

## TV Review: 16th-Century Soap Opera Wears Thin on ‘The Tudors’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 10, 2010 - 8:29pm

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CHICAGO – Not exactly for history buffs, Showtime’s “The Tudors” has always been more about bodice-ripping and political intrigue than about straightforward historical facts. Still, in its first three seasons, with a combination of multi-dimensional characters and inspired casting choices, the “Desperate Housewives” of sixteenth-century England was a guilty pleasure not to be missed.



Television Rating: **2.0/5.0**

Unfortunately, the premiere of the fourth and final season of the series suggests that its best days are likely behind it. Though not always exactly historically accurate, real life events do dictate that King Henry VIII outlives most of the series’ most interesting characters. The desperate, scheming mistress-turned-second wife Anne Boleyn (Natalie Dormer), the loving and sympathetic first wife Catherine of Aragon (Maria Doyle Kennedy), and the chillingly clever adviser Thomas Cromwell (James Frain) have all by now either been executed or have died in exile. Thus, we begin season four with a dearth of vibrant characters to hold our interest.



Natalie Dormer as Anne Boleyn, Joss Stone as Anne of Cleves, Joely Richardson as Catherine Parr, Jonathan Rhys Meyers as Henry VIII, Tamzin Merchant as Katherine Howard, Annabelle Wallis as Jane Seymour, and Maria Doyle Kennedy as Queen Katherine.

*Photo credit: Courtesy of Showtime*

Even the usually flawless Jonathan Rhys Meyers now seems bored and uninspired playing the lusty and increasingly sociopathic Henry VIII. Everything about this fourth season opener wears thin. Tamzin Merchant, playing the young and pretty Catherine Howard, Henry’s latest wife, does an admirable job in the role of a flighty, emotionally labile seventeen-year-old who veers between self-absorbed arrogance and gripping insecurity.



Tamzin Merchant as Katherine Howard and Jonathan Rhys Meyers as Henry VIII in The Tudors  
Photo credit: Courtesy of Showtime

But perhaps she is too young, too erratic, to be interesting; there is not enough substance to her character to be appealing. Likewise, Master Culpepper (Torrance Coombs), the cruel, young page at court who is obsessed with Catherine, should be a compelling replacement for his psychotic antecedents on the series, such as Cromwell and Thomas Boleyn (Nick Dunning), but Culpepper's violent coveting of the young queen is expected and boring. His character feels too paper-thin and pale compared to his colorful predecessors.

After three seasons, all of the devices used here to make the tawdry feel compelling are expected and uninspired. The fourth season premiere contains torture and executions mercilessly ordered by Henry, vivid sex scenes, political betrayal and backstabbing, and even an intimation of a lesbian dalliance between Catherine Howard and her childhood friend and lady-in-waiting Joan Bulmer (Catherine Steadman). In short, it contains nothing that even a casual viewer hasn't come to expect from the series.

Overall, it seems that the best of "The Tudors" is behind it. Faithful fans may dutifully hold out hope that the mid-season arrival of Joely Richardson, alumna of another dark and dirty cable series "[Nip/Tuck](#) [17]," will spice up the last season as Henry's sixth and final wife Catherine Parr. Yet, it seems that Rhys Meyers and the writers have mentally checked out, trotting out cheap and ineffective devices to draw in viewers to the soap opera.

On Sunday night, only devoted fans nostalgic for the glory days of "The Tudors" should bother tuning in to its season premiere. Fans of drama would do better to catch AMC's stellar "[Breaking Bad](#) [18]," airing at the same time, or the series premiere of the hotly anticipated "[Treme](#) [19]" by the creators of the "The Wire," also in this time slot on HBO.

The era of the Tudor dynasty is finally over.

*The fourth season of "The Tudors" premieres on Showtime on Sunday, April 11 at 9pm CST. It stars Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Tamzin Merchant, Henry Cavill, Torrance Coombs, David O'Hara, and Sarah Bolger. It was created by Michael Hirst and executive produced by Tim Bevan and Eric Fellner.*

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