

Screening Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in Transcultural Britain

Joe Wright's Little England and Gurinder Chadha's Global Village

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Throughout the 1990s, the long-standing tradition of 'Austenmania' and 'Janeism' culminated in a large number of filmic adaptations of Jane Austen's novels,¹ which inspired critics to coin inventive terms such as 'Austen Powers' and 'Janespotting'.² In the current decade, both literary and filmic rewritings of Austen's work have once again found large and enthusiastic audiences. Austen remains a cultural fetish, whose status is only loosely connected to her actual writings, as Claudia Johnson emphasises: "loving – or hating – her has typically implied meanings well beyond any encoded in her works" (1997: 212). In the following, I will focus on two of the more recent adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, which is not only acknowledged as the most popular narrative of Austen's oeuvre, but has also recently been elected the second-best loved book in the UK.³ Given the enormous popularity of Austen's novel to the present day, its cultural significance seems out of question. Questions that do arise, however, are: Why is the novel so popular? Which aspects make it attractive to the present day? The filmic adaptations of the novel can help to illuminate the issue, since they, for economic reasons, have to appeal to the tastes and interests of the majority of Austen fans as well as to those audiences who are unfamiliar with the novels. Directors Gurinder Chadha and Joe Wright and their teams worked almost simultaneously on adaptations of Austen's classic. Their films *Bride and Prejudice* and *Pride and Prejudice*, which were released in the UK within eleven months of each other in October 2004 and September 2005 respectively, give contrasting answers to questions regarding the novel's relevance for present-day cultural concerns.⁴

My examination of Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice* and Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* will in particular focus on how the films revise the cultural heritage (as epitomised in Austen's novel) in the light of present socio-cultural negotiations of Britishness: What impact does the increasing transculturation of present-day Britain have on contemporary takes on Austen, who is regarded as a long-established "icon of Englishness" (Jones 2004: 33) or even of Britishness at large, and whom some critics consider an instrument of continuous colonisation? Edward Neill opens his study *The Politics of Jane Austen* with the statement, "Jane Austen [...] is [...] one of the great formative and founding influences of how we think about 'England' and 'Englishness'" (ix), and Moyra Haslett calls Austen "a writer who embodies 'Englishness'" (2000: 202). Roger Gard even claims that her novels can

only be valued by English native speakers, thus employing Austen to establish a restrictive notion of Englishness: “Foreigners, whether reading in translation or in the original, see little or nothing” (1992: 14) of Austen’s brilliant stylistic clarity. Moreover, according to Gard, reading Austen requires a special cultural competence: “Jane Austen is especially, and congenially, English. She writes from and into a spiritual atmosphere which, by means of a positive absence of perceived restraint, is a real presence in English culture and those related to it” (*ibid.*: 17).

While Neill, Haslett, and Gard refer to ‘Englishness’ and thus agree with Austen’s historical perspective – her heroine Emma talks of “English culture, English comfort” (Austen 1994: 264) –, Austen’s novels and persona are also employed as an epitome of ‘Britishness’, in particular by the heritage industry. Generalisations of English matters as British matters tend to marginalise Irish, Scottish, and Welsh heritages, which, of course, differ considerably. Darryl Jones sees the recently heightened awareness of the decisive differences between the ‘British’ and the ‘English’ heritage as a development of the last twenty years, when the notion of Englishness came into view as a “consequence of the breakdown of ideas of a stable British identity” (2004: 34), which forced the English to consider their particular national identity. References to Austen abound, Darryl posits, during a time of national crisis, since her novels are “Condition of England novels (or better, novels which continue to interrogate the Condition of the English)” (*ibid.*: 35). In this the debate about Austen’s Englishness or even Britishness, one particular appeal of her novels for a contemporary discussion of nationality resides in the fact that during Austen’s day, the notion of a unified British identity gradually evolved, as critics such as Linda Colley in her study *Britons. Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* amply demonstrated. References to Austen today, including filmic adaptations, can thus be regarded as the examination of national roots. Due to the thematic scope of this essay collection, I will in the following focus on this contested, more inclusive notion of Britishness.

Apart from the important differences between the Scottish, Welsh, Irish, and English perspectives, Austen as an icon of Britishness is also a hot spot of debates about the cultural relationship to Britain’s former overseas colonies. In this respect, John Wiltshire postulates, Austen used to serve and still serves as a means of exporting and enforcing Englishness. To him, “Jane Austen signifies English imperialism, the dissemination of her work via the BBC and Miramax films, colonisation in a new form. This Jane Austen is perceived as an enemy of the indigenous, the literary queen (as Shakespeare is the king) of a dominant culture, her texts one arm of an oppressive educative project that inculcates the values of the ‘mother country’” (Wiltshire 2001: 8; cf. also Sunder Rajan 2000: 12). In contrast to estimations of Austen as either exclusively and impenetrably English (Gard) or as a tool of educative colonisation (Wiltshire), other critics have regarded her topics as universal enough to speak to non-British audiences beyond oppressive cultural projects. Thus, Salman Rushdie praises her novels for Indian qualities and even considers her a “great Indian novel-

ist" (2006: xi–xii) because of her "portraits of brilliant women caged by the social convention of their time" (*ibid.*: xii). In this broad spectrum of estimations of Jane Austen's cultural status in an increasingly transcultural world, the filmic adaptations by Wright and Chadha take opposing positions.

1. Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* and Britishness: The Reach for Groundings

Joe Wright's adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* adheres, I will argue, both aesthetically and ideologically to the characteristics of the 'heritage film' – and thus to a group of films which is as popular as it is controversial. Its very status is in dispute; there is an ongoing journalistic and academic debate whether 'heritage film' is a genre, a cinematic style, a category set up for reasons of promotion, or an ideology (cf. Higson 1996, Vincendeau 2001, Monk 2002, Higson 2003, Voigts-Virchow 2004). The *Sight and Sound* reader on *Film/Literature/Heritage*, published by the British Film Institute, offers a broad definition of the heritage film as a genre "in a loose sense" (Vincendeau 2001: xviii) which encompasses "costume films made in the past twenty years or so, usually based on 'popular classics'" (*ibid.*: xvii). Heritage films have high budgets and production values, are directed by A-list directors, and use stars (cf. *ibid.*: xviii). Aesthetically, they are characterised by a "restrained aesthetic of display" (Higson 1996: 234), a conventional filmic narrative style with long shots, unobtrusive continuity cutting, a realistic mise-en-scène, and classical music. The films usually pay close attention to the recreation of historical settings (though often not entirely accurately) and show impressive national landscapes and buildings; in the case of the British heritage film, these are particularly stately homes. Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* conforms to these production values and to most of these aesthetic conventions, but updates the latter to some extent. While the film begins with a long shot of early morning rural English landscape, accompanied by twittering and delicate piano music, and afterwards introduces the house of the Bennets with an unusually extended tracking shot, it frequently breaks with the pattern of unobtrusive, 'objective' camera work and cutting, for example when Elizabeth Bennet first visits Pemberley. This sequence invites spectators to share her perspective. It is introduced by an eye-line shot of Elizabeth squinting into the sun, and later the mise-en-scène and high-angle camera when entering Pemberley suggest Elizabeth's awe. Her rising fascination with Darcy's sensuality, his appreciation for art, and his wealth is reinforced by lingering gaze shots and point-of-view takes when she wanders through Pemberley's sculpture gallery and eventually encounters Darcy's bust among naked statues. In addition to this moderate modernisation of the camera work and mise-en-scène, Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* depicts its female protagonist as a more girlish, more untidy, and less elegant heroine than earlier adaptations, thus creating a "slightly gritty, more realist style" (Troost 2007: 86).⁵

The heritage film's focus, the recreation of the past, is also its ideological bone of contention. Critics considered the heritage films of the 1980s conservative endeavours and linked them to Thatcher's government, arguing that they tended to celebrate rather than critically investigate the British past. According to Andrew Higson, who alongside Cairns Craig launched the most severe criticism of heritage films, they "articulate a nostalgic and conservative celebration of the values and lifestyles of the privileged classes", generalise these values as pan-English or even pan-British and thus reconstruct an image of Britain that no longer exists "as something fondly remembered and desirable" (Higson 2003: 12).⁶ This nostalgic dwelling on the white and patriarchally structured communities of the British aristocracy and gentry distracts from issues of the present or, even more problematically, naturalises the present status quo, for example regarding race, class, or gender. As Ginette Vincendeau (2001), Claire Monk (2002), and Eckart Voigts-Virchow (2004) trace in their overviews, this initial condemnation of heritage films as aesthetically and ideologically conservative was followed not only by counter-readings of the heritage films of the 1980s, but also by more sophisticated and ambiguous heritage films since the 1990s, like *Elizabeth* (1998) directed by Shekhar Kapur, which takes a critical and yet sympathetic look at this iconic British figure. Critics such as Pamela Church Gibson (2000), Moya Luckett (2000), and Claire Monk (2002) suggest new labels to categorise these more recent films, such as 'anti-heritage', 'post-heritage', and 'alternative heritage'. They argue that the aesthetic as well as ideological character of heritage film has changed significantly under the New Labour government, whose 'Branding Britain' campaign employed art, film, and music to launch a new image of 'Cool Britannia' that aimed to "replace a myth of an old Britain with the reality of the modern Britain".⁷ Monk even recommends giving up the category 'heritage film', because its ideological definition no longer holds true: Whereas Austen adaptations such as Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park* (1999) abandon ideological (and aesthetic) conservatism, popular British films set in the 'Cool Britannia' of the present day, like *Bridget Jones's Diary* (itself replete with references to *Pride and Prejudice*) or *Notting Hill*, share the marginalisation of working class characters and immigrant cultures regarded typical of the 'core' heritage films (cf. Monk 2002: 195).

A number of Austen adaptations critically invest rather than merely celebrate the past. For example, Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) with a screenplay by Emma Thompson questions the pre-industrial patriarchal system through its focus on the empowerment of female characters who struggle with social conventions, most often with the rigid boundary between the aristocracy, gentry, and the new 'middling sort' or 'pseudo-gentry' that emerged during Austen's day. Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*, starring Keira Knightley as the self-confident but non-propertied protagonist Elizabeth Bennet, who falls in love with the aristocratic Fitzwilliam Darcy, likewise invites criticism of both the disadvantage suffered by the impoverished daughters of the gentry and the gender ideals involved in the marriage market of the day. The film traces Elizabeth's clash with the ideal of the accom-

plished woman, her defence of her critical intellect and wit, her lack of reverence for rank (if, in modern eyes, in a moderate form) as well as her eventual social acknowledgement through the marriage with Darcy. While the film does, to a certain extent, invite criticism of the class and the sex/gender system, it does not, I will argue, problematise its implications in terms of nation and race.

Regarding the depiction of landscape and social structure, Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* nostalgically constructs a vision of Olde England as "a green and pleasant land, pre-industrial, safe and welcoming" (Higson 2004: 42) by showing picturesque images of the English rural landscape and of awe-inspiring manor houses with lavish décor; thus, the film ties in with what Clara Tuite has described as Austen's "Romantic-period cultural strategy of naturalizing the country, and its social relations" (2002: 100). As with earlier adaptations of the novel, it was shot on location in England: for example, Chatsworth House in Derbyshire and Wilton House in Wiltshire served as the scenery for Mr Darcy's Pemberley. The film, and in particular its DVD version, whose bonus material advertises the stately homes, internationally promote the English/British cultural heritage. This close interaction with the touristic 'heritage industry' has become a typical feature of the heritage film and was particularly noticeable in the adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* as a BBC-mini-series in 1995, which was seen by 10 to 12 million people in Great Britain and was successful on the international market as well. The series effected such a substantial increase in visits to the stately homes which served as locations for the film (such as Lyme Park in Cheshire) that the English Tourist Board granted the series one of its most prestigious awards, *England for Excellence* (cf. Haslett 2000: 204).⁸

Adaptations of Austen's novels for television and the cinema thus contribute to the notion of a 'heritage England'. They become part of a myth of national identity (cf. Feldmann 2004: 186), which is not only reflected but also constructed by cultural forms of representation, as Stuart Hall reminds us: "We have been trying to theorize identity as constituted, not outside but within representation; and hence of cinema, not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects" (1993: 402). Film scholars have shown in which respects films, and in particular heritage films, shape contemporary notions of the nation. For example, Sarah Street's study *British National Cinema* opens with the observation that, to a high degree, we "have inherited a dominant conception of what it is to be British, a collective consciousness about nationhood which has, in part, been constructed by cultural referents, including Cinema" (1997: 1). Despite the unusually extensive shooting on location, Wright's film occasionally resorts to digital grading to visualise this 'heritage England'; for example, the depiction of Darcy's Pemberley is perfected in this way. That such filmic and even digital constructs can nonetheless, in Hall's sense, constitute reality for viewers and decisively shape their understanding of national history was illustrated by the fact that the costumes for Lee's adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* were exhibited in British museums together with

original clothing of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Whelehan 1999: 14; cf. also Haslett 2000: 205 and Higson 2004: 36). In a similar vein, Simon Seligman, representative of the Chatsworth House Trust, explains on the DVD of Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* that "the great thing for us about this film is that after this film comes out, we will be Pemberley".⁹

The fascination for this 'heritage England' in general and the 'Austenmania' in particular looks to a period when Englishness appears to have been defined much more restrictively than it is today in transcultural Britain. Firstly, as mentioned above, heritage films, and among them Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*, offer a "very class-bound vision of national identity" (Higson 2004: 42). Secondly, they portray patriarchal societies which include, thirdly, only white citizens. Moreover, *Pride and Prejudice* focuses on a small local network, a face-to-face community in which people know each other well. The novel, and with it Wright's film, which the reviews most often categorised with reference to the problematic label 'faithful adaptation',¹⁰ depicts a community that appears much more knowable, calculable, and homogenous than contemporary British society. Applied to the increasing transculturation of Britain today, one can identify a yearning for 'knowability' in Wright's film, which constructs an image of the past that can serve as a myth of national origins: a pre-industrial, ethnically homogenous England that offers retreat to a world in which local communities, as it appears, had not yet constantly been influenced by global processes in unexpected ways, be it economically through globalisation, culturally and religiously through migration, or politically through terrorism. Harriet Margolis accordingly describes contemporary Austen filmings as "an effort to capitalize on people's desire for a stable, recognizable world – a cultured world – such as we associate with Austen, whose world was guided by rules for proper conduct and social structures determining people's relations" (2003: 23; cf. also Troost & Greenfield 1998: 4). This view of Austen's literary worlds as reassuring, peaceful communities "before history blew up, before rules and codes lost their efficacy" (Johnson 1997: 217) was even employed in professional psychological treatment when Austen's novels were recommended as a therapeutic reading for British World War I veterans suffering from post-traumatic shock syndrome (cf. Kent 1989: 59). As Claudia Johnson argues, this "notion [...] that Austen could be therapy for people whom history has made sick has an origin in global crisis and in a profound yearning for a world still sufficient to its own forms and rituals" (1997: 217). Such readings of Austen do, however, marginalise the existing political insecurities during Austen's day, like the French Revolution and the war with France, which are registered in her work (cf. Stedman 1997: 14). In *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, "the recent arrival of militia regiment in the neighbourhood" (Austen 1998: 20) reflects the impending war with France in the late 1790s. Likewise, an understanding of Austen's literary worlds and her historical realities as havens of ethnic and national homogeneity is a retroactive projection. As mentioned above, in Austen's day, dissident nationalists from Scotland, Wales, and Ireland emphasised their non-British, ancient identities in an

ideological move which Katie Trumpener has described as 'Bardic Nationalism' (1997).

Rather than emphasising such disquieting political aspects, however, Wright's version of *Pride and Prejudice* focuses on the emerging relationship between Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy and on the issues of gender and class identity involved in this love match. In this regard, it stands in contrast to more recent Austen filmings such as Rozema's *Mansfield Park* and, as I will argue in the following, Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice*. These films differ more radically than Wright's from the conventional aesthetics of the heritage film, and, moreover, they address the aspects of imperialism and colonial exploitation which are present, but, as Edward Said famously argued in *Culture and Imperialism*, repressed in Austen's novels.¹¹ In contrast, Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* relates back to the more conservative filmings of the 1980s and earlier 1990s and evokes an imagined past that Stuart Hall describes as the "reach for [...] groundings" (1991: 36), as the "re-creation, the reconstruction of imaginary, knowable places in the face of the global postmodern" (*ibid.*: 35–36).¹²

2. Gurinder Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice*: Transcultural Romance

In contrast to Wright's depiction of an exclusively white community, Gurinder Chadha's filming of *Pride and Prejudice* links the novel's negotiation of class borders with the negotiation of national and ethnic identity. Chadha's version transplants Austen's plot to the present-day, post-industrial world and already marks this deviation from its literary source in the title, *Bride and Prejudice*. Here, the little England described by Austen becomes the global village, in which the British, US-Americans, Indians, and non-resident Indians interact. The problematic relationship between centre and periphery, which Austen's novel presents as the interplay between London and the countryside, is reconfigured as the relationship between Western global cities, most notably London and Los Angeles, and the Indian city Amritsar, located in the northwestern state of Punjab. While London and Los Angeles, apart from their iconic sights such as the London Eye or the Hollywood sign, resemble each other in their urban global culture, Amritsar (which has more than one million inhabitants) is presented as the rural, poorer, less sophisticated, chaotic but lively 'other'. In its staging of its settings, *Bride and Prejudice* agrees with Robin Cohen's observation in *Global Diasporas* that metropolises like London and Los Angeles increasingly interlink, while they tend to lose contact to their hinterland: "As transactions and interactions between global cities intensify they lose their major national characteristics and their significance resides more in their global than in their national roles"; "Tastes, consumption patterns and forms of entertainment are drawn more from an emerging global culture than from the national culture" (1997: 167). While London and Los Angeles hence are not primarily British or American cities, but global metropolises, the

Indian province offers a cultural and national specificity, which dissolves but is still more clearly discernable than that of the global cities.

The very opening of *Bride and Prejudice* emphasises the interconnection of the local and the global: After the opening shot of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Lalita Bakshi alias Elizabeth Bennet is shown on a tractor in an agricultural setting accompanied by Indian music; while the farm workers wear traditional Indian clothing, including turbans, Lalita is dressed in jeans and T-shirt. Through cross-cutting, we simultaneously witness how William Darcy, Balraj (alias Charles) Bingley, and his sister Kiran (alias Caroline) arrive at the local airport, encountering the unsophisticated luggage procedures in front of the half-built terminal at the airport with Western arrogance (Darcy and Kiran) and amused indulgence (Balraj). After a chaotic ride through the cow-ridden city of Amritsar, we see the Bakshi villa, situated at 7 Udham Singh Road, as a brief shot of the road sign tells us. With this passing reference to the assassin of Michael O'Dwyer and thus to the Indian Independence Movement, Chadha underpins the depiction of the present with a reminder of the colonial past.¹³ From the film's beginning, she thus highlights the issue of cultural interconnectedness and exchange; and throughout the film, she shows how the process of transculturation has affected – by means of colonisation, migration, globalisation, tourism, and modern communication forms – not only the Indian provinces, but also the USA and Britain. For example, Lalita's mother searches for appropriate sons-in-law from the Indian diaspora via an online database called "indianmatchmakers", and Darcy's mother (alias Catherine de Bourgh) declares that she does not have to travel to India, since she can learn yoga and buy all her Indian spices at home in LA just as well.

The negotiation of cultural hybridity in *Bride and Prejudice* is particularly pertinent to Chadha's invention of three non-resident Indian characters, Mr Kholi (alias Mr Collins), and the Bingley siblings, who live in the American and the British diasporas respectively. Although they retain relations to India, they do not plan to return to the 'mother country'. The characters hence act according to current developments of Indian diasporic identity; as Jigna Desai shows with respect to Indian diasporic film, the term 'diaspora' in recent years has been increasingly dissociated from nostalgia and the yearning for the homeland in both theoretical discourse and cultural products (2004: 18). It thus no longer necessarily corresponds to William Safran's definition that people living in the diaspora "regard the homeland as the true, ideal home to which they or their descendants should and will eventually return when conditions are acceptable" (1991: 84). In *Bride and Prejudice*, the non-resident Indian characters demonstrate that hybridity, as has been extensively theorised by postcolonial critics such as Homi Bhabha, Arjun Appadurai, and Aihwa Ong, subverts nativism and the close interconnection of race, nation, and territory.¹⁴ The disintegration of the nation-state in favour of transculturality also affects the central concern of the film's plot: heterosexual romance and marriage. Austen's ironic opening sentence, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want

of a wife" (Austen 1998: 1), is rephrased in Chadha's adaptation, but it still applies: "Any single man with big bucks is shopping for a wife". Austen's concentration on the aristocracy (Darcy), the impoverished gentry (the Bennets), and the newly rich pseudo-gentry (the Bingleys) is reflected in Chadha's portrait of the global financial elite (Darcy and the Bingleys) and the aspiring middle-class Bakshis. Chadha emphasises that marriage in contemporary Indian society has a significance that is comparable to Austen's day, as it secures the material well-being of the bride and means a financial relief for her family.¹⁵ Additionally, the marriages in *Bride and Prejudice* negotiate the question of national and cultural belonging. Whereas in Austen's novel the depicted marriages underpin the project of nation-building by joining spouses who belong to different counties,¹⁶ in Chadha's film they create a transnational network. While Jaya (alias Jane Bennet) immediately falls in love with the British-Indian Balraj Bingley, who can offer her a luxurious life in London and New York, Lalita Bakshi initially rejects the affluent American William Darcy because of his Western arrogance and refuses to marry her American-Indian cousin Mr Kholi merely for financial reasons. The film stages Kholi's hybrid national identity in a comic manner. As a caricature of the typical non-resident Indian, he proudly shows photographs of his Californian home built, as he emphasises, in the "colonial style" and searches, rather indiscriminately, for a 'traditional', 'authentic' Indian wife, whose roots in the mother country should guarantee her heterosexuality and her unhesitating compliancy. The film emphasises, however, that such an image of the Indian wife stems from Kholi's projection and that the Indians who live in the diaspora thus construct the mother country according to their needs and desires: Before Kholi's arrival, Mother Bakshi has to give her Westernised daughters detailed orders on how a 'traditional' Indian woman has to dress and behave.

While this scene deconstructs a traditional notion of Indianness, the figures of Balraj and Kiran diversify the notion of Britishness. When Kiran invites the Bakshis to have tea in her home, furnished in typically British style, which is situated on the Thames next to Windsor castle, the film demonstrates that the offspring of Indian immigrants are more British than the 'native' British themselves. It also draws attention to the fact that one of the icons of Britishness, namely tea, was only discovered through Britain's history of imperialism and had been imported from the Indian colonies for decades – just as Kiran's identity is truly transcultural, seemingly 'pure' Britishness is always already influenced by other cultures. Rather than tracing the multiculturalism of the contemporary globalised nations, that is, rather than identifying clearly demarcated, homogenous groups within one community, the film thus stages the transcultural global network which has been theorised by critics such as Wolfgang Welsch (cf. 1992 and 2002).¹⁷

Chadha hence employs an icon of Britishness, Jane Austen, to tell a story about the close cultural interconnectedness between India, the Indian diaspora, Britain, and the USA. At the level of plot, her adaptation of Austen's novel foregrounds the international economic and cultural cooperation which already characterised the production of earlier heritage filmings of Austen – most of which were co-pro-

duced by American companies (cf. Monk 2002: 177). Aesthetically, this emphasis on cultural amalgamation is reflected in a mixture of cinematic elements taken from the traditions of the British heritage film, of Hollywood (in particular of musical films), and of Bollywood.¹⁸ For instance, Chadha adopts the colourful *mise-en-scène* of Bollywood movies and underpins the action with Bollywoodesque singing and dancing numbers that reinforce the emotions of the figures, visualise their fantasies, and replace the erotic physical contact which Indian films do not show in a realistic manner. These singing and dancing numbers, however, are already cultural hybrids; while fulfilling the requirements of Bollywood movies, their iconography at the same time alludes to famous Hollywood musicals and singing numbers in Hollywood films such as *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Grease*, and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.¹⁹ Because of its global setting, the film offers a mixture of impressive international sights, spectacular landscapes, and lavish décor. This visual emphasis on setting and décor merges the visual traditions of the British heritage film and the fascination with foreign locales typical of the Hindi film. In this respect, one setting of the film is particularly interesting as an illustration of the aspect of transculturality in both the film's plot and its production. When Chadha wanted to show a typical LA location where Lalita and Darcy could meet, she opted for a Mexican restaurant. For reasons of funding, however, Chadha had to shoot a majority of the scenes in Britain. Therefore, a Spanish restaurant in Clapham was 'Mexicanised' with the support of extras from the growing Latino community in South London;²⁰ drawing on Britain's transcultural society, the transcultural setting of Los Angeles could be staged.

This amalgamation of the British heritage film, the Hollywood musical, and Bollywood aesthetics clearly departs from the characteristics of 'black British film' or 'Asian British Film', a label that has been applied to Chadha's previous popular films *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002).²¹ Owing to their use of comedy and their rather light-hearted approach to the issue of the intercultural encounter, *Bhaji on the Beach* and *Bend It Like Beckham* already transgressed the notion of the early black British film as a "cinema of duty" (Malik 1996: 203) which has to pay tribute to the "burden of representation" (Mercer 1994: 81). In contrast to these (mostly) realist sociocritical films, such as Hanif Kureishi's *Sammie and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), which trace the difficulties inherent in the *intercultural* encounter and mixing, Chadha's films celebrate the "pleasures of hybridization" (Malik 1996: 212). This celebrative attitude towards *transculturality* involves the marginalisation of problems and anxieties engendered by colonisation, migration, and globalisation, which even intensified during the writing and shooting of the film. In particular since the terrorist attacks in New York and London, the so-called 'racialisation' of South Asian, Muslim, and Arabian immigrants to both the USA and the UK has increased. *Bride and Prejudice* largely ignores this sociopolitical context – which of course also applies to other European countries, having effected, for example, a discussion about the *Leitkultur* in Germany. For instance, the film's travel depictions ignore realities such as protracted

and at times humiliating airport procedures, and in one of the rare moments in which the issue of economic and cultural imperialism is raised, responsibility is transferred from Britain to the USA: Lalita criticises Darcy's endeavour to extend his American hotel chain to India by remarking that her home country should not be turned into a theme park for American tourists. The protagonist thus objects to the impending economic absorption by the USA rather than the colonisation by Britain.²² Such explicit moments of social criticism remain an exception, however, and are eventually resolved in the double marriage between Lalita and Darcy and Jaya and Balraj, which is presented as a transcultural festivity with music and dancing. Chadha's topical rewriting of Austen's novel can hence, I would argue, hardly be considered a sociocritical *anti-heritage* film. Rather, it appears as an *alternative* heritage film, since it replaces the myth of an old Britain with the embellished version of the reality of modern transcultural Britain.

While Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* cautiously updates the aesthetic characteristics of the heritage film, but once again, as with many late 1980s to mid-1990s Austen filmings, adapts an Austen novel to create a reassuring story about the ostensible roots of British society, a version of a soothing past cleansed of reminders of ethnic and intercultural conflict, Chadha employs an allegedly quintessentially British story to explore the transcultural, hybrid identities which have come into existence through the cultural and economic exchange processes between Britain, the USA, and India. Her take on Austen's novel both aesthetically and ideologically hybridises an icon of Britishness and shows how a new, more comprehensive concept of Britishness can be established on the basis of a heritage notion of (seemingly) 'pure' Britishness.²³ As an alternative heritage film, *Bride and Prejudice* offers a portrait of the ethnic, national, and cultural hybridity and transcultural network structure of the modern world which is so positive and optimistic in the face of the actual aggravation of inner- and intercultural conflicts in recent years that the film appears as a utopia of transcultural harmony.

Notes

- 1 Cf. for example <<http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/edoc/ia/eese/breuer/biblio.html>> for an extensive list of sequels and adaptations, compiled by Rolf Breuer.
- 2 Cf. for example Voigts-Virchow 2004 and McCrum 2005. This enthusiasm is no recent phenomenon but was inspired by James Edward Austen-Leigh's memoir of his aunt Jane Austen, published in 1870. Cf. Johnson 1996 and 1997 for a study of the popular and academic Austen cults.
- 3 In 2003 the BBC conducted the largest ever poll for the "UK's Best-Loved Book" in which *Pride and Prejudice* came second, behind *The Lord of the Rings*. The poll was part of a show called *The Big Read*, and more than 750,000 people took part by way of a viewer vote via the Web, SMS, and telephone. The show attracted controversy for adopting an allegedly sensationalist approach to literature, but supporters praised it for raising the public awareness of reading.

- 4 Given that every film is a collaborative product, Wright and Chadha of course cannot be regarded as the sole 'authors' of the adaptations. For reasons of readability, however, I will in the following call the adaptation directed by Wright, starring Keira Knightley, with a screenplay by Deborah Moggach, to name but a few involved artists, 'Wright's adaptation' and will speak of 'Chadha's adaptation' when I refer to *Bride and Prejudice*, starring Aishwarya Rai, with a screenplay by Paul Mayeda Berges.
- 5 Because of the differences to earlier heritage films, Linda V. Troost considers Wright's filming a 'fusion adaptation', which connects Hollywood style and British heritage style, and also subsumes Rozema's *Mansfield Park* under this category (2007: 82–87). While this categorisation can be useful for a focus on the aesthetics of Austen adaptations, my analysis of their sociocultural implications will emphasise the differences of Wright's and Rozema's adaptations.
- 6 Higson in his 2003 study qualifies this earlier strict argument, allowing for more ambiguous meanings and readings of heritage films.
- 7 Thus Robin Cook, UK Foreign & Commonwealth Secretary in 1998 (<http://wwp.greenwich2000.com/millennium/info/panel2000.htm>, 19.11.2006, quoted in Lockett 2000: 89). As Lockett points out, the shift associated with the events of 1997 (that is, the election of New Labour and the death of Princess Diana) was a culmination of earlier trends (*ibid.*: 89).
- 8 Cf. Haslett 2000 for an account of the role that the sightseeing of manor houses played in Austen's day, when "domestic tourism to English country houses became increasingly popular" and when "social tourism arose as a national, patriotic and aesthetic pursuit" (223).
- 9 Cf. the bonus material of the DVD released in 2006 by Universal Studios: *The Stately Homes of Pride and Prejudice / Chatsworth House*.
- 10 Since the reality depicted in Austen's novels consists for the most part of speeches, opinions, and interpretations and the appearance of persons or spaces is hardly ever described, filmic adaptations need to fill in these details. Some critics doubt whether it is at all possible to adapt novels adequately for film. For example, Gard criticises the "artistic paucity of mere looking" (2003: 10) and the lack of narrative voice in films. Moreover, he considers psychological characterisation via images to be heavy-handed and misses the ironic tone of Austen's novels in their filmic adaptations (*ibid.*: 10–11). Such a "fidelity approach", which judges literary adaptations in view of their fidelity to the original, is increasingly regarded as a "doomed enterprise" (McFarlane 1996: 9) in film studies, since *the* correct approach to a novel does not exist. 'Adaptationists' such as Brian McFarlane, Morris Beja, Helmut Kreuzer, and Irmela Schneider in particular criticise this model (cf. Voigts-Virchow 2004: 17–19). Andrew Higson highlights the economic dimension of the label 'faithful adaptation': "What the film industry buys into, as much as anything else, is the cultural status of the novel and its author, from which point of view it is less a question of how faithful an adaptation is to its source text, and more about how the discourse of fidelity is mobilised in the promotion and reception of the film" (Higson 2004: 37). Different adaptation models are used in film studies; according to Geoffrey Wagner's model (1975), *Pride and Prejudice* is a 'transposition' and *Bride and Prejudice* an 'analogy' of the novel. Following Dudley Andrew's typology (1984), *Bride and Prejudice* is a 'borrowing' and *Pride and Prejudice* a 'transforming' of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.
- 11 See Church Gibson 2004 for a reading of Rozema's *Mansfield Park* as "a truly progressive heritage text" (51).
- 12 Cf. also Bhabha 1990 on the role of the novel in the project of nation-building.
- 13 Udham Singh assassinated Michael O'Dwyer, erstwhile governor of the Punjab province, in March 1940 to revenge the massacre of Indian civilians by British troops on April 13, 1919, which became known as the the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre or the Amritsar massacre. Despite a ban on public assemblies, more than 10, 000 civilians had gathered on that day to attend

a protest against British rule. British soldiers fired into the gathering, killing 400 people and injuring 1,200 more. O'Dwyer supported the massacre and placed the entire province under martial law two days later. The massacre and its aftermath is considered a turning point in the history of the Indian Independence Movement, since many previously moderate Indians lost their trust in the proclaimed fairness of the British Raj (cf. "India").

- 14 Bhabha perceives the diaspora as a heterogeneous form of being which produces cultural strategies such as mimicry and hybridity and thus criticises nationalism and nativism. Arjun Appadurai, who can perhaps be regarded as the strongest proponent of the dissolution of the nation-state via globalisation, envisions how "bounded territories could give way to diasporic networks, nations to trans-nations, and patriotism itself could become plural, serial, contextual and mobile" (Appadurai 1993: 806). Aihwa Ong explains the subversive potential of transnational processes: "I prefer to use the term *transnationality*. *Trans* denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something. Besides suggesting new relations between nation-states and capital, transnationality also alludes to the *transversal*, the *transactional*, the *translational*, and the *transgressive* aspects of contemporary behavior and imagination" (Ong 1999: 4).
- 15 Despite her modernisation of Austen's novel in terms of ethnic and cultural identity, Chadha's depiction of gender identity is more conservative than Austen's. For instance, marriage seems to be the sole project of the Bakshi daughters, whom audiences, except from in the opening shots that depict Lalita helping out her father, never see at school or at work. A more detailed discussion of the gender implications of *Bride and Prejudice* would be worthwhile, but is beyond the scope of this essay.
- 16 Cf. Franco Moretti's comment: "Austen's plots join together – 'marry' – people *who belong to different counties*. Which is new, and significant: it means that these novels try to represent what social historians refer to as the 'National Marriage Market': a mechanism that crystallized in the course of the eighteenth century, which demands of human beings (and especially of women) a new mobility: physical, and even more so spiritual mobility." (Moretti 1998: 14–15)
- 17 As Welsch points out, the prefix 'trans-' is meant to indicate that we are *beyond* the traditional understanding of cultures as closed systems and that the contemporary ways of life effortlessly transcend and go through these old cultural formations (1992: 5).
- 18 The very process of adaptation is a principle not only of the heritage film but also of the Bollywood industry, which is based on transculturation: It often remakes successful Hollywood films by 'Indianising' them (cf. Ganti 2004: 77).
- 19 The market song "A Marriage Has Come to Town", in which the entire city joins in, alludes to the village singing scenes in *Fiddler on the Roof*, and the pyjama-party song "No Life without Wife" is reminiscent of the one in *Grease*. Lalita's song "Take Me to Love", sung next to the window to a guitar accompaniment, cites, I would argue, Holly Golightly's singing of "Moon River" in the same position and pose in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.
- 20 Cf. Chadha's and Berges's audio comments on the German DVD of *Bride and Prejudice*, released in 2005 by Ufa, Chapter 8.
- 21 Cf. for example Korte and Sternberg 2003: 163–177. Although Chadha's earlier films adhered more strongly than *Bride and Prejudice* to the realistic aesthetic of the black British film and paid attention to the potential for conflict inherent in cultural hybridity, they have been criticised for their positive and light-hearted approach to questions of inter- and transculturality. Cf. Sedlmayr 2006 for an account of such criticism regarding *Bend It Like Beckham* and for a counter-reading of the film as a comedy with utopian overtones which nonetheless "shows us what the often abstract talk about a multi-ethnic society might practically mean" (182).

- 22 Lalita: "I don't want you to turn India into a theme park. [...] I thought we got rid of the imperialists." / Darcy: "I am not British, I am American." / Lalita: "Exactly."
- 23 Cf. Chadha's comment on her earlier film *Bhaji on the Beach*: "What I'm trying to say is that Britain isn't one thing or another. It isn't just *Howard's End* or *My Beautiful Laundrette*. There are endless possibilities about what it can be – and is – already" (Chadha 1994: 27).

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- Bridget Jones's Diary* (UK/France 2001, D: Sharon Maguire, Sc: Helen Fielding)
- Elizabeth* (UK 1998, D: Shekhar Kapur, Sc: Michael Hirst)
- Fiddler on the Roof* (USA 1971, D: Norman Jewison, Sc: Joseph Stein)
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- Mansfield Park* (UK 1999, D & Sc: Patricia Rozema)
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