
THE ROYAL
EXCHANGE
A FILM BY MARC DUGAIN



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THE ROYAL EXCHANGE

[L'ÉCHANGE DES PRINCESSES]

A FILM BY **MARC DUGAIN**

FROM THE NOVEL **THE EXCHANGE OF PRINCESSES** BY **CHANTAL THOMAS**
EDITIONS DU SEUIL (2013) AND EDITIONS POINTS (2014)

with Lambert Wilson, Anamaria Vartolomei, Olivier Gourmet, Catherine Mouchet, Kacey Mottet Klein, Igor Van Dessel, Juliane Lepoureau, Andréa Ferreol, Maya Sansa

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SYNOPSIS

1721. A bold idea is brewing in the head of Philip of Orléans, Regent of France…

11-year-old Louis XV is soon to become king and an exchange of princesses would allow the nation to consolidate peace with Spain after years of war that have bled the two kingdoms' coffers dry.

He therefore marries his 12-year-old daughter, Mademoiselle de Montpensier, to the heir to the Spanish throne, in exchange for which Louis XV must marry the Spanish Infanta, 4-year-old Mariana Victoria.

But this precipitous introduction into the grownups' world of manipulation and power games will get the better of them and their carefree spirits.





Interview with MARC DUGAIN

This is the first time you've adapted a film from someone else's book. Why did you wish to adapt Chantal Thomas' *The Exchange of Princesses*?

I'm a history buff. This story appealed to me especially since as a child I read numerous books about the 18th century. This historical episode concerning the exchange of the princesses is quite unique, notably with regards to how very cruelly the children were treated, and the way in which each one of them tried to make their way through it.
None of this is very far from my usual area of interest, which has been mostly devoted to political manipulation. These children are literally manipulated by adults who themselves aren't really grownups. Young princes and aristocrats were brought up with much pomp and ideas of grandeur, all the while being infantilized and kept in a puerile state: children who play at war because they have nothing else to do. This is what in part accounts for the monarchy's decline. In the film we can see that the monarchy is already heading towards its demise.

Indeed, your film opens at the end of a very particular world, with the omnipresence of death, in a Versailles falling in ruins.

This connection with precariousness was fundamental in my desire to make this film. In the 18th century, the omnipresence of epidemics such as the plague and smallpox implied that people had a very particular perspective on life. The probability of living until the age of seventy like today didn't exist; one was more likely to die before reaching the age of thirty-five. The ominous and ubiquitous presence of death also explains the importance of religion in people's lives as it offered a link between eternal life and life on earth, which was fleeting. When Philip V tells the Infanta that life and death are the same thing, it's a concept that is at the base of religion, to reassure the living with regards to death. I wanted to show this utter terror upon the realization that one is merely mortal: a pivotal and defining moment in childhood.

That especially applies to Louis XV…

Louis XV is a child whose entire family was wiped out by smallpox. He has seen everyone around him die: his great-grandfather, grandfather, father, mother, brother… And despite this terrifying emotional void, he is required to be king. He finds himself vested with a function that he at first fills awkwardly, and then which he will learn to fully embody.

A phrase the King utters to the Regent shows the complex relationship he has with the role of being king: "On the eve of my majority, we refuse to sleep alone."

The film shows the process of becoming a king: how a sick orphaned child, through this somewhat ridiculous system of lineage finds himself suddenly vested with a royal function – and discovers the world through the prism of absolute power. At the same time he also understands that "he's only been made king so he will obey."
The young Louis XV is tactless and indecisive. Whenever he's asked to make a decision, he becomes wary, scrutinizes the people around him, barely answers. I wanted to show this facet of royal power, the burden such a responsibility represents for a child. Louis the XV is overwhelmed by his role, but he doesn't shy away from it, and fulfills it, at times even with a degree of severity. When he is in the boat with the Infanta and he says, "Madam, people say you aren't growing," he has stepped into a reproductive role, in the royal sense of the term.





The Infanta's inner strength and depth is astonishing.

In Chantal Thomas' book, the Infanta is already very present and well fleshed out. She admirably transcends her role. Chantal Thomas gives the children certain qualities and a precocity that they probably didn't have in reality. Yet, I love the way she depicts the children.

I conferred certain qualities upon Louis XV; Chantal conferred certain qualities upon the Infanta; the film is the result of our respective projections. Chantal accepted my vision of Louis XV, and I tried to respect her vision of the Infanta as best I could. All the while knowing that I was equally as interested in the other child characters and that finding the right balance was important for me. The idea was to have four children of equal importance.

Fiction pays a larger role in the film than in the book, notably in reference to Louise-Elisabeth, who ends up growing close to Don Luis…

Louise-Elisabeth was an emancipated, cheeky, and rather modern girl. However, I didn't want to take it to an extreme. I thought it was interesting to have a moment when she resigns herself to her role of being a royal spouse, and becomes attached to Don Luis, encouraging him to stand up to his parents: "If you remain as resolute as king I could even love you" she tells him. I find the fact that she accepts her fate with resignation at once unbearable and beautiful.

These children are involved in a cynical conspiracy, but they navigate their way through these rough waters in a noble manner, accepting their destiny…

I never belittle or degrade my characters, I can't; it's just not in my nature. I like movies where the characters have a certain dignity and nobility in their being. We don't have to be focused on a sinking and despairing humanity; it's already drowning well enough on its own!
Although the children stand tall and dignified, they are no less victims of their decaying heritage. This raises the entire matter of determinism: to what extent can one be released from their education and extract themselves from the environment in which they were immersed from birth? Dramatically opposing oneself to one's childhood signifies having already integrated it. Escaping this environment is extremely complicated for these children, for Louis XV in particular, since he only has one solution: become king because he was born to be king. He accepts this and grows into it.

Above all, you focus on the private lives of your young characters and film very little of the Court's splendor.

There are two options when you make a historical film. Either you film the official history – history with a capital H including all the pomp and circumstance, which is a rather Anglo-Saxon take on history – or you choose a more intimate way of telling your story. I opted for the latter, for I wanted to stay tightly focused on the children, their reactions and their emotions. In my mind, therein lied the interest of the film, not in making a detailed panorama of the 18th century.

As for the common people, they are totally off screen, except for the interlude in the forest when the princess comes across a young peasant woman…

The princess steps out of the carriage to relieve herself, looks up at the sky, and suddenly she sees this young girl in the woods. She's intrigued, the hint of a smile crosses her face, but she is instantly recalled to her own world… I thought it would be interesting to have this unique interaction between the aristocracy and the common people take place this way, showing the princess oppressed by her world.
In order to show the aristocracy in decline, it wasn't necessary to add the cliché representation of the "sans culottes" in rags; the consanguinity in which they lived was enough! This aristocracy was self-destructing in tribal wars: the Bourbon dynasty against the House of Orléans. And after years of interbreeding with their own kin, they end up degenerating, as illustrated by the example of Philip V.

The Duke of Condé is quite a ridiculous character.

I'm fond of this character's excessive side; someone who is just crazy enough to want to succeed in politics. At the time, France was the world's leading nation and at its head was a young thirteen-year-old king who was trying to find himself and a twenty-one-year-old degenerate prime minister.

Homosexuality is largely alluded to…

This period of ambiguity that many adolescents go through, not necessarily in a purely sexual manner, for that matter, is very interesting. Especially since during this time period, many masculine friendships were fueled by admiration and feelings: men would write to each other almost like two women would. It was an era when it was more complicated to approach women. I wanted to depict all this questioning that this king in the making was going through.
As for Louise-Elisabeth's homosexuality, I tackled it head on. When she gets out of bed with her lady-in-waiting, we understand that something really happened, that she has discovered a new territory. At the time, homosexuality was a way of getting around sexual taboos, and also of avoiding the rather high risk of pregnancy.



Where did you shoot the film?

We used several castles in Belgium: Beloeil, whose interior is like a replica of Versailles, and Egmont Palace, where the Belgium foreign ministry is housed. And not very far, in the Flemish region, there's Gaasbeek castle, which is rather representative of Flemish art under Spanish influence. That's where we shot the scenes for Philip V's court.

How did you find the four young actors?

Somebody had spoken to me about Igor Van Dessel, who pays Louis XV. He was working on a film in Cap Ferret, and as I live in Bordeaux, I went to meet him. I took him out to lunch, we had a discussion, and then at all of thirteen years old, at the end of the meal he took out his wallet and asked: "May I invite you to lunch?"



Igor is extremely photogenic. He has a way of taking the light, with his incredible eyes and somewhat angelic demeanor. And as with great actors, he is capable of great focus, but when a take is over with, he immediately disconnects. This young boy is astounding because he is capable of rectifying a detail in a split second, and he had the ability to make his character evolve although we weren't shooting chronologically. Igor had a profound understanding of this character who had lost everything and then had to reconstruct himself.

And the choice of Juliane Lepoureau, who plays the Infanta?

She was there among several children who'd come to the casting. As soon as I saw her, I knew she was the one. She was so spontaneous, and brought great intelligence to her lines. I don't know how one possesses the ability to act that way at her tender age. On the set, she was always happy, never tired, and never complained although there were moments when she had to wait and wait for long periods of time.

And for the role of Louise-Elisabeth, Gilles Porte had spoken to me about Anamaria Vartolomei. He'd seen her in Beigbeder's *L'Idéal*, for which he handled the cinematography. She is in fact a magnificent and very talented actress. As for Kacey Mottet-Klein, who plays Don Luis, he was a bit of a godsend. He is also extremely talented.

And what about casting for the adults?

Catherine Mouchet has a unique acting style. It's surprising to see on set, but even more when you discover her work in the rushes. Catherine perfectly embodies this bond with the two lost children. As for Lambert Wilson, he is extremely generous, with a strength that at times needs to be channeled, but which makes him an exceptional actor. I find him magnificent in the abdication scene, where he expresses to perfection Philip V's mystic insanity. I imagined him in this role from the beginning, for he is at once extremely sensitive and imposing.

Having Olivier Gourmet as the Regent was also an obvious choice for me. The Regent was in fact more effeminate, but the brutality given off by Gourmet corresponds quite well to the cattle merchant side of the exchange: I'll sell you my daughter and buy yours…

I also very much wanted Maya Sansa for her role. All the actors were people I had hoped for, including the supporting roles, like Vincent Londez, who plays Saint-Simon. We see very little of him but he establishes himself with just one look.



How did you work with Gilles Porte, the cinematographer?

I believe in actors' talent, in their improvisational skills, but not in that of the director during the film shoot! As a result, I prepare everything in advance, in particular my shooting script. A month before the shoot, I went with Gilles to visit the different backgrounds and sets, where scene after scene I played out the actors' blocking and staging, to see where he would put the camera. In the end, we followed the shooting script fairly closely.
In order to share my vision with him for the lighting, I showed paintings to Gilles, in particular one that perfectly corresponded with what I was going for: a painting of a child by Gainsborough. I loved the light he'd cast on the child's face, and Gilles brilliantly used it for inspiration.

And how did you work on the music?

I called upon Marc Tomasi, who had already composed the music for *The Curse of Edgar*. I was looking for a neo-baroque style of music and Marc worked night and day in order to compose a score in time. The applause the musicians of the London Symphony Orchestra gave him during the recording was the ultimate accolade for him.

Why are you so interested in historical subjects?

It's always been that way with me. As a child, I had before my eyes a man whose life had collided with history: my grandfather was atrociously disfigured in the First World War. This shock between History and someone's personal life made me acutely aware of the fact that great causes can at times have a very dramatic impact on individuals. In its own way, *The Exchange of Princesses* tells the story of the powers that be who manipulate and drag us into collective disasters. It's a story that I could have written.

Interview by Claire Vassé



Interview with CHANTAL THOMAS

How did you hear about this surprising exchange of princesses?

From the *Memoirs of the Duke of Saint-Simon*. And because Louis XV was already in my previous novel, *Le Testament d'Olympe [Olympe's Legacy]*. I had read several biographies about him where it was mentioned in passing that he had been married at the age of eleven to the Spanish infanta, Mariana Victoria, who was four years old.
During the Ancien Regime, political and diplomatic marriages were very common. Their purpose was at times to abate generations-old hatred between different nations. The destiny of these princesses was rather harsh, for they represented past wars – they were hostages in a way. What is extraordinary in the case of Mariana Victoria and Louis XV is their young age. That is what struck me.

Indeed it is very surprising for us today to see this sacrificed childhood, from which emanates an adult's maturity.

Indeed, these children are pawns, mere instruments in political plans that are entirely beyond them. What I found fascinating was this other vision of childhood, the perception of the body, time, and death. These children on the one hand are entirely innocent, the letters written by Madame de Ventadour, the Infanta's governess, attest to this. But from the moment her father announces to her that she is destined to become Queen of France, the little girl seriously accepts the role. Like Louis XV, she is at once manipulated and a sovereign.
I believe we have that much more trouble understanding this maturity today because we are in the opposite process: childhood is extended at times until adolescence, which in itself goes on indefinitely, postponing the age of adult decision-making. During that era, childhood was a practically nonexistent stage. And that was true for every social class.

Louis XV had an acute awareness of death.

Having lost his mother, father and brothers when he was very young, Louis XV felt he was constantly surrounded by death, all the more so because the threat of being poisoned loomed over him incessantly. In the film he asks: "could one kill a child for his throne?"
I think that Louis XV lived in silence, sadness and nostalgia for his mother, who was an extraordinary person. His deep attachment to his governess springs from this, although she is to become the Infanta's governess. Louis XV and the Infanta find themselves rivaling one another for the attention of the only person they love: Madame de Ventadour.

What type of education did Louis XV receive, since he was supposed to rule over an entire nation?

He was intelligent and educated with great care. He had very attentive preceptors. They explained the main opposing powers, maps of the different countries, but not diplomacy, strictly speaking. Louis XV had been king since the age of five, but he became absolute king at twelve, when he was crowned in Reims. He could then decide everything, but as he says himself, others use his name to govern in his place.

As for the princesses, they receive nearly no education, save for a few exceptions, otherwise they are schooled in "gentle-womanly accomplishments" – such as arts and crafts, music. This resulted in an inequality between the sexes that continued for an extremely long time.

The film goes much further into fiction than your book, particularly in the story between Luis and Louise-Elisabeth, who, as opposed to what you relate in your book, ends up being moved by her husband.

I think the big difference between a novel and a film is that the first is more open to interpretation. This is a luxury that a film cannot afford, for a film takes place during a limited amount of time for the audience. So more specific choices have to be made.

In the book, I stayed faithful to Luis' letters, which express his love for Louise-Elisabeth, who isn't very close to her husband, except perhaps at the very end. It was indeed this positive and sentimental end that Marc Dugain and I wanted to develop in the film. This ultimate spark of love between them made the young prince's premature death even more cruel. Because Louise-Elisabeth actually started to love him, something is genuinely lost.
I really discovered Louise-Elisabeth by going to Madrid, and reading short notes written by her. Manifestly she hadn't been taught to write, she had been given no education, she was unloved by her family and this lack of love continued with the Spanish royal family. The only person who could love her was Luis, and she discovered this too late.

In the end we grow quite fond of Don Luis.

Don Luis was appealing and handsome but extremely unhappy. For inspiration, I studied several paintings in Madrid depicting this royal family. One of them, in which he is portrayed in pale gray dress, is particularly troubling… His story is quite tragic. His sister, Mariana Victoria had a true destiny, but he died of the unhappiness that stifled him. First, for having lost his mother, then for being in the claws of the cold and spiteful Farnèse, who prevented him from existing. That he had to shoulder such a royal responsibility all the while being belittled is awful. When he turns to the painting of Louise-Elisabeth and implores her to love him, it is clear that he has placed all his hopes in her.

Elisabeth Farnèse, Queen of Spain, was an implacable mother and stepmother.

Farnèse was the Spanish court's true underhanded and sinuous political power. And she mistreated Philip V's children from his first marriage, Luis in particular. She is less present in the film than she is in the book because it was important to focus on the four children. But we grasp well enough the fascinating couple she made with Philip V, who were caught up in a strange form of passion, as the King had ruled that she should never be far from him. We can easily see how the pair formed a two-headed monster and how dazzling, albeit terrifyingly ravaged by mysticism and madness, Philip V was.

The Infanta's story also has a greater part of fiction in the film, where Louis XV is more attentive to her than in the book…

It's perhaps not that there's more fiction, but that he's not as merciless. Louis XV reaches out to her to a greater degree in the movie. But what the book and the film share is the difficulty these children have living their lives, their loneliness, how they have to make their way in a world where they are caught up in terrible political power play, which threatens to crush them as individuals altogether.

Homosexuality is very present in this story.

Homosexuality is also a subject that is generally glossed over or ignored in biographies, all the more so in Louis XV's, who will later be famous for the number of young mistresses he had in his life. However, he spent years surrounded by homosexual friends, and he himself was tempted by it.
As for Louise-Elisabeth's homosexuality, it's not like in *Les Adieux à la Reine [Farewell, My Queen]*, where I invented the character of the reader and gave her unconscious urges. Here, the princess's relationship with one of her ladies-in-waiting was authentic.





How did you work with Marc Dugain on the screenplay?

He has a very direct, rapid and specific way of formulating what he's feeling and what he wants. We cut up the novel, basing our choices on scenes that each of us felt were important to keep. I read certain passages out loud, Marc immediately transcribed them into dialogue, which he sent me and I reread. There was a circularity that occurred between the reading, speaking, rereading, speaking about it again – but also laughter. And there were times when we told each other stories, our own personal stories for example.
Marc and I are not interested in the same historical eras, but we understood each other very quickly. Above all, I think what caught his attention in this story was childhood confronted with Power and Death.

Why does Louis XV move to Versailles at the beginning of the film?

When Louis XIV died in 1715, the Regent didn't want to join the Versailles Court. He lived in the Palais Royal and was fond of Paris. So he repatriated Louis XV near him, to the Louvre. Then seven years later they left together for Versailles, essentially for political motives. The Regent's entourage suggested that actually following in the footsteps of Louis XIV would be good for Louis XV's popularity.
I am endlessly fascinated by Versailles, which is a political symbol, an idea of absolute royalty, removed from the people. And I love its maze-like architecture, the modifications that took place from ruler to ruler. We're well familiar with the pomp and ceremony, which is constantly shown: the Hall of Mirrors and at the very end, the King's and the Queen's apartments. But, there's also another side that we are not privy to. The winding corridors and rooms that were never aired-out are also part of Versailles, as well as all of the many destinies smashed to pieces while unable to resist its lure.

The film shows very little of the Court's pomp.

When Louis XV arrived in Versailles, the castle had been abandoned for seven years and there had been very little upkeep. It took time for the court to reinstall itself in the castle. The film shows the underbelly of Versailles' smooth and monumental side. Indeed, it's an intimate space: a place of power lost somewhere in the woods, which for me has a fairy tale aspect to it. Moreover, this entire story plays out very much like a tale.



The character of the Regent, Philip of Orléans, is complex.

I have a lot of sympathy for him. When I worked at the CNRS (The National Center for Scientific Research) we devoted an entire book to him. The Regent was quite a character, a spirited and brilliant person. He yearned to govern his entire life, but was prevented by his uncle, Louis XIV, essentially because he was brilliant. It was only after Louis XIV's death that the Regent was able to show his true capacities. The Regent was cynical, as we see in the exchange sequence, but he was also very fond of Louis XV.

What is most known about him is that he was a sensual libertine, but what is little known is that he had a good head for international politics, had an eye for collecting, and was an aesthete. He loved music and composed operas. The Regency marked the reopening of the court after its literal desertion at the end of Louis XIV's reign.



The Regent's mother, the Princess Palatine, was a very flamboyant woman.

The Regent's mother is one of my favorite characters, I adore her! We only know about Louise-Elisabeth and Farnèse through indirect sources. While The Palatine is known from her abundant correspondence, which give us a great deal of information about a multitude of events. In particular, concerning how the little Mariana Victoria was so adorable and enchanting. She wrote about her in letters in a way that is very touching. The Palatine stands out from the others because she expressed herself in a lively manner in a world where people only spoke about hunting, the latest theatrical performances and gossip. The Palatine spoke her mind and that was scandalous at the Sun King's court.

Do you feel this story has relevance today?

Yes, in the way children are treated. Today, everyone says that their happiness is an end in itself, but children often unwittingly become the pawns of a strategy decided upon by parents, who in their confused feelings put their children's emotional well-being at stake. It's just that things are no longer played out on a political level, but on a family level. And also economically, because in the last decades the child also represents a rich potential market, a consumer to be exploited.
And if we carry this discussion beyond our culture, the subject of forced marriage is highly topical, since it's still permitted on entire continents. We become indignant with regard to these horrific acts practiced in the 18th century, but what is said today about the millions of women forced into marriage in African countries, India or Afghanistan? Young or teenage girls treated like property belonging to parents who do with them as they please. This is an abomination that is completely relevant today.

And the way in which politics is nothing more than petty negotiations and manipulation…

Under the Ancien Regime, politics played out between families. The sovereigns were all more or less brothers and cousins – which explains Marie-Antoinette's inability to grasp the very notion of a nation during the revolution! This familial dimension has disappeared from our modern politics. This said… if you read Marc Dugain's latest novel *Ils vont tuer Robert Kennedy [They're going to kill Robert Kennedy]*, you realize that the story of this clan is just extraordinary: the two brothers' close relationship, the fear of conspiracy, the curse on the family – in a country that is supposed to be so vast and modern.
Marc hadn't yet written the book back when we were working on the screenplay, but now that I've read it, I have a better understanding of his imagination, his analytical mind, his fantastical and yet practically forensic way of projecting himself: Darkness reigns at the heart of Power. *THE ROYAL EXCHANGE* also occurs at the heart of darkness, but what makes this story strangely radiant is the four children, kings and queens despite themselves.

Interview by Claire Vassé





Biography
MARC DUGAIN

Since 2001, Marc Dugain has devoted himself to novel writing. He has published over ten books, has nearly 3 million readers and has received thirty or so literary prizes in France and abroad.

An Ordinary Execution, with André Dussollier was his first feature film. He then directed *The Kindness of Women*, starring André Dussollier, with a TV audience of 4 million on the French Public TV station, France 2. His third film, *The Curse of Edgar*, was made in English, with Brian Cox in the leading role, for Arte and Planète Canal+. It received the prize for best director at the Berlin international film festival and for best production design in Milan. The film also received several nominations at the New York International Film Festival and at the Austin Film Festival.



Cast

PHILIP V OF SPAIN	**Lambert WILSON**
LOUISE-ELISABETH	**Anamaria VARTOLOMEI**
PHILIP OF ORLEANS, REGENT OF FRANCE	**Olivier GOURMET**
MADAME DE VENTADOUR	**Catherine MOUCHET**
DON LUIS	**Kacey MOTTET-KLEIN**
LOUIS XV	**Igor VAN DESSEL**
MARIANA VICTORIA, THE INFANTA	**Juliane LEPOUREAU**
ELISABETH FARNESE	**Maya SANSA**
PRINCESSE PALATINE	**Andréa FERREOL**

Crew

Director	**Marc DUGAIN**
Producers	**Patrick ANDRE**
	Charles GILLIBERT
Screenwriters	**Marc DUGAIN**
	Chantal THOMAS
Director of Photography	**Gilles PORTE**
Music	**Marc TOMASI**
Sound	**Pierre MERTENS**
Costume Designer	**Fabio PERRONE**
Production Designer	**Patrick DECHESNE**
	Alain-Pascal HOUSIAUX
Casting Supervisor (France):	**Dominique SPINDZEL**
Casting Supervisor (Belgium)	**Sébastiàn MORADIELLOS**
Editor	**Monica COLEMAN**
Post-production Supervisor	**Barbara DANIEL**
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