



Source: City A.M. {Main}
 Edition:
 Country: UK
 Date: Friday 15, June 2012
 Page: 26,27
 Area: 988 sq. cm
 Circulation: ABC 98573 Daily
 BRAD info: page rate £8,000.00, scc rate £33.00
 Phone: 020 7015 1200
 Keyword: A Royal Affair

Cosmopolis is flawed but compelling

LIFE & STYLE GOING OUT

FILM

COSMOPOLIS

Cert 15 | By Steve Dinneen



IN THE future, nobody will move their face. That is, at least, in David Cronenberg's dystopian vision, adapted from Don DeLillo's novel *Cosmopolis*.

Through billionaire finance whiz-kid Eric Packer (Robert Pattinson), Cronenberg seems intent on building an American *Psycho* for the 21st century, with Pattinson essentially playing an updated Partick Bateman. Packer conducts his business from an internet-connected, tank-like stretch limo, dreaming up tweaks to his forex-trading algorithm to add a few more zeros to his bank balance. In classic Bateman style, he receives a daily medical check-up (one scene involves a protracted prostate exam, conducted during a wealth management meeting); he attempts to buy the Rothko Chapel, just so he can know it belongs to him and he lines his limo in cork in a futile attempt to sound-proof it. He's very aspirational.

He's in the limo because, like a spoiled child, he has demanded his security team take him across town for a haircut. This is a bad idea for several reasons: gridlock caused by an anti-capitalism protest; a presidential visit; the funeral procession of a beloved rapper. Oh, and somebody might be trying to kill him. The car barely moves but he receives visitors, who trade lines about the nature of wealth and money (you couldn't call it conversing, exactly). Like a cross between Gordon Gekko and Rainman, he worries about the strength of the yuan but doesn't really "get" people ("isn't this how people talk?" he implores his soulless socialite wife).

The sterile world of Packer's limo is

a stunning oasis of technology and wealth amid the fumes and grime of the city. Even as anarchists descend on the car, its passengers seem blissfully unaware, so far removed from the protesters that they don't even acknowledge their existence. The limo, crawling through the anarchic streets, becomes a blindingly clear metaphor for the financial crisis (you can't avoid the parallel, even though the novel was released five years prior to the crash). But what could be a lazy deconstruction of the financial sector

is turned on its head, with the self-satisfied egotism of the anti-capitalist movement – with clear parallels with the Occupy demonstrations – also coming under fire. As Packer says: "Nobody hates the rich. Everybody is 10 seconds away from being rich... at least that's what they think."

You're left with a rather empty, very misanthropic world, peopled by beautiful, empty people. If Pattinson's aim was to exorcise the ghost (or the vampire) of the *Twilight* films, he goes some way towards achieving it; he may not have to move his face a great deal but his presence is palpable.

Cosmopolis isn't classic Cronenberg

but it's a fascinating interpretation of the times we live in, and an entertaining one at that.

FILM

A ROYAL AFFAIR

Cert 15 | By Steve Dinneen



ATWO-AND-A-HALF-HOUR movie about the Danish Royal family. Sold yet? Neither was I. In fact, it's testament to the strength of the Danish film industry that *A Royal Affair* is even getting a British release.

It documents one of the most famous

chapters in Danish history and, even by our own bonkers monarchal standards, it's quite a tale.

English princess Caroline Mathilde sets off to Denmark to marry her cousin, who, rather than the fairytale prince she'd been hoping for, turns out to be a tittering ninny. Worse, he's also slightly unhinged – possibly schizophrenic, earning him the rather unkind nickname "the Mad King" – and completely under the thumb of the socially regressive Danish court, who care only for self-preservation and looking after their pals. The peasants of Copenhagen aren't eating much bread

and they certainly aren't getting any cake.

Most of the action takes place in and around the palace but even here the gilt furniture glowers moodily from shadowy corners – this is a time of political turmoil and there is no place for frivolities like clear lighting.

As far as the court is concerned, everything is going just fine until subversive Enlightenment-thinker-come-physician Johann Friedrich Struensee is parachuted into the court as the king's quack. He's charming and brooding and the king falls madly in love with him in what, given a different historical backdrop, could have been a heart-warming bromance adventure. A power-struggle that helped to define the direction of Danish culture ensues, with an increasingly despotic Struensee intent on exerting his influence to free the subjugated peasantry and dismantle the powers of the landed gentry.

Alas, the friendship comes to an abrupt end when Struensee's head falls into the axe-man's basket. You see, while he is a man of principle, he also has an eye for the ladies and the queen is too good a prize to pass up.

The dynamic between the suave Struensee – played by Mads Mikkelsen, who you might remember as scar-faced poker-player Le Chiffre in *Casino Royal*



– and bumbling Christian can be captivating, with Struensee torn between helping the people and exploiting the vulnerable king.

Mikkelsen delivers the standout performance, with Struensee simmering under his cool façade, as the heavy burden of power takes its toll. The supporting cast play their roles well enough, but broad brush strokes render the majority of them either heroes or villains (you can play a game of Forbrydelsen bingo, with more than a few faces familiar from the hit Danish TV show).

The main problem, though, is that it's just too long. Mad king Christian VII's reign lasted a total of 42 years and by the end of [A Royal Affair](#), I was starting to suspect they were recreating it in real-time; like watching an interminable reality TV show in which the contestants are executed at the end. You start off caring about Struensee but by the end, I was wishing he'd just put his head on the chopping block and get it over with.

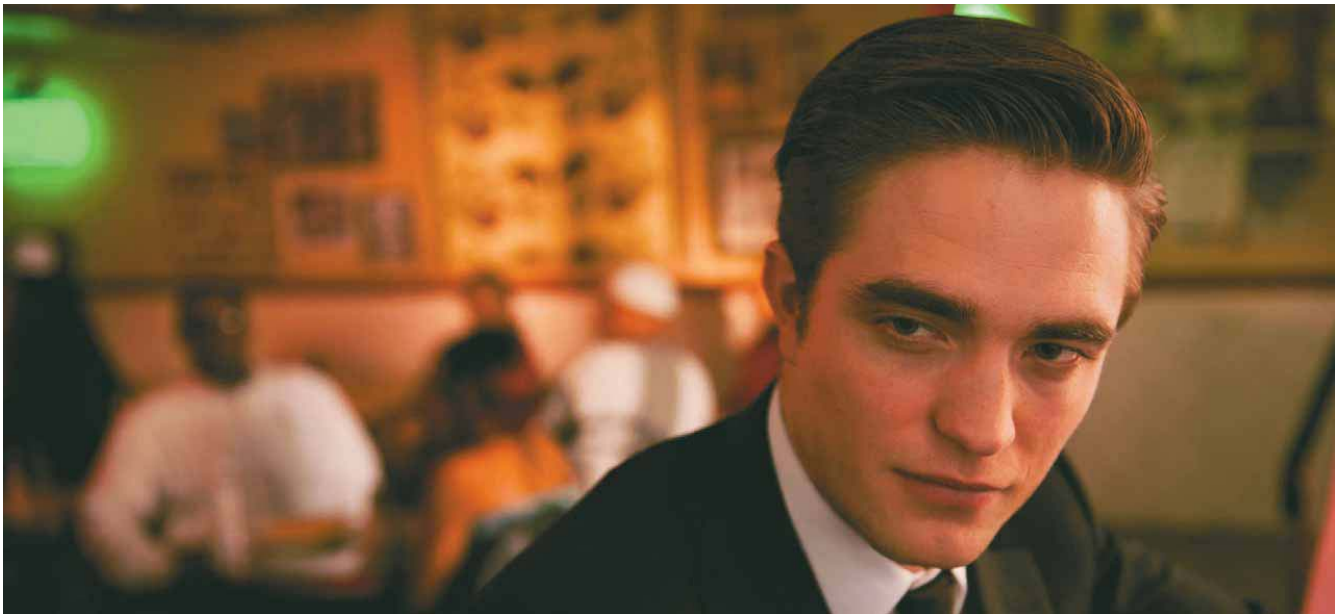


Alicia Vikander and Mads Mikkelsen as the Danish queen and her physician



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