



*Mistress of Everything:
Queen Victoria
in Indigenous Worlds*

**Sarah Carter and
Maria Nugent (eds.)**

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If the British Empire dominates the popular perception of imperialism in the nineteenth century, the figure of Queen Victoria, due to the sheer longevity of her reign (1837–1901), can be considered an important symbol of that vast empire. Indeed, one aim of this exciting collection of ten essays, which takes an unashamedly singular focus on the Queen, is to “plumb the ideas and interpretations ... which Indigenous people have formulated and articulated *about*—or, more accurately, *through*—Queen Victoria in response to the colonial encounters” (1). Sarah Carter and Maria Nugent have organised these essays into three themes that range from metaphor and memory to royal relations and Sovereign subjects. Accompanying many of these chapters are historical photographs—amongst which is the statue of Queen Victoria at Ohinemutu, in Rotorua, New Zealand—which provides an additional insightful aspect to this rich collection.

The editors begin the volume with a brief introduction that discusses the core themes found throughout the book. For many of the ten contributors, Victoria was not only an individual, but she was also a “synonym for the Crown, for the British government, and for the Empire” (2). The book also illustrates how Victoria viewed her Indigenous subjects, how the Queen was ‘known’ to the colonised, and the method in which the monarchy’s representatives employed the figure of the Sovereign in their dealings with displaced peoples of the Empire. Carter and Nugent acknowledge the purposely limited scope of the collection to the settler colonies of Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and southern Africa. They defend this decision, however, because of the number of features that these four colonies share in terms “of their colonial histories, in their relationships to the imperial metropolitan centre, in the composition of their colonial communities, and consequently, in their cultural and political institutions” (2).

The first section, ‘Monarch, Metaphor, Memory,’ begins with Hilary Sapire’s exploration of the 1860 royal tour to South Africa by Prince Alfred, Victoria’s second son. Despite the mammoth expansion of Britain’s imperial reach to become the largest empire at the time of her death in 1901, Victoria never visited her empire. Rather, as substitutes for their august mother, Victoria’s sons were deployed by her court and government via ‘royal tours’ as ‘roving ambassadors.’ Sapire describes how the presence of the teenage Alfred through the new repertoire of royal ceremonial during a month-long tour not only made the Indigenous peoples aware of the existence of the Queen, but

also enabled African leaders to take advantage of momentary prominence in public life to bypass local officialdom, and through the Prince, appeal to Victoria for political claims or press for territorial agendas. Michael Belgrave next offers a broad look at the history of Māori attitudes towards Victoria in New Zealand from 1840, and charts the changing relationship: from loyalty in the early stages of the young Queen's reign through her association with treaties, to pessimism by some whether a distant Queen could protect their rights thus leading to the establishment of a Māori King, until "by the end of the 1880s, there was almost universal Māori support for the Queen" who they understood as a guarantor of rights denied (67).

The next two chapters in this section focus on opposite ends of the empire—Canada and Australia, respectively. Sarah Carter, turning attention to the North American hemisphere for the first time in the collection, uses the prism on the Saulteaux of the St Peter's settlement in Western Canada to investigate the mobilisation of Queen Victoria by both the colonised and the colonisers in a series of 'contact zones.' Using prominent figures such as the vice-regal Governors-General who were valuable individuals in propagating helpful notions of Queen Victoria as a "tender and watchful mother" (86), Carter demonstrates how the Saulteaux called on the Crown's representatives to "act with honour, justice, integrity, and generosity, to protect them from injustice and oppression, and to guard their rights over and above the arbitrary rule of trading companies or settler governments" (78). The final chapter in the first section, written by Maria Nugent, focuses on some of the situations and occasions in which Aboriginal people in Australia's south-east evoked Victoria's name in the claim that she had been the personal source of reserve lands. Nugent investigates how Aboriginal people implicated the figure of Queen Victoria as a useful instrument to remind settler Australians about provisions made to the Aboriginal people by colonial authorities, and to ensure that later generations of settlers were not allowed to forget that promises had since been broken. Queen Victoria became a carrier and reminder of historical memory, and a tool in the Aboriginals' persistent efforts to seek redress for their dispossessions by their imperial overlords.

The second section, 'Royal Relations,' is spearheaded by Barbara Caine's chapter on the extent of Victoria's interest in colonial matters, and challenges the conventional view that the Queen harboured little interest in her imperial possessions. Caine declares that despite acknowledging as a young monarch the limits of her constitutional power in imperial matters, Victoria found avenues to challenge and to extend those limits, one such avenue being Victoria's pursuit of personal interactions with colonised peoples—most noticeably the one Victoria 'adopted' with deposed royalties. Few people met Queen Victoria, yet in the summer of 1863, a party of

thirteen Māori, accompanied by their interpreter, were ushered into the presence of the Queen and her three children. Transforming the relationship between Crown and subjects from one based on representatives such as flags and coins, to a rare opportunity for her to relate and interact on a personal level with Indigenous peoples, Clarke's chapter turns attention to the fascinating question of Māori dress. The final chapter in the section, written by Neil Parsons and drawing on personal correspondence including the Queen's journals, provides an account of the visits to Victoria by southern African kings or envoys, such as the thirteen-minute interview between Victoria and King Cetshwayo during his 1882 trip to London and Osborne House.

Penelope Edmonds opens the third section, 'Sovereign Subjects?', with an in-depth essay on the circulation of Queen Victoria's image on currency in south-eastern Australia, and the Aboriginal peoples' engagement with the idea of the Queen. The following chapter, by Amanda Nettelbeck, combines nineteenth century Canada and Australia in an exploration of how the art of gift giving mediated the bond between the Crown and Indigenous peoples, while seeking to explore how these gifts were received, circulated, and the various meanings they generated. The next chapter, taking as its focus the Māori parliament, is tackled by Miranda Johnson, who offers an insightful analysis of the historical problem of Māori loyalty to the British Queen, and the members who demanded Māori self-government, authorised by Victoria.

With *Mistress of Everything: Queen Victoria in Indigenous Worlds*, the editors have compiled a stimulating collection of studies that entice the reader with absorbing case studies from across the British Empire. Supported by a well-organised framework, these various essays by ten different scholars draw on a diverse range of sources, provide a multivalent approach to the relationship between Queen Victoria and her Indigenous peoples in the settler colonies, and invite further research into the other colonised peoples in the British world during the nineteenth century.

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