The King's Speech: an allegory of imperial rapport

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In March 2014 to the surprise of many in Australia, the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, announced the reintroduction of the titles of Knight and Dame into the Australian honours list. The titles, given in recognition of public service in various domains, hark back to an imperial tradition that was eliminated in 1986 by the Australian government and replaced with a national system of honours called the Order of Australia. With Abbott's reform, Knights and Dames are once again to be appointed by the monarch, presently Elizabeth II, who is not only Queen of the United Kingdom but also Queen of Australia, on the advice of the Prime Minister.¹ The reversion to knighthoods was greeted with bemusement throughout the country, with critics bemoaning a return to a 'colonial frame of mind', or the establishment of what has long been termed in Australia, a 'bunyip aristocracy'.² It also revealed the complexity of an entirely independent Australia's relationship to the British monarchy.

This return to royal honours comes in the wake of a series of mediated public relations 'successes' for the British royal family in the twenty-first century. In Britain the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee of June 2012 and the live telecast event of Prince George's christening were slick media events that contributed, according to many commentators, to the 'rebranding' of the royal family. Claire Wardel and Emily West demonstrate that already for the Golden Jubilee of 2002 one could observe a new co-operative tone in the British tabloid press.³ In Australia the 2014 tour of Kate and Wills seemed also to have been followed by 'fawning' coverage,⁴ with live television crosses to the couple's activities and reports naming baby Prince George the 'Republican-slayer'. Meanwhile little coverage of this royal tour addressed the real constitutional issues of Australia's relation to Britain,

the question of whether Australia should retain the British monarch as head of state into the twenty-first century. The republican debate that drew ample media attention in the 1990s, including a fully televised constitutional convention broadcast by the Australian Broadcast Commission, seemed to have ceded media space to celebrity culture. At the time of William and Kate's 2014 tour the press reported a ReachTEL poll indicating that republican sentiment was at its lowest point in twenty-three years, with only 35 per cent of 18–34-year-olds supporting a republic. In Britain, also, republican sentiment has declined, according to a ComRes poll showing that from 2011, when 25 per cent of Britons expected the emergence of a republic within fifty years, the number dropped to a tiny 7 per cent in 2013. This shift in both countries is framed by new configurations in global media patterns where circulating icons clearly enhance the soft power of monarchy. Within this landscape, films about royals also have their role to play.

Two major commercial releases of the years 2000 map this change in opinion in Britain and Australia, and stand out as contemporary narrative explorations of the legitimacy of the British monarchy: *The Queen* (Stephen Frears, 2006) and *The King's Speech* (Tom Hooper, 2010). Coming as they do four years apart, it is possible to read the dynamic these films have produced as powerful visual arguments. While *The Queen* traces troubled times for Her Majesty and even dangles the threat of republicanism as the political stakes of her public relations failure, the Oscar-crowned *The King's Speech* appears to restore the monarch as cinema hero and indeed as a legitimised, dignified heir to the British throne. One could argue that *The King's Speech*, with its insistence on the triumphant reconstruction of the monarch, seeks to repair what *lèse-majesté* the film of 2006 may have stirred up. In the final scene of *The Queen*, Elizabeth II and Tony Blair take a walk in the gardens of Buckingham Palace, and Peter Morgan's script has her ask him, 'Don't you think what affection people used to have for this institution is diminished?' Blair rejects such a claim, but the doubt does hang in the air as the essential political query posed by *The Queen*. On the other hand, by the end of Tom Hooper's film of 2010 the audience is cheering for their hero, not an underdog from the popular classes, but no less than Britain's King George VI.

Both films feature the monarch as protagonist following Shakespearean tradition, and employ the narrative device of a reflection character whose function is to help reconquer the elusive 'majesty' of rightful monarchy. Elizabeth II is saved by her Prime Minister, her rival in popularity but loyal admirer, Tony Blair, who engineers the tabloid and televisual media to create a space for Her Majesty, side-lined and criticised during the drama of Princess Diana's death.

Meanwhile, Bertie (the Duke of York) in *The King's Speech* is aided by his speech therapist, the unorthodox colonial Lionel Logue, who transforms the stuttering, younger brother of Edward VIII into a confident George VI. The plot turns on a familiar dramatic tradition where social opposites are paired to generate both drama and comedy, evoking such figures as Shakespeare's 'trusted fools' or 'wise companions'.

However, the debate about monarchy which provides the context of these two films raises interesting political questions about the idea of loyalty: in *The Queen*, the conservative monarch relies on the support of the Labour leader, in the case of *The King's Speech*, a 'bromance' develops between King and colonial Other. Recent cinema around the British monarchy demands thus a critical cultural studies approach to the kind of representations the industry is circulating. While *The Queen* is about the special relationship in the United Kingdom between the sovereign and the Prime Minister, *The King's Speech* raises a postcolonial problematic of the peculiar status of a Commonwealth realm. In both films, the codes are both ancient and modern: the loyal helper is required to manage the monarch's prestige within the new-fangled complexities of media power, while at the same time engaging in traditional chivalric codes of lord and vassal.

The trope of chivalry is at the narrative heart of these films about twentieth-century modern monarchs. According to tradition, the vassal, locked into feudal ties of loyalty, rushes to the aid of his lord sovereign and is rewarded or protected for this fealty. In *The Queen*, the chivalric relation between Blair and Queen Elizabeth II is constructed both narratively (Blair indeed manages to save the Queen's public image) and iconographically. One of the most powerful shots occurs during an early scene showing the newly elected Blair bent on one knee kissing the Queen's hand, the traditional 'hands kissed on appointment'.⁵ A similar relationship is set up in John Madden's 1997 film about Queen Victoria, *Mrs. Brown*, with the bearded Glaswegian comic Billy Connolly playing the role of Her Majesty's loyal Scottish servant, Mr Brown. A controversial blow against Scottish nationalism perhaps, the peripheral subject of Her Majesty is represented as a life-giving force for an institution in crisis. In *Mrs. Brown*, the Scot heals an English monarch in mourning, while in Hooper's *The King's Speech*, the future monarch suffers from the crippling condition of a speech impediment. Life-blood is needed from somewhere in the realm, and in *The King's Speech*, it is drawn from the Empire. The question of representing monarchy spreads beyond Britain's metropolitan borders, and this film pictures the sovereign's 'help' as an Australian.

The relationship between two men, Bertie (the Duke of York, played by Colin Firth) and his therapist, Lionel (played by Geoffrey Rush), is the main focus of the film. Lionel Logue is taken into the trust of the King, or, rather, in the shift the film proposes, the King is taken into the trust of his vassal, Logue, not at court but in the inner realm of the therapist's subterranean medical rooms. The tensions around the inequality of their status are emphasised by the *mise-en-scène*: lengthy exchanges are filmed in the intimacy of the decaying, patina-walled offices using a series of close-ups, short-sided shots and other quirky camera angles and lenses. Cinematographer Danny Cohen explained that under Hooper's direction he placed his camera very close to the actors and shot with wide-angle lenses (using ARRI Master Prime lenses), his strategy being to not only produce large character portraits but to also bring in the background.⁶ Others have noted the unconventional framing in the scene where Bertie and Lionel discuss Bertie's unhappy childhood – reverse shots displace both characters to opposite edges of the frame, emphasising the social distance between them. For Jason Haggstrom, there is indeed an overuse of 'interesting' camera angles, which he perceives as a directorial distraction from the action, the canted angles and short-siding overpowering the acting.⁷ This rhetorical cinematography, the 'distressed' set design with peeling wallpaper and bare furniture, as well as the sagging pin-striped suit worn by Logue transports the viewer into a theatrical world conceived to highlight what is played out as the psychological melodrama of the Prince's speech problem. The low lighting and smoggy scenes atmospherically suggest a Depression era plagued with uncertainty and crisis: Bertie's speaking problem is clearly a metonymic reference to the faltering kingship of Edward VIII that resulted in his abdication. In *The King's Speech*, the lighting is oppressive, the war is approaching and the throne threatens to remain empty.

The abdication is the central historical drama that the film skirts around in favour of George VI's personal tale. The constitutional crisis of 1936 was critical: Europe was in turmoil with Spain in civil war, Hitler remilitarising the Rhineland, while Mussolini drew closer to Nazi Germany. The British monarch's role was supposed to represent symbolically the unity not only of Britain but also the Empire, itself drawn into incipient conflicts of decolonisation. The anxiety produced by the threat of a vacant throne cannot be overestimated and the core narrative of *The King's Speech* is to instate a moral authority, a figure to unite all British subjects, both in the United Kingdom and in the dominions and colonies. *The Times* echoed this anxiety in its editorial of 4 December 1936,

stating that, 'the need for national calm and national unity was never greater'. With Edward VIII's abdication, Prince Albert emerged as hope for the Crown in a troubled Europe. While his early reign was marked by the policy of appeasement, this is one of the many political realities missing from Hooper's film. Much of the politics seems to have been edited out, save towards the end, when Anthony Andrews's Stanley Baldwin and Timothy Spall's Winston Churchill support Albert for monarch, while the real-life Churchill actually supported Edward VIII.

The focus on the relationship between the King and his therapist, however, carries a rich subtext along the themes of social equality and imperial rapport. The *Economist* journalist who signs her/himself Bagehot (after the Victorian defender of constitutional monarchy)⁸ points out that the film's success in the United Kingdom is partly due to its theme of equality, always dear to British hearts: 'At the heart of the film lie two linked themes. One involves Britain's ideas of hierarchy, the other its wartime heroism and rejection of fascism.'⁹

The social divide between the main characters is referenced by the depiction of Logue's shabby rooms as well as a shot of the street where he lives with his family, figured as a slum littered with refuse and street urchins. The Yorks meanwhile live in a grand house. The dialogue constantly raises social difference through Lionel's casualness and Albert's stiff-upper-lip aristocratic manner. The problem of hierarchy, however, stretches beyond the British class system to the tiered relations of Empire. Lionel Logue is an Australian called to help his King and their relationship has historical resonance. Their rapport can be analysed on several levels: the narrative structure and dialogue of Bertie and Lionel's story, the performance of Geoffrey Rush as Lionel Logue as well as what we know of the real-life historical Logue, speech therapist to King George VI. *The King's Speech* also raises the question of film as social allegory: is it possible to interpret the drama of Bertie and Lionel as a framed argument relating to a wider historical context, that of relations between Britain and Australia in the 1930s as well as now?

In David Seidler's screenplay the duo function according to some classic Proppian narrative rules.¹⁰ Lionel Logue is recruited to aid the fragile hero to overcome his 'impediment' and a series of difficult tasks to attain a prized regal dignity. Logue is the actantial supporter¹¹ whose main function is to advance the hero's story. (The dialogue makes this explicit, when Bertie says to the therapist, 'I came here as I was under the illusion you might help me perform this function.') His role naturally engages the question of equality.

In the beginning of the film, Prince Albert seeks aid from someone he will consider a 'servant'. Social hierarchy is initially raised by his wife, Elizabeth York, who has come to Logue's offices in Harley Street to ask for help. When Logue suggests rather casually that her 'hubby' pop over for treatment for his stutter, she commands, 'You must come to us.' This is the beginning of a struggle between Albert and Lionel around their status. On his first visit the Prince admonishes Logue, 'When speaking with a royal one waits for the royal to start the conversation and choose the topic.' Yet, the established hierarchy is complicated by the therapist's role as a teacher who must make demands of the royal. Logue resolves the difficulties of the situation, through his demands for a circumscribed equality. This point is repeatedly made – refusing to call his patient 'Your Royal Highness', Logue insists that, 'We must be true equals.' He begs the Prince to 'Call me Lionel' not 'Dr Logue' and is generally undaunted by the status of his patient.

It would seem then that Logue is ambivalent: on the one hand, he is the King's vassal, locked into a relationship of mutual trust and service, and on the other, he resists this subservient role. Indeed, the character is marked by a quasi-republican refusal to recognise royalty (calling the Prince 'Bertie', insisting on his professional prerogatives, making a cup of tea with his back turned to him). However, Logue's story in the film is one of learning his place, as we will see, while in the meantime Rush's performance plays liberally with imperial hierarchy.

The film opens at the closing ceremony of the British Empire Exhibition of 1925 at what was originally called the Empire Stadium.¹² While most critics focus on the Bertie character as King of Britain, this setting reminds us that George VI was in fact the last British Emperor,¹³ and Australia in the period depicted still what was called a Dominion.¹⁴ Australia had officially gained Dominion status at the 1907 Colonial Conference, though it had been a self-governing nation since 1 January 1901. By 1926 the Balfour report defined this status as being on an equal footing to Britain and the word 'colony' was soon dropped by the Statute of Westminster in 1931, the founding document of the Commonwealth. Following the Second World War, Australia, like Canada, New Zealand and others, was known officially as a Commonwealth *realm* (rather than *dominion*), and continued to retain the British monarch as its head of state. This situation continues today, except that the Australia Act of 1986 removed the final legal ties to Britain's courts and states that the Commonwealth of Australia is entirely 'a sovereign and independent nation'.

Australians, like other imperial subjects, had participated in the First World War, sending hundreds of thousands of volunteers to fight and die for the Mother Country. While their sacrifice was behind the push to make Britain abolish colonial status for its Dominions,¹⁵ imperial belonging coloured Australian politics for the whole of the interwar period. Torn between conservative imperial loyalty and growing nationalism, Australia was scarred by the events of the war and some began to doubt the wisdom of a citizenship so directly linked to Britain.¹⁶ The hegemonic ideology of the early decades of the twentieth century, however, remained loyalism. Defined as personal allegiance to the sovereign, it was conceived as the uniting thread of the British Empire, as it was supposed to override religious or ethnic affiliation.¹⁷ A British subject in the 1930s was still defined as one who 'recognized the King as his Lord', and owed allegiance to the King's person (a different status was reserved for 'British Native subjects'). Empire Day was observed in Australia as of 1905, an occasion on which school children were enjoined to swear their allegiance to the Crown. Fighting for 'King and Country' had been the central propaganda of the First World War for Australians, Irish, Canadians, New Zealanders, Indians and others locked into an imperial *pro patria mori*.

The dependence in the film of the King on the Australian is reminiscent of this ideology of loyalism. In the dialogue Lionel Logue mentions how he had come to England specifically to cure the young men whose speech had been affected by shell shock during the Great War. The narrative suspense is constructed around the final speech, *the King's speech* of the title, which will be delivered on the radio to rally not only the nation but also the Empire to another war. George VI's broadcast declaration is in fact an appeal to Empire: 'For the second time in the lives of most of us, we are at war. ... It is to this high purpose that I now call my people at home and my people overseas who will make our cause their own.' The First World War had put the chivalric contract between colonial subject and monarch to the test. We can recall the speech delivered by a Labor Party member in Australia at the outbreak of war in 1914, that Australia would help Britain, 'to the last man and the last shilling'.¹⁸ On the brink of another European conflict, the King in Hooper's film asks the Australian Lionel, 'Are you willing to do your part?'

The inner tensions of the screen relationship between the monarch and his subject owe much to the performance of Geoffrey Rush, who also co-produced the film. Rush plays Logue less as a loyal vassal than as a colonial upstart, disregarding hierarchy, treating the Prince/King as any other.¹⁹ While his wife, Myrtle (Jennifer Ehle), performs a respectful curtsy to Elizabeth, Lionel's

egalitarianism is seen as seditious. When Lionel attempts to pat his shoulder, the Prince warns him, 'Don't take liberties! You're a dangerous man, Logue.' At a later point in the film, Logue criticises Bertie's brother, David, who is on the point of being crowned King Edward VIII. The Prince denounces him as 'a wicked man. Trying to get me to commit treason!' 'Oh dear, perhaps he's a Bolshevik', sighs Elizabeth York, going up in the creaky lift with her husband. When Logue quizzes her for more information on his client, she taunts, 'You will be treated as an enemy if you are not obliging.' The characterisation mixes obligation and rebellion, with Logue's constant attempts to flatten out imperial order. For the first half of the film, Bertie plays along (more or less) with this egalitarian game, but at one stage he indignantly closes ranks. In the argument filmed with Steadicam as they walk through foggy Regent's Park, the exasperated Prince shouts, 'I'm the brother of a King, the son of a King, back through untold centuries. ... You are a jumped-up jackaroo from the Outback.' Like the dominion nation, Australia, in the interwar years, Lionel Logue is not quite sure of his place – he considers himself equal but is regarded as inferior.

Logue's colonial status is further underscored by the theme of his dubious credentials. It is soon revealed that he has no formal training in speech therapy and is in reality an actor from Perth, the peripheral subject struggling to make a place for himself in the metropolitan centre. From the outer reaches of Empire, he has dreamed of performing Shakespeare in Britain and auditions for the role of that other king with a disability, Richard III, in an amateur London playhouse. Rush gives a *mise-en-abyme* performance – an Australian actor playing a ham Australian actor – after which he is laughed out of the audition as a poor-cousin, colonial sham. 'I didn't realize Richard III was King of the colonies', taunts the director. The many references to Richard III in the film have been seen as an allusion to George VI's disability, but it should be remembered that it is Logue who plays Richard III, the usurper of royal power. In doing so he poses the threat of the colonial 'mimic'. Homi Bhabha traces the colonial subject's opportunistic desire to succeed in the metropolitan culture by copying its behaviour, dress and language, resulting in what he calls an ambivalent hybridity. Geoffrey Rush's audition scene produces this ambivalent effect, and the derision the Australian actor suffers fuels a growing sense of resentment. Bhabha also claims that mimicry can be an unconscious subversion of colonial power in revealing the hollowness of the codes that are imitated.²⁰ Thus mimicry can register both the stain of inadequacy and a threat to power. All this begs the question, is Rush's Logue a subversive performance?

If we take this perspective, much of the character's dialogue can be read as slanted references to republicanism. In addition to Logue's constant calls for equality, he repeatedly claims self-determination, impertinently answering Elizabeth York's demands with 'My game, my turf, my rules.' While they are in his offices, Logue answers Bertie's protests about the therapy again with 'My castle, my rules.' The theme of equality is also evident in the cinematography, with large-framed two-shots punctuating the film. In the scenes filmed in the Harley Street rooms, the two characters are juxtaposed and given equal screen-space. In the Regent's Park scene they are framed in medium long shots so the viewer sees the bodies of the two men who are dressed almost identically, with dark coats and hats, two friends walking in the park. While much of the film involves cross-cutting between close-ups, and point-of-view shots from behind the King's microphone to emphasise his nervousness, the longer two-shots establish a neat homology between the two main characters. Similarly, promotional posters released by the Weinstein company vary between a shot featuring Rush standing behind Firth, the attendant acolyte, and a more balanced two-shot of Firth and Rush.

A far more obvious republicanism is expressed in the pivotal coronation rehearsal scene when Logue provocatively (and very unrealistically) dares to sit on the throne, the 700-year-old King Edward's Chair. This is an anxious moment, once again emphasised by the cinematography – a slightly shaky hand-held camera and more short-sided shots. At this point, the still-vacant throne of England seems to have been usurped by a colonial mimic, evoking the anxiety of 'hollowness' theorised by Homi Bhabha. To add insult to injury, Logue quips, 'I don't care how many royal arse-holes have sat on this chair.' This outrage is intended to spark the therapeutic anger of the soon-to-be George VI, who achieves self-realisation when he shouts 'I have a voice.' However, the symbolism is tangible and was favourably commented on by the deputy of the Australian Republican Movement, John Warhurst, who calls the film's version of Logue a 'republican hero': 'He recognises authority but will not bow to it. He insists that his professional work with the Duke of York/George VI is conducted on a no frills, first name basis. He might be somewhat eccentric, but his humanity and humour are enormously appealing. Jack is as good as his master.'²¹ Rush's performance involves a doubling effect characteristic of allegory, indexing both the identity crisis of a British Dominion in the interwar years and, indirectly, the republican values espoused by a large number of Australians, particularly of Rush's generation, today. The argument is made somewhat heavy-handedly,

21 Colonial mimicry? Australian speech therapist Lionel Logue (Geoffrey Rush) dares to sit on King Edward's Chair in *The King's Speech* (Tom Hooper, 2010).

both audibly and visually – Rush's cultivated Australian accent (as opposed to English Received Pronunciation or broad Australian) recalling early recordings from the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Commission) and his challenging gaze when he is seated on the Coronation Chair suggesting the familiar figure of the King's fool and the anti-authoritarian sentiment of Australian republicanism.

Nevertheless, in the dénouement after the emotional climax of the rally to War speech, Logue finally recognises George VI's authority and the master–servant relationship reverts to the status quo. 'Thank you. Well done, my friend', says the King in a belated bid for egalitarianism, 'Thank you, Your Majesty', replies Logue (albeit with a rather ambiguous intonation). It is at this point that the stories of the two men concur and the film's conservatism re-emerges. Lionel learns his place, his rebellion is tamed and he is rewarded, as vassals in days of old, with a knighthood.²² George VI gains that sacred quality of kings theorised by Ernst Kantorowicz²³ in his work on European monarchy, the aura of imperial majesty that has been threatened by crisis. He does so both through the recognition accorded by his subject, and through the pseudo-mystical power of the media. Speech therapy is the instrument to the King's aural presence through radio. His domain is addressed through broadcasting, visually referenced in the final scene with cross-cuts to the BBC studios (filmed at Battersea Power Station), with all the dials and what look like frequency transmitters marked with destinations within the British Empire – Bechuanaland, Kenya, Bahamas, Australia. These are interspersed with the establishing shots of people around

Britain listening to the speech – soldiers preparing equipment, working-class customers in a pub, gentlemen in a London club and so forth – creating the effect of a global British community. Thus the King's media presence is also the channel of his imperial authority: 'I send to every household of my people, both at home and overseas, this message, spoken with the same depth of feeling for each one of you as if I were able to cross your threshold and speak to you myself.' This is the triumph of the King, to be able to incarnate authority ('I have a voice') and to disseminate this disembodied authority from Buckingham Palace (from where the speech was broadcast) across the Empire. In real life, the call was answered by Australia. On the same day as the King's Call to Arms, 3 September 1939, Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies delivered his famous radio broadcast declaring his country's commitment to Britain: 'Fellow Australians, it is my melancholy duty to inform you officially that ... Great Britain has declared war upon her [Germany], and that, as a result, Australia is also at war.'

The *Economist's* Bagehot is correct to point out that the film's success in Britain is partly about the public's narcissism: 'If British cinema-goers have taken this tale of a reluctant king to their hearts, it is because it faithfully reflects their sense of themselves.'²⁴ This social imaginary works also for an Australian audience in this Anglo-Australian production. Australians are invited to see themselves in this irreverent, egalitarian character full of 'colonial ingenuity', suggesting the old Australian nationalist cliché formulated by Russell Ward in the 1950s: 'The Australian believes that Jack's not only as good as his master but probably a good deal better.'²⁵ Australian audiences, well versed in the history and cultural memory of the World Wars, recognise their former colonial selves. The republican question is raised, but in a typically Australian way remains unresolved. The film lingers in the half-light of postcolonial ambivalence with a final shot of Geoffrey Rush standing literally on the threshold between two rooms of Buckingham Palace.

From an Australian point of view the pitting of a local 'working-class' hero against the British aristocratic system is hardly new cinema material. Graeme Turner mentions it as a well-worn routine of Australian nationalist film fiction citing such productions of the 1980s as *Gallipoli* (Peter Weir, 1981), *Breaker Morant* (Bruce Beresford, 1980) as well as the television series *Bodyline* (1984), in which the 'heroic' Australian challenges British authority.²⁶ Such national fictions draw on familiar stereotypes such as the 'cheeky, resourceful larrikin' that go as far back as the 1890s literature of Henry Lawson and C. J. Dennis's *The*

Sentimental Bloke and *Ginger Mick*, both made into popular silent films in 1919 and 1920. The 'Australian type' in this tradition is invariably white and masculine and was particularly skilfully incarnated by Paul Hogan in his film *Crocodile Dundee* (Peter Faiman, 1986). Both Turner and Tom O'Regan discuss the role of 1970s and 1980s so-called national cinema in creating a 'social bond' through narratives that both unite and exclude Australians, and note the persistence of the theme of postcolonial rivalry with Britain.²⁷ Yet they also signal its declining relevance in an increasingly multicultural society with the narrow focus on the 'Anglo' white male dissipating in the films of the 1990s and beyond. Felicity Collins and Therese Davis demonstrate the rupture that the Mabo decision of 1992 (a High Court decision that allowed Indigenous Australians to claim their land rights) brought to Australian cinema,²⁸ introducing a renewed set of national narratives linked to the political recognition of indigenous Australia, and a new set of heroes like the young female runaways of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (Philip Noyce, 2002). The post-Mabo films deal with the country's own internal colonising past and traumatic memories, rather than the identity struggle between Australia and Britain. Hooper's film signals the return of the imperial dynamic and the white male democratic hero, with the original approach of bringing the Australian into the intimate circle of the monarch. Rush's Lionel Logue avoids the larrikin stereotype, presenting us with a relatively fresh characterisation of the cultivated Australian, a type he had already played in his Oscar-winning performance in the film *Shine* (Scott Hicks, 1996). He still represents a challenge to aristocratic power, but rather than roam free in the Bush or on the streets of Sydney like *Ginger Mick*, he is absorbed into the heart of the court.

The King's Speech was marketed to a variety of audiences, in a context where narratives of 'national cinema' are no longer clear-cut. Rush's performance serves to entertain the generation of Australians who recognise the old chestnut of Anglo-Australian relations, and British viewers who fantasise about Australian class iconoclasm. Yet, for obvious budgetary reasons, the film was primarily aimed at North Americans, not necessarily versed in this specific postcolonial issue, yet sensitive to its tension. Distributed by the Weinstein Company, it met with unexpected and sustained success in the USA, largely as a result of its inclusion of an older cinema-going target. The feel-good tale of an ordinary monarch's symbolic transformation was then 'crowned with success' at the 2010 Academy Awards, enacting a kind of resacralisation through transnational media.²⁹

But contrary to Rush's performance, the diaries of the real Lionel Logue reveal a story of true loyalty. In 2010, grandson Mark Logue published them

in a book modestly entitled, *The King's Speech: How One Man Saved the British Monarchy*.³⁰ He also gave several interviews about his discovery of the diaries in the family attic. Explaining that the relationship between Logue and George VI was far more formal, he states that in the film 'there's artistic license in the breaking through of the royal etiquette'. He adds that Lionel Logue was far from impertinent: 'I'm not sure if the Bertie thing was real. I personally believe he was more deferential and would have called him Your Majesty. That's consistent in the diaries.'³¹ The class difference conjured up in the film by the dirty streets and poor furnishings of the Logue residence is also a fabrication. Mark Logue paints the portrait of a prosperous bourgeois living in a mansion in Sydenham called Beechgrove:

Beechgrove had twenty-five rooms, five bathrooms, five acres of garden, a tennis court and a cook; it was probably bigger than the Piccadilly house his patient moved into when he and his duchess were married. Logue had never been poor – he was a respectable middle-class Australian who delighted in his intimate access to the monarchy and gladly deferred to its members.³²

The diaries portray a perfectly loyal imperial subject with no shading of the Aussie egalitarianism suggested by Geoffrey Rush. When George VI thanked Logue, his typical response was, 'The greatest thing in my life, Your Majesty, is being able to serve you.' Possibly chosen to assist the King because he was a practising Freemason,³³ Logue seems to illustrate the official and hegemonic loyalism of the Australian upper class in the interwar years, underwritten by the firm allegiance of Australian Freemasonry to the sovereign. With its rewriting of its vassal as a radical egalitarian, *The King's Speech* demonstrates how media culture participates in a society's shifting self-image. For contemporary Australian spectators, Rush's Logue personifies the indecisiveness of their republican dream.

NOTES

- 1 The honours are not imperial; recipients become Knights and Dames of the Order of Australia.
- 2 A term coined by early Australian republican Daniel Deniehy in the nineteenth century when the New South Wales government tried to introduce a local peerage system. A *bunyip* is an aboriginal mythological creature.
- 3 Claire Wardle and Emily West, 'The press as agents of nationalism in the Queen's Golden Jubilee: how British newspapers celebrated a media event', *European Journal of Communication* 19:2 (2004).

- 4 Mark Day, opinion editor for *The Australian*, criticised media coverage of the event in 'Cheer Kate, but don't confuse celebrity with constitution', *The Australian* (28 April 2014), www.theaustralian.com.au/media/opinion/cheer-kate-but-dont-confuse-celebrity-with-constitution/story-e6frg9tf-1226897652898#.
- 5 The tradition of appointing the United Kingdom's Prime Minister is explained on the website of the British monarchy, www.royal.gov.uk/MonarchUK/Queenand-Government/QueenandPrimeMinister.aspx.
- 6 Danny Cohen interviewed in Beth Marchant, 'Cinematographer Danny Cohen on *The King's Speech*', *Studio Daily* (17 February 2011), www.studiodaily.com/2011/02/cinematographer-danny-cohen-on-the-kings-speech.
- 7 Jason Haggstrom, 'The miserable ugliness of *The King's Speech*', *Reel 3* (31 December 2012), <http://reel3.com/the-miserable-ugliness-of-the-kings-speech>.
- 8 In 1867 William Bagehot published *The English Constitution*, in which he defined the role of the constitutional monarch in Great Britain.
- 9 'Bagehot', '*The King's Speech*, a preposterous film but oddly shrewd about Britain', *The Economist* (14 January 2011), www.economist.com/blogs/bagehot/2011/01/british_monarchy.
- 10 Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, trans. American Folklore Society (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968).
- 11 Narratological term developed by A. J. Greimas in 'Éléments pour une théorie de l'interprétation du récit mythique', *Communications* 8:8 (1966).
- 12 The aim of the Empire Exhibition was to 'stimulate trade and strengthen bonds that bind mother Country to her Sister States and Daughters'. See Mark Logue and Peter Conradi, *The King's Speech: How One Man Saved the British Empire* (London: Quercus, 2010), p. 36.
- 13 George VI was the last 'Emperor of India' (a title the British borrowed from the Mughals), witnessing the independence of India in 1947. He signed himself 'G.R.I.' (*rex imperator*) for the last time on 15 August 1947. The Irish Free State had already written the monarch out of its constitution at the abdication and by 1948 was a republic refusing even to join the British Commonwealth. The Commonwealth itself withdrew the concept of common allegiance to the Crown, with the King placed as the symbolic head of a free association of states. Burma also gained independence from Britain in 1948 while George VI was King.
- 14 Thus, Australia was technically a dominion from 1907 to 1948, after which it was called a 'realm'.
- 15 The Statute of Westminster abolished the term 'colony' for those countries of the Empire which had largely independent parliaments. However, the Government of Australia did not ratify the Statute of Westminster till 1942, when the threat of Japanese invasion forced a change in foreign policy.
- 16 The main political debate in Australia was around economic policy to combat the disastrous effects of the Depression. The left of the Labor party opposed imperial financial policies as well as the conservative culture of loyalism.

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- 17 See Daniel Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship: Empire and the Question of Belonging* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 21.
- 18 Andrew Fisher delivered an impassioned speech in favour of the Empire's war effort on 6 July 1914: 'Australians will stand behind our own, to help and defend her, to the last man and the last shilling.' Australian Federal Election speeches, Museum of Australia, <http://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1914-andrew-fisher>.
- 19 This seems to have also been the choice of Tom Hooper and Geoffrey Rush, though Hooper explains they were at pains to avoid stereotyping. 'Geoffrey was very keen he didn't want to make a York-versus-snob movie. I think if Geoffrey hadn't been Australian and I hadn't been Australian, we probably would have lapsed into a much broader cliché.' In John Lopez, 'The King's Speech director Tom Hooper on the King's stammer, Colin Firth, and the royal family, *Vanity Fair* (8 December 2010), www.vanityfair.com/online/oscars/2010/12/the-kings-speech-director-tom-hooper-on-the-kings-stammer-colin-firth-and-the-royal-family.
- 20 Homi Bhabha, 'Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse', in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- 21 John Warhurst, 'Lessons about Australian identity from "The King's Speech"', *Eureka Street* 21:1 (25 January 2011), www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=24802#.UqXSLqWqOmw.
- 22 The extra-diegetic note explains this before the final credits: 'Lionel Logue was made a knight of the Royal Victorian Order in 1944 – This high honour from a grateful King made Lionel part of the only order of chivalry that specifically rewards acts of personal service to the Monarch.'
- 23 The German historian Ernst H. Kantorowicz, writing in the 1930s, theorised the sacredness of medieval kings and the persistence of their rituals in his work, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2nd edn, 1998).
- 24 'Bagehot', *The King's Speech*.
- 25 Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 2.
- 26 Graeme Turner, 1994, *Making it National: Nationalism and Australian Popular Culture* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1994), p. 48.
- 27 Tom O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 17–27.
- 28 Felicity Collins and Theresa Davis, *Australian Cinema after Mabo* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- 29 For more on media sacralisation see Nick Couldry, *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach* (London: Routledge, 2002).
- 30 Logue and Conradi, *The King's Speech*.
- 31 Stephen Krutz, interview with Mark Logue, "The real story behind "The King's Speech"", *Speakeasy Blog, Wall Street Journal* (4 December 2010), <http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2010/12/04/the-real-story-behind-the-kings-speech/>.
- 32 Krutz, "The real story behind "The King's Speech"".

- 33 According to Suzanne Edgar's entry for Lionel George Logue in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (published by the National Centre of Biography at the Australian National University, Canberra), adb.anu.edu.au/biography/logue-lionel-george-10852, he was also speech therapist to the Royal Masonic School.

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