Out of office and ailing in 1880, Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, left 10 Downing Street for his country home, Hughenden, and used his unwelcome leisure to complete a novel. He had last published *Lothair* in 1870, when he had last been defeated by the sanctimonious W. E. Gladstone, who remained his political and personal archenemy. *Endymion* was already well along. He had begun it before he had returned as Prime Minister in 1874, and kept it a secret—almost. His private secretary, Monty Corry, knew, and safeguarded the manuscript.

*Endymion* was in the planning stages in 1871 when Disraeli wrote to his old friend the Duchess of Somerset (Lady Seymour when he first knew her in the 1830s) to ask whether she had kept any souvenirs of the Eglinton Tournament, the great social and spectator event of its year. He wanted his novel’s semiautobiographical hero to be part of that early Victorian experience, the symbolic revival of romanticized medievalism. The reenactment had been staged at Eglinton Castle, home of a sporting peer in Ayrshire, near Glasgow, on 28 August 1839, the Wednesday following the close of the parliamentary season. Thirteen costumed and armored knights had taken part and Lady Seymour as Queen of Beauty, despite drenching rain and mud, and the scattering of both participants and crowd, awarded a trophy to the champion and presided over a culminating banquet on the first dry day, August 30.

The Duchess wrote back to Disraeli that a “stupid maid” had burnt her relics, all but a color print, which she sent him. Nevertheless, Disraeli created his own authenticity. In the nostalgia-drenched England of his “Montfort Tournament” in *Endymion*, “The sun shone, and not one of the breathless multitude was disappointed.”

Monty Corry’s recollection that his first glimpse of the novel came when the unfinished manuscript was locked away in the new strong room at Hughenden on 15 October 1878 is precise without being accurate. On 19 November 1877, accompanied by Corry, Disraeli had entrained for St. Albans,
where Lord Verulam’s carriage was waiting to take them to Gorhambury. A descendant of Francis Bacon (the first Baron Verulam and Viscount St. Albans), the ruins of whose house still remained on the property, Verulam was an agreeable aristocrat. Lame and using two crutches, he guided guests about his park, showing them Bacon’s observatory and the old “Kissing Oak” under which Queen Elizabeth reputedly embraced her host. His house was filled with Baconian relics.

One of Verulam’s visitors was travel writer and memoirist Augustus Hare, who recalled Disraeli explaining why he never carried a watch: “I live under the shadow of Big Ben.” He also noted in his diary (about 20 November 1877) that the Prime Minister “seemed absorbed…. Scarcely noticed any one, barely answered his hostess when spoken to.” Apologizing for Lord Beaconsfield, “Corry said that his chief declared that the greatest pleasure in life was writing a book, because ‘in that way alone man could become a creator’: that his habit was to make marionettes, and then to live with them for some months before he put them into action. Lately he had made some marionettes; now he was living with them, and their society occupied him entirely.”

When Disraeli began thinking out his marionettes is unclear. It may have been soon after he completed Lothair. The name of Disraeli’s autobiographical protagonist, Endymion Ferrars, may be a clue to the actual writing. Although the satirist William Aytoun had published a burlesque of Disraeli’s “Ixion in Heaven” in 1842 entitled “Endymion,” Disraeli had almost certainly forgotten it. The mythological Endymion, the handsome son of Zeus and the nymph Calyce, was the object of the desperate love of Selene, the Moon goddess. One story about their relationship is that Endymion was lying asleep in a cave one night when Selene gently kissed his closed eyes, after which Zeus gave him eternal youth at the cost of his never awakening. Disraeli’s epistolary courtship of Selina, Countess of Bradford, dates from 1873, and his christening his hero Endymion seems to link the author with his own Moon goddess.

When he put the manuscript away for safekeeping in 1878, not expecting to complete it, if ever, until he left office, he explained to Corry that there were about a hundred pages to go. In the box he left notes on how the plot was to be worked out in case Corry would have to finish it—or publish it as it was. Settled into Hughenden after the summer parliamentary recess, he set to work completing it while Corry negotiated with Thomas Longman, publisher of Lothair, on the basis of the novel’s imminent completion. Corry, now Lord Rowton, wanted at least as attractive a contract for Endymion as for Lothair, pressing for £7,500 for all rights. Partly it was a matter of pride,
partly of pounds. Now out of Downing Street, Disraeli did not want to linger indefinitely at Seamore Place despite the generosity of Alfred de Rothschild.

Longman’s first offer, on July 20, was unsatisfactory to Corry. On August 4 the publisher reconsidered—although neither he nor Corry had read a single page of the book. It was, after all, a three-volume novel by a successful writer and statesman who was probably the most eminent man in England. Turning up in the Lords late in the day while the Liberal leader in the Upper House, the Duke of Argyll, was speaking, Corry first sat impatiently at Disraeli’s side, then got up briefly and returned with a note:

There are things too big to impart in whispers! so I leave your side, just to write these words—Longman has today offered Ten Thousand Pounds for Endymion.

I have accepted it! I cannot tell you what a pleasure it is to me to see my ardent ambition for you gratified!

And you have an added honor which may for ever remain without precedent.

Longman followed up the offer to Corry with a formal one in which he asked Disraeli to judge for himself whether the commercial possibilities of the work were up to that advance. On August 7, Disraeli accepted “with pleasure,” adding: “I would not do so, unless I had a conviction that you would have no cause to regret the sales price.” It was a very large sum for 1880, one of the highest offers at the time in the history of authorship. Dickens had brought in £9,000 for Dombey and Son, of which he retained three-quarters. George Eliot had earned from all sales on Middlemarch about £8,000, and about £9,000 for Daniel Deronda. The highest sum that the envious Anthony Trollope had garnered for a single novel had been £3,525 for Can You Forgive Her? (1864), not one of his more esteemed works. (The usual retail price then for a three-volume novel, upon which royalties would have been computed, was thirty-one shillings.)

Disraeli asked Corry to read the manuscript through, to validate that it was “fit to publish.” Then he was to read it a second time “to see if it be in English.” On still a third reading he was to check spelling and punctuation. Invited to Hughenden to discuss details of publication, Longman delivered a portion of the advance and received an invitation to return on September 14 to collect the pages. Accepting the check, Disraeli told Corry, was “magic.”

Longman worked quickly. By September 18 he estimated that to fit his three-volume format, the novel, somewhat longer than Lothair, would need one extra letter on each line and one extra line on each page. Proofs would be sent in secrecy to provide for the most possible surprise value.

Disraeli worked equally fast, finding only one error in a character’s name, “Jowett” for “Jawett,” which he worried might be seen “as a slur on the celebrated Oxford Don.” Given Disraeli’s ailments and poor eyesight, proof-
reading well over nine hundred pages was a tremendous task, but by October 6 he had passed all the pages. By November 5 the sheets were at the binders, with press and presentation copies promised for the 23rd. Disraeli intended to send the Queen a special copy, “in more stately garb,” he instructed Longman, bound in dark green morocco. As the release date neared, Longman worried about a possible special session of parliament to pass Gladstone’s Irish Coercion Bill, writing Disraeli that the “awful condition of Irish affairs is absorbing more of public attention than the publisher of Endymion cares about. I fear it will affect the sale.” The 26th was the official release date, and Mudie’s ordered three thousand copies for its subscribers—“unprecedented,” Longman told Disraeli, for a work of fiction. The first printing was 7,000 copies, and 10,500 were in print by December 3. Press interest was so great that Disraeli received from Longman 110 notices and reviews from British and Irish papers alone.

The first was the most troublesome. The Standard had somehow secured an early copy, summarizing the plot in its issue of November 23, guessing at the identity of the major characters, and deploring that the political narrative had “less dramatic interest than almost any of the novels … of Lord Beaconsfield.” Its editor, Disraeli explained to Longman, was a friend of the republican-leaning Liberals Charles Dilke and Joseph Chamberlain, although the paper had supported Disraeli when he was in office. The leak may have damaged sales, but reviews in general were positive, and what pleased Disraeli most was that the Revue des deux mondes, “that capital periodical,” liked it and appeared to be “the only notice, out of the hundreds wh[ich] we have received in which the critic has read the book he reviewed.”

Lady Dorothy Nevill, who read Disraeli again and again with “a renewal of sentiment,” she told Edmund Gosse, pored over Endymion almost as personal history. “What a charm,” she declared, “after the beef and mutton of ordinary novels.” She knew more of the originals of Disraeli’s characters, from the amiable Waldershare, a much-laundered George Smythe, to the chatelaines of the great houses, than anyone but the author himself. Still, Disraeli told Lord Beauchamp, Endymion was the first novel he had ever published “without the preliminary advantage of a female critic.” He said much the same thing to Emma de Rothschild, Natty’s wife, in presenting a copy “from her friend Beaconsfield,” and she responded, after some praise: “If I might venture to allude to a shadow amongst so much light, I would ask why your hero, possessing every quality likely to ensure a success, should be partly indebted to the worldly and prosperous position of a sister?”

While fixing upon the political weakness of Disraeli’s protagonist, Lady de Rothschild failed to notice, nor did her husband, the little private joke about Sir Nathaniel that had been slipped into the book. Natty, who nev-
er forgot anything, was the one to whom Disraeli went when he needed a date in history. Midway through the novel a character confides to Endymion: “I like reading encyclopedias. The ‘Dictionary of Dates’ is a favorite book of mine.” Of a younger generation than the author, Emma was even less able to recognize that among the personal and political debts Disraeli was paying through his characters was the overwhelming one he owed to his sister, Sarah. In *Endymion* she has the great marriage denied to her in life and the impact upon the hero’s career which her pathetic real-life role made impossible.

Beginning in 1827 with Lord Canning’s death, the career of Endymion Ferrars encompasses thirty years of English politics. Young Ferrars is the son of a failed politician who has retired to a country house much like Disraeli’s Bradenham. Since the family cannot afford upscale schooling for Endymion, he leaves Eton at sixteen for a government clerkship. Ferrars may be a distant echo of Edward Ferrars of Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*, where, according to his more sophisticated brother, Robert (Disraeli, instead, posits a sister), Edward’s “extreme gaucherie … kept him from mixing in proper society.” His ambitions are modest, but the “irresistible will” of Myra, his twin sister, and those older women who enter his life as sponsors of his career, move him upward. In the politically turbulent years culminating in the Reform Bill, Endymion’s mother dies suddenly and his father commits suicide. The young man’s prospects are dim, but he has attracted notice because he is obviously clever and of good family, and because Mr. Vigo, whose trade is the dressing of gentlemen, offers him credit and advice to avoid the “shabby genteel” look. Vigo tells Endymion: “No man gives me the trouble Lord Eglantine does; he has not made up his mind whether he will be a great poet or prime minister. ‘You must choose, my lord,’ I tell him. ‘I can not send you out looking like Lord Byron if you mean to be a Canning or Pitt.’"

Dress is crucial, for this is the grand London world of Disraeli’s rise, and the novel is his elegiac backward glance at it. Endymion inhabits the great political salons of rich and regal women, attends the Eglinton Tournament, meets lively and enterprising young men who have useful connections, and—although he is a slow learner—they teach him something about the real world. He observes the reigns of George IV and William IV give way to that of a buoyant young Queen; he matures in the age of Chartist and railway shares mania; and he enters politics in the era of Sir Robert Peel, experiencing the stage fright of young Disraeli on making his maiden speech in the Commons.

It is given to the novel’s Metternich figure to enunciate Disraeli’s racial loyalties, observing that “Semittes now exercise a vast influence over affairs
through their smallest though most peculiar family, the Jews. There is no race gifted with so much tenacity, and such skill in organization. These qualities have given them an unprecedented hold over property and illimitable credit.” “In another quarter century,” he predicts, “they will claim their share of open government.”

Their representative in the novel is recognizable, but is not burdened with a faith awkward to the plot. Myra becomes companion to Adriana, the only child of the head of the Neuchatel banking family, Swiss in origin in the novel but clearly the Rothschilds. Adrian Neuchatel is a version of Baron Lionel, and the banker’s country seat, Hainault, is much like Gunnersbury, although east rather than west of London. Myra’s connection with the Neuchatels is as valuable as is her brother’s relationships with influential London hostesses. While the ladies have their network of highly placed people, Neuchatel himself becomes Endymion’s informal university. Among other things he recommends reading foreign newspapers. “The most successful man in life,” he says, “is the man who has the best information.” He prefers private business to elective politics, reminding Endymion: “A public man is responsible, and a responsible man is a slave.” While the electorate can make the elected its pawns, “it is private life that governs the world.” But the public pose, he understands, is always crucial: “Nobody should look anxious, except those who have no anxiety.”

If there are echoes of Lionel de Rothschild in the shrewdness of Adrian Neuchatel, there is affectionate reminiscence in the portrait of his wife, Emily, who is much like Lionel’s Charlotte. Warm and witty, she is a tireless news-gatherer and letter-writer to her daughter, a benefactor to “her schools,” a zealot for rare solitude, indifferent to elegant cuisine and elaborate ceremony, and prizing guests for their intellect, yet a gracious hostess for her husband to ambassadors and cabinet ministers.

Endymion, who has trouble finding a purpose for himself, comments early in the novel to the ambitious Radical Job Thornberry that his rural life must be a pleasant one. “Yes,” agrees Job, “but life should be more than pleasant; an ox in a pasture has a pleasant life.” He would like to go into politics and replace feudalism with “the commercial principle.” Curiously, his name deflects direct identification with either Cobden or Bright, as Job Thornberry was the leading character in the younger George Colman’s stage masterpiece, *John Bull*, produced at Covent Garden in 1803, the year before Disraeli was born.

At Somerset House and other government bureaus, Endymion meets a variety of personalities adapted from Disraeli’s experience. “St. Barbe,” jealous, ambitious for success as a writer, and a satirist of snobs who is a snob himself, is Thackeray, repaid for his *Codlingsby*. “Gushy” the sentimental-
ist is Dickens. “Waldershare,” good-hearted, romantic and capricious, represents the best in the often unprincipled Smythe. “Count Ferrol” is the younger Bismarck, and “Baron Sergius” is Metternich, and their counsel is almost a manual on how European foreign affairs were transacted in the first half of the century. “You will find it of the first importance in public life,” advises Ferrol, “to know personally those who are carrying on the business of the world; so much depends on the character of an individual, his habits of thought, his prejudices, his social weaknesses, his health. Conducting affairs without this advantage is, in effect, an affair of stationery; it is pens and paper that are in communication, not human beings.”

The novel is rich in the wry wisdom of Disraeli’s six decades in political and fashionable life. Critics who saw apothegms pilfered or inverted missed the point that he was representing what he knew, what he heard, and what he found more true when turned into its opposite:

“As a general rule, nobody has money who ought to have it.”

“What is the use of diamond necklaces if you cannot help a friend into Parliament?”

“Marriage is a mighty instrument.”

“Life is a masquerade.”

“Desperation is sometimes as powerful an inspirer as genius.”

“As for religion generally, if a man believe in his Maker and does his duty to his neighbor, in my mind that is sufficient.”

“It is not good taste to believe in the Devil.”

“A little knowledge of the world is a dangerous thing, especially in literature.”

“I prefer the society of a first-rate woman to that of any man.”

“Never dine out in a high[-necked] dress.”

“Only let a man be able to drive into Bamford on market day, and get two or three linendrapers to take off their hats to him, and he will be happy enough, and always ready to die for our glorious Constitution.”

“The most precious stone ... must be cut and polished.”

“Without tact you can learn nothing. Tact teaches you when to be silent.”

“I think life would be very insipid if all our lots were the same.”

“No one can be patient who is not independent.”

“Every procession must end.”
Having soured on Gladstone, Cardinal Manning is rewarded by a gentler image than his Machiavellian one in *Lothair*, becoming Nigel Penruddock, a convert to Rome who rises to Papal Legate to England and Archbishop of Tyre. He is also given lines that Victoria told Disraeli she found the most amusing in the novel, the young priest’s panegyric: “The Athanasian creed is the most splendid ecclesiastical lyric ever poured forth by the genius of man. I give every clause of it implicit assent. It does not pretend to be divine; it is human, but the Church has hallowed it, and the Church ever acts under the influence of the Divine Spirit. St Athanasius was by far the greatest man that ever existed.” The lines carry an irony the novelist never knew, as he could not have read Cardinal Newman’s private letter questioning what Disraeli thought of the Athanasian creed; and in a double irony, the dialogue is given to the churchman modeled upon the man whom Newman most disliked, Manning.

“Lord Roehampton” is an urbane cabinet minister patterned upon Lyndhurst as well as Palmerston and who confesses “the feelings of youth and the frame of age.” He marries Myra, giving Endymion a boost among the Whigs; on Roehampton’s death she marries the former Continental exile she had known as “Colonel Albert,” now the amiable King Florestan. A sanitized Napoleon III, he is given an island nation much like Sardinia, which had furnished troops to assist the West against Russia in the Crimean War.

Adriana Neuchatel (with something of Hannah de Rothschild—heiress to Mayer’s millions—in her) is denied her chance at marriage to Endymion, but not her opportunity to manipulate his life. Her anonymous gift of £20,000 in bonds, a trifle to her, enables him to finance—in effect, purchase—a parliamentary election. His open political sponsors are older women, especially the beautiful, domineering Berengaria, Lady Montfort, who combines elements of Lady Cowper (Palmerston’s wife), Mary Anne Wyndham Lewis (whose husband’s death was to Disraeli’s advantage), and Lady Londonderry, the energetic, lion-hunting hostess Disraeli admired. “Everything in this world depends upon will,” Lady Montfort exalts Endymion. “I think everything in this world,” he claims, “depends upon woman.” And for him it does.

Lady Montfort’s husband (a version of Sir Francis Sykes and a like-minded complaisant husband) conveniently dies, leaving Berengaria a fortune and the opportunity to marry her protégé in a romanticized version of the Wyndham Lewis affair. Montfort had not been meanly heartless, as “he had no heart. He was good-natured, provided it brought him no inconvenience,” for he had “a contemptuous fine taste, which assured him that a gentleman should never be deprived of tranquility in a world where nothing was of the slightest consequence.”
Pressed earlier to propose marriage to Adriana, Endymion had shrunk back, claiming not that he was already magnetized by Lady Montfort but that at twenty-five he was unready. “Great men,” his sister scolds him—she means potentially great—“should think of Opportunity, and not of Time. Time is the excuse of feeble and puzzled spirits.” Agreeing with Berengaria, Myra warns that time cannot accomplish what ought to be achieved by will. Although in her wit, her resolve, and her ambition, Myra Ferrars is the true Disraelian figure (“You are myself,” she tells Endymion), the novel is ultimately about a female political dimension that remained crucial in a culture where office, and even the ballot, were denied to women—when their political fulfillment came in nourishing male ambition. “If we cannot shape your destiny,” Myra tells her twin, “there is no such thing as witchcraft.”

Unable to wrest Endymion from Lady Montfort, Adriana marries the charmingly cynical Waldershare, who is given the Disraelian lines in the novel inappropriate for the rather prim Endymion. “Sensible men are all of the same religion,” Waldershare observes; when he is asked, “And pray what is that?” he quips, “Sensible men never tell.”

At the end of the novel the Earl of Aberdeen’s government has fallen—it is the period of the Crimean War—and Endymion Ferrars, who has advanced from clerk to private secretary (as Disraeli was to Lyndhurst) to M.P. and then to the Cabinet, becomes Prime Minister—a Whig one at that.

What puzzled readers and critics as much as the Whig milieu in which the Tory novelist’s hero makes his way was the old-fashioned outlook, attuned as it was to the old-fashioned prose. To evoke the vanished London of his youth, Disraeli was writing in his early manner, and when Ellery Sedgwick in the Nation attacked the novel as dated by fifty years, he failed to recognize that it had been the author’s intention. Like other critics, he also saw the weakness of Endymion in its malleable hero, who has “no real struggle” and is “fatally successful.” (Unlike his creator, the protagonist has to be pushed into being ambitious.) Writing anonymously in the Quarterly Review, Alfred Austin recognized Disraeli’s strategies: “What he did at twenty-five [in Viv-ian Grey], he is doing at seventy-five, only doing it better.” But now, Austin noted, Lord Beaconsfield was the only person writing political novels from the inside, “and the only person who, by the very conditions of the case, could have written them.”

Most of the more favorable notices were nevertheless on the edge of being unkind, the Edinburgh Review calling the novel “a satirical picture of life, with the transformations of a Christmas pantomime.” From Washington, the Anglophilic Henry Adams, mining his anti-Semitic vein, wrote to Charles Manes Gaskell, “I have read Endymion, with stares and gasps. There is but one excuse for it; the author must be in a terrible want of money; his
tenants have paid him nothing, and Mr Gladstone has docked his pension. If he has not, he should. *Endymion* is a disgrace to the government, to the House of Lords, the Commons and the Jews."

It took the Queen nearly two months to finish *Endymion*, but she read all of it and on 7 February 1881 questioned Disraeli: “Were you not thinking of the Duchess of Manchester in Lady Montfort, and of Mr Bright in Job Thornberry? But who is Endymion taken after? How is it that your hero should be a *Whig*?”

Three days later Disraeli responded in the last long letter he wrote: “what I would admit to no one else, that I think there are features of Lady Palmerston in her youth in that representation, and some traits of devotion drawn from someone else.” If a delicate allusion to Lady Bradford, it suggested that he could only wed the long-married Selina in fiction. There was a Lord Bradford, very much alive. “Indeed,” he assured Victoria, “I had no intention or desire to draw any living characters.” As for Thornberry, he explained, “I have endeavoured to convey my impression of the style of Mr Cobden as an orator. All the rest is typical: traits, perhaps of Mr Bright, but the catastrophe of the family occurred literally to Mr [John] Potter, the Socinian Mayor of Manchester, and M.P., who, having made his fortune, sent his two sons to Oxford to make them gentlemen; but they only became Roman Catholics.”

*Endymion*, Disraeli explained, “was not intended for a hero any more than M. Gil Blas by Le Sage.” In Alain-René Lesage’s *Gil Blas* (1715), the hero is a rather passive student pushed by circumstance into a series of adventures—fleeced by a swindler, carried off by brigands, but eventually ingenious enough to succeed by his wits in a variety of professions and even, twice, in marriage. *Endymion* was not intended to be interesting in himself, Disraeli added; thus he was given “no imagination and very controlled passion: but he has great patience, perseverance, judgement, and tact, which qualities, with good looks, have, before this, elevated men in your Majesty’s Councils. He is in fact rather a plodder, and I thought quite good enough to be a Whig.”

He feared it was “too long a letter,” Disraeli closed. “It is like an Address in answer to the gracious Speech from the Throne.” But it was the most revealing private letter he had ever written about his fiction—and his last.

What critics overlooked was the mellow charm of the narrative, a political fantasy spun about the author’s friends and enemies of a lifetime, embodying his appraisal to Lady Bradford: “I have had a good innings and cannot agree with the great King that all is vanity.” With no serious pretensions or sermonizing to slow it down, *Endymion* nevertheless examines how society and politics were interlinked in the aristocratic milieu in which he challenged the norms. A world which the rising bourgeois political powers of
the 1880s saw as well lost, it was never as sunny as Disraeli painted it, yet in some ways it was more hospitable than in his fiction. An outsider like Disraeli could never have penetrated Endymion Ferrars’s society, not even its lowest rung.

“I don’t give my mind at all to politics,” he had written to Lady Bradford on September 10, for “the A.V.”—the Arch Villain, Gladstone—“has carried everything before him.” Yet in the leisure between his completion of *Endymion* and the arrival of Longman to pick the pages up, he discussed his favorite subject, politics, with Lord Ronald Leveson-Gower, a Scottish M.P. of thirty-five who dabbled also in painting, sculpture, poetry, and boys, and would be the model for Lord Henry Wotton in Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. (His elder brother, the 3rd Duke of Sutherland, was a Disraeli ally in the Upper House and a crony of the Prince of Wales.) Gower had been to Hughenden once before, eight years earlier, when Disraeli posed for a statue, seated, with arms folded (now in the National Portrait Gallery). Proudly, Disraeli showed Gower the changes since. A portrait of Byron by William Westall hung at the landing. On the staircase were pictures of personal and political friends and the Queen’s portrait by Heinrich von Angeli that was her gift. Some of the painters—he mentioned Stuart Wortley and Augustus Lumley in his diary—Gower dismissed as “amateurs,” but kept that to himself. The tour of the manor was a review of Lord Beaconsfield’s rise, from the portraits of his mother and father to two of his grandfather Benjamin—“the real D’Israeli,” said Gower’s host.

In the library while they examined Hughenden’s treasures, including Isaac’s books and manuscripts and presentation books from Victoria, Disraeli picked up a volume Gower described as on “Solomon’s writings,” and spoke of religion in the vein of his novels. “I would indeed be very ungrateful to speak ill of Christianity,” he said, “which has caused half the civilised world to worship a man and the other half a woman, both of my race.” He spoke of his early travels to Spain and the East, and after dinner, at which Disraeli ate little—“only some venison and a little of a cabinet pudding (which I thought an appropriate dish)”—they sat in the library. Despite an asthmatic cough, Disraeli smoked a forbidden cigarette, dismissing his ailments with the thought that he was likely to live only two years more at most, though he had prophesied to the Queen a fanciful twenty.

Although Mary Anne had been dead eight years, Disraeli referred to her as “my dear wife.” She had been, Gower thought, “his good angel.” Her portraits were prominent in the house, Disraeli’s favorite a flattering enlargement of a miniature showing a youngish Mary Anne whom he, and perhaps no one else, ever knew. At 11:00 he rose to go off to bed, and was up at 7:30 for breakfast before his guest was awake. After Gower’s breakfast they exam-
ined further Hughenden treasures and looked in at the rooms used by the
Prince of Wales earlier in the year. As the peacocks cried, they walked down
the slope to the churchyard, where at the east wall were the graves of Mary
Anne, Sarah Brydges Williams, and James D’Israeli.

After lunch, they went on a long walk in the bright sun down to the trout
stream—the Hughen—and through the beeches to the high road, where a
pony cart waited to take them further. It was market day in Wycombe, and
when the pair dismounted and walked among the crowds, people bowed to
their famous neighbor. The next morning, a wet one, they sat in the smok-
ing room, dominated by a portrait of Lord George Bentinck, and again talk-
ed politics, largely about Disraeli’s desire to leave its burdens altogether.
He had asked, he confided, to have Salisbury replace him as party leader.
And he excoriated Hartington for lack of courage in deferring to Gladstone
when the Marquess could have been Prime Minister. The post arrived just
as Gower was leaving in the rain, Disraeli’s carriage taking him to Wycombe
Station. With the mail was The Times, which included a letter from Glad-
stone thanking the public for its prayers during his recent illness. “Did you
ever hear anything like that?” Disraeli said, glancing at the letter with dis-
gust. “It reminds one of the Pope blessing all the world from the balcony of
St Peter’s.”

Two months later, on November 8, Gower was back. It was a golden
autumn day, but Disraeli, sunning himself on his veranda among the shrill
peacocks, was huddled in a fur-lined coat that reached nearly to his feet,
one of which was slippered after a sharp attack of gout. He rejoiced in his
gout, Disraeli claimed, for it had driven away his bronchitis. After lunch, as
they sat by a blazing fire in the library, he accepted what he claimed was the
first cigarette he had smoked since Gower’s last visit, and was “full of the
past, and his youth.” He described the three Sheridan sisters in the flower
of their beauty and dinners they graced, where the wit and humor flowed
“more copiously by far than the claret.” Gazing into the fire he murmured,
“Dreams! dreams! dreams!”

“Life,” he sighed, “is [either] an ennui, or an anxiety.” For the person born
with position and means, with little to strive for, he explained, existence
could be a burden and a bore. For the self-made man, life was full of trou-
bles and anxieties—to achieve position and then to hold on to it. “My idea
of a happy future state,” he mused, “is one of those long midsummer days,
when one dines at nine o’clock.”

“I believe he is engaged in writing something,” Gower guessed, “but this
he didn’t tell me.” Something in Disraeli’s conversation suggested it, but
Gower and almost everyone else learned of it only when the fragment was
published in The Times in 1905. Before becoming too ill to carry it fur-
ther, Disraeli had only reached the tenth chapter. Since called *Falconet* after the likely leading character, it begins among the spacious brick residences surrounding Clapham Common which housed pious merchants and magnates who preferred a quieter life than that of the Mayfair aristocracy. That the father of the first leading figure is named Wilberforce Falconet suggests the Evangelical ambience, and indeed there was a Clapham sect earlier in the century. Its religious and philanthropic ideals motivated Shaftesbury and Macaulay (whose father, Zachary, was a Claphamite), and inspired Thackeray’s satiric view of Clapham in *The Newcomes* (1855). Falconet’s daughters are pretty and pious, and two of his five sons are assiduous in the family counting house. Another enters the clergy, and the black sheep chooses the army. The youngest, Joseph Toplady Falconet, a brilliant Oxford scholar but deficient in a sense of humor and disputatious in nature, is eager to be “a lay champion of the Church…. A seat in the House of Commons seemed to be indicated.”

“What’s the use of cutting up the A.V.?” Disraeli wrote to Lady Bradford on 2 November 1880. “I see no chance of [political] salvation unless he really goes mad, but he is such a hypocrite that I shall never believe that, till he is in Bedlam.” Yet Disraeli was cutting him up in a way that seemed feasible only for a writer drifting out of politics. He would dissect Gladstone’s hypocrisies in his novel—and the “Arch Villain,” seen as a political climber, is young Falconet.

Critics have found a sardonic combination of names in Disraeli’s coinage. Joseph Surface was W. B. Sheridan’s scheming hypocrite in *The School for Scandal*, while Augustus Montague Toplady was the anti-Wesleyan divine who was the hymnist of “Rock of Ages.” It is possible, too, that Disraeli intended some ironic sexual innuendo in the name—a suggestion of what Gladstone never accomplished in his relations with demimondaines, and possibly the source of his manic intensity. It was well known that Gladstone in 1839 had Latinized “Rock of Ages,” and was already imposing what to Disraeli were the irrelevant perspectives of religion upon the practical business of politics. Seething at the “A.V.” during the Russo-Turkish Eastern crisis, he had written to Lord Derby in October 1876: “Posterity will do justice to that unprincipled maniac Gladstone—extraordinary mixture of envy, vindictiveness, hypocrisy and superstition; and with one commanding characteristic—whether Prime Minister, or Leader of the Opposition, whether preaching, praying, speechifying or scribbling—never a gentleman.”

The lineaments of Joseph Toplady Falconet were laid out long before the writing was begun, and when Disraeli, at a Royal Academy view, saw the Millais portrait of Gladstone, he remarked that there was one element missing in the face—the vindictiveness. In what we have of *Falconet* the Glad-
stone figure is still too immature for that, but already visible is the Joseph Surface side. Gladstone, so Disraeli wrote to Lady Bradford, was “a ceaseless Tartuffe from the beginning.” Was Falconet beneath the dignity of a former Prime Minister to write? It may be that Disraeli did not intend to publish it in his lifetime, but that he began it at all suggests how much he thought a corrective to Gladstone’s aura of sanctity was necessary. His version was intended as a Gladstone for the ages.

The opening pages suggest the high noon of the Claphamites, a period of expansive optimism, but Disraeli juggled time and set Falconet in the recent past. Optimism, but for the Falconet family, is almost gone. The experience of the Eastern Question had left its mark on Disraeli, and he was unconvincing, even to himself, when he had insisted to Victoria on 28 October 1880 that he was neither a pessimist nor “a disappointed politician.” Bleakly, he added, “I gratefully recognise that I have had my fair chance, & share, of serving my Sovereign & my country, but with nearly a half century of experience in public life, I wish not to deny that the present condition of affairs fills me with anxiety, & even gloom.”

“I am not a pessimist,” he maintained to Lady Chesterfield on 22 December 1880, while admitting “the present state of affairs makes me tremble. Old England seems to be tumbling to pieces…. I receive letters every day asking me to write a manifesto and make a speech; that I am the only man who could do so with effect; and all that. Why should I?” Yet he was answering his own question in fiction, the medium for his argument that either the political processes had failed or that humanity itself had failed its opportunities.

The name Falconet, Sarah Bradford suggests in her biography, “may have been inspired by Gladstone’s appearance; to admirers he resembled an eagle, to Disraeli a bird of prey.” Like Joseph Surface and Augustus Toplady, however, the only Falconet of any fame also derived from the later eighteenth century. Peter Falconet was a portrait painter, but in the novel it is Falconet’s own portrait that is to be limned. Not much of it was drawn in the few chapters in which Falconet appears, although he is seen passionately attacking the revival of the slave trade in the Red Sea. There is no truth to the allegation, yet his audience is electrified and it suffices to prove Falconet’s readiness for the seat that falls vacant when Lord Gaston, son of Earl Bertram’s first marriage, resigns it. But, advises the Earl, a cabinet minister much like Palmerston, the issue so eloquently raised was unsuitable for the House of Commons. “I think I would leave the Red Sea alone. It was a miracle that saved us from being drowned in it before.” Once in the Commons, however, Falconet perceives “the fund of Religionism in the House” and takes up
Sabbatarianism. He is “essentially a prig, and among prigs there is a free-masonry which never fails. All the prigs spoke of him as the coming man.”

While the Earl is as vivacious and paradox-loving as Oscar Wilde’s later lords, Gaston is the last of Disraeli’s disillusioned young men. There is an undeveloped suggestion that Gaston is hopelessly in love with his still-beautiful stepmother, carrying through to the close Disraeli’s sense that the ideal mate for an ambitious young man is an experienced older woman. The world disappoints Gaston. Not merely parliaments are “worn out,” but “even this little planet.” If it has a future, he contends, it is not for the human race. “The mistake which our self-conceit has always made has been to suppose that this planet was made for man. There was never any foundation for such belief, and now we know it is mere folly.”

He is “capable of devotion,” Gaston insists—but only “to the happiness of my species. For that reason I wish it to become extinct.”

Another disillusioned young gentleman, seen earlier in *Lothair*, is Hugo Bohun, whose wretchedness is of a different order. At a ball he dances with Lady Bertram’s daughter, Ermintrude, and gushes that she had made the night one of the happiest of his life. “Do you know, I think it wonderfully kind of you to dance with such a miserable wretch as I am.”

“One meets with so many happy people,” Ermintrude assures him. “I rather like sometimes to meet a miserable wretch.”

“What other miserable wretch do you know except myself?”

“I know several wretches,” says Ermintrude, in lines that anticipate Wilde’s Cecily and Gwendolen in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. “But I am not at all sure they are miserable wretches.”

“Well, what’s your idea of a wretch?”

“I think a man who is discontented with his lot in life is a wretch.”

“Everybody is discontented with their lot in life.”

“I thought just now you said you were most happy.”

“So I am when I am with you.”

“Then, after all, you are not a real wretch.”

“Do you think Gaston is?” Hugo asks.

“His wretchedness is on so great a scale that it amounts to the sublime.”

“I should think you were contented with your lot in life,” asserts Hugo.

“I have not yet considered that question so deeply as it deserves,” says Lady Ermintrude, observing that a dance seemed the wrong place for such reflections. And she reaches for the hand of a passing young man to return to the floor.
“Now,” mourns Hugo, “I feel this is the most miserable night of my life.”

More serious characters are introduced in the early chapters, but they remain undeveloped. The Hartmann Brothers banking family is still another variation of the Rothschilds, with the firm’s future dependent upon an only daughter. The present head, recruited from the German branch, is a devotee not of Falconet’s religion of hymns and tracts but of Spinoza and Kant, whose portraits hang in his library. And there is a Buddhist philosopher from Ceylon, Kusinara, who apparently thinks in parallel with Lord Gaston. Arriving as a missionary because his understanding is that the English were “rapidly renouncing, not only their own religion, but their religious principles altogether,” he is surprised by the Sabbatarian zeal, which “could only have been equalled in old Jerusalem.” Their narrowness of outlook vexes him. “True religion,” he contends, “would secure repose for every day.” To Kusinara, “the great remedy which can alone cure the evils of the human race” is its elimination. “Death,” he explains, “is the only happiness, if understood.”

His mysterious companion—they had met on the boat from Rotterdam that brought them to England—is eager to meet with Hartmann, while Kusinara carries a letter of credit to Falconet and Company. The unnamed traveller, “high-bred” and “in the prime of middle age,” is as cynical as young Lord Gaston and, it proves, as nihilistic as the German financier, whose name echoes that of Leo Hartmann, a Nihilist conspirator whom the Russians had vainly tried to extradite from Paris early in 1880. Yet the suggestion by Disraeli’s biographer G. E. Buckle that the Nihilist angle was influenced by the assassination of Alexander II in St. Petersburg on 13 March 1881 places the writing of the novel fragment at a time when Disraeli was already ailing beyond authorship.

“If anything is to be done in this world,” the mysterious stranger assures Hartmann, “it must be done by visionaries; men who see the future, and make the future because they see it.” To him the terms Liberal and Conservative mean little—“different names for the same thing.” The only solution to human misery, he asserts, “is the destruction of the species.… We differ only in our estimate of the time required…. You think that centuries must elapse before the consummation…. All that is happening in the world appears to me to indicate a speedier catastrophe.” He sees in the “immense armies” assembling in Europe, and the “new-fangled armaments,” inevitable depopulation not from “the slaughter of battles” they make inevitable, but from the “disease and famine” that would follow.

Hartmann doubts that the “comparatively slight means” of destruction represented by armaments could result in the elimination of humanity. “Not so slight as you may imagine,” the stranger contends. “Besides we must
accept all means. Destruction in every form must be welcomed.” If “creeds are falling away,” he muses, “cannot our principle of experimentation be clothed in a celestial form?” There is nothing to be compared to the stimulus of the “religious principle,” the stranger contends, “except the influence of women.”

His sardonic view may mesh somehow with the loss of faith, but Disraeli leaves no clue as to how the feminine factor is to influence the argument, or how the gentle Kusinara’s Buddhism is to clash—or mesh—with the destructive element. To complicate matters, Kusinara is by birth, Mrs. Falconet finds, “half a Christian.” She resolves “that he should become a whole one.” There, one paragraph into chapter X, the fragment stops.

How Disraeli could have integrated his social comedy with the political drama of progress thwarted by religiosity, with the further implications of new secular creeds like communism and nihilism, and with forebodings about man’s suicidal exploitation of his planet, cannot be guessed at. The manuscript breaks off too soon. Yet it is a provocative last testament, a frank summing up by a pragmatic politician freed from an active politician’s constraints. It would have taken all of Disraeli’s genius to bring it off.