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FORUM

Caesarism in Nineteenth-Century British Political Thought

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Previous scholarship on Caesarism has focused overwhelmingly on continental Europe. Insofar as Britain has been mentioned at all, it has been as a mere foil to the latter: ostensibly, the kind of democratic dictatorship known as "Caesarism" was wholly alien to British traditions of limited, representative, and parliamentary government; as such, the British dismissed it out of hand; the concept never gained any purchase within British thought; indeed, the word itself was not even used in Britain until 1857 (according to the OED*, cited by several scholars). By drawing on an array of periodical and newspaper sources, the proposed contribution will challenge this orthodoxy along three principal lines: first, it will demonstrate that Auguste Romieu's* L'ère des Césars *(1850) was widely reviewed in Britain, with the result that both the word and the concept of "Caesarism" passed immediately into British usage; second, it will demonstrate that rather than merely dismissing the concept out of hand, mid-century British thinkers engaged seriously with it, formulating an elaborate critique of "Caesarism" as practiced on the Continent; third, it will demonstrate that, as the century wore on, above all due to the democratization of the British constitution that occurred as a result of the 1867 and 1884 Reform Acts, many British thinkers came to believe that Britain was in fact at imminent risk of collapsing into Caesarism, most likely through the emergence of a charismatic parliamentary leader such as Benjamin Disraeli. In this sense, the received belief that Britain was somehow "immune" to Caesarism might hold for the mid-nineteenth century, but it does not hold for the late nineteenth century.*

Previous scholarship on the concept of Caesarism has focused overwhelmingly on continental Europe, with Britain receiving little to no attention. Indeed, many surveys of Caesarism have ignored Britain altogether.[1] In other studies, the British reception of the

[1]The following single-author surveys make no reference to Britain: Arnaldo Momigliano, "Per un riesame della storia dell'idea di cesarismo," *Rivista Storica Italiana* 68/2 (1956), 220–29; Zvi Yavetz, "Caesar, Caesarism, and the Historians," *Journal of Contemporary History* 6/2 (1971), 184–201; Dieter Groh, "Cäsarismus, Napoleonismus, Führer, Chef, Imperialismus," in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 8 vols. (Stuttgart, 1972), 1: 726–71; Luisa Mangoni, "Cesarismo, Bonapartismo, Fascismo," *Studi storici* 17/3 (1976), 41–61; Michael Stürmer, "Krise, Konflikt, Entscheidung: Die Suche nach dem neuen Cäsar als europäisches Verfassungsproblem," in Karl Hammer

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concept has been reduced to cursory mention of two articles by Walter Bagehot, namely "Caesarism as It Existed in 1865" (1865) and "The Collapse of Caesarism" (1870).[2] Accepting at face value Bagehot's claim that Caesarism was a specifically French phenomenon, some of these studies have dismissed explicitly the relevance of the concept to Britain, which, they assert, was insulated by its traditions of constitutional monarchy, parliamentary government, and a limited electoral franchise. As such, British thinkers rejected the concept out of hand, and it never gained any purchase within British political thought.[3] Remarkably, one leading scholar of the concept has asserted repeatedly that the word "Caesarism," which was coined in French by Auguste Romieu in 1850, did not even enter the English language until 1857.[4]

However, such assertions have not been based on evidence, and, even prima facie, they seem unlikely. For one thing, Victorian thinkers maintained a strong and consistent interest in both day-to-day French politics and French political ideas.[5]

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and Claus Hartmann, eds., *Der Bonapartismus: Historisches Phänomen und politischer Mythos* (Zurich, 1977), 102–18; Salvo Mastellone, "Imperialismo e cesarismo," *Il pensiero politico* 11/2 (1978), 257–62; Zvi Yavetz, *Caesar in der öffentlichen Meinung* (Düsseldorf, 1979), section on the nineteenth century at 16–21; Alfred Heuss, "Der Cäsarismus und sein antikes Urbild," in Hartmut Boockmann, Kurt Jürgensen, and Gerhard Stoltenberg, eds., *Geschichte und Gegenwart: Festschrift für Karl Dietrich Erdmann* (Neumünster, 1980), 13–40; Fulvio De Georgi, "Scienze umane e concetto storico: Il cesarismo," *Nuova Rivista Storica* 68/3–4 (1984), 323–54; Innocenzo Cervelli, "Cesarismo: Alcuni usi e significati della parola (secolo XIX)," *Annali dell'Istituto Storico Italo-Germanico in Trento* 22 (1996), 61–197; Melvin Richter, "A Family of Political Concepts: Tyranny, Despotism, Bonapartism, Caesarism, Dictatorship, 1750–1917," *European Journal of Political Theory* 4/3 (2005), 221–48; Federico Trocini, "Cesarismo," in Angelo D'Orsi, ed., *Gli ismi della politica: 52 voci per ascoltare il presente* (Rome, 2010), 59–64. In terms of edited volumes, neither Manuela Ceretta, ed., *Bonapartismo, cesarismo, e crisi della società: Luigi Napoleone e il colpo di stato del 1851* (Florence, 2003); nor Peter Baehr and Melvin Richter, eds., *Dictatorship in History and Theory: Bonapartism, Caesarism, and Totalitarianism* (Cambridge, 2004), featured chapters on Britain.

[2]Morena Fini, "Il cesarismo nel pensiero di Walter Bagehot," *Il pensiero politico* 16/3 (1983), 445–9; Peter Baehr, "Accounting for Caesarism: Introduction to Gollwitzer," *Economy and Society* 16/3 (1987), 341–56, at 353; Baehr, *Caesar and the Fading of the Roman World: A Study in Republicanism and Caesarism* (New Brunswick, 1998), 121–5; Gian Mario Bravo, "Il fallimento della politica: Marx e gli altri: a proposito di Luigi Bonaparte," in Ceretta, *Bonapartismo, cesarismo, e crisi della società*, 3–22, at 14; Peter Baehr, *Caesarism, Charisma, and Fate: Historical Sources and Modern Resonances in the Work of Max Weber* (New Brunswick, 2008), 41–4; Nicholas Cole, "Republicanism, Caesarism, and Political Change," in Miriam Griffith, ed., *A Companion to Julius Caesar* (Chichester, 2009), 418–30, at 425–7; Markus J. Prutsch, *Caesarism in the Post-revolutionary Age: Crisis, Populace and Leadership* (London, 2020), 151–4. Fini, "Il cesarismo," 448; and Prutsch, *Caesarism*, 153, stated that Bagehot's views were typical of Victorian liberals, but neither of them provided any evidence. Helena Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism: From Ancient Rome to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, 2018), has a chapter entitled "Caesarism and Liberal Democracy: Napoleon III, Lincoln, Gladstone, and Bismarck" (156–93), with a few pages on the Liberal leader William Gladstone (177–82), but in fact the word "Caesarism" is never used.

[3]Baehr, *Caesar and the Fading of the Roman World*, 121–3; Baehr, *Caesarism, Charisma, and Fate*, 41–4; Prutsch, *Caesarism*, 151–3.

[4]Baehr, "Accounting for Caesarism," 343; Baehr, *Caesar and the Fading of the Roman World*, 103; Baehr, *Caesarism, Charisma, and Fate*, 34. Baehr cited the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which still gives 1857 as the first known use of the word: www.oed.com/dictionary/caesarism_n?tab=factsheet#10764455 (accessed 24 July 2024).

[5]J. P. Parry, "The Impact of Napoleon III on British Politics, 1851–1880," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 11 (2001), 147–75; Georgios Varouxakis, *Victorian Political Thought on France and the French* (Basingstoke, 2002).

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Furthermore, political allusions to ancient Rome, and particularly analogies between ancient Rome and modern Britain, were a constant feature of Victorian political thought.[6] Even more specifically, during the second half of the century, there was great attention to the life of Julius Caesar amongst British historians.[7] Therefore it is implausible that British thinkers would have remained indifferent to the theory and practice of Caesarism.

This contribution to the forum will argue for the importance of Caesarism in nineteenth-century British political thought along three principal lines.[8] First, it will demonstrate that Romieu's *L'ère des Césars* (1850) was in fact widely reviewed in Britain, with the result that both the word and the concept of Caesarism passed immediately into British usage. Second, it will show that, rather than dismissing the concept out of hand, many mid-century British thinkers (not only Bagehot) engaged seriously with it, formulating an elaborate critique of Caesarism as practiced in France and elsewhere on the Continent. Third, it will demonstrate that, as the nineteenth century drew to a close, many Liberal thinkers came to fear that Britain itself was in fact at imminent risk of collapsing into Caesarism, above all due to the expansion of the British Empire and the democratization of the constitution that had occurred through the 1867 and 1884 Reform Acts.[9] As such, the trajectory of the concept of "Caesarism" within British political thought closely paralleled that of the concept of "Imperialism": it began to be used during the early 1850s with specific reference to the Second Empire of Napoleon III, before being transformed during the 1870s into a Liberal *Kampfbegriff* against the demagogic and expansionist foreign policy of Benjamin Disraeli.[10] Despite the admiration of certain British historians for Julius Caesar,[11] then, amongst political commentators, the concept of "Caesarism" continued to be employed in an overwhelmingly negative sense, whether in relation to France or to Britain.[12]

[6]Norman Vance, *The Victorians and Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1997), 28, 38–41, 54, 270.

[7]Friedrich Gundolf, *Caesar im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1926), 35–7; Frank M. Turner, "British Politics and the Demise of the Roman Republic: 1700–1939," *Historical Journal* 29/3 (1986), 577–99, at 589–94; Vance, *The Victorians*, 75–9.

[8]Gian Enrico Rusconi, *Cavour e Bismarck: Due leader fra liberalismo e cesarismo* (Bologna, 2011), 19, emphasized the importance of situating Caesarism in specific national contexts.

[9]It would therefore seem that British thinkers believed that the British constitution was more likely to lapse into Caesarism than the American Constitution, on which see Cheryl B. Welch, "An Immunity to Authoritarianism? Bagehot, Bryce, and Ostrogorski on the Risk of Caesarism in America," *Society* 60/4 (2023), 501–15, at 501: "all judged that the United States … was largely immune to Caesarism." For a short survey of nineteenth-century American usages of the concept see now Iain McDaniel, "American Caesars," *History Today* 74/10 (2024), 86–9.

[10]Richard Koebner and Helmut Dan Schmidt, *Imperialism: The Story and Significance of a Political Word, 1840–1960* (Cambridge, 1965), 1–2, 122–3, 134, 147–8. Koebner and Schmidt noted in passing that "Caesarism" was sometimes used as a synonym for "Imperialism." Ibid., 7. Mastellone, "Imperialismo e cesarismo," 258, also stressed the conjunction, albeit not in the British context.

[11]Turner, "British Politics," 589, 594.

[12]This contribution to the forum will focus closely on explicit uses of the word "Caesarism." Subsequently, Cesare Cuttica's contribution will examine the inscription of "Caesarism" into broader debates about democracy and antidemocracy in nineteenth-century Britain.

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I

Although the word "Caesarism" (*césarisme*) was not coined in French until 1850, the underlying idea had been long in the making. During the French Revolution, the concept of "despotism" was weaponized by the revolutionaries, who applied it indiscriminately to the hereditary monarchy, the feudal aristocracy, the Catholic Church, and all those other institutions of the *Ancien Régime* that obstructed the will of the people, which was now held to be the only legitimate source of sovereignty.[13] Subsequently, and accordingly, Napoleon I was portrayed not as a traditional monarch, but rather as a new kind of leader who embodied the will of the people, a portrayal that he encouraged by holding plebiscites on important constitutional changes. Moreover, having tamed the anarchy of the revolutionary republic into a stable political order, he was frequently compared to Julius Caesar.[14]

On the eve of the Restoration, Benjamin Constant's *The Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation* (1813) argued that the concept of "despotism" had become obsolete: whereas the ancient despot had expected only passive obedience from his subjects, the modern "usurper" (Napoleon) demanded the active and total mobilization of the entire citizenry, thus creating a new and unprecedented form of oppression that eliminated intermediate political institutions.[15] Subsequently, this line of analysis was powerfully developed in the first volume of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835), in which Tocqueville predicted that the democratic passion for equality would lead to a democratic despotism; in other words, the tyranny of the majority would fully realize itself in the tyranny of a single individual, who would proceed to suppress intermediate political institutions. Although Constant and Tocqueville did not use the word "Caesarism," the essence of the concept was already present in their writings.[16]

The upheaval of the 1848 Revolution brought the concept of Caesarism to articulate expression.[17] The credit both for finally coining the word and for fully elaborating the concept belonged to Auguste Romieu's violently polemical *L'ère des Césars* (1850), which rapidly went through two editions. In short, Romieu's argument was that traditional hereditary monarchy was dead and buried; that weak, vacillating liberal parliamentarism led inexorably through anarchy to civilizational collapse; and that the only authority now capable of restoring order was the army, ruling by title of brute physical force alone.[18]

[13]Richter, "A Family of Political Concepts," 230–31; Prutsch, *Caesarism*, 13–15.

[14]Stürmer, "Krise," 103–8; Baehr, *Caesar and the Fading of the Roman World*, 92–6; Prutsch, *Caesarism*, 16–21, 25–7, 36–7.

[15]Baehr, *Caesar and the Fading of the Roman World*, 97–100; Richter, "A Family of Political Concepts," 235; Prutsch, *Caesarism*, 39–43.

[16]De Georgi, "Scienze umane," 334–5; Cervelli, "Cesarismo," 177–97; Regina Pozzi, "Il cesarismo nella riflessione di Tocqueville," in Ceretta, *Bonapartismo, Cesarismo*, 23–32, at 23–6, 29; Melvin Richter, "Tocqueville and French Nineteenth-Century Conceptualizations of the Two Bonapartes and Their Empires," in Baehr and Richter, *Dictatorship*, 83–102, at 88–92; Richter, "A Family of Political Concepts," 235–6; Prutsch, *Caesarism*, 59–62.

[17]Prutsch, *Caesarism*, 62.

[18]Momigliano, "Per un riesame," 220–22; Groh, "Cäsarismus," 749–50; Heuss, "Der Cäsarismus," 13–15; De Georgi, "Scienze umane," 324–5; Baehr, "Accounting for Caesarism," 342–3, 350; Baehr, *Caesar and the Fading of the Roman World*, 106–12; Richter, "A Family of Political Concepts," 239–40; Pierre-Guillaume

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When the democratically elected president of the Republic, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, carried out a military coup and dissolved the National Assembly on 2 December 1851, Romieu's prophecy appeared to have been fulfilled. Having code-named the coup "Operation Rubicon" in honor of Julius Caesar, Louis-Napoleon promptly restored universal manhood suffrage and organized a plebiscite in which the French people voted overwhelmingly to override the Constitution, diminish the power of the legislature, and greatly enhance the power of the president. On 7 November 1852, another plebiscite inaugurated the Second Empire under Napoleon III, Emperor of the French. This was exactly the kind of democratic despotism that Constant and Tocqueville had feared, and Romieu's term "Caesarism" seemed to fit it perfectly.[19]

II

As noted above, it has been claimed that the word "Caesarism" was not even used in English until 1857.[20] However, this claim is demonstrably untrue: Romieu's *L'ère des Césars* (1850) was almost immediately noticed in Britain, being the subject of no fewer than six reviews in the periodical press, four of which used the word "Caesarism."[21] Before examining these reviews, it is necessary to briefly outline some of the contexts in which the British reception of Romieu took place. Although, before 1850, no one had an opinion on "Caesarism" (the word did not exist), many people had an opinion on Julius Caesar. In contrast to the late nineteenth century,[22] during the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, British opinion on Caesar was overwhelmingly negative. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Whig oligarchy had taken as its model the Roman Republic, and had accordingly vilified Caesar as the usurper who had finally extinguished the liberties of the latter.[23] For example, in his *The History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic* (1783), the Scottish Enlightenment writer Adam Ferguson had defended the aristocratic Senate of the late Republic, portraying

Kopp, *Die Bonapartes: Französische Cäsaren in Politik und Kunst* (Munich, 2013), 17, 61–2; Prutsch, *Caesarism*, 76–80.

[19]George L. Mosse, "Caesarism, Circuses, and Monuments," *Journal of Contemporary History* 6/2 (1971), 167–82, at 167–70; Stürmer, "Krise," 108–9; Mastellone, "Imperialismo e cesarismo," 260; Baehr, *Caesar and the Fading of the Roman World*, 101; Richter, "A Family of Political Concepts," 238; Trocini, "Cesarismo," 60–61; Walter Bruyère-Ostells, "De l'héritage politique napoléonien à la formation du césarisme démocratique (1814–1848)," *French Politics, Culture and Society* 31/2 (2013), 1–14, at 1–2, 4–5, 10–11; Prutsch, *Caesarism*, 70–71, 81–4.

[20]Baehr, "Accounting for Caesarism," 343; Baehr, *Caesar and the Fading of the Roman World*, 103; Baehr, *Caesarism, Charisma, and Fate*, 34.

[21]Baehr, *Caesar and the Fading of the Roman World*, 103, stated that Romieu's book was "never translated into English," but many periodical reviews translated substantial excerpts.

[22]See note 7 above.

[23]Walter Allen Jr, "The Snare of Caesarism," *Carolina Quarterly* 2/2 (1950), 27–32, at 27–9; Addison Ward, "The Tory View of Roman History," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 4/3 (1964), 413–56, at 413–25; J. A. W. Gunn, "Parliament and the Caesars: Legal Tyranny in the Political Rhetoric of Eighteenth-Century England," in Gunn, *Beyond Liberty and Property: The Process of Self-Recognition in Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Kingston and Montreal, 1983), 7–42, at 12–13; Turner, "British Politics," 578–82; Thomas Biskup, "The Enlightenment," in Griffith, *A Companion to Julius Caesar*, 399–409, at 400–2. For the rare Tory dissenters from the predominant Whig view see Ward, "The Tory View," 415, 445–50; and Turner, "British Politics," 582–3.

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Caesar as a depraved and self-interested demagogue who, having incited the rabble to overthrow the Senate, had proceeded to set himself up as a despot.[24] Subsequently, a decade of war against Emperor Napoleon I served to bring the name of Caesar into even deeper disrepute in Britain.[25] There was little change after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Thomas Arnold's *History of the Later Roman Commonwealth* (1845) opining of Caesar, "It may be justly doubted whether the life of any individual recorded in history was ever productive of a greater amount of human misery, or has been marked with a deeper stain of wickedness."[26]

Furthermore, by the beginning of the 1850s, most British commentators were congratulating themselves on having escaped the vicious cycle of revolution and despotism that had consumed continental Europe since 1848, above all in France. By contrast, Britain, in their view, had successfully maintained its distinctive blend of commercial liberty, a free press, local self-government, a limited electoral franchise, parliamentarism, and constitutional monarchy.[27] All in all, then, the "Caesarism" of Romieu and Napoleon III was destined to fall on stony ground in Britain.

To be sure, almost all British reviewers roundly rejected Romieu's doctrine of "Caesarism." However, rejection did not necessarily equate to out-of-hand dismissal.[28] In November 1850, *Fraser's Magazine* published a strongly hostile review of Romieu under the one-word title "Caesarism."[29] According to the reviewer, what Romieu called "*Caesarism*," a neologism for which "he is decidedly entitled to all the honors of invention," was nothing more than "the monstrous theory of the superiority of Force over Reason."[30] The reason why Romieu's "absurd" book had met with a positive reception in France, the reviewer suggested, was that, having grown exhausted by "the over-excitement of revolutionary action," certain classes of Frenchmen now yearned for "repose" and "stability" at any price.[31] Nevertheless, the reviewer proceeded to explain why Romieu's prophecy of "the rule of one man, in whom the force of the country will become temporarily incarnate," could never be fulfilled.[32] In short, the progress of democracy had become irresistible, rendering personal rule impossible forevermore. The reviewer explained,

> Public men, be they kings or emperors, must henceforward be content, in all countries which have tasted of constitutional liberty, to be the instruments, not the leaders of their party … under the levelling influence of steadily advancing democracy such exceptional aggregations of power are fast crumbling down into the common mass … So far from foreseeing an era in which the revolutions

[24]Turner, "British Politics," 584–7.

[25]Ibid., 587.

[26]See Vance, *The Victorians*, 37–8, 75–9, quote at 76.

[27]Baehr, *Caesar and the Fading of the Roman World*, 121–3; Parry, "The Impact of Napoleon III," 147–52.

[28]The initial reaction of British commentators to French "Caesarism" closely paralleled their reaction to French "imperialism," on which see Koebner and Schmidt, *Imperialism*, 1–10.

[29]"Caesarism," *Fraser's Magazine* 42/251 (1850), 495–502. I have not been able to ascertain the author.

[30]Ibid., 496–7.

[31]Ibid., 496; see also ibid., 501.

[32]Ibid., 497.

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> of a palace, or the acclamation of a camp, will influence the fate of nations, it seems to us that modern societies are growing daily more independent of their governments.[33]

Of course, the reviewer's complacency was misplaced: the following year, Louis-Napoleon's coup would demonstrate that "democracy" and "the common mass" were by no means opposed to the untrammeled rule of one man.

Later that month, *The Athenaeum* published a similarly forceful condemnation of Romieu by Georgina Frances de Peyronnet, a British journalist resident in France.[34] According to Peyronnet, Romieu's doctrine, if implemented, "would reduce civilized Europe to a condition worse than that of the Roman Empire in the most degraded days of its decline."[35] Despite its popularity in France, Peyronnet was confident that no Briton would ever countenance Romieu's "argument in favor of the expediency of substituting the will of one man for the more complicated machinery of representative government, his abuse of all parliamentary forms and delays, and his unqualified admiration of the brutal power of the sword." Indeed, only "[a]n unfortunate schoolboy goaded into madness by daily and excessive inflictions of Roman History could become converted in the present day to what M. Romieu terms 'Caesarism.'"[36] In the opinion of Peyronnet, Romieu's doctrine was a gross and absurd anachronism: the example of ancient Rome was simply irrelevant to the complexities of a modern commercial and democratic society. "How," Peyronnet inquired rhetorically, "is Caesarism to agree with Parliaments, newspapers, electric telegraphs, peace congresses, and exhibitions of industry?" To realize "Caesarism," she claimed, "the European world" would have "to retrograde 1900 years at one step," "and all the progress of human intellect and reason be annulled before the reign of cannon."[37] Again, such complacency was misplaced: Louis-Napoleon's regime would turn out to be by no means adverse to "electric telegraphs" and "exhibitions of industry."[38]

The only even halfway sympathetic response to Romieu in Britain was that of the veteran Tory polemicist John Wilson Croker, which was published the following year in September 1851; that is, on the eve of Louis-Napoleon's *coup d'état*, when politics in France appeared to have reached a deadlock.[39] Reviewing Romieu alongside twenty other specimens of "Revolutionary Literature," Croker expressed

[33]Ibid., 502.

[34][Georgina Frances de Peyronnet], "*The Era of the Caesars*—[*Lère des Césars*]. By M. A. Romieu. Paris," *The Athenaeum*, 23 Nov. 1850, 1207–8, attribution from the Curran Index to Nineteenth-Century Periodicals, at www.curranindex.org/?selectedItem%5Bindex%5D=article&selectedItem%5Bid%5D=56703&showModal=true (accessed 17 Sept. 2025).

[35]Ibid., 1207.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Ibid.

[38]One week later, an article entitled "Czarism, Caesarism, and the King of Prussia," in *The Leader*, 30 Nov. 1850, 851, briefly summarized the ideas of Romieu without approval or condemnation. I have been unable to ascertain the author.

[39][John Wilson Croker] "Revolutionary Literature," *Quarterly Review* 89/178 (1851), 491–543, attribution from Walter E. Houghton, ed., *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals*, 5 vols. (Toronto, 1966–89), 1: 735.

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his fear that the democratic passion for "Equality," if left unchecked, would culminate in "Communism."[40] Despite this grave danger, President Louis-Napoleon and the National Assembly were currently consumed by their struggle against each other: according to the Constitution, Louis-Napoleon was required to step down as president at the end of his term, but he refused to do so, and was touring the country drumming up support in an illegal reelection campaign. According to Croker, the most preferable solution would be for the National Assembly to disqualify Louis-Napoleon and instead appoint as president Lamartine, a "moderate" and "anti-socialist," who, unlike Louis-Napoleon, had "no pretensions to a crown."[41] However, Croker continued,

> If some such course as this be not adopted we see no possible extrication from the *fix* of 1852, but some illegal violence; and nobody can doubt that nothing but the unconstitutional intervention of the army can effect [it] … M. Romieu … evidently a man of considerable ability, has ventured to examine that contingency in a very celebrated pamphlet entitled *L'Ère des Césars*, which, however visionary it may be, and as we hope it is, in some of its conclusions, is but too well founded in its premises. His thesis is, after so many revolutions, such a vicissitude of sovereigns, such a rupture of all ties of tradition, habit, loyalty, or reverence, there is no longer in France any moral authority sufficient to constitute a government, and that nothing is left but the barbarism of brute Force.[42]

"We are sorry," Croker continued, "to concur in most of M. Romieu's practical views of the present state of his country, and we believe with him that ultimately the army will have to play a preponderating part in the restoration and maintenance of regular government."[43] However, Croker immediately made clear that he believed that Caesarism was suited only to the specific conditions of France: there was no need whatsoever for it in England, where there had been no revolutions for the past 160 years, where the population was long accustomed to liberty, self-government, and representative institutions.[44]

When Louis-Napoleon successfully mounted a *coup d'état* with the support of the army on 2 December 1851, other British commentators also began to take Romieu's doctrine of Caesarism seriously. On 20 December 1851, the Catholic periodical *The Tablet* published an article entitled "Socialism and Caesarism," which conceded that Romieu's book had proven to be "not without a very real and formidable groundwork of truth." Indeed, given the impossibility of reviving hereditary monarchy and the imminent threat of communism, military rule had become a necessity for France.[45]

Not all British commentators were entirely convinced, however. Shortly after Louis-Napoleon had declared his intention to restore the empire, the Liberal newspaper *The Examiner* published an article entitled "Augustus Redivivus." To be sure, the author

[40]Ibid., 496–7.

[41]Ibid., 516–17.

[42]Ibid., 517.

[43]Ibid., 519.

[44]Ibid., 520–21.

[45]"Socialism and Caesarism," *The Tablet*, 20 Dec. 1851, 809–10, quote at 809. I have been unable to ascertain the author.

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of the article took Romieu very seriously indeed, claiming, "The book which ushered in the *coup d'état* of December was the *Ère des Césars*." However, according to the author, the victory of Caesarism was illusory and would not endure. Like several previous British reviewers, the author stressed the matter of anachronism; that is, the fact that crude analogies with ancient Rome offered no real guide to the complexities of a modern commercial and democratic society. The author elaborated,

> the inhabitants of separate planets can scarcely differ more from each other, than ancients and moderns differ in all their wants and ways … [In ancient Rome] the rich had wealth amassed, but no uses to turn it to. Trade there was none. The people were supplied with bread by their government. The annihilation of a republic and the substitution of absolutism in such a state merely offended a few senators and lawyers. There was neither trade nor credit to paralyze, there was no press to destroy, no ideas to crush, no discussion to stifle … The ludicrous inapplicability of any such remedy to societies developed like those of the west of Europe is too obvious to require insisting on … The most virtuous of autocrats could not continue to reign, by the side of a free press, over a large industrious people, of whom the absolute necessity, the very life and soul, is the activity of self-government.

Indeed, the author predicted, Caesarism would sooner or later collapse through another "explosive and terrible revolution."[46]

III

In the event, the Second Empire endured for another eighteen years, during which British commentators continued to offer their assessments of Caesarism; a particularly important moment was the publication of the first volume of Napoleon III's *History of Julius Caesar* in 1865, which initiated a new round of reflections.[47] Remarkably, in the face of the empire's largely successful economic policies, which fostered the rapid growth of industry, developed the infrastructure of the country, and significantly raised the living standards of the working classes,[48] British commentators were forced to abandon their claim that Caesarism was fundamentally incompatible with a modern commercial society. For example, an article published by the Irish journalist J. A. Scott in October 1862 praised Napoleon III for having provided France with ten years of "steady government," opining that he had "acquired a moral title by his successes."[49] In particular, Scott continued, the emperor had "turned the attention of his people

[46]"Augustus Redivivus," *The Examiner*, 30 Oct. 1852, 691. I have been unable to ascertain the author.

[47]On its composition, content, and reception see Momigliano, "Per un riesame," 224–5; De Giorgi, "Scienze umane," 325; Vance, *The Victorians*, 75; Leandro Polverini, "Imitatio Caesaris: Cesare a Alessandro, Napoleone e Cesare," in Alberto Barzanò, ed., *Modelli eroici dall'antichità alla cultura europea* (Rome, 2003), 403–14, at 411–14, Claude Nicolet, "Caesar and the Two Napoleons," in Griffith, *A Companion to Julius Caesar*, 410–17, at 414–16; and Kopp, *Die Bonapartes*, 58–61.

[48]See Kopp, *Die Bonapartes*, 57–8; and Prutsch, *Caesarism*, 104–5.

[49][J. A. Scott], "France under Napoleon the Third," *Dublin University Magazine* 60/358 (1862), 498–512, at 499, attribution from Houghton, *The Wellesley Index*, 4: 321.

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to industrial pursuits to an extent never known before in France," with the effect that "Mammon has expelled politics."[50] Above all, "This money mania" had "benefitted the *ouvrier* [laborer]," who "enjoys his trifling pleasures now in happy indifference to all dynastic or socialist agitation."[51] Having accustomed the French people to industrial pursuits, the challenge for the future would be for the state to slowly step back, allowing greater "scope for individual enterprise." To be sure, "the process must be slow, from the prevailing 'Caesarism' having proved so successful."[52]

However, other British commentators reacted to the economic successes of the empire by invoking traditional republican or civic humanist tropes regarding the corrupting effects of luxury.[53] For example, in 1865, one British reviewer opined that while Caesarism "may build palaces, beautify cities, create navies, and extend commerce," "it arrests moral and social progress."[54] The same year, the Liberal historian Edward Augustus Freeman delivered an address on "Caesar: His Forerunners and Followers," in which he declared his belief that the "Caesarism" of "the government of Buonaparte at this time" was "the most corrupting of all governments." He explained,

> We are told that they make their people prosperous and quiet and all that, but is it not the very greatest mischief of the system that they do? A good old-fashioned tyrant, which sends people off to prison, which murders this man and plunders another, really does less mischief; there is some hope of a nation under that sort of tyranny, some hope that it may rise and get rid of its tyrant; but a tyrant like Augustus or Buonaparte, after the proscription or the *coup d'état* is past, does nothing of that outrageous kind; he rather puts his people into a sort of fool's paradise, and gives them a prosperity like that of the hog in his stye; he is a tyrant under whom people may eat and drink and get rich, but under whom every noble aspiration is crushed … There lies the real sin of Caesarism, Bonapartism, or whatever we may call it; it makes men corrupt, it stifles everything good and great in them, it does not leave them even the energy into which other tyrannies arouse them, the energy to rise and shake off their chains.[55]

Through such civic humanist rhetoric, the economic achievements of the regime could be reframed as a bad thing, fostering selfishness, luxury, and moral corruption.

Other British commentators chose to focus their critique on the specifically political aspect of Caesarism; that is, the way in which Caesar, deriving his authority from the acclaim of a base, ignorant rabble, proceeded to suppress intermediate political institutions and centralize all power in his own hands, thereby excluding the virtuous and

[50]Ibid., 499–501.

[51]Ibid., 501.

[52]Ibid., 505.

[53]On such criticisms of Caesarism in France see generally Rosenblatt, *Lost History*, 163–5. On British accusations that the regime deliberately fostered luxury to corrupt its subjects see generally Parry, "The Impact of Napoleon III," 154, 162.

[54]"Modern Caesarism," *Hertford Mercury*, 4 March 1865, n.p.

[55]"Annual Meeting, 1865," *Proceedings of the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society*, new series 2 (1864–71), 19–36, Freeman's address at 21–36, quote at 35–6.

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educated from public life. Remarkably, the fact that, during the 1860s, Napoleon III carried out a program of liberalization, including granting greater power to the National Assembly, strengthening the municipalities, and relaxing press censorship, as well as the fact that many French liberals were willing to cooperate with these initiatives,[56] did not convince British commentators to change their minds about the fundamental nature of the regime.[57] In the opinion of a contributor to *The Spectator* in 1861, such liberal reforms would ultimately prove incompatible with the inherently centralized character of Caesarism. By renouncing his prerogative of taking out new loans without the consent of the Chamber of Deputies, Napoleon III had made the fatal admission that Caesar was not omnipotent after all, and in fact required the aid of intermediate institutions. The author elaborated, "Caesarism has broken down in one essential department of life. By the confession of the Caesar himself, it is unable, with all its enormous power, to meet a financial crisis, and in the most practical of all State questions is compelled to fall back on the Parliamentary system it has so long denounced." Having set a precedent, the author predicted, it was likely that the National Assembly would begin to stake a claim to authority in other areas too.[58]

Far from being the only British analysis of French Caesarism,[59] Walter Bagehot's article "Caesarism as It Existed in 1865" served to extend and elaborate the critique that had already been developed by previous British authors.[60] Like the authors cited above, Bagehot was willing to concede that "[n]o Government has striven to promote railways, and roads, and industry, like this Government," and that the regime had achieved real successes in promoting "the welfare of the masses—the present good of the present multitude."[61] However, although it may be "an admirable Government for present and coarse purposes," it remained "a detestable Government for future and refined purposes." Above all, by excluding the voice of the educated from public life, Caesarism "stops the effectual inculcation of important thought upon the mass of mankind."[62] Therefore, according to Bagehot, not only the educated suffered under Caesarism; the masses were also deprived of the improving influence of their betters. An article published one week later in the *Aldershot Military Gazette* appeared to follow Bagehot's analysis, while holding out the hope that "[i]ntelligent Frenchmen" would soon assert their "claim to a share in the conduct of [their] own affairs, whenever the opportune moment shall arrive."[63]

[56]Sudhir Hazareesingh, "Bonapartism and the Progenitor of Democracy: The Paradoxical Case of the French Second Empire," in Baehr and Richter, *Dictatorship*, 129–52, at 129–35, 140–43; Rosenblatt, *Lost History*, 160–61; Prutsch, *Caesarism*, 107–10.

[57]On British criticisms of the supposed over-centralization of the empire, see generally Parry, "The Impact of Napoleon III," 154, 164.

[58]"The Constitutional Change in France," *The Spectator*, 16 Nov. 1861, 1249. I have been unable to ascertain the author.

[59]See note 2 above.

[60]Walter Bagehot, "Caesarism as It Existed in 1865" [*The Economist*, 4 March 1865], reprinted in Walter Bagehot, *Literary Studies (Miscellaneous Essays)*, ed. Richard Holt Hutton, 3 vols. (London, 1895), 3: 72–9. For further commentary see Fini, "Il cesarismo," 445–7; Prutsch, *Caesarism*, 152–3.

[61]Bagehot, "Caesarism as It Existed," 73–4.

[62]Ibid., 75–6.

[63]"Caesarism—What It Is," *Aldershot Military Gazette*, 11 March 1865, n.p.

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While Bagehot's article of March 1865 owed something to previous British authors on Caesarism, it was also echoed by other analyses published shortly thereafter. In July 1865, *Macmillan's Magazine* published an English translation of the Italian exile Giuseppe Mazzini's review of Napoleon III's *History of Julius Caesar*.[64] According to Mazzini, the great evil of Caesarism was that it sapped the force of individual initiative and thus precluded all moral "Progress."[65] Commenting on Mazzini's article, a contributor to the *Saturday Review* put forward a similar point to Bagehot's, emphasizing that Caesarism "deprives of political privileges those who are fit to use them, while it does not educate for political life those who are as yet unfit. For the upper classes it is deprivation; for the lower, stagnation."[66]

After Napoleon III fell from power in 1870 following military defeat at the hands of Prussia, Bagehot published an article in *The Economist* entitled "The Collapse of Caesarism," in which he argued that the suppression of intermediate institutions and the exclusion of men of talent from the state had been the fundamental cause of French defeat.[67] According to Bagehot, the distinguishing characteristic of Caesarism was that it sought to "win directly from a plebiscite, i.e., the vote of the people," the power to "hold in severe check the intellectual criticism of the more educated classes." "We do not doubt," he continued,

> that the explanation [for French defeat] is to be found in the very nature of Caesarism,—i.e., in the absence of all intermediate links of moral responsibility and co-operation … Consequently, everything must depend on [the Emperor] … This has evidently been the ruin of the great military power of France. The Emperor, unlike the first Napoleon, has had neither genius, nor health, nor perhaps the industry to check or superintend personally any considerable part even of the military organization of the Empire.[68]

In particular, the replacement of competent officers with the emperor's "creatures" had proved disastrous.[69] In addition to the emperor's own personal inadequacies and the absence of intermediate institutions on which he could have relied for skilled counsel, the other fatal flaw of Caesarism had been the emperor's abject dependence on "the masses of the people," whose opposition had prevented the emperor from enforcing "his newest conscription law." "A Caesar who is supported against the aristocracy and the educated and professional classes by the ignorant peasantry," Bagehot concluded,

[64]Joseph Mazzini, "On Caesarism," *Macmillan's Magazine* 12/69 (1865), 259–66. The original had been published as "Il Cesarismo," *L'Unità Italiana*, 17 May 1865. For commentary see Momigliano, "Per un riesame," 225–6; and Salvatore Ringari, "Il cesarismo nel pensiero politico italiano del secondo Ottocento," in Ceretta, *Bonapartismo, Cesarismo*, 95–104.

[65]Mazzini, "On Caesarism," 260. See also Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help; with Illustrations of Character, Conduct, and Perseverance*, new edn (London, 1866), 3–4, which counterposed "Caesarism" to "Self-Help".

[66]"M. Mazzini and Caesarism," *Saturday Review*, 22 July 1865, 101–2, at 101. I have been unable to ascertain the author.

[67][Walter Bagehot], "The Collapse of Caesarism," *The Economist*, 20 Aug. 1870, 1028–9.

[68]Ibid., 1028.

[69]Ibid., 1029.

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had necessarily been "compelled to limit his measures by their ignorant likes and dislikes," which had in the end been his downfall.[70]

IV

In Britain during the 1850s and 1860s, then, the word "Caesarism," like the word "imperialism," continued to be applied almost exclusively to France.[71] However, even during this period, several British commentators considered the possibility that French Caesarism might spread to other countries in continental Europe. For example, in 1861, the Anglo-Irish clergyman J. B. Heard argued that the "effete" ruling classes of Europe increasingly resembled "the Patrician families who long monopolized the liberties of Rome," only to fall victim to "a fierce democracy, clamoring for their rights," and having found a leader in "Caesar," "a renegade noble" who had "became the idol of the people."[72] "Continental Europe," Heard claimed, was now "passing though the throes of revolution, the same as those of ancient Rome," and "Caesarism" was already "ascendant in France, where the people bow the neck contentedly before the military chief who represents the principles of 1789, and the abolition of all feudal privileges."[73] Moreover, the regime of Napoleon III was deliberately stirring up nationalist discontent within the multinational monarchies of Europe. "These nationalities," Heard wrote, "are to a Napoleon what the *plebs* were to a Caesar. He will use them for his own purpose, and turn their wrongs into a step-ladder for his ambition." Nevertheless, Heard admitted, "in the eyes of millions of Italians, Hungarians, Croats, Poles, Roumelians, Serbs, and Wallachians," Napoleon III "represents a sacred principle; he is democracy, with drawn sword, come to reckon with their oppressors."[74]

Towards the end of the 1860s, some British commentators began to entertain the possibility that the word "Caesarism" might be usefully applied to Otto von Bismarck's Prussia. During the first half of the decade, Bismarck had repeatedly overruled the Prussian House of Representatives, restricted freedom of the press, and won military victories against Denmark in 1864 and Austria in 1866, resulting in the formation of the North German Confederation, which was to have a Reichstag elected by universal male suffrage. In response, many German conservatives, liberals, and social democrats accused Bismarck of "Caesarism," an accusation that was echoed and debated in the British press.[75]

[70]Ibid. Bagehot's article was summarized with approval in "The Collapse of Caesarism," *King's County Chronicle*, 31 Aug. 1870, n.p.

[71]Koebner and Schmidt, *Imperialism*, 14–24, 29.

[72][John Bickford Heard], "The Month's Chronicle," *Dublin University Magazine* 57/341 (1861), 629–40, at 629, attribution from Houghton, *The Wellesley Index*, 4: 315.

[73]Ibid., 629–30.

[74]Ibid., 630.

[75]For varying interpretations of the debate in Germany see Groh, "Cäsarismus," 760–65, Michael Stürmer, "Bismarckstaat and Cäsarismus," *Der Staat* 12/4 (1973), 467–98, at 474–7, Stürmer, "Krise," 110–15, Innocenzo Cervelli, "'Cesarismo': Un neologismo per il linguaggio politico contemporaneo," in Ceretta, *Bonapartismo, Cesarismo*, 107–13, at 107–9; Rusconi, *Cavour e Bismarck*, 139–41; Rosenblatt, *Lost History*, 182–5; and Prutsch, *Caesarism*, 119–48.

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Writing shortly before the Austro-Prussian War and the creation of the Northern Confederation, a contributor to *The Spectator* reflected on "The Progress of Bismarckism."[76] In his opinion, the "Caesarism" of France and the "Bismarckism" of Prussia were two entirely different things: whereas the former derived its power from the will of the people, the latter functioned through regular defiance of the popular will. In the words of the author,

> Caesarism is the rule of an individual in accordance with the leading desires and tendencies of the nation, is based upon opinion, as well as the sword, and is despotic rather through the absorption of all initiative in the State into one mind … Bismarckism is a widely different thing … It does not rely upon opinion as a base, but rather acts in defiance of opinion … This system carries out the ideas of those who have framed it, not those of the public.

In this analysis, then, the term "Caesarism" remained specific to the democratic, plebiscitary dictatorship that had been established in France; it could not be generalized to monarchical or other regimes elsewhere in Europe.

Later that year, however, following the Prussian victory in the Austro-Prussian War, the establishment of the Northern Confederation, and the announcement that the latter would have a popularly elected Reichstag, several British commentators suggested that the Prussian polity was now rapidly evolving into Caesarism. For example, on 22 August 1866, John Stuart Mill wrote in a private letter that the victory of Prussia over Austria represented the triumph of "a powerful Caesarism" over "an expiring feudality," this being "to cast out devils by Beelzebub the prince of the devils."[77] Three days later, on 25 August 1866, a contributor to the *Saturday Review* argued similarly that Prussia was now developing into a genuine Caesarism. In particular, the author predicted that these measures would lead to the suppression of intermediate institutions and the marginalization of the educated classes, just as had already occurred in France. The author wrote,

> Having created a great empire, the Prussian Minister [Bismarck] at once proceeds to a measure which will probably prevent the establishment of constitutional liberty. A national Parliament is to be convened on the basis of equal electoral districts and universal suffrage … an adoption of the system which has lately been called Caesarism can scarcely fail to destroy Parliamentary Government. The supremacy of the masses means in all countries, as well as in Imperial France, the exclusion from political influence of landowners, merchants, capitalists, scholars, lawyers, and professional politicians, and the administration of public affairs by the paid agents of the Central Government.[78]

[76]"The Progress of Bismarckism," *The Spectator*, 20 Jan. 1866, 62–3. I have been unable to ascertain the author.

[77]John Stuart Mill to Theodor Gomperz, 22 Aug. 1866, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J. M. Robson, 33 vols. (Toronto, 1963–91), 16: 1197.

[78]"France and Germany," *Saturday Review*, 25 Aug. 1866, 227–8, at 227. I have been unable to ascertain the author.

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In this analysis, Caesarism was not necessarily confined to France, and had the potential to spread to other European countries.

The following month, the Liberal politician William Cornwallis Cartwright pushed back against such claims in an article published in *Fraser's Magazine*. "In some quarters," Cartwright wrote, "the fear is that the upshot aimed at by Bismarck is the establishment of a great military despotism—a German Caesarism." However, Cartwright dismissed such fears, arguing that Caesarism was in fact unsuited to the stolid character of Germans. "A dragooning Caesarism, resting on Praetorians and ruling in an affectation of divine right of usurpation," he wrote, "is a thing foreign to the nature of the German world," which was defined by "slowness" and an attachment to traditional constitutional "forms."[79]

Bagehot's article, "The Collapse of Caesarism," which appeared during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, can also be read as an intervention in this ongoing British debate about the character of Bismarck's Prussia. As noted above, Bagehot portrayed the Second French Empire as Caesarism par excellence, due to the dependence of Napoleon III on the popular will and the suppression of intermediate institutions. By contrast, Bagehot made clear that the Prussian state could not be described as a form of Caesarism: although the king of Prussia and Bismarck were certainly guilty of practicing "personal government" and defying the will of parliament, they did not derive their power from plebiscites, and they had consistently maintained, respected, and deferred to intermediary institutions, above all in the army.[80] Bagehot wrote,

> Nowhere is the respect for military custom and the power of military caste more keenly felt than in Prussia. The King has always officered his army through the nobility, and that alone is a strong guarantee for an *esprit de corps* that no personal power could defy … there never could have been the same danger of the army falling into inefficiency through the inefficiency of any one man, whether at its head or not, that there is under a Caesarist system.

Furthermore, whereas Napoleon III had been the slave of the "ignorant peasantry," the king of Prussia enjoyed "the affection of an aristocracy near his throne, and of a middle class that shows an educated preference for the old dynasty"; as such, he had "no need to fear the displeasure of the lowest among the population."[81] For Bagehot, then, as for the contributor to *The Spectator* cited above, Caesarism *stricto sensu* remained a specifically French phenomenon.

V

The word "Caesarism" appears to have been first applied to British politics during the debates leading up to the 1867 Reform Act.[82] When Lord John Russell's Liberal ministry

[79]William Cornwallis Cartwright, "The Reconstruction of Germany," *Fraser's Magazine* 74/441 (1866), 366–84, at 383.

[80][Bagehot], "The Collapse of Caesarism," 1028.

[81]Ibid., 1029.

[82]Iain McDaniel, "The Politics of Historical Economics: Wilhelm Roscher on Democracy, Socialism and Caesarism," *Modern Intellectual History* 15/1 (2018), 93–122, at 116–20, points out that certain German observers believed that the 1867 Reform Act was leading Britain into Caesarism.

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brought forward a Reform Bill at the beginning of 1866, the leading Conservative Lord Robert Cecil accused the Liberals of truckling to the mob, and especially to Radicals such as John Bright who would make Britain more like America. Due to its dependence on Parliament, Cecil explained, the British executive was much weaker than the directly elected executive of the United States. As such, it did not currently "offer any analogy to the budding Caesarism of the American Presidency."[83] However, Cecil hinted darkly at the close of his article, if the Liberals succeeded in extending the franchise from "an educated minority" to "the class which lives on the proceeds of its daily labor," then "the independent power which the educated classes, the aristocracy, the professional men, the merchants, the landowners, the manufacturers, have hitherto exerted, will be gone forever."[84] Although Cecil did not say it explicitly, the implication seems to have been that the extension of the franchise would serve to undermine the influence of intermediate classes and thereby open the way to Caesarism in Britain too. After Russell's ministry had been replaced by a Conservative government under Earl Derby, *The Spectator* suggested similarly that a "more democratic Parliament," in its haste to remedy "pauperism," would be tempted to "enthrone some individual will strong enough and able enough to gratify the secret longing to establish Caesarism." In the British context, the author added, "the Caesar" was likely to be "a popular Parliamentary leader, acting through a silenced and disciplined majority."[85] Comparably, an article that appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* shortly after the 1867 Reform Act had been shepherded through Parliament by Disraeli raised the question "whether this realm is to maintain any longer its strangely balanced system of centuries," or "whether it is to be delivered over to modern democracy or to Caesarism."[86] Although these remarks were made in passing in short one-page articles and were not properly elaborated, they nonetheless represented the first time that the word "Caesarism" had been applied to Britain.

Another factor that spurred British thinkers to begin contemplating the prospect of Caesarism in Britain was the aggressive foreign policy of Disraeli's subsequent Conservative government (1874–80). By this point, the French Second Empire had already collapsed, thus freeing up the word "Caesarism," along with the word "imperialism," for other purposes.[87] After his victory in the 1874 general election, Disraeli prioritized the Eastern Question over the settler colonies of the British Empire.[88] For example, in 1876, the Royal Titles Act made Queen Victoria the "Empress of India," a title which to Liberals smacked of the regime of the recently deceased Napoleon III.[89]

[83][Lord Robert Cecil], "The Coming Session," *Quarterly Review* 119/237 (1866), 250–80, at 278–9, attribution from Houghton, *The Wellesley Index*, 1: 748. I owe this source to Cesare Cuttica.

[84]Ibid., 279–80.

[85]"The Danger of Parliaments," *The Spectator*, 10 Nov. 1866, 1244. I have been unable to ascertain the author.

[86]"Political Frivolity," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 Oct. 1867, 1429. I have been unable to ascertain the author. I owe this source to Cesare Cuttica.

[87]On the shifting British usage of the word "imperialism" see Koebner and Schmidt, *Imperialism*, 118–23, 134, 147–8; and Parry, "The Impact of Napoleon III," 171–3.

[88]Koebner and Schmidt, *Imperialism*, 111–17.

[89]Ibid., 118–23.

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Early in 1878, Disraeli dispatched an army of Indian troops to occupy Malta, which led to accusations in the Liberal press that he was maintaining an army composed of foreign soldiers without the authority of Parliament, and that this army might even be sent to Britain to establish a military despotism; the comparison with the fall of the Roman Republic was made explicit.[90] When Britain found itself at war not only in Afghanistan in December 1878 but also with the Zulus in January 1879, the Liberal campaign against Disraeli's "imperialism" rose to fever pitch.[91] The upshot was that within a mere few years, the word "imperialism" had been transformed from a label for the regime of Napoleon III to an anti-Disraeli slogan.[92]

During these years, the word "Caesarism" seems to have undergone the same transformation. The best example is an article entitled "Caesarism" published in the *Liverpool Mercury*, a Liberal newspaper, on 24 April 1879, which claimed to be a review of James Anthony Froude's *Caesar: A Sketch* (1879). On the first page of his book, Froude had suggested that "to the student of political history and to the English student above all, the conversion of the Roman Republic into a military empire commands a peculiar interest." Like the English, Froude claimed, the early Romans had "possessed the faculty of self-government," thanks to which "they became the most powerful nation in the world." Yet "their liberties perished" when "Rome became the mistress of conquered races, to whom she was unable or unwilling to extend her privileges," and it was not impossible that "the Imperial tendencies" that had recently become apparent in England "might lead us over the same course to the same end."[93] Paraphrasing this first page, the reviewer could not resist shading into an attack on Disraeli, writing that "Caesarism," as "sketched by Mr. Froude," "appears in many respects the foster-parent of Imperialism as interpreted by Lord Beaconsfield." In particular, the reviewer added, the war in Afghanistan, the war against the Zulus, and the looming prospect of intervention in Egypt amounted to an "unmistakable 'Caesarism'," as pursued by "our belligerent Premier," which threatened "to make an end of our free institutions."[94] Thus, like "Imperialism," the word "Caesarism" had come to be applied directly to the foreign policy of Disraeli.

VI

Following the electoral victory of the Liberals in 1880 and the death of Disraeli in 1881, the Liberals no longer needed to make such polemical use of the word "Imperialism," at least for the time being.[95] However, the word "Caesarism" was soon appropriated for other purposes, namely to articulate fears about the possible consequences of the 1884 Reform Act, a Liberal measure that had extended the right to vote to a majority

[90]Ibid., 136–40.

[91]Ibid., 155–9.

[92]Ibid., 147–8. See also Peter Cain, "Radicalism, Gladstone, and the Liberal Critique of Disraelian 'Imperialism'," in Duncan Bell, ed., *Victorian Visions of Global Order* (Cambridge, 2009), 215–38.

[93]James Anthony Froude, *Caesar: Sketch* (London, 1879), 1; see also ibid., 171–2.

[94]"Caesarism," *Liverpool Mercury*, 24 April 1879, 6. This was an extremely partisan appropriation of Froude's book. "Lord Beaconsfield" was Disraeli's title.

[95]Koebner and Schmidt, *Imperialism*, 166–7.

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of adult men. As noted above, scholars have assumed that Britain was immunized against Caesarism by its long-standing traditions of constitutional monarchy, parliamentary government, and a limited electoral franchise.[96] However, the point made by the authors surveyed below was that, through the 1884 Reform Act, Britain had finally laid waste to its traditional constitution, fully degrading itself into a vulgar democracy on continental European lines, and thereby opening the path to Caesarism. Remarkably, they suggested that in Britain Caesarism was now more likely to arise from within rather than against Parliament: a charismatic party leader, standing at the head of a disciplined majority of MPs in the House of Commons, and claiming to have received a mandate from "the people," would encounter few limitations on his power.[97] Interestingly, such concerns were expressed both by disillusioned Liberals and by Conservatives.

The most striking example of the former class was an article entitled "Caesarism," published by Earl Cowper in January 1885.[98] A wealthy landed aristocrat, Cowper was a member of the House of Lords rather than the House of Commons and had served as Gladstone's Lord Lieutenant of Ireland between 1880 and 1882. However, as his article made clear, he had deep misgivings about Gladstone's Reform Act. Rejecting complacent notions of British exceptionalism, Cowper argued that Britain was subject to the same developmental tendencies as any other polity. In words reminiscent of Polybius, Cowper stated that, "As a rule," "a monarchy is succeeded by an oligarchy; an oligarchy, after a more or less prolonged struggle, by a democracy; and a democracy by the dominion of an autocrat." Indeed, the polities of ancient Greece, ancient Rome, and the medieval city-states of Italy had all followed this same trajectory.[99] Far from having broken this cycle, Cowper continued, modern Britain had in fact "run the usual course."[100] In particular, the 1832 Reform Act had marked "the end of our aristocratic period," and over "the last fifty years" Britain had been making the "transition" to democracy, culminating in the Reform Act of 1884.[101] Now that Britain was a democracy, it was only natural that "some form of Caesarism" had become "one of the dangers that may possibly threaten us."[102] According to Cowper, it was a vulgar error to assume that "Caesarism" necessarily meant the seizure of power "by an able and unscrupulous general at the head of a victorious army." In fact, there was "another kind of Caesarism founded not upon arms but upon the affections of the people," and it was this latter form of Caesarism that now menaced Britain.[103] Indeed, it was a worrying premonition that, over recent years, political life had come to be dominated by charismatic party leaders such as Disraeli and Gladstone, and it was by no means impossible that,

[96] See note 3 above.

[97] As noted above, the same points had been hinted at in 1866 and 1867, but after 1884 they were developed at much greater length.

[98] [Earl Cowper], "Caesarism," *The Nineteenth Century* 17/95 (1885), 1–14.

[99] Ibid., 3.

[100] Ibid., 4. For further discussion of Polybius in relation to Caesarism see Cesare Cuttica's contribution to this forum.

[101] Ibid., 5–6.

[102] Ibid., 7.

[103] Ibid., 7.

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in the near future, "a man may arise with all Mr. Gladstone's popular talents, but less real ability, far less scrupulous and more ambitious of personal rule."[104]

To be sure, Cowper did not despair entirely. Even after the 1884 Reform Act, the British constitution still provided certain checks on the power of the prime minister, which, if respected and maintained, might help to stave off the threat of Caesarism. In the first place, Britain was still a monarchy, and the Crown tended to draw to itself "much of the popular enthusiasm which would otherwise be accumulated upon the favorite of the moment."[105] Furthermore, over recent years, the Cabinet had developed into an important part of the executive, providing another "very valuable check upon the too exorbitant ambition of an individual."[106] In addition, the increasing complexity of government meant that even if a prime minister was "powerful enough to choose his own Cabinet very much at his own discretion," he would still "be compelled to place very able men at the head of the different departments."[107]

Ultimately, however, Cowper argued, the question whether or not Britain would succumb to Caesarism would be settled not by institutions, but rather by the will and ability of elites to resist the slide into democratic dictatorship. "The independence of the House of Commons," he wrote, "will be decided by how far our strongest and most intellectual men continue to have seats in it," and whether they would have the courage to resist the rise of a prime ministerial Caesar. In this regard, Cowper's final prognosis was bleak: "the addition to our constituencies of 2,000,000 voters belonging to the most ignorant and impulsive of our population" was unlikely to favor the election of good men, being rather calculated to "intensify the evil of which I have spoken."[108]

Later that year, in October 1885, the Conservative-leaning editor and journalist William Earl Hodgson put forward a similar analysis in an article entitled "Party Organization: The Curse of the Country."[109] Here Hodgson stressed the dangers of factionalism and partisanship within a democracy. According to Hodgson, neither Liberal nor Conservative leaders cared much for "the nation's interests," instead being obsessed about whether "it would [end] in a triumph for Mr. Gladstone or in a triumph for Lord Salisbury"; that is, the question of whom the electorate would choose to play Caesar for the next few years.[110] Indeed, both sets of leaders competed to outdo each other in flattery of the newly enfranchised "masses," who were all too susceptible to such blandishments. Hodgson wrote,

> In the pride of their conscious power, and forgetful of their ignorance, the sense of which has been obliterated by the persistent flattery from above, the Masses have become vain, and pretentious, and sectarian; while, well knowing that they can succeed only by pampering those weaknesses, the leaders of the masses,

[104]Ibid., 8–9.
[105]Ibid., 10.
[106]Ibid., 10–11.
[107]Ibid., 12.
[108]Ibid., 13.
[109]W. Earl Hodgson, "Party Organization: The Curse of the Country," *Time* 2 (1885), 395–409.
[110]Ibid., 395. Lord Salisbury was the leader of the Conservative Party.

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> the candidates and the demagogues, have lost the backbone of their morality altogether.[111]

The freshly inaugurated British "Democracy" was thus already sliding into "Caesarism and degeneration," "a political intoxication into which the masses have been seduced by men seeking to profit by the consequent excitement and confusion."[112]

Three years later, in 1888, neighboring France appeared to be on the brink of Caesarism once again, this time in the person of General Boulanger.[113] Events across the Channel prompted Cyril Ransome, a professor of modern history at the Yorkshire College in Leeds, to reflect on the prospect of Caesarism in Britain.[114] Like Cowper, Ransome stressed that whereas in France Caesarism tended to seize power through military coups, in Britain it was far more likely to arise gradually from within Parliament in the form of a popular and unscrupulous party leader. "Our Boulanger," Ransome wrote, "will act under constitutional forms and in secret."[115] Also like Cowper, Ransome argued that Britain was not exempt from the normal laws of political development, and that having become a commonplace democracy through the 1884 Reform Act, it had thrown open the way to Caesarism. He wrote,

> England has no monopoly of freedom from the ordinary forces which are found in action in certain forms of political life. It is true that we have hitherto enjoyed an immunity from certain phenomena which have been disastrous to the institutions of other countries; but have we any guarantee that this immunity will last? So far from cherishing the peculiarities of our constitution, we have of late years been engaging in steadily levelling it to an ordinary type of democracy … [The House of Commons has become] the mouthpiece of a single class of voters … the least gifted with political information … While this change has been going on in Parliament, the Executive Government has been made more and more the province of a single individual … the Prime Minister … is the Ministry; while the practice of resignation on an adverse election makes him the choice neither of the Sovereign nor of Parliament, but of a *plébiscite*.[116]

In effect, as a result of the 1884 Reform Act, general elections had been transformed into French-style plebiscites, whereby the masses were invited to choose between the competing party leaders. "Great masses of voters," the author concluded grimly, "are little swayed by ideas. They like names." Indeed, "Such a state of things" constituted "an immense temptation to a popular leader to stimulate rather than to check this

[111]Ibid., 398.

[112]Ibid., 403.

[113]On Boulanger and the post-1870 persistence of Caesarism in France see Philip Thody, *French Caesarism from Napoleon I to Charles de Gaulle* (Basingstoke 1989), 68–70; and Prutsch, *Caesarism*, 158–61. For a British defense of Boulanger's "Caesarism" see "Oxford Union Society," *Oxford Magazine*, 4 March 1891, 258.

[114][Cyril Ransome], "Boulangism in England: A Speculation," *Macmillan's Magazine* 59 (1888), 31–5, attribution from Houghton, *The Wellesley Index*, 1: 631.

[115]Ibid., 31.

[116]Ibid., 31–2.

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tendency," and, after all, "It is the earlier steps towards Caesarism which are the most subtle, and, therefore, the most likely to escape detection."[117]

Such fears of Caesarism emerging from within a democratically elected Parliament were reiterated in highly similar terms in an article entitled "Modern Caesarism" in 1899.[118] "Essentially," the author explained, "Caesarism is representation, representation of the mass by a man."[119] As such, there was no reason to assume that it was limited to France; such a phenomenon could also occur in Britain, although it would naturally be shaped by the parliamentary traditions of the latter. The author wrote,

> Curiously enough it is England, rather than France, that appears to be developing the conditions of a true Caesarism … Government here has been becoming less and less parliamentary, and more autocratic every year … And when, as is often the case, the Cabinet is dominated by a single personality, then for the time being we have—what but a kind of Caesarism? … We have only to suppose that it becomes habitual with the people to vote not for a policy, but for a man; that it becomes as much a point of honor for the majority in Parliament to support their chief as it is for Presidential electors [in the United States] to vote for their party candidate; and we shall have, by a change of political manners rather than political machinery, what would be in effect a new form of government, that of a dictator responsible to the people.

"Such," the author concluded, "is Caesarism as it might be developed in England."[120]

VII

Nine months after these words were written, a Conservative government led Britain into the Boer War (1899–1902). As a consequence, the word "Caesarism" was once again bent back towards foreign policy, in terms highly reminiscent of previous Liberal denunciations of Disraeli.[121] According to G. H. Perris, a radical Liberal and member of the Rainbow Circle, the war had been instigated not in the national interest, but rather in the interest of "Mr. Cecil Rhodes" and "those kindred groups of speculative financiers whose Capital is the Stock Exchange." From "that centre," the members of this cabal were "seizing the reins of power in Parliament and the administration, while they are prostituting public opinion by means of a reptile press, and carrying on their diabolical work on the outskirts of the Empire without let or hindrance."[122] Such imperialist wars also served as a means to keep "the passions of the mob alive in this new Rome,

[117] Ibid., 34.

[118] "Modern Caesarism," *Saturday Review*, 25 Feb. 1899, 230–31. I was unable to ascertain the author.

[119] Ibid., 231.

[120] Ibid. For a later discussion of the possibility of Caesarism in a British parliamentary context see Antonio Gramsci's remarks on Ramsay MacDonald as discussed by Francesca Antonini, *Caesarism and Bonapartism in Gramsci: Hegemony and the Crisis of Modernity* (Leiden, 2021), 147–9.

[121] Again, there were close parallels with the word "imperialism," on which see Koebner and Schmidt, *Imperialism*, 223, 233.

[122] G. H. Perris, "The New Internationalism," in Stanton Coit, ed., *Ethical Democracy: Essays in Social Dynamics* (London, 1900), 30–59, at 53.

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as the gladiatorial games did in the old," "while the constant increase of armaments … entails ever heavier drafts upon the British Exchequer, and so serves the additional purpose of impeding domestic reform."[123] Even more worryingly, Perris warned, the expansion of the empire in Africa and Asia encouraged the development of authoritarian forms of rule, which might one day be brought back to Britain. "Caesarism and Plutocracy abroad," he concluded, "mean Caesarism and Plutocracy at home."[124]

Two years later, in 1902, the Liberal leader Sir Henry Campbell-Bannermann also emphasized the pernicious effects of the war within Britain. These effects, Campbell-Bannermann told his audience, might be termed "domestic imperialism," or, even better,

> Caesarism … [it] magnifies the executive power, it acts upon the passions of the people, it conciliates them in classes and in localities by lavish expenditure, it occupies men's minds with display and amusement, it inspires a thirst for military glory, it captures the electorate by false assertions and illusory promises, and then, having by these means a plebiscite, in the servile Parliament thus created it crushes opposition and extinguishes liberty.[125]

The same point was made by Augustine Birrell, the president of the National Liberal Federation, who lamented, "We are asked to look forward … to a future in which no true Liberal could breathe, a future of Imperialism, of Caesarism, of Empire, of expansion abroad in places where no white man can live, of military conscription at home, of false ideals of national greatness and of national honor." Such "Caesarism," Birrell claimed, was "fatal to real manhood, and to virtue, and can only end in financial ruin, political corruption, decay and death."[126] Indeed, this was exactly the kind of language that had been used by mid-Victorian Liberals against the regime of Napoleon III, with the difference that, by the close of the nineteenth century, it was being applied directly to the Conservative governments of Lord Salisbury and Arthur Balfour.[127]

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This contribution to the forum has demonstrated the enduring importance of the concept of Caesarism within nineteenth-century British political thought. Rather than simply ignoring the concept, British commentators noticed and began to engage with it immediately in 1850. At first, they were mostly dismissive, claiming that Caesarism was an impracticable anachronism in a commercial and democratic society. However, following the success of Louis-Napoleon's *coup d'état* and the survival of his regime, British commentators had to face the fact that Caesarism had proven entirely compatible with both commerce and democracy. Over the next two decades, many British commentators (not only Bagehot) developed an alternative critique of Caesarism as

[123]Ibid., 54.

[124]Ibid., 56–8, quote at 58.

[125]Sir Henry Campbell-Bannermann, speech at Leicester, 19 Feb. 1902, reported by the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 20 Feb. 1902, 6.

[126]Augustine Birrell, speech in May 1904, in Robert Spence Watson, *The National Liberal Federation: From Its Commencement to the General Election of 1906* (London, 1907), 289.

[127]There would certainly be scope to follow the concept of "Caesarism" into twentieth-century British political thought, but for reasons of space, our story must end here.

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practiced in France, emphasizing the perils of its suppression of intermediate political institutions. Subsequently, the word "Caesarism" began to be used to express anxiety about the possible consequences of the 1867 Reform Act, albeit passingly, as well as the subsequent foreign policy of Disraeli. After Disraeli's death in 1881, the concept was used at much greater length to articulate fears about the consequences of the 1884 Reform Act, which, according to several British commentators, had transformed Britain into a plebiscitary democracy in which the leaders of tightly disciplined political parties were invited to audition before the masses for the role of Caesar. At the turn of the century, Caesarism was used to voice Liberal disquiet over the Boer War, which appeared to combine the worst excesses of mass democracy and aggressive imperialism ("jingoism"). Ultimately, then, Britain's parliamentary constitution had failed to function as a barrier to Caesarism, serving rather as its conduit.

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