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# "What if your future was the past?": Temporality, Gender, and the "Isms" of *Outlander*

**Leah Haught, University of West Georgia**



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In August of 2014, Starz launched the first half of a sixteen episode series, *Outlander*, based on Diana Gabaldon's hugely popular book of the same name.[1] In it, we follow the adventures of Claire Randall/Fraser, a World War Two combat nurse, as she time travels to 1743 Scotland, where she encounters bands of sword wielding Highlanders, sadomasochistic red coats, rugged landscapes, political intrigue, rampant disease, and an appalling—at least from her perspective—lack of concern for the opinions of women. Even before its official debut, the epic scope and historical-fantasy components of the show garnered comparisons to *Game of Thrones*, with the woman-centric narrative leading early reviewers to dub *Outlander* a "feminist answer to *Game of Thrones*"[2] or "the Anti-Game of Thrones."[3] Obvious differences in setting and cast makeup aside, the two shows do have many superficial commonalities: both feature violence with archaic weaponry; acerbic, unshowered leads with varying degrees of British accents; awesome if under-explained supernatural phenomena; and lots of nudity and sex, including a disturbing amount of the non-consensual nature. As these comparisons suggest, although not a series engaged with medievalism in the strictest definition of the word, *Outlander* invites viewers to consume it as a medievalism through a complex juxtaposition of "modern" and "pre-modern" temporal perspectives. Claire's position as a time traveler allows her to disrupt traditional borders between time and space—to "queer time," to borrow a phrase from Carolyn Dinshaw[4]—in a way that foregrounds both the nonlinear or multifarious nature of time and the tendency of the "present" to judge the past according to its own belief systems. From Claire's vantage point as an educated, twentieth-century woman, the insular Highland culture of eighteenth-century Scotland has more in common with a medieval worldview than a modern one, since it privileges religion and superstition over inquiry and male desires over female ones. The longer Claire remains in the past, however, the more she is able to appreciate it as a time and a place with merits of its own, a shift that is best exemplified through her changing relationship with Jamie Fraser, a remarkably open-minded Highlander. Thus, the show demonstrates the extent to which the concept of "medieval primitivism" can be relativized and affectively applied to a wide variety of "early" or "non-modern" temporalities—including the eighteenth century—while also recognizing the perverse pleasures associated with complicating the normative values and behaviors that these pre-modern settings generally presuppose, especially for women.[5] In this

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[1] *Outlander* is the first of eight books Gabaldon has published in the eponymously named series thus far. She is currently writing a ninth; whether or not this will be the last remains to be seen. The books are wildly popular, with over 25 million copies in print. The first installment was published in 1991, and the eighth, released in July of 2014, went straight to number one on the New York Times bestseller list, besting Hilary Clinton's memoir. See Mark Medley, "Big Books, Small Screen: Diana Gabaldon's Outlander Series Heads for TV," *National Post*, June 25, 2014, http://news.nationalpost.com/arts/books/big-books-small-screen-diana-gabaldons-outlander-series-heads-for-tv (accessed June 26, 2015).

[2] Anne Helen Peterson, " 'Outlander' is the The Feminist Answer to 'Game of Thrones' — And Men Should Be Watching It," *BuzzFeed Entertainment*, August 4, 2014, http://www.buzzfeed.com/annehelenpetersen/watch-outlander#.cswPEbN29 (accessed June 26, 2015).

[3] Sara Stewart, "Meet Outlander, the Anti-Game of Thrones," *Women and Hollywood,* August 27, 2014, http://blogs.indiewire.com/womenandhollywood/meet-outlander-the-anti-game-of-thrones-20140730 (accessed June 26, 2015). As Willa Paskin suggests, however, characterizing *Game of Thrones* as "boy fiction" is an oversimplification of that show's appeal, which averaged 18.6 million viewers for season four, forty-two percent of whom were women ("Outlander," *Slate*, August 8, 2014, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/television/2014/08/outlander_on_starz_reviewed.html (accessed June 26, 2015). Fans and critics of *Thrones* have long debated its depiction of women and sexual violence, and that debate reached fever pitch following the brutal rape of the much maligned Sansa Stark in episode six of season five, which aired 17 May 2015. For a succinct summary of this dispute, see Sarah Hughes, "Game of Thrones Walks a Fine Line on Rape: How Much More Can Audiences Take?" *The Guardian*, May 20, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/may/20/game-of-thrones-rape-sansa-stark (accessed June 26, 2015).

[4] Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham: Duke University Press 2012). On the importance of "presentism" to medievalism, see Louise D'Arcens, "Presentism" in *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, ed. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014), 181-88. Both women discuss narratives of time travel in considerable detail as being particularly illuminative of how different temporal perspectives might productively inform one another.

[5] The show's promotional connections to medievalism are widespread, including in the materials catered more toward potential male viewers. For example, a feature on Sam Heughan, the actor who plays Jamie Fraser, appeared under the heading "Medieval

way, *Outlander* makes explicit the theoretical sophistication and vitality of modern medievalism as a response to the postmedieval invention of the Middle Ages predating modernity precisely because the past it is recreating is not medieval but still engages seriously with many of the key concepts of medievalism. Reading *Outlander* as a medievalism, then, encourages a broader consideration of the diverse ways that "pre-modern" history has been reimagined for twenty-first century audiences, demonstrating encouraging changes and troubling consistencies alike insofar as historicized depictions of gender roles and gendered behavior are concerned.

Thrust into the androcentric world of eighteenth-century Highland politics, Claire is thricely othered: she is English, a woman, and full of twentieth-century ideas, including a strong sense of her own self-worth. Yet through a combination of resourcefulness and intelligence, she not only survives, she thrives. The series is careful to play up Claire's smarts, especially as a skilled medical practitioner accustomed to improvising under horrid conditions, which serves her well in both eras. Her medical know-how is not, however, exclusively what we in the twenty-first century might consider to be "scientific" or "modern," though she certainly has a keen understanding of the impact of disease, infection, and trauma on the human body. An interest in medicinal herbs is ultimately what sends her back to Craigh na Dun, the Stonehedge-like circle of stones where she and her twentieth-century husband, Frank, observe a pagan ceremony early in the first episode. It is during this second visit that Claire hears strange noises coming from the stone circle and, after touching one, is transported back in time. This association with what we might, for lack of a better word, call magic complicates her characterization as a worldly, forward thinking nurse, a complication that the show prepares us for throughout the scenes leading up to her experience of time travel. Shortly after arriving in Scotland with Frank, for example, Claire is unsettled by a tea leaf-based reading of her future that indicates she might have a complicated journey involving little travel and two husbands ahead of her, and she suggests a degree of understanding of the pagan women she and Frank observe dancing at Craigh na Dun when she corrects her husband's characterization of what they just witnessed with the observation that said women are "druids, not witches."[6] Claire's intelligence blends science and mysticism, then, distinguishing her from the show's more historically and politically minded male characters, including Frank, who has just been hired to teach history at Oxford when the show begins, and whose interest in his own family history is part of the reason the couple are vacationing in Scotland in the first place. Once she is displaced temporally, however, Claire gains a distinct advantage in the categories of knowledge that are gendered male as well, since she knows the outcome of the Jacobite uprising with which many of the Highlanders are engaged.[7]

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Muscle" and details how Heughan "varies his training to look ready for a duel." See Ben Radding, "Medieval Muscle," *Muscle & Fitness* October 2014, 168. To get a sense of the show's popularity with women, one need simply search "Outlander memes" on Google or Pinterest. The vast majority of search results center around the attractiveness of Sam Heughan/Jamie Fraser, with a noticeable emphasis being placed on his Scots accent and kilt (i.e., his "non-modern" garb). The feistiness of Claire, played by Caitriona Balfe, is another popular topic, as is the enjoyment derived from watching the show as a whole. In one particularly sly homage to the physical pleasure women might experience while watching, an ecstatic cat is used as a stand-in for an important part of the female anatomy, See weheartit.com, accessed June 27, 2015, http://weheartit.com/entry/138057165/in-set/27560150-outlander?context_user=ebiasotti98).

[6] "Sassenach," *Outlander*, season one, episode one, directed by John Dahl, aired August 9, 2014 (Culver City, CA: Sony Home Pictures Entertainment, 2015), DVD.

[7] It is worth noting that one of the ways the show depicts Claire "remembering" things about the eighteenth century is through flashback sequences in which Frank explains the "history" of Highland politics, among other subjects, to her. In this way, knowledge continues to be gendered not just within each separate era but also across both. Other examples of male characters being historically and politically minded include Claire's uncle Lamb, who raised her after her parents were killed, and was an archaeologist, and whom she credits with teaching her how to live unconventionally on several occasions; Reverand Wakefield, a Scottish clergymen who shares Frank's love of "historical mysteries" and helps him track down documents on the Randall family; Dougal MacKenzie, Jamie's uncle and the war chief of Leoch, who is an avid Jacobite dedicated to raising money for the cause; and Ned Gowan, the MacKenzie clan's chief lawyer and Dougal's political ally. By comparison, the first eighteenth-century person to recognize and fully appreciate Claire's skills as a healer is another woman, Mrs. Fitz, who is the housekeeper at castle Leoch. Local townswoman, Geilles Duncan is, like Claire, knowledgeable about plants and their effects on the body; she is also fairly outspoken and rumored to be a witch as a result of these attributes, which perhaps should concern Claire more than it seems to considering the striking parallels between them. "Back" in the twentieth century, Mrs. Graham, the owner of the Bed and Breakfast where Claire and Frank were staying, tries to tell Frank that Claire might have time traveled through the stones; Mrs. Graham was one of the pagan dancers at Craigh na Dun and the person responsible for Claire's foreboding and, as it turns

Indeed, Claire's position of being simultaneously advantaged and disadvantaged generates considerable tension throughout the first half of the season, as she repeatedly finds herself in situations where she is forced to decide if she should say what she knows—whether that be medically or historically-based—or stay silent. Given the fact that the show is firmly stepped in fantasy, it is perhaps not surprising that Claire opts to speak her mind more often than she chooses to err on the side of caution.[8] She tends to find methods of punishment, religious education, and medical treatment to be particularly abhorrent or "medieval"; for instance, she calls a public beating she witnesses "barbaric," the desire to cut a thief's hand off "appalling," and she repeatedly butts heads with a priest about how to best treat a child he thinks is possessed by the devil but she knows has ingested a poisonous plant.[9] Even when Claire does decide to bite her tongue, audiences are given insight into her thoughts through frequent voice-overs. In short, we are clearly supposed to like and even identify with this woman, in spite and perhaps because of her embarrassing tendency to draw attention to her status as an outsider or *sassenach*.

Luckily for Claire, the band of Scotsmen by which she is taken prisoner (she is thought to be an English spy when found wandering the woods) happens to contain a hybrid male counterpart for her damsel who refuses to distress in Jamie Fraser. Like Claire, Jamie is both advantaged and disadvantaged throughout most of the first half of the season. The nephew of the Mackenzie clan chief, he commands a certain amount of respect. He also, however, owes allegiance to second clan—his father's—and, as a result, is viewed with some suspicion by his maternal uncles. He is an educated man—certainly more so than most of his peers—and as such, he is capable of acknowledging the unlikelihood that multiple village boys are possessed by the devil, and he is progressive enough to take a public beating on behalf of a young woman accused of loose morals. But he is also fiercely protective of the Highland way of life, warning Claire on several occasions not to judge what she does not understand.[10] Moreover, he has a price on his head after escaping British "justice," which the show clearly indicates is better understood as systematic injustice, since flashbacks paired with glimpses of Jamie's horribly scarred back quickly reveal that he was flogged twice in less than a week after attempting to defend his sister from a band of British soldiers. He is, therefore, reliant on his family to help hide and feed him, making him a man out of his place as much as he is a man in and of his time.

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out, accurate tea leaf reading. Thus while neither of these forms of knowledge is dismissed or routinely privileged over the other—both are clearly important within the larger logic of the show—they are continuously characterized as gendered.

[8] The genre of the book series has been in debate since 1991, when Gabaldon agreed to publish the first novel as a romance after being told that the romance market was a larger than other possible genres the book might "fit." She was promised she could re-market the subsequent books simply as fiction if they sold well. According to Gabaldon's website, she considers the novels to be "Big, Fat, Historical Fiction, à la James Clavell and James Michener," although she also admits to writing the first novel for practice, with no plans to show it to anyone. As a result, she felt free to experiment with whatever genres and themes that she liked. It is, therefore, not particularly surprising that the show, like the books before it, has been described everything from action-adventure, fantasy, and romance, to historical fiction and science fiction. See, respectively, Diana Galbadon, "FAQ: About the Books" and "The Outlander Series," DianaGabaldon.com, http://www.dianagabaldon.com/resources/faq/faq-about-the-books/ and http://www.dianagabaldon.com/books/outlander-series/ (accessed June 28, 2015).

[9] Claire witnesses Jaime take a public beating on the behalf of Laoghaire, a young woman accused of behaving inappropriately, in the second episode of the season, and she openly disapproves of the violence with which the public sentence is carried out ("Castle Leoch," season one, episode two, directed by John Dahl, aired 16 August 2014 (Culver City, CA: Sony Home Pictures Entertainment, 2015), DVD. In the very next episode, "The Way Out," she opposes the loss of a hand as punishment for a young boy accused of stealing. The boy is ultimately given the "lesser" punishment of having his ear nailed to a public post, and Claire enlists Jaime to help her free the boy from the post shortly thereafter. Later on in the same episode, she treats another young boy for poison, which is how she makes enemies of Father Bain, who thinks the boy is possessed and wants to perform an exorcism. Father Bain's dislike of Claire almost gets her killed in the eleventh episode of the season, when he testifies against her and Geillis while they are on trial for witchcraft, a development that many viewers of the show unfamiliar with the books saw coming, even if it comes as a surprise to Claire herself. See "The Devil's Mark," season one, episode eleven, directed by Mike Barker, aired April 18, 2015 (Meridian, CO: Starz, 2015), television.

[10] For example, when Claire angrily proclaims, "I truly believe Father Bain would have preferred that boy die rather than I save him," Jaime agrees but also contextualizes Father Bain's behavior within the belief systems and way of life of Highlands: "A man's beliefs are how he makes sense of life and death. If you take that away, what do you have left?" Earlier in this same conversation, Jamie claims to be "an educated man" but also a "Highlander, born and bred." See "Castle Leoch."

Like Claire, Jamie seems prone to speaking his mind despite the fact that doing so might carry serious consequences. For example, he tells Claire that he is an outlaw with a price on his head—information he freely admits is "valuable" and might result in him being turned over to the English for money if it fell into the wrong hands—after knowing her only a few days simply because she "asked" him about himself.[11] Jamie is, in sum, the right blend of "modern" and "pre-modern" to complement Claire, a fact made clear from their very first meeting when she pops his dislocated shoulder back into place and he tries to return the favor by wrapping a clearly chilled Claire in his *féileadh-mór*.[12] Their mutual respect for one another is quickly tested, however, when Jamie disregards Claire's instructions for caring for his arm, opting to fight English dragoons instead, and then threatens to throw her over his wounded shoulder when she resists remounting their shared horse after said battle. In other words, they display fiery wills and a proclivity for sparring alongside a genuine concern for the wellbeing of one another. Clearly this is a match made in ratings heaven, and it relies heavily on strategies associated with popular medievalisms—from ironic hindsight, figured in this particular instance more as foresight, to imagining the past as "productive of postmedieval cultural constructs," including proto-feminism[13]—to position itself as such. One of the best indicators that *Outlander*'s deployment of these strategies is resonating strongly with the show's fanbase is the fact that it was picked up for a second season well before the first eight episodes of the first had finished airing.

The series' much discussed sexual dynamics are likewise a blend of modern and what we might call pre-modern or "medieval." Before being sent back in time, Claire is in Scotland trying to reconnect with Frank after the Second World War had separated them for close to six years, and physical intimacy is central to this process of their getting reacquainted with one another. Indeed, one of the first scenes lauded as establishing the series' less gratuitous and more female-centered approach to sex occurs between these two during a visit to the ruins of castle Leoch—the same castle Claire will inhabit two hundred years earlier in her not too distant "future"—when we see Frank go down on his wife at her invitation. This scene, which does not appear in the book, depicts Claire as confident in her sexuality and capable of enjoying a consensual sexual encounter without being objectified, since undergarments aside, she remains fully clothed throughout.[14] By the end of this same episode, however, Claire is on top of a horse with Jamie after a series of heated encounters that make it clear that he too is a love interest for her. Thus our alliances are, jarringly perhaps, switched from rooting for reconciliation in the present to rooting for the tantalizing possibilities of a "foreign" past within a single episode. Notably, the first thing Claire experiences in the eighteenth century is a near rape at the hands of Frank's ancestor, Jonathan Randall, who happens to look exactly like Frank.[15] This threat of sexual assault by Frank's doppelganger arguably makes it easier for audiences to defect from team Frank to team Jamie and by extension to prefer the Scots to the English, but it also characterizes "premodern" Scotland as dangerous by immediately grounding its difference from the present in the perpetual risk of sexualized violence.

When Claire and Jamie finally do have sex, they do so under the very "medieval" construct of an arranged marriage orchestrated to protect Scottish interests by preventing Claire from being questioned by the English about MacKenzie politics. Their earliest sexual encounter is, therefore, first and foremost a legal necessity even if it is also

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[11] "Castle Leoch." As Claire goes on to point out, telling someone something just because they asked is "no answer. You could have lied. Told me it was none of my business." "I suppose I could have," Jamie replies. "I didn't think of that. I decided to trust you instead."

[12] *Féileadh-mór* is a Gaelic term for the "great" or "belted" kilt worn by many Highlanders before Culloden; it tended to be between nine and twelve yards long.

[13] Juanita Feros Ruys, "Love," in *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, ed. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014), 125.

[14] According to Jenny Trout, the scene helps establish the show's powerful and, unfortunately, unusual appeal to the female gaze by focusing "entirely on her [Clarie's] pleasure. Unlike most Hollywood couplings, there are no flickering candles, no slow strip-teases to reveal her gravity defying breasts or his rippling six-pack. Perhaps the most shocking part of this scene is how graphic it is in its realism; without the usual cues to the viewer that scream, 'you're watching something sexy,' it feels like voyeurism. It looks like sex that anyone could be having." See "Outlander and the Female Gaze: Why Women Are Watching," *Trout Nation*, September 22, 2014, http://jennytrout.com/?p=8049.

[15] Both Frank and Jonathan "Black Jack" Randall are played by the same actor, Tobias Menzies. Claire is ultimately saved from this attack by a Highlander, who then takes her back with him to where the rest of his compatriots are hiding.

technically consensual. It is also a fumbled affair that highlights Jamie's youth and lack of knowledge in at least one area of considerable import—he is younger than Claire and a virgin who happens to think that people mate like horses, from behind.[16] In a reversal of traditional gender roles, it is, therefore, up to Claire to teach Jamie about sexual intimacy, which she does through a combination of conversation and sex acts. The more these two get to know each other, the more they clearly like one another, which translates into better—defined by the logic of the show as mutually satisfying—sex. By the third and final sexual encounter of their wedding night, it is clear that this is not just going to be a marriage of necessity or convenience. Although there is more nudity in this episode than in any of the intimate scenes between Claire and Frank, both Claire's and Jamie's naked bodies are shot similarly and treated as equally important.[17] In her role as teacher, Claire introduces Jaime to the thrill of giving *and* receiving sexual pleasure, ensuring that her desires are satisfied alongside those of her new husband. Having Claire educate Jamie in the arts of sexual arousal is certainly a welcome change from the more common formulation of older man initiates younger woman into "adulthood" through sex. Nevertheless, Jamie's complete lack of sexual know-how prior to the wedding ensures that a degree of that conventional "sexual experience determines power" formulation persists in this transhistorical romance despite its inversion of certain components of stereotypical sexual roles. Flipping a conventional dynamic on its head is not the same thing as successfully challenging or subverting that dynamic, which the second half of the season makes increasingly apparent by having Jamie experience what many heroines, virgins or not, routinely suffer—the complete powerlessness that is associated with rape at the hands of a politically advantaged foe who can and does enact his privileged status in whatever way he sees fit.

We are, in fact, reminded of the precariousness of Jamie and Claire's unique relationship almost immediately after it is first consummated. Upon leaving the bridal chamber to get some water, Claire is propositioned by Dougal, Jamie's uncle and the man responsible for their arranged marriage in the first place. Things go from creepy to downright horrifying by the very next episode when Claire is assaulted not once but twice by two different English soldiers. Indeed, the mid-season cliff hanger finds Claire in a disturbingly familiar position: about to be raped by Jack Randall; Jamie's appearance is what prevents the assault from happening. Avatar though she may be for modern women seeking a version of the past willing to acknowledge their fantasies and voices alike, Claire finds herself in the conventional position of needing to be rescued by her husband on many occasions. Indeed, even when the tables appear to be turned and Claire fearlessly attempts to free Jamie from Wentworth Prison and the clutches of Jack Randall toward the end of the season, this dynamic proves difficult to escape. Jamie ultimately submits to Randall's will in order to save Claire's life after she is caught trying to break him out of his cell. The last two episodes of the season see him tortured and repeatedly raped by Randall, a fate he does not fight because he ultimately values Claire's safety over his own. Prior to Claire's arrival at Wentworth, Jamie has no interest in negotiating with Randall, who offers a noble death in exchange for Jamie's admission of fear, which is, of course, its own form of submission, especially since Randall is the person responsible for the repeated floggings that left Jamie's back so horribly disfigured. Instead of giving him what he wants, however, Jamie attacks Randall and his crony, Marly. Once Claire has been captured, though, and is herself in Randall's clutches again—literally, as he is choking her to death when the "deal" is made—Jamie offers himself in exchange for Claire's release. As a testament of his willingness to surrender completely to Randall, Jamie places a hand that had already been badly mangled during their previous fight in front of his captor, who nails it to the table before demanding a kiss from Jamie in front of Claire.[18]

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[16] "The Wedding," season one, episode seven, directed by Anna Foerster, aired September 20, 2014 (Culver City, CA: Sony Home Pictures Entertainment, 2015), DVD.

[17] As Maureen Ryan puts it, "both characters' points of view, and both bodies were equally important. The camera was interested in everything—in both characters' mental and physical states, in every curve and every limb." I am inclined to agree with her assertion that it "absolutely made a difference" that the episode was written and directed by women as well because, as she observes, "directors and DPs are overwhelming[ly] male. What they don't want to see usually doesn't get shot." See ("'Outlander' The Wedding Episode and TV's Sexual Revolution," *Huffington Post Entertainment*, September 29, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/29/outlander-wedding_n_5896284.html (accessed June 28, 2015).

[18] This act of forced intimacy is clearly meant to hurt both Jamie and Claire in much the same way that destroying Jamie's is. But the extent to which Randall is obsessed by Jamie in particular raises some troubling questions about how the relationship between sexual preference and villainy might be interpreted within the series and the book upon which it is based. On the one hand, Jack Randall certainly seems to derive pleasure from watching just about anyone suffer at his hands, suggesting that he is an equal opportunity sadist, since we see him torture Jamie, his sister, Jenny, and Claire, among others. On the other hand, his

Claire is then forcibly removed from the prison, since she makes it clear through her anguished sobs that she would rather remain with Jamie and, one would presume, suffer with him than be freed.[19] Even at his most vulnerable, Jamie remains capable of making decisions on Claire's behalf in a way that she is not capable of making for him when being victimized herself.

Consequently, while Jamie's torture and rape at Jack Randall's hands certainly places him in a more feminized position than most male protagonists of historical fantasy are likely to find themselves in, those same horrific experiences also ultimately confirm his status as an idealized man by highlighting his willingness to endure the unimaginable on Claire's behalf. The fantasy of a love that merges past and present gender roles to promote an exalted or timeless relationship remains, therefore, grounded in and bound by many of the same gender norms that the show works hard to distance itself from. And because the moments in which this is most apparent tend to conflate violence and patriarchy in the threat of sexual assault, it is hard to comfortably label the show a feminist fantasy about the potential pleasures of choosing traditional or "pre-modern" gender roles over more progressive or "modern" ones.[20] *Outlander* might position its female protagonist as being keenly aware of the issues of consent, desire, and repression as important components of historical change, but she remains limited in her ability to act on this knowledge, and both she and Jamie suffer for it. Thus, as enjoyable and revolutionary as the show may be, it also functions as an important reminder of another uncomfortable truth: an empowered woman is not necessarily the same thing as powerful one.

What, then, is gained by including *Outlander* in our discussions of medievalism? First and foremost, an appreciation of the fact that the past's role as a time and a place full of potential and one full of danger extends beyond the realm of strictly medievalist fantasy. So too does the desire for transhistorical identification. Really recognizing this could open the door for productive, co-disciplinary work on the ways in which different experiences of or expectations for non-modern temporalities influence our understanding of the present and, by extension, the future. As Jonathan Hsy reminds us, "the continued thriving of medievalism studies depends on its capacity to transform and adapt. Medieval studies explores both the affective *and* intellectual modes of cross-identification with the past, and it facilitates intimate exchange between seemingly unlikely disciplinary bedfellows."[21] Imagine the knowledge that might be gained if medievalists, scholars of the eighteenth century, gender theorists, and television critics joined forces to talk to the hundreds of thousands of fans who made Gabaldron's novels global best sellers for the past two decades and have now made the Starz series an international hit in its own right.[22] Second, we stand to learn a lot about the vibrant afterlives of some of the more problematic ideas or occurrences associated with the word "medieval" in general, and their influence on gender roles and gender relations in historical fantasy in particular.

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own sexual arousal is clearly strongest with Jamie; when he attempts to rape Jenny, for example, he is unable to get an erection and has to settle for knocking her unconscious instead. See "Lallybroch," season one, episode twelve, directed by Mike Barker, aired April 25, 2015 (Meridian, CO: Starz, 2015), television. With Jamie, however, he is able to perform sexually on more than one occasion, and he is not always violent while doing so. Amidst the prolonged periods of torture he, in Jamie's words, "made love to me," which is the most traumatic part of the ordeal for Jamie. See "To Ransom a Man's Soul," season one, episode sixteen, directed by Anna Foerster, aired May 30, 2015 (Meridian, CO: Starz, 2015), television. In this way, Jamie's victimization can be seen as evidence of his seemingly universal desirability in a way that most female rapes are not, while the unwanted nature of Randall's attention simultaneously privileges Jamie and Claire's heteronormative relationship.

[19] "Wentworth Prison," season one, episode fifteen, directed by Anna Foerster, aired on May 16, 2015 (Meridian, CO: Starz, 2015), television.

[20] According to Emma Green, "there's an appeal for self-styled feminists—including Claire and, probably, a lot of viewers—to fantasize about 'traditional' romantic and sexual roles, especially if they're the ones who are choosing . . . It's transgressive. It's a small way of reclaiming the patriarchy for ourselves." See "*Outlander*: False Feminism?" *The Atlantic*, August 16, 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/08/outlander-reviewed-is-starzs-new-show-actually-feminist-or-pandering-to-feminists/378637/ (accessed June 29, 2015).

[21] Jonathan Hsy, "Co-disciplinary," in *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, ed. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014), 44.

[22] These fans are, in many ways, akin to the amateurs or dilettantes Dinshaw discusses at length in *How Soon is Now*. In addition to reading and re-reading Gabaldon's books and watching the show, they write fan fiction, recreate the costumes and foods of the eighteenth century, study Scottish history, dedicate whole websites and other forms of social media to the books and/or show, and attend author readings and special screenings with the show's actors.

These ideas or occurrences are not simply medieval or pre-modern, even if they are continuously characterized as such within the collective popular imagination.[23] The inclination to code anything deemed "taboo" or "primitive" as "medieval" reflects our anxieties about the present as much as it does our fantasies about the past, and the affective engagement with medievalism for exploring issues that might otherwise seem dated or unacceptable by a show set in two different postmedieval periods exemplifies the continued relevance of medievalism to a wide variety of historical fictions. Finally, broadening our conception of medievalism to include shows like *Outlander* opens up the possibility that our understanding of other ideas like "modernity" or "progress" might also be expanded to encourage dialogue not just about the ongoing, ever present relationship between fantasy and history, but also about how different audiences are invited to consume and enjoy said historical fantasies.

[23] On the complex relationship between medieval and modern depictions of and reactions to rape as gendered, see Kathleen E. Kelly's excellent reflection on the debate over Sansa Stark's rape. See "What Sansa Stark's Rape Tells Us About Our Own Culture," *Vice*, May 22, 2015, http://www.vice.com/read/a-medievalist-responds-to-sansas-rape-on-game-of-thrones-585 (accessed June 29, 2015).