
1	The Convenient Marriage by Georgette Heyer – One	8:17
2	There did not seem to be much to say after that.	7:06
3	Two	6:31
4	The Earl was absently swinging his eyeglass...	6:41
5	Three	5:13
6	In quite another quarter...	6:32
7	There was an uncomfortable silence.	5:37
8	Four	5:56
9	She was too clever a woman to press her point.	5:29
10	The Viscount, having received in Rome....	7:34
11	Five	7:07
12	It was all very disturbing...	5:35
13	Six	4:39
14	On the top lay a sheet of paper...	4:34
15	Horatia's gyrations, however...	5:15
16	She looked a little doubtful.	4:53
17	Seven	6:01
18	She came aware that her hand was still reposing in his...	5:50

19	Eight	8:38
20	Nine	5:17
21	Never one to neglect opportunity...	4:44
22	Somewhere about noon, when he was still in bed...	8:45
23	Ten	6:28
24	Having visited both the principals in the late affair...	8:02
25	Eleven	5:35
26	He put his hand to the Mechlin cravat...	6:47
27	Horatia stood by the table in the middle of the small saloon...	7:35
28	Twelve	5:37
29	Horatia gave a gasp...	6:29
30	Thirteen	7:42
31	Fourteen	5:40
32	She was by now really frightened...	6:56
33	Fifteen	4:53
34	When, twenty minutes later, the phaeton drew up...	7:20
35	Sir Roland, meanwhile, had arrived in Half-Moon Street...	4:42
36	Sixteen	5:13

37	It was only six miles to Meering...	7:10
38	Seventeen	6:41
39	Rule wiped the sweat from his face...	6:47
40	Eighteen	7:40
41	Nineteen	8:35
42	Twenty	7:36
43	Twenty-One	7:28
44	Twenty minutes later they faced one another...	5:21
45	For once she wasted no time...	4:07
46	Twenty-Two	5:59
47	Several secluded paths led to the little temple...	6:01
48	The ring-brooch lay in the palm of his hand.	7:42

Total time: 5:06:50

Georgette Heyer

(1902–1974)

The Convenient Marriage

Normally, notes like this give warning of a plot point about to be discussed. But it is not giving too much away to say that in *The Convenient Marriage*, the impetuous heroine marries the saturnine and enigmatic hero. There are two reasons for this not being a great surprise. One is that it happens very early in the book, and so can hardly be said to be the climax. The other is that, to be blunt, surely the impetuous heroine marries the enigmatic hero in every romance; isn't that what 'romance' means?

Yes and no. On the one hand, there is no point in pretending that Heyer's 35 or so Regency romances have significantly differing plots. On the other, when in *The Convenient Marriage* Horry proposes to the Earl of Rule, it is a genuine surprise for several reasons, and just the kind to delightfully engross the reader, even as

it makes Horatia's mother reach for her vinaigrette. Heyer knew what she was doing; how to make each book sufficiently different to entertain, while satisfying the core requirements of the genre (one which she essentially invented) and allowing her to upset certain conventions. And her audience, then and now, loved it; because they knew what to expect, too, and were prepared to judge the books on those merits. They were, and are, in on the game.

It seems from this distance that Georgette Heyer emerged fully formed as the romantic novelist with a particular taste for the Regency period, so completely is she associated with it. But she wrote works that delved 700 years further back in English history; considered her *magnum opus* to be a three-part novel about the Lancasters; suppressed

some of her contemporary novels; and wrote detective novels and thrillers too, as well as short stories. She was enormously successful (first print runs for a Heyer novel would be over 65,000), hard-working, aware of her responsibilities as a writer, professional, and dedicated. She was also averse to publicity. Her first great success was published during the General Strike, and was therefore free of any promotion at all. It went on to sell thousands, and she therefore decided that publicity was unnecessary for future writings. *The Times* did manage to persuade her to have a picture taken in 1970, but that was pretty much the extent of it. She regarded such self-aggrandisement with something approaching distaste, and her self-deprecation went so far that she once said: 'I think myself I ought to be shot for writing such nonsense'; although she went on to acknowledge that it was also 'good escapist literature ... [and] very good fun'.

Her first book, *The Black Moth* (1921), was written as an entertainment for her haemophilic brother, but it was no great surprise that she was writing. Her father

was himself an author who actively encouraged her; and she was close friends with authors Joanna Cannan and Carola Oman. It may not have been a surprise that she started writing, but once under way she never stopped. Her productivity was extraordinary, essentially a book a year for almost 50 years; her reputation being established quite early, with the huge success of *These Old Shades* (1926). By then, however, she had also published two contemporary, even experimental novels, and was to write two more. She was to suppress these (and one or two others) later in life. They dealt more directly with sex and death, two matters that Heyer was having to cope with herself at the time. Her father had died suddenly of a heart attack after a game of tennis with Heyer's fiancé, George Ronald Rougier, in 1925, whom she married shortly afterwards.

Rougier was a mining engineer and his work took him and his new wife to Tanganyika in East Africa and then Macedonia. But he left the job and in 1929 set up a sports shop in Horsham; this in effect meant that Heyer was now

the principal breadwinner in the family, and soon to be a mother. So she wrote. She wrote contemporary novels, a novel about William the Conqueror, Regency novels, crime novels... and she worked. She prepared detailed notebooks on all aspects of the time in which she set her books and had a huge collection of reference works, with the result that the scholarship and detail in her books is almost flawless (there is one error: in *The Masqueraders* she mistakes the opening of White's club by one year – in her defence, in this instance she was writing just below the equator without any reference books to hand). In time, her husband became a barrister, and then a QC; but despite his success, she kept on writing, producing consistently popular books, avoiding the limelight, and in private being a charming, generous and amusing friend.

'Regency Romances', apart from being a slightly belittling title, is also somewhat inaccurate. The Regency proper only lasted between 1811 and 1820. Heyer's historical romances cover some years before and after these times, with *The Convenient Marriage*, for example, set

in 1776. It is a point Heyer knew better than anyone. The period detail, and her evident dedication to and pleasure in it, is one reason why her novels are so good. They sound and feel right. The fashions, the books, the entertainments, the social activities, the behaviour, the styles, the slang – they have authenticity, and for a reader living 300 years after the time in which the books are set, they bring it to vivid life. They also reveal slight but telling aspects of their time. The impact of extremely high-stakes gambling on upper-class families was so severe that Parliament introduced sanctions on certain card games because the losses could be so great. It was a serious malaise, and Heyer incorporates it into the fabric of *The Convenient Marriage* with the unobtrusive significance that marks much of her historicity. Even the title is a deliberate play on the dubious, rakish mores of the time.

There is another area where Heyer goes beyond her many rivals. If the basic plots of romances are generally interchangeable, Heyer nevertheless makes a point of not being clichéd. We

might know the hero and heroine are to marry; but this is never just a woman giving herself up to a dominant man and being thrilled at the chance to be dependant. Heyer's heroines aren't simpering, and her heroes aren't chauvinists. The types of love and marriage Heyer celebrates are those where the individuals make their choices for themselves, find shared happiness and can laugh both at themselves and with each other. This is perhaps her greatest strength, even above her sense of style, her dialogue and her detail. She is witty and knowing, not taking the book too seriously, but never underestimating it, either. As a result there is a current of intelligence and warmth running through her delightfully escapist romances in which the enigmatic hero marries the impetuous heroine.

Notes by Roy McMillan



Richard Armitage trained at LAMDA. He is best known for his appearances in the television series *Spooks*, *The Vicar of Dibley*, *Robin Hood* and *North and South*. His theatre credits include *The Duchess of Malfi* and *Macbeth* for the Royal Shakespeare Company. He has also featured on BBC Radio 4's *The Ted Hughes Letters*. He has read *Sylvester* and *Venetia* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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