

## **Film Screening of "A Royal Affair" on the 4th of April 2017. Directed by Nikolaj Arcel.**

This film is based on historical facts and portrays a rather unknown but very interesting era of Central European History, a period of historical bending in the configuration of European Modernity.

The story is about the young Princess of England Caroline Mathilde (played by Alicia Vikander), who is trapped in a marriage of diplomatic feasibility with young Danish King Christian VII 1 (impressively played by Mikkel Boe Følsgaard). Marital life turns out to be a great challenge for the young Princess, who is forced to desolate her progressive beliefs in Rousseau and Voltaire within the conservative Danish court and who is constantly being humiliated and rejected by the mentally ill King. The appearance in the Danish court of the German doctor and Devotee of the Enlightenment, Johann Friederich Struensee (played by Mads Mikkelsen) as the Kings personal physiatrist, turns out to be crucial. The balance between the Authoritarian Court and the domination of the Queen-stepmother (played by Trine Dyrholm) is threatened by love and revolution. The illegal affair building up between Caroline and Johann and the friendship and faith between Johann and the mentally disturbed King, create progressive reforms and changes for the people but ends tragically with the revolution. The conservative plans for a military coup under the guidance of the Authoritarian (court) creates a trap for the unbalanced King Christian and thereby overrules Struensee in his fight for the people (though in an authoritarian way).

Struensee is being executed in the guillotine and Caroline is separated from her children in exile, dyeing very young in a desert castle. Nevertheless, history gets its revenge later when the son of Caroline, Frederic, overrules a military coup and becomes the leader of the spirit of Enlightenment, thereby restoring the reform work by Struensee.

The Danish instructor with Greek roots, Nikolaj Arcel brings back to life "a hidden historical treasure" in his achievement to tell a real story with real modern characters (Antiochos 2012). The movie is characterized by a balance between historic-political aspects and a love story.

In the movie, we experience the revival of Denmark in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century with the ideology of Enlightenment being expressed through Reformist Friederich Struensee whose character is not at all idealized, but on the contrary is reflected as an Authoritarian, disregarding his ideological beliefs in the fight for freedom. The restrained performance by Mads Mikkelsen (the directors choice), escalates in the last scene of the execution. The sensual and almost discreet performance by Alicia Vikander becomes the incarnation of a young princess created by the revolution of love and a revolutionary man. She follows the destiny of women determined by gender and female needs (motherhood-sexuality). The letter written to her children, Frederic and Maria Louisa, reflects the strength of motherlove and its influence. The biggest discovery in the movie is the debut by Mikkel Boe Følsgaard (who was chosen from the Royal Theatre Academy as a second year student) performing excellently as the bipolar and weak King. One of the most beautiful scenes of the movie is when the three main characters, driven by love and the ideas of Enlightenment, hold hands in the vision of a bright future that they will never themselves experience. The director emphasises a great deal on hypocrisy and its characters and thereby sticks to tradition of Northern European theatre (also Bergman and Dreyer<sup>2</sup>). This kind of filming reflects in the best possible way the characters and their psychology.

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1. Christian VII (1749-1808) King of Denmark and Norway from the Royal House of Oldenburg, son of Frederic the 5<sup>th</sup>. Inspired by his personal physiatrist Johann Friederich Struensee, the King participated in the reforms of the time. From 1770 Struensee was a de facto governor until the Coup in 1772 (wikipedia)
2. Dreyer said: "Nothing can be compared to the human face. It is a territory that we never get tired of exploring, a place of unique beauty".

Even though the form of this movie was considered quite conventional for such an unconventional story, we can nevertheless see the influence of Hollywood (narrative kind of historical epic) as well as the influence of Dreyer, mainly in the dark face of feudalism. The scene of the guillotine and the mystic meetings in the castle reflects the last spasm of the Dark Age before the Enlightenment.

Suffering and passion are familiar elements to Dreyer and they are also present in this movie through the comments about the strict Lutheran atmosphere and the religious legalisation of oppression (for example when the servants are questioned in order to testify Johann's nightly visits in Caroline's chamber). In this part of the movie, the Queen represents the *rebellious female – the spirit of opposition*, a dominating character in Dreyer's work.

Similarly to the Three Colours movies by Kieślowski, "White", "Red" and "Blue" and their reference to *Freedom, Equality and Brotherhood*, the movie "A Royal Affair" touches upon the established values of Europe - values that have overthrown dark perceptions, created a more Progressive framework of modern values existing until today.

The movie reflects upon light and love, life through the shade of hatred, death and oppression but also with emphasis on ontology. When Struensee declines Caroline's idea to run away to a distant place, he sacrifices himself to the people by remaining in order to support his reforms. His expectations for the support of the people is in vain and his ideologies of freedom and resistance turns him into a martyr of freedom, just a few years prior to the explosion of the American Revolution.

## **Awards**

The movie was first presented at the Berlin Film Festival in 2012 and received two awards:

Best male actor (Mikke Boe Følsgaard)

Best script (Nikolaj Arcel and Rasmus Haisterberg)

Nominated at the Oscars as Best Foreign Movie in 2013.

Awarded for Best Filming, Best Costume design and Best Second Female role.

It had great success in England, Australia and France.

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