



Shooting Victoria: Madness, Mayhem, and the Rebirth of the British Monarchy

Paul Thomas Murphy

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During Queen Victoria's 64-year reign, no fewer than eight attempts were made on her life. Murphy follows each would-be assassin and the repercussions of their actions, illuminating daily life in Victorian England, the development of the monarchy under Queen Victoria and the evolution of the attacks in light of evolving social issues and technology.

There was Edward Oxford, a bartender who dreamed of becoming an admiral, who was simply shocked when his attempt to shoot the pregnant Queen and Prince consort made him a madman in the world's eyes. There was hunchbacked John Bean, who dreamed of historical notoriety in a publicized treason trial, and William Hamilton, forever scarred by the ravages of the Irish Potato Famine. Roderick MacLean enabled Victoria to successfully strike insanity pleas from Britain's legal process. Most threatening of all were the "dynamitards" who targeted her Majesty's Golden Jubilee—who signaled the advent of modern terrorism with their publicly focused attack.

From these cloak-and-dagger plots to Victoria's brilliant wit and steadfast courage, *Shooting Victoria* is historical narrative at its most thrilling, complete with astute insight into how these attacks actually revitalized the British crown at a time when monarchy was quickly becoming unpopular abroad. While thrones across Europe toppled, the Queen's would-be assassins contributed greatly to the preservation of the monarchy and to the stability that it enjoys today. After all, as Victoria herself noted, "It is worth being shot at—to see how much one is loved."

Shooting Victoria: Madness, Mayhem, and the Rebirth of the British Monarchy Details

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From Reader Review Shooting Victoria: Madness, Mayhem, and the Rebirth of the British Monarchy for online ebook

Zach says

This book is a very detailed, but enjoyable, account of the various assassination attempts on Queen Victoria. Reigning for over 60 years, she was shot at or physically attacked seven different times throughout her long stay on the throne. Though no bullet ever struck her, and rarely did the attackers claim they wanted to actually kill her, the events nonetheless were harrowing episodes in Victoria's life.

What makes "Shooting Victoria" such a fascinating read is that Murphy does more than just recap the buildup, shooting and aftermath of each incident he. In lesser hands, such a book would only be say 7 chapters long, reciting the details quickly before moving on to the next attempt. Instead Murphy argues persuasively that these attacks were influenced by the larger context of the Victorian Era, and vice versa: the earliest of these attacks legitimized Victoria and thus her era. To accomplish this, he delves into all the specific details of the attackers' backgrounds, plans, actions and consequences; the reactions of Victoria, her relatives, and important politicians; and also the surrounding context of the time. At times this extra context can seem superfluous, such as the Bedchamber Crisis. But at other times it can be really enlightening, such when Murphy discusses The Great Exhibition or the various Ireland policies.

Overall, "Shooting Victoria" is an excellent piece of historical research. It provides a specific, original and insightful lens into one of the most written about eras in British history. While it can occasionally drag at times (it took me six months of on and off reading to finish the book), it nonetheless is a great piece of scholarship. If you are interested in the Victorian Era, this title will both add something new, as well as build upon previous knowledge.

Colleen says

Fascinating, entirely enthralling readable book, despite its size. I know sometimes historian asides and digressions can veer into padding or authorial conceit or just accidentally off-topic in their enthusiasm for the subject, and while this book could so easily have gone off the rails, I was impressed on just how comprehensive this really is. If you read no other book perhaps on Victoria or her reign, I'd advise this one. The assassination attempts against her luckily coincided with some of the lowest part of her rule, restoring her popularity from ebbs (the Bedchamber Incident, marriage to a foreign prince, Chartist upheavals, discontent over her long seclusion, Irish troubles)--and with the attacks and her escapes from death grew in time, the people grew ever more protective of her, in part because she always heralded her trust in her people after these by parading about them intentionally leaving herself open. Nor is this really old news, since the McNaughtan Rules came out of all this and set the standard for insanity defenses in court trials.

I am sure Secret Service agents or bodyguards would wince on every page on just how poorly she was guarded and over the decades with more lunatics or attention seekers or suicide-by-regicide folks only failing because their own ineptness, and not because of any protection of hers. This book opened up several completely plausible explanations for the much hyped events of her life. Her reluctance for crowds later in life and dislike for London: Even with how badly her attackers failed, the violence grew in intensity I noticed--one man attacking her with a cane, leaving a scar for 10 years, bloodying her forehead (did the scar just fade or did she do something about it?) She showed up at the opera that night, bandaged but resolute to full cheers--but this was the first to actually attack her with a weapon other than a gun. The next one the bullet passed between her carriage. In the courtyard of her own home.

She did have the nerve to go out and bathe in the love of her relieved subjects, but this had to make a person paranoid. And the author points out her wish to leave for remoter parts outside of her formerly beloved London to her retreat on Isle of Wight or up in Scotland--couldn't this also easily explain her squeamishness, besides all the other factors? Especially when the whole playing chicken with assassins somewhat depended upon her being unguarded. And her recoiling from the traditional punishment (drawn and quartered) and the obvious craziness and youth of the first person, had her and Albert push for a lifetime committal to a mental hospital (which was an appropriate and obvious punishment). From that mercy though, by the end she wanted floggings--and you can see why she was so upset. And at the end the punishments handed out were ludicrously light--a few months in jail? with wine stewards and French lessons?

Hearing how lightly some got off, with the splashy trials and newspaper headlines, did inspire some of the attempts or help plant that seed. Especially now. You'd get more time for shoplifting now than what the cast of characters mostly got. It explains why Victoria disliked Gladstone and some of the prime ministers she so famously clashed with. People always have a hard time pinning down her politics, because they varied so much, sometimes from person to person. She did become more of an arch reactionary at the end, but how Gladstone handled the ones under his administration--condescending notes, inaction, and trying to quietly get the accused off--you wanted to throttle him for her. It also helps explain how firm her rule was in comparison with others with the attempts coming like clockwork, causing Elizabeth Barrett Browning to despair more and writer from Punch to say:

"With the mark of that ruffian's violence plainly visible on her forehead, I never heard such shouting. It was a deafening tumult of love, in which a thousand voices were trying to outvie one another in giving the loudest expression of their sympathy. Then came God Save the Queen, and soothed the angry waters into something like a calm regularity of flow, until the surging voices rose musically together, and formed one loud swelling wave of devotion and enthusiasm"

The number of her family members there to witness it--first attempt she was pregnant with Vicky; other times Albert (and the one where only Albert and like one stuttering kid witnessed the shot was a nice comic situation), but all her children were there for some of them. Arthur tackling a guy, Bertie getting red in the face, the younger ones crying. Makes you wonder if all of them being there for some crazy guy trying to kill their mother could also explain the intense relationship they all had with her.

And since the attempts span her entire reign, starting with old fashioned flintlocks, ending with dynamite, you get a different angle to the politics and turmoil of the late 19th century. Will have to read more of this author's books!

Brad Hodges says

Here's a fun fact many Americans probably don't know--Queen Victoria was the victim of eight assassination attempts, by seven different men (one of them tried twice). Paul Thomas Murphy, in his book *Shooting Victoria: Madness, Mayhem, and the Rebirth of the British Monarchy*, chronicles those attempts, as well as giving an overview of Victoria's reign, and most especially, the development of the laws surrounding the attempts.

Victoria, of course, is one of the most impactful monarchs of the last few hundred years, essentially the grandmother of Europe. She ruled for 64 years. But it's interesting to note that early in her reign she was something of a controversial figure, and not universally loved as she was in her later years, when she was an icon. The first attempt to kill her came in 1840, at the hands of Edward Oxford, a disturbed young man who

fired a pistol in her general direction as she rode in a carriage with her husband, Prince Albert.

Oxford's gun may or may not have been loaded, which was a contention at his trial. He was clearly, by our standards, insane, and a convoluted verdict led to him being imprisoned at Bethlem, the insane asylum that stood for nearly a millennium and gave us the word "bedlam."

It can be said that all seven of Victoria's assailants had some degree of insanity. A spate of the them followed Oxford's attempt, as the men thought that by making an attempt they would get a lifetime of care by the state. Those who attempted were John Francis (he would try twice, as he escaped the first time and Victoria was used as bait to catch him after a second try), John Bean, a disfigured dwarf, and William Hamilton may have taken a shot at her in 1849, all with this in mind: "She was now certain that the law as it stood would only encourage more attacks. Any desperate and overambitious boy in the kingdom might now attain with a cheap pistol an instant worldwide notoriety granted by the elevated charge of High Treason."

What developed over these attempts were changes in the law and how insanity was judged. To be found not guilty by virtue of insanity was a Catch-22: one could be incarcerated at the Queen's pleasure, which meant forever. To be found guilty of "annoying" the queen, that is firing a gun at her with no bullets, could mean a seven-year term of hard labor and a flogging.

Later attempts included Robert Pate's, the only man who actually harmed the queen, as he struck her on the head with his cane: "Of the many attacks upon her, the Queen until the end of her life considered this one the meanest and most ignoble--'far worse,' she wrote 'than an attempt to shoot which, wicked as it is, is at least more comprehensible and more courageous.'" Unlike her previous assailants, Pate had succeeded in breaking through the invisible barrier between Queen and subject, and in actually hurting her. He shook her until-now unshakeable trust in the public."

After Albert's death in 1861, Victoria didn't go out in public as much, so it was several years before the next attempt, by Arthur O'Connor, who though insane, was the only one who had a somewhat political motive--he did it for Ireland. He managed to get inside the gates of the palace, and perhaps came the closest of actually killing her. Her manservant, John Brown, tackled him. "Of all of the attempts upon her, O'Connor's--violating the security of her home as well as her personal space--was the one that frightened her the most. Her worst fears about Fenians, the Irish, and the growing dangers that lurked in the metropolis were all confirmed in the puny boy."

The last attempt came in 1882, by Roderick Maclean, who fancied himself a poet. He claimed he was not trying to hurt the queen, but it was found that his gun was loaded, and had a trajectory that could have hit her.

None of the seven assailants were executed. Some lived the rest of their lives in confinement, while a few others were exiled to Australia, where they married and led somewhat productive lives. Murphy does add a postscript about an attempt that was foiled when some Irish revolutionaries contemplated blowing up Westminster Abbey during Victoria's golden jubilee, which could have taken out the entire royal family.

Murphy's book is enlightening but often strays, as he gets into detail about other sensational crimes of the period and other, successful assassinations, such as of James Garfield in the U.S. Also, and by no fault of his own, the book has a kind of repetition to it, as each attempt is followed by the trial, and all the assailants kind of blend into one. His descriptions of Victoria's relationships with her prime ministers--those she liked, such as Robert Peel and Benjamin Disraeli, and those she didn't, like Lord Palmerston and William Gladstone--are ably etched.

Though Victoria's attackers were all somewhat insane, the violence of them prefigured the modern age, when shortly after her death an assassination would launch the world into war, and to the state we're in now, when all world leaders must have vigilant and air-tight security. Of course, she would endure, dying in 1901 at 82, the longest serving monarch in British history.

Ben says

I found this a surprisingly intriguing book that genuinely challenged a lot of what I thought I knew about late 19th Century Britain -- which, don't get me wrong, was a lot. But I didn't know that so many attempts (most of them fairly pathetic, in fairness) had been made on Her Maj's life, and I didn't know how the reaction to these had unfolded. By selecting these incidents, the author affords himself a unique perspective on the Victorian -- especially the post-Albert -- period, and I was fascinated to see how this focus blended with the parts of the history that were more familiar to me. "Shooting Victoria" led me to read "A Magnificent Obsession: Victoria, Albert, and the Death That Changed the British Monarchy", (Spoiler Alert: Albert's), which was also well worth it.

Tom Williams says

Paul Thomas Murphy has set out to tell the story of the Victorian Age through the accounts of the seven attempts made on her life over her reign. Strictly speaking, some may not have been real attempts. It is not clear if all of those who shot at the Queen (six of the attempts involved firearms) had taken the trouble to load their weapons first, but all were dramatic events. Each was followed by widespread rejoicing that the Queen had survived.

The story of each of these seven occasions and their consequences for the would-be assassins would make interesting reading in itself, but Murphy uses these incidents as pegs on which to hang a much larger narrative. His central argument is that the Queen (who was not initially a popular monarch) achieved her popularity at least in part because of the sympathy she gained from the public after each unsuccessful attempt on her life. Nowadays the response of the Palace to Prince Charles's car being mobbed by rioters is to consider purchasing one of the most secure armoured vehicles in the world. Victoria's response to the earlier shootings was to ensure that she was, as soon as possible, seen driving out amongst the people in an open carriage. A naturally shy woman, Victoria forced herself to expose herself in this way with, according to Murphy, an almost instinctive understanding that only by being seen to be open to her subjects could she make monarchy an institution that would survive. Survive it did, and gloriously so. At a time when monarchies across Europe were falling, sometimes in circumstances of extreme violence, the British monarchy went from strength to strength. Victoria came to define an age and, although Murphy recounts ups and downs in her relationship with her subjects, by the time of her death she was so loved that the idea of any sane person trying to kill her was, to the Victorian mind, quite impossible.

Murphy's central argument is well presented. Around the story of the attempts on her life, Murphy weaves details of the political background to her reign, her relationship with Albert, the influence of new technologies such as photography, and the social background which framed the way her subjects saw her. It is a convincing argument, presented with lots of colourful detail which makes it an easy read for a non-specialist audience.

Murphy does not stop there, though. He looks at what happened to the men (they were all men) who threatened her and from their experiences he goes on to write about the development of the police force,

19th-century lunatic asylums, and the penal system. He describes hangings at Newgate, the horrors of Australian penal colonies, and the early development of forensic psychiatry. Much of this is fascinating, but it rambles away from the central theme of the book, which is often in danger of becoming simply a succession of fascinating but unconnected anecdotes about life in 19th-century London.

The last attempt on Victoria's life was made in 1882. She lived until 1901, which leaves Murphy with no attempts on her life to write about for a significant 19 years of her reign. Instead, he turns to plots that came to nothing, most notably a plan by Irish Republicans to bomb the Jubilee Thanksgiving service at Westminster Abbey in 1887. Murphy details the story of an orchestrated plan, devised in the USA, to bring dynamite into Britain and blow up the crowned heads of Europe. Interesting as this is, it has little in common with the seven would-be assassins described in the previous chapters. It's as if we are now in a completely different book and, given that the plot fizzled out without dynamite being planted, let alone exploded, it's quite a dull book, too.

Overall, this is a pleasant read and an easy introduction to the world of Victorian England. However, its rambling style and somewhat loose construction makes it a book that is easy to put down and maybe never pick up again. It will benefit from a tighter structure and a more disciplined approach. One feels that either Murphy simply wanted to write about a period he clearly knows a lot about and chose to focus on "shooting Victoria" to make a commercial book, or that he wanted to write about the seven assassination attempts and then padded it out with other material because he felt that otherwise it would be too short. Despite this, it's a pleasant read and will inform and entertain those who persevere with it.

Trish says

There's no question in my mind that, no matter how much history you know or think you know there is always something new to learn. That point was brought home to me as I was reading this book about the attempts on the life of Queen Victoria.

The author gives a brief outline of Victoria's life up until her coronation and marriage to Prince Albert. That's something most of us know. He then gives us the lives of the several men who tried to shoot the Queen at various times during her reign. These attempts were made easy by Victoria's habit of going out in an open carriage wherever she went, with the additional information that knowledge of these rides were made public in advance, so that anyone could know where she would be on a particular day, and at a particular time.

Considering that these different assailants had firearms of different quality some very bad, the distance from which they shot should have done some damage, either to the Queen or those who were riding with her. Nothing of the sort happened, except for the one time a heavy walking stick was used, and which did strike Victoria on the forehead, causing some bleeding and a bruise that was visible for a long time.

The author then goes into the trials of these persons, and we see the beginning of the modern defense of not guilty by reason of insanity in several cases. We also learn that there was transportation to the area of Australia for several of these men. The book goes on until Victoria's death, and even follows the life of her assailants, and what they did and where they went, until they also died.

This is a fascinating piece of historical writing and it kept my attention all the way through it's several hundred pages. That's often difficult for a history work to do, which just shows the excellence of the writing and the story telling.

Sheila says

Author Paul Thomas Murphy reveals details of Queen Victoria's seven assailants in greater detail than would be expected by the book's title and subtitle. *Shooting Victoria: Madness, Mayhem and the Rebirth of the British Monarchy* examines the political landscape, family and background of each attacker, and the assailant's motivations. After describing each incident in detail, author Murphy goes on to cover the psychological evaluations and interviews of each of the men with particular attention to their trials and the effect on British law, with an emphasis on insanity pleas.

The book begins in May of 1840 with an introduction to Queen Victoria's first assailant who shot at her while she was pregnant with her first child. The reader is then brought up to date on Queen Victoria's life to that time, and proceeds with the first incident in detail. It continues on with the assailant's interviews, examinations, trial, and the result, as well as the effect on Victoria and her family. Murphy proceeds through all seven assaults in this fashion with an emphasis on the trials of each and what happened to each man.

There were seven men who assaulted Victoria: Oxford, Francis, Bean, Hamilton, Pate, O'Connor, and Maclean. All except Pate used a handgun to shoot at her; all of those used a flintlock with the exception of Maclean, who used a cheaply-made Belgian pistol that had a pin-firing mechanism (all of the guns seemed to be either old or in poor condition). Pate actually struck Her Majesty in the forehead with the metal ferrule (the silver top) of his walking stick, drawing blood and causing a lump which lasted as a scar for many years. In between assailants three and four was Daniel McNaughtan, who shot and killed Edward Drummond, secretary to Prime Minister Robert Peel. McNaughtan had seen Drummond riding in Peel's carriage in Victoria's entourage, and thinking he was Peel, stalked and murdered him by shooting him in the back. Maclean was the last assailant, but there was an additional plot to bomb the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 1887 which was thwarted by London's Metropolitan Police. That bombing plot involved five Irish-Americans, members of the American society Clan-na-Gael, who intended to cause terror during the celebration.

In explaining the contemporaneous political and legal landscape during these assassination attempts, Murphy details other assassinations and attempts. He gives the reader the background and incident of Charles Guiteau fatally shooting President James Garfield on July 2, 1881 and how that influenced the yet-to-come trial of Roderick Maclean. He also discusses the political upheavals of the time, especially the 1880's forward, with the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, Empress Elisabeth of Austria, and President William McKinley. This is a vast job to tie all of these things together, but Murphy manages to do it.

There are a number of things that I learned for this book; the most obvious was that there were seven men who actually tried to kill Queen Victoria in addition to the Golden Jubilee bomb plot. Victoria's son Prince Alfred, while serving in the Royal Navy in 1868, was shot in the back while helping to raise funds at the Sailor's Home in Sydney, Australia (the bullet missed his spine by inches and he recovered). An assassination attempt was made against Victoria's oldest son Bertie, Prince of Wales (later to become King Edward VII). Victoria had a chainmail lined parasol in the 1840s, which is now deep in the vaults of a London museum (and probably wasn't used very much at 3 1/4lbs). I knew that Typhoid Fever killed Prince Albert, but I didn't know that their son Bertie nearly died from it as well (from dirty drinking water, it is the bacterium *Salmonella typhi*). And, that prisoners convicted of serious felonies wound up being transported to Van Dieman's Land, now known as Tasmania.

Perhaps the most notable revelation of the book was that the Victorian era in England ushered in the era of modern-day terrorism. The Clerkenwell bombing of 1867 was intended to blow a hole in a prison wall so that one inmate could escape; the amount of dynamite was seriously miscalculated and 6 died immediately, 6 more died of their injuries, and the fronts of housing facing the prison were demolished. Unintentional terror was spread throughout Great Britain. Later, in January of 1881 came the real beginning of modern terrorism: the army barracks at Salford were bombed with the intention of spreading terror and commemorating th

Manchester Martyrs. That bomb also demolished a butcher's shop, injuring three adults, and killing a seven-year-old boy.

This was an interesting book that did ramble somewhat. However, I think that it was the author's attempt to give the reader a true overview of world events in Britain, Europe, and the U.S. that caused it to shift focus from time to time. Overall, I found it to be a very interesting explanation of how and why things happened in Victorian England. I would not have wanted to undertake the task of tying together the events in all of these places to explain why the assailants may have been motivated to try to kill Victoria; of course, this motivation is in addition to the serious mental illness that most of them clearly had. I have to say I was glad for my courtroom experience as a litigator which made reading the trial sections easier and faster; otherwise, the book might have bogged down during those passages. But, I don't think the author could've achieved his goal without them. A very thorough work.

Ron says

"It is worth being shot at to see how much one is loved," Queen Victoria

An exhaustive history of the many men who shoot at Queen Victoria. While they varied in background, their motives were surprisingly (and sadly) similar ... and usually had nothing to do with injuring the queen. Paradoxically, Victoria was only injured once, and the incident wouldn't be in the book had Murphy stuck rigorously to his title.

"[Oxford] was pleased to find himself an object of so much interest."

No bit of related trivia is too small or unrelated for inclusion. Therefore, the reader is subjected to the history of all the other monarchs shot at, the life history of the police, prime ministers, cell mates, the Great Exhibition of 1851, with a cameo by P. T. Barnum. It's that kind of book.

"Before, the Queen's popularity stemmed from her *doing*; now, it stemmed from her simply *being*."

Runs counter to several popular images. Victoria, for example, is usually seen as a shy, reclusive lady. Murphy explains when that image if and when it didn't, and why. England's modern image is of an almost gun-free nation. That certainly wasn't true in the nineteenth century when even paupers could purchase pistol most anywhere.

"Victoria's personal courage and her unerring sense of her relationship with her people were responsible for it all." (It being "universal and spontaneous outpouring of loyalty and affection")

The late nineteenth century seems to have been open season on royalty. Murphy relates several parallel shoots taken at other monarchs. By 1918, all the monarchies of central Europe were no more.

"Trust in her subjects was instinct to [Victoria.]"

Kristen says

I am relieved and slightly let down as I finally finish this book, and honestly have no idea how I'm going to rate it as I start writing my review. When I started reading it, this book was *my jam*. I find reading about assassinations and assassination attempts really interesting (and highly recommend Sarah Vowell's *Assassination Vacation* to anyone else who feels the same way), love all things British, and am drawn to the Victorian era although I don't know a ton about it. Case in point: before reading this book I had no idea that there had been one attempt on Queen Victoria's life, let alone 8. Also, the author's style--using one story to branch out in related (sometimes very loosely) tangents--is one that drives many people insane, but that I personally love. As this review from The New York Times states, "*Shooting Victoria* rambles uninhibitedly and learnedly through 19th-century history into literature, penology, constitutional theory and even ballistics, stimulating highly topical thoughts along the way." So the book started out really, really strong for me.

Unfortunately, the book started to drag about halfway through. There really are no political motivations here--Queen Victoria did not inspire anti-monarch sentiments (indeed, the legacy she created is probably what saved the British monarchy in a time when European governments were starting to dismantle theirs). Instead, her would-be assassins were a sad, pathetic bunch who were mostly motivated by wanting notoriety or just to be taken out of the crushing poverty they lived in to a state run asylum or jail. All of their stories were sad, but their motivations didn't do much to illuminate the Victorian era, besides show the lack of mental health care access available to the society as a whole, which is sadly still an issue today. And because all of their motivations were so similar, their stories started to sound too same-y, and I lost interest. It does start to pick up again towards the end, so I felt it ended on a high note.

However, the motivations of the would-be assassins isn't the author's fault, and he still manages to inject a lot of interesting facts into this book. I learned a lot about the politics of the Victorian era. It's astonishing how many major events happened during her reign (assassination of Garfield, Irish potato famine and resulting problems between Ireland and England, Charles Dickens' writings and what seems like an unprecedented interest in the plight of the poor, and much more, all of which is gone into in this book). All in all, while it wasn't as amazing as I thought it would be in the beginning, I am glad I read this book. However, I'm not sure who I would recommend it to. You'd have to have a lot of patience, and a lot of interest in the subject, to make it through.

Cyrano says

I'm a reformed History major, and I found this book fascinating. I had no idea Her Majesty had been such a popular target, although I did unconsciously know that she ruled during that anarchist heavy period when assassination attempts were almost a fad, starting with Lincoln and... probably wrapping up with Franz Ferdinand. Eight attempts, although one of them was her getting hit on the head with a cane, so it may not count. It *was*, however, the only successful attack. The defence for many of these men included 'you can't prove there was a bullet in the gun', and a sizable portion of them didn't want to hurt QV, but had gotten the idea that if you tried to assassinate the Queen then you'd be taken in and given a life out of crippling poverty in prison or hospital. We spend a lot of time with the Queen, watching her navigate her relationship with Parliament, her court, and her people, but also a lot of time with the assassins. I'm kind of surprised such detail was available. And for those budding aristocrats out there, here's the take away: every time somebody tried to shoot her, the public responded with even more enthusiastic shows of support and love.

Kerry says

The problem with this book was not its length, which would have been a pleasure had it been well-focused.

Murphy's clear passion for research and writing skills are a joy. Unfortunately, it was unclear what the book was about: crime, mental illness, Queen Victoria's reactions to her assassination attempts, justice in Victorian England? Murphy had to follow every tangent to its very end; the book was structured like a tree with limbs and branches. Not all blame falls on the writer, though. I found myself asking where the editor was whenever I noticed that I was being led down another path that may or may not intersect with a more familiar one.

This book could have been one of those that are painlessly educational because the writing is effortless-seeming and entertaining. But it was bogged down by lack of focus and the inclusion of too much irrelevant information. That said, I enjoyed what I read and may return to it at a later time.

Martin Mostek says

It is maybe somewhat weird idea for a book to write about time and life of a monarch from perspective of attempts on life of said monarch. On the other hand Victorian era was in some aspect era weirdness lurked (and was eagerly searched for) in every shadow of every respectability proudly presented to general view. So chronicle of Victoria reign, her life as a person and as monarch, of political crises, famous crimes and development of jurisprudence especially regarding insanity question in criminal trials told in recounting seven attempted assassination of Queen is not so weird after all.

There were seven attacker. All male, all disturbed or insane, some vainglorious, some pathetic, some simply desperate. Six fired pistols, all missed, or fired blank, only one pistol seemed to be certainly loaded and able to seriously harm Queen. Only one attacker was able to actually hit the Queen - he smashed her in forehead with some stick.

Especially in her first decades on throne, when incidentally attempt were more frequent, Queen Victoria repeatedly showed considerable physical and moral courage. Later on memories on earlier attack and new attempts contributed to her urges to limit severely her public appearances -and bickering bitterly with her Governments and Prime Ministers who tried to persuade her to took part in more important public functions. The same attacks, as author repeatedly shows, in each event helped to strenght British Monarchy by renewing loaylity of public to the Queen - and as author claims, one attempt in 1870s may even destroy ascendig republican feeling in country.

Well written and researched book also offers both anecdotes, now funny - then not so much, how miscommunications in police and government enabled at least one of attackers and gives some context of various famous crimes or other events which were talk of the town when some of seven attempnts happened - newspaper may be full of many things at any given time: murder trials, government crises, death of statesman after riding accident - or high drama of transporting an elephant from London ZOO to US (about that last case only one word: Barnum).

All in all informative and interesing read. Recommended.

Rebecca Huston says

A very good collective biography that goes a step farther. The story deals with the people who tried to assassinate Queen Victoria, along with their stories, associated events, and how the British monarchy switched from the dislikable, excessive Hanoverans to what we know today. Very well written, excellent notes and sources, and two inserts of photographs. For anyone interested in British monarchy, this is a must read. Five stars overall.

For the longer review, please go here:

http://www.epinions.com/review/Paul_T...

Alex Sarll says

One of those all-too-common history books which would have been much better at about a third of the length. There is, though, something fascinating in the sheer hopelessness of all eight attempts on Victoria's person. Perhaps that's why (to the best of my awareness, and if I'm wrong, do tell me about them) nobody ever seems to have got any work of substance out of one fascinating counterfactual possibility they suggest - what if the very first attempt, by Edward Oxford, had succeeded? Victoria was pregnant with her first child, Albert not yet accepted by Britain - her vile reactionary uncle, Cumberland, would have been next in line. And the year of revolutions, 1848, was just around the corner. Britain's nineteenth century, and hence its twentieth, would have been very different.

Emma says

It was a very interesting read as it explored Victoria and her assailants in-depth, however, some parts felt irrelevant and could be a bit confusing at times.
