



## **'Full cause of weeping': Affective Failure in *The Queen* (2006) and *The Crown* (2019)**

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### **Abstract**

This article reads *The Crown*, Series Three, Episode Three, 'Aberfan', as an adaptation of *The Queen*, both of which were written by Peter Morgan. Each focuses on a crisis in public relations emerging from Elizabeth II's delayed reaction to a tragedy: the mining disaster in *The Crown* and the death of Princess Diana in *The Queen*. Both are double portraits, in which the monarch's affective failure is contrasted with the more humane response of the prime minister, Harold Wilson and Tony Blair respectively. And both texts explore the tension between private grief and public performance. By reading these texts in dialogue, their relevance to their contemporary contexts is magnified. *The Queen* uses Elizabeth II's nadir in public relations to comment on Blair's fall from grace as a result of the Iraq War, while 'Aberfan', by emphasising the avoidable nature of the disaster, comments on the Grenfell Tower fire of 2017. While neither text shrinks from criticising the monarch for her breakdown in empathy, the resonances between Aberfan and Grenfell allow the Queen's immediate and humane response in 2017 to redeem her delayed reactions in the past. This demonstrates the capacity of fictional texts to intervene in the popular perception of their subjects.

*Keywords:* *The Queen*, *The Crown*, royal biopic, affective failure

You think I'll weep  
No, I'll not weep:  
I have full cause of weeping; but this heart  
Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws,  
Or ere I'll weep.  
(*King Lear*, II.4.209-13)

In Series Three, Episode Four of Netflix's *The Crown* (2016–), Helena Bonham Carter's Princess Margaret comments on the ridiculousness of 'being filmed watching television, so that people might watch us watching television, on their own television at home'. What sounds like a biting dismissal of the reality show *Gogglebox* is in fact a comment on the BBC-funded documentary *Royal Family* (1969). The programme, produced in response to fears of the monarchy's declining relevance, was watched by 68% of the British population, and is now recognised as a watershed in public access to the royals.<sup>1</sup> In the words of the documentary's narrator, what had once been 'an impenetrable fortress, its inner workings hidden from view' was now offered up for public scrutiny. But in granting 'a peep behind the curtains', the documentary made a fundamental error. To quote *The Crown's* newspaper reporter, it failed to recognise that 'the strongest piece of armour in the monarchy's arsenal is its sense of mystery' (3:4 'Bubbikins').<sup>2</sup> It was, perhaps, in recognition of this truth that the royal family suppressed the documentary, which never appeared on television screens again.

The irony, of course, is that the following century saw a wave of biopics that the House of Windsor was unable to quash, in which actors playing its members were not only 'filmed watching television', but also eating, in bed, and at moments of great personal crisis. Margaret's observation thus accrues greater resonance, indicating the intrusions made by the royal biopic as a form.<sup>3</sup> The first screen depiction of a living sovereign was *The Queen* (2006), written by Peter Morgan, directed by Stephen Frears, and starring Helen Mirren. At first glance, it is surprising that such a depiction did not follow more closely upon the lifting of the Lord Chamberlain's decree in 1968, which enabled, for the first time, dramatic portrayals of the reigning monarch. But as Mark Lawson points out, 'it was fact that freed the way for fiction',<sup>4</sup> when Prince Charles gave a televised interview with Jonathan Dimbleby in 1994 and Diana with Martin Bashir the following year. An audience of 22.8 million tuned in for Diana's revelations about the 'three of us in this marriage': herself, Charles, and Camilla Parker-Bowles.<sup>5</sup> By likening her media following to 'a soap-opera'<sup>6</sup> Diana can be seen to 'invite [...] the political risk of dramatization',<sup>7</sup> a chain of causality clearly indicated by the screening of clips from the interview in *The Queen*.<sup>8</sup>

George Custen also indicates royal biopics’ tendency to focus on moments of ‘instability for the monarchy’,<sup>9</sup> and the Queen’s appearance on the silver screen might have been delayed for a few more years were it not for her daughter-in-law’s death, and her own belated and much-scrutinised response. Focusing on the associated public relations crisis, *The Queen* heralded a chain of films exploring similar moments of instability, such as *The King’s Speech* (2011) and *W.E.* (2011), about events surrounding the abdication of Edward VIII, and *Diana* (2013), about the Princess’s affair with Hasnat Khan. (An exception, the altogether fluffier *A Royal Night Out* (2015), joins Elizabeth and Margaret for a Victory in Europe Day romp around London.) Meanwhile, the small screen saw the Channel Four docudrama *The Queen: The Life of a Monarch* (2009), preceded by the licenced documentaries *Elizabeth R.* (1992) and *A Year with the Queen* (2007). With five episodes, each featuring a different actress and focusing on a significant moment from five decades of the Queen’s reign,<sup>10</sup> the docudrama shares strategies, if not prestige, with Netflix’s flagship series *The Crown*. The latter has been renewed for a total of six seasons, and will change cast three times, with Claire Foy, Olivia Colman, and Imelda Staunton each reigning for twenty episodes.

This article concentrates on two of these depictions, exploring Elizabeth II’s perceived affective failure in response to Diana’s death in *The Queen*, and in Season Three, Episode Three of *The Crown*, which concerns the 1966 collapse of a spoil tip in a Welsh mining village. ‘Aberfan’ is the third of a group of four episodes directed by Benjamin Caron; these are also the first episodes in which Colman stars. Writing in relation to the frequent cast changes in *The Queen: The Life of a Monarch*, Marta Minier describes how this ‘distancing, alienating approach’ precludes ‘the viewer’s easy identification of an actor with the portrayed personality’.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, while twenty episodes of *The Crown* made Claire Foy synonymous with the Queen in many viewers’ minds, Colman had not yet attained such familiarity after only three episodes.<sup>12</sup> This strangeness is heightened in the first episode of Season Three when postage stamps depicting the ‘young woman’ versus the ‘settled sovereign’ are offered for the audience’s comparison (3:1 ‘Olding’). The disruption occasioned by the change of cast enables the symbolic introduction of a third figure, inviting Mirren’s performance in *The Queen* to be read in dialogue with Colman’s.

Like the rest of *The Crown*, ‘Aberfan’ is shot in cinematic widescreen,<sup>13</sup> establishing a further, visual link to *The Queen*, and both are written by Peter Morgan. They are bridged by Morgan’s play *The Audience* (2013), in whose first West End production Mirren also starred. Much of *The Audience* consists of duologues for Elizabeth and her various prime ministers, in keeping with Morgan’s career-spanning interest in dual

biographies.<sup>14</sup> *The Queen* and ‘Aberfan’ are similarly legible as double portraits, in which the monarch is paired with Tony Blair and Harold Wilson respectively. Both focus on a concentrated time span of just over one week (signalled in both cases with title cards), in which the tension between the Queen’s public and private roles is stretched to breaking point. Finally, both foreground the relevance of their historical narratives to current events.<sup>15</sup> While *The Queen* uses its protagonist’s nadir in public appeal to comment on Blair’s own fall from grace as a result of the Iraq war, the avoidable disaster in ‘Aberfan’ can be connected to the Grenfell Tower fire of 2017, and the differing responses of the Queen and her then-Prime Minister. I have thus read ‘Aberfan’ as an unacknowledged adaptation of *The Queen*, a relationship whose recognition opens up new and rewarding insights.<sup>16</sup>

One such insight reveals how both texts engage gendered expectations specific to a female monarch, about how she might appropriately display her grief. As Sara Ahmed has noted, ‘emotions are associated with women, who are represented as ‘closer’ to nature, ruled by appetite, and less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgement’.<sup>17</sup> Yet *The Queen*’s Elizabeth recalls how this emotionality was subjugated through the strict lesson of ‘duty first, self second’ that she learned on her accession as ‘a girl’. This lesson is vividly realised in Season One, Episode Two of *The Crown*, where Claire Foy’s Elizabeth, newly fatherless, is stripped of her day clothes and dressed in state mourning by an aide. As the private body is subsumed into the public body, reminiscent of the transformation of her predecessor into ‘a virgin’ at the climax of *Elizabeth* (1998), the young queen reads a letter from her grandmother, which the audience hears in voiceover. Queen Mary expresses her condolences, not just for her son, but for ‘Elizabeth Mountbatten’, who has been ‘replaced by another person, Elizabeth Regina’. Hereafter, ‘the Crown [...] must always win’. Yet the crises of ‘Aberfan’ and *The Queen* demand the resurrection of Elizabeth Mountbatten, to shed a tear and pose for a photo, before disappearing again behind the crown, a process that Arlie Hochschild calls ‘emotion managing’. She defines this as ‘the action of wilfully managing emotion when the occasion calls for it’, noting the ‘outside resemblance’ of such a performance to ‘spontaneous feeling’.<sup>18</sup> In both narratives, Elizabeth’s failure to muster an appropriate response is compared unfavourably – and unfairly – to the more apparently expressive responses of her two prime ministers. But the odds are stacked in Harold and Tony’s favour: the transitory role of prime minister does not eclipse their private personae as fully as the crown does Elizabeth’s. Moreover, as men, their displays of emotion are exceptions to the repression demanded by toxic masculinity, and thus to be remarked upon. As a woman, meanwhile, Elizabeth Mountbatten is expected to weep, making the dry eye of

Elizabeth Regina seem aberrant.<sup>19</sup> In each text, the queen’s failure to comply with gender-specific expectations of grief provokes a crisis in public relations, as explored in more detail below. Such failures naturally make for marketable narratives, activating viewers’ memories of recent history and tantalising them with the prospect of glimpsing the ‘real’ sentiment behind the unsuccessful public show.

### **Elizabeth and the Prime Minister: a tale of different instincts**

The first sequence of *The Queen* depicts Tony Blair’s landslide victory in the 1997 general election, ‘introduced diegetically through television news footage’,<sup>20</sup> and culminating in his formal invitation to form a government. Once the legalities are over, the conversation turns to some rather strained pleasantries, including discussion of Elizabeth’s impending move to Balmoral. She quotes Queen Victoria’s commendation of a place where ‘all seems to breathe freedom and peace and to make one forget the world and its sad turmoils’. It is there that she is entrenched when Diana is killed, proving resistant to Tony’s attempts to engage her with the ‘sad turmoils’ that ensue. The attribution of the phrase to the Queen’s ‘great-great-grandmother’ connects Elizabeth’s response to Diana’s death with Victoria’s response to Albert’s, whereupon ‘the grieving queen retreated behind palace walls and concocted strict rules of engagement with the outside world’.<sup>21</sup> Yet the privacy of royal mourning was tolerated rather better in 1861 than in 1997, when the Palace’s insistent framing of Diana’s death as a ‘private matter’ appeared increasingly out-of-touch with the public lining the streets. Thus, Queen and country became polarised; the royal family was mystified by ‘hysterics carrying candles’, while the film’s Cherie Blair voices a popular impression of the so-called chief mourners as ‘emotionally retarded nutters’.<sup>22</sup>

In *The Queen*, as in ‘Aberfan’, this crisis in public engagement is shown to result from a series of wrongheaded instincts on Elizabeth’s part, in comparison to which the response of the Labour government appears more humane. In the film, the differing attitudes of Elizabeth and her prime minister are first witnessed during a telephone call the morning after Diana’s death. Each conducts the conversation from their respective study, Elizabeth’s formal, its walls lined with leather-bound volumes, Tony’s cluttered with toys and other paraphernalia of family life. Both are dressed in monochrome, Elizabeth in a severe black dress reminiscent of official mourning and Tony in a Newcastle strip and dark jogging bottoms, suggestive of a more approachable, less self-conscious response to grief. And significantly, both are interrupted in the course of the conversation. Cherie Blair tiptoes in, also dressed in monochrome, and provides a sympathetic audience as her husband carefully selects

his words. Prince Philip strides in, his footsteps clearly audible in the room’s resonant acoustic, his Highland regalia striking a discordant note against the subdued appearance of the other three. His presence is seen to influence Elizabeth’s behaviour, as her intransigence regarding an official statement or public memorial descends into performative sarcasm: ‘This is a family funeral, Mr Blair, not a fairground attraction’. She then terminates the call mid-way through Tony’s goodbye. Throughout the film, Philip consistently doubles down when Elizabeth appears to waver in her response, a pattern of influence seeded in the above scene. This reflects a stubborn popular tendency to diminish the authority of powerful women by representing them as pawns for their spouses. This is evident, for instance, in the *Metro*’s notorious ‘Just tell her Phil’ headline of May 2019, apparently exhorting Theresa May’s husband to force his wife’s resignation.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, as a man, the film’s Tony is influenced not by his spouse but by his advisors. These dispense far better counsel than Philip does to Elizabeth, giving him the appearance of better instincts.

The telephone call is bookended by two scenes in which the Prime Minister’s response to Diana’s death is scripted and performed. Before sunrise on the morning of the death, we see him on the phone discussing ‘some sort of statement’ with Press Secretary Alastair Campbell, who responds that ‘I’ve already started coming up with ideas’. When Tony exclaims that ‘she’s only been dead an hour’, Alastair asks whether ‘you’d rather I *didn’t* do my job?’ The message is clear: Tony is more empathetic than Elizabeth, his first concern to address the people, but his response is enabled by a bureaucratic machinery that cannot afford the luxury of quiet reflection. Indeed, when the camera pans down to Alastair’s notebook, the tentpoles of the speech are already in place: ‘Queen of Hearts’, ‘Beacon of Hope’ and ‘People’s Princess’. Following Tony’s vexed conversation with Elizabeth, we are shown news footage of him addressing the nation from outside Trimdon Church in his constituency, the grainy picture quality and square aspect ratio enabling the scene to oscillate in viewers’ minds with remembered footage from the time. Alastair watches smugly from the Downing Street press room as Tony delivers the phrase ‘People’s Princess’, his voice breaking as he adds ‘and that is how she will stay...how she will remain...in our hearts and in our memories forever’. When we cut back, it is not to Alastair but to a nauseated Robin Janvrin, the Queen’s Private Secretary, who finds the statement ‘a bit over the top’. Yet all around him, members of Palace staff are weeping, their reaction matched, as Belén Vidal has astutely observed, by ‘the inclusion of real footage of ITV newsreader Martyn Lewis [...] caught in a moment of spontaneous emotion [...]’.<sup>24</sup> Despite viewers being privy to Alastair’s cynicism (‘People’s Princess, mate! You owe

me!’), the scene is played for tears, forcing viewers to experience how ‘the ability to pretend with conviction can yield a genuinely sympathetic response’.<sup>25</sup>

In the end, Elizabeth is forced to give a statement of her own, and to concede the idea of a public funeral, but not before she has sacrificed further goodwill on the related issues of flowers and flag. While Tony is delivering his speech, other screens in the press room show the flowers piled outside Buckingham Palace, and Robin subsequently reveals that these have become so numerous as to impede the Changing of the Guard. Elizabeth’s automatic response is to ‘move them away’, literalising Queen Mary’s insistence, in *The Crown*, that ‘sentiment’ (represented by the flowers) must be ‘put to one side’ to make way for duty (the ritualised Changing of the Guard). Robin, however, points out that a simpler solution would be to ‘send the Guards through the North Gate’. Elizabeth agrees that this is ‘quite right’, but the camera savours her loss of composure. Drilled on the rightness of royal protocol, the demand for a more sympathetic, human response leaves her visibly at a loss.

This tension is then magnified when Elizabeth, Philip, and Charles discuss Tony’s suggestion, prompted by the results of an irate vox pops, that there should be a flag flying at half-mast above Buckingham Palace. Philip’s angry response is that ‘there *isn’t* a flag above Buckingham Palace. There’s the Royal Standard, which flies for one reason only – to denote the presence of the monarch. Since you’re here, the flagpole is bare, which is as it should be’. Charles counters this by asking whether ‘for some people, the Royal Standard is just a flag? And the flagpole being bare sends out the wrong signal?’ Charles voices the feelings of the ‘man in the street’ interviewed previously, who acknowledges that ‘the Queen’s not in residence today’ but still demands, ‘where the hell’s the flag?’ Both thus sublimate the Royal Standard’s denotative function to a flag’s universal meaning as a marker of respect. While Elizabeth is quick to dismiss this view, a previous shot of Diana’s coffin draped in the Royal Standard strengthens her claim in the viewer’s mind. During this exchange, which takes place on a rather bleak moorland picnic, Elizabeth’s corgis whimper for food that she has thrown to them, but inexplicably forbidden them to eat. As Philip confidently predicts that ‘in forty-eight hours this will have all calmed down’, an overhead shot shows the corgis rushing in, barking, to devour the food. The implication is that the people’s goodwill will not last indefinitely, and that Elizabeth is throwing scraps when she should be making genuine concessions. And indeed, a flag flew at half-mast above Buckingham Palace on the day of Diana’s funeral: not the Queen’s, but the Union Jack, acknowledging that the ex-HRH (Her Royal Highness) was now property of the nation.

‘Aberfan’ unfolds a similar narrative, contrasting Elizabeth’s reluctance to visit the scene of the disaster with the more prompt attendance of Harold Wilson, her brother-in-law Anthony Armstrong-Jones, and Prince Philip. The first ten minutes of the episode are set almost entirely in the Welsh mining village, but for a brief scene of Elizabeth writing her diary before the credits roll. Of the one hundred and sixteen children who lost their lives in the disaster, we follow a class of around thirty as they prepare to sing ‘All Things Bright and Beautiful’ in school assembly on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1966. The camera then singles out two children, a bespectacled girl and a golden-haired boy, to follow from school to the miners’ cottages and back to school the next day. As they practise for the performance, the soundscape blends their treble voices with the lamentations of string music, and with the sound of the incessant rainfall that saturated the spoil tip. On the morning of the disaster, we cut between the classroom and the mine, as the sinkhole opens and the supervisor watches in horror from the canteen as the landslide begins. As the children hide, screaming, beneath their desks, the last shot is of the teacher standing at the window as the slurry shatters the glass, reminiscent of the water smashing the portholes in James Cameron’s *Titanic*. We then cut to Harold receiving the news as, incongruously, he opens a hypermarket. When we cut back to Aberfan, miners and mothers are digging among the wreckage with their bare hands, discovering only exercise books and a child-sized pair of spectacles.

The subsequent wide shot of an opulent stateroom is thus calculated to emphasise Elizabeth’s disconnection from the world in which we have just been immersed. The rich reds and pinks of the upholstery are mirrored in Elizabeth’s jacquard suit, framing the monarch as ‘part of the furniture’ and foreshadowing her reluctance to leave the Palace. As she sits at her desk, Assistant Private Secretary Martin Chatteris breaks the news, talking quite literally over her head to Private Secretary Michael Adeane. Both are dressed in black three-piece suits, suggestive of the efficient bureaucracy that has drafted a statement of condolence as swiftly as Alastair did in *The Queen*. Requesting the use of an aircraft to transport Harold to the scene, Martin then ventures to ask whether Elizabeth was planning to visit herself. ‘What a question!’ exclaims Michael, and Elizabeth agrees: ‘The Crown visits hospitals, Martin, not the scenes of accidents’. By taking her cue from her Private Secretary (just tell her, Michael!), *The Crown*’s Elizabeth accedes to the same passive role as *The Queen*’s Elizabeth did in relation to Philip. This has, however, the fringe benefit of attributing some of her behaviour to misguided advice, in the face of which Martin advocates for a more personal response. He thus initiates a campaign that will be taken up by Harold, whose role parallels Tony’s in *The Queen*.



Before Harold's audience with Elizabeth, we follow him to Aberfan, an immediacy of response that compares once again to Tony's. The *mise-en-scène* recalls footage of the Blitz: darkness, smoke, the glare of searchlights, low-angle shots of men in helmets, fathers cradling the bodies of children recovered from the wreckage. The disaster is thus made to seem an anachronism in peacetime, maximising its horrors. Harold is visibly moved, blinking back tears as he watches the search efforts and passing a hand over his face in the privacy of his lodgings. It is a humanising departure from his characteristic male stoicism, recalling, for instance, Gordon Brown's unprecedented tears in an interview over the death of his infant daughter, credited with a 'watershed' in his public appeal.<sup>26</sup> Harold, dressed in black for his subsequent audience, seems almost like a grieving father himself, whereas Elizabeth's periwinkle blue is as incongruent as Philip's tweeds in *The Queen*. She argues, pragmatically, that her visit would paralyse the recovery efforts: 'The last thing emergency and rescue services need when they're working against the clock is the Queen turning up'. While this shows the practical concern of a woman who lived through the war, Harold emphasises the need to respond personally to a situation where an entire 'community is devastated.' Elizabeth responds with an icy veneer:

What precisely would you have me do?

Harold: Comfort people.

Elizabeth: Put on a show? The Crown doesn't do that.

Harold: I didn't say, "put on a show." I said, "comfort people."

By referring to herself in the third person, as she did with Martin, Elizabeth embraces her official role, presenting herself as marching in step with what 'the Crown' has historically done. Harold, conversely, demands that she separate her private from her public persona, to break with tradition in order to provide solace. The reference to 'put[ting] on a show' is illuminating: for Elizabeth, to show emotion is not to drop the mask, but to substitute one mask for another; not to reveal Elizabeth Mountbatten, but Elizabeth Regina's approximation of her. The mention of 'a show' recalls the dismissal of a public funeral as a 'fairground attraction' in *The Queen*, and Isobel Johnstone's discussion of that text is similarly pertinent here: the 'demand for a display of 'genuine' emotion [...] in fact translates as a preference for an alternative, more florid style of self-presentation'.<sup>27</sup> By abruptly terminating the audience, Elizabeth indicates her refusal to perform in this way. As Harold's footsteps recede down the corridor, she fusses with her three strands of pearls, clearly questioning her response, before the camera pans back to focus on the reverse of a group of photo frames. We are thus

reminded of the unbroken chain from Elizabeth’s father, who gave her the pearls, to her children, whose images occupy some of the frames. The juxtaposition recalls both the oppressive lineage governing Elizabeth’s behaviour, and the lineages so abruptly terminated in Aberfan, where photographs are all that remain.

Elizabeth’s responses to visits made by Anthony and Philip then suggest that where displays of emotion are concerned, she is not so much unwilling as incapable. Joining her sister and mother for breakfast at the Palace, Margaret describes her husband’s visit to Aberfan, and we cut between his Dante-esque wandering through the village, his recounting of the events to his wife on the telephone, and the third-hand narrative offered to her family. She speaks of Anthony’s visit to the hospital, ‘where he comforted a man holding his son’s school cap’, the kind of comfort Harold wishes that Elizabeth could provide. And she impresses upon her sister how ‘unimaginably awful’ the scene was: ‘miners used to digging for coal, now digging to reach their children’. The sequence ends with a rear shot of Margaret sitting on the edge of the bed, shoulders shaking, telephone in hand, which cuts to a sustained shot of Elizabeth’s impassive face, as she fails to muster any kind of response. The series consistently presents Margaret as a more emotional, more spontaneous foil to Elizabeth, a dualistic portrayal originating in George V’s designation of his elder daughter as ‘my pride’ and his younger ‘my joy’.<sup>28</sup> However, when Philip visits the scene, we witness a display of male emotion that serves to amplify Elizabeth’s failure of empathy. When he returns from the children’s funeral, his wife asks whether he wept, to which he replies, ‘anyone who heard that hymn today would not just have wept. They would have been broken into a thousand tiny pieces’. ‘That hymn’ is ‘Jesus, Lover of my Soul’, sung by the children’s families as the camera cuts from Philip’s face to an aerial shot of the scores of identical coffins, arranged in the shape of a cross. Many viewers may not have made it through this scene dry-eyed, confirming Philip’s statement. Coupled with his reference to ‘a thousand tiny pieces’, the close-up of Elizabeth’s uncomprehending face frames her as a Lear figure, whose ‘heart / shall break into a hundred thousand flaws / or ere I’ll weep.’

### Public show and private sorrow

In *The Queen*, Elizabeth eventually capitulates to the pressure for a public display, after a last-ditch attempt to persuade Tony that popular hysteria will give way to ‘a period of restrained grief, and sober, private mourning’. Her myopia is bluntly symbolised by her polishing her glasses during the conversation, yet she cannot overlook the increasingly hostile headlines, which force her to concede that she may ‘no longer

understand [her] people’. She thus accedes to Tony’s demands that she pay her respects at Diana’s coffin and give a televised speech, scenes that form a continuous sequence culminating in the funeral. As Elizabeth visits the flower tributes, the cards chart the increasing anti-monarchist sentiment of the previous week, as ‘RIP Diana, we love you’ and, in a child’s hand, ‘I miss you Princess Diana’ give way to ‘you were too good for them’, ‘they didn’t deserve you’ and ‘they have your blood on their hands’. Reaction shots show Elizabeth’s troubled response, but when she turns to the waiting crowds, it is with a benign smile. Women of Diana’s age stare impassively at Elizabeth, leaving her wrongfooted, before she reaches a young girl clutching flowers, and asks ‘would you like me to place those for you?’ ‘No,’ the girl replies bluntly, and we cringe at Elizabeth’s humiliation. Then, after a pause: ‘these are for you’. ‘For me?’ Elizabeth responds. ‘Thank you.’ Then, to the crowd, quietly: ‘Thank you very much,’ as she recognises the forgiveness that she has been extended. A solo violin plays as Elizabeth proceeds past women of her own generation, who curtsy with tears in their eyes. The scene is affecting in its poignancy, as the film’s implicit endorsement of the flowers’ more hostile messages dissolves before ‘the powerful influence of the monarch’s mere presence’.<sup>29</sup>

Barriers are, however, re-erected in the following scene, which employs a series of distancing techniques to frame Elizabeth’s tribute to Diana as a bravura performance rather than a heartfelt statement. We see Alastair scribbling notes on his copy of the speech, before Robin relays the proposed addition: ‘What I say to you now, as your Queen, *and as a grandmother*, I say from my heart’. The line as delivered by the historical Queen attempts to combine her two roles, claiming that public statement also reflects private sentiment. But by suggesting that ‘as a grandmother’ was Alastair’s intervention, the film severs the two personas, repositioning the speech as a straightforward discharging of obligation. While the similar attribution of ‘People’s Princess’ to Alastair had no such impact on Tony’s speech, the intervention is compounded, in this case, by other strategies emphasising the statement’s constructed nature. Elizabeth is viewed through the filter of a recording screen, her lines punctuated by reaction shots of Philip, Charles, and, from their respective homes, the Queen Mother (enjoying a Martini), Tony and Cherie. Just before the speech reaches its denouement, an overhead shot reminds us of the recording paraphernalia, while Elizabeth’s expression of gratitude for Diana’s life is undermined by being glimpsed on an autocue moments before its delivery. The overwhelming impression is voiced by Cherie: ‘she doesn’t mean a word of this.’ But for Tony, this isn’t the point: ‘what she’s doing is extraordinary. *That’s* how you survive’, confirming that the purpose of the speech is less self-expression than self-preservation.

The funeral scene crystallises the presentation of Elizabeth as a consummate actress by juxtaposing shots of her with historical footage of real-world actors, including Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, as they arrive at Westminster Abbey. We are reminded that ‘Elizabeth’ is a role played by Mirren, whose celebrity rivals that of Kidman and Cruise, and that the character’s (restrained) grief is itself an act, outweighed by the raw emotion betrayed by the crowd. In stark contrast to this layered performance is historical footage of the ‘real’ Diana. She is captured in the moment of becoming hyperreal, her iconography taking on a life of its own as her physical body is buried. As Elizabeth dabs unconvincingly at a dry eye, Diana turns to stare straight at the camera, as though to confront and expose her mother-in-law’s disingenuousness.

Viewers have, however, privileged knowledge of an earlier tribute, which took place in the grounds of Balmoral, safe from the public eye. Early on in the film, the royal family watched news reportage of Charles’s half-hour vigil at his ex-wife’s coffin, punctuated by Philip’s tone-deaf comments on the appearance of a fourteen-point stag on the estate. The juxtaposition frames the stag as a symbol for Diana, picking up on Charles Spencer’s eulogising of his sister as ‘the most hunted person of the modern age’.<sup>30</sup> The stage materialises when Elizabeth is waiting for a mechanic by a broken-down Land Rover, the only time that she is seen weeping, and enables a generous interpretation of her tears as symptomatic of grief rather than self-pity. Peter Morgan describes the moment as ‘unprecedented – almost supernatural. No stag ever willingly comes this close to humans’,<sup>31</sup> and Elizabeth’s response mingles admiration (‘Oh, you beauty!’) with concern for the stag’s proximity. Echoing her description of Diana as having paid ‘a high enough price for exposure to the press’, as though her death was of her own making, she shoos the animal in exasperation as shots ring out in the distance. The stag disappears – this time – only to wander onto a neighbouring estate, where Philip reports its death at the hands of a commercial guest.

Elizabeth Ford and Deborah Mitchell mine this moment for its symbolism: “‘To be a queen of people’s hearts,” as Diana puts it [in her *Panorama* interview], to leave the enclosure behind, is to bask in adoration and to risk destruction’.<sup>32</sup> Yet Ford and Mitchell overestimate the safety of the ‘enclosure’, where Philip and the Princes had their sights set on the stag; had it remained, it would have joined the hunting trophies lining the walls. By this token, Diana fled interment by the establishment, rather than turning her back on a safe haven. Similarly questionable is Ford and Mitchell’s equation of ‘the stalking and killing of the animal’ with Elizabeth’s ‘epiphany about her own position’, since by their own admission the death does not occur until she has ‘decided against her preference for stoicism’.<sup>33</sup> It does not determine future behaviour so much as it enables past offences to be redeemed, as Elizabeth rushes to pay her

respects with an immediacy that she denied Diana. The stag hangs from its hind legs in a refrigeration room, and the camera slowly pans down its inert body. ‘Isn’t he a beauty?’ asks the gamekeeper, painfully recalling Elizabeth’s previous epithet. She then spots the head, lying off to one side, and sees that ‘he was wounded’. As the gamekeeper describes the miles of tracking before the animal could be humanely dispatched, Elizabeth touches the wound reverently, a symphony of quiet emotion playing over her face. ‘Let’s hope he didn’t suffer too much,’ she breathes, patently referring to Diana, since this cannot be true of the stag. When she turns back to the gamekeeper, she is equal to congratulating the hunter, and can proceed to London for her ‘grand performance’, having offered Diana a private funeral after all.

Similarly, in *The Crown*, Elizabeth’s private listening to ‘Jesus, Lover Of My Soul’ summons the emotion absent from her public performance. Her belated visit is prompted by a newspaper leak from the Labour party attributing her absence to establishment disinterest in ‘the whole working class’. The cut from Michael and Martin breaking the news, to Elizabeth’s diary, which reads ‘Saturday[:] Aberfan’, frames the visit less as a tribute to the community than an attempt to salvage her reputation, much like the televised speech in *The Queen*. On the plane, Martin reminds Elizabeth that ‘this is Wales, not England. A display of emption would not just be considered appropriate – it’s expected’. He thus reads her stoicism in national terms, emphasising that while a stiff upper lip may be quintessentially English, her Celtic subjects demand to see the woman behind the regent. Despite the clarity of these instructions, on surveying the wreckage Elizabeth can muster no tears. The use of the same locations visited by Harold, Anthony, and Philip emphasises the tardiness of her response, as scenes of chaos become silent backdrops for a visit that is no longer relevant. She proceeds between short lines of locals and officials, shaking hands as though this were any other state occasion, before visiting the former mortuary, now restored to its normal function as a church. A rear shot from behind a crucifix captures Elizabeth at the altar, recalling a view lampooned by Tony in *The Queen*: ‘she believes that it’s *God’s will* that she is who she is’. ‘Aberfan’ sees Elizabeth cleaving to this belief, while its rejection by a small majority in a Mass-Observation survey contemporaneous with the disaster<sup>34</sup> reflects a growing view that privilege should be earned. Clearly, in this instance, manners maketh monarch, and reporters wielding cameras are waiting at the scene to scrutinise the appropriateness of Elizabeth’s grief. She is handed a wreath to place on a grave already laden with flowers, an implicitly superfluous gesture that compares unfavourably to Philip’s presence at the interment. She then visits one of the miners’ houses, where the sole survivor from a group of siblings offers her flowers and a card ‘from the remaining children of Aberfan’, recalling the olive

branch extended by the young girl in *The Queen*. Elizabeth then approximates the expected display by busying herself with a handkerchief on the doorstep of the cottage as flashbulbs explode around her. The entire visit, delayed by more than a week, lasts ‘approximately two-and-a-half hours’.

Following an audience with Harold to which I shall shortly turn, Elizabeth listens to a professional recording of the hymn, which naturally lacks the immediacy of the families’ rendition. A wide shot takes in both record player and listener, seated in anticipation, before cutting to a rear shot of Elizabeth from behind the player, recalling the composition of the shot in the church. As Louis Giannetti observes, ‘the less we see [of the actor’s face], the more mysterious and inaccessible [they] will seem’,<sup>35</sup> and Elizabeth’s unknowability is compounded by the transition from the hymn to an extradiegetic soundtrack, which symbolically isolates her in a separate soundscape. We then cut to Elizabeth’s face where we linger for the thirty seconds it takes for a single tear to tremble, gather weight, and fall. As the credits roll, an aerial shot of ‘the remaining children’ in the school playground emphasises their decimation, demanding of the viewer greater emotion than Elizabeth was able to muster. Despite the poignancy of her private tribute, we are left wondering whether she was weeping for Aberfan, or for what she perceives as her own inadequacy.

### Failure, regret, and redemption

In each text, a final audience with the prime minister guides the viewer in their interpretation of the events that have just unfolded. Karen Hollinger’s diagnosis of *The Queen* is as true of ‘Aberfan’: the parallelism of the weekly audiences provides ‘a framing device’ that shows ‘the transformation of [...] views’,<sup>36</sup> as well as the magnitude of the intervening days. *The Crown*’s Elizabeth impresses on Harold that ‘the people of Aberfan deserved a prompt response [...] a display of compassion, of empathy, from their Queen. [...] They got nothing. I dabbed a bone-dry eye and by some miracle no one noticed’. As Johnstone writes in a different context, while the reporters in Aberfan are ‘taken in by showy and implicitly ‘inferior’ performances’, the viewer is invited into a ‘conspiratorial relationship’, in which Elizabeth reveals herself to have been fundamentally unmoved.<sup>37</sup> She charges herself with a failure of empathy, and connects this to related instances throughout her life, each of which Harold explains away. When visiting hospitals during the Blitz, she was a young girl, he points out; when Queen Mary died, Elizabeth had had time to prepare. She then confesses to affective failure on the birth of her first child, ‘a moment of such significance for every mother’ that her lack of response amounts to an implicit failure

to perform her gender correctly. Rather than acknowledge that ‘the woman’, in Laertes’ phrase, is ‘out’, having been subsumed into the genderless institution, Harold skirts the issue. Their shared role, he suggests, is to ‘calm more crises than we create. No-one needs hysteria in a head of state.’ A pause creates the sense of Elizabeth filing this away for future reference. This is a moment ironised by the series’ dialogue with *The Queen*, whose events radically disprove Harold’s claim that ‘your absence of emotion is a blessing’.

In connecting her lack of tears to ‘something wrong with me’, something ‘defective’ or ‘missing’, *The Crown*’s Elizabeth grapples for the vocabulary to describe issues of neurodiversity, issues in which contemporary viewers are significantly better versed. The modern understanding of neurodiversity being less developed in 2006, when *The Queen* was released, the film attempts a more straightforward equation of Elizabeth’s poor emotional intelligence with the consequences of her upbringing. ‘Duty first, self second,’ she tells Tony. ‘That’s all I’ve ever known. [...] But I can see that the world has changed and one must “modernise”’. *The Queen* thus closes with an affirmation that Tony has helped Elizabeth bridge the generational divide and ‘adapt to a modern conception of the performance of royalty’,<sup>38</sup> (Johnstone 2016, 68), which makes a virtue of ‘wear[ing] one’s heart on one’s sleeve’. Yet the dialogue with ‘Aberfan’ prompts a re-consideration of *The Queen*, one that resists its purported tale of private grief versus public show. For Mirren’s Elizabeth seems unable to weep even in her most intimate moments, such as when watching from behind a half-closed door as Charles breaks the news to her grandsons, confirming the ubiquity of the ‘public body’ even within the ‘private sphere’.<sup>39</sup> Such moments confirm the self-reported affective failure in *The Crown*, and suggest that Elizabeth’s emphasis, in *The Queen*, on ‘restrained grief’ and ‘private mourning’ conceals a systemic breakdown in compassion. But this is an angle that the film’s survival narrative lacks the scope, or the inclination, to explore. The final scene has Elizabeth clad in purple, symbolising the restoration of her stability as sovereign, ‘the momentary hiccup that was ‘Diana’ already long forgotten’.<sup>40</sup>

In *The Queen*, the final audience between Elizabeth and Tony is used instead to look to the future and to anticipate the Prime Minister’s own nadir in public appeal. In a late-stage addition not included in the published script, Elizabeth bluntly surmises the reason behind Tony’s public support for her position: ‘Because you saw those headlines and you thought, one day that might happen to me.’ Undeterred by Tony’s blustering, she makes an accurate prophesy: ‘And it will, Mr Blair. Quite suddenly, and without warning.’ The reference, of course, is to the vilification of Blair when he led the country to war in Iraq in 2003, an event that is in the characters’ future but the audience’s past. The cited weapons of mass destruction failing to materialise, Blair

appeared at best George Bush’s puppet, at worst a war criminal, justifying his place in a 2002 opinion poll among the ‘100 worst Britons’.<sup>41</sup> (Interestingly, the sovereign herself was also included, suggesting lingering resentment at her mishandling of the response to Diana’s death). In an interview, Morgan acknowledged the existence of hindsight, stating that ‘while I was writing [Tony] being a star, he was busy being a warmonger’, but claimed to ‘resist’ being too heavily informed by ‘the knowledge that I had later’.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, by emphasising the pertinence of her advice (*‘I’m the one supposed to be advising you’*), Morgan turns Elizabeth into a Sybil, who diagnoses with ruthless accuracy the precariousness and ultimate brevity of Tony’s popularity.

When the conclusion to *The Queen* is read in dialogue with ‘Aberfan’, it imbues the events of that episode with similar powers of foreshadow. Harold’s private secretary Marcia Falkender suggests that the tip’s collapse could have been avoided had it complied with regulations; as it was, it contained too much coal (300,000 cubic yards) and was five times taller than the recommended maximum height. Contrary to the official version of the catastrophe as ‘an accident caused by unprecedented rainfall’, for the community it was ‘a disaster waiting to happen, and no-one listened’. This recalls with great poignancy the Grenfell fire of 2017, which claimed seventy-two lives. Like the Aberfan disaster, the fire had an immediate catalyst – the faulty wiring in a resident’s refrigerator – but raged because of a combustible combination of insulation and cladding that failed to comply with building regulations, but which saved the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea some £300,000.<sup>43</sup> Grenfell is, then, to ‘Aberfan’ what the Iraq War was to *The Queen*: a contemporary horror that retrospectively informs the text. It demonstrates the power of historical film to ‘say as much about the present in which it was made as about the past in which it was set’.<sup>44</sup>

The credits to ‘Aberfan’ reveal that ‘according to those close to her, the Queen’s delayed response to the disaster remains her biggest regret as sovereign’, and that ‘since 1966, she has returned to the village more than any other member of the royal family’. By adapting the narrative of *The Queen* in ‘Aberfan’, Morgan creates a sense of history repeating itself, and of irony that such regrets did not prompt a timelier response to Diana’s death. The remorse he attributes to the Queen also recalls feelings expressed by Theresa May on the anniversary of the Grenfell fire. Writing in the *Evening Standard*, she asserted the longevity of her engagement, describing a visit made the day after the disaster as ‘the first of a number of trips’. Like the Queen’s returns to the mining village, May’s visits seem designed to compensate for an ‘initial response’ that she admitted to be ‘not good enough’. For while she attended the site of the disaster more punctually than the Queen did Aberfan, her response was similarly lacking in the human touch. May recognised, belatedly, that ‘the residents



of Grenfell Tower needed to know that those in power recognised and understood their despair. And I will always regret that by not meeting them that day, it seemed as though I didn't care'. While May insisted that 'that was never the case', her inhumane response has continued to haunt her, colouring the reception of her emotional resignation speech the following year.<sup>45</sup> Writing in the *Huffington Post*, Minnie Rahman, for instance, refused to 'waste sympathy on a prime minister who failed to shed a single tear in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire'.<sup>46</sup> Like *The Crown's* Elizabeth, May showed 'a bone-dry eye'; the difference was that people noticed. Having failed to respond appropriately at Grenfell, May's subsequent reaction is seen as crocodile tears, 'a form of manipulation', indicating the 'no-win situation' in which women often find themselves where displays of emotion are concerned.<sup>47</sup>

In emphasising the similarities between the Aberfan and Grenfell tragedies, Morgan allows the Queen's compassionate response of 2017 to redeem her earlier one, while May appears condemned to repeat the sovereign's missteps. Within two days of the fire, the Queen did indeed visit a rest centre for survivors, holding personal conversations that left her visibly close to tears.<sup>48</sup> While May hid behind concerns for her personal safety, the Queen offered her person as 'focal point at a moment of considerable pain', proving, in the words of the BBC's Royal Correspondent, that the 'monarchy [...] has learned from its mistakes of the past'.<sup>49</sup> The quiet sympathy the Queen displayed must surely be ranked alongside the more 'high profile events', such as the Diamond Jubilee and royal weddings, imagined to catapult her from among the worst Britons to the best were an opinion poll to be conducted today.<sup>50</sup> Similarly influential are biopics such as *The Queen* and *The Crown*, which serve as 'critical commentary on the performance of the real Queen', shaping her subjects' reactions.<sup>51</sup> These texts do not hide from uncomfortable truths: that 'the people of Aberfan deserved a prompt response', as did those touched by the death of Diana. They deserved 'a display of compassion, of empathy from their Queen' – but the people of Grenfell got one.

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Yeatman, Dominic. ‘Just tell her Phil: Top Tories urge husband to persuade May to quit.’ *The Metro*, 24 May 2019, 1, 4.

## Filmography

*The Crown. Series One*. Written by Peter Morgan, performances by Claire Foy, John Lithgow, Matt Smith and Vanessa Kirby. Netflix, 2016.

*The Crown. Series Three*. Written by Peter Morgan, performances by Olivia Colman, Jason Watkins, Tobias Menzies and Helena Bonham Carter. Netflix, 2019.

*The Crown. Series Four*. Written by Peter Morgan, performances by Olivia Colman, Gillian Anderson, Tobias Menzies and Helena Bonham Carter. Netflix, 2020.

*The Queen*. Directed by Stephen Frears, performances by Helen Mirren, Michael Sheen, James Cromwell and Alex Jennings, Pathe Productions Limited, 2006.

## About the Author

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Babilas, Dorota. ‘Reshaping Gloriana: Representations of the British Queens in *Victoria* (2016) and *The Crown* (2016).’ In: Laurence Raw (ed.), *Adapted from the Original: Essays on the Value and Values of Works Remade for a New Medium*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2018, 67-81 (69); Bastin, Giselle. ‘Filming the Ineffable: Biopics of the British Royal Family.’ *alb: Auto/Biography Studies* 24:1 (2009), 34-52 (38).

<sup>2</sup> All unattributed quotations are taken from *The Queen* (2006) or *The Crown*, Series Three, Episode Three, ‘Aberfan’ (2019).

<sup>3</sup> For clarity, first names will be used to refer to the fictional characters, and surnames or titles to refer to the historical persons.

<sup>4</sup> Lawson, Mark. ‘One Is Ready for One’s Close-up.’ *The Guardian*, 8 September 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2006/sep/08/3>. Date accessed: 15 June 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Telegraph Reporters. ‘Revealed: The most watched TV programmes of the last 80 years.’ *The Telegraph*, 31 October 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/31/princess-diana-interview-among-most-watched-tv-programmes-of-the/>. Date accessed: 15 June 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Bashir, Martin. ‘The Panorama Interview’ [transcript]. *BBC*, n. d. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/politics97/diana/panorama.html>. Date accessed: 15 June 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Lawson.

<sup>8</sup> Belén Vidal concurs with this assessment, noting how the publicity attached to Charles and Diana’s divorce served to redefine ‘the boundaries of privacy’, licencing portrayals – such as Morgan’s – that would previously have been sanctioned. Vidal, Belén. ‘Morgan/Sheen: the compressed frame of impersonation.’ In: Tom Brown and Belén Vidal (eds.), *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2014, 140-158 (149-150).

<sup>9</sup> Custen, George F. *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed History*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992 (315).

<sup>10</sup> Minier, Marta. ‘Joining History to Celebiography and Heritage to Documentary on the Small Screen: Spotlight on the Content of the Form in the Metamediatic Royal Bio-docudrama *The Queen*.’ In: Marta Minier and Maddalena Pennacchia (eds.), *Adaptation, Intermediality and the British Celebrity Biopic*. Oxford: Routledge, 2016, 79-101 (84-85).

<sup>11</sup> Idem (85).

<sup>12</sup> Michael Sheen, by contrast, had already portrayed Blair in *The Deal* (2003), Morgan’s television drama about Blair and Gordon Brown’s negotiations for leadership of the Labour Party. This might function to make actor and historical figure interchangeable for viewers of both productions.

<sup>13</sup> Johnston, Trevor. ‘Drama Queen.’ *Sight and Sound*, December 2016, 46-48 (47).

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, *The Deal* and *Frost/Nixon* (2008).

<sup>15</sup> The trailer for Series Three of *The Crown* features Bob Dylan’s ‘The Times They Are A-Changin’’, inviting a broader consideration of the 1960s setting as the beginnings of our contemporary moment. Thus the sibling rivalry between Elizabeth and her younger sister in Episode Two, ‘Margaretology’, evokes the manufactured media feud between Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge and the former Duchess of Sussex, while the abdication crisis recalled in Episode Eight, ‘Dangling Man’, gains unexpected resonances in light of the Sussexes’ resignation as official members of the royal family. Lastly, the sexual abuse accusations levelled at Prince Andrew, and his connection to Jeffrey Epstein, cannot but overshadow the innocent scenes of him and Prince Edward bouncing on space-hoppers in Episode Seven, ‘Moondust’.

<sup>16</sup> While it is crucial to acknowledge the differences in media between the short-form drama of *The Queen* and the long-form drama of *The Crown*, the concentrated time-span of ‘Aberfan’ enables it to function as a self-contained narrative, lending weight to my reading of the episode as an unacknowledged adaptation of the film.

<sup>17</sup> Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Second Edition. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014 (3).

<sup>18</sup> Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. California: University of California Press, 2012 (112).

<sup>19</sup> Evidence for this double-standard is provided by a 1976 study by Norma Wikler cited by Hochschild, which discovered that university ‘students expected women professors to be warmer and more supportive than male professors; given these expectations, proportionally more women professors were perceived as cold’. Hochschild (114).

<sup>20</sup> Vidal (144).

<sup>21</sup> Bastin (38).

<sup>22</sup> The description of the public as ‘hysterics’ recalls the criticisms of ‘the inauthenticity of grief for Diana’ analysed by Little, Graham. *The Public Emotions: From Mourning to Hope*. Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation Books, 1999 (4). As Ahmed explains, such criticisms ‘are also by implication critiques of femininity and hysteria, in which women in particular are seen as having been ‘taken in’’. Ahmed (14).

<sup>23</sup> Yeatman, Dominic. ‘Just tell her Phil: Top Tories urge husband to persuade May to quit.’ *The Metro*, 24 May 2019, 1, 4 (1).

<sup>24</sup> Vidal (147).

<sup>25</sup> Johnstone, Isobel. ‘Reframing the Royal Performance: Helen Mirren’s ‘Transformative Acting’ and Celebrity Self-presentation in *The Queen*.’ In: Marta Minier and Maddalena Pennacchia (eds.), *Adaptation, Intermediality and the British Celebrity Biopic*. Oxford: Routledge, 2016, 65-78 (73).

<sup>26</sup> Dejevsky, Mary. ‘Tears, jokes and the humanising of Gordon Brown.’ *The Independent*, 14 February 2010, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tears-jokes-and-the-humanising-of-gordon-brown-1899132.html>. Date accessed: 4 September 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Johnstone (72).

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, Series One, Episode Eight, ‘Pride and Joy’, and Series Three, Episode Ten, ‘Cri de Coeur’.

<sup>29</sup> Ford, Elizabeth, and Deborah C. Mitchell. *Royal Portraits in Hollywood*. Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2009 (299).

<sup>30</sup> Spencer, Charles. ‘The Most Hunted Person of the Modern Age.’ *The Guardian*, 4 May 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2007/may/04/greatspeeches>. Date accessed: 19 June 2020. Morgan revises this symbolism in *The Crown* Season Four, Episode Two: ‘The Balmoral Test’, bolstering my reading of *The Crown* as an appropriation of *The Queen*. Diana, true to her naming after the Goddess of the Hunt, corrects Prince Philip’s assessment of the wind direction, enabling him to dispatch an Imperial stag wounded by his neighbour’s commercial guest. This contrasts with the hopelessness at blood sports demonstrated by the previous visitor, Margaret Thatcher, and secures Philip’s approval of Diana as Charles’s future wife. Charles receives Philip’s verdict in the hanging room, intercut with a phone call with Camilla in which he bemoans his father’s ‘oblivious[ness] to the grotesque symbolism...it might as well have been me strung up and skinned’. In counterpoint to *The Queen*, this episode establishes Charles, rather than Diana, as the quarry. However, Charles Spencer’s understanding of Diana as less hunter than hunted is echoed in the episode’s final transition. As the stag’s head is mounted on the wall at Balmoral, we cut to a London street, where members of the press, having presumably caught the scent of her upcoming engagement, pursue Diana with flashbulbs as guns.

<sup>31</sup> Morgan, Peter. *The Queen*. London: Faber, 2006 (71).

<sup>32</sup> Ford and Mitchell (298).

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem. Karen Hollinger uses Morgan’s production notes for *The Queen* to make a related argument: that the stag ‘represent[s] the monarchy’s need to figure out a way to survive into the media-saturated contemporary period’, yet the final image of the animal’s headless corpse is less suggestive of survival than of execution. If we insist on reading the stag as a metaphor for the Queen, then this image is legible only as an unsubtle plea for a republic. See Hollinger, Karen. *Biopics of Women*. London: Routledge, 2020 (72).

<sup>34</sup> Bastin (37).

- <sup>35</sup> Gianetti, Louis. *Understanding Movies*, Thirteenth Edition. London: Pearson Education, 2014 (74).
- <sup>36</sup> Hollinger (71).
- <sup>37</sup> Johnstone (73).
- <sup>38</sup> Idem (68).
- <sup>39</sup> Minier (93). Her first encounter with the stag is the sole exception, but as aforementioned, it is unclear whether she is weeping for Diana or for her own unpopularity.
- <sup>40</sup> Morgan (101).
- <sup>41</sup> Minier, Marta, and Maddalena Pennacchia. ‘Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Biopic: An Introduction.’ In: Marta Minier and Maddalena Pennacchia (eds.), *Adaptation, Intermediality and the British Celebrity Biopic*. Oxford: Routledge, 2016, 1-32 (23).
- <sup>42</sup> Novak, Julia and Werner Huber. ‘Inaccurate but Truthful’: Q&A with screenwriter Peter Morgan.’ *European Journal of Life Writing* 4 (2015), n. pag.
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- <sup>50</sup> Minier and Pennacchia (23).
- <sup>51</sup> Johnstone (66). In an interview, Morgan expressed discomfort with the interpretation of the film as a ‘love letter to the queen’, claiming that ‘she wasn’t nice to anybody’ in his screenplay (Novak and Huber). While claiming to be neither a republican nor a monarchist himself, Morgan stated that the director, Stephen Frears, was kept awake at night by the idea that the film was responsible for a zenith in the monarchy’s popularity.