

SHE BLINDED ME WITH SCIENCE...

The Bluestockings Behind the Quill

What Julia Quinn, Emma Wildes, Samantha Grace, Heather Snow, Erin Knightley and Jennifer McQuiston have in common—and it's not just writing fabulous historical romance!

By Heather Snow

I've been reading historical romance since the day I finished my last Nancy Drew. As I devoured those sweeping tales of love and adventure, I didn't give much thought to the women who wrote them. Or if I did, I imagined them sitting next to their typewriters, sipping wine as they gazed at the picturesque countryside outside of their quaint English cottage. Or sitting in their posh New York apartment, sipping wine (are we sensing a theme here?) while feeding their cats Fancy Feast® off of a china plate like Joan Wilder in one of my favorite movies, *Romancing the Stone*.

What I never imagined was them slaving over a Bunsen burner, dissecting a human cadaver, digging trenches in a bid to save the environment or running all over the world investigating outbreaks of disease.

Until one day, after discovering the delightful stories of Stephanie Laurens, I read in her bio that she has a Ph.D. in biochemistry and used to be a research scientist. Later I learned that Julia Quinn had gone to the Yale School of Medicine before withdrawing to focus on her books. You can't know how exciting I found that information to be. As a woman with a chemistry degree who'd attended medical school herself for two years before deciding it wasn't for me, I was inspired by these other left-brained ladies who wrote incredible historical romance—just as I hoped to someday.

Since becoming an author myself, I've noticed there are several of us in the historical romance author ranks. I started wondering what it was about our genre that drew so many science-minded women to write it. So I decided to conduct a

little not-so-scientific study: I asked six historical romance authors working today the same questions, then analyzed our answers to see if we could determine just what it was we all had in common—and learned it was even more than I thought.

The Subjects and their Qualifications for Inclusion in the Study:

[Julia Quinn](#) — Graduate of Harvard and Radcliffe colleges and one-time Yale medical school student. Also, identified at the age of 13 as one of the top female math students in the United States.

[Emma Wildes](#) — Started college with a scholarship in chemical engineering and went on to graduate with a degree in geology before working as a laboratory manager in the medical field.

[Samantha Grace](#) — Has a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and Masters in Social Work, encompassing social science, psychology and counseling theory.

[Heather Snow](#) — Graduated with a chemistry degree and attended the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine (yes, I am the slacker in this group!).

[Erin Knightley](#) — Has a Bachelor of Science in Marine Science and worked as an environmental specialist.

[Jennifer McQuiston](#) — Has a degree in veterinary medicine and a Masters in Molecular Microbiology, and currently works as an epidemiologist tracking zoonotic diseases all over the world (infections swapped between animals and people).

Let the dissection begin!

Even though you initially chose a career in the sciences, did you always want to be an author?

Four of the six authors answered with a definite yes. The only two dissenters were myself and Jennifer McQuiston, who both decided we wanted to write fiction later in life. Another thing the two of us had in common was that, though we knew we intended to go into science from an early age, we both won awards for English or Literature in school and were tapped to write articles in our careers. I noticed in our answers that even when the authors were detailing their careers for me, they

were so poetic about it. For example, Emma Wildes says, "I chose geology because when you think about it, though it is a science, it is almost artistic. Rocks are as varied as snowflakes."

Conclusion? Beneath our scientific skin beat the hearts of writers, whether we knew it or not...

How long of you been reading historical romance?

Four of the six of us have been reading the genre since we can remember. Jennifer McQuiston says, "It seems as if I went straight from 'Dick and Jane' to historical romance." Three mentioned that they snuck their first either from their mother or grandmother. The two who picked up HR later in life were Erin Knightley, who discovered it while working as a lifeguard in her late teens, and Samantha Grace, who discovered it as an escape from the stress of grad school.

Conclusion? Good habits are most often passed down from earlier generations, but they can be learned ;)

Once you decided to write, why historical romance over other genres?

All of us answered that it was because it was what we liked to read. However, as I suspected, there was a bit more. Samantha Grace says, "I've always been fascinated by history, but that goes back to my interest in social science. What was happening during a certain period and how did that affect ways people interacted?" Jennifer McQuiston adds, "I love reading historical texts and biographies, and when crafting a story, I enjoy the challenge of trying to appeal to modern sensibilities within the constraints of another time." Emma and I made similar statements.

Conclusion? Historical romance not only challenges us, but appeals to our inner researcher.

Do you consider yourself a left-brained, analytical thinker?

It didn't surprise me that all six of us identified ourselves as left-brained. However, five of the six said they were a mixture of both. Emma Wildes says, "I am analytical, but also a dreamer." Erin Knightley says, "I am a very odd mix of left and right brain. I certainly never turn off the analytical side of me. I think that comes through in the research and attention to detail. But the creative side of me come through, too--the characters are real to me, their stories genuine." Jennifer

McQuiston adds, "I am probably more right-brained than most scientists. Luckily, epidemiology is a creative field."

Conclusion? We're a pretty balanced group of ladies! (Except when we're on deadline...then we're a bit unhinged)

Does your left-brain thinking spill over into your writing process?

I think Julia Quinn put it best. "I don't know that it has. I wish it would; I would probably get more done." Several of us expressed some frustration that, while we enjoy the creative process, it's a bit of a different animal than we are used to. Where the left side of our mind might demand we outline, plot, dissect and plan out our work, our right side has different ideas. Coaxing out the prose and the characterization that brings life to our stories turns out to be a lot harder, and a lot more challenging, than we'd expected. Our left brain can also hold us up. Samantha Grace says, "Sometimes I have to stop writing for a day to figure (plot problems) out. I am a linear writer. Until that problem is solved, I can't move forward in the story, even if I know where it's going." I agree entirely!

Conclusion? Our scientific minds can be both a blessing and a curse!

How do you feel your background has helped you as a historical romance author?

Most of us said our experience as researchers has helped us craft stories that feel true to their times. Samantha Grace mentions that her background in psychology has helped her understand her characters better. I think my understanding of chemistry has helped as well in both story development and characterization. There are definite rules to follow in both, but some you can break when you want to experiment. Most chemical reactions require a catalyst to drive them, just like characters require motivation to drive the story forward. And finally, both chemistry and writing, if done well, involve a precise mixture of elements and careful manipulation to achieve that perfect reaction that makes you want to sigh with satisfaction.

Conclusion? No life experience is ever wasted. It's all in how you apply it.

Have you ever used your particular knowledge in a story?

Most of us have. My debut, *Sweet Enemy*, features a Regency-era lady chemist who has to go undercover as a husband hunter to discover who killed her father. I

got to use my knowledge of chemistry to get her out of few scrapes. Julia Quinn says, "I love including medical information in books. It's tricky with historicals because you need to make sure that you are describing the disease as understood at the time. So for example, when I gave a character malaria in *When He Was Wicked*, the symptoms were the same sort one might find today, but characters still thought the disease was caused by 'bad air'". Jennifer McQuiston adds, "My upcoming debut, *What Happens in Scotland*, doesn't feature any infectious diseases of prominence, but I got to invent (through careful research, of course!) the Victorian-era equivalent of a roofie." I think my favorite answer comes from Erin Knightley, however. "I haven't used any of my fancy marine science knowledge...yet! Perhaps there is a sea captain in my future!"

Conclusion? Having a group of modern-day Bluestockings writing historical romance makes for some interestingly rich characters, situations and stories. A win for readers!

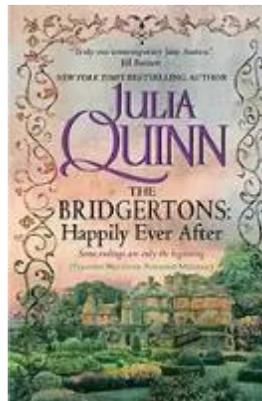
The Bluestockings' Books

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Julia Quinn

The Bridgertons: Happily Ever After

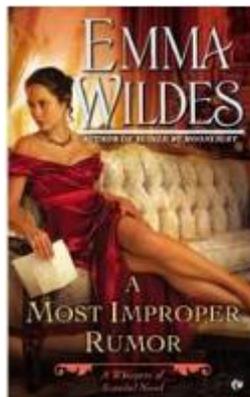
Julia Quinn revisits her beloved Bridgerton family, with all eight 2nd Epilogues finally bundled into one volume—along with a bonus novella about Violet Bridgerton... Harper Collins/Avon, April 2013



Emma Wildes

A Most Improper Rumor

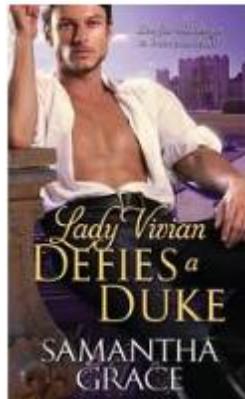
When Benjamin Wallace, the Earl of Heathton, is approached by the most infamous murderess in England to help her clear her name, he finds himself facing a dangerous and cunning adversary... Signet Eclipse, March 2013



Samantha Grace

Lady Vivian Defies a Duke

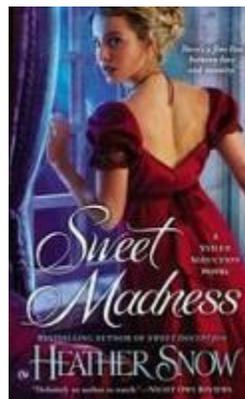
When Luke Forest, the newly named Duke of Foxhaven, arrives at Lady Vivian Worth's country home, he has one thing in mind: convincing his bride-to-be to break the engagement his father secretly arranged on his behalf. Instead, Luke finds himself agreeing to play matchmaker for her. But turning the incomparable Lady Vivian over to another man may be a promise he can't keep... Sourcebooks, May 2013



Heather Snow

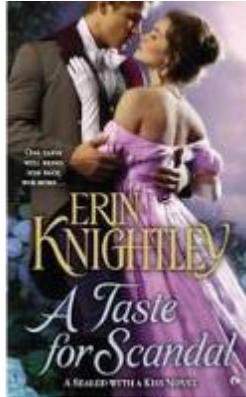
Sweet Madness

Lady Penelope Bridgeman has dedicated herself to studying maladies of the mind, particularly those of soldiers returning from the Napoleonic wars, but Gabriel Devereaux's unpredictable episodes are like nothing she's ever seen. Even though she knows the folly of loving a broken man, she can't help herself from trying to save him, no matter the cost... Signet Eclipse, April 2013



Erin Knightley
A Taste for Scandal

When the charming but rakish Earl of Raleigh turns Jane Bunting's world upside down, the sensible and no-nonsense baker wants nothing more than to be rid of him. Jane proves to be an irresistible challenge for Raleigh, but will his taste for scandal lead to both their downfalls? Signet Eclipse, December 2012



Jennifer McQuiston
What Happens in London

A fun Victorian romp based on the always fun "she woke up married" story, albeit with a handsome Scotsman, a smashed chamber pot, and a mystery to solve. Avon, February 2013

