When words fail: *The King's Speech* as melodrama

Nicola Rehling

In his review of *The King's Speech* (Tom Hooper, 2010), *Guardian* critic Peter Bradshaw remarks that the Oscar-winning film shows 'some cheek at presenting an English monarch as the underdog'.¹ However, although melodrama traditionally 'sides with the powerless',² it has become a common mode through which the British monarchy is represented in contemporary British cinema, primarily to evoke sympathy for the strain the royal role places on the monarch as private individual. George VI (Colin Firth) in the film is without doubt a melodramatic figure, the victim of his severe speech impediment and the demand that he speak publicly – the violent imposition of duty over private desires that characterises the melodramatic terrain. The film can also be read as a 'family melodrama' thanks to its relentless focus on the personal and domestic realm – evident in the diminutive 'Bertie' by which the young Prince Albert who becomes King is called for much of the film. In the father–son melodrama tradition, his stammer is attributed to trauma enacted by his stern, dominating parent (Michael Gambon) and an inability to live up to paternal expectations.

The King's Speech is also exemplary of Peter Brooks's formulation of melodrama as a mode that seeks moral legibility in what he terms a 'post-sacred era', one without universal religious conviction.³ Moral imperatives, Brooks argues, can now only be expressed in personal terms and are often orchestrated by generating pathos for a virtuous but wronged figure, whose suffering is often literalised physically.⁴ Bertie is such a figure, his tortured body and agonising stammer bespeaking not only the burden of monarchy, but most importantly his unrecognised goodness. While the film is willing to reference some of the ideological conflicts about Britain's constitutional monarchy that prevailed in the 1930s, its insistence on Bertie's victimisation and integrity forcefully inscribes not only

his personal virtue but also, by extension, the virtue of the monarchy as institution – provided, the film suggests, individual monarchs undertake the role with the commitment and duty entrusted in them.

MELODRAMA, FILM STUDIES AND THE MONARCHY BIOPIC

I primarily use the term melodrama with Brooks's sense of it as 'an imaginative mode', a way of seeing and conveying moral truths rather than a stage or screen genre with a clear set of conventions.⁵ However, the debates around melodrama in film studies in the early 1970s, when film theorists actively constructed the family melodrama as a genre, are highly pertinent to *The King's Speech*. Adopting Marxist, feminist and psychoanalytic approaches, and taking capitalism, ideology, patriarchy and repression as their main topics of investigation, scholars such as Thomas Elsaesser, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Laura Mulvey, Chuck Kleinhans and David Rodowick, among others, focused on the 1950s family melodrama, typified by the work of Douglas Sirk.⁶ While differing in emphasis, this cycle of films explored intergenerational conflicts and repressions within middle-class families, most often through the suffering of a victim (rarely the father) who served as the primary figure of identification. These films, it was argued, could voice a critique of patriarchy and capitalism by revealing internal tensions and ideological incoherencies.

Crucial in staking out the family melodrama as a genre is Elsaesser's essay 'Tales of sound and fury: observations on the family melodrama' (1972). There he argues that the persistence of melodrama as a popular cultural form is symptomatic of a stubborn refusal 'to understand social change in other than private contexts and emotional terms'.⁷ Despite his criticism of melodrama's escapism from political crises through its unrelenting focus on the personal realm, Elsaesser suggests that the screening of impotent, victimised individuals, subjected to external forces that find no release but drive relentlessly and destructively inwards, can 'serve to formulate a devastating critique of the ideology that supports [such alienation]'.⁸ Elsaesser has been influential in his attention to melodrama's pathos, or sympathetic feeling, and its role in conveying psychological and sexual repression, as well as to the expressive *mise-en-scène* of the family melodrama – the oppressive bourgeois home whose clutter seems to entrap the protagonists, evoking a latent but ever-lurking hysteria.⁹ Many of his observations on melodrama as a style expressing impotent suffering can be applied to *The King's Speech*, as we shall see.

Along similar lines, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, in his brief essay 'Minnelli and melodrama' (1977), also fused Marxist and Freudian approaches, analysing the psychic and social determinations at work in the bourgeois melodrama. For Nowell-Smith, the castrating power of patriarchal dominance constitutes melodrama's main thematic concern; hence, the oppression of female protagonists or males whose masculinity is 'impaired' – since what melodrama dramatises, he argues, are 'forms of a failure to be male – a failure from which patriarchy allows no respite'.¹⁰ With the father responsible for the perpetuation of this symbolic sexual division, the family melodrama is centrally concerned with paternity and succession (a key concern of the monarchy film, of course), as well as

the child's problems of growing into a sexual identity within the family, under the aegis of a symbolic law which the Father incarnates. What is at stake (also for social-ideological reasons) is the survival of the family unit and the possibility of individuals acquiring an identity which is also a place within the system, a place in which they can both be 'themselves' and 'at home', in which they can simultaneously enter, without contradiction, the symbolic order and bourgeois society. It is a condition of the drama that the attainment of such a place is not easy and does not happen without a sacrifice, but it is very rare for it to be seen as radically impossible.¹¹

The happy end in melodrama, he notes, often feels impossible and contrived, achieved at the cost of repression, resulting in an excess which cannot always be accommodated into a classic realist narrative, but is 'siphoned off' – expressed in the 'hysterical' moments when realist conventions break down, such as intrusive music or excessive *mise-en-scène*. For Nowell-Smith, the importance of melodrama is precisely this laying bare of the contradictions that most Hollywood forms smooth over.¹² While his assumption that only non-realist aspects of a text can voice social critique is problematic (a distrust of realism that characterises many of these 1970s ideology theorists), his framework is useful in thinking through not only Bertie's relationship with his father, but also the non-realist stylistics that occasionally punctuate the film, most often to generate sympathy for Bertie, who seems entrapped by the demands of the institutions of both the family and monarchy. However, as Laura Mulvey noted, writing in the same year, while the textual 'fissures' of melodrama can highlight the incoherencies of bourgeois ideology, they might also function as a 'safety valve for ideological contradictions'.¹³

Another approach to melodrama, which has been highly influential in film studies, and greatly informs my own analysis of *The King's Speech*, is the framing

of melodrama not so much as a distinct form but rather a 'mode of representation with a particular moralizing function operating across many genres'.¹⁴ As Linda Williams aptly summarises, '[i]f emotional and moral registers are sounded, if a work invites us to feel sympathy for the virtues of beset victims, if the narrative trajectory is ultimately concerned with a retrieval and staging of virtue through adversity and suffering, then the operative mode is melodrama'.¹⁵ Her paradigm stems from Peter Brooks's seminal work *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (1976). Brooks explores how melodrama was initially a theatrical form that emerged with the French Revolution's abolition of the licensing restrictions on theatres and the need to find new ways to address uneducated audiences about moral values at a time when the Church had lost much of its power and influence. In this 'post-sacred' era, there was still an ongoing craving for moral certainty, but it was only conceivable in personal terms.¹⁶ Melodrama, for Brooks, is thus 'a peculiarly modern form' that responds to the loss of pre-Enlightenment values by 'making the world morally legible', often through a distinct polarisation of good and evil in order to reassure us of 'their presence and operation as real forces in the world'.¹⁷ For this reason, melodrama is often structured around the path of unacknowledged, wronged and suffering virtue, and the staging of its ultimate triumph and/or recognition.¹⁸ In this Manichean universe, Brooks argues, characters rarely have interior depth; rather, since 'melodrama exteriorizes conflict and psychic structures', they embody ethical imperatives or psychic signs.¹⁹ These ethical imperatives or emotional states may be rendered in somatic terms, allegorising them through extreme physical conditions.²⁰ The most common example in melodrama is that of the 'mute role' – not only metaphorically, such as a character unable to speak as a result of familial or structural relations or one sworn to a vow of silence, but also cases of literal physical muteness.²¹ This muteness often results in characters being unable to show their true virtue, or being wrongly accused and unable to defend themselves, such as Pixérécourt's *Le Chien de Montargis* (*The Dog of Montargis*, 1814), in which a mute servant is falsely accused of murder and struggles to prove his innocence. The failure of words or language is also evident in the 'heightened dramatization' of the mode, such as gestures, music or other expressionistic devices, which are symptomatic of this failure of words to be 'wholly adequate to the representation of meanings'.²²

Many of the recent biopics about the modern monarchy, such as *Mrs. Brown* (John Madden, 1997), *The Queen* (Stephen Frears, 2006),²³ *The Young Victoria*

(Jean-Marc Vallée, 2009), as well as *The King's Speech* can be read in terms of melodrama if we adopt Brooks's paradigm. These 'quality films', which showcase British stars whilst using the monarchy as a global commodity to court international as well as domestic audiences, depict monarchs who suffer unjustly under the strain imposed by royal life. One of the prime attractions of such films, as Belén Vidal notes, is the 'star-as-performer', notable examples being Judi Dench's and Helen Mirren's controlled performances in *Mrs. Brown* and *The Queen* respectively, in which close-ups dramatise emotional restraint through small, subtle gestures or facial expressions, and the voice is slightly modulated to convey pent-up feelings, resulting in 'nuanced psychological portraits of the otherwise inaccessible figures they embody'.²⁴ Much like the quality literary film, which takes pleasure in screening self-possession, stifled feelings, fleeting glances, the failures of speech, the unarticulated and the frustration of intentions,²⁵ the monarchy film foregrounds repression, the thematic concern *par excellence* of melodrama. These films also orchestrate 'the feeling of righteousness achieved through the sufferings of the innocent',²⁶ in this case the victimised monarchs whose private lives are ravaged by the public role they are forced to bear. Thus they construct a benign representation of constitutional monarchy, while politics only enters the picture in terms of its impact on the monarch's private lives. This focus on the personal is essential in an era in which only individual virtue can legitimise the monarchy as an institution.²⁷

THE MONARCHY IN CRISIS: *THE KING'S SPEECH* AS MELODRAMA

From its opening, *The Kings Speech* presents Bertie as a victim and the primary point of the spectator's identification. A title card informs us that the King asked Prince Albert to give the opening address to the Empire Exhibition in 1925 – his 'inaugural broadcast to the nation and the world', the BBC announcer tells his audience. This is then followed by a series of close-ups of the microphone, a repeated motif throughout the film that conveys the Prince's dread of public speaking, and then a series of close-ups of a panic-stricken Bertie muttering the speech to himself. The asymmetrical framing of this moment, with the Prince on the extreme left of the frame (a technique used throughout the film), suggests he has been thrown off balance by the daunting task ahead and psychologically retreats – an example of the many overtly expressionistic moments in the film that foreground his alienation and punctuate the realist mode in ways that recalls Elsaesser's,

Nowell-Smith's or Mulvey's readings of the family melodrama. After shots of Bertie's wife Elizabeth (Helena Bonham-Carter) comforting him, and a montage sequence of equipment for broadcasting to the colonies that shows the immensity of the audience – the entire Empire, no less – Hooper again overtly eschews classic realism by using a tracking shot filmed with a slightly distorting wide-angled lens to lead the funereal Prince to the dreaded microphone, a directorial choice that forges the spectator's identification while separating Bertie from his environment and underscoring his isolation. The microphone itself looms large, creating a barrier between Bertie and the crowd in a way not dissimilar to Sirk's prevalent use of barriers, frames and constrictions as part of his domestic *mise-en-scène* of entrapment – the non-verbal, heightened expressionism that for Elsaesser and Brooks characterises the melodramatic form. While the melancholic tones of Alexandre Desplat's haunting soundtrack accompanied Bertie to the microphone, now a painfully long silence ensues, broken only by a horse neighing, followed by close-ups of the Prince as he battles to speak, intercut with shots of puzzled technicians, his pained wife and embarrassed members of the crowd turning away as he struggles to utter the 'k' at the beginning of 'king' – an over-determined refusal of the role from the very outset of the film. Bertie is thus silenced, similar to Pixérécourt's mute stage characters, unable to reveal his true worth, which none the less is immediately made known to the spectator.

As the film jumps to 1934, Bertie continues to suffer such indignities. Consulting a leading speech therapist of the time, he is encouraged to fill his mouth with marbles and 'enunciate' (an intertextual reference to *Pygmalion*), which, the therapist cheerily informs the Prince, 'cured Demosthenes', the Athenian orator who suffered from a speech impediment as a boy (evoking the ironic comment from his wife that 'That was in Ancient Greece. Has it worked since?'). Filmed in an overpowering, suffocating, low-angled close-up, again with a distorting wide-angled lens, the therapist is represented from Bertie's point of view as a threatening figure, whose assaults on Bertie's self-respect prompt the irascible Prince to expel the marbles angrily, storm out in a violent outburst and refuse further treatment. Such cinematic language might function as a means of articulating the unbearable pressures of royalty, in the way that Elsaesser and Nowell-Smith, for example, interpret the 'excessive' or 'hysterical' moments of the family melodrama as oblique social critique, but its primary function is 'to generate emotion'²⁸ and secure sympathy for the demoralised, repressed Bertie as an *individual* facing adversity.

That said, the film's main source of melodrama – Bertie's distressing unsuitability for the public role he is forced to play – allows the film to explore the consequences for the monarchy of the reterritorialisation of the public/private spheres by mass media under modernity, since the Prince's predicament is only exacerbated by the new requirements of radio broadcasts. As his father George V – the first monarch able to broadcast to his subjects – states of the radio (which he terms a 'devilish device'): 'In the past all a king had to do was look respectable in uniform and not fall off his horse. Now we must invade people's homes and ingratiate ourselves with them.' Such ingratiation, which signifies a constitutional monarchy that has to struggle to retain its popularity,²⁹ he obviously find particularly distasteful, even though the real George V has been credited by some with modernising and thereby saving, even, the British monarchy.³⁰ This emphasis on the import of performance in modern leadership is made more heavy-handedly when Bertie and his family watch footage of Hitler addressing the crowd at the Nuremberg rallies; when his daughter Elizabeth asks what Hitler is saying, Bertie replies, rather wistfully, 'I don't know but he seems to be saying it very well.' This demand for public performance makes the film's George V disdainfully remark that the royals have become the 'lowest, basest of all creatures' – 'actors' – actors who had to perform very well indeed to avoid being 'out of work', a reference to the very real threats posed by republicanism and socialism at this time. Indeed, for historian David Cannadine, it is precisely the 'invention' and performance of royal rituals and traditions, perfected at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, which prevented the British monarchy from suffering the same fate as its Austrian, Prussian and German equivalents.³¹ None the less, in evoking sympathy for Bertie, the film at times seems to join George V in expressing nostalgia for a monarchy that retained its mystique and privacy (still just possible at this time, the film suggests, when speech therapist Lionel Logue (Geoffrey Rush) doesn't recognise Princess Elizabeth) and no longer possible with the mass media, the Internet, mobile phones and the media construction of the Windsors as celebrities.

Scenes with George V also stage a father-son melodrama, screening a Bertie who fails to live up to his father's demands and thus struggles to find a place where he can be 'himself' and be 'at home', to rephrase Nowell-Smith.³² During the 1934 Christmas broadcast, when George V impels his son to try out the microphone, he impatiently bellows: 'Sit up, straight back, face boldly up to the bloody thing and stare it square in the eye, as would any decent Englishman. Show who's in command.' Then, condemning Bertie's socialite brother David,

the future Edward VIII (Guy Pearce), and his scandalous relationship with the American divorcée Wallis Simpson (Eve Best), he sternly predicts (in a way typical of the contemporary monarchy biopic's self-reflexivity about narratives of history and nation):³³ 'When I'm dead, that boy will ruin himself, this family and this nation within 12 months. Who will pick up the pieces; hmm? Herr Hitler, intimidating half of Europe, Marshall Stalin the other half? Who'll stand between us, the jackboots, and the proletarian abyss? You?' This final questioning 'You?' conveys a lack of confidence in Bertie, with public and political antagonisms articulated as personal conflict in the melodramatic tradition. When the Prince again attempts to speak in the microphone, his muscles clench, his jaw locks and his stammer is at its most violent, causing his father, filmed from a threatening, higher camera angle to roar: 'Get it out boy!' 'Just try it!' 'Do it!' Bertie, though, like the mute figures Brooks discusses, cannot speak or prove his worth to his father. Positioning Bertie as a 'boy' whose masculinity is 'impaired',³⁴ the film adopts the classic Oedipal paradigm of the castrating father,³⁵ with melodrama's obsession with paternal legacy, the survival of the family and the reconsolidation of patriarchy rendered more pressing through Bertie's future role not merely as head of a family, but as future King and Emperor. While he discovers after the King's death that his father had actually deemed him to have had 'more guts than all his brothers put together', this merely compounds the film's melodramatic operation, since it screens the typical 'too late' motif of emotional revelation, with the psychic damage already done.

This Oedipal drama is further played out through the Prince's therapy-style confessions to Lionel Logue, an Australian-born, self-taught, often irreverent speech therapist, irrepressible to Bertie's repressed.³⁶ If the doctor is most often a pivotal figure in melodrama who 'serv[es] to identify and cure the physical and psychic maladies of femininity',³⁷ here Logue's function is to interrogate the physical and psychic maladies of monarchy and privileged masculinity. Having worked with shell-shock victims in the First World War, he is convinced that speech impediments are rooted in psychological traumas and locates Bertie's stammer not so much in the burden of royalty, but his dysfunctional relationship with his stern father, cold mother and bullying elder brother. The Prince is initially unwilling to confide in Lionel and is dismissively contemptuous of his 'modern' methods – a point underscored cinematically in their first meetings when both characters occupy the extreme edges of the frame; however, once Logue gains Bertie's trust after his father's death, now in a tightly framed shot connoting intimacy, the Prince confesses how the teasing he endured as a child

was encouraged by his father, who declared: 'I was afraid of my father and my children are damned sure going to be afraid of me.' Bertie further reveals the painful memory of a sadistic nanny who pinched him and refused him food – a memory so painful he cannot speak but can only sing to the tune of 'Swanee River' (one of Lionel's unorthodox methods) – noting that it took his parents three years to notice. Lionel also asks Bertie why he thinks his stammering is worse around his brother David, whom we see bullying Bertie and mimicking his stammer, reducing Bertie to an inarticulate, crumpled heap.

These instances of cruelty reinforce the Prince's own belief that the Windsors are not a family but a 'firm' – a reference to the beginning of the royal family circulating as a brand in the global marketplace. The pressures of the nuclear family and the impossibility of reconciling private desires with patriarchal power and duty – that is, the stuff of family melodramas – are rendered more acute for royals since, as we see with Edward VIII's abdication and the constitutional crisis it evoked, pursuing private desires can have very public consequences – a common theme to all monarchy films.³⁸ However, the film also shows tender scenes of Bertie's supportive wife and children, suggesting that he will be a very different father. This follows the common trend in British and American films of casting benign masculinity as sensitive paternity, as a corrective to the traditional model of a repressed, non-emotional patriarch, such as that embodied by George V.³⁹ In this respect, the film adds to the common construction of the royal family as a typical bourgeois family that was initiated by Queen Victoria⁴⁰ and continues in current media representations, including the soap opera coverage of the Windsors as a dysfunctional family during the royal divorce scandals in the mid-1990s.

The film's overt foregrounding of the trauma and pain at the heart of the royal nuclear family, with Bertie and his father (who is given little psychological depth) representing psychic signs of psychological conflict, is highly illustrative of the convergence between melodrama and psychoanalysis that Brooks identifies: 'psychoanalysis is a kind of modern melodrama, conceiving psychic conflict in melodramatic terms and acting out the recognition of the repressed, often with and on the body'.⁴¹ For Brooks, what is key both to both discourses is the hysterical body, 'a body preeminently invested with meaning – a body that has become the place for the inscription of highly emotional messages that cannot be written elsewhere, and cannot be articulated verbally'.⁴² The task of Logue, then, who directs the responses of spectators much better versed in Freudian discourse than his intra-diegetic contemporaries, is to interpret

33 The monarch as the virtuous victim of melodrama: Colin Firth as George VI in *The King's Speech* (Tom Hooper, 2010).

Bertie's stammering body, which he does by constantly commenting not only on the Prince's childhood traumas, but also on his unrecognised courage and potential brilliance, telling his wife that his unnamed client 'could really be somebody great, but he's fighting me'.

Bertie's stammer therefore, like the muteness of virtuous victims in nineteenth-century stage melodramas, makes the world 'morally legible'⁴³ at a time when the monarchy derives its power from the people rather than God. This enables the film to screen some of the challenges to the institution whilst reassuring us that it is a benign influence in British modern life. In this respect, the film shares the ambivalences of the British heritage film since it fetishises the spectacle of royalty and valorises its role in forging national unity while drawing attention to the gulf between the lives of the Windsors and their subjects.⁴⁴

The challenges posed to the modern monarchy are played out in the personal sphere through the dynamics of Bertie's friendship with Logue, which stages a gentle class and culture clash when Bertie's pompous belief in his superiority is debunked by the lower-middle-class Australian in ways that court audience enjoyment, such as when Logue insists on equality, calls his patient 'Bertie' ('only my family call me that', the outraged Prince utters) and forbids his smoking with the edict 'my castle, my rules'. His therapeutic exercises result in undignified royal displays when Elizabeth sits on her husband's chest, or when Bertie is rolled around the room by Logue, or sings and dances his speech

or punctuates it with profanities, as do the Windsors' clumsy negotiation with the lift cage in the building where Lionel has his consulting room. This gentle debunking of the royals' sense of superiority makes them more accessible, portraying them as private individuals with normal longings and weaknesses – a project similar to the monarchy films *Mrs. Brown* and *The Queen*. It also, however, underscores the validity of the Prince's own confession that he is painfully out of touch with the 'common man' – a problem facing the constitutional monarch in many royal biopics of recent years, most notably *The Queen*, which revolves around Elizabeth II's lack of media savviness compared to her young Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

While Logue demands respect, he is no republican or rebellious imperial subject. He might well sit in St Edward's Chair during the coronation rehearsals, an act of impudence that so outrages the combustible Bertie that he invokes Divine Right in his claim to the throne; however, his actions do not constitute a political challenge, but rather his attempt, as a therapist, to force his patient to assert his desire to be King. Indeed, Logue's actions prompt Bertie to shout out in a melodramatic moment of psychological unblockage: 'I have a right to be heard! I have a voice!' In other words, the therapist's concern is not the monarchy as institution, but Bertie's absence of self-belief. It could also be argued that this relationship between the future King and Emperor and his colonial subject works in the way Paul Dave notes of the patrician/plebeian couple – to offer a unifying 'representations of essential Englishness rather than evidence of class [or, I would add, colonial] struggle'.⁴⁵ The same could be said of the contrasting shots of the lavish royal residences with the dilapidated, Depression-hit setting of Lionel's modest home and grungy consulting room. The film's insistent focus on Bertie's struggle with adversity circumvent even this fleeting recognition of the vast suffering of the general populous during this time – laying the film open to common criticisms levelled at the conservatism and elitism of the heritage film.

That said, the film does engage on some level with political challenges of republicanism and the spectre of socialism that plagued the monarchy at this time, such as when George V tells Bertie 'at any moment, some of us might be out of work', while the Prince reminds his errant brother, 'Kinging is a precarious business, these days. Where is the Russian Tsar? Where's cousin Wilhelm? [...] [T]here are people marching across Europe singing the Red Flag', only to be told by David that he is being 'dreary' and Herr Hitler will sort them out. Moreover, while little is made of the crisis of public faith in the monarchy

caused by the Abdication, resistance to Prince Albert ascending to the throne and the Blackshirt support for the Nazi-sympathiser Edward VIII is noted through background shots of British Union of Fascists posters declaring 'God Save the King' – posters which, Bertie acknowledges to Lionel, do not refer to him. However, one could also argue that such transitory recognition of the contradictions and tensions of the monarchical system configure a means by which the monarchy sustains itself – similar to the ways Laura Mulvey reads 1950s melodrama's representation of patriarchy.

The stark opposition the film constructs between Bertie, the good King, and David, the bad King – blatant embodiments of the moral polarisation in which melodrama trades – also allows the film to suggest the problem is not the monarchical system *per se*, but by whom and how it is executed. In complete antithesis to our opening glimpse of Bertie, the confident, dashing and highly eloquent David is first seen piloting himself into the Sandringham estate, described as 'a sun god descended from the skies' in the screenplay.⁴⁶ David, of course, is also a melodramatic figure, struggling with the conflict central to the mode – 'the impossibility of an individual reconciliation of the law and desire',⁴⁷ forced to choose between 'what he wants, or ... what the people expect him to do', as Stanley Baldwin puts it. While at times David is treated with some sympathy for his predicament, such as his melodramatic collapsing into tears on his father's death as he ascends the throne, his behaviour is also characterised as selfish on account of his failure to carry out kingly duties, his profligacy, his socialite lifestyle and his insistence on marrying an unsympathetically painted Wallis Simpson. The film also references, though rather briefly, his support of Hitler, with George VI and Elizabeth's own initial support of appeasement conveniently side-lined by the way the film skips almost directly from the abdication to the outbreak of the Second World War.⁴⁸

In contrast to his brother, the Prince is rendered heroic for forsaking his personal desires for public duty, continuing 'the monarchy film's traditional theme of self-sacrifice'.⁴⁹ This martyrdom is foregrounded when he offers his religious oath to the accession council in a scene that shares some of the oppressive *mise-en-scène*, camerawork and stylistic excess that characterised the 1950s family melodrama, though here it evokes not women's imprisonment in domestic confinement but Bertie's entrapment in kingship. His dread of this overpowering ritual is conveyed through a low-angled, hyper-symmetrical point-of-view shot of the accession chamber, filmed with a wide-angle lens to emphasise depth of field and evoke Bertie's total alienation. Such shots of the

lavish spectacle of the chamber might well evoke awe and fetishise British customs – the much-criticised ‘nostalgic gaze’ at ‘heritage space’ of the heritage film, which for Andrew Higson undercuts ‘the social critiques so often suggested narratively by these films’;⁵⁰ however, the ornate ceiling also seems about to cave in on Bertie, adding to an ongoing sense of constriction evoked in a film dominated by claustrophobic, interior settings.⁵¹ This is followed by a series of disconnected shots of paintings of previous monarchs that Bertie sees hanging on the wall, the last being that of his father, which suggests the future King’s rising panic and fear of failing to measure up to his predecessors. Unable to utter a word, he is reduced to what the screenplay terms ‘a complete muscle-locked halt. He bows his head in humility. And shame.’⁵² Here again, excessive cinematic language as well as Bertie’s hysterical body bespeak the entrapment and resistance that he cannot articulate, while ‘the literal suffering of [his] agonized body’ ‘orchestrate[s] the moral legibility crucial to the [melodramatic] mode’,⁵³ his victimisation confirming his virtue.

Bertie’s failings in the accession chamber only highlight his later triumph when he delivers his radio broadcast to rally his subjects’ support for war, a scene that is melodrama at its purest. The stakes could not be higher. As the Prince complains, recognising his decorative role and political impotence, but simultaneously the importance of his symbolic function in forging national unity, ‘If I am to be King ... where is my power? May I form a Government, levy a tax or declare a war? No! Yet I am the seat of all authority. Why? Because the Nation believes when I speak, I speak for them. Yet I cannot speak!’ This, as Cynthia Fuchs notes, is one of the film’s direct allusions to its multi-faceted title: ‘as the act of speaking, as the extra-significant speech he must make to announce England’s 1939 entry into war against Germany, and as the more metaphorical notion: speech as a means of communicating and so constructing national identity’.⁵⁴ Bertie’s fumbled rehearsals exploit our fears that he might fail the nation in this grave hour, as does the deployment of similar techniques to the opening scene, such as the motif of the tracking shot to the microphone down tight, narrow corridors and close-ups of the looming microphone. As the speech scene begins, he is initially shown seemingly imprisoned by the microphone, and once broadcasting begins, an awkward silence ensues, creating a palpable tension evoked through intercutting shots of Elizabeth, terrified for her husband, and puzzled broadcasters. After a shaky beginning, Bertie, literally conducted by Logue, gains confidence, and while not delivering a perfect performance, which the director Tom Hooper rejected for being too much of

'a Hollywood ending',⁵⁵ reaction shots as well as the stirring accompaniment of Beethoven's Seventh attest to its success. This rather intrusive, but none the less extremely moving soundtrack provides the moral legibility and emotional pitching that for Brooks is the essential role of excessive 'melos' (music) in melodrama.⁵⁶

As the King's confidence increases, and the music swirls, longer, side-on shots of Bertie are used in which he no longer seems trapped by the microphone, intercut with shots of his huge audience hanging on his every word. This includes working-class men in a pub, factory hands, servants at Buckingham Palace, soldiers serving abroad, the dignitaries at Buckingham Palace, David and Wallis Simpson in France (shot against an expansive window suggesting both their freedom from Bertie's oppressive role and their exile), Logue's wife and son, as well shots of the equipment broadcasting the speech to the entire Empire, and a very relieved Elizabeth. Bertie, the montage sequence implies, has indeed succeeded in using radio to collapse the public and private distinction and deliver his speech with what he calls 'the same depth of feeling for each one of you as if I were able to cross your threshold and speak to you myself'. His body is now healed, allegorising the reinvigorated national body that had been ailing from his brother's abdication, but triumphantly emerges reunified behind its King, whose virtue has finally been recognised, just in time for the forthcoming war.

By ending with this highly moving speech, real-life chronology is very much compressed, since it is documented that Prince Albert's stammer had considerably improved as early as 1927 when he opened the Australian parliament.⁵⁷ The film thus adopts the 'subjective and selective' postmodern approach to history that for McKechnie also characterises *Mrs. Brown*, with '“facts” subordinated to the needs of the narrative'.⁵⁸ This also stages the 'in the nick of time' motif of melodrama, allowing Bertie to incarnate goodness to Hitler's evil and thereby inscribe the moral polarisation essential to the mode. This montage sequence, intensely poignant as a result of our extra-textual knowledge of the atrocities the war would bring,⁵⁹ represents the 'imagined community' of the 'nation', to use Benedict Anderson's term,⁶⁰ one in which class relations and inequalities are harmonised and wartime Britain is represented as 'one large family whose common concerns ride above any sectional interests'.⁶¹ The melodramatic mode of address, in other words, builds on cultural representations of the Second World War as 'our finest hour', a time of unparalleled national unity. Inevitably, we read this scene with our extra-textual knowledge of the Allies' victory, of George

VI's and Queen Elizabeth's popularity (their refusing to leave London during the Blitz now well established in cultural mythology), the imminent break-up of the British Empire and the future loss of the alleged postwar consensus. Thus, to deploy Svetlana Boym's two typologies of nostalgia, this scene is less exemplary of 'reflexive nostalgia,' a forward-looking nostalgia that creates spaces for critical thinking and foregrounds the contradictions of modernity, than that of 'restorative nostalgia,' a backward-looking nostalgia which attempts to reconstruct a lost 'truth' and tradition.⁶² Indeed, this triumphant sequence fosters a conservative view of a former Britain that appears unified, despite rigid class hierarchies (which for the film seems more to index 'Britishness' than suggest any entrenched national division), culturally uniform (conforming to the all-white norm of the heritage film)⁶³ and an unrivalled imperialist power.

This image of Britain has perhaps become more necessary to construct now that traditional markers of national identity, as well as the notion of national cinema itself, are under erasure; as Belén Vidal puts it, the heritage film is gradually changing into a "post-" phenomenon: post-nation, post-quality and post-modern', whether that refers to multinational funding sources, globalised production processes or a stylistic diversity that eludes national or auteurist specificity.⁶⁴ Indeed, *The King's Speech* was partly US funded, despite the self-congratulation in the British press concerning its innate Britishness in the wake of its Oscar successes.⁶⁵ This sense of *The King's Speech* as quintessentially British stems largely from the subject matter of the monarchy as a prototypical British icon, but none the less one intended for global consumption,⁶⁶ with the film aptly dubbed '[a] picnic for Anglophiles' by Hoberman.⁶⁷

If, as Kara McKenchie argues, the royal biopic responds to conceptions of the monarchy dominant at the time of production,⁶⁸ then, released just before Prince William and Kate Middleton's royal wedding, *The King's Speech* played well into the resurging popularity of the royal family after it had reached its lowest ebb in the 1990s with the royal divorces and the disastrous handling of Princess Diana's death. The film's melodramatic discourse of 'monarch in crisis' certainly meditates on the impossibility of royals reconciling private desires and public duty, but far from giving space to ideological challenges to the monarchical system, the spectre of the real historical threats of republicanism and socialism are raised only to be deflected. Indeed, the primary function of the film's melodramatic address, I would argue, is to foreclose overt political critique, with threats to the monarchy played out on the personal terrain, treated as personal conflicts and traumas against which Bertie, in his individual struggle

against adversity, ultimately triumphs. Taking not only *The King's Speech*, but also other monarchy films such as *The Queen*, *Mrs. Brown* and *The Young Victoria* into account, it would seem that the melodramatic mode and its appeals to victimhood, as the Queen herself seems to have learnt when she dubbed 1992 her 'annus horribilis',⁶⁹ constitute an essential means through which the British monarchy is currently rendered an accessible and necessary British product (with international appeal, as the global success of the film verifies), enabling it to reaffirm its legitimacy in postmodernity.

NOTES

- 1 Peter Bradshaw, 'Oscars 2011: the Academy and the elderly genuflect to *The King's Speech*', *Guardian* (28 February 2011), www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/feb/28/oscars-2011-the-kings-speech1.
- 2 Martha Vicinus, '“Helpless and unfriended”: nineteenth-century domestic melodrama', *New Literary History* 13:1 (1981), p. 130.
- 3 Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2nd edn, 1995), pp. 42–3.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. vii.
- 6 For an excellent account of these debates, as well as the Sirkian melodrama, see John Mercer and Martin Shingler, *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility* (London: Wallflower, 2004).
- 7 Thomas Elsaesser, 'Tales of sound and fury: observations on the family melodrama', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: BFI, 1987), p. 47.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 47, 62.
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 61–2.
- 10 Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'Minnelli and melodrama', in Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, p. 72.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 73.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- 13 Laura Mulvey, 'Notes on Sirk and melodrama', in Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, p. 76. Mulvey's crucial feminist intervention into these debates was to argue that melodramas with a male protagonist tend to arrive at a more satisfactory conclusion than those with a female point of view – a narrative trajectory that *The King's Speech* follows. For criticisms of these theorists of family melodrama see Christine Gledhill, 'The melodramatic field: an investigation', in Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, and Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000), ch. 5.
- 14 Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 15.

- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 16.
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 42, 13.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 56. Brooks speculates that different kinds of dramas have different corresponding physical conditions: for tragedy, which is concerned with a lack of knowledge and insight, it is blindness; for comedy, which pivots around misunderstanding and a lack of communication, it is deafness; for melodrama, characterised by a desire to express everything but also the inability to do so, it is muteness (Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 57).
- 21 *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 31.
- 22 *Ibid.*, pp. xiii, 56.
- 23 See Mandy Merck's analysis of *The Queen* in this volume, in which she argues that the film's melodramatic mode ends up dominating the docudrama genre, with the victimised heroine *par excellence* – Princess Diana – gradually being replaced by Queen Elizabeth II, who is represented as a beleaguered, misunderstood working woman.
- 24 Belén Vidal, *Heritage Film: Nation, Gender and Representation* (London: Wallflower, 2012), p. 38.
- 25 E. Sonet, cited in Vidal, *Heritage Film*, p. 26.
- 26 Linda Williams, 'Melodrama revised', in Nick Browne (ed.), *Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 62.
- 27 This goes some way towards accounting for the patronage of charities and 'highly visible, public-spirited social service' of the modern British monarchy, which some historians believed saved it from republicanism and socialism in the twentieth century – Prochaska, cited in Andrzej Olechnowicz, 'Historians and the modern British monarchy', in Andrzej Olechnowicz (ed.), *The Monarchy and the British Nation, 1790 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 28.
- 28 Williams, 'Melodrama revised', p. 44. Here Williams is taking issue with the 'so-excessive-as-to-be-ironic model' of 1970s and 80s anti-realist, ideological critics of melodrama (Elsaesser, Nowell-Smith, Mulvey, etc.) that read any such 'excessive', non-realist expressionism as an ironic comment on bourgeois ideology and/or a 'siphoning off' of characters' repressed emotion, overlooking the crucial affective impact of such techniques on audiences.
- 29 For David Cannadine, this signifies an 'emasculated' and 'feminised' monarchy, resulting in 'greater stress on family, domesticity, maternity and glamour'. David Cannadine, 'From biography to history: writing the modern British monarchy', *Historical Research* 77:197 (2004), p. 303.
- 30 See, for instance, the BBC2 documentary *King George and Queen Mary: The Royals Who Rescued the Monarchy* (2012).
- 31 David Cannadine, 'The context, performance and meaning of tradition: the British monarchy and the "invention of tradition", c. 1820–1977', in Eric Hobsbawm and

When words fail: The King's Speech

- Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 32 Nowell-Smith, 'Minnelli and melodrama', p. 73.
- 33 Vidal, *Heritage Film*, p. 37.
- 34 Nowell-Smith, 'Minnelli and melodrama', p. 72.
- 35 Indeed, George VI has been termed 'the ultimate castrated male' by Prochaska (cited in Olechnowicz, 'Historians and the modern British monarchy', p. 29).
- 36 J. Hoberman, *The King's Speech*: how therapy saved monarchy', *Village Voice* (24 November 2010), www.villagevoice.com/2010-11-24/film/the-king-s-speech-how-therapy-saved-monarchy.
- 37 Marcia Landy, 'Melodrama and femininity in Second World War British cinema', in Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 2nd edn, 2001), p. 123.
- 38 Pamela Church Gibson, 'From dancing queen to plaster virgin: *Elizabeth* and the end of English heritage', *Journal of Popular British Cinema* 5 (2002), p. 135.
- 39 See Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), ch. 7; Fred Pfeil, *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference* (London: Verso, 1995), ch. 2; Nicola Rehling, *Extra-Ordinary Men: White Heterosexual Masculinity and Contemporary Popular Cinema* (Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2009), ch. 2.
- 40 Cannadine, 'From biography to history', p. 303.
- 41 Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, p. xi.
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 44 For a useful summary of debates concerning the heritage film, see Vidal, *Heritage Film*, ch. 1.
- 45 Paul Dave, *Visions of England: Class and Culture in Contemporary Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), p. 5.
- 46 David Seidler, *The King's Speech*, Screenplay, *Deadline* (14 January 2011), www-deadline-com.vimg.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/TheKingsSpeech-DL.pdf, p. 35.
- 47 David Rodowick, 'Madness, authority and ideology: the domestic melodrama of the 1950s', in Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, p. 273.
- 48 Peter Bradshaw, '*The King's Speech* – Review', *Guardian* (21 October 2010), www.guardian.co.uk/film/2010/oct/21/kings-speech-review-colin-firth.
- 49 Kara McKechnie, 'Taking liberties with the monarch: the royal bio-pic in the 90s', in Claire Monk and Amy Sargeant (eds), *British Historical Cinema: The History, Heritage and Costume Film* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 227.
- 50 Andrew Higson, 'Re-presenting the national past: nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film', in Lester Friedman (ed.), *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: Wallflower, 2006), p. 99.
- 51 Roger Ebert observes that the film 'is largely shot in interiors, and most of those spaces are long and narrow. ... I suspect [Hooper] may be evoking the narrow, constricting walls of Albert's throat as he struggles to get words out.' Roger Ebert, '*The*

- King's Speech*, RogerErbet.Com (15 December 2010), www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-kings-speech-2010.
- 52 Seidler, *The King's Speech*, p. 63.
- 53 Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, p. 29.
- 54 Cynthia Fuchs, 'The King's Speech: a little more concentration'. *PopMatters* (24 November 2010), www.popmatters.com/pm/review/134071-the-kings-speech.
- 55 David Gritten, 'Tom Hooper interview for *The King's Speech*', *Telegraph* (23 December 2010), www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmmakersonfilm/8219733/Tom-Hooper-interview-for-The-Kings-Speech.html. Hooper stated in the same interview:
- Originally, it had a Hollywood ending. ... Bertie was cured. His final speech was flawless. I finally came to understand that wasn't truthful. If you hear the real speech (made by the King on the outbreak of war in 1939), he's clearly coping with his stammer. But it's not a perfect performance. He's managing it.
- I felt wary of making a film about a miracle cure. For most people [who stammer], it's not about a cure; it's about living with it. Also, there was a massive dramatic return on this change. Because the greatest problem in any movie like this is that you need to believe in the capacity of your hero to fail in the final act.
- 56 Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, pp. 48–9. The Beethoven soundtrack in this finale has prompted this scene to be labelled 'the official Rocky moment' by Hoberman (Hoberman, 'The King's Speech'). Hoberman's response, which mirrors that of many other reviewers, is indicative of what Brooks, p. ix, terms 'our postmodern sophistication' in that 'we don't quite take melodrama "straight" anymore – maybe no one ever did – but always with a certain ironic detachment. Yet, remarkably, as spectators we can demur from the melodramatic – find it a hoot, at times – and yet still be seriously thrilled by it.'
- 57 Steve Meacham, 'king's voice calmed a nation', *Sydney Morning Herald* (10 November 2010), www.smh.com.au/entertainment/movies/kings-voice-coach-calmed-a-nation-20101109-17m2x.html?skin=text-only.
- 58 McKechnie, 'Taking liberties with the monarch', p. 227.
- 59 Tara Judah, 'The King's Speech', *Liminal Vision* (25 December 2010), <http://liminalvision.wordpress.com/2010/12/25/the-kings-speech/>.
- 60 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, rev. edn, 1991).
- 61 Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), p. 171.
- 62 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. xviii.
- 63 John Hill, 'Contemporary British cinema: industry, policy, identity', *Cineaste* 26:4 (2001), p. 33.
- 64 Vidal, *Heritage Film*, p. 75.
- 65 The film was also the last film to be funded by the now disbanded UK Film Council, dubbed its 'Swan Song' by Bradshaw. Bradshaw, 'Oscars 2011'.
- 66 Vidal, *Heritage Film*, p. 19.

67 Hoberman, 'The King's Speech'.

68 McKechnie, 'Taking liberties with the monarch', p. 218.

69 Queen Elizabeth II, 'Annus horribilis speech', 24 November 1992, *Official Website of the British Monarchy*, www.royal.gov.uk/ImagesandBroadcasts/Historic%20speeches%20and%20broadcasts/Annushorribilisspeech24November1992.aspx.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, rev. edn, 1991).

Boym, Svetlana, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

Bradshaw, Peter, 'The King's Speech – review', *Guardian* (21 October 2010), www.guardian.co.uk/film/2010/oct/21/kings-speech-review-colin-firth.

——— 'Oscars 2011: the Academy and the elderly genuflect to *The King's Speech*', *Guardian* (28 February 2011), www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/feb/28/oscars-2011-the-kings-speech1.

Brooks, Peter, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2nd edn, 1995).

Cannadine, David, 'The context, performance and meaning of tradition: the British monarchy and the "invention of tradition", c. 1820–1977', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

——— 'From biography to history: writing the modern British monarchy', *Historical Research* 77:197 (2004).

Church Gibson, Pamela, 'From dancing queen to plaster virgin: Elizabeth and the end of English heritage', *Journal of Popular British Cinema* 5 (2002).

Dave, Paul, *Visions of England: Class and Culture in Contemporary Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2006).

Ebert, Roger, 'The King's Speech', *RogerErbet.Com* (15 December 2010), www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-kings-speech-2010.

Elsaesser, Thomas, 'Tales of sound and fury: observations on the family melodrama', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: BFI, 1987).

Fuchs, Cynthia, 'The King's Speech: a little more concentration', *PopMatters* (24 November 2010), www.popmatters.com/pm/review/134071-the-kings-speech.

Gledhill, Christine, 'The melodramatic field: an investigation', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: BFI, 1987).

Gritten, David, 'Tom Hooper interview for *The King's Speech*', *Telegraph* (23 December 2010), www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmmakersonfilm/8219733/Tom-Hooper-interview-for-The-Kings-Speech.html.

- Higson, Andrew, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).
- 'Re-presenting the national past: nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film', in Lester Friedman (ed.), *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: Wallflower, 2006).
- Hill, John, 'Contemporary British cinema: industry, policy, identity', *Cineaste* 26:4 (2001).
- Hoberman, J., 'The King's Speech: how therapy Saved monarchy', *Village Voice* (24 November 2010), www.villagevoice.com/2010-11-24/film/the-king-s-speech-h-how-therapy-saved-monarchy.
- Jeffords, Susan, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994).
- Judah, Tara, 'The King's Speech', *Liminal Vision* (25 December 2010), <http://liminalvision.wordpress.com/2010/12/25/the-kings-speech/>.
- Landy, Marcia, 'Melodrama and femininity in Second World War British cinema', in Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 2nd edn, 2001).
- McKechnie, Kara, 'Taking liberties with the monarch: the royal bio-pic in the 90s', in Claire Monk and Amy Sargeant (eds), *British Historical Cinema: The History, Heritage and Costume Film* (London: Routledge, 2002).
- Meacham, Steve, 'King's voice calmed a nation', *Sydney Morning Herald* (10 November 2010), www.smh.com.au/entertainment/movies/kings-voice-coach-calmed-a-nation-20101109-17m2x.html?skin=text-only.
- Mercer, John and Martin Shingler, *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility* (London: Wallflower, 2004).
- Mulvey, Laura, 'Notes on Sirk and melodrama', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: BFI, 1987).
- Neale, Steve, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000).
- Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey, 'Minnelli and melodrama', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: BFI, 1987).
- Olechnowicz, Andrzej, 'Historians and the modern British monarchy', in Andrzej Olechnowicz (ed.), *The Monarchy and the British Nation, 1790 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- Pfeil, Fred, *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference* (London: Verso, 1995).
- Rehling, Nicola, *Extra-Ordinary Men: White Heterosexual Masculinity and Contemporary Popular Cinema* (Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2009).
- Rodowick, David, 'Madness, authority and ideology: the domestic melodrama of the 1950s', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: BFI, 1987).

When words fail: The King's Speech

- Seidler, David, *The King's Speech*, screenplay, *Deadline* (14 January 2011), www-deadline-com.vimg.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/TheKingsSpeech-DL.pdf.
- Vicinus, Martha, '“Helpless and unfriended”: nineteenth century-domestic melodrama', *New Literary History* 13:1 (1981).
- Vidal, Belén, *Heritage Film: Nation, Gender and Representation* (London: Wallflower, 2012).
- Williams, Linda, 'Melodrama revised', in Nick Browne (ed.), *Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
- *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).