

*A Royal Affair - George III and His Troublesome Siblings* by Stella Tillyard. Chatto and Windus 2006.

As many writers have previously demonstrated, the Georgian period is an intensely rich one for biographers and historians; as such the opportunity for fresh material and approaches is rare. Where Stella Tillyard scores in her analysis of the lives of George III and his more exciting siblings is in the way she subtly lays the foundations for some of the modern attitudes towards royalty (especially by the fourth estate) as well as demonstrating that private passions have always had a disproportionate effect on public life in the case of the British royal family.

George III emerges from *A Royal Affair* with his honour and integrity intact, a subject ripe for sympathy, even admiration, as he tries increasingly desperately to steer a course between the demands of state and family loyalty. His brothers, notably the Dukes of York, Gloucester and Cumberland, and his sister Caroline Mathilde, Queen of Denmark do not cover themselves with glory.

The amorous affairs of the royal dukes, their complete disregard for the responsibilities of their position and their duty to their brother, let alone their scandalous maltreatment of the women they loved, make for racy and intriguing reading; but the story of the Queen of Denmark, her unhappy marriage to a mad Christian VII, her doomed love affair with the royal physician and social reformer Johann Struensee, and her spectacular and brutal fall from power and grace really dominates the book.

The latter story was beautifully written about in Per Olov Enquist's novel *The Visit of the Royal Physician*, but comes even more alive through Stella Tillyard's pen and meticulous research in Copenhagen, in Danish, and in the Royal Archives in Windsor, in English. The diligence of her research has paid handsome dividends.

*A Royal Affair* is an intensely rewarding read for anyone interested in royalty, British history, or the impact on ordinary human beings and their emotions of lives that must be lived out on a great and exposed stage.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh