

Behind Closed Doors: Bridgerton S2E7

By Nicole Bell

Longing, passion, temptation, betrayal. The agony of losing the one you love because pride got in your way. The second season of *Bridgerton* captivated social media for weeks as everyone swooned over actors and raved about the thoughtful storylines. It captured all the drama of an Austen novel while incorporating a *Gossip Girl* style narrator. This show provided escapism to those longing for the simplicity of a life without technology, but one that was inclusive to all.

The *Bridgerton* novels created a world set in the Regency period, but producer Shonda Rhimes set the show apart from other period dramas by developing a very diverse cast. As a major fan of period dramas herself, she wanted to find a way to implement color-conscious casting. She explains in an interview: “When you’re watching television, you should get to see people who look like you” (Gruenwedel, 2022). Before the first season aired, many critics argued the show lost credibility by casting people of color in upper-class standing throughout English society. The problem with this thinking, while also fundamentally problematic, is that absolutely no adaptation of the regency period is historically accurate. One of the leading actors, Regé-Jean Page, states: “With color-conscious casting, I get to exist as a Black person in the world” (Romano, 2021).

Others argue the show’s “color-blindness” is problematic because it doesn’t address the society they exist in was built on racism and slavery. This is where the show can get conflicting because they also do realistic diverse casting. For example, the Sharma sisters of season two come from India. This plot line aligns with the foundation of the British East India Company, founded in 1599 (Allingham, n.d.). These British and Indian marriage arrangements were very common during this era.

In the newest season of the show, *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story*, it seems Rhimes has taken the time to address the controversial color-blindness in the regular season. She has provided a backstory to the Black characters of *Bridgerton*, like Queen Charlotte and Lady Danbury. This is important to recognize since many viewed the first and second seasons as “unrealistic”. While Rhimes or any other Regency period recreator owes no one realism, she listened to her viewers and created backstories that might put critics at ease.

This show should also be viewed as an intention to suspend our disbelief, we are placed in a world where all people can play the part of high society. While those who worship Jane Austen might disagree with the efforts made by Rhimes, this show was made for a broader audience in a 2020 world.

The show is centered around the children of the Bridgerton family, each season following a different child's love story. The head of the household is a Viscount, something that makes his marriage of great importance. This family is esteemed in society, however the scandals of this season shake their foundation. The characters, and the audience, grapple with the theme of how far one will go to uphold familial obligation.

Season two builds tension in more ways than one; who doesn't love a good love triangle? We watch Anthony Bridgerton, the head of the Bridgerton household, and Kathani "Kate" Sharma, the eldest step-daughter of the widowed Mary Sharma, deny and fight their feelings for each other. Anthony and Kate share one common trait: they took over their households when their fathers died. This trauma adds depth to their characters and makes their connection stronger; both suffer from eldest child expectations.

The back and forth between the two happens despite Anthony's engagement to the youngest Sharma daughter, Edwina. The precarious situation has forced the two to deny any feelings they might have for each other, but then why do they keep finding themselves "unchaperoned"? The episodes twist and turn between the cusp of confession and the lows of prideful deception. Their squabbling and competitive tendencies make the perfect "enemies to lovers" trope.

The seventh episode starts with a scheme. While this isn't new to the series, this plan is more of an act. Anthony and Edwina have called off their proposal due to the obvious attraction between him and Kate, but society smells a scandal. In order to keep the situation hush-hush, they devise a plan to host a ball together. This is the ultimate symbol of unity, supposedly. The two have been told to stay apart, but it wouldn't be a good love story if they could keep their hands off of each other.

Edwina's character exhibits the expected grace and poise of English society, that is until she discovers her sister and lover having feelings for each other. This transforms her gullibility to disdain and Kate bears the brunt of it. An escalated argument turns into insults thrown at each other and Kate leaves for a secluded garden and Anthony follows.

The ending of the episode is the passionate climax of the season. Kate and Anthony finally, and very passionately, have sex. They lose regard for the exaggerated consequences women faced when having sex before marriage and fully give in to each other. Bridgerton carefully uses sex as an expression of love, which can be a problematic trope to continue. However, it is one of the societal expectations that causes the most drama, so of course it is kept into the writing.

The music crescendos and a pit in the audience's stomach grows all the way to the end of the episode, when regret drives Kate to run away on horseback. We see Anthony come to her home to propose but Kate is long gone. The episode ends with a final scene of Kate riding away in the

rain as her lover follows behind. In an unfortunate turn of events, Kate falls and mortally wounds herself. Anthony screams in agony and then... Black screen.

Love and betrayal make for a great soap opera; however, Rhimes dressed this one up to fit all our expectations of Austen society. The show gives us a spicy romance of longing and almost-kisses until finally the climactic scene leaves us on the edge of our seats. Will she be okay? Will there be resolution? You may not like Austen novels or period dramas in general, but you have to admit, they know how to leave you wanting more.

Works Cited:

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