

PERIODICALLY DRAMATIC

THE HISTORICAL MAGAZINE

A LOVE OF HISTORY THROUGH THE ART OF FICTION



**LEARN WAYS TO
CELEBRATE
HISPANIC
HERITAGE
MONTH!
PG 4**

**CAN YOU GUESS THE
FASHION DECADE?**

PG 13!

Dear Charles,
Tell me what does it
feel like?
Charles
Charles
Charles

PERIODICALLY DRAMATIC

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Reader,

With every publication, there are significant changes. I dedicate my time and effort to make this little magazine feel as much yours as it does mine. This is the most amount of writers I've had for an issue and I cannot tell you how much it warms my heart. It continues to become everything I dreamed of and more and that's because of every eager reader and writer that has passed through here. Our community will only continue to grow. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for stopping by. This magazine is for both you and me. I hope you enjoy it.

Stay safe,



Marina Hill, Editor-in-Chief

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Picture: Shannyn / @personally.speaking

Contributing Writers

LIBBY BEATHAM

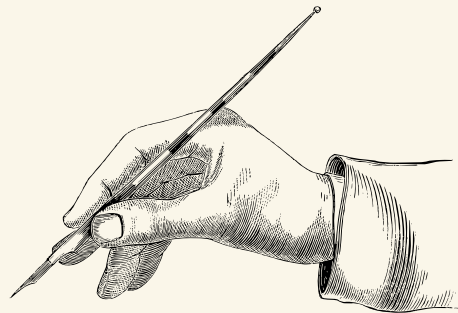
ANNA FAVRE

KATLYN LANDES

ARI M.

ANA MEDINA

TRISS SILVERSMITH



EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: MARINA HILL

OUR FAVORITE VILLAINS!



A favorite of @timeperiodfilm's

PERIODICALLY DRAMATIC

PAGE 3 / ISSUE 6

CONTENTS



04 Hispanic Heritage Month

05 Highlighting Panamá

06 David's Field of Adventure
Movie Review

08 The Book Nook

09 Billie Holiday: More Than A
Singer
Movie Review

11 Dressing Belle
Movie Study

A favorite of @personally-speaking's

A favorite of @aerin214's



A favorite of
@sophie2709's



A favorite of @caseybor
and @catherinekratoska's



A favorite of
@bunnymoon77's

13 Guess the Fashion Decade

14 The Musketeers: A Love Letter
to Dumas and His Masterpiece
Show Review

16 Monsters, Romance, and Good
Society
Book Review

18 Upcoming Period Dramas

19 The Story of a Return
Short Story



HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

BY MARINA HILL

Hispanic Heritage Month lasts from September 15th to October 15th every year in the United States. It started out as a single week in 1968 under President Johnson, but President Reagan expanded it to a month in the 1980s.

The beginning of the celebration is on September 15th because it marks the day of many Latin American countries gaining their independence.

The U.S. Hispanic population is more than 60 million and the largest ethnic groups are Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. There is a multitude of ways one can celebrate this month, for there are endless ways Hispanics have benefited this country.

One way to celebrate this month is to donate to organizations that support Hispanics--like ones that help families reunite at the Mexican-American border. Also, readers can seek out books by Hispanic authors in any genre they prefer.

A wonderful way to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month is to learn about the beautiful cultures of some Spanish-speaking Latin countries. Many countries are ignored or overlooked in exchange for

some Latin countries that dominate lessons in the classroom.

You can learn about the Guaraní, the indigenous peoples in regions of Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, and Uruguay. You can also learn about the Guna Tribe, one of the indigenous groups in Panama.

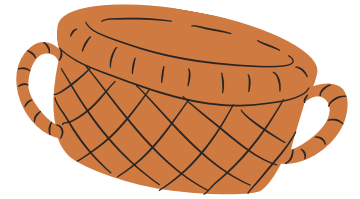
Latin America has a limitless amount of culture. Latinx culture did not emerge until Spanish colonization. Before Spain invaded, the Americas filled itself with self-sufficient indigenous populations and an endless supply of languages, natural wonders, and cultural practices.

As the Spanish invaded and brought disease, many of the population died out. The majority of the Transatlantic Slave Trade entered Latin America. Due to these historical events, a new ethnic group emerged.

The definition of being Latinx is more assigned with culture than ancestry. Because of this, Latinx culture is deep, rich, and complex with roots in European, African, and indigenous populations.

Hispanic Heritage Month is a way to honor the resilience and strength of all of these cultures. ■

PANAMÁ



I would like to highlight my roots in Panamá for Hispanic Heritage Month. Like so many Hispanic Americans, my American family's story begins with my abuela falling in love with an American soldier and coming to the United States.

However, the turbulent culture of the American 1960s inspired my abuela to ignore her Panamanian roots and try to be as "American" as possible. This resulted in a huge loss of culture in my family.



After years, as my family and I begin to explore more of our culture and family history, we discover many tios and primos willing to welcome us with open arms.

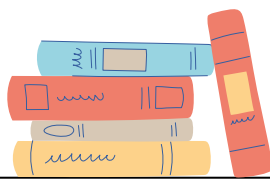
It's a struggle to feel a true connection to your roots when you see others who've had connections their entire lives. You see those who speak another language at home, who participate in cultural festivities, who travel between America and their native country throughout childhood. It leaves a hole in your heart and makes you believe you are not "enough" of an identity.

I'm here to tell you that you're enough--and you're not alone.



THE POLLERA IS A TRADITIONAL FOLKLORE DRESS. IT CAN EITHER BE WHITE OR EXTREMELY COLORFUL. IT HAS TEMBLEQUES DECORATING THE HEAD, USUALLY MADE OF BEADS. THE OUTFIT ALSO HAS A SUPERFLUOUS AMOUNT OF GOLD NECKLACES.





DAVID'S FIELD OF ADVENTURE

BY LIBBY BEATHAM

The Personal History of David Copperfield, set in the 1840s, follows the trials and tribulations of its iconic protagonist, David Copperfield. The adaptation of Charles Dickens' semi-autobiography sheds light on all that is good and bad in the world. David's journey to find his own place in society is both hilarious and tragic, but



beautiful all the while. The colorful imagination of his childish tendencies is inspiring to say the least, so much so that his unfortunate decline into destitution and despair leaves a saddening mark on any viewer's soul. Even so, its animated and wonderfully witty characters bring exciting humor to an otherwise subdued and often disheartening rollercoaster of a story. A dominant factor in bringing Dickens' imagination to life so successfully is the



film's stellar cast and exciting characters. British TV legends like Daisy May Cooper and Peter Capaldi mixed with the likes of the wondrous Ben Whishaw and Tilda Swinton created a recipe for a deliciously fun and captivating film. Mr. David Copperfield himself, played by the brilliant Dev Patel, is a curious soul with blinding optimism that could turn even the direst of situations desirable. Patel's terrific performance was by far the film's most impressive triumph; he was a marvel at embodying the spirit and characteristics of David's encounters, just as Dickens described him. Pegotty, played by the brilliant Daisy May Cooper, is one of the first people we meet as an audience, and although no more important (*cont.*)



than any of the other fifteen or so side characters, she creates just as much of an impact as David Copperfield himself. Cooper's ability to prevent her character from getting lost in the wonder of the film makes Peggotty one of the most loveable and impactful individuals. She's presented with such warmth that you'd want her to always take care of you, even if she frequently seems to have no idea what she's doing. Another standout character for me is Betsey Tropicwood, David's strong-willed aunt. Played brilliantly by Tilda Swinton, she's about as affectionate as the 'pot black kettle' Peggotty first describes her as, but her wonderfully bizarre nature and ambitious wiles make her a fine woman of whom I give my greatest regard.

However, one of my few criticisms would be the random cutscenes of David writing the chapter titles of his life as we live it; they feel misplaced and unneeded, and although perhaps included as a break from the flow of time, their random nature makes for a jointed and almost disconcerting element. Perhaps if Armando Lannucci--the director--had included more,

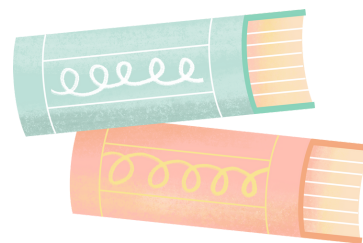
or used them more consistently, they wouldn't have seemed so misplaced, but their inclusion in the film seems unnecessary and adds nothing to the story.

On a lighter note, the film concludes with a blissfully jovial ending. Without giving too much away, it felt as if I was watching a modern romantic comedy, where all the characters unite at the end, or as if it was a superhero movie where each person uses their strengths and love for another to defeat the common enemy. Films like these often have predictably happy endings, and while this was no exception, the way it came about was successfully surprising.

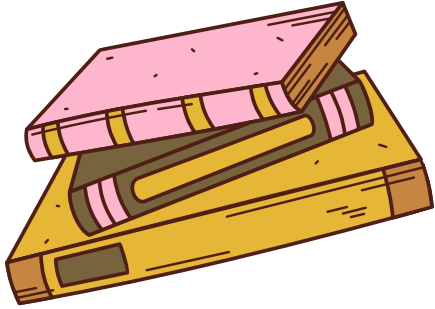
My review simply cannot be complete without a special mention of Mr. Dick's kite flying scene. It truly was my favorite moment, full of the most heart-warming and humbling sentiments that I could watch over and over and never tire of. Watching the pure joy Mr. Dick received from the simplest of actions, I felt as liberated and jovial as he and David did themselves upon watching it.

After much consideration, I have given this film 4 out of 5 stars for its fabulous cast, wonderful storytelling, exciting characters, and emotional plot.

I wholeheartedly recommend it to period drama lovers and casual film watchers alike. ■

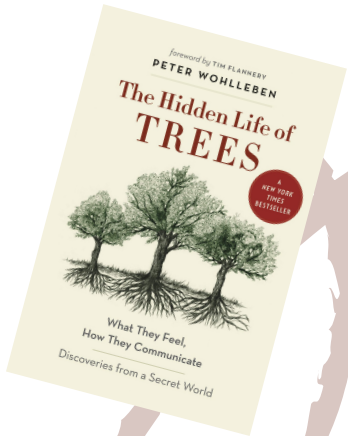


The Book Nook

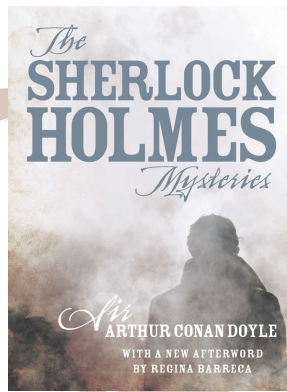


WHAT
HAVE WE
BEEN
READING?

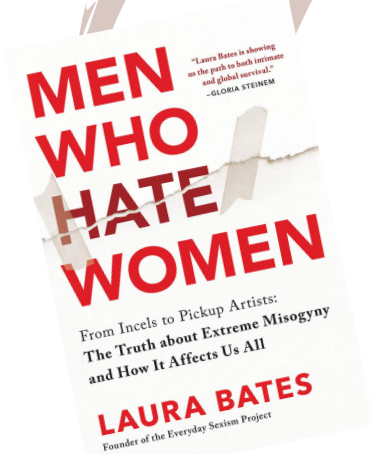
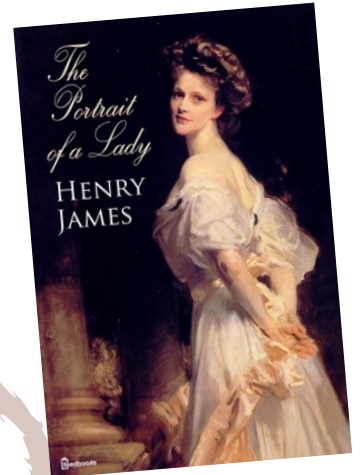
@periodicallydramatic is reading *The Hidden Life of Trees!*



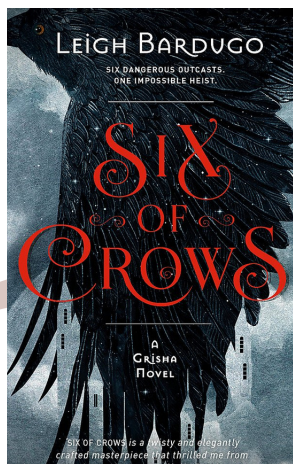
@personally.speaking is reading *The Portrait of a Lady!*



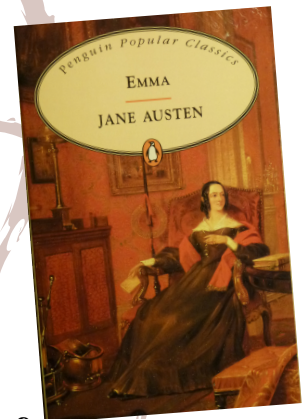
@sophieg2709 is reading *The Sherlock Holmes Mysteries!*



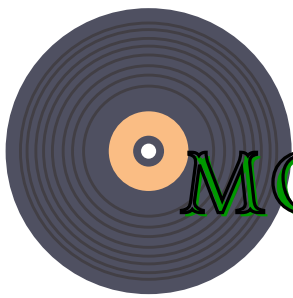
@rachelnatmcg is reading *Men Who Hate Women!*



@maggie.mead is reading *Six of Crows* (again!)



@refinnej2104 is reading *Emma!*



BILLIE HOLIDAY: MORE THAN A SINGER

BY ANA MEDINA



The United States vs Billie Holiday—directed by Lee Daniels and starring Andra Day—shows us maybe one of the worst things that the US has done to a singer—try to silence a woman who sings about atrocities committed by the government.

This movie is one of the best biographical films I've ever seen. It's not just about Billie's battle with the US Government, it is about the battle with her past, her drug addiction, and herself. Andra Day's performance was absolutely marvelous. As an already accomplished singer herself, she sings all the songs unlike Rami Malek in *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Andra really falls into the role and makes you forget she's acting. She embodies Billie well enough we can't tell them apart. She really deserved her Oscar nomination.

My favorite character was definitely Billie. We don't watch just a singer with drug addiction, we watch a woman fighting for equal rights, confronting her past, trying to be a better version of herself every day, and most importantly, we watch a human being. My favorite scene was at the beginning where the interviewer asks Billie how it is to be a black singer. Billie answers that she wouldn't ask that kind of question to Doris Day. That response aged like wine! It was incredible because it gives you the premise of what Billie will be like during the film.

Talking about a more technical aspect, the visual proposal was so unique. The mix

between black and white, 35 mm film and Super 16 film was excellent and captured brilliantly the old Hollywood essence. Lee Daniel's direction was great; he knows how to direct actors and how to create an atmosphere in which we feel part of the movie.

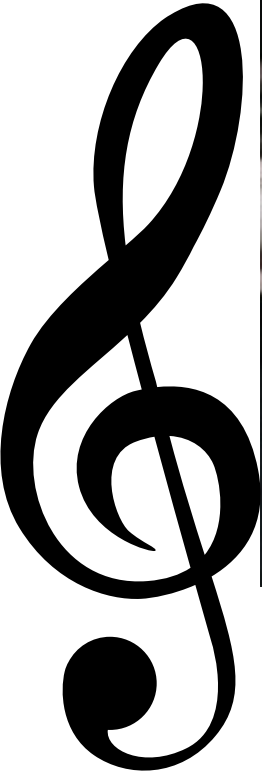
And now, what's wrong with the film? The script. In the first 20 minutes—which were my favorite part—there are two timelines. Billie gives an interview and we see her story through flashbacks. At an unclear point, the interview ends and the movie continues. I'd have loved that the two timelines lasted longer; it would be so interesting to watch for two reasons. First, the narrative of the two timelines is similar to *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (a marvelous film I recommend). Second, this narrative allows filmmakers to use one of the most important rules of cinema: *show don't tell*.

In general, like any other movie, it has good aspects, like Andra's performance, the direction, and the visual proposal. Then we encounter not-so-good ones like the script. But it's not a big issue because the most important aspect in cinema is the camera, not the script. *The United States vs Billie Holiday* is a great film—not the best of 2021 but a remarkable one. I learned a lot about Billie's life and had no idea how hard she was having it for more than a decade. I admire and respect her more than ever. I give it 4 stars out of 5. ■

ANDRA DAY AS BILLIE HOLIDAY IN 'THE UNITED STATES VS. BILLIE HOLIDAY'



(APRIL 7, 1915 – JULY 17, 1959)



DRESSING BELLE

BY KATLYN LANDES

Belle left an aftertaste similar to that of a political film, where the fashion is dutiful and efficient, as opposed to the opulence and luxury I long for in a period piece. The film was inspired by the family portrait depicting two cousins, Dido and Elizabeth Lindsay, still hanging at Scone Palace in Scotland with the most recent Mansfield descendant. Dido was the child of Maria Belle, an African slave in the West Indies, and Sir John Lindsay, a British naval officer. Her father brought Dido home to be raised by his uncle and Dido's great uncle, the Earl of Mansfield, as was her blood right. The film examines Dido's somewhat unusual position at the center of the late eighteenth-century abolitionist movement in England.

I fully expected *Belle* would celebrate the excess of eighteenth-century Western European fashion. However, I found the costume design to be quite restrained and, on occasion, dull. And while the story felt quietly revolutionary, the wardrobe felt tired and utterly expected. Instead of ornamentation, there was texture; and where I expected oversized hooped petticoats, there were flared skirts. Art and design in the eighteenth century were often quite playful and experimental as much of Europe was now able to create outside of the context of the church. The simpler, more refined fashions in *Belle* were perhaps chosen to preface the move towards simpler patterns and the switch from silk to cotton that would take place later in the century.

Dido's initial naïveté is reflected in the fashion chosen for the first half of the film, before her rise to action. The patterns and even colors were springy, floral, and youthful—one could argue a visual interpretation of ignorance within the construct of fashion. Gardens were often symbols of youth throughout the history of art. Thus, it is no mistake that Dido twice donned a dress decorated with green vines and pink blooms, neatly, and all too expectedly wrapped up with a rose pink bow at the bust. However, by the time Dido has learned of the Zong trial, and her father's potential to change the future for people of color, her (*cont.*)



wardrobe becomes more elegant and less playful. She opts for more dramatic jewel tones and serious silks. This visual progression felt rather boring or predictable to me, which is a disservice to Dido.

I did appreciate the visual pairing of Dido and Elizabeth, who were so often depicted in coordinating colors or patterns when sharing a scene together. It further affirmed their attachment and friendship, while also mirroring the 1779 David Martin portrait.

Portraying them as two sides of the same coin also illustrated their attempt at equality, which was nearly unprecedented at that point in art history. Every scene featuring both Dido and Elizabeth was color-coordinated, from the set design to their dresses. Each scene together was a living, breathing classical painting.

In a film full of activists, dreamers, and revolutionaries, there was not much risk taken with the costume design. While I was disappointed in the decision to create a more restrained wardrobe, I recognize that this could have been a choice to set the tone for the political conversations. There is room for discussion here as my interpretation is, of course, subjective.

Did the director wish for simpler silhouettes in order to cast the right shadows? The interpreted macro versus micro themes of this film seemed to get tangled occasionally, but the lazy metaphors used in the costume design kept me consistently underwhelmed on the fashion front. ■



“Every scene featuring both Dido and Elizabeth was color-coordinated, from the set design to their dresses. Each scene together was a living, breathing classical painting.”



CAN YOU GUESS?

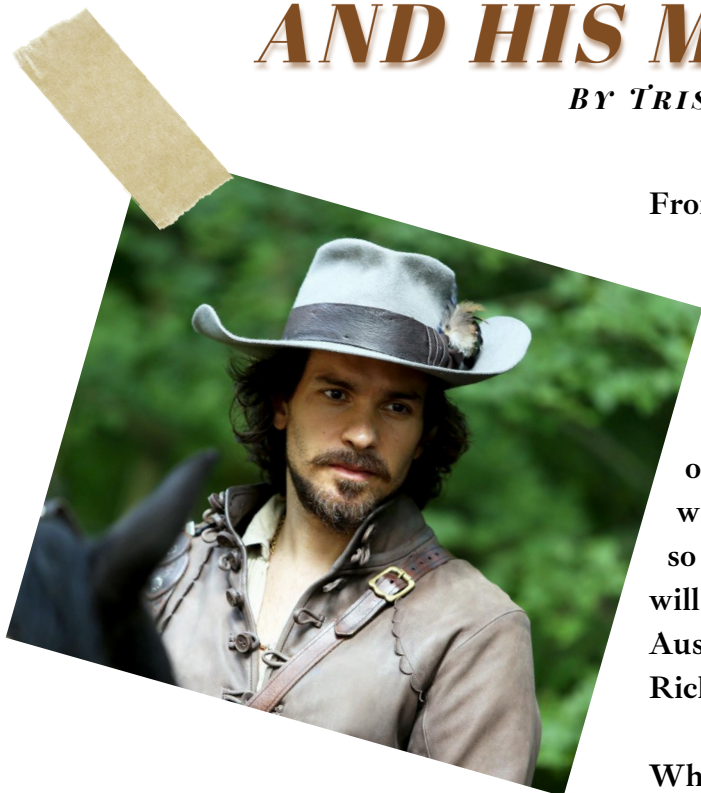


Can you guess the exact decade
of this fashion plate?

The answer is on page 18!

THE MUSKETEERS: A LOVE LETTER TO DUMAS AND HIS MASTERPIECE

BY TRISS SILVERSMITH

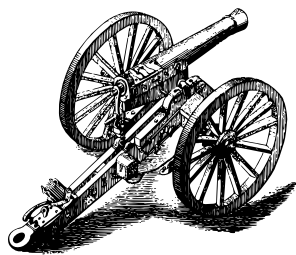


From 2014 to 2016, the BBC produced a period drama series inspired by Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*, a novel set in the France of King Louis XIII (father of the famous "le Roi Soleil"), which tells the story of D'Artagnan, a young Gascon man who leaves for Paris with the intention of becoming one of the king's musketeers. Together with the melancholic Athos, the religious—but not so much—Aramis, and the heartbreaker Porthos, they will try to protect the reputation of Queen Anne of Austria from the various intrigues plotted by Cardinal Richelieu to tarnish her name.

While the characters created by Dumas (as well as their real-life inspirations) do not have distinctive

physical features, it is important to remember that the author himself was biracial. His mother was a white woman while his father was the first black French general in history who served under Napoleon. And this simple fact in turn influenced the BBC's show production, for it wasn't very common to see black and Latinx actors and actresses in period dramas' leading roles until the mid-2010s.

The incredible scripts, the wonderful costumes, and the soundtrack that makes you shiver are not the only highlights of this TV adaptation; it is a real delight to see the entire cast act as each of them embodies their character to perfection like they were born for that role. And although most of the actors and actresses are English and white, we have some exceptions among the main cast. We have Porthos, played by Howard Charles, an English black actor. We also have his inseparable companion Aramis, played by Santiago Cabrera. (*cont.*)



Cabrera, a Chilean actor who was born in Venezuela and grew up in many places like England, Romania, and Spain, had previously participated in other period dramas such as *Che*, *Empire*, or *Merlin*, which is also from the BBC.

In the book, the undisputed protagonist is D'Artagnan (closely followed by Athos). In the series, the four Musketeers share the leading role more evenly. Bit by bit, Santiago Cabrera's Aramis gains presence in the plots, becoming completely essential from the end of the first season.

The charisma that Santiago gives off when playing the musketeer makes him worthy of it, and the producers have known how to take advantage of it, giving him a distinctive feature that Dumas' Aramis did not possess but that, in effect, only plays in

favor of the character: I'm talking about those moments, although scarce, in which he speaks in Spanish throughout the series, making it clear that he can adapt to the needs of the musketeers' company at the right time, and integrating it perfectly into the historical context of the series, marked in real life by the continuous confrontations between the French and Spanish crowns.



Honorable mention also deserves Thalissa Teixeira—an English actress who lived in Espírito Santo, Brazil, until she was seven years old—in the role of Sylvie, a girl from the poorest neighborhood of Paris whose path will cross that of the musketeers on numerous occasions during the entire third season, who gains more prominence as the plot progresses.



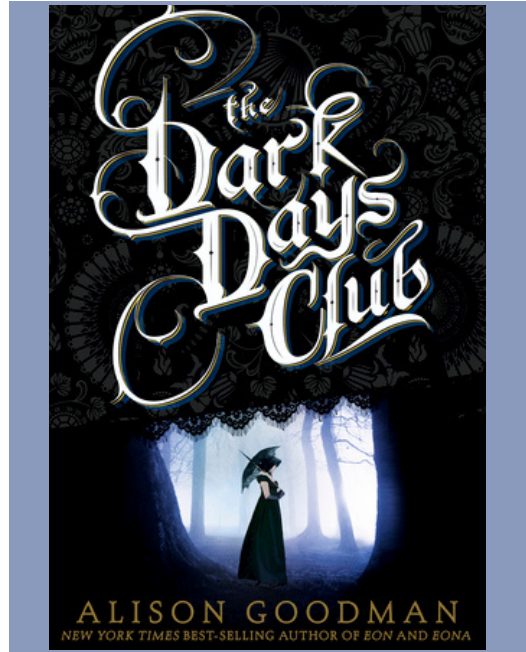
In short, in this great production they bet on from the very first moment on diversity, and they showed it to us in a totally integrated way in what was the French society of the seventeenth century.

And if BBC learned that lesson, taking part in the change we need to see in the world, the whole period drama community can also learn. Because you know how it goes: *one for all and all for one.* ■

MONSTERS, ROMANCE, AND GOOD SOCIETY

BY ANNA FAVRE

The Dark Days Club is the story of a young debutante in Regency London who discovers that she has special abilities and must use them to fight hiding demons. Standing between her two worlds is Lord Carlston, a man of dubious reputation and infuriating manners who believes that Lady Helen can protect humanity. But she also has to follow the rules of the normal world, which means she must marry... What will Helen choose?



When I first started to read this book, I couldn't stop, and this magic came back every time I re-read it. The story is very well planned; we just flow from page to page. There is no brutal change, and I found the ability of the author to pass from the "normal" world to the more mysterious and dark fantasy world quite astonishing. It was brilliantly done.

To be honest, I have to say that I prefer the historical side of the book, partly because we instantly feel the research of the author and her joy to make us "live" in this passionate era, and partly because I'm not quite as much into dark fantasy as I am in historical books. Plus, I find the "dark fantasy side" of the book less well-written and too confusing. I do also think this part pales in comparison with the historical side of the book, which was, for me, better explained and developed. It is certainly easier when an author has done a lot of research on an era (she did two years of research!) to just write about it than to build an entire fantasy world inside of it. I have no doubt about this being very difficult. Therefore, I would have been glad to have this part better explained, with fewer writing facilities and fewer subplots that are resolved too fast and too easily.

However, some passages are brilliant, and the introduction of this mysterious part of the world is very well done. There is not really a cliffhanger at the end, unlike book 2, but, when I close it, I always want to read the rest. The characters are also very well developed, from Lady Helen, a wonderful character with qualities and defaults, to Lord Carlston, a tenebrous man haunted by... something. We also see the way of the Duke of Selburn, charming, intelligent, and well-educated (but a little too protective sometimes), to Helen's family, her brother, aunt and uncle (her parents died ten years ago in mysterious conditions), and her acquaintances of the high society. I'm quite in love with the romance and (*cont.*)

friendships between characters, as they can be so deep, mostly between Lady Helen and the Dark Days Club members. Or superficial—with members of high society or even with her own family.

I don't feel qualified to talk about diversity, but as I know how this is an important subject, I'll do my best. From my point of view, there is good diversity, as one major, one minor, and one mentioned character are people of color. All of these characters are seemingly well-written and their presence feels normal. There is also a character, who I personally love, who is gay. There could have been more BIPOC or LGBTQ+ characters, but I still feel this was good. I also love the way that the author represents how much women, domestics, peasants, harlots, or noble ladies were stifled, and couldn't do what they wanted, unlike a lot of men. She shows it in a way that impeaches the story to be redundant, like in a well-known historical Netflix series, in which the injustice of women's conditions was shown by only one character. They didn't show the struggle of women between independence and what society teaches them. Even with superpowers, it wasn't easy to gain your freedom because of the mentality, pressure of society, and all that come with it.

Here, we assist the conflict in Lady Helen's mind, between her education, which taught her to be feminine, gracious, to avoid scandal and to get married as soon and best as she can, and her nature, which

“Even with superpowers, it wasn't easy to gain your freedom because of the mentality, pressure of society, and all that come with it.”

is quite literally the contrary of all of that (being capable of throw a man at the other side of a room is not really feminine, indeed). With our modern minds, this dilemma may appear easy, and Helen quite annoying with her moral questions, but we can apprehend way more deeply the difference between our world and hers, especially about women's education and role in society. The author said, translated myself from my French edition: "The Regency era is a period of elegance, courtesy, and politeness. Lady Helen is the reflection of her time, so smooth in appearance, yet very rough on the inside," and I couldn't agree more.

To finish, I would say that *The Dark Days Club* by Alison Goodman is a great book with a great representation of the Regency Era, a great romance (even if we'd guessed the end before the beginning of book two), a great dark fantasy novel and I recommend it warmly! ■

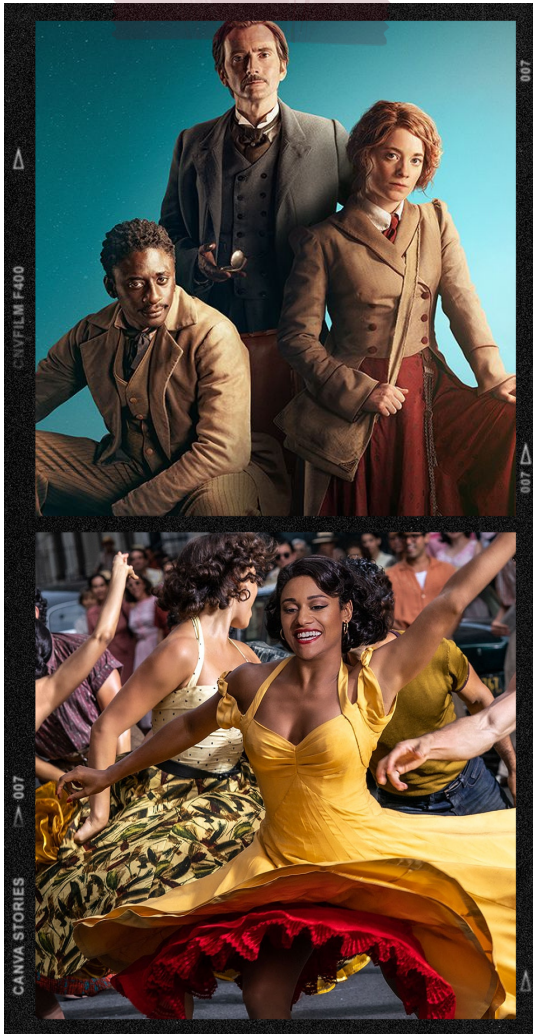


Upcoming Period Dramas!



AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS

This upcoming British drama is an adventure series based on a novel of the same name.



WEST SIDE STORY

This classic story about star-crossed lovers in the 1950s will be releasing this December.

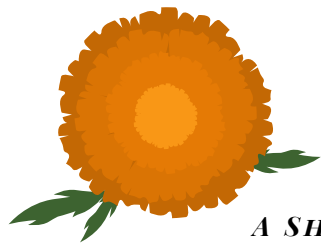
PERSUASION

There is another adaptation of Jane Austen's beloved novel, *Persuasion*, coming soon.



THE GILDED AGE

This upcoming HBO series is set in the United States during the 1880s.



THE STORY OF A RETURN

A SHORT STORY

BY ARI M.



In every generation, there is a war, and every war must come to an end; join four sisters as they finally see the Second World War come to a close.

If you asked Doña Magdalena Garza which room in her home she was proudest of, she would immediately say her kitchen, of course. The day the stock market crashed, she liked to boast that she could feed her family and the neighborhood with nothing more than a few beans harvested from her garden. Indeed, she kept it scrubbed sparkling clean with tiles so dirt-free you could eat off of them if it pleased you—not that it would please Doña Garza. She worked hard to keep her kitchen spotless and you’d be put to work scrubbing the floor you just ate off of.



There was one other room she took pride in, and that would be her guest room. Once her daughters’ bedroom, it was now neat and pretty for guests, but was rarely used by actual guests. Four neat beds with handmade wooden frames lined one wall, a washbasin, a mirror, and an empty dresser on the other end. Doilies littered every square inch of furniture and crocheted blankets were neatly folded at the foot of each bed. This area was always quiet; the only disturbance each day came when Doña Garza entered to keep the room sparkling clean as always.

Therefore, when three chattering sisters with suitcases burst into the room, pursued by a fourth sister swinging in on her crutches and followed up by Doña Garza no less, the room was alarmed. It had not been used by anyone in so long, it seemed to hold its breath as these girls broke the silence and Doña Garza told them where to set their things. It wasn’t entirely sure what to think of this intrusion allowed by its caretaker. Doña Garza stooped and opened the dresser up to let them put their clothing inside, and then the room seemed to realize—it would be a proper room again, and the floorboards gave a quiet sigh of relief.

“Muchisimas gracias, abuelita,” said the eldest girl, kissing the older woman’s cheek and kneeling by the dresser to begin placing their clothing within. The sisters with the suitcases passed her the items within while the one with crutches rested on the bed. Every dress was folded carefully, their blouses soon set in neat rows. Doña Garza made a noise of derision when a few sets of pedal pushers were brought out and placed in the lowest drawer.

The kneeling girl closed the drawers and rose, dusting herself off and shaking her skirt down neatly to cover her knees.

“Gregoria, I had best not see you in those slacks at tomorrow’s party,” Doña Garza said sharply to the tallest of the girls. “You are seventeen and a young lady, it is time you gave up such a silly notion such as wearing pants. Take your example from Jurado, mijita—she is not as beautiful as Felix, but she dresses well!”

From behind their grandmother, the elder sister gave the younger a stern stare and raised her brows as if to say, *“Don’t you dare talk back.”*

The message was telegraphed well enough and Gregoria only said meekly, “Yes, abuelita. I understand. I’ll be sure to let Magdalena dress me up nicely. Maybe she can even make a Dolores del Rio of me.”

The grandmother nodded her acceptance, strolling out to check on the rest of the house. Gregoria made a face after her, muttering loud enough for her sisters to hear, “Old fuddy-duddy.” The younger two giggled behind their hands at that.

“Gregoria Rosario Figueroa y Garza,” Magdalena, the oldest sister, hissed at her. She reached over to twist her ear, but Gregoria slapped her hand away quickly. “That is our mother’s mother, you know we’re lucky she and abuelito are letting us all stay until Christmas so mami can have some rest!”

Those words wiped the smirks off the sisters’ faces and the ones nearer the beds looked down at their shoes. The Depression had been tough enough, but America entering the war had really put a strain on everyone. It had just ended two weeks ago on the second, but now and then they listened to the radio in fear, wondering if it all wouldn’t start up again.



“You know I hate lecturing, but sometimes you leave me no choice, Goya,” Magdalena continued to scold, turning her face to Gregoria so the two younger ones wouldn’t feel worse. “The war is finally over, but papi is dead, mami needs to rest from working so much, and you aren’t helping matters when abuelita was so nice to let us in.”

Gregoria scuffed the floor with the toe of her shoe, muttering, “Gee whiz, I understand, Malena. Don’t have to lecture.”

“Then let it be the last time I have to tell you. And stop calling me Malena, you know how I dislike nicknames,” Magdalena warned her. She turned to the others with a smile, saying, “Girls, have you decided which beds you’ll be sleeping on?”

“I want this one,” Faustina announced, flopping onto a bed with a red crocheted blanket.

“Did you ask Ursula if that’s all right with her?” Magdalena asked, trying to sound motherly.

“Oh, that’s okay,” Ursula piped up by the bed nearest the window. “See, this one has a blue blanket, that means it’s for me. And look! I can see abuelita’s garden outside, too. Do you think she’ll let me help her with it?”

“She has to, you’re the one with the green thumb,” Gregoria told her little sister, going to stroke her head. “She already knows I harm any plant I come near.”

“Except nopales—they harm you instead!” Faustina shrieked, and the girls dissolved into laughter remembering how Gregoria had fallen into a patch of prickly pear cactus.



The next day, everyone was busy helping to prepare for the party; it was a double party to welcome back all the soldiers and celebrate dieciseis de Septiembre, Mexican Independence Day. All the women but Gregoria were helping in the kitchen; Don Garza had taken her to help him set up at the park where the festivities would be held. It was a beautiful, sunny September day in El Paso, the summer’s heat still present in the desert town; but by night, it would drop to a pleasant temperature and everyone would enjoy themselves.

Gregoria was brought back in time to get bathed and then dressed up to Doña Garza’s specifications. Faustina finished pinning her sister’s hair just in time for Gregoria to see Magdalena putting on makeup. Gregoria balked, scolding Magdalena immediately, “You’ve only just turned eighteen, Malena, and you haven’t even graduated high school! Mami’s going to be upset at you for putting on make-up!”

“I do not see how I can be upset,” came a gentle voice from behind Gregoria, making the girl jump in surprise. “If I was the one who allowed her to do so, mi Goyita.”

Gregoria turned around to face their mother, eyes wide in shock. She gaped for a little bit like a fish, Ursula and Faustina suppressing giggles with their pillows so their sister

didn't get mad at them.

"But mami, you said when we graduated high school we could wear make-up! That isn't fair! And Malena's only a girl, same as me."

"Magdalena is a young lady," Mrs. Figueroa said firmly. "She is eighteen years old, and she has a novio who will be escorting her tonight, so she has my permission."

Gregoria nearly hit the roof. Who was the boyfriend? Why wasn't she told about this? What possessed Magdalena to want to actually date a boy?

Their mother silenced Gregoria with a look, going to the eldest and hugging Magdalena to her side.

"Would you like to explain?"

Magdalena nodded meekly and told her sisters, "Two years ago, before Heliodoro left for the war, he asked me to kiss him. I... Well, gosh, I didn't want to let him go off to war and say no, what if he had died?" She bit her lip, blushing, then went on, "Well, after that he asked me if I would save my lips for him." She hid her face in embarrassment, unable to go on.

"Just like in that book you got me for Christmas, Goya!" Ursula gasped. "Oh, did you?" Magdalena nodded silently, and Mrs. Figueroa continued on for her: "Your sister said she would, and I told her that she could consider herself formally courted by Heliodoro. Your grandparents and his grandfather approve, as do I."

Gregoria still simmered, but only because she couldn't bear the thought of any of her sisters marrying and leaving her and their mother all alone. Begrudgingly, she did admit, "Well, I had wanted that to happen anyway. I guess if it has to be anyone, good ol' Leo is the best fit for Malena."

"And he will be escorting her to the dance tonight, so yes, she does have my permission to dress up a little if she pleases." Mrs. Figueroa gently wiped a little smudged lipstick off Magdalena's face and smiled at her. "You look beautiful, mi reina." She kissed her daughter's forehead and released her, then kissed the foreheads of the rest of her daughters.

"I want you all to have fun tonight. The past four years have been very tough, but you have kept your heads held high, helped in the best way suited to each of you, and have all blossomed into the señoritas I always hoped you would be. I am incredibly proud of you."

All the girls dropped their heads to hide watery eyes, Gregoria groping around in her pockets for a handkerchief. Mrs. Figueroa just smiled, excusing herself to finish getting ready.



Don Garza came to escort his granddaughters outside to the car when they were all gussied up, beaming at how beautiful the girls were.

“We’ll dance together, nenita,” he said to Ursula with a wink, the girl giggling at her grandfather; they were going the same pace, him relying on his cane and her on crutches.

“I’ll save one for you, abuelito.”

There were two cars waiting at the curb when they got outside—one was Don Garza’s old Coupe, and the second was a shiny, almost new-looking Ford convertible. Standing next to it was a handsome young man dressed in an Army uniform, holding his hat in one hand. The sisters almost didn’t recognize him, until he grinned in his old boyish way and called, “No three cheers for Leo? I thought I was supposed to receive them when you saw me!”



“Hip hip, hooray for Heliodoro!” Gregoria shouted, running over to hug him. The young man drew his best friend into a crushing hug, then pushed her away before he mussed her too much.

“Hurry and smooth your dress down! If looks could kill, your grandmother would have me roasting over hot coals,” he laughed, grinning impishly at Doña Garza.

Doña Garza was unmoved, looking further appalled when Ursula and Faustina went over to hug him too.

“Girls, that is entirely inappropriate!” she chided them.

“How can it be? He’s going to be our brother someday soon!” Faustina laughed through tears, hugging Heliodoro.

“If it isn’t tiny Tina and speedy Suly!” he gloated, hugging the girls close. “You two have shot up like sprouts, I can’t believe it’s you!”

“Well, of course! I told you I’d catch up to you,” Faustina joked through her weeping. He tugged her ponytail to tease her and she shoved him, the two laughing happily as they used to.

“And how about you, Suly? You don’t have those bangs any longer.” He patted her back, gentle as ever with her.

“No, I don’t,” she said proudly. “I remember someone’s advice that I should stop hiding from the world because I had a lot to offer.”

Heliodoro squeezed her close and then let the girls off to their mother, before turning to look at Magdalena. He smiled at her and offered a hand out to her.

“May I escort you to the dance, Ms. Figueroa?” he asked gallantly.

She smiled at him, placing her hand in his, and replied, “Yes, you may, Sergeant Diaz.”

He opened the door and helped her in, gently closing it behind her.

“We’ll see you there. Keep her safe, joven,” Don Garza said with a smile as he climbed into his own car and drove off.

Heliodoro slipped into the driver’s side, looking over at Magdalena. The light of the sunset illuminated her perfectly, and he wondered to himself if this was how San Juan Diego had felt, seeing La Virgen de Guadalupe descend upon him. Awestruck, almost breathless, nervous, all because of the divine beauty near him.

“Are you comfortable, Lena?” he asked her softly. He guided the cat to follow Don Garza’s, discreetly rubbing his hands one at a time on his slacks. They were sweating from nerves. “Sorry, I mean Magdalena. You don’t like nicknames.”

“I am, thank you, Doro,” she replied softly. She hid her hands in the folds of her dress and tried not to wring them together, otherwise, she’d ruin the nice gloves her mother loaned her. “I don’t mind the nickname when it comes from you. And... I’m glad you came back safe, um, t-to me,” she added, her face going pink.

“Well,” he replied softly. “I do believe I promised the girl I love I would.”

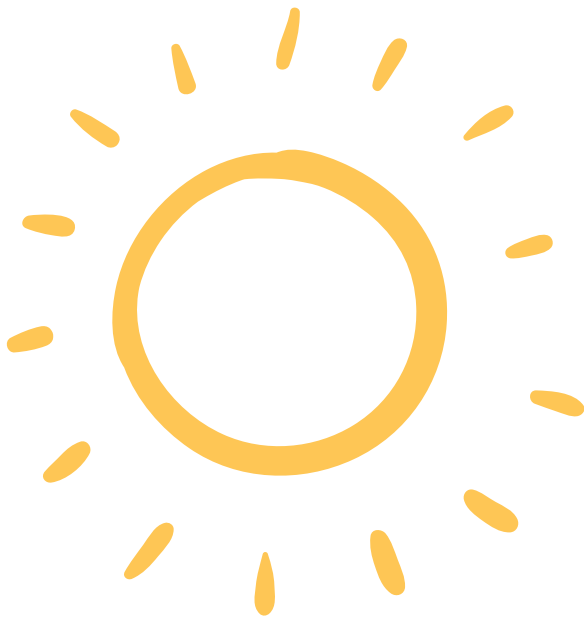




They were quiet after that. Heliodoro followed Don Garza and parking next to the latter's vehicle. He escorted Magdalena up to the park, and couldn't help puffing up with pride a little. He had the prettiest girl in Ysleta High on his arm, her mother and grandparents had accepted him proposing to Magdalena later tonight, and he would be marrying one of his best friends.

Happy as the little couple was, they sobered when they came into the park.

The war had changed much, as could be seen on the war-worn faces of his friends, or in the missing ones of boys who had not come home. Her girl-friends who had gone away as nurses were back as women, a grimness in their eyes even as they smiled and play-acted the part they were expected to. Things would never be the same again; they were no longer boys and girls, and their happy times would never return. They were men and women now, giving up their playtime to do the sober work of repairing their world.



They had seen the worst the world could produce, and tonight they set about righting wrongs they had inflicted upon each other. Old rivalries were finally ended and former enemies promised each other friendship, if not at least civility. Only Gregoria had an aggrieved look now and again when she looked at her sister and her best friend—no one knew how hard it was to lose her older sister. They had been each other's only sisters and playmates for so long before the little girls were born that she felt as if she were losing half herself.

Heliodoro came over when he saw the look on her face, while Magdalena went to her mother to return the loaned gloves. He didn't say anything to her for the moment, simply drawing her into a one-armed hug and letting her cry some.

"You're only going halves," he promised her softly. "And besides, we'll be right next door.

Neither she nor I would ever leave good old Goya alone. *And* we'll need you as the tia we give the babies to when we need a break."

Gregoria gave a helpless, damp laugh, pushing away from him and wiping her face.

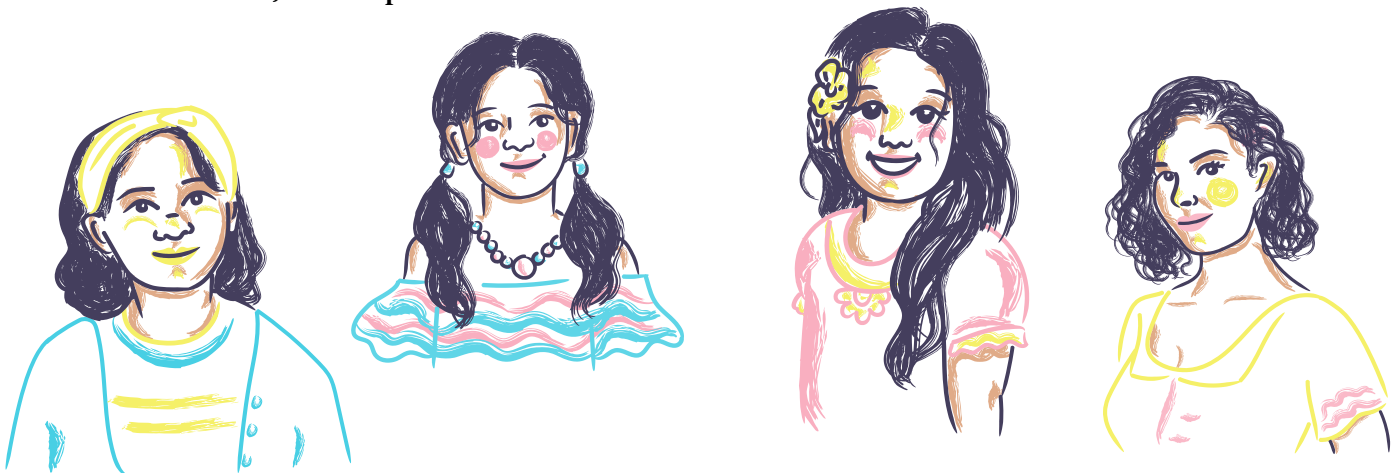
"I'll tell them ghost stories and give them sweets and send them back to you terrified and over-energetic," she threatened him as she groped around for a handkerchief in her pockets—as always, she never had one. He offered one of his instead, and she accepted.

"And that's exactly what we'd expect from tia Goya," he said, patting her back. "Don't despair. We'll be closer than ever, now that we'll be family."

"You're right, Leo, we will be," she agreed, finishing his handkerchief off with a honking of her nose.



Nothing is ever truly perfect, but everyone in attendance that night agreed that the party was something close to it. Though many familiar faces were gone, they were there in spirit—their memories were drunk to, and each one honored with a kind word or memory for the sake of their families. Those who were there agreed they must push forward in the name of hope for a better world, and so they would, for if there is one thing in this world which cannot be killed, it is hope. ■



THE STORY OF A RETURN



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