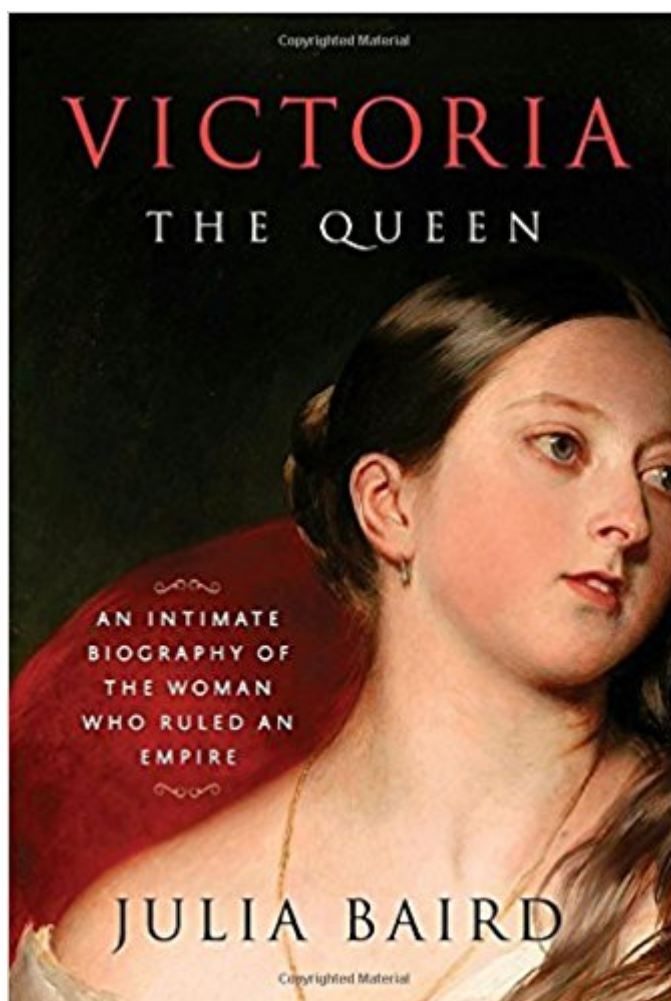


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Victoria: The Queen: An Intimate Biography Of The Woman Who Ruled An Empire



Synopsis

The true story for fans of the PBS Masterpiece series *Victoria*, this page-turning biography reveals the real woman behind the myth: a bold, glamorous, unbreakable queen—a Victoria for our times. Drawing on previously unpublished papers, this stunning new portrait is a story of love and heartbreak, of devotion and grief, of strength and resilience. NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY JANET MASLIN, THE NEW YORK TIMES • ESQUIRE • THE CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY • “Victoria the Queen, Julia Baird’s exquisitely wrought and meticulously researched biography, brushes the dusty myth off this extraordinary monarch.” • The New York Times Book Review (Editor’s Choice) When Victoria was born, in 1819, the world was a very different place. Revolution would threaten many of Europe’s monarchies in the coming decades. In Britain, a generation of royals had indulged their whims at the public’s expense, and republican sentiment was growing. The Industrial Revolution was transforming the landscape, and the British Empire was commanding ever larger tracts of the globe. In a world where women were often powerless, during a century roiling with change, Victoria went on to rule the most powerful country on earth with a decisive hand. Fifth in line to the throne at the time of her birth, Victoria was an ordinary woman thrust into an extraordinary role. As a girl, she defied her mother’s meddling and an adviser’s bullying, forging an iron will of her own. As a teenage queen, she eagerly grasped the crown and relished the freedom it brought her. At twenty, she fell passionately in love with Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, eventually giving birth to nine children. She loved sex and delighted in power. She was outspoken with her ministers, overstepping conventional boundaries and asserting her opinions. After the death of her adored Albert, she began a controversial, intimate relationship with her servant John Brown. She survived eight assassination attempts over the course of her lifetime. And as science, technology, and democracy were dramatically reshaping the world, Victoria was a symbol of steadfastness and security—a queen of a quarter of the world’s population at the height of the British Empire’s reach. Drawing on sources that include fresh revelations about Victoria’s relationship with John Brown, Julia Baird brings vividly to life the fascinating story of a woman who struggled with so many of the things we do today: balancing work and family, raising children, navigating marital strife, losing parents, combating anxiety and self-doubt, finding an identity, searching for meaning. Praise for *Victoria: The Queen* • “Fascinating.” • Vogue • “In Baird’s deft portrayal, Victoria lives, breathes, and struts before us in all her complexity. . . . On a geopolitical level, Baird’s sweeping historical portrait also illuminates just how interconnected the European

royal families were during this time. . . . Historical astuteness aside, the pages gallop along enhanced by titillating morsels of info. [Esquire](#) “A vivid portrait of one of England’s longest-reigning monarchs.” [Entertainment Weekly](#) “[A] success from start to finish. . . [Baird’s] Victoria is a vivid, visceral creature.” [The Christian Science Monitor](#) “Like the best biographers, Baird writes like a novelist, and her book is crammed with irresistible detail and description.” [The Seattle Times](#)

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Customer Reviews

“Victoria the Queen, Julia Baird’s exquisitely wrought and meticulously researched biography, brushes the dusty myth off this extraordinary monarch. Right out of the gate, the book thrums with authority as Baird builds her portrayal of Victoria. Overturning stereotypes, she rips this queen down to the studs and creates her anew. . . . Baird’s Victoria isn’t the woman we expect to meet. Her queen is a pure iconoclast: emotional, demonstrative, sexual and driven. . . . Baird writes in the round. She constructs a dynamic historical figure, then spins out a spherical world of elegant reference, anchoring the narrative in specific detail and pinning down complex swaths of history that, in less capable hands, would simply blow away.” [The New York Times Book Review \(Editor’s Choice\)](#) “In this in-depth look at a feminist before her time, you’ll balk at, cheer on, and mourn the obstacles in the life of the teen queen who grew into her throne.” [Marie Claire](#) “Exhilarating . . . [A] frisky, adventurous new biography . . . This book shows how

Victoria's girlish naughtiness turned into a regal, willful, complex nature that other biographers have tended to simplify. . . . [Julia] Baird brings a strong feminist awareness to the ways in which Victoria's letters, edited by two men, have been censored to excise the full range of her personality, and also to the subordinate role any wife was expected to assume when Victoria was a young bride.

•Janet Maslin, *The New York Times*

•"Fascinating.

•Vogue

•"In Baird's deft portrayal, Victoria lives, breathes, and struts before us in all her complexity. . . . On a geopolitical level, Baird's sweeping historical portrait also illuminates just how interconnected the European royal families were during this time. . . . Historical astuteness aside, the pages gallop along enhanced by titillating morsels of info.

•Esquire

•"A vivid portrait of one of England's longest-reigning monarchs.

•Entertainment Weekly

•"[A] success from start to finish. . . . [Baird's] Victoria is a vivid, visceral creature. . . . Baird also does a lively, excellent job of detailing Victoria's later years. . . . [She] paints a touching picture of those final decades, during which Victoria strove to feel alive despite the fact that the great love of her life was dead.

•The Christian Science Monitor

•"Like the best biographers, Baird writes like a novelist, and her book is crammed with irresistible detail and description.

•The Seattle Times

•"Baird thoroughly and engagingly strives to restore a truer perspective of both woman and sovereign in her fine work, *Victoria: The Queen*. . . . Baird's biography successfully presents the queen in all of her roles, some of which were contradictory, to show how Victoria did indeed have a mind of her own despite her husband and prime ministers and lived and ruled the way she thought best.

•Chicago Tribune

•"Julia Baird's research uncovered a wealth of new material that gives a fuller, three-dimensional profile of the English queen who reigned over a quarter of the known world. She writes in a fluent, conversational style that helps readers understand the role of royalty in nineteenth-century England.

•Fredericksburg Free-Lance Star

•"Baird emphasizes Victoria's private side and guides us through her personal life with a sympathetic touch. She makes excellent use of Victoria's voluminous personal writings and humanizes this forbidding figure. . . . Baird brings a compassionate humanity to the story of Victoria, and leaves us with a fresh understanding of her influential rule and, just as importantly, her interior life. This Victoria has a strong, beating heart.

•Newsday

•"Spellbinding. . . . Julia Baird's biography of Queen Victoria reads like a novel.

•Ottawa Citizen

•"Victoria: The Queen is that rare bird of serious historical biography, a page-turner.

Writing with grace and authority, Baird reaches well beyond the conventional image of a reclusive and compliant queen to reveal “a robust and interventionist ruler, iron-willed, uncompromising and sexually charged—a most unvictorian woman. . . . As a writer and historian, Baird has a wonderful gift for compressing complicated personalities and historical events.”

•Dallas Morning News “Baird writes with such spirit and well-founded authority that readers will feel as though the story of the famous British queen is being told for the first time. . . . Baird does not turn a blind eye on Victoria’s darker sides, including her willfulness, selfishness, and self pity. But that simply adds dimensions to a significant character.”

•Booklist (starred review) “Baird convincingly reframes the public perception of Victoria as a mother, along with providing unprecedented insight into her relationships following Prince Albert’s death. . . . Baird crafts a comprehensive study of the monarch and others with whom she was involved in an engaging, smoothly rendered narrative. Highly recommended for those interested in British history and the integral figures who shaped it, as well as readers looking for an excellent biography.”

•Library Journal (starred review) “Baird draws on previously unpublished sources to fashion a lively, perceptive portrait of the long-reigning queen. . . . Baird shrewdly assesses the quality of the queen’s family life and creates sharply drawn portraits of the major players in her circle. . . . A well-researched biography sensitive to Queen Victoria as a woman.”

•Kirkus Reviews “Victoria was young enough when she assumed the throne to consult with her prime minister about her eyebrows (were they too thin?), confident enough when she married to elect to preserve the word ‘obey’ in her vows.”

Julia Baird vividly captures her in every light, at once bold and sentimental, stubborn and deferential. Victoria: The Queen is a crisp, sparkling account of the extraordinary woman whose reign was as long as her legacy is vast.

•Stacy Schiff “A stunning achievement . . . Neither sanitized nor mythologizing, Victoria: The Queen is a remarkably lucid, endlessly engaging account of Queen Victoria’s life and rule.”

•Amanda Foreman “With elegance and keen insight, Julia Baird has painted a memorable, moving, and surprising portrait of one of the most important women in history. This is a remarkable book; in Baird’s hands, Victoria’s story resonates in our own time, shedding new light on why we live the way we do now.”

•Jon Meacham “What was it like to reign over the world’s greatest empire as queen—but in an age when women were supposed to be submissive, supportive, subservient? Baird does not shy away from reality or complexity. She has given us a moving, lusty, passionate, thoroughly human story of one of the most fascinating women of her, or any, time.”

•Evan Thomas

Julia Baird is a journalist, broadcaster, and author based in Sydney, Australia. She is a columnist for the International New York Times and host of The Drum on ABC TV (Australia). Her writing has appeared in Newsweek, The New York Times, The Philadelphia Inquirer, The Guardian, The Washington Post, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Monthly, and Harper's Bazaar. She has a Ph.D. in history from the University of Sydney. In 2005, Baird was a fellow at the Joan Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University.

I knew very little about Queen Victoria, being more of a Tudor history buff. But in advance of the Masterpiece Theater version that was to be aired in the states early this year, I decided to purchase this highly-rated biography and read ahead. The book was so well written and compelling that I only watched the first episode before just giving up and concentrating on the book. Baird does an exemplary job weaving in the historical context and the complicated and entangled monarchical history that put Victoria on the throne. This is a very readable and accessible biography of Victoria and Albert. I highly recommend it.

At 496 pages, not including nearly 120 pages of end notes and a 25 page bibliography which includes several unpublished primary and contemporary sources, Julia Baird's "Victoria: The Queen" is an interesting and entertaining read. Baird, an Australian journalist, author, and historian, presents a well researched look at England's second longest reigning monarch. Taking the reader from Victoria's birth as the heir presumptive to the British throne, to her death at age 81, Baird paints a portrait of a stubborn, imperious woman who was not perfect, but managed to lead an empire for over 50 years. Baird addresses Victoria's marriage to her cousin Albert, the births of her nine children (all of whom survived to adulthood), the death of Albert and three of her children, as well as her relationships with John Brown and Abdul Karim. Albert's increased involvement in ruling the British Empire, Victoria's relationships with her numerous Prime Ministers, and her political and personal goals are all covered in this tome. Baird presents Victoria in an engaging light, as a woman who enjoyed her husband, her children, and grandchildren; the letters and diary entries that contradict her image as a dour, prudish person are an intriguing look into the 'real' Victoria. As Baird states, the purging of Victoria's private correspondence by her children and ministers, with the removal of anything that would paint Victoria as other than a pillar of moral rectitude created a false image of the long reigning monarch. Baird's writing ability and the way she presents her subject makes the nearly 500 pages read quickly. Victoria was more than what her descendants allowed

the world to see - she was a woman who enjoyed life, admitted to some of her flaws, and was considerably more involved in ruling her empire than has been portrayed in past biographies.

For as much as we think we understand a historical figure like Queen Victoria, there's always that little morsel to be found that opens our eyes and makes us wonder once more. Author Julia Baird does an excellent job of introducing us not just to Queen Victoria, but to Victoria herself, with all her faults and feats. My knowledge of Victoria was always basic --- longest reigning monarch (until the current Queen of England changed that), petite, married to a man she adored, had nine children --- but I knew very little of her politics. It's amazing to think of her at the age of 18 accepting so much responsibility, willingly, when having the poise and grace to do that at any age is difficult. Granted, we are talking about a woman who was raised to be queen. She was a spoiled child who was known to have an incredible temper later in life, but could somehow find the control to wield amazing power when needed. While she clearly had a healthy respect for her position, and the power with which she was entrusted, Victoria had very little understanding of her subjects at large. For a woman who never interacted with the outside world, this wasn't surprising. Victoria was intelligent and understanding, if clouded by her royal trappings. At times she could be very uncaring regarding certain sections of the population because she saw everything through the lens of being queen. What was good for her country was not always good for her subjects, and she sometimes missed that connection. Still, she always did what she thought was best for her country and never lost sight of that end goal. For a woman so sheltered, Victoria never had a warm or comfortable family life, constantly at odds with those around her who were doing their best to control her future. It was not until she married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha that she finally understood what family could mean. She was a passionate woman who clearly was not afraid to express her love for her husband at a time when sex was not discussed, and found stability and maturity in marriage. While she clearly loved her children, she notoriously complained about the toll pregnancy took on her body and her life. Family transformed Victoria in other ways as well. She went from a confident 19-year-old to a 35-year-old who was the leader of an empire in her own right, but who questioned her own intelligence simply because of her gender. She relied heavily on Albert, who ended up belittling her choices in order to increase his own power, and it's sad to see a woman who fought so hard for her independence cave that easily. Victoria's inability to grasp the basic human needs of her subjects was a fault of hers. For instance, she believed that reducing the work day to 10 hours would harm the economy and throw the country into an economic slump as opposed to being

concerned about the health, safety and welfare of her subjects. Victoria was a strange mixture of beliefs, and this was a prime example. While extolling the virtues of being a wife and mother, neglecting the fact that she was a working woman, she would also look down on females in the working class who were fighting for their rights. Fighting to keep and strengthen her own power was something Victoria did with fervor. Well into her 70s, she was still battling with her ministers. If she ever recognized this contradiction, it wasn't noted, but it does make her all that much more interesting. Victoria reigned during a time of amazing innovation --- railroads, indoor plumbing, the typewriter --- and seemed to marvel at it all. She was a curious and smart person who engaged with scientists, doctors and statesmen, and could intimidate like no other. She was admired but could be infuriating and forever will be remembered as a woman who helped to usher in great change, even if she didn't agree with it. Victoria ruled an empire, sometimes by sheer will, and was an agent of change in ways she didn't live to see. Reviewed by Amy Gwiazdowski

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