This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced version of an article accepted for publication in Journal of Victorian culture following peer review. The version of record Valerie Sanders, Charles Kingsley's Anthropology of the Generations, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, Volume 24, Issue 3, July 2019, Pages 316–322, is available online at: https://doi.org/10.1093/jvcult/vcz019

Charles Kingsley's Anthropology of the Generations

Valerie R. Sanders

Charles Kingsley (1819–1875) was born three weeks after Queen Victoria, and five after Charles Blachford Mansfield (1819–1855), a Cambridge friend.1 Although Kingsley became the Queen's Chaplain in 1859, and she reciprocated by reading his novels, and designating him 'a personal friend of the Queen', Mansfield was the contemporary with whom he felt a particular connection.2 Perhaps because the chemist was, like himself, a clergyman's son and a Cambridge man, who relished outdoor pursuits, everything about him delighted Kingsley, who recalled his appearing over the glebe at Eversley, 'with his knapsack on his back, like a shining star appearing with peace on earth and good-will to men'. Passionate about ornithology, geology, mesmerism and chemistry, like one of Kingsley's own fictional characters, Mansfield died prematurely, 'after nine days of agony . . . like a Christian man', when one of his experiments caught fire.3 While Kingsley is well known for his characters' spirited debates about rural poverty, Chartism, the Church, and the Game Laws, his acute consciousness of the duty to take responsibility for social change makes more sense if one reads it in the context of the charismatic personalities of his generation, of whom Mansfield was an important representative.

Kingsley thought deeply about the meaning of generations, and their impact on other related concepts, such as the Zeitgeist, or 'spirit of the age', and social and political reform. With Mansfield largely forgotten, Kingsley is more often associated with fellow Christian Socialists Thomas Hughes (1822–1896) (author of Tom Brown's Schooldays), and mentor Frederick Denison Maurice (1805–1872), after whom both Hughes and Kingsley named one of their sons. Another Christian Socialist friend and confidant was the lawyer John Malcolm Forbes Ludlow (1821–1911). Though Maurice was more like a father-figure to the rest, being around 15 years older, and the others were born slightly later than 1819, they confirmed Kingsley's sense of belonging to a significant, socially and religiously responsible generation. Even if they functioned more like a social group than a generation, this did not stop Kingsley from regarding them as men with a shared commitment to an urgent reformist agenda, growing out of their common values and experiences. My aim is, therefore, first to identify Kingsley's use of a broadly generational model in his periodical writing on poetry in the early 1850s, and then to see how he applied this model to his portrayal of families, and ultimately the history of communities, primarily in Yeast (1851), with some reference to Alton Locke (1850) and Two Years Ago (1857).

1. THE GENERATIONAL MODEL

Karl Mannheim, in 'The Problem of Generations' (1927), explains how members of a generation (defined as born within the same approximately 30-year period) do not automatically constitute a special-interest group, but by living through the same historical events and social developments, may be predisposed towards similar ways of thinking. The 'problematic' aspect comes from understanding how, or indeed whether, such a loosely defined association of people can be treated by historians and sociologists as a politically united group, or deemed capable of sharing particular values simply by virtue of having been born around the same time.

'Mere contemporaneity', Mannheim argues, 'becomes sociologically significant only when it also involves participation in the same historical and social circumstances'.4 Even then, there might be subdivision into 'generation units', groups that each react differently to the same circumstances.

These units might be diversely inflected by gender, class, religion, geographical location, profession, or other factors causing their experience of something on the scale of a war or revolution to influence their lives in different ways. In Kingsley's case, his inner circle (beyond his family) shared an essentially masculine, Christian, and middle-class perspective on the social and political turmoil of the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

2. KINGSLEY'S EXPERIENCE OF GENERATIONS

From an early age Kingsley felt that he was born both of 'a most remarkable pair of parents', and distinguished ancestors, as he told Francis Galton. 'Our talent, such as it is, is altogether hereditary', he affirmed, reflecting Galton's findings in his essay 'Hereditary Character and Talent' (1865).5 He also soon sensed that he was living through significant times, and needed to involve himself in active campaigns for change. Less familiar, perhaps, is his preoccupation with generational time spans, and the acts of looking backwards and forwards in the narrating of national crises and people's interactions with them. As Walter Scott argues in his 'Postscript which should have Been a Preface' to Waverley, 'we are not aware of the progress we have made until we fix our eye on the now-distant point from which we set out'.6 This kind of progress was what Kingsley monitored in himself as he observed the building of national unrest.

He was still a schoolboy when he witnessed the Bristol Riots of 1831, which erupted when the House of Lords rejected the Second Reform Bill, and Dragoons were brought into Queen Square to restore order. The sight of 'those dangerous classes' and the destruction left in their wake, he told his pupil, John Martineau (1834–1910), initially made him 'the veriest aristocrat', disgusted by the violence of the mob, before he became a Radical.7 The Bristol Riots remained a personal and political touchstone for Kingsley, which he continued pondering over the next 10 years. 27 years after the event (about the span of a generation), when he was lecturing in Bristol in 1858, he recalled the scene in vivid detail, as if his memories had been reignited by being back in the place where it originally happened.8 He was also present at the Chartist rally of 10 April 1848 at Kennington Common in London, with his barrister friend J. M. Ludlow, and subsequently declared himself a Chartist.9

For Kingsley, therefore, his own generation stood in constant comparison with at least the previous two, reinforcing his awareness of significant shifts in value systems. Arguably, however, his models suggest that moral and intellectual progress is not necessarily steady or continuous. Earlier poets, such as Pope and Burns, remained superior, in his view, to all but a few present-day working-class poets, and the times in which his fictional protagonists live are too tumultuous to indicate any simple way forward, as we see in the chaotic psyches of Yeast's Lancelot Smith, his cousin Luke, and his would-be bride, Argemone Lavington. Juxtaposing his provocative judgements of past and present poets with Yeast helps us further understand the passionate quality of the cultural debates in this and subsequent novels.

3. THE REVIEW ARTICLES

The review articles Kingsley wrote from 1851 to 1853 are peppered with such phrases as 'fifty years afterwards', 'fifteen years after', 'the last forty years', 'a brave and wise man of fifty years ago', 'the last thirty years in England', 'twenty years ago', and 'this thirty years' prologue to the reconstruction of rotten Europe'.10 For him, however, as with some types of social reform, the passage of time does not necessarily foster a steady advancement in quality. Kingsley preferred Burns to the majority of Chartist poets, even if the earlier poet did come from a 'hard-drinking, coarse, materialist age'.11 He saw Burns and the Chartists in explicitly generational terms, making frequent recourse to phrases

that characterize the late eighteenth as very different from the middle of the nineteenth century. So far as poetic history is concerned, Kingsley defines it in absolutist terms. 'The time for merely reflective poets is past', he admonished an Oxford friend who was hoping for encouragement to publish.12 It was essential now for aspiring poets to embody the subjective in objective forms, as he tried to explain in his review article on Burns and the working class poets of the next generation. What sounds, in his definition, like subjective verse – 'the history of their hearts' – should not merely articulate the experiences of an individual, but what he calls, in Burns's case, 'a contemporaneous history': in other words, 'the history of one man who has felt in himself the heart experiences of his generation, and anticipated many belonging to the next generation'. This is 'so far the collective history of that generation and of much – no man can say how much – of the next generation'.13

For Kingsley, Burns was the man to do this, albeit in difficult conditions. As for his own times, Kingsley sees them as infinitely more complicated than Burns's, and therefore less immediately productive of authentic and persuasive working-class poetic voices. Singling out the 'Corn-Law Rhymer' Ebenezer Elliott (1781–1849) for especial disapproval, Kingsley finds that although his 'terrible Dantean vividness of imagination' is perhaps 'unequalled in England in his generation', it too often degenerates into 'sheer fustian and bombast'.14

Applying a similar generational model to his other reviews of contemporary and recently past poetry, Kingsley identifies a disjunction between the 'marvellous and inspiring' atmosphere of his own times, and the poor quality of the poetry produced in it. He deplores disregard for Byron in comparison to the continuing influence of Shelley, in what he characterizes as an 'effeminate' age: 'a mesmerizing, table-turning, spirit-rapping, Spiritualizing, Romanizing generation, who read Shelley in secret, and delight in his bad taste, mysticism, extravagance, and vague and pompous sentimentalism'.15 Two years on from his hopefulness about the post-Napoleonic age, the 'reconstruction of rotten Europe', mentioned above, Kingsley is here berating the mixed-up, faddish thinking of the mid-century middle classes whose experiments with alternatives to manly Protestantism are sending people off in all kinds of fruitless directions.16

Kingsley's generational model is therefore based on a notion of constant change and rejection of previous tastes and values, but at the same time, he is careful to insist in his article 'Alexander Pope and Alexander Smith' (1853) that human problems are 'radically the same in every age'.17 The difference lies in the quality of poetic vision, and the current vagueness of expression in modern poets is less excusable in more enlightened times. While Kingsley sees the poet as essentially a representative figure, who should 'begin by confessing that he is as other men are, and sing about things which concern all men', he concludes that 'our young poets are a very hopeless generation, and will so continue unless they utterly repent and amend'.18

4. YEAST: 'A VERY HOPELESS GENERATION'?

How 'hopeless', then, does Kingsley consider the younger generation – albeit not just 'poets' – in one of his most turbulent novels, Yeast? Its hero, Lancelot Smith, spends much of his time casting about for clues as to the most ethical and socially useful purpose in life for an educated young man like himself. Like Scott, Kingsley explains himself in prefaces to his novels, and for Yeast (first serialized in Fraser's Magazine in 1848 before being published in book form in 1851), he updates this for the first time when his novel goes into a fourth edition. The generational language he adopts in both is similar to that of his articles on poets. The novel, he explains in the Preface to the first edition, was 'written between two and three years ago', in the hope of calling attention to 'the questions which are now agitating the minds of the rising generation'. Drawing on the language of family disharmony, in which 'the young men and women of our day are fast parting from their

parents and from each other', he shows this specifically in Argemone Lavington's difficult relationship with her mother, whose sole aim is to see her daughter marry well and within a strong Christian culture.19 The narrator observes how distant they are in terms of education, though this by no means makes the daughter's position straightforwardly superior: 'The daughter had utterly out-read and out-thought her less-educated parent, who was clinging in honest bigotry to the old forms, while Argemone was wandering forth over the chaos of the strange new age'.20 Although this reads like a novel about, and for, people of his own generation (he was 29 when it was first serialized), Kingsley's first Preface acknowledges that both old and young may read it and benefit differently. 'To the young', he believes, 'this book can do no harm; for it will put into their minds little but what is there already. To the elder, it may do good', in that it may teach them something of the real 'state of their own children's minds'.21 Not that any two young people in the novel share a similar state of mind, in that Colonel Bracebridge is, by his own confession, 'miserably behind the age',22 Lancelot's cousin Luke, 'goes over to Rome', Argemone toys with joining a religious order, and her sister Honoria focuses on practical succouring of the poor.

Why, then, did Kingsley add a further Preface to his fourth edition? One explanation seems to be that he was always keen to update his position on the social conditions described in each of his novels. This time he is very conscious that 12 years have passed since the novel's first publication, and notes the 'improved tone' of society.23 Alton Locke, meanwhile, accreted so much prefatory material that by the time of the 1900 Macmillan edition, no fewer than three prefaces (including one by Hughes), plus a reprint of 'Cheap Clothes and Nasty', postponed the reader's entry into the novel text itself. The first – 'To the Working Men of Great Britain' (1854) – and the second – to 'the Undergraduates of Cambridge' (1860) – range over an extensive history of class conflict, going back 'thirty or forty years ago', when university men believed that '"the masses" were their natural enemies'.24 The measure of time he repeats in this Preface is 'twenty years' – not quite a generation, according to Mannheim's definition, but sufficient, supported by 'twenty years of virtue and liberality in the Court', to facilitate 'the late twenty years of increasing right-mindedness in the gentry'.25 If the 'present generation', he adds, can do no more for manhood suffrage, 'it is all the more incumbent on the rising generation to learn how to do . . . the work which their fathers have left undone'.26

In Mannheim's terms, Kingsley is essentially talking about generational units in these Prefaces, deeply fissured by class interests. For Kingsley, indeed, class looms larger as a factor in identifying generational interests, and outweighs the other experiences shared by people of a similar age. Indeed, as we have just seen in his discussion of the poets, he prefers Byron to the 'Corn-Law Rhymer', while in his novels, the educated middle-class men most like himself recoil from the realities of a brutalized and ignorant rural working class. Mannheim's faith in the artist and the man of letters as the two key figures in any society who have the flexibility to drive change, sounds, at times, like Kingsley, especially in Mannheim's linking of the artist 'with the driving forces of his generation, even when politically indifferent'.27 As David Amigoni reminds us, Kingsley had just been appointed to the Chair of Modern History at Cambridge when he wrote the 1860 Preface, and the novel itself is presented as 'a rhetorical intervention in the unfolding process of Modern History'.28In both his Prefaces and his novels Kingsley explores the ways in which authoritative and creative observers can advise and intervene in such times of social upheaval. Collectively, his characters agree there is a need for urgent action by those with influence over the poor.

5. 'WE WAS AN EVIL AND PERVERSE GENERATION':

THE REPETITIONS OF HISTORY

The 'evil and perverse generation' cited here by 'an aged blind man' in Alton Locke belongs to the time of the Napoleonic Wars, but self-destructive behaviour persists in all classes in Kingsley's novels, which are essentially case studies and dialogues in which the whole community is engaged.29 In Yeast, nevertheless, one of the longest disquisitions on the state of the poor occurs when Lancelot Smith and Paul Tregarva, the Methodist gamekeeper, visit the Village Revel in Chapter XIII, and observe the tawdry looks and worse behaviour of the younger generation. Tregarva dismisses them as a 'stupid pig-headed generation at the best', made worse by the lack of opportunity to develop themselves intellectually or morally.30 The younger generation are also physically weaker than their elders. Again, this condition is attributed not just to their harsh working conditions and the degrading effects of the New Poor Law, but also to the lingering impact of the Napoleonic Wars: Tregarva believes 'There was too much filthiness and drunkenness went on in the old war-times, not to leave a taint behind it, for many a generation'.31 Here Kingsley seems to be anticipating, and then inverting, Galton's theory of hereditary character and talent, cited above. For Tregarva, at least, the current generation have been damaged by the intergenerational traits of their ancestors, corrupted by a fatal combination of poor genes and deeply engrained bad habits.

In the opening chapters of Two Years Ago (1857) the language of generations references something more like a stadial model of generational development. According to this more positive theory, subsequent generations will improve on their predecessors, rather than replicate their worst characteristics, as in Tregarva's vision. For Stangrave, the New York businessman who is conversing with Claude Mellot in the introductory chapter, the people of America, even the Southern slaveholders, are the imperfect, but potentially redeemable 'children' of the old country, Great Britain. 'Remember', Stangrave cautions Mellot, the sympathetic artist figure, carried over from Yeast, 'we are but children yet; our sins are the sins of youth'.32 In Britain too, Mellot identifies the rising of a 'better spirit', of 'self-reform', which gives him hope of an ever-improving moral progression in all social groups.

Finally, such is Kingsley's complete absorption of the generational model that he applies it equally to men, foxhounds and fish. While Old Squire Lavington (also from Yeast), is known as 'patriarch of the chase', even his hounds are described in human generational terms as 'old Goodman, son of Galloper'.33 So are the ancient trout and other wildlife of the district, prompted by thoughts of Lord Vieuxbois' ancestors of 500 years ago, as Claude observes that 'the descendants of mediaeval trout snap at the descendants of mediaeval flies, spinning about upon just the same sized and coloured wings on which their forefathers spun a thousand years ago; having become, in all that while, neither bigger nor wiser'.34 At this humble cyclical level, Kingsley indicates, earth stands still while man progresses. The generational model has, for him, done its work.

6. CONCLUSION

By 1852, Kingsley's aim was, as he phrased it, to: put the anthropology of men of my own generation on as sound a footing as I can, that their children and grandchildren may have some fixed ideas concerning God, and man, and the universe, to fall back on, and fight from, when the evil day comes – as come, unless the tide turns, it surely will.35

As the word 'anthropology' suggests, Kingsley's vision of human development, both physical and moral, and its role in the evolution of enlightened societies, is a generational model derived from social and biological sciences. While his focus on the period between the Napoleonic and Crimean Wars (roughly 1815 to 1856) charts neither a generational unity nor a steady progression towards a more egalitarian society, but rather a splitting into generational units, inflected by diverging class values, and even a decline in vigour and integrity, he nevertheless argues in his reviews and fiction

that these years saw a heightened awareness of generational change. This lens offers not so much a reassuring model of growing civilization, but rather suggests a jumbled and inconsistent process of self-regeneration, both of individuals and societies, in the face of recurrent crises. For Kingsley himself, however, this is an exhilarating time to be alive. Strenuous thought, and an urgent desire for self-improvement leading to social action, characterize his most self-aware and earnest characters. His novels suggest that if everyone accepts a responsibility to compensate for the shortcomings of their predecessors, 'our great-grandchildren . . . will look back on the latter half of this century and ask, if it were possible that such things could happen in an organised planet?'36

1 Kingsley wrote a preface for C. B. Mansfield, Paraguay, Brazil and the Plate. Letters Written in 1852–1853. With a Sketch of the Author's Life, by the Rev. Charles Kingsley, Jun. (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co, 1856).

2 Queen Victoria to Mr Disraeli, 27 March 1868 in The Letters of Queen Victoria, Second Series 1862–1878, ed. George Earle Buckle, 2 vols i (1862–1869), p. 519.

3 Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of His Life, ed. by Frances Eliza Grenfell, 5th edn, 2 vols (London: Henry S. King, 1877), I, 441; 444.

4 Karl Mannheim, 'The Problem of Generations', in Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge (1927); repr. ed. Paul Kecskemeti (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 298.

5 Letters and Memories, I, 4. Galton's essay, 'Hereditary Character and Talent', published in Macmillan's Magazine, 12 (1865), 157–166, cites the Kingsley family as 'two brothers, eminent novelists, two others no less talented' (p. 164).

6 Walter Scott, Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since (1814); repr. ed. Claire Lamont (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 340.

7 Letters and Memories, I, 22.

8 Letters and Memories, I, 21.

9 Thomas Hughes notes in his 'Prefatory Memoir' (1849) to Alton Locke that although Kingsley declared himself a Chartist at a public meeting in London, he also denounced their methods (Letters and Memories, I, 166).

10 This last phrase is from 'Thoughts on Shelley and Byron', Fraser's Magazine (November 1853), 568–576 (p. 569). The others are from 'Burns and His School', The North British Review (November 1851), 149–183; and 'Alexander Smith and Alexander Pope', Fraser's Magazine (October 1853), 452–466.

11 'Burns', p. 151.

12 Letters and Memories, I, 185.

13 'Burns', p. 154.

14 'Burns', p. 166.

15 'Thoughts on Shelley and Byron', p. 568; p. 571.

16 'Shelley and Byron', p. 569.

17 'Pope and Smith', p. 456.

18 'Pope and Smith', p. 459; p. 466.

19 Charles Kingsley, Yeast (1851); repr. ed. Everyman's Library (London and New York, NY: Dent Dutton, 1976), p. 9.

20 Yeast, p. 127.

21 Yeast, p.10.

22 Yeast, p. 82.

23 Yeast, p. 4.

24 'Preface To the Undergraduates of Cambridge,' in Alton Locke: Tailor and Poet. An Autobiography (London and New York, NY: Macmillan and Co, Limited, 1900), p. lxix.

25 'Preface To the Undergraduates of Cambridge', p. lxx.

26 'Preface to the Undergraduates of Cambridge', p. lxxvii.

27 Mannheim, 'The Problem of Generations', p. 314.

28 David Amigoni, Victorian Biography: Intellectuals and the Ordering of Discourse (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1993), p. 78. See also Barbara Leckie's discussion of the chronology and different purposes of Kingsley's Prefaces to Yeast and Alton Locke in 'What is a Social Problem Novel?' in Twenty-First Perspectives on Victorian Literature, ed. Laurence Mazzeno (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), pp. 102–3.

29 Charles Kingsley, Alton Locke (1850) rpt. ed. Elizabeth A. Cripps (Oxford: World's Classics, 1983), p. 265.

30 Yeast, p. 172.

31 Yeast, p. 181.

32 Charles Kingsley, Two Years Ago (1857; rpt. London and New York: Macmillan and Co Limited, 1900), p. 4.

33 Two Years Ago, p. 7.

34 Two Years Ago, p. 14.

35 Letters and Memories, I, 326.

36 Epilogue to Yeast, p. 265.