

## **British Refractions of India and the 1857 'Mutiny' through the prism of Ancient Greece and Rome**

The process of British imperial acquisition of the planet shifted up a gear during the 1840s.<sup>1</sup> Between 1842 and 1849, at a breakneck speed, Britain annexed Afghanistan, Sind, the Punjab, Hong Kong, Labuan in Indonesia, and, in Africa, Natal, the Orange River, and Gambia. War was waged against the Maoris in New Zealand, and the 1854 conquest of lower Burma and the Crimean War further flanned the flames of imperial ardour.<sup>2</sup> The idea that Britons were destined to rule the world seemed to be reaffirmed in practice on an almost daily level, and their imperial self-confidence felt increasingly justified. The psychological shock caused by the outbreak of the Indian 'mutiny' on May 10<sup>th</sup> 1857 was therefore incalculable. The conflict did not last much more than a year, since the resistance to British rule was attenuated by the beginning of the summer of 1858. But the level of chaos and violence in India, brilliantly evoked in William Dalrymple's recent study of life in Delhi during the 'mutiny' in *The Last Mughal* (2007), seemed wholly without precedent. British confidence in the invincibility of its control over not only India but all its colonies had been shattered. Revenge was on British minds.

One of the ideological priorities was to stamp out any suggestion that this was an uprising to do with the self-determination, or struggle for liberty, of the Indian people. Sanjay Seth has recently shown how the large number of histories of education in India written between 1857 and the period just after Independence themselves actively erase the uprising from their narratives and celebrate the inclusion of the native Indian in the circle of western culture and reason.<sup>3</sup> Just as telling is the way in which the question of the language to be used in describing the events of 1857 was contested at the time and

has remained so ever since. At one end of the spectrum, the overwhelming majority of Britons agreed with the journalists calling for bloody retribution, who described it as a 'mutiny', with all the anarchic and treacherous connotations of that term. But there was already a tiny handful of commentators like Karl Marx, who insisted in the *New York Daily Tribune* that 'by and by there will ooze out other facts able to convince even John Bull himself that what he considers a military mutiny is in truth a national revolt.'<sup>4</sup> Indian nationalists since V.D. Savarkar's *The Indian War of Independence* (1909) have indeed seen 1857 as a year of 'revolution'.<sup>5</sup> In this article, the purpose of which is to discuss the role played by the ancient Greek and Roman worlds in images of the events of produced by westerners, I have generally adopted the term 'uprising' unless the context requires otherwise.

There were, it must be said, a very few influential ruling-class intellectuals who took less extreme positions on the question of the uprising and called for moderation in its suppression. Benjamin Disraeli dared to suggest that the uprising might have been in part a response to the harshness of British rule, notoriously declaring to the House of Commons on 27 July 1857, 'The decline and fall of empires are not affairs of greased cartridges. Such results are occasioned by adequate causes, and by an accumulation of adequate causes'.<sup>6</sup> Lord Canning, the Governor of India with a first-class degree in Classics from Christ Church, Oxford, called for the disciplining of the rebels to be discriminate and characterized by the thoroughly Augustan virtue of clemency. But the public was in no mood for moral temperance. The press and popular writers, including Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, fanned fear and outrage until the dominant response of almost every Briton at home as well as in India was to support violent and indiscriminate retribution; in the British metropolitan imagination, the Indians could now only be seen as criminals or savages.<sup>7</sup> The two most important codes in which the events of the uprising were presented were Victorian medievalism and Christian

heroism, through which new moral legitimacy was acquired by the British in India. They were consistently portrayed as chivalric figures,<sup>8</sup> righteous Christians meting out just recompense to limitlessly barbarous heathens, new Israelites defending Canaan, or modern crusaders recovering an eastern Jerusalem, when all had nearly been lost, for western civilization.

It was more or less precisely at the moment of the uprising, in fact, that medieval and Christian imagery challenged and indeed, at least for a time, largely displaced almost all other frames of reference structuring the British vision of her hegemony in India. The Old Testament was invoked by balladeers, confident that Sir Colin Campbell, the British military Commander-in-Chief, would 'tame the black Sepoy and will drive them to the other side of Jordan'.<sup>9</sup> Newspapers and fiction described dashing regimental crusaders on horseback rescuing Christian virgins, or besieged expatriates praying as they awaited death with saintly calm; writers invoked the symbolism of lions, hearts of oak, and crosses of St. George. In photography, a recent invention, there was a parallel shift away from the classical vision of the British role in India. The appearance of India in the British imagination had previously been conditioned by the picturesque compositions of William Hodges and the Daniells, which implicitly equated the Indian past with the ruins of the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations.<sup>10</sup> Hodges had been directly influenced by the classical 'history' paintings of both Benjamin West and Gavin Hamilton.<sup>11</sup> But now the British photographers Felice Beato and Samuel Bourne, recording the aftermath of the uprising, replaced that classical vision with a 'flattening out of time', as all buildings in India, however recently constructed, could 'serve equally as "ruins" in the tale of British fortitude and valour'.<sup>12</sup>

This article argues that the telling classical parallels in discourse on the Indian uprising are, in fact, mostly to be found in the writing of decidedly dissident voices of Marx and the Chartists. It has rarely been acknowledged how the India question

fertilized the imagination of homegrown British radicals struggling to understand the relationship between British imperialism on an international level and the exploitation of the working class domestically. The last section of this article therefore looks at two important Chartist responses to the British empire in India, the second of which is an epic poem entitled *The New World* (later renamed *The Revolt of Hindostan*) by Marx's English associate Ernest Jones. But such anti-imperialist voices were in a tiny minority: for the vast majority of Britons in 1857-8 and the decade immediately afterwards, all ability to think objectively about their role in India disappeared, along with most of the explicit analogies that had conventionally been drawn between British India and the idealized empires and polities of the classical world.

This is particularly striking since the conquest of India had always lain at the heart of the western colonial self-image, and its representations exemplified the intimate relationship borne by western colonial propaganda to its Greek and Roman models. From the moment when Vasco da Gama reached Calicut in May 1498, he was portrayed in the West as a new Ulysses or Aeneas, a colonizing hero following the divinely ordained destiny of a classical epic hero. *Os Lusíadas* (*The Lusiads*), by Luís Vaz de Camões, is the Portuguese national epic, published in 1572, that celebrated Vasco da Gama's voyage round the Cape of Good Hope to India. This epic poem was published in an influential English translation by William Mickle in 1776, admired by Schlegel, praised by Herman Melville's seagoing hero Jack Chase in *White Jacket* chapter 65 as 'the man-of-war epic of the world', and described by the classicist C.M. Bowra as 'in many ways the epic of Humanism'.<sup>13</sup> The imperialist agenda of the epic only slightly discomfited the influential Renaissance scholar E.M.W. Tillyard, who declared *Os Lusíadas* to be 'the one worthy poetic record of the expansive spirit of the whole of western Europe'.<sup>14</sup>

In this narrative de Camões' poetic voice announces that he will sing of

Arms and the Heroes, who from Lisbon's shore,  
Thro' seas where sail was never spread before,  
Beyond where Ceylon lifts her spicy breast...<sup>15</sup>

The *Aeneid* is the major inspiration, but there are pointers to the *Odyssey*, including Sirens, idyllic islands, and the instruction to Fame that da Gama has outdone Ulysses: 'with wonder name the Greek no more, / What lands he saw, what toils at sea he bore'.<sup>16</sup> When da Gama arrives in India in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> cantos of the poem, the antithesis between western, classically derived rhetoric and rationality on the one hand, and Hindu and Muslim superstition on the other, becomes the rhetorical framework for the ethnic opposition between da Gama and Zamorin, the Hindu ruler misled by his devout Islamic counsellors.<sup>17</sup> The use of scenes from classical epic – by Lucan and Statius as well as Homer and Vergil – is dense and complicated, and it has been argued recently would surely have been the object of much more recent study were it not for anxieties about the poem's overwhelming colonialist agenda.<sup>18</sup>

Reading the *Aeneid*, and comparing translations of famous passages, was a way that some Britons in India whiled away their evenings and assuaged their feelings of cultural exile.<sup>19</sup> And by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this epic model of classical heroism on the frontier was supplemented by and expressed in the neoclassical taste of affluent East Indiamen, who both in India and in Britain fostered an association between themselves and the colonial rulers of ancient Greece and Rome. The model of the sagacious ancient Greek lawgiver was one which British political thinkers liked to invoke when identifying their role in relation to India: Bentham wanted to be seen as the Solon of India, while Macaulay preferred to identify himself with Lycurgus.<sup>20</sup> But the model of the Roman Empire was the favoured point of comparison amongst political theorists in almost all contexts and at all ends of the political spectrum: even Bentham, a critic of colonialism

as a policy, was to compare the benefits that he felt the Hindu and Muslim inhabitants of India derived from British rule with those enjoyed by Britons under Roman government.<sup>21</sup> Yet the analogy between British rule in India and British rule in Ireland, which is apparent in much late 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century writing on empire, fostered an increasingly complex set of cultural aetiologies; these included an equivalent celebration of the ancient Indian and ancient Irish cultures as well as justifications for the necessity of bringing these cultures under the 'advanced' civilizing rule of Britain. Irish, Greek, Latin and Sanskrit were declared the oldest of the Indo-European tongues, while Sir William Jones and other Orientalists, engaged in what in fact went beyond comparative linguistics to encompass early comparative anthropology, traced equivalences of religious and social institutional development in India, Ireland and the ancient Mediterranean basin.<sup>22</sup>

Under the remarkable administration of Warren Hastings, members of the officer class were offered handsome financial incentives to take up the study of Indian languages and culture, and it was inevitable, given the way their own education had been dominated by the classical languages and civilizations of Greece and Rome, that it was to classical Indian thought and to Sanskrit that they turned their primary attention. In 1800 the Company set up a college at Fort William, Calcutta, designed to be a 'University of the East', where newly arrived officers spent three years in arduous study. Here the rigorous curriculum reinforced the study of Hindu, Arabic and Persian with attention to Latin and Greek, and compared Indian and Islamic law with Roman and British systems.<sup>23</sup>

The shape of the history of education in India itself had been fundamentally affected by the debate between the 'Orientalists', and the 'Anglicists', the latter led by Macaulay, and which culminated in his famous 'Minute';<sup>24</sup> the Despatches of 1835 and 1839 led to the foundation of governmental support of institutions that taught Western

knowledge. The entire educational system, in addition to new universities in Madras, Bombay and Bengal, provided a curriculum including all that 'Western values' entailed in terms of the cultural and imperial models of ancient Greece and Rome.<sup>25</sup> It was inevitable that Indian society was seen by educated men – both the colonizers and (although to a far lesser extent) the colonized -- through lenses informed by their vision of ancient Greek and Roman culture; this vision permeates, for example, the *Lakshmi* of Dalpatram Dahyabhai. Phiroze Vasunia has shown how this Gujarati adaptation of Aristophanes' *Plutus*, published in 1850, synthesises Gujarati folk culture with the Athens of Aristophanes and colour from colonial Ahmedabad.<sup>26</sup> It is significant that Dalpatram had been encouraged in this project by Alexander Kinloch Forbes, his close associate and the Assistant Judge in that city. Indeed, Forbes' own perception of India as retaining some cultural elements from the archaic Indo-European past reflected in ancient Greek literature can be seen in his own description of women engaged in a ritual lament, first published, like *Lakshmi*, before the uprising (in 1856):

...the relations and neighbours assemble at the house of the deceased; and, like an *entre acte* to the tragic drama, commences the humming moan of lamentation. The nearer relatives enter the habitation, exclaiming, 'O, father! O, Brother!'. The women, standing in a circle near the door, bewail the deceased, and sing a funeral dirge, beating their breasts to the sad accompaniment of the measure... The dirge, which usually consists of unconnected exclamations of grief, is sung by one or two women, while the remainder join in chorus...<sup>27</sup>

As Parita Mukta has observed, by setting this display of grief in a public space and comparing it with the performance of a Greek tragedy, Forbes is both familiarizing the

Indian women to his classically trained readership, and rendering them archaic and alien – twins strategies typical of the coloniser's vision of the colonized.<sup>28</sup>

It had indeed become conventional for writers on India to see its inhabitants – Hindu, Muslim and Sikh -- as akin to ancient Greeks themselves. The Sikhs in particular are occasionally and always patronizingly, even after the uprising, compared with Iliadic warriors, brave and brilliant in combat but prone to vindictive grudges and petty feuds; their elder statesmen reminded John Cave-Browne of the older figures in the Iliad. Amongst the Sikhs of 'Umritsur' was the 'Nestor' of their race, the 'gallant old' semi-retired leader Kooshayal Singh; but their high priest was so little respected by his own people that the British had little to fear 'from this old Calchas of the Sikh armies'.<sup>29</sup> A particularly interesting case is presented by the writing of Marianne Young, the wife of an officer in the Bombay Native Infantry in Cutch. She used ancient Greek sources in a quite different way in order to help her readers in the British homeland imagine the *reality* of life in India. For Young, who was fluent in Hindustani, India preserved much of what she perceived to have been the ancient Greek way of life – colourful, polytheistic, exotic, and sensual. In 1857, the year of the uprising, she published *The Moslem Noble: His Land and People*. She had written it all well before the uprising, and its attempt to render India more acceptable to the British mind must have fallen on ears deafened by the hysteria with which news of it was received. Yet it is a well-informed and warm-hearted appreciation of various aspects of Indian life, including discussions of the Hindus and Parsis as well as Muslims. She has the best of intentions: she has written the book because any young man who has never traveled 'views with contempt all that his narrow mind cannot comprehend; and because the outward aspect of the Oriental differs from his own, it pleaseth him to consider the descendant of the Mogul as an inferior being...'; moreover 'it is an unhappy truth that the moment any one begins to chat about

India, every one looks bored.... Who among us does not dread the sallow-cheeked old colonel, with his interminable stories of tiger hunts?'<sup>30</sup>

What she does is invite the reader, trained in Greek and Roman Classics, to admire and feel familiar with India because it represents what Greece was like in the classical era – her vision is actually a mass-market, popular-culture version of William Jones' Indo-European model, or of the Theocritean pastoral atmosphere so carefully conjured in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's idyllic Mauritius of *Paul et Virginie* (1787), one of the bestselling French novels of all time.<sup>31</sup> This is clear from just two examples in Young's book: Chapter 1 is a description of a Muslim wedding, opened with epigraph from Theocritus's *Idyll* 18, which takes the form of an epithalamion for Helen: 'She is like the rising of the golden morning, when the night departeth, and when the winter is over and gone; she resembleth the cypress in the garden, the horse in the chariots of Thessaly'. While waxing lyrical about the amazing cotton industry, Young gushes enthusiastically, 'how beautiful even *cotton* seems, when draped with a grace equaling Grecian art over fair forms...'<sup>32</sup>

Once the uprising began to be reported, however, the Christian, crusading and medieval idiom of the mainstream representations of the diabolical mutineers and their punishment made this kind of delicately exotic classical analogy seem wholly inappropriate. Very few tropes or images from ancient Greece or Rome permeate popular representations of India in 1857-8, despite the Greco-Roman style of the helmets worn by the Bengal Horse Artillery,<sup>33</sup> and despite the continuing tendency of the military leaders in India to reinforce their mutual identity as classically trained gentlemen by writing dispatches to each other which interspersed English with phrases in Latin or even ancient Greek.<sup>34</sup> It also conspicuous how rarely the struggle between Britain and India in satirical cartoons of the time is classically inflected. The overwhelming imagery depicts a confrontation of muscular Christianity, supported by superior technology and

discipline, with chaotic and 'orientalised' superstition and barbarism; this is often symbolized by a sturdy British lion calmly vanquishing an effete Indian tiger. Only one of the many relevant satirical cartoons in *Punch* (12<sup>th</sup> September 1857) toys with a claim on classicism by portraying (British) Justice as a maiden in something like a Doric chiton and an arguably hoplite shield, trampling racially inferior Sepoys beneath her naked feet. But there is a complete absence of a mainstream classical frame of reference for the apologists of savage retribution. This is in itself intriguing, given that 18<sup>th</sup>-century self-representation of Britons in India as latterday Greek or Roman colonialists.

The dearth of a 'master' trope from classical antiquity in typical British responses to the uprising must have something to do with the previous appropriation of the conventional ancient exemplars of liberty and enlightened government -- Brutus, Cato and so on -- by the Whig aristocracy of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, whose maladministration of India, or so many advocates of a hard line on the rebels felt, had led to the uprising in the first place. Julius Caesar became a problematic figure as we shall see below. Augustus' propagation of *clementia* ruled him out as a suitable role model, and when it came to the later Roman Empire, the frightening spectre of mutinous legionaries eroding the power of central imperial administration occurred briefly on numerous occasions only to be passed over swiftly, no doubt as too alarming. One historian argued that the main cause was less the Sepoys' disaffection and their undeniable strength in terms of manpower and training, but their *knowledge* of their own strength: 'As with the Roman legions of old, it was not their strength merely, but the knowledge of that strength, which proved fatal to the empire'.<sup>35</sup> A third factor which must be borne in mind is that the dominant, mainstream opinion on the India question was that held by the less educated lower middle-class and working-class British families who produced the teenage boys who actually found themselves in India. Although the senior civil servants who ran India were classically educated, and sometimes inclined, like Canning, to a more liberal and

patrician view of the ideal administrator's treatment of the natives, it is important to remember how rudimentary was the education of most of the Britons living there. As Kapil Raj has stressed, the vast majority of recruits to the East India Company arrived in India between the ages of 14 and 18, and the only educational requirement was knowledge of 'the rule of three and merchants' accounts'.<sup>36</sup> Most wanted to make money fast, were susceptible to extremely crude racist propaganda, and had little interest in culture or language acquisition, either classical European or Indian.<sup>37</sup>

Yet the absence of an emergent classical parallel was perhaps partly a result of the particular genres in which the uprising was dominantly addressed. These have been analysed in a fine study by Gautam Chakravarty.<sup>38</sup> One popular genre emerged in middle-brow histories of the conflict, in which classical references of a thoroughly jejune kind are to be found, but which do not add up to a sustained model or archetype.<sup>39</sup> An early example is the Revd. John Cave-Browne's *The Punjab and Delhi in 1857: Being a Narrative of the Measures by which the Punjab was Saved and Delhi Recovered During the Indian Mutiny* (1861). Here classical tags and occasional comparisons are to be found, most of which attempt to strike an emotional note when a brave British hero meets his demise: Cave-Browne pictures Sir Henry Lawrence's noble leadership, and his death, with the verdict that the truly noble Indians whom he ruled mourned him as much as the Britons back at home: this is summarized with the Latin tag *multis ille bonis flebilis occidit*, an adaptation of what Horace says to Vergil about the death of their mutual friend Quintilius at *Odes* 1.24.9-10.<sup>40</sup> Cave-Browne likens the plight of the few British soldiers who managed to help themselves in the conflict in the Punjab to Aeneas' shipwrecked comrades, *rari nantes in gurgite vasto* – (*Aeneid* 1.118).<sup>41</sup> When the teenaged Quentin Batty dies at Lahore, it is 'with a smile on his face and a Latin quotation on his tongue: *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*.'<sup>42</sup> Yet Latin tags are used to ornament comments on both sides in the dispute: an Ovidian phrase is invoked to

comment on the way that loyalties of the mutineers swerved around -- *tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis*.<sup>43</sup> But a few scattered epitaphs on fallen Britons and comments on confused mutineers through the evocation of some of the best-known of all Latin phrases scarcely constitute a sustained or consistent classical inflection to this presentation of history.

Perhaps the most important way in which Britons 'were able to effectively exorcise the spectre of 1857-59' was through romantic fiction.<sup>44</sup> The typical formulaic 'mutiny' novel entails a fictional romance between an Officer-Class (and therefore educated) hero and the British female he loves. She is rescued from threats of sexual assault and death at the hands of barbarous natives, enacting a white supremacist plot where imperial order is restored in the face of terrible adversity. Although such stories inevitably have distant ancestors in ancient literature, above all in the 'escape plays' of Euripides and the escapades of the Greek novel, neither their Victorian authors nor the (predominantly female) readers were aware or interested in such literary pedigrees. They were far too concerned to see that their devout white heroine was not sadistically raped by a murderous heathen.

A third source of images of the uprising and its suppression that were available on a wide scale was provided by the broadsides and ballads that streamed from a network of presses across the British Isles. Here the common white soldier's experience of India is articulated, as in the following example:

Our sons are away to the Indie's again  
The rebels to fight on Hindoostanee plain...;  
Britons will be triumphant and that you will see,  
And revenge we will have for their cruelty:  
Our brothers and sisters they tortured full sore,

At Delhi and Lucknow, Meerut and Cawnpore.<sup>45</sup>

But such ballads, especially those commemorating the service of Scottish and Irish soldiers in India, tend to strike a slightly less celebratory note than other genres about the reprisals taken against the rebels, and even occasionally pray for peace and international harmony; one example, *The Indian War and the Fall of Delhi*, closes with the plea. 'And soon may those cruel wars cease, / And men like brothers live in peace.' Although they are explicitly Christian and almost all deploy the same symbols – especially white femininity under threat – as do historiography, reportage and fiction, Projit Mukharji has suggested that the 'subaltern' perspective of the Scots and Irish working-class soldiers within the British empire and army was inevitably inflected by a desire for an early peace: 'After all, it was they who bore the brunt of the violence and received the least recompense for it.'<sup>46</sup>

The slight distaste for indiscriminate reprisals that Mukharji detects in a few of the ballads of the poorer classes of the 'internal' colonies of Britain leads my discussion into its final section, which addresses the way ancient Greek and Roman material informs the picture of India in the imaginary landscapes inhabited by British campaigners for the extension of the suffrage to all men. The first example occurs in Thomas Cooper's epic poem *The Purgatory of Suicides*, written in the early 1840s in Stafford Gaol, where he was imprisoned as a Chartist after being convicted of sedition. *The Purgatory of Suicides*, at over 900 stanzas long, presents a challenge to any reader, but its poetry and conceptual ambition did impress not only its Chartist readership but such literary figures as Carlyle, Disraeli, and Kingsley.<sup>47</sup> For Cooper, the voice of India, in the mouth of the sage Calanus, transcends time and space in a manner reminiscent of the choruses of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas* to prophesy global liberation and universal suffrage.

Calanus is found in several ancient sources for Alexander the Great's activities in India, including Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* and Arrian's *Anabasis* 7.1.5-3.6. He was frequently praised by ancient philosophers and Christians including Ambrose for his self-control and bravery in the face of death.<sup>48</sup> In an essay entitled 'Every Good Man is Free', the Alexandrian Jewish scholar Philo (c. 20 BC to 50 AD) had cited Calanus as an outstanding example of the true freedom enjoyed by every good man. Philo records that when Alexander tried to coerce him into leaving India and travelling with him, Calanus pointed that he would become a useless specimen of 'barbarian wisdom' for the Macedonian to display to the Greek world if he allowed himself to be forced to do anything against his will (Philo, 9.14.92-6). Cooper takes the idea of Calanus as a spokesman for true spiritual freedom, and puts it to innovative use by recasting it in political terms.

The first six stanzas of *The Purgatory of Suicides* are, he says, a poetical embodiment of a speech he delivered in 1842 to the colliers on strike in the Staffordshire Potteries, as a result of which he was arrested for arson and violence. In book 1 he poetically recalls being imprisoned and has a dream of his Voyage to the Land of Death, where he meets the souls of suicides. But in book 2 he introduces Calanus in order to provide a climax for a list of various *Greek* sages. Calanus tells the Greeks Empedocles and Cleombrotus of his utopian vision of the future -- a spiritual allegory for the Chartists' vision of a levelled and democratic society:

The time will come, O Hellene! when the sun  
Shall look upon a world no more o'errun  
With slaves to sensualism; when haggard Spite,  
And frowning Pride, and Envy pale shall sun  
Truth's glorious beams...<sup>49</sup>

He says that the strong will end up seeking to break bread for weeping orphans, and

Knowledge, the great Enfranchiser, is near!

Yet, though their bonds the wide world's helots break,

They seek not in their tyrants' blood to slake

A thirst for vengeance...<sup>50</sup>

That an ancient Indian sage should be selected to lecture ancient Greeks on the topics of feeding the destitute as well as enfranchising and educating the wide world's 'helots' reveals Cooper's intuition that British commercial interests in India were inextricably linked to the predicament of the working classes internationally. Cooper – an outstanding working-class intellectual -- has read his ancient Greek sources on Alexander and Calanus significantly 'against the grain'.

The lowliness of Cooper's origins makes all the more remarkable the detail of his knowledge of ancient history, as well as the topical appropriation to which he subjects that knowledge. Born illegitimately in 1805 to a fisherman's daughter and an itinerant dyer, he was one of the most prodigious autodidacts of the Chartist movement. When apprenticed to a cobbler, he found opportunity to teach himself Greek and Latin while engaged in time-consuming manual labour. He taught Latin, French and literature at the Lincoln Mechanics Institute, and by 1843 he had become a convinced Chartist while working as a journalist on a radical newspaper in Leicester. Cooper was not only committed to universal male suffrage and agitation on behalf of the poor, but on an international level he was indubitably opposed to imperialism: one of his most inflammatory speeches, delivered at Hanley in August 1842, began with a catalogue of 'conquerors, from Sesostris to Alexander, from Caesar to Napoleon, who had become

famous in history for shedding the blood of millions...' He described 'how the conquerors of America had nearly exterminated the native races....' He excoriated 'British wrongdoing in Ireland'.<sup>51</sup>

For the working-class activist Cooper, then, the ancient Brahmins of India, as filtered through ancient Greek historiography and biography, represented a mystical fount of ancient knowledge of the post-imperial international utopia to be ushered in by the advent of universal male suffrage. Cooper made Calanus, an ancient Indian, lecture an ancient Greek/Macedonian conqueror on social justice. Cooper had, of course, never been anywhere near India, however clear his understanding of the link between the class system in Britain and the oppression of indigenous peoples in her colonies.

But it was the Roman empire, rather than the Macedonian, that became difficult to avoid once the uprising in India had commenced, and the group who found their ideological interests best served by antiquity at this time were others who, like Cooper, rejected the legitimacy of empire altogether. As early as 1853 Karl Marx, now a permanent resident of London, was equating British rule in India with the worst aspects of the Roman Empire:<sup>52</sup>

After the British intruders had once put their feet on India, and made up their mind to hold it, there remained no alternative but to break the power of the native princes by force or by intrigue. Placed with regard to them in similar circumstances as the ancient Romans with regard to their allies, they followed in the track of Roman politics.

Inevitably, when the reports of the revolt in the Indian army began to come through, he systematically developed the analogy:<sup>53</sup> 'The Roman *Divide et impera* was the great rule by which Great Britain, for about one hundred and fifty years, contrived to retain the

tenure of her Indian empire.’ He reports speeches on the revolt delivered during the debate in the British parliament (including the speech by Disraeli briefly mentioned above) as if they were the orations of Roman Senators declaiming on the topic of the decline of their Empire.<sup>54</sup> And when protesting against the extraordinary lack of balance in the reporting of the atrocities committed in India on either side, he implies in thundering prose that Roman imperial barbarism was actually less culpable than its British or French equivalents on the ground that it was less hypocritical:

The cutting of noses, breasts, &c., in one word, the horrid mutilations committed by the Sepoys, are of course more revolting to European feeling than the throwing of red-hot shell on Canton dwellings by a Secretary of the Manchester Peace Society, or the roasting of Arabs pent up in a cave by a French Marshal, or the flaying alive of British soldiers by the cat-o’-nine-tails under drum-head court-martial, or any other of the philanthropical appliances used in British penitentiary colonies. Cruelty, like every other thing, has its fashion, changing according to time and place. Caesar, the accomplished scholar, candidly narrates how he ordered many thousand Gallic warriors to have their right hands cut off. Napoleon would have been ashamed to do this. He preferred dispatching his own French regiments, suspected of republicanism, to St. Domingo, there to die of the blacks and the plague.<sup>55</sup>

That all imperial powers are capable of atrocity in the acquisition, enforcement and maintenance of power is a truth with which Marx’s English Chartist friend Ernest Jones would have passionately agreed. In Jones’ work we encounter the most remarkable literary response to the Indian uprising in the English language of all, remarkable because it was originally not a response at all but a forecast that soon came true.

Jones was born in Berlin on Jan 25<sup>th</sup>, 1819, the son of a Major in the British army. His mother was the daughter of a wealthy Kent landowner. The money was 'old', inherited rather than made through commerce, and his class identity that of a son of the gentry. Jones was educated in Germany at St. Michael's College, an elite school at Lüneburg, a garrison town near Hanover; there he acquired enough ease with ancient Greek to use it on occasion in his diaries.<sup>56</sup> It was on a literary career that he embarked when he moved to London at the age of 19, although he subsequently entered the Middle Temple and married very advantageously. But he then lost his entire fortune and was declared bankrupt in 1844. At this point he became extremely interested in Chartism, and uncharitable or politically motivated biographers have always alleged that he began to analyse the causes of poverty on an intellectual level only after being faced on a personal level with poverty himself. Yet his commitment to the cause thereafter was undeniable. So is the richness of the classical learning expressed in his published polemics throughout his life.<sup>57</sup>

His first collection of poetry, *Chartist Songs*, was published in 1846, and scored an instant success with his working-class readership; it was at this time that he met Marx and Engels and much impressed them.<sup>58</sup> Jones had long taken an interest in India, since he discerned the direct economic and political links between the oppression of the working classes in Britain and of the native populations of India, although being fascinated by the different mechanisms the ruling class used to exert control in each context. In 1853, inspired by the debate over Sir Charles Wood's 'Government of India' bill, he had decried the extortions of the East India Company and the shameless exploitation of the Indian peoples in ways which anticipate Marx's much better known articles of 1857 in the *New York Tribune*.<sup>59</sup>

Jones' views on India had, however, been long in development. He was given a two-year prison sentence in Manchester gaol for seditious behaviour and unlawful

assembly in 1848; the Attorney General, terrified by the recent bloody street fighting on the streets of Paris, told the jurors that England was the 'Thermopylae' of civilized Europe,<sup>60</sup> to be defended to the death against the Chartists and all other insurgents. Jones used his time in prison to write a Chartist version of Revelations, a visionary blank verse commentary on the cyclical rise and fall of empires with a focus on India. Emerging from prison in 1850, he announced, 'I went into your prison a Chartist, but ...have come out of it a Republican,'<sup>61</sup> and published the 1359-line poem under the title *The New World*. But he reissued it in the autumn of 1857, as 'a prophecy of the Indian Mutiny',<sup>62</sup> standing by his principles on India when public opinion was flowing hysterically in the opposite direction, under the new title *The Revolt of Hindostan*. His remarkable poem needs to be read, therefore, from two perspectives: first, that of a reader in 1850, when few thought there could ever be a rebellion against British control of India; and, secondly, that of a reader in 1857 and afterwards, responding to the poem in full knowledge that Jones' prediction had come true.

Conceived more than seven years before the uprising, this visionary poem describes how successive empires have risen and fallen. I am sure that Jones had discussed India with Marx as well as having read the *Communist Manifesto* (published February 1848), since there is more than what Jones' recent biographer has rather scathingly called 'a whiff of historical materialism' in the view of history that his poem presents:<sup>63</sup> the materialism is also dialectical, since each social order, as it comes to dominance, simultaneously creates its own nemesis by forging an alliance with the very forces that will eventually prove instrumental in its destruction. This is as true of his vision of the corrupt British administration in India as of any other, and is expressed in the rousing detail with which Jones describes the rebellion that did indeed come to pass in 1857. British Rule in India, modelled on Roman rule over its Empire, becomes the paradigm and measure for all oppressive empires, and the rebellion he predicts becomes

the example of what will always inevitably happen until, according to his teleology (which combines an early Marxism with Republicanism and some esoteric Christian imagery), the New World dawns.

The poem concludes with the foundation of a global socialist utopia, ruled from Tahiti; in this choice Jones was engaging with the longstanding perception of the peaceable communism of the natives of that island. This had been made famous by the French explorer Louis-Antoine de Bougainville in an account of his 1768 visit to Tahiti in his *Voyage autour du monde* (1771). He praised the island as an Edenic paradise where people lived in contentment and innocence, removed from the corrupting forces of civilization. This description seemed to give substance to the Enlightenment concept of the noble savage, and indeed was leapt upon by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Yet despite the breadth of Jones' reading in 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature and philosophy, and his focus on British India, all the empires he describes are informed by the Romans' experience of empire, and the experience of those who resisted the Romans, both Hannibal and Spartacus.

The poem begins with the great hopes that had been invested in the young republic in North America, which only recently secured its independence from its imperial masters in England as the baby Hercules killed the asps:

Young Nation-Hercules! whose infant-grasp  
Kingcraft and churchcraft slew, the twinborn asp!  
What glorious visions for thy manhood rise,  
When thy full stature swells upon our eyes!<sup>64</sup>

Yet America's status as land of the free is completely compromised by the continuing legality of slavery there, an institution which had been abolished across the British

colonies by an Act passed in 1833 and put into effect at midnight on August 1<sup>st</sup> 1834:

Ah! that the wisdom here so dearly bought  
Would sanctify thy wild, luxuriant thought,  
And righteously efface the stripes of slaves  
From that proud flag where heaven's high splendour waves!<sup>65</sup>

Jones is, however, quite clear that the practice of injustice is (potentially at least) no prerogative of white people: imperialism's relationship to commerce and militarism is fundamentally colour-blind. If black people gain the upper hand, it may be whites who become the slaves:

But not the black alone the wrong shall feel,  
The white man sinks the prey of gold and steel;  
For Victory carries Glory in her train,  
Who dark behind her trails a lengthening chain.  
The hordes, ambition taught afar to roam,  
Soon rivet links on misery's limbs at home;  
The taste of conquest brings the thirst for more,  
And death fraught navies leave the saddened shore.<sup>66</sup>

The bulk of the poem is, however, not in the future tense but in the past and present, as it sets the scene for the 'revolt of Hindostan' against the British in India, and then describes the revolt itself in colourful and rousing detail. Western imperialism began, he says, with the lure of India:

When erst the West its warrior-march began,  
The eyes of earth were drawn to Hindostan:  
Long time the clouds stood gathering, tier on tier,  
And thickening thunders, muttering, growled more near.<sup>67</sup>

The cruelty and exploitation that characterized the conduct of the British towards the colonized Indians led in Jones' vision inevitably to discontent and rebellion, which motivated Britain to fortify her garrison towns in India:

Then wary Britain, all her forces massed,  
Arrayed her greatest army, and her last;  
The towns were fortified, as if to show  
They felt how weak themselves, how strong the foe:  
That very preparation and display  
Took half the chance of victory away.<sup>68</sup>

Jones describes the British army raised to quell Indian rebellion as not only her greatest army but 'her last', which reveals his assumption that an Indian uprising would topple British imperial dominion everywhere and forever – one part of his prophecy that did not even begin to be fulfilled until well into the twentieth century. But the details in his account of the uprising do indeed seem remarkably prescient and accurate, especially the discontent of the Sepoys and the vested interests of the new rich of India, drawn from the poor of Britain:

Back press the frontiers, once the example given,

In part by force, but more by panic driven.  
Victorious deluge! from a hundred heights  
Rolls the fierce torrent of a people's rights,  
And Sepoy soldiers, waking, band by band,  
At last remember they've a fatherland!  
Then flies the huxtering judge, the pandering peer,  
The English pauper, grown a nabob here!  
Counting house tyranny, and pedlar-pride,  
While blasts of freedom sweep the country wide!<sup>69</sup>

The Britons abandon India, and with it their worldwide imperial project. But economic laws mean that other empires yet are destined to rise and fall, including at some distant future time the empire of the Indians themselves, who

Spread east and west their vast dominion wide,  
From broad Amoo to Tigris' arrowy tide:  
But valour's early impulse dies away  
In easy, loitering, somnolent Cathay.  
Most empires have their Capua:—bold endeavour  
Retrieves a Cannae, but a Capua never.<sup>70</sup>

In a fascinating turn, it is now a hypothetical future Indian empire that is compared with ancient Rome, as the poet considers the damage that a future equivalent of Hannibal might inflict, as the original Carthaginian hero had inflicted on Rome at Cannae and Capua in 216 and 212 BC.

The revolutionary climax of the poem sees the continent of Africa finally rise, to wreak revenge for the millennia of indignity and exploitation to which it had been subject:

Deep in the burning south a cloud appears,  
The smouldering wrath of full four thousand years,  
Whatever name caprice of history gave,  
Moor, Afrit, Ethiop, Negro, still meant slave!  
But from the gathering evil springs redress,  
And sin is punished by its own excess/.../  
Near and more near, and fiercer and more fierce,  
East, West, and South, the sable legions pierce;  
Drive thro' Justinian's capital the steel,  
And spurn Mahomet's dust with haughty heel;  
"Tunis!" "Algier!" and "Tripoli!" they cry,  
Prone at the sound, behold a nation die!  
On! to the site, where ancient Rome once rose,  
And modern towns in meaner dust repose.  
Up, Eunus! tip! and Spartacus! awake!  
Now, if you still can feel, your vengeance slake!  
What bleeding form around yon column crawls?  
The Gladiator looks, and smiles, and falls.  
See! where in doubt sublime yon wrecks remain,  
If Coliseum once, or Peter's fane,  
With shrieking laugh a kingly phantom soar;  
"Old venal City! worth a price no more!"<sup>71</sup>

In this fantastic vision, the peoples of Africa arise, take Constantinople and the Ottoman and French cities of North Africa, before pressing into the heart of the European imperial mainland to the modern city of Rome itself. There they rouse the spirits of the ancient slave leaders, the Eunus (leader of an early Sicilian revolt<sup>72</sup>) and Spartacus, to assist in their struggle, before obliterating all signs of both the pagan Roman emperors and their Christian successors.

Ernest Jones' remarkable poem offers the clearest example of the appropriation of the ancient Mediterranean world in the cause of exploited colonial subjects of Britain in the Indian sub-continent. His poem, along with the journalism of Marx, shows how the violent conflict in India in 1857-8 was matched on the level of representation by a struggle of images. Was the rebellious Indian a barbarous infidel being subjected to righteous punishment by upright and technologically advanced Christians, or was he the freedom fighter resisting the cruelties of Roman rule, the warrior of ancient Carthage or Gaul, the slave rebel Eunus or Spartacus? Despite the longstanding neoclassical idiom in which the British rulers of India had previously articulated their regime, classical exemplars proved inadequate or inappropriate ideological weapons in and after 1857 for the supporters of British reprisals and imperial policy in India. They did, however, prove suggestive and inspiring for the few western radicals who saw that the Indian question was inextricably tied to the question of the universal rights of man.

Jones must have been acutely disappointed by the suppression of the Indian uprising and the transference of the territory from the East India Company to the crown in 1858. In his lifetime there was no hope of the fulfillment of his prophecy in line 367 of his poem, 'The signal flies, and Hindostan is free!' But in the purview of history, the philosophical perspective he advocated, a hundred years is not such a long time, and it

was, indeed, almost exactly a century after the uprising that India became independent, at midnight on August 14<sup>th</sup> 1947.

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor (2000) 148.

<sup>2</sup> See Kiernan (1982) and, for the impact of these wars on Victorian writers, Said (1993) 105-6.

<sup>3</sup> Seth (2007) with bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> *New-York Daily Tribune*, August 14, 1857. The writings of Marx (and Engels) on India are almost all to be found in volumes 12 and 15 of their *Complete Works* (1975-2005), and conveniently reproduced and edited in Husain (2006).

<sup>5</sup> See Sen (2007) with bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> Hansard (1857) 475.

<sup>7</sup> As Guha (1983) Mukherjee (1990) and Palit (2007) have shown. On the lasting impact of the uprising and its suppression on British identity, as a form of foundation myth licensing a particular style of imperial government, see the perceptive remarks of Paffard (1989) 7-11.

<sup>8</sup> Chakravarty (2005) 164-7.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Mukharji (2007) 19.

<sup>10</sup> On the importance of the images in *Oriental Scenery* (1795-1808) to the British understanding of India as a governable region in political terms, see Bendiner (1986) 88.

<sup>11</sup> Tillotson (2000) 94-5.

<sup>12</sup> Lakshmi (2007) 22.

<sup>13</sup> See De Oliveira e Silva (2000) 736; Melville (1850) -- Jack Chase is captain of the U.S.S. Neversink; Bowra (1945) 138.

<sup>14</sup> Tillyard (1954) 248.

<sup>15</sup> Translated by Mickle (1776) 1.

<sup>16</sup> Translated by Mickle (1776) 2; see further Hall (2008) ch. 6.

<sup>17</sup> De Oliveira e Silva (2000) 752.

<sup>18</sup> See e.g. De Oliveira e Silva (2000). The poem's complicated reception of classical epic was well brought out in Piper (1965).

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. Richardson (1852) 463-72.

<sup>20</sup> See Clive (1973) 435, Stokes (1959) 51 and Brantlinger (1988) 83.

<sup>21</sup> Bentham (1843) vol. 5, 260, from 'Official Aptitude Maximized—Expense Minimised' (1826). See further Pitts (2003) 211.

<sup>22</sup> See Bayly (2000) with bibliography 382 nn. 20-3.

<sup>23</sup> Raj (2000) 125-6.

<sup>24</sup> On which see especially Sirkin and Sirkin (1970-71).

<sup>25</sup> Seth (2007) 26.

<sup>26</sup> Vasunia (2007).

<sup>27</sup> Forbes (1878 [1856]) 635-6.

<sup>28</sup> Mukta (1999) 34.

<sup>29</sup> Cave-Browne (1861) 233-4.

<sup>30</sup> Young (1857) 6.

<sup>31</sup> See Bissoondoyal (1967) 56-8.

<sup>32</sup> Young (1857) 126.

<sup>33</sup> See James (1997) fig. 18, captioned 'A Centurion of the Raj'.

<sup>34</sup> Greek prose composition reveals itself even in a missives sent in desperate situation, when General Charles Windham sent a secret message to Sir Colin Campbell announcing the severe straits in which the Cawnpore garrison found itself under enemy artillery fire. See Harris (2001) 175.

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- <sup>35</sup> Cave-Browne (1861) 27-8.
- <sup>36</sup> Raj (2000) 122.
- <sup>37</sup> Young hoped to gain sympathy for the peoples of India by describing the gorgeous wedding rituals in terms that will have reminded her schoolboy readership of ancient Greek poetry on the subject of the infinitely desirable Helen. But for numerous British men in 1857, native Indian wives and the Anglo-Indian children they had borne suddenly became a liability: a more obvious parallel must have been offered by Medea than by Helen of Troy. While rumours of untold savagery against the British community spread from India, the other item that dominated the news during the long, hot summer of 1857 was the tortuous debates about The Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act, finally passed at the end of August. This was reflected in a rash of theatrical performances about Medea: see Hall and Macintosh (2005) ch. 14.
- <sup>38</sup> Chakravarty (2005).
- <sup>39</sup> See Chakravarty (2005) 19-48.
- <sup>40</sup> Cave-Browne (1861) 32.
- <sup>41</sup> Cave-Browne (1861) 148.
- <sup>42</sup> Cave-Browne (1861) 328-9, quoting Hodson (1859) 202.
- <sup>43</sup> Cave-Browne (1861) 293.
- <sup>44</sup> Gosh (2007) 38; Chakravarty (2005) 105-26.
- <sup>45</sup> Quoted and discussed in Mukharji (2007) 18.
- <sup>46</sup> Mukharji (2007) 19.
- <sup>47</sup> Taylor (2003) 81.
- <sup>48</sup> See Musurillo (1954) 237.
- <sup>49</sup> Cooper (1877) 67.
- <sup>50</sup> Xoooper (1877) 68.
- <sup>51</sup> Cooper (1872) 187-90.
- <sup>52</sup> *New-York Daily Tribune*, July 25, 1853.
- <sup>53</sup> *New-York Daily Tribune*, July 15, 1857.
- <sup>54</sup> *New-York Daily Tribune*, August 14, 1857.
- <sup>55</sup> *New-York Daily Tribune*, Sept. 16th 1857.
- <sup>56</sup> Taylor (2003) 47.
- <sup>57</sup> See e.g. his configuration of Hercules as Monopoly Capital, wrestling with Antaeus as Labour, from a lecture with which he toured in 1867, in Saville (1952) 230.
- <sup>58</sup> Saville, John (1952) 20.
- <sup>59</sup> Saville (1952) 65-6.
- <sup>60</sup> Schoyen (1958) 172.
- <sup>61</sup> Saville (1952) 113.
- <sup>62</sup> Saville (1952) 65.
- <sup>63</sup> Taylor (2003) 144.
- <sup>64</sup> Jones (1857) 5.
- <sup>65</sup> Jones (1857) 6.
- <sup>66</sup> Jones (1857) 6.
- <sup>67</sup> Jones (1857) 7.
- <sup>68</sup> Jones (1857) 8.
- <sup>69</sup> Jones (1857) 10.
- <sup>70</sup> Jones (1857) 14.
- <sup>71</sup> Jones (1957) 29.
- <sup>72</sup> For the sources on the Sicilian slave revolt led by Eunus at Enna, see Diodorus Siculus 34/35. 2. 1-48 and Strabo 6.2.6.