



Afterword

Adrienne Munich and Margaret Homans

This afterword reflects on this issue of *19*'s accomplishments and on prior studies of Queen Victoria in local and global contexts, and suggests directions for future scholarship.



As we have shown in our books on the varied ways Queen Victoria shaped her image, her icon was received differently throughout her realm in a dynamic we began to characterize and locate.¹ Recently, with their series of workshops in 2018 and 2019 culminating in a conference at Kensington Palace, London in May 2019, Joanna Marschner and Michael Hatt have refocused contemporary scholarship on Queen Victoria by inviting scholars, curators, activists, and other experts from a range of global locations to interpret visual representations of the Queen. A curator herself, Marschner has followed Queen Victoria's example in managing the Queen's image at Kensington Palace, the subject of her article here. This issue of 19 joins a rich archive of important publications on representations of the Queen, scholarship that, like the workshops and the conference, at once centres Victoria in the era named for her — a remedial practice still unusual in the broader field of nineteenth-century historical and cultural studies — and strives to decentre the monarchy and the imperial centre for our era of decolonization.

The issue captures much though not all of the excitement generated by *Victoria's Self-Fashioning: Curating the Royal Image for Dynasty, Nation and Empire*, the title of Hatt and Marschner's ambitious research enterprise, which addressed Queen Victoria's shaping of her own image, representations of her at home and abroad in many visual media, the circulation of these images in Britain's global empire, and the creation in the post-empire of an evolving array of images responding to what had initially circulated from the imperial centre. The workshops and the conference pursued the important work of placing visual representations of the Queen in a global context, looking not only at the empire from the point of view of the imperial centre, but also at that centre from disparate and, often, subjugated points of view. The workshops and conference studied these images both for what they meant in their own times and for the contested meanings they may bear now.

Most of the articles in the first three sections of this issue are based on presentations given at the 2019 conference. Several focus on images of the Queen produced in Britain primarily for consumption within Britain, although many images — such as the copied portrait of Victoria that was hung and then vandalized in the embassy in Tehran and the illustrations in *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands* that made their way to India in translations of that text — circulated in the empire as well.

Not included in this issue is a group of conference papers that focused on images created far from the imperial centre, papers pointing to one important area for future scholarship and curation: decentring the Queen to focus on those whose lives were shaped

¹ Adrienne Munich, *Queen Victoria's Secrets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Margaret Homans, *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and Victorian Culture, 1837-1876* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); and *Remaking Queen Victoria*, ed. by Margaret Homans and Adrienne Munich, *Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

— often violently — by her reign. Michael Hatt’s introduction to five ‘counter-ceremonial’ artworks, some made in or in relation to post-imperial locations (Canada, Guyana, Ireland), gives some indication of the excitement generated by papers in panels on ‘Global Image’ and ‘Gifting and Diplomacy’. There were papers on Chinese Anglophilia; on Indigenous representations of Victoria in New Zealand; and on the vexed question of repatriating objects gifted to the Queen — or in some cases taken in her name — from Oceania. In the final panel artist Jane Wildgoose spoke about the vast Victorian collection of human skulls from across the British Empire that remains in the Natural History Museum.² These and other such papers showed how far beyond the imperial centre extended — and continue to extend — the range and the creativity of global image making; and how complex were the negotiations and contestations over the meaning of Queen Victoria’s image.

An important precursor to such work is the essay collection *Mistress of Everything: Queen Victoria in Indigenous Worlds*, edited by Sarah Carter and Maria Nugent.³ Carter and Nugent are represented in this issue by short statements in the section ‘Victoria and the Politics of Representation’, but they also gave longer papers at the conference: Carter presenting with Sharon Venne (also present here) on Canadian First Nations as treaty peoples whose sovereign negotiations with Britain’s Queen can be seen as superseding the British government’s claims; and Nugent presenting on Aboriginal women leaders who made use of the image of Queen Victoria to bolster their own powers. Continued work on Indigenous representations, following up on *Mistress of Everything* and on these scholars’ contributions to the conference, is an important avenue for future decentring studies of Queen Victoria.

In our own scholarship on the Queen, we have considered textual as well as visual representations, often treating these forms as inextricable from each other. In emphasizing the visual, especially public art such as the two vast memorial monuments in London and Kolkata treated by John Plunkett and the Victoria statues altered by Sophie Ernst, Hew Locke, and others in Hatt’s account, this issue suggests even more possible avenues to consider Queen Victoria’s myriad, disparate images. Urban statues and memorials play an outsized role in perpetuating the public’s historical memory of the Queen, as attested by the many attacks on statues that continue to serve as focal points for broader protests against the brutal and enduring effects of empire. But public monuments can take textual form as well, and another task for future scholarship would be more

² For Jane Wildgoose’s research see, for example, ‘Presenting ‘*Lost But Not Forgotten*’ at the Crypt Gallery St. Pancras: Negotiating and Constructing Active Critical Conversation Concerning Contested Human Remains in Museums’, in *In This Place: Cumulus Association Biannual Conference Proceedings Wednesday 27 April – Sunday 1 May 2016*, ed. by Duncan Higgins and Venu Dhupa (Nottingham: Nottingham Trent University, 2016), pp. 43–50 <http://www.cumulusnottingham2016.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/OS919_Cumulus_publication_Final_260117.pdf> [accessed 23 November 2021].

³ *Mistress of Everything: Queen Victoria in Indigenous Worlds*, ed. by Sarah Carter and Maria Nugent (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

critical attention to the Queen's best-selling book, *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands*, and its sequel *More Leaves from the Journal of a Life in the Highlands*; to her other writings, both private and public; to contemporaneous textual monuments to the Queen such as the model biographies studied by Alison Booth or other contemporaneous texts that constructed and reflected her complex identity; and to the rapidly growing canon of biographies and fictional narratives about the Queen in film and television, representations both visual and verbal that have elicited adoring responses seemingly at odds with the defacing of public monuments.⁴ What is the relation between these two kinds of responses, celebratory and destructive; are they as far apart as they appear?

Moreover, for attendees at the May 2019 conference and for visitors to Kensington Palace from May to December 2019, another kind of public textual memorial appeared. The exhibition highlighted the Queen's Indian connections by including portraits of and clothing worn by the Maharajah Duleep Singh and by Princess Victoria Gouramma. It also exhibited — in a room filled with information about the British government's cruel treatment of her Indian subjects — the notebooks in which the Queen practised writing in Urdu. To supplement the historical record, historian Priya Atwal (who also presented at the conference) facilitated a project which brought members of London's South Asian community, invited by Historic Royal Palaces, to preview the exhibition and to respond in writing to what they saw. These visitors wrote poems responding not only to the Indian vitrines but also to portraits and other objects related to Victoria's life as Queen, wife, mother, and widow. These exquisite and moving poems were printed on wall labels, eloquently attesting to the museum objects' continuing emotional resonance and to the value of measured, ongoing community dialogue. Public engagement with communities still living in the shadow of Victoria's reign could be yet another way of keeping the Queen Victoria record current.

In our closing remarks we want to give credit to two precursors who influenced our work on Queen Victoria and whose presence can still be felt in the contributions to this issue of 19. Before our studies, Victoria's icon was taken as 'real', not appreciated as a brilliant and deliberate construction that effectively maintained the British monarchy in the face of its waning powers and republican pressures. Changing subsequent ideas about Victoria's agency and significance, Dorothy Thompson, in *Queen Victoria: The Woman, the Monarchy, and the People* (1990), a biography that was part of a series intended for younger readers, regarded the Queen as a woman who helped to shape her monarchy and who was a political actor in her own right. Thompson's important

⁴ Alison Booth, 'Illustrious Company: Victoria among Other Women in Anglo-American Role Model Anthologies', in *Remaking Queen Victoria*, ed. by Homans and Munich, pp. 59–78; see also the essays by Gail Turley Houston, Maria Jerinic, and Robin L. Bott.

work can be understood in the context of feminist consciousness, although she herself avoided that label. She combines Victoria's private life as a daughter, mother, and wife with her public role as a female monarch facing a sternly patriarchal government. Thompson explored some interactions of Victoria's familial and governmental roles not only as a balancing act but also as an effective international dynamic. Her short book has had a disproportionately strong impact on subsequent work, including the effect of her generously opening her archives to Munich.

The second enduring influence on Hatt and Marschner's work as well as on our own is Stephen Greenblatt's study of Elizabeth I's reign, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (1980), a work that introduced a methodology for generations of literary, cultural, and art historians, although Greenblatt's focus was textual. In adopting a phrase from Greenblatt's exploration of the concept of 'fashioning', Hatt and Marschner suggest a cultural approach to Queen Victoria that Greenblatt's work inflects. 'Fashioning' includes the action of creating meaning, whether of oneself, as in 'self-fashioning', or in systems of public signification where one's own fashioning is subject to those varied audiences or readers who receive it. It is in this latter context that John Plunkett's work on Victoria as a media queen rests. As Munich stated: 'Those aspects of Victoria's image produced by calculation anticipate the media techniques of today' (p. 7); and Homans points to Victoria's position in 'an era of rapidly diversifying technologies for the dissemination of the self' (p. xxi). To complicate the concept of fashioning, Homans argues that the effects of a calculated image cannot be accurately anticipated: 'The Queen is subject to the policing power of Victorian ideology as much as are the sailors and soldiers she nominally commands' (p. xxiii). Everyone, we both noted, at certain moments is a subject. Our points were anticipated by Greenblatt's attention to a related concept of fashioning that is particularly relevant to a collection of articles from the museum world, and that is 'curate'. Greenblatt cites its religious etymology, emphasizing that a curate follows strict religious codes. He brings back to consciousness that no one factor fashions an image.

The articles in this issue demonstrate many positions from which Victoria is curated in her own fashioned image, reshaped by the realities of those in the world who receive her image and impress on it their situated meanings. We remember our own subjected positions and recognize that we shaped our own Victorias according to what we were enabled to notice. We herald this next iteration of a decentred Queen Victoria, whose uniqueness enabled her image's extraordinary ability to undergo constant and lively reshapings. Despite and because of her fashionings and curatings, new Queen Victoria icons are portrayed in this issue and will be in images and scripts yet to come.

