DISMANTLING THE MONARCHY. THE BRITISH MONARCHY BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN SUE TOWNSEND'S *THE QUEEN AND I*

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Abstract: The British society is witnessing hot debates on a troubling question: should the monarchy continue to rule or should there be an end to the monarchy? Republicans claim that the monarchy is expensive, dysfunctional, traditionalist and does not represent modern Britain. Sue Townsend's (1946 –) fiction subtly blends humour with social satire and criticism of the Royal Family. This paper explores the ways in which Townsend, in "The Queen and I" (1992), satirizes the British monarchy's traditionalism at various levels, its destabilized status, its failure to respond to the demands of modernity, as well as the great distance – political, social, economic, even emotional – that has taken shape between the monarchy and its subjects. The paper discusses two of these aspects, namely the political and social demotion of the British monarchy.

Keywords: Sue Townsend, British monarchists vs. republicans, satire, abolition of the monarchy

1. Introduction

At the turn of the nineteenth century, British identity was based on six fundamental pillars among which the British institutions occupied a central role. Britain was the founder of democracy and had "the mother of all Parliaments" (Lever 2001: 40). The monarchy was much revered because it held Britain together and gave the nation a strong sense of its identity.

It is well known that the monarchy is the oldest institution in Britain and functions like the symbol of British identity, echoing ideas of stability, continuity, tradition, duty, dignity, order, responsibility, diligence, loyalty, or morality. Since 1215[1], the monarchy has gradually been deprived of much of its political power, but it has preserved some of its original spiritual and magical influence, embodying the hopes and beliefs of the British people. The monarchy's greatest strength is founded on its maturity and pride in the nation's past achievements. Therefore, the glory of the past is often associated with the monarchy.

According to political historian Peter Hennessy, the monarchy is central to the British political system, even if it is a system of government which has not fundamentally changed since the medieval period.[2] A 2011 Guardian/ICM Poll shows that the monarchy is still regarded as a unifying factor by 47% of respondents, while 36% believe the monarchy divides

[1] Throughout the centuries, the tendency to restrict the monarch's power has been paralleled by the rise of Parliamentary influence. One very early step in the process of limiting the monarch's power occurred in 1215 when King John (1199 – 1216) was forced by his leading subjects to agree to the terms set out in the Magna C(h)arta, which established some of their basic freedoms, as shown in Dargie, Richard. *A History of Britain. The Key Events That Have Shaped Britain from Neolithic Times to the 21st Century*, Arcturus Publishing Ltd., London, 2007, p. 73.

[2] *The Power and the Glory of the British Monarchy*. Documentary, 1992, available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzXUP783zuE, accessed July 26, 2012.

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the country and upholds the class system.[3] The same poll shows that public loyalty and attachment to the monarchy is still strong, with 67% of interviewees claiming that the monarchy is still significant to national life, makes Britain respected internationally, and seems to be better than any other political substitute.[4]

The monarchy is often regarded as a symbol of British identity and the personification of the state itself. Hence, supporters of the monarchy insist on its popularity, adaptability, and modernisation although the institution is a strong preserver of traditional values. One of its main strengths lies in the fact that it still preserves the aura of detachment and mystery, even though media exposure has diminished this quality. The British monarchy is a defender of the unwritten constitution, a guarantor of stability and continuity in times of tumultuous changes, a stimulator of national consolidation and a promoter of British interests abroad. Moreover, the monarchy is above politics because it is politically neutral and free from political manipulation and partisanship.

Nevertheless, public debates have heated up the British, dividing the society into two groups: the monarchists and the republicans or anti-monarchists. The roots of this debate lie, among other things, in the financial problems and political tensions following the two World Wars and the growing economic difficulties faced by the British population. Decolonization, devolution and regionalization, as well as EU integration also created a climate of ideological change. The supporters of the monarchy, generally conservative, maintain that the monarchy has proved to be popular, adaptable and open to modernization trends. They insist that a non-elected head of state is above politics and represents everyone in a way an elected President could never succeed. Even more, the monarchy is an organic concept which reinforces the bonds of a common culture and the relationship of the individuals to the state far more efficiently than the temporary authority and standing of elected politicians can.[5]

Opinions on the apparent unfitness of the monarchy nowadays have fuelled public calls on the destitution of the monarchy and its replacement with a republican system of government. According to polling data from Ipsos Mori, support for a republic was 18% in 2012, so republican commitment is still weak. Critics of the monarchy claim that it lacks adaptability, is out-fashioned, undemocratic, costly, linked with aristocratic advantage or that it echoes an English rather than British identity. The hereditary system is also outdated and goes against modern practices which insist on the value of personal merit and opportunity. Similarly, its distance and isolation from ordinary life maintain class divisions and hierarchies within society. Its roles are merely ceremonial and, therefore, impractical and ineffective. Anti-monarchists also argue that there are no national traditional values to uphold especially now that the country is so fond of seeing itself as a modern political democracy. Its lack of adaptation to modern times is also proved by Lady Diana's treatment by the Royal family. To this extent, the latest crisis suffered by the Windsor family is seen as a crisis of identity as a result of the clash between tradition and modernism. In newspapers, the Royals are often said to represent fossilisation and decay and the anachronism of the British monarchy is often satirised (Blain & O'Donnell 2001: 87). The monarchy is often criticized for lacking contact

[3] http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/apr/24/monarchy-still-relevant-say-britons, accessed July 30, 2013.
[4] *Ibidem*.
[5] Golby, J.M.; Purdue, A.W. *The Monarchy and the British People. 1760 to the Present*, B.T. Batsford Ltd., London, 1988, p. 133.

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with reality, its changes or the concerns of the population. As a result, anti-monarchists call for change, which shows that a form of conflict between the old and the new, or between tradition and modernity seems to exist. This is because "continuity presupposes consensus while change typically results from conflict" (Halsey 1981: 10).

In 1987, Republicans formed an organization campaigning for a republic in the United Kingdom. Republic calls itself "a democratic alternative to the monarchy" and urges for a new constitution, one that allows ordinary people to have access to power. Republicans believe that people have the right to elect their head of state, a leader who should possess and exert real power. In 2012, during the Diamond Jubilee celebration events, the Republicans protested by staging a demonstration. The protesters waved placards and banners saying "citizen not subject", "power to the people" and "democracy not monarchy".[6] Though called by many "festivals of patriotism"[7], jubilees are also seen as nothing but a celebration of inherited power and privilege, and so they are said to have no place in a modern democracy.[8]

English writer Sue Townsend (1946 –) is best known for the comic Adrian Mole series, but she also ingeniously combines humour with social and political satire in other novels, with particular focus on criticism of the royal family or some British Parliament members, as in *The Queen and I* (1992)[9], *Number Ten* (2002), or *Queen Camilla* (2006). Funny but also biting, *The Queen and I* can be considered subversive literature because it seeks to undermine the power and authority of the monarchy, Britain's most celebrated institution. All the arguments of the republicans or anti-monarchists mentioned above are also present in Townsend's fictional satire, with topics ranging from politics, socio-economic aspects and related matters such as social class and status, poverty, bureaucracy, the medical system, legal aspects and youth crime, education and language, with emphasis on the several types of dysfunctions or anomalies at various levels of English society. All these aspects are interrelated because, as Townsend shows, the effects of economic and political forces on ideology and culture are inevitable and customary. It is money, or rather the lack of it, that influences all areas of human life, and the author artfully depicts the ways in which financial insufficiency degrades human life, relations, and ideals. Additionally, Townsend also reveals that politics plays a significant role in the formation and evolution of culture. A question of power, politics is also related to the distribution of privileges and benefits, so Townsend calls attention to the inequality of this distribution and the dramatic effects of political action.

In her novel, Townsend also imagines the effects of the demotion of monarchy from the condition of royalty or sovereignty to that of ordinariness. The novel depicts the degradation of the status of the royal family following the general election of 1992, when a republican party wins the election and the Windsor monarch, Queen Elizabeth II (1952 –) is removed from power, dispossessed of titles, privileges and wealth, and obliged to live, together with her family, on a housing estate among the working classes. They are given lists

[6] http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2012/jun/03/republicans-stage-protest-queens-diamond-jubilee, accessed June 16, 2013.

[7] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/10093611/British-identity-is-waning-in-England.html, accessed August 3, 2013.

[8] According to *Republic Magazine*, Issue 3, 2011, available at http://www.slideshare.net/RepublicCampaign/republic-magazine-s2011-issue-3, accessed June16, 2013.

[9] All quotations given in this article are taken from the 2012 edition: Townsend, Sue. *The Queen and I*, With a Foreword by Jo Brand, Penguin Books, London, 2012.

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of things they are allowed to take with them, and they will live on the same street of a poor neighbourhood, Hellebore Close, or Hell Close, as the dwellers call it, which really turns into hell for some members of the royal family. The royals come to experience the troubles specific to low status, including poverty, humiliation, illness, burglary, cheating, misery, and even hunger. However, in their itinerary from royalty to ordinariness, some members of the royal family seem to discover their true selves, adapting to the new condition, finding strength to adjust to the new state of affairs and even rising above the misery of their circumstances.

In her novel, the author intersperses many of the arguments commonly used by the British anti-monarchists. As the paper shows, these arguments can be grouped into distinct types of criticism of the royal family and the monarchical system of government, including political issues or social matters.

2. Political promises and social tensions

2.1 From monarchy to republic

In her novel, Townsend subtly introduces major concerns of a part of the British population regarding the possibility of replacing the monarchy with a republican system of government. The author goes back in time and uses a real event as a pretext for the fictional dismantling of the British monarchy. It was election night, Thursday 9 April 1992 when Queen Elizabeth II's worst nightmare came true. In her dream, elections were won by Republicans led by Jack Barker, thus defeating the other two powerful party leaders, John Major, Conservative, and Neil Kinnock, Labour, both supporters of the monarchy. In reality, elections were won by Conservatives, with 42.3% of the votes.[10] Another personality from British politics is also mentioned, echoing the Queen's dislike for Margaret Thatcher, for instance, whose "mad eyes and strangulated voice has quite unnerved the Queen at their regular Tuesday afternoon meetings" (p. 4).

The hypothetical situation imagined by the Queen suggests that the royals are aware of the anti-monarchist movement that has existed in Britain for a while, wondering "if the day would ever dawn when a victorious Prime Minister did *not* support the monarchy" (p. 4; author's emphasis). However, in the novel, a large section of the population, especially the middle-aged and the young people voted for the Republican Party, which proves that the younger generation is asking for a change. Most people are tired with having a monarch as their leader, and even the royal staff is happy with the removal of the monarchy. When the Royals take their public leave from the people, they observe the immense crowd in front of Buckingham Palace, hooting and roaring, and it even seemed that the entire "citizenry of Great Britain" (p. 9) surrounded the palace.

The author suggests that the abolition of the monarchy is an imperative wish of the British population since Jack Barker takes it as his first duty to go directly to Buckingham Palace "and order the Queen to abdicate" (p. 7). However, this coup had been carefully planned before, with the assistance of the media, newspapers and TV broadcasts encouraging the people to "vote republican – end the monarchy" (p. 8). Anti-monarchist marches had been organised – just as it happened in reality during the Diamond Jubilee in 2012 – and people

[10] http://www.ukpolitical.info/1992.htm, accessed August 4, 2013.

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had shown placards reading "God damn you ma'am", which is misinterpreted by the Queen Mother as "God bless you madam" (p. 8).

The fictional representation of the republican government rests on the critical evaluation of every political action of the monarchy. We have mentioned above that the republicans encourage granting "power to the people" together with enabling better social conditions. Consequently, the most important promise of the republicans is a social one, that of eradicating poverty with the assistance of the population itself since "under the People's Republican Party's rule, nobody in Britain will starve" (p. 6). What Barker imagines is a form of collective leadership permitting all the British people to be "their own figure-head" (p. 12). Jack Barker believes he is the representative of the whole section of the population who lived rough and so it is his turn now to take revenge for the time of "poverty and humiliation" (p. 12) he lived back in his childhood.

In fact, the new parliamentary leader takes on power for himself and starts his new job by discrediting the royals and the institution of monarchy as such. The symbol of monarchy, the Imperial State Crown is simply thrown out from the balcony of the palace into the courtyard below, causing the former Queen's staff to jumble for the scattered gems. The status of the Queen is demystified – now that the people see her, she looks so small when in fact they thought of her as being so grand – just as the symbol of royalty is trivialized. On the other hand, the Queen, as former "head of state" still has a great impact on ordinary people, although they think of leadership in material terms (the head on the envelope, on the coins etc.); for them, the Queen is a figure that exudes political power, without consciously thinking of her in terms of national values.

Another concern of the republicans is the necessity of instituting social equality among people. In his first address to the people, Barker focuses on the terminological and ideological shift from the state of being a "subject" to that of "citizen", which is accompanied by the removal of the class system which has caused so much social disparity. He suggests that the existence of a hierarchical system belittled individuals, poisoned the society on the whole and hampered progress. Barker equates monarchical rule with tyranny and subjugation and takes it as his duty to liberate people from social constraints and inequality.

A taboo topic of much anxiety for most British people is the question of separatism, regionalism and independence associated to the four regions of the kingdom. In the twentieth century, the notion of Britishness as a political and identity construct was gradually affected by four major phenomena: the loss of the Empire, immigration, regionalism and EU accession. However, 'Britishness' and 'Englishness' appear to have been synonymous for most of the twentieth century, when in fact there are so many things which make them different (Bassnett 2001: 20-21). Oakland (2011: 56) shows that historical developments regarding Britain's people have shaped a multinational, multicultural, and multi-ethnic British society. Hence, the term 'Britishness' itself, used to refer to the people of the UK, seems to be open to doubt and debate. After 1707, Britishness was generally associated with centralized state institutions, such as the monarchy, Parliament, the law, and Protestant churches. After 1801, it was also dependent on the Empire, as well as on Britain's industrial and military power in the world. Over time, the meaning and importance of the concept weakened when the meaning attached to these elements declined.

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Both immigration and the growing nationalistic trends have altered the notion of Britishness. As the Scots, Welsh and Irish have become more empowered, more certain of their own identity, definitions of Britishness have become more problematic, particularly since earlier myths of Englishness were premised on the idea of racial purity invented in the late nineteenth century. If Britishness can be defined as the sum-total of traits, beliefs and values which build up national character, then the existence of the current multicultural, multiethnic and multinational identities denies such a set of distinctive regularities common to all British people. Both immigration and internal dissentions caused by the sense of separateness in Scotland, Ireland, or Wales have contributed to the proposal of other terms for defining ethnic identity on the island. It no longer seems wrong to speak of Irishness, Scottishness, or Welshness, with Englishness as a separate strand. This has led to the disintegration or fragmentation of the Britishness concept, which now entails the coexistence of different cultural genomes or mindsets.[11] In 2012, the "twin festivals of patriotism", London Olympics and the Diamond Jubilee, did not succeed in boosting feelings of Britishness among the English, as shown in a survey run by the Institute for Public Policy Research and Cardiff and Edinburgh Universities. Despite the fact that these events brought a large number of British people together, Englishness is still regarded as the primary source of identity for the English people.[12]

Townsend suggests that the Queen herself is very much aware of the existing regionalizing and nationalistic trends and of the public reluctance to adhere to a common notion of Britishness, an attitude which is perhaps redolent of the conflicts which sometimes occur in Britain's different regions, so she "was careful, even in thought, to distinguish the English from the Scots, Irish and Welsh who, owing to their Celtic blood, were inclined to be rather hot-headed at times" (p. 30).

Economic hardship has affected and still affects the UK, too. The famous recession of 1991- 1992 in the UK was caused by high interest rates, falling house prices and the pound sterling's weakness. Chancellor Norman Lamont officially announced that Britain was in recession as business was rough. The reduction of inflation received top priority but many English people declared they lived one of the toughest years from a financial viewpoint.[13] Manufacturing was also down, and in 2012 numerous other sectors of the economy were still problematic, such as construction, banking, trade, or housing.[14] Townsend explicitly refers to the economic recession and the novel reflects many of these problems. Newspapers wrote that "Britain faced its gravest crisis since the dark days of the War" (p. 222). On assuming official duties, Barker is familiar with Britain's financial hardships and the narrator somehow suggests that the economic environment and its inherent troubles are often unpredictable and

[11] This might explain why social anthropologist Kate Fox (in *Watching the English*. *The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2004) no longer uses the term Britishness and studies only the defining characteristics of Englishness. Fox identifies ten defining features, with social dis-ease as the central core, which represents lack of ease, discomfort and incompetence in the field of social interaction. Other features refer to fair play, courtesy, modesty, humour, moderation, hypocrisy, empiricism, class-consciousness, some of which are mocked by Townsend, as well. Also see Wellings, Ben. Rump Britain: Englishness and Britishness, 1992 – 2001, in *National Identities*, 9(4)/2007, pp. 395-412.

[12] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/10093611/British-identity-is-waning-in-England.html, accessed August 10, 2013.

[13] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/7686531.stm, accessed August 13, 2013.

[14] http://www.theguardian.com/business/2012/dec/07/uk-economy-problem-sectors, accessed August 13, 2013.

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difficult to solve, no matter who the leader is, while the citizens' patience when it comes to poverty is always limited in time: "He was now responsible for their food, their education, their drains – and finding the money to pay for it all. Could he do it? Was he up to it? How long would they give him to prove himself?" (p. 9). In Hell Close, the home of the underclass, as well as all over London, job shortage and the general downturn in the economy contributed to the bankruptcy of many shops.

Even though the republicans openly proclaim equal access to power for all people, Barker takes full control of the political situation and finds great pleasure in ordering and being in charge. The text develops the conceptual metaphor 'man is animal' to refer to the world of politics, with politicians seen as the monarch's pets. However, they are only apparently meek and subservient, because when the occasion seems favourable for their political advancement or when they do not agree to their superior's decisions they are ready to bare their teeth malevolently and even bite the opponent, a metaphorical suggestion of their desire to seize power. Harris' attitude[15] after the death of the pack leader, King, is similar to Barker's position after the Queen is removed from the throne. Both start destroying everything on their way, demolishing what others had painstakingly constructed, based on the famous proposition "the King is dead. Long live the King" (p. 153). Harris destroys Prince Charles' garden, thus symbolically ruining the heir to the throne's chances of becoming King. Barker, in an access of populism, knocks down the gates and fence surrounding the Prime Minister's residence, thus metaphorically inviting the population to take hold of power, as well. This act offsets the common criticism of monarchy, according to which the government is inaccessible to common people and that policy is only the privilege of a few people, so Barker promises a "more open government" (p. 160).

However, facing the bitter life of a commoner, even the Queen herself comes to acknowledge that even her enemy's policies are better than hers. Confronting the harsh reality of low life for the first time, she admits that there are many changes that need to be made in the medical system, the educational system, the law, social security, employment and housing, or taxation. She does not stubbornly cling to the past, on the contrary, she has strong hopes for the future, wishing that "Jack's expensive-sounding plans for Britain would come to fruition" (p. 160). Still, she is aware that the major difficulty politics comes up against when desiring to make these plans come true lies in having the necessary money.[16]

Nevertheless, the new Prime Minister manages to implement some of his political decisions which benefit many aspects of social life. Many Hell Close residents praise Barker's beneficent initiatives, and even some of the royals congratulate the Prime Minister for his projects. The neighbourhood's school finally gets a new roof, the shabby houses will be renovated, some people start receiving their unemployment benefits on time, others get a new job, and Prince Charles is ecstatic about the new tree-planting scheme (pp. 235-36).

Observing these changes, the Queen no longer wants to resume her official duties as Queen, probably because she agrees with Violet Toby's sad comment that, unfortunately, politics does not affect, that is improve, common people's lives. The Queen herself realizes

[15] The Queen's dog from the novel.

[16] Another issue raised by the republicans is the cost of maintaining the monarchy, which is still estimated to be the most expensive monarchy in Europe. As public calls intensified, the Queen started to pay income tax and capital gains tax in 1992.

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that politics was ineffectual and that the distance between the world of political action and real life has become immense. Moreover, considering that the economy presents a grim prospect, the Queen is reluctant to be reinstated on the throne, because the political world would have to take all the blame for the citizens' economic adversity. Politics and the economy do seem to be mutually dependent. It is the financial crisis that makes Barker ask for a loan of 12,000 billion yen from the Japanese, thus forging an unwanted alliance between Britain and Japan. Barker's commitment to open government is now seen as a scam since the population is not even informed on the terms of the collateral loan.

Financial scarcity has had dramatic effects on Britain's political independence. After World War II, Japan's economic miracle has been much eulogized. The post-war Japanese economic growth became an example for many countries, and many factors contributed to it, including political stability, competition and entrepreneurship, surplus funds for investment, a surplus of well-educated workers, trade union structure, the shift from dependent industries to less dependent industries, or state-assisted capitalism.[17] Britain itself looked back nostalgically to those times when it was one of the most powerful nations in the world. Back in the Victorian era, British imperial rule embraced a quarter of the world's population, thus shaping the famous British narrative of imperial greatness (Bassnett 2001: 16). The gradual loss of the Empire in the twentieth century affected Britain's power in world economy and politics. Townsend satirically shows how Britain is transformed, under the strain of economic recession, from a colonizing superpower into a colony, a small annexed state which becomes "just another Japanese offshore island" (p. 264). Sold to Japan, Britain is mortgaged to the Bank of Japan, even though Barker slyly claims that this "Treaty of Friendship with Japan" will only "put Britain back on the road to greatness" (p. 262). It seems that the wheel of fortune has turned, and it is the flag of Japan now that is being hoisted in Britain. The transfer of monarchical power to Japan is supported by betrayal, which seems to be yet another common practice in politics. Both Prince Andrew and Harris, the Queen's dog, join Emperor Akihito's family, though reluctantly, because the text suggests that the British royals are certainly accustomed to be exclusively in control of power. However, the worst possible scenario has come true and royal power is transferred to the Japanese monarchy.

2. 2 The Restoration of monarchy

A public movement supporting the monarchy's restoration on the throne is born, led by Eric Tremaine and his wife, two loyal subjects from Northamptonshire. B.O.M.B.[18] leaders campaign for the restoration of monarchy, zealously believing in the right of monarchs to rule, even though "pigs like Barker will not accept that some of us are born to rule and others need to be ruled, and ordered about for their own good" (p. 173). The inefficiency of their efforts is suggested both by the Queen's attitude, because she openly advises Tremaine to stop this action, and the feeble effect of their demonstrations since "nobody appeared to take any notice of them, apart from a few impatient motorists" (p. 198). Tremaine uses violence to attain his goal and is imprisoned, finally proving that fanatic acts could not have a positive result.

[17] http://spice.stanford.edu/docs/122, accessed August 8, 2013.
[18] The short form of "Bring Our Monarch Back" (p. 172).

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B.O.M.B. pro-monarchist protests do not succeed in bringing the monarchy back on the throne. The Queen's nightmare ends when political changes take a dramatic turn and Britain becomes Japan's colony with Jack Barker as Governor General. Fortunately, when she awakes, the Queen is happy to hear that the Conservatives won the election.

3. Demoting the monarchy. From royalty to ordinariness

The plot develops on the central subject of dismantling and 'ordinarizing' the monarchy. Transformed into ordinary citizens of the state (p. 5), in fact included in the lower orders since they live on social benefits, the former Queen and her husband live in a pensioner's bungalow, without the assistance of dressers, cooks, secretaries, cleaners, or chauffeurs. Finally, it seems that the wish of the population related to social equality has come true. The social imbalance with the royals at the top of the hierarchy is destroyed by Barker who wishes to make wealth evenly accessible to all. In the republicans' view, class fear and inequality have impeded progress (p. 12). Quite dramatically, the Royal Family is thrown at the most miserable margins of society, on a council estate where most people are unemployed and live on social assistance.

In her new status, the Queen makes painful contact with urban poverty and the "dreadful lives" (p. 17) of poor people. From a visitor she becomes a resident of a place she knew nothing about. It was only from documentaries that she heard about such people and their lives, and these programmes remained mere "sociological curiosities" (p. 17) that could not truly exist in her Kingdom. The daily living of the underclass is shocking at first: poverty, unsafe living conditions, violence, disorder, dirt, youth crime, idleness, roughness of manners and speech, and lack of jobs. Formerly, the royals seemed to have lived in a crystal globe, as though "covered in glass" (p. 63), unaware of the world outside, a fact which is much criticized by the republicans. Their disconnectedness from the real life of common people is of much concern for the British population.

Unlike other members of her family, the Queen strives hard to adapt to her new situation. If for some social workers the resonance of royalty is still present with the Windsors, social assistant Trish McPherson readily accepts the role of helping the royal couple deal with their "trauma" (p. 38). She destabilizes the position of the royals even more and treats them pitifully as "two displaced pensioners who will need a great deal of support" (p. 38). She quickly strips the remains of rank and the mystical aura surrounding the royals. In effect, their demotion coincides with their transformation from an icon, a symbol and an idealized image of Britishness into human beings, and McPherson is perhaps the only one who really understands the human necessities of the couple in their current situation: "they may be royal, but they are *human*" (p. 38; my emphasis).

Another complaint of anti-monarchists is related to the fact that the royals do not work, they are unable to perform basic jobs and thus they are unproductive for the society, or social parasites (p. 159). The Queen – she is still named in this manner all through the novel, probably a suggestion of the fact that her royal status is never fully taken away from her and will be reinstated in the end – gradually discovers the enjoyment of being able to do things on her own. Lacking skill in basic activities like dressing herself, making tea, opening a tin, cooking, or turning on a stove, the Queen has to deal with these apparently insurmountable problems. However, managing to cope with these matters gives her a "terrific sense of

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achievement" (p. 39). Achievement comes from small things now, even though, at first, they are perceived as great troubles because of lack of practice. Having to deal with her own chores, the Queen is amazed that "there is so much to *do*", wondering how ordinary people "manage" (p. 40). Further on, the Queen really insists on doing things, suggesting that she is still in control of the situation and of her family members who avoid doing anything useful for themselves, like her sister, Princess Margaret, or her husband, Prince Phillip. As elsewhere, this shows Townsend's subtle recognition of the Queen's adaptability, her intrepid nature and ready performance of duty, the last aspect being known as a characteristic feature of the Queen.

Satirically, the royals are finally learning how to do things rather than receive them. Banal activities turn into extraordinary situations, and even Prince Charles watches gravely a neighbour's explanation on how to heat a saucepan as if he "were watching a demonstration of a Maori war dance" (p. 56). In their neighbours' eyes, they are so inexperienced just like babies are (p. 57), as if time has vainly passed by.

Only material possessions remind them of their former status. The expensive antiques brought with them in their new home contrasts sharply with their new situation, with the house they live in (in fact many objects do not fit, both literally and figuratively), and with their income. Their old furniture – including a Chippendale desk, a William Gates cabinet made for George V – is ridiculously placed in a small semi-detached house, and many objects are cut or adjusted, suggesting that the royals themselves need to adapt and conform to the new condition.

Being deprived of the royal wealth and income, the royal family experiences the financial difficulties most Hell Close residents endure daily. They even undergo the humiliation of borrowing from their grandchildren's piggy bank. The Queen even runs out of money for electricity, so she is left in the dark, which symbolically refers to the real world, where hardship and danger loom. It is the real world of "imperfect people who wore drab clothes and spoke another language" (p. 78). Pulled out from their bright, flashy, perfect world of royal existence, they are now immersed into the real world with its imperfections. Soon, she runs out of money completely, asking for urgent support from the Department of Social Security, and she is shocked by the bureaucratic system's indifference to financial emergencies. In fact, she comes to understand the falseness of the picture-perfect image she created about many institutions she visited as Queen: hospitals, factories, schools, probation hostels, or homes for the elderly people.

The loss of status brings about degradation and decline at all levels: physical, psychic, financial, or social deterioration. The loss of wealth is immense, and so is the fall for the Queen "who had lost palaces, property, land, jewels, paintings, houses, a yacht, a plane, a train, over a thousand servants and billions of pounds" (pp. 128-29). Now, they literally eat bones (p. 129) because they cannot afford better food. Charles and Diana are also penniless and pay for food in kind, giving away some of their expensive goods like a "silver apostle spoon" (p. 141).

Ordinariness is also linked with degradation of manners. Thus, poverty roughens manners and degrades human character, just as it happens with the Hell Close residents. The Queen herself quickly forgets nice manners and all royal etiquette gradually vanishes. Hunger made her "ravenous. She bit hungrily into the doughnut and jam dripped out and trickled

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down the front of her cashmere coat" (p. 82). Once this happens, she turns into a totally common person and she conforms to her new position and the belittling of her former status. Called "Liz" by a neighbour, she takes "no offence at the over-familiarity" (p. 83). Instead, she thanks her for the napkin, fully aware that her present condition of want does not allow her to care about royal protocol anymore. Hence, she prefers humiliation to starvation.

Metaphorically, the Queen herself transfers her power to the common people. It is a transfer of status and wealth, or merely its abandonment, by means of royal objects. Helping a neighbour in childbirth, the Queen gifts the mother and her child with linen and clothes belonging to the royal family, some with ancestral value. She understands that the legacy of royalty in her own family is now impossible. She collects "linen sheets, towels and pillowcases, a silver kettle, cups and saucers (...), a large fifteenth-century porcelain bowl and baby clothes that had once belonged to her great-grandmother, Queen Victoria. She had brought them with her from Buckingham Palace. She knew that Diana was keen to have a daughter" (p. 99). Even the baby's long name resembles royal names, Leslie Kerry Violet Elizabeth Monk (p. 100). Seeing herself in her simple clothes as opposed to her appearance in full regalia shown in an old photograph, she understands that the time has come for such an exchange: a commoner is invested with special symbols indicative of royalty, whereas she steps down from her royal office, leaving ancestry and royal identity behind, and steps in the world of commonness.

As a result, being the (ex-)Queen herself is no longer profitable, but the fact that she resembles a famous actress who looks like the Queen could help her make a fortune. A homeless man makes fun of her "classy accent" (p. 119) and comments that she should profit from her resemblance to actress Jeanette Charles (1927 –). On the other hand, in her present condition, the Queen embodies a degraded image of royalty, whereas he, a poor untidy man, boasts with his similarity with Prince Phillip (p. 119). Once again, we witness a symbolical transfer of power.

The ex-royals feel attracted to commoners or ordinariness. For example, Prince Charles falls in love with Beverly Threadgold, a poor neighbour, and Princess Anne has an affair with Spiggy, the carpet fitter, as an act of rebellion against, and liberation from, the constraints imposed by their former status (Charles) or against the pressure exercised by the media on their private affairs (Anne). They feel that these common people have easier access to their humanity and private selves, and Princess Anne feels liberated when talking to "somebody who had no preconceptions about her" (p. 147). Additionally, in prison, Prince Charles really wants to be treated as if he were a commoner. Although he does not receive any special treatment, he asks the prison officers to treat him harshly, just as they treat the other prisoners. He believes that people should be treated equally and if the others are to be treated contemptuously, then he must receive identical treatment. Somehow, his exaggerated claim seems to wash away or compensate for the privileged treatment the royals often receive.

All through the novel, most ex-royals gradually leave behind aspects which remind them of, or connect them to, their former circumstances. This acceptance of their present life helps them survive and adapt. The Queen best understands the insignificant position they occupy in people's lives in the present and she realizes this is only natural, given their hard living conditions. She does not want to get stuck in the glorious past and is aware that adaptation also involves leaving behind status, privileges, wealth, even memories. In the local

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newspaper, the news of the Queen Mother's death is given an insignificant place. The Queen does not even want to keep the news item because she understands the uselessness of holding on to the past. Additionally, financial shortage leads to the total removal of royal protocol and ceremonial for great events like childbirth or funerals. Royal heritage and tradition are annulled or left behind when facing the misery of the present. The Queen Mother is carried to her grave in a gypsy cart because they do not afford a proper funeral service, not to mention a royal-like one.

The removal of the Queen from her position also poses a problem of identity. Being divested of her professional role, the Queen must struggle with the crisis of identity and belonging which results from the effort of adaptation to commonness. From a social point of view, she is nothing but an ordinary citizen who wrestles with poverty. A state of confusion and displacement inevitably emerges as "it was terribly difficult to work out where she belonged any more – except as a number between thirty-eight and forty" (p. 120) on DSS lists. She goes through a process of depersonalization and feels deprived of her sense of personal identity. However, she struggles to fit in the new condition in a dignified way and after the death of her mother, the Queen mother, she "felt strangely invigorated, almost released" (p. 235). Once the last tie with the past is broken, she feels liberated from her "old self", her old identity which denied the free expression of affection and even the experiencing of emotional states altogether. Her former status emphasized her social identity at the expense of the free manifestation of her private self. Instead, her new self is no longer cold, distant, formal, controlled excessively, even unfriendly and aloof. She can finally give way to emotion and affection and behave in an informal way which relaxes the spirit. Getting dressed for the funeral, she comments: "How like my old self I look, she thought. Since moving into Hell Close she had lived in comfortable skirts and sweaters. She now felt stiff and over-formal in her funeral outfit" (p. 230).

Somehow, by the end of the novel the Queen totally gives in to ordinariness. The ultimate stage in her 'ordinarization' occurs when she acknowledges that her substitute's policies are, in fact, beneficial for the citizens. The title of the novel suggests that the inclusion of the ex-monarch in the community of the commoners becomes complete. When she runs out of money to support her family, the reduction of the bus fare is a miraculous gift for the Queen. Her neighbour Violet Toby feels that the Queen is now one of theirs (p. 156).

4. Conclusions

Public debates on the anti-modern character of the present-day monarchy in Britain have also been represented in literature. The fictional dismantling of the British monarchy imagined by Sue Townsend is both comical and satirical. The text is a good-humoured satire which gives the author the opportunity to expose social and political criticism under the guise of comedy. Voicing many of the contemporary objections of anti-monarchists or republicans to constitutional monarchical rule, the novel portrays the many social and political ills that exist in England and which are also associated with the monarchy's ineffectual leadership. On the other hand, the novel also discloses the humanity of the royals and shows that, in fact, they are just like everyone else. The Queen and some other members of the royal family undergo a process of demotion from royalty to ordinariness and eventually manage to adapt to the new demotic circumstances. At the same time, this adaptation also facilitates the discovery

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of the private self, one which longs for freedom, affection, and ordinariness. However, the end of the novel rehabilitates the position of the royals by revealing that the demolition of the institution of monarchy was only an imaginary construct, a terrible dream. Hence, though it signals that the monarchy may be less popular than in the past, Townsend's work also evinces that the end of the institution as such may still be far off.

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