Elizabeth: The Golden Age

Universal Studios / Widescreen DVD 2008



Directed by Shekhar Kapur, *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* focuses on the years 1585-1588 during the reign of Elizabeth I. While the film is artistically directed and well acted, a crucial problem is that the plot centers on the attack and defeat of the Spanish Armada, and too much attention is paid to Elizabeth I's historically unlikely love for Walter Raleigh. The movie spends too much time making suppositions about Elizabeth's inner world and emotions. The Elizabethan age was an eventful time, this period of the age especially, which the filmmakers rightly term "The Golden Age."

The stereotype that women are primarily emotional rather than intellectual beings is alarmingly evident. It is well known that Elizabeth was an eminently rational and intellectual woman. In addition, Cate Blanchett and Samantha Morton are too young for their respective parts as Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, and little effort is made to make them look the appropriate ages. When the film opens in 1585, Elizabeth I was 52 years old. Cate Blanchett was 38 when this film was made and looks younger. Mary Stuart was born in 1542 and therefore would have been 43 years old in 1585, but Samantha Morton, who was 30 when the film was made, looks no older than 25.

Important historical characters are completely missing. William Cecil and Robert Dudley, both prominent figures in this period of history, are completely absent. The filmmakers have tried to subsume Cecil's character into the character of Francis Walsingham and Dudley's character into Sir Walter Raleigh. Walsingham is given Cecil's role of chief advisor, and while Walsingham did have a very prominent role and great influence and prominence in the Elizabethan court, Cecil held the position of chief advisor until his death in 1598. Walter Raleigh is given the role of "love interest" for the Queen, a role that Robert Dudley held until his death shortly after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. The historical Robert Dudley was present at Tilbury and served as Elizabeth's lieutenant general, yet there is no sign of him in the movie.

This film does have several strong points. The special effects employed to depict the attack and defeat of the Spanish Armada are spectacular. The film's costumes, props, and settings are beautiful and historically credible. The performances of the actors and actresses in the film are outstanding. Cate Blanchett and Samantha Morton provide superb renditions of Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart. While not paying due attention to details, the film captures the spirit and splendor of the period.

–Samantha Lord