

## 4. Royal Performance and the Queen's Three Bodies

### The Making of the British Monarchy in the Netflix Series THE CROWN

---

With its double appeal of being the “biggest drama commission in British television history”<sup>1</sup> and the first fictional TV series to break the taboo of featuring a living British sovereign as its protagonist, *THE CROWN* (UK) has garnered significant attention from media critics and scholars. First released in 2016 on the streaming portal Netflix as an original production, the series provides a fictionalised account of the lives of the British queen Elizabeth II and her family as they struggle to navigate the demands of royal life. Starting shortly before her ascension to the throne in 1952, the series’ plot has, as of summer 2022, reached season four and the early 1990s. *THE CROWN* is the latest culmination of a fascination that fictional accounts of the British monarchy (and their historical role models) continue to exert on global audiences. This phenomenon requires some examination in a mediatised and commodified postmodern era that is allegedly defined by an “incredulity towards metanarratives”.<sup>2</sup> What is more, the series exemplifies a number of motifs that are central to the construction of popular polit-series and will reappear throughout this thesis.

As Will Abbiss claims, *THE CROWN* is a narrative “investigation into the monarchy’s position in the modern era”.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will show that, with its elaborate discussions of the mechanisms of monarchy, the series provides an extensive meta-commentary on the precarious postmodern predicament of a fictionalised institution founded on the divine right of kings and largely obsolete notions of national (imperial) self-aggrandisement. However, how does *THE CROWN* turn a complex, controversial, and – by some accounts – archaic historical phenomenon like the British monarchy into an operational

- 
- 1 Gillian Doyle, “Television Production, Funding Models and Exploitation of Content”, *Icono* 14, no. 2 (July 2016): 88. <https://doi.org/10.7195/ri14.v14i1.991>.
  - 2 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, transl. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), XXIV.
  - 3 Will Abbiss, “Proposing a Post-heritage Critical Framework: The Crown, Ambiguity, and Media Self-consciousness”, *Television & New Media* 21, no. 8 (August 2019): 828, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476419866427>.

and commercially successful serial narrative? Which properties make this show a compelling watch for Netflix's global 21st-century audiences with varying degrees of attachment to the historical British monarchy?

Following the assumption that *THE CROWN*'s plot hinges on the royal family's struggle to consolidate personal needs with the juxtaposed demands of public duty,<sup>4</sup> this chapter will show that, underneath its exceptional production values, *THE CROWN* applies well-established fictional conventions and a relatively limited set of narrative interactional patterns, which primarily take the shape of *Coming-of-Age* (CoA) Games and *Reverse Macbeth* (RM) Games described previously in the previous chapter.

It will illustrate that what G.W.F. Hegel describes as "one of the most common and suitable collisions for the novel": "the conflict between the heart's poetry and the opposing prose of reality's conditions",<sup>5</sup> re-emerges in *THE CROWN* as a central identity diffusion caused by a struggle between what Ernst H. Kantorowicz famously called "The King's Two Bodies". It is a motif which Andrew Higson – with recourse to Kantorowicz – has justly pointed out as a recurring theme of monarchy fiction<sup>6</sup> and which reappears, in one form or another, throughout polit-fiction. Accordingly, I will discuss how *THE CROWN*, following this narrative convention, constructs its plot primarily around the conflict that arises from the dichotomy between the fictional Queen's "body politic", the conceptual, ceremonial body of the sovereign, and her "body natural", the physical person that wears the crown.<sup>7</sup>

Examining the structural reasons for the predominance of the formulaic *King's two bodies* (K2B) trope in both fictional and historical imaginaries of monarchy, this chapter will argue that the motif serves to (1) condense the complex construct of the British monarchy into an operational narrative and (2) to make a relatable fictional character out of a figure in objectively unrelatable circumstances.

Further structural analysis will demonstrate that *THE CROWN* operationalises the K2B formula in a variety of narrative games that turn an abstract Elizabethan concept of monarchy into tangible narrative action. As I will discuss, in creating its plot, the series largely relies on a *zero-sum* CoA game between a ceremonially superior *Monarch* actant and an inferior co-player, which, at times, takes the shape of a highly agonal RM game.

- 
- 4 Paolo Braga, "Narrative Rhetoric in Representing the British Aristocracy: Julian Fellowes and Peter Morgan", in *The British Aristocracy in Popular Culture: Essays on 200 Years of Representations*, ed. Stefania Michelucci, Ian Duncan, and Luisa Villa (Jefferson: McFarland, 2020), 230; Ib Bondebjerg, *Screening Twentieth-Century Europe: Television, History, Memory* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan/Springer, 2020), 127; Thom F. Cavalli, "For the Love of God and Country, the Making of a President", *Jung Journal* 12, no.1 (February 2018): 59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19342039.2018.1403259>.
  - 5 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), 393. My translation: "Eine der gewöhnlichsten und für den Roman passendsten Kollisionen ist deshalb der Konflikt zwischen der Poesie des Herzens und der entgegenstehenden Prosa der Verhältnisse [...]".
  - 6 Andrew Higson, "From political power to the power of the image: contemporary 'British' cinema and the nation's monarchs", in *The British Monarchy on Screen*, ed. Mandy Merck (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 353.
  - 7 For both terms see Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, 7<sup>th</sup> paperback printing (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 7f.

Analysing these interactional patterns, this chapter will show that *THE CROWN*'s relatively limited structural repertoire nonetheless undergoes some notable recalibrations in its presentation of the monarchy. The first occurs through an age-related cast change following its season 2 finale. The second follows the introduction of the character of Diana Spencer in the series' fourth season and disrupts the royal games' previous *cooperative* nature. I will show that this structural shift significantly increases the ambivalence of the series' portrayal of the monarchy. This recalibration coincides with a tangible change in perception of the historical monarchy following a series of highly publicised scandals.

Furthermore, this chapter will illustrate that *THE CROWN*, exploring how a union between Elizabeth II's body politic and body natural can occur under postmodern circumstances, expands the relatively conventional K2B trope. Referencing Louis Marin's concept of the monarch's third, mediatised body,<sup>8</sup> I will demonstrate that, in *THE CROWN*, the imaginary construct of *Queen Elizabeth* can come into existence only through performative acts which serve to unify the individual that wears the crown (body natural) and the concept of the monarch (body politic) in the public's interpretative imagination. The series thus presents the *Queen* as a discursive postmodern myth that relies on the continued participation of her subjects.<sup>9</sup>

It will become apparent that the perpetuation of the myth of monarchy under favourable terms is the central motivation for the fictional Elizabeth II. In her dealings with her family, 'her' Prime Ministers, and the public, *THE CROWN* portrays the Queen and other protagonists as more or less savvy political operators in a highly politicised game. It is crucial to note that this structural outline emerges in one way or another throughout polit-fiction. Its discussion will thus provide a foundation for much of this study going forward.

This chapter will ultimately provide a thorough structural understanding of one of the most prominent and expensive series of the global North's current mainstream TV landscape. Moreover, examining *THE CROWN*'s fictional portrayal of the British monarchy provides a revealing example of how the postmodern 'incredulity' reshapes prevailing national imaginaries like the British royal family. These are valuable insights in a time where uncontested metanarratives are rare.

In the current era of mass entertainment, fictional commodities like *THE CROWN* will arguably be one of the primary sources from which many audiences learn about the British monarchy. Evidence suggests that the series has already become a powerful macro actor in creating the British monarchy's image. As Laura Saxton shows, the series has increased international audiences' awareness of and interest in the royal family.<sup>10</sup> After the release of *THE CROWN*'s third season in 2019, for example, the historical

8 See Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King*, transl. Martha M. Houle (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988), 13–15.

9 Following classic fictional concepts of royal dominance such as "the emperor's new clothes", as discussed in Thomas Frank, Albrecht Koschorke, Susanne Lüdemann, and Ethel Matala de Mazza, *Des Kaisers neue Kleider: Über das Imaginäre politischer Herrschaft: Texte, Bilder, Lektüren* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2002).

10 Laura Saxton, "A true story: defining accuracy and authenticity in historical fiction", *Rethinking History* 24, no.2 (March 2020): 134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2020.1727189>

role model for the heavily featured fictional breakout character Princess Anne enjoyed a surge in popularity.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the para-historical biopic *THE QUEEN* (Stephen Frears: UK/ France/ Italy, 2006) – attributed mainly to *THE CROWN*'s showrunner function Peter Morgan – is said to have been “the most sophisticated public relations boost HRH had had in 20 years”.<sup>12</sup> Examining how *THE CROWN* portrays the monarchy thus contributes to understanding how many audiences in the UK and around the globe will perceive the history of the British royal family and thus of one of the UK's last remaining national imaginaries.

#### 4.1 Anxious About History and Breaking Taboos

Regarding its international success, it is no wonder that scholars and critics alike have paid significant attention to *THE CROWN*. Roberta Pearson, for example, examines the series' considerable impact on the changing British TV landscape.<sup>13</sup> She lays out how Netflix's economic superiority contributes to the erosion (or “disruption”) of the public service broadcasting system, e.g., by raising production costs and luring talent and younger viewers away from the classic PSB system<sup>14</sup> while moving into the globally successful market niche of costume drama, which had previously been serviced mainly by the PSB.<sup>15</sup> Echoing long-standing concerns of cultural and economic hegemony surrounding the reliance of British TV on the US market (particularly with regards to the successful yet controversial Heritage genre<sup>16</sup>), she notes how high-profile interpretations of British history through external production actors (such as Netflix) and for non-native, global audiences risks creating a distorted version of the nation's past and identity, e.g., by focussing on glamorised presentations of the upper echelons of a rigid class system.<sup>17</sup>

- 
- 11 Chloe Fossaines, “Princess Anne is getting a Popularity Boost, Thanks to The Crown – but she's always been great”, *Town And Country Magazine*, November 14, 2020. <https://www.townandcountymag.com/leisure/arts-and-culture/a29849136/princess-anne-the-crown-popularity-boost/>; *The Guardian*, “Hard work and horses: why Princess Anne is having a moment”, December 4, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/shortcuts/2019/dec/04/princess-anne-is-having-a-moment>.
  - 12 David Thomson, “Stephen Frears”, *The Guardian*, September 2, 2010. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/sep/02/stephen-frears-david-thomson>.
  - 13 Roberta Pearson “The biggest drama commission in British television history: Netflix, *The Crown*, and the UK television ecosystem”, in *A European Television Fiction Renaissance: Premium Production Models and Transnational Circulation*, ed. By Luca Barra and Massimo Scaglioni (New York: Routledge), 86–100.
  - 14 Roberta Pearson “The biggest drama commission in British television history: Netflix, *The Crown*, and the UK television ecosystem”, in *A European Television Fiction Renaissance: Premium Production Models and Transnational Circulation*, ed. By Luca Barra and Massimo Scaglioni (New York: Routledge), 87.
  - 15 Pearson, “The biggest drama commission in British television history”, 95.
  - 16 Coined by Andrew Higson (originally in 1993) in “Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film”, in *Fires were started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. by Lester D. Friedman (London/New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), 91–109.
  - 17 Pearson, “The biggest drama commission in British television history”, 95–97. See also Matt Hills, “*Black Mirror* as a Netflix Original: Program Brand “Overflow” and the Multidiscursive Forms

The originally cinematic Heritage genre, together with the costume and period genre, encompasses, as Belén Vidal puts it, a set of fictional narratives that place “its characters in a recognisable moment of the past, enhanced by the *mise-en-scène* of historical reconstruction”<sup>18</sup>. Heritage fiction has frequently received criticism for conveying smoothed-over, selective visions of Britishness as upper-class, white *Englishness* to satisfy international and especially US-American audiences.<sup>19</sup> However, Will Abbiss proposes a “post-heritage” reading for *THE CROWN*, pointing out the series’ supposed ambiguity towards the monarchy and its prevalent self-consciousness.<sup>20</sup>

While comparatively little attention has been paid to the actual dramatic and formal properties of *THE CROWN* as a fictional TV narrative, scholarly examination and media criticism often concern themselves with more or less implicit questions of historical accuracy. The novelty of the series’ breaking the waning taboo of portraying a living UK sovereign and the prominence of the historical British royal family seems to provide a strong presence with which both *THE CROWN* and its critics must contend. Martin Kramer, e.g., discusses the series’ portrayal of the Suez crisis.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, popular volumes like “*The Crown Dissected*” promise to inform readers about “What really happened and what certainly did not happen”.<sup>22</sup> Even *THE CROWN*’s historical consultant, Robert Lacey, contributed an “official history behind the Hit Netflix series”.<sup>23</sup> This historical focus is unsurprising, as Saxton notes: “Truth has consistently been a contested concept in discourse surrounding historical fiction”, in which “critics often regard accuracy as a marker of merit”.<sup>24</sup>

The critical evaluation of *THE CROWN*’s historical accuracy has come to different conclusions. Media critic Simon Jenkins calls the series “reality hijacked as propaganda,

- 
- of Transatlantic TV Fandom”, in *Transatlantic Television Drama: Industries, Programs, and Fans*, ed. Michele Hilmes, Roberta Pearson, and Matt Hills (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 219.
- 18 Belén Vidal, *Heritage Film: Nation, Genre and Representation* (London/New York: Wallflower, 2012), 1.
- 19 Higson, “Re-presenting the National Past”, e.g., 91–96. For the (US) commodification of fictional projections of Britishness see also Thomas Elsaesser, “Images for Sale: The ‘New’ British Cinema”, in *Fires were started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Lester D. Friedman (London/New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), e.g., 49–57.
- 20 Will Abbiss, “Proposing a Post-heritage Critical Framework: The Crown, Ambiguity, and Media Self-consciousness”. *Television & New Media* 21, no. 8 (August 2019): 837, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476419866427>.
- 21 Martin Kramer, “How true is ‘The Crown’ on the Suez Cover-Up?”, *Mosaic Magazine*, March 1, 2018. <https://mosaicmagazine.com/observation/israel-zionism/2018/03/how-true-is-the-crown-on-the-suez-cover-up/>.
- 22 Hugo Vickers, *The Crown Dissected: An Analysis of the Netflix Series The Crown Seasons 1,2, and 3*. (Richmond Hill: Firefly Books Ltd, 2020). For quote see the book’s editorial note: *Firefly Books*, <https://www.fireflybooks.com/catalogue/adult-books/health-beauty/product/13963-the-crown-dissected-an-analysis-of-the-netflix-series-the-crown-seasons-1-2-and-3>.
- 23 Robert Lacey, *Crown: The Official History Behind the Hit NETFLIX Series: Political Scandal, Personal Struggle and the Years that Defined Elizabeth II 1956–1977* (London: Blink Publishing, 2019).
- 24 Laura Saxton, “A true Story: Defining Accuracy and Authenticity in Historical Fiction”, *Rethinking History* 24, no.2 (March 2020): 128, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2020.1727189>.

and a cowardly abuse of artistic license".<sup>25</sup> David Sims refers to it as a "Sweeping, Sumptuous History Lesson".<sup>26</sup> Evelyn Toynton claims that the series 'actually provides a fairly good primer on the history of the period'.<sup>27</sup> Harry Leslie Smith, once again echoing critical readings of the Heritage genre, accuses *THE CROWN* of joining "a long line of period dramas that ignore lives of ordinary men and women", choosing to "anaesthetise viewers from the unpleasantness of our past with idolatry for the aristocracy and the monarchy".<sup>28</sup>

As a commercial product, *THE CROWN*'s main selling point is arguably its promise to provide a glance behind the ever-drawn net curtains of Buckingham Palace. As a scholar of narrative, however, it is crucial not to blindly follow the series down this curiously alluring path by giving in to the temptation of reducing the analysis to a historicising roman à clef-type search for historical traces.

There is no doubt that, through their continuous media presence, the historical royal family become involuntary, discursive macro actors in *THE CROWN*'s overall network. However, the series' historical background is most relevant not because of its influence on the fictional text but because of its purpose to aid *THE CROWN*'s marketing as a commercial product. Tangible historical references enable the series to capitalise on the significant global profile of the royal family. The Windsors' fame, together with an increase in the renown of *THE CROWN*'s cast, has created a "merging of two cults of celebrity":<sup>29</sup> that of the British royal family with that of the famous screen-actors\*. As this article will show, the series' narrative composition remains relatively conventional if regarded on its own merit. It is thus through the prominence of its historical reference that *THE CROWN* has managed to attain its status as a 'prized' entertainment commodity.

Despite its historical frame of reference, one should resist the temptation of accord- ing 'realism' or historical accuracy to *THE CROWN*. While the series features historical people and events (e.g., the Suez crisis in 1956, the Great Smog of London in 1952, or Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953), these motifs are adapted, distorted, and simplified to fit the *pragmatic logic* of a serialised entertainment commodity and the *dramatic logic* of a fictional serial text. Nonetheless, fiction doubtlessly exerts considerable influence on the perception of historical facts. According to Steven Fielding:

- 
- 25 Simon Jenkins, "The Crown's fake history is as corrosive as fake news", *The Guardian*, November 16, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/nov/16/the-crown-fake-history-news-tv-series-royal-family-artistic-licence>.
- 26 David Sims, "*The Crown* Is a Sweeping, Sumptuous History Lesson", *The Atlantic*, November 4, 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/11/the-crown-netflix-review/506522/>.
- 27 Evelyn Toynton, "Happy and Glorious: *The Crown*", *Salmagundi* no. 195 (Summer, 2017): 259.
- 28 Harry Leslie Smith, "The Crown's portrayal of history is an insult to my generation's struggles", *The Guardian*, November 8, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/08/the-crown-portrayal-of-history-insult-to-my-generations-struggles>.
- 29 Andrew Higson, "From political power to the image: contemporary 'British' cinema and the nation's monarchs", in *The British Monarchy on Screen*, ed. Mandy Merck (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 359.

Research indicates that even audiences primed with the facts are likely to believe the most blatantly erroneous screen renderings of real events. This is also true of those who possess first-hand knowledge of the subject depicted.<sup>30</sup>

Deborah Cartmell and I.Q. Hunter have shown how “retrovisions”, that is, fictionalised renderings of history, can prompt new interpretations creating “a subversive countermyth about the past”.<sup>31</sup> Sylke Satjukow and Rainer Gries propose a similar concept they call “para-history”.<sup>32</sup> For them, fictional narrative texts that explicitly reference historical events create a new, changed vision of history in a cooperative process between production entities and recipients.<sup>33</sup> As Giselle Bastin states, the fictionalisation of a real historical source is delicate, particularly when dealing with a subject as emotionally charged as the British royal family.<sup>34</sup> According to her, biopics about the Windsors find themselves in a “double-bind”:<sup>35</sup> audiences will (1) be quickly disappointed if the text’s presentation does not reflect their own imaginary of the royal family; (2) the myth of the historical royal family is, in part, infringed upon through the fictional presentation of their backstage lives, confronting audiences with “an ‘aura’ [...] that is eroded twice over in the adaption process”.<sup>36</sup>

In fictionalising not only a present-day historical royal family but a living monarch, *THE CROWN* marks a break from several established (albeit waning) conventions. As Bastin notes:

until comparatively recently, it was deemed improper to present a living sovereign on stage or in film in dramatic form at all. This belief is tied to the notion that the Monarch is somehow sacred – un-filmable, even.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, the historical royal family have been conscious of “negotiat[ing] their place in the popular imagination on their own terms”.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, fictionalisations of the British

---

30 Steven Fielding, *A State of Play: British politics on Screen, Stage and Page, from Anthony Trollope to The Thick of It* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 15.

31 Deborah Cartmell and I.Q. Hunter, “Retrovisions: Historical Makeovers in Film and Literature”, in *Retrovisions: Reinventing the Past in Film and Fiction*, ed. Deborah Cartmell, I.Q. Hunter, and Imelda Whelehan (London: Pluto, 2001), 2.

32 Sylke Satjukow and Rainer Gries, “Hybride Geschichte und Para-Historie: Geschichtsaneignung in der Mediengesellschaft des 21. Jahrhunderts”, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 66, no.51 (December 19, 2016): 13f. My translation: “Para-Historie”.

33 Sylke Satjukow and Rainer Gries, “Hybride Geschichte und Para-Historie: Geschichtsaneignung in der Mediengesellschaft des 21. Jahrhunderts”, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 66, no.51 (December 19, 2016): 14f.

34 Giselle Bastin, “Filming the Ineffable: Biopics of the British Royal Family”, *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 24, no. 1 (2009): 35f, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2009.10846787>.

35 Bastin, “Filming the Ineffable: Biopics of the British Royal Family”, 36.

36 Bastin, “Filming the Ineffable: Biopics of the British Royal Family”, 34.

37 Bastin, “Filming the Ineffable: Biopics of the British Royal Family”, 34.

38 Bastin, “Filming the Ineffable: Biopics of the British Royal Family”, 34.

monarchy have traditionally been hagiographies of long-deceased monarchs, most often Victoria and Elizabeth I.<sup>39</sup>

It has been argued that breaking the taboo to fictionally portray a living monarch and the royal family's private lives is the result of a long process of the royal family's conscious instrumentalization of the media. It arguably begins with Victoria and Albert embracing the emerging medium of photography (and encouraging the dissemination of royal portraits) and later film<sup>40</sup> and includes milestones such as televising Elizabeth II's coronation, the publicised wedding of Diana and Charles, and Diana's equally televised funeral.<sup>41</sup> The couple's heavy instrumentalization of the press in promoting (1) their 'fairy-tale marriage' and (2) their subsequent divorce dealings has been regarded to have contributed to a further decline in media deference towards the royal family. As Bastin argues, "the Waleses' collusion with the media gave the filmmakers tacit approval to do whatever they wished with the story".<sup>42</sup>

Bastin notes that "the start of the 'Age of Diana' shifted the ground on what was allowable in filmed versions of the Royals' lives".<sup>43</sup> Fictional on-screen portrayals of the contemporary monarchy started in the US with movie adaptations of the Diana-and-Charles story (pre- and post-divorce). Bastin locates the release of the first two Diana-and-Charles biopics in September 1981.<sup>44</sup> However, there remained, as Mandy Merck notes, a "comparative reluctance of British producers to portray living members of the royal family in dramatic works until recently".<sup>45</sup> Many formulaic Diana-and-Charles films came with the explicit understanding that they would not be shown in the UK.<sup>46</sup> The feature film *THE QUEEN* (UK) became the "first full-length cinematic representation of a reigning British sovereign"<sup>47</sup> as late as 2006 (it is no coincidence that its auteur function, Peter Morgan, likewise serves as *THE CROWN*'s showrunner and personifies, as I have noted in chapter 3, the series' discursive showrunner function).

Having been produced for the macro actor Netflix, the US-American affiliation of *THE CROWN*'s network and its aim at Netflix's international, largely non-British audiences (another macro actor) arguably contributed to the series' comparatively lax attitude towards royal sacrosanctity. *THE CROWN* presumes to show not only members of the royal family but the Queen herself in an ambivalent and, at times, unflattering light.

39 See Mandy Merck, "Introduction", in *The British Monarchy on Screen*, ed. Mandy Merck (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 6–10.

40 Merck, "Introduction", 3 and 5f; Ian Christie, "A very wonderful process: Queen Victoria, Photography and Film at the Fin de Siècle", in *The British Monarchy on Screen*, 23–46.

41 Merck, "Introduction", 4.

42 Ciselle Bastin, "Filming the Ineffable: Biopics of the British Royal Family", *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 24, no. 1 (2009): 48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2009.10846787>

43 Bastin, "Filming the Ineffable: Biopics of the British Royal Family", 40.

44 Bastin, "Filming the Ineffable: Biopics of the British Royal Family", 40.

45 Mandy Merck, "Introduction", in *The British Monarchy on Screen*, ed. Mandy Merck (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 4. See also Mark Lawsons overview of evolving representational practices concerning British fictionalisations of the royal family in the UK: Mark Lawson, "One is ready for one's close-up", *The Guardian*, September 8, 2006. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2006/sep/08/3>.

46 Bastin, "Filming the Ineffable: Biopics of the British Royal Family", 40.

47 Merck, "Introduction", 4.

It even portrays the monarch's bathroom routine, complete with her sitting on the toilet before her 25<sup>th</sup> jubilee.<sup>48</sup> However, whether the series is genuinely critical of the institution remains doubtful, as I will discuss shortly.

THE CROWN arguably influenced the further serial treatment of the British monarch. By comparison, the hyperreal UK-satire THE WINDSORS (2016-present) shows the royal family in a much more explicitly satirical light, Elizabeth II. herself, however, does not appear in the series' otherwise irreverent portrayals. With a much more nationally limited target audience, the UK production THE WINDSORS, despite its often-savage mockery of the monarchy, shies away from breaking the taboo of fictionalising the monarch. The HBO-Max Production THE PRINCE (USA, 2021-present), on the other hand, features satirical cartoon versions of all current members of the royal family (including Elizabeth II) and is an example of how far the possibilities of fictionalising a living monarch have evolved in recent years.

The anxiety about THE CROWN's portrayal of the monarchy, its historical accuracy, and its influence on audiences has not only afflicted critics, scholars, and conservative politicians.<sup>49</sup> Interviewers have even seized the opportunity to approach Elizabeth II's grandson, Prince Harry, for commentary shortly after his heavily mediated 'resignation' from the royal family in 2020. Harry went on record stating about THE CROWN:

Of course, it's not strictly accurate, but loosely, it gives you a rough idea about what that lifestyle, what the pressures of putting duty and service above family and everything else, what can come from that.<sup>50</sup>

With the prince's recent attempts to establish a public persona independent of the Windsor family, his comments should be taken *cum grano salis* as part of the continuum of the 'royal soap opera'. Thus, Harry's quote is interesting not for its affirmation of the series' presumed historical accuracy but for another reason: By referring to the "pressures of putting duty and service above family and everything else", he inadvertently mentions the central dichotomy that underlies most narrative renderings of monarchy, including THE CROWN.

## 4.2 The Queen's Two Bodies: How to Dramatize a Monarchy

THE CROWN's focus on the central narrative dichotomy of *responsibility vs personal need* has been frequently remarked upon, e.g., by Ib Bondebjerg, who calls the series a "classic

48 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 10, "Cri de Coeur", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 17, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215740?trackId=200257859>, 53:07".

49 See my previous mention of former UK culture secretary Oliver Dowden's request for a historical disclaimer: Lanre Bakare, "UK culture secretary to ask Netflix for 'health warning' that The Crown is fictional", *The Guardian*, November 29, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2020/nov/29/the-crown-netflix-health-warning-fictional-oliver-dowden>.

50 BBC, "Prince Harry on Life in California and what he thinks about The Crown", February 26, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-56208342>.

story of duty and freedom”.<sup>51</sup> Thom Cavalli, likewise, describes how, in the series, “public persona must take precedence over individuality”.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, Paolo Braga notes:

Every episode of the show follows a clear format which explores, in different circumstances, the irreconcilable conflict between Elizabeth the wife, mother, and sister and Elizabeth the Queen.<sup>53</sup>

However, it should be noted here that Braga’s claim of THE CROWN being a “progressive study of only one character”<sup>54</sup> underestimates the series. Indeed, while Elizabeth II is THE CROWN’s protagonist, many members of her family, e.g., her husband Philip, her sister Margaret, and her children Charles and Anne, feature in their own plotlines and face their version of the struggle of having to reconcile diverging public and personal requirements.

For the fictional Elizabeth II and her family and following intradiegetic logic, the constant incongruence between personal desire and royal duty creates what psychologist E. Tory Higgins has called a “self-discrepancy”, that is, for our purposes here, an incongruence between the three “basic domains of the self”.<sup>55</sup> They are the “*actual* self, which is your representation of the attributes that someone (yourself or another) believes you actually possess”, the “*ideal* self, which is your representation of the attributes that someone (yourself or another) would like you, ideally, to possess”,<sup>56</sup> and the “*ought* self, which is your representation of the attributes that someone (yourself or another) believes you should or ought to possess”.<sup>57</sup> Higgins notably points out that the particular incongruity between the ideal self and the ought self describes the “classic literary example of the conflict between a hero’s ‘personal wishes’ and his or her ‘sense of duty’”.<sup>58</sup>

As I have noted with regard to Hegel, the *poetry vs prose* dichotomy is a well-established narrative motif in fiction of all types. It constitutes a fundamental principle of the dramatic logic of monarchy fiction. Abbiss, while underestimating the actual reach of the trope, e.g., points out that THE CROWN’s character’s struggle to consolidate personal and ceremonial identity innovates on a theme going back to Shakespeare.<sup>59</sup> It is ultimately the central struggle at the heart of every coming-of-age story. Accordingly,

51 Ib Bondebjerg, *Screening Twentieth-Century Europe: Television, History, Memory* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan/Springer, 2020), 127.

52 Thom F. Cavalli, “For the Love of God and Country, the Making of a President”, *Jung Journal* 12, no.1 (February 2018): 59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19342039.2018.1403259>.

53 Paolo Braga, “Narrative Rhetoric in Representing the British Aristocracy: Julian Fellowes and Peter Morgan”, in *The British Aristocracy in Popular Culture: Essays on 200 Years of Representations*, ed. Stefania Michelucci, Ian Duncan, and Luisa Villa (Jefferson: McFarland, 2020), 230.

54 Braga, “Narrative Rhetoric”, 221.

55 E. Tory Higgins, “Self-Discrepancy: A Theory Relating Self and Affect”, *Psychological Review* 94, no.3 (1987): 320f.

56 Higgins, “Self-Discrepancy”, 320.

57 Higgins, “Self-Discrepancy”, 321.

58 Higgins, “Self-Discrepancy”, 321.

59 Will Abbiss, “Proposing a Post-heritage Critical Framework: The Crown, Ambiguity, and Media Self-consciousness”, *Television & New Media* 21, no. 8 (August 2019): 832, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476419866427>.

Braga, regarding *THE CROWN*, states, “The narrative macro frame structuring the show is that of the educational path”, presenting “the apprenticeship of a queen”.<sup>60</sup>

*THE CROWN*, however, presents a monarchy-specific variation of the dichotomic *poetry vs prose* motif. As a fundamental structure of its plot-driving conflicts, the series evokes the aforementioned pre-enlightened doctrine of “The King’s Two Bodies” that Ernst H. Kantorowicz described in his influential study of the same name. Formulated in Elizabethan times, this concept of monarchy sees the sovereign as a dual being in possession of, on the one hand, a mortal, physical body natural and, on the other hand, a ceremonial, immortal, and transferrable “superbody or body politic”<sup>61</sup> constituted by the impersonal concept of the King\*Queen. In *THE CROWN*, this motif takes the shape of an identity diffusion caused by the demonstrative conflict between the body politic and body natural of Elizabeth II and – to a lesser extent – her family.

The trope of the Queen’s two bodies is omnipresent in *THE CROWN*. Upon Elizabeth’s ascension to the throne, her grandmother, Queen Mary, lays out the ground rules for the series’ future conflicts – arguably much more for the *dramatic* purpose of orienting the audience than *intradiegetic* necessity –, stating:

while you mourn your father, you must also mourn someone else: Elizabeth Mountbatten. For she has now been replaced by another person: Elizabeth Regina. The two Elizabeths will frequently be in conflict with one another [...].<sup>62</sup>

Mary’s remarks express *THE CROWN*’s central theme and establish the specific nature of the predominant conflict the protagonist will face as queen. The very title of the series reflects the central position that Elizabeth’s struggle with the mythical concept of monarchy and ‘the crown’ holds within its narrative. According to the K2B doctrine, the crown, historically, “was distinct from both *rex* and *regnum*”.<sup>63</sup> Kantorowicz writes:

the crown by its perpetuity was superior to the physical *rex* as it was superior to the geographical *regnum* while, at the same time, it was on par with the continuity of the dynasty and the sempiternity of the body politic.<sup>64</sup>

Accordingly, in the series’ diegesis, ‘the crown’ is repeatedly and explicitly treated as a separate mythical entity, at times, almost as an individual. Elizabeth’s uncle, the abdicated King Edward (née David) e.g., claims that the crown “always finds its way to the right

- 
- 60 Paolo Braga, “Narrative Rhetoric in Representing the British Aristocracy: Julian Fellowes and Peter Morgan”, in *The British Aristocracy in Popular Culture: Essays on 200 Years of Representations*, ed. Stefania Michelucci, Ian Duncan, and Luisa Villa (Jefferson: McFarland, 2020), 230.
- 61 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, 7<sup>th</sup> paperback printing (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4.
- 62 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 2, “Hyde Park Corner”, directed by Stephen Daldry, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025758?trackId=255824129,52.52>.”
- 63 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, 7<sup>th</sup> paperback printing (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 341. Original emphasis.
- 64 Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 342. Original emphasis.

head”.<sup>65</sup> In the scene, glimpses of a mythical, supernatural notion of medieval monarchy briefly replace the postmodern, democratic sensibility according to which a sovereign is chosen by a mixture of luck and public accord rather than an act of God. The idea of ‘the crown’ as an individual body politic that is separate from the human head that wears it is suggested not only by the series’ title and diegetic comments but also by its intro. It shows not people but a growing golden crown, taking shape almost organically to the tunes of the series’ at once grandiose and sinister Hans Zimmer-theme song.

In *THE CROWN*’s variation of the *poetry vs prose* motif, the conflict between the juxtaposed requirements of the royals’ body politic and body natural requires uncompromising submission to a game with rigid pre-existing rules. A royal’s coming-of-age does not involve the development of moral, intellectual, and social maturity but total conformity. As Elizabeth learns from her grandmother in one of the series’ defining scenes: wherever the demands of royalty and personal needs do not align, “the crown must win, must always win”.<sup>66</sup>

The “implicit renegotiation” of the K2B doctrine is, as Andrew Higson points out, a common trope in contemporary monarchy fiction.<sup>67</sup> Kantorowicz himself remarks that while the K2B doctrine has vanished “from modern constitutional thought [it] still has a very real and human meaning today”.<sup>68</sup> For Kantorowicz, this narrative prominence is due to Shakespeare, who, in plays like *Richard II*, “eternalized that metaphor”.<sup>69</sup> Accordingly, the general motif of a narrative identity diffusion caused by the K2B predicament is present in many fictional accounts of monarchy.<sup>70</sup> Sheri Chinen Biesen accordingly notes:

---

65 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 8, “Dangling Man”, directed by Sam Donovan, written by David Hancock and Peter Morgan, aired November 17, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215738?trackId=200257859>, 37.14”.

66 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 2, “Hyde Park Corner”, directed by Stephen Daldry, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025758?trackId=255824129>, 53.15”.

67 Andrew Higson, “From political power to the power of the image: contemporary ‘British’ cinema and the nation’s monarchs”, in *The British Monarchy on Screen*, ed. Mandy Merck (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 353.

68 Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 26.

69 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, 7<sup>th</sup> paperback printing (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 26.

70 See, e.g., mentions to that effect in Giselle Bastin, “Filming the Ineffable: Biopics of the British Royal Family”, *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 24, no. 1 (2009): 34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2009.10846787>; Mandy Merck, “Introduction”, in *The British Monarchy on Screen*, ed. Mandy Merck (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 4f; Nicola Rehling, “When Words Fail. The King’s Speech as Melodram”, in *The British Monarchy on Screen*, 384f. The motif is likewise the implicit object of extensive fictional exploration in Thomas Mann’s 1909 novel “Königliche Hoheit” [*Royal Highness*].

*The Crown* evokes other feature films, documentaries, BBC historical period drama biopics, royal history programs, and television mini-series on the royal family, Queen Elizabeth and Winston Churchill, including *The King's Speech* and *The Darkest Hour*.<sup>71</sup>

It is fascinating to observe how the K2B trope has become an implicit motif for all kinds of narratives featuring royalty, both fictional and historical. Remembering the historical Prince Harry's affirmation of the strain of royal "duty and service",<sup>72</sup> it is remarkable that the K2B motif is present even in the historical British royal family's official self-conception. What is the cause for this widespread application?

Following the requirements of dramatic logic (and largely ignoring historical fact), the K2B's prominence is partly due to the fact that it constitutes a convenient way to adapt the complex historical phenomenon of monarchy into the established narrative formula of the *poetry vs prose* dichotomy. As a time-tested pattern that is easily recognisable to audiences across various levels of cultural literacy, it serves to condense a complex and ambivalent concept like the British monarchy into an easily understandable, non-threatening, and (commercially) successful narrative.

The widespread use of this narrative trope is a reaction to the difficulty of turning a monarch into a protagonist that is, if not likeable, at least relatable. Outside the fictional identity diffusion of the narrative K2B trope, a monarch's uniquely privileged position and the profoundly aleatory nature of monarchy itself pose a problem for popular dramatic logic's requirements for creating relatable characters. As Roger Caillois points out, a monarch is a result of an accident of birth which

enthrones a being that is distinguished in nothing – apart from this lucky coincidence – from the masses over which it is called upon to rule by a blind act of fate.<sup>73</sup>

For him, this "pure judgement of an absolute *alea*"<sup>74</sup> creates an unbridgeable divide between the monarch and his\*her subjects. According to Caillois, a monarch's continued existence encourages the persistent wish among subjects to make him\*her part of their common frame of reference. The result is the familiar narrative of a monarch burdened by the crown and the privileges heaped upon him\*her, a monarch lacking liberty and human warmth.<sup>75</sup> Caillois writes:

---

71 Sheri Chinen Biesen, "Binge watching the Past: Netflix's Changing Cinematic Nostalgia from Classic Films to Long-Form Original Programs", in *Netflix Nostalgia: Streaming the Past on Demand*, ed. Kathryn Pallister (London: Lexington, 2019), 50.

72 BBC, "Prince Harry on Life in California and what he thinks about The Crown", February 26, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-56208342>.

73 Roger Caillois, *Die Spiele und die Menschen: Maske und Rausch*, transl. Peter Geble (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2017), 155. My translation: "[...] inthronisiert ein Wesen, das sich – abgesehen von dieser glücklichen Fügung – in nichts von der Masse derer unterscheidet, über die es auf Grund eines blinden Schicksalsspruches zu herrschen berufen ist".

74 Caillois, *Die Spiele und die Menschen*, 155. My translation: "reines Urteil eines absoluten *alea*". Original emphasis.

75 Roger Caillois, *Die Spiele und die Menschen: Maske und Rausch*, transl. Peter Geble (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2017), 155.

One wishes him [the monarch] to be simple, soulful, and, above all, crushed by the splendour and the honours to which he is condemned. In order to have to envy him less, one mourns him.<sup>76</sup>

The “bizarre mixture of envy and pity” surrounding the monarch<sup>77</sup> expresses itself in the narrative transformation of the K2B doctrine into the *poetry vs prose* motif. At least for popular dramatic logic, it remains the most suitable way to turn an otherwise infinitely remote figure into a relatable, easily legible, and even likeable fictional character. Unsurprisingly, historical monarchs have often sought to evoke this trope in creating their own mediated representations. However, it is by no means a reflection of historical accuracy.

### 4.3 Some Notes on Typecasting and THE CROWN's Season Divide

A general recalibration occurs after THE CROWN's first two seasons. It is most notable in the complete change of cast with, e.g., Olivia Coleman (Elizabeth), Helena Bonham-Carter (Margaret), Tobias Menzies (Philip) and Charles Dance (Louis Mountbatten) replacing the younger actors Claire Foy, Vanessa Kirby, Matt Smith and Greg Wise in their respective roles. This recasting is remarkable for several reasons. It (1) significantly increased the cast's overall international profile, particularly with Coleman and Bonham-Carter being famous actresses in the Western world, and thus THE CROWN's standing as a cultural commodity.

However, this change of cast (2) corresponds to the series' recalibration as a more ambivalent (if by no means critical) portrayal of the royal family themselves. The reshuffle arguably constitutes a notable act of typecasting, allowing the series to profit from its stars' particular profiles to create its narrative's meaning, thus turning them into discursive, macro actantial *functions* within the series' network. Olivia Coleman, e.g., rose to international fame, not least, through her Academy Award-winning performance as a slightly dull, tragicomic Queen Anne in the 2018 feature film THE FAVOURITE (Giorgos Lanthimos: UK/Ireland/USA). Charles Dance became known as the ruthless Machiavellian patriarch Tywin Lannister in HBO's serial-blockbuster GAME OF THRONES (USA/UK, 2011–2019). Helena Bonham-Carter starred as a young Queen Elizabeth (“Queen Mum”) in the monarchy film THE KING'S SPEECH (Tom Hooper: UK/USA/Australia, 2010). She primarily gained international renown for her rendition of unhinged characters, e.g., her part as crazed villain Bellatrix Lestrange in the HARRY POTTER franchise (2001–2011) or her role as the unstable Marla Singer in the 1999 cult movie FIGHT CLUB (David Fincher: USA). This typecasting visibly corresponds to (and supports) the evolving presentation of the respective characters in THE CROWN. The performance of Coleman, e.g., adds an

76 Caillois, *Die Spiele und die Menschen*, 155. My translation: “Man wünscht ihn sich einfach, gefühlvoll und vor allem erdrückt vom Prunk und den Ehren, zu denen er verurteilt ist. Um ihn weniger beneiden zu müssen, beklagt man ihn”.

77 Caillois, *Die Spiele und die Menschen*, 155. My translation: “Eine bizarre Mischung aus Neid und Mitleid umgibt so das höchste Amt [...]”.

ambivalent note to the Queen's character. Bonham-Carter's rendition of Princess Anne comes with expected notions of eccentricity and mental instability. Charles Dance's Louis Mountbatten is a somewhat sinister, patriarchal figure that evokes his former breakout role.

The change of cast also brings with it a change in the series' plot structure. THE CROWN's first two seasons often revolve around games involving Elizabeth II's coming-of-age and her coming to terms with her new position as queen. It is a narrative structure befitting a relatively young cast whose international profile was, in part, sharpened by their roles in THE CROWN (although Claire Foye, at least to a British audience, was already somewhat royally typecast through her part as Anne Boleyn in the BBC *Two* mini-series WOLF HALL (UK, 2015)).

However, after the change of cast and with the beginning of the third season, the series features a middle-aged queen Elizabeth (Coleman), who has generally managed to settle in her role as monarch through persistence, patience, and passage of time. Thus, the earlier seasons' central coming-of-age element is replaced by more diversified plot-lines that prominently feature the struggles of individual members of the royal family, e.g., Elizabeth's son Charles in season three and his wife, Diana, in season four. The increasingly populated network of a fictional family serves an essential *pragmatic* and *dramatic* need of serial television: it provides a large pool of interconnected characters with virtually unlimited structural potential for conflict-rich games.

#### 4.4 The Monarch's Two Bodies Game

Being situated in the primarily demonstrative, dramatic medium of television, THE CROWN, like most popular TV series, presents its plot as well as most of its characters' internal developments through tangible, external interactions with other characters. THE CROWN operationalises its dominant K2B trope in a recurring narrative transactional pattern that I want to call the *Monarch's two Bodies* game (M2B game). Understanding this game is crucial for the structural analysis of fictional politics because it reoccurs, in one form or another, throughout most dramatizations of institutionalised power structures and their inhabitants.<sup>78</sup> It can appear as a central plot driving force, as in THE CROWN, or as a secondary game meant to establish hierarchies, e.g., through rigid insistence on forms of address of officials with elevated ceremonial status. As later chapters will illustrate, the latter example is particularly pertinent in US-American dramatizations of the US presidency.

With its reference to the well-known narrative K2B motif, the M2B game is easily recognisable for most audiences, so much so that it has established a certain self-evidence in how it structures the presentation of fictional monarchies. As a narrative motif, the M2B game is so common that it tends to evoke notions of realism for audiences that

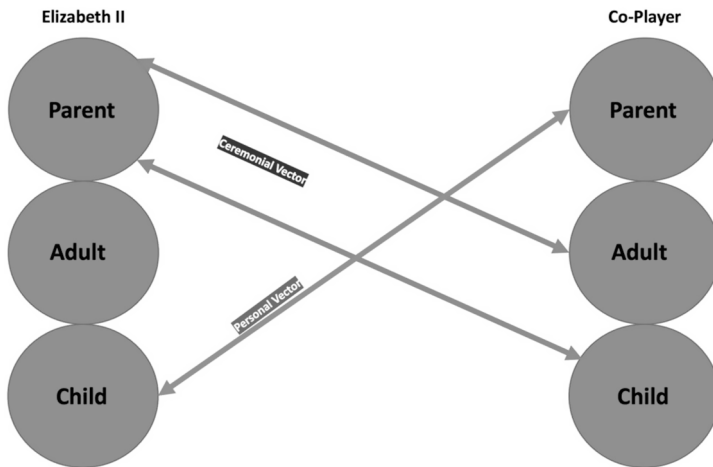
---

78 Friedrich Balke, e.g., remarks on the field of tension between the presidential body politic and body natural in THE WEST WING: Friedrich Balke, "Doppelkörper und Korridorbildung: Souveränität und Subversion in The West Wing", in *Souveränität und Subversion: Figurationen des Politisch-Imaginären*, ed. Rebekka A. Klein and Dominik Finkelde (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 2015), 85.

hide its true origin in a series' dramatic logic. In *THE CROWN*, the M2B game is the central source of conflict for the series' plot-driving games.

The M2B game consists of two central actants: One is a ceremonially elevated individual, which I want to call the *Monarch* (in *THE CROWN*, this is usually Elizabeth II or members of the royal family when interacting with lower-ranking individuals). The other is a ceremonially inferior Co-Player (e.g., other family members, government officials, secretaries, servants). In a configuration where it serves to create conflict, the M2B game features an ulterior transactional structure that structurally mimics the body politic–body natural dichotomy of the K2B trope. All transactions with the *Monarch* take place on two distinct vectors: an ostensible ceremonial and an ulterior personal one (see figure 14).

Figure 14: *The Monarch's two Bodies game – Example: Young Elizabeth II with undefined co-player*



Transactions on the ceremonial vector usually follow a prescribed Parent (*Monarch*)-Child (*co-player*) structure that is guided by ritualised protocol. However, the ulterior personal vector depends on the two players' individual qualities and the nature of their relationship. Where both vectors do not align, the M2B game becomes a source of conflict, either because it causes the two players to clash or because it causes the *Monarch* player to struggle with his\*her own inability to consolidate the two vectors.

Following intradiegetic logic, the ceremonial vector acts as an aid in the navigation of the sovereign's tricky double nature. By providing a fixed set of rules for all games involving royalty (rigid forms of address such as “your majesty”, “mam”, “your royal highness”, bows and curtsies, to mention just a few), it serves to allow the sovereign to incorporate his\*her body politic and hide his\*her body natural, depending on the co-player's willingness to focus on the former and overlook the latter.

The *Monarch* is an *adjusted* player who makes no changes to the overall game and functions as arbiter and guarantor of the game and its rules. In *THE CROWN*, Elizabeth II's

unquestioned ceremonial precedence thus turns the ongoing royal interactions into *co-operative* games where rules can be enforced and transgressions punished.

In *THE CROWN*, all players play a double-game with, on the one hand, Elizabeth Windsor as a wife/sister/daughter/mother/friend and, on the other hand, Elizabeth II. as the Queen. In order to create suitable narrative conflict, there exists a dramatic rule that ensures that the interests of these two roles and the game's two transactional vectors seldomly align. This rule, which results exclusively from dramatic logic, serves to create tension between the private Elizabeth Windsor and Queen Elizabeth II as well as her co-players. To a lesser extent, this rule applies to all members of the royal family.

In the first two seasons, the M2B game serves to operationalise Elizabeth's coming-of-age as queen narratively. As the game's *Monarch*, Elizabeth Regina and her co-players communicate in highly ritualised complementary Parent (her)-Child (them) transactions on the ceremonial vector. In the case of respected and experienced players such as Tommy Lascelles, the Queen's long-serving private secretary, or Winston Churchill, the aged prime minister and (albeit diminishing) "father of the nation",<sup>79</sup> they occur in a slight variation as complementary Parent (Queen)-Adult (co-player) transactions. However, as an individual who is – as Elizabeth herself frequently states – relatively uneducated, inexperienced, and shy, the ulterior personal vector looks different. In the series' first two seasons, a young Elizabeth (Claire Foye) often tends to engage in transactions on the personal vector following the reverse Child (her)-Parent (co-player) pattern she was used to as a princess, thus emphasising the incongruity between her two roles. In the series' third and fourth seasons, an experienced full-fledged Queen Elizabeth almost exclusively engages in complementary Parent (her)-Child (co-player) or Parent (her)-Adult (co-player) transactions on both vectors, having consolidated her personal needs and the demands of her office.

In the narrative structure of *THE CROWN*, the M2B game fulfils a central function. The opposing configuration of the game's two configurations, which Elizabeth must integrate into all games of which she is a part, creates constant tension not only within herself as she battles to unify these roles but also between her and her co-players.

The pragmatic and dramatic logics of serial perpetuity and innovation and repetition become visible here, too: After Elizabeth's successful completion of her royal apprenticeship (and that of her husband and sister, which occur in seasons 2 and 3, respectively), the coming-of-age arc within the conflictive configuration of the M2B game is transposed onto Charles (from season 3) and his siblings and wife Diana (in season 4). It primarily plays out as a (direct or indirect) conflict between Charles and his mother/ the Queen and in marital games between Charles and Diana. Some examples will demonstrate the progression of the M2B game in *THE CROWN*.

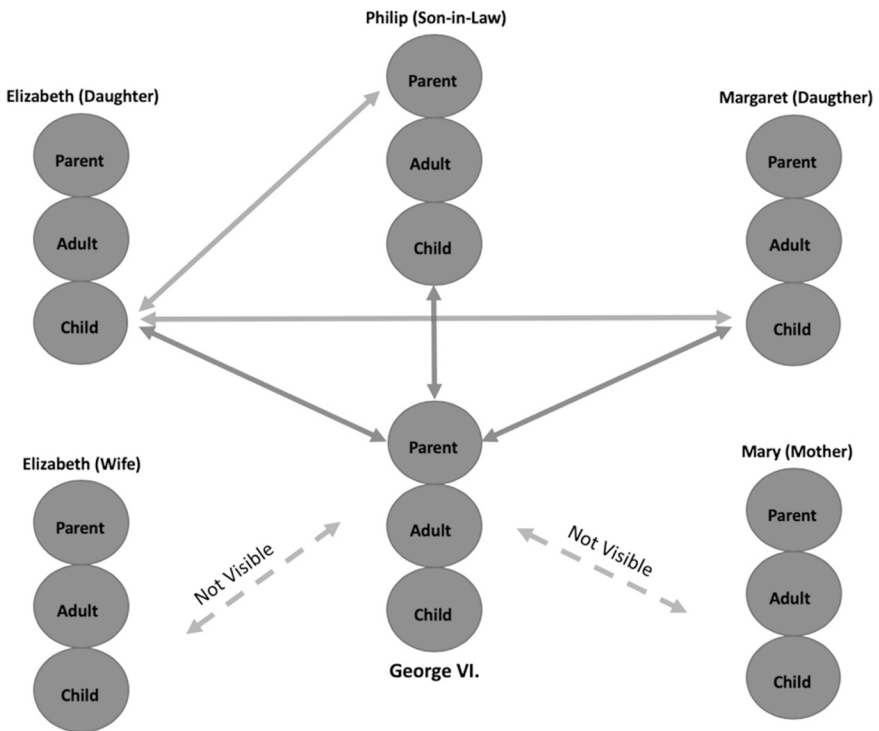
---

79 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 1, "Wolferton Splash", directed by Stephen Daldry, written by Peter Morgan, aired, November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025757?trackId=200257859,10.48>".

### 4.4.1 General Configuration and Coming-of-Age Arcs

At *THE CROWN*'s outset, the royal family appears very much as a functioning harmonious unit in which everybody knows their place. Serving an expositional function, the initial episodes introduce a harmonious, patriarchal version of the M2B game featuring a *Monarch*, Elizabeth's father, George VI, who has long since completed the consolidation of his bodies natural and politic. Regarding George, the notion of relatable struggle that accompanies the narrative K2B trope is only introduced explicitly after the king's death in the first season's second episode, e.g., when his mother alludes to the burden of the crown in her letter to Elizabeth. In the third episode, she repeats this trope when she implies the burden of the crown having killed her son.<sup>80</sup> At the series' outset, King George is the stabilising centre of all transactions involving the royal family, consisting of himself, his wife Elizabeth (Bowes-Lyon), his mother, Queen Mary, the adult daughters Margaret and Elizabeth (the future Queen) and his son-in-law Philip (Elizabeth's husband) – see figure 15.

Figure 15: Expositional configuration of *THE CROWN*'s royal family



80 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 3, "Windsor", directed by Philip Martin, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025759?trackId=200257859, 08.55>".

Narratively, this configuration creates little to no conflict because George appears only in interactions in which his ceremonial role as King and his private role as a respected parental father figure align. He and his family members exclusively engage in games that take the form of simple complementary Parent (George)-Child (family) transactions. The children's relationship (Elizabeth and Margaret) with their father is one of adoration and respect. Philip fears and respects his father-in-law and adheres to ceremonial precedence at all costs, even if it means standing up naked in the King's presence.<sup>81</sup> Other games involving the King may – purely following intradiegetic logic – feature a different division of roles, such as those he might be playing with his wife or mother. However, following the configuration's expositional purpose, they remain in the hyperdiegesis and are not part of the series' visible plot. Thus, the King appears as the orienting and stabilizing core of the royal family's initial game.

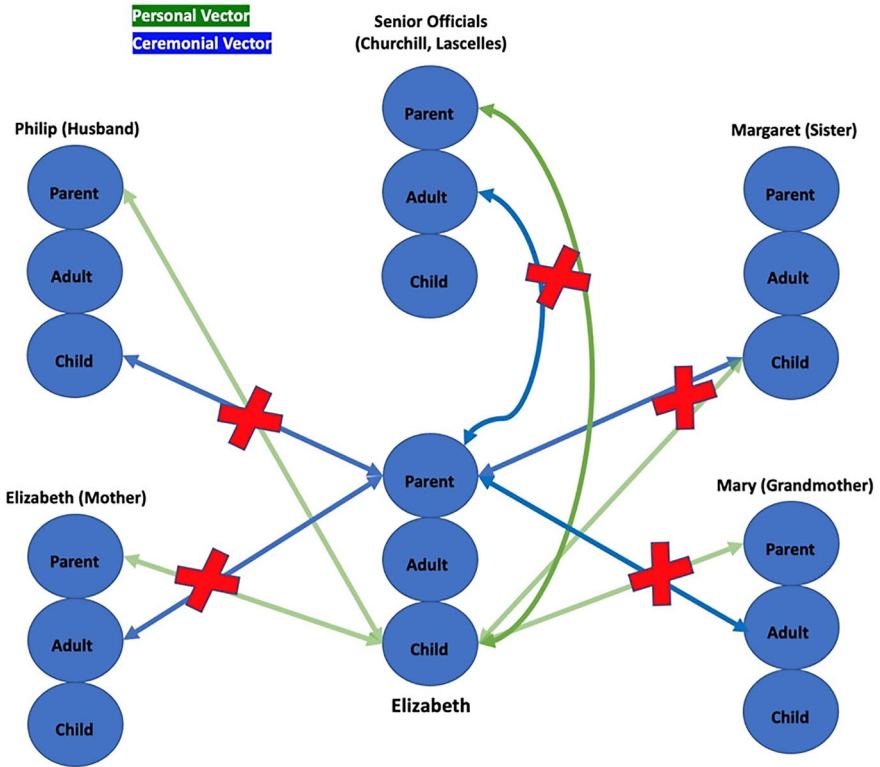
With the death of George VI. in the series' second episode,<sup>82</sup> the initial, harmonious configuration of the Windsor family's game dissolves, thus allowing for engaging narrative conflict to arise. The king's death marks the destruction of the royal family's expositional Eden-like equilibrium. Due to the hierarchical nature of primogeniture, Elizabeth, taking over as queen and thus figurating the family game's *Monarch* actant, becomes the new centre of the overall family unit. However, while ceremonially undisputed, her personal position is initially far less consolidated than her father's. Elizabeth's previous personal configurations from her time as a princess (usually Child (her)-Parent (co-player) transactions) now clash with the M2B game's ceremonial vector's additional requirements, thus demonstrating (and emphasising) her identity diffusion and creating the potential for (narratively engaging) conflictive crossed transactions (see figure 16). I will discuss those in more detail in the coming sections. Her figurating the *Monarch* actant likewise introduces a new set of ulterior transactions with a host of experienced and confident senior officials who pay tribute to Elizabeth Regina's ceremonial role while playing to Elizabeth Windsor's personal weaknesses (Child (her)-Parent (co-player)). This evolution transforms the hitherto static configuration of the consolidated M2B game into a dynamic and conflictive structure, which sets off the games that constitute the first two seasons' coming-of-age arc.

---

81 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 1, "Wolferton Splash", directed by Stephen Daldry, written by Peter Morgan, aired, November 4, 2016, [https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025757?trackId=200257859\\_50.08](https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025757?trackId=200257859_50.08)".

82 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 2, "Hyde Park Corner", directed by Stephen Daldry, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025758?trackId=255824129>.

Figure 16: Conflictive configuration after Elizabeth's figuration of the Monarch actant



#### 4.4.2 The Price of Monarchy

Throughout its first four seasons, *THE CROWN* elaborates both on the price of successful participation in the M2B game and the consequences of an unsuccessful one. In a cruel over-the-top interpretation of Hegel's dictum, facing the *prose of reality* in the successful completion of the royal apprenticeship seems to include eradicating all *poetry of the heart*. In *THE CROWN*, Elizabeth's coming-of-age as queen in the M2B configuration equals the struggle of becoming the embodiment of the sovereign by approaching as closely as possible the body politic of Elizabeth Regina at the cost of her human body natural. In a photo session that marks the end of season one's finale, she is revealingly told:

That's it, there. [...] Not moving, not breathing. Our very own goddess. Glorious Gloriana. Forgetting Elizabeth Windsor now. Now only Elizabeth Regina.<sup>83</sup>

Transactionally speaking, Elizabeth increasingly loses the ability to access the M2B game's personal vector as her monarchical development progresses. Her coming-of-age appears as the slow death of her human side in favour of perceived duty. As a player of

83 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 10, "Gloriana", directed by Philip Martin, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025766?trackId=200257859>, 52.42".

the M2B game, this manifests in Elizabeth taking increasingly cold and detached Parent or (with respected co-players) Adult positions in personal transactions that mirror her ceremonial status. The older Elizabeth's self-admitted emotional coldness and detachment as a wife, mother, and sister, e.g., are regarded – and almost universally accepted – as the direct and unavoidable result of her being “mother to the nation”.<sup>84</sup> An unsolicited hug from an emotionally desperate Diana leaves the middle-aged Queen so puzzled that she silently leaves the room (various personal and ceremonial transactional vectors cross here).<sup>85</sup> She later affirms Anne's baffled response to the event, who exclaims, “I feel sick”.<sup>86</sup> Following a devastating mining accident, the experienced Queen likewise appears emotionally and intellectually unable to grasp the size of the catastrophe and her part in mitigating it. Denying her PM's request to visit the disaster site, the Queen engages Harold Wilson in the following exchange:

Elizabeth: What precisely would you have me do?  
 Wilson: Well ... comfort people.  
 Elizabeth: Put on a show? The Crown doesn't do that.  
 Wilson: I didn't say put on a show. I said, comfort people.<sup>87</sup>

Throughout the series, Elizabeth largely succeeds in sacrificing her personality to approach her monarchical “superbody”.<sup>88</sup> Her family members fare less well. After the termination of Elizabeth's royal apprenticeship in season 2, her son Charles carries on the coming-of-age plotline in season 3, following repetitive serial continuity. His struggle with the M2B predicament primarily plays out in direct and indirect conflicts with his mother as the arbiter of the cooperative M2B game. However, unlike his mother, he remains unsuccessful in consolidating the opposing demands of personal poetry and royal prose.

A heated exchange about her son's failure to comply with the demands of the royal predicament has Elizabeth lay out the ground rules once more (following the pragmatic logic of keeping audiences oriented in long-running series, she does so frequently to ensure viewers' awareness of the series' fundamental principles):

Elizabeth: Not having a voice is something all of us have to live with. We have all made sacrifices and suppressed who we are. Some portion of our natural selves is always lost.

84 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 4, “Favourites”, directed by Paul Whittington, written by Peter Morgan, November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215491?trackId=200257859>, 53.08”.

85 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 6, “Terra Nullius”, directed by Julian Jarrold, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215493?trackId=200257859>, 49.14”.

86 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 6, “Terra Nullius”, directed by Julian Jarrold, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215493?trackId=200257859>, 50.05”.

87 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 3, “Aberfan”, directed by Benjamin Caron, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 17, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215733?trackId=200257859>, 22.26”.

88 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, 7<sup>th</sup> paperback printing (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4.

[...]

To be impartial is not natural; it's not human. People will always want us to smile, or agree, or frown, or speak. And the minute that we do, we will have declared a position, a point of view. And that is the one thing, as a royal family, we are not entitled to do. Which is why we have to hide those feelings, keep them to ourselves. Because the less we do, the less we say or speak or agree or...

Charles: Think. Or breathe, or feel or exist ...

Elizabeth: ... the better.

Charles: Well, doing that is perhaps not as easy for me as it is for you.

Elizabeth: Why?

Charles: Because I have a beating heart. A character, a mind and a will of my own. I am not just a symbol; I can lead not just by wearing a uniform or by cutting a ribbon but by showing people who I am. Mommy, I have a voice!

Elizabeth: Let me let you into a secret: no one wants to hear it.

Charles: Are you talking about the country or my own family?

Elizabeth: No one.<sup>89</sup>

In this exchange, Elizabeth once more acknowledges the need to sacrifice one's humanity to the royal cause with Charles, acknowledging his unwillingness or inability to fulfil these demands.

A royal's advance in the M2B game ultimately requires his\*her adaption of a cold, impersonal Adult vector in all things personal while deferring to the monarch's Parental precedence. However, throughout the series, Charles' transactions with his mother betray his constant craving for adult approval, e.g. when he scolds her for not thanking him enough after completing an investiture tour through Wales.<sup>90</sup> Unable to emancipate from his mother's ceremonial Parental precedence and simultaneously unable to fulfil her expectations in sacrificing his personal needs (particularly his 'unsuitable' mistress, Camilla Parker-Bowles), Charles remains trapped in a perpetual personal Child state in all interactions with his family and thus a barely tolerated and largely unsuccessful participant of the M2B game (see figure 17). Elizabeth, who, by season 4, considers her adult son to be "lost",<sup>91</sup> e.g., scolds him saying, "If one day you expect to be king [...] then might I suggest you start to behave like one!"<sup>92</sup> Even the palace's servants treat Charles more as a prop (a factor without individual agency) than an actual player, e.g., running past

89 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 6, "Tywysog Cymru", directed by Christian Schwochow, written by James Graham and Peter Morgan, aired November 17, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215736?trackId=200257859>, 48.40".

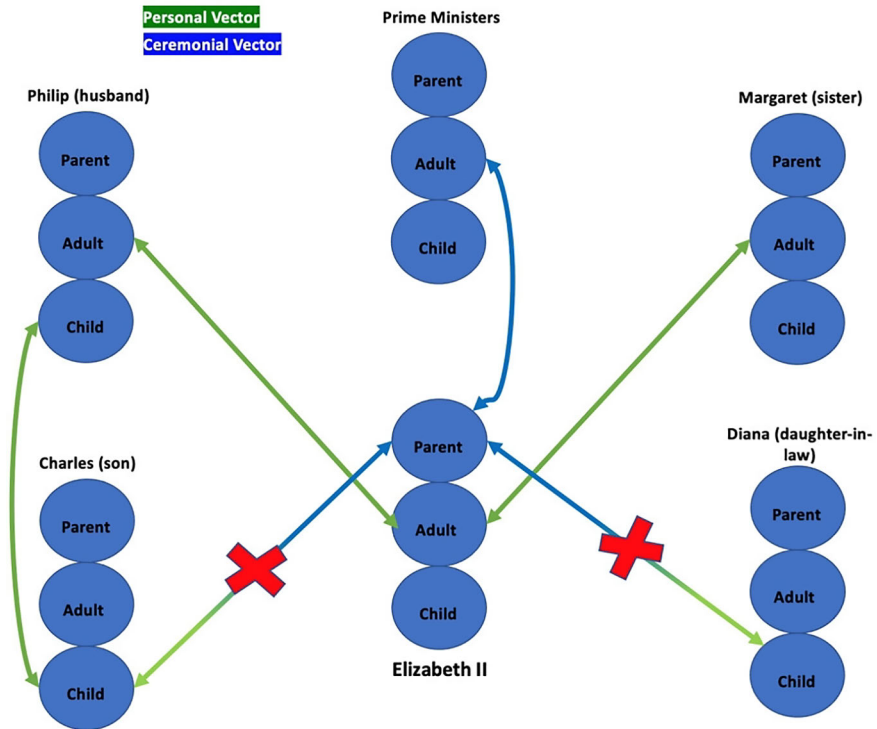
90 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 6, "Tywysog Cymru", directed by Christian Schwochow, written by James Graham and Peter Morgan, aired November 17, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215736?trackId=200257859>, 47.15".

91 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 4, "Favourites", directed by Paul Whittington, written by Peter Morgan, November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215491?trackId=200257859>, 52.08"

92 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 10, "War", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215497?trackId=200257859>, 43.58".

him with little more than a quick obligatory “excuse me, Sir”, while he is forced to wait in front of his mother’s office door awkwardly.<sup>93</sup>

Figure 17: Configuration of the M2B game with the post-coming-of-age Queen



In a blatant meta-commentary on Charles’ position within the M2B game, *THE CROWN* shows the desperate prince starring in Shakespeare’s *Richard II* and delivering a section of the play’s central monologue, which reads:

Cover your heads and mock not flesh and blood  
 With solemn reverence. Throw away respect,  
 Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty.  
 For you have but mistook me all this while:  
 I live with bread like you, feel want,  
 Taste grief, need friends. Subjected thus,  
 How can you say to me, I am a king?<sup>94</sup>

93 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 9, “Imbroglia”, directed by Sam Donovan, written by Peter Morgan, November 17, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215739?trackId=200257859>, 28.12”.

94 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 6, “Tywysog Cymru”, directed by Christian Schwochow, written by James Graham and Peter Morgan, aired November 17, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215736?trackId=200257859>, 52.05”.

The dramatic *poetry vs prose* configuration of the K2B doctrine central to this scene (how can a king incorporate the sovereign's body politic and *feel* at the same time?) is so essential to Shakespeare's play about an ill-equipped king that Kantorowicz dedicated an entire chapter of his study to *Richard II*.<sup>95</sup>

In *THE CROWN*, Charles, unable to sacrifice his personal needs as thoroughly as his mother to the demands of the royal body politic and thus attain a secondary but respected Adult transactional position, ultimately remains trapped in his adolescent identity diffusion. Instead of becoming a competent and respected – albeit personally reduced – player of the M2B game, he resorts to turning his county house into a dream-like hide-away, his “own little Shangri-La”.<sup>96</sup> His progression through the royal apprenticeship remains, like that of Richard II, ill-fated and ultimately unsuccessful throughout the series, leaving him at odds with himself, his mother, the family and, indeed, most of the country. In an argument with Diana, Charles, responding to his wife's threat to start to “properly loathe” him, accordingly yells: “What took you so long? The rest of us have been there for quite some time!”<sup>97</sup>

The M2B game is a mercilessly *cooperative* game requiring participants to submit to the *Monarch* and the rigid system she represents or remain marginalised and defeated – to “bend” or “break”,<sup>98</sup> as Elizabeth's mother, ‘Queen Mum’, puts it. This configuration turns the series' interactional patterns into highly agonal zero-sum games, thus creating dramatically engaging conflict. For the family, admission to superficial Adult status is only possible after completing their respective coming-of-age processes and submitting to the uncompromising game's cooperative nature (as achieved by Philip after season 2 and Margaret after season 3).

#### 4.4.3 The Queen's CoA games: Prime Ministers and Other Officials

Some of the most central games in *THE CROWN* are those between the Queen and ‘her’ various prime ministers and other close associates and employees, such as the successive private secretaries Tommy Lascelles, Martin Adeane, and Martin Charteris. Adhering to the dramatic logic of repetition and innovation, these games always include the same actants and follow the same progression while featuring different players. In seasons 1 and 2, they operationalize Elizabeth's coming-of-age. In seasons 3 and 4, they serve to create tangible narrative action.

According to the M2B configuration, Elizabeth's games with her PMs and other associates take place in the shape of covert ulterior transactions, containing an ostensible cer-

95 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, 7<sup>th</sup> paperback printing (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 24–41.

96 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 4, “Favourites”, directed by Paul Whittington, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215491?trackId=200257859,46.05>”.

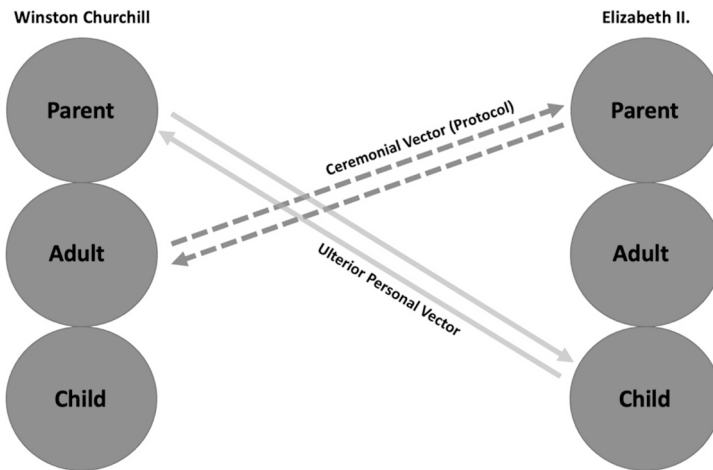
97 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 9, “Avalanche”, directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215496?trackId=200257859,05.56>”.

98 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 6, “Terra Nullius”, directed by Julian Jarrold, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215493?trackId=200257859,50.47>”.

emonial vector and an ulterior social vector. Following the overall M2B configuration, all royal CoA games require Elizabeth to adjust her personal interactions to the ceremonial vector. Her CoA *Mentor-Student* game with Winston Churchill illustrates this progression particularly well.

Winston Churchill, the first PM of Elizabeth II's reign, insists on the rigorous up-keep of the ceremonial vector, even refusing to sit down while in an audience with the Queen.<sup>99</sup> However, he simultaneously attempts to dominate the royal family's life, sees himself as a mentor to the young Elizabeth – claiming on various occasions that “she needs me”<sup>100</sup> – and even lectures her on the proper way to hold her audiences with him.<sup>101</sup> Initially, Churchill's interactions with the Queen, therefore, take the shape of covert duplex transactions in which the ceremonial vector (Churchill: Adult – Queen: Parent) and the ulterior personal vector (Churchill: Parent – Queen: Child) diverge (see figure 18).

Figure 18: Initial configuration *Mentor-Student* game Churchill-Elizabeth II



As a skilled and experienced political operator and a democratically elected leader, Churchill possesses a high level of confidence and an established systemic and symbolic legitimation for his dominance over the inexperienced Queen.

The interactions between Churchill and Elizabeth take the shape of a *zero-sum* CoA game, in which one player's gain has to be balanced with the other player's loss. Churchill's ability as a player decreases proportionally to the Queen's rise in experience.

99 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 3, “Windsor”, directed by Philip Martin, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025759?trackId=200257859>, 19.16”.

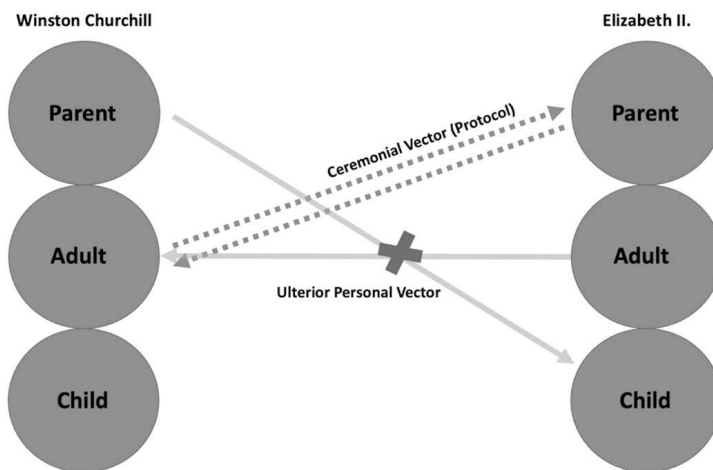
100 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 1, “Wolferton Splash”, directed by Stephen Daldry, written by Peter Morgan, aired, November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025757?trackId=200257859>, 33.28”.

101 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 3, “Windsor”, directed by Philip Martin, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025759?trackId=200257859>, 19.16”.

While the two processes are by no means linked by intradiegetic causality, this proportional decline fulfils the *dramatic* function of emphasising Elizabeth's coming-of-age.

Churchill's ability starts to deteriorate as the season progresses. He misjudges political crises like the London smog<sup>102</sup> and suffers several strokes.<sup>103</sup> As the plot continues and Elizabeth grows in confidence and experience, the games between Churchill and the Queen notably change. There are frequent moments when Elizabeth is no longer willing to take a Child position in the transactions with her previous mentor and, instead, initiates Adult-Adult transactions. Initially, the self-confident Churchill refuses to engage in these attempts and continues to interact with the Queen in the ulterior Parent-Child configuration of the *Mentor-Student* game. This leads the duo's interactions to end in crossed transactions and abrupt termination of the interaction (see figure 19). One example of this is Churchill's overreaction to the news of Philip taking flying lessons. Elizabeth's attempt to initiate a reasonable exchange on equal footing about the matter prompts Churchill to abandon all but the thinnest layer of ceremonial reverence, eventually storming out of the room, angrily beating the wall with his walking stick.<sup>104</sup>

Figure 19: Winston – Elizabeth mid-coming-of-age



The turning point in the duo's dynamic comes when Churchill withholds information about his frail health from the Queen. It leads to Elizabeth scolding her PM in a simple complementary Parent (her)-Child (him) transaction aptly named by her tutor: "a good

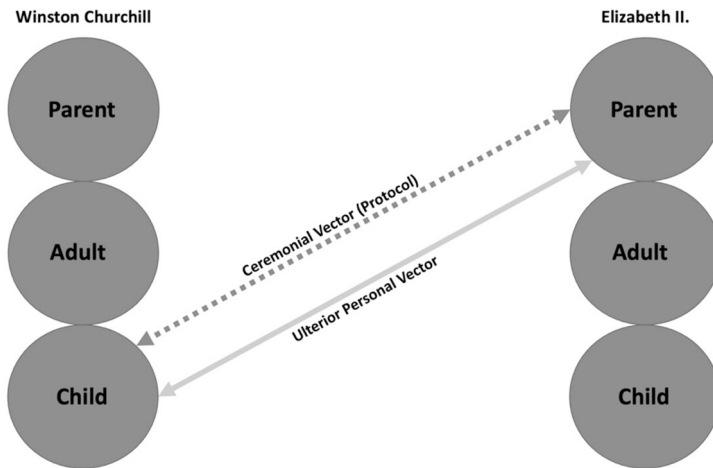
102 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 4, "Act of God", directed by Julian Jarrold, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025760?trackId=200257859>.

103 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 7, "Scientia Potentia Est", directed by Benjamin Caron, written by Peter Morgan, November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025763?trackId=200257859>.

104 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 4, "Act of God", directed by Julian Jarrold, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025760?trackId=200257859>, 30.44".

dressing down from nanny”,<sup>105</sup> to which the seasoned politician – already diminished as a player of the zero-sum CoA game – willingly submits. For the first time, the scene sees the M2B game’s ceremonial and ulterior personal vectors align for the Queen.

Figure 20: Winston – Elizabeth post-coming-of-age



Churchill’s deterioration eventually leads him to retire (season 1, episode 9: “Assassins”), leaving him an honoured but ultimately weary and powerless old man. His last audience takes the shape of a rite-of-passage for the Queen and marks the ‘successful’ completion of their *Mentor-Student* game (see figure 20). An emotional Churchill declares Elizabeth’s maturity as queen and even kisses her on the forehead in a final gesture of parental blessing.<sup>106</sup> Subsequently, the duo’s social transactions occur between a now much more confident adult Elizabeth and a much weakened “Winston”, as the Queen calls the PM. Their dynamic on the personal vector is, at this point, permanently reversed, featuring complementary Parent (her)-Child (him) transactions. At a dinner in his honour at 10 Downing Street, a moved Churchill tears up during the Queen’s toast.<sup>107</sup> It is a finale with diverging subjective intensity, marking the irreversible end of Churchill’s political life (3<sup>rd</sup> degree) while meaning significantly less to Elizabeth, who arranges it after a suggestion from her mother.<sup>108</sup> By the start of season three, Churchill, like the Queen’s other early advisors, no longer serves a function in the narrative’s coming-of-age con-

105 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 7, “Scientia Potentia Est”, directed by Benjamin Caron, written by Peter Morgan, November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025763?trackId=200257859,45.21>.”

106 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 9, “Assassins”, directed by Benjamin Caron, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025765?trackId=200257859,50.19>.”

107 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 9, “Assassins”, directed by Benjamin Caron, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025765?trackId=200257859,57.37>.”

108 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 9, “Assassins”, directed by Benjamin Caron, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025765?trackId=200257859,52.04>.”

figuration and, therefore, dies – in polite accordance with dramatic logic – right at the start of the season.<sup>109</sup>

Elizabeth's games with later PMs mimic this initial *Mentor-Student* game's progression throughout without serving the same illustrative coming-of-age purpose. In order to create a dynamic interactional plot, they usually start by showing the Queen at a transactional disadvantage, e.g., due to her cluelessness about a particular political matter, thus causing an incongruence between her Parental superiority on the ceremonial vector and the Child (Queen)-Parent (PM) transactions on the personal vector. The situation usually develops in a way that leads Elizabeth to attempt to assert her transactional dominance leading to crossed transactional vectors on the social vector and thus conflict. It ends in a final consolidation in which the respective resigning PM reverts to a complementary Child state, ultimately allowing Elizabeth to express her benevolence in a now consolidated ceremonial and personal Parent (her)-Child (PM) transaction. The game's *dramatically* motivated zero-sum progression, e.g., causes the socialist and monarchy-sceptic Harold Wilson to develop Alzheimer's and end up highly moved by the Queen's offer to honour him with a dinner after his resignation.<sup>110</sup> Margaret Thatcher, having been ousted both by her party and the Queen's refusal to dissolve parliament, is similarly brought to the edge of tears after the monarch benevolently presents her with the order of merit.<sup>111</sup>

However, as Elizabeth is largely adjusted to her royal role after completing the *Mentor-Student* game with Churchill and seeing that her ministerial co-players are equally stable in their respective identities, the game's progression usually remains superficial and does not indicate further character development. In the series, it essentially serves to structure action-based conflict surrounding the series background political events (e.g., the Falkland war,<sup>112</sup> a Cabinet reshuffle,<sup>113</sup> or commonwealth (in)action against apartheid).<sup>114</sup>

Following the series' *dramatic* need for repetition, the intensity of these action-based conflicts is usually limited. More radical PMs like Wilson (left) or Thatcher (neoliberal) threaten reform but ultimately do not take tangible steps that would affect the series' core configuration (e.g., a republican revolution). Despite being an old-school socialist,

109 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 1, "Olding", directed by Benjamin Caron, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 17, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215731?trackId=200257859>.

110 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 10, "Cri de Coeur", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 17, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215740?trackId=200257859>, 43.14".

111 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 10, "War", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215497?trackId=200257859>, 34.35".

112 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 4, "Favourites", directed by Paul Whittington, written by Peter Morgan, November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215491?trackId=200257859>; and *The Crown*, season 4, episode 5, "Fagan", directed by Paul Whittington, written by Jonathan D. Wilson and Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215492?trackId=200257859>.

113 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 2, "The Balmoral Test", directed by Paul Whittington, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215489?trackId=200257859>.

114 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 8, "48:1", directed by Julian Jarrold, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215495?trackId=200257859>.

Wilson ultimately does not attempt to “rough you lot up”, as he puts it.<sup>115</sup> And Thatcher, who appears as Elizabeth's rival throughout season 4 (following a common but largely unfounded perception of the two women's relationship), ultimately makes no attempt at reforming the country “from top to bottom” as she initially threatens after an ill-fated weekend-getaway with the Windsors.<sup>116</sup> In fact, as part of the *cooperative* M2B game and following dramatic serial logic, all PMs and other officials in *THE CROWN* unquestioningly accept the Queen's ceremonial dominance, thus limiting intensity, leaving the series' basic configuration intact and allowing its games to repeat in subsequent episodes and with different players.

#### 4.4.4 The Windsors' Reverse *Macbeth* Games

In *THE CROWN*, much of the plot's conflict derives from the conflictive games between the Queen and those members of her family who undergo a similar coming-of-age process in the M2B configuration (her husband Philip in seasons 1 and 2, her sister Margaret in seasons 1–3, her son Charles in season 3 and 4, Diana in season 4). These games often take on the shape of an RM game in which the unequal division of power is aggravated either by their contradiction of patriarchal gender dynamics (in the case of Philip and Charles) or by their contradiction of a more assertive personality (in the case of Margaret and Diana) and thus serves to emphasise engaging narrative conflict.

A central example is Elizabeth's games with her husband, Philip. The dynamic of their marriage before her ascension to the throne seems to follow the patriarchal layout of their generation and class, in which a dominant husband demands respect and obedience from his wife. Initially, Philip's unequal concept of matrimony seems to complement Elizabeth's desires. This is suggested not only by the fact that the couple's marriage appears happy before Elizabeth's ascension to the throne. Her pronounced insistence on keeping the promise to “obey” her husband in their marital vows is a further indication of this.<sup>117</sup> The couple's initial private dynamic thus plays out in the form of simple complementary Parent (him)-Child (her) transactions (see figure 21).

However, with Elizabeth becoming queen, the dynamic of the M2B game takes over their relationship. Elizabeth's role as queen is now always a factor in the couple's marital games. This situation is complicated further by Philip's initial lack of a corresponding ceremonial/professional position. Indeed, his public role as a navy officer is taken away from him upon the ascension of his wife.<sup>118</sup>

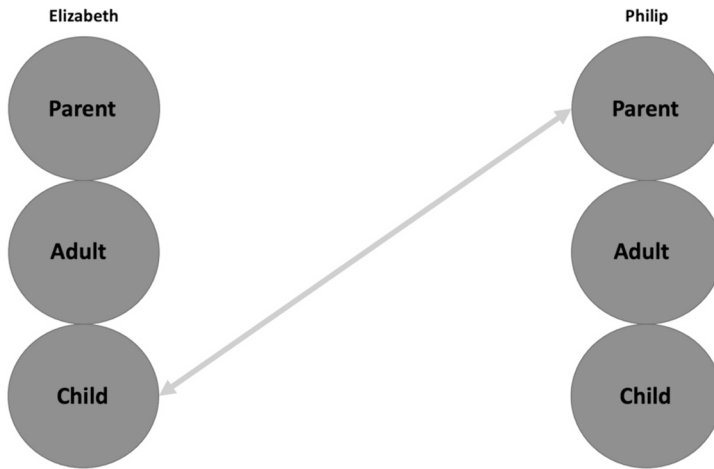
115 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 10, “Cri de Coeur”, directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 17, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215740?trackId=200257859,44.58>”.

116 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 2, “The Balmoral Test”, directed by Paul Whittington, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215489?trackId=200257859,29.37>”.

117 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 1, “Wolferton Splash”, directed by Stephen Daldry, written by Peter Morgan, aired, November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025757?trackId=200257859,14.30>”.

118 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 2, “Hyde Park Corner”, directed by Stephen Daldry, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025758?trackId=255824129>.

Figure 21: Initial configuration Elizabeth-Philip



While Philip must give in on all official matters, the couple initially agrees that he is to retain his patriarchal status in private affairs.<sup>119</sup> However, faithful to the dramatic logic of the conflictive M2B game, there ultimately exists no division between private life and the royal role, leading to constant conflict between the couple.

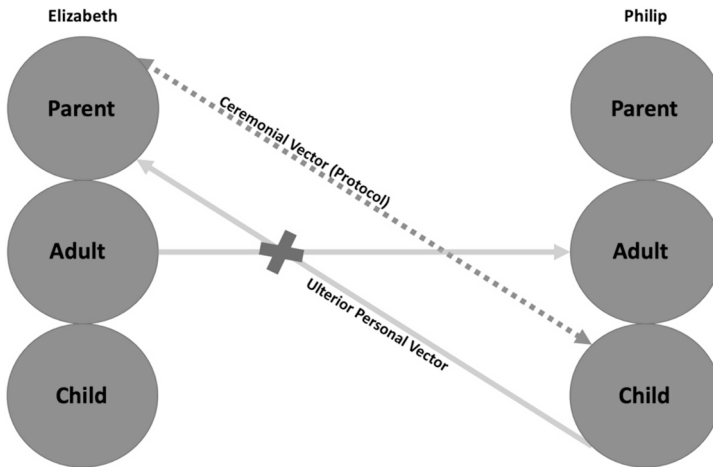
The pattern of progression for Elizabeth and Philip's RM game looks as follows: An apologetic Elizabeth sees herself forced to go against her husband's wishes in order to accommodate a demand of the crown. She will usually start a request as a wife in the couple's private patriarchal configuration in order to sway her husband (Child (her)-Parent (him), see figure 12). Philip will deny this request, asserting his dominance on a social vector by engaging his wife in complementary Parent (him)-Child (her) transactions. The failure of her request will lead Elizabeth to repeat her demand as Queen, thus reversing the couple's initial dynamic to a Parent (her)-Child (him) transaction. In turn, Philip usually accommodates this reversal by assuming the required complementary Child state. However, while this enables the continuation of the communication, it intensifies the conflict. An attempt by Elizabeth to dissolve the tension by initiating an Adult-Adult transaction on the personal vector will usually remain unsuccessful, leading to crossed transactional vectors and thus a termination of the communication (see figure 22).

Without the establishment of a stable complementary transactional pattern, the Queen's ceremonial precedence becomes the decisive factor in the argument rather than the arrival at a mutual, 'adult' agreement. Unable to refuse the Queen's request but unwilling to admit defeat, Philip will usually concede by withdrawing from the match (thus presenting a common popular motif of a character dramatically leaving a scene). As the story progresses, Philip will increasingly avoid his seemingly inevitable defeat in the marital RM games by avoiding playing altogether. Thus, the couple's relationship becomes increasingly hostile and distant. Philip's withdrawal serves a dramatic function,

119 See, e.g., *The Crown*, season 2, episode 9, "Paterfamilias", directed by Stephen Daldry, written by Tom Edge and Peter Morgan, December 8, 2017, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80149013?trackId=200257859>, 24.30".

too: It facilitates the deferred resolution of the conflicts central to the plot (indeed, the couple's RM game is only resolved at the end of season 2).<sup>120</sup>

Figure 22: Conflictive termination of the Reverse Macbeth game



An excellent example of the martial RM games' structure is the couple's conflict over what name their family, and thus the royal dynasty, should take (Philip's: Mountbatten, or Elizabeth's: Windsor) and where the family should live: Clarence House (his preference) or Buckingham Palace (the Queen's choice).<sup>121</sup>

Elizabeth: I need to talk to you

Elizabeth initiates a Child (her)-Parent (him) transaction on the personal vector.

Philip: About what

Elizabeth: They'd rather we didn't keep the name... Mountbatten.

Philip: Who's they?

Elizabeth: Cabinet.

Philip: It's none of their business.

Philip tries to assert his dominance in a complementary Parent (him)-Child (her) transaction on the personal vector.

Elizabeth: I think you'll find it's very much their business.

120 *The Crown*, season 2, episode 10, "Mystery Man", directed by Benjamin Caron, written by Peter Morgan aired December 8, 2017 <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80149014?trackId=200257859,45.49>".

121 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 3, "Windsor", directed by Philip Martin, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025759?trackId=200257859,53.54>".

Elizabeth abandons her Child-stance and asserts her underlying dominance by initiating a Parent (her)- Child (him) transaction on the personal vector.

Philip: You're my wife. Taking... taking my name is the law.

Elizabeth: It's the custom, not the law.

Philip: A custom practised so universally it might as well be the law. You can't do this. Am I to be the only man in the country whose wife and children don't take his name? You can't do this to Dickie [his uncle, Louis Mountbatten], it will devastate him. You know that. You know how important it is to him. I've told him the royal house Mountbatten is in the bag.

Philip shifts into a complementary Child position on the personal vector, thus enabling the communication to continue.

Elizabeth: That was a mistake. It's not. The name has to be Windsor. For stability. – There's more. Clarence House ...

Philip: Our home. What about it?

Elizabeth: We have to give it up. The home of the sovereign of the United Kingdom is Buckingham Palace.

Philip: Says who?

Elizabeth: Me.

Philip: I thought you hated that place?

Elizabeth: I do. We all do.

Philip: Then why go along with it?

Elizabeth. Because that's the overwhelming advice.

Philip: That's the point, Elizabeth. It's just advice. It doesn't mean that you have to act on it.

Elizabeth: When it comes from the government, you do.

Elizabeth initiates an Adult-Adult transaction on the social vector.

Philip: What kind of marriage is this? What kind of family? You've taken my career from me, you've taken my home, you've taken my name. I thought we were in this together.

Philip remains in the Child mode, thus creating a crossed transaction.

*He gets up and leaves.* (Season 1, Episode 3: "Windsor")

The communication falters.

It is not always the case that Elizabeth and Philip's conflict is this outspoken or even concentrated in one scene. However, their marital games usually follow this pattern.

Diegetically, the RM game is conserved in this configuration because the couple is (in their shared opinion) unable to divorce or make other significant 3rd-degree changes

to their external situation.<sup>122</sup> Elizabeth and Philip seem ultimately unable to renegotiate the dynamics of their relationship without questioning fundamental assumptions about the M2B game (e.g., the monarch's precedence, primogeniture, or the pertinence of the royal cause), which neither of them is willing to do. Indeed, even if their intradiegetic character development suggested such a move, the *pragmatic* need to retain a series' basic configuration would arguably prevent them from taking any 3<sup>rd</sup>-degree steps. In the couple's unhappiness and simultaneous inability to make significant changes, their conflicts are neither resolved nor able to escalate beyond a certain point. Their game remains within a 2<sup>nd</sup>-degree intensity, thus likewise complying with the dramatic logic of limited escalation that enables the serial repetition of established conflicts.

Philip's temporary boycott of the game will usually be swayed by an increasingly desperate Queen making some concessions for him "to be in, not out"<sup>123</sup> (e.g., granting him the title of Prince).<sup>124</sup> In doing so, she facilitates the escalated games' necessary reset to a lower intensity, thus, 'buying' another round.

Following intradiegetic logic, the couple's continuously escalating game will finally become too much for Elizabeth to bear, leading her to the unprecedented move of withdrawing herself from the game and thus forcing Philip to follow and engage her.<sup>125</sup> This unusual move changes the configuration of the couple's marital game and leads to a dramatically well-timed complementary Adult-Adult transaction in the finale of season 2. Their conversation results in an arrangement that allows Philip certain privileges (e.g., concerning extramarital affairs). However, it also results in him accepting the basic M2B configuration of his life with Elizabeth, including their status as ultimately non-coequal players and his wife's precedence as queen.

The dissolution of the conflictive RM game in the season 2 finale marks the completion of a couple's joint coming-of-age, a settling-into the realities of their life together. Following the game's peaceful resolution, the couple primarily engages in amicable Adult-Adult (on the personal vector) transactions throughout seasons 3 and 4. They even appear able to joke about previous difficulties, with Elizabeth mockingly alluding to Philip's affair with a Ballerina<sup>126</sup> and Philip leaving a confidential meeting with little more than a shrug and the commentary, "That's our cue: queens only".<sup>127</sup> However, with the resolution of the RM configuration, the couple's marital game loses much

122 *The Crown*, season 2, episode 3, "Lisbon", directed by Philip Martin, written by Peter Morgan, aired December 8, 2017, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80149007?trackId=200257859>, 44.30".

123 *The Crown*, season 2, episode 3, "Lisbon", directed by Philip Martin, written by Peter Morgan, aired December 8, 2017, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80149007?trackId=200257859>, 45.35".

124 *The Crown*, season 2, episode 3, "Lisbon", directed by Philip Martin, written by Peter Morgan, aired December 8, 2017, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80149007?trackId=200257859>, 47.10".

125 *The Crown*, season 2, episode 10, "Mystery Man", directed by Benjamin Caron, written by Peter Morgan, aired December 8, 2017 <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80149014?trackId=200257859>, 42.10".

126 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 9, "Avalanche", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215496?trackId=200257859>, 06.53".

127 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 9, "Imbroglio", directed by Sam Donovan, written by Peter Morgan, November 17, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215739?trackId=200257859>, 35.22".

of its potential for the creation of engaging conflict. Therefore, Elizabeth and Philip's relationship occupies a minor role in the plot going forward.

The RM game possesses a highly pertinent zero-sum structure in which one player's dominance is proportional to the other's submission. It, therefore, serves to introduce a highly agonal component into the couple's relationship that makes for dramatically engaging conflict.

Following the dramatic rule of innovation and repetition, all other coming-of-age games involving the Queen and her relatives follow a similar progression. In a second central RM game, Elizabeth's younger sister Margaret figurates Elizabeth's co-player. Unlike Philip, Margaret's futile claim to superiority does not derive from patriarchal gender norms but her status as their father's original favourite child<sup>128</sup> and her more sparkling personality. As children in the Windsor family's initial idyllic configuration, Elizabeth and Margaret had sworn to always look out for one another.<sup>129</sup> Before Elizabeth's coronation, this rule had been the foundation of the sisters' games, leading to close intimacy between the siblings. However, with Elizabeth's ascension to the throne and the intrusion of the dynamic of the M2B game, the personal vector no longer matters, as both Elizabeth and her sister frequently discover, e.g. in Margaret's foiled attempt to marry an 'unsuitable' lover.<sup>130</sup> Accordingly, Margaret, who, like her brother-in-law, lacks a defined public role to add as a counterweight in her games with the Queen, finds herself relegated to the background where she used to occupy the frontstage.

Following the configuration of the RM game, Margaret's attempts to regain lost dominance on the social vector usually lead to the assertion of the Queen's Parental ceremonial authority and Margaret's subsequent relegation to a desperately impotent Child position. Throughout the series, the crown's precedence forces Margaret to apologize for frivolous behaviour,<sup>131</sup> give up her fiancé, Peter Townsend,<sup>132</sup> return from a vacation with a younger lover,<sup>133</sup> and even give up some of her royal functions.<sup>134</sup>

128 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 8, "Pride and Joy", directed by Philip Martin, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025764?trackId=200257859,53.37>".

129 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 10, "Gloriana", directed by Philip Martin, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025766?trackId=200257859,02.50>".

130 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 6: "Gelinite", directed by Julian Jarrold, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025762?trackId=200257859>. And *The Crown*, season 1, episode 10, "Gloriana", directed by Philip Martin, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025766?trackId=200257859>, 2016.

131 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 8, "Pride and Joy", directed by Philip Martin, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025764?trackId=200257859,55.49>".

132 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 10, "Gloriana", directed by Philip Martin, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025766?trackId=200257859>.

133 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 10, "Cri de Coeur", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 17, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215740?trackId=200257859,36.30>".

134 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 7, "The Hereditary Principle", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215494?trackId=200257859,16.03>".

Bound to the cooperative structure of the M2B game by her *intradiegetic* unwillingness to give up her social and financial privileges, the *pragmatic* need for serial perpetuity and the resulting *dramatic* need for repetitive serial continuity, Margaret (like Philip) is generally unable to resort to more drastic steps of defiance. With every defeat, Margaret, like her brother-in-law, withdraws a little more from the personal side of the game that ties her to her sister, resulting in loosening the siblings' initially close bond.

Following the game's *dramatic* zero-sum structure, Margaret grows ever more erratic as Elizabeth grows into her role as queen. Indeed, like Charles after her, Margaret's overall status in the Windsors' configuration is precarious. The Princess's inability to adjust to the rules of the M2B game (submission, restraint, duty, sacrifice, representational attitude), in turn, reduces her standing as a player. By season 3, her inaptness as a royal player leaves Margaret with nothing to contribute or withhold but her volatile affections. A 'cry for help'-type suicide attempt appears as the final extension of this last remaining ammunition. The unsuccessful "cri de coeur"<sup>135</sup> marks the finale of season 3, the end of Margaret's struggle against the M2B game and the termination of her own royal apprenticeship. Having survived in accordance with serially repetitive limited intensity, she resigns herself to her fate, even accepting her family's cruel disposal of disabled relatives to preserve the reputation of the 'blood line'.<sup>136</sup> Like Philip, Margaret's coming-of-age results in largely stable (social) Adult-Adult transactions with her immediate surroundings. As a character, she thus loses her role as a prime source for narrative conflict throughout much of season 4.

#### 4.4.5 Changing the Rules: Charles and Diana

Given the prominence of their historical role models, it is unsurprising that the dysfunctional marital games between Charles and Diana take the centre stage in the second half of THE CROWN's season 4. In the spirit of serial repetition, the series once more employs the RM game (albeit in a slight variation) to evoke the well-known *fairytale-gone-wrong* trope that usually surrounds fictional and historical accounts of the Wales' marriage. In presenting the couple's "grotesque misalliance",<sup>137</sup> as Charles terms their relationship, the RM configuration cues an easily legible conflict based on traditional associations with hurt male (and aristocratic) privilege. The series introduces a second area of conflict, Charles' ongoing affair with Camilla Parker-Bowles. However, as Diana has no agency in this game (the relationship continues throughout season 4 without much development in any direction), their RM configuration serves the dramatic purpose of providing her and Charles with a common interactional template to create narratively dynamic conflict.

135 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 10, "Cri de Coeur", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 17, 2019, [https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215740?trackId=200257859, 47.00](https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215740?trackId=200257859,47.00)".

136 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 7, "The Hereditary Principle", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215494?trackId=200257859>.

137 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 10, "War", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, November 15, 2020, [https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215497?trackId=200257859, 38.19](https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215497?trackId=200257859,38.19)".

Diana's frontstage position in the RM game comes not from her ceremonial superiority (as is the case with Elizabeth) but from her personal qualities: her perceived "beauty", "charm", and her ostensibly emotional "motherhood".<sup>138</sup> As a public personality, she continuously outshines Charles, whose awkward, unevenly developed personality relegates him to the backstage, even causing audiences to boo when he appears without his wife.<sup>139</sup> Due to his presumed precedence as Diana's senior (in age, gender privilege, and title), Charles follows the RM game's impotent progression from an attempted assertion of dominance to a perpetual Child state which he expresses in constant jealous reproaches against his wife. He, e.g., accuses her of engaging in "grotesque mortifying display[s]", "exquisite selfishness", and reproaches her for the alleged "calculated vulgarity of the antics"<sup>140</sup> with which she publicly outshines him. Locked in the broader cooperative M2B game (with the Queen as the game's arbiter refusing to intervene), the couple remains in this escalating pattern until the season 4 finale.

Nonetheless, as a player, Diana introduces a new dynamic into the royal family's previously cooperative M2B dynamic. She, too, struggles to consolidate public duty and personal needs. However, in her case, the consolidation process is reversed. Initially, Diana appears to have a natural talent for royal life, as the ostensibly "perfect princess"<sup>141</sup>, passing the family's 'Balmoral test' with "flying colours"<sup>142</sup> and easily managing to appeal to masses from New York<sup>143</sup> to Australia.<sup>144</sup> Initially, she is likewise eager to accept both Charles' and the Queen's various claims of Parental superiority.

However, Diana frequently shuns the ceremonial vector in favour of personal Child (her)-Parent (co-player) stimuli, e.g., when she insists on calling the Queen "Mama".<sup>145</sup> As the Queen (and much of her family) are, at this stage, largely unable to access the personal vector beyond superficial Adult transactions due to their advanced progression in the M2B game, this usually leads to irritation and rejection.

138 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 6, "Terra Nullius", directed by Julian Jarrold, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215493?trackId=200257859,36.34>".

139 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 6, "Terra Nullius", directed by Julian Jarrold, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215493?trackId=200257859,37.20>".

140 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 10, "War", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215497?trackId=200257859,37.03>".

141 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 6, "Terra Nullius", directed by Julian Jarrold, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215493?trackId=200257859,43.05>".

142 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 2, "The Balmoral Test", directed by Paul Whittington, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215489?trackId=200257859,42.28>".

143 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 10, "War", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215497?trackId=200257859,28.03>".

144 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 6, "Terra Nullius", directed by Julian Jarrold, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215493?trackId=200257859,42.58>".

145 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 10, "War", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215497?trackId=200257859,41.32>".

Diana's difficulties are not the result of overwhelming royal demands but personal mistreatment (by Charles and the Queen). Accordingly, her coming-of-age takes the form of a growing rejection of the official demands of the monarchy (and the, by then, static player that upholds them: the Queen) in favour of her personal needs. The development is seemingly completed in the season 4 finale when she rejects the usual Child-Parent dynamic and defiantly engages Philip in an Adult-Adult transaction, stating:

And if he [Charles]... if this family can't give me the love and security that I feel I deserve, then I believe I have no option but to break away... officially... and find it myself.<sup>146</sup>

The season 4 climax at a Christmas gathering at Balmoral Castle is tellingly underlaid with the soundtrack of "Baby it's Cold Outside", a song that, due to its coercive message of not accepting a date's wish to leave, had been at the centre of a highly publicised controversy in 2020.<sup>147</sup>

Diana marks a change in *THE CROWN*'s general configuration and its presentation of the monarchy. Her disregard for the M2B game's iron-clad rules – which all royal players in *THE CROWN* had until then obeyed – makes Diana the series' very first *creative player* and thus a nuisance in a narrative and intradiegetic system built on rigid continuity. After brushing off Diana's frequent attempt at a heart-to-heart, the Queen instructs Charles that he will not be allowed to "separate, or divorce or let the side down in any way".<sup>148</sup> In the previous M2B games involving the Queen, this usually led to her co-players' lamenting submission to the games' inevitable cooperative character. With Diana being a creative player, however, as most audiences know from history, this progression will likely change in the seasons to come.

It should be noted that this change in *THE CROWN*'s structure significantly alters the series' presentation of the royal family. Throughout her coming of age, the Queen's, at times, morally ambivalent actions retained an involuntary character appearing almost dictated by the crown itself. However, in the series' fourth season, Elizabeth's emotional unavailability increasingly appears as a personal deficit which becomes most visible in her continued rejection of the otherwise highly functional new royal Diana. Diana's difficult position in the M2B game thus ultimately appears as a result of the royal family's personal deficits, not of her inability to adjust to the system's demands. This changed configuration serves an important dramatic function.

Following her well-known historical persona as a royal breakaway and 'Queen of Hearts', most audiences will expect a fictional Diana to appear both as a generally positive character and eventual antagonist to the Windsor family. For there to be a legitimate and easily legible conflict, however, dramatic logic demands that the previously high

146 *The Crown*, season 4, episode, 10, "War", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215497?trackId=200257859>, 47.03".

147 *The Crown*, season 4, episode, 10, "War", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215497?trackId=200257859>, 39.39".

148 *The Crown*, season 4, episode, 10, "War", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215497?trackId=200257859>, 43.53".

moral standing of the fictional Queen be reduced (a move that had been prepared by typecasting character actress Olivia Coleman for seasons 3 and 4).

It should be mentioned here that the production of *THE CROWN*'s season 4 and the increasing ambivalence of the series' normative evaluation of the royal family coincides with several high-profile scandals that arguably changed the historical monarchy's reception, at least among global, progressive 'prestige' audiences. Since 2019, the Queen's second son, Prince Andrew, has been at the centre of allegations of sexual assault<sup>149</sup> (the series' alludes to this by portraying a young Andrew as a sleazy show-off with transgressive sexual tendencies).<sup>150</sup> Furthermore, at the start of 2020, the historical royal family had to contend with the highly publicised departure of Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan. It was a controversial move that the couple has since followed up with further highly publicised criticism of the monarchy, e.g., by alleging racism within the Windsor family.<sup>151</sup> In addition, general discursive developments such as the global rise of post-colonial and anti-racist movements in 2020 have arguably changed the perception of an institution that is, by its very nature, linked to imperial exploitation and white privilege. While the timely introduction of Diana as the royal family's first legitimate and narratively sustainable antagonist might be a coincidence, the series' overall change in its attitude towards the royal family almost seems like a tangible – albeit hesitant – reaction to incorporate these historical developments surrounding the British monarchy without changing too much of its basic configuration. This, by no means, implies that *THE CROWN* has, so far, contended with the numerous dark sides of the historical monarchy (from its role as a past profiteer and legitimating force of imperialism and slavery to its conservative embodiment of rigid, racist class structures). Whether the series is willing and able to contend with these factors in the future remains to be seen.

#### 4.5 The Royal Panopticon and the Queen's Third Body

*THE CROWN* expands its narrative exploration of the K2B trope beyond the *poetry vs prose* motif. One of the series' main concerns is how the making of monarchy and the sovereign can be achieved in the democratic, commodified, and mediatised postmodern age. As Spencer Dew notes, *THE CROWN* pays significant "attention to how said sovereign negotiates modern media technology and the rumblings of discontent at the edges of her empire".<sup>152</sup>

149 A civil lawsuit was settled in early 2022. See Mary O'Connor, "Prince Andrew settles US civil sex assault case with Virginia Guiffre", *BBC*, February 15, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-60393843>.

150 *The Crown*, season 4, episode 4, "Favourites", directed by Paul Whittington, written by Peter Morgan, November 15, 2020, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215491?trackId=200257859>, 33.11".

151 In an interview with Oprah Winfrey first aired in the US on CBS on March 7, 2021. See, e.g., Christen Jones and Caroline Linton, "Harry and Meghan detail royal struggles, from Baby's Skin tone to suicidal thoughts", *CBS*, March 8, 2021. <https://www.cbsnews.com/live-updates/oprah-winfrey-interviews-meghan-markle-prince-harry/>.

152 Spencer Dew, "The Crown", *Religious Studies Review* 43, no.2 (June 2017): 157, <https://doi.org/10.1111/rsr.12935>.

In a time that is said to suffer from the “postmodern condition”, which is, as Jean-Francois Lyotard writes, characterised by a belief in the “obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation”,<sup>153</sup> simple recourse to the divine right of kings is of little use when creating a feasible monarchical imaginary. On a dramatic plane, the K2B trope by itself is arguably not enough to provide a significantly strong motivation for the characters to endure the alleged sacrifices necessary to succeed in the agonal M2B game over an extended period of serial narrative time. Under such circumstances, how does THE CROWN propose one to make “a goddess” out of an “ordinary young woman of modest ability”, as Elizabeth’s abdicated uncle David summarises monarchy in THE CROWN?<sup>154</sup>

#### 4.5.1 The Royal Panopticon

There is a scene that stands out among THE CROWN’s continuous meta-commentaries on the postmodern condition of monarchy. During a meeting with the PM, the fictional Elizabeth II reveals the sovereign trade secrets by explaining the purpose of royal pageantry. Lamenting the difficulty of being (and remaining) a monarch, the exasperated Queen states:

The best we’ve come up with so far is ritual and mystery. Because it keeps us hidden while still in plain sight. The smoke and the mirrors, the mystery and the protocol, it’s not there to keep us apart; it is there to keep us alive.<sup>155</sup>

The scene is remarkable because it has a fictional sovereign acknowledge that her status as Queen rests on nothing but the protective and creative powers of well-curated imaginaries.

In THE CROWN, the royal family lives under constant observation and control through the media and rigid palace officials. It is a state reminiscent of Michel Foucault’s concept of “Panopticism”<sup>156</sup> and his exegesis of Jeremy Bentham’s homonymous concept of the panopticon.<sup>157</sup> As inhabitants of a metaphorical panopticon, the royal family are constantly aware of being potentially watched by a critical, incredulous public. This obliges the Windsors to incessantly self-observe, self-evaluate, and adjust their behaviour according to their potential observers’ imagined and unverifiable demands. The panopticon’s original context as part of Bentham’s homonymous prison concept

153 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, transl. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), XXIV.

154 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 5, “Smoke and Mirrors”, directed by Philip Martin, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, [https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025761?trackId=200257859\\_48.59](https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025761?trackId=200257859_48.59).”

155 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 4, “Bubbikins”, directed by Benjamin Caron, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 17, 2019, [https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215734?trackId=200257859\\_40.45](https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215734?trackId=200257859_40.45).”

156 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, transl. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1995), 195ff.

157 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 200ff.

applies aptly to the ‘golden cage’ imagery *THE CROWN* evokes when illustrating this royal predicament.

It is important to note that the ever-watchful public in *THE CROWN*’s royal panopticon is a collective fiction constructed by the royal family’s internal discourse. To the Windsors, the public remains the Other, a haunting spectre, faceless and vague throughout the series, taking on the intangibility and potential omnipresence (and omnipotence) of Foucault’s conceptual prison guard.

Remarkably, while *THE CROWN* is full of references to the potential dangers of the royal family’s panoptic existence,<sup>158</sup> there is little concrete diegetic evidence to demonstrate the diegetic reality of this unfortunate predicament. Indeed, the panopticon’s most likely proponent, the media, appears largely meek and reverent in *THE CROWN*. The fictional BBC, e.g., suppresses the announcement of the king’s death until Elizabeth can be told.<sup>159</sup> The precarity of the royal family’s panoptic existence is evoked almost exclusively in the palace’s internal discourse and rarely supported by actual diegetic events. Its frequent mention serves to create the largely unverified assumption, both among the fictional Windsors and among *THE CROWN*’s audiences, that the monarchy is in constant peril, with every misstep potentially being the last. Primarily following dramatic logic, it thus evokes a potential 3rd-degree intensity for the narrative that serves to create high stakes for otherwise relatively contained conflicts and thus facilitate an engaging plot. The lack of actual escalation of this implied 3<sup>rd</sup>-degree intensity follows dramatic serial logic as well: where would *THE CROWN* and its basic narrative configuration be if the panoptic spectre of the public were to assert its imagined power, e.g., by getting rid of the monarchy?

Dramatically, the panoptic predicament may primarily serve to raise the stakes and, thus, create narrative suspense. Diegetically, it has significant consequences for the process of making the monarchy. In the postmodern panopticon, the anthropomorphic public and not the royal family ultimately set the standards for what the monarchy – and by extension, the monarch’s body politic – should be. This corresponds to the paradox of all dominance described, e.g., by Thomas Frank et al., according to which “dominance depends on the *accord* of the dominated”.<sup>160</sup> To the royal family in *THE CROWN*, the standard by which this accord is granted seems arbitrary. Elizabeth makes this clear when she

158 Barely an episode goes by without mention of the fragility of the institution of monarchy.

159 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 2, “Hyde Park Corner”, directed by Stephen Daldry, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025758?trackId=255824129,27.30>. Mirroring a historical practice by the BBC, as Erin Bell and Ann Gray note: Bell and Gray, “Television’s Royal Familia: Continuity and Change”, in *The British Monarchy on Screen*, ed. Mandy Merck (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 305.

160 Thomas Frank, Albrecht Koschorke, Susanne Lüdemann, and Ethel Matala de Mazza, *Des Kaisers neue Kleider: Über das Imaginäre politischer Herrschaft: Texte, Bilder, Lektüren* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2002), 73. My translation: “[...] dass Herrschaft der *Zustimmung* der Beherrschten bedarf”. Original emphasis.

exclaims, after facing public criticism, “Well, what do they [the public] want? Tell me! It’s all any of us want to know!”.<sup>161</sup>

Accordingly, the gaze of the public in the royal panopticon must constantly be diverted by the “smoke and mirrors” (likewise the episode-title of *THE CROWN* 2016. 1:5) of ritual and ceremony, or – as Walter Bagehot calls it in his famous reflections on the British constitution – by “pretty events”.<sup>162</sup>

If power, as Foucault demands, must be both “visible and unverifiable”,<sup>163</sup> so too is it only through performance that the monarchy can uphold the pretence of its purposeful pre-eminence. It is the pretty events that, as Elizabeth claims, “keep us [the monarchy] alive”.<sup>164</sup> She thus echoes Bagehot, who states, “When a monarch can bless, it is best that he should not be touched”.<sup>165</sup>

*THE CROWN*’s panoptic structure exposes, as Frank et al. write in their study of the similar theme in narratives of the “emperor’s new clothes”, “the dependence of authority on fiction”, emphasising the “empty ground of political dominance” and thus “problematiz[ing] the relationship between art and politics and, in turn, [its] own status”.<sup>166</sup>

#### 4.5.2 The Queen’s Third Body

*THE CROWN* elaborately demonstrates how the process of making a monarch occurs within the royals’ postmodern panoptic predicament. In the series, the success of creating a functional royal imaginary hinges on the successful unification of Elizabeth II’s bodies politic and natural in the eyes of the supposedly all-seeing public. By elaborating on the vital importance of royal mimicry, *THE CROWN* implies the creation of what Marin calls the king’s mediated third body. For Marin, the king (or in this case, the queen) “is only truly king, that is monarch, in images. They are his *real presence*”.<sup>167</sup> It is only after Elizabeth has visibly presented herself in the physical and discursive trappings that signify the sovereign’s conceptual body politic (ritual and regalia) and only in the process of a co-creative actualisation of these royal performances through her diegetic au-

161 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 4, “Bubbikins”, directed by Benjamin Caron, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 17, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215734?trackId=200257859,40.07>.

162 Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, ed. Paul Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 37.

163 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, transl. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1995), 201.

164 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 4, “Bubbikins”, directed by Benjamin Caron, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 17, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215734?trackId=200257859,41.07>.

165 Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, 41.

166 Thomas Frank, Albrecht Koschorke, Susanne Lüdemann, and Ethel Matala de Mazza, *Des Kaisers neue Kleider: Über das Imaginäre politischer Herrschaft: Texte, Bilder, Lektüren* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2002), 9. My translation: “die Angewiesenheit der Autorität auf Fiktionen”, “geben den leeren Grund politischer Herrschaft frei”, “problematisieren also das Verhältnis von Kunst und Politik und damit auch ihren eigenen Status”.

167 Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King*, transl. Martha M. Houle (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988), 8. Original emphasis.

dience that her two bodies unite to form the ephemeral third body of *Elizabeth Regina*. As Frank et al. point out, “The political body of the king is not visible; it comes into existence only in the imagination of his followers and subjects”.<sup>168</sup>

In *THE CROWN*, the pretty events of ceremony and ritual thus do more than keep the monarch “alive”, as Elizabeth claims. It is only through her acts of performative mediatization and the benevolent reception of these acts by the public that Elizabeth becomes *the Queen* at all. For this purpose of negotiating the distribution of power in favour of the monarchy, the performative K2B trope gains a highly political dimension. It is a motif that reappears, in one form or another, throughout polit-fiction and is, thus, central to this study.

Historically, presentations of ceremonial performance that unify an official's bodies natural and politic in the public's imagination serve a vital function in the creation and preservation of legitimacy. As Clemens Porschlegel writes:

The legitimacy rests [...] in an unimaginably mythical place of a social Third, which is only accessible in the mode of representation and from where the sense of the entire existing order with its social, juridical, and economic circumstances becomes plausible and believable, and from where it seems justified.<sup>169</sup>

In historical politics, the mimetic, performative element does not imply the erosion of a ‘real’ political process. On the contrary: it is part of and even necessary to constitute it.<sup>170</sup> However, the fictional diegetic monarchy in *THE CROWN* is a different matter. As a representative office without any political power, the fictional Queen's role is by its very nature reduced to performance. Here, the opulence and splendour of the performative signifier of monarchical dominance (ritual and ceremony) have remained unchanged while its significate (actual political power) has all but vanished. The royal mimicry, in *THE CROWN*, thus, “degenerates to a dereferenced act of performance which only produces insubstantial forms of public visibility, that is, images that deceive”.<sup>171</sup>

168 Frank et al., *Des Kaisers neue Kleider*, 8. My translation: “Den politischen Körper des Königs kann man nicht sehen; er wird allein im Imaginären seiner Gefolgsleute und Untertanen gegenwärtig”.

169 Clemens Porschlegel, “Die Grimasse der Macht: Zur Theatralität des Politischen”, in *Souveränität und Subversion: Figurationen des Politisch-Imaginären*, ed. Rebekka Klein and Dominik Finkelde (Freiburg/Munich: Karl Alber, 2015), 275. My translation: “Die Legitimität ruht vielmehr einem unvordenklich mythischen, nur im Modus der Repräsentation zugänglichen Ort eines sozialen Dritten auf, von dem aus der Sinn der gesamten bestehenden Ordnung, ihrer sozialen, juristischen und ökonomischen Verhältnisse plausibel und glaubwürdig wird und von dem aus sie gerechtfertigt erscheint”.

170 See Robin Celikates and Simon Rothöhler, “Die Körper der Stellvertreter: Politische Repräsentation zwischen Identität, Simulation und Institution: Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, The Parallax View, The West Wing”, in *Inszenierungen der Politik: Der Körper als Medium*, ed. Paula Diehl and Gertrud Koch (Munich: Fink, 2007), 61f.

171 Celikates and Rothöhler, “Die Körper der Stellvertreter”, 67. My translation: “[...] degeneriert hier zu einem dereferenzialisierten Darstellungshandeln, das lediglich substanzlose Formen öffentlicher Sichtbarkeit, also Bilder, die täuschen, herstellt”. They write this with regards to classic Hollywood polit-films but it applies aptly in this study's context as well.

Through the smoke and mirrors of monarchical performance, THE CROWN's royal family, in their panoptic predicament, creates a simulacrum of royalty. For Jean Baudrillard, referencing Ecclesiastes, "The simulacrum is never what hides the truth – it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true".<sup>172</sup> With its exaggerated pageantry that conserves the appearance of a long-vanished dominance, the Queen's mediated body in THE CROWN is, to say it with Baudrillard, "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal".<sup>173</sup>

#### 4.6 Questions of Purpose: Why do they do it?

In THE CROWN, the royal simulacrum results from a co-creative effort of both the producers (royals) and the recipients of a performance (the public). As a hyperreal myth, the monarchy begins and ends, almost disappears in its presentation.<sup>174</sup> Following Roland Barthes, a myth's function is to endow human-made convention with "a natural and eternal justification", to give "them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact".<sup>175</sup> In THE CROWN, the performative monarchy accordingly turns the historical, discursive construct of a human king or queen into a nebulous yet self-evident law of nature.

In its highly postmodern meta-commentaries – e.g., the frequent allusion to the fairytale character of monarchic presentations – THE CROWN makes it clear, however, that the diegetic public is generally aware and indeed supportive of the monarchy's reduced performative nature. Why then do royals, politicians, palace officials and the public, in THE CROWN, collectively and without exception, indulge in this deceptive fiction? What is the purpose of the monarchy, according to the series?

For Marin, "The effect of representation – the simulacrum – operates only because it gives pleasure".<sup>176</sup> In THE CROWN, the monarchy's mediated simulacra accordingly appear as an escapist mass media production, as "the world's longest continually running soap opera"<sup>177</sup> ready for the diegetic public's consumption. Within THE CROWN's diegesis, the royal family serves as an ongoing entertainment commodity to be consumed like – and competing with – other commodified imaginaries.

172 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, transl. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1. Baudrillard's rendition of a quote from Ecclesiastes.

173 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, transl. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.

174 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 45.

175 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, transl. Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press/Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1972), 143.

176 Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King*, transl. Martha M. Houle (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988), 65f.

177 Roberta Pearson, "The biggest drama commission in British television history: Netflix, *The Crown*, and the UK television ecosystem", *A European Television Fiction Renaissance: Premium Production Models and Transnational Circulation*, ed. Luca Barra and Massimo Scaglioni (New York: Routledge, 2021), 92.

This commodification of the monarchy turns the public into willing second-order accomplices of their own deception. As Theodor Adorno puts it with regards to the engaging powers of consumerism:

People are not only, as the saying goes, falling for the swindle; if it guarantees them even the most fleeting gratification, they desire a deception which is nonetheless transparent to them.<sup>178</sup>

As far as concrete narrative evidence goes, the series stays notably ambivalent about the higher purpose of the royal simulacra beyond the evident self-interest of a dynasty that wishes to retain its privileged position. Instead, it provides countless allusions to established historical assumptions about the British monarchy's function. One sees the Queen as an "unthreatening and stabilising influence" on British society.<sup>179</sup> Another is Bagehot's somewhat elitist idea of monarchy being politics' "comprehensible element for the vacant many".<sup>180</sup> A third has Elizabeth II be "a unifying symbol of permanence and national community" in the face of encroaching modernity.<sup>181</sup> In *THE CROWN*, the monarchy's only expressly stated purpose is to elate and distract a weary public. The series' fictional princess Margaret, like her sister in search of the monarchy's larger meaning, mirrors this latter assumption, stating:

It [the country] has only fallen apart if we say it has. That's the thing about the monarchy, we paper over the cracks. And if what we do is loud and grand and confident enough, no one will notice that all around us it's fallen apart. That's the point of us. Not us... of you.<sup>182</sup>

The monarchy's undeniable potential to provide emotional diversion has, at times, been regarded as a legitimate function of the historical institution. Toynton, e.g., states in her assessment of *THE CROWN*:

[...] these avatars of slightly dippy good will, figureheads with no direct political power, not only hold steady the ship of state: they soothe the spirit, they serve as an antidote to despair.<sup>183</sup>

178 Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry Reconsidered", in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London/New York: Routledge, 1991), 103.

179 Matthew Glencross, Judith Rowbotham, Michael D. Kandiah, "Introduction", in *The Windsor Dynasty 1910 to the Present: 'Long to Reign Over US'?*, ed. Matthew Glencross, Judith Rowbotham, Michael D. Kandiah (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 9.

180 Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, ed. Paul Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 37.

181 David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the "Invention of Tradition, c. 1820–1977", in *The Invention of Tradition*, 21<sup>st</sup> printing, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 122.

182 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 10, "Cri de Coeur", directed by Jessica Hobbs, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 17, 2019, [https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215740?trackId=20025785\\_9\\_54.08](https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215740?trackId=20025785_9_54.08).

183 Evelyn Toynton, "Happy and Glorious: The Crown", *Salmagundi* no. 195 (2017), 262.

In the series, the co-creative making of monarchy becomes a collective response to post-modernity's "decline of strong referentials, these death pangs of the real and of the rational that open onto an age of simulation".<sup>184</sup> For Baudrillard, the postmodern recession of definite history leaves a

[...] panoply of events, ideologies, retro-fashions – no longer so much because people believe in them or still place some hope in them, but simply to resurrect the period when *at least* there was history [...] Anything serves to escape this void, this leukaemia of history and of politics, this haemorrhage of values [...].<sup>185</sup>

Here, in the middle of the void of postmodern incredulity, the larger purpose of THE CROWN's royal protagonists appears. Both the pseudo-archaic pageantry of royal ceremony and the series' frequent mentions of the monarchy's ability to simulate notions of a vaguely defined lost national 'greatness' attest to this.

It is an unfortunate stage on which the Windsor family find themselves in THE CROWN. They face an audience that is, at once, fundamentally incredulous and desperate to become the accomplice of its own escapist deception. However, while the series reflects upon the (self-)deceptive, co-creative process of the making of monarchy, royal performance, even in its disenchanting state, appears able to effectively gloss over existing societal struggles and cultural chasms (or as Elizabeth euphemistically calls it: "heal divisions").<sup>186</sup>

Mirroring its historical role model, the fictional monarchy in THE CROWN thus appears as a powerful agent in creating something akin to what Marcuse calls "Affirmative Culture" (albeit without adopting the concept's critical stance). For Marcuse, the term denotes the separation and elevation of a spiritual, intellectual realm from and above burdensome material circumstances.<sup>187</sup> It affirms "and disguise[s] the new social conditions of [modern] life".<sup>188</sup>

Similarly, the royal family in THE CROWN becomes – and perceives itself as – an instrument to simulate the existence of an elevated realm beyond the hardships of material reality. Characters in THE CROWN extensively reflect upon the monarchy's function of separating the ideal and material world. A young Elizabeth, e.g., learns, with explicit recourse to Bagehot, that the monarchy represents "the dignified" element of the state while the government, the seat of actual political power, is its "efficient" element.<sup>189</sup> This

184 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, transl. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 43.

185 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 44.

186 *The Crown*, season 3, episode 6, "Tywysog Cymru", directed by Christian Schwochow, written by James Graham and Peter Morgan, aired November 17, 2019, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80215736?trackId=200257859>, 47.45".

187 Herbert Marcuse, "Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur", in *Kultur und Gesellschaft I*, 20th ed. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2011), 63.

188 Marcuse, "Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur", 64. My translation: "Die Kultur bejaht und verdeckt die neuen gesellschaftlichen Lebensbedingungen".

189 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 7, "Scientia Potentia Est", directed by Benjamin Caron, written by Peter Morgan, November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025763?trackId=200257859>, 01.58".

division is reminiscent of what Marcuse calls Affirmative Culture's "separation of the utilitarian and necessary from the beautiful and enjoyment",<sup>190</sup> creating an idealised, imaginary realm distinct from – and arguably 'superior' to – the harsh material world. In *THE CROWN*, the royals as a mediatised commodity thus become an affirmative instrument of creating this division of realms and thus conserving the social status quo in times of threatening historical change. Their express purpose is to, as the fictional Princess Margaret notes, "paper over the cracks" within the existing order. As Judith Williamson states about the historical monarchy, "our acceptance of *their* place tends to carry with it an acceptance of our own".<sup>191</sup>

*THE CROWN* thus joins the long fictional Heritage tradition "in which national cinemas turn to the past at different moments in their histories in search of their own foundational myths".<sup>192</sup> With its splendid visuals, celebrity cast, and internationally competitive production value, the series produces notions of historical authenticity and escapism. In a strange mimicry of its own diegetic discourse, it thus performs a function similar to royal ritual. About the latter, Cannadine states:

When watching a great royal occasion, impeccably planned, faultlessly executed, and with a commentary stressing (however mistakenly) the historic continuity with those former days of Britain's greatness, it is almost possible to believe that they have not entirely vanished.<sup>193</sup>

*THE CROWN* reproduces many established and often legitimising narrative tropes associated with the historic royal family: Their political neutrality and impotence, skilful synthesis of middle-class "private probity" and "public grandeur",<sup>194</sup> their dedication and family spirit, to name just a few. A particularly poignant example is the series' reproduction of the established narrative of the legitimising ancient age of the dynasty and its rituals and traditions. The dowager Queen Mary's elaborations on the special status of the English monarchy show this very clearly:

[...] he [Philip] represents a royal family of carpetbaggers and parvenus that goes back what, 90 years? What would he know of Alfred the Great, who wrote of equity and mercy, Edward the Confessor, William the Conqueror or Henry VIII?<sup>195</sup>

190 Herbert Marcuse, "Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur", in *Kultur und Gesellschaft I*, 20th ed. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2011), 57. My translation: "Die Trennung des Zweckmäßigen und Notwendigen vom Schönen und vom Genuß".

191 Judith Williamson, *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Boyars, 1986), 79. Original emphasis.

192 Belén Vidal, *Heritage Film: Nation, Genre and Representation* (London/New York: Wallflower, 2012), 3.

193 David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the Invention of Tradition, c. 1820–1977", in *The Invention of Tradition*, 21<sup>st</sup> printing, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 157.

194 Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual", 139f.

195 *The Crown*, season 1, episode 4, "Act of God", directed by Julian Jarrold, written by Peter Morgan, aired November 4, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80025760?trackId=200257859>, 21.26".

Of course, the historic dynasty to which Mary is referring rose to take the English throne only in 1714 as the then-House of Hanover and has no particularly close familial relations to any of the people named by her. By the (fictional) time Mary pronounces these statements, the family's name, 'Windsor', is roughly 36 years old. However, this evocation of notions of long-standing continuity is in keeping with the established practice of the historical British monarchy to enhance and maintain their traditional authority by, as Cannadine examines in his study of the historical development of royal ritual, inventing traditions.<sup>196</sup> "Invented traditions" are, as Eric Hobsbawm states,

a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.<sup>197</sup>

Indeed, large parts of the historical royal family's ritualistic presence are, as Cannadine shows, a product of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the period 1877–1914 being the first "heyday of 'invented tradition'".<sup>198</sup> It is at this time that the monarchy's ritualistic repertoire, "hitherto inept, private and of limited appeal, became splendid, public and popular",<sup>199</sup> having turned "positively fairytale"<sup>200</sup> in the decades after the first world war.

According to Cannadine, the monarchy's decreasing political power enabled its increased ceremonial presence<sup>201</sup>, which made it into "a unifying symbol of permanence and national community" in the face of the unsettling influences of modernity,<sup>202</sup> as well as a way to legitimise and 'sell' the empire to a public in a time when its foundations might have already been much less solid.<sup>203</sup> Thus, the time from 1918 till 1953 became "the period in which the British persuaded themselves that they were good at ceremonial because they always had been".<sup>204</sup> It is a notion that THE CROWN reflects as well.

One example of these invented traditions that feature prominently in THE CROWN is the monarch's Christmas broadcast which, upon its establishment in 1932, had been

196 David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the Invention of Tradition, c. 1820–1977", in *The Invention of Tradition*, 21<sup>st</sup> printing, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 101–164.

197 Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions", in *The Invention of Tradition*, 21<sup>st</sup> printing, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1.

198 David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the Invention of Tradition, c. 1820–1977", in *The Invention of Tradition*, 21<sup>st</sup> printing, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 108.

199 Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual", 120.

200 Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual", 142.

201 Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual", 121.

202 David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the Invention of Tradition, c. 1820–1977", in *The Invention of Tradition*, 21<sup>st</sup> printing, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 122.

203 Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual", 124–126.

204 Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual", 108.

“immediately adopted as ‘traditional’”.<sup>205</sup> Another example is the public celebration of royal events, with the example of the ritualised, public “royal wedding” being re-established as late as 1922.<sup>206</sup> Corresponding to established historical practice regarding royal spectacle, *THE CROWN* omits this relatively young age of most public royal traditions and affirms the traditional legitimization of the cited invented traditions.

Simplifications and alterations are, of course, a legitimate move in creating a functioning and engaging fictional narrative. Nonetheless, it is remarkable how closely *THE CROWN*'s fictional presentation of royalty mirrors many established narratives that support and legitimise the historical monarchy. This is doubtlessly due to the *pragmatic* attempt of the series' production actors to appeal to audiences by conforming to certain popular notions of the British monarchy. However, it results in the series contributing a powerful para-history that conforms to how the historical royal family has historically portrayed itself. Where *THE CROWN* presents royal characters or institutions in an unfavourable light, e.g., Philip's toxic masculinity, racism, and misogyny, Margaret's spoiled, snobbish and unhinged demeanour, Elizabeth's emotional coldness or the oppressive rigidity of the royal system itself, these presentations ultimately reproduce well-known images of how the historical monarchy is seen already. Thus, while *THE CROWN* adds fictional details and allusions to established historical narratives, it largely complies with their general impetus.

It must be mentioned here that the notion of past ‘greatness’, referred to time and again in *THE CROWN*, not least through the constant diegetic lamentation of its loss, is itself an embellished and nebulous imaginary. Ultimately it refers to the – historically never quite realised – political and economic preeminence of a Britain still in possession of an intact empire while omitting, at the very least, the racist assumptions, as well as the systematic oppression and violent exploitation of a substantial part of the world's population that made it possible.

#### 4.7 Conclusion: Fictional Games, Imaginary Bodies, and Narrative Contortions

This chapter showed that *THE CROWN* draws on a time-tested and almost universally legible narrative formula by presenting its characters engaged in a struggle between personal needs and the requirements of their public role. In the series, this *poetry vs prose* motif appears as the narrative adaption of a pre-enlightened concept of monarchy called ‘The King's two Bodies’. It describes the monarch as a dual being that possesses both a human *body natural* and an immortal, conceptual *body politic* and dramatizes the sovereign as the victim of an identity diffusion caused by his\*her two bodies' opposing demands. As I have shown, the resulting presentation of a monarch burdened and bent by the demands of his\*her office is the most common way to turn an otherwise infinitely privileged and highly remote being into a relatable fictional protagonist ready for mainstream consumption.

205 Cannadine, “The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual”, 142.

206 Cannadine, “The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual”, 151.

This convention has decisive consequences for THE CROWN's normative evaluation of the monarchy. Whether it be the creators' intentions or not, using the K2B trope will always create a general climate of goodwill towards a protagonist so burdened by the idiosyncrasies of his\*her life of splendour. No matter how cold, detached, or selfish the fictional Windsors become in THE CROWN, the K2B trope ultimately serves to *dramatically* mitigate and even justify their behaviour by illustrating the central divisive perversion of their condition. Given the impossibility of the challenge, so the K2B construction invariably tells us, a royal has no option but to fail. Thus, the fictional Windsors' many shortcomings are, to a certain extent, excused.

This chapter showed that THE CROWN operationalizes the K2B trope in transactional patterns, which I called the *Monarch's two Bodies* game. It features ulterior transactions on two distinct vectors: the ceremonial one, which allows the monarch to hide his\*her humanity behind a ritualised parental facade and the ulterior social vector, on which the players' personal qualities come into play. I showed that the M2B game underlies all other interactions in THE CROWN and provides them with a cooperative and zero-sum structure that (1) allows the repetition of established interactional structures according to serial logic and (2) creates conflict and thus an engaging narrative. I showed that, in THE CROWN, the M2B structure manifested in two fundamental games that drive most of the series plot: (1) *Coming-of-Age* games in which the respective Windsors undergo the painful process of sacrificing their humanity in order to approach their royal body politic, and (2) in *Reverse Macbeth* games, which create narrative conflict by juxtaposing its players' personal entitlement with their institutional or public success.

Analysing the changes in the series' game structure after the introduction of Princess Diana as a fictional character, it became clear that THE CROWN undergoes a recalibration in its fourth season. This happens partly because the series' relatively rigid configuration is unable to accommodate a character like Diana, who, due to her historical role model's fame, has become an established discursive macro actor of her own. With many audiences expecting Diana to be both a positive character and an antagonist to the Windsors, the series had to shift its previously largely sympathetic portrayal of the royal family in order to allow for legitimate conflict to take place. I also showed that the slight change in THE CROWN's portrayals of the fictional monarchy followed a shift in the historical royal family's image as a result of highly mediatised scandals and controversies.

Likewise, this chapter demonstrated that THE CROWN expands the concept of 'The King's two Bodies' to present the monarchy in its postmodern predicament. Thrust centre-stage into a performative production, the fictional Queen and her family have no choice but to contend with a world where a dynamic process of constantly re-adjusting imaginaries replaces objective values and supportive metanarratives. The royals thus find themselves in a panoptic situation that obliges them to adjust to the vaguely defined standards of a potentially omnipresent, watchful public.

In presenting them as constantly engaged in negotiating their position, THE CROWN shows the members of the self-proclaimed unpolitical monarchy engaging in a profoundly political process: In THE CROWN, Elizabeth's status as Queen rests entirely on the accord of her subjects. The painful process of succeeding in the M2B game serves the sole purpose of attaining and preserving this accord. In order to maintain the monarchical imaginary, the gaze of the panoptic public must continuously be diverted

from the Queen's all too human body natural through the 'smoke and mirrors' of royal performance.

Pointing out the nature of royal pageantry as an extravagant signifier of dominance without an equivalent significate, this study has shown that the monarchy in *THE CROWN* appears as a hyperreal simulacrum whose only explicit purpose is the ability to serve as an anaesthetic tool of Affirmative Culture. It emotionally separates a burdensome material world from an elevated, ideal fictional realm, thus conserving and legitimising the social status quo.

Accordingly, while *THE CROWN* breaks a taboo in presenting a living British queen – and a flawed one at that – the series is by no means a critical account of the monarchy. While *THE CROWN* makes plain that the postmodern monarchy is an imaginary resting on a fragile agreement between the sovereign and her subjects, the public's accord is ultimately granted. The fictional Elizabeth's subjects choose almost without exception to engage in the co-creation of the royal simulacrum. The series thus ultimately endows its monarchy with a pseudo-democratic legitimacy.

Indeed, while the series laments the institution's flaws, the monarchy ultimately appears as the only solution against the onslaught of (post)modernity. In what could – with recourse to Mark Fisher's concept of "Capitalist Realism"<sup>207</sup> – be called 'Pseudo-Feudal Realism', the series implicitly declares the archaic relic of the monarchy a vital necessity within a democratic system not because of its own virtue but because of an inability to imagine a better alternative. Accordingly, Andrew Higson points out that by portraying the monarchy centre-stage in a high-profile production, "by exploiting a fascination with the British royal families", fictional presentations of the Windsors "play a role in maintaining the monarchy as a contemporary cultural presence", fulfilling this role "almost regardless of whether they represent the royals in a sympathetic manner".<sup>208</sup>

Considering the historical monarchy's role as providing legitimising metanarratives for (and profiting from) some of the worst excesses of imperialism, nationalism, racism, and social injustice on record, the pop cultural prominence of the royal family is not without risks as they continue to influence and shape the discursive construct that is commonly regarded as a nation's 'history'. As Higson remarks with regards to Heritage film:

While all of these films engage with history, they are also creative products designed to work as profitable entertainment commodities. They are, to that extent, part of the imaginative construct that is heritage.<sup>209</sup>

This chapter's examination of the central tropes of *THE CROWN* provides a starting point for further text-based analysis. Much more could and should be said about the series. One such topic is its portrayal of frequently under- and misrepresented groups, espe-

207 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Lanham: John Hunt Publishing, 2009).

208 Andrew Higson, "From political power to the power of the image: contemporary 'British' cinema and the nation's monarchs", in *The British Monarchy on Screen*, ed. Mandy Merck (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 348.

209 Higson, "From political power to the power of the image", 340.

cially of female protagonists and minorities (respectively, the almost complete lack of the latter).

Likewise, and without suggesting a need for one-to-one historical comparisons, *THE CROWN*'s disturbingly glossy image of both the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in general and of the former empire, in particular, should be studied further. The historical period covered by *THE CROWN* saw some of the defining key events and discourses of British and world history, to name just one example: the dissolution of the British Empire and the subsequent, often painful, and still incomplete struggles with the violently racist ideological presumptions that made it possible in the first place.

The series' evident aim to succeed as an escapist entertainment commodity results in an almost complete lack of narrative awareness of the atrocities and upheavals of history. This is even more remarkable as the historical empire is inextricably intertwined with the imaginaries and rituals of the real British monarchy that, as I have shown, forms a dominant point of reference in the series' network. To achieve its questionable escapist feat of presenting the pageantry of the British monarchy without portraying its central role in sustaining and legitimising imperial oppression, *THE CROWN*, at times, performs visibly incongruous narrative contortions. This certainly merits a closer look.

Many of the games and motifs examined in this chapter reappear as established conventions throughout (polit-)fiction, reaching from the operationalisation of the K2B trope to the defeatist notions of 'Pseudo-Feudal / Capitalist Realism'. The subsequent chapter will examine their reappearance in the construction of polit-comedy.

