

# BRIDGERTON IS THE REGENCY FANTASY WE DID NOT KNOW WE NEEDED

By Ella Ostrowski

*An insight into the new popular period drama -Spoilers ahead*



It is not surprising that there has been an increased interest in watching shows on Netflix whilst the worldwide pandemic has meant remaining at home. Bridgerton premiered on Netflix in December 2020 and was announced by Netflix that it had become their "biggest series ever" with 82 million households around the world tuning into it in its first 28 days online.

The courting regulations displayed in the series may surprise viewers who are used to modern dating which has evolved to grant absolute choice in who you date. Dating apps enable this as users can connect with a variety of people at the swipe of a screen which would not have been socially acceptable or possible in the Regency-era.

Much of the entertainment provided in the series comes from the clear competition to acquire a suitable partner in the courting season. Amidst this tale of Regency, set in 1813 London, rivalry between the Bridgerton family and the Featherington family is at its heart. Daphne and the three Featherington daughters all are trying to find a husband. The main plot is derived from Daphne and The Duke's fake relationship which aims to ensure another suitor for Daphne and the Duke some peace from his nagging Aunt.

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Despite the emphasis on competing in the series providing entertaining scenes, it further brings to light the contextual pressure on women to secure a man. Not only was this to aid themselves to gain financial stability, but it is also to help their families and to start a family of their own. Often marriages in the Regency period worked like contracts, as we see when Daphne is forced to consider marrying the rather unattractive, Lord Berbrooke, to stop him from causing her and her family social ruin.

Jane Austen's 1811 novel *Sense and Sensibility* relates closely to the series where the pressure on women and men to marry in the 19th Century is also a prominent theme. Austen's novel includes Edward Ferrars being warned by his mother, Mrs Ferrars to not be "drawn in" by "any young woman". Much like how the charming eldest child, Anthony Bridgerton, in the Netflix show is advised to cut off relations with the opera singer, Siena Rosso, to find a more suitable wife of his class.

Additionally, Austen's novel explores similar ideas around the representation of women as competitors which is provoked by the pressure on them to marry. The plot involves Marianne whose love interest, Willoughby marries a rich woman named Miss Grey who has a settlement of £50,000. He points out how his "affections for Marianne were not sufficient enough to outweigh the dread of poverty", demonstrating how he must prioritise financial stability in marriage over love as marrying a good suitor was important in the period. This contrasts to the overtly passionate Marianne who states, "money can only give happiness where there is nothing else to give", where she is arguing how money is not everything.

Financial issues affecting marriage as seen in Austen's novel is also addressed in episode four of *Bridgerton* where the Featherington family struggle financially. Their father's reckless gambling addiction leads to his own death and is discovered by Lady Featherington who upon finding documents realises that her husband has driven the entire family into debt and lost their daughters' dowries. This cliché-ridden tale leaves many story lines open ended leaving you wanting more and awaiting the second season. You are left questioning what will happen to the financially struggling Featherington family. As well as whether the single bachelor, Anthony Bridgerton, will ever be able to settle down?



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