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REEL WORLD



The Favourite

Royal flush

Three English queens in two entertaining period pictures

Three English queens, palaces spilling over with rowdy tragicomedy; a host of feminist takes on raunchy English royalty; and quite a lot of royal flash make for an abundance of flamboyant artistry and entertainment in two rousing accessible end-of-year releases set in separate phases of English history: *The Favourite*, which immerses itself in the 18th century reign of

by
Juan-Carlos Selznick



The Favourite
Starring Olivia Colman, Rachel Weisz, and Emma Stone. Directed by Yorgos Lanthimos. Cinemark 14. Rated R.



Mary Queen of Scots
Ends tonight, Jan. 3. Starring Saoirse Ronan and Margot Robbie. Directed by Josie Rourke. Pageant Theatre. Rated R.

Queen Anne; and *Mary Queen of Scots*, which recounts once again the deadly serious conflicts of Queen Elizabeth I (a Protestant) and Queen Mary (a Catholic) in 16th century England.

Both stories have their time-honored tragic elements, but these new film versions bring a warts-and-all kind of irreverence into play on matters of the royals' personal conduct at the same time that they work up dynamically complex characterizations of their respective female protagonists.

In the latter, Mary (Saoirse Ronan) is viewed more sympathetically than Elizabeth (Margot Robbie), but both are portrayed as extraordinarily strong and intelligent figures caught up in historic circumstances that lead, perhaps inevitably, toward tragedy.

In *The Favourite*, tragedy intertwines with farce in the portrait of Queen Anne (Olivia Colman), who is simultaneously a figure of obvious pathos and surprising resilience. And that portrait is further intensified via her attachments to Lady Sarah (Rachel Weisz) and the no longer well-to-do Abigail (Emma Stone), two

resourceful strivers who find themselves in increasingly fierce competition for status as the Queen's "favourite." Each of the three is a kind of flawed heroine, at one point or another.

Both films season the requisite "pomp and circumstance" with rough and ribald details of physical and sexual existence in their respective eras. Elizabeth and Anne both suffer disfiguring illnesses. *The Favourite* is richly endowed with quantities of mud, both indoors and out. Wayward sexuality crops up raw in a variety of ways in both films. There's a bisexual, biracial "lady in waiting" (Ismael Cruz Córdova) in *Mary*, and a there's a masturbating stagecoach passenger in *The Favourite*.

The fine performances of Ronan and Robbie are the most rewarding elements of *Mary Queen of Scots*. The script is by Beau Willimon (*House of Cards*); the director is Josie Rourke, making her feature film debut.

The Favourite, directed by Yorgos Lanthimos (*The Lobster*, *Dogtooth*, etc.), is a much more challenging experience, but also a more richly rewarding one. Colman is superb as Queen Anne, but Weisz and Stone also deliver exceptional work in strikingly nuanced roles.

There's a multitude of male characters in both films, but very few of them fare well in any sense of the word. Guy Pearce, David Tennant and Brendan Coyle (the butler in *Downton Abbey*) are all on hand in *Mary*, but mainly as contrasting figures in a wall-size group portrait. Joe Alwyn is in both films, both times as a character who mistakenly presumes to have power over a woman. □



Poor



Fair



Good



Very Good



Excellent