

# LUCY WORSLEY INVESTIGATES: THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Review by **John Davis**



## ***Lucy Worsley Investigates: The American Revolution.***

Two-part mini-series available on BBCI/Player.  
Directed by Craig Collinson and Tim Niel.

I WAS REMINDED the other day about the huge developments that have taken place in broadcasting programmes on historical themes when I viewed a short series called *The War Lords* (BBC 1976) given by one of the doyens of the medium, A.J.P. Taylor. In it he appraised the lives, motives and legacies of six pivotal leaders who directed the fundamental operations of World War Two. Taylor delivered his lectures straight to camera without, I understand, notes or autocue. It was a hallmark of his style, conversational story-telling in which complex political and military issues were made so eminently comprehensible. No benefits of catch-ups or streaming here.

Ms Worsley, a frequent face on screens these days and with all the advantages of modern technology at her disposal, gave us *The American Revolution* in this two-part mini-series, very apt since the Declaration of Independence occurred on July 4th, 250 years ago.

She provided us with colourful filmed sequences of relevant locations worldwide, the views of fellow experts and the dramatization of key

events and characters to reinforce her own insight and analysis. Not quite sure why so many of the location shots focussed on her fashion in footwear and handbags or why Benjamin Franklin (a shrewd, political operator apparently) dominated the characterisations while George Washington was not thought deserving enough to be included and poor George III never stopped frowning and pacing about. He did have a lot on his mind though.

Ms Worsley assured us that she would provide the 'untold version', that she would be 'searching the evidence for clues' and that she intended to 'get closer to the truth'. I'm no expert on the period but I am sure many of these goals were achieved. There was certainly information that I had not been aware of including the terrorist bomb attack on Portsmouth Dockyard, British spy Edward Bancroft, the 007 of the times, and King George's threat to abdicate and decamp back to Germany to get away from it all. A snapshot of a key event in Britain's history all very stimulatingly presented.

In the end, it materialised, the thirteen original states of the United States of America just got fed up of paying taxes to service Britain's massive debts. They were not against taxation *per se* but they wanted to decide on their own methods of collecting it and using it and in the process more freedom to carve out their own destiny.

# YOU ARE THE FUHRER'S UNREQUITED LOVE

Review by **John Davis**



## *You Are The Fuhrer's Unrequited Love*

by Jean-Noel Orengo.

Translated from the French by David Watson.

OXYMORONS have become an accepted part of our conversational language. These are phrases where diametrically opposed words are used to emphasis a point or reveal a deeper truth. A book is 'awfully good', for example, or information has been 'clearly misunderstood'.

The relevance here is that this book's subject, Albert Speer, is often described as 'the good Nazi' but can anyone have any virtue if they were incontrovertibly embroiled in one of the most evil and barbaric regimes of European history?

Speer, a budding young architect during the 1930s, became a favourite of the Third Reich hierarchy and eventually Hitler's blue-eyed boy. Almost the talented son he never had. Cutting his teeth on the staging of the Nuremberg rallies, Speer graduated to projects like Berlin's new Chancellery building while sharing the Fuhrer's dreams of the future Germania, if only in balsa wood and papier-mache models. When Fritz Todt who served as Reich Minister for Armaments and Munitions, was killed in 1942, it was Speer to whom Hitler turned to ramp up the war effort.

Orengo has condensed his assessment of Speer into 250 erudite pages. It falls somewhere between a novel and a biography, often called autofiction, and is absorbingly readable with imagined interactions between the main characters. The first two thirds of the narrative deals with Speer's career. The final third is based around interviews Speer had with Gitta Sereny, author of *Albert Speer: His Battle with*

*Truth* and gives Orengo, perhaps less effectively, the chance to air his own philosophical slant on what transpired.

Ex-colleagues of Speer unrepentantly blustered throughout the Nuremberg trials maintaining they were only obeying orders, while Speer was more apologetic, claiming he was ignorant of many of the atrocities, thereby being collectively responsible but not individually guilty. His persuasive arguments resulted in a twenty-year prison sentence instead of the gallows. No use of legal principles then like guilt by association or joint enterprise. In prison he wrote his bestseller *Inside the Third Reich* and followed it with *Spandau: The Secret Diaries*. Both books made him a wealthy man.

Since his death in 1981 opinion has shifted about the veracity of the protective wall of mythology that Speer constructed around himself. Some historians, including Sereny, were genuinely sceptical at first but recent evidence and research suggest his remorse was largely a calculated survival strategy fabricated to save his own life initially and then to preserve his legacy. As the falsehoods have mounted up a quote from Nietzsche rings true. "I'm not upset that you lied to us, I'm upset that from now on we can't believe you."

*Footnote:* The title of the book comes from a quote attributed to SS officer, Karl Maria Hettlage, who, noting the close bond of admiration between Speer and Hitler when working together remarked to the architect, "Do you know who you are Speer? You are Hitler's unrequited love."

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