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Introduction

Some years after Disraeli's death, Lord Eustace Cecil was accosted at the Carlton Club by Dr. Bell. "Do you remember," Bell asked him, "the conversation we used to have here in the library, in the days when we were indignant with our leaders and called them 'the Jew and the Jockey'? And now this very morning when I was passing up by Westminster, I saw the statue of Mr. Disraeli all covered with flowers . . . What! They have canonized him as a saint!"

As a saint? No, Disraeli was very far from being a saint. But perhaps some old Spirit of Spring, ever vanquished and ever alive, and as a symbol of what can be accomplished in a cold and hostile universe, by a long youthfulness of heart.

—ANDRÉ MAUROIS, *DISRAELI* (1927)

THERE IS NOBODY quite like Disraeli. Imagine, if you can, a Conservative prime minister whose novels were admired by Marxists, translated by German Social Democrats, and inspired the name of the Labour leader Michael Foot's dog ('Dizzy'). Imagine a politician who, in life, was painted as an opportunist dandy eager to climb the greasy pole of politics but, in death, became the subject of innumerable admiring biographies, smash-hit Broadway and West End theatrical productions, and Oscar-winning Hollywood films—much of which portrayed him as a visionary prophet of empire, democracy, and social reform. Imagine a politician whose name was invoked by figures as varied as Friedrich Engels, Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher, and the US producers of *Family Guy*—all with at least some sense of audience familiarity. Imagine a budding Member of Parliament (MP) attending dinner in green velvet trousers, a canary yellow waistcoat, lace at the cuffs of his sleeves, bright silver buckles on his shoes,

his hair set in perfectly coiled ringlets, who, for at least half a century after his death, inspired annual 'pilgrimages' to commemorate his memory.

Contrast this image with the Disraeli we more commonly encounter today. Maurois's 'Spirit of Spring'—the nineteenth-century statesman, Benjamin Disraeli (1804–81); from 1876 earl of Beaconsfield—is now generally cast in a more limited role as the 'founder' of 'One Nation' Conservatism. Disraeli, it is widely seen, 'develop[ed] the slogan and strategy of One Nation'.[1] A nod to Disraeli has become a time-worn reference for those wishing to locate and legitimise the notion that social concern is a long-standing feature of conservative thought and Conservative policy. Doing so, however, rests on the ability to primarily conceive the historic, multifaceted, Disraeli through one specific, narrow lens. That is, as a great architect of social reform and national unity, via the selective interpretation of Disraeli's thirteenth novel, *Sybil* (1845). *Sybil* and, even more narrowly, the famous passage on the perceived chasm between the 'two nations' of the rich and the poor, is then used as the principal vehicle for interpreting the electoral and social reforms of his 1866–68 and 1874–80 governments. From here, the timelessness of the tradition is established: 'One Nation', it is claimed, was not only 'founded' by Disraeli but has existed ever since.

One Nation Conservatism remains one of the most recognisable, if increasingly endangered, traditions within contemporary British political discussion and analysis. A reference to Disraeli and 'One Nation' is seen to signal a holistic, socially minded brand of conservatism which claims sympathy towards social problems and seeks to promote social peace and national unity to preserve existing institutions and systems of power. While, politically, One Nation Conservatives are increasingly positioned in opposition to a growing 'hard' or 'far' right, the notion of a distinct, socially minded 'One Nation' strand of conservative thinking is also a feature of school and university curricula on conservative ideals as well as British politics. The variety of policies or principles to which 'One Nation' is attached, however, do not easily sit together: from an emphasis on permissive, local-government reformism by 'Tory Democrats' in the late nineteenth century to the welfarism and programmatic planning of the post-1945 period, when the term was established in its contemporary, capitalised form with the founding of the One Nation Group in 1950.

1. Gamble, *Conservative Nation*, 18.

Despite Disraeli's undisputed position as the 'founder' of One Nation Conservatism, it is well known that Disraeli did not coin the term 'One Nation'. Lately, this act has been attributed to the long-time Conservative leader and prime minister Stanley Baldwin in a speech of 1924.[2] Yet even making a connection between Baldwin and Disraeli is of recent vintage: for much of the post-war period Baldwin was not celebrated as a Disraelian, proto-One-Nation Conservative but condemned as a 'Guilty Man' who oversaw, in the 'hungry' 1930s, both the appeasement of Hitler and some of the darkest hours of British social history.[3] Since the 1960s a growing body of scholarship has sought to explode, first, the 'myth' of Disraeli the democratising social reformer,[4] and, second, the notion of a timeless 'One Nation' tradition which can be seamlessly traced from Disraeli to later One Nation Conservatives.[5] The latter approach in particular concentrates, perhaps sensibly, on distinguishing the differences in policy produced between any supposed precursors and the One Nation Group and their associates, who were operating in distinct postwar ideological and political contexts. We are still no wiser, however, as to how this powerful myth was formed, how it gained and retained such authority, and to what substantial uses it has been put.

This book is about how, why, and when this reputation was established in Britain, how it was subsequently adapted, and for what purposes. It is not about Disraeli as he lived in his own time, nor is it a history of the 'origins' of One Nation Conservatism. Whether Conservatism is understood more abstractly as a set of principles or 'mindset' or, more pragmatically, as a living political tradition, it is historically contingent—subject to changing domestic and international preoccupations and concerns, and adaptable by men and women from different backgrounds, with different mentalities, and with a surprising variety of different ambitions. In charting the construction and legacy of the 'Disraeli myth' in its varying forms, my goal has not been to catalogue everything that makes up the wealth of 'Disraeliana' produced since 1881. Instead, I have taken a more selective approach in charting how Disraeli's political and ideological reputation was reduced (or transformed) to that of a figurehead for what would become 'One Nation' Conservatism. As a process, it involved the distillation of Disraeli's legacy to certain texts, political moments, and specific concepts and

2. Baldwin, *On England*, 72–73.

3. Williamson, 'Baldwin'.

4. Most obviously: P. Smith, *Disraelian Conservatism*, 322; Blake, *Disraeli*; Blake, *Peel to Churchill*; Stewart, *Foundation*.

5. Neill, 'Ian Gilmour'; Hickson and Williams, 'Boris Johnson and Beyond'.

rhetorical slogans which could be presented as representative of his genuine thought and politics, and also as offering productive insights on the evolving issues of the day. Perhaps the most significant matter here was the transformation of the entire two-party agenda from one dominated, at a domestic level, by constitutional maintenance and reform, to one which increasingly centred questions of social reform, welfare, and economic management. The result was the construction of a political legend, and with it a broader tradition of socially minded c/Conservatism. Disraeli became a key resource for reflection on not only the nature of British Conservatism but so much more—including questions surrounding ideal forms of statesmanship and on what basis claims to political legitimacy and identity could be made. What initially emerged was something akin to a sourdough starter: the Disraeli myths constructed in the decades following his death in 1881 became the essential basis, which was fed into and fermented new iterations as new problems emerged and circumstances shifted—highlighting the interplay between historical narrative and political necessity.

For much of the period covered, the historical past (and the figures within it) acted as a constructive political force and less, as is so common today, as a political prop that can be embraced or rejected as politically expedient.[6] Taking the role of mythmaking, the use of the past, and a kind of political nostalgia in modern Britain, seriously helps us to understand the power of longer durée languages and mental structures in politics, the ways in which they still inform the way we frame problems and their solutions, and their continued significance in forming and fortifying individual and group political identities. In this case, we will see how, for over a century, changing impressions of a variously reconstructed 'Disraeli' have contributed to the framing, justifying, and critiquing of British politics, policy, and history. A systematic, historical, account of the changing reputation of Disraeli and the eventual construction of One Nation Conservatism thus offers a tool that helps us to understand the ways in which ideas are adapted, how principles and histories are altered in order to legitimate political action or rhetorical intervention, and how different strands of broad-based traditions such as Conservatism are picked up and put down accordingly.

This book is also a history of conservatism and the Conservative Party only in the very broadest sense. I do not seek to provide, for instance, a historical account of the Conservative Party's (re)presentation of its social philosophy and politics in its entirety. Instead, I bring to light an

6. Robinson, *History, Heritage and Tradition*, 182.

important, distinctive, and previously neglected component within it—one which existed alongside, and often in tension with, alternative visions of conservative thought and Conservative politics. More importantly, Conservatism has never existed in a vacuum. My approach to political and intellectual construction has thus been a relational one: what follows demonstrates how those who stood apart from the Conservative and Unionist Party contributed a very great deal to the vital tasks of Disraelian construction and circulation. Moreover, such an approach reveals the multiple uses and authors who (and for what reasons) saw in the historic Disraeli an authoritative source of inspiration and/or legitimation—expressed in parliamentary debates, political speeches and pamphlets, a wide range of bipartisan print media, historical writing, literary studies, and theatre and film productions. The sheer range of people who claimed Disraeli or were in some way involved in propagating his myth is astonishing: from the late Victorian Tory Democrats to the postwar One Nation Conservatives, we also meet a further cast of socialists, liberals, Oscar-winning actors, and everyone in between. Nor was this material produced and consumed exclusively in Britain: the Disraeli 'cult' crossed the Atlantic, and, at one point, both Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger described themselves as 'Disraelian conservatives'.[7]

The Historical Benjamin Disraeli

Before we begin, it is necessary to introduce the historical Benjamin Disraeli. Myths, though not entirely untrue, are stories that come to embody particular meanings, which often change (or are adapted) over time, depending on who is telling these stories, when, and where. In a political or intellectual setting, these historical narratives about past events or canonical figures have been a principal component in the construction, sustenance, and reinvention of major traditions across the ideological spectrum. While there were materials in Disraeli's life and writings for later builders of a political and intellectual tradition to adapt, their identification and extraction was not straightforward. Disraeli was a working politician, moving through shifting political circumstances. Behind the mythologised Disraeli, therefore, lies Disraeli himself: the Jewish-Anglican Tory novelist and politician. Born in London in 1804, his background was mercantile

7. J. H. Plumb, 'Nixon as Disraeli?', *New York Times Magazine* (11 Feb. 1973): 260–64. See also, for example, R. Nixon, 'Toasts of the President'. Kissinger was particularly notable as someone who considered America's position in the twentieth century with reference to Britain's in the nineteenth.

rather than aristocratic, and he did not spend his formative educational years in either the public schools of Eton and Harrow or the ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge. His Jewish heritage condemned him in the eyes of many contemporaries, and he was subject to antisemitic attacks throughout his political career—particularly over his support for Ottoman rule over Bulgarian Christians during the 'Eastern Question' of the 1870s.[8] Despite this important distance from the elite establishment, Disraeli was nonetheless steeped in English literature and English literary traditions thanks to his early immersion in his father's library.[9] As a young man, Disraeli wrote his first novels, *Vivian Grey* (1826) and *Popanilla* (1828), before turning his attention to politics: first, as a radical, and then as a budding Tory MP. In total, before his election at Maidstone in 1837, Disraeli's fictional works ran to eleven novels, a book of poetry, and one play. It was also in this period that Disraeli produced his *Vindication of the English Constitution* (1835) and the *Letters of Runnymede* (1836), as well as works on Mexico and American mining companies following the loss of a great sum placed on speculative investments—incurring debts that would follow him to the end of the 1840s.

It is at this point that Disraeli's fiction takes real shape for posterity with the 'Young England' novels *Coningsby* (1844), *Sybil* (1845), and *Tancred* (1847). The literary interventions of Disraeli and his more blue-blooded Young England comrades—Lord John Manners, later the seventh duke of Rutland (1818–1906); George Smythe (1818–57); Henry Thomas Hope (1808–62); and Alexander Baillie-Cochrane, later Lord Lamington (1816–90)—have become touchstones for a paternalist Tory response to social problems that married concern for the poor with a distinctive but still Tory constitutional position on the Crown, the established Church, and religious toleration. As we will see, the mythologisation of Disraeli also sat alongside the mythologisation of Young England into a more prominent and Disraelian group than reality might suggest; the term was first applied critically by Richard Monckton Milnes, contrasting the movement to more popular and generally republican movements such as Young Ireland and Young Italy.[10]

To Disraeli, Sir Robert Peel's new label 'Conservative' following the 1834 Tamworth Manifesto symbolised nothing more than the conservation of Whig principles and policies—'Tory men and Whig measures',

8. Feldman, 'Conceiving Difference', 175–77; Wohl, '"Dizzi-Ben-Dizzi"'; Wohl, '"Ben JuJu"'.

9. Harvie, *Centre of Things*, 31.

10. Faber, *Young England*.

in the words of *Coningsby*'s Mr Taper[11]—rather than a properly distinct national Toryism orbiting around its true lodestars of Church and Crown. The Whigs, Disraeli stated in his *Vindication of the English Constitution* (1835), were in contrast an anti-national party, 'odious to the English people'. Their aim was to establish an oligarchic republic based on a few great families and 'declare war against all those great national institutions'—'our Crown, our Church, our Universities, our great municipal and commercial corporations, our Magistracy'. Such an attack, for Disraeli, would ultimately result in the bartering away of the freedom of the English people.[12] Hence, in another much-cited quotation from 1872, Disraeli stated that 'the Tory party, unless it is the national party, is nothing.'[13] Peel's destruction, following the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, of what Disraeli considered to be the historic party system of English government to the detriment of the reputation of Parliament lowered his estimation even further.[14]

In addition to his fiction, Disraeli's 1872 speeches delivered at Crystal Palace and Manchester's Free Trade Hall were also elevated to canonical status as providing evidence—however vague—of Disraeli's belief in both social reform and imperial unity. Disraeli's 1874–80 administration could then be positioned as the watershed example of 'Tory Democracy in action'. Social legislation tackling housing, factory work, sanitation, and trade unions—largely the work of the home secretary R. A. Cross—now stand as key indicators of Tory or Conservative concern for the condition of the working classes, despite their fundamentally permissive or legalistic nature. Disraeli was, by this point, increasingly prone to extreme fatigue and illness, as well as intense 'gouty attacks'.[15] As chapter 2 demonstrates, this administration has been frequently twinned with a mythologised account of Disraeli's oversight of the 1867 Reform Act, which, despite failed attempts to introduce fancy franchises and other restrictive amendments to limit the extension of the suffrage, enfranchised the so-called (urban, working-class, ratepaying) 'angels in the marble'.[16] The narrative that was subsequently generated around the 1867 Reform Act enabled a vital, invented, link to be established between the Conservative Party and the notion

11. Disraeli, *Coningsby*, i.220.

12. Disraeli, *Vindication*, 181–82.

13. Disraeli, *Selected Speeches*, ii.524

14. Windscheffel, 'Men or Measures?', 944.

15. Monypenny and Buckle, *Life of Benjamin Disraeli* (hereafter M&B), v.343–53, 489–94.

16. For its operation in practice: Blewitt, 'Franchise'; Matthew, McKibbin, and Kay, 'Franchise Factor'.

of 'trust in the people', which only increased in importance as the suffrage was expanded further in 1884, 1918, and 1928.

But Disraeli was no democrat—at least not in the way we understand the term today. He held a fundamentally hierarchical conception of society, and his interest in the practical realities of (to contemporaries, bipartisan) social reform and legislation was minimal.[17] His oratory was, similarly, little heard outside of Westminster: unlike Gladstone, whose speeches reached vast audiences, Disraeli 'practised the reserve of an eighteenth-century statesman' in the nineteenth.[18] As prime minister, Disraeli gave much more time and attention to foreign and imperial matters; in particular, the Suez Canal, the so-called 'Eastern Question' over the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the balance of power in Europe, wars against the Afghans and the Zulus, and bestowing upon Queen Victoria the new title of 'Empress of India', in 1876. This did not, of course, preclude Disraeli from having genuine political, social, religious, and constitutional beliefs and principles, focusing especially on the maintenance of national institutions.[19] Disraeli was a strategic politician, but he was no mere opportunist. Though postwar revisionists, such as Paul Smith and Robert Blake, sought to destroy the legend of Disraeli's reputation as a pioneer of social reform legislation, the reforms—as Richard Shannon observes—were genuine enough for Lord Salisbury to endorse at the time and for Joseph Chamberlain (and so many others) to celebrate later.[20] Nonetheless, serious posthumous reconstructive work was required to get to the 'One Nation' Disraeli of today.

Traditions of social reform in the Conservative Party date back at least to the work of figures such as Robert Southey (1774–1843); Michael Sadler (1780–1850); Richard Oastler (1789–1861); and Lord Ashley, later seventh earl of Shaftesbury (1801–85); not to mention the sizeable number of Conservative women who devoted their time and intellect to philanthropic efforts.[21] Similarly, Disraeli's Young England comrades drew on a particular, English and Tractarian, version of noblesse oblige: a Tory idyll of squire and parson. This amounted to a ruralist conception of society cared for by local landowners and parish priests (and some well-meaning Conservative manufacturers), who were connected to and concerned with the spiritual

17. Ghosh, 'Style and Substance'; Parry, 'Disraeli and England', 723–24.

18. M&B, v.504–5.

19. Ghosh, 'Disraelian Conservatism', 295; Parry, 'Disraeli and England', 703.

20. Shannon, 'Blake', 90.

21. Best, *Shaftesbury*, esp. chs 4 and 5. See also Lawes, *Paternalism and Politics*; Craig, *Robert Southey*; Gleadle, 'Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna'.

and physical health and welfare of those around them, from the labouring classes to the middling sorts. This lived squirearchialism was born of long exclusion from power and acted as both an understanding of ideal social relations and of aristocratic and Christian duty. It stood as a direct challenge to the great Whig landowners; Trollope's 'Dukes of Omnium'—or, to use Disraeli's phrasing, the Venetian oligarchy who, since 1688 (or even the Reformation and the dissolution of the monasteries), had used fine phrases such as 'friends of the people' but were as far removed from the lower classes as it was possible to be. Their primary task lay in articulating the 'true' principles of the constitution and in creating a harmonious society that united poor and rich, industrial and agricultural.[22]

Despite the existence of Tory radicalism and genuine interest in social reform earlier in the century, however, this did not amount to a consolidated and well-established set of ideas. Nor was it viewed as a discernible political tradition usable for later Conservative thinkers, politicians, and supporters who, for much of the nineteenth century and beyond, had been centrally occupied by constitutional rather than social questions. Figures ranging from Southey, writing in the *Quarterly Review*, to Shaftesbury and Young England rarely gained support from the party leadership, and key figures such as Peel, Wellington, or John Wilson Croker had little interest in government intervention.[23] Nor were older figures forthright supporters of Disraeli and his policies. Shaftesbury, for instance, could be as critical of Disraeli as his political opponents: he mocked Disraeli's idea of a 'conservative working man' in 1867 and later described him, in his diary, as an unprincipled opportunist—'He is all things to all men and nothing to anyone. . . . [He] is waiting for the highest bidder.'[24] There is also a question as to how it came to be accepted that (in contrast to an alternative tradition of liberal political economy) the kind of Tory paternalism embedded by Shaftesbury and others could be claimed as the authentic social teaching of evangelicalism in this period.[25] Significant constructive intellectual, political, and cultural work was needed in order for these figures to be placed together comfortably and for references to terms such as 'Tory Democracy', 'One Nation', and even to Disraeli himself to take on a specific meaning, and be a useful source of inspiration, legitimacy, and rhetorical effect across a substantial period of time. Terminology is

22. Pereiro, 'Reformation', 326–27. This was not a universal source: Shaftesbury abhorred Tractarianism.

23. Sack, 'Paternalism and Politics'.

24. Hodder, *Life and Work*, 623–24, 631.

25. Hilton, *Age of Atonement*; Mandler, 'Tories and Paupers'.

important. As we will see, it was in fact the more precisely Disraelian term 'two nations' rather than 'one nation' which held rhetorical pre-eminence for the first half of the twentieth century.

The Disraeli Myth

Since his own lifetime, a vast range of historians, politicians, literary scholars, journalists, and many more have been captivated by the historical Disraeli's politics, religion, celebrity, and 'Jewishness'.[26] In fact, between his death in 1881 and the final (sixth) volume of the 'official' biography by W. F. Monypenny and George Buckle in 1920, no fewer than two hundred book-length publications relating to Disraeli had reached the public. Disraeli's 'mysterious' life, his finances, his Otherness, all contributed to an enduring fascination with his biography at this time. Many had the specific goal of reinterpreting or discerning both his 'real' character and his 'true' principles, as well as elevating his legacy in various modern contexts and rescuing him from the regular negative, antisemitic attacks that had dogged his political and literary career. In more recent years, the self-fashioning of Disraeli by his own strategies has been the subject of scholarly examination and refinement.[27] The accusations laid repeatedly at Disraeli's feet—that he was unprincipled, an un-English imperialist, or an alien Jew—might, as Jonathan Parry has shown, morph in form over time, but all such charges are consistently found wanting.[28] Not all claims that Disraeli lacked principles were grounded in antisemitism: Disraeli's actions, however calculated, could appear as a 'leap in the dark', and his manner was often elusive. Either way, that Disraeli was subject to repeated attacks with regard to his sincerity, opportunism, and 'slipperiness' throughout his career makes the fact of his mythologisation as a great statesman, a serious thinker, and an essential guide to modern problems in the decades following his death even more intriguing.

The posthumous presentation of Disraeli as a key touchstone for British Conservatives and, at times, international conservatism is ripe for investigation. For one thing, the perceived significance of the Disraeli myth inspired the major revisionist work of historians examining the relationship between Disraeli and Conservatism, which emerged from the mid-1950s. If, as significant revisionists such as Robert Blake

26. Mayer, 'Prime Minister as Celebrity'; Kearney, 'Disraeli and Religion'; O'Kell, *Disraeli*; Parry, *Benjamin Disraeli*; Ghosh, 'Style and Substance'.

27. Richmond and Smith, *Self-Fashioning of Disraeli*.

28. Parry, 'Disraeli, the East', 601–4.

and Paul Smith took great pains to stress, Disraeli 'did not found modern Conservatism', this begs the question of at what point—and why—was it widely believed that he had?[29] While the myth-busting scholarship of the late twentieth century attempted to deconstruct the legend, these historians were less interested in the question of its formation. Yet death, as Richard Gaunt writes, was in many respects the making of Disraeli. It was from this point that the Conservative Party appropriated and restyled aphorisms such as 'Imperium et Sanitas', 'Peace with Honour', and, later, 'One Nation' into a mythology of successful domestic political statecraft and stirring jingoistic rhetoric that has provided both rhetorical and imaginative frameworks for generations of modern Conservatives.[30]

The revisionists were not, therefore, entirely successful in their original quest: the mythologisation of Disraeli has had major significance for broader developments both in conservative political thought and identity and in the languages and culture of Conservatism in modern British history. It remains commonplace to use Disraeli if one wants to stress and legitimise a long-standing Conservative position on the welfare of, and trust in, the people.[31] There thus remains, as Alex Windscheffel has stated, a real need for work into the projection and reception of Disraeli's public persona, as well as its 'mythological functions in the mentalities of the twentieth-century Conservative party'.[32] This absence is even more significant, given the importance of the late Victorian and Edwardian invention of 'modern conservatism' and the centrality of genealogy to the overall reconstruction of Conservative and Unionist identity from 1885.[33] Moreover, previous scholarship has failed to recognise the international dimensions of Disraeli's celebrity, and the effect that this had on his profile at home and abroad. Nick Pearce's insightful analysis into the Disraeli myth within twentieth-century Conservatism emphasises how the myth itself was not monolithic, and so alternative Disraelis could be summoned in different Conservative contexts.[34] Importantly, however, this book examines sources outside of the Conservative Party. As a result, we will see how the creation and repurposing of the Disraeli myth (or myths) were also the work of those belonging to other political parties, as well as the authors

29. Smith, *Disraelian Conservatism*, 322 (quote); Blake, *Disraeli*, 1, 477, 758–59, passim; Shannon, 'Blake', 88. See also Stewart, *Foundation*.

30. Gaunt, 'Disraeli, Peel', 32; Vincent, 'Was Disraeli a Failure?'.

31. See, for example, Packer, 'Conservatives', 53; Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, 149, 179, 223.

32. Windscheffel, 'Men or Measures?', 944.

33. E. Jones, *Edmund Burke*, chs 5 and 6.

34. Pearce, 'Constructing Disraeli'.

and audiences of the numerous books, plays, films, and more which provided persuasive new readings of Disraeli's life, literary output, and politics.

The significance of a mythologised Disraeli to modern accounts of 'One Nation Conservatism', it is generally recognised, lies not only in a selective narrative of his Conservative statesmanship but in a narrowly focused reading of his literary output. It was the 'Young England' novels of the 1840s in which Disraeli expressed his concern for the condition of the nation, and the gaps between rich and poor, writing in *Sybil* (1845) of:

> "Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws."
>
> "You speak of—" said Egremont, hesitantly. "*THE RICH AND THE POOR*."[35]

This, then, was Disraeli's diagnosis of the social problem. Disraeli's readers understood his proposed solution to be both national and party political (albeit light on practical policy solutions): Toryism, he wrote later in the novel, 'will yet rise from the tomb over which [Henry St John, Viscount] Bolingbroke shed his last tear, to bring back strength to the Crown, liberty to the Subject, and to announce that power has only one duty: to secure the social welfare of the PEOPLE'.[36]

Since his death, this statement—and Disraeli's legacy more generally—has been transformed into a significant and potent strand of conservative thinking. Today, One Nation has been positioned as a working political tradition or, more broadly, as a strand of philosophical conservatism. This latter tradition stresses the organic, paternalistic, and pragmatic nature of society; a 'trust' or 'faith' in the people—and the democratic electorate; and a concern for social welfare and the unity of the nation. These are significant ideological constructions in themselves: while, for example, some Conservatives may have welcomed the 'Tory democracy', many others were terrified of an expanding mass democracy. In the process of construction, historical and philosophical genealogies were produced in support of varying policies and programmes, which could also be set against

35. Disraeli, *Sybil* (Henry Colburn ed.), i.149–50.

36. Disraeli, *Sybil* (Henry Colburn ed.), ii.310. Bolingbroke (1678–1751) was a Tory writer and politician, most famous as the architect of the Treaty of Utrecht (1715) and for his treatise, *The Patriot King* (1738).

other 'isms' both within and outside of conservatism. While this type of appropriation creates entirely problematic readings of historical events and people, its usefulness as a form of political identification and legitimation and thus a kind of cement for group cohesion appears to defy scholarly deconstruction.[37]

In this sense 'Disraelian' or 'One Nation' Conservatism is often positioned, for example, as a complement to the notion of 'Burkean conservatism' centred around a belief in the organic nature of society, a preference for slow, evolutionary change, and the importance of tradition, religion, and property to a well-ordered state, as well as, in this instance, emphasis on Burke's notion of the 'little platoons' that shape our daily lives and command our highest affections. It has also been deployed against a supposedly 'Peelite', Thatcherite, or, more recently, 'far right' brand of Conservatism, as well as the 'pessimistic quietism' of Lord Salisbury.[38] In addition to concern for social and national well-being, and before decolonisation, a 'Disraelian' tradition was also claimed by imperialists seeking to maintain and reform the empire, including protectionist economic policies and the promotion of the Commonwealth. Since then, it has come to symbolise a modernised, socially informed branch of Conservative thinking which stresses the duties that an individual has to his or her community (as opposed to both class politics and a more individualistic or libertarian Conservatism more sceptical of 'society'), including the promotion of locally focused 'civic capitalism'.[39] This flexibility has, historically, been an essential part of its power and its stickiness.

Impressions of Disraeli

For Disraeli to become the 'founder' of One Nation Conservatism, several developments were required. First, Disraeli had to be presented not as an unprincipled opportunist but as a significant leading statesman with an identifiable set of political ideas. Second, Disraeli's Jewishness was also in need of positive reinterpretation. Third, *Sybil* had to be extracted and canonised from Disraeli's many writings as both Disraeli's most representative text and an important historical and literary document with which one could propose a seamless line of historical descent

37. On other 'founding fathers' and mythmaking, see the excellent work of Claire Rydell Arcenas in *America's Philosopher* and Glory Liu in *Adam Smith's America*.

38. Green, 'Radical Conservatism', 690; Fawcett, *Conservatism*. Salisbury served as Conservative prime minister in 1885–86, 1886–92, and 1895–1902.

39. See, for example, Timothy, *Remaking One Nation Conservatism*.

from earlier Tory social reformers down to the present day. More generally, a 'Disraelian' approach to politics or thought which promoted slogans such as 'Tory Democracy' and 'Tory Socialism' had to be identified in, and extracted from, various quarries of Disraeli's writings and speeches. Fourth, an imagined Disraelian legacy had to be perceived as relevant to contemporary issues, so much so that later figures would identify themselves as his heirs and routinely cite his name and works in political debate. The final part of this process is the invocation of Disraeli by figures from across the political spectrum, and perhaps internationally, as evidence of the established nature of the 'myth'. An expansive circulation for these various revisionist interpretations was equally essential.

Chapter 1 ('From Hughenden to Hollywood') outlines the rise of Disraeli's global status in the half-century that followed his death in 1881. It draws on a vast corpus of anglophone biographies, histories, obituaries, paintings, film, and more, to chart the transformation of Disraeli's political and personal reputation, including his Jewishness. These reinterpretations of Disraeli allowed his supporters and admirers to promote him as a political thinker rather than an opportunist, and to invoke this image for their own ends. We then turn to the question of what principles or policies Disraeli could be presented as embodying. Chapter 2 examines the development of what was termed 'Tory Democracy', what it was seen to signify, and Disraeli's supposed legacy to it. Drawing on a significant cache of published books, speeches, histories, and periodical articles, it demonstrates how a mythologised Disraeli became a useful device at a time when a distinctly 'Tory' or conservative conception of democracy was developed and used. As Britain transitioned to a mass democracy, an important (selective) historical narrative was crafted in which Disraeli became a prophetic leader who had not only discerned that Conservatives could place their 'trust in the people' but legislated major political reforms which expanded the franchise to some urban working men.

Chapter 3 moves away from party-political analysis and places Disraeli in a broader developing canon of social and economic history and literary criticism. It reveals the ways in which historians and other writers developed interrelated scholarly and literary narratives of nineteenth-century social reform against the backdrop of the growth of the modern university disciplines of history and English literature. The first aspect of this story is the new and influential social and economic histories of the Industrial Revolution from Arnold Toynbee onwards. The second part examines the scholarly and popular productions concerned with the 'Condition of England' novelists created between Disraeli's death and F. R.

Leavis's *The Great Tradition* (1948). From these accounts, it is possible to reconstruct, for the first time, how a broad-based tradition of conservative social reform, with a supporting literary canon, was established and popularised. Disraeli was firmly placed within a longer tradition of 'Tory humanitarianism' but could also be claimed as a major contributor to a less partisan one, too: the 'Condition of England' novelists. In this way, well-known and now entrenched historiographical orthodoxies came to take shape and gained traction well before the real professionalisation of history later in the twentieth century. Disraeli's perceived historical significance received a major boost, and the 'two nations' of the rich and the poor was established as a tool for analysing the contemporary social problems.

Sitting alongside cross-party accounts of the evils of industrialisation, chapter 4 situates Disraeli within the emergence of a distinctly 'Tory' social ideal in the period 1880–1920. Here, a surprising development lay in the identification of a conservative conception of society that could be branded as a form of 'socialism' distinct from 'liberalism'. 'Tory Socialism' was pitched as a potential means of addressing late Victorian and Edwardian iterations of the condition of England question, but it also became part of a narrative which sought to trace the 'origins' of British collectivism. Drawing on a plethora of individualist and collectivist writings, lectures, and speeches, this chapter addresses how a mythical Disraeli was emmeshed within a definitely Tory interpretation of social reform and thought. Tory Socialism became a time-limited source of inspiration for constructive social reform and welfare policy that nonetheless reaffirmed the importance of private property and low taxation and helped to generate now-familiar concepts such as 'equality of opportunity' (its corollary of course being inequality of outcomes).

The final substantive chapter brings our story to a close by considering the zenith of Disraeli's fame and political utility during the interwar period in Britain as the two-party system irrevocably realigned around a new axis of welfare and economic management. It was in this period that the foundational ideas contained within the pre-war Disraelian myth were expanded and modified by politicians and scholars to legitimise a Conservative conception of nation, empire, and society that offered a clear alternative to any 'individualist' Liberals, more libertarian Conservative rivals, and the domestic parliamentary socialism of Labour, but also the spectre of Bolshevism it seemed to portend. The goal was to maximise social cohesion on a conservative basis and offer positive proposals which claimed inspiration from Disraeli. This latter-day 'constructive conservatism' even attracted the attention of scholars and commentators across the Atlantic, dazzled

by the dramatic representations of Disraeli on the screen and stage. Over time, the range and utility of Disraeli myths—visionary democrat, prophetic imperialist, leading Tory social reformer—would narrow. The epilogue therefore brings the book to a close by connecting this account to, firstly, the formation of the One Nation Group and Conservative histories in the post-1945 period; secondly, the historiographical and political fortunes of Disraeli after this date; and, finally, what this has to do with conservatism today. What follows is an account of how ideas work in politics, but also, in turn, how politics and culture have made, remade, and circulated some of the most recognisable political ideas and 'myths' still at work today.

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