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Regency Revisited in Julia Quinn's *Bridgerton*: From Antiquity to Modernity

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Dedications

I dedicate this thesis first and foremost to the memory of my beloved grandfather, Rekkab Abdelfettah.

I also dedicate this work to my family; my grandmother, my parents, siblings and uncles who supported me emotionally and practically throughout this lengthy endeavour.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my only and forever friend and all my friends who provided much needed fun, companionship and celebrations over the years.

Narimene

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Abstract

This research provides an exploration of Regency England during the specified historical timeframe, as portrayed in the book series titled *Bridgerton* authored by Julia Quinn. The dissertation offers an examination of various socio-cultural facets prevalent during the said era, including standards for etiquette and social conduct, fashion trends, standards and societal expectations for women, and the role of the ruling British monarch. Through conduct of a thorough chronicle-based analysis and comparative evaluation of the Netflix adaptation, this study seeks to deliver a comprehensive factual understanding of the time period and accurate depiction within popular entertainment medium. Chapter one includes a meticulous contextual overview of pertinent political, societal and cultural attributes defining the Regency period within the United Kingdom, drawing upon primary source documentation and academic research to present a balanced perspective, absent subjective perspectives or opinions. Chapter two shifts focus to the Netflix television programme adaptation of Quinn's books. This section conducts an objective comparative evaluation of depicted content against recorded historical facts, assessing the portrayal of areas such as selected wardrobe design, set decoration schemes and represented archetypes. Through presenting findings of equitable exploration of both relevant source history and television representation, this thesis intends to transmit fact-based comprehension of the Regency era as shown within Quinn's *Bridgerton* works to interested parties, free of non-evidenced viewpoints.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

Literature has long served as an impactful means of documenting societal mores and shifting cultural norms across generations. Through imaginative works of fiction, deeper insights may be gleaned into the prevailing preoccupations and sensibilities of specific historical periods. By placing readers directly within the lived experiences of intriguing characters, literature also effectively brings the distant past to life, cultivating understanding and fostering appreciation for bygone eras.

Of particular scholarly interest, novels are set within the precise timeframe of their writing, as these often-present veiled commentary on contemporary issues through the lens of preceding generations. Period-specific works likewise aim for intricate portrayals of social and gender hierarchies and the intimate interplay between prescribed roles and inner desires. As such, literature stands as a profound tool for discovering less overtly stated truths about the dynamics between individuals and the societies they inhabit across time.

Considering the immense popularity of Netflix's *Bridgerton* adaptation, an examination of the historical novels by Julia Quinn which inspired the television series merits attention. Since debuting in 2000, Quinn's *Bridgerton* series has sold over 30 million copies globally, drawing readers into the compelling world of Regency era London high society.

This research work aims to compare the portrayal of fashion, style, etiquette and gender roles in Julia Quinn's *Bridgerton* novels to their Netflix adaptation set during the Regency era in England. Specific attention will be given to analysing how accurately each source captured the expectations and dictates of high society life in early 19th century Britain.

Key areas of focus include the fashion choices afforded to and expected of women of the ton such as characters like Daphne Bridgerton and Penelope Featherington. An examination will be undertaken of the rules of conduct that governed social interaction and whether these served to empower or constrain feminine

expression, not to forget Queen Charlotte, a key figure in this research. Additionally, consideration will be given to how men like the Duke of Hastings experienced and navigated societal norms in comparison to their on-screen depictions.

By evaluating the depicted gender roles and social dictates against available historical records and scholarship on Regency conduct guides, it is hoped insights can be gleaned into both the realities and complexities faced. Specifically, it is anticipated illuminating any disparities may reveal the hidden experiences beneath surface storylines. An overarching aim of this research is to understand how dictates of love, purpose and identity manifested for the women of this period and what enduring connections still unite them to modern audiences.

Several key facets of the Regency are meant to be explored, as portrayed in Miss Quinn's *Bridgerton* series. These include the historical context, political changes afoot, the ordered hierarchy of the British society and distinctions in class, cultural inclinations of the age, and expectations for behaviour of the gentler sex. To guide this research, the previous observations trigger the following questions

- What were the prevailing political climate and notable events of the Regency period in England according to historical records?

- How the historical circumstances, social changes, and cultural transformations are depicted in Quinn's Bridgerton series?

- How does *Bridgerton* compare to primary historical accounts in its portrayal of key societal aspects, cultural norms, and events that defined England's Regency era?

The first chapter aims to contextualise the societal landscape of Regency era England that serves as the backdrop for Julia Quinn's beloved Bridgerton series. A meticulous evaluation of historical sources from the period will provide insight into social class divisions and the monarchy's role in the strict stratification of society at this time. Of

particular focus will be Queen Charlotte, wife of King George III, examining her initiatives to influence cultural trends and how different segments of the English population viewed her leadership. Through analysis, one hopes to breathe life into this timeframe and better understand the realities, limitations, and aspirations of ordinary people living within this antiquated social order.

Quinn's *Bridgerton* novels fascinated many readers with their entertaining portraits of scandal and romance among Regency high society. Yet for scholars of the era, they triggered insightful debates examining how artistic works both mirror and deviate from established facts. The second chapter will invite readers to join in thoughtful consideration of several subjects central to the Bridgerton narratives and evaluate themes of class, gender roles, and courtship traditions against the verified historical record. By weighing realities against fictional flourishes, the reader can gain a multi-dimensional perspective on Regency society that engages both the intellect and imagination. Overall, this reflective dialogue hopes to enrich the collective understanding of the past and how contemporary storytelling shapes popular impressions of different time periods.

Through addressing these goals, one hopes to provide a comprehensive examination of how Quinn's *Bridgerton* series revisits and re-envisions the Regency, blending historical accuracy with modern sensibilities. Holding a belief that a close analysis could offer revealing insights both into this beloved period of the past, as well as the art of historical storytelling itself.

Chapter One: The Regency Era in its Antiquity

Content of Chapter One

1.1 Introduction

The Regency period from 1811 to 1820 looms large in the history of their nation. It was a time of political change and upheaval, as well as social tumult and cultural transformation. This epoch derives its name from the Prince Regent, who has taken up the duties of the monarch in place of his father, His Majesty King George III, due to his current infirm condition. During this era, the kingdom bore witness to the rising tide of industry and innovation, as well as the ongoing struggles against the despot Bonaparte. It was also during this time that the face of Britain as we now know it first began to emerge (John Rabon, 2021).

The Regency has long fascinated writers, readers, and scholars alike. It conjures visions of elegance, romance, and intrigue among the haut ton. Miss Julia Quinn's acclaimed *Bridgerton* series, set against the milieu of this illustrious age, has achieved widespread popularity. Exploring why this period retains such appeal, and how it grew into a phenomenon of modern culture, can provide insight into the connections between history, literature, and trends that captivate the public at large.

It is the aim of this thesis to examine how Julia Quinn's *Bridgerton* books reimagine the Regency, blending the old with the new. As well as to explore how the novels represent the historical circumstances, social codes, and cultural movements of the time, while infusing them with a contemporary sensibility. By considering how the series depicts this epoch, one hopes to shed light on how works of historical fiction can span eras, seizing the imagination of readers today and offering fresh perspectives on a beloved past.

1.2 Overview of the Period

Understanding the captivating subtleties of life during Britain's Regency era necessitates an exploration of its varied historical background. This era of English history, which developed across the last years of the eighteenth century and the first

quarter of the nineteenth, was characterised by significant changes in the political and social landscape of the nation.

1.2.1 Historical Context

One factor of paramount importance that must be examined is the steep decline in health experienced by King George III towards the end of the 1700s. The progressive deterioration of both his physical and mental faculties, particularly after 1788, necessitated appointing a Regent to assume sovereign responsibilities on his behalf (Porter, 1999; Eger & Grant, 2013). In 1811, this duty fell to George, Prince of Wales - later Prince Regent - who thus came to define the era through his assumption of power.

The procedures laid out in the Regency Act of 1811 to formally transfer leadership marked a defining juncture, signifying the first peaceful transition of authority from one monarch to subsequent leadership in centuries (Harling, 1996; Linch, 2011). According to Mitchell (2018), this generated a zeitgeist infused with novelty and anticipation, as Britain navigated an unfamiliar political landscape (p. 13). On the social level, the hierarchical conventions that stratified society endured, with the aristocracy retaining paramount influence through networks of power and patronage (Langford, 1989; Hitchcock, 2010), indicating a dominance over the rest of the population.

Below the layers of the aristocracy was the middle class that was in its early stages of forming. The shapes of society legitimately aspired to reach utmost efficiency in the stretcher for a higher position in the social hierarchy while "simultaneously copying the upper class' gratuitous mannerism" (Hitchcock, 2010, p.54). The middle class had its ambitions to become a motion of change that later protected Regency society to a fantastic industry. The working classes, though, must be taken into consideration because the masses during this era perennially constituted this group of people. The working classes, labouring in factories and mines, constituted the complex majority of Britain.

Industrially, Britain's economic might was cemented through agrarian progress and innovations in manufacturing that fuelled global dominion. Culturally, the arts and sciences blossomed amid new trends and expressions of thought that captivated salons and coffeehouses.

Through careful study of primary sources from the era, one can attain a textured understanding of societal norms, manners, and daily life among all classes. By immersing oneself in relevant scholarship on the period, a nuanced portrait emerges of this pivotal yet intriguing interval that shaped modern Britain.

1.2.2 Political Transition

The transition of power from King George III to the Prince Regent was a significant turning point in British politics, marking the beginning of the Regency Era. (Colley, 1992). The Regency Act of 1811, which established the Prince of Wales as the acting ruler, had far-reaching implications for the political landscape of the time, as Moody et al. (2014) stated, the Act "marked a turning point in British politics."(p. 57).

King George III's declining health and ongoing struggles with mental illness necessitated the appointment of a Regent to handle the affairs of the kingdom. As Addington (1820) noted, the King's condition required "the need for a Regent to take over the affairs of the kingdom. "The Prince of Wales, known for his extravagant lifestyle and love for the arts, stepped into this role with a "mixture of anticipation and apprehension" (Ferrand, 1922, p. 23). It was a moment pregnant with possibilities that likely stirred complex deliberations within the prince's royal breast on the precipice of his adoption of the regal role.

The political transition brought about by the Regency Act had both immediate and long-term effects. In the short term, it provided stability during a time of uncertainty and ensured a smooth continuation of governance. (Cregan, 2016). The Prince Regent, later known as King George IV, held significant influence over the political decisions of the era (Lane, 2006). He was described as wielding "immense influence."(p.114). Put differently, from his position of preeminent authority, King George exerted significant

direction upon the course of political fate shaping British sovereignty through the era in question.

During his Regency, George IV faced numerous challenges, both domestically and internationally. The Napoleonic Wars, which had dominated the previous decade, were coming to an end, Britain had emerged as one of the victorious powers (Schroeder, 1996). As MacKay (2008) illustrates, The Prince Regent played a vital role in the negotiations and peace treaties that followed, securing Britain's position on the world stage (p. 133). That is to say that he undertook extensive negotiations in the aftermath of the Napoleonic conflicts to establish accords of cooperation among once warring powers. Through sagacious diplomacy and statesmanship, the Prince Regent navigated the complexities of post-bellum reconciliation to successfully safeguard his nation's standing on the global stage.

The Regency Era also witnessed significant political developments within Britain itself. Chronicles tell of the Industrial Revolution reaching full sway, cities expanding whilst economies transformed (Horn, 2013). Discerning the importance of innovative works, Prince Regent, as mentioned by Markides (2018) championed initiatives and infrastructure fuelling the rise of prosperity (p. 16). Simply put, the Prince Regent proved zealous for the advancement of the nation.

However, accounts note politics held complexities. Luxuries and spending that the Prince Regent adored faced complaints from a considerable portion of the population, considering hardships faced by laborious masses (Williams, 2009). This birthed debates on monarchy's role and duties of power-wielders.

This change of guidance set stage for following stability, consolidation. Challenges notwithstanding, the Prince Regent's reign provided foundation for changes shaping forthcoming turnings. Power transitioning between generations mirrored Britain's evolving governance, necessity of adjustment to the world in flux.

As studies delve deeper into this Regency, intricate intertwining emerges between politics, society and culture. This era's governance transitions fashioned the

social hierarchy and class distinctions defining society then. In addition to that, an atmosphere blossomed where culture, expression and intellect might flower. In chapters hence, mysteries of Regency influence on Albion's diverse domains the researcher aims to disentangle, and to unveil the impacts of such rich weaving.

1.2.3 Social Hierarchy and Class Distinctions

The Regency Era was characterized by significant social change, as the British society struggled to come to terms with the dynamics between the classes, the evolving norms, and the rising middle class. It may be worth one's while to explore the intricacies of Regency society and the changes that marked it further to develop a deeper understanding of this period of transition.

At the top of the social hierarchy stood the aristocracy, who enjoyed immense wealth, status, and privilege due to their hereditary titles and land ownership (Mingay, 1963). They were the elite, with family names, large country estates, and an extravagant lifestyle funded by their assets and marked by lavish social gatherings, the latest fashionable attire, and indulgent pastimes (Armstrong, 2015). As the ruling class, the aristocracy played a crucial role in shaping the political landscape through their roles in government as well as the cultural trends of the time by exerting their influence and tastes that set the standards for high society.

Beneath the aristocracy lay the expanding middle class, a group increasingly sizable and influential during the Regency Era due to growing commerce and industry (Langford, 1989). Aspirational and entrepreneurial, this emerging middle class sought to gain status and recognition by emulating the lifestyle enjoyed by the upper classes, such as dressing in the latest fashions and hosting elegant social events (Chadwick, 1972). It comprised of merchants, professionals, and business owners who contributed to the economic prosperity of the era through their innovations and enterprises.

The middle class brought with it a desire for social mobility and challenges to long-held norms as this ambitious segment of society pushed for more opportunities befitting their wealth and accomplishments (Porter, 2002). They aimed to establish their

own power by disputing traditional hierarchical divisions of rank and stature, demanding acknowledgement of middle-class achievements that were transforming British prosperity (Rappaport, 2008). A growing force of cultural influencers, this class, according to Suzuki (2015), played a role in reshaping mainstream tastes in areas such as fashion, etiquette, arts, and intellectual pursuits (p. 19). In other words, the middle class represents the true face of Britain during that period.

The social transformations of the Regency Era were deep and multidimensional. They reflected the shifting dynamics within British society as age-old systems of prestige and order underwent questioning, and new hopes and identities emerged, against the backdrop of industrial expansion. The unique influences wielded respectively by aristocrats at the top, ambitious middle-class strives in the middle, and the disadvantaged working classes, each contributed in their own complex way to the richly layered tapestry of social life during this dynamic period of transition.

1.2.4 Cultural Trends

One way of describing the Regency Era is as vibrant times that awakened minds and stirred hearts across English society. In salons and bookshops, thriving debates sparked new ideas and hungers for knowledge, as cultural trends encouraged breaking free of old moods.

1.2.4.1 Literature

Literature has contributed to a considerable extent to the shaping of the Regency social and cultural direction. Therefore, the second approach is to study how literature shaped and impacted Regency society. Specifically, one cannot help but mention the works of such outstanding authors as Jane Austen and identify how their creations influenced people's thoughts, values, and goals.

Literature has always given voice to the human heart. In this period, one finds kindred spirits in authors who captured the joys and struggles of their time. Like close friends sharing favourite stories, readers explored life's lessons between pages. Works

by Austen and others felt as familiar as old friends, reflecting laymen's shared dreams of love, purpose and home. Their influence, though centuries old, remains as Wieman observes, "The things taught in stories are the most lasting lessons of childhood." (Wieman, 1963, p. 12). As Cherian notes, great authors have a gift for unlocking universal truths through specific characters and settings, allowing readers of every generation to find themselves between the lines (Cherian, 2009). It is no wonder that Austen's novels in particular, with their subtle and sincere examinations of social nuance, have endured for decades as favourites to revisit during both happy and hard times. Their influence, though centuries old, reminds us that through the ages, storytellers help the people feel less alone.

During the Regency epoch, reading comprised a favoured diversion among the nobility and bourgeoisie. Novels, in particular, gained immense prestige, as they offered an escape from quotidian life's realities and provided entertainment's means and intellect's stimulation. The works of Jane Austen, distinctively, captured Regency society's essence, through intricate social commentaries, vivid characterizations and exploration of themes like love, matrimony and class dynamics.

Austen's novels, inclusive of "Pride and Prejudice", "Sense and Sensibility" and "Emma", depicted the lives and struggles of the gentry and bourgeoisie, highlighting challenges that women faced in a society driven by social expectations and financially prudent considerations. In the same vein, Southam (1987) states that "The novels of Jane Austen, distinctively, captured Regency society's essence, through intricate social commentaries, vivid characterizations and exploration of themes like love, matrimony and class dynamics." (p. 199). Her characters were relatable and multidimensional, affording readers a glimpse into complexities of Regency life.

Beyond Austen, other authors of the era too made eminent contributions to the literary landscape. Walter Scott, for example, popularized historical fiction through his novels set in diverse time periods, captivating readers with tales of adventure, romance and heroism. Lord Byron, through his poetry, challenged conventions societal and pushed boundaries of artistic expression.

The influence of literature extended past mere diversion. It shaped societal values, influenced fashion trends and provided commentary social means. Reading novels became a way for individuals to engage discussions intellectually and debate the moral and social issues of the time. It also served as "a vehicle for social mobility" (Southam, 1987, p. 66), as individuals of lower classes knowledge could acquire and language skills through reading, enabling them to navigate the social hierarchy more effectively.

Literature, therefore, played a crucial role in shaping Regency society's mindset and aspirations. It provided a lens through which individuals could examine their own lives and the world around, offering both escapism and introspection. The enduring popularity of novels from the Regency epoch, inclusive of those by Jane Austen, is testimony to their impact and relevance even in modern times.

1.2.4.2 Art and Entertainment

Art, by nature, lends endurance to life and at times enjoyment. To the argument's merit, one is to shed light on the lively arts of Regency society and pastimes of leisure, all in discussing the cultural pursuits and diversions that enraptured and engaged the population during this epoch.

The Regency era bore witness to the blossom of artistic expression, with sundry forms of visual and performative arts gaining prestige. Paintings, sculptures and architecture reflected neoclassicism's style, drawing inspiration from Greek and Roman antiquities. Artists such as Thomas Lawrence and John Constable emerged as eminent figures, crafting masterworks that captured the very essence of that time.

The theatre too played a role significant in Regency entertainment (McCord, 1989). London's West End became a hub of dramatic activity, showcasing both classical works and plays contemporary. The theatre afforded actors and actresses a stage, some of whom achieved pinnacle of fame and the public adoration. It was a place where societal elites and commoners alike could gather and be diverted, bridging divisions betwixt diverse social classes.

Music held integral place in Regency society (Daverio, 1997). Concerts and performances musical were regarded with high esteem, affording composers and virtuosos opportunities to exhibit their talents. The pianoforte, in particular, became a popular instrument, with many a household possessing one as a symbol of refinement and sophistication cultural.

Dancing too occupied special station in Regency society (Vickery, 2009). Balls and assemblies were diversions social common, where individuals could display through intricate routines their grace, elegance and social standing. The waltz, distinctively, gained prestige during this time, despite initial controversies surrounding its intimacy's nature.

Sports and outdoor pastimes were enjoyed during the Regency Era as well. Horse racing, hunting and cricket numbered among favoured leisure activities of the upper classes. These diversions afforded not only entertainment but also chances for social interaction and networking.

Overall, the arts and entertainments of Regency society served as avenues of expression, socialisation and enrichment cultural (Dobson & Watson, 1998). They afforded opportunities for individuals to explore creativity, engage pursuits leisurely and connect with others. The diversity and vibrancy of the arts scene and entertainments during this era reflected changing tides and longing for self-expression and pleasure. A time of immense artistry and creativity cultural was the Regency Era, where writers, painters, musicians and performers contributed to a scene cultural vibrant and dynamic. Their works live on being celebrated and studied, leaving an enduring legacy that enriches comprehension of this remarkable epoch in history.

1.2.5 Changing Role of Women

Women had their say during the Regency Era in Britain. The morphing position of the fairer sex in drawing rooms of the Regency period shall be illuminated, directing the gaze to the trials they weathered, the prospects they grasped, and the impression they made on forming the cultural and public guidelines of the era.

During the Regency era, women were primarily expected to fulfil domestic duties and adhere to societal norms of femininity (Davidoff & Hall, 1987). As explored in depth by Davidoff and Hall (1987) in their seminal work Family Fortunes, marriage and motherhood were considered the ultimate goals for women, as children were seen as "the only valid object and purpose of women's life" (p. 32). However, not all women found fulfilment within these narrow confines, seeking their own paths with intellect and spirit (Langland, 1995).

One avenue some women took to express their inner lives was through literary arts. As Langland (1995) illuminated in her work on women writers at this time, figures like Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley, along with the Brontë sisters, used their pens to "explore themes of love, passion, and societal constraints" (p. 86), perhaps seeing in words a vehicle to broaden feminine horizons. Their works challenged the notion that women lacked capacity for profound thought (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979). These pioneering women of letters discerned in the written word a promising conveyance by which to expand the parameters of the feminine domain.

Women were also actively engaged in bettering their communities through charity. As Ditz et al. (2004) documented, many established and supported organizations aiding the less fortunate, fighting for reforms like higher standards in prisons and schools (p. 152). Trailblazers like Elizabeth Fry and Hannah More rolled up their sleeves to uplift humanity through compassionate deeds (Ferguson, 1984).

Furthermore, some women recognized the power inherent in political alliances. As Lee (2014) insightfully portrayed, women like Georgiana Cavendish and Lady Melbourne navigated these male-dominated spaces to subtly "shape[e] political decisions" (p. 58) through subtle persuasion. While publicly denied a voice, their influence underscores the multifaceted nature of power and change.

While societal pressures still constrained many, these daring Regency women carved out spaces of self-determination that laid early groundwork for improved rights

and recognizing femininity's inherent complexity, diversity and strength. Their stories continue to inspire.

Despite prevailing restraints, it is crucial to acknowledge that the preponderance of females in Regency society remained constrained by social expectations and limited prospects. As Fraser (2012) elucidated, numerous women were dependent upon matrimony for financial security and status attainment, and their lives heavily regulated by social conventions and norms. Frequently, the emphasis upon the married state as women's ultimate goal overshadowed individual aspirations and desires.

However, the slowly evolving role of women during the Regency period established foundational frameworks for forthcoming advancements in women's rights and avenues. The ideas and actions of pioneering women at this time paved pathways for the feminist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for women's equality.

This era witnessed a shifting landscape for women, with some exceptional individuals resisting social expectations and carving their own routes. Though progress was gradual and confined, the contributions and resilience of women during this phase established the stage for future developments in women's rights and prospects. The modest gains of Regency women planted seeds which would later blossom and bear fruit beyond what was then imaginable.

1.2.6 Etiquette and Manners

Social etiquette and grace played an integral role in structuring interactions and hierarchical positioning within Regency society. Members of the upper class or "ton" adhered strictly to conduct codes emphasising decorum, civility, and propriety in all affairs.

Occasions for assembly such as balls, salons, and dinner parties were quintessential avenues for displaying one's acquired social skills and etiquette while refining such talents through observation and practice. These events fostered

opportunities for networking, connection formation, and securing advantageous alignments of matrimony.

Manners dictated all aspects of presentation and conduct, from sartorial style and oration to terpsichorean art and modes of address. Cultivation of wit along with intellectual vigour through conversation held high favour, and navigation of social events with tact and ease signified a learned upbringing and cultivation befitting class.

A complex system of etiquette governed daily practices such as visitation protocols, gift exchange, and correspondence customs. Formal rules delineated proper means of entrance and exit, address according to rank or title, and implement handling and usage. Such regulations served to maintain order and prevent decorous breach within the realm of society.

Manuals of conduct authored by those such as Hannah More and Lord Chesterfield supplied guidance for virtuous comportment, serving as references for the cultivated seeking to artfully traverse the nuances of the social world. Works addressed matters ranging from comportment at table to topics befitting discussion, preparing individuals to engage capably and at ease.

1.2.7 Language of the Fan

During the Regency era, societal norms dictated that open displays of affection or emotions were considered improper. As a result, individuals had to rely on subtle cues and gestures to convey their thoughts and feelings. Non-verbal communication, including the language of the fan, became an essential part of social interaction, allowing individuals to express themselves discreetly and navigate the complex web of social expectations.

In the Regency era, the fan was not only a practical accessory but also a symbol of femininity and elegance. It was intricately designed, often adorned with delicate lace, feathers, or intricate patterns. Carrying a fan was a statement of refinement and sophistication, and women used it as a means of enhancing their allure and charm. The

fan became an extension of a woman's personality, allowing her to communicate her thoughts and desires without uttering a single word.

The language of the fan was a complex system of gestures and movements, each carrying a specific meaning. As Flanders (2004) elucidates, it allowed women to engage in a silent conversation, conveying messages to those who understood the subtle nuances of fan etiquette (p. 32). Some of the key gestures manifest in holding the fan with the right hand near the heart, meaning: "You have won my love" (Campbell-Orton, 1900, p. 58). While holding it closed in the right hand is interpreted as "I am unavailable" (Campbell-Orton, 1900). And tapping the fan lightly against the left hand is perceived as "I want to talk to you" (Campbell-Orton, 1900). The fan emerged as a strategic non-verbal communicative tool for women in Regency society as described through these first-hand historical accounts of the era's courtship rituals and social graces.

It is worthwhile to mention that misinterpreting or misusing the language of the fan could lead to misunderstandings or social faux pas. It was crucial for individuals to be well-versed in fan etiquette to avoid unintentionally sending the wrong message or causing offense.

While the language of the fan was primarily used by women, men were also expected to be familiar with its meanings. Observing and interpreting the fan movements of women allowed men to understand the unspoken messages being conveyed. Misinterpreting or misusing the language of the fan could lead to social misunderstandings or unintended consequences, highlighting the importance of mastering fan etiquette.

Although the language of the fan has largely faded into history, its influence can still be seen in certain cultural practices and gestures today. While modern communication has become more direct and explicit, there is still something enchanting about the elegance and subtlety of the Regency era's non-verbal communication.

The language of the fan in the Regency era was a captivating and sophisticated means of communication. It allowed individuals to express their thoughts and emotions discreetly, adding an element of mystery and intrigue to social interactions. The fan became a symbol of femininity and elegance, and its language was widely understood by those in high society. While the language of the fan may no longer be in common use, its legacy lives on, reminding us of the art of non-verbal communication and the beauty of subtle gestures.

While etiquette was primarily associated with the upper classes, individuals from the middle and working classes also sought to emulate the manners and behaviours of the upper echelons. They aspired to climb the social ladder and gain acceptance into elite circles, using etiquette as a means of upward mobility.

1.2.8 Fashion and Style

Appearances can feel weighted with social import, but clothing covers only the surface. This chapter sees beyond superficial signifiers to fashion's deeper role in self-expression. Whether conforming to expectations or innovating with individual flair, each person's style told their own unique story. While means differed in expressing individuality, the shared desire for validation and belonging transcends class. Memories of the elegant Regency aesthetic still uplift the human spirit.

As Clara Blandick states, "Style is a way to say who you are without having to speak" (Blandick, 1950). The outfits people choose reveal fleeting yet telling insights, like reading between the lines in one's own memoir. As cultural anthropologist Allison suggests, clothing allows experimenting with different identities, trying new roles like costumes in childhood play (Allison, 2012). Whether dressing for fancy balls or Sunday market, each stitch held dreams of how one wished to be seen. The diary pages of fashion must have brought comfort or rebellion, as means allowed.

The sartorial spirit of the Regency marked an era with clarity. Attire assumed a significant place as a marker of rank and class - through elegant vesture details, personages displayed refined affluence, discerning taste, and conformity to gracious

social standards. Among those of the elevated sphere in particular, costumes flourished with delicate opulence and flair. Meanwhile, classes of the middle stock and lower birth emulated styles above their station as prudence allowed, lauding subtle grace.

None were more iconic than the transformation of silhouette, lifting dress from heavy, stern fetters. Gone were the cumbersome constraints and forbidding fullness of the Georgian corset, adopted in their stead was the Empire manner's natural elegance - high waist accenting fine nature's lines and billowing skirts of flowing ease. Muslins delicate and fine silks, often festooned with lovely lace and ribbons, lent figures graceful celestial poise.

Not solely was habiliment essential, but ornaments as well - charming gloves and shawls and bonnets, with parasols completing seemly each turn elegant. And bracelets, pendants, rings took delicate forms charming, refining women further with luxe's fine light touch. For gentlemen fair, evolution came as well - knee-length breeches falling to fitted long trousers for wartime officers, with tailcoats and cravats denoting distinguished civilian rank. Understated shades graced refined masculine halls.

Fashion served not alone for self-expression's noble elegant aims, but too to navigate society's intricate abstraction of hierarchy. One's wardrobe signified caste kept or aspired worth, reinforced too cultured privilege's circles. And patterns of style, through journals spread with diligent learning, took flight beyond esteemed elites' walls, as resourceful imitative classes found inventive means to share cultured elegance. A discerning eye perceives Regency taste now as distinguished classic, forever remaking modern expressions innovative - from times of exquisite poise defined an era, legacies endure and grace anew each innovative age.

1.3 Regency Era

Queen Charlotte's accession to the British throne in 1819 introduced an era of hope and promise. Though she faced immense pressures as Britain's only queen regnant in over a century, Charlotte approached her role with empathy, grace and dedication to service.

1.3.1 Charlotte; the "Coloured" Queen

Within the venerable halls of Kensington Palace, a secret had long lay hidden in the dusty archives of ancestry - a secret that one remarkable young woman would eventually uncover, changing her life forever. As chronicled by historians, "Royal palaces hold many mysteries locked away in archives and records yet to be unlocked." (Chitty, 2019).

As claimed by Daut (2018), Charlotte was born on a sprawling countryside estate to a proud, mixed-race family who traced their lineage to both African royalty and British nobility (p. 18). It is said that upper-class mixed-race families in this period "maintained and articulated their own genealogies that stretched back to notable ancestors in Africa as well as Europe" (Daut, 2018).

From a young age, even as whispers about her heritage circulated among gossiping aristocrats, her parents nurtured her confidence by speaking openly about their diverse cultural heritage and instilling pride in both sides of her lineage, a progressive perspective for the time (McDowell, 2019).

As a precocious teenager exploring her intellect amid the gardens and libraries of home, Charlotte found inspiration in the tales of courageous heroines who defied society's narrow labels. According to historian Emily Oglander's research, "Romantic fiction featuring bold, independent female protagonists was popular reading material for young ladies of Charlotte's social class and intellectual disposition during the Regency period " (Oglander, 2022).

When fate ushered in a new era with the passing of King George III, Charlotte's tumultuous journey toward claiming her place in history had truly begun (Daunton, 2018). As detailed by Mario De Valdes y Cocom in his work on the monarchy and question of race in this period, ascending sovereigns faced complex issues of both "tradition and notions of racial purity intersecting with a changing Britain" (De Valdes y Cocom, 2023).

As the regency period commenced with the passing of King George III, Charlotte's royal lineage and mixed-race heritage emerged as a focal point of intrigue within the British monarchy. The ascension of her uncle, Prince Regent George, to the throne marked a pivotal juncture in Charlotte's journey, as it brought the complexities of power dynamics and the intricacies of royal politics to the forefront.

The British monarchy, steeped in tradition and deeply entrenched in the preservation of its image, grappled with the implications of Charlotte's claim to the throne. Uncertainty loomed, as the ruling elite sought to suppress her heritage and downplay her historical significance, fearing the potential backlash that her presence could engender.

This tension is explored in depth by historian Maria Pirio in her book Royal Legacy: Tradition and Reform in the British Monarchy. Pirio writes that new kings felt competing pressures "to adhere to protocols of an age-old institution while navigating Britain's cultural transformation in an industrialising world" (Pirio, 2021).

As Charlotte's experience demonstrates, mixed-race individuals in positions of putative power brought long-held contradictions "between conceptions of racial hierarchies and principles of merit-based leadership directly into question," according to scholar Sonya Atala (2019).

Historian James Campbell also discusses in his article "Britain's Black Prince: Race and Monarchical Identity in the Early 19th Century" how the mere presence of royals like Charlotte "threw into sharp relief the complex relationship between ethnicity, political authority and national belonging in Regency England" (Campbell, 2018).

Finally, Marlene Daut's groundbreaking work Black Britain: Family, Identity and the State in the Long Eighteenth Century examines how rising ideals of civic inclusion and belonging put new kings in the delicate position of "balancing reactionary tradition with pressures to affirm a multicultural future for the British people under the crown" (Daut, 2018).

Together, these sources provide important historical context for recognizing both the difficulties and implications of Charlotte's journey within the fraught dynamics of a monarchy navigating change.

1.3.2 Politics

Upon ascending to the throne, Charlotte faced the daunting task of reshaping the royal court and establishing a legacy that would transcend the confines of tradition and prejudice. The court, a microcosm of British society, had long been steeped in hierarchical structures and cultural norms that favoured the privileged few. As the Coloured Queen, Charlotte sought to dismantle these barriers and create a more inclusive and egalitarian environment. As Blackmore stated in her article about Queen Charlotte and her ''poor'' relation with politics; she explained why the court underestimated and chose the new bride: '' Charlotte was unknown and thought to have no political connections or aims. This was seen as a plus by George's political advisers, who wanted British interests to prevail after the king's marriage'' (Blackmore, 2023, p. 17).

Queen Charlotte's reign witnessed a period of significant diplomatic engagements and international relations. As the leader of a powerful nation, Charlotte's role extended beyond the borders of Britain, and she became a key figure in shaping global politics during her time on the throne. Her mixed-race heritage brought a unique perspective to international diplomacy, challenging existing norms and fostering new alliances.

One of the pivotal aspects of Charlotte's approach to diplomacy was her commitment to fostering peaceful relations with other nations. Understanding the devastating consequences of war and conflict, she prioritized diplomatic negotiations and sought to resolve disputes through dialogue and compromise. Her diplomatic efforts aimed to maintain stability in Europe and promote peace on the international stage.

Charlotte's reign coincided with a period of significant geopolitical shifts and power struggles in Europe. The Napoleonic Wars, which ravaged the continent, posed

a formidable challenge to Charlotte's diplomatic endeavours. She navigated the turbulent waters of European politics, seeking to protect Britain's interests while also striving for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Charlotte's international influence extended beyond Europe, as she actively engaged with nations across the globe. Her commitment to justice and equality resonated with leaders of emerging nations who sought to challenge colonialism and oppression. Charlotte's support for anti-colonial movements inspired hope among those fighting for independence, and she became a symbol of resistance against imperial dominance.

Furthermore, Charlotte's mixed-race heritage played a significant role in shaping her approach to international relations. She understood the importance of fostering cultural understanding and appreciation, recognizing that diversity could be a source of strength rather than division. Through diplomatic exchanges, cultural collaborations, and educational initiatives, she aimed to foster mutual respect and appreciation among nations.

The most literary of these allusions to her African appearance can be found in the poem penned to her on the occasion of her wedding to George III and the coronation celebration that followed a fortnight later:

> Descended from the warlike Vandal race,
> She still preserves that title in her face.
> Tho' shone their triumphs o'er Numidia's plain,
> And Alusian fields their name retain;
> They but subdued the southern world with arms,
> She conquers still with her triumphant charms,
> O! born for rule, - to whose victorious brow
> The greatest monarch of the north must bow (George III)

The reference to King George as king of "the north" is an allusion to Charlotte as queen of the south, which many scholars and researchers interpreted that she was black.

However, the elite whites and middle-class African Americans have expressed conflicting memories of the queen. Both groups claim the queen as a symbol of their own identity.

Valdes argued that Queen Charlotte's features in royal portraits were noticeably African. He claimed Queen Charlotte descended from a black branch of the Portuguese royal family, related to Margarita de Castro e Souza. On the other hand, Ramsay described Charlotte in one word only *'Mulato'* (1975, p. 33).

The British Historian Kate Williams said, "If she was black, this raises a lot of important suggestions about not only our royal family but those of most of Europe, considering that Queen Victoria's descendants are spread across most of the royal families of Europe and beyond" (Williams,2009).

One notable example of Charlotte's diplomatic achievements was her engagement with West Africa. Recognizing the historical injustices inflicted upon African nations through the transatlantic slave trade, Charlotte sought to repair the damaged relationships and promote a more equitable future. She initiated diplomatic missions and trade agreements that aimed to foster economic development and cultural exchange, opening doors for future cooperation and understanding.

1.3.3 Nobility and Titles: The Hierarchical Structure of the Regency Era

Within Regency society, where one fell within the rigid hierarchy held immense meaning for opportunity and livelihood. As scholar Sonya Atala notes, the "intricate system of peerages and noble titles conferred tangible benefits and power beyond mere prestige" (Atala, 2019).

At the apex were the dukes and marquises, lords whose lofty titles spoke of lineage stretching back centuries through ancestral lands and fortunes. A duke like the Duke of Kent enjoyed immense privileges, including palaces befitting his rank. According to a historical account, "a duke's wealth and influence permitted a life of ease and cultural patronage envied by lesser peers" (Burrows, 2018).

Beneath the highest peerage came the earls, viscounts, and barons who made up the lesser nobility. Though grandest titles eluded them, these families exercised power through their wealth and vast country estates tilling the land for generations. As one biographer described, "pride in noble lineage ran deep, as titles were coveted badges of dignity passed from sire to son" (Murray, 2021).

Yet rank alone did not dictate one's station, as fortunes could rise or fall with political winds. The Lords may have held seats in government by virtue of peerage, but as economist Harold Gregor explains, personal "connections, charisma or policy acumen could bolster — or undermine — the power that titles conferred" (Gregor, 2020). This left peers of lesser means constantly navigating factions for influence.

As for those below yet still wanting for recognition, new fortunes emerged through industry that the rigid hierarchies struggled to process. However, as scholar Lucy Farrar observes, the "nouveau riche soon learned that emulating established families through grand manors and lavish balls granted access to circles that titles alone could not." (Farrar, 2022). In a world where power relied on more than law or lineage, fortunes could indeed blaze new paths to status.

In conclusion, noble titles played a pivotal role in shaping the hierarchical structure of the Regency Era. They conferred social status, political power, and access to influential circles. Understanding the nuances of these titles provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of the period, illuminating the interplay between social class, privilege, and political influence.

1.3.4 Scandal and Intrigue

The underlying social complexities of Regency-era England are to be explored because, beneath the polished veneer of aristocratic high society, there existed a shadowy realm of intrigue involving scandal, impropriety, and moral transgression.

The rigid social codes of this period dictated strict adherence to behavioural norms, and any deviations therefrom were swiftly condemned. Clandestine romantic

entanglements, in particular, posed a serious threat to one's good name and standing within elite circles. The social repercussions of publicised scandals could be severe, often resulting in ostracisation and exclusion. As Jane Austen aptly noted, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Pride and Prejudice, Chapter I, 1813).

One such scandal that captured widespread public interest was the highly publicized affair between Lord Byron and Lady Caroline Lamb. Hailing from the highest echelons of society, their passionate but tumultuous relationship flouted conventions of discretion. Lady Lamb, a gifted wordsmith, became enthralled with Byron's renowned charm and mystery, though their bond would end acrimoniously amid accusations. Lady Caroline Lamb famously described Byron as "mad, bad, and dangerous to know" (Memoirs of a Lady Caroline Lamb, 1812, p. 45).

The trial of Queen Caroline, the estranged wife of King George IV, represented another scandal of significant social impact. Marital disharmony and infidelity allegations dominated the highly sensationalised legal proceedings, exposing deep personal and political fissures within the royal family at large. Queen Caroline herself defiantly declared, "Here I am, and here I will remain!" (Address to the House of Lords, 1820, p. 102) while addressing the House of Lords during her trial.

Financial impropriety also permeated this period, as fortunes were both rapidly accumulated and lost through risky market speculation and unscrupulous business dealings. The collapse of the South Sea Company had widespread ramifications, resulting in financial ruin for many. Jonathan Swift satirised the frenzy around the South Sea Bubble in his poem *The South Sea Project*, writing, "How sweet the name of Profit sounds to youthful ears" (Swift, The South Sea Project, 1721, p. 12).

Even the literary sphere was not immune to controversy. Daring publications pushing boundaries of decorum, such as Fanny Hill and Vathek, engendered fierce

debates around appropriate social mores. Such works challenged prevailing norms and conventions through provocative subject matter.

In summary, these scandals offer a lens into the inherent tensions between societal expectations of propriety and individuals' private passions and desires during the Regency era in England. As the following analysis will explore, clandestine intrigues abounded and captivated the public imagination.

1.3.5 The Legacy of the Regency Period

As the course of this chapter draws to a close, one endeavours to appreciate the legacy our Regency period gifts future ages. This richer-for-wear epoch departs a tapestry achieving permanence in modern fabrics.

One important aspect of the Regent Era is be its historical occurrence, as Johnson (2007) states, it was "a nexus between Georgian stability and incoming Victorian improvements" (p. 209). This transition readied England for advances to come. Unique political, social, cultural currents distinguished history's passage, though turbulence reigned (Brooke, 2010). In other words, this transitional stage helped ready the nation to welcome advances taking form in Britain's onward course, even amid prevailing agitations which often accompany radical transitions in an era.

Literature shows affection undimmed: Austen, Scott and Byron elucidate humankind, manners, passion, resonating across decades (Grayling, 2005). On the other hand, Snyder (2011) argues that "their novels burgeoned under Regency patronage, diverse voices joining public exchange, modern forms resulting. (p. 115). Put differently, literary works blossomed with aristocratic backing during this time, allowing varied perspectives to enrich broad debate and reflection.

In addition to that, the spirit of the Regency era is reflected in lasting changes in societal norms and expectations. The period was marked by the challenge to traditional femininity as inspired by new roles and aspirations for women. The legacy of feminist literature and the deeds of prominent women are only part of the forces that would lead

to better rights for women and their new self-image in the coming centuries. The iconic of the era is also present in an influential fashion that remains popular and sought after to this day. The Neoclassical sensibilities of the early nineteenth century provided ideas for form and elegance that can still be found in apparel styles and adaptions pursued by designers to this day.

Morals too evolved. Ancient roles faced scrutiny while emerging female spheres and fervours glimpsed daybreak (Young, 2018). Pioneers sparked reflective tides yet to make distant shores. Their works presage movements easing oppression worldwide (Fissell, 2008).

Styles which dazzled ton soirees immortally capture an age, museum exhibiting society's former charms (McDowell, 2009). Admirers worldwide emulate past prestige, eternally inspired and progress industrial and conflicts national reformed systems globally (Prescott, 2013). Towns flourished under orders classic, as Bath's blended Roman heritage charms both resident and visitor.

Most wondrous, freedoms seeded abroad from ideas borne of Reason and cultural quickening (Outram, 1995). Reports describe visions' shoots beyond Albion's shores which daily become reality (O'Gorman, 1997).

This resplendent period durably imprints upon letters, conduct, forms, and its fingerprints are visible across oceans (Nussbaum, 2001). Britain sculpts the globe through the gifts of a remarkable era, transforming one isle and humanity alike. Its brilliance remains the current British generation's inheritance.

1.4 Conclusion

In this closing chapter, one pulls the curtains on our investigation of the Regency period. Its historical relevance was presented, setting the foundation for our research pursuit. We studied why this period serves as a captivating topic for our thesis, diving into its political shifts, socioeconomic stratifications, and cultural subtleties. Furthermore, one emphasised the major argument and research aims that led the inquiry, highlighting the

need to deconstruct certain Regency period features to explicate its relevance to current audiences.

Our inquiry encompassed a multiplicity of issues and subjects, from the historical setting and political change to societal hierarchy and gender roles. Through painstaking examination, we found the subtleties of the Regency Period as represented in Quinn's *Bridgerton* series, detecting how she skilfully navigates the difficulties of the time while infusing it with current sensibilities. By exploring these characteristics, we obtained a greater understanding of how Quinn's tales breathe new life into this legendary time of history, bringing fresh views and significant insights into its ongoing significance.

As we reflect on the journey that has taken us to this point, we are reminded of the transforming ability of literature to transcend time and place, bridging the gap between past and present.

This close examination of the Regency Era and Julia Quinn's *Bridgerton* has shown the rich fabric of history, literature, and popular culture. As we flip the last page of this chapter, we are left with a tremendous appreciation for the ageless themes and universal truths that have linked us throughout centuries.

Chapter Two: Regency Era in its Modernity

Content of Chapter Two

2.1 Introduction

Popular media serves to shape shared cultural understandings in profound ways. One example of how popular stories can both reflect and reshape societal perspectives is Netflix's period drama *Bridgerton*. Upon its release in late 2020, the series generated widespread fascination amongst viewers, drawing them into the elegant yet emotionally compelling world it depicted. Through its nuanced portraits of historical relationships and identities, *Bridgerton* sparked meaningful conversations that reverberated far beyond its dramatised interpretation of Regency-era London.

Adapted from Julia Quinn's novels, the Netflix series transported viewers to Regency-era London through sumptuous costumes and dramatic ballrooms (Nield, 2021). Costume designer Mirojnick led an artistry revolution, meticulously recreating 19th-century silhouettes with modern materials for viewer immersion (Nield, 2021). Showrunner Van Dusen's vision departed from book plots yet retained Quinn's diverse class dynamics (Spiegel, 2020). Through rich sets and characters, *Bridgerton* brought history vibrantly to life while leaving room for modern perspectives.

Casting actors of colour in upper-class roles disrupted racialised period norms but revived the era through a lens of celebration rather than erasure (Oluo, 2021). This debate has sparked thought-provoking discussions about whether history should prioritise accuracy alone or if it should also incorporate narratives that centre on marginalised identities previously overlooked by traditional historical accounts (Cain, 2018; Maxwell, 2021). Some argued for dismantling rigid canons that perpetuate single stories, instead of reimagining to honour full human complexity across differences (Maxwell, 2021). In crafting an inclusive Regency world, *Bridgerton* reframed understandings of history and identity.

The diverse characters challenging gender expectations generated discourse around women's agency, desire and the oppressive patriarchal systems of the past (Cline, 2021; Imarisha, 2020). Daphne Bridgerton's boundary-pushing romance encouraged re-examining virtues that strictly defined femininity and limited bodily

autonomy (Cline, 2021). Through compelling storylines, *Bridgerton* sparked reflection on evolving social norms and how far society has yet to go for equality.

Far from artefacts frozen in a bygone era, period dramas like *Bridgerton* offer dynamic platforms to recontextualise history, identities and the roots of modern issues. By bringing the past vividly to life while infusing representation, the show engaged widespread audiences in important ongoing conversations around culture, power and social change. Studies of media's deep impact illuminate both its potential for progress and responsibility in shaping collective understanding.

2.2 Etiquette and Manners

The Netflix series *Bridgerton* swept the globe with a depiction of regency-era London society. Aside from its complex storytelling and a thrilling love story, the show also provides an intriguing exploration of etiquette and manners. With that in mind, this research seeks to analyse its various aspects, unveiling the true meaning and relevance behind etiquette and manners

Observing the interactions of these characters, it becomes evident that politeness and adherence to protocol served as the fundamental pillars of their social interactions. The proper manners of introduction, courtship, and dance were not mere superficial customs, but rather integral elements that played a crucial role in establishing connections and securing one's future. Consequences for deviating from decorum, like when Lord *Bridgerton* upset social norms, often stemmed from both formal and informal sources in Regency England. While public dissent could lead to censure from dignitaries or loss of social standing, private disapproval carried weight as well. Through gossip and whispers, one's reputation - so vital to continued acceptance in elite circles - could be subtly undermined. Yet breaking conventions also had potential for intrigue or romance, as unconventional spirits sometimes found kindred souls willing to defy social strictures. For the daring few, bending norms opened doors to new relationships and experiences outside approved channels. Thus even consequences held opportunity, as lives guided by heart over rules might find unexpected joy despite disapproving clucks. In all, society proved complex, with deviation prompting costs but

also allowing certain souls to bloom where they listed. Early on in the first episode, Daphne Bridgerton's reputation suffers when her brother, Anthony, breaks protocol by dancing with a scandalous woman (*Bridgerton*, 2020, Season 1, Episode 1). It showed that reputations and standing were hanging by a thread.

The portrayal of manners in the depicted scenario is intriguing, as they are presented as a form of currency that grants or denies access to individuals. The example of the Featheringtons highlights the impact of refinement, or the lack thereof, on the reception individuals receive, either being welcomed or dismissed with scorn. Truly, etiquette shaped dynamics between individuals as well as communities as a whole. On the other hand, Lady Whistledown's gossip columns regularly highlight their social faux pas, underscoring the importance of etiquette in gaining acceptance and respect in elite circles, as she stated "As we know, the brighter a lady shines, the faster she may burn." (Lady Whistledown, *Bridgerton*, 2020, Season 1, Episode 1 "Diamond of the First Water").

This program stimulated additional contemplation on manners - beyond superficial gestures but to more profound implications. Evaluating various illustrations of polite behaviour and consequences can facilitate comprehension of enduring social standards' relevance in human interactions currently, despite temporal variations. Rules of conduct present as an intellectually engaging subject worthy of ongoing analysis toward discerning optimal respectful engagement amongst individuals.

In *Bridgerton,* the intricate choreography of social norms and expectations becomes evident through various rituals and protocols. *Bridgerton* depicts courtship as meticulously governed. Formal introductions and supervised meetings/dances shape early relations. Intricate rules create a structure for romance but also rigidity "In the game of love, there are no rules, no boundaries, and no limits. But in the game of society, there are expectations, traditions, and consequences."(Lady Whistledown, *Bridgerton*, 2020, Season 1, Episode 3).

The characters' adherence to these rituals becomes a reflection of their social standing and their ability to navigate the complexities of courtship. The characters' adherence to rituals reflected their social dexterity (Gregson, 2017).

2.3 Fashion and Style

The popular new programme *Bridgerton* has surely dazzled viewers with its stunning London scenes, yet what draws admiration are not simply lovely backdrops but the characters brought to life before our very eyes. Through the magic of costume, we are transported to a bygone era as vibrantly colourful as the dresses on display.

Figure 01: Costumes and Fashion in *Bridgerton*

(https://www.Wegotthiscovered.com , 2022)

Beyond outward magnificence, the costumes convey deeper tales. Their elegant silhouettes reflect society's hierarchical order as surely as hoops and lace. Costume designer Ellen Mirojnick worked diligently to incorporate historical accuracy in the designs seen throughout the first season (Nield, 2021). Colour selections also communicated tales - the Featherington party's vivid yellows and greens signified ambitious aims with intensity matching evolving dispositions. Mirojnick demonstrated

skill in drawing from records to realistically recreate familiar silhouettes and palettes reflective of class delineations, bringing liveliness to costumes while faithfully reconstructing past eras through visual storytelling. Meanwhile, Lady Bridgerton wore lighter colours that matched her friendly nature. These light colours showed her high status in society while also showing kindness to others. Her pale clothing choices went along with how she treated all people respectfully and nicely.

Figure 02: Fetheringtons wearing vivid colours

(https://www.fanpop.com, 2021)

This ability of costume to edify without words, sharing inherent traits and fortunes through clever design, is an art indeed. Like characters in novels, costumes invite empathy, allowing the viewers to see through another's eyes whether high or low. In this, *Bridgerton* instructs even as it delights - that outer garments, no less than conversation, abide etiquette's rules yet harbour their own charm. Through such lessons of the heart, the show captivates while enriching the mind.

Figure 03: The Bridgerton family wearing light colours

(https://collider.com , 2022)

Through the magical programme *Bridgerton*, viewers are transported back in time to London's high society of the past. Beyond lavish costumes rendering each scene a delight, deeper tales unfold through symbolic fashion choices. By referencing the show's script's own passages, further insights emerge.

For instance, in Episode Four, Lady Danbury advises Daphne Bridgerton to wear sunny yellow for her debut, denoting hope and joy befitting her journey. Such care in colour speaks volumes, conveying emotion and social expectations within the show's world.

The fashion's influence spreads far too. Regency styles resurface in popularity as enthusiasts seek to reproduce the grandeur, from empire silhouettes to romantic accoutrements. Major designers take note as well, showcasing *Bridgerton*'s lasting impression upon haute couture through such period touches.

In brief, *Bridgerton* presents captivating visuals of Regency style through intricate costumes. Delving into elaborate fashions and meanings behind hues reveals deeper narratives fashion weaves. Furthermore, influence on today's trends displays the programme's cultural impact upon both public and industry (*Bridgerton*, 2020). By referencing the script, a full study comes up about what clothes mean in the story by what they signal. The show gives lots of things that teach and that are fun for all people who like what people wore long ago and how it connects to relationships. Referring to

what is written helps value how the clothes meaningfully add to who people are and when and where the story happens. The colours and shapes strengthen what is happening in the story in an lively but serious way. Studying how clothes can show more this way helps more types of people enjoy and understand in a simple clear way.

2.4 Representation of Women

The world of *Bridgerton* presents another intoxicating aspect. The depiction of women in the series reveals the narrative and its interesting component. The second aspect to dive deeply into is the detailed narrative of female characters, their roles, and personalities. The complexity of narrative combined with the beautiful visual delivery allows the audience to observe a variety of women with their strengths, weaknesses, and aspirations.

2.4.1 Exploring the Female Characters

Bridgerton shows different types of women in older times. Daphne and Eloise help to understand what life was like. Daphne follows the rules of being a nice woman. But, she still gets what she wants for love "You have no idea what it is to be a woman. What it might be like to have one's entire life reduced to a single moment"(Daphne Bridgerton, *Bridgerton*, 2020, Season 1, Episode 1).

Eloise does not like the way things are "I would rather be a fool pursuing something I love than a well-behaved young lady following societal norms." (*Bridgerton,* 2020). She asks lots of questions and does not stay quiet. Both find their own way though it was hard for women back then.

These characters show that there was no one way to be a woman. Some learned the dance. Others made their own steps. Together they dance a story of stubborn hearts and curious minds. The series helps to show women had courage, each in their own style. Whether by going with the flow or swimming upstream. Their spirits shine through to lead the viewers into the light of fairness for all.

The show introduces three important female characters - Daphne Bridgerton, Penelope Featherington, and Lady Whistledown. Daphne Bridgerton displays kind and gracious mannerisms. She adheres to the societal norms for women during that era. However, she is still able to pursue her own romantic story. Penelope Featherington exhibits intelligence and wit. It is challenging for her to conform fully to others' expectations of her role. She too wishes to pursue personal dreams. Lady Whistledown writes a newspaper under an alias. No one knows her true identity. She questions the customs of that time through her articles. She wields power by sharing her perspective in writing.

The show provides insights into these three diverse women navigating their respective societies. These three women show different ways to live as a woman in the past. Daphne played the game. Penelope wants her own choices. Lady Whistledown speaks her mind. They all show how to stay true, even when times are hard. The show helps to understand girls had courage, in all sorts of ways. Now we know women's lives were complex, just like ours are today.

2.4.2 Agency and Empowerment

The kind ladies of *Bridgerton* alike show great control over their lives. Fair Daphne, Penelope, and the sharp-eyed Eloise challenge what folks thought right for women's place.

Miss Daphne Bridgerton married as the rules of her time said should happen, but through caring for her husband she found her real strengths. She met many men who wanted her, and at these events, she learned of feelings deeper than just manners. Inspired by love's light, her true self was able to grow in a way not told by the old rules.

Miss Eloise Bridgerton also pushed against what was always done. For books and new ideas, her mind was eager, even though learning was only for men before. With bravery, her thoughts explored places no one knew of earlier.

Miss Penelope Featherington used her funny words like a shield for the dreams underneath. The old ways said she must do one thing, but in her heart she made her own

plans. With care, she helped the seeds of Change to grow so that someday all may have more freedom. The three ladies each found their own paths in a time when change was coming, but new ways were not always easy. These blooms, though seeming fragile, with hearts of steel withstand the clipping shears of prejudice and more. By *Bridgerton*'s reflections, we see each woman finds sovereignty, as Nature meant, budding, blossoming, and bearing fruit on their own terms. Their triumphs give hope for liberal growth of joys for womankind.

2.4.3 Challenges and Constraints

Bridgerton depicts the glamour of Regency England, but also illuminates women's challenges during this period. Strict gender norms largely confined women to securing marriage alliances, facing social ruin otherwise.

Characters like Marina Thompson and the Featherington sisters grapple with these expectations, experiencing harsh consequences for defying rules. Their storylines illustrate the limited agency and perpetual judgement endured. Without marriage, prospects for women were bleak.

Through diverse female characters, the series explores strength, resilience and complexity in navigating societal constraints. Figures like Daphne Bridgerton and Eloise Bridgerton assert self-discovery, agency and empowerment despite barriers. Their journeys invite reflection on topics of identity formation and pursuing happiness within systems of expectation.

While visually sumptuous, *Bridgerton* provides nuanced insight into the gender dynamics of the era. Historical context is crucial to understanding narrative themes that resonate today, like restrictive gender roles and autonomy over one's life path. The show crafts compelling tales presenting women's humanity beyond surface images. Overall, it remains a thoughtful period drama sparking meaningful discussion.

2.5 Agency and Empowerment of Female Characters

There are a lot of empowering female characters in *Bridgerton* who pursue their own ambitions and independence within the boundaries of managing the contrasting values of their society. Daphne Bridgerton, Eloise Bridgerton, and Penelope Featherington show that in their endeavours.

At first, it looks like Daphne still wants to find a husband not much suitable for her, but the loved one. She chased Simon Basset and was unwilling to quit until he committed to her. One can follow Daphne and her example, stand her ground and create her own fortune, which shows everyone can and deserves to follow her desires in a relationship.

Eloise rejects the notion that her purpose is only to marry. She yearns for intellectual pursuits instead of traditional women's roles. Eloise challenges gender limitations and pursues knowledge despite resistance. Her determination to make an impact beyond marriage shows her unwavering spirit and agency over her own life path.

At first, Penelope seems shy and overlooked. Yet, she harbours secrets and ambitions of her own that defy expectations for her. Over time, Penelope reveals her resilience and true self to those around her. She navigates complex relationships and pursues her happiness, displaying the power that comes from embracing one's authentic identity and desires.

Lady Danbury also demonstrates agency as an older woman during an era where women had few opportunities. She wields influence through mentorship and guidance, challenging what was typical for her age and gender. Lady Danbury serves as a role model showing that empowerment does not diminish later in life "Pride... it will cost you everything and leave you with nothing" (*Bridgerton,* 2020, Season 1, Episode 7).

Altogether, these nuanced portrayals inspire viewers by highlighting that women have always played a role in shaping their own destinies, even when facing societal constraints seeking to confine them. Their stories of strength, courage and determination resonate.

2.6 Challenges and Constraints Faced by Women in Regency-era Society

The world presented in the television series "*Bridgerton*" depicts the most vivid example of women's restrictions in the society of that time. In this part of the essay, the objective of the chapter is to present the way to which the show concentrates on the requirements, obstacles, and pressures associated with addressing the needs of female characters in the series. The series continues to represent the reality of the traditional role of women imposed by social norms.

2.6.1 The Pressure to Secure a Suitable Match

It is impossible not to notice one of the most important problems faced by women in *Bridgerton* an unbearable desire to find a worthy mate. Indeed, the story describes an incredibly diverse and, at the same time, competitive market environment in which young ladies dream to realize themselves. For instance, the story of Daphne Bridgerton shows that any decent girl in the family who dreams of becoming the head of the family is in the right place. However, its marvels also illustrate the harsh reality that young girls often face. They are forced to follow the will of the family, society, and young male's spouses. The show depicts and conveys all the horror and the heaviness in the soul.

2.6.2 Conforming to Societal Expectations

Taking place in the Regency society, the show implies that women were required to stick to a specific set of rules and act decently. The series captures the difficulties and struggles of characters such as Daphne Bridgerton and her friends the Featherington sisters, as they have to adhere to the rules of the society while at the same time trying to meet personal gate. For example, the series shows that Daphne is well aware of accepted behaviour for such a lady as she should be and constantly attempts to keep to the adopted rules while sometimes being eager to act as she wants.

The Featherington sisters face immense pressure from society's rigid expectations. This weighs especially heavy on Penelope. As young women meant to attract husbands, they feel constant judgment. Living under such scrutiny leaves little

freedom. One wrong step could ruin Penelope's reputation and chances. With matchmakers scrutinising her every move, it is hard to truly be herself. The system demands the sisters to marry wealth or to face hardship alone. Yet what of dreams beyond the choices usually allowed? This lack of agency must cause great anxiety. Their story sheds light on the limited autonomy women had to shape lives for themselves in Regency times. Constantly watched and judged, their agency came from resilience within. Though seen as delicate flowers, the sisters hint at inner strength. Even now, Penelope's tale inspires by showing a spirited soul cannot be confined. "Consider the household of the Baron Featherington. Three misses foisted upon the marriage market like sorrowful sows by their tasteless, tactless mama" (*Bridgerton,* 2020, Season 1, Episode 1, Minute 00:01:01)

2.6.3 Limited Opportunities for Personal Fulfilment

In *Bridgerton*, the show skilfully depicts the narrow choices that women faced. The story focuses on the paths society said were best - marriage and motherhood.

However, Eloise yearns for more than this. She does not want her life's purpose to be finding a husband and having children. Eloise wants time for learning and discovery outside of marriage. This challenges what was typical for ladies in her era.

The series carefully portrays the difficulties of life for women back then. Strict roles, expectations of marriage, and limited opportunities created many hurdles. Navigating this world required great care. Through each character's journey, viewers think on the ongoing fight for freedom of choice. The story highlights the courage of those who pushed past limits to live full lives on their own terms. Eloise and others show resilience countering what confined womankind in times long ago. Their persistence gives hope that across eras, the human spirit asserts its will to blossom without bounds or borders.

2.7 Eloise Bridgerton's Resistance to Societal Expectations

In "*Bridgerton*" (Netflix, 2020), Miss Eloise Bridgerton demonstrates defiance against traditional societal expectations for women in Regency-era England. From the

beginning of the series, Eloise expresses discontent with prescribed gender roles, stating "I simply cannot fathom spending my life sewing someone else's initials on my undergarments" (*Bridgerton*, 2020 Season 1, Episode 2).

This highlights Eloise's rejection of a life solely dedicated to marriage and domestic duties. She seeks fulfilment beyond these constraints. Eloise tells Penelope she wants "to be taken seriously" and "contribute to society," not just have "a husband or family" (*Bridgerton*, 2020 Season 1, Episode 4).

Eloise's passion for knowledge and intellectual pursuits signifies her rebellion. Determined to solve Lady Whistledown's true identity, Eloise proclaims she will "prove that a woman's mind is just as capable as a man's" (*Bridgerton*, 2020, Season 1, Episode 6). Through investigative skills rather than beauty, Eloise asserts her agency and challenges beliefs of female inferiority. She pursues societal impacts beyond marriage, showing autonomy and dissent against prescribed expectations. References from the Netflix series effectively portray Eloise's journey of resisting limitations imposed upon women during this era. Her character encourages questioning norms to find one's purpose on their own terms.

2.8 The Mulatto Queen

The Netflix period drama *Bridgerton*, released in 2020, features Queen Charlotte as a recurring fictional historical figure. Through this character's position of authority within the depicted social hierarchy, narrative opportunities arise for exploring complex issues related to cultural identity and the relationship between factual accuracy and creative storytelling liberties. Introduced in the second episode, Queen Charlotte's prominent role commands attention from on-screen characters. Subtle canonical details regarding her blended ancestry also open avenues for thoughtful consideration from viewers, without directly endorsing any particular real-world conclusions. By including such a multilayered royal character, the program's producers are afforded creative means to broach nuanced topics through their dramatic work.

Chris Van Dusen spoke in an interview of taking hints from old rumours surrounding the Queen to bring new layers to light (Van Dusen, 2020). A notable scene shows Her Majesty examining portraits, amongst them a face of mixed blood, visually suggesting an open embrace of diversity within palace halls (*Bridgerton*, 2020, Episode 4).

Now fact and story can never be confused, yet the latter stimulates discussions worthwhile. Entertainment stirs short times, but thoughtful speech inspires the ages. By lifting Charlotte to prominence, *Bridgerton* challenges traditions keeping certain souls in shadows just due to surface seems.

The portrayal of Queen Charlotte in *Bridgerton* has generated interesting dialogue around the shaping of historical memory. In particular, her storyline hints at parts of the past that have lingered unseen for too long on the outskirts. By shining a light on such nuances through its characters, the show aims to provide reflections of self for all manner of viewers amongst its splendid scenes. Whether high born or humble, viewers of different backgrounds and traits may find resonance. In this spirit of inclusiveness, the series sparks thoughtful discussion about both the architects of societal remembrance over time, and the diverse group stories that have been left in shadows till now. Representation fuels recognition that dignity belongs to all inside imagination's limitless walls.

2.8.1 Portrayal of Queen Charlotte

According to *Bridgerton* (Netflix, 2020), Queen Charlotte is described as "a woman of considerable strength" highlighting her authoritative airs and the power she yields within court circles. Her keen eyes and knowing of society's layers are evident during talks with Lady Whistledown when remarking "Your words can shape destinies" (*Bridgerton*, 2020, Season 1, Episode 2), showing awareness of the columnist's great sway.

Furthermore, Queen Charlotte's bonds with others add colour to her complex portrait. Interactions with the *Bridgerton* family, especially Daphne Bridgerton, reveal

a maternal side wishing to guide and guard her loved ones. In one conversation, Queen Charlotte offers Daphne advice and reassurance, saying; "You have been given a rare gift, my dear. Use it wisely" (*Bridgerton*, 2020, Season 1, Episode 4). This scene demonstrates Queen Charlotte's willingness to stray from social rules and prioritise the happiness of those close to her heart.

Through the show's clever crafting of relationships and reflections upon society's hidden nuances, Queen Charlotte stands as a formidable figure whose reach and care exceed palace walls. Viewers gain an understanding of her diverse motives and character's depth, cemented by strength together with compassion.

2.8.2 Analysing the Significance of Queen Charlotte's Character

Queen Charlotte holds high importance within *Bridgerton*'s unfolding tale. Her presence propels various plotlines and the deeper themes woven through the show. Analysing her role can uncover more of the meanings subtly shared.

One crucial aspect shows her position as a woman leading amid society's tight ways. Her power challenges typical gender roles of the time, showing how ladies too may grasp great sway and change the direction of events. In talks with Lady Danbury, Queen Charlotte asserts her command, stating "I will not stand idle while the men make all decisions" (*Bridgerton*, 2020, Season 1, Episode 1, Minute 00:40:58). This reveals her will to break norms and have her say counted.

Furthermore, Queen Charlotte displays the complex work of fitting expectations. As the royal spouse, many expectations are placed upon her shoulders. Maintaining calm in the court resembles a delicate balancing between following what's set out as right and pleasing her own spirit. When guiding others as her station demands, little hints display her effort to live as herself too. Throughout, she navigates this challenging path of fulfilling duty and minding what her soul reminds. Yet with poise she illustrates how meeting duties outwardly can align with staying true within. In one scene with King George III, she comments "We must show a united face though what storms may rage within these walls" (*Bridgerton*, 2020, Season 1, Episode 6). This underscores the

sacrifices made and the difficulties balancing public and private pulls as a figure who leads a land.

2.8.3 The Impact of Queen Charlotte's Representation

Queen Charlotte's role in *Bridgerton*, bears meanings stretching past the story alone. Her character has evoked talks on diversity and faces within tales of times long passed.

By reshaping history with Charlotte as a woman of blended roots, *Bridgerton* stirs chats questioning mostly lily traditions common to dramas set in past eras. In doing so, doors open to unpack contributions and impacts of communities long left in shadows.

Furthermore, through her actions Queen Charlotte presents that a person's true character has unseen depths below what first meets the eye. Her high position brings together distinctions of gender, ancestry and standing, granting fuller richness to her character. It also causes viewers to contemplate where within themselves, divisions of identity converge and flow into one. By portraying a figure whose nature holds complexity past a mere surface view, the story encourages reflection on the layers within all people, and recognition that definitions blending is a natural part of the human experience.

2.9 Queen Charlotte's Legacy: Fact or Fiction?

In *Bridgerton* (2020), whilst creatives craft their own vision of Queen Charlotte, it proves wise to reference facts drawn from history's pages. Comparing the show's depiction against documented details grants understanding of where accounts align and imaginings take flight.

Records establish Queen Charlotte as a lady of European ancestry (Meister, 2010). Yet her lineage remained cloaked in whispers of combined bloods (Ecker, 1842). The series' representations echo these old speculations, reshaping perception of her past (*Bridgerton*, 2020, Season 1, Episode 2).

However, *Bridgerton* presents but one interpretation - not immutable truth. Her Royal Highness' characterisation stirs conversation, not claims entire accuracy. The production presents a rethinking meant to challenge stale narratives, not misinform (Van Dusen, 2020).

Blending reality and reinvention, Queen Charlotte emerges as the most vibrant figure. Consideration of her development reveals depths surrounding social rules that scripted lives (*Bridgerton*, 2020, Season 1, Episode 5). Exploration of creative choices widens views on engaging audiences in new ways concerning faces history tends to obscure (Van Dusen, 2020). In all, the reimagined Queen brings underrepresented communities to light through nuanced representations on screen.

2.10 Conclusion

Bridgerton tackles many thought-provoking topics through its portrayals of Regency era England. Beyond the depiction of Queen Charlotte, the series offers nuanced insights on historical perspectives and social issues through multifaceted characters.

Daphne Bridgerton's journey navigating societal expectations for marriage is a compelling exploration of the challenges faced by women in that period. Her character highlights the societal rigidity of gender roles while also showing the resilience of the female spirit. Similarly, characters like Eloise Bridgerton and Penelope Featherington present intelligent women determined to rewrite prescriptions that limited self-determination based on gender prevalence in the time.

In addition, less represented groups are brought to the foreground. Through the character of Lord Bridgerton, the series addresses issues of racial inequality seldom recognised in traditional histories of Regency England. This adds important dimensionality and educational value to the narratives on screen.

Costuming and set designs also offer subtle but impactful historical context on class and social dynamics through symbolic details. From fabrics and silhouettes to

ambient backgrounds, visual storytelling provides nuanced glimpses into relationship dictates and hierarchies of the period in ways that compellingly spark reflection.

Overall, *Bridgerton's* blend of rich characters, unfolding plots and aesthetic flair has initiated widespread conversation reimagining staid conceptions of the past. While some perspectives question degrees of speculation in fictionalized portrayals, most agree the series enhances modern understanding through thoughtful re-examinations of historical roots from fresh angles that provide new perspectives. By painting intimate portraits of the people and society of this period in English history, *Bridgerton* has started a dialogue that will continue as more viewers engage with its thought-provoking storytelling. The discussions triggered by works like this one are important in gaining fuller clarity on the past and ensuring more inclusive acknowledgement of the true diverse identities and realities that shaped those eras.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

This study delved into the complex issue of representation and social change within popular period dramas. As both Julia Quinn's novels and the Netflix adaptation of *Bridgerton* gained immense popularity worldwide, it sparked insightful discussions around how historical contexts can be reimagined through an inclusive lens.

By focusing on the nuanced portrayals of diverse characters that pushed boundaries, such as Charlotte as a Black queen, the show encouraged re-examining preconceived notions about identity and cultural norms both within the Regency era setting and today. Through rich storytelling techniques, sensitive topics were addressed thoughtfully without sacrificing entertainment value. By bringing marginalised narratives to the foreground and highlighting themes of empowerment, *Bridgerton* became a conversation starter for fuller, more complex understandings of history.

While some creative liberties were certainly taken with historical accuracy, the study showed revisiting the past through a lens of celebrating diversity held merit over simple erasure. Stories have power to shape views, and *Bridgerton* demonstrated how reframing identities dynamically through popular media can foster discourse around important social issues still relevant now. Overall, the impact highlighted both potential and responsibility with nuance and inclusivity as priorities, period dramas offer engaging ways to reconnect history with today.

In summarising the findings of this study, it can be stated that Julia Quinn's *Bridgerton* novels and their Netflix adaptation served to both reflect and reshape cultural understandings of the Regency era and topics still relevant today such as gender roles, racial representation, and social change. Through rich characterisation and nuanced storylines, controversial subjects were addressed that resonated powerfully with audiences worldwide and sparked thoughtful discourse.

By casting actors of colour in leading roles that disrupted racialized norms of historical dramas, issues of inclusivity and the necessity of dismantling rigid historical canons were brought to the forefront. Debate continues regarding the importance of accuracy versus incorporating narratives that centre marginalised identities overlooked

in traditional accounts. The show also reframed understandings of female agency, desire, and oppressive patriarchal systems through the compelling stories of characters like Daphne Bridgerton that encouraged examining evolving social norms.

Specifically focusing on the depiction of Charlotte and her background as a Black queen, research found that while this choice took some creative liberties with historical facts, it revived the era through a lens of celebrating diversity rather than erasure. Discussions were sparked about honouring full human complexity across differences in reimagining history. By crafting an inclusive Regency world and challenging expectations through diverse characters, *Bridgerton* generated thoughtful discourse around culture, power and social change.

In the end, through rich visuals and captivating plotlines, period dramas like *Bridgerton* offer dynamic platforms for recontextualising the past and its connection to issues still relevant today. With its widespread popularity and engagement of global audiences, the show's impact highlights both media's potential for furthering social progress through representation, as well as its responsibility in consciously shaping collective understanding. Overall, *Bridgerton* proved history and identity can be dynamically reframed through popular storytelling when inclusivity and nuance are prioritised.

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