

Chapter 9: “Unsettling Happiness: Blackness, Gender, and Affect in the *The Woman of Colour* and its Media Afterlives”

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Abstract: This chapter takes to task the believed-universal appeals to happiness in the long eighteenth century to instead argue that any and all such affective appeals are contoured by the intersections of gender, race, and class. We look specifically to the anonymously published *The Woman of Colour* (1808) and its influence on contemporary media as in Amma Asante’s historical biopic, *Belle* (2013). Olivia Fairfield, the novel’s heroine, and Dido Elizabeth Belle, the film’s protagonist, navigate the harsh realities of the Georgian aristocracy and marriage market, ultimately realizing how their own experiences of happiness (or lack thereof) do not conform to those of their white peers, confidants, or kin. Rather than conceding to the discriminatory logic of happiness that keeps Black and mixed-race women at bay, Olivia and Belle model an erotic autonomy we call “blackened happiness” that honors their affective experiences and rethinks the totalizing nature of happiness.