Table of Contents

Discussion Questions 3
The Real Queen Victoria: A Conversation with Author Daisy Goodwin 5
A Woman at the Helm, Bringing ‘Victoria’ to Life 8
Discussion Questions

1. Daisy Goodwin was inspired to tell this story by Queen Victoria’s diaries. "How handsome Albert looks in his white cashmere breeches," the young queen wrote in 1839. Goodwin suddenly found herself imagining what it would be like if her own teenage daughter became the most powerful woman in the world overnight. How does Victoria handle her rise to power at the age of eighteen? How do you think you might have handled it?

2. In what ways does Victoria come across a "typical" teenager and/or as a powerful sovereign?

3. How does Victoria’s sheltered upbringing at Kensington Palace influence her ultimate ability to rule her country?

4. Why do you think one of the young queen’s first acts is to reject her given name of Alexandrina in favor of Victoria?

5. In what ways does Victoria’s relationship with her mother influence her decisions as queen? How does that relationship change in the course of the novel?

6. Where do you think Victoria gets the strength to stand up against her family and others who try to dictate her role as queen?

7. Why was Victoria so vengeful toward Lady Flora?

8. What are the biggest challenges that Victoria faces? How might you have dealt with those situations?

9. How do you feel about Lord Melbourne? What might Victoria's life have been like if she had chosen him over Albert?

10. What did you think of Albert when he first appeared in the story? How do you view Victoria’s prediction that theirs "will be a marriage of inconvenience"?

11. Victoria thinks Lord M must be teasing when he says that some Chartists believe that women should have the vote. There are also a number of references to "bonnets," or women, whose significance is clearly different from men’s. How do you see the role of women in general — and Queen Victoria in particular — in the course of the novel?

12. How has courting changed for the current heirs to the English throne compared to Queen Victoria?

13. Are there any modern-day world leaders you would compare to the young Victoria?
14. What do you see as the most and least enviable aspects of Queen Victoria’s life?

15. What was the most interesting thing about Victoria that you learned while reading this novel? Did you feel the same way about her at the beginning and end of the book? (Questions issued by the publisher.)

The Real Queen Victoria: A Conversation with Author Daisy Goodwin

Queen Victoria’s public legacy is often of the doting grandmother, or the stodgy old woman. Daisy Goodwin—author of Victoria and screenwriter for the PBS Series of the same name—talks to Unknown History’s Giles Milton about the misconceptions surrounding Victoria’s personality, her younger years, and her love affairs.

UH: Today, we’re excited to be here with Daisy Goodwin, author of Victoria, now available at all book retailers. Daisy is the author of the New York Times bestselling novels The American Heiress and The Fortune Hunter. She’s a Harkness scholar who attended Columbia University’s film school after earning a degree in History at Cambridge University. She was chair of the judging panel for the 2010 Orange Prize for Fiction, and is the creator and screenwriter of the masterpiece presentation ”Victoria” on PBS. She lives in London. Welcome, Daisy.

DG: Hi!

UH: Queen Victoria has written more than sixty-two million words in her diaries, which you have extensively read and sifted through for your research. What were a few of the most interesting stories you came across in the diaries?

DG: I came across Queen Victoria when I was a teenager myself. I was reading history at Cambridge, and one of the subjects I was studying was Queen Victoria and the media; part of the assignment was to read some of her diary. So I went to the library and got one of these enormous red leather-bound volumes of her diaries. She wrote a lot; if she’d been alive today, she would have been the queen of social media. I opened it up, and it fell open at a page in 1839, and my eyes flicked down the page, and I saw a phrase that caught me by surprise. It said, “I saw my dearest Albert today, and it was raining outside and he was wearing his uniform. He looked so splendid and he had these white cashmere breeches with nothing on underneath.” I used to think Victoria was a stodgy old woman in black and a bonnet. But then I saw this and just went ”wow, that’s not an old lady in a bonnet. That’s a living, breathing, passionate teenager.”
If Victoria has been alive today, she would have been the queen of social media.

It was one of those moments where you go beyond the historical figure to see the person behind the words. I thought. "Here is a girl who is only 19. She’s just fallen madly in love. She’s really interested in men and sex, and she’s got a very passionate nature." It gave me insight into this girl, which later made it easy for me to write a screenplay and a novel about her.

Her diaries reveal that she was a woman of strong emotion. She notices everything, she’s interested in everything. They're incredibly vivid, and are a fantastically good resource. I can’t think of any other monarch about whom we know so much. If you go back to the originals- or as close as you can get- you get a sense of not just the head of state, but the woman. If you want to know what it’s like to be the woman who was the head of the most powerful country in the world for 63 years, then you can go back to her diaries and get a very, very strong sense of what it was like.

UH: There is a big controversy surrounding whether or not Queen Victoria had a relationship with her Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne. Can you speak some more to the evidence that supports this association?

DG: So Victoria comes to the throne when she’s eighteen, and until she comes to meet Lord Melbourne, she’s only ever been alone in a room with a man once before, and that was an old Prime Minister. When Lord Melbourne turns up, he is a famous ladies' man. He’s had this very colorful past, he’s been with lots of women. His wife famously ran away with Lord Barron. He’s the picture of legend, a romantic figure.

Victoria's father had died when she was six months old, and the only man in her life was her mother’s advisor, Sir John Conroy, whom she detested. She rightly thought he was trying to wrestle power from her. Melbourne is charming, he’s attractive, and even though he’s much older than her, he’s the first person to take her seriously. She falls for him. You can see from the moment she meets him in her diary that he’s literally all she writes about for three years.

I think it’s unlikely that it was an affair in the carnal sense, because even though she was very passionate, I don’t think Melbourne would have ever crossed the line. There’s no doubt that he was also very attached to her—the way I see it is that Melbourne was Victoria’s first love, and Victoria was Melbourne’s last love. There was lots of evidence at the time; people who saw them together were convinced that there was a relationship.

UH: Your new novel is focused on young Queen Victoria. What led you to focus on her early life in this book?

DG: In my last book, The Fortune Hunter, I’d written about Victoria in her sixties. I’d started thinking about another novel, and as I was thinking about it, I thought of Victoria at the beginning of her reign. The thing that triggered it for me was a fight with my daughter, who is 16 and the same height as Victoria. She’s very small, she’s very intense, and she’s very passionate; she’s full of hormones, and she’s turbulent. We were having a huge round, and she rushed out and slammed the door, and I thought, “Well, how would it be if she woke up tomorrow and found herself the most powerful woman in the world?” And that sort of gave me the dramatic impetus, and I could see that it was a great moment to start a drama to start a novel.

Of course, the early years of her reign are fascinating. You’ve got a country that’s been ruled, for centuries, by old, fat, disreputable men, and suddenly you’ve got this beautiful young queen; she’s innocent, she’s eighteen, she’s tiny. There was an enormous kind of warmth towards her, but also a whole
establishment hardening their ranks and thinking, “This is never going to work” because she was not a bloke. It’s a very exciting moment, and I felt that this was the place to start.

A Woman at the Helm, Bringing ‘Victoria’ to Life

By ROSLYN SULCAS, JAN. 11, 2017

CHURCH FENTON, England — A heavily pregnant Queen Victoria lay in bed, looking disheveledly pretty and decidedly grumpy. A deadpan Prince Albert read her a lame joke from a magazine to cheer her up. “We are not amused,” she muttered.

“That’s funny,” a production assistant said, looking at the television monitors showing the actors Jenna Coleman and Tom Hughes as they ran through this scene in the large studios here, in which bits of Buckingham Palace had been recreated.

“We are not amused” may be a familiar phrase. But ITV’s “Victoria,” which debuts on “Masterpiece” on PBS on Sunday, doesn’t show us the dumpy, doughty black-clad widow associated with the expression. Instead, “Victoria” paints a picture of a pretty, willful, inexperienced and isolated teenager who wakes up one day to find herself queen of England, and who must find the inner strength to take on a male-dominated world.

There are clear similarities between this story and other costume dramas that are bread-and-butter “Masterpiece” fare (as well as with “The Crown,” the Netflix series that portrays the reign of the young Queen Elizabeth II). But Daisy Goodwin, the British television producer and writer of historical fiction, who created “Victoria,” said that there is at least one important difference.

“Although ‘Victoria’ has a romantic sensibility, at its heart it is about a concept so modern that it still frightens people: a young woman in power,” who had direction over her life that one doesn’t expect in a period drama, Ms. Goodwin said.
Ms. Goodwin, who studied history — with a focus on the Victorian — at Cambridge University, said that her vision of the adolescent, impetuous Victoria came in part from being a parent. “I have a 16-year-old daughter, and we had a row one day, and I thought, what if we woke up and she was the boss of me?” Ms. Goodwin said.

Initially, she planned to write a novel about Victoria. “I had read her diaries and had a sort of epiphany about her friskiness as a young girl,” she said. “I began to work on it, but I’m not really equipped to be a novelist alone. I soon thought, why has no one done this as a TV series?”

The production company Mammoth commissioned a script, and PBS committed to the production at an early stage. Rebecca Eaton, the executive producer of “Masterpiece,” said that she and her colleagues were looking for a show that could reach a nontraditional audience of young women, as well as fill the large coronet-shaped hole left by “Downton Abbey.” She said that “Victoria” distinguished itself with its singular focus — both on and behind the camera. “This is an opportunity for an arresting, truly memorable performance by an actress, as Glenda Jackson delivered with ‘Elizabeth R,’ or Helen Mirren in ‘Prime Suspect,’” Ms. Eaton said. “And Daisy Goodwin, not a roomful of writers, as the single creative force at the heart of the story is an opportunity for a very personal, deeply felt piece of work.”

Ms. Goodwin said she knew she would begin the series (and her novel, which she wrote simultaneously) with the day Victoria learned she was queen. (It was June 20, 1837.) “When she got the power, she didn’t hang around,” Ms. Goodwin said. “She replaced the name she was known by, Alexandrina, with Victoria, a name that didn’t exist in England at the time. You have to think that this was self-determinism, victory over her childhood.”

That childhood was an unhappy and lonely one, dominated by her mother and Sir John Conroy, her mother’s manipulative adviser. “Her resistance to that tells you a lot about her; this absolute, obstinate nature of hers was vital in getting her through her reign,” said Ms. Coleman, who played the companion to Doctor Who from 2012 to 2015.

Season 1’s eight episodes follow Victoria through her first three years as queen; years dominated by her infatuation with her prime minister, Lord Melbourne (Rufus Sewell), her growing confidence as ruler, and her eventual passion for her first cousin, the German Prince Albert (Mr. Hughes). In Britain, where the show aired in the fall, ratings were high and reviews mainly positive, but the show was also criticized for historical inaccuracy, notably its portrayal of Victoria’s obsession with Lord Melbourne, and the general unlikeliness of Mr. Sewell’s smolderingly handsome figure. “I’m sure I’ve heightened it, but there is no doubt that Victoria was besotted with Melbourne,” Ms. Goodwin said. “He is on every page of her diaries.”

In a telephone interview, Mr. Sewell said that his research allayed any fears that Lord Melbourne had been too “souped up” for modern-day audiences. “He was very attractive to women all his life; he was a proper Regency rake, and he really liked women.” But Mr. Sewell
and Ms. Goodwin did decide to deviate from one part of the record: portraying Lord Melbourne in his historically correct late 50s. “It seemed a waste to lose my late 40s,” he said.

Eventually, Victoria falls for and marries Mr. Hughes’s brooding, perfectly German-accented Albert, and the series ends with the birth of their first child.

Ms. Goodwin, steeped in Victorian fiction, uses many of those tropes in the series: a bit of Emma, a bit of Mr. Knightley, a bit of Dickens. “But in those works, women are mostly such passive agents,” she said. “Here you can subvert the normal marriage plot, because it’s Victoria who has the power and must propose to Albert.”

The next season, Ms. Goodwin said, will deviate from the usual period drama fare as well. “It will be about the very modern dilemma of dealing with the job, children and a power struggle with your husband,” she said.

She added: “It’s about a woman who gets to call the shots in her life at a time when that was very difficult for women, and that’s a powerful thing. At the same time, it’s quite sprightly and funny and romantic, and I think that’s what is pretty much missing in the TV landscape now.”