

Jewel Theatre Audience Guide

Addendum: Queen Victoria



directed by Art Manke

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Little else has exerted its influence on the events and characters of this play more than the Victorian Era, which is discussed in a separate document. Queen Victoria herself is an offstage character in the play.

The following biography of Queen Victoria draws from an article on BBC.com (<https://www.bbc.com/timelines/ztn34j6>), written by royal historian Professor Kate Williams, and is supplemented by the resources listed at the end of the document.

Alexandrina Victoria was a study in contradictions. She reigned in a society that idealized motherhood and the family, and had nine children of her own. Nevertheless, she hated pregnancy and childbirth, detested babies, and was uncomfortable in the presence of children. She had no interest in social issues, yet her reign ushered in an age of reform, including benefits for the lower and middle classes and support of child labor laws. She resisted technological change during a time when mechanical and technological innovations, spawned by the Industrial Revolution, redesigned European civilization.

Victoria was determined to retain political power; at the beginning of her marriage to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, she insisted that her husband have no part in the governance of the country. Yet within six months, and after repeated haranguing on his part, she allowed her confidant, advisor and mentor, Lord Melbourne (William Lamb), to give her husband access to the governmental dispatches, and then to attend her meetings with her ministers. What was initially a concession became standard practice, and during her first pregnancy, the prince received his own “key to the secret boxes.” Finally, the queen relinquished her reins of power to her husband, who succeeded in incapacitating her with unwanted pregnancy after unwanted pregnancy. As Victoria grew more and more dependent on Albert, he continued to assume an increasingly political role. By 1845 Charles Greville, chronicler of royal history, was led to conclude, “It is obvious that while she has the title, he is really discharging the functions of the Sovereign. He is the King to all intents and purposes.” Victoria, once so enthusiastic about her role, came to conclude that “we women are not made for governing.”

Despite inheriting an uncertain monarchy with an unclear role and unpredictable duration, she was charged with determination and excitement to rule. Neither willingly nor intentionally, Victoria would come to preserve the British monarchy by defining its political role within the constitutional monarchy that England had become. When her son Edward VII succeeded her, the change was complete: the future of British royalty as a social, non-political entity was protected and secured.

Victoria was born on May 24, 1819 to the Duchess of Kent and Prince Edward, Duke of Kent and Strathearn. Her father was the fourth son of George III, who was the King of England at the time of her birth, and she was (and would remain) his only child. Fifth in line to the throne, her birth was given scant notice. However, her father died when she was only eight months old, and his father, the King, died six days later.

Ahead of her in succession were three elderly uncles, suddenly increasing her prospects of becoming queen by a wide margin.

Princess Victoria was raised at Kensington Palace. She was educated by her governess, Baroness Lehzen, who taught her languages, arithmetic, drawing and music. She also encouraged her willfulness, which helped her to survive her troubled childhood and life as a young queen. Her widowed mother was lonely and depended utterly on John Conroy, a former servant of her deceased husband who knew an opportunity when he saw one. The elder Duchess of Kent confided in him and had him run political interference for her. He wielded a Svengali-like power over her, holding the position of comptroller of her household for the next nineteen years.



Princess Victoria at five years of age and her mother Victoria, Duchess of Kent, in 1824

Together they designed the Kensington System, an elaborate and strict construct of rules for the upbringing of young Victoria, designed to render her weak-willed and utterly dependent upon Mom and this Conroy character in the hopes of allowing them one day to wield power through her. She was made to share a room with her mother to keep her isolated from her ruling Hanoverian uncles, and was prevented from having any time alone and unsupervised. They hoped to render her passive, undemanding, and above all obedient, unobtrusive, and not interfering.

Lehzen had other ideas. She protected Victoria from the Duchess and Conroy's influence, emboldening her to be strong, informed, and independent, which caused friction between them. Victoria's loyalties were clear—Lehzen's influence over her would displace all others—including that of her own mother.

When Victoria was 13, she was taken on a tour of the Midlands so that Conroy and her mother could show her off to the public. The princess found it exhausting and

became increasingly stubborn. She started writing a diary, lodging her observations, dreams and plans, as well as her complaints, to the tune of 2,000 words a day, every day, until 10 days before her death. Highly redacted excerpts were published during and after her lifetime.

Her first entry, penned on August 2, 1832 from a train after she had seen Birmingham, remarked on soot from the city's factories, powered by steam from burning coal: "The men, women, children, country and houses are all black ..."

Thanks to his oppressive Kensington system and the misery he inflicted upon her childhood, Princess Victoria grew to despise Conroy. With the exception of her mother, he was also unpopular among the rest of the British royal family. His efforts to place the Duchess in the role of regent were ultimately unsuccessful, as Victoria ascended the throne in 1837 after reaching her "majority," or 18th year, following the death of William IV. Her journal entry reads: "Lord Conyngham then acquainted me that my poor Uncle, the King, was no more ... and consequently that I am Queen".



Victoria at 15

The new queen's immediate order of business was to expel Conroy from her household, though he would remain in the Duchess of Kent's service for several more years. She also requested an hour alone, something she had been hitherto denied.

Victoria took up official residence in Buckingham Palace, where she exiled her mother to live in far-off rooms and banned John Conroy from her state apartments. Parliament granted her an annuity of £385,000, the equivalent of \$55,721,097 today, making her the richest woman in the world. They did not, however assign her much power. The preceding Hanoverian rulers had been corrupt and extravagant, causing disrespect for the monarchy among the citizens of England. The Victorian Government

featured one of the earliest constitutional monarchies of the world, with a democratic governance that was relatively new. While still acknowledging her royal position, Queen Victoria was nevertheless given a limited amount of power in comparison to monarchs who had governed two centuries before. With few exceptions, she was relegated to an advisory function with Parliament and the Prime Minister, the elected officials who made the day-to-day decisions for the country.

Queen Victoria is often claimed to have been a very good monarch, adored by the people of England for the majority of her reign. Having ascended the throne in a climate of distrust, she is credited with bringing credibility back to it.



The new queen, crowned one month into her 18th year

Victoria developed a close relationship—some say romantic—with her first prime minister, the Whig party leader Lord Melbourne (William Lamb), who tutored her in government and politics. Due to her strict upbringing and the influence of her mother's religious piety, Victoria was very prudish and morally conservative throughout her life. Her moral standards impacted the ethics of the time (discussed in the Victorian Era document). Nevertheless, she chose to ignore Melbourne's rather

considerable past indiscretions, including the scandal of his failed first marriage to Lady Caroline Lamb, who had an infamous affair with Lord Byron. Lady Caroline wrote of it, as well as her marriage, in lurid detail in her popular Gothic novel, *Glenarvon*, which was published in 1816.

The queen became embroiled in a political crisis in 1839 that was attributed to her reliance on Melbourne, who was seen as becoming too powerful. The Whig government had fallen, and Lord Melbourne was forced to resign. The queen invited the Conservative leader, the Tory politician Sir Robert Peel, to form a government and become its prime minister. Peel agreed conditionally, requesting that Victoria replace some of her Whig ladies-in-waiting with Tory ones, which was the usual practice. She refused, Peel declined to form a government, and she reappointed Lord Melbourne, who returned to office. The queen's act was criticized as being unconstitutional.

Victoria created a second crisis at the same time by fostering false pregnancy allegations against the popular, young and single Lady Flora Hastings, a lady-in-waiting to her mother. She was only too pleased to accuse the hapless woman of



Lady Flora Hastings

indiscretion, as Lady Flora had colluded with Conroy and her mother to develop the despised Kensington System. When Lady Flora began to experience pain and swelling in her lower abdomen, she saw the queen's physician, Sir James Clark, who assumed she was pregnant. The friends of the queen, including her former governess, Baroness Lehzen, got wind of it, and quickly instigated rumors that Lady Flora was pregnant. On February 2, 1839, Victoria wrote in her journal that she suspected Conroy to be the father. The rumor mill ground louder and louder, forcing Lady Flora to take to the *Examiner*, a London paper, to defend her honor publicly. They published a letter wherein she thinly disguised the names of her detractors.

After Lady Flora consented to an examination by royal doctors, it was discovered she had a cancerous tumor in her liver, with only months left to live. Although a contrite Victoria visited Lady Flora while she was dying, she would be haunted by guilt and nightmares for years afterwards. After Lady Flora's death at 33 in London on July 5, 1839, her brother, Lord Hastings, joined with Conroy to launch a press campaign against the queen, who had become so unpopular because of this incident that crowds would gather to boo her at her public appearances. The campaign called out the queen and her conspiratorial friends for disgracing and insulting Lady Flora with false rumors, and for plotting against her and the Hastings family.

That wasn't all. The campaign had a hidden agenda: to discredit the immature, inexperienced, emotionally untethered and now quite unpopular queen, forcing her to appoint Conroy back into a royal post. Victoria held her ground, adamant that Conroy never darken her wing of the royal palace. It took her marriage and subsequent pregnancy the following year to restore her to popular favor, where she would remain, with few exceptions, to the end of her reign.

Her marriage was to her first cousin, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, whom she fell in love with when he visited the UK in 1839. As head of state, it was incumbent upon her to propose to him; he accepted, and their wedding was on February 10, 1840.

Children quickly followed, numbering nine altogether, most of whom would marry into the royal families of Europe. Victoria, the princess royal, was born in 1840; in 1858 she married the crown prince of Prussia and later became the mother of the emperor William II. The prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) was born in 1841. Princess Alice arrived next, in 1843. She would become grand duchess of Hesse. Prince Alfred, born in 1844, would be duke of Edinburgh and duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha; Princess Helena, who would become Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein, was born in 1846. Princess Louise, later duchess of Argyll, was born in 1848. Two princes followed: Prince Arthur, later duke of Connaught, in 1850 and Prince Leopold, who would be duke of Albany, in 1853. The ninth child, Princess Beatrice, later Princess Henry of Battenberg, was born in 1857.



Victoria and Albert in their wedding photo

The queen's first grandchild was born in 1859 and her first great-grandchild in 1879. There were 37 great-grandchildren alive at her death.

Victoria would go on to earn the nickname "Grandmother of Europe," as her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren are members of the royal families of Germany, Russia, Greece, Romania, Sweden, Norway and Spain.

Three of Victoria's grandchildren were significant figures in WWI: Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany, Alexandra Romanov of Russia and George V of Britain. Kaiser Wilhelm has been quoted as saying that if his grandmother had been alive, WWI may not have happened: "she simply would not have allowed her relatives to go to war with one another".

Victoria was the first known royal carrier of hemophilia, a rare disorder preventing the blood from clotting normally because of a lack of sufficient blood-clotting proteins. A person with hemophilia may bleed for a longer time after an injury than



The entire family in 1857

they would if their blood clotted normally. The condition is now associated with European royal bloodlines. Victoria's son Leopold died at 30 from an injury that triggered a hemorrhage, and several of her grandchildren had hemophilia, including her grandson, Alexei Romanov.

More information about Victoria and Albert's nine children can be found here: <https://kcts9.org/programs/victoria-masterpiece/what-happened-queen-victoria-s-nine-children>

Albert took over Melbourne's role as confidant and advisor to the queen in August 1841 after Melbourne resigned following a series of parliamentary defeats. Albert also steered Victoria towards a reconciliation with Sir Robert Peel, who was now prime minister. With Albert's guidance, Victoria reevaluated her opinion of him and

the Tories, seeking equilibrium as she came to recognize the risk of her Whig affinity. She learned from Albert the importance of maintaining partisan neutrality in the delicate balance of constitutional monarchy. As the dominant figure and influence in her life, Victoria soon grew to depend on Albert for everything; she wrote in her journal that she “didn’t put on a gown or a bonnet if he didn’t approve it.”

Albert called himself Victoria’s “permanent minister” and effectively became Victoria’s private secretary, a position of great power as it had been for Melbourne with her and James Conroy with her mother. On the domestic front, he dodged the obstacles that ministers threw in his path, increasing the worth of her existing properties and acquiring more. He built the royal residences of Balmoral and Osborne on the land he purchased, respectively, in Scotland and on the Isle of Wight.

It didn’t take long for Victoria to relinquish her jurisdiction on the home front and abroad to Albert, as she focused more and more on childbearing and writing letters and her long journal entries. The period until his death became known as the Albertine Monarchy. Not that she took a back seat entirely: Victoria was opinionated and combative. Lady Lyon, one of her ladies-in-waiting, observed “‘a vein of iron’ which ran through the Queen’s extraordinary character”.

Albert’s interest in intellectual and scientific matters was not shared by his wife, who preferred the ease and relative simplicity of country living at Balmoral, visits to the circus and waxwork exhibitions, and the novels of Charles Dickens. Yet, they jointly brought about what would be regarded as the highpoint of the Albertine Monarchy, the Great Exhibition, an international trade show that opened in 1851. Albert organized every detail. He oversaw the construction of the Crystal Palace, the magnificent greenhouse-inspired glass building that was erected in Hyde Park to house the exhibition. It alone was a marvel of architecture. More than 10,000 exhibitors displayed Britain’s wealth and technological achievements to the world, from false teeth to farm machinery to telescopes. Six million visitors in five months attended what would become a symbol of the Victorian Age and the first World’s Fair.

Victoria credited its success to her husband’s genius, writing in her diary: “I do feel proud at the thought of what my beloved Albert’s great mind has conceived.” Profits from the Great Exhibition funded what became the South Kensington complex of colleges and museums.

The Great Exhibition was the highpoint of their rule, which also had its low points. Much as her experiences at Balmoral led Victoria to affectionately favor her Scottish constituents, it neither raised hers and Albert’s social awareness or inspired noblesse oblige. In order to relieve distress in famine-devastated Ireland, they supported the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, protectionist legislation that kept the price of British grain artificially high. Beyond that, they did nothing to mitigate the effects of the Great Famine. Victoria and Albert chose instead to divert their efforts to the building of Osborne and to foreign policy, effectively ignoring—along with the British government—the plight of Ireland’s poor. Laissez-faire attitudes, as

well as rigidity, poor planning, inadequate solutions, and most abhorrently, malicious attitudes of anti-Irish bias, providentialism and Victorian moralism contribute to the loss of many lives.

The Albertine Monarchy also gave its full support to the government's policy of repression of the Chartists, who were advocates of far-reaching political and social reform. After the 1848 failure of the last great Chartist demonstration in London, the queen wrote in her journal:

The loyalty of the people at large has been very striking and their indignation at their peace being interfered with by such worthless and wanton men—immense.

Disregarding the “untold misery” of the UK's many poverty-stricken citizens, a characteristic of hers and Albert's reign, and summoning the divine right of kings, she continued:

Revolutions are always bad for the country, and the cause of untold misery to the people. Obedience to the laws and to the Sovereign, is obedience to a higher Power, divinely instituted for the good of the people, not the Sovereign, who has equally duties and obligations.

Victoria and Albert had admiration and affection for their foreign secretary, Lord Aberdeen, during his tenure from 1841-46, but frequently clashed with Lord Palmerston during his, which was from 1846-51. This was due to his refusal to honor their sanctions or censures if he disagreed with them. The Albertine Monarchy's foreign affairs were further shaken when Albert was wrongly suspected of trying to influence the government in favor of the Russian cause in the Crimean War (1853–56), when in fact the opposite was true. The royal couple regained the popularity they lost as the war progressed, thanks to the queen's personal supervision of the women's relief committees for the wounded, support of Florence Nightingale's efforts, visits to crippled soldiers in the hospitals and institution of the Victoria Cross for gallantry.

Victoria and Albert visited and were visited by other monarchs during the time of their realm. They had relatives throughout Europe and, due to Victoria's matchmaking efforts with her offspring and the European heads of state, they would have more.

Prince Albert died suddenly at the age of 42 on December 14, 1861. Though his monarchy would come to an end, his influence on the queen was enduring, as described in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*:

He had changed her personal habits and her political sympathies. From him she had received training in orderly ways of business, in hard work, in the expectation of royal intervention in ministry making at home, and in the establishment of a private (because royal) intelligence service abroad. The

British monarchy had changed. As the historian G.M. Young said, “In place of a definite but brittle prerogative it had acquired an undefinable but potent influence.”

Following the death of her husband, Victoria, who had suffered from depression during and after each of her pregnancies, found herself plunged into immeasurable, incessant grief, which she described in her journal: “those paroxysms of despair and yearning and longing and of daily, nightly longing to die ... for the first three years never left me.”

Even after some of her depression dissipated, she kept herself in mourning and in partial retirement. She spent four months of each year in Balmoral and Osborne, disregarding the difficulty it inflicted on her ministers. She declined to fulfill her expected role as monarch, absenting herself from official and ceremonial functions. The public were sympathetic at first, but as her recalcitrance kept on, they disapproved of her absence. It didn't matter to her, and no one could bend her notorious iron will to capitulation.

Victoria may have resisted her ceremonial duties, but she still remained determined to be a political influence, operating as she felt Albert would have wanted. She guided her actions by what she knew he would have done. All of Albert's prudent advice to her on partisan neutrality was tossed aside, however, when she chose sides in the most famous political rivalry of the 19th century, that of Benjamin Disraeli, who served as prime minister off-and-on between 1874 and 1880, and William Ewart Gladstone, who served four non-consecutive terms as prime minister from 1868 to 1894. Disraeli was leader of the Conservative Party, while Gladstone headed the Liberals. Their ruthless and relentless enmity polarized Parliament.

Albert hadn't liked Disraeli and had approved of Gladstone, but Disraeli insinuated himself into Victoria's favor by telling her that it would be “his delight and duty, to render the transaction of affairs as easy to your Majesty, as possible”. Gladstone, on the other hand, enraged her by persisting, often insensitively, in attempts to convince her to return to performing her ceremonial duties.

Ignoring her self-directive to follow her husband's footsteps, she became close to Disraeli, who lifted her spirits and helped assuage her grief. They shared a belief in British Imperialism, and she admired his aggressive foreign policy, especially when in 1875, he negotiated the purchase of half the shares of the Suez Canal and presented them to her as a personal gift. He topped the gesture the following year by making her “Empress of India”; she returned the favor by giving him the rank and title of Earl of Beaconsfield. In 1878, at the Congress of Berlin, he averted war with Russia over the Balkans, returning home in triumph after ensuring that the British would control the strategically located island of Cyprus.

Victoria disagreed with Gladstone's moralistic approach to politics, which she called hypocritical. He did not share her and Disraeli's vision of Britain's imperialistic role in

the world. Among Victoria's disputes with Gladstone was over "the problem of Ireland". *Encyclopædia Britannica* explains:

Whereas "to pacify Ireland" had become the "mission" of Gladstone's life, the queen (like the majority of her subjects) had little understanding of, or sympathy for, Irish grievances. She disliked disorder and regarded the suggestion of Irish Home Rule as sheer disloyalty. The proposal of an Irish "Balmoral" was repugnant to her, especially when it was suggested that [her son] the prince of Wales [with whom she had developed an enmity after Albert's death] might go in her place. To avoid the Irish Sea, she claimed to be a bad sailor; yet she was willing in her later years to cross the English Channel almost every year. In all, she made but four visits to Ireland, the last in 1900 being provoked by her appreciation of the gallantry of the Irish regiments in the South African War.

Gladstone's defeat in the parliamentary elections of 1874 thrilled her. "What an important turn the elections have taken," she wrote in her journal, "It shows that the country is not Radical. What a triumph, too, Mr. Disraeli has obtained and what a good sign this large Conservative majority is of the state of the country, which really required (as formerly) a strong Conservative party!"

Her joy lasted less than five years, when in 1879, the bitter rivalry of the Conservatives and Liberals threatened the dissolution of Parliament. It survived long enough for the Conservative Party to be defeated in the 1880 elections and Gladstone to take the mantle of Prime Minister once again.

Victoria didn't hide her opposition to Gladstone, calling for his immediate retirement. She had persuaded herself that Gladstone's government, which she believed was "dominated by Radicals," threatened the stability of the nation. She wrote that his "whole conduct from 1876" was "one series of violent, passionate invective against and abuse of Lord Beaconsfield [Disraeli]," casting a blind eye at Lord Beaconsfield's equivalent behavior toward Gladstone. Gladstone's declaration, that he "would never be surprised to see her turn the Government out, after the manner of her uncles" may have brought her finally to her senses by revealing how destructive her own partisanship and prejudice had become. In an unprecedented move, she took it upon herself to mediate a compromise between the two houses, which resulted in the third parliamentary Reform Act in 1884.

Her change of heart didn't last long. In 1886, she orchestrated the formation of an anti-Radical coalition in an attempt to defeat a third Gladstone ministry. The "People's William", as Gladstone was called, was defeated without her intervention when his baby, the Government of Ireland Bill, commonly known as the First Home Rule Bill, was shot down by Parliament on June 8, 1886. Parliament was dissolved on June 26 and a UK general election was held. Gladstone's party placed a distant second, ending a period of Liberal dominance for 18 of the previous 27 years. They had won five of

the six elections held during that time, but would only be in power for three of the next nineteen years.

Ultimately, it's questionable whether Victoria's interference with her ministers, especially Gladstone, made much difference. She would ride out her final years in the Salisbury administration (1895–1902) without intervention, as its mounting imperialism aligned with her views from the days of Disraeli when he made her empress of India.

Victoria's former involvement with her ministers was replaced with a newfound level of interaction with her subjects and a return after decades to her official functions. Moved by the suffering of her soldiers during the South African War (1899–1902), she filled her schedule with a demanding agenda of troop inspections, medal ceremonies and visits to military hospitals, riding out her years as the model of a modern monarch.

As the Jubilees of 1887 and 1897 would attest, Victoria was a popular queen. Nevertheless, she absented herself or outright opposed many of the important political, social, and intellectual currents of the later Victorian period. She never came to accept the advancement of democracy, and opposed suffrage for women. Although she might sympathize with the travails of an individual worker, she did not concern herself with the working class as a whole. Without Albert's influence, Victoria had little contact with artists and intellectuals, blissfully ignorant of new directions and advancements in culture and technology. Although her reign was shaped by the new technology, she never welcomed innovation. Yet, her lengthy escapes to Osborne and Balmoral would not have been available to her without the development of the rail system and the invention of the telegraph.

The queen died after a short and painless illness on January 22, 1901 in her beloved Osborne on the Isle of Wight. She was buried beside Prince Albert in the mausoleum at Frogmore near Windsor. She had outlived her beloved by 40 years, yet every night at Windsor, his clothes were laid out on the bed, and every morning fresh water was put in the basin in his room. Until the end of her life, Victoria slept with a photograph over her head of Albert's head and shoulders.

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