

## Neo-Victoria: On Queen Victoria's Celebrity in the Twenty-First Century

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### **Abstract:**

Queen Victoria was the namesake, the very face, of the latter half of the nineteenth century. 'Neo-Victoria', on the other hand, is a memory of the Queen by means of which we sustain her relevance even into the new millennium – via such biopics as Jean-Marc Vallée's *The Young Victoria* (2009) and, more recently, Tom Vaughan's ITV series *Victoria* (2016). This paper compares Victorian and neo-Victorian accounts of the Queen on the basis of underlying tropes and discourses of domestic femininity. In the nineteenth century, Victoria was portrayed as the consummate bourgeois wife and imperial mother to coloniser and colonised alike (Voskuil 2004: 170); at present, a Neo-Victoria is introduced as a reaction against her progenitor's projected wifely submissiveness, but, curiously, not against the imperial meaning inscribed in her maternal role. Neo-Victoria's vestigial imperialism, I argue, is at least an impediment to Vallée's project of retrospectively empowering Victorian femininity or re-envisioning the nineteenth century in a postcolonial global context. *The Young Victoria*, in particular, seeks to redress Victorian patriarchy but in the end invigorates a residual nostalgia for imperial Britain.

**Keywords:** biofiction, imperialist nostalgia, Neo-Victoria, postcolonialism, Queen Victoria, royal celebrity, Jean-Marc Vallée, Tom Vaughan, *Victoria*, *The Young Victoria*.

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The last decades have seen a resurgence of popular interest in Queen Victoria, especially her youth and the early years of her rule. 2009 saw the release of Jean-Marc Vallée's royal biopic *The Young Victoria*, written by Julian Fellowes, which discloses the struggles its heroine underwent before she became the legendary Grandmother of Europe. In 2016, Tom Vaughan continued this effort to re-imagine the Queen in the ITV series *Victoria*, created by Daisy Goodwin. Both filmmakers envision the Queen as what I will term 'Neo-Victoria': a version of the historical monarch that self-consciously panders to twenty-first-century feminist (and sometimes postfeminist) as well as present-day socio-political concerns. In both the TV

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series and the film, Neo-Victoria is a dutiful Queen to her subjects, a loving wife to Albert, but an independent-minded woman no less. Her pregnancy does not bar her from politics; the moral dogma of the time does not keep her from giving free rein to her sexual passion and desires. And yet Neo-Victoria is celebrated primarily on the grounds of her successful marriage with Albert: in commemorating Victoria as an exemplary wife, one of course risks rehearsing the Victorian idea that domesticity dictates the parameters of any feminine contribution to the nation. To go so far as to sentimentalise Victoria's romance with Albert is to turn a blind eye to her role as grandmother of imperial Europe and as matriarch to a nation-family of imperialists. Plainly put, to commemorate Victoria's matriarchy in the twenty-first century is to endorse an expansionist ideology, which had its roots in the royal bed. Neo-Victoria's vestigial imperialism is at least an impediment to any project of empowering Victorian femininity or of re-envisioning the nineteenth century in a postcolonial global context.

### **1. Biofictional Neo-Victorias**

Neo-Victoria does not simply re-present her historical antecedent with all her actual ideologies. Indeed, she is often the latter's very antithesis. Neo-Victoria is an example of "celebrity biofiction" derived more from the popular understanding of history and cultural memory than from historical fact; as such, there is an incongruity inherent in the figure, one which foregrounds not only some "tensions and discrepancies between public and private personas", as Kohlke puts it (2013: 7), but also its elided colonial and patriarchal valences. In short, Neo-Victoria is a fictionalisation of the Queen, one intended to challenge – though not always successfully – common misconceptions of the Queen, such as her purported aversion to women's emancipation (see Paterson 2008: 25), or her prudish view of sex as a patriotic duty. Repeatedly, the advice to married women to "lie back and think of England" during sex has been (mis-)attributed to the monarch (see Hadley 2010: 30).

Beyond unsettling commonplaces, to envision Neo-Victoria – to open up and rewrite the celebrity of Victoria – is to humanise her and to some extent democratise her royal pedigree. Both Vallée and Vaughan, and their respective writers, challenge the moral orthodoxies embedded in Victoria's historical celebrity, all the while appealing to the contemporary sensibility regarding individual freedom and female agency.<sup>1</sup> However,

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since neither director is sensitive enough to the nineteenth-century patriarchal and imperialistic politics at stake, neither is entirely successful in placing the Queen beyond “the relation of external empire and postcolonial contexts into a wider panorama of the multiplex encounters with a Victorian tradition in a nineteenth-century perspective within a global environment” (Llewellyn and Heilmann 2013: 28), such that the Queen can be truly neo-Victorian. For the directors and writers of the film and series under discussion, ‘neo-Victorian’ is to rewrite Victoria’s celebrity as it is generally and stereotypically perceived, and to re-inscribe it with postmodern progressive, particularly feminist values. Neo-Victoria may seem ‘progressive’ enough so long as she remains politically active (even at the risk of exasperating her husband Albert). However, could Neo-Victoria be neo-Victorian if she is a pseudo-feminist devoted to the British Empire? That is, could we consider Victoria modernised if she is at once a feminist and an imperialist? Could it be that Neo-Victoria fascinates us *because* she stokes our nationalistic feelings – which, in the wake of Brexit, run more rampant in Britain now than ever before?

In this article, I evaluate the young, supposedly less inhibited, Neo-Victorias of Vallée and Vaughan (played, respectively, by Emily Blunt and Jenna Coleman). I devote more attention to the more relatable character of the two, Vallée’s Neo-Victoria, who demonstrates genuine sympathies for the working class – all but futile, however, since the royal family sees to it that she is divested of actual political power to enact reform. In what appears to be a gesture of youthful defiance, she forms alliances with Lord Melbourne, the head of the liberal party, and later with Albert, her betrothed and a proponent of better welfare for the kingdom’s poor and working class.<sup>2</sup> Vallée’s Neo-Victoria (and Vaughan’s to some extent also) is distinctive among the monarch’s recreations on screen, which, as in the case of Herbert Wilcox’s *Victoria the Great* (1937), for the most part portray Victoria from the public perspective (see Ford and Mitchell 2009: 159). Films and TV shows that do depict Victoria’s private life usually focus on her widowhood, and often her melancholia. In John Madden’s *Mrs. Brown* (1997), written by Jeremy Brock, for instance, Neo-Victoria (Judi Dench) resembles the historical Victoria insofar as she, too, heavily relies on the “strong male influence” of a “father figure” (Paterson 2008: 6, 23). No one is able to convince Madden’s Neo-Victoria to end her prolonged mourning for Albert and attend to the affairs of state (as is befitting of a monarch),

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until she finds a confidant in her servant Mr Brown. Meanwhile in Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's graphic novel *From Hell* (1999), the distressed Neo-Victoria is fiercely protective of the purity of the royal bloodline. She becomes the tyrant who gives the Ripper (the royal surgeon William Gull) license to murder, so that she may stifle the secret of her grandson's affair with a commoner. In both instances, Neo-Victoria is depicted as an implicitly hysterical woman in need of male counsel, though also an individual (as opposed to a mere type) who struggles with life 'just like us' (see Hadley 2010: 30-31). A Neo-Victoria who disobeys her male counsellors would consequently appear a better 'feminist', and indeed for Vaughan and Vallée, Neo-Victoria is precisely that: a rebellious young woman eager to have some kind of political presence in her nation.

So in 2001 the media began to pay more attention to Victoria's adolescence with John Erman's BBC series *Victoria and Albert*. Mark Lawson of *The Guardian* gives the show the laurels for

kickstart[ing] the current trend – continued by the Julian Fellowes movie *The Young Victoria* and now the new ITV series – to banish images of the Queen as a bombazine barrage-balloon and show her as a frisky young woman. (Lawson 2016: n.p.)

Vallée picks up on this 'feistiness' in *The Young Victoria*. He nonetheless makes no mention of, say, the gradual development of Albert's affection for Victoria or the messiness of the monarch's pregnancies, but envisions a Neo-Victoria distinguished by her youth and pursuit of liberal ideals, with the promptings of Lord Melbourne. In search of freedom for herself and for the working class, Vallée's Neo-Victoria provides the biofictional backstory to the well-worn image of the mourning woman, which the historical Victoria became after Albert's death.

Yet Vallée's depiction of a well-meaning (if not always blameless) Neo-Victoria gives cause for concern, once we recognise the inevitable intersection of imperial ideology and Victoria's femininity: in a sense, each is predicated on – and inscribed in – the other. To this day, Victoria is often perceived as "the exemplary construct of Victorian ideology" (Homans 1998: xxi). As "bourgeois wife, mother and later widow" (Homans 1998: xxi), unswerving in her devotions, Victoria epitomised feminine virtues in a

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patriarchal society. Moreover, she was mother not only to her royal children in Europe, but also, symbolically, to her colonial subjects in India and around the globe. In the nineteenth century, her celebrity was based upon her imperial sovereignty, as well as her status as the “epitome of the Victorian ‘type’”: “serious and straight-laced”, “prudish and repressed” (Hadley 2010: 30). In light of this entwinement of royal lineage and imperial power, one cannot help but wonder if Vallée’s heritage piece (perhaps Vaughan’s as well) reflects an unacknowledged nostalgia: overtly for Victorianism, but tacitly for the empire it assumes but need not represent as such, since the film focuses only on Neo-Victoria’s accession to the throne and the early part of her reign rather than her donning of the imperial mantle as ‘Empress of India’ more than halfway through her reign. This article elaborates on the risks that attend any celebration of the sovereign, whose statues continue to dominate not just iconic British sites, such as Buckingham Palace, but also postcolonial cityscapes, such as Hong Kong (see Ho 2012: 1-4). Far from deprecating commemorations of the Victorian, however, this article is intended as a caveat-lector, emphasising the ways we have retouched some surviving images of Victoria for the creation of Neo-Victoria. We must remember what has been edited out, so as to forestall uncritical, nostalgic celebrations of Victoriana, and to make neo-Victorian reflections upon the Victorian all the more meaningful.

Discussions of Victoria’s on-going relevance to the twenty-first century need to exercise due caution. In celebrating Victoria as a woman who becomes empowered despite patriarchal constraints, we may in effect be celebrating her as the symbol of the British imperialism also, the very premise of both her greatness and her ‘feminism’. In his biofictional re-imagining of Queen Victoria, Vallée presents romance as resolution, repeating a well-worn narrative cliché. Love does indeed afford Neo-Victoria power, despite all the institutional restrictions which accompany the British Crown, and all the consequent political manoeuvrings. However, Vallée’s emphasis on romance and reproduction in itself connects Victoria with Neo-Victoria – the former the Grandmother of Europe, the latter an empowered woman who gave birth to imperial Britain. In what follows, I explore the (in)advisability of celebrating Neo-Victoria, progressive and feminist, yet embroiled in the history of colonialism.

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## 2. Princess Neo-Victoria

Vallée's Neo-Victoria, if at all a feminist, is one who derives power from the patriarchal framework of her times. She is the face of Imperial Europe – the all-powerful English monarch whose portrait we see cast atop a map of Europe at the beginning of *The Young Victoria* (Vallée 2009: 8:31). This Neo-Victoria necessarily re-affirms the political order the Crown symbolises, if only to covertly turn it to her advantage. Far from questioning the colonial implications of the Crown, Vallée celebrates them as a testament to Neo-Victoria's power – the political power she discovers in her love for Prince Albert. In *The Young Victoria*, she is but another fairy-tale princess who has found the solution to her problem (i.e. the political manipulation of her family) in the figure of a prince.

*The Young Victoria* is therefore the romantic backstory to the Queen's felicitous marriage – felicitous for herself and the British Empire. The film is a work of celebrity biofiction which invents reasons for us to still celebrate Victoria, a young woman able to achieve individualisation even though she was at odds with her society in general (see Kinzler 2011: 56), and the royal family in particular. Vallée portrays the royal family as an obstacle to Neo-Victoria's growth, thus a problem for her to overcome. In the opening scene of his biopic, the child Neo-Victoria is already seen playing hopscotch on a black-and-white grid reminiscent of a chessboard, chess, of course, being a game of strategy and manipulation, often described as 'the game of kings'. As the film's metaphor for the political framework of nineteenth-century Britain, the chessboard and its rules are meant to pre-determine every move of the guileless Neo-Victoria. King William, Lord Melbourne, the Duchess of Kent (the princess's mother), and the Duchess's lover, Sir John Conroy, all wish to control the heiress to the throne for their own political interests. Royal birth is here not a matter of privilege, but an ideological restriction that Neo-Victoria must negotiate to establish herself as a grown, autonomous woman, an agent in her own right, and as Queen, a political agent for her nation and its territories.

The film's royal milieu at once empowers and undermines Neo-Victoria. The coronation scene, for instance, owes much of its splendour to a perfect symmetry that only dwarfs Neo-Victoria. At its centre sits the crowned Queen, framed by the cathedral's many columns, before which stand strict rows of spectators in salutation, donning their headwear as Neo-Victoria receives her crown. The cathedral's rigid architectural structure and

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the rituals performed therein symbolise the institutional restrictions surrounding the Crown. Throughout the film, Neo-Victoria is repeatedly ensnared in one symmetrical framework or another. She announces that she feels freedom “for the first time in [her] life” on seeing Buckingham Palace (Vallée 2009: 41:35), and yet she is already visually and literally boxed in, with soldiers lined up on either side. Later in the film, Neo-Victoria and Albert find themselves set in-between rows of conical shrubbery – another fearful symmetry – while they discuss the fate of workers in the wake of rapid industrialisation (see Vallée 2009: 42:17).

Such symmetries likewise define some royal spectacles in the ITV series *Victoria*. In Episode One, when Vaughan’s Neo-Victoria visits Buckingham Palace for the first time, she, too, scurries around in excitement. With pillars on either side of the frame, the palace indeed appears impressive, and its structural symmetry is said by one servant to complement the monarch’s physique, for both are glamorously “in proportion” (Vaughan 2016: 24:30). That is to say, proportionality is a regal trait which Neo-Victoria appears to possess. Nevertheless, Vaughan is aware that this rigid structuralism is not always empowering – and it most certainly is not in the coronation scene. In the ITV series, snippets of Lady Flora’s physical examination interrupt Neo-Victoria’s coronation and, in this manner, corrupt its royal grandeur. The Queen here suspects Lady Flora, her antagonist in these early days of her rule, of having an affair with her primary antagonist Sir Conroy and concealing a resulting pregnancy. Without substantial evidence, she orders a physical examination for Lady Flora, only to learn that the Lady is chaste but dying of a tumour, with the Queen’s impetuosity causing Lady Flora’s unjust humiliation. Vaughan uses a filmic parallelism to remind us of the crowned Queen’s disrespect towards her subjects, and consequently of her unpreparedness for her station: while Neo-Victoria is being royally cloaked amongst her subjects, Lady Flora is being uncloaked by her physicians.

This parallel readily refutes Neo-Victoria’s claim that she is ready for the throne, as well as reserving any ‘feminist’ right to act on her own desires for herself. Playing with her subject as she does with her dolls, Neo-Victoria here betrays an immaturity that her political opponents are quick to construe as “hysteria”, “insanity”, “unstable temperament” and the like in Episode Two (Vaughan 2016: 27:24-28:15). Vaughan is much less ready than Vallée to celebrate the young Queen’s *Bildungsroman*, and thus furnish

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a story that coheres with the un-depicted later narrative of Victoria as faithful widow, i.e. the moral leader of a nation. Vaughan interprets Neo-Victoria as a narrative problem rather than a resolution; for him, she is an adolescent girl overly inclined to fall in love with men she takes to be gallant, such as Lord Melbourne. However, as the Belgian King Leopold observes to Lord Melbourne in Episode Three, “a young girl’s head can be turned so easily” (Vaughan 2016: 33:46). She can and will be made to redirect her affection towards her cousin Albert, a more formidable political alliance. Her youthfulness merely makes her all the more malleable and exploitable.

Vallée’s Neo-Victoria seems more assertive than self-serving, by contrast. She finds that the politics of the royal household impede her growth, and she finally finds the solution in Albert, her ‘one true love’. In *The Young Victoria*, Albert suggests to Neo-Victoria that, in face of structural restrictions, their only option is to “master the rules of the game” until they play it better (Vallée 2009: 15:56). The institution of the Crown serves social order, just as a focal point provides a painting with structural coherence. If Neo-Victoria cannot overthrow the royal institution, she must seek the aid of a husband, one who “play[s] with you, not for you”, says Albert (Vallée 2009: 15:16). This is the lesson the young Neo-Victoria must learn before she can be celebrated as the Queen of England and, eventually, as the Empress of India. She must accept the restrictions of the royal institution so that she can manipulate them in turn. More specifically, she must acknowledge and check the prejudice that she is unfit to rule because of her age and gender by acquiring a male counsellor, whose love and loyalty even the royal establishment cannot control.

Vallée’s film thus offers the resolution of true love to Neo-Victoria’s personal struggles. She escapes the chessboard, so to speak, precisely when she locks eyes with Albert at the coronation ball. Albert gives her the means to assert her agency because, in marrying him, she acquires for herself an ally against all who seek control over her. Her coming of age (i.e. her acceptance of Albert’s advice regarding the importance of marriage) sends a message of possibility within a political structure as rigid as that of the royal family. The Princess is triumphant in her quest for ‘true love’, because she is able to discern that marriage need not always or only be political, despite her guardians’ teachings. At its conclusion, Vallée’s film presents Neo-Victoria as her husband’s equal, a self-possessed woman who dares gaze

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directly at the camera. In the twenty-first century, Victoria no longer looks away from the camera, as she did, for instance, in the photograph ‘Queen Victoria and Sharp’ or in her Diamond Jubilee Portrait.<sup>3</sup> Conveying an almost aggressive assertion of selfhood on Neo-Victoria’s part, Vallée here departs from the tradition of imagining the Queen as a widow trapped in an emotional impasse, or a self-indulgent mourner who absented herself from public for close to fifteen years.<sup>4</sup>

Thus Victoria and Vallée’s Neo-Victoria represent two opposing kinds of femininity. Whereas the Queen aligned herself with the stereotype of the housewife, the Princess in *The Young Victoria* exudes an adolescent facility for change; whereas the Queen endorsed a submissive role for women in the domestic realm, the Princess strives to be a woman with a will.<sup>5</sup> One recalls that in the nineteenth century, it was Victoria’s ostensible domesticity – her love for her family and grief for her husband – that lent her feminine virtue, a quality that was the kernel of her royal celebrity. Victoria herself took care to advertise her domesticity, as when she published *Leaves from a Journal of Our Life in the Highlands* (1868) to ensure that the Victorians were aware of the royal family’s summer holidays and picnics (Paterson 2008: 14). The popularisation of photography around this time only enhanced Victoria’s performance as an exalted British matriarch. With the opening of London’s first photographic portrait studio in 1841, the royal family became widely accessible. It was none other than Victoria who seized this opportunity to show the public her exemplary family. Michael Paterson explains: “Pictures, which sold well in cheap coloured editions, showed them [Victoria, Albert, and their children] enjoying simple pleasures in domestic settings – gathering around a Christmas tree [...] or romping on the carpet” (Paterson 2008: 15). Similarly, after Albert’s death, photographs of Victoria in mourning were widely circulated to complement her self-promotion as loyal widow. Lynn Voskuli argues that these images of Victoria in modest black appealed to the people, because she “represented [them] in all their ordinariness” (Voskuli 2004: 145), as if sharing in their own losses.

Vallée’s somewhat rebellious Neo-Victoria does not support the prevailing impression that Victoria was a docile wife, and yet, there is a troubling continuity between the two. In emphasising the popular conception of Victoria as Prince Albert’s faithful lover, Vallée downplays the political nature of Victoria’s marital alliance with Albert, which,

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historically, produced royal heirs for many European powers and colonial governments for the rest of the world. Vallée does not recall the aftermath of this love, because his sole preoccupation is to portray Victoria as a pseudo-feminist who will not sell herself for any political agenda, and will therefore marry only for love. By not eschewing the emphasis on romance, Vallée already fails to challenge the assumption that a woman matures only when she plays the role of a loving wife to a doting husband; he neglects, as well, the neo-Victorian imperatives to critique the history of colonialism and/or patriarchy. An insufficiently neo-Victorian work in this regard, *The Young Victoria* presents ‘true love’ as the only viable source of female agency, and imperialism as its implicit laudable outcome.

### **3. Grandmother Neo-Victoria**

But how do romance and imperialism overlap? Neo-Victoria’s romance ends in a fertile marriage, and the idea of reproduction, of course, complements the expansionist ideal implicit in imperialism. Vallée’s sentimental commemoration of this imperial icon comes at a time when the anxiety vis-à-vis neo-imperialist geopolitics, by both Western and other nations, is once again mounting. This concern coincides with the further shrinking of Britain’s post-imperial prestige, for instance via the loss of Hong Kong in 1997 and on-going republican debates in several Commonwealth countries about replacing Queen Elizabeth II as head of state with elected presidents (see Meaker 2015: n.p.). Thus Vallée’s Neo-Victoria serves as a timely and compensatory reminder of Britain’s imperial prowess in the nineteenth century.

However, to maintain Victoria’s celebrity status in the twenty-first century is to risk glossing over, if not outright romanticising, the colonial connotations of royalty. Victoria’s celebrity began in the nineteenth century, when her star qualities recommended her to her subjects (both British nationals and colonised peoples abroad) as the face of the British Empire. Somewhat anachronistically, her celebrity has re-emerged since the millennium in part because efforts to promote her – and, by association, imperial Britain – have not diminished. Having overtaken Victoria as the U.K.’s longest-reigning monarch, Queen Elizabeth II certainly plays a part in rousing memories of empire. When Elizabeth II became the only British monarch other than Victoria to celebrate a Diamond Jubilee in 2012, many

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were eager to search for similarities between the two, as in a *CBC* article published in the same year:

Victoria's Diamond Jubilee was [...] a rare opportunity for the British public to get a glimpse of their queen because she had been in relative seclusion since the death of her beloved husband in 1861. Heads of the Commonwealth countries came to London to mark Victoria's 60 years on the throne. The celebration began on June 20, with the official commemoration coming two days later. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the prime minister of Canada at the time, went to London and was knighted. (Penhorwood 2012: n.p.)

Queen Elizabeth, by contrast, was "devoted" not to an empire but to the Commonwealth (Penhorwood 2012: n.p.), while her Jubilee celebrations could be regarded as an extended version of her regular public 'walkabouts', mingling with her subjects, especially at home in Britain. In the nineteenth century, Victoria commanded a worldwide interest, because she was the head of an empire; now, in the twenty-first century, Elizabeth attracts an equal amount of interest because of Britain's colonial past.<sup>6</sup> This imperial connotation of royalty may have helped revive Victoria's celebrity, which arose in the nineteenth century within a specific ideological context, namely the imbrication of patriarchy and colonialism. Inevitably, (Neo-)Victoria is celebrated for both the imperial and the patriarchal meaning she gives 'Britishness': heritage films like Vallée's may reclaim Victoria's personhood alongside her womanhood, but, in seeking to do so, they necessarily overlook the colonial facet of Victoria's celebrity to which her performance of the feminine role was tied.

Yet, for the film's screenwriter Julian Fellowes, only a Neo-Victoria overtly branded as 'British' deserves to be celebrated. Neo-Victoria belongs to the past Fellowes conjures to create the illusion of social stability for the contemporary British audience, after all. With regard to his other work *Downton Abbey* (2010-2015), Fellowes once said, "it is comforting for people to see a story about a period of British history when everybody had a station in life, whether it was as a footman or an earl" (Fellowes qtd. in Byrne 2014: 315). Fellowes' goal is to 'reassure the people' by emphasising "the domestic sphere and its fascination with everyday artefacts" (Byrne

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2014: 313). His portrayal of the young Victoria as an ordinary woman in love is no less reassuring, for it reintroduces the Queen's role within the domestic sphere to consolidate Britain's nationhood: Fellowes re-writes Victoria's life story to remind 'the people' of that episode in British history where Victoria's motherly role fostered a familial tie across the most distant parts of Europe, and across the vast British territories and later Empire. *The Young Victoria* is a re-invention of Victoria's nineteenth-century celebrity – an excessively loyal reproduction of it, unfortunately.

Regarding the production of a celebrity biopic, much thought is given not only to what qualities would recommend the star, but also to what should be excluded so as to legitimise these recommendations. In this sense, *The Young Victoria* is an attempt to sift through Victoria's catalogue of historical titles and qualifications, merely to re-present her para-subjectivity, her imposition of a British 'we', in the twenty-first century. The very epilogue of Vallée's film celebrates Victoria as the Grandmother of Europe in just this manner: "Victoria and Albert had nine children. Among their descendants are the Royal Families of Britain, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Yugoslavia, Russia, Greece, Romania and Germany" (Vallée 2009: 1:36:48). The couple's more well-known accomplishments include "reforms in education, welfare and industry [...]. Victoria remains the longest reigning British sovereign. To date" (Vallée 2009: 1:38:50), though recently overtaken by Elizabeth II. Vallée's coming-of-age tale of the Princess Victoria, then, culminates in her mothering of Europe. Viewers of the film witness the maturing of Victoria's femininity when they see her in bed with Albert, presumably post coitus. Victoria says, "Now I am quite married", to which Albert responds, "I should warn you that I am expecting a very large family" (Vallée 2009: 1:15:40). Albert's expectation of a large family foreshadows Victoria's greatest achievement yet – her fertility, in other words her ability to fulfil her procreative duty as wife and Queen. British blood will flow in royal chambers across Europe, and, Victoria, the Grandmother of Europe, will have facilitated not only British but Western imperialism.

Julia Kinzler objects to Vallée's domestication of Victoria on the grounds that the pregnant Queen is not "presented as a monarch, but as a pregnant woman who is reduced to her body" (Kinzler 2011: 61). Yet Kinzler overlooks that *The Young Victoria* does not celebrate the Queen's pregnancies per se, but her fertility, which fostered blood relations among

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the enumerated European monarchs, from Western to Eastern Europe. Victoria, the (Grand)mother of Europe, effectively made Britain the centre of Europe. Her fecund body is expansive and imperial rather than reductive and local. *The Young Victoria* is a biofictional backstory about Victoria's path to stardom, and as such it must establish a sense of temporal sequentiality in its interpretation of Victoria. The film therefore grapples with the point in time when Victoria entered womanhood, the critical moment determining that her fertile body would facilitate the expansion of British influence and cement the British claim to rival the Roman Empire. Just as "Britain had [...] once been a Roman province" (Broughall 2015: n.p.), India (for example) formally became a British colony during Victoria's reign. Britain thought itself destined to inherit the world: as William Dyce's *Resigning to Britannia the Empire of the Sea* (1847) reveals, Britannia reserved a divine right (of sorts) to conquer any place on earth that was navigable by sea.<sup>7</sup> In this vein, "from the mid-to-late Victorian era, imperial advocates and adherents sought to project the British Empire solidly into the shadow of the Roman Empire" (Broughall 2015: n.p.). Victoria's maternity is consequently emphasised alongside the historical lineage of Britain, as if she were the daughter of the Roman Empire, inheriting the idea of the Roman *imperium*, and later the grandmother of European empires.

The reproductive function of Victoria and Albert's marriage – like their apparent felicity – was political, and Vallée's contemporary re-imagining of their union is no less so. In fact, Vallée's championing of Victoria's role as the Grandmother of Europe is clearly modelled upon nineteenth-century depictions of the royal family. Franz Xaver Winterhalter's painting *The Family of Queen Victoria* (1846), for example, is a portrait of Victoria, Albert and their family, which was engraved for public circulation in 1850.<sup>8</sup> In this royal spectacle intended for public consumption, the young couple proudly parent five children, among them a male heir, distinguished from the rest due to his red clothing. The fertility of Victoria and Albert figures as the logical consequence of their love, while their youth alludes to the possibility of still more children. The Turkish rug in the portrait, on the other hand, sheds light on the family's consumption of foreign goods, which of course gestures towards Britain's trade and colonial relations with 'the Orient'. Meanwhile, the apparent sea in the background alludes to Britain's formidable navy power – Britain's means to 'establish

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connections' with countries overseas. The people were to learn that Albert and Victoria led not only a family of seven, but also the 'global family' to which Western imperialism gave rise.

Considering the historical context, portraits of the royal family such as Winterhalter's consolidated the idea that Victoria and Albert's offspring initiated an expansion of British influence within and beyond Europe. As Vallée himself remarks in the epigraph of *The Young Victoria*, the royal family, headed by the matriarch Victoria, infused British blood into other European royal chambers. Before pressing this point of royal lineage, one must ask if Vallée celebrates Neo-Victoria for anything other than her maternal qualities. Is Neo-Victoria not derided for her infantile attempts to be something other than a good wife in the film? Any political power that she might wish to exercise is regarded as inappropriate. Her friendship with Lord Melbourne is taken as political interference, and an offense to the public as such. Her appointment of ladies-in-waiting also proves political rather than domestic: she is accused of breaching her political neutrality when she appoints only the wives of Whig ministers. Even so, however, politicians merely fault Lord Melbourne for influencing the Queen, who is supposedly far too young to be able to reach any decision by herself. At the Parliament, Sir Robert Peel accuses Lord Melbourne of using the Crown as "a shuttlecock in the game of politics" (Vallée 2009: 1:06:0); some Britons even shout "Melbourne the great seducer" (Vallée 2009: 1:07:18) as the Queen's carriage passes through their neighbourhood.

Albert also concedes that Neo-Victoria has made a mistake in choosing her ladies-in-waiting – but only because "she has listened to a fool [i.e. Lord Melbourne]"; hence, according to Albert, "She had better change her advisor" (Vallée 2009: 1:07:26), and he does not hesitate to play the part after he becomes the Prince Consort. Shortly after he moves into the Palace, he takes the initiative to re-organise the way the Palace is run, inquiring about all domestic affairs, from dirty windows to the Duchess's spending habits. When Lord Melbourne does offer advice, Albert states that he is "the husband of your sovereign" and as such he will make his own decisions (Vallée 2009: 1:25:53-56). From this point onwards, Neo-Victoria's defiance against her family very much depends upon Albert. If her marriage is more romantic than political, it is only because Albert says so. In a letter to King Leopold, Albert writes that he "prefers not to talk politics" (Vallée 2009: 1:26:17). Vallée therefore celebrates Neo-Victoria's alliance with

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Albert, but not Neo-Victoria as a grown, independent woman. His epilogue merely reasserts the success of Neo-Victoria's marriage, the basis of Victoria's celebrity as fertile matriarch and the face of colonial Europe. His Neo-Victoria's greatest achievement is her successful conjoining – and promotion – of patriarchy and colonialism.

Similarly in the ITV series, Neo-Victoria learns that she may relate to her people only as their benevolent mother – who must not announce her political allegiances. In Episode Two, Lord Melbourne duly reminds Neo-Victoria of the “difference between duty and inclination (Vaughan 2016: 29:39): it is the Queen's political duty to cast aside her personal preferences and maintain the appearance of neutrality in all that she does, for even the most private aspects of her domestic life interface with the political arena. In the same vein, in Episode One, Lady Flora urges the Queen to understand that her ladies-in-waiting “set the tone for the whole court” (Vaughan 201: 27:30). Neo-Victoria's marriage is absolutely political then. King Leopold of Belgium advises Neo-Victoria to marry Albert, her kin, only to ensure that their family – the Coburg family – continues to hold power.<sup>9</sup>

Curiously enough, the Prince Consort need not exercise as much political restraint as Neo-Victoria; he indeed takes great pains to assert his political authority in Britain *independently of his wife*. In the series, any quarrel Albert and Victoria have in the household may pertain to domestic and sometimes world politics, so much so that even the problem of slavery is presented as an opportunity for Albert to garner public support. Non-white characters appear in the show's First Season for the first and the last time in Episode Six, where Albert publicly condemns the practise of slavery in the Free World. Albert addresses London on the issue to woo its people, who have so far rejected him because of his German ancestry. While we do not hear Albert's address in its entirety, we can infer from the enthused clapping at the end that it is well received. Everyone in the audience is white but with the single exception of a formerly enslaved person, who fled Virginia and successfully made his way to London. For some brief moments, this character dominates the screen, not to hazard an opinion but to applaud Albert for his “fine speech” (Vaughan 2017: 43:2). Ironically, slavery is brought up only to showcase Albert's moral fibre and to prove that he, though German, is a fit consort for the monarch of Britain, the presumed leader of the civilised world. Because every aspect of the Queen's life – her court, her romance, her marriage – is tinged with politics, her

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relationship with Albert can only be romanticised with some reservation. Wedded to a man with clear political ambition, Vaughan's Neo-Victoria finds herself competing with her spouse for political influence. Her marital home seems a hotbed of political struggles – a royal spectacle that is less than harmonious.

In a word, Vallée and Vaughan share the goal of impersonalising Neo-Victoria, although the former shows more optimism in his treatment of the subject than the latter. Vaughan presents Neo-Victoria's marriage as a political decision, which she is in no position to resist, owing both to her inexperience and her gender. Vallée, on the other hand, interprets the marriage as a powerful romance, which strengthened Britain at home and abroad. In reading history so optimistically, Vallée forgets to dispute the "discursive and ideological conditions" – to borrow from Dyer's description of celebrity culture (Dyer qtd. in Turner 2004: 7) – that enabled Victoria's ascendancy to the celebrated role of the Grandmother of Europe. In a celebratory tone, the film ends with no mention of Victoria's colonial legacy or of her career as the Empress of India (discussed below); it merely broaches the success of her educational, industrial and welfare reforms. The aforementioned epilogue suggests that Victoria's longevity has rendered her a legend even among royalty. The addition of the phrase "To date" advertises her relevancy, thereby calling for further explorations of such an iconic figure.

Ending on this somewhat optimistic note, *The Young Victoria* reminds viewers of the current political impact of Victoria's reign; it celebrates Neo-Victoria to acknowledge the part Victoria yet plays in Britain's heritage and nationhood. Vallée's decision to portray Victoria as the embodiment of British heritage is not entirely unforeseeable, considering that Victoria marked the beginning of the royal celebrity phenomenon in Britain. According to Benjamin Poore,

[m]atters become more complicated with Queen Victoria since she carries so much symbolic weight for the British people, their history and identity. [...] Victoria sowed the seeds for the modern monarchy's engagement with the public and was the first British monarch to benefit from the explosion of print media in the nineteenth century that endlessly refashioned her into a succession of images: the

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girlish queen, the young matriarch, the Widow of Windsor, Empress of India and the grand old lady. (Poore 2014: 178)

To put it differently, Victoria has come to personify Britishness not because she constituted the foundation of British heritage, but because she was the first self-fashioned British royal celebrity. The broader concept of British heritage includes Queen Elizabeth I, who is no less a subject of intrigue than Victoria to be sure. Michael Hirst's *Elizabeth* (1998) and its sequel, Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007), (both starring Cate Blanchett) exemplify some recent endeavours to underpin the agedness of British traditions – of which Neo-Victoria is merely a part. Elizabeth I is relevant in this discussion only because those in the heritage industry – like Vaughan – are too eager to imagine some kind of lineage between her and Victoria. In Episode Three of the ITV series, for example, Neo-Victoria blatantly advertises herself as Elizabeth I's 'feminist' daughter, who is also too 'career-driven' to consider marriage. She even impersonates Elizabeth (whose portrait she repeatedly studies in the episode) at a royal ball to promote this self-conceived lineage.

Neo-Victoria and her advisors understand that a positive public image can earn a monarch the people's support: as Neo-Victoria unveils her first official portrait as Queen at a private ceremony in Episode Two, an attendee remarks, "The public likes having a young queen [...] it makes the country feel youthful" (Vaughan 2016: 43:21). Neo-Victoria must make herself appealing to the masses by fashioning herself as the young fertile leader of a nation that *feels* equally young and fertile. The reputation she later earns as the Grandmother of Europe, and concomitantly her famed feminine fertility, recommend her as a significant cultural text demonstrating the lineage, the legendary ancestry, of Britain. In spite of her unattractive dourness in later years, her grandmother persona has earned her popularity enough to still be regarded as a celebrity to this day – in Hong Kong (as Ho tells us) and in Canada, among other places. In Victoria, British Columbia, a statue of Victoria remains standing in front of the parliament building. Just adjacent to the statue is the Empress Hotel, which, perhaps not coincidentally, overlooks the city's inner harbour.

This tacit nostalgia for imperialism recommends *The Young Victoria* as a notable cultural text still seeking to revitalise and appease current British nationalistic sentiments. Neo-Victoria, specifically, is celebrated as a

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royal personage from whom the current monarch inherited her ‘Britishness’. Michael Billig, for one, has suggested that modern Britons show a definite reverence towards Elizabeth II, because she represents a reinvention of traditions, indeed a “post-modernist’s [rendering] of the past contain[ing] elements of pastiche and self-parody” (Billig 1992: 205). The contemporary royal family is a paradox inasmuch as it possesses imperial lineage, eschews the Victorian ideology of expansion, but still argues for its own survival; it seems almost a parody of Victoria’s royal family, which straightforwardly sought to extend the geopolitical influence of Britain and the West. Elizabeth II might even be imagined as a version of Victoria, the purpose of whose celebrity is to distract and re-assure those in the present who cannot help but cast “quick, frightened glance[s] towards [Britain’s] unknown future” (Billig 1992: 219).

This nostalgic tenet of modern royal celebrity is still more evident in *Neo-Victoria*, who embodies the richness of British heritage to mollify those worried about the unknown future. In a heritage film such as *The Young Victoria*, Neo-Victoria mollifies precisely the current British anxiety to construct “the landscapes and narratives of British, or, more properly, English, tradition and privilege”, as an iconic site or “place that pre-dates the Americanization of English culture” (Higson 2001: 252, 253), and hence that culture’s diffusion or even contamination. In response to this nostalgia for a pure, uncorrupted Englishness, Vallée pays tribute to Victoria who still carries much symbolic weight for the British people (to quote Poore) as their fertile monarch, for she still excites fantasies about their nation’s imperial past. Unlike the current monarch, Vallée’s Neo-Victoria is *unapologetically* colonial, for her passionate loving self serves as the backstory – the biofiction – of the Imperial Mother, the head of a ‘very large family’ indeed. Neo-Victoria herself is a fiction re-framed within royal portraiture (as mentioned earlier), to the effect that she becomes an extension rather than a radical re-invention of the Queen.

To put it another way, Vallée’s celebration of Neo-Victoria is problematic because, seemingly unselfconsciously, the film incorporates the motifs of fertility, lineage and time – all inscribed in the colonial discourse of Victorian Britain. Voskuli’s analysis of the Eastern Question in the nineteenth century casts some light on how Victoria’s imperial achievements were celebrated in terms of lineage and time within and beyond Europe:

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As England became ever more deeply involved in Eastern affairs, the most crucial function of [Victoria's] public image was to dramatize and embody the idea of English authenticity even as that idea began to incorporate colonial peoples abroad. In the political pamphlets, speeches, foreign policy statements, diplomatic dispatches, newspaper articles, journal essays, satires, and cartoons [...], Victoria's changing public image – newly theatricalized in an imperial mode – came to symbolize the expanded position of her island nation on a newly global stage. (Voskuli 2004: 141)

Victoria's imperial 'star' image symbolised the bond between Britain and its colonies: it seems no coincidence that both Victoria and Albert wear their 'star of the Garter' in Winterhalter's earlier discussed painting. In any case, Victoria's "global" stardom elicited an expression of "sympathy" with England" from her colonised subjects (Voskuli 2004: 168). Spectacles were staged both at home and abroad to celebrate what was supposed to be Victoria's commitment to global progress. In 1851, the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations was held in London to show the Royal Family's "unflagging support of the arts and sciences", as Vallée puts it in his film's epilogue (Vallée 2009: 1:38:28). The colonial implication of the event – which Vallée (perhaps purposely) fails to mention – is fairly evident in Prosper Lafaye's *Queen Victorian, Prince Albert and three of their children at the Indian Pavillion of the Great Exhibition (1851-81)*.<sup>10</sup> The exotic furniture in the background of Lafaye's painting reflects the Queen's acceptance of her Indian subjects. Tokens of their culture here seem worthy of the Royal Family and, by extension, Britain. In fact, the Queen once expressed her "very strong feeling" that "the natives and coloured races should be treated with every kindness and affection, as brothers, not – as, alas! Englishmen too often do – as totally different beings to ourselves, fit only to be crushed and shot down!" (Victoria qtd. in Paterson 2008: 29) In the tone of a chiding mother, Victoria bade 'Englishmen' show their 'coloured' siblings more kindness. To strengthen this familial bond, the Queen also took it upon herself to enlighten the 'children' she colonised: Thomas Jones Barker's *The Secret of England's Greatness (Queen Victoria presenting a Bible in the Audience Chamber at Windsor)* (ca. 1863) shows Victoria in the act of teaching an ambassador from East Africa the ways of

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God, as it were.<sup>11</sup> Victoria apparently sought to unite the world with the word of God, and she expected her subjects to show “sympathy” with England in return. This expected sympathy was best encapsulated in the Imperial Assemblage held in Delhi in 1877, a grandiose ceremony organised to prompt India to express its ‘sympathies’ for Victoria, the self-proclaimed Empress of India, as well as for her colonising project. To this end, the Imperial Assemblage featured a procession, a “visual narrative of global history, the story of a world in which the primitive East is energized and driven forward by the progressive spirit of the innovative West” (Voskuli 2004: 170), a spirit embodied, above all other nations, by Britain.

This is not to say that the Queen’s subjects in India were as submissive as she would have liked, as demonstrated in the Indian Mutiny (1857-58), nowadays also referred to as India’s First War of Independence. According to Robert Johnson, the uprising very nearly destroyed the Empire (Johnson 2003: 35). The oracular cult of Milmo (or Mwrai) of 1896 – which “promised that the white man’s bullets would turn to water” (Johnson 2003: 86) – was another public attempt at resistance. Passive resistance within the domestic realm was also common: “[f]or Indian men, the preservation of culture within their home life and the seclusion in purdah of their womenfolk were symbolic of an India beyond the reach of the British” (Johnson 2003: 87) – a practice of (self-imposed) seclusion ironically imitated by Victoria following Albert’s death. The 1877 procession nonetheless visualised or narrativised the ties between Victoria’s maternity and Britain’s imperial project under discussion here. Victoria was presented as the face of a progressive spirit. Predictably, as well as the mother of civilisation, she represented the future of India, with the latter relegated to the role of noble savage still entrapped in the past.

In the West, meanwhile, Victoria was celebrated as grandmother, the basis of a modern European civilisation – and that continent’s interconnected dynasties – to be spread far and wide. Both East and West thus owed lineage, biological as well as temporal, to Queen Victoria. Her putative genealogy, encompassing both the Occident and the Orient, united humankind in one family, one ethnocentric branch of global history. Vallée’s reiteration of the Queen’s femininity, then, is not as innocuous as it appears, for in its association with expansion it undergirds Britain’s imperial nationhood in the nineteenth century. While there is never any explicit acknowledgement of Victoria’s role as the Imperial Grandmother in the

film, she is labelled as “the key to Europe” from the start (Vallée 2009: 8:31). Albert is told early on that an alliance with Victoria would consolidate the Coburg family’s place in Europe. The King of Belgium, the King of Portugal, and the Queen of England’s mother all belong to the family, and Albert will be the “next piece in the game” (Vallée 2009: 12:01) if he becomes the Prince Consort of England. The film tells us that one family controls the imperial powerhouse that is England, and Victoria, being the Queen of England, *is* England.

Perhaps Vaughan is less subtle than Vallée in making Neo-Victoria’s European connection a matter of English pride, for it is surely not by chance that the last episode of Season One (Episode Eight) is entitled ‘Young England’. In this episode, Neo-Victoria finally achieves what she is frequently pressed to do – which is to start a family of which England can be proud. The season then ends with Albert telling Neo-Victoria that he is “proud of” her (Vaughan 2016-2017: 46:00), although Neo-Victoria is concerned that the baby is a girl. She assures Albert that they “will have a boy next time” (Vaughan 2016: 46:16), thinking that she is still young enough to make England and the Coburg family prouder still. A male heir would mean that England, the key to Europe, is the Coburg family’s to keep. A Queen who boasts of furthering/mothering the European family *par excellence* undoubtedly would be England’s pride, and to this end Neo-Victoria – England – will unite Britain as well as Europe under the Coburg name. Thus Neo-Victoria/England necessarily undercuts the Young England faction which, in Episode Eight, objects to Albert’s growing influence in local politics because of his German ancestry. So-called Englishness cannot be imagined independently of Europe, since Englishness is too nebulous a notion – one too “long subsumed with an over-indulged Britishness” (Featherson 2009: 12). English nationalism is so lacking in “ideological and discursive resources” (Featherson 2009: 12) that many seeking to define Englishness (like the writer Peter Ackroyd) are unable to “identify as ‘English’ anything that could not be attributed as well to other nations” (Hitchens qtd. in Lewis 2007: 186). Neo-Victoria, too, can only be imagined as English-European: she does England proud (and cannot be more English in this regard), because she, as England, has a hand in the growth of *the Coburgs’* imperial Europe. Like the Coburg family, England is yet young and virile enough to see its influence extended beyond Europe – that is, to build an empire and start a ‘global family’. One might ask if all these

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celebrations of Victoria's lineage, whether expressed through heritage films or the fascination with today's royal family, should not be problematised, considering that the Queen's very identity, from her femininity to her celebrity, contains and perpetuates colonial connotations not easily mitigated.

#### **4. A Neo-Victoria without Nationalism?**

Neo-Victorianism has the potential to rejuvenate Victoria's celebrity for our times, imputing to it a narrative of (self-)discovery, a delineation of her individual exceptionalities and, as a consequence, a challenge to institutionalism. Both the film *The Young Victoria* and the *Victoria* TV series dismantle the more patriarchal aspects of Victorian celebrity culture, but leave its imperialist agenda unchecked. Memories of Queen Victoria, the Grandmother of empire, are fondly recalled to provoke patriotic sentiments in Britain. Due in no small measure to the rise of neo-Victorianism, as well as an abiding (nostalgic) interest in Victorian culture, the historical celebrity of Queen Victoria is being re-evaluated, revised and made newly relevant. *The Young Victoria* and the *Victoria* re-examine the Queen as an icon and, more crucially, as an ideological tool. Vallée's film in particular presents a Neo-Victoria who desires to overcome structural limitations that check her growth; it wants to reclaim the Queen's subjectivity such that she can look squarely into the camera and, albeit virtually, communicate with futurity. In this vein, the neo-Victorian movement defamiliarises Victoria by re-introducing her as Princess, a contemporary celebrity who embodies the power of the individual – a kind of a democratic promise – and the right to personal happiness. Neo-Victoria is transformed into a twenty-first-century celebrity with a message of possibility so that, surprisingly, she can challenge some of the ideologies sheer real-life counterpart endorsed in the nineteenth century, the very ones which have long defined her work or legacy as Queen.

The resulting celebrity of Neo-Victoria, however, is far from ideal, given that it is derived from her status as the Grandmother of Europe, matriarch of its monarchies and their imperial agendas, *mission civilisatrice* or white man's burden. Even as herald of modernisation/Westernisation, the self-designated Empress of India was in this sense the nurturing mother of the noble savage. I have argued that Victoria's image as fertile woman is inseparable from her contribution to an Anglo-centric reading of lineage and

time. The attention Victoria enjoys in the twenty-first century only *seems* to adhere to modern democratic sensibilities: built upon modern re-inventions of her Victorian femininity, Neo-Victoria's celebrity status overtly conveys a message of possibility, but covertly fosters a sense of unique and superior British nationhood in the setting of the postmodern democratised 'global family', quite ironically.

### Notes

1. One can also argue that paradoxes are inevitable in biofiction. As Martin Middeke reminds us, biofiction necessarily exploits, mocks, and frustrates "the desire to reconcile a pair of opposites, to have synthesis follow antithesis" (Middeke 2010: 10). There is no reason why Neo-Victoria must resolve the tension between feminism and colonialism, or validate the political sentiments of either the nineteenth or the twenty-first century.
2. When Albert expressed a desire to help the poor, he chiefly had in mind his white working class subjects. As Preeti Nijhar reminds us, Albert and Victoria's government lent very little help to their non-white subjects. The many Indians who came to London as free sailors (lascars) or as housemaids (ayahs) were subject to indentured labour, a "halfway house between slavery and waged economy" (Nijhar 2006: 343). The welfare system that existed before Albert became Prince often excluded ethnic minorities in the country. In 1834, for instance, the Poor Laws were in place to govern social and economic relief, and yet they did not "apply to destitute Indians" (Nijhar 2006: 353). Then in 1855, when Albert *was* in power, the Merchant Shipping Amendment Act was instated to ensure that trade companies "provide welfare provisions for the destitute Indians" (Nijhar 2006: 357). Little was done when the East India Company defied the Law, however. Eventually, in 1857, the Strangers' Home for Asiatics opened in London to house immigrants who, owing to their poverty, had no choice but to loiter around the city. Serving the purpose of "civilis[ing]" non-Westerners to a "British way of life" (Nijhar 2006: 348), the Home was less a charity than a colonial institution backing the idea of the White Man's Burden.
3. The image entitled 'Queen Victoria and Sharp' (<http://www.bordercolliemuseum.org/QueenVictoria/QueenVictoria.html>) was taken in 1866 and the *Diamond Jubilee Portrait* ([https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/77/Queen\\_Victoria\\_60\\_crownjubilee.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/77/Queen_Victoria_60_crownjubilee.jpg)) in 1893.

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4. After Albert's death, Victoria dutifully assumed the role of a reclusive widow. She "had only begun to reappear in public after a period of mourning for Albert that had lasted close to fifteen years, an absence so prolonged that it had tried the patience even of Victorians accustomed to elaborate and sustained mourning rituals" (Voskuli 2004: 143).
  5. For Susan P. Casteras, this ennoblement of Victoria is most apparent in a portrait of her receiving news of the death of King William IV. Here Victoria seems the "female equivalent to Jesus among the elders in the temple", perhaps a "modern Mary as well as a new ruler" (Casteras 1997: 193).
  6. According to Claire Penhorwood, while Victoria had expected her subjects to travel to London from afar to attend the celebrations, Elizabeth took the trouble to travel abroad. John M.T. Balmer finds that Elizabeth II owes much of her popularity to her frequent public appearances; in fact, he would go so far as to label Elizabeth II a "corporate heritage brand" (Balmer 2007: 518), an object of desire for Britain and for the many nations "where Queen Elizabeth remains Head of State" (Balmer 2007: 519).
  7. For a copy of the painting, see <https://www.artfund.org/supporting-museums/art-weve-helped-buy/artwork/5314/neptune-resigning-the-empire-of-the-sea-to-britannia-william-dyce>.
  8. For a copy of the portrait, see [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Franz\\_Xaver\\_Winterhalter\\_Family\\_of\\_Queen\\_Victoria.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Franz_Xaver_Winterhalter_Family_of_Queen_Victoria.jpg).
  9. Vallée concedes this point too. In *The Young Victoria*, Albert is reminded that his uncle's "throne is six years old and born of civil war [...] if it is to survive, he must have English force at his disposal" (Vallée 2009: 8:40). Albert, however, shows little interest for his uncle's predicament, and he eventually asks his uncle not to discuss politics in their correspondence.
  10. For a copy of the painting, see <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O16700/queen-victoria-prince-albert-and-oil-painting-lafaye-prosper/>.
  11. For a copy of the painting, see <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw00071/The-Secret-of-Englands-Greatness-Queen-Victoria-presenting-a-Bible-in-the-Audience-%20Chamber-at-Windsor>.

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Queen Victoria and Nineteenth-Century Britain. The 19th Century was a time of unprecedented expansion for Britain in terms of both industry and Empire. Although her popularity ebbed and flowed during her reign, towards the end of her crown, she had become a symbol of British imperialism and pride. Queen Victoria was emblematic of this period. She was an enthusiastic supporter of the British Empire. She celebrated Lord Kitchener's victory in the Sudan; she supported British involvement in the Boer War. She was also happy to preside over the expansion of the British Empire, which was to stretch across the globe. In 1877 Queen Victoria was made Empress of India, in a move instigated by the imperialist Disraeli.