

A (wo)man's world: Society's norms are challenged in new HBO drama

By Andrew Warren
TV Media

A (wo)man's world: There's never been a historical drama quite like this one. "Gentleman Jack" features a modern woman living in the early 1800s, a member of the gentler sex who is determined to become an industrialist and collect taxes from her family's land — activities that her contemporaries view as decidedly unladylike. Oh, and she also wants to marry another woman.

"Gentleman Jack" is HBO's latest fascinating historical miniseries and is based on Anne Lister's actual diaries, which were written largely in code and remained undeciphered until more than a century after her death. The series, a co-production with the BBC, premieres Monday, April 22.

Suranne Jones ("Coronation Street") stars as Lister, a landowner who returns to her ancestral home after several years of traveling and takes up a lifestyle that is most unbecoming for a lady living in the 1830s. But while her efforts to industrialize her family's estate and modernize her business interests raise more than a few eyebrows, it's her not-so-secret interest in other women that leads to her earning the nickname "Gentleman Jack."

A drama about a historical lesbian needs a love interest, of course, and English actress Sophie Rundle ("Peaky Blinders") fills the role here. She plays wealthy heiress Ann Walker, whose relationship with Lister scandalizes a community that's deeply rooted in its traditional Anglican faith.

Gemma Jones ("Bridget Jones's Diary," 2001), Timothy West ("EastEnders"), Gemma Whelan ("Game of Thrones") and Joe Armstrong ("Darkest Hour," 2017) also star as other members of Lister's family, her neighbors and the movers and shakers around her who struggle to deal with the scandals she leaves in her wake.

The real-life Lister kept meticulous records about her battles with societal norms in her coded diaries, and now HBO has given her unique story the miniseries treatment. "Gentleman Jack" premieres Monday, April 22.



Suranne Jones stars in "Gentleman Jack"

Keeping up with the Conners: Audiences have stuck with the Conner family, and so has ABC. The story of "Roseanne's" revival more than 20 years after it went off the air, its cancellation after just one new season, and the subsequent creation of a new "Roseanne" series minus the show's titular matriarch doesn't need to be retold here, but through all of the scandal and the title changes, ratings have proven that the show's formula is still a winning one.

"The Conners" premiered last fall still stinking of scandal, and while the idea of a show that was basically "Roseanne" without Roseanne Barr sharply divided fans,

the numbers don't lie. "The Conners" is a hit, and ABC has renewed the comedy for a second season.

That's not to say that "The Conners" is as big a phenomenon as the "Roseanne" revival was. Despite keeping all of its other stars, including John Goodman ("10 Cloverfield Lane," 2016), Sara Gilbert ("The Talk") and Laurie Metcalf ("Lady Bird," 2017), "The Conners" experienced a significant decline in audience numbers when compared to the previous year's revival, but that isn't the full story. Even with fewer viewers, "The Conners" was still the highest-rated new show on ABC this season, and it was one of

the top five new shows on any network.

Those are some impressive achievements, and they've proven that audiences want more of the Conner clan — and now that Season 2 is officially a go, they will. Expect the second season this fall on ABC.

Glitzy good boys: Hollywood stars are going to the dogs. In what's fast becoming a holiday tradition, NBC brings the third annual Beverly Hills Dog Show Presented by Purina to TV screens across the nation on Easter Sunday, April 21.

Tune in and watch as more than 1,200 furry friends representing 175 breeds mingle with

Hollywood stars before moving on to compete for the coveted Best in Show title. Actor John O'Hurley ("Seinfeld") and American Kennel Club-licensed judge David Frei serve as hosts, while Maria Menounos ("E! News") and NBC Sports correspondent Mary Carillo provide minute-by-minute commentary on the goings-on in the show ring and among the celebrities in the audience and on the red carpet.

This year's lineup of canine-loving guests is an impressive one and includes professional snowboarder and Olympic gold medalist Shaun White, "Saved by the Bell" star Mario Lopez, "High School Musical" (2006) star Ashley Tisdale and "Mani-

fest" actress Parveen Kaur. Two Triple Crown-winning jockeys, Victor Espinoza and Mike Smith, also plan to attend.

Last year's Best in Show winner, a seven-year-old wire fox terrier named King, went on to win the same title at this year's prestigious Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show in New York City, which has helped to establish the Beverly Hills show as a proving ground for that most established show.

Dog lovers are everywhere, even in Hollywood. Stars and dogs come together for a day of glamour, glitz and tasty little biscuits in the third annual Beverly Hills Dog Show presented by Purina on Sunday, April 21, on NBC.