



‘I Get to Exist as a Black Person in the World’: *Bridgerton* as Speculative Romance and Alternate History on Screen

Piia K. Posti

When the screen adaptation of Julia Quinn’s romance series *Bridgerton* premiered in December 2020, a lot of fuss was made about the liberties taken with historical accuracy. Lists were compiled and the “mistakes” were discussed (see for example, Kickham 2021; Shanks 2022). Some fumed about the corsets, others commented on the music. But mostly, the discussion focused on the Black Queen and the unprecedented large number of Black and other non-white actors. While Shondaland, Netflix and producer-cum-screenwriter Chris Van Dusen emphasized how they were “reinventing the period drama through a color-conscious lens” (Van Dusen 2021), and actors underlined the wonderful opportunity to act in leading roles previously denied them due to their skin color,¹ some viewers and reviewers questioned the level of consciousness by which the adaptation addresses (or does not thoroughly address) race and racism. “You can’t say race isn’t of consequence when the world these characters inhabit

P. K. Posti (✉)
Linnaeus University, Småland, Sweden
e-mail: piia.posti@lnu.se

© The Author(s) 2024
J. L. Hennessey (ed.), *History and Speculative Fiction*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-42235-5_7

was created in part through racism,” states Carolyn Hinds in “‘Bridgerton’ Sees Race Through a Colorist Lens” (Hinds 2021).

In this chapter, I explore why the *Bridgerton* adaptation and its casting are interpreted in such a mixed and challenged way (e.g. Jean-Philippe 2020; Kini 2021). I will show that the adaptation’s problems with achieving its goals of representativity and color-consciousness are related to the fact that the screenwriter and the producers have not fully considered the implications of genre. My analysis takes the genre of historical romance as one of its starting points, delves into the way race and romance are intertwined in popular Regency romance (such as Julia Quinn’s *Bridgerton* novels), and shows how this creates a number of concurrent and contending interpretations of the character Simon, Duke of Hastings, when cast as Black. In order to further show why genre is so important, I discuss the adaptation’s casting in relation to the British casting policy of the last decades. I consider the portrayal of some of the other Black characters in the series, such as Marina Thompson, Lady Danbury, and Will Mondrich. Also, since Van Dusen has stated that both the script and the casting were influenced by his awareness of “the historical theories of the actual Queen Charlotte’s African ancestry” and how he found it “revolutionary—not just as a real, historical theory but also as the basis for the show,”² I pay attention to the role of history in the process and field of adaptation. Using Queen Charlotte’s possible African ancestry as his starting point for the adaptation, Van Dusen also writes a kind of speculative fiction for the screen. Hence, my analysis investigates the implications of the alternate history that emerges in *Bridgerton*, a Regency world without racism, and I conclude by discussing how the adaptation may be reassessed when explored through the perspective of decoloniality.

The screen adaptation of Julia Quinn’s romance series set a record for Netflix’s most viewed streaming show. Season 1 was the most-watched English-language series debut of the streaming platform, with 625.49 million hours viewed within the first 28 days, only to be surpassed by season 2 and its 627.11 million hours viewed (Davies-Evitt 2022; Hipes 2022). With such immense and global impact, the adaptation also needs to be considered in the light of its transnational and transcultural status. What happens when a predominantly white genre such as popular historical romance is recast as “multihued, multi-ethnic” and broadcasted on a global scale?³ Could it be that despite its criticized color-*un*consciousness, the show warrants a deeper analysis since it indicates how popular romance *reimagined* might in fact work as a vehicle for decoloniality?

GENRE MATTERS: POPULAR HISTORICAL ROMANCE AND RACIALIZED SCRIPTS

Adapting Julia Quinn’s Regency romance novels with Black, Asian, and minority ethnic actors (BAME actors) in leading roles challenges not only notions of historical accuracy but also the romance script itself. Popular romance is “particularly sparse in its representation of non-white characters” and the “symbolic language and imagery” of the genre is “heavily racialized” (Young 2020, 512). One aspect of this racialized symbolic language is constituted by the way the hero and the heroine are portrayed in a dichotomous relationship of dark and light characteristics. The romantic heroine’s fair hair and skin are recurrently used as symbols for her innocence and inner light, a light which is meant to illuminate the darkness of the hero (Barlow and Krentz 1992, 16, 20; Young 2020, 511). The illumination of the hero is the major drive of the traditional romance plot, in which the “heroine’s quest” is to encourage and “[teach] the devil to love” (Barlow and Krentz 1992, 20). Even when the heroine is portrayed as a brunette or a redhead, her fair skin is typically emphasized and linked to her purity of heart, characteristics which are then set against the dark and brooding rake who needs to be reformed and convinced of the romance ideal of domestic love and bliss.

What makes this dichotomy racialized is that the characteristics of feminine light have predominantly been ascribed to white heroines, and it is only recently that romance narratives with non-white heroines have emerged.⁴ Furthermore, “English-language historical romances set in diverse locations around the globe written by non-white authors and/or starring non-white characters as the romantic leads have had an even slower growth pattern, especially from traditional outlets” (Ficke 2020, 123).⁵ In a recent study of three major genres of popular fiction, *Genre Worlds: Popular Fiction and Twenty-First-Century Book Culture* (2022), Kim Wilkins, Beth Driscoll, and Lisa Fletcher further show that romance and other popular genres are marked by white privilege since “issues of racial and cultural inclusion and representation can be sidelined by white members in a genre world” (Wilkins et al. 2022, 115). Writers and publishers often operate along “industry lore,” the implicit notions of, for example, the market and readers’ interests, which “can lead to narrow representations of racial and ethnic groups and perpetuate unconscious bias” which often “become self-fulfilling prophecies because of how often and to whom they are articulated” (Wilkins et al. 2022, 24).⁶ The “race

problem” of the romance genre (Young 2020, 512) is therefore a matter both of the narrative script and of the romance industry itself.

The racialization of the romance script becomes even more visible when the hero is considered. Therefore, the choice to cast the romantic hero of the first season of *Bridgerton* as a Black Regency duke needs further analysis. Since Black men have rarely figured as romantic heroes in historical romance, such a casting decision does indeed take a radical and much needed step toward greater representativity and toward breaking the racialized script. Broadcasting a Black Regency Duke to a world-wide audience, the adaptation not only confronts the romance script, also it affects the racialized script for Black actors and Black people in general. As actor Regé-Jean Page (who plays the Duke) puts it: “I get to exist as a Black person in the world [...] It doesn’t mean I’m a slave. It doesn’t mean we have to focus on trauma. It just means we get to focus on Black joy and humanity” (Lenker 2020). However, by casting a Black actor as a rakish duke in a Regency romance, the Black male is inevitably reinscribed on the negative side of the familiar dichotomy of light and darkness according to the logic of the romance script. Furthermore, the logic of the romance narrative is to contain and neutralize the dark counterpart, thus privileging light and, in its trajectory, whiteness.

In the romance script, the hero, functioning as the opposite to the light and innocent heroine, is attributed characteristics such as being dark and brooding, embodying sexual danger, having “a dark and dangerous past,” and being “bent upon vengeance rather than love” (Barlow and Krentz 1992, 17). He is also often portrayed as a diabolical figure, a devil (Ibid., 18–19). The Duke in *Bridgerton* certainly adheres to this script on several points. He avoids his peers and society as a result of his “dark and troubled past”: an abusive father and a stigmatizing stutter. A notorious rake, he poses a danger to the heroine’s virtue. And by publicly insisting that marriage and family are not in his plans, he defies the norms of society. Furthermore, the reason for this defiance is vengeance. The Duke swears on his father’s deathbed that he will not continue the family line as a consequence of his father’s disappointment and brutal disavowal of him when he was a boy.

This might not be seen as particularly troubling at first, since these are traits that are traditionally ascribed white heroes, and one might argue that this is an effect of a gendered script rather than of a racialized script. However, the romance dichotomy is further supported by a narrative structure that safeguards a “reproduction of whiteness” (Young 2020,

514). In the popular romance narrative, the goal of the heroine is to *conquer* the darkness surrounding the hero: “despite the hero’s significantly greater social, political, and economic power, the heroine succeeds in converting him to her worldview; in effect, she transforms and domesticates him” (Young 2020, 522; see also Krentz 1992, 8; and Barlow and Krentz 1992, 19). Thus, in popular romance, whiteness is the norm. The hero’s alluring dark attributes function merely as, what Toni Morrison calls, “romancing the shadow” and “playing in the dark” (qtd in Young 2020, 514), because “ultimately,” the darkness of the hero is “rejected in order for ‘whiteness’ to prosper” (Young 2020, 514). Darkness is neutralized through the mutual love that is developed between the couple, and the (white) social order is restored.⁷

Because of the romance script, the *Bridgerton* adaptation’s purported color-conscious casting policy is not as straightforward and inclusive as its director, producer, and actors seem to assume. It is true that we are now, for the very first time on a global screen, seeing a Black man in a role which has historically been denied him, in society, in popular romance fiction and in heritage film and TV series. However, the racialized codes of the romance genre simultaneously ascribe to the Black male the same kind of negative otherness which we recognize from colonial discourses and in which Black men are portrayed as sexual predators and a threat to white women and consequently white society. In the colonial context as in popular romance narratives, the “dark” male is to be controlled. Hence, in some recent romance studies, it has been argued that “popular romance contributed to the production of racial difference in support of colonial agendas” (Young 2020, 513). Paradoxically, in both discourses, there is a strong investment in the presence of darkness/blackness, but in the colonial context, the presence of actual Black men is considered threatening, and there are still very few mainstream romances in which the leading man and lover is Black. Ironically then, in the *Bridgerton* adaptation, the Black man is not only domesticated and neutralized by entering marriage and by adhering to the rules of Regency society and shouldering his duties as a Duke; he practically disappears from the series once he has fulfilled the romance script.

It could be argued that the disappearance of the Duke in the second season is simply a consequence of the fact that the popularity of the series had garnered more acting opportunities for Regé-Jean Page. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the *effect* is that of a strong Black character disappearing from the story once his function in the romance script has been

fulfilled. The series could have recast the Duke with another Black actor (as is frequently done in other series when actors are engaged elsewhere) if Shondaland had wanted to develop the plotline of the Duke. However, in this case, the adaptation follows Quinn's plot, which in turn adheres to the rules of the romance script where the hero is operative mostly in relation to the heroine.

Since we are dealing with a TV series that has claimed a strong interest in representativity, it is important to address the effect of the Duke's disappearance from the storyline. Furthermore, it is significant for my analysis, since it reveals a *concurrency*, an instance of discursive and ideological intersections in conflict.⁸ The codes and patterns of the romance narrative meet and compete with the objective of color-conscious casting, complicating the casting of BAME actors in roles such as the historical romance hero. In the romance script, the hero has a mainly functional role in providing the heroine with a worthy "opponent." This opponent is in turn, as shown above, meant to embrace the light of the heroine to ensure the stability and dominance of whiteness (Young 2020, 516): "there is a time-honored tradition of heroines sent on a quest to encounter and transform these masculine creatures of darkness" (Barlow and Krentz 1992, 19). This transformation of the hero is in turn part of the bigger quest for equal partnership: "the genre's primary drive is to imagine ways that romantic love and desire (erotic or asexual) might serve as a path to self-fulfillment and, increasingly, socio-political equality" (Kamblé et al. 2020, 3). However, according to the rules of the genre, the matter of self-fulfillment and equality predominantly concerns the heroine. In the historical romance, in particular, it is the heroine who is struggling for (fictional) recognition on her own terms, not the hero since he is already privileged. Color-conscious casting is, on the other hand, driven by demands on representativity as well as equity and acting opportunities for BAME actors. A tension is thus created between the fictional drive and the ideological drive of inclusivity in period drama casting. In the case of Shondaland's *Bridgerton*, this tension is further increased by the debate about historical accuracy. Because of Van Dusen's choice not only to cast a Black romantic hero but also to extrapolate a racially mixed Regency society from the recent claims that Queen Charlotte was Black, it is necessary to also consider how color-conscious casting and adaptations of historical narratives concurrently intersect in *Bridgerton*.

ADAPTATION, RACIST STEREOTYPES, AND COLORBLIND/ COLOR-CONSCIOUS CASTING

Alternate history, anachronism, and unexpected casting are often used as a conscious strategy in adaptations. As Julie Sanders shows in *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006), the point of an adaptation is usually to “make texts ‘relevant’ or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating” (19). This can be done by setting the text in a different time period, by “stretching history” and “redeploy[ing it] in order to indicate those communities or individuals whose histories have not been told before, the marginalized and disenfranchised” (Sanders 2006, 140; see also Stam 2017). It can also be done through “amplificatory procedure” (adding, expanding, interpolating) with the aim of bringing the text “closer to the audience’s frame of reference in temporal, geographical, or social terms” (Sanders 2006, 18, 21). For example, Hamlet may be played by a female actor in order to amplify certain aspects of the (male) character, but also in order to cast light on patriarchal structures. Other strategies of casting can draw attention to the lack of non-whites in certain genres of text and film, as with *Bridgerton*, where the unusually large number of BAME actors makes more conspicuous the white privilege of the Regency period, as well as the whitewashing in earlier period drama adaptations. Indeed, “making relevant” seems to take precedence over historical fact in the process of adaptation. Moreover, in adaptation, there is also always a consideration of the interest and pleasure of the audience, whether it is a question of relevance, identification, representativity, or simply recognition.

Consequently, historical “fact” and accuracy are not really that important in adaptation. In fact, in recent adaptation studies, historical “distortion” and anachronisms have been considered to constitute integral parts of adaptation; it has even been claimed that historiography is a form of adaptation. Defne Ersin Tutan argues in “Adaptation and History” (2017) not only that “every version of history should be regarded as a rewriting, essentially an adaptation, since the historian adapts the material [...] at hand into a pre-planned scheme to meet a certain end” (576) but also that “all historical representations are radically adaptive” (577). In her essay “Intership” (2017), Mieke Bal calls for a kind of adaptation that performs “a dialogue with the past we know was there but cannot be ‘restored’” and she describes adaptation as “a productive deployment of anachronism as a figure of intertemporal thought” (181). Adaptation, and in particular

the adaptation of narratives set in the distant past, is always already about much more than creating a historically accurate scene. Drawing on Tutan and Bal, I would argue that adaptation can be described as the double act of approximating the past while also establishing a dialogue between the past and the present.

With its emphasis on “making relevant,” it is hardly surprising that adaptation has also been one of the most significant areas in which contemporary interest in representativity and the promotion of diversity have managed to gain traction. In her 2020 article, with the telling title “Casting for the Public Good,” Christine Geraghty “examines changes in casting practices which have begun to put black, Asian, and minority ethnic actors more regularly on British screens and in more significant parts” (168). The major driving forces behind the changes in casting policies have been equality and justice, “to improve the employment position” of BAME actors (169). According to Geraghty, this call for equity has been addressed by using two strategies: (1) adapting narratives from a “wider range of experience,” as stories by and about the lives of BAME people would be performed by BAME actors and (2) by making “more roles ... available for BAME actors,” by adopting a policy of colorblind casting (Geraghty 2020, 169). Operating as a meritocratic policy, colorblind casting assumes that any actor may be chosen for any role, irrespective of race and ethnicity. However, despite the fact that British theatre has used colorblind casting for quite some time now, it is only during the last decade that film and television have started to practice colorblind casting.⁹ Geraghty argues that this lag has to do with the higher expectations of verisimilitude and historical accuracy for film and television; the medium as such carries with it a notion of “truth” (Geraghty 2020, 175). Theatre audiences however are expected to understand the “conventions” of the stage and “know that they should make a distinction between actor and character and that, in this context and on this stage, ethnic origin and colour of skin are not significant in creating meaning” (Geraghty 2020, 170).

It has been argued, however, that these conventions rather than promote diversity might just as easily emphasize skin color while negating the experiences of people of color (Geraghty 2020, 172). Ayanna Thompson, Christine Geraghty, and L. Monique Pittman have all provided examples of when colorblind casting assumes a double standard of both seeing and not seeing race and ethnicity. Thompson argues that “nontraditional casting can actually replicate racist stereotypes *because* we have not addressed

the unstable semiotics of race” (Thompson 2011, 77). Referencing Thompson, Geraghty maintains that: “On the one hand, audiences are expected not to take ethnicity and skin colour as semiotically significant while, on the other, they are meant to recognize that the cast as a whole represents a society marked by multicultural diversity” (Geraghty 2020,171). Similarly, Pittman contends that “the colourblind casting strategy often fails to correct problems of multicultural representation and does not adequately account for the way in which an actor’s skin colour sets in motion unintended racialized meanings” (Pittman 2017, 182).

In the *Bridgerton* adaptation, racialized meanings occur several times in scenes with the Black characters. We have already seen how the Duke is associated with an image of darkness that resonates with colonial sentiments, and I will show presently how the Duke’s working-class friend the boxer Mondrich is linked with slavery and ends up in a scheme of being sold for the benefit of a white man and his family’s social future among the ton. Throughout the series the casting strategy creates a concurrence of colorblindness and color-consciousness that problematizes its claims to representativity and diversity. Thompson’s cautioning that “nontraditional casting can ... replicate racist stereotypes” definitely holds for several of the Black roles in *Bridgerton*.

Lady Danbury and boxer Will Mondrich both constitute examples of such stereotypical replication. A long-awaited powerful Black woman in a period drama, Shondaland’s Lady Danbury has been applauded for finally breaking the racial glass ceiling of heritage film and TV series (alongside the character of Queen Charlotte). However, as Rachel Bass has argued, “one must look beyond the status given to her character and instead at the ideology she is expressing” (Bass 2023). In her analysis, the power of Lady Danbury, as well as Queen Charlotte, is very much directed at “keep[ing] whiteness as the focal point” and their function in the story is to convey “a loyal maternalism reminiscent of the minstrel mammy” (Bass 2023). I would argue that Lady Danbury not only replicates the minstrel mammy but also other similar stereotypes known from film history. Her lack of a background story—how did she end up such a wealthy widow and with such a high position in society?—and the way she supports the white characters makes her function like a female variety of the “ebony saint,” an upscaled and more positive version of the “Magical Negro” (“MN”) familiar from both fiction and film, and the similar “Magical Asian” character, whose purpose in the narrative are “to further the white character’s

journey.”¹⁰ The trope of the “MN” has a long history in American cinema and it refers to

a stock character that often appears as a lower class, uneducated black person who possesses supernatural or magical powers. These powers are used to save and transform disheveled, uncultured, lost, or broken whites (almost exclusively white men) into competent, successful, and content people within the context of the American myth of redemption and salvation. (Hughey 2009, 544)¹¹

The “ebony saint” trope, Matthew W. Hughey asserts, appeared in conjunction with the emergence of “an assimilationist agenda of sanitized African American characters [...] during the late 1950s and early 1960s as a response to demands for more ‘positive’ characters” (Hughey 2009, 545). This trope is associated with notions of integration and assimilation, providing a non-threatening Black character on screen who enjoys some modicum of equality in white society by playing by its rules.

Despite the fact that Lady Danbury has an even more dominant role in the adaptation than in the novels, and one which may at first glance look like a conscious move to give a Black actor a prominent and strong role, the character’s importance derives mostly from the way she supports the white characters, the power structures, and the ideals of the society. She is the one who glosses over the racist past of their society when emphasizing the benefits that the Black people of the ton have accessed through the marriage of the King to “one of us”: “look at everything it is doing for us, allowing us to become” (S. 1, Ep. 4). She sympathizes with the heroine of the romance, Daphne, and her struggles with her overbearing brother. She encourages and facilitates the Duke’s courtship of Daphne, their marriage by special license, and she safeguards their reconciliation when stopping the rest of the ton from dancing and sends them home at the final ball at the end of season one. The ball scene is significant since this is meant to be the last time the Duke and Daphne will attend to their social duties as a couple. After the ball, they have planned to remain married but lead separate lives. However, by stopping the ton from dancing, Lady Danbury provides the couple with the private romantic moment they need to reconcile and reach the final stage of domestic bliss. This might be interpreted as her only helping the Duke, whom she has taken under her wing since his childhood (like a benevolent “mammy”), but considering the fact that Daphne is the lead character of the first novel and the first

season of the adaptation and that the entire narrative is about the (white) Bridgerton family, her support is ultimately a support of white heroes and heroines.

Moreover, like previous “ebony saints” who enjoy some privilege since they are assimilating to white society, Lady Danbury can function as a supporting character to the entire Bridgerton family due to her position as advisor to the queen with access to the core of the power (mad King George). In season two, she has a hand in choosing Edwina as the Diamond of the season, and she is the one Queen Charlotte turns to with demands to “repair today’s situation” and sort out the mess with the Viscount’s wedding (S. 2, Ep. 6). Even though Lady Danbury is neither poor nor uneducated, she is arguably reminiscent of the facilitating “MN” and the assimilating “ebony saint.” Thus, the example of Lady Danbury provokes further questions about the level of “consciousness” by which the series was cast and reinforces the negative statements about the series’ “surface-level diversity” (Komonibo and Newman-Bremang 2020).

Another character who displays several characteristics of the two tropes is the boxer William Mondrich. The boxer and his family do not appear in the novels, and being an added element in the adaptation, this character becomes even more interesting to consider in relation to the series’ color-conscious assertions. Some viewers have been puzzled, to say the least, by this character’s purpose in the first season. Carolyn Hinds points out in the *Observer* that he is one of the only two truly dark-skinned Black actors in the series and that it is quite telling that he serves “as Simon’s unpaid therapist” (Hinds 2021). This character functions as a foil to the Duke in the first season, as he offers a space (the boxing ring) where the polished Duke can relax, exert himself physically, and receive counselling on his journey to reconcile with his past and to develop into a proper romantic hero, the reformed rake.¹² In the beginning, Mondrich mostly plays the part of the uneducated and lower-class character who has an extraordinary ability of strength and fighting stamina, being a boxing champion. As the series develops, however, Mondrich further approximates the “MN” as an aid to and supporter of the white characters. Mondrich is persuaded to participate in a betting scheme to help Lord Featherington pay his debts, which in turn would allow his wife and daughters to buy new dresses (furthering their chances on the marriage market) and allow Philippa Featherington her dowry and wedding (S. 1, Ep. 8). Here, Mondrich becomes the linchpin for the fate of the (white) Featherington family.

In the narrative arc of Colin Bridgerton's revelation of the new Lord Featherington's embezzlement scheme, Mondrich plays a supportive role in ways that are once again reminiscent of the "MN" trope. First, Mondrich seems to have a unique ability to detect dishonesty, and he draws attention to the new Lord's dubious character (S. 2, Ep. 6). Second, he retreats when Colin stands up for Lord Featherington as part of his ploy to expose the Lord's shady dealings (S. 2, Ep. 8), thus allowing the white man to be the hero proper and save the entire ton from possible financial ruin. And third, Mondrich is rewarded by the white hero for stepping back and granting him the role as savior (according to the narrative pattern in which the trope figures): Colin brings Mondrich the much-needed patronage of his newly opened club.

In this way, both Lady Danbury and Mondrich display several characteristics of the "MN" trope and the "ebony saint," which in turn troubles the claims made about the series' color-consciousness. Tropes like these manifest what Hughey terms "cinethetic racism," a version of a "new racism" as it "reinforces the meaning of white people as moral and pure characters while also delineating how powerful, divine, and/or magic-wielding black characters may interact with whites and the mainstream." The insidiousness of "new racism" is that it "supports the social order while seemingly challenging the racial inequality constitutive of that order" (Hughey 2009, 544).

As a result, the romance script and the casting of *Bridgerton* intersect in a way that reinforces a "new racism" while simultaneously providing a global audience with an unforeseen level of diversity and representation in historical romance and heritage film and TV series. While opting for an alternative history in which racism has ceased through a racially mixed royal marriage, the adaptation nonetheless, in the words of Shaun Armstead, "traffics in historical fantasy seeking to emulate the liberal politics of our present. ... [I]nstead of breaking down historical racial and gender formations that continue to dehumanize Black women and men today, *Bridgerton* reinforces them" (Armstead 2021).¹³ In fact, the way the adaptation attempts to counteract the racism of the period and promote diversity in the present is quite similar to the way white intellectuals in the 1700s and 1800s transferred the suffering of African slaves to their own moral suffering within the system of slavery. Black experience was exploited within the emancipation movement by reformed whites and white abolitionists. While this was sometimes done to evoke empathy for the enslaved, by forging a common experience, it was still a discourse of

suffering that centered upon whiteness and white sentiment (Wood 2002, 23–86). As Marcus Wood has maintained, this transference hinged upon dehumanizing Blacks (Wood 2002, *et passim*). It seems that both then and today, breaking down racial formations involves acts of dehumanizing Black people. Such dehumanizing also occurs in *Bridgerton*. Despite its reimagination of a Regency period in which Black and white people have equal opportunity, there are two scenes in which the series’ dehumanizing tendencies thoroughly surface.

These two scenes make actor Regé-Jean Page’s jubilant words about not being portrayed as a slave and dehumanized seem rather hasty. I am referring here to the scene in which Marina Thompson, a cousin of the Featheringtons, is offered to an old bachelor and to the scene in which Mondrich is asked by Lord Featherington to forfeit a boxing match. These scenes illustrate how the casting of BAME actors in *Bridgerton* tends to support a racist script rather than dismantle it.

Marina Thompson is interesting in several ways. Firstly, she only appears as a character with a developed narrative arc in the screen adaptation; Marina is wholly a creation of Van Dusen and Shondaland. Secondly, viewers have commented on the fact that “Marina’s character is both relentlessly commodified and hyper-sexualised as a stereotype of the ‘tragic mulatta’” (Garden 2021). Hence, the character is not seen by the audience through a colorblind lens. Rather, since this is a case in which the “role overlaps with cultural stereotypes associated with the ethnicity of the actor in question” (Pittman 2017, 182), Marina is interpreted as an example of stereotyped Black characters which in turn makes the color-conscious casting ambition quite ambiguous. Thirdly, there is one scene in particular in which viewers are clearly meant to pay attention to the actor’s skin color. When Mrs. Featherington discovers that Marina is with child, there is a rush to secure a marriage for her to avoid a scandal. An elderly and unsympathetic bachelor is invited to the house at which point he demonstrably inspects Marina’s teeth and body in a way that revokes the denigrating inspections of Africans on the slave market (S. 1, Ep. 4).

With the example of Marina, we are yet again given an illustration of the way popular historical romance “can serve to erase problematic issues and reinforce white fantasies of the time” (Hernandez-Knight 2021, 1) and why casting BAME actors in historical period drama can cause ambivalence when the adaptation has not thoroughly addressed the racism of the period and the racist legacy within the historical romance genre. In fact, the sexualized Black woman at the mercy of the slave owner and

images of Black people as chattel are such established cultural and literary tropes that “for black women readers, romantic desire for white men cannot be easily divorced from the historical legacy of abuse and dehumanization that black women have experienced at the hands of white men and the institutions they control” (Young 2020, 523).¹⁴ We may therefore ask what purpose this scene is meant to serve in the *Bridgerton* adaptation. Is it there to provoke awareness of racist society (then and now)? Or is it simply another example of what Pittman describes as “unintended racialized meanings” (182)? Moreover, are those meanings really so unintended?

The inspection scene creates further ambivalence in that it also resonates with the equation made by European women writers already in the seventeenth century between slavery and the marriage market. French literary examples and strategies have been traced by Karen Offen in “How (and Why) the Analogy of Marriage with Slavery Provided the Springboard for Women’s Rights Demands in France, 1640–1848” (2007). In a British context Moira Ferguson noted in the early 1990s that even Jane Austen, who has repeatedly been read as problematically silent on British imperialism and the slave trade, “connects the Caribbean plantation system and its master-slave relationships to tyrannical gender relations at home and abroad” (Ferguson 1991, 130). The “comparison of the young woman on the verge of marriage with the slave on the auction block” was already established by the early eighteenth century by Mary Astell and Judith Drake in *An Essay upon the Female Sex* and Mary Astell in *Some Reflections upon Marriage*, and it was further employed by writers such as Jane Austen in *Emma* and George Eliot in *Daniel Deronda* (Wood 2002, 313–314).

There is little doubt that the scene in *Bridgerton* constitutes a contemporary version of the trope. However, since this trope is mainly associated with the struggle of *white* women (both historically and in the literary narratives), it can be interpreted as yet another white fantasy that has been reiterated within literary romances and travelled to popular historical romance. Notably, this possibility of interpretive recognition of a racist legacy is not duplicated *within* the world of the adaptation. Whereas the audience is invited to notice skin color to access such interpretive layers in certain scenes as well as partake of the fictional representation of a diverse, inclusive, and colorblind Regency Britain, there is hardly any recognition of a racist past in the adaptation itself. The shift that apparently has taken place from a racist to a harmonic and fully diverse society in *Bridgerton*’s alternate history seems to have caused selective amnesia in the white characters. It is mainly the Black characters who voice any awareness of racism.

The white characters act as if instructed by a colorblind script. This becomes glaringly apparent when we consider Eloise Bridgerton's critique of marriage, her highly verbalized awareness of social injustice against women, and her brother Benedict's struggle against classist ideas of what kind of occupation is befitting a gentleman's second son. Why does neither display any memory of other forms of injustice such as their society's recent racism?

The one exception is Lord Featherington who makes a blunt remark about boxer Will Mondrich's past and about his father being an American slave. This takes place in the scene in which Mondrich refuses to throw his next fight by maintaining "My honor is not for sale" (S.1, Ep.7). Here Mondrich's insistence that he does not wish to sell his honor carries double meaning because of Featherington calling him out as the son of a slave. Yet this can easily go unnoticed as being a racist remark since not all viewers might know that Featherington's mentioning of "Dunmore's regiment" in the scene is a reference to an actual British regiment of escaped American slaves who were offered freedom if they fought on the British side in the American revolution (Quarles 1996, 19–32). Since this remark is brief and easy to miss—it rests wholly on the mentioning of the regiment—the scene functions rather as a demonstration of the level of Featherington's moral corruption than to truly "address" the "semiotics of race," to repeat what Ayanna Thompson argues is often lacking in cases of "nontraditional casting" (Thompson 2011, 77). The reference to Dunmore's regiment shows that the audience is still meant to notice that Mondrich is Black and pick up on the racism, while also going along with the alternate history of a diverse and non-racist Regency society, which rests upon the speculative notion that love conquers (and erases) all.¹⁵

IT TAKES A (BLACK) QUEEN: SPECULATIVE ROMANCE AND DECOLONIALITY

I understand that you believe such subjects as love and devotion, affection and attachment, you find it all trite and frivolous. But have you any idea, those very things are precisely what have allowed a new day to begin to dawn in this society. Look at our Queen. Look at our King. Look at their marriage. ... We were two separate societies, divided by colour, until a king fell in love with one of us. Love, Your Grace, conquers all. (S 1. Ep. 4)

These lines, spoken by Lady Dunbar to the Duke, constitute the only explicit commentary on the series' alternate history and explanation of its diversity. In that regard, they provide the audience with an important cue for reading the *Bridgerton* adaptation as speculative fiction. They also reveal that it is a speculative fiction that operates from two prerequisites: the alternate history of a Regency Britain ruled by a Black Queen Charlotte and the logics of romance in which love is portrayed as a powerful force that can right any wrong. Note once more the importance of the romance genre for understanding the alternate world of this adaptation. In fact, romance fiction can in itself be seen as a form of speculative fiction by its insistence upon love as the universal means for resolving anything from gender inequality, family conflict, enmity, classism, ageism, to racism. As Catherine M. Roach argues, and in line with previous claims made by romance scholars like Janice Radway, Tania Modleski, and Ann Barr Snidow, "romance stories are a creative respite for women, an imaginative play space to roll around in the fields of fantasy with sister readers of the genre, all the while affirming the reality of love as a force that can work good in the world" (Roach 2016, 13).

Speculative fiction takes various forms (fantasy, utopia, dystopia, science fiction) and can be defined in many ways, but at its core we find a "what if?" (Thomas 2013, *et passim*). In her short essay "Writing *Oryx and Crake*," Margaret Atwood states that speculative fiction "begins with a *what if* and then sets forth its axioms" (Atwood 2005, 285). In popular historical romance, that *what if* is often formulated as: What if the heroine could enjoy heterosexual love and all the riches and privileges of aristocratic society while also managing to bypass the constraints of patriarchy? As stated in the introduction to this volume, speculative fiction is also a way of making the familiar unfamiliar and the unfamiliar familiar: "it invents nothing we haven't already invented or started to invent" (Atwood 2005, 285). The *Bridgerton* adaptation makes the familiar world of period screen drama unfamiliar by challenging its white gatekeeping and white-washing, while simultaneously familiarizing the audience with an alternate and unfamiliar non-racist Regency Britain.

Speculative fiction is a way of dreaming that which has not yet been realized. It creates a fantasy about a different way of living and being, with a power to make us question our actual lives, beliefs, and existence. As activist scholar Stephen Duncombe argues:

Dreams are powerful. They are repositories of our desire. They animate the entertainment industry and drive consumption. They can blind people to reality and provide cover for political horror. But they can also inspire us to imagine that things could be radically different than they are today, and then believe we can progress toward that imaginary world. (Duncombe 2007, 182)

The phrases imagining the “radically different” and “progress toward that imaginary world” can also describe the method and objective of decoloniality. What speculative fiction and decoloniality have in common is the drive to challenge our thinking, to question what we know, “to disengage from the illusion and focus on the puppeteer behind the scenes, who is regulating the terms of the conversation” and to “alter... the principles and assumptions of knowledge creation, transformation, and dissemination” (Mignolo 2018, 144–145). Simply put, both aim to tell a different (hi)story in a different way.

Defining decoloniality as an analytics and praxis that aims to “delink” from “the logic of coloniality,” Walter D. Mignolo argues that postcolonialism and decolonialism have not succeeded in achieving such a delinking: “The changes were in the content not in the terms of the conversation” (Mignolo 2018, 125 & 124). The change that needs to be made he describes as follows:

By conceiving of coloniality ... as a complex structure of management and control, one grasps that it is the “underlying structure” of Western civilization and of Eurocentrism and that fully understanding how it works is a necessary condition for delinking from coloniality. Eurocentrism is not a geographical issue, but an epistemic and aesthetic one (e.g., control of knowledge and subjectivities). In order to do so, it is necessary to think and act (doing, praxis) decolonially, both in the analysis of the colonial matrix of power—delinking subjectively and programmatically from it—and by engaging with projects and organizations that run parallel and in the same direction. (Mignolo 2018, 125)¹⁶

One form of delinking or praxis of decoloniality would be to challenge and reimagine “universal fictions” (Mignolo 2018, 187). Therefore, imagining alternate histories and creating speculative fictions, such as popular historical romance, can be delinking since such histories and fictions often engage with and challenge the universal fictions at work in our reality. In *The Glass Bead Game*, for instance, Hermann Hesse speculates in

the “what if there were a world where aesthetics and philosophy were in focus and technology and economy were reduced to a bare minimum?” In this narrative it is the universal fiction of Western capitalism that is challenged and reimagined by Hesse’s creation of a future world in which technology and economy are devalued and intellectual and spiritual pursuits are glorified.¹⁷ In Shondaland’s *Bridgerton*, the universal fiction of white supremacy is challenged and reimagined through the lenses of diversity and racial equality. These two narratives certainly do not address the same universal fiction, and *The Glass Bead Game*, with its aesthetic principles, is arguably complying with colonial epistemic and aesthetic ideals. Nevertheless, they do share the speculative form as a method to question universal fictions and to dream an alternate reality.

Even though *Bridgerton*, as shown in my analysis, does not resolve the universal fiction of white supremacy underlying Britain’s colonial legacy and the romance script, it could, from the perspective of decoloniality, still be argued that it engages in and has caused global engagement in analytic and “praxical” work of a decolonial kind. As Mignolo maintains, there are reimaginings that “have a decolonial import and dimension, though they might not define themselves as decolonial, and are remodeling knowledge, being, and communal relations” (Mignolo 2018, 126). Reimaginings of racism and sexism, for example, can have such decolonial import (Ibid.). Hence, if we shift our perspective from the *content* of the conversation to the *terms* of the conversation, we might discover that *Bridgerton*, despite its entanglement in a racist script, also constitutes a change of the terms. And this may indeed explain why the adaptation has been received with both praise and criticism.

Because *Bridgerton* is a phenomenon that includes much more than the actual adaptation. It is a transnational and global event that has inspired numerous articles and analyses in popular media, countless conversations on social media platforms, and disputes in forums dedicated to literary romance (Jane Austen) and other popular adaptations of Regency romance (*Sanditon*) (Prescott 2021). *Bridgerton* has been called out on its inherent racism, and in these conversations, the racism among fans of heritage drama has been revealed. As a study by Amanda-Rae Prescott reveals, “*Bridgerton*’s premiere ... changed the media environment and also revealed new divisions in Austen and Austen-adjacent spaces. The promo photos of [the Black actors] quickly resulted in the ‘historical accuracy means no BIPOC actors in traditionally white roles’ racists rushing to trash the series” (Prescott 2021, 5). The phenomenon of *Bridgerton* has

forced media, fandom, and scholars to engage in a conversation about the unstable semiotics of race, across the boundaries of their respective spheres.

Bridgerton is a testimony of injudicious casting, but it is also an example of decolonial praxis. According to Van Dusen, *Bridgerton* was created through the work of listening, dialogue, and a demand to do more:

My goal of reinventing the period drama through a color-conscious lens was taking shape. But then several members of my brilliant cast reached out suggesting I do more. That's when one of the most unexpected and satisfying collaborations of my career happened.

What followed was one of the most poignant and transformative days I had during the making of this series. Together with every single actor of color on the show in one room, I was able to listen to everything everyone had to say over a long afternoon of tea and other English goodness. My job was to simply sit, listen and learn. It was emotional, powerful and completely necessary.

Many of those in that room felt the show could go further in terms of its exploration of race. The show, they agreed, was already so beautifully eloquent when looking at things like class, gender and sexuality. But couldn't there also be an acknowledgment of color onscreen?

The question humbled me. They were right. We could do even more to turn the genre on its head and dig even deeper into the stories of the characters the show aimed to include. So the things my cast talked to me about that day found their way into the scripts. Into the characters' backstories. Into the world itself. (Van Dusen 2021)

Van Dusen's narrative includes phrases that could indeed cause skepticism and even frustration among postcolonial critics and BIPOCs. What kind of allyship is described here? Why the emphasis on tea and "English goodness"? However, we need also keep in mind that decoloniality is a work that can take many (imperfect) guises:

There is no master plan and no privileged actors for decoloniality. There are, certainly, scales in the intensity of colonial wounds. Decoloniality is a multi-faceted global enterprise in the hands of the people who act and organize themselves/ourselves as decolonial thinkers, actors, and doers. If coloniality is all over, decolonial praxis shall be over as well. Consequently, no experience of privilege could be claimed in the complexity of global decoloniality. (Mignolo 2018, 125)

If we shift our attention from what is being said to what is being done in Van Dusen's description, we can see that *Bridgerton* was created through the decolonial work of dialogue between representatives of groups that do not normally converse upon matters of race and racism in heritage film. Moreover, as Prescott has shown, in popular media and on social media platforms, new conversations and analyses are taking place that did not take place before the impact of the reimagined world of Shondaland's *Bridgerton*. All contribute to "changing the terms of the conversation" which Mignolo argues is pivotal to achieve decoloniality.

To conclude then, the reception of *Bridgerton* shows that as speculative romance and alternate history it can indeed participate and even provide important "work" in "delinking" from coloniality. For example, one effect of the casting policies of *Bridgerton* is that "BIPOC fans have pushed for *Sanditon* to expand Crystal Clarke's role as Georgiana and diversify the cast and crew" (Prescott 2021, "Abstract"). (Georgiana is the adaptation's version of the "mulatta" heiress, Miss Lambe, in Jane Austen's unfinished novel *Sanditon*.) Thus, *Bridgerton* contributes to familiarizing audiences on a global scale with the presence of Black people in Regency Britain (which is historically accurate), to foster a broader interest in learning about the lives of Black people of that period, to recognize the presence of Black characters (however minor) in the work by canonized writers like Jane Austen, to discover the absence of Black characters in contemporary Regency romance, and to reflect upon casting and matters of representativity. *Bridgerton* has also contributed to further discussions of "white privilege" in many arenas and on many levels (romance, casting, fandom).

But as my analysis shows, that decolonial work and "delinking" takes place in a concurrence of conflicting and competing scripts, conventions, adaptive choices, and casting policies that affect and inform the narrative, causing equally conflicting impressions and interpretations of the TV series. This in turn demands methods of analysis that address the complexity of the concurrences. In this chapter, I have addressed the complexity by considering not only the "text" of the adaptation but also how characters and scenes take on different meanings depending on how we understand the effect of genre (historical romance, speculative fiction), casting choices and policies, demands on historical accuracy, matters of adaptation and adaptation theory, cinethetic racism, fandom, and popular media. I have shown that even popular phenomena such as heritage film and TV series can contribute to decolonial work, but also that the work of scholars within Romance fiction studies, adaptation studies, and studies of fandom

can contribute to further the understanding and choices of writers, screenwriters, and producers. However “imperfect” the result of the casting choices and explorations of the Black characters, *Bridgerton* shows us that the analysis should include more than the adaptation “text” if we are to grasp what impact this global phenomenon may have on the colonial legacy.

NOTES

1. Golda Rosheuvel (Queen Charlotte) celebrates the series for its inclusivity: “I knew that it was something that I was hoping to see. That I have *always* been hoping to see: that inclusion, that diversity, pushing the boundaries so Black and brown artists can be celebrated in fabulous clothes and fabulous wigs” (Burack 2022).
2. Van Dusen 2021. Independent historian Mario de Valdes y Cocom is most often referred to in the newspaper articles that have spread to a larger audience the theory of Britain’s first Black royalty. See for instance, Stuart Jeffries, “Was this Britain’s first black queen?”, *The Guardian*, 2009.
3. I have borrowed the quoted words from Van Dusen 2021.
4. More inclusive romance fiction began to emerge in the twenty-first century, according to Young 2020, 512.
5. It should be noted that Julia Quinn’s *Bridgerton* series does not include non-white characters.
6. See also Wilkins et al. who argue that genres “can exclude. They may do this by reproducing enduring structural inequalities, on the basis of gender or race, for example, limiting some people’s ability to participate or lead” (Wilkins et al. 2022, 113).
7. Paradoxically, in the *Bridgerton* adaptation, (white) order is assisted further by the female Black characters. For an astute analysis of how “the show creators center white womanhood as the most desirable, beautiful and marriageable, and uses Black women as her most stalwart advocates,” see Rachel Bass, “She Wins: Here’s to Powerful Black Women Leaders on Screens,” 2023.
8. *Concurrences* is to be understood as both a methodological tool and a theoretical perspective. It was established to counter challenges within postcolonial research and has been explored in different forms by a growing research group at the Linnaeus University in Sweden. Gunlög Fur, to whom this book is dedicated, is among the founding members of the group, including Hans Hägerdal, Peter Forsgren, Maria Olausson, Margareta Petersson, and myself. The epistemological objective of identifying and analyzing *concurrences* in a postcolonial and decolonial context is

to provide a framework and method in order to “capture” and “encompass” the “topics and challenges of difference, entanglement and complicity that postcolonial studies has brought to light and grappled with in the last decades.” As a conceptual framework, *concurrency* “draws attention to the contestations over epistemic entitlement, competing (and sometimes conflicting) narratives of (post)colonial encounters and experiences, and territorial claims, with which studies with a global perspective invariably must grapple” (Posti 2014, 1337–1338.). It also “offers a way of thinking about similarity and difference together, without necessarily privileging the priority of one over the other and without assuming the parameters of relationality in advance. To look for concurrences is not to assume either full equivalence across systems or the inferiority of one to another” (Brydon, Forsgren and Fur 2017, 3). For a more extensive discussion of the concept as well as studies where the concept and perspective are used, see Brydon et al. 2017.

9. See Pittman for a discussion of the *The BBC's Diversity Strategy 2011–15*. See Geraghty for the BBC Guidelines for diversity and the way the British Film Institute ensures more diverse casting. Both Pittman and Geraghty compare the longer use of color-blind casting in British theatre with its more recent use in film and television.
10. Carrie S. quoted in Young 2020, 526. The quotation is from an online review by Carrie S. of Mary Balogh’s novel *Someone to Love*. The review is posted on *Smart Bitches Trashy Books*, and I have included the quote here and its source history with the purpose of demonstrating that there is today public awareness of such racist stereotyping of Black and Asian characters.
11. A few examples of “MN” characters are John Coffey (played by Michael Green Duncan) in *The Green Mile* (1999); Candelaria (Veryl Jones) in *The Punisher* (2004); and The Oracle (Gloria Foster and Mary Alice) in *The Matrix* films (1999–2003).
12. Even though the Duke is played by a Black actor, the character as such, a Regency rake, is highly associated with white privilege within the historical romance genre (see Young 2020, 513–520 and my previous discussion). Hence, the insertion in the adaptation of a new Black character positions that character in a complex relationship within which the character (Mondrich) nonetheless functions as a kind of “MN” or “ebony saint” supporting the white (although cast as a Black) hero/reformed rake of the narrative. We may recall Morrison’s notion of “playing in the dark,” which is meant to draw attention to the fact that it is never a question of embracing Black identity but of creating an “Africanist presence” to set off the heroism and ideals of white society (Young 2020, 514).
13. There is quite an irony to this emphasis on the marriage between a Black Queen and white King as the solution to ending racism when considered

- in the contemporary context of what has unfolded in the media about the British royals after Meghan Markle and Prince Harry were interviewed by Oprah Winfrey in 2021.
14. For an extensive study of how Black women writers have contested and negotiated the literary legacy of dehumanization and oversexualization of Black women, see Patton 2000.
 15. Once again, we see how the strategies of color-conscious casting concur with the racialized romance script. As Sarah H. Ficke has pointed out, “traditional historical romance stories rely upon limited, sanitized settings or the erasure of dehumanizing political and economic systems” (Ficke 2020, 124).
 16. In the quoted passage, Mignolo uses the less common term “aesthetic” to remind us of the fact that the universal fictions of coloniality also affect the sensory level: “Universal fictions operate on our sensibilities; they have an *aesthetic* power, affecting our senses, driving our emotions and desires” (Mignolo 2018, 187).
 17. Hesse “bemoaned the pressures generated by life in modern capitalist society and the instrumental and often callous behaviour which threatened to engulf the world. In response he espoused the pursuit of self-understanding through grasping the spiritual insights offered to us in tragedy and the illusory nature of prestige and wealth. Occasionally he expressed sympathy with the ideal of socialism and even admired Marx, considering his critique of capitalism ‘essentially incontrovertible’” (Wilde 1999, 87).

REFERENCES

- Armstead, Shaun. 2021. Blackness, Dehumanized: A Black Feminist Analysis of “Bridgerton”. AAIHS African American Intellectual History Society. February 2. Accessed January 30, 2023. <https://www.aaihs.org/blackness-dehumanized-a-black-feminist-analysis-of-bridgerton/>.
- Atwood, Margaret. 2005. Writing *Oryx and Crake*. In *Writing with Intent. Essays, Reviews, Personal Prose: 1983–2005*, 284–286. New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers.
- Bal, Mieke. 2017. Intership: Anachronism between Loyalty and the Case. In *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. Thomas Leitch, 179–196. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Barlow, Linda, and Jayne Ann Krentz. 1992. Beneath the Surface: The Hidden Codes of Romance. In *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance*, ed. Jayne Ann Krentz, 15–30. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

- Bass, Rachel. 2023. She Wins: Here's to Powerful Black Women Leaders on Screens. *Ms. Magazine*, January 7. Accessed January 30, 2023. <https://msmagazine.com/2023/01/07/golden-globes-viola-davis-black-women-bridgerton/>.
- Bridgerton. 2020. *Season 1. Shondaland*. USA: Netflix.
- . 2022. *Season 2. Shondaland*. USA: Netflix.
- Brydon, Diana, Peter Forsgren, and Gunlög Fur, eds. 2017. *Concurrent Imaginaries, Postcolonial Worlds: Toward Revised Histories*. Leiden: Brill.
- Burack, Emily. 2022. Golda Rosheuvel Thinks *Bridgerton's* Queen Charlotte Sees Herself in Edwina. *Town & Country*, March 31. Accessed August 24, 2022. <https://www.townandcountrymag.com/leisure/arts-and-culture/a39529646/golda-rosheuvel-queen-bridgerton-season-2-interview/>.
- Davies-Evitt, Dora. 2022. *Bridgerton* Season 2 Breaks its Own Record as the Most-Watched English-Language Series on Netflix. *Tatler*, April 21. Accessed May 22, 2022. <https://www.tatler.com/article/bridgerton-season-2-breaks-its-own-record-as-the-most-watched-english-language-series-on-netflix>.
- Duncombe, Stephen. 2007. Dreampolitik. In *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*, 176–183. New York: The New Press.
- Ferguson, Moira. 1991. *Mansfield Park: Slavery, Colonialism and Gender*. *Oxford Literary Review* 13 (1–2): 118–139.
- Ficke, Sarah H. 2020. The Historical Romance. In *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction*, ed. Jayashree Kamblé, Eric Murphy Selinger, and Hsu-Ming Teo, 118–140. London: Routledge.
- Garden, Alison. 2021. *Bridgerton* and Normal People Expose Romance's Colonial Hangover. *Aljazeera*, April 20. Accessed September 8, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/4/20/bridgerton-and-normal-people-expose-romances-colonial-hangover>.
- Geraghty, Christine. 2020. Casting for the Public Good: BAME Casting in British Film and Television in the 2010s. *Adaptation* 14 (2): 168–186.
- Hernandez-Knight, Bianca. 2021. Race and Racism in Austen Spaces: Jane Austen and Regency Romance's Racist Legacy. *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts 1640-1830* 11 (2): 1–16. Article 12.
- Hinds, Carolyn. 2021. "Bridgerton" Sees Race Through a Colorist Lens. *Observer*, January 1. Accessed March 14, 2022. <https://observer.com/2021/01/bridgerton-sees-race-through-a-colorist-lens/>.
- Hipes, Patrick. 2022. *Bridgerton's* Season 2 Edges Season 1 To Become Netflix's Most-Watched English-Language Series Debut. *Deadline*, April 19. Accessed May 20, 2022. <https://deadline.com/2022/04/bridgerton-season-2-netflix-record-views-1235005908/>.
- Hughey, Matthew W. 2009. Cinethetic Racism: White Redemption and Black Stereotypes in 'Magical Negro' Films. *Social Problems* 56 (3): 543–577.

- Jean-Philippe, McKenzie. 2020. *Bridgerton* Doesn't Need to Elaborate on Its Inclusion of Black Characters. *Oprah Daily*, December 29. Accessed August 15, 2022. <https://www.oprahdaily.com/entertainment/tv-movies/a35083112/bridgerton-race-historical-accuracy/>.
- Jeffries, Stuart. 2009. Was this Britain's First Black Queen? *The Guardian*, March 12. Accessed September 8, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/mar/12/race-monarchy>.
- Kamlé, Jayashree, Eric Murphy Selinger, and Hsu-Ming Teo. 2020. Introduction. In *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction*, ed. Jayshree Kamlé et al., 1–23. London: Routledge.
- Kickham, Dylan. 2021. 9 Historical Inaccuracies In “Bridgerton” Season 1 You Won't Be Able To Unsee. *Elite Daily*, January 29. Accessed September 8, 2022. <https://www.elitedaily.com/entertainment/9-historical-inaccuracies-in-bridgerton-season-1-you-wont-be-able-to-unsee-58816645>.
- Kini, Aditi Natasha. 2021. Royal Representation. On the Strange Racial Politics of ‘Bridgerton’. *Bitchmedia*, January 14. Accessed August 17, 2022. <https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/bridgerton-diversity-colorblind-storytelling-colorbaiting>.
- Komonibo, Ineye, and Kathleen Newman-Bremang. 2020. A Double Hot Take On *Bridgerton*, Race & Romance. *Refinery 29*, December 28. Accessed March 14, 2022. <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2020/12/10240235/bridgerton-review-blackness-representation>.
- Krentz, Jayne Ann. 1992. Introduction. In *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance*, ed. Jayne Ann Krentz, 1–9. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Lenker, Maureen Lee. 2020. How *Bridgerton* is Poised to Revolutionize Romance on Television. *Entertainment Weekly*, November 13. Accessed April 26, 2022. <https://ew.com/tv/bridgerton-poised-revolutionize-romance-television/>.
- Mignolo, Walter D. 2018. What Does It Mean to Decolonize? In *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, ed. Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, 105–134. Durham: Duke UP.
- Offen, Karen. 2007. How (and Why) the Analogy of Marriage with Slavery Provided the Springboard for Women's Rights Demands in France, 1640–1848. In *Women's Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation*, ed. Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Brewer Stewart, 57–81. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Patton, Venetia K. 2000. *Women in Chains: The Legacy of Slavery in Black Women's Fiction (SUNY series in Afro-American studies)*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Pittman, L. Monique. 2017. Colour-Conscious Casting and Multicultural Britain in the BBC *Henry V* (2012): Historicizing Adaptation in an Age of Digital Placelessness. *Adaptation* 10 (2): 176–191.

- Posti, Piia K. 2014. Concurrences in Contemporary Travel Writing: Postcolonial Critique and Colonial Sentiments in Sven Lindqvist's *Exterminate All the Brutes* and *Terra Nullius*. *Culture Unbound* 6 (7): 1319–1345.
- Prescott, Amanda-Rae. 2021. Race and Racism in Austen Spaces: Notes on a Scandal: Sanditon Fandom's Ongoing Racism and the Danger of Ignoring Austen Discourse on Social Media. *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts 1640-1830* 11 (2): 1–25. Article 10.
- Quarles, Benjamin. 1996. Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment. In *The Negro in the American Revolution*. (1961), 19–32. Reprinted with a new introduction by Gary B. Nash and foreword by Thad W. Tate. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Roach, Catherine M. 2016. *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Sanders, Julie. 2006. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Shanks, John. 2022. Presentist Anachronism and Ironic Humour in Period Screen Drama. *Research in Film and History. New Approaches* 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/18962>.
- Stam, Robert. 2017. Revisionist Adaptation: Transtextuality, Cross-Cultural Dialogism, and Performative Infidelities. In *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. Thomas Leitch, 239–250. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Thomas, Paul L., ed. 2013. *Science Fiction and Speculative Fiction. Challenging Genres*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Thompson, Ayanna. 2011. *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tutan, Defne Ersin. 2017. Adaptation and History. In *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. Thomas Leitch, 576–586. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Van Dusen, Chris. 2021. “Bridgerton” Showrunner on Creating A Color-Conscious Series (Guest Column). *The Hollywood Reporter*, August 23. Accessed August 24, 2022. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/bridgerton-showrunner-creating-color-conscious-series-guest-column-1234998873/>.
- Wilde, Lawrence. 1999. The Radical Appeal of Hermann Hesse's Alternative Community. *Utopian Studies* 10 (1): 86–97.
- Wilkins, Kim, Beth Driscoll, and Lisa Fletcher. 2022. *Genre Worlds: Popular Fiction and Twenty-First-Century Book Culture*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Wood, Marcus. 2002. *Slavery, Empathy and Pornography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Young, Erin S. 2020. Race, Ethnicity, and Whiteness. In *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction*, ed. Jayashree Kamblé, Eric Murphy Selinger, and Hsu-Ming Teo, 511–528. London: Routledge.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

