

The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature

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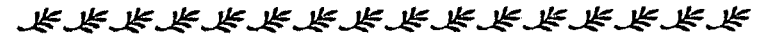
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The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature

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Barbarism and Civilization: Political Writing, History, and Empire

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During the period covered by this volume Britons often claimed that the light of civilization had passed from the ancient Greeks to the Romans to modern Europeans, but not all critics in Europe agreed on where to draw the line between civilization and barbarism. And was 'barbarism' always deplorable? If 'barbarous' ancestors resisted Roman imperialism 'animated by a love of liberty', this could be a source of pride.¹ For many Britons in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the distinction was not a purely theoretical concern but a practical issue as well. Britain's expanding empire brought it into contact with peoples who did not conform to European notions of civilization, practised strange religions, had disparate historical traditions, and appeared to be at varying stages of development. Few observers in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe seriously feared that these distant and not-too-distant races posed a military threat to their own security, but many strove to understand such concepts as civilization, barbarism, and culture and to grasp the relationship between them. Some drew a distinction between barbarians, who knew how to write or had a history, and savages, who belonged largely to illiterate societies and were not mentioned in classical sources or the Bible; others simply collapsed the distinction and used terms such as 'savage' and 'barbarian' interchangeably. Some thinkers drew on the idea of a ladder of civilization that extended from savagery at one end to civilization at the other. Colonial administrators and politicians wondered, or so

they said, how the Empire might improve the lives of non-Europeans and bring them up from barbarism to levels of civilization that were enjoyed in Europe. But civilization could be fragile. Historians such as Adam Ferguson observed that the Roman empire in the West eventually plunged back into 'barbarism, superstition and ignorance': the challenge for Britain's empire was to avoid a similar fate.²

For many thinkers and intellectuals, a major point of reference in these discussions was the world of Greek and Roman antiquity, which was perceived to be accomplished, literate, and pre-industrial. Were they savages or barbarians, these Greeks and Romans, or were they simply classical?³ Writers identified with the Greeks and Romans or, by contrast, they compared the ancients to non-Europeans, and in the process attempted to define what it meant to be European subjects. Enlightenment notions of liberty, progress, and selfhood were being worked out in relation to ancient texts as well as in relation to knowledge about non-European peoples over the earth. The idea of barbarism was central to the formulation of the sovereign European subject, and it was an idea to which historians, political writers, and other intellectuals obsessively returned as they grappled with the 'modernity' of Europe in an age of globalization.

Empire and Revolution

The relationship between civilization and barbarism was a preoccupation for writers such as Edward Gibbon and Edmund Burke. For them, order and civilization went hand in hand; order was a guarantee of freedom, and the collapse of order could spell disaster for the civilized world. The latter point had been recently brought home to Gibbon by the events leading up to the French Revolution and by the violence of the Terror. Gibbon, like Burke, saw in the Revolution the exaltation of despotism and tyranny, and was dismayed to see existing structures of power pushed to the brink with the execution of the king and the end of the *ancien régime*. In France, for him, 'a people of slaves' had 'suddenly become a nation of tyrants and cannibals'.⁴ Gibbon 'consistently viewed the prospect of mob rule and demagoguery with no less horror than the naked power of the prince', and this was because rabble-rousers and demagogues created confusion and ended up destroying the state.⁵ 'This total subversion of all rank, order, and government, could be productive only of a popular monster, which after devouring everything else, must finally devour itself.'⁶ Revolutionaries and fanatics were sowing the seeds of what could easily turn into a despotism worse than the French monarchy, and, as the Roman empire had shown, despotism would lead

to decay, instability, and collapse. As long as the Roman empire had been administered in 'a spirit of moderation', and as long as the emperors did not seek to rule the entire world, the empire had prospered, Rome had been safe, and the legions succeeded in warding off even the most powerful barbarians. Within that political framework, and within the stability provided by enlightened and pragmatic emperors, arts, laws, and the civilized life flourished. As for Rome, so for France.

If despotic emperors were a major threat to this conception of progress and civilization, barbarism was another. For Gibbon, the barbarians had the ability to tear the fabric of civilization into shreds, a feat they accomplished when they sacked Rome and set the city on fire. Yet barbarism was not the province of Goths and Vandals alone: it was acquired by Romans when they became too prosperous for their own good or when they themselves came into contact with barbarians. Soldiers who were dispatched to fight battles in distant places picked up 'the vices of strangers and mercenaries'; these men 'first oppressed the freedom of the republic, and afterwards violated the majesty of the purple'.⁷ The challenge for the Roman empire thus was to prevent 'the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness' as well as to resist invasions from the north and the east, and eventually the empire failed on both counts.

The challenge for contemporary Europe was of a different type, however, since, in Gibbon's estimation, the region was now characterized by a 'general state of happiness, the system of arts, and laws, and manners, which so advantageously distinguish, above the rest of mankind, the Europeans and their colonies'.⁸ The ancient Romans had been unaware 'of the extent of their danger, and the number of their enemies'.⁹ But the nations of modern Europe had passed a threshold and become civilized; they appeared not to be at war with each other, and they agreed that their 'common enemy' was 'the savage nations of the globe', which were too far from Europe to be an immediate danger.¹⁰ In Europe itself, 'independent Barbarism' was constricted to a narrow area, 'and the remnant of Calmucks or Uzbecks, whose forces may be almost numbered, cannot seriously excite the apprehensions of the great republic of Europe'.¹¹ Again, European nations were the civilized beneficiaries of gunpowder as well as mathematics, chemistry, the mechanical sciences, and architecture. 'Cannon and fortifications now form an impregnable barrier against the Tartar horse; and Europe is secure from any future irruption of Barbarians; since, before they can conquer, they must cease to be barbarous.'¹² One needed to be on the lookout for 'new enemies and unknown dangers' from unexpected sources, but, as far as Gibbon could tell, Europe in the present seemed safer than the Roman empire just before its dissolution.¹³

If, moreover, the most severe blows to the Roman empire were dealt by despotic emperors, corrupted by luxury and advised by a servile court, the possibility of despotic rule in modern Europe was limited by a series of factors. Gibbon wrote: 'The abuses of tyranny are restrained by the mutual influence of fear and shame; republics have acquired order and stability; monarchies have imbibed the principles of freedom, or, at least, of moderation; and some sense of honour and justice is introduced into the most defective constitutions by the general manners of the times.'¹⁴ Besides, would-be invaders from Tartary would have to overcome the Russians, the Germans, the French, and the British, all of whom might also unite to defend Europe from the 'savage conqueror'.¹⁵ Even if, by some stroke of good fortune, the foreigners succeeded in conquering Europe up to its westernmost boundaries, the Europeans would take to the sea and transport themselves to America, there to 'revive and flourish' among their own 'colonies and institutions'.¹⁶ But that desperate scenario was not about to come to pass. The prospect for Europe's survival was very strong, and it was not likely to be overwhelmed by barbarians in the foreseeable future.

Gibbon's dislike of the mob and extremism made him respect Burke ('I admire his eloquence—I approve his politics, I adore his chivalry'¹⁷), and both scorned the barbarism of the despot, the tyrant, and the herd. Yet Burke's warnings about the excesses of empire were far more strident than Gibbon's and more urgently directed against the British empire of his own day. On America, France, India, and Ireland Burke did not hesitate to indict what he saw as violations of authority and liberty. 'He opposed the injustice of the system of Protestant control in Ireland, and recognized without regret the inevitability of American independence and saw the capriciousness and legal pedantry on which George III's hollow power relied and rested.'¹⁸ As for India, in the Ciceronian speeches he delivered during the impeachment of Warren Hastings, Burke 'saw through the abusive distortions of civilizational hierarchies, racial superiority, and assumptions of cultural impoverishment by which British power justified its territorial expansion and commercial avarice in India and elsewhere'.¹⁹ The writings on the French Revolution were of a piece with the speeches about India—the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* were written and first published in 1790, that is, roughly at the midway point in the impeachment of Hastings—and, in fact, implied an analogy between the *ancien régime* and the Indian social order. For Burke, both were responsible for upholding aristocratic values and old traditions; these values and traditions had been destroyed by violent revolutions, realized in one case by the French mob and in the other by the British East India Company.

Burke's use of rhetorical devices in his writings and speeches, his flowery eloquence, and even—or especially—the familiarity with classical Greek and Roman

models, made him the more suspect in the eyes of radicals such as Thomas Paine. Burke's knowledge of Greek and Latin antiquity was wide-ranging, as a glance at his writings and speeches indicates, and he loosely modelled himself on Cicero in persecuting Hastings through the long years of the impeachment. 'We have all in our early education read the Verronian orations', he said, on 16 June 1794, in his summing-up:

We read them not merely to instruct us, as they ought to do, in the principles of eloquence, to instruct us in the manners, customs and Laws of the ancient Romans, of which they are an abundant repository, but we read them for another motive for which the great Author published them, namely that he should leave to the world and the latest posterity a monument by which it should be shewn what course a great public Accuser in a great cause ought to follow, and as connected with it, is what course Judges ought to pursue in such a cause.²⁰

Burke was grand and prolix, and welcomed the comparison with Cicero; he, like his exemplar, deployed winding classical periods in speeches that dragged on for too long. In the same June oration Burke referred to the deaths of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette and to the fall of the parliament of Paris in tones that laid bare his anguish. He then concluded his speech:

But if you stand, and stand I trust you will, together with the fortune of this ancient Monarchy, together with the ancient Laws and liberties of this great and illustrious Kingdom; may you stand as unimpeached in honour as in power; may you stand not as a substitute for virtue, but as an ornament of virtue, as a security for virtue; may you stand long and long stand the terror of Tyrants; may you stand the refuge of afflicted Nations; may you stand a sacred Temple for the perpetual residence of an inviolable Justice.²¹

The exaggerations, the rhetorical sparkle, the counter-revolutionary sentiments, and the defence of ancient monarchy would have appalled Paine, as would the earlier invocation of the ancient Romans.

Well before the end of the Hastings impeachment Burke had been criticized for his writings on France, when again he self-consciously followed classical models of rhetoric. Scholars have discerned the influence of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian on the *Reflections*.²² Classical tropes are deployed not just in the description of Marie-Antoinette but also elsewhere in the *Reflections* where Burke seeks to evoke sympathy and to dramatize the violent behaviour of the revolutionaries. Burke was excoriated for serving aristocratic values in these passages, even though he believed he was defending the rights of those oppressed by overweening despotism. Paine famously said that Burke 'pities the plumage but forgets the dying bird', thus implying that Burke sympathized

with the aristocratic victims of the Revolution and disregarded the legitimate sufferings of those who rose up in revolt. Paine went on to attack him for privileging style over substance: 'Accustomed to kiss the aristocratical hand that hath purloined him from himself, he degenerates into a composition of art, and the genuine soul of nature forsakes him. His hero or his heroine must be a tragedy-victim expiring in show, and not the real prisoner of misery, sliding into death in the silence of a dungeon.'²³ Burke's fondness for polished prose and his mastery of hyperbole were held against him, and his smoothness and rotundity were felt to come in the way of true self-expression. These were features of a prose style he had perfected by his reading of the ancients. The Romantics discounted Burke on precisely these issues. 'This is because for Romantic period radicals such as Paine and Wollstonecraft,' Saree Makdisi writes, 'the contours of individual freedom must be defined by voluntary self-regulation, self-limitation, self-denial—a rejection of figurative and verbal, as well as bodily and sensual, excess—rather than by externally enforced regulation, limitation and denial.'²⁴

Paine's response to Burke was forceful and vigorous, and he, like Burke, quoted from Greek or Latin sources *en passant* and referred to the great names of antiquity, but, unlike Burke, he 'had absolutely no reverence for antiquity or for the artistic masterpieces of Greece and Rome'.²⁵ He said he had 'no notion of yielding the palm of the United States [his adopted country] to any Grecians or Romans that were ever born'.²⁶ Humankind had improved its condition over two thousand years, he wrote, and had no need to look for precedents in ancient history. Paine believed in progress and wrote that moderns enjoyed more rights than many of the ancients ever did. 'Could the mist of antiquity be cleared away, and men and things be viewed as they really were, it is more than probable that they would admire us, rather than we them', he said, in expressing a thought that occurs more than once in his writings.²⁷

Paine objected to the classics as irrelevant in the search for political ideals, but their relevance *had* been given a fresh lease of life in the eighteenth century. No less an event than the French Revolution itself took 'its inspiration, iconography and institutions primarily from classical antiquity'.²⁸ Of course, the versions of antiquity that were followed by the revolutionaries varied considerably, and no single conception of antiquity appealed to all groups during the Revolution. Yet the idea that antiquity might have a contemporary political relevance was a fierce riposte to those who had attacked the study of Greece and Rome for its musty detachment and antiquarian fetishes. Early and late contemporaries of Burke, such as J. J. Winckelmann and Friedrich August Wolf, were also providing the materials for political readings of antiquity. In the *Prolegomena ad Homerum*

(*'Prolegomena to Homer'*, 1795), Friedrich August Wolf had linked classicism to the Greek genius and had identified 'the central subject of philology as the Greek national character'.²⁹ The burden of classical scholarship, after Winckelmann and Wolf, was to recuperate the national genius of the Greeks, a genius which was thought to have attained its full flower in the fifth century BCE, languished in the Roman period, and then entered a period of prolonged decline in the Byzantine and, especially, the Ottoman centuries. Following the writings of Wolf, Herder, and the Romantics, many supporters of the Greeks in the War of Independence justified their cause on the grounds that modern Greeks were the true heirs to ancient Greeks and that the Greek people needed to be helped as the inheritors of classical culture. The Greek War of Independence gave Hellenism and the study of the past a political urgency, but this sense of urgency was itself the creation of an intense, and narrowly focused, philhellenism that traced its origins to intellectuals such as Winckelmann and Wolf.

This approach to the past tended to highlight the ancient traditions of a land and people—the Greeks or Romans, for example—and to endow epochs and cultures with a far-reaching importance. The task of the historian was, in Christian Gottlob Heyne's words, to come to an appreciation of the particular 'national' genius of a people, 'its customs, rites, institutions, laws, arts, crafts, and all products of the human intellect'.³⁰ Inevitably, as Seamus Deane observed, this perspective on the past overvalued an originary creation, which was then adapted, modified, or revised down the ages: for Wolf, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* had been composed originally by the illiterate Homer in a remote time and then augmented and edited as they had been handed down by oral tradition. The approach was shared by Gibbon, who looked back nostalgically to the Roman Republic, which had been corrupted and then ruined by the conduct of imperial despots, the depravities of tyrants, the excesses of Christianity, and the invasions of barbarians. Similarly, in contrasting Britain to revolutionary France, Burke posited the legacy of an ancient and unwritten constitution among the Britons. 'Burke, like Wolf, was the writer who was now clarifying its status by asking his audience to recognize that, in all its successive variations, it was an emanation of a national character that Burke wanted to define not only as British but also as the most central, because most fully developed, national character of the modern world as the Greek national character had been of the classical world.'³¹ The Jacobins in France had broken with monarchical tradition and, by insisting on the creation of a new Roman republic, were coming dangerously close to distracting Britain from this hallowed inheritance. As Deane writes: 'National character contains within itself that theory of antiquity which, in its Roman political form (in France) and in its Greek literary form (in Germany) provided a basis,

however frail and even illusory, for the revolution and the romanticism of the European bourgeoisie.³²

In his own way, Burke, like his contemporary Gibbon, was drawing attention to the quality of the barbarism that posed a threat to civil society, and for Burke, as for Gibbon, barbarism was not something peculiar to non-European societies alone. For Burke, in fact, it was regularly Europeans who manifested barbarism, whether on the Continent or outside it. In France barbarism took the form of the Jacobins and revolutionaries; in India, of Warren Hastings and the East India Company; in Ireland, of the Protestant Ascendancy. What troubled Burke, as Deane suggests, were the attempts to naturalize these barbarisms and to give them the appearance of self-evident rightness. 'Civil society disappears and is replaced by barbarism, yet by a barbarism that defends itself in the name of or in the language of civil society. This is what makes these territories phantasmal. They are unreal and yet real, the more real because they are unreal—like Paris. They are foreign, yet their foreignness is defined by the contrast they make with what is native and natural.'³³ The Jacobins justified their tactics and demands by insisting on the universalism of their principles and by seeking precedents in antiquity; Hastings and his supporters in the East India Company claimed that their actions were consistent with the traditional practices of the natives in Bengal. Each group gave the illusion of inevitability to their actions, but Burke attempted to expose the actuality behind the illusion.

Deane further reads Burke's writings of the 1790s to show how modernity became possible in revolutionary France.³⁴ What is interesting in Burke, as in some other skilled readers of antiquity, is how he takes a detour through the ancient world to proclaim the features of a modernity that lie ahead of his time. The French revolutionaries explicitly followed in the traditions of ancient Rome, as Karl Marx also saw: 'Camille Desmoulins, Danton, Robespierre, Saint Just, Napoleon, the heroes as well as the parties and the masses of the old French Revolution, performed the task of their time in Roman costume and with Roman phrases, the task of unchaining and setting up modern *bourgeois* society.'³⁵ Yet what they wrought in the territory of France, via the recourse to classical antiquity, was a modern secular republic, free of the monarchy, bleached dry of the aristocracy, and disconnected from the many long-established traditions of France; they severed the bonds that tied together land, blood, national character, and tradition.³⁶ This particular claim to modernity was peculiar to the French case, although Burke also implicitly sketched out the possibilities of its emergence in eastern India. In Bengal, according to Burke, Hastings and his allies were distorting the connection between land and tradition in passing off their own knavish behaviour as local custom and in stating that bribery was acceptable

in the late Mughal period. But especially in revolutionary France, Burke located a conception of the modern that was, for him, liable to shatter the harmony of civil society.

Burke's attack on Hastings's immorality in India and his defence of the *ancien régime* made contemporaries think of him as a spokesperson for the Oriental, the aristocratic, and the traditional. The Romantics' objection to Burke was not that he spoke about the Orient, but that he spoke about it in his particular way. Makdisi makes the argument that the criticism of figures such as Burke also functioned as a criticism of Oriental style, and that it connected Paine and the Romantics to 'the most prominent cultural component of imperialism, namely, Orientalism'. He remarks that most of the Romantics 'had at least a passing flirtation with... Orientalism—if not a full-blown Orientalist phase—and that almost all had some kind of interest in the larger imperial project, of which Orientalism was merely one manifestation among others'.³⁷ And he claims that Romantic philhellenism fuelled the distinction between conquering Europeans and conquered non-Europeans. In other words, 'the Romantic obsession with Greece unfolded precisely under circumstances in which Europeans were trying to differentiate themselves from non-Europeans'.³⁸ One might read John Keats's poem 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' (1816) in this vein, for the poet 'explicitly compares the sudden unveiling of the new literary world made available to him by that volume to the prospect made available to the gaze of the imperial adventurer'.³⁹ The poem's reference to 'realms of gold', 'goodly states and kingdoms', and Cortés are suggestive of explorers and recall the many colonial travellers who set off in search of treasure or land. Strikingly, it was a translation of Homer that stirred Keats, whose knowledge of Greek was minimal, to undertake the composition of the poem and to conjure up its breathtaking vistas. Hellenism, on this interpretation, serves not just as the source of the young poet's inspiration but also as a marker of his European identity; it reflects the attempts made, especially after Winckelmann, to bind ancient Greece ever closer to Europe and to its purported roots.

There is much to be said for such a reading of Romantic literature, and the Orientalism of British Romantic texts can hardly be doubted. One need only think of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, Byron's *Turkish Tales*, *Childe Harold*, and *Don Juan*, Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh*, Percy Shelley's *Ozymandias* and *Revolt of Islam*, and Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, to name merely a few of the most famous works, in order to recall the extent of Romantic Orientalism. The knowledge that went into these creations was acquired from travellers, administrative narratives, and a variety of other sources: in late 1812, for example, Shelley was consulting Sir William Jones's

Works, Robertson's *Disquisition concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India*, and Moor's *Hindu Pantheon*.⁴⁰ Since more than 150 million people were subjected to direct and indirect British rule between 1790 and 1830, it is not surprising that, for political and administrative reasons alone, European accounts of the East proliferated in this period. Accounts of India, the Ottoman lands, and other regions had begun to appear in larger numbers in the late eighteenth century, after the establishment of bodies such as the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, and they continued to shape some of the most popular creations of the Romantic imagination. As critics such as Makdisi acknowledge, for the Romantics, as for many other artists, the engagement with the Orient (whether real or imaginary) was enabling, fecund, and motivating.

What remains nonetheless remarkable is the crossing of Hellenism and Orientalism that we find in some of these very texts. Indeed, the most celebrated compositions of philhellènes such as Shelley and Byron could not have been written without a passionate interest in the cultures of the East, to which these artists frequently turned. In their different ways, Shelley's *Prometheus Bound* and Byron's *Don Juan* are explicable in terms of Indian, Turkish, and other Eastern traditions as well as in terms of Hellenism. Where Byron was less impressed than Shelley by European claims to superiority, both combined Hellenic and Eastern themes, motifs, and characters in their work. Exactly why such a combination should have taken root in the poetic imagination at this date is difficult to say, but geopolitical developments outside Britain are undoubtedly part of the explanation. The Ottoman empire's hold on Greece and the Greek War of Independence were partly responsible for turning philhellenic eyes toward non-European cultures. Another factor was British imperialism in Asia, and the political, economic, and cultural investment of Britons in places brought under British rule. Romantic Hellenism and British writing about the East are both responses to international events which Britons themselves did much to influence.

This representation of Hellenism might suggest that Hellas was wholly a European or British obsession, but such a suggestion would be misleading. For one thing, many intellectuals and politicians in North America counted themselves as lovers of the ancient Greeks, although, just as in Europe, some were careful to mark a distance between themselves and what they perceived as a simplistic devotion to the cult of antiquity. Many Americans saw the American and French revolutions and the Greek War of Independence as blows for freedom and democracy, which they traced back to ancient Athens or the Roman Republic. For another, philhellenism, and indeed a passion for Latin as well as Greek literature, can be seen in the writings of the Eurasian author Henry Louis

Vivian Derozio (1809–31), who lived all his life in Calcutta and composed verse in English. Like many Romantics, Derozio died young, and like many of them, he supported the Greeks in the War of Independence. The titles of his poetic compositions are indicative of his adoration of Greece: 'Thermopylae', 'The Greeks at Marathon', 'Address to the Greeks', and 'Sappho', to quote a few. Derozio was drawn to the modern Greek cause partly because of his heroes Shelley and Byron, but he can also be seen as a radical in the spirit of Tom Paine, whose *Rights of Man* was something of a best-seller in colonial Calcutta. 'Tom Paine's abolitionism, anti-monarchical views and advocacy of equal rights found an echo in Derozio's politics, as indeed his critique of religion too must have done', writes his most recent editor.⁴¹ Unlike Paine, but like Shelley, Derozio read the works of Jones and other members of the Asiatic Society and incorporated his Asiatic researches into his poetry. Yet Derozio also espoused a complicated nationalism (or proto-nationalism) and anti-colonialism, and thus stood at a remove from radicals such as Shelley, for whom Indian self-rule was not a desirable prospect.⁴² That the non-European Orient was a limit-point for radicals such as Paine and Shelley can be understood from the texts of Derozio, who yearned for the renewal of the Indian nation no less than the freedom of the Greeks.

The Lays of Empire

National character and modernity were preoccupations of Thomas Babington Macaulay and were subjects that he frequently explored through such writings as his articles for the *Edinburgh Review*, his *History of England*, and his *Lays of Ancient Rome*. The *Lays* indirectly resumes the themes of Burke, Gibbon, and Wolf and presents Macaulay's versions of the early ballads or 'lays' of Rome.⁴³ In effect, Macaulay was sifting through Livy and the Roman historians and turning the material he found there into the ballad poetry of the earliest Romans. His introduction refers to the theories of James Perizonius (1651–1715) and Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776–1831). The latter's *History of Rome*, which began to be published in English in 1827, argued that the early books of Livy consisted of legendary or mythological material and could not be taken for historical truth. Macaulay's approach was not to regard the legends as the basis of unvarnished fact but to posit the existence of an older poetic tradition, anterior to classical Latin literature. There was, he said, 'an earlier Latin literature, a literature truly Latin, which has wholly perished, which had, indeed almost wholly perished long before those whom we are in the habit of regarding as the greatest Latin writers were born'.⁴⁴ The conceit of Macaulay's book was to turn this 'literature truly

Latin' back into metrical form and to turn it into English rather than its original language.

An important reason for reconstructing the early poetic compositions was their closeness to the founding moments of Roman history, to the epochs of Romulus and Remus, the Sabines, the Tarquins, and Lucretia. Once the closeness of the ballads to the founding of Rome was established, and once it was granted that over the ages they had been embellished, it was easy to see why these stories were 'unlike almost every thing else in Latin literature, native where almost everything else is borrowed, imaginative where almost every thing else is prosaic'.⁴⁵ The 'magnificent, pathetic, and truly national legends' had been gradually forgotten by the Romans, who came under the spell of Greek literature and Greek models, and eventually only a hesitant memory of them remained, so that they survived in a highly sublimated form in the works of such historians as Livy.⁴⁶ But Macaulay was bringing them back to life in his *Lays*, in English, and in the persona of 'ancient minstrels who know only what a Roman citizen, born three or four hundred years before the Christian era, may be supposed to have known, and who are in nowise above the passions and prejudices of their age and nation'.⁴⁷ The *Lays* were nearer to the heart of 'a literature truly Latin' and to the national character; and even if the *Lays* showed the Romans devoid of 'Christian charity and chivalrous generosity', they nonetheless granted the English reader access to the earliest Romans' numerous 'great virtues', including 'fortitude, temperance, veracity, spirit to resist oppression, respect for legitimate authority, fidelity in the observing of contracts, disinterestedness, [and] ardent patriotism'.⁴⁸

Macaulay published the *Lays*, in 1842, after his journey to Italy, and in that sense we may say that Rome inspired the *Lays*. Yet Rome only brought to the boil ideas that had been simmering for many years. Macaulay himself said that the inspiration for the *Lays* came to him near the foothills of the Nilgiris and that the poems were mostly composed in 'dreary' and 'disagreeable' sojourns in India.⁴⁹ As the composition of an Englishman in the colonies, the *Lays* offered a complex triangulation of Rome, England, and India. At the high point of Victorian imperialism, Richard Jebb thought the *Lays* were 'heart-stirring' and compared them to Rudyard Kipling's 'best poem—as many people deem it—the "Recessional"; that is, rhetorical power, kindled into poetry by the kind of emotion which great national events or causes stir in poetically-minded men'.⁵⁰ The hearts stirred by the *Lays* were English, not Roman; and the poems were an English meditation, invented in an English colony, on nationhood and national character. Horatius is made to speak for the courage by which modern nations and cultures are defended and empires are sustained:

'To every man upon this earth
Death cometh soon or late,
And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers
And the temples of his Gods?'⁵¹

The *Lays* were the compositions of a man who was living in India, dreaming about England, and writing about Rome.

What else, apart from important official papers, did three and a half years in India inspire Macaulay to write? The *History of England*, perhaps, given that he was already thinking about the work in India. That Macaulay should have been thinking about a history of England in India would be, of course, unsurprising to anyone familiar with the psychology of colonialism. Macaulay, himself the son of a Scottish father, never forgot that he was an Englishman in India; and almost every page of his Indian prose bears the imprint of his national identity. That Macaulay was indeed musing about the *History of England* in India is clear from his writings, including a review of James Mackintosh's *History of the Revolution in England in 1688*. Mackintosh had intended to write a history of England from 1688 to 1789, but he died in 1832, leaving the bulk of his history unfinished, save for the relatively small part that Macaulay reviewed, in July 1835, for the *Edinburgh Review*. Mackintosh, who collected some forty volumes of papers for a history he barely commenced, was Macaulay's intellectual predecessor as the Whig historian who would repudiate David Hume, and Macaulay relied heavily on Mackintosh's work, especially in the early volumes of his own *History of England*, itself an unfinished opus. Interestingly, Mackintosh served in India, as Recorder of Bombay from 1804 to 1811; he was subsequently a professor of law and general politics at the East India Company's College at Haileybury, and in 1830 was appointed to the Board of Control for India. The man who outlined the theory of the Whig account of England and the man who would execute that account both spent several years in India, and spent several years setting policy for India, while simultaneously thinking about the true shape of English history.

The Indian background makes the narrow geographical and political range of the *History* stand out all the more starkly: the *History of England* was an imperial history that, in Catherine Hall's words, 'banished the Empire to the margins'.⁵² It was resolutely a history of the English nation, and not a history of the Empire, even if the marginalization of empire called for a tendentious reading of English history. Scotland and Ireland were central to the narrative, Wales less so. Yet, mainly, Macaulay's work 'was a history of the imperial nation that made England

its centre and placed the colonies on the very outer limits, his own experience of India as profoundly alienating ensuring the impossibility of imagining it as belonging with the white nation'.⁵³ The inhabitants of North America, the Africans enslaved and transported to the Caribbean, and the natives of South Asia 'were the ghostly presences of the *History*, making possible the delineation of the peculiarities of the English'.⁵⁴ The spectral appearance of the colonized, when the colonized were mentioned at all, served largely to clarify the traits of the English, to emphasize their distinctive achievements, and to bring out the coherence of the national psyche.

Some critics have suggested that the concentration on England was the result of Macaulay's Thucydidean inclinations.⁵⁵ 'I did not much like Thucydides formerly', Macaulay wrote from Calcutta, in February 1835. 'I have now no hesitation in pronouncing him the greatest historian that ever lived.'⁵⁶ Where Herodotus took his readers to Persian courts, Egyptian priests, and Babylonian markets, and where Herodotus famously presented non-Greek as well as Greek perspectives on the Persian Wars, Thucydides offered a narrative of the Peloponnesian War that could be described, and that was described by many, as Athenocentric and heavily focused on strategic and political actualities. With the *History of England* Macaulay appears to have followed the precedent of Thucydides rather than Herodotus.⁵⁷ In his review of Mackintosh's fragment, long before the first volume of the *History* was published, Macaulay had set forth his understanding of English history:

The history of England is emphatically the history of progress. It is the history of a constant movement of the public mind, of a constant change in the institutions of a great society... In the course of seven centuries the wretched and degraded race have become the greatest and most highly civilised people that ever the world saw; have spread their dominion over every quarter of the globe, have scattered the seeds of mighty empires and republics over vast continents of which no dim intimation had ever reached Ptolemy or Strabo, have created a maritime power which would annihilate in a quarter of an hour the navies of Tyre, Athens, Carthage, Venice, and Genoa together, have 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, have produced a literature which may boast of works not inferior to the noblest which Greece has bequeathed to us, have discovered the laws which regulate the motions of the heavenly bodies, have speculated with exquisite subtlety on the operations of the human mind, have been the acknowledged leaders of the human race in the career of political improvement. The history of England is the history of this great change in the moral, intellectual, and physical state of the inhabitants of our own island. There is much amusing and instructive episodical matter; but this is the main action.⁵⁸

The important point was made not in the quasi-Ciceronian period but in the terser sentences that followed. The history of England was to be discovered in the changes discernible in 'our own small island'. The English nation had changed the rest of the world forever, but its true history was found in the transformation England had produced at home and not in the impact England had had on other people.

In truth, Macaulay had been thinking seriously about historical writing since at least the 1820s, well before he left for India. In 1824 he had reviewed William Mitford's *History of Greece* in a long essay for *Knight's Quarterly Magazine* that anticipated some of the themes essayed in the *History of England*. Like Grote and Mill at a later date, he had more enthusiasm than the conservative Mitford for the Greek legacy of political freedom. At the end of the review he offered a statement that has impressed some for its 'unsustainable intensity':⁵⁹

The dervish, in the Arabian tale, did not hesitate to abandon to his comrade the camels with their load of jewels and gold, while he retained the casket of that mysterious juice which enabled him to behold at one glance all the hidden riches of the universe. Surely it is no exaggeration to say that no external advantage is to be compared with that purification of the intellectual eye which gives us to contemplate the infinite wealth of the mental world, all the hoarded treasures of its primeval dynasties, all the shapeless ore of its yet unexplored mines. This is the gift of Athens to man. Her freedom and her power have for more than twenty centuries been annihilated; her people have degenerated into timid slaves; her language into a barbarous jargon; her temples have been given up to the successive depredations of Romans, Turks, and Scotchmen; but her intellectual empire is imperishable. And when those who have rivalled her greatness shall have shared her fate; when civilisation and knowledge shall have fixed their abode in distant continents; when the sceptre shall have passed away from England; when, perhaps, travellers from distant regions shall in vain labour to decipher on some mouldering pedestal the name of our proudest chief; shall hear savage hymns chanted to some misshapen idol over the ruined dome of our proudest temple; and shall see a single naked fisherman wash his nets in the river of the ten thousand masts;—her influence and her glory will still survive,—fresh in eternal youth, exempt from mutability and decay, immortal as the intellectual principle from which they derived their origin, and over which they exercise their control.⁶⁰

Scholars have noted the popularity of the commonplace that Macaulay developed in his final sentence. The idea of a traveller 'at the ruins of London in the future is for a period of a hundred years or so, from about 1770 to 1870, a rhetorical device', one that Macaulay deployed again, more famously, when he described a New Zealander standing beside a broken London Bridge and sketching the ruins of St Paul's.⁶¹ Here, in Macaulay's review, London was associated with Athens rather than with Rome, which was more commonly the comparandum

in Victorian ruminations on ruin and decay. Rome was the great imperial capital of antiquity, London of the nineteenth century, and the comparison established 'by its classical associations the transfer of learning (*translatio studii*) as well as the transfer of empire (*translatio imperii*) from ancient Rome to modern London' and foreshadowed 'the eventual *translatio imperii* from Britain to the next great imperial power'.⁶² Athens, too, was at times linked to London in *translatio*; and yet its presence in this passage can be explained not just by the citation of parallels but also by the 'gift' that Macaulay mentioned, the gift that made Athens's intellectual empire imperishable. The gift was like the 'mysterious juice' which allowed the dervish to gaze upon 'all the hidden riches of the universe'. It was encompassing, panoptic, total; it enabled its beneficiaries 'to contemplate the infinite wealth of the mental world, all the hoarded treasures of its primeval dynasties, all the shapeless ore of its yet unexplored mines'. The metaphors are tantalizing, and the language suggestive of mercantile adventurism: riches, wealth, treasures, ore. The prose recalls an imperialist fantasy in which the beholder greedily eyes the treasures of all the world and extends his rapacious hands to grasp the globe. It was this fantasy, in Macaulay's words, that survived in the present and into the future ever fresh, influential, and exempt from decay.

To return to Macaulay in India, the colonial administrator's voracious reading of classical Greek and Latin authors in the subcontinent was astonishing, even by the standards of voracious nineteenth-century classical scholars; he read Greek and Latin for 'three or four hours before breakfast'.⁶³ In India, Macaulay, who was 'always bookish', became 'almost pathologically so under the stress'.⁶⁴ Paragraph after paragraph of the extraordinary letters to his friend T. F. Ellis reflect Macaulay's devotion to Latin and, especially, Greek authors. The editor of Macaulay's letters, Thomas Pinney, writes that these letters are unmatched 'in the history of any public man anywhere, ever, for quantity and range'. He adds: 'It was in India that Macaulay became a classicist after his own fashion; that is, one who read and re-read through the whole sequence from Homer to Photius, from Plautus to Augustine, with undiminished and constantly renewed appetite.'⁶⁵

To be a 'classicist' in India was, for Macaulay, also a way of being British and of asserting his European identity among what he perceived as trying local conditions. 'My acquirements such as they are fit me far better for Europe than for Asia', he wrote to Charles Macaulay from Calcutta in December 1836.⁶⁶ And in July 1841 he reminisced to Macvey Napier: 'In India, I was an exile.'⁶⁷ Greek and Latin consoled him in the desolation he felt over the death of his sister Margaret; he was also affected by the loss of another sister, Hannah, to marriage. 'Indeed one might see his immersion in classical literature as a form of escapism both

from grief and also from life in India, which he saw as a kind of exile, necessary to secure the financial future of himself and his remaining siblings.'⁶⁸ It is nonetheless remarkable that Macaulay gave himself so entirely, so profoundly, and so overwhelmingly to Greek and Latin literature in order to cope with cultural displacement and the death of his sister. In a letter to Ellis, written in Calcutta and dated 8 February 1835, Macaulay mourned the death of his sister and then continued at length on the topic of Greek literature:

Dear Ellis,

The last month has been the most painful that I ever went through. Indeed, I never knew before what it was to be miserable. Early in January, letters from England brought me news of the death of my youngest sister. What she was to me no words can express. I will not say that she was dearer to me than anything in the world: for my sister who is with me was equally dear. But she was as dear to me as one human being can be to another. Even now, when time has begun to do its healing office, I cannot write about her without being altogether unmanned. That I have not utterly sunk under this blow I owe chiefly to literature. What a blessing it is to love books as I love them,—to be able to converse with the dead and to live amidst the unreal. Many times during the last few weeks I have repeated to myself those fine lines of old Hesiod.

εἰ γὰρ τις πένθος

[...]

I have gone back to Greek literature with a passion quite astonishing to myself. I have never felt anything like it. I was enraptured with Italian during the six months which I gave up to it. I was little less pleased with Spanish. But, when I went back to the Greek, I felt as if I had never known before what intellectual enjoyment was. Oh that wonderful people.⁶⁹

Macaulay's 'passion' for Greek literature was so consuming that he did not mention his sister's death again in the letter and veered toward the subject of classical literature for many lines more. He was able to discourse on the happiness he felt at being able to read Greek still in full adulthood, on his admiration for Pindar, transitions in the odes, the relationship between Pindar and Horace, the former's politics, and the authenticity of Hesiod's 'Shield of Achilles'—but he could not bear to speak again about the news that made him live through 'the most painful' weeks of his life. In fact, the letter concludes not with a recollection of his bereavement but with another quotation in the original Greek, now from Euripides' *Hippolytus*, directed chiefly at his correspondent Ellis, and with a postscript in which Macaulay quoted from Horace's *Odes* as he briefly resumed his discussion about Pindar. As he put it, he could not 'write about her without being altogether unmanned', by which he presumably meant that he could not

write about his dead sister without weeping, and he therefore determined not to write about her again. But there is something more vital here than the consolations of poetry, for what gave Macaulay courage and kept him aloft in those difficult days—that is, what rescued him from being ‘unmanned’—was Greek. It was Greek literature that helped Macaulay sublimate his grief, and, in the words of Hesiod, make him forget his melancholy and sorrow.

At about the same time that he wrote this letter Macaulay drafted the ‘Minute on Indian Education’ (dated 2 February 1835) that changed British policy in colonial India and strengthened the official position of English over and above classical Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian. The Minute was intended as a vehicle of colonial modernity, since it called for the central role of English as the means to aid the ‘intellectual improvement’ of the people of India.⁷⁰ Just as Western European languages had civilized Russia and helped it emerge from ‘a state as barbarous as that in which our ancestors were before the Crusades’, so would English help the natives.⁷¹ No reader of the Minute was in doubt about Macaulay’s views of the condition of Indian literature, and the implication of such remarks was that the Indians of his time lived in a state of semi- or complete barbarism. Indeed, so frequently has the Minute been quoted that its phrases are, for us, all too familiar: the single shelf of a European library that is worth the whole literature of India and Arabia, the intrinsic superiority of Western letters, the defective nature of historical and philosophical writing in Sanskrit, a geography that consists of seas of treacle and seas of butter, and so on. Macaulay also added that England was a nation of ‘high intellectual attainments’, and it was excellently placed to educate the natives ‘of a nation comparatively ignorant’; besides, the natives were clamouring for an education in English and were prepared to pay for it, hence, in the case of ‘all such subjects the state of the market ought to be decisive.’⁷² With his Minute Macaulay effectively reversed the position taken by William Jones in 1772, in his ‘Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations’, where Jones called for greater attention to be given to the literatures of the East than of ancient Greece and Rome.

For a document that was written at roughly the same time as the letter to Ellis of early February 1835, the Minute presents Greek and Latin in an unexpected light, for it advances the claim that ‘[t]he literature of England is now more valuable than that of classical antiquity’.⁷³ The Minute stands at odds with the declared passion for Greek and Latin literature in the letters of the same period and with the enthusiasm shown by the author for Greek and Latin literature in other contexts.⁷⁴ When Greek and Latin appear in the Minute they are mentioned to underline the relative ease with which English can be learned or to draw an analogy between Renaissance Europe and contemporary India. Thus, the Minute

suggests that since English is easier for Indians than Greek for English boys, and since Indians are already showing a great facility with the modern language, the notion that English is a difficult language to acquire is untrue. And secondly, the Minute likens English in India to Greek and Latin in Renaissance Europe—although this was anomalous, as several contemporaries were already pointing out, for Sanskrit and Persian, rather than Greek and Latin, had better claims to an analogous position in India. But Macaulay was not interested in exploring the anomalous nature, or even the coherence, of his own statements, and was more concerned with advocating the cause of English in India. For that purpose he was prepared to develop his case as strongly as possible, even if it led to contradiction.

The Minute proposes that English, rather than Greek and Latin, be taught in Indian colleges. It does not oppose Greek and Latin to Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian; the contrast is between English on the one hand, and Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian on the other: in other words, the contrast appears to be between European modernity and Oriental antiquity. As we saw earlier, Macaulay’s own way of being English in India was to immerse himself in Greek and Latin, and yet when it came to the education of Indian natives he proposed the teaching of English. The choice of English is remarkable, given that English literature was not yet institutionalized in the curriculum in the England of the 1830s, while Greek and Latin were (English was institutionalized in England as a college subject only after it was on the curriculum in India).⁷⁵ But Greek and Latin were so integral a part of his own self that Macaulay could not imagine a scenario in which they could be part of the identity of those others over whom he ruled. If Macaulay really had been interested in the creation of ‘a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’, he would have insisted that this class of persons be educated as thoroughly in Greek and Latin as an educated Englishman was. Only a few days after he dispatched the Minute, he wrote: ‘My admiration for the Greeks increases every day. It almost amounts to idolatry.’⁷⁶ But, for the Indians, he insisted on English and thereby revealed what appear to us as the contradictions in his own thinking.

Where Gibbon had earlier made a distinction between the savages of the New World and the non-Europeans who lived in Oriental nations with historical traditions, and where Burke had opposed ‘geographical morality’, Macaulay called for the transformation and perhaps even the obliteration of the native cultures of South Asia. This kind of change was to be achieved by British rule, and by violence if necessary, in the name of modernization and progress. Two years earlier, in July 1833, Macaulay had said in the House of Commons: ‘It is scarcely

possible to calculate the benefits which we might derive from the diffusion of European civilisation among the vast population of the East...⁷⁷ Indeed, it was a duty for England and for the East India Company to rule India, even in the face of danger and opposition, and to improve the lot of the Indians. 'To trade with civilised men is infinitely more profitable than to govern savages', and to make Indians a civilized people was an obligation for the English.⁷⁸ He went on to remark: 'To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have so ruled them as to have made them desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens, would indeed be a title to glory all our own.'⁷⁹ This was, of course, the standard liberal justification of empire: it took the line that a European education was self-evidently improving and that such an education was to be foisted on the natives whether they liked it or not. Macaulay's major contribution to the debate over Indian education was to associate English with modernization and progress; in the process, he attempted to place Greek and Latin in a special category where the languages would be available not to the educated Indians reportedly clamouring for a European education, but only to those Europeans who were already civilized, such as himself.

Overcoming Barbarism

What is the distance between civilization and barbarism? How are you to bridge the difference? Or, as Simon Goldhill has it: 'how many books do you need to civilize a brute?'⁸⁰ Macaulay did not specify a number, but he said that the books should be in English rather than Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic, or even Greek and Latin. Other writers imagined scenarios in which Greek was used to improve the lot of those who were unversed in European letters. Goldhill himself is referring to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), in which the monster comes upon a 'leathern portmanteau' that contains *Paradise Lost*, the *Sorrows of Young Werther*, and a volume of Plutarch's *Lives*. All three works give the monster 'extreme delight' and contribute to his education significantly, but it is Plutarch who teaches him 'high thoughts' and who elevates him 'above the wretched sphere of my own reflections, to admire and love the heroes of past ages'. The monster reads in Plutarch of histories and ancient republics, of lawgivers and statesmen, of 'men concerned in public affairs, governing or massacring their species', and he feels as a result 'the greatest ardour for virtue' and 'abhorrence for vice'.⁸¹ As Goldhill writes, 'Plutarch is a source and resource of moral feeling, of history, of models of virtue. He is a storehouse of Greek culture. Plutarch, for Shelley, is a necessary read in the self-formation of a civilized being.'⁸²

Shelley's *Frankenstein* emphasizes how personal identity and cultural education are shaped by texts and language, and it is instructive to see the place given to a Greek author such as Plutarch in the novel. But there is another work in addition to Plutarch's, and Milton's and Goethe's, that leaves a determining imprint on the monster, and it is the Comte de Volney's *Ruins of Empires* (*Les Ruines, ou Méditations sur les révolutions des empires*, 1791), the book which Felix uses to educate Safie. The invocation of Volney strikingly places Shelley's *Frankenstein* in a historical frame and recalls the fortunes of empires old and new. As Felix teaches Safie, the monster learns about 'the several empires at present existing in the world' and 'the manners, governments, and religions of the different nations of the earth'. He hears about 'the slothful Asiatics; of the stupendous genius and mental activity of the Grecians; of the wars and wonderful virtue of the early Romans—of their subsequent degenerating—of the decline of that mighty empire'. And he weeps with Safie 'over the hapless fate' of Native Americans after the discovery of the Americas.⁸³ Volney's book, at least in this particular evocation of it, reaffirms the Romantics' view of the ancient Greeks, expresses a note of caution about the Roman empire, and condemns the treatment of natives by Europeans in the Americas.

Volney moves the monster and rouses contradictory emotions in him as he contemplates the good and evil of which human beings are capable, but let us not forget the worldliness of the choice made by Shelley. Felix selects Volney's book for Safie 'because the declamatory style was framed in imitation of the eastern authors', and thus, presumably, was more familiar or accessible to the daughter of a Turkish merchant.⁸⁴ Why was Volney's style deemed to have 'eastern' qualities by Felix? In fact, Volney's interests in the East, no less than his politics, were well known in European literary circles by the time that Shelley wrote her novel. Volney, who died in 1820, wrote famously about Egypt and Syria, learned the elements of Sanskrit and Persian, and was a member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. He sought to gain a deeper knowledge of Indian and Tibetan culture as well as the Chinese and Malay languages.⁸⁵ The civilizing process in *Frankenstein* needs Volney, no less than Plutarch, with all the historical resonances that these names summon up for the contemporary reader. If it remains debatable whether the monster actually makes the passage to civilization, Shelley suggests nonetheless that these books potentially 'can sum up a whole world of Western knowing, a stupendous body of work which has the power to make the monster transcend himself'.⁸⁶

Thanks to his 'education' in Volney, Plutarch, Milton, and Goethe, and thanks to the conversations he overhears, the monster can communicate with a European in a European language. He looks brutish and hideous but he speaks the

language of culture and civilization (and so, uncannily, anticipates Macaulay's goal for Indian education). You can talk to a monster in French—the language Felix teaches Safie—but what language do you need to communicate with a foreigner from another land? Some kind of answer is given to this question in a text published soon after the appearance of Shelley's novel, namely, in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821) by Thomas De Quincey. Here, the other presence that irrupts into the world of the narrator is overtly marked as exotic and non-European.⁸⁷ Recall the sudden arrival of the Malay at De Quincey's lodgings in the English mountains, and consider how the narrator of the *Confessions* responds to the linguistic challenge posed by his new arrival:

My knowledge of the Oriental tongues is not remarkably extensive, being indeed confined to two words—the Arabic word for barley, and the Turkish for opium (madjoon), which I have learnt from Anastasius. And, as I had neither a Malay dictionary, nor even Adelung's *Mithridates*, which might have helped me to a few words, I addressed him in some lines from the Iliad; considering that, of such languages as I possessed, Greek, in point of longitude, came geographically nearest to an Oriental one. He worshipped me in a most devout manner, and replied in what I suppose was Malay.⁸⁸

De Quincey supposes that Homeric Greek can best reduce the linguistic distance between an English person and the Malay visitor. This distance De Quincey has already described as immense, for he has told us that between the Malay and the servant-girl who opened the door 'there seemed to be an impassable gulph fixed between all communication of ideas'.⁸⁹ Iliadic Greek nonetheless elicits the reverence of the Malay. Why Homer causes the Malay to worship De Quincey is ambiguous: the Malay himself is ignorant of Greek, despite its supposed proximity to his own language. Perhaps the epic poem evokes the defeat of Asia by Europe and so cows the Malay into submission; perhaps the poem's antiquity overawes the Malay and alludes to a history that reaches back to a distant past (later in the work it is De Quincey who shudders at the immensity of Asia's age). At any rate, the recitation of Homeric Greek succeeds in taming the Malay and thwarting the perceived threat of the Asiatic visitation, or at least thwarting it until the Malay reappears, to terrifying effect, in the narrator's dreams.

De Quincey's narrative offers a powerful conjunction of the Asiatic and the Greek on which it might be worth reflecting for a moment. Of the languages that he speaks, De Quincey says that 'Greek, in point of longitude, came geographically nearest to an Oriental one'. The implication of De Quincey's remark is that Greek resembled Oriental languages because Greece was located close to the Orient. The struggle of the Greeks against Ottoman Turkey was in the news when De Quincey was writing his *Confessions*, and would have reminded his

readers of Greece's association with the Ottoman empire. But De Quincey is not constructing a barrier between Greece and Asia; rather, he is taking the measure of their closeness. This is not to underplay 'the unimaginable horror which these dreams of oriental imagery, and mythological tortures, impressed upon' De Quincey: the narrator's nightmares doubtless point to fear, terror, and revulsion.⁹⁰ Yet De Quincey decides to speak Greek to the Malay at the initial moment of contact and presumes a kinship between the Hellenic and the Oriental. The reward for this presumption is the veneration of the Malay.

While there were various ways of understanding the proximity of Greeks and barbarians, or the distance between them, De Quincey wondered at a linguistic affinity that was predicated on geographical nearness. In 1846, when reviewing the first two volumes of George Grote's *History of Greece*, John Stuart Mill approached the division between Greeks and barbarians in a slightly different manner. 'If in several things they were but few removes from barbarism, they alone among nations, so far as is known to us, emerged from barbarism by their own efforts, not following in the track of any more advanced people.'⁹¹ The Greeks were not far removed from barbarism, Mill writes, but their proximity to barbarism lay in the fact that they were also the 'beginners of nearly everything'.⁹² There was no one to show the way to civilization for the Greeks and to introduce them to a higher way of living; they got there first, on their own, without 'following in the track of any more advanced people'. For all their failings, they were the first to conceive of 'political freedom', the first to break down the 'barriers of petty nationality', the first to produce a historical literature; they were the inventors of mathematics, physics, politics, and philosophy.⁹³ Since they were the founders of so many institutions and the creators of so many arts and sciences, the period immediately before they came along was marked by the absence of their inventions; in other words, by barbarism.

Herein lay the value of the Greeks to the nineteenth century: so near to barbarism and so close to modernity. What the Greeks wrought in a few centuries, more than two thousand years ago, connected them inseparably to the Victorians. Greek history was profoundly consequential, and the Greeks 'were the beginners of nearly everything, Christianity excepted, of which the modern world makes boast'.⁹⁴ But just before the time of the Greeks, there existed a way of life that was rude, barbaric, and uncivilized, and it needed to be overcome for Greek culture to emerge. Even more impressive than the results they achieved, then, were 'the powers and efforts required to make the achievement'.⁹⁵ It was the Greeks who, first in history, made the crossing from barbarism to civilization and who were, for that reason, 'the most remarkable people who have yet existed'.⁹⁶ More than progress was at stake in this passage, however, for it was the Greeks'

special accomplishment both to found and to protect their way of life. Not only did the Greeks arrive at civilization by an incredible manifestation of energy and will; they also succeeded in repulsing the Persians who would have arrested their progress and cut off their culture when it was in full flower. Hence, Mill writes, in words that can stand as a summa of this chapter: "The battle of Marathon, even as an event in English history, is more important than the battle of Hastings. If the issue of that day had been different, the Britons and the Saxons might still have been wandering in the woods."⁷⁷ The Greeks held their own at Marathon; they remained the torch-bearers of civilization in the face of the many barbarisms that threatened to extinguish its flames. Marathon was appropriated and celebrated in the once-popular verse of the Victorian civil servant Sir Francis Doyle, son of a general, and so were the heroic deeds of those he regarded as modern torch-bearers of civilization, such as the humble but dauntless 'Private of the Buffs', represented as a successor to Leonidas fighting for freedom at Thermopylae:

So, let his name through Europe ring—
A man of mean estate,
Who died, as firm as Sparta's king,
Because his soul was great.⁷⁸

The torch was still burning, or smouldering, in classically inflected late Victorian and Edwardian imperial discourses which lie beyond the limits of this volume.

Notes

¹ See William Robertson, *The Progress of Society in Europe: A Historical Outline from the Subversion of the Roman Empire to the beginning of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Felix Gilbert (Chicago, 1972), pp. 7–8, reprinted from his *History of the Reign of Charles V* (1769). For barbarism, civilization, and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century constructions of Greek and Roman history more generally see e.g. J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, 1999–2010) (based on Gibbon); Arnaldo Momigliano, *Studies in Historiography* (1966) (Gibbon and Grote), *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Oxford, 1977), and *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley, 1990); Frank M. Turner, 'Why the Greeks and Not the Romans in Victorian Britain?', in G. W. Clarke, ed., *Rediscovering Hellenism* (Cambridge, 1981); Maria Wyke, *Caesar: A Life in Western Culture* (2007); J. W. Burrow, *A History of Histories* (2007), particularly good on Robertson and Gibbon.

² Adam Ferguson, *The History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic*, 3 vols. (1783), vol. 3, p. 574. For Ferguson and Rome see Iain McDaniel, *Adam Ferguson in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Roman Past and Europe's Future* (Cambridge, MA, 2013).

³ François Hartog, *Anciens, modernes, sauvages* (Paris, 2005). For primitive barbarism versus proto-modernity in commentary on Homer at an earlier period, see David Hopkins's chapter on Homer in *OHCREL* 3, 165–95.

⁴ Quoted in Roy Porter, *Edward Gibbon: Making History* (1988), p. 155.

⁵ Porter, *Edward Gibbon*, p. 109.

⁶ Quoted in Porter, *Edward Gibbon*, p. 110.

⁷ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley, 3 vols. (1994; first published 1776–88), vol. 2, ch. 38 ('General Observations on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West'), p. 509.

⁸ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, 2, 511.

⁹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, 2, 512.

¹⁰ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, 2, 511.

¹¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, 2, 512.

¹² Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, 2, 514.

¹³ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, 2, 512.

¹⁴ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, 2, 513.

¹⁵ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, 2, 513.

¹⁶ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, 2, 513–14.

¹⁷ In Porter, *Edward Gibbon*, p. 109.

¹⁸ Uday Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, 1999), p. 155.

¹⁹ Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, p. 155.

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²¹ In *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, 7, 694.

²² R. P. Lock, 'Rhetoric and Representation in Burke's Reflections', in *Edmund Burke's 'Reflections on the Revolution in France'*, ed. John Whale (Manchester, 2000), pp. 18–39.

²³ Saree Makdisi, 'Romantic Cultural Imperialism', in *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 601–20, at p. 610.

²⁴ Makdisi, 'Romantic Cultural Imperialism', p. 611.

²⁵ A. Owen Aldridge, 'Thomas Paine and the Classics', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 1 (1968), pp. 370–80.

²⁶ Quoted in Aldridge, 'Thomas Paine and the Classics', p. 376.

²⁷ In Aldridge, 'Thomas Paine and the Classics', p. 376.

²⁸ Mortimer N. S. Sellers, 'Revolution, French', in *The Classical Tradition*, ed. Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, Salvatore Settis (Cambridge, MA, 2010), pp. 822–6, at p. 822.

²⁹ Anthony Grafton, 'Prolegomena to Friedrich August Wolf', in *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), pp. 214–43, at p. 216, also quoted in Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790* (Oxford, 1997), p. 26.

³⁰ Quoted in Grafton, 'Prolegomena to Friedrich August Wolf', p. 218.

³¹ Deane, *Strange Country*, p. 26. Deane points to the similarities in historical method between Burke, Gibbon, and Wolf.

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³³ Deane, *Strange Country*, p. 17.

³⁴ Deane, *Strange Country*, pp. 1–28.

- ³⁵ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), trans. from the German (Moscow, 1984), p. 11.
- ³⁶ Deane, *Strange Country*, p. 8–18.
- ³⁷ Makdisi, 'Romantic Cultural Imperialism', p. 601. See also Jennifer Wallace, *Shelley and Greece: Rethinking Romantic Hellenism* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 119–47.
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- ³⁹ Makdisi, 'Romantic Cultural Imperialism', p. 616.
- ⁴⁰ John Drew, *India and the Romantic Imagination* (Delhi, 1998), p. 233.
- ⁴¹ Rosinka Chaudhuri, ed., *Derozio: Poet of India. The Definitive Edition* (New Delhi, 2008), p. lxxiv.
- ⁴² See e.g. *Shelley's Prose, or, The Trumpet of a Prophecy*, ed. D. L. Clark (1988), p. 238.
- ⁴³ *The Lays of Ancient Rome*, in *The Works of Lord Macaulay, Complete*, 8 vols., ed. Lady Trevelyan (1866), 8. 443–539. For the English background, see William R. McKelvy, 'Primitive Ballads, Modern Criticism, Ancient Skepticism: Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28 (2000), 287–309.
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- ⁴⁶ Macaulay, *Lays*, p. 454.
- ⁴⁷ Macaulay, *Lays*, p. 461.
- ⁴⁸ Macaulay, *Lays*, p. 461.
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- ⁵² Catherine Hall, 'At Home with History: Macaulay and the History of England', in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, eds. Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 32–52, at p. 32.
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- ⁵⁵ See P. R. Ghosh, 'Macaulay and the Heritage of the Enlightenment', *English Historical Review*, 112 (1997), 358–95, and Robert E. Sullivan, *Macaulay: The Tragedy of Power* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), pp. 140, 382–4.
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- ⁵⁸ Macaulay, 'Sir James Mackintosh', in *Works of Lord Macaulay*, 6. 76–134, at pp. 95–6.
- ⁵⁹ Sullivan, *Macaulay*, p. 50.
- ⁶⁰ Macaulay, 'On Mitford's History of Greece', in *Works of Lord Macaulay*, 7. 683–703, at p. 703.
- ⁶¹ David Skilton, 'Tourists at the Ruins of London: The Metropolis and the Struggle for Empire', *Cercles: revue pluridisciplinaire du monde Anglophone*, 17 (2007), 93–119, at p. 96.
- ⁶² Skilton, 'Tourists at the Ruins of London', p. 96.
- ⁶³ Macaulay to Ellis, dated Calcutta, 30 Dec. 1835, in *Letters of Thomas Babington Macaulay*, 3. 159.
- ⁶⁴ Pinney, in *Letters of Thomas Babington Macaulay*, 3. viii.
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- ⁶⁸ Catharine Edwards, 'Translating Empire? Macaulay's Rome', in *Roman Presences: Reception of Rome in European Culture*, ed. Catharine Edwards (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 70–87, at p. 74.
- ⁶⁹ Macaulay to Ellis, dated Calcutta, 8 Feb. 1835, in *Letters of Thomas Babington Macaulay*, 3. 129. The full Greek quotation, written without accents and slightly inaccurately, perhaps from memory, is from Hesiod, *Theogony* 98–103: 'For although a man has sorrow and grief in his newly-troubled soul and lives in dread because his heart is distressed, yet, when a singer, the servant of the Muses, chants the glorious deeds of men of old and the blessed gods who inhabit Olympus, at once he forgets his heaviness and remembers not his sorrows at all; but the gifts of the goddesses soon turn him away from these.' Trans. H. G. Evelyn-White.
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- ⁷¹ Macaulay, 'Minute', p. 167.
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- ⁸¹ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus*, ed. Marilyn Butler (Oxford, 1994), pp. 103–4.
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- ⁸⁵ Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia, 2010), ch. 8, esp. p. 476.
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Quincey: *A Psychopathology of Imperialism* (New Haven, 1991), and Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge, 1992).

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