

QUEEN KELLY

A star at Paramount until 1926, Gloria Swanson founded her own production company, which she managed under the influence of Joseph P. Kennedy, father of the future president. They decided to hire Eric von Stroheim to write the script and direct *Queen Kelly*. Despite getting off to a good start, the collaboration came to an end after three months of shooting. Gloria Swanson reproached Stroheim for his slowness but above all, she worried about the censors' reactions to Stroheim's direction, which she deemed provocative and indecent. In 1931, Swanson hired Viola Lawrence, Stroheim's long-standing collaborator, to edit the scenes shot and asked Gregg Toland to shoot a different epilogue from what was initially planned in the script, favouring a tragic ending and thereby abandoning certain sequences filmed in Africa.

About the film, Langlois wrote¹:

Unfinished work, prologue of a film that would not see the day, Queen Kelly takes us into a world that would have definitively disappeared without Stroheim: a world with a heavy heredity in which a society, prisoner of the nets it had woven to save itself, stagnated; a perverse world, crueller than Sade's, more deeply moving in its moral misery than Sacher Masoch's. A vanished world of which Erich von Stroheim brought out the phantoms.

How far we are from the charming legend of Vienna with its waltzes, its beautiful blue Danube; how close we are to the cruel reality of this time-bomb, this two-headed eagle to which the assassination in Sarajevo finally struck the death blow.

Finally, Queen Kelly takes us into a universe of incest and solemn boredom, degeneracy and absolute power, complacency and complicities left unpunished, a universe made for creating monsters, semi-madmen, victims, slaves, valets.

Queen Kelly, which could have been Stroheim's most mature work had he been able to finish it, dazzle us (Lotte Eisner).

Never did Stroheim go so far in this anatomy of central empires of divine right. Never did he push so far the taste for splendour: "waxed parquets, walls of polished marble, porphyry staircases, crystal chandeliers, reflections ad infinitum". Never had he gone so far "in the voluptuousness of matter, enriching cinema with this theatre of light that plays in the Baroque churches of Mitteleuropa; the iridescence and haziness lull our senses, playing on the white uniforms of the cuirassiers, on the wimples and white robes of the girls in the convent, on the apple trees in blossom" (Lotte Eisner).



In 1974, for the actress's 75th birthday, Henri Langlois organized a Gloria Swanson cycle at La Cinémathèque française.

¹ Henri Langlois, *Écrits de cinéma*, texts collected by Bernard Benoliel and Bernard Eisenschitz, Ed. Flammarion/Cinémathèque française, 2014

Queen Kelly

United States, 1931 – 74 minutes

Direction, script and adaptation: Erich von Stroheim

Production: Gloria Productions

Photography: Paul Ivano, Gordon Pollock, William Margulies

Set: Gordon Wiles

Originale music: Adolf Tandler

Direction of the epilogue: Gregg Toland

Editing: Viola Lawrence

Cast: Gloria Swanson, Walter Byron, Seena Owen, Sidney Bracey

In a kingdom of central Europe, the cruel, jealous Queen Regina must wed Prince Wolfram, a notorious libertine. One day, at the head of his regiment, the prince encounters a group of young nuns on a country road. Amongst them, he notices the charming Patricia Kelly.

The present print is the short, so-called 'Gloria Swanson version', safeguarded by Langlois in the 1950s and restored in 1983. Otherwise, a long version, restored in 1985 by Kino International under the supervision of Dennis Doros, allowed for reintegrating the African sequences and re-establishing the ending that Stroheim had wanted.

