

Royal Burdens

by Theodore Dalrymple



Public life has never been more public than it is today, and the lives of famous people are examined as never before. Gone are the days when a President's polio or marital infidelities were passed over in silence by a compliant press corps. A rhinoceros hide is required now, as perhaps never before, for a life in politics—though, as the new President has amply demonstrated, a rhinoceros hide is by no means incompatible with a thin skin.

Who among us has no embarrassing secrets? The constant risk of exposure and humiliation must deter many good people from seeking public office. We demand perfection and get mediocrity.

It is not even necessary any more for the famous to die for their lives to be turned into soap opera, as has happened to the British royal family with *The Crown*. The first 10 hour-long episodes of the Netflix series cover a period of about five years, from 1951 to 1956, which means that, at this rate,

it will take 120 more episodes to bring the story up to date. At the outset *The Crown* reminded me, I must confess, of the story by Jorge Luis Borges in which geographers produce a map on a scale of 1:1, exactly reproducing, to the last detail, what they set out to map.

If the show's dramatic moments are real enough, so are its *longueurs*