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Written by Maureen Younger

ARTS

MY Outlander

Maureen Younger talks history lessons, the lessons of history and episode nine. Contains SPOILERS.

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You're history: can Claire (Caitriona Balfe) and Jamie (Sam Heughan) change the outcome for the Jacobites? Photos: Sony Pictures Television/Starz.

For those of us not au fait with 18th-century Scottish history, this week's *Outlander* episode tries to bring us slightly up to speed.

Jamie (Sam Heughan) steps up a gear both as a man and a leader of men and Claire (Caitriona Balfe) is her usual resourceful self. The action is intercut throughout by Claire reliving the trauma of her experiences as a combat nurse in World War II: so

while Jamie and his men prepare for war, we see Claire remember the carnage and human cost that war inevitably brings in its wake. And all of this accompanied by the most amazing soundtrack of Gaelic music you are ever likely to hear: the music evoking the mood brilliantly without ever impinging on the story being told.

And for the last few centuries it's been easy to romanticise the stories told about the old Highland way of life that Jamie and Claire are so busy defending. Jamie Fraser, as its current poster boy, follows a long literary tradition of such Highlander heroes: Alan Breck Stewart from RL Stevenson's *Kidnapped* his most famous literary precedent. (My personal favourite – Ewen Cameron from the trilogy by [DK Broster](#). Any *Outlander* fans looking for another literary Highlander fix, I'd heartily recommend her novels).

And it's easy to romanticise a way of life once it was so ruthlessly extirpated by the British army after Culloden. Not only did it leave summary executions, wholesale murder, rape and widespread destruction in its path but it also ensured the Highlanders no longer posed the threat they had been in the past. And let's face it, it's so much easier to romanticise a people who you are no longer scared of.

Moreover, a justifiable sense of loss at a way of life, forever lost to the mists of time, is no doubt compounded, once you compare what happened to many of the Gaels after the breaking down of the clan system. (Let's just say, there's a good reason why there are so many Scottish Gaelic speakers in Canada).

And thanks to our romantic notions of the old clan system, it's easy to forget that the system was at heart feudal. This meant that many of the men who fought in the Jacobite army were not there out of conviction but because they were nothing more than human rent: it was the price they had to pay to their Chief for eking out a living on his land.

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Thus Jamie's army is full of men, untrained and undisciplined, half of whom, not surprisingly, desert at the first opportunity. And with the arrival of Dougal (Graham McTavish) and the vivid contrast in the way he and Jamie go about training the men, we see the dilemma facing the Jacobite army.

On the one hand, the old way, exemplified by Dougal and the Highland Charge: an effective tool in the past but no match for 18th-century artillery and trained British troops. And then there is Jamie's way, who, as an experienced soldier, knows only too well that soldiers need to be disciplined and trained.

And it becomes yet clearer in this episode that Jamie is a born leader of men. He can inspire his men for sure and is steely determined; he has no qualms in having his men flogged for carelessness nor does he flinch from meting out such a punishment on himself for the exact same reason. Like any good general, Jamie is also proactive, raiding the British camp and putting their guns out of action.

Now called Red Jamie by the British, we get to see another side of his character when he proves ruthless enough, after breaking the arm of a would-be assassin in self-defence, to torture him to obtain the information on British army movements that he requires.

Fortunately for Jamie's reputation as [fantasy male par excellence](#), the torture is soon put a stop to thanks to a clever subterfuge by Claire that proves far more effective in getting the prisoner, Sir William Grey, to talk. Before he leaves, though, Sir William promises to kill Jamie and you do get the feeling that these two will meet again. I really hope though that his threat to kill Jamie is not going to prove prophetic.



As for Dougal, in the end, Jamie refuses to be undermined by him any longer, and in this refusal, we witness a generational shift in power from Dougal to Jamie. Jamie is definitely no longer the 22-year-old boy of season one: here he is, without doubt, a man and a man in charge.

So, as Jamie's men reach the Prince's camp, we already see the seeds of Jacobite destruction. A ragtag army, often led by men like Dougal, undoubtedly idealistic and brave but with no real conception of the realities of current warfare and facing one of the best-trained and well-equipped armies in Europe.

Of course the intriguing thing is that, in reality, the Jacobites came close to succeeding and, perhaps, if the Bonnie Prince had left people like Jamie, such as the real life Lord George Murray, considered by many as one of the most brilliant generals of the 18th century, in charge who knows what might have happened.

Of course as the history books recount, the Prince handed over command to Sir John William O'Sullivan whose utter lack of military perspicacity ultimately led to the bloodbath of Culloden and the destruction of the Jacobite cause.

It will be interesting to see who fares the best with the Bonnie Prince – the experienced soldier Jamie or the idealistic Dougal. Of course if the historical figure is anything to go by, the Bonnie Prince proved yet again that people such as he, with a tendency to believe they have a God-given right to rule and thus inherently know better than anyone else, often make really bad decisions.

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