbed to the "top of the greasy pole" of British politics on the strength of Machiavellian rather than altruistic motivation. This is unfair and misleading. This thesis outlines the elements of his extremely idiosyncratic political philosophy--which is best described as "Disraelianism". The best sources for the details of Disraelianism are not his political writings, but rather his novels. Chapters three, four, five and six of this thesis discuss the purely personal facets of this philosophy: ambition and belief in his innate superiority, his sense of heroic destiny, and pre-occupation with his Jewish origins. Chapter seven details the historical and political/constitutional factors that form the core of Disraelianism: his anti-Whiggism, his abhorrence of *a priori* political theories, and his dedication to ancient English institutions. Chapter eight outlines Disraeli's political actions and how he remained remarkably true to his lifelong beliefs.

  
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It is unlikely that I can adequately express my appreciation to Dr. S. W. Jackman. His patience and understanding, as well as his wisdom, are primary reasons that this project came to a conclusion at long last.

## **Dedication**

The love and indomitable spirit of my wife, Karin Paul, is the major reason I was able to finish this thesis. Its successful completion is dedicated to her.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### I

Benjamin Disraeli's career, personality, and works were distinctly un-Victorian. He violates our modern preconceptions of Victorian piety, respectability and modesty. His religious beliefs were always suspect, he had a scandalous personal reputation before he entered the House of Commons, and his attitude towards his own accomplishments was anything but self-effacing. Yet, he managed to overcome public social prejudice so successfully that he excelled in two very honourable Victorian professions---politics and literature---rising to become both a popular Prime Minister and a best-selling novelist. Given the disadvantages of his modest social position, modest financial circumstances and, of course, immodest temperament, his achievements are nothing short of stunning.

As it did during his lifetime, so his posthumous reputation has suffered many rises and declines. Once more, he is enjoying something of a renaissance, with the past few years seeing the appearance of a new biography, the publication of a previously unknown novel and three volumes of his letters (with more to come), as well as Penguin editions of the first two volumes of his Young England trilogy. Unfortunately, the multi-faceted nature of Disraeli's success has resulted in a rather fragmented assessment of his life and career.

Historians are mainly interested in Disraeli the politician; his literary career being little

more than a 'novel' form of expressing his eccentric Tory ideas. Literary scholars have confined themselves to critical analysis of his novels and their place in the milieu of nineteenth-century prose fiction. Biographers have usually focused on the political aspect of his life, regarding it as the most sensational, and have therefore interpreted all significant personal events merely in terms of their effect on his political future---if such events were considered at all. Occasionally a 'popular' biographer/historian will forsake any avowed special emphasis in favour of a comprehensive portrait of "Disraeli-the-man". This usually involves a literal, and simplistic presentation of material from letters and writings as evidence of the 'great man's' personality.

With the major aspects of his life and work parcelled out to various scholarly disciplines, it is not surprising that possible areas of analysis have been overlooked. In all the attempts, both simple and sophisticated, to come to some understanding of the drive and motivation of Disraeli's public career, there exists no systematic study of his novels. Nor is there any serious effort to examine his political philosophy.

There are, of course, a few substantive studies of the novels from a literary point of view---two published relatively recently. While they are valid and elucidating scholarship in their own right, they tend to undervalue the fact that Disraeli was writing at the same time he was actively pursuing a political career. In such a situation, one might think it warranted to look for something 'extra' in the novels; to search for some hint, or clue, or even explicit outline of the socio-political philosophy that governed his ambitions, his actions, and later, his policies.

Any sustained effort at delineating Disraeli's political philosophy tends to focus on his tracts and partisan pamphlets. His distinctly political writings are really not helpful in getting a clear view of this philosophy. They do not show him at his most articulate, insightful, or honest. They were written more as efforts to impress party panjandrums than to espouse a personal political manifesto. His artistic temperament, plus his numerous literary remains, both favouring fiction over purely political polemic by a huge margin, leads a student of Disraeli to agree with Isaiah Berlin's characterization of the value and essence of the "canon";

A man may not be sincere in his political speeches or his letters, but his works of art are of himself and tell one where his true values lie. (1)

S.W. Jackman corroborates this view in a book about the mind of Viscount Bolingbroke, one of Disraeli's heroes and inspirations;

Disraeli...was a romantic. He used the novel as the chief medium to expound his political ideas and his specifically political writings are insignificant. (2)

John Matthews, Senior Editor of the Disraeli Project dealing with the extant Disraeli letters, acknowledges the wealth of insight that remains unmined from the novels.

If one has the stamina to read all thirteen novels...one may see in a new way that much better - known political career, which, because of its sheer implausibility, has tended to overawe all his other activities. We tend to think of him as a Prime Minister who wrote novels on the side, rather than, as he thought of himself, an author engaged in politics, but politics of a special kind. (3)

Of all those who have written about Disraeli, or even just thought about his achievements, only Matthews has made an attempt to illuminate that 'special kind of politics' through the novels. The early novels are much more significant than the

conventional criticism allows, and his 'political novels' have more depth than merely being novels of manners set against a political backdrop.

...he was intending to do much more than that, and that he was conscious of conducting stylistic and structural experiments in the form of the novel to express a much more comprehensive concept. (4)

Still, Matthews' fourteen page essay is hardly more than an outline of the work that could be done. It is in the face of this void, with John Matthews' modest beginning in mind, the focus for this thesis took shape---to show through his novels;

the nature and variety of Disraeli's pre-occupation with the political process as both a general philosophical concept of the nature of man living in society, and as a practical set of procedures much in need not only of revision, but reanimation through a type of moral rearmament....(5)

...and then to trace the implementation of that pre-occupation in his political life.

Many unsympathetic commentators on Disraeli would take issue with the very idea that he had any coherent political philosophy. They claim that Disraeli had a good deal more personal ambition than principle.

Appearances are all against his having held sincere political convictions. And in the normal sense of the word, we must admit that Disraeli was not sincere. He did not submit his beliefs to the impartial judgement of conscience or reason, dismissing self-interest, irrelevant feelings, and prior determination. All the evidence suggests that ambition and self-interest were the guiding lights when Disraeli took decisions. (6)

As Thomas MacKnight said of Bolingbroke, as also, by implication, of Disraeli;

Of political morality, such as has regulated the conduct of most English statesmen, he had no idea. (7)

Even members of his own party were dubious about, and antagonistic to his political opportunism. Lord Salisbury (then Lord Robert Cecil) spent many years as an openly hostile opponent of Disraeli's leadership. His best known public assault was an article published in the Quarterly Review in 1859:

To crush the Whigs by combining with the Radicals was the first and last maxim of Mr. Disraeli's Parliamentary tactics. He had never led the Conservatives to victory as Sir Robert Peel had led them to victory. He had never procured the triumphant assertion of any Conservative principle, or shielded from imminent ruin any ancient institution. But had been a successful leader to this extent, that he had made any Government, while he was in Opposition, next to an impossibility. (8)

Indeed, a superficial survey of his political career, especially in its early stages, seems to support such a view.

He began by offering himself as an independent Radical candidate in a by-election at High Wycombe. During the course of three unsuccessful attempts in High Wycombe he managed to garner some backing from all of the principal political groups; he convinced Irish Radical leader Daniel O'Connell to write a letter of recommendation, used his growing friendship with Lord Lyndhurst to obtain tacit Tory support, and was often accused of openly espousing distinctly Whiggish policies. On the surface it appeared that Disraeli was merely a crass opportunist who, lacking any true depth of political or moral feeling, was simply trying to make it obvious that his services were available to whichever party was able to grant him a safe seat. Until such an offer was made, Disraeli would forsake any commitment that would shut off a possible route towards membership in the greatest Club in the world - The House of Commons. In the eyes of many his concerns

were obviously centred on service to himself rather than service to Britain.

It is very tempting to accept this assessment. Many of the facts of his early career, and even later in life, seem to support it. Unfortunately, as is usually the case with Disraeli, the first layer of facts gives a grossly distorted picture. The misconceptions are magnified when these facts are used to judge Disraeli's actions against conventional Victorian standards. Such analysis simply refuses to yield a fair and realistic judgement of the man. While a closer investigation does not transform him into a universally attractive figure, it does shed some light on the motivation behind the facts, which in turn makes his 'opportunism' less reprehensible and more understandable. It also goes a long way to explaining how such a person could so dramatically flout the social and political norms of the time and still manage to become Prime Minister.

A simple example of how the bare facts of his life belie a more complex reality is the case of his early reluctance to attach his fortunes to any particular party. The real reasons had less to do with a lack of principle than a surfeit of it. His novels, as well as pamphlets and letters, make plain his lifelong aversion to the Whigs. Deeply influenced by his father's devotion to the Crown, Disraeli felt that the Whig oligarchy had eroded the power of the monarch. This was detrimental to the nation, for it had been the Crown alone among the power groupings that could rise above self-interest and ensure that all the people were treated fairly. He felt this so strongly that no matter how much he identified with their reform and foreign policies, he could never bring himself to offer services his to the Whigs.<sup>(9)</sup> To the casual or uninformed observer, Disraeli's championship of some obviously Whig ideas without actually joining their ranks was simply an instance of

wanting to keep all his political doors open. In actuality, firm principle prevented him from becoming even a Whig sympathizer, let alone a 'party man'.

If Disraeli could admire some Whig policies without being able to stomach becoming a Whig, he had a similar problem with the Tories. At the time of his initial attempts to enter Parliament the Tories were such a backward agglomeration of country squires and buffoons that no one with even slightly progressive ideas could, in all conscience, join with them. The pre-Peel Tory party that existed during Disraeli's first ventures on the hustings had not yet even been reconciled to the Reform Bill, and becoming a Tory at this time might have seemed to Disraeli to be tantamount to political suicide--not to mention it being intellectually stifling. The fact of tacit support from the Tories during his second and third election attempts was due much more to the personal intervention of his new friend Lord Lyndhurst than to anything close to official support from the party.

Under these circumstances Disraeli could not bring himself to join with either of the two major parties. His adoption of an Independent Radical label was a disadvantage forced upon him by his principles.

I start on the high Radical interest and take down strong recommendatory epistles from O'Connell, Hume, Burdett and hoc genius. Toryism is worn out, and I cannot condescend to be a Whig. (10)

In fact, the Independent Radical title was not simply one born of expediency, it is an accurate reflection his political beliefs. His desire to provide aid and to be a voice for the poor and disadvantaged was a distinctly Radical stance. The manner in which he sought to deliver this help was unique and therefore quite rightly called 'Independent'. His

shunning of the established parties is partly explained above, but there is also another factor to consider. He never concealed the fact that he hoped to enter politics as an independent force and let his genius forge a National Party that was above the petty partisanship of Whigs and Tories. Hesketh Pearson says that Disraeli's politics at this time were neither Whig nor Tory, but "could be described in one word: ENGLAND" (11). So, as this small example illustrates, although the facts surrounding Disraeli's political life seem to provide a picture of a scavenger casting about for any bit of support that would get him elected, closer scrutiny reveals that the patchwork of his first electoral platforms was based on principles and ideas that may have clashed with the established political convention of the time, but were nonetheless heartfelt and consistent with his own conception of the political needs of the country.

It does not take great mental gymnastics to make sense of Disraeli's politics. As Richard Faber comments, Disraeli is complex, but he is not really 'deep'(12). The effort expended in getting beyond that first layer of facts is rewarded with the realization that the mystery of his success in the face of mere egocentric, unprincipled, self-aggrandizement is dispelled as a myth. Disraeli did in fact have a coherent political philosophy, and, once this becomes evident, it becomes plain that he was remarkably consistent in his political actions and decisions. The evidence for this is not hidden - it is contained throughout all his writings. As R.B. McDowell comments;

His goods in all their various glitter are displayed in his shop window, not kept darkly out of sight. It is not really his way (although it sometimes seems it) to practise mystification of his audience for some inner, and concealed purpose; on the contrary he is usually open and often surprisingly indiscreet. Even at his most mysterious, he is not trying to hoodwink; the mystery arises because he has to express ideas apprehended

intuitively rather than logically. (13)

The 'shop windows' that are essential in drawing a coherent outline of his political philosophy are his novels.

Such an approach is not entirely new. Many scholars have commented on the fact that the motivation for his imaginative writing is basically political in nature. For example, McDowell writes:

.....it is clear that, for him, novel writing is part of an activity which is essentially political. A great deal of the art of politics consists in making people see certain things - facts, events, other people - in certain light. The politician wishes to persuade you that this is the only way to see them and sometimes that certain actions follow from such a way of seeing them. Disraeli's politics have so little that is fixed and definite that he has a great deal of freedom when he uses the medium of fiction for political purposes. (14)

And Richard Levine states:

Disraeli wrote novels to attract attention to himself and later as a means of expressing his political opinions, in my own mind there is no doubt that the urge primarily lay in the direction of giving himself exercises designed to stimulate his own imagination, the better to serve the great purpose of his life - political pre-eminence. (15)

If Disraeli put so much of his political self into the novels; if the novels were the repository for speculations and imaginings that were primarily political in nature, then it is simply a matter (although far from a simple matter) of gleaning from the novels all that they contain of Disraeli's political philosophy.

## II

Benjamin Disraeli had a distinct, comprehensible and consistent political philosophy; the last characteristic being one that is rarely attributed to Disraeli. It would be a trait entirely misapplied if his political philosophy were conceived of in the usual Victorian terms. His ideas do not fit very well into any of the familiar doctrines that were typical of the politics of his day. The primary principles which formed the basis of his actions do not even come within the pale of George Watson's nebulous definition of "Liberalism" or "Liberty". Watson uses Lord Acton's pronouncement on Liberty as the cornerstone of his theme of an overreaching English political ideology; "Liberty is not a means to a higher political end. It is itself the highest political end" (16). Watson claims that such an impulse to 'government by ideas' was the predominant influence in the mainstream of Victorian political life.

Liberty is the English ideology, and its achievement within parliamentary institutions dignified by traditional and ceremonial forms - sometimes called the 'Westminster model' is still the first image that springs to mind when most men hear the name of England. (17)

[England] was the prime example on earth of a nation progressing towards a notion of human liberty undistributed by revolutions or foreign conquests. English history demonstrated how events could be self-engendered...(18)

It is one of the strengths of Victorian liberalism that it can excite the enthusiasm of those of great faith or of none.....The morality of the age is objectivist, and contemptuous of the view that moral choices are merely matters of personal choice. (19)

None of the above is very helpful in coming to terms with the political faith of Disraeli.

He held a particular contempt for such ideas and would have laughed at any attempt to categorize his own thoughts and actions under such headings. Throughout the course of his career it is possible to identify pieces of nearly every form of ideology known to nineteenth-century British politics--Karl Marx even referred to the Young England movement as a perverted kind of "feudal socialism"(20). But we never manage a clear view of what he envisioned as long as we try to place his philosophy into established molds--especially Watson's "liberty and liberal" notion. However, viewed within the framework of his peculiar personal philosophy, Disraeli was as consistent as any successful man of power could hope to be. As Hesketh Pearson notes:

In many respects he was the most consistent and sincere politician of his age, though naturally his views expanded and were partly dictated by the changes and circumstances of the time. But this must be said at the outset: he was, like every politician who comes to the front, a careerist. No one fights political battles for the sake of peace and quiet; no downright incorruptible idealist could endure the wire-pulling, charlatry, humbug, chicanery, place-seeking, time-serving, and power-snatching, which are the necessary ingredients of politics; and the spectacle of a successful and mainly disinterested statesman, whether right, left or centre, is one that the world awaits in vain. (21)

Benjamin Disraeli's political philosophy is best described as "Disraelianism" --not just because it is a convenient term to describe a unique amalgam of ideas, but because Disraeli himself was the core of his own motivation. It goes far beyond being driven by blind ambition and the thirst for purely personal power and gain. Disraeli honestly believed that he was blessed with genius - a genius for both imaginative work and the leadership of men. It was his destiny to use this gift in the guidance of his country, and his personal ambition was really a desire to become a saviour for England.

The driving force of Disraeli's life was ambition, but his

was a noble ambition, and because there was nothing of pettiness about it, his ambition was almost frightening in its intensity. Ambition carried to such a pitch of intensity must be judged to be in the nature of a defect, a defect, however, which was largely redeemed by the ends Disraeli set out to achieve and by his perfect honesty about himself. It was redeemed, too, by his astounding self-control; a degree of self-control which, of itself, amounted to genius, for a nature so sensitive, and a brain so active and visionary, must have taken a deal of controlling. (22)

His ambition and sense of destiny are evident in the words of Contarini Fleming:

I felt all my energies. I walked up and down the hall in a frenzy of ambition, and I thirsted for action. There seemed to be no achievement of which I was not capable, and which I was not ambitious. In my imagination I shook thrones and founded empires. I felt myself a being born to breathe in an atmosphere of revolution. (23)

He honestly believed that what England really needed was a strong, imaginative political leader who could save the nation from its downward slide. His peculiar talents made him best suited to become the hero/saviour that circumstances required.

For a long period he had struggled between the impulse to use his genius in a literary-contemplative life and the compulsion to lead a life of action in the political arena. The early novels, especially the loose trilogy of Vivian Grey (1826 and 1827), Contarini Fleming: A Psychological Autobiography (1832) and The Wonderous Tale of Aloy (1833), are thinly disguised stories of Disraeli trying to come to terms with the two divergent ways of life that were open to him. His complete range of pre-parliamentary novels, which are largely ignored by both critics and historians, contain a wealth of evidence about his inner struggle:

They [the novels] enabled him, as he felt they had for Byron, to analyse past mistakes and learn from them, to project future ambitions and to test them, and to assess his present position between the two. (24)

Eventually he came to the simultaneous conclusions that first, he had a poetic temperament, but obviously lacked the poetic gifts to express such a temperament, and second, what he really wanted was to pursue a Parliamentary career.

He would end his days, not in the study and the creation of the beautiful, but in the more frenzied pursuits of the politician. (25)

He took to heart the advice of Winter, the artist/sage advisor in Contarini Fleming, to a despondent Contarini Fleming: "...act, act, act without ceasing, and you will no longer talk of the vanity of life" (26).

Despite being such clear reflections of his internal struggle between seemingly equal impulses, the early novels eventually make it plain which of the alternatives Disraeli would ultimately choose. Most of the fully-conceived political ideas attributed to the Young England trilogy are actually evident in embryonic form in the early novels. George Watson tries to explain Disraeli's ideology in terms of conventionally understood concepts:

...a compound of romantic royalism and semitic mysticism, at once racialist and populist, with a taste for charismatic leadership and a cult of youth, and a contempt for the Revolution of 1688 and all its works. (27)

All of which is quite true. By itself, however, it fails to explain how an individual who acts according to such an ethos and who takes a seemingly opportunistic attitude to

established political parties could possibly have a successful public career in the highly morally charged atmosphere of Victorian Britain. More than that, it fails to explain Disraeli's success because it ignores the most important factor in his personal drive - a factor that binds together the disparate elements of his political philosophy. This factor is obvious in the novels and their depiction of his working out of the most appropriate avenue for his genius - it is obvious in his fictional exploration of political alternatives. It is the place of the *hero* in public affairs that is crucial to understanding Disraeli. The strength, power and even necessity of the heroic individual was something conspicuously absent from Victorian politics, something Disraeli fervently believed in, and he meant to bring it into play.

Let us not forget also an influence too much underrated in this age of bustling mediocrity - the influence of individual character. Great spirits may yet arise to guide the groaning helm through the world of troubled waters; spirits whose proud destiny it may still be at the same time to maintain the glory of the Empire and to secure the happiness of the People. (28)

Disraeli felt that it was his mission to provide the heroic leadership Britain so sorely needed. Thus, which political party was to be the instrument of his wreaking salvation on his nation was of relatively small consequence. What really mattered was that he should be elected and eventually come to control the government. When his initial romantic vision of forming a National Party in opposition to the established ones dissolved in the face of immutable intransigence, he was practical enough to realize that the fulfillment of his destiny was only going to be achieved via the vehicle of one of the current parties. He chose the Tories, but did so as much by default as by any earnest belief in "Toryism". The Radicals were a loose association and unlikely to ever form a government. Only something in the order of an offer of an immediate cabinet post would have been enough

to overcome his hatred of the Whigs. The Tories were the only viable alternative when Disraeli finally made his decision in 1835. These were the revitalized Tories of Sir Robert Peel, and had, largely through Peel's efforts, become a much more acceptable option than they had been when Disraeli first entered politics. He cemented his position with the Tories, and forever alienated the other parties, with the publication of Vindication of The English Constitution (1835) and the vituperative Letters of Runnymede. His famous quarrel with Daniel O'Connell earned Disraeli the lasting enmity of the Irish members and most of the Radicals. His political future thus became irrevocably tied to the fortunes of the Tory Party.

This fact of practical politics leads most commentators to refer to Disraeli's political philosophy as a breed of "Conservatism" or "Toryism". It is true that his ideas were more "Tory" or "Conservative" than they were anything else, but ultimately these labels are not very helpful in understanding Disraeli's politics. It is not valid to claim Disraeli as either inheritor or progenitor of a consistent Tory creed. He was unique - his political philosophy is coherent and consistent only when viewed against his peculiar circumstances. His novels provide the evidence for this necessary background.

### III

In order to present this evidence, the chapters which follow will outline the material

from the novels in the context of several relevant topics. These topics are organized under the two headings which reflect the factors that dominated his political thinking and actions: *himself* and *England*.

Disraeli's conception of, and obsession with, himself is central to his approach to politics. Two especially important aspects of this very complex subject that are particularly evident in his fiction are his pre-occupation with individual heroism, and the determining role played by race. As has been mentioned, he passionately believed in his role as heroic saviour of England. He also felt that his racial/ethnic background not only put him on even ground with the English aristocracy, but gave him certain advantages over his Anglo-Saxon colleagues that made him particularly suited to govern them.

Once he decided that public activity was the best outlet for his genius, he focused his considerable energies on the whole of England. The novels provide a wealth of information about the social and constitutional problems that demanded the public intervention of someone with Disraeli's particular abilities and heroic propensities. Centering on the general concept of the history and institutions of England helps to organize his seemingly disparate ideas on the subject.

As one writer on Disraeli's novels notes, Disraeli believed in looking to the past to inform present action and theory - efficacy of the great principles of the past. He was very "...optimistic about the state that English life could reach if those great principles were practised" (29). Unfortunately, in Disraeli's view, these principles were abandoned at two stages in English history. Much of his political energy was expended in outlining plans

that would hopefully reverse the trends created by events such as Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries and the Glorious Revolution of 1688-1689. He also tried, to a small degree, to "re-educate" the majority of people who had long believed these events to be positive influences in English history. This "re-education" was necessary because most of the recent history had been written by those who benefitted from their occurrence - the Whigs. He was often criticized by his contemporaries for this reactionary attitude. A critic, referring to the concept of history as set out in Coningsby, characterized it as follows:

Certain it is, that there is much colour of truth in [his] statements, and even in some important particulars, the very facts are incontrovertible; whilst, nevertheless, their perspective is so ingeniously disarranged and distorted, that the sum total of the impression conveyed is clearly mendacious. (30)

Modern commentators, like Thom Braun, also have little time for his view;

Disraeli's idiosyncratic historical perspective was only one facet of a mind which was alarming in its individuality. (31)

Despite its weak factual and theoretical basis, this historical view is nonetheless a cornerstone of Disraeli's political philosophy and will be examined closely through the special evidence provided by the novels.

The political and social institutions that had long dominated English society were key factors in Disraeli's political philosophy. The perfect England that Disraeli envisions depends a great deal on the strength and revitalization of such institutions as The Church of England, Parliament, The Monarchy, The Aristocracy, and Empire. With the notable

exception of the latter, all these are frequent topics in his novels. In typically Disraelian fashion, his criteria for the necessity of a particular institution is nothing as mundane as a Benthamite test for utility. He wished that English institutions would return to their original function of building and maintaining national character. English institutions must also protect individual Englishmen and enhance England's reputation abroad. Just how the institutions were to achieve such nebulous goals is never made clear. Yet, it is plain that Disraeli felt their role in England's survival was vital.

After outlining his political philosophy as seen through his novels, this study will conclude with a look at the practical implications of this framework. Despite his prolific literary output, Disraeli spent an even greater part of his life as an active politician. It is against this record of public action and pragmatic party machinations that his ideology must ultimately be measured. It is important to consider how the reality of political life modified, and perhaps superseded, his ideals. Conversely, the degree to which his political decisions--both in opposition and in government--were informed by his somewhat bizarre philosophy is a matter of obvious interest. Thus, a brief overview of some of the main policy areas of Disraeli's political career will be examined for evidence of the continuity of approach he often claimed for himself.

Disraeli's novels are a wonderful 'window' into his psyche. They served as a much needed catharsis for the 'tortured genius'. They also acted as a laboratory for his political and personal ideals, and are therefore indispensable documents in any reconstruction and understanding of his political philosophy. Such an analysis debunks the common

assessment of Disraeli as a shameful figure totally devoid of political or ethical conscience or consistency. The conventional view is arrived at by reckoning his political actions and utterances in terms of conventional Victorian ideology. Conclusions arrived at by such methods are not valid because they put Disraeli in a context that obscures the roots of his motivation and the real goals for which he strove. Considered in his own terms, with a clear view of his philosophy as delineated in his novels, Disraeli's political rationale is remarkably coherent and consistent. Stephen Graubard, in explaining the relationship between Disraeli and his fiction, foreshadows the approach taken in this study:

When Disraeli wrote, he wrote for himself primarily. If this appears to be a contradiction, it may be explained by Disraeli's continuing preoccupation with himself and his progress in the world. In the tales which he invented, Disraeli sought to reassure himself about what the individual might achieve by his own effort and intelligence. Writing at a time when fiction formed a staple in the reading diet of many, Disraeli knew the advantages of writing for this public. The novel suited Disraeli's purpose; it broadcast his views, made his personality known, and gave free rein to his imagination. Disraeli believed in the hero in history and imagined that destiny had selected him for such a role. The novel, more than any other literary form, permitted him to explore the possibilities of individual action. (32)

NOTES

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- 2 - S. W. Jackman, The Man of Mercury (London: Pall Mall Press, 1965), p. 143.
- 3 - John Matthews, "Literature and Politics: A Disraelian View" in Humanities Association of Canada NEWSLETTER (Vol. XII, no. 1, October 1983), p. 4.
- 4 - Matthews, p. 7.
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- 6 - Louis Cazamian, The Social Novel in England 1830-1850 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 179.
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- 9 - The Whigs were the more socially exclusive of the political groups, and it is very likely that someone with Disraeli's background would have been received as anything more than a factotum. Doubtless this was also a factor in his antipathy towards them.
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- 24 - Matthews, p. 12.
- 25 - Stephen Graubard, Burke, Disraeli and Churchill: The Politics of Perseverence (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 107.
- 26 - Contarini Fleming, p. 593.
- 27 - Watson, p. 145.
- 28 - Benjamin Disraeli, "What Is He?", quoted in Robert Blake, Disraeli (London: Eyre and Spotteswoode, 1966), p.93.
- 29 - Richard Levine, Benjamin Disraeli (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1968), p. 87.
- 30 - T. Price, review in The Eclectic Review quoted in R.W. Stewart (ed.), Disraeli's Novels Reviewed, 1826 - 1968 (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1975), p. 173.
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CHAPTER 2: LITERARY, HISTORIOGRAPHIC, AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC  
BACKGROUND

I

Disraeli's literary reputation has usually been greatly over-shadowed by his political career and his fascinating personal life. Although never in danger of being classed as a giant in English literature, the placing of Disraeli's work in relation to that of other literary figures is often an elusive task. The Norton Anthology of English Literature (1) makes no mention of Disraeli as a novelist. Robert Adams' The Land and Literature of England: A Historical Account (2) refers only to Disraeli's Jewish origins, his eccentric politics and character, and his generally brilliant but rather implausible career. Peter Conrad's recent history of English literature allows only one sentence for Disraeli - and that is in the context of a discussion of Byron (3). On the other hand, Peter Quennell, in A History of English Literature (4), devotes over two pages to an outline of Disraeli's work. This space is roughly equivalent to that given to Anthony Trollope, and more than that used for Elizabeth Gaskell or Charles Kingsley. The Oxford Companion to English Literature devotes nearly as much space to Disraeli's literary career as it does to Trollope, Stevenson, Thackeray and Meredith (5).

While this is a somewhat superficial way of evaluating the relative merits of literary figures, it does reflect the wide variety of opinion regarding Disraeli's significance as an artist. In writing a book or assembling an anthology that purports to cover all of English

literature, some critics do not find enough reason to give Disraeli a mention in their survey. Others find that his work is of sufficient quality to warrant according him a place, if not in the first rank, at least solidly in the second rank of Victorian novelists --- in the company of Stevenson, Butler, and Meredith , as well as Trollope, Gaskell, and Kingsley.

This range of reaction to Disraeli's creative work is characteristic of that to his entire career. General histories of Victorian politics tend either to shower him with plaudits and refer to him as a great statesman, or try hard to ignore him, except as he appears as Gladstone's arch-enemy. Response to any aspect of Disraeli's life, either against him or in his favour, is rarely notable for its moderation. All three of the book-length evaluations of the novels are noticeably enthusiastic about Disraeli the novelist, and the novels themselves. Thom Braun's Disraeli The Novelist (6) and Daniel Schwarz's Disraeli's Fiction (7) make a show of disinterested observation at the beginning, but it soon becomes obvious that they have fallen under the spell of the man whose power to charm and to fascinate has not waned more than a century after his death. Richard Levine, in his book Benjamin Disraeli, makes it quite plain he is committed to resurrecting Disraeli's works and helping them to take their rightful place in the prescribed pantheon of the English Literature student's Parnassus (8). While taking great pains to point out some of the warts on his subject, Levine is clearly a Disraeli zealot;

an acute politician, and a brilliant statesman, but he was also a keen observer of the motivations which shaped men and their institutions. And his novels yield many of Disraeli's most penetrating conceptions of life and history as well as politics. (9)

Much of the negative reaction to his novels is expounded *en passant* during discussions on larger or related matters. John Morley, as a staunch partisan of Gladstone, does not have much good to say about Disraeli's literary prowess (10). In his own autobiography, Anthony Trollope felt compelled to comment on Disraeli's novels and their effect upon the younger generation:

Because he has been bright and a man of genius, he has carried his object as regards the young. He has struck them with astonishment and aroused in their imagination ideas of a world more glorious, more rich, more witty, more enterprising than their own. But the glory has ever been the glory of pasteboard, and the wealth has been a wealth of tinsel. The wit has been the wit of hairdressers, and the enterprise has been the enterprise of mountebanks. . . .I can understand that Mr. Disraeli should in his novels have instigated many a young man and many a young woman on their way in life, but I cannot understand that he should have instigated anyone to any good . . . I have often lamented, and have as often excused to myself, that lack of public judgement which enables readers to put up with bad work because it comes from good or from from lofty hands. I never felt the feeling so strongly, or was so little able to excuse it, as when a portion of the reading public receive [a Disraeli novel] with satisfaction. (11)

But no assault of Disraeli's literary credibility is as sustained or venomous as the Literary and Political Biography credited to an obscure M.P. Even though, at the time of its appearance, Disraeli was still only a third of the way through his eventual forty-four year political career, and had only served one very short term as Chancellor of the Exchequer, his parliamentary and novelistic activities had spawned vehement reaction. MacKnight's lengthy attack seeks to discredit Disraeli as an important political thinker, and, more significantly, it tries to undercut any influence his Young England trilogy might have had on "The New Generation" (12) of Englishmen.

If I conceal nothing I shall certainly exaggerate nothing.

But it is the solemn duty of the moralist not to speak well of evil. They who have not had their moral sense quite perverted, and have not laughed themselves into insensibility, will fairly consider what is here written. Conscious of no motive but the public good, with little to hope or fear from any political party, strongly attached to principles, but indulgent mere opinions, neither Whig nor Tory, but a respecter both of the sincere conservative and the sincere liberal, I have no dread of the partisan's malice. They whom Mr. Disraeli has led through maze after maze, and who are still ready to surrender themselves blindfold to his guidance, will doubtless not agree with much that is here recorded. But these are not the people of England. (13)

In the end, once the purely political considerations have been put temporarily to one side, what divides opinion on Disraeli's literary standing is the extreme range of quality in his work. From the same pen came the insightful social commentary of Sybil, the playful yet mellow reflectiveness of Lothair as well as the adolescent satire of The Voyage of Captain Popanilla and the absurd emotional and descriptive excesses of Henrietta Temple and The Young Duke. He also attempted an epic poem, "The Revolutionary Epick", which is so pompous and stilted that it is literally painful to read (14). Even within the same novel we see a good deal of foolishness juxtaposed with passages and characterizations of obvious genius. An apologist, like Schwarz, sees such unevenness as a conscious technique (15). That is an unjustifiably favourable interpretation -- Disraeli was simply careless and undisciplined.

The disparity between the ridiculous and the genuinely 'literary' is most prevalent in his pre-Parliamentary novels which are usually tagged with the epithet "Silver-Fork". The reputation of being an entertaining, witty, but essentially silly writer is never really dispelled by the more sober tone and stylistic maturity of the Young England trilogy,

Lothair, and Endymion .

Politics, agriculture, and the Grand Tour are all very well but the fashionable novelist knew that he was never giving his readers their supreme thrill unless he devoted many pages to the mysteries of the London season. (16)

Disraeli began writing fiction at the height of the popularity of the fashionable Silver-Fork kind of story. Robert Plumer Ward's Tremaine and Edward Bulwer-Lytton's Pelham inspired the young Disraeli to try his hand. Convinced of his innate superiority to others in all endeavours, he had no doubt that he could master this particular genre and outshine all other 'novelists-of-fashion'. The result was Vivian Grey which was brought out anonymously and 'puffed' (17) shamelessly by the publisher, Colburn. The book was a sensation among the social elite as well as the rising middle class. The latter was the biggest market for such novels because it gave them a peek at what was supposed to be a true picture of the form and action of fashionable society. When it was revealed that Vivian Grey's author was a social 'nobody', and not a man-of-fashion as Colburn had claimed, the ridicule and derision heaped on the book and its author was as strong as the preceding praise. For the rest of his life Disraeli tried to deflect the notoriety he garnered as a result of his maiden fictional effort. Much of the description of high society was invented, for Disraeli in fact had no such social contacts at the time, and some of his fictitious scenes and conversation are rather foolish and excessive. He also made the mistake of constructing a plot that paralleled his recent experience with the publisher John Murray in South American mining speculation and an attempt to begin a new daily newspaper. Both projects failed dismally, leaving the young Benjamin with some bitter feelings and a mountain of debts. Many of Vivian Grey's characters are thinly drawn caricatures of the principals in these episodes. It resulted in a great deal of ill-will on both

sides and a permanently poisoned relationship between Disraeli and Murray, who had hitherto been as close as father and son. Disraeli tried to soften the continuing impact of the book by drastically revising it for subsequent editions, and constantly apologizing for it whenever he had occasion to comment on his novels. Disraeli loyalists also try to limit the attention given the book. Despite all this, Vivian Grey remains among the best known of his works after the Young England novels, and is still cited as one of the most successful of the Silver-Fork school of fiction. As Matthew Rosa says in The Silver Fork School: Novels of Fashion Preceding "Vanity Fair":

Monypenny loyally dismisses the book, claiming for it only biographical significance. It has more than that, however, in a study of the fashionable novel, for it remains, with Pelham, one of the chief examples of the type. (18)

Disraeli had no desire to become a purely fashionable novelist. He thought of himself as an artist, with a destiny to be a leader of men. He tried to break out of the Silver Fork mold with his next book The Voyage of Captain Popanilla (1828), a pure political and social satire in a style that mimics Swift's Gulliver's Travels. He makes witty, if often still overdone, commentary on most aspects of English society, including fashionable novels, the Corn Laws, and, particularly, Utilitarianism. However entertaining and clever this book may have been, it was not a popular success. His mounting debts, and a desire to tour the Levant, forced him to return to a genre that would pay the bills.

Despite being a personal and critical disaster Vivian Grey sold very well, and continued to do so even after the reviewers had humiliated the author. The market for fashionable novels was still strong in 1831, so he brought out The Young Duke. Again he was drawing on the fruits of his imagination rather than direct experience, for he was

virtually ignorant of the society of Dukes. The book has many features to recommend it to the modern reader, but these are over-shadowed by the sheer force and excess of Disraeli's gaudy descriptions of social life. As Rosa says:

everything on the oriental palette of Disraeli is lavished on the book. The result is not so much just another fashionable novel as it is a fashionable novel to end fashionable novels. (19)

In fact he may have gone too far, even by the somewhat dubious standards of the genre:

the book is not a genuine fashionable novel. Justification for such an assertion can come only from the book's extravagance. It is a caricature rather than an original specimen. (20)

Disraeli is obviously laughing at the style and even at his audience. Yet, The Young Duke made enough money to assuage his creditors and partially finance his Eastern Tour.

Disraeli's novels that complete the pre-parliamentary group are not exclusively concoctions of the Silver Fork variety. Contarini Fleming: A Psychological Autobiography (1832) is as autobiographical as Vivian Grey, and contains accounts of glittering social occasions reminiscent of The Young Duke. But, the remarkable feature of this work is the increasing length of sections that exhibit a taut, concise and precise style of fiction that had been noticeably absent from his previous books. This style of writing is usually employed when the discussion turns to Contarini's inner turmoil. In a situation that mirrors Disraeli's own psychological state, the protagonist tries to come to terms with impulses that led him to consider both the active, energetic career of politics and diplomacy, and the more passive, contemplative life of a man of letters. The book is seriously flawed, less this time by overwrought language than by the other typically

Disraelian kinds of literary irritations --- a pointless travelogue which pads out the latter half of the book, and a conclusion that is utterly unsatisfactory from both a literary/intellectual point-of-view and a simple story-telling one. Despite such faults, Contarini Fleming remains as the most sustainedly introspective of Disraeli's novels and is particularly helpful in examining the psychological foundation of his political philosophy.

This departure was not a successful one in terms of public acceptance. While he received some unaccustomed critical praise, most notably from Goethe, the book was a financial failure. Thus, the books which followed, although containing some unique gimmick or device, were more in the sentimental, fashionable, romance realm than Disraeli would have liked. Venetia (1837) is an absurdly garbled fictionalized version of the relationship between Byron and Shelley. In 1833, Disraeli began Henrietta Temple (1837) as a tribute to his tempestuous love affair with Henrietta Sykes, and, after their relationship soured four years later, was polished off for purely monetary reasons. It is not a memorable novel, with very little social or political commentary. Only his continuing interest in Catholicism remains as thematic residue from his previous works. Clearly, very little of his intellectual or emotional self went into these books. In 1837 his debts were growing at an alarming rate and he was still struggling with the enormous losses incurred in the disastrous mining speculation twelve years earlier. His thoughts were now consumed by politics, and his four unsuccessful attempts to enter the House of Commons not only added considerably to his debts, but also took most of his mental energy.

Of the three novels which came after Contarini Fleming, The Wonderful Tale of

Alroy (1833) is the most intriguing, especially within the framework to be discussed later. It contains a wide variety of ideas and is the culmination of the early personal trilogy. Disraeli referred to Alroy as a depiction of his "ideal ambition" (21). Alroy forms a convenient yet valid bridge between the self examination of the 'pre-parliamentary' novels, and the socio-political commentary of his later work. Daniel Schwarz describes Alroy as:

Disraeli's ultimate heroic fantasy. He uses the figure of the twelfth-century Jewish Prince Alroy, as the basis for a tale of Jewish conquest and Empire. Disraeli found the medieval world in which Alroy lived an apt model for some of his own values. He saw in that world an emphasis on imagination, emotion and tradition; respect for political and social hierarchies; and a vital spiritual life. (22)

Given his early fascination with the Middle East, his travelling experience in the area, and his knowledge of the culture and religion involved, it was reasonable to hope that Disraeli had finally found that known world upon which his rich imagination could impose a wonderful story. Unfortunately, from a literary point of view, Alroy cannot be taken very seriously, and it is intolerably difficult to read. Because his story is set in the 12th century, Disraeli felt a compulsion to write in the style of the time -- or at least a style he thought of as typically medieval. Moreover, because his story is set in the Holy Land, he seems to have wished to incorporate a certain biblical quality into his prose-poem format. The result of this literary experiment is often so laughable that it is not surprising that most of the important ideas in Alroy are ignored, and few readers are able to see beyond the stylistic absurdities.

Although he always denied having been influenced by other authors, Disraeli's pre-parliamentary works betray the strong effect that Walter Scott and particularly Byron

had on his imagination. Scott was attractive as an advocate of the importance of the hero and the value of adventure in shaping the heroic character (23).

Byron was Disraeli's great hero, and the manner in which the former conducted his life was always an example for the latter. Most biographers refer to Disraeli's early attitudes and lifestyle as 'Byronic', and he did his best to be the archetypical Regency dandy, by emulating Byron's style of dress, ironic poses, social flippancy and literary pretensions. In his own travels he attempted to retrace Byron's movements through Europe, and even found Byron's former boatman Tita and immediately engaged the Italian as a personal attendant, more for sentimental reasons than any need he felt for a servant.

Bernard McCabe suggests several direct literary parallels;

Byronism is everywhere in this first trilogy. And if Vivian Grey suggests Don Juan and Contarini Fleming, Childe Harold, then Byronism in Alroy apes the Oriental Romances. (24)

E.A. Horsman points out that;

Disraeli's language does repeatedly challenge Byron's. It can surprise and delight with metaphor the very incongruity of which shocks us into a judgement upon the situation, without subtracting anything from the sense we receive that the author, far from being scornful, rejoices to contemplate it. (25)

What this does not tell us is that, more often than he 'challenged' Byron, Disraeli fell far short of the literary achievements of his idol. He was certainly a brilliant individual, but did not possess poetic genius.

Like some other men of action, Cromwell, Clive, Wellington, Lincoln and Henry Lawrence, he had the

poetic temperament without the poetic talent, and his novels are so many attempts to reveal his feelings. Their failure is due to the fact that he could not create living characters. It has been said that his social scenes, wherein peers and politicians rub shoulders at great receptions, are the best in the language. If so, it is merely because no great writer has bothered to depict peers and politicians rubbing shoulders. A man cannot give life to a scene without giving life to the people who take part in it; and Dizzy's characters lack the vitality of their creator (26)

In fact, in many ways, Disraeli was often seen as a parody of Byron and this was actually an obstacle to the social entrée he hoped his dandyism would provide. Gradually he came to recognize this, and the more visible trappings of his Byronism began to slip from view. His clothes became more subdued and his writing a good deal less sensational. Even though Henrietta Temple and Venetia are not as interesting as the previous novels, at least in autobiographical terms, they do exhibit a definite shift in tone and style that indicates Disraeli's attempt to shed his image of frivolousness.

In the mid-1830's Disraeli moved from re-writing Byron in prose to more traditional concepts of prose fiction. Disraeli was influenced by the eighteenth-century novel with its uneasy balance between romance and realism, between comedy and tragedy, between seriousness and burlesque, between satire and sentimentalism. (27)

This conscious move towards relative respectability and conventionality seems to have come during the same year that he was first elected to Parliament, and a cynical observer could easily conclude that Disraeli saw some measure of conformity as a necessity for his new position.

A new discovery, however, makes it plain that he was beginning to cast off the more obstreperous facets of his literary and social dandyism as earlier four years before his

election at Maidstone in 1837--long before he had any immediate expectations of entering the House of Commons. In October of 1833 he began a book in collaboration with his sister Sarah. After much difficulty, it was finally published in March 1834, by Saunders and Otley, under the pseudonyms of "Cherry and Fair Star" as A Year At Hartlebury; or, The Election. Until the Fall 1979 issue of the Disraeli Newsletter from the Disraeli Project, there was no evidence of the true authorship. Definitive authorial attribution of the various sections is difficult, but the first nine chapters of Book II have been identified as Disraeli's (28). In fact, Matthews believes they are so obviously Disraelian that it is surprising that the reviewers of the time did not immediately identify it as such.

. . . the distinctly Disraelian political philosophy that . . .  
one might think, would give the authorship away at  
once. (29)

The most important thing about this discovery, aside from the addition to literature, is that, as Matthews points out, the obvious Disraelian features are less in its outrageous style, and more in its political details. The description of the election campaign, and outline of Toryism/Anti-Whiggism in A Year at Hartlebury are as good as anything in Coningsby or Sybil . It may be possible to make a case for A Year at Hartlebury as the first true political novel instead of Coningsby . There are unfortunate lapses in continuity of plot and characterization, but the autobiographical elements in the depiction of the hero, Aubrey Bohun, and the superbly drawn election sequence make A Year at Hartlebury a more convenient bridge between the Silver Fork novels and the Young England trilogy than any of his other works, even Alroy.

Between 1837 and 1844 there comes a 'fallow' period in Disraeli's writing activities.

With his election to Parliament he found a new outlet for his abilities. As a parliamentarian he was always notable for his energy and hard work (30). As he learned his new 'trade' he had little time for writing.

Disraeli had without doubt entered a new phase in his life . . . His oratorical assault on the House of Commons will be remembered by politicians and historians forever, and, if the quest for parliamentary celebrity had begun with energy rather than tact, the scale of Disraeli's commitment obviously supported Mary-Anne's claim that "Literature he has abandoned for politics". Six years were to pass before Disraeli published another novel. (31)

By the time he published Coningsby in 1844, his situation in life was markedly different than it was when he last brought out a novel. He was a veteran M.P., but had been disappointed by his exclusion from Peel's 1841 cabinet. He had married Mary-Anne Wyndham-Lewis, the widow of the late William Wyndham-Lewis, and had thereby partly solved his financial difficulties. He was rising in the social world that was part of politics and had developed personal experience of the *milieu* of the aristocracy - something he could only fantasize and fictionalize earlier in his life. The effect of these factors is obvious in the series of novels published between 1844 and 1847 - known collectively as the 'Young England trilogy'.

E.A. Horsman reflects the common assessment of the significance of these three novels when he says:

For most people, Disraeli stands or falls, as a novelist, by the works of the forties, Coningsby (1844), Sybil (1845) and Tancred (1847). The first two touch contemporary history much more directly than any other of his fictions, so that they are read by many as documents. (32)

Lord Blake's biography of Disraeli devotes an entire chapter to them. He comments,

the trilogy made up by Coningsby, Sybil and Tancred is quite different from anything he had written before. A wide gulf separates them from his silver fork novels and historical romances of the 'twenties and 'thirties. (33)

He would be remembered for these if he had written nothing else and never become a Prime Minister. (34)

While this attitude seriously undervalues the pre-parliamentary novels, the Young England books must be recognized as Disraeli at his literary best. Most, but not all, of the descriptive excesses and jarring authorial intrusions so prevalent in earlier works, are absent here. Ideological elements that were no more than incidental in his prior work, become the core. The alternation in style, scope and realism is emphasized by the change in the criticism one reads. Where gaudy descriptions of clothes, food and various entertainments had previously been attacked as frivolous, the new target was Disraeli's penchant for allowing too much religious and political polemic to invade his fiction.

A preoccupation with the political is quite understandable, given that Disraeli's life was now devoted to it, and that Coningsby was conceived as a kind of manifesto for the Young England group in the Commons. Fiction was used as the forum most likely to carry their message to the greatest number of people. It was begun in September 1843 at the home of one of the group's members, Henry Hope, and published in May of 1844. After several years abstinence from regular literary work, he found writing very tiring (35). Sarah Bradford, his most recent biographer, lists the flaws in the book:

Coningsby suffers from the literary faults common to the whole trilogy: banality of plot, and awkward conjunction of lectures on political history and fictional scenes of society and romance and woodenness of the the hero and heroine. (36)

Blake forgives these shortcomings, preferring to focus on the 'alpha' elements in the work:

In Coningsby he produced the first and most brilliant of English political novels, a genre which he may be said to have invented (37)

The discovery of A Year at Hartlebury might challenge Coningsby's claim to being the first English political novel, but few indeed can approach its brilliance. Bradford's comments are all valid ones, but Coningsby is still very readable, a quality not abundant in the early novels, and much more believable in its detail than any of his books. Depictions of those things of which he had no direct experience, such as student life at Eton and Cambridge, were carefully researched and then reviewed by friends who knew about such matters. This attention to detail is an example of Disraeli's growing maturity and responsibility.

Sybil, the next in the series, came out in May 1845. It dwells less on the political and more on the social problems in England. Bradford finds the weaknesses in Sybil to be similar to those in Coningsby, but believes the former to be a "more powerful book" (38) because of its occasional vivid descriptions of the squalid social conditions of most of the people. The raw material for these passages was second-hand--not from Disraeli's personal experience, but gathered by reading parliamentary reports (Blue Books) and Royal Commission testimony. This has often been used as a reason to denigrate Disraeli's achievement in Sybil--as evidence to prove his hypocrisy and disingenuous championing of the poor. Thom Braun tries to rescue the author by pointing out that:

the mention of these Blue Books as sources raises two immediate points. One is that a too conscious concern

with secondary sources may blind us to the author's use of irony and opportunity; Disraeli was writing, after all, to create an effect through fiction, not to provide a reliable record of industrial abuse. And secondly, that such a concern obscures our aesthetic appreciation of Disraeli's overall art in the novel. (39)

Schwarz reinforces this:

Once we understand the kind of novel Disraeli wrote, we shall then understand that Sybil deserves to stand among the major novels of the nineteenth century. (40)

Both Coningsby and Sybil were popular books, and easily sold out their initial run of 3,000 - netting Disraeli a nice profit of £1,000 on each. The last installment of the trio was Tancred (1847) which was eagerly awaited by the novel reading public. Although its sales were respectable (41), it was essentially a disappointment. The subject, "Church and Religion", was to complete a cycle in which Disraeli wanted to examine the three major factors in the life of the English nation, the other two being "Government" and "Society". The novel begins with the hero, Tancred Montacute, engaged in a sincere spiritual self-examination. Most of his comments about the state of the Church and the spiritual condition of the nation is insightful and well written. Tancred decides to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to try and resolve this personal dilemma. After his arrival in Syria the story breaks down entirely. In Coningsby and Sybil Disraeli made some progress with his technique in constructing plots, but, such rudimentary skill as he possessed seems to have abandoned him as soon as his hero disembarks in the Levant. From that point onward the plot degenerates into a morass of mysticism and disconnected episodes. It is an important book in terms of what it says about race, religion and Christianity, but the second half resembles Alroy in its lack of readability. Readers did not

enjoy Tancred nearly as much as Coningsby or Sybil. Its initial sales were achieved mostly on the reputation of the latter two, and, as word of the disappointing book spread, sales fell off to almost nothing.

Before entering another long period without significant literary production, he finished one more book in 1851. Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography was supposed to be a tribute to his friend and colleague in the defense of the Corn Laws against Peel. The result, however, is an account of Bentinck's life so sensationalized and romanticized that it is more like another novel than a biography. Disraeli takes his subject's incidental support of allowing Jews to enter Parliament as an excuse to launch into a lengthy discussion of his own idiosyncratic views of the role of Judaism in England. Ironically, it is only that section of the book that a modern historian finds useful, as it is yet another installment in Disraeli's life-long attempt to justify his Jewishness.

The "Young England" phase of his literary life occurred as he became frustrated with his political situation. He was very restless on the backbenches after his vocal loyalty to Peel went unrewarded in 1841. His whole-hearted devotion to political activity waned slightly and he turned once again to literature as an avenue for his ideas and ambition. After the battle with Peel left the Tory party permanently divided, Disraeli found himself as the only really able and talented member of the largest group of Tories in the Commons. The insurmountable obstacle to his political advancement, Sir Robert Peel and those who identified themselves with Peel, had been removed, and the field was open. It was not an easy path for Disraeli. From 1849 when he assumed the leadership of the "Protectionists" in the Commons (42) until he finally succeeded Derby as overall leader of the Tories in

1868, there was constant pressure on Disraeli to step aside in favour of a more orthodox, if less brilliant, leader. Maintaining his position took all of his energy, and he did not return to fiction until 1870.

He did not give up writing completely. Following the defeat of Derby's second government (1859), in which Disraeli had again served as Chancellor of the Exchequer, he commenced the compilation of a series of memoirs that were finally published as a whole in 1975 as Disraeli's Reminiscences. The editors of Reminiscences suggest he began these musings as preliminary notes to his biographer (43). He knew his career had significant public interest and used this period out of office to begin preparations. Once again an obstacle appeared on his road to the Premiership, this time in the form of Palmerston's popularity and longevity, and he turned to writing as a diversion from his political setbacks.

The Reminiscences make entertaining reading, so much that one wonders why Disraeli did not write another novel when he had the leisure to do so. . . He had, he told Lady Londonderry in 1857, lost all zest for fiction, and, in the opening paragraph of the dedication to the 1864 edition of the Revolutionary Epick, he seems to have abandoned the idea of ever writing again - 'As it has long been improbable that I should ever publish another work'. His mind, according to Stanley, was occupied during the fifties and early sixties by questions of a religious and philosophical nature, and he several times mentioned the curious project of writing a Life of Christ 'from a national point of view' - a singularly opaque phrase - but nothing came of it. Disraeli himself never explained this period; the lethargy that infected his political life until the death of Palmerston seems to have extended also into the creative sphere. (44)

The political lethargy was dispelled in 1866 when Disraeli became Derby's Chancellor of the Exchequer, for the third time. He still had no time or energy for, nor

interest in writing fiction. The Reform Bill of 1867, and his succession of Derby as Prime Minister in 1868 took all his attention. The 1868 electoral defeat at the hands of the very people he had just enfranchised left Disraeli rather dispirited. He sought solace in creation. In 1870 Lothair appeared as the first volume in a collected edition of his novels, and the result was a public sensation:

on 2 May 1870, Lothair was published. To quote again the writer in the Saturday Review: 'Mr. Disraeli has provided a new sensation for a jaded public. The English mind was startled when a retired novelist became Prime Minister. It has been not less surprised at the announcement that a retired Prime Minister is about again to become a novelist. (45)

Over 5,000 copies were in circulation by the 6th of May, and by the time he left for the Congress of Berlin in 1878 his own financial reward was well over £10,000.

It was his personal fame that sparked the first rush of sales, but the quality of the book itself was the force behind its continued popularity. Blake claims Lothair is Disraeli's best work:

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-Rothchildness which can be tiresome elsewhere. Disraeli depicts with a touch of satire, so subtle that perhaps its objects did not recognize it, the grand social world in which he had been a familiar though slightly mocking traveller for over thirty years. The wit and humour are splendid. The conversation sparkles and there is a good thing on nearly every page. The characters, too, are excellent (46)

Once again, even though his vocation was politics, it was literary activity that claimed his attention. He even started Endymion before returning his energies to politics. It was almost a cathartic process, a revitalization that helped him just in time to prepare for the

### 1874 General Election.

Whatever it was that made Disraeli a novelist, was as alive in the 1870's as it was in 1826. Despite the many calls on his attention as Leader of the Opposition, he was sufficiently invigorated by the success of Lothair and the collected edition to begin a new novel. It is difficult to know if, at this stage, he ever envisaged being Prime Minister again. Certainly, he was getting no younger, and as he moved into his late sixties events began to place more of a strain on him. It was against a background of murmuring discontent that he managed to find his strength at just the right time. (47)

This preparation began with a series of speeches in 1872 and prevented him from completing Endymion at that time.

Success at the polls in 1874 installed Disraeli as Prime Minister for the second time, and allowed him the luxury of participating in a majority government for the first and only period in his life. His relatively advanced age (he was now almost seventy years old) and his temperament did not allow him to be the master of detail that Peel had been as Prime Minister. Nevertheless, Disraeli was a very active first minister, particularly in the field of foreign affairs, and he had no time to finish his last novel.

That time became available in 1880. The voters once again made him a 'former' Prime Minister. He worked on the manuscript in secret and delivered it to his publisher with more than a dash of 'cloak-and-dagger' theatrics. Longman paid Disraeli £10,000 in advance--making it the largest single amount paid for a book in the nineteenth century. Endymion sold slowly at first; so slowly in fact that he felt guilty about the large advance and offered to return some of it. Longman refused of course, and the book soon justified his confidence. Endymion is generally thought to be inferior to Lothair and the Young

England trilogy. Here the author is obviously showing the effects of his age and the pressures of heading a government--especially the trying period from 1878 to 1880.

Braun recognizes this:

When Disraeli finished Endymion he was 75 years old. He had been aged further than his years by being Prime Minister. He maintained right to the end of his life the characteristic humour and vivacity which were to be found in all his writings and conversations. But, in many ways, Endymion is a tired book, and it lacks that vital spark of originality. (48)

Blake likewise comments that Endymion:

had a better reception both from the critics and from Disraeli's friends than Lothair. Yet for all its qualities it is not such a good book, although one can see why contemporaries preferred it. Endymion contains many excellent things. The fireworks blaze away as gaily as ever. But it lacks that fascinating yet faintly disturbing ambiguity which in Lothair and the trilogy of the 1840's so often leaves us uncertain whether the author is mocking or accepting the political *beau-monde* of which he was master in both fiction and reality. This subtle blend of irony, satire and romance which gives Disraeli's best novels a flavour unlike anything else in literature is found to perfection in Lothair, and it pervades Coningsby, Sybil and much of Tancred. It is not absent from Endymion but there is less of it, and not enough to mask the absurdity of the plot and the implausibility of the principal characters. The style, too, has a certain languor and tiredness about it. One might have guessed, if one did not already know, that the author was an old man. (49)

Bradford rates the work much more highly:

Endymion is perhaps Disraeli's most readable book and shows him at his best as a political novelist. . . it is autobiographical, although Disraeli took pains to make the hero, Endymion Ferrars, as unlike himself as possible. (50)

In his early life Disraeli felt compelled to choose between a life in politics or in writing. By the time he died on 19th April 1881, he had achieved a substantial reputation in both spheres. Critical reaction to his literary work will always be as varied as the level of quality of his works. Bernard McCabe sees both the sides quite clearly:

Brilliance and absurdity. These might seem very useful terms with which to sum up Disraeli the novelist. Initially at least we see in his books only brittle chatter, bizarre politics, blatant heroics, bloated sentiment, a medley of brilliant absurdities, a medley with considerable entertainment value (if of rather *recherche* appeal) and more. (51)

What made Disraeli more and more audible in the House of Commons was a combination of acute intelligence and a sensitive understanding of what went on there. The same intelligence and sensitivity make it possible for us, often admittedly against considerable odds, to take him seriously as a novelist. In the end what links him, however, remotely, to the greatest nineteenth-century novelists: an imaginative and witty awareness, on many levels, of the world in which he was involved . . . It is true that this awareness emerges only fragmentarily in the earlier novels, where absurdity abounds. (52)

Schwarz believes much the same thing, expanding this train of thought to say:

As he matures, however, he learns to use his style to reflect the psyche of the characters he is describing and, when he wishes, to step aside and comment ironically on that character's thought processes. (53)

Blake, as usual, had the most to say on the subject. The following is a necessarily contracted version of his assessment of Disraeli's abilities as a novelist.

It is easy to list Disraeli's defects. His descriptions are conventional and unperceptive . . . His novels are hastily written, ill constructed, a series of scenes rather than a story; and what plot there is is often implausible, sometimes impossible, eg. the whole business in Sybil about Gerard's claim to the Mowbray estates. His range is limited, and he sounds hollow and unconvincing

whenever he tries to touch the deeper feelings. He could descend to astonishing bathos and commit error of taste almost as bad as those in Vivian Grey. Yet in spite of all this he lives . . . Disraeli is 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. (54)

## II

Implied throughout this work is the belief that literature in general, and novels in particular, are valid and valuable as historical sources. Some historians might see this statement as self-evident, and claim further discussion as an unnecessary diversion at this point in this study. Unfortunately, there is a large body of historians who question this basic assumption, and thus it is useful to provide a justification, however brief, of the use of novels as historical documents; as well as an outline of the problems particularly posed by Disraeli's novels.

The search for firm theoretical underpinnings for history has led many proponents of particular points of view to state their case in a manner that necessarily excludes all other viewpoints as inadequate, or completely in error. They see theirs as the theory that will save history from the oblivion of 'theoretical limbo'. This is akin the naive ethnocentrism of the zealot who believes his religion to be the one true faith, and all others heresy and abominations. As with religious extremism, any historiographical theory that claims truth

and illumination as its exclusive preserve is ultimately more obscurant than it is helpful.

It has been the tendency of most advocates of new historiographical theories to trivialize the attitudes, methods and sources of historians whom they claim worked in a theoretical vacuum. The old style "literary" or "narrative" historian has usually been the target of the theoretician. While deprecating his historical assumptions, his lack of rigorous methodology, and his stylistic preference for narration over analysis, the "new breed" has also been prone to view his sources with extreme disapprobation. In an obvious effort to distance themselves from the literary overtones of the old style of history, historians today have sadly neglected literature as a source of information. To them it may serve as useful fodder for adding 'colour' to history, but it is rare to find one of them who will allow that literature can be fruitfully studied as historical evidence in its own right.

By far the most plentiful of this kind of material that can properly be called literature is the form of prose fiction referred to as the Novel. It is a travesty, maybe even a tragedy, that such an abundance of material should be seen as property of literary scholars, and out of the reach and concern of the historian. Learning today takes place in a system that encourages compartmentalization. Professor Christopher Kent, of the University of Saskatchewan, has pointed out that nowhere has the border been more ardently observed of late than between the sister disciplines of Literature and History. (55) Kent's likening any sustained interdisciplinary intercourse to mere "tourist traffic" between the two is superficially amusing, but reflection gives cause for profound sadness. There is much common ground between literature--especially novels--and history. However, this

commonality has been ignored and abandoned as those on the cutting edge of historical studies have turned to science and social science in search of the elusive 'holy grail' of theoretical solidity.

While historians were putting distance between themselves and literature, literature was having a change of heart over its relationship with History. This came to a peak in the 1930's and 1940's with the New Criticism of F.R. Leavis and T.S. Eliot. Since the two disciplines began to drift in opposite directions in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, much that is positive has occurred in each area of study. Literature was now to be seen as an art form, and to be studied as such -- autonomous, complete within itself, and unfettered by concerns with its origins and context. This attitude gave rise to an increasingly sophisticated methodology of explication and inquiry based on complex theories of art and literature. Similarly, as historians went in search of objective truth, they transformed history from a pastime of the 'gentleman amateur', into a rigorous profession. A.L. Rowse, one of many eminent historians who reject the narrowness of "scientific" history, does nevertheless, have substantial, unqualified praise for the contributions of scientific historians. Severe scientific standards and methods have led to greater care and caution in historical analysis:

emphasis upon exact accuracy at every point, in examining evidence and arriving at conclusions from it, a constant awareness of the dangers of bias and attempts on every side to counteract it. (56)

Closer alliance with social sciences has made some historians more self-conscious about their enterprise. They seem to have awakened to the necessity of a greater awareness and examination of the assumptions implicit in historians' work that had been taken for

granted. An emphasis on finding and articulating a theoretical basis for history has been the result.

Thus, we see a situation where both literature and history have developed, methodologically and theoretically, into much more sophisticated disciplines in their estrangement than they had been when they were studied more closely together. Ironically, it is in this condition of supposed maturity, and in occupying what seem to be opposite poles of the epistemological spectrum that each has a great deal to offer the other. History must re-evaluate its position *vis à vis* literature and explore the possibilities from increased interchange. As mentioned, the novel is a particularly fruitful source of literary material for this new enterprise.

One thing that can be said, without equivocation, about the state of historiography is that there is no consensus about the ultimate purpose of the study of history, or even about the most appropriate subject for it to deal with. Despite the delusions of many theorists, no single approach satisfies everyone's concept of what history should be. Every theory provides profound insights, which are inevitably accompanied by equally profound difficulties and limitations. The above statement regarding claims of the monopoly on truth is appropriate here. It seems that the best course is to examine the validity of each theory in terms of what it hopes to accomplish. To assign history to any of the theoretical pigeon-holes yet put forward is to condemn history to being a mere adjunct of other disciplines. History's existence as an autonomous discipline seems to rest on its ability to encompass a variety of purposes, not all of which are compatible.

It is history viewed as a humanistic study that is most likely to make adequate use of novels as sources. History, as with all other subjects in the humanities, must, at some level, seek to deal with the discovery and revelation of the quintessence of what it is to be a human being. Literature attempts this through fiction, history does so via facts and actualities. The concept of "what it is to be a human being" is very difficult to articulate, but the best attempt for the purposes of this discussion is put forth by philosopher Michael Oakeshott:

Being human is recognizing oneself to be related to others, not as the parts of an organism are related, nor as members of a single, all-inclusive 'society', but in virtue of participation in multiple understood relationships and in the enjoyment of understood historic languages of feelings, sentiments, imaginings, fancies, desires, recognitions, moral and religious beliefs, intellectual and practical enterprises . . . . In short, a human being is the inhabitant of a world composed, not of 'things', but of meanings; that is, of occurrences in some manner recognized, identified, understood and responded to in terms of this understanding . . . . To be without this understanding is to be, not a human being, but a stranger to the human condition. (57)

The purpose of Oakeshott's article is to provide a rationale for education based on what it means to be a human being. According to his conception, the idea of education is to provide an initiation into an inheritance of human understandings by showing the difference from the mere 'fact of life', and recognizing living in terms of 'quality of life.'

A.L. Rowse concludes that while science has benefitted the study of history, it is in the realm of art and imagination that the true purpose of history is revealed:

But, it is in the long run, all these [scientific] intellectual aids are but external; the inner spirit of history, the genius of the thing, is elsewhere: it is in the spirit of man, the flame of life itself. The appropriate rendering

of that can only be given by art. (58)

This initiative/educative quality has been a vital factor in the study of history. Russel Nye points out that the historians and literati of a century ago saw their respective functions as essentially the same--to interpret experience, for the purpose of guiding and enlightening man (59).

[The historian's] aim, like the literary artist's, was the ordering and interpreting of experience to some useful and civilized end. (60)

Nye quotes Emerson as saying that literature is fable created by the imagination, and history is experience interpreted by reason. Both are records of "the one mind common to all individual men"--both attempt to distill out of experience some understanding of the relation between act and reason, between cause and effect (61). In other words the study of history has a major role to play in inducting people into Oakeshott's "multiple understood relationships". Even a very conservative and pragmatic constitutional historian like G.R. Elton, who emphasizes history as a "rational reconstruction of the past" (62), acknowledges that the historian

contributes to the complex of non-practical activities which make up the culture of a society. When he stimulates and satisfies the imagination he does not differ essentially from the poet or artist, which is not to say that he should be picturesque. There is an emotional satisfaction of a high order to be gained from extending the comprehending imagination to include the past. (63)

This approach to history has been viewed with much circumspection by the current crop of social science-oriented historians. The main reason for this is that such a

"mystical", "imaginative" view of history does not easily lend itself to being studied via analytic constructs or models. Because it resists this kind of analysis, many historians and historiographers have dismissed it as a second class citizen in the new world of theoretically-based study of the past. Martin Bulmer uses R.F. Berkhofer to show the new behavioural approach to history:

His purpose in *A Behavioural Approach to Historical Analysis* is to bring to history some of the clarity of conceptualization and explicitness of explanatory purpose of the social sciences. He aims to 'encourage the incorporation of a sophisticated social theory and precise explanation into the writing of history, in order to achieve a more complex representation of past reality than hitherto found in the subject.' (64)

Gareth Stedman Jones claims that "the criteria by which the construction of a problem will be judged of historical significance will ultimately be dependent upon some explicit or implicit theory of social causation"(65). The history that is the most valuable is that which states its underlying assumptions, bases those assumptions on theoretical constructions, and practises its investigations with a precision that rivals that of the sciences (66). Yet, to ignore or decry the value of historical study bases on "spirit" and imagination because it does not easily yield to analysis seems extraordinarily obtuse. It is akin to behavioural psychology, which disregards imagination and intuition as unsuitable subjects of psychology because they cannot be studied empirically, or reduced to a simple stimulus-response-reinforcement pattern. Both attitudes are silly. Any open-minded historian must allow that there is much of value to be learned from history that acknowledges and makes use of imagination. It is this orientation to history that is particularly open to making use of novels as documents.

Now it is necessary to look at the theory and aims of novels, and see what it is about them that can be useful to historians.

...novels which are truly worth reading help us to see things as they really are. (67)

Contrary to the naive beliefs of the uninformed, novels are much more than simply fiction--simply made-up stories. Recent theoretical discussions of the novel, as an artistic and literary form, always begin with an acknowledgement of the undeniable element of reality that is present in novels that are true to the classic form.

A fundamental building material out of which novels are made is a narrative that claims to be factual and which contains internal evidence of an appropriate kind to convince readers of its truth. (68)

Novels are not just stories; they must bear some relationship to the concepts of truth. (69)

Novels have always submitted themselves to the dual test of artistic success and imitative accuracy, or truth. In the nineteenth century the emphasis was on a mimetic interpretation of life, while in this century the aim has shifted towards an accurate, albeit necessarily impressionistic exploration of the inner self. In either case, recent historiography, and formalist literary criticism have tended to ignore the element of reality in novels. This element usually takes three basic forms: 1) the degree to which the details of setting, costume, action, etc. in the novel correspond to what is commonly held to be historical actuality; 2) the extent to which the novel reflects any social, political or psychological theory that was current at the time it was written; and 3) the way the novel manages to reflect the mentality of the readership for which it was intended, and the author who created it.

A standard glossary of literary terms gives a lengthy definition of "the novel". (70) Two essential characteristics of serious fiction are that it deals with man in significant action in his world, and that it has a high degree of verisimilitude, or believability. These two features are particularly evident in the works of the nineteenth century, which is generally believed to be the golden age of the novel. This era was the flowering of the 'realistic' school, especially in English, French and Russian novels, and serious authors prided themselves on the high level of realism in their work. Charles Dickens, for all his exaggeration of character and plot mechanics, was noted for the scrupulously accurate details of his settings--especially the descriptions of London. For keen, true-to-life portrayals of institutional machinations, a very good source is Anthony Trollope. The day-to-day workings of rural clergy in the Barchester series, and the marvelous depiction of the Victorian political picture in the sequence of Palliser books have both been acclaimed as more enlightening on their respective subjects than any single orthodox historical treatise.

One would go a long way before discovering a more incisive account of the collapse of Napoleon III's Empire in 1870, and the 1871 Paris Commune, than that which forms the setting for French novelist Emile Zola's La Débâcle. Zola's obsessive concern for detail and accuracy created a narrative that would rival that of any "legitimate" historian. In fact, the research Zola did was exhaustive and impressive. He interviewed hundreds of participants, ranging from exiled royalty to peasants residing in the locale of the action. He examined thousands of military documents from official archives made available to him by both the French and the Germans. And he spent months tracing the exact movements of troop trains, whole armies, and individual couriers. He even visited battle sites and

followed troop march routes--all in an effort to establish the absolute authenticity of the setting and action for his story. The result of this massive undertaking, because its final form turned out to be a novel, is largely ignored by historians as a possible source of accurate details of the Franco-Prussian War.

With the exception of newspapers, there is no more plentiful public document of the nineteenth century than the novel. Since many authors attempt to produce a faithful rendering of reality, it makes very little sense to leave it unused. In a brief but illuminating essay, John Fleming calls upon historians to be more responsible in this regard:

literary texts offer important and sometimes unique kinds of historical evidence and that, by and large, the historical discipline has been curiously diffident about exploiting this evidence with vigor and confidence. (71)

Arthur Bryant makes the same plea, saying these authors are communicating contemporary experience (72) -- a communication any historian should be glad to utilize.

None of this should be taken as a call for historians to drop their work with more traditional sources and suddenly take to poring over novels in order to glean details about past societies or events. What is being called for is a more serious regard for the novel as a source of that detail. The *genre* depends on employing realism, and most novelists, especially in the nineteenth century, relied on experience and observation to create that realism. This does of course bring up the issue of how the historian is to use the information he garners. Many "rationalists" would claim that this is essentially an imaginative act and thus outside the province of the historian. However, it must be remembered that the kind of interpretation the historian practises on data is also an

imaginative act, not really different from the literary. What the historian has to do is bring a new set of skills to bear on this new document.

The second kind of reality often prevalent in novels is a reflection of the theories and attitudes of the authors.

Fiction is not so much an account of experience as it is an author's explanation of experience. A novel is experience which has been selected, re-formed, and set in motion. Narrative fiction is a model of social interaction, it is social theory. (73)

This kind of interpretation is not necessarily restricted to studying the most serious or even the most successful novelists. Any novelist, as a historical figure himself, will endow his fiction with attitudes, actions and mores that reflect personal bias as well as social/environmental preoccupations of the time. However, it is from the most socially and artistically conscious novelist that the historian can learn the most, with the least effort, about social theory. Peter Morales claims that the beauty of studying social theory in novel form is that the

intimate, vital relationship between an author's values and his theoretical models is much harder to disguise in fiction than in jargon-laden, supposedly scientific prose of the social sciences. (74)

The novelist manages to do this by combining the theoretical, or idea-type person, with the actuality of individual action; by comparing what society expects, and how the individual reacts; and by focusing on social roles.

'Social role' here means the set of prescribed behaviours society imposes on people, behaviours which come complete with promised rewards and punishments. By tracing how different types of people in different types of situations interact with the expectations and demands of

society, the novelist is constructing a set of detailed ;and complex propositions about social and psychological change. (75)

In his essay, Morales gives a detailed analysis of two novels--Henry James' The Bostonians, and William Dean Howells' A Hazard of New Fortunes--and shows the extent to which they are very real repositories of social theory. Searching study of plot, character, and setting reveals a staggeringly sophisticated level of social analysis on the part of the novelist.

The novel, read as social theory, emerges as a multidimensional laboratory, a laboratory in which the novelist places his theoretical constructs in motion and develops the implications of his ideas and values....The novel's wealth of detail and vitality tempt us to overlook its theoretical component. Models tend to get lost in drama and content. (76)

Here we see an answer to the historian's claim that novels are just fake stories, manipulated by the whims of the author. The novelist cannot do just as he pleases. If he does, his work has even less value as literature than it does as history. Believability is the key to the success of both novels and history. The novelist works under equally restrictive, if not identical constraints of reality and theory as the historian. While the latter has these restraints based in an "already occurred" reality which is obviously more restrictive, the former, nonetheless, is also tied to a reality--albeit the much less confining one of probability. Nevertheless, if the limits beyond which the novelist cannot pass can be delineated, the historian's task in employing novels as sources is simplified. Two of those limits are realism of fact, place and action, and the theory of how an individual acts in society.

The third kind of reality contained in a novel that would be of interest to the historian is information about the readership of a novel. The first two kinds of "reality" discussed pose methodological challenges that are sometimes insurmountable. There is great difficulty in verifying historical details in novels. There is the question of reliability in this case as well as in the case of deriving social theory from novels. Most historians have seen this as reason enough to eschew novels as documents--they questioned the novel's utility in telling them something about the period in which it was written. Post-formalist critics, such as James Smith Allen, see a new kind of literary criticism arising that will be an immense boon to historians, especially social historians. This new approach is based on French structuralism and makes possible new knowledge of the past. Allen writes,

The knowledge, however, is not of the details in the text, the author's view of his social world, or the great work's superiority as a document, but of historical readers and the structure of their beliefs reflected in the texts and their literary system. If the historian cannot easily use the novel as a document because of the more intractable methodological difficulties of extracting reliable and verifiable information from an art form, he can study fiction and its structures as elements of a collective mentality. (77)

Every fictional text assumes a readership. This notion of the supposed readership, Allen claims, allows the literary scholar to reconstruct the values of that group by examining the understandings and network of relationships between authors, textual narrators, and the readers. While this is a very clear echo of Oakeshott and Rowse, and the interpretative/imaginative school of history, it is nonetheless firmly rooted in theory.

Historians may now study the novel with more theoretical sophistication derived from specialists sympathetic to issues extrinsic to literature...any advances over previous uses of fiction for historical purposes must avoid conceiving of the text as a document, however suggestive, and think of it instead as

part of a structuralist system, discourse, or code. To do so...builds on the interdisciplinary theories of revisionist literary scholars. (78)

Such a reader-response approach allows a historian to confidently use novels to deal with new questions about the culture and mentality of large groups of people who inhabited the past; "the social historian may read the novel to understand its audience and the socially significant conventions it preferred in the novel" (79).

These three incarnations of "reality" show very clearly that the fictive element in novels should not pose a serious barrier to their use by the historian. Nor should the apparent absence of theory in literary history be an impediment. Both history and literature have developed frames of reference that are perfectly adequate for making the novel a meaningful historical tool.

As can be discerned from the first section of this chapter, Disraeli's novels are not typical of the genre. They are not typical of novels of the Victorian period, tending to be more 'regency' in character even long after he had adapted other aspects of his life to the changes in Victorian society, nor are they typical of the kinds of novels that lend themselves very easily to the type of use as historical sources described above. This does not mean that Disraeli's novels are not useful or usable as documents for the historian. It means that his work falls into that narrow band of novels that are more important for what they reveal about the author than what the author tells us about his society and surroundings. Trollope's novels are most valuable for their descriptions of settings and social relationships. His demonstrated commitment to, ability to, paint realistic pictures of such things are his main value. If analyzed closely enough, Trollope's books would

also show something about the author, but his style and focus on the major subjects of the books make such an analysis unfruitful and of slight interest at best. When reading Trollope we are not concerned with what we can learn about Trollope. Quite the opposite is true of Disraeli. His depictions of everything, with the possible exception of political events, is highly unreliable. But, as will become obvious, his novels reveal a great deal about himself--his ambitions, his hopes, his likes and dislikes, his political and social ideas. When reading Disraeli the most interesting thing we can learn is more about Disraeli.

There is very little difficulty with equating the ideas of the author with those of the narrator and/or the central character in the novels. What Schwarz says in the context of a discussion of Contarini Fleming is true for Disraeli's work in general:

Contarini may nominally have an independent existence but he is inseparable from Disraeli's own complex personality and character. Disraeli does not succeed in creating a sufficient distinction between himself and his character. While Contarini is meant to be Disraeli's version of the poetic personality and character. Disraeli the romantic uses Contarini to dramatize how his own imagination will free his soul from conventions, traditions, systems and false knowledge. (80)

In a more general sense he says:

Reading his novels we read the biography of Disraeli's soul. Particularly in the period between 1826 and 1836, the novels are his most revealing *actions* in the sense that they most accurately reflect his doubts and anxieties, his hopes and aspirations. In the novels, Disraeli presented various aspects of his complicated personality as he imagined it at a particular time and place; the novels stand as vehicles for which his mind and psyche are the tenors. (81)

Disraeli used his novels not only to create the political

figure he became but also to define his essential character and personality. (82)

While in total agreement about few things, the other main critics are unanimous in their belief in this central factor - that Disraeli's novels do give us more information about the author than about anything else. Here are Braun's, Levine's and McCabe's statements on this issue:

. . . Disraeli's novels are more important for what they tell us about their author than they are works or art in their own right. 'Fiction' and 'fictionalizing' formed an important part of his life (83)

Through our attempt to isolate the writer's ideas as developed in his novels, the politician and the man should become better understood. (84)

Behind in all [his novels] lurks the spirit of that clever and complex man, Benjamin Disraeli, constantly challenging the reader to come to terms with this elusive mind. (85)

Horsman even goes so far as to claim that Disraeli reveals certain things in his novels that he would probably not have found prudent to put in a non-fiction form:

He uses [novels] to make play with possible actions and opinions in such a way that we not only attend to but a judge of the characters and events, and their inter-relations. Moreover, his powers as a novelist, although obviously limited, are considerable enough to allow us to see things for ourselves, some of them things which his political presuppositions - for instance in Coningsby - might have led him to conceal. (86)

Faced with this weight of critical opinion, and Disraeli's own admission in his letters and The Mutilated Diary of the autobiographic nature of his fiction, it is valid to claim a

high level of historical utility for his novels--if the goal of the historian is to find evidence for an analysis of some aspect of Disraeli himself. Since his political philosophy has its deepest roots in his obsession and his unique, rather distorted, view of history and England, his novels are invaluable documents.

### III

There is no definitive collected edition of Disraeli's works. There are numerous editions and collections of all his fiction, some of which also include samples of his speeches, letters and non-fiction. However, he had a habit of severely 'editing', in fact bowdlerizing, his work in its later editions in an obvious effort to expurgate their more embarrassing passages and allusions. Disraeli had a propensity for fictionalizing his past. The family 'history' that he wrote as a preface to one of his father's literary works is dubious at best. When David Bryce Publishers planned the first uniform edition of Disraeli's novels in 1853, the author took the opportunity to eliminate the indiscretions of his youth--at a time when his leadership of the Tories in the House of Commons was beginning to yield results in terms of his respectability and a likely cabinet post. In his book about Disraeli's career as a novelist, Dr. Braun confirms that it was these revised versions of the novels that formed the basis of the 1870 Longman edition and most subsequent editions (87). One of the avowed aims of the Disraeli Project at Queen's University is to produce an authoritative edition of the novels (in 14 volumes). However, since no such work yet exists, the choice of what edition to use for a study such as this is

somewhat problematical.

The decision was made to use the twenty-volume The Works of Benjamin Disraeli Earl of Beaconsfield , subtitled "Embracing Novels, Romances, Plays, Poems, Biography, Short Stories, and Great Speeches", published by M. Walter Dunne in 1904-1905. It is supplemented with a 'Critical Introduction' by Sir Edmund Gosse, then the Librarian to the House of Lords, and a 'Biographical Preface' by Robert Arnot. The copy of Volume 1 in the collection of the University of Victoria contains an elaborate frontispiece which proclaims the set to be the "Primrose Edition", of which 999 sets were printed and this is number 248. This is "Attested" to by the signature, or facsimile signature, of the Managing Editor, Robert Arnot. The choice of this particular edition was based upon its qualities of completeness, apparent reliability, and readability. The latter is a matter of no small consequence in an undertaking of this kind - especially given Professor Matthews' belief that stamina is one of the requisite factors in pursuing a study that incorporates all of Disraeli's novels (88).

After substantial preliminary research had already been done using these volumes, certain irregularities concerning the bibliographic background of this set of the works were discovered. Extensive cross-checking of passages used in this thesis with other editions show that these irregularities do not compromise the integrity of the actual content of the novels. The main question that remains unanswered relates to the origin of this so-called Primrose Edition. The most comprehensive bibliography of Disraeli, that compiled by R.W. Stewart, lists two Primrose Editions: an eight volume set, containing the novels from Vivian Grey to Sybil, brought out by Routledge in 1888, and that published by

Ward Lock in 1892 which only offers five novels (Vivian Grey, The Young Duke, Henrietta Temple, Coningsby and Sybil) (89). None of the other major bibliographies of Victorian literature have any mention of these editions.

On the other hand, all of these bibliographies (90) acknowledge a twenty-volume set as described above--the same title, subtitle, publisher, date of publication, critical introduction by Gosse and biographical preface by Arnot --except that it is never referred to as "The Primrose Edition". Stewart does not give a name to this set in his bibliographic appendix to Blake's biography (91). Curtis Dahl refers to it as being "...variously called the Empire and Earl's Edition...", and considers it to be the best edition of Disraeli's works (92). The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature simply lists it as "Empire and Earls edition", with no possessive on Earls, and gives Gosse, rather than Arnot, the title of Editor (93). In his more complete bibliography, Stewart calls it the "Empire" edition, with no mention of "Earl's" or "Earls", and says that 1244 sets were printed for subscribers (94), not 999 as listed on the frontispiece of the set belonging to the University of Victoria. Nowhere in any of the twenty volumes of the set at the University of Victoria is there any mention of "Empire" or "Empire and Earl's" or "Empire and Earls". A plausible explanation may be that the "Primrose" version of the M. Walter Dunne set might have been printed for the North American market, while the other was for British subscribers. This possibility is weakened by the fact that a separate edition would certainly have been noted as such by the bibliographers.

All this rather arcane bibliographic detail is probably only significant to the dedicated bibliographer. The inconsistencies and irregularities do point to very real oversights

and/or carelessness on the part of those who have compiled Disraeli bibliographies and these should be followed up, but, as mentioned above, it does not affect the utility of the text for historical research. It is, nevertheless, just another of the many suspect details that surround Disraeli's life and works. Disraeli was concerned with generalities and the 'big-picture', and had a tendency to neglect matters of detail--his forté was vision not precision. This pattern seems to have continued long after his death in the re-issuing of his novels and the compilation of bibliographies. One last point, to add emphasis, is made by examining the career of the writer of the "Critical Introduction", Edmund Gosse. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Gosse was one of the most popular and widely read critics of the period. His reputation was forever tarnished by his connection with several literary scandals revealed in the 1930's and 1940's (95) . His role in these scandals was essentially peripheral; it was his sloppy scholarship that was taken advantage of by the infamous T.J. Wise. As Richard Altick comments:

His literary histories and biographies, with all their charm of manner and frequent flashes of critical acuteness, are thoroughly careless as to fact. (96)

He could easily have made the same comment about Disraeli, and it seems to be apt that such a person was chosen to write a critique to an edition of his novels that is surrounded by bibliographic errors and unexplained irregularities.

NOTES

- 1 - M.H. Abrams (General Editor), The Norton Anthology of English Literature (4th Edition) (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979).
- 2 - Robert Adams, The Land and Literature of England: A Historical Account (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983).
- 3 - Peter Conrad, The Everyman History of English Literature (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1987), p. 436.
- 4 - Peter Quennell, A History of English Literature (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1973), p. 337 - 339.
- 5 - Margaret Drabble (ed.), The Oxford Companion to English Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 276 - 277.
- 6 - Thom Braun, Disraeli The Novelist (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981).
- 7 - Daniel Schwarz, Disraeli's Fiction (New York: Barnes and Noble Imports/Harper and Row, 1979).
- 8 - Richard Levine, Benjamin Disraeli (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 7
- 9 - Levine, p. 8.
- 10 - John Morley, Life of William Ewart Gladstone (volume 2) (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1905), p. 284.
- 11 - Anthony Trollope, An Autobiography (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 259 - 260.
- 12 - "The New Generation" was the subtitle to Coningsby, the first of the so-called "Young England" trilogy. MacKnight obviously saw the ideas in these novels as unsuitable for England's young man.
- 13 - [Thomas MacKnight?], Benjamin Disraeli, M.P. (London: Richard Bentley, 1854), p. 10 - 11.
- 14 - When he first read it to a group of acquaintances in January of 1834, they could hardly contain their laughter until he had left the room.
- 15 - Schwarz, p. 114.
- 16 - Matthew Whiting Rosa, The Silver Fork School: Novels of Fashion Preceding "Vanity Fair" (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 43.

- 17 - "Puffing" was an unscrupulous form of publicity practised by many publishers of popular books. Colburn was a major culprit, and well known for it at the time.
- 18 - Rosa, p. 102.
- 19 - Rosa, p. 108.
- 20 - Rosa, p. 109.
- 21 - Benjamin Disraeli, "The Mutilated Diary" in Benjamin Disraeli Letters: 1815 - 1834 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 447.
- 22 - Schwarz, p. 42.
- 23 - Braun, p. 76.
- 24 - Bernard McCabe, "Benjamin Disraeli" in Minor British Novelists ed. Charles Alva Hoyt (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 84.
- 25 - E.A. Horsman, On The Side of Angels? (Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago Press, nd), p. 43.
- 26 - Hesketh Pearson, Dizzy: The Life and Personality of Benjamin Disraeli -- Earl of Beaconsfield (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), p. 293.
- 27 - Schwarz, p. 63.
- 28 - John Matthews, "Appendix I" in A Year At Hartlebury or The Election (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), p. 208.
- 29 - Matthews, p. 206.
- 30 - Lord Blake lists this as one of Disraeli's four greatest political assests in Disraeli (London: Eyre and Spotteswoode, 1966), p. 286.
- 31 - Braun, p. 71.
- 32 - Horsman, p. 43.
- 33 - Blake, p. 190.
- 34 - Blake, p. 191.
- 35 - Sir Edward Clarke, Benjamin Disraeli: The Romance of a Great Career (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1926), p. 69.
- 36 - Sarah Bradford, Disraeli (New York: Stein and Day, 1983), p. 135.
- 37 - Blake, p. 190.

- 38 - Bradford, p. 136.
- 39 - Braun, p. 87.
- 40 - Schwarz, p. 105.
- 41 - Blake and Braun differ on the exact initial sales. The former says 2,250, while the latter claims 2,500.
- 42 - Disraeli was *de facto* leader, if not so *de jure*. In an effort to pacify anti-Disraeli factions in the still fragile Tory party, Derby set up a 'triumvirate' leadership in the Commons - composed of Disraeli, Lord Granby (soon to be the 6th Duke of Rutland), and Charles Herries. This arrangement did not last long, and was never effective. Disraeli was leader.
- 43 - Helen M. Swartz and Marvin Swartz, "Preface" in Disraeli's Reminiscences (New York: Stein and Day, 1976), p. xxiii.
- 44 - Bradford, p. 245 - 6.
- 45 - Braun, p. 128.
- 46 - Blake, p. 518.
- 47 - Braun, p. 139.
- 48 - Braun, p. 141.
- 49 - Blake, p. 735.
- 50 - Bradford, p. 380.
- 51 - McCabe, p. 79.
- 52 - McCabe, p. 80.
- 53 - Schwarz, p. 5.
- 54 - Blake, p. 219 - 220.
- 55 - Christopher Kent, "History and the Novel: Competing Realities", lecture at the University of Victoria, February 17, 1983.
- 56 - A. L. Rowse, The Use of History (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1946), p. 94.
- 57 - Michael Oakeshott, "Education: The Engagement and Its Frustration", in A Critique of Current Educational Aims, ed. R. F. Dearden, P. H. Hirst and R. S. Peters, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 18-19.

- 58 - Rowse, p. 111.
- 59 - Russell B. Nye, "History and Literature: Branches of the Same Tree", in Essays on History and Literature, ed. Robert H. Bremner, (Akron: Ohio State University Press, 1966), p. 125.
- 60 - Nye, p. 124.
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- 63 - Elton, p, 48.
- 64 - Martin Bulmer, "Sociology and History: Some Recent Trends", in Sociology (vol.8, 1974), p. 146.
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- 67 - Ian Milligan, The Novel in English (London: The Macmillan Press, 1983), p. 3.
- 68 - Milligan, p. 20.
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- 70 - C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature (Indianapolis: The Odyssey Press, 1977), p. 354.
- 71 - John V. Fleming, "Historians and the Evidence of Literature", in Journal of Interdisciplinary History (IV:I, Summer, 1973), p. 95.
- 72 - Arthur Bryant, Literature and The Historian (London: Cambridge University Press, 1952), p. 5.
- 73 - Peter Morales, "The Novel As Social Theory: Models, Explanations and Values in Henry James and William Dean Howells", in Clio (V, 3, 1976), p. 331.
- 74 - Morales, p. 333.
- 75 - Morales, p. 332.
- 76 - Morales, p. 343.
- 77 - James Smith Allen, "History and The Novel: Mentalites in Modern Fiction", History and Theory (XXII, 3, 1983), p. 246.

- 78 - Allen, p. 245.
- 79 - Allen, p. 237.
- 80 - Schwarz, p. 31 - 32.
- 81 - Schwarz, p. 5.
- 82 - Schwarz, p. 150.
- 83 - Braun, p. vii.
- 84 - Levine, p. 25.
- 85 - McCabe, p. 97.
- 86 - Horsman, p. 62.
- 87 - See detailed discussion of this in Braun, pp. 122 - 125.
- 88 - John Matthews, "Literature and Politics: A Disraelian View" in Humanities Association of Canada NEWSLETTER (Vol. XII, no. 1, October 1983), p. 7.
- 89 - R.W. Stewart, Benjamin Disraeli: A list of writings by him, and writings about him with notes (Methuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1972), p. 107 - 108.
- 90 - The two major bibliographies by Michael Sadleir do not mention any of Disraeli's collected editions.
- 91 - R.W. Stewart, "Writings of Benjamin Disraeli" in Blake, p. 772.
- 92 - Curtis Dahl, "Benjamin Disraeli/ Edward Bulwer-Lytton" a bibliographic essay in Victorian Fiction: A Guide to Research (ed. Lionel Stevenson) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 22.
- 93 - George Watson (ed.), The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature (Volume 3) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 773.
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- 96 - Altick, p. 58.

CHAPTER 3: AMBITION AND POLITICS IN THE "PRE-PARLIAMENTARY"  
NOVELS

I

Disraeli's novels are about himself. Although they deserve a modest reputation as novels in their own right, their prime importance is as a marvelous set of documents about his own hopes, ambitions, and ideals. The majority of his novels were written before his election to the House of Commons at Maidstone in 1837, and these eight books provide great insight into his political, philosophical and personal development. Critics, like Levine, tend to dismiss the whole group as stylistically immature, self-obsessed, and interesting only insofar as they provided evidence that Disraeli would eventually produce the much more significant Young England trilogy. From a purely literary point of view this may be a valid assessment, although Goethe's admiration of Contarini Fleming would seem to indicate that book at least has more to offer than is generally acknowledged. From the standpoint of the historian, however, the very factors that mar the novels' artistic status are the reasons that they are so valuable.

Stylistically, the pre-parliamentary novels are particularly notable for the over-wrought emotions of the main characters, the excessively ornate language used in description, the jarring authorial intrusions, and the irritatingly artificial way in which characters are manipulated in order to illustrate some idea that Disraeli was toying with at the moment. All of these things reveal different aspects of his character that formed key parts of his political philosophy. Such style, in general, is not so very different from that

employed by other Silver-Fork novelists such as Bulwer-Lytton, Lady Caroline Lamb or Lady Morgan. Where Disraeli's novels are a notable departure from others written in a similar vein is in the degree of excess, as well as the insertion of ideas and issues that were decidedly more thoughtful and sophisticated than was evident in the books of his 'colleagues'. Throughout these novels we see Disraeli using the freedom of fiction to muse about personal and political issues that intrigued him. He could manipulate reality in order to experiment with personal qualities and ideas he was exploring, developing and questioning. Matthews compares this process with that of Disraeli's greatest personal hero:

They [books] enabled him, as he felt they had for Byron, to analyse past mistakes and learn from them, to project future ambitions and to test them, and to assess his present position between the two. (1)

Hesketh Pearson said that "Disraeli's novels are solely interesting as revelations of his personality and as political documents..." (2). Disraeli himself acknowledged the true nature of at least some of his early work;

In *Vivian Grey* I have portrayed [sic] my active and real ambition. In *Alroy*, my ideal ambition. The *P. R.* is a developmt. of my poetic character. This Trilogy is the secret history of my feelings. (3)

The notion of 'ambition' forms the basis of this chapter. The "real and active ambition" introduced in *Vivian Grey* is present throughout these novels. Disraeli was a fiercely ambitious man and never doubted his ability or destiny for greatness. Such confidence was founded on an unshakable belief in his innate superiority to other humans. He also had a very strong streak of idealism or ideal ambition. He possessed an

obsessive belief in Heroism, and the virtue (and responsibility) of heroic qualities in political life. This factor is especially important and will be dealt with in a separate chapter. Even though he had little real artistic ability, he had a poetic/artistic temperament, and his early writings show his struggle with conflicting impulses to pursue either an active life in politics or the contemplative life of a literary artist. These factors, as they are revealed in the pre-parliamentary novels, form the basis of an understanding of the personal/political development that became evident in his later political career. They show his mind at work as he tries to come to terms with his talents, his background and the society in which he found himself. The language of the early novels reveals Disraeli's obvious Romantic influence, but it is possible to overlook the very realistic side to his nature which is also available to the careful reader. Georg Brandes, the Belgian philosopher and a contemporary of Disraeli, wrote:

We should not understand anything of the character of Benjamin Disraeli if we overlooked the fact that even his theories and fantasies, which bear the strongest impress of the great romantic reaction, had been, without exception, disinfected by born scepticism and early developed critical faculty. Even in his castles in the air, you do not find the malaria arising from the Maremmas of superstition and prejudice...by careful observation they may be easily distinguished from the structures of dreamland and reverie. (4)

The eight 'pre-parliamentary' novels (5) are dealt with together because they form a logical as well as convenient group. His letters and papers reveal that Disraeli wrote fiction almost continuously from the time he first took the pen up in earnest until his election in 1837. After that, there was a gap of seven years before he published the next novel. During the intervening years the circumstances of his life changed quite drastically.

The ideas, preoccupations and style of the novels of the parliamentary Disraeli are obviously, and necessarily, different from the pre-parliamentary Disraeli (6). All his novels have that self-experimental, self-exploratory nature discussed earlier, but in those written before 1837 we see the results as published in a time before he was in a position, namely in the House of Commons, to actively pursue them. He could give free reign to his stunningly original and active imagination.

## II

If Disraeli's novels are self-exploratory, then the discoveries he made merely confirmed what he already knew to be the four keys to his personality: confidence, ambition, power and imagination. "The result of his self-examination was absolute confidence in his powers and in his future" (7). In "The Mutilated Diary" he is unequivocal:

My career will probably be more energetic than ever, and world will wonder at my ambition. (8)

The world calls me *conceited*. The world is in error. I trace all the blunders of my life to sacrificing my own opinion to that of others. When I was considered very conceited *indeed*, I was nervous, and had self confidence only by fits. I intend in future to act entirely from my own impulse. I have an unerring instinct. (9)

His belief in his ability and his destiny was so strong that André Maurois was not exaggerating when he wrote, in a biography of Disraeli:

Life, it seemed to him would be intolerable if he were not the greatest among men: not one of the greatest, but quite definitely the greatest. (10)

Daniel Schwarz quite correctly identifies this supreme confidence and driving ambition as a key to the subject of this thesis:

Disraeli's political philosophy was often based less upon principles than upon the belief that he could act in the best interest of those less perspicacious, intelligent and informed than himself. He believed that the 'natural aristocracy' of ability had the responsibility to lead....(11)

Schwarz would have done better to say that Disraeli's philosophy was often not based upon principles that were commonly acknowledged--for there were, most definitely, principles underlying his ambition. These will be discussed later.

Let us first examine how the expression of his belief in the power of his talents, and his ambition for power are sustained throughout the pre-parliamentary novels. In the initial chapters of his first published work (12), Vivian Grey (1826), the hero soon realizes that he is not an ordinary school-boy.

Superior power, exercised by a superior mind, was for a long time more than a match even for the united exertions of the whole school. (13)

The hero, Vivian, is obviously meant to be Disraeli himself. He lacked the skill to draw original characters, and all of the central figures of his books are thinly disguised versions of himself--their lives poorly transmogrified versions of his life, or at least how he wished his past to be seen by others. This general pattern is firmly established, and most pronounced in Vivian Grey. Vivian soon finds, as did his creator, that conventional

schools are unsatisfactory. He continues his education by engaging in an intense regime of study from resources in his father's library. Studying philosophy, religion and history only served to confirm Vivian's belief in his superiority, and that his destiny was for something quite exalted. Nor did he see his somewhat middling social position as a barrier:

In England, personal distinction is the only passport to the society of the great. Whether this distinction arise from fortune, family, or talent, is immaterial; but certain it is, to enter into high society a man must either have blood, a million, or genius. (14)

Vivian was blessed with the latter, and so by implication was Disraeli.

The young genius virtually lusted for greatness but could not quite decide upon the most felicitous and expeditious route. He spurned a career at Oxford feeling he had enough education, and rejected a life at the Bar because:

...to succeed as an advocate, I must be a great lawyer; and to be a great lawyer, I must give up my chance of being a great man. (15)

After a great deal of reflection he decided that he was best suited for a life in politics.

And now everything was solved, the inexplicable longings of his soul, which had so often perplexed him, were at length explained. The want, the indefinable want, which he had so constantly experienced, was at last supplied; the grand object on which to bring the powers of his mind to bear and work was at last provided. He paced his chamber in an agitated spirit, and panted for the Senate. (16)

He would not settle for merely becoming a member of Europe's most élite club he had to become a pre-eminent force within it:

Power! Oh! what sleepless nights, what days of hot anxiety! what exertions on mind and body! what travel! what hatred! what fierce encounters! what danger of all possible kinds, would I not endure with a joyous spirit to gain it! (17)

Such ambition and self-confidence became the hall-mark of most of Disraeli's pre-parliamentary heroes. This burning desire for power remained a major part of his personality right up until the final year of his life when he lost the premiership to Gladstone. However, in this first appearance of one of his many autobiographical characters, Disraeli concluded Vivian's political adventure in typically romantic but surprisingly unsuccessful fashion. The disintegration of Vivian's carefully constructed political scheme reflects Disraeli's own experience in trying to establish a new daily newspaper, The Representative. In fact Vivian Grey was such an obvious re-telling of the Representative débacle, and the principle actors, that he permanently alienated those involved - John Murray, John Gibson Lockhart and John Wilson Croker. (18) But, when presented with the opportunity to allow his hero to achieve his goals, Disraeli instead forced Vivian to experience the same instructive benefits of failure that he himself had endured. Even at this 'adolescent' stage of his career, and in full belief that he was destined for greatness, he was capable of recognizing his own shortcomings and errors that could prevent his success--even if, in this case, his major failing had merely been the inability to perceive treachery in others.

The affair of The Representative, and the harsh critical and social reaction to Vivian Grey temporarily shook Disraeli's confidence. He did not lose belief in his ability or essential superiority, but he briefly lost the conviction that he could use these gifts to rule

others. Part II of Vivian Grey, written a year after Part I, was a poor sequel, in which Vivian suffers an aimless continental exile after killing his former ally, Cleveland, in a duel. Throughout his wandering Vivian was no longer the instigator of events, but rather he travelled about passively allowing things to happen to him. He meets Beckendorf, the Prime Minister of a German duchy who had risen to power from social and political obscurity. In his discussions with Beckendorf (19) Vivian learns a great deal about how a superior person has to manage those with position, influence and money but no talent or brains. Most important of all Vivian learned that he had to control his emotions and to work dispassionately to advance his career. This reflects Disraeli's own resolve following the embarrassments of 1827. Vivian never gets the chance to put his new-found wisdom to use because the author inexplicably kills off his hero in a riding accident. Disraeli never learned to write a decent ending.

In 1828, while recovering from from a long illness, Disraeli published The Voyage of Captain Popanilla - a sharp satire on politics in general and utilitarianism in particular. The 'hero', Popanilla, becomes dissatisfied with his idyllic life on a tropical island paradise when he reads utilitarian tracts found in a sea chest that had been washed up on the beach of the island. The inhabitants of the island soon tire of Popanilla's attempts to impose his new ideology on them and remake their uselessly happy existence. He is set adrift and soon finds himself on the shores of the powerful island of Vrailbleusia. Here the many foibles and idiocies of social and political England are ruthlessly satirized. This little entertainment shows that Disraeli had a sense of humour. He was definitely ambitious and yearned to be accepted in the politically important social circles, yet he was not above poking fun at some of the more ridiculous factors he saw there. His desire for power to

control others did not mean that he blindly accepted all of the trappings of the established power structure. This is the first extended evidence of Disraeli's antipathy to systems of ideology--especially utilitarianism--and that the basis of his 'right' to govern was not some *a priori* ideology but his own unique talents and individual imagination. The foundation for legitimate government was not an objective system it was simply the abilities of a capable, even great, individual. In addition, The Voyage of Captain Popanilla gave him an outlet to take revenge upon a society that had so far failed to recognize his talents.

Disraeli's next book, The Young Duke did not appear until three years later (1831).

In a letter to his friend, Benjamin Austen, he admits that it was written for money:

I fear I must *hack* for it. A literary prostitute I have never yet been, tho' born in an age of general prostitution, and tho' I have more than once been subject to temptations which might have been the *ruination* of a less virtuous young woman. My muse however is still a virgin, but the mystical flower, I fear, must soon be plucked. Colburn I suppose will be the bawd. (20)

Despite its mercenary genesis and essentially silver-fork focus, it does contain enough passages to ensure the reader that the author had not lost his hunger for greatness. The character of the Duke of St. James embodies Disraeli's thirst for social success. Not just any success would be sufficient, so Disraeli had his fictional Duke yearn for pre-eminence; to be the brightest star in the social firmament. As Blake says, when it came to his public position Disraeli wanted to be the best no matter what, whether the arena was literary, political or social:

...the scorn for a 'moderate reputation' is the quintessence of Disraeli, indeed the key to his character and career. (21)

Not all of The Young Duke is either frivolity or a panegyric on the pursuit of social position. Occasionally one of the all too frequent authorial intrusions reassures us that Disraeli still sees himself as a frustrated paragon, a condition which is hopefully temporary:

Could we but drag the purple from the hero's heart; could we but tear the laurel from the poet's throbbing brain, and read their doubts, their dangers, their despair, we might learn a greater lesson than we shall ever acquire by musing over their exploits or their inspiration. Think of unrecognized Caesar, with his wasting youth, weeping over the Macedonian's young career? Could Pharasalia 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? The visions of past glory might illumine even that dark imprisonment; but to be conscious that his supernatural energies might die away without creating their miracles: can the wheel or the rack rival the torture of such a suspicion? (22)

Even though this book was in a popular genre written for the money, the need for recognition as a superior being was rarely far from the surface. Keeping it from the surface was almost causing it to fester.

In 1832 Disraeli was twice defeated at High Wycombe. As might be expected during this time he was not always convinced that politics was the most appropriate outlet for his genius. Contarini Fleming, which came out in the same year, shows this uncertainty. The title character is continually pulled between impulses that draw him to a literary career, and those that push him into the realm of politics. But Contarini never doubted his innate personal superiority. Like Vivian Grey, this hero first becomes conscious of his aptitude and his taste for ruling others while at school (23). He also leaves an intellectually inferior

and unsatisfying school, and goes home to 'study' under his father's guidance. During this time, indeed throughout the entire book, Contarini finds it impossible to decide between literature and politics; but he does not question the necessity of finding some outlet for his immense capacities. His greatest fear was not being able to find an outlet sufficient for his talents and would provide the concomitant fame they warranted:

they cannot even remotely conceive the agony of doubt and despair which is the doom of youthful genius. To sigh for fame in obscurity is like sighing in a dungeon for light; yet the votary and the captive share an equal hope. But, to feel the strong necessity of fame, and to be conscious that without intellectual excellence life must be insupportable, to feel all this with no simultaneous faith in your own power, these are moments of despondency for which no immorality can compensate. (24)

Contarini is obsessed with greatness. He consults his father and Mr. Winter about how to attain and cope with greatness. When he finally realizes his dream of visiting Venice, he gazes at the city and sees past greatness.

...the monuments are not only of great men, but of the greatest. You do not gaze upon the tomb of an author who is merely a great master of composition, but of one who formed the language. The illustrious astronomer is not the discoverer of a planet, but the revealer of the whole celestial machinery. The artist and the politician are not merely the first sculptors and statesmen of their time, but the inventors of the very art and the very craft in which they excelled. (25)

But, this is also a book that mirrors some of Disraeli's uncertainty at that time, and Contarini's reaction to a review of his book shows that neither he nor his creator is immune to criticism:

The criticism fell from my hand. A film floated over my

vision; my knees trembled. I felt sickness of heart, that we experience in our serious scrape. I was ridiculous. It was time to die. (26)

Although the uncertainty about Contarini's future role is not resolved at the end of the book, the reader is left with no doubt that the hero will continue to strive for greatness. Disraeli may have endured several setbacks in 1832, but, while he suffered a slight weakening of confidence, it was definitely temporary. The next year saw the beginning of his torrid love affair with Lady Henrietta Sykes, and the publication of The Wonderful Tale of Alroy.

As Disraeli himself said, Alroy represents his 'ideal ambition'. During his travels in the Levant he became intrigued with the true story of David Alroy and wanted to tell that story. His book opens upon a period of Arabian domination of the Jews, and Alroy, as 'Prince of the Captivity', chafes at the subjugation of his people and his own suppressed desires:

No, no; I live and die a most ignoble thing; beauty and love, and fame and mighty deeds, the smile of women and the gaze of men, and the ennobling consciousness of worth, and all the fiery course of the creative passions, these are not for me, and I, Alroy, the descendant of sacred kings, and with a soul that pants for empire, I stand here extending my vain arm for my lost sceptre, a most dishonoured slave! (27)

Disraeli always maintained that he was descended from an aristocratic Jewish family, and he obviously identified with Alroy's frustration.

Alroy mounts a rebellion based upon the conviction that he has been chosen by God

to lead his people out of bondage. From that point on he does not doubt that he will be successful--it is his destiny. He exclaims,

I cannot doubt my triumph. Triumph is a part of my existence. I am born for glory, as a tree is born to bear its fruit, or to expand its flowers. (28)

In the end, however, Alroy abandons strict adherence to his quest and God allows the Arabs to recapture lands taken by Alroy. Alroy himself is captured and, just before he is about to be executed, he renounces the selfishness that brought about his downfall. He realizes that he should never have put his interests ahead of those of God; but he still has enough personal pride, and belief in the importance of his name to his people, that he worries over his posthumous reputation:

Alas! there is no one to guard my name. 'Twill be reviled; or worse, 'twill be forgotten. (29)

He is reassured by one of his devoted followers that his great deeds and character will survive:

Never! the memory of great actions never dies. The sun of glory, though awhile obscured, will shine at last. And so, sweet brother, perchance some poet, in some distant age, within whose veins our sacred blood may flow, his fancy fired with the national theme, may strike his harp to Alroy's wild career, and consecrate a name too long forgotten? (30)

Like Alroy, Disraeli felt like an oppressed aristocrat who was denied a proper place in the ruling classes. Like Alroy, Disraeli knew that his superiority would inevitably raise him to his proper place. Disraeli also believed, as Alroy eventually discovered, that positions of power, however much they may be the right of the occupant, must always be used to achieve a higher purpose. The heroic strain in his personality created his conviction that

once one slips into a pattern of personal use and abuse of power, as Alroy did, the power is forfeit.

In 1834 Disraeli was introduced to Lord Lyndhurst, the former Tory Lord Chancellor. They soon became good friends, and it was this friendship that helped Disraeli to decide to committ himself to the Tory party. That same year a novel entitled A Year At Hartlebury or The Election was published under the names of Cherry and Fair Star. The discovery, in 1981, that Hartlebury was in fact a collaboration between Disraeli and his sister Sarah adds an important novel to the general 'canon' of political novels. In fact it can be justifiably claimed that is the first of the true political novels since it contains all the characteristics of the genre and pre-dates Coningsby, the novel formerly accorded this distinction, by a full decade.

Hartlebury is the story of the upset that comes to that constituency by the coincident return of the squire of Bohun Castle, and an election in which a new Member of Parliament must be chosen. The main character, Aubry Bohun, has, as Disraeli had, recently returned from mysterious travels in the East to claim things the author himself only dreamed of: an ancient castle, a substantial, unencumbered income, and a position of influence in the region surrounding his estate. In contemplating his situation Bohun falls into a reverie that reflects Disraeli's own wistful longing for the feudal socio-political arrangements of bygone eras:

Devoted vassals rose up in numbers around him, his willing tools to some great though as yet undefined end. He knew he could work upon men's minds, he felt he had all those powers of eloquence that could excite. (31)

Despite Bohun's social and electoral success, two things that had thus far eluded Disraeli, he eventually loses the respect and affection of the people who helped him. His fall is precipitated by his dishonesty. He did not do anything extreme, but he seriously misled the primary female character—he 'trifled with her affections'. The moral is meant to show that while the desire for, and pursuit of, worldly things is not evil (it may in fact be a virtue) such rewards should only go to those whose brilliance warrants their attainment, and whose morality justifies their retention. Bohun met the first qualification, but was seriously deficient in the second.

Three years passed before Disraeli published another novel. He brought out a tract in 1835, The Vindication of the English Constitution, the principle purpose of which was to promote his qualifications to the leaders of the Tory party.

The last two of Disraeli's pre-parliamentary novels, Henrietta Temple and Venetia, came out in 1837. The latter was a rather garbled story that utilized various facets of the lives and characters of Byron and Shelley. It had been a 'pet project' for years. The former had its genesis in his love affair with Lady Sykes and was started in the middle of their relationship. When their passion cooled so did Disraeli's interest in the book. It lay dormant for a year and a half until he finally completed it for financial reasons. Neither book contains much of political interest, which makes them unique among his works, and Levine feels that is about all that need be said about them:

In the final analysis, however, the novel[s are] neither typical nor meaningful in Disraeli's canon: for [they carry] few ideas or authorial observations, and Disraeli's fundamental interests for us are a novelist of ideas (32)

There are, however, subtle aspects of these works that are applicable to this discussion of his ambition.

Henrietta Temple has so little purely political content because love temporarily displaced politics as the dominant passion in Disraeli's life. Instead, the novel leaves the reader with a clear view of his strong Byronic temperament, Byronic pretensions and Byronic ambition. Henrietta Temple is by no means the first example of his Byronism:

Byronism is everywhere in this first trilogy. And if Vivian Grey suggests Don Juan and Contarini Fleming, Childe Harold, the Byronism in Alroy apes the Oriental Romances. (33)

It is, however, a great sample of a passionate Disraelian display that did its best to suggest Byron, without being overshadowed by the more overtly political passages present in the other novels. Suggesting that Disraeli's wish to emulate Byron can be characterized as ambition is not an overstatement. As has been seen so far, Disraeli had many ambitions, but none was stronger or more long standing than his desire to be seen as an incarnation of Byron. His *ennui*, dark moods, and general emotional displays and his foppery, cynicism and pretensions to poetic ability, were outward signs of Disraeli's attempts to emulate Byron. But he was in pursuit of more than just the image. Disraeli saw Byron as someone who could influence affairs in which he took no active part by the sheer force of his imagination, and was very attracted and intrigued by such a personality--he wanted to be like that. He also took to heart Byron's resistance against taking himself too seriously--a sense of self-irony, deeply felt and not merely a flippant pose as others often thought. The public perception of them both was as having an:

air of supercilious melancholy as his public face, and the pose of leaning one one elbow, his cheek resting against

his clenched hand in romantically pensive attitude. (34)

Blake comments on Disraeli's use of Byron as his model:

He was a passionate admirer of Byron, who had died two years before [1826] and whose influence upon a whole generation it is hard to exaggerate. Byron was the symbol of adventure, liberation, romance and mystery. His extraordinary combination of literary genius, worldly cynicism, theatrical melancholy, aristocratic disdain and political liberalism, together with the rumor not only of a multitude of sexual triumphs but also of what used to be called 'nameless' vices, had made him even in his lifetime the object of perennial fascination which he has remained ever since. (35)

Regarding the Bryonic elements of Henrietta Temple he says:

...it is possible to suspect that even from the start he was less in love with her [Henrietta] than with the idea of being in love and of being loved. A grand passion was an inseparable part of that Bryonic tradition. . . in Disraeli's life. (36)

While the essential Byronism of Henrietta Temple consists of the overwrought, high flown emotions, and of the emphasis on the style of Byron, Venetia actually uses Byron as its subject. The two central characters are in fact a confusing amalgam of Byron and Shelley. What is not confusing is the obvious message that Disraeli had a great admiration for these two giants of Romanticism. Not only was this an intriguing departure in terms of subject matter, but politically it was also a potentially dangerous one. At a time when Disraeli was coming ever closer to realizing his first political dream, it seems incongruous that he should 'consort' with two figures who were still seen as disreputable by the Regency/Early Victorian establishment. Shelley, as an avowed revolutionary and atheist, was socially and politically anathema, and Byron was viewed as a talented poet, but, nevertheless, a moral reprobate. Since Disraeli was consciously working to soften his

earlier image as someone not 'steady' enough to be trusted with political office, Venetia is a difficult book to understand. Monypenny and Buckle offer an analysis that satisfactorily explains it in terms of his political ambitions, which at the time had led him to formally join the Tories, and in terms of his supreme individuality and self-confidence:

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 leader; so that he felt impelled to demonstrate that, though he had submitted himself to the yoke of a definite political allegiance, his thoughts were not therefore to be bounded by the Tamworth manifesto. By choosing as his heroes the two greatest revolutionary figures that England had produced 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. (37)

Whatever the motivation for its creation, Venetia was the second consecutive book in which Disraeli highlighted his political debt to Byron and, to a lesser but still significant extent, both personal and artistical debts. Brandes provides a useful summary of Disraeli's attitude to his idol:

He unites in himself the qualities which are divided between his heroes--the visionary ideas and the making an idol of self. When writing this book, he was inspired by the great humanitarian visions which had pursued him from West to East and back. These visions enabled him to understand Shelley; on the other hand, he was animated by ardent personal ambition and desire for political power, and through these qualities he felt himself akin to Byron. But there was a third element in him, an element which cannot be said to have belonged to either of the great men with whose destinies he was occupied; this was the instinct of self-preservation...it has certainly always served to prevent Disraeli from making shipwreck on his way to port with his day's work half done, long and stormy as the voyage may have been. (38)

His soul drew him to Byron, but, being a surprisingly practical person, he would not allow his devotion to destroy his future. When the more sober fashions of the Victorian era overtook Regency dandyism, he prudently backed away from the outwardly Byronic trappings--the affected mannerism, the ironic attitude, and the outrageous costumes. Inwardly, however, he remained true to the ideas and ideals of his hero.

Ambition and self-confidence were the cornerstones of Disraeli's political philosophy. He was convinced of his superiority, and wanted public acclaim in some sphere of notoriety that would ensure that this superiority was widely acknowledged. In his early novels this attitude was so blatant that the literary agent of William Beckford, a minor novelist, called Disraeli the most conceited person he had met. Beckford's reply, written after reading Contarini Fleming, was that what 'appeared conceit in Disraeli was only the irrepressible consciousness of Superior power' (39). As Gertrude Himmelfarb says,

Had Disraeli been content to be like his father, 'a quiet member of a tolerated minority', as Blake says, he too could have enjoyed the amenities of the Athenaeum. But he would not condescend to be quiet and tolerated. He wanted nothing less than the highest public office, and he wanted it on his terms, as the most conspicuous member of the most 'superior race'. (40)

### III

Disraeli never questioned that he was better than other men, that he was destined for something great. The big question for him during most of his early life was whether the best outlet for his peculiar genius was in the political arena or in the realm of literature.

Left to his own devices there would have been no such quandary--his nature virtually demanded that he pursue a parliamentary career. But the singular vocation of his father, and the literary milieu that surrounded the D'Israeli (41) household made it inevitable that young Benjamin would also have a strong literary influence in his life. Thus, the heroes in several of his pre-parliamentary novels wrestle with dual impulses--one towards a life of active fulfillment of genius in politics, or, alternatively, a more passive, contemplative existence pursuing the muse. Disraeli exhibited this dichotomy when he wrote of himself that "Poetry is the safety valve of my passions, but I wish to act what I write" (42).

It is interesting that none of the heroes in the pre-parliamentary novels who experience this dilemma--Vivian Grey, Contarini Fleming, David Alroy, Lord Cadurcis, and Marmion Herbert--ever come to a satisfactory decision. All of them, at various times in the novels, commit themselves to one of the alternatives, but they never come to terms with having to abandon or suppress the other. This reflects Disraeli's own ambivalence about having to make a similar decision. The fact that literary action resumed the dominance of his life whenever his political energies waned temporarily seems to confirm this. Hesketh Pearson notes that Disraeli had a real, if not great, literary talent, and his forays into fiction had more independent literary significance than being the mere dabblings of a bored or frustrated politician. Pearson says,

When a born man of action takes to letters, his main concern is propaganda, his chief object to impress his personality upon the world. For that reason no man of action can be a great writer, the temperament which produces great literature being opposed to the temperament which produces practical results, the first being reflective and objective, the second active and subjective. (43)

But what makes him an exceptionally interesting figure is

that, though well aware that action was his true *metier*, he had a strong predilection for art, and knew intuitively that the poet was more important than the politician, a perception that places him spiritually above the other leading statesmen of our history. He was also gifted with more imagination than the rest, an imagination that found admirable expression in occasional sentences and sometimes in more extended passages. Many of his apothegms are first-rate, and he was master of the picturesque and pithy phrases. (44)

Although he eventually made politics his primary activity, and was more or less reconciled to the suppression of the literary impulse, he managed to bring a key and unique element from his fiction to politics--imagination. His early experience in politics, especially the failures and the ridicule, also had an effect on the way politics is portrayed in the novels. He gradually learned patience in politics. The successful political figures in Disraeli's pre-parliamentary novels have risen to power by being patient and cautiously using their brilliance to best advantage--not indiscriminately. Those who failed in the political arena usually did so because of their impatience, their desire to achieve instant success. Not until he himself achieved success in politics, however, does he present a successful fictional politician who is also the main character. Until then, those characters who have viable political careers are secondary actors, meant to serve as examples and inspiration to the protagonist.

Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming provide the best examples of the 'politics vs. poetry' issue. For a brief time Vivian Grey felt equally drawn to the lives of politics and literature, but he does not take long to make up his mind. Vivian feels himself destined to rule others even though he is still rather young:

[Vivian] had all the desire of a matured mind, of an

experienced man, but without maturity and without experience. He was already a cunning reader of human hearts; and felt conscious that his was a tongue which was born to guide human beings. (45)

Young Vivian, and thus the young Disraeli, exclaims that a contemplative life would be a poor second choice to an active one:

A man may read all his life, and form no conception of the rush of a mountain torrent, or the waving of a forest of pines in a storm; and a man may study in his closet the heart of his fellow-creatures for ever, and have no idea of the power of ambition, or the strength of revenge. (46)

Both of the above passages are from the first volume of Vivian Grey, before the catastrophic collapse of Vivian's political plans. They reflect Disraeli's attitude to ambition and power relationships during his first 'political' adventure, The Representative affair. The second volume, written a year later, shows a more subdued Disraeli as it outlines the errors Vivian made and gives an example of the quintessential politician and his success. Vivian's race to become the controlling genius behind a new political party ended in disaster. His approach had been to virtually shove his brilliance down the throats of his fellow collaborators. When he meets Beckendorf he learns how the German Prime Minister rose from the peasantry to his exalted position by virtue of his ability, his diplomacy, his capacity for hard work, and his patience. Talent was the basis of Beckendorf's career, but he realized that, by itself, talent would not be sufficient--an insight that had eluded Vivian and lead inevitably to his downfall. Beckendorf, being of low birth, had to find ways of achieving results while not upsetting the existing traditional class structure at court. Disraeli writes:

A Minister who has sprung from the people will always

conciliate the aristocracy. Having no family influence of his own, he endeavours to gain the influence of others; and it often happens that merit is never less considered than when merit has made the Minister. (47)

The lengths to which he must go to achieve the necessary influence for his policies often meant that important positions had to be offered to incompetents, thus dramatically emphasizing the importance of Beckendorf's ability to take on great amounts of routine work:

All about him are young nobles, quite unfit for the discharge of their respective duties. His private secretary is unable to coin a sentence, almost to direct a letter; but he is noble! And the Prime Minister of a powerful empire is forced to rise early and be up late; not to meditate on the present fortunes or future destinies of his country, but by his personal exertions to compensate for the inefficiency and expiate the blunders of his underlings, whom his unfortunate want of blood has force to overwhelm with praises which they do not deserve, and duties which they cannot discharge. (48)

Disraeli used the character of Beckendorf as a means to illustrate what he thought it would take to become a success in his own situation (after having botched his part in The Representative project). With his immense talent, work ethic, and patiently diplomatic ability to impress and placate those with positions of influence, Beckendorf served as the model upon which Disraeli patterned his own slow climb to the Premiership.

As he published more fiction, and gained more exposure to electoral politics (though not yet achieving electoral success), the tension created by his inability to choose between politics and literature became more pronounced. The best illustration of his turmoil is in the character of Contarini Fleming. Throughout that novel, Contarini is much more than merely "interested" in both occupations, he is terribly torn between them and first plunges

whole-heartedly into one, then the other, and back again. Each time he immerses himself in either, he deeply feels the loss of the one he has forsaken and agonizes over his decision. As early as his first term at school, the young Fleming has felt the intoxicating feeling of exercising 'political' power, and then, very quickly, experienced the need for literary expression that leads him to attempt fiction. He recalls,

this was the first time in my life that the idea of literary creation occurred to me; for I disliked poetry, of which I had read little except plays; and although I took infinite delight in prose fiction, it was only because the romance of the novel offered to me a life more congenial to my feelings than the world in which I lived. But the conviction of this day threw light upon my past existence. My imaginary deeds of conquest, my heroic aspirations, my long, dazzling dreams of fanciful adventure, were, perhaps, but sources of ideal actions; that stream of eloquent and choice expression which seemed ever flowing in my ear, was probably intended to be directed in a different channel from human assemblies, and might melt or kindle the passions of mankind in silence. (49)

When he gets personal experience of the real difficulty of generating "art", and is faced with the combined limitations of lack of expertise and education, his early infatuation with the literary life fades. About this time Contarini learns more of his father's background in Italy, and the Baron Fleming's current position as Foreign Minister in a northern kingdom. Since he had recently abandoned both his school and literary career, Contarini reluctantly accepts his father's offer of a temporary position at the Foreign Office. Being exposed to the day-to-day life of the active politician soon reactivates his earlier desire to control affairs:

I began to muse upon this idea of political greatness...Poetry and philosophy and the delights of solitude, and the rapture of creation, I know not how it was, they certainly did not figure in such paramount beauty and colossal importance as I had previously

viewed them....Ambassadors and chancellors, under secretaries and private secretaries and public messengers flitted across my vision. I was sensibly struck at the contrast between all this greatness achieved, and moving before me in its quick and proud reality, and my weak meditations of unexecuted purposes, and dreamy visions of imaginary grandeur. (50)

It was enchanting to be acquainted with the secrets of European cabinets, and to control or influence their fortunes. A year passed with more satisfaction than any period of my former life. (51)

In the midst of his political apprenticeship he achieves a major diplomatic triumph and his future is assured. But, almost immediately, he rejects this worldly life and again yearns for the chance to express himself in fiction--to immortalize his genius through literature:

I look forward to the immediate fulfillment of my long hopes, to the achievement of a work which might last with its language, and the attainment of a great and permanent fame. (52)

In a feverish, almost maniacal, burst of energy Contarini writes a book, Manstein, the history of which parallels that of Vivian Grey. At first it creates a social sensation, then the author is shunned when his identity becomes known, and, finally, the critics write scathing reviews that destroy Contarini's literary confidence. He goes into self-imposed exile and claims to have foresaken literature in favour of politics.

It was a political age. A great theatre seemed before me. I had ever been ambitious. I directed my desires into a new channel, and I determined to be a statesman. (53)

Even at the end of the book, Contarini has still not been able to decide on his life's direction. His soliloquizing in the final pages quite accurately reflects Disraeli's own

muddled feelings at the time:

Here let me pass my life in the study and the creation of the beautiful. Such is my desire; but whether it will be my career is, I feel doubtful. My interest in the happiness of my race is too keen to permit me for a moment to be blind to the storms that lour on the horizon of society. Perchance also the political regeneration of the country to which I am devoted may not be distant, and in that great work I am resolved to participate. Bitter jest, that the most civilised portion of the globe should be considered incapable of self-government! (54)

Contarini never really learns the patience necessary for success, at least not by the end of this book, but others in his life were there to provide examples and words of wisdom. His father told his son about how he himself had to learn to control his own vitriolic artistic temperament in order to stabilize his life and allow him to achieve political success. The other major influence in Contarini's life was Winter, the mysterious artist, and his advice to Contarini on how to achieve artistic success has patience as its focus: "BE PATIENT: CHERISH HOPE. READ MORE: PONDER LESS. NATURE IS MORE POWERFUL THAN EDUCATION: TIME WILL DEVELOP EVERYTHING" (55).

While the indecision on the part of Disraeli's characters about which vocation to pursue is a genuine reflection of the author's own turmoil, the reader is really left in little doubt about which activity should, and will, dominate. Throughout the pre-parliamentary novels the characters are most 'happy' when engaged in political activity. When dealing with the nature of a life in literature or politics, or outlining the qualities that will ensure success or failure in each, the discussion of politics is by far the dominant one--it obviously has more power over Disraeli's thoughts. It is almost as if the tension between the two is presented to the reader as a means of showing the author as a serious

thinker/writer who feels it as much an obligation as a joy to enter politics.

The pre-parliamentary novels are full of references about what makes a good or a bad politician. Perhaps this is one of the best indications that Disraeli had always known politics would be his primary career. From his very first published work he was essentially outlining a code of conduct for those who aspire to high office. In Vivian Grey there are two clear examples of the kind of politician Disraeli detests. The first comes in the form of the Marquess of Carabas and the other nobles who form the "Carabas party". The self-important, but essentially useless, aristocrats who feel their birth alone warrants their occupying the places of power were a target of Disraeli's attacks. The parasitic sycophants, epitomized by Mr. Staplyton Toad (56), were another type of politician Disraeli despised. They compensated for lack of originality and ability by becoming the toadies of anyone who had the position or power they desired for themselves. Staplyton Toad was precisely the kind of person who did not deserve the honour of sitting in the House of Commons.

On the positive side, Disraeli provides Cleveland and Beckendorf. Cleveland was to be the 'man-of-talent' to lead the Carabas party in the Commons. He embodied the typical brilliant 'man-of-business' whom Disraeli felt deserved, even earned power, in fact whose duty it was to assume power. Beckendorf, as has been pointed out, had the talent, patience and tact to rise, and rightfully so. These were the kinds of politicians that Disraeli admired and felt he should try to pattern himself after.

In The Voyage of Captain Popanilla, we see all of society satirized, and the country's

cabinet is portrayed as a set of twelve managers. These managers are far from praiseworthy, but when describing the work they must undertake, Disraeli shows that government is something that cannot be left to fools:

The twelve Managers surrounded the Statue at a respectful distance; their posts were the most distinguished in the State; and indeed the duties attached to them were so numerous, so difficult, and so responsible, that it required no ordinary abilities to fulfil, and demanded no ordinary courage to aspire to them.  
(57)

The Young Duke is primarily a "Silver-Fork" novel, a social comedy. Yet, interspersed throughout it, almost unnoticeable, are several passages that reflect important parts of Disraeli's political philosophy that he carried throughout his life of political involvement. The character of Charles Annesley, though peripheral to the main story, but nevertheless represents the type of *persona* that Disraeli was attempting to develop in himself:

His natural and subdued nonchalance, so different from the assumed non-emotion of a mere dandy; his cautious courage, and his unadulterated self-love, had permitted him to mingle much with mankind without being too deeply involved in the play of their passions; while his exquisite sense of the ridiculous quickly revealed those weaknesses to him which his delicate satire did not spare, even while it refrained from wounding. All feared, many admired, and none hated him. He was too powerful not to dread, too dextrous not to admire, too superior. Perhaps the great secret of his manner was his exquisite superciliousness, a quality which, of all, is the most difficult to manage....On the whole, he was unlike any of the leading men of modern days....(58)

This passage is remarkable not only for what it tells us about Disraeli's goal for his personality development but also for the fact that it quite accurately describes him in later

life (59).

Disraeli became well-known as a consummate parliamentary orator. To him oratory was a vital political skill, especially as it displayed one's brilliance of mind, and eloquence was a gift that any politician should treasure. No one, however, can be eloquent, and thus shine in oratory, if there is no substance to the speaker's thoughts. Thus, this notable passage in The Young Duke:

The truth is, Eloquence is the child of Knowledge. When a mind is full, like a wholesome river, it is also clear. Confusion and obscurity are oftener the results of ignorance than of inefficiency. .... Knowledge must be gained by ourselves.... Knowledge is not a mere collection of words; and it is a delusion to suppose that thought can be obtained by the aid of any other intellect than our own.... When a man is not speaking, or writing, from his own mind, he is as insipid company as a looking-glass. (60)

Known for his dry wit and eloquence, Disraeli took his own words to heart, and was always the master of his subject and could never be accused of parroting another's views--his spoken and written opinions were decidedly unique. Near the end of the book there is one of his memorable aphorisms--this one on the subject of speaking styles:

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. (61)

He did, of course, have time to attempt oration in both Houses. Such a public statement must have seemed impertinent coming from the pen of someone who, at the time of writing, was only a notorious novelist and failed candidate for the Commons. Disraeli, however, was merely honestly declaring his ambition--what was to him a realistic

ambition.

Perhaps the quality most important to his political longevity, apart from his patience, was his knowledge of human nature--of all people generally, but of himself in particular.

Throughout his political career he held this to be a key thing for the successful politician:

Before a man can address a popular assembly with command, he must know something of mankind; and he can know nothing of mankind without knowing something of himself. Self-knowledge is the property of that man whose passions have their play, but who ponders over their results. Such a man sympathises by inspiration with his kind. He has a key to every heart. He can divine, in the flash of a single thought, all that they require, all that they wish. Such a man speaks to their very core. All feel that a master-hand tears off the veil of cant, with which, from necessity, they have enveloped their souls; for cant is nothing more than the sophistry which results from attempting to account for what is unintelligible, or to defend what is improper.  
(62)

In Contarini Fleming, Disraeli gives life to a more sophisticated incarnation of Beckendorf in the form of Contarini's father, Baron Fleming. In true Disraelian style, the Baron's background is vague and highly romanticized. He is from a noble Venetian family that tragically lost its wealth and position, and is forced to place his talents at the service of a northern ruler. By dint of hard work and, of course, natural brilliance, Baron Fleming has risen to become Minister of State. A summary of his political style is remarkably similar to Disraeli's own.

His practice of politics was compressed in two words, subtlety and force.... His perfection of human nature was a practical man. He looked upon a theorist either with alarm or with contempt. Proud in his own energies, and conscious that he owed everything to his

own dexterity he believed all to depend upon the influence of individual character.... Out of the cabinet the change of his manner might perplex the superficial. The moment that he entered society his thoughtful face would break into a fascinating smile, and he listened with interest to the tales of levity, and joined with readiness in each frivolous pursuit...he was a universal favourite...you might have supposed him for a moment, for had you caught his eye, you would have withdrawn your gaze with precipitation, and perhaps with awe. (63)

Disraeli acknowledges the great cost that the development of such a *persona* exacts. Baron Fleming rarely interacts with his family, although in the book it is clear he loves them dearly; in fact, he is hardly ever seen in a setting outside his ministerial suite of offices. Most significantly, he had to suppress his own poetic impulses in order to be successful in politics. As he admits to Contarini:

I, too, believed myself a poet; I, too, aspired to emancipate my kind; I, too looked forward to a glorious future, and the dazzling vista of eternal fame. The passions of my heart were not less violent than yours, and not less ardent was my impetuous love. (64)

The fact that Baron Fleming has sacrificed and suffered much in the pursuit of his career, and yet remained a largely positive example of political activity, is a key factor in Contarini's dilemma. As he learned more about the reality of diplomacy, and grew to know his father better, he felt the attraction of such a life and was impressed by its effect upon his father. It became an equal alternative to his impulse to literature.

In Alroy, Disraeli uses the hero, David Alroy, as well as the latter's mentor, Honain, to express his thoughts on the proper qualities of a politician. They were complementary: Alroy with the physical and emotional presence of a true charismatic person, and Honain as the calm, rational, yet idealistic magus. Honain's is the strong hand that must guide the

more wild Alroy. In the end, it is the quiet strength of purpose possessed by Honain that is the more durable quality. Alroy's volatility, like Disraeli's own, lead to a misdirection of that passionate energy and, in Alroy's case, a tragic loss of focus. When he cut himself off from the stabilizing influence of Honain he was unable to control his own ambition.

The control and proper direction of ambition is a key factor in the list of desirable qualities in a politician. After the disaster of The Representative affair, and his financial failings, Disraeli began to understand that his own brilliance had to be tempered if he was ever to rise. This is evident from the change in his outward demeanour and appearance after he was finally elected to Parliament, but he often showed flashes of his former self. Success in political action required the natural qualities possessed by Alroy--the passion and the vision--but in order to be substantial and lasting it required the strong 'reign-hand' of the alternative set of qualities depicted in Honain.

Mr. Aubrey Bohun, in A Year At Hartlebury, likewise possesses the circumstances and the qualities that Disraeli valued in a public man. He was wealthy, but generous to his tenants; he was physically attractive, but not vain; he valued tradition, but not at the expense of progressive ideas; and he was able to combine a poetic temperament with a passion for action and practical achievement. Above all, Mr. Bohun found that he enjoyed politics, particularly the hustings, although some of the compromise and theatrics of electioneering is distasteful to him. He comments,

Well this is life, this is excitement, and that is all I care about. I feel I live. And yet there is something petty and vulgar in all this bustle, which half disgusts me. (65)

Throughout his career Disraeli felt a certain exhilaration when making his appeal directly to

the electorate, but he also felt extreme distaste for the back-room negotiation and double-dealing that went along with it.

The pre-parliamentary novels thus give us many examples of politicians and people engaged in a variety of political activity. Their qualities, taken all together, add up to a virtual check-list of characteristics to cultivate and those to expurgate. The successful politician had to be an ambitious, imaginative, hard-working, honest, man of action, and, if he is to make a truly valuable contribution, his imagination must be tempered by practicality, patience, and a self-confident genius. He who lets his imagination lead him to ignore practical reality, or lets his ambition rule him when patience is advised, or becomes a toady to another, is likely to meet with sudden and spectacular failure in the first two instances, and deserved obscurity in the third. For most of his political life Disraeli adhered to this "code" set out in the novels he wrote before entering Parliament. This is rather remarkable considering that the number of compromises required in practical politics often decimates naive notions of principle and propriety held by neophytes.

## NOTES

- 1 - John Matthews, "Literature and Politics: A Disraelian View" in Humanities Association of Canada NEWSLETTER (vol. XII, No. 1, October, 1983), p. 12.
- 2 - Hesketh Pearson, Dizzy: The Life and Personality of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield (New York: Harper and Row Brothers, 1951), p. 77.
- 3 - Benjamin Disraeli, "The Mutilated Diary" in Benjamin Disraeli Letters: 1815 - 1834, ed. J.A.W. Gunn, et. al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 447. ["P.R." stands for "Psychological Romance", Disraeli's preferred title for Contarini Fleming]
- 4 - Georg Brandes, Lord Beaconsfield (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1966) [A reprint from the edition of 1880 - Authorized translation by Mrs. George Sturge], p. 10.
- 5 - Vivian Grey (1826 & 1827); The Voyage of Captain Popanilla (1828); The Young Duke (1831); Contarini Fleming: A Psychological Autobiography (1832); The Wonderous Tale of Aloy (1833); A Year at Hartlebury or The Election (1834); Henrietta Temple (1837); Venetia (1837).
- 6 - Because he served as M.P. continuously from 1837 until his death, Disraeli never had a 'post-Parliamentary' period.
- 7 - Brandes, p. 19.
- 8 - "The Mutilated Diary", p. 446.
- 9 - "The Mutilated Diary", p. 447.
- 10 - André Maurois, Disraeli: Picture of the Victorian Age (translated by Hamish Miles) (New York: The Modern Library/Random House, 1928), p. 19.
- 11 - Daniel Schwarz, Disraeli's Fiction (New York: Barnes and Noble Imports/Harper and Row, 1979), p. 35.
- 12 - There is evidence that Disraeli's first actual work was something called Alymer Popanilla, which he submitted to John Murray well before writing Vivian Grey. It was probably a forerunner of The Voyage of Captain Popanilla. (There is no surviving copy of the manuscript.)
- 13 - Benjamin Disraeli, Vivian Grey (Volume 1 in The Works of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield - Primrose Edition) (New York: M. Walter Dunne, 1904), p. 19. [All references to the novels, other than, A Year at Hartlebury, are from this 20 - volume set. Therefore, all further novel citations will simply contain the title, volume number, and the page number.]
- 14 - Vivian Grey (vol. 1), p. 26.
- 15 - Vivian Grey (vol. 1), p. 29.

- 16 - Vivian Grey (vol. 1), p. 27-28.
- 17 - Vivian Grey (vol. 1), p. 48.
- 18 - The most comprehensive account of the episode is, of course, in Monypenny and Buckle (pp. 58-83), but Monypenny seems rather too anxious to make excuses for Disraeli's actions. The most informative is Bradford's second chapter entitled "The First Fall" (pp. 13-26).
- 19 - Vivian Grey (vol. 2), p. 207-11.
- 20 - Benjamin Disraeli, Benjamin Disraeli Letters: 1815 - 1834, p. 113.
- 21 - Robert Blake, Disraeli (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1969), p. 54.
- 22 - The Young Duke (vol. 3), p. 82.
- 23 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 5), p. 31.
- 24 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 5), p. 52-3.
- 25 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 5), p. 332.
- 26 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 5), p. 233.
- 27 - The Wonderous Tale of Alroy (vol. 7), p. 11.
- 28 - Alroy (vol. 7), p. 80.
- 29 - Alroy (vol. 7), p. 287.
- 30 - Alroy (vol. 7), p. 287.
- 31 - Benjamin Disraeli, A Year at Hartlebury or The Election (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), p. 57.
- 32 - Richard A. Levine, Benjamin Disraeli (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 58.
- 33 - Bernard McCabe, "Benjamin Disraeli" in Minor British Novelists, ed. Charles Alva Hoyt (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 84.
- 34 - Sarah Bradford, Disraeli (New York: Stein and Day, 1983), p. 10.
- 35 - Blake, p. 51.
- 36 - Blake, p. 104.
- 37 - W.F. Monypenny and G.E. Buckle, The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield (vol. 1) (London: John Murray, 1929), p. 366.

- 38 - Brandes, p. 99.
- 39 - reported by Disraeli in The Mutilated Diary, p. 447.
- 40 - Gertrude Himmelfarb, Marriage and Morals Among The Victorians (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), p. 184.
- 41 - Benjamin changed the spelling of his name from "D'Israeli" to "Disraeli" in an attempt to reduce its foreign appearance.
- 42 - Quoted in Maurois, p. 59.
- 43 - Pearson, p. 77.
- 44 - Pearson, p. 144.
- 45 - Vivian Grey (vol. 1), p. 28.
- 46 - Vivian Grey (vol. 1), p. 253.
- 47 - Vivian Grey (vol. 2), p. 139.
- 48 - Vivian Grey (vol. 2), p. 140.
- 49 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 5), p. 51.
- 50 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 5), p. 124.
- 51 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 5), p. 197.
- 52 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 5), p. 349.
- 53 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 6), p. 102.
- 54 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 6), p. 109.
- 55 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 5), p. 72.
- 56 - Vivian Grey (vol. 1), p. 107.
- 57 - The Voyage of Captain Popanilla (vol. 7), p. 72
- 58 - The Young Duke (vol. 3), p. 21.
- 59 - Except for "no one hated him" --Disraeli had many enemies.
- 60 - The Young Duke (vol. 3), p. 395.
- 61 - The Young Duke (vol. 3), p. 399 - 400.

62 - The Young Duke (vol. 3), p. 396.

63 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 5), p. 121 - 2.

64 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 6), p. 100.

65 - Hartlebury, p. 141.

CHAPTER 4: AMBITION AND POLITICS IN THE "PARLIAMENTARY" NOVELS

I

The seven years between the publication of Venetia (1837) and Coningsby (1844) were busy ones for Disraeli, and, because they were also the first seven of his many years in parliament, they represented a marked alteration in the conduct of his life. Membership in this most exclusive club in Europe was the realization of a long cherished dream. He was determined to show his worthiness for the honour, and to do so in such a way that secured his claim to membership for a long time to come.

Thus, as was mentioned earlier, he dropped many of the sartorial trapping of his dandyism, and adopted the more respectable dress of a Victorian member of the House of Commons.

It was a great thing for Disraeli to be on the front bench for the first time. He symbolized his transformation from brilliant rebel to grave statesman by a corresponding change in dress and speech. both became duller. He wore a suit of impeccable black, instead of the gorgeous colours of the past,...(1)

He also showed a remarkable capacity for the hard work required of an ambitious junior M.P., especially in the various committees that conducted the bulk of their business outside the spotlight of the House. The most difficult change for Disraeli was the necessity, albeit a temporary one, to curb his verbal wit and sharply ironic eloquence. His excessively verbose and ornate maiden speech was a disaster. He was so humiliated that

he readily accepted Richard Lalor Shiel's advice to

get rid of your genius for a session. Speak often, for you must not show yourself cowed, but speak shortly. Be very quiet, try to be dull, only argue and reason imperfectly, for if you reason with precision, they will think you are trying to be witty. Astonish them by speaking on subjects of detail. Quote figures, dates, calculations. And in a short time the house will sigh for the wit and eloquence, which they all know are in you; they will encourage you to pour them forth, and then you will have the ear of the house and be a favourite. (2)

He accepted this advice and, for an extended period, he confined his Commons speeches to simple, relatively short presentations - mostly in a context of strong support for his leader, Sir Robert Peel.

With all of this parliamentary activity, as well as his courtship of, and eventual marriage to Mary-Anne Wyndham-Lewis, it is hardly surprising that Disraeli did not find the time or energy to produce any fiction. Even if he had managed the time, it is doubtful whether he would have had the inclination. Despite the indecision portrayed in the autobiographical heroes of his pre-parliamentary novels, Disraeli had long ago decided between literature and politics as the outlet for his genius - politics was his outlet of choice. As long as he was happily engaged in political pursuits he would willingly forgo his former literary activities and ambitions.

For Disraeli, what constituted 'happy engagement' had been amply illustrated in Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming. His paragons of political virtue and consequent success were Beckendorf and Baron Fleming. Both had been compelled to overcome numerous obstacles to gain their prestigious positions - obstacles that Disraeli felt he must

also surmount. Both Beckendorf and Fleming were forced to rely upon their natural talents, which were necessarily far superior to those of their peers, in order to compensate for deficiencies in wealth and social position. Their rise was attributable to their ability to work at a nearly superhuman rate, and impose their will upon the inferiors around them while also managing to remain in their good graces. This strategy brought steady promotion, leading eventually to their occupation of the exalted positions of Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, respectively, by the time they are introduced in the novels. Disraeli was certain that such an approach would work for him, and thus his first four years in Parliament (1837-1841) were characterized by diligent attention to affairs, vociferous public pronouncements against the Whig government, and unequivocal support for Peel. When, on 30th August 1841, Sir Robert went to Windsor Castle and kissed hands as Prime Minister, Disraeli fully expected to reap the rewards of his efforts and take his first step up the political ladder (3).

To say that he was disappointed by Peel's unwillingness to grant him even the most junior of positions is a great understatement. He felt betrayed and he let Peel know it:

I confess to be unrecognized at this moment by you appear to me to be overwhelming, and I appeal to your own heart - to that justice and magnanimity which I feel are your characteristics - to save me from an intolerable humiliation. (4)

Monypenny and Buckle claim that Peel was willing enough to grant office to Disraeli (5), but had to bow to the demands of others. At best, this is a questionable assertion. Regardless of the reasons for Disraeli's exclusion, Monypenny and Buckle are probably close to the mark in their belief that this snub by Peel was a serious one for Disraeli's future prospects:

He had shown qualities that would have won him influence and promotion as a Minister, and if he had been taken into the Ministry in 1841 progress would have been easy; but an open and visible check such as he then received is more often than not fatal to a parliamentary career, and in his case recovery was rendered more difficult by the dubious reputation which, taking its origin from his early political escapades and his affectations of dress and manner, still clung to him persistently. (6)

Despite an initial public show of equanimity and loyalty to his leader, it was only a matter of time before Disraeli would break with Peel. His exile to the backbench put him in contact with those who were to prove to be the catalyst for both his fight against Peel and his return to the literary world. Had he been included in Peel's government he would have had no motivation for the former and no time for the latter. As it was, he was no longer "happily engaged" in a political career which, until recently, he had every reason to believe would turn out as glorious as that of one of his fictional characters. The best outlet for his genius, his outlet of choice, had been blocked up again, and a renewed literary flow was inevitable.

In the next few years Disraeli produced four books: Coningsby; or the New Generation (1844), Sybil; or the Two Nations (1845), Tancred; or the New Crusade (1847), and Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography (1851). The first three are known collectively as the "Young England" trilogy and were meant by their author to stand as the manifesto for that group of new M.P.'s who came to be called Young England (7). They were idealistic young men just down from Cambridge who bemoaned the spiritual sterility of the materialistic modern industrial age, and longed for the simpler, more satisfying age of feudalism. Disraeli sympathized with their romantic vision,

admired their courage and youth, and, in his disaffected mood at the time, soon found himself a part of their close group. For their part, Manners, Smythe, *et. al.*, soon found themselves under the spell of the charismatic older man (Disraeli was now 37 years old) and he quickly became their unofficial leader. As the "Political Economy" parliament of Sir Robert Peel continued on, Young England became increasingly distressed by the direction of the government's policies and its lack of attention to the Condition of England Question. They eventually convinced Disraeli that his experience and talents made him best suited to be the group's spokesman. The manner in which he chose to speak out was through the novel. He reasoned that not only was this the form at which he excelled, and for which he had an established audience, but novel-reading was fast becoming a major pastime of a newly literate public. The novel was thus a fairly palatable way in which to get the message across to a large number of people.

Given their genesis in a crucible of political discontent and social unrest, it is hardly surprising that these novels tell us much more about Disraeli's political ideas and a lot less about his personal political foundations than was evident in the pre-parliamentary novels. Even without the force of the events that prompted their publication, any novels written at this stage in his life were bound to have a different emphasis. Still, the three issues discussed in the previous chapter, his consciousness of his own genius, his anguish about how to best utilize such gifts and, having chosen politics, how a successful and trustworthy politician should act, are still key factors in the development of his new characters. They show that the personal underpinnings of his political philosophy had not changed much since he had become a full participant in politics, rather than the observer he essentially was when he first set down his personal beliefs.

Coningsby, the hero of the first book in the trilogy, is endowed by Disraeli with a sense of great destiny - that he [Coningsby] is somehow superior to others. The young Coningsby becomes a leader at his school (Eton) and a great hero to the other boys. In conversation with one of his friends, he says that ambition, pursued by one with genuine talent and pure motivation, is almost a duty:

It is our privilege to live in an age when the career of the highest ambition is identified with the performance of the greatest good. Of the present epoch it may be truly said, "Who dares to be good, dares to be great." (8)

Later, in the interval between school and university, Coningsby discusses his feelings with a friend. He believes in the destiny of the great person to rise in the world--based only upon the force of his abilities and personality. Such men must lead others:

Nothing is great but the personal. As civilization advances, the accidents of life become each day less important. The power of man, his greatness and his glory, depend on essential qualities. Brains every day become more precious than blood. You must give men new ideas, you must teach them new words, you must modify their manners, you must change their laws, you must root out prejudices, subvert convictions, if you wish to be great. Greatness no longer depends on rentals, the world is too rich; nor on pedigrees, the world is too knowing. (9)

Several times throughout the book, Coningsby must face misfortune and hardship. Such instances lead the hero to question his previous self-perception of superiority. The consequences of these misfortunes usually seem certain to be penury, obscurity and a life of mind-numbing drudgery. When an argument with his grandfather seems certain to consign Coningsby to that obscurity, a chance meeting with Sidonia, the most fascinating

of all Disraeli's creations (10), helps restore his confidence and re-focus his energies on the intellectual preparation for his road ahead; a greater world awaited his greatness,

A world of action and passion, of power and peril; a world for which a great preparation was indeed necessary, severe and profound, but not altogether such a one as was now offered to him. (11)

One of Sidonia's early comments is a declaration against how the current age had created a plethora of mediocre leaders, and had stifled the potentially great ones, "Man must ever be the slave of routine: but in old days it was a routine of great thoughts, and now it is a routine of little ones" (12). Near the end of the book, Coningsby is forced to article himself to a solicitor, and fears a life of 'little thoughts'. But, more inspiration from Sidonia and the support of his ever-loyal friends renew his conviction in his genius.

This conviction of power in the midst of despair was a revelation of intrinsic strength. It is indeed the test of a creative spirit. From that moment all petty fears for an ordinary future quitted him. He felt that he must be prepared for great sacrifices, for infinite; that there must devolve on him a bitter inheritance of obscurity, struggle, envy, and hatred, vulgar prejudice, base criticism, petty hostilities, but the dawn would break, and the hour arrive, when the welcome morning hymn of his success and fame would sound and be re-echoed. (13)

This passage, indeed the situation which prompts it, has loud echoes of Disraeli's youth. After leaving school, and deciding not to attend Oxford, his father arranged for him to enter the employ of Messrs. Swain, Stevens, Maples, Pearse and Hunt as an articulated clerk. He hated it, and when he left on a brief tour of the continent in 1824, he determined not to resume work there upon his return. He felt stifled in such an environment although he by no means thought himself ill-treated it was the tedious nature of the work that he abhorred. So, when Coningsby becomes mightily depressed about the prospect of a life

in the law, it is an accurate reflection of Disraeli's earlier quip in Vivian Grey that "to be a great lawyer, he must give up a chance of being a great man."

The hero of Sybil, Charles Egremont, comes to realize his superiority much later in life. He had no doubt of his high social position, but the first chapters of Sybil show that the focus of this was hedonistic self-indulgence, not a drive to ascend to power. Egremont's school days and subsequent idle years of youth did nothing to awaken anything exceptional in him.

There was nothing in the lot, little in the temperament, of Charles Egremont, to make him an exception to the multitude. Gaily and securely he floated on the brilliant stream. Popular at school, idolised at home, the present has no cares, and the future secured him a family seat in Parliament the moment he entered life, and the inheritance of a glittering post at court in due time, as its legitimate consequence. Enjoyment, not ambition, seemed the principle of his existence. (14)

As someone born into the ruling class, Egremont already had access to, and a future in the apparatus of power, but he took it all for granted. A career in parliament was not seen as a necessary and useful outlet for something special within himself it was merely the expected path followed by a younger son in a noble family. Although Disraeli manages the introductory chapters without the excesses of his earlier writing, the reader gets the strong impression that Charles Egremont could easily set out on the road that nearly destroyed the Duke of St. James in The Young Duke.

Throughout the first half of the book Disraeli presents characters and circumstances that slowly bring out the characteristics that raised Egremont above the shallow, hypocritical herd of the complacent aristocracy--and aristocracy that had done little to ease

the tension and causes of the Condition of England Question. His growing acquaintance with Walter Gerard and his daughter, Sybil, opens up a new world to him. The more he learned about this new world of "The People" the more he learned about his own unhappiness with the frivolous lifestyle of his own class. He reflects,

And are these then THE PEOPLE? If so, thought Egremont would that I lived more among them! Compared with their converse, the tattle of our saloons has in it something humiliating. It is not merely that it is deficient in warmth, and depth, and breadth; that it is always discussing persons instead of principles, and cloaking its wants of thought in mimetic dogmas, and its was of feeling in superficial raillery; it is not merely that it has neither imagination, nor fancy, nor knowledge to recommend it; but it appears to me, even as regards manner and expression, inferior in refinement and phraseology; in short, trivial, uninteresting, stupid, really vulgar. (15)

It seemed to Egremont that, from the day he met these persons in the Abbey ruins, the horizon of his experience had insensibly expanded...He could not resist the conviction that, from the time in question, his sympathies had become more lively and more extended (16)

Such new-found seriousness of mind has its roots in Egremont's growing realization of his own importance in the situation. This leads inexorably to a strong seriousness of purpose, and a sense of his destiny for greatness. His sense of this is not as formless as that of Disraeli's earlier characters. For Egremont it is clear that his energy and abilities must be focused upon the restoration of effective leadership for the people. He sees himself at the vanguard of a new generation of natural leaders who must rectify the abuses and neglect of their predecessors. The talents of such men are necessary because the people must be led-- they cannot rule themselves. As he says,

The people are not strong; the people never can be strong. Their attempts at self-vindication will end only in their suffering and confusion...There is a dayspring in the history of this nation, which perhaps those only who are on the mountain tops can as yet recognise...The new generation of the aristocracy of England are not tyrants, not oppressors...Their intelligence, better than that, their hearts are open to the responsibilities of their position...They are the natural leaders of the people, Sybil, believe me, they are the only ones. (17)

The heroes of the first two books of the Young England trilogy are much different from Disraeli's earlier creations, but he still endows them with genius--genius of a kind that will thrust greatness upon them. It is clear that in spite of the setback of not being given office, Disraeli had no doubt about his own superiority and ultimate vision of what that fact meant for him. A notable change from the pre-parliamentary novels is the absence of any indecision about what activity will best utilize their genius. Once fully aware of their destiny, neither Coningsby nor Egremont seriously considers anything other than a political career as the best avenue of fulfillment. In fact, it is not just that personal preference leads them in the direction of politics, circumstances in the form of the perceived needs of the nation demand that each pursues a public career.

While at university, Coningsby felt a strong attraction for the academic life and the rewards and recognition of scholarship. Conversely, the university also offered the resources for investigating many of the social and political crises that England was facing. Such a course of reading was not very compatible with that of his degree syllabus, and when it became obvious that he could not do justice to both, Coningsby decided to forgo the strict devotion to prescribed readings that would have probably led to academic honours in favour of preparation for his 'higher calling'--leading England. Egremont

experienced a similar temptation when he went incognito to live near the Gerards. As he became more intimate with Walter, Sybil and their friend Stephen Morley, he wished more and more to be able to live like them--an honest working regime, a loving family and an intellectually stimulating atmosphere developed by years of self-directed study and reading. He resists the draw of this idyllic situation, and his strong sense of duty, both familial and legislative, forces him to return to London and attend to his onerous responsibilities.

In the context of this chapter, Tancred is something of an anomaly. The main character, Tancred Montacute, is heir to the Dukedom of Bellamont. Like all the other Disraelian heroes, Tancred is a talented, thoughtful and brooding young man. But, unlike other Disraelian heroes, Tancred is not obsessed by a sense that it is his destiny to be a great. The book was meant to be an examination of church issues, and the focus of the young Lord Montacute is to satisfy his many religious questions. As had Coningsby and Egremont before him, Tancred is disappointed in the quality of the men in positions of power:

It will be seen, therefore, that his lordship was one of those characters not ill-adapted to an eminent station in an age of movement, but of confused ideas; a country of progress, but too rich to risk much change. Under these circumstances, the spirit of a period and a people seeks a safety-valve in bustle. They do something, lest it be said that they do nothing. At such a time, ministers recommend their measures as experiments, and parliaments are ever ready to rescind their votes. Find a man who, totally destitute of genius, possesses nevertheless considerable talents; who has official aptitude, a volubility of routine rhetoric, great perseverance, a love of affairs...such a man, though he be one of an essentially small mind, though his intellectual qualities be less than moderate, with feeble powers of thought, no imagination, contracted

sympathies, and most loose public morality; such a man is the individual who kings and parliaments would select to govern the State or rule the Church. (18)

He decries the paucity of men who live their own lives by a strong code of principle and morality, and would govern others by the same standards. Given what he sees as a total absence of such men and ideas in England, or even in Europe, he determines to travel to the Levant in search of answers to his spiritual quest. This prologue to setting out on the journey takes up a little over a quarter of the book and is written to the new higher standard of polish and restraint evident in Coningsby and Sybil. The rest of Tancred, unfortunately, is confused and aimless. After getting his hero to the Middle East, Disraeli was unsure of what to do with him. The book ends abruptly, and Tancred never comes to any conclusions about the questions he posed for himself at the outset.

One conclusion that Tancred arrives at early on is at odds with all the rest of Disraeli's heroes, and shows that the author was not convinced of the utility or efficacy of Parliament in all things social or spiritual. Tancred remarks:

'Parliament seems to me to be the very place which a man of action should avoid. A Parliamentary career, that old superstition of the eighteenth century, was important when there were no other sources of power or fame. An aristocracy at the head of a people whom they had plundered of their means of education, required some cultivated tribunal whose sympathy might stimulate their intelligence and satisfy their vanity. Parliament was never so great as when they debated with closed doors. The public opinion, of which they never dreamed, has superseded the rhetorical club of our great-grandfathers. They know this well enough, and try to maintain their unnecessary position by affecting the character of men of business, but amateur men of business are very costly conveniences. In this age it is not Parliament that does the real work. It does not govern Ireland, for example. If the manufacturers want to change a tariff, they form a commercial league, and they effect their purpose. It is

the same with the abolition of slavery, and all our great revolutions. Parliament has become as really insignificant as for two centuries it has kept the monarch. O'Connell has taken a good share of its power; Cobden has taken another; and I am inclined to believe' said Tancred, 'though I care little about it, that, if our order had any spirit or prescience, they would put themselves at the head of the people, and shake the rest. (19)

These are certainly strange words for Disraeli to put in the mouth of one of his main characters, especially at the conclusion of a trilogy of books that were spawned by a parliamentary group that had thus far extolled the virtues of pursuing Parliamentary remedies for the ills of England.

What Tancred does share with the other Young England heroes and their creator, is an intense belief in the value of independent, creative thought, and the stagnation that occurs when leaders kowtow to public opinion or blindly follow the 'general' principles of second-rate philosophers.

'I do not see how there can be opinion without thought' said Tancred; 'and I do not believe the public ever think. How can they? They have no time. Certainly we live at present under the empire of general ideas, which are extremely powerful. But the public have not invented those ideas. They have adopted them from convenience. No one has confidence in himself; on the contrary, every one has a mean idea of his own strength and has no reliance on his own judgment. Men obey a general impulse, they bow before an external necessity, whether for resistance or action. Individuality is dead; there is a want of inward and personal energy in man; and that is what people feel and mean when they go about complaining there is no faith.' (20)

Despite a dearth of characteristics in common between Tancred and the other two Young England protagonists, especially in the obvious areas of ambitions and career, all three do share the trait so aptly expressed in the above passage. They believe in the strength and

necessity of individual thought and action, especially that which is opposed to conventional views, as the key to an individual 'making a difference'. Coningsby and Egremont both made independent journeys of inquiry that lead to their commitment to action in their respective political and social spheres. Tancred does not have their sense of self-destiny or extra-ordinary capabilities; he never develops a clear vision of how best to utilize his strengths, but he is convinced that the answers to his spiritual questions cannot come from any of the usual sources. The solutions must be achieved by his own personal search; and the search must take place outside his known world.

his dissatisfaction with that social system; his conviction of the growing melancholy of enlightened Europe, vieled, as it may be, with sometimes a conceited bustle, sometimes a desperate shipwreck gaiety, sometimes with all the exciting empiricism of science; his perplexity that, between the Asian revelation and the European practice there should be so limited and imperfect; above all this passionate desire to penetrate the mystery of the elder world, and share its celestial privileges and divine prerogative. (21)

Coningsby and Egremont complete their search, and find the answers to the problems which so perplexed them at the beginning of their stories. Tancred finds no satisfactory resolution to his spiritual quandary; Disraeli does not even permit him to physically come to the end of his journey. The Duke and Duchess of Bellamont arrive in the Middle East to retrieve Tancred, and the book comes to an abrupt end.

Tancred is a wholly unsatisfying and unsatisfactory book. It shows that, of the three factors he felt important to improving the Condition of England - political, social and spiritual - Disraeli had the most difficulty coming to terms with the last. When the arenas of action/contemplation are politics and social injustice, as they are in Coningsby and

Sybil, his characterization and plot construction are sure and confident. With spiritual issues as the focus, however, he deprives his hero of the personal qualities that ensured the ultimate success of the predecessors. He fills Tancred with many questions, as he did with Coningsby and Egremont, but does not permit him to discover any answers. He has Tancred eschew the chosen avenue of solution of Coningsby and Egremont, namely a Parliamentary career, but presents nothing as a viable alternative except aimless wandering and contemplation which obviously does not satisfy him. Disraeli was always aware that the spiritual sphere was a key element of life, but he had no real success in coherently incorporating it into his political philosophy.

The next Disraeli novel did not appear until 1870. By the time Lothair was published, so much of note had transpired in his career that the author was no longer advertised as the writer of Vivian Grey, but as a former Prime Minister. Since the Bentinck biography, Disraeli had secured his hold on the party leadership in the House of Commons, thrice served in Cabinet as Derby's Chancellor of the Exchequer, and eventually succeeded to the Premiership when ill health forced Derby's retirement. This lengthy period of happy engagement in the political enterprise came to an abrupt end in 1868 when the November election returned Gladstone's Liberals to power with a resounding majority. Disraeli was shocked by the rebuff and, as he had done when disappointed by Peel in 1844, sought solace and outlet by once again taking up his pen to write fiction.

Lothair is the least enlightening of all Disraeli's novels on the subjects of ambition, genius and career direction. Perhaps he had resigned himself to the likelihood that, at age

sixty-six he was unlikely to become Prime Minister again. Certainly the publication of Lothair as part of a collected edition of all his novels was not a move calculated to present himself as a Prime Minister in waiting.

The publication of Lothair, like that of Tancred, was politically a hindrance rather than a help to Disraeli. The serious politician, like Gladstone in the Punch cartoon, pronounced it flippant. How could Parliamentarians be expected to trust an ex-Premier who, when half-way between sixty and seventy, instead of occupying his leisure, in accordance with the British convention, in classical, historical, or constitutional studies, produced a gaudy romance of the peerage, so written as to make it almost impossible to say how much was ironical or satirical, and how much soberly intended?...This political distrust was increased by the resuscitation, in the General Preface in the autumn, of all the peculiar doctrines about English history and politics, about Christianity and Judaism, and about religion and science, which the English people had found difficult of assimilation when propounded in Coningsby, Sybil, and Tancred, in Lord George Bentinck and in the Sheldonian speech, and many of which were even now *caviare* to the general. The whole literary performance of the year made Disraeli, the man, a more interesting figure than ever; but it only deepened the doubts about Disraeli, the statesman, which the heavy defeat of 1868, and the apparent hopelessness of the Conservative cause in opposition, had aroused. (22)

Lothair has claim as the 'hero' of the book on the tenuous qualifications of being named in the title and appearing to be the focal point around which the action revolves. In all respects he is very uninteresting, and is the passive receptor of the action rather than a catalyst or even moderately active participant. He does not have to aspire to wealth or position, for he is described at the outset as a 'posthumous child' and heir to vast wealth. His early life is spent as a virtual captive on the estate of his uncle, a dour Scots nobleman. Thus, when he goes up to Oxford he does so as a complete innocent and with no

experience of the world. The plot revolves around the various attempts by religious and political groups to take advantage of his vulnerability and win him over as an adherent to their faction before he reaches his majority.

Unfortunately, Disraeli does not seem very interested in his first fictional hero since Tancred. The supporting characters who try to entice Lothair into a commitment to Romanism or Republicanism see Lothair merely as a valuable recruit; they are the ones actively involved in choosing a life's pursuit for him. Beyond a vague feeling that he should do something useful and good (23), Lothair seems to have no strong inclinations one way or the other; he is easily persuaded by the arguments of both sides. The fact that he eventually rejects both 'suitors' and elects a Tory/Church of England course for his life has virtually nothing to do with a reasoned, conscious selection on his part--it is simply that the actions of Cardinal Grandison and Theodora, in their zeal to attract him, had engaged in actions that caused Lothair to become disillusioned with both. His ultimate choice of bride and church is no real choice at all--the decision is made by default. Disraeli did not invest Lothair with a sense of superior ability or intellect. Nor did he give Lothair the compulsion to become a notable success. Lothair is a passive, listless creation.

At this point in his career Disraeli himself was politically listless. Energy and action had always been typical of Disraeli's political life and of his fictional characters, and his lethargy showed through in his characterization of Lothair. Such qualities as youth and inclination to action were still a fundamental part of his thinking, and this is expressed throughout the book:

'Ah! that is a great thing in your country.' exclaimed the Princess, 'a man being his own master at so early an

age...the only tolerable thing in life is action is feeble without youth. What if you do not obtain your immediate object? - you always think you will, and the detail of the adventure is full of rapture. And thus it is the blunders of youth are preferable to the triumphs of manhood, or the successes of old age.' (24)

Action may not always by happiness...but there is not happiness without action. (25)

Examples of the embodiment of such sentiments abound in Theodora and General Bruges, the leader of the Republican army, but, as Schwarz says, in Lothair the central character is not such a person:

For Disraeli greatness consists in being a man of action such as General Bruges or an effective leader of a parliamentary party. Disraeli is *contending* that the capacity for greatness is a characteristic of personality and temperature and that Lothair has exhibited this characteristic...while Disraeli may imply that Lothair achieves greatness by his marriage and acceptance of Anglicanism, the reader cannot believe that Lothair's superficiality and passivity have permanently disappeared. (26)

At this stage in his career Disraeli no longer seems to have felt it necessary to endow his main character with an awareness of talent for a life of either contemplative scholarship or active public life - and to have that character choose, with suitable difficulty, between the two, and always in favour of the latter. Both attributes were still important, but he now bestowed them upon his secondary characters and allowed any conflict to occur as a clash between characters rather than turmoil within one person.

The political inaction, and resultant strain on relations with his party that led to his retreat to the refuge of fiction vanished in 1872. An obviously rejuvenated Disraeli went

on a vigorous offensive that produced a landslide Tory majority in 1874. Perhaps his *ennui* after 1868 was partially due to the fact that, despite his having technically reached the pinnacle of British political aspirations, he had not been elected Prime Minister in his own right. The returns of the 1874 General Election must have satisfied Disraeli on that count. All his ambitions had been fulfilled. He even garnered a bonus when his success at the Berlin Congress of 1876 made him acclaimed as an international statesman. By the time Gladstone defeated him again in 1880 all his political desires had been satiated.

His last completed work, Endymion was finished so soon after the election that he must have written most of it during the burst of literary activity that produced Lothair. The lack of drive and ambition in the main character that began with Lothair is even more clearly evident in Endymion. It is almost as if the closer Disraeli got to achieving all his goals, the less need he felt to attain them vicariously through his obviously autobiographical heroes. But ambition and pursuit of power were emotions too long a part of his everyday consciousness to be left out of the fictional equation altogether. Thus, Endymion is the story of a main character who is as devoid of distinctiveness as Lothair, and is propelled to the Premiership by the manipulations and force of will of the women in his life. Disraeli seems to have deliberately made these people vital and interesting characters in the book, and Endymion quite the opposite.

...Disraeli in a letter to the Queen, expressly repudiates any wish to make Endymion a hero or even a character of interest. He confesses him to be a man devoid of imagination and with passion held under severe restraint. His qualities are said to be those of 'a plodder'... (27)

Endymion gains power by waiting. His sister Myra and Lady Montfort, his eventual wife, succeed against obstacles on his behalf by vigorous action.

In the earlier books the main characters realize early on that they possess special qualities that place them above the common mass of humanity. They then must deal with the burden of employing their genius that is most likely to benefit the general public while still fully realizing their potential. In his last novel, Disraeli leaves it to others to recognize the hero's supposed talents, and to lead or push him in a direction that will do them justice:

...the secret purpose of the life of Endymion was that, from being a clerk in a public office, he should arrive by his own energies at the station to which he seemed, as it were born. To accomplish this he felt that the entire devotion of his labour and thought was requisite. He character was essentially tenacious, and he had already realised no inconsiderable amount of political knowledge and official experience. His object seemed difficult and distant, but there was nothing wild or visionary in its pursuit. He had achieved some of the first steps, and he was yet very young. There were friends about him, however, who were not content with what they deemed his moderate ambition, and thought they discerned in him qualities which might enable him to mount to a higher stage. (28)

More than any other person, his sister Myra works for his advancement.

She had in a great degree moulded his life. Her unfaltering, though often unseen, influence had created his advancement. Her will was more powerful than his. (29)

At the end of the novel, even though she has just recently married the newly crowned Emperor of France, her last words are about her feelings at seeing Endymion become Prime Minister:

All I have desired, all I have dreamed, have come to pass. Darling, beloved of my soul, by all our sorrows, by all our joys, in this scene of our childhood and

bygone days, let me give you my last embrace. (30)

At the beginning of the book the young Endymion is unsure about the best course to follow to ensure a career as a powerful person. He is instinctively drawn to public life, but briefly has his head turned in the direction of a less obvious route to power. Baron Sergius has a strong influence on Endymion and advises against a political career.

'The most powerful men are not public men.' said the baron. 'A public man is responsible, and a responsible man is a slave. It is private life that governs the world. You will find this out some day. The world talks much of powerful sovereigns and great ministers; and if being talked about made one powerful, they would be irresistible. But, the fact is, the more you are talked about the less powerful you are. (31)

Eventually, however, he ignores this advice and acquiesces in the pressure from his sister and Lady Montfort to enter politics. His contemplation of what such a move means and then his reaction to his first sight of the House of Commons make it obvious that he has made the correct choice.

The greatest opportunity that can be offered to an Englishman was now his - a seat in the House of Commons. It was his almost in the first bloom of youth, and yet after advantageous years of labour and political training and it was combined with a material independence on which he never could have counted. A love of power, a passion for distinction, a noble pride, which had been native to his early disposition, but which had apparently been crushed by the enormous sorrows and misfortunes of his childhood, and which had vanished, as it were, before the sweetness of that domestic love which had been the solace of his adversity, now again stirred their dim and mighty forms in his renovated, and, as it were, inspired consciousness. (32)

For himself, he entered the chamber with a certain degree of awe, which, with use, diminished, but never entirely

disappeared. The scene was one over which even his boyhood had long mused, and it was associated with all those traditions of genius, eloquence, and power that charm and inspire youth. His practical acquaintance with the forms and habits of the House from his customary attendance on their debates as private secretary to a cabinet minister, was of great advantage to him, and restrain that excitement which dangerously accompanies us when we enter into a new life, and especially a life of such deep and thrilling interests and such large proportions. This result was also assisted by his knowledge, at least by sight, of a large proportion of the old members, and by his personal and sometimes intimate acquaintance with those of his own party. There was much in his position, therefore, to soften that awkward feeling of being a freshman, which is always embarrassing. (33)

As dull and uninteresting a character as Endymion may have been designed to be, Disraeli could not, even toward the end of his career and life resist having this character feel the same emotions about Parliament that he had always felt--and still felt.

## II

Most of the novels of Disraeli's parliamentary period carry on the practise of having the hero choose a political career. Even in the exceptions, Tancred and Lothair, all of these books also supply ample examples of what the author saw as 'good' and 'bad' politicians and how an aspirant to power should conduct himself.

In Coningsby, the hero encounters many politicians in the *milieu* surrounding his grandfather, Lord Monmouth--none of whom is very exemplary. Two of Disraeli's best

comic creations, Tadpole and Taper, are marvelous caricature of the kind of toadies and political sycophant that Disraeli detested. With less humour and more obvious distaste Disraeli outlines the history and character of Mr. Rigby, Lord Monmouth's principle parasite.

Mr. Rigby was member for one of Lord Monmouth's boroughs. He was the manager of Lord Monmouth's parliamentary influence, and the auditor of his vast estates. He was more; he was Lord Monmouth's companion when in England, his correspondent when abroad; hardly his counsellor, for Lord Monmouth never required advice; but Mr. Rigby could instruct him in matters of detail, which Mr. Rigby made amusing. Rigby was not a professional man; indeed his origin, education, early pursuits, and studies, were equally obscure; but he had contrived in good time to squeeze himself into parliament, by means which no one could ever comprehend, and then set up to be a perfect man of business. The world took him at his word for he was bold, acute, and voluble; with no thought, but a good deal of desultory information; and though destitute of all imagination and noble sentiment, was blessed with a vigorous, mendacious fancy, fruitful in small expedients, and never happier than when devising shifts for great men's scrapes.

They say all of us have one chance in this life, and so it was with Rigby. After a struggle of many years, after a long series of the usual alternatives of small successes and small failures, after a few cleverish pamphlets, with a considerable reputation, indeed for pasquinades, most of which he never wrote, and articles in reviews to which it was whispered he had contributed, Rigby, who had already intrigued himself into a subordinate office, met with Lord Monmouth.

He was just the animal that Lord Monmouth wanted, for Lord Monmouth always looked upon human nature with the callous eye of a jockey. He surveyed Rigby, and he determined to buy him. He bought him;...It was a good purchase. Rigby became a great personage, and Lord Monmouth's man. (34)

Once again Disraeli makes it quite clear about his vision of the type of man who did not

deserve the honour of sitting in the House of Commons. Even Sir Robert Peel's brief appearance is a decidedly unsympathetic treatment.

The only favourably drawn characters are not politicians - at least not at the beginning. The three people who most influence Coningsby--Sidonia, Mr. Millbank and Eustace Lyle--are all initially barred from political activity. Sidonia, as a Jew, is of the wrong race, Millbank, as a businessman, is of the wrong class; and Lyle, as a Catholic, is of the wrong religion. By the end of the book Lyle and Millbank have overcome their particular obstacles to Parliament. The prejudice which impedes Sidonia is still law, but was an injustice that Disraeli fought against all his political life. From the beginning of the book to the end, Disraeli makes clear the personal qualities that the electorate should demand of its M.P.'s. It is upon these merits alone that the capacity for leadership should be judged--not race, money, class, religious or connections. Early in the novel, Coningsby comments on politics as practised at the time:

disgust for political intrigue; a dazzling practice, apt at first to fascinate youth, for it appeals at once to our invention and our courage, but one which really should only be the resource of the second-rate. Great minds must trust to great truths and great talents for their rise, and nothing else. (35)

The final passage in the book is authorial musing about the fate of Coningsby, and the rest of the New Generation in their political lives. Implied in the litany of questions is the list of qualities Disraeli sees as necessary to political greatness.

Coningsby passed his next Christmas in his own hall, with his beautiful and gifted wife by his side, and surrounded by the friends of his heart and his youth. They stand now on the threshold of public life. They are in the leash, but in a moment they will be slipped. What will be their fate? Will they maintain in august

assemblies and high places the great truths which in study and in solitude, they have embraced? Or will their courage exhaust itself in the struggle, their enthusiasm evaporate before hollow-hearted ridicule, their generous impulses yield with a vulgar catastrophe to the tawdry temptations of a low ambition? Will their skilled intelligence subside into being the adroit tool of a corrupt party? Will vanity confound their fortunes, or jealousy wither their sympathies? Or will they remain brave, single, and true; refuse to bow before shadows and worship phrases; sensible of the greatness of their position, recognise the greatness of their duties; denounce to a perplexed and disheartened world the frigid theories of a generalising age that have destroyed the individuality of man, and restore the happiness of their country by believing in their own energies, and daring to be great? (36)

Sybil was very much a sequel to Coningsby, and presents the positive and negative possibilities in politicians in much the same fashion as its predecessor. To the extensive catalogue of qualities set out in Coningsby, a key element added in Sybil is that the successful leader must know England. Disraeli attributes the extraordinary influence of Lord Shaftesbury to his extraordinary knowledge of England, and blames Wellington's lack of political success on the Duke's deficiency on that point (37).

Tancred presents few politicians during the story, but does not lack for things to say about them. Tancred can find nothing good in the political system of his own country. In the search for his own spiritual fulfillment he often comments on the lack of spirituality in all politicians as a main reason for the 'malaise of Europe.' He says,

The most energetic men in Europe are mere busybodies. Empires are now governed like parishes, and a great statesman is only a select vestryman. And they are right: unless we bring man nearer to heaven, unless government become again divine, the insignificance of the human scheme must paralyse all effort. (38)

The author of Tancred believes that an element of spirituality is essential for the great politician.

When he came to write Endymion Disraeli was as experienced in practical politics and he was obsessed with ideals. That is to say, in addition to illustrating the more abstract personal qualities a politician should or should not have, he wrote a great deal more about some of the necessary skills and acquirements than he did before. Two of the most useful are personal social contacts and personal prestige built upon demonstrated attributes.

'The first requisite', Baron Sergius would say, 'in the successful conduct of public affairs is a personal acquaintance with the statesmen engaged. It is possible that events may not depend now, so much as they did a century ago, on individual feeling, but, even if prompted by general principles, their application and management are always coloured by idiosyncrasy of the chief actors.'  
(39)

The House felt that he had not only the adequate knowledge, but that it was knowledge perfectly digested; that his remarks and conduct were those of a man who had given constant thought to his duties, and was master of his subject. His oratorical gifts also began to be recognized. The power and melody of his voice had been before remarked, and that is a gift which much contributes to success in a popular assembly. He was ready without being too fluent. There were light and shade in his delivery. He repressed his power of sarcasm; but if unjustly and inaccurately attacked, he could be keen. Over his temper he had complete control; if, indeed, his entire insensibility to violent language on the part of an opponent was not organic. All acknowledge his courtesy, and both sides sympathised with a young man who proved himself equal to no ordinary difficulties. In a word, Endymion was popular... (40)

From his earliest political and literary activity to his dying breath Disraeli strove for greatness--to fulfill a consuming ambition and perceived destiny for pre-eminence. His fiction is forever focused upon autobiographical characters who, though they may briefly struggle with alternatives, eventually acknowledge politics as the proper avenue for pursuit of that destiny. This was not, however, a venal lust for power and self-aggrandizement. It was Disraeli's conviction that a political career was not to be undertaken for purely selfish reasons. No matter how much personal fulfillment and ambition were driving forces in his career, they were always tempered by the notion that some higher purpose was also served by his presence in the climb up "The Greasy Pole".

NOTES

- 1 - Robert Blake, Disraeli (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1966), p. 256.
- 2 - Benjamin Disraeli, Benjamin Disraeli Letters: 1835-1837, ed. J.A.W. Gunn, John Matthews, et. al. (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 329.
- 3 - In a letter to Sarah he tells of an editorial in The Herald which predicts he will be offered the post of Paymaster of the Forces. (Letter no. 1174 in Benjamin Disraeli Letters: 1838 - 1841, p. 350.)
- 4 - Benjamin Disraeli, Letter no. 1186 in Benjamin Disraeli: 1838 - 1841, p.356.
- 5 - W. F. Monypenny and G. E. Buckle, The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield (vol. I) (London: John Murray, 1929), p. 519.
- 6 - Monypenny and Buckle, vol. I, p. 626.
- 7 - George Smythe, Lord John Manners, Henry Hope, etc.
- 8 - Coningsby (vol. 12), p. 344.
- 9 - Coningsby (vol. 12), p. 197.
- 10 - Chapters 5 and 6 deal with Sidonia in more detail.
- 11 - Coningsby (vol. 12), p. 344.
- 12 - Coningsby (vol. 12), p. 304.
- 13 - Coningsby (vol. 13), p. 197-8.
- 14 - Sybil (vol. 14), p. 41.
- 15 - Sybil (vol. 14), p. 189.
- 16 - Sybil (vol. 14), p. 189.
- 17 - Sybil (vol. 14), pp. 400-401.
- 18 - Tancred (vol. 15), pp. 94-95.
- 19 - Tancred (vol. 15), pp. 175-176.
- 20 - Tancred (vol. 15), p. 190.
- 21 - Tancred (vol. 16), p. 132.

- 22 - Monypenny and Buckle (volume II), p. 509 - 510.
- 23 - Lothair (vol. 17), p. 19-20.
- 24 - Lothair (vol. 17), p. 192.
- 25 - Lothair (vol. 18), p. 35.
- 26 - Schwarz, p. 138.
- 27 - Algernon Cecil, Queen Victoria and Her Prime Ministers (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1953), p. 216.
- 28 - Endymion (vol. 20), p. 107.
- 29 - Endymion (vol. 20), p. 203.
- 30 - Endymion (vol. 20), p. 269.
- 31 - Endymion (vol. 19), p. 223.
- 32 - Endymion (vol. 20), p. 63.
- 33 - Endymion (vol. 20), p. 88.
- 34 - Coningsby (vol. 12), p. 39-40.
- 35 - Coningsby (vol. 12), p. 90.
- 36 - Coningsby (vol. 13), pp. 225-226.
- 37 - Sybil (vol. 14), p. 32.
- 38 - Tancred (vol. 16), p. 407.
- 39 - Endymion (vol. 19), p. 266.
- 40 - Endymion (vol. 20), p. 149.

CHAPTER 5: HEROISM AND THE POLITICAL SAGE

## I

That very sense of higher purpose is a key to Disraeli's political philosophy, and his sincere belief in it goes a long way to accounting for his persistence and political longevity. Amongst the myriad of factors that made up the complex motivation for Disraeli's career, the force of Heroism is perhaps the strongest--stronger even than raw ambition. This was not simple heroism in the sense that everyone, to some extent, views themselves as the 'hero' or focus of his own life. This particular Heroism was an expansion of his desire to fulfill his potential as a great man - it was not merely potential, it was *destiny*. Disraeli felt he was not only the hero of his own life, but everyone else's as well; when the condition of England cried out for someone of extraordinary ability and compassion to lead it, Disraeli knew he was that person. Whenever he experienced a setback - be it due to force of circumstance, the malice of others, or his own errors - it was the conviction that he was destined to be England's Hero that sustained him.

In taking himself to have heroic qualities and destiny Disraeli went beyond the normal bounds of Victorian modesty and self-effacement; such a proclamation should be made by the hero-worshippers, not the would-be object of that worship. But in placing such emphasis on the value of the 'Heroic' his was very much an accurate reflection of the Victorian imagination. Walter Houghton's book on the intellectual backgrounds of Victorian England contains a chapter on heroism and the widespread practise of

hero-worship, and he places that chapter in the midst of the section devoted to analysis of "Moral Attitudes" (1). Houghton outlines the development of the 'cult' of hero-worship among the Victorians, and attributes its growth to a general Romantic reaction against the rigidity of the new Industrial age, and the decline of the efficacy of religion as an outlet for the spirit and imagination--"for when God was dead, the gods and heroes of history or of myth could take his place and save the moral sum of things" (2).

There was an increase in the popularity of ancient heroic literature, and critics and artists such as Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin expounded on the necessity of producing art and literature in the "grand style", the appropriate subjects of which were "some eminent instance of heroic action, or heroic suffering" (3). The influence of the works of Scott, Byron and Tennyson was also very important in fanning the flames of rampant hero-worshipping among the Victorians. It is Thomas Carlyle who is credited with being the "major prophet" of hero-worship in Victorian England (4), and who referred to hero-worship as "the basis of all possible good, religious or social, for mankind" (5).

Carlyle is witness to the curious but fruitful alliance of Romanticism and Puritanism behind the Victorian tendency to think of men in two categories, heroes and ordinary mortals. (6)

Houghton divides his chapter into six sections of analysis that are roughly equivalent to Carlyle's six lectures on the subject in Heroes and Heroworship (7). Throughout the discussion he outlines the circumstances that encouraged the Victorian fascination with heroes, and how the conception of the hero was adjusted to be relevant to the nineteenth

century. The problems of newly industrial England became so vast and complex that leadership by the merely respectable and competent was not enough to engender confidence--something akin to a saviour was needed to set things right. While the revival of interest in heroic literature and past heroic figures created an atmosphere of acceptance of an ideal, there was also much thought given to what contemporary form and role such saviours might assume. Carlyle and Ruskin hoped that this affinity for the heroic would carry over to business and "captains of industry [would] be heroes to their men and...their men...heroworshippers...[to] form a 'chivalry of labour' marching together" (8). Kingsley claimed that serving the poor in nineteenth century England was just as chivalrous as a knight's concern for the down-trodden and defenseless in middle ages or imagined fairy lands (9).

As Blake points out in the following passage, there is no certain evidence that Disraeli knew Carlyle's work:

It is not clear whether Disraeli ever read Carlyle. He did not read much contemporary literature...He appears to have read little in the way of poetry after Byron and little in the way of novels after Scott...Even if Disraeli never read Carlyle he must, however, have been aware of the ideas that Carlyle was disseminating. (10)

Whether or not he actually read Carlyle, it is clear that he would have agreed completely with the ideas expressed about heroism in Past and Present, Essays, and especially Heroes and Heroworship. Disraeli's study of, and devotion to, the works of Scott and Byron began long before the mid-Victorian fashion for that kind of story, and long before Carlyle published his essays on the subject. His belief in the importance of the imagination in establishing an effective system of government, in opposition to the

restrictively rational/mechanistic one, was formed very early in his adult life. Still, it would not be reaching very far to claim that Disraeli would have felt comfortable using much of Carlyle as the foundation for his personal manifesto if Carlyle's work had been written twenty years earlier.

In the first lecture - "The Hero as Divinity" - Carlyle introduces the subject of the series to follow with a general statement that so mirrors Disraeli's feelings that it would not look out of place as a pronouncement by Vivian Grey or Sidonia. Carlyle writes:

...universal history, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the history of the great men who worked here. They are the leaders of men, these great one; the modelers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment of thoughts that dwelt in the great men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these. (11)

That a single man could affect individual events of history was not doubted. Carlyle even went so far as to suggest that one person, one heroic giant, had it in his power to alter the course of civilizations. Ancient empires need not have passed away if the right man had been available to lead them--and the people had presented him with the reins of power:

For, if we will think of it, no time need have gone to ruin, could it have *found* a man great enough, a man wise and good enough: wisdom to discern truly what the time wanted, valor to lead it on the right road thither; these are the salvation of any time. (12)

In the turmoil of the 1840's and the Condition of England Question, Disraeli certainly saw himself as such a man--someone who was destined to hold England and her Empire

together should the pressures of discontent threaten to break it up.

Of particular relevance to a study of Disraeli are Carlyle's third lecture - "The Hero as Poet" - and the fifth - "The Hero as Man of Letters". When presenting so many of his characters in anguish over the best outlet for their obvious greatness, Disraeli allowed no doubt that the passive writer had as equal and valid heroic potential as the active manipulator of political and martial events; the question had only been one of the appropriate personal choice between equally acceptable and efficacious alternatives. What Carlyle states explicitly was implied in Contarini Fleming and Sybil.

Hero, prophet, poet - many different names, in different times and places, do we give to great men; according to varieties we note in them, according to the sphere in which they have displayed themselves! We might give many more names, on this same principle. I will remark again, however, as a fact not unimportant to be understood, that the different *sphere* constitutes the grand origin of such distinction; that the hero can be poet, prophet, king, priest or what you will, according to the kind of world he finds himself born into. I confess, I have no notion of a truly great man that could not be all sorts of men. (13)

Disraeli believed that great writers were great and even heroic men. It is perhaps one of the reasons he always returned to writing whenever he could, and why he coveted his literary reputation almost as much as his political one. Carlyle, too, knew of the power and value of literary men - to him it was a travesty that they were so often thought of as mere entertainers,

taken for some idle nondescript, extant in the world to amuse idleness, and have a few coins and applauses thrown him, that he might live thereby; *this* perhaps, as before hinted, will one day seem a still absurder phasis of things! Meanwhile, since it is the spiritual always that determines the material, this same man-of-letters hero

must be regarded as our most important modern person. He, such as he may be, is the soul of all. What he teaches, the whole world will do and make. The world's manner of dealing with him is the significant feature of the world's general position. Looking well at his life, we may get a glance, as deep as is readily possible for us, into the life of those singular centuries which have produced him, in which we ourselves live and work. (14)

Of all the forms the hero may assume, the most important is the active leader of men. In the sixth and final lecture on heroism--"The Hero as King"--Carlyle presents an ideal that corresponds very closely with Disraeli's conception of how a nation should be led:

Find in any country the ablest man that exists there; raise *him* to the supreme place, and loyally reverence him: you have a perfect government for that country; no ballot-box, parliamentary eloquence, voting, constitution-building, or other machinery whatsoever can improve it a whit. It is in the perfect state; an ideal country. The ablest noblest man; *what he tells us to do* must be precisely the wisest, fittest, that we could anywhere or anyhow learn (15)

Where Disraeli went beyond Carlyle was in discovering where a true hero could be found. Carlyle spent a lot of time and energy describing the attributes of the hero so that the masses would be able to recognize him when he presented himself. He also lamented the dearth of genuine heroes for the masses to recognize, and exhorted everyone not to lose any of the rare and precious opportunities for hero-worship. Disraeli, on the other hand, while he probably would have agreed with most of what Carlyle said on the subject, diverged from him on the point of where one finds such a man--Disraeli believed that he himself was such a man, and the search need extend no further than his own dressing-room mirror. The tone of this statement is meant to point out the very real streak

of pomposity and self-importance in Disraeli, but it must not be taken as an impugment of his sincerity. It is the reality of this sincerity that separates him from false image presented by others as an opportunist who had no scruples - he was an opportunist with very strict scruples. He honestly believed that he had been cast in the mold of the Hero of England, and that his destiny was to be raised up to that 'supreme place' Carlyle describes.

## II

In Vivian Grey the young protagonist has only an inkling of his heroic potential, as does the young author. His ambition to fulfill his potential for greatness is discussed in Chapter 3, but the quest for his own advancement to a position where he can control others is not tempered by the genuine qualities of a hero. Vivian has little sense of a heroic mission; he is primarily self-seeking in his actions, and this is essentially why he fails. The book is not, however, devoid of reference to the elements of reflection and sagacity that must characterize a hero and his development. Disraeli always presented a character whose function was to guide and advise the young 'hero', a character who can appropriately be referred to as a 'Heroic Sage'. In Vivian Grey this role is filled by Vivian's father--a character whose words and life style are a close parallel of Isaac D'Israeli. Mr. Grey's advice sounds very much like that offered by Isaac during young Disraeli's involvement in The Representative affair. It is to the detriment of both Vivian and Benjamin that neither heeded the words of those whose only motivation for offering advice was the well-being of their sons. Mr. Grey tells Vivian:

In this age every one is striving to make an immense fortune, and what is most terrific, at the same time a speedy one. This thirst for sudden wealth it is which engenders the extravagant conceptions, and fosters that wild spirit of speculation which is now stalking abroad; and which, like the Daemon in Frankenstein, not only fearfully wanders over the whole wide face of nature, but grins in the imagined solitude of our secret chambers. Oh! my son, it is for young men of the present day that I tremble; seduced by the temporary success of a few children of fortune, I observe that their minds recoil from the prospects which are held forth by the ordinary, and, mark me, by the only modes of acquiring property, fair trade, and honourable professions. It is for you and your companions that I fear. God grant that there may not be a moral as well as a political disorganization! God grant that our youth, the hope of our state, may not be lost to us! (16)

Vivian is too full of his plans and his self-importance to pay any heed to his father's concerns. Later, as events progress in a troubling way, Mr. Grey writes a long letter to his son imploring him to have patience in his pursuit of political power, and warns of the consequences of improper motivation in the search for fame.

When the selfish combine with the selfish, bethink you how many projects are doomed to disappointment! How many cross interests baffle the parties at the same time joined together without ever uniting...Is it not obvious, my dear Vivian, that true Fame and true Happiness must rest upon the imperishable social affectations? I do not mean that coterie celebrity which paltry minds accept as fame; but that which exists independent of the opinions or the intrigues of individuals: nor do I mean that glittering show of perpetual converse with the world which some miserable wanderers call Happiness; but that which can only be drawn from the sacred and solidary fountain of your own feelings. (17)

He also entreats his son not to act purely according to some vague or arcane theories, nor to take himself too seriously.

Active as you have now become in the great scenes of human affairs, I would not have you be guided by any

fanciful theories or morals or of human nature. Philosophers have amused themselves by deciding on human actions by systems; but, as these systems are of the most opposite natures, it is evident that each philosopher, in reflecting his own feelings in the system he has so elaborately formed, has only painted his own character....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. Do not imagine that there are not other beings, whose benevolent principle is governed by finer sympathies, by more generous passions, and by those nobler emotions which really constitute all our public and private virtues. (18)

If Vivian had taken all this advice to heart, perhaps his energy and talents could have become transformed from a destructive self-centeredness to a productive and visionary heroism. His father, his political sage, warned against what could destroy him and pointed him towards attitudes and behaviour that were essential to the true hero. Vivian's greatest flaw was that he could recognise not the great truth of the words offered for his benefit.

The Duke of St. James has the same kind of flaws as Vivian Grey, but his are even worse because his life is not directed towards anything as specific as political power. He has no real predilection for the heroic, but has been blessed with the independence of wealth and the immediate recognizability of high social rank that can be useful in bringing a hero to the attention of those who must offer their worship. When it seems that he will squander his advantages, the young Duke is saved by the intervention of his own heroic sages. May Dacre and her father are able, by word and by example, to retrieve him from the brink of disaster and kindle the flame of heroic action where no others had perceived that there was even the smallest spark.

The truth is, Eloquence is the child of Knowledge.  
When a mind is full, like a wholesome river, it is also

clear. Confusion and obscurity are much oftener the results of ignorance than of inefficiency. Few are the men who cannot express their meaning, when the occasion demands the energy; as the lowest will defend their lives with acuteness, and sometimes even with eloquence. They are master of their subject. Knowledge must be gained by ourselves. Mankind may supply us with facts; but the results, even if they agree with previous one, must be the work of our own mind. To make others feel, we must feel ourselves, we must be natural. This we can never be, when we are vomiting forth the dogmas of the schools. Knowledge is not a mere collection of words; and it is a delusion to suppose that thought can be obtained by the aid of any other intellect than our own. What is repetition, by a curious mystery ceases to be truth, even if it were truth when it was first heard; as the shadow in a mirror, though it move and mimic all the actions of vitality, is not life. When a man is not speaking, or writing, from his own mind, he is as insipid company as a looking-glass. (19)

Before a man can address a popular assembly with command, he must know something of mankind; and he can know nothing of mankind without knowing something of himself. Self-knowledge is the property of that man whose passions have their play, who ponders over their results. Such a man sympathises by inspiration with his kind. He has a key to every heart. He can divine, in the flash of a single thought, all that they require, all that they wish. Such a man speaks to their very core. All feel that a master-hand tears off the veil of cant, with which, from necessity, they have enveloped their souls; for cant is nothing more than the sophistry which results from attempting to account for what is unintelligible, or to defend what is improper. (20)

Unlike Vivian Grey, the Duke of St. James is able to understand the value of the advice offered to him, and he acts on it. Throughout most of the novel he is a completely selfish person, but by the end he has been so transformed that he is compelled to undertake a selfless and heroic act--an act that he does not announce to those whom it would benefit. On the coach ride to London to perform this act, he is vilified by his fellow passengers (who do not know that the subject of their conversation is, in fact, their travelling

companion) but does not speak up to defend himself--rather he accepts their words as a kind of penance he must endure for his past sins.

Contarini Fleming goes far beyond the Duke of St. James in terms of self-understanding and has many of the same ambitious impulses as Vivian Grey, but Disraeli allows this character to benefit from the wisdom of his heroic sages and to be saved from personal destruction. Contarini's immense genius and thirst for greatness are evident from the beginning, both to the reader and the character. Contarini, however, is the first 'hero' that Disraeli endows with a self-conscious sense of the heroic. He believes that his actions and choices of career not only have implications for his personal destiny, but also for the society around him--he believes his life affects all others in a profound way.

Despite this demonstrated self-knowledge, Contarini requires constant direction and reassurance. Baron Fleming's words to his son might also have come from Isaac D'Israeli to a frustrated Benjamin:

'I think you have sufficient talents for all that I could reasonably desire, Contarini,' continued his father; 'I think you have talents indeed for anything; anything, I mean, that a rational being can desire to attain; but you sadly lack judgement. I think that you are the most imprudent person with whom I ever was acquainted. You have a great enemy, Contarini, a great enemy in yourself. You have a great enemy in your imagination. I think if you could control your imagination you might be a great man. (21)

Contarini heeds this admonition and almost immediately reaps the benefits. The enigmatic artist, Winter, also offers must needed advice and encouragement, appearing suddenly in

the novel whenever Contarini is most deeply mired in self-doubt or confusion. When he begins to think the time for greatness has passed him by --"Alas! what is life! At this age I hoped to be famous." --Winter replies:

Depend upon it you are in the right road; but rest assured you must go through every trial that is peculiar to men of your organization. There is no avoiding it. It is just as necessary as that life should be the consequence of your structure. (22)

Disraeli leads the reader to believe that ultimately Contarini will be the hero that his country requires. He may be young and lack the maturity to be certain of his course during the period in which the novel takes place, but there is no doubt that he possesses that special quality of dynamism that makes his potential as a genuine hero a certainty. He has vision to accompany his genius;

I gaze upon the beautiful, and mind responds to the inspiration, for my thoughts are as lovely my visions.  
(23)

When these are put at the disposal of the country that needs them, Contarini will have fulfilled his heroic destiny.

In The Wonderous Tale of Alroy, Disraeli gives the most sustained examination of the heroic and heroism of all of the pre-parliamentary novels. Richard Levine's summary of the meaning of the book is also a useful encapsulization of Disraeli's concept of the true goal of a hero and the factors which should motivate the hero:

In its simplest terms, Alroy's mission is to deliver his people to their rightful position as tradition has defined that position. Alroy's quest is, in one sense, predicated upon his ability to invoke principles both by which his people's condition can be ameliorated and by which they can once more be brought into harmony with tradition.

(24)

Disraeli saw his own mission as identical to that of David Alroy's. The glory of England, and the well-being of its people, could only be restored by reverting to a society that functions on the timeless principles that created that greatness in the first place.

The Wonderous Tale of Alroy adds the final important factor in the complex equation of heroism and heroic responsibility. It is the first of the books in which Disraeli depicts a hero who is fully aware of his genius and destiny, who is also conscious of the incredible obligation such destiny brings with it. The energy of his anger and shame at being the prince of a captive people is transformed into a vision of freedom by a dream in which he sees himself as the deliverer of his people.

And, lo! a mighty chariot now appeared, drawn by strange beasts whose forms were half obscured by the bright flames on which they seemed to float. In that glorious car a warrior stood, proud and immovable his form, his countenance...that chieftain was myself. (25)

In his dream Alroy is given a sceptre by the last of the free kings of Israel. The significance of this is interpreted for him by his lifelong mentor, Jabaster. Jabaster, another in the long line of Disraelian heroic sages, sees this particular dream as the final proof that Alroy is the one who has been chosen by God to free the people of Israel from their ignoble captivity.

for him great trials are impending. Not lightly must that votary be proved, who fain would free a people. The Lord is faithful to his promise, but the Lord will choose his season and his minister...It is written in the dread volume of our mystic lore, that not alone the Saviour shall spring from out our house of princes, but that none shall rise to free us, until, alone and unassisted, he have gained the sceptre which Solomon of old wielded within his cedar palaces. (26)

Jabaster takes on the responsibility for directing young David's focus on the specific task for which God has selected him.

He is able to bring David into contact with the great principles of the past and to channel his zeal into programs which offer some possibilities for success. (27)

As long as Alroy remains dedicated to his primary duty with pure heart and motivation, he experiences unprecedented and unexpected military success against the Arab captors. As Levine says, David is essentially:

protected by his belief in great principles. And as long as his belief in those principles remains firm and unaltered, Alroy is successful. Only after he decides to compromise his original dedication does he fall from favour and meet with failure. (28)

Alroy's compromise comes when he becomes intoxicated with the acclaim that inevitably accompanies his success. His original goal of freeing his people from their captivity begins to fade with the prospect of personal glory and aggrandizement. Strict adherence to the divine directives which gave him his extraordinary luck also required a devout faith and blind obedience to God's orders. But, as his military success creates situations which demand certain religious decisions, Alroy chooses compromise rather than doctrinal purity--temporal and secular concerns began to take precedence over the principles which had enabled him to fulfill his heroic destiny.

The day may come when this [purification and forced conversion of the conquered people] may be affected. At present, Jabaster, we must be moderate, and content ourselves with arrangements which may ensure that order shall be maintained, property respected, and justice administered. (29)

Jabaster tries to warn his protege that he is abandoning those very ideals that brought him success in his altruistic quest:

now, when thy fortunes, like a noble cedar, swell in the air and shadow all the land; thou, the very leader of His people, His chosen one, for whom He hath worked such marvels, thy heart is turned from thy fathers' God, and hankers after strange abominations. (30)

Alroy's ultimate transgression occurs when he violates God's direct interdiction not to enter the city of Babylon. At his obvious spiritual peril, and in the face of his previous blind faith in the word of the oracle, Alroy ignores this directive. He has supreme confidence in himself and his judgement--he comes to believe that his success is due solely to his own, unaided ability, that the 'divine' force at work is secondary or unimportant. In Disraeli's eyes, David Alroy has committed the most heinous sin of which a hero is capable--he has betrayed his mission and the people who trusted him and offered him their devotion, their hero-worship. He has become an example of one of the difficulties inherent in assuming the mantle of leadership of a nation--what Houghton refers to as the "tendency to become embodiment of sheer force and the exponent not of justice, but of his own self will" (31). Alroy does achieve a measure of redemption by refusing to prostrate himself and his restored faith before his Arab captors. Even the hope of avoiding a horrible death will not convince him to cowardly give in to personal considerations a second time. He does die, but his final acts and attitude ensure that it is a heroic death.

Later, when he came to write the Young England trilogy, Disraeli was in a battle with Peel for the hearts and minds of the Tory Party. He was finally in a truly heroic position and this sense is evident in Coningsby where we find the most fully realized heroic and

'heroic sage' characters in all of his fiction.

From his earliest memories Coningsby is conscious that he has qualities that bring the admiration--even the devotion--of others. Intelligence, integrity and demeanour lift him to high position in school and society. As was outlined in the previous chapter, Coningsby and his friends recognize that they were destined for significant roles in English history. Only Coningsby, however, has the characteristics of a true hero--most pronounced when he risks inevitable personal and political oblivion by refusing to compromise his ideals when pressured to do so by his autocratic grandfather. And, just as Alroy was punished when he deviated from the heroic path, so Coningsby is rewarded for his fidelity to principle and the concept of heroic service to his nation.

The best discussions of heroism in Coningsby come in the encounters between Coningsby and Sidonia. When they first meet by chance at a roadside inn, Disraeli has already established Coningsby's credentials as an embryonic hero, but he is impeded by two deficiencies. One is within himself--a perceived lack of experience and wisdom which disqualifies him from immediately acting on his impulses towards political action in the cause of saving England from self-destruction. The second is what he sees as a deficiency of the current age--an age when the power of the masses drowns out the abilities of a single man. Sidonia sweeps these concerns aside:

'I perceive,' said Coningsby, pursuing a strain of thought which the other had indicated, 'that you have great confidence in the influence of individual character. I also have some confused persuasions of that kind. But it is not the Spirit of the Age.'

'The age does not believe in great men, because it does not possess any,' replied the stranger. 'The Spirit of the

Age is the very thing that a great man changes.'

'But does he not rather avail himself of it?' inquired Coningsby.

'Parvenus do,' rejoined his companion; 'but not prophets, great legislators, great conquerors. They destroy and they create.'

'But are these times for great legislators and great conquerors?' urged Coningsby.

'When were they wanted more?' asked the stranger. (32)

Throughout the rest of the book, whenever they meet, Sidonia instills in Coningsby more of the sense of the value and validity of heroism in the public service--the notion that those such as Coningsby who possess the traits of a true hero must do their utmost to fulfill their destiny no matter what the 'Spirit of the Age' may seem to dictate. If such a path entails some discomfort or sacrifice, then that is the price to be paid for having been blessed with the power to lead and restore a once-great nation. As a character, Sidonia is too fanciful to be truly believable, but that is hardly unusual in a Disraeli novel. Stephen Graubard offers an accurate summary of part of Disraeli's purpose in creating such a character.

Disraeli invented Sidonia because he required a spokesman for ideas which could not be entrusted to callow youths, and which, because of their novelty, required the authority of a man whose critical and prophetic powers transcended what was common to the world of British politics. (33)

Coningsby was an apt pupil. At Cambridge, when he is faced with the choice between academic honours or preparation for a career of public service, his choice of the latter is based upon feelings which were latent in his consciousness all along, but needed the coaxing of Sidonia to be articulated.

It was that noble ambition, the highest and the best, that must be born in the heart and organised in the brain,

which will not let a man be content, unless his intellectual power is recognised by his race, and desires that it should contribute to their welfare. It is the heroic feeling; the feeling that in old days produced demi-gods; without which no State is safe; without which political institutions are meat without salt; the Crown a bauble, the Church an establishment, Parliaments debating-clubs, and civilization itself but a fitful and transient dream. (34)

'Where is the spirit that raised these walls [Cambridge]?' thought Coningsby. 'Is it indeed extinct? Is then this civilisation, so much vaunted, inseparable from moderate feelings and little thoughts? If so, give me back barbarism! But I cannot believe it. Man that is made in the image of the Creator, is made for God-like deeds. Come what come may, I will cling to the heroic principle. It can alone satisfy my soul.' (35)

Even when he is handed the setback of sudden penury by his grandfather's vindictive will, the ideals that were born in him and nurtured under the tutelage of Sidonia remain strong.

If he possessed the intelligence in which he had confidence, the world would recognise his voice even if not placed upon a pedestal. If the principles of his philosophy were true, the great heart of the nation would respond to their expression. 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 conscience, however, it may lead to immediate success, is a fatal error. (36)

This conviction of power in the midst of despair was a revelation of intrinsic strength. It is indeed the test of a creative spirit. From that moment all petty fears for an ordinary future quitted him. He felt that he must be prepared for great sacrifices, for infinite suffering; that there must devolve on him a bitter inheritance of obscurity, struggle, envy, and hatred, vulgar prejudice, base criticism, petty hostilities, but the dawn would break, and the hour arrive, when the welcome morning hymn of his success and his fame would sound and be re-echoed. (37)

In Sybil and Tancred there is less direct discussion of heroes and heroism as Disraeli's focus shifts to other issues of the 1840's. Still, there are strong heroic characters and heroic sages. The interaction between the two is not the stylized polemic about heroism that is found in Coningsby; instead the topics deal with social inequity (Sybil) and spiritual frustration (Tancred), but the underlying concern is often with promotion of heroic action, among those capable of it, and hero-worship amongst everyone else.

Charles Egremont does not have the early awareness of his heroic potential that Coningsby possesses. He wallows in aristocratic indolence for most of his life until he comes under the influence of Sybil and her father, Walter Gerard. While Sidonia's task was to instill Coningsby with a sense of self-confidence about his already strong heroic impulses and ideals, the Gerards' role as sages for Egremont was to delve much deeper into his psyche to awaken him to that which he did not know he was capable. His natural goodness compels him to reject the aristocratic excess of his brother and to seek something more meaningful and just. In his desire to seek such alternatives he exhibits the nature of a true hero, and the Gerards provide the education by example that his family and social environment had denied him. Chapter 4 shows how his relationship with the Gerards brings about a feeling that he is capable of greatness. That this potential for greatness is merely one of the facets of a heroic make-up is made obvious through Egremont's many examples of sacrifice--instances of his doing the right and honourable thing instead of the simply easy and personally comfortable. He refuses to take up the family parliamentary seat if the debts incurred on his behalf cannot be settled; when he assumes the identity of Mr. Franklin in order to be near the Gerards and live as they do, he gives up the luxury of

the noble life style; he resists the temptation to remain in the country and keep the pastoral, idyllic way of life he experiences with the Gerards when it is time to return to London and take up the responsibilities of his parliamentary duties; and he risks losing the regard of Sybil and Walter when they are allowed to discover who he really is. All these risks and sacrifices were made because of Egremont's strong sense of duty--a strong sense that he has special abilities and perspective, that he is in a unique position to change the horrible course that brought about the division of England into two nations. As Levine says:

Egremont also came to accept two cardinal factors: the natural supremacy of some men over others; and the unquestionable truth of England's division into 'two nations'. (38)

Through Sybil and Walter, Egremont learns the reality of what this rupture in the social fabric has done to the conditions for those who lose in the rich/poor equation.

There is more serfdom in England now than at any time since the Conquest. I speak of what passes under my eyes daily when I say that those who labour can as little choose or change their masters now as when they were born thralls. There are great bodies of the working classes of this country nearer the condition of brutes than they have been at any time since the Conquest. Indeed, I see nothing to distinguish them from brutes, except that their morals are inferior. Incest and infanticide are as common among them as among the lower animals. The domestic principle wanes weaker and weaker every year in England; nor can we wonder at it, when there is no comfort to cheer and sentiment to hallow the home. (39)

Such vivid orations, and eyewitness experiences help crystallize Egremont's previous unfocused discontentment with the current social/political situation.

In terms of offering illustrative passages and clearly defined heroic characters,

Tancred is the least concrete book of the trilogy. There are several figures who could be listed in the category of heroic sage, but all are inadequate. They stimulate thought in the young Tancred, but they do not have any profound effect upon him. That may, perhaps, be a primary reason why his quest ends just as inadequately. Sidonia makes a cameo appearance early in the book, but Tancred is removed from that setting before they can develop a relationship. Their meeting does leave the impression that prolonged interaction with the mysterious financier could have influenced and directed Tancred in the same way he did with Coningsby. Tancred possessed the requisite resources, abilities and altruism to have a heroic impact upon his country. Like the previous Young England heroes, he too is troubled by the lack of genuinely heroic leaders, and the public conditions in which they could thrive. To his father he decries the decay of English society through the inartistic 'levelling' that has reached so far into the minds of the people that they no longer have the visionary capability to spawn heroes or to follow them.

...but where is the art? It seems to me the very quality wanting to our present condition. Art is order, method, harmonious results obtained by fine and powerful principles. I see no art in our condition. The people of this country have ceased to be a nation. They are a crowd, and only kept in some rude provisional discipline by the remains of that old system which they are daily destroying. (40)

Later he talks to a friend about his sadness at seeing so little confidence among potentially great men. With the dilution of power amongst so many has come the instinct to merely survive by parroting the ideas of the multitude back at them, rather than lead by expounding noble, heroic ideas that may be alien to the many.

No one has confidence in himself; on the contrary, every one has a mean idea of his own strength and has no reliance on his own judgment. Men obey a general impulse, they bow before an external necessity, whether

for resistance or action. Individuality is dead; there is a want of inward and personal energy in man; and that is what people feel and mean when they go about complaining there is no faith. (41)

Tancred Montacute is the first Disraelian hero to fail in his quest for fulfillment since Vivian Grey. At the end of book there is no optimistic view of the future now that yet another brilliant, advantaged, noble (in the moral and well as social sense of the word) young man had broken through to the heroic plane. The conclusion of Tancred is simply punctuated by the frustration and feeling of ineffectiveness that was present at the beginning.

'I have a vague impression,' said Eva, sorrowfully, 'that there have been heroic aspirations wasted, and noble energies thrown away; and yet, perhaps,' she added, in a faltering tone, 'there is no one to blame. Perhaps, all this time, we have been dreaming over an unattainable end, and the only source of deception is our own imagination. (42)

Like Vivian Grey, Tancred did not have absolutely everything necessary for success. Both were without that strong guidance--a heroic sage who could direct them towards the path of the true hero. When he returns to fiction several years after Tancred, Disraeli is still concerned with the hero, but his emphasis has actually shifted to that character of the heroic sage.

The distinguishing feature of Lothair and Endymion, the flatness and passivity of the central character, is balanced by the strength and vitality of the those characters who had, up to this point, played subordinate - albeit important - roles. In Lothair the heroic sage characters, Cardinal Grandison and Theodora, are examples of the possibilities inherent in

a position in which latent heroic potential is recognized by others, but is manipulated rather than nurtured. Both Theodora and Grandison want to develop Lothair's heroism, but only after he has been won over as a convert to their cause. This was a new twist, and Disraeli does not allow either faction to win. Rather, Lothair rejects both and pledges his fortune and potential to the staid establishment represented by Lady Corisande - the only person who had been honest with him from the outset.

In his old age, Disraeli seems not to have felt as strongly about presenting strong, young characters to get his message across. In Endymion Disraeli makes the heroic sages into the real heroes. Endymion's sister Myra, Lady Montfort, his friend Miss Neuchatel and her mother Mrs. Neuchatel not only offer him their wisdom about how to proceed in his political career. Of all of them, his sister is strongest in her resolve to ensure that her brother's career does not end as tragically as did their father's:

She had in a great degree moulded his life. Her unfaltering, though often unseen, influence had created his advancement. Her will was more powerful than his.  
(43)

In his earlier novels it was youth and intellect that enthralled Disraeli, but at the end of his life his interest shifted from mere potential to those characteristics who actually produced results. As Daniel Schwarz says:

While the narrator, Disraeli's surrogate, often patronises Endymion as he carefully and judiciously ascend the political ladder, he is in awe of Myra's and, to a less extent, Lady Montfort's Realpolitik. (44)

Still, there is no doubt of the value--even the necessity--of heroic action. The fact that he depicted it differently in his later characters and plots indicates only that his perspective

had changed with the natural course of time. Graubard is unequivocal about the heroism of the 'behind-the-scenes' machinations of the women in Endymion's life:

In these persons, and in their efforts, Disraeli represented the heroic possibilities open to those prepared to aspire to great things. (45)

Even accounting for shifts and changes attributable to the vicissitudes of social styles and attitudes, Disraeli remained remarkably constant in his belief in heroism. Throughout his career he held to the conviction that the truly great men in English political history were those who brought vision and ideals to their prosaic pursuit of power. They were able to function effectively in the world of compromise and opportunism that characterized "practical" politics and yet remain above it. To Disraeli, these men were the heroes England desperately needed in an age where faith was dangerously eroded--and he wished to place himself in their company. Speaking through his fictional characters and narrators he admits to powerful personal ambition, but he tempers it with an indisputable sincerity.

NOTES

- 1 - Walter E. Houghton, "Hero Worship" in The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 305-340.
- 2 - Houghton, p. 322.
- 3 - Houghton, p. 308.
- 4 - Houghton, p. 306.
- 5 - Thomas Carlyle, "Lecture 4: The Hero as Priest" in Heroes, Heroworship and The Heroic in History. (New York: A.L. Burt, nd), pp. 145-146.
- 6 - Houghton, p. 306.
- 7 - Carlyle gave six lectures between 5th and 22nd May 1840, the titles of which were: "The Hero as Divinity", "The Hero as Prophet", "The Hero as Poet", "The Hero as Priest", "The Hero as Man of Letters", and "The Hero as King".
- 8 - Houghton, p. 319.
- 9 - Houghton, p. 320.
- 10 - Robert Blake, Disraeli (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1966), p. 191-192.
- 11 - Carlyle, "Lecture 1: The Hero as Divinity", p. 1-2.
- 12 - Carlyle, "Lecture 1: The Hero as Divinity", p. 15.
- 13 - Carlyle, "Lecture 3: The Hero as Poet", p. 92-93.
- 14 - Carlyle, "Lecture 5: The Hero as Man of Letters", p. 183.
- 15 - Carlyle, "Lecture 6: The Hero as King", p. 232.
- 16 - Vivian Grey (vol. 1), p. 35.
- 17 - Vivian Grey (vol. 1), p. 202.
- 18 - Vivian Grey (vol. 1), p. 203.
- 19 - The Young Duke (vol. 3), p. 395.
- 20 - The Young Duke (vol. 3), p. 396.
- 21 - Contarini Fleming (vol.5), p. 197.

- 22 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 5), p. 358.
- 23 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 6), p. 281.
- 24 - Richard Levine, Benjamin Disraeli (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1968), p. 52-53.
- 25 - The Wonderous Tale of Alroy (vol. 7), p. 38.
- 26 - The Wonderous Tale of Alroy (vol. 7), p. 39.
- 27 - Levine, p. 52.
- 28 - Levine, p. 53.
- 29 - The Wonderous Tale of Alroy (vol. 7), p. 178.
- 30 - The Wonderous Tale of Alroy (vol. 7), p. 181.
- 31 - Houghton, p. 330.
- 32 - Coningsby (vol. 12), p. 157-158.
- 33 - Stephen Graubard, Burke, Disraeli and Churchill: The Politics of Perseverence (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961.), p. 122.
- 34 - Coningsby (vol. 12), p. 344-345.
- 35 - Coningsby (vol. 12), p. 354.
- 36 - Coningsby (vol. 13), p. 145.
- 37 - Coningsby (vol. 13), p. 197-198.
- 38 - Levine, p. 77.
- 39 - Sybil (vol. 14), p. 245.
- 40 - Tancred (vol. 15), p. 65.
- 41 - Tancred (vol. 15), p. 190.
- 42 - Tancred (vol. 16), p. 412.
- 43 - Endymion (vol. 20), p. 203.
- 44 - Daniel Schwarz, Disraeli's Fiction (New York: Barnes and Noble Imports/Harper and Row, 1979), p. 142.
- 45 - Graubard, p. 164.

CHAPTER 6: RACE

## I

Benjamin Disraeli was a Jew. He was also a racist. These facts have not been ignored in accounts of his life, but neither have they been examined closely as important factors in his political philosophy.

His principle biographers are cognizant of the fact that his Jewish origin was very significant in his life and career. Monypenny and Buckle, Pearson, Blake, and Bradford all devote a great deal of space to accounts of how Disraeli's Jewishness affected his early school experiences, and relationships with his peers. Blake and Bradford offer quite different conclusions about the degree to which a Jew was impaired in his ability to function as a full member of British society. Sarah Bradford gives a distortedly pessimistic view:

The central fact of Disraeli's birth and indeed of his whole life was his Jewishness; in terms of early nineteenth-century England this meant political and social impotence, even isolation. Until the rise of the English house of Rothschild in the second quarter of the century, a Jew was barred by religion from entering the political establishment and by birth from entering Society. (1)

Lord Blake's analysis of the position of Jews at the time of Disraeli's birth is more helpful in that it is more balanced and detailed. If it had not been written two decades before Bradford's book, the following could almost be taken a rebuttal to the passage cited above:

Disraeli suffered from a potentially fatal handicap. He was a Jew. The handicap did not arise from social or religious persecution. England at the beginning of the

nineteenth century was a tolerant place, and its Jewish inhabitants were numerically far below the figure at which, sociologists tell us, an alien minority risks becoming the object of hatred to their fellow citizens. The Jewish religion with its strange observations and eccentric taboos inspired curiosity rather than detestation. The handicap lay in the fact that the law prohibited non-Christians from entering Parliament. (2)

No such ban applied to people who were merely Jewish by race, provided that they were ready to take the oath. As early as 1770 Sampson Gideon the younger, who later became a peer, was returned for Parliament. Sir Manasseh Lopes entered the House in 1802, Ralph Bernalin in 1818, and, most famous of all, the great economist, David Ricardo, in 1819. All four were members of the Anglican Church, but their racial origin was well known, and it was evidently not an insuperable bar. (3)

Whatever these differences between the conclusions of Blake and Bradford may be, they are basically differences of degree. It remains a fact that, had he remained even a nominal member of the Jewish faith, Disraeli would never have had a political career. It would not have been enough for him to be a non-practising Jew, or even an atheist, as his father was. To have any hope of a public life, he had to be a member of the Church of England. The most complete account of young Benjamin's conversion to Anglicanism is given by Monypenny and Buckle, and all other biographies seem to have based their own version of this event upon this basic information. Isaac D'Israeli had never been very interested in his native religion, and, given his personal preference, would probably have broken with his Temple long before he did had it not been for the wishes of his father--Benjamin D'Israeli. Isaac was so disinterested in religion in general, being of somewhat Voltarian bent, that he would never have taken the time to formally resign from

his congregation if the Elders of that body had not created circumstances which compelled him to do so. In 1813, quite against his will, he was elected Parnass, or Warden, of the Congregation of Bevis Marks. He declined to serve, and was subsequently fined by the council of Elders. He refused to pay the fines, but refrained from an irrevocable break while his father was still alive. When the elder Benjamin died in 1816, Issac felt free to act according to his conscience, and he terminated his association with that Synagogue in particular, and Judaism in general. Two of the three obstacles to young Disraeli's conversion--familial wishes as expressed by his grandfather, and technical affiliation with a Synagogue--were thus effectively removed within days of each other.

The third difficulty was in fact created by Isaac himself. Although he ceased to be a Jew, he did not become a Christian--and appeared to have no inclination to present this option to his children. It took the intervention of a long-time family friend, the artist Sharon Turner, to convince Isaac that such an attitude with regards to the children would seriously impair their futures, and that it was in their best interests to be baptized as Anglicans. The younger brothers, Ralph and James, went through the ceremony on 11th July, 1817, Benjamin on the 31st of the same month, and Sarah on 28th August. As a possible explanation for why it took three separate sessions to baptize all the young D'Israelis, Blake repeats Dr. Cecil Roth's contention that:

Benjamin and Sarah, being old enough to have some ideas of their own, may have dug their toes in and refused to accompany their father's friend on the earlier occasion. (4)

None of Disraeli's other biographers even hint at resistance on Benjamin's part. Blake himself, while admitting the possibility, clearly does not think it very likely:

This is possible, although Benjamin seems to have had no memory of such reluctance: in his own account he says, wrongly, that all four children were baptized on the same day. (5)

Regardless of any possible personal misgivings, it was Disraeli's reception into the Church of England, more than any single event besides his birth, that made his extraordinary career possible. This conversion would likely not have come about when it did had it not been for the initial decision on the part of the temple Elders to elect Isaac to a position in which he did not want to serve, and the subsequent decisions to bind him by that election and to further provoke him by levying fines for non-compliance. Monypenny and Buckle conclude that:

No one could have foreseen how fruitful in great consequences this event was to be - neither the Elders of the Synagogue who forced the rupture, nor the Voltarian father, nor the zealous family friend, nor Mr. Thimbleby, who in Benjamin's case performed the ceremony of baptism. If the gentlemen of the Mahamad had shown less obstinacy or more worldly wisdom - and it was only, we are told, a question of two or three votes - that strange political career which was to fascinate a later generation might well have been impossible. (6)

Blake has the same feelings about the significance of this act:

Benjamin had taken, or had been pushed into taking, far the most important decision of his boyhood. From now onwards he was a practising member of the Church of England as by law established. Had he remained a Jew, his later political career would have been impossible. He would never have become leader of the Conservative party if he had been obliged to wait till his middle fifties before entering Parliament. (7)

Implicit in both these statements, however, is the assumption that, had it not been for the peculiar set of circumstances that led to his entering the Anglican church on 31st July

1817, he NEVER would have taken such a step on his own. The last thought in the passage from Blake quoted above makes it clear that the author thinks that Disraeli would not have eventually taken the initiative to remove such a legal barrier to his political ambition, claiming that Disraeli would have had to wait until the Oaths Bill of 1858 which removed the barriers which had prevented Jews from sitting in the Commons as professed Jews. Such an assumption is clearly invalid. Given Disraeli's driving political ambition, his own less than ardent religious views, and the absence of any real feeling about religion, one way or another, on the part of his parents, it is highly unlikely that he would have allowed such a problem to impede him for very long. Even if Turner had not convinced Issac of the merits of conversion to Christianity in 1817, it seems logical to assume that Benjamin would soon have come to realize this on his own and made the necessary decision to join the Church of England. To suggest that Disraeli would simply have waited until he could enter Parliament as a Jew shows that Blake must have temporarily lost sight of the nature of his subject--Benjamin Disraeli would not have let such an easily rectified circumstance as official religion disqualify him from reaching for his goals.

Having said that he placed little emphasis on professed religion, it must be emphasized that Disraeli had very strong feelings about race. He was a racist--not necessarily in the strictly pejorative sense of the word that is applicable today, but rather in the sense that he believed in race as a determinant element in such things as an individual's ability, intelligence, and insight. Hesketh Pearson outlines Disraeli's concept of the paramountcy of race, and goes on to claim that his preoccupation with it may have created more problems than the simple fact of Jewish origin:

This doctrine was opposed to such tenets as the equality of man, which, he asserted, had destroyed ancient society without creating a satisfactory substitute. Men were only equal in relation to their Creator; all other equality was absurd; but faith was essential; and spiritual, not material, values were all that mattered. Such was his creed, and it explains his belief in an aristocracy that should lead, guide and enlighten, soften vulgar prejudices and encounter popular passions. But his doctrine does not take into account individual genius, which, in literature and action, has had more effect on the world than race; and it does not do justice to his own remarkable achievement, which was as unique as himself, and due to the peculiarities of his nature, not his racial characteristics. It is true that his origin was against him also that his chief racial quality, patience, was in his favour; but what ultimately made him leader of a party whose components were radically antipathetic to his derivation, his manners, his mentality, his habits, his personal appearance, and indeed everything about him, was the compelling force of his personality; in a word, his genius." (8)

In fact, such general ideas on race were widely held attitudes among nineteenth century Englishmen. The word "race" was often used to refer to different social, religious and national origins, as well as the biological distinction used today. Thus, it was common to hear such labels as the "French race" or the "Catholic race". Many Englishmen may be said to have been "racist" in this sense--especially in their popular belief that no other group was the equal of the "English race". Disraeli was an Englishman, but his Englishness was tempered with a Semitic origin and conversion to the Anglican Church had been more for convenience than conviction. He therefore had a much different perspective on racism than other Englishmen--his point-of-view was that of a racial "outsider" who desperately wanted to be an "insider". He had been in this position most of his early life. Monypenny and Buckle tell of his experiences at a school run by Reverend John Potticany, which was noted for its liberal atmosphere "as to both politics and religion" (9), where he stood apart from the other boys during prayers and took

instruction from a visiting Rabbi on Saturdays. This sense of being separate from, and somehow shut out of, the general English "racial group" stayed with Disraeli all of his life, even after he became a Christian. Just as he revelled in his fabricated Spanish origin, so too many of his contemporaries wondered if he was not much like the *Marranos* of fourteenth century Spain--Jews who converted to Christianity in order to avoid expulsion. Such suspicion was never too far in the background, and Disraeli was always keenly aware of it.

In typically Disraelian fashion, his most effective means of dealing with this problem was to take the offensive. He was openly boastful of his Jewish heritage and tried to use it as justification for having the temerity to seek public office.

The way in which Disraeli was to come to terms with what was the principal obstacle to his advancement is vital to an understanding of his character and outlook. He was a man of middle-class birth and moderate means in a world in which aristocratic blood and money were the only things that counted. Yet he felt himself innately superior, an aristocrat by instinct; the only way in which he could face up to and enter the world of politics and power for which he longed and for which he felt himself destined was by glorying in his ancient lineage as a Jew....Disraeli's Jewishness, instead of being a humiliating fact to be concealed, became something to be gloried in, an aristocracy of race far older, and therefore superior, to a mere territorial nobility going back less than a thousand years. But Disraeli, being the man he was, could not let well enough alone; he was a Jew and therefore a natural aristocrat - he must also be an aristocratic Jew, descended from the great Iberian families of the Sephardim. (10)

In the 1849 forward to an edition of his father's works, he wrote a geneological note about his family:

My grandfather, who became an English Denizen in

1748, was an Italian descendant from one of those Hebrew families whom the Inquisition forced to emigrate from the Spanish Peninsula at the end of the fifteenth century, and who found a refuge in the more tolerant territories of the Venetian Republic. His ancestors had dropped their Gothic surname on their settlement in the Terra Firma, and grateful to the God of Jacob who had sustained them through unprecedented trials and guarded them through unheard-of perils, they assumed the name of DISRAELI, a name never borne before or since by any other family, in order that their race might be for ever recognised. Undisturbed and unmolested, they flourished as merchants for more than two centuries under the protection of the lion of St. Mark (11)

None of this was true. Not content to take pride in his actual heritage, he felt compelled to elaborate his personal lineage to the point of fabrication.

Despite extremes of over-compensation prompted by his sense of being outside the racial mainstream of England (never a sense of inferiority), he always used the facts of his roots as a source of strength, and fused that with a kind of devotion to England and Englishness that is often peculiar to those not totally accepted by, or at home in, the body of the nation.

...alien minorities tend to admire the traditions and structure of the society in which they live but of which they are not a part. With the Jews this is especially so; and along with his sceptical outlook and exotic constitution, Disraeli had a profound respect for English custom and an exaggerated veneration for English caste. With him this did not degenerate into mere snobbery, for he had no illusions about individuals and did not confuse the peer with the peerage. It was simply his romantic idealisation of something from which he felt himself cut off. Thus in politics he was an intellectual Radical, an emotional Tory (12)

Like so many people who are not wholly indigenou, Disraeli was fonder of England and the English way of life than were the natives of the island. (13)

The foundation of the strength he drew from his Jewishness, was the firm belief that, being Jewish and therefore more aristocratic than the so-called landed aristocrats of England, he was just as suited to govern - even more so. Georg Brandes is the most forceful of Disraeli's biographers in outlining this:

Was...this mixed population of Saxons and Normans, among whom he had first seen the light, of purer blood than he? Oh no, he was descended in a direct line from one of the oldest races in the world, from that rigidly separate and unmixed Bedouin race, who had developed a high civilization at a time when the inhabitants of England were going half-naked, and eating acorns in their woods...They [Christians] had appropriated all the religion and all the literature of his fathers. They had acknowledged the literature to be sacred, inspired by God Himself, and this religion to be a revelation which might be supplemented, but could never be abolished. They divided their time by Jewish methods. They rested on the Sabbath, in accordance with a Jewish law, and it was observed by them scarcely less literally or fanatically than in the ancient land of the race. They considered it to be virtue, even a duty, continually to study the history of his ancestors, and taught it to their children before teaching them the history of their own country. Week by week they sang in their churches the hymns, laments, and praises of the Jewish poets; and finally, they worshipped the Son of a Jewish woman as their God. Yet, nevertheless, they excluded with disdain from their society and their parliament, as if they were the offscouring of the earth, the race to which they owed their festivals, their psalms, their semi-civilization, their religion, and their God. (14)

His racial origin and his belief in the significance of race, were more than merely a source of inner support for Disraeli; their effects were manifest in overt ways as well. He was always preoccupied with being Jewish, and, after the publication of Vivian Grey and The Young Duke, he wanted to focus his next major work on a Jewish hero--David Alroy. Collection of raw material for this project was one of the reasons Disraeli gave for setting out on his tour of the Mediterranean and the Near East. This trip was to be his "Grand

Tour", but a Grand Tour unlike that undertaken by any of his contemporaries. As a 'capping off' of a young man's education the traditional Grand Tour was spent mostly in Western Europe and was extended beyond only in the rare circumstance that finances, time and inclination all combined to allow it. Italy was one of the principal stops of interest, if for no other reason than it was viewed as one of the cradles of grand European civilization and had preceded England as an imperial power. Disraeli's 'cradle' lay further east, in the Levant, and the closest he got to visiting continental Europe on this journey were stays in Spain, Gibraltar and Malta. When he returned to England in 1831 after eighteen months of travel, he had gone through what was arguably the single most formative experience of his life. Lord Blake thought it a significant enough event in Disraeli's career that his second book on him was devoted to this Grand Tour. In the introduction to this book Blake writes:

My visit to Jerusalem [in 1979], however, made me read again many works by and about Disraeli, including my own and his novels, and above all his letters describing his tour of the Near East. It also made me think again about the effect upon him of his stay in Jerusalem. However briefly he describes it in his letters, a re-reading of some of his (admittedly least readable) novels suggest that the experience really was important...I do believe that his tour of the Near East, and in particular his week in Jerusalem, had a profound influence upon him, and that an effort to analyse it is worth making. (15)

In his discussion of the "Aftermath" of the tour, Blake concludes that while his actual entry into Parliament, or such events as his collision with Peel would probably have happened anyway, Disraeli's "thought, writings, outlook and personality, perhaps even his views on foreign policy, might well have been different if he had never set out on his travels" (16). As might be expected, the most eagerly anticipated item on his itinerary was

the stop-over in Jerusalem, and a letter to Sarah describes his feeling upon seeing the Holy City for the first time (17). Blake believes this to be the most significant part of Disraeli's entire trip:

There can be no doubt that of all his many experiences on his tour the one that left the greatest and most lasting impression upon him was the visit to Jerusalem...It is not fanciful to see in his few days there the origins of his intense interest in what he called 'the race' - an interest which had been lacking hitherto in the rather indifferent atmosphere of his upbringing. Jerusalem fascinated him because of its scenes and sights, its biblical associations and its dramatic sectarian conflicts. He was intrigued by the great mosques and the imperious power of Islam. He saw the Wailing Wall and he was sympathetically aware of the depressed and poverty-stricken condition of the mass of the Jewish community, even if he had no direct dealings with them during his brief stay. But the phenomenon which interested him most, because of personal parallels however far-fetched, was the part played...by the successful Jews, those who mysteriously rose up in this alien world through its interstices and became rich and powerful and grand - the Rothschild equivalents in the Near East. (18)

Disraeli's concepts of race and his own Jewishness did indeed profoundly colour his perception in later life. G.M. Trevelyan explains how, to his detriment, Disraeli's unorthodox views impelled him to geo-political positions that were often at odds not only with those of his political opponents, but also of 'the times':

in one respect Gladstone, for all his idealism, was more realist than Disraeli. Gladstone believed in nationality and Disraeli did not. Disraeli believed in 'race', but he did not see why every race should demand a right to express its genius through national freedom and self-government. His own race, of which he was so proud, thrived and was famous for its own distinctive qualities, without being a nation. And so, except in the case of the old-established 'nations' like England and France, Disraeli preferred cosmopolitan empires of the

*ancien regime*. He had supported Austrian and papal claims against Italian aspirations. On the same principle he saw no reason why the Turk should not continue to rule over Serbs, Greeks, and Bulgars. But national feeling was the great force of the century, and had become a motive power in all human affairs. *Realpolitik* could no longer leave it out of account. It was impossible, as events have since proved (19)

These beliefs and experiences also created odd attitudes to religion and church issues that came up later in his career as Prime Minister. As Constance de Rothschild recorded,

...he believed more in the compelling power of a common ancestry than in that of a common faith. He said to me, as he has said over and over again in his novels, "All is race, not religion - remember that" (20)

His literary life was affected just as much as his political life--if not more so--by his views on race, his self-consciousness as a Jew, and his direct contact with his Near Eastern roots. In terms of sheer volume of evidence of the influence of these factors upon him, Disraeli's novels are by far the best source. In the novels lies the clearest outline of all the aspects of race and the reality of being Jewish that Disraeli thought important. In Tancred for instance, there is an extended discussion of what André Maurois called his most eccentric idea: "He did not understand how a Jew could not be a Christian; in his eyes that was to stop half-way and to renounce the glory of the race which was that it had given the world a God" (21). His published non-fictional material specifically on this view of Judaism is limited to ill-prepared printings of a few of his speeches on the subject during debates in the Commons, and a section of what was supposed to be a biography of Lord George Bentinck. It is only in novel form, when the reader can judge against the general emotional and philosophical background of spiritual questioning and physical

journeying similar to what Disraeli himself experienced, that his strange ideas make any sense. Throughout his life he was convinced that the answer to such problems as set out in his novels lay in the "Oriental mentality", as he liked to call it:

The divine element in human regeneration can no longer be represented adequately in the social role of the clergy or the philanthropic work of pious Catholic gentlemen. It will take a great mystical vision from the heart of Asia to revive decadent European society. (22)

Pearson sees Disraeli's racial heritage and travelling episodes in the Levant as satisfactory explanations of much of his behaviour, and even his writing style:

This accounts for Disraeli's Oriental imagination and satirical intellect. He saw and felt things differently from the average Englishman; wrote in a style which, though spawned by the Romantic movement, had a voluptuous and more profusely rhetorical quality than the outpourings of purely Oriental romantics (23)

Reading all Disraeli's novels in chronological order also makes it obvious that he was consistent in this regard. Through his fiction there is always a strong indication that his race and heritage were significant influences on his thoughts and actions.

## II

In his pre-parliamentary novels, Disraeli presents heroes who see themselves as separate from their peers; in those written after his Grand Tour, especially Contarini Fleming and The Wonderful Tale of Alroy, this separateness is often racial. From Vivian Grey forward there is a growing number of statements by the heroes about the importance

of race in general, and the the superiority of Semitic origin in particular. Usually the setting or circumstance that prompts these statements mirrors Disraeli's own experience and are biographically suggestive.

In the five novels written after his election to Parliament, there is even more racially centred material than in his previous works. It rarely, however, emanates from the main character. Disraeli learned that, as an aspirant to number 10 Downing Street, it did him little good to draw too much attention to his own status by creating more fictional characters who were also "outsiders". But these feelings were still strong in him and, rather than abandon them, he created vital and sympathetic secondary characters who could make such pronouncements for him. His main characters were, therefore, admirable examples of Anglo-Saxon Englishness, but most of the interesting things said in the books came out of the mouths of the foreigners, and generally dealt with the high value of all that was Semitic in character and origin.

There is very little in the first three of his novels, Vivian Grey (1826-7), The Voyage of Captain Popanilla (1828) or The Young Duke (1831), to show that he was inordinately interested in the concept of race, or preoccupied with his own racial heritage. All were written before Disraeli left for the Near East and exhibit only the smallest clues about the fire which that journey was to awaken in him (24). That is not to say there is no inkling in the early books of such interest. There is a distinctly autobiographical quality to Vivian Grey's experience at school when his classmates turn on him because of his appearance and abilities, and they try to quell him with cries of "NO STRANGER, NO STRANGER" - 'stranger' being a term often used as a euphemism for those of Jewish

origin (25). In The Young Duke Disraeli has virtually nothing to say about race or Jewishness. He does, however, make the problem of Emancipation for the "Catholic race" a major issue in the book; and St. James' impassioned speech in the Lords in favour of a bill which would bring this about (26) is quite similar to that which Disraeli himself would deliver nearly sixteen years later on the subject of Jewish disabilities.

After the Near Eastern tour, Disraeli wrote four more books before entering Parliament. Contarini Fleming (1832) and The Wonderous Tale of Alroy (1833) are the most useful in the context of a discussion about race--the former for its sharp portrayal of the emotional and even spiritual difficulties caused by being a racial outsider, the latter for its unabashedly exaggerated and sentimental wallowing in the mythology of a Jewish hero.

The young Contarini becomes acutely aware of his racial separateness when tragic circumstances force his widowed father to leave his hereditary estates in Venice. The Baron offers his services to the monarch of a "northern kingdom", eventually marries a woman who is a native of that country, and has two sons with her. Contarini has not adjusted very well to his new home, and feels no kinship with his new family:

As a child, I viewed them with passive antipathy. They were called my brothers, but Nature gave the lie to the reiterated assertion. There was no similitude between us. Their blue eyes, their flaxen hair, and their white visages claimed no kindred with my Venetian countenance. Wherever I moved I looked around me, and beheld a race different from myself. There was no sympathy between my frame and the rigid clime whither I had been brought to live. I knew not why, but I was unhappy....I was alone. (27)

Contarini's school experience mirrored that of Vivian Grey and Disraeli himself. After the inevitable confrontation with his inferior companions, who were incapable of understanding either his genius or his temperament, both of which were endemic in his race, he runs away from school. He feels so isolated that his chance entry into a Catholic cathedral leads to his desperate decision to enter the Catholic faith as well. It is within the bosom of the Church that he feels such comfort as he has not felt for some time. The depth of depression to which his loneliness has led him is evident in a conversation he has with the painter Winter on their first meeting. Contarini tells Winter:

'O sir, how happy you must be! To see Venice, and to travel in distant countries - I think I could die as the condition of such enjoyment.'

'You know as yet too little of life to think of death', said the stranger.

'Alas, sir,' I mournfully sighed, 'I have often wished to die.'

'But can one so young be unhappy?' asked the stranger.

'O sir, most, most unhappy! I am alone supported in this world by the fervent persuasion, that the holy Magdalen has condescended to take me under her especial protection.'

'The holy Magdalen!' exclaimed the stranger with an air of great astonishment; 'Indeed! and what made you unhappy before the holy Magdalen condescended to take you under her especial protection? Do you think, or has anybody told you that you have committed any sin?'

'No sir, my life has been, I hope, innocent; nor do I see indeed, how I could commit any sin, for I have never been subject to any temptation. But I have ever been unhappy, because I am perplexed about myself. I feel that I am not like other persons, and that which makes them happy is to me a source of no enjoyment.' (28)

When he cannot find peace in his adopted country, it is to Venice--the most recent supposed home of the D'Israeli's, and the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East--the ancestral home of the Jews, that Contarini goes to in search of refuge and peace. As mentioned previously, the last third of Contarini Fleming is essentially uninteresting, degenerating as it does into a pointless travelogue. The 'ports-of-call' in this travelogue are, however, illuminating in that they are all in the area of Disraeli's recently completed Tour, and carry an emotional tone and contain such a wealth of convincing detail that the reader of Disraeli's fiction cannot help but compare these passages with those of the earlier and equally pointless discourse about travel about the European continent in Vivian Grey. In both cases the descriptions have no value in terms of plot development and are clearly present for no other purpose than to extend the length of the book. Both such sequences are also closely based upon notes that Disraeli made during extended trips in the particular area. The qualities of emotion and tone mentioned above are not present in Vivian Grey in any sustained way. While possibly due to a less mature writing style and an inability to observe such *minutiae*, it is more reasonably attributable to deep feeling for, and interest in the homeland of the Jews and its surrounded regions.

This emotion is more readily apparent in The Wonderous Tale of Alroy than in any of Disraeli's other pre-Parliamentary novels. This book is the product of much of the research, observation and soul-searching that Disraeli did in the Levant. The hero of this novel, David Alroy, is an actual historical figure whom Disraeli has transformed beyond all recognition into a kind of medieval Jewish superman. At that time, the Jews in the Near and Middle East were subjects of the Turks, with the leader of the Jewish community bearing the pitiful title of "Prince of the Captivity". David Alroy holds that title as the

novel opens and, in his frustration and rage at the slave status of himself and his people, his outburst sounds very much like Disraeli:

No, no; I live and die a most ignoble thing; beauty and love, and fame and mighty deeds, the smile of women and the gaze of men, and the ennobling consciousness or worth, and all the fiery course of the creative passions, these are not for me, and I, Alroy, the descendant of sacred kings, and with a soul that pants for empire, I stand here extending my vain arm for my lost sceptre, a most dishonoured slave! (29)

As he endured less than critical acclaim for his literary efforts, and was forced to withstand many racial slurs on the hustings in two unsuccessful election attempts, Disraeli must have felt just as frustrated and isolated as Alroy did. For Disraeli, the cathartic element in this book was to have his equally disappointed and despairing hero pursue a near impossible dream--in this case the relief of his people from the cruel and shame of captivity - and live to see its achievement. The liberation of the thirteenth century Jews was a fictional realization of Disraeli's "ideal ambition", a fictional realization of his own liberation from the fetters of British society's unwillingness to either forget his Jewish origin or be awed by it.

Alroy achieves his goal. Personal drive, self-confidence, martial prowess and an implied racial superiority are the keys to his victory over the Seljuks. The whole of Chapter VI is taken up with a dream sequence in which Alroy enters a higher plane of existence and is confronted by all the past kings of the Jews. The majesty of their presentation nearly overwhelms the Prince of the Captivity, but the experience confirms two things for Alroy: he is right in the pursuit of violent overthrow of his oppressors, and he is the rightful successor to those great kings in whose presence he is now an equal.

Pale as a spectre, the pilgrim [Alroy], whose pilgrimage seemed now on the point of completion, stood cold and trembling before the object of all his desires and all his labours. But he thought of his country, his people, and his God; and, while his noiseless lips breathed the name of Jehovah, solemnly he put forth his arm, and with a gentle firmness grasped the unresisting sceptre of his great ancestor. (30)

At the end of the story Alroy is eventually defeated, betrayed by his own inability to withstand temptation, and faces certain death. His only hope of reprieve is to renounce his faith and any claim to kingship. But, as his enemy's emissary notes, his simple defeat is not enough; the people have seen that one of their kind can rise and stand against the Turks and Alroy's public renunciation of any holy mission is required by the Caliph if he is going to be able to control the people again (31). Alroy becomes aware of this and uses the knowledge as a source of strength to resist the terms that will allow him to live. In all of Disraeli's novels, in spite of his constant use of heroism as a theme, this decision by the young David Alroy is the only truly heroic ACT. It results in his death, but he maintains his faith, and thus the Jewish people retain some hope that their captivity will not be everlasting.

Not only was The Wonderful Tale of Alroy the first extensive discourse on his real feelings about Judaism and its legacy, it was also the first clear warning that Disraeli planned to go on the offensive. The aristocratic nature of the Jewish race was his best qualification for claiming a place in public life; and the story of David Alroy was equal to any found in the English mythology.

It is in the Young England trilogy, and its 'appendix' The Political Biography of Lord

George Bentick, that one finds the most overtly pro-Jewish sentiments that Disraeli ever uttered; and they are uttered with such frequency and fervency that his intent cannot be mistaken. The main characters are no longer the focal point in this issue, for reasons already outlined the major protagonist is now always a member in good standing of the British Anglican Aristocratic Establishment. At the same time the main characters are no longer the most interesting or sympathetic actors in the books. While always honourable, talented, ambitious young men--eminently worthy of our admiration--the real geniuses and genuinely insightful people are the secondary characters. The mysterious Sidonia is by far the most important of such creations. If Alroy was Disraeli's prototypical conception of a Jewish 'superman', then Sidonia is the fully realized version of the same ideal. Throughout the trilogy Sidonia, and those who have been influenced by him, spout a series of didactic pronouncements that elaborate on Disraeli's general ideas about the importance of being Jewish in the Anglo-Saxon world. The three novels, plus the biography, are especially clear on three key issues: the aristocratic nature of the Jews as a function of their purity of race; the natural conservatism of the Jew and the significance of this in terms of the ability to own land and undertake political duties; and the direct theological line that ties the Jew to the Christian makes exclusion of the Jews on religious grounds virtually incomprehensible.

Sidonia first appears as a mysterious traveller about one-quarter of the way through Coningsby (1844). He befriends Harry Coningsby and eventually reveals something of his personal history. Sidonia has great wealth, learning, wisdom and erudition, but has little peace of mind or spirit. Being a Jew, and unwilling to renounce his faith, he is thus disabled from using his prodigious talents in a political career--the only activity which

holds out the prospect of relieving the boredom he finds in the isolated pursuit of knowledge and the almost routine matters related to the increase of his fortune. In the course of advising Coningsby on the course to follow for the fulfillment of political aspirations, Sidonia also clearly outlines factors inherent in being a Jew that, while being used by the Establishment as arguments for the continued exclusion of Jews, are, upon closer scrutiny, actually reasons for allowing their full participation in the government of England. According to Sidonia, the enfranchisement of Jews would not, as was often said, result in Parliament being deluged by a flood of middle-class money-lenders and tradesmen. Jews were, by their very existence as Jews, an aristocratic people. They were in fact more aristocratic than the mere landed nobility of England because their lineage lay in a racially pure and religiously uncompromised organization. Their unusual customs and insistence on separateness should not be reasons for being suspicious of them, but rather are strong factors in their survival as the pure and strong people they are--the kind of people who should be welcomed as part of the governing élite of Britain.

An unmixed race of a first rate organisation are the aristocracy of Nature. Such excellence is a positive fact; not an imagination, a ceremony coined by poets, blazoned by cozening heralds, but perceptible in its physical advantages, and in the vigour of its unsullied idiosyncrasy. . . .He [Sidonia] was persuaded that organisation would outlive persecution. When he reflected on what they had endured, it was only marvelous that the race had not disappeared. They had defied exile, massacre, spoliation, the degrading influence of the constant pursuit of gain; they had defied time. . . .To the unpolluted current of their Causcasian structure, and to the segregating genius of their great Lawgiver, Sidonia ascribed the fact that they had not been long ago absorbed among those mixed races who presume to persecute them, but who periodically wear away and disappear, while their victims still flourish in all the primeval vigour of the pure Asian breed. (32)

Perhaps, Sidonia muses, the common reasons for persecution and exclusion of the Jews have been merely masks for the real reason--fear of this strength:

every generation they must become more powerful and more dangerous to the society which is hostile to them. Do you think that the quiet humdrum persecution by a decorous representative of an English university can crush those who have successfully baffled the Pharaohs, Nebuchadnezzar, Rome, and the feudal ages? The fact is, you cannot destroy a pure race of the Caucasian organization. It is a physiological fact; a simple law of nature, which has baffled Egyptian and Assyrian Kings, Roman Emperors, and Christian Inquisitors. No penal laws, no physical tortures, can effect that a superior race should be absorbed in an inferior, or be destroyed by it. the mixed persecuting races disappear; the pure persecuted race remains. And at this moment, in spite of the centuries of degradation, the Jewish mind exercises a vast influence on the affairs of Europe. (33)

He also takes great pains to establish the intellectual credentials of his race. Such intellect has long been at the command of European leaders--Sidonia himself had been an advisor to several continental courts. Non-Jews in all Europe act according to laws which have their roots in Jewish law; non-Jews are still saturated with Hebrew literature, and:

You never observe a great intellectual movement in Europe in which the Jews do not greatly participate. The first Jesuits were Jews; that mysterious Russian diplomacy which so alarms Western Europe is organised and principally carried on by Jews; that mighty revolution which is at this moment preparing in Germany, and which will be, in fact, a second and greater Reformation, and of which so little is as yet known in England, is entirely developing under the auspices of Jews, who almost monopolise the professorial chairs of Germany. (34)

Jews, according to this enigmatic power-broker, are essentially conservative. If admitted as full partners into the running of the affairs of the country, those in the current

establishment would find a group, much like Disraeli himself, devoted to the *status quo* and the maintenance of the English constitution. Sidonia comments,

What I contend is, that if you permit men to accumulate property, and they use that permission to a great extent, power is inseparable from that property, and it is in the last degree impolitic to make it the interest of any powerful class to oppose the institutions under which they live. The Jews, for example, independently of the capital qualities for citizenship which they possess in their industry, temperance, and energy and vivacity of mind, are a race essentially monarchical, deeply religious, and shrinking themselves from converts as from a calamity, are ever anxious to see the religious systems of the countries in which they live flourish; yet, since your society has become agitated in England, and powerful combinations menace your institutions, you find the once loyal Hebrew invariably arrayed in the same ranks as the leveller and the latitudinarian, and prepared to support the policy which may even endanger his life and property, rather than tamely continue under a system which seeks to degrade him. The Tories lose an important election at a critical moment; 'tis the Jews come forward to vote against them. The Church is alarmed at the scheme of a latitudinarian university, and learns with relief that funds are not forthcoming of its establishment; a Jew immediately advances and endows it. Yet the Jews, Coningsby, are essentially Tories. (35)

In Coningsby Sidonia only briefly alludes to the theological debt that Christianity owes to Judaism. This issue is examined in greater depth in the subsequent books. Sidonia makes only a brief appearance in Sybil (1845) therefore much of the discussion on this point must come from other secondary characters. If there is a dominant religious theme in Sybil, it is the lack of understanding and respect suffered by Englishmen of Roman Catholic faith--there is not as much direct talk of the plight of the Jews as in Coningsby. However, Disraeli saw a number of parallels between the way the British establishment had treated the Catholics and the manner in which they had dealt with Jews.

He also had a strong admiration of the Church of Rome, not least because it acknowledged its debt to the Jews and remained true to that heritage. He writes:

The Church of Rome is to be respected as the only Hebraeo-Christian Church extant; all other churches established by the Hebrew apostles have disappeared, but Rome remains; and we must never permit the exaggerated position which it assumed in the middle centuries to make us forget its early and apostolical character, when it was fresh from Palestine, and as it were fragrant from paradise. The Church of Rome is sustained by apostolical succession; but apostolical succession is not an institution complete in itself; it is a part of a whole; if it be not a part of a whole it has no foundation. (36)

Egremont's Catholic friend, the aristocratic Mr. St. Lys, utters a sentiment that mirrors exactly what Disraeli's thoughts were on the relation of Judaism to Christianity:

In all these Church discussions, we are apt to forget that the second Testament is avowedly only a supplement. Jehovah-Jesus came to complete the "law and the prophets". Christianity is completed Judaism, or it is nothing. Christianity is incomprehensible without Judaism, as Judaism is incomplete without Christianity. (37)

It is a decided understatement to say that this was a unique theological perspective, and it was one which was to cause Disraeli a great deal of political embarrassment, an embarrassment which did not deter him from expounding his idiosyncratic beliefs.

Even more so than 1846, when he had his historic battle with Peel over the repeal of the Corn Laws, 1847 was an important year in Disraeli's political life. When Parliament reassembled on 19th January 1847, after the general election of the previous June, Disraeli was now the member for a county seat (Buckinghamshire), and the only man of real talent on the Protectionist side of the irrevocably split Tory party. The 330 Conservatives

members returned to the House represented a slight majority, but 100 of those were the followers of Peel who refused to be associated with the protectionists. Disraeli found himself in the forefront of a very weak opposition party. He was still an unknown quantity to the country squires who made up the core of his party, and these squires were very suspicious of his flamboyant style and foreign ideas and appearance. At such a time as this, a time when he was on the verge of taking a major step on the road to fulfilling his life-long ambition, it would have been prudent to avoid any issue that would be likely to alienate the rank and file of his party. On most matters Disraeli did precisely that--except on the subject of the Jews. During the 1847 session he brought out Tancred, the third book in the Young England trilogy, and then took a vocal part in the debate on Russell's motion "that the House should consider the removal of the civil disabilities of Her Majesty's Jewish subjects" (38). As Sarah Bradford claims, these two events were the culmination of Disraeli's search for a way to reconcile his heritage with his ambition:

In the third novel of the trilogy, Tancred (published in March 1847), and in the Commons in December, in a great speech pleading the cause of Jewish emancipation, he came to terms with the anomalies of his position as a Christian and a Jew in a manner which many were to find both offensive and incomprehensible. For Disraeli, however, faced with an acute problem of identity, the views formulated in Tancred and repeated in Parliament represented the solution for which he had been searching since the genesis of Alroy almost eighteen years earlier. (39)

Tancred is filled with aphorisms and lectures by Sidonia. Sidonia's comments are more directly applicable to Disraeli's concerns about religion in race because they are in response to the hero's spiritual questions rather than the political focus of Coningsby. More than ever it is possible to identify the words of this character with those of Disraeli

himself; and when Sidonia tells Tancred that "All is race; there is no other truth" (40) we have Disraeli's theory and beliefs about race condensed to a single statement--without being diluted in any way to make it more palatable for the public. He does not even see this as at all contradictory to his conviction of the power of the individual and the efficacy of individual will:

'What is individual character but the personification of race', said Sidonia, 'its perfection and choice exemplar? Instead of being an inconsistency, the belief in the influence of the individual is a corollary of the original proposition.' (41)

He even points to Jewish law as the roots of English ways of government; but those who wield the arms of government in England are largely ignorant of this fact--and this ignorance is a factor in the spiritual decline of the country.

The life of a British peer is mainly regulated by Arabian laws and Syrian customs at this moment; but, while he sabbatically abstains from the debate or the rubber, or regulates the quarterly performance of his judicial duties in his province by the advent of the sacred festivals, he thinks little of the land and the race who, under the immediate superintendence of the Deity, have by their sublime legislation established the principle of periodic rest to man, or by their holy anniversaries, have elevated the condition and softened the lot of every nation except their own. (42)

The search for the pure wellspring of spiritual and temporal virtue impels Tancred towards the Holy Land (43). At the end of the book, after many spiritually significant encounters, Tancred is convinced that he was correct in his decision to travel to the East:

'I am an Arab only in religion,' said Tancred, "but the consciousness of creed sustains me. I know well, though born in a distant and northern isle, that the Creator of the world speaks with man only in this land;

and that is why I am here." (44)

The machinations of plot, such as they are in this work, require that Sidonia remain in England while the reader follows Tancred through meanderings in the Levant that take up most of the book. The voice of Sidonia, however, is not lost. The beautiful Eva continues to instruct Tancred on the superior nature of all things Jewish, and her words are indistinguishable from Sidonia's. She elaborates on the argument that evidence of the aristocratic nature of the Jews--their eternal status as 'the chosen people'--is seen in their ability to survive as a pure race. This ability comes from the special protection of God--a kind of protection evident less in direct interference than in the qualities given to the race.

But tell me: it cannot be denied that, whatever the cause, the miracle exists; and that the Hebrews, alone of the ancient races, remain, and are found in every country, a memorial of the mysterious and mighty past.

Their state may be miraculous without being penal. But why miraculous? Is it a miracle that Jehovah should guard his people? And can He guard them better than by endowing them with faculties superior to those of the nations among who they dwell? (45)

Eva also extends Sidonia/Disraeli's contention that persecution of the Jews on religious grounds is to deny the very core of the Christian faith. She takes the argument beyond the already tenuous assertion that Christianity is simply completed Judaism and carries it to a bizarre and patently absurd level. Disraeli has her claim that the Jews' role in the crucifixion is grounds for their being considered worthy subjects for Christian adoration.

The holy race supplied the victim and the immolators. What other race could have been entrusted with such a consummation? Was not Abraham prepared to sacrifice even his son? ...Persecute us! Why, if you believe what you profess, you should kneel to us! You raise statues to the hero who saves a country. We have saved the human race, and you persecute us for doing it. (46)

This statement is all the more disturbing because it comes from a serious character--one with whom Disraeli obviously meant the reader to sympathize. He often created comic characters who say outrageous things, but it is always clear that readers are not meant to take those things seriously. In this case, Eva is not in any way supposed to provide comic relief--she is a female equivalent of Sidonia, and thus of Disraeli himself, and her pronouncements are meant to carry the weight of wise sage, and used to guide Tancred in his spiritual search. To buttress his case with such a ridiculous example of Christianity's supposed debt to the Jews, Disraeli must have believed so strongly in the irresistible logic of his position that he did not consider that the public or his colleagues could object to it. It was a risk he would not have made at this stage of his career without the inner security of complete conviction.

One of the major underpinnings of his sense of personal superiority was his racial attitude. His Jewish ancestry not only lent aristocratic credibility to his political ambitions, but also placed him in the great tradition of leaders who derived their mandate from God as much as from the people.

They are always men who have manifested an extraordinary aptitude for great affairs, and the possession of a fervent and commanding genius. They are great legislators, or great warriors, or great poets, or orators of the most vehement and impassioned spirit. Such were Moses, Joshua, the heroic youth of Hebron and his magnificent son; such, too, was Isaiah a man, humanly speaking, not inferior to Demosthenes, and struggling for a similar and as beautiful a cause, the independence of a small state, eminent for its intellectual power, against the barbarian grandeur of a military empire. All the great things have been done by the little nations. (47)

Tancred's guide on his journey is Baroni and his son. The longest digression in the book

is a detailed telling of Baroni's story and how he is saved from penury and degradation by a fellow Jew, Sidonia. The early life of the Baroni was typical of many European Jews: they had genius, talent and morality superior to that of their gentile oppressors, but were prevented from enjoying the fruits of these gifts and virtues simply because they were Jews. In the last extended diatribe of the book Disraeli makes it clear that this is not only a cruel injustice to the individuals so treated, but results in an irretrievable loss to all of Europe (48). The only hope for Europe is to give its resident Jews a chance to utilize their talents and implied in this is that Britain should begin this process with the author of those ideas--Benjamin Disraeli.

All of his unique views are confirmed in the most unusual of sources, the biography of his friend Lord George Bentinck. Chapter Ten of Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography is entitled "The Jews", and Chapter Eleven was given to the subject of "Jewish Disabilities". Disraeli arrives at the subject by way of trying to demonstrate Bentinck's capacity for personal loyalty and general fair-mindedness. Both qualities come to the fore during the debate on the Jewish Disabilities resolution of 1847 when Bentinck stood unfailingly behind Disraeli. As Blake says about Bentinck's position, "He had a straightforward old-fashioned Whiggish belief in religious liberty, and he was not now going to leave Disraeli in the lurch" although "he did not use any of Disraeli's unorthodox arguments" (49). Disraeli, however, used all of chapters Ten and Eleven to expound his beliefs by claiming that they were Bentinck's own. He not only took advantage of the situation to discuss in detail a topic that his subject never really gave much thought to, he also tried to create validity for his views by fabricating a coincidence of philosophy between himself and Bentinck. The ideas voiced in this chapter so closely mirror those in

the novels that it is obviously Disraeli speaking and not the solid, but conventional Bentinck. As Monypenny and Buckle observed:

There are various digressions in which Disraeli puts forward his own political views, most of them woven more or less closely into the general narrative, but some - and one especially...the Jewish question...rather in the nature of excrescences; and, of course, the Disraelian philosophy. In these respects it holds a unique position as an interpreter of his opinions; it is the one book of his political maturity which is not cast in the form of fiction; and therefore the views expressed in it may perhaps be taken literally with comparative immunity from misconstruction. (50)

Disraeli presents Bentinck as an adherent to the notion expressed by Eva in Tancred:

If the Jews had not prevailed upon the Romans to crucify our Lord, what would have become of the Atonement? But the human mind cannot contemplate the idea that the most important deed of time could depend upon human will. 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 - which vanquished Satan, and opened the gates of Paradise? Such a tenet would sully and impugn the doctrine that is the corner-stone of our faith and hope. Men must not presume to sit in judgement on such an act. They must bow their heads in awe and astonishment and trembling gratitude. (51)

The issues of racial purity and natural aristocracy are raised again - the Jews are superior because of the qualities which have allowed them to survive socially and racially intact for so long.

other degraded races wear out and disappear; the Jew remains, as determined, as expert, as persevering, as full of resource and resolution as ever. Viewed in this light, the degradation of the Jewish race is alone a striking

evidence of its excellence, for none but one of the great races could have survived the trials which it has endured (52).

Even Disraeli's contention that "the persecution of the Jewish race has deprived European society of an important conservation element" (53) finds space in Chapter Ten. This idea is expanded in Chapter Eleven when he attempts to re-introduce the case that all good government must be formed along lines informed by semitic principles; and that failure to do so inevitably results in inferior government and disaster.

the decline and disasters of modern communities have generally been relative to their degree of sedition against the Semitic principle. Since the great revolt of the Celts against the first and second testament, at the close of the last century, France has been alternately in a state of collapse or convulsion. Throughout the awful trials of the last sixty years, England, notwithstanding her deficient and meagre theology, has always remembered Sion. The great Transatlantic republic is intensely Semitic, and has prospered accordingly. This sacred principle alone has consolidated the mighty empire of all the Russias...Austria would long ago have dissolved but for the Semitic principle, and if the north of Germany has never succeeded in attaining that imperial position which seemed its natural destiny, it is that the north of Germany has never at any time been thoroughly converted (54).

With such irrefutable principles and conclusions in mind, it is incomprehensible to the author that any country would allow such legal and social barriers as England had erected to put in the way of the Jews.

Using this biography as a platform for ideas which he had already expressed adequately in several other genres could not have done Disraeli any good. Not only would it seriously skew the personal history of his friend, but he risked incurring the displeasure of the Bentinck family. The latter was not a small consideration, for Bentinck's family,

including the incumbent Duke of Portland, had provided the financial backing that enabled Disraeli to purchase his estate at Hughenden. In fact, some months later the family demanded repayment of the 'loan' which Lord George had led Disraeli to believe was not to be re-paid. The intervention of a mutual friend resulted in Bentinck's surviving brothers reconsidering their position. Although there is no evidence extant that it was the nature and quality of the Bentinck biography that caused the family's change of attitude towards Disraeli, this was generally assumed to be the case (55).

From the time of the debate in 1847 until Jews were finally allowed to sit in the House as Jews in 1858, Disraeli did not relent in the articulation of his views. His most vociferous outbursts, both in writing and in the Commons, were concentrated in the period 1847-1851. This was also the period when his future leadership of the Protectionist/Tory party was most in doubt. It seems incongruous that an ambitious and experienced politician with his capacity for patience, practicality and shrewdness should jeopardize his chances for advancement by speaking out in such a way. He already had a reputation amongst the Tory landowners as a clever man, but also as someone who projected a suspicious 'foreignness' and was essentially 'unsound'. Prudence would seem to dictate that he spend his time remaking his image with the class that now constituted the vast majority of his party. Instead he risked all he had gained by championing a cause that was rejected by the squirearchy *en masse* (56).

Disraeli's most captious critics must find it hard to censure his conduct over the Jewish question. He had nothing to gain and much to lose by speaking as he did....A great deal depended upon his presenting to the high Tory squires with their belief in church and State the appearance of a 'sound man'. He had just become member for Bucks, and he was about to set up as a country gentleman at Hughenden. He had a good chance

of living down his erratic past and securing the leadership of the party....The overwhelming balance of advantage from a careerist point of view lay in silence and abstention.

Disraeli never flinched for one moment on this issue. It was to occupy Parliament at regular intervals for ten years, during which Jewish Emancipation Bills were repeatedly carried in the lower and rejected in the upper House....In his life of Bentinck published at the end of 1851 he repeated all his most politically obnoxious arguments in favour of the Jews; ...with almost complete irrelevance to the theme of the book...(57)

One possible explanation for his behaviour is simply that he wanted to justify, popularize, even glorify, the Jewish people in a very public way; and thus enhance his chances for political and electoral support. This is true, as far as it goes -- Disraeli did indeed like to take the offensive tack when faced with personal opposition -- but it hardly seems a satisfactory reason for him to take the issue as far as he did. The nature of his views and the frequency of their expression clearly could have done -- and probably did -- him more harm than good. Disraeli was always astute enough to abandon or soften strategies for increasing his popularity when it became obvious they were counter-productive. Why then was he so persistent in pursuing this issue -- even at the cost of political support? The answer must be that he believed it all; and believed in it at a level that went beyond purely personal political considerations. Although other instances of such behaviour litter his career, this is the most important example of Disraeli putting principle and belief above the cynical world of politics -- hardly the actions of a political opportunist.

After the Jewish Emancipation Bill was finally passed by both Houses, Disraeli seems to have become less interested in displaying his views on race and Jewishness. The two factors which may be said to have prompted such display -- the civil disabilities of

Jews, and the public perception of him because of his Jewish origins -- were both essentially solved by this time. Jews could sit in Parliament, and Disraeli had attained public office and was secure as the Tory leader in the Commons. Yet, while the need to go out of his way to express these ideas had passed, it does not mean that he ceased to hold them.

When electoral defeat afforded him the necessary leisure time, he returned to novel writing. Both Lothair (1870) and Endymion (1880) contain characters, plot and passages that confirm his continued adherence to rather idiosyncratic notions of religion and race. The characters and pronouncements are less sharply drawn than those in novels written decades previously, but there is no diminution of the belief in the basic ideas. In Endymion, in one of the last passages he ever wrote, we find sentiments that would not have seemed out of place forty years before:

The Semites are unquestionably a great race, for among the few things in this world which appear to be certain, nothing is more sure than that they invented our alphabet. But the Semites now exercise a vast influence over affairs by their smallest though most peculiar family, the Jews. There is no other race gifted with so much tenacity, and such skill in organisation...Language and religion do not make a race - there is only one thing that makes a race, and that is blood (58).

In the Preface to Lothair he sums up the themes of previous novels, and makes particular reference to the subject under review in this chapter.

In asserting the doctrine of race, they were entirely opposed to the equality of man, and similar abstract dogmas, which have destroyed ancient society without creating a satisfactory substitute. Resting on popular sympathies and popular privileges, they held that no

society could be durable unless it was built upon the principles of loyalty and religious reverence (59).

As this passage illustrates Disraeli was definitely not a democrat and had rather singular views on the utility of organized religion. These political characteristics have their foundation in his racial ideas and preoccupations. But the most important political implications of his notions, no matter how strange they may be, is that they were sincerely felt, and were retained and expounded in the face of politically unfavourable criticism. They show Disraeli as a political figure in political situations who adhered to his principles when expediency dictated that he dispense with them.

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- 2 - Robert Blake, Disraeli (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1966), p. 10.
- 3 - Blake, p. 10.
- 4 - Blake, p. 11.
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- 8 - Hesketh Pearson, Dizzy: The Life and Personality of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), p. 129.
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- 11 - Benjamin Disraeli, "On The Life and Writings of Mr. D'Israeli", in Curiosities of Literature (volume 1) by Isaac D'Israeli (London: Frederick Warne and Co., 1849), p. viii.
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- 16 - Blake, Disraeli's Grand Tour, p. 105.
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- 21 - André Maurois, Disraeli: Picture of the Victorian Age (translated by Hamish Miles) (New York: The Modern Library/Random House, 1928), p. 56.
- 22 - Louis Cazamian, The Social Novel in England 1830-1850 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 207.
- 23 - Pearson, p. 76.
- 24 - The Young Duke was published in 1831, but Disraeli completed it *before* he left on his Tour.
- 25 - Vivian Grey (vol. 1), p. 14.
- 26 - The Young Duke (vol. 4), p. 21.
- 27 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 5), p. 6.
- 28 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 5), p. 65-66.
- 29 - The Wonderous Tale of Alroy (vol. 7), p. 11.
- 30 - The Wonderous Tale of Alroy (vol. 7), p. 109.
- 31 - The Wonderous Tale of Alroy (vol. 7), p. 273.
- 32 - Coningsby (vol. 12), p. 292-293.
- 33 - Coningsby (vol.12), p. 331-2.
- 34 - Coningsby (vol. 12), p. 333.
- 35 - Coningsby (vol. 12), p. 330.
- 36 - Sybil (vol. 14), p. 160.
- 37 - Sybil (vol. 14), p. 161.
- 38 - Blake, p. 258
- 39 - Bradford, p. 179.
- 40 - Tancred (vol. 15), p. 191.
- 41 - Tancred (vol. 15), p. 192-193.
- 42 - Tancred (vol. 15), p. 198.
- 43 - Tancred (vol. 15), p. 158.

- 44 - Tancred (vol. 16), p. 119.
- 45 - Tancred (vol. 16), p. 33-34.
- 46 - Tancred (vol. 16), p. 37.
- 47 - Tancred (vol. 16), p. 80.
- 48 - Tancred (vol. 16), p. 216.
- 49 - Blake, p. 259.
- 50 - Monypenny and Buckle (volume I), p. 1136-1137.
- 51 - Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography (vol. 4), p. 121.
- 52 - Bentinck, p. 123.
- 53 - Bentinck, p. 129.
- 54 - Bentinck, p. 138.
- 55 - Monypenny and Buckle (volume I), p. 1142.
- 56 - Blake, p. 260.
- 57 - Blake, p. 260-261.
- 58 - Endymion (vol. 19), p. 361.
- 59 - Lothair (vol. 17), p. xxiv.

CHAPTER 7: POLITICAL ASPECTS OF DISRAELIANISM

## I

Up to this point, the emphasis has been on Disraeli's personality and self-conception as key determinants in the understanding of his political philosophy. There is, however, much more to it than mere personal peculiarity. There is an identifiable intellectual basis to his political creed - it is not enough to attribute the idiosyncracies of his politics to a particular view of himself, his abilities, and his background. He operated within a very circumscribed set of political parameters and his success as a politician is directly attributable to the way in which he molded his peculiar beliefs to the realities of Victorian party machinations. Disraeli discovered early in his career that he had no chance of attaining power and influence if he remained outside either of the two traditional political groupings. His early inclinations were distinctly Radical, but the loose association of activists that comprised the nominal Radical party stood no chance of coming to power in his lifetime. The only realistic choice was between the Whigs and the Conservatives and, as will become apparent in the discussion which follows, his aversion to the Whigs was so strong that the decision to join the Tories was virtually forced upon him by circumstance. Given that his adult life was spent as Tory Leader, Tory Cabinet Minister, Tory Prime Minister and, finally, Tory Peer of the Realm, studies have usually referred to his politics as a brand of "Toryism" or "Conservatism". While this is an understandable position for analysts to assume, and therefore a convenient point of departure for this part of the discussion. It is, nonetheless, in error. That Disraeli's political philosophy contained elements that were obviously Tory in origin is irrefutable the other important

components made his belief-system best titled nothing other than "DISRAELIANISM". This chapter will outline the major parts of Disraelianism, and show how the clearest expression of it, like that of his self-exploration, is found in his novels.

Disraelianism had many constituent parts, quite apart from the purely personal factors that drove Disraeli in his political life, but these parts can best be understood if viewed as subsumed under the overall goal of developing a truly National Party in Britain. Disraeli saw that the most effective means through which to exert the force of his superiority was through a political party that was able to serve the entire nation. Braun encapsulates much of what motivated Disraeli by attributing to him the belief that "individual character will only achieve real success if it reflects in its pursuits the aspirations of the national character" (1). Dr. Paul Smith satisfactorily captures the essence of Disraeli's approach to party politics:

Disraeli's 'national' Toryism envisaged a mutually advantageous alliance between the party and the people, in which social paternalism would be traded for support of the established order. (2)

Even his move away from the more Peelite term 'Conservative' to that of 'Tory' when referring to the party was a conscious attempt to evoke a particular feeling among his potential supporters (3). As satisfactorily as he sums up what Disraeli was trying to achieve, Smith also recognizes the basic futility of his, and many other historians' and political scientists', attempts to systematize Disraeli's vision.

Given their essentially non-rational character, it is not surprising that Disraeli's ideas should have been formulated with small regard for precision, coherence and literal truth. Original and bizarre, brilliant and meretricious, fanciful and vulgar, mingling the true coin with the false, like the man himself, their value lies in

insights, not in conclusions. They are a personal extravaganza, not an intellectual system. Their author 'believed' in them as an artist in the artifact, not as a mathematician in the theorem. (4)

Disraelianism was very complex, but it does not do its progenitor a disservice to distill it down to its essential components. One group of such components is a set of negations. As Smith has pointed out, it was not a system -- Disraeli was opposed to abstract, *a priori* ideology as the best underpinning for practical political action. He believed in basic moral and common-sense principles. A rigid set of rules, mechanically imposed, was anathema to him as not only alien to human nature, but as an impediment to the flexibility and practical sense necessary to function in public office. Utilitarianism as a system, and Benthamites as its apostles, were the most frequent targets of his merciless attacks on such concepts.

As well as being unsystematic, Disraelianism was also not logical. This makes it even more difficult for analysts to categorize it as political philosophy. The illogicality grew out of his powerful imagination which, as Richard Faber states, can actually be seen as a positive rather than negative factor:

Conservatism is the least exciting of political creeds...there was little scope for imagination, always a note of caution, of realism, sometimes of self-interest that is unattractive to the romantic...Disraeli's value to the right-wing is to allow a romantic to feel comfortable in its company. (5)

A belief in the power and value of the individual imagination, as well as that of the collective, was something which underlay nearly all the factors of Disraelianism. Individuals should not be made to feel trapped by the rigidity of rational thought, and the

nation as a whole should have means for sparking its general imagination.

Disraelianism was vehemently Anti-Whig. Much of Disraeli's political creed developed upon and around this point. His view of English history was that many of the country's present problems arose from the decay of the foundation of the English constitution caused by the ascendancy of the Whigs. These relative upstarts in English politics had staged what amounted to a *coup d'etat* in 1689 and had been selfishly manipulating government since then. The reason that so few Englishmen were upset by this problem, in Disraeli's opinion, was that they did not study history, or, if they did, the little bit they read was more than likely written by the Whigs themselves. Given, as he was throughout his life, to conspiracy theories, it is appropriate that his principal political opponents were seen as the most insidious conspirators.

The things that Disraeli was in favour of, as a political thinker, can be organized under the general category of English Institutions. Institutions were the backbone of the ancient constitution of England and had become part of the national character -- building that character was the keystone to Disraeli's plan to regenerate the whole of England. His attitude amounted to what Faber calls "reverence of existing, and sometimes desuetude institutions" (6). The five institutions of the English constitution that were most vital to England's survival were: the Monarchy, the Aristocracy, the Houses of Parliament (both Lords and Commons), the Church of England, and "The People". The intricate web of duties and responsibilities that each sector owed to, and could expect from, the others and the country as a whole was the essence of what has been called Disraeli's 'Tory Democracy', and each needed a great deal of reinforcement and revitalization before it

could be counted on to do its part in answering the 'Condition of England Question' - a question that Disraeli felt need never have been posed if it had not been for the Whigs. The remedy lay in restoring each of these institutions to its original status so that it could carry out the original intent of its creators.

The Monarchy and the Church had long ago been charged with the task of watching over those who were without the power to defend and provide for themselves -- the peasantry and the lower working classes; but the machiavellian machinations of the post-1689 Whigs had seriously weakened the throne, and the Henrician dismantling of the monasteries had crippled the Church's ability to minister to the physical needs of the masses. The reduced power of the Monarch was particularly distressing to Disraeli, not only from a romantic notion of majesty, but also because he sincerely believed "that the monarchy not only symbolizes the people but protects the people, and to limit the proper power of the monarchy would be to diminish the happiness of the people" (7).

The Aristocracy, especially those newly created members who had flourished under the Whigs, had become negligent in carrying out their duties to those who lived under them. While they had drawn power away from the throne and the Church, they had also alienated the people by growing enormously rich from their labour, which feudal predecessors had also done, but failed to look after their needs as the medieval lords had done. Disraeli was a strong supporter of the landed interest as the real backbone of the nation -- he firmly maintained a belief in the rights and duties of property. He also believed that the majority of the aristocracy had been too quick to demand their rights without paying adequate attention to their duties. The result was that the masses were in a

worse condition in this new, industrial, urban, supposedly more affluent age, than they had been in the rural, and supposedly backward days before the Hanoverian kings came to England and the Whigs that rose in their favour. Living in such circumstances had justifiably created wide discontent throughout the populace along with the feeling that they had no protection and no avenue of appeal for their grievances. This was having a distorting affect on the Parliament. The House of Lords' purpose and make-up was obvious to all, and that of the House of Commons had been so, but there was now a sense that it should change its nature by becoming an institution that was representative of, and responsible to, all the people. This went against what Disraeli believed to be the true purpose of the Commons and threatened to impair its function as a key factor in the English preference for reform and adjustment over revolution. The influence of the Whigs had vitiated English institutions and caused distress and unrest in the largest institution -- The People. The distress was regrettable and morally insupportable, and the unrest threatened to become the very revolution that Englishmen had always been able to avoid.

Taken together, Disraeli's political writings give an adequate outline of these central ideas. They are: "What Is He?" (1833), "The Crisis Examined" (1836), "Vindication of the English Constitution" (1835), "The Letters of Runnymede" (1836), a speech at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester (3 April 1872), and a speech at the Crystal Palace (24 June 1872). They do not, however, provide a very comprehensive account -- written as they were in two very short periods of time and consisting of a total number of pages that are less than just one of his novels. Not only do the novels surpass the pamphlets, speeches and letters in didactic detail, they are also superior in depth and breadth. As a convenient point of departure, the next section will be a brief outline of the major aspects of Disraeli's

political philosophy evident in his non-fiction writings. The third section will look at how the novels present these ideas consistently throughout his career. This chapter will deal with three of the elements of Disraelianism mentioned above: its anti-abstract ideology bias, especially anti-Utilitarianism; its attempts to place Disraeli in a justifiable place in the Tory 'apostolic succession'; and its unique view of English history from which is derived its anti-Whiggism and the general insistence on the uses of the imagination. This theme will carry over to the final section, which will discuss the remaining element - English Institutions.

## II

"What Is He?" (1833) was written in anticipation of a by-election to be called for Marylebone later that year. Not only was it Disraeli's usual electoral manifesto, but, as the title implies, it was his public response to the criticism he had encountered during his two previous campaigns at High Wycombe. He had stood as an independent candidate and confused many voters with his seemingly disparate ideas -- some that sounded Radical and some that were definitely Tory. In this pamphlet Disraeli discussed the issues of consistency and the place in politics for the original thinker. It was also the first time he publicly presented his notion of a National Party -- and its anti-Whig basis.

A Tory and a Radical, I understand; a Whig - a democratic aristocrat, I cannot comprehend. If the Tories indeed despair of restoring the aristocratic principle, and are sincere in their avowal that the State cannot be governed with the present machinery, it is their duty to coalesce with the Radicals, and permit both

political nicknames title of a National Party. (8)

The political crisis of the autumn of 1834 brought about a general election, and Disraeli's speech at Wycombe was published as a pamphlet in 1835 as "The Crisis Examined". He again talks at length about consistency, and introduces two topics that will be staples of his platforms later: the necessity for a strong Lords and Crown to balance the growing power of the Commons (9), and, a subject that was always in the forefront of Tory policy discussions, the notion that Tories, simply because they are Tories and had once opposed the Reform Bill, should not always be thought of a party that was against change (10). After all, many of the Whigs who supported the 1832 bill had opposed it in an earlier form -- and yet they were not thought unprincipled because they later felt comfortable supporting a changed measure. If Whigs are allowed such flexibility, Tories should also be permitted to grow and change with circumstances.

Monypenny considers "Vindication of the English Constitution in a Letter to a Noble and Learned Lord by Disraeli, the Younger" (1835) to be the most important of Disraeli's early political writings (11). Blake calls it "his first serious contribution to political literature", and says it "marks an important stage in Disraeli's progress as a political thinker" containing "early all Disraeli's most well-known and characteristic ideas about history and politics" (12) even though the primary purpose seems to have been a defense of the House of Lords, which was under considerable attack at the time, as well as a self-serving effort to ingratiate himself with Lord Lyndhurst in particular and the Tory party in general.

The first substantive chapter of the "Vindication..." is an attack on Utilitarianism, centering on the contradiction between such key Utilitarian terms as 'greatest happiness of the greatest number' and 'self-interest'. Chapter Three is a more general attack against theoretical abstractions as useless in politics:

the fallacy of supposing that theories produce circumstances, whereas the very converse of the proposition is correct, and circumstances indeed produce theories. (13)

This leads to the general conclusion that national character is organic and grows naturally, and, thus, is not amenable to the imposition of pre-determined systems. Chapters four and five apply this concept to the growth and development of the English Constitution -- beginning with the Magna Carta. Disraeli believed that Magna Carta, whose status as the foundation of the constitution cannot realistically be challenged, was not the result of some 'system', but was based on the right of the inheritance of power and the necessity of law and precedence, which occurs over time and cannot simply be imposed.

They [the originators of the constitution] looked upon the nation as a family, and upon the country as a landed inheritance. Generation after generation were to succeed to it, with all its convenient buildings, and all its choice cultivation, its parks and gardens, as well as its fields and meads, its liberties and its collections of art, all its wealth, but all its incumbrances. (14)

In chapters six to eleven Disraeli gives examples of other countries who have thrown over a 'natural' form of government in favour of what appeared to be better 'systems'. France, Prussia, the Sicilies and the Peninsula, and the Americas are all depicted as politically, constitutionally, and, therefore culturally, inferior to England.

Beginning with Chapter 12 Disraeli writes about the institutions key to the English

constitution. The House of Commons was under pressure to become the House of the People, something it was never meant to be. The members of the Commons were, like the Lords, a privileged, limited class -- not all the people:

The Commons of England are an Estate of the realm, and the members of the House of Commons represent that Estate. They represent nothing more. (15)

It never was the House of the People; it is not the House of the People. The members of the House of Commons never were the representatives of the people. They always were, and they are still, the representatives of the Commons, an estate of the realm privileged as the other estates, not meeting personally for the sake of convenience, but by its representatives, and constituting, even with its late consideration accession members, only a small section of the nation. (16)

The Reform Bill of 1832 increased the number of members in the Commons, which was only to be expected since the rise in the population and the change in the emphasis of the economy, but it also began an alteration to its very nature. Changes had been taking place since Tudor times and those in power during Victoria's reign must only contemplate reform that maintained the Commons in its proper incarnation. The Whigs were forcing reform on the political scene that was "conceived and prosecuted in a profound ignorance of the nature of our Constitution". (17) They were trying to guarantee their hold on parliamentary power by playing with the way in which this estate was represented -- it amounted to constitutional as well as electoral gerrymandering -- but even their meddling had not created a Commons that was actually representative of the People.

Chapters 22 to 26 are an extended defense of the place of the peerage in the government of England. Disraeli responded to the charge of the Benthamites that the Lords was not a 'responsible' arm of the government because of its hereditary nature:

If the estate of the Peers be not more irresponsible in the exercise of the power with which it is invested than the estate of the Commons, so also the qualification by which the Peers exercise their power is in its nature the same as the qualification by which the Commons exercise their power. If the institution of hereditary legislators be absurd, I do not see that that of hereditary electors is less so. If it be absurd to enact that a man in the most elevated and cultivated class of the community should be born with a right of becoming, at a legal age, an English legislator, so is it equally absurd to maintain that a man in one of the humbler and less educated classes of the community should be born with the right of becoming, at a legal age, the nominator of a legislator. Yet the qualification of a majority of the English Commons is hereditary...it turns out, on a little dispassionate examination, that the 'anomalous' institution of the House of Lords is not quite so irregular, so flagrantly out of rule, so absolutely alien to the genius of our Constitution, as, were we to place credit in our profound disquisitionists and reformers, we might hastily imagine...The Lords, it seems, in a legal point of view, are not a jot more irresponsible than the other limited and privileged and purely conventional order of the State (18)

The results of five centuries of hereditary Peerage has been progress in the general welfare of people and the stability of the State. It has been a way of using a group in society that brings qualities to government that can only come from the experiences and attributes of a landed aristocracy.

A House of Lords must consist of men whose influence is not felt merely in their chamber of Parliament. They must be an order of individuals whose personal importance crosses us in all the transactions of life, and pervades the remotest nook and corner of the country...Their names, office, and character, and the ennobling achievements of their order, must be blended with our history, and bound up with our hereditary sentiment. They must be felt and recognised as the not unworthy descendants or successors of a class that has always taken the lead in civilization, and formed the advanced guard in the march of national progress. Vast property, and the complicated duties which great

possessions entail upon their owners, the inspiring traditions of a heroic history, the legendary respect of ages, the fair maintenance in the order itself of that civility of manners, that love of liberal pursuits, and that public spirit which become the leaders of a free people, and a strong conviction in the nation generally that, under the constitution of which this order forms a branch, they have flourished for a longer period, and in a greater degree, than any existing commonwealth - such are some of the elements of which a Senate must be formed that attempts to cope with House of Lords of England. (19)

It has also been a way of ensuring that the most intelligent and talented are allowed to govern without having to endure an electoral process which does not always bring out the best of all possible legislators.

The English nation has thought that there is a greater certainty of securing a Senate of this high character by entailing its functions on the most important order of its members than by trusting to the periodical selection of any body of individuals whatsoever. It has supposed that the chance production of its carefully cultivated aristocracy may offer, on the whole, senatorial elements preferable to the selected materials of popular choice. It has desired that there should be one portion of its legislature free from the turbulent and overwhelming passion that occasionally assail the less guarded structure of its more popular assembly; and to secure all these great purposes, to contrive at the same time, in establishing this chamber, its power and its perpetuity, its independence and its ability, it has not comprehended how a more practical system could be adopted than to establish the hereditary legislation of a democratic Peerage. (20)

An analysis of the state of the monarchy in chapters 27, 28 and 29 detail Disraeli's attitude about how that institution had deteriorated in importance and influence since the beginning of Whig dominance of English politics. The Whigs were a small but active, powerful and power-hungry minority who had established the House of Brunswick by a

kind of *coup d'etat* and the power of their 'long purses'. This strong oligarchy had reduced the English kings to little more than a Venetian *doge* - a mere puppet, with the real power resting with the Whig aristocrats to whom this dynasty owed its existence.

According to Disraeli, it was not just the institution of monarchy to which the Whigs were antagonistic, and it was up to the Tory party to assert its moral and popular force to protect the real England from the further destructive affects of this oligarchy.

In order to accomplish their object of establishing an oligarchical republic, and of concentrating the government of the State in the hands of a few great families, the Whigs are compelled to declare war against all those great national institutions the power and influence of which present obstacles to the fulfillment of their purpose. It is these institutions which present obstacles to the fulfillment of their purpose. Without our Crown, our Church, our Universities, our great municipal and commercial Corporations, our Magistracy, and its dependent scheme of provincial polity, the inhabitants of England, instead of being a nation, would present only a mass of individuals governed by a metropolis, whence an arbitrary senate would issue the stern decrees of its harsh and heartless despotism...might still possess the fruitless privilege of electing its representatives in Parliament, but without any machinery to foster public spirit and maintain popular power, the whole land a prey to the most degrading equality, the equality that elevates, we should soon see these mock representatives the mere nominees of a Præfect, and the very first to tamper with our privileges and barter away our freedom. (21)

Set against this wicked collection of virtual usurpers and vile opportunists is the Tory party. Its characteristics are diametrically opposed to the goals of the Whigs:

The Tory party in this country is the national party; it is the really democratic party of England. It supports the institutions of the country because they have been established for the common good, and because they secure the equality of civil rights, without which,

whatever its name, no government can be free, and based upon which principle every government, however it may be styled, is in fact a Democracy. (22)

After making his case for the vilification of the Whigs and the consequent accession of the Tories, Disraeli attempts to place his ideas and himself firmly in the mainstream of Tory history and ideologies. He tries to make the case that his ideas and concerns follow in the tradition of Shelburne, Pitt, and especially Bolingbroke. Henry St. John, later Lord Bolingbroke, was constantly invoked by Disraeli as the first true Tory to attempt a revitalization of his party after the Hanoverian succession and the resultant dominance of the Whigs. When he describes Bolingbroke's struggle in political life, Disraeli has obviously 'interpreted' it in such a way as to have it mirror his own:

Opposed to the Whigs from principle, for an oligarchy is hostile to genius, and recoiling from the Tory tenets, which his unprejudiced and vigorous mind taught him at the same time to dread and to contemn, Lord Bolingbroke, at the outset of his career, incurred the common-place imputation of insincerity and inconsistency...It is probable that in the earlier years of his career he meditated over the formation of a new party, that dream of youthful ambition in a perplexed and discordant age, but destined in English politics to be never more substantial than a vision. More experienced in political life, he became aware that he had only to choose between the Whigs and the Tories, and his sagacious intellect, not satisfied with the superficial character of these celebrated divisions, penetrated their interior and essential qualities, and discovered, in spite of all the affectation of popular sympathy on one side, and of admiration of arbitrary power on the other, that this choice was in fact a choice between oligarchy and democracy. From the moment that Lord Bolingbroke, in becoming a Tory, embraced the national cause, he devoted himself to his party: all the energies of his Protean mind were lavished in their service (23)

From this almost Disraelian scenario came the basic ideas and Tory philosophy that

allowed later Tories such as Pitt and Peel to become Prime Minister. Bolingbroke had

eradicated from Toryism all those absurd and odious doctrines which Toryism had adventitiously adopted...and in the complete reorganisation of the public mind laid the foundation for the future accession of the Tory party to power, and to that popular and triumphant career which must ever await the policy of an administration inspired by the spirit of our free and ancient institutions. (24)

After having established such an impeccable historical authority, Disraeli must have felt that his prescription for the Tory party's return to political dominance would have more credibility.

In the conduct of the Tory party at this moment, it appears to me that there are three points to the furtherance of which we should principally apply ourselves: First, that the real character and nature of Toryism should be generally and clearly comprehended: secondly, that Toryism should be divested of all those qualities which are adventitious and not essential, and which, having been produced by that course of circumstances which are constantly changing, become in time obsolete, inconvenient, and by the dexterous misrepresentation of our opponents even odious: thirdly, that the efficient organisation of the party should be secured and maintained (25)

All of these points are things that Disraeli laboured for throughout his career as a Tory. The first was a constant subject of his speeches and novels. The second was especially evident in efforts to wean his colleagues from such unpalatable positions as support for the Corn Laws after Free Trade had become a permanent fact of business, and opposition to Reform when public support for it was so strong. The third was put into practice in earnest between 1868 and 1874 and was largely responsible for the landslide victory of 1874.

The beginning of the "Vindication..." indicates that Disraeli had some self-serving motives in writing this 'letter'. That notion is reinforced by the dubious invocation of Bolingbroke as the spiritual father of his ideas. It closes with a thinly veiled justification of his own expectation of success in politics and claims to a position of greatness:

the meanest subject of our King is born to great and important privileges; an Englishman, however humble may be his birth, whether he be doomed to the plough or destined to the loom, is born to the noblest of all inheritances, the equality of civil rights; he is born to freedom, he is born to justice, and he is born to property. There is no station to which he may not aspire; there is no master whom he is obliged to serve...These are rights and privileges as valuable as King, Lords, and Commons; and it is only a nation thus schooled and cradled in the principles and practice of freedom which, indeed, could maintain such institutions. Thus the English politics are as the old Hebrews in religion, 'a favoured and peculiar people'. (26)

Monypenny and Buckle quote from a letter by Disraeli to his sister Sarah which contains a portion of Peel's response to the "Vindication...". In a tone that was uncharacteristically warm, Peel seems to justify Disraeli's hope that publication of this tract would attract the attention of the upper echelon of his new party.

I beg to return you my best thanks for that copy of your recent work respecting the House of Lords for which I am indebted to your kind attention and consideration...I thank you, both for the work itself and the satisfaction which the reading of it has afforded me. (27)

The Letters of Runnymede had a similar intent, but were quite different in tone and attitude. Before being published as a collection, these letters appeared individually in The Times. The opinions expressed in favour of the Tories and against the Whig government

were intemperate to say the least -- probably Disraeli was emboldened by the anonymous nature of their publication. The letters were a sensation and Disraeli was pleased with the reaction they engendered, though he did not think it prudent to admit authorship -- even to his own family. In a letter to his father, in late January of 1836, he mentions the reception of the series, but does acknowledge his responsibility for them:

The Letters of Runnymede are the only things talked of in London; especially the latter ones. The author is unknown, and will probably remain. One or two papers have foolishly ascribed them to me. There is certainly some imitation of my style, and the writer is familiar with my works. (28)

Their primary importance are as examples of the use of the journalistic epistolary form of vehement partisanship. He characterized the Whig Chancellor of the Exchequer as "the sort of fussy busybody who would impose upon and render himself indispensable to indolent and ill-informed men of strong ambition and weak minds" (29), and claimed that the Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, was "born with a strong ambition and a feeble intellect" (30). The letter to The People is worse.

A Prime Minister is 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: second-rate as a lawyer, as a statesman a nonentity, bought in by his own party from necessity.(31)

These letters do not, however, have any real significance as documents of political ideals.

As Monypenny and Buckle said:

That the letters were immensely effective at the time of their appearance there is no room for doubt, but their style is hardly such as to win appreciation now or to act

as a salt to preserve them for posterity. (32)

When the Letters of Runnymede were published as a collection, Disraeli added a long dedication to Peel at the beginning and a short essay at the end entitled "The Spirit of Whiggism". The tract appended to the still anonymous Letters was sufficiently like the Vindication in content, albeit in a shorter and simplified form, to lead many people to identify the author of the Letters as the young Disraeli. William Hutcheon, the editor of Whigs and Whiggism, speculates that "The Spirit of Whiggism" was probably written before The Vindication of The English Constitution but published later only after the public reaction to the larger work had been so positive. He writes,

It is the "Vindication" in little - a popular summary that Disraeli hoped might be easily read and easily remembered. It is perhaps freer from extravagances of style than any other of his writings of the period. Of its genesis little is known. It may be that it represents the original form of the Letter to Lord Lyndhurst, when, as he says, he found that the subject gave rise to so many reflections that what was originally intended for a pamphlet expanded almost into a volume. (33)

It covers all the basic tenets of Disraelianism -- the value of English historical institutions, and Estates of the Realm, the attack of the Whigs on the constitution and their insidious plan to impose republicanism on England, and the danger of a changed England if the Tories were not supported in their stand against the Whigs. It concludes:

If there be slight probability of ever establishing in this country a more democratic government than the English constitution, it will be as well, I conceive, for those who love their rights to maintain that constitution; and if the recent measures of the Whigs, however plausible their first aspect, have, in fact, been a departure from the democratic character of that constitution, it will be as well for the English nation to oppose, with all their heart, and all their soul and their strength, the machinations of

## the Whigs and the "Spirit of Whiggism." (34)

After he was finally elected to Parliament in 1837, it was nearly thirty-five years before Disraeli made any significant addition to his theoretical writings. It is almost as if his political writings amounted to an 'entrance exam' to the Tory party -- an exam in which a passing grade meant an invitation to contest a safe Tory seat. Once he 'made the grade' and proved his value and loyalty to his new party, his focus turned to the day-to-day details of securing his newly-won position in the party and the House of Commons. He occasionally wrote opinion pieces for newspapers and published some of his speeches, but they dealt primarily with policy and personalities rather than ideology or philosophy. Not until 3rd April 1872 did he again offer a sustained non-fictional depiction of his vision of the future offered to England by the Tory party.

The parliamentary acumen that piloted the passage of the Tory Reform Bill secured Disraeli's likely succession as party leader whenever Derby succumbed to his infirmities and retired. On 27th February 1868 Disraeli formally became Prime Minister. He was buoyed by the successful passage of a contentious Reform Bill that seemed to favour the Tories, and the opportunity to fight the next general election in the advantageous, and unaccustomed, position of being the Government. Unfortunately, the Tory government was still in a substantial minority in the House, and an election was forced upon the new Prime Minister before he was ready -- the result of which was a landslide victory for Gladstone's Liberals. Blake points to some faint glimmers of hope for the Tories to built on for 1874 (35), but the prospect of another six years in opposition rather dispirited Disraeli, and caused substantial rumblings of discontent within his party. For the first

four years of Gladstone's mandate Disraeli went into a kind of political hibernation and was relatively silent and inactive. This lack of visible and vocal opposition from their leader did not sit well with fellow Tories.

Disraeli's political stock slumped steadily during the first three sessions of the new Parliament. He was often ill and often absent...Whatever the reason for Disraeli's inactivity, there was much discontent among his colleagues. Manners and Northcote were apparently the only dissentients at a meeting at Lord Exeter's seat, Burghley, on February 1, 1872, when it was agreed that the new Lord Derby would be a more effective leader. The Chief Whip declared that his name alone would be worth forty or fifty seats...Disraeli knew that there was trouble afoot. The newspapers were full of it, and the rival merits of the two leaders were the subject of much public discussion. (36)

Typical of his temperament and personality, Disraeli did not acquiesce in what appeared to be a full-scale revolt against his leadership.

Accordingly he decided to assert himself. He began with a brisk and quite unwarranted rap on the ducal knuckles of the leader of the House of Lords for insufficient co-operation. He then opened the session with a vigorous speech...(37)

The revitalized Leader of the Opposition continued his attacks on the government for several months. He even made public speeches to huge audiences in 1872, which was rare for him; two of those speeches were the only real contribution to his political writings after 1836. The first, on the 3rd of April at Manchester, took up three and one-half hours (and a whole bottle of white brandy) and was a response to the Liberal government's claim that the Tories had no programme (38). T. E. Kebbel, the editor of a two volume set of Disraeli's speeches, titles this one "Conservative Principles" and claims that "The gist of

this speech lies in the one sentence, "The programme of the Conservative party is to maintain the institutions of the country" (39). The beginning parts of the speech are simply a reiteration of the basic elements of Disraelianism that he had obviously brought forward with him from the earlier days of his career. It is again in the context of how the Tory party was the only party that could provide the needed bulwark against the thoroughly unconstitutional Whigs/Liberals:

Gentlemen, the programme of the Conservative party is to maintain the Constitution of the country. I have not come down to Manchester to deliver an essay on the English Constitution; but when the banner of Republicanism is unfurled - when the fundamental principles of our institutions are controverted - I think, perhaps, it may not be inconvenient that I should make some few practical remarks upon the character of our Constitution - upon that monarchy, limited by the co-ordinate authority of Estates of the realm, which, under the title of Queen, Lords and Commons, has contributed so greatly to the prosperity of this country, and with the maintenance of which I believe that prosperity is bound up. (40)

In defense of that Constitution Disraeli uses all the weapons of his ideology; his attitudes about the Monarchy, the Commons and Lords, the principle of property, the Church, the Whigs and the accidents of history that gave this oligarchy unwarranted power are all unaltered from the last time he publicly expressed them over thirty-five years before.

Concern for the common mass of humanity was always a part of his ethos, but it was never quite focused. This concern finds its way into the world of practical politics with his expression of commitment to advanced health legislation -- something new for the Tories.

But, gentlemen, in attempting to legislate upon social matters the great object is to be practical - to have before

us some distinct aims and some distinct means by which they can be accomplished.

Gentlemen, I think public attention as regards these matters ought to be concentrated upon sanitary legislation. That is a wide subject, and, if properly treated, comprises almost every consideration which has a just claim upon legislative interference. Pure air, pure water, the inspection of unhealthy habitations, the adulteration of food, these and many kindred matters may be legitimately dealt with by the Legislature. (41)

The second new plank in the Disraeli-Tory platform was the very popular one of Imperialism and the importance of maintaining British prestige as a world power. He called Gladstone's handling of foreign affairs "a combination of negligence and blundering" (42). He advocated that

the policy of England with respect to Europe should be a policy of reserve, but proud reserve; and in answer to those statesmen - those mistaken statesmen who have intimated the decay of the power of England and the decline of its resources, I express here my confident conviction that there never was a moment in our history when the power of England was so great and her resources so vast and inexhaustible. (43)

In his novels there are few references to Disraeli's Imperial ideas, but even as early as Vivian Grey one finds clear evidence and background for the later pre-occupation with international affairs. When he reached the apex of power Disraeli found this arena much more compelling than social issues. But, aside from these two relatively recent ideas, which were essentially as much responses to changes in circumstances of the country at that time as they were responses to the Liberal charge of policy vacuousness, this speech shows that when he was under pressure to outline a strong Tory philosophy to set the party as distinct from the government, Disraeli relied upon the ideas that had remained at the core of his political belief system throughout his career.

On 24th June at Crystal Palace he reinforced these ideas -- in effect making Disraelianism the Tory programme for the upcoming election. He again outlined the "three great objects" of the Tory party, and how Liberals opposed such laudable objectives:

The first is to maintain the institutions of the country - not from any sentiment of political superstition, but because we believe that they embody the principles upon which a community like England can alone safely rest. The principles of liberty, of order, of law, and of religion ought not to be entrusted to individual opinion or to the caprice and passion of multitudes.(44)

...the second is, in my opinion, to uphold the Empire of England. If you look to the history of this country since the advent of Liberalism - forty years ago - you will find that there has been no effort so continuous, so subtle, supported by so much energy, and carried on with so much ability and acumen, as the attempts of Liberalism to effect the disintegration of the Empire of England. (45)

Gentlemen, another great object of the Tory party...is the elevation of the condition of the people. Let us see in this great struggle between Toryism and Liberalism that has prevailed in this country during the last forty years what are the salient features. It must be obvious to all who consider the condition of the multitude with a desire to improve and elevate it, that no important step can be gained unless you can effect some reduction of their hours of labour and humanise their toil. (46)

The effect of Manchester and Crystal Palace, which were both gatherings of Conservative Party members and officials of local Conservative associations, was to solidify Disraeli's position as leader of the party. The positive reaction of the public made it obvious that he had 'struck the right note' at just the right time. Even Morley, Gladstone's biographer, grudgingly admitted that Disraeli had been the more successful of the party leaders in capturing the true spirit of the times:

Disraeli's genius, at once brooding over conceptions and penetrating in discernment of fact, had shown him vast

Tory reserves that his household suffrage of 1867 would rally to his flag. The same genius again scanning the skies read aright the signs and characteristics of the time...National Pride...was silently but deeply stirred. (47)

### III

Overt expressions of, 'Disraelianism' are not very evident in Vivian Grey, but they are not entirely absent. Vivian's father tries to show his enthusiastic son that he should be on guard against the easy answers to the complex questions of human society offered by *a priori* systems -- "I want you to take no theological dogmas for granted, nor to satisfy your doubts by ceasing to think" (48). He continues,

Active as you have now become in the great scenes of human affairs, I would not have you be guided by any fanciful theories or morals or of human nature. Philosophers have amused themselves by deciding on human actions by systems; but, as these systems are of the most opposite natures, it is evident that each philosopher, in reflecting his own feelings in the system he has so elaborately formed, has only painted his own character. (49)

Seeing no future in either of the dominant parties for someone of his background, Vivian decides to create a party for his own purposes. The genesis of this new party had none of the altruistic basis of Disraeli's National Party it was intended solely as a vehicle for the supposed political genius of young Mr. Grey. Nonetheless, albeit in a satirical way, the Carabas party owed its beginnings to those standard Disraelian preoccupations of anti-Whiggism (50) and a sense of indebtedness to Bolingbroke (51).

The Voyage of Captain Popanilla (1828) has two distinct sections, one a biting satire of Benthamite principles and ideas, the other an equally pointed indictment of various aspects of English society. While it certainly does not approach Swiftian standards of satire, The Voyage of Captain Popanilla is clever and successful on its own level. The frequent lack of subtlety may be annoying to the literary critic, but the historian should find it helpful as irrefutable evidence of the formation of some of Disraeli's political views some seven or eight years before The Vindication of the English Constitution.

When Popanilla discovers a chest full of books washed up on the shores of his island, his life changes forever. The books are about Utilitarianism, the study of which leaves him discontented with the aimless pursuit of simple happiness on his idyllic island home. Soon after having mastered this set of 'first principles', Popanilla submits the fun-loving king of the island to a long harangue on the dangers of continuing the kind of life his people have hitherto enjoyed:

he begged to inform his Majesty that man was born for something else besides enjoying himself. It was, doubtless, extremely pleasant to dance and sing, to crown themselves with chaplets, and to drink wine; but he was 'free to confess' that he did not imagine that the most barefaced hireling of corruption could for a moment presume to maintain that there was any utility in pleasure. If there were no utility in pleasure, it was quite clear that pleasure could profit no one. If, therefore, it were unprofitable, it was injurious; because that which does not produce profit is equivalent to a loss; therefore pleasure is a losing business; consequently pleasure is not pleasant. (52)

Disraeli extends his ridicule of the logic of the Utilitarians when Popanilla responds to the king's claim that the islanders lived in a state of nature and that Popanilla's ideas went

contrary to what was natural. Thus,

Popanilla triumphantly demonstrated that no such order as that which they associated with the phrase 'state of nature' ever existed. "Man" said he, "is called the masterpiece of nature; and man is also, as we all know, that most curious of machines; now a machine is work of art, consequently, the masterpiece of nature is the masterpiece of art. The object of all mechanism is the attainment of utility; the object of man, who is the most perfect machine, is utility in the highest degree. Can we believe, therefore, that his machine was ever intended for a state which never could have called forth its powers, a state in which no utility could ever have been attained, a state in which there are no wants; consequently, no competition; consequently, no invention; consequently, no profits; only one great pernicious monopoly of comfort and ease? Society without wants is like a world without winds. It is quite clear, therefore, that there is no such thing as Nature; Nature is Art, or Art is Nature; that which is most useful is most natural, because utility is the test of nature; therefore a steam-engine is in fact a much more natural production than a mountain. (53)

The conclusion of his diatribe is a recommendation for a new direction for the people. Like the Utilitarians in England, Popanilla said he valued the contribution of the older way of life, but felt the old ways did not fit with new knowledge and improved ideas of government. Finally,

After having thus preliminarily descanted for about two hours, Popanilla informed his Majesty that he was unused to public speaking, and he proceeded to show that the grand characteristic of the social action of the Isle of Fantasie was a total want of development. This he observed with equal sorrow and surprise; he respected the wisdom of their ancestors; at the same time, no one could deny that they were both barbarous and ignorant; he highly esteemed also the constitution, but regretted that it was not in the slightest degree adapted to the existing wants of society: he was not for destroying any establishments, but, on the contrary, was for courteously affording them the opportunity of self-dissolution. He finished by re-urging, in strong terms, the immediate development of the island...Popanilla had no hesitation

in saying that a short time could not elapse ere, instead of passing their lives in a state of unprofitable ease and useless enjoyment, they might reasonably expect to be the terror and astonishment of the universe, and to be able to annoy every nation of any consequence. (54)

The only annoyance, however, is that felt by the king and the rest of the inhabitants of Fantasia, for "unfortunately for our revolutionizer, there was not a single grumbler" (55). Popanilla is not deterred by this minor setback. He won a handful of converts and sent them proselytizing throughout the island. Disraeli's description of their preparation and presentation mirrors his feelings about the Benthamites:

Being not utterly ignorant of some of the rudiments of knowledge, and consequently have completed their education, it was now their duty, as members of society, to instruct and not to teach...Their tones were so shrill, their manners so presuming, their knowledge so crude, and their general demeanour so completely unamiable, that it was impossible to hear them with delight, advantage, and admiration. (56)

The king of Fantasie's solution to the problem of how to deal with such a disruptive and irritating element in his island paradise is one which Disraeli must have wished he could implement for England -- he sets Popanilla adrift in a boat in such a way as to render his return to Fantasie impossible.

Even in The Young Duke, a novel particularly notable for its frivolous depiction of frivolity, Disraeli finds a suitable place to introduce his distaste for Utilitarianism. In the course of damning this philosophy by way of acidic ridicule, he gives us one of his most memorable characters in the person of Mr. Duncan Macmorrogh Senior, whose son, Duncan Junior, is a major proponent of Utilitarianism as evidenced by his many articles in "The Screw and Lever Review".

There is no mention of political or social issues until the Duke of St. James begins to develop a sense of his political and social obligations. Near the conclusion of the book, the young St. James is travelling anonymously from his northern estates to attend an important debate in the House of Lords - his first appearance in that chamber since attaining his majority some two years earlier. One of his companions inside the coach is the elder Mr. Macmorrogh. This gentleman regales his fellow passengers with a detailed résumé of his son's career and writings:

Young Duncan Macmorrogh...had just brought himself into notice by a series of articles in 'The Screw and Lever Review', in which he had subjected the universe piecemeal to his critical analysis. Duncan Macmorrogh cut up the creation, and got a name. His attack upon mountains was most violent, and proved, by its personality, that he had come from the Lowlands. He demonstrated the inutility of all elevation, and declared that the Andes were the aristocracy of the globe. River he rather patronised; but flowers he quite pulled to pieces, and proved them to be the most useless of existences. Duncan Macmorrogh informed us that we were quite wrong in supposing ourselves to be the miracle of creation. On the contrary, he avowed that already there were various pieces of machinery of far more importance than man; and he had no doubt, in time, that a superior race would arise, got by a steam-engine on a spinning-jenny. (57)

The Macmorrogh insight is particularly keen when analysing the value of the aristocracy. This discussion in the coach is prompted by passing St. James' Hauteville Park. Duncan the elder claims that parks are useless, and, in this case, about as much value to society as its owner.

'And do you think his existence, then, perfectly useless?' asked the Duke.

'To be sure I do. So the world will, some day or other.

We are opening our eyes fast. Men begin to ask themselves what the use of an aristocracy is. That is the test, sir.'

'I think it not very difficult to demonstrate the use of an aristocracy,' mildly observed the Duke.

'Pooh! nonsense, sir! I know what you are going to say; but we have got beyond all that. Have you read this, sir? This article in "The Screw and Lever Review?"

"I have not, sir.'

'Then I advise you to make yourself master of it, and you will talk no more of the aristocracy. A few more articles like this, and a few more noblemen like the man who has got this park, and people will open their eyes at last.' (58)

Macmorrogh unwittingly utters a remark that Disraeli himself would have agreed with; peers who acted as the young Duke had for most of the book were indeed undermining public support for the aristocracy and if something was not done soon to exhibit the value of such a class it would surely disappear. Where Macmorrogh errs is in supposing that this decline in sympathy is due to the test of utility and first principles, rather than the failure of many current aristocrats to live up to their traditional obligations.

A Year at Hartlebury or The Election (1834), written before the Vindication, contains all of the ideas, albeit in somewhat abbreviated form, of that 'non-fiction' work. Mr. Molesworth, an archetypical, squirearchical tory, is illustrative of all that Disraeli found attractive as well as repulsive in the Tory Party of 1834. He stubbornly adheres to the outdated notion that the 1832 Bill had destroyed the country -- a position Disraeli knew to be politically untenable -- but quite laudably opposed the Whig and Utilitarian forces who had benefitted from it at the expense of the people.

'...then [pre-1832] we were indeed an aristocratic

nation. That is past. We are now a people of political economists. Ricks are burnt and machines shattered, and the people are starving, but then we have the advantage of being destroyed by the most scientific legislation. As for myself, I glory in being a bigot.'

'Which means Mr. Molesworth,' said Mr. Bohun, 'in your vocabulary, a very honest man.' (59)

As might be expected, an election is the central event in the book, and the hero - Aubrey Bohun -- carries the author's beliefs onto the hustings with him. Bohun's anti-Whiggism is the most prominent feature of Disraeli's description of the campaign, even when attempting to differentiate between two species of that party.

A high Whig is at least grand in his haughtiness. He is a tyrant, but a tyrant on a great scale. He loves a coercion bill, he cares not how many infants may be sacrificed to the bloody Moloch of Manufacturing industry, but then he can talk of the bill of rights, and advocate the immediate emancipation of the Niggers; but a low Whig is the least human of all the combinations human matter, for soul we cannot concede to those wretches with contracted minds and cold hearts. If ever a revolution comes round in this once happy country, we may trace all our misery to the influence of the low Whigs. These are the real causes of Manchester massacres, though they think they are always abusing the magistracy; these are the men who, though they think they are only snuffing the candle in their own miserable hard-hearted parlours, are in fact lighting the torch of every incendiary in the kingdom. How the low Whigs hated Mr. Bohun! They hated him with that intense predisposition of enmity, which cold-blooded calculating, unsympathetic selfish mortals always innately feel for a man of genius, a man whose generous and lively spirit always makes them ashamed of their dead, dunghill-like existence. (60)

Mr. Bohun considered the Whigs as a party of political swindlers, who had obtained power by false pretence of making those changes which the spirit of the age required: instead of effecting this purpose, their only object had been to root up the power of their opponents, and to destroy that happy balance of parties in the state,

which in an aristocratic country is indispensable to the freedom and felicity of the mass. (61)

Even though the book was a collaboration between Disraeli and Sarah, John Matthews is certain that the account of the political activity in the first nine chapters of Volume 2 is reliably attributable to Benjamin (62). The intemperate feelings that come out in his description of his hero's principles and speeches are an obvious residue of recent electoral defeats at the hands of Whig opponents.

Having found fault with both the major parties, Bohun determined to contest the Fanchester seat as an independent Radical. This, of course, parallels Disraeli's own declaration at that time, and was really a label of convenience -- a prelude to the establishment of a viable third party. Bohun

was desirous of seeing a new party formed, which while it granted those alterations in our domestic policy which the spirit of the age required, should maintain and prosecute the ancient external policy by which the empire had been founded, and of this party he wished to place himself at the head - a position which his high lineage - his splendid fortune - and his superior talents, justified him in contemplating. (63)

As Ellen Henderson says in a essay at the end of the book:

Disraeli's vision of the possibility of building an alliance of Radicals and Tories was grounded in a conviction that neither of the traditional parties was based on deep-seated beliefs or principles. Just as Chumfield's and Bagg's Toryism is purely a function of their anti-Whiggism, so Gainsborough's Whiggism is portrayed as a confusion of matters of personal honour with those of political principle. Like Bohun, Disraeli believed that such individuals were the most likely recruits for his new 'national' party that would replace the outworn traditional ones...he never abandoned the notion, and it reappeared in a variety of guises later on in

his career, both in his novels and in the Young England experiment. (64)

This is borne out clearly in the text of the story.

Mr. Bohun cared nothing about the wretched struggle of factions, but he wished to be the subject of a great empire, and not to sink into the miserable citizenship of a second-rate island. He knew that the Tories could never have remained so long in power, unless they had maintained a national policy: he knew the Whigs, in expelling them from their places, were bound to maintain an adverse system, and therefore he foresaw the dismemberment of the Empire. This was the reason he opposed the Whigs. (65)

Even though nearly a decade elapsed between his last pre-parliamentary novel and the first of the Young England trilogy, Coningsby, the three themes of anti-Utilitarianism, anti-Whiggism and the need for a truly National Party remain paramount in Disraeli's fiction. He still blamed that odious Benthamite 'religion' for many of the problems facing society:

'I must say,' said his Grace, 'that I for one deeply regret that our popular customs have been permitted to fall so into desuetude.'

'The Spirit of the Age is against such things,' said Lord Everingham.

'And what is the Spirit of the Age?' asked Coningsby.

'The Spirit of Utility,' said Lord Everingham.(66)

The best argument comes, as usual when convincing extended discourse is called for, from Sidonia. He says that, no matter how irrefutably rational the Utilitarian system may be, it must ultimately be considered a failure because it does not take into account essential

factors of human constitution:

'In this country,' said Sidonia, 'since the peace, there has been an attempt to advocate a reconstruction of society on a purely rational basis. The principle of utility has been powerfully developed. I speak not with lightness of the labours of the disciples of that school. I bow to intellect in every form: and we should be grateful in this country, where for so long a period our statesmen were in so pitiable an arrear of public intelligence. There has been an attempt to reconstruct society on a basis of material motives and calculations. It has failed. It must ultimately have failed under any circumstances; its failure in an ancient and densely-peopled kingdom was inevitable. How limited is human reason, the profoundest inquirers are most conscious. We are not indebted to the reason of man for any of the great achievements which are the landmarks of human action and human progress. It was not reason that besieged Troy; it was not reason that sent forth the Saracen from the desert to conquer the world; that inspired the Crusades; that instituted the Monastic orders; it was not reason that produced the Jesuits; above all it was not reason that created the French Revolution. Man is only truly great when he acts from the passions; never irresistible but when he appeals to the imagination. Even Mormon counts more votaries than Bentham.'

'And you think, then, that as imagination once subdued the State, imagination may now save it?'

'Man is made to adore and to obey: but if you will not command him, if you give nothing to worship, he will fashion his own divinities, and find a chieftain in his own passions.'(67)

The Whigs remained Disraeli's particular target for hatred. It was his contention that most of the problems in English society find their origins in Whig deviousness, exclusionism and oligarchical tendencies. And, when the 'natural' course of politics threatened to keep them from office at the end of Liverpool's administration, they set upon a course of Reform agitation to change the 'rules of the game':

New families had arisen on the Tory side that almost

rivalled old Newcastle himself in their electioneering management; and it was evident that, unless some reconstruction of the House of Commons could be effected, the Whig party could never obtain a permanent hold of official power. Hence, from that period, the Whigs became Parliamentary Reformers. (68)

Whigs were also notorious for twisting the historical record so as to cover their plans and to mislead the English people into believing that they had in fact benefitted from Whig policies. As the narrator in Sybil remarks:

Generally speaking, all the great events have been distorted, most of the important causes concealed, some of the important causes concealed, some of the principal characters never appear, and all who figure are so misunderstood and misrepresented, that the result is a complete mystification...(69)

Two things in particular that Disraeli feels compelled to reveal and expound upon are the issues of finance and loyalty. The former comes in for sharp criticism in Sybil under the epithet "Dutch Finance":

The principle of that system was to mortgage industry in order to protect property: abstractedly, nothing can be conceived more unjust; its practice in England has been equally injurious...the system of Dutch finance, pursued more or less for nearly a century and a half, has ended in the degradation of a fettered and burthened multitude. Nor have the demoralising consequences of the funding system on the more favoured classes been less decided. It has made debt a national habit; it has made credit the ruling power, not the exceptional auxiliary, of all transactions; it has introduced a loose, inexact, haphazard, and dishonest spirit in the conduct of both public and private life; a spirit dazzling and yet dastardly; reckless of consequences and yet shrinking from responsibility. And in the end, it has so over-stimulated the energies of the population to maintain the material engagements of the state, and of society at large, that the moral condition of the people has been entirely lost sight of. (70)

The example of the Whigs' treatment of Edmund Burke is important to Disraeli. Burke brought his enormous ability to the service of the Whigs at a time when they were in desperate need of a 'man-of-talent' - much as Disraeli had been for the Tories very recently. Burke, Disraeli writes,

restored the moral existence of the party. He taught them to recur to the ancient principles of their connection, and suffused those principles with all the delusive splendour of his imagination. He raised the tone of their public discourse; he breathed a high spirit into their public acts...In a dearth of that public talent for the possession of which the Whigs have generally been distinguished, Burke came forward and established them alike in the parliament and the country. (71)

But, in an action that was also to become characteristic of the Whigs, they virtually ignored him when they found themselves in a position to form an administration -- after he had almost single-handedly put them in that position:

And what was his reward?...When the hour arrived for the triumph which he had prepared, he was not even admitted to the Cabinet, virtually presided over by his graceless pupil. (72)

Disraeli believed this was the Whigs' usual attitude to talented individuals who were not on their social level. They were very much a closed hierarchy and would allow outsiders to rise only so far -- men like Burke were useful, and available to be used, but they were essentially disposable. This aspect of Whiggery was a vital factor in Disraeli's vehement hatred of them, and at the heart of his decision never to join them. Conversely, having aligned himself with Bolingbroke, and by drawing the parallel between Burke and Bolingbroke, Disraeli placed himself in the company of abused party intellectual saviours who were unjustly treated by their party when the time came for recognition and reward.

Thus, right at the beginning of Sybil, this is an obvious attack on Peel for having left Disraeli out of the cabinet, and the implied rebuke that such ingratitude made Peel little better than a Whig and it was not wise of the Tories to alienate someone of his (Disraeli's) calibre -- especially since they owed their position as the government to his exertions.

Disraelianism was much more than purely negative elements, however; more than just aversions to *a priori* political theories and Whiggery, it focused a great deal upon the elements necessary to create and maintain a truly National Party. In the pre-Parliamentary novels Disraeli believed it possible to create a viable third party -- a credible option to the electorate's choice between Whig and Tory. Once he threw in his lot with the Tories, he did not give up the dream of constructing a genuine National Party he merely changed his emphasis to the RE-construction of the Tories into that vision. With typical Disraelian subtlety he did not present his ideas as radical change to a very conservative party, but instead demanded that the party revert to its original principles. He presented the Tory Party as always having been the only party that was really National in its outlook, interests and priorities; it was a relatively recent development that they had espoused a viewpoint that had narrowed its constituency. In the Preface to Coningsby Disraeli makes his intention clear:

The main purpose of [the] writer was to vindicate the just claims of the Tory party to be the popular political confederation of the country; a purpose which he had, more or less, pursued from a very early period of life...It was opportune, therefore, to show that Toryism was not a phase, but a fact; and that our political institutions were the embodiment of our popular necessities. (73)

According to Disraeli, the Tories had been the authors of their own image difficulties.

They deviated from true Tory principles and lost the chance to forge wide national support. A genuine Tory party could have avoided the agitation that led to the Reform Bill which distorted the political process and gave the Whigs such a large electoral advantage. The Party leaders that came after Pitt created the misdirection that fatally flawed the Liverpool administration and was being repeated by Peel. In Coningsby, Disraeli the narrator outlines what went wrong; Peel and others that came after Pitt

pursued a policy which was either founded on no principle whatever, or on principles exactly contrary to those which had always guided the conduct of the great Tory leaders...This factious league had shuffled themselves into power by clinging to the skirts of a great minister, the last of Tory statesmen, who, in the unparalleled and confounding emergencies of his latter years, and been forced unfortunately for England, to relinquish Toryism. His successors inherited all his errors without the latent genius which in him might have still rallied and extricated him from the consequences of his disasters. His successors did not merely inherit his errors; they exaggerated, they caricatured them ...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 code, and Restriction the genius of their commercial code. (74)

He was especially disappointed by the performance of Liverpool's government. With so much in its favour, the opportunity to secure the rightful place of the Tories as the natural governing party was badly squandered because they abandoned true Toryism.

This ministry, strong in the confidence of the sovereign, the parliament, and the people, might, by the courageous promulgation of great historical truths, have gradually formed a public opinion, that would have permitted them to organise the Tory party on a national basis. They might have nobly effected a complete settlement of Ireland...concluded a satisfactory reconstruction of the third estate, without producing that convulsion with which, from its violent fabrication, our social system still vibrates. Lastly, they might have adjusted the rights and

properties of our national industries in a manner which would have prevented that fierce and fatal rivalry that is now disturbing every hearth of the United Kingdom...This cabinet, then, with so much brilliancy on the surface, is the parent of The Roman Catholic Association, the Political Unions, the Anti-Corn-Law League. (75)

Peel based his leadership on his pronouncement of 1834, "The Tamworth Manifesto", which Disraeli describes as "an attempt to construct a party without principles; its basis therefore was necessarily Latitudinarianism; and its inevitable consequence has been Political Infidelity" (76). In Chapter XVI, "The Conservative Constitution", another chapter consisting entirely of authorial comment, Peelite Conservatism comes in for some severe criticism for espousing 'principles' that are weak and misleading:

There was indeed a considerable shouting about what they called Conservative principles; but the awkward question naturally arose, What will you conserve? The prerogatives of the Crown, provided they are not exercised; the independence of the House of Lords, provided it is not asserted; the Ecclesiastical estate, provided it is regulated by a commission of laymen. Everything, in short, that is established, as long as it is a phrase and not a fact. (77)

...[such] Conservatism assumes in theory that everything established should be maintained; but adopts in practice that everything that is established is indefensible...[such] Conservatism was an attempt to carry on affairs by substituting the fulfillment of the duties of office for the performance of the functions of the government; and to maintain this negative system by the mere influence of property, reputable private conduct, and what are called good connections...[such] Conservatism discards prescription, shrinks from principle, disavows progress; having rejected all respect for antiquity, it offers no redress for the present, and makes no preparation for the future. (78)

Eustace Lyle expresses the same attitudes to young Coningsby later in the book:

The Duke talks to me of conservative principles; but he

does not inform me what they are. I observe a party in the State whose rule it is to consent to no change, until it is clamourously called for, and then instantly to yield; but those are concessionary, not conservative principles. This party treats institutions as we do our pheasants, they preserve only to destroy them. (79)

All the things that the Peelite Conservative party failed to do at the time of Disraeli's writing Coningsby, are the things that he wanted to make the core of a new National Tory Party.

In Chapter XXXV Sidonia once again tutors Coningsby in the essential factors to consider for revitalising English society. All the goals of political activity must be subordinated to the rebuilding of national character by developing a strong sense of community. Coningsby asks,

'Where, then, would you look for hope?'

'In what is more powerful than laws and institutions, and without which the best laws and the most skilful institutions may be a dead letter, or the very means of tyranny in the national character. It is not in the increased feebleness of its institutions that I see the peril of England; it is in the decline of its character as a community.' (80)

'Rely upon it,' said Sidonia, 'that England should think more of the community and less of the government' (81)

Economic and exclusively rational solutions to the problem of declining public virtue and sense of national community are useless according to Sidonia -- for the same reasons that society cannot be 'regulated' by Utilitarian rule -- because it ignores the irrational/imaginative side of mankind. Change and movement in a society are rarely motivated by non-rational forces. Sidonia provides an example:

'I think,' said Sidonia, 'that there is no error so vulgar as to believe that revolutions are occasioned by economical causes. They come in, doubtless very often to precipitate a catastrophe; very rarely do they occasion one. I know no period, for example, when physical comfort was more diffused in England than in 1640. England had a moderate population, a very improved agriculture, a rich commerce; yet she was on the eve of the greatest and most violent changes that she has as yet experienced.'

'That was a religious movement.'

'Admit it; the cause, then, was not physical. The imagination of England rose against the government. It proves, then, that when the faculty is astir in a nation, it will sacrifice even physical comfort to follow its impulses. (82)

In order to foster this kind of imaginative awakening in the people, and to channel it into firm support for the Tory party, there must be a set of Tory principles that the public can see as the driving force behind the party. These principles had to be identifiably different, trusted, historically based, and speak to the various parts of the English 'soul'. At a reunion between Coningsby and his old Etonian schoolfellows they discuss the inadequacy of the current parties, and the qualities they would like to see in a new National Party; they want to remain aloof from

political parties which, from the necessity of things, have ceased to have distinctive principles, and are therefore practically only factions; and wait and see, whether with patience, energy, honour, and Christian faith, and a desire to look to the national welfare and not to sectional and limited interests; whether, I say, we may not discover some great principles to guide us, to which we may adhere, and which then, if true, will ultimately guide and control others. (83)

By the time of the General Election that concludes the book, and the extraordinary manner

in which Coningsby is elected the member for Dalford, Disraeli still does not have his hero espouse allegiance to, or even support of, the Tory Party. Coningsby is returned as M.P. on the strength of a coalition between the best Liberal and Conservative agents -- based on Coningsby's personal integrity and talent, not his political affiliation. He is essentially an Independent Member of Parliament. Together with his Eton/Cambridge friends Buckhurst and Oswald Millbank he enters the House of Commons with the same background, ideals, and expectations of the real Young England group that Disraeli was associated with at the time of writing Coningsby. And, although he was a member of the Tory party, his perceived poor treatment at the hands of Peel and the hierarchy of the party convinced him that the present incarnation of that party did not meet his standards as an expression of National principles and representation. His own way of showing this disillusionment was to have an appealing character like Coningsby give voice to a preference for true Tory principles, but also to demonstrate disappointment at not finding a party which practises them by entering Parliament as a free-agent, much as Disraeli himself tried to do in his first attempts at election. As an expression of his dissatisfaction and uncertainty about his position within the Tory party, Disraeli does not conclude Coningsby with unreserved optimism that young Harry will be able to reform the Tories enough to feel comfortable and useful within its ranks (or at its head), but rather with a series of questions to the reader that reveal that Disraeli himself was still in much doubt about the fate of the new generation beginning their parliamentary careers.

They stand now on the threshold of public life...What will be their fate? Will they maintain in august assemblies and high places the great truths which, in study and in solitude, they have embraced? Or will their courage exhaust itself in the struggle, their enthusiasm evaporate before hollow-hearted ridicule, their generous impulses yield with a vulgar catastrophe to the tawdry temptations of a low ambition? Will their skilled

intelligence subside into being the adroit tool of a corrupt party? Will vanity confound their fortunes, or jealousy wither their sympathies? Or will they remain brave, single, and true; refuse to bow before shadows and worship phrases; sensible of the greatness of their position, recognise the greatness of their duties; denounce to a perplexed and disheartened world the frigid theories of a generalising age that have destroyed the individuality of man, and restore the happiness of their country by believing in their own energies, and daring to be great? (84)

In Sybil Disraeli appears more sure of his commitment to the Tory party, or at least to a Tory party shaped by his vision of its traditional roots. It becomes obvious throughout the book that the author had a definite prescription for the ills of the nation, and it is equally obvious that he had no confidence in either of the two parties, as they currently stood, to take the necessary steps. A National Party was needed, but there was no real need to create a brand new party to accomplish this. The priorities of the Whigs were anathema to the needs of the people of England and, thus, they were clearly unacceptable -- but the principles and examples of past leadership of the Tory Party were ideally suited as guides out of the darkness of an increasingly industrialised and de-humanized Britain. There were two significant difficulties preventing the party taking its rightful place at the vanguard of British politics; 1) the misdirection of the party by Peel, and 2) the lack of general public acquaintance with the richness of the Tory past.

Disraeli felt that the first problem could be rectified if the second were properly dealt with. The primary reason for ignorance of real Tory philosophy was that Whigs had been in the dominant position for so long that their version of history was taken by all as the literal truth. Again, it is the author as narrator who first expresses this:

Generally speaking, all the great events have been distorted, most of the important causes concealed, some of the principal characters never appear, and all who figure are so misunderstood and misrepresented, that the result is a complete mystification. (85)

The worst omission was the lack of recognition accorded the great Tories of the recent past, those whose genius and energy were instrumental in laying the groundwork for the rebirth of true Toryism:

we might have been saved from the triple blessings of Venetian politics, Dutch finance, and French wars: against which, in their happiest days, and with their happiest power, struggled the three greatest of English statesmen, Bolingbroke, Shelburne, and, lastly, the son of Chatham. (86)

To be fair, there was a limited acknowledgement of the accomplishments of Pitt -- they were too prodigious to ignore. But the root of that ability was not in the moulding by his famous father, rather ... "To understand Mr. Pitt, one must understand one of the suppressed characters of English history, and that is Lord Shelburne" (87). Shelburne in turn owed a great deal of his intellectual maturity to the pure genius of Bolingbroke, who, when his voice was silenced in Parliament, used his writing "which recalled to the English people the inherent blessings of their old free monarchy, and painted in immortal hue his picture of a patriot king..." (88). Moreover,

Lord Shelburne adopted from the first the Bolingbroke system; a real royalty, in lieu of the chief magistracy; a permanent alliance with France, instead of the Whig scheme of viewing in that power the natural enemy of England; and, above all, a plan of commercial freedom, the germ of which may be found in the long-maligned negotiations of Utrecht, but which, in the instance of Lord Shelburne, were soon in time matured by all the economical science of Europe, in which he was a proficient. (89)

Of his qualities in council we have no record; there is reason to believe that his administrative ability was conspicuous; his speeches prove that, if not supreme, he was eminent, in the art of parliamentary disputation, while they show on all the questions discussed a richness and variety of information, with which the speeches of no statesman of that age except Mr. Burke can compare. (90)

These men represented the 'Apostolic Succession' of the Tory Party, and Disraeli wished to identify himself with it. His aim in this was to enhance his credibility and legitimacy as a genuine Tory and valid successor to previous leaders.

Early on in Sybil Disraeli returns to the theme of national character and sense of community as central tenets of his National Party. This time Walter Gerard, not Sidonia, delivers the lecture about what evil has been wrought in England by the weakness of national community:

There is no community in England; there is aggregation, but aggregation under circumstances which make it rather a dissociating than a uniting principle. (91)

It is a community of purpose that constitutes society...without that, men may be drawn into contiguity, but they still continue virtually isolated. (92)

Lack of community and an anchored national character had resulted in a dangerously bifurcated society. When Egremont's replies with a vapid school-boy remark, Gerard's response is one of Disraeli's most famous passages.

'Well, society may be in its infancy,' said Egremont, slightly smiling; 'but say what you like, our Queen reigns over the greatest nation that ever existed.'

'Which nation?' asked the younger stranger, 'for she reigns over two.'

The stranger paused; Egremont was silent, but looked inquiringly.

'Yes,' resumed the stranger after a moment's interval. 'Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.'

'You speak of --- ' said Egremont, hesitatingly.

'The Rich and the Poor.' (93)

Healing this division caused by Whig malice and Peelite Tory neglect was a major goal for Disraeli. His genuine concern for the condition of the lower classes was a remainder of his earlier Radical views, and has always been difficult for analysts to reconcile with his championing of the rights of the landed classes to retain political and social ascendancy. What appears as an obvious paradox to others never seemed so to Disraeli. It was an essential principle of Disraelianism that all classes were interdependent, and, while class lines must remain clearly drawn, the welfare of each was vital to the survival of English society. It was the task of a National Party to represent the interests of the upper and lower classes -- to create a 'community' within which each could, by knowing their place and mutual obligations, feel part of a greater whole.

Disraeli did not ignore pockets of England where this character and community already existed. Trafford's factory, and the environs surrounding it, was a prime example of how proper attention to the material and spiritual needs of the workers by an 'aristocrat' not only improves the lot of the lower classes, but consequently creates increased income and respect for the 'lord'. All of this is portrayed in a modern, industrial setting, but the

effect is essentially mediaeval -- it is Disraeli's way of transporting his historical ideals to the present and showing how well they fit current circumstances. Neither was Disraeli ignorant of the fact that such occurrences were rare -- that men such as Trafford were the exception rather than the rule:

'But all men will not act like Trafford,' said Morley. 'It requires a sacrifice of self which cannot be expected, which is unnatural. It is not individual influence that can renovate society; it is some new principle which must reconstruct it...What we want is community.' (94)

The author agrees with his character's premise and conclusion, that in their current society very few men will act on the impulse that drives someone like Trafford, and that some form of national bond is required to make them do so. Where Disraeli differs from Stephen Morley is on the subject of method. The latter's solution is to compel them to act in the best interests of the majority by imposing the new and alien concept of Utilitarianism to all human activity, while Disraeli would rely upon the re-activation of the old patterns of mediaeval society and would do so by creating a National Party to act as a catalyst. Disraeli believed that the feudal structure, of mediaeval life was a more 'natural' way to live--current problems were caused by the 'unnatural' way of life brought about by a de-humanizing industrial process controlled by uncaring, mercenary brutes.

Towards the end of Sybil the reader is increasingly impelled toward the conclusion that the author has given up the idea of the creation of a totally new political party to serve as the necessary catalytic agent, and has turned instead to the re-creation of the Tory Party to achieve the same end. It must be re-created because in the hands of Peel

in a parliamentary sense, that great party has ceased to exist; but I will believe that it still lives in the thought and sentiment and consecrated memory of the English

nation. It has its origin in great principles and in noble instincts; it sympathises with the lowly; it looks up to the Most High; it can count its heroes and its martyrs; they have met in its behalf plunder, proscription, and death. Nor, when it finally yielded to the iron progress of oligarchical supremacy, was its catastrophe inglorious. Its genius was vindicated in golden sentences and with fervent arguments of impassioned logic by St. John; and breathed in the intrepid eloquence and patriot soul of William Wyndham. Even now it is not dead, but sleepeth; and, in an age of political materialism, of confused purposes and perplexed intelligence, that aspires only to wealth because it has faith in no other accomplishment, as men rifle cargoes on the verge of shipwreck, Toryism will yet rise from the tomb over which Bolingbroke shed his last tear...(95)

Perhaps the best encapsulization of what Disraelianism would try to accomplish is given by Egremont when he tries to explain his vision of English politics to Sybil:

The future principle of English politics will not be a levelling principle; not a principle adverse to privileges, but favourable to their extension. It will seek to ensure equality, not by levelling the few, but by elevating the many. (96)

In Lothair and Endymion, written after he had become Tory Prime Minister and had been that party's leader for many years, Disraeli still tries to convince us of the importance of his earlier pronouncements on national character and the proper construction of the Tory party. In the General Preface to Lothair (1870) he is still concerned that the public should believe that his version of the Tory party is actually a return to its 'first principles' and that such a return is a vital part of returning English society to its proper equilibrium and happiness. The people must remember what damage is caused by political parties who deviate from the basic premise of English government. They must also remember that it

was Disraeli who first set them on the road to recovery:

The perverse deviation of political parties from their original significance may at first seem only a subject of historical curiosity, but they assume a different character when they practically result in the degradation of a people. (97)

The examples from Endymion show Disraeli at his propagandistic-partisan best. In a book where his hero is a Whig -- though he yet manages to present him sympathetically -- Disraeli still includes a comprehensive review of the essentials of Disraelianism without the intrusive device of authorial asides. From the mouth of the likeable Waldershare comes a summary of the Tory history and a panegyric that the author has tried to present to the electorate (and his own party) throughout his political life:

'Is not the Tory,' Waldershare would exclaim, 'a succession of heroic spirits, "beautiful and swift," ever in the van, and foremost of their age? - Hobbes and Bolingbroke, Hume and Adam Smith, Wyndham and Cobham, Pitt and Grenville, Canning and Huskisson? - Are not the principles of Toryism those popular rights which men Shippen and Hynde Cotton flung in the face of an alien monarch and his mushroom aristocracy? - Place bills, triennial bills, opposition to standing armies, to peerage bills? - Are not the traditions of the Tory party the noblest pedigree in the world? Are not its illustrations that glorious martyrology, that opens with the name of Falkland and closes with the name of Canning? (98)

He continues to try and place himself firmly in the pure Tory lineage by making a historical reference to himself at the time of the 1852 "Who-Who" cabinet:

One of this band, a gentleman without any official experience whatever, was not only placed in the cabinet, but was absolutely required to become leader of the House of Commons, which had never occurred before, except in the instance of Mr. Pitt in 1782. (99)

And, despite having had many direct and not always agreeable experiences of the whims of the people of England, Disraeli still believed in the basic importance of national character and emotion as key to the governance of the kingdom. Much of the explanation for his defeats and his successes is found in this passage -- one of the last he wrote:

The English people are the most enthusiastic people in the world; there are other populations which are more excitable, but there is no nation, when it feels, where the sentiment is so profound and irresistible. (100)

#### IV

In a textbook intended for sixth form students in England, B.H. Abbott nicely summarizes Disraeli's prescription for the re-kindling of the emotion necessary for the re-creation of national character and community. That prescription called for attention to be paid to institutions neglected for too long. Abbott writes:

Through 'Tory democracy' Disraeli hoped that...ancient institutions would not be discarded but would be revitalised by "the invigorating energies of an educated and enfranchised people." Disraeli explained precisely what these institutions were: "I mean the splendour of the Crown, the lustre of the Peerage, the privileges of the Commons, the rights of the poor."...Despite his failure in the 1880 election the later prestige of the Conservative Party indicates that Disraeli was successful in his attempt to interpret original Tory principles within the setting of the modern world. (101)

All of his novels, to some extent, deal with these institutions and the attention which a National Party should pay to them.

As with the other political elements of Disraelianism, Vivian Grey is rather thin in the area of expressions of the author's thoughts on the value of the institutions that formed the keystones of his political philosophy. Little mention is made of the Church or the Monarchy, but comments and implications about the Commons and Lords, the Aristocracy and the People definitely echo attitudes expressed more forcefully in later novels. Disraeli's description of Mr. Cleveland's career in politics shows that, while it may be temporarily controlled by a party, or parties, that pervert its real purpose, the House of Commons was an effective and honourable arena for men of integrity and talent (102). Disraeli's own forty-four years as an M.P. did nothing to dampen this belief -- a belief here expressed more than ten years before he was first elected. Even on his deathbed he insisted on correcting his speeches for Hansard (103).

The Marquess of Carabas is a caricature of a foolish peer. So, on a smaller scale, are the other nobles who are taken in by Vivian's plan to create a new party. The story of the elevation of such an unworthy person and the promotion within the peerage as the result of blatant jobbery (104) are abuses of the institution of the Aristocracy that Disraeli spent a great deal of time and energy to eradicate. Carabas' particular qualities are his inflated sense of pride and no sense of duty, his sense of being owed deference and luxury with no accompanying sense of responsibility. In this book Disraeli offers neither remedies for this common situation, nor positive examples of what the Aristocracy could and should be -- showing that he had not yet fully realized the real and vital role it played in the deterioration of the country, and would be called upon to play in the regeneration of English life.

Chapter XI, "Vivian as the Good Samaritan" is a curious chapter that seems to portray Vivian quite out of character. After building Vivian up as a self-obsessed opportunist, Disraeli puts him in a situation where an act of kindness is not only much needed by the recipient, but which Vivian takes no pains to profit by (105). In showing his hero as something other than a caniving, unscrupulous political adventurer, the author established the base for his long history of concern for the peasants and lower working classes.

In The Voyage of Captain Popanilla, 'Captain' Popanilla's boat comes to rest on the shores of the powerful land of Vraibleusia, a country difficult for Popanilla to comprehend, being full of contradictions and bizarre customs and traditions. The strange customs of the Vraibleusians provide Disraeli with ample opportunity to satirize English politics and government. Popanilla's first great confusion arises when he is confronted with the concept of national debt:

'Debt! I thought you were the richest nation in the world?'

'Tis true; nevertheless, if there were a golden pyramid with a base as big as the whole earth and an apex touching the heavens, it would not supply us with sufficient metal to satisfy our creditors.'

'But, my dear sir', exclaimed the perplexed Popanilla, 'if this really be true, how can you be said to be the richest nation in the world.'

'It is very simple. The annual interest upon our debt exceeds the whole wealth of the rest of the world; therefore we must be the richest nation in the world.'  
(106)

In a chapter entitled "The Wonderful Statue" Disraeli explains that Vraibleusia is governed by a magical statue which has been 'modified' over the years to reflect the changes that have taken place in Vraibleusia itself. This statue symbolizes the English Monarchy and Constitution, and the extent to which it has been altered over history:

The figure bore the appearance of great antiquity, but had evidently been often repaired and renovated since its first formation. The workmanship was clearly of different eras, and the reparations, either ignorance or intention, had often been affect with little deference to the original design. Part of the shoulders had been supplied by the other, though less precious metal, and the Roman and imperial ornaments had unaccountably been succeeded by the less classic, though more picturesque, decorations of Gothic armour. On the other hand, a great portion of the chivalric and precious material of the body had been removed, and replaced by a style and substance resembling those of the lower limbs. In its right hand the Statue brandished a naked sword, and with its left leant upon a huge, though extremely rich and elaborately carved, crosier. It trampled upon a shivered lance and a broken chain. (107)

Clearly, the Whigs are the ones to blame for equivalent changes that have debilitated the English Monarchy. Whig domination of Parliament and the Cabinet for so long had allowed them to alter the constitution to their own purposes. Their Vraibleusian counterparts are the twelve 'Managers' that tend to the Statue.

The care of the wonderful Statue was entrusted to twelve 'Managers', whose duty it was to wind up and regulate its complicated machinery, and who answered for its good management by their heads. It was their business to consult the oracle upon all occasions, and by its decisions to administer and regulate all the affairs of the State. They alone were permitted to hear its voice; for the Statue never spoke in public save on rare occasions, and its sentences were then so extremely commonplace that, had it not been for the deep wisdom of its general conduct, the Vraibleusians would have been almost tempted to believe that they really might exist without the services of the capital member. The twelve Managers

surrounded the Statue at a respectful distance; their posts were the most distinguished in the State; and indeed the duties attached to them were so numerous, so difficult, and so responsible, that it required no ordinary abilities to fulfill, and demanded no ordinary courage to aspire to them. (108)

Two of the major 'institutions' that find their way into the discussion in The Young Duke are the monarchy and, more extensively, the aristocracy. A clear example of what Disraeli sees as some of the real value of the monarchy is seen in Chapter XII: "Royal Favour". The scene is early in the story of the young Duke of St. James, but he has already begun his career of debauchery. When part of his incredible social schedule includes a dinner party with the King, we get a brief but clear picture of what a positive effect a monarch may have upon his subjects, even one seemingly without such finer feelings:

His Majesty summoned a dinner party, a rare but magnificent event, and the chief of the house of Hauteville appeared among the chosen vassals. This visit did the young Duke good; and a few more might have permanently cured the conceit which the present one momentarily calmed. His Grace saw the plate, and was filled with envy; his Grace listened to his Majesty, and was filled with admiration. O, father of thy people! if thou wouldst but look a little oftener on thy younger sons, their morals and their manners might be alike improved. (109)

His Majesty, in the course of the evening, with his usual good-nature, signalled out for his notice the youngest, and not the least distinguished, of his guests. He complimented the young Duke on the accession the ornaments of his court, and said, with a smile, that he had heard of conquests in foreign ones...His Majesty asked some questions about an Emperor or an Archduchess, and his Grace answered to the purpose, but short, and not too pointed. He listened rather than spoke, and smiled more assents than he uttered...the Duke knew when to withdraw; and he withdrew with

renewed loyalty. (110)

This paternal/maternal quality, along with the loyalty inspired in the subject were attributes Disraeli saw as key to the value of having a monarchy.

As well, throughout his political career Disraeli felt a need to simultaneously defend and reform the aristocracy. He saw the upper class as not only a key element in the fabric of the English society and constitution, but also as something more crucial - they were the glue, the vanguard, the natural leaders. He touched on this in his political writings, but the depth of his conviction comes through most clearly in the examples provided in the fictional portraits. The sense of latent ability and power in the aristocracy is evident in an early passage in The Young Duke that describes the lassitude of the House of Lords:

While all this was going on, some made a note, some made a bet, some consulted a book, some their ease, some yawned, a few slept; yet, on the whole, there was an air about the assembly which can be witnessed in no other in Europe. Even the most indifferent looked as if he would come forward if the occasion should demand him, and the most imbecile as if he could serve his country if it required him. When a man raises his eyes from his bench and sees his ancestor in the tapestry, he begins to understand the pride of blood. (111)

Unfortunately for England, it is all too rare that most members of the aristocracy make an effort to respond to their country's needs, or even those of their county or estate. Nearly the whole of the The Young Duke is illustrative of how so many nobles live a wasted life -- failing to fulfill the potential inherent in their concentrated wealth and exalted position to improve and maintain the best in society. The simple realization of responsibility and duty is not enough, often the greatest difficulty is in overcoming the inertia of long-term inactivity. Even after only a year of living as a wastrel, St. James confronts this problem:

Why should I live? For virtue, and for duty; to compensate for all my folly, and to achieve some slight good end with my abused and unparalleled means. Ay! it is all vastly rational, and vastly sublime, but it is too late. I feel the exertion above me. I am a lost man. (112)

As this shows, Disraeli knew that just the knowledge of one's duties could not rouse the richness of personal qualities aristocrats naturally possessed. It took the extra step of awakening their emotions to complete the process of resurrecting a valuable part of what had made England such a great nation. The Duke of St. James experiences this gradual inner growth when he spends some time accompanying May Dacre on her rounds of obligatory visits to the tenants on her father's vast estates. Her easy manner with the people, and their obvious reliance on their landlord's attentions, begin to have an affect upon St. James:

So he continued her companion, each day rising with purer feelings and a more benevolent heart; each day more convinced of the falseness of his past experience, and of the possibility of happiness to a well-regulated mind; each day more conscious that duty is nothing more than self-knowledge, and the performance of it consequently the development of feelings which are the only true source of self-gratification. He mourned over the opportunities which he had forfeited of conducing to the happiness of others and himself. (113)

This new awareness of the joy and potential for goodness in the mere performance of his basic duties as a noble finds its first expression in an anonymous act of kindness for one of his companions in the coach heading to London. Her son had died leaving her with little means of support and a broken heart, and he muses,

'I have no mother; I have no one to weep for me...and yet, if I had been in this youth's station, my career probably would be as fatal. Let me assist her. Alas! how I have misused my power, when, even to do this slight deed, I am obliged to hesitate and consider whether it is practicable. (114)

The consciousness of a noble action is itself ennobling. His spirit expanded with the exciting effects which his conduct had produced; and he felt consolation under all his misery from the conviction that he had no claims to be remembered, and perhaps regarded, when he was no longer among them. (115)

This feeling grows rapidly once it is finally triggered, and by the end of the book the young Duke has reversed his image from that of a typical example of what is seriously wrong with the aristocracy to a living paragon of just what the vast potential of that class can accomplish. Merely by living his life as a noble was meant to, St. James makes the best case for the value of the aristocracy:

His 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 existence of an aristocracy. (116)

In the "Young England" trilogy, and its first installment - Coningsby, Disraeli exhibits a stronger, more sustained preoccupation with the key institutions of English society. The Church, the Aristocracy and, to a lesser extent, the Monarchy. In his preface to the book, Disraeli clearly delineates his conception of the true nature of the Church's function in England's society and constitution. The Church is the potent force -- a focal point -- in the re-generation of the national 'soul':

In considering the Tory scheme, the author recognised in the Church the most powerful agent in the previous development of the England, and the most efficient means of that renovation of the national spirit at which he aimed. The Church is a sacred corporation for the promulgation and maintenance in Europe of certain Asian principles, which, although local in their birth, are of divine origin, and of universal and eternal application. (117)

The Church, as it existed in the times before Whig ascendancy, is the institution most able to act as the balance between the powerful aristocracy and the powerless peasants and serfs. When Henry VIII broke with Rome, dissolved the monasteries, and used the spoils to create his new aristocracy, he began a process that left the poor masses without assistance or sanctuary and gave birth to an uncaring, distorted class of peers. In a lengthy chapter of authorial comment (118), Disraeli discusses what England has lost and gained as a result of the altered condition of the English Church -- a condition which has favoured no one but the hated Whigs. They were the class created by the change and were therefore the only ones able to achieve advantage from it. As Disraeli notes,

It is in the plunder of the Church that we must seek for the primary cause of our political exclusion, and our commercial restraint. That unhallowed booty created a factitious aristocracy, ever fearful that they might be called upon to regorge their sacrilegious spoils. To prevent this they took refuge in political religionism, and paltering with the disturbed consciences, or the pious fantasies, of a portion of the people, they organised them into religious sects. These became the unconscious Praetorians of their ill-gotten domains. At the head of these religionists, they have continued ever since to govern, or powerfully to influence, this country. They have in that time pulled down thrones and churches, changed dynasties, abrogated and remodelled parliaments; they have disfranchised Scotland and confiscated Ireland. One may admire that vigour and consistency of the Whig party, and recognise in their career that unity of purpose that can only spring from a great principle; but the Whigs introduced sectarian religion, sectarian religion led to political exclusion, and political exclusion was soon accompanied by commercial restraint. (119)

It is through the hero's discussions with Millbank later in the book that Disraeli provides an answer to the problems created by the demise of the paternal and integrated Church. Part of the solution is also related to what he saw as the greatest void in political

leadership: a ruling group who have risen to positions of power and influence on factors other than merit.

Once the Church in this country was universal in principle and practice; when wedded to the State, it continued at least universal in principle, if not in practice. What is it now? All ties between the State and the Church are abolished, except those which tend to its danger and degradation. (120)

The only consequence of the present union of Church and State are, that, on the side of the State, there is perpetual interference in ecclesiastical government, and on the side of the Church a sedulous avoidance of all those principles on which alone Church government can be established, and by the influence of which alone can the Church of England again become universal....The Church is the medium by which the despised and degraded classes assert the native equality of man, and vindicate the rights and powers of intellect....It would do as great things now, if it were divorced from the degrading and tyrannical connection that enchains it. You would have other sons of peasants Bishops of England, instead of men appointed to that sacred office solely because they were the needy scions of a factitious aristocracy; men of gross ignorance, profligate habits, and grinding exortation, who have disgraced the episcopal throne, and profaned the altar. (121)

...by the Church alone that I see any chance of regenerating the national character. The parochial system, though shaken by the fatal poor law, is still the most ancient comprehensive, and the most popular institution of the country; the younger priests are, in general, men whose souls are awake to the high mission which they have to fulfil, and which their predecessors so neglected; there is, I think a rising feeling in the community, that parliamentary intercourse in matters ecclesiastical has not tended either to the spiritual or the material elevation of the humbler orders. (122)

In Coningsby, Disraeli also uses the character of Mr. Millbank to express his disapproval of the origins and current actions of the aristocracy. As an industrialist, and

one of the newly risen wealthy merchant class whose financial importance has not been reflected in political power, he claims not to be opposed to a system of aristocracy: "No, I am not. I am for an aristocracy; but a real one, a natural one." (123) The type of profligate, frivolous and arrogant aristocracy who wield power and influence in England do not deserve their exalted position. According to Mr. Millbank, and the author,

We owe the English peerage to three sources: the spoilation of the Church; the open and flagrant sale of its honours by the elder Stuarts; and the borough-mongering of our own times. Those are three main sources of the existing peerage of England, and in my opinion disgraceful ones. (124)

When Coningsby asks where Millbank expects to find such a natural aristocracy, the latter replies,

Among those men whom a nation recognises as the most eminent for virtue, talents, and property, and, if you please, birth and standing in the land. They guide opinion; and, therefore, they govern. I am no leveller; I look upon an artificial equality as equally pernicious with a factitious aristocracy; both depressing the energies, and checking the enterprise of a nation. (125)

Disraeli obviously hoped that his message would carry more weight by having it spoken by someone demonstrably politically and socially different from himself. In no way, however, can the author or narrator be accused of democratic inclinations. The closing sentence makes it clear that, while both are clearly displeased with the present composition of the upper echelon of society, there can be no doubt that each firmly believes that some such gradations should exist. Where they depart from the existing order is in the matter of just who should be aristocrats and how they should be chosen.

Not all aristocrats who owe their positions to factors other than pure merit warrant the

criticism that Disraeli sprinkles throughout his books. In an effort to acknowledge this, he occasionally draws examples of the many worthy aristocrats who were born to their position, but have earned respect by their merit and attention to the duties inherent in inherited honours. For instance,

The guests at Lord Monmouth's to-day were chiefly Carlists, individuals bearing illustrious names, that animate the page of history, and are indissolubly bound up with the glorious annals of their great country. They are the phantoms of a past, but real aristocracy; an aristocracy that was founded on an intelligible principle; which claimed great privileges for great purposes; whose hereditary duties were such, that their possessors were perpetually in the eye of the nation, and who maintained, and, in a certain point of view justified, their pre-eminence by constant illustration. (126)

Disraeli takes much the same approach in Coningsby to outlining his views on the state of the Monarchy. While maintaining an indefatigable pro-monarchist position, he is vocal in his conviction that the crown is not what it must be to be effective; but it can become so -- even in an ever-increasingly populist political atmosphere.

It is not impossible that the political movements of our time, which seem on the surface to have a tendency to democracy, may have in reality a monarchical bias. (127)

Sidonia, who takes on the responsibility of educating Coningsby and developing his political/constitutional sensibilities, echoes Disraeli's own belief that, as a necessary parallel to a natural aristocracy, the nation will naturally support a properly constituted monarchy:

The tendency of advanced civilization is in truth to pure monarchy. Monarchy is indeed a government which requires a high degree of civilization for its full development. It needs the support of free laws and

manners, and of a widely-diffused intelligence. Political compromises are not to be tolerated except at periods of rude transition. An educated nation recoils from the imperfect vicariate of what is called a representative government. Your House of Commons, that has absorbed all other powers in the State, will in all probability fall more rapidly than it rose. Public opinion has a more direct, a more comprehensive, a more efficient organ for its utterance, than a body of men sectionally chosen. The printing-press is a political element unknown to classic or feudal times. It absorbs in a great degree the duties of the sovereign, the priest, the parliament; it controls, it educates, it discusses. That public opinion, when it acts, would appear in the form of one who has no class interest. In an enlightened age the monarch on the throne, free from the vulgar prejudices and the corrupt interests of the subject, becomes again divine. (128)

Mr. Millbank also comments on the value of the monarchy as a political and social institution. These thoughts are not much different from those of Sidonia, but, once again, Disraeli sees advantage in having them expressed by someone respectable but with reason to dislike and distrust the current system. Millbank says,

...I would accustom the public mind to the contemplation of an existing though torpid power in the constitution, capable of removing our social grievances, were we to transfer to it those prerogatives which the Parliament has gradually usurped, and used in a manner which has produced the present material and moral disorganisation. The House of Commons is the house of a few; the Sovereign is the sovereign of all. The proper leader of the people is the individual who sits upon the throne. (129)

In a word, true wisdom lies in the policy that would effect its ends by the influence of opinion, and yet by the means of existing forms. Nevertheless, if we are forced to revolutions, let us propose to our consideration the idea of a free monarchy, established on fundamental laws, itself the apex of a vast pile of municipal and local government, ruling an educated people, represented by a free and intellectual press. Before such royal authority, supported by such a national opinion, the sectional anomalies of our country would disappear. Under such

a system, where qualification would not be Parliamentary, but personal, even statesmen would be educated; we should have no more diplomatists who could not speak French, no more bishops ignorant of theology, no more generals-in-chief who never saw a field. (130)

These issues continue to be discussed with undiminished strength in Sybil. Chapter I, "The Eve of the Derby", is the best first chapter of all Disraeli's novels. While powerfully illustrative of aristocratic indolence and its sensual satiety, it does not depend on authorial intrusion or didactic character's oratory. Instead, the spare prose evokes an appropriately laconic atmosphere, while still manages to providing the detail necessary to paint a picture of opulence that is so taken for granted by its occupants. For example,

The seats on each side of the table were occupied by persons consuming, with a heedless air, delicacies for which they had no appetite; while the conversation in general consisted of flying phrases referring to the impending event of the great day that had already dawned. (131)

As the following conversation shows, those who have so much in life are bored, spoiled fools who, never having had to exert themselves in pursuit of their pleasures, are no longer able to find any pastimes that truly interest them.

'I never go any where,' replied the melancholy Cupid, 'everything bores me so.'

'Well, will you go to Epsom with us tomorrow, Alfred?' said Lord Fitz-Heron. 'I take Berners and Charles Egremont, and with you our party will be perfect.'

'I feel so cursed *blasé* !' exclaimed the boy in a tone of elegant anguish.

'It will give you a fillip, Alfred,' said Mr. Berners; 'do you all the good in the world.'

'Nothing can do me good,' said Alfred, throwing away his almost untasted peach; 'I should be quite content if anything could do me harm. Waiter, bring me a tumbler of Badminton.'

'And bring me one too,' sighed out Lord Eugene de Vere, who was a year older than Alfred Mountchesney, his companion and brother in listlessness. Both had exhausted life in their teens, and all that remained for them was to mourn, amid the ruins of their reminiscences, over the extinction of excitement. (132)

Such indulgence by the aristocracy, without attention to duty, leads to an inversion of values. As Mountchesney says, "I rather like bad wine...one gets so bored with good wine." (133).

In Chapter III, "The House of Egremont", Disraeli explores more of his feelings on the subject of 'recently' created peers and the common absence of responsibility that should accompany their lofty position. The Egremonts profited handsomely from the Henrician redistribution of monastic property, and had advanced rapidly through the aristocratic ranks, even though they "never had done anything for the nation or for their honours" (134). "What they aimed at was promotion in their order; and promotion to the highest class" (135). The incumbent Earl of Marney had no ambition except the desire to have his brow "circled with the strawberry leaf" symbolic of dukes. As well,

Their family furnished none of those artful orators whose bewildering phrase had fascinated the public intelligence; none of those toilsome patricians whose assiduity in affairs had convinced their unprivileged fellow-subjects that government was a science, and administration an art, which demanded the devotion of a peculiar class in the state for their fulfilment and pursuit. The Egremonts had never said anything that was remembered, or done anything that could be recalled.(136)

The Lords of Marney, as the Egremonts were known, had the genesis of their elevation from a humble station in Henry VIII's time as reward for their political utility. Even more odious to Disraeli was the recent practice by the *nouveau-riche* of buying their way into the aristocracy. Marney's neighbour, Lord Fitz-Warene is such a peer whose rise is detailed in Chapter XIII, "Transformation of a Waiter To A Nabob". Although many members of the aristocracy claim the privileges that accompany their position in an ancient order, their attitudes and behaviour reveal that their aristocratic 'roots' are far from antiquity. Fitz-Warene began as John Warren, a waiter in a St. James club. He managed to ingratiate himself with a club-member, became his private secretary in India, and eventually went into business for himself. He returned to England a wealthy man, purchased a vast estate and, with it, a parliamentary borough which he chose to occupy himself. He had no political allegiance and rose in preferment of several governments by assiduous flattery of ministers of whatever group happened to comprise the administration. He was created "Sir" John Warren, then quickly an Irish barony was found for him -- as well as a fictitious lineage appropriate to his new position. Disraeli despised the cynicism that resulted from this thin deception, as he notes:

The new Baron figured in his patent as Lord Fitz-Warene, his Norman origin and descent from the old barons of this name having been discovered at Herald's College...but the public gets accustomed to everything and has an easy habit of faith...There was an ill-natured story set afloat that Sir John owed this promotion to having lent money to the minister...(137)

The first baron's son was equally opportunistic, and patient. He shared his father's desire to rise as far as possible above their common origins and made it his goal to transmute the family to the ranks of English Earls. The era of Pitt created a series of governments strong

enough to survive without Fitz-Warene, but eventually the second baron's waiting was rewarded:

the successors of Mr. Pitt managed to govern the country for twenty years, and were generally very strong, in such an interval of time, however good their management or great their luck, there were inevitably occasions when they found themselves in difficulties, when it was necessary to conciliate the lukewarm or to reward the devoted. Lord Fitz-Warene well understood how to avail himself of these occasions: it was astonishing how conscientious and scrupulous he became during Walcheren expeditions, of the government was a step in the ladder to the great borough-monger...they wanted his six votes for Canning...he made his terms; and one of the means by which we got a man of genius for a minister was elevating Lord Fitz-Warene in the peerage, by the style and title of Earl de Mowbray of Mowbray Castle. (138)

Throughout Sybil Disraeli makes a point of showing the current aristocrats as undeserving fools while other segments of the population exhibited more of the qualities of genuine aristocracy than their supposed 'betters'. The Radical Stephen Morley's reaction to the social system of the dirty, chaotic artisan town of Wodgate included the observation that, despite its physical degradation, the guild leaders of the community were

a real aristocracy; it is privileged, but it does something for its privileges. It is distinguished from the main body not merely by name. It is the most knowing class at Wodgate; it possesses indeed in its way complete knowledge; and it imparts in its manner a certain quantity of it to those whom it guides. Thus it is an aristocracy that leads, and therefore a fact. (139)

Beyond simply leading their dependents, aristocrats also have a duty to care for the people's various physical and spiritual needs. As the nature of the existing peerage has changed and became ignorant of and unresponsive to these needs, and as the nature of the

economy changed and brought great wealth to a new group of industrial magnates, Disraeli saw the aristocrats' responsibilities often being assumed by the new powerful middle class -- becoming the *de facto* if not the *de jure* aristocracy. The best example of this phenomenon is the factory owner Mr. Trafford, whose treatment of his employees reflects Disraeli's image of how a feudal landlord took care of his peasants:

When the work people of Mr. Trafford left his factory they were not forgotten. Deeply he pondered on the influence of the employer on the health and content of his workpeople. He knew well that the domestic virtues are dependent on the existence of a home, and one of his first efforts had been to build a village where every family might be well lodged...In every street there was a well: behind the factory were public baths; the schools were under the direction of the perpetual curate of the church, which Mr. Trafford, though a Roman Catholic, had raised and endowed. (140)

In large part, Sybil is about the education of Charles Egremont; it mirrors Disraeli's desire to educate the entire recalcitrant class of English aristocrats. His teacher on the subject of the value of the Church to society, especially the Church as it existed before Henry VIII, was Walter Gerard -- and the lessons began as soon as the two meet in the ruins of an abbey on the Marney/Egremont estate.

All agree that the monastics were easy landlords; their rents were low; they granted leases in those days. Their tenants, too, might renew their term before their tenure ran out: so they were men of spirit and property. There were yeomen then, sir: the country was not divided into two classes, masters and slaves; there was some resting-place between luxury and misery. Comfort was an English habit then, not merely an English word...The monastics could possess no private property; they could save no money; they could bequeath nothing. They lived, received, and expended in common. The monastery, too, was a proprietor that never died and never wasted. The farmer had a deathless landlord then;

not a harsh guardian, or a grinding mortgagee, or a dilatory master in chancery: all was certain; the manor had not to dread a change of lords, or the oaks to tremble at the axe of the squandering heir. (141)

The Church was structured and focused in such a way as to create much good in the land. It offered assistance, refuge and responsible management that the people could depend upon -- it instilled a sense of community that was lacking at the time of writing. Disraeli points out:

The monks were never non-resident. They expended their revenue among those whose labour had produced it. These holy men, too, built and planted, as they did everything else, for posterity: their churches were cathedrals; their schools colleges; their halls and libraries the muniment room of kingdoms; their woods and waters, their farms and gardens, were laid out and disposed on a scale and in a spirit that are now extinct; they made the country beautiful, and the people proud of their country. (142)

As for community...with the monasteries expired the only type that we ever had in England of such an intercourse. There is no community in England; there is aggregation, but aggregation under circumstances which make it rather a dissociating than a uniting principle. (143)

Egremont's Roman Catholic friend Mr. St. Lys., whose actions and words convince the reader that he is a genuine aristocrat, sees the catalyst of England's social problems in the demise of the old Church and the inability of its successor to fill the void:

The Church deserted the people; and from that moment the Church has been in danger, and the people degraded. Formerly religion undertook to satisfy the noble wants of human nature, and by its festivals relieved the painful weariness of toil. The day of rest was consecrated, if not always to elevated thoughts, at least to sweet and noble sentiments. The Church convened to its solemnities, under its splendid and almost celestial raised, the whole Christian population; for there, in the presence of God, all were brethren. It shared equally

among all its prayer, its incense, and its music, its sacred instructions, and the highest enjoyments that the arts could afford.....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 very existence of all art, which is essentially spiritual. (144)

Though but a shell of its former self, both literally and figuratively, the Church, as it was, still lives in a small but very real way through its ceremonies and its buildings. But, these edifices are largely closed off from public access, and renovated so as to disguise their original purpose and design. In discussing the state of spiritual life outside a shut-up Westminster Abbey, Egremont says,

It is much to be deplored that our sacred buildings are generally closed, except at the stated periods of public resort. It is still more to be regretted that, when with difficulty entered, there is so much in their arrangements to offend the taste and outrage the feelings. In the tumult of life, a few minutes occasionally passed in the solemn shadow of some lofty and ancient aisle, exercise very often a salutary influence: they purify the heart and elevate the mind; dispel many haunting fancies, and prevent many an act which otherwise might be repented. The church would in this light still afford us a sanctuary; not against the power of the law but against the violence of our own will; not against the passions of man but against our own. (145)

A great deal of the Church's inability to minister to the people's needs can be also be traced to its deviation from the principles of its 'oriental' progenitors and its tendency to follow the example of the secular aristocracy by elevating third-raters to bishoprics. The condition of the Church that has resulted makes it impossible for the hero of Tancred to find the direction and spiritual solace he requires at a crisis point in his life. According to Disraeli,

The Church of England, mainly from its deficiency of oriental knowledge, and from a misconception of the priestly character which has been the consequence of that want, has fallen of late years into great straits; nor has there ever been a season when it has more needed for its guides men possessing the higher qualities both of intellect and disposition. (146)

These men, notwithstanding their elevation, with one exception, subsided into their native insignificance; and during our agitated age, when the principles of all institutions, sacred and secular, have been called in question; when, alike in the senate and the market-place, both the doctrine and the discipline of the Church have been impugned, its power assailed, its authority denied, the amount of its revenues investigated, their disposition criticised, and both attacked; not a voice has been raised by these mitred nullities, either to warn or to vindicate; not a phrase has escaped their lips or their pens, that ever influenced public opinion, touched the heart of nations, or guided the conscience of a perplexed people. The they were ever heard of it was that they had been plotted in a riot. (147)

Up to this point in his life (1847), Disraeli maintained very clear, consistent views on the necessity of having a thriving, vigorous Church -- it was a key factor in reinvigorating national spirit.

In 1870, while writing an introduction to a collection of his works that included his new novel Lothair, Disraeli shows that sentiments expressed more than twenty years before are still valid for him late in his life:

In recognising the Church as a powerful agent in the previous development of England, and possibly the most efficient means of that renovation of the national spirit which was desired, it seemed to me that the time had arrived when it became my duty to ascent 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. Some of the great truths of ethnology were necessarily involved in such discussions. Familiar as we all are now with such

themes, the house of Israel being now freed from the barbarism of mediaeval misconception, and judged, like all other races, by their contributions to the existing sum of human welfare, and the general influence of race on human action being universally recognised as the key of history, the difficulty and hazard of touching for the first time on such topics cannot now be easily appreciated. But public opinion recognised both the truth and sincerity of these views, and, with its sanction, in Tancred: or, the New Crusade, the third portion of the Trilogy, I completed their development. (148)

In a conversation between Lothair and Cardinal Grandison we hear the ring of sincerity that continued to suffuse Disraeli's writing on religion and the Church:

...his Eminence put his arm easily and affectionately into that of Lothair's, 'it is a most happy thing for you that you live so much with a really religious family. It is a great boon for a young man, and a rare one.'  
'I feel it so,' said Lothair, his face kindling.

'Ah!' said the cardinal, 'when we remember that this country once consisted only of such families!' And then, with a sigh, and as if speaking to himself, 'and they made it so great and so beautiful!'

'It is still great and beautiful,' said Lothair, but rather in a tone of enquiry than decision.

'But the cause of its greatness and its beauty no longer exists. It became great and beautiful because it believed in God.'

'But faith is not extinct?' said Lothair.

'It exists in the Church,' replied the Cardinal with decision. 'All without that pale is practical atheism.'

'It seems to me that a sense of duty is natural to man,' said Lothair, 'and that there can be no satisfaction in life without attempting to fulfil it.'

'Noble words, my dear young friend; noble and true. And the highest duty of man, especially in this age, is to vindicate the principles of religion, without which the world must soon become a scene of universal desolation. (149)

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CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION - DISRAELIANISM IN PRACTICE (CONSISTENCY AND LEGACY)

I

Any discussion of Disraeli's political life will eventually come around to the issue of his philosophical 'flexibility'. It is a common charge that he held no firm views on political issues, and had no general set of principles to guide him -- except a drive for personal power and self-aggrandizement. Given this supposed dearth of standards, it is not surprising that his reputation was as a crass opportunist who inconsistently applied his few publicly avowed ideals.

This reputation is grossly misleading. The immense weight of evidence from his novels dispels any notion that Disraeli operated in a philosophical vacuum. His actions during his political career were governed by general adherence to a coherent, cogent, although decidedly idiosyncratic set of principles. In his article on Derby and Disraeli in a book on the Conservative Leadership since 1832, J.T. Ward accurately summarizes the usual attitude to Disraeli's political actions:

Recent historians have often been tempted by (and sometimes succumbed to) the ideas that Disraeli was merely an expert in expediency, the greatest Victorian exponent of political 'pragmatism'. (1)

He was, by no means, a saint amongst politicians; he certainly succumbed to the realities of compromise that are necessary in the life of a working, 'practical' politician. There are

some researchers, who have studied Disraeli enough to get beyond the surface impressions of inconsistency and opportunism, who will claim that Disraeli was actually a more constant and sincere adherent to his principles than were such reputed paragons as Gladstone or Bright.

Not that he was unprincipled and wholly opportunistic as alleged by his enemies or even by such fellow conservatives as Lord Salisbury, who once called him a 'mere political gamester'. There was, in fact, much more consistency in Disraeli's general outlook and even in his successive political measures than in those of his far more doctrinaire counterpart, William Gladstone. But he was a realist who carefully weighed the possibilities and, while in his novels he could yield to flights of fancy, in practical politics he sought the attainable. (2)

In his 1961 book, Beaconsfield and Bolingbroke, Richard Faber also takes great pains to point out, that even though charges of insincerity are somewhat understandable, he remained more true to his political ideals than did the other major political figures of his time (3).

Identifying a coherent political creed in the writings of Disraeli is one thing, but the issue of his constancy is quite another matter. As noted above, there are critics on both sides of the constancy argument; but it is very difficult to come to terms with, and some of the best works that deal with Disraelian thought exhibit some ambivalence about the final verdict. Stephen Graubard says at one point that Disraeli was remarkably sincere and self-disciplined in his approach to questions of principle (4), yet not too far along in the same book he does not seem very sure of that position:

In bowing to circumstance, which an unfriendly critic might call expediency, he revealed himself a superb political conjurer. He knew how to use 'principle' and

pretend to consistency when the situation required him to. (5)

Even Robert Blake cannot come to a conclusion about Disraeli's consistency:

Disraeli contrived to put up, as most politicians do, a façade of consistency, but, in fact, he lived from crisis to crisis, improving, guessing, responding to the mood of the moment. (6)

The truth is that Disraeli had principles when he led the party and believed in them sincerely (7)

The controversy was nothing new to Disraeli -- it dogged his career ever since he first offered himself for election and he often responded to it in writing. The clearest statements of his attitude to the issue appear in two pamphlets written in the 1830's. His first campaign as an *Independent Radical*, with his hybrid and confusing platform, evoked serious questioning of his true party allegiance. His response was to publish "What Is He?" (1833), in which he wrote:

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; and who were it not for the individual "inconsistency" which they brand, would often become the victims of their own incapacity and ignorance. A great mind that thinks and feels is never inconsistent, and never insincere. He who will not profess opinions without first examining them is ever considered insincere by the mass who adopt doctrines without thought, and retain them with the obstinacy which ignorance can alone inspire. He who will not act without a reason will always be considered inconsistent by the irrational. The insincere and the inconsistent are the stupid and the vile. Insincerity is the vice of a fool, and inconsistency the blunder of a knave. (8)

Three years later, after finally committing himself to the Tories, "The Crisis Examined"

was issued. In it Disraeli makes a further statement about his attitude to the question of political consistency:

a statesman is the creature of his age, the child of circumstance, the creation of his times. A statesman is essentially a practical character; and when he is called upon to take office, he is not to inquire what his opinions might or might not have been upon this or that subject - he is only to ascertain the needful and the beneficial, and the most feasible manner in which affairs are to be carried on. The fact is, the conduct and opinions of public men at different periods of their career must not be too curiously contrasted in a free and aspiring country. The people have their passions, and it is even the duty of public men occasionally to adopt sentiments with which they do not sympathize, because the people must have leaders. Then the opinions and the prejudices of the Crown must necessarily influence a rising statesman. I say nothing of the weight which great establishments and corporations, and the necessity of their support and patronage, must also possess with an ambitious politician. All this, however, produces ultimate benefit; all these influences tend to form that eminently practical character for which our countrymen are celebrated. I laugh, therefore, at the objections against a man that at a former period of his career he advocated a policy different to his present one: all I seek to ascertain is whether his present policy be just, necessary, expedient; whether, at the present moment, he is prepared to serve the country according to its present necessities? (9)

This basic position did not change throughout his life -- he was always consistent in his attitude to the controversy over his inconsistency and sincerity.

The most appropriate way to highlight his genuine and long-term idealism is to examine his actual political activity and compare it with the principles that formed the core of Disraelianism. Therefore, the following two sections will first provide a summary of Disraelianism, and then provide some examples of his important political actions and decisions.

## II

Disraelianism was not a branch of traditional Conservative thought; it was purely personal and peculiar to its namesake. That Disraeli ended up as a Tory has as much to do with the circumstances of the time and the state of the parties he had to choose from, as it did with any Conservative imperative deep within his soul. Nor can Disraelianism, as a political creed, be said to have had any lasting effect upon political philosophy in general, or the Tory party in particular. Obviously, much that he accomplished profoundly altered the course of the party's history, but the principles which guided him left behind no real philosophical legacy. In the introduction to Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform, Paul Smith offers an acute assessment of the place of Disraelianism in the development of the Conservative Party:

the most cursory examination shows that the history of the Conservative party in the seventies and after cannot be written in terms of its adaptation to 'Disraelian' ideas of popular appeal and social amelioration. As it emerged from the Disraelian era, the party bore only faintly the impress of Disraelian inspiration...The party of Salisbury and Balfour can hardly be described as Disraelian, still less the party of Bonar Law, Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain. (10)

However Disraelianism may be described, a part of the recognizably Tory continuum it most certainly was not. Disraeli's ideas were not systematic enough to form the basis of a truly lasting dogma, nor were they specific enough to satisfy the criteria of a complete political system. As Smith says later on in his book,

Given their essentially non-rational character, it is not

surprising that Disraeli's ideas should have been formulated with small regard for precision, coherence and literal truth. Original and bizarre, brilliant and meretricious, fanciful and vulgar, mingling the true coin with the false, like the man himself, their value lies in insights, not in conclusions. They are a personal extravaganza, not an intellectual system. Their author 'believed' in them as an artist in the artifact, not as a mathematician in the theorem. But they form a part of his public personality and of his political significance, and cannot be ignored. (11)

Just what were these intensely personal principles that motivated Disraeli's actions in political life? As has been shown, they can be discussed in two groupings: 1) those which arise out of his belief in his own innate superiority and his destiny to rule over other men--for their own good, and 2) those which pointed towards the need for a truly national party that was capable of restoring Britain to the kind of social equilibrium it enjoyed during the Middle Ages.

The foundation of that portion of Disraeli's political creed which focuses on himself is the life-long conviction that he was fated to be a great man, and the burning desire to fulfill that destiny. Every one of his novels has a major character tormented by the knowledge that he is capable of greatness, but may be prevented by circumstance from fully realizing such potential. From his earliest inkling that he possessed this capacity he went through a phase of indecision about which public pursuit would provide the most suitable outlet. The literary preoccupations of his father, and the resulting exposure to the literary *milieu* of Regency England--especially Byron, gave Disraeli a permanent desire to become a 'literary power'. But the compulsion to actively control affairs was stronger than the need to be the passive recipient of a reputation earned in pursuit of the muse, so

he devoted himself to a parliamentary career. Even after he made this decision, the main characters of his novels are made to go through a similar period when they are uncertain about how to choose between two relatively equal paths to greatness. Like their creator, all the fictional characters decide in favour of politics, but Disraeli himself never completely abandoned his artistic career and the books he produced while working his way up the 'Greasy Pole' had a profound impact upon his ego, his public image, and his always strained pocketbook. The manner in which he selected politics as the primary activity of his life, and the way he used fiction to work out his feelings, had profound implications for the rest of his political career. If the path to public office had been followed at the expense of abandoning all literary activity, an argument can be made that Disraeli's ultimate success might not have come about.

A substantial portion of his confidence in his own abilities did not come from a purely egocentric assurance of his superior talents, but rather from the notion that much of his claim to legitimacy as a political leader came from his racial background. Whether it began as a defence mechanism against being made to feel an outsider in English social and political life, or whether it was always with him, there can be no doubt that Disraeli did everything he could to turn the potential liability of his Jewish heritage into an advantage---and to express it in such a manner that would be understood by class-conscious England. In his books and speeches he never apologized for his Jewishness, choosing instead to emphasize its aristocratic nature and thus legitimize his credentials as an aspirant to positions traditionally reserved for those of high rank. In fact, as Daniel Schwarz notes, Disraeli even came to view his aristocratic claims as superior to those of his British contemporaries:

Disraeli took great pride in his Jewish heritage. He empathised with those who had a non-European heritage and resented the pretensions of those who thought that the Europeans were the fathers of civilization. This reflected, no doubt, his own frustration at being patronised by Anglo-Saxons whom he regarded as only a few centuries removed from barbarism in contrast to the Semitic peoples' substantial contribution to western civilization. (12)

R.B. McDowell, in British Conservatism 1832-1914, takes this idea even further. Not only did his race give Disraeli standing as an aristocrat, he also used it to answer charges that his Church of England status was only for convenience, and to justify his place in the forefront of the Tory party:

One of his earliest and deepest convictions was that race or national character (he treated them as meaning the same) was one of the great historic forces. The Saxon race protected by its insular position has stamped 'its diligent and methodic character' on the century. As for the Jews, not only had they made an immense contribution to European civilization through their influence on its laws, literature, philosophy and religion. (Tancred in the East spoke of Christianity as 'Judaism for the multitude') but as Disraeli delighted to point out they held the key posts in all the great capitals. Proud of his Jewish background and full of admiration for England, he fused his two loyalties by an ingenious equation. The English national genius was best expressed by the tory party and the Jews, monarchical and deeply religious, were Nature's tories. (13)

In a political atmosphere that placed a strong emphasis on moral behaviour and duty as the best motivation for pursuit of public office, it is unlikely that a career motivated purely by a drive for self-aggrandizement would have gone as far as Disraeli's did. The factor that is most important in tempering what may seem to be a mercenary attitude is that of heroism. Disraeli sincerely believed that political power, as the fulfillment of his

personal destiny, had a purpose beyond the satisfaction of his own ego. His talents had been bestowed on him so that he could be the 'larger-than-life' hero to pull England out of the social doldrums caused by rapid industrialization and oligarchic rule by the Whigs. To seek political office merely to gratify a personal desire was anathema to Disraeli -- his personality required something more, and that extra element was the conviction that greatness brought with it great responsibility. His responsibility was to save England.

Disraeli's political ideas are all connected to his dream of creating a party that was truly national. Such a party was to be the vehicle that could carry Disraeli to power and thus restore the proper political and social stasis to Britain. He never issued a detailed rationale, or platform, for this party - in fact, his hope for the party's formation grew out of dissatisfaction with the existing alternatives. The Tories of the 1830's took themselves out of the mainstream of national opinion by irrationally opposing most change on the grounds that change itself was inherently bad. Even worse was the state of the Whig party, for its flaws went beyond mere policy positions the very origins and *raison d'etre* of Whiggism were enough to damn them in Disraeli's eyes. McDowell succinctly summarizes Disraeli's attitude towards the Whigs:

The whigs were a selfish clique of ennobled families based on monastic spoils and united in the pursuit of power. Their aim explained their opposition to the crown in the past and their readiness to co-operate with the radicals even to the extent of the sacrificing great national institutions for temporary parliamentary support.  
(14)

With regard to the radicals, he sympathized with many of their proposals, but disagreed with the underlying philosophy that generated them. The growing influence of Bentham's Utilitarian creed often drew vehement reaction from Disraeli. He was always opposed to

'systems' of thought as the basis for political actions and governmental planning -- the best approach was to deal with circumstances as they arose using the best practical course of action available regardless of its *a priori* home. Using what has worked before was more sensible to Disraeli than doing what was dogmatically correct. As Richard Levine says,

Like Burke, Carlyle and Newman, Disraeli argues forcefully in favour of the efficacy of tradition - of that which has been tried, tested, and found successful. Abstractions in themselves are valueless unless they are abstracted from practice. (15)

His attitude is perfectly expressed by Richard Faber in Beaconsfield and Bolingbroke:

If one looks to the past of one's country for inspiration, rather than to abstract ideas, one is bound to see political events from a national and traditional point of view. The past achievements of the nation suggest a unity that current conflicts may obscure. The earliest and most stable elements in national life - such as the Crown and the Land - come to seem especially important. (16)

Although largely negative factors impelled Disraeli to wish for a new party, he did nevertheless express what such a party should favour. He supported the retention and restoration of the traditional powers and responsibilities of England's great institutions -- the established Church, Parliament, the Monarchy, and the Aristocracy. The nobility, as the natural leaders of the nation, was a particular concern for Disraeli. He was alarmed by the erosion of the authority of that leadership group by the decline in public deference to such natural authority, as well as by the reluctance of the aristocracy to acknowledge their responsibility in taking care of the people over whom they exercised authority. This notion of erosion of the respect for natural authority, and the concomitant decline in

authority's acceptance of its paternal obligations, is a foundation of Disraelianism.

What in fact was to be the basis of Disraelian Conservatism? The fundamental task of the Conservative Party, Disraeli had written earlier, was 'to uphold the aristocratic settlement of the country', and many writers have seen this aim as the one thread of consistency that runs through all Disraeli's ideas and policies from first to last. (17)

Empire and social reform were not really separate elements of Disraelianism, but rather were adjuncts to, and contemporary expressions of, his preoccupation with traditional institutions and practices. The Empire existed to enhance the prestige of the Crown, while social reform was not evidence of any liberal-democratic sympathies, but was an attempt to fulfill some of the ancient paternal obligations that the nobility had to the lower classes.

Thus we see that Disraeli's 'new' National Party was really an attempt to return to what he saw as the best in England's past as a means of curing the ills of the England of his own time. The upper classes were the nation's leaders by right, and the welfare of the lower classes was their responsibility by duty. When he recognized that he would get nowhere in trying to establish a totally new political organization, he chose the party least repugnant to him -- the Conservatives -- and proceeded to impose his ideas upon it. From the time of his formal alliance with the Tories he expressed his 'national party' ideas as a form of Toryism: not just *a form* of Toryism, but the genuine Toryism -- a Toryism that had been lost to England for years and which he could now restore to it. Certainly Disraeli's mission was not always to educate his adoptive party in the ways of catholic Toryism. He obviously wanted to couch his own odd notions in terms that would make them more palatable to the country squirearchy, and many of his attempts to force aspects of Disraelianism into the mold of Toryism orthodoxy are specious. But, by the time of his

death, he had succeeded in at least reconciling the Tory party to many of his ideas. Robert Blake, in his history of the modern Conservative party, is certain of this:

That then, is Disraeli's most lasting contribution to the success of his party. He made it the 'national party'. It cannot be said that this was an inevitable development... But Disraeli set a tradition from which the party has never deviated. Again and again in the years to come the Conservatives were to try to pin the label of spiritual treason upon first their Labour opponents, and if they did not always succeed, they managed to do it often enough to make this one of their most profitable moves in the party game...It is only a superficial paradox that Disraeli, the least English of Englishmen, should have been the person to ram the lesson home. (18)

### III

Looking at Disraeli's political career and trying to trace a thread of political orthodoxy through it is a fruitless task. Charges of inconsistency are valid if he is judged against the myth perpetuated by Conservative apologists who portray him as the father of 'social Tory democracy'. The mantle thus bestowed puts Disraeli in a dishonest position -- for he was definitely no democrat, was only a de facto Tory in the traditional sense, and was not concerned with social issues *per sé*. He certainly was not constant to the principles implied in the term 'social Tory democracy'. But he very rarely wavered from the ideals that comprised Disraelianism. The personal aspects are less easy to identify in isolation, but those which relate to his dream of a National Party are evident in nearly every political action he took.

Disraeli's belief in himself and his heroic destiny was the engine that kept driving him towards his goal of creating such a party. The very length of his career and term of leadership is evidence enough to suggest that he never significantly faltered in his self-confidence or belief in the power of his superiority. No matter what set-back the party encountered in the thirty-three years between majority governments, he did not feel compelled to resign or retire. Twice during the 1850's he did actually make offers to Derby to step aside as leader in the Commons if it would clear the way for the return of some of the Peelites. By this time Disraeli had worked very closely with Derby, and his confidence had grown with experience. Such offers were probably necessary to demonstrate a willingness to be reconciled with his former colleagues and make a majority a possibility for the Tories. But he must have depended on Derby's honourable character in not yielding to pressure to throw over someone who had been as loyal as Disraeli; or, he must have had an abiding confidence in his ability to compete with these former 'bright lights' of the party, for it is inconceivable that he could accept anyone as his superior or even equal in the House of Commons. Once reunion with the Peelites was no longer a possibility, there is no hint that Disraeli ever considered voluntarily relinquishing his position. From the frustration of seeming endless opposition and minority government in the 1850's, through the doldrums of the Palmerston era, to the surprising defeats in the 1868 and 1880 general elections, Disraeli never released his hold on the leadership he worked so hard to acquire. His position was never completely secure as he continually repelled assaults from within the party, but he felt his superiority to be so overwhelming it was unthinkable that any other person should lead as long as he was able and as long as there were goals not yet achieved. Even in 1880, when he again found himself in opposition:-- at age 76 -- he continued to lead the Tories from the front bench of the Lords

and from his bed.

When he finally had the opportunity to exercise real power, his actions and reactions in key situations and to key issues were often clear reflections of other aspects of the 'personal elements' of Disraelianism that had been developed forty years before. His preoccupation with heroism found its greatest expression in the 1878 Congress of Berlin. The exhilaration he could only imagine in 1832, when he had Contarini Fleming say "I felt the triumph of success. I felt that I had done a great action" (19), became reality in 1878. By his actions at this meeting he secured the British Empire from Russian advances, and secured a reputation as an international statesman (20) -- a status he had long coveted. He received the admiration of the rulers of Europe -- the most memorable of which was Bismark's statement that "Der alte Jude, das ist der Mann" (The old Jew, that is the Man). But perhaps the most rewarding result for Disraeli was the reception he received back in England. The success of the terms of the final treaty, and the reported manner in which Disraeli out-maneuvered his continental counterparts made him a popular hero. Returning home,

Disraeli was received as a conquering hero. Arriving at Charing Cross leaning on the arm of Lord Salisbury and looking pale and worn but in good spirits, he was greeted by red carpets, cheering crowds and 'thrilling ladies' (22)

He was conscientious in acknowledging the work done by Salisbury and Lord Odo Russell, but the rain of praise fell largely upon Lord Beaconsfield (as he had been since his elevation to the Lords in 1876). Gertrude Himmelfarb summarizes his performance this way:

By being bold and determined, threatening to break up

the Congress and even declare war, he succeeded in depriving Russia of the crucial gains she had achieved after her victory over Turkey and in bringing about a settlement of the crisis that was more to the liking of the European powers than of either Turkey or Russia. He returned home from Berlin a conquering hero. (23)

Blake is clear about the success of, and responsibility for the outcome of the Congress:

Disraeli did not want war. He wished to preserve as much of Turkey as he could, stop the Russians entering Constantinople, break up the *Dreikaiserbund*, if possible without war, though he did not flinch at war if there was no alternative. He succeeded in his object, despite the divisions of the Cabinet, despite the opposition of Derby, who was not only Foreign Secretary but one of the most powerful figures in the Conservative party, despite the deep divisions in the country, despite Gladstone and despite his own bad health...judged by the criteria of tactical skill and achievement of objectives, Disraeli's foreign policy was an undoubted success. As for the Berlin settlement, of course it was not perfect. No treaty ever is. But it was followed by almost as long a period of peace between the European great powers as the interval separating the Crimean War from the Congress of Vienna. (24)

...on the whole one can say of British policy over the Eastern question that it was more fully the personal responsibility of the Prime Minister than any of the other policies associated with his régime. (25)

Disraeli's ideas on race in general, and the superiority of the semitic races in particular, also had a discernible effect upon his policies. The most notable instance was his sympathy with the Turks in the Eastern Question. As the passage of Trevelyan's quoted in Chapter 5 (26) makes clear, his concept of race was that race was a stronger force than nationalism -- after all, the Jews had survived very well as a race without having the need for political embodiment as a nation. This stance was a vulnerable blind spot for Disraeli and provides a good example of how the principles of Disraelianism

interfered with his usually impeccable practical political judgement. It was not exposed as a serious weakness until the matter of the Bulgarian Atrocities in 1876. In May of that year the Turkish response to insurrection by occupied Bulgarians was to massacre thousands of innocent peasants. The first reports to reach the British public came through the Daily News on 23rd June 1876. They were so sensational and graphic in their detail that Disraeli was inclined to view them as exaggerated and unreliable -- coming as they did from an opposition newspaper and so long after the original incident. He also tended to give the benefit of the doubt to the Turks, with whom his natural sympathies lay. Bradford suggests that,

His attitudes had been fixed by the experience of his Eastern Tour...His experiences in the East had coloured his attitude towards the Turks, a people whom he liked and admired. (27)

George Brandes comments that Disraeli's reaction to the situation can be clarified by looking at one of the early novels and imagining the Prime Minister's actions and feelings at Berlin:

The romance "Alroy" did not meet with success; it was not appreciated. But Alroy has never deserted Disraeli; it was not one of those ideas of which a poet delivers himself by carrying it out. Alroy has certainly accompanied him through life, and I should not be surprised if the passage in which he seizes the sceptre occurred to Lord Beaconsfield, when, at the Congress of Berlin (in full accord with his definition of England as an Asiatic power), he snatched the British supremacy over Asiatic Turkey which brought those countries, over which David Alroy acquired dominion, under the sovereignty of Benjamin Disraeli. (28)

Disraeli's lack of sympathy for the nationalist aspirations of the Bulgars led him to

underestimate the power of their cause, and to continue to support Turkey because it was the only bulwark against Russia's Mediterranean aspirations. His support was founded first upon practical geo-political considerations, but he could take such a position much more easily because of a personal liking for the ruling Turks and dislike of rebel nationalists.

The effect of this aspect of Disraelianism was to make him unpopular at home, and provide fuel to Gladstone's burning desire to unseat the evil Jew. What seemed to be a realistic stance in Britain's international interest was actually impractical for Disraeli on the domestic front. He found himself on the losing end of an emotional argument that claimed it was morally offensive to support Turks who had slaughtered scores of Christians under their rule. Gladstone's pamphlet, The Bulgarian Horrors, sold 200,000 copies in the first month. Still, Disraeli did not regard the matter as terribly significant. He did receive a respite by his Berlin triumph, but the foreign policy attitude of the Eastern Question and the Zulu and Afghan crises, that Gladstone labelled 'Beaconsfieldism', was a major factor in the 1880 election result. Blake indicates that,

Disraeli had no sympathy with the notion that political questions are basically ones of morality...Unluckily for Disraeli, he lived at a time when great moral explosions were liable to convulse the country...it created a confrontation as bitter as anything in recent history; Gladstone standing for what he believed to be the higher moral law, Disraeli for what he considered to be the 'permanent abiding interests of England', which he equated with the preservation of Turkey as a bulwark against Russian expansion. (29)

Here is an instance of Disraeli's mythically over-riding practicality and opportunistic motivations being clouded by his peculiar view of life and his early formative experiences.

When Gladstone's campaign against the government's policy in Eastern Europe began to have such a significant popular impact, the supposedly mercenary Disraeli should have seen the way the political wind was blowing and trimmed his sails accordingly. He did not. Even if he had lived in an age of accurate opinion surveys, it is likely his response would have been the same -- to act in what he had determined was England's best interest and not bow to opposition rabble-rousing.

Probably the most lasting effect of Disraelianism can be seen in the state of present-day British Conservative party. His vision of a National Party, the written record of his goals, and the actual steps he took to realize them, are the cornerstone of the myth and imagination that support the party of Thatcher today. The key is imagination and vision; it is certainly not the legacy of legislation and policy that have formed the foundation of the present party. Conservative partisans tend to see Disraeli's stand on the Corn Laws as evidence of his commitment to traditional Tory values. They also consider his Reform Bill of 1867 and the social policy of the early part of his 1874-1880 government as the basis of casting him as progenitor of current Tory claims to be the only genuine custodians of the welfare of the working man. All this is a misrepresentation of Disraeli's motives. He was not a great agent of philosophical change in the party. What he did accomplish was to make the remnants of a Peelite Conservative party, comprised of reactionary provincial protectionists, into a semblance of the National Party he dreamed of; and he did so by creating a sense among Tories that if change was necessary it could be made palatable by casting it in terms of accepted traditions. Thus, positions taken by Disraeli over the years that appear opportunistic or contrary to Toryism are subsumed into the canon of Tory doctrine because it is necessary to the survival of the party. Disraeli felt

the foundation of his politics was so fundamentally national in nature that no policy that could genuinely benefit England was alien to Toryism. His genius lay in the way he could bring forward new ideas and not create an irrevocable split in the party - Peel's failure lay in his inability to do this. Peel failed because he did not recognize the emotional needs of the 'natural' Tories, he had no acceptable framework within which he could rationalize seeming revolutionary departures like repeal of the Corn Laws. The quality of genius that served Disraeli and was absent in Peel was imagination. Gertrude Himmelfarb says this is the essence of Disraeli's lasting effect. Even in the 1980's the Conservative Party of Margaret Thatcher tried hard to be seen as Disraelian.

However inconsistent and inconstant he may have been, however opportunistic and eccentric, he did represent a distinctive political mode, a disposition and sensibility that did not quite qualify as a philosophy and policy - hence the vacillations on his part and the disagreements about him on ours - but which were recognized as unique and significant in his own time and still command attention today. He speaks to us as his great antagonist does not; it is a long time since anyone invoked the name of Gladstone to lend authority to a political figure or cause. (30)

Or, as A.J.P. Taylor says, "Gladstone was the Victorian conscience; Disraeli the release from it" (31). A look at two of the most controversial episodes of Disraeli's political career will show how he was true to Disraelianism.

It was a hallmark of Disraelian Conservatism that he did not feel compelled to "conserve the disabilities imposed upon you by your political adversaries" (32). If he can be said to have educated his party, this is the major concept he tried to impart. The first of these 'disabilities' to be jettisoned was Protectionism. His critics most often use this issue to attack his sincerity and to impute cynical opportunism. He drove Peel out of the party

with his vigorous defence of the Corn Laws, and, soon after they were repealed, worked equally as hard to abandon the protection principle as a foundation of the party. It looks suspiciously like Disraeli used the best issue at hand to gain his revenge on Peel, but his later actions show that he never really believed in the policy he championed. Paul Smith writes,

Though Disraeli had made his fortune as Peel's executioner, it is doubtful how deep his hostility to Peel's general policy had been. Certainly there was a great difference in temper between his Toryism and Peelite Conservatism, with its lack of imagination and popular sympathies; but the phillipic of 1844-6 owed as much to spleen at having been refused office by Peel in 1841, and to sheer ambition, as to divergence of political outlook. (33)

This interpretation is partially true, but its conclusion is a gross distortion of his motivation in the matter. Lord Blake's conclusion seems closest to the mark when he states that Disraeli's fight with Peel was more to do with the latter's unilateral decision to abandon one of the protections for landowners after having presented himself as the leader of a party devoted to that protection (34). Disraeli himself never professed adherence to the principle behind the Corn Laws; what he objected to was Peel's betrayal of the majority of his own party without consultation or proposing alternatives to outright repeal.

Free Trade or Protection, Disraeli was ready to grant that a man could prefer one to the other, but what was intolerable was that a Parliament elected to carry out one of those policies should boast of carrying out the other, that a man designated to his Sovereign by the confidence of a party should now come forward and say that the confidence of that Sovereign permitted him to scorn that party, and that he cared little for the judgement passed by the House, because he was sure of that which would be passed by posterity. (35)

Aside from the issue of moral and political turpitude, Disraeli also fought Peel's repeal Bill

on grounds that were fundamentally Disraelian. His belief in the necessity of maintaining the elevated place of a landed aristocracy as an essential element of the constitution lead him to assert that protectionist corn laws were a right of the landed classes, if for no other reason than it was one of the few barriers against the advance of industry.

Disraeli rested the case for the Corn Laws openly on the argument that of the two great branches of industry it was essential to give to the agricultural a preponderance compared with the the manufacturing. England had a territorial constitution. It was upon the land that there fell 'the revenues of the Church, the administration of justice and the estate of the poor'. The 'territorial constitution' was important not because it pampered that proprietor but because it was 'the only security for self-government; and more than that the only barrier to that system of centralization which has taken root and enslaved the energies of surrounding nations'. Cobden, he declared, wanted the repeal of the Corn Laws in order to transfer power from the landed classes to the manufacturers. (36)

John Morley, Paul Smith and others claim that Disraeli's attacks were unwarranted and were prompted purely by pursuit of personal gain. Furthermore they contend that the loss of a great statesman to the Conservative cause and the consequent banishment from power for over thirty years was Disraeli's fault, and that Disraeli was the only real beneficiary. Again, these charges contain a grain of truth, but they ignore the fact that Disraeli was giving voice to an existing sentiment amongst the squirearchical backbenches. Granted, personal animosity certainly affected the colour and tone of some Disraeli's speeches, and the prospect of personal advancement could have enhanced his tenacity in pursuing the issue. But, it does not make sense to blame Disraeli for the break up of the Peelite Conservative party, for that implies the inarticulate backbenchers would have merely acquiesced in Peel's plans, and things would have gone on as if nothing had happened. Such a notion is clearly untenable. The descent was real and widespread. Men like

Bentinck would never forgive Peel, and a change in parliamentary alignments was inevitable; they were not cajoled or misrepresented by Disraeli's oratory. The real blame for the political ramifications of the repeal of the Corn Laws must rest with Peel himself. Disraeli's actions were prompted by sincere outrage at Peel's betrayal and a genuine belief that it was a constitutional and economic mistake. That there was personal political advantage in his stance has never been denied -- it is just that there was much more to it than that.

The biggest stick from the Corn Law/Anti-Peel campaign that Disraeli's critics use to beat his reputation is his seeming cynical dropping of the protectionist banner as soon as he became leader of the decimated party. The conclusion usually drawn is that Disraeli's only motivation in taking such an active role in the Corn Law debate was to get rid of Peel and the rest of the talent that stood in his way -- and once that issue served its purpose and became a political liability rather than an asset he took an abrupt *volte face*. Once more we see an unwarranted conclusion based on selected facts. What Disraeli recognized and knew he must deal with was the fact that Free Trade actually worked. The dire economic conditions that were supposed to weaken the landed classes had failed to materialize - protectionism was not a defensible political position, nor did it appear to be necessary. He had been wrong and it was time to adjust to reality (37). As Hesketh Pearson describes it:

From 1846 onwards, it was Disraeli's task to work to get the Tories to accept the idea that Protection was a dead issue and that Free Trade must be allowed---if for no other reason than it was working. (38)

Protectionist Tories were now in the same position they had been in after the first Reform Bill was passed in 1832 -- they had to come to terms with new conditions or cease to be a

viable political option. Disraeli was the only leader who felt some urgency in distancing the party from protection. Derby grudgingly agreed with him, but was unwilling to make a clean break with the issue so soon after the emotional trauma that came from their impassioned defence of it. Nonetheless, over the five years following the departure of the Peelites, Disraeli made numerous pronouncements, both in public and private, against the party's continued support of some form of re-instated Corn Laws. Eventually he accepted Derby's approach of gradual weaning, but his attitude was well known and he was distrusted by the majority of landowners. As an aspirant to a leadership position in the protectionist faction, it would seem to have been in Disraeli's best interest to cause as little agitation as possible. But one of the major elements of Disraelianism was the development of a National Party, and Disraeli knew that a party mired in the muck of a moribund policy that ran so contrary to current opinion had no chance of being National. Here we see a situation which can be seen as a matter of principle -- it was in Disraeli's immediate self-interest to curb his wish to move quickly and appear to espouse a return to protectionist tariffs. This would have solidified his dominant position in the party, but it would likely have been a party that was not capable of realizing the Disraelian goals of a National Party led by the heroic Disraeli. His adherence to Disraelianism, as explained in this thesis, helps to show why he took the risks he did in the late 1840's and early 50's. In retrospect his critics have condemned his stand as a calculated plan to follow the path of least resistance to power. What they fail to acknowledge is that there was a strong likelihood that the rank and file of the party he sought to re-direct would not have tolerated such 'calculations'. Nevertheless, Disraeli knew it to be the proper policy for the good of the party. J.T. Ward allows that Disraeli's new position on protection was good for the party, but it did not make things easy for him with his colleagues:

Back-bench Protectionist unease, distress and occasional bitterness against the Tory leadership in the years following 1846 (and long before) is at least understandable. The watering-down of impracticable party writ is easily condemned as 'treason' by those of its votaries who are called upon to render it practicable; and subsequent electoral defeat 'confirms' their prejudices. But party leadership involves greater duties than carrying out 'mandates'. It must maintain that alliance of interests and individuals which constitute a party; it must seek a consensus of opinion but avoid domination by it; it must create opportunities for its followers to win elections. It is concerned with the actuality of political power, and must therefore propound viable policies and offer credible candidates. (39)

Disraeli's actions on this issue are often presented by his supporters as the first evidence of his thirty-five year task of educating the Tory party. André Maurois portrays Disraeli as the saviour of a group of fools who had to be schooled in a modern philosophy of social-democratic Toryism:

he had to extricate it from Protection, to raise it from a caste feeling to a national feeling, to teach it to take heed of popular comfort and of the solidity of the Empire. He put forward a bold programme to take the place of Protection (40)

Disraeli had no such grand plan. As his cabinet was surprised to discover in 1874, their Prime Minister had not worked out the particular policies, let alone administrative details, for the implementation of his vision of England. There was no bold legislative programme locked away waiting to be released when he finally had a parliamentary majority to work with. All he had were vague dreams. What Disraeli really began at this time was an education of his party in the art of surviving as a potent political force. The one principle they had to accept was that to become a truly National party, and to maintain that status, they had to develop the capacity to eject ideas and positions that had outlived their

usefulness -- they had to realize that they did not have to be prisoners of earlier policies. As long as they remained true to certain basics, such as the aristocratic settlement of the country, the primacy of property, and the important role of the Church and Crown, other factors were merely temporal responses to circumstance; when the circumstances changed as they did in 1832 and 1846, it was not heresy to change with them. It was possible to alter policy and still retain sincere Tory beliefs. Disraelianism demanded that, provided it adhered to those simple fundamentals, the Tory party's biggest obligation was to place itself in a position to govern (with Disraeli at the helm of course).

The next significant crossroads encountered along this path of education arose at the next serious attempt at parliamentary Reform in 1866. Derby and Disraeli blocked that Liberal bill and introduced their own a year later. The usual assessment is that the Tory bill was not essentially different from Gladstone's offering, but Disraeli's brilliant generalship in the Commons allowed the minority Tories to carry a measure more to their liking, and probably secured him the overall leadership when Derby retired. Again, his motives are often perceived as selfish ones because, as a Tory politician, he was not considered to be a genuine supporter of parliamentary reform. Nor can he claim the position of the genius who awakened the Tories to the value and virtue of reform -- he was simply acting in accordance with his long-held Disraelian views that reform was not the birthright of the Whigs, and as they had used it as a means to distort the make up of the electorate in their favour with the 1832 measure, so the Tories should be able to use reform to set things right, to ensure that the electoral system reflected their natural position as the National Party. The Tories did not need to be held hostage by the blindness of their ancestors. J.T. Ward comments on the common arguments against considering Disraeli's

attitude a sincere but unique one:

Tory hagiographers trying to prove an innate consistency in every thought, word and deed of the most complicated of all Tory statesmen are unconvincing. But the views of writers ancient and modern whose only consensus is that there is something improper in Tory reform are equally suspect...They have not altered sufficiently to prevent some latter-day opponents from continuing to regard Disraeli as simply a clever opportunist and from explaining 'unnatural' Tory reform as either forced by external pressure or engineered dishonesty. (41)

Stephen Graubard claims that because Disraeli had opposed some reform proposals after 1832, it exhibits a pattern of opposition to the idea of reform and, therefore, his late introduction of a bill of his own (along with a published selection of speeches to support his claim to being a long-time reformer) was a cynical act of blatant opportunism and lack of principle (42). This is a perplexing lapse on Graubard's part. It ignores the fact that Disraeli did indeed have a long history of supporting reform -- the speeches in the 1867 book were genuine. It ignores his earliest attempts to enter parliament when the Tory resistance to the fact of the 1832 Act prevented him from considering joining them. It also ignores Disraeli's general support of the Chartist petition in 1839. He did not agree with the specific provisions of the petition, but the need for reform (both social and parliamentary) to correct the 1832 settlement was so clear that he could not keep silent. The debate on the petition in the Commons was not very inspiring, but Disraeli gave the best speech of his young career and blasted the House for its indifference. It was a courageous thing to do as he was one of only five M.P.'s who showed any support for the Chartists. Far from regretting his lonely stand, he was proud of his performance as is evident from his letter to Sarah the next day:

I made the most capital speech on Chartism last night, of which the Times give a fair and accurate report. The Morning Herald has taken up the speech and written a leader on it, and calls it "a speech of very considerable talent". It was made under every disadvantage (43)

He took a great chance with his future by risking antagonising the leaders of the Commons, but it laid the foundation of his claims to have a consistent attitude to all reforms. But even then he couched his support in terms of shoring up the bedrock of the aristocratic nature of the country, not as a revolutionary. In one passage of his speech he says,

The time will come when Chartists will discover that in a country so aristocratic as England even treason, to be successful, must be patrician. They will discover that great truth, and when they find some desperate noble to lead them they may, perhaps, achieve greater results.(44)

Graubard's assessment also ignores a key precept of Disraelianism that was essential to the development of the Tories as National Party -- the most important principle was to adopt policies that would make the Tories the government. The policies of the moment were merely details; the grand design and adherence to basic Tory beliefs were the essential things. Therefore, no particular policy position was inherently against Toryism, provided it could be framed in such a way as to be made compatible with those basic beliefs. As Blake says of Disraeli's answer to the question of what Conservatives should conserve,

He had not answered it completely, but he had discovered at least a negative aspect of the answer: there is no need to conserve the disabilities imposed upon you by your political adversaries. (45)

Maurois sees Disraeli and reform in this context. Disraeli's attitude to reform was

that it was inevitable and necessary, but had to be accomplished so as to maintain the constitution as it was meant to be, as Disraeli had expressed it in his fiction:

In his heart of hearts he had always been friendly to the idea of suffrage extended to the more responsible section of the working-classes. That union of the aristocracy and the people which he had preached in Sybil would thus find its expression (46)

In both Disraeli and The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher, Blake is unsympathetic to Disraeli's actions regarding reform. He grudgingly admits that Derby's government had to do something about reform because "a viable Conservative government had to show that it could move with the times" (47), but says that only "purely opportunistic" (48) and "party expediency" (49) motives can explain why they "sabotaged" (50) a relatively moderate Liberal bill in 1866. What Blake, Graubard, and others, do not want to admit is that Disraeli's stand on reform was remarkably consistent throughout his career. This does not mean that he espoused it at every sitting of the House, nor that he should have supported every proposal regardless of the source. His position was quite simple. He was a mainstream Tory in his dislike of the 1832 Act, but that dislike was based on a peculiarly Disraelian foundation. He viewed that measure as a Whig *coup d'état* that granted "undue predominance to the urban middle classes" (51). The national spirit was against a return to pre-1832 conditions, and Disraeli recognized and respected this as other Tories failed to do. This failure by the main body of Tories was partially overcome by Peel in 1841, but the vehemence with which they had opposed the bill's passage left a lingering impression of them as a party of reactionaries that was a definite electoral disability. Disraeli realized that when the reforming impulse of the nation became strong again in the late '50's, his approach must be to utilize the opportunity to undo the damage wreaked by the Whigs, as well as eliminate the image of his party as an

anti-reform *cadre*. This he accomplished--and did so with genius. His genius went beyond the strategy and tactics of achieving passage of the 1867 Reform Bill with only a parliamentary minority to work with. His real genius shows through in the fact that the Tory party emerged from debate on an explosively divisive issue as a stronger party -- not a divided one. Reform in 1867 had the same damaging potential that Corn Law repeal had in 1846, but Disraeli had the skill to pilot the passage of a necessary piece of legislation without destroying the party the way Peel had done. The passage of the 1867 Reform Bill was a distinctly Disraelian episode, and was entirely consistent with the principles of Disraelianism.

The fruits of the new act were not apparent in the ensuing election. Disraeli over-estimated the immediate benefit of the accompanying redistribution scheme, and his followers were not pleased with defeat in 1868. This disappointment also had the potential to fracture the Tory party, yet it did not. In the years until the 1874 election Disraeli continued to claim that his Reform Act would make the Tories the national government once again, but this time he relied on an often overlooked aspect of Disraelianism -- his practicality. With a larger and different electorate it required much more formal organization to have the tory nature of the nation reflected in the voting returns. To this end he spent a great deal of time improving the national organization of the party, establishing an efficient national headquarters, and giving prominence to the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations. The new efficiency at both the national and local level allowed the Tories to take advantage of the new Reform act, and the result was a landslide election victory in 1874. In true Disraelian fashion, of course, the aging Prime Minister quickly lost interest in the details of keeping the party

machinery in working order, and they were not as well prepared to withstand Gladstone's onslaught in 1880.

But that was an aberration; as all non-Conservative/Tory governments since then have been. Disraeli laid the foundation that allowed the party to become truly national. It has long since abandoned the principles of Disraelianism (if indeed it ever really held them) regarding the aristocracy, the monarchy, etc, yet, it retains the notion that it will be the National Party as long as it is able to adapt itself to the needs and mood of the country at the time and not be afraid of constant, albeit modest, change. Liberals and Labourites, with the basically *a priori* nature of their philosophies, will occasionally find themselves more in tune with the electorate than the Tory/Conservatives, much as the fixed hands of a stopped clock will display the correct time twice per day. But it is the Tories, with their ability to adapt and change their philosophy as they were taught to by Disraeli, that have most often captured the electoral feeling. The preponderance of Conservative governments since 1874, and the rise and fall of opposition parties over the years, is evidence enough of this. This is a significant contribution, and contemporary conservative defenders should be content with it. However, they seem to be uncomfortable with the fact that, although Disraeli was a principled and consistent politician in his own terms, the pursuit of his principles has created an enduring national party with relatively few principles -- except to remain in power. Disraeli had a definable vision of England that made his search for a National Party of government justifiable. There is none of that vision today, so he is endowed with characteristics and credited with beliefs that are not his. His legacy is real nonetheless.

## IV

Disraelianism, as it has been outlined in this study, is a real and coherent set of political principles, and it stands as more than adequate answer to charges that Benjamin Disraeli functioned in a political principle vacuum. It is not coherent if one insists on comparing it to recognizable and logical philosophical systems, but it does make sense in terms of explaining much of Disraeli's political life. If one can accept that he was sincere in pursuit of his ideals, then it becomes easier to accept the fact of his remarkably long career. If Paul Smith is correct in his assessment that during this period "It is a convention in England to regard politics as a matter of principle and conviction" (52), then his subsequent statement is an inadequate explanation of Disraeli's success:

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. A Jew, a quasi-intellectual, and a *litterateur*, standing by background and temperament outside the customary frame of British political life, he set himself not to assert a principle or attain an ideal, but to play the role of the romantic hero on the most unlikely of all stages, the floor of the House of Commons; and by wit, courage and extraordinary force of will he succeeded. (53)

By Smith's own argument this could not have been enough to sustain a lengthy political career.

Disraeli did have a 'system' of a sort. It made sense to him, it gave him inspiration and direction, and he was as true to it as any active politician can be true to principles. He expressed many of the political elements of his philosophy early on in such pamphlets as

The Vindication of the English Constitution, and most of his later actions can be understood in terms of those elements. The richest store of evidence for his philosophy, however, is to be found in his works of fiction not in the specifically political writings. They are rich not just for what they add to our knowledge of his political ideas, but also for how they provide enlightenment about his personality. They show what he thought and felt about himself, how his background contributed to the development of those political beliefs, and the process by which he trained himself to function within the existing system so as to satisfy his longing to realize the potential of his genius and still bring his vision of England to fruition. Smith belittles Disraeli's conception of himself as a hero, calling it merely a role he played so as to be able to stay on the 'stage' of the British political scene. However, the novels show quite clearly that Disraeli did not see it as just a play-acting role; he genuinely believed that his genius could make him the saving hero of Britain. The nation needed a National Party, as he had described it, and it needed Disraeli to lead that party. His life was dedicated to the creation of such a party and to ensure that he was at the head of it -- for the good of England.

His political actions make sense in terms of this philosophy. Everything from the Corn Laws episode and the Reform Bill of 1867 to the social legislation and imperial foreign policy of his 1874-80 ministry may seem to be a disparate hodge-podge of self-seeking, opportunistic policies if one tries to explain them in terms of a conventional political philosophy. However, they make perfect sense in terms of the unorthodox tenets of Disraelianism. Of course, none of his specific policy ideas survive today, as Conservative party devotees would try to claim, but the legacy of Disraelianism is real nonetheless. J.T. Ward's comments at the end of his article,

Disraeli's restoration of romance and imagination to politics is an intangible factor more easily appreciated by platform orators and their audience than by political theorists and their readers. (54)

Disraeli had tried, different ways, to 'move' Britain. He had taught a party of haughty patricians and apoplectic squires to face unpleasant realities. He had regularly demonstrated that the defence of ancient institutions could be allied with 'radical' social policies...he also taught his party that politics was conditioned by possibility and that conservation involved knowing precisely what was most worth conserving at any period...He largely invented that combination of respect for ancient things British (or from his viewpoint, English) nationalism and a reaction against the harshness of *laissez-faire* which restored his party to major status. And despite many vicissitudes and many alternative formulae, the Disraelian ethic still survives. It may well be true that Tory cabinets tend to be Peelites; but Tory supporters remain largely Disraelian. (55)

At the end of the conclusion of the definitive biography Buckle claims that it is valid to place Disraeli amongst the best "practical statesmen in legislative achievement" (56). Certainly he was a practical politician, or he could not have survived as long and as well as he did, but the major legislative accomplishments of his administration were those of his cabinet colleagues -- especially Cross. His real contribution was his Disraelianism, the way he worked it out in the imaginary world of his novels, and then brought that imagination to public life.

Lord Blake's "Epilogue" focuses upon Disraeli's imagination and genius as the elements most responsible for his place in history. About Disraeli's mind Blake says it

was like a catherine wheel shooting out sparks. Most of them fell on damp earth. Every now and then one would reach the dry grass, set it ablaze and illuminate the night. (57)

The spark of Disraeli's imagination certainly set the Victorian political firmament ablaze, but the nature of the brightness has often been misinterpreted, perhaps because the source of the spark has been mostly ignored. It is to his novels that one must turn in order to discover the true source of the fuel that turned his 'catherine wheel'.

NOTES

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- 3 - Richard Faber, Beaconsfield and Bolingbroke (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 22.
- 4 - Stephen R. Graubard, Burke, Disraeli and Churchill: The Politics of Perseverance (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 141.
- 5 - Graubard, p. 152.
- 6 - Robert Blake, Disraeli (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1966), p. 464.
- 7 - Blake, Disraeli, p. 762.
- 8 - Benjamin Disraeli, "What Is He?", in Whigs and Whiggism (London: John Murray, 1913), p. 20.
- 9 - Disraeli, "The Crisis Examined" in Whigs and Whiggism, p. 32.
- 10 - Paul Smith, Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 3.
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- 16 - Faber, p. 77.
- 17 - Paul Adelman, Gladstone, Disraeli and Later Victorian Politics (Harlow, Essex: Longman Group Limited, 1983), p. 15.
- 18 - Robert Blake, The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 130.
- 19 - Contarini Fleming (vol. 5), p. 221.

- 20 - W.F. Monypenny and G.E. Buckle, The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield (volume II), p. 1234.
- 21 - McDowell, p. 39.
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- 23 - Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Disraeli: The Tory Imagination" in Marriage and Morals Among the Victorians (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), pp. 190-1.
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- 25 - Blake, Disraeli, p. 652.
- 26 - G.M. Trevelyan, British History in the Nineteenth Century and After: 1782 - 1919 (Harmondsworth: Pelican/Penguin Books, 1979), p. 363.
- 27 - Bradford, p. 337.
- 28 - Brandes, p. 62.
- 29 - Blake, The Conservative Party..., pp. 119 - 120.
- 30 - Himmelfarb, pp. 178 - 9.
- 31 - A.J.P. Taylor, "Dizzy" in Essays in English History (Harmondsworth: Pelican/Penguin Books, 1976), p. 120.
- 32 - Blake, Disraeli, p. 278.
- 33 - Paul Smith, p. 23.
- 34 - Blake, Disraeli, p. 227.
- 35 - Andre Maurois, Disraeli: A Picture of the Victorian Age (trans. Hamish Miles) (New York: The Modern Library/Random House, 1928), p. 190.
- 36 - Blake, Disraeli, p. 232.
- 37 - Ward, p. 84.
- 38 - Hesketh Pearson, Dizzy: The Life and Personality of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), p. 144.
- 39 - Ward, p. 67.
- 40 - Maurois, p. 218.
- 41 - Ward, p. 92.

- 42 - Graubard, p. 42.
- 43 - Benjamin Disraeli, Benjamin Disraeli Letters: 1838 - 1841 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 197.
- 44 - Quoted in Monypenny and Buckle (volume I), p. 485 - 6.
- 45 - Blake, Disraeli, p. 278.
- 46 - Maurois, p. 241.
- 47 - Blake, The Conservative Party..., p. 105.
- 48 - Blake, Disraeli, p. 438.
- 49 - Blake, Disraeli, p. 396.
- 50 - Blake, The Conservative Party..., p. 105.
- 51 - McDowell, p. 82.
- 52 - Paul Smith, p. 11.
- 53 - Paul Smith, p. 12.
- 54 - Ward, p. 99.
- 55 - Ward, p. 100.
- 56 - Monypenny and Buckle (volume II), p. 1519.
- 57 - Blake, Disraeli, p. 764.

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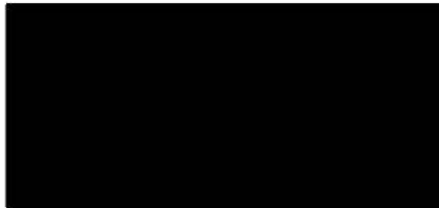
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