Review

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The Trial of Warren Hastings. Classical Oratory and Reception in Eighteenth-Century England. By Chiara Rolli. London. Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. viii + 209 pp. ISBN 978-1-7845-3922-1.

The impeachment of Warren Hastings, first Governor General of Bengal, was one of the most spectacular public events of the eighteenth century. Hastings was said to have provoked a revolt in 1781 and confiscated the landed income and treasure of the mother and grandmother of the Nawab of Awadh. He was also accused of corruption: receiving presents and other advantages in his relations with Indian rulers.

The prosecution was led by a cast of star orators, and three of the most brilliant speakers of the time had a determinant role: the politician and philosopher Edmund Burke, the Whig leader Charles James Fox, and the celebrated playwright (and manager of the *Drury Lane Theatre*) Richard Brinsley Sheridan. They intentionally pronounced their speeches in a dramatic rather than legalistic tone. Hastings was judged in Westminster Hall not only by the House of Lords but also symbolically by the whole nation. The trial ended with his acquittal in 1795.

The book is divided into five chapters, includes 550 notes, a vast bibliography, more than 100 primary sources, 160 secondary and web sources (pp. 185–200), and a useful index (pp. 202–209).

The first chapter, "Cicero, Verres and the classics in eighteenth-century Britain" (pp. 11–28) puts forward the fundamental role played by classical authors in eighteenth-century British culture and education. From the sixteenth century onwards, the education of the elite was based entirely on the classics. Although tutors, philosophers, and scholars continued to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of such an education, it was not until the nineteenth century that the method was modified. The famous philosopher John Locke, for example, admitted the neces-

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Roman Legal Tradition, 18 (2022), 26–30. ISSN 1943-6483. Published by the Ames Foundation at the Harvard Law School and the Alan Rodger Endowment at the University of Glasgow. ROMANLEGALTRADITION.ORG. DOI 10.55740/2022.3

sity of Latin for a gentleman and Greek for a scholar. However, focusing on that study was said to bring no utility for trade and business. The ancient languages contributed to the refinement of understanding and the embellishment of style. In fact, political careers depended on rhetorical skills; therefore gentlemen had to be trained in classical models.

The A. shows how classical orators and allusions to the ancient world had a prominent position in parliamentary debates, as well as in the press and in satirical prints. These years saw the publication of numerous biographies of Cicero and translations of his speeches. London papers and satirical caricatures often linked leading political figures with ancient orators, and similarities were found between many members of Parliament and Greek and Roman orators. Indeed, the Roman Senate and the British Parliament were regularly associated with one another. Even Voltaire observed that members of Parliament tried to compare themselves to the ancient Romans. The Irish-born orator Burke implied that he himself was Cicero and his contemporaries also saw a resemblance.

A clear example was in the use of Latin pseudonyms by writers, satirists, or political reporters, and in articles with epigraphs in Latin and Greek. Public interest was also kindled by new English versions of classical texts, notably the most authoritative text on Cicero's life in Plutarch's *Lives*, where Cicero shows his different facets: orator, statesman, and philosopher. Plutarch not only highlights Cicero's diligence, sense of justice, and moderation, but also alludes to his avidity for glory. Some British accounts of Cicero's life justified his vanity and others were negative and scornful.

The second chapter, "A clash of characters" (pp. 29–46), focuses on the two protagonists, piecing together significant details from the classical education that influenced their personalities and careers.

Edmund Burke was known to be a controversial politician and orator and an eclectic philosopher. He cited Cicero directly or alluded to him in nearly all his works, and his library included many of Cicero's books. The A. discusses Burke's training in the law at Trinity College Dublin, where he founded the Academy of Belles Lettres to provide students with autodidactic learning in public speaking. His intention when he first arrived in London was to practice law at the Middle Temple, but he finally entered the Commons where he made a name as a speaker. Burke astonished everyone with the power of his eloquence. His talent for speeches may have followed his passion for the stage. He usually made

eccentric gestures with exaggerated theatricality, grabbing the attention of the newspapers and satirical prints. Despite the fact that Burke travelled little, he managed to collect information about the geography, history, religion, and cultures of the Indian subcontinent. Furthermore, he borrowed from Cicero one of the most important ideas derived from natural law: that the state is an indirect emanation of God's power.

Warren Hastings had an adventurous life across Britain and India, and the two countries served as classical *loci* in the trial. The A. recounts his childhood and youth, and then explains his experiences in India. As Governor General, he made a revision of the local judicial system. The idea of ruling the conquered by means of their own traditions was similar to what the Romans adopted toward their provinces. Many European writers actually compared contemporary Indians to ancients Greeks or Romans.

Hastings built himself a good reputation, but the Supreme Council was hostile to him. Hastings and most of his fellows were accused of, among other things, personal corruption. Owing to the multiple accusations against Hastings, the British Government tried to dismiss him in 1776, and this forced him to finally resign and return to Britain in 1785. Burke prosecuted the ills of imperial rule in the person of Hastings because he could not accept the fact that there could exist one law for Europe and another for India.

The third chapter, "Classical oratory and theatricality in the trial against Warren Hastings" (pp. 47–84), considers the trial as a theatrical entertainment attended by the most fashionable members of society. The A. shows the extent to which classical rhetorical strategies influenced the orators' performances. She concentrates on the orators' body language and dramatic enactments, arguing for the overlapping of theatre and politics. Just as Roman prosecutors staged sentimental dramas and played with their audiences' emotions, Sheridan and Burke, the prosecutors, feigned illnesses and fainting spells at the end of their most striking speeches. They were highly influenced by classical rhetorical prescriptions, which recommended that the orator should transform legal debates into spectacles of justice.

Westminster Hall, the location of the trial, was conceived as a dramatic setting, and temporary stands were erected to accommodate a vast public. The auditors and prosecutors had clearly turned the occasion into a fashionable dramatic entertainment. Ladies and gentlemen, wishing to attend the trial, had to produce a ticket as if it were the entrance to a theatre. For some sessions the passes were in great demand and, to prevent forgery, each day they changed their color and design. Other features, like the

practice of eating and drinking while watching the spectacle, and standing in queues for hours outside Westminster (not to mention the impatient mass of people who pressed and crushed those around them) signified how much of a spectacle this trial had become.

Burke's and Sheridan's performances were influenced by Cicero's and Quintilian's theoretical works on oratory (*De oratore*, *Orator*, *Brutus*, *Institutio Oratoria*). Cicero frequently recommended that orators receive a theatrical training. In Latin, both actors and lawyers were called *actores*, those who hide behind the mask. Even in eighteenth-century rhetorical treatises they were encouraged to appeal to the emotions of the audience, a view shared by Burke and Sheridan. Cicero had indeed stressed the importance of persuasive appeals based on emotions that might be transferable from the orator to the audience: *ipse ardere* (*De oratore* 2.188). In *Brutus* 89 he made it clear that *inflammare iudicem* was more important than *docere*. Burke's speech about Hastings' abominations and tortures in India had its effects. The prosecutors opted for indispositions and swoons, sometimes real and sometimes pretended.

The fourth chapter, "Spectacles of passion: Cicero's *In Verrem* and Burke's 'Speech on the opening of the impeachment'" (pp. 85–112), brings us to the heart of Burke's appropriation and reuse of the *Verrines* throughout the impeachment. The A. focuses on Burke's oration delivered on the fifth day (the narration of the Rangpur atrocities) in order to collate it with several relevant passages from Cicero's orations.

Cicero and Verres were familiar to the aristocracy and gentry from a version of the *Verrines* published in 1787. Political satires often portrayed powerful figures as Verres, the prototype of the degenerate politician. Rapacity and corruption, cruelty and monstrosity were the characteristics of Verres brought into sharp focus by Burke and Cicero. At the time, members of the English elite often travelled to Sicily as part of the Grand Tour. Intellectuals were frequently compared to Cicero or the greedy governor of Sicily.

Last, the fifth chapter, "The reception of the Hastings trial in the newspapers and satirical prints" (pp. 113–132), analyses the trial's reception in certain contemporary satirical prints as well as in the major newspapers published in Britain and in India.

The classical speeches had a formative role in the perception of Roman rhetoric, and informed the British understanding of Roman rule. In fact, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British elite identified themselves with the conquering classical Romans, and parties in the British Parliament identified themselves with the

Roman Senate. Satirists even published cartoons representing Burke as a British Cicero in the plastic pose of a Roman orator, his right arm emphatically lifted in the air. Sheridan, the other speaker, also showed how political debates could become great public spectacles in the Graeco-Roman tradition, and how verbal eloquence went hand in hand with physical eloquence.

The link between classical oratory and theatrical performances in the trial of Hastings was still present even fifty years after the acquittal of Hastings. Burke's orations were included in the syllabus of the "speech days" of the most prestigious schools, including Harrow and Eton, and were given the same esteem as classical orations, such as *in M. Antonium, in Catilinam*, and *in Verrem*.

To sum up, the A. has undoubtedly achieved her purpose. Many scholars have based their studies on the vast resonance and theatricality of the impeachment. In fact, it has been explored from a variety of perspectives: historical, philosophical, political, and even postcolonial. But the A. brings a new point of view to the presence of theatricality in the trial. She has recorded the ways in which the prosecutors were influenced by classical oratory by investigating a wide range of sources (journals, correspondence, reports, and even satirists' published cartoons) to show how profoundly Graeco–Roman culture influenced speeches and performances. The book is written in flawless English and in a clear style. The A. shows her thorough knowledge of the abundant literature on the topic and the numerous sources in both Roman and modern rhetoric.

This is an interesting book, an impressive work of recovering the complex and multiple interfaces between classical culture and the impeachment of the Governor General of Bengal. We look forward to the A.'s further work on Roman rhetoric.