



## Acts of Kindness

### Connections

Recently an email pinged into my inbox. It came from a former student (whom I shall refer to as A.) who is at university now. The recent death of Queen Elizabeth II prompted her to write to me. She was a student in my 2020 year 12 English as an Additional Language class. The link between the death of the Queen and emailing me, was the strong memory she had of studying the Peter Frears film text, *The Queen* in class with me that year.

The events of the film take place in 1997 in the week immediately following the death of Diana, the former Princess of Wales, in a horrific car accident and focus, in particular, on the reaction – or public non-reaction – of the Queen to the news of Diana’s death. The subject matter, the times, the protagonists, were scarcely known by my international students, including the traditions which still inform the British Monarchy to this day, as is only too evident by the current media saturation.

A. based her creative response to the text on the scene in the film in which Queen Elizabeth II is silently grieving, with her face away from camera, while sitting on a stone beside the River Dee in the Scottish Highlands. Her attention is caught by the sound of a great stag; she turns, face wet from her tears and locks eyes with him. Her fixed stare and comment, “Oh you are a beauty” demonstrate the human and animal connecting at some deep level. Upon hearing the hunters’ approach, she claps her hands to shoo the stag away and to save him from certain death.

A. took that scene and, in her response, imaginatively became Queen Elizabeth II. She wrote a monologue in which the conflicted feelings she imagined the Queen having, regarding what the public expected of her, her duty to the Crown, and her suppressed grief for the tragic loss of Diana, were poured onto the page. The Queen had been vilified in the press and faced extraordinary pressure the ‘do something’ and ‘do it now’. The student infused her writing with empathic emotion, producing some of her most fluent English.

For a time, this film text connected all of us in that class due to the skilful cinematic exposition of the public and imagined private life of Queen Elizabeth II. Together we were induced to feel empathy and understanding for the obviously demanding position in which the Queen found herself: she must maintain the expected dignity and codes of her regal office, repress her private grief, and find a way to appease the public.

The Queen’s death in reality, occasioned an email from A. in which I, as the teacher who opened the text up to her, was remembered, and invited to connect once again. This kindness is unexpected and humbling.