



The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror

Simon Joyce

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When Margaret Thatcher called in 1979 for a return to Victorian values such as hard work, self-reliance, thrift, and national pride, Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock responded that “Victorian values” also included “cruelty, misery, drudgery, squalor, and ignorance.”

The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror is an in-depth look at the ways that the twentieth century reacted to and reimagined its predecessor. It considers how the Victorian inheritance has been represented in literature, politics, film, and visual culture; the ways in which modernists and progressives have sought to differentiate themselves from an image of the Victorian; and how conservatives (and some liberals) have sought to revive elements of nineteenth-century life. Nostalgic and critical impulses combine to fix an understanding of the Victorians in the popular imagination.

Simon Joyce examines heritage culture, contemporary politics, and the “neo-Dickensian” novel to offer a more affirmative assessment of the Victorian legacy, one that lets us imagine a model of social interconnection and interdependence that has come under threat in today’s politics and culture.

Although more than one hundred years have passed since the death of Queen Victoria, the impact of her time is still fresh. *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror* speaks to diverse audiences in literary and cultural studies, in addition to those interested in visual culture and contemporary politics, and situates detailed close readings of literary and cinematic texts in the context of a larger argument about the legacies of an era not as distant as we might like to think.

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