

A Romantic Romp With Lucy Worsley

By **Alexander Baron** - Oct 24, 2015



Lucy Worsley

5
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Lucy Worsley may look like a fashion model and sound like a flibbertigibbet, but don't let that fool you. This girl is 41 years young and a PhD. Her thesis was *The Architectural Patronage Of William Cavendish, First Duke Of Newcastle, 1593–1676*, which was published in 2007 as *Cavalier: A Tale Of Chivalry, Passion And Great Houses*. And yes, of course she is married. Now we've got that out of the way, this 3 part series, *A Very British Romance*, though breezily presented, waltzes through three hundred years of romance from the first or one of the first romantic novels, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* to those of Barbara Cartland, all 723 of them.

In the second episode we see her duet at the piano with the equally charismatic Derek Scott, himself an historian and author of many books. He is currently Professor of Critical Musicology in the University of Leeds, and is even rumoured to be mentioned in the *SongFacts database*. We hear also the voice of Ellen Johnston, one of a tiny number of

working class writers who managed to get into print in the 19th Century. Working class? Known as the **Factory Girl**, her short life was indescribably hard, something that should make **everyday whiner Laura Bates** pause and check her privilege.

We hear the story of what is quite likely the most elaborate Valentine's card ever assembled, by a man whose future wife would present him with 15 children. Then in 1847, a new kind of romance and new kind of heroine – a girl who wasn't beautiful – Jane Eyre – heralded the advent of the battle of the sexes, one which was played out in the 1858 divorce hearing of Isabella Robinson, whose scandalous diaries drew major headlines.

Has anyone ever found love at a seance? Apparently so, but like Ellen Johnston, the lot of some women in this world was bearable only because of the promise of rewards in the next; this brings us to the Foundling Hospital, and a maid who on becoming pregnant, and on relaying the news to her suitor was told to drown herself. In those days he would have been called a cad; today, most people would use a stronger word.

Modern feminists believe erroneously that **the suffragettes** *liberated* women; those who actually read history realise it was the combination of new technology and the First World War, the latter of which brought women into the male workplace for the first time while the men went off to slaughter each other. Lucy Worsley adds a new liberator, the bicycle – okay, this is technology, but by increasing the literal mobility of a certain class of women it brought about new social conventions and new fashions.

In the third episode we are well into the Twentieth Century where she looks at the novel *The Sheikh*, and *Married Love* by Marie Stopes, which reads more like a romantic thriller than an academic text or mere advice manual.

Lady Chatterley's Lover – adultery – gets a mention, as does *The Well Of Loneliness*, a book whose title will need no introduction to students of sexual history. Then came romantic films, an American import, like *Top Hat*.

Sexual mores were transformed by World War II, and, she says, this was a prequel to what became known as the Permissive Society and the Swinging Sixties.

Although until the divorce law reforms of the 1970s, divorce was not easy, it is difficult to believe this was still the case even when both parties wanted to end the marriage; this led to the advent of the Brighton quickie. Talking of quickies, you win a coconut if you can count the number of costume changes our intrepid historian makes in this series, and clearly loving every minute of it.

In case you didn't know it, the diamond engagement ring is a surprisingly new phenomenon. Sadly, the series ends with *Maurice*, a novel by E.M. Forster which was published only after his death, and *gay* "marriage". With creatures as alluring as Lucy Worsley walking the Earth, it is easy to understand lesbianism, but male homosexuality, seriously?

5

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