

Declassified EGSM – Jane Austen

Content Warnings

- Mild innuendo
- Strong language
- Discussion of: sexism, age gaps, pandemic and lockdown
- Mentions: compulsory heterosexuality, slavery, war

LYDIA

That whole description was like... “you have to go for the glories of Lyme... ahh... the village... ahh the cliffs... ahh... the gravely shore” and I was like Austen, hon, I wish you got the chance to get out more”.

[Show Theme - Intro]

HELEN

Hello friends, fans and everybody else, welcome to Enthusiasm. I’m your host Helen Gould, one of the best Rusty Quillers. This is our show where various members of the RQ crew get together, kick back and chat about a few of our favourite things. Today on the agenda, we’re talking about Jane Austen...

Rusty Quill Enthusiasgasm – Jane Austen

LYDIA

Ooo!

HELEN

And I am delighted... yes whoo... whoo... for Austen!

[Laughter]

HELEN

I am delighted to be joined by

LYDIA

Lydia Nicholas... Oh wait I'm... doing it like a Rusty Quill Gaming thing, where I assume everyone knows who I am.

[Laughter]

LYDIA

No... err...sorry I am Lydia... I remain Lydia Nicholas... you may know me from Rusty Quill Gaming and Magnus, sometimes. I stab things...

HELEN

Yeah, that's the character trope [laughter]

MADDY

I'm Maddy Searle. I am the editor on Stellar Firma and mysterious upcoming things that will be made known soon.

HELEN

I think they'll probably be known by... because this is patron only, they probably already know about it, by the time this has come out. Unless there's something I don't even know about.

MADDY

No, this is something... no this is umm... Inexplicables... so yes you do definitely know about it...

[Laughter]

HELEN

The thing I definitely know about...

[Laughter]

LYDIA

Me and Sasha making eye contact through the camera, like no idea...

[Laughter]

SASHA

When you said inexplicable, I was like... I thought that was just a descriptor...

[Laughter]

HELEN

Sorry... and Sasha... who are you.

SASHA

Oh hi, yes. I'm Sasha Sienna. I voice Georgie Barker on the Magnus Archives, and I just am kind of a general Rusty Quill Towers haunts person, just doing things... games designing things, and occasionally get pulled in to do other things.

[Laughter]

HELEN

We all know who each other are now. So... Jane Austen. To my knowledge there are six main Jane Austen novels out there. We have, of course, Pride and Prejudice, which is the one with Mr Darcy. We have Sense & Sensibility which... Sense & Sensibility is...

LYDIA

It's the boring version of Pride and Prejudice...

SASHA

Errmmm...

HELEN

That's the one with Mr Wickham isn't it?

MADDY

No... that's Willoughby...

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SASHA

Pride and Prejudice is the one with Mr Wickham. This one's Willoughby...

HELEN

Oh no!

SASHA

Sense & Sensibility is the one with Emma Thompson and Alan Rickman and Kate Winslet in the 1995 adaptation.

HELEN

Yes.

LYDIA

The cool things you're remembering about Sense & Sensibility actually are the sub-plots of Pride and Prejudice. And this is not the first time I've seen that happen.

HELEN

Well, she shouldn't have titled them so similarly. So, Sense & Sensibility is the one where they're the poor women because their older half-brother got all the money.

SASHA

Yep.

HELEN

And yeah...

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SASHA

And then they got to live in a cottage.

HELEN

Yes, that's the one... Oh that's the one where Hugh Grant turns up isn't it?

SASHA

Yes.

MADDY

Edward Ferris.

HELEN

OK. Then there's Emma, who is the meddling lady, who keeps trying to set everyone up, and actually isn't very good at it?

SASHA

Yeah.

LYDIA

She has very cool clothes, and they go to a 90s high school.

SASHA

That's the one!

MADDY

Yes, I love the tartan skirts.

LYDIA

Yeah, I mean my favourite thing about Emma is the AI programme to choose an outfit. I really think that that was a...

SASHA

Oh my word, I was so into the idea of that, as a child.

LYDIA

Yeah, yeah!

MADDY

It was amazing. And it was like...

SASHA

I thought that was going to be the future. I honestly thought that like oh come the year 2000 we'll all have those... We did not.

HELEN

Should we be clear that we're not actually talking about the original Emma... just then **[laughter]**.

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SASHA

I do feel like some context...

LYDIA

Yeah, I think the weirdest thing about the original Emma is that Paul Rudd hasn't aged.

[Group Laughter]

MADDY

Yes. He's immortal.

LYDIA

Since the original publishing, which is quite a while ago now.

SASHA

Honestly believable.

HELEN

We are talking... is it Clueless is that right...

SASHA

We're talking about Clueless...

LYDIA

Clueless is the only adaptation of Emma that I will... err... I think it's the only one that's worth watching. I remember being bored by one once. But the problem is, it's the one that makes the age gap reasonable, whereas so many other... like the age gap in the group is gross. Like, they make a point of the fact that he knew her as a baby.

SASHA

Well, I have strong opinions about this. OK, yes, no it is gross that he knew her when she was a baby, but also like the... the age gap in Regency times was very, very different. Like the context was very, very different. And I think that it's... you could argue that umm... a college person going out with someone who is 15, who is also his stepsister, is also very questionable. I don't think there's that much of a difference contextually. Which is why I think it's such a good adaptation.

HELEN

So, the next three are the lesser known ones, I think, right? So then there's Persuasion, which is the one where...

LYDIA

Persuasion is my favourite too. I saw Maddy like... smile...

MADDY

Yes. I didn't want to interrupt, but I clasped my hands in a wistful way, because I love it.

HELEN

Yeah. So that was somewhat like her long lost... like... he proposed, and she was forced to say no, I seem to remember... and he went...

MADDY

Yep...

HELEN

... he went away to the navy... and then he came back, and then they have another go.

SASHA

Yep... they do have another go... yep.

MADDY

It's the most beautiful letter.

LYDIA

Yes it is... it's so pretty, and it's so feminist...

[Laughter]

HELEN

Mansfield Park is the one that tries to tackle slavery a bit, I think.

MADDY

I've kind of steered clear of that one, and never managed to actually read it.

LYDIA

I've never read it either.

HELEN

I always confuse Mansfield Park with Gosford Park, which is a completely different period piece... And then there's Northanger Abbey, which is the funniest one, in my opinion.

MADDY

Yeah.

SASHA

It's so good.

HELEN

And that's the one with the lady, who is obsessed with gothic romances.

SASHA

Yes.

MADDY

I really want to make a version where it's basically the main character is obsessed with... not Twilight, but something very like Twilight...

LYDIA

That is the correct adaptation choice. Yeah... that is absolutely like... yeah... because someone that's obsessed with horror, has a completely different vibe now.

HELEN

Yes, that's very true. So, I like to think I've got A star on these summaries...
[laughter]...

LYDIA

I think you would totally have passed the Austen module of my literature degree, which is the last time that I read most of these.

SASHA

Are we talking about the others, or not?

HELEN

Tell us about the others, Sasha.

LYDIA

Juvenilia!

SASHA

Yeah, well there's the Juvenilia, but then there's also some later published works, which were published postumously or posthumously. I don't know which it is postumus/posthumous. I mean there's Lady Susan, which is a short story, which may or may not be part of the Juvenilia, as far as I am aware,

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there is a bit of debate around that, and that is one of my very favourite Austen pieces which is a short story about a woman who is like a very wealthy... well formerly very wealthy, now pretty poor, really flirty society lady, who's going around, making a nuisance of herself and getting into scandals. And then there were the unfinished novels, Sanditon and the Waltons, which... well they are unfinished. They are short little snippets, but I would really like to talk about Lady Susan, because I love it.

LYDIA

I wish that you'd given a reading list before. Because I think I vaguely remember reading the Sanditon bit, but I do not remember Lady Susan.

SASHA

It's OK, we don't have to talk about it. I'm actually... I'm filming... not filming sorry, I'm actually recording another Podcast about Lady Susan, this weekend, so I can hold it in.

LYDIA

[laughter] There's so much Austen, coming out of your pores...

SASHA

I seem to be making somewhat of a semi-career of just like, being weirdly into Jane Austen...

[Laughter]

LYDIA

It's not weird...

HELEN

So I think I'll do what I did with the Buffy and with the horror episodes, and ask like... how did we all, like, first encounter Jane Austen? What got us hooked, as it were, because for me it was my mum. She was super into it. She and I both have a love of period dramas, and I still haven't forgiven her for spoiling Jane Eyre for me.

[Laughter]

HELEN

Because we were watching a BBC adaptation of it, and there was like a shot where there was like a red scarf coming out of the tower...

MADDY

Oh yeah...

HELEN

... and I was so fascinated, I was like oh my gosh, what could that be? And my mum was like... oh yeah...

SASHA

And she answered?

HELEN

It's the dead... It's the wife...

MADDY

Oh my God...

HELEN

And I was like... Mother!

SASHA

Did you start watching adaptations or reading the books? Like, which did she share with you, or both?

HELEN

Definitely the films. I didn't have the books until I was in university, I think.

MADDY

A minor side bar, Toby Stephens, in the Jane Eyre adaptation is absolutely awesome, and very sexy!

[Laughter]

HELEN

Well then Maddy, how did you get into it?

MADDY

I was similar. It was my grandmother, who I called Gigi, because it was like a childhood nickname that stuck. She was an English teacher and she loved Jane Austen and Shakespeare, and all these kind of things, and showed me lots of movie adaptations and TV adaptations, and things like that. And it was basically like I was getting sneaky English lessons, and not even knowing it, and just absolutely loving it, because it was just watching films with my granny, so it was really lovely...

LYDIA

Ahh... I remember trying to read the books, quite young, because that was the sort of thing you were supposed to do, and hating them, because it was like... there's all these women, and they don't do anything, and I would really like to go back to all the magicians, and dragony stuff, please. I mean I'll put up with... sometimes they have ladies in, but they don't have to feature much, and I don't have to care about their emotional lives, because when I was young, pretty much everything that you read was like... men do things, women feel things. And I remember at sixth form, we had Persuasion, as a set text, and the teacher that we had was... she was like a feminist anti-racist activist in Australia, who had taken time off from activism, to go live somewhere else and teach in a private school, because I was on like a scholarship at that sixth form, and so we had this tiny, tiny class, and this incredibly enthusiastic teacher, who would bring politics into every line of that book. And would talk to us about what it was about, relationships and stuff, and so I have a copy that is just filled with notes, that are so... like child doing their A levels. So I'm like underlining stuff, and it's like... he is angry... but it's not clear...

[Laughter]

LYDIA

And the sort of stuff where like... I'm reading it now... and I'm like... yes duh... so much of that. And yeah, I remember it... like the letter that he writes at the end, where she says that there's this massive reversing of like... in so many of the other books... it's like the men do things, and they're allowed to speak, and they get opinions... and the women have to like subtly negotiate, through these tiny cracks, to get any control over their lives and futures. And there's just like this thing of... she's taking an action, and he... he like is silent, and sort

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of petitioning her, and she gets this ultimate choice, and this was this huge thing. And I just remember going through it... Like Sasha's eyes... I don't know if like Sasha's processing all of this and being like... I have a millions opinions of your relatively basic take... and I'm sure... I'm sure...

SASHA

No, no...

LYDIA

... but like, reading through it again, I still think it's an incredible book. But I have not... I still find most of the others like, impossible and irritating.

[Laughter]

LYDIA

Genuinely, I can enjoy the adaptations, but like... they have their own value, and I love the humour, and I love the writing and the language, but like... Persuasion is one where it feels like it could be possible, and apart from how she jumps off the steps at Lyme... and like that's ridiculous... like why she jumps... it's like why would you... bonks her... anyway... that was like my intro, and then I had to study the others at university, and I still... they're funny... right. I love the humour, but a lot of the time I'm going through it and I'm like... this URRR... It's all about people's feelings, and I don't really understand people's feelings, so like, they're playing a game, that I don't... the rules are a mystery. That's it. I will be quiet now, and hear Sasha's intro to Austen.

SASHA

Actually my eyes were lighting up, when you were talking about how you would underline all your books during A levels, because the way that I got into Jane Austen was I actually found a book in my house, I don't know where it came from. It wasn't either of my parents, but it was clearly someone else's old A level text of Pride and Prejudice with all their annotations, and I was about 13 or 14 at this point, and loved to read, but to be honest, like English lessons, when you did like "literary analysis," in air quotes, at like age 12, had left me desperately bored. And this was the first time that I had read a book, where you could actually see some analysis of it, in real time, and it blew my mind, I loved that book so much!!!

[Laughter]

SASHA

And I was already like... I was in a bit of a classic literature phase anyway. I just was such an eye opener. I just fell so hard for it, and I just devoured the rest of the books. Absolutely loved it, but I loved all like that... like classic literature, that you would read as a teen. You know that kind of stereotypical stuff. And then it wasn't until I was in, maybe my first or second year at university, and I was talking to a man who was doing English literature, undergrad, and he was a self-identified feminist, and he mentioned Jane Austen, and I was like... oh yeah, I love Jane Austen, and he was like... Mm... yeah, no... it's just I don't... I don't think it should be studied... I don't know if he said I don't think it should be studied... but he was like... oh, it's just pointless. I may be putting words in his mouth there, but he was basically saying like... all these wars and big

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events, historical, important political events were going on and she's just writing about like women getting married... Like she's just writing about day-to-day stuff, and it just... OH MY GOD... you know that gif of Mrs White... like flames on the side of my face, from the Clue movie... I just like just got this rage... and it was like... and I just went on this massive rant about how actually (a) the stuff that's happening, the day to day, is still... does still matter, (b) this was women's real life, and actually there is plenty going on in the books and I'm so sorry if you don't have the subtlety of thought to tell that people are still doing things, even if they're not telling you...

[Laughter]

LYDIA

Yes!

SASHA

... and then a man went to a war and killed a fucking person... like... you know, they are still events, they are still important. And also, like, it's not just about the romance, because you can't forget that at this time, a woman's marriage was her... like... her economic survival. It is not just about people's feelings, not that there is anything wrong about people's feelings... that can also be incredibly valuable, and definitely worth studying, but it is also of material concern, what's happening here and...

LYDIA

Yep...

SASHA

If you can't pay attention to that stuff, then that's on you, not on Jane Austen...

LYDIA

Yeah.

SASHA

... like, yes we should still be studying her, and I'm sorry nobody is going to war in this book. Also there are people going to war in this book, you just have to look closely to...

LYDIA

Yeah, yeah!

SASHA

...to see what... Anyway I'm sorry, I'm getting too agitated... I'm moving around, and I hope none of these listeners are that particular male literature student, from my second year of university... so I...

LYDIA

I hope that they are and that they like... come to Austen, as it were.

HELEN

Yeah...

LYDIA

The fact that I say that about what 13-year-old me thought when she was trying to read these things...

SASHA

Oh goodness... no, I know... like...

LYDIA

That's the thing, is that I then grow up slightly, and realised those were important. It was just like... there was such a clash, when I was a kid, that it was like... this is what you should be interested in, at exactly that same stereotypical age... and I'm like... no, I want to read Dickens... where like there's little thieves, and they do stuff...

[Laughter]

LYDIA

And it was like... no... you know what... it's just as important... it's just... yeah... it genuinely does take more of subtlety of thought. I think there's a lot of people who can really enjoy them, at whatever age, and whatever level. There is. Yeah. There is a subtly of thought to realising how serious it is. Like she's taking the silliness of life seriously, because like the silliest one, who is Lydia, by being silly, and they literally call her "a silly girl" like she potentially destroys lives, right?

SASHA

Yeah!

LYDIA

What seems trivial, is absolutely not. Ever.

SASHA

That's such a good way of putting it. It's like she takes the silliness of life seriously. I really love that. And yeah, so that's why my eyes were lighting up while you were talking, because it mirrored how I came to it... very nicely I thought.

LYDIA

In a weird way, that's why I actually find *Pride and Prejudice* and a couple of the others quite hard, is someone, I can't even remember who, commented once, when I was talking about *Pride and Prejudice*, about how it was a fantasy. And it is one of those things that really sticks with you, because she said something like... you don't marry a Lizzy... Like Darcy wouldn't marry a Lizzy. She maybe gets to be... like she's the affair... right... like... and that's the... the reality. When you look at it, especially in the adaptation, where he's got that chonky house...

[Laughter]

LYDIA

And it's like... she doesn't have anything to recommend her, except her personality and herself, and it's... it's wonderful how it happens in the book. But there's... I think... almost hearing it... hearing I just remember someone's commentary, kind of like... he wouldn't even have... he wouldn't feel that he has the freedom to do that, because he's got so many other like... yeah, there's the responsibilities to marry the right person, to keep the line, and to keep everything... like it's not a thing that would really happen. I find it quite hard now watching it. I mean like this is... it's someone's idea of what would be nice

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to happen, because she shows their lives being destroyed by silliness, and then she saves it, in a way that is... you know... I don't know when so much of the rest is really plausible. Like it's fine for a novel... like I read stuff with magic in, it's cool.

[Laughter]

LYDIA

...That's not to say it's a bad book, it's just... I don't know. I remember that really ruined the book for me, reading it like someone saying that and like it feeling then like a fix-it fic.

SASHA

I feel like actually I've heard that criticism as well, and I feel like first of all, again, with my soap box, like...

LYDIA

Mmm! Please fix it for me.

SASHA

That criticism like "oh it's just not realistic" only ever gets applied to romance novels, written by women. And it's like... no, of course these are supposed to be unusual events, that is why we are writing a fucking novel about them...

[Laughter]

SASHA

Then they're supposed to be not just every single day this happens. But I think that that would be a more cutting criticism for me, if the book itself did not

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treat this as completely out of the ordinary. Because obviously... no, the vast majority of cases, that wouldn't have happened, but out of the ordinary things did still happen...

LYDIA

Yeah.

SASHA

... in Regency times. Not everybody lived their lives in one way, and this is very much treated as like, this is a wild decision for him to have made!

LYDIA

Yeah.

SASHA

His family are like... what are you doing, but he is saying he's going to do it anyway. And I don't think that that was a fix it, I think that that was... this is very much a book about a man, who seems like the sort of person who would have done the normal honour of the family, protect the line thing, but actually, all the way through, he is not that man.

LYDIA

Yeah.

SASHA

... he is somebody else. And so, I think, it doesn't seem like a fix-it-fic, because it's not a fix it, it's baked into the book. That is what the story is. But also, I do think that the book treats it as very notable...

LYDIA

Yeah.

SASHA

... which I think is... like I'm reading books for things to be a bit notable.

[Laughter]

LYDIA

I get that. It's... and yeah, like I say, I read things with magic in. And there's...

SASHA

Oh, but that's part of what like... that's part of the deal right?

LYDIA

Yeah.

SASHA

... like if you're reading.

LYDIA

Yeah, I think it's the internal consistency thing, with some of her books. Like... but this is the sort of thing that I do criticise in say Dickens, where they're just... there's the incredible coincidences. Like... oh no... it turns out that so and so is also his uncle, who was long lost at sea. Like, we get that that is a thing in Dickens. And that is also definitely a thing continually through Austen, because they are constantly re-meeting the same like three people. Like... oh... it turns out that my ex is just going to live up the road, because he's connected by

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marriage to someone that... but that's fine. I'm fine with that. I think... I think you have fixed my sadness about Pride and Prejudice. So, thank you Sasha.

SASHA

Oh, I'm glad! That is my main aim in life.

LYDIA

Yay!

MADDY

And I think it's also interesting to kind of... because from a modern perspective a lot of the kind of stories that I like are like... smash the system, get rid of all the old stuff, get it all out there, whereas Jane Austen is much like... we're in a system, this is just how it is. We have to work with it. We can't like completely destroy it, we have to like sneak our way through and find the best outcome in this very flawed system, which I find very interesting.

LYDIA

It is about living in a broken world in a lot of it. Like they can't do things that they want to.

HELEN

Yeah.

LYDIA

There's a lot of... lockdown has made me understand Jane Austen a lot better.

SASHA

Oh yes **[Laughter]**

LYDIA

I absolutely cannot see people. There's all the like... oh it... it's not like I have a chaperone, but I can't see the people I want to... like, all the same. And so I literally... the whole take a turn around the room, sounds absurd, like I remember like... re-watching that a while ago and being like... "what absolute idiots. How this must be satirical. This must be one of her funny bits". And now... yep... lockdown, I'm like... I'm just going to walk around the garden, for a change of scene.

MADDY

My mum has a Fitbit, and sometimes she just waltzes through the house, like... "I'm doing my steps!!"

[Laughter]

SASHA

I think that particular bit about "let's take a turn about the room", I think that bit is satirical.

LYDIA

Well, she's being funny about it, but the idea that that is a ridiculous thing to do always...

SASHA

Yeah.

LYDIA

Like, she's being ridiculous in that moment, because she's trying to do something...

SASHA

Yeah.

LYDIA

But the idea that... you would...

SASHA

But it certainly isn't so out of line with the rest of the book, that you're like... that would never happen... and now, yes, very much like, "oh I think I might take a walk to the kitchen".

LYDIA

Yeah.

HELEN

I think, for me, the bit that I am now connecting more to with lockdown is just the... my imagination is like doing really weird things, at the minute, because I don't have much outside stimulation. Like I haven't really been seeing people, to talk about things, and discuss things and say what ifs. And so, to me it seems that the number of like times when people just like are daydreaming, or thinking by themselves, or sitting under a tree, for hours... which before I was like... I can't... you have to have something with you. I can't just stare into space for hours. And now I'm just like... I probably could now actually. If I've got nothing else to occupy my mind... I'm just like... what if this happened, wouldn't that be nice.

LYDIA

Yeah. It's very strange. I think one of the things about Austen's books is they can... when you are, as I say, the kind of person that reads things that are either smash the system or smash the magic tower, or like... they feel small, but that's fine, because it is... it's also a delighting in the smallness of real life...

EVERYONE

Yes!

LYDIA

... and existing, and the skill that it takes to navigate those things. In Persuasion there's so much about how Anne is practical, and the fact that she gets to show that will just be useful and find her life has shrunk so much, even compared to other people within that system, but she still finds ways to survive and to daydream and to help people...

HELEN

Yeah, that's the thing. I feel like my life has shrunk, and so my imagination is so much more active now, in order to try and push those boundaries to where I think that they used to be. But we're getting a little bit maudlin, I think. Shall we talk about something very, very funny?

LYDIA

Sure!

MADDY

Go for it.

HELEN

Shall we talk a little bit about... I really do want to talk about Northanger Abbey. I think it's my favourite out of all of them. Just because... for one thing, it's hilarious that she's just walking around a house thinking... "oh ghosts"... and for another I didn't realise how risqué the books that she was reading actually were. I think it was you who told me, Sasha...

SASHA

Oh my goodness... have you read *The Monk*?

HELEN

No.

SASHA

Oh my word, it's got serious trigger warnings, but it is very, very risqué.

HELEN

I'm going to look it up.

SASHA

Yeah. So like when John Thorpe... because you know so she's reading mysteries of *Udolpho*. And that's what her friend Isabella is suggesting she reads as well, or is reading along with her, and she's loving that, and that one is pretty risqué... and then John Thorpe, who's the dickhead guy, he suggests to her that she reads *The Monk*, and says that that's what he's reading, and that's how you know... that's one of the many clues that he's a dickhead. Like he's got no clue about what is and isn't appropriate. He's just... he's got this kind of like brash, modernity about him, in a way that is very censored and yeah that

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like the whole fact that he's recommending *The Monk* to her, is such a telling character point, because... my word, that's an explicit book for a Regency era.

HELEN

Yeah, I'm reading some of the plot summary.

[Laughter]

HELEN

Oh my...

SASHA

Mmm!

[Laughter]

HELEN

Oh my gosh... Burned to death...

LYDIA

I would listen to a Podcast that is just... Helen reacts to plot summaries...

SASHA

To Wikipedia...

[Laughter]

LYDIA

To risqué Regency era novels.

[Group Laughter]

HELEN

The thing that least sticks with me, as well in Northanger Abbey, is the scene where, I think she's with John, and like they're just riding off in his chariot really fast, with his horse... straight passed the people she actually wants to... just the idea of her going... woo... then there's like... watching her go by... I think is just so funny.

MADDY

I can just really imagine him as like this really dickish dude bro in like a really fancy sports car, just like zooming past the people... in like the very ordinary Volkswagen or something. She's like "I want to talk to the people in the Volkswagen, please!"

HELEN

What are the rest of your... like what are your favourites? Because Northanger Abbey is mine. What about you? I mean, Sasha, you already said Lady Susan.

SASHA

Yeah, so Lady Susan is one of my favourites. I always tell people that my favourite of the novels is Northanger Abbey, because I think it's the most underrated, and also it's the most like when I was 15 and reading it, I was like... "this is me... this is a book about me!" and it was a book about me. But also I really hate to say that my actual favourite might be Pride and Prejudice, because it's very basic thing to say.

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HELEN

Nothing here is basic.

SASHA

So yeah, my favourites are Northanger Abbey and Lady Susan, for sure. Yeah.

[Laughter]

LYDIA

“I’ve read Jane Austen books you’ve never heard of...”

[Laughter]

SASHA

Well, it’s just everyone’s favourite is Pride and Prejudice, and also Theresa May said that Pride and Prejudice would be her book on Desert Island Discs and now I don’t want to say that it would be mine, lest people think that I have something in common with Theresa May... Unless I actually do have something in common with Theresa May, which would be worse.

LYDIA

She probably likes it for different reasons. She likes it for basic reasons. You like it for good reasons...

SASHA

Yeah, thank you!

LYDIA

While also acknowledging that the basic reasons are also valid, because things can just be good.

SASHA

Yes, thank you.

LYDIA

It's complicated...

[Group Laughter]

HELEN

How about you Maddy?

MADDY

I've just been trying to think. I think I'm very much like Pride and Prejudice is my favourite like classic romance one. But then Persuasion is my favourite like very low key, and very sort of heart felt and almost kind of subversive one. And then Northanger Abbey is my favourite funny one. And so, these are all my favourites for different reasons. And I even like Sense & Sensibility for... well mainly for the Emma Thompson adaptation, just because it's so pretty...

SASHA

It's so good.

LYDIA

I think with Pride and Prejudice... not Pride and Prejudice... with ah... with Persuasion, there are such moments of... I think it's because... you say understated, or like subversive... and it is those things, but it's also... there are just like the moments where she's thinking about him and thinking about what she's lost. Where like there are points where it's like... there's so much emotion, that if it was an adaptation... and I have never seen an adaptation actually... if it was an adaptation, I would need to pause it, and with this I often

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have to put the book down, and be like... cup of tea... so much emotion. Oh - I feel it in my core... and then like read again. It is... Wentworth is just so sexy. He's just so sexy.

MADDY

Yes, he is.

[Laughter]

MADDY

There is an adaptation that's the one I watched before I read it, which I really liked, which is a BBC one, kind of... I think it was towards the end of the sort of 90s period drama run, and it's Amanda Root and Ciaran Hinds, in the main roles, and it's just absolutely brilliant. And, of course, like all the minor characters are brilliantly cast and hilarious. Like Mary, her sister is completely wonderfully awful, and Simon Russell Beale is just kind of very sweet, but kind of useless as her husband and yeah... it's just like an all-star... like British character actor version, and also it's just incredibly like quiet and beautiful and has only the most gentle piano accompaniment soundtrack and like they really like allow the moments of silence and the like beautiful kind of bleak shorelines and woods and forests.

LYDIA

They are so into Lyme. Like that whole, that whole description was like... "you have to go for the glories of Lyme, ah... the village... ah.. the cliffs... ah...the gravelly shore and it's like... Austin hon, I wish you got the chance to get out more... like... it's cool.

MADDY

Yeah, there's probably a lot better seaside resorts than Lyme, sorry to say...

SASHA

But she hated the big ones, you know. She was all about that like... tiny little beachside, where no one else was going and it's like there's probably a reason why no one else is going there... but you know she hated like the Brighton kind of places. She thought it was the worst place in the world.

[Laughter]

SASHA

Wish you could see it now Jane!

[Laughter]

HELEN

I do want to say that like one of the things that really endears me towards like all fiction of this era is the very outlandish ways that they all speak to each other. Where its almost like "oh they are the most kind and generous person in the entire world, and you know you can stab me, if you think differently". Do you know what I mean? Like, the overstatements is just something that I love to read. Because... there's a part of me that's like... they don't really mean that. No one can really mean that. But on the other hand, maybe they do because only knew like 20 people in the, like altogether.

LYDIA

And they are like the connection with an ex. You know the “oh we have the pleasure of a connection with the Duchess. Really... oh...” It’s a... oh I’ve just noticed... sorry I can bring it up later, but I did make notes on Pride and Prejudice adaptation and I’ve just seen them in front of me. I gave up, because all they are is... Darcy is naked in the bath. Oh my... Darcy’s hair is wet... ooh!

[Laughter]

LYDIA

Oh Darcy again on a horse... Oh the pond. He gets wet so much... Oh, Fencing scene... sweaty again.

MADDY

Fencing...

LYDIA

Pond. Underlined... underlined.

SASHA

This is the best review of 1995 Pride and Prejudice I have ever heard in my life...

[Everyone agrees]

LYDIA

Yeah... that’s what I got. I’ve also put... oh like, “Ugh, I hate Jane” a few times. That’s basically it.

[Laughter]

LYDIA

Those were the comments I had.

HELEN

In the adaptations, what I really love is the subtleties of everything. How someone can say something but to me I'd be like... Oh OK! But to someone else it's like "oh... oh how dare..." and like faints... Do you know what I mean? And like the concept of cutting someone...

MADDY

Yeah, I was really thinking about the moment in Emma where she says a really cutting thing to... I can't remember the lady's name. The sort of busybody lady...

SASHA

Miss Bates.

MADDY

Yeah, yeah... and she just absolutely devastates her and it's like the most horrible thing that ever happens in that book. And it was just like this one sentence and I'm like... wow...

SASHA

It's just like a knife in the heart, every time you read it.

HELEN

And I think it's what you were saying earlier about how it's all the small things, because you're in that world of small things. It's also small things that can have such an impact, and I really love being sucked into that. 'Cause like, me as a person, I'm pretty confident. It's not that easy to insult me, really. But there's something about the adaptations of these things that really just makes me think, "oh I totally understand how awful that is".

LYDIA

I think you're right about the fact it's these lives are so constrained, and every little misstep is the stakes are genuinely high. And that does get repeated to you over and over again. Like obviously there's the Lydia and Kitty being silly and then potentially endangering everyone's futures. But that kind of happens over and over again. Like in Emma, where she advises her protégé (singing) "rollin with the homies"

[Laughter]

LYDIA

To date the wrong person when she should obviously be with the stoner skateboarder. It's just they don't... it's so... I can remember in the actual book... I can't remember who calls her up on it, but they really do say to Emma... like you... that would never happen, like that will never work, what you're proposing, and you've risked her future. Like she had a chance of a good future, that worked, that would make her happy, and be secure and like, you've stepped in and screwed this up. I do remember say in Pride and

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Prejudice, where her friend who marries Mr Collins, she says, like, “oh he’s got so much to do in the garden, and I tell him to do stuff in the garden, and I also tell him to call on lady what’s her face about you know... sometimes he has to do it twice a week... twice a day, and those sermons he has to write, honestly they take ages. I only see him... you know half an hour at dinner”... and it’s the strange like what you have to do to make a life.

SASHA

Have we all heard the head cannon... the academic theory... of Charlotte Lucas is a lesbian?

MADDY

I don’t think I have, but that is really interesting.

HELEN

Who’s a lesbian?

SASHA

OK, so Charlotte Lucas is Lizzy’s best friend in Pride and Prejudice. Mr Collins, her awful cousin proposes to her and she says no. And he then proposes to Charlotte Lucas, who says yes. Who’s in a very similar financial situation to Lizzy. So she basically married him, even though she knows he is ridiculous, but she’s going to have a stable home to live in. And then when Lizzy goes to visit her, Charlotte Lucas is perfectly like seems genuinely perfectly content, but is very much like Lydia said... like “yeah, he’s out in the garden, and he’s going to call on Lady Catherine and we only see each other very little”, and that’s why she’s happy. And there is a theory that she is intended to be a

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lesbian. And there is a theory that she is not intended to be a lesbian, but that you could read her as one anyway, so, which I really like.

LYDIA

Yeah.

HELEN

Do we think that Jane Austen knew about lesbians?

SASHA

There is also a big theory that she was bi-sexual. Yes, I think she did know about lesbians.

HELEN

Oh!

LYDIA

I mean, she does talk well about the ladies being pretty. She appreciates a pretty lady.

SASHA

I mean have you heard her description of Harriett Smith? It's intense.

[Laughter]

SASHA

Emma is in raptures over her eyes all the time. That book is *gay*.

MADDY

And in the 2019 Emma, like they really make a lot of the really close female friendship between them, and I really like that, and I was just like this is quite gay. I like it a lot.

SASHA

Mm-hm...

LYDIA

Helen doesn't have anything to say. Helen's imagine has taken over...

[Laughter]

HELEN

I'm just... I'm just thinking about lesbian Jane Austin. I'm sorry **[Laughter]**. And I'm just thinking about like queer readings of older texts...

SASHA

Well, they're there. They're definitely there.

HELEN

Yeah... Ah... That would be so nice! I really... I love a... I don't know what this era... Regency?

SASHA

Mm-hm...

HELEN

Regency lesbians... I think that's great. I would like more of those. I'd like more gayness all round, everywhere.

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LYDIA

Pride and Prejudice and gayness.

SASHA

Sense & Sensibility and sapphism.

LYDIA

Yes!

MADDY

Yes.

HELEN

Yay!

[Laughter]

LYDIA

Emma is a lesbian.

HELEN

OK, that's good.

[Group Laughter]

HELEN

Are you a friend of Emma?

[Laughter]

HELEN

OK. Alright. I'm trying to... I'm looking at the questions that I want to ask, but I feel that they're all much less interesting than what we've already talked about without like any guidance from me.

LYDIA

That's cool!

SASHA

What are your questions, Helen?

HELEN

I think the one that I most want to ask, is like which relationship do we like the best?

SASHA

Oh, that's a good question!

MADDY

That's a really good question!

SASHA

That's a good question.

MADDY

Yeah, there's a lot of kind of relationships in the books where the man is like... I need to scold you, because you've been naughty... and...

[Laughter]

MADDY

It's a bit like... because Mr Tilney is like, "oh you're too silly reading your gothic books"...

SASHA

Oh no no no no no!

MADDY

... and Mr Knightly's like "oh Emma you should be nicer to your friends." But...

SASHA

Ok. Mr Knightly, yes very much. Also, Edward Bertram... You can't see me I'm just doing a... if you're listening to a Podcast you can't see that I'm doing a big thumbs down there, but no... Henry Tilney is joking. He is saying those things super-ironically because that was the dominant cultural narrative at the time. And he is like poking fun at it. He's being sarcastic.

MADDY

Nice. Cool. Yeah, I was also kind of... I've only really seen the 80s adaptation, which has weird saxophones in it, which is hilarious.

SASHA

Oh my god, yes! Katharine Schlesinger and Peter Firth. Oh my God. Oh yes. OK. That's maybe the worst thing about the film, I fucking love it. So I... on my Twitch channel I read Northanger Abbey as a bedtime story, over several weeks.

HELEN

Yeah!

SASHA

To people, and they watched it. And then at the end, we watched one of my favourite Jane Austen adaptations, which is the 2007, Northanger Abbey with Felicity Jones and JJ Fields and then immediately followed it with the 1987 Northanger Abbey. It's awful. It's the worst thing in the World. Isn't it dreadful? Doesn't he look at her like he wants to eat her skin?

MADDY

Yeah, I think I watched it when I was a kid with my grandma, so I really can't remember it that well. And I have read the book more recently, but still quite a while ago, so it's all a bit fuzzy in my brain, but yeah, it is very bizarre.

SASHA

It's bizarre.

LYDIA

I just genuinely want your recommendations of what the best adaptations are.

SASHA

Well, it depends on what you want from a Jane Austen adaptation?

LYDIA

Comedy and hot men?

SASHA

Oh, OK yeah... so... define hot men?

LYDIA

Well, I mean, it's a very varied pallet. But you know... they're hot... and they're usually men. But not all are hot men.

SASHA

OK. So... Oh, this is a good time for me to plug my Podcast actually.

HELEN

Yes!

SASHA

I have a Podcast where I watch and review every Jane Austen adaptation ever filmed, with Jessica Law, who plays Nicola in the Magnus Archives. And she has never read a Jane Austin novel before and will be watching each adaptation completely fresh. So that's very exciting. And we, we do a review

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system, where we score adaptations, based on five main criteria which we think are important to a Jane Austen adaptation, which is... so first of all there is Austenly vibes, how Austenly does it feel and there's how funny are the side characters, how much fun it is, how likeable is the leading lady and how sexy is the leading man.

LYDIA

Cool.

HELEN

Mmm...

SASHA

So, yeah it's a good one to watch if you want something funny and with sexy men... sorry it's a good one to listen to. So I think... so for Northanger Abbey, the 2007 adaptation of Pride and Prejudice - Sorry, of Northanger Abbey is the really good one. JJ Fields is not what I would call a traditionally like sexy man, but I think he does very well in the role of Captain Tilney, sorry Frederick Tilney.... Henry Tilney... Good lord, Captain Frederick Tilney is someone else.

LYDIA

One of the things that Austen makes very clear, especially say in Persuasion when they talk about how... how hot her cousin is all the time, is that dudes can be... like they can look traditionally hot, and they can seem cool, but they're not. They're creepy... whereas

MADDY

There's so many bad boys...

LYDIA

So many bad boys... Wickham, no!

SASHA

So this is going to be my next one. If you want to look at sexy people, and you're not that fussed about the rest of the quality of the adaption, then Billie Piper's Mansfield Park is a good one to go for, because I don't remember the name of the guy who plays Henry Crawford, but Hayley Atwell plays Mary Crawford and obviously the Crawford siblings are the sexiest of all the Jane Austen characters, I would say.

HELEN

That's the adaptation that I can't get through at all.

SASHA

Yes, it's absolute crap...

HELEN

And I can't remember why...

[Laughter]

HELEN

Just because it's crap.

SASHA

Real bad.

HELEN

Wading through wet sand...

LYDIA

Trying to reach the Darcy at the end... But you cannot make it.

[Laughter]

MADDY

I think the only version of Mansfield Park I've actually consumed is a BBC radio adaptation, and I still really can't remember what happened in it, and I'm just like... no... it's just... I think I probably ejected it from my brain for a good reason...

[Laughter]

LYDIA

Maybe that's the thing. I haven't read Mansfield Park, so I can't comment.

SASHA

Yeah, it's the one where like among people who are very into Jane Austen, a lot of the time, we just kind of put it in a corner. Like some people absolutely love it, but there's definitely like... it's one where more people just are like... oh except Mansfield Park, I guess. Like it's the weird one. Like in the Jane Austen Book Club there's this... I think it's a book and then a film, and there's a line about Mansfield Park, where they're like... and we'll read all six of her novels, and they're like... "even Mansfield Park?" "Yes, even Mansfield Park!" It's a bit of a slog. We never said which was our favourite relationship!

LYDIA

Oh yeah, yeah yeah!

HELEN

No, you never did. We got side-tracked. Alright, hit me with them, quick.

LYDIA

I'm trying desperately to not to think of the couples, and to like be cool, and think of a female friendship, that's much better. But so many of the female friendships are also kind of complicated and messy in interesting ways. Which I think is realistic and I love, but like I hate Jane. I just can't stand her, you know. There's others but... I... Anne and Wentworth. Anne and friends...

MADDY

Yeah.

LYDIA

They're just because I've got a bias that way.

SASHA

Yeah... Anne and Wentworth is a good one.

LYDIA

He actually really respects and knows her. Like he knows her, and she knows him.

SASHA

Yeah.

MADDY

I have to agree. I think that was the one that I was going to go for as well. And I think also, there is an element of just... just talk to each other. Just communicate... you both like each other. Just talk, but then there's also an element of... oh... the tension...

LYDIA

(squeaks) *Tension!*

SASHA

But there not allowed...

HELEN

It is... it is... slow burn...

[Laughter]

LYDIA

Friends to enemies, to friends... Three thousand K.

SASHA

I know I brought this up, but I now... I now will refuse to choose.

LYDIA

What's your favourite female relationship? Because I bet you can think of one?

SASHA

I mean I love Emma and Harriett, because it is such a... just a messy drama, like just a mess. It's just a mess. I love that. That's really good. I think maybe Elinor and Marianne. I think that they are basically each other's worlds, when they move, you know. And they are so different, and they have so many points of tension, in a way that I think is really realistic for a sibling relationship, but also they are 100% each other's best friend, and I think when Marianne falls ill, Elinor is just devastated and I don't remember if it's in the original book, but in the Emma Thompson adaptation she has this line that like "don't leave me all alone" and it's just...

HELEN

Yes, you're right!

SASHA

Oh God... Yeah... Maybe that one.

HELEN

I'm annoyed now because that's what I was going to pick but I can't remember Elinor's name...

SASHA

Oh no, I'm sorry!

[Laughter]

HELEN

I was like... Marianne and... what was her name. For some reason I was thinking Lydia, and I was like... no... Lydia is the weird one in the other one.

LYDIA

What I like is the difference actually between this and say Lord of the Rings, where if I got like a word wrong, like when I was like, it was the last friendly house, and you're like "it's the last homely house...". Like you'd come in and correct everything...

HELEN

I'm sorry!

LYDIA

No no, it was cool, because it was like Helen's encyclopaedic, in that kind of... there's loads of things I kind of know... I keep the connections, but I don't keep the specifics. I'm really terrible at that. I'm a bad researcher like that. I have to write everything down. Nothing stays in my head... so when people know stuff... when they can just encyclopaedically pick out the indexing. I'm just like

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I'm in awe. And the way that you did that over the Lord of the Rings, and I love how you clearly cared just as much about all the worlds of Jane Austen, but you're like... "my favourite one... I think her name might be... Bob!".

HELEN

Yeah, I can't remember anyone's name at all in Jane Austen.

SASHA

To be fair they've all got the same name. She reuses names so often.

[Laughter]

SASHA

How many Henry's do there need to be?

MADDY

Basically, if you're not named after a Monarch, you're not real.

[Laughter]

HELEN

I think though that is all we have time for. Which is very sad because I want to keep talking. I mean, I say this every episode... Like, no I want to keep talking, I think what I'm learning from this is that we need Enthusiasm episodes to be two hours long... at least. But we'll see if I can wangle that, or not...

[Laughter]

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LYDIA

Yeah, I can imagine the collective editing...

[Laughter]

HELEN

Anyway, with that... thank you very, very much for listening. I hope that you've enjoyed it as much as we have. It's been very, very nice, but for now, and until next time, it's goodbye from me, goodbye, and it's goodbye from them...

EVERYONE

Bye!

[Show Theme - Outro]

HELEN

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[Show Theme – Outro Ends]

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