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# Nation, Heritage, and Hospitality in Britain after Thatcher

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**"Nation, Heritage, and Hospitality in Britain after Thatcher"**
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**Abstract:** In his paper, "Nation, Heritage, and Hospitality in Britain after Thatcher," Ryan S. Trimm examines the trope of cultural inheritance in postimperial Britain. "Heritage," an ubiquitous term in 1980s Britain, circulates largely as a conservative concept, an imagined bequest that works to exclude groups such as minorities who are disinherited putatively by not being part of the past and conceived as handing down some legacy. Such seems to be precisely the way heritage functioned under Margaret Thatcher's heritage politics, a collection of policies that associated icons such as the country house with the nation itself. However, although appeals to heritage stress continuities with the past, the very idea of inheritance depends on a break with the past. It is the necessity of these fissures that opens the possibility of a reappropriation of heritage, one that locates multiplicities and gaps rather than an exclusive continuity of singularities. Such a reimagining bestows a heritage that awaits the past as that which might return, a specter to whom one must play host. This intersection with hospitality and immigration offers a version of heritage attuned to the ways images of the past can be reworked and national and cultural identity revised, a rearticulation enacted in very different way in the Hanif Kureishi and Stephen Frears's film *My Beautiful Laundrette* and in Julian Barnes's novel *England, England*.

**Ryan S. TRIMM**

**Nation, Heritage, and Hospitality in Britain after Thatcher**

The study of national identity in general and Englishness in particular has become something more than mere cottage industry since the 1980s. In Britain, this rising output has been further fueled by political agendas from Margaret Thatcher to Tony Blair making self-conscious use of national iconography. These deployments have ranged from Thatcher's crow after the Falklands campaign that she had put the "'Great' back in Great Britain" to New Labour's drive to "rebrand" the nation. The crablike movement toward European union, the increased visibility of imperial ethnicities, the decline of local governmental structures in favor of an increased federalism, and the devolution of a geographical Britain itself have also put emphatic stress on the corporate identities of Britishness and Englishness. The net effect of these transformations has been to increase the rhetorical presence of the past either as source of some putative identity to be retrieved, or as one in danger of being lost, or even as the well-spring of current difficulties (such as regional and ethnic tensions, racial division, or gender inequities). As a result, heritage has become quite a flash-point for discussions about the uses and misuses of representing the past. Heritage in fact came into its own as signifier for the social imaginary of the United Kingdom in the 1970s and 1980s. As Raphael Samuel has charted in *Theatres of Memory*, these decades witnessed a proliferation of museum openings, calls for preservation of historic buildings, and a burgeoning interest in signs of the past ranging from country houses to antique jars. In addition, a seemingly endless series of costume dramas, most set within a decade or so of World War I, appeared on television and at the cinema. Politically, Thatcher's reign was associated with the advocacy for a return to "Victorian values" and with calls to save the legacy of the country house through government intervention.

These appeals to heritage have not dissipated -- even Blair's notion of "rebranding" Britain, as Tom Nairn has reported, depends just as much on an idea of inherited national splendor as Thatcher's return to "greatness." Many critics identified this retrieval of the past as part of a larger cultural phenomenon: Andreas Huyssen suggests a "culture of memory" has been dominant in North Atlantic societies since the 1970s (15). Others -- labeled the "heritage bashers" by opponents -- linked heritage culture to postmodernity itself. Among the latter, commentators such as Andrew Higson and Robert Hewison have argued that the "nostalgia for the present" located by Fredric Jameson as the prominent symptom of postmodern fiction and film could be similarly identified in heritage trends such as the fetishism of the country house and the cinematic revival of costume drama. Higson in particular finds heritage to be the ultimate materialization of situationist spectacle: "The commodity on offer is an image, a spectacle, something to be gazed at. History, the past, becomes in Frederic Jameson's phrase, 'a vast collection of images' designed to delight the modern-day tourist-historian. In this version of history, a critical perspective is displaced by decoration and display, a fascination with surfaces, 'an obsessive accumulation of comfortably archival detail' in which a fascination with style displaces the material dimensions of historical context. The past is reproduced as flat, depthless pastiche, where the reference point is not the past itself, but other images, other texts. The past as referent is effaced, and all that remains is a self-referential intertextuality" ("Re-presenting" 112). Yet conceiving heritage as merely another example of contemporary simulacra overlooks the way it depends on a specific slip between nation, state, and cultural "tradition." Heritage, as demonstrated by Patrick Wright, depends on the particular elision between a given object (say, the country house) and a larger entity (the nation) whose values are purported to reside within this icon. It is this connection that has so energized the searching criticism that has characterized much of the "heritage wars."

In these critiques, heritage circulates as a strictly conservative concept for it stresses conservation of a certain past through policed transmission of ownership. Further, this selective heritage is presented around a catalogue of icons, glossy images that position these representations of the past as commodities. Indeed, heritage properties were the major engine of a rising tourism economy in Britain. As Thomas Elsaesser notes, "at issue is what kind of Britishness 'we' could sell to 'them,' in turn balancing an appeal to 'insider knowledge' about England and Britain with what the

world knew, or thought it knew, about Britain" (59). Heritage can be seen as a successful resolution to this marketing dilemma -- if the world "knew" an England of literary classics, ancestral homes, well-to-do characters, and tradition, that would be exactly what was proffered. Heritage culture "thus offer[s] apparently more settled and visually splendid manifestations of an essentially pastoral national identity and authentic culture: 'Englishness' as an ancient and natural inheritance, *Great* Britain, the *United* Kingdom" (Higson, "Re-presenting" 110). More disturbingly, this notion of the past frequently conceals a not-so-subtle politics of exclusion. A certain vision of the past is valorized as incarnating the essence of a given community, a past which only a restricted number seem authorized to claim as their legacy. Heritage functions to exclude present members of the community (black Britons, for example) from being seen as fully-fledged citizens, for they are disenfranchised in not being able to lay claim of this past ideal. As this certain past is not infrequently an "invented tradition," heritage is viewed with more than a little skepticism. However, given the prevalence and resonance of uses of the past, a transformation of the concept also seems in order, one that revisits this figure of inheritance to find not a seamless transmission of an essential identity from one authorized group to the next but rather a fraught exchange characterized by breaks and fragmentation. By rethinking heritage in such a way, the past can be reconceived, not as snug home or closed community, but as disruption and broken transmission, a fracturing that reopens the present.

Such a rethinking would work in a similar fashion to Jean-Luc Nancy's idea of community, in that a given social group can only tend toward a communion it cannot actually achieve. Community must then be characterized by "sharing this (narcissistic) 'lack of identity'... Finitude, or the infinite lack of infinite identity... is what makes community" (Nancy xxxviii). Similarly, heritage, as the purported legacy and tradition of a community, would be characterized by the non-identity of past and present, the failure to transmit the past. Such a logic begins to locate alterity within the purported communion. In so tracing the cultural politics of heritage, I am taking Krishan Kumar's advice "to work from the outside in" to find "English national identity as a kind of residue" of previous engagements and reactions to a wider world (43-44). That is, heritage should be conceived not solely as an internal legacy but one constructed through a "history that happened elsewhere" (in Salman Rushdie's infamous tag) and one that must encompass the return of this elsewhere to what will be described as a haunted house of heritage. If, as Jacques Derrida suggests in *Specters of Marx*, the logic of inheritance itself figures the uncanny return of a strange *revenant,* then it is in relation to the cultural politics of immigration and assimilation that the texts and icons of the past seem most haunting. I will explore this tension by mapping the alterity of the archaic and the *Heimlichkeit* of both host and hosted in the contemporary politics of heritage.

Thatcher's passing of two National Heritage Acts in 1980 and 1983 is the most material manifestation of her version of "heritage politics." These two acts founded the Department of Heritage -- since relabeled the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport by the Blair administration -- and established the National Heritage Memorial Fund. The Fund in particular assumed an aggressive presence. It struck estate deals with cash poor heirs of country houses like Calke Abbey in Derbyshire, the state acquiring the property and contents for the National Trust in lieu of capital transfer taxes. It endowed lavish archeological projects such as the recovery of the *Mary Rose*, Henry VIII's flagship which languished at the bottom of Portsmouth Harbor until lifted from the bottom in the year of the Falklands. The Fund also assisted in the development of museums like the open air site at Ironbridge Gorge, a project that uses costumed performers (like Williamsburg in the United States) to enact scenarios providing visitors with the "living history" of the birth of the Industrial Revolution (see Patrick Wright's *On Living in an Old Country* for more on these projects). However, this drive to conservation was in fact the flipside of a much more forcefully articulated emphasis on enterprise and innovation, a stress intimately linked to the supply-side economics and industry-friendly policies of the Thatcher years. So marked was the Tory emphasis on transforming what had been the economic status-quo since the 1940s that commentators such as Tom Nairn and Anthony Barnett have argued that Thatcherism in fact instituted a revolution through a *peroistroika* of the United Kingdom. The stress on heritage was largely, according to John Corner and Sylvia Harvey, inspired as a response to the loss of Empire and the threat of assimilating English identity

into the European Union; in other words, a generalized "perceived diminution of national identity" (45). Ironically enough, in terms of the way Thatcher's terms related to one another, it was in fact largely the modernizing impulse contained in "enterprise" that put "heritage in danger." Here the relation between the terms is more complex than heritage seen simply as an integral part of the tourism enterprise: "it is there at a more general and more strategic level in the way in which re-modeled versions of 'identity' and 'belonging' have been projected by heritage. These have been offered as *compensatory* in relation to the undertones of destabilization and fragmentation carried by the enterprise imperative, along with its official melodies of opportunity and progress... Nation-alist nostalgia might well serve to construct, via sentiments of *inheritance,* a sense of the National Present perfectly suited for use as a departure point for an 'enterprising' National Future, through, for example, the celebration of nineteenth-century industrial entrepreneurship" (Corner and Harvey 46).

Consequently, these terms instituted a temporal disruption between the constant innovation and modernity appealed to by "enterprise" and the call of continuity through tradition in "heritage." This divide was smoothed by the ubiquitous sign of the past, an inescapability best seen in popular culture forms: the heritage film, the retrieval of Victorian styles by Laura Ashley, the Past Times catalogue. The result was an insertion of "'pastness' into the popular by narrative represen-tations which have drawn on, and then re-enhanced, the periods, events, characters, costumes, and activities forming heritage's intertextual grid... behind every use of 'heritage'... there is neces-sarily a sense of *inheritance* which is rhetorically projected as 'common', whilst at the same time it is implicitly or contextually closed down around particular characteristics of, for instance, social class, gender, and ethnicity (Corner and Harvey 49). In abreaction to the ahistoricizing rhetoric of "bootstrap" enterprise then, heritage held out the promise of a connection to the past, one that provided the promise of an almost familial relationship. As such, the past became projected as that which was held in common, a shared legacy that seemingly could bind a nation together even as its contemporary "society" was publicly derided as a chimera. Heritage would then serve as a uni-fying concept. This figuration of a bequest imagines not only a bounded and unifiable group of re-cipients, but also a singular benefactor and a limited legacy. The rhetoric of heritage then provides a transmission that binds and collects all terms of the equation: it is a practice serving to produce unities that themselves are linked rhetorically by the relay of the object. It binds together in retro-spect that which must have been separated before. Furthermore, such a relay presumes no distor-tion will corrupt or transform the legacy as it is handed down, even while such mutability is the necessary precondition for an inheritance. It is for the reason that heritage must always be "in danger" (to echo Tory MP Patrick Cormack's tome which helped spark the heritage wars). Heritage makes its appeal by implicitly stressing the gaps it must bridge through projected unities, imag-ined unities that then conceal those breaks. For example, Corner and Harvey note that in the emo-tional appeal used to position the private property of the country house as an emblem of a public inheritance, a "strategic *indivisibility* is seen to be at work, subsuming awkward differences within larger continuities. The implication that while the property may, in most cases, remain in private ownership, the values it represents are 'public,' is frequently to be found" (51). Indeed, as heri-tage properties became opened to the public through estate tax deals struck with literal inheritors (such as the one for Calke Abbey), "a sufficient *discontinuity* with the past permit[ed] *increased access* to be marked as part of the exciting *promise* of heritage" (51). Politically, heritage came to mark the attempt to erase present differences through the extension of a past (and very politi-cized) inheritance, a maneuver ironically conducted through a break with the past allowing this legacy to be proffered to all. If this past was one of class (emphasized by these critics over impe-rial and gender issues) domination, then the "heritage industry" sought to preserve hierarchical relations. In a related fashion, heritage selects only some pasts as appropriate, pasts clothed in a rhetoric of legacy similarly limiting who might have this history passed down to them.

However, such criticism of heritage -- that it takes form as an ahistorical relation to a valorized and fabricated aristocratic tradition -- has itself been criticized by Raphael Samuel and his History Workshop as a reductive vision. Samuel's work focuses on the demotic deployment of heritage in the form of museums stressing the "lived experience" of a past, local history re-enactments, and

collections of everyday objects (farm and factory tools, bottles, train schedules, and so forth). Clearly, there could be many types of heritage, other forms valorizing industrial labor and the working class, rather than a pastorally based aristocracy. Furthermore, Samuel, along with film critics like Claire Monk, pointed out that much of what these "heritage baiters" (who were more or less exclusively male) complained of in the putatively quintessential heritage text, a cinematic adaptation of the Merchant-Ivory ilk, were elements such as a lingering gaze on lavish interiors, little 'action,' and fetishized period costumes. These elements were precisely the ones connecting this cycle with melodrama and the sentimental; in short, with "women's films." The seemingly obligatory invocation of Alan Parker's dismissive snap about "the Laura Ashley school of filmmaking" by heritage critics only further betrayed a glossing over of gender issues. Heritage then is not a simple signifying system, but one with many permutations that are also expressive of other identities. As a result, the heritage question begins to morph from questions of whether or not it is truly expressive of national identity, of whether or not it is naturally allied with a conservative politics, to the more fraught difficulty of how the imbricated identities in the semiotics of heritage might be mapped. Further, as Andreas Huyssen notes, reading this drive toward cultural preservation as simply "provid[ing] compensation for the ravages of accelerating modernization in the social world is just too simple and too ideological. It fails to recognize that any secure sense of the past itself is being destabilized by our musealizing culture industry and by the media that function as leading players in the morality play of memory" (24).

Such destabilization might be plumbed by examining the rhetoric and resonances of this notion of inheritance that heritage depends upon. Certainly heritage as bequest bestows a sense of authorization upon the inheritor. The one who inherits is granted custody of the estate, approves and authorizes projects involving the legacy of the bestower, and prosecutes those who improperly appropriate the name and effects of the legator. It is the legatee who becomes the authorized representative of the past, an authorization stressing a formalized legitimacy, one that legally empowers the inheritor to pass judgment on behalf of the interests of the past. In fact, it is as if the legatee takes control over the past, appropriates it as property. In this manner, an inheritance appears as a form of distinction, a singling out, for patrimony in this view cannot be given to all -- only the chosen are selected. Heritage becomes a drawing of boundaries distinguishing between legatees and those left out. And yet this empowering inheritance did not exist -- or rather did not exist as inheritance -- before it was received by the legatee. That is, before the death or passing that led to the bestowal, the legacy was not a legacy yet -- it was still something whose value was primarily in some sort of use, exchange, or significatory value, a value imagined only at the rates of exchange of that moment. It is only after the fact of death or passing that the legacy becomes a legacy and becomes charged with an aura of the past, with a value dependent on the artifact having survived the past. The legacy achieves a special aura of value by dint of its having outlived its initial value of presentness and garners a special supplement of preciousness over and above its new worth in use, exchange, or present signification. Indeed, its new present signification depends on the legacy's value as a residuum, as a marker of continuity. However, this continuity depends on the actuality of there having been a break, a change of a much larger scale. Only in terms of such a dwarfing scale of loss does heritage have any value as heritage. The preciousness of persistence in the legacy depends on its contrast with a much greater fracture.

As a result, the historicity of heritage depends on its having outlived its own history, on the legacy having now survived on as an anachronism. Heritage might serve as index or signifier for history, but doing so depends on its own violation of the periodizing history that it seems to suggest. That is, the legacy serves as a sign of the era before it became a legacy, the era in which it was in circulation with regards to use, exchange, or signification. In signaling this era after its passing, the legacy thus violates the periodizing punctuation dividing that era from the present, for the legacy itself belies the fact of exclusive separation it would signify. The aura of pastness in the legacy thus disavows its persistence -- and its presentness. It is for this reason that the aura of the past serves as isolating resonance, one that estranges the legacy from any new context. By focusing on this aura of pastness, the trope of heritage attempts to prevent a recontextualizing and rehistoricizing of the legacy; it prevents its being understood in terms of the way the legacy

might currently recirculate. Heritage then works perversely enough by using the residuum of the past to stress an absolute break between past and present, a break seemingly denying any possibility of real residuals (whatever remains does so by dint of some sort of divine grace and not because of its own sturdy design, persistent utility, adaptability to new situations). By largely disclaiming continuity, heritage suggests an homogeneity on either side of the break with the past. On one side is the now lost world of the past, a world complete and whole in itself; on the other is the present day, a world whose own wholeness and unity serves as stark relief to the surviving legacy. This opposition of past to present helps explain the strange politics resonating around heritage. The idea of legacy -- a singular transmittable and authorizing bequest -- is inherently conservative, literally a drive to conserve and restrict versions of the past. At the same time, the nostalgic gaze fetishizing some lost wholeness only persistent in the residuum of the legacy is also inherently critical, for it always depends on an implicit (and frequently explicit) judgment of the present as being found wanting for its disruptions, lack of community, relentless commodifying drive, or fractured sense of culture. Whether or not the past actually contained a more positive version of these things, the fact that the present is found wanting suggests heritage always expresses a discomfort with the processes of modernization.

By stressing these gaps and fractures, the rhetoric of heritage begins to encompass a sense of haunting through this transmission of the past through breaks. These breaks at once provide the synaptic gaps for the passing down of legacies and indicate historical breaks -- thus signaling that such an inheritance will always appear as *unheimlich*. Indeed, Jacques Derrida reminds us in *Specters of Marx* that "one never inherits without coming to terms with some specter, and therefore with more than one specter" (21). This multiplicity stems from the strange temporality of the specter, one that signals the anachronism of a residuum of the past in the present, a present that then must encompass that past. Furthermore, Derrida stresses the specter is in fact oriented most to the future, for this ghostly presence of the non-present "is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back" (39). That is, what makes the specter uncanny is not so much a past that has actually come back to the present but the suggestion that it might do so, that this return is still come. The legacy of the specter is that of an unstable binding of past, present, and future. Rather than a simple bequest from the past, what is inherited in the specter is a disruption of ordered temporality. Indeed, because the specter is itself an inseparable knot of temporal strands and connections, there can be no simple singularity in terms of an easy communication of legacy between past and present. In fact, because of this complex temporality, the specter cannot even in fact be spoken of as reducing simply to the mere receptivity of the present, for such would overlook ways in which the past might belatedly inherit from the present or the future. As specters hold the line binding temporality together, the retroactive alteration of the past and the projective modification of the future would then proceed through processes such as *Nachträglichkeit.* Specters then help remove the sense of monumental authorization, for they encompass also shifting and humbling movements of retrospection and anticipation. Because of the overloaded and provisional nature of the specter, Derrida locates in it "a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations" (xix). This political resonance of heritage stems from the fact that "Inheritance is never a *given,* it is always a task... like all inheritors, we are in mourning... That we *are* heirs does not mean that we *have* or that we *receive* this or that, some inheritance that enriches us one day with this or that, but that the *being* of what we are *is* first of all inheritance, whether we like it or know it or not... we can only *bear witness* to it. To bear witness would be to bear witness to what we *are* insofar as we *inherit...* we inherit the very thing that allows us to bear witness to it (54).

Indeed, "there is no inheritance without a call to responsibility. An inheritance is always the reaffirmation of a debt" (Derrida 92). As a result, heritage cannot be conceived as simple bequest from past to present, for inheritance destabilizes all terms in that equation. Most significantly perhaps for conversations of national historical legacies is the complex subject position staked out for inheritors, a complexity signaled by the tripartite divide located there: the inheritors must assume the position of bearing witness to that which they already are, a being that in fact is identified as not their own but the actual inheritance itself. As a result, inheritance becomes an open-ended

ethical act and not simply a closed-system oriented around the invocation of some past. It should be stressed, though, that just as the specter points toward a future of anticipated retrospection, so too does the affiliated notion of inheritance. The debt assumed by the act of inheritance is not merely one owed to the past, whether in terms of "standing on the shoulders of giants" or obeying some patrilineal injuncture or code, but one even more owed to the future. And because the haunting aspect of inheritance stresses a "domesticity," this haunted heritage then "implies places, a habitation, and always a haunted house" (Derrida, *Archive* 86). If the ethics of inheritance must be articulated outward, beyond the past to the future, and they must be enacted around a haunted habitation, inheritance becomes directed more to the one to come than to the one before; or, in the figure of the specter, the one before returns as the one to come. As a result, the politics of the specter and the inheritance start to edge into the politics of hospitality, and the figure of the specter becomes that of the immigrant, the one who comes to partake of this hospitality.

I want to conclude by using two very different texts, Julian Barnes's 1998 novel *England, England* and the 1986 film *My Beautiful Laundrette*, to gesture toward some possible lines of extension from this conception of heritage culture. Barnes's *England, England* is the most obvious echo of heritage and enterprise. Here, Sir Jack Pitman creates simulacra of all things English in a heritage theme park on the Isle of Wight, now relabeled England, England. The theme park replaces the real thing and secedes, causing old Albion to lapse into neo-rustic insularity and decay. Both the theme park and the English rump of Albion in fact trade on heritage by novel's end; the difference is in the way those heritages are conceived. In *England, England,* it is precisely the modernizing impulse in the form of enterprise that at once authorizes the construction of heritage and constructs this heritage as a break: "You -- we -- England -- my client -- is -- are -- a nation of great age, great history, great accumulated wisdom. Social and cultural history -- stacks of it, reams of it -- eminently marketable, never more so than in the current climate... if I may coin, no, copyright, a phrase, *We are already what others may hope to become*. This isn't self-pity, this is the strength of our position, our glory, our product placement. We are the new pioneers. We must sell our past to other nations as their future!" (41). It is this enterprising rational that uses a "touristy" image of the past to mark a break with the past itself, to invent a future as marketable heritage. The commercial heritage of England, England continues the Thatcherite/Blairite association of modernity with enterprise in this national open air museum staffed with costumed interpreters and demonstrators (much like the real Ironbridge). The result is an incongruous collage of postcard visions of English heritage jumbled together: the transplanted King of England pilots his own Spitfire in daily reenactments of the Battle of Britain then adjourns to watch Lady Godiva or sport with Nell Gwynn; a SAS team from World War II conducts a staged battle with Robin Hood and his Merrie Men; Harrods emporium is located in the new Tower of London. Further, this version of heritage does allow some tweaking: Robin Hood's band is now composed of a motley crew of the socially marginalized; Maid Marian now leads a feminist separatist group. However, while such a version of the past does point toward an opening of history and though this heritage is concerned with relations to those whom it entertains, these are valued and incorporated solely as "visitor throughput," as the clicks of the turnstile and the clanks of cash in the register. There is no possibility of being interwoven into an imagined community, for it is most manifestly a society of paid performers enacting emphatically scripted lines. However, as the conception of *England, England* underscores, there can be no unscripted or authentic heritage: "Bo-gus implies... an authenticity which is being betrayed. But is this -- the case in the present instance? Is not the very notion of the authentic somehow, in its own way, bogus?" (134). Given the starting points of legend and half-truth characterizing popular heritage, it is the idea of a static and final version allied in perfect correspondence with a mythical past that is itself counterfeit.

In contrast, the decidedly unmodern rump of Albion devolves around a heritage of returning to the closed circle of the pastoral. However, this new naturalism depends on the performative folk improvisations of those who had not been ethnically coded English, residents who now compose new English traditions wholesale and on the spot. Jez Harris (né Oshinsky) is a former American lawyer who delights in playing the English yokel to ethnologists traveling through, plying them with "tales of witchcraft and superstition, of sexual rites beneath a glowing moon and the tranced

slaughter of livestock, all not so very long in the past" (252), all for a treated evening at the pub. This new folklore also encompasses a postimperial expansion of English culture, perhaps best embodied in the prominence chutneys are given at the folk fair. This fair is a hodge-podge of events based on foggy memories, dusty encyclopedias, and old fair guides, one inclusive of conga lines, St. George crosses, and Beatles' songs. The result is an instant tradition, one treated as heritage even as it is being actively fabricated. Paradoxically, these self-consciously invented traditions are very much open and subject to intervention and extension at precisely the same moment they are presented as a weighty and monumental heritage to visitors. Such an inheritance extends a very uncertain hand in greeting. In contrast, Hanif Kureishi's screenplay and Stephen Frears's direction of *Laundrette* tells the story of the son of Pakistani immigrants who rises to proprietorship of a string of laundromats through hard work, the support of his family, a not always scrupulous enterprising nature, and the love of a good man. *My Beautiful Laundrette* refuses seemingly the whole idea of heritage, at least of a strictly English one: the film offers a sometimes ironic celebration of the entrepreneurial spirit of Pakistani immigrants in south London. The lines of ethnic contrast are strong: the English are either sycophants like those in attendance at Nasser's parties or aimless punks looking for an excuse to wreck violence, as with Johnny's old mates. It is the Pakistanis who are always in motion, briskly reinventing themselves, seizing control of personal and business situations, and continually articulating an evolving sense of singularity. As such, they are dramatized as economic redeemers of a sort: Salim and Nasser bemoan the frenzy of their lives but acknowledge they are "too busy keeping this country in the black. Someone's got to do it." The English, such as Nasser's mistress Rachel, can only look on regretfully: "Everything is waiting for you. The only thing that has ever waited for me is your father [Nasser]." Indeed, it is only menial labor and "unscrewing" left "for them in this country." The effect is one of apparent dispossession -- London is a world of infinite possibility for the Anglo-Pakistanis and a futureless realm for the English themselves. This position is taken not only by the business community surrounding Nasser but also by Johnny's mates. Genghis, a voice for this crew who at one point is shown wearing a British National Party t-shirt, offers up the standard arguments to Johnny: "They came to work for us. That's why we brought them over ... Don't cut yourself off from your own people. Because there's no one else who really wants you. Everyone has to belong." The English clump together in a last-ditch action in the face of the swamping demographic tide Enoch Powell feared. As a result, the Pakistani characters in the film seem the face of newness itself.

However, the protagonist, Omar, navigates with and around a cultural heritage of his own, one most clearly figured in the prospect of marriage with his cousin Tania (whose mother Bilquis maintains a traditional stance right down to the ability to cook magic potions). Tania, despite her modern poise, is still positioned as a traditional daughter, one shut out from the family business ("he wouldn't dream of asking me"). Omar, though, is able to reconcile his ambivalence with this heritage only when he becomes enmeshed in the family enterprise and displays the family's enterprising spirit. Only after Omar has embarked on his entrepreneurial career is he acknowledged to be "one of us now." Salim's friendly hailing marks Omar not only as a member of the Anglo-Pakistani business community but his use of "one of us" also echoes Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim,* a novel in which the phrase marks the title character as an Englishman of a certain social stature. "One of us" signals not only Omar's passage into an ethnic economic enclave but also the assimilation of Englishness itself (from entrepreneurship to clubbiness) by this enclave. Omar's uncertain relation toward the heritage of his father is alleviated only through his claiming the mantle of enterprise, a legacy that all the English presented in the film seem estranged from. Heritage here seems a truly transferable object, one that seemingly selects its own inheritors and, in so doing, molds and claims them as its own even as they transform the bequest itself. Indeed, it seems as if the moral of the screenplay is a measured celebration of an enterprising modernity hailing new and hybridized identities, a celebration picked up in the title of the essay accompanying the script, "The Rainbow Sign." This title comes from the lyric "God gave Noah the rainbow sign,/No more water, the fire next time" -- an echo that also invokes James Baldwin's warning in *The Fire Next Time*. Though this rainbow sign seems to promise a new peaceful and tolerant compact, it comes at the

cost of the deluge that is its necessary prerequisite, a deluge that has swept away all that had stood before. The bequest of the rainbow only comes after a washing away of what had been.

Heritage is oft presented as having a chilling effect on the present, a way of foreclosing transformations within a society. However, the very rhetoric of legacy in fact depends on these breaks and fractures. Once examined more closely, heritage can be recast less as an exclusionary move and more as one that can open up the temporality of a given community. Along these lines, the Parekh report on *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* quotes Marina Warner as suggesting that "'arguing with the past, like paying taxes, like observing the law, like queuing, like not playing music full blast when others will be disturbed, has suddenly become a vital part of being a member of society, an ordinary but important act of citizenship, a factor in establishing the idea of a home as a place you would like to belong, and might be allowed to stay" (4). Indeed, the Committee itself recommends one of the major tasks for the nation as "reimagining Britain's past story and present identity" (105). Heritage might be remapped as a form of this reimagining, a civic responsibility of sorts, just as with the country fête in *England, England*. However, one essential move will be to track the frequent intersections and congruences with the accompanying signifier of enterprise. It is the concealment of this link that allows discussions of heritage to go largely unchallenged in regards to the breaks and disruptions talk of inheritance always invokes. As with *My Beautiful Laundrette,* it is precisely around these gaps that new lines of bequest might be thought. It is vital to plumb the ramifications of this fractured figuration not only to examine the commerce of "inherited" culture, but also to open out the politics of heritage beyond simple and reductive transmission of the past into extending its accompanying hospitality.

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