Britain and Its Empire in the Shadow of Rome

The Reception of Rome in Socio-Political Debate from the 1850s to the 1920s

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BLOOMSBURY
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Academic
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

175 Fifth Avenue
New York
NY 10010
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

First published 2012

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

EISBN: 978-1-4411-7778-0

Typeset by Newgen Imaging Systems Pvt Ltd, Chennai, India
Printed and bound in Great Britain

To my parents Graham and Tricia Harris

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Acknowledgements

My thanks go to the many people who have offered advice and given encouragement throughout the process of writing my doctoral thesis and rewriting it for publication. Foremost is Prof. Richard Alston who has read, reread and commented on my numerous drafts. Others who have contributed time and effort to the evolution of this book include Dr Zoe Laidlaw, Dr Phiroze Vasunia, Dr Lindsay Allen, Prof. Lorna Hardwick, Prof. Edith Hall and Prof. Margaret Malamud, the staff of the various libraries and archives I have visited, but most especially the staff at the Bodleian, Oxford, the British Library, St Pancras and the British Newspaper Archive, Colindale and, by no means last, Bloomsbury Publishers. Special thanks go to Dr Russell Wallis who has encouraged me in my efforts over many years and, finally, to Chris, Amanda, Luke and Daniel Butler.

Introduction

The nineteenth century was a time of unprecedented change in the British Empire and Great Britain. Two factors were central to that change. First, the acquisition of new territories had, by 1900, given Britain control of approximately 400 million culturally and racially diverse people. The task of administering and maintaining order in this vast Empire required, in Philippa Levine's words, 'something more than merely muddling along'.[1] Secondly, industrialization and urbanization changed the traditional basis of British society from rural to urban and heralded the birth of all that was modern. As Marshall Berman puts it, 'the first thing' noticeable in the nineteenth century:

> [i]s the highly developed, differentiated and dynamic new landscape in which modern experience takes place. This is a landscape of steam engines, automatic factories, railroads, vast new industrial zones; of teeming cities that have grown overnight, often with dreadful human consequences; of daily newspapers, telegraphs, telephones and other mass media, communicating on an ever wider scale; of increasingly strong national states and multinational aggregations of capital; of mass social movements fighting these modernizations from above with their own modes of modernization from below; of an ever-expanding world market embracing all, capable of the most spectacular growth, capable of appalling waste and devastation, capable of everything except solidity and stability.[2]

As the nineteenth century passed its midpoint, the reality of administering an expanding Empire whose subjects were becoming increasingly antipathetic to British rule *and* countering the gradually more strident demands of the working classes at home for political, economic and social reform, challenged the prevailing liberal ideology and the idea of progress. The much vaunted idea of progress had underpinned methods of administering both the so-called inferior peoples of the Empire, the non-white indigenous populations of the colonies and dependencies, and the lower classes of Britain itself (including the Celts of Scotland, Wales and Ireland).

In this book I focus on three interconnected debates – Empire, Nation and City – that animated political life from the 1850s onwards as attempts

were made to resolve the structural tensions of imperial society. In the face of these problems, optimism waned. It culminates in the 1920s in a politically, economically, socially and ideologically restructured Britain that was imbued with a conservative ideology and was in possession of an Empire that, so *The Times* reported in July 1920, was in partnership with Britain:

> For an Empire based on organized force or organized commerce the people of this country have substituted, in their own minds, the conception of a British commonwealth founded on the willing cooperation of free peoples. That they have done so is, in our opinion, no small vindication of our national repute for genius in government.[3]

My intention, though, is not to add a traditional history of the Empire or of Britain to the impressive array that already exists (and the bibliography is extensive) but rather to show that throughout the restructuring and the development of 'new' imperial and national ideologies, ancient Rome had a central part to play. This is something that modern historians have often downplayed and rarely is the significance of classical allusions in Victorian and Edwardian texts commented on, perhaps because references to and discussion of ancient history are in themselves straying into modernity. In a world that was so new, the anachronistic presence of Rome is a problem. As Michel de Certeau states, 'Western history essentially begins with differentiation between the *present* and the *past*'.[4]

Yet, in the multifarious references to the ancient past in nineteenth and early twentieth-century texts, in explicit and extended discussion and in stray allusions in newspapers, in fiction, in political speeches, in technical treatises and, of course, in historical analyses, it is clear that intellectuals did look to the past for guidance and that ancient Rome did increasingly influence key debates.[5] Moreover, looking in depth at the way Rome was utilized in these discourses reveals that it was mainly as a result of the fear that change engendered in the ruling elite that caused Rome to become a significant presence. Rome acted as a warning of decline and fall and as an example of how it could be avoided.[6] The philosopher and economist, John Stuart Mill, discussing the Hegelian concept 'Spirit of the Age' in 1831, pointed out that engagement with the past was 'essentially' an idea 'belonging to an age of change':

> The 'Spirit of the age' is in some measure a novel expression. I do not believe that it is to be met with in any work exceeding fifty years in antiquity. The idea of comparing one's own age with former ages, or with our notion of those which are yet to come, had occurred to philosophers; but it never before was itself the dominant idea of any age.[7]

Change then was fundamental to how intellectuals viewed history and as they looked to Rome as a way of preventing or controlling it, Rome became part of the structure of thought, a stratum in the 'Archaeology of Knowledge' always present, even if not explicitly so.[8] When the intelligentsia of the day sought the necessary perspective from which they could assess their own age in historical analogy or tried to think about how society and history in its generalities worked, it was to Rome that they turned.

Over the past 40 years or so ancient historians and classicists have increasingly explored the reception of the ancient world in the nineteenth and twentieth century, recognizing that knowing how and why intellectuals engaged with the past adds to our understanding of the period. Much of this has been concerned with the reception of Rome. Literary texts across a range of disciplines have been scrutinized in order to show that intellectuals, in Christopher Stray's words, looked 'back to an authoritative and exemplary past' in order 'to make sense of the present' and to direct future policy.[9] Early contributors to the field of reception studies concentrated primarily on the use of Rome in the political arena but since the 1990s, research has been extended and scholars have explored not only the political but also the cultural hold of Rome in Britain and inquired with greater critical purchase into the function of the classical paradigm.[10]

This book builds on this scholarship, although it takes its lead from Norman Vance's *The Victorians and Ancient Rome* (1997) and Richard Hingley's *Roman Officers and English Gentlemen* (2000) comprehensive studies of Rome's impact on a range of discourses rather than the more specialized studies that look at, for instance, how Rome was utilized in the discourse on British imperialism.[11] In other words, I have taken a generic approach to the subject and explored foreign and domestic debates over an extended 70-year time period. It is this approach that reveals most clearly Rome's emergence from its place in parliamentary debate in the early part of the nineteenth century with references to Rome 'sparingly used and carefully considered',[12] to steadily become a potent political device wielded by those charged with the efficient running of Britain and the Empire and to support a gradually more conservative ideology.

Citing ancient authors and ancient history in parliamentary debates during the early nineteenth century can largely be accounted for by the predominance of the Classics in the school curriculum. Stray in *Classics Transformed* (1998) charted in detail the value of a classical education to the Victorians pointing out that knowledge of the Classics gave an unspoken sense of belonging to an elite club that reinforced a class (and imperial) hierarchy. Effectively, the Classics allowed the educated to gain from others 'ways of seeing the world, maintaining

their solidarity, and of excluding outsiders'.[13] However, the time devoted to classical study during the school day does not explain why Rome became more than rhetorical garnish in Parliament. Neither does it explain the transformation in the reception of the ancient world and the growing preference for the ideology of Imperial Rome over that of Greece and the Roman Republic both of which were regarded by Mill in the 1830s as 'the *best constituted* commonwealths of antiquity'.[14] What becomes clear is that between the 1850s and 1920s, the ancient world underwent a process of reinterpretation in order that Rome generally and Imperial Rome specifically could be made to support shifting imperial and national debates and to reinforce 'new' political ideologies – even political ideologies in conflict with each other. If by the late nineteenth-century Imperial Rome supported the debate on 'new' imperialism, from the early twentieth century, it could also support a national ideology becoming invaluable to 'Little Englanders'.

There is of course no simple explanation for Rome's increasingly high profile in an English intellectual tradition; the very complexity of the ongoing and evolving debates on the Empire, the Nation and the City precludes any monolithic story.[15] Yet understanding the way many intellectuals navigated between the present and the past, supplies us with clues.[16] Future Conservative Prime Minister, A. J. Balfour, delivering a lecture on 'The Pleasures of Reading' in the 1890s shows that Victorians increasingly adopted a 'presentist' approach to Roman texts reading them more or less, as Peter Barry puts it, 'exclusively in terms of the present' and scrutinizing the past 'for what [was] "germane" to themselves and rejecting the remainder'.[17] Victorians, Balfour wrote, rather than 'contemplating as it were from a distance the larger aspects of the human drama . . . may elect to move in familiar fellowship amid the scenes and actors of special periods'. Moreover, for Balfour, this 'social circle . . . a circle perhaps narrowed and restricted through circumstances beyond our control' could be enlarged 'by making intimate acquaintances, perhaps even close friends, among a society long departed' who could be 'if it so pleases us, revive[d]'.[18] In this way, Rome was remade and rewritten in accordance with a modern agenda.

This propensity to actively engage with Rome to find solutions to modern problems continued into the twentieth century.[19] The Romano-British historian, Francis Haverfield, friend and colleague of many influential thinkers and doers, believed Rome had much to offer twentieth-century Britain. Contributing to a debate on 'Ancient Imperialism' in 1910 along with, among others, the former Consul-general of Egypt and Earl of Cromer, Evelyn Baring, the archaeologist D. G. Hogarth and the classical scholar J. L. Strachan Davidson, Haverfield

concentrated primarily on the Roman model of imperialism. 'The chief work of [lecturers and teachers]', he stated:

> is to widen the political imaginations of their audiences, and to make them realize that, quite apart from the personal factors of any moment, there are forces and tendencies not easily stated except in the abstract, but able, if ignored to take very concrete vengeance. I am not, be it observed, recommending the study of story on the ground that it aids us to form political prophecies or draw political analogies. It does that, no doubt. But its real value lies in helping us to realize the existence and the true character of various forces – it may be of geography or race feeling or religion or much else – with which we, like our predecessors, have to deal in our everyday politics.[20]

However, a 'presentist' critique alone cannot provide all the answers as to why Rome became the principal model for many of those actively involved in the running of Britain and the Empire, since not all overtly engaged with the past. Despite the lack of explicit references to Rome in the discourse on India, Richard Alston suggests, Rome was nevertheless a 'core narrative' that 'lurk[ed] as part of the intellectual scaffolding of the time'.[21] Likewise, close analysis of other discourses often reveal the experience of Rome consciously or unconsciously underlay intellectual thought. A 'presentist' critique also leaves open the question of the work that Rome does in each debate. Nonetheless what is without doubt is that many intellectuals from a wide range of disciplines and from across the political spectrum did implicitly or explicitly engage deeply with Rome and in that engagement there was seen to be the possibility of a remaking of the present and this issue lies at the heart of this book. When tracking modern debates, which were sometimes expressed in exclusively contemporary terms, I seek out the nucleus that was Rome, and assess the impact of that nucleus in the shaping of British imperial and domestic history.

The three debates form the basis of the three chapters that make up this book with each chapter subdivided into comparable time periods: approximately 1850–80, 1880 to the end of the century (the period often termed 'new' imperialism) and from then to the end of the 1920s. Chapter one looks at the way rising unemployment and civil unrest in Britain and the desire to maintain a political hold over subject territories caused attitudes to ancient civilizations to shift. Adopting a systematic method of colonization used by Rome, so many argued, would help solve the problem of the unemployed and contain rebellious elements. Additionally, emulating Roman colonies that had acted as the

guarantors of Roman political and military control rather than Greek colonies that established largely independent cities in new lands for limited political gain, would ensure the spread and preservation of British power. But, rebellions overseas, notably in India (1857) and Jamaica (1865), and growing concern over what was perceived as the culturally and racially degenerate effect of non-white subjects on Britons was to alter attitudes to Rome itself. As harsher methods of rule were judged, in J. S. Mill's words, 'warranted', and with history recording that the Republic's oriental subjects were responsible for introducing untold vices into Rome which contributed to the Republic's fall, it was to Imperial Rome that the intelligentsia looked for guidance.[22] The influential historian, J. R. Seeley, in *The Expansion of England* (1883), noted the growing appeal of Imperial Rome previously considered 'unacceptable in political terms' on account of its despotic nature.[23] The Roman Empire, Seeley wrote, though 'despotically governed', was 'the most interesting of all historical phenomena' being progressive, creative and achieving 'memorable results'.[24]

But with continued unrest in the Empire in the latter part of the nineteenth century; with the acquisition of further overseas territories in the 1870s and 80s (including Egypt in 1882), fuelling fears of the corrupting influence of foreigners; with the Empire under threat from the expansionist aims of other European nations; with realization that the cost of defending an Empire prevented addressing pressing domestic issues, by the start of the twentieth century there was a turn away from the Empire. The struggle to defeat the Boers in the Second Anglo-South African War (1899–1902) proved to anti-imperialists that the safety of the Empire was reliant on a 'degenerate' British population. Making matters worse was the prospect of a European conflict. If Britain's forces were unable to defend the Empire, might they also struggle to defend the nation itself? Despite growing antipathy to the Empire and a corresponding rise in nationalism that, by its very nature, would seem to preclude alignment with an imperialistic regime, the Roman Empire remained an important reference point in the debate on the Empire. Acknowledging the nationalist mood, however, Rome's Empire was represented by pro-imperialists in a way that mirrored a more inclusive and more intimate vision of Britain's. Familial imagery suggested both Rome and Britain worked in partnership with their colonial possessions. In contrast, anti-imperialists conjured up images of Rome (if to a lesser extent since those on the Left tended instead to produce 'modernist' interpretations of the political problems afflicting Britain) to show it was the possession of an Empire and Roman methods of administering it, particularly during the Republic, that could be blamed for its fall. In other words, Rome could be made to support a pro- or

anti-imperialist/nationalistic agenda. Nor did the resurgence in nationalism in the interwar years do much to undermine Rome's usefulness to pro-imperialists convinced that the Empire remained vital to British interests. Appealing to the workers of Britain on the grounds that the Empire was essential to economic recovery and national security, advocates of Empire carried on domesticating the Roman Empire in tandem with what Alison Light terms the 'domestication of the imperial idea' in Britain.[25]

It was Imperial Rome's ability to justify the 'new' imperialism in the late nineteenth century and yet be reworked to validate the 'gentler' version of British imperialism in the twentieth *and* be 'useful' to anti-imperialists, that accounts for my decision to explore domestic as well as foreign debates. Deciding on the 1850s as a starting point (the decade when optimism in the imperial mission was high rather than the 1880s, the decade when arguably optimism started to wane) was determined by the fact that the possession of an Empire alone fails to explain the growing appeal of Rome at this time. With the Roman model rather than the Greek model becoming the favoured one for Britain's Empire when fear of imperial decline was not a major concern was, as noted above, partly to do with attempting to resolve troubling domestic problems. It was the necessity to stabilize Britain, therefore, as much as to stabilize the Empire that encouraged a shift in attitude to the two ancient civilizations. Likewise, as we will see, there were indications of a change in attitude to Rome itself prior to the Indian Mutiny and the move to a more despotic form of rule overseas. What, for instance, caused expressions of support for Roman imperialism (even if not popularly held and challenged at the time) by the Oxford scholar, Richard Congreve, in 1855? In Congreve's opinion, scholars mistakenly concentrated on the history of the Republic whereas, for him, it was the system of government in the imperial period with its checks and balances that both secured the Empire and, importantly, safeguarded Rome's position within it.[26] Again, the answer to this lies partly with what was happening in Britain. Chapters two and three, therefore, look in greater detail at what was occurring at home.

Regardless of the rhetoric of Britain as 'one nation, one people, one culture', Britain in the 1850s was 'raced as well as classed, constituted through those "others" within and without'.[27] History taught that England began with the Saxon invasion and that modern Englishmen were descendants of the racially pure, racially superior Saxons or Teutons. In this reading the Celts of Scotland, Wales and Ireland, descendants of the ancient British tribes, were inferior to their English neighbours. Speaking at St James's Hall in London in 1859, the historian, novelist and outspoken social commentator, the Reverend Charles

Kingsley stated that 'of all the races upon earth now, the English race is probably the finest' and it showed 'not the slightest sign whatsoever of exhaustion'. Comparably-speaking the race that most resembled the English, culturally if not racially, was 'the old Roman'.[28] However, with only the classically-educated English elite, the inheritors of Roman culture, knowledge of Greek, Latin and ancient history placed a metaphorical barrier between the elite and the lower orders.[29] Effectively, the Celts and the working classes were Britain's equivalent of the imperial 'other'.

Faced, though, with the task of administering increasingly antagonistic culturally and racially diverse peoples in British territories and fearing the imperial ambitions of other European powers that demanded a show of 'Britishness', a new origin myth emerged. Historians revisited British history and, supported by scientific theories of race, argued the Celts of England survived the Roman conquest and that Romano-Britons integrated with their Saxon invaders. But, although this mixed origin myth was more inclusive of the Celts and working classes (both essential to the imperial mission), certain Britons remained outsiders. First, to justify England's authority in Ireland but also due to a greater aversion to the Irish generally, the Irish were judged less worthy Britons than the Scots and Welsh and, secondly, with evidence that the urban working class – in particular the urban poor – lacked the racial vigour of their country-bred ancestors, they too continued to be designated the 'other'. Two factors were blamed for racial degeneration: immigration and the change in Britain from a rural to an urban society. Both factors, historians argued, had played a part in the downfall of the Roman Republic. Yet, if the experience of the Republic acted as an example of what the consequences might be for Britain, in contrast, the experience of Imperial Rome (at least the early period) appeared to offer hope. Augustan policies intended to rejuvenate the Roman race – restricting the influx of foreigners into Rome, promoting marriage and the 'right' kind of breeding and instilling in Roman society all the 'rural' virtues that had made Rome great – were commended.

Confirmation of racial degeneration in Britain's population came at the start of the twentieth century with, as Richard Soloway puts it, 'the uninspiring performance of the armed forces in South Africa'.[30] But, with historians continuing to enthuse about Augustan attempts to reverse degeneration in the Roman race and keep Rome for the Romans, similar strategies were adopted in Britain. Most agreed controlling immigration would help prevent imparting 'foreign' vices into the national population, although opinion was divided over the best way to restore racial vigour to working class urbanites and the urban poor. While for

some the answer lay with eugenics and encouraging the middle classes (but not the urban working classes) to breed, for others, not convinced by the eugenic argument, providing a healthy environment would solve the problem. With the second option having the advantage of rejuvenating the present generation rather than future generations, the environmental argument won out. However, the rise in English nationalism at the start of the century, partly caused by worries over racial degeneration, ran counter to the idea of a united Britain. Nonetheless with the Empire still requiring a show of 'togetherness' from the ruling race and with the likelihood of a war with Britain's erstwhile Teutonic ancestors on the cards, belief in the new mixed origin myth persisted. Nor did the resurgence of English nationalism after the Great War do much undercut belief in it, although a new type of Englishman emerged – an inward-looking Englishman more in tune with the nation rather than the Empire. But, if this new Englishman was a home-loving, community-minded, virtuous individual who preferred the country to the town, so too did the Romans. What emerged during the interwar years was a more homogeneous Britain (although the Irish largely remained as outsiders) less divided along the lines of race and class. Moreover, the Romans, culturally aligned to the English elite in the 1850s, had become by the 1920s the racial ancestors of (nearly) all Britons but specifically modern Englishmen. As the Egyptologist Arthur Weigall put it, 'the Cockney of to-day is as much Roman as he is anything else'.[31]

The loss of racial vigour was not the only negative consequence of the transformation in Britain from a rural to an urban/industrial society. Physical degeneration in the urban masses, so many feared, was equally likely to affect Britain's standing as a global power. Chapter three therefore tracks the debate on the City as the deleterious effects of industrialization and urbanization reversed perceptions of the town and country.[32] In the early part of the nineteenth century, cities along with 'organized stable commerce' and 'the rule of law' represented to J. S. Mill, a civilized society.[33] To be civilized was, as Robert Young states, to be 'a citizen of a city . . . as opposed to the savage (wild man) outside or the more distant barbarian' in the Empire.[34] However, as the city gradually became in the words of, Josiah Strong, an American clergyman and passionate believer in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race, 'a serious menace to our civilization',[35] it was the wide open spaces of the Empire or the countryside that became '"the natural", the wholesome and the safe – the ideal against which all other forms of settlement were judged'.[36]

Underlying this change in perceptions of the city was fear that a physically degenerate urban working class was not only prone to revolutionary tendencies

but putting in jeopardy the very thing the upper and middle classes wanted to maintain at all cost – economic prosperity. Strong warned that New York was likely to become like London, a place populated by:

> the social dynamite: here toughs, gamblers, thieves, robbers, lawless and desperate men of all sorts, congregate: men who are ready on any pretext to raise riots for the purpose of destruction and plunder; here gather foreigners and wage-workers; here skepticism and irreligion abound; here inequality is the greatest and most obvious, and the contrast between opulence and penury the most striking; here is suffering the sorest.[37]

In line with efforts to improve conditions for urbanites living and working in overcrowded and unhealthy cities, historians cited the failures of the late Republic and successes of Imperial Rome in urban planning. Whereas in the early to mid-nineteenth century classical architecture had inspired the elite to construct modern civic buildings and restore their homes in a neoclassical style to display their power and status, increasingly Roman ideas of urban reform and town planning met a more universal need.[38]

But, with little evidence by the end of the nineteenth century that urban (and social) reform had reinvigorated a physically degenerate workforce on whom the nation depended militarily as well as economically, other solutions were sought.[39] Historians, on the one hand, overtly compared the physical condition of the Roman Republican masses to the physical condition of modern working-class urbanites while, on the other, they praised Augustus' urban renewal and back-to-the-land (be it the Italian countryside or the colonies) programmes which had restored the masses to health. With worry though over the depopulation of the countryside making emigration a less attractive option for Britain and with industrial cities essential if the nation was to equal and surpass the manufacturing output of other industrialized nations, urgent attention was given to urban and suburban reform. Offering hope were the ideas of the Garden City Movement. The planned city movement wished to see the creation of small urban centres built along the lines of Romano-British towns and through which Roman civilized values could be spread.[40] Francis Haverfield, who believed that after the trials and tribulations of the previous century Britain was more dependent 'on the Roman world' than ever before, recommended in *Ancient Town-Planning* (1913) the study of Roman town plans which emphasized 'the need for definite rules and principles'.[41] However, interest in Roman town planning subsided in the post-war years. Rather than a style that reflected Roman order and which characterized modern European cities, the breeding ground of post-war

revolutionaries, preferred instead were towns constructed in a uniquely English village style. Nonetheless, Romano-British towns reimagined as the forerunners to garden cities could be made to support a counter-type of Roman urbanism, a small town urbanism that rejected the industrial life. As the culture and spirit of the rural community came to be seen as the place in which Englishmen were created, Rome was reworked to support the reformulation of national ideals.

The three chapters then take as their basis three specific debates that reified as a result of fear – fear of decline and fall. However, as what was happening in Britain impacted on the imperial discourse and *vice versa* and, as no one debate can adequately explain the change in attitude to ancient civilizations or Imperial Rome's increasingly high profile in an English intellectual tradition, none of the chapters can be independent of the others. The first two chapters focus on well-established debates but the debate on the city was a relatively new debate as all the ramifications of the industrialized age were felt. A study of the function of Rome within what came to be a town versus country debate around the late nineteenth century, offers a new angle by which it is possible to understand why the city came to take on a distinctive form in Britain. All three chapters though meet at the core of the book, that is, the exploration of the impact (and the very real impact) of ancient Rome in sociopolitical debates that aimed to find solutions to a multitude of modern 'crises'. As the historian, H. P. Judson remarked in his review of Oxford's Camden Professor of Ancient History, Henry Pelham's, recently published *Outlines of Roman History* for the *Classical Review* in 1894, although '[w]e talk of our modern science, of our new thinking in philosophy and religion, of the achievements of our nineteenth century democracy', yet, 'everywhere, in state and church and scholarly life, we are always under the shadow of Rome'. Far from being an abstract idea discussed within sterile academia, sociopolitical debates were infused with notions of Rome and Rome became a foundational element having an impact in and of itself.

A final word needs to be said on my chosen methodology. Throughout I have concentrated on influential opinion-formers of the period, those wielding political power or those esteemed by contemporaries in their particular fields of expertise. It is through analysis of their writings; as we learn how Rome was perceived and how these perceptions were transmitted to a wider audience; as we see what periods and aspects of Rome were portrayed positively and negatively and as we look at why perceptions and representations of Rome changed over time in relation to the contemporary situation, that it becomes clear that Rome was part of 'the intellectual infra-structure' not just in imperial discourse but also in national debates of the time.[42]

The interdisciplinary nature of the book was inevitable due to cross-specialization and the cross-fertilization of ideas between politicians, historians, scientists, economists, social reformers and others. Ancient histories of the time are naturally a rich source of evidence and there can be no doubt that the reception of Rome changed between the 1850s and 1900s when comparing the historian and headmaster of Rugby, Thomas Arnold's, negative portrayal of Imperial Rome and its first Emperor to that of Pelham's.[43] Translations of ancient texts and commentaries on ancient authors (and classical scholars were by no means the only intellectuals who produced such works) also provide valuable evidence. As well as transmitting knowledge of the ancient world to a wider audience, they disclose much about contemporary society.[44] Which ancient authors rose in popularity and which went out of fashion was in itself dependent on circumstances. As an example, appreciation for Lucretius as 'a champion of scientific rationalism' rose in line with scientific advancement in Britain while Ovid, 'a degenerate in a degenerate age' and offensive to Victorian sensibilities, was kept off centre stage.[45] Others, such as Virgil, were adaptable to fit both an imperial or national ideology. If the *Aeneid* was frequently cited in the debate on imperialism, the back-to-the-landers preferred Virgil's pastoral works. With a plethora of Roman texts to choose from, the cognoscenti could be and were selective in their appropriation of ancient texts and this is reflected in the book. Histories of Britain and the Empire are equally revealing. Although not overtly concerned with ancient history, the comparisons and contrasts drawn between the ancient and modern reveals a great deal about both. As Eric Hobsbawm points out, 'all historians, whatever else their objectives', legitimate actions by contributing 'consciously or not, to the creation, dismantling and restructuring of images of the past which belong not only to the world of specialist investigation but to the public sphere of man as a political being'.[46]

Yet knowing that perceptions of Roman history changed, knowing which ancient authors went in and out of fashion and noting the comparisons drawn between the ancient and modern is one thing, understanding why is another. For this it is necessary to look at the work Rome was made to do in each debate. The usefulness of the ancient world to politicians debating contemporary issues is well documented. Lord Palmerston, Benjamin Disraeli, William Gladstone and Robert Lowe were just a few who famously cited from Latin texts in parliament. Some politicians also actively and deeply engaged with the ancient world and produced scholarly accounts or translations of ancient texts. Gladstone, for instance, proved to be equally adept at translating Horace as he was in delivering speeches in parliament. Seeley acknowledged the debt historians and politicians

owed each other. 'Politics', he stated, 'are vulgar when they are not liberalized by history, and history fades into mere literature when it loses sight of its relation to practical politics'.[47] Haverfield and the historian, Liberal politician and one-time Ambassador to the United States, James Bryce, also recognized the value of history to politics. On 15 February 1915, Haverfield wrote to Bryce asking him to deliver a lecture at the annual meeting of the Roman Society on the Roman and Russian Empires. Such a lecture, he believed, 'would show everyone that Roman history is not without its present-day importance'.[48] Hence there was a conscious decision to invoke Rome in debates and, in this way, as Kathryn Castle states, history 'became a partner in the controlling ideology of the age'.[49]

The importance of scientific tracts to the book is evident from the way scientific 'proof' of a racial hierarchy that justified the control of non-white imperial peoples and allowed elite Englishmen to maintain a race and class hierarchy in Britain, was legitimated by Rome. Regardless of growing calls for a more specialized school curriculum that should, if anything, have lessened the tendency to look to the ancient past, scientists contributing to the construction of the 'other' in the Empire and at home (and latterly to the construction of a new origin myth), were reliant on translations of ancient texts and modern accounts of Roman and ancient British history. In short, the Classics and Roman history stood behind (sometimes some way behind) the concept of the 'other'.[50] For instance, the President of the Ethnological Society John Crawfurd and the philologist, Headmaster of Marlborough College and from 1895 Dean of Canterbury, Frederic William Farrar, both referred to the work of Roman historians in their studies of race.[51] Historians were equally indebted to scientists. In one instance, accusations of inadequacy in the face of scientific advancement from the anatomist and ethnologist Robert Knox who maintained historians and other intellectuals 'attached no special meaning to the term' race 'for reasons best known to themselves', caused historians to acknowledge the value of science.[52] H. C. Coote in *The Romans of Britain* (1878) and H. M. Scarth in *Early Britain, Roman Britain* (1882) both incorporated scientific theories into their accounts of Roman Britain to support the idea that the Romans were the biological ancestors of modern Britons.

The power of the press as an opinion-former (and by the interwar years newspapers had become, according to Mark Hampton, 'arguably the most important medium of political communication and cultural influence'[53]) influenced my decision to include newspapers and journals. Parliamentary debates, speeches and meetings were reported in the press, editorials commented on issues of the day, letters were written to editors, book releases were

announced and advertisements frequently promoted the Empire. Reflecting the trend, often references to Rome were included in reports, editorials, letters and advertisements. For instance, *The Times* reporting on a meeting of civil engineers in 1900 commented that a 'highly and interesting part of the address was historical, and comprised an account of the waterworks of ancient Rome' drawn from Frontinus' *On Aqueducts*.[54] A letter from 'Geo. B.' to *The Times* in 1896 complaining at the harm done to plane-trees in St James's Park argued that a similar occurrence in Rome would have seen 'all the people from the Forum' rushing to 'avert by bountiful libations of water the direful consequences to the State the sign presaged',[55] while an advertisement for Selfridge & Co. in 1925 claimed 'efficient businesses' like governments were 'controlled autocratically'. Whether good 'as it was in Rome in the time of Augustus Caesar' or bad 'as in the days of Nero . . . undoubtedly the system allows government to do its work most *efficiently* and with the least expenditure of energy'.[56]

The cross-class appeal of the press was another factor. Editor of the *Birmingham Daily Post*, J. Thackray Bunce, observed that by 1893 newspapers and journals were:

> in every house, in every hand, amongst all classes – from the castle to the cottage, from the club to the village reading-room; in the factories of towns, in the country tap-rooms, wherever, indeed, men come together for business or pleasure, there, in one or other of its varieties, you find the newspaper.[57]

Additionally, newspapers employed novelists, social commentators and others influential in sociopolitical debates. Rudyard Kipling, friend of among others the wealthy South African businessman and politician, Cecil Rhodes; High Commissioner of South Africa, Viscount Milner; the hero of Mafeking, Robert Baden-Powell and the interwar Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin (Kipling's cousin), was employed as a journalist in India and Africa. An admirer of Horace, Kipling had clear conceptions of the role Rome played in the creation of modern England that he famously incorporated into *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906).[58] Likewise John Buchan, appointed by Baldwin as Governor-general of Canada in 1935 and equally at home writing the adventures stories of John Hannay as he was in composing biographies of Julius Caesar (1932) and Augustus (1937), worked as a correspondent for *The Times* and *Daily News* during the First World War.

Deciding to extend the conceptual and methodological scope of the book to include fiction with its own literary and intellectual history was based on three factors. First, as Edward Said points out, the novel was fundamental in

the nineteenth century to 'the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences'.[59] Frequently the Empire figured, if only as part of the scenery, in nineteenth-century novels thereby transforming conquest into something 'more acceptable to the European sensibility . . . than the shattering experience' for the defeated.[60] The principal characters in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1812–14) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) made their fortunes in the colonies. George Eliot had characters escaping to the colonies in times of adversity. In *Middlemarch* (1871–2), Ladislaw developed a 'new interest' in the colonies following his disgrace and alienation from society while Rex's reaction to Gwendolen's rejection of his marriage proposal in *Daniel Deronda* (1876) was to emigrate to Canada.[61]

Secondly, the popularity of fiction makes it a source that cannot be ignored. For Brian Street, it was the '"ethnographic novel", estranged in time and space from the claustrophobic Victorian drawing-room' that proved particularly popular. Henry Rider Haggard's adventure stories enabled '[f]or the first time information on other cultures, expressed in vivid, exciting tales' to be 'available to the mass public of England'.[62] National concerns were also explored in fictional narratives. Thomas Hardy's anxiety at the ruination of the countryside is apparent in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), while Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Dickens and William Morris all exposed the atrocious working and living conditions of urbanites. Without exception these novelists displayed a familiarity with the ancient world and, like scientists, increased their status by citing from ancient texts.

Thirdly, with popular writers, such as Dickens, Disraeli, Rider Haggard and Charles Kingsley, deeply involved in debates of the day, deconstructing the fictional narratives of those contributing to these debates provides supporting evidence, possibly more illuminating evidence, of attitudes. Effectively, the gap between author and idea made possible through the use of imaginary characters lessened the strictures imposed on authors by convention or political allegiance in public debate. The importance of race to Disraeli, for example, is clear in *Tancred* as Sidonia expressed views that surely reflected Disraeli's own.

> Is it what you call civilisation that makes England flourish? Is it the universal development of the faculties of man that has rendered an island, almost unknown to the ancients, the arbiter of the world? Clearly not. It is her inhabitants that have done this; it is an affair of race. A Saxon race, protected by an insular position, has stamped its diligent and methodic character on the century . . . All is race; there is no other truth.[63]

Equally, Coningsby's speech in the same novel displays Disraeli's admiration for the many achievements of Imperial Rome:

> Look at the great centuries of the Roman Empire! You had two hundred millions of human beings governed by a jurisprudence so philosophical that we have been obliged to adopt its laws, and live in perpetual peace. The means of communication, of which we now make such a boast, were far more vast and extensive in those days. What were the Great Western and the London and Birmingham to the Appian and Flaminian roads? After two thousand five hundred years, parts of these are still used . . . As for free trade, there never was a really unshackled commerce except in the days when the whole of the Mediterranean coast belonged to one power. What a chatter there is now about the towns, and how their development is cited as the peculiarity of the age, and the great security for public improvement. Why, the Roman Empire was the empire of great cities. Man was then essentially municipal.[64]

The novel, and for Andrew Sanders the historical novel in particular, had a vital role to play in producing 'modern' history. Historical novelists who 'could see character moulded by specific historical circumstances' could 'influence, and be influenced by, a particular turn of events' and, in this way, history was rendered 'immediate to the modern age'.[65]

Over a 70-year period, Rome became entrenched in intellectual thought and a significant force in sociopolitical debates primarily as a result of the fear of decline and fall. Rome's power lay in its paradoxes, in its ability to act as both a warning of decline and as a way to avoid it; its ability to fit a liberal ideology and yet be made to support an increasingly conservative ideology and its ability to be manipulated to support an imperialist or a nationalist agenda. But, Rome was not an empty symbol. The process of reinterpretation that intellectuals assiduously undertook between the 1850s and 1920s in order that Rome could be made to accommodate alternate views, support imperial and national debates and reinforce 'new' political ideologies in the Empire and at home supports this.[66] Seeing and understanding what contemporary tensions and fears changed attitudes to the ancient world can only add to our understanding of the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

1

Ancient Rome and the Debate on the British Empire

The 'civilizing' mission

The nineteenth century was a century of territorial expansion for Britain. Adding to territories acquired during the Napoleonic Wars, for instance, Ceylon, Trinidad and Mauritius, in the 1820s, Britain seized control of areas in the North East of Burma.[1] During the 1840s, when as Edith Hall puts it, the 'imperial acquisition of the planet shifted up a gear', Britain annexed Hong Kong, Sind and the Punjab among others.[2] Lord Dalhousie, Governor General of India from 1848–56, acquired further Indian states for Britain during the 1850s, and Nigeria and the Gold Coast became British colonies in 1861 and 1874, respectively. Fiji was added to the Empire in 1874, the Transvaal in 1877, Egypt in 1882 and Kenya in 1886. By the 1920s, Britain had at least some control over close to 25 per cent of the world.[3]

The control of subject peoples provided a political and philosophical challenge to Britain's elite who, with the passing of 1832 Reform Act, were prepared to countenance an extended (if limited) democracy at home and, yet, deny political rights to indigenous peoples in the dependencies. Justification for this lay with the belief that first, the dependencies were not capable of self-rule and, secondly, the civilizing mission that aimed to raise 'dependent' peoples from their lowly state. The concept of civilization had been a powerful influence on imperial ideology in the eighteenth century and Westerners were convinced of their suitability to take on the mantle of 'civilizer'. As the historian and political philosopher Adam Ferguson put it in 1767, the 'genius of political wisdom and civil arts appears to have chosen his seats in particular tracts of the earth, and to have selected his favourites in particular races of men'.[4] In effect, Westerners had bifurcated the world into civilized and uncivilized and Englishmen placed themselves at the apex of Western civilization. Ferguson, himself a Scotsman, acknowledged that it

was Englishmen who had 'carried the authority of government of law to a point of perfection'.[5]

Ideas of the progressive nature of civilization gathered force in the nineteenth century. Politician, historian and author of the *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842) and the hugely popular five-volume *History of England* (the first two volumes published in 1848), Thomas Babington Macaulay, believed England's history was 'emphatically the history of progress'. Proof of this lay with the transformation over a 700-year period of a 'wretched and degraded race' into 'the greatest and most highly civilised people that ever the world saw'. During this time, Englishmen had 'carried the science of healing, the means of locomotion and correspondence, every mechanical art, every manufacture, every thing that promotes the convenience of life, to a perfection which our ancestors would have thought magical'.[6] Therefore, in Macaulay's opinion as he famously expressed it in his *Minute on Indian Education* (1835), educating the indigenous population of India to be 'English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect' would ensure their progression and ultimately fit India and presumably other dependencies for self-government.[7] An additional benefit that arose out of British rule was the protection of 'lesser' races from exploitation by local rulers. The British naturalist, Sir Joseph Banks, encapsulated the paternalistic attitude that pervaded the consciousness of those intent on controlling, and so the argument went bettering, the lives of subject peoples living under British 'protection'. Following his expedition to Niger in 1799, Banks wrote to the President of the Board of Trade, Lord Liverpool, stating that:

> in a very few years a trading company might be established under immediate control of the Government, who could take upon themselves the whole expense of the measure, would govern the Negroes far more mildly and make them far more happy than they are now under the tyranny of their arbitrary princes.[8]

Raising savages to manhood would then, in John Ruskin's estimation, redeem them from 'despairing into peace'.[9] Hence, the civilizing mission that produced what J. A. Mangan terms a 'mental myopia', eased the conscience of those who acknowledged that British rule over others was at variance with a liberal philosophy at home.[10]

Bound up in the 'civilizational argument' was the reception of ancient civilizations. From an early age, future imperial administrators were imbued with knowledge of the Classics and the possession of an Empire was conducive to the study of ancient empires.[11] Archaeologist Edward Falkener pointed out in

1851 the value of the study of the ancient past to those in authority, or intending to become so:

> The study of futurity is speculative, the present is wrapped up in that which is to come; and it is the past only which is complete. We are now in a state of progression, the future is shrouded in uncertainty and we gain knowledge and experience only from the past.[12]

In line with Britain's liberal philosophy, it was Classical Greece and the Roman Republic that appealed to intellectuals. While Greece attracted liberal thinkers, the Whig interpretation of Roman history romanticized the Senate and extolled the Republican virtues of liberty and patriotism.[13] It was the 'fittest men', John Stuart Mill wrote in 1831, 'the educated gentlemen of the country (for such the free citizens of Athens, and in its best times, of Rome, essentially were)' who enabled these ancient civilizations to exercise world power.[14] Proof of this was evidenced in Athens as 'the affairs of that little commonwealth were successively managed' to such an extent that Athens became 'the source of light and civilization to the world', while in Rome 'the same fact' was 'certainly demonstrated, by the steady unintermitted progress of that community from the smallest beginnings to the highest prosperity and power'.[15] In other words, for Mill, the fittest of Romans, the men who had gained and successfully administered an Empire, were Republicans. The eighteenth-century playwright George Lillo's (1693–1739) *Christian Hero*, which was republished in 1810, shows the high esteem in which the Republic was held in the early nineteenth century.

> Degenerate Rome! By godlike Brutus freed
> From Caesar and his temporary chain
> Your own ingratitude renew'd those bonds
> Beneath whose galling weight you justly perished.[16]

Fascination with the Classics and ancient history ensured references to Roman history were not infrequent in contemporary debates and comparisons with the Roman Republic were especially common in discussion on the British Empire.[17] Not only had the Republic built up an Empire but also, as a writer for London's *Monthly Review* explained it, their mixed constitution resembled Britain's.

> It is certain, that a thorough acquaintance with the Roman government must afford the most useful information to the subjects of a free State, and more especially to our own: for there is undoubtedly a very strong