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## **ERKLÄRUNG**

Hiermit bestätige ich, diese Arbeit nach bestem Wissen und Gewissen selbstständig verfasst, und die Regeln der wissenschaftlichen Praxis eingehalten zu haben.

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<b>CURRICULUM VITAE</b>	

This royal throne of the kings, this scepter'd isle,  
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,  
This other Eden, demi-paradise,  
This fortress built by Nature for herself  
Against infection and the hand of war,  
This happy breed of men, this little world,  
This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
Which serves it in the office of a wall,  
Or as a moat defensive to a house,  
Against the envy of less happier lands,  
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.

## 1. Introduction

John of Gaunt's deathbed speech from Shakespeare's *Richard II* conjures up an image of an ancient and pastoral England which is deeply rooted in the national mythology. That the glamour of the mythical image had not faded away in the course of history was further demonstrated by the prevalence of heritage cinema in the 1980s and 1990s, at the centre of which was an old England, mostly rural and set in the past. Although appealing to international audiences with regard to box-office success, heritage film was dismissed by some critics on the Left as "conspicuous consumption" (Craig 3). The most provocative statements against heritage cinema were proposed by Andrew Higson, an academic most consistently cited in connection with the 'heritage film' debate, who argued that in the films, "historical narrative is transformed into spectacle; heritage becomes excess, not functional mise-en-scène, not something to be used narratively, but something to be admired" (Higson, *English Heritage* 39), and that "the strength of the pastiche in effect imprisons the qualities of the past, holding them in place as something to be gazed at from a reverential distance, and refusing the possibility of a dialogue with the present" (Higson, *Re-presenting* 119). The underlying assumption of Higson's disparaging statements is that, implicated in the discourse of conservatism, heritage cinema is of little artistic or aesthetic value and irrelevant for the present, which in effect is by no means the case.

The study thus aims to demonstrate primarily, although not exclusively, that the two statements against heritage cinema proposed by Higson is highly inappropriate: first of all, it would be wrong to reduce the mise-en-scène to heritage spectacles or to dismiss it as visual excess. Rather, it will be demonstrated that mise-en-scène of the films can be narratively functional, suggesting emotion, desire, repression and so forth; secondly, contrary to “refusing the possibility of a dialogue with the present” (Higson, *Re-presenting* 119), it will be argued that in the heritage films under discussion contemporary issues are addressed through a return to an imaginative national ‘past’ and that the confrontation with the present thus points to the films’ inner historical and political progressiveness.

The primary subject of this study is films produced after the 1980s which either are adapted from canonical English literary texts or depict some aspects of the English past in relation to the monarch. Combining literature, culture and film studies, the study can be said to be an interdisciplinary study. Thus, the methodology has been to find a middle way between literary and social criticism and film aesthetics: specifically, individual films will be closely analyzed as visual ‘texts’; at the same time, heritage cinema will be located in a wider social spectrum so that the relationship between heritage film and the social or political background can be examined.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. An Overview of Heritage Cinema

#### 2.1.1. 'Heritage Film' as a Genre?

'Heritage film' as a genre has been highly contested. Coined by Charles Barr to refer to British wartime cinema (see Voigts-Virchow *Corset Wars* 14), the term 'heritage film' has gained a certain currency as a means of describing a group of British period films produced in the 1980s and 1990s. In an earlier article "Re-presenting the National Past", Higson narrowly applied the label to a fairly small group of British quality costume dramas of the 1980s and early 1990s (see Higson *Re-presenting* 109) which concentrated on the life of the upper-middle classes in the early decades of the twentieth century. In recent years, however, Higson seemed to have realized that the way he defined heritage cinema was quite "tightly circumscribed" (Higson *English Heritage* 11), and managed to reformulate a more inclusive and flexible definition, asserting that heritage film was "a genre of film which reinvents and reproduces, and in some cases simply invents, a national heritage for the screen" (Higson *Waving* 26).

What is underlying the attempt to define heritage films collectively is the presupposition that these films actually constitute a genre and share certain formal and thematic characteristics. However, Jancovich points out that the genre itself is forged artificially, since "[the] technique of classification does not simply identify some pre-existing essence. Instead, it produces what it purports to identify" (Jancovich, qtd. in Monk *Revisited* 192). For some critics, heritage film is unsatisfactory as a genre category in that it remains an unresolved problem that "whether heritage films can be said to constitute a

valid and coherent genre -- and how far this 'genre' has any usefulness outside the circumstances in which it was first defined" (Monk *Revisited* 192) with regard to the historically specific origins of heritage film. As Monk notes, identified as a putative grouping, heritage film can be "collectively denounced" by those leftist critics, given that the term 'heritage film' is "openly pejorative and dismissive" (*Revisited* 177).

Although it has been observed that "heritage films have been produced in Britain since at least the 1910s" (Higson *Waving* 26), virtually all the films identified as 'heritage film' are those produced after 1980s when the debate around 'heritage film' emerged in Britain as a response to Thatcherite conservatism. Unwittingly, an artificial boundary line was thus drawn between those pre-1979 British period films and the so-called 'heritage films' within a 'heritage' critical framework. Consequently, separating the British period films of the Thatcher years from their precursors "[represses] many continuities and complexities" on the one hand, and "marginalizes films which do not neatly fit the 'heritage' critical template" on the other (Monk *Past* 11).

Accused of "[making] a mockery of neat categorization or reductive critical discussion" (Monk *Revisited* 176), Higson remains unconvinced, defending his stance by asserting that

The term heritage cinema seemed appropriate since I and others identified these films as the products of a culture and an economy in which what had come to be called the heritage industry -- the commodification of the past -- had become highly visible [...] A number of English period films of the 1980s and 1990s displayed a marked generic intertextuality. (*English Heritage* 11)

Furthermore, in accordance with Higson's perspective, Cairns Craig, "one of the most hostile critics" (Monk *Revisited* 177) of heritage films, points out that

“the genre is in danger of turning into a parody of itself” (3). Although Higson has admitted that “perhaps the term genre is too strong” (Higson *Waving* 27) for these films can also be seen as “a sub-genre of the historical romance or costume drama” (Higson *Waving* 27), he nevertheless maintains that “genre or not, such films constitute a coherent enough body of films for them to be discussed collectively and for better or worse I shall continue to refer to them as a genre” (Higson *Waving* 27). Given that all genres are hybrid categories and genre boundaries are always in flux and flexible, other potential substitutes for the label ‘heritage film’ such as ‘period film’, ‘historical film’ or ‘costume film’ “merely open up different cans of worms and by no means lend themselves to clearer generic delineation” (Voigts-Virchow *Corse Wars* 16). In face of Monk’s charge, Higson convincingly argues that “as critics, we should not try to regulate the genre or cycle too closely or too loosely...there are no hard and fast rules to be adhered to or broken. After all, it is we critics who make up the rules as we write” (*Heritage Film* 235). Pragmatically speaking, though being accurate, the way Monk proposes to refer to the films as “British screen fictions set in the past” (*Revisited* 177) is comparatively impractical and inconvenient<sup>1</sup>. Obviously, the problem is not so much about right or wrong as about whether a consensus on the issue can be achieved by critics. And what is more essential than the ‘genre problem’ is that, “the very fact that the category has stimulated so much criticism illustrates how productive it continues to be” (Voigts-Virchow *Corset Wars* 16).

### 2.1.2. Characteristics of Heritage Film

Set in the past, heritage films primarily focus on the English upper-middle class, depicting their manners and lifestyles, telling stories about their romantic entanglements and proprieties. Particularly, these films are marked by their visual splendour and period authenticity with the display of magnificent English country-houses, the picturesque landscape of southern

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<sup>1</sup> For sake of convenience, the films under discussion in the study will also be referred to as ‘heritage film’

England and luxurious interior décors which to some extent have become major attractions of the genre (see Higson *English Heritage* 1). Compared with Hollywood blockbusters, the budgets of heritage films are fairly modest, with a clear dependence on television<sup>2</sup> (see Krewani 166). And the core audience of heritage film is identified as relatively more socially upscale, mature and feminine than most mainstream audiences (see Voigts-Vichow *Heimat* 128).

Generally speaking, there are two major types of the genre. One central type is adaptations of canonical literary texts which already have a privileged cultural status. Merchant Ivory, for instance, produced a series of critically acclaimed and commercially successful adaptations of E.M Forster's novels, represented by *A Room with a View* (1987), *Maurice* (1987), and *Howards End* (1992). It was noticeable that Jane Austen took over from Forster and became one of the most favourable authors for filmmakers in the mid-1990s when "Austenmania really hit the screens [...] with the enormously successful BBC serialization of *Pride and Prejudice* (1995)" (see Higson *English Heritage* 16-20). The other type, in Higson's terms, is "the reconstruction of a historical moment which is assumed to be of national significance" (Higson *Waving* 27). In authentic period settings, these films either deal with real historical figures or are based on legendary folk heroes. In particular, a range of films offer fictionalized accounts of royal personages and the monarchy, and these monarchy films in themselves constitute one key cycle within the category. Examples are *The Madness of King George*, *Mrs Brown* and *Elizabeth* (see Higson *English Heritage* 20-22).

For all their superficial stability, heritage films seem very often to deal with an identity crisis or ideological conflict, or in other words, "the last of old England" (Higson *English Heritage* 28). The central theme of *Howards End*, for instance,

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, both *A Room with a View* and *Maurice* were partially funded by the television company Channel Four.

is how people from different social classes struggle over the ownership of Howards End, or rather England. In *The Remains of the Day*, traditional concepts of 'Englishness' are demythologized with the downfall of the British Empire and its ethos. In terms of narrative style, heritage films are identified as characteristically "slow-moving, episodic and de-dramatic" (Higson *English Heritage* 37) in comparison with Hollywood movies, which are mostly marked by fast pace and narrative energy. Comprising several central protagonists, the narrative structure of heritage film tends to be more dispersed than most hero-focused Hollywood films (see Higson *English Heritage* 37). One explanation for the aesthetic difference between heritage film and mainstream Hollywood movies is perhaps that, "[the heritage films] of the 1980s and 1990s are character studies or dissections of specific milieu, and do not therefore feel the need to push the narrative relentlessly forward" (Higson *English Heritage* 38). Stylistically speaking, it is well recognized that "there is a preference for long takes and deep focus, and for long and medium shots, rather than for close-ups and rapid cutting" (Higson *Re-presenting* 117). However, what remains questionable is Higson's argument that "the camera is characteristically fluid, but camera movement is dictated less by a desire to follow the movement of characters than by a desire to offer the spectator a more aesthetic angle on the period setting and the objects that fill it" (*Re-presenting* 117), implicitly pointing out that the camerawork of heritage film is narratively unmotivated. As one of the central concerns of the study, Higson's point of view mentioned above will be closely examined in relation to detailed analysis of individual films.

Another conspicuous characteristic of the genre is intertextuality, which is highly visible in the films, since "the same actors play similar roles and class types in several different films, bringing a powerful sense of all the other heritage films, costume dramas, and literary adaptations to each new film" (Higson *English Heritage* 29). Emma Thompson and Anthony Hopkins are quintessential models here, having become almost synonymous with understatement and restraint. After playing a couple in *Howards End* (1992),

they again successfully portrayed an emotionally intense yet repressed relationship in *The Remains of the Day* (1995), bringing with them all the cultural connotations of reserve and repression. As Craig ironically puts it, “the same cast in the same period costumes gives the feel almost of a repertory production, with actors who know well each other’s strengths and limitations, and directors who know perhaps too well their audience’s expectations” (3).

## 2.2 Reconstructions of National Identity

### 2.2.1 Heritage Cinema as National Cinema

Since the First World War, British screens have been dominated by Hollywood movies. A British government report points out the embarrassing situation British cinema is currently in, noting that “our films have only 23% of our own audience, while US films have 73%” (qtd. in Todd 20). It can be said that, the British film industry has “both benefited and suffered from sharing an ostensibly common language with its powerful American competitor” (Friedman 1). The complaining attitude towards the overwhelming influence of Hollywood is manifest in producer Leon Clore’s statement: “if the United States spoke Spanish, we would have a film industry” (qtd. in Friedman 3). Nevertheless, it does not make any sense to attribute the failure of a national cinema to American influence, as Samuel observed that when a nation is in certain difficulties, “foreign influences are routinely blamed” (Samuel *Exciting* xxxiii) even though the problem comes more from within than from without. One major factor blocking the development of British cinema is identified as “a certain incompatibility between the terms ‘cinema’ and ‘Britain’” (Truffaut, qtd. in Friedman 3), since “camera forces one to face facts, to probe, to reveal, to get close to people and things”, whereas the British character tends to be restrained, to eschew direct confrontations and “to cloak harsh truths with innuendoes” (Ray, qtd. in Friedman 3).

In response to US domination, British film-makers have made every effort to establish and maintain a national cinema. Given that the very idea of 'national cinema' is somewhat monolithic, it is noteworthy that there seems to be no specific or consensual identification of 'British national cinema', which tends to be heterogeneous and highly diverse, as Eric Fellner, co-chairman of Working Title, notes:

The business here is a cyclical cottage industry done in dollars. If the exchange rate is good, business is good; if not, business is bad. Perceptions are also cyclical: if a *Four Wedding* or a *Full Monty* come out, everyone wants small British films; if not, they don't. If Merchant Ivory scores a hit, everyone wants frock-flicks or tea-and-cucumber flicks; if there's a *Trainspotting*, everyone screams for hip, cutting-edge contemporary movies. It's shifting sands. There is no clear-cut British Film Industry. (qtd. in Todd 24)

In the cycle of British art cinema (see Hill 247), which is recognized as one "prime example of a national cinema" (Hill 247), heritage films are thus seen as representing the national cinema on an international scale dealing with indigenous cultural traditions, for "the concern for heritage is a concern to reproduce the indigenous, the distinctive, the national; the culture of heritage is assumed to be in the national interest, capable of elevating the general public" (Higson *Waving* 17).

Avoiding direct competition with Hollywood, heritage film's exploiting indigenous cultural traditions is deemed as one way of "differentiation from Hollywood" (Hill 246), one of the three major strategies identified by Stephen Crofts<sup>3</sup>. Curiously enough, heritage film achieves "much of its status as national cinema by circulating internationally rather than nationally" (Hill 247),

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Crofts identifies three strategies available to British cinema: the imitation of Hollywood, competition with Hollywood and differentiation from Hollywood.

and as Hipsky asserts, “[English heritage films] seem to have carved out a cinema-going American *market niche*” (100). One key reason why heritage film particularly appeals to American audiences is perhaps that such a film privileges one’s “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, qtd. in Hipsky 102), or flatters one’s cultural sophistication (see Hipsky 101-102), as Hipsky suggests

I want to suggest that the act of viewing an Anglophilic film may reaffirm one’s accumulation of this type of cultural capital at a time when the professional-managerial class and its aspirants feel the need of that reassurance. These movies appeal to people who want their increasingly expensive college educations to pay some cultural dividends. (103)

By contrast, Rotha entirely rejects such a notion of ‘national cinema’ which he believes is built on fake cultural prestige:

The British film is established on a hollow foundation. Perhaps it would be more significant to write that it rests upon a structure of false prestige [...] the whole morale of the British cinema is extravagantly artificial. It has been built up by favoured criticism and tolerance of attitude [...] As it is, the British film is spoon-fed by deceptive praise and quota regulations, with the unhappy result that it has not yet discovered its nationality. (qtd. in Higson *Waving* 36)

All in all, what lies at the heart of the ‘heritage film’ ideology is in effect a paradox: on the one hand, by reproducing an indigenous national culture and focusing on traditional English values, heritage film deliberately differentiates itself from mainstream Hollywood films; on the other hand, this assertion of national identity is “only possible because of transnational funding, especially American funding” (Higson *English Heritage* 259) and these films are, more often than not, intended for, and consumed by, international audiences.

### 2.2.2 The Search for 'Englishness' in the Past

Heritage film allegedly represents English national identity or so-called 'Englishness' mainly through returning to the 'past', for "collectivity has its roots in the past" (Weil, qtd. in Lowenthal 44). However, it is noteworthy that, as Giddings observes, the 'past' with which heritage film seems particularly concerned is the nineteenth century: "a major warehouse of historical commodities and evidence, and a period still almost within living memory in which culture we feel we have strong roots" (qtd. in Whelehan 12). There seems to be a consensus among many leading authorities that it is only after the eighteenth century that the 'past' became romanticized and integral to the sense of English identity, which means that something remarkable happened to, and fundamentally changed, the national character at the turn of the centuries. Harold Perkin, a social historian, points out that : "Between 1780 and 1850 the English ceased to be one of the most aggressive, brutal, rowdy, outspoken, riotous, cruel and bloodthirsty nations in the world and became one of the most inhibited, polite, orderly, tender-minded, prudish and hypocritical" (qtd. in Richards 5).

According to Jeffrey Richards, the formation of the English national character on the one hand can be seen as a response to the identity crisis caused by the predominant influence of French culture in Britain during the second half of the eighteenth century (see Richards 8-9). On the other hand, Evangelical Protestantism and chivalry, as "the distinctive shaping social and ideological forces of the nineteenth century" (Richards 12), also contributed to the way in which the English perceive and identify themselves, with each developing into a political party: "Evangelicalism into Liberalism, chivalry into Conservatism" (Richards 12). Even more interesting is the way in which the myth of 'Englishness' is perpetuated, as George Orwell notes:

Myths which are believed in tend to become true, because they set up a type or persona which the average person will do his best to resemble [...] Traditionally the Englishman is phlegmatic, unimaginative, not easily rattled, and since that is what he thinks he ought to be, that is what he tends to become...Millions of English people willingly accept as their national emblem the bulldog, an animal noted for its obstinacy, ugliness and impenetrable stupidity. They have a remarkable readiness to admit that foreigners are more 'clever' than themselves, and yet they feel that it would be an outrage against the laws of God and Nature for England to be ruled by foreigners. (qtd. in Richards 17)

Therefore, to some extent, the particular invention of the myth of Englishness in the nineteenth century exerts great influence on the conception of 'Englishness' and is essential for how 'Englishness' is staged in heritage film, since "the characteristic Englishness of English culture was made then very much what it is now" (Shannon, qtd. in Dodd 20). In that sense, features like gentle, decent, sentimental, deep sense of duty and emotional restraint which are traditionally represented as English virtues, are basically "cultural artefacts" (Richards 1) of the nineteenth century, forged to serve as political propaganda, since the nation is, above all, "an imagined community" (Anderson qtd. in Richards 1).

### 2.3 Thatcherism and English Heritage Cinema

Characteristically marked by tensions, contradictions and ambivalences, the ideology of Thatcherism prevailed in the 1980s when Britain was undergoing an identity crisis. Advocating for individual self-sufficiency, Thatcher introduced a series of economically aggressive policies to establish a free market in Britain, which also meant abolishing the nationalized industries and dismantling governmental controls (see Richards 23-24). Although encouraging economic risk-taking and innovative business practices, Thatcherite individualism fundamentally affected British society with regard to

the degeneration of moral values and social problems it generated. With little sympathy for socially disadvantageous groups, Thatcher disparaged and denigrated all ideas of public services, notoriously stating “There is no such thing as society” (qtd. in Richards 23). Traditional values like the sense of duty, self-sacrifice, restraint were dismissed and replaced by a consumerist ethic or the Thatcherite philosophy of “self-gratification” (Richards 23), for the ultimate doctrine of Thatcherism was to “let the people have what they want” (qtd. in Richards 23). The myth of ‘Englishness’ was thus undermined, as Richards observed

Such massive, wide-ranging social and cultural changes and value shifts cannot but affect the national character and the national identity. Almost all of the elements that went to make up British identity have been eroded...The empire has gone, taking with it the sense of duty, service and chivalry it inspired and leaving behind only the racism it also engendered. (25)

Even worse was the relationship between Thatcher and the intelligentsia and artists, which was described as “embattled” (Quart 23), since she treated the arts no different than any other business. Calling for the universities “to serve the national economy more effectively” (qtd. in Quart 23), for instance, Thatcher “cut deeply into university funding and eliminated three thousand university jobs”, which consequently irritated the universities, as Oxford unusually refused to grant Thatcher an honorary degree (see Quart 23).

For all her aggressive economic policies, Thatcher paradoxically called for a return to ‘Victorian’ moral values, which seemed to be at odds with the “acquisitive individualism” (Quart 20) implicated in the ideology of Thatcherism. Furthermore, the Thatcher government managed to establish a sense of continuity by focusing on the national ‘heritage’, “one of the most powerful imaginative constructs of our time” (Samuel, qtd. in Higson *Re-presenting* 112) , in order to reaffirm the sense of national identity bruised by rapid

cultural and social transformations. One of the most conspicuous manifestations of governmental concern with the 'past' can be found in the National Heritage Acts of the 1980s and 1983, which institutionalized the very idea of 'heritage'. Besides, in the area of education, the Thatcher government also managed to instil patriotism into history as a subject in schools emphasizing the continuity of national history (see Samuel *Continuous* 9). With regard to the social context of Thatcherism, Higson explicitly points out the political agenda behind the promotion of the notion of 'heritage'

[The] radical economic and social reconstructions of Britain in the 1980s required the Thatcher government to find novel ways of managing the conflict between old and new, tradition and modernity. They identify the key concepts in the process as "heritage", with its connotations of continuity with the past and the preservation of values and traditions. (*Re-presenting* 112)

Clearly, using "the signs of history in highly contradictory ways" (Leach 200), the emergence of 'heritage industry' characteristically represented the Thatcherite paradox, for whereas 'heritage' alluded to the past and traditions, 'industry' unambiguously pointed to Thatcherite "entrepreneurial spirit" (Leach 200).

As part of the so-called 'heritage industry', heritage film was 'promoted' by Thatcher in a very ironic way. In accordance with its free-market philosophy, the Thatcher government discarded the quota and subsidy systems designed to protect the national film industry, and passed a new Films Bill in 1984-85, which applied market principles to the film industry (see Quart 23). Although vindicated by the subsequent international success of heritage films, her policies on the film industry was criticized for "[compounding] the long term problems of a historically sick industry whose audience continued to decline" (Quart 24). Nevertheless, despite Thatcher's unwillingness to aid the British film industry, the Thatcher era witnessed an English film renaissance

represented by heritage film which “stands as one of the more positive by-products of the Thatcher ethos, though in an almost totally oppositional and critical manner” (Quart 17). Accordingly, it would be rather superficial to identify the heritage films with Thatcherism, as Quart notes that

Thatcher’s prime contribution to British filmmaking was not the business climate she created, but the subject matter her policies and the culture she helped create provided British directors. The majority of English films of the eighties never engaged in open critiques of Thatcherism, but the ethos she created seemed to become the implicit or explicit subject of many of the period’s best films. (25)

Lurking in the background, Thatcherism was thus represented as a trope in heritage film whereby filmmakers could express their discontents with the present situation and moral decay in that nostalgically looking back to the past necessarily implied that there must be something wrong with the present. What is at stake is the fact that the apparent contradiction between visual conservatism and narrative progressiveness of heritage film, in a way, corresponded to the inner paradox of Thatcherism which on the one hand promoted an energetic free-market economy and gave rise to serious social problems on the other (see Dave 32). In that sense, though she never provided direct help to the film industry, Thatcher’s powerful presence “moved British filmmakers to burn brightly for at least one decade” (Quart 33).

## 2.4 A Review of the Critical Debate on Heritage Cinema

### 2.4.1 A Debate Between The Left And The Right

In the heyday of Thatcherism, British cinema was unwittingly involved in a political or cultural debate between the Left and the Right, as a result of which

heritage film came to the fore and became a major target of attack from critics on the Left. It is said that the trigger of the debate was Oxford historian Norman Stone's provocative right-wing criticism of recent independent British films including *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears, 1987), *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (Stephen Frears, 1987), and *The Last of England* (Derek Jarman 1987) (see Dave 29). Firmly located in a contemporary Britain, these films denounced by Stone directly responded to current social and political oppressions by exclusively focusing on cultural and sexual diversity and social division. Condemning the films as "worthless and insulting" and "riddled with left-wing bias" (Stone, qtd. in Monk *Revisited* 189), Norman Stone stated that

they are all very depressing and are no doubt meant to be. The rain pours down; skinheads beat people up; there are race riots; there are drugs fixed in squalid corners; there is much explicit sex, a surprising amount of it homosexual and sadistic [...]The done thing is to run down Mrs Thatcher, to assume that capitalism is parasitism, that the established order of this country is imperialist, racist, profiteering. (qtd in Monk *Revisited* 189)

By contrast, Stone mentioned three recent films, *Hope and Glory*, *A Passage to India* and *A Room with a View*, praising them as "very good films of a traditional kind" (qtd. in Monk *Revisited* 190). As a result, the films Norman favoured were inextricably linked with "the political agenda his article sought to advance on behalf of the Conservative government" (Monk *Revisited* 190) by academics and filmmakers on the Left. For instance, Derek Jarman suggested that heritage films were "nostalgic, obsessed with the past ... feeding illusions of stability in an unstable world" (qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 70). Stephen Frears dismissed the genre of heritage film as "the rattling of teacups" (qtd. in Fuller 37). Even more provocative was Hanif Kureishi's statement that heritage film was "the sort of soft-sore [*sic*] saccharine confection that Tory ladies and gentlemen think is Art" (qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 71).

Andrew Higson, who established a set of “ground rules” (Fuller 37) for the genre, argues that heritage film transforms the values of the English upper and middle classes into national interests appealing to cultural snobberies (see Higson *Re-presenting* 109-110). Escaping from the cultural heterogeneity of contemporary Britain, heritage films are criticized for “[turning] their backs on the industrialized, chaotic present” and for “nostalgically [reconstructing] an imperialist and upper-class Britain” (Higson *Re-presenting* 110). Thus, from a leftist perspective, heritage films “are conservative films for middle-class audiences, and they function to maintain values and interests of the most privileged social strata” (Higson *English Heritage* 46).

Questioning the validity of the leftist critique of the genre, however, Monk suggests that it is vital to understand heritage-film criticism as a historically specific discourse in relation to the particular cultural environment it is rooted in and responsive to (see Monk *Revisited* 187). She points out that heritage-film criticism is lack of vigour due to the fact that “it presumed a reader who was already broadly acquainted with anti-heritage-industry arguments and predisposed to agree with them” (*Revisited* 188). For Monk and Sargeant, what is at stake is that heritage-film criticism “has become as effective a commodity in the academy as heritage films have been in the cinema” (2).

Interestingly, in response to anti-heritage critics like Monk and Cook, Higson deliberately distances himself from the leftist perspective and shifts his position towards a more pluralistic interpretation of the films, recognizing that “his original formulation of the genre overstates its conservative complexion” (Dave 28)

Too often the debate about the meanings and values of heritage films has become polarized, as if one view was correct, and another incorrect. It is surely more productive to recognize that all these views are simply interpretations, that all interpretations betray the interests

and perspective of the interpreter, and that the variety of interpretations is indicative of the vitality of the reception process and the richness of the films themselves. (*English Heritage* 48)

#### 2.4.2 Mise-en-scène And Narrative

One central argument of the leftist critique is that heritage film is characterized by an aesthetic ambivalence between the narrative aspiring to progressive sentiments and the mise-en-scène which is seductively attractive and conservative. Moreover, the heritage attractions presented in the films are thus deemed as “narrative distractions” (Higson *Waving* 61), blocking other historical readings, as Higson puts it:

Historical narrative is transformed into spectacle; heritage becomes excess, not functional mise-en-scène, not something to be used narratively, but something to be admired...camera movements frequently exceed narrative motivation...this is not a narrative cinema...but something more akin to...the cinema of attractions. (*Representing* 117)

To support his argument, Higson takes E.M. Forster, one of Merchant-Ivory’s favourite writers, for an example. Stating that Forster “is less a novelist of place than of ideas and manners” (*English Heritage* 81), Higson implicitly suggests that Forster’s liberal and historical awareness is undercut by an indulgence in heritage spectacles in most Merchant Ivory adaptations of Forster’s novels. In tune with Higson’s perspective, Morrison states that “Forster would have hated to be used as a piece of heritage industry” (qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 186). In addition, Craig also points out that Forster’s “narrator is always given an ironic awareness of the extent to which the spiritual concerns of the characters are dependent upon their financial security, but that sense is entirely elided in the films” (4).

What these leftist critics fail to realize is the fact that cinema and the novel employ different semiotic systems. In the age of “photography and cinematography” (Guynn 68), one needs to realize that, the image is not just another form of narrative; it constitute “a discourse in its own right” (White, qtd. in Guynn 68). A film does not proceed in the same way as a novel does. Whereas readers of a novel are allowed into the minds of characters through narrative techniques, the expression of social criticism in a film heavily hinges on filmic devices or visual codes. Costume as a signifier in the semiotic system of cinema, for instance, can be interpreted as “a means of understanding the body or character who wears them not an end unto themselves” (Bruzzi xiv), and it is through clothes that a character can be established in terms of his or her gender, class, sexuality and wealth, and nationality. For example, in *A Room with A View*, one is impressed by Lucy’s prim and high-necked blouse which plays an important part in establishing the sexually repressed character and reflects Lucy’s attitude towards sexuality (See Higson *English Heritage* 41). So far as the representation of emotional repression in heritage film is concerned, Claire Monk suggests that the mise-en-scène should not be read as a separate discourse of scenic display but as indicative of what Forster would call “the inner life” (Monk, qtd. in Higson *Heritage Film* 241). Furthermore, it is observed that heritage film is particularly characterized by the way in which emotional depth is represented, as Dyer asserts that “feeling is expressed in what is not said or done, and/or in the suggestiveness of settings, music and situation” (qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 40).

A further example is a shot of Lucy playing the piano in *A Room with A View*, which Higson frequently applies to demonstrate that “camera movement is dictated less by a desire to follow the movement of characters than by a desire to offer the spectator a more aesthetic angle on the period setting and the objects that fill it” (*Re-presenting* 117). While luxurious artefacts and

furnishings frame the background, Lucy is seen playing the piano to the family friends and relatives of her fiancé Cecil (Fig 1). In Higson's terms, "the camera gracefully, but without narrative motivation, tracks slowly around one splendid item of furniture to reveal it in all its glory" (*Re-presenting* 117). The key point for the interpretation of the scene lies on the positioning of Lucy side by side with luxurious furnishings which exactly corresponds to the way her fiancé Cecil perceives her, since for Cecil Lucy is more like one of the artefacts in his possession than an individual entity. Through his facial expressions, it is thus revealed that Cecil is actually showing off Lucy, or rather his taste, to other spectators, and that what Cecil really appreciates is the value of Lucy as a piece of 'art' rather than her personality. Therefore, it seems that what Higson regards as the "textual ambivalence of heritage film" (*English Heritage* 65), or the contradiction between narrative and mise-en-scène, does not account for this scene; on the contrary, it is a perfect example demonstrating that the mise-en-scène of heritage film can be narratively functional rather than being mere visual excess.



Fig 1: *A Room with a View* Lucy playing the piano

### 2.4.3 The 'Past' in Heritage Film

Deeply rooted in the past, heritage film is dismissed by leftist critics for its marked nostalgia and the way it romanticizes history. From a leftist perspective, represented as “a vast collection of images” (Jameson, qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 64), history is reproduced in heritage film “as flat, depthless pastiche” (Higson *English Heritage* 64). And according to Higson, the pastiche “imprisons the qualities of the past, holding them in place as something to be gazed at from a reverential distance, refusing the possibility of a dialogue or confrontation with the present” (*English Heritage* 65). Condemning heritage film as “conspicuous consumption”, Craig suggests that the fetishization of period details such as country houses, interiors and clothes merely “[provides] a good business for New York fashion houses selling English country style to rich Americans” (3). In addition, Higson points out that historical awareness is therefore undermined in an obsession with pastiche:

In this version of history, a critical perspective is displaced by decoration and display, a fascination with surfaces, ‘an obsessive accumulation of comfortably archival detail’, where a concern for style displaces the material dimensions of historical context...The image of the past becomes so naturalized that it stands removed from history, the past as referent is effaced, and all that remains is a self-referential intertextuality. (*English Heritage* 64)

In response, Cook explicitly points out the partiality implied in Higson’s attitude towards the way history is represented in heritage film:

The pastiche factor may also have something to do with the contempt in which recent ‘heritage’ films are held by critics on the Left, who are fond of dismissing them as phoney, contaminated versions of history which mask the ‘true’ account of our national past. (Cook *Fashioning* 7)

According to Cook, Higson's stance in effect reveals his own difficulty in perceiving history as pastiche rather than as authentic and an anxiety about popular engagement with, or in Samuel's terms, "mere entertainment" (Samuel, qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 53) of the past. Moreover, it is argued that such perspective in effect echoes "a view of history as necessarily offering lessons for the present; and a sense that history should somehow remain uncontaminated by commodification" (Cook *Fashioning* 69). In accordance with Cook's view, Monk and Sargeant suggest that it is the long-standing belief that "the central duty of films set in the past is to document historical fact" (2) that has constrained and shackled British period films.

From a leftist perspective, implicated in the discourse of conservatism, nostalgia, with which heritage film is permeated, should be rejected in that the romanticized ideal of the past it represents may disturb one's rationality. As observed by Monk, it thus "became a corollary that all films set in the past and which focused on the comfortable bourgeoisie or upper classes must be politically conservative or 'bad'" (*Revisited* 190). Whereas critics on the Left identify nostalgia as an indicator of conservatism, the others advocate its progressive connotations. For Lowenthal, one seems to be less concerned to relive a past than to yearn for it; the past is celebrated only because "we are absolutely assured that those days are out of reach" (5) and beyond all spoiling. The imagined past is therefore more significant than the historical reality in that it lives in people's collective cultural memory and "conditions their responses to the present" (Richards 364). Richards expresses his stance:

It is not just a picture of an idealized past, it is also an image of an imagined future. It sets a list of targets for our elected governors to attain. It is a great mistake to see nostalgia as a passive, wishy-washy, rose-tinted yearning for the past. Nostalgia is a vital force, passionate, active, committed to the ideal of reviving and preserving the best of the past, not just because it is the past but because it works, it is needed and it is right. For at heart nostalgia is love. (365)

Returning to an imagined past implies dissatisfaction with the present situation, hence a critique of the present, for “no term better expresses modern malaise” (Lowenthal 2) than nostalgia. Thus, using nostalgia to process present concerns, heritage film should be read as a rejection of Thatcherism and its ethics rather than a crude reflection of it. For instance, James Ivory, a representative heritage-film director, especially emphasized the socially critical aspect of his works stating that his films were “fired as much by scepticism and indignation as by affection and admiration” (qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 73). Furthermore, in the light of Lowenthal’s statement that “negative and positive responses to the past both imply their opposites” (68), it can be said that by nostalgically looking back to the past, one strategically confronts the present rather than escapes from it. All in all, Raphael Samuel convincingly suggests in *Theatre of Memory*,

Aesthetes of the right and the left simply reveal their own difficulties with popular culture when they dismiss those versions of heritage which seem to package the past in Disneyland style. The wide spread use as terms of revulsion, of such words as ‘superficial’, ‘vulgar’, ‘trivializing’ and ‘commercial’ speaks of a fear of the popular...and of popular versions of the past, and of a preference for the real thing, the authentic. (Higson *Heritage Film* 245)

### 3. Merchant-Ivory Productions

#### 3.1 Merchant-Ivory: Conservative or Liberal?

Produced by Ismail Merchant, directed by James Ivory and based on scripts by Ruth Praver Jhablava, Merchant Ivory films constitute an important strand of English heritage films. Having established a relatively high-brow trademark, the Merchant Ivory film, more often than not, adheres to the “principles of Art, Culture and Quality” (Higson *English Heritage* 179), and the team itself is usually recognized as “civilized”, “culturally refined” and “the quality lit team of contemporary cinema” (qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 178). However, it is noteworthy that attitudes towards Merchant Ivory films have been highly polarized. Whereas some critics deride the films produced by Merchant Ivory as “Laura Ashley school of filmmaking” (Parker, qtd. in Voigts-Virchow *Heimat* 128), others applaud them for their quintessential Englishness as the films are invariably associated with adjectives like “elegant” (Canby qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 176), “exquisite” (Kempley, qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 176), “refined” (Haskell, qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 176) and “sublime” (Travers, qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 176) in reviews.

With its lavish mise-en-scène, its sumptuous settings and representations of southern English landscape, the Merchant Ivory film is characterized by period authenticity, as Ismail Merchant claims: “Authenticity is important to our movies...In 30 years we have never shot in a studio” (Merchant, qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 187). It is this attention to period detail that leads critics to interpret Merchant Ivory films as “synonymous with heritage” (Caughie, qtd. in Gibson 115), hence conservative films. Exclusively focusing on the picturesque images in the films, critics therefore denounce the way England is represented in the films as “seen through rose-tinted spectacles” (Higson *English Heritage* 148), and suggest that the artistic sophistication

points to the films' "aesthetic attachments to high culture" (Higson *English Heritage* 148). Regarding this association with high culture, it is further argued that the films appeal to audiences in that they provide an opportunity for the audience to have their good taste ratified, as James Bowman explains in *The American Spectator*

Their appeal is to a limited -- indeed, a selected -- audience on the strength of their associations with approved cultural artefacts, especially classic novels. Each of them offers a whole set of challenges to the filmmakers: not to entertain or thrill or move us but to get right the costumes and the customs, the period detail of dress, décor, manners, and language...For a post-literate culture they are the equivalent of the ornamentation on medieval cathedrals: the only way for ordinary folk to know anything about history. Such sermons on celluloid cannot be judged as artistic experiences but only as one would judge a *National Geographic* documentary. (qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 183)

Those who condemn the films as "a paean to conservatism" (Higson *English Heritage* 148) fail to recognize that to some extent pastiche "is the undoing of authentic identities [and] pastiche suggests hybridity rather than purity" (Cook, qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 149). For all its superficial stability, the Merchant Ivory film in a way responds to the identity crisis which the nation was undergoing during the Thatcherite era through dramatizing liberal discontents with Old England. Thus, "to see Merchant and Ivory's films as an expression of neo-conservative Thatcherism was to miss this" (Dave 31). Director James Ivory also voices his concern with the balance between the visual attractions and the underlying messages the films convey, noting that "sometimes you have to be careful that the surroundings don't distract from what's going on... that's part of the production value of a movie" (Ivory, qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 188).

In what follows such presumption that Merchant Ivory films adhere to conservatism shall be debunked. This chapter primarily focuses on *Howards End* (1992), which is identified as a “terribly English production” (Errigo, qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 147) in comparison with another two exemplary Merchant Ivory films, *A Room with a View* (1986) and *The Remains of the Day* (1993). In response to critics criticizing the films for “lulling viewers into passivity by giving them sensuous landscapes, sets, and costumes to absorb, thereby destroying the novels’ social and political critiques” (Hall 221), the chapter aims to examine the relationship between narrative and mise-en-scène with regard to the way in which visual spectacles function as carriers of coded meanings. In particular, based upon detailed analysis of individual films, it will also be explored how liberal sentiments of the narrative are reflected in the seemingly conservative and distracting mise-en-scène.

## 3.2 *Howards End*

### 3.2.1 Plot Summary

*Howards End* is adapted from E. M. Forster’s novel of the same title. Set in Edwardian England, it presents the interconnections between three social classes represented by three families: the Schlegels, who represent bourgeois aesthetes; the Wilcoxes, who are rich capitalists, an emerging class displacing the aristocracy; and the Basts, who belong to the lower-middle-class.

The film starts with a short-lived romance between Helen Schlegel and Paul Wilcox, which establishes an embarrassing link between the two families at the very beginning. A year later, knowing that the Wilcoxes move into the apartment opposite the Schlegels’ in London for the wedding of their elder son

Charles, the elder sister, Margaret Schlegel, pays a courtesy visit to the mother, Ruth Wilcox, who owns Howards End, and befriends her. After a few months contact, Ruth is impressed by Margaret's kind-heartedness through a series of seemingly trivial incidents. Unexpectedly, she bequeaths Howards End to Margaret before she dies, writing her will on a note which is later burnt by her family. Knowing that the Schlegels' lease of flat runs out, Mr Wilcox offers to help, as a result of which the two get close and Margaret finally accepts Mr Wilcox's proposal of marriage.

Meanwhile, Helen makes the acquaintance of Leonard Bast, an insurance clerk, in a lecture on "music and meaning". Impressed by his self-improvement and aspiring to literature and art, the Schlegels befriend Leonard and kindly warn him to leave his position as they learn from Mr Wilcox that the company Bast works for is about to go bankrupt, which turns out to be bad advice. As a result, Helen attributes Leonard's losing his job to Mr Wilcox's false information, and brings the Basts to Wilcox's daughter's wedding, demanding his help. It is then revealed that Jacky Bast, Leonard's wife, had an affair with Mr Wilcox who is humiliated and refuses to help. Helen sympathises with Leonard and ends up having an illegitimate child by Leonard Bast. In the confrontation scene, protagonists are brought together to Howards End, where Leonard is accidentally killed by Charles Wilcox. Ultimately, Ruth's will is fulfilled: in the last sequence, Henry announces to his family that he is leaving Howards End to Margaret, who will in turn leave it to Helen's son.

In both film and novel, Howards End is foregrounded as a symbol for English tradition or Englishness, and the struggle over the ownership of Howards End can thus be understood as a reformulation of the fabric of society in terms of class and power. Therefore, the central question arises: "who will inherit Howards End?" or rather "who will inherit England?"

### 3.2.2 Narrative Functions of the Mise-en-scène

Stylistically speaking, it can be said that the period detail is presented in a highly symbolic way in *Howards End*. Observably, the film is characterized by the slow pace of the narrative with fairly long shots and mediums shots rather than close-ups and rapid cuts, so that the period detail in the background is foregrounded. In addition, in comparison with most mainstream American films of the 1980s which had an average shot length of about five to seven seconds, the film is also characterized by its relatively long takes with an average shot length of 8.92 seconds (see Higson *English Heritage* 172). Based upon this observation, Higson suggests that the camera's lingering on the spectacles in effect "[gives] full rein to the display of heritage properties" (Higson *English Heritage* 172) and exceeds narrative requirements.



Fig 2: *Howards End* The Hospital Scene

A scene set in the hospital where Ruth Wilcox is dying is adopted as a prime example by Higson to back up his point of view (Fig 2). After a shot showing Margaret visiting Ruth Wilcox, who lies in her hospital bed, the camera cuts to

a wide long shot of the exterior of the hospital from a high-angle position. Putting forward the question of “for whom is this splendid view of the building” (Higson *English Heritage* 173), Higson refers to it as an “unmotivated view of the hospital building, and unmotivated camera movement” (Higson *Heritage Film* 240). However, the interpretation of the shot of the hospital building largely hinges on the narrative context in which it is positioned. Immediately after the shot of the hospital building, the camera slowly pulls back and slightly pans to reveal that Charles Wilcox and his sister Evie Wilcox are standing at a window through which they are looking at the exterior of the hospital. Combined with the facial expressions of the two characters, the shot can thus be symbolically read as an externalization of character emotions, suggesting a mourning mood for the impending death of Mrs Wilcox. In that sense, it can be argued that the heritage property, in this case the hospital building, may serve as an indicator of the inner feelings of the characters, hence fulfilling a narrative function



Fig 3: *Howards End* The Proposal Scene

Another interesting example is the proposal scene (Fig 3), in which Henry Wilcox is showing Margaret Schlegel around his London house where he proposes to her. With its magnificent décors, furnishings and interiors, the

scene is regarded by heritage-film critics as a perfect example demonstrating that Forster's historical awareness is entirely displaced by "overdecoration" (Higson *Heritage Film* 242), for in the novel Margaret's view of the apartment is depicted as being rather ironic and critical: "Such a room admitted loot" (Forster, qtd. in Higson *Heritage Film* 242). Therefore, Higson points out that "there can be no denying that the scene [...] makes the most of the opportunity to display some fine authentic period properties, which are of course the properties of a very privileged class" (*Heritage Film* 242).

Higson's assertion that the social criticism of the novel is elided from the scene points to his own difficulty in adapting himself into the semiotic system of the film. What is at stake is the fact that *Howards End* "needs to be considered not just as a version of E.M. Forster's novel but also as a Merchant Ivory production" (McFarlane 27). From a filmic perspective, the scene will be interpreted rather differently. In the course of a strained conversation on a staircase, Henry Wilcox manages to propose to Margaret Schlegel in an emotional yet restrained way:

HENRY. Miss Schlegel. Uh...I have had you here for false pretences. I want to speak on a much more serious matter than the house. Do you think you could be induced to share...I mean is it at all probable that ...

MARGARET. Oh, yes, I see.

HENRY. Miss Schlegel. Margaret. I don't think you quite understand.

MARGARET. Oh, yes, indeed, yes.

HENRY. I'm asking you to be my wife.

MARGARET. Yes. I know. I know.

HENRY. Are you offended?

MARGARET. How could I be?

HENRY. Well, perhaps I should've written first.

MARGARET. No, no. Rather you will receive a letter from me.

HENRY. Thank you.

MARGARET. Not at all.

While conveyed by the narrator's voice and Margaret's inner thoughts in the novel, the emotional turmoil and complex of the characters to a large extent

depend on Thompson and Hopkins' charismatic performances in terms of facial expressions, gestures and eye contact, for Margaret's ecstasy at Henry's proposal can hardly be detected in the brief exchange. Apart from that, the positioning of the two characters is also very meaningful. Standing on the upper position of the staircase, Henry Wilcox is shot from a low-angle position indicating his socially privileged position in his relationship with Margaret. Hence, the space of the staircase between Margaret and Henry expressively points to the social distance between them as well as the difference in their ideologies.

### 3.2.3 Class

Regarding the way the social hierarchy is depicted, it is not unwarranted to say that the Edwardian England reconstructed in *Howards End* is characterized by social diversity and cultural heterogeneity rather than conservatism and homogeneity. In effect, the liberal or progressive tone of the film is somehow set up from the outset by a painting presented in the title sequence, *La Danse*, by André Derain. The function of the painting is twofold. On the one hand, the painting establishes an immediate link between the film and high culture, for only those who are in possession of elite cultural capital can recognize and appreciate it. On the other hand, given that the painter Derain was one of the prominent French avant-garde of the Edwardian era, the painting can hardly be associated with conservative Englishness (see Higson *English Heritage* 152). Clearly, the aesthetic strategy of the film is manifested by the inherent ambivalence of the painting: despite all the heritage spectacles displayed on the surface, *Howards End* is fundamentally progressive.

In the film, class boundaries are represented mainly through comparisons of characters' costumes, living conditions, social behaviours and so on. For instance, there are two representative scenes through which the social distance between the Schlegels, the bourgeois intelligentsia, and the Basts of the poor lower-middle-class is vividly presented. Following Helen, who inadvertently takes his umbrella home by mistake, Leonard Bast is invited by the Schlegel sisters for a cup of tea. Offended by their brother Tibby's indifference who is making tea, Leonard refuses to stay and takes his leave. The camera then immediately cuts to a scene of a dark and filthy area where the Basts live, as in the scene Leonard Bast is apparently on his way home. As Leonard arrives at home, Jacky asks if he wants a cup of tea. Looking at the tea and food Jacky prepared for him, Leonard again refuses. Thus, a triple contrast between the two families is established in the two scenes. Visually speaking, in comparison with the Schlegels' ubiquitous silver, delicate cookies and the antique china, the tableware of the Basts appears rather low in quality and the food unpleasant. With regard to the aural effect, while Leonard is following Helen to the Schlegels' house, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is used as the non-diegetic sound in the background indicating the Schlegels' comparatively high cultural status. Cutting to the scene of Leonard walking home, the diegetic sound abruptly turns into various noises indicating the poor living conditions of the Basts. In particular, what is in disharmony with the background noises is Leonard's whistling the tune of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony signalling the lower-middle-class man's aspiration to high culture and art. Thirdly, diametrically opposed to the Schlegel sisters' elegance and civility, Jacky is portrayed as vulgar and uneducated in her dressing, eating behaviour and accent. For instance, her speech is marked by grammatical mistakes: "Well, people do get killed in accidents and don't come home no more", which is immediately corrected by Leonard: "Anymore, Jacky."

As rich capitalists, the Wilcoxes represent the class which is displacing the aristocracy in the Edwardian period. Instead of being overshadowed by a concern for showing off the property of a very privileged class, colonialism is

especially underscored in the two-edged treatment of the Wilcoxes in the film, as it resides beneath the surface prettiness. As Francke observes, although “[extracting] the sharpest teeth from Forster’s original dialogue”, the script “[has] tried to get to the heart of the novel’s world view” (Francke 148). In effect, there are quite a number of allusions to the source of the Wilcoxes’ wealth in colonial exploitation in the film. For example, at the very beginning of the film, regretting his engagement with Helen, Paul Wilcox, the younger son, explains to her in the garage why he cannot marry her: “You see. I’ve no money of my own, and I still have to make my way in Nigeria. It’s beastly out there for a white woman, what with the climate and the natives and all that” (*Howards End Ivory*). What is most conspicuous in the scene is a highly polished vintage car, on which the two characters lay their hands (Fig 4). Given that Paul’s comments on his future in the colonies in a way can be regarded as a manifestation of colonialist ideology, the vintage car then becomes a symbol for the fortune the family has made through colonialism.



Fig 4: *Howards End* Paul and Lucy in the Garage

Another explicit allusion to colonialism occurs in the scene when Margaret visits Henry Wilcox’s office for the first time:

MARGARET. So this is the famous office? I'd expected to be more African.

HENRY. Oh, heavens. No.

MARGARET. Spears, animal skins and that sort of thing...But I suppose this is the imperial part of the Imperial and West African Rubber Company

HENRY. Yes...

Clearly, there is a striking difference between Margaret's and Henry's attitudes towards colonialism. Whereas Margaret expects African cultural artefacts, Mr Wilcox exclusively focuses on the profit made in Africa since the only thing in the office indicating the company's connection with Africa is the map of "Central Africa" hanging on the wall in front of which Charles and his father Henry Wilcox are standing. In contrast to Margaret Schlegel's cultural subtlety, the Wilcoxes as "nouveau riche" (Leach 204) are identified with acquisitive colonialism and capitalism. Thus, it is through this scene that ideological differences between the two social classes, or rather "two opposing outlooks on life" (Hall 222), are thoroughly presented.

### 3.2.4 Howards End and Englishness

Both in the novel and the film, Howards End is used as a symbolic representation of English tradition and rural England, and the ownership of the house is regarded as the core of the narrative, for the question of "who is to inherit Howards End" is also a question of "who is to inherit England". As the narrative unfolds, Ruth Wilcox, who was born at Howards End and whose family had lived there for centuries, unexpectedly leaves her house to Margaret Schlegel. That Ruth Wilcox bequeaths Howards End to Margaret Schlegel points to the fact that, what the two female characters have in common are the virtues embodied by the country house. And the female line of inheritance of the house is underlined by two parallel scenes, in which their strong attachment to Howards End is portrayed.

In the opening scene, following a leisurely stroll through the meadow, Ruth Wilcox walks past one of the windows of Howards End and gazes into the interior. From Ruth's point of view, it is revealed that inside the house Henry Wilcox and Helen Schlegel are carrying on a lively conversation while the Wilcoxes children are looking on and laughing. "With its display of charming period costumes and the picturesque rural setting of the house", as Higson notes, the sequence is "less goal-driven or organized around the causal logic of action sequences than it is driven by a desire to explore character and ambience, period detail and manners" (Higson *English Heritage* 171). However, what Higson fails to account for is the narrative functions of the scene as far as the whole film is concerned. First of all, Ruth's female gaze through which Howards End is presented for the first time in the film establishes her as the owner of the house and the landscape. Secondly, in contrast to Forster's direct introduction of Helen Schlegel in the novel, the scene is entirely re-created by Merchant and Ivory so that Helen can be introduced to the spectator through Ruth's observation foreshadowing Helen's inevitable inheritance of the house (see E.K Stone 47-50). And in that sense, Stone asserts that the opening scene can be read as "a microcosm of the whole film" (E.K Stone 49).

Corresponding to the scene of Ruth's stroll around the house is the scene of Margaret's visiting Howards End for the first time. Wandering around the house admiring its interiors, Margaret encounters the eccentric housekeeper, Miss Avery, who mistakes Margaret for Ruth:

MISS AVERY. I took you for Ruth Wilcox.

MARGARET. I like Mrs Wilcox?

MISS AVERY. You have her way of walking... around the house.

What Margaret is obsessed with is not only the house but also cultural values invested in it, for she seriously looks for the pig tooth stuck into the trunk of the chestnut tree which according to the local legend told by Ruth can cure

the toothache. It is therefore revealed that Ruth leaves Howards End to Margaret because she recognized that Margaret is the one who can truly understand and protect the values of the house as she used to. Therefore, it is the folk customs, legends or traditions which are passed down from Ruth to Margaret through the country house.

In the course of the narrative, Howards End passes from the landed gentry, Ruth's family, to rich capitalists the Wilcoxes to the Schlegel sisters, whose "English' qualities are enriched by a cultural sensibility inherited from [their] German father" (Leach 204). And it is revealed in the final sequence that Helen Schlegel's illegitimate son by Leonard Bast becomes the ultimate inheritor of the house in that Margaret, the new owner of Howards End, wants to leave it to her nephew after she dies. As a result, a very untraditional family constituted by Henry, Margaret, Helen and Helen's son is formed, one that apparently counters Thatcher's definition of a traditional family.



Fig 5: *Howards End* the ending scene

The last scene of the film opens with an overhead crane shot of Howards End (Fig 5). While Henry's children leave in a vintage car, Helen and her son are seen playing in a field in front of the house not far from whom a farmer is following his horse-drawn plough across the field. Typical of Merchant and

Ivory's film style, the "juxtaposition of chaotic technology and pastoral bliss" thus serves to "obliquely link the two scenes together" (E. Kim Stone 61). Although it is clear that the Schlegel sisters will eventually inherit Howards End, that the idyllic final shot is overshadowed by the exhaust fumes of the vintage car on the adjacent road implicitly suggests that it is the values of the Wilcoxes rather than the Schlegels' which triumphed historically (see Leach 205).

Regarding the combination of liberal sentiments and heritage spectacles in *Howards End*, it is evident that the criticism of the film is rather ambivalence:

It has become fashionable in certain leftish circles to sneer at the 'Laura-Ashley' school of costume drama, and it's true that the success of *Room with a View* spawned a flood of dull, inferior imitations... but *Howards End* is not a celebratory, nostalgic film...it's a complex, unsentimental, intellectual meaty piece. And while its debates are of their period... you're constantly reminded of how topical and contested they continue to be. (Johnston 18)

### 3.3 *A Room with a View*

#### 3.3.1 Plot Summary

Set in Italy and England at the beginning of the twentieth century, *A Room with a View* focuses on the sexual awakening of Lucy Honeychurch who represents the repressed culture of Edwardian England. While touring in Italy accompanied by her overbearing cousin and chaperone, Charlotte Bartlett, Lucy encounters a free-spirited Englishman George Emerson in the hotel "Bertolini". A romance between them unwittingly commences, as George says, "something tremendous has happened". Unwilling to expose her true feelings

for George, Lucy regards George's kiss as an insult and leaves with her cousin the next day.

After returning to England to her family home, Windy Corner, Lucy accepts a marriage proposal from a wealthy upper-class yet pretentious Englishman Cecil Vyse, for she believes that she will never meet George again. However, the Emersons turn out to be the new tenants of a cottage in the neighbourhood of Windy Corner. The narrative then reaches a dramatic climax when George is invited by Lucy's brother Freddy to Windy Corner, where he encounters Lucy and her fiancé Cecil. After a series of incidents, Lucy breaks her engagement with Cecil, for she finally realizes and admits to the elder Mr Emerson that she has been in love with George all along. The film ends with Lucy's elopement with George to Florence where they first met.

As Forster's most romantic and optimistic book, *A Room with a View* is marked less by progressiveness than by a nostalgic sentiment when compared with *Howards End* and *The Remains of the Day*. Nevertheless, it still can be used as a good example to demonstrate the extent to which the coherence of the narrative depends upon the *mise-en-scène*. Given the comparative weakness of the script which "immensely [diminishes]" (Freedman 22) the Forster's novel, it is thus assumed that "the most widely praised and most memorable aspects of the film are certain radically extra-literary aspects over which Ivory may be assumed to have exercised the most complete control" (Freedman 21). And it is through the settings, props, costumes and performances that the central themes of the Forster novel are foregrounded in the film.

### 3.3.2. "Rooms" vs. "Views"

As the title suggests, the characters in the film can be generally divided into two types, "rooms" and "views", with the exception of Lucy Honeychurch whose view of the world develops dramatically in the course of the narrative. Whereas those associated with "rooms" are conservatives represented by Cecil Vyse and Charlotte Bartlett, the characters identified with "views" are mostly free-spirited and forward-thinking represented by the Emersons and Freddy. For instance, the only scene in which the Vyse's house is presented in the film exclusively focuses on its luxurious interiors in a dim lighting suggesting a suffocating mood, whereby the upper-class status of the family and its narrow-mindedness are revealed. Diametrically opposed to the way the Vyse's house is portrayed, Windy Corner, where Lucy and her brother Freddy reside, is, more often than not, depicted from outside, especially through the family's activities on the lawn and the tennis court indicating the family's inner unrestrained passion for life.

The incompatibility of "rooms" and "views" is presented mainly through ideological conflicts between Cecil and Freddy, for Cecil apparently despises Freddy's unrestrained and childish behaviour. When Lucy's mother is trying to persuade Lucy to invite Charlotte whom both Lucy and Freddy dislike to Windy Corner, Freddy suddenly bursts into singing the comic lyric of "The Story of Prince Agib" loudly and passionately with the key abruptly elevated. On hearing Freddy's singing, Cecil who is reading a book near a shelf immediately leaves the room without saying a word. Even Mrs Honeychurch, who is identified with conservatism in the novel, is irritated by Cecil's rude behaviour and pretentious attitude

MRS HONEYCHURCH. Is it a thing or a person when Freddy sings?

LUCY. You can't expect a really musical person to appreciate comic songs as we do  
MRS HONEYCHURCH. Must he sneer and spoil everyone's pleasure?



Fig 6: *A Room with a View* National Gallery Scene

Another impressive encounter between “room” and “view” is presented in a flashback scene in which Cecil makes the acquaintance of the Emersons in the National Gallery (Fig 6). Conscious of social boundaries, Cecil’s attitude towards the socially inferior father and son appears to be rather arrogant and contemptuous, for during the course of his conversation with the elder Mr Emerson Cecil constantly looks around to and nods at other seemingly superior visitors passing by, showing little respect for Mr Emerson. By contrast, George is entirely absorbed into the painting on the wall in the background barely involved in the conversation. Furthermore, in the scene, the “room”, Cecil, and the “view”, George, are positioned on either side of the frame with the more sophisticated elder Emerson standing in-between. Thus, the framework of the scene reveals the oppositional relationship between the two world views.

The battle between “rooms” and “views” culminates in the confrontation scene in which George, Freddy, Lucy and Cecil are presented simultaneously on the

tennis court of Windy Corner. While the others are playing tennis, Cecil, strolling around the precinct of the court, annoyingly reads aloud from a novel by Miss Lavish, which happens to depict George and Lucy's romance in Florence. What follows is a hilarious scene in which Cecil is hit by the tennis ball when he is reading the sentence "And so, locked in mortal combat, they brought to life the eternal battle where men stand face to face." The sentence Cecil reads implicitly refers to the oppositional situation on the tennis court in terms of ideology. In addition, that the ball which hit Cecil comes from either Freddy or George metaphorically suggests that the "room" is beaten by the "view" in the battle between the two opposing world views.

### 3.3.3 Feminism and the Politics of Sexuality

The film explores "a progressive sexual politics" (Edwards 118) through a comparison between two competing views of love and women represented by Cecil Vyse and George Emerson. Whereas Cecil regards Lucy as a piece of art in his possession, George loves her as she is. From Cecil's perspective, Lucy represents perfection with regard to the way she is brought up, her social and educational background and the music she plays, which is explicitly pointed out by George when he is asking Lucy to leave Cecil:

GEORGE. I'd have held back if Cecil was different. But he's the sort who can't know anyone intimately, least of all a woman. He doesn't know what a woman is. He wants you for a possession to look at like a painting or an ivory box. Something to own and to display. But I love you. I want you to have your own thoughts and ideas, even when I hold you in my arms.

To put it more precisely, it is through Lucy that Cecil's taste can be affirmed and his vanity satisfied. One example revealing the way Cecil perceives Lucy is the scene in which he compares Lucy to paintings (Fig 7). Shot at mid-

distance and surrounded by countryside spectacles, Lucy is stopped by Cecil while coming towards him:

CECIL. Don't move. Stay where you are. "Ginevra de Benci!" Did you know you were a Leonardo, smiling at things beyond our ken?



Fig 7: *A Room with a View* Lucy as a painting

Clearly, it echoes the scene of Lucy's playing the piano at the Vyse's house to Cecil's family friends as mentioned previously, for in both cases, the display of spectacles or interiors side by side with Lucy has the similar narrative effect of reinforcing Cecil's conception of Lucy as a delicate artefact to be shown off.

It is clear that Lucy's inner ambivalence is portrayed through two symbolic characters, Charlotte Bartlett, her embittered spinster cousin, and Freddy Honeychurch, her uninhibited brother. Whereas Charlotte represents the ridiculously strict moral rules of Edwardian England conditioning Lucy's behaviour, Freddy "repeatedly acts out [Lucy's] unspoken desires" (Monk Sexuality 34). It is in the famous nude bathing scene, the erotic centre of the film, that the clash between the two perspectives on sexuality is thoroughly presented. In the scene, Lucy, Cecil and Mrs Honeychurch are leisurely strolling in the woods when they accidentally encounter George, Freddy and

Mr Beebe bathing in the pond. In comparison with Cecil and Mrs Honeychurch, who are hugely discomfited and embarrassed by the scene of sensuality and nudity, Lucy's intricate reaction in the exposure to male physicality to some extent indicates her erotic awakening. In particular, when confronted with George's naked body, Lucy instinctively shields her eyes with her umbrella, which symbolizes her subconscious imposition of social rules of sexual repression. However, driven by curiosity about, or inner desire for, the male body, Lucy slightly moves her umbrella down to glance at George nervously yet excitedly. Noticing that Lucy is staring at him, George screams and jumps up and down out of ecstasy. Thus, Lucy's inherent passion for sexuality and sensuality are manifested in the scene. Moreover, with regard to transgressive sexuality, Monk asserts that the nude bathing scene is significant for the interpretation of the whole film, in that it explicitly points to the fact that the film "is simmering with feminine, queer and ambiguous sexualities" (Monk *Sexuality* 34):

*Room's* PG-certificate display of penises makes it something of a cinematic landmark: in hetero sex scenes in mainstream movies it is still a near-certainty that extravagant measures will be taken to conceal the male organ at all times [...] [the scene] endows the narrative with a bi-sexed androgyny and implicit homoeroticism, opening up multiple viewing pleasures. (Monk *Sexuality* 34)

That Lucy's inner desires finally triumph over restrictive rules is revealed in the scene of her refusal of Cecil (Fig 8). Using George's words, Lucy explains to Cecil the reason for not marrying him

LUCY. Because...you can't know anyone intimately, least of all a woman [...] You wrap yourself up in art and want to wrap me up. So I'm breaking it off.



Fig 8: *A Room with a View* Refusal Scene

While bidding farewell to Cecil, Lucy is shot from a low-angle position as she is standing on the stairs and looking down on Cecil signalling her advantageous position in her emotional relationship with Cecil. Evidently, the scene is created by Merchant and Ivory, for in the novel it is Cecil who is going upstairs. Such spatial arrangement of the two characters indicates the reversal of the power relationship between them. Though socially inferior to Cecil, Lucy is now presented as spiritually and emotionally elevated in the relationship. And the lamp she is holding in her left hand symbolically points to her erotic enlightenment. On the other hand, Cecil is also somehow transformed in the refusal scene

CECIL. I must actually thank you for what you've done. For showing me what I really am. I admire your courage.

It is noteworthy that for the first time in the film Cecil is seen without his pince-nez, a symbol for his pretentiousness. Cecil's frustration and retrospection are explicitly presented in the subsequent scene, another filmic invention, in which he sits on the stairs and puts on his shoes. It seems that all his foppish mannerisms are gone. Clearly, in the battle between the two ideologies,

liberal passions finally triumph over conservative restrictions, and the filmmakers' repulsion of Thatcherite conservatism is thus manifested.

### 3.4 *The Remains of the Day*

#### 3.4.1 Plot Summary

*The Remains of the Day* is a 1993 Merchant Ivory adaptation of the novel by Kazuo Ishiguro, dealing with issues of politics, dignity, Englishness, class and relationship. Set in 1950s England, the film starts with Mr Stevens (Anthony Hopkins), the butler of Darlington Hall, receiving a letter from Miss Kenton (Emma Thompson), who has become Mrs Benn and who worked with Stevens as housekeeper at Darlington Hall during the years prior to World War Two. As Miss Kenton ambiguously reveals in the letter the failure of her marriage and her nostalgia for the days she spent at Darlington Hall, Stevens resolves to convince her to rejoin the staff of Darlington Hall, or rather to strive for a second chance in their relationship. With permission of his new American employer, Mr Lewis, who purchased Darlington Hall, Stevens embarks on a journey to the West Country where Miss Kenton now resides anticipating a more promising future.

Stevens' automobile journey to the west of England turns out to be a voyage of retrospection in which some of the key events of the old days at Darlington Hall are reviewed in flashbacks, including his father's death, his romantic yet constrained entanglement with Miss Kenton and the miserable downfall of Lord Darlington, whom he loyally served and trusted and whose reputation was destroyed before he died due to his ill-fated involvement in British politics of appeasement. At the end of the film, it is revealed that Miss Kenton finally decides to remain with her husband in order to take care of her grandchild,

suggesting that Stevens and Kenton probably will never meet again in what remains of their lives.

What distinguishes *The Remains of the Day* from previous Merchant Ivory literary adaptations is the psychological and political depth which provides insightful portrayals of the characters. Apart from that, employing quintessential English stereotypes such as the aristocracy, the butler and the trope of the country house, it overtly explores an individual identity crisis in relation to the collapse of the myth of English national identity. Englishness, embodied by the ethics of the butler, is thus demythologized both in the novel and the film.

#### 3.4.2 Repression of Emotions

Emotional restraint is deemed a typical English trait and an essential quality a great butler is supposed to possess, as Stevens declares in patriotic fashion in the novel,

It is sometimes said that butlers only truly exist in England. Other countries, whatever title is actually used, have only manservants. I tend to believe this is true. Continentals are unable to be butlers because they are as a breed incapable of the emotional restraint which only the English race are capable of [...] [W]hen you think of a great butler, he is bound, almost by definition, to be an Englishman. (*The Remains of the Day* 43)

Submitting himself to the principles of professionalism and dignity, Stevens, played by Anthony Hopkins, demonstrates great skill in controlling his emotions in the film, in particular in dealing with his father's death and his frustrated relationship with Miss Kenton. To a large degree, the character's

inner struggle is portrayed mainly by Hopkins' charismatic performance who "has always been expert at suggesting a sense of wounded innocence" (Macnab 51).



Fig 9: Stevens' and his father's hands Fig 10: The French ambassador's feet

Here is an example when Stevens' filial duties are in conflict with his professional ones. In the sequence, in which he dutifully deals with the self-pitying French ambassador who complains about his sore feet, Stevens is told by the under-butler Charles that his father has suffered a stroke. On seeing his father kneeling unconscious on the ground, a flicker of painful shock crosses Stevens' face. However, Stevens does not allow himself to indulge in the pain since from Stevens' perspective "dignity and grief are incompatible" (Berberich 145). Quickly recovering from the shock, Stevens sends Charles, the under-butler, to attend to the French ambassador with some hot water and salt. In the following close-up shot (Fig 9), it is shown that Stevens' hands are slowly yet strenuously removing his father's stiff hands which are tightly holding the dusting cart. Immediately cutting to a close-up shot of two feet in a basin (Fig 10), the camera pans upward to reveal that the French ambassador is sprinkling salt into the basin and the pain in his feet is apparently soothed: this suggests that Stevens' duty is fulfilled. It is therefore through the two

parallel close-up shots of parts of the human body that the tension between Stevens' public self and private self is superbly presented.

Even more revealing is the scene in which Stevens is informed of his father's death by Miss Kenton:

KENTON. Mr Stevens I'm very sorry. Your father passed away a few minutes ago.

STEVENS. Oh I see...

KENTON. I'm so very sorry...I wish there was something I could say. Will you come up and see him?

STEVENS. I'm very busy at the moment, Miss Kenton, in a little while perhaps.

KENTON. In that case you permit me to close his eyes?

STEVENS. I'll be most grateful, Miss Kenton. Thank you.

It is noticeable that in the course of their conversation, against a lighter background, the two characters are presented as black shapes in a silhouette (Fig 11). An immediate effect of the backlighting is the effacement of the facial expressions of the characters, which in a metaphorical way echoes Stevens' concealing his emotions to maintain dignity in front of other staff. It thus points to the butler's self-effacement and the invisibility of his private self.



Fig 11: *Remains* Stevens is informed of his father's death

Emotional restraint on the other hand necessarily implies emotional turmoil, and Stevens' affection for Miss Kenton is even intensified by his deliberate efforts to conceal it. In the film, Stevens' reluctance to expose his true feelings for Miss Kenton is particularly symbolized by the way he observes her. In the first 'observing' scene of the film, Miss Kenton comes to Stevens insisting he have a look at the chinaman which was misplaced by his father. Being perfectly aware of the fact that Miss Kenton is in effect trying to convince him that his father is too old for his duties, Stevens asserts that he is too busy to talk for the moment and closes the door leaving Miss Kenton waiting outside. Then, Miss Kenton is seen through the keyhole from Stevens' point of view. On the occasion, it can be said that Miss Kenton represents the weakness in Stevens' heart, for provided that he admits to himself that his father is unable to undertake his work, he has to relieve his father who has spent most of his life as an under-butler from his duties, which will mentally destroy his father. And the door, in this case, symbolizes a shield of cold indifference which Stevens uses to hide his inner complex feelings from Miss Kenton.

Similar to Stevens' observing her through the keyhole is the scene in which he looks through a window at Miss Kenton leaving Darlington Hall. When Miss Kenton unusually asks him for a day off in an unstable mood, Stevens grants her permission without prying into her private affairs suppressing his great curiosity. After a long shot of Miss Kenton riding a bike out of the courtyard from Stevens' point of view, the camera cuts to Stevens, who is standing and watching behind a window. The scene thus reveals Stevens' deep concern and curiosity about Miss Kenton's personal life in spite of his superficial nonchalance. In that sense, hiding himself behind a window symbolizes the butler's great difficulty in confronting and exposing his emotions.

The scene in which Stevens' emotions are on the brink of outburst is brilliantly played by Hopkins and Thompson (Fig 12). Discovering that Stevens is reading a book in his private room, Miss Kenton insists on being told the name of the book. By doing so she is apparently crossing the threshold between public affairs and private lives. As Miss Kenton physically advances on him, teasing and provoking him with a clear sexual overture, Stevens resists her temptation and insists she respect his privacy. When she finally wrestles the book from his hands, it is revealed that Stevens is reading a sentimental novel. As the heavily curtained window in the mise-en-scène indicates, Stevens' romantic desires and emotions are deeply buried behind his restraint.



Fig 12: *Remains* Stevens' reading a sentimental novel

### 3.4.3 Englishness in Crisis

It is clear that there are a number of identifiable similarities between *The Remains of the Day* and *Howards End* which have “the effect of serializing the two films” (Trimm 180), in particular with regard to their deployment of “the familiar parallel of English country house and the nation” (Trimm 182). The importance of the country house for the establishing of English national identity is unambiguously pointed out by Patrick Cormack:

These houses are a special public possession for it is in them and in our churches that we perhaps come closest to the soul and spirit of England. Germany has its castles, France its chateaux, and Italy its villas and England its country houses [. . .]. Set in the spacious parklands and often containing priceless collections, our country houses are part of the very fabric of our civilization [. . .]. These owners could more properly be called stewards or trustees. Their special position, and the importance of what they hold in trust for the nation, has been increasingly recognized since the end of the First World War, which marked the end of the great era of country-house living. (qtd. in Trimm 182)

Whereas *Howards End* stands for rural England and English tradition, *Darlington Hall* represents the rigid social hierarchy of English society between the two World Wars, and the transfer of the house from an English aristocrat to a rich American, in a way, symbolizes the collapse of the English Empire as well as its corresponding ethos. Social conflicts in association with the house are revealed primarily through ironic representations of the gentlemanly character of dignity. For Stevens, dignity is the very quality most central to his notion of professionalism and essential for his identity. Believing in Lord Darlington's wisdom and moral standard, Stevens loyally serves his aristocratic master in that he tends to conflate the dignity of a butler with that of gentlemen like Lord Darlington, who resides on the top of the social ladder (see Fluet 1). That Stevens is often self-consciously confused by his identity is manifested in the scene at a local inn in Moscombe where he stops by on his journey. Judging from his well-mannered behaviour, his accent and dress, the townspeople mistake Stevens for a wealthy gentleman who in turn allows them to believe that he used to be an amateur politician like Lord Darlington, as he misleadingly says that "It was my good fortune to have consulted with many many influences...from Europe and from America".

It is significant that the scene at the inn is immediately followed by Stevens' recalling an occasion in which he is ruthlessly ridiculed by a genuine

'gentleman' and his dignity is fundamentally challenged by social distance between the classes. While serving Lord Darlington and his visitors with wine, Stevens is stopped by one of Lord Darlington's friends Mr Spencer, who asks him questions about politics and economics. Being perfectly aware that Mr Spencer tries to prove that a man in his position has no opinion of his own, Stevens repeatedly and nonchalantly answers him by saying that "I'm sorry sir, I'm unable to be of assistance in this matter", for his duty prevents him from stating opinions to superiors. Hence, Stevens' professional dignity is maintained at the cost of his personal dignity. That the scene in which Stevens is mistaken for a gentleman is linked with the scene in which he is humiliated by a gentleman points to Stevens' inner confusion about the notion of 'dignity' as well as his own identity. The conflict revealed in the two scenes hence points out that "Mr Stevens possesses his dignity not in spite of the ideology of aristocracy but for reasons directly related to it. He has the virtue of dignity in so far as he acts in accord with the complex social hierarchy of his day" (Meyer, qtd. in Medalie 53).

Given the metaphorical link between Darlington Hall and English social hierarchy, the transfer of the ownership of the house then symbolizes the collapses of the old order. Although never explicitly mentioned in the film, the loss of British Empire<sup>4</sup> is symbolically represented in a long take of Stevens driving his car on a country road at sunset surrounded by a stunning pastoral landscape. Furthermore, that Darlington Hall is purchased by a rich American Congressman also represents the displacement of English aristocracy by foreign influences. Symbolically, the fine Elizabethan painting Mr Lewis bought at auction at the very beginning of the film reappears in the last sequence meaning that what the empire is dispossessed of is not merely a grand country house but also its glorious past. In that sense, both the country house, Darlington Hall, and the English landscape function as "signifiers of a lost and pastoral nation" (Trimm 33).

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<sup>4</sup> The narrative takes place against the historical background of the Suez Crisis, which formally marks the decline of British Empire (see Wong 495).

Unlike the novel, the film ends in a highly symbolic way. After a pigeon has flown down the chimney and is trapped in the room, in spite of his role as the master Mr Lewis nimbly captures the pigeon and sets it free not leaving this task to Stevens, who is seen hopefully looking out of a window at the flying pigeon. With regard to the thematic structure of the whole film, the ending is psychologically convincing in that what the new American owner of Darlington Hall truly sets free is the butler's individuality trapped in his duties and the nation's spirit trapped in its past.

## 4. Jane Austen Adaptation

### 4.1. Reinterpreting Jane Austen

With the enormous success of the BBC TV adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* in the mid-1990s, so-called 'Austenmania' commenced, as a result of which many of Austen's well-known novels have been adapted into films during the following years, such as *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), *Persuasion* (1995) and an updated version of *Emma* entitled *Clueless* (1995). With regard to their generic and stylistic characteristics, these adaptations of Austen's work undoubtedly constitute a distinctive strand of heritage cinema.

Austen's popularity can be accounted for by the cultural complexity of her works on the one hand and her iconic status in English culture on the other. First of all, in tune with Hollywood style, central concerns of Austen's novels -- romance, money, sex -- are deemed key factors appealing to modern viewers. Besides, the genteel and polite society presented in her works allows the audience temporarily to retreat from "the uncertainties of complex twentieth-century existence" (Troost and Greenfield 4). Apart from all these factors, the particular industrial context in which these Austen films were produced and circulated is regarded as the catalyst for the boom of Austen adaptations. Higson points out that "it would be wrong [...] to see the Austen films in a vacuum. Rather they need to be seen in the context of the English costume drama production trend" (Higson *Selling* 47). In the discourse of the heritage industry, Austen is identified as an icon of English national heritage and her iconic status thus becomes a particular selling point in the movie market. As Fay Weldon puts it:

When we say "Jane Austen" everyone knows what we're talking about. Austen means class, literature, virginity and family viewing [...] The clip-clop of horses over cobbles suggests the past, and the past was

when jobs were safe, and bouquets flowed, not brickbats [...] Or one could say, with a little more charity, but not much: “Why, we love Jane Austen because she’s Heritage.” (Weldon, qtd. in North 38)

What distinguishes Austen films from other variants of heritage film, such as Merchant-Ivory adaptations of E.M Forster’s novels, is “the tendency to label the Austen revival as part and parcel of a conservative cultural turn” (Looser 160). It is therefore assumed that Austen’s current popularity signals her and our conservatism” (Looser 160). In effect, the nature of Austen’s ideology has always remained controversial. Whereas some critics argue for a conservative Austen, others read her texts as somehow subversive. Feminist critics suggest reading Austen’s adherence to conservatism as a “cover story” (Gilbert and Gubar, qtd. in North 39) for her implicit rebellion against the patriarchal system. Clearly, it is the feminist perspective that is widely endorsed and thoroughly explored by many makers of Austen films.

Filmic adaptations of the canonical author’s works certainly cannot avoid being compared with the source texts which, more often than not, results in an unconscious prioritizing of the novel over the film. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that most filmmakers exhibit the courage to break the obsession with fidelity maintaining a good balance between traditional values and topicality. Ironically, as observed by Linda and Troost, the success of many Austen films “rested on their infidelity to Austen’s novels and departure from traditional ‘adaptation’ filming methods” (84). Furthermore, the makers of Austen films in one way or another declare that their works comply with Austen’s spirit but at the same time insist on being interpreted as independent works of art. As Higson notes, it is “important to think about what has been gained in the process of adaptation, rather than lost from the ‘original’” (Higson *Selling* 37).

In response to the phenomenon of the Austen revival, three representative adaptations of Austen's novels, *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), *Mansfield Park* (1999) and *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), will be closely examined and, in one way or another, made to show Austen's compatibility with contemporary ideologies.

## 4.2. *Sense and Sensibility* (1995)

### 4.2.1. Plot Summary

Set in late eighteenth-century England, the story revolves around the fate of the two Dashwood sisters Elinor and Marianne and centres on their distinctive views on life and love. After Mr Dashwood's death, the Dashwood sisters Elinor, Marianne, Margaret and their mother have lost their home Norland Park, which is inherited by John, Mr Dashwood's son by his first marriage. Due to the ill advice of his snobbish and merciless wife Fanny, John breaks his promise to his father and leaves his stepmother and his half-sisters in near poverty. Before the Dashwoods leave, Fanny's brother, Edward Ferrars, is invited to Norland Park by his sister. During Edward's visit, an intimate friendship between Elinor and Edward soon develops. Aware of the fact that Edward's family will never allow the match, Elinor conceals her affection for Edward.

After they move to Barton cottage offered to them by a distant relative Sir John, the Dashwoods make the acquaintance of Colonel Brandon, who falls in love with Marianne at first sight. At the same time, Marianne is feverishly obsessed with the handsome and dashing John Willoughby, who accidentally rescues her. Overwhelmed by her sensibility, Marianne fails to recognize the true nature of Willoughby, who later abandons her in order to marry the

extremely wealthy Miss Grey. Meanwhile, having learnt that Edward had been secretly engaged with Lucy Steel for five years, Elinor, who is heartbroken, decides to hide her secret and her despair from her family. As the narrative unfolds, it turns out that Lucy marries Edward's brother Robert Ferrars, for Edward is disinherited by his mother. On learning that Edward is unmarried, Elinor bursts into tears out of joy revealing her deep affection for Edward. In the end, Elinor accepts Edward's proposal and Marianne happily marries Colonel Brandon.

Directed by Ang Lee and scripted by Emma Thompson, *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) is a commercially successful and critically acclaimed adaptation of the Austen novel of the same title. The film's status as an exquisite costume drama is further confirmed by Emma Thompson's presence, which is reminiscent of the elder sister Margaret Schlegel in *Howards End*. On the one hand, the success of the film owes much to Lee's direction, which is credited for providing "the visual equivalent of Austen's ironic narrative stance" (Jeffrey qtd. in Flavin 47). On the other hand, as a "late twentieth century, English, middle-class, Cambridge educated feminist" (Gay 92), Emma Thompson's revisionist script provides the film with cultural subtlety. As Fuller asserts, *Sense and Sensibility* "is Ang Lee's classical masterpiece, but Emma Thompson's romantic triumph." (81)

#### 4.2.2. Mise-en-scène and Characterization

With regard to visual representation, it can be said that Lee exhibits considerable talent for making metaphorical use of mise-en-scène to externalize the characters' inner feelings. For instance, the Dashwoods' miserable social downfall is primarily depicted through the striking contrast between the grandeur of Norland Park and the shabbiness of Barton Cottage. According to Thompson's stage direction, Barton Cottage is supposed to

possess “the air of a damp shoebox” (qtd. in Parrill 4) so that the melancholy feelings of the Dashwoods can be underscored. Moreover, in a long shot showing Elinor and Edward strolling on an open stretch of lawn with the grand house in the background (Fig.13), their developing affection is explicitly presented in the panoramic tableaux. In addition, the “formal, placid beauty” (Parrill 2) of Norland Park also reflects Elinor and Edward’s personalities of self-restraint and rationality and their warm but not passionate love (see Parrill 2).



Fig.13: *Sense and Sensibility* Norland Park (Elinor and Edward)

Diametrically opposed to the way Elinor and Edward’s affection is portrayed, the melodramatic scene in which Marianne is rescued by Willoughby resorts to conventional romance imagery. As the rain is pouring down, the Knightly Willoughby appears on a horse and carries the injured Marianne back to Barton Cottage. On the one hand, the weather and the wild nature symbolize Marianne and Willoughby’s passionate and unrestrained character. On the other hand, in a postmodern manner the romantic cliché also ironically foreshadows the danger of their transgressive love and behaviour.

Apart from the use of landscape, weather and house, costume also plays an important role in characterization. For instance, the other suitor competing for

Marianne's affection, Colonel Brandon, who is supposed to represent the reality principle, is romanticized or transformed through variation of his costume. Dressed in funereal black, Brandon's first appearances in the film are characterized by formality and elegance, and his buttoned-up look literally signals his sexual repression (Fig. 14). Having fallen in love with Marianne at first sight, Colonel Brandon pessimistically confides to Sir John in the gun-room that Marianne would never love him. In the shot, the gun Brandon is cleaning and his shirtsleeves both contribute to reinforce a sense of his masculinity and virility (Fig. 15). Most notable is the scene in which Brandon is waiting outside Marianne's sick room pleading Elinor to give him something to do: coatless, his cravat hanging untied and loose, his shirt unbuttoned (Fig. 16). Looking sexually attractive and passionate, the Colonel has thus been thoroughly transformed into a "romantic Byronic hero" (Gay 98)



Fig.14 Colonel Brandon



Fig.15 Colonel Brandon



Fig.16 Colonel Brandon

It has been argued that Austen's ironic stance and witty humour are completely reduced to excessive picturesqueness through the film's unashamed romanticism (see Engel 1). Admittedly, compared with the novel, some characters are conspicuously modified or rather romanticized to various degrees such as Edward, who is transformed from "one of the dullest suitors in literary history...into a mumbling super-nerd muffled so deep in shyness that when he does speak his meaning stays runically opaque." (Monk *Sense* 181) However, romanticization does not necessarily imply the filmmakers' adherence to conservative ideology; rather, it is part and parcel of the film's

aesthetic. In effect, to avoid the central themes of the film being overshadowed by visually excessive spectacles, Lee “insisted on removing a scene where two swans happened to sail under a bridge beside which two of the protagonists were embracing, despite the fact that the entire crew clapped at this engaging coincidence” (Gibson 117). This “attempted austerity” (Gibson 117) therefore makes the filmmaker’s artistic stance manifest.

#### 4.2.3. Feminism

Feminism is expressed in two opposing manners. On the one hand, Thompson applies the motif of women looking out of windows as a metaphor for female confinement. Sitting at her desk, Elinor watches Margaret swordfighting with Edward; standing at a window in Cleveland, Elinor watches Marianne, who is melancholically wandering in the rain; anticipating the match of Elinor and Edward, Mrs Dashwood looks at them walking on the lawn from a higher window (see Fuller 80). Besides, with the exception of Marianne, female characters in the film are more often than not presented indoor reinforcing the sense of confinement and emphasizing the social restrictions imposed upon women by patriarchy.

On the other hand, feminist sensibility is overtly articulated by Margaret Dashwood, “Thompson’s finest job of characterization” (Fuller 79). While barely present in the source text, Margaret Dashwood is reinvented and allowed more space in the film. As a tomboy, the teenage Margaret is constructed as the spokesperson for the adults’ inarticulate feelings by virtue of her untainted innocence and healthy nonconformity. It is Margaret who is the only person in the film and who questions the injustice of female non-inheritance:

MARGARET. Why are they [John and Fanny] coming to live at Norland? They already have a house in London.  
ELINOR. Because houses go from father to son, dearest -- not from father to daughter. It is the law.

Simultaneously, the fact that Elinor tries to explain to Margaret the law of primogeniture points to the elder sister's submissiveness and reveals "the oppressive nature of social conventions of correct female conduct." (North 45)

Margaret's fascination with geography and her obsession with the occupation of piracy can be further interpreted as a gesture of escapism from her current predicament:

EDWARD. Our circumstances are therefore precisely the same.  
ELINOR. Except that you will inherit your fortune.  
EDWARD. Perhaps Margaret is right.  
ELINOR. Right?  
EDWARD. Piracy is our only option.

At the same time, Margaret's interest also establishes a metafictional awareness of history in that she represents "the future of young women in the nineteenth century" (Flavin 44) and that the audience is perfectly aware what is to take place in Margaret's generation. Thus, Margaret becomes the one that a postmodern audience is most likely to identify with, for "they find in Margaret the character most like themselves, who is free to grow up to be whatever she wants to be" (Collins 85). As Richard Blake notes in his review of the film,

the youngest daughter, 11 year old Margaret, has more perspective on life. She climbs into tree houses to observe at a distance the lunacy of English customs. She learns how to fence and pores over atlases to plan the expedition she will lead to China. Margaret is not yet trapped in the web of injustices that may yet destroy her sisters. She still inhabits a child's world of endless possibilities. (qtd. in Collins 85)

#### 4.2.4. Sense vs. Sensibility

The most significant achievement of the adaptation is the re-evaluation of 'sense' and 'sensibility' from a contemporary perspective. Whereas in the novel it is the emotionally excessive and self-indulgent Marianne who is transformed into a sensible and mature woman, the film to a large extent concentrates on the emotional journey of Elinor who has learned how to confront and to express her true feelings. The ideological scheme of the source text is thus somehow disrupted by the viewer's great sympathy for Marianne. Conversely, self-restraint is in a way represented as an emotional barrier which one needs to overcome (see Dickson 50-52).

In the film, the relationship between 'sense' and 'sensibility' is no longer absolutely oppositional; rather, it is complicated mainly by the depiction of Elinor's inner struggle between emotion and self-command. It is clear that Thompson manages to carve out more space on Elinor's sensibility in the script for there are quite a number of added scenes primarily portraying Elinor's emotional delicacy. In an exemplary scene, the camera follows Edward coming through a doorway where he discovers that Elinor is silently watching Marianne playing their father's favourite song. In the following Edward's point-of-view shot, Elinor turns around with her tearful eyes noticing that she herself is also being watched by Edward. In another added scene, Elinor sadly says farewell to her pony in the stable where she again encounters Edward. Both scenes explicitly foreground Elinor's sensibility -- sadness, melancholy, despair, and what is at stake is the fact that it is Edward to whom her sensibility is revealed. The exposure of her unspoken emotions to the viewer therefore forms a striking contrast with her subsequent concealment and repression of her affection for Edward, on the one hand, and leads the viewer to expect Elinor's final transformation on the other.

In the film, Elinor's transformation constitutes three steps or rather three 'breakdowns'. Throughout the film, the emotionally expressive Marianne constantly encourages Elinor to express her true feelings for Edward. On learning from Mrs Jennings that Edward is secretly engaged to Lucy, Marianne is shocked by Elinor's concealment of this secret and her heartbreak asking: "Always resignation and acceptance! Always prudence and honour and duty! Elinor, where is your heart?" In response to Marianne's questioning, Elinor is no longer able to maintain her composure and finally explodes, speaking loudly and angrily to Marianne:

ELINOR. What do you know of my heart? Or anything but your own suffering? For weeks, Marianne, I have had this pressing on me without being at liberty to speak of it to a single creature. It was forced upon me by the very person whose prior claims ruined all my hopes. I have had to endure her exultation again and again while knowing myself to be divided from Edward forever. Believe me, Marianne, had I not been bound to silence I could have produced proof enough of a broken heart even for you.

Clearly, the scene of Elinor's emotional storm is Thompson's dramatic invention, which never occurs in the novel. Elinor's breakdown in the scene is regarded as "relief and a sense of justification" and somehow meets the audience's expectation since "we want Elinor to speak out" (Gay 102). By forcefully expressing herself, Elinor's inner struggle over sense and sensibility is intensified, through which Thompson further convinces the viewer that Elinor needs transforming.

Elinor's second emotional outburst takes place during Marianne's illness. The sequence of Marianne's illness provides powerful evidence for the film's tendency to allow the voice of sensibility to dominate. Whereas in the novel there seems to be little sympathy for Marianne's "wilfully self-induced" illness, the film represents it as "an accidental result of Marianne's genuine grief"

(North 42). Accompanied by mournful music, Marianne is shown lying dying in bed in an overhead shot; the audience is instantly encouraged to identify with Marianne and her sufferings. Told to “prepare [her]self” by the doctor, Elinor breaks down for the second time in the film, falling to her knees by the bed and speaking incoherently to Marianne:

ELINOR. Marianne, please try -- I cannot -- I cannot do without you.  
Oh, please, I have tried to bear everything else -- I will try -- but please, dearest, beloved Marianne, do not leave me alone

From Lee’s perspective, this is the defining shot of the whole film, as he notes, “Desperate Elinor discovers that Marianne’s her soul mate; and if Marianne dies, she’ll die, too. I told Emma to show pure fear and remove every other emotion” (qtd. in Gay 104). Brought up a Chinese family, Lee’s statement unambiguously manifests his aesthetic and strong conception of family which is largely determined by his cultural background. In opposition to Lee’s interpretation, Rebecca Dickson suggests that the way in which Elinor’s grief and fear is represented in the scene does not make any sense, for she believes that Elinor “has nothing to apologize to Marianne for as her sister hovers near death” (Dickson 53). However, what is at stake is not whether the sisters’ love is overestimated but the fact that ‘sense’ is again overwhelmed by ‘sensibility’ through Elinor’s emotional release.

At the end of the film, on learning that Edward is still unmarried, Elinor bursts into hysterical sobbing. Regarding Austen’s Elinor who rushes out of the room to cry alone, Dickson criticizes Thompson for depriving Elinor of dignity by allowing her to cry in front of Edward and her family (see Dickson 54). The third breakdown in effect marks the completion of Elinor’s transformation, hence the dramatic climax. In opposition to Dickson’s point of view, the scene convincingly demonstrates that Elinor can finally expose her unspoken love

for Edward to others which is thematically consistent with the film's central concerns.

Hugely disappointed, Dickson complains that "Elinor was all wrong" (50) in the first place. She further suggests that the film's conscious promotion of sensibility primarily aims to meet audience's expectations, on the one hand, and conveys a message that "our general cultural lessons do seem to be more obviously self-oriented" (52) on the other. The essence of Dickson's argument hinges upon the assumption that cinema, as a popular medium, has a similar responsibility for providing the viewer with moral lessons as novels did in the nineteenth century. In the discourse of postmodernism, however, a film is considered as more of an independent art form than an instrument for preaching. Indeed, *Sense and Sensibility's* implicit sanctioning of sensibility points to the prevailing ideology of self-expression rather than self-restraint at the time of its production. But self-expression or self-fulfilment is not necessarily equal to "mean-spirited" (Dickson 52); rather, the film's prioritizing of sensibility over sense should be interpreted as an exploration of the complexity of human nature. Collins asserts that "the films are judged not on the basis of their historical realism but on their ability to mold history into a form which is reminiscent of the present" (88). In that sense, the filmmakers' reinterpretation of the Austen novel contributes to the progressiveness of the film.

### 4.3 *Mansfield Park* (1999)

#### 4.3.1 Plot Summary

The film starts with young Fanny Price being sent from her impoverished home in Portsmouth to live with her aunt and uncle, Sir Thomas and Lady

Bertram, and her cousins Tom, Edmund, Maria and Julia on their vast country estate, Mansfield Park. At Mansfield Park, Fanny is treated as a social inferior by the Bertram family except for Edmund, who kindly befriends Fanny and to whom Fanny has also developed a strong sentimental attachment.

As the years progress, Fanny grows into a good-looking and free-spirited young woman, who gains some insights through reading and writing. The routine of Mansfield Park is disrupted by the arrival of the worldly and charismatic siblings Mary and Henry Crawford. While Henry shamelessly flirts with Maria, who is already engaged to the rich but idiotic Mr Rushworth, Mary instantly captures Edmund's heart and attention, which deeply hurts Fanny. As the narrative unfolds, Henry is attracted by Fanny's genuine kindness and falls in love with her. Secretly in love with Edmund and confirmed that Henry is a rake, Fanny therefore declines Henry's proposal. Furious at Fanny's rejection, Sir Thomas sends her back to Portsmouth as a punishment.

Recalled back to Mansfield Park to nurse Tom, who becomes fatally ill after his return from Antigua, Fanny discovers his sketchbook depicting sexual abuses of the Antiguan slaves. Meanwhile, Henry and Maria's adultery spreads out and Mary Crawford's callousness and vanity are revealed, for she wishes for the death of Tom so that Edmund can be the heir of Sir Thomas's fortune. Shocked by Mary's unashamed calculation, Edmund breaks with her and finally confesses his love for Fanny. In the end, Fanny and Edmund happily get married and Sir Thomas gives up his plantation business in Antigua. The Bertram family is reconciled to some extent.

Compared with *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), *Mansfield Park* (1999), which is directed by Patrick Rozema, is a failure at the box-office, and critical attitudes towards the film are also polarized. Whereas some critics praise it as "a stunning revisionist reading of Austen's darkest novel" (Johnson, qtd in Flavin

109), others are annoyed by the outright travesties of Austen's character and plot, asserting that "by failing either to recognize Austen's intent or to sufficiently modify the novel's plot and characters to suit her own postmodern concerns, Rozema exposes the incompleteness of her vision and her inability to recognize her own silent biases." (Shea 58)

The most controversial aspect of the adaptation is Rozema's reinvention of the character of Fanny, as Richards famously notes that "the Fanny of Rozema's film [...] is resolutely all the things the Fanny of the novel is not: vivacious, artistic, even sexy -- a self-confessed 'wild beast'" (198). Defending her artistic stance, Rozema argues that the Fanny Price of the novel is "annoying", "not fully drawn" and "too slight and retiring and internal and perhaps judgmental to shoulder a film" (qtd. in Mongahan *Reinventing* 112). By attributing modern liberal humanism to the nineteenth-century heroine, Rozema transforms a reticent sufferer into an active and insightful female author. In particular, it is evident that Fanny the author is to a large degree modelled on Jane Austen herself with regard to Austen's biographical details incorporated into the adaptation (see Mcfarlane 17)<sup>5</sup>. In addition to the reinvention of Fanny, the film's explicit dealing with controversial issues of incest, lesbianism, eroticism and slavery in a way renders itself as an 'outcast' within the category of Austen adaptations. In what follows, Rozema's artistic stance shall be closely examined in relation to her reinterpretation of the source text.

#### 4.3.2. Feminism

Rozema's preoccupation with feminism is manifested from the outset. A sense of female confinement is immediately evoked in the opening overhead

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, Fanny's accepting Henry's marriage proposal and declining it the next morning resembles Austen's life experience.

shot as the camera tracks down from a bird-eye position onto Fanny and her sister Susie, who are lying in bed in their Portsmouth home (Fig.17). Accompanied by the young Fanny narrating a story of her wild fantasy about escape, the opening scene therefore establishes one of the central themes of the film: female rebellion against patriarchal confinement (see Monaghan *Reinventing* 122). More intricately composed is the following added sequence of Fanny's journey to Mansfield Park. The helicopter shot of the carriage carrying Fanny from Portsmouth to Mansfield symbolizes Fanny's escape from her impoverished family to a seemingly more promising future. Meanwhile, the mournful wail of "black cargo" from a ship anchored in the bay implicitly associates Fanny with slavery foreshadowing her inferiority at Mansfield Park. In that sense, the supposed escape is satirized and female vulnerability underlined.



Fig.17 *Mansfield Park* (1999) Opening shot

Another symbol of female entrapment is the caged bird, which is consistently alluded to throughout the film. In the library scene, in which Fanny is reading Lawrence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, the womanizer Henry Crawford deliberately reads aloud a passage concerning the caged starling to attract her attention:

HENRY. I was interrupted with a voice which I took to be a child. which complained "it could not get out"- I look up and down the passage, and saw a starling hung in a little cage- "I can't get out"- "I can't get out" said the starling. God help thee! said I, but I'll let thee out, cost what it will; but it was double twisted so fast with wire, there was no getting it open without pulling the cage to pieces- I took both hands to it. The bird flew to the place where I was attempting his deliverance. And thrusting his head through the trellis pressed his breast against it as if impatient. – I fear, poor creature! said I, I cannot see thee at liberty. –"No" said the starling- "I can't get out- I can't get out" said the starling.

That Henry reads out the highly metaphorical passage to Fanny thematically corresponds to his subsequent romantic trick of setting free white doves to please Fanny during her stay at Portsmouth. Through the symbolism of freeing the doves, it is implied that accepting Henry's marriage proposal is Fanny's opportunity for escape from her current predicament. However, having realized that Henry's offer of marriage merely represents "another kind of enclosure: marriage to a man Fanny neither loves nor trusts" (Flavin 119), Fanny finally rejects the "illusionary escape from the prison of patriarchy promised by Henry" (Monaghan *Defense* 63). Even the immoral and adulterous Maria is conscious of the patriarchal confinement imposed on women, exclaiming to her brother Edmund, who confronts her with her adultery: "Don't look at me like that, Edmund. Rushworth is a fool you know that. I can't get out! Edmund, I can't get out!"

Fanny's rebellion against various forms of sexual entrapment is also represented symbolically in the film. In response to Sir Thomas's offensive comments on her physical beauty and his intention to transform her into a commodity in the marriage market, Fanny mounts her horse and rides off violently into the stormy night, angrily addressing Edmund: "I'm not to be sold off as one of your father's slaves!" Later in the film, after her romantic flirtation with Henry Crawford at the ball, Fanny retreats to her own room and reads aloud one of her stories warning about the danger of wild romance in order to regain her "sense" and free herself from Henry's enchantment. Having

discovered that Henry is standing beneath her bedroom window, Fanny instantly snuffs out her candle, which can be understood as “a gesture that symbolically denies his phallic power and literally removes her from his gaze” (Monaghan *Reinventing* 124).

#### 4.3.3. A Postmodern Perspective on *Mansfield Park*

Implicated in the discourse of postmodernism, *Mansfield Park* is primarily characterized by a striking contrast between its “predominantly genteel mise-en-scène” (Richards 198) and the dark themes, which seem rather incompatible with the heritage genre such as slavery, lesbianism and incest. Unlike other heritage films which ostentatiously display the grandeur of country estates, the sparsely furnished Mansfield Park of Rozema’s film is shown as “cold, barren, faded, and empty” (Flavin 118): this suggests the moral corruption and coldness of the people who inhabit the house. Consequently, the stereotypical notion of idyllic English country life is subverted by the highly symbolic settings of the film.

That the film explicitly deals with transgressive sexuality further violates the audience’s expectations with regard to Tom’s sketchbook explicitly depicting sexual abuse of slaves, Mary Crawford’s lesbian touching of Fanny in a wet dress and the scene of Fanny confronting Henry and Maria having sex. Moreover, sexual awakening is deemed the turning point in the characterization of Fanny. Most representative is the ball sequence in which Fanny, who is in a low-cut dress, voluntarily displays her body for the first time in the film. Compared with her previous rigid behaviour, Fanny appears to be more willing to participate in the erotic interaction of the dance. Making use of slow-motion and close-ups of body parts such as heads and hands, Rozema further emphasizes the “intensely sexual nature of the dance” (Monaghan *Reinventing* 125). The ball thus becomes “a positive and powerful experience of the liberating potential of erotic interaction” (Monaghan *Reinventing* 125). In

the subsequent scene, while climbing the stairs to her room, Fanny is stopped by Henry, who is enchanted by her and who declares his love for Fanny on the staircase. On the one hand, the scene of Fanny standing several steps above Henry indicates her emotional superiority in the sexual relationship. On the other hand, instead of directly rejecting Henry, Fanny apparently enjoys flirting with him, which foregrounds Fanny's newfound confidence in her ability to manipulate her male counterpart and which marks her sexual awakening.

The film's conspicuous identification with postmodern self-consciousness calls attention to itself as an art work and breaks the illusion of realism. In particular, the film's postmodern self-consciousness is overtly manifested in the final sequence in which every major character's fate is reported in Fanny's summarizing narrative. Rendered as an author, Fanny "has become more an omniscient than a first-person-participant narrator" (Monaghan *Reinventing* 127). Through filmic devices such as voice-over, direct camera address, slow motion and freeze frame, the Bertrams are subjected to Fanny's authorial narration or rather dominance. To put it more precisely, Fanny is represented as the scriptwriter of their fate as she comments in the voice-over, "it could have turned out differently...but it didn't". Monaghan proposes that Fanny's reply could have been: "because I chose that it didn't" (*Reinventing* 127). Thus, it can be said that Fanny finally transcends the confinement of patriarchy through the art of writing, which echoes the opening sequence: the montage representing the magic power of the written word. What is more significant is the fact that the postmodern ending also points to the film's self-awareness as an independent art work. And like Fanny, "Rozema must be granted the freedom to shape her source material according to her own artistic imperative" (Monaghan *Reinventing* 121).

#### 4.4 *Pride and Prejudice* (1995)

##### 4.4.1 Plot Summary

At the turn of the eighteenth century in rural English, the Bennet family, who belong to the gentry class, live on a working farm, Longbourn. Given that the house is to be inherited by Mr Bennet's nephew, Mr Collins, the desperate Mrs Bennet is thus anxious to marry off her daughters before Mr Bennet dies.

The family is greatly disturbed and excited by the arrival of two wealthy bachelors, Mr Bingley and his friend Mr Darcy, who has recently moved into Netherfield in the neighbourhood. At an assembly ball, the eldest daughter, Jane and Mr Bingley are mutually enchanted by each other. However, Jane's reserved character misleads Mr Bingley to believe that she is indifferent to him. Meanwhile, Darcy gives Elizabeth the wrong impression of being arrogant and rude, as Elizabeth overhears his describing her to Mr Bingley as "barely tolerable" and "not handsome enough to tempt me". Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy is further enhanced by Wickham's vicious slander on Darcy and by Darcy's separating Bingley from Jane.

In the course of the narrative, Elizabeth's misunderstanding of Darcy is gradually resolved by Darcy's letter of explanation, his generous help in solving the family scandal of Lydia's elopement with Wickham and his contribution to the reunion between Jane and Bingley. Having realized that she has already been in love with Darcy, Elizabeth finally accepts his marriage proposal.

#### 4.4.2 “The Muddy-Hem Version” of *Pride and Prejudice*

Dubbed as “the muddy-hem version” of *Pride and Prejudice* by the scriptwriter Deborah Moggach (qtd. in Stewart-Beer 3), the film is notable for its generic hybridity merging an irreverent realism with classic heritage film’s authentic period settings. The film’s director, Joe Wright, who was brought up in a working-class family and who had never read Jane Austen’s novels nor seen an Austen adaptation made since 1940, makes his “gritty social-realist aesthetic” (Dole 4) manifest in his comments on making the film:

I wanted to treat it as a piece of British realism rather than going with the picturesque tradition, which tends to depict an idealized version of English heritage as some kind of heaven on earth. I wanted to make it real and gritty and be as honest as possible. (qtd. in Doel 5)

According to Brevet, Joe Wright’s irreverence is also evident in his character when he persuaded Dame Judi Dench to join the cast by saying, “I love it when you play a bitch. Please come and be a bitch for me” (qtd. in Dole 4). Nevertheless, the film’s irreverent realism should be understood as more a particular strategy for appealing to younger audiences than a manifestation of the director’s personal idiosyncrasy. That the film seeks to expand beyond the niche market to attract a wider and younger audience is further confirmed by the presence and youthfulness of Keira Knightley, who shares the same age as her fictional counterpart and who is best known for her impressive performance in *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Moreover, “the film’s advertising campaign referenced the popular *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (‘from the producers of...’) before it referenced Jane Austen” (Dole 4).

The film’s aesthetic ambivalence is particularly underlined in the opening sequence, which demonstrates both the film’s adherence to heritage conventions and characteristics of realism. The opening establishing shot of a green rural landscape conforms to the conventional heritage film’s attention

on the English idyll. By contrast, in the following scene of Elizabeth's country walk at Longbourn, the mucky reality of the family's farm life is presented by wandering pigs, geese, mud and various farm animals, which instantly subverts the viewer's traditional concept of English rural life (Fig.18). Apart from the props and settings, the Bennets are also depicted as dishevelled and rather undisciplined indicating their lack of good manners. In a breakfast scene prior to Mr Collins's proposal, the seemingly exhausted Bennets, who apparently have not completely recovered from the Netherfield ball, surround a dining table, which is occupied by many dirty dishes. In respect to their mess hair and eating manners, one can hardly relate this vision to "the fussy, dandified look that some associate with Regency England" (Troost 86). Joe Wright points out the artistic motive for making a mess of Longbourn, saying that

personally I was brought up in a very messy house. And I think it's more beautiful than sterile, clean environments. I like mess; I think it has life. And I think if you've got five daughters all living in a house together and you haven't got enough money for the servants to be constantly looking after the place, and you haven't got the money to upkeep the house in the way it should be kept, then your house is going to get pretty messy. (qtd. in Woodworth 3)



Fig.18. *Pride and Prejudice* Longbourn

Repelled by the presentation of Longbourn crowded by untidy people and wandering animals, Woodworth points out that Wright fails to recognize the fundamental “difference between clutter and squalor” arguing that “I simply cannot imagine that Mrs. Bennet and her nerves would have countenanced a farmyard intrusion into her domestic domain” (3). Furthermore, Woodworth denounces Wright’s declaration of realism: “It would appear that realism for Wright is a twenty-first-century variety of realism, rather than something resembling Austen’s reality” (5). By visualizing the family’s financial predicament, Wright apparently seeks to highlight the social distance between Darcy and Elizabeth and Elizabeth’s determination to marry for love, as he notes, “each house is chosen as a symbol of their wealth and their status, but also as a symbol of their character as well” (qtd. in Woodworth 4).

It is evident that the striking contrast between the visual representation of Longbourn and Netherfield respectively reveals the difference between the two families in terms of character, financial status and social position. Netherfield conforms to the stereotypical notion of an English country house: fine furniture, delicate decor, large rooms, neatness and a small army of servants, which exclusively point to the Bingleys’ wealth and upper-class status. By contrast, Longbourn is messy and cluttered and the interior colour scheme earthier and darker, which is in tune with the family’s status: untidy, genteel but shabby and relatively poor. The difference between the two households is further underscored by the camerawork. Whereas Wright makes use of hand-held and unsteady cameras for scenes at Longbourn to indicate the lively character of the Bennets, Netherfield is presented more statically and every shot is delicately composed, which suggests the formal character of its inhabitants (see Chan 3-4).

#### 4.4.3. Psychological Depth

Compared with previous Austen adaptations, Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* is especially notable for the psychological depth of characterization. By deploying a wide range of cinematic devices, Wright tends to focus on the interior of the characters. For instance, the recurrent metaphor of "half-ness" is adopted to stand for partiality of perception. In the shot of Mr Collins' first appearance in the film, he is initially seen left-half-covered by a door and it is only after the door is opened that his status as a clergyman is revealed by the sermon books he is holding with his left arm (Fig.19). A similar effect is created in Elizabeth's first encounter with the deceitful Wickham, in which he impresses her with his seeming sincerity. That Elizabeth smiles at Wickham with the right half of her face covered by a ribbon symbolically points to the partiality of her perception and foreshadows her subsequent misunderstanding of, and prejudice against, Darcy (Fig.20).



Fig.19 *Pride and Prejudice* (Mr.Collins) Fig.20 Elizabeth smiling at Wickham

Observably, landscape also plays an important part in representing the heroine's interior journey. Throughout the film, Elizabeth as a free spirit is constantly associated with nature. In an extremely long shot of her silhouette walking across a field to visit Jane, overwhelmed by the splendour of the landscape, Elizabeth is in essence represented as part of nature. The association is further exemplified by two temporally connected and thematically related shots: an extreme close-up of Elizabeth's closed eyes

and a long and sweeping helicopter shot of Elizabeth standing on the precipice of a huge cliff. Accompanied by the effect of the previous shot, the cliff scene thus seems more like a manifestation of Elizabeth's subconscious than an actual presentation of reality.

A privileged example of the way in which the heroine's interior is depicted via filmic devices is the scene of Elizabeth's introspection in front of a mirror at Hunsford parsonage. As Elizabeth is walking away from the camera along a corridor, the shot frame gradually becomes blurred representing Elizabeth's sinking into her subconscious. In the next scene, as Elizabeth stops in front of a mirror and looks at herself, the camera cuts to a medium shot of the reflection of her profile in the mirror. Through the careful positioning of the camera, it thus seems as if Elizabeth is looking at the viewer, hence "an effect of maximum identification" (Hudelet 88)<sup>6</sup>. In comparison with the variation in light in the background, which indicates the passage of time, Elizabeth's self-reflection is underlined by her stillness and lack of expression.



Fig.21 *Pride and Prejudice* (2005)



Fig.22 *Pride and Prejudice* (2005)

In the following scene when Darcy delivers a letter to Elizabeth, a sense of uncertainty is evoked as Darcy and Elizabeth are alternately seen as blurred due to variations of focus (Fig.21 & Fig.22). In respect to the narrative function of the particular cinematic device employed in the scene, Hudelet notes that "the film therefore relies on our physical, sensorial identification with the

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<sup>6</sup> Joe Wright comments on the scene: "we were her" (qtd.in Hudelet 88)

character: Elizabeth is learning to see things clearly, and above all learning that her vision and understanding are partial, just as the spectator's vision is impaired or biased by variations in focus, light and camera distance" (89). Unconvinced by the film's representation of Elizabeth's interior, Kaplan suggests that the relocation of the scene<sup>7</sup> not only results in "metaphoric incoherence" but violates "the spirit and essence of Austen's story" (3). Furthermore, he claims that it is most disappointing that the heroine's most important sentence has been edited out of the script: "Till this moment, I never knew myself" (see Kaplan 2-3). In effect, Kaplan's strong preference for conveying the heroine's epiphany through verbal utterance violates the essence of film and reveals her own unwillingness to adapt herself to the semiotic system of film.

In an interview conducted prior to the general release of the film in 2005, Joe Wright justifies his artistic stance by saying that "I wasn't interested in the monolith that has been erected over [Jane Austen] and her books. I was interested in being true to her spirit and the spirit of her stories. That was what was important to me" (qtd. in Woodworth 2). As an indicator of contemporary ideology (see Goggin 1), Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* distinguishes itself from its precursors by virtue of the combination of its irreverential playfulness with the source text and its stylistic conformity to the genre of heritage film. Concerning the film's significance for the future development of the genre, Dole asserts that

Wright's *Pride & Prejudice*, in its mixture of the generic traits and attitudes of eighties heritage cinema, British realism, and teen romance, is compelling evidence that the heritage film has not died -- as Higson momentarily considered after the box-office failure of both *The Golden Bowl* and *The House of Mirth* in 2000 (144) -- but rather been transformed into a more flexible genre (10).

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<sup>7</sup> In the novel, Elizabeth reads Darcy's letter in the lane outside Rosings Park.

## 5. Monarchy Bio-Picks

### 5.1 The Monarchy Bio-Pic: To Dethrone the Monarch

Characterized by “the pageantry of royalty” (Leach 207), the monarchy film, which prevailed in the 1990s, is considered a particular strand of heritage cinema. In fact, prying into the lives of royal personages is anything but the invention of our time, and it would not be unwarranted to say that the filmic depiction of the monarch has already been featured as a tradition of British cinema, as Geoffrey Macnab observes that “British cinema has always enjoyed basking in the shadow of monarchy” (47).

What contemporary monarchy bio-pics share with their precursors are the interest in, and employment of, the lives of the members of the royal family because the royal subjects command a great voyeuristic interest and this voyeurism is somehow legitimated in the form of ‘the monarchy bio-pic’. Given that the monarchy has functioned as a national symbol for stability and continuity since the sixteenth century, monarchy films were invariably produced when the public perception of the monarchy was challenged by scandals or crises. For instance, at the time of the 1938 Abdication Crisis when Edward VIII decided to renounce the throne in order to marry a divorced woman, confidence in the monarch was restored through films like *Sixty Glorious Years* (Herbert Wilcox, 1938) and *Victoria the Great* (Herbert Wilcox, 1937), which functioned as “a reaffirmation of the monarchy at a time of doubt and uncertainty” (Leach 208). Similarly, at the end of post-war austerity, *A Queen is Crowned* (Castleton Knight 1953), which was a documentary record of the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953, was produced to demonstrate “the nation’s ability to reconcile tradition and modernity” (Leach 208) through emphasizing the continuity which the monarchy symbolically represents. Despite the fact that contemporary monarchy films no longer serve

propaganda purposes due to the loosening of censorship, the monarchy bio-pics produced in the 1990s can nevertheless be seen as a cultural response to a series of scandals in which the members of the royal family were involved and the gruesome death of Princess Diana.

On the other hand, however, the modern monarchy bio-pic distinguishes itself from previous filmic depictions of the monarch in terms of its approach to history. With the advent of postmodernism, the notion of history as a consistent process has broken down and “an era of *histoire*” (Hoefele 81) commences. Consequently, the traditional obsession with historical accuracy is replaced by a revisionist historical awareness. Having transcended the mere compilation of biographical facts, modern monarchy bio-pics tend to focus on the interior of the royal subjects through “a complementary use of historical information and psychology on the one hand and intuition, empathy, *Einfuehlung*, on the other” (Schabert 19), for there seems to be a consensus among academics that “criticizing a monarchy film for historical inaccuracy is inappropriate” (McKechnie *Liberty* 218). The change of historical attitude in history films is further elaborated on by Barta:

The relationship between film and history is less cosily opposed than it used to be. It was a relatively straightforward matter some years ago for historians to criticize the misrepresentation of dramatized versions of the past [...] Allowances had to be made for the screen, which of course was much more the creature of historical pressures in the present than academic history was -- a delusion still to be found in some corners of the academy. Commerce had to have its due: the stars were there for the box office and so were the plot. The costume department, though, should try to get things right. (qtd. in McKechnie *Liberty* 217)

Moreover, the monarchy films produced in the 1990s are particularly notable for the irreverential way in which royal subjects are represented: these royal personages are no longer romanticized as unreachable god-like figures;

rather, they are demythologized or dethroned to be shown as human beings “with their good share of weakness, problems and difficulties” (Meyer-Dinkgraefe 90). This holds true of all three recent monarchy bio-pics *The Madness of King George*, *Mrs Brown and Elizabeth*, which provide fictionalized depictions of the lives of royal personages and which invariably focus on the discrepancy between their public and private personae. Though set in authentic historical settings, these films primarily seek to understand the royal subjects from the inside through dragging them down to earth rather than restoring an irretrievable past: this can be understood as a manifestation of the paradox underlying the ideology of postmodernism, which is “a contradictory cultural enterprise, one that is heavily implicated in that which it seeks to contest” (Hutcheon 106). However, the three films vary in the extent to which they adhere to postmodern ideology: whereas *The Madness of King George* and *Mrs Brown* have much in common with one another for they are generally based upon historical facts, *Elizabeth* marks a significant departure with regard to the way in which history is boldly travestied in the film (see McKechnie *Liberty* 222).

## 5.2 *The Madness of King George* (1994)

### 5.2.1 Plot Summary

Directed by Nicholas Hytner and based on Alan Bennett’s play *The Madness of King George III*, the film primarily focuses on the King’s personal struggle with mental illness and his equally deteriorating relationship with his son, the Prince of Wales, during the Regency Crisis of 1788.

Suffering from his inability to control his behaviour, which is considered as a symptom of mental illness, the King’s competence in ruling the country is

questioned in Parliament. It thus becomes a politically critical moment, for if the King is declared unfit to rule, the government will topple and Prime Minister Pitt will be replaced by Mr. Fox, who is an advocate for the Bill of Regency. After “three quack doctors” (Macnab 47) have ineffectively treated the King, which include blistering him, taking his pulse and studying his stools, Dr Willis, who is recommended by the Queen’s Lady-in-Waiting, Lady Pembroke, and who is reputed to cure the insane through behaviour modification, is summoned to be in charge of the King’s treatment. Partly because of Dr Willis treatment, the King regains his sense and finally remembers “how to seem” a King. At the same time, a bill has been drawn up to declare the Prince of Wales Regent. In the dramatic climax of the film, the King recovered is brought to Parliament just in time to prevent the passing of the Regency Bill. The film ends with the royal family’s reunion: standing on the stairs of St Paul’s and waving to the people, they continue to be shown as a model family.

Combining psychological depth, family melodrama and political conspiracy, *The Madness of King George* seeks to exploit the downfall of a powerful ruler and to represent the powerlessness of the British monarchy during a time when Republicanism started to prevail. The way in which history is represented in the film is particularly characterized by the clash of Alan Bennett’s two roles -- historian and dramatist, who is observed “[aiming] to please everybody” (McKechnie *Liberty* 233), for he manages to maintain the film’s historical credentials, on the one hand, and to satisfy narrative needs of the genre of film on the other. In an ironic way, Bennett points out his own aesthetic dilemma by saying that he “would like this film to be a masterpiece, if it can be arranged” (qtd, in McKechnie *Royal* 113).

### 5.2.2. Americanization: From Play to Film

Specifically aiming to meet cultural and visual expectations of the American market, there are considerable changes from the source play to the film in what Joseph H. O' Mealy calls a process of "Americanization" (1). First of all, the alteration of the title from *The Madness of King George III* to *The Madness of King George* is deemed a "calculated adjustment" (O' Mealy 1) to the Hollywood tradition of 'sequelization', as the playwright Alan Bennett notes that "a survey [has] apparently shown that there were many moviegoers who came away from Kenneth Branagh's film of *Henry V* wishing they had seen its four predecessors" (qtd. in O' Mealy 1). Another filmic invention, which is also "the film's most shameless invocation of an American film convention" (O' Mealy 4), is the melodramatic scene in which the King arrives at Westminster in the nick of time to prevent the passing of the Regency Bill. With the "suspenseful intercutting between preparations for the vote and the progress of the King" (O' Mealy 4), the narrative thus reaches a climax. Bennett amusingly justifies the director's filmic invention by saying that

Had Nicholas Hytner at the outset suggested bringing the King from Kew to Westminster to confront the MPs, I would have been outraged at this adjustment to what had actually happened. By the time I was plodding through the third draft I would have taken the King to Blackpool if I thought it would have helped. (qtd. in O' Mealy 5)

The most significant change from play to film is the replacement of the preoccupation with political issues with a focus on the interrelationship between members of the royal family. The fact that the film falls into the category of "classic American family drama" (O' Mealy 2) is unambiguously pointed out in the film, as the Lord Chancellor stops Prime Minister Pitt's interfering by saying that "this is a family matter." After the King has tried to choke him, the Prince of Wales is slapped by his mother, remarking that

“Assaulted by both one's parents in the same evening! What is family life coming to?” The film's family-centred emphasis is further manifested by the highlighting of the King's fatherly love. Driven by his conviction that London is being flooded, the King is shown desperately hustling his youngest children out of bed and carrying them up to the rooftop. Through representing the King as an actual person rather than an embodiment of the nation, the King's tragedy is thus painted as “a personal one, the plight of a good family man” (O' Mealy 6) whereby the audience's sympathies for the King are instantly aroused.

With regard to the traditional American concept of George III, whom the American audience's ancestors used to fight against for national independence, the film deliberately eschews the sensitive political matters concerning the loss of the American colonies during the reign of George III. In spite of the toning down of political issues, the metaphorical link between the King's loss of mind and the loss of the American colonies has always loomed in the background and has frequently been alluded to in the course of the narrative. To avoid losing the American viewer's sympathies for the King, the King's attitude towards the loss of America is portrayed as “longing and regret” in the film (O' Mealy 8). This complex attitude of the King is depicted through his reluctance to accept the loss of America as a fact. At the beginning of the film, when addressing Parliament, the King automatically refers to America as “our possessions in North America”, which is immediately corrected by himself as “our former possessions” after a reminding cough by the Lord Chancellor. In another exemplary scene, having obsessively mistaken some irrelevant official papers for something concerning America, the King becomes furious and explodes:

KING. Now, what is this? America, I suppose?

PITT. No, sir.

KING. America's not to be spoken of, is that it?

PITT. For your peace of mind, sir. But it's not America.

KING. Peace of mind? I have no peace of mind. I've had no peace of mind since we lost America. Forests, old as the world itself...meadows...plains... strange, delicate flowers...immense solitudes...and all nature new to art...All ours...Mine. Gone. A paradise... lost.

Therefore, the King's immense regret for, and his obsession with, the loss of America is overtly revealed. On the other hand, the sharpness of the political issue is somewhat blunted by rendering the King as "a human and sympathetic figure" (Bennett, qtd. in Chandler 78), complying with the Hollywood tradition of "invoking the personal" (Nicastro 5). With regard to the way in which the English monarchy, which is part of the national heritage, has been adapted to suit American tastes, Coe ironically states that "[Americans] will allow us to tell our own stories, but only on their terms. It is the terrible and continuing revenge of the colonists on their erstwhile oppressors" (138).

### 5.2.3. Representing the Monarchy in Crisis

#### 5.2.3.1 The Powerlessness of the Monarch

Set in a period when the absolute power of the monarchy was being prevailed upon by parliamentary democracy, the film highlights the powerlessness of the monarchy primarily by concentrating on the King's dilemma "between a desire to assert his authority and a recognition of his mainly ceremonial function" (Leach 210). The fact that the constitutional monarchy has been reduced to a powerless symbol is conveyed through ironic representations of its ceremonial activities as a royal show. Early in the film, as the King leaves Westminster in a carriage after his 'speech show' in Parliament, the servants are shown sorting out various 'props' the King used during his speech. In particular, one servant's playfully throwing the crown to another servant explicitly reveals their little respect for the King's supreme authority, which has

been somewhat diminished by Parliament. Another similar example is the first concert scene, in which the King and the Queen sit complacently listening to the music while their courtiers are standing behind them. The ritualistic formality of the monarch is further disrupted and ridiculed as the camera slowly pulls back to reveal that the courtiers are sweating and fidgeting with boredom. Immediately after the King and the Queen leave the music room, the exhausted courtiers collapse in seats with one courtier even taking off his shoes, which satirizes the performativeness of the royal rituals.

Prime Minister Pitt's assertion that "the King will do as he's told" at the beginning of the film corresponds to Dr Willis' treatment of the King through behaviour modification, as the King is literally forced to do what he is told by the doctor. The film's depiction of the King's powerlessness culminates in the pseudo-coronation scene. Seized and strapped into a blistering chair, which "serves as a metaphor for the royal condition within constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy" (McKechnie *Royal* 109), the King is lectured to by Dr Willis on why he must be restrained

KING. Help me! Help!

DOCTOR. If the king refuses food, he will be restrained. If he claims to have no appetite, he will be restrained. If he swears and indulges in meaningless discourse...he will be restrained. If he throws off his bedclothes, tears away his bandages, scratches at his sores, and doesn't strive every day towards his own recovery, then he must be restrained.

KING. I am the king of England!

DOCTOR. No, sir! You are the patient!

Accompanied by the soundtrack of the coronation anthem "Zadok the Priest", the scene is therefore interpreted as "a perversion of coronation, a de-crowning of a monarch stripped of his voice, his power, his sanity and his

dignity, with the restraining chair as a caricature of the throne” (McKechnie *Royal* 109).

### 5.2.3.2 The King's Identity Crisis

Represented as both “a despot and a deeply troubled man” (Leach 210), the King has undergone an identity crisis, which is mainly manifested in his mental illness. Relating the monarchy to lunacy, Dr Willis comments: “Do you know, Mr Greville, the state of monarchy and the state of lunacy share a frontier? Some of my lunatics fancy themselves kings. He... is the king. Where shall his fancy take refuge?” “Determined to destroy mystique of majesty” (Macnab 47), the film turns a supreme ruler into a sympathetic victim by focusing on the King's private persona. In a bedroom scene in which the King and the Queen in their sleeping gowns affectionately address each other as “Mr King” and “Mrs King”, a sense of intimacy is instantly evoked whereby the King is humanized and his tragedy personalized. More straightforward is Mr Greville's response to Sir George's refusal to allow a physical examination of the King: “Whatever his situation, His Majesty is just a man”. Admittedly, the successful portrayal of the King's inner struggle to a large extent depends on Nigel Hawthorne's performance, for which Alan Bennett has great respect:

Without Nigel Hawthorne's transcendent performance the King could have been just a gabbling bore and his fate a matter of indifference. As it is, the performance made him such a human and sympathetic figure the audience saw the whole play through his eyes.

Occasionally conscious of his madness, the King incoherently confides his “internal panic that accompanies his belligerence” (Wolf 3) to Queen Charlotte

QUEEN. Do you think that you are mad?

KING. I don't know. I don't know. Madness isn't such torment. Madness isn't half blind. Madmen can stand. They skip. They dance. And I talk. I talk and talk and talk. I hear the words, so I have to speak them. I have to empty my head of the words. Something has happened. Something is not right. Oh, Charlotte.

It seems to be difficult to say when the King is truly himself throughout the film. While the King is assumed to be without his wits, it is his most truthful yet restrained emotions that burst out including his fatherly concern for his children's safety, his anger at his son's betrayal and his immense regret for losing the colony of America. At the end of the film when everything returns to "eccentric normality" (Chandler 80), the King temporarily recovered points out the essence of his predicament in relation to his identity:

King. I've always been myself, even when I was ill. Only now I seem myself. And that's the important thing.

#### 5.2.3.3 The Royal Family: 'A Model Family'

Throughout the film, the portrayal of the royal family is characterized by a conspicuous discrepancy between its public image of solidarity and the troubled relationship between the King and the Prince of Wales, which is consistently kept in focus. The family's pretence of being a happy family is revealed at the outset of the movie by the Prince of Wales's sullen obedience to his mother's request to smile and wave in public

QUEEN. George! Smile, you lazy hound. It's what you're paid for. Smile and wave. Come on. Smile and wave. Everybody, smile and wave. Smile and wave!

The most impressive example of the royal family's display of public solidarity is the very last scene at St. Paul's Cathedral, in which the family is to commence the Thanksgiving ceremony. Having regained his sanity for the moment, the King instructs his children that "it is their job to be a 'model family'" (Leach 211).

KING. There are model farms now, model villages, even model factories. Well, we must be a model family, for the nation to look to.

PRINCE. But, Pa, I want something to do.

KING. Do? Well, follow in my footsteps. That's what you should do. Smile at the people, wave to them. Let them see that we're happy. That is why we're here.

The significance of this scene is manifold. First of all, the King's words "point to the emerging cultural order in which the symbolic power of the monarchy came to depend on the image" (Leach 211). Secondly, the sentimental conclusion of the restoration of the King and the rescue of the nation from its crisis implies a "widespread desire for stability in Britain after the social and economic dislocations of the Thatcher years" (Chandler 80). Last but not least, the sight, or rather, the royal tableaux of the family waving to the cheering crowds instantly establishes a link between the film and the real-life Royal drama in the 1990s, since it is reminiscent of the fact that Prince Charles and Princess Diana used to stand on those very steps of St. Paul's Cathedral happily waving to the cheering people and that the image of a 'model family' was finally destroyed with the end of the fairytale marriage. Such connections with the modern monarch are even more explicitly underscored in the film, *Mrs Brown*.

## 5.3 *Mrs Brown*<sup>8</sup>

### 5.3.1 Plot Summary

Set in the early 1860s, following the death of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria has indulged in intense mourning and withdrawn from public life for years. In order to help the inconsolable Queen overcome her grief, John Brown, who used to be a trusted servant of Albert, is summoned to the court. As the narrative proceeds, it turns out that the Queen builds a very close relationship with her Scottish servant John Brown, who takes considerable liberties in addressing the Queen as “woman”. John Brown’s growing privilege and influence over the Queen further aggravates the tension between him and the royal family.

The Queen’s continuing absence from public life and the rumour casting her as “Mrs Brown” causes a decline in her popularity and provokes calls for the abolishing of the monarchy. At the critical moment, Brown persuaded by Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli urges Victoria to return to the performance of her public duties, which is perceived by the Queen as personal betrayal. Consequently, the Queen re-establishes a formal and chilly relationship with John Brown, clearly distancing herself from Brown.

The Queen’s return to public life rescues the monarch from crisis and gives rise to a revitalization of her popularity. In spite of the Queen’s indifference, John Brown, as head of security, continues to be obsessively concerned about her safety, and successfully thwarts an attempted assassination of the Queen. After chasing a possible assassin through the woods late at night, Brown becomes fatally ill with pneumonia. Paying a visit to the dying Brown,

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<sup>8</sup> The film has also been released and advertised under the title of *Her Majesty, Mrs Brown*.

Victoria and Brown are reconciled on his deathbed. Finally, the film ends with John Brown's diary being taken away by Victoria's chief secretary Sir Ponsonby, who states that it must never be seen by anyone, hence the concealment of their relationship forever.

Scripted by Jeremy Brock and directed by John Madden, *Mrs Brown* dramatizes the tension between Queen Victoria's public and private life by exploring her close relationship with her Scottish servant John Brown. Compared with "the historically careful but at times timid approach of *The Madness of King George*" (McKechnie *Liberty* 229), the way in which the historical subject is approached in *Mrs Brown* is noticeable for the uncertain boundary between myth and history. Despite the fact that the representation of Victoria to a certain extent depends upon historical and biographical sources, the filmmakers apparently "are happy, in the absence of exhaustive historical data, to suggest a conspiracy to conceal the truth" (McKechnie *Liberty* 228). Although the film never directly addresses contemporary suspicions about their sexual relationship, through sexual innuendoes it suggests that there might be an affair between them. For instance, when the Queen and Brown return late from a jolly visit to a gillie's cottage, Sir Ponsonby forbids the royal physician from further speculating why the Queen's cheeks are flushed, saying: "don't even think it." Thus, it can be said that the subjectivity and selectivity of the filmmaker's attitude towards historical material is in accordance with the postmodern treatment of history: "facts' subordinated to the needs of the narrative" (McKechnie *Liberty* 228).

### 5.3.2 Characterization and Mise-en-scène

Generally speaking, *Mrs Brown* demonstrates more characteristics of heritage cinema than *The Madness of King George* in terms of visual style and mise-

en-scène, as McKechnie suggests that “its pace, its camerawork and especially its visuality makes *Mrs Brown* as much a continuation of the likes of *Howards End* as it is of the royal biopic” (*Royal* 115). Nevertheless, the film’s conspicuous emphasis on the visual does not necessarily lead to reductionism in its reading; rather, it can be said that the mise-en-scène serves as “a powerful subtext” to the film” (McKechnie *Royal* 112). For instance, in an establishing shot in which the Queen is shown being dressed by her servants, there is a muted expression of pain on the Queen’s face when a maid is trying to fasten the ribbons of her bonnet too tightly, indicating the suffocating restraint imposed on the Queen by her public duties (see McKechnie *Royal* 109).

In particular, the film’s parallel representations of English and Scottish landscapes are highly symbolic. Whereas the rugged imagery of the Scottish landscape stands for the “robust, direct and masculine” Scottishness (Neely 244), England is marked by artificial gentility and formality representing the suffocating atmosphere of the court. Thus, similar to Lucy’s trip in Italy in *A Room with a View*, the Queen’s journey to Scotland can be understood as a psychological escape from the weight of her privilege and public duties. Such comparative representations of the two landscapes also conform to the ideology of the ‘Kilt movie’: “a conception about Scotland in which the English are portrayed as elitist, repressed and effete while the Scots are depicted as demotic, ‘natural’ and warm-hearted.” (McArthur 3) Furthermore, the film employs the strategy of “constructing impeccably symmetrical images and then breaking them up” (McKechnie *Royal* 112) to underscore the discrepancy between the Queen and her Scottish servant in rank. In one exemplary scene (Fig.23), the sense of symmetry is evoked through two identically dressed footmen and a symmetrically arranged pathway, in the middle of which it is shown that Brown is leading a horse with the Queen

riding it and walking away from the symmetrical arrangement. The sense of symmetry is then disrupted by the Queen's elevated position on the horse's back pointing to the oddity of their so-called 'friendship'.



Fig. 23 *Mrs Brown* (Victoria and John Brown)

### 5.3.3 Contemporary Monarchy Crisis

The fact that *Mrs Brown* was released around the time of Princess Diana's death enhances its impact and to a certain extent contributes to its success at the box office. Conspicuously, what Princess Diana shares with Queen Victoria is the conflict between their pursuit of personal happiness and the imposition of public duties. Ellis makes a comparison between Victoria's predicaments and those of Princess Diana, stating that "The inescapable image is of Diana striding into the new century with a coltish grace that left the Royal family rooted in the past. She showed Britain the same spirit that John Brown sought to instil in Victoria. This graceful, witty movie now assumes an awful sadness". (qtd. in McKechnie *Liberty* 226)

In the 1990s, the imagery of the royal family as a 'model family' had been thoroughly destroyed by the breakdown of the Prince and Princess of Wales's

fairytale marriage and the ensuing exposure of both parties' extramarital affairs by the press. The general belief that Diana was chased to death by paparazzi can also find a parallel in *Mrs Brown*, as some journalists attempt to spy on the Queen and Brown in the Highlands. More explicit is Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli's comment on politics: "This country is not governed by wisdom but by talk" (see Boehnke 105). Given that the paparazzi primarily aimed to satisfy the public's appetite for royal scandals, the death of Princess Diana in a way pricked the public's conscience, as a result of which, the prevailing mood of grief and guilt rendered the viewer more sympathetic towards Queen Victoria in *Mrs Brown*, for Victoria had much in common with Princess Diana in terms of the pursuit of personal happiness and freedom. Furthermore, the ways in which the two past Princes of Wales are portrayed in the two films<sup>9</sup> are also revealing as far as the current royal family crisis is concerned. Both of the characters are depicted in a rather negative way: while Prince George is cast as an idling villain in *The Madness of King George*, the future Edward VII is shown "kept firmly in check by his controlling mother" (McKechnie Royal 107) in *Mrs Brown*. Through such projections of the image of the Prince of Wales, it is clear that the viewer is somehow encouraged to identify with Princess Diana in the real-life royal drama rather than with Prince Charles. And the impact of Diana's death is even stronger on the production of *Elizabeth*, as Cate Blanchett, who played the part of Elizabeth in the film, claimed that "it was incredible to begin filming two days after her death. The first line of the shoot was 'The Queen is dead. Long live the Queen!' And it was just very odd, very odd" (qtd. in McKechnie *Liberty* 221).

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<sup>9</sup> *The Madness of King George* and *Mrs Brown*

## 5.4 *Elizabeth*

### 5.4.1 Plot Summary

Set in the sixteenth century, *Elizabeth* focuses on the early years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, a historical period when England was in political and religious turmoil. Charged by her half-sister, Catholic Queen Mary, with treason, Elizabeth was jailed in the Tower of London. However, Queen Mary, who was fatally ill, could not sign Elizabeth's death warrant, as a result of which Elizabeth was crowned Queen after Mary's death.

In spite of her coronation, Elizabeth's reign was still unstable and confronted with various threats: from the outside, The Duke of Norfolk, Mary of Guise and the Spanish conspired to have her murdered; in England, the Catholic bishops were plotting her downfall. Forced to 'grow up' in the face of the cruelty of political reality, the youthful Queen had rapidly reached mental maturity and overcome her psychological dependence on her intimate friend, Robert Dudley, who was assumed to have an affair with the Queen. Having six of her opponents temporarily imprisoned, Elizabeth ensured the passing of the Act of Uniformity, establishing a single Church of England.

With the aid of her most trusted advisor, Walsingham, Elizabeth had annihilated her enemies and opponents through murders and executions demonstrating her ruthlessness as a ruler. Having declined Sir William's advice to secure the country through marriage, Elizabeth finally declared that she was married only to her country adopting the personae of the 'Virgin Queen'. The film ends with a postscript suggesting that England's Golden Age commenced.

#### 5.4.2 Historicity

Scripted by Michael Hirst and directed by Shekhar Kapur, *Elizabeth* is primarily characterized by the flamboyance and postmodern irreverence with which history is treated. It has been observed that the film shows “scant respect for actuality” (Luckett, qtd. in McKechnie *Liberty* 230) with regard to the historical inaccuracies in the film, including the compression of a large time span into a five-year period, the obvious change in the fate of Mary of Guise and the simplification of religious matters (see Knowles 78-79). Annoyed by the way in which the filmmakers take liberties with their historical subjects, Alan Bennett declares that “I hate [*Elizabeth*] I’m afraid” because none of it “happened like that at all” (qtd. in McKechnie *Liberty* 218). Among all its historical travesties, however, it is the bold depiction of the Queen’s sexual relationship with Robert Dudley that generates moral panic and arouses repulsion among some English patriots, for the Queen’s chastity has always been deemed an essential part of her myth. In an editorial comment in *Daily Telegraph*, the outrage at the film’s transgressive treatment of the Queen’s sex life is manifested:

A new film denying Elizabeth I’s chastity says rather more about our morals than hers. The obsession with sullyng the reputations of dead heroes and heroines is one of the ugliest features of our age. This is bad enough when there is actual proof of their transgressions, but all the evidence suggests that Elizabeth went intact to her grave [...] To question Elizabeth’s virtue 400 years after her death is not just a blackguardly slur upon a good, Christian woman, but an insult to our fathers who fought for her. It should rouse England to chivalrous anger (Anon, qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 253).

In defence of his aesthetic stance, the scriptwriter Michael Hirst argues that the invention of the Queen’s sexual relationship with Robert Dudley is meant to satisfy the needs of drama and is therefore fulfilling a narrative purpose:

For putting Elizabeth into bed with Dudley, I have already been branded a heretic [...] By showing them as lovers, I have not changed the course of English history [...] The characters in the film sleep with one another, because that is the logical expression of their desire, their passion, their love. (Hirst, qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 243)

In spite of the filmmakers' promotional strategy describing it as "a film about a very English subject" (qtd. in Chapman 310), *Elizabeth* is "marked by its distance from rather than veneration for its subject" (Bruzzi, qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 198). And such distance or rather irreverence is largely determined by director Kapur and his outsider's view of English history, as he himself admits: "I am the last person, in the world who should be directing *Elizabeth* [...] To ask an Indian who knows nothing about British history to make a film about a British icon. It was such a mad thing, I just had to do it" (qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 199). Furthermore, as far as the film's treatment of history is concerned, Kapur makes manifest his attitude:

Whether she [Elizabeth] was or wasn't a virgin I think is unimportant. I was interested in the idea that people made such a big thing of it. It must have gone beyond a physical fact [...] I had to make a choice: whether I wanted the details of history or the emotions and essence of history to prevail (qtd. in McKechnie *Liberty* 233).

By deconstructing or debunking the myth of the Virgin Queen, Kapur seeks to recreate a living human being with desires and anxieties and to understand the Queen behind the historical mask making use of literary imagination and fictional devices, as Fitzgerald notes that "it is one of the pleasures of *Elizabeth* to watch Indian director Shekhar Kapur remove that mask [...] He lets down her hair, loosens her bodice and frees her from constraints." (qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 245). Accordingly, it is not unwarranted to say that

Kapur's treatment of his historical subject to a certain extent conforms to the ideology of postmodern historiography, because

[postmodernism] approves of uncertainty, ambiguity, and fragmentation; it distrusts the ideas of totality, synthesis, or binary oppositions [...] [it] has entailed the deconstruction, the demystification, and, ultimately, the death of any authority, be it god, the author, or the canon. (Middeke 1)

#### 5.4.3 Generic Hybridity

Combining romance, period drama and conspiracy thriller, *Elizabeth* is primarily characterized by its generic hybridity. Given that a budget of \$ 25 million for a historical film represents a considerable economic risk (see Chapman 301), the filmmakers needed to expand the niche market of heritage cinema to appeal to more mainstream audiences through the mix of genres, which is regarded as "a vital means of maximizing audiences" (Higson *English Heritage* 198). Such a marketing strategy is implicitly pointed out by the film's producer Tim Bevan, who deliberately distances *Elizabeth* from previous heritage films:

We were keen to do a period movie, but one that wasn't in that recent tradition of what I call 'frock flicks'. We wanted to avoid, as it were, the Merchant Ivory approach [...] We also wanted to stamp a contemporary feel onto our story, and with the early part of her reign being filled with such uncertainty, we decided to structure it as a conspiracy thriller. (qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 197)

Whether or not *Elizabeth* belongs to the category of heritage film depends on the extent to which it engages with heritage discourses. Apart from the quintessentially English subject and the authentic period settings, the theme at the centre of the narrative is also identified as "typical of heritage film": "the hesitant exploration of the crisis of inheritance, the struggle over the meaning

of Englishness, and the question of national ownership” (Higson *English Heritage* 200). In Higson’s words, “if the film is not a celebration of Englishness, it can certainly be read as an exploration of Englishness, a historical meditation on the making of modern England and the construction of a central icon of the national heritage” (*English Heritage* 198). Kapur further explains the reason why the film needed to adhere to the conventions of heritage cinema in terms of its visual style: “I wanted the film to be intimate and personal...to vibrate with the nervous system of a young woman... but also to have a sense of scale, of grandeur, for the young woman was also a Queen” (qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 225).

On the other hand, however, identified as a combination of “the intrigue of *The Godfather* and the shooting style of *Trainspotting*” (Charity, qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 222), *Elizabeth* also exhibits characteristics of a conspiracy thriller and an action movie in terms of narrative pace, shooting style, lighting and camerawork, which in a way distinguish the film from conventional heritage film, as Chapman observes:

[*Elizabeth*] exhibits a radically different aesthetic. There is nothing at all leisurely about the narrative: the editing is on a par with an action movie and the narrative itself moves from one event to another with breathless rapidity. The camerawork, furthermore, is far removed from the unobtrusive, reverential style of the Merchant-Ivory films. Kapur makes full use of the mobile camera, tracking the movements of his protagonists around the on-screen space rather than filming in tableaux, and deploys an array of unusual angles. (*Past* 306)

With regard to the camerawork, Kapur makes use of jump-cuts, high camera angles, close-ups and fast-tracking shots to satisfy the needs of melodrama. In an assassination scene, for instance, the sense of danger and suspense is enhanced by showing the Roman priest walking towards Elizabeth in slow motion. In addition to camerawork, lighting has also played an important role

in creating an atmosphere of danger, as low-key light from candles or other diegetic sources are frequently employed in the scenes in which conspiracies against the Queen are being plotted (see Peters 1-2). The most noticeable example is the opening sequence of Protestants being tortured to death under Catholic Queen Mary's instruction. With a close-up of a woman's bleeding head which is being forcefully shaved, a sense of brutality and horror is immediately evoked and the film's adherence to the traditions of a thriller or rather a horror film revealed. Regarding the stylistic characteristics of the opening sequence, Kapur asserts that

[it] was actually designed to throw away the comfort factor of the viewers, who have gotten accustomed to a certain type of film grammar. It's [symbolic of] a handshake between the filmmaker and the audience on how to view violence." (qtd. in Lowery 15)

Richard Alleva remarks that "I don't know which historians director Shekhar Kapur and writer Michael Hirst consulted [...] but it's quite clear that they must have seen *The Godfather* at least 47 times" (qtd. in Pigeon 19). Modelling *Elizabeth* on *The Godfather*, which is decidedly male and action-oriented, the filmmakers in effect attempt to "masculinise material" (Pigeon 15) in order to meet the modern viewer's expectation of a generically different treatment of history. With regard to the film's adherence to the discourse of contemporary youth culture, Dreher ironically suggests, "This is Masterpiece Theatre for the MTV generation, a Virgin Queen for people raised on 'Like A Virgin'<sup>10</sup>" (qtd. in Higson *English Heritage* 222).

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<sup>10</sup> "Like A Virgin" is a song by American singer Madonna.

#### 5.4.4 The Queen's Transformation

Unlike other filmic portrayals of Queen Elizabeth I which invariably focus on the politically stable and more prosperous period of the Elizabethan era, namely the "Golden Age", Kapur's *Elizabeth* depicts the transformation of the new Queen from a naïve young girl to a resolute and tough ruler during a period when England was in political and religious turmoil. To put it more concisely, this is the story "of a journey from innocence to loss of innocence" (Kapur, qtd. in McKechnie *Liberty* 229).

It has been observed that the transformation of Elizabeth has dual implications: "both the refusal of men and the adoption of a masculine persona" (Higson *English Heritage* 214). In the first half of the film, Elizabeth's indecisiveness and vulnerability are mainly conveyed through her emotional attachment to her childhood sweetheart Robert Dudley and her psychological reliance on her advisor Sir William, a father figure. Before Dudley is revealed to be married, Elizabeth's heavy dependence on him is highly visible as the inexperienced Queen is frequently shown looking to Dudley for support. When she is arrested for treason under Mary's instruction, for instance, it is Dudley's words, "remember who you are", that gives the future Queen confidence and courage. The young woman's attachment to her lover is explicitly manifested by her assertion that "You are everything to me". The change in their relationship is visually exemplified in two parallel scenes in which they dance a Volta. Whereas in the first scene the dance is marked by the impeccable harmony of their bodies and movements, their deteriorating relationship is shown through lack of physical intimacy in the second dancing scene. What's more, at the end of their second dance, Elizabeth announces to Dudley: "I am not your Elizabeth. I am no man's Elizabeth. And if you think to rule me you are mistaken." Besides, Pidduck points out that the "formality, precision and stiff poses" of the stylized Italian Volta "amplifies the sexual frisson between

Elizabeth and Dudley in a public rite of foreplay” (134). Furthermore, the Queen’s recurring demand “Play a Volta!” reveals the fact that “the young Elizabeth enjoys the sexual agency of absolute power” (Pidduck 134).

The fact that the film casts white-haired Lord Richard Attenborough as Sir William Cecil, who in history was only 38 years old when Elizabeth ascended the throne, underscores his status as a patriarchal figure to the young Queen. The timidity with which Elizabeth confronts male authorities is revealed in the rehearsal scene in which she is shown nervously practicing her speech for the bishops. And through the use of jump-cuts, Elizabeth’s nervousness is further intensified by the break in temporal continuity (see Peters 4). In that sense, Elizabeth’s final rebellion against Sir William’s paternal advice can be interpreted as an assertion of her authority over patriarchy. In the scene in which Sir William says to Elizabeth that she ‘must’ show some conciliatory gestures towards Spain after the murder of Mary of Guise, Elizabeth rebuffs his paternal request for the first time in the film:

ELIZABETH. The word ‘must’ is not used to princes. I have followed your advice in all the affairs in my kingdom, but your policies will make England nothing but a part of France or Spain. From this moment, I am going to follow my own opinion, and see if I’ll do any better.

CECIL. But madam you are only a woman

ELIZABETH. I may be a woman, Sir William! But if I choose, I have the heart of a man! I am my father’s daughter. I am not afraid of anything!

Sending Sir William off into retirement, Elizabeth then formally moves away from a reliance upon this father figure and frees herself from patriarchal restrictions.

Elizabeth’s transformation is further enhanced by her adopting the persona of the “Virgin Queen” in the final sequence. As the Queen’s hair is being cut by

one of her ladies-in-waiting, there are flashbacks to her life before she became Queen: the young Elizabeth happily dancing in an open field. Through such editing, the viewer is provided with a subjective insight into the Queen's mind: a longing for a lost innocence, hence empathy for the Queen's "imprisonment" (Peters 5) in the monarchy. What follows is the Queen's assertion "I have become a virgin" when she is looking at her reflection in a mirror foregrounding the constructed nature of the myth of the "Virgin Queen". In the following scene at court, the Queen reappears "powdered, elaborately coiffed, her body crustacean-like with embroidery, lace and jewels" (Pidduck 134) (Fig.24), an image which is apparently based upon Ditchley's portrait of Elizabeth I (see Moss 801). Elizabeth then declares her permanent allegiance to her country: "Observe, Lord Burghley<sup>11</sup>, I am married -- to England" marking the completion of her transformation. In that sense, it can also be said that Kapur's *Elizabeth* is about the making of the myth of the "Virgin Queen".



Fig.24 The Virgin Queen (*Elizabeth* dir. Kapur)

Elizabeth's assuming the persona of "Virgin Queen" necessarily entails a sacrifice of her privacy and personal happiness. In one exemplary scene when Elizabeth and Dudley make love in her chamber, their intimacy is subjected to other people's voyeurism, as her ladies-in-waiting are giggling

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<sup>11</sup> Sir William Cecil is retired as Lord Burghley.

and peeking through stonework to observe them. Their voyeuristic fun is interrupted by Sir William's arrival, who demands them to show him Elizabeth's bed-sheets daily, for "Her Majesty's body and person are no longer her own property. They belong to the state." Furthermore, the pattern of ears and eyes imprinted on Elizabeth's bed curtains is also highly symbolic: it represents "the insistent surveillance of her most private moments" (Pigeon 16). This tension between Elizabeth's public and personal life is reminiscent of, and consciously alludes to, the dilemma of Princess Diana, who was also subjected to the voyeuristic surveillance of the public.

What the three monarchy bio-pics discussed have in common are national identity in crisis at the centre of their narrative and their allusions to contemporary monarchy crises. Unlike other heritage films in which an identity crisis is usually solved with "the protagonists invariably choosing personal freedom over stifling social conventions", "no such escape is possible" (Gibson, qtd. in Leach 209) in the monarchy films since personal freedom and happiness will always entail a constitutional crisis. Thus, it is clear that the national crisis can only be solved through the sacrifice of the King's or the Queen's personal freedom: the mad King has remembered how to seem himself; Victoria returns to her public duties; Elizabeth adopts the persona of "Virgin Queen" giving up personal happiness.

## 6. Conclusion

In the 1990s, British society had gone through a political and ideological transition from Thatcherism to New Labour's "Cool Britannia", a process which fundamentally influenced the production of heritage films during the period. In respect to Higson's anxiety over the mere visual entertainment of heritage film, it is shown in this thesis that the heritage films discussed make use of the past to play out contemporary concerns, be they political or ideological. In Chapter Three, the three Merchant Ivory films are read as expressing a deep revulsion with Thatcherism and a nostalgic yearning for social stability since national identity was being threatened by moral decay caused by aggressive Thatcherite policies. Having subverted the traditional notion of the conservatism of Jane Austen, the filmic adaptations of Austen's novels discussed in Chapter Four are primarily marked by modern sensibilities. In the discourse of postmodernism, the monarchy films dethrone the King or Queens to represent them as human beings with desires and anxieties in response to the monarchy crises of the 1990s.

It is noteworthy that the national identity constructed in these heritage films is marked by diversity rather than singularity, for the definition of Englishness varies in the course of history. The fact that the Department of National Heritage was renamed the Department of Culture, Media and Sport by New Labour in 1997 points the way in which the country re-identifies itself, as Tony Blair declares:

When I talk about Britain as a "Young Country", I mean an attitude of mind as much as anything. I mean we should think of ourselves as a country that cherishes its past, its tradition, and its unique cultural inheritance, but does not live in the past. A country that is not resting on past glories, but hungry for future success. (qtd. in Higson *Waving* 56)

The use of the past in the heritage films discussed (to process present-day concerns) is exactly what Blair called for here. The reconstructed national past is far more significant than historical reality because it conditions people's responses to the present and it is the dissatisfaction with the present that fuels a nostalgic longing for an imagined national past. To conclude with David Lowenthal's words, "Nostalgia is memory with the pain removed. The pain is today" (6).

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## German Abstract (Deutsche Zusammenfassung)

Das primäre Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, linksgerichtete Perspektiven (vertreten durch Andrew Higson), laut denen das *mise-en-scene* des *Heritage Films* ein *visual excess* ist und der Heritage Film selbst im Konservatismus verankert und daher nicht relevant für die Gegenwart ist, aufzudecken. Mithilfe einer detaillierten Analyse von ausgewählten Filmen wird in dieser Studie aufgezeigt, dass das *mise-en-scene* des *Heritage Films* narrative Zwecke erfüllt und dass der *Heritage Film* durch eine Rückkehr zu einer *imagined national past* sehr wohl zeitgenössische Themen anspricht.

Das zweite Kapitel behandelt eine theoretische Darstellung des *Heritage Cinemas* als Genre und gibt einen Überblick von der kritischen Debatte, die zwischen den Linken und den Rechten über das *Heritage Cinema* entbrannt ist. Darüber hinaus wird erforscht, in wieweit die dem *Thatcherism* zugrunde liegende Ideologie die Produktion dieser Filme beeinflusst hat. Die darauffolgenden drei Kapiteln sind drei verschiedenen Strömungen dieses Genres gewidmet: *Merchant Ivory productions*, Adaptationen von Jane Austen-Romanen und *Monarchy bio-pics*.

Aufgrund ihrer Obsession mit der authentischen Darstellung der historischen Epoche wurden Filme von Merchant Ivory von Kritikern weitgehend als Loblied auf den Konservatismus abgelehnt. Kapitel Drei veranschaulicht, dass die Funktion des visuellen Schauspiels in diesen Produktionen einen tieferen Sinn hat, wobei der Fokus auf den folgenden drei für dieses Phänomen charakteristischen Filmen *A Room with A View* (1985), *Howards End* (1992) und *The Remains of the Day* (1993) liegt.

Im Vierten Kapitel wird in Bezug auf das Phänomen des Austen Revivals angestrebt, Austens Kompatibilität mit zeitgenössischen Ideologien zu veranschaulichen. Mithilfe eines Vergleichs dreier Adaptationen von Jane Austens Romanen, nämlich *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), *Mansfield Park* (1999) sowie *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), lässt sich erkennen, dass die meisten Filmemacher den Mut aufweisen, mit der Idee der wahrheitsgemäßen Wiedergabe zu brechen indem sie eine Ausgewogenheit zwischen traditionellen Werten und Zeitgeist aufrecht erhalten.

Das Hauptaugenmerk von Kapitel Fünf liegt auf der wenig ehrfurchtsvollen Art und Weise, in der Monarchen in den sogenannten *Monarchy Films*, die sich in den 1990er Jahren großer Popularität erfreuten, repräsentiert wurden. Anstelle der traditionellen Obsession mit historischer Richtigkeit findet man ein revisionistisches historisches Bewusstsein vor. Im Diskurs der Postmoderne werden die königlichen Persönlichkeiten nicht länger als unerreichbare, Gott-ähnliche Figuren verklärt, sondern demystifiziert und als normale Menschen mit all ihren Schwächen, Problemen und Schwierigkeiten dargestellt. Außerdem spielen die drei Filme *The Madness of King George* (1994), *Mrs Brown* (1997) und *Elizabeth* (1998), die zu diesem Zweck analysiert werden, auf die Krisen der Monarchie in den 90ern an, was ein weiteres Beispiel für den Bezug des *Heritage Films* zur Gegenwart darstellt.

Abschließend lässt sich feststellen, dass die nationale Identität, die in diesen *Heritage Films* konstruiert wird, sich mehr durch Diversität als durch Singularität auszeichnet, da die Definition von *Englishness* im Lauf der Geschichte stark variiert. Die *national past*, die in diesen Filmen rekonstruiert wird ist keineswegs eine Manifestation von Wirklichkeitsflucht. Sie dient eher der Aufarbeitung von gegenwärtigen Anliegen, da es die Unzufriedenheit mit der Gegenwart ist, die eine nostalgische Sehnsucht nach einer *imagined national past* schürt.

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