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CHAPTER 1: Monarchy in Relation to National Identity and National Pride

1. 1 Introduction

In Britain, 2012 was "the year of the Jubilympics", as Britain celebrated Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee, and hosted the Olympic Summer Games. On Friday July 27th, 2012, an estimated worldwide audience of 900 million people watched the opening ceremony of the London Olympics. The artistic spectacle, displaying the host nation's culture, dealt with Britain's Industrial Revolution, National Health Service, literary heritage, and, especially, popular music. Prior to her arrival in the Olympic Stadium, Queen Elizabeth appeared in a short film with James Bond actor Daniel Craig. Many Britons were elated at this unexpected and witty spoof. In the following three weeks, Team Great Britain collected sixty-five medals, making these Games the most successful since 1908. After the Games, a research poll showed that nearly three quarters of the nation admitted to a huge sense of national pride (Freeview-web). Only five years earlier, it was concluded that there had been an ongoing decline in British national pride since the beginning of the 1980s (Tilley 661). Obviously, at least for the time being, the Games had caused a change of heart.

In November 2012, a poll carried out by Ipsos MORI revealed that nine in ten people in Britain were satisfied with Queen Elizabeth II (Ipsos-web). Fifteen years earlier, after the sudden death of Princess Diana, only five in ten Britons had been in favour of the Queen (Worcester-web). The docudrama film *The Queen*, released in 2006, shows the struggle the royal family experienced in trying to deal with Diana's death, at a time when the country seemed to be consumed by hysteria. *The Queen* not only was a real box office success, but it also won Academy Awards, BAFTA Awards and Golden Globes. The film, generally considered to be meant as a rehabilitation of the Queen, on the one hand exposes the

Windsors as having grown out of touch with the people. Yet, it also creates understanding for their behaviour. *The Queen* thus paved the way for two other – flattering – films on British royalty, being *The Young Victoria* (2009), and the four-time Academy Award-winning *The King's Speech* (2010). This thesis will show that these three high-quality English heritage films, belonging to a new generation of royal bio-pics, have subjected their protagonists to the phenomenon of "Dianafication": that is, among other things, they not only portray the monarch's ineffable and all but impossible responsibilities, they also expose the monarch's self-reflection and vulnerability. Thus, they function as "cultural ambassadors" of the British Monarchy and exemplars of a culture fascinated by the failings of celebrities.

1. 2 Theoretical Framework Nationalism

National identity is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "a sense of a nation as a cohesive whole, as represented by (the maintenance of) distinctive traditions, culture, linguistic or political features, etc." (OED). The phenomenon of national pride is closely related to national identity. National pride can be measured and presented in graphs. Surveys ask the inhabitants of a country to what extent they are proud of different aspects of their country, such as democracy, social security, and so on.

In *Imagined Communities* (1983), a central text on nationalism, Benedict Anderson defines the "nation" as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign". This community is *imagined* as, even in the smallest nation, people cannot know or meet all their fellow-members. Still, the "image of their communion" lives in the mind of each of them. The nation is thought to be *limited* because it always borders on other nations, and *sovereign* because this concept was created in the age of Enlightenment and Revolution, when the legitimacy of the realm as divinely-ordained became seriously disputed.

The nation is imagined as a *community*, because it is always thought of as a "deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 6-7). In order to understand nationalism, Anderson aligns it with the two large cultural systems that preceded it: the religious community and the dynastic realm. Both were once taken for granted. All the great religious communities were imaginable as being cosmically central, because they linked a sacred language to a super-terrestrial power. In the dynastic realm, the legitimacy of Kingship was derived from divinity. The automatic legitimacy of sacral monarchy slowly declined in the seventeenth century. In England, for example, King Charles Stuart I was beheaded in the first revolution in the modern world, after which the country was ruled by a plebeian Protector for eleven years.

1. 3 Nationalism in Great Britain

In *Britons - Forging the Nation 1707 - 1837*, Linda Colley borrows Anderson's definition of nation to discuss the invention of Great Britain in 1707, in the moment when the Act of Union was passed by the Parliament in Westminster, linking Scotland to England and Wales, to be "one united kingdom by the name of Great Britain" (11). Colley states that, though superimposed onto much older alignments and loyalties, such as the national identities of England, Wales, and Scotland, after 1707 the British gradually defined themselves as a single people. This was not the result of political or cultural consensus at home, but of the wars they fought against hostile "others", being not only the French, but also colonial peoples. In other words, the British decided who they were by reference to who and what they were not. Tilley and Heath state that, during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the forced British national identity gathered momentum.They provide three causes for this. Firstly, Catholic France still represented an undesired "otherness". Secondly, the British Empire was able to celebrate many economic and military successes. Thirdly, the three nations, through Protestantism,

shared religious and cultural traditions. In the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, Britishness strengthened by the awareness of having common institutions such as the welfare state, liberty, and parliamentary democracy. In 1922, the BBC was founded, with its main responsibility to provide impartial public service broadcasting in the entire United Kingdom. Moreover, Britain felt united in waging war against Germany in two world wars.

McCrone states that British national identity weakened with the end of the British Empire, which also implied a declining political influence world-wide (Tilley 662). Linda Colley agrees that Britain has had to adjust to the loss of its empire, but thinks that, apart from that, another cause for a diminishing British nationalism can be found in the fact that Protestantism in general, and the Church of England in particular, has become only a "residual part" of the British culture. Moreover, Britain can no longer define itself against European powers, especially because it joined the then European Economic Community in 1973 (Colley 6). Recently, however, there seems to have developed a growing anti-European Union sentiment.

In 2007, Tilley and Heath concluded that there had been a general decline in nearly all areas of British national pride since the beginning of the 1980s. In general, in 2007 British people were less proud of their Britishness than they had been twenty-five years earlier (Tilley 661). The research by Tilley and Heath was based on data that had been compiled, at twelve different moments since 1981, by a variety of sources. These surveys had all asked a basically similar question, namely "How proud are you to be British?" (Tilley 664) Their research explains the causes of the decline in national pride as being partly generational, and partly regional. More recent generations have substantially less pride in being British than previous ones, who acquired a lifelong attachment to their nation as they grew up during the Second World War. On a regional level, in Scotland there are substantially larger differences between old and new generations, when compared to England and Wales. Younger Scots

appear to have become much more receptive to Scottish nationalist movements. Tilley and Heath have also taken into account the different types of pride that people have in their Britishness, being democracy, economic achievement, social security, history, armed forces, ideals of fairness and equality, science, sport, and arts and literature. They conclude that there is a general decline across all areas of national pride, with the exception of British sporting achievements, which younger generations value a little higher than older ones (Tilley 672).

In July 2012, on the eve of the Olympics, in a discussion of nationalism, Jonathan Freedland signalled a rise in *English* identity over the five previous years (Freedland-web). As early as 1992, Linda Colley had already predicted a re-emergence of Welsh, Scottish, and English nationalism, which could not only be considered to be the outcome of cultural diversity, but also as a "response to a broader loss of national, in the sense of British, identity" (7). Sunder Katwala is director of British Future, an "independent and non-partisan think-tank", which aims at involving people in a discussion of "identity and integration, migration, and opportunity". He maintains that the rise of an English identity is not a threat to modern Britain, but an opportunity for reinforcement of a "multi-ethnic, pluralist Britain through its claim for the recognition of dual identities" (British Future-web). Katwala hopes that every citizen will be accepted to have more than one identity, just like the American hyphenated identity model. In addition, Katwala expresses his opinion on why the British national identity has declined since the 1980s. He states that under Thatcher, traditionalists had clung to the old principles of national identity while they were struggling with the new, multi-ethnic Britain (Freedland-web). In October 1997, five months after he had become Britain's Prime Minister, Tony Blair linked willingness to modernise the country to a renewed national spirit. He aimed for the post-imperial nation to become a quality-of-life superpower: "the best place to rear children, get an education, grow old" (Leadbeater 2). After the "dark" Thatcher years, Blair's New Labour government represented hope for a better future. Katwala maintains that

Labour's enthusiasm for modernisation already evaporated many years ago. The modernisers under Blair did not know how to deal with Britain's past, as it had to be considered "a new country". Katwala calls the combination of the Diamond Jubilee and the Games in 2012 a synthesis – an affirmation of both the past and the present. Whereas, in the old days, people had to choose between national pride and acceptance of a changed Britain, now the British can take pride in the nation that has gone through changes (Freedland–web).

Although Tilley and Heath's 2007 survey has not mentioned monarchy at all, there is a strong link between British national identity and the royal family. A research carried out in 2008 by the above-mentioned Anthony Heath, together with Jane Roberts, does mention monarchy as an element of pride. When scrutinising the item of political legitimacy in Great Britain, they conclude that "the biggest differences are in levels of support for the monarchy, which is to be sure one of the key British symbols" (Heath 21). In 2008, sixty-six percent of the British think that it is very important that the monarchy continues. It is professor Michael Billig, a social psychologist and one of the first academics to study the position of the House of Windsor, who states that "the issue of nationalism cannot be divorced from that of monarchy". Billig distinguishes between two different types of nationalism: the "hot" variant of political movements, which "seeks to establish new nation states", and the "banal" variant, which "ensures that established nation-states are daily reproduced". Although the British are hardly aware of this, the constant flow of news about the royal family, especially in the tabloid newspapers and magazines, provides them with banal, but harmless, reminders of nationhood. It regularly informs them about the royals, who symbolically represent that nationhood (Billig xii).

1. 4 "Banal" Reminders of Nationhood 1990 – 1996

A survey, carried out by Ipsos MORI in January 1990, showed that, at the beginning of that decade, ninety-three percent of the British population still thought that Britain would have a monarchy in "ten/fifty/one hundred years" (Worcester-web). Michael Billig considers the start of this decade to have been "the last moment when monarchy seemed secure beyond all challenge. At that time, to assert that Britain would be well shot of the Windsors was an easy way of being shockingly naughty" (Billig ix).

The year 1992 turned out to be a disastrous turning point in the history of British Monarchy. On November 24th, 1992, the Queen addressed the Guildhall on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of her accession. In her speech, with a typically British sense of understatement, she said: "1992 is not a year on which I shall look back with undiluted pleasure. In the words of one of my more sympathetic correspondents, it has turned out to be an "annus horribilis" (OED). The Queen's "dreadful year" had seen not only the fire at Windsor Castle, in which it was seriously damaged, but also an almost constant stream of negative headlines in the newspapers. Firstly, her daughter Anne, the Princess Royal, divorced her husband Mark Phillips. Secondly, her second son Andrew, the Duke of York, separated from Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York of whom, later that year, the front pages of the tabloids showed embarrassing photographs. Thirdly, Elizabeth's eldest son Charles, the Prince of Wales, separated from his wife Diana, whose biography *Diana, her True Story* was published in June 1992. In this book by Andrew Morton, The Princess of Wales was depicted as a "betrayed, self-mutilating bulimic" (Davies-web). In that same year, *The Sun* newspaper revealed the contents of a twenty-minute telephone conversation between Princess Diana and her supposed lover James Gilbey, recorded on New Year's Eve 1989. *The Sun* even went as far as setting up a telephone line for readers to ring in and listen for themselves. This telephone conversation ridiculed the royal family and confirmed the terrible state of Charles and Diana's marriage (Daily Mail-web). Finally, another sexually explicit phone call, between

Prince Charles and his mistress Camilla Parker-Bowles, also recorded in 1989, was published in the British tabloids in the first month following the "annus horribilis" (Wisegeek-web). At the time of her Guildhall speech, the Queen must have been aware of the nation's dissatisfaction with the royal family, when she stated that "no institution, city, monarchy, whatever, should expect to be free from the scrutiny of those who give it their loyalty and support, not to mention those who don't" (Davies-web). It resulted in the formation of the *Way Ahead* group, a secret body of family members and senior advisers that met twice a year to discuss public opinion and possible policy adjustments (Pascoe-Watson-web). In a survey carried out by Ipsos MORI / King's College in December 1992, so only one month after the "annus horribilis" speech, satisfaction with the Queen appeared to have dropped to seventy-five percent. Only fifty-eight percent was positive about the future of the monarchy, whereas, as mentioned before, in January 1990 ninety-three percent had been positive (Worcester-web).

The years following 1992 could be considered to be "anni horribiles" as well. The Queen herself, probably spurred on by the *Way Ahead* group, did try to make some goodwill gestures to the people. She did so, for example, by announcing she would volunteer to pay tax on her private income and by allowing to open parts of Buckingham Palace to the public, in order to apply the entrance fees to the repair costs of Windsor Castle (Davies-web). Still, newspaper headlines paid much more attention to the ongoing quarrel between the Prince and Princess of Wales. Michael Billig maintains that the tabloids were continually inviting the public to take sides (Billig x). In June 1994, to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of his investiture as Prince of Wales, a television documentary on Prince Charles was watched by millions. According to John Darnton of *The New York Times*, the film was largely flattering to the Prince, trying to paint "a more human and appealing portrait". For example, it paid attention to *The Prince's Trust*, a charity founded by Prince Charles himself to help disadvantaged young people. However, three-quarters of the way through the programme,

Charles admitted to having committed adultery. Darnton concluded that the nationwide broadcast "reopened all the old wounds" at a time when the monarchy had "tried to overcome the scandals and a negative public image" (web). Even more people watched Princess Diana's Panorama interview on November 20th, 1995, in which she, too, admitted to adultery, and in which she referred to Prince Charles' camp as being "the enemy". Diana expressed her hurt feelings, caused by her husband's relationship with Camilla Parker-Bowles: "In this marriage there were three of us, so it was a bit crowded" (Alleyne-web). A month later, the Queen asked Charles and Diana to divorce. The marriage was officially dissolved on August 28th, 1996. Diana was no longer to be addressed as "Royal Highness," but kept her title as "Princess of Wales." She received a lump sum settlement of about seventeen million pounds (British Royals-web). After her divorce, Princess Diana continued some of the activities she had undertaken on behalf of charities. Her unremitting popularity resulted in becoming one of the most-photographed women in the world (Britannica Encyclopaedia-web). In December 1996, Ipsos MORI's survey again showed that only fifty-eight percent in Britain thought that there would be a monarchy in 10/50/100 years. Eight months later, in August 1997, New poll results by Ipsos MORI showed that there was a resurgence of support for the Windsors among the British public, as the percentage of people being optimistic about the future of the monarchy had risen by seven percent, to sixty-five (Worcester-web).

1. 5 The Aftermath of Diana's Death (August 31st, 1997)

Diana's sudden death, and the Windsors' refusal to share in public mourning, received more media coverage than any event in history. For a full week, it dominated all mass media to an extent that had never been experienced before. Both BBC and commercial television and radio reported on mourners, piling up masses of flowers outside Kensington Palace, queuing

for hours to sign books of condolence, and, even, weeping in the streets. Newspapers and magazines measured The Princess's life in thousands of extra copies. On Thursday of that pre-funeral week the front page of *The Sun* read "Where is our Queen / Where is her flag?" Page two read "the final insult," giving some guidance for public opinion by stating that "thousands of people accused the royal family of insulting Princess Diana's memory by refusing to fly a flag at half mast" (Mallory Wober 129). Likewise, many other leader pages and news stories were critical of the Windsors' failure to be seen and heard, sharing the people's sorrow. It took six days for the royal family to respond to public pressure to show their sympathy. On Friday, the eve of the funeral, they returned from Balmoral to London for a walkabout near the Palace. The Queen, finally realising the royal public relations problem, delivered an unprecedented live speech on television to refute all innuendos. The funeral coverage on Saturday, September 6th, was the biggest ever broadcast operation. An estimated thirty-two million viewers in Britain and two and a half billion viewers around the world watched the service at Westminster Abbey. Elton John, with just himself at the piano, sang a live re-work of the 1974 Marilyn Monroe-tribute *Candle in the wind*. Songwriter Bernie Taupin had included lines such as "Now you belong to heaven / and the stars spell out your name" and "your footsteps will always fall here / along England's greenest hills". It is hardly likely that John and Taupin's decision to re-work a song that had originally been written about the cinematic icon Marilyn Monroe, another vulnerable blonde who died young, was coincidental. The CD single-version of the song became not only the UK's but also the world's best-sold single ever by far, raising twenty million pounds for the Diana Memorial Fund. In early 1998, Elton John was knighted at Buckingham Palace (Roach 18-20).

Retrospectively, critics have stated that a peculiar relationship between news makers and news consumers developed during that week of hysteria, following the Paris car crash. Ipsos MORI's chairman, Worcester, afterwards expressed his amazement at the fact that

throughout that week, ordinary people had almost continually been asked to give their opinions about the royal reticence, but that "no poll was commissioned by the British media that week to obtain a systematic and objective measure of the public mood. Only an American TV network, ABC news, sought polling data from the British people". Worcester wondered why nobody at the BBC rang for any MORI poll data (web). Bernard Bergonzi writes that "there was a strange symbiosis, or closed loop, between the masses and the media, so that people when interviewed and asked what they were feeling, replied in phrases they had already heard on TV" (9). Mallory Wober suggests that the notion that, throughout the week, news makers and the public thought and felt alike, already might have been started by Tony Blair on Sunday, August 31st, when he said "I feel like everyone else in the country today, utterly devastated. We are today a nation in a state of shock, in mourning, in grief. People everywhere (…) regarded her as one of the people" (130). Bergonzi typifies the extravagant public emotions, although seemingly genuine, as "mass hysteria", and wonders how people can profess "such intensities of feeling for someone they have never met" (9).

Although the term "Dianafication" has not been included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* yet, it has been frequently used since Diana's death in August 1997. As early as October 6th, 1997, *Time Magazine* reported that "the Dianafied version of *Candle in the Wind* is creating a windfall for Elton John" (Ressner-web). A number of journalists have claimed to have coined the term and have ascribed different meanings to it. However, the most common meaning of "Dianafication" was already used in an article in *The Times* in November 1997. In this article, "Dianafication" was defined as "the taking on of characteristics or behaviour that are media-friendly, perceived as relating to the common people, or demonstrating interest in public problems" (Barrett-web). In reaction to the American political satirist and TV host Stephen Colbert's use of the term, it was explained as "the process whereby the British general public have become more emotional, and less "stiff upper lip" – since the death of

Princess Diana" (Urban Dictionary-web). It was Jonathan Freedland from *The Guardian* who linked the term "Dianafication" to the new generation of royal bio-pics, when he stated about *The King's Speech* that "in today's era the royals can best win our affections in the manner favoured by so many celebrities – by revealing their struggles against adversity". Freedland maintained that, in this film, "Dianafication" of the monarchy was extended back two generations, as it asked the audience to hail the monarch "not for his majesty, but for his vulnerability" (Freedland-web).

The Queen's decision to give in to the people's wishes that she should fly the Union Jack at half mast above Buckingham Palace and deliver a – well-crafted – speech on television, only partly dampened down the negative public opinion. The poll carried out by Ipsos MORI on September 4th and 5th – Thursday and Friday, so before the TV speech – showed that the confidence of the British people in the monarchy had plummeted from sixty-five to fifty-four in a few weeks' time. A poll, held two days later, showed only a minor improvement (Worcester-web). Communication experts William Benoit and Susan Brinson conclude that the Queen's speech was "remarkably well-crafted". Firstly, she denied the accusations that the Windsors did not care about Diana or the people and their sorrow. Secondly, she improved her own image by showing "heartfelt emotions, selfless motives, and gratitude". Thirdly, the Queen briefly offered an excuse for the royal family's behaviour and suggested that the people focus on a different issue – "the Britons against the world" (Benoit 154). However, in spite of the Queen's performance in front of the camera, after this week following Diana's death, the stereotype that the royal family were cold and unfeeling and proferred the "stiff upper lip" had begun to emerge (Mallory Wober 131).

1. 6 "Good Evening, Mr Bond": How the Windsors Bounced back (1997 – 2012)

In order to survive, the monarchy was left no other choice than to reflect on the changed mood in society and to adapt. In 1998, a reissue of Professor Michael Billig's *Talking about the Royal Family* appeared. In its preface, the author stated that, because of Princess Diana's death, suddenly the British monarchy had become "a respectable matter for academic study" (xiii). The people's reaction towards – and the part they played in - what happened in that first week of September 1997 was described and experienced in national terms, thus strengthening the relationship between monarchy and identity (Billig xv). Republican Anthony Barnett's opinion is an example of this, when he analyses the royal family within the context of the monarchy as an institution. He states that, previously, the British people had been enchanted by the aura of tradition around the monarchy. They offered the Queen their passive support because they wanted to believe in the constitutional system. Barnett claims that the "spirit of Diana" brought about a change in public mood, not just confined to the royals in particular, but showing "an implicit national concern about the whole constitution". From Diana's death onwards, people would treat the Queen by judging, praising, or criticising her in a secular manner (Duffett 492). Professor Vernon Bogdanor, constitutional researcher at King's College in London, states that the Queen and her advisers must have been aware of this "acceleration of social change". When, in 1952, Elizabeth ascended to the throne, one third of the population still thought she had been chosen by God himself. The magical monarchy appeared to have to be transformed to a public service monarchy. Apart from her *Way Ahead* group, the Queen also sought help from public relation advisors outside the palace (Davies-web).

The Golden Jubilee of 2002 was the first serious sign that the Queen's newly-chosen strategy was successful. The *Scotsman* wrote that "after the skilful rehabilitation of the monarchy through the Jubilee, the republicanism that was fuelled by the royal crises of the Nineties has suffered a severe setback" (Duffett 502). The chairman of the Republican

Society, Professor Stephen Haseler, said that "the royal family have done well out of this. Their public relations advisors are better than they used to be. They're well advised now" (Duffett 502). Mark Duffett states that *The Party at the Palace* especially, should be considered to be a strategic move in the royals' campaign to increase their popularity (502). He considers *the Party* to have been a highly political act, by deploying pop music celebrities to show mass public support for the Queen and her family (492). Already at the beginning, when the rock band Queen's Brian May performed the national anthem *God Save the Queen* from the roof of Buckingham Palace, a link was forged between "celebrating the history of popular music, cheering for Britain, and supporting the Queen" (Duffett 500). When the Queen herself appeared on stage – wearing earplugs – she was addressed as "mummy" by the Prince of Wales, thus highlighting traditional family feelings and relationships, Paul McCartney was allowed to perform his disputed *Her Majesty,* and Dame Edna Everage ventured to call Queen Elizabeth "The Jubilee Girl". Such frivolities Her Majesty would never have allowed in the first fifty years of her reign.

Apart from a short relapse following the precarious marriage of the Prince of Wales and Camilla Parker-Bowles, in April 2005, ratings of both satisfaction with the Queen and confidence in the monarchy have steadily been going up (Lydall-web). In September 2006, the film *The Queen* was released. The film was the most critically acclaimed film of the year. Roger Ebert called Helen Mirren's acting a "masterful performance, built on suggestion, implication and understatement" (Ebert-web). Minette Marrin of *The Sunday Times* called the film "practically a hagiography." She expected the film to "work public relations wonders for the House of Windsor" (Marrin-web). Other royal highlights followed, such as the Royal Wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton in April 2011, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in June 2012 – with another pop concert – and, on July 27th, the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games in London, involving a filmed cameo appearance of the Queen. Its creative

director, Danny Boyle, later revealed that originally, he had only asked the palace for permission to find a good double for the film, when he was told that "Her Majesty would like to be in it herself". It was the Queen who suggested she should say something (Daily Mail-web). In November 2012, ninety percent of the British people was satisfied with the way the Queen was doing her job, and seventy-nine percent would favour Britain remaining a monarchy. Prince William had become the most popular royal, which, according to Ipsos Mori, suggests a willingness – particularly among the younger generations – for widespread support for the monarchy in the future (Ipsos-web). Caroline Davies of *The Guardian* wrote that "after the turmoil of the 1990s, the Queen can take satisfaction that she has steered the monarchy to calmer waters (Davies-web). In conclusion, the institution of the British monarchy has met with an unexpected survival into the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 2: *The Queen* (2006)

2.1 Introduction

In the last scene of the film *The Queen*, a "coda" that takes place two months after the turmoil caused by Diana's death, Queen Elizabeth (Helen Mirren) and Prime Minister Tony Blair (Michael Sheen) discuss "that week". The Queen tells Blair that she does not think that she will ever understand what happened. However, she has finally realised that "the world has changed, and one must ….. modernise" (1.27.40). Two months later, she still appears to be reluctant to pronounce the word "modernise", a significant term in British politics towards the end of the nineties. However,she is aware of the fact that something has happened in British society and that there has been a shift in values, causing her to adjust her attitude. This chapter will show that *The Queen*, after its release in 2006, has contributed to a revival of the popularity of the Queen and her family, by carefully creating understanding for the Queen's behaviour during "that week", by showing unknown, favourable characteristics of the Queen, by nuancing the relationship between Elizabeth and Diana, and by gradually showing more and more appreciation for the Queen as a person, in particular as observed through the eyes of Tony Blair.

The Queen not only exceeded its box-office expectations, but the film, and its star actor Helen Mirren, were also highly praised by a vast majority of critics. *The Queen* won two BAFTAs (out of ten nominations), two Golden Globes (out of four nominations), and one Academy Award (out of six nominations). Three awards were won for Best Actress, two for Best Screenplay. Roger Ebert concluded that "told in quiet scenes of proper behaviour and guarded speech, it is a spellbinding story of opposite passions" (web), whereas Giselle Bastin called *The Queen* an "up-market portrayal of the Royal Family" (48). Sandy Flitterman-

Lewis, in *Cineaste*, stated that "brilliant and complex interweaving of myth, media, politics, and power forms the core of this eminently human film" (50), and Richard Alleva had never seen a film "that treats current heads of state in such a manner". He also stated that Elizabeth and Blair were "seen without reverence, yet also without a trace of derision" (16). Yet another positive commentary was provided by Mandy Merck, who considered Helen Mirren's casting to be one of the film makers' master strokes, as it caused the political figurehead of the monarch to be identified with a leading actress (156). Casting Mirren was all the more striking, as she was known to be a republican. Leading American film critic Roger Ebert lauded Mirren for her "masterful performance, built on suggestion, implication, and understatement" (web).

Director Stephen Frears and screenwriter Peter Morgan, together with producers Christine Langan and Andy Harries, wanted *The Queen* to be different from general expectations, by centring on "a vulnerable human being in her darkest hour" (Levy-web). In 2003, they had already made *The Deal* together, a television drama on the rivalry between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown for the leadership of the Labour Party. After its success, they decided to develop a second project, on another British institution. The Royal Family at the time of Diana's death seemed to be an obvious choice (Levy-web), or, as Frears put it himself in *The Making Of-documentary*: "it was always going to be about that week" (DVD). Likewise, it was obvious that Michael Sheen, an actor who has specialised in impersonating real people, would play Tony Blair again. David Edelstein concluded that Frears and Morgan faced a large challenge in dramatising the conflict between the young and media-genic Diana and the old and, in the opinion of many, emotionally stunted Elizabeth (web). However, Frears wanted *The Queen* to be different from what people would expect in a movie about the British head of state. He remarked that as, in his opinion, many people in Britain think that the institution of monarchy is quite ludicrous, the Queen and her family are often mocked as well.

A good example of this once was *Spitting Image*, an ITV satirical puppet show (1984-1996) that, apart from caricatures of politicians such as Thatcher, Major, and Reagan, also featured caricatures of the royal family. In *Britons*, Linda Colley states that this phenomenon of satirising the British royals was far from new. As early as the 1780s, cartoons of King George III "led to snorts of irreverent amusement among the multitudes who bought them for a few pence or gazed at them in the windows of print shops". The shift that had taken place in the case of George III, from anger at the monarchy towards mockery of individual royals, helped – just as it later helped the aged Queen Victoria – to preserve the institution, as "laughter takes the sting out of criticism" (Colley 210).

With this film, the makers wanted to focus on quite the opposite, by showing how extraordinary the Queen really is (Levy-web). As little is known about the Queen's private life, one reviewer remarked that "constructing a convincing portrait of the world she inhabits would seem to be a harder task than recreating Middle Earth". Yet, the film makers have always stressed that they never pretended to portray the Queen completely accurately; instead, they aimed at making it merely "believable" (Bastin 45). Thus, one could argue that this reconstruction of the Queen's life might differ significantly from a scholarly approach, and, moreover, that it has been manipulated. At any rate, its results are likely to have a much bigger audience than do the works of professional historians (Lässig 155).

2.2 "The most Lovely Smile" versus "Reserved and Cool Gravitas"

Leading actress Helen Mirren was raised on republican principles. In an interview she recalls that, as a girl, she wondered why the Queen would never smile, thinking "Does it hurt her to smile? Isn't that what she's there for?" (Kantrowitz 1). When, in September 1997, the Royal Family stayed at Balmoral, unwilling to mourn in public, millions of people repeated the

questions Helen Mirren had asked as a girl. *The Queen* adjusts Elizabeth's public image which deteriorated during "that week", by explaining her maintenance of traditions and by showing other, far more positive, characteristics than the "stiff upper lip", the one people distinguish most when watching her in public. The film does not focus on monarchy as an institution, but on Elizabeth herself who, in the course of the film, is convincingly portrayed as a remarkable and extraordinary person. For example, the film explicitly stresses the Queen's sense of humour and her concern for her grandsons.

The film neatly explains why Elizabeth considers Diana's funeral to be a private matter, why she thinks that there should not be a Union Jack flying at half mast above Buckingham Palace, and why she does not feel the need to come down to London. Firstly, when, on Sunday evening, Prince Charles (Alex Jennings) asks permission to use a royal plane to go to Paris, she refuses, by saying that it is "out of the question. This isn't a matter of state. (…) Diana is no longer a member of the Royal Family. She's not an HRH. This is a private matter." (13.50) This attitude is exploited by Prince Charles, when he meets Tony Blair at the airport: "My mother, the Queen, comes from a generation not best equipped. She grew up in the war. I think what we need, what this country needs, is a modern perspective, if you follow…" (27.10). Charles, by mimicking New Labour, seems to be licking Blair's boots here and, thus, is being mocked, as it is obvious that he is not taken seriously by Blair. Secondly, Prince Philip (James Cromwell) explains why there should not be a Union Jack above Buckingham Palace, because "there's the royal standard, which flies for one reason only, to denote the presence of the monarch. Since you're here, the flag pole is bare, which is just as it should be (…). The point is, it's more than four hundred years old. It's never been lowered for anyone" (44.30). Thirdly, in her second telephone conversation with the Prime Minister, Elizabeth becomes agitated when Blair suggests she should come down to London to help the public with their grief. She replies by saying that the public, in the end, will favour

"a period of restrained grief and sober, private mourning. That's the way we do things in this country, quietly, with dignity. It's what the rest of the world has always admired us for" (51.30). In all these three cases it is obvious that the Queen's decisions are based upon tradition, in spite of suggestions from younger generations (such as Prince Charles or Tony Blair) to be more flexible. Frears and Morgan, in the end, seem to have succeeded in convincing the audience that the Queen's attitude was better-balanced.

The film makers have tried to show that behind the Queen's formality and gravitas in her public appearances, there is quite a different personality as well. This opinion is confirmed by Helen Mirren, who once had the opportunity to have tea with Queen Elizabeth. She states that it provided her with an important change of insight in the Queen's true nature. She has tried to bring that into her playing the Queen:

> There is a twinkle to her and a relaxation about her that you don't really see in her formal moments, and her formal moments is what we mostly see. 99.9% of the time we see those formal moments and they're familiar to us. That, to all of us, is "The Queen". But there is another Elizabeth Windsor who is very easy and welcoming and sparkly and with the most lovely smile, and alert and not that sort of reserved and cool gravitas that she normally communicates. So I very much tried to bring that into it. Because the tragedy happened so fast in the film, I only really had a tiny space at the very beginning of the film and then a tiny space at the end of the film to bring that personality into it. (Murray-web)

In the opening scene, these two "different Elizabeths" are juxtaposed. The Queen is having her portrait painted, in the Order of the Garter robes, while pleasantly chatting to the painter. Elizabeth is relaxed, friendly, and witty, and she smiles a few times. However, at one point,

the Queen turns her head and gazes straight into the camera, as if she suddenly realises that she is facing the public. Her expression becomes the familiar and formal one, as it turns cold and without emotions. At the end of the movie the film makers have Elizabeth herself admit that

> Nowadays people want glamour and tears, the grand performance. I'm not very good at that. I never have been. I prefer to keep my feelings to myself, and foolishly, I believed that was what people wanted from their queen – not to make a fuss, nor wear one's heart at one's sleeve. Duty first, self second. That's how I was brought up, that's all I've ever known. (1.27.40)

Here, the queen admits to Blair that she is aware of her characteristic of keeping her feelings to herself. Apart from that, she has finally realised that she was wrong about how the people wanted her to behave in public. Unlike her grandfather George V in *The King's Speech*, and unlike her former daughter-in-law, she appears not to have been aware of the people's expectations that a royal must "invade" their homes and ingratiate herself/himself with them (Seidler 27).

Elizabeth's sense of humour is shown several times in the "tiny space at the very beginning of the film" (Murray-web). When her private secretary, Robin Jarvin (Roger Allam) tells her that Blair was "educated at Fettes, where he was tutored by the same man as the Prince of Wales," the Queen replies "well, we'll try not to hold that against him" (03.40). Half-smiling, she asks Blair: "Have we shown you how to start a nuclear war yet?" (…). "First thing we do apparently. Then we take away your passport and spend the rest of the time sending you around the world." There is even some self-mockery when she asks Blair about his three children and adds: "How lovely. Such a blessing, children…" (06.10). This remark

implicitly refers to her "annus horribilis", in which three of her four children damaged the royal family's public image.

The film shows that Elizabeth is very concerned about the well-being of her two grandsons, whom she refers to as "the boys" (and who, for reasons of respect, do not play an active part in the film, which in itself is interesting, as they are the people affected most by grief and bereavement). Shortly after the news of Diana's death, Elizabeth asks the Prince of Wales: "Charles, isn't this awful? What are you going to do about the boys?" (13.50). She tells a servant that she does not want the boys to get upset and that she wants him to take out their radio and television (17.30). When her husband reports Princess Margaret's reaction ("something about Diana managing to be more annoying dead than alive"), she tells him "Just make sure you never let the boys hear you talk like that" (17.45). In her second telephone call with Blair she clearly states that the boys are her priority: "If you imagine I'm going to drop everything and come down to London before I attend to my grandchildren who have just lost their mother…, then you're mistaken" (51.30).

2.3 The Queen of the Nation and the Queen of Hearts

Forty-seven minutes into the film, Prince Charles tells his private secretary that "the two Dianas, the public's and ours, bear no relation to one another at all" (47.10). It is exactly this perception of the People's Princess that *The Queen* aims to make the audience aware of. Although gradually, and subtly, Princess Diana's saint-like status is adjusted, the film carefully avoids passing a value judgment.

Already in the first ten minutes of the film, characteristics of the "other" Diana are shown. The first time that she is mentioned in the film, is when Tony Blair and his wife suddenly have to leave "the presence", her Majesty's company. Cherie, while walking down

the stairs, is sure that they were dismissed because of "Diana… whatever it is, it'll be something to do with Diana" (8.30), suggesting that Princess Diana is constantly causing the Queen trouble. This scene is immediately followed by seven short genuine newsflashes on Diana, which seem to provide proof of Cherie Blair's point. The newsflashes are shown in a lower resolution and desaturated colours, thus giving the film a second level of reality. At this point, *The Queen*, apart from being a fictional melodrama, also takes on the nature of a documentary, by presenting "moments of truth" (Merck 154). In these news items, Diana is reported to be "embroiled in controversy", and the last item concludes that "once again, her judgment's under scrutiny" (9.40).

The film also questions the sincerity of Tony Blair's speech on Sunday morning, delivered only a few hours after Princess Diana's death. To begin with, *The Queen* shows that the term "People's Princess" was coined by Alastair Campbell (Mark Bazeley), Blair's director of communications, not because it was a sincere emotion, but just to add weight to Blair's melodramatic speech. Moreover, Blair's statement is shown in the film when it is watched by the staff at Balmoral. Although other staff members are fighting their tears, Robin Jarvin remarks that it is "a bit over the top, don't you think?" (24.10).Thus, the film juxtaposes both opinions on Blair's rhetoric: either it was sincere and moving, or political and self-serving. It is even considered by some to have been the start of the mass hysteria that gradually developed during "that week" (Mallory Wober 130).

The Queen herself can hardly be caught saying negative things about her former daughter-in-law. Only once, she gives her opinion on Princess Diana. When Prince Charles tells her "whatever else you may have thought of Diana, she was a wonderful mother. She adored those boys, and never let them forget it. Always warm, physical, never afraid to show her feelings", the Queen snaps: "Especially whenever a photographer was in sight!" (38.00). In the rest of the film, the viewer can only measure her opinions on Diana by her facial

expressions. David Edelstein states that it is "uncanny how many emotions bleed through Mirren's regal mask: distaste, horror, pity, regret, bewilderment, and perhaps something else – envy" (web). An example of this is the scene in which the Queen watches the Panorama interview and, obviously annoyed, switches off her TV. Another example is the scene at Westminster Abbey during the memorial service. Edelstein states that one cannot help being astonished at the will power the Queen must possess to keep up appearances when so many people think that she is "both scarily heartless and laughably out of touch" (web). During this scene, an image of Diana is inserted twice. The second time, with Diana showing her well-known "sideways-looking-up-smile" (Pease 78), it immediately follows a close-up scene of Elizabeth, thus suggesting that the Queen still experiences Diana's haunting presence.

Frears and Morgan even allow the Queen to start doubting whether the royal family has done the right thing where Diana is concerned. After her discussion with the Prince of Wales, she tells the Duke of Edinburgh that "maybe he's got a point. Maybe we are partly to blame. We encouraged the match. We both signed off on it. You were very enthusiastic, remember?" Prince Philip answers that "she was a nice girl, then. And I was sure he'd give the other one up, or at least make sure his wife toed the line", thus partly blaming Charles, because of his adultery with Camilla Parker-Bowles, and partly not understanding Diana and modern sexual morals (41.00).

According to Frears, the pivotal moment in *The Queen* is the stag scene, which most critics suppose to refer to Princess Diana (Law 125). The scene is the only moment in the film that the audience can watch Elizabeth crying, before she marvels at the beauty of a stag. After a distant gunshot, and her look of panic, she encourages the stag to "go on". When she notices that it has gone, the Queen half-smiles, smiles, and even chuckles, dries her tears and gets a determined look, as if she has regained strength and has decided upon something (59.00). The stag scene has been interpreted in a number of different ways. O'Rourke feels that the stag

scene represents the Queen who experiences a moment of sympathy for herself, whereas others think that the Queen feels sympathy for Diana. It has also been suggested that the Queen is contemplating her own mortality. Mandy Merck states the obvious when she remarks that the scene refers to the Roman goddess Diana, the same metaphor Earl Spencer used in his memorial eulogy. Merck maintains that the film substitutes the Queen for Diana as the victim of the hunt, and that she is emotionally rescued by the deer (Merck 158). However, not a single critic has taken the comparison to the goddess Diana, or Artemis, one step further by comparing the Queen to the Greek mythological Iphigenia. In order to appease Artemis and to be able to sail to Troy, Iphigenia had to be sacrificed. In the end, however, Artemis felt sorry for Agamemnon's daughter and replaced her by a deer. When applied to *The Queen*, this metaphor would show Elizabeth crying as she is about to be innocently sacrificed, when she is replaced by the stag. The animal, representing Princess Diana, gets wounded by an incompetent banker (possibly representing Al Fayed) and finished off by stalkers (the paparazzi). Her investigation of the dead stag on Friday morning, when she remarks "Let's hope it didn't suffer too much", could be explained as feeling compassion for Diana (1.13.30). Thus, the stag scene shows that Elizabeth has finally accepted Diana's way of life, and maybe even death itself, as this is also a film about different ways of dealing with bereavement. In conclusion, regardless of how this scene could be interpreted, all critics agree that it shows that Elizabeth's reaction to Diana's death was "not simply one-dimensional" (Law 126). Generally, it is implied that Elizabeth's encounter with the stag helped her to decide to follow Blair's advice.

The film does not demonise Diana; it only tries to readjust her public image and, at the same time, the Queen's. This is shown by the cover of the DVD of *The Queen.* It juxtaposes the "Queen of a nation" with the "Queen of hearts". Helen Mirren has the familiar "gravitas" look, while standing in front of a "larger than life" picture, or half-picture, of Princess Diana,

of whom we only see the lower part of her face. This picture clearly represents the leading public image of both women during "that week", combined with the film makers' point of view. On the one hand, there is Elizabeth, who is depicted formally and cold, but, if one cares to look again, who is also alive and in colour. On the other hand, there is the media-genic, smiling, and gigantic Diana, of whom only one half is visible, thus representing only one of the "two Dianas" whom Prince Charles refers to in the film.

2.4 The Queen and her Prime Minister:

"Will Anyone Save these People from themselves?"

Although the DVD cover suggests that *The Queen* is primarily about Queen Elizabeth and her former daughter-in-law, the essence of *The Queen* is constituted by the development of the relationship between Elizabeth and her Prime Minister during "that week". Writer Peter Morgan, in *The Making Of,* maintains that "this is the relationship between our sovereign, our elected Prime Minister, inherited power, democratically elected power, and two people" (DVD). Again, next to Helen Mirren's, Morgan seems to have a republican attitude towards monarchy as well. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis states that the Prime Minister and Queen Elizabeth together are responsible for the modernisation of the Monarchy (50). At the same time, the film is about the process of their individual changes. Tony Blair transforms from a radical moderniser who might want to abolish monarchy, to someone who defends the Queen from cheap ridicule and realises that Britain being a republic would be unimaginable (Flitterman-Lewis 51). Queen Elizabeth finally allows herself to meet demand of modernisation.

The Queen and Blair never meet in person during the week following Diana's death; there are only three telephone calls which chart the battle of wills between them, as to how the people's grief should be dealt with (Alleva-web). The three calls show the struggle between

the tightly contained and tradition-bound Queen and the country's brand-new, modern, and image-conscious Prime minister (Levy-web). In the first telephone conversation, Blair is submissive and even allows the Queen to end it before he has finished his last sentence:

> QE: I think the Princess has already paid a high enough price for exposure to the press, don't you? Now, if there's nothing else I must get on, the children have to be looked after.
>
> TB: Of course, well, goodbye, Your M….(Queen has already hung up). (21.00)

In the second call, Blair behaves a little more insistently towards the Queen, stating what he thinks should be done, but he has no answer to her indignant reaction and refusal to follow his suggestions:

> TB: If that's your decision, Ma'am, of course the government will support it. Let's keep in touch…
>
> QE: Yes, lét's….(hangs up). (51.30)

In the third and last telephone conversation the tables appear to have been turned. Blair is already announced to the Queen as being "rather insisting", and now it is Elizabeth who is taking a deep breath before answering the phone, and who is sighing occasionally, or just remaining silent, whereas, according to Flitterman-Lewis, Blair, now that there is an unavoidable crisis at hand, risks propriety and oversteps his position (51):

> TB: Then I'm sure you'll agree the situation has become quite critical. (silence…)

> Ma'am? A poll that's to be published in tomorrow's papers suggests that 70% of people believe that your actions have damaged the monarchy and that one in four are now in favour of abolishing the monarchy altogether. As your prime minister, I believe it is my constitutional responsibility to advise the following…. (the Queen does not say anything, she is just sighing). (1.04.40)

It is obvious that Blair is now in charge here, clearly showing strength and determination. He explains to the Queen that, if she wants to save the monarchy, she does not have a choice but to follow his advice. After three calls, the uphill battle of wills between tradition and modernity has been decided.

In the first part of the film, Tony Blair is carefully depicted as a politician who wants to reform and modernise. Before her first encounter with her "prime minister to be", the Queen is told by Robin Jarvin, her private secretary, that "his manifesto promises the most radical shake-up of the constitution in three hundred years" and that Blair is "married to a woman with known anti-monarchist sympathies" (03.40). When practicing a speech in front of his advisers on the Monday morning after Diana's death, Blair says:

> After eighteen years of opposition, I am proud to stand before you as the new Labour prime minister of our country. I want to set an ambitious course to modernise this country, to breathe new life into old institutions, to make privilege something for the many, not the few. (31.00)

This speech suggests that it is Blair's intention to modernise monarchy as well. Both Blair's advisers and his wife regularly show their anti-monarchical disdain. When, on Sunday

morning, Campbell tells him to ask the Queen "if she greased the brakes", he only utters a weak "now, now" (20.00). At the beginning, his sympathies clearly lie with Princess Diana; apart from his emotional television address, he tells Cherie that giving Diana a private funeral is a mistake and that "they screwed up her life. Let's hope they don't screw up her death" (21.30).

However, throughout "that week", Blair gradually develops more and more understanding of the Queen and starts to show his disapproval of all the criticism the Queen has to endure. When his wife Cherie, on Tuesday evening, calls the Royal Family "a bunch of freeloading, emotionally retarded nutters", Blair asks her to spare him the whole "off with their heads" thing, as it is "unimaginable, this country being a republic" (48.10), wittily using a paradox here. He even tells her that he thinks that there is "something ugly" about the way everyone's started to bully the Queen (1.00.40). Blair's change of heart is caused in the first place by Robin Jarvin, who tries to explain the Queen's behaviour:

> I understand how difficult her behaviour must seem to you, how unhelpful, but try and see it from her perspective. She's been brought up to believe it's God's will. She is who she is. (…) She just might haven't seen anything like this since the abdication, and I cannot emphasise enough what effect that had on her. Unexpectedly becoming King as good as killed her father. I'm afraid she's in a state of shock. This public reaction has completely thrown her. (54.10)

By having Jarvin speak these words and by showing Blair's reaction towards it, the film makers carefully create understanding and empathy for the Queen. Blair promises Jarvin that he will try to do something about "these terrible headlines". After this telephone conversation, the camera provides the audience with a close-up of a deeply reflecting Prime Minister,

suggesting that he is about to take action.

At the end of the week, Blair's transformation into "Mr Saviour of the monarchy" (as uttered by his wife) is complete (1.27.20). When, on Friday, Blair discusses the Queen's television speech, Alastair Campbell insults the Queen three times:

> They sent a copy of the Queen's speech. You might want to scrape the frost of it first. Well, I phoned them with a couple of suggestions to make it sound like it came from a human being. (…) At least the old bat has finally agreed to visit Diana's coffin. (1.17.00)

Blair reacts vehemently:

> That woman has given her whole life in service to her people, fifty years doing a job she never wanted, a job she watched kill her father. She's executed it with honour, dignity, and as far as I can tell, without a single blemish, and now we're all baying for her blood! All because she's struggling to lead the world in mourning for someone who threw everything she offered back in her face, and who, for the last few years, committed twenty-four/seven to destroying everything she holds most dear. (1.16.00)

David Edelstein states that Blair behaves with chivalry in defending the Queen (web). Apart from that, this part of the film also shows that Blair has transferred allegiance: whereas, at the beginning of the week, he told his wife that the Windsors had "screwed up her life", he is now blaming Diana for deliberately thwarting the Queen.

By the end of the week, not only Tony Blair appears to have gone through evident changes; Queen Elizabeth, too, shows behaviour and ideas that would have been

inconceivable before. After having seen Thursday's headlines and after the third telephone call with Blair, Elizabeth seeks advice from her ninety-seven-year-old "mummy", whom she tells that "there's been a change, some shift, in values. When you no longer understand your people, mummy, maybe it's time to hand it over to the next generation". She even allows herself to doubt whether her actions have damaged the Crown (1.04.00). The next morning, when she has decided to agree to Blair's wishes to fly the flag at half mast, to come down to London, and to address the nation in a televised speech, she tells the nagging Prince Philip that "further discussion is no longer helpful either" (1.13.00). Moreover, she halts her car outside Buckingham Palace in order to inspect the tributes to Princess Diana; it makes a startled BBC reporter remark that "the last time the Queen was among her people outside the Palace was the day the war in Europe ended" (1.16.00).

The transformation in the relationship between the two antagonists can be traced most clearly when comparing the explanatory prologue taking place three months before the events, to the "coda", taking place two months after them. When Blair is on his way to meeting the Queen on the day after his landslide election victory, he admits to his wife Cherie that he is "actually rather nervous" and that, although he has often met her before, it was "never one to one, and never as prime minister. (…) she's still, you know, the Queen" (04.55). In the fifteen-minute conversation with the Queen, Blair hardly utters more than three syllables at a time, and obviously does not know that, after kneeling, he should not be the one to ask the Queen's permission to form a government. In the "coda", however – according to Blair the first "chance to speak since….that week" – the Prime Minister is self-confident and the one who takes the initiative in the conversation. Although Elizabeth initially receives him rather coolly, Blair even dares to offer his apologies, "in case you felt manhandled or managed in any way" (1.27.40). Later on, after the Queen has uttered some critical remarks towards Blair, she relaxes and allows herself to share her personal thoughts with him:

QE: I've never been hated like that before.

TB: And that must have been difficult…

QE: Yes, very… (a silence follows)

Richard Alleva writes that at the fade-out of the film, the former opponents walk through the gardens of Buckingham Palace, while they are discussing the welfare of the British people. After all that they have gone through together, they both have become winners (web). Edelstein even calls *The Queen* the tale of Elizabeth and Tony Blair's fortunate symbiosis (web). The last words spoken in this film are:

QE: But I can see that the world has changed, and one must….modernise.

TB: Well, that's perhaps where I can help.

QE: Don't get ahead of yourself, Prime Minister! Remember I'm the one supposed to be advising you... (she chuckles).

Although the viewer might have expected Tony Blair to be completely in control, the film allows the Queen to have the final say. It denotes the mutual dependence in this unlikely relationship. Halfway through the film, when the Queen has refused to fly the Union Jack at half mast, Blair wonders: "Will anyone save these people from themselves?" (44.30) It is exactly what the Prime Minister has done, but only because the Queen allowed him to save her.

2.5 Conclusion

Film critic David Thomson concludes that *The Queen* has been "the most sophisticated public

relations boost" that Queen Elizabeth II has had in years (Merck 151). This chapter has shown how Frears and Morgan have carefully attempted to upgrade Elizabeth Windsor's public image by creating much more understanding for her behaviour during the week following Diana's death. T*he Queen* has explained Her Majesty's maintenance of traditions and has shown that behind her formality, there is a different personality as well. Moreover, the film has adjusted Princess Diana's public image, and it has made the audience gradually identify with Tony Blair as the hero of the story, thus having the audience also adopt his changed views on the Queen.

Considering the fact that the film attracted many laudatory reactions, both from the public and from critics, one could maintain that the film makers have succeeded in creating more understanding for that "vulnerable human being in her darkest hour." Royal biographer William Shawcross states that *The Queen* elicited many letters from the people who wrote that "before the film they had never quite understood what the Queen had been through", or "how glad they were that the film had finally tried to tell the truth they had always accepted" (106). The real Elizabeth II must have shared this last reaction, judging from the fact that, a few months after *The Queen*'s release, Helen Mirren was invited to have dinner with her at Buckingham Palace (BBC-web).

CHAPTER THREE: *The Young Victoria* (2009)

3.1 Introduction

On the morning after their wedding night, Victoria (Emily Blunt) tenderly wakes her husband, Prince Albert (Rupert Friend). When Albert kneels at her feet and rolls her stockings up her legs, Victoria tells him that their honeymoon cannot last longer than three days. Immediately, Albert rolls the stockings down again. Surprised, Victoria asks him "What are you doing?" Albert replies by saying "Well, if we've only got three days…." Both start to laugh (1.12.45). One would expect this intimate scene to have been completely made up by twenty-first century film makers, but the fact is that the real Queen Victoria has recorded this intimate scene in her journal. The entry in the "Lord Esher transcription" for February 13th, 1840, three days after their marriage, reads: "Got up at 20 m. to 9. My dearest Albert put on my stockings for me. I went in and saw him shave; a great delight for me. We breakfasted at ½ p. 9 together." (Royal Archives/Bodleian Libraries – web 354). It shows Victoria and Albert as lovers, rather than as the Queen and her consort.

Jean-Marc Vallée's *The Young Victoria* (2009) aims at adjusting the stereotype of the long-reigning Queen being a reclusive, sour-faced, matronly woman dressed in black mourning robes, and frequently uttering "we are not amused!" Two days before its official release in the United Kingdom, script writer Julian Fellowes stated in *The Daily Mail* that the young but forgotten Victoria was a "lively, passionate, feisty woman who loved dancing and opera and adored her husband". The film wanted to bring back "the girl we've lost" (Fellowes-web). Before taking on this project, Fellowes had already won an Academy Award for his screenplay for the film *Gosford Park* in 2002, and would, in 2010, create the highly

successful ITV costume drama D*ownton Abbey*, which won BAFTA Awards as well as Golden Globes.

The phenomenon of nostalgia proves central to Fellowes' work. Andrew Higson distinguishes two versions of nostalgia, the modern and the postmodern. The modern concept is founded on wistfulness, whereas in the postmodern concept of nostalgia the irrecoverable is attainable and seems to stand outside time (Higson 120-123). Both Modern and Postmodern nostalgia coexist in *The Young Victoria.* On the one hand, it sometimes invokes a sense of "bittersweet remembrance" and tends to idealise and sentimentalise the past. For example, it shows the audience that the heroic Prince Consort is prepared to die for his wife and for the nation. On the other hand – and this is a more prevalent aspect of the film – *The Young Victoria* aims at amusing and charming the audience, thus celebrating the past as exotic, glamorous and therefore entertaining.

It was Sarah Ferguson, former member of the British royal family, who suggested the idea of making a film on Queen Victoria's early life, to Oscar-winning producer Graham King (*The Departed)*. King agreed with her that "the story of Victoria's early years was just waiting to be told" (Fox-web), but was determined to distinguish this film from the formal and old-fashioned British costume dramas. King, together with co-producer Martin Scorsese, contracted French-Canadian director Jean-Marc Vallée, whose film C.R.A.Z.Y. (2005) had been one of the most successful Canadian films ever, both with the public and with critics. C.R.A.Z.Y.'s protagonist had tried to cope with homophobia and heterosexism in Quebec in the 1960s. King and Scorsese considered Vallée to be the perfect director to provide the film with some "rock 'n' roll" elements. As a matter of fact, Vallée thought Victoria to be a rebel, doing things her own way (Salisbury-web). To underscore this aspect, Emily Blunt, scene stealer in *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), was cast in the role of Victoria, alongside Rupert

Friend, already known for his role as Mr Wickham in the 2005 version of *Pride and Prejudice*, in the role of Prince Albert.

Generally, *The Young Victoria* was positively received, both by the public and by critics. It had a six-week run in the UK, earning more than a million pounds in its opening week, and, after some difficulty over its rights, was a moderate success in the United States as well, grossing eleven million dollars in nineteen weeks. Derek Elley of the weekly American entertainment-trade magazine *Variety*, praises the "tip-top casting and playing, led by young thesps Emily Blunt and Rupert Friend as the royal lovebirds", the "succulently crisp script", the "trim helming" by Vallée, the outstanding supports – especially by Miranda Richardson (Duchess of Kent) and Harriet Walter (Queen Adelaide) – and Ilan Eshkeri's classical score, lending "both dignity and romance to the material" (Elley-web). The film won two BAFTA Awards (Costume Design and Make-up and hair) and an Academy Award (Costume Design), and was nominated in two other Academy Award categories. Emily Blunt was nominated for a Golden Globe in the category Best Dramatic Actress.

Newspaper critics in the UK were divided over *The Young Victoria*. In general, right-wing papers tended to be far more positive. *The Times'* Wendy Ide judges Victoria and Albert's relationship to be "persuasive and rather charming" and is also very enthusiastic about both the main and the supporting cast (Ide-web). Chloe Fox of *The Daily Telegraph* calls the film a "production of the highest calibre with an impeccable cast" (Fox-web).

Two other critics, from *The Guardian*, are less enthusiastic about the film. Alex von Tunzelmann states that, although the film is fairly accurate, its script has a low opinion of its audience. He refers to the chess scene, in which, he thinks, "there is just enough time to groan at the blatant symbolism before Victoria actually starts to explain it". Furthermore, this critic calls the screenplay "clunky" and observes that Victoria and Albert are "caught between a variety of predatory interests. (...) It was more like being the two last balls in a game of

Hungry Hungry Hippos" (Von Tunzelmann-web). Peter Bradshaw states that he had much anticipated Emily Blunt's casting, whom he describes as a "black-belt minx", but is really disappointed, because "Blunt is never allowed to let rip. All that coiled feline sensuality stays coiled." Bradshaw thinks that the film is boring as "for an awful lot of the time, they are apart, in different countries". Finally, Bradshaw states that Julian Fellowes does not match his "cracking script for *Gosford Park"* (Bradshaw-web).

This chapter will show that *The Young Victoria*, with a quality screenplay, cast, producer, and setting,has contributed to a revaluation of Queen Victoria and her husband, by showing Victoria as a rebellious, joyful, and romantic young woman, and Albert as possessing a sense of social awareness, executive skills, political insight, and a romantic nature. Moreover, it will show that this film followed in the footsteps of *The Queen*, which set the trend for a new type of royal bio-pic. Thus, *The Young Victoria* has contributed to a new consciousness regarding Britishness in general, and of the British Monarchy in particular.

3.2 *The Young Victoria* as Historical Film

Queen Elizabeth II is said to have questioned some inaccuracies in *The Young Victoria.* According to *News of the World*, "a source" reported on the Queen to have expressed that the film had "a lot of good points", but showed her disapproval of Albert being shot in the assassination attempt, as she is a "stickler for accuracy" and this just did not happen. Apart from that, Her Majesty thought that the British officers' uniforms looked too Germanic (Jamieson-web). In *The Daily Telegraph,* screenwriter Julian Fellowes admitted to these and other inaccuracies of the film, but dismissed them as trivial, as "ordinary people" would not be distracted by them, only wondering if the film would be good or not (Jamieson-web). The discrepancy between these two opinions on the extent of historical accuracy, the Queen's and

Fellowes', raises the historiographic issues of truth and objectivity.

Late-twentieth-century historiography has known a rise in attacks from postmodern critics, who maintained that all judgments by historians, by definition, were affected by subjectivity. For example, in *Telling the Truth about History* (1994), the American historians Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob state that "history has been shaken right down to its scientific and cultural foundations" (1). They advocate a new historiographic approach, as "once there was a single narrative of national history that most Americans accepted as part of their heritage. Now there is an increasing emphasis on the diversity of ethnic, racial, and gender experience" (1). In their view, there are many possible narratives, instead of one. Key words in their "new" perception of history are "scepticism" and "relativism". In their view, moderate scepticism encourages people to learn more and to remain open to possible own mistakes. They define relativism as "the belief that the truth of a statement is connected with the position of the person making that statement" (6). Alan Munslow suggests that, in a postmodern world, we must accept that we cannot really know the past. We can only consider a number of different possible versions of it. Evaluating one version of the past as more authentic or true than another is already problematic in itself (6).

Within the profession, the possibility of writing truthful history at all became a subject of intense debate. In 1997, Richard J. Evans, History professor at the University of Cambridge, published *In Defence of History*. In this book, Evans expresses his concern that "growing numbers of historians themselves are abandoning the search for truth, the belief in objectivity, and the quest for a scientific approach to the past" (Evans 4). He shows what tools, including such modern devices as computer models, historians use in order to extract meaning from the unruly past, with the aim of reconstructing a verifiable, usable one. Although Evans thinks that it is a good thing that historians are forced to reconsider their discipline, he concludes that, despite everything, historians can still, "if we are very

scrupulous and careful and self-critical," find out how something happened, "though always less than final conclusions about what it all meant" (Evans 252). Wulf Kansteiner dismisses Evans' defence because he thinks that Evans derives his knowledge about postmodernism from hardly representative sources, and that he unnecessarily attacks colleagues and critics (226).

In spite of different views on history in general, film historian Professor James Chapman states that most historians agree on the characteristics of the historical film. In his introduction to *Past and Present*: *National Identity and the British Historical Film*, he discusses those characteristics. Firstly, historical films often "reflect the societies and cultures in which they are produced and consumed" (Chapman 1). An example of this is a statement by Julian Fellowes; when discussing *Downton Abbey*, he says that "in difficult and rude-mannered times, it is comforting for people to see a story about a period of British history when everybody had a station in life, whether it was as a footman or an earl" (Byrne 5). Katherine Byrne argues that, indeed, the 1920s Abbey itself functions as a microcosm for twenty-first century Britain (5). One could argue that, when writing *The Young Victoria*, the same Julian Fellowes has drawn parallels from Victoria in the 1830s to Princess Diana in the 1990s, as, for example, both are imagined as fighting for personal freedom.

Secondly, a film is labelled "historical", when it is based, even although loosely, "on actual historical events or real historical persons", thus narrowing the category more than the terms "costume drama" or "period film" would. Often, the historical film asserts its own status by using devices such as voice-overs, or, as in *The Young Victoria*, title captions to establish the historical context. Especially British historical films tend to create their own "verisimilitude", the appearance of being real. Chapman states that this is done in the promotion and production discourses surrounding the film, in its *mise-en-scène* (sets, dressings and costumes), and in the use of quotes from original sources. All three elements are

applicable to *The Young Victoria*. It is interesting to take a closer look at what historical sources have been used, especially because, according to Chapman, films about the kings and queens of England particularly "come in for the most severe criticism from historians." (Chapman 5)

When studying the film's screenplay in detail, it can be concluded that Fellowes appears to have extensively consulted two rather outdated (and one of them even slightly controversial) biographies on the monarch, being *Queen Victoria* by Lytton Strachey (1921), and *Victoria R.I.* by Elizabeth Longford (1964). Minor elements in the script which one would expect to have sprung from the writer's imagination, appear to have been based on either of the two biographies. For example, after a short description of the Coronation, Strachey writes that "when she returned to Buckingham Palace, at last she [Victoria] was not tired; she ran up to her private rooms, doffed her splendours, and gave her dog Dash its evening bath" (60). In her chapter on 1840, Longford writes that "her [Victoria's] dependence on the Prince even in matters of state was advancing as steadily as her pregnancy. The arrangement of their writing-tables at Windsor, side by side, was introduced into Buckingham Palace when they returned there after the summer" (153). The most striking example of the film's borrowing from Lytton Strachey, who used the *Greville Memoirs* as his own source, is the birthday banquet speech by King William IV (Jim Broadbent), in which he turns on Victoria's mother. When these two quotations are compared, Fellows appears to have cited Strachey almost literally. (35/25.30) .

Contemporary critics are divided over Strachey's biography: either they consider this book to be "the definitive biography of Britain's greatest monarch", lacking false flattery and submission to the subject and being full of sly humour, or they consider its writer to have misused the subject of Victoria to explore his own personality. Obviously, Julian Fellowes belongs to the first category. Lytton Strachey (1880-1932) became popular through his writing of four short biographies in *Eminent Victorians* (1918), namely the lives of Cardinal

Manning, Florence Nightingale, Thomas Arnold, and General Gordon. Otherwise his literary reputation, though, is based upon *Queen Victoria* (1921). Richard Hutch states that Strachey, although unknowingly, was the first to use "strategic irony" in biographical writing, thus connecting psychology with biography. Hutch defines irony as a pretended ignorance designed to confuse or provoke. Strachey has combined "the way a biography is written with a principle of interpreting a life," here Queen Victoria's. Hutch suggests that Strachey, when writing *Queen Victoria*, has been "pressing the queen into the service of his own personal needs", as "behind the work of Strachey the biographer is the person attempting to find out the truth about himself" (Hutch 7). Indeed, parallels can be drawn between Victoria's life and Strachey's own. For example, Victoria never knew her father, the Duke of Kent, whereas Strachey felt "great emotional distance" from his father, who was sixty-three years his senior.

Using these historical sources has not completely prevented historians, or "stickler-for-accuracy" critics, from offering "sincere criticism". In particular, there are two historical facts concerning Victoria and Albert which differ from the way they are depicted in *The Young Victoria*. Firstly, critics have questioned the main character's photogenic appearance and her perfect English. Whereas, according to Fellowes, "the physical resemblance between Friend and – the young – Albert silenced the cast when filming began" (Fox-web), Emily Blunt is generally considered to be "too pretty to convey what the young Victoria was like" (Wilson-web). Martin Filler thinks that Blunt is "too thin and comely to play the pudgy, pop-eyed queen" (Filler-web). Blunt's "pure British cut-glass" English is striking (Elley-web), as other characters, such as Albert, the Duchess of Kent, and the Dowager Queen speak with a German accent. Strachey states about Victoria that "German was naturally the first language with which she was familiar", as German was the mother tongue of both her mother and Baroness Lehzen, Victoria's governess. As a result, "her mastery of English grammar remained incomplete" (26). Secondly, – and Queen Elizabeth was right about this – the

suggestion that Prince Albert was shot during the assassination attempt to save his wife is definitely untrue. However, the would-be assassin, Edward Oxford, was real. He shot twice but missed Victoria and Albert with both attempts. According to Longford, Albert flung his arms around his wife, shouting "My god! Don't be alarmed!" (151).

There are more, though less important, differences between the historical, or supposedly historical, and cinematic Albert and Victoria. The role of Prime Minister Lord Melbourne is played by thirty-seven-year-old actor Paul Bettany, whereas the real Melbourne was in his late fifties. Albert's visit to England in 1838 never took place; not only was Prince Albert absent from the ceremony at Westminster Abbey, he also never danced with Victoria at her coronation ball. Some story lines cannot be traced historically but seem to have been invented by Fellowes, such as the frequent advisory conversations between Victoria and Queen Adelaide (to provide the viewer with explanations), and the importance within the budding royal relationship of the music by Schubert (to make the film more romantic). Victoria's relationship with the two all-important women in her life as a child, her mother and Baroness Lehzen, is not satisfactorily explained. Originally, these story lines were included in the film, but, in the end, these scenes were deleted. The same thing happened to the scenes dealing with the scandal involving Lady Flora Hastings, which was at least as damaging to the Crown as the "bedchamber crisis".

3.3 "Royal Reserve, Girlish Enthusiasm, and lightly Tempered Steel"

Eleven years before the appearance of *The Young Victoria*, the stereotypical public perception of Queen Victoria was reinforced by the appearance of director John Madden's *Her Majesty, Mrs. Brown* (1997). Although this film in general, and leading actress Judi Dench in particular, were highly lauded and received a number of Golden Globes, BAFTA Awards, and

even an Oscar, it still showed an "aloof, pinch-faced old lady dressed in black, mourning her husband Prince Albert" (Salisbury-web), or, as Rupert Friend formulates it in the DVD-special feature "The real Victoria", "a very reclusive sort of dowager widow". Emily Blunt, once she had been appointed to the leading part, started reading about the younger Victoria "obsessively, and realised that Victoria was the polar opposite of that stereotype. She was joyful and feminine. She liked to dance till dawn. She was passionate and willful and full of life" (Fox-web). To Blunt, it was exciting to try and change people's opinions of what Victoria was like by playing her as a contradiction to people's preconceptions (Cinematic I.A.-web).

The film does not completely contradict the way Victoria was commonly perceived. Derek Elley states that Emily Blunt's greatest achievement in *The Young Victoria* is the fact that the more familiar Victoria of her later years can already be glimpsed in her performance without ever hindering her youthful portrait. The actress demonstrates a "beautifully modulated turn, which balances royal reserve, girlish enthusiasm, and lightly tempered steel" (web).

On the one hand, the film shows some of the characteristics that the public already supposed the older Queen to possess. Firstly, the film shows Victoria's strong will. Hardly three minutes into the film, Sir John Conroy tries to make Victoria sign the regency order, but she determinedly refuses. During William VI's birthday banquet, the Duke of Wellington and Lady Sutherland refer to this incident exemplifying Victoria's strong will. Secondly, Dowager Queen Adelaide remarks that it is Victoria's stubbornness that has caused the fall of the government during the "bedchamber crisis", by saying "you are confusing stubbornness with strength, my dear. And I warn you, the people will not like you for it!" (1.03.40). Thirdly, towards the end of the film of *The Young Victoria*, the Queen and her husband have a row and

Victoria is shown screaming with rage, ordering Albert to stay in the room. Apart from Victoria's generally known uncontrollable anger, this row also suggests her egotism.

On the other hand, the film paints the picture of the rebellious, joyful, and romantic young Queen, which, over the years, would be forgotten almost completely. Firstly, she is depicted as having a strong desire for independence and freedom. She clearly shows her discontentment with the "Kensington system" in the introduction ("so I began to dream of the day when my life would change and I might be free"), and abolishes it the moment that she has become queen: she refuses her mother to hold her hand when going up the stairs and orders Lehzen to arrange for her bed to be moved into a room of her own (35.50). About visiting Buckingham Palace for the first time, Victoria writes to Albert: "As I stepped out of the carriage, for the first time in my life I felt freedom" (39.20). When Adelaide tells her that she has to decide on a husband soon, she replies that she cannot marry the man they *want* her to marry, and wonders if she cannot be her own mistress for a while, because she feels that she has earned it (39.35).

Secondly, the film shows Victoria as a joyful young woman who loves dancing, the opera, and a good laugh. At the end of the chess scene, she asks Albert to waltz with her, as she is "quite in love with it" (14.00), and before the coronation, she tells Lord Melbourne that it is her intention "to dance until dawn" (52.00). At the opera "I Puritani", Victoria appears to know the lyrics by heart (8.55). At the King's birthday, Victoria and her uncle have a very witty "tête-à-tête" (25.30), and in one of her letters to Albert she writes about Melbourne and herself that "sometimes we laugh so much, it's as if we were naughty children" (42.00). After the enchanting dance with Albert at the coronation ball, she tells Albert "Oh dear, I have a quadrille with the Prince of Prussia next…My poor little toes. I feel sorry for them already! (she laughs) (52.30).

Thirdly, and most surprisingly, the young Victoria is depicted as a feminine and romantic woman enjoying the marital pleasures of sexual intercourse. While writing a letter to Albert, Victoria swoons over Schubert's *Schwanengesang*, and after the romantic rain scene, Victoria takes the initiative for a tender embrace, saying "we will take care of each other, won't we?" (1.14.20) The use of the long-standing trope of lovers playing chess, as used in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, is "the medieval and Renaissance symbol of courtly, aristocratic entertainment, even of sexual equality" (Poole 50). This scene, at the beginning of the film, is an obvious reference to Albert and Victoria's future sexual relationship on the basis of equality. Apart from the already mentioned stockings-scene, there are more moments in the last part of the film that show how much the young couple enjoy making love. While tenderly caressing Albert, Victoria blissfully remarks that now she is "quite married" (1.12.45). Not surprisingly, this last royal characteristic cannot be found in the biographies by Strachey or Longford. However, close reading of Victoria's private journals and letters confirm that the virginal young queen showed clear signs of sexual concern, and that once Victoria married Prince Albert, she learnt how to enjoy things very quickly (Filler-web). For example, The Lord Esher transcription of Friday, November 1st, 1839 (three months before their marriage), reads:

> The Rifles look beautiful. It was piercingly cold, and I sat in my cape, which dearest Albert settled comfortably for me. He was so cold, dear Angel, being in grande tenue with tight white cazimere pantaloons (*nothing under them*) and high boots. (Royal Archives/Bodleian Libraries – web 1).

After Victoria's death, her journals were expurgated by her youngest daughter Beatrice.

Sentences like these (including those referring to the stockings scene) have only survived in Lord Esher's *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria,* covering the period from 1832 to 1840.

3.4 "One of the Best Things that ever Happened to Britain"

Contrary to the stereotypical public image of his wife Victoria, twenty-first century people hardly have a clear image of Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. Rupert Friend states that, while studying the prince's life, he almost immediately felt a connection with the character he would play. He considers Albert to be a real unsung hero, and calls him "a great reformer, a doting husband, a hard worker, and a man of real integrity and modesty" (Fox-web). This image is carefully built up throughout *The Young Victoria*, culminating with the scene in which Lord Melbourne of all people, sings Albert's praises. Melbourne tells Victoria that "the prince is a good man. A better man than any of us knew. (…) He is able. He is clever. And he's faithful. Let him share your work!" (1.30.00) This scene refers to the chess scene at the beginning of the film; Albert has just arrived in England after having been trained in Victoria's literary and musical preferences, and behaves clumsily in his first encounter with his cousin (12.30). However, the princess starts to fancy Albert as soon as he drops his act, when he ventures to advocate Schubert (13.30), and tells Victoria about his mother. When she assumes that Uncle Leopold asked him to tell her that, he answers: "No, er, he actually told me never to mention it" (16.30). Elley states that "Blunt and Friend quickly establish the screen chemistry vital to the movie's success" in this "delicious scene in which the two play chess under the watchful eyes of their scheming elders" (web). Albert advises Victoria to find a husband, not to play the game for her, but with her (14.00). The involvement that Victoria and Albert develop as early on in the film as this, is sealed by the fulfilment of Albert's piece of advice: at the end of the film, Victoria is finally able to end the political triangle between

herself, Albert, and Melbourne, and decides that it is Prince Albert who is going to share her work.

Throughout the film, Albert's personal skills and qualities are enlarged upon. Firstly, the Prince demonstrates a sense of social awareness. He tells Victoria that every sovereign must "champion the dispossessed", and passionately shows her his plans to solve the housing problem of workers in the fast-expanding industry (44.50). Secondly, Albert is in possession of executive skills. He carefully inspects the bookkeeping of Sir John Conroy (Mark King), and tries to make the royal household more effective. The film's postscript states that "Victoria and Albert championed reforms in education, welfare, and industry" and also that "unflagging support of the arts and sciences was most famously celebrated in Prince Albert's Great Exhibition of 1851" (1.33.20). Thirdly, at various moments in *The Young Victoria*, the Prince demonstrates his political insight and skills. During one of Baron Stockmar's lessons, he wonders why the English prime minister would want to save a foreign throne if it was not in the country's interest (19.45). When Melbourne tries to advise him on how Victoria and the Duchess of Kent could be reconciled, Albert answers that he will make his own decisions and does not need his advice (1.21.50). Albert also diplomatically avoids a possible second "bedchamber crisis" (1.24.00). Fourthly, the prince appears to be romantic, too. During his second visit to England, he teaches Victoria how to shoot with bow and arrow, which suggests that, at this point in the film, Albert won her heart. In a scene in which Victoria is reading one of his letters, the audience hears his voice, while accompanied by piano music of Schubert's "Swan Song" (33.45). Although the assailant scene has been exaggerated, it enables Albert not only to demonstrate his love for Victoria, but also to explain that the British Monarchy would not have survived without her.

The highly positive image of Prince Albert that is created in *The Young Victoria* does justice to the historical Prince. Although one might be tempted to state that *The Young*

Victoria has depicted Prince Albert as a real "too good to be true" Prince Charming, Martin Filler writes that "for two pivotal decades at the height of the Industrial Revolution, Albert exerted a salutary influence on the developments of the arts, sciences, and technology in Britain" (web). A.N. Wilson, too, states that Albert has not been valued for the genius he was and considers him to be "one of the best things that ever happened to Britain". He even maintains that if Prince Albert had lived as long as Victoria, the Great War would not have happened, as he would have been able to control his grandson, the German Emperor (web).

3.5 Conclusion

The film makers of *The Young Victoria* have followed the trend, set by Frears and Morgan in *The Queen*: the simple re-enactments of the former royal bio-pic have been substituted by a three-dimensional portrait of the young main character and her future husband, or, put differently, Vallée and Fellowes have taken the film's subject very seriously. For example, during the constitutional crisis, Victoria writes to Albert that "The storm still rages outside the palace walls. I wonder now if everyone was right. Perhaps I am too young and inexperienced for my position" (1.06.00). This scene not only shows Victoria's self-reflection, it also shows the almost unbearable responsibilities of being a queen.

It is very likely that the "new" portrayals of the young Albert and Victoria have taken root in, foremost British, collective memory. As far as Prince Albert is concerned, this is obvious, as he is convincingly depicted as an "unsung hero", and, moreover, as only few people had a clear image of him. With Victoria, things are more complicated, as there already existed a strong stereotypical image of her. Emily Blunt wonderfully portrays the "new" Victoria as being rebellious, joyful, and romantic. Very cleverly, however, the film does not completely contradict the old stereotype, by also showing characteristics like Victoria's

stubbornness and her uncontrollable rage. Thus, the audience is able to make a connection between the "old" and the "new" Victoria, and adjust its opinion.

Criticism of the film has centered on two aspects: left-wing critics have called the film, and especially Albert and Victoria's relationship, boring, and historians (and the Queen) have pointed at historical inaccuracies. Chapman contends that every historical film invokes parallels between the past and the present. In some films, a contemporary meaning is imparted consciously, in others it has only "been read into the film by critics or historians" (10). Chapman advocates that an interpretative analysis of films is only justified "when the historical circumstances of production and reception have first been established". Otherwise, the interpretation would only show the critic's own familiarity with the latest fashionable trend in cultural theory (Chapman 11). This is exactly what Bradshaw does when he states about Victoria that "Blunt is never allowed to let it rip". If Emily Blunt had played Victoria as the "black-belt minx" from *The Devil wears Prada*, as he obviously wanted, it would have made the film ridiculous.

In his reaction to Queen Elizabeth's criticism, Julian Fellowes has not only confirmed that he has written the screenplay with a contemporary audience in mind, he has also specified that they are "ordinary people", who are not distracted by historical inaccuracies, and who are obviously not interested in what Beck has called "serious history with a capital H." (Byrne 2) In other words, whereas the Queen herself would support Richard Evans' view on historiography, Fellowes would turn to Alan Munslow's suggestion that, in a postmodern world, we must accept that "we cannot really know the past".

Regrettably, the film makers only had ninety-five minutes at their disposal to portray this royal love story. So much had to be told and explained, that scenes concerning Victoria's mother, Baroness Lehzen, and Lady Flora Hastings were deleted in the final cut, scenes that would have added to the coherence of the film. Still, chances are that after having watched

The Young Victoria, people will feel more compassion for the short and reclusive woman in black.

CHAPTER 4: *The King's Speech* (2010)

4.1 Introduction

Tom Hooper's film *The King's Speech*, which had its world premiere in September 2010, turned out to be both an overwhelming box office and a critical success. In the UK, where people were "reported to have been queuing around the block to see it" (Bradshaw), it became the most successful independent British film ever. As expected, the film won many BAFTAs, seven out of fourteen nominations. In the US, it took one hundred and thirty-eight million dollars, being screened in more than fifteen hundred cinemas at a time. *The King's Speech* received four Academy Awards (Best Actor, Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Original Screenplay), out of twelve nominations.

The *King's Speech* tells the unlikely story of the introverted stammerer Albert, Duke of York (Colin Firth), and his undeferential Australian speech therapist Lionel Logue (Geoffrey Rush). When George V's elder son David (King Edward VIII, played by Guy Pearce) decides to abdicate, he saddles his younger brother Albert, or Bertie, as he is called in the family circle, with the throne. As King George VI, Bertie has to overcome his stammer to deliver the speech of his life when, on the third of September, 1939, war is declared on Germany. With Logue as his teacher and his friend, his voice becomes one of the heroic and inspiring voices of the Second World War.

The original screenplay for the film was written by David Seidler, who, as a child, was a profound stammerer himself. He recalls: "The King was a childhood idol of mine. I thought, well, if a king can get over it, with everyone in the world listening to every syllable he utters, maybe there's hope for me" (DVD). Seidler asked official permission to write on this subject as early as the 1980s, but Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (George VI's wife, in the film played by Helena Bonham Carter) asked him to wait until after her death. In 2005, Seidler's

script, originally written as a play, was brought to the attention of Joan Lane and, through her, of Bedlam productions. With Iain Canning, Emile Sherman, Gareth Unwin, and Australian actor Geoffrey Rush on the production team, Tom Hooper was contracted as director. Hooper, a British film and television director of English-Australian parentage, had already been successful with television dramas such as *Elizabeth I* (2005), *Longford* (2006), and *John Adams* (2008), and with the film *The Damned United* (2009). This football docu-drama, adapted by Peter Morgan from David Peace's bestseller, starred Michael Sheen as Brian Clough, following his forty-four-day stint as Leeds United's manager. Initially, the film was directed by Stephen Frears, but halfway through the project Tom Hooper took his place. The project of *The King's Speech* was partly funded by the UK Film Council (which event, ironically enough, coincided with a government cut on their budget).

Almost unanimously, *The King's Speech* was lauded by film critics, both from right-wing and left-wing newspapers, and both British and American. David Gritten of *The Telegraph* calls the film "an uplifting audience pleaser that also showcases film-making arts and crafts at an exalted level". Gritten also praises "gorgeous backdrops - the accession ceremony in Westminster Abbey, a beautiful mist-shrouded park, the bohemian charm of Logue's office" (web). Even *The Guardian*'s Peter Bradshaw, who had not been very enthusiastic about *The Young Victoria,* is positive. He states that "what looks at first like a conventional Brit period drama about royals, is actually a witty and elegant new perspective on the abdication crisis and on the dysfunctional quiver at the heart of the Windsors and of pre-war Britain" (web). Three months later, he writes that "it's acted and directed with such sweep, verve, darting lightness. George VI's talking cure is gripping" (web). Bradshaw only has some minor criticism of the film, which, he thinks, might possibly be "excessively royalist" and which "skates rather too tactfully" over the Windsors' appeasement policy. *Rolling Stone*'s Peter Travers thinks that *The King's Speech* is "powered by a dream cast"

(web). Leading American film critic Roger Ebert remarks that “if the British monarchy is good for nothing else, it's superb at producing the subject of films” (web).

Apart from highly praising the film in general, critics also hail the individual actors' achievements. Bradshaw states that “everyone agrees that Firth (...) is the X-factor at the heart of the film” (web). *The Daily Mail*'s Chris Tookey writes that “Colin Firth really does give the performance of his life as the Queen's father, George VI. (...) He's wonderfully complex as this reluctant monarch: tetchy, insecure, dutiful but resentful of duty at the same time” (web). Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* calls the film “a buddy story about aggressively charming opposites” and praises the “two solid leads”. Travers thinks that Geoffrey Rush is Firth's match, “fiercely funny in the hilarious and heartfelt interactions between king and commoner. Lionel is a failed actor given to grand gestures, and Rush chows down on this feast of a role, jolting the movie to life” (web).

Finally, critics agree that, in addition, there is an impressive supporting cast. Tookey even maintains that they “must be among the best in the history of cinema” (web). Most attention from critics is paid to the excellent performances by Helena Bonham Carter, Michael Gambon, and Guy Pearce. Bonham Carter, who can be merciless, as in *Harry Potter* (Ebert-web), makes a splendid Elizabeth, “acid-tongued, assured, possessed of a dry wit” (Gritten-web), and “creates miracles with every subtle look and gesture” (Travers-web). Gambon (King George V) is considered “memorably severe and regal” (Dargis-web), and has “two great scenes” (Bradshaw-web). Pearce is thought to be “absolutely stellar” (Travers-web), and “a terrific Edward, the smooth obnoxious bully who mocks Bertie's stammer” (Bradshaw-web). Dargis admires Pearce's scene at Balmoral Castle, when David “viciously taunts Bertie” and “you see the entirety of their cruel childhood flashing between them” (web).

This chapter will explain how the unusual friendship between a king and an Australian

immigrant could develop, as a result of which King George VI would become a symbol of national resistance against Hitler. It will also show that the film connects to the example of William Shakespeare, which, among other factors, contributed to the film turning out to be a classic example of the English heritage film. Moreover, it will demonstrate that *The King's Speech* almost perfected the modern type of royal bio-pic, as initiated by Frears and Morgan's *The Queen*.

4.2 *The King's Speech* as Therapy Film

The King's Speech is a therapy film, in the tradition of Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945), Dennis Potter's TV serial drama *The Singing Detective* (1986), and Robert Redford's *Ordinary People* (1980). As the success of the treatment, in the end, is essential to Bertie becoming a symbol of the British nation in World War II, it is useful to discuss the film from a psychological point of view. In short, contemporary medical experts approve of the ways in which *The King's Speech* deals with King George VI's stammer problem. Adele Cabot, a designated voice psychologist from UCLA, stresses that Colin Firth acted the complex speech impediment "with extraordinary detail, compassion, and emotional honesty. His adroit tortuous manipulation of his facial features while stammering was an amazing feat". Apart from this, Cabot maintains that the physical exercises that are shown in the film, although brief and not complete, "provide an authentic glimpse of how a speech/voice therapist works even today" (242).

The film's approach towards Lionel Logue's healing methods is highly lauded as well. Already in their first encounter, Lionel demands that the two men should work on the basis of equality, if they want the treatment to be successful. According to Cabot, Logue diagnoses Bertie's stammer straightaway as developed "as an unconscious physical habit in response to

high levels of anxiety" during his childhood (Cabot 241). He tells Bertie that "no infant starts to speak with a stammer", but that stammering mostly starts at the age of four or five (Seidler 21). Melissa Louder, a marriage and family therapist from the University of Nevada, argues that Bertie may have developed his stammer in order to maintain the balance within the royal family. According to her, he and his elder brother David reacted quite differently to their harsh and stern father, King George V. David became rebellious, whereas Bertie was reserved and happy to stay out of the limelight. Louder considers these two different patterns of behaviour to be common, regarding the two brothers' birth order. By playing the role of the second son from an early age, Bertie excluded himself from running for the role of monarch. An example of this from the film, is the scene in which Bertie comes to collect David at the private landing strip on the Sandringham estate, where David simply tells his younger brother: "I'll drive!" (35) To both brothers it is only natural that David is in charge. Just like Cabot, Louder approves of Logue's treatment of Bertie, especially when he asks Bertie to recollect memories from his childhood.When he was a child, Bertie felt detached from his parents and neglected and treated cruelly by his nanny. As a result, with Bertie still carrying painful memories of his father and brother, Louder thinks that Logue is right to clinically explore Bertie's attachment problems. She states that, if the therapy is to become a success, the client-therapist relationship is of vital importance. In an "ordinary" therapist-client relationship, there is a power differential as the therapist is the expert, but here, there is also a second power differential because of Bertie's royal status. It makes developing a therapeutic alliance much more difficult.

The film demonstrates that Bertie needs three attempts to really lower his royal persona and to assent to equality of status, which is absolutely necessary for a successful treatment.The first attempt only takes one session, in the middle of which Bertie decides not to continue. He does not return to Logue until after having been humiliated by his father, who

wants him to try and read his Christmas speech. When George V has died, Bertie, quite unconventionally, turns to Logue and, while drinking whiskey with him, takes him into his confidence about his childhood relationships with his father and his brother. According to Cabot, this is the moment in the development of their relationship at which the first cracks in Bertie's armour start to appear. He tells Logue that, although David and he were "very close," David, like the rest of the family, also teased him, by calling him "Buh-buh-buh-Bertie." About his father he states that he encouraged the bullying (44). Shortly afterwards, Bertie feels having returned to square one, when he is not able to say a word in reply to David's bullying at Balmoral Castle. In the scene in the cold and chilly Regent's Park, the second "treatment attempt" comes to an end. Logue takes "liberties" by telling Bertie that he need not be governed by fear. Bertie, after having insulted Logue, strides off angrily, telling Logue that the sessions are over (Seidler 57-58). When David has abdicated and when, as King George VI, he has delivered a disastrous speech to the Accession Council, Bertie is shown in his most vulnerable hour; although comforted by his wife, he breaks down and cries, with fierce and heavy sobs. He and Elizabeth decide, for the third time, to turn to Logue (65), who apologises and eventually convinces Bertie that he is very much his "own man": he does not have to keep carrying shillings with the faces of his father or brother around in his pocket, or, in other words, he should not be afraid of his childhood phantoms anymore (67).

The fact that Bertie, from this moment on, puts complete trust in Logue is shown by the scene at Westminster Abbey. Although Bertie's choice for Logue is heavily criticised by authorities like the Archbishop of Canterbury, he refuses to replace Logue by the Archbishop's "recommendations", and even insists that Logue should be seated in the King's Box during the ceremony. Their fully grown friendship is demonstrated in the film's magnificent final scene. A few moments before Bertie is on air, Logue tells him to forget everything else and just read the speech to him, "as a friend" (85). Although the tension is

palpable, Logue radiates calm confidence, and Bertie takes a deep breath and also puts into practice all the other things that Logue has been teaching him. Though slow and not completely flawless in the beginning, Bertie gains more and more confidence during his speech, and is completely in command towards the end. Afterwards, Bertie takes Lionel's hand and, for the first time, calls Lionel “my friend”. Lionel, for the first time as well, replies by calling Bertie “Your Majesty” (86-88). The last card of the film reads: “Lionel and Bertie remained friends for the rest of their lives” (90).

In conclusion, the speech therapy proves to be successful as a result of Bertie's willingness to become friends with Logue. If the relationship between the future King of Great Britain and the self-taught therapist from one of its colonies had not become this “morganatic bromance” (Bradshaw-web), showing intimacy instead of deference and the inner depths instead of the surface, Bertie would never have become a “symbol of national resistance” (90).

4.3 Bertie and Lionel: the Shakespearean King and his Fool

One of the things that might act as a marker to the audience why *The King’s Speech* should be seen as a 'quality film', is its close connection to English literary culture. In particular, it is said to have Shakespearean qualities. Firstly, the film contains a number of quotations from, or allusions to, Shakespeare plays. Secondly, and more importantly, the film also uses the Shakespearean archetypal relationship of “king” versus “fool”. When Elizabeth visits Logue to make an appointment for her husband, Lionel apologises for the simplicity of his practice by using the phrase from *Othello* that “poor and content is rich and rich enough” (8). When Logue auditions in front of the committee (Seidler 16), he recites the opening scene from *Richard III:*

> Now is the winter of our discontent
> Made glorious summer by this sun of York;
> And all the clouds that lour'd upon our house
> In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.

The "sun of York" was used by Shakespeare as a pun, referring to Richard III's and Edward IV's father Richard, the Duke of York of that time. It is obvious that, in this film, the quotation refers to Bertie, who was still Duke of York at the moment of Logue's audition. In the scene in which Bertie is asked to read aloud with headphones on, he is reading the famous soliloquy from *Hamlet*, the prince who should be king but is not (24). When Lionel plays the "Shake" game with his sons, they expect him to do the "Scottish play" or *Othello*, but instead he quotes Caliban, from *The Tempest* (40). When Bertie starts swearing and does so without a single stammer, Lionel remarks that defecation "flows trippingly from the tongue", which, again, is from Hamlet (55). The blog *Bardfilm*, which comments on films, plays, and other matters related to Shakespeare, is positive about *The King's Speech.* It states that the allusions in this film, contrary to most other films, in which Shakespeare is almost randomly used to make the contents appear more intellectual, are "exactly of the right sort" (Bardfilm-web). Nick Walton, a lecturer in Shakespeare Studies, also approves of the film. He maintains that, like many original Shakespeare plays, the film explores "what is it like to live with the saddle of expectation", by which he means that Bertie, just like, for example, Hamlet, appears to have grave doubts whether he is appropriate for his task (Walton-web).

The character of Lionel Logue in *The King's Speech* is a modern version of the Shakespearean fool. The characteristics that are typical of this fool can easily be ascribed to Logue as well. Firstly, Samantha Markham states that the Shakespearean fool is an ordinary, working class commoner, "deemed as being of the lower order" (Markham-web). Logue is

not even a working class Brit, he is an Australian, being called “King of the colonies” by the Shakespeare director (16), and “a jumped-up jackeroo from the Outback” by Bertie, when he is terribly angry with Logue (58). Secondly, the fool in *King Lear* is the only person in the play who, often wittily, comments on events and characters, and who is allowed to criticise the King. Just like Feste in *Twelfth Night*, this fool is not afraid to speak the truth and calls his master “foolish” (shmoop-web). Logue is very much like Lear's fool and Feste, telling Bertie the, sometimes inconvenient, truth throughout the film. He calls Bertie's physicians “fools” (21), labels Mrs Simpson “Queen Wallis of Baltimore” (56), and does not care “how many royal arses” have sat on the Coronation Chair (74). The most important truth that he wants to convince Bertie of, is that he could outshine David as a king. Initially, Bertie cannot face this truth and even considers it to be treason. Thirdly, both Lear's fool and Feste are said to be loyal. Logue is loyal as well: after Bertie has insulted him and told him that their sessions are over (58), he tries to visit Bertie at his palace in order to apologise, but Bertie's equerry prevents him from doing so (60). Fourthly, Lear's relationship with his fool is one of friendship and dependency. The relationship between Lionel and Bertie, gradually leading up to the finale in which both men call each other “friend”, constitutes the brilliance of the film. It is not only the fact that Lionel plays the Shakespearean fool, but also the fact that Bertie allows him to, that makes the happy ending possible.

4.4 A Classic Example of the English Heritage Film

The King's Speech turns out to possess all the qualities that are thought characteristic of the English “heritage film”. According to Andrew Higson in *English Cinema, English Heritage* (2003), English heritage films “operate at very much the culturally respectable, quality end of the market”. Higson states that these are the kind of films that are invited to

film festivals and that win BAFTAs, Golden Globes and Oscars. The majority of their audience is middle class, and older than the mainstream film audience. Heritage films appeal to a film culture closely connected to "educational discourses, English literary culture, and the canons of good taste". They are often exported, and sometimes even do well in mainstream cinemas. In that case, they "operate as cultural ambassadors, promoting certain images of Englishness". Thus, these films show notions of nationhood and national identity (Higson 5).

Apart from the – already discussed – fact that the film has Shakespeare qualities, Higson's other characteristics of a heritage film can also be applied to *The King's Speech*. Firstly, it was considered to have quality enough to be invited to the Telluride film Festival in the U.S. and to the Toronto International Film Festival. Secondly, as mentioned before, it won seven BAFTAs, four Oscars and one Golden Globe. Thirdly, it was exported to, among other countries, the United States, Australia, Canada, Germany, France, the Benelux countries, Scandinavia, China, Hong Kong, and Latin America. Fourthly, T*he King's Speech* even did well in mainstream cinemas abroad, as for example in Australia, where the executive director of Palace Cinemas remarked that "it's a good example of a film that started out in the independent cinemas and then spread to the mainstream cinemas" (Kwek-web). The only thing considered, by some people, not to be "connected to the canons of good taste" is the obscene language used during the speech therapy sessions. Still, it is obvious that, according to Higson's definition, *The King's Speech* must have worked wonders as "cultural ambassador of Englishness".

The stammering Bertie perfectly matches the profile of the archetypal Brit, as his "underlying worthiness is constrained by emotional constipation". Although *The King's Speech* is a completely British film – being set in Britain, having been shot in Britain, with a British director and an almost completely British cast – it has hugely impressed America as well (Cox - web). Following in the footsteps of films such as *Mary Poppins*, *The Last of the*

Mohicans, and *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and to be followed by television series such as *Downton Abbey, The King's Speech* again successfully burnishes the British national stereotype, both in Britain and in the United States. Thus, the archetypal Brit, being stoic, reserved, and self-contained, "still looms large in the global imagination".

A second characteristic of this stereotype, being "the Brit winning the war", is essential to the film's final scene (Cox-web). Freedland states that World War II has become Britain's "defining narrative, almost its creation myth (...), our finest hour when we stood alone against the Nazi menace". At the outbreak of the Second World War, Bertie appears to be able to inspire the nation when there are "dark days ahead" looming. Freedland states that it is this address at the outbreak of war that constitutes the "emotional core of the film" (web). Gritten writes that "it may even leave a patriotic lump in the throat" (web). In conclusion, the combination of Bertie's victory over his own stammer, the reference to Britain's defining narrative, and the brilliant choice of score of Beethoven's seventh symphony, result in a breathtaking climax to *The King's Speech,* an English heritage film *pur sang*.

4.5 Conclusion

Adele Cabot states that the story of Bertie and Lionel has never been told so far, partly because it may have been overshadowed by more spectacular stories concerning the Second World War, but also because the Queen Mother did not give her permission for the story to be told until after her death. As she outlived her husband by fifty years and did not die until 2002, Bertie's public image before the release of *The King's Speech* could be compared to his great-grandfather Prince Albert's: twenty-first century people, at least those younger than seventy, hardly had a clear image of King George VI. Taking into account that *The King's Speech* was an enormous box office success, won many awards, and received wide-spread

media coverage which was almost unanimously positive, the film can hardly have escaped the average British citizen's attention. The portrayal of Bertie, as the present Queen's sympathetic father who inspired a nation during the war, must have taken root in British collective memory.

Hooper and Seidler have continued Frears and Morgan's new type of royal bio-pic. As already stated earlier, both *The Queen* and *The Young Victoria* showed the monarch's self-reflexive exploration. In *The King's Speech*, too, the royal protagonist reflects on his duties and has severe doubts whether he can fulfill them. Shortly before Bertie has to deliver his paramount speech, he tells Logue: "If I am to be king...where is my power? May I form a government, levy a tax, or declare a war? No! Yet, I am the seat of all authority. Why? Because the nation believes that when I speak, I speak for them. Yet I cannot speak!" (Seidler 81).

It is the fact that the makers of *The King's Speech* have ventured to deviate from the traditional cinematic Brit that accounts for part of its enormous success. Apparently, the cinematic George VI embodies the British national stereotype perfectly, as he is shown having both characteristics that David Cox mentions: firstly, at the beginning of the film, he is emotionally damaged because of his cold, abusive childhood – beaten because he was left-handed, starved by a malevolent nanny, bullied by his father and his elder brother – and, secondly, at the end of the film, he is of vital importance when inspiring the British in the war against the Nazis. However, in between these two moments, Bertie shows behaviour that does not match the stereotype that is so often burnished in British films. In order to become that Second World War hero, he has to make every endeavour to overcome his stammer. He can only succeed in doing so by becoming friends with a commoner. Moreover, he eventually shows how vulnerable he is. In a scene shortly after his accession to the throne, Bertie tries to make sense of his state papers. When his wife Elizabeth, in night clothes (adding to the

intimacy of the scene), enters, he tells her that he has to do a Christmas broadcast ("I think that might be a mistake") and shows her plans for the coronation ("I think that's an even bigger mistake"). Bertie says: "I'm not a king. I'm a naval officer. It's the only thing I know about". He breaks down with fierce, wracking sobs (Seidler 65). Jonathan Freedland of *The Guardian* states that, by persuading the nation to hail King George VI for his vulnerability instead of his majesty, *The King's Speech* has extended the "Dianafication" of the British monarchy back two generations (web). The contrast of the archetypal Brit as he used to be depicted in British films to someone who is not afraid to show emotions in order to gain strength constitutes a large part of *The King's Speech* quality.

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion

In January 2011, shortly after the successful release of *The King's Speech*, *The Guardian*'s Jonathan Freedland advises all British actors and actresses dreaming of ever winning an Academy Award, to "go royal". Referring to Helen Mirren in *The Queen* and expecting *The King's Speech* to win Academy Awards as well, he states that the path to win Oscars "runs through Sandringham, Windsor, and SW1", referring to the postal code of Buckingham Palace (Freedland-web). However, the failure of other recent British royalty-related films, such as Oliver Hirschbiegel's 2013 biographical drama film *Diana,* shows that it takes much more for a film to be successful than just dealing with royalty. This thesis has demonstrated that *The Queen, The Young Victoria, and The King's Speech* were applauded, not for the fact that they were royalty-related, but for their quality, constituted by factors such as the screenplay, the cast, the producer, and the setting.

In one of the first scenes of *The King's Speech*, taking place in 1934, King George V (Michael Gambon) has just delivered a Christmas radio speech. He tells his second son,Bertie, that he mourns the newly-introduced wireless:

> This devilish device will change everything (…). In the past all a king had to do was look respectable in uniform and not fall off his horse. Now we must invade people's homes and ingratiate ourselves with them. This family is reduced to those lowest, basest of all creatures…we've become…actors! (Seidler 27)

Although no evidence can be found that the real King George V has ever made a prophetic prediction like this, one could maintain that it is not by coincidence that the makers of *The King's Speech* have this King say these words. George V embodies the protagonist as he used to be depicted in earlier royal bio-pics (starting with *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, made in

1933): as a monarch whose authority is completely based on strength and grandeur. Thus, he is contrasted to his son Bertie, who represents a new era of bio-pics, in which the viewers warm to the royal protagonist because of his (or her) vulnerability. *The Queen, The Young Victoria, and The King's Speech* all belong to this new generation of films that depict the life of a historical monarch. George V's remark refers to the crucial Shakespearean combination of the king as player, and the player as king. It shows that the "power" of a – nowadays constitutional – monarch is theatrical, or rather, cinematic, something to be broadcast, and that the – movie – theatre is also about power. Provided that it is convincing, a heritage film has the power to mould people's opinions.

According to Giselle Bastin, Frears' *The Queen* was the first royal bio-pic that acknowledges to operate within a dialogic framework when it tries to capture the sovereign "self". Many earlier royal bio-pics, such as the (mostly American) Charles and Diana television films from the eighties and nineties, consisted of commonplace re-enactments of the royals' private lives within the frames of conventional romance and soap opera. Bastin states that Frears has turned these simple re-enactments into "a self-reflexive exploration and recognition of the ineffable qualities of royalty and majesty" (Bastin 35). In *The Queen*, for example, after her confrontational encounter with the stag, Queen Elizabeth seeks advice from the Queen Mother.We regard Elizabeth wondering if her actions have damaged the crown, as she no longer seems to understand her people. In the same conversation, however, there is a reference to her great commitment to both God and to her people, to whom she once devoted her whole life. Vallée and Hooper, in *The Young Victoria* and in *The King's Speech,* do the same thing. Both the young Queen Victoria and the pre-war Bertie, for different reasons, have considerable doubts whether they could be a good monarch, and have to find a way to overcome the problems that started in their childhoods. At the same time, though, the audience cannot but take their monarchic duties very seriously.

A parallel can be drawn between this new generation of Royal bio-pics and Shakespearean theatre, as in both cases, in part due to their influence, both provide the reigning monarch with an increase in popularity. Leonard Tennenhouse has examined the display of power in Elizabethan and Jacobean public theatre and states that, as there are contrasts between the representations of monarchic power of Elizabeth and James, it is political power that, to a certain extent, dictated Shakespeare's authorship. Erickson writes that "in Tennenhouse's view, the equation of theatre and state is so close as to constitute complete convergence. The carrot-and-stick of royal sponsorship as the route to financial success (…) is seen as sufficient to guarantee the dramatist's envelopment in monarchical ideology" (510). Tennenhouse's new approach focuses on the fact that Shakespeare contributed to developing a nationalism that benefitted both Elizabeth I and James I (Erickson 511). Melanie Smith maintains that King James "sought to use the theatre to help quiet subversive elements" (Smith 255). Four hundred years later, three films helped the monarch to "quiet subversive elements" as well, although the difference is that nobody considers the films to have been made for that purpose. Chapter Two of this thesis has demonstrated how the makers of *The Queen* created more understanding and sympathy for Queen Elizabeth II herself. Chapter Three has shown how *The Young Victoria* achieved the same goal with her great-great-grandmother. Chapter Four has demonstrated how *The King's Speech* managed to have a very positive image of Elizabeth's father take root in collective memory. Moreover, just like Shakespeare, they contributed to "developing a nationalism that benefitted" James I's descendant, Elizabeth II (Erickson 511).

Elizabeth, Victoria and Bertie received a "public relations boost" (Merck 151), because, retroactively, they underwent the process of "Dianafication". The life – and death – of the "People's Princess" has set a new standard for public royal behaviour. Indeed, just as stated by the fictional version of George V, the film makers of all three new-generation royal

bio-pics have made their protagonists “ingratiate” themselves with the people, especially by showing them “in their darkest hour”. Freedland signals this new trend concerning royal bio-pics, when he writes that “in today’s era the royals can best win our affections (...) by revealing their struggles against adversity.” (web) In all three films discussed in this thesis, the protagonists were depicted in situations in which they had to overcome serious problems, problems that threatened the survival of the monarchy.

Queen Elizabeth can be said to have taken her cinematic grandfather's prophesy even one step further: by playing an active role in the Olympics 2012 James Bond spoof *Happy and Glorious*: she has literally become an actress. Whereas, according to her grandfather, that would have implied that she has been “reduced to those lowest, basest of all creatures”, twenty-first-century TV viewers all around the world were stunned. George V appears to have been too anxious with his statement, and the same thing can be said about Elizabeth in *The Queen*, who, only after agonising what she should do to save the monarchy, finally decides to dismiss her grandfather’s opinion by delivering a live television speech, thus “invading people’s homes”. Only few people will have realised that that same Elizabeth, as a young princess, also appeared in *The King's Speech*. Jonathan Freedland points out that, since 1952, today's Queen has met weekly with twelve different prime ministers. She is one of the last living public connections to the Second World War, Great Britain's “defining story”. It must be the realisation of this fact that made - the cinematic - Tony Blair remark that “it's unimaginable, this country being a republic. Certainlyin her lifetime, because no one would wear it. No one wants it. It's just daft” (48.10).

In conclusion, Frears and Morgan can be credited with combining the modern royal bio-pic with heritage films. *The Queen* has set a new trend of showing the royal responsibilities very seriously, while at the same the time the audience warms to the royal protagonist’s vulnerability. Possibly, without *The Queen*, the other two films would even

never have been produced. According to Higson's definition, these three films have operated as "cultural ambassadors, promoting certain images of Englishness", in this case British Royalty. As a result, these films have shown notions of nationhood and national identity. It is obvious that *The Queen* itself would never have been made without the events of "that week" in August/September 1997. Definitively, the image of British Royalty has undergone "Dianafication".

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