

Review #29 : *The White Queen* (2013)

Rebecca Ferguson and Max Irons



If you are of the disposition to enjoy extravagant production values, a handsome cast and plots compromised of devious political manoeuvring, then this epic saga is for you. If, however, you are a *narc* for period accuracy, it's probably best to stick to history channels and library books...

REVIEW

'Men go to battle. Women wage war'.

The White Queen is a riveting portrayal of one of the most dramatic and turbulent times in English history. A story of love and lust, seduction and deception, betrayal and murder, as seen through the perspective of three different and relentless women – Elizabeth Woodville, Margaret Beaufort and Anne Neville. In their quest for power, they will scheme, manipulate and seduce their way onto the English throne.



1464. War is ravaging throughout England over who is the rightful King. It is a bitter dispute between The House of York and The House of Lancaster. Young Edward IV of York (**Max Irons**) is crowned King of England with the help of a master manipulator, Lord Warwick. But when Edward falls in love with a beautiful Lancastrian commoner, Elizabeth Woodville (**Rebecca Ferguson**), Warwick's plan to control the throne comes crashing down...



A violent, high-stakes struggle ensues between Elizabeth, her most fierce adversary, Lancastrian Margaret Beaufort (Amanda Hale) and Anne Neville (Faye Marsay), the pawn in her father's power game – each woman vying for the crown.



It might be worth mentioning that the pilot episode is actually the weakest of all, mainly serving the purpose of character introductions and setting the foundation of the central romance between Elizabeth and King Edward IV. This is not say that it is without merit, as the episode acts as an intriguing appetizer of promised delights to come...



Initial patience is soon rewarded as subsequent instalments progressively keep you hooked and the series thus continues to deliver very strongly. Admittedly creative license has been taken in regards to a number of events, but there is no denying that *The White Queen* is thrilling melodrama nevertheless...

Some people did complain about historical inaccuracies. There are concrete steps in some scenes, handrails in some others, etc. However I think the truth is that the cost of covering all these things up would have been huge. I don't think it is possible for a TV series to be totally accurate. Somehow, productions that have the pretension to vow total respect to '*historical accuracy*' might not be accurate at all either. After all, none of us lived back then, right? So why on earth would we want a TV series to be accurate to *our* own vision of what this period *might* have looked like? Moreover, I think that in a TV series that is too much to expect...

This series is extremely compelling as far as character portrayal is concerned. The hugely difficult situation and mostly **pressure** – from family, court, society, etc – lived by each character is extremely well rendered with inherent complexity.



You can really feel for the people caught up in this deeply unpleasant world of schemes and political manoeuvring. The fate of Isabella among others is particularly poignant. Even if you roughly know what happens, it remains really **exciting** +++



The underlying theme, that the women in the Wars of the Roses were just as significant as the men in their own way, is an important and original point. There are many powerful moments that illustrate time and again how a woman's body was both her greatest tool and her inevitable prison while a man could control his fate by mind or sword...



Unfortunately, by choosing to illustrate this misty lands of generic medievalness with so many disparate characters – in a story of such inherent complexity –, the creators of *The White Queen* were forced to launch too many battles, rip too many bodices and dispatch too

many messengers with thundering hoof beats. Years sometimes slip by in a moment, dismissed with clunky exposition, the rooms with their hangings become interchangeable and claustrophobic, and though some windows shine brightly, it becomes increasingly difficult to understand what's happening and why. Thus I have to mention some **clumsy handling of the script and very regrettable nude scenes...** But then, what would the *go-forward* button be for – if not for those **relatively few** embarrassing moments (including an attempt by Edward to rape Elizabeth before their engagement) ?

One of the performances I have been enjoying the most is that of Lady Margaret Beaufort. There is so much to her character : considered as a religious fanatic and obsessed with putting her son on the throne, she is continuously scheming and plotting to get to her goals. Amanda Hale portrays it all excellently and most viewers admitted finding themselves strangely **sympathetic to her cause**. Most of all the script often has many excellent **moments between mother and son**. In one scene, when Henry Stafford says to her : ‘*You realise that for your son to become king he has to walk past five coffins ?*’ – we know that Margaret understands this and it is strongly communicated that she is capable of doing it all...

The other stand-out performance is the one by Aneurin as Richard III – although once again creators put history aside, as well as Richard's supposed ugliness and deformity – to make him reborn as a tormented and brooding youngster turning *Goth*. While everyone was looking at the Edward-Elizabeth romance, I... was looking at the little brother and his blossoming feelings for Anne. The proposal scene, under a gentle snowfall, is quite sweet – especially when you know how it all ends : with a blade in the heart...



Another thumbs-up to the very discreet yet indispensable backing performance of Elizabeth's mother Lady Jacquetta. This strong-willed and loving mother will always be behind her daughter – in her moments of joy as well as in her moment of grief and need...



Last but not least, some pieces of the ladies' wardrobe are jolly good. I'm not so interested in historical precise accuracy – what the h*** with zippers! – than in visually entralling and ornamented gowns +++



Not to mention the superb vaulting of 15th century **Bruges Gothic Hall** +++



In the last episodes, when the increasingly paranoid Elizabeth is locked up in sanctuary, with the make-up department trying to age Rebecca Ferguson's flawless complexion with tear-stained wrinkles, powerless to stop her winsome daughter Elizabeth from trying to seduce her own uncle, so we are left to the magnificent Margaret Beaufort to keep up the women's end in the final battle, as she is the **only female character who seemed to have the navigation skills and horsemanship to ride out across the country to find the men in action** and bear the indeed frightful sight of the injured.

The finale pulls out nature as its show-stopping star. Wintry oak trees stab the leaden skies, storms rage and the sun makes a rare appearance only to be dramatically eclipsed...

CONCLUSION

Overall this a fine *fantasy* – more than historical – retelling of the atmosphere and ambitions of a period from the point of view of women, a somewhat toned-down *Game of Thrones* for all fans of the genre to behold. I totally recommend this show – although it may warrant some fast-forwarding : 8/10 +++