

# Haven't We Seen This Royal Exit Before?

Yes. The 2014 play 'King Charles III' has proved to be astonishingly prophetic.

By NANCY COLEMAN

It's said that life imitates art — or, at least, that certain creative minds have some sort of uncanny psychic prowess.

And now that Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, have made a dramatic declaration of independence from the royal family, the British playwright Mike Bartlett can be added to the list of writers who seem to have a crystal ball on hand.

Bartlett wrote "King Charles III," a near-future imagining — with Shakespearean-level intensity and iambic pentameter to match — of what happens when Queen Elizabeth II dies and her son Charles, Prince of Wales, ascends to the throne.

The show premiered at London's Almeida Theater in 2014, followed by a transfer to the West End later that year and a Broadway run in 2015.

In Bartlett's world, the whole royal family is there: Prince William and Kate, Duchess of Cambridge; Prince Charles's wife, Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall; even the ghost of the real Harry's mother, Diana, Princess of Wales (because what's more Shakespearean than that?).

Prince Harry, in this story, falls in love with a commoner and decides to leave behind his life as a senior member of the royal family. "I want to go with her into the world," he tells his father, "Not trap her here inside these regal walls."

Sound familiar?

The real Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan Markle, announced on Wednesday that they would "step back" from their official duties, in a momentous and unprecedented step for members of the royal family.

The popular couple said they would split their time between Britain and North America, adding that they planned to "work to become financially independent."

Rupert Goold, who directed "King Charles III" and is the artistic director of the Almeida Theater, noted the correlation on Wednesday, posting an excerpt from the script on Twitter.

The play had always been "unusual," he said in an interview Thursday, because it was constantly recontextualized by current events — Scotland's referendum for inde-



SARA KRULWICH/THE NEW YORK TIMES

pendence from Britain came during rehearsals, followed not long after by the early stages of Brexit.

But the scene he posted on Twitter, in which Harry explains to his family why he wants to leave, was just "eerie," Goold said.

It's rare for a scene or a character's decision, across any art form, to come to fruition this literally — here's looking at you, "The Simpsons" writers' room.

"Mike (Bartlett), who wrote the play, sent me a two-word email going, 'See this?' or something, with a link to the BBC," he added. "And I was like, 'Oh my God. That's incredible.'"

But even before the "Megxit" announcement, Prince Harry of "King Charles III" wasn't too far off.

In the play, the prince is introduced to an art student named Jess through a mutual friend at a club. They fall in love beyond the palace walls; Harry is particularly smitten with the freedom Jess has in her flat — "TV, Doritos, curry."

Meghan is also a commoner with a career in the arts: She was a popular television actor before their marriage, known for her role in "Suits" on USA, but gave up acting to be a full-time royal.

The couple also was introduced by a mutual friend, who set them up on a blind date in July 2016.

As rumors of their relationship began to surge over the next few months, British tabloids latched onto story lines that Meghan wasn't Prince Harry's type, or that the American actress wasn't British enough.

The prince's first confirmation of his relationship came in an unusual statement in November 2016, in which he condemned the "racial undertones" of stories about Meghan, who is biracial, and "the outright sexism and racism" of comments online.

Jess, in a script written years earlier, complained of similar treatment — though a strained relationship between the royal family and the British news media certainly isn't a new prediction.

From left: Richard Goulding as Harry, Tim Pigott-Smith as Charles and Taffine Steen as Jess in the Broadway production of Mike Bartlett's 'King Charles III.'

It is rare for a scene to come to fruition this literally

Increasingly there's stories in the news About the Prince and I. They think I'm an Unusual match for him, and so explore My past and present, calling up my friends

Wednesday's news took Goold and Bartlett by surprise, Goold said — because after Harry and Meghan's wedding, that's where they assumed the coincidences would end.

"We always used to say the one thing that would destroy the play is if Harry gets married, because the whole point was Harry wanting to escape," Goold said. "I remember Mike and I saying, 'O.K., well, that's the end of the play!'"

Instead, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex's shift away from the royal family highlighted even more striking similarities.

In the scene tweeted by Goold, Jess and Harry deliver the news to their family as a joint decision, just as Meghan and Harry appeared to — though the play's Prince Harry says he wants to "Cast off the Princely burden of my birth," and there has been no indication from the real royals that they will renounce their titles.

CHARLES: You have the royal protection and respect.

Whatever we can do to help we will.

You will be welcome in our family.

JESS: But sir that's not —

HARRY: It isn't that we want.

And earlier in the story, Jess specifically addresses the financial aspect of the decision, criticizing the money Prince Harry receives from the crown — money that Meghan and the real prince seem to be turning away from.

HARRY: It's not what I was born into — JESS: Then change it. Look at all this — it's absurd it still exists.

The world you were born into... It's paid for by those people in Wagamama, you take money from their hard work and you Spend it on portraits, palaces, and in your case flights to Las Vegas. It's not your money to spend.

But perhaps no dialogue sums up the situation quite like Prince Harry's first line in the play, when, after the Queen's funeral — in a particularly overt piece of foreshadowing — he tells his family that he plans to make an abrupt exit.

I might head off. If that's O.K.? I know there's this thing, but I'm tired.

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**WHO'S WHO IN THE CAST**

TIM PIGOTT-SMITH (Charles), Extensive theatre includes *King Charles III* (Oliver Award nomination 2015; Almeida, West End, Broadway); *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *The Tempest* (Theatre Royal, Bath); *King Lear* (Theatre Awards, UK nomination, West Yorkshire Playhouse); *Evans* (Olivier Award nomination, Chichester, Royal Court, West End); *The Jewen Corneth* (Almeida, Old Vic, Broadway); *Pygmalion* (Bath, Old Vic); *Sherlock Holmes* (Aldwych, Broadway). Television includes "Waldenhouse in Exile," "Downton Abbey," "Foye's War," "Jewel in the Crown" (BAFTA, Press Guild and TV Times' Best Actor Award). Film includes *Alice in Wonderland*, *Quantum of Solace*, *V for Vendetta*, *Bloody Sunday* (Best Actor, Operto Film Festival), *Remains of the Day*, *Clash of the Titans*, *Victory*.

ANTHONY CALF (Mr. Stevens), Theatre: *The Heart Problem*, *The White Guard*, *The Power of Yes*, *Gettosome, Never So Good*, *The Palace Servant*, *Betrayal*, *The Madness of George III* (National); *Fathers and Sons*, *Les Parents Terribles*, *The Hotel in Amsterdam* (Donmar); *Cervidie* (Almeida); *My Night With Reg*, *Neverland*, *Rock 'n' Roll* (Royal Court); *Four Servants Rendered*, *Private Lives*, *The Deep Blue Sea* (Chichester); *My Fair Lady* (Crucible Theatre, Sheffield); West End; *Stephen Ward* (Aldwych); *Private Lives* (Gielgud); *Death and the Maiden* (Harold Pinter); *Rock 'n' Roll* (Duke of York's); *My Night With Reg* (Criterion).

OLIVER CHRIS (William), This is Oliver's second time at the Music Box, having previously co-starred with James Corden in *One Man, Two Guinners* in 2012. Some other notable theatre credits include *One Man, Two*

GUINNERS (NT, West End, Broadway); *Great Britain*, *Seasons Greetings* (NT), *King Charles III* (Almeida, West End); *Closer* (Donmar Warehouse); *Bottom* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* opposite Judi Dench, directed by Sir Peter Hall. Television: *Lots*, *Flint*. Some Oliver is delighted to be back on Broadway.

RICHARD GOULDING (Harry) trained at Guildhall. He has performed in an Olivier Award for his nomination in the original cast of *King Charles III* at the Almeida and West End. Richard's other theatre includes *A Mad World My Masters* (BSC), *King Lear* (Almeida); *Push* (Royal Court, West End); *There Is a War* (National); the RSC global tour of *The Seagull*, going to BAM New York and West End. Screen credits include *Mr. Before You*, *The Iron Lady* and the TV series "Fresh Meat," "Ripper Street" and "The Crown."

NYASHA HATENDI (Gwenore, Nick, Sir Gordon), Theatre: *King Charles III* (Almeida and Wyndham's Theatre), *Richard III* (Nottingham Playhouse; Theatre Royal, York), *Muano* (Tricycle Theatre), *The Play She's a Whore* (Check by Jowl), *11 and 12* (Theatre des Bouffes du Nord), *The Restless Rise of Arturo Di Lyric Hammermuth*, *The Brothers Siz* (A.C. Young Vic). Television: "Casual," "W.A.," "Single Black Men," "Garrow's Law," "Above Suspicion: Silent Screams," "Law & Order: UK," "Blood and Oil," "The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency," "Silent Witness," Film: *Narcopolis*, *The Comedian*, *Fast Freddie*, *The Ghost Writer*, *The Good Shepherd*. Training: RADA.

ADAM JAMES (Mr. Evans) is thrilled to be returning to Broadway and sharing his role

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## TIM PIGOTT-SMITH'S REFLECTIONS ON *KING CHARLES III*

As I read Nancy Coleman's *Times* article about the uncanny ways in which *King Charles III* anticipates recent developments in the lives of Prince Harry and his bride, I couldn't help recalling some exchanges I enjoyed several years ago with the remarkable performer who played the title role in Mike Bartlett's insightful depiction of Britain's royal family.

My wife and I attended a riveting Broadway performance of Bartlett's play at The Music Box on Sunday, November 29, 2015. And to our delight, Tim Pigott-Smith invited us to join him afterwards for what turned out to be a memorable conversation in his dressing room. In 1994 he'd contributed a brilliant foreword to an edition of *Measure for Measure* that I was producing for THE EVERYMAN SHAKESPEARE, a paperback set under the aegis of J. M. Dent at Orion House in London. So I was grateful for an opportunity to thank him, not only for his thought-provoking analysis of one of the theater's most psychologically and ethically profound works, but for his indelible rendering of Angelo in the BBC/TIME-LIFE series that was presented on this side of the Atlantic as *The Shakespeare Plays*. I also wanted to congratulate Tim for roles such as his riveting portrayal of Colonel Merrick in PBS's *The Jewel in the Crown*.

What I was most interested in exploring on this occasion, however, was the memorable experience that he and his colleagues were providing in a fresh script that pulsed with blank verse, a dramatic vehicle that seemed surprisingly natural in this context, but one that managed at the same time to feel hauntingly reminiscent of the supple discourse that had captivated 16th- and 17th-century English audiences at the Globe and the Blackfriars.

It soon became clear that Tim shared my admiration for a modern dramatist who'd come up with what he wittily depicted as a "future history play." Comparing Mike Bartlett not only to the author of such classics as the *Henry* plays, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*, but to a 20th-century American writer, Tim recalled how impressed he'd been by "Moss Hart's wonderful *Act One*," a work that reinforced his conviction that "unlike a lawyer or a doctor, each of whom can use precedent and example and experience as they age, the playwright enters a new land with its own rules every time he starts a new play."

Responding by email to a question about how Mr. Bartlett and director Rupert Goold had chosen to portray Prince William's wife, Tim said "Our Kate is, I guess, a teaspoonful of Margaret of Anjou, a tablespoon of Lady M, a pinch of Cleo, and a splash of pre-tamed Kate." He then asked "How great is Mike Bartlett?" and advised observers to "Watch his space!"

And so we're now doing, grateful that in 2017, a little more than a year after the theatrical presentation of *King Charles III* that my wife and I enjoyed in a storied Broadway venue, we had a chance to applaud Rupert Goold's adaptation of Bartlett's script for television, a presentation that we found just as powerful as the staging that had moved us so deeply on an overcast autumn evening in Manhattan's theater district. Not only does the screen version of the drama preserve *King Charles III* for posterity; it provides an enduring reminder of the charismatic artistry of a performer who left us much too soon, at the height of his powers as one of the leading exemplars of what will long be cherished as a golden age of classical acting.

JOHN F. ANDREWS  
January 16, 2020

## OBITUARIES

# Tim Pigott-Smith, Vaunted Stage Actor, Dies at 70

By MICHAEL PAULSON

Tim Pigott-Smith, an acclaimed British character actor who in the 1980s vaulted to fame on television in “The Jewel in the Crown” and who more recently won accolades playing the title role in the West End and Broadway productions of “King Charles III,” died on Friday in Northampton, England. He was 70.

His death was confirmed by his agent, John Grant, who said the cause was not immediately known.

Mr. Pigott-Smith, who lived in London, had been in Northampton rehearsing the role of Willy Loman for a British touring revival of “Death of a Salesman,” which was scheduled to begin on Monday at Royal & Derngate.

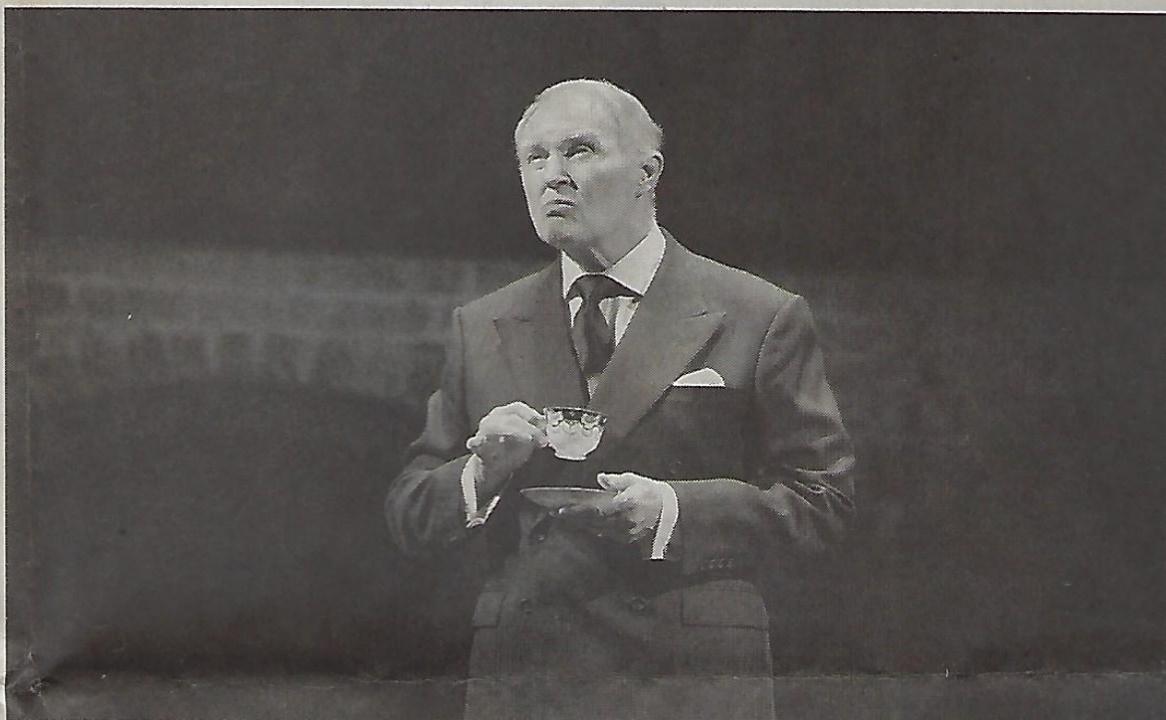
He had recently completed “Victoria and Abdul,” a film starring Judi Dench that is scheduled for release this fall, as well as a television adaptation of “King Charles III.”

Mr. Pigott-Smith, 6 feet tall with blue eyes and fair hair, was a patrician figure with classical training who worked constantly on stage, film and television, mostly as a performer, but also as a director. This year he was awarded the Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II for his services to drama.

His work in “The Jewel and the Crown,” a 1984 mini-series set in India during the British Raj, was recognized with a BAFTA award, Britain’s equivalent of an Academy Award; his performance in “King Charles III” — which imagines Prince Charles succeeding his mother as the British monarch — was nominated for both Olivier and Tony awards.

“He was a funny mix, because he was really bright, very educated; he almost felt like an English private-school master,” said the British director Rupert Goold, who had known Mr. Pigott-Smith since childhood (he had been driven to school by Mr. Pigott-Smith, who had a child in the same school) and who directed him in “King Charles III.”

“He also had a silly, playful, mischievous side,” Mr. Goold said. “He enjoyed joining in dancing, or crazy warm-ups.” An example, he said, was a decades-long prank Mr. Pigott-Smith had played with Ms. Dench, in which each tried to



SARA KRULWICH/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Tim Pigott-Smith as King Charles III on Broadway in 2015. He played the role in London as well.

slip a black glove into productions featuring the other.

Timothy Peter Pigott-Smith was born on May 13, 1946, in Rugby, England. His mother was an amateur actor and his father was a journalist. His enthusiasm for the theater was intensified when his father became editor of a newspaper in Stratford-upon-Avon; the young Mr. Pigott-Smith went to see as much Shakespeare as he could.

He studied drama at the University of Bristol and the Bristol Old Vic Theater School, and then began work at the Bristol Old Vic as an assistant stage manager, occasionally playing small parts, there and around the country.

He made his West End debut in 1971, as Laertes in “Hamlet,” and then joined the Royal Shakespeare Company. He made his Broadway debut in 1974, as Doctor Watson in a Royal Shakespeare Company production of “Sherlock Holmes.” (“Tim Pigott-Smith showed good natured spaniel-bafflement as the invaluable Dr. Watson,” the critic Clive Barnes wrote in *The New York Times*.)

“It was heaven, of course — absolute heaven,” Mr. Pigott-Smith said in an interview in 2015. “That

was the first time I’d been to the States.”

He moved from theater into television in the 1970s and 1980s, peaking with his role as Ronald Merrick, a villainous police superintendent in “The Jewel in the Crown.”

He also appeared in many movies, among them the original

## A performer who played Prince Charles as England’s king.

“Clash of the Titans,” in 1981, with Laurence Olivier, and, that same year, in a soccer film, “Victory,” which he called “one of the world’s great turkeys.”

But when he was offered a television pilot that, if successful, would require him to move to Los Angeles, he decided that he was not interested in celebrity; he and his wife, the actress Pamela Miles, bought a house in London, and he recommitted himself to the stage.

“I couldn’t think of anything

better than doing great plays with great people in a great company,” he said.

He is survived by Ms. Miles, who had been scheduled to appear with her husband in “Death of a Salesman” until she was injured and had to drop out. His survivors also include a son, Tom, and two grandchildren.

In theater, Mr. Pigott-Smith played a wide range of classical and contemporary parts — from Shaw to Albee — but with a special emphasis on Shakespeare. In 1999, he played Larry Slade in a Broadway production of Eugene O’Neill’s “The Iceman Cometh” led by Kevin Spacey.

He often played villains, and was frequently in supporting roles, which made his casting in “King Charles III,” particularly poignant.

“He had done so much amazing work in TV series and on film and in plays, but he hadn’t carried things as often as he deserved to, so there was something in the role of Prince Charles that spoke to him,” Mr. Goold said. “He also had a passion for new work, and for verse, and for someone to be writing for an actor his age in blank verse — he was in heaven.”