

EGSM – Period Drama

Content Warnings

- Explicit language
- Innuendo & sexual references throughout
- Discussions of: racism & sexism, death & physical violence
- Mentions of: poverty, COVID-19 pandemic, alcohol, homophobia, zombies, police brutality

HELEN

Would anyone like to tell me what they think a period drama is?

RAFAELLA

I think it is when two people want to shag but they can't talk about it.

(Group laughter)

[Show Theme – Intro]

HELEN

Hello friends and fans and welcome to Enthusiasm, the show where we talk about a few of our favourite things. I am your host Helen Gould, one of the best Rusty Quillers. Today we're talking about period drama TV shows and I am ravished – no that doesn't sound right...

(Group laughter)

NEMO

God! Helen's being ravished – live on air – God someone save them.

IMOGEN

Enraptured?

HELEN

Enraptured, good one. I am enraptured to be joined by Fay, Imogen, Nemo and RAFAELLA. So, as always, let's introduce ourselves alphabetically. So, Fay, what are your pronouns and what do you do?

FAY

My pronouns are ze/zir, or they/them and I have various hats. I am a business change and project manager; I am a performance poet and I am a still somewhat accidental voice actor – after this time it's possibly less of an accident – but yes, that's me.

HELEN

You know, it's a surprising amount of people who are accidentally voice actors these days. Imogen, what are your pronouns and what do you do?

IMOGEN

Hi there, I'm Imogen Harris. My pronouns are she/her. I was a voice on Magnus Archives and on Stellar Firma, and in my day job I write copy for Modern Art.

HELEN

Ooh, that's quite fancy.

IMOGEN

I know right, check myself out. I was talking to my mum about it and she said, "Well, I mean, how do you make sure that doesn't sound pretentious?"

(Laughter)

IMOGEN

And I went, "I don't!". I think if you're worried about sounding pretentious you may be in the wrong job.

HELEN

Yeah. It's a kind of a losing battle that really, isn't it?

IMOGEN

Yeah. Embrace your inner pretentiousness.

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HELEN

Next up Nemo, what are your pronouns and what do you do?

NEMO

Hello, my name is Nemo. I use they/them pronouns and I am a writer and theatre maker for Rusty Sq... Rusty Squid? That is not....

(Group laughter)

NEMO

The name for Rusty Quill!

IMOGEN

Sh. Don't give it away!

NEMO

I, I am writing a podcast called Trice Forgotten which is coming out this year.

HELEN

Hooray! I'm really excited, genuinely so excited.

NEMO

I've got to add a squid now, just to you know, thematically, contractually.

(Laughter)

HELEN

And Rafaella, what are your pronouns and what do you do?

RAFAELLA

Hi, I'm Rafaella, often Raf because Rafaella has too many syllables in it. My pronouns are she/her. I am a writer and director, theatre maker, and I am writing on two upcoming Rusty Quill podcasts; Cry Havoc, Ask Questions Later and also Trice Forgotten. Wooooo!

NEMO

Woop woop woop woop woop.

HELEN

Very good, very good. Well, let's start with some definitions. Would anyone like to tell me what they think a period drama is?

RAFAELLA

I think it is when two people want to shag but they can't talk about it.

(Group laughter)

NEMO

Oh my God!

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HELEN

Oh no, that does describe a lot of it doesn't it?

RAFAELLA

I've given this a lot of thought.

NEMO

Before we started we, we started talking about like you know, era's and, and what it means and stuff and I was like one, one thing I wanted to say was, do we think that Naruto – the anime – is a period drama, because technically it's set in a period other than contemporary Japan. And it is about Naruto and Sasuke who do want to shag but....

FAY

Okay.

(Laughter)

NEMO

So that's my spicy opinion that I'm dropping at the beginning and it's only going to get better from here.

FAY

Fantastic.

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HELEN

I believe you, however I have never seen Naruto, so I cannot...

FAY

Me neither.

HELEN

I am an objective observer in this case. I didn't even know that it was set in like the real world, I thought, I assumed it was like a fantasy thing.

NEMO

I mean, it is a fantasy show, but there's a Japanese genre called Jidaigeki which it kind of falls into as well, which basically is just like period drama but Japanese.

HELEN

Oooh!

FAY

And the whole like Ninja Samurai kind of world falls into that. So in my head, period drama.

IMOGEN

Fair enough.

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HELEN

Well listener, we'll leave it up to you.

(Laughter)

Any other takers for what a period drama is?

FAY

I think it's when the viewers get really obsessed with whether the facial hair is correct or not.

(Group laughter)

HELEN

When, is that – has that happened?

FAY

Oddly enough with some of the people I talk to, yes.

HELEN

Okay.

FAY

Because I have friends who are, not only into watching period dramas, but who've done costuming or make up or stuff for it, and they get very...but it's

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not just them – other people will just go, “fffffftttttttttttttt they wouldn’t have had sideburns like that.” And it’s...

(Group laughter)

FAY

...just becomes a whole thing. So, yeah. That’s been my observation. People get more into the, the set dressing literally than perhaps any plot holes you know? That’s not the right kind of corset.

HELEN

Yeah.

FAY

Yeah.

HELEN

Do we have any other takers for a definition of what period drama is?

FAY

I guess it’s something that sparks nostalgia. If I’m going to have a more serious answer. It’s the stuff that it’s, it’s sufficiently long ago that it’s...it’s a little bit foreign at least.

HELEN

Mmmmmmm.

FAY

I was thinking about the kind of stuff that I've watched that I'd say was a period drama and I'd, I'd think okay I watch stuff set in the '60's, so like Pennyworth or whatever, although that's an alternate universe stuff, but that I would definitely say was a period drama. But, because I was born in the '70's, stuff that's in like the '80's and '90's doesn't feel like a per... even if it's set back there rather than filmed back there – doesn't feel like a period drama to me. But something in the '60's is that bit alien, and at the same time is the sort of thing that my parents would have talked about, so yeah. That, that for me that's part of the definition. But I think it's going to be interesting talking to people who are younger than me to see what they think is a period drama when, when that, when does that stop, when's the upper limit for that?

RAFAELLA

I have an earlier cut off point than you.

IMOGEN

Aaaahhh!

RAFAELLA

Yeah. I mean my main ingredient I think for it, this is what makes it a period drama is more in terms of content, or maybe this is form. I think it has to have a slightly soapy element to it.

(Laughter)

HELEN

Ooh!

RAFAELLA

Whether or not...and I'm including adaptations of big, heavy air quotes, great literary novels especially if they're Victorian because so many of them were. Those novels were serialised and episodic. They actually do have that continuing drama kind of feeling baked into them. One of my favourites which is the adaptation of Bleak House, a lot of which is half hour episodes and it was very consciously designed to mimic watching something like EastEnders. So not being at all denigrating when I say they have to feel soapy.

FAY

No

HELEN

Yeah.

RAFAELLA

That's the level of concern and the stakes are extremely high within a family or a relationship.

HELEN

So when you say soapy you mean like, high, emotional stakes carrying on from one bit to the next.

RAFAELLA

Absolutely. And I think that's part of this question of historical accuracy as well. When you think about...so, so many period dramas are marriage plots. That's just what they are and it's very easy to dismiss that as something frothy. There's lots of them going, I'm going to do a gritty Jane Austen or whatever.

(laughing)

Then I go well I don't need that because in its way it's already gritty because if you don't manage to marry someone you will end up in penury and have a terrible life so the stakes are high already.

HELEN

Yeah. It's interesting Fay that you mentioned about nostalgia because on my list of period dramas are several ones set in Roman times and Vikings as well and I have no particular nostalgia for those times.

FAY

Interesting.

HELEN

But they definitely do feel foreign

IMOGEN

I think something like what Nemo said about it allows you to look at your own society.

FAY

Mmhuh

IMOGEN

There has to be an assumption that the morals and values at the time differ from yours and generally are more restrictive, we tend to think, because we like to think now that we're a lot freer and everything. So there's an idea that you have to be looking at this through a lens of a different set of sensibilities and rules and I think that's one of the things that sometimes trips up modern period dramas when they make it too much of the sensibility of our time and then that stops feeling like a period drama if they've...if they've gone into that or made a character who's...the kind of classic one is they make a very, sort of, feminist heroine and that's quite jarring because you're like, well, no this isn't...that's not what I'm watching the period drama for.

FAY

Ah yes

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IMOGEN

It needs to contrast my own society's morals.

NEMO

There was quite a lot of talk about that with the latest adaptation of Around the World in 80 Days.

FAY

I've still not seen that. I'm really looking forward to it.

HELEN

I haven't see that.

NEMO

It was interesting to watch because obviously it's a fairly colonial novel.

HELEN

Yeah

NEMO

Starring David Tennant and Ibrahim Koma – I'm not sure how to pronounce his name and they talk about blackness and there's an interracial black/white relationship that happens over the course of the episodes and that actually...they go to America and there is quite a lot of anti-blackness that happens and then they come back to Europe and there's a lot of anti-blackness

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that happens. And also they talk about it in a very interesting way and like Imogen said...so I was reading an article that was about the phrase “oh it was just a product of its time” and how that’s a really flawed thing and it’s something that we love to think or a lot of people do love to think because we like to think that we have progressed as society towards people who wouldn’t be racist or sexist or transphobic or all the other phobias and, and I think we can see that in period dramas quite starkly because I guess writers are aware now of trying to centre that conversation and it was interesting with *Around the World in 80 Days* because I couldn’t work out whether they had done it well or not. Like I kept swinging back and forth.

HELEN

Oh that it interesting.

NEMO

There were some bits of that that I was like it’s really good that they are flagging up that black/white allyship did happen in the 19th century and that they mentioned things like boycotts and it wasn’t just racial like, murder porn, there were characters of colour who had significant roles and good lines but it’s still a colonial novel and, yeah. So it was quite interesting how that was weighed up and I don’t know how they could have done it differently in 2021.

FAY

Yeah I mean if you’ve seen the film, the David Nevin film, and what they did with that which was very much...oh, I think it was Shirley McClain so couldn’t have been whiter, being the exotic Indian princess and all of that kind of stuff

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and you just...again if we're talking about product of its time or whatever, even the makings of stuff, talking about the past and, yeah. That's something that Raff talked about as well it's just really interesting watching different adaptations of the same story. Like we always have a new Robin Hood every, what, ten...five, ten years, something like that. And I love that. I love watching the different versions of Robin Hood because it's pretty much the same story. Everyone has the basics for Robin Hood or King Arthur or anything of that kind of ilk that's of particular age but we do different things to it every decade or every half decade. Even...because at one point I was...I used to collect short story collections of Robin Hood and you could tell which era they were written in by, not only the language they used but the focus they had. What was the more important thing about identity, about different people's powers. Is this thing talking about class or is this thing talking about gender more. Is this talking about...how does...what does rebellion look like depending on which one you're looking at. Which is why I don't mind when, for example, Robin Hood's aren't very historically accurate because that's not the point. The point is that we're projecting onto the known story of Robin Hood, we're just going right this is this decade's transformation of it. Yeah. But it's a funny one because if it's too historically inaccurate it can jar you too much. It's like Imogen was saying about that's not why I'm watching a period drama. I want some of that slightly nostalgic foreignness to it I guess.

RAFAELLA

Yeah it's very poignant to hear you talking about Robin Hood because this was one of my projects that was lost to the pandemic was a new adaptation of Robin Hood.

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FAY

Oh my days!

HELEN

Ooh

RAFAELLA

For theatre. For a young audience and exactly as you said, both the writer and I, we both came in and pitched to this company. They were going...very earnestly going we'd like Marion to be really central to it and both the writer and I came in and were like or...or as well, why don't we just have a Robin who's female or femme.

(gasps)

And we both had separately said that and they went "yeah great". And we were like "cool, good". So that's how we're going to come at this from the point of view that we're gonna have a femme Robin, a fem Marion that's still a romantic relationship and that kind of outsiders them in the society they live in is what drives their social change.

HELEN

That's so cool

FAY

I am so excited about that.

RAFAELLA

I don't think it's going to happen now sadly. That's lost to time because.

HELEN

Socialist lesbian Robin Hood.

FAY

Yes please! More, more queer Robin Hood please. Oh dang.

I wandered off though from how do we talk about race and definition and stuff and how do we portray that and all the rest of it. Like even some of my favourite, more contemporary ones which do have more actors of colour and they are then sometimes explicitly characters of colours, sometimes it's colourblind and sometimes they're explicitly characters of colour but there's still...there's still a higher body count in...the people who survive tend to be paler. They tend to be less tortured, less assaulted and less dead in general and it's...no matter how you slant it, even shows that look quite progressive we're still bringing that with us. So we're talking about, you transform it, you lean into the modernity of the period you're making the thing in.

HELEN

Yeah

FAY

But how...how far do you push that before it no longer becomes a period drama. So you could say, for example, Sherlock. Definitely based on the

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original Victorian thing with even a whole fan fic bit where they did that Christmas episode based in the Victorian version

HELEN

Yeah of course

FAY

But we wouldn't call that a period drama would we even though a lot of the plot lines and the characters and the rest of it have been taken and adapted and transformed for modern sensibilities for a Sherlock Holmes for this era and as with Robin Hood and King Arthur you also have Sherlock Holmes-es for each era.

NEMO

I think what we were saying before about costumes really does come into it because at least in the BBC context which is one of the biggest producers of period dramas. Period dramas is synonymous with costume drama and I was reading something about this, it's about the appearance of authenticity and the...the BBC in the UK, it creates what is canonical in our minds I would say, because it has the authority of a patron of the arts. It's a long established production company and so we generally, hmm...recently it's coming under fire and also r.i.p. BBC but in the UK and we ship TV shows internationally, we are known as costume drama producers and I think it comes down to the idea that period drama is something that looks...it looks like it could've been made in that time period.

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HELEN

Yeah

NEMO

It creates a world that draws us in enough that we're like, oh, yeah the way that they're speaking. But then, as I'm saying that, I'm like oh but then you have shows like The Great which have the lavish sets and it is, I would say, a costume drama but they speak in colloquial British rather than Russian.

HELEN

I can't wait to watch The Great. It's on my big list. Nicholas Holt is so weirdly good. I saw him in The Favourite and I was like oh you were made for this. I see.

NEMO

Unhinged

HELEN

I love it!

RAFAELLA

Nicholas Holt loves to wear a powdered wig and be a weird little guy

NEMO

Yeah just a little

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HELEN

I support him

NEMO

Running around

FAY

What a life. Sounds great.

HELEN

Let him be weird and bewigged

NEMO

Weird and bewigged, that's a period drama.

HELEN

That's the title of this episode. Weird and Be Wigged. I'm calling it now. And on that announcement we're gonna go to a break.

[BREAK]

HELEN

And welcome back. So that was a really cool first half where we talk about all kinds of theory and now I want to talk about what shows we like and who should kiss.

(laughing)

Now in the break we did have a minor discussion about how there's loads of shows about the Tudors and Nemo you also reminded me that the BBC adaptation of Wolf Hall, in terms of the thing about filming in a way that makes us think that it could've been filmed like that at the time and how the BBC just like went completely natural light and had candlelight and it was...couldn't see a thing.

(laughing)

It was good but could not see most of what was happening. But what are your favourite shows to watch in terms of period drama?

IMOGEN

I'm gonna have to put in a plug here for Hornblower

HELEN

Ooh

IMOGEN

The Ioan Gruffudd Hornblower series. Personal favourite because my peak period drama watching years were a few years when I lived with a friend of mine and I was working nights, seven days on seven days off, so every alternate Monday was the Monday after my night shift finished and we had classic British serials night which was where we...it was the funnest night of the week. She and I would have a couple of bottles of wine and watch whatever classic British serial were on and Hornblower was...I think what started classic British serials and remains a favourite, to the point where we have to save it for times of extreme stress. So if you're heartbroken then it's time to put on Duty and Mutiny and crack open the vodka because that's what you need. So, yeah, Hornblower for me is one of the top ones.

HELEN

That's a good choice.

RAFAELLA

I've got to pick up that baton because so many of my period drama watching experiences are incredibly social as well and about a group of friends and actually at university my...still of my closest friendship groups, we formed a kind of unofficial period drama appreciation society and a real big fixture in that was North and South.

IMOGEN

Ooh, yeah.

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FAY

Classic

RAFAELLA

Yes, yes, yes. These are the correct reactions coming through my headphones

(laughing)

And the very first time that I watched that which is an adaptation of an Elizabeth Gaskell novel starring Richard Armitage and the daughter from My Family.

(laughing)

Sorry to the actress, I can't remember her name!

HELEN

Oh no!

RAFAELLA

And the very first time that I watched it, I watched it with a friend and we invented a cocktail which we called a Gaskell after the writer

NEMO

Oh my god

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RAFAELLA

And it was something awful like Peach Schnapps and Limeade. Or...the sort of the thing, you're 16 and what's in the house.

HELEN

I would drink that. I would drink that.

FAY

Tooth dissolving stuff, yeah.

RAFAELLA

Do you know what, there's a moment, I think she hands him a teacup and their hands brush and my friend grabbed my wrist and went "oh my god, they basically just had sex"

(laughing)

And I think for me that is...that is the core. That is the real core, of the appeal of a period drama. Is that moment.

HELEN

Oh it's just occurred to me, so North and South is about a nice southern lady moves up north and there's a grumpy industrialist and they hate each other and it's an enemies to lovers kind of deal. I've never seen Hornblower. I don't actually know what it's about Imogen. What's Hornblower actually about?

IMOGEN

Ok Hornblower is a young man, Horatio Hornblower, what infernal luck. Joins the navy as a midshipman. That's one of the lines from the show. That's not me being coarse and he goes from a callow youth who gets terribly seasick but he learns through the course of it, how to be a dutiful man basically and how to lead. He tastes the captain's bitter brew and he...

(laughing)

Another line.

(laughing)

And he becomes...I think there's a series of books by CS Forrester, I want to say, and he gets all the way to admiral. I mean Alice and I still say if we've had to take on a responsibility that was difficult or we had a really bad day at work, we had to lead other people, we'll say I'll tasted the captain's bitter brew today.

(laughing)

FAY

I was braced but it still didn't help.

HELEN

This sounds intensely homoerotic Imogen.

IMOGEN

I couldn't possibly comment.

(raucous laughter)

NEMO

I mean it's on a ship right and all ship dramas, they're all...it's just a group of men...

IMOGEN

It's just very manly men.

NEMO

...having some horn blowin' time.

FAY

I'm going straight to AO3 after this.

HELEN

Nemo, while we're on you, what's your favourite period drama show then?

NEMO

I was trying to think about this because very recently I've been getting into the Chinese Wuxia genre. So, sorry for this pronunciation Mo Dao Zu Shi or the

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Untamed and there's one called Nirvana in Fire. It's like a cross between fantasy and period drama but it's got the same...you watch it for the costumes, you watch it for the...especially the Nirvana in Fire has that political intrigue Court drama. It's like a Court drama which is quite period drama-ey, we kind of touched on the Tudors which is a lot of Court drama and because a lot of them are based on Chinese web light novels which are basically mostly gay stories but once they become produced in China, because of censorship laws, they can't actually kiss or fuck or touch or show that they're in a romantic relationship so it does have a lot of Raff's favourite thing of like they look at each other and you know that oh my god, look at them, they're basically having a sloppy make out right now.

RAFAELLA

Yearning!

(laughing)

HELEN

The yearning

FAY

Yearning! Yeah.

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NEMO

And they call each other their soulmates and oh they're bonded forever but they can't be husbands. Yeah. So that's the kind of world that I've been living in.

HELEN

Oh! Fay what about you?

FAY

Oh sorry I've just had a flashback because I've been thinking about the first period dramas that I watched because my mother was very, very into them. I was thinking oh yes thing like the Onedin Line and Upstairs Downstairs and stuff but then I was thinking no I used to watch Monkey and the Water Margin.

IMOGEN

Oh I used to watch Monkey.

FAY

Oh! Glorious

HELEN

What was Monkey?

FAY

Ah! It was based on the old...sorry I feel so very, very old, it's based on the old journey to the west. So if we're talking period it's like really old and it's basically...it's an epic quest taking someone from China to India, is where they're heading. But the one I watched, again because I was very little, this is the one that was from the '70s and it's dubbed which nowadays which I would find...and I remember as a small and not entirely neurotypical child finding it very difficult that the lipreading was different from the...I remember my dad having to explain it to me and I was just "nurgh" dissonance and the rest of it but then I kind of got used to it. The music was profoundly '70s and so were all the huge sideburns and all the rest of it and again it's a cross between fantasy, because you've got magical demigod type creatures like Monkey, Pigsy and Sandy and people like that who are essentially animal spirits who have their own special skills and the rest of it. Lots...lots and lots of people fighting each other and screaming and occasional plot but mostly it's just people getting into scrapes and then getting out of them and lots of human venality and stuff like that. So that was my first introduction to that but – but the one that is my big one now, I would say is, talking about BBC period drama, is the Musketeers. Yeah.

HELEN

Which version because I think there's been a couple?

FAY

This is the BBC one that was...this shows my depth of fandomness but it was 2014 to 2016 and I didn't start watching it till 2018, so that kind of thing. But it

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was three seasons and you could tell they were running out of cash towards the end of the second season and that it was all gonna finish because suddenly everything speeds up and gets very argh, let's tie all the plots together really, really, really fast. Yeah and again it's interesting watching that with my own knowledge of the 17th century stuff and then getting to know people in fandom who include professional costumiers who go "nope" about the hair and the corsets. There's one person who will give you a dissertation on corsets but one of the things that I love, one of the little nuggets of behind the scene stuff that I love is that everyone wore from underwear outwards, everyone wore full costume for these shows. Right?! So they're in...the scenes shot in the summer they're all going "kill me now. How did people do this"

(laughing)

It's like 100 layers plus a lot of leather because this particular adaption has gone through a lot of leather which is great, obviously.

IMOGEN

I'm a huge fan of the films of the Musketeers which are all terrible in their own different ways.

FAY

Yes. Wonderfully terrible.

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IMOGEN

Amazingly terrible. So enjoyably I couldn't even tell you which is my favourite. They're all amazing. So I must try this TV series.

HELEN

On a vaguely related sort of topic I'm gonna put my...what is the phrase, my flag on a mountain? My foot in the ground?

FAY

Line in the sand?

IMOGEN

Colours to the mast.

HELEN

Spartacus is what I'm trying to say.

(laughing)

The Starz with a z production of Spartacus.

FAY

Oh my.

HELEN

It's got some of the best character writing that I've come across, genuinely but you would be easily fooled into thinking that it's terrible because of...they don't have any money.

(laughing)

They have three sets and no money and obviously it's about Spartacus, it's about gladiators. Every fight has got a heavy metal soundtrack underneath it and there is so much CGI blood that looks like it was out of a '90s PlayStation game just splashing everywhere and yet the characters themselves and the actors and the writing is really, really solid, in my opinion. It comes with all of the trigger warnings that you might expect for a narrative about slavery but the arcs in it are very interesting. It's got that thing again of there being really high emotional stakes about relationships being really important, about there being rivalries and arguments and disagreements and people nearly dying and then people actually dying and...

FAY

There's forbidden love as well from what I remember because I've only seen the first season. So before the actor had to be switched out, which was a real shame wasn't it. Yeah I mostly just went Lucy Lawless for a long time.

HELEN

She's great in it.

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FAY

She just absolutely steals it as you'd expect.

HELEN

Lucy Lawless is excellent in everything that she does. I need to look up the actor who played Oenomaus who is like the gladiator trainer guy and he is the most noble, having a code, loyalty driven character and that makes him make some bad decisions because obviously his loyalty is towards the slave owner at first but then they persuade...they eventually are like look at the thing...look at the...and then he becomes the staunchest support of Spartacus and the freedom and it's...he's so good. He's so good.

NEMO

Peter Mensah

HELEN

That's the guy.

FAY

There's also a lot of men wearing very little so you know if that draws you in.

(laughing)

HELEN

Ok I was not going to mention the character I think we only know as horse cock but...

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NEMO

Oh my god. Burying the lead there, really.

HELEN

Poor horse cock we barely knew ye.

FAY

I'd forgotten horse cock. Oh my days

IMOGEN

Sorry how could you forget horse cock. I've not seen this show but you're like...

FAY

Because Lucy Lawless

IMOGEN

...oh yeah it slipped my mind.

FAY

Because Lucy Lawless

IMOGEN

Oh ok, fair enough. Fair enough.

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FAY

Sorry

NEMO

My new favourite relationship is Hornblower and horse cock

(laughing)

RAFAELLA

I think that's the episode title!

HELEN

But yeah I would recommend. Just be careful with it because it's horrible all the way through.

FAY

Oh god yeah. There's a lot of sexual exploitation as well in it. Way more than I was anticipating even having seen...

HELEN

Yes. Oh yeah of all genders, yeah.

FAY

Yeah.

RAFAELLA

There's like a broader point to extrapolate that about all period drama which is it obviously tend to land its focus on the shoulders of a certain class level.

HELEN

Yes

RAFAELLA

And it's not always the very, very highest but there are these invisible stratas of society in the past which are...which I think probably includes quite a lot of middle class stratas as well. You don't tend to see some, you know regency, you don't tend to see the people who are shopkeepers who are a cruel joke tossed off by a Bingley sister. There's a loads and loads of layers who, we almost end up feeling like they didn't exist. Which I think, Nemo, is going back to what you were saying about what's put out by the BBC ends up essentially setting the cultural tone or temperature or whatever for how we think of the past and it's...no it was all rich people and also there were some servants because the rich people had servants.

FAY

Ok because that's...because I'm thinking about the period dramas of my youth, again sort of '70s and '80s and stuff like that and things like Upstairs Downstairs which was deliberately and explicitly about the different levels of society as it is with Downton Abbey and all the rest of it now. But there was also...17th century again, By the Sword Divided, which was about the build up to and then the execution of the British Civil War.

HELEN

Ooh.

FAY

Yeah but that focused on actually a quite middle-class family and how they divided into...I don't want to say Roundhead to Cavaliers but whatever the actual...the actual term for that was.

RAFAELLA

Parliamentarians?

FAY

Parliamentarians and Royalists, yes.

HELEN

Yes, yeah.

FAY

And again it's about family, it's about identity and all the rest of it as we keep seeing in any drama, let alone a period drama and where people choose to place their loyalties as well as the big, grand stage stuff and about big fighting and famous people and all the rest of it. But you've also got this family and how it positions itself in this divided land and all the rest of it and looking back, I am glad that was one of my early exposures to historical...I guess historical

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fiction, historical drama whatever, was the idea that it wasn't, as you say, there are some people with names and there are servants.

(laughing)

HELEN

Yeah

RAFAELLA

I don't know, the one that was quite formative...it was also...this is a big recommend, also English Civil War, there was one called the Devil's Whore.

FAY

Oh yeah

HELEN

I remember that! I really liked that.

FAY

I know the name but don't...

HELEN

I thought that was good. Yeah. I don't remember anything about it but...

RAFAELLA

It was great and John Simm played a character called Sexby which is funny. Yeah but that one...that was literally following her, sort of going up and down these different stratas of society. Maybe we just need more English civil war period drama. I think that's the answer.

HELEN

I think that would be interesting.

FAY

Or more French Revolution stuff even because that's got a whole bunch of stuff about...although again you start researching fan fiction for Musketeers and you find out how many revolutions there've been. When you start saying French Revolution and if you've done any research, you'll go which one. Which uprising? At which point and its characteristic things but what I loved reading about was when the most successful ones were the ones that took in...again all strata of society saying nah, I will not, kind of thing. When that happens that how important that is.

HELEN

I am going to have to draw us to a close because we've gone way over time but it's all been really fascinating.

RAFAELLA

Oh, I didn't even talk about Desperate Romantics.

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NEMO

Ooh what's Desperate Romantics?

HELEN

And I didn't even talk...I didn't even talk about Versailles

NEMO

Or Lost in Austen or Poirot

HELEN

What a disgustingly expensive looking show that is. But I do want to go around a bit and I would like us to give a recommendation of a show that we think deserves a bit more love. That is what we've been doing for a while but I feel like we all have a dozen of them. So I want to give everyone one last opportunity before we close and I am...I am going to go with Versailles since I just mentioned it because I know nothing about that period of history, I know nothing about France and I...I spent the whole time thinking I'm not sure if I'm going to watch the next episode, I don't know if I like this or not and then suddenly I'd finished the series. So, it's not entirely a recommendation, it's just I had some emotions watching this. You also may have some emotions and it's one of the very rare instances where I've seen a successful thuple relationship play out.

FAY

More of that please.

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HELEN

It takes a while to get there but it's a fun...it's fun watching the dynamic develop. Imogen?

IMOGEN

Ok I would say...oh, Jewel in the Crown. I dunno if that's unloved but it's so good, so good. Young Art Malik, amazing. Obviously the Jeremy Brett, Sherlock Holmes, amazing.

FAY

Superior Sherlock Holmes.

IMOGEN

Oh my god, just the best and that's a very competitive category but he is the best and I would probably also go for the Romola Garai four part adaptation of Emma which is awesome.

HELEN

Lovely. I love Romola Garai

IMOGEN

Her and Johnny Lee Miller and Tamsin Gregg as Ms Bates and it's sublime.

RAFAELLA

It's really good.

HELEN

Fay?

FAY

Obviously I've already spoken in depth about the Musketeers but I would really like to point people towards Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell.

HELEN

Ooh.

FAY

Partly because I was a big fan of the book and I expected to be very grumpy about the adaptation and genuinely loved it and agreed with pretty much all of the...because obviously in order to adapt a book you have to make stylistic choices and you don't always get the casting that you want and all the rest of it or you have a different vision in your head from what the readers to and all the rest of it. But they really...they nailed so much of the eerie yet mannered vibe of the books. So yeah it's something like a six part, you can get it from various different places and I would definitely recommend that. I've also had a couple of people telling me that I should watch the War and Peace but I know nothing about it except, again this is from my costume friend, costumes were alright, plot went a bit weird but the costumes are great.

(laughing)

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And yeah Outlander along a similar line. Again it's been on my list and I've seen the first couple of episodes and I know it's that kind of thing, because I grew up reading things like lots of Robert Louis Stevenson and all that kind of stuff, it's right there is my childhood story wheelhouse, so I want to watch it and I want to get into it but it's hours in a day and stuff so.

HELEN

Raff, what about you? What would you recommend?

RAFAELLA

I have to say Brideshead Revisited. The 13 hour miniseries...it's not a miniseries, it's 13 hours but the Jeremy Irons and Antony Andrews one. Yeah the fact that it takes 13 hours to adapt a 200 page book...it's a bit longer than that, it's like sinking into a bath, a very gay bath.

FAY

A very, very gay bath.

RAFAELLA

It's lovely. So I have to say I recommend that one. I would also...one that I think is very under loved...unloved is the...I think it was the 2003 adaptation of Daniel Deronda

IMOGEN

Yes that's really good! Yes isn't it really good.

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RAFAELLA

It's also Romola Garai and Hugh Dansy...

IMOGEN

Yes she's amazing. She should be in more everything.

FAY

Yeah. Agreed.

RAFAELLA

I think she's maybe the unsung heroine...period drama, kind of, yeah, because also the Hour as well which is also a period drama as well, definitely. But Daniel Deronda is George Elliott's last book and unfinished and it's a bit imperfect but I think it's a really brilliant and fascinating book and has two parallel storylines; one about a guy called Daniel Deronda who's played by Hugh Dansy who is adopted and basically becomes inexplicably drawn to his Jewish friend in the Jewish quarter of London, this is Victorian, and maybe he's going to go and find some stuff out about himself.

NEMO

Wink, wink. Eyebrow.

RAFAELLA

And I am part Jewish so I love that side of the story. And then the other side is Romola Garai playing this brilliantly kind of – calculating is the wrong word but playing a beautiful woman called Gwendoline whose family is poor but she is

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going to marry well and that so the way that those two storylines intersect. It's really, really good and then I also just have to give my trash recommendation which is Desperate Romantics.

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HELEN

Yes

RAFAELLA

Which is...when was it on? 2008/2009 maybe. It was a BBC series about the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and they're artists and they're angry and they're horny and like...

(laughing)

That is the whole summary.

HELEN

Extremely relatable.

RAFAELLA

Aidan Turner plays Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Yeah that's what it's about. That's the whole of it. Yeah and it's Aidan Turner just slightly pre stardom. Just before...but yeah he's playing Dante Gabriel Rossetti so it's very...he's very brooding, there's a lot of shirtsleeves, there's a lot of angry storming into taverns and slamming down tankards. I cannot in good conscience call it a good show but it is a very special show.

(laughing)

HELEN

That's extremely valid. And Nemo, what would you like to recommend?

NEMO

On the East Asia side I would recommend Kingdom which is a South Korean drama. It's a period drama...a Court period drama and then zombies happen and it's like if you try and be like, oh it's medieval times and you're trying to stop a zombie apocalypse from happening and you can't text people in cities far away but there's a zombie apocalypse coming. You've only got horses. Yeah it's stressful and it's really good. It's on Netflix. And Word of Honour which is very much the two guys who are soulmates and they soul bond and then on the other side, it was something that Fay brought up that reminded me, the 2019 film by Ladj Ly called Les Misérables which is, not technically an adaptation because it's set in 21st century France but it's from the perspective of a group of black teenagers and it's about police brutality.

HELEN

Oh wow

FAY

I've heard really good things, yeah

NEMO

And it is that idea of how to adapt...it's not a period drama because it's not set...it's not set in...it doesn't have Jean Valjean, it doesn't have Javert in it but it does talk about the socio economic structure of Paris and about police

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brutality and about all of the class consciousness and all of that that Hugo talked about but specifically made by a black French filmmaker in 2019 so, yeah, that's my recommendation.

HELEN

Oh I love all these recommendations so much. This is great. But we definitely have to stop.

(laughing)

We really, really do. But thank you all so much for coming on. This has been one of those episodes where I've just learned so much and just felt so #blessed to have such smart people around me. But with that I will see you in the next episode. For now it is goodbye from me, goodbye. And it is goodbye from all my guests. Would you all like to say goodbye.

EVERYONE

Goodbye. Farewell.

NEMO

Yeah, God, take it again guys!

HELEN

Do you all just want to say farewell? Prithee, fare thee well.

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RAFAELLA

Adieu.

FAY

Adieu.

NEMO

May God be with thee

(laughing)

RAFAELLA

We ride at dawn

NEMO

The miner strike comes tomorrow. We take down the bourgeois class.

(laughing)

HELEN

Sush, they'll hear us!

FAY

And that's the title of the episode, right.

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(laughter)

[Show Theme - Outro]

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[Show Theme – Outro Ends]

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Producer by Lowri Ann Davies

Executive Producers: Alexander J. Newall & April Sumner

Editing by Tessa Vroom and Cathy Rinella

Music by Sam Jones

Art by Anika Khan

