

AGAINST FACTS, DREAMS. THE FABULATION IN QUEEN CHARLOTTE: A BRIDGERTON STORY

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ABSTRACT

In the present article, we propose an analysis of the Queen Charlotte series: a Bridgerton story (Netflix, 2023). Much of the critical reception of the work, produced and scripted

by Shonda Rhimes, addressed the fact that its narrative was based on historical facts about British royalty and explored the public's curiosity regarding what was real or fictional in the story. One of the most discussed issues – and which caused a lot of controversy – concerns Queen Charlotte's racial identity. Was the idea of attributing the series' leading role of a Western monarch to a black personality just poetic freedom or a decision based on evidence that the queen was of African descent? Rather than entering into this controversy, we are interested in reflecting on this fabular gesture, this movement that resituates the past at the same time as it provokes the present and acts to outline possible futures. In the path around this central theme, we seek to characterize the narrative world constructed in the series, based on the Bakhtinian notion of chronotope, to reflect on this fabulation, in our view an act of counterfactual historical imagination.

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1. INTRODUCTION

"This is the story of Queen Charlotte of Bridgerton. It's not a history lesson, it's fiction inspired by fact. All the liberties taken by the author are quite intentional." This warning appears before the opening images of *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story*, a six-part series produced and scripted by Shonda Rhimes for Netflix and released worldwide in May, 2023. Anchored in the success of the two seasons of *Bridgerton*, a series by the same producer, based on the books of the same name by Julia Quinn, *Queen Charlotte* is set five decades before its predecessor. The narrative is divided into two periods of time. The first and main one focuses on Charlotte's (India Amarteifio) arrival and adjustment to the British throne, as well as her love story with King George (Corey Mylchreest). The second timeline, which is the same as *Bridgerton*'s, portrays the older Queen (played by Gouda Roscheuvel) and her efforts to ensure that her children give her grandchildren and guarantee her line of succession.

Bridgerton's spin-off is integrated into Netflix's presence in global markets. Despite the fact *Queen Charlotte* is linked to *Bridgerton*, an adaptation of an U.S. novel, and that it tells its version of real characters of the British monarchy, it was not made for those audiences only. As put by Jenner (2018), Netflix films and series are textually thought to have a transnational, decentered audience. Or as Mateo-Perez, Lacalle, and Rocha (2022) put out, streaming audiences, such as Netflix, are, at the same time, massive and fragmented (considering not only segments such as LGBT communities but also bearing local, cultural peculiarities). This is seen for instance in Netflix strategies for Latin America, which is considered, as Rocha, Arantes and Silva (2021) note, a "homogeneous area" (in spite of its "internal differences") that demands, however, specific modes of communication and marketing. Thus, "...its international catalog system can also be studied in relation to legacy media studies questions—questions about cross-border media flows, global/ local dynamics, and audiovisual diversity" (Lobato, 2017, p. 252). Having this scenario in mind, we are not interested, in this article, in researching or focusing on local reception of narratives such as *Queen Charlotte*. Our goal is different: to address the imaginative challenges that the series presents in relation to the past and the present, which are linked, in our opinion, to the broad appeal of romance dramas and the racial debate provoked by Shonda Rhimes' production.

The critical and audience reception of *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* has been very positive. The series premiered

in first place in 91 countries¹ and, in May 2023, entered the list of Netflix's² top ten most watched English-language series. In general, the production has been highly rated. In Rotten Tomatoes, checked on October 2025, it had 94% positive views³. In the UK, the series was considered a "gorgeous triumph" by The Guardian⁴. In Peru, as having moments of genius⁵. For Variety, "Queen Charlotte is the best 'Bridgerton' yet"⁶. In Brazil, it was considered "great"⁷, the "biggest hit" of the *Bridgerton* series⁸ and even better than it⁹.

Most of the texts addressed the fact that the play was based on historical facts about British royalty and explored the public's curiosity about what was real or fictional in the story. One of the most discussed issues - and which caused a lot of controversy - concerned racial issues, such as Queen Charlotte's racial identity, the "great experiment" (as the plot names it), and the interracial love between the queen and her husband. In Brazil, this debate generated headlines such as "Queen Charlotte: what is true and what is fiction in the *Bridgerton* spin-off?"¹⁰ and "7 truths and lies about *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story*"¹¹. U.S Vox considered the interracial love a problem in the series, stating the weak evidence of Queen Charlotte's blackness¹². *Time* magazine observes that Shonda Rhimes' joint "...doesn't shy away from making race an integral part of multiple story lines, addressing everything from colorism to segregation and integration. But (...) there's definitely a liberal blurring of the lines be-

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_Charlotte:_A_Bridgerton_Story

2 <https://www.netflix.com/tudum/top10/tv?week=2023-05-07>

3 https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/queen_charlotte_a_bridgerton_story/s01

4 <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2023/may/04/queen-charlotte-a-bridgerton-story-review-a-ravishing-romp-packed-prequel>

5 https://elcomercio.pe/saltar-intro/netflix/series/reina-charlotte-una-historia-de-bridgerton-un-versus-de-opiniones-sobre-la-serie-de-netflix-criticas-review-india-amarteifio-corey-mylchreest-noticia/#google_vignette

6 <https://variety.com/2023/tv/tv-reviews/queen-charlotte-review-bridgerton-prequel-1235602760/>

7 <https://www.omelete.com.br/series-tv/criticas/rainha-charlotte-bridgerton-critica>

8 <https://www.chippu.com.br/criticas/rainha-charlotte-maior-acerto-bridgerton-critica-netflix>

9 <https://cinepop.com.br/critica-rainha-charlotte-spin-off-de-bridgerton-e-ainda-melhor-que-a-serie-original-412591/>

10 <https://www.omelete.com.br/series-tv/rainha-charlotte-bridgerton-real-ficcao>

11 <https://www.techtudo.com.br/listas/2023/05/7-verdades-e-mentiras-sobre-rainha-charlotte-uma-historia-bridgerton-streaming.ghml>

12 <https://www.vox.com/culture/23712625/queen-charlotte-bridgerton-netflix-real-history>

tween history and fantasy in the series”¹³. Portuguese newspaper Público asked if it has ever existed “a Queen Charlotte”, and answers: “Yes, and she had Portuguese ancestors”¹⁴

Sophie Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, who reigned over the British Empire for almost 60 years, was born in a small province in Germany. She was 17 when she arrived in England for her wedding to King George, whom she met at the altar. According to Brazilian Uol, “Charlotte was said to be a descendant of King Afonso III of Portugal and one of his mistresses, known as Madragana, who was Moorish or Mozarabic (Iberian Christians who adopted the Arabic language and culture)”¹⁵ (translated from the original text in Portuguese). Some historians, such as Mario de Valdes y Cocom, a specialist in the African diaspora, have reported finding strong evidence that she was a direct descendant of a black branch of the Portuguese royal house. In period paintings, such as those by the artist Allan Ramsay, the monarch is portrayed as a white woman, but her facial features are black and her hair is curly.¹⁶ In addition, Valdes found a document in which the royal doctor describes her as “small and crooked, with a real mulatto face”. One minister is also said to have written that her nose was very wide and her lips very thick.¹⁷ Valdes’ thesis, however, according to Uol¹⁸, is contested by many other specialists, who have found no conclusive evidence of Charlotte’s racial origin. There is a historical debate as to whether she was, therefore, black or of African descent, even though she has been portrayed with light skin on different screens. In the series, however, there is no doubt: Charlotte is played by two black actresses, deepening a provocative choice present in *Bridgerton* and linked to Shonda Rhimes’ political activism.

Bridgerton is inspired by Julia Quinn’s nine period novels, released between 2000 and 2013. Quinn’s books can be seen as an updated version of popular romance novels as those of Georgette Hayes and her regency books, and Barbara Cartland, a specialist in love stories set in the past, in an ide-



FIGURE 1: IN THE PAINTING BY ALLAN RAMSAY, QUEEN CHARLOTTE IS DEPICTED AS WHITE, BUT HER HAIR IS CURLY AND THERE IS EVIDENCE OF BLACK FEATURES ON HER FACE.¹⁸



FIGURE 2: INDIA AMARTEIFIO AS QUEEN CHARLOTTE IN THE NETFLIX SERIES. NATURAL, ABUNDANT HAIR, INTENTIONALLY MADE PROMINENT.¹⁹

alized British aristocracy of the 18th and 19th centuries. In all these cases, despite their many variations, the narratives are led by women who face obstacles related to the fulfillment of romantic love.

Despite being set in the early 19th century, *Bridgerton*, as produced by Shonda Rhimes, featured black characters occupying different social strata, including the most prominent spaces at court. Queen Charlotte herself, as we have seen, is a black woman, as is the protagonist, the Duke of Hastings

13 <https://time.com/6277014/queen-charlotte-netflix-true-story-behind/>

14 <https://www.publico.pt/2024/05/20/impar/noticia/bridgerton-existiu-rainha-charlotte-carlota-sim-ascendencia-portuguesa-2091089>

15 <https://gizmodo.uol.com.br/rainha-charlotte-quem-foi-a-monarca-que-inspirou-o-spin-off-de-bridgerton/>

16 <https://www.omelete.com.br/series-tv/rainha-charlotte-bridgerton-real-ficcao#25>, acessado em 12/02/2024.

17 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/05/15/meghan-markle-queen-charlotte-and-the-wedding-of-britains-first-mixed-race-royal/>, accessed on 11/02/2024.

18 <https://gizmodo.uol.com.br/rainha-charlotte-quem-foi-a-monarca-que-inspirou-o-spin-off-de-bridgerton/>

19 Image: <https://gizmodo.uol.com.br/rainha-charlotte-quem-foi-a-monarca-que-inspirou-o-spin-off-debridgerton/>

20 Image: <https://veja.abril.com.br/coluna/e-tudo-historia/a-figura-real-por-tras-de-rainha-charlotte-nova-seriebridgerton>



FIGURE 3: BRIDGERTON IS AN ADAPTATION OF THE BOOKS BY JULIA QUINN, REPRESENTATIVE OF A GENRE OF PERIOD ROMANCE THAT BECAME VERY POPULAR WORLDWIDE FROM THE 1970S TO THE 1990S AND WHICH HAD BARBARA CARTLAND AS ONE OF ITS MOST RECOGNIZED AUTHORS.

(Regé-Jean Page), and various other members of high society. The series was a popular success, but received criticism for being set in a kind of post-racism era. Shonda Rhimes' aesthetic and political choice in *Bridgerton*, intensified in *Queen Charlotte*, is linked to the trajectory of the producer and screenwriter. From the success of *Grey's Anatomy*, a series created in 2005 and still running, Rhimes has become known for creating works starring strong and complex black women, such as *Scandal* (2012-2018) and *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014-2020) (Alves and Souza, 2021; Calhoun, 2025; Rocchi and Farinacci, 2020; Weinstein, 2024; Nbinjama and Nikoala, 2024).

For Rocchi and Farinacci, who endeavour a qualitative and quantitative methodology to analyse three Rhime's series (*How to get away with murder*, *Scandal* and *Grey's Anatomy*),

Rhimes delivers numerous post-feminist, strong, independent, and complex female characters that persist through the various seasons. In regard to race, the corpus displays a colour-blind representation of the characters. Although racial issues are mostly neutralized, the corpus is dotted with episodes that specifically deal with issues of racial inequality and are relegated mostly to the past. (2020, p.31)

Rocchi and Farinacci noted that the female presence in Rhimes' production is effective and defies some old dichotomies regarding women, such as powerful/feminine, intelligent/sensuous, and resolute/elegant. However, they point out that these characters are usually "post-feminist singletons" and, in regards to race, Rhimes doesn't break with the tendency of "commodifying racial differences is reducing the Black female body and culture into consumable goods in American media" (2020, p.37). This assumption, however, is not taken for granted by all critics and scholars. As we will further see, there is more ambiguity, not to say complexity, in how Rhimes presents race and female characters.

Analysing two Rhimes' speeches, but also taking into account some of her productions, Adelinda Nbinjama and Sisanda Nikoala present a different perspective. According to them, Rhimes is conscious of what it means being a highly successful black woman in the entertainment industry, and she is an "ally" to Black feminism in a "post-structural world". This is so, because, as Nbinjama and Nokoala put it, "...there's some progression towards gendered and racial diversification within Rhimes' series", since their narratives highlight "...multiple intersectional female characters, allowing the expression of various female portrayals". Most importantly, Rhimes "...ability to engage her fans and audiences via online platforms

widens her ability to reach broader audiences from various intersectional backgrounds”. (2024, p.166).

As Calhoun notes, while media criticism celebrates Rhimes’ racial diversity, scholars are more “ambivalent”, situating her castings and narratives “...within ideologies of colour-blindness and post-racism that erase the realities of continuing oppression” (2025, p.5). For Khoo (2025, p.3), Rhimes’ productions are often “...critiqued practice of colourblind casting, that is, employing diverse casts without directly addressing their ethnoracial differences”. Although “colorblind” seems to be a key-term for *Bridgerton* and *Queen Charlotte* (Khoo, 2025; Sporic, 2022; Hanus, 2024; Harris and Sanders, 2023, among others), other expressions, such as “quasi-color consciousness” (Lynn, 2024), and “color-evasive” (Khoo, 2025), are also associated to *Bridgerton* and *Queen Charlotte*. Despite their differences, they all point out that, in Emma Lynn’s words, “...the series ignores race as an important part of characters’ lives, distances itself from history, and mischaracterizes love as a cure for racial discrimination”. (2024, p.312). Or, as Khoo observes:

It is possible to frame the lack of discussion around race in *Bridgerton* as a marker of progress; that is, that in a post-racial world there is no longer any need to discuss issues of race. However, this silence (or silencing) also removes any opportunity to explicitly challenge racism as it continues to exist both in front of, and behind, the camera. In a period drama like *Bridgerton*, this practice can result in an implausible story world, where a marginalized or oppressed race can take on positions in society that they would historically never have access to. For audiences, this can create a utopic world of fantasy and escapism, but it also elides more serious issues of racism (2025, pp.4/5)

The political implications of Rhimes’ choices are not, as we see, to neglect and mark also their distance to historical accuracy. As Kulak (2022, pp. 178/179) reminds us

As for the Regency era, the known population of black people were very small in the cities of the mainland, even in London (Myers, 1996, pp. 7-8; Panayi, 2010, p. 20; Walvin, 1986, p. 47). Although slave trade was prohibited by the sign of King George III, slavery had not been completely abolished yet. The incidents especially beginning in the mid-eighteenth century in which black people run away from their

masters and thereby forced authorities to become free were still continuing (Walvin, 1986, pp. 62-63). Thus, a small free black community was expanding under the shadow of apparent racial discrimination. But there are two factors to think that this community were disadvantageous in terms of population growth: the black population was mostly men, and racial discrimination made marrying black and white people almost impossible (Edwards & Walvin, 1983, pp. 20); after the Slave Trade Act 1807, the entrance of black people to the mainland began to be prevented. When thinking these factors with the other aspects of racial discrimination, it is not hard to imagine the poor living conditions of the black community of those days (Edwards & Walvin, 1983, pp. 26-27; Panayi, 2010, pp. 20-; Walvin, 1986, pp. 64-66).

About *Queen Charlotte: a Bridgerton story*, Rhimes, in an interview published on May 10, 2023, claimed that she did a lot of research on the monarch and that the deviations she made were purposeful to bring light to the racial issue, which is erased from most historical narratives. She says:

I’m fascinated by the need many people have to fight the theory that she [Charlotte] had a darker skin tone. The question really is: why is a black queen so bothersome? So, we chose to embrace this idea and show all the beauty of a black woman, such as her natural and abundant hair on stage (in Portuguese in the original).²¹

As we can see, Rhimes consciously takes a historical uncertainty, which is not very well known, as a theme to provocatively address the past and, especially, the present. Using as tools both the creative freedom provided by a fictional work, and the popularity of historical and “sappy” narratives, as well as the context of audience phenomena such as the series *Downton Abby* (2010-2015) and *The Crown* (2016-2023), Rhimes materializes a possible world in *Queen Charlotte*, one whose controversy becomes, in our view, both the starting point and the end point. Consciously delving into the choice she makes in *Bridgerton*, Rhimes knew the controversy she would create and how, besides attracting an audience, this would be another element in the discussion about racism.

21 Footnote missing: <https://veja.abril.com.br/coluna/em-cartaz/rainha-charlotte-a-ousada-novaserie-de-shonda-rhimes-na-netflix>, accessed on 12/02/2024.

The strength of a black western queen, with striking curly hair, an independent and strong spirit, not only tells of a story that “could” or “might” (perhaps “should”) have been, as it also claims today other possibilities of being, beyond the prejudices in vogue, whether aristocratic or not.

In the present article, rather than getting into the controversy of whether or not Rhimes could have given herself “such” poetic license in relation to the story, we are interested in reflecting on this fabular gesture, that resituates the past, at the same time as it provocatively addresses the present, and outlines possible futures. It seems to us that this fabulation is not the same as others, which seek to restore the stories of people who have been erased, marginalized or relegated to oblivion by colonial dynamics and the history of the conquerors, even though it is based, like them, on a solid ethical and political purpose. In the path around this central theme, we seek to characterize the narrative world constructed in the series, based on the Bakhtinian notion of chronotope, in order to reflect on this fabulation. In our view, it is an act of counterfactual historical imagination.

2. IN WHICH TIME AND IN WHICH WORLD IS THIS QUEEN CHARLOTTE OF BRIDGERTON?

The notion of chronotope was formulated by Mikhail Bakhtin in his essay, “The Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel”, around the 1930s, and has been referred to in different studies, whether dedicated to cinema, literature or other narratives (Stam, 1989; Haynes, 1993; Machado, 1995; Bemong *et al*, 2010; among others), with more or less verve or inventiveness. In Bakhtin, the chronotope is linked to studies of literary genres and the original essay, in which the term is developed, is dedicated, in its various pages, to characterizing the spatio-temporal articulations in the classical Greek drama, in the chivalric novel, among others. Chronotope is, first and foremost, an analytical category which allows us to reach essential aspects of the narratively constructed world in different works. As Bakhtin (2018, p. 11) defines it, the chronotope refers to the “essential interconnection of the relations of space and time as an artistically assimilated form in literature”. The notion, therefore, considers that in artistic-literary creation

...there is a fusion of the indications of space and time into an apprehended and concrete whole. Here,

time thickens and takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; space intensifies and is incorporated into the movements of time, plot and history. The signs of time are revealed in space, and space is apprehended and measured by time.” (Bakhtin, 2018, p.12)

As we can see, a chronotope refers to the ways in which temporal and spatial relations are effectively constructed and configured in a given story or discourse. It’s not a question, then, of checking how a historical experience considered to be real is “transported” or “represented” in a narrative, but rather, almost in the opposite direction, of observing how a discourse, a work or text, constructs, composes, articulates, in its own way, its own times and spaces. In this sense, Ribeiro and Sacramento (2023, p.93/94) observe:

If the first insight of Bakhtin’s concept of chronotope is the irreducible relationship of time and space as semiotic constructs (i.e., socially significant), the second is that these semiotically mediated spatiotemporal orders configure our perception and experience and, therefore, not only the subjective sensation of space and time, but also the concrete field where human action is imagined to be possible.

Thus, to investigate a particular chronotope is to reflect on how spatio-temporal relationships were imagined and configured in a particular story. The assumption, as we can see, is that, on the one hand, “time” and “space” are not uniform, absolute categories that are experienced in the same way by individuals, groups and cultures; and, on the other hand, that each narrative, each discourse, each genre is a construction that, dialogically, creates and shapes space-time relations in a particular way, establishing what later came to be called the “possible world”. What is particularly interesting in Bakhtin’s chronotope is that space and time are not approached separately, but seen intertwined in peculiar ways in each genre and each narrative. This is essential, if we are to understand the universe in which the characters of *Queen Charlotte of Bridgerton* lives. For us, the series’ possible world has strong and important similarities to Bakhtin’s characterization of the idyllic chronotope.

In his studies on chronotopes in European literature, Bakhtin (2018) pays attention to the tensions between the novel, as it appeared in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the idyll, which was very present in folk narratives. It is inferred,

from the reflections of the Russian thinker, that the literature of this time is built in tension with this idyllic chronotope, in its many variations, often pointing to its destruction or unfeasibility in modern societies (as would be the case, for example, in narratives by Stendhal, Flaubert and Balzac). According to Bakhtin, the idyllic chronotope has some basic characteristics that are common to all its variations. The first of these is the particular relationship between time and space, in which there is “the fixation, the organic aggregation of life and its events to a place”, which is then constituted as a “spatial microcosm”, “delimited and self-sufficient”, which “has no major connections with other places, with the rest of the world” (2018, p.194).

In addition to this unity of place, the idyll is also characterized by the narrative’s restricted attention to “the few basic realities of life”, such as love, birth, death, marriage, work, food, drink etc. This means that, according to Bakhtin (2018, p.198), “the idyll does not know everyday life”. Finally, the third element of the idyll in folk narratives is the unity of life with the rhythm of nature, integrating human events with natural phenomena. In this case, however, Bakhtin observes that it becomes almost metaphorical in Romanesque narratives, and only a part of it “remains real”. In the narratives about love, in the amorous idyll, these basic elements find “their weakest expression”, according to the Russian thinker. “The social conventionalism, the complications and the possibility of separation in private everyday life,” he says, “are contrasted with the absolutely conventional simplicity of life in the heart of nature: this same life is reduced to a totally sublimated love” (2018, p.195). For Bakhtin, this “weakness” of the amorous idyll is what allows it to be integrated into different narratives and even be mixed with other idyllic variations.

Some of the basic features of the idyll chronotope are found in *Queen Charlotte*, despite the fact its main characters were real in the past. The historical character Sophie Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz was born in 1744 and, in 1761, married the then English monarch, King George III. In the series, however, this historical accuracy is not an anchor for the narrative, and may be seen as quite unimportant. As Aucar and Bon (2023) note, *Queen Charlotte*’s costume design attempted to be faithful to Georgian times, but also incorporated some contemporary references. According to Aucar and Bon, “[t]he anachronism of certain plays shows that fiction only corresponds to a historical period, but can be considered a narrative set back in time, with a palimpsest of temporal layers that mobilize a variety of languages” (2023, p.360). Thus, the draped, embroidered and heavily wo-

ven dresses, wigs, ceremonies, dances, carriages and men’s costumes refer not only to what was worn in the 18th century in England, but pay respect to what an implied audience considers what would be a representation of the “period”, of the “past”, of the “aristocracy” and of the “royalty”, with a little help of a more contemporary fashion elements.

A decisive feature in this suspension of historical time in the series is its soundtrack, which makes more explicit the dialogue with a contemporary audience and the narrative distance to the historical past. Led by Kris Bowers, who also acts in *Bridgerton*, *Queen Charlotte* brings together original compositions and contemporary pop songs in arrangements that feature violins and harpsichords, and emulate European classical music of the 17th and 18th centuries. Among the songs are “Halo”, popularized by Beyoncé, in episode 1; “If I ain’t got you”, by Alicia Keys, in episode 3; “Deja vu”, also by Beyoncé, in ep.4; “Nobody gets me”, by SZA, and “I will always love you”, popularized by Whitney Houston, both in ep.6. All the songs, certainly not by chance, are known for their recordings by black American singers. By using these versions, the series undoubtedly draws on the repertoire of contemporary audiences, introducing yet another element of connection with those who watch it.

All the pop songs that appear in the series talk about emotional relationships and, in particular, are a frame for and comment on the different phases of Charlotte and George’s relationship, from their first falling in love (“Halo”) to the reinforcement of their commitment (“I will always love you”, in the sixth and final episode). In episode 1, for example, “Halo” appears after Charlotte and George’s wedding and accompanies them until the moment he takes her to the castle where they will live. The lyrics of the song, although not sung in the series, are known by contemporary audiences and are a declaration of love, in which the lyrical voice tells the loved one that their emotional walls are crumbling, because she is “everything I need and more, it’s written all over your face”, justifying the passion in the phrase repeated several times, including in the chorus “baby, I can see your halo”. In the last episode, in a dance scene in which Charlotte supports George in a moment of crisis, SZA’s song has as its refrain the verse - which gives it its name - that says “nobody gets me [but], you do, you do”.

The reaction to this use of pop songs was very positive, to the extent that two albums were released with the series’ soundtrack, one with the original works and the other with just the covers. From the point of view of the diegetic world of *Queen Charlotte - a Bridgerton story*, these songs are “out of date”, if we take the historical time as reference. However,

the way the songs are presented, that have great resemblance to the music of “the past”, doesn’t seem to simply deny the historical past. It seems, as we have seen in the costume design, that *Queen Charlotte* arranges temporalities in a complex, layered way, in order to build a chronotope with mixed and misplaced references.

Alongside costumes and music, other narrative aspects help us see that *Queen Charlotte* builds its own spatiotemporal experience, which is based not in the historical time, but in the peculiar temporalities and spatialities of love and bonding. We don’t know precisely how long it would take to get from one place to another inside the palaces, for example. It doesn’t really matter, just as it’s unnecessary to indicate the distance and time of the journey between Buckingham and Kew palaces, where much of the story takes place. Although the use of spatial and temporal ellipses is intrinsic to all narratives, especially audiovisual ones, in *Queen Charlotte* this resource produces specific effects related to the construction of its own chronotope. The important thing for the narrative is whether the Queen and the King in particular, but also other characters, are together or apart.

In fact, an essential element of the love relationship between Charlotte and George is marked by the various movements of physical closeness and distancing, which constitute and characterize the construction of the emotional-sexual bonds of solidarity and trust between them. From the point of view of the series, the moments when George isolates himself at Kew, or doesn’t sleep in the same bedroom as Charlotte, are equivalent in the configuration of the torment that the two characters face in building the bonds between them. We don’t know, from the narrative, how long this or that moment of isolation or distance lasts, just as the journey between one space and another depends not on speed or a mathematical temporality, but on the mental and emotional processes experienced by the characters.

One of the moments of this isolation in the series coincides with Charlotte’s first pregnancy. After an episode of madness, George, already aware of the beginning of the pregnancy with the future king, retreats to Kew, and we follow Charlotte, also alone, dealing with the information about her husband’s mental condition. We don’t see the days, weeks or months during which George is subjected to brutal and inhumane treatment, while Charlotte feels the development of the future baby. But we do follow his efforts to heal and return to her, and Charlotte’s process of accepting reality, which includes recognizing herself as Queen. The series chooses to elicit chronological markers in order to highlight Charlotte’s

personal process of maturing, in which she recognizes and values her love for George and also recognizes her role as monarch. In the same way, we don’t know exactly when, historically, Charlotte’s mature narrative takes place. We do know that it’s after the Bridgertons’ second marriage, and then we see the rapprochement between Lady Violette (Ruth Gemmell) and Lady Danbury (Adjoa Andoh) and, especially, the Queen’s efforts to continue her lineage. This, as we see in the last episode, is based once again on her commitment and her love for her husband.

If the historical and chronological times are placed in the background, the spaces narrated in the series highlight the loneliness of the characters and the limits imposed on them by their social roles. These spaces are almost always isolated: we don’t know where they are, either in relation to adjacent places or to each other. Most of the actions and sequences take place indoors or are confined by high walls, even in gardens or squares. At most, they take place on the entrance stairs of these buildings, when the characters move toward them, or on the way out, heading toward a carriage and another building. The lighting reinforces the atmosphere of loneliness, anguish and enclosure.

One major exception is when Lady Danbury (in her youth, played by Arsema Thomas) begins to settle into her daily life, after being widowed. At this point, she walks through meadows and fields, the boundaries of which she herself is unaware. In any case, these and the other narrated spaces, whether palaces, rooms or carriages, have only a very tenuous link - if any - with their historical referents. They, like the temporal relationships, are more strongly linked to the symbolic places that influence and guide the characters’ actions. In this sense, they present themselves as an element of the visibility of emotional and existential landscapes.

The chronotope constructed in *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* deliberately withdraws from historical times and spaces in order to highlight the processes of maturation and construction of autonomy and protagonism of the characters, especially the women. It’s time for them to take charge of their bodies, their affections and their social roles. This is true for the young Charlotte and also for the Queen, and for the Ladies Bridgerton and Danbury, on the other narrative level. In all cases, we see female characters who, through strength of character and temperament, learn to deal intelligently with the circumstances, rules, conventions and social limitations imposed on them. Charlotte, Violette Bridgerton and Agatha Danbury, therefore, have something in common: the energy to fulfill their desires, affections and positions.



FIGURE 4: THE ISOLATED ENVIRONMENTS, CLOSED OR LIMITED BY WALLS AND HIGH CEILINGS, REFER IN A TENUOUS WAY TO A PRECISE HISTORICAL TIME, BUT SHOW INTENSELY THE LONELINESS OF THE CHARACTERS, THEIR EMOTIONAL AND EXISTENTIAL CONDITIONS.

Bakhtin's reflections on the chronotope, including the idyll, do not intend to constitute "ideal types" or "a-historical forms" but, rather, in the opposite direction, to verify their diversity and variations in the vast literary production that he investigates. Thus, no contemporary narrative will be fully adequate or compatible with the chronotopes identified by him, which does not prevent dialogues and articulations. In this sense, we can see that *Queen Charlotte* simultaneously absorbs and displaces some elements of the idyll. On the one hand, the setting of the space, constructed as a closed microcosm, is easily verifiable in the series and is highlighted, as we pointed out, by the choice of walled environments. In the same way, the whole narrative of the series can be understood as the effort to make the marriage of Charlotte and George a reality, and to build bonds of complicity and trust between them.

As the older Queen's narrative plan shows, even births (of children and grandchildren) are presented as an expected outcome of this central event. On the other hand, the love story between King and Queen does not effectively oppose social conventionalism to natural love, which is far from being merely sublimated. The marital bond between the protagonists of the series, while competing for space in the midst of social rituals and conventions, presents itself as an essential element that gives meaning and even viability to their status as monarchs. This deep and companionable love is also carnal. Charlotte and George have moments of surrender, pleasure and sharing in the sexual act, which precede and support the actual emotional closeness between the two. In this sense, in *Queen Charlotte*, sex is not opposed to the idyll and the deconstruction of everyday life that it establishes, but is also



FIGURE 5: IN THEIR CLOSED MICROCOSM, CHARLOTTE AND GEORGE GRADUALLY TRANSFORM THEIR SEXUAL ENCOUNTERS, INITIALLY AN OBLIGATION THAT THEY MUST FULFILL EVERY OTHER DAY IN ORDER TO GUARANTEE AN HEIR TO THE THRONE, INTO MOMENTS OF SURRENDER AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRUST AND COMPLICITY.

integrated into the idealized world and based on the strength of passions and natural events.

By absorbing some features of the idyllic chronotope, *Queen Charlotte* affirms once again that it does not aim to have realistic commitments or be an archive of information about periods and characters. History is used, in the opposite direction, for the construction of a particular chronotope, with recognizable idyllic aspects, which highlights themes, positions, and attitudes that can engage with different historical realities. In this sense, assuming itself to be a work of fiction, the series establishes space-time relations that can be taken as “uchronias” (non-time) and even “utopias” (in its etymological sense of “non-place”). After all, the series exercises historical and mnemonic imagination, not in the sense of trying to recall or recover something as it occurred, but, rather, indirectly to put both the past and the present, as well as the future, under tension. This fictional, political-imaginative action dialogues with other, current efforts that take fabulation as a way of problematizing the narrative of the story. Its relations to historical time and action seems to be, then, counterfactual, offering a contrast through the propositional power of the images and stories it weaves.

3. A COUNTERFACTUAL FABULATION

Counterfactual thinking deals with “what if”, with imagining what could have been or what might happen. Thus, asking what would have happened if Napoleon had not been defeated at Waterloo, or if the guerrillas had won the fight against the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil, are typical counterfactual fabulations, just as imagining what the world will be like in 50 years if, for example, the trade agreement between Mercosur and the European Union is realized.

Deluermoz and Singaravelou observe that, although contested, counterfactual thinking has always been present in historical studies and has gained particular strength from the second half of the 20th century, when it reached other fields and acquired a diversity “never before seen” in different cultural productions. French historians understand that this “explosion” results from a series of factors, such as the supposed “end of ideologies,” the “modifications in the relationship between reality and fiction,” and “feelings of uncertainty in a globalized world” (2018, p. 313). Referring to the work of the historian, the researchers assert, without hesitation, the vitality of counterfactual thinking. They state that, for those who study history, counterfactual thinking proves to

be “a timely attitude in a social world surrounded by plural and unfinished determinations, a world in which the historian has a role to play, recalling first and foremost that history is still possible” (Deluermoz and Singaravelou, 2018, p. 313).

If we substitute “historian” with “screenwriter”, Deluermoz and Singaravelou’s call for counterfactual thinking might prove even more powerful: it is a way of responding to plural and unfinished realities and, especially, of affirming that both history and stories are open relationships, full of possibilities. In this sense, the fabulations crafted in *Queen Charlotte*, by composing an idyllic and uchronian chronotope, make explicit both their defiance of the past (what could have, or perhaps should have, happened) and, especially, a provocative response to the present, aimed at opening up possible futures. The “betrayal” of history, in this case, is a stance relative to the past as well as a gesture encouraging change and the production of more plural and inclusive narratives.

Arsema Thomas, the actress who plays the young Lady Agatha, spoke to the press about her joy in being part of a period production without portraying the tragedies experienced by Black people, such as slavery. “Everything that is historical for us relates to trauma,” she said. “So, seeing a series like this, with non-white people empowered and having space to provoke change, is very important.”²² Golda Rosheuvel, who plays the older Queen Charlotte in *Bridgerton* and in the series’ spin-off, expressed a similar sentiment: “To be able to create the space where you can have a black queen in Netflix’s most-watched period drama, to be able to break boundaries to make room for black and brown people to be part of a lavish, sexy, scandalous, and beautiful representation of life²³.”

In *Queen Charlotte*, the coronation of a non-white woman leads Princess Augusta (Michelle Fairley), the King’s mother, to coordinate the so-called “great experiment” with Parliament, which involves distributing noble titles to the Black elite of the country. The goal is to diversify the court to make the queen feel more comfortable and to avoid potential rejection of her person. In this way, wealthy men from the colonies, such as Lord Danbury (Cyril Nri), achieve a higher social status and begin attending London high-society events. However, the process does not unfold smoothly, without conflict. Its success is only ensured through the intervention of the young Agatha Danbury and the actions of Queen Charlotte herself.

22 <https://elle.com.br/cultura/rainha-charlotte-mostra-o-passado-de-bridgerton>

23 <https://rollingstone.com.br/noticia/golda-rosheuvel-de-bridgerton-sente-se-privilegiada-por-interpretar-rainha-negra-portas-se-abriram-para-pessoas-nao-brancas/>

This social experiment never actually happened. It is purely a fictional device that Shonda Rhimes uses as poetic license to bring more representation into the series and introduce the debate over the racial issue into the storyline, a topic absent in the first two seasons of *Bridgerton*. In fact, the conflicts in *Queen Charlotte* serve as an explanation of the origin of the racial diversity presented in the preceding series. Unlike *Bridgerton*, *Queen Charlotte* addresses explicitly the debate around whiteness and racism. India Amarteifio's character is the target of discrimination when her ethnicity takes center stage in certain situations. In the first episode, when Princess Augusta meets her for the first time before the wedding, she scrutinizes Charlotte in detail, observing her physical structure and skin, even asking her to show her teeth. Her conclusion is that the young woman would serve well for the purpose of providing the King with children. Beyond the pompous setting, the scene is notably similar to those shown

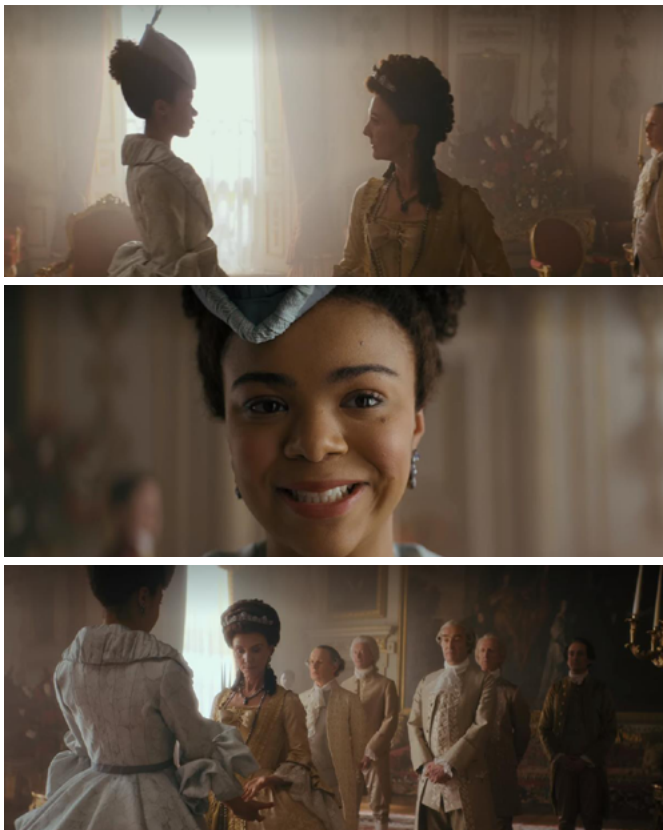


FIGURE 6: THE SEQUENCE SHOWS PRINCESS AUGUSTA, BEFORE THE WEDDING, EXAMINING CHARLOTTE'S PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS IN DETAIL, EVEN HER TEETH.

in films, soap operas, and series where wealthy people examine enslaved Black individuals, evaluating their bodies for potential purchase. Following this scene, in a meeting with the prime minister and other members of Parliament, the King's mother complains that the girl's skin is too dark and that this could be a problem: "They will comment". The cancellation of the union is even considered, but the idea is abandoned as there are only six hours until the ceremony.

Another moment occurs when the official painting of the royal wedding is being made. Upon noticing that her skin is lighter on the canvas, Charlotte complains to the painter Allan Ramsay and requests that a dark color be used. However, her request is contested by Princess Augusta, who argues that the queen should be depicted with a lighter tone so that she "shines". In addition to the racial issue, *Queen Charlotte* addresses a series of other topics that are part of the contemporary political agenda, such as the condition of women under patriarchy (especially through the character of Lady Danbury), the relationship between people of the same sex and gender (through the royal butlers, Brimsley and Reynolds), and the sexuality of older women (through Lady Violette's dilemmas).



FIGURE 7: CHARLOTTE ASKS THAT ALLAN RAMSAY PAINT HER SKIN DARKER, BUT HER REQUEST IS CONTESTED BY PRINCESS AUGUSTA.

Such themes are certainly "displaced" from the historical reality of the 18th century. Not that it would be possible faithfully to reconstruct what happened in the lives of people from that time. As historians Quentin Deluermoz and Pierre Singaravelou (2018, p.15) observe, history is knowledge of the past "produced from preserved remains and the questions of the present". In this sense, it seeks and produces not an absolute truth, but always a "situated truth". The past, referenced by historical knowledge, is always in constant construction, shaped by the present, social contexts, and concrete circumstances of human interaction. It is con-

tinually revised to accommodate the future, which is open and in constant development. It is imagination that enables us to establish continuities in our experiences over time and creatively transforms the past into a source for considering possible transitions between the present and the future.

For Hayden White (2019), historical imagination is the ability of historians to construct narratives of the past, which are not simply objective representations of facts, but rather constructions involving choices, plot patterns, rhetorical tropes, and ideologies. He argues that the craft of historiography is intrinsically literary, as historians organize events, create a narrative structure, and shape historical discourse through language. Historical imagination, therefore, is the intellectual process of giving shape and meaning to a past that, in itself, cannot be directly accessed, but rather reconstructed through writing.

Based on different theoretical premises, Collingwood (1981) had already drawn attention to the vital role of imagination in the production of historical knowledge. The author also describes imagination as the intellectual process through which the past is actively reconstructed. The historian uses sources as a starting point, but historical imagination is what allows him to go beyond them, recreating the internal connections between events and the reasoning behind actions.

These ideas were fundamental to the development of the concept of critical fabulation, proposed by Saidiya Hartman (2022). According to the author, it is a method that combines historical research with imagination to fill the gaps in archives about marginalized lives, especially those of Black people.

Despite operating in a fundamentally different register, which is that of fiction and fantasy, Shonda Rhimes' mnemonic gestures have some points in common with Saidiya Hartman's proposal. The American author and researcher has a project that is clearly political, just like the creator of *Queen Charlotte*. She refuses to inscribe the lives of Black people, enslaved or formerly enslaved, from the perspective of subjection. She advocates fabulation as a critical gesture capable of understanding the feelings of those who have been denied a place in institutionally recognized archives. Her proposal is to portray these individuals as agents of their own stories.

Hartman begins the book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* with "A Note on Method," in which she discusses her choice to narrate intimate stories, relegated to oblivion and never considered outside a slavery-based framework.

In this spirit, I pushed the limits of legal records and documents, speculated on what might have been,

imagined things whispered in dark rooms, and expanded moments of confinement, escape, and possibility, moments when the vision and dreams of rebellion seemed possible. (Hartman, 2022, p. 12-13)

Her method, the critical fabulation, with clear references to the category developed by the Russian formalists, is a work that starts from historical documentation and, through literary language, gives shape to possible lives. Hartman recreates, with rich detail, real characters whose stories were reduced and crystallized in official records, where their existence was marked by subordination. In Hartman's work, fabulation serves the history—not the one told by the oppressors, but the one constructed to confront the dehumanization promoted by racist and colonial thought. Critical fabulation, then, can be seen as part of a policy of the right to the time and to the history.

In the case of *Queen Charlotte*, the fabulation functions in a different way, on another level. Two important scenes, at the end of the fifth episode of the series, are particularly significant in this sense. Throughout the episode, we follow Charlotte, who is pregnant and unhappy, lonely and without news of George who, without her knowing it, is undergoing brutal treatments in an attempt to cure his illness. To escape this situation, Charlotte thinks about fleeing England and returning to her homeland. At one point, she seeks out Lady Danbury at her home, asking for help to flee. There, they engage in a dialogue in which her friend advises her: "We are women. And the men who hold our fates in their hands hardly imagine that we have desires, dreams of our own. If we want to live the life we desire, we must make them understand. Our bravery, our willpower will be their proof."

It is not, as we can see, about resistance, rebellion, revolution, or moving toward breaking or challenging social rules but, rather, about finding paths to autonomy and fulfillment from within those rules. This understanding of the path to take is decisive for the following scene, when, returning to Buckingham accompanied by her brother, Adolphus, Charlotte says to him as she begins to ascend the palace stairs: "You sold me to be the Queen of England. I will be the Queen of England". She then goes to meet George at Kew, facing his madness head-on and dismissing the royal doctor, "playing the game" to which she has been subjected to from the start.

There is another important difference between Saidiya Hartman's theoretical-methodological approach and Shonda Rhimes' aesthetic-political project. Hartman highlights agen-

cy and grants dignity to subordinate subjects, within the very conditions of their subordination. Rhimes does not. The idyllic aspects of the series, as we have noted, serve as a shield from the complexity and reality of everyday life, reducing them (along with the characters and the story itself) to basic and idealized events. More importantly, it is crucial to observe that the empowerment of the characters happens through their adherence to elite values—in the case of *Queen Charlotte*, to the values of the English aristocracy and royalty. This is an important difference. The critique of racism and the moral order in the series does not unfold into any kind of structural questioning of the prevailing order, the status quo. Not even the British colonial system is called into question. In the story, the presence of a black queen and the racial diversity of the court do not threaten the economic system or the privileges of the English ruling classes.

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

For Calhoun (2025), *Queen Charlotte* presents a “sociological view” of racism, since it is interested in how it functions within institutions and structures of power. In this sense, according to the author, “race is necessarily enacted by people, but individual characters in *Queen Charlotte* find that they are engaging in power struggles, not identity conflicts” (2025, p.7). This seems correct when the analysis focuses only on the possible world created by the series. However, if the perspective is broadened and attention is paid to the conscious narrative strategies developed by Rhimes, on the one hand, and the debate that *Queen Charlotte* provoked, on the other, it is necessary to consider other aspects and implications.

The fabulation present in Rhimes’ narrative have some positive aspects in presenting a more complex black female protagonist, whose individualistic, adaptive features. However, it leaves the foundations of racism and colonization out of sight. The movement is, therefore, ambivalent and ambiguous. If the characters are entangled in power struggles, they do so as a way of survival, to achieve their emotional, affective, institutional goals and, thus, to be more in control of their destiny and actions. However, the focus is on the individual capacity to deal with those power struggles, not to the order of things itself.

This is what enables Calhoun (2025) to identify Queen Charlotte’s fictional trajectory to the one of Rhimes in her career. According the American researcher, *Queen Charlotte* is an

coming-of-age story with undeniable echoes of Rhimes’s own ascent through the television industry: A woman comes into position of power within a storied institution, learns to fulfil a new role with substantial responsibilities, and finds herself responsible not only for herself but for the progress of all people of colour (2025, p.2)

Similarities can be surely found, particularly in the loneliness of Charlotte in the British monarchy, which is compared to Rhimes’ experience in the entertainment industry, since both are, to recover an expression used by Calhoun, *F.O.D.*, which means First, Only, and Different. However, the projection of a fictional character over a real persona needs, as Calhoun herself recognizes, a debate about authorship which is complex and demanding. It also requires a more defying investigation, which involves a confrontation with the conceptual, empirical, and cultural (at least) blurred lines between fiction and reality.

In establishing its distance to historical reality and concerns, *Queen Charlotte* builds a world for its own. Its ground on the features of such popular genre as the romance novels undoubtedly helps in its appeal and reception. As some of the Heyes and Cartland’s heroines, Charlotte is, in the series, fighting for her happiness, but, as Calhoun sharply noted, it doesn’t mean to “live happily ever after”, since her beloved George suffers from an incurable illness. This deviation from the genre - which, for Calhoun, reinforces the authorial voice of Rhimes - makes more explicit its originality. Moreover, it stresses that *Queen Charlotte* is an imaginative construct that is thought to dialogue critically with the present, the past, and, for extension, with the future. We must like or dislike it, agree or not with some of its aspects and strategies, but, since we decide to inhabit its world it is inevitable to put these temporal aspects in question.

Cultural and aesthetic experiences involving fabulation and historical imagination are many and varied. However, in any case, it is always an active process, something that is done in an engaged and creative way. When we turn to the past, we do not merely activate a repertoire of images at our disposal; we engage in a process that can be emotional, as explored in melodramatic fiction, but is also intellectual and ethical-political. Fabulations such as *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story*, in their strength, limitations, and contradictions, are powerful examples of what has been done and of how much more can still be produced in this field.

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