

# The Young Victoria (2009)

Rated PG. Our ratings: V-1 ; L- 0; S/N-2. Running time: 1 hour 40 min.

*Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.*

*Romans 8:2 (Phillips Version)*

Americans are devoted to “the Victoria and Albert during one democratic way of life,” but of his visits to London most of us also are fascinated with British royalty, thus if given a chance, this new production should fare well at the box office. It deserves to do so, writer Julian Fellowes uncovering the high drama of the maneuvers of the teenaged Victoria’s mother and ambitious stepfather to control her, and director Jean-Marc Vallee apparently sparing no cost on the gorgeous period costumes and lavish homes and palaces serving as the backdrop of the drama.

2009 Sony Pictures  
Entertainment

You do not have to be an Anglophile to enjoy this lavish production starring Emily Blunt as the young heir to the British throne whose stepfather Sir John Conroy (Mark Strong) and mother the Duchess of Kent (Miranda Richardson) tried to bend to their will. Like most Americans, I had no idea of their harsh schemes to force the teenaged princess to sign a

paper giving them the power of regents, thus enabling them to rule on her behalf. And I do mean "force" –in one scene Sir John comes to the girl's bedroom, places the pen in her hand, and tries to make her sign the paper he has prepared. When she continually refuses his command, he would have struck her but for the intervention of one of her ladies in waiting.

Such was her mother's attempt to rule over her that she kept her from seeing her uncle the King, except for a few state occasions, and she would not even let her daughter go up or down the stairs without holding the hand of an adult. (Talk about "smothering love" !) An exhilarating and dramatic moment in the film is the scene in which Victoria is informed that she is now Queen, whereupon she refuses her mother's order to take her hand as she ascends the stairs. The young woman must also learn to be wary of those who would use her, as in the case of Lord Melbourne (Paul Bettany) who aspires to power in the government.

We see not only a strong-willed young woman, but also one who, when her romance with the socially progressive Prince Albert flourishes, takes a deep interest in the welfare of her people. Their long period of intercourse, beginning with their first meeting, which is especially encouraged by Albert's father the King of Belgium, is like one of those old dances in which the partners meet, step back, circle around each other, and then continue to move forward and then back again. For a long time Albert is not certain about Victoria's feelings for him, and he dare not express his because of the discrete etiquette of the time. Even when they finally do declare their love and marry, Victoria, ever mindful of past attempts to manipulate her, turns on him when he makes suggests, reminding him forcefully that she is the Queen. They are, of course, soon reconciled, but the incident reminds us that such an idyllic marriage as theirs has its rough passages.

If you love the Masterpiece Theater productions, you will love this film about a woman needing to stand up for herself in a

male-dominated world.

## **For Reflection/Discussion**

1. What impressed you the most about Victoria as a person?
2. What was the prevailing view about the nature and place of women then? What vestiges of this do you see still? For instance, what has Hillary Clinton experienced in her political career? What do you think is the reason that she, and most successful female politicians, wears pants suits rather than dresses?
3. How was Albert unusual for the men of his times? How was he a good match for Victoria?
4. Americans espouse democracy, and yet seem fascinated by British royalty. What do you make of this?