

**Women and/of the Empire(s):
On the 150th Anniversary of Queen Victoria's Proclamation as
Empress of India (1876-2026)**

29-30 October 2026

**An international conference hosted by the
Faculty of Arts and Humanities (Faculdade de Letras),
University of Porto, Portugal**

Confirmed keynote speakers:

Ana Cristina Mendes

(Professor of English Studies, University of Lisbon,
President of the Association for Cultural Studies)

Martin Hewitt

(President of the British Association for Victorian Studies, Visiting Professor of English,
University of Leeds, Editor of the Curran Index)

Under the Royal Titles Act of 1876, Britain's Queen Victoria, who had often, albeit informally, been called Empress of India, had the title officially added to her style. The nominal head of the most powerful country in the world henceforth matched the titles used by the monarchs of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire. In a context of international rivalry, the overtones of grandeur were intended to instil a notion of British superiority as well as to flatter the "Mother of Europe". Ironically, however, the new title was also an attempt to cover up how close British control over India had come to utter collapse due to the Indian Mutiny (also known in India, significantly, as the First War of Independence) less than two decades earlier. At the same time, Victoria's proclamation as Empress arguably exalted her as a supreme figure of the age in a global perspective as much as highlighted the fact that she was a woman with visibility and power in a period that almost universally denied women a range of rights and opportunities that we have come to assume are integral to any modern, democratic society.

This conference will seek to explore the realities and the legacies of the Victorian Age, its monarch and its empire. It will focus on women, their engagement in private and public life, their experience of class, travel, migration, and cultural exchanges – on either side of the cultural divide involved in imperial encounters – as well as on how women writers, of Victorian and later periods, have engaged artistically and critically with such realities in their poetical and fictional works.

Although Queen Victoria provides the starting point for the conference, we are also interested in contributions dealing with other aspects of the imperial/colonial experience, not limited to the nineteenth century, women, or the British Empire. Comparative perspectives, as well as broader chronological approaches, are also welcome.

The organisers welcome **proposals for 20-minute papers in English** responding to the above. Suggested (merely indicative) topics include:

- national (ethnic, religious, etc.) identity/ies and the ideology/ies of empire
- women, power/powerlessness, and the experience of empire
- Victoria's/Victorian exceptionalism in a historical and global perspective
- nostalgia, trauma, exaltation: the legacies of empire
- institutions of national/imperial memory: academies, museums, libraries, archives
- rival discourses of patriotism and identity, war and peace, prejudice and (in)tolerance
- literary and artistic representations of Queen Victoria in the nineteenth century and later
- politically radical perspectives on, and attitudes to, empire by Victorian women writers and activists
- representations of empire: literature, autobiography, journalism, the visual arts, digital media, etc.

This conference reflects the concerns of the **research strand “From Classicism to Victorianism”** of CETAPS (the Centre for English, Translation and Anglo-Portuguese Studies).

The standard conference fee is 80 euros. A reduced fee of 40 euros is available for students. The conference will be held in person at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Porto. All delegates are responsible for their own travel arrangements and accommodation.

Submissions should be sent by email to victoriaempire@letras.up.pt

Please organise your proposal into **two separate files**:

- a file containing the full title and a 200-250 word description of your paper;
- a file containing the author's data: name, affiliation, contact address, paper title and author's bio-note (150 words).

Please name these two documents as follows:

Surname_Name_Abstract_Empire

Surname_Name_AuthorInfo_Empire

Deadline for proposals: 15 June 2026

Notification of acceptance: 30 June 2026

Deadline for registration: 30 September 2026

More information available later at <https://womenandempire.wordpress.com/>

Executive Committee:

Jorge Bastos da Silva (coord.) | Ana Catarina Anjos | Cláudia Coimbra | Tânia Cerqueira

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