

# The Queen

a lovely human being

Dennis Raymond

1969

Was it really only ten years ago that Main Resnais shocked the world by graphically demonstrating that lovers do not always wear pajamas to bed?

My, how far we've come since "Hiroshima Mon Amour." Bared breasts, bellies and buttocks no longer hold the shock value they had back in 1959. And with the upcoming release of Vilgot Sjöman's "I Am Curious: Yellow," we will have witnessed every possible "normal" human sexual activity on the screen, and then some.

So after our ultimate loss of innocence, where will the movies go from there?

Sexual deviation seems the answer. In case you haven't noticed, the whole film industry is now immersed in an era devoted to the gay life. 1968 was the year of the Lesbian, Now, with the emergence of Rod Steiger in "The Sargeant," a rather dumb character study of life and love in the barracks, we all know that 1969 is going to be the year of the Hollywood Homosexual.

How refreshing to discover an honest, sensitive, and uncompromising work on that delicate subject: male homosexuality. "The Queen" is such a film.

For sixty-eight all-too-short entertaining minutes we are asked to forget all the problems of the world and become totally involved in the preparations, the mechanics, and the outcome of a transvestite beauty contest. The forty contestants are judged as follows: 5 points each for walking, talking, bathing suit competition, gown, make-up and hairdo, and 10 points for beauty.

And beautiful they are, these gentlemen in drag. Decked out in silken gowns, hairfalls, falsies, bras, nylons and heels, some of them have achieved a remarkable physical beauty; an illusion so perfect that it is most jolting when one of them knowingly allows the exaggerated mannerisms to emerge. With their limp wrists, mincing gate, and sensuous, open mouths, the drag queens are not female imitations at all, but sly, campy parodies.

Despite its subject, "The Queen" is anything but shocking and sensational, but then neither is it patronizing and mocking. Where one might feel scorn, disgust, and repulsion, one is moved to understanding, compassion, and, above all, humor. We laugh not at these young men, but with them. When they get together, their humor is simply inspired. One asks another about his draft board: "Did you tell them you were homosexual?" "No," is the reply. "They told me."

Discussing their escapades with the draft, their lovers in Vietnam, their family ties, each comes across as a happy, intelligent, adjusted, likable, and perfectly lovely human being, not much different from someone you might meet on the street.

"We're like in this fantasy bag, y'know?" remarks one of the queens to the camera. "But then who's not in a fantasy bag?"

"The Queen" could stand on its own just for its many cinematic virtues. It is Frank Simon's first feature film and is directed with much imagination, sensitivity and beauty.

One just can't help but acknowledge all detail, intelligence, and wit that has gone into the making of "The Queen," while window shopping, one of the queens passes by a theatre playing "A Man And A Woman," the strate-

gic positioning of the camera during the actual contest, shooting from below each contestant in order to heighten the desired effect of cleavage and round breasts; the simple deletion of sound as the camera moves from face to face, each absorbed in carefully applying make-up; the wild and garish color used to heighten the excitement and gaiety of the event.

In sharp contrast to the lightheadedness that has preceded, Simon ends "The Queen" with a heartbreaking image. The winner of the "Miss All-American" title, a beautiful boy with bleached blond hair, sits alone in a crowded airport terminal toying with his "prize": a cheap, jeweled crown.

What we have here is a rich portrait of outsiders who exist within our society. What might have become a freak show is a compassionate humanistic document. It is a sad and thoughtful ending to an extraordinary motion picture.

# fifth Estate

Dennis Raymond  
The Queen  
a lovely human being  
1969

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/72-february-6-19-1969/the-queen>  
Fifth Estate #72, February 6 — 19, 1969

**[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net)**