



# TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

THURSDAY  
MARCH 9, 2017

7:00PM • WHITNEY  
HUMANITIES CENTER

PRESENTED WITH  
SUPPORT FROM  
PAUL L. JOSKOW  
'70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.

# The Madness of King George

ORGANIZED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE EXHIBITION

*Enlightened Princesses: Caroline, Augusta, Charlotte, and the Shaping of the Modern World*

ON VIEW AT THE YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ART UNTIL APRIL 30, 2017



In light of the connection between tonight's screening and the Yale Center for British Art's exhibition, it is fitting that the film opens on Queen Charlotte (Helen Mirren)—brightly lit, and framed prominently by a partly-opened doorway. Characteristically, she is attending to family. Although King George is the central character, Charlotte is the stable force: authority figure for her children, promoter of the royal image ("It's what you're paid for: smile and wave!"), and steadfast supporter of her beleaguered husband.

The six-minute opening credits sequence concisely establishes most of the film's important elements: the colorful regal setting (combining actual locations and Ken Adam's Academy Award-winning set design); the splendor of majesty (conveyed cleverly through the awestruck points of view of both a newcomer and a child); the grandiose Handel soundtrack; the major supporting players (unpleasant Prince of Wales, faithful Edward Thurlow, efficient William Pitt, and antagonistic Charles Fox); and, of course, King George (portrayed with bravura throughout by Nigel Hawthorne). It is 1788, only five years after America's independence, a loss that weighs heavily on George.



Spoilers ahead! We do not yet see the titular madness, which first appears about twenty minutes of screen time later, and which precipitates the film's central political crisis: the 1788-1789 battle between the King's supporters and those who demand a regency under the Prince of Wales.

DIRECTED BY **NICHOLAS HYTNER**  
WRITTEN BY **ALAN BENNETT** BASED ON HIS PLAY  
(1994) 104 MINS.

PRODUCED BY **THE SAMUEL GOLDWYN CO.**

STARRING **NIGEL HAWTHORNE, HELEN MIRREN,  
RUPERT EVERETT, AND IAN HOLM**

At about the halfway point, George is forcibly placed under the treatment of stern Dr. Francis Willis (Ian Holm). In the book accompanying the YCBA's exhibition, Lead Curator Joanna Marschner writes of the actual doctor, "While Willis's approach to the King's cure might only be seen as mixture of morale boosting and psychological bullying, supplemented by more conventional medical practices such as blistering, experimental practices for merely managing mental illness gradually became the basis of a new science of psychiatry."

Director Nicholas Hytner and screenwriter Alan Bennett vividly depict the effectiveness of Willis's methods, but they also use poetic license, and poetry, to present a partner of science: art. In a touching scene, George is seated outdoors, enacting King Lear's recognition of his madness. This begins comically, with George wearing a straw hat in lieu of a crown, and Thurlow (John Wood) playing Cordelia, but it becomes a poignant expression of self-realization, "the moment when the King awakes." George/Lear: "Pray do not mock me. I am a very foolish, fond old man. And to deal plainly, I fear I am not in my perfect mind." Dr. Willis (who has never read Shakespeare): "Is that the end, Your Majesty?" George: "Oh, good Lord, no... They all die. It's a tragedy." Thurlow: "Very affecting." George: "Well, it's the way I play it." Thurlow: "Your Majesty seems more yourself." George: "Do I? Yes, I do. I've always been myself, even when I was ill. Only now I seem myself. And that's the important thing. I have remembered how to seem."

By playing Lear, by "remembering how to seem," George is able to resume playing the role of monarch. As James Fisher has observed, "It is, ironically, his ability to play a role that is *not himself* that demonstrates his capacity to truly *be himself*. The fact that George can perform as a fictional character and *know that is what he is doing* signifies his return to normality." George proudly praises himself as a tragedian, but the film contradicts Shakespeare by ending happily. There is no hint of the return to insanity that will ultimately consume the King. For the moment, King George III's monarchy is secure, and his loving relationship with the enlightened Queen Charlotte is reaffirmed.

**DID YOU KNOW:** GEORGE III WAS THE THIRD LONGEST-REIGNING BRITISH MONARCH (59 YEARS, 96 DAYS), TOPPED BY HIS GRANDDAUGHTER VICTORIA (63 YEARS, 216 DAYS) AND VICTORIA'S GREAT-GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER ELIZABETH II (65 YEARS, 31 DAYS, AND COUNTING).

**NEXT UP:** CELEBRATE THE WORK OF LEGENDARY PHOTOGRAPHER AND FILMMAKER ROBERT FRANK WITH TWO SCREENINGS NEXT MONTH: FIRST, DIRECTOR LAURA ISRAEL IS JOINED BY JOURNALIST NICHOLAS DAWIDOFF FOR A SCREENING AND DISCUSSION OF HER 2015 DOCUMENTARY **DON'T BLINK—ROBERT FRANK** ON **FRIDAY, APRIL 14, AT 7:00 PM.** FRANK'S 1988 FEATURE **CANDY MOUNTAIN**, FEATURING AN ECLECTIC CAST INCLUDING TOM WAITS, LEON REDBONE, AND DR. JOHN, SCREENS ON **35MM ON SATURDAY, APRIL 15, AT 7:00 PM.**