

The British Monarchy on the Small Screen: The Functions of the Crown in the TV Series *Victoria* and *The Crown*

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 0009-0005-1896-4945

Received: 13/10/2024

Accepted: 01/11/2025

Published: 01/01/2026

Abstract

The British royal family—and the British monarch in particular—have long fascinated filmmakers and television producers, serving as rich material for historical drama and political storytelling. Yet beneath the glittering ceremonies, palaces, and public pageantry lies a powerful discourse about authority, legitimacy, and national identity. In periods marked by debates over the relevance and sustainability of the monarchy, screen representations become more than entertainment; they function as cultural texts that shape public perception. Media productions can therefore be instrumentalized—intentionally or implicitly—to construct, reinforce, or rehabilitate a particular image of the Crown. This article explores how the British royal institution is portrayed and symbolically marketed in the television series *Victoria* and *The Crown*. Drawing on media studies and discourse analysis, the research examines a selection of key scenes that frame the monarchy through dramatized depictions of Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth II. Although fictionalized, these representations contribute to contemporary understandings of royal authority and continuity. Through narrative structure, cinematography, dialogue, and character development, both series craft a coherent discourse that presents the Crown as indispensable to British political and cultural life. The study identifies three principal functions of the monarchy as constructed in the two series. First, the Crown is portrayed as a quasi-divine entity, invested with sacred symbolism and historical destiny. Ceremonial rituals, coronation scenes, and religious imagery elevate the monarch above ordinary political actors, reinforcing a sense of transcendence. Second, the monarch is framed as a loving and self-sacrificing mother figure, whose personal struggles humanize the institution while maintaining its moral authority. Finally, the Crown appears as the guardian of the constitution, depicted as politically neutral yet crucial in safeguarding democratic stability during times of crisis. Overall, the findings suggest that both series strongly favor the monarchy, foregrounding its spiritual, political, and social significance. By blending historical drama with emotional storytelling, the shows contribute to a largely positive and legitimizing portrayal of the British Crown in contemporary media culture.

Keywords; British Crown; *The Crown*; Media Representation; *Victoria*.

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Journal of Languages & Translation © 2026. Published by University of Chlef, Algeria.

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Introduction

The British monarchy has always been a major source of inspiration for the creation of fictional works and the production of audio-visual content on the small and big screen alike. Over the years, countless movies and series have explored both the splendour and drama of royal life. The 2010s saw the broadcast of two TV shows about the British Crown that met with worldwide success and popularity and became instant media phenomena: *Victoria* and *The Crown*. Both series enjoy a high production value and are artistically and cinematographically appealing. However, through the allure and glamour of the beautiful sets and costumes the series convey strong statements about the nature and perceived importance of the Crown.

The portrayal of the monarch in the show reflects a particular discourse about the legitimacy of the British royalty. The entertaining aspect of the shows camouflages an ideology strongly in favour of the Crown. The fact that the media phenomena under scrutiny here are not movies but serialized programs means that they have ample time and scope to forge their desired image the Crown and convey it to their audience. Thanks to well-written scripts and adequate cinematographic techniques, the viewers become invested in the lives and fates of the characters over the many episodes, in particular the main character—the Queen. The length of the shows also allows them to insert and reiterate the same messages over and over again. Repeatedly, the two series showcase the queen stepping in and performing roles only she—the shows seem to suggest—can fulfill, thus making the Crown irreplaceable. These roles, or functions, are explored in this paper after a brief overview of the nature of the Crown and its relation to the media and an explanation of the data collection process.

1. Filming Majesty: The Crown and the Media

Before discussing the particular portrayal of the monarch in *Victoria* and *The Crown*, it is necessary to explore the nature of the British Crown as well as its legal and brand status. Furthermore, attention must be given to the relation between Crown and media and how the former uses its public image to win the consent and approval of the people. These points are covered in the sections below.

1.1 The Legal and Brand Status of the Crown

The British royal family is widely considered the most famous and recognizable monarchy in the world and is among the most emblematic cultural landmarks of the United Kingdom. Still, the workings of the Crown can be rather perplexing. Strictly speaking, Britain is a theocracy—a country ruled by God, whose authority is vested in the Crown. The latter is a transcendent legal entity subtly distinct from the person of the monarch. The monarch is both Head of State and Head of the Church of England. Over the centuries, most of the Crown's power has been delegated, first to the barons in the 1215's Magna Carta, and eventually to the people through their elected representatives in the 19th and 20th centuries. While political power derives from the Crown, the monarch retains only a ceremonial role. Although the British monarchy may seem at odds with a democratic state, it is enabled by the lack of formal legal protest against it ("Is Britain a Monarchy", n.d). If the monarchy's political and legal status may come across as confusing, its corporate and media status on the other hand are more straightforward.

The British Crown has increasingly been recognized and examined in the light of corporate branding. Many organizations nowadays rely on brand-like management for survival. This is especially true for an arcane institution like the British Crown whose real significance lies in its "iconic, branding role, as a symbol of both people and of nation" (Balmer, 2019, p.3). The British Crown does not only operate as a constitutional institution but also as a marketable entity akin to a corporate brand selling consumer goods. The monarchy is careful to cultivate a polished and curated public image through strategic management of media presence. This 'brand' status allows the Crown to maintain cultural relevance and public appeal and to reinforcing its legitimacy. Over the course of the centuries, the dynamic between Crown and people changed, so much so that while in the past the monarch used to have a people, it is now the people who have a monarch (Balmer, 2019). In this situation, the authority and

survival of the Crown depend on its popularity and visibility. For instance, the absence of Queen Victoria from public life during her mourning of Prince Albert led to a surge of republicanism (Balmer, 2019).

Today more than ever, many critics question the legitimacy of and need for the monarchy. While some commentators oppose it on democratic egalitarian grounds, others object to its financial burden on taxpayer money, estimated at approximately £292 million a year (“Valued at £67 Billion”, 2017). Many citizens question its actual relevance, or lack thereof, in the governance and management of the country. In this context and with no real legal political power, the monarchy rules by consent, not by inherent right, and has to work hard to preserve the affection and respect of the people from which it derives its legitimacy (Balmer, 2009). In an age of mass communication and media image, a significant part of this quest for the people’s consent goes through the screen. However, unlike other consumer goods, the monarchy’s presence, role, public image, and symbolic value have the advantage of being marketed in the form of movies and multi-season TV shows. These screen productions become in effect full-length advertisements for the Crown.

1.2 Media Portrayal of the Crown

The relation between Crown and media is one of mutual benefit. While the media covers royal events to satisfy the public interest, the monarchy also shapes its media image to project values such as continuity, tradition, stability, and national unity. Since the monarchy lacks direct political power, these cultural messages are not imposed by force but through cultural leadership and consent. By managing public appearances and media representations the Crown engages in what Antonio Gramsci might describe as a form of cultural hegemony, where consent is won not through force but through persuasive imagery and ritual (Martin, 2023). This also holds true on the international stage. The global media presence of the Crown’s enhances its soft power and symbolic influence, reinforcing the monarchy’s relevance beyond the UK. The Crown’s media strategy aims at maintaining prestige and legitimacy in a global, media-driven, democratic context. The humanized and glamorous portrayal of the royals supports Britain’s cultural diplomacy, boosts tourism, and contributes to the country’s global brand.

The partnership between the British royalty and visual media is as old as the media themselves. The advent of photography during the Victorian Age made the monarch more visible than ever before and brought her closer to her people. This new technology was also used to manipulate the vision of the monarchy (Roibás Diaz, 2014), presenting an image of blissful domesticity and virtuous family life that became major tenets of Victorian morality. The invention of moving pictures in the late 19th century allowed Queen Victoria to become the first British monarch ever to be filmed. Not only that, but the power and prosperity of her reign became emblematic for producers at times when the country faced war, rebellion and economic crises (Merck, 2016), a tradition that is perpetuated today.

The next British queen, Elizabeth II, for her part created a major media event by televising her coronation in 1953, allowing 20 million Britons—40% of the population—to watch it in their homes. This turning point democratized the Crown, making Elizabeth II the first monarch to be truly crowned in sight of her people as the service ordains. It also signaled the realization that the British public was the actual power behind the throne (Balmer, 2009).

Fictional productions on the monarch, on the other hand, received a different treatment. Due to the sentiment that the unknowability, mystique, and sanctity of royalty were keys to its existence, it was considered inappropriate to portray a living monarch on stage or on screen until recently. However, the spread of audio-visual media in the past decades led the royal family to renegotiate its public image, turning into the paramount example of media event (Bastin, 2009). The biopic, being one of the most

respected forms of TV drama and film, became the obvious genre for the representation of the royals (Merck, 2016). Contemporary movies on the monarch include Stephen Frears' *The Queen* (2006) and Tom Hooper's *The King's Speech* (2010) both commercially successful and multiple award-winning productions. Countless television dramas on British royalty have also been produced, both in the UK and abroad. The two series selected for study in this paper are *The Crown* and *Victoria*.

ITV's *Victoria* (2016-2019) is a British television series created and written by Daisy Goodwin and starring actress Jenna Coleman. It dramatizes the rule of Queen Victoria since her accession to the throne. The show makes ample use of dramatic license. The Queen having died over a century ago and part of her diaries having been destroyed, there are fewer means of fact-checking, which leaves more room for speculation, imagination, and romanticization. Setting this contemporary production in the Victorian Age helps invoke the greatness of both Crown and nation. Three seasons were aired in total, earning the show several awards ("Victoria, Awards", n.d.). The launch episode garnered the highest British audience for a new drama that year, and the show was later sold to 150 countries (Mitchell, 2016).

The Crown (2016-2023), created and written by Peter Morgan, stars the award-winning actresses Claire Foy and Olivia Colman as the younger and older Queen Elizabeth II respectively. *The Crown* follows the life and reign of the monarch since her marriage to Prince Philip. The show had a team of researchers and advisors, among which is Major Rankin-Hunt, who worked for the royal household for 33 years (VanArendonk, 2019). Moreover, most of the main characters are still alive today, and the life of the current royal family has been well documented by the media. This allowed the show to be more factual and historically accurate. The American-British television series produced for Netflix counts six seasons so far but only the first three are under scrutiny in this paper. This choice of material was made in order to maintain a balance with the number of seasons of *Victoria*. *The Crown* has received more than 30 awards and has achieved great commercial success ("The Crown", 2020). In 2020, out of 158 million households with a Netflix account worldwide, 73 million have watched the royal drama, making *The Crown* "part of the global cultural zeitgeist" ("The Crown Viewing Figures", 2020).

In addition to the figures provided by official outlets, there are countless more views on illegal platforms and copyright-infringing websites. This craze is a testimony to the popular appeal and public taste for the life of British monarchy across the world. This makes shows about the royals a powerful propaganda tool to affirm and assert the Crown's position and image in the UK and the Commonwealth as well as globally. In the past few decades, the phenomenon surrounding these royal fictions might have gone unstudied and the works dismissed by the academia because of their low culture status. Today, however, cultural studies acknowledge that such artefacts have a lot to reveal about social, economic, and political structures.

1.3 Manufacturing Consent

Cultural studies uphold popular culture and everyday life as worthy of academic inquiry and focus on how a particular phenomenon relates to matters of ideology. A key concern of cultural studies today is the role the media play in the construction and circulation of cultural and symbolic values—the role and 'importance' of the Crown for instance. Cultural studies on media are conducted through the analysis of films, TV serials, advertisements, music, and other products of popular culture. The studies are based on the assumption that these media are political and ideological and help reinforce the power and hegemony of certain political, economic or cultural groups by conveying ideologies that the uninformed audience may assimilate unawares. In the process, identities are constructed for both the creator and the receiver of cultural codes—in this case, the Crown and the audience alike. Mambrol (2016) emphasizes that representation is a central concept in cultural studies, as it refers to the use of language to engage

with issues of class, power, and ideology within the framework of discourse — a process through which objects and social relationships are defined.

Barker (2003) expresses similar ideas when he explains that subordination goes through consent as well as coercion. In the field of cultural studies, popular culture is commonly understood to be the arena in which this consent is won or lost. Consent is precisely what allows the Crown to endure, and cinema and television play a crucial role in this process. Barker adds that “[t]he production of consent implies popular identification with the cultural meanings generated by the signifying practices of hegemonic texts”, highlighting that the written word is not the only signifying activity (p. 10). Television too is considered a text with a discursive aspect. Not only that, but because it is the main form of communication in western societies, television is unmatched in the volume of cultural text it produces and the size of its audiences (Barker, 2003). As text, television content can have contrasting meanings and be interpreted in several ways. The text, however, is structured in dominance, that in a way that leads to a preferred meaning (Barker, 2003). This is exemplified by *Victoria* and *The Crown* which seem to promote a very flattering image of the monarch and underscore what they regard as the Crown’s irreplaceable role.

2. Analytical procedures

The data for this study was collected using a simplified form of qualitative content analysis (QCA). Flick (2004) explains that QCA aims at classifying linguistic material in order to “make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material” and arrive at generalizable statements by comparing texts or cases (p. 5). Schreier (2012, 2014), for her part, defines QCA as a method which systematically describes the meaning of qualitative material by classifying relevant segments of the text as instances of the categories of a coding frame. The latter is an analytical instrument consisting of a hierarchy of codes or concepts and their variables that describes different aspects of the topic(s) being researched (Schreier, 2012; 2014).




Coding frames come with diverse structural complexity, but there must be a minimum of one main category —that is a topic or a theme—and two subcategories —aspects and feature that describe the main category (Schreier, 2014). The coding frame for this analysis has a basic structure and consists of one main category—*functions of the Crown*—and three subcategories—*the divine entity*, *the loving mother*, and *the guardian of the constitution* (Figure 1). The main category or topic—*functions of the Crown*— was concept-driven and generated deductively from the research question ‘What are the main functions of the British monarch portrayed by the TV shows *Victoria* and *The Crown*?’. The three subcategories—*the divine entity*, *the loving mother*, and *the guardian of the constitution*—were data-driven and generated inductively (Schreier, 2014).

The selection of the units of analysis—i.e. the corpus consisting of the first three seasons of *Victoria* and *The Crown*—took place before the beginning of the QCA proper since this study was motivated by an interest in the discourse vehicle by the two programs. The first step of the data collection process consisted of rewatching the 55 episodes the six selected seasons and marking relevant segments. This was done by transcribing the script of pertinent scenes and noting the episode number and timestamp for each segment. Scenes or segments were selected according to a thematic criterion whereby each segment corresponds to mentioning or discussing one relevant idea or topic (Schreier, 2012). Hard copies of the transcripts were then colour-coded with highlighters to organize the segments.

Subcategories describing the main topic—*functions of the Crown*—emerged inductively through progressive summarizing and subsumption. Progressive summarizing involves paraphrasing the segments in such a way as to retain only the gist of the content then comparing and grouping paraphrases that refer to similar ideas to generate a category name and definition (Mayring, as cited in Schreier, 2012). When a new relevant segment did not fit into an already existing subcategory, a new subcategory was generated. This is what is referred to as subsumption (Mayring, as cited in Schreier, 2012).

The analytical steps above yielded a number of functions ascribed to the monarch in the shows. They include: the emblem of national prestige, the Head of Empire and Commonwealth, the Fidei defensor, and the diplomatic asset in international politics. To allow a more in-depth analysis, this study focuses on the three functions that are most consistently emphasized across the episodes. The roles used for illustration in this paper are *the divine entity* in *The Crown*, *the benevolent mother* in *Victoria*, and *the guardian of the constitution* in both shows. The structure of the final coding frame is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Coding frame of the study.

MAIN CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORIES
Functions of the Crown	 The divine entity  The benevolent mother  The gardian of the Constitution

Source: The researcher's design.

As a final step, a codebook consisting of definitions for the different elements of the coding frame was drafted. By stating what is meant exactly by a given category—or code or concept—and describing its characteristic features, the codebook provides a set of instructions for coders (Schreier, 2014). Coders are then able to identify instances when the application of a given code or category is appropriate (Schreier, 2014). This measure also ensures the replicability of the study. The concepts of the coding frame of this study are defined as follows:

- *Functions of the Crown*: Roles and tasks that are presented by the shows as capable of being performed by the monarch alone. This latter often intervenes to do what is beyond the reach and capacity of other people—however powerful—or simply to exist in a sublime state. In particular, the monarch is shown fulfilling one of the following functions:
 - ✓ The divine entity: Instances that emphasize the spiritual significance of the Crown and the monarch's connection with the godly and the sacred, and portray the monarch as privileged and superior to the realm of mere the mortals.
 - ✓ The loving mother: Instances that display the Queen's nurturing nature, kindness, warmth, understanding, empathy, support, protectiveness, and selflessness towards her people.
 - ✓ The guardian of the Constitution: Instances where the Queen acts as a wise, just, incorruptible, and unshakable arbiter during political predicaments by upholding the principles of the Constitution.

3. Discussion of the Roles of the Monarch in *Victoria* and *The Crown*

Results of the QCA strongly suggest the existence of a dominant meaning that *Victoria* and *The Crown* communicate about the role of the British Crown. The Crown and the monarch are showcased performing many different functions the most important of which are the divine entity, the benevolent mother, and the guardian of the constitution.

3.1 *The Divine Entity*

Perhaps the most distinctive role ascribed to the Crown in the show of the same name is that of divine entity. It is the aspect of the Crown most immediately accessible to the viewer. This is in great part due to the pompous ceremonial and iconography surround it, which have a strong audio-visual impact on screen. More than anything else, sacredness is presented as the very essence of the Crown. As Balmer (2009) explains “[c]oronations invest a Sovereign with sacerdotal eminence; ... the anointing of the monarch ... is seen both by monarchs and prelates as the most central of all the liturgical rites: in effect, a quasi-sacrament” (p. 10). This can be seen in *Victoria* and *The Crown* where the coronation scenes of the queens are given great prominence and are designed to be emotionally charged for both the characters and the audience. The viewer is left in awe of the majestic ceremonials. In these scenes, the Crown is sanctified and elevated above temporal authority, making the monarch the representative of God on earth. This is explicitly expressed by Queen Mary, the Queen’s grandmother, in her advice to Elizabeth II shortly after the latter accesses the throne (Figure 2). The Queen’s grandmother statement raises the Crown to the realm of the sacred and the metaphysical. This is a very strong message implying that mere mortals—i.e. mere citizens—should not dare criticize the Crown or put it into question. The Crown in the show is beyond temporal laws and morality and is only answerable to God.

Figure 2: “Act of God”, minutes 20:55-21:50.

QM: Loyalty to the ideal you have inherited is your duty above everything else, because the calling comes from the highest source. From God himself.

...

Monarchy is God's sacred mission to grace and dignify the earth.

To give ordinary people an ideal to strive towards, an example of nobility and duty to raise them in their wretched lives.

Monarchy is a calling from God. That is why you are crowned in an abbey, not a government building.

Why you are anointed, not appointed.

It's an archbishop that puts the crown on your head, not a minister or public servant.

Which means that you are answerable to God in your duty, not the public.

Source: The researcher’s transcription of Morgan (2016).

The Duke of Edinburgh goes even further when commenting on Elizabeth II’s coronation. While the previous passage places God above the Crown, the Duke’s speech confers the monarch herself a god-like status (Figure 3). This scene first highlights that the mystery surrounding the divine nature of the Crown

is part of its appeal, prestige, and authority. There is, however, an underlying criticism of the soundness of judgement of the people. It is suggested here that the public prefer surface appearances rather than substance; they do not care if they do not understand what or who is ruling them as long as everything looks nice. It is also implied that the British citizens—and voters—are irresponsible, uniformed, and easily distracted by smoke and mirrors. This idea would have a major impact in the context of an eventual referendum on the abolition or continuation of the monarchy.

These two illustrations are emphatic and unequivocal assertions about the legitimacy and unaccountability of the Crown. They set the general tone of the show: that the Crown cannot and should not be considered in terms of earthly standards; it is imbued with a sacredness that places it above other institutions and authority. The Crown, in short, is described in the show as

Figure 3: “Smoke and Mirrors”, minutes 50:13-51:20

DE: Oils and oaths. Orbs and sceptres. Symbol upon symbol. An unfathomable web of arcane mystery and liturgy. Blurring so many lines no clergyman or historian or lawyer could ever untangle any of it.

...

Who wants transparency when you can have magic? Who wants prose when you can have poetry? Pull away the veil and what are you left with?

An ordinary young woman of modest ability and little imagination. But wrap her up like this, anoint her with oil, and hey, presto, what do you have?

A goddess.

Source: The researcher’s transcription of Morgan (2019d).

part of the divine realm made manifest on earth, a status that confers to it a quasi immunity from attacks and criticism.

3.2 The Loving Mother

After the collapse of a colliery spoil tip in Aberfan, *The Crown’s* Elizabeth II visits the mining community at the urging of her Prime Minister. She is shown struggling to connect with the people and feel genuine empathy for the victims and their families (Morgan, 2019a). This rather cold and distant aspect of the monarch is more than compensated for by the fictional Queen Victoria. The most significant role this monarch assumes in *Victoria* is that of the loving and compassionate mother to her people. For instance, in “Brockton Hall”, she is shown commuting the sentence of Chartists leaders accused of treason from execution to transportation to Australia, stating that she would like her reign to be a merciful one (Goodwin, 2016a). She also declares herself a supporter of the abolition of slavery since her childhood days in “The Queen’s Husband” (Goodwin, 2016b). In “The Sins of the Father”, despite being in a fragile physical and mental state during her confinement, Queen Victoria visits explosion victims in hospital, and her Prime Minister, Lord Peel, comments that “[her] presence made all the difference to those poor souls” (Wilford, 2017, 22:25).

During the 1854 Broad Street cholera outbreak, a pioneer doctor, John Snow, maintains that the disease is not caused by miasma, as was conventionally believed, but by the contaminated water of a well. He is

shunned by the local authorities while the Queen alone heeds his words. She then asks her minister, Lord Palmerstone, to organize a visit to the cholera patients at the hospital. When Palmerstone warns her against the danger of contamination she replies that that “if one of [her] children were ill, [she] would not hesitate to go into the sick room” (Wilford, 2019, 20:08). She also asserts that it is a matter of duty on her part to visit the hospital and is shown demonstrating compassion and support to the cholera patients. During the potato famine, Queen Victoria, distressed by the plight of Ireland, writes in person to Mr. Traill, a parish doctor in Ireland, and invites him to the palace to brief her on the situation and help her “relieve the misfortunes of her most unfortunate people” (Goodwin, 2017, 24:40). She is deeply affected and alarmed by his report and tearfully pleads with her ministers Prime Minister to help alleviate the situation (Figure 4).

Figure 4: “Faith, Hope & Charity”, minutes 32:55- 34:57.

QV: I will not stand by while the Irish die of hunger! I cannot have it on my conscience. Sir Robert, remember Corinthians 13. 'And now abideth faith, hope, charity'. The greatest of these is charity.

...

Look at this child, Sir Robert. Look at Alice [She hold the newly-born Princess Alice]. Can you imagine what it must be like to be a mother in Dr Traill's parish, who knows that she has no milk to give. And the crying will grow weaker and weaker and weaker, until one day it stops. Charity begins at home, Sir Robert, it begins here in the nursery and as a mother. I will not let my people starve.

Source: The researcher's transcription of Goodwin (2017).

The proclamations and actions mentioned above unequivocally present the Queen as a mother to her people. She is portrayed as a dedicated parent who does not hesitate to put her health at risk to comfort her people. Historical records and Queen Victoria's personal diaries, however, show that in reality, the Queen did not intervene during either the potato famine or the cholera outbreak, nor did she use her prerogative to save the Chartists from execution. In *Victoria*, nonetheless, the monarch is painted as a compassionate, kind, and benevolent ruler striving to help her people wherever they may be. She is a reassuring and comforting authority figure who is always there for her people in the direst moments.

3.3 The Guardian of the Constitution

The Constitution of the United Kingdom does not exist as a single codified text. Over the centuries, legal principles emerged from political conventions and social consensus to form an unwritten constitution. In a constitutional monarchy like Britain, the monarch's power is checked by the constitution. That is, politicians use the Constitution to prevent abuses of power on the part of the monarch. In *Victoria* and *The Crown*, however, the monarch is depicted as the ultimate protector of the Constitution, often intervening when politicians try to exploit its flexible nature to their advantage.

In “Young England”, a man aims and shoots at the pregnant Queen Victoria while she is out in her carriage (Goodwin, 2016c). The Queen escaped unscathed, but the fear of an assassination plot against

her spreads. Upon investigation, the man is declared to be mentally ill and is therefore sentenced to a prison sentence rather than execution. To support the court's decision and despite lingering risks, Queen Victoria decides to go out in public, against the advice of her husband. She justifies her decision by her unshakable faith in the rule of the Constitution (Figure 5).

Figure 5: “Young England”, minutes 33:49-34:48.

QV: When I took the coronation oath, I swore to uphold the laws of this nation under God. If an English jury believes this man is not of sound mind, then we must accept that verdict, whatever our own feelings.

And furthermore, to show how much we believe in English justice, we will go for a drive this afternoon.

Source: The researcher's transcription of Goodwin (2016c).

This is a highly symbolic act by the Queen: not only does she uphold the Constitution and the rule of its law despite potential threats to her life, but she also makes it a point to do it in public view. In “London Bridge is Falling Down”, Queen Victoria intervenes more directly to protect democracy. When Chartists organize a mass procession to present their third petition to Parliament, the police and military, fearing an uprising, mobilize massively under the command of the Duke of Wellington to stop the protesters from crossing the Thames to Westminster. As the Queen and her family are being evacuated from London as a safety measure, she has a change of heart at the last moment and gets out of her carriage. She goes against the advice of her ministers and officers and orders that the petitioners be given safe passage saying that “[t]he Chartists must be able to present their petition to Parliament” (Goodwin, 2019a, 41:52). She even suggests—and rightly so—that the riots were staged by the ministers in order to frame the Chartists. When the protests start, the Queen meets a representative of the Chartists who makes it clear that their fight is with politicians not with the Queen, and that they love and respect their monarch (Goodwin, 2019b), an affection that is justified when the Queen steps in to save the day, guaranteeing both the safety and civil rights of the militants.

Likewise in *The Crown*, there is a strong connection between monarchy and democracy as well as between Crown and Constitution. In the episode “Scientia Potentia Est” (i.e. knowledge is power), Elizabeth II laments to her private tutor that she is not as well-read and as knowledgeable as the members of her government and other world leaders. Her tutor retorts that she was drilled for years in the finer points of the Constitution and knows it better than anyone, and that it was the only education that mattered (Morgan, 2019c). This establishes the Queen as the ultimate authority when it comes to constitutional matters.

A situation soon arises where the Queen has to exercise this authority. When the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary are incapacitated by health issues, they conspire with the Cabinet to hide this from the Queen. The Constitution, however, prescribes that they step down if not fit for office to ensure national security. When the Queen uncovers the situation, she rebukes her ministers for breaking the sacred trust between Crown and government, and lectures them on the workings of the Constitution saying that “...it is not [her] job to govern. But it is [her] job to ensure proper governance” adding that can not do that “if [her] ministers lie and plot and hide the truth from [her]? [They] have prevented [her] from doing [her] duty. [They] have hampered and bamboozled the proper functioning of the Crown”(Morgan, 2019c, 49:45). This scene exemplifies how the Crown monitors government actions and makes sure they are in compliance with the Constitution. In “Coup”, in his attempted coup to remove the incompetent Prime

Minister Wilson from office, Lord Mountbatten, a close relative of the Queen, asks her to act for the good of the country and declare a state of emergency and dissolve Parliament. She categorically refuses, and the two have a confrontation (Figures 5). Here again, the Queen is portrayed as an impartial figure, undisturbed by party rivalry and power struggles and siding only with the Constitution and the people.

An interesting dynamic between Crown and Constitution is observed. While the monarch is still bound by the Constitution in the use of her authority, another dimension of this relationship is explored in *Victoria* and *The Crown*. The monarch is shown as the custodian of the Constitution, overseeing proper governance and making sure the Government abides by its principles. When the government fails to uphold constitutional principles, the Crown is there to rectify the situation. The monarch assumes the role of a neutral apolitical umpire, safeguarding the function of the Constitution as a legal instrument at the service of the public good and the people rather than the personal interests of politicians. This effectively counters arguments raised against the monarchy's relevance in a democratic country.

Figure 6: “Coup”, minutes 43:00-45:03.

LM: Why are you doing this? Why would you protect a man like Wilson?
QE: I am protecting the Prime Minister. I am protecting the constitution.
I am protecting democracy.
LM: But if the man at the heart of that democracy threatens to destroy it,
are we supposed to just stand by and do nothing?
QE: Yes. Doing nothing is exactly what we do, and bide our time, and wait
for the people that voted him in to vote him out again, if indeed that is
what they decide to do.

Source: The researcher's transcription of Morgan (2017b).

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to analyze the dominant discourse transmitted by the two TV series *Victoria* and *The Crown*. Amidst the ongoing debate about the legitimacy, desirability, and benefits of the monarchy, *Victoria* and *The Crown* can be seen as giant marketing schemes advertising for the royal brand. Even though nothing indicates the ruling family's direct involvement in the productions, the shows are nonetheless effective publicity stunts that help shape public opinion and justify the Crown's existence by putting forward its most solid selling points. The Crown is presented as a valuable asset for the nation and is showcased among other concepts as a spiritual and religious token, a source of emotional support, and an incorruptible overseer of democracy and justice. The Crown—the series suggest—permeates all aspects of life, from the spiritual to the political, passing through the social and the emotional. In the context of the controversies surrounding the Crown's legitimacy and relevance, it is hard to perceive *Victoria* and *The Crown* as innocuous entertainment, especially when we consider their huge popularity and critical success. Through their representations of the monarchs, the shows project a polished image of the Crown that may or may not, depending on their worldview, gain the viewers' consent and approval, but is more than likely to help tip the balance in favour of the Crown.

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