

IWONA LILLY
Doctoral School of Humanities
Faculty of Philosophy and History
University of Lodz

The Two Victorias – From Constraint to Liberation As Presented in History, Literature and on Screen

Abstract

The life of the most depicted and written about monarch, Queen Victoria, was full of twists that set her life on a path that was never to be walked by herself. She was always accompanied by shadow figures such as her mother, Sir Conroy or even her own husband, in the game of power, dominance and even love. Her life could be divided into two parts that depict a disturbing portrayal of her as the most powerful woman of her times who was also controlled by the aforementioned figures, and as one finally liberated from all of the ties constraining her freedom. This article traces and analyses events in Victoria's life that shaped her character and constituted the feeling of constraint, and those that inevitably led her to being liberated from them.

Keywords: Queen Victoria, the Kensington System, Prince Albert, children

The role of a monarch is not an easy one and requires much strength and a well-balanced mind that will be able to hold the responsibilities of the tasks which lie ahead. Within royal families when the succession is set and the next in line is determined, there is no surprise as to what to expect and which way the royal education should be carried out. However, when looking back to times of Queen Victoria and her predecessor, William IV, this was not such an obvious state matter as one might expect. The legacy of the British monarchy was not so easily decided and the next in line was yet to be appointed. Such was the air of Victoria's birth. From the very moment of her birth, her life was to be decided by others. This article aims to analyse different moments from Queen Victoria's life that had influenced her as a person, as well as to show how the conditions she had been raised in and which were also predominant during her marriage shaped her and led Victoria to being more dominant and strong-willed in her later years.

Only by understanding the constraints that were prevalent in Victoria's life are we able to understand how important it was for her to feel liberated and no longer controlled or even manipulated later on.

Depending upon which aspect the historians focus, one can reach for works referring to Victoria's political achievements and struggles, relationship with Prince Albert, her children, John Brown or Abdul Karim. The published works, both modern findings and those contemporary to Victoria, provide the reader with various angles from which her life is being analysed. There are indeed some works which tend to evade particular aspects of Victoria's life by merely mentioning in passing certain uncomfortable moments or even omitting them. This approach, so common in earlier years just after Victoria's death, was simply to glorify the persona in order to depict her as a perfect monarch. When reading Longford's *Victoria R.I.*, one receives a detailed description of almost every single day in Victoria's life. However, it seems that the character of Munshi is portrayed in a rather subjective manner, without any defence of him. A similar approach is taken when John Brown appears a few pages earlier. Victoria's journals give us a strong and full account of both her happy and sorrowful moments. Nevertheless, it is difficult to remain impartial and not to sympathize to some extent with certain characters. The more modern book by Lucy Worsley, *Queen Victoria, daughter, wife, mother, widow* has a very approachable style, making it easy to take in the history without being overshadowed by the excessive number of facts and data that at times do not bring much to the general understanding of the discussed topic. Yet, it is the reader who, in the end, must draw the conclusion rather than be presented with the findings of the author. Solely for this reason, this article focuses not on what one commonly understands as biography but rather on certain aspects, moments, events from Victoria's life that shaped her character. The many widely available accounts describing the Queen's life and addressing numerous events allow the close analysis of factors which turned a young, vivacious, yet controlled girl, into a monarch who had to find her own way to liberate herself from various frames that were either set by the morals of the times or her own family. The aim of this article is to present select moments that allow the understanding of how dominated the life of young Victoria was and on top of that how this controlled environment affected her later decisions.

The very first, and perhaps the most important, event that led to irreversible change in Victoria's character was the death of Prince Edward, her father. This unfortunate circumstance created a situation that left a mother and a less than a year-old child in a very perplexing setting. This left them prone to influence and the ill ambitions of others such as John Conroy - an ambitious man who sought social advancement all his life. The Duchess, a German, remained quite unpopular in Britain and grew very close with Conroy. She depended on him in all aspects concerning her life - from being her private secretary, counsellor, political agent, confidant, even to, as some rumoured, being her lover. Together they designed a rather adverse way of raising Victoria called "the Kensington System" or simply "the System" (Vallone 2001: 47). It was a vast, refined and quite hostile set of rules that were to oppress and control the life of Princess Victoria in every possible manner. The System assumed a complete isolation from her surroundings, even the family. It allowed only a select few to be around the young Victoria. The aim was to mould the Princess into a person utterly weak and dependent upon her mother and subsequently on Conroy himself (Vallone 2001: 59). Victoria's every step was closely monitored, her every action controlled. If it were possible, her thoughts would have been subjected to strict scrutiny as well. Once it became apparent that she would eventually inherit the throne, Conroy implemented an even more vile approach trying to force his appointment as her personal secretary and treasurer. The System introduced a rigorous regime consisting of day-long studies in decorum, reading, writing, as well as learning languages such as Greek,

Latin, Italian, French and German. It also aimed to create a specific public image of Victoria. Conroy, being aware of the unpopularity of previous kings, wanted young Victoria to be perceived as pure, devoted and modest (Vallone 2001: 61–62). Thus, together with the Duchess, they would set out on so called tours around Britain whose main goal was to make the nation grow fond of their future Queen – the Nation’s Hope (Worsley 2018: 58). The outside observer might perceive the System as a clever strategy. However, Victoria, unlike any other girl of her age, was subdued to public scrutiny, especially during her social debut. She spent the summer of 1835 on one of such perfectly staged tours meant to introduce the Princess to the affection of the English people. Meanwhile, behind closed doors, Victoria suffered great physical and mental pain. She found it difficult to cope with the hormonal changes, as well as the constant observation of her person and manner. She suffered from migraines and exhaustion; always on display, on duty, never left alone (Worsley 2018: 60).

When holidaying at Ramsgate, Victoria felt too sick and unable to leave her bedroom for two days. Nonetheless, the illness was not the worst that could have happened to Victoria. The most dramatic and poisonous blow fell upon her from the sight of her mother and Conroy himself who wanted to use this situation and have her agree to make him Private Secretary and chief advisor. Conroy even threatened to lock up Victoria if she did not agree to follow his instructions (Worsley 2018: 65). Yet, she resisted. With the support of the devoted Baroness Lehzen, Victoria did not succumb to the bullying and eventually, after a long three weeks, managed to overcome the illness. The historians do not agree whether Victoria suffered from typhoid fever which was common at that time or perhaps it was salmonella bacteria. Nevertheless, the ultimate treatment of quinine gave the anticipated results and Victoria finally resumed writing her journal. The disastrous holidays in Ramsgate not only showed how malignant the System was but also made Victoria completely change her view of her mother. She had always despised Conroy, but now, seeing how he has poisoned her mother, Victoria turned against the Duchess and never regained trust in her. She could not understand how her own mother “did nothing without Conroy’s advice & whatever was told him”. (RA VIC/ADDA/12, part three 8–13 June 1837, as quoted in Worsley 2018: 69). Through the above description of Victoria’s early to teenage years, it is easy to observe how manipulative and controlling her surrounding was. Even people who were supposed to be loved ones, closest to her, had an underlying agenda in their actions that were to create a future queen that would be dependent on them so they could, in time, profit from having a marionette sitting on the throne. Indeed, the constrained environment did not allow any space for a healthy development of the young girl. Sadly, such a limited space continued to be existent later through Victoria’s life, even within the marriage to Prince Albert, which was in Victoria’s eyes the ultimate expression of love and devotion.

Nonetheless, when reading Victoria’s diaries she had kept throughout her whole life, we see a woman completely submissive, reliant to her Angel as she called her husband. The quote below perfectly depicts the emotions the two shared and how Victoria herself described the love she had for him which also indicates the blinding affection the Queen had.

we embraced each other over and over again, and he was so kind,
So affectionate; oh! To feel I was, and am, loved by such an Angel
As Albert, was too great delight to describe! He is perfection; perfection
In every way, - in beauty – in everything! I told him I was
Quite unworthy of him and kissed his dear hand.
(Weintraub 1997: 25)

The above passage that was recorded before the wedding depicts young love, but it is already visible how Victoria had seen herself – as unworthy. This belief and attitude will be perceived till the very end. Even in her marriage vows, contrary to suggestions, when “the Archbishop asked Victoria if she promised to ‘obey’ her husband, he got a strong, loud, positive response” (Worsley 2018: 145).

Albert was Victoria’s Angel, however, as a man of knowledge and strong character, it was difficult for Albert to find himself a position within the household that would not be diminutive. In his letter to William von Lowenstein, Albert wrote that indeed he was “very happy and contented; but the difficulty in filling my place with the proper dignity is that I am only the husband, not the master in the house” (Albert to William von Lowenstein May 1840, quoted in Hobhouse 1983: 26). With this dissatisfaction of his position held, Prince Albert tried to overtake some of Victoria’s duties as he felt himself to be better acquainted with matters concerning ruling. This was a predominant case as two months into their marriage, Victoria became pregnant. She found this new state extremely difficult to bear as she did not have quite the appeal towards raising children. For her, having offspring was a burden, an unwelcome consequence of the passionate moments she had with her husband. It is during her first pregnancy when Victoria fell dependent on Albert and allowed him to share the heaviness of daily dealing with the boxes, ministerial visits and many other issues connected with governing the country. Albert found this new position welcoming and slowly began overpowering his wife in her duties. He made Victoria completely dependent on him. When he was away, she could hardly bear it. Quite often she noted in her memoirs: “I feel lonely without my dear Master”, “I pray God never let me to survive him” (Martin 1880: 276). “He is King to all intents and purposes... while she has the title, he is really discharging the function of the Sovereign”; “Formerly the Queen received the Ministers alone, but now husband and wife did it together, and both of them always said We – We think, or wish, to do so and so” (Greville 1885: 323). Politically and domestically she leant on him completely. This only proves how deeply the control was engraved in her. She moved from one source of constraint, which was her mother and Conroy, to another one – her husband. With time, he managed to gain such a great impact on the Queen that he was referred to as a “king-in-all-but-name” (Worsley 2018: 167). Under his guidance “the crown constantly desired to be furnished with accurate and detailed information about all important matters” (Weintraub 1997: 352). He wanted to make sure he can hold the ministers to account in every aspect. It was he who devised a complicated system of filing all notes. Albert believed he could not delegate his work to anyone else and he fully devoted himself to running the country apart from running his family and participating in many duties he was chosen to or he himself had undertaken. With this vision in mind, he also found a role for his wife – a role that was far from being what Victoria was – a mother rather than a queen. Even though Victoria detested being pregnant and simply could not bear looking after the children, he felt that they did keep her occupied enough for him to assume more duties (Worsley 2018: 171). During a decade of pregnancies, Victoria’s mental state underwent dreadful changes with instances of postnatal depression. Yet, even though it was visible that the Queen’s condition is deteriorating, Prince Albert made sure that the children were coming. Seeing the state of disintegration that Victoria was in, the surrounding people treated her with a mixture of toxic concern and control. This was especially visible in Albert’s attempts to control her emotions when commenting on her behaviour “You have again lost your self-control quite unnecessarily”, “I do my duty towards you even though it means that life is embittered by scenes” (RA VIC/MAIN/Z/140/60–3 as quoted in Worsley 2018: 172). Such situations led to Victoria slowly checking her feelings to avoid any further clashes with Albert. In times when the arguments between Victoria and

Albert were over their children, he could be extremely bitter, unfair and devastating commenting that he “shall have nothing more to do with it; take the child away and do as you like and if she dies you will have it on your conscience” (RA VIC/ADD/U2/4 18 January 1842 as quoted in Worsley 2018: 173). These are obviously not words of a loving, devoted, kind man that Victoria described in her journals. It is obvious that Victoria was seeing only what she wanted to see and thus, she pictures a life of love, devotion and generosity. She did not see that her personal desires at one point became subordinate to his. “My chief and great anxiety is – peace in the House...” (RA VIC/ADD/U2/4 19 January 1842 as quoted in Worsley 2018: 174) – she wrote after one of Albert’s outbursts. One can easily claim that Victoria submitted herself to her husband in the very same way her mother submitted herself to Conroy thus continuing the life of constraint and control.

Another example showing the conflicted and quite restrained environment Victoria was in relates to her beloved governess, Baroness Lehzen, who was the only person that Victoria could relate to in her young times. She took care of her, literally raised her and was the only counterweight to the System. However, she was highly detested by Prince Albert as he had always perceived Lehzen as a rival for Victoria’s love, as the one who took away all the attention. According to Hibbert, there could be no question of Lehzen’s devotion and love to the Queen. Nonetheless, with time, this admiration grew to extreme jealousy and conviction that “no one but she could take proper care of the Queen as she had done in the past” (Hibbert 2001: 151). The constant disagreement over the person of Baroness Lehzen caused many arguments between Prince Albert and the Queen. As Albert noted, “All the disagreeableness I suffer comes from one and the same person and that is precisely the person whom Victoria chooses for her friend and confidante... Victoria is too hasty and passionate for me to be able often to speak of my difficulties. She will not hear me out but flies into a rage and overwhelms me with reproaches and suspiciousness, want of trust, ambition, envy etc. There are therefore, two open ways to me: (1) to keep silence and go away... (2) I can be still more violent (and then we have scenes...)” (RA VIC/ADD/U2/4 19 January 1842 as quoted in Worsley 2018: 62). Thus, at the end of 1842 he designed Lehzen’s departure from Windsor and albeit very sad and broken, Victoria had to again bend her character to the dominant’s will (Hibbert 2001: 155).

In all this, Victoria always declared herself grateful to Albert for all his work and relieving her from the tiresome duties. For this reason, it felt easy for Victoria to succumb to the many changes that Albert introduced in the royal household. The manner of Albert’s behaviour stemmed from his German upbringing, his love for order and sense in every single thing that was done. He did not enjoy being close to the household, thus, he distanced himself and his family from those who surrounded them as much as possible. He was claimed to be cold, stiff, even unpleasant. He introduced self-control and regime, not only in regard to himself, but also to Victoria and the children. He made Victoria keep a notebook where she recorded her tempers and other behaviours he deemed as unwelcomed and which he would later read and issue comments. He dealt with Victoria the very same way he would deal with his children in terms of behavioural correctness. Even though the constant adoration toward her husband is visible in Victoria’s journals, it is certain he made her feel inferior to him in terms of intellect and morals. It was far from a marriage of equals. Indeed, Victoria was the Queen, however, in all other aspects, she was made to feel inadequate and subordinate. In moments of ill-temper, Albert would punish Victoria with withdrawal to his rooms where he would devote himself to even more work (Ridley 2017). Despite being treated by him in such a harsh way, in her own words to her daughter, Vicky, Victoria stated “no one could be as blessed

as she with such a husband: he was her father, protector, guide, adviser in all and everything; she might even say her mother as well as her husband.”; “no-one was ever so completely altered in every way as she had been by her dearest husband’s blessed influence” (Fulford 1968: 44).

Taking into consideration all of the above presented facts, one receives quite an unusual portrayal of Victoria. On one hand, the Queen of a vast empire, successful in many fields and on the other hand, a woman completely overpowered and governed, initially by her own mother and her accomplice, and later cast into a blind submission by her controlling and authoritative husband. Astonishingly enough, even after Albert’s death, Victoria remained, in the eyes of the nation, devoted and loyal to the memory of her late husband who died December 14, 1861 to typhoid fever. Albert died in the Blue Room, in the presence of the Queen and five of their nine children. This death left Victoria extremely devastated and made her close herself off. She wore black for the rest of her life becoming known as “the Widow of Windsor” (Hobhouse 1983: 150–151) During the time after Albert’s death, her weight increased significantly as the result of comfort eating which she turned to once there were no watching and controlling eyes from her husband. This secluded her even more from the public eye (Ridley 2017).

It is widely acknowledged and agreed upon by many historians such as Hibbert, Longford, or even Worsley, that the Queen, even though she gave birth to nine children, was not a fond and dotting mother, as she considered pregnancy as an unwanted, sad result of an intimate relationship with Prince Albert. She very much enjoyed this relationship as she often proved herself to be passionate and ultimately devoted to her Angel. As a result of this great affection, she conceived distressingly soon after the wedding. Once Victoria realised this she remarked “I was in for it at once & furious I was”; “the greatest horror of having children and would rather have none” (Pakula 1997: 104). She described herself when pregnant as “ugly & enormously fat, more like a barrel than anything else” (RA VIC/MAIN/QVLB/ 10 November 1840 as quoted in Worsley 2018: 151).

Within seventeen years, Victoria gave birth to nine children – five girls: Victoria (1840), Alice (1843), Helena (1846), Louise (1848), and Beatrice (1857); and four boys: Albert (1841), Alfred (1844), Arthur (1850), and Leopold (1853). When Vicky was born, Victoria was greatly disappointed for the child to be a girl as she knew that now she would have to get pregnant again in order to produce a male heir to the throne. According to her “it would have been better politics to have produced a male heir straight away, as she and Albert had so hoped and wished for. We were, I am afraid, sadly disappointed” (Woodham-Smith 1972: 216–217).

For Victoria, her children were those who kept her dear Albert away from her. At one point she stated, “all the numerous children are as nothing to me when he is away; it seems as if the whole life of the house and home were gone” (Benson, Esher 1908: 240). “I find no special pleasure or compensation in the company of children, I only feel properly a mon aise & quite happy when Albert is with me” as she carried on expressing her feelings (Ponsonby 1951: 85). After each pregnancy, Victoria retreated from the politics more and more becoming more dependent on her husband. When she gave birth to Vicky, she did return to her state quite swiftly. However, after giving birth to Bertie, she suffered rather severe postnatal depression, “my poor nerves were so battered... I suffered a whole year from it” (Weintraub 1997: 137). The Queen experienced vision impairment “spots on people, which turned into worms”, “coffins floated before her eyes” (Worsley 2018: 172). Victoria understood that her mental state was an illness that came and went but was distinctly connected with pregnancies. She clearly addressed the discomfort of being pregnant so quickly, however, Albert persisted on having more children. He also hoped that they would

occupy the Queen to such an extent that they would allow him to assume more power and responsibility moving the Queen away from these duties at the same time (Worsley 2018: 171).

All of the above paints Victoria in a completely different light to what the readers of common works or commercial film viewers are accustomed to. In a more recent ITV Series *Victoria*, the Queen is presented in a more approachable way. This created a vision of a lost girl controlled in every step by her mother and her accomplice, and later on by Albert, who albeit was quiet was able to make Victoria more compliant with his opinions and wishes. Nevertheless, with time, she emerges as a woman driven by physical passion towards her husband, willing of her own accord, to become submissive and agreeing to ascend to an inferior role to that of her husband's. Still a Queen in name, but more often a Hausfrau to her Albert. Throughout the years of their marriage, she showed herself to be extremely emotional and vivacious which had to be trimmed down by her husband. She enjoyed his company. However, she did not so much enjoy the company of their children. The constant control she had been subjected to as a child, in later years turned into resentment of her own children and after Albert's death, an obsessive control of them that lasted till Victoria's death in 1901. She made sure that her children always remembered she was not only their mother but also their Sovereign, so while they could rebel against their mother they could not do so against their Queen. It might even be dared to state that the later relationship Victoria had with her children was rather pathological due to her compulsiveness in their regard. For instance, reading the many letters she exchanged over the years with her daughters, one can see a woman that at times showed an unreasonable amount of feelings or emotions, being none, that would be expected of a mother. This was even more visible in the strange relationship she had with her younger daughters, especially Princess Louise and Princess Beatrice, both of whom were to devote their lives to being unwilling companions of their mother's life. The constraints, if no longer having a human face, were still there and were never to fully cease.

It is quite visible to even the unread person, or to those who share a keener eye into the life of the glorified Queen that her life up to the death of her husband was subjected to different forms of control - her mother and sir Conroy, Lehzen, Prince Albert, and even Lord M. Thus, it is not a surprise that once Victoria was left without the guidance of her beloved husband, to whom she submitted so willingly, she was lost, she was as if a small child without parental guidance. However, being faced with this new, solitary situation, the Queen had to accept it in some way. She no longer felt the need to be told what to do, reminded what is right or should be done. As always, headstrong, she was more eager now to express her own will and whims, her passions and wants, her acceptance or disapprovals. She did remain faithful to the memory of her beloved husband, adorning herself in black. However, as the words below will show, she became liberated, free, more expressive of herself. Her constraining knots were no longer there - only the memory of the past people looming in her head were able to limit her, but that too was to fade away.

With time passing and the sorrow overwhelming her after Albert's death diminished, Victoria set her mind onto one thing vital for her - to continue in an unchanged way the life's work of her husband. In her work, she continued to idolise Albert and remain obedient to the idea that her husband had represented. She would be restless, even furious at the sole thought of any kind of intrusion to her plan, strongly expressing herself - "I am anxious to repeat one thing and that one is my firm resolve, my irrevocable decision, that his wishes - his plans - about everything, his views about everything are to be my law! And no human power will make me swerve from what he decided and wished" (Benson, Esher 1908: 474-475). Thus, she became restless and unbreakable, once she set her mind upon something, she

was unwilling to change. Nevertheless, this glorified devotion separated her immensely from her nation - a nation that was undergoing changes and needed their Queen.

With time, and with all her children somehow settled in somewhat convenient marriages, Victoria regained her balance and optimism. The devastating loss of her husband dwindled down to a permanent ache. She was now ready to enter, what would later be known as the golden age, a new stage in her life; a stage which was accompanied by new companions and new emotions. One such new companion who assisted the Queen with her everyday life in more of a behind the scenes way rather than an openly public way, was one of Albert's ghillies, John Brown, who accompanied the couple on the many visits to Balmoral, Scotland. They were simply charmed by the marvellous and magical scenery of the woods and hills, and Victoria developed a strong emotional connection with the Scottish people (Ashdown 1975: 76-77). For the Queen, John Brown became more than just a servant, but more of a confidant or a partner to the prosaic life, someone who shared her passions and was truly devoted to her. With time, Brown's name began dominating Victoria's journals and he became known as the Queen's Highland Servant. He was to take orders only from the Queen herself and no one else could interfere (Ashdown 1975: 130). His appearance and character were domineering as he was quite direct and confident in his manners. He often addressed the Queen with the word *woman*, ordering her to sit still while he was fastening her in her saddle (Longford 1966: 406). On one occasion, a passer-by heard Brown shouting at the Queen while pinning her cloak to hold her head up. However, Victoria did not seem to mind. On the contrary, she felt admired and cherished, protected, and comforted by this honest and open man. He was sympathising, understanding and unselfish. He was a friend that Victoria needed at that time (Ashdown 1975: 130). It is noticeable that Brown's presence helped to improve Victoria's wellbeing. She did feel a bit uncomfortable in the beginning, but she came to terms with the fact that she needed a man to lean on, not to marry; a man, not a machine; someone who would share her worries and could take care of her (Longford 1966: 409). It was more than just obvious that the Queen was perhaps infatuated with Brown. There was gossip circulating that stated Victoria had secretly married her servant and was referred to in elegant drawing-rooms as Mrs Brown (Longford 1966: 409). Even though the public was widely commenting on the character of Brown, Victoria remained naïve and oblivious to all the gossip and even kept providing fresh evidence supporting the stories. Many scholars would agree that she did share some warm feelings towards him in her own way, however, it is difficult to state whether she loved him or not. He treated her as a woman whereas everyone else treated her as a queen. All this kept her further away from her family. The closer she was with John Brown the more distant she became from her children. The fact that he had such an immense impact on the Queen was quite disturbing for the family and the closest circle. In her letter to the Queen, Mrs M.A. Murray writes asking her 'dear Queen' to step down and let her beloved son act as a regent as long as Victoria is alive. The criticism was vast and seemed to not end. It was unthinkable that a servant would come before any member of the family - whether in a royal household or otherwise. The Queen's advisers were desperate. No one could force her to change her mind. No one could force her to sacrifice Brown in order to put an end to the rumours and the storm within her family (Longford 1966: 413). Indeed, Brown spoke freely to Victoria's children and oftentimes ordered them in the very same way he ordered the Queen to keep her composure. He quarrelled with Prince Alfred, ministers and Private Secretaries, however, he was never the one to apologize the first. Victoria knew of all this, but she preferred to turn a blind eye (Hibbert 2001: 326). She was finally free from the conveniences created by her controlling mother and her husband. Victoria no longer had to abide by the opinions and wishes of

those who surrounded her. Finally, no one was trying to manipulate her into acting in a certain way or take over the power in her hands. She had someone by her side who did not wish any of the power or influence. It is true that John Brown helped Victoria to go through the unhappy years after Albert's death. However, he rooted himself quite deeply within the Queen's life. On the rare occasions when she would drive out in London, the people could see the same man constantly occupying the driver's seat. He would even attend the more important public outings. On one occasion, when the ministers asked the Queen to be present at a review in Hyde Park, she insisted much to the ministers' dismay, to be accompanied by Brown. The Queen declared that she would not be dictated or made to alter any of her plans (Hibbert 2001: 326). This perfectly depicts the change that happened in the character of the Queen. She no longer blindly agreed to the decisions made by others, but finally, freely made her own choices whether liked by others or not. Brown was seen by others as a coarse animal behaving quite roughly towards the Queen. However, she felt perfectly comforted around him. In the book written by the Queen herself, *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands*, she depicts Brown quite prominently. She states at one point that "his attention, care and faithfulness cannot be exceeded, and the state of my health, which of late years has been sorely tried and weakened, renders such qualifications most valuable and indeed most needful" (Queen Victoria 1868: 87). The book met with some criticism and Victoria was accused of naivety, banalities and unintentional humour. It was even a subject of parodies to mention only the most famous one *John Brown's Legs or Leaves from a Journal in the Lowlands*.

In March 1883 John Brown got infected with erysipelas which made him unable to attend to the Queen for the first time in eighteen years. Two days later he died leaving Victoria heart broken and which she described in her journal "The comfort of my daily life is gone – the void is terrible – the loss is irreparable" (Baird 2016: 406). Upon his death, Victoria ordered private memorials and a statue to be erected. Later, they were destroyed at the order of King Edward VII who often clashed with Brown. This shows that only after Victoria's death, were her children able to oppose her. She was stern in her choices and no longer willing to subdue to any form of control enjoying the freedom she found in her later years.

Victoria, with her strong character, unwilling to bend or follow someone's expectations had the extraordinary gift of enjoying unique relationships with her servants. Victoria's journals, later transcribed by her daughter Beatrice, bear many names of servants such as dressers and maids Singer, Peneyvre, Skerret, and Dehler (Worsley 2018: 278) who became more than just regular servants, but rather enjoyed the position of confidants. That is why it was only natural for the Queen that a few years after the death of her John Brown another servant appeared next to her. This time, however, it was even more difficult for the family to stomach their mother's choice for she found closeness and understanding, or even shared maternal feelings towards an Indian male servant, Abdul Karim. With time they grew quite close, and Karim was bestowed the title of 'Munshi'. She showered him with trinkets, gifts and even land. Her zest for life was again awoken by this new figure in her life and she was unwilling to give in to the constant allusions of her family regarding the conduct of Munshi. Victoria felt free again and was willing to pursue new passions especially when she became known as the Empress of India in 1876. In August 1887, Karim started teaching Hindustani to the Queen – "I am learning a few words in Hindustani. It is a great interest to me for both the language and the people, I have naturally never come into real contact with before" (Hibbert 2001: 446). Indian curries cooked for the Queen by Munshi expanded her interest in the culture and people of India in a most delightful way. In the craze of the coming Golden Jubilee, this slim and clever character again stirred the imagination of the royal environment with the same if

not a bigger magnitude than John Brown had done years earlier. It needs a bow towards the Queen for bringing dark-skinned people to the court, hence banishing any racial prejudice. However, Karim's person became more than just an example of racial equality. Victoria arranged for him to have a seat among her ladies-in-waiting, entrusted him with private correspondence and even some confidential papers which raised serious concerns among the ministers and the family. Her behaviour again showed more of her character rather than the suggested approach of such a conservative family. She was no longer willing to stand the insinuations or even open attacks on her servant and reacted with fierce anger thus expressing her emotions and unbreakable character even more sternly (Hibbert 2001: 451). The war against her Munshi lasted for months. However, he took no notice of what was happening around him and caused more and more public offence. One of such strong opponents was Dr Reid. He started asking questions in order to confront Karim. He found out that Munshi, contrary to what he had claimed, was not the son of a doctor nor did he work as an office clerk. With all that, he ventured to inform the Queen of his findings. However, Dr Reid made one major mistake. He forgot that Victoria did not care much for the social status of her servants. She desperately needed someone to love and, in Karim, she found a substitution of a son that would love her no matter what, unlike her real children (Worsley 2018: 313). The Queen was determined, however, to do whatever was in her power to make her dear friend feel comfortable and save him from any potential humiliation. She dismissed Dr Reid's accusations with violent passion and opposed threats from people in high places. She even signed off her letters addressed to Karim with the words "Your Loving Mother". The extent of her generosity was so wide that she even put Munshi in her will. Nevertheless, upon her death, all was annulled and any correspondence that was found between the Queen and Abdul Karim was burnt at Frogmore Cottage, which was Karim's residence at that time. However, some diaries were smuggled out to India by Karim and thanks to them we now know of the devoted relationship these two had.

In 2017, Stephen Frears tried to present the story of Victoria and Abdul from a different angle. In the movie, *Victoria & Abdul*, starring Judy Dench as Victoria and Ali Fazal as Karim, the focus is rather on the uniqueness of their bond than on the mischiefs and treachery of Karim as it was suggested by his contemporaries. One might actually sense that he was truthful in his devotion to the Queen. The movie, contrary to many published works on the subject, portrays Victoria's love for her people and her need to honestly be loved and understood instead of being constantly ordered and subjected to the power struggles around her.

The life of Queen Victoria presents a variety of fields upon which one could focus their research. Her life was full of dominating people, submission and strong willingness. Victoria managed to survive in many different conditions. She understood the importance of her role as the Sovereign and was not afraid to put it before her husband and children. However, she was not willing to fully give up herself and let herself be controlled, especially in her later life. Once she realized her life can indeed still be filled with love and feelings she learnt when married to Albert, she was unwilling to resign even though her children tried very hard for certain events not to see the light. The turbulence of Victoria's life, both political, as well as private, gives food for more than just a short analysis. Studying different aspects of her life, the attitude towards her ministers, the intricate and difficult relations she had with her own children, the intimacy of her relationship with Albert and even the ill mother-daughter relationship she shared with the Duchess of Kent can be the source of many more academic and even non-academic publications. The available works of such major names as Hibbert, Longford, Worsley, Strachey and many more, create

a world that allows the reader to learn and meet Victoria not only as a Queen but also as a passionate woman, educated female opposing the feminist movements yet giving grounds to the same movements by her own work and strength.

As the Grandmother of Europe, even in her final hours she was surrounded by her family, children, grandchildren. She outlived her beloved Albert, she outlived two of her nine children, Alice and Affie and even some of her grandchildren. But she had the numerous Houses of Europe surrounding her, the Kaiser was resting her in his arms. Victoria died on January 22, 1901. As her final wish she was dressed in a white dress and her wedding veil. Before passing, she ordered a few mementos to be put alongside her in the coffin. These included one of Albert's dressing gowns, a plaster cast of his hand, a lock of John Brown's hair together with a picture of him which were placed in her left hand concealed with the veil. This little secret of hers was the final act of her personal freedom she enjoyed so much. A strong sovereign, she tried to remain in charge of her private life as much as possible and openly opposed her children who wanted to subject her to control again.

References

- Anand, Sushila (1996) *Indian Sahib: Queen Victoria's Dear Abdul*. Michigan: Duckworth.
- Ashdown, Dulcie (1975) *Queen Victoria's Family*. London: Robert Hale & Company.
- Baird, Julia (2016) *Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography of a Woman*. London: Random House.
- Benson, Arthur Christopher, Reginald Brett Esher (1908) *The Letters of Queen Victoria. A selection from Her Majesty's correspondence between the years 1837 and 1861*. Volume 1–3/3 *Victoria from 1837 to 1852*. [At:] <https://archive.org/details/lettersqueenvic00bensgoog> [date of access: 15 January 2021].
- Fulford, Roger (1968) *Dearest Child: Letters Between Queen Victoria and the Royal Princess 1858–1867*. [At:] <https://archive.org/details/> [date of access: 15 January 2021].
- Greville, Charles (1885) *The Greville Memoirs: A Journal of the Reign of Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1852*. Volume 2/3. [At:] <https://archive.org/details/cu31924088004225> [date of access: 15 January 2021].
- Granville, Harriet, Frederick Leveson Gower (eds.) (1883) *Letters of Harriet, Countess Granville, 1810–1845, Edited by Her Son the Hon. F. Leveson Gower*. [At:] <https://archive.org/details/lettersharrietc00levegoog/page/n5/mode/2up> [date of access: 15 January 2021].
- Hibbert, Christopher (2001) *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*. London: Harper Collins.
- Hobhouse, Hermione (1983) *Prince Albert: His Life and Work*. London: SN Books Ltd.
- Longford, Elizabeth (1966) *Victoria R.I.* London: Pan Books.
- Martin, Theodore (1880) *The Life of His Royal Highness the Prince Consort 1819–1861* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Volume 1–5.
- Anonymous (1897) *The Private Life of Queen Victoria: By a Member of the Royal Household*. New York: D. Appleton and Company. [At:] <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=loc.ark:/13960/t9n30j31n&view=1up&seq=64> [date of access: 15 January 2021].
- Pakula, Hannah (1997) *An Uncommon Woman*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Ponsonby, Frederick (1951) *Recollections of Three Reigns. Prepared for the Press with Notes and an Introductory Memoir by Colin Welch*. London: Staples Printers.
- Ridley, Jane (2017) *Victoria and Albert: a Marriage of Misery?* [At:] <https://www.historyextra.com/period/victorian/queen-victoria-marriage-prince-albert-unhappy-husband/> [date of access: 15 January 2021].

- Ridley, Jane (2017) *Forty Years of Comfort-Eating*. [At:] <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/forty-years-of-comfort-eating> [date of access: 15 January 2021].
- Strachey, Lytton (1978) *Queen Victoria*. New York: First Harvest/HBJ Edition.
- Weintraub, Stanley (1997) *Uncrowned King: The Life of Prince Albert*. New York: The Free Press.
- Woodham-Smith, Cecil (1972) *Queen Victoria*. New York: Black Five Books.
- Worsley, Lucy (2018) *Queen Victoria: Daughter, Wife, Mother, Widow*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Vallone, Lynne (2001) *Becoming Victoria*. New York: Yale University Press.
- Victoria, Queen of Great Britain, Arthur Helps (ed.) (1868) *Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highlands, from 1848 to 1861 [Microform]: to Which Are Prefixed and Added Extracts from the same Journal Giving an Account of Earlier Visits to Scotland, and Tours in England and Ireland, and Yachting Excursions*. New York: Harpers and Brothers.
- Victoria, Queen of Great Britain (1884) *More Leaves from the Journal of a Life in Highlands from 1862 to 1882*. London: Smith, Elder & CO
- Bevan, Tim, Eric Fellner, Beeban Kidron, Tracey Seaward (Producers) & Frears, Stephen (Director) (2017) *Victoria & Abdul*, United Kingdom: Universal Pictures.
- Frift, Paul, David Boulter (Producers); Daisy Goodwin, Guy Andrews, Otille Wilford (Scriptwriters) (2016–2019) *Victoria*. Number of series: 3, United Kingdom: ITV Studios.