

Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens

101 Printemps | 2025

Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881): His Lives and Afterlives (Colloque SFEVE) —
Frontières et déplacements (Congrès SAES)

Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881): His Lives and Afterlives (Colloque de la SFEVE 25-26 février 2024)
Part 2: Cultural, Literary and Religious Impressions

Disraeli and Peacock

Disraeli et Peacock

FREYA JOHNSTON

<https://doi.org/10.4000/13qt2>

Résumés

English Français

When Benjamin Disraeli met Thomas Love Peacock in 1848, he greeted him—to Peacock’s apparent surprise—as his ‘master’. Why should Disraeli have considered the prose satirist who was Shelley’s contemporary to be the leading influence on his early literary career? In seeking to answer this question my article draws on Isaac D’Israeli’s *Flim-Flams! Or the Life and Errors of My Uncle, and the Amours of My Aunt* (1805), a work never mentioned by his son, as well as on other points of historical, biographical, and stylistic connection between Peacock’s novels and the so-called ‘Silver Fork’ or ‘Dandy’ School to which *Vivian Grey* (1826–27) belongs.

Lorsque Benjamin Disraeli rencontra Thomas Love Peacock en 1848, il le salua — à la surprise apparente de Peacock — comme son « maître ». Pourquoi Disraeli aurait-il considéré le satiriste en prose, contemporain de Shelley, comme l’influence principale sur sa carrière littéraire ? Pour tenter de répondre à cette question, cet article s’appuie sur l’ouvrage d’Isaac D’Israeli, *Flim-Flams ! Or the Life and Errors of My Uncle, and the Amours of My Aunt* (1805) d’Isaac D’Israeli, une œuvre jamais mentionnée par son fils, ainsi que sur d’autres points de connexion historique, biographique et stylistique entre les romans de Peacock et l’école dite « Silver Fork » ou « Dandy » à laquelle appartient *Vivian Grey* (1826-27).

Entrées d’index

Mots-clés : Peacock (Thomas Love), Disraeli (Benjamin), D’Israeli (Isaac), satire, roman, biographie, Flim-Flams, Vivian Grey

Keywords: Peacock (Thomas Love), Disraeli (Benjamin), D’Israeli (Isaac), satire, novel, biography, Flim-Flams, Vivian Grey

Texte intégral

- 1 Benjamin Disraeli met Thomas Love Peacock only once, on 22 December 1848, at Erle Stoke Park, the Wiltshire residence of John Cam Hobhouse, later Lord Broughton. It was the day after Disraeli's forty-fourth birthday and the end of a momentous year in which his father had died and he himself had consolidated both his social standing and political power, moving decisively (albeit not permanently) from writing novels to a life divided between the front bench and his country estate. By this point Disraeli no longer needed, as Jonathan Parry puts it, 'to retreat into fictional worlds in order to find something to manipulate' (Parry 2011).
- 2 Neither the host at Erle Stoke nor his companion, a senior official at the East India Company, seems to have been entirely won over by their celebrity guest. Hobhouse, who generally thought better of Palmerston as a speaker, remarked in his diary that Disraeli 'does not talk much and what he says is given in set phrases and with hesitation, as he speaks in Parliament. He quotes books, chiefly commonplace, . . . and does not appear to have much reading' (Broughton 1911, 228). Even Disraeli might have felt somewhat abashed to be discussing books in company with the friend, survivor, and executor of Byron (in Hobhouse's case) and of Shelley (in Peacock's), the two poets Disraeli 'had attempted to shadow forth', as he phrased it, in *Venetia* (1837) and whom he hailed in that work as among 'the most renowned and refined spirits that have adorned these our latter days' (Disraeli 1837: 'To LORD LYNTHURST'). Peacock and Hobhouse were two of the prime living guarantors of that Romantic generation Disraeli had venerated in his youth. If he knew anything of *Venetia*, Peacock, who abhorred biography, could hardly have warmed to Disraeli's boldly invasive re-imagining of Byron and Shelley. One reviewer, writing in *The Athenaeum* in May 1837, warned all poets to 'look well to your lives, for the novelists are after you!', proceeding to attack the author as demonstrating no 'regard for the feelings of the living' (1837a, 356). *The Spectator* went further still, accusing Disraeli of an incapacity to comprehend the truth and of tastelessly jumbling together 'the most painful incidents' in the lives of Byron and Shelley, applying them 'indiscriminately to the one or the other' at his own 'pleasure' (1837b, 16).
- 3 Hobhouse and Peacock, two witnesses with good cause for complaint against Disraeli the 'biographical novelist', as *The Athenaeum* called him, were now both in their sixties (1837a, 356). They were on highly competitive as well as intimate terms with one another. In their correspondence they favoured abstruse allusions to Greek and Latin literature, a branch of learning in which Disraeli knew himself to be deficient—as he immediately admitted to Peacock (Broughton 1911, 228; see e.g. Peacock 2001, 280–85, 290–93, 385–86, 417–19, 436–37). If Byron had been the shining hero of his youth, Peacock appears from the encounter at Erle Stoke to have been scarcely less influential on Disraeli's literary formation. Hobhouse says that the political orator was 'much delighted with Peacock, and surprised to find in him the author of "Headlong Hall," and calling him his "master"; but, says Peacock to me, "I did not know he was my pupil"' (Broughton 1911, 228). (Disraeli may not have been quite as impressed as his host assumed; he wrote to his sister on 29 December 1848 that he 'had not met anyone particularly interesting' at Erle Stoke.) (Disraeli 1993, 120. See also Peacock 2001, vol. 2: 286 and n. 1).
- 4 Hobhouse's diary is itself a masterly display, summarizing numerous sociable exchanges that glitter with male rivalry. The setting for this encounter, a comfortable rural seat at Christmas-time, full of wealthy and distinguished people, lavish food, and musical performances, is reminiscent of the scenes that Peacock chose for his own linguistically and formally experimental novels of talk and Disraeli for his first work of satirical, carnivalesque, indulgent fiction. In each case, the luxurious atmosphere is charged with questions concerning who knows what, and about whom. Who can most wittily express what he knows, or most effectively conceal the absence of knowledge? The way in which Hobhouse isolates Disraeli's habit of delivering 'set phrases' also makes it sound as if the younger politician might be a character from one of Peacock's

novels, in which almost everyone habitually speaks in polished, epigrammatic manifestoes.

5 It is perfectly possible that Disraeli had no idea, before meeting him at Erle Stoke, who the author of *Headlong Hall* was. Peacock had always published his satires anonymously and was both professionally and personally committed to keeping a low profile (the result in large part, no doubt, of seeing how Byron's and Shelley's reputations had been mangled). On the other hand, Richard Bentley's Standard Novels set of four of his books had appeared in print in 1837, making his authorial identity better known than it had been. So perhaps Disraeli's surprise 'to find in him the author of "Headlong Hall,"' as Hobhouse puts it, simply means that he was startled to find Peacock, whom he already recognized by name as a writer, at this gathering.

6 Hobhouse's laconic journal entry might also encourage us to wonder why Peacock did not suspect that Disraeli had learned anything from him. Was it because he had not read any of the younger man's fiction? Or was it perhaps because, having done so, he failed to discern in it any trace of his own authorial character or style? If Disraeli took Peacock as one of his models for portraying Byron and Shelley in novelistic form, a reader would be hard pressed to see how.¹ *Venetia* is not a satire and its use of the most scandalous elements of the poets' private lives is entirely transparent. Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) contains two characters that in various ways summon up or resemble Byron and Shelley, but Mr Cypress (the Byronic character) is little more than a tissue of quotations from *Childe Harold* (1812–18) without any of the notorious biographical material that inspired and accompanied it, while Scythrop (the Shelleyan hero) loosely echoes Peacock's friend in traits of character such as his self-absorption and unlucky love affairs—which are here presented as farcical rather than tragic. Shelley, who was still alive at the time of the novel's publication (as was Byron), was later said to have taken the character 'to himself' (Peacock 2016b, xcv).

7 Peacock, generally renowned both in print and in person for his amused detachment and cool temper, might conceivably have been 'his "master"' in the sense of suggesting to Disraeli how to speak and govern himself in company (a recurrent concern in *Vivian Grey* (1826–27)). When Disraeli left Erle Stoke on Boxing Day in 1848, Hobhouse recorded that he said goodbye to his host in yet another 'set speech', this time smoothly quoting Byron. Such controlled performances were an attempt to remain in charge of very powerful emotions, as Hobhouse also noted (without showing any sign of feeling comparably moved by the experience himself): Disraeli had, in the first instance, 'gone upstairs', Hobhouse says, 'without taking leave, to avoid the pain of parting!' (Broughton 1911, 229).

8 Such moments in Disraeli's life might encourage us to wonder, as many others have wondered, what the novelist has in common with the politician, especially during a period in which literature assumes a function that is versatile, mobile, and vicarious. One thing is an interest in the disposition—that is, both the character and the arrangement—of various and conflicting groups of people. Disraeli, like Peacock—who was a smooth, skilful bureaucrat and political operator, as well as a writer of fiction—was concerned with the art or 'necessity', as it is described in *Vivian Grey*, 'of managing mankind by studying their tempers and humouring their weaknesses' (Disraeli 1826–27, 4). In Disraeli's case, this interest in managing scenes and individuals was not always matched by formal or stylistic control of his materials; in 1828, not long after publishing his first novel, he described his own breakdown in a letter to his father's friend Sharon Turner as 'one of those tremendous disorganisations which happen to all men at some period of their lives' (Disraeli 1982, 103).

9 Between 1815 and 1861 Peacock composed a series of tightly organized works of fiction in which some very peculiar individuals—obsessive, accident-prone, greedy, speculative, ludicrous, and politically extreme—participate in quick-fire debate, exchanging their opinions on a wide variety of tendentious and sometimes outlandish subjects. Peacock's sustained imaginative interest in a miniature polity of dilettantes, philosophers, and antiquarians, harmlessly riding their hobby horses while indulging in fine dining at someone else's expense, must have served as a release from the

administrative discipline he was required to maintain in the course of a long and successful career as Examiner at the East India Company. But the style of his imaginative writing is also directly continuous with that of his bureaucratic reports in being strikingly lean as well as sprinkled with footnotes. Only one of his works of fiction extended to three volumes.

- 10 Where Disraeli, or Vivian Grey, or the narrator, strains to analyse motives and feelings in the interests of working on persuading others to his point of view (and of understanding how his own mind is put together), Peacock strives rather to act as an impresario, remaining outside his characters and leaving the prejudices with which they began for the most part entirely intact. Very few speakers in his novels are persuaded by anyone consciously to embrace an opinion that is different from the one with which they started. A noble exception to this rule is Sir Telegraph Paxarett in *Melincourt* (1817), who is convinced by Mr Forester's anti-saccharine argument that he must renounce sugar and join Forester's cause. The clean, decisive culmination of this argument may serve to demonstrate Peacock's characteristic and unusual presentation of novelistic dialogue, as if he is reporting a parliamentary debate:

MR. FORESTER.

I infer, that it is the duty of every one, thoroughly penetrated with the iniquity of the slave-trade, to abstain entirely from the use of colonial produce.

SIR TELEGRAPH PAXARETT.

I may do that, without any great effort of virtue. I find the difference in this instance, more trivial than I could have supposed. In fact, I never thought of it before.

MR. FORESTER.

I hope I shall before long have the pleasure of enrolling you a member of the Anti-saccharine Society, which I have had the happiness to organize, and which is daily extending its numbers. (Peacock 2022b, 35)

- 11 Despite the fact that people very rarely change their headline allegiances, it quickly emerges in Peacock's works that even the most fiercely espoused theoretical positions are not always matched by steady or practical commitment to a cause. In the opening pages of *Headlong Hall*, a proponent of vegetarianism helps himself to a slice of beef, while a committed 'deteriorationist' (Peacock's coinage), who just happens to be the same man, finds himself suddenly able to 'imagine the possibility of one change for the better' when he catches sight of a gorgeous young woman (Peacock 2022a: 3, 9, 11, 15). Part I of *Vivian Grey* is largely concerned to show the temporarily successful efforts of the hero in winning people over to his view of things, often (as the narrator acknowledges) on the basis of no facts or evidence whatsoever, indeed frequently thanks to a misrepresentation of the truth. Peacock's speakers generally do not possess this enviable but very dangerous power to win over their auditors, and each argument, however absurd, is given as much space as the other—so that, in the end, not much can really be said to have changed.
- 12 The targets of *Headlong Hall* (1815, dated 1816) include politics, philosophy, craniology, and painting. Not all of these are topical or timely objects of satire. One of the reasons Disraeli might have been drawn to the book and readily conceived its author as his 'master' is that Peacock appears to have borrowed freely and without acknowledgement from the novels of Isaac D'Israeli—works about which his son chose to say very little in print. Honouring Peacock's fiction was perhaps a way of indirectly paying homage to a paternal strain of humorous, freakish creativity and to the influence that it might have had on his own development.² The two men—that is, Isaac D'Israeli and Thomas Love Peacock—were kindred spirits: largely self-taught lovers of anecdote, saturated in classical and periodical literature, and beguiled as well as maddened by enthusiasts of every stripe.
- 13 Peacock's novelistic career also seems to have been launched, at least in part, by Isaac D'Israeli. *Headlong Hall* borrows many of its sources and targets from a work of fiction that Benjamin Disraeli himself never mentions, his father's painfully exuberant satire

Flim-Flams! Or the Life and Errors of My Uncle, and the Amours of My Aunt (1805), as does Peacock's second novel, *Melincourt* (1817)—a more overtly political text in which a dapper, civilized orang-utan is elected MP for the rotten borough of Onevote.

14 It is possible that Peacock's sixth novel, *Crotchet Castle*, was provoked by the Silver Fork genre to which *Vivian Grey* belonged, as well as by the financial crisis of 1825 and the hectic surge in philosophical fads that is captured in the works of all three men. 1831, the year of *Crotchet Castle*'s publication, was also the year in which William Hazlitt passionately defended Jewish emancipation (Hazlitt 323–24). (He had previously attacked the so-called Dandy School of novelists in 1827, singling out *Vivian Grey* for particularly scornful comment.) Peacock's sixth work of fiction opens in an idyllic southern English landscape that has been occupied by an intellectually voracious parvenu of Jewish extraction; a man whose money derives from dubious sources, who is keen to suppress his origins by slightly altering his name as well as to assert his right to cultivate the land he now occupies and to play the role of an English squire, coat of arms included (Peacock 2016b: 5–6). There is no single target here, and the casual anti-Semitism is hardly unique to Peacock, but the range of reference and implication is, in the context of his other covert allusions to and uses of Isaac D'Israeli, at least suggestive.

15 *Flim-Flams* barely hangs together as a novel or fictional biography, having very little plot to speak of. Like Isaac D'Israeli's justly more celebrated work, the *Curiosities of Literature* (1791 and frequently reprinted thereafter)—a favourite of Byron's—it is rather a collection of philosophical, scientific, and literary specimens and anecdotes, loosely strung together by the observations of the narrator (and his critics). The gatherings of stories are licensed by the formation of a 'Society', 'constellation', or 'Academy' of excitable gentlemen collectors and amateur enthusiasts—a precursor of sorts of the Pickwick Club—including the narrator's uncle, who meet at the Cat and Fiddle to exchange news of their latest researches and discoveries. The members of this society are Caco-nous, a metaphysician; Bulbo, a cattle-fancier and enthusiast for apples; Dick and Jack, who are both would-be poets; and Raphael Contour, a befuddled connoisseur of the fine arts and admirer of the picturesque. D'Israeli mingles historical with fictional characters, though the preponderance of the real over the imagined world is extreme and to the detriment of the novel (D'Israeli 1.89, 101, 103, 110, 137, 139).

16 Unlike Dickens, or Sterne, or Peacock for that matter, Isaac D'Israeli makes almost no attempt to reproduce the conversation of these oddballs *as* conversation. Where Peacock offers us fiction that looks like a symposium, accompanied by typically short footnotes, D'Israeli gives us fiction that adds up to little more than a wild collection of anecdotes and opinions. His characters' speeches are indirectly summarized or translated into brief descriptions of states of mind or activities. As a result, the text lacks immediacy and life other than what is bestowed upon it by the narrator's own intrusions (and by the quite absurd proliferation of exclamation marks).

17 Like *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–67), *Flim-Flams* begins with a scatter-brained enquiry into 'Ante-natal impressions' (D'Israeli 1.27–28). Written by a man who was about to become a father, it is occupied with pregnancy and paternity gone awry—culminating in the aunt giving birth to a monkey—and with the botched or multiply compromised development of character. As a work of fiction, it is itself a very strange example of distracted and arrested development. The text is so overwhelmed with quotations knitted together with authorial remarks, supplementary arguments, and commentaries as to amount to a thesis in footnotes. Rabbinical, classical, and modern authorities are cited on matters ranging from physiology and physiognomy to apes, lexicography, aesthetics, and landscape gardening. All of these will go on to feature, in better ordered and more concise form, in Peacock. Each writer is highly conscious of the ways in which particular enthusiasms are intensified by modern forms of print circulation and by the rapid, sometimes open, sometimes covert, communication of gossip and news.

18 Perhaps in connection with those subterranean networks, Isaac D'Israeli hints at and deflects his Jewishness, and the means by which its secret essence might be guessed:

'Were I a *Jew*, or a *Platonist*...', as the author-narrator says teasingly to us at one point (Disraeli 1.28). *Vivian Grey*, too, with its classification of toadies, pursuit of gossip, and hints that may lead to social and political advancement or demotion, follows the circuitous routes of 'scandal', 'secret history' and 'interesting anecdote' (Disraeli 1826-27: 1.237). Here, Benjamin Disraeli begins to sound very like his father. One reviewer, George Croly, even dismissed the young author as a mere 'collector of intelligence' and his work as (oddly, to modern ears) the 'miserable product of self-sufficiency'—a claim which relates to Disraeli's irrepressible ambition, presumptuousness, and excessive confidence in his own abilities, as well as to aspects of the Silver Fork genre that are evident in Robert Plumer Ward's *Tremaine, or The Man of Refinement* (1825), in which the hero's pursuit of independence from corrupt social circles is of central concern ([Croly] 154-60). One of the satirically pointed morals of *Tremaine* is that 'it is possible that some one heart may be just so far abstracted from the glare of self-sufficiency, and the love of general admiration, as to feel what for the moment may be called an interest about some other heart' (Ward 2.267). Since Peacock's fiction typically ends in multiple marriages, this is no bad way of summing up his novels either.

19 'My books are the history of my life', Disraeli wrote to Lady Bradford after the publication of *Lothair* (1870); 'I don't mean a vulgar photograph of incidents, but the psychological development of my character' (Disraeli 1929, 1.268). His first three novels narrated, he said, 'the secret history of my feelings'; his fourth, *Contarini Fleming* (1832), is subtitled *A Psychological Romance* (O'Kell 253-84: 262, n. 5). The 'subject' of *Vivian Grey* continued to strike him in later life as 'essentially psychological' (Disraeli 1870-71: 'General Preface'). But despite such overtly personal quarrying of his own thoughts and emotions he did not exactly set out in *Vivian Grey* to write an *exposé*, even if there was a fashion for such works at the start of the nineteenth century (as at the start of the eighteenth), and even if that was exactly what his publisher wanted. Like Peacock, and unlike many Regency satirists, Disraeli did not want his reader to map imagined characters directly onto their real-life equivalents, although that is indeed what transpired. Unlike Peacock, however, the young Disraeli undoubtedly here cherished and promoted biography and autobiography over history. His fictional writing is therefore personally driven, and personality-driven, in a way that Peacock's strives not to be.

20 In Peacock's hands, eccentric aspects of character find legitimate expression in a series of peripheral, male-dominated households (abbeys, towers, and castellated villas). These buildings, governed by fathers and sons—mothers are, as a rule, nowhere to be seen—operate as if they were informal clubs or institutions, within which a group of disparate individuals can meet as social equals and remove themselves from the dangerously unpredictable world outside. In political terms, Peacock's novels are specially attuned to that class of educated non-professionals in possession of inherited property who cannot assume, or are no longer able to assert, a direct or automatic claim on positions of power. Perhaps that is why the settings of these fictions are so often buildings that have lost their original purpose, religious or defensive, and which have come instead to be occupied by characters whose plausibility and role in the world are comically uncertain.

21 Peacock's dialogic novels are seemingly documentary records of imagined speech in which the conventions and procedures of intellectual exchange are pressed to accommodate highly decorous, patterned, and surreal varieties of debate. The discussions themselves offer strange, disquieting views of largely well-meaning individuals operating in a world of classical or antiquarian farce and slapstick. Even when accidents happen, as they often do, things tend to work out for the best.

22 As a novelist, though he would never have willingly identified himself as such, Peacock found himself hesitating between two distinct impulses. There was the desire not to reveal his own character to the world, and on the other hand the wish not to leave unrecorded the disputes going on around him. His talking heads paraphrase or spout verbatim whole passages from the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly Review* (among many other publications). Readers are typically directed via the footnotes, more or less fully,

to the original sources (or to a teasing impersonation of them), but Peacock, like Disraeli, was not averse to including spurious references. Each writer apparently possessed what is described in *Vivian Grey* as ‘the singular faculty of being able to improvise quotations’ (Disraeli 1826–27, 1.80).

23 Even those characters in Peacock’s novels that are based in some sense on real people—including Byron and Shelley—are typically built out of citations from and indeed reviews of their own works, rather than on any attempt to depict them as realistic individuals in private and domestic life. Peacock, seeking to maintain what he called ‘my own impersonality’, applied that rule to his characters in general (Peacock 2016a, 152). Disraeli might well have admired him for that, given the scandalous reception of *Vivian Grey* as a too thinly veiled *roman à clef* and despite his own very strong attraction to biography and biographical novel-writing. He would also have enjoyed the pervasive scepticism about the modern rage for progress that all of Peacock’s fictions exhibit.

24 Peacock was especially fascinated with those phenomena which might be taken as evidence of progress and of degeneracy, and at the same time. (It is true, as his detractors claimed, that he liked to sit on a fence, but it was a slender fence of elaborate devising and the act of sitting upon it always a precarious one.) Print is one such phenomenon; science is another. This is recognizably the same territory as that of *Vivian Grey*, in which a cacophony of voices advances what the hero, whose ‘mind teems with original ideas to which I can annex no definite meaning’, describes as ‘a variety of contradictory theories, which are all apparently sound’ (Disraeli 1826–27, 1.343). Peacock’s speakers, like many of those who stroll in and out of *Vivian Grey*, are walking, talking embodiments of particular attitudes and philosophies. One of the appealing as well as limiting qualities of such characters, at first glance, is that you think you know exactly where they stand. As Dr Opimiam remarks in Peacock’s last complete work of fiction, *Gryll Grange* (1860), ‘there is much to be said about fish; but not in the way of misnomers. Their names are single and simple’ (Peacock 1861, 4–5). In *Vivian Grey*, a character called Mr Macaw is duty-bound to be a specialist in exotic birds, just as Mr Foaming Fudge—Disraeli’s name for Lord Brougham, also a favourite target of Peacock’s—can only spout nonsense. Among the strongest indications of Peacock’s influence on Disraeli is the latter’s choice of the name Parthenopex Puff for a would-be ‘sayer of good things’ in *Vivian Grey*, who is in reality ‘a modest wit’ (Disraeli 1826–27, 1.186). The name ‘Parthenopex’ is playing a very Peacockian game, alluding to the Greek legend that the siren Parthenope drowned herself when her songs failed to seduce Odysseus. The joke is therefore that, despite his best efforts to ‘puff’ or advertise his own verbal prowess, this modern-day male siren will also end washed up on the rocks.

25 *Nightmare Abbey*’s Mr Glowry has every right to be disappointed, given Peacock’s usual practice, when one of the servants he employs solely on the basis of their names refuses to conform to type: ‘Diggory Deathshead’, the footman, turns out to be cheerful and healthy—and proceeds to impregnate all the maids (Peacock 2016b, 9–10). Glowry hopes to behave like the author of an allegory, or a fishmonger, for whom names restrict within certain parameters the behaviour of those they describe. But life will not let him. That Peacock is careful to say as much should alert us to his own sense that fiction does not necessarily match reality; that one of the enjoyments of fiction, and of life, is the discrepancy between them—one that can also be felt as a painful let-down.

26 Disraeli could not but recognize the discrepancy between life as it is and life as it was represented in *Vivian Grey*, a work in which ‘knowledge’, as he said in 1853 and repeated in 1870, had not yet been informed or ‘acquired by experience’. If Peacock really had been in some sense his early ‘master’, this ‘essentially . . . puerile work’, which ‘baffled even the efforts of its creator to suppress it’, left Disraeli, as he put it in 1853, ‘no longer the master of his own will’ (Disraeli 1870–71, ‘Advertisement’). His irrepressible first book, refusing to obey its author, lived on. It may well be fitting to conclude any discussion of Disraeli with his beginnings rather than with his end, since he constructed what amounts to a reverse chronology for himself in the 1870 ‘General Preface’ to the Hughenden Edition, wrapping up with an account of the first of his

novels—as if it were in some sense the mature culmination rather than the lurid inauguration of his authorial career (Disraeli 1870–71, ‘General Preface’). In terms of charting his own literary and hence perhaps his psychological development, he seems to have envisaged ending more or less exactly where he had begun. In that sense, too, Peacock—who specialized in depicting unreformed characters—might well have been his master.

Bibliographie

- ANONYMOUS. ‘VENETIA’. *The Spectator* (20 May 1837): 16.
- ANONYMOUS. ‘Venetia. By the author of “Vivian Grey,” and “Henrietta Temple.”’ 3 vols. *The Athenæum* (20 May 1837): 356.
- BROUGHTON, Lord [John Cam Hobhouse]. *Recollections of a Long Life*. Ed. Lady DORCHESTER. 6 vols. 1909–11. Vol. 6: 1841–1852. London: John Murray, 1911.
- [CROLY, George], ‘FASHIONABLE NOVELS’. *The Monthly Magazine* (August 1826): 154–60.
- D’ISRAELI, Isaac. *Flim-Flams! Or the Life and Errors of My Uncle, and the Amours of My Aunt*. 3 vols. London: John Murray, 1805.
- DISRAELI, Benjamin. *Collected Edition of the Novels and Tales by the Right Hon. B. Disraeli*. 10 vols. London: Longman, Green and Co., 1870–71.
- DISRAELI, Benjamin. *Letters*. Ed. J. A. W. GUNN, et al. Toronto and London: U of Toronto P, 1982. Vol. 1: 1815–1834 (1982); Vol. 5: 1848–1851 (1993).
- DISRAELI, Benjamin. *The Letters of Benjamin Disraeli to Lady Bradford and Lady Chesterfield*. Ed. the MARQUIS OF ZETLAND. 2 vols. London: Ernest Benn, 1929.
- [DISRAELI, Benjamin.] *Venetia*. New edition. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1837.
- [DISRAELI, Benjamin.] *Vivian Grey. A New Edition*. London: Henry Colburn, 1826–27.
- DYER, Gary. *British Satire and the Politics of Style, 1789–1832*. Cambridge: CUP, 1997.
- HAZLITT, William. *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt: Centenary Edition*. Ed. P. P. HOWE. 21 vols. London and Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930–34. Vol. 19 (1930).
- O’KELL, Robert. ‘The Autobiographical Nature of Disraeli’s Early Fiction’. *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 31 (1976): 253–84.
- PARRY, Jonathan. ‘Disraeli, Benjamin, Earl of Beaconsfield (1804–1881), Prime Minister and Novelist’. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Accessed 5 Feb. 2024, from <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-7689>. (2011, May 19).
- [PEACOCK, Thomas Love.] *Crotchet Castle*. 1831. Ed. Freya JOHNSTON and Matthew BEVIS. Cambridge: CUP, 2016a.
- [PEACOCK, Thomas Love.] *Gryll Grange*. London: Parker, Son, and Bourn., 1861.
- [PEACOCK, Thomas Love.] *Headlong Hall*. 1815. Ed. Nicholas A. JOUKOVSKY. Cambridge: CUP, 2022a.
- [PEACOCK, Thomas Love.] *Melincourt*. 1817. Ed. Gary DYER. Cambridge: CUP, 2022b. DOI : 10.1017/9781139424806
- [PEACOCK, Thomas Love.] *Nightmare Abbey*. 1818. Ed. Nicholas A. JOUKOVSKY. Cambridge: CUP, 2016b.
- PEACOCK, Thomas Love. *The Letters of Thomas Love Peacock*. Ed. Nicholas A. JOUKOVSKY. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001.
- VILLA, Luisa. ‘Laughing with Young Ben: *Vivian Grey*, *Flim-Flams!*, and the Perplexities of Satirical Writing’. *Romanticism* 28 (2022): 277–90.
- WARD, Robert Plumer. *Tremaine, or The Man of Refinement*. 3 vols. London: Henry Colburn, 1825.

Notes

1 On the contrast between the two men as satirists, see also Gary Dyer 1997, 94–138.

2 On that influence, see Villa 277–90.

Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique

Freya Johnston, « Disraeli and Peacock », *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* [En ligne], 101 Printemps | 2025, mis en ligne le 10 avril 2025, consulté le 06 mai 2025. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/cve/15856> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/13qt2>

Auteur

Freya Johnston

Freya Johnston is a Professor of English and Hazel Eardley-Wilmot Tutorial Fellow at St Anne's College, Oxford. She has published books about Samuel Johnson and Jane Austen and is General Editor of *The Cambridge Edition of the Novels of Thomas Love Peacock*.

Freya Johnston est Professeure en études anglophones et Hazel Eardley-Wilmot Tutorial Fellow de St Anne's College, à l'Université d'Oxford. Elle a publié sur Samuel Johnson et Jane Austen. Elle est rédactrice-en-chef de *The Cambridge Edition of the Novels of Thomas Love Peacock*.

Droits d'auteur



Le texte seul est utilisable sous licence CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Les autres éléments (illustrations, fichiers annexes importés) sont « Tous droits réservés », sauf mention contraire.