

YOUNG ENGLAND: PART TWO

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“YOUNG England”—this short-lived and curious Conservative Parliamentary offshoot of the 1840s announces in the name it adopted for itself that *youth* matters, though scholars for most of the movement’s history have largely discounted or ignored the centrality of youth to its meaning: “Young” too obvious, or trivial, it seems, to mean anything at all. In Part One of this essay I argued that the new field of juvenilia studies provides the explanatory framework that allows us to read what *Young England* does signify, and to indicate how the term “Young” signified in its time. More specifically, the recovery by juvenilia studies of the cultural presence of young people in Britain in the generation before Young England—its recovery of an active juvenile tradition of writers, simultaneous with and related to Romanticism—puts into context the self-fashioning and reception of this next post-Romantic generation: ambitious Young Englanders George Smythe (1818–57), John Manners (1818–1906), and Andrew Baillie-Cochrane (1816–90) in particular. Friends from boyhood, schoolmates at Eton and Cambridge, born into families of rank or on their way to titles, they looked to other bold young nobles who had made a splash before them—George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824) and Percy Shelley (1792–1822). Those Romantics’ prior precocious fame provided the justification for believing that Young Englanders could make a splash too, and gave them the script for how to do so. In Part Two I focus on Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881), their political mentor, who used this script explicitly in his *Coningsby* novels about Young England, fusing the movement’s personalities with the characters of their meteoric Romantic predecessors.

Vital to Young Englanders’ understanding of this prior generation was their sense of the shaping power of the past. Within Young England’s Conservative platform, a return to a romanticized feudal past was meant to redeem England’s future, in their view reuniting aristocrats and working folk in loyalties that would heal the nation by dispelling the alienation of modern industrialism. Understanding Young Englanders’ theory of history through their relation to earlier juvenile predecessors, however, reveals a much more complicated sense of the past than the wishfulness and sentimentality with which their critics tasked them: instead, they saw history as explicitly manufactured—a necessarily imaginative fiat predicated on an understanding of the past as uncertain and ultimately hollow.

In joining literary studies, then, juvenilia studies changes that field. To recover the concurrent juvenile tradition that informed Young England is to rewrite Romanticism and transform literary history. Moreover, the very idea of history must change too. If juvenilia matter in themselves, if what

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comes first is not simply a rung left behind on a ladder of developmental progression, then how we imagine and explain history must find new verbs besides “progress” and “advance” and “evolve” and “unfold.” Young England epitomizes this radical reformulation because it rewrites succession: for it, the past is already the future. It theorizes relation to youthful predecessors as simultaneously coincident and discontinuous, but never merely imagines itself just in the wake of them. A consideration of Young England’s example also provides the field of nineteenth-century literary juvenilia with one answer to the question of what comes next for its own studies. Youthful writing, so alive and noticeable at the beginning of the century, continued to inform the rest of the century, but it did so by rethinking priority and subsequence. Young England performs the new model of tradition that dispenses with old assumptions of origins and development, just as the stars above act out the experiments of theoretical physics—though in this case the stars themselves brook the hypothesis.

Part One of this essay focused on the recovery work central to juvenilia studies. It demonstrated the influence of Byron and Shelley on Young Englanders’ understanding of themselves—in Smythe’s case, it charted a direct connection to Byron through Smythe’s father, Percy (Sixth Lord Strangford). It recovered the importance of the prior generation even more directly through that father, revealing the importance of his 1803 translation *Poems from the Portuguese of Luis de Camoëns* to the juvenile tradition at that time. His text was an important influence on Byron among others. Part Two continues that work by demonstrating a similar direct link to Byron through Disraeli’s father. And other young writers would matter to Young England too—in Part Two I briefly consider the influence of Frederick Faber as representative of the Oxford movement, another faux medievalism that passionately moved youth at the time. Shelley is a remnant of the past that haunts Disraeli, but Disraeli’s own popular novels about it demonstrate that Young England established itself through contemporary literature too, also alluding to other blockbusters such as J. B. Buckstone’s play *Jack Sheppard* (a dramatization of William Harrison Ainsworth’s novel by the same name about that swashbuckling criminal).

Part One also recovered the now unknown juvenile poetry of the teenaged George Smythe. Both Strangfords, father and son, wrote to make history by joining other youth who wrote to make their imprint on the future. Locating the Strangfords’ writing within this larger youth movement (that is, locating their own early careers within the juvenile tradition) also demonstrates how their writing theorized about and performed youth. It thereby reveals the ways the juvenile tradition reflected on and constituted itself.

That early juvenile tradition changes literary history when we consider what its youth movement looked like at the time, but even more so when we consider why it mattered, why it *continued* to matter to writers and events that came after and were influenced by it. This afterlife is the focus of Part Two, which explores Disraeli’s role in Young England’s continued literary existence. Disraeli used the movement’s reconsideration of history to rethink literary genealogies by repositioning Shelley and Byron as leading directly to Disraeli and Young England. In self-fashioning learned from Byron, this future Prime Minister presents his trilogy of Young England novels as a strategy—to mobilize multimedia showmanship in politics, asserting style over substance. Part Two situates the performances (of history and politics) of “Disraeli the adventurer,” as he called himself, within a sense of identity as absence. Only by ignoring our own belatedness can critics today claim for postmodernism alone the recognition that writing whelms from lack. Disraeli’s personification of Young England grows out of a tradition of young writers that rethinks juvenile writing as more than outworn and rethinks literary history as more than advancement—that presents tradition as dynamic, flashing back and flashing forward, to define generation otherwise.

Fake, Young England, Fake Away

WHEN HE was preparing for university, the undergraduate-to-be George Smythe chid his father for trying to please him with talk of dances and pantomimes, of ices and “smart white gloves and white waistcoats” (de Fonblanque 206). Those, the teenaged Smythe argued, were the everyday amusements of his younger brother and of ordinary youth—uninteresting to one “who reads in the past the history of the future” (206). Later, of course, its critics would lampoon Young England precisely in terms of those youthful vanities that Smythe had rejected—ridiculing it expressly as “the White Waistcoat Party” (Shelton 40; Champlin 553). Smythe and his young aristocratic friends had vowed to sit together in Parliament to represent their union, and wore white fronts to represent their purity and iconoclasm. “The wearing of white waistcoats in the House was one of” Young England’s “peculiar signs” (Jennings 317).¹ Almost a decade later, *Punch* was still having fun with display it considered sophomoric: “for no Young Englander is to the heart a Young Englander, unless his heart beats against a spotless White Waistcoat” (“Duties” 163).²

Critics of Young England relentlessly homed in on the “Young.” *Punch* drew cartoons of its members as babies (“Young England and” 118). “There is no more formidable symptom in the aspect of these times than the increasing influence and sway of the babies of England,” the *New Monthly Magazine* agreed in mock alarm. “It is observable that the phrase ‘old England’ is almost obsolete. Nothing but ‘young England’ will go down now” (“Young England or” 174). “None now are geniuses but Puppies” (Catellus 74), another review chimed in: “did we not possess first-rate Puppy authority in Byron” (77) already, it asked, and it argued that Young England simply continued this attitude and promised to remain “thus for ever young—or younger” (70).

But in sophomorically asserting that he read in the past the history of the future, Smythe characteristically was both right and wrong about what his youth meant. “For men like Mr. Smythe, the present is not all-sufficient,” chroniclers of Young England agreed; the understanding that he saw things “through an historical ... medium” captures “Young England more faithfully” than knowing the specific quarrels of the time (“Literary Legislators No. V” 536). Such reviews associated with unproven and empty “early genius” the way Young England looked “upon the past as a vast collection of facts” (536–37) to be picked over—a precocity they considered all glitter and show based on nothing. Early genius involved “a sufficient perception of the beauties of style ... which is pleasing to a popular assembly by providing short cuts to important conclusions without requiring the labour of reasoning” (536). Smythe’s speeches seem to *promise* more than “mere ornament or display” (536), but actually only “please the taste, like a perfect sonnet, a fine strain of music, a beautiful sculpture” (537). Whether or not Young England was all style instead of any substance devoted to real political debate was a question it entertained of itself. In his reminiscences of Young England fifty years afterwards, erstwhile Young Englander Baillie-Cochrane could still recall the words of a ballad spoofing the movement—especially its repeated refrain: “Fake, Young England, fake away” (Lamington 149–50). This pasquinade was based on a blockbuster song from Buckston’s *Jack Sheppard*. The ballad, sung by a pack of thieves, had put into common parlance a sense of “fake away” to mean “carry on”—but used as a pack of thieves might use it to encourage one another, with all the lying, thieving, swindling, shamming, and contrivance necessary to their carrying on.³

The context was telling. Worried cultural gatekeepers saw Ainsworth’s highwayman novel *Jack Sheppard* as romanticizing criminals into heroes; they took its runaway success as symbol of its dire effect on youth, fostering juvenile delinquency.⁴ Placed in these terms, the smoke and mirrors that critics then and now charged against Young England—how can one possibly translate their romanticisations into any real politics?—actually seem to have constituted its appeal at the time and its identity for its founding young members. As Baillie-Cochrane’s fond memories of this ballad show,

the sense of pretend was generative. They were playing at glamorized bad guys, *enfants terribles*, pretend troublemakers gleefully vandalizing the status quo. (Smythe and Manners had taken active part in the riots customary at Eton in their time [Millar 40–41, 49].) Smythe himself defended the political inconsistencies in Young England by regarding them as youthful hijinks. To explain his own attack on his leader Robert Peele in 1847, Smythe quoted Robert Southey’s defense of his revolutionary *Wat Tyler*, a juvenile play brought out (twenty years after Southey had written it) by political enemies hoping to undercut the conservative views into which he had aged: “I am no more ashamed of having been a republican,” said Mr. Southey, “than of having been a boy;” and I,” Smythe continued, “am no more ashamed of having used strong language against the Minister than I am of having been young” (E. Strangford xxvi). Far from being ashamed, he was actually proud to take Southey-as-young-scamp as his model; Manners said that Smythe credited Southey “as a founder of Young England” (Whibley 1: 260). Southey was also a lynchpin of the juvenile tradition, first as a contributor and later as its mentor (Langbauer 110–28). Defining itself through such juvenile predecessors, then, Young England flaunted its sense of youthful rebellion.

And spoke to other youth through this stance. “Young England was a party of youth” (Faber 45) aware of itself as directly allied to other important forces of youth at the time, such as the Oxford movement. “The seminal event of the Young England movement” came during a holiday in the Lake country in 1838—the meeting with the Reverend Frederick Faber (Speck 199), that charismatic preacher who ultimately went over to Rome. O’Kell sees the attraction of the Oxford movement for Young England in the Oxford Movement’s similar stress on “lofty ideals of chivalry and divine kingship” and “noble views of feudalism” (207). Manners and Smythe were passionately inspired by Faber, and they all wrote poems to one another. In excusing his own youthful poetry, Faber wrote that its faults are “such as must inevitably adhere to all young publications, and the question is whether it has been well to publish so young . . . I don’t repent. I am in a desperate hurry” (qtd. in Faber 47).

Inspired by Faber’s appeal to their youth, Young Englanders used their own writing expressly to draw other youth. Manners calculated their success by declaring that “all, or nearly all, the enthusiasm of the young spirits of Britain is with us” (Whibley 1: 66). What those young spirits celebrated was in part their own place within a juvenile literary tradition: a self-styled “Young Englishman,” in a “Letter to Benjamin Disraeli” (1844), writes “we of the provinces, rejoice to see so many of our young authors identify themselves with this movement” (41).⁵

For Young England, their writing merged with the past through Romanticism—Young England was understood, and understood itself, as “a parliamentary experiment in romanticism” (Kegel 691). George Saintsbury asserts Young England as “the most striking political effect among us of the vast Romantic revival” (269). Romanticism constituted a glorious past for Young England, and not just because, for the Victorians, the Romantic era symbolised when the century had been young. Their nostalgia reimagined the past through romantic feudalism, claiming it for aristocracy’s turf just as Horace Walpole (1717–97), Fourth Earl of Orford, had originated the Gothic by simulating a past-that-never-was in his faux-Gothic Strawberry Hill. For Young England, Romanticism equaled such self-fashioning.

Not the past itself, but the act of treating the past as imaginative creation—of simulating the past, as Walpole had done—was what *actually* inspired Young England. The criticism of Young England by Richard Monckton Milnes, later first Baron Houghton (a hanger-on of Young England, who sniped at it from his remove) that “Young England, crusading against the unreality of Conservatism, must have some better arms than those of historical etymology to fight with” (605), missed the point but captured the spirit: their history explored origins to point them up as manufactured fantasy. Marx and Engels recognized these contradictions, seeing the vogue for romantic feudalism of the time as “half lamentation, half lampoon, half echo of the past, half menace of the future” (qtd. in Ward 127). Engels

took Young England expressly as “a satire on all historic development”: while he found the “romantic feudalism” of their views ridiculous, he saw in them some “good intentions,” and saw as well a courage to resist “existing prejudices” and “recognize the vileness of our present condition” (294n).

An appreciation for the past as an act of the imagination, then, rather than a set of political principles, is what tied Young England together. Adam Gopnik sees a “strong sense of self-irony” underlying Disraeli’s manufactured “English history ... served up to his none-too-bright acolytes” (par. 18).⁶ But Disraeli’s followers had gotten their history out of books long before they met him—most signally out of Kenelm Digby’s *Broad Stone of Honour* (1822). A fabricated account of medieval times and a cult classic among Cambridge undergraduates, it equated youth with chivalry (Smith 431). Digby, who “as an undergraduate ... resolved to be a knight” (Holland 9), rode around Europe researching this book before he was twenty-one. A kind of society-of-one for creative anachronism, Digby kept nightly vigils in chapels and held tournaments “with ponies for steeds and hop-poles for spears” (10). Like Faber, he ultimately converted to Catholicism. His book not only “had much to do” with that “romantic young Cambridge enterprise” called Young England (12) but also inspired other youth enterprises such as Baden-Powell’s Boy Scouts (Jeal 422, 583). From such traditions as these came their critics’ sense that “perhaps ‘Young England’ amounted simply to a figment of boyish imaginations” (Ward 127). In such imaginations, however, lay Young England’s appeal and its explanatory power.

Disraeli, Historian of Young England’s Albeit School

TO SUBORDINATE individual identity to succession was a habit of mind ingrained in young men of title. Brilliant outsiders like Disraeli aspired to join this exclusive circle through the juvenile tradition’s different patrilineage. Disraeli’s father Isaac too had been a juvenile author; he was a distinguished man of letters, admired by Southey and Walter Scott, and part of John Murray’s circle (Byron’s publisher at the time). Escott writes, “It is customary to speak of” Disraeli’s “exceptionally disadvantageous circumstances,” but “the distinction of his father, and the reputation which he had himself won as a novelist, had already combined to secure him recognition in society” (2). Disraeli knew the elder Strangford, for instance, called him a friend (and characteristically put him into a book: *Contarini Fleming* [Millar 36–37]). Isaac D’Israeli had known Byron; they exchanged letters on the topic of juvenile genius. When he was eighteen, the younger Disraeli started recording his father’s reminiscences about Byron. Because of his father’s direct connection, “Byron had been an inspiration and a model” to Disraeli (Monypenny 361), who worked to cast himself as “a latter-day Byron” (Jerman 72). In short, “Byron’s influence over Disraeli is a well-recognized literary and historical fact” (Lansdown 106).

Disraeli especially learned from Byron how to affect a pose, impersonating refinement, breeding, and exclusivity in his writing (and increasingly in his life) because, lacking the peer’s “blue blood, ... unlike Byron, Disraeli had nothing except poses to rely on” (Elfenbein, “Silver” 81). More than just the “fashionable affectation of youth which was prevalent in the generation which followed Byron,” Disraeli’s homage was expressly for the “insecure twenty-one-year-old [Byron] of 1809” who set off on world travels that Disraeli deliberately traced in 1830–31 when stuck at the same crossroads at the end of his own juvenile writing (Lansdown 106, 107). Murray used to ask for literary advice from his friend’s son when Disraeli was just a teenager (attesting to the boy’s literary acumen), but such attentions also encouraged his posturing—so much so that, when Murray rejected his first novel, Disraeli imitated the confidence of the peer by pointedly scorning Murray: “as you have some small experience in burning MSS you will perhaps be so kind as to consign it to the flames” (Disraeli, *Letters*

1: 9)—a reference to Murray’s part in the scandal of burning Byron’s memoirs (1824): “it was an astounding taunt for a nineteen-year-old to make” (Ridley 27).

Identifying with Byron gave Disraeli’s literary self-fashioning its self-conscious cheek. The youthful Disraeli blazed onto the scene as a writer with his silver-fork novel *Vivian Grey* (1826)—claiming he’d written it “before he was twenty-one” (Rosa 100)—about a “smart and precocious youth” who draws his “colossal assurance” from Byron (102, 105). Its publisher carefully puffed this anonymous novel of fashionable life as “after the manner of Lord Byron’s celebrated work,” terming it “a sort of Don Juan in prose” by a new author similarly placed in society (“Literary Report” 173). Yet, in its knowing self-consciousness, the novel also trumpets the spuriousness of that claim. Grey forges an autograph for a young lady and boldly asks, “Shall I write any more? ... Mr. Disraeli’s? or shall I sprawl a Byron?” (Disraeli, *Vivian* 50).

Even to Young England, Disraeli’s alignment with them could seem an open performance. Early on, as they constituted their movement together, Lord John Manners wrote of Disraeli in his diary: “His historical views are quite mine, but does he believe them?” (qtd. in O’Kell 211). Disraeli blatantly lampoons Young England’s historical pretensions, having one of his dandies in *Coningsby* complain “It has got hold of all the young fellows who have just come out ... but it requires a devilish deal of history, I believe, and all that sort of thing” (391). *Fraser’s* even picks up Disraeli’s spoofing language to critique Smythe’s *Historic Fancies* as “all that sort of thing” because it certainly does not represent anything like history proper (“*Historic*” 311). Yet Disraeli in no way rejected or censured pretense. It was part of his political strategy. “I am Disraeli the adventurer,” he supposedly told Lord Derby (Millar 237). Though he understood that Young England’s historical vision was largely imaginary, Disraeli did not therefore condemn it; rather, his “political career” instead took “on the character of a fiction” (O’Kell 211). After Smythe died, Disraeli wrote, “Poor dear Smythe! Had he lived, after all, he would have succeeded. Alas! He has gone—& within the last five years—all that I cared for in this world. I am an actor without an audience” (Disraeli, *Letters* 8: 143).

IN PART One, I read George Smythe’s juvenile poetry as depicting youth to be tragically hollow, a haunted emptiness, an imposture prompting poetry through the very absence of a stable self that the young writing self seeks to fill. Disraeli’s open fraudulence of identity is reminiscent of Smythe’s (and Byron’s) recognition of youth’s manufacture in the first place. As the “achievement” by “a minor whose only security was his own audacity” (Jerman 44), Disraeli’s performance occupies that empty subject position boldly. In this, Shelley was his model. Monypenny argues that Disraeli “was one of the first who had the courage to attempt to do [Shelley] justice ... in defiance of popular prejudice” (363); he was drawn to Shelley because Shelley offered the audacity to locate meaning in nothingness. In his 1821 “Sonnet to Byron,” which Duerksen says Disraeli knew (78), Shelley writes that he is “like a worm whose life may share / A portion of the unapproachable” (577). To approach the unapproachable, Shelley “dares these words” (577) to Byron. He writes, precisely *because* he has no real ground from which to speak. Disraeli’s critics, such as Richard Monckton Milnes, found his turn to Shelley revealed Disraeli’s revisionary history as all lies: “Shelley was called mad at Eton, and treated as a criminal at Oxford, because he opposed the ‘Old England’ of his time with a childish heroism ... whereas neither at school nor at college is Coningsby ever persecuted or misunderstood” ([Milnes] 602). But Sichel argues that Disraeli’s “inmost soul is embodied in the ‘Young England’ which he organized and encouraged” (28); I would argue this is precisely *because* Young England redefined any supposedly inmost essence into show and performance.

Disraeli’s poses had everything to do with youth, including his own early experience: “from early childhood ... I had imbibed on some subjects conclusions different from those which generally prevail, and especially with reference to the history of our own country” (“General” ix). “Born in a

library” (ix), an outsider—middle-class, Jewish—Disraeli had to manufacture knowledge of the upper echelons of fashionable life—“What does Ben know of dukes?” his father wondered (Monypenny 128). So little, it turns out, that one biographer complains “there are expressions [in *Vivian Grey*] which almost remind one of *The Young Visitors*” (Blake 42). In a backhanded way this allusion to nine-year-old Daisy Ashford’s juvenile novel nevertheless suggests the shared realm of simulacra among youth. Once Disraeli’s identity became known, he was brutally denounced (in anti-Semitic terms) for his class pretensions, as well as for his youth, and he came to regard this first book as one of his “juvenile indiscretions” (Monypenny 85). But juvenile indiscretion was also the going pose for the Sheppard-like swagger of Young England. After years of trying “to suppress the novel” (Rosa 102), when Disraeli finally reissued *Vivian Grey*, he chose juvenile writing as its most defensible identity: one of those “books written by boys” (“General” xx).

In his novel *Venetia* (1837), Disraeli made sure his readers understood Shelley and Byron as symbols of youth—the models for his characters, real-life silver-fork antecedents, who actually enjoyed the rank, celebrity, and personal attractions that fueled the fantasies of the silver-fork (and Disraeli’s own fantasies of himself: “There is more than a little of himself in the portrait” of these youthful heroes, as Hesketh Pearson suggests [61]). In *Venetia*, Disraeli took these young dead poets as models for charismatic statesmen, leaders of political movements: *acknowledged* legislators. *The Critic* later called Shelley’s “Defence of Poetry” “the philosophy of Young England put into expressive shape” (“Essays” 214). The Byron character extols “Youth, Glittering Youth!” (*Venetia* 417) and asks, “What is manhood, and what is fame, without the charm of my infancy and my youth” (305). Disraeli means this character’s steadfastness to his childhood love to redeem him from political cynicism, just as he means youthful idealism to guide the initially wayward Shelley character to become “a great poet, and an illustrious philosopher. His writings became fashionable, especially among the young,” so much so that he “was not only now openly read, and enthusiastically admired, but had founded a school” (223–24), forging another juvenile tradition.

Disraeli ultimately critiqued (by killing off) the Shelley and Byron characters in that novel. For this reason, Tom Mole suggests that “Disraeli depicts the Romantic inheritance as a source of fascination for the younger generation, but no longer a potent force in Britain’s cultural or political life” (34). Nevertheless, depicting “Romantic poets increasingly ... in need of renovation” (32) this way let Disraeli imagine and call up the subject position of contemporary youth who might achieve that renovation—continue, regenerate, and supplant, accomplishing the necessary political and cultural work he felt only youth could carry off.

Disraeli turned to those prior juvenile celebrities as part of “the larger project by early Victorian novelists to use the silver-fork novel to demarcate what was distinctive about their era from the one that had immediately preceded it” (Elfenbein, “Silver” 82). That turn was also part of the reimagining of history that understands the conditions of its possibility through other youth, a genealogy that paradoxically and retrospectively transforms forefathers into age-mates, rethinking ideas of precedence. When Disraeli wrote that “it is the past alone that can explain the present, and it is youth that alone can mould the remedial future” (*Sybil* 488), he offered youth as the yardstick by which to measure history and England’s success. His Coningsby trilogy—*Coningsby* (1844), *Sybil* (1845), and *Tancred* (1847)—foregrounds what *Coningsby*’s subtitle called *The New Generation* and the “new and ... better mind of England” (Disraeli, *Coningsby* v).

Disraeli defined and promoted Young England in these books, through *roman-à-clef* allusions to Smythe and Manners and Cochrane. The future England his trilogy imagined could only be a “Young England”—it could “only be brought about by the energy and devotion of our youth” because “the Youth of a Nation are the trustees of Posterity” (*Sybil* 489). O’Kell finds *Coningsby* “imaginatively autobiographical”: “a frivolous and adolescent romance” with a “close affinity” to Disraeli’s own

juvenile novel *Vivien Grey* (212). The “adolescent power fantasy” (208) in his novels connects them all, consoling their author with “a fantasy of acceptance ... [a] compensatory alternative to his adolescent alienation” (210). Disraeli, no longer young when writing his political novels, nevertheless wrote out through them a statement of the history and possibilities of juvenility—as he imagined it for England and for himself. Looking back in 1860, he considered this trilogy an extension of his youthful imagination: “I thought then I had seen a great deal of the world—after what has occurred since it appears to me to be a nursery dream” (Ridley 275).

The aspirations of the young politicians in the *Coningsby* trilogy also lay in nursery dreams. By the time he wrote *Tancred*, Young England had disbanded. Disraeli showed his disenchantment with the movement by having his characters stray from such early idealism. He has *Coningsby* abandon the juvenile aspiration of his writing at Eton, though at the time his character felt: “What fame of after days equals the rapture of celebrity that thrills the youthful poet, as in tones of rare emotion he recites his triumphant verses amid the devoted plaudits of the flower of England?” (*Coningsby* 104–05).

Through these characters who had lost their way, Disraeli depicted in *Coningsby* what he and his circle feared: had Young England wasted the promise of the juvenility inspiring it? But Disraeli countered that fear by defining juvenility as conditional—provisionality was always part of Young England’s identity and the understanding by Young Englanders of their relation to the juvenile tradition. When Smythe and Manners were twenty, and they were all writing poetry, Faber, their hero at that time, deemed them “the *albeit* school.” He lists all the reasons why, moving from “free from Rome *albeit* near to antiquity” in a dizzying slide that culminates in: “boys in heart *albeit* men in years; lakers *albeit* not of the lake school” (Whibley 1: 112–13). The conjunction “albeit” applies to juvenile writing (boys/men) as much as Romanticism (lakers/Lake School). We might extend the *albeit* school in young writers such as Smythe and Disraeli to add to the list: radical *albeit* conservative; dispossessed *albeit* part of a movement. *Albeit* means “although” or “notwithstanding.” Like the “might-have-been” by which (I argued in Part One) Smythe summed up his life, *albeit*’s logic of connection is conditional, a “both/and” that tries to yoke incommensurables to add up to something bigger than its parts—this is Young England’s hope for history.

Might-Have-Beens

APOLOGIZING to his father for his wasted life, George Smythe wrote: “Were I to die to morrow, I should occupy three lines in a biographical dictionary as a ‘might have been’” (de Fonblanque 237–38). Young England seemed a “might-have-been” in the same way: its political contradictions added up to only a year or two of political action and may have muddled the real reforms its adherents actually conscientiously desired. Young Englanders’ uncertain position was as members of a ruling class who substituted the metonymic slide of tradition for what each feared was the fraudulence of his individual identity. Such instabilities and denials paradoxically lay bare the ways a marginalised tradition such as the juvenile one calls its writers into being—and asks us to revise our ideas of literary traditions in general. The nobles were the ones who got noticed, but, in taking identity from this assailed and multivalent tradition, they revealed the room in its succession not just for an adventurer like Disraeli but for a sizar like Byron’s gadfly, classmate, and critic whom I discussed in Part One, the juvenile writer Hewson Clarke. Byron is the metonym for the juvenile tradition’s conditional practice because, as Marshall McLuhan recognized long ago, Byronism “was able to project those symbols of alienation and inner conflict” that foregrounded “the split-man and the split-civilization” (30, 31). In joining “the great Byronic tradition ... of the aristocratic rebel fighting for human values in a sub-human chaos of indiscriminate appetite” (25), the writers of Young England indulged a wounded narcissism but also expressed the condition of youth as prevenient absence. As Oxford-Movement-inspired, they must

also have seen such lack in terms of prevent grace—what allows agency when none exists, the ability to write out of naught.

Young England collapses its stress on history into the history of juvenile writers. The resulting historiography is one that critics such as James Livingston, charting cultural revolutions, have explored: “this historical context, this unfolding relation between here and there, now and then, actual and potential,” is what “the self constructs, *or rather becomes*, in time” (293–94). Young England’s was a self-confirming prophecy of its own irrelevance. Like the history Smythe told of his times and of his own life in his fragmentary novel *Angela Pisani*, Young England ultimately reveals history to be “a romance without a hero, and a story without a plot” (Escott 10).

We now regard such an indeterminate dismantled sense of self as very (post) modern. Before Livingston, McLuhan had defined that indeterminacy as in effect political—though a politics involving an identity produced from structures of authority and power that are in excess of the governance, state, or partisanship that make up conventional politics. Young England personifies politics in both senses; it shows the splits within their meaning to be in effect generational, the afterlife of the juvenile tradition a generation before. As Mole writes, “the idea of a break between two generations with different attitudes and concerns emerges in the first half of the nineteenth century, and the first historical shift to be described in those terms is the shift from Romantic to Victorian generations” (38). Young England marks but also redefines this advent of generational thinking by rethinking temporal succession or causality altogether. The logical extension of a prior juvenile heritage which remakes identity, Young England plays out how this sustained attention to youth even transforms the political into the performative spectacle of the self we consider it today. Posterity would try to appropriate, to redefine, and to exploit the juvenile tradition’s understanding of what youth might mean, but no one has been able yet to exhaust its importance, as modern readers continue to understand more and more the extent of that tradition’s effects to redefine or open up what literary histories and traditions can allow.

NOTES

¹ Disraeli supposedly wore a white waistcoat—“a bottle-green frock coat, a white waistcoat, no collar, and a needless display of gold chain”—for his maiden speech on the floor in 1837; the speech was supposedly not successful, in part because the members were so distracted by his appearance (Sanderson, Lamberton, and McGovern 332).

² Such waistcoats were a stylized part of any evening wear, and worn at Eton to mark various celebrations, but wearing them during the day professionally made a statement. Reed argues that though white waistcoats would have been in the wardrobe of any gentleman, they were nevertheless an important marker of wealth: in Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*, “the gentleman in the white waistcoat is a counter for a whole class . . . indicating that only a gentleman comfortably well off could afford such a fashionable item that would require expensive laundering and so forth. White gloves similarly indicated station through the implication that they would have to be changed during the day and many of them laundered over time. Thus articles of clothing encode a certain social attitude and even ideology” (421). Farina argues that Sir Leicester’s white waistcoat in *Bleak House* “personifies the tragic backwardness of Disraeli’s “Young England,” which imagined that recovering paternalistic, feudal values would somehow produce a different future” (Farina note i).

³ Slang dictionaries of the time look to that original ballad to explain “fake” as “a very ancient cant word, possibly from *facere*, used in the honest sense of to do, to make, originally but afterwards in the dishonest one” (Barrère 350). The myriad of those dishonest meanings cited include “to cheat, swindle . . . Also invention, contrivance . . . In conjuring, any mechanical contrivance for the conjuring of a trick” (351).

- ⁴ They worried that Ainsworth's especially, like other Newgate novels, might contribute to "juvenile delinquency"; see mention of that novel throughout "Appendix 2, Juvenile Delinquency, Liverpool," to the 1852–53 collection of *Reports from the ... House of Commons: Criminal and Destitute Juveniles* (especially 414–26). Painting identifies Disraeli as an early adopter, if not coiner, of the phrase "juvenile delinquency" in an 1851 note planning *Sybil* (Painting 456). Disraeli clearly was familiar with the phrase from its Parliamentary use at this time, but that juvenile delinquency was a political topic helps deepen this lampoon of Young England. England was so worried about "the Sheppard craze" (the twenty-something valet Benjamin Courvoisier confessed that Ainsworth's novel gave him the idea to murder his employer) that for forty years after that the Lord Chamberlain withheld license for any play with Jack Sheppard in its title; see Stephens 3. Buckstone's adaptation escaped the embargo.
- ⁵ In his note to a 9 October 1844 letter to Benjamin Disraeli, the editor cites his source as "Hughenden Mss, 15/2/fos 135-6" (that is, it is from the collection of papers originally found at Disraeli's Hughenden estate, now housed in the Bodleian Library at Oxford) and adds "this letter was written shortly after the widely publicized opening of the Manchester Athenaeum Institute by members of Young England" (44n18).
- ⁶ See Brantlinger for Disraeli's (and Byron's) knowing self-irony, and "the importance of image-making" and "undecidability" in their imagined imperial milieus (96, 103).

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