

# Trice Forgotten - Below Deck 2 – Gender Through History

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## Content Warnings

- Colonization and Imperialism
- Discrimination
- Racism
- Oppression
- Discussions of; Queerphobia, Fatphobia, White Supremecy, Enslavement
- Mentions of: Transphobia, Dysphoria, Abortions, Eugenics, Genocide, Diet culture

## [Show Theme - Intro]

### **RAFAELLA**

Hello and welcome to episode 2 of Below Deck, where we dive into some of the research, questions, stories and general tangentially interesting things that went into making Trice Forgotten. I'm Rafaella, my pronouns are she/they. I am the director of the series, and also one of the writers. I'm thrilled today to be joined by our series creator, Nemo Martin and by Hannah McGregor. First of all, I'm going to ask our guests to introduce themselves with their pronouns, and then we'll talk a little bit about gender. Nemo, would you like to introduce yourself, again, for our listeners.

### **NEMO**

Sure. Hi, my name is Nemo. I use they/them pronouns and I'm very excited to be here again. Talk about gender.

**[Laughter]**

**RAFAELLA**

Hannah, would you like to introduce yourself, and explain who you are, for the benefit of this conversation!

**HANNAH**

Ha-ha! Absolutely. My name is Hannah McGregor. My pronouns are she/her. I am a scholar? I guess! I'm a professor at Simon Fraser University, in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, and I'm also a podcaster. I make a podcast called Witch, Please, which is extensively about Harry Potter, but is actually, sneakily about teaching people critical theory.

**NEMO**

Ha!

**RAFAELLA**

We love to hear it.

**[Laughter]**

**RAFAELLA**

So as I... as I teased just then in that intro, today we're going to talk about gender, which is quite a big deal in this show. Specifically gender in terms of how it's been represented in historical periods. How we're representing it and creating a piece of historical fiction, and not just through time but also through place. And how gender, and ideas of gender differ across different global

groupings of people. So, Nemo, I'm actually going to start by asking you, if you would outline some of the ways in which gender is important to this story. Not just as something that you and we wanted to represent, but why it feels to me like gender is really wrapped up in the heart of the story that we're telling here. So I wondered if you could talk about that, a little bit first.

**NEMO**

Yeah. It's interesting because like when I was thinking, as you were introducing, and I was like - oh I don't know whether I did as much research about historical genders, as I did about many other things in the podcast, but then I realised that was a lie!

**[Group Laughter]**

**NEMO**

It's just that - so I'm actually doing a PHD at the same time, right now, and it's about race and gender within Les Misérables... the Victor Hugo novel, and so in my mind these two research projects are completely different, but they do end up influencing each other, of course and while doing my PHD, it really has come to the - the centre of it is, basically race and gender are tangible and...

**RAFAELLA**

Yeah...

**NEMO**

Super-linked... Right. So – story arcs in this show is about taxonomy [laughter] and - I mean spoiler/not spoiler it's - how natural history links with the history of anthropology, and the history of racial science - and then you eugenics and genocide, slavery, the fact that we have racial brackets, it's all so interweaved it's so interlocking, you can't - for me - talk about race without talking about gender. You can't talk about gender without talking about race, because anything that we see as being a masculine or a feminine trait "are things created to make sure that white men and white women, were seen as a different species from other races". And so - you know this is ostensibly about natural history - ha-ha - it's about like fish science, or snail science. But it really was all formed around this like central thing, which was the research topic of how people - how we exist nowadays. How our society is fully based on these thinker - these white men codifying what they thought that race and gender should be for them.

**RAFAELLA**

That's a beautiful answer. Hannah - doing lots of very like vigorous nodding. I know this is an audio medium, and sometimes I think my role as host of these is just to translate to the listener, the beautiful things that I can see now on our Skype call.

**HANNAH**

Nodding so hard and literally biting my lip, because I'm like too excited to have this conversation. My God... don't break in - ahh... I love it so much!

**RAFAELLA**

Yeah - well how does your - well this is Hannah - how does your research, and your areas of scholarship, without the question mark, that you put on it earlier - sort of fit into this field, or kind of is this field - and yeah - go on - break in - respond to what Nemo said.

**HANNAH**

Yeah. I'm really interested in the history of white femininity, in particular. The sort of historical figure of the white woman and the sort of imaginative role that she has played, historically. Particularly because of the role that she occupies - that we occupy - I am a white woman, in sort of contemporary feminist conversations. And then unpacking the history behind that. And what you were saying, Nemo, is exactly true and so crucial to any conversations we're going to have today about feminism, about queer community, about gender - is that we have to understand that not only are race and gender indivisible, as sort of two technologies of imperialism, that were really being sort of - developed through the late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but that in many ways race - as a way of dividing and managing the world, proceeds gender. So that when we try to have conversations, say about feminist organising - which is very central to my own sort of thinking and activism, and we try to pretend that woman is this stable, universalizable, ahistorical category that can somehow - you know - unite us across difference, not only is that a pretty ahistorical way of thinking about human identity, but it's actually a deeply/depoliticising way of thinking about human identity, because it hinges on white women's desire to pretend that we occupy sort of the neutral identity of women. As though our ability to stand in as the signifiers of womanhood isn't itself rooted in white supremacy and eugenics.

### **NEMO**

Umm... yeah... [laughter]... there's me again just like nodding - being like - biting my tongue and like... oh... oh... I want to reply so bad... one of the big things in - if you don't know the story of Les Misérables, one of the main characters - Fantine, she is a white woman who falls into misery because of poverty. And it's really interesting like - one of the big reasons why I started my PHD is because Victor Hugo says at one point - now that slavery has been abolished, slavery doesn't exist in the world except for white women - and throughout the novel, he compares both Fantine and Jean Valjean, the like male protagonist, with the language used for the enslavement of black people, but in a way that's like taking - as a short hand to take that history - centuries worth of oppression that is still going, and putting it on to his white characters, because his readers - he was pro-abolition, and I mean it was current affairs - it was current affairs for him, and he was taking those vivid emotions that white people were feeling about abolition and about enslavement, and putting them on to his white characters to give them like emotion, and now we have the musical on-stage, we have BBC adaptation, we have all these adaptations, which are based on this idea that these are two super-subjugated people, and we have completely taken out the fact that for Hugo, his readers would have read blackness in that! And it's just... yeah.

### **HANNAH**

Yeah. And the flip side of that, is sort of the way that abolitionist writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe, used sort of the tropes of sentimentality, which were about white femininity, in many ways, to sort of "humanise black characters". Right? So, you used the vocabulary of enslavement, to signify the oppression

of white characters and then you used the vocabulary of white sentimentality to humanise black characters and still at the heart of all of these sorts of ways of representing human suffering, is the sort of continuous centring of whiteness as the neutral human.

**RAFAELLA**

Umm... umm... Just to say to bring this very brilliant conversation into the context of Trice Forgotten,

**[Laughter]**

**HANNAH**

We're going to get out of control very quickly if you don't reign us in...

**[Laughter]**

**RAFAELLA**

Let's get out of control, because these are context episodes, these are behind the scenes, and this is a really, really brilliant little slice of the context that went into creating a series where - you know, throughout literature and portrayals of the historical periods encompassing the last few hundred years, what we get over and over again, is black characters, and characters of colour who - we are to read them through their proximity to a white character. And in this show, what we have is none of the central characters are white. There are white characters in the show, but none of our central - our core family of characters are white. So I wondered - yeah, Nemo, did you - when you were creating the series, and when you were writing your episodes, did you - I don't know - was there anything that you had to unlearn, or any kind of - anything

you had to unpick in your head, in order to write this world, and this group of people?

### **NEMO**

That's really interesting. I sat for quite a long time, trying to balance the main characters that we see. So - right now, when this episode is coming out, we've seen Elizabeth, Baker, Siva and Noor. And I knew from the beginning that I wanted to have trans and nonbinary characters. Because I am a trans nonbinary person. I want to see that happen, and what roles these characters took - developed quite a lot, as I kind of sat there and was thinking - well which one's going to be the trans one. Or which one's going to be like the femme one. Which one's going to have more masculine qualities, and stuff like that. And you know it's really - I mean, again, this came up with race, 'cause I was like well, if this character is going to be more outspoken, or if this character is going to be more timid, then what race and gender are they going to be projecting themselves as. And I really like - it was really hard, because at some point these characters also have to unlearn stuff that, like they don't exist in this podcast as being perfect. They do have to go on character journeys. And so, making the balance of characters who grew up in a world where they did have to, to some extent, be educated in a certain way - survive in a certain way, versus - from the very beginning I knew that there was not going to have like transphobic slurs, or anything like - you know - you can't be this gender or you can't be that gender - like that's not really going to be the question. There's no question about whether these identities existed or exist, because that's not something that interests me, that can be something that other people study, and people have been studying for a really long time. So, I guess what I was really unlearning, was like - I mean - to answer the question, yes, and I think it's a continual thing. And as the characters continue to develop, I

was finding myself - reminding myself - that gender and race are really hard - ha-ha - and a lot of times, I was making assumptions about the characters and then being like - no I don't need to put that in actually. I don't need to have that character be like this.

### **RAFAELLA**

So let's use that to talk about - nonbinary people in the past, basically. That's the biggest headline I can think of for it, because obviously there is a - you know we do not need to entertain the nonsense misconception of this idea that this is a 21<sup>st</sup> century fad and no one used to be this... you know... we know this isn't true. And we actually - we touched on this a little bit in our first below deck episode, where we talked about - our topic is we were talking about authenticity and accuracy, and we talked a little bit about the language behind - OK how do these characters, in our sort of 19<sup>th</sup> century setting, how do these characters refer to themselves. Are they using the same language as us, if not then what is the language they're using and it's probably not that far off from the language that we would use. So yeah, I wonder if Hannah/Nemo you wanted to - either of you wanted to talk about the experience of being nonbinary - of living a queer nonbinary life, in the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> contrary.

### **HANNAH**

Ah hm... I mean I will - it is - I think without question, for historians of gender, that the gender binary is a - again historically fairly recent construct. And that, again if we link it to imperialism and to white supremacy and to eugenics, our contemporary notion of the gender binary is very much a technology of whiteness. And something that was sort of historically again - sort of 19<sup>th</sup> century denied to a lot of non-white people. Either imposed or denied, depending on how - you know, the violence of colonialism was operating on those populations. And you still see the way that that plays out in the kind of

gendered end of rationalised policing of - for example, the way that black women, who are good at sports, are being accused of secretly “being men”, which has its roots in this kind of masculinisation of blackness, and a kind of treatment of black people as being less gendered than white people. Which was sort of part of the technology of slavery or the way that Asian cultures are still really feminised, because the role of India, say, under - scare quotes there too - I use so many scare quotes when I talk... “under” Britain, put India into a feminised position, because of that kind of gender hierarchy, at work, and so - you know - colonialism and imperialism was an imposition of many sort of forms of violence that included a deliberate erasure of the actual range of genders that existed, and continued to exist in a lot of the cultures that were being colonised. The context that I know best, is indigenous nations, in what we now call Canada, who now use the language of two-spirit, to talk about nonbinary genders. That’s a fairly contemporary word, but it is rooted in like a very long history and - you know, it’s an English term for gender identities that obviously have their own languages in different nations, in different first nations, have different actual sort of terminology for different genders, as they would - why would totally different nations, with totally different languages, and totally different histories have the same vocabulary and category of gender, that we do, in English - that wouldn’t make any sense. But there’s no denying, that historically, pre-colonisation, different places had different genders.

### **NEMO**

It was kind of interesting, because like one of the starting points for Trice Forgotten - I mean this much is obvious - is Moby Dick, right? And the kind of like nautical epic. Mostly out of my - I mean amusement with them,

but not particular love of them. I mean - yeah - in that love/hate relationship - I love that he goes on a rant about whales, and none of the facts are true!

**[Laughter]**

### **NEMO**

... and in the same way, goes on rants about people of colour, and none of the facts are true. But the relationship with Queequeg is really interesting, because there's quite a lot of like gendered language, even within these two essentially cis-men. And again, rationalisation comes up with that. But the idea of like, wife, or the idea of the like - I mean they put wife/husband kind of language into it. And away from just like romantic or sexual queerness, it always struck me as interesting in like - gender-wise, gender roles - I mean on a ship, there were already quite a lot of gender play things happening anyway. Even within like white western-sphere. And someone that I was talking to the other day, Natcha Chirapiwa, they're a researcher about stereotypes of East Asian people, especially in comedy, and they were saying that with stereotypes, one thing you learn a lot about, is the people stereotyping the other people. And so, you can look at stereotypes of East Asian people or East Asian men, you know - like "lack of masculinity" in East Asian men, or a hyper-femininity in East Asian women, and what you can see is a western desire for masculinity looks like. And so like, you know there are quite a lot of conversations about nonbinary-ness in other cultures, but like the other conversation we can be having, is how we can reflect that view back on white people. Like - what are you as a white person - why have you created this stereotype, and it's because you are insecure about white male masculinity. You're insecure about white female femininity, you've created these stereotypes of other people, because those are things that you are scared of.

Those are things that you want to eradicate from the world. So when I was reading a lot of these like - you know - white male nautical epics, or just epics - you know Les Misérables is another one, it's so fascinating to see when cis-male characters use the language of femineity for themselves. Jean Valjean is an interesting one. He is, in popular culture, I feel like we would see him as quite a big man, quite like violent in some regards, but just very like masculine. But in the novel, he's described as being a mother. He's described as being like very feminine, effeminate - he's described as being someone who - I mean he's at home with a group of nuns. He takes like the name Madelaine from Mary Madelaine. Like, all of these very feminine tropes and why don't we then say that Jean Valjean is nonbinary. Not just like you know typically like effeminate male people, but he's a very masculine person. He used he/him pronouns, and I would say that's gender play. So, yeah - I really - like, both of these things have like - it's a colonial thing. For sure it's a colonial thing. But - yeah, how can we turn that gaze back onto the white men of history.

**EVERYONE**

Mmm...

**RAFAELLA**

I do always think it's fascinating when... the dominant person in the social hierarchy, who is more often than not the white-cis man or white-cis woman, coming very shortly behind, kind of finds loopholes in gender. In the same way that - to draw a kind of unfortunately sort of topical parallel, I've been reading a lot about very sort of conservative Christian women in the States, who have had abortions, but do not view their abortion as being the same as - the type of abortions they're protesting against. There is that - for me but not for thee - thing about gender where I do think it is something that everyone is trying to

escape from all the time, but Jean Valjean cannot conceive of himself as nonbinary, because we can... no not himself - he's not a real person!

**[Laughter]**

**RAFAELLA**

... we cannot consider...

**NEMO**

He is in my heart - he's my friend!

**[Laughter]**

**NEMO**

I love him, and he lives beside me at all times...

**[Laughter]**

**RAFAELLA**

We... and when I say we, I'm using a very like - western kind of western cannon of literature, readers of the western cannon of literature, we cannot conceive of Jean Valjean as being nonbinary, because nonbinary is a thing that happens to marginalised groups - nonbinary is an existence that happens on a specific set of margins that we - again - a very loose we - don't necessarily wish to associate our protagonists and our hero with.

**NEMO**

Yeah. I like that frame. In Trice Forgotten, I mean there's the obvious thing of like nonbinary and trans people are always the villains in stuff and so, like - you

know - it's unsaid that our protagonists are the trans and nonbinary people. But hopefully it's like "not the obvious" people who are nonbinary or trans... or like gender play - all of them play with their gender - like all of them do. And that's on purpose. All of the characters, even the white-cis people, that we are going to meet, in later episodes - gender play is something that we considered, in casting as well, which I find really interesting. We can talk about that when those episodes come out, I guess.

**RAFAELLA**

I know there's a whole bunch of characters I want to talk about, and we can't talk about them yet...

**HANNAH**

But we do... I mean this is a old school Judith Butler, but we are all playing with our genders, all the time.

**RAFAELLA**

Yes.

**HANNAH**

Like we are all engaged in gender performance, in gender play, in gender perform activity, which is not the same as gender performance, but it's - you know - inter-sex with it. Like, we're all - **(laughing)** as RuPaul said; "You're born naked and the rest is drag"! Like - we're all playing this gender game. And you can play it - you can do a real method acting approach to it. Or you can do a real camp approach to it, but we're all - we're all playing...

### **NEMO**

Yeah. It is interesting - like I hadn't really thought about it before, but I think it is on purpose that Noor is our first main character. Obviously, Elizabeth is actually the first trans-nonbinary a-gender character that we meet. But Noor is more established. And - obviously everyone's free to imagine what Noor dresses like, or looks like, or clothing that they wear - when I was picturing them in my head, I did imagine them wearing a head-scarf, but having facial hair - *and* having facial hair, not but - unpicking...

### **RAFAELLA**

Unpicking...

### **NEMO**

And wearing quite loose, feminine clothes, but feminine in how we see them, as a western people. And that was really on purpose. I think that when you - when people see Noor, I don't think - in the world - in my head, I don't think that you can look at Noor and put them as a binary gender, even though they wear things that maybe would place them in the category of male or female, because of religious things, or because of cultural things or because of "biological things". Yeah - and like the facial hair thing doesn't necessarily mean that Noor - without access to modern healthcare, it does not mean that Noor was assigned male at birth. Quite a lot of these characters are based on people that I know, including quite a lot of brown women that I know. Cis-gender women, who have quite a lot of facial hair. Again, because of racial/gender stereotypes, that we have that we're like - oh facial hair... that must mean that that person was either assigned this gender at birth, or that they are taking hormones, but intersex people exist and just the amount of

facial hair you can grow as a person changes. So, yeah, like all of these things which - I mean it's an audio-medium, so these are things that are never like really going to affect you as a listener, but are things that I did think about, when I was creating Noor.

**HANNAH**

Well it's important for people to know - for the fan art...

**[Laughter]**

**NEMO**

Of course, of course.

**RAFAELLA**

And we do know... because I think in one of the episodes, when we meet Noor for the first time, which is episode 2, is an episode that I wrote, so treading the line between - you know, again I don't want to take away too much imaginative power from the listener, but what are the things that're really important for us to know about Noor, and I settled on two things, one is they are hench as hell...

**NEMO**

Yes - yes...

**RAFAELLA**

They are tall and strong, stronger than anyone else on the ship - they are canonically the strongest person on the ship....

**NEMO**

Yep. They are big...

**HANNAH**

A real Jean Valjean type!

**[Laughter]**

**NEMO**

Oh no... oh whoops...!

**RAFAELLA**

This is what you've done Nemo, this is what you've created! And the other thing is that they have - they are wearing this beautiful, intricate jewellery. And both of those things, you may read as being suggestive of a particular gender, but when you actually dig down into them, neither of them have an inherent connection to masculine or feminine - being hench, and wearing beautiful jewellery are not the exclusive preserve of one gender or another, especially when you detach from a western context.

**HANNAH**

Yeah. I mean the other sort of piece of this, that we haven't put into play yet, is class. Because you know - gender and class are also deeply interwoven and I've been - I recently read an article about the history of the colour pink, because I'm very cool...

**NEMO**

Hell yeah...

### **HANNAH**

And that's an example, right? that like pink - as a colour that people wear, sort of comes into existence in the 18<sup>th</sup> century - sort of primarily via colonialism, because they - you know - European nations start to extract new things from colonies, that allow them to create new clothing dye colours. And pink is a sign of wealth, that has absolutely no gendered affiliation. You wear pink to show off that you can afford clothes that have been dyed pink. So like - you know jewellery has a similar role. You know jewellery often indicates wealth or social status or belonging to a particular family or cast and has very little to do with gender, as we think about adornment being legible.

### **NEMO**

For sure. The class thing is very important. With Noor as well, like Noor comes from a fishing background and they are not someone who comes from a family who can afford a lot of jewellery. They're not from a family that can afford a lot of ostentatious clothing. And the fact that they do have these things, is important, and is part of their gender presentation for a reason. And yeah - the people who can afford to have gender, like - in the show - that is really - that's a good way to frame it, I guess.

### **RAFAELLA**

Oh - I want to talk about a character who hasn't appeared yet - so badly... we'll revisit. We'll just have to keep doing the same episode week by week, until we've met all the characters....

**[Laughter]**

**NEMO**

That's true. It's just like a deconstruction of - well this week's gender is...

**[Laughter]**

**HANNAH**

I keep thinking about - there's this excellent - there's a few scholars who's like really, really have shaped my understanding of this historical period, and how it relates to rag class and gender. Simone Brown is a huge one. She has a wonderful book called Dark Matters, which is about the history of the surveillance of black people. Which is a real - if you're trying to stop relying on Foucault to understand how power works in modernity, strongly recommend Simone Brown as a - somebody who's like - hey, you know Foucault was talking about the panopticon and Jeremy Bentham. Well Jeremy Bentham based the panopticon on slave ships. So, let's talk about who actually might understand modernity and surveillance technologies. But Kyla Schuller also has this wonderful book called the Biopolitics of Feeling. That is about the role that...

**NEMO**

Yeah...

**HANNAH**

Have you read it? It's so good.

**NEMO**

Yeah, I read it for this actually.

## HANNAH

Really? Ah well... that makes - that explains why I felt it in the DNA of this series, because it's about sentimentality and this concept that she refers to as impress-ability, which is our individual and collective capacity to be impacted by forces external to us. Sometimes also referred to as our malleability. And she talks about how sort of whiteness was constructed via this heightened impressability that white people are understood as being much more malleable according to sort of 19<sup>th</sup> century race science than people of colour, with the exception of childhood. So there is this idea that during childhood people of colour had a heightened impressability which was how white people justified the stealing of children, during childhood. Such as the history of residential schools, and that sort of within this like whiteness equals impressability and malleability which then equals whiteness equals civilisability, because civilisation is about the ability to sort of transform, we then have this problem of like impressability is good, but also what if too much. What if impress-ability but too much and then the answer to that is... women. We'll make white women responsible for the feelings, and then white men can just do the civilising. And then we have all of these technologies that emerge out of that - like sentimentality, like diet culture also comes right of out this, because it becomes this like - oh white women feel too much, white women have too much embodiment, and so must be constantly managed. But it's one of the really striking things I think about the characters in *Trice Forgotten*, is that there is this way that - because we see them between their childhoods and who they are now, and we see them change through the series, that there is this like real insistence, but like look at this, not only are we seeing the way in which people who are not white, are constantly transforming one another, transforming in relation to the things that happen to them, but are also

transforming outside of the context of whiteness. Like, are not transforming because a white person is changing them. But transforming in relation to one another.

**NEMO**

Thank you ha-ha-ha. I was like - wow that's such a good way of describing this show. Like, one thing that I have been working on, as a human being, is the fact that I have grown up in England, surrounded by whiteness, and my ability to succeed has always been how intelligent I can make other people think that I am. And so a lot of times that has meant supressing being a feeling human being. Someone who is hurt by things, someone who is saddened by things, joyful about things in order to appear like the white man civilised.

**RAF**

Mmm.

**NEMO**

And so creating this podcast, like something that has been really freeing, is the idea that like these characters are intelligent, but also they have feelings, and those are complex feelings. And those complex feelings means that sometimes that they - we talked about them being messy last week, that they are allowed to have both of these things. They can be incredibly clever people, but they have emotions, they feel joy. Like one thing that we rarely ever get to see is like characters having joy! And being sad by the world - or being allowed to be angry. Like one thing that I've never been allowed to be is angry. Because if you're angry, then you're not taken seriously. And you should calm down and have a rational explanation and that is something that I have to

work on in my real life. My day-to-day interactions with people, it is like - I'm allowed to be angry, at the same time as being clever. Like - yeah - I'm glad that you brought up this because they are so engrained, within me, as a writer, but also within the show.

### **RAFAELLA**

Something that sort of, I guess to piggy-back on that slightly - I said at the top my pronouns are she/they. Which I changed within the last year, and obviously like anyone who has changed their pronouns, had obviously actually been thinking about this for years prior, and going my relationship with womanhood feels so unstable, and part of that is because I'm a fat person, and part of that is because - and fatness and queerness are so intrinsically just related to each other. And part of that is I already identified as queer in other ways. And it kept coming down to this very circular question of going - do I not feel like a woman because I'm not a woman, or do I not want to be a woman because I don't feel like I can adequately perform womanhood and because I don't like what the sort of white western definition of womanhood is, and I kept sort of chasing my own tail on that, for a really long time, until my partner, who is a cis-man, went - I mean does it matter? Are they not kind of ultimately the same thing. You know, if we put you in a vacuum - if we put you in a vacuum, it's quite possible that you would feel differently, but you don't live in a vacuum. And that - kind of feels so - very, very apt to these characters, I'm linking back to that idea of they are not developing in relationship to how a white character, or how... in lots of cases, as to how a cis-character kind of thinks that they should be developing. And I think that is something really beautiful in what you have created, Nemo, is essentially - this simultaneous sense that these are queer characters, living queer lives, that are also sensible

of the ways in which other people are going to stereotype them, categorise them, taxonomize them.

**HANNAH**

As you were saying, that, which I couldn't agree more, I have conversations about the instability of gender for fat/queer people a lot, because I do - like I identify primarily as a fat femme, because fem-ness feels much more comfortable to me than woman-ness which I also am like - well what does that mean? And also, the way that these turfs are talking about being a woman, I'm like - well I don't - that - I definitely don't feel.

**RAFAELLA**

Yeah, I don't want to be a member of that club.

**(laughter)**

**HANNAH**

If that is the way that being a woman feels - then I don't know. But what you really - what your differentiation there between - you know am I like "really" non-binary or "really" a woman or "really" - makes me think about the history of the medicalisation of gender and sexuality, which is the sort of - again - like 19<sup>th</sup> century shift, to being like - let's identify homosexuality, as like something that can actually be like medically or scientifically located within the body somewhere. And that has been like kind of a tactic that queer folks have used in order to gain rights. There is argument, right of like you're just born gay. You're just born this way and there's nothing you could do about it. So - and that - and like we can see how that's been tactically used, like - well you can't

make gay people not gay. So, I guess you just have to put up with us. And I think, you know, again medicalisation has a particular history, has had a particular use, historically, but still always defaults to this like - cis-hetero default. Like we're assuming that the human is naturally cis-gender and heterosexual and so we have to sort of medically identify difference. And if we just refuse that premise, then the whole idea of like - oh well am I really? Like am I really, or do I just kind of feel that way, because of the circumstances of my life. Like, what does really mean, in that context? And it does have, under tis surface, this kind of medicalisation, right? Like if somebody could do a test on me, if I could have blood work done, what would it say my gender was. And it's like - well that's not - that's nothing. Like there is no real gender.

### **NEMO**

I've had quite a few friends, during lockdown, use other pronouns, and quite a lot of these conversations start with like - oh I don't want to be taking up space. And it's like - there's no space to take up...

**[Laughter]**

### **NEMO**

Anyone can be nonbinary. If someone - like was born male, likes wearing male clothing, likes having short hair and presenting as masc. but wants to consider themselves nonbinary then there is - you can fully do that. Like - yeah - this idea that nonbinary has to be like - oh well they're a bit ambiguous and they're like femme but light or like anything like that it's just so...

**RAFAELLA**

Diet femme...

**(laughter)**

**NEMO**

Yes, exactly. It's so wild and every time I'm like - if you want to be nonbinary, you can. And if you decide that you don't like it, then you can do that also. Continue questioning forever, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. Yeah.

**RAFAELLA**

So, we will have to wrap up soon, which is gutting, because I'm so enjoying this conversation, to use that and to bring it back to telling stories about nonbinary people and telling stories about gender more broadly is it - I don't know if I agree with the thing that I'm saying, but is it therefore more freeing, in a way, to set this in the past, where these characters, who are nonbinary, they don't have an online community, they don't have discourse, they don't have a kind of a set of language to go back to our previous episode, being offered to them, they are simply finding their way to the gender expression and the gender identity. I say simply - not simply at all - but they are finding their way, in a world in which many different contexts apply to the contexts that we experience, gender in. Is it - yeah, when we tell those stories, and I wonder also, Hannah, with your critical readings of the Harry Potter series, for example, as one might come into this - yeah - when we create fictional words, and when we tell fictional stories - Nemo - is it more - is it more freeing to set it in the past - you know, is there more to say, setting it in the past?, Hannah - I would be so interested to hear about some of your readings of gender, in that

**(laughing)** well, well of course we don't have another three hours, but yeah... tell me about both of you - tell me about fictionally - telling these stories in fiction. There we go!

**HANNAH**

Yeah, I mean, what I will say is that there is always an imaginative freedom in fiction, that's the joy of fiction, is that we can use it as a space to work things through and think about contexts in different ways. And - that for that reason, the fiction that is the most exciting to me, and I think to a lot of queer folks, is the fiction that uses its imaginative possibilities to imagine otherwise.

Whether that's looking at the past in a different way than we have been fed narratives of the past, or using fantasy or speculative fiction, as an opportunity to interrogate our assumptions about how gender and race and power and identity operate. That's why I find things like Game of Thrones so profoundly boring.

**[Laughter]**

**HANNAH**

Because why would you just project such a stable notion of like gendered violence into the past, like you've got dragons, and you couldn't think about gender in a different way? OK - alright, alright – a failure of imagination. And that sense Harry Potter is also a failure of imagination on many, many levels - what's exciting for me about the world that's emerged around Harry Potter, is what the fans have done, who have taken up a series that is - I would say remarkable for its lack of context - because the world building in that series is so poorly done, but that has become a sort of way in for fans, is that you can be like - well none of these questions are answered, so I can just go ahead and

answer them myself. But that's one of the things that strikes me about Trice Forgotten, is that it's not people - you know - finding their way through gender, without context, it's without our context - but it's like, they're good characters because they come out of contexts, that they are navigating and that are unforming things, like - their understanding of their gender.

### **NEMO**

I think that I had an easy time of it, in a certain way, because obviously there was all this research that went into the show, but at a certain point, like - these characters don't have Wikipedia and they don't have Twitter, and they don't have Tumblr and, like you say Raf, they're not like emersed in identity politics and discourse, and they don't have to like one-up each other on like knowledge about each other. In order to know more about the world, they have to ask each other questions, or take what the other person says at face value. And so, when Siva and Noor are talking Siva just has to accept that what Noor is saying, is the truth, and what the truth for Noor is, like you know - "the truth" - we've talked about like authenticity and stuff like that, but like what Noor is saying is - I am this, these are all the people that I come from. And Siva has no way to fact check that, or to be like - well actually I've read that nonbinary people don't exist in the protectorate of Aiden...

**[Laughter]**

### **NEMO**

Like, and we're going to meet some characters in the future, who just come out and be like - oh this is my gender, and like we're moving past that, because - yeah, there's no asexuality wiki or agenda wiki like you can go and read. And for some - you know, I am very, very glad that we have these resources now.

like the Internet, like - I wouldn't know that I was nonbinary, without the pages and pages of research that other people have done it before me. But for a story setting, like it's so much easier than when a character can just be like - this is my identity, and the other characters are like - can't debate you on that!

**[Laughter]**

**RAFAELLA**

Yeah. It's the characters who get to be authority on themselves, which feels great. Fantastic, we're going to bring things to a close there. But before we go, Hannah, where can we find more of you?

**HANNAH**

Oh, well - you can find me on Twitter and Instagram at hkpmcgregor. I'm very formal, very serious - and HannahMcGregor.com. And I also have a book coming out in September - September 2022 I have a book coming out called - A Sentimental Education, which is about queerness and fatness and whiteness and colonialism and sentimentality and podcasting. So I feel like... related to some of our conversations today.

**RAFAELLA**

Tangentially a little - a little may be. And Nemo, where can we get more of you?

**NEMO**

I am on Twitter at zeus-japonicus, or you can just type my name, Nemo Martin into Twitter. I also have a podcast about Les Misérables - if you want more thoughts about Jean Valjean being nonbinary, yeah, you should go listen to that. It's called Bread and Barricades - a Les Mis podcast or it's on Twitter at Les Mis podcast – L-E-S-M-I-S-Podcast, so yeah. Raf, where can people find you? What do you have to plug?

**RAFAELLA**

Thank you so much for asking, Nemo. I am on Twitter @rafaellamarcus - which is rafaellamarcus. It's very silly and unprofessional Twitter - don't hold it against me - and I do not have a book or a podcast to plug, but I have written my first play...

**NEMO**

Yeah...

**RAFAELLA**

... which is called Sap.

**NEMO**

It's the most beautiful poster I have ever seen for a play. So even if you just go to look at the poster, you should go and do that.

**RAFAELLA**

Yeah, just go and look at my header on my Twitter page, because it is an extraordinarily beautiful poster.

**NEMO**

I'm sure the play is great as well!

**RAFAELLA**

The play's fine! And that play is also about queerness and it's sort of a thriller and it's based on Greek mythology. So if you - this I think will be the past, but it will have been on - had it's debut on at the Edinburgh Fringe, at Summerhall and maybe - maybe we'll be around about again in the future - possibly. Thank you so much - both of you again. And thank you listener. We will see you next time, below deck. Goodbye

**ALL**

Bye!

**[Show Theme - Outro]**

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And was edited by James Austin, Lowri Ann Davies, and Catherine Rinella

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Trice Forgotten is produced by Ian Geers, Lowri Ann Davies and production manager Natasha Johnston with executive producers Alexander J Newall and April Sumner

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