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BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Bridgerton: Comparison of Selected Aspects of the adaptation with their
(Historical) Models

Bridgerton: Srovnání vybraných aspektů adaptace s jejich (historickou)
předlohou

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis, titled “ Bridgerton: Comparison of Selected Aspects of the adaptation with their (Historical) Models” supervised by PhDr. Tereza Topolovská is a result of my own work and research cited in the “Sources used” section.

I further declare that this bachelor thesis has not been used to attain any other degree.

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ABSTRAKT

Cílem této bakalářské práce je porovnání vybraných aspektů seriálu *Bridgerton*, který je založen na knižní předloze, kterou napsala Julia Quinnová a odehrává se v regentské Anglii, s historickými fakty. Práce se snaží poukázat na rozdíly, které plynou z historicky nepřesných prvků seriálu a odůvodnit jejich zapojení. Teoretická část okrajově zmiňuje teorii adaptace a podrobněji představuje vybrané části života za regentské éry. Praktická část podává stručný popis odchylek seriálu od své knižní předlohy, ale především od historického kontextu. Těžištěm je analýza povahy těchto změn – za hlavní motivaci je považována snaha vytvořit populární adaptaci, která osloví co nejširší moderní publikum.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Knižní série *Bridgerton*, seriál *Bridgerton*, regentská Anglie, adaptace, historické nepřesnosti

ABSTRACT

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to compare selected aspects of the Bridgerton series, which is based on a book written by Julia Quinn and set in Regency England, with historical facts. The thesis seeks to highlight the differences that arise from the historically inaccurate elements of the series and to justify their inclusion. The theoretical part briefly mentions adaptation theory and further addresses selected parts of life during the Regency era in more detail. The practical part gives a brief account of the series' departures from its book model, but pre-eminently from historical context. The focus of this thesis is an analysis of the nature of these changes - the main motivation is considered to be the desire to create a popular adaptation that will appeal to as wide a modern audience as possible.

KEYWORDS

The Bridgerton series, TV series *Bridgerton*, Regency England, adaptation, historical inaccuracies

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1. Introduction

For many years period romance films have proven to be a popular way of an escape from chaotic modern life into a world that seems to be full of emotions, beautiful dresses, and handsome gentlemen. Undoubtedly, the most popular Regency period romance films are adaptations of the books by Jane Austen. The film *Pride and Prejudice* in particular remains a timeless classic. However, recently a new Regency drama has dominated the screens of millions of viewers. In December 2020, the global streaming platform Netflix aired the first season of *Bridgerton*, a Regency period drama and an adaptation of books by Julia Quinn. The first season has been met with great success with unbelievable 625 million hours watched according to a chart on *netflix.com* earning a sixth spot among the most watched Netflix TV shows. The second season has managed to outperform the first with 656 million hours watched which placed the second season in the fourth spot on the list according to the article ‘*Most Watched Series & Movies on Netflix of All Time*’ published on website *whats-on-netflix.com* on June 14th 2023.

As a fan of Regency dramas myself, I decided to focus on *Bridgerton* in my bachelor thesis as I have noticed a number of historical inaccuracies while watching it. Besides determining their nature and motivation of the creators to involve them, I also wanted to find out the reasons behind its popularity.

The primary aim of this thesis is therefore to provide a historical context of the show in order to comprehend its popularity. The subsidiary aim is to detect information that influenced the decision to divert from history and construct a world in a way that would be appealing to modern audiences. For these reasons, the theoretical part of the thesis first provides an insight into the theoretical background of the adaptation process. Moreover, it explores the aspects essential for successful adaptation which are mainly rooted in the findings of Linda Hutcheon and Linda Seger. To provide the necessary context, the theoretical part also refers to the historical background of the Regency era focusing on manners, marriage, and fashion of this specific period. Furthermore, the theoretical part briefly mentions basic information about the writer Julia Quinn and the influential producers of the successful TV-series, Shonda Rhimes and Betsy Beers.

The practical part mainly analyses the first two seasons of the series and discovers the liberties taken by the producers. The main aim is to focus and emphasise the historical inaccuracies and specific approaches that have been made in order to make the adaptation more appealing to today's society. To find the reasoning behind the inaccuracy and justify the producer's decisions. The practical part provides a concise summary of the plot of the first two books *The Duke and I* (2000) and *The Viscount Who Loved Me* (2000), of the original source material by Julia Quinn that directly correspond with the two seasons. Furthermore, it addresses the modern approaches that are typical for today's society but are incredibly historically inaccurate. The topics include the changes in costume design, the addition of feminist elements and racial inclusivity when it comes to casting.

2. Theoretical part

2.1. Adaptation

This chapter aims to clarify adaptation as a process and discuss the most commonly used approaches and methods while adapting literary sources based on history in order to comprehend the liberties made by the adaptor that divert from the original source material.

2.1.1. Condensing or expanding

According to Linda Seger, the author of *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact And Fiction Into Film*, from its very nature, adaptation is a transition, a conversion, from one medium to another. However, it is not a completely identical copy of the first work. Adaptation implies change, a process that demands rethinking, conceptualising, and understanding how the nature of the film is intrinsically different from the nature of written literature (Seger 14).

The adaptor must think ahead and beware potential issues. Certain scenes perform flawlessly in written form but feel awkward and unnatural in front of the camera. The adaptor also has to keep in mind the phase. The primary task of the adapter is to conceive

a plan to fit the original material into different time parameters (Seger 2). In order to make the film adaptation appealing to the viewers, the producers have to take some liberties and in most cases, adjust the story slightly. Depending on the source material which can significantly vary in length from a short story in newspapers to a novel the adaptor can choose from two approaches either to condense or expand the material (Seger 2).

Condensing a novel essentially means losing certain amount of the material, including some subplots, leaving out some themes that might be even lovable parts of the story. In order to provide clear beginning, middle and end of the storyline many scenes or characters are left out. However, cutting and combining characters helps condense an unwieldy novel into a workable form (Seger 3).

Seger also addresses the opposite approach which is frequently chosen when working with a short story – it often involves expansion of the original source material, demanding adding rather than subtracting. There may be various reasons behind it either the story does not have enough characters or they are in a simple situation with no subplots therefore not being as engaging for the audience. By adding and creating new storylines and characters the adaptor provides exciting complications to the basic story to keep the audience interested. These are important to take into consideration especially when analysing an adaptation that differs from the original source material (Seger 3).

2.1.2. Adding a commercial element

Many writers may perceive the adjective “commercial” as a dirty word that implies losing the integrity of one’s project. Producers, however, have been purposely adding various shocking or appealing elements, e.g. a car chase, nudity, or a sex scene to draw the audience, because it has proven to be effective in order to make greater profit (Seger 4).

It is important to remember that entertainment involves a show plus business, and producers need to be reasonably sure that they can make a profit on their investment, hence making changes to attract wider audience. The adaptor and the producers need to make a reasonable assessment about what will work and what will be too difficult and not worth the investment (Seger 5).

It is important for the purpose of this bachelor thesis to acknowledge that racial inclusivity has become a key element in modern adaptations. Maryann Erigha the author of *The Hollywood Jim Crow: The Racial Politics of the Movie Industry*, mentions that racial discrimination has been an issue for decades to actors but producers as well. However, thanks to social movements like Black Lives Matter the film industry began to shift. Now it appears that race is no longer a covert force and is increasingly accepted (Erigha 9). Producers and potentially the film industry as a whole aim to be as inclusive as possible. This resulted in including LGBTQ + characters, couples, and colour-blind casting. Colour-blind casting is the practice of casting actors without considering factors such as their ethnicity, skin colour, body shape, or gender (Downs 181). From a commercial point of view, this is a smart strategy because it can reach a much broader audience.

Another element which proves to be surprisingly effective in drawing bigger audiences is an appealing soundtrack. It is crucial for the adaptor to create an auditory element that would be complementary to the visual experience and ensure that one does not overshadow the other. Soundtracks in films enhance and direct audience response to characters and action. Music also merges with sound effects both to underscore and to create emotional reactions (Hutcheon 41). An effective soundtrack helps to engage the audience and to create a great cinematic experience. Regarding commercialisation, the adaptor can collaborate with popular artists, composers, or singers to allure broader audience.

Simplification and clarification are also ways of making adaptation more commercial. It is necessary to set main characters and their personal traits and avoid ambiguity as much as possible. There is no opportunity to turn back the page, recheck the name, or re-read the description. Thus the adaptor takes one distinct personality trait and assigns it to a specific character to make them more memorable so that the audience does not get confused. As clarity is an important element in commercial viability, creating a commercial and viable adaptation means giving the story a clearer structure, so audiences can easily follow it (Seger 7).

2.1.3. The appeal of an adaptation

An adaptation often comes with an element of pleasure and comfort that comes with full understanding and knowing what is about to happen next, as many may know the original. Perhaps the real comfort lies in the simple act of almost but not quite repeating, rather revisiting a theme with variations (Hutcheon 115).

Another factor that is to be discussed are the fans. Adapters mostly choose source materials that already have enormous fan base therefore having an immense potential for success. It is not only made up only of teenagers and young adults. Adults are just as addicted to sagas like *Star Wars* and *Avengers* that retell and extend a popular story. In some cases, however, what can allure the fans is not the famous story being adapted to a visual form but rather the famous director or producer. Therefore an adaptation of unfamiliar source material can become a sensation based purely on the person who decided to adapt it as it is proven further in this thesis.

The second largest audience for adaptations after the fans are teachers and students (Hutcheon 117). Nowadays, young people are more likely to watch an hour and a half adaptation than read for innumerable hours. However, if the adaptation engages the students the chance of them reading the original book increases. Adaptations are often considered educationally important for children, for an entertaining film might give them a taste for reading the book on which it is based on (Hutcheon 118).

2.1.4. Historical adaptation

This thesis concerns the adaptation of the Regency period therefore it is necessary to address the intricacies of history adaptation. Adapting a piece of history comes with innumerable complications. The representation of historical events in art shapes often the way history is perceived and understood by modern society (Thornely 10). Generally, producers would consult professional historians to portray historical facts accurately. However, historians are often reluctant to provide their consultation and insights because they believed the film was made to fictionalize and mostly entertain the audience and also make money rather than describe and explain how things occurred in the past (Thornely 12). Hence, the first films made based on historical facts were war films representing well-known historical events that happened quite recently and the source material is

verified and reliable. However, with the rise of TV and media, traditional historian' view had to change dramatically.

While traditional historians focused primarily on the accurate representation of the past in feature films, the postmodern turn in historical studies shifted the analytical focus onto “how the past means rather than caring about the things which happened in the past that gave rise to the meaning” (Rosenstone 10). The boundaries between fact and fiction became irrelevant, and postmodern media critics introduced the idea that one can interpret the fictional and factual representation of history in similar ways (Thornely 14).

According to Thornely the process of adaptation can be divided into two parts. One is dealing with a selection policy and the other one is the actual adaptation policy. The selection policy examines the concrete literary sources selected for adaptation. Adaption policy deals with the actual adaptation. It may not be always possible to make a clear distinction between a selection and an adaptation moment. This applies especially to autobiography. When a film features a “based on a true story” caption it already denotes vagueness. Not only the verb “based on” but also the word “story” implies ambiguity. It is not clear whether the story refers to a previously published text or an unpublished story and whether it is factual or fictional (Thornely 14). This creates a safety net for the producers and screenwriters in case they would face accusations about the accuracy of their film. Let's not forget that filmmakers are trained and paid for making up compelling stories, not to tell the truth. From a marketing point of view, a good story is far more vital for the success of the film and the truth is there just accompany the intriguing plot.

2.2. Julia Quinn

Julia Pottinger, better known under her pseudonym Julia Quinn, is an American author who specializes in writing romance fiction. She was born in 1970 and developed an appreciation for literature from an early age. She graduated from Harvard with a degree in Art History. However, she decided to continue studying and applied to Yale to study medicine. In her free time, she started to write light-hearted Regency novels. By the time she entered her first semester, she had already published three books and sold two of them at an auction. After a few months, she decided to leave school in order to pursue her writing career. Quinn's novels were well received. According to her website

juliaquinn.com, after the first book of the *Bridgerton* series, *The Duke and I* was published in 2000, it spent three weeks on the *New York Times* Bestseller list, two weeks on the Publishers Weekly Bestseller list, and five weeks on *USA Today*. In 2003, she was featured in *Time Magazine*. The success kept growing and now she is the author of nineteen consecutive *New York Times* bestsellers. In March 2021, all eight books from the *Bridgerton* series were on the *NYT* list at the same time, a record for an adult fiction author.

Although Julia Quinn focuses exclusively on historical romances she admitted during an interview with Claire White (1998) that she does not do much research for books before writing. She includes general historical knowledge that she acquired from reading historical novels but does not focus on historical details.

Julia Quinn's main focus in *Bridgerton* series, seems to be rather on individual characters. Her books contain very little description when it comes to setting a scene. Rather than engaging in the picturesque detailed description of the ballrooms, gardens or intricate dresses that would draw the reader into the Regency world, her novels are character-driven and oriented. She uses third-person narration and a lot of dialogue and inner monologue to express character's thoughts and feelings.

In general, a romance novel is a kind of fiction genre with its main focus being a romantic relationship between two people. And even though this loose definition can be applied to Quinn's novels perhaps a more fitting definition of the genre Quinn uses is the so-called "bodice ripper genre."

Any film or novel which is set in the past and which includes a lot of sex scenes qualifies as a bodice ripper, especially if it otherwise is of lower literary quality ("Bodice Ripper Definition and Meaning"| Collins English Dictionary).

Based solely on this definition, it is evident that these books are not intended for individuals seeking factual history. What is more the author, diverted her work from historical facts by introducing feminist elements and agenda into the storylines. Thus, Quinn reinvents the romance genre to be more suitable for postmodern feminist society:

"The heroines were doormats, with all these alpha males bossing them around. I can't imagine a romance novel published today where the hero rapes the heroine and she falls in love with him" (Julia Quinn as quoted in *Time Magazine* 2003). Therefore she

took a different approach and made her heroines have feminist qualities such as being independent, resilient, and defying social norms. On one hand, it speaks to a modern audience, on the other hand, it contradicts the prevalent attitude of the times the story is set in. Her male characters usually possess some kind of character flaw or weakness justifying their distant reserved behavior. Often times these shortcomings are based on their previous traumatic experience that gets to be explored by the heroines.

In 2017, her book *The Duke and I* got noticed by a producer Shonda Rhimes and on the 25th of December 2020 the first season of *Bridgerton* aired on the international streaming platform Netflix. According to Netflix's statistics *Bridgerton* became an instant hit with nearly 82 million households streaming *Bridgerton* during the first month after its debut.

2.3. Shonda Rhimes and Betsy Beers

Shonda Rhimes is an African American award-winning television creator, producer, author and the CEO of the global media company Shondaland. Shonda Rhimes was born in 1970 and attended the film school at the University of Southern California. Her career started growing with writing screenplays for films like *The Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement* (2004). Eventually, Rhimes turned to TV series. That is where she accomplished her breakthrough when she created drama series about the lives of surgeons called *Grey's Anatomy*. Her work is known for having strong independent female lead roles, diverse cast and interracial relationships. Rhimes established her own company called *Shondaland* in 2005 and produced many successful TV series such as *How to Get Away with Murder*, *Scandal*, *Private Practice*, and the already mentioned *Grey's Anatomy*. In 2017, Rhimes left traditional TV and made the unprecedented move to Netflix where her production company, Shondaland will now produce content exclusively for the streaming media company (Who We Are). That's how *Bridgerton* became Shondaland's first project for media streaming company.

Betsy Beers is a revered veteran of the film-and-television industry and an award-winning executive producer and creative partner at Shondaland. Over the past two decades, Beers has developed and produced some of the world's most loved, watched,

and talked-about television series. She met Shonda Rhimes while working on TV series *Grey's Anatomy* and they have been working together since.

One day in 2017, Rhimes happened to be in a hotel room that had a copy of the book *The Duke and I*. “I wasn’t into romance novels; I really didn’t even know much about the genre. But I picked it up, couldn’t put it down, and immediately got my hands on the rest of them because they were fabulous” (Rhimes as quoted in *Inside Bridgerton* 9). She immediately passed the books onto Beers. Even though Beers was skeptical at first because period romance was not a genre Shondaland would produce, she trusted Rhimes’s judgement and they both saw potential in Quinn’s modern view of Regency society. Quinn provided a great source for the producers with its modern elements therefore it was easy for them to expand the original thought.

2.4. Regency era

Shondaland did not want a history lesson; they wanted “something new” and unique (Rhimes, Beers 48). However, for the purpose of this thesis, it is only proper to introduce historical facts before diving into the analysis of the Netflix adaptation.

The Regency era was a time period in England following the Georgian era and preceding the Victorian era. The true Regency lasted only nine years. It began on 5 February 1811 when George, Prince of Wales, was officially sworn in as Regent and ended on 31 January 1820 when he was proclaimed King George IV. Yet the term “Regency” is frequently used to describe the period of English history between the years 1780 and 1830, because the society and culture during these years were undeniably marked by the influence of the man who would become George IV (Kloester 1). Moreover, it is often perceived to last longer since George III had a prolonged episode of mental illness in the summer of 1788. Parliament proposed the Regency Bill in 1789. King recovered and the Bill was eventually withdrawn. Had it been passed into law, the Prince of Wales would have been the regent in 1789 (Herman 128).

When talking about aristocracy it includes more than just the royal family. The English aristocracy, or “peerage”, is actually a very small group-a few hundred families-though immensely powerful, structured around inherited titles. Duke/duchess is the highest rank that you can have, followed by marquess/marchioness, earl/countess,

viscount/viscountess, then baron/baroness. Lady and lord apply to anyone in the peerage, though if someone is a duke, you are supposed to refer to him by his title. These titles are either bestowed by the monarchy or passed from father to son. It's a patriarchal society and therefore run by men. Not only did these men hold all the wealth, they also dominated the government (Rhimes, Beers 28).

For much of the Georgian period the peerage had remained largely unchanged but between 1780 and 1832 George III and George IV added one hundred and sixty-six new members to the peerage and by the year 1820 there were three hundred peers in England.

2.4.1. The Etiquette of the upper class

To clearly understand the differences between history and the modern-day adaptation of this period the proper manners of the early nineteenth century need to be addressed - especially the behaviour of the upper class and the position of women in that society.

Children of both sexes were allowed to entertain themselves by participating in various games with their friends or siblings. It was until the verge of approaching adolescence that the girls were confined their physical activities to walking and riding to prevent them from becoming boisterous (Kloester 86).

Jennifer Kloester elaborates on the topic of females in the Regency period in the book *Georgette Heyer's Regency World*. To be born a female, particularly in the upper class, during Regency meant fulfilling high expectations. The role was to represent the gentle sex that balances men's nature by being coy, reserved, elegant, and not having any opinions or ideas of political nature. Innocence was perceived as the most important virtue, that applied to both knowledge and experience. Women of the upper class were actually exceptionally knowledgeable and therefore had to disguise their intelligence, since it was considered disrespectful and unacceptable behaviour. If a woman showed herself to be knowledgeable about the male pursuits like gambling and boxing, or was too familiar with the language of stables and spoke her mind she would become stigmatised as "hoyden" and thus not suitable (Kloester 83).

Apart from learning how to read and write, girls were not expected to acquire education in the same manner that the boys did. However, it was not uncommon for upper-

class women to learn to speak French or Italian, although it was perceived more as a useful social skill rather than an intellectual skill (Kloester 86).

Beauty, taste, modesty, manners, a strong sense of duty and a desire to make a good marriage were esteemed as the most desirable female attributes and girls were trained from birth to abide by the restrictions placed upon them and to conform to their parents' and later their husband's expectations (Kloester 81).

Because of these social restraints imposed on Regency women and girls especially, they often had to repress their natural inclinations. Girl's leisure time usually consisted out of activities they were expected to accomplish by the time they got married. These accomplishments included singing, watercolour painting, dancing, fine embroidery, and the ability to play the pianoforte or the harp. It was almost vital for the debutant to demonstrate her prowess in at least one of the skills as it was essential before entering the Season or in other words making a come-out, which happened at the age of eighteen.

Kloester provides an insight into an upper-class man's life in the chapter *A Man's World*. It was essential for them to have a proper education, hence the learning began at a very early age. At first the boys were taught by a governess or a tutor at home schoolroom and at the age of eight they were sent away to the well established public schools. The most common subjects that were taught included mathematics, history, Greek, Latin, French or Italian languages. The father usually educated his sons in male pursuits such as riding and hunting. At the age of sixteen or seventeen they entered notorious universities such as Oxford or Cambridge. University was considered to be extremely important, although not as much for academic purposes as for creating friendships and powerful contacts that might become convenient in the future. Young men usually spent two to three years at the university before entering society as fully-fledged adults (Kloester 66).

The daily life of bachelors, unmarried men, was a lot less restricted than the life of young women. While women's reputation was of utmost importance, men's reputation was far more resistant to scandal. They could indulge in activities including gambling, drinking in bars, attending brothels, and gaming halls without becoming social outcasts. Even though men displayed behaviour of much looser moral standards in their private life when it came down to elite social circles or public events, balls especially, men were expected to be elegant both in dress and manners (Kloester 63).

There was a difference concerning the male duties if the family had more than one son. The first-born son would inherit the estate and his first responsibility was to the family name and the enhancement of wealth, prestige and power of the family. He had to get married before he was too old to father a son that would carry the name (Kloester 64).

Although the younger sons of the nobility did not have to fulfill the expectations and responsibilities incumbent on the eldest son, neither did they enjoy the wealth and power that came with his inheritance (Kloester 72). In some cases, the younger sons were given an allowance by their father or eventually their oldest brother, and even though it probably would enable them to live their bachelor lifestyle without restrictions, it definitely wasn't enough to provide for a future family. Therefore, they were compelled to find employment suitable for their social status. To secure a good income, upper class men would become clerks, join the navy or pursue politics and fill a spot in the House of Commons or become a diplomat for the Foreign Office. Occasionally, the younger sons would enter the Church, although not for their belief and religious passions but for the financial comfort the position provided (Kloester 71).

2.4.2. Marriage

All throughout the Regency era, one of the most prestigious and beloved activities for the aristocracy and wealthy was hosting various extravagant balls and dancing the night away. The balls provided a perfect environment for courting which oftentimes lead to marriage.

Since the main plot of the *Bridgerton* series is centered around balls and finding a husband, Dr. Hannah Greig, a historian and an advisor for the adaptation, addressed the phenomena of “marriage mart” and “the season” from a historical point of view in the book *Inside Bridgerton*. Young women have been taught to play a social game well and gain a good match that will ensure not only their future but also the future matches for their sisters. They typically have one season, otherwise known as the “marriage mart”, about six months of balls, to find a husband. It was ideal to be married or at least betrothed by the end of their first season and crucial by the end of their second, otherwise they would be facing the stigma of spinsterhood.

Upper-class daughters were thoroughly schooled in what was owed to their family and the family name, and love was not considered an essential requirement for a good match. In some families, if the parents were able to arrange an eligible match, they hoped that the girl might feel affection for the chosen bridegroom; but if not, she was expected to swallow any aversion and marry him anyway (Kloester 95).

In order to understand the way women are portrayed in the adaptation it is important to acknowledge the fact that while the marriage mart seems restrictive, a good match provided a sense of freedom for women. Once the male heir was secured it wasn't uncommon for women to live separately from their husbands. Moreover, oftentimes there was a rather bigger age gap between young women and the lords they married, hence they early became widows (Rhimes, Beers 27-28).

Joan Perkin further explores the laws and marriage of the upper class in the monograph *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* (1988). Although marriage for the English upper classes in nineteenth century was amazingly open and tolerant during this period, it was also a very serious matter (Perkin 50). Property in land and large sums of money were usually involved. The desire and the need for legitimate heirs were powerful considerations, affecting people's deepest-held wishes. Alliance with other powerful families could be forged through marriage ties. Social status could be enhanced. Patronage for jobs affecting the whole family could be procured through the influence which property exerted (Perkin 50). History often portrays men to be the ones, who focus primarily on these concerns, and women are entirely passive creatures, manipulated by fathers and guardians, forced into marriages they did not want and from which they had no escape, and no capability for independent action or rebellion (Perkin 50).

However, after 1749, schemes of inheritance often gave precedence to close female kin, such as sisters or nieces over remote male cousins. Also, once the practice of enforcing a change of name and arms upon fictive kin became common (husbands or sons of women who inherited), owners were more willing to settle their estates on females. We shall be astonished to find, that upper-class Englishwomen with separate estates and income were the most liberated group of wives in the country (Perkin 71-72).

The driving factors in the marriage were wealth and status-and many hoped to find a man who would give them an heir and then, ideally, die. It is wild to imagine that the ultimate promise of marriage was eventual widowhood (Rhimes, Beers 17).

Marriage served mostly as a social and political instrument with no or very few feelings involved. This is probably why most period romances are set in this particular era because falling in love with the person you will marry was improbable. Love was a theoretical concept rather than the most important thing.

2.4.3. Regency fashion

As fashion plays an important part in the lure of *Bridgerton*, a short introduction of typical garments and fashion styles and rules needs to be provided. Many styles and trends converged and flourished during the Regency period. To understand the fashions of the time in the proper context, it is necessary to backtrack slightly into the eighteenth century. France had dominated high fashion for most of the eighteenth century, but developments at this time showed a decidedly English taste asserting itself (Cole).

2.4.3.1. Women's clothing

Regency style was heavily influenced by Neoclassicism which put emphasis on simplicity, elegance and comfort. The gowns were high-waisted with skirts gathered under the bust, which did not accentuate the waist compared to the previous periods. The fabrics used at that time were much more lightweight, sometimes almost transparent. This would have been impossible to wear during the winter season in England. As a result, they started producing fabrics using wool and other thicker materials. Skirts were gathered under the bust and often with more fullness at the back to allow women to walk and move freely. Dresses were commonly embroidered with white thread creating a white-on-white style that was extremely popular while keeping the garment simple and flowing. This contrasted sharply with tight and heavily embroidered gowns worn in previous decades.

Fashion moved away from expensive and highly decorated items that only the wealthy could have afforded. Clothing style became plainer, however, ladies preferred to

look outstanding and well-dressed so plain white garments were highlighted with subdued embroidery and simple frills to the hem of the sleeves. Thus, a lady could remain within the boundaries of simplicity while her gowns could have been unique (Love 39).

White was the most fashionable colour for dresses. It continued to be popular in the following decades, especially for young women, largely because it was associated with purity and innocence. White cotton muslin, embroidered with white thread or left plain, was the height of fashion. The finest muslin was imported from India in great quantities (Rushton).

Corsets and stays were a crucial part of the undergarments. Not only did it provide support for the breast but was also used to create silhouette and fashionable shape. It also prevented the fabric from wrinkling and riding up. They were designed to fit around an elevated waistline also sometimes called Empire-line which circled directly under the bust. They remained hidden under the loose gowns while still supporting the chest that was additionally accentuated by the fashionable square-cut or low-cut necklines.

In the Regency years, if a woman fainted it was not usually because of a tight corset, as they were fairly soft and flexible due to being reinforcing by stitching, rather than excess stiffening from whalebone or metal as seen in later years (Love 9).

Love further elaborates on the dresses and accessories dividing them according to the specific events. A rigid etiquette dictated the styles of clothing that must have been worn for every specific occasion from morning to night by women, men and children. There were gowns worn for every day activities such as reading, sketching, playing music, knitting and sewing and more elaborate embellished evening gowns for balls and formal events.

According to Love, Regency was a grand period when it came to accessorising. Accessories had the opportunity to stand out when combined with understated dresses. Most common accessories were fans, parasols, shawls and reticules.

Fan was the most vital accessory. It provided a cooling effect during summer but it also served as a method of hiding blushes and having private conversations. Fans were usually made out of bone, wood or ivory decorated with tiny carvings, paintings, lace, jewels or feathers.

Parasols were essential piece for the promenade. It was light umbrella-shaped piece of accessory made of cotton, silk or linen that provided shade during summer days preventing exposure to sun and helping to avoid undesirable freckles.

Reticules were equivalent to today's purses. They were small elaborately embroidered pouches made out of various materials to carry small items like a handkerchief, mirror, coins powder or any necessity a woman may need.

Similarly to fans, shawls also served a dual purpose. They provided warmth but also displayed status and wealth. Shawls were commonly imported from India, hence they were mostly made out of cashmere.

Women styled their hair into braided updos with small soft hair strands framing their faces. This was to imitate the antique Roman style that was considered the standard of beauty. Furthermore, having the hair pulled back helped to accentuate the neckline. For formal occasions such as a ball it was fashionable to wear a tiara or even a wreath of flowers in one's hair but for presentations at Court it was required by etiquette to wear ostrich feathers (Kloester 245-246).

2.4.3.2. Men's clothing

While women were enjoying more comfortable loose gowns, men were not as lucky. Although, men's clothing also witnessed the abandonment of heavy embroidery, lace and other embellishments, it became tight-fitted. Men's wear consisted of breech, tail coat, waistcoat, vest and a linen shirt that often featured frills (Kloester 213).

Breeches were light-colored and of knee length, often with hem trim to match the coat and with buttons and buttonholes to fasten them at the knees. Breeches usually had a drop down front waist flap with buttons for easy access (Love 10).

A shirt was an important undergarment for a man as it protected outergarments from the gentleman's sweat and body's oils, helped preserve modesty under tight breeches, and in an emergency doubled as a nightshirt. Shirts were almost exclusively white and usually had starched chin-high necks to accommodate an array of elaborate cravats (Love 35).

Vests or waistcoats were sleeveless pieces of undergarment worn over the shirt reaching just below the waist providing another layer of protection and also serving as an area for decoration.

Similarly to women having various types of dresses for different occasions, men had different types of coats that could be divided into morning, shooting and dress coats. Dress coats were the most common with an open cut away in the front and a tail in the back. Generally, the coats were made from wool of varying colour palette, but mostly presented only one solid colour.

Cravats were a type of formal accessory for men, however they looked differently from the ones we know today. They were most commonly white and resembled something between a scarf and a modern tie. It was a long piece of fabric that would be tied around the shirt and then tucked into the shirt itself. An even more formal alternative to a cravat was stock. It was a much smaller piece of white cloth that would be tied around the neck and hooked with a buckle.

Gloves were essential for outdoors or for formal occasions and a gentleman might also carry accessories such as a cane, quizzing glass or, in inclement weather, an umbrella.

During the Regency period wigs were considered out of fashion and were worn only by older generations or at Court. Men wore their hair short with just enough length to be waved or curled. The hairstyle was inspired by an antique Grecian style, however, the main aim was to look as natural as possible without any indication of the time required to achieve it (Kloester 244).

3. Practical part

3.1. The Bridgerton series

Bridgerton is a book series consisting of eight romance novels following the love life of a wealthy noble family living in London during the Regency era. This novel series includes *The Duke and I* (2000), *The Viscount Who Loved Me* (2000), *An Offer From a Gentleman* (2001), *Romancing Mister Bridgerton* (2002), *To Sir Philip, With Love* (2003), *When He Was Wicked* (2004), *It's In His Kiss* (2005), *On The Way to the Wedding* (2006).

The Bridgerton family has nine members: a widowed viscountess with eight children that are named in alphabetical order – Anthony, Benedict, Colin, Daphne, Eloise, Francesca, Gregory and Hyacinth. The mother, Violet, experienced a great love story with her late husband and wants the same for her children. Therefore, she does not encourage them to find a good match when it comes to materialistic qualities, but pushes them to find true love. Each book follows the love story of each sibling. So far only the first two novels have been adapted– *The Duke and I* and *The Viscount Who Loved Me*.

3.1.1. *The Duke and I* (2000): Synopsis

The first novel from the Bridgerton series focuses on the eldest daughter Daphne. Daphne has attended two seasons already which would make her approximately twenty years old. She is described as a beautiful young lady who is quick witted, funny and kind, however, no one is dazzled by her beauty. One of the men even described her as “positively normal” (Quinn 11).

Her love interest is a close friend of her oldest brother the new Duke of Hastings, Simon Basset. Simon experienced a rough childhood. His mother died during birth and because he was born with a stammer, his father proclaimed him an imbecile. He was raised by Nurse Hopkins and even though he eventually managed to moderate his stammer to almost normal speech, his father still resented him. The feeling became mutual and while lying on a deathbed as revenge, Simon swore to his father, to never sire an heir, and to have his bloodline die with him.

They first meet while Daphne is arguing with one of her suitors about rejecting his marriage proposal. As a result of his intransigence, Daphne delivered a punch to his face, and Simon witnessed everything and acquired an admiration for her. After few dances and lighthearted conversations, they share their discontent when discussing courting season. Daphne is tired from being dragged from one man to another by her mother, and saddened by the lack of interest in her. Simon complains about the constant attention from the debutantes. They decide to form an agreement that would benefit both of them, that is to appear as if they are courting one another which would make Daphne look more desirable and Simon would not have to face so many debutantes. This, however, does not go as planned, because both of them eventually develop feelings for

each other. When Daphne's brother catches them kissing, which is highly inappropriate behavior for a lady, they are forced to get married so that Daphne's reputation is not ruined.

At first, the marriage seems to work, they move to Clyvedon and they both declare their love for each other, but after some time the problems start to arise when Daphne begins to long for a child. Simon explains his reason for not wanting a child and shares his past with his father. Although Daphne tries, she ceases to understand the logic behind his reasoning. One night after their first big quarrel, Daphne takes advantage of Simon who is under the influence of alcohol, and forces him to make love. This act results in a huge fight and even though Daphne did not manage to conceive a child she leaves back to her family house. When she has an accident while on a horse ride, Simon saves her and proclaims his undying love for her. He finally surrenders and agrees to have a baby and start a family with her, because his love for Daphne is stronger than hatred for his father. It's a boy for the Duke and Duchess of Hastings - after three girls, society's most besotted couple has finally produced an heir (Quinn 187).

3.1.2. *The Viscount Who Loved Me* (2000): Synopsis

The second book from the series follows the love story of the eldest son and Viscount Anthony Bridgerton as he finally decides to leave his bachelor days behind and declares his intention to marry. Anthony grew up in a loving family but his greatest love, respect, and admiration were for his father. Anthony witnessed his father die right in front of his eyes from an allergic reaction to a bee sting. As a result, Anthony inherited the title of Viscount at the early age of eighteen. He was profoundly affected by his death believing he could never surpass such a great man not even in life expectancy. Therefore he is convinced that he would die young exactly like his father did.

Meanwhile, there is the Sheffield family consisting of a widowed mother Mary with her younger daughter Edwina and an older step-daughter Kate. They are getting ready for Edwina's first Season. While Edwina is excited to find a good match on the Marriage Mart, Kate is pessimistic and convinced she will grow old as a spinster. She is twenty-five after all. Nevertheless, this fact didn't spare her from male attention. Edwina, who values her sister's opinion above all else, publicly announced that she wouldn't marry

anyone her sister does not approve of first. The suitors come to Kate with hopes to win her over and have her permission, including Anthony Briderton who chose Edwina to be the best available option for marriage. Kate has read a gossip column earlier about the Viscount being a rake, therefore definitely not a suitable husband for her sister. When Anthony is introduced to Kate at the first ball of the season they immediately do not get along.

The next day Anthony comes to visit Sheffield's residence to see Edwina, sadly he finds out that only her sister is present. They take a walk in the park to find her, unfortunately, Edwina has an accident and falls into a lake resulting in illness and Edwina can not attend the following balls. Anthony gets stuck at the balls with Kate and despite her brash demeanor, he finds himself being attracted to her. The next ball is held at Bridgerton's residence, Kate gets overwhelmed and unknowingly hides in Anthony's private study. When Anthony finds her they get into a heated argument about his rakish behavior. In the middle of their argument, Anthony kisses her.

Days later the Sheffields are invited to Bridgerton's country home for a party hosted by Anthony's mother Violet. Anthony finds Kate and apologises for the kiss and assures her that he still wants to pursue her sister. Kate feels hurt but keeps her feelings hidden because she puts her sister's happiness over her own. However, they aren't able to keep their distance and Anthony comforts Kate during a stormy night that caused her to experience a panic attack. Things escalate the next day when Kate is stung on her collarbone by a bee. Anthony gets upset and terrified of witnessing another person that he cares about die and in order to prevent this from happening he attempts to suck the venom out of her chest. This act gets noticed by Mary, Violet and Mrs. Featherington, a local scandalmonger. Having been caught together unchaperoned in a compromising situation and the likelihood of gossip caused by Mrs. Featherington's presence leads to an agreement. Anthony and Kate will marry within a week. Edwina is understanding and supportive of their wedding since she noticed Anthony being smitten with Kate from the beginning.

On their wedding night, Anthony makes it clear that their marriage is built on friendship and mutual respect and understanding but they will never fall in love. Kate is devastated because she already developed feelings towards him. Anthony desperately tries to avoid falling in love with Kate, therefore he pretends to be busy, trying his best to

distance himself. However, his plan falls apart when Kate gets into a carriage accident. Anthony comes to her rescue and finally confesses his love for her.

3.2. Storyline differences between books and Netflix series

There are currently two seasons based on the first two books streaming on the platform Netflix with each season containing eight episodes. The books are a great source material since they are composed mainly out of dialogues enabling a lot of creative freedom for the adaptors. The producers and creators of the adaptation have made some fundamental changes to the original story. They decided to enrich their adaptation by adding subplots and creating new storylines following the expanding approach mentioned in chapter 2.1.1.

In order to make eight episodes per season they added major plot adjustments to make the main storyline longer. The culmination of the love story between Daphne and Simon in the first season is postponed by the introduction of Prince Friedrich. The Prince serves as an opponent to Simon and creates a suspension and a diversion from the main plot. They executed this similarly in the second season as well. By having Anthony almost marry Edwina they managed to postpone the climax of the love story by at least two episodes.

In both cases, the production team constructed a third-party situation sometimes known as a love triangle. The purpose of this was mainly to build up suspense. The audience already knows which characters are going to end up together therefore it's the rocky journey of ups and downs and unexpected twists that make the key entertainment. In addition, by making the love story more complicated it becomes more relatable for the audience because things in life, especially those concerning love, go smoothly very rarely. There are many additional subplots and storylines such as the life of the Featheringtons but these are irrelevant for the purpose of this thesis and therefore will not be mentioned or discussed any further.

3.3. Adjustments for the modern world

The main purpose of *Bridgerton* was not a history lesson. Even though the producers stayed true to the period of Regency to some extent, they also took a more modern approach. Their main aim was to explore the world of Regency and the characters through a contemporary lens. In this context, it works rather well since the stories themselves are timeless and universal and could easily happen today. There were no dating apps during that time, but the producers involved a parallel to modern world by essentially implying that finding a match during the season is similar to finding a match on a dating app. Basically, the producers and creators of the show aimed to make a modern love story in period clothing.

3.3.1. Racial inclusivity and addition of Queen Charlotte

Perhaps the biggest character addition that deviates from the books and is entirely constructed by the production team is Queen Charlotte. She plays a major role in the series, attends the balls and gets to see all the fresh young ladies entering society for the first time, and names the most beautiful one ‘the diamond of the season’ essentially guaranteeing a good match and marriage by the end of the season.

The real enrichment produced by the addition of this character is due to the fact that she is played by an actress Golda Rosheuvel who is a British actress born in Guayana. Rhimes and Beers discuss this choice further in their book *Inside Bridgerton*. They admit that even though they hired historians and experts to develop the structure of Regency life, they took a great deal of liberties. They justify their intention with ambiguous findings about the real Queen Charlotte that suggest her being allegedly of African origin. According to Erin Blakemore’s article in *The National Geographic*, the first debates about her descent commenced with a portrait painted by Allan Ramsay where she is depicted as having darker skin. However, this painting is an exception and other portraits certainly illustrate her as a Caucasian. And rightfully so, it is indisputable that Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz was German and even though there is some speculation about her ancestral ties to Portuguese aristocracy, that could potentially make her biracial, there is no reliable evidence to support this theory. Furthermore, the ancestors were so distant the likelihood of them affecting her look is significantly low. As Blakemore further states, those who are

confident about her having black ancestors are convinced the portrayal of the queen as light-skinned is merely an adjustment to conform with the era's Eurocentric ideals of beauty. This belief is driven by the modern conception of race rather than legitimate historical facts and rationality.

Shondaland is known for producing shows with racial inclusivity, hence it appears as though Rhimes and Beers took advantage of this rumour to advocate for including characters of other than Caucasian race in Regency period. Whether they truly believe this theory or use it purely as a justification to include people of colour is disputable. This decision could have been made in order to please Shondaland's fans that are used to seeing racial diversity in motion pictures by Shondaland's production. As it is mentioned in the chapter 2.3.1. knowing the audience can have an immense impact on future success of the adaptation. They do address this decision in their book, clarifying that they created an alternate version of history. It is also implied in the series by Lady Danbury who said: "We were two separate societies divided by colour until King fell in love with one of us." Queen Charlotte became a tool for expanding the view of people of colour in that society. It enabled the possibility to populate the show in a way that was different from usual period piece (Rhimes, Beers 10-22). It also raises a question if this approach would still be taken if Rhimes herself was not African American and fighting for racial equality.

People of African descent definitely lived in England during Regency, however, they were all working class, which made this decision anachronistic. It seems as though the casting was entirely color-blind which is discussed further in the chapter 2.1.2. Rhimes and Beers explicitly clarified that their casting is not color-blind. They knew specifically which characters will be of different race before the casting began.

Besides Queen Charlotte, there are numerous members of the upper class played by British actors of African descent. The most prominent ones are Simon the Duke of Hastings and Lady Danbury. Actress Adjoa Andoh, who portrays Lady Danbury, mentioned she was stunned when the producers wanted her to play an upper-class woman and for the book *Inside Bridgerton* started: "I needed to know that this was an opportunity to be in it—and also that I was expected to be myself, a Black woman, not a Black woman pretending that she is white. I needed to know that the auditions

weren't color-blind. Because when we say we're color-blind, whose color are we being blind to? I am the color I am".

African origin is not the only ethnicity included in the series. The women from the Sharma family are Indian representing the nobility of South Asian descent. This is an essential liberty taken by the producers that unlike having Black British aristocracy has a higher potential and probability of actually happening. Durba Ghosh, a professor of history at Cornell University addressed this in an article for *BBC History Magazine*. She provided the information that at the turn of the nineteenth century the elites from South Asia circulated through London the heart of the empire and socialising among high society. They were considered aristocracy because of their status in India and the women were educated and fluent in English. Even though having a high-class English gentleman marry an Indian noblewoman at that time is still improbable, the historical likelihood of it happening is still significantly higher than having a dark-skinned upper class pre-eminently the Queen.

3.3.2. Feminist elements

As it was previously mentioned in the chapter 2.2., Quinn's female characters possess powerful feminist qualities. These qualities have been magnified accentuated and multiplied by ten in the adaptation. The heroines but also side female characters are quick-witted, educated, independent, they flout conventions of the society and are not afraid to defy a man. Even though it has been frequently repeated in interviews and books by both Rhimes and Quinn that *Bridgerton* is an alternative fictional reality, from a strictly historical context these heroines are disobeying the rules of etiquette defined in the nineteenth century which are discussed closely in the chapter 2.4.1.

Daphne is the least feminist heroine in the series. She is conventional and well aware of her position and recognises that she has no value without marriage and only through marriage can attain her goals and therefore follows the rules in order to secure a match on the marriage mart that is further addressed in the chapter 2.4.2. She was raised to obey social rules to be essentially perfect. Although she might not be as defiant as other female characters she is still empowered. Instead of rebelling conspicuously against the society she adjusts and invents her way how to achieve her goals within the social

structure. Thanks to her conformity she is able to attain her place in the society. Her most feminist action and biggest disregard towards historical facts is punching Nigel Berbrooke. Even to oppose a man verbally was deemed as inappropriate behavior to go as far as to attack a man physically would make a woman condemnable. Phoebe Dynevor addressed her role in the book *Inside Bridgerton* and her approach in making Daphne more relatable for modern audience. She correctly assessed that a person experiencing such pressure on being flawless would suffer immensely from anxiety pointing out the parallel to modern life where women experience the same pressure to perform perfection. Women and young ladies especially may not be judged by others on the marriage mart but are judged nonetheless by others not only in real life but on social media as well. The stress of attaining the beauty standard and being compared with other ladies on the balls corresponds with women today being constantly compared to models. In a way, the world of Bridgerton mirrors today's society or perhaps the society does not change but the technology and outer circumstances do.

Another strong leading female character is Kate Sharma. She is the main female character in the second season. Unlike Daphne, Kate is convinced she will never marry and live a life as a spinster. However, her decision is not driven by the urge to refute the social construct. She considers her primary and sole purpose in life is to marry her younger sister Edwina off. By putting Edwina's happiness above hers and focusing purely on securing Edwina's future, she overshadowed even the mere thought of having someone who would marry her. Therefore she did not indulge in typical ladies' activities and did not learn to dance, sing or play an instrument and took pleasure in male activities such as hunting. Having no interest in finding a husband Kate considered following social etiquette as a pure waste of time, which might make her a feminist from the modern point of view. She is not rebelling against the social regulations per se, however, she contradicts them for she has no interest in swooning around men and sees no added value in becoming a married woman. The showrunner Chris Van Dusen mentioned in an interview with *Teen Vogue* that Kate's character was inspired by an Indian figure Baiza Bai. She was a ruler in the first half of the nineteenth century and unlike the majority of female royalty, she learned to be a masterful swordswoman who knew how to handle a firearm, and never side-saddled. She sat astride like the men did (Bridgerton Showrunner Talks Kanthony, Deleted Scenes, Harry Styles, and More). Even though Kate's demeanor may be viewed as

empowered and appeal to the modern world according to Regency etiquette Kate would be perceived as “hoyed” and condemned as an unsuitable match for marriage as addressed previously in chapter 1.4.2.

Although both characters carry certain feminist qualities, they can not come even slightly close to the extent of feminist aspects represented by the character of Eloise Bridgerton. Eloise is the second oldest daughter in the Bridgerton family and she is portrayed as a true feminist in the series, the one who charges against society with force. She serves as a sharp contrast to her older sister Daphne. Daphne aims to be the perfect daughter, sister, and potentially a perfect wife and acts according to the social norms whereas Eloise desperately wants to break out of the constraints. Unlike Daphne, she struggles to learn the ways of how to be a proper lady but that is essentially because she does not want to be one. For Eloise, the mere idea of being flawless and appealing in the eyes of society is the jail she wants to escape from. Thanks to her privilege and family status and thanks to Daphne as well she is allowed to have more latitude in her life. With Daphne fulfilling her role as the oldest daughter that married well basically guaranteed future success for her sisters when it comes to marriage. Therefore she lifted a lot of pressure to perform well during the season allowing Eloise to explore other passions in life. She even acknowledges this in the series by saying to Daphne: “Thank you for being so perfect, so that I do not have to be.” Her main interest does not lie in pompous balls and securing the perfect husband, her passions are about the world of academics and literature, however, her biggest excitement comes from pure living and the feeling of freedom. Eloise has a desperate desire to be more in life than what society has deemed to be appropriate. What needs to be addressed is that from a historical point of view, Eloise would be quite radical. A historian and an advisor for the Bridgerton series, Dr. Hannah Greig speaks in detail about her character in the book *Inside Bridgerton*. By pushing against the future that she sees laid out for her, and resisting society’s expectations, she feels very familiar—and some might say modern. Although, she is not simply “modern,” but she also captures what some women of the time felt. Many daughters of aristocrats, like Eloise, were highly literate. They had access to extensive libraries, they read newspapers, they met interesting people. They were able to engage with new ideas that would now be called “women’s rights.” In Regency England, there were many writers arguing for women’s access to education, to politics, to a life beyond marriage and

motherhood. Eloise mentions her summer reading list which includes Mary Wollstonecraft who is considered to be one of the founders of feminism focusing on women's rights. That's her greatest source of inspiration (Rhimes, Beers 88-90). With all these facts taken into consideration, there is a slim chance Eloise would be able to maintain her position and status during the Regency period based solely on the fact she came from a noble wealthy family in the first place but ultimately and more likely would struggle with being a social outcast and probably would never marry relying on a wealth of her family to financially secure her.

3.3.3. Contemporary rendition of Regency wardrobe

The Regency fashion was previously discussed in chapters 2.4.3.1. and 2.4.3.2. but the showrunners of the series decided to put a modern twist to the Regency clothes. Overall they managed to recreate the clothes remarkably accurately by paying attention to detail and focusing on the high empire-line waist which was fundamental for the typical Regency silhouette. The styling of the dress is where the designers took some liberties and what makes them different from the history. The most fashionable colors were pale shades such as cream, white, and beige with light embellishments as described in the chapter 2.4.3.1. The Netflix series does abide by the Regency aesthetic to a certain extent.

Dr. Hannan Greig, a fashion historian addressed the fashion as: "Members of Regency society spent a vast amount on their wardrobes because every dress was scrutinized. They were always on a stage, even if they were just promenading in Hyde Park. It's probably useful to think of that world as a permanent red carpet" (Rhimes, Beers 124).

The costume designer for the series, Ellen Mirojnick shares her process of creating the costumes in the boom *Inside Bridgerton*. The design team was assigned a task to establish the show's sensibility and colour palette. The main purpose was to come up with a seductive, aspirational, romantic, Regency world that would still connect with a modern audience. The task was to enhance the Regency period, not to bastardise it. Dr. Hannah Greig further spoke about the colour intention as something that could be realistic. She pointed out that clothes displayed in museums are two hundred years old, faded, and antiqued, moreover, the museums are usually interested in collecting pieces regarded as

tasteful whereas bad aesthetics were filtered out. If one was to look at the clothes when they were brand new the colors would be vibrant. The showrunners wanted a bright technicolor universe that would feel both relatable and escapist. It became crucial for the team, they must invent an entirely new look for all the costumes, hence they had to build everything and renting costumes from costume houses was not an option since nothing would comply with their vision. The aim was to have an audience perceive *Bridgerton* as a period romance but subconsciously feel that there is something relevant and current about it as well. By having to create all of the costumes the financial plan had to be reassessed. The costume designers managed to procure the world's finest couture fabrics from New York, Florence, London, Rome, and Madrid. The design formula was to create hundreds of basic garments that could be eventually embellished. A staggering amount of clothes was created. In total, there were seventy-five hundred pieces of costume made including all of the period-specific underwear (Rhimes, Beers 73-79). Corsets were indispensable pieces of garments designed to accentuate the waist. Rhimes and Beers elaborated on corsets and used them as an analogy for women's status in society. Not only were corsets hard to breathe or move in, but it was also impossible to put them on without help. This mirrors how society restrained women from speaking their minds and had them voluntarily strap themselves into something that impedes every woman's agency. Moreover, corsets emphasized the chest making the female silhouette into a vase with the bosom flowering out at the top becoming the epitome of female objectification (Rhimes, Beers 197-204). This is a subtle metaphor developed by the creators and it is occasionally addressed in the series and does open the subject of previously mentioned feminism.

Daphne Bridgerton is the only one who invariably wears white or very light shades with unobtrusive embroidery, tiny accessories, and practically no adornment. The stylists decided to do this in order to capture and accentuate her elegant and refined personality. With Daphne being the diamond of the season, therefore declared the most beautiful young lady of the season, it was an excellent choice to employ this colour palette since it is simple yet tasteful and does not distract one away from her natural beauty. Similarly to Daphne, Edwina Sharma being announced as the diamond of the following season, was also assigned a light-coloured wardrobe, however, her dresses fall mostly under the pink colour spectrum, as that is the signature colour of the Sharma family. One can see other

characters wearing white, although rarely and only on special occasions such as weddings or balls celebrating an engagement.

The Sharma family members have slightly different wardrobes from the rest of the ton to stress their Indian heritage. Even though the showrunners and producers maintained the Empire-line waist and the overall silhouette of the Regency period they used Indian fabrics and Indian-inspired embroidery and jewellery from rose gold (Rhimes, Beers 139). It is important to address that each family in the ton was assigned a typical colour and the family of Bridgerton possesses blue or green shades, the Featheringtons orange and yellow, and the Sharmas wear pink or violet.

Even though the Featheringtons are supporting roles their wardrobe needs to be discussed for it is historically the least accurate of all. Their dresses are trumpery and pompous embellished with grotesque flowers and flower embroidery. The use of gaudy shades of yellow and orange with extravagant jewelry completely diverts from the historical data. The thought process behind this decision was mentioned by the producers. The Featheringtons have no status and financially struggle. The goal was to convey that Lady Featherington wants to compensate for not having a title, she feels she needs to telegraph it through the opulence of her dress. The Featheringtons are new and they desperately want to fit in. Ironically, Lady Featherington only knows how to do that by standing out and drawing as much attention to herself and her daughters as possible (Rhimes, Beers 129). Choosing a dress like this for a Regency drama could be excused by acknowledging what was previously mentioned, that tasteless gowns are not collected in museums nor are they represented in any paintings of that time. Technically there is a possibility of them existing in the past.

Costume designers most certainly broke conventions when styling men. Men's fashion during the Regency period as discussed further in chapter 1.4.4.2. included breeches, a shirt, a vest, a tailcoat, and a cravat or stock. The designers wanted the men to look as fashionable and handsome as possible which the traditional Regency clothing did not provide, hence they decided to take certain liberties. Simon does not wear white breeches, he wears black trousers instead, even though the designers managed them to look period they are unquestionably constructed in a different way and different colors. They also completely abandoned the stock and preferred the male characters more casual by opening up their shirt collar and instead of a cravat they tethered a simple scarf

(Rhimes, Beers 137). The main reason behind omitting the stock and neckcloth was the intricacy of its proper fitting. To perfectly tie a neckcloth requires considerable skill. Furthermore, the fashion designers did not like the complete coverage of the neck and stocks made the male characters look cumbersome.

3.3.4. Music

Probably one of the most modern twists from the series is the accompanying music. Alexandra Patsava, the music supervisor for the series, addresses the soundtrack in the book *Inside Bridgerton*. She explains that the most commonly used instruments during Regency were those falling under the string category such as pianoforte, violin, harp, and cello. Similarly to the costume design the creators wanted to achieve a soundtrack containing Regency references, yet to be modern as well. They decided to assemble an accompanying soundtrack consisting of instrumental covers of today's popular songs. The soundtrack includes covers of world-renowned singers like Billie Elish, Ariana Grande, and Miley Cyrus. This was an excellent approach taken by the producers in order to add an auditory element to enhance the audience response as mentioned previously in chapter 2.1.3. To perform and perfectly execute these songs, Alexandra Patsava hired the Vitamin String Quartet and further she commented: "They are one of the best groups at covering pop songs in a classical way. They can hear an entire song and convey it with so much beautiful musicality. And at the same time, someone who isn't in the industry can listen to it and say, "Oh, I know that song." These are songs that can make the audience feel exactly what the characters feel"(Rhimes, Beers 215).

4. Conclusion

This thesis attempts to analyse the Netflix adaptation of *Bridgerton* series written by Julia Quinn, primarily from the point of view of the producer's decisions to divert from the historical context even further than the author of the romance books does. It focuses on the essential liberties that were taken by the producers to transform the Regency period into a modern fantasy in their adaptation. We have found specific deviations from the historical data that the filmmakers efficiently used in order to create a romance set in the nineteenth century that would appeal to the contemporary world. Moreover, what led the creators to implement these changes and how important were they in the production of a compelling television series.

In the theoretical part, the theory of adaptation and the process behind creating a successful adaptation is explored. This part is based on the works of Linda Hutcheon and Linda Seger on the topic. They both argue that considering inclusion of commercially attractive elements is crucial for an adaptation: it should be profitable as well as addressing the widest audience possible. In order to provide a historical context of the period and therefore judge whether the adaptation is historically accurate or not, the theoretical part also includes a short introduction of the Regency period when it comes to manners, marriage, and fashion. The historical part is primarily based on the book *Georgette Heyer's Regency* by Jennifer Cloester and the fashion trends of that time are substantiated by history note books by Suzi Love. To provide the necessary context for the adaptation it also briefly mentions the writer Julia Quinn and the producers Shonda Rhimes and Betsy Beers who stand behind the famous television production company Shondaland.

The practical part of the thesis summarises the plot of the first two books of the *Bridgerton* series. They correspond directly with the first two seasons providing the necessary context in order to demonstrate the changes done to the main plot. This part demonstrates the addition of subplots and characters to construct a story that would be more engaging for the audience and shows the use of the expanding technique commonly used when creating an adaptation. The following chapters focus on the historical inaccuracies that occur throughout the show that were added in accordance with the commercialisation. It also demonstrates the changes from modern audience point of view.

The paramount difference between the series and the history is the addition of feminist elements and racial inclusivity. And while this approach absolutely defies the historical norms it is justified by mentioning that the producers did not stick with the history intentionally because they preferred to create an alternative reality that would be more relatable for the audience, hence again acting according to the commercial rules. They managed to build a world that has enough elements to be considered escapist but also touches on issues of modern world, which makes it easier for the audience to connect with the story. Perhaps, it is a world that is more just and equal than reality, which could also contribute to its popularity.

The practical part of the thesis further discusses the changes when regarding the wardrobe in chapter 3.3.3. The producers managed to capture the Regency dresses faithfully when it comes to the basic silhouette concerning the Empire-line. The place where they took essential liberties was the colour choice. The practical part is mainly substantiated by the book *Inside Bridgerton* which contains the reasoning behind some of the changes and the producers managed to justify their decision to change the colour palette in a quite reasonable way that is not as diverse from historical norms.

Lastly, the practical part briefly addresses the final commercial element the accompanying soundtrack which complies all of the aspects of a successful auditory element. The producers have come up with an ideal combination of classical and popular music that increased the show's popularity.

The producers have made essential modifications and even though they have managed to justify them, one cannot help but wonder if they justified the right reasons. As for the racial inclusivity which is justified by the very slim chance of Queen Charlotte having African ancestors. Despite deviating from the historical accuracy, the original literary text also strays from the factual events. Therefore, the producers and creators could create their version of the book series as long as the end result resembles the original.

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