

“Inga Arvad – the scandalous Scandinavian”

Full review, Nordjyske Tidende

(online: [http://www.mallingfilm.dk/annwebcollect/forrygende\\_historie.pdf](http://www.mallingfilm.dk/annwebcollect/forrygende_historie.pdf))

Kennedy’s Danish mistress

5 stars out of 6

By Charlotte Rørth

“During his stay, Ensign John Kennedy of the United States Navy spent every night with subject in her room at the Fort Sumter Hotel and engaged in sexual intercourse on numerous occasions”.

This laconic message is written February 6 1942 by an anonymous FBI agent in a report to the FBI chief himself, J Edgar Hoover. It refers to the man who later became the American President and the Danish woman only a few people know of.

Inga Arvad is the name of ‘the subject’, characterized in the same report as a “smart dresser” with “heavy legs”.

She was much more than that, particularly to JFK. And at last, at long last we are able to read her fantastic story: A Danish beauty who came close to Hitler, attended Goring’s wedding, married an explorer, moved to the USA and almost got married to one of the world’s most powerful men.

Inga Arvad’s story is almost incomprehensible and hence it is very reassuring that it has been handled by someone who had the energy to go through with the old-fashioned hard work of close-reading dusty documents in the USA, Denmark and Germany, scour WWII newspapers and 1200 pages of FBI documents, plough through dairies, post cards and posthumous writings. Plus all the oral history of the writer’s research: Interviews with her two sons and with contemporaries who remember her.

Ann Mariager is a journalist and she too attended Columbia University School of Journalism in New York, just like Inga Arvad did at the age of 27, when the newspaper New York World-Telegram in 1941 wrote of Inga Arvad that she was one of the “people who live those lives” of the chosen few.

Ann Mariager’s book opens with this quote and from then on you do not put her book down. Even though you’re eager to go straight to the passionate affair between Miss Denmark 1931 and the man who became a myth, Ann Mariager writes in a way that makes her entire life, the very person Inga Arvad, fascinating.

We know that Arvad will go far at the age of 17 when she wins the beauty contest – a vulgar event according to the bourgeoisie that Arvad belonged to. She has a talent for being in the spotlight, she takes it in and lets it enhance her radiance even more. Other young women are beautiful and gifted but Inga has so much chutzpah that she shortly after the Miss Europe contest marries an Egyptian and moves to Cairo. She already knows the world, having travelled with her mother for years as a child; she gets bored easily and leaves Egypt for Denmark to try out the film business.

Later she marries film director and explorer Paul Fejos, gets bored again and wants to write. Her good connections and her coquettish audacity help her land a string of bigwig interviews in Berlin in the mid-30s. She is the first reporter to break the news of General Hermann Goring’s upcoming marriage to actress Emmy Sonnemann.

Wisely Ann Mariager lets us read this article from the Berlingske Aftenavis, just as we get to read Inga Arvad’s interview with Hitler later that year, 1935. Her articles show a woman reporter who has the courage to write like a woman, not just copy men’s focus on politics but pass it only to dig deeper into the person underneath.

Throughout the entire book Ann Mariager wisely selects from the millions of details that created some of the most eventful years ever in Europe and the United States. We get the events that framed Arvad’s life. We get the events that put women into perspective. How

were they able to move ahead? How did the world function at the time? We see things not only in a historically reasonable light but with a sense of the lives lived at the time, its sensibilities and its facts.

These angles of approach are rarely used by writers but they make it possible for us to understand why Arvad was suspected of being a Nazi spy even though she wasn't. This suspicion, along with Arvad's marriages, makes it impossible for JFK's father, "Big Joe" Joseph Kennedy, to accept the subject of his son's affections.

Instead, John is destined to fulfill his family's ambitions and unescapably more so when his big brother Joseph is killed in action. That's when Big Joe and the FBI increase their surveillance and Ann Mariager shows us a facet of American mentality we mostly know from action filled conspiracy movies.

Ann Mariager also shows us how women are looked upon by not only men but by the power structures they create. How panic-stricken they are by their own libido and how far they'll go to blame it on women.

It is a grim game Inga Arvad is thrown into, but she makes the decision to leave it herself. She decides to keep her self-respect, finds new ways, a new job and eventually a man who can give her the children that she wants to have.

She ends up having had it all, all kinds of lives: A life of affluence, of politics, of journalism, of the suburbs ..

Through the years she creates her own life – in the company of her mother Olga, who raised her alone. Mother and daughter "nearly form a legalized union", writes Ann Mariager. Her biography is almost a double portrait of these two fates.

It is nothing less than a formidable story, Ann Mariager has written.

Beyond being a wise and well-constructed portrait of a woman, it is also a painting that explains two continents in an era that formed the politics and mass culture into what we're living with today. It is seen from a completely different angle. It is so enriching that everybody with the slightest interest in the opposite sex is encouraged to read this book.

I hope that an intelligent person will create an epic movie out of this book. I cannot wait to see it.