

## Romanticism on the Right: Benjamin Disraeli's Authoritarian Aesthetics

RACHEL TEUKOLSKY

Scholars today are responding to a resonant call to “undiscipline” Victorian studies (Chatterjee et al. 371). Many are scrutinizing the foundations of our field, discovering uncomfortable truths about the norms and conventions that governed the nineteenth century. In this essay, I turn an undisciplining lens on Benjamin Disraeli, who served as prime minister of Britain in 1868 and again from 1874 to 1880. For political historians, Disraeli is the most famous Tory politician of the era, an eloquent founder of the Conservative Party. For literature scholars, Disraeli is a prolific novelist, best known for the Young England trilogy of politically themed novels published in the 1840s. Most critics read *Sybil, or the Two Nations* (1845), the middle novel in the trilogy, which is distinctive for its industrial, Condition-of-England theme. The novel is often grouped with the industrial novels of Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell, lending Disraeli's works a slightly progressive slant.

In this essay, however, I propose a different Disraeli. I argue that some of his novels operate within a tradition of deeply conservative aesthetics,

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**ABSTRACT:** This essay turns an undisciplining lens on Benjamin Disraeli, the prime minister of Britain in 1868 and again from 1874 to 1880. I argue that some of his novels operate within a tradition of deeply conservative aesthetics, celebrating authoritarian models. I focus on *Coningsby* (1844) and *Tancred* (1847) to argue that they belong to a long Romanticism, opposing moves toward democracy, reason, and utilitarianism, and espousing values of beauty, passion, and eroticism toward authoritarian ends. Though Disraeli's conservative politics have often been localized as a part of the contest between the Whigs and the Tories, his novels offer a surprising template for a long-lived set of ideas, anticipating more virulent strains of hard-right thought and practice that would arise in the twentieth century.

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The government of Victorian Britain did not qualify as authoritarian, as the term has been variously defined by scholars.<sup>3</sup> Disraeli himself entertained a long, diverse career as a conservative politician without meriting the label. Yet Disraeli's novels modeled values consonant with a conservative "hard right," a term used by political theorist Edmund Fawcett to describe a more extreme form of conservative thought. Disraeli's conservatism has often been localized as a part of the nineteenth-century contest between the Whigs and the Tories. But his novels offer a template for a long-lived set of ideas, anticipating more virulent strains of hard-right thought and practice that would arise in the twentieth century.

These ideas include an intense nationalism based in notions of racial supremacy; a vision of society as a naturalized hierarchy under a strong leader; a dominant masculinism and the exclusion of women from power; an erotic bond between male leaders and male subordinates; an ideal of governance as spiritual and divinely inspired; and political values conveyed by means of pageantry and beauty. If the hard right today has succeeded in capturing the imagination of people around the world, that success can be attributed in part to artworks and media offering compelling aesthetic and political values. Hard-right ideas are sometimes portrayed as fringe or far from the mainstream; yet Disraeli's novels show that these ideas have a long history in surprisingly mainstream art forms.

The sociologist Karl Mannheim argues that early-nineteenth-century conservatism was essentially Romantic. This worldview valued "family against contract, intuitive certainty against rationality, [and] inner experience as a source

of knowledge against the mechanistic” (65). While Romanticism itself is not inherently authoritarian—and Romantic-era artists and authors expressed a range of political commitments—the aesthetic style was adopted by many conservative thinkers of the period.<sup>4</sup> Familiar Romantic values included an investment in subjective feeling over objective analysis, expressivism over positivism, organic growth over mechanism, intensity and passion over serenity or exactitude, and genius and the exceptional individual over the generic multitudes.<sup>5</sup> Disraeli used Romantic values to imbue authority with aesthetic allure, in a model that differed from Burkean conservatism: unlike Edmund Burke, who favored gradual change, Disraeli advocated for a more fiery vision, in which a heroic figure of superior blood would single-handedly transform the world. His novels called for a revolution that would remake conservatism into a glorious model of powerful leadership.

### 1. The Aristocracy of Nature

Disraeli came from a middle-class Jewish background in an era when Jewishness barred most of his compatriots from personal and professional attainments. His father had him baptized as an Anglican at age twelve, but Disraeli’s Jewish background still made him an outsider figure in Britain. Despite the impediments of his religion and social class, however, Disraeli managed to transform himself into the embodiment of aristocratic, landowning, Tory arch-conservatism. This bold act of self-transformation has made Disraeli into a cult figure: there are books published about him every few years, even today. He is considered the most important Tory politician of the nineteenth century, dominant in the party from the 1840s to the 1880s, and still widely admired. A 1998 volume devoted to “the self-fashioning of Disraeli” identifies the keynote of the collected essays as “Disraeli’s preoccupation with ‘genius’” (Smith, Introduction 2), especially “the imperious necessity of realizing the true nature of his [own] genius and translating it into mastery over his environment” (4). Many biographers portray Disraeli as an adventurer and a kind of Byronic hero, a comparison that Disraeli himself encouraged. (In 1826, while touring the continent as a young man, Disraeli sought out and befriended Lord Byron’s boatman in Venice.) Disraeli’s life story models all the appeal of ambition, self-making, and an irrepressible rise to power. No wonder that historians and biographers strive to retell it every few years.<sup>6</sup> My analysis, however, will question the politics of the Byronic hero in the context of British imperial ideals.

A darker account of Disraeli’s life appears in a brief chapter of Hannah Arendt’s study *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Arendt doesn’t look closely

Disraeli's novels, but she does align him with a disturbing historical legacy. She writes of Disraeli's keen political instincts as he brilliantly maneuvered his way into power. He presented himself as "the chosen man of a chosen race," using his charm, wit, and eloquent writing skills to gain entry into London's most exclusive social circles and clubs (71). "It was his virtuosity at the social game which made him choose the Conservative Party, won him a seat in Parliament, the post of Prime Minister, and, last but not least, the lasting admiration of society and the friendship of a Queen" (69). Disraeli often seemed to lack coherent political principles, tacking between a variety of positions in order to achieve and retain power.<sup>7</sup> He chose the Tory party because he saw an opening for someone like himself. This proponent of conservative monarchism thus also worked to secure the second Reform Act of 1867 and contributed to the British welfare state in a series of reforms in the 1870s. Despite this apparent inconsistency, however, I will discuss below how all of these legislative moves ultimately cohered into Disraeli's right-wing vision for the nation and the empire.

Disraeli supported his political ambitions using a race theory about Jews that would become deeply pernicious in the twentieth century. As Arendt documents, Disraeli asserted that Jews belonged to a "natural aristocracy" of born leaders: "There is only one thing which makes a race and that is blood"; race is "the key to history" (qtd. in Arendt 73). Disraeli was also an enthusiastic subscriber to conspiracy theories: he saw certain Jews, such as the famous banking family of the Rothschilds, as part of a desirable global aristocracy; but he also saw negative conspiracies afoot everywhere in the revolutionary forces threatening European governments. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1903), the notorious forgery implicating Jews in a worldwide conspiracy of domination, reproduces many of the motifs voiced by Disraeli, but casts them in a negative light. For Disraeli, Jewish racial superiority qualified Jews to lead; for later anti-Semitic thinkers, however, Jewish racial difference signified membership in a diabolical cabal. It is ironic that Disraeli unwittingly worked to script and amplify the common terms of anti-Semitic propaganda, which would fuel violent oppression in the twentieth century, even while these ideas facilitated his success in British politics during his lifetime.

If Disraeli has been normalized as a Victorian novelist with conservative political commitments, a close study of his hard-right aesthetics serves to defamiliarize the specific substance of his conservatism. Fawcett uses the term "hard right" to designate a certain radical tradition of conservative thought that lies on a spectrum with more moderate conservative theories. He identifies as representative the hard-right thinker Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821), who, like Burke, was also a counter-Enlightenment theorist responding to the French

Revolution. But whereas Burke cultivated “a tone of enlightened good sense and worldly-wise competence” (3) that would come to define Anglo-American conservatism, Maistre “argued in black and white with Manichean ferocity” (4), representing a more zealous French and German strain. Maistre penned such utterances as: “Every government is despotic; the only choice is to obey or rebel” and “liberty was always the gift of kings” (qtd. in Fawcett 4). Jerry Z. Muller calls the hard-right tradition “radical conservatism,” again making the contrast with Burke: unlike Burkean conservatism, which aims to shore up existing institutions, radical conservatism sees current social foundations as too decrepit to be worth preserving. The radical conservative therefore seeks to overturn a decadent status quo: “Radical conservatism is a revolt against existing institutions in the name of the need for authority” (Muller 28). Muller notes that radical conservatism, while most commonly associated with National Socialism and fascist movements of the twentieth-century interwar period, also describes “the common denominator among a range of intellectual and political movements which extend beyond Europe and beyond the interwar era” (29). Fawcett delineates the hard right by tracing Maistre’s legacy to later theorists such as Charles Maurras, Georges Sorel, and Carl Schmitt.<sup>8</sup> Neither Muller nor Fawcett sees Disraeli as a representative of the hard right—as, indeed, most scholars do not.<sup>9</sup> Disraeli’s record as a Tory politician emphasized consensus and compromise over militant transformation. Yet his novels animated an incendiary worldview that is surprisingly consonant with more extreme conservative traditions.

In defamiliarizing Disraeli’s conservatism, I also question a larger master narrative about British domestic politics, one that is especially dominant in literary criticism. Literary histories of Britain typically invoke a political history emphasizing democratization: as Britain advanced toward democracy through a series of reform acts, this progress was matched by the expansion of a “mass reading public” and the rise of the novel as the century’s major literary form (Altick 1). The novel’s mass appeal thus appears to coincide with a presumptive democratic politics of the people. Yet while novels undeniably courted a broad cross-class audience, the novel’s democratic ethos in fact contrasted starkly with the real-world practice of British politics. The inner workings of the British government were characterized by exclusivity, tribalism, and a profoundly undemocratic sensibility. Many British politicians—including Disraeli—conveniently changed their views over time to retain a hold on power. The Whigs and Tories were in effect elite clans of aristocratic or wealthy property owners who jockeyed for advantage across the century.<sup>10</sup> Britain’s halting moves toward democracy were far from a triumphant march. In the 1840s, when Disraeli published the *Young England* novels, middle- and upper-class people lived in fear of the

idea of democracy; the 1832 Reform Act aimed to limit an expanded franchise rather than invite it.<sup>11</sup> In other words, if Disraeli was a skilled navigator of a political system characterized by hierarchy and massive inequality, he was also a prime representative of its values, rather than an outlier.

## 2. *Coningsby: To Adore and to Obey*

The hard-right worldview of Disraeli's novels consists of some familiar traits. I define these characteristics briefly using the work of Arendt, Muller, George Mosse, Zeev Sternhell, and Thomas Linehan. While they focus on twentieth-century developments, these scholars all look to the nineteenth century as a cauldron for the formation of hard-right thought. The hard-right political program reacts against Enlightenment principles and political egalitarianism; it organizes itself under a banner of extreme nationalism, emphasizing models of consensus and unity. It celebrates a charismatic leader operating with an authoritarian ethos, cultivating aspects of hero worship: the ideal leader is "an individual symbolic of what other individuals could become" (Mosse 110). Beneath the leader, however, the ideal is anti-individual and collectivist, submerging individuals into the organic, tribal unity of the nation.<sup>12</sup> The worldview combines strands of both "modernism" and "anti-modernism," harkening back to anachronistic pasts while proposing visions of bold new futures (Linehan 8). It yearns toward utopia while pessimistically diagnosing cultural decline and a "decadence of the present" (Mosse 101). Muller writes of how the radical conservative literalizes a turn to nature in the naturalizing of inherited traditions, seeing "nature in the most physical and mythical sense, of consanguinity and geography—blood and soil" (30). Land is romanticized, earthy, fascinating; it features in gatherings steeped in ritual and pageantry that appeal to the senses.<sup>13</sup> This worldview celebrates male beauty and a muscular warrior ethic, courting misogyny.<sup>14</sup> Political violence is an appropriate punishment for outsiders and enemies; both insiders and outsiders are often defined by race or blood.

These elements all appear, nascently or fully fledged, in Disraeli's 1844 novel *Coningsby, or the New Generation*. "The New Generation" of the subtitle refers to the upcoming cohort of Tory politicians radicalized in the wake of the 1832 Reform Act. Disraeli imagines them as a group of rebellious young men overthrowing a moribund, degenerate Toryism—one linked to his enemy, Robert Peel.<sup>15</sup> *Coningsby* is the first in Disraeli's Young England trilogy, which also includes *Sybil* and *Tancred*. Written by a Tory MP, these novels are basically Tory propaganda. (Disraeli had first become a Tory MP in 1837 and would remain in Parliament for

the rest of his life, serving largely as an opposition leader.) “Young England” was the name of the nationalist movement that Disraeli helmed as an up-and-coming Tory politician. Combining modernism and anti-modernism, the movement promised a bold new future by reinstating admirable elements from history, especially the medieval past. Victorian medievalism exceeded shining Camelot: it was also a repository for powerful political imagery. In *Coningsby*, the main character advocates for a return to monarchical power, a strong Church, and a diminishment of parliamentary power, especially in the House of Commons. National unity can triumph over sectarianism under the reins of a strong, inspiring leader who moves people with his spiritually inflected words.

Harry Coningsby, the novel’s protagonist, models all the qualities of an ideal leader. An English aristocrat, he’s a young seeker full of ambition and looking for a purpose. Key scenes in his life transpire at Eton. The venerable boarding school is portrayed as a pastoral utopia, especially for certain enterprising students:

Those antique spires, hoar with faith and wisdom, the chapel and the college; that river winding through the shady meads; the sunny glade and the solemn avenue; . . . the stirring multitude, the energetic groups, the individual mind that leads, conquers, controls; the emulation and the affection; the noble strife and the tender sentiment; the daring exploit and the dashing scrape; the passion that pervades our life, and breathes in everything, from the aspiring study to the inspiring sport: oh! what hereafter can spur the brain and touch the heart like this . . . ? (11)

The school’s natural beauty, from river to glade, naturalizes the competitive hierarchies among the students, out of which emerges “the individual mind that leads, conquers, controls.” Harry Coningsby exemplifies such a student leader. His charisma, striking blue-eyed looks, and graceful athleticism make him the most popular boy in the school: “He had become the hero of Eton; the being of whose existence everybody was proud, and in whose career every boy took an interest. They talked of him, they quoted him, they imitated him” (92). If only the nation could be remade into a place like Eton, the novel implies, everything would fall into its proper order. The younger boys act as servants to the older boys, traditions and pageants are rigorously observed, and the nation’s male elite form bonds that will continue into their adult lives as politicians.

In the climactic scene at Eton, a boys’ swimming party goes awry: young Millbank, son of a wealthy Whig Manchester industrialist, almost drowns in the river, only to be rescued by the intrepid Harry. Millbank’s Whig father is the mortal enemy of Harry’s grandfather Lord Monmouth, an old Tory aristocrat. But Harry’s heroic act makes young Millbank into his adoring fan. The novel

ultimately resolves the clash between the Whigs and Tories by having Coningsby marry Edith, Millbank's sister. Beyond her stunning beauty, Edith is a blank: she is in effect a placeholder for the unity the novel envisions, bridging party divides. *Coningsby* imagines aristocrats and industrialists united into a benevolent ruling class, in a regeneration fired by the hero's spiritual, masculine ideal. Coningsby's alliance with the grateful Millbank allows him to transcend the degenerate Toryism of his grandfather, leading to the "new generation" of Tories promised in the book's subtitle.<sup>16</sup>

Harry's maturation and eventual enlightenment proceeds through a series of conversations with diverse characters. Most influential is Sidonia, a handsome, wise, athletic, mysterious, Jewish man who has inherited the wealth of a banking empire. Many have seen Sidonia as a portrait of the fabulously wealthy Lionel de Rothschild, but this character also serves as a mouthpiece for Disraeli's own views. Sidonia's great wealth, combined with his Jewish bar to citizenship in Europe, make him a spiritual wanderer, friend to monarchs, generals, and other great men. It is Sidonia who expresses Disraeli's beliefs in Jews as a superior race because of their pure bloodlines. "The Hebrew is an unmixed race. . . . An unmixed race of a first-rate organisation are the aristocracy of Nature" (192–93). Despite centuries of exile and persecution, says Sidonia, "Hebrews" "flourish in all the primeval vigour of the pure Asian breed" (193). This superior blood also has political consequences: "the Jews, Coningsby, are essentially Tories. Toryism, indeed, is but copied from the mighty prototype which has fashioned Europe"; Jews "are a race essentially monarchical, deeply religious" (219). Sidonia admires the great men whose "blood" and passion make them naturally fitted to become legislators and conquerors. In a crucial passage, using rhetoric both radiant and terrifying, Sidonia attacks Utilitarianism and its pallid doctrines of equality:

[Sidonia]: "How limited is human reason, the profoundest inquirers are most conscientious. 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; . . . 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."

[Coningsby]: "And you think, then, that as Imagination once subdued the State, Imagination may now save it?"

[Sidonia]: "Man is made to adore and to obey: but if you will not command him, if you give him nothing to worship, he will fashion his own divinities, and find a chieftain in his own passions."



[Coningsby]: "But where can we find faith in a nation of sectaries? Who can feel loyalty to a sovereign of Downing Street?"

[Sidonia]: "I speak of the eternal principles of human nature, you answer me with the passing accidents of the hour. Sects rise and sects disappear . . . England is governed by Downing Street; once it was governed by Alfred and Elizabeth." (210–11)

The passage is compelling because it touches on home truths: politics based on statistics or rational claims will not stir people as does a politics fueled by passion, emotion, or beauty. Sidonia frames authoritarian power as Romantic domination, drawing on the power of the aesthetic to create a vision of governance as eternal and natural. This vision opposes the artificial, bureaucratic, and sect-riven realities of modern Downing Street.<sup>17</sup> Sidonia's political model evinces the familiar Romantic aesthetic qualities of a secularized religion, numinous and visionary, harnessing "the Imagination" as a force for strong governance.<sup>18</sup> An obvious influence is Thomas Carlyle's 1840 *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*: the nation is superimposed upon the charismatic figure of the leader, a heroic personality. Sidonia's language describes an eros of politics, promising power to the leader who can best harness the innate human desires for love and passion. He uses a second-person address to position "you" above a people "made to adore and to obey," aligning the reader with the protagonist: both are situated above the populace as future leaders ready to take the reins.

In *Coningsby*, Disraeli portrays governance as a beautiful relationship between men. When Harry and the worshipful Millbank are reunited at Oxford after their schooldays have passed, they share an ecstatic emotional outpouring: "Man is never so manly as when he feels deeply, acts boldly, and expresses himself with frankness and fervor" (309). Scholars such as Mary Poovey have noted the novel's unabashed homoeroticism; Poovey observes that Disraeli eroticizes politics, especially manly speech and the "congress" between men (142). She concludes that the novel's concealed truth is a taboo homosexual love between the male characters.<sup>19</sup> But I take at face value the novel's palpable homoerotic bonds: in fact, *Coningsby* eroticizes politics because the passion between men drives an authoritarian politics, in which grateful male subordinates worship a strong leader in a world devoid of women.<sup>20</sup> As the novel quips, English politics is what happens in the half-hour after dinner, when the women leave the room.<sup>21</sup> *Coningsby* tracks the pathways of power through a series of all-male institutions, from Eton, to Cambridge, to the private London clubs, to Parliament, each institution escalating in power and prestige. In each case, top-down Tory politics pulses with the erotic influence of men subordinate to their superiors. The Byronic hero serves as a model for the sexy outsider individualist, who

also makes for a great leader. Even though Byron himself was progressive and fought for Greek independence against Turkish imperialism, his style of passionate, charismatic masculinity ironically became a type for British right-wing politics, channeled by Disraeli, and exemplified by Sidonia, the mysterious, powerful, Jewish outsider.

Disraeli's English nationalism, in *Coningsby* and elsewhere, presumes a racial alliance between Jews and Anglo-Saxons—two so-called superior races fitted for leadership. Sidonia declares Jews the aristocracy of nature because they are “a pure race of the Caucasian organization” (219). Disraeli adopts the racial typology of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, who, writes Patrick Brantlinger, “is usually credited with inventing the ‘Caucasian’ racial category, the highest and oldest of his five major races” (*Taming* 90). Blumenbach's system classified both Anglo-Saxons and Jews as “Caucasian.” The strong friendship between Coningsby and Sidonia thus embodies the racial alliance from which “the nation” emerges as a mythical concept. As Ivan Davidson Kalmar argues, Disraeli's race-based, mythic nationhood obscures the more prosaic truth of bourgeois ascendancy; it is no coincidence that Disraeli's conduit of national feeling is a quintessential bourgeois figure, the “wise banker” (362).<sup>22</sup> Yet Sidonia's bourgeois aspects in *Coningsby* are easily forgotten, as the character achieves an otherworldly presence, manly and wise, a soul captain and spiritual guide for the nation.

As *Coningsby* narrates the ascendance of its golden protagonist, it also incorporates elements of non-fiction prose. The narrator directly addresses the reader, using a tone of scathing irony, to trace a *longue durée* of Whig hegemony that goes all the way back to Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. After the English Reformation, a Whig oligarchy arose that now necessitates a vigorous Tory response. *Coningsby's* passages of political prose show the influence of Disraeli's hero, Henry St. John Bolingbroke, the famed eighteenth-century Tory philosopher and author of *The Idea of a Patriot King* (1738).<sup>23</sup> As Simon During observes of the Young England trilogy, “in the spirit of Bolingbrokean patriotism, Disraeli urges that a strong national leader will be required, probably but not necessarily the monarch—there's room for Caesarism in Disraeli's early political theory” (90). During describes the paradox by which Disraeli could claim to capture the popular spirit by promoting a “charismatic, nonrepresentative leadership [that] can resist oligarchies and operate in the interest of the people as a whole” (90).<sup>24</sup>

The political passages in *Coningsby* raise a pointed question: why, after all, did Disraeli choose to clothe his ideas in novel form, rather than in nonfiction prose? In fact, the novel does important imaginative work in merging the

aesthetic and the political, courting popularity and the reading populace. *Coningsby* offers a tantalizing what-if scenario to readers, most of whom did not have access to the elite institutions portrayed. Blending the silver fork genre with the political—in an era when politics was itself a silver-fork affair—Disraeli invites his readers into the closed-off hallways of power, which are also the spaces of aristocratic male privilege. The novel offers an illusion of access, a thrill of borrowed power. Embedding authoritarian ideas within the flesh of characters, *Coningsby* shows a psychological investment in creating characters who live the beauty of sublime domination. Harry Coningsby's life as a powerful leader exists mostly in the novel's future, as he is mentored by the powerful Sidonia; his character's blond blankness must be educated to ascend to his destiny. Coningsby's blankness also opens a space for readerly projection. We, too, might learn to lead, if given imaginative access to the right ideas and inspiration.

### 3. *Tancred*: A Theological Sublime

*Coningsby*'s call to revivify the Tories made a tremendous impression. A few weeks after the novel was published in 1844, Disraeli gave a speech on conservatism to two hundred Tory MPs gathered at the Carlton Club. Here he broke with the official Tory line by backing the Ten Hours Bill and changes to the Poor Law.<sup>25</sup> Support for working-class issues was always a part of Disraeli's platform and vision, as seen in his industrial novel *Sybil; or, the Two Nations*, which again foresees a future when "the two nations" can be united under the leadership of benevolent aristocrats. *Sybil* is the Disraeli novel most studied by scholars, in part because it is categorized as an industrial novel alongside those of Dickens and Gaskell.<sup>26</sup> This categorization, however, implicitly lends *Sybil* a progressivist slant that it loses when seen as the middle novel of the Young England trilogy: care for the working classes appears differently when it is understood as part of Disraeli's larger, top-down political program.

Significantly, the final novel in the trilogy, *Tancred; or, the New Crusade*, moves the action to the Middle East. Here the good-looking, ambitious hero, another English aristocrat, rejects superficial London society to make a "new crusade" to the Holy Land, again advised by Sidonia. Tancred's physiognomy expresses "indomitable will and an iron resolution" (41); Sidonia observes that "he possessed all the latent qualities which in future would qualify him to control society" (124). Once in Palestine, Tancred joins forces with a Lebanese emir, Fakredeem, a beautiful, passionate young man who worships him. The two plot to create a unified Syrian nation that will serve as the basis for a new

Asian empire, elevated by Judeo-Christian spiritual truth and vigorous Asian blood. From Asia, this future empire will inspire and revivify a degenerate Europe. Disraeli's version of Jewishness as an elite Asian bloodline has him envisioning imperial conquest as a second coming, another Christ coming out of the east to remake Europe. The hero says, "The government of this globe must be divine, and the impulse can only come from Asia" (393). Of course, the path to Europe's rebirth is through colonization in Asia, harnessing the noble "Arabian" blood (266). Fakredeen even proposes relocating the heart of the British empire from London to Delhi, weirdly anticipating Disraeli's act almost thirty years later to crown Queen Victoria the empress of India. The novel blurs together the divides of East and West, Judaism and Christianity, Asia and Europe, seeing all as potentially united under the truths of a divinely inspired, racially superior leader.<sup>27</sup> As Sidonia says, "All is race; there is no other truth" (149).

*Tancred* appears to participate in Romantic Orientalist fantasies, but it differs in some key respects. Edward Said's familiar Orientalist paradigm observes a stark divide between West and East: the West is a bastion of reason, science, pragmatism, masculinity, and progressivism, while the East is a realm of a purported laziness, femininity, submissiveness, sexuality, emotion, circularity, and stasis. (These contrasts appear explicitly, for instance, in Alfred Tennyson's 1842 poem "Locksley Hall.") But in *Tancred*, the West is castigated for being too materialist, too scientific, and too hostile to religion. In a typical passage, the novel's narrator critiques the West by taking an Eastern point of view, again using distinctly racialized language:

Some flat-nosed Frank, full of bustle and puffed up with self-conceit (a race spawned perhaps in the morasses of some Northern forest hardly yet cleared), talks of Progress! Progress to what, and from whence? Amid empires shrivelled into deserts, amid the wrecks of great cities, a single column or obelisk of which nations import for the prime ornament of their mud-built capitals, amid arts forgotten, commerce annihilated . . . the European talks of progress because, by an ingenious application of some scientific acquirements, he has established a society which has mistaken comfort for civilisation. (226–27)

In a striking moment of modernist anti-modernism, the passage defamiliarizes the Anglo-Saxon peoples of the North into the "flat-nosed Frank," whose prized Western civilization has fallen into decadent collapse. *Tancred* is a strange imperial fantasy, since the author shares affinity with the so-called Eastern and Asian point of view: it's a fantasy of Asia regenerating Europe, rather than the other way around. The problems of the West will be solved by a spiritualized East,

site of passion and eros, but masculinized in the form of a splendid male conqueror. This messianic figure from the East will also be Westernized, like Christ. (The novel unwittingly reveals some of the conundrums in understanding Christianity as Western or British, when the religion's roots are starkly otherwise.)<sup>38</sup> Judaism brings these problems to the fore, as Disraeli attempts to harness what he portrays as the primitive, vigorous aspects of an ancient Eastern religion for a modern regeneration of the West.

*Tancred's* Romantic aesthetics entwine with its authoritarian politics in the form of a theological sublime. When the hero travels to Jerusalem, he experiences a profound religious encounter with an angel. The angel describes Jesus as the first divine conqueror and suggests that the time has come for a new conqueror in the same mold:

The equality of man can only be accomplished by the sovereignty of God. The longing for fraternity can never be satisfied but under the sway of a common father. . . . [Look to a new source to find] the solution of the social problem that perplexes you. Announce the sublime and solacing doctrine of theocratic equality. Fear not, faint not, falter not. Obey the impulse of thine own spirit, and find a ready instrument in every human being. (291)

The angel proposes a highly idiosyncratic notion of "equality," suggesting that all humans are equally available to be instruments of a single, divinely appointed leader. Communal bonds are cemented under God, a "common father" whose authority infuses that of his powerful human representative (290). As Tancred explains, "equality, properly developed, is in fact the patriarchal principle" (367). The novel lays out an aesthetics and eros of conquest, a political sublime grounded in spiritual regeneration. Combined with Disraeli's insistently racial understanding of character, the resulting vision interweaves blood, race, empire, and holy war. Tancred predicts that, from the "bosom" of "Arabia,"

we shall go forth and sweep away the moulding remnants of the Tataric system [i.e., the Ottoman empire]; and then, when the East has resumed its indigenous intelligence, when angels and prophets again mingle with humanity, the sacred quarter of the globe will recover its primeval and divine supremacy; it will act upon the modern empires, and the faint-hearted faith of Europe, which is but the shadow of a shade, will become as vigorous as befits men who are in sustained communication with the Creator. (428)

The revivification of the West entails a new masculinism, vigor triumphing over faint-heartedness. This imperial project blends the spiritual with the aesthetic, calling upon the supreme expressivity of angels and prophets, blessed with

puissant speech, and embracing men gifted with divine communication. The tropes of linked beauty and power all go toward legitimizing what is essentially a program of imperial violence, and even ethnic cleansing.<sup>29</sup>

*Tancred's* unusual Orientalism, its willingness to adopt an apparently Eastern point of view in critiquing the West, has inspired some scholars to locate in it a surprisingly progressive streak. Brantlinger calls Disraeli's self-identification with Eastern peoples a "reverse orientalism" ("Nations and Novels" 273), which defies "the stereotyping that would identify one's nation and race as superior to others" (256). Likewise, Richard Dellamora sees Disraeli as a quasi-progressive figure for his spirited defense of Judaism against relentless British anti-Semitism.<sup>30</sup> The scholarly account of *Tancred* as heteroglossic, however, misses Disraeli's lifelong, race-based, conservative hostility to egalitarianism. In his 1851 biography of the Tory politician George Bentinck—who had proposed legislation to allow Jews into Parliament—a chapter on "The Jewish Question" proclaims Jewish superiority by attacking "that pernicious doctrine of modern times, the natural equality of man": "now in vogue," such "a principle" would, if acted upon, "deteriorate the great races and destroy all the genius of the world" (*Lord George Bentinck* 331). The Bentinck biography again hails Jews as a "natural aristocracy" using language taken from the mouth of Sidonia, in *Tancred*: "All is race. In the structure, the decay, and the development of the various families of man, the vicissitudes of history find their main solution" (*Lord George Bentinck* 331). Whatever equalizing impulses might be inherent in Disraeli's reverse Orientalism, these impulses seem radically overthrown by his broader, ongoing investment in naturalized inequalities, made ominous in an abstracted notion of "history" and its "solutions."

One of the oddest things about *Tancred*—in a novel filled with oddities—is that its bizarre Orientalist fantasies unfold amid a recognizable Middle Eastern landscape. As Said notes in *Orientalism* (1978), "*Tancred* is not merely an Oriental lark but an exercise in the astute political management of actual forces on actual territories" (169). Disraeli's novel exceeds the fantastical, vague imaginaries usually found in the Romantic Oriental tale. He has studied the particulars of Middle Eastern history, which the novel recounts in mind-numbing detail. "The Eastern question" (381) is a phrase that recurs throughout *Tancred*, along with places of familiar geopolitical significance—Damascus, Jerusalem, Palestine, Beirut ("Beiroot"), Constantinople. When Tancred utters the famous line, "The East is a career," his words capture the professional man's sense of a place where ambitious Westerners might make their mark (141). The novel portrays intrigues between Druze, Maronite,

Lebanese, Syrian, French, British, Turkish, and Russian peoples (among others), evoking the territorial contests that would make the region unstable from the nineteenth into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This combination of geopolitical specificity with Romantic fantasy would come to define aspects of Disraeli's later career as Britain's prime minister, where he is often credited as a major inspirational force in Britain's imperial imaginary.

#### 4. By Jingo: Nation to Empire

Disraeli died in 1881, just as the era of Britain's New Imperialism was gaining momentum. His time as prime minister was not characterized by the rank acquisitiveness of British imperial conquests in Africa and elsewhere later in the century. Nevertheless, he is often recognized as a major architect of the late-Victorian imperial program. His novel trilogy shows how a strongly nationalist agenda could arc toward an imperialist idea.<sup>31</sup> Some Tories were isolationist Little Englanders, but Disraeli became associated with jingoism, extreme patriotism expressed via hawkish foreign policy and colonial dominance. In a famous 1872 speech delivered at the Crystal Palace, Disraeli declared that the Tory party should aim to uphold a strong empire:

England will [soon] have to decide between national and cosmopolitan principles. The issue is not a mean one. It is whether you will be content to be a comfortable England, modelled and moulded upon Continental principles and meeting in due course an inevitable fate, or whether you will be a great country,—an imperial country,—a country where your sons, when they rise, rise to paramount positions, and obtain not merely the esteem of their countrymen, but command the respect of the world. (Disraeli, *Selected Speeches* 2: 534)<sup>32</sup>

Disraeli's flights of rhetoric dismiss isolationism as "comfortable" and "Continental"—implicitly French, with hints of the recently fallen Second Empire—whereas greatness emerges from the global and the imperial, even while foregrounding English supremacy. Effeminate Frenchness is disavowed in favor of empire helmed by the masculine "sons" of England.

The word "jingoism" was invented to describe the feelings of ultra-nationalism favoring Disraeli's foreign policy during the "Eastern Question" crisis of 1877–78. A clash between the Russian and Ottoman empires threatened Britain's trade route to India; a similar conflict had previously triggered the Crimean War. Disraeli as prime minister opposed Russian aggression, even though this meant supporting the unpopular and non-Christian Turkey. A resonant music-hall tune, "By Jingo," supported Disraeli's position, expressing

the martial sentiments of the time and leading to the coining of the term “jingoism”:

“The Dogs of War” are loose and the rugged Russian Bear,  
Full bent on blood and robbery, has crawl’d out of his lair;  
It seems a thrashing now and then, will never help to tame  
That brute, and so he’s out upon the “same old game.”  
.....

CHORUS:

We don’t want to fight but by jingo if we do,  
We’ve got the ships, we’ve got the men, and got the money too!  
We’ve fought the Bear before and while we’re Britons true  
The Russians shall not have Constantinople.  
.....

Let them be warned, Old England is brave Old England still,  
We’ve proved our might, we’ve claimed our right, and ever, ever will,  
Should we have to draw the sword our way to victory we’ll forge,  
With the battle cry of Britons, “Old England and Saint George!”  
(*Hunt, “MacDermott’s War Song”*)

Once again, medieval “Old England” serves as a fount of militaristic political imagery—even though “the sword” was an anachronistic weapon of warfare in 1877. “Old England” serves to link nationalist and imperialist sentiments. The song’s celebration of masculinist imperial puissance accords with Disraeli’s own novelistic vision, reflecting his lifelong investment in cultivating working-class support of the Tory party. He is widely credited with making the Tory party the party of the empire, in alliance with working-class nationalists. As Paul Smith writes of his late turn toward empire, “Disraeli was introducing his party to the politics of mass mobilization, but hardly to those of mass participation” (*Disraeli* 166).

The music-hall song was itself a significant vehicle for political sentiments. Popular media, from novels to songs and films, channeled and fueled political beliefs from the nineteenth into the twentieth centuries. In fact, Disraeli himself was a hero of the late-Victorian music hall: historian Michael Diamond notes that Disraeli continued to be lionized in music halls for decades after his death in 1881. Music-hall politics, Diamond observes, were decidedly conservative, imperial, and xenophobic, and tended to favor politicians who were flamboyant and charismatic. After Disraeli, Joseph Chamberlain, architect of the Boer War and major shaper of British colonial policy, gained the popular mantle in music-hall song. Moreover, Disraeli had a long and celebratory afterlife in film, especially films of the interwar period, which were largely consumed by working-class audiences. As Steven Fielding notes, films such as *Disraeli*



(1929) portrayed the prime minister (with “blatant inaccuracy”) as a masterful patriarch, guiding the country toward a triumphant imperialism (495). British actor George Arliss, who won an Oscar for portraying Disraeli, became known for depicting sympathetic “millionaires, prime ministers, monarchs, and aristocrats,” promoting a “particularly benevolent view of those great men who wielded authority . . . and political power . . . to millions of more humbly placed cinemagoers” (502).<sup>33</sup> Popular portrayals of Disraeli’s own life maintained a Romantic view of authoritarian politics, aligning the spectator with the grateful populace.

In both song and film, Disraeli was glorified for two especially daring feats during his reign as prime minister. First, in 1875, he single-handedly enabled Britain to purchase controlling shares in the Suez Canal, a key route to colonial India. Learning that Suez shares were available, Disraeli sidestepped the slow mechanism of parliamentary approval by turning to his friend, the banker Lionel de Rothschild, to borrow the funds privately. When the deal went through, Disraeli was fêted for his audacious move, extending British dominance abroad. Second, during the Congress of Berlin in 1878, which resolved the so-called Eastern Crisis, Disraeli forced the Russians to accept unfavorable terms, while secretly negotiating with the Ottomans to gain Cyprus for British rule. What these feats have in common is that Disraeli accomplished them alone, without consulting Parliament. The actions corresponded with the philosophy put forth in his novels, celebrating the decisive actions of a strong executive unhampered by the cumbersome deliberations of the elected governing body. While Disraeli’s real-world practices were tactical and reasoned, popular culture glorified him as a master politician according to a mythical, Romanticized vision of how a leader behaves and what he can accomplish.

Meanwhile, Disraeli’s nationalist ideals, grounded in a sense of racial superiority, continued unabated into his later years. He campaigned for working-class votes not from a belief in egalitarianism but from his sense, writes Kalmar, that all “Englishmen” belonged to the same “noble race”: he wanted to “create a society where people were united not as equals but as sharers in the greatness of their nation.” He thus “offered to new classes . . . inclusion with the old ones, on the principle of race” (365).<sup>34</sup> His racial thinking likewise manifested in an 1873 speech that he delivered as rector of Glasgow University, predicting the downfall of a materialistic people who have discarded ancient values. Disraeli’s speech condemns the French Revolution, the Paris Commune, and the “new philosophy” demanding “social equality” among the classes:

A people who recognize no higher aim than physical enjoyment must become selfish and enervated. Under such circumstances, the supremacy of race, which is the key of history, will assert itself. Some human progeny, distinguished by their bodily vigour or their masculine intelligence, or by both qualities, will assert their superiority and conquer a world which deserves to be enslaved. (Disraeli, "Address" 12)

The speech directly links authoritarian politics to racial supremacy, touching now on the familiar late-Victorian trope of racial degeneracy. "Masculine intelligence" still defines the desirable political power. And "a world which deserves to be enslaved" speaks baldly of the moral righteousness of power, where the weak or vulnerable warrant their own domination.

### 5. Political Theology: Disraeli and Schmitt

A final, shocking afterlife for Disraeli can be found in Nazi Germany, where his racial rhetoric proved influential. In fact, many German thinkers were fascinated by Disraeli and published books about him as early as the 1880s.<sup>35</sup> *Tancred* appeared in a German translation in 1935. Hitler himself quoted Disraeli in a 1941 speech to the Reichstag: "The British Jew, Lord Disraeli, once said that the racial problem was the key to world history. We National Socialists have grown up with that idea" (qtd. in Cesarani 235).<sup>36</sup> Carl Schmitt, the conservative political philosopher and Nazi jurist, kept a picture of Disraeli above his desk, and wrote of Disraeli both critically and admiringly.<sup>37</sup> Schmitt's notion of political theology, of the ways that politics ought to move and act like a religion, is deeply consonant with the beliefs laid out in Disraeli's novels. Both thinkers celebrate a superior leader, passionate and unruly, who can exert his sublime control in governance.

In fact, Schmitt's reactionary models show striking commonalities with Disraeli's. By noting the similarities, we can further position Disraeli within a long-lived trajectory of Romantic authoritarianism. In *Political Theology* (1922; rev. ed. 1933), Schmitt critiques the modern liberal state for being too dependent on discussion and compromise: "The essence of liberalism is negotiation, a cautious half-measure, in the hope that the definitive dispute, the decisive bloody battle, can be transformed into a parliamentary debate and permit the decision to be suspended forever in an everlasting discussion" (63). Schmitt's barely submerged masculinism favors "the decisive bloody battle" over the ineffectual pluralism of "everlasting discussion" between different factions. He celebrates an idea of power consolidated in the hands of a single person who makes authoritative decisions. Hence the book's famous first line, set into its own commanding paragraph: "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception"

(5). The “exception” here is the hypothetical economic or political crisis threatening chaos, when a leader might be called upon to invoke extraordinary measures beyond the current rule of law. Schmitt’s vision of sovereignty, positioned on the knife-edge of chaos and crisis, echoes Disraeli’s breathless sense of emergency in the face of the 1832 Reform Act, which similarly threatened to throw the country into a profound disorder.<sup>38</sup>

Schmitt’s Romanticism expresses itself in his desire to place persons over laws, contrasting the unruly organicism of human life with the dull, mechanistic operation of the law: “the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition” (15).<sup>39</sup> The law should be subordinate to the humans who live according to its rules; “all law is situational law” (13), shifting and mobile, responding to the specific human conditions under which it operates. *Political Theology* is underpinned by aesthetic values invested in excitement, passion, and exceptionality—opposed to the dull and the normal, where law typically operates. “The exception is more interesting than the rule” (15), says Schmitt; he supports the idea by quoting from Søren Kierkegaard’s theology. It is striking how Schmitt’s values echo those of Disraeli’s Sidonia, as well as the narrator of *Coningsby*: all celebrate the great masculine conquerors of history who depended on passion rather than reason to rule. My point is not to argue that Schmitt was directly influenced by Disraeli, but rather to observe the surprising fact that Disraeli anticipates Schmitt’s model in Victorian novels written in the 1840s.

Like Disraeli’s critique of Utilitarianism, Schmitt attacks neo-Kantian law for its attempt to base state power in ideas of reason. (In fact, Schmitt names John Stuart Mill as one of his ideological opponents.) He looks back to Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651) for an ideal, returning to a seventeenth-century model of authoritarian power during the English Civil War. The ideal leader would unify the state and harness the qualities of transcendence and strength as modeled by God himself, sovereign over creation. Just as Disraeli laments the sect-riven bureaucracy of Downing Street, so too Schmitt warns against the bureaucratization of the modern state, which risks becoming “a huge industrial plant” (65). This factory-like government increasingly “runs by itself . . . [and] the decisionistic and personalistic element in the concept of sovereignty is lost” (48). Schmitt takes up Max Weber’s critique of modern bureaucracy as dependent on rules and abstract processes rather than on persons. (Weber termed this rise of bureaucracy “the disenchantment of the world” [155]). Against a rationalized world, moving toward democracy and abstraction, both Disraeli and Schmitt call for governance by a superior human, zealous and impassioned. Like God, this leader could ordain a new political regime of

law, a something “created out of nothingness” (66). Schmitt lionizes Hobbes and the *Leviathan*, but his theory ultimately speaks to a modern world that is irrevocably secular and individualistic: politics should not return to theocracy but rather should imitate theocracy’s best qualities, concentrating power in a single, extraordinary individual. Disraeli works in a similar vein, modeling his values after the Judeo-Christian faith while ultimately defining power for the modernizing Victorian age.

The through line from Disraeli to Schmitt highlights a long and important history of the Romanticization of authoritarian leadership in Anglo-European culture. Scholars have often designated Thomas Carlyle as a distinctive nineteenth-century precursor to later hard-right ideas, but we should expand our gaze. Disraeli’s novels of the 1840s are an unexpected site for hard-right ideology: they are significant for the way that they clothe this political ideology in novelistic form, using elements of psychology and desire to propose the advantages of a strong leader and a race-based nationalism. The seductiveness of the Romantic authoritarian vision is worth taking seriously, with its compelling invocation of aesthetics, charisma, and passion. These attractive elements accompany a deeply unequal and hierarchical model of society, in which some are targeted as enemies, and violence is validated as a political means. Rather than seeing the appeal of these models as fringe, we might today want to consider relocating them to a more central place in our cultural landscape and history.

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## NOTES

1. Speare and Harvie credit Disraeli with inventing the genre of the political novel.
2. Disraeli is a divisive figure in the realms of literature, history, and politics. As Clausson writes, “Few novelists have elicited such diametrically opposed responses as Disraeli, and the same contradictory evaluations appear among historians and biographers, who are just as divided over whether Disraeli is the quintessential political opportunist who climbed, as he himself quipped, to the top of the greasy pole, or the principled founder of the modern Conservative party” (198). Pereiro offers a useful overview of Disraeli historiography from a conservative point of view (336–37); he notes that some historians today support Disraeli’s view that the Pre-Reformation Catholic Church was a benevolent institution, “not as corrupt and ineffective as Protestants had tended to represent it” (337). On the more progressive side, scholars like Arendt and Cesarani observe certain troubling aspects of Disraeli’s conservatism. My essay aligns itself with this latter branch of scholarship. Cesarani is an eminent Jewish studies scholar and Holocaust specialist who was granted access to a Disraeli archive to write for Yale UP’s “Jewish Lives” series. His more critical tone perhaps reflects his outsider’s perspective on Victorian

political history. In sum, Disraeli's works offer a kind of Rorschach test for a critic's political leanings, leading to significantly divergent interpretations.

3. While authoritarianism includes a range of political typologies, it generally describes a government characterized by strong executive power, limited separation of powers, the inhibition of plurality, the reduction of democracy, and an easing of the rule of law. Linz provides the classic account; more recently, see Ezrow and Frantz. In "Authoritarian Politics," Frantz notes that democracy and authoritarianism are not necessarily opposites, as many dictatorships today use forms of "pseudo-democracy" to buttress their regimes.

4. Mannheim gives a foundational analysis of Romantic conservatism. More recent scholarship includes Gilmartin, Makdisi, and Michael.

5. Abrams offers the classic account of Romanticism's aesthetic qualities in *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953).

6. The standard biography is Monypenny and Buckle.

7. Cesarani writes of Disraeli, "there were many reasons for doubting his fidelity to any person, party, or idea" (115).

8. See Fawcett 7.

9. Fawcett contrasts Robert Peel's moderate conservatism with Disraeli's more rightward views. Yet Fawcett refuses to credit Disraeli with a truly zealous conservatism, seeing him as a pragmatic politician who deftly navigated the tides of change. Muller's study, meanwhile, omits Disraeli; analyzing Victorian conservatism, he chooses the idiosyncratic examples of Matthew Arnold and James Fitzjames Stephen. Two scholars who align Disraeli with hard-right politics are Arendt, in *Origins*, and Cesarani, in his biography. Cesarani mentions the hard right only briefly: discussing Disraeli's rhetoric in cultivating working-class allies, he notes that it "eerily prefigures the mainly right-wing populist politics that emerged in the late nineteenth century" (86). Here he footnotes two sources on British fascism.

10. Cesarani describes some of the backroom deals and power plays typical of both Tory and Whig politicians. By contrast, the Chartists and radicals who advocated for progressive political causes operated largely outside of British governmental institutions.

11. See Thompson.

12. See Sternhell 10.

13. See Linehan 8, 5.

14. See Mosse 58–59.

15. While *Coningsby* targets Peel by linking him to a hapless and ineffective Toryism, in fact Peel was a moderate, pragmatic conservative who had drawn Disraeli's ire for more personal reasons. In 1835, Disraeli had supported Peel's leadership with hope for a cabinet position; when the position did not materialize, Disraeli targeted Peel as his enemy. In *Coningsby*, Disraeli attacks Peel's 1834 *Tamworth Manifesto* as "an attempt to construct a party without principles. . . . Having rejected all respect for Antiquity, [Peel's conservatism] offers no redress for the Present, and makes no preparation for the Future" (87–88).

16. Vanden Bossche argues that *Coningsby* and *Sybil* adopt the Chartist and middle-class critiques of an effete, self-interested aristocracy, using these critiques to propose a reformed aristocracy: "The plots of these novels . . . enact the transfer of forms of

agency developed by the middle class and working class to their aristocratic hero. Each novel consequently concludes with members of the opposing class ceding authority to a reformed aristocrat" (85).

17. Berlin also links Disraeli to Romanticism, but portrays this penchant in a positive light.

18. Abrams terms the Romantic tendency to imbue aesthetic ideas with religious-style fervor "natural supernaturalism." See *Natural Supernaturalism*.

19. Poovey writes of *Coningsby* and *Millbank* that "their infatuation with each other [has] been converted into an infatuation with England" (143).

20. Garofalo likewise links strong masculinity to authoritarian politics in nineteenth-century literature; she studies Carlyle's captain of industry, the Byronic hero, Jane Austen's Mr. Darcy, and Charlotte Brontë's Mr. Rochester.

21. Disraeli writes: "A very great personage . . . ascribed the superiority of the English in political life . . . to 'that little half-hour' that separates, after dinner, the dark from the fair sex" (115–16).

22. Kalmar argues that Disraeli's racial thinking was "romantic" for its idealizing, affirming conception of Jews. Pereiro speculates that Disraeli's race-based nationalism was inspired by the "German Romanticism" of Johann Gottfried Herder, who "conceived national cultures as organic beings, each endowed with its own inborn character" (323).

23. O'Kell describes Disraeli's idiosyncratic appropriation of Bolingbroke's ideas (180–91). Disraeli especially admired Bolingbroke's vision of the populace sharply divided from its gifted leaders, "men of more genius than the common herd" (qtd. in O'Kell 183).

24. During sees "democracy" as a surprising keyword for Disraeli, as it created "an ecology in which antidemocratic conservatism may flourish" (86). During's account helps to explain Disraeli's paradoxical investment in both conservatism and working-class reforms, though During's emphasis on "democracy" perhaps obfuscates Disraeli's core belief system, which was resoundingly anti-egalitarian.

25. See Cesarani 100.

26. See, for instance, Gallagher.

27. *Tancred* idiosyncratically designates both Judaism and Christianity as "Asiatic" faiths, often confusingly (222). For instance: "Half a century ago, Europe made a violent and apparently successful effort to disembarass itself of its Asian faith" (170). Disraeli is describing the French Revolution's attacks on the Catholic Church. The passage goes on to observe the failure of the effort: France has since "erected the most gorgeous of modern temples, . . . consecrated . . . to the . . . celestial efficacy of a Hebrew woman" (171).

28. I delve into these conundrums at length in *Picture World* (2020), studying Victorian Bible illustration (143–214).

29. For scholarship on how British forces pursued real-world policies with violent, even genocidal consequences, see Davis, Forth, Hensley, Kinealy, and Madley, among others.

30. See Dellamora 86.

31. Bivona is one of the few scholars to emphasize the imperialist arc of Disraeli's Young England novels: the trilogy reveals how, for Disraeli, the same imperative linked "the mission to colonize alien cultures" and "the mission to 'colonize' the middle and

working classes in England" (306). Bivona then shifts into a psychoanalytic study of Tancred's relationship to his parents.

32. Disraeli's claims for empire in this speech were not original; as Smith notes, the novelty lay in moving empire to "the centre of the Conservative platform," thus "providing for all classes a common symbol of national stature . . . This was image-making, not policy-making" (*Disraeli* 164).

33. Disraeli was popular in both British and American films; the 1929 *Disraeli*, starring Arliss, was made in Hollywood.

34. Pereiro describes Disraeli's optimistic, if unreal, vision by which an expanded voter base could help restore the monarchy to its former power, "becoming again a free and real monarchy as sung by Bolingbroke" (328).

35. See Kinzel.

36. Cesarani nevertheless concludes his book on a surprisingly generous note, writing that Disraeli's life spanned "two Jewish eras: he was one of the last court Jews and one of the first victims of modern anti-Semitism" (236).

37. See Buruma 232.

38. Parry writes of how the "crisis-ridden decade" of the 1840s worked well for Disraeli's conservative theories: "the crisis was . . . convenient, because it pointed up the need for leadership capable of making England a nation again" (34).

39. I align Schmitt with Romanticism even though he despised German Romanticism and attacked its secular and bourgeois qualities. (See his *Political Romanticism* [1919].) Schmitt anticipates that his own political conservatism will be seen as Romantic and tries to reject these associations. Nevertheless, the three conservative theorists at the center of *Political Theology*—Joseph de Maistre, Louis de Bonald, and Juan Donoso Cortes—are counter-revolutionary thinkers who wrote in the wake of the French Revolution. Schmitt notes disdainfully that all three are sometimes called "romantics in Germany because they were conservative or reactionary and idealized the conditions of the Middle Ages" (*Political Theology* 53). Despite Schmitt's attempts to distance himself from Romanticism, however, his version of aestheticized politics cultivates strikingly Romantic values.

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