

## There Were Three of Us in this Biography, So it Was a Bit Crowded: The Biographer as Suitor and the Rhetoric of Romance in Diana: *Her True Story*

Giselle Bastin

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**Abstract:** This paper explores how some of the major tropes of the romance genre have informed the structuring of Diana, Princess of Wales's real-life story in *Diana: Her True Story* (1992). I focus on how the biographer Andrew Morton places himself in the position of 'royal champion' in the narratives both within and surrounding this text, and how his role in the construction of this biography attracted responses of outrage from the British social and media establishment.

**About the Author:** Giselle Bastin is Head of English & Creative Writing at Flinders University in South Australia. Her research interests include biographies of the British Royal Family, narratives of fame and celebrity, and constructions and representations of 'English-ness' in popular fiction and film.

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A photograph of a young Lady Diana Spencer provides another image of English romance. She is shown reading a novel by her step-grandmother, Barbara Cartland, but there is not just one book in the picture; at least five more are strewn around, all Barbara Cartlands. It is as though Diana is involved in dreamy but intensive research into the genre to which Barbara Cartland contributed so amply. Only a few years later Diana was, indeed, involved in a national romance of unprecedented scale, albeit one that

ultimately devolved into the cognate genre of gothic horror. (Featherstone 172)

(please navigate here to view the photo described:  
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*Diana: Her True Story* (henceforth referred to as *HTS*), a royal biography about the Princess of Wales, was written by Andrew Morton in 1991 and released in 1992. The sheer number of copies sold (over two million) testifies to the book's enormous popularity upon its release. Readers were given the opportunity to re-read the text when it was re-released on the princess's death as *Diana: Her True Story, In Her Own Words* (1998). Diana's most recent biographer, Tina Brown, has called *HTS* Diana's most sustained "expression of choreographed rage" (296); it is a book described elsewhere by Jude Davies as a generic hybrid of "romantic novel, testamentary (auto)biography, [and] *bildungsroman*" (93). Davies' general banner of "romantic novel" can be broken down further into a number of categories, and Morton's book read for its intratextual use of some aspects of the romance fiction of Barbara Cartland; for its appropriation of some of the main tropes of genres as diverse as Mills and Boon romantic fiction and popular self-help discourses; and for undertones drawn from English "heroine" novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*. The application of these various genres in the telling of her own story suggests that Diana was well-versed in these narrative styles. The structuring and organization of *HTS* suggests, too, that Andrew Morton is equally adept in applying the dominant tropes from these same popular genres. Further, the familial connection between Cartland and Diana is cited by several biographers as evidence that Diana's story, from the earliest days of her courtship and betrothal to Prince Charles, was shaped and configured along the lines of popular romance. Indeed, many a commentator, including Simon Featherstone (quoted at the start of this discussion), has seen in the familial connection between Cartland and Diana a framework in which to interpret the trajectory of Diana's life.

However, of even greater interest here are the metatextual codes that are employed by scholars and media critics who have commented on the book. These metatextual codes turn out to be one of the most intriguing facets of *HTS*, offering as they do an insight into how discourses of chivalry and courtly love are loosely appropriated by commentators to either celebrate or denounce Andrew Morton's role in the production of the Diana biography. Taken together, the narrative style of, and commentary about, *HTS* suggest that Diana's "story," true or otherwise, can only be interpreted within the frameworks of existing romance narratives. Moreover, such persistent recourse to different romantic narrative streams suggests that the emotional investment in the "romance of the century" was not so much Diana's as the critics' own.

### **"The only books Diana ever read were mine, and they weren't terribly good for her": Diana as Barbara Cartland's Step-Granddaughter**

The future self-titled Queen of Hearts became related to Barbara Cartland, the self-proclaimed Queen of Romance, when her father, the 8<sup>th</sup> Earl Spencer married Cartland's

daughter, Raine, in 1977. While not a fan of her new step-grandmother, Diana quickly became a fan of her not inconsiderable catalogue of novels, novels that Cartland happily supplied to the Spencer household in cartloads. Diana herself remembered Cartland's fiction with a degree of fondness, telling MP Gyles Brandreth, "In those stories was everyone I dreamed of, everything I hoped for" (Brown 22). Julie Burchill charts how "Diana was a figure straight out of one of [Cartland's] books, bringing her virginity triumphant to the marriage bed as a gift of love" (200).

According to Suzanne Lowry, Diana "might have been invented just to prove the point" of Cartland's fiction, which is that virginity will win the prince (124). The critics' equation of Diana with all things connoted "romance" found its origins in the earliest commentary about Diana, which emphasized the need for a royal bride to be a "virgin." Certainly, popular commentary at the time of the royal betrothal that emphasized Diana's virginal status, and analyzed the demand for such status, wittingly or otherwise drew parallels between the royal bride and Barbara Cartland's fiction. As Rosalind Brunt has noted, Cartland became publicly identified in the 1960s and 1970s as "an active propagandist for virginity" (140), producing novel after novel that celebrated the "Happy Ending when the experienced Playboy Prince, the wealthiest and highest-born man in the land, discards the more sophisticated women he has dallied with to marry his teenage virgin bride" (135-6).

Many critics have been uncertain about the empowering effects of romantic fiction on Diana's emotional and intellectual development. Sarah Bradford is one who bewails Diana's immersion in "the world of Barbara Cartland's novels in which strong men woo [...] virgin brides and love triumph[s] over all," seeing this as "perhaps the worst preparation for life in general and her own life in particular that [Diana] could have had" (25). Sally Bedell Smith suggests that Diana's relative immaturity when she was first engaged to Prince Charles led to an "idealized version of marriage that was fed by the fairy-tale romances written by [...] Cartland" (20). Diana Simmonds observes that "[Barbara Cartland's books] have been translated into almost every known language except reasonable English," and remarks that the novelist's family connection to Diana may have become quite possibly "the single biggest drawback to Diana's case for becoming the next Princess of Wales" because of "the access it would inevitably give the Queen of Romance to the Queen of England, something that apparently had the corridors of Buckingham Palace alternatively rocking with mirth and shudders" (130). But it is perhaps Barbara Cartland herself who best summed up what the other biographers were keen to detail, when in 1993 she announced, "The only books [Diana] ever read were mine and they weren't terribly good for her" (Brown 67), adding for good measure her opinion that the royal marriage had foundered because "[Diana] wouldn't do oral sex" (144).

In *The Diana Chronicles*, Tina Brown suggests that Diana's "addiction to romance novels became a diabetes of the soul, leaving her spiritual bloodstream permanently polluted with saccharine.... She clung so tenaciously to her dreams that they became a wilful act of unknowing" (23). Brown identifies in Cartland's plots a type of road map for Diana's own psycho-social development. For example:

In the cad-about-town James Hewitt she saw only the Dashing Cavalry Officer; in the serious and private cardiologist Hasnat Khan, she saw the Heart-throb doctor who would be at her side in Florence Nightingale

missions; in the coked-out playboy Dodi Fayed she saw the liquid-eyed Arab Sheikh who would whisk her away on a magic carpet.... [Diana's step-mother was Raine, formerly Lady Dartmouth, and] ... it is ironic that Raine was the daughter of Barbara Cartland. Fate was giving Diana the inside track on the perversion of her own fairy story. (23)

Like Brown, Featherstone draws a clear link between romance narratives and Diana's life choices: "Her post-divorce emotional career resorted to other narratives drawn from Cartland and Mills and Boon. Army officers, sports stars, charismatic surgeons and playboys constituted the full range of the masculine stereotypes of English romance" (174). Biographer of the Queen, Ben Pimlott, recognizes that representations of Diana's life also draw explicitly on the tenets of romantic fiction, saying of *HTS* in particular that "[It] was a new kind of [royal biography], for a new generation: although its style was that of a romantic novel.... The story was a moral classic about a young woman who had entered the legendary world which millions dreamt about" (553).

Another genre of romance that has been identified as an influence in the structure and content of *HTS* is that of the Harlequin/Mills and Boon style of popular fiction. Jude Davies finds a number of parallels between Diana's story and the Mills and Boon formula (127-34). A brief application of Ann Barr Snitow's well-known analysis of this romance mode to a reading of *HTS* suggests a number of possible parallels between the two. Where Snitow identifies the heroine who must find ways of responding "appropriately to male energy without losing her virginity" (135), for example, Morton's Diana must negotiate Charles's leaping on her at a house party and offering her a lift (read: opportunity for sex) back to London (149); where Snitow's heroine awaits her hero's next move and fills her time working at menial jobs, maintaining a "holding pattern [...] while she awaits love" (137), Diana attends a cordon bleu cookery class and performs a range of menial jobs such as house cleaning for her sister and her sister's friends (Morton 40-43); in addition, she becomes a childcare worker at the Young England Kindergarten (43) and babysitter with "Knightsbridge Nannies" (38). Anne Barr Snitow notes how the Mills and Boon heroine feels awkward on early dates, and wears clothes that are too tight thereby revealing to her hero, in a passive act of self-exposure, her vulnerability (135). This is echoed in Diana's early encounter with the English press which resulted in the now-famous ["see-through" skirt photograph](#) (Morton 51), and her wearing of the strapless black, cleavage-exposing evening gown to an early official function (61). The Mills and Boon heroine, Snitow continues, is surrounded by female friends (Diana's Coleherne Court flatmates (Morton 43)); she is useful in a range of female roles (Diana "good with children" (Morton 42)); and is, above all, free of the taint of sexual experience ("I knew I had to keep myself tidy for what lay ahead" (Morton 44)). A Harlequin/Mills and Boon structure joins, therefore, with the image of Cartland's royal virgin bride to situate Diana as a romance figure. Yet, in order to articulate why it is that, despite an adherence to all the other plot devices identified by Snitow, Diana's narrative has nonetheless been robbed of both a Cartland and Mills and Boon "Happy Ending," Morton has had to superimpose another meta-language onto Diana's story, one drawn from self-help and personal testimony.

From the early chapter headings which chart Diana's descent into self-doubt and misery within the royal household ("My Cries for Help" and "Darling, I'm Going to Disappear") to chapter headings which hint at her passage to selfhood and recovery ("My

Life Has Changed its Course” and “I Did My Best”), Andrew Morton’s application of the language of self-help and testamentary genres is evident in the shaping of the chapters of *HTS*. According to Davies, it is the testamentary mode that holds together the “realist, romantic and mythic registers” of *HTS* (93). Furthermore, Diana’s framing of her personal narrative and Morton’s shaping of her story so that it complies with the generic structures of two of the biggest-selling genres in the world today—the popular romance and the self-help manual—offer critics further evidence that Diana’s “true story” is one that can only be read within the parameters of these popular modes.

## Whatever Love Means

One childhood friend of Diana’s reflected after the princess’s death that “Barbara Cartland’s books didn’t prepare [Diana for married life]” (Bedell Smith 97). Certainly, what they didn’t prepare Diana for was the heartbreak involved in discovering that that her pre-arranged aristocratic alliance with the Prince of Wales was never going to be the bourgeois companionate marriage of her dreams—one where the bride and groom are joined in a consensual marriage of mutual satisfaction and benefit, and the groom, within the Cartland plotline, is “the-always-intended-hero” (Brunt 145). Unfortunately for Diana, her expectations of romantic companionate marriage ran counter to the royal house’s views about feudally-structured aristocratic alliances. In the latter’s view, love, when and if it be required, is best found outside of the traditional marriage arrangement. As an acquaintance of Diana’s *bête noir*, Camilla Parker Bowles and her ex-husband Andrew, has remarked, everyone in the “country set” of Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, where Prince Charles and Camilla did their extra-marital courting, slept with each other rather than outsiders because “It’s safer. And it was considered an honour to have your wife or husband as a king’s paramour.’ Didn’t Andrew Parker Bowles mind [that his wife was the Prince’s mistress]? ‘Mind? No. Loved every second of it. The idea is to keep it in the family. Better Us than Them, you see” (Pearson 3).

Yet, apart from being a case where the princess simply got it wrong or didn’t “get the point,” it could be argued that the tropes of popular romance writing gave Diana the ways and means of contributing to a discourse of royalty perpetuated by the House of Windsor itself; one which had, by and large, been in circulation since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The shift in this period, that saw stories about royal office and ceremonial meaning change to narratives about the modern monarchy’s existence primarily as a family that represents the “national family,” created precisely an environment responsive to Diana’s tale of marital breakdown and domestic woe. In presenting themselves as being “like us, but special,” the Windsors invited readings of their domestic arrangements that allowed for the same interpretations of family and marital breakdown that were occurring elsewhere in the lives of ordinary Britons. In addition, the shift in register from royal subject as public figure to one of private self with bourgeois constraints and yearnings occurred within a discourse community already familiar with the tropes of the modern romance novel, and also, in part, with English “heroine” novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*.

**“Last night I dreamt I went to [Highgrove] again”: *HTS* and the English Novel**

Diana's early mastery of the codes and styles of romantic fiction connect her to a long tradition of English story-telling, one where a raft of female narrators have struggled toward selfhood via the narratives of struggle and redemption through love. According to Simon Featherstone:

[Diana] applied the lessons of her early study of Barbara Cartland's fiction and her later mastery of the semiotics of *Vogue*, *Tatler*, *Hello!* and a newly virulent English tabloid press. [Diana] both constructed herself and was constructed by the narratives and discourses of this popular culture.... The 'crowded' marriage that followed became in multiple retellings a royal *Rebecca*, with its ingénue heroine intimidated by the presence of erotic ghosts and crippled by social naivety. Courtiers "hung on my every word ... only I had none," Diana recalled of an early visit to Balmoral, telling her biographer in true Daphne du Maurier style that on her honeymoon she "dreamt of Camilla the whole time" (174).

Diana's testamentary monologues, and their fashioning along the lines of du Maurier's and Brontë's well-known novels, can be linked to a long British tradition of stories featuring a female character's complicated journey on the road towards love. Alison Light has identified stories such as *Rebecca* and its "precursor" *Jane Eyre* as the literary models "from which the modern product developed" (Lowry 129-30). Certainly, stories about Diana's post-wedding life and her "fight for freedom" from the royal system and the narratives about her transformation and empowerment are, according to Jude Davies, "consonant with the threatened female figures of nineteenth-century novels rather than with feminist iconicity" (107). But just as du Maurier alters her narrator's agency in *Rebecca* by making her an older woman who is looking back, Ancient Mariner-like, "[on] her story of middle-class femininity [where she is] as much the victim as the producer of the [the story's] fictionality" (Light 22), so too does Diana re-visit and re-shape her own romantic saga to take, what Alison Light refers to in reference to *Rebecca*, a form of "imaginary control of the uncontrollable" (22). Unlike *Rebecca's* narrative voice, however, Diana's story is mediated through a range of voices and interventions, from friends and family to professional associates who have watched Diana's story unfold and unravel from the sidelines.

It is to these interventions that I should now like to turn, for in looking at how critics and scholars draw on the tropes of popular romance when critiquing the Morton-Diana collaboration, it becomes clear that it isn't only the princess and her biographer who are dependent on modes of expression drawn from popular romance. What becomes clear from a grouping together of a number of responses to the Morton book is that language of chivalry—adapted and applied loosely by a number of sources—permeates much of the commentary about Morton's involvement.

### **Princess in Distress: Morton as Diana's Champion**

The way that *HTS* was commissioned and executed, and the various responses that the book elicited upon its release, contain interesting references to the motifs of the traditional courtly love saga and to the codes of chivalry recorded in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in France and England. When reading how royal biographers, cultural commentators and members of the media and social establishment react to this book, it is clear that the language of courtly love and the chivalric code unconsciously informs the terminology used to describe the Morton-Diana arrangement. Descriptions of Diana's securing of James Colthurst's and Morton's services are often couched in terms that resemble the feudal relationship that took place between noble women and their chosen knights in the mid-twelfth century. In order to interpret such responses it becomes necessary first of all to examine some definitions of courtly love and the chivalric code.

There never was a medieval Code of Chivalry as such, but many of the tenets of the movement were recorded in texts such as the eleventh-century *Song of Roland* which documents the battles of Charlemagne in the eighth century. After the primary role of serving God, medieval knights had to swear their allegiance to the liege lord and, among other things, protect the weak and defenceless, live by honour, protect the honour of fellow knights, speak the truth at all times, and respect the honour of women. The courtly love system was tied in nature and period to the codes of chivalry and codified the rules of love relationships. It was designed by noble women in the French royal courts of the mid-twelfth century. The women who have been most identified with its conception are Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter, Marie de Champagne, the latter being the one who commissioned a cleric named Andreas Capellanus to write down the codes of this courtly love ritual in a text entitled *De arte honeste amandi* (*The Art of Honest Love*). According to Deborah B. Schwartz, the courtly love relationship was:

modelled on the feudal relationship between a knight and his liege lord. The knight serves his courtly lady (*love service*) with the same obedience and loyalty which he owes to his liege lord. She is in complete control of the love relationship, while he owes her obedience and submission.... The knight's love for the lady *inspires him to do great deeds*, in order to be worthy of her love or to win her favor.... The "courtly love" relationship *typically was not between husband and wife*, not because the poets and the audience were inherently immoral, but because it was an idealized sort of relationship that could not exist within the context of "real life" medieval marriages. In the middle ages, marriages amongst the nobility were typically based on practical and dynastic concerns rather than on love.

Given the relative absence of love within the marriage state and given women's almost complete lack of self-determination in this period, women of the court used the courtly love rituals as a way of expressing their thoughts and desires for others outside of the sanctified union of marriage. This system of expression was a highly codified one and involved such rules as absolute insistence that the "relationship" (which was not expressed sexually—at least in principle) remain unknown to all but the two people involved and their closest intimates; the male "lover" had to remain attentive and discreet, and could love his lady only "from a distance." The lady characteristically had to be both "married"

and “unattainable,” and the man had to remain “the vassal who serves her” (Thompson). According to Eileen Power:

the lover served his lady as humbly as the vassal served his lord. He had to keep her identity secret from the world, concealing it under some fictitious name when he praised her in song. He must ... bear himself with the utmost humility towards her, showing infinite patience in the trials to which her caprices and disdains must (by all the rules) submit him. (16)

The lady’s unattainability was a central conceit within the courtly love code because married people were of equal rank, and as Alexander J. Denomy explains it, “once a woman becomes a man’s equal in marriage” in the courtly love tradition, “she ceases to be his goal” (23).

An early cultural observer of Diana’s social meanings observed that the young princess seemed from early on to attract “opportunities ... for ritual displays of gallantry and protectiveness” (Lowry, 100). Examples of this range from public displays of “gallantry” such as a schoolboy kissing the princess’s hand during an early walkabout in the village of Tetbury before her marriage, to a man’s laying down of a cloak over a puddle during one of the princess’s appearances on her 1985 tour of Italy. Stories abound about the press pack’s early attempts to act as her “protectors”<sup>[1]</sup> a fact that stands in stark contrast to the princess’s last years as “Diana the Hunted” (Spencer).

Jude Davies perpetuates the chivalric imagery when he asserts that Morton self-fashioned himself as Diana’s “rescuer” (109). Other cultural critics, such as Julie Burchill and Beatrix Campbell have argued that Diana needed an interlocutor in order for *HTS* to have been released at all. Julie Burchill describes Andrew Morton as the “familiar who ... helped [Diana] find a voice” (171); Heather Mallick, too, identifies his role as Diana’s defender as an act of “gallantry.” Taken together, such recurrent terminology bears scrutiny for what it reveals about the critics’ own investment in rhetorical codes drawn from courtly love and chivalric romance as they have been interpreted via contemporary evocations of such modes. In order to contextualize these rhetorical codes further, it is useful to examine the ways in which *HTS* was compiled.

*Her True Story*’s mode of production can itself be understood broadly in chivalric terms. The book began life after Diana employed, through her friend Dr. James Colthurst, the services of Andrew Morton, a freelance royal reporter with whom she had become familiar on the usual rounds of royal duties. The process involved Colthurst riding his pushbike to Diana at Kensington Palace—not exactly a white steed, but a humble, earnest expression of his willingness to serve—and his then giving Diana lists of questions to answer that had been prepared by Morton. Colthurst would then take the taped answers back to Morton. The whole process was designed to ensure that Morton and Diana never met directly in the preparation of the book and it was done in utmost secrecy as a way of avoiding the screening and vetting devices of the royal courtiers who control the flow of information from the royal houses. In the first of many references to Morton that engage with the language of romance and chivalry, Tina Brown refers to how Colthurst “sealed his pact” with Morton and agreed to undertake a “mission,” one that would require his complete discretion and weeks of his time (289).



Ben Pimlott contributes to the popular appropriation of medieval romance when he suggests that Morton did not merely undertake disinterested research about the princess but took up “cudgels on her behalf” (553). The insinuation here is that Morton’s relationship with Diana transcends the usual biographer/subject arrangement in that his part in the construction of Diana’s story—and importantly his pledge to cover for her and protect her “honor” by lying about her involvement in the book—recontextualises the biographer as one of the “suitors” in Diana’s life. By granting Diana “total deniability,” or rather, by agreeing to the demand that her involvement remain a secret, Morton’s role in the ensuing royal mêlée allowed him to assume the position of royal champion and protector of the princess’s honor. Morton positions himself in accounts of the story as Diana’s squire (which is interesting given later press denunciations of him as her errant Lancelot); according to his version of events, it is he who will witness the lady’s acts of indiscretion but remain silent about them. Of the “deniability” clause, Morton has said:

[Diana] had total, utter deniability, so that I would take the flak for it. It would be my responsibility. Some of her friends would bear the burden of it as well, and that was it, so Diana could say to [Prince Philip and] the Queen, “[It was] nothing to do with me.” (*Diana: Story*)

Elsewhere he has said: “The palace may have harbored extreme suspicions about [Diana’s] involvement, but she was able to say, ‘My friends were speaking out of turn; I didn’t realize this was going to happen.’ She could have played the card of being naïve and being used by this appalling tabloid journalist” (*Royals and Reptiles*).

Diana’s “innocence” and “honour,” so much a part of the discourses surrounding her early courtship and betrothal to Prince Charles, are central here to an understanding of the biographer as transgressor: transgressor of royal narratives as well as “sexual transgressor” of the royal person.

Early biographies of Diana such as Robert Lacey’s *Princess* led the way for dozens of hagiographic tomes that stressed, above all, Diana’s “freshness” and “innocence.” She was cast very early on as a figure of fairytale, and her journey into the arms of the prince labeled—by none other than the Archbishop presiding at her wedding—as “the stuff of which fairytales are made” (Clayton and Craig 84).

But just as early narratives of Diana are predicated upon the essential innocence and sexual naïf status of the princess, later narratives, of which *HTS* is the apotheosis, dismantle these earlier stereotypes and expose the myths of the child-princess to reveal instead the “mad”—some would say ropable!—woman in Highgrove’s attic. Critical reception of *HTS* forms part of a long tradition which has viewed Diana in a sexualized paradigm where she has been contextualized as either “virgin” or “fiend” (James 17), and hinges in large part on an essential sexualizing of both the book’s subject and its author. It is precisely in her loss of textual innocence in *HTS* that Diana intones the wrath of Establishment voices, who have a vested interest in the preservation of courtly codes of honour and sexual loyalty. To this end, given the difficulties involved in at first acknowledging their own future Queen as a sexual being, a transference of sexual misdemeanor onto the figure of the biographer becomes necessary.

The sexualization of Morton began early, with other journalists noting Diana’s special preference for him when he joined the entourage of royal reporters who covered

royal tours. Royal correspondent for *The Sun*, Judy Wade, noted that as early as Diana and Morton's first meeting that there was a sexual frisson between the two:

I vividly remember the first time Andrew and Diana met. I think it was at a cocktail party in Spain, or somewhere like that, and Diana immediately seemed to be interested in him. She was toying with his tie and making comments about what a bright pattern it was, and from then on Andrew always wore bright ties.... [The ties] gave her an excuse to always get close to him. She'd pick up his tie and pull it towards her and we were all standing back amazed, totally gobsmacked [by this].... And a press officer standing nearby said, "God, I think I'll have to get a bucket of water and throw it over them." (*Di's Guys*)

Observations such as this inadvertently position Morton as yet another of the royal beaux catalogued in *HTS*, and in this lies one of the reasons for the envy that Morton's access to the princess's secrets evoked. As Brown says: "The rat pack felt jilted. Their pin-up girl had bestowed her favours elsewhere, handed the ingrate freelance Andrew Morton access his colleagues had been denied" (304). The rat pack's sense that Diana had betrayed them contributes to an understanding of a narrative in which, as Beatrix Campbell has suggested, "these men were able to exercise their sexual fantasies about a future queen" (193). The "storm" of the book's release "blew through the House of Windsor and every assumption of establishment consensus—discretion, deference and mutual protection" (294).

Words such as "collusion," "used," and "dabbling," and references to Diana's "indiscretions," are used repeatedly by these speakers. Such terminology suggests a fear about what it was that Diana and Morton were doing together and about the dangerous secrets they were about to expose of this private world.

## **The Battle of Hastings and the Big Bottoms: Errant Guenevere and the Knight-Pretender**

Years after *HTS*'s publication, when Diana's complicity in the project became public knowledge, former media advisers and supporters of the princess reacted in ways which perpetuated the chivalric imagery and rhetoric. Unable to defend Diana's "innocence," the book's detractors assume the pose of jealous and jilted lovers. Morton has said: "People like Max Hastings [editor of *The Daily Mail*] said that it was a disgraceful thing that I did it ... [and] all the questions I got [were] "did she cooperate or not?" and I had to lie" (*Royals and Reptiles*). It is as if Morton has perpetuated an act of textual rape of the royal personage, and the worst part is the suspicion that she has played along. There is an implication in Max Hastings's arguments elsewhere that Diana has "asked for it" when he suggests that there is no way that Diana's pleas at this time for some privacy from journalists would mean anything because she would have been "unhappy if she'd been left alone" (Campbell 193).

Morton appears to have compounded his crime in the eyes of the Establishment by not only having had access to the princess's personal secrets, but by talking about them

afterwards—especially when he released *HTS: In Her Own Words* shortly after the princess's death. In this instance, English journalist Mark Lawson accused Morton of being a "moral leper." Lawson is yet another who joins a gentleman's circle of individuals who have all, at one time or another, claimed to speak on Diana's behalf and who have expressed disapproval of the one who got the chance to do so. From Lord McGregor, chairman of the Press Complaints Commission, to Sir Max Hastings, editor of *The Daily Telegraph*; Sir Peregrine Worsthorne, columnist for *The Sunday Telegraph*, to various other Establishment types (a series of men who have been described by Robert Harris of the *Sunday Times* as "[the] big bottoms' ... well-off nasties, horribly out of tune with the times" (Malick 5)); a range of men questioned the authority of the Morton biography when the book was released, and were unable to believe that a royal princess would employ a journalist to employ the tone and style of a romance story to record the details of her royal life. What was so surprising for them in retrospect was that "their" princess, the woman whom they were so keen to defend, would collude in an act of transgression with a man who was not of her, or their, class. A friend of Diana's, Lord Palumbo, said "If she'd come to me, we would have said 'No, don't do it.' But she didn't want to hear that" (*Diana: Life*). Morton himself has noted "the class prejudice at work" in the attacks visited upon him in the wake of the biography's publication. As Heather Mallick paraphrases him:

Morton was not a toff, but a grammar school boy from the north of England who attended a red-brick university. "I don't speak with a plum in my mouth," he says. Translation: He didn't go to a fee-paying upper-class school like Eton and then on to Oxford or Cambridge. So he is not considered fit to question the mores of the Royal Family.

Max Hastings was the most eloquent on the subject of Morton's "unworthiness." He said in an interview on BBC 4 just after the serialisation of *HTS* in the *Sunday Telegraph*: "I'm bound to say [of] royal reporters [that] if you can't get a job as a pianist in a brothel, you become a royal reporter" (*Diana: Story*). Some five years after the book's release, Hastings reflected further:

I just found it so difficult to come to terms with the fact that anybody—whether the Princess of Wales or anybody else—could be so foolish as to engage a tabloid journalist like Andrew Morton, in indiscretions on that scale.... It was an extraordinary act in which it did seem amazing that she should want to talk at all, and to willingly engage the Murdoch press! (*Royals and Reptiles*)

When in 1995 he discovered that the princess had ignored his and others' advice not to appear on the BBC *Panorama*[\[2\]](#) program, he shifted register from that of Royal Protector to that of a jilted and cuckolded "lover" in the Restoration comedy vein, exclaiming: "I've never had my advice so resoundingly not taken as [when I realized] ... that at that very moment that we'd been having that conversation ... [the BBC camera crew] were setting up the cameras upstairs!" In accounts such as this one, Hastings "blushes" to remember his cuckoldry and regrets that he ever stood by Diana and defended her

character: "If I look back on ten years as editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, then I suppose the moment at which I blush most is to remember the Morton book" (*Royals and Reptiles*).

More blushing is discernible in the responses of Diana's cousin, Robert Spencer, who is forced to express that he is "shocked" (*Di's Guys*); and Sir Peregrine Worsthorne, who exclaims:

One felt absolutely let down by Princess Diana. For a royal figure to put their own desire to get their marriage case understood by the public against their husband—this was an irresponsible thing for a royal princess to do. By the old rules of the game, if you marry into the monarchy, you take the rough with the smooth, and you're also morally obliged to play by the rules, which she didn't do. (*Royals and Reptiles*)

To this, Lord Deedes (Max Hasting's predecessor at the *Daily Telegraph*) laments, "Diana didn't play by the rules; the rules had changed" (*Royals and Reptiles*).

Various other "knight" figures waded into the debate to denounce Morton. Lord McGregor felt strongly that journalists, even when posing as biographers, should not "dabble their fingers in the stuff of other people's souls" (Duffy). Lord McGregor defends the Queen's Press Secretary, Sir Robert Fellowes (who also happened to be the princess's brother-in-law) of having any involvement in or knowledge of Diana's collusion with Morton, arguing that Fellowes had acted "honourably" in his claims that Morton acted alone (Brown 299). And Fellowes was, after all, a fellow for whom "[f]ealty to his sovereign was paramount" (Bedell Smith 275). Appalled by her betrayal, Robert Fellowes tenders his resignation to the Queen—or, in the words of one biographer, "to fall," in the style of a Roman senator, "on his sword" (Wharfe 172).

Contributing to this language of jousts and fealty to the liege lord (or falling on one's sword, a phrase derived from the ancient Roman Plutarch), Diana's personal bodyguard Ken Wharfe suggests that this book "was not throwing down the gauntlet; this was unhorsing an opponent before he had even reached for his lance" (171). Tina Brown notes that Diana's involvement in the Morton book would have been "stupefying not just to the Prince of Wales and the court" but to "all the ancient believers in the codes of loyalty to the monarch" (294). The Queen of Romance herself, Barbara Cartland, waded in to the debate, pointing out that Diana "did not have to marry a royal. No one dragged her along and forced her to do it.... But if you choose that path you simply can't foul up the monarchy" (Morton 157). It was, as Andrew Morton notes in his Postscript to the 1993 edition of *HTS*, as if Cartland and some Conservative Members of Parliament "were keen to shut [me] away in the Tower of London" (157).

Clearly, then, when faced with an errant heroine who is refusing to play by the imperatives of the usual royal narrative—when the royal princess threatens to bust out of the frame configured for her along the lines of loyalty to the liege lord—she needs reminding of her duty in the language of the very codes she is breaking.

Tales of cuckolded journalists and "fat bottoms" and well-meaning father-figures, as well as unhappy damsels sacrificed to dynastic obsession, each contribute to a reading of the production of the Morton book as a tableaux of courtly love drama. Morton is the hand-picked champion who is to take the princess's story of failed romance to the world—but he

is to do so without anyone knowing of her involvement, and he is to take the blame for the ensuing fallout the minute the story becomes public. By using Morton as an outlet for her own frustrated desire to be freed from the hypocrisy that was her marriage to Charles, Diana does the very thing that ruptures the courtly code most: "In the Prince's world, infidelity, especially his own, was one of marriage's forgivable crimes. *Talking to the press was not*. The extent of Morton's knowledge forced him to recognise that the betrayal was his wife's" (Brown 299, emphasis mine). As a friend of Charles's has been quoted as saying: "[T]he thing he relies upon from those close to him is discretion and loyalty. And Diana was disloyal to him. When the Morton book came out it was as if someone had died" (Pearson 2). By facilitating Diana's story, Morton was seen to have committed an act of "treason." Spared hanging, however, Morton was tried in the public forum of the press where the "big bottoms" rallied to the cause; unable to prove the guilt of the errant Guenevere, however, and disinclined by nature at first to presume that a royal figure would dabble her fingers in the stuff of her and her husband's "souls," they turned to discrediting Morton as Lancelot figure.

Critics may disapprove of Diana's "dabbling" with journalists, or bemoan the "illusion of pleasure" that Barbara Cartland's fictions offered her; illusions that left—to borrow from Ien Ang's reading of Radway—Diana's "'real' situation unchanged" (104), yet such responses remain blind to the multivalent possibilities that this mode of expression offered the princess. And those who are aghast at Diana's willingness to employ this genre's modes for her own purposes belie their own desire for what Janice Radway has identified as a "standard romantic plot" (Ang 105). For while Diana and Morton do stage Diana's story according to their own mélange of what they deem to be a standard romantic plot, they nonetheless include their own crucial plot deviation—the princess does not live happily ever after—and this unsettles the mechanics and textual assumptions of the genres of the Cartland novel, the chivalric code, and the Mills and Boon texts, as well as the traditional royal biography. When complaints were heard that Diana could only have colluded with Morton (and Bashir on *Panorama*) because she "was in the advanced stages of paranoia" and had "lost the plot," (*Frontline*) it could well have been because certain factions really did feel that Diana had not only lost the plot, but that she had altered it irrevocably for her own ends. For them, it is not so much that Diana had read too many of Cartland's novels, but that she had not read them attentively enough. Cartland's plots are predicated on the basic formula that the story will end well, "following the first kiss or the first orgasm of the wedding night" (Brunt 146); and that the heroine, well-versed in the didacticism of Cartland's stories, will accept that her job is to transform her "[male partner's] philandering into the transcendent category of enduring love" (141). When Cartland herself remarked that her romance novels weren't terribly good for her step-granddaughter, she belied a suspicion that they weren't good for her because, if anything, they didn't teach Diana enough. What they did not teach her was that there are times when the hero's philandering with other women does not cease; there are times when the courtship kisses do not transform into enduring love. When Diana's pre-ordained "destiny" to "love one man" (Brunt 141) proves too complicated in the face of the fact that Prince Charles does not love her in return, Diana draws on the very narrative codes that she intends to dismantle. When, in the telling of her story, Diana realizes that the modern romance narrative has gone awry, Diana's narrative draws on other conceits. By invoking English novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*—stories where the "heroine knows the hero

loves her [thereby indicating that] the story is over" (Snitow 137)—Diana necessarily draws on other conceits. Far from being over, Diana's story, as it turns out, has only just begun. Diana takes up her place in the pantheon of British romantic heroines who refuse to settle for anything less than a sense of selfhood achieved through the affirmation of love received from their hero. When Charles refuses her his love, her narrative shifts mode once again. Further, having interpreted the trajectory of Diana's life from romantic ingénue to royal wife in terms of the prevailing tenets of popular romance modes, Diana's and Morton's critics then invoke the "authority" of the chivalric code of honor to denounce the princess's collusion with her lowly vassal.

Depending on one's viewpoint, then, media commentators and academic observers appear in this saga to be trapped within, or perhaps liberated by, the same rhetorical codes that they are endeavoring to deconstruct. So, by asserting either that Diana had applied the codes of the romance, or altered them in order to dismantle them, or altered them in order to empower herself, or compromised herself by allowing someone else to alter the plot for her, the conversations surrounding *HTS* share in common an investment in the rhetorical codes of the romance. One can't help but feel that there is an irony in the idea that while the young Diana did not welcome the arrival into her life of an over-powdered and overpowering step-grandmother in the guise of Barbara Cartland, it has become nonetheless almost impossible to imagine the princess's story without her.

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[1] Royal reporters such as Arthur Edwards and photographers such as Harry Arnold and Ken Lennox kept very close to Diana in her pre-wedding days and have expressed in interview their dismay and the arrival of the paparazzi on the Diana circuit in the 1990s. See interviews with each in the *Royals and Reptiles* series. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/royals/interviews/>

[2] The Panorama program, where the Princess of Wales was interviewed by Martin Bashir for the BBC November 20, 1995, has attracted nearly as much commentary as the Morton biography.

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