

Meghan and Harry v 'The Institution': another royal fairytale turned Grimm

No one really cares about the HRHs doing their dull ribbon-cutting duties. It's the drama, and the villains, that we're after

Marina Hyde, The Guardian, March 9, 2021

Well now: a “21st-century monarchy”. As an oxymoron to run a mile from, it's up there with “fourth-century brain surgery”. Trying to clean up after the Meghan and Harry interview feels like asking a series of decapitated mafia soldiers if they can produce an email trail showing they raised their issues with their manager.

The institution headed by the Queen, 94, is accused of racism. A lot of people will have dealt with racist family members, of course – but concerns about bloodline mean so much more coming from any royal house founded on intermarriage. Indeed it feels a little late for the royals to be taking an interest in genetics. A child being a quarter African American is somewhat less of a talking point than one side of that child's family having repeatedly bred with its cousins for half the 19th and 20th centuries.

The more Harry and Meghan used the word “the institution” in their Oprah interview, the more it sounded like somewhere known locally as “The Institution”. As in, a nightmarish place, with staff instructed not to speak about what happens there.

Moneywise, I'm sure it's unfortunate being “cut off financially” in your mid-30s, forcing you to leave a taxpayer-funded house to purchase a \$14.5m Californian mansion. But even more so when Buckingham Palace advertises jobs at below the living wage, given a lot of the duties sound like something you would perform if you were being held without your passport in exchange for “room and board” in a shed.

But we know all this. Perhaps the last truth some dare not speak about royal dysfunction is their own addiction to it. For all the outrage yesterday, there was a sense of high excitement, as people condemned/supported the latest bombshells thrice hourly on social media. I was reminded of the woman I met the day before Meghan and Harry's wedding. “It's terrible what they've done to her,” she fumed to me of the tabloids, three of which she had bought and was working her outraged way through.

Contrary to the pompous way in which it is often discussed, people loved the abdication crisis. The whole drama gave them quite the lift in otherwise depressing times. To quote Evelyn Waugh's diaries: “The Simpson crisis* has been a great delight to everyone. At the nursing home they report a pronounced turn for the better in all adult patients. There can seldom have been an event that has caused so much general delight and so little pain.”

People say they want dutiful ribbon-cutters who speak in platitudes, and only biannually. They say they want 1,500 words of painfully uneventful bollocks about William and Kate boarding an easyJet flight. But what they really want is high drama, pure mess, grotesque villains and a side to take.

They've certainly got one now. Early polling suggests sympathy for the Palace and the Sussexes is split deeply on generational lines – which is a problem if you're in charge of something that has to get handed down the generations. It is increasingly clear that the Queen has constructed a monarchy which only works with her specific, unreplicable personage at the helm.

*Wallis Simpson's relationship with Prince Edward scandalised society in the 1930s. She was an American woman who was divorced, just like Meghan Markle.