



history man

in the two-hour opener where not much was happening, or at least didn't happen at the staccato pace we're used to in forensic police stories. But my attention never wavered. It was like being caught in quicksand, I could feel it sucking me in. It was horrible, but compulsive. The production is also rather smart and flattered the pitch of the story. There was some clever split-screen work, a tricky device to pull off without jarring the eye back into being aware it's watching coloured lights on a glass screen. But it was used sparingly and added to the fractured nature of the story.

My one complaint about LaPlante — and it's more an observation than a complaint — is that she doesn't seem to like people very much. Well, she doesn't like her characters. They're all pretty remorselessly grim and depressingly damaged. The underlying Jacobean theme to her work is that everybody is a victim of their own lives, it's just the dead who no longer have to go through the dreary ghastliness of living it.

My admiration for Simon Schama is embarrassingly close to fandom. Coming to the end of **The History of Britain** (Tuesday, BBC2), he produced a programme that showed why he is by far the most thoughtful historian on television. It was the story of two Winstons — Churchill and Smith, the antihero of George Orwell's 1984. By comparing the lives and world-views of Churchill and Orwell, he not only took an invigoratingly bleak look at Britain from the Great War to the first Labour government, but, more importantly, he asked complicated and subtle questions about the use and meaning of history.

This was an original and endlessly provoking programme. While most television historians start with the TV and make the history fit, so that we get Macaulay-style ripping yarns or a sort of living archeology — imagine yourself as a plague victim or a Victorian chambermaid — only Schama has tackled

the purpose of history and shown that it's not some sort of son et lumière or ornamental garden that happens outside the window. Rather, it's the fabric of the building and the furniture with which we live. Above all, he explains that history isn't fixed or immutable, but can both serve and hobble the present and the future. He also implies that television is a serious place for history to happen and be discussed, and of course, as time goes on, the box will become more and more where history is kept, its prime textual resource.

A Dangerous Obsession (Monday, C4) looked at one young man's excitable obsession with collecting orchids. Orchid collection, it transpired, was possibly the most dangerous and pointless pastime available to young men. Orchids tend to grow in deeply frightening places. Our hero had already been kidnapped by Colombian guerrillas for four months. As hobbies go, this one is way out there. And the programme could barely keep the smirk off its face.

Of course, for those of us who don't share them, obsessions are funny. And the obsession to collect is particularly amusing, as well as being almost entirely male. Psychiatrists tend to tap their noses and nod knowingly when confronted with a collector. Apparently, what men choose to hoard is deeply Freudian. Our young lad wanted to name a new flower for his grandmother. The Greek origin of the name orchid, as I'm sure you know, is testicle.

Widely held obsessions don't seem that funny, but just imagine a grown man painting his face, wearing a fright wig and a comedy hat and going out in public to sing and dance. If there wasn't a football involved, you'd think he was as barking as a floral knacker-collector. The World Cup continues to be far and away the most exciting thing that's appeared on television this century. □

Def and

Radio 1 Roadshows began in 1972. The first one, in Newquay, consisted of a Range Rover towing a caravan and a trailer. The BBC broadcasted from the front of the caravan and sold T-shirts from the back. Over the next two decades, this developed into an extravaganza, travelling thousands of miles around British seaside resorts every summer. Always there was the Bits-and-Pieces quiz, the Mileage Game, buckets of water and cheering. It was where the top of the charts met the end of the pier.

Radio 1 was back in Newquay on Friday. Not to celebrate the roadshow's 30th birthday, but to show how much it has changed.

Instead of Smashie and Nicey playing discs, Pete Tong and Fatboy Slim were "hitting the dex" (new Radio 1 prides itself on new spelling: def,



lite, blak, tekno, drem and teem. The culture of Mis-Teeq we might call it, or even Mistake). Instead of an audience of three people, which is all that first roadshow mustered, 50,000 clubbers were expected to descend on the town.

But one thing hadn't changed. Both events were free. Although Radio 1 embarked on a ground-zero policy in the 1990s, re-creating itself as a yooof (new spelling is infectious) station for 15- to 24-year-olds, and casting aside both older listeners and older presenters, it did not abandon the tradition of free summer shows, launched by Alan Freeman in 1972 — except that they are no longer exclusively at the seaside. Friday's "massive dance event" will be followed by similar ones in Liverpool in July and Sheffield in August. Live from Swansea last Sunday there came a more conventional