Victoria's feminist Legacy: how nineteenth-century women imagined the queen

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Abstract
"Victoria's Feminist Legacy: How Nineteenth-Century Women Imagined the Queen" examines Victoria's impact on the development of early feminism. Although her vehemently expressed anti-feminist sentiments have come to dominate the Queen's reputation, during her life her persona as a public and politically active woman inspired other women to reassess their beliefs about what women could do or be. This dissertation explores how the works of Victorian women writers, artists, and thinkers testify to the Queen's feminist influence. Chapter 1, "The Commercial Queen: Intimations of Feminism," explores how Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letitia E. Landon, and Caroline Norton balanced public anxieties and expectations regarding the monarch at the outset of her reign with the radical and disruptive potential she possessed. Chapter 2, "The Personal Queen: 'There Ain't Any Slave But Has Some Freedom,'" shows how a more matronly Victoria later fostered an "affective feminism" that allowed ordinary women who were not politically active to appropriate some of the Queen's empowerment, as depicted in Emily Eden's Semi-Detached House (1859), Sarah Orne Jewett's "The Queen's Twin" (1910), and Lady Charlotte Milles's photomontage of Victoria and the Waleses (1870s). Chapter 3, "The Royal Mother: Queen Victoria and her Daughters," documents the elder Princesses' participation in early and proto-feminist movements: those who grew up accustomed to strong female authority became active and influential women in their own rights and promoted the empowerment of other women. Chapter 4, "The Feminist Queen: 'The Magnificent Example of her Life and Character,'" expands on the tendency of more moderate feminists, like Millicent Garrett Fawcett and Emily Crawford, to put Victoria to more emancipatory uses than did radicals like Olive Schreiner. Chapter 5, "The Conservative Queen: Victoria as Stealth Feminist," considers how conservative thinkers like Margaret Oliphant and Marie Corelli interpreted the Queen in their commentaries about her at the turn of the century. In spite of their resistance to many advanced constructions of femininity, their depictions of Victoria's life sound at times surprisingly like modern feminism. In this way, Victoria's greatest feminist legacy may have been her subversive allure for the adversaries rather than the allies of early feminism.

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During the nineteenth century, women in the United States organized and participated in a large number of reform movements, including movements to reorganize the prison system, improve education, ban the sale of alcohol, grant rights to people who were denied them, and, most importantly, free slaves. Some women saw similarities in the social status of women and slaves. Women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucy Stone were not only feminists who fought for the rights of women but also fervent abolitionists who fought to do away with slavery. These brave people were social leaders who supported The status of women in the Victorian era was often seen as an illustration of the striking discrepancy between the United Kingdom's national power and wealth and what many, then and now, consider its appalling social conditions. During the era symbolized by the reign of British monarch Queen Victoria, women did not have the right to vote, sue, or own property. At the same time, women participated in the paid workforce in increasing numbers following the Industrial Revolution. Feminist ideas spread