

## **THE FAVOURITE (2018)**

- Released on November 23rd, 2018
- 1 Hour 59 minutes
- \$\$15,000,000 (estimated) Budget
- Directed by Yorgos Lanthimos
- Written by Deborah Davis, Tony McNamara
- Element Pictures, Scarlet Films, Film4
- Rated R for strong sexual content, nudity and language.

## **QUICK THOUGHTS**

- Marisa Serafini
- Mina Wahab
- Demetri Panos

## **DEVELOPMENT**

- It started with a screenplay by Deborah Davis, which producer Ceci Dempsey and her company Scarlet Films started developing two decades ago.
- Kate Winslet was originally cast, but dropped out.
- Fox Searchlight Pictures acquired distribution rights to the film in May 2017. It screened at the Telluride Film Festival on September 2, 2018. It was the New York Film Festival's opening night film 28 September 28, 2018. It opened the BFI London Film Festival on October 18, 2018. It got a limited release in the U.S. on November 23, 2018 and in the UK on January 1, 2019.
- The film is a co-production of Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

## **REAL HISTORY**

- The research that went into the history of this film came from many letters from Abigail to Harley (the Tory leader who became the equivalent of the Prime Minister. These letters became instrumental in establishing the characters voices on the page.
- Queen Anne may be England's least known ruler, not least of all because she left no heirs to speak of her, despite an extraordinary 17 pregnancies.
- Ascending to the throne at the turn of the 18th Century, essentially because no other Protestant successors to the Stuart royal line were available, she assumed the role of Queen just as England was on the verge of a tidal wave of changes. Anne would oversee a war with France, considered the first world war of modern times, and the uniting of England with Scotland to forge the Kingdom of Great Britain.
- Whigs and Tories taking sides as partisans and bitterly battling each other for influence as a young two-party political system was born. Whig—whatever its origin in Scottish Gaelic—was a term applied to horse thieves and, later, to Scottish Presbyterians; it connoted nonconformity and rebellion and was applied to those who claimed the power of excluding the heir from the throne. Tory was an Irish term suggesting a papist outlaw and was applied to those who supported the hereditary right of James despite his Roman Catholic faith. The Whigs, made up largely of landed aristocracy, supported the war and initially had the monarchy's support. The Tories—the opposition party—sought to bring the war, with all its mounting costs in blood and treasure, to an end.

## **WRITING (Deborah Davis, Tony McNamara)**

- Deborah Davis first became familiar with this project 20 years ago when she read an article in a local London Newspaper with a headline “Everyone knows Queen Anne was having an affair

with Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough". She began researching and discovered an extraordinary story of women in power, running a country from a bedchamber. Also a pretty toxic female triangle.

- Prior to this film Director Yorgos Lanthimos had written or co-written each of his films; this is the first film Yorgos has no screenwriting credit with.
- They found a catalytic match in Australian playwright and screenwriter Tony McNamara, who seemed to share a tantalizing way of probing the weirdness and wildness of everyday human behavior. "Tony shares Yorgos' irreverence, wit, unpredictability, love of the absurd and dark, dark humour. They also share the same kind of artistic discipline, which was so important."
- Lanthimos reportedly has a very collaborative process - both screenwriters got an "Executive Producer" credit for this film as well.
- "The first draft of the script landed on my desk seemingly out of the blue," Dempsey recalls. "It was a fantastic story of betrayal with a rare opportunity to see brilliant women behaving badly, and the fact that it's based on a true story made it even more appealing. Since then, the script has gone through countless mutations but the core story, that of three women each struggling to survive by betraying the others, has endured."
- To research this triangle, Davis combed through volumes of letters between Sarah and Anne and Abigail and Harley.
- As the saying goes "A Film is Rewritten Three Times" finding its final shape in the edit. The choice of splitting the film in "Chapters" came about in the edit.
- This Original Screenplay has been nominated at the BAFTAS, Golden Globes, British Indie Film Awards, Critics Choice Awards, the Gotham Awards, and the Academy Awards.

## **STORY/TOPICS**

- Early 18th century England is at war with the French. Nevertheless, duck racing and pineapple eating are thriving. A frail Queen Anne (Olivia Colman) occupies the throne and her close friend Lady Sarah (Rachel Weisz) governs the country in her stead while tending to Anne's ill health and mercurial temper. When a new servant Abigail (Emma Stone) arrives, her charm endears her to Sarah. Sarah takes Abigail under her wing and Abigail sees a chance at return to her aristocratic roots. As the politics of war become quite time consuming for Sarah, Abigail steps into the breach to fill in as the Queen's companion. Their burgeoning friendship gives her a chance to fulfil her ambitions and she will not let woman, man, politics or rabbit stand in her way

## **CAST**

- Casting director Dixie Chassay and her team took to the streets. "Yorgos likes to marry classically trained actors with people who have no experience. He finds the purity of their spontaneity very rewarding; it's something no one can recapture," Chassay explains.

## **OLIVIA COLMAN (Queen Anne)**

- Olivia Colman gained 2.5 stone (16 kg. or 35 lbs.) to play Queen Anne.
- Colman noted sexual politics are "timeless." She quipped, "We think we invented sex, but it's been going on for a really long time." Then, to great laughter, she added of their characters in the film, "It was awfully fun having sex with Emma Stone." (Stone concurred.)
- "But surely when people realize half the world is women, and women want to see stories about women, you can't pretend that half the population isn't female. A script like that is joyous and brilliant and fun to play!"

- "I always choose actors because of their presence, their natural inclinations and what the camera sees in them, even if we don't know exactly what that is. I just knew early on that Olivia had to be our Queen," says Lanthimos.
- Colman's portrait of Anne is very much rooted in the Queen's body, in its vulgar awkwardness and its laments, but also its responsiveness and sensuality.
- "At the same time, she is quite childlike, so that part was fun to play. In her heart, she doesn't really feel like a Queen, which comes out in her rages and in her way of putting her foot down. I enjoyed myself, being cantankerous and slapping page boys."
- Working previously with him with on THE LOBSTER.

#### **RACHEL WEISZ (Lady Sarah)**

- "Let's get people to write more things where women drive the story, the protagonists drive the story and get to be anything — whether cruel, vulnerable, kind, sadistic, powerful or manipulative, like we are in real life. I get completely depressed talking about it like we are unicorns or something. They treat us as if we are an outlier. We do have to talk about it. It's about what stories people choose to tell."
- Lady Sarah Churchill, the first Duchess of Marlborough—who also attained unprecedented power, though more through savvy than inheritance.
- The first was Lady Sarah Churchill, the legendarily sharp and alluring Duchess of Marlborough, Anne's BFF since childhood who, once Anne took the throne, became a primary political adviser and perhaps (according to rumors that have swirled for centuries) her lover. The second was Abigail Masham, who was Sarah's cousin by birth but reduced to destitution by family bankruptcy, joining the royal household as a lowly maid. Nevertheless, Abigail would set in motion an epic, impassioned battle with Sarah to become Anne's new "favourite," making herself indispensable to the Queen, while pushing Anne in the opposite political direction that Lady Sarah was pulling.
- "I don't think Anne realizes that Sarah is the true love in her life when she has her head turned by Abigail," Colman observes. "She and Sarah have known each other since they were little girls and they've always protected each other. But with Abigail, Anne is just so thrilled that someone is so attentive towards her. She just thinks, 'oh, this beautiful young creature is looking at me' and she's completely struck by that. But the tragic part is that the Queen thinks it's all for real ... and it's not."
- Rachel Weisz in her second feature with Lanthimos, following THE LOBSTER.

#### **EMMA STONE (Abigail)**

- "It's just so rare to read something, you know, written for the screen that features three women who are so emotionally complex, and funny, and raw, and fragile, and strong, and, you know, powerful. They all feature such a range of emotion that it was just a dream."
- "I've always appreciated Emma a lot and as soon as I met her I understood that she was very smart, that she like to dive into things and that she felt really strongly about this character. It was just amazing to see her work. I knew she could do this, but I don't think she has had the opportunity to ever do something like this before. So it was just a great experience to witness that." -Lanthimos
- "That there are three really beautifully crafted females at the center of this story still remains rare in film scripts," she points out. "The way they are each so flawed, so hilarious and so very complicated, I love that. It's just reflective of real life."
- "I had to learn to curtsy, to shoot an 18th Century gun and ride a horse," she says. Then there was the royal protocol. "In the Palace, everything is so formal and so presentational. That was all

fascinating to learn. Abigail has to back out of the room because you don't turn your back on the Queen. Those things are so interesting."

- Stone joined with Colman and Weisz for a 3-week period before production, during which they developed both a rapport and the openness they would need before the cameras. "We got to know each other so well and trust each other in those three weeks. I think it created a certain dynamic between us and also with Yorgos himself where we were ready for whatever might happen, which was so important on a film like this."

#### **NICHOLAS HOULT** (Robert Harley)

- The Tory opposition leader was Robert Harley, 1st Earl of Oxford and Earl Mortimer, considered one of the modern world's first master practitioners of "spin." Harley finds his access to the Queen constantly blocked by Sarah.
- "I love that the film is about the power and the love of three women-Rachel, Emma and Olivia's characters. Whose characters are actually much stronger than the male characters in many ways and certainly, in terms of appearance compared to these men running around in three inch heels, leggings and big wigs," muses Houlton.
- "We all understood that we were taking our characters outside the confines of what is known about them," he says. Instead, going off his actions in the script, Houlton describes Harley as "quite manipulative," noting that "to get the Queen's ear, Harley has to weave his way in through an alliance with Abigail."

#### **MARK GATISS** (John Churchill, Lord Marlborough)

- Whig leader John Churchill, The Duke of Marlborough, to find ways to fund England's war with France.
- Gatiss was drawn to Lanthimos' unorthodoxy. "In some ways, you had to unlearn things you've been doing for years," he describes of the set. "Yorgos always wanted to dig deeper and find something unusual and more contemporary in these characters than anyone else might have seen."
- The historic Churchill married Sarah when she was still a teen, but later his wife's curiously tight bond with the Queen would prove to be of great advantage.

#### **EMMA DELVES** (Queen's Maid)

#### **FAYE DAVENEY** (Sarah's Maid)

#### **DIRECTING** (Yorgos Lanthimos)

- "He is an enigmatic individual who has this amazing ability to communicate through his films. There is a kind of subliminal magic that goes on with his storytelling, a kind of alchemy where you watch one of his films and a few days later you're still coming up with more questions. He can be incredibly provocative in all the best ways." -Dempsey
- "He shoots things from angles that nobody else shoots and it all looks beautiful. I love learning and it's always a massive learning curve working with Yorgos." -Coleman
- "Yorgos is an incredibly kind human being. He's not scary in any way, he just has very unique ideas and you just want to be able to submit to them without getting into your head too much. I felt in very safe hands with him." -Stone

#### **PRODUCTION** (Robbie Ryan - DP, Production Designer Fiona Crombie)

- Filming began March 20, 2017.

- “Tonally, the film is a pure creation of Yorgos-and how he creates tone is perhaps the most brilliant and most mysterious thing he does.”
- "To be trapped in such close quarters only heightens the personal tensions." -- Ceci Dempsey, Producer
- Lanthimos knew he wanted to use the Palace architecture as one uses the rooms in a bedroom farce, with a manic array of interconnections. "The way the Palace operated was really important to Yorgos visually and we used that in the storytelling," McNamara explains. "Yorgos liked the idea that everyone's rooms were connected and he liked the sense of Abigail starting downstairs and working her way up."
- To portray the Palace, the production utilized Hatfield House, a Jacobean estate in Hertfordshire, England, on a parcel of land that has housed royals since the 15th Century. The present structure was built in 1611 by Robert Cecil, the Chief Minister to King James I, replete with grand staircases, capacious drawing rooms and crucially, elongated corridors that stretch for miles.
- Shooting with the rich warmth of 35mm film
- "There were a couple of instances outside at night where we had to use lights so you could at least see something, but the rest we shot like all my films-with natural light," says Lanthimos.
- “The film was never shot in a conventional manner and you saw them constantly seeking out different ways to film. I think that's part of what makes Yorgos' films feel different, fresh and at times unsettling.”
- "The Queen's apartment often changes and we had no fixed rules such as this is where that chair goes. I really like this idea that's in the script that the Queen is carried on a sedan chair, so there's a natural mobility of objects wherever she goes.
- The chequered black-and-white marble floor in Hatfield's Great Hall helped Crombie to develop the design palette for the film with a monochromatic field of golds, champagnes, pineapple and oak tones, an idea that came from costume designer Sandy Powell. "We were all delighted by the way that the costumes sit in this gold and wooden warm world," says Crombie.
- “One of the biggest challenges we had was all the candles because as you can imagine, there are very strict protocols about managing candles. So we had to use an enormous number of wax catchers.”
- The film's use of wide angle lenses and 360-degree whip pans was especially rewarding for Crombie, as it gives a new perspective on her team's work.
- Color became key to the design. While Powell stayed true to 18th Century silhouettes, color became her sandbox, and she played with a minimalist palette of visually stark neutrals and golds.

#### **EDITING/VFX (Yorgos Mavropsaridis)**

- Nabbed 10 prizes at the British Independent Film Awards (“BIFA”) and recently nominated for five Golden Globes. Greek editor.
- Have edited all of Yorgos Lanthimos's feature films. “I edited [Lanthimos] first video clips, and also his first short film.
- “We met in the commercial business and got along together. We developed a kind of friendship that was based mainly on our common interest in what we were doing and also a kind of, let's say, resistance towards a director's cut, something like that, even if it was the commercial business.”
- “I must tell you that I came to *The Favourite* after the assembly was already done. I couldn't work part in parcel all this time. I was first to "read" the cut and then I read the script, as a matter of fact. There was already a structure there. There was a script there. Okay, we did work

with a small, let's say, corrective script, working a lot more on the actresses, on the power of everything, but it was the same structure.”

- “We took out the scene where Abigail first arrives and everything starts up. We didn't like it. We started the film instead with a discussion between the Queen and Sarah on the nature of love. And *then* Abigail comes.”
- “Sometimes it was for aesthetic reasons, sometimes we wanted the rhythm of the film to be faster, in a sense, to have more of a pulse somehow. Sometimes you have a scene and you wish to keep some of the lines and so you combine them with a different scene. I'm working [toward] the way Lanthimos wants to see the film played.”
- “Somehow we wanted to emphasize, formally, a close up of Abigail insinuating something, about her character. Other times it was for aesthetic reasons, for transitions or maybe because we did develop all these aesthetic tools to last through the end of the film.”
- “We had to construct [the ending] because it was not shot like that. There were a couple of rabbit close-ups in the end, but he wanted this idea to come through. He wanted to make a dissolve of all of these cuts together, to somehow combine them and create this multi-level light.”
- “It was a deliberate choice at certain moments when to use the fisheye lens. And sometimes we do things without reason. One other aspect of Lanthimos's narrative is that he is present. He says "this is the way I narrate it. I am here." Some people find [the fisheye] lens too much or too intrusive to the narrative, but that's what it is. Yes. Because we are viewers of film and we have to be reminded of that. Because we must make some particular conscious efforts on watching a film like that, I guess, or I hope!”
- “We changed the chapters a lot. We even changed the names of the chapters! At some point, I remember a chapter lead the viewer to believe the film was finished (but it wasn't) and so we had to change the cut so people wouldn't think it was finished, and it went on. The ideas were used differently throughout, but the idea was there from the beginning.
- “The vibrancy of the picture was there from the first “one light” pass the lab did in our editing files. Lanthimos likes to edit having the best possible color correction in our rushes. You cannot properly edit if the image and the sound contradict the mood that the director is trying to create. Lanthimos likes to keep the feeling as “analog” as possible, that’s why he prefers to shoot using negative and mostly uses natural sources of light.”

#### **TRIVIA/EASTER EGGS**

- The wigs had their own trailer.

#### **SOUND/MUSIC ()**

- “At certain times, we even tried to use more modern music, but then we reverted to the more classical because we didn't see that it took away from the modernity of the picture.”  
-Mavropsaridis

#### **PROMOTION**

#### **BOX OFFICE**

- Domestic (as of January 30th, 2019): \$26,878,893
- Foreign: \$27,948,917
- Worldwide: \$54,827,810

## RECEPTION

- RT: 93% Tatometer: 62%
- IMDB: 7.1/10
- Cinemascore: NA

## SEQUEL/LEGACY

### Academy Awards, USA 2019

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Nominee</b><br>Oscar | Best Original Screenplay<br><a href="#">Deborah Davis</a><br><a href="#">Tony McNamara</a>  |
|                         | Best Achievement in Production Design<br><a href="#">Fiona Crombie</a><br><a href="#">Alice Felton</a>  |
|                         | Best Achievement in Costume Design<br><a href="#">Sandy Powell</a>  |
|                         | Best Motion Picture of the Year<br><a href="#">Ceci Dempsey</a><br><a href="#">Ed Guiney</a><br><a href="#">Lee Magiday</a><br><a href="#">Yorgos Lanthimos</a> |
|                         | Best Achievement in Directing<br><a href="#">Yorgos Lanthimos</a>   |
|                         | Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role<br><a href="#">Olivia Colman</a>   |
|                         | Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role<br><a href="#">Rachel Weisz</a>   |
|                         | Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role<br><a href="#">Emma Stone</a>   |
|                         | Best Achievement in Cinematography<br><a href="#">Robbie Ryan</a>   |
|                         | Best Achievement in Film Editing<br><a href="#">Yorgos Mavropsaridis</a>  |



