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Go shopping. Take a look in the bookstore where demure Jane Austen heroines merge with zombies and Setterfield's *The Thirteenth Tale* channels *Jane Eyre* and *The Woman in White* into contemporary, best-selling fiction. As you wait in line at the grocery, flip through the pages of *Victoria* magazine; revel in the glowing photos of romantic English gardens and the eloquent elucidation of Victorian decorating trends. Lace and cameos abound, contrasting with the graphic sketches of *The Victorian Undead* comic book in the hands of the teenager behind you. While you are out, visit the nearest movie rental store: *Young Victoria (2009)* is a current favorite. If you prefer action flicks, try *Sherlock Holmes (2009)* instead. On the way home, the radio newscaster updates you on the American involvement overseas, tossing around terminology of imperialism. Finally, park your car in the garage.

One does not have to drive far for evidence of the contemporary infatuation with the nineteenth century. Examples of retro-Victorian, neo-Victorian, and post-Victorian creations of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries readily present themselves from every strata of culture. Diane Sadoff and John Kucich refer to the phenomenon as "the recent explosion of postmodern Victoriana" (x). Victorian film imaginings alone are seemingly limitless, i.e. *Middlemarch* (1994), *Daniel Deronda* (2002), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (2002), *Vanity Fair* (2004). Even as I compile this paper, theatres are debuting a new version of Emily Bronte's *Jane Eyre* for the cinema screen. Also prominent is the surge of contemporary novelists who

"have unearthed and resuscitated the great Victorian tradition" (Guteleben 6). Christian Gutleben, in his study of Victorian-looking fiction of 1980s and 90s, names over twenty-eight novels in his "non-exhaustive" list (6). Attempting to sum up this cultural uprising in the final decades of the twentieth century, Kate Mitchell writes: "[w]e are indeed invaded by Victoriana, we welcome the incursion and insist upon it" (1).

While Victoriana has been notably 'exploding' in contemporary culture for three decades, Neo-Victorian studies as a scholarly forum and distinct discourse is an emergent phenomenon. In 2000, Sadoff and Kucich introduced their critical compilation of essays *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century* with the fact that "[o]ddly […] the prominence of the nineteenth century for postmodernism has yet to become the subject of rigorous scholarly analysis" (x). The dual editors then attribute the origins of their anthology to their "surprised awareness of this critical gap" and "an attempt to begin a discussion of postmodernism's privileging of the Victorian" (x-xi). While Sadoff and Kucich dismiss a few studies discussing manifestations of nineteenth century themes in contemporary fiction, their statement is largely true. Yet, the advent of the millennium proved that the obsession with the Victorians was not a passing cultural fancy and elicited an academic response. The following recently published book titles illustrate the steady growth of critical examinations: *Nostalgic Postmodernism: The Victorian Tradition and the Contemporary British Novel* (2001), *Functions of Victorian Culture at the Present Time* (2002), *The Victorians Since 1901: Histories, Representations and Revisions* (2004), *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror* (2007). In 2010 alone, Palgrave Macmillan published three full-length critical texts with the word "Neo-Victorian" featured prominently in the titles. In 2008, Swansea University in Wales, UK, published the first issue of a new online literary journal, *The Journal of Neo-Victorian Studies.* In

the inaugural essay of the inaugural issue, general editor Marie-Louise Kohlke opens with a

defense of Neo-Victorian studies as a field of its own, no longer relegated to a sub-point of

Victorian or nineteenth century studies. Kohkle claims that the "the production of neo-Victorian

artifacts, fictions, and fantasies has become too prolific [over the last two decades] to be

contained as a ghost in the corner of Victorian studies parlour" (1). Kohkle's essay marks the

growing, solidifying Neo-Victorian conversation. *Neo-Victorian Studies*, the journal, just

published its fifth issue, implying the exciting newness of the burgeoning field. While the field

of inquiry is relatively new, it seems to be here to stay. Hadley and Llewelyn argue that while

"[t]here are not many references to a neo-roman, neo-Classical, neo-medieval, or neo-

Renaissance fiction, yet neo-Victorian has stuck and as a genre will continue to stick with us"

(24). The discussion is here to stay, yet there is still much left to be explored.

Marie-Louise Kohkle, in fact, is the first to admit that Neo-Victorian studies, and even

the term "Neo-Victorian" itself, is still unsure of its boundaries and definition. Kohlke

prophesies that experimentation with and solidification of what it means to be "Neo-Victorian"

will occupy much of the new journal and of the critical discourse in which it positions itself:

"What properly belongs *in* and *to* this emergent, popular, inter-disciplinary field of study remains

to be seen" (1). Sadoff and Kucich express the difficulty of pinning down the nature of the field

and of the current obsession with its creative expressions, calling it "over-determined" and

resistant to any "single reductive answer" (xvi, xv). The prospect is indeed overwhelming since

the question of "what *is* Neo-Victorian?" is entangled with manifold discourses each with their

own theories and debates, i.e. cultural studies, film studies, Victorian studies, historicism,

politics, postmodern theory, etc.

One of the problems with existing attempts to theorize the Neo-Victorian is the tendency to make quality judgments regarding the impulse as a whole. However, as Simon Joyce writes in his *Victorians in the Rearview,* "the Victorian inheritance is always a conflicted one that it makes little sense to wholeheartedly endorse or reject" (15). Therefore, the tendency to judge the movement as a whole is out of order. First, one needs a basic theory to determine the Neo-Victorian functions of an individual text before applying a political or artistic significance to that text. The individual text must be allowed freedom to navigate its own perspective within the movement, rather than being immediately labeled with a perspective attributed to Neo-Victorianism as a whole.

Therefore, with a decade of vigorous critical dialogue behind the Neo-Victorian critic, it is possible to explicate the unifying elements of Neo-Victorian criticism and the primary tenets of what it means to be a Neo-Victorian artifact. Drawing from the existing respected voices which currently form the cacophony of the Neo-Victorian conversation, the unifying element of Neo-Victorian criticism at this point is the dual function of Neo-Victorian memory. Here, the term "memory" encompasses the act of revival and recollection of something past which is inherent in each Neo-Victorian artifact. Yet, memory is also a fitting term to describe the Neo-Victorian impulse for memory is a mutable thing which changes depending on the circumstances in which it is birthed. This tension between restoration and revision is a natural consequence of Neo-Victorianism's dual function.

Essentially, amid the tangle of critical voices, a consensus seems to be building that the true Neo-Victorian artifact has *two* inseparable parts. In the most simplified terms, the *past* and the *present*. More distinctly defined, the first is the impulse to remember the *past*, to root the present in a vivid sense of its Victorian origins. The second is the impulse to use that past to

understand and negotiate the realities of the *present*. I hesitate to imply that the two parts are at all separate, for the difference is more a matter of perspective and direction than of separation. They are more like two distinct directions of the same gaze, two foci incited by the same impulse, or, as the title of this study implies, two faces of the same Janus-like being. One face looks forward, one backward. Yet, to sever them would mean a fatal splitting of one skull, one mind – the Neo-Victorian mind. Therefore, while the discussion of the dual function of Neo-Victorian memory requires one to discuss them as distinct functions, keep in mind that they are inseparably twined and immediately lose their Neo-Victorian-ness when forced into independence.

The first function of Neo-Victorian memory is that of the backward gazing face which represents the impulse to remember, reestablish, and reexamine a sense of relationship with the nineteenth century past. Sadoff and Kucich, previously mentioned, ground their text in the argument that the nineteenth century functions as a site of "cultural emergence" for much of the cultural phenomena with which we still grapple: i.e. the relations between humanity and the environment, tension between society and technology, gender negotiations, capitalist economics, and questions of spirituality. Therefore, contemporary society looks back to the nineteenth century to find the roots and origins for the present. (Here, already, one can see the difficulty in defining this function separate from the second. However, notice how it is not that the first function precludes a discussion of the present but that the *direction* of the gaze is on the past.) Another critic, writing specifically toward issues of education, reiterates the Neo-Victorian emphasis on the contemporary's rootedness in the Victorian: "Victorian ideas can give us a clearer understanding of the origins of our present problems, showing how our tangles over education and class, gender and religion took root in the first place" (Birch qtd. in Llewellyn,

164). Hadley proffers another reason that the contemporary retrospective gaze so often falls upon the Victorians. Emphasizing the time-lapse, Hadley poses that the Victorians are "[c]lose enough for us to be aware that we have descended from them yet far enough away for there to be significant differences in life-styles" (7). This sense of distance allows for more critical engagement. While opinions differ as to the critical value of the retrospective gaze, the diverse and active scholarly discussion only confirms the Neo-Victorian attempt to "hold out the possibility of establishing an empathetic connection to the past" (Hadley 26). Llewellyn sums up this first function of Neo-Victorian memory when he writes that the Neo-Victorian fashions a sense of "indebtedness to the nineteenth century, for good or ill" (165).

Yet, the Neo-Victorian is not complete without its second function, its second face. It is more than straight historical fiction or nostalgic escapism into a reality assigned to a forever lost past. The relationship between the present reimaginings and the Victorian past can "not be reduced to filial piety nor to any form of straightforward homage" (Gutleben 7). Heilmann and Llewellyn, in their 2010 book *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009*, argue that being a truly Neo-Victorian text means more than being situated in a nineteenth century setting or borrowing nineteenth century stylistics. Instead, the texts "must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*" (4). Therefore, it is not only the interpretation and discovery and vision of the past, but the *re*interpretation and *re*discovery and *re*vision of that past to engage with the present.

The second function of Neo-Victorian memory is symbolized by the forward-looking face, the gaze directed toward the contemporary present. Through this function, Neo-Victorian texts invoke the past as a means of understanding and negotiating the present. The Victorian past

is similar enough to allow for real grappling with current concerns yet distant enough to allow for freedom and critical separation. In the words of Llewellyn, the Victorian era proffers the "simultaneous possibilities of proximity and distance" (175). Bowler and Cox use the metaphor of a mirror to represent the present's use of the past: "the Victorian world serves as a mirror in which our own experiences, though necessarily distorted, are nevertheless reflected" (10). One popular Neo-Victorian genre, the dual-plot novel, illustrates this function. The dual-plot novel has one plotline situated in the present that frames a narrative from the Victorian past. As in A.S. Byatt's Neo-Victorian novel *Possession*, the inner plot becomes a space to explore and understand the relational tensions, anxieties, or mysteries of the current framing. While the majority of the action takes place within the space of the past, the issues being resolved and/or complicated are chosen by and linked to the present. Hadley reinforces the comparison when she asserts that "the bi-directionality of neo-Victorian fiction, pointing to both the Victorian past and the contemporary present, is explicitly dramatized in novels that adopt a dual plot" (15). A Neo-Victorian text, dual-plot or no, functions like the inner narrative of such a novel, with the real present framing it and infusing it with its own questions and realities. In Sadoff's discussion of Victorian revivals in film, she writes that the Neo-Victorian film texts "repeat [past problems] for a new historical moment" (xiv). Mitchell also supports the presence of this second function of Neo-Victorian memory when she defines the nostalgia of the movement as a "creative tool for […] mapping present identities" (6). This impulse to explore contemporary problems in a space which allows a measure of distance and creative license is nothing new. How many times have you told a remodeled story from your own past instead of giving a straight piece of advice? Cox cement the function of the forward-looking face: "our sustained engagement with the past signals out continued attempts to make sense of the contemporary moment" (3).

The online home page for *The Journal of Neo-Victorian Studies* features a nineteenth century painting which visually illustrates the dual function of the Neo-Victorian gaze ("Traveling Companions" by Augustus Leopold Egg).

Two girls sit inside a train car, of which the cross section is visible. They are dressed identically, yet sit on opposite benches, facing each other with slightly different postures. As the web page describes them: "one [is] dreaming forwards into the future, one [is] reading into the past" (CITE WEB PAGE). While these two girls are distinct and have two different perspectives, they are part of the same painting. Ultimately, they are both caught in the same gaze, that of the viewer. This dual nature caught in one unified picture represents the dual function of Neo-Victorian memory that both gazes backward to past origins and forward to negotiate present experiences. The Neo-Victorian is not merely historical fiction set in the nineteenth century, but rather the

conversation between that past and the contemporary present, the use of the past to make sense of and forge present identities.

This attempt to collate and classify the basic tenets of a Neo-Victorian artifact provides a lens through which to examine the diverse and often problematic Victorian-looking texts which overrun our contemporary culture. The Neo-Victorian phenomenon is so widespread and diverse there is no one checklist for judging the critical or artistic value of its offspring. Ultimately, each text – ranging from an Austenian Vampire novel to a PBS Victorian reality show – has something to say about the contemporary context which fashioned it; whether the individual critic judges that revelation as positive or negative depends largely upon his particular perspective and theoretical framework. Therefore, one must be able to explicate the specific Neo-Victorian nature of a text before being able to see what that nature reveals about contemporary attitudes and anxieties.

The British heritage film is one such genre which contributes to the growing catalogue of Neo-Victorian offspring and which has incited various critical reactions ranging from indictment as nostalgia-wallowing pastiche to praise as history-liberating revision. The British heritage film – which also goes by other names such as the period drama, the costume drama, and the literary adaptation – is essentially a British film which presents stories/fictions from the English national past and has a strong commitment to authenticity, or at least to an aura of authenticity (*English Heritage* 5, Cartmell and Whelehan 8). The heritage film also occupies a particular space in popular culture, for it operates on the higher quality, culturally respectable end of British cinema production ("Re-presenting" 93). Sadoff connects the British heritage film to the revival of the Victorian era as a source, setting and inspiration for cultural products in her *Victorian Vogue: British Novels on Film*. Not all British heritage films are eligible to wear the Neo-Victorian nom

de plume, yet a remarkable percentage is. In fact, the genre has particularly culled inspiration

from Victorian literature, adapting canonical texts of George Elliot, Charles Dickens and Thomas

Hardy (Cardwell 183). The 1980s mark an especial exposition of such films, a date which, not

surprisingly, coincides with the growth of the larger Neo-Victorian fascination ("Re-presenting"

91). Not every heritage film is Neo-Victorian, but the genre accounts for many Victorian-

harkening productions.

This paper will examine one such British heritage film that has not yet been critiqued by

the Neo-Victorian scholastic community – BBC's 2004 film adaptation of Elizabeth Gaskell's

1855 novel, *North and South*. The film traces the move of the Hale family from Mr. Hale's

southern, English parsonage to the northern industrial town of Milton. The plot follows the

experiences particularly of Margaret Hale, the independent and strongly opinionated daughter. In

addition to her family's physical relocation, Margaret goes on another journey to overcome her

prejudice toward the new home and its people, particularly the manufacturer John Thornton, who

becomes romantically interested in Margaret. The film essentially follows two central

relationships, both fraught with tension, that between Margaret and Thornton and that between

the 'masters' and the 'workers' of Milton's cotton industry. The film *North and South* reveals the

dual function of Neo-Victorian memory in the medium of the British heritage film. *North and*

South continues to ground English heritage and identity in a relationship with its Victorian

origins; however, the film breaks with the traditionally static projection of that past and revises

the image of Britain's Victorian heritage to negotiate the changing politics of the present and the

contemporary version of British identity rising in the wake of Thatcherite ideals.

The first function of the Neo-Victorian memory is evident in the general nature of *North*

and South's genre, the Victorian-looking British heritage film. The film genre borrows the term

"heritage" from the larger-scope British heritage industry, which includes tourism, museums, theme parks, as well as films and novels. Jerome Degroot, the go-to heritage scholar, defines the industry as a movement to sell a certain 'Britishness' to England and to the world and to ground that image of Britishness in history (184). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "heritage" as "any property, and esp. land, which devolves by right of inheritance" and the "condition or state transmitted from ancestors." Therefore, the heritage impulse, by definition, emphasizes an indebtedness to the past, a direct connection between the English national past and the contemporary citizen. Voigts-Virchow assigns to the heritage industry as a whole the drive to "re-establish the past as a property or possession, which, by 'natural,' or better, 'naturalized' right of birth, 'belongs' to the present" (123). In other words, the industry forges a sense of ownership and identification with an image of the past. Other critics align the heritage film with the similar function of remembering and reconstructing the English past: the films "reconstruct" the past and are "embedded" in history ("Re-presenting" 95, *Victorian Vogue* xi). Ultimately, the heritage films create a dialogue between the past they invoke and the present that produces them in order to ground the present in a sense of the past. The British heritage film does indeed 'look back' in an attempt to forge a connection with the past as a vibrant source of British cultural roots.

North and South, as a British heritage film, reveals this first Neo-Victorian 'face' functioning in a specific visual text. *North and South* easily fulfills the prerequisites to being a British heritage film. First, it is a British production, the three bold initials of the British Broadcasting Company emblazoned prominently at the top of its DVD cover. Secondly, the story revives a historical moment in the English national past, a moment which includes the rise of the industrial revolution in Northern England, Prince Albert's Great Exhibition of 1851, and mid-

nineteenth century labor strikes. Thirdly, the film is an outspoken adaptation of a British Victorian novel, Elizabeth Gaskell's 1855 *North and South*. According to Richard Armitage, the actor who played the film's hero John Thornton, the cast members were never allowed to forget their indebtedness to Gaskell's original text which was "around [the set] all the time" (Armitage). Jeremy Degroot, in his in-depth discussion of heritage film and British costume drama, specifically addresses the BBC adaptations of classic literary texts. Degroot's work cements the connection between *North and South* and the greater genre of heritage film. From its footing in the present, *North and South* creates a sense of connection with nineteenth century British origins through an obvious reverence for historical accuracy and through the use of objects as tangible history.

First, *North and South* was created with a belief in and commitment to historical accuracy which manifests itself clearly in the end product. According to the film's Production Notes, the production crew transplanted themselves several times in order to create a physical setting which would best "recreate the Victorian era" (Interview). Instead of filming in Manchester, the city that inspired Gaskell's textual Milton, the crew chose the less-modernized Edinborough because it would better represent the original context of the drama. Filming also uprooted to Selkirk, Keighley, and Burnley in order to find the most fitting and "accurate" backdrop upon which to enact the 1855 drama. In order to conjure up the aura of authenticity for the audience, the actors had to feel it as well. Richard Armitage confesses to taking his job to represent the figure of a nineteenth century manufacturer very seriously. In order to best assume his role, Richard Armitage researched the cotton industry, visited pertinent museums, and even read portions of Frederic Engels canonical text *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*. Richard Armitage also studied Victorian etiquette just so he would know what protocols his less-proper,

Northern character would be *breaking* (Armitage). Even the use of speech in the film reveals the

production's obsession with recreating the image of a real past. The citizens of the Northern city

of Milton have a distinct accent with a decidedly Irish lilt. The Hales and their servants have the

more recognizably "English" accent of the South. Although at times this attention to linguistic

accuracy obscures dialogue and makes the characters difficult to understand, the illusion that one

is watching the "real" thing is heightened by the continuity. According to Ellen Rosenman,

"[a]uthenticity [also] resides in material culture, a belief that exalts the objects of everyday life

into high art status" (54). In *North and South*, even the patterns of the wallpaper in the Hale's

living room are in keeping with the style of its source era. This commitment to a sense (whether

one believes it possible or not) of historical accuracy is something audiences have come to

expect from BBC period dramas. *North and South* is no exception. The film fulfills the

audience's expectation for a visually stimulating representation of a past to which they can

relate.

The film also follows the heritage film tradition of using objects to ground a sense of

concrete connection with the past. Simon Joyce writes that the heritage cinema's visual style

"emphasizes a concrete material reality through its overriding concern for the authenticity of

period details" (13). In such productions, "[objects] stand for history" (Rosenman 54). While in

such films objects and possessions can become "disproportionately important," the films tend to

recreate the physical world of the past in order to maintain a sense of "integrity" (Troost 80,

Rosenman 54). One nickname for heritage film – the costume drama – invokes one such

attention to history as object, the attention to costumes. Richard Armitage remarks that the

costumes were "really important" not only for the audience but for the actors themselves. They

"shouldn't' even feel like costumes." The attention to detail was so great that Armitage's suit

even had "a worn, darned spot on [the] knees" (Armitage). The film audience cannot see the mending, but the detail enables Armitage to even more fully become the 'real' John Thornton complete with financial tenacity and precarious social position. The costumes act as wearable time-machines which help the actors transport themselves into a different time and, therefore, help transport their audience along with them. One way the film uses costumes to maintain a connection with the characters and their period it by presenting the realistic limitations of wardrobe. The viewer sees Margaret in only a handful of different gowns throughout the film, her everyday dresses being repeated again and again as one would expect of a young woman in her station. The use of costumes, however, is not all bonnets and frills. The film represents the clothing of the lower classes as well, faded, ripped and course. Yet, even within the class, the costumes are distinct. Bessie Higgins wears simple and dark dresses which, albeit plain, are clean and mended, paralleling the nature of her character as religious, conscientious and proud. Bessie's neighbor Mrs. Boucher, however, wears stained and torn clothing acting as a silent reflection of the more impoverished state of her larger family.

The object, i.e. props and costumes, becomes a connective force between the past and the present. For example, in *North and South,* the scenes within Marlborough Mill were filmed using working Lancashire Looms from the nineteenth century that had been preserved in the Queen Street Mill Museum ("Production Notes"). It is easier to imagine a personal connection with a past when one can touch and see the same tool as 'they,' the people of the past, did. The objects, or patterns for reproductions of the objects, have spanned the gap between the past and the present, acting as a sort of catalyst between the two ages. In the film, these museum pieces, like the looms, are rejuvenated into living history, something to which we can relate. *North and South,* participating in its genre's elevation of the historical object and attention to authentic

recreation of historical setting, grounds English heritage in a vision of its nineteenth century origins.

North and South's participation in the first function of Neo-Victorian memory is fairly self-evident. It is, after all, a heritage film, one which by definition seeks to connect its viewers with a sense of personal indebtedness and identity in the past. The drama also takes place completely in a nineteenth century setting; it never 'breaks the fourth wall.' So, its backward-gazing face is easily identified. However, according to the dual function of Neo-Victorian memory, in order for *North and South* to qualify as a Neo-Victorian artifact, it must also have the forward-gazing face, the second function of memory. It is this function which is not as readily evident in *North and South*. However, an inspection of *North and South*'s conspicuous divergence from the patterns of its genre reveals that it breaks with the typical vision of British heritage presenting an image more relevant to mapping the British *present*.

There is a particular version of "Britishness" presented by the grand majority of heritage films produced in the recent past. This popularized version features a rural setting, upper/upper middle class characters, and pre-capitalist economics. In the words of Andrew Higson, Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at the University of East Anglia, "it is difficult to find [heritage] films that step confidently away from the privileged class" (*English Heritage* 26). The heritage film industry has set a decided trend, often noted by critics, to produce films that feature a very one-class-sided version of the British past. The films most often revolve around the romantic intrigues of the upper class or upper-middle class (Joyce 75, Troost 80). For example, *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) focuses on upper-middle class girls romancing men of the landed gentry. The filmic fascination with the privileged class, their possessions and manners and entertainments, "transform[s] the heritage of the upper classes into the national heritage" ("Re-presenting" 96).

The setting of the typical heritage film is also fairly predictable and features the rural landscape and country setting. Consider scenes of the moors in *Wuthering Heights*, the grand, landed estates of *Pride and Prejudice* and the country manor of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Andrew Higson has written extensively on this image of the British landscape associated with the heritage cinema, noting the nearly "reverential" portrayal of "picturesque rural spaces" in the costume dramas of the eighties and nineties ("Rural Spaces" 248). Simon Joyce expresses a similar sentiment and connects Jennifer Green Lewis' claim that Victorian photography presents "elevated viewpoints of the landed gentry" and "sentimentalizes the 'rural poor'" to the Victorian setting in contemporary film (90). Perhaps the most prominent physical feature of this rural backdrop is the country house (think Pemberley, Barton Cottage, Casaubon's Estate, Thornfield). Critics have come to call the phenomenon the 'cult of the country house' as it invades not only film but the British tourist trade. Voigts-Virchow, for example, argues that "heritage products invariably make reference to the country house, the stately mansion, the gentrified lifestyle of a neo-pastoral southern Englishness" (124).

This rural version of England coincides with the typically represented economic 'landscape' of the heritage film genre. With its emphasis on the rural and the aristocratic, the filmic projection of British heritage presents a 'pre-capitalist' society or at least one distanced from the realities of industry and urbanization. In the heritage film, the city is often conspicuously absent, offering a "respite" from modernity and technology ("Rural Spaces" 248). Although Britain's economy is now largely driven by industry and capitalist enterprise, the genre shies away from the image of the manufacturer or the tradesman on film. It seems to offer an "alternative" reality to the modern England and tends to critique rather than celebrate the marketplace if showcasing it at all ("Re-presenting" 108). Andrew Higson goes so far as to say

that, instead of engaging with the present, the heritage films of the eighties and nineties "turn[ed] their backs on the industrialized, chaotic present [in order to] nostalgically reconstruct an imperialist and upper-class Britain" ("Re-presenting" 93).

North and South conspicuously inverts each of the core tenets of the typical presentation of British heritage in the period film. First, the film refocuses the reverential gaze away from the rural setting to the urban. Instead of in the English countryside, the majority of the film takes place in the Northern industrial city of Milton. The very narrative of the film ridicules the idealization of the rural life. The film opens with Margaret, the heroine of the story, within a train car headed north toward Milton (a fact exposed later). She lovingly strokes a yellow primrose from her family's country parsonage in Helstone. She looks longingly at it, and the viewer later realizes she is longing for her country home. Read symbolically, Margaret represents the typical nostalgic impulse of the heritage film, longing for a lost, idyllic and arguably mythical past. In the opening dialogue of the film, Margaret calls Helstone "the best place on earth," and the scene immediately changes to a picturesque image of Margaret reclining in the soft, vivid grass of that "best place," Helstone. During this opening scene in Helstone, the cinematography is light-filled and hazy, almost dreamlike. Helstone seems to be the rural British ideal that the heritage films are used to portraying. However, the film removes Margaret and her parents from this idyllic Helstone to the smoky, dark, and noisy Milton. The film makes the contrast explicit. Upon reaching Milton, the Hale family is overwhelmed by noise and the bustle of busy and disinterested people. The viewer, like Margaret, is predisposed to think Milton an ugly and cruel place in comparison with the country village.

However, the rest of the film forces the viewer to get used to Milton, like Margaret herself does. Images of the grey and brown streets clutter the film. Margaret frequents a walk in

a hilltop cemetery which allows the viewer a panoramic view of the city. Smoke sifts into grey skies and above the brick turrets of chimneys and mills. The dreary landscape does not change; however, as Margaret comes to know the people of the community and grows to appreciate the active and busy life of the manufacturing community, her original prejudice toward Milton softens. The Milton cityscape, however, remains cold and dark. The film does not shy away from its bleak and sooty reality, a fact which emphasizes its *reality* over the questionably dream-like Helstone. In contrast, Helstone, the idyllic country setting, does *not* remain the same. Margaret grows out of it. In the fourth and final episode of the film, Margaret revisits Helstone. Yet, it is no longer the golden childhood home of her nostalgic imagination. She finds it changed. The scene of her arrival starkly juxtaposes the bright memory of home enshrined in her imagination with the real image of a dulled, small, simple house overgrown with weeds. The shot swiftly cuts from Margaret's imaginary image to the reality, hitting the viewer with the emotional impact of the change upon Margaret. As her visit to her previous home comes to a close, Margaret declares to her traveling companion Mr. Bell that she has learned something on this trip: "try as we might, we cannot go back." Margaret ends the film choosing Milton *over* Helstone, leaving the rural home behind forever, relegated it to the world of childhood fancy. The narrative makes the shift from the rural to the urban England rather explicit. After all, the opening and closing shots of the lengthy film are a fast moving train headed for the North, for the city.

The primary manifestation of this shift to the urban landscape is the shift from the 'country house' as the fetishized image to *North and South's* repeated motif of the factory and the machine. Arguably the most striking image of the film is that of the interior of Marlborough Mill, the center of John Thornton's manufacturing enterprise. The viewer sees the carding room of the mill for the first time with Margaret. The film builds up to the scene for minutes, allowing

the music to build and suspend, build and suspend, while the clacking of the machines fills the distance. Finally, as Margaret pulls open the doors to the room, the soundtrack lets loose with an explosion of triumphant chords filled with the deafening percussion of the machinery. White puffs of cotton hover and clutter the air. Dark iron mills in full motion stand row upon row. It is the sound of the mill which pervades the film; the machine becomes inseparable from the image of modern life and industry in Milton. Although none of the action in Gaskell's *original* novel takes place within the mill, the scriptwriter Sandy Welch places some of the most intense and important events of the drama within the mill with the machines as the backdrop. In the mill, Margaret meets John Thornton. In the mill, Thornton finally hears the truth about a disreputable rumor, freeing him to love Margaret. In the mill, Margaret confronts Mrs. Thornton, John's austere mother, and shares her change of heart toward Milton and John and his industry. Sandy Welch acknowledges that the first scene on the mill floor "is one of the most powerful scenes in the dramatization" ("Production Notes"). The adaptation intentionally moves action away from the house and into the presence of the new symbol of modern life, the machine.

North and South also elevates characters from those classes neglected by the heritage industry. The drama replaces the Darcy-esque heroes of the heritage genre with the two strong male leads of the film – John Thornton and Nicolas Higgins. John Thornton is a self-made man who as an adolescent worked in a draper's shop to elevate his family from poverty. Margaret sees him as uncouth and hard, a sentiment incited by her first encounter with Thornton as he violently punishes a worker for smoking in the mill. It is only later that Margaret learns the huge risk of fire from which Thornton was protecting his factory and workers. The viewer and Margaret progressively learn of Thornton's impeccable character and hard-earned respect. Thornton, by the end of the film, has placed the well-being of his employees above his own and

shows a faithful love and respect for his responsibilities as a gentleman and as a son. He risks his own reputation to protect Margaret's at a time when she did not seem to deserve anything but blame. The viewer watches as Thornton remains committed to providing for his aging mother and refuses to risk the payroll of his employees at the expense of his own health and ease of mind. The lines about his brow increase and the camera finds him asleep, sprawled exhausted upon the uncooperative financial ledgers. John Thornton is the strong, self-made individual made possible by the market economy of the Northern industry. He is not well-born and his money came only through hard work.

Nicolas Higgins is perhaps an even more surprising hero. Higgins is a poor, scruffy, hard-edged factory hand. Yet, the viewer first meets him performing the gentlemanly act of defending Margaret against the rude advances of men on the street. He gently escorts Margaret to a cab. When Margaret attempts to pay him for his service, Higgins gallantly replies: "no charge, Miss." Next, Margaret meets Higgins walking with his invalid daughter, filling the role of loving, albeit terse, father. Later, Higgins becomes the eloquent and savvy leader of a mill strike and the sacrificial caretaker of another man's children (though Higgins despised the man himself). In Gaskell's original text, Higgins is a more violent man, given to drinking binges which upset his children. Yet, in Welch's film, Higgins' drinking is only alluded to briefly. Even the physical portrayal of Higgins emphasizes his gentleness in the face of his hardships. His character has round cheeks with a dimpled smile and eyes which look like they are winking even when angry. The film celebrates these two men from classes traditionally left to the margins.

The film also does not turn away from showing the squalid living conditions of the working class of Milton. Margaret spends time in the Higgins one room apartment, visiting with Higgins' sick daughter, Bessie. The film features her repeatedly walking under ragged laundry,

past dirty children, and leaving charity baskets on damp doorsteps. Bessie Higgins, although penniless, becomes Margaret's one true friend in Milton. She listens to Margaret's stories and shares her own. One of the most tragic moments of the film is Bessie's quiet death, in which she is pictured with an angelic, peaceful aura. Another, central narrative of the film follows the development, advent, and break of a city-wide mill workers strike. The film dramatizes both sides of the war between masters and workers. At one particular scene, the screenshot flashes between the boisterous rally of the strikers reveling in the exercise of their communal strength to the simultaneous gathering of the mill owners across the street brooding over the growing threat of a strike. Welch herself expresses that "we tried to convey that [the class struggle and the work of industry] is not just one dimensional" ("Production Notes"). All of these changes culminate in a full on confrontation with the industrial capitalism which is so often avoided or neglected by the genre.

North and South's conspicuous break with the mainstream characteristics of British heritage film removes it from Higson's indictment of the genre for turning its back on the present. Instead, as a brief examination of recent British politics reveals, the issues of enterprise, class relations, capitalism and individual achievement with which the film grapples are issues intimately linked with contemporary concerns. A look at the history of Thatcherite government and its effect on Tony Blair and the New Labour Party sets up the British political backdrop at the opening of the twenty-first century, the present with which North and South engages.

Margaret Thatcher served as Britain's prime minister from 1979 to 1990, and her political agenda, or Thatcherism, is now considered the "foremost issue for late 20th century Britain" (Collette and Laybourn 1). Thatcher not only changed the political impetus of her Conservative Party but, as we will see, also influenced deep-seated changes in the opposing Labour Party.

Politically, Thatcher was committed to "rolling back" the control of the state. Under this declared umbrella agenda, she fought to cut back the welfare state in order to release funds for the expansion of private industry. In fact, Thatcher worked to move many state industries into the private sphere – a commitment known as privatization. Ultimately, Thatcher was devoted to the goal of unfettered industry (Collette and Laybourn 7). With this dedication, Thatcher also sought to reduce the power of the trade unions; her government passed eight acts between 1979 and 1990 directly related to the decrease of the unions' leverage. The defining crisis and triumph of her government was the break of the coal miners' strike of 1984. The failed strike marked a "turning point" in British industry, proving a "determined government could take on a militant union and win" (Rubinstein 325). Thatcher emerged from the crisis nearly a legend.

While the political changes instigated by Thatcher were manifold, perhaps the greatest effect on the British community at large was that of attitude. Her time in office encouraged a free-market perspective and an emphasis on the enterprise of the hard-working individual. Rubinstein records the cultural shift "in attitudes toward capitalism, especially among the young, such that business life and entrepreneurship became popular career choices […] capitalism was looked up as far less 'exploitative' than it had before" (333). In 1990, the conservative politician John Major took power. Yet, John Major acted as a "son" of Thatcher and continued the general conservative agenda of his dynamic predecessor. Thatcher left a political legacy that emphasized the potential glories of free enterprise and championed individual achievement and responsibility.

With the assumption of the New Labour Party and the election of Tony Blair in 1997, British politics took another turn. And, instead of visibly dominating the political scene, Thatcherite ideals began to mix with and change the face of the Labour Party. Tony Blair entered

office under the banner of the New Labour Party; yet, the significant movement from the Old

Labour Party to the New had been percolating throughout Thatcher's government. As Evans

emphatically states, "[a]ny evaluation of the impact of Thatcherism on British politics should

primarily explore the extent to which it determined the policies of Blair's New Labour

Government" (qtd in Collette and Laybourn 21). Not surprisingly, Thatcher's growing popularity

as a conservative politician correlated with the growing unpopularity of the opposing party. In

short, the Old Labour Party was experiencing a crisis of public opinion and was swiftly losing its

political base. Tony Blair saw the need to revitalize the party and shed its perception as "old" and

outdated. Essentially, the movement from the Old Labour to the New Labour, which spanned the

years from 1983 to1997, integrated Thatcherite ideals of capitalist economics and individualism

with the Labour Party's commitment to social cooperation. The great symbol of the change was

the removal of Clause Four from the Constitution of the Labour Party. Clause Four aligned the

party with a "commitment to common ownership of the means of production" (Collette and

Laybourn 97). The alternative statement, which was soon adopted, committed the party instead

to "work for a dynamic economy, serving the public interest, in which the enterprise of the

market and the rigour of competition are joined with the forces of partnership and co-operation"

(97). The New Labour Party attempted to merge social consciousness with the increasingly anti-

socialist attitude incited by Thatcherism.

     In 1997, the New Labour Party stole center stage with Tony Blair's dramatic persona

playing the role of Prime Minister. Blair's politics claimed to function under the new ideology

"equidistant between traditional social democracy and Conservatism." Economically, he

maintained the Thatcherite emphasis on capitalist enterprise and did not resist the growing spirit

of free enterprise, emphasizing a dynamic market system. Blair, however, wanted to revitalize

the image of Britishness which he saw as stuck in the past. He aligned himself with a fresh

version of Britain as a country progressing, as a "modern, youthful and energetic nation." As part

of this agenda, Blair renamed the Department of National Heritage birthed in the Thatcher era to

the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (*English Heritage* 54). The role of grounding

Britain in a sense of its past was the same, the image of that past, however, needed to be more

hip, more in keeping with the dynamic present. Blair launched a campaign to "to reshape Britain

as a powerhouse of profit and the imagination" and to "shed the image of being stuck in the past"

(Miekle qtd in *English Heritage* 55). Under Blair, Britain began to embrace an image of

individual enterprise and modernization, the image incited by Thatcherite politics but not

realized in the public and media consciousness during the more nostalgic tendencies of the

earlier decades.

Examining *North and South* in light of the changes within British politics reveals that the

film's thematic shifts are not arbitrary. The film engages critically with the political changes and

atmosphere developing in the aftermath of Thatcherite ideals. First, as explored in the earlier

section, the film represents a capitalist Britain devoted to the ideals of private enterprise. This

shift in focus directly corresponds with the Thatcherite elevation of free-market economy. The

film elevates the self-made individual (i.e. Thornton) and the honest worker (i.e. Higgins),

regardless of class, another image reminiscent of the Thatcherite push for and belief in individual

responsibility and achievement.

However, the film goes even further, engaging with the political impulses closest to its

creation. *North and South* introduces the Blair-esque impulse that England can 'have her cake

and eat it too' or be full-on capitalist and still soften that capitalist edge with the practices of

cooperation and social understanding. Margaret is the first to purport this image of cooperation.

She makes friends with Nicolas and his daughter Bessie. She listens intentionally to the plight of the mill strikers and uses her own limited resources to extend charity to suffering families. The "masters" of industry, Thornton's fellow manufacturers, confront Margaret with the hard rules of capitalism economics saying that she was only prolonging the strike by helping the impoverished workers. In response, Margaret passionately retorts with the compassionate, "is it a crime to give a dying baby food!?" She refuses to sacrifice human generosity and sympathy to the rules of industry. It is Margaret who challenges John Thornton to begin *listening* to the working people rather than pre-judging them. Yet, prejudice is on both sides, not only that of the rich. Margaret presents the same plea to Nicolas not to pre-judge Thornton based on assumptions regarding the masters of industry. While both men nearly fail the test, eventually Margaret's message of cooperation and mutual understanding triumphs. The challenge comes to a head when Higgins comes to Thornton looking for work after the mill strike ends. Higgins nearly refuses to go to Thornton, and Thornton *does* refuse Higgins work at first. Eventually, however, Higgins and Thornton both swallow their pride – Higgins by asking Thornton for work and Thornton by apologizing to Higgins for rude treatment. In order to do so, however, Thornton must visit Higgins' home, an action symbolizing the attempt to enter into and understand another person's position, another person's sphere. The scene takes place within Higgins' dark, one-room dwelling, a place Thornton would never have entered without the influence of Margaret and the final consideration of the fairness of his actions. One of the truly beautiful moments of the film comes when the two strong and highly opinionated men shake hands. The shot focuses in on the two gripped hands, cutting the view of their clothing and setting. The shot emphasizes the mens' equality and mutual strength by separating their hands from the material circumstances and social images which had divided them.

Thornton and Higgins continue to develop a model of dialogue and cooperation. When confronted with the reality of underfed workers, Thornton and Higgins conspire to purchase meat wholesale and provide meals for the workers for a cheaper price at a communal restaurant on the mill property. The scheme strikes the balance between individual interests and social interests, as Thornton realizes that workers with full stomachs are better workers. In a touching scene of camaraderie and understanding, Higgins invites a careworn Thornton into the makeshift restaurant; Thornton dines with his employees while Higgins chats with his employer like an old friend. The film seems to try to present the ideal balance between generosity, cooperation and the principles of profit and fair industry, the very balance which the New Labour Party of the millennium was trying to find and exercise. While visiting the elaborate celebration of new technologies at the World's Fair in London, Thornton himself issues the challenge to his Victorian society, and to the contemporary audience of the film: "Technologically we're the envy of the world. If only their was a mechanism to enable us all to live together, to take advantage of the great benefits that come from industry, but that will be for future generations." *North and South*, therefore, while set in the past, negotiates political concerns and attitudes of its contemporary context, namely the tension between the lingering influences of Thatcherism and the developments of the New Labour Party. Therefore, a close examination of the British heritage film *North and South* reveals that it does indeed function according to the two functions of Neo-Victorian memory, grounding British identity in the past and using that past to navigate contemporary concerns.

Negotiation, however, is not without bias: *North and South*, presents a romanticized image of this 'new' image of British heritage. First, the romance plot which symbolizes the reconciliation between the two different British paradigms overshadows the political message.

There is no way around it; the film ends with a kiss, and, ultimately, that passionate kiss is the final 'take away' from the film. The viewer has little choice but to feel the 'warm fuzzies' wash over them and, consequently, over the entire film. Suddenly, Bessie's death because of horrific working conditions and the hard-edged attitude of Thornton's colleagues are forgotten in the final image of union, reconciliation, and love. The final shot of the film shows Margaret and John in a train car headed for Milton and, judging by their facial expressions and postures, a life of bliss. Margaret has committed her life and money to John and his manufacturing industry. She has become a 'believer' in the free enterprise of the industrious North. The general message of the film, while representing capitalism's potential horrors, aligns capitalism and raw industry with the narrative of social progress. It leaves the viewer believing in the John Thorntons and Nicolas Higginses of the world who live according to ruthless personal integrity and sacrifice for the well being of the weak. It is largely dependent on the interpretation of the viewer and/or the critic to determine whether the film functions as a rousing call to social cooperation and empathetic enterprise or whether the film romantically assuages social guilt regarding the harsh rules of competition and industry.

This case study demonstrates the Neo-Victorian functions within a particular text. The changes manifest in *North and South* can be explained as manifestations of the Neo-Victorian dialogue between the past and the present. The filmmakers are responding to the Neo-Victorian spirit to use the Victorian past to make sense of our present, to emphasize the similarities rather than differences between the two "worlds." The film represents a moment of Victorian origins and within that moment grapples with questions of capitalist economics, social cooperation, and individual enterprise. Yet, the film presents a definite romantic image of that enterprise. While it

shifts the gaze of the heritage film and faces present anxieties, the film's ending raises the question of whether the genre is caught in a rut of anti-critical discourse.

Ultimately, the filmic space of *North and South* functions as a palimpsest, writing a modern narrative upon a Victorian one. As Llewellyn, the prominent Neo-Victorian critic writes: "The importance of the palimpsest lies not in the writing of new texts over old ones, but in the simultaneous existence of both narratives on the same page, occupying the same space, and speaking in odd, obscure, and different ways to one another" (170-171). The Neo-Victorian text is a space of mutual dialogue and (ex)change. The present inscribes new meaning and interpretation upon the narrative of history; the ghostly script of the nineteenth century mingles with the fresh ink of the twenty-first, offering a language and a space in which to engage with itself. Ultimately, this is exactly what is taking place within the visual 'pages' of *North and South*. The film writes back to its nineteenth century source, while making vital changes in order to engage with questions of identity and political vision for a developing twenty-first century Britain. The Neo-Victorian palimpsestic texts are all around us, forging new conversations with old words and revitalizing aged stories with fresh perspectives. Listen. Through these Neo-Victorian mouthpieces, the Victorians call to us – like John Thornton to his absconding lover – "look back at me."

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