

UK's Prince Andrew and the 2019 BBC interview on his relations with Jeffrey Epstein: *Scoop*

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“The British monarchy, hypocritical British conservatism, religiosity, servility, sanctimoniousness—all this is old rags, rubbish, the refuse of centuries which we have no need for whatsoever.” —Trotsky, 1924

Scoop fictionally recounts the circumstances surrounding the November 2019 interview conducted by Emily Maitlis of the BBC's current affairs program *Newsnight* with Prince Andrew, the Duke of York, the younger brother of the current king of England. The interview was intended by the prince's handlers to limit the damage created by Andrew's well-publicized relations with financier and sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein, by then already deceased.

Instead, as the WSWS noted at the time, the maneuver “backfired in spectacular fashion.” The conversation was meant to “humanize” the prince. But he was not nearly a good enough actor for that. In the end, Prince Andrew was either unwilling or unable to be anything but himself: indifferent to the feelings and suffering of others, snobbish, stupid, spoiled.

The interview was the most watched in *Newsnight*'s history. Only days after the program was aired, Buckingham Palace announced that Andrew was “stepping back” from royal duties. In January 2022, he was stripped of his honorary military titles and royal patronages. “In a humiliating blow,” the *Times* reported, “Prince Andrew, 61, will also no longer use the style of His Royal Highness in any official capacity.”

In February 2022, Andrew settled a lawsuit with Virginia Giuffre, who accused him of sexually abusing her when she was under age, as the result of being trafficked by Epstein. The prince did not admit liability but reportedly paid Giuffre as much as 12 million pounds [\$US 16 million].

Scoop, released on Netflix, is directed by Philip Martin and written by Peter Moffat and Geoff Bussetil, based on the book by Samantha McAllister, a BBC producer at the center of the efforts to organize the interview with Prince Andrew, in the “scoop” of the title.

The film concerns itself with various aspects of the Andrew-Epstein-BBC episode, some quite secondary and most of the latter not very enthralling. “Sam” McAllister (Billie Piper) is presented (or presents herself, through her book and the ultimate screenplay, on which she no doubt had some influence) as something of a “populist” troublemaker, a hip maverick in the rather rarefied, highbrow domain of the BBC and *Newsnight* in particular.

In a recent *Hollywood Reporter* article, “This Is How I Made That Crazy Prince Andrew Interview Happen,” McAllister describes her on-screen persona as “magnificently bedecked in my everyday attire (think black faux leather, fake fur, snakeskin boots, lashings of lip gloss, huge handbag, even huger sunglasses).”

Scoop's early scenes, McAllister (Piper) sneers at the program's being discussed in “All the dinner parties in [middle class] North London ... ‘Did you see *Newsnight* last night?’ ‘Wasn't it amazing how Emily Maitlis said all the great things we all agree with?’ We're mistaking talking to ourselves for news, Freddy, and it's killing us.”

A healthy portion of the proceedings is taken up by friction and conflict in the newsroom and by McAllister's various relationships, with her wise “mum” (Amanda Redman), her adorable son Lucas (Zach Colton), her nonsense local kebab vendor, etc., etc., and those sequences, as noted, do not light up the sky.

The film's advertising and to a certain extent the screenplay's structure present *Scoop* as an examination of the roles of three women in bringing about the interview and presumably Prince Andrew's exposure and downfall: McAllister, Maitlis (Gillian Anderson) and Amanda Thirsk (Keeley Hawes), Andrew's private secretary.

The attempt to turn this into some sort of #MeToo exposure, spearheaded by courageous females (publicity claim: “The film is a behind-the-scenes story of the women who negotiated with the Buckingham Palace establishment to secure the ‘scoop of the decade’ that was the public catalyst for the downfall of Prince Andrew”), doesn't make much sense. McAllister, as she would seem to be the first to concede, wasn't especially interested in the Epstein scandal or its socio-political implications and simply regarded the booking of Andrew as a career coup.

The real-life Thirsk, who had worked at Buckingham Palace for 15 years, was strenuously, if quite misguidedly, attempting to *defend* the queen's younger, apparently “favorite” son. Hawes-Thirsk's presence and her various (mostly unhappy facial) reactions as events spin out of control amount to a large red herring. What are we to make of her—some sort of unwitting traitor to the #MeToo cause, a slave to the patriarchy? It remains murky. (Thirsk lost her job as a result of the interview-fiasco.)

Maitlis (Gillian Anderson), according to *Scoop*, has something more of a political agenda. Asked at one point why she is doing the interview with Prince Andrew, she replies:

Monica Lewinsky. I feel like I let women down by not asking Clinton about her. Sex with that woman was actually consensual. She was 21. He was the president of the United States. He got his life back. She got decades of vicious misogyny.

This seems a bit strained and never gets another mention.

To what extent the BBC officialdom, an essential component of the British capitalist establishment, hoped that the interview would improve

Andrew's reputation and standing is not clear. Maitlis, within definite limits, appears to have been determined to expose the prince as a disreputable, dishonest, possibly criminal individual, which, given the damning circumstantial evidence and Andrew's general obtuseness and flat-footedness, was not so demanding a task.

The broader significance of the Epstein affair, what it demonstrated about the character and depravity of global ruling elites, is largely missing in *Scoop*.

In an early exchange with a photographer about Epstein and his activities, Sam asks:

—How do we not know about this?
—Because it's young girls no one cares about going in and out of a house. And he's rich. You know, he went to jail. Now he's out. Frankly, hardly anyone gives a shit.

Later, it's left to a montage of television anchors to report that

[anchor 1] Mr. Epstein, arrested just over a month ago, was found dead this morning in his cell at the Metropolitan ...
[anchor 2] He once counted among his friends Bill Clinton, Prince Andrew ...
[anchor 3] He was in cardiac arrest and pronounced dead ...
[anchor 4] ... charged on trafficking dozens of girls for sex ...
[anchor 5] ... six underage victims ...
[anchor 6] ... involving underage girls ...
[anchor 7] ... including Donald Trump, liked beautiful women ...
[anchor 8] ... categorically denied by the royal family.

In numerous articles posted since July 2019, the WSWS has offered the most insightful commentary on the Epstein affair, including his alleged suicide and the role of Prince Andrew.

These articles would be a starting point in any consideration of the case:

The case of Jeffrey Epstein and the depravity of America's financial elite, July 2019

Who wanted Jeffrey Epstein dead?, August 2019

Epstein scandal engulfs Britain's Royal family after BBC interview with Prince Andrew, November 2019

Prince Andrew settles out of court with Jeffrey Epstein sexual abuse victim, February 2022

Prince Andrew and a monarchy in crisis, February 2022

The coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla: The terminal crisis of the British monarchy, May 2023

Notes on the financial oligarchy: Jeffrey Epstein and the criminality of the ruling class, May 2023

Justice Department report fails to substantiate the suicide narrative of Jeffrey Epstein's death in federal custody, June 2023

Court documents list Jeffrey Epstein's associates among political, corporate, celebrity elite, January 2024

In 2019 we commented:

There seems little doubt that Epstein is guilty of serious crimes. This is not an instance of "over-sensitivity" on the part of alleged victims or a case involving sexually ambiguous or confusing situations, much less outright #MeToo-type witch-hunting for career advancement, revenge or other motives.

By all accounts, Epstein, to satisfy his and others' sexual or psychological needs, deliberately set out to prey on the poor and defenseless. Courtney Wild, who says she was 14 when she met Epstein, told the *Miami Herald*, "Jeffrey preyed on girls who were in a bad way, girls who were basically homeless. He went after girls who he thought no one would listen to and he was right." ...

And further:

"We were stupid, poor children," said one woman, who did not want to be named because she never told anyone about Epstein. At the time, she said, she was 14 and a high school freshman. "We just wanted money for school clothes, for shoes. I remember wearing shoes too tight for three years in a row. We had no family and no guidance, and we were told that we were going to just have to sit in a room topless and he was going to just look at us. It sounded so simple, and was going to be easy money for just sitting there."

Epstein, despite the seriousness of his crimes, was protected for years by his influential friends and maintained his connections to the rich and powerful.

Epstein's rise says a great deal about American society in the past four decades in particular, and what it says amounts to an ugly and harsh indictment.

Unsurprisingly, Martin's film largely sidesteps these issues. What's most interesting and valuable in *Scoop*, above all, is the portrait of Prince Andrew rendered by the talented Rufus Sewell.

Here art does what political analysis cannot do, present the truth in the form of concrete imagery. Sewell is remarkable at bringing out the mix of stifled, upper class repression and, inevitably, more malevolent, crueler qualities, a stuffed shirt capable of genuine coldness and callousness, all of this qualifying him for "friendship" with the Machiavellian Epstein. Sewell's Duke of York is someone who has never grown up and expects always to have his way, an individual calamitously out of touch with others and himself, arrogant, self-indulgent and thoughtless.

From the interview itself:

—So, in 2006, in May, an arrest warrant was issued for Epstein for sexual assault of a minor.

—Yes.

—He was released in July of 2010. And within months, you went to stay with him at his New York mansion. Why? Why were you staying with a convicted sex offender? ...

—I was doing a number of other things while I was there.

—But you were staying at the house of a convicted sex offender.

—It was a convenient place to stay.

And as to whether Virginia Giuffre was lying about having sex with him on three separate occasions, aged 17, "once in a London house when she was trafficked to you in Maxwell's house, once in New York a month or so later in Epstein's mansion, and once on his private island, in a group of seven or eight other girls"?

That's a difficult thing for me to, um ... answer because I don't know what she's, um, trying to achieve. But I can tell you ... uh ...

categorically, I don't remember meeting her at all. I do not remember a photograph being taken, and I've said, consistently and, um ... frequently, that we never had any sort of sexual contact whatever.

Bizarrely, in reply to Giuffre's allegation that Prince Andrew bought her drinks and danced with her at a London night club, he answers:

—No, that couldn't have happened because on that particular date, I was, um, at home. I was with the children. And I had taken Beatrice to a Pizza Express in Woking for a party, I think ... round about 4:00, 5:00 in the afternoon.

—Why would you remember that so specifically?

—Because going to Pizza Express in Woking is an unusual thing for me to do. A very unusual thing for me to do.

And so forth. The image of Andrew, following the broadcast of the BBC interview, fresh from a palace bath tub, naked, standing awkwardly, frozen in place as he reads denunciations of himself and his conduct, a semi-pathetic figure thoroughly taken aback by the hostile public reaction, disgraced and friendless, privileged as ever, will stay with the viewer.

One thinks at that moment of Trotsky's comment that "the office of kingship is an interrelation between people. The king is king only because the interests and prejudices of millions of people are refracted through his person. When the flood of development sweeps away these interrelations, then the king appears to be only a washed-out man with a flabby lower lip."



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