

Stephen Fry:

Hello, everybody. This is Stephen Fry, welcoming you to a great celebration of the works of Georgette Heyer, who started writing 100 years ago in order to cheer up a sick relative, I believe. She wrote *The Black Moth*, and from then she just exploded with creativity and brilliance. Those of us who love Georgette Heyer have always felt that we're part of a small group who are rather misunderstood.

Stephen Fry:

Without wishing to spread to many insults, let's face it, the covers of those books suggest someone icky and gooey and sentimental and fluffy and romantic and ... Well, she is romantic, there's no shame in that. But in the worst kind of romantic, I suppose, I mean. The covers have not been kind to her. They've not suggested the vivid, powerful intelligence, the extraordinary historical knowledge, the detail, the wit. All those things that we love.

Stephen Fry:

Now, without too much roundaboutation, I will try and say something about Georgette Heyer today and why I think she still matters. There are different ways of recreating the past. And I'm not going to attack *Bridgerton*, which has been an enormous success. But those of us, of course, who know our Regency through Georgette Heyer are naturally, at first, a bit shocked by what we might call the historical blunders and the peculiarities of their attempt to recreate an age that we feel we know better. Where were the vouchers at Almack's? And, simply saying, "shall" instead of "will", doesn't make you speak pure Regency.

Stephen Fry:

But I don't want to attack it, because I think there's a huge success. And, it's wonderful that it's opened the world of Regency England to a global audience. But that way that they have of presenting history, rather like *The Favorite* or *The Great* about Catherine the Great, that you may have seen. These are ways in which you bring in modern concerns, modern ages, modern views of the world and you mix them up with the past.

Stephen Fry:

Georgette Heyer did something else. She recreated the past. It's a bit like comparing, I don't know, Van Gogh with Vermeer. Georgette Heyer was a Vermeer. She created an absolute simulacrum of Regency in terms of the cant speech, the slang speech, the styles of people, the styles of clothing and carriages, food, every detail. You know as fans of Georgette Heyer just how magnificent she was at conveying this.

Stephen Fry:

And, of course, the stories are romances. A lot of them are really essentially retreads of *Pride and Prejudice* in some ways. A dark hero, a bit of a bad hat, a bit of a snob, perhaps, and a bright and vivacious heroine. But, she wrote different heroines. She wrote some bookish heroines and she wrote some that were children and some who were older and there's more variety than in many romantic novelists. But, above all, there's that wit. She just had a perfect ear for a sentence of great English in whatever period she wrote. Yes, she was probably a snob and quite a difficult person to get on with. But, she gave us a gift of books that I will continue to read. I wouldn't have to be ill to read them, either, though it is perfect reading for convalescence, of course. And we've all been convalescents this past

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year. Anyway, that is enough of that roundaboutation. I want to welcome you to this marvelous meeting of minds. And, to hope that you have a simply fabulous time. Lots and lots of love.