

'Lee Harvey Oswald' Prompts Total Disbelief

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TV has played so fast and loose with historical accuracy in recent months that one ought to approach ABC's two-part, four-hour fictional documentary, "The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald," with total disbelief.

More than half the production, which premieres tomorrow, 9 P.M. Channel 6 with Part 1 and will conclude Sunday at the same time, is admittedly fictional. Oswald was slain by Jack Ruby. There never was a trial. Therefore there is no reason to believe anything beyond his initial arrest in tonight's premiere—and I really couldn't say how much of the material prior to that is truthful. I suspect that a great deal of that is hokum, too.

Producers of these historical grotesqueries say that they must take certain dramatic license in order to produce entertainment and sustain interest. But more often they create pure fiction and encourage viewers to think it is truth. At least the producers of the Oswald oddity acknowledge that their principal focus never hap-



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pened. But they have issued numerous releases claiming that their script is simply a "logical development" of principal events that occurred during the tragedy.

Adapting a skeptical attitude toward the Oswald drama tonight takes away a lot of good will on the part of the viewer. The capacity to appreciate the dramatic performances given by John Pleshette as Lee Harvey Oswald and Mo Malone as his mournful, Russian-born wife, Marina, is considerably diminished. It does no good to constantly tell yourself, "I can't buy

its historical accuracy, but I can appreciate it as a drama." Utter nonsense. You can't.

Many viewers, including this one, are still trying to determine just how much of "Washington: Behind Closed Doors" was authentic. We are learning that vast areas of it wasn't. So what was the value of it, anyway? Not many are stimulated enough to dig down into history and learn true facts. It's easier to lull yourself into thinking that what you saw was true—and that is a serious flaw. Certainly, the re-creation of the assassination of a President and the license of presuming it did not terminate the way it did, suggests an arrogance.

Most of tonight's opening two hours re-create the fatal shooting of President Kennedy in Dallas and detail the life and behavior of Oswald at the time. There are closeups of Oswald and his wife—implying that they were incompatible. Pleshette portrays Oswald as withdrawn, strange, and obviously smoldering beneath the surface.

Ben Gazzara is introduced as the brash ("We want to win this one—let's not leave anything to chance!") prosecutor. Lorne Greene appears as the "Eastern liberal" appointed by the court to defend Oswald, who objects to him but nevertheless accepts him. There is plenty of action and drama—enough to keep one watching.

It is an enormously complicated drama—switching from scene to scene and from thread to thread. Flashbacks are numerous. This is the first of two TV dramas this season about the Oswald case. CBS has a three-hour film coming up later on "Oswald and Ruby" which at least follows the conventional story. By then the viewing public may have had enough of the whole thing.