

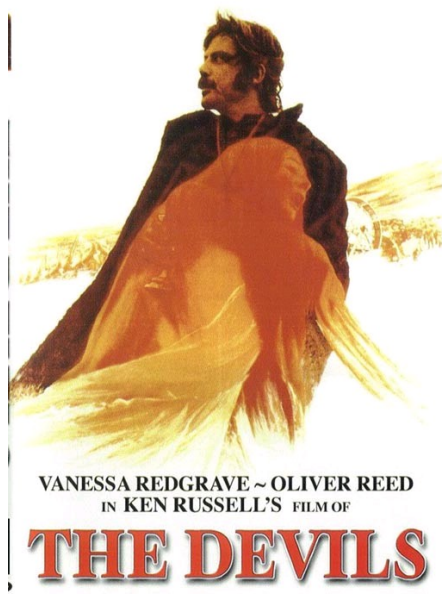


Autumn
Season
2009

the devils

Director: Ken Russell; **Producers:** Robert H. Solo, Ken Russell; **Screenplay:** Ken Russell; **Camera:** David Watkin;
Editor: Michael Bradsell; **Music:** Peter Maxwell Davies; **Art Director:** Derek Jarman. **Running time:** 109 mins.
Cast: Vanessa Redgrave, Oliver Reed, Dudley Sutton, Max Adrian, Gemma Jones, Murray Melvin

Extract of a review by Variety, from 1971:



Working from John Whiting's play of the same title, and Aldous Huxley's book, *The Devils of Loudun*, Ken Russell has taken some historical liberties in fashioning the story of Father Grandier (Oliver Reed), sensually liberated priest in 17th-century France whose ethics brought him into conflict with the political ambitions of Cardinal Richelieu and the Catholic Church, and whose virile presence and backstairs reputation cued the erotic fantasies of a humpbacked nun, Sister Jeanne (Vanessa Redgrave).

When this sister's lustful ravings begin to infect other nuns in her convent, the Church, through its military agent (Dudley Sutton), brings in an exorcist (Michael Gothard) to stage circus-like public purges of the naked, foulmouthed nuns which result in Grandier's conviction on heresy charges, his torture and burning at the stake.

As if the story alone weren't bizarre enough, Russell has spared nothing in hyping the historic events by stressing the grisly at the expense of dramatic unity.

Given Russell's frantic pacing, performances tend to get lost amid the savagery. Reed carries the film with an admirably restrained portrayal of the doomed priest. Redgrave, on screen only sporadically, is stunning as the salacious sister.

REVIEWED BY ROGER EBERT, January 1, 1971:

A burning at the stake, an afternoon in the rack, headscrews, a douche with boiling water, nails into hands, induced vomiting, ripped tongues, dead babes, human target practice, possession by devils, rape, transvestism, nude orgies in the nunnery. Put them all together and they spell Committed Art, because these are modern times and I certainly hope none of us is opposed to truth.

Now truth, as I've explained before, is what's real. If it isn't real, it isn't true, which is why a stone is better than a dream. If it isn't reality, who needs it? Or could lay hands on it, anyway? And everything on the list above really happened -- oh, yes it did. All the events and persons depicted in *The Devils* are based on actual events and real persons. How do I know? Ken Russell tells me so!

And so I went to see the movie so that I, too, could ascertain that unspeakable atrocities had occurred in the 17th Century. I didn't want to be the only member of my generation unaware of the terrible events of 1634, a year that will live in infamy. Like everyone who's committed, I found it my duty to bear witness against the moral outrages of, if not my time, then at least somebody's time. You can't just sit around.

And Ken Russell really did it this time. He stripped the lid of respectability off the Ursuline convent in Loudon, France. He exposed Cardinal Richelieu as a political schemer. He destroyed our illusions about Louis XIII. We are filled with righteous indignation as we bear witness to the violation of the helpless nuns, which is all the more horrendous because, as Russell fearlessly reveals, all the nuns, without exception were young and stacked.

It is about time that someone had the courage to tell it like it was about Loudon, a seemingly respectable provincial town beneath the facade of which seethed simmering intrigues, unholy alliances, greed, fear, lust, avarice, sacrilege and nausea. The story has gone untold for too long. Aldous Huxley wrote a book about it, and John Whiting wrote a play about it, but only Ken Russell has made a movie about it.

