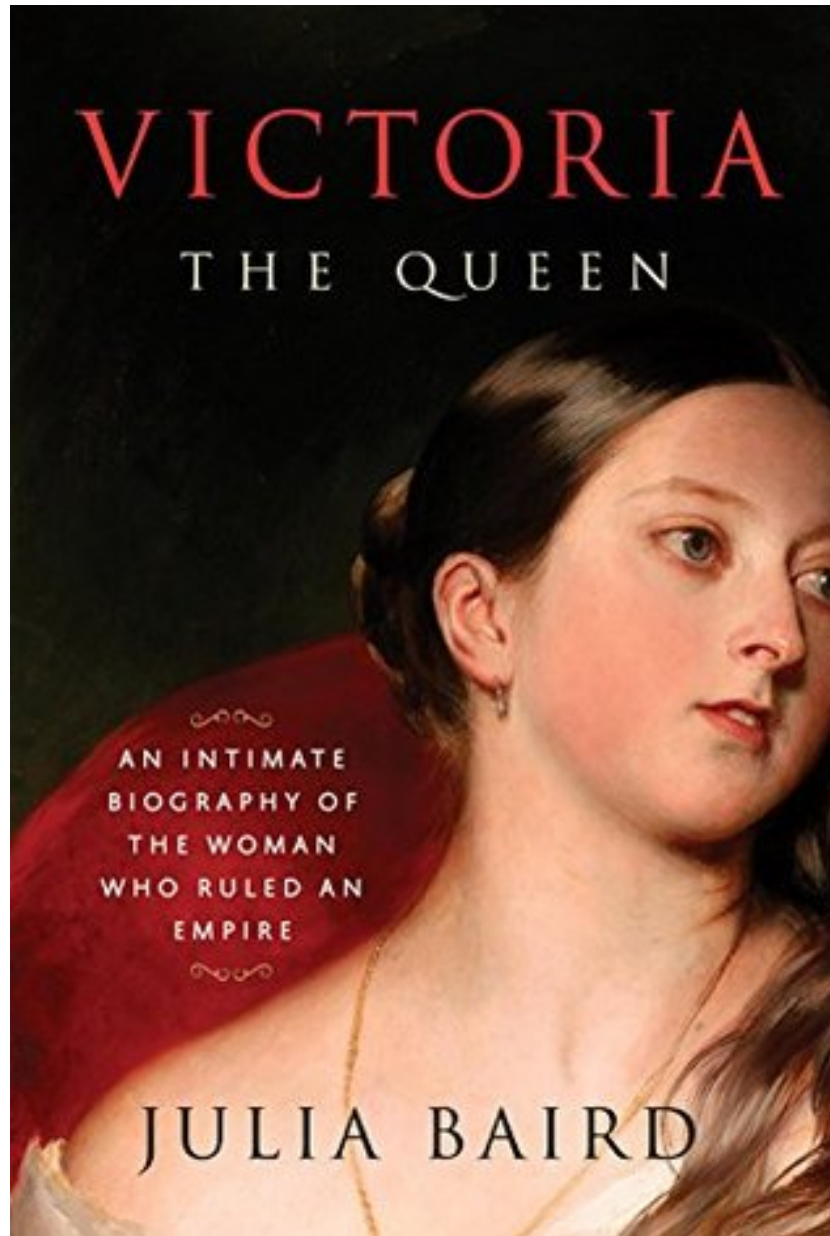


Victoria: The Queen: An Intimate Biography of the Woman Who Ruled an Empire Book PDF Download



**By:
Julia Baird**

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What people Say:

Matt

As Canada prepares to celebrate its 150th birthday, I felt it high time to look back and explore the life and times of our first monarch, Queen Victoria. Much of the country was either shaped or influenced by this British monarch, whose reign was only recently surpassed by Queen Elizabeth II. Julia Baird offers a thorough and thought-provoking biography of Victoria, exploring and dispelling many of the key events and stories that history have attributed to this 19th century wonder. Baird's prese

As Canada prepares to celebrate its 150th birthday, I felt it high time to look back and explore the life and times of our first monarch, Queen Victoria. Much of the country was either shaped or influenced by this British monarch, whose reign was only recently surpassed by Queen Elizabeth II. Julia Baird offers a thorough and thought-provoking biography of Victoria, exploring and dispelling many of the key events and stories that history have attributed to this 19th century wonder. Baird's presentation sheds Victoria in three distinct lights that the reader will notice throughout the narrative: Victoria the woman, the politician, and the monarch. Striving to provide a clear understanding of Victoria and the influence she had over much of the world, Baird provides the reader with a stellar piece that opens the door to further exploration.

While her enduring reign over Britain and the British Empire may have made Victoria seem super-human, she proved to have common concerns, like many of her subjects. Born in 1819, Victoria arrived amidst an ascendancy crisis in Britain. Fifth in the line of succession after the recent death of her grandfather, George III, Victoria was vilified by some of her uncles, all aged and without legitimate heirs to the Throne. Baird attributes this to George III's Royal Marriages Act, which required the monarch to approve of all unions before they could be officially accepted by Parliament. A few deaths and no heirs to take their place left Victoria in a position to rule at a young age. Victoria ascended to the Throne at nineteen, without a husband or significant love interest. Enter Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, who boldly presented himself to his cousin and determined to convince her that they should wed. Hesitant at first, Victoria soon acquiesced and they married, beginning what some have called the strongest romantic relationship of any English monarch. Victoria soon began a period of almost constant pregnancy, giving birth to nine children in total while still running the country (and Empire). Interestingly enough, while she held much power Victoria willingly handed the reins of power to Albert, as women of the time might have done, without a second thought. Baird amply illustrates the long and devoted marriage that Victoria and Albert shared, growing stronger with each passing year, during which time Albert was able to make many of the household (and monarchical) decisions without Victoria's protest. Equally shocking, as Baird presents it, Victoria remained a devoted mother as well, tending to the nine children and her subjects as effectively as possible. To bestow so much onto the shoulders of one woman is, in my

opinion, more than can be expected, but Victoria did it all masterfully. When Albert fell ill and eventually died in 1861, Victoria was beside herself with grief. Baird supports what many have said that Victoria continued to reign, but never passed out of her period of mourning. Much speculation arose as John Brown soon appeared on the scene, Victoria's manservant, which Baird addresses as being rumoured to be her lover for the years before his death. (The reader can make their own decision after reading Baird's curious discovery surrounding Victoria's requirements during her preparation for burial.) Surely the friend and support that Victoria needed in her time of despair, Brown, too, succumbed earlier than one might have expected, dealing Victoria another blow. As a mother with grown children, Victoria sought to ensure her daughters married well and history proves that this was surely the case. With her son 'Bertie' (the future Edward VII) in the wings, Victoria offered as much affection to her family as possible, while remaining in a state of grief for the loss of Albert all those years before. Even when the Crown bore heavily upon her, Victoria emerged as a woman of power and significance throughout her life. At her death in 1901, Victoria had lived a life full of remarkable joy and dreadful sorrows, the weight of the latter at times self-imposed. Interestingly enough, while Victoria did little at the time to bolster the role of female emancipation or women in a position of authority, the world looked to her after her death and lauded much praise and ceremonial titles that had otherworldly connotations. While a remarkable queen, Victoria's qualities as a woman cannot be forgotten.

While surely not a member of either of Britain's Houses of Parliament, Queen Victoria played a significant role in the political machinations throughout her reign. Soon after she ascended to the Throne, Victoria forged a strong friendship with her first prime minister, Lord Melbourne. Baird presents him as a father figure that Victoria lacked in her formative years, though some may also speculate a strong affinity or 'crush' on Victoria's part. Needless to say, Victoria did not hide her sentiments and tried all she could to keep him and the Whigs in power. From this point forward, Baird presents Victoria as having a strong and lasting influence over her prime ministers and their cabinet choices, as well as messages she presented in the numerous Openings of Parliament. Victoria's strong-headedness becomes apparent as she clashed greatly with William Gladstone, Prime Minister on four occasions. Baird illustrates the dynamic between these two and how they could not find common ground on much. These were formative years for England and the British Empire, a time in which Victoria sought to have her voice heard. Issues of Irish famine, steep grain tariffs, Irish Home Rule, and imperial expansions into Africa fill the narrative, areas in which Victoria offered her own opinions, though she was happy to help shape solutions through her actions as a part of the political machine throughout the time all ten of her British prime ministers led governments. In exploring Victoria's hands-on approach, Baird discusses something that is taken for granted in Canada, the role of a constitutional monarch in the larger process. Baird refers to writings by Walter Bagehot, who sought to explain the loose English Constitution and the place in which the monarch rests. Advice differs from influence and acceptance from determination, though much of the process was steeped in precedent and not firm law. Victoria played a much more active and quasi-partisan role than might have been expected (or allowed?) today, on either side of the Atlantic, though it was surely interesting to see her interpret and play such a transparent role in her choice of engagement at the top of the parliamentary process. Victoria may never have faced the

ever-growing electorate at the ballot box, but her political influence could surely be felt throughout her time on the Throne.

Until recently, Victoria held the record for the longest-serving monarch in English history, surpassed by the current Elizabeth II. During that long period on the Throne, Victoria saw not only the Empire transform, but also her own family, as well as herself. From the early years as a young queen, Victoria was more apt to get in the middle of things, playing the role of innocent monarch, ignorant of her larger ceremonial role. However, as mentioned above, Victoria soon became a monarch that sought to steer England in a specific direction, at least to the best of her ability without facing a parliamentary election. The Empire grew significantly during her time, turning her from English monarch to that of numerous countries all over the world. For as regal as she was, Baird presents Victoria as a monarch who took her own family life to heart and did not espouse the stoic nature to which many are accustomed with today's queen. Victoria's decades-long mourning for Albert and reclusiveness for a significant period may, for some, lessen the impact of her reign. However, using her Jubilee celebrations as any measurement for her support, Victoria was loved by many and adored by her subjects. Longevity cannot be the sole factor in the praise she received for her Golden Jubilee, nor the deference paid to her around the world and especially throughout Europe. Truth be told, she had her bloodline running through many of the significant monarchies of Europe, but even still, she was not one to hold back her opinions when it suited her. The British Empire expanded and many could feel the Victorian impact, a legacy that has long outlived her reign. Victoria kept the Empire together, which was surely no small feat, and left England ready to face the 20th century by the time she died. Influential without being dictatorial, Victoria's influence as a monarch lasted throughout her long life.

Baird has taught us much in this biography, though many questions remain. Through her powerful narrative abilities, Baird takes the reader on a winding journey through the life of Victoria and the creation of a firm Empire, which continues in the form of the British Commonwealth. Born at a time when the English Throne was still seen as a despotic seat, Victoria sought to soften the blow in her own way. Baird effectively argues numerous points of contention in the book, which may leave some readers somewhat distraught, though the supporting arguments are strong and prove convincing. While I might show some bias, I would have liked to have seen a little more on some of the monumental aspects of the Empire's growth, particularly the formal addition of Canada as a country in 1867 or Australia's lobby and eventual inclusion in 1901. True, Victoria remained in mourning during the Canadian build-up, which might limit Baird's ability to track down sentiments and strengthen the narrative, but as the largest Dominion in the Empire, one might have expected it to receive some place in this biography. On the flip side, Victoria's waning years occurred as Australia set to formally distinguish itself as an independent country, leaving little Victorian influence. Tackling such a large project may have been daunting, though Baird synthesises Victoria powerfully, getting detailed when needed but not drowning in the minutiae that was surely tempting over such a long reign. The reader can sail through the biography with ease, seeing Victoria as an influential (and influenced) woman whose love for family trumped all else. Any who are curious about this wonderful woman ought to give Baird a chance to offer formal introductions in this stellar piece of writing.

Kudos, Madam Baird for such a powerful biography. I did learn a great deal about Canada's first queen. I can only hope to find more of your work and marvel at the detail you add to the narrative.

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Kirsti (Melbourne on my mind)

4.5 stars.

Things I learnt from this book:

- Queen Victoria was THIRSTY. Like...T.H.I.R.S.T.Y. Homegirl reeeeeeeally wanted the D. Her main concern when told that she should stop having children was basically "But I can still get laid, right??"
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DeB MaRtEnS

Queen Victoria's story has been well defined in this fascinating, well-rounded and researched biography by Julia Baird. Victoria Regina Imperatrix was the petite queen whose feet did not reach the bottom of the throne on the day of her coronation. Her daughters saw her beautiful smile, her husband enjoyed her strong libido and to her dismay she found herself in a cumbersome pregnant body for eight out of nine years running. Prince Albert was the man of the relationship and Victoria deferred in t

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Victoria's history is fairly well-known, especially that of her courtship and marriage to Albert. Julia Baird had access to previously inaccessible documents which further enriched the biography, adding insight and balance to former accounts. Their youngest daughter Beatrice between 1933-1943 had taken upon herself to whitewash her mother Queen Victoria's diaries, rewriting them, and burning the originals "in one of the greatest acts of historical censorship of the century". As a result, we know about "The Queen" but her interior self has been poorly represented. Baird has filled in that picture, giving context and softening the more familiar grim biographical portrait which has represented Victoria. I appreciated her life, it's hardships, her joys and felt great compassion for the working mother, wife and widow that the author has brought to life.

The global style of this biography is very satisfying. Baird's writing brings us closest to Victoria and then as her timeline is followed, so too is that of Britain, the Commonwealth and the fully expanded Empire. She was actively knowledgeable about Parliament, hard-working and opinionated and at times meddlesome when politicians would have preferred to ignore her mature good advice. Though she insisted that everyone who met with her must always walk away backwards and never show their backside to her, she was surprisingly free of racial prejudice. Interestingly, the prim attitudes toward sex which characterized the Victorian Age were Prince Albert's, not Victoria's!

There is such a broad range of information in this biography: history, anecdotes, interesting trivia, fashion, a theory of the psychology about extended bereavement and killer diseases prevalent in the previous century, now almost unheard of today. Family grudges had a part in starting World War I; British empire building can be linked to the beginning of crises in the Middle East. Considering the years and years of intermarriage between royalty from different countries, Julia Baird's retelling of

the facts sometimes seemed like the zany family history of misbehaving European monarchs, with actions that resonated eerily today. Prince Albert's mother met a fate so much like Princess Diana's, it gave me shivers.

***I admit that I skimmed through the most detailed passages set in government; the political infighting between Gladstone and Victoria became tiresome. I felt that the nitty gritty of his life and other politicians, in finite detail, bogged the book down in the middle. A large general audience might enjoy this biography if this section was pared down to a more basic focus, keeping its good anecdotes (eg., the ones about Disraeli). I could then confidently recommend Victoria: The Queen to fans of Downton Abbey because the majority of the biography otherwise is as fluid as good historical fiction.

Victoria: The Queen is a bibliophile's pleasure. Part history, part personal story, the book transports the reader into Victoria's life to imagine the scenes, the trials and tribulations and splendour of her great life.

NetGalley and RandomHouse Publishing provided the ARC for my unbiased review.

Ashley Brooks

For me it's usually a gamble with long, historical biographies on whether or not they'll be dense and dull. Victoria: The Queen was definitely the opposite. Baird wrote an engaging, well researched and well rounded account of the woman who shaped an era. It's a shame that Victoria's journals and letters were censored so heavily, but I think Baird did an excellent job of uncovering the truth where she could, and making (clearly noted) educated speculation based on the information she had.

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I highly recommend this and will be keeping an eye out for Baird's writing in the future!

Book Riot Community

It's not often I'm able to read a nonfiction book in one sitting, much less a historical biography, but that's just what happened with Julia Baird's new biography of Queen Victoria. Baird writes beautifully, crafting a careful narrative around Britain's second-longest reigning monarch. Her research is thorough, and she really provides the reader with a sense of what Victoria the woman and Victoria the queen were like. But most of all, this book is compulsively readable. Don't let the 500+ pages

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-Swapna Krishna

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