THE NOVELS OF BENJAMIN DISRAELI

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University of Ghana, Legon.

An Inaugural Lecture delivered on 25th February, 1969 at the University of Ghana, Legon.
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Politicians sometimes write novels, Presidents and Prime Ministers never, with one exception — Benjamin Disraeli. But Disraeli was exceptional in many ways. He was the only Jew to become Prime Minister of England, it was he who led the stern unbending Tories in the House of Commons during the debates over the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1844—6, and who showed a flexibility and a dynamic, some would say a diabolic dexterity in debate which still make the speeches he made worth reading as examples of eloquence seasoned with wit. He had never been to any of the famous public schools or to Oxford and Cambridge, he had no landed property, and his emergence as the undoubted leader of the Tory party and eventually as Prime Minister was not, as Hannah Arendt claims in her account of his career in her book on the Origins of Totalitarianism simply due to chance or luck but to the ability not only to see the opportunity but to grasp it and so become the acknowledged leader of the Tory Party.

Tonight however we are concerned with his novels. These can be dealt with in three groups. They began with Vivian Grey which he wrote when he was only 21 and which was published in 1826. Then came The Young Duke in 1831, Contarini Fleming in 1832, Alroy in 1833, Henrietta Temple and Venetia in 1837. In 1837 he managed to get a seat in Parliament and the second group of novels, Coningsby, Sybil and Tancred appeared between 1844 and 1847. His next novel Lothair did not appear till 1870, two years after his first short office as Prime Minister in 1868, and his last, Endymion after the close of his second Ministry from 1874 to 1880. There is also a fragment of
a novel *Falconet* on which he was working at the time of his death and which would have contained as its chief character a prototype of his great rival Gladstone.

One of the most interesting features of Disraeli's novels is that they are, especially the second group, political novels in the sense that they not only deal with current problems but they also embody Disraeli's own experience of the intrigues of politicians and the solutions to the social problems of his age some of which have an almost contemporary ring about them.

But if these novels were simply social and political documentaries I should not be dealing with them tonight. Taken together they are a fascinating psychological and very human counterfoil to Disraeli's own political career, not only to his purely political aspirations, but to what Robert Blake in his recent biography of Disraeli dismisses rather contumously as his daydreams, but which in fact represent the more deep laid convictions of his personality which had a disconcerting way of sometimes emerging into the realm of practical politics.

Vivian Grey, the hero of his first novel, is clever, precocious and ambitious. He plays on the prejudices and predilections of the Marquis of Carabas, a disappointed politician, to build up a new party, but his machinations are defeated by the intrigues of Mrs. Lorraine who not only tries to poison him but creates a rift between him and his friend Cleveland who challenges Vivian Grey. In the duel Cleveland is killed and Vivian Grey flees the country. The rest of the novel is largely a succession of episodes on the Continent which leave him with the conviction that he is the most unfortunate and unhappy being that ever existed. Gladstone read the novel and said that the first quarter was very clever and the rest trash. I doubt whether anyone would dispute this verdict—least of all Disraeli. It was in fact a source of embarrassment to him for a long time, because, despite the social gaffes the reviewers seized on and pilloried, it was very popular, ran into several editions, was widely read in America, and was supplied with a key to the characters. If anyone wants to do a piece of research of the kind that is fairly common
nowadays he could do worse than analyse the changes Disraeli made in subsequent editions of the novel down to 1853 eliminating the more obvious gaffes and also the more pointed remarks on contemporary politics which, as a rising politician he would gladly have disowned. The truth was that Vivian Grey, who is really the young Disraeli, was too clever by half, and in subsequent political novels Disraeli did not make the mistake of identifying himself with the hero who is often insipid and colourless but certainly not unscrupulous or too clever.

*The Young Duke* is chiefly remarkable for a macabre scene at the end where the young duke is sitting at a card table where he has gambled £100,000 away in 36 hours, with packs of used cards scattered all around him, guttering candles and the curtains still drawn, but the novel is made up chiefly of a series of forced witticisms and contrived situations based on Disraeli’s idea, gathered chiefly from books and hearsay, of fashionable life. However it provided the money which enabled Disraeli to embark on the grand tour which took him to the Near East Palestine and Egypt, where his friend Meredith who was engaged to his sister Sarah, died.

*Contarini Fleming* is about a wealthy and ambitious young man whose father desires to become Prime Minister. Contarini at a European conference wins golden opinions by the skill audacity and wit which he deploys to save the position of the monarchy in his own country from a league of European statesmen. Unfortunatley it comes out that he has written a novel which satirises the political scene and he also sets out on his travels which are a mixture of fantasy fact and romance. Evidently Disraeli is thinking of Vivian Grey and the damage it could do to his reputation if he entered seriously into politics. *Alroy* which completes this trilogy of Disraeli’s fantasies and very real aspirations and desires is about a Jewish prince of the captivity who leads a revolt against the Caliph of Bagdad and actually enters the city only to be eventually killed. Disraeli embellishes the story with the beautiful daughter of the Caliph and the whole is written in a high flown kind of blank, very
blank verse masquerading as prose.

"Speed, fleetly speed, thou courser bold, and track the desert's trackless way. Beneath thee is the boundless earth, above thee is the boundless heaven, an iron soil and brazen sky. Speed, swiftly speed, thou courser bold, and track the desert's trackless way.

Still the courser onward rushes, still his mighty heart supports him. Season and space, the glowing soil, the burning ray, yield to the tempest of his frame; the thunder of his nerves, and lightning of his veins.

Food or water they have none. No genial fount, no graceful tree, rise with their pleasant company. Never a beast or bird is there, in that hoary desert bare. Nothing breaks the almighty stillness. Even the jackal's felon cry might seem a soothing melody. A grey wild rat, with snowy whiskers, out of a withered bramble stealing, with a youthful snake in its ivory teeth, in the moonlight grins with glee. This is their sole society."

This is the kind of meretricious mish mash Disraeli runs into when he indulges the pseudo-poetical side of his nature.

In a fragmentary diary Disraeli kept between 1833 and 1836, Disraeli described *Vivian Grey* as portraying his active and real ambition, *Contarini Fleming* as the development of his poetic character and *Alroy* as the secret history of his feelings. It is difficult to read these last two novels with any patience nowadays. However they are important because of what Disraeli thought when he was writing them and as giving some indication of how his imagination developed.

It is worth noticing however that in *Contarini Fleming* there is a character who frequently appears in Disraeli's later novels, a painter called Winter, who turns up at a critical moment in Contarini's life and strengthens him with his counsels to adopt a life of action and to be worthy of his race, just as in *Alroy* there is Miriam, Alroy's sister who visits him in prison and strengthens him for the ordeal of his imminent death. Winter reappears in *Coningsby* as Sidonia
the wealthy Jew, as a mysterious voice in *Tancred* and as the Paraclete in *Lothair*. Miriam who undoubtedly embodies Disraeli’s devotion to his sister Sarah, appears again in *Sybil* and in *Lothair* as Theodora, the beautiful, fearless girl who accompanies Lothair when he joins Garibaldi.

Here I should like to make a point which as far as I know has not been made by critics of Disraeli. These characters, both male and female appear at critical points in the careers of the heroes of the novel. Sometimes they are Jews, sometimes not, but they supply the strength of purpose and decision which the heroes lack. In this sense therefore they might be regarded as projections of Disraeli’s own alter ego. Though his father had turned Christian when Disraeli was 12 years old Disraeli’s own appearance, his youthful flamboyance were very definitely un-English and it is part of my contention that Disraeli’s theory of race which I shall deal with later was because he felt the need for a prop to his confidence which he could never have got from trying to behave like a trueborn Englishman. These early novels of Disraeli are also interesting because they reflect the young Disraeli’s own passions and despairs and Winter the painter in *Contarini Fleming* pulls Contarini out of a state of suicidal apathy just as Miriam in *Alroy* strengthens Alroy’s spirit for the ordeal that awaits him. Incidentally this also reflects some kind of psychological crisis in Disraeli’s own life between 1826 and 1829.

One of the later novels reflects Disraeli’s own love affairs. He had a mistress called Clara Bolton, who was taken over by a baronet called Sir Frederic Sykes, while his wife Henrietta fell madly in love with Disraeli. At first Sykes objected to them meeting but eventually he decided to accept the situation, gave Henrietta an allowance of £1,850 a year and the affair with Disraeli lasted for about four years. Her letters to him have survived but not his to her. She seems to have been one of these typical full breasted Victorian women who appear in the painting of Daniel Machel and William Etty and who were infatuated by Disraeli. He wrote a novel called *Henrietta Temple* which is really his version of the affair though naturally in the novel there is nothing to suggest an illegal liaison, only the love
of Armine for Henrietta Temple, and her engagement to Lord Mountfort. Then, appalled by the sufferings of Armine his wealthy cousin Katherine Grandison intervenes, and marries Mountfort herself while Henrietta is reunited to Armine. The first part of the novel, which is much the best is the one novel of Disraeli’s where as Philip Guedalla says ‘one actually hears the rustling of the ladys’ petticoats.’ In other words Henrietta comes to life in a way wh,ch none of Disraeli’s other heroine{s do.

Venetia was a pot boiler based on the lives of Byron and Shelley but put back to the time of the American Revolution. This again was a novel which had too obvious a key—one hears it clicking time and again in the lock as Disraeli makes Byron or Herbert a general in the American army, and finally drowns both Herbert or Byron and Caduris or Shelley in the Bay of Spezia.

The third group of novels, Coningsby, Sybil and Tancred were all written between 1844 and 1847, when Disraeli had entered Parliament after a maiden speech which was very nearly disastrous to his political career. He had however followed the advice of an old Irish member of Parliament, to get rid of his genius for a session, and to speak often but shortly. ‘Be very quiet, try to be dull... and in a short time the House will sigh for the wit and eloquence they know are in you’ and finally he established himself as the spokesman of the landed gentry on the controversial question of the Corn Laws. In the meantime he had become associated with a group of young Tories including George Smythe and Lord John Manners who were concerned at the tyranny of the industrial system, who looked back to the days before the Reformation when the Church had been the guardian rather than the oppressor of the poor, who believed that the gentry of England and the monarchy were the natural protectors of the people, and who sighed for the chivalry of the middle ages when ancestral loyalty was synonymous with national aspirations.

It was a very vague nostalgic yearning for the past, but Disraeli took up this very rusty old sword, refurbished it and gave it point
and edge in the debates on the repeal of the Corn Laws.

The novels of this period are, as Robert Blake has said, worth issuing in a critical edition because they epitomise brilliantly Disraeli's political creed.

*Coningsby* describes the political period from 1832 and the passing of the Reform Bill to the fall of the Melbourne Ministry in 1841. It is about the early life of Harry Coningsby, who is generous warm hearted and the orphan grandson of the wealthy Marquess of Monmouth who was estranged from Coningsby's parents but takes up Coningsby, who goes to Eton, becomes friendly with the son of a rich Lancashire manufacturer Arthur Millbank and falls in love with Millbank's sister. At the same time he develops political views contradictory to those of Monmouth. When the latter dies Coningsby is disinherited but he sets to work to qualify as a barrister and Millbank the manufacturer, impressed with the young man's seriousness, withdraws his opposition to Coningsby's marriage with his daughter and gets him elected to Parliament for his own constituency.

The best parts of the book however are the descriptions of the Tadpoles and Tapers the typical party wire pullers and of the self-seeking politician Rigby. There is also the Jewish superman Sidonia one of these mysterious men who figure in Disraeli's novels and appear at crises in the heroes' lives to advise and strengthen them in the battle of life.

*Sybil* or the *Two Nations* is based on Disraeli's visit to the north of England and his reading of reports on conditions in the manufacturing towns. The *Two Nations* are the rich and the poor and Disraeli has combined his social criticism with the fortunes of Egremont the younger brother of the Lord Marney, one of the meanest and most inhuman of the landowning class. He meets Sybil the daughter of Gerard one of the leaders of the Chartist movement and the drama of the book lies in the revelation that Gerard is the real inheritor of the Marney estates because of his relationship with the last abbot of Marney whose lands had been seized under Henry VIII at the time of the suppression of the monasteries.
The last part of the book has much more action, rising to drama and melodrama when the castle of Lord Marney is attacked, Marney is killed while Gerard is cut down by the yeomanry. Morley, Egremont’s radical journalist friend also dies, but not before he has found a box in the muniment room at the castle with the documents proving Sybil’s claim to the Mowbray estates. Highly improbable though it seems, Disraeli manages this part of the novel very well indeed and really does bring to life, not only the conflict between the workers and the landlords but the inner conflict between the workmen who are bent on death and looting and the leaders who try to control the excesses of the mob.

The final novel in this trilogy Tancred is the most improbable of them all. Tancred when he comes of age renounces a political career after meditating deeply on the social and political conditions of his day and decides to go to the East to solve the great Asian mystery. In effect this is the divine decree by which the Jews were not only the chosen people but the instrument of the redemption of man through the crucifixion of Christ, and the solution for Tancred’s dilemma is to promote the doctrine of theocratic equality.

But after receiving a revelation on Mt. Sinai he goes to the Lebanon where he meets the brilliant but erratic Fakhr ed Din, a pseudo-Christian prince of the Lebanon, who is intriguing to become the lord of the whole region. The adventures that follow leave Tancred disillusioned about Fakhr ed Din and in Jerusalem he falls violently in love with Eva a beautiful Jewess. At this moment there is a loud tumult. ‘The Duke and Duchess of Bellmont, Tancred’s parents had arrived in Jerusalem.’ This deliberate anti-climax suggests that Disraeli had imposed his own curb on whatever speculations he had in mind for the future of his hero Tancred and Eva.

In this novel Sidonia reappears and writes to Besso the chief banker in Palestine whose daughter Eva is Fakhr ed Din’s foster sister and who is another of those women characters who may have owed something to Disraeli’s own sister Sarah. I think however that there is a fairly plausible explanation of these single minded, beauti-
ful and inspiring women in Disraeli’s novels. He himself said he had read no novels since Scott, and it is in Rebecca the beautiful and intrepid daughter of Isaac of York in *Ivanhoe*, that one can find the prototype for most of these women.

These three novels *Coningsby*, *Sybil* and *Tancred* were written during the impassioned debates on the Repeal of the Corn Laws when Disraeli, allied with Lord George Bentinck in the House of Commons emerged as the one speaker on the side of those Tories who had refused to cross the House with Sir Robert Peel, who could formulate incisively and brilliantly the case against Free Trade. They are as I say important because they contain not only all the elements of Disraeli’s personality, but also because they are a kind of epitome of the ideals and the objects of the Young England movement which had attracted Disraeli to the side of the Tories.

After the three novels of the forties’ Disraeli wrote no more novels until 1870 when he published *Lothair* which in many ways is the most satisfying of them. The pattern of the novel is the familiar one, the young nobleman, an orphan, left in the guardianship of his uncle Lord Culloden and a High Anglican clergyman, Grandison, who enters the Catholic Church. Most of the novel is concerned with his efforts, those of Monsignor Catesby and the beautiful Clare Arundel to get Lothair with his immense fortune to enter the church at a time, 1866, when Garibaldi was threatening Rome again. As against these there are the beautiful Corisande whom Lothair wishes to marry, and the heroic Theodora who urges Lothair to come with her and join the army being assembled by Garibaldi. He goes off with Theodora who is killed in a skirmish outside Viterbo, while Lothair himself is wounded at the battle of Mentana and wakes up in a Papal hospital to find that this conversion is being announced in Rome and Cardinal Grandison trying to persuade him that he was wounded fighting for the Pope rather than against him. Lothair however remembers the promise he gave to the dying Theodora and refuses to be taken in by the casuistries of the Cardinal, despite their plausibility and moves on to Palestine where he meets the Paraclete or the intercessor, another of these mysterious characters who app-
ear in Disraeli’s novels, this time to give Lothair the spiritual strength and refreshment which enable him to go back to England to marry Corisande.

After the unscrupulous audacity, wit and unconcealed ambition of Vivian Grey, Disraeli had evidently decided that it was giving too many hostages to fortune to make his heroes politically brilliant and ambitious.

In his last novel *Endymion* published in 1880 when Disraeli was 77 and out of office, we have the hero Endymion who is the son of a rising politician who dies penniless after having to retire from politics. Endymion himself is clever and amiable, but he is overshadowed by his twin sister Myra who is proud, ambitious, determined and marries the foreign secretary Lord Roehampton. After his death she marries an upstart monarch, Prince Florestan who smacks of Napoleon III.

Endymion owes his success not so much to his own ability as to the influence of his sister and Lady Mountfort whom he marries on the death of her husband. With two such determined and imperious women behind him it is not surprising that Endymion becomes a success, but there is little in his character to suggest Disraeli, although Disraeli was always conscious of the importance women had played in his own life. But there is nothing in these later novels to break the image of the impassive, inscrutable, enigmatic Disraeli in the tightly buttoned black frock coat and stock he affected in his later years.

Instead we have a succession of scenes such as the following which could only have been written during what one might describe as the Indian summer of the English landed gentry. This was the period between 1850 and 1874 when the price of corn, despite the repeal of the Corn Laws and the free trade policy of the Liberals, had not been seriously affected. Landowners still lived in those vast country houses, most of which have now been turned into hospitals, schools or appropriated by government departments. They still had rent rolls of £30,000 and £40,000 a year, income tax was a mere 8d. in
the £, death duties were not introduced until 1894. Most landowners still kept up their houses in London where they entertained during the season and when Parliament was down there was a round of visits of the great Tory houses which Disraeli assiduously followed even though he did not fish, hunt or shoot, and though he usually complained in his letters of the draughtiness of the long corridors the badness of the food and of the boredom of these long visits.

Here is an example of a Sunday in the country from *Lothair*:

‘But Sunday in the country, with your house full of visitors, is too often an exception to this general truth. It is a trial. Your guests cannot always be at church, and, if they could, would not like it. There is nothing to interest or amuse them: no sport; no castles or factories to visit; no adventurous expeditions; no gay music in the morn, and no light dance in the evening. There is always danger of the day becoming a course of heavy meals and stupid walks, for the external scene and all its teeming circumstances, natural and human, though full of concern to you, are to your visitors an insipid blank. How did Sunday go off at Muriel Towers?... It had been announced that the breakfast hour was to be somewhat earlier. The ladies in general were punctual, and seemed conscious of some great event impending. The ladies Flora and Grizell entered with, each in her hand, a prayer-book of purple velvet adorned with a decided cross... Lord St. Aldegonde came down late, and looked about him with an uneasy, ill-humoured air.

Whether from the absence of Theodora or from some other cause, he was brusque, ungracious, scowling, and silent, only nodding to the Bishop who benignly saluted him, refusing every dish that was offered, then getting up and helping himself at the side table, making a great noise with the carving instruments, and flouncing down his plate when he resumed his seat. Nor was his costume correct... Lord St. Aldegonde had on his shooting jacket of brown tweeds and his locks, always to a certain degree neglected, were peculiarly dishevelled.
Hugo Bohun, who was not afraid of him and was a high churchman, being in religion and in all other matters always on the side of the Duchesses, said, ‘Well, St. Aldegonde, are you going to chapel in that dress?’ But St. Aldegonde would not answer; he gave a snort and glanced at Hugo with the eye of a gladiator.

The meal was over. The Bishop was standing near the mantelpiece talking to the ladies, who were clustered round him; the Archdeacon and the Chaplain and some other clergy a little in the background; Lord St. Aldegonde, who, whether there were a fire or not, always stood with his back to the fireplace with his hands in his pockets, moved discourteously among them, assumed his usual position, and listened, as it were grimly, for a few moments to their talk; then he suddenly exclaimed in a loud voice, and with the groan of a rebellious Titan, ‘How I hate Sunday!’

“Granville!” exclaimed Lady St. Aldegonde, turning pale. There was a general shudder.

‘I mean in a country-house,’ said Lord St. Aldegonde. ‘Of course I mean in a country-house. I do not dislike it when alone, and I do not dislike it in London. But Sunday in a country-house is infernal.’ ‘I think it is now time for us to go,’ said the Bishop.”

This was part and parcel of English political life until living memory, and the novels especially these last novels of Disraeli give a very vivid account of it. I have quoted this passage rather than the more often quoted passage where Lothair is in hospital being persuaded by Gardinal Grandison that he is suffering from hallucination in believing that he was fighting for Garibaldi rather than the Pope, because it is a good example of Disraeli’s prose at its best.

The pattern which emerges from these novels is by now, fairly clear. A young man usually an orphan, (Disraeli incidentally never mentions his own mother,) who at a critical point in his life is galvanised into action either by one of these mysterious characters like
Sidonia or the Paraclete, or a dynamic woman like Theodora, and a good deal of witty dialogue, which anticipates the dialogue of Oscar Wilde or the aesthetes. You have also the bored aristocrat who has run through the current pleasures of society. An example occurs in the *Young Duke* where one of the characters says 'All Paradise opens—let us die eating ortolans to the sound of soft music'. One could collect a score of examples of dialogue which hardly differs from that we are familiar with in Oscar Wilde.

None of the novels has a plot in the ordinary sense of the word. They all tend to prolong themselves through the vicissitudes of the hero who goes on a long tour of the Continent and eventually either discovers, like Vivian Grey, that he is a worthless rake, or like Lothair returns and marries the girl he loves. The only one which has a plot in the sense that there is a conflict of character and conflicting attitudes to society and social reform is *Sybil* which would make a very good scenario for a film.

Finally there is an increasing tendency in Disraeli's novels to look to the East for the future of Britain, and this is bound up with Disraeli's own origins.

I have quoted Hannah Arendt's opinion that Disraeli's succession to the leadership of the Tory party was the result of chance or luck. This simply will not stand up against the evidence. In 1848 Disraeli who with Lord George Bentinck had been the main bulwark of the Tory opposition supported a motion by Lord John Russell to remove the disabilities against Jews entering Parliament. Disraeli spoke in favour of the motion and nearly wrecked his political career by doing so. Lord George Bentinck resigned the leadership of the Tory party in the House of Commons and the Tories cast around to find someone who could succeed him who would have some of the authority of Lord Bentinck if not the brilliance of Disraeli. But though they tried very hard there was no one and Disraeli despite his ambiguous views on protection was the only one. This was not the result of luck but of sheer unquestioned intellectual superiority which the Tories however reluctantly had to recognise.

It is here that the novels of the forties' are useful because they
reinforce the argument that the novels reflect a kind of inner conflict in Disraeli. It has been said that there was nothing like the prejudice against Jews in the forties’ that developed in the seventies and eighties with the arrival in London of the refugees from the ghettos of Russia and Poland. Nevertheless a prejudice there was which expressed itself in the sneers at the Jew boy, the consistent anti-Semitism of Punch, and the general idea of Jews as an international canker. Now Disraeli in an attempt to rationalise his position put forward an idea which was unfortunate. Briefly in Coningsby Sidonia explains to the young Coningsby that all the great ministers of finance have been Jews and reeks off a list of names which are quite incorrect. In Tancred Disraeli goes even farther and has Eva telling Tancred that the Jews are the chosen race because without their collaboration there would have been no victim, no crucifixion, no atonement and no salvation and that Christianity is only completed Judaism. All this appears in the latter part of Tancred as though Disraeli were trying to persuade himself that as a Jew by race if not by religion he was only fulfilling a kind of perverted destiny of his own.

It has been pointed out that in the reflections of Sidonia and Eva that Disraeli was supplying ammunition to those who would use it with devastating effect later on. On the other hand as the leader of the Tory party and a potential Prime Minister he had to show that he need not be less proud of his Englishness because he was a Jew and that it was because of his Jewishness that he was able to identify himself so absolutely with the people he was to lead. This may seem absurd today but to Disraeli it was absolutely necessary to enable him to achieve his objective. It is best illustrated perhaps by referring to the remark that Charles Labouchere once made about Gladstone. He said he did not mind the old man keeping a trump card up his sleeve but he wished he would not claim that God Almighty had put it there. When Disraeli was speaking, which he always did very clearly and audibly, pronouncing every syllable, he would herald some hit or thrust by producing a handkerchief from his left pocket pass it to his right hand sniff at it, and after he had made his point return it to the same pocket until a new subject for his wit or calcu-
lated indignation came up. One might have said that Disraeli's indentification of the Jews with Britain is an exercise in the same verbal sleight of hand or mind.

But what I would call these perilous paradoxes about the relation of Judaism to Christianity and to the Anglo-Saxon race were essential to Disraeli for two reasons. One was the reassurance that he got from them in what was his comparative isolation. Then as a Jew by race if not religion, as a man who had none of the century old family traditions and connections which characterised the party he was leading, he needed to identify himself in his own mind at any rate with the country he served while at the same time satisfying himself that the English no less than the Jews were the chosen people and had taken on some of the attributes of the Messiah.

I doubt whether Disraeli knew or bothered himself about the periodical appearance of a Messiah among the Jews. Messianic tremors sometimes stirred orthodox Jews, but he certainly would have known nothing about the Messianic idea among the 19th century Jews in Eastern Europe. What he did do however was to transfer the idea to the expansion of England in the 19th century. There is a famous passage in Tancred where Fakhr ed Din expounds to the fascinated Tancred the idea of a great Eastern Empire dominated by England.

"You must perform the Portuguese scheme on a great scale; quit a petty and exhausted position for a vast and prolific empire. Let the Queen of the English collect a great fleet, let her stow away all her treasure, bullion, gold plate, and precious arms; be accompanied by all her court and chief people. and transfer the seat of her empire from London to Delhi. There she will find an immense empire ready made, a first-rate army, and a large revenue. In the meantime I will arrange with Mehemet Ali. He shall have Bagdad and Mesopotamia, and pour the Bedoueen cavalry into Persia. I will take care of Syria and Asia Minor. The only way to manage the Affghans is by Persia and by the Arabs. We will acknowledge the Empress of India as our suzerain, and secure for her the Levantine coast. If she
like, she shall have Alexandria as she now has Malta: it could be arranged. Your queen is young; she has an avenir. Aberdeen and Sir Peel will never give her this advice; their habits are formed. They are too old, too ruses. But, you see! the greatest empire that ever existed; besides which she gets rid of the embarrassment of her Chambers! And quite practicable; for the only difficult part, the conquest of India, which baffled Alexander, is all done!"

Here is the idea of England’s future being based on an Indian Empire, which was realised when Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India in 1876 during Disraeli’s second ministry, while the culmination of Disraeli’s concept of England as a great power came in 1878 at the Congress of Berlin. This was all part of the process by which Disraeli identified England with a Messianic mission. The poems and novels of Rudyard Kipling are in a way a continuation of the same idea. As Sir William Harcourt a Liberal said when Disraeli left the House of Commons for the House of Lords as Lord Beaconsfield, ‘To the imagination of the younger generation your life will always have a special fascination. For them you have enlarged the horizon of the possibilities of the future.’

If I had time I would have liked to say something of Disraeli as a social reformer. He said himself rather deprecatingly that he came into full office too late to do much about the abuses which instigated his novel Sybil or the Two Nations. It should however be remembered that he realised the dangers of a centralised bureaucracy, and that he always fought against it. His faith in the landowning classes may have been misplaced but his realisation of the habit a centralised government has of eroding the machinery of local government and the dull apathy that follows was not.

Sybil despite its melodramatic conclusion is an acute diagnosis of the tendency of administration to neglect the human misery which may result from their measures. In the forties it was the new Poor Law, but Disraeli was also aware of the neglect of the condition of the working classes.
It was also the first of a number of novels including Charles Kingsley’s *Yeast* and *Alton Locke*, and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* which dealt with the social problems of the period and particularly the rise and fall of the Chartist movement and the condition of the working classes in the great industrial towns.

I have not dealt specifically with Disraeli as a novelist. Some critics in fact have doubted whether apart from a flair for narrative, for witty dialogue, and in the later novels a very intimate knowledge of the way that government affairs are managed, he could be regarded as a novelist at all. I have preferred to treat his novels as he undoubtedly regarded them, as a means of projecting something of himself, which as a politician and later as a statesman he repressed. It is for this reason that like his latest biographer Robert Blake I would welcome a definitive edition not only of the trilogy of political novels of the forties’ but also of *Lothair* and *Endymion*, though unlike Robert Blake I would not regard them simply as ‘great fun.’ Far too many of the remarks made by his characters have passed into common parlance, and a great many of the problems he deals with, notably the relation between government and the people governed are still very much with us. And it should be remembered that for all the apparent flippancy of a lot of Disraeli’s writing he did have an acute appreciation of the relation of London to the industrial north, and the menace of a centralised bureaucracy which we know only too well today.

THE END

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Professor McHardie of Christ Church Oxford, suggested that the tale of the divine angel, Raphael, who appears at the crucial moments of the story contained in the book of Tobit, might well have been among the sources from which Disraeli drew his idea of those prophetic figures who appear when the hero needs their counsel and encouragement.
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