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Wednesday's TV: New English Civil War drama- off with its head!

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THE DEVIL'S WHORE, Channel 4, Wednesday 19th November,

9:00pm

Gasping young ladies in tight bodices and dashing young gentlemen whose tresses spill onto their frilly collars have long been a staple of British costume dramas. The Devil's Whore, this autumn's four-parter from Channel 4, has an abundance of both- **but not much else.**

The new drama from **Peter Flannery** (best known for the mid-90s series, Our Friends in the North) follows the fortunes of Angelica Fanshawe, (fictional) niece to Charles I. Set between 1642 and 1660, it

charts the progress of the English Civil War through Angelica's eyes, softening the political and religious complexities of this period with some swash-buckling human interest. (For those of us a bit rusty on our British history, Charles I was the pretty-boy monarch removed from the throne and executed on the order of Oliver Cromwell.)

Seventeen year old **Angelica finds herself all mixed up in the ever tricky politics of the period** not only via her uncle the king, but also through Edward Sexby, a servant of her husband who has links to the anti-monarchist cause. Damned if she'll behave with the docility expected of a woman of her rank and sympathetic to those calling for greater civil liberties, **the feisty young madam becomes embroiled in the republican struggle.**

The focus here is definitely one of a **scandal-loving** nature, characters and their various relationships (mainly those of Angelica). The trouble with this emphasis is that the historical context, though maybe boring in comparison, itself pretty integral to the workings of Angelica's story, feels squeezed into a few short scenes. The result? **Blink and you've missed a whole host of crucial plot points and character motivations.**

It's made all the more confusing by the fact that all the men look so bloody similar! It's one rugged, dirty faced and lank haired bloke after another here! Not enough introduction is given to Sexby and fellow republicans Oliver Cromwell and Thomas Rainsborough, making the first hour of plotting a **blurry test(osterone)-fest** of anonymous politics.

Ok, so the first episode of a historical drama is always going to be the hardest to get right, what with needing to set the scene, explaining context and establishing characters. It's undoubtedly more difficult here with the complex subject matter but **The Devil's Whore just doesn't hook the viewer in the way that it should.** Channel 4 have done their utmost to sex-up the programme, including a stirring, modern soundtrack, lots of nudity, and the occasional appearance of a cartoonish demon that haunts Angelica and leads her astray, but all this **doesn't make up for a lack of decent storytelling.**

Fans of costume dramas will probably enjoy **The Devil's Whore**, but it isn't a patch on BBC productions like Cranford, Pride and Prejudice and Bleak House. Long curls and corsets alone are just not enough these days. Nope, this one just doesn't make the grade- to the block, **off with its head!**

By Jo Caird

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