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## DISRAELI AND THE ARCHI-TEXTUAL: CONSTRUCTIONS OF AUTHORITY IN *SYBIL*

Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845) has often been read in three overlapping contexts: as a political novel, an engagement with the 'Condition of England' debate, and a novel concerned with symbols and signs.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on such readings, I argue that *Sybil* uses architecture and language as the raw material to construct a lost source of truth and authority, whose 'restoration' the text seeks to bring about. This process, I suggest, produces two related problems: first, since no single building, name, or document is sufficient to serve as basis for this lost origin they must be combined into mutually dependent 'archi-textual' structures, concealing the contingency of authority in the novel. Second, the deployment of material objects as sites of authority undermines *Sybil*'s attempts to establish a transcendent truth beyond materiality, placing architecture and language in the position of Derrida's 'supplement'—an object or concept that appears marginal to a structure, but on which that structure in fact relies. For Derrida, one example of this is writing's relationship with language: although writing appears to be a secondary development within language, it is in fact the place where the *différance* necessary to sustain language is established.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in *Sybil*, supposedly secondary signs of power (houses, documents, names) establish and enforce the authority from which they are presumed to derive. In developing this reading I draw upon Heidegger, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari—thinkers whose work, like Derrida's, decentres and destabilizes authority.

The first way *Sybil* has typically been read is in relation to Disraeli's politics, especially as part of the 'Young England' trilogy of political novels, between *Coningsby* (1844) and *Tancred* (1847). Robert O'Kell's recent major study of Disraeli argues that his fiction and politics are inseparably intertwined, so that 'both are shown to be enactments of the same urgencies and purposes. The political career, like the fiction, is an invention.'<sup>3</sup> For O'Kell, *Sybil* is 'consistent with the ideals of Young England embodied in *Coningsby*', expressing this allegiance imaginatively through an 'allegorical romance of

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Condition of England' was coined by Thomas Carlyle. See *Chartism*, 2nd edn (London: [n. pub.], 1840). For an introduction to this topic see James Simmons, 'Industrial and "Condition of England" Novels', in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 336–52; and Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 132–54.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 141–64.

<sup>3</sup> Robert O'Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), p. 8.

secular politics and spiritual devotion'.<sup>4</sup> According to Gary Handwerk, *Sybil* employs the rhetoric of a practised politician, with Disraeli attempting to build a consensus for the legitimacy of Young England's goals. Matthew Bevis has suggested that such rhetoric was later parodied by Dickens in *Bleak House* (1852–53) through the figure of Sir Leicester Dedlock.<sup>5</sup> Sheila Smith also comments on *Sybil* in political terms:

Together with *Coningsby*, *Sybil* embodies the ideas of Young England, active from 1842 to 1846, a small group of Tory MPs including Lord John Manners and George Smythe, led by Disraeli [. . .] Young England attacked the Utilitarians and looked back with nostalgia to an idealized feudal system in which Church and aristocracy combined to protect the rights of the people.<sup>6</sup>

To read *Sybil* in this way is to see it as part of a political project that seeks to escape an alienating present and return to what Daniel Schwarz calls an 'agreeable but imaginary past'.<sup>7</sup> According to Paul Smith, this is part of a wider European debate, concerning whether 'an organic and stable community could be sustained or formed, when old bonds of locality, traditional authority and religion had been loosened'.<sup>8</sup> The name 'Young England' gestures towards this European backdrop—Walter Benjamin quotes Pierre Martino's observation that Théophile Gautier and his friends were referring to themselves as 'Young France' by 1833.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as O'Kell observes, it was in Paris that 'the parliamentary identity of the Young England movement took shape' in 1842.<sup>10</sup> It is in this political context that Disraeli's division of England into 'Two Nations' must be considered: 'I was told', says Egremont,

that an impassable gulf divided the Rich from the Poor; I was told that the Privileged and the People formed Two Nations, governed by different laws, influenced by different manners, with no thoughts or sympathies in common; with an innate inability of mutual comprehension.<sup>11</sup>

Young England seeks to bridge this divide, not only in terms of a new future, but as the return to a lost past. As a result, the novel's politics are arranged as

<sup>4</sup> O'Kell, pp. 278, 273. This chapter on *Sybil* first appeared in *Victorian Studies*, 30 (1987), 211–34.

<sup>5</sup> Gary Handwerk, 'Behind *Sybil*'s Veil: Disraeli's Mix of Ideological Messages', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 49 (1988), 321–41 (p. 325); Matthew Bevis, *The Art of Eloquence: Byron, Dickens, Tennyson, Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 111–29.

<sup>6</sup> Sheila Smith, *The Other Nation: The Poor in English Novels of the 1840s and 1850s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Schwarz, *Disraeli's Fiction* (Guildford: Macmillan, 1979), p. 81.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Smith, *Disraeli: A Brief Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 63.

<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 764.

<sup>10</sup> O'Kell, p. 207.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 245. Further references are given in the main text.

a conflict between the restoration of what has been ruined or concealed (such as medieval forms of society) and two other forces: on the one hand, mere surface, epitomized by the bored young dandies of Chapters 1 and 2, and on the other a politics which erases the past completely, epitomized by Wodgate (see below) and the revolutionary ideas of Stephen Morley.

In pursuing this return to the past, politics in *Sybil* becomes intensely historical. For Schwarz, the novel, like *Coningsby* and *Tancred*, centres on its protagonist overcoming doubt to attain a 'unique intellectual and moral potential to shape history'.<sup>12</sup> This shaping of history involves a process of historical return, an unearthing of the origins from which genuine social values are supposed to emanate. It is a process that requires the protagonist to take on the values he hopes to restore, something Schwarz points to in observing that Disraeli's trilogy 'explores the possibilities of heroism' in the Victorian age.<sup>13</sup> If Disraeli's protagonists are heroes, it is in Thomas Carlyle's sense of the word, as members of an 'Aristocracy of Talent' uniquely equipped to correct the errors of the English nation. In *Past and Present* (1843)—a text which influenced Disraeli's understanding of history—Carlyle describes the most significant of these errors: 'We took transient superficial Semblance for everlasting Substance; we have departed far away from the *Laws* of this Universe, and behold now lawless Chaos and inane Chimera is ready to devour us!'<sup>14</sup> Carlyle asserts that genuine and universal values exist, but that false appearance and quackery have usurped their place in England, where people have mistaken surface appearance for truth. For Disraeli, this is the problem his heroes must overcome. Carlyle had previously explored the theme of heroism in his lecture series (1840) and book (1841) on the topic, proposing that 'the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here'.<sup>15</sup> Influenced by German idealist philosophy, Carlyle suggests that the hero is able to penetrate the 'divine mystery' of the world, of which 'all Appearance, from the starry sky to the grass of the field, but especially the Appearance of Man and his work, is but the *vesture*'.<sup>16</sup> The hero sees the truth concealed by this external clothing and imparts it to others, as prophet, poet, priest, or king. Part of the significance of

<sup>12</sup> Schwarz, p. 89

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1870), p. 35. According to Gordon Fraser, *Sybil* helped spread Carlyle's political views in America; "'To be indifferent and to be young": Disraeli, *Sybil*, and the Preservation of an American "Race," 1879–1912', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 39 (2011), 463–82. See also Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form 1832–1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 207.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History*, ed. by Michael K. Goldberg and others (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

*Sybil* lies in the way it combines this heroic search for 'true' Carlylean origins with an interest in the ways authority can be socially constructed.

Critics have also commented on the novel's engagement with the 'Condition of England' question, typically alongside *Mary Barton* (1848), *North and South* (1855), *Hard Times* (1854), and *Alton Locke* (1850). Raymond Williams takes this approach, comparing *Sybil*'s 'brilliant romantic generalizations' to *Hard Times*,<sup>17</sup> as does Catherine Gallagher, who argues that the 'tensed structure' of the novel in England was uncovered and altered for good by Disraeli and his peers. For Gallagher, the concerns these novels raise about industrialization are also questions about how the realist novel deploys narrative representation. *Sybil*, for instance, is built around a 'combination of ironic and synecdochal symbolic representation', with the political classes offering incomplete and corrupted representation while Sybil Gerard stands for the possibility of full or genuine representation. This structure, Gallagher suggests, builds on Carlyle's concern in *Sartor Resartus* (1836) with the dual nature of signs or symbols: their ability to both conceal and reveal. Though Teufelsdröckh, the novel's protagonist, appears to distinguish between 'extrinsic' (opaque and conditional) and 'intrinsic' (transparent and essential) symbols, it eventually becomes clear, says Gallagher, that both sorts of symbol are 'at least partially socially determined, arbitrary and potentially ironic'.<sup>18</sup> She extends this critique to *Sybil*, arguing that Sybil Gerard should be read against the grain of Disraeli's text, as an ultimately 'extrinsic' rather than 'intrinsic' symbol.

Other critics who have interpreted *Sybil* as a complex of more or less closed and open symbols—the third main critical approach to the novel—include O'Kell, whose politically inflected reading contends that *Sybil* sees Disraeli 'attempting to write propaganda in the form of an allegorical romance', and Mary Poovey, who argues with reference to *Coningsby* that 'Disraeli attempts to arouse his readers' interest in the political domain by figuring the initiation into politics as falling in love'.<sup>19</sup> Both O'Kell and Poovey read romance in the Young England novels as a political allegory, with Disraeli's politics underlying a more conventional romantic structure. This structure both displays Disraeli's politics (by incorporating them into the plot) and conceals them (by sublimating them into a different form). Similarly, for Louis Cazamian, Disraeli 'thought in symbols, and was acutely alive to the power of images over human thought and conduct'.<sup>20</sup> Jennifer Sampson takes symbolism as

<sup>17</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 97.

<sup>18</sup> Gallagher, pp. xii, 200, 196.

<sup>19</sup> O'Kell, p. 257. Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation 1830–1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 135.

<sup>20</sup> Louis Cazamian, *The Social Novel in England 1830–1850*, trans. by Martin Fido (1903; repr. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 179.

her focus when she contends that Sybil Gerard represents Queen Victoria, whose early reign is revisited and reinscribed by the novel. Symbolism for Sampson is a gendered and gendering activity, since '[t]he business of making women into symbols, of investing their bodies with meaning, is the business of men, men like the Disraeli who is writing *Sybil* and rewriting Victoria'.<sup>21</sup> The most sustained reading of symbolism in *Sybil*, though, has been by John Ulrich, who unites Cobbett, Carlyle, and Disraeli as writers for whom truth increasingly seems accessible only through a network of shifting and uncertain signs. For these writers, industrial labour has degraded the human and social body to the extent that 'truth and meaning are no longer guaranteed'. In response, they seek to make history, labour, and the body 'mutually dependent guarantors of stability and meaning', primarily by appealing to the security of the medieval past.<sup>22</sup>

What Ulrich describes as Disraeli's desire to overcome a lack of secure meaning in society is also a reaction against an absence of authoritative origins. In *Sybil*, this emerges particularly when texts and names interact with architecture. There is a latent hope in such interactions that the solidity of stone can overcome the fluidity of the signifier, stabilizing signification. These interactions often produce 'archi-textual' structures, by which I mean structures that dialectically combine architecture and textuality, seeking to make truth at once readable and sustainable.<sup>23</sup> In their combination of stability and fluidity, archi-textual structures open up the interplay between hope and anxiety as a central dichotomy within the novel, one that remains unresolved despite the conventional marriage ending. The 'supplementary' nature of the archi-textual relationship is often occluded, as it is in Carlyle's account of 'The Hero as Poet', which sets up a relationship between language and architecture where the former relies on the latter while seeming to triumph over it. The poetry of Dante is said to outlast '[a]ll cathedrals, pontificalities, brass and stone', yet Carlyle has earlier claimed that authentic, so-called 'musical' language, such as Dante's, contains '[a] true inward symmetry, what one calls an architectural harmony'.<sup>24</sup> In this way, architecture is made to appear worthless next to poetry while in fact being preserved as the metaphorical basis of poetry's permanence.

If *Sybil*'s primary solution to a lack of social meaning is a return to the past, embodied by Walter and Sybil Gerard, then there is also a subtext in which the future lies in producing England anew. This is associated with Devilsdust,

<sup>21</sup> Jennifer Sampson, 'Sybil, or the Two Monarchs', *Studies in Philology*, 95 (1998), 97–119 (p. 107).

<sup>22</sup> John M. Ulrich, *Signs of their Times: History, Labour and the Body in Cobbett, Carlyle and Disraeli* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> This differs from Gérard Genette's concept of the architext, for which see *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. by Jane Lewin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>24</sup> *On Heroes*, pp. 84, 78.

a self-made man, and Stephen Morley. As Sybil says to her father: 'Stephen does not want to recall the past [. . .] he wishes to create the future' (p. 169). The exchange continues:

'The past is a dream,' said Gerard.

'And what is the future?' enquired Sybil.

'Alack! I know not; but I often wish the battle of Hastings were to be fought over again and I was going to have a hand in it.' (p. 169)

For Gerard, the only way to conceive of the future is as a repetition of the past, specifically of the Battle of Hastings, which established a split between ruling Normans and subjected Anglo-Saxons that persists in Egremont's 'Two Nations'. Gerard collapses the modern social problems of England into older historical divisions, sidestepping their dangerous modernity, which might, if acknowledged, lead to calls for a wholly new solution. While Gerard recognizes the past as a 'dream', he can still only comprehend the future as its return, albeit in altered form. His stance here is that of Young England, and the novel as a whole: origins may be illusory dreams, but they must be protected and reproduced as the only viable route to a new future. The desire to make the past and future identical creates a constitutive tension in *Sybil* between forces of progression and regression, which emerges in the text's repeated attempts to establish and secure an authority that could allow for both.

### *From the Abbey to the Arboreal*

One way text and architecture interact in *Sybil* is in Charles Egremont's relationship with Marney Abbey, his family home. Charles is the younger son of the Egremont family, whose nobility dates from the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century and an ancestor named Baldwin Greymount. The dissolution saw the establishment of Marney Abbey—the moment the Egremont family 'planted themselves in the land' (p. 10)—and the adoption of their current name, as the narrator ironically describes:

although the exalted rank and extended possessions enjoyed [. . .] by the Greymounts had their origin immediately in great territorial revolutions of a recent reign, it was not for a moment to be supposed that the remote ancestors of the Ecclesiastical Commissioner of 1530 [Baldwin Greymount] were by any means obscure. On the contrary, it appeared that they were both Norman and baronial, their real name Egremont, which, in their patent of peerage, the family now resumed. (p. 10)

The replacement of the name 'Greymount' by 'Egremont', a fraudulent Normanization, is secured by the name's inscription in the patent of peerage, just as the family's rights to the abbey are secured by 'planting themselves' in the land. Planting here becomes an architectural rather than organic term, with

implications of forced conquest and usurpation. It is, like the adoption of the name 'Egremont', an artificial origin posing as a natural one.

The capacity for ennobling through renaming persists into the narrative present of *Sybil*, particularly with Baptist Hatton, whose mastery of family history grants him the power to bestow names and estates, as the denomination 'Baptist' ironically indicates. A journalist claims that 'since the reform of parliament the only chance of a tory becoming a peer is the favour of Baptist Hatton'; he is 'a discoverer, inventor, framer, arranger of pedigrees' (p. 236). Hatton is mirrored and parodied by his brother, 'Bishop' Hatton, who performs marriages in the town of Wodgate by sprinkling some salt over a gridiron, reading 'Our Father' backwards, and writing the couple's names in a book (p. 167). The importance of naming is also recognized by Chaffing Jack—owner of 'the Temple of the Muses', a meeting hall. For Chaffing Jack, 'name's everything; made the fortune of the temple; if I had called it the Saloon, it never would have filled, and perhaps the magistrates never have granted a licence' (p. 92). This interdependence of name and building is given literal shape by the front of Marney Abbey, which is 'crowned with a considerable pediment of what seemed at the first glance fanciful open work, but which, examined more nearly, offered in gigantic letters the motto of the house of Marney' (p. 42). Writing and architecture here become indistinguishable, each turning into the other in the act of establishing and securing the 'house of Marney'.

This Marney Abbey, home of Lord Marney, Charles Egremont's brother, is mirrored and inverted by another Marney Abbey: the 'monastic ruins' of the medieval building which pre-dates it (p. 57). Viewing these ruins, based on Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire,<sup>25</sup> Egremont reflects that 'His own house, his own order, had established themselves on the ruins of that great body, the emblems of whose ancient magnificence and strength surrounded him. And now his order in turn was menaced' (p. 59). The doubling of the abbeys makes the ruins simultaneously origin and endpoint for the Egremont family, and for the English aristocracy it represents, each of which is positioned as parasitic upon an older set of structures. This passage makes history circular rather than linear, replacing the concept of a single historical origin with a cyclical movement between growth and collapse, unity and fragmentation. It is no contradiction, therefore, that Egremont was 'almost born amid the ruins' which prefigure his family's destruction (p. 57).

Just as the modern Marney Abbey is built on the ruins of the old, the earlier abbey has its own ancestor. Its cloister garden is built around a 'solitary yew', which 'seemed the oldest tree that could well live, and was, according to

<sup>25</sup> See Glyn Coppack, *Fountains Abbey: The Cistercians in Northern England* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2009).



tradition, more ancient than the most venerable walls of the Abbey' (p. 58). Egremont addresses a stranger leaning against its trunk, who turns out to be the working-class leader Walter Gerard. Gerard responds:

They say 'tis the trunk beneath whose branches the monks encamped when they came to this valley to raise their building. It was their house, till with the wood and stone around them, their labour and their fine art, they piled up their abbey. And then they were driven out of it, and it came to this. Poor men! poor men! (p. 60)

The yew tree is not just the origin of the abbey, but its prototype. Marney Abbey developed out of this ancient yew, which served as its origin and model, enabling the monks to 'plant themselves' in the land, like the Egremont family. Walter Gerard is, however, keen to distinguish between the monks and modern landlords such as Lord Marney, insisting that the monks 'built and planted, as they did everything else, for posterity' (p. 63). The moral valence of planting has shifted from an act of taking (the claiming of land) to an act of giving (the provision of food and care for future generations). For Walter, the communitarian architecture of the monasteries represents an ideal that has been eroded by the houses of individual wealthy families. He echoes Augustus Pugin in *Contrasts* (1836), for whom Henry VIII was a 'merciless tyrant' and the dissolution 'a fatal blow to the progress of Architecture' which saw the old abbeys 'consigned to rapacious court parasites, as the reward of some grovelling submission, or in the chance of play'.<sup>26</sup> The Egremont family are just such 'parasites', complicit in the destruction of the authentic, inclusive architecture of the medieval period.

Yet even for the original Marney Abbey, a problem remains, since in *Sybil* 'planting' is always in some way architectural and artificial. The monks' framing of the yew tree within the monastery is also a technological enframing in Heidegger's sense, as described in 'The Question concerning Technology' (1953). For Heidegger, technology is not primarily a designation for human products, but a 'setting-upon' or 'challenging' by means of which nature becomes 'standing-reserve' [*Bestand*], a resource purely for the use of Man.<sup>27</sup> An ocean becomes a place to get fish, or to use for travel, rather than existing in its own right. In the passage quoted, the monks' perception of the tree as a prototype for the new abbey is an act of enframing in which the tree is constrained into coming into being as a 'house', rather than emerging as its own event. In the final analysis, the yew tree only seems to be a foundation for the monastery: as soon as the monks arrive, they see the valley and the tree as

<sup>26</sup> A. W. Pugin, *Contrasts; or, A Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries and Similar Buildings of the Present Day; Shewing the Present Decay of Taste* (London: [n. pub.], 1836), pp. 6, 8.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'The Question concerning Technology', in *The Question concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. by William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 3–35 (pp. 15, 14).

a monastery yet to be built, and this determines the way they utilize the tree. The monastery is a Derridean 'supplement': it constitutes the tree as origin in order to root itself more securely in the landscape.<sup>28</sup>

This process of enframing parallels the founding of the Egremont family. The 'discovery' of an ancient Norman past in effect 'enframes' the family tree of the Greymounts, turning it into standing-reserve to be used, by means of retrospective changes, to bring social and economic benefits to the family. The metaphor of the family tree is used in the text when Gerard refers to the junior sons of the aristocracy as 'younger branches' (p. 62). These are branches which are secondary, held in reserve in case of the death of the designated heir. Though the novel makes technological enframing transparent in the case of the family tree, and opaque in the case of the yew tree, the structure of the process is essentially the same: the abbey originates the yew tree in the same way as the title originates the family.

### *Wodgate, Trafford, and Marney*

As the abbey's yew suggests, trees in *Sybil* operate to support or secure historical and architectural structures. This makes their absence significant, as is the case in Wodgate, a town based on Willenhall in the West Midlands.<sup>29</sup> Wodgate is 'a sort of squatting district of the great mining region to which it was contiguous' (p. 161). It is

the ugliest spot in England, to which neither Nature nor art had constructed a single charm; where a tree could not be seen, a flower was unknown, where there was neither belfry nor steeple, nor a single sight or sound that could soften the heart or humanize the mind. (p. 162)

The lack of trees and architecture (especially churches) runs together here, signifying an absence of history and culture as well as nature. This description can be compared with Lord Valentine's account, later in the novel, of his family's achievements:

The finest trees in England were planted by my family; they raised several of your most beautiful churches; they have built bridges, made roads, dug mines, and constructed canals and drained a marsh of a million of acres which bears our name to this day. (p. 225)

In this passage, which effaces the role of the labourers who actually completed the work, trees and buildings form a complex secured by the authority of the aristocratic family, whose name marks the land they cleared. Wodgate, by

<sup>28</sup> Derrida, p. 141.

<sup>29</sup> Sheila Smith, 'Willenhall and Wodgate: Disraeli's Use of Blue-Book Evidence', *Review of English Studies*, 13 (1962), 368–84.

contrast, is 'land without an owner; no one claimed any manorial right over it; they could build cottages without paying rent. It was a district recognised by no parish; so there were no tithes, and no meddling supervision' (p. 161). Wodgate reveals the lawlessness that results from a lack of structure, whether architectural, legal, or symbolic. Ironically, it is known for making keys and locks, symbols of private property, raising the possibility that this town produced the locks which the Hell-Cats later smash on their rampage across the country, including that on the iron box held in Mowbray Castle (p. 267). The disturbing implication is that the dominant social order relies on a violence and lawlessness which falls outside its control.

This lawlessness is evident in the people of Wodgate, who are outside the structures of signification that a building like Marney Abbey provides, making them pre-moral and pre-linguistic:

It is not that the people are immoral, for immorality implies some forethought; or ignorant, for ignorance is relative; but they are animals; unconscious; their minds a blank; and their worst actions only the impulse of a gross or savage instinct. There are many in this town who are ignorant of their very names; very few can spell them [. . .] Ask them the name of their sovereign and they will give you an unmeaning stare; ask them the name of their religion, and they will laugh. (p. 164)

This absence of names is connected to the absence of architecture and trees. The people of Wodgate are defined by their rootlessness, by not being 'planted in the land'. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, Wodgate is an absolutely 'deterritorialized' space, one where structure has broken down.<sup>30</sup> In the process of deterritorialization, though, Wodgate has been simultaneously 'reterritorialized', or restructured, through the power of labour, which 'reigns supreme' under the brutal direction of the town's master workmen (p. 163). This reterritorialization does not fully overcome the rootlessness of the people of Wodgate, however, as they later rise up as the 'Hell-Cats' (p. 372) to rampage across the country halting industrial production. The narrator (and, it seems, Disraeli) sees Wodgate's lack of history, law, and structure as the absences that allow such an event to occur.

A key metaphor used by Deleuze and Guattari when discussing signifying structures is the tree or root system (the arboreal), which is set against the rhizome, a non-systematic arrangement with no origin and no teleology.<sup>31</sup> This suggests that trees are structural and structuring in the same way as architecture. In Wodgate, a lack of trees combines with the lack of a sovereign, a religion, and even names to leave the people of Wodgate effectively uninscribed, without human identity. Wodgate is, in psychoanalytic terms,

<sup>30</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. by Robert Hurley and others (London: Continuum, 1984), pp. 347–48.

<sup>31</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 1987), pp. 3–28.

a society without repression. Architectural structure, which the town lacks, plays the same role in society as the apparatus of repression plays in the mind, so that its absence leaves an undifferentiated, unstructured unconscious. As if to support this reading, the town has no defined form or centre:

As you advanced [. . .] you expected at every moment to emerge into some streets, and encounter buildings bearing some correspondence, in their size and comfort, to the considerable population swarming and busied around you. Nothing of the kind. There were no public buildings of any sort; no churches, chapels, town-hall, institute, theatre. (p. 164)

Hierarchical, or arboreal, architecture founds social identity by concealing and repressing the social unconscious, presented here as a swarming, undisciplined population. Such architecture, though, does not fill an absence of authority, but merely covers it over. This is precisely the case with Marney Abbey, which simultaneously represses and memorializes the Egremonts' lack of genuine nobility. If Marney Abbey appears to put authority on display while covering over its absence, in Wodgate this lack is laid bare.

As with many structural elements of the novel, Wodgate has a mirror image in the text, in this case the village of Trafford. Trafford takes its name from its founder, the benevolent manufacturer Mr Trafford, whose patriarchal authority extends over it. In giving it his name, Mr Trafford impresses on the village the structural importance of identity, an idea he reinforces by encouraging his workmen to purchase the homes they rent, thus using the possession of private property as the means to strengthen one's individual stake in the community while indirectly increasing his own security. The workers who save sufficient money to take up this offer are 'proud of their house and their little garden, and of the horticultural society, where its produce permitted them to be annual competitors' (p. 182). These 'little gardens' exist alongside the public buildings provided by Mr Trafford: 'In every street there was a well: behind the factory were the public baths; the schools were under the direction of the perpetual curate of the church' (p. 182). Whereas Wodgate is built on land under no one's name and no one's gaze, Trafford is morally regulated by its buildings, and by the presence of Mr Trafford's own house, located '[i]n the midst of the village' (p. 182). This house's panoptical effect is made clear: 'Proximity to the employer brings cleanliness and order, because it brings observation and encouragement. In the settlement of Trafford crime was positively unknown, and offences were slight' (p. 183). Such moral regulation replicates the conditions of Trafford's modern factory: 'a single room, spreading over nearly two acres, and holding more than two thousand workpeople' with a 'roof of groined arches, lighted by ventilating domes at the height of eighteen feet' (p. 181). The narrator points out the 'moral advantages' of such a light and open workspace: 'the child works under the eye of

the parent, the parent under that of the superior workman; the inspector or employer at a glance can behold all' (p. 182). In Trafford, the entire existence of the worker is brought under not only the name, but also the gaze of the father, in the person of Mr Trafford and his surrogates.

As well as Wodgate, the town with no landlord, Trafford invites comparison with Marney, the town with an uncaring landlord. Marney, based on Ripon in Yorkshire,<sup>32</sup> is built on land owned by the Egremont family but, although its situation is 'one of the most delightful easily to be imagined', its picturesque appearance is a '[b]eautiful illusion' (p. 51). Unlike Trafford, Marney is only attractive from a distance, so that '[t]he contrast between the interior of the town and its external aspect was as striking as it was full of pain' (p. 51). Marney in close-up consists of 'a variety of narrow and crowded lanes formed by cottages built of rubble, or unhewn stones without cement, and, from age or badness of the material, looking as if they could scarcely hold together' (pp. 51–52). Whereas Trafford's gaze penetrates into every aspect of his workers' lives, Lord Marney only views Marney as part of the landscape. By making the village a pleasing prospect and nothing more, he constrains its existence, in an aesthetic counterpart to Heidegger's technological enframing. Raymond Williams associates this form of perception with eighteenth-century landscaping, and its dispossession of ordinary working people:

it can be said of these eighteenth-century arranged landscapes not only, as is just, that this was the high point of agrarian bourgeois art, but that they succeeded in creating in the land below their windows and terraces what Johnson at Penhurst had ideally imagined: a rural landscape emptied of rural labour and labourers.<sup>33</sup>

Such a desire to remove labour and labourers is evident in Lord Marney's Malthusian pronouncement that ricks are only burnt '[b]ecause there is a surplus population in the kingdom [. . .] and no rural police in the county' (p. 68). It also emerges in Lord Valentine's description of his family's activities (p. 225). If Marney's façade-like architecture indicates Lord Marney's maintenance of an eighteenth-century perspective, Trafford's buildings reflect the simultaneous medievalism and modernity of its founder, whose interest in reviving 'the baronial principle' (p. 182) of enlightened feudalism coexists with his employment of modern techniques of production and panoptical surveillance.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See Sheila Smith's note 51 in *Sybil*, p. 433.

<sup>33</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Hogarth Press, 1985), pp. 124–25.

<sup>34</sup> On panopticism and modernity see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Vintage, 1979).

*The Tomb and the Papers*

For Foucault, modern surveillance is a form of inscription, in which the body is 'written on' by structures of law and state, including the architecture which serves such structures (prisons, courts, barracks, and so on). This suggests that bodies might play a part in constructing the authority which writing and buildings appear to display.<sup>35</sup> In *Sybil*, buildings and bodies often run together: early in the novel, Egremont compares Marney Abbey to a 'great body' (p. 59), and later, on seeing Sybil in Westminster Abbey, he is 'caught by the symmetry of her shape and the picturesque position which she gracefully occupied' (p. 232), viewing her as part of the abbey's structure. Similarly, the house where Sybil and Walter stay in London mirrors them, being 'withdrawn as it were from the vulgar gaze like an individual who had known higher fortunes' (p. 235). Bodies, especially Sybil's, combine with buildings to imply the existence of a soul, or divine essence, within architecture. This presumes an account of physiognomy that views bodies as an index to truth, such as that provided by Carlyle in *On Heroes*. Carlyle sees in Dante's portrait '[a] soft ethereal soul looking out [...] as from imprisonment of thick-ribbed ice!', and quotes Novalis, for whom '[t]here is but one temple in the Universe [...] and that is the Body of Man. Nothing is Holier than that high form.'<sup>36</sup> Combining bodies with buildings, specifically temples, here reinforces the sense that both contain something holy. In *Sybil* this connection is also in operation, supporting the impression of pre-existent authority which archi-textual structures produce.

Archi-textual structures are of particular importance in the family story of the Gerards, playing a key role in establishing their nobility. One example of this is the Gerards' connection to the ruined Marney Abbey, first evident after Walter, Sybil, and Stephen Morley meet Egremont at the abbey, when Sybil talks of regaining 'our rights' (p. 81) and 'our lands' (p. 82). Sybil reveals that the 'last abbot's tomb' bears her father's name (p. 82), establishing a link between Walter Gerard and the abbey that makes Walter the rightful steward of Lord Marney's land. The authority of the shared name lies at the basis of this claim, reinforced by its inscription on the tomb, a structure that marks both an end (the death of the abbot) and a beginning (of the Gerards' claim). This tomb, an architectural document, lends the authority of truth to two other documents, the first being a book Walter mentions to Stephen Morley:

when you came the other day, and showed me in the book that the last Abbot of Marney was a Walter Gerard, the old feeling [of dispossession] stirred again; and I could not help telling you that my fathers fought at Azincourt, though I was only the overlooker at Mr. Trafford's mill. (p. 83)

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., especially pp. 195–228 and 231–56.

<sup>36</sup> *On Heroes*, pp. 74, 11.

The second, and more important, is a set of 'papers' that seemed to provide legal proof of Walter's father's nobility and 'rights', but have since been lost. Walter describes his father's obsession with these papers in terms that anticipate Richard Carstone's preoccupation in *Bleak House* with the riches promised by the Jarndyce and Jarndyce court case:<sup>37</sup>

[The papers] were my father's; and he was jealous of all interference. He was a small yeoman, who had risen in the war time, well-to-do in the world, but always hankering after the old tradition that the lands were ours. This [Baptist] Hatton got hold of him; he did his work well, I have heard;—certain it is, my father spared nothing. It is twenty-five years come Martinmas since he brought his writ of right; and though baffled, he was not beaten. But then he died; his affairs were in great confusion; he had mortgaged his land for his writ, and the war prices were gone. (p. 83)

These papers, insufficient to prove the family's nobility, are given added authority by the name on the tomb. For Ulrich, 'this gravestone is a sort of historical document, marking incontrovertibly (and indelibly) the nobility of Gerard's ancestral lineage'. Yet the tomb remains useless without the lost papers. As Ulrich observes: 'While the tombstone records this historical fact, it does not carry any legal authority; that authority exists elsewhere, *on paper*, in the form of land deeds and other documents.'<sup>38</sup> Ulrich is perhaps too quick, however, to separate out historical fact and legal authority here, sidestepping their interdependency. Since his father's death, Walter has thought of these papers only 'with disgust, as the cause of my ruin' (p. 83). He has, indeed, been 'ruined' twice over, once by his family's dispossession and once by his father's obsession with overturning that dispossession. Gerard's ruin repeats the ruin of the abbey, the site on which his name appears, with only the union of paper document and stone architecture seeming to offer the possibility of raising his fortunes. This is precisely what the Egremont family achieved by building a grand house and inscribing a new name in the patent of peerage—though not unproblematically, since Charles Egremont remains haunted by the ruin of the original abbey.

It is clear from this episode that the 'rights' of the Gerard family depend on three forms of evidence: names, architecture, and documents, of which the missing element is the third. For this reason, the story of the papers, only ever described obliquely as 'the deed of '77' (p. 266), becomes vital to the Gerards' prospects, and can be traced throughout the rest of the novel as a counternarrative to Charles Egremont's progress. If Egremont's trajectory is the emergence of the individual Carlylean hero, the story of the papers is the re-emergence of a lost aristocratic and familial authority. Central to this secondary narrative is Hatton, who took the papers following Walter's father's

<sup>37</sup> See Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Penguin, 2003), especially Chapter 37.

<sup>38</sup> Ulrich, pp. 130, 129.

death—a fact that emerges in Book IV after Hatton is located and questioned by Stephen Morley and Walter Gerard. Following these encounters, Hatton reflects:

Those infernal papers! They made my fortune; and yet, I know not how it is, the deed has cost me many a pang. Yet it seemed innocuous; the old man dead, insolvent; myself starving; his son ignorant of all, to whom too they could be of no use, for it required thousands to work them, *and even with thousands they could only be worked by myself*. Had I not done it, I should ere this probably have been swept from the surface of the earth, worn out with penury, disease and heart-ache. And now I am Baptist Hatton, with a fortune almost large enough to buy Mowbray itself, and with knowledge that can make the proudest tremble. (p. 253, emphasis added)

The papers are here revealed as the foundation of Baptist Hatton's fame, fortune, and power. Even allowing for a certain amount of self-justifying hyperbole, it seems the papers, sold to Lord de Mowbray as a protection against legal challenge, made Hatton's name, as the phrase 'now I am Baptist Hatton' recognizes.

Hatton's authority is pre-eminently textual, emerging not only from the papers, but also another legal document: the 'barony by writ of summons' which, according to the journalist encountered by Morley, he proved as genuine in the landmark 'Mallory case' (p. 237). For the journalist, Hatton has no known origin outside the courts: 'He may be a veritable subject of the kingdom of Cockaigne for aught I know' (p. 237). Unlike the Gerards or Egremont, his authority does not derive from aristocratic heritage, unless perhaps from the 'nobility' of his Catholicism; it is, as in the case of the abbey and the yew tree, not rooted but circular. The papers which ruined Walter are the foundation of Hatton's power, and yet Hatton is the 'only one' who could 'work' them, so that their legitimacy depends on him alone. Hatton's authority derives from the papers, and the papers' authority derives from Hatton: both legitimate the other, rendering the origins of legal authority utterly reciprocal. What the novel hints at, but cannot admit at the risk of undermining the nobility of Sybil and Walter, is that Baptist Hatton's authority is no less arbitrary than that of his brother, 'Bishop' Hatton. When asked 'why do you call him the Bishop?', Tummas, a resident of Wodgate, replies: 'That's his name and authority; for he's the governor here over all of us' (p. 166). The authority derives from the name, and the name from the authority: there is no other basis, no church or symbolic structure which grounds Bishop Hatton's power. Baptist Hatton's influence operates in the same way: his name is his authority, but also a signifier that fails to attach to any definite signified. As the journalist puts it: 'who he is no one knows, and what he is no one can describe' (p. 236).

Catherine Gallagher addresses this question of the arbitrary origin of authority in relation to the de Mowbray family, whose noble title is, like the



Egremonts', falsely acquired, and who possess land that 'rightfully' belongs to the Gerards. For Gallagher, the irony surrounding the de Mowbrays' claims to nobility creates 'a desire for the restoration of the legitimate heirs, for reattaching title and name to their proper signifieds, Sybil and Walter Gerard'. She argues, though, that this restoration of proper names never leads to an origin, in a paragraph which is also important to Ulrich's argument:

This process of destabilization [of legitimate origins], moreover, occurs repeatedly as the narrator deflates the pretensions of one aristocratic family after another. Indeed, almost all aristocratic family histories in *Sybil* are devaluations. They are explorations that lead from the fact of the name back to its moment of acquisition, which turns out to be, not an originary moment of meaning, but a moment when meaning is displaced through usurpation. Most importantly, as long as one inhabits the realm of history, one encounters nothing but displacement and usurpation; one never reaches the origins that confer legitimacy. In *Sybil* history and displacement are synonymous.<sup>39</sup>

Linguistic origins, the moment when a name is acquired, are vulnerable in *Sybil*, perpetually undermined by a series of displacements. There can, in fact, be no proper names in the novel—none which refer to one thing only and thereby confer a sense of original truth. This is evident from the long list of duplicates in the text: the two Marney Abbeys, the two Hattons, the two Walter Gerards. Even Charles Egremont functions as his elder brother's double, since his brother took his place in marrying the woman he loved (p. 154). Elsewhere, proper names are taken up at will, like masks, as when Egremont adopts the name Mr Franklin to conceal his aristocratic background (p. 136). 'Franklin' also describes Walter Gerard's class position—'I was a Franklin's son myself' (p. 137)—so that Egremont is Walter's double too. Devilsdust, a working-class radical in the town of Mowbray who takes his name from a term for cotton waste, also uses names in this way. His name, already a nickname, is changed when he becomes a capitalist at the end of the novel: 'Devilsdust [...] thought it but a due homage to the social decencies to assume a decorous appellation, and he called himself by the name of the town where he was born' (p. 420). In a reversal of the naming of Trafford and Marney after their founders, Devilsdust takes his name from a town, becoming Mr Mowbray.

Ulrich opposes Gallagher's claim that no origins exist in *Sybil*, saying she collapses 'the past and the historiographical representation of the past into a single category', whereas, he points out, Disraeli distinguished between them, identifying a misrepresented history and a true history beyond displacements, which might be recovered through its careful rewriting.<sup>40</sup> Such an approach to history is highly Carlylean, distinguishing between 'superficial Semblance' and a genuine truth which lies behind or beyond it.<sup>41</sup> In making this distinc-

<sup>39</sup> Gallagher, p. 206.

<sup>40</sup> Ulrich, p. 113.

<sup>41</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 35.

tion, Ulrich accurately identifies the way Disraeli perceives history, but does not clearly differentiate between authorial intention and the operations of the text, which have the capacity to undermine Disraeli's own distinctions. Ulrich is concerned at this point (like Disraeli) with the reconstruction of what has been lost—in this case 'Disraeli's view of history'—whereas Gallagher is concerned with the unconscious contradictions within Disraeli's text, particularly the way *Sybil* presents ironically at one point what is treated seriously elsewhere. Gallagher identifies a disjunction between 'the book's major literary mode of representation, irony, and Disraeli's desired system of political representation'.<sup>42</sup> As much as Disraeli might have wanted to recover the past, or to articulate a new form of politics, the narrative mode he uses makes this impossible, undoing his desire to separate an ironic and a true history. In this sense, what Ulrich finds problematic in Gallagher—collapsing the past and its historiography—is what for Gallagher takes place unconsciously within *Sybil*. Elsewhere, though, Ulrich is critical of Disraeli's calls for a 'true' history, suggesting that while the text simulates a natural correspondence 'between the present and the past, between the leaders and the people, between men and women', this is just a tool to secure hegemonic consent for aristocratic rule.<sup>43</sup>

This claim that the text promotes a hegemonic politics is close to Dickens's critique, in *Bleak House*, of Disraeli and the British Government. Dickens draws attention to the illusory, ideological, and insular nature of Disraelian politics—features *Sybil* conceals by placing the sources of political authority beyond question. On the parties held by Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, Dickens writes:

There ARE at Chesney Wold this January week some ladies and gentlemen of the newest fashion, who have set up a dandyism—in religion, for instance. Who in mere lackadaisical want of an emotion have agreed upon a little dandy talk about the vulgar wanting faith in things in general, meaning in the things that have been tried and found wanting, as though a low fellow should unaccountably lose faith in a bad shilling after finding it out! Who would make the vulgar very picturesque and faithful by putting back the hands upon the clock of time and cancelling a few hundred years of history.<sup>44</sup>

Disraeli was a famous dandy in his youth, on one occasion dining at Edward Bulwer-Lytton's house in 'green velvet trousers, a canary coloured waistcoat, low shoes, silver buckles, lace at his wrists, and his hair in ringlets'.<sup>45</sup> Such dandyism is connected by Dickens to Disraeli's medievalism, and derided as a means of erasing the working classes by rendering them merely 'picturesque'. Disraeli is accused of viewing the common people as Lord Marney views

<sup>42</sup> Gallagher, p. 270.

<sup>43</sup> Ulrich, p. 138.

<sup>44</sup> *Bleak House*, p. 189.

<sup>45</sup> Moneypenny and Buckle, quoted in O'Kell, p. 38.

the village of Marney, replacing their reality with an illusory image. In 1852, when Dickens was writing this part of *Bleak House*, Disraeli served briefly as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons, before the government was defeated over his budget in December.<sup>46</sup> Together with Disraeli's Jewish background, this has led some critics to connect Disraeli with Dickens's figure of 'Joodle', given 'the Home Department and the leadership of the House of Common' in an administration that also includes Boodle, Coodle, Doodle, Foodle, and Goodle.<sup>47</sup> Whether or not this specific figure stands for Disraeli, Dickens's depiction of Parliament is highly critical at a time when Disraeli was a major political force at the heart of government, portraying it as a self-justifying system structurally incapable of seeing beyond its own borders. The Boodles, Coodles, and Joodles all substitute for one another, interchangeable terms in a system with no authentic authority. In Lauren Goodlad's words, Dickens sees Parliament as 'part of a systemic dysfunction to which there is hardly any outside', while for Disraeli it is 'a vehicle through which heroic politicians might substantively improve the nation's governance'.<sup>48</sup> Where Disraeli sees heroism, Dickens sees a system that maintains an appearance of obviousness and naturalness in order to perpetuate itself and exclude the people for whom it claims to speak:

it is perfectly clear to the brilliant and distinguished circle, all round, that nobody is in question but Boodle and his retinue, and Buffy and HIS retinue. These are the great actors for whom the stage is reserved. A People there are, no doubt—a certain large number of supernumeraries, who are to be occasionally addressed, and relied upon for shouts and choruses, as on the theatrical stage; but Boodle and Buffy, their followers and families, their heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, are the born first-actors, managers, and leaders, and no others can appear upon the scene for ever and ever.<sup>49</sup>

There is a parodic echo of Carlyle's championing of 'Great Men' here, in the reference to 'great actors for whom the stage is reserved'. Despite holding differing critical positions, Raymond Williams and Matthew Bevis both see the rhetoric in this section of *Bleak House* as an interrogation of class position, Williams suggesting that what appears as 'superficial, ranting prejudice' in Dickens's writing in fact offers 'a new way of seeing a system. Not here a

<sup>46</sup> For a chronology of this period see Benjamin Disraeli, *Letters*, ed. by M. G. Wiebe and others, 18 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982– ), vi: 1852–1856 (1997), pp. xxviii–xxxiii.

<sup>47</sup> See 'Introduction', in *Letters*, vi: 1852–1856, pp. ix–xxv (p. xv), and Frederick Schweitzer, 'Disraeli's Boomerang Efforts to Combat Antisemitism', in *Maven in Blue Jeans: A Festschrift in Honor of Zev Garber*, ed. by Steven Jacobs (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2009), pp. 362–87 (p. 366).

<sup>48</sup> Lauren Goodlad, 'Parliament and the State', in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, III: *The Nineteenth-Century Novel 1820–1880*, ed. by John Kucich and Jenny Bourne Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 444–61 (p. 447).

<sup>49</sup> *Bleak House*, pp. 190–91.

new system, but an old system seen from a new point of view'.<sup>50</sup> This system, which is that of English parliamentary politics, is made to appear as a closed loop, possessing no genuine mandate outside its own circle. What takes place in *Sybil* is an attempt to establish an authoritative origin for such a politics. As I have argued, however, the way in which this takes place is itself circular and supplementary.

### *The Parchment of an Estate*

If architecture, names, and documents are supposed to secure authority in *Sybil*, the novel's denouement illustrates their interdependency. To see this requires a return to the Gerards' lost papers, and a conversation between Baptist Hatton and Lord de Mowbray in Book iv, Chapter 13, where Hatton learns the papers are held 'in the muniment room of the great tower of Mowbray Castle' (p. 267). The documents must be carefully guarded, not because they provide Mowbray with authority, but because they signify its lack, revealing that the building and its owner are, like Saussure's signifier and signified, not essentially but only arbitrarily connected. They are held in an iron box in a cupboard (p. 267), at the centre of a series of layers (box-cupboard-castle) which incorporates them into the structure of the building, making them a signifying absence at its heart. Despite the danger they present to Lord de Mowbray, they are never destroyed, Hatton having persuaded him they are vital to his wish to become a baron (p. 267). Though it remains unclear whether this is true, as far as de Mowbray is concerned the documents that threaten his ruin are also the route to his future elevation. He thus ends in the same position as Gerard's father, undone by the papers which promised to raise him to a higher status.

This complex of papers and castle is an image of how authority functions in *Sybil*: buildings can only stand as sites of authority when documents or names are incorporated into their structure, like Marney Abbey's motto or the tomb of Walter Gerard. This explains why, after the documents are finally removed from de Mowbray castle, it is burnt down. In Lady Bardolf's description of de Mowbray's death, it is impossible to separate the discovery of the papers and the destruction of the building: 'They say the writ of right killed poor Lord de Mowbray, but to my mind he never recovered the burning of the castle' (p. 418). It cannot be decided which event killed de Mowbray, since both castle and text were incorporated into the archi-textual authority which maintained his power and position.

More fundamentally, the papers offer the fulfilment of an impossible desire, the return to a unified state which can only be imagined in an inaccessible

<sup>50</sup> Raymond Williams, *Writing in Society* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 95.

past, analogous to the realm of 'everlasting Substance' posited by Carlyle. As Hatton says: 'I have need of some of these papers with respect to an ancient title, a claim to which by a person in whom I am interested they would substantiate' (p. 342). This 'ancient title' stands as a Carlylean origin, or imagined fundamental unity between the subject and 'true' authority. Hatton's pronouncement applies most clearly to Sybil, but could also apply to Lord de Mowbray, since Hatton has told him to preserve the papers for a claim after which 'The Fitz-Warenes Lords Valence will yield to none in antiquity' (p. 267). In either case, the papers are the only means to 'substantiate' the claim of the 'interested' person, whose 'ancient title' promises access to the sphere of proper names otherwise denied in the text.

As symbolic object of desire, the papers are aligned with Sybil Gerard, pursued by both Egremont and Stephen Morley (who attacks Egremont after a moment of intimacy with Sybil (pp. 200–01)), as well as Baptist Hatton (p. 287). This connection is reinforced by the attack on Mowbray Castle, engineered by Baptist Hatton and Morley, which provides the opportunity for Morley and Devilsdust to retrieve the hidden papers. The attempt to take the papers by force demonstrates their position as object of desire, their seizure operating like a violent sexual conquest. This is evident in the search:

Some of the cases were very deep, and they had hitherto in general, in order to save time, proved their contents with an iron rod. Now Morley with a desperate air mounting on some steps that were in the room, commenced formally rifling the cases and throwing their contents on the floor. (p. 412)

The men take the aggressive, masculine role of 'proving' the feminized cases and cabinets with a phallic iron rod, pursuing the papers in a sexually charged hunt. The search climaxes with Morley finding the papers in a cabinet: 'he pulled out with triumphant exultation the box, painted blue and emblazoned with the arms of Valence' (p. 412). It is important that it is Morley, one of the men who desires Sybil, who retrieves the box: it serves as a surrogate for her, the desired object he cannot attain. Morley issues orders to Dandy Mick: 'I will throw this box after you. Now mind; take it to the convent at Mowbray, and deliver it yourself from me to Sybil Gerard' (p. 413). Unable to attain possession of Sybil, Morley displays his desire by seizing the papers which play a comparable role in the narrative, sending them to her as a sign of his devotion and sexual frustration. Sybil's body is closely associated with the castle at this point, in another example of buildings and bodies combining, as she finds herself in danger of the rape it symbolically suffers. After Sybil is separated from her friends, she is forced to leave the castle garden, upon which:

Suddenly a band of drunken ruffians, with shouts and oaths, surrounded her; she shrieked in frantic terror; Harold [a dog] sprung at the throat of the foremost; another advanced, Harold left his present prey and attacked the new assailant. [. . .] One ruffian

had grasped the arm of Sybil, another had clenched her garments, when an officer, covered with dust and gore, sabre in hand, jumped from the terrace, and hurried to the rescue. (p. 417)

The officer is Egremont, who protects Sybil as the castle and its locks have failed to protect the papers. Sybil's body is like both castle and papers; both a fortress to be conquered and an object to be seized. In holding this position, her body reinforces the sense that something beyond either building or document is at stake, which neither they nor her body alone can successfully symbolize.

Sybil and the papers are both subject to aggressive masculine attempts to possess them, one of which is approved and one deplored by the narrative. Egremont, the Carlylean hero, is the only character permitted to possess both simultaneously. Although Mick follows Morley's instructions, delivering the box to Sybil, we find that 'Sybil was too agitated at the moment to perceive all its import, but she delivered the box into the custody of Egremont' (p. 419), in whose care she also resides. This fantasy of aristocratic male fulfilment with which the novel ends combines the two main narratives: individual masculine heroism (Egremont) and the restoration of familial authority (the papers and the Gerards). Names and buildings are once again crucial, as Sybil is taken to Marney Abbey 'never again to quit it until her bridal day' (p. 419). This is the day her name is changed to match that of the abbey, as she and Egremont emerge as 'the Earl and Countess of Marney' (p. 419), binding her to the building in a new and permanent way under the authority of a husband.

A term that expresses the operations I have been describing is offered by Walter Gerard in Book III, Chapter 8:

If you want to understand the ups and downs of life, there's nothing like the parchment of an estate. Now master, now man! He who served in the hall now lords in it; and very often the baseborn change their liveries for coronets, while gentle blood has nothing left but—dreams. (p. 188)

Gerard's phrase 'the parchment of an estate' suggests that estates are built out of parchment and parchments made from estates, each reciprocally producing the other. This archi-textual metaphor unites parchment, the material of documents, and estates, a term associated with both names and houses (Lady St Julians refers to 'the Mowbray estate' (p. 418)). It is significant that Walter returns to 'dreams' to explain his point. As with Walter's dream of refighting the Battle of Hastings, this passage directs us towards both the past (where 'gentle blood' originated) and the future (where it might be restored as 'master'); again, the origin is the endpoint. In this moment, the text gives us the image of its own construction. It shows that *Sybil* does not just play out the search for a symbolic origin of values, but actively seeks to produce

its own origin, projecting it into the future as a dream. Throughout the novel, names, texts, and buildings are placed in supplementary relationships, like the 'papers' and Mowbray Castle, or Bishop Hatton and the documents he alone constitutes as authoritative. These archi-textual constructs become Derridean supplements themselves, implying the pre-existence of an origin, whether historical, familial, or divine, which they in fact constitute. Such origins, to which the novel seeks to return, can only be imagined as lost objects, like the Gerard family's nobility or the papers taken by Hatton. It is only in being lost that these origins are established as sites of authority. What the novel stages, then, is the dream of their recovery, a dream in which past and future are impossibly united and true authority becomes self-evident.

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