

SLEEPING WITH THE HEGEMONY:  
BRITISH CINEMA AND HOLLYWOOD IN THE 1990S

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with British film production in the 1990s and the ways it has adapted to Hollywood's stranglehold on global markets. It is my view that the tendency to connect Britain's volatile industrial production base with the weakness of British cinema generally, a belief shared by film scholars and popular journalists alike, fails to take into account the more complex discourses that British films have come to inhabit. My argument proceeds as follows: In my introduction I outline the terms in which critics have generally discussed British cinema, focusing particularly on the nationalism and pessimism that colours their arguments. Chapter One examines the manner in which cinema in Britain came to be dominated by Hollywood and the way the British film establishment has ultimately acquiesced to its presence. My second chapter looks at the idea of national cinema, which has often been mobilised as a means to counter Hollywood domination, arguing that the concept has little relevance to the way film is produced and consumed in Britain. By analysing the impact of globalisation on film, I argue that British cinema is better defined not in terms of where it is produced but of what it represents. Chapters Three and Four thus examine the two principle discourses governing representations of Britain: the British past and the British actor. The former discourse is strongly connected to the British heritage film aesthetic, which emerged in the 1980s and was subsequently appropriated by Hollywood as a means to invoke a sense of the bygone. The latter discourse centres on the representations of British masculinity and femininity produced in the performances of British actors, which are typically constructed in opposition to Hollywood norms. Representations of Britain in 1990s British cinema have thus proved migratory; they have transcended their circumstances of production and been adopted by the international Hollywood system, in the process giving them an enormous global currency. As a result of these changes, and despite the inadequacies of the film industry in Britain, British cinema can therefore be said to be in solid shape.

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# INTRODUCTION

## What Cinema? What Britain?

In the 1990s, in a Britain which is no longer Great and a Kingdom which is no longer United, there are again signs of a cinema staggering towards resurgence, still without consistent support and still uncertain about what constitutes success. Like Dr Johnson's dancing dogs, it is not always that they do it well but that they do it at all that seems to invite – and deserve – attention.

– John Caughie, The Companion to British and Irish Cinema (8).

### *Critical (im)positions*

In 1963, Alfred Hitchcock agreed to participate in a series of in-depth interviews with New Wave critic and filmmaker Francois Truffaut. Questioning Hitchcock about his early career in Britain, Truffaut observed that even before he arrived in Hollywood, Hitchcock was already making 'American-type pictures'. By contrast, once the director had made his inevitable transition to America, he never looked back to the 'British type of film'. The reason for this, according to Truffaut, is that 'there's something about England that's anticinematic'. He goes on, 'I get the feeling that there are national characteristics – among them, the English countryside, the subdued way of life, the stolid routine – that are antidramatic in a sense'. And finally, the much-quoted *coup de grace*, 'isn't there a certain incompatibility between the terms 'cinema' and 'Britain'?' (124). Though it could hardly have been planned, this off-the-cuff remark may have been the defining moment in British film studies.

Obviously, there is much to fault in Truffaut's argument. At the very least, his lack of discrimination between 'England' and 'Britain' is problematic. He also seems to have missed just how deeply Hitchcock's British films were rooted in British culture, language and landscape. His creative debt to novelists John Buchan, J.B. Priestley and John Galsworthy are self-evident, although rarely discussed (Barr 1999, 8). Moreover, Hitchcock did not simply leave these influences behind when he set out for Hollywood.

Far from being an 'American-type picture', Rebecca (1940) was set in Britain, adapted from a British novel and predominantly cast with British actors. Suspicion (1941) and The Paradine Case (1947) have a similar cultural provenance, while North By Northwest (1959) was in many respects a remake of The 39 Steps (1935). To his credit, Hitchcock's reply to Truffaut was perceptive and well considered. In contrast to Truffaut's generalisations, he accounted for the limitations of British film culture with reference to specific social institutions, in particular the bourgeois domination of the industry and the contempt with which the British intelligentsia has held the cinema (124). Nevertheless, it is Truffaut's comments, not Hitchcock's, that have set the tone for early discussions of British cinema. In the introduction to his path-breaking anthology All Our Yesterdays (1986), Charles Barr notes:

Virtually no one who writes about British cinema finds it possible to do so without quoting, or coining their own version of, some such sweepingly dismissive [...] verdict on an entire national output (1).

As though to verify his point, Barr goes on to quote similar statements by Satyajit Ray and Pauline Kael (ibid). However, it is important to note that this negativity is not unique to non-British critics. When the influential Movie magazine published its survey of British cinema in 1962, the only British filmmaker they found to be of interest was Joseph Losey, a political exile from the USA. Other important British film writers of the period, notably Robin Wood and David Thompson, tended to ignore British cinema completely. In fact, the antipathy of British critics for their national culture has a long tradition. In his essay 'The Lion and the Unicorn' (1940) George Orwell noted that 'England is the only great country whose intellectuals are ashamed of their own nationality,' and further that 'an English intellectual would feel more ashamed of standing to attention during 'God Save the King' than of stealing from a poor box' (161-2). A part of the problem for these writers, and also for Truffaut and his ilk, was the absence, or at least the marginalisation, of critical discussion on British cinema. When the auteurist critics of the 1960s constructed their canons of attention-worthy directors, British filmmakers were mostly excluded. Thus, in 1969, Peter Wollen noted that in contrast to the cinema of America, British cinema was 'utterly amorphous, unclassified,

unperceived'. In the same year, Alan Lovell presented a paper entitled 'The British Cinema: the Unknown Cinema' (Barr 1986, 2).

Much has changed since the 1960s, although problems still remain. The growth of film studies and cultural studies in British universities has turned the scarcity of materials on British cinema into abundance, generating a body of writing that amounts to far more than a groundwork. In the last fifteen years, substantial book-length studies from John Hill, Robert Murphy, Sarah Street, Andrew Higson and others have appeared, each treating British film culture with an academic seriousness previously reserved for the cinemas of Hollywood and continental Europe. When Lovell revisited his 1969 paper thirty years on, he concluded:

Arguments can be made that comparable cinemas like the French or Italian have, over their whole history, been superior to the British cinema but the differences are only relative ones. British cinema isn't a special case, there isn't some fundamental deficiency to be accounted for (243).

However, if British intellectuals have been reconciled to the academic significance of the national cinema, their writings retain elements of the negativity and pessimism that Wollen and Lovell identified. The aesthetic value of British cinema is no longer in question; instead, the new generation of critics is rankled by the weakness of the economic and political structures supporting film production in Britain. Writing in 1997, Sarah Street quoted from a 1952 study of the British film industry:

The crisis in British filmmaking – where lies the main problem of the industry – started a long time ago, and only at rare intervals during the past forty years have there been brief periods of prosperity to lighten the otherwise depressing canvas (27).

'Another forty years on,' she adds, 'we cannot but reach the same conclusion' (ibid). This pessimism achieved its most extreme formulation in the notion that the very existence of British cinema was under threat. In 1985, in the midst of the Thatcher government's purge on arts subsidies, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith claimed that 'there is now an imminent danger that British cinema, as we know it, will have effectively ceased to

exist within the decade' (147). Eleven years later, with a Conservative government still at Downing Street, Duncan Petrie confirmed Nowell-Smith's apocalyptic prophecy:

By the early 1990s it was possible to argue that the British cinema, as an entity rooted in a particular industrial infrastructure producing a certain critical-mass of audio-visual fictions for exhibition in cinemas, no longer existed (1996, 604)

On the face of it, such declarations might seem absurd. There is no shortage of identifiably British films in the market. At the time of writing, Gosford Park, Iris and Last Orders (all 2001) can be seen in theatres around the world. However, if we accept Nowell-Smith and Petrie's line of argument, the existence and even the success of these films is not really the point. According to John Hill, the perception that British cinema has increased in strength in the 1990s derives from the exceptional popularity of a small number of films rather than a more widespread economic viability (1999b, 76). What is at stake therefore is the existence of a film *industry* in Britain, that is, a business organised around the dual processes of manufacture (production) and trade (distribution and exhibition).

The reason most commonly given for the apparent non-existence of the British film industry is the global monopoly of international film markets operated by Hollywood.<sup>1</sup> In most critical histories of cinema in Britain, the spectre of Hollywood is a constant, defining presence. In 1986, Robert Murphy entitled his study of film production in Britain 'Under the Shadow of Hollywood'. Tom Ryall's Britain and the American Cinema (2001) advances this thesis, constructing a history of British cinema in terms of its subordinate relationship with Hollywood. This critical position was perhaps expressed

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, the term 'Hollywood' refers principally to the world's dominant film industry, a conglomerate based in but not exclusive to the USA. This industry encompasses production facilities, exhibition facilities (cinemas) and distribution and advertising networks. These properties are concentrated more or less in the hands of six media conglomerates, News International/20th Century Fox, Viacom/Paramount, Vivendi/Universal, AOL Time Warner, Sony/Columbia and Disney, although smaller organisations MGM and DreamWorks should not be overlooked. Also included are the legion of semi-independent production companies, who exist largely through formal business relationships with these conglomerates.



most clearly by the producer Leon Clore, who suggested 'if the United States spoke Spanish, we would have a film industry' (Roddick 1985, 5). In fact, the fear of American cultural invasion and the belief in its harmful influence on British people has a long history in British culture. In 1927 a Daily Express editorial declared:

The bulk of picture goers are Americanised to an extent that makes them regard the British film as a foreign film. They talk America, think America, dream America; we have several million people, mostly women, who, to all intents and purposes, are temporary American citizens (Puttnam, 148).

Paternalist anxiety over the harmful leisure activities of the public was not confined to bourgeois sections of British society. In their groundbreaking analyses of working class culture in Britain, George Orwell and Richard Hoggart were highly critical of what they perceived as the erosion of indigenous traditions by the vulgar, artificial pleasures of American popular culture. Hoggart's description of American culture in his Uses of Literacy (1957) is particularly evocative: it is a 'shiny barbarism', a 'candy-floss world', 'a sort of spiritual dry-rot' (Hebdige 52). However, other critics have presented the influence of American culture in less negative terms. In particular, Dick Hebdige and Tony Bennett have suggested that the more democratic nature of American entertainment provided a liberating alternative to the class-bound nature of Britain's dominant culture. According to Bennett,

The impact of American popular culture in Britain has been more positive, particularly in making available a repertoire of styles and resources [...] which, in various ways, have undercut and been consciously mobilised against the cultural hegemony of Britain's traditional elites (Higson 1989, 40).

More recently, Richard Maltby and Ruth Vasey have noted that Hollywood offered European working class audiences an 'imagined Utopian society' where class distinctions did not exist or at least could not be recognised (50).

However, if some critics have perceived a silver lining in Hollywood's popular appeal, its economic impact has proved more difficult to accept. In their comic history of Britain, 1066 and All That (1930), W.C. Sellar and R.J. Yeatman suggest that history

'came to a stop' when America usurped Britain as 'top nation' after the Great War (113). After WWII, Britain's political subordination to the USA was no longer a laughing matter. The nation's military invulnerability had been undermined, its empire dismantled, and its economy only saved from bankruptcy by American loans. Both economically and militarily, it was apparent that Britain could no longer stand alone. The Suez crisis of 1956 and America's subsequent threat to speculate against the pound made this even clearer. In the decades that followed, the notion of American popular culture as banal and crude was thus complemented by the image of American industry (Hollywood included) as a totalising, homogenising force, bent on exerting its control over the world. The development of globalisation as a political theory has provided an ideological rallying-point for critics of American economic power. Though many would argue globalisation is an essentially non-national, decentred phenomenon, others have been eager to identify its effects with America and American corporations. The popular status of American culture is thus no longer attributed to its seductive populism; instead it is perceived as part of an international hegemony capable of absorbing and destroying all external competition. Thus, in 1990, film critic Derek Malcom was moved to write an article entitled 'Hollywood is the Enemy', in which he warned that 'our cinema is in danger of being wiped out by American moneybags' (27). In extreme instances, British critics have invoked, without irony, the imagery of colonialism to describe Hollywood's presence in Britain. Thus, Nick Roddick has suggested that Britain has 'a cinema culture which is the colony of Hollywood,' while for Peter Wollen, Hollywood domination has reduced British film culture to 'subaltern status' (3; 129).

Two key trends can be discerned in these critical discourses on British cinema and Hollywood. First, the popularity of American culture tends to be viewed as a threat to bourgeois nationalism. By winning the hearts and minds of the British people, in particular the working classes, it undermines their 'natural' identity as British subjects. Second, and as a consequence of this, British cinema has been charged with the task of countering Hollywood's perceived erosion of British identity by providing accurate, inclusive representations of Britain to its domestic audience. I do not challenge the notion that Hollywood has effectively 'bought out' the British film industry. Indeed, it is possible to reconstitute the history of British cinema, at least since the 1960s, as the

history of Hollywood's involvement with British cinema: of its expansion into the British market, of its investment in British production, of the popularity of British films with American audiences, of the influence of Hollywood films on British product. However, it seems to me that the effects of Hollywood on British cinema and British culture generally is a great deal more complicated and somewhat less negative than this summary suggests. In this thesis, I will attempt to put the economic and aesthetic consequences of Hollywood's global domination into a fuller context. The impact of Hollywood's dominant position in the British market is already well documented; what interests me is the idea that this position might have a reciprocal influence on Hollywood's own production. In order to research this notion I will examine British film production in its entirety, but specific attention will be paid to British filmmaking in the 1990s. I have chosen this period partly through personal preference, but also because it reflects the greatest level of interaction between British cinema and Hollywood. In this way, developments occurring in the 1990s are also the surest indication of the shape of things to come.

In my first chapter, I will examine the economic history of British cinema, particularly the way this history became entwined with Hollywood product and capital. I will look the way exported Hollywood films came to dominate the British, the impact of American investment in British film production, and the ways British filmmakers and policy makers have responded over time to Hollywood's domineering presence. My second chapter will examine the idea of a 'national cinema' in Britain, the ways the term has been deployed by critics, and the relationship it endorses between the concepts of 'nation' and 'cinema'. I will also consider the development of globalisation, its impact on the relationship between Hollywood and film-consuming world and the way these factors relate to the Britishness or otherwise of any given film. My final two chapters will build on this theoretical groundwork by shifting focus to the politics of representation in specific British films. I will elaborate my argument through two interrelated case studies, the first concerning the development and meaning of the heritage film in Britain, and the second concerning the deployment of the British actors in British and Hollywood filmmaking. In both instances, the films I look at are aimed simultaneously at domestic and international audiences, testifying to the international currency of certain British

images. This dual-address provides insight not only into the way modern Britons might see themselves, but also the way they are seen from the outside. Underlying this framework is my desire to counter the pessimism and nationalistic chauvinism that characterises so much writing on British cinema. As Andy Beckett has recently suggested, filmmaking in Britain is 'a marginal but highly symbolic activity' (2001, 2). When British films are successful they generate national pride, when they fail they are seen as an embarrassment. This problem has perhaps been more evident over the last twenty years than it ever was in the past. When Colin Welland picked up a Best Original Screenplay Oscar for *Chariots of Fire* in 1982, he declared from the podium in distinctly warlike tones, 'the British are coming!', presenting what was essentially the recognition of an individual achievement as a victory for Britain as a whole. By contrast, the failure of any British film to be selected for competition at Cannes in 2001 was widely interpreted as a slur on the nation. It seems to me that British films could only benefit by being released from their yoke of nationalist representation and allowed to function on their own terms. Who knows, if they were allowed to be less symbolic, British films might even become less marginal.

### *A Note on Usage*

It will become apparent that despite my preference for the terms 'Britain' and 'British cinema', the majority of the films I discuss are primarily English, both in their subject matter and their centres of production. A few can be described as Scottish, but none I think have any substantial connection to Wales or Northern Ireland (which, strictly speaking, is a part of the United Kingdom rather than Great Britain). This is due in part to the kind of British cinema I have chosen to write about, but it also reflects a more general marginalisation of Britain's 'Celtic fringe'. However, despite this imbalance, and even in this time of devolution, I feel it is still more appropriate to talk of a British cinema than it is to talk of an English one. There are several reasons for this. First, I am engaging with a body of criticism that has invariably, and in most cases unquestioningly, identified its subject as British. Exceptions exist – notably Charles Barr's *The English Hitchcock* (1999) and Andrew Higson's *English Heritage, English Cinema* (forthcoming) – but they

constitute a very recent development. Second, the history of cinema in Britain is intimately connected to the interventions of British government, interventions that have occurred on a British rather than an English level. State funding does exist in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but the majority of finance is distributed centrally. Moreover, the bulk of this funding is generated through the sales of lottery tickets, which are brought throughout Britain and Northern Ireland. Third, even though British cinema bases the majority of its production in England (London, more specifically), it has always drawn personnel from all over Britain (Babington, 5). Fourth, in spite of their Anglo-centric emphases, British films have always been *intended* for a British audience, and are distributed as such throughout Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (ibid, 6). Similarly, as far as international distributors are concerned, Britain (or 'the UK and Ireland', as it is often designated) constitutes a single market. As a consequence, the kinds of films available to audiences in Glasgow, Swansea, Birmingham and Derry barely differ. And finally, to talk only of an English cinema seems unnecessarily exclusionary. Although British film production has generally been much more 'English' than it has been Scottish, Welsh, or Northern Irish, these nations have always been, to varying extents, involved with and represented by British filmmaking. The re-titling of 'British cinema' as 'English cinema' seems only to exaggerate this marginalisation. For all the problems they raise then, the terms 'Britain' and 'British cinema' strike me as most accurate and appropriate terms for my subject.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Domination and Dependency

Does history repeat itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce? No, that's too grand, too considered a process. History just burps, and we taste again that raw-onion sandwich it swallowed centuries ago.

– Julian Barnes, A History of the World in 10½ Chapters (239).

### *In the Beginning*

If British cinema can be said to have had a 'golden age', a period where its artistic achievement was balanced by economic promise, the most obvious candidate is the 1940s, when the outbreak and aftermath of war intensified the social role of the nation's filmmakers. However, a strong case might also be made for the 'primitive' films of the Brighton School, made almost a century ago just a few years after the invention of the cinema. Pioneering works such as Cecil Hepworth's How It Feels to Be Run Over (1900), James Williamson's The Big Swallow (1901) and R.W. Paul's The Country Bumpkin and the Cinematograph (1901) display a technical brilliance and modernist verve that arguably surpasses their contemporaries in France and the USA. Moreover, with its enormous wealth, its political supremacy, its strong manufacturing base and its access to an Imperial world market, Britain had a head start in the race to mass-produce and export filmed entertainment (Caughie, 1). It could have been the global leader. We might have spoken of 'Brighton' as we now speak of 'Hollywood'. What went wrong?

For better or for worse, by the end of the Great War the USA was firmly established as the world's pre-eminent film-producing nation. In the years that followed it quickly developed this lead into a seemingly unbreakable monopoly over the majority of the world's film markets. However, prior to 1914 the American film industry showed little ambition to distribute its product internationally. Instead, America's embryonic film studios concentrated on consolidating their presence in the home market, which proved to

be the largest and most profitable in the world. Given the freedom by the government to operate as an oligarchy, the studios were able to develop the large-scale, cost-effective production methods and integrated distribution/exhibition networks that would become their standard. By contrast, European nations, with their smaller national markets and longer trading histories, were quick to grasp the possibilities of international export. By 1908, the French company Pathé Frères was selling films in Europe, Asia and North America. Italian and Norwegian companies soon followed, while Britain (still the centre of global finance) established itself as the hub of the distribution and re-exporting business (Vasey 1996, 53-57). As war broke out in Europe, exports of American produce, particularly munitions and food, rose sharply as European nations found they had underestimated the duration of the conflict. Filmed entertainment was part of this general trend, although the initial surge in cinema exports can be attributed to an increase in orders from abroad rather than Hollywood's conscious expansion into foreign markets. As Kristin Thompson notes, if the war had lasted two years rather than four, there is no guarantee that the American film industry would have held on to its competitive advantage (71).

The key change occurred in 1916 when American studios abandoned their policy of trading their films through London-based sales agents and began to handle exports directly. Given this greater degree of control, American producers and distributors began to take a much more active role in foreign trade, establishing subsidiary branches in South America, Asia, and of course, Europe. With domestic film production and export impaired by the practicalities of war, the European market was in no position to either resist or compete with the sudden expansion of American trade. By 1920, American exports of exposed film stood at 175m feet – five times the pre-war figure (Vasey 1996, 57). In Britain, 80% of the films exhibited in cinemas were imported from Hollywood (Murphy 1986, 51). However, despite their international success, American films still derived 65% of their gross income from the domestic audiences (Vasey 1996, 57). In fact, Hollywood's supremacy was to a large degree contingent on its exclusive access to the lucrative American market. Because a film's entire negative cost could be recovered at home, it could be sold abroad at virtually any price, as nearly all sales would be profit. The profitability of the American film industry also led to an exponential rise in film

budgets, generating lavish productions that poorer European industries could not safely compete against. The Great War thus proved pivotal in determining the course of British film history, establishing American films as a permanent, domineering presence not only in the British market but also in film markets around the world. Eighty years later, surprisingly little has changed.

The British response to the dominance of Hollywood has followed three basic patterns: competitive, industrial and protectionist. For the most part, all three policies have been employed simultaneously by different sections of the film establishment. The competitive response involves attempting to challenge Hollywood for its own domestic market, which has always been the world's richest and best protected. Whereas the introduction of sound between 1927 and 1930 had a negative (if temporary) effect on Hollywood exports to non-Anglophone nations, such language barriers did not exist in Britain. Hollywood imports did not require dubbing or subtitling, which was expensive and alienating to audiences – they could be sold directly, in unaltered form, just as silent films were. However, Anglophony was also seen by British filmmakers as an opportunity to invert US domination in Britain by making films that could be sold back to America. The policy was pioneered by Alexander Korda and his 1933 film The Private Life of Henry VIII, which grossed over \$500,000 in America (Murphy 1986, 55).<sup>2</sup> This extraordinary success spurred Korda to repeat his formula with more prestigious, history-led biopics. Unfortunately, The Private Life of Don Juan (1934) and Rembrandt (1936) proved much less successful. In the intervening years, Hollywood studios had appropriated the formula for their own purposes, producing such films as Mary of Scotland (1936) and, most blatantly of all, The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex (1939). The lessons are clear. As Peter Wollen notes, 'if a subaltern cinema comes up with a successful formula [...] the dominant (American) cinema is quite capable of absorbing it and reflecting it back to its county of origin' (129). Nevertheless, the Korda case is far from an isolated example. When Goldcrest Films found themselves at the top of their profession after Chariots of Fire (1981) and Gandhi (1982), they responded by

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<sup>2</sup> In real terms, The Private Life of Henry VIII may be the most successful non-American film ever released in the USA.



pumping their profits back into similar prestigious, historical epics, notably Revolution (1985) and The Mission (1986), which proved spectacularly unsuccessful and bankrupted the company. Again, when Four Weddings and a Funeral became an international box-office success in 1994, Hollywood studios responded by hiring Hugh Grant and director Mike Newell to make films in the USA. Moreover, the film's production company, Working Title, was subsequently absorbed by Hollywood conglomerate Universal when Polygram, its Dutch-owned parent company, was broken up. In this way, the occasional success of British films in Hollywood has too often proved to be a siren call to ambitious British filmmakers. As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith notes, Hollywood is 'inherently monopolistic' and tends to absorb all threats to its supremacy (1998, 15).<sup>3</sup> As a result, the American market has proved effectively closed to British filmmakers: whereas Hollywood currently commands around 80% of the British market, the British share of American box office in the 1990s rarely rose above 1 or 2% (Hill 1999b, 80).

Second, the industrial response to Hollywood has involved the creation of a strong economic film infrastructure in Britain, integrating production, distribution and exhibition interests along Hollywood lines in order to dominate the domestic market (Higson 1995, 10). Attempts to organise a vertically integrated film industry in Britain were most fully realised by the Rank Organisation and the Associated British Picture Corporation (APBC), who effectively operated a duopoly in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s, controlling 70% of all British studio space and a third of all cinema seats between them (Street 13). This enabled the companies to provide their cinema chains with British films through their production arms and Hollywood films through their relationships with American distributors. However, the domination of Rank and APBC was considered harmful to the British film industry, particularly by independent production companies, and in 1944 the matter was taken up by the Board of Trade. Their report, entitled 'Tendencies to Monopoly in the Cinematograph Industry', recommended imposing restrictions on further circuit expansion and changing booking regulations so that the industry might have 'freedom from foreign domination and freedom from dominating

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<sup>3</sup> Evidence of this practice can be seen in Hollywood's appropriation of the Hong Kong action genre in the mid-1990s and its more recent involvement in Indian Bollywood production.

British control' (Dickinson & Street, 142). The legislation recalls the Paramount decree of 1948, in which the US government brought the monopolistic practices of the major Hollywood studios into check. But whereas the American companies were able to weather the lean years that followed as they adjusted their business practices, Rank and ABPC, which were much smaller, proved less durable. The principle reason for this was the steady decline in British audiences from the mid-1940s onward. As leisure patterns shifted, the ability of British films to recoup their production costs on the domestic market was no longer assured and filmmakers were forced to market their films to international audiences in order to stay in business (Hill 1996, 106). By contrast, Hollywood companies were still able to count on the loyalty of a substantial (though also declining) home audience. Moreover, many of the old Hollywood studios were absorbed by media conglomerates and were able to sustain production through diversified interests in home video, TV and publishing. Rank and ABPC, on the other hand, responded to the squeeze by divesting firstly their production facilities and then their distribution networks. The process was completed in February 2000 when Rank sold its Odeon cinema chain to a venture capital group for £280m (Hill 2001, 30). The vacuum left by the Rank/ABPC duopoly has since been filled by American distributors and exhibitors and a raft of small, usually short-lived British production companies. In this climate, a vertically integrated film industry has become something of a Holy Grail for critics and policy-makers. According to Neil Watson, writing in 1999,

It is likely that the only way of creating a truly flourishing indigenous industry which delivers real benefits to the national economy is to encourage the creation of fully integrated companies, capable of producing both films and television programmes on a consistent basis, and able to exploit aggressively the markets opened up by the increasing convergence between the television, computer and telecommunications industries (86).

In other words, Britain needs a modern equivalent of Rank and ABPC. Fifty years too late, the British film community seems to have realised that a British monopoly is a more palatable alternative to an American one.

The final response to Hollywood influence has been the government protection of the British film market. Protectionism was first employed by European governments,

notably France and Germany, during the Great War as a means to regulate the import of American films. The policy has always been opposed by the American government, who have often taken aggressive measures to circumvent it, but it remains an important part of film policy in Europe. The first significant legislation passed in Britain was the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927, which required distributors in Britain to acquire a minimum quota of 7.5% British films and forced exhibitors to show a minimum of 5%. In 1936 the Act was reviewed and the quotas were raised to 20% and 15% respectively (Petley 1986, 32). Initially, the Act led to an increase in production as British film companies expanded their operations to meet the new demand. In later years, however, distributors and exhibitors elected to meet the quota by filling their schedules with cheap, rushed-off productions known as 'quota quickies'. Irrespective of their actual merit, this brace of 'quota quickies' came to signify the cultural humiliation of the British film industry: instead of winning audiences over to the virtues of locally produced film, they were made to facilitate the exhibition of Hollywood product. A similar embarrassment followed in 1947 when a cash-strapped British government imposed a 75% *ad valorem* duty on all American film imports. The Motion Picture Association of American (MPAA) responded by boycotting Britain altogether, giving British producers the unexpected opportunity to dominate the home market. Unfortunately, they proved unequipped to capitalise on the situation, and when the duty was lifted after just seven months, the British market was flooded with the stockpiled surplus of Hollywood films. Small producers were driven to bankruptcy and even Rank and ABPC were shaken (ibid, 36). In 1951, the Labour government introduced a more cautious protectionist policy based on existing French and Italian models. The Eady Levy paid a proportion of the price of every cinema ticket sold in Britain to a fund and shared the proceeds between British film producers according to their box-office earnings. As with the quota, the Eady Levy was successful in stimulating domestic production, but it also offered support to overseas companies as long as they employed predominantly British facilities and personnel. Thus, under Department of Trade and Industry guidelines, films such as Star Wars (1977) and Superman (1978) were classified as British productions and received Eady subsidy. The impact of the Eady Levy was therefore, to some extent, self-negating:

it supported British production, but it also supported the kind of Hollywood films that had weakened British film production in the first place.

Government protection of British film production has for the most part been poorly managed, but it has provided much-needed support for filmmakers. By 1984, the Eady Levy alone was worth £4.5m a year (*ibid*, 38). It was perceived as something of a blow, therefore, when protectionist policies were suspended wholesale by the Thatcher government in line with its free market economic strategies. Between 1982 and 1985, the distribution/exhibition quotas and the Eady Levy were duly abolished, leaving British film production exposed to market forces for the first time in almost sixty years (Dickinson & Street, 248). According to the economic liberalist ideology of the government, it was not the place of government to intervene if British audiences freely chose Hollywood over British films. On the other hand, as John Caughie has argued, if the government continues to leave the market to its own devices, there may cease to be a British cinema for the public to exercise their choice upon at all (6). Protectionist film policy reared its head again during the Uruguay round of the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations in 1993, when the US delegation sought to deregulate the European audio-visual market completely by abolishing all quotas and subsidies. They presented the issue in economic terms, arguing in favour of free markets, consumer choice and the redundancy of quota systems in general (Nowell-Smith 1998, 2).<sup>4</sup> Conversely, EU nations, marshaled into a united front by France, argued that films and TV could not be compared to other export/import industries because they were 'cultural products', and therefore ought to be exempt from free-trade provision. Against US economic rhetoric, they argued for the right to national self-expression, the importance of cultural identities and for the resistance of alien cultural hegemony (Nowell-Smith 1998, 2). The refusal of the EU to shift its position resulted in a breakdown in negotiations, which was eventually resolved by the omission of audio-visual products from the trade agreement in what the French delegation called a 'cultural exception' clause. The British delegation upheld the French position, but its enthusiasm

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, this position concealed the fact that Hollywood's international oligopoly has for decades been dependent on the direct political and economic assistance of the US government (Miller 1996, 76).

was muted. After all, British cinema was already on its way to being fully deregulated at the time. According to Angus Finney,

The final months of the negotiation [...] highlighted the tendency for French politicians, culturecrats and industryites to assume that what is best for France is also best for the rest of Europe (1996, 5).

Film policy among the member states of the European Union was far more fragmented than the GATT negotiations suggested. There is evidence that cultural protectionism may even be losing support among French industry figures. In December 2001, Jean-Marie Messier, CEO of the newly merged Franco-American conglomerate Vivendi-Universal, caused a media furore in France when he declared that 'the Franco-French cultural exception is dead' ('Messier and Messier', 47). As Vivendi-Universal own TV Company Canal Plus, which funds much of the French film industry, Messier seemed (prior to his sudden departure) in a position to make good on his promise. Far from bringing Britain's film policy back into line with the rest of Europe, then, the GATT negotiations may only have delayed the inevitable collapse of all barriers to American trade, in the process exposing critical weaknesses in the EU defence. Future trade negotiation will tell whether the EU will continue to resist American economic pressure or whether it will follow Britain's lead into a deregulated film market.

We may conclude from these events that Britain's competitive, industrial and protectionist responses to the presence of American film in the home market have done little to stave off the steady domination of Hollywood product or to invigorate the domestic industry. Each approach has been associated with a certain degree of success, but in each case it has proved decisively short-term. However, British producers have often found that if they cannot prevent Hollywood's market occupation, they can at least profit by it. From this position a fourth response emerges: collaboration, whereby investment is sought from Hollywood companies, usually via co-production arrangements. In other words, if you can't beat them, join them, or at least work for them. American investment in British production was particularly prominent in the early to mid-sixties, as Hollywood struggled to reorientate its business practices. The British film industry was no better off economically, but its popular culture had become fashionable

in the USA through the so-called 'swinging London' movement. Although generally associated with pop music and fashion, a number of British films were caught up in the momentum and achieved considerable international success, particularly Dr. No (1962), Tom Jones (1963) and A Hard Day's Night (1964). Investment in British cinema made good financial sense, and the limited amounts of US funding already in place increased exponentially: by 1966, 75% of production finance came from American sources; by 1967 the figure stood at 90% (Murphy 1986, 64). As Peter Lev notes, 'the British film industry was essentially taken over by American companies' (25). Some of the films produced under this arrangement were highly successful, among them Alfie (1966) for Paramount and Blow Up (1966) for MGM, but other projects proved less profitable, including Fox's Modesty Blaise (1966) and UA's The Battle of Britain (1969). The failure of these films was part of a more general downturn in Hollywood's balance sheets during the period, due principally to over-production and declining audiences, and the studios responded by closing down their expensive overseas production facilities and scaling back foreign investment (Murphy 1986, 66). With its principal source of investment withdrawn, the British film industry was left to atrophy. The events of the sixties were repeated on a smaller scale in the early 1980s, and may be happening again at present, illustrating the hazards of over dependence on the capricious favour of Hollywood financing. Producer Sally Hibbin has perhaps outlined the problem most forcefully:

There are catastrophic cycles in the history of British film. This is how they run: British movies suddenly become internationally popular; the Americans arrive and buy up everything they can; some years later they pull out; our industry collapses in the wake... It has almost become a tradition in our industry (40).

This problem can be accounted for by what Nick Roddick calls 'the paradox of an infrastructure without (always) an industry to go with it' (6). In other words, Britain has managed to maintain high-quality production facilities and technical personnel without maintaining the levels of indigenous production and trade necessary to constitute a film industry. As long as this situation is sustained, Britain will remain an attractive investment for Hollywood companies: the talent and the facilities are already in place,

they only need someone to hire them. The implications of this practice for the production of British cinema, on the other hand, are another matter.

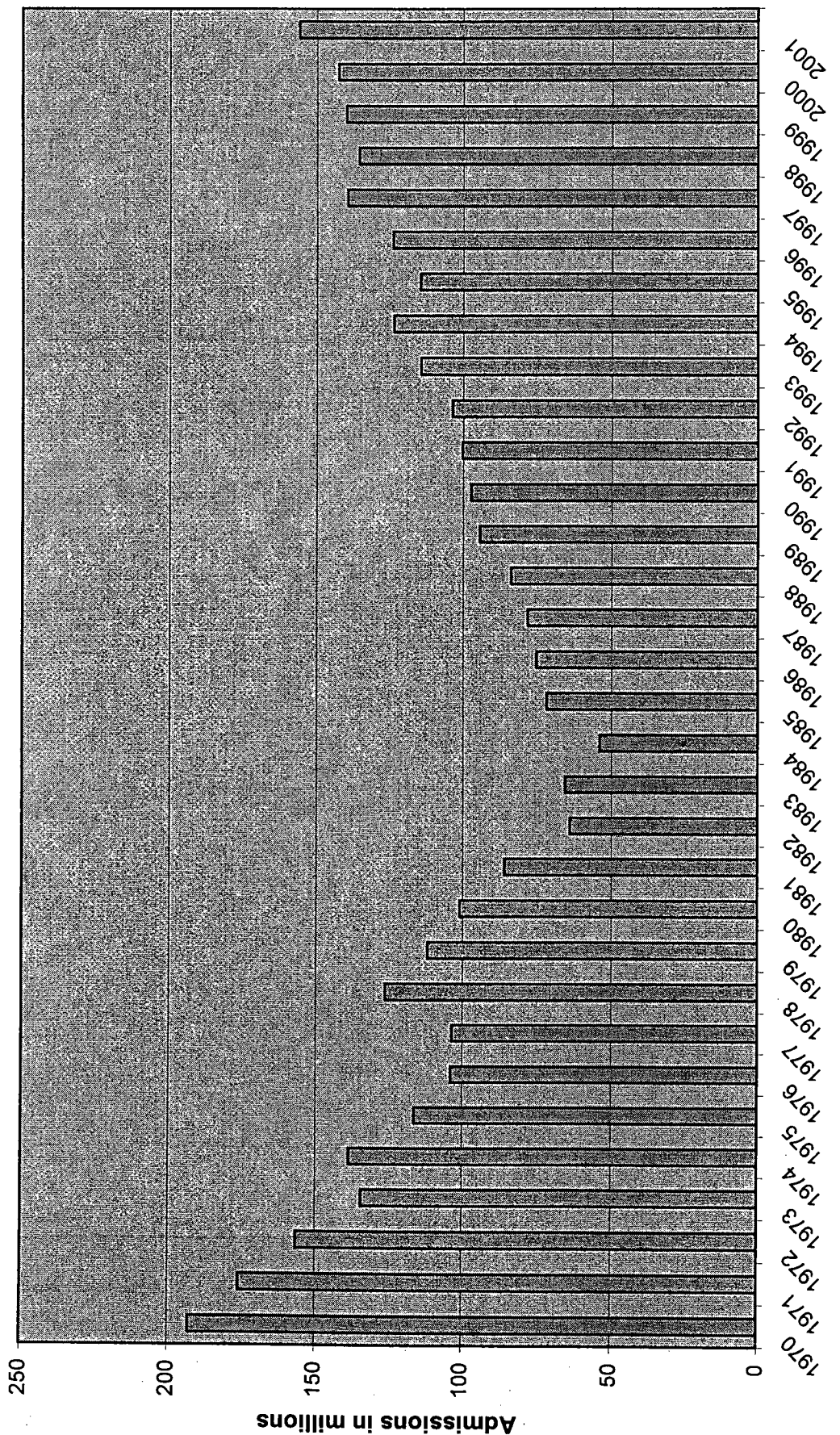
If a central theme can be identified in the economic history of British cinema, it is the tendency to favour short-term opportunities over foresight and investment. When British films have been popular in the USA, as with The Private Life of Henry VIII, producers have often responded by trying to repeat the formula rather than by taking the opportunity to experiment with new ideas. Similarly, protectionist policies in Britain have been hampered by the failure of legislators to take into account the long-term consequences of their policies. Likewise, those that opposed the Rank/ABPC duopoly failed to see the greater problems posed by the structures that filled its vacuum. But despite their lack of real impact, the industrial and protectionist responses were united by the unquestioned belief that Hollywood's domination of the British market could and *should* be resisted. It is curious, then, that these policies have gone hand in hand with attempts to collude with Hollywood in order to exploit the home-market for mutual profit. While this policy generates revenue in the short-term, they have left British film production vulnerable to boom/bust cycles. More importantly, however, the simultaneous operation of these policies is contradictory: British film producers cannot properly resist Hollywood when they are cooperating with it, and they cannot properly cooperate with Hollywood when they are resisting it. It is also apparent that the existence of a self-sufficient British film industry is far from an outlandish proposition. As the Rank/ABPC duopoly indicates, all that it really requires is that the British economy support two or more vertically-integrated film companies who invest in local production and who distribute and exhibit both British and imported films. With these things in mind, I will now turn to British film production in the 1990s.

### *They Think It's All Over*

At first glance, British film at the end of the 1990s appeared to be in a rude state of health. Figures show that film production and cinema admissions in Britain rose steadily through the decade after slumping in the 1980s (see figs. 1 & 2). The extraordinary and

**Fig 1: UK Cinema Admissions 1970-2001**

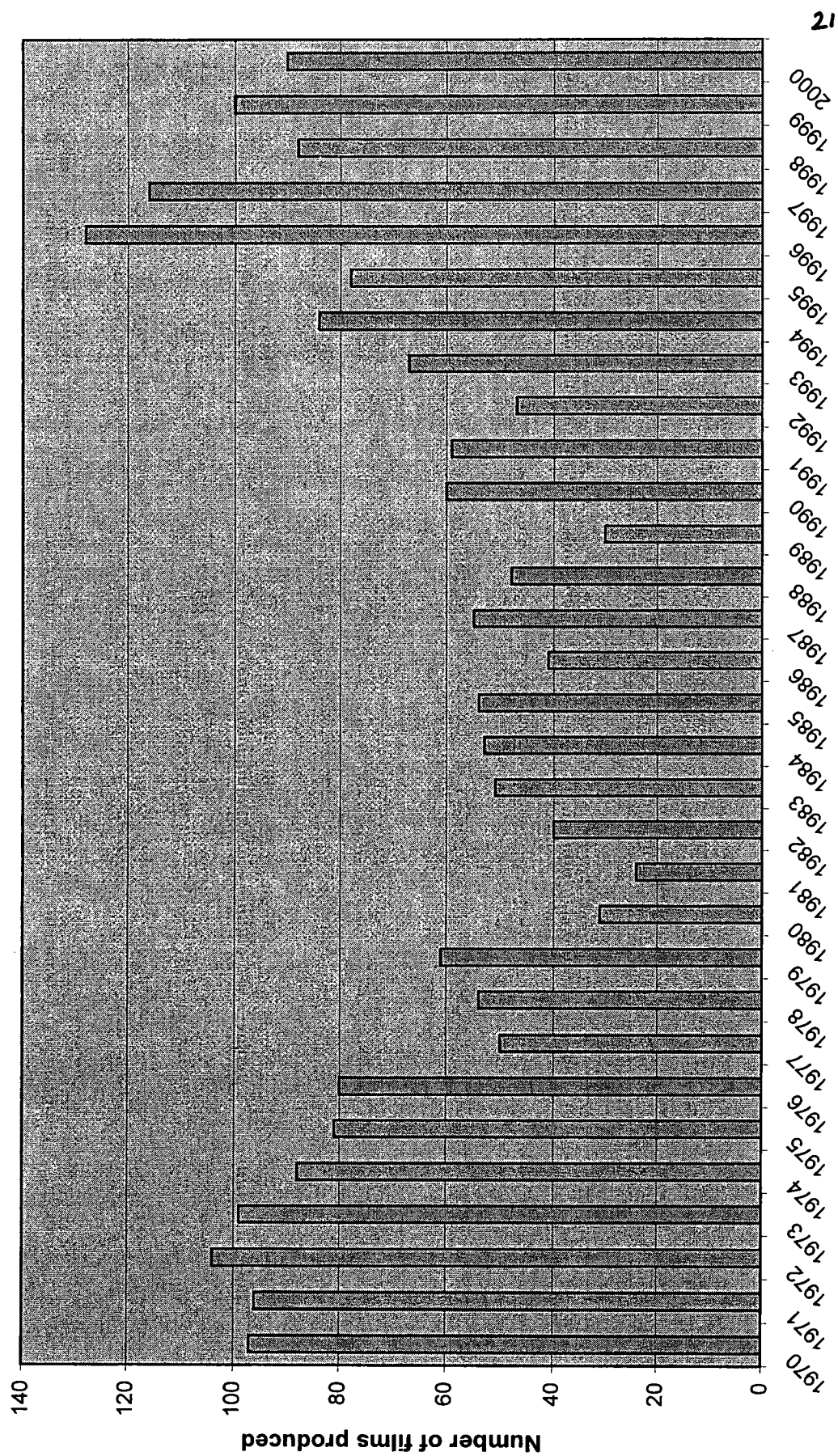
(source: [www.bfi.org.uk/facts/stats/alltime/uk\\_admissions.html](http://www.bfi.org.uk/facts/stats/alltime/uk_admissions.html))





**Fig. 2: UK Feature Film Production 1970-2000**

(source: [www.bfi.org.uk/facts/stats/2000/ukfeatures\\_made.html](http://www.bfi.org.uk/facts/stats/2000/ukfeatures_made.html))



largely unforeseen box office success of Four Weddings and a Funeral highlighted a demand among British cinemagoers for domestically produced films. The trend continued in the years that followed, as Trainspotting (1996), Bean (1997), The Full Monty (1997), Sliding Doors (1997), Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels (1998), Notting Hill (1999), Billy Elliot (2000), Chicken Run (2000), Bridget Jones' Diary (2001) and Gosford Park (2001) recorded UK box office grosses over £10m.<sup>5</sup> Outside Britain, British films have proved no less popular or profitable, with Four Weddings and a Funeral, Bean, The Full Monty, Notting Hill and Bridget Jones' Diary each grossing over \$200m worldwide. Some critics suggested that British cinema's renewed commercial direction was matched by a new aesthetic vigour. In 1997, for example, the Venice Film Festival featured a 'British Renaissance' sidebar. In the same year, Harlan Kennedy claimed that 'Britain is benefiting from a hole in the zeitgeist layer... Tongues are loosened and imagination freed as a heyday of national pride shakes down into a postlude of self-assessment and funky, reindividualised visions' (5). However, in order to ascertain the significance and durability of this revival, it is necessary to examine it from its roots: money.

At present there are three principle investors in British filmmaking: TV companies, the government (via public subsidy) and overseas production companies. Of Britain's TV companies, Channel Four has been most active in film production. Launched in 1982, the station has its roots in the 1977 Annan Committee report, which recommended that broadcasting institutions in Britain be decentralised. Channel 4 was

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<sup>5</sup> Source: AC Nielsen/EDI/Screen Finance/BFI, taken from [www.bfi.org.uk/facts/stats/index.html](http://www.bfi.org.uk/facts/stats/index.html). Box office statistics (compiled by market research company AC Nielson) are not exact and account for only a fraction of any given film's gross revenue after the money has been counted from international territories and ancillary markets. The figures do not indicate the number of people to have actually viewed a given film, nor do they account for inflation. However, box office grosses are favoured within the film industry as a means to indicate the overall takings, as the two figures are broadly proportional. Statistics quoted in this paper should therefore be interpreted as indicative of a film's financial success relative to other films, and not as absolute.

established along the lines of a publishing house: rather than producing its own material, it was required to commission and broadcast programmes from independent production companies, with the specific remit of catering to minority interests. Film production was carried out along similar lines: a major part of the station's drama budget was committed to film, and independent companies were contracted to produce the material, usually in collaboration with other funding organisations. Channel 4's pledge to minority groups tended to be manifested in films that were experimental in form, critical of the status quo and removed from mainstream British filmmaking. As David Aukin, Channel 4's head of drama has stated, the company encouraged 'the making of films from original screenplays dealing with contemporary themes rather than adaptations or the dreaded biopic' (183). Other TV companies had been producing feature length drama for decades, but Channel 4 was the first to see the possibilities of exhibiting this material theatrically prior to its broadcast. More than merely generating an economic return in themselves, cinema releases added prestige to productions, attracting greater audiences when they were subsequently broadcast (Grade, 179). Because they did not depend on direct box office returns as conventional production companies do, Channel 4 could afford not to make money on their films. As John Hill has suggested, Channel 4 effectively subsidised film production in Britain through the 1980s, in as much as its investment was not matched by the number of programming hours or the ratings it generated (1999a, 61). This situation led some to regard Channel 4 as midwives to a golden age in British filmmaking, citing such films as My Beautiful Laundrette (1985), Riff-Raff (1990) and Naked (1993) as evidence. In 1987, Sight and Sound magazine suggested that Channel 4 had supplied filmmakers with 'a continuity of financial support not seen since the heyday of Balcon's Ealing Studios' (Giles, 75).

However, Channel 4's funding policies changed in 1993 when the station was made responsible for selling its own advertising. According to Hill, 'with the channel no longer guaranteed its income, and competition with other television companies for advertising, there was increased pressure not only to make programming more 'popular' but also to take less (sic) artistic and financial risks' (1999a, 61). Channel 4 thus began investing in bigger-budget, more mainstream features. Examples included Four Weddings and a Funeral and Trainspotting, which brought the company unforeseen

commercial returns. In order to capitalise on these and other successes, Channel 4 restructured its filmmaking interests in 1998 as FilmFour Ltd, a new 'commercial subsidiary' integrating the company's production, distribution and sales interests as a 'ministudio' with a budget of £40m a year (Hill 2001, 31). The commercial ambitions of the new company were flagged up by the appointment of Paul Webster, previously the head of Miramax's UK division, as FilmFour's CEO. Thus reformed, the channel's investment policy became even more conservative and internationally orientated, something reflected in the seven film co-production and distribution deal it announced with Warner Bros. in 2000. The first film released under this partnership was Charlotte Gray (2002), a £10m literary adaptation with multinational financing and a Hollywood cast. Though not quite a 'dreaded biopic', the film had little of the formal innovation and social commentary that distinguished Channel 4's early output. In many ways, the BBC's involvement in film has followed the path forged by Channel 4. The channel has a long and prestigious history in TV drama, but it was not until the early 1990s that features like Truly, Madly, Deeply (1991) and Enchanted April (1992) were distributed theatrically. Further successes came with films like Mrs Brown (1997) and Billy Elliot, encouraging the company to raise its financial stake in production. At present, BBC Films invests between £10m and £15m on filmmaking through deals with BBC Worldwide, the commercial arm of the company, and private investors Harvest Pictures. Like Channel 4, most of this money is tied up in medium-budget, international productions such as the forthcoming The Assumption with Juliette Binoche. Channel 4 and the BBC can thus be seen to have followed their success funding low-budget, domestically orientated films by investing in expensive, more mainstream films aimed at the international market. Of course, neither company has abandoned their commitment to lower-budget, more experimental filmmaking, but from a financial point of view it has become a minority interest.

Channel 4's attempt to turn its fifteen year association with British filmmaking into a commercially viable enterprise came to an end in July 2002 when it was announced that FilmFour was to be dismantled. In place of the vertically integrated operation, Channel 4's distribution and sales arms are to be closed and production reabsorbed by the company's TV drama division on an annual budget scaled back from £30m to around

£10m. FilmFour's deal with Warner Bros. will presumably be invalidated. Despite its basis in Channel 4's popular achievements of the mid-1990s, FilmFour's production slate was conspicuously short on commercial success: of the sixty or so films it supported, only East is East (1999) took off at the box office, and its audience was mostly limited to the UK. A large part of the problem was that FilmFour's big investments had failed to pay off: Charlotte Gray grossed just £1.2m at the UK box office, though it eventually went into profit overseas, and Lucky Break (2001), pitched as a sequel to The Full Monty in an extravagant advertising campaign, also performed beneath expectations. FilmFour also stands to lose its entire \$5m stake in the Robin Williams comedy Death to Smoochy (2002), which sank at the US box office earlier this year. The failure of these investments was all the more ignominious for the fact that they seemed such solid commercial prospects: losing money on risk-taking ventures is one thing, losing it on films calculated to appeal to a popular audience might smack of incompetence. But despite FilmFour's failure to turn a profit, the decision to close operations after just four years struck many as too hasty. As Stuart Jeffries noted, 'two duff films, after all, isn't unforgivable, and failure can be instructive' (16). The decision to shut down Channel Four's distribution and sales divisions also came in for criticism. According to an 'industry insider' quoted in The Independent, 'you're getting rid of the elements that will make you the money... They're lessening the chances of their films getting a release' (Jury, 7). The reasons underlying the closure of FilmFour will no doubt become clearer as more information emerges, as will its long term effects on British film production, but at present it seems the biggest impediment to success may have been its own excessive expectations. According to a Channel 4 spokesperson, FilmFour suffered from its inability to 'become a meaningful player internationally against the sheer scale of the major studios' (ibid). As FilmFour joins the end of a long, distinguished list of failed British filmmaking ventures (London Films, Ealing, Elstree, Gainsborough, Palace, Goldcrest), the futility of such large-scale ambitions seems starkly apparent.

The anti-protectionist policies of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government were overturned to a limited extent in 1995. However, rather than reinstating the Eady levy, as many had hoped, the new legislation allocated a share of revenues from the newly established National Lottery to film production through the Arts Council of

England (ACE). One of the ACE's key innovations was the strengthening of partnerships with Britain's fragmented, small-scale private sector. To this end, long-term franchises were created with three independent production companies – DNA Films (£29m), Pathé Pictures (£33m) and the Film Consortium (£33.5m) – in the hope of creating 'ministudios' which would propel British film production towards self-sufficiency. Instead of producing films on a 'one off' basis, this investment would allow production to be mounted on a scale sufficient to spread the risks of investment, as Hollywood studios have done for decades. The process was streamlined by the Labour government in May 2000 with the creation of the Film Council; an umbrella organisation merging the Arts Council of England, British Screen, the British Film Institute and the British Film Commission. The Film Council is currently responsible for distributing £55m of lottery money per annum (including £15m tied up in the three franchises inherited from the ACE) under the familiar, though entirely laudable mandate of creating a 'sustainable UK film industry'. The organisation is to a certain degree culturally motivated, and aims to 'back radical and innovative filmmakers' through its £5m 'New Cinema Fund'. However, as with Channel 4 and the BBC, the bulk of the Film Council's money has been targeted at higher-budget films and will be distributed by the Council's £10m 'Premiere Fund' in order to facilitate 'the production of popular mainstream British films' ('Towards a Sustainable...'). John Woodward, the Council's CEO, has explained the thinking behind this policy in admirably blunt terms:

Filmmaking is a business like any other, the fact that we are dealing with public money should not affect our policy towards providing assistance and finance... We are certainly not prepared, nowadays, to support small art films with a tough, social subject matter or European foreign language films, which won't find a distributor in Britain. We have to accept the fact that the British public goes to see, 85% of the time, American films... The Film Council will help finance films that the British public will go and see in the multiplexes on a Friday night. Films that entertain people and make them feel good (Poirier, 12).

True to their roots in public funding, the Film Council would seem to be engaging with the reality of modern cinema culture in Britain by investing in explicitly populist entertainment. It is still rather early to assess the performance of the Film Council, but

some observations can be made. The three ACE franchises they inherited have, at least, been very slow starters, coming in for vicious criticism by the English press when it was reported in January 2001 that all but only one of the fourteen films produced under the franchise had turned a profit (James, 301).<sup>6</sup> The Film Council's Premier Fund, on the other hand, can already count four significant successes: Mike Bassett: Football Manager (2001) and Bend it Like Beckham (2002), low-budget football comedies aimed squarely at the UK market; and Gosford Park and The Importance of Being Earnest (2002), medium-budget US-partnered heritage films which have sold well both in Britain and internationally. Of the two categories, the latter, with its greater international appeal, seems a more probable indicator of the organisation's future. Accordingly, forthcoming productions with large Premier Fund investment include Five Children and It, produced by the American Jim Henson Company, adaptations of Anthony Trollope's Eustace Diamonds and John Masefield's Box of Delights, and a biopic about Charles Darwin's wife. All seem sound financial investments, but quite how they contribute to 'a sustainable UK film industry' is unclear.

At the start of the 1990s, it was widely forecast that coproductions with European producers, particularly in the EU, indicated the way forward for British cinema. Much of this expectation came from the anticipated creation of the European Economic Area in 1994, forming a commercial space of comparable size to the USA (Hill 1994, 60). It was hoped that coproductions would spread the financial burden of film production, enabling European filmmakers to compete with Hollywood on something like equal terms, and allowing filmmakers from smaller nations to develop indigenous film industries (Jäkel, 146). To this end, two pan-European production funds emerged at the beginning of the decade. The first was Eurimages, established by the Council of Europe, with the mandate of supporting 'works which uphold the values that are part and parcel of the European identity' (ibid, 147). Britain initially refused to join, but in 1993 the Conservative government relented, only to withdraw again in 1996. Nevertheless, in these three years over fifty British films received partial funding, around one third of Britain's total

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<sup>6</sup> The film in question was An Ideal Husband (1999). However, such journalistic reports raise the question of how the 'profitability' or otherwise of films is calculated.

production, including Land and Freedom and The Pillow Book (both 1995) (Christie, 74). The second scheme was the European Union's MEDIA programme, a smaller fund dedicated to promoting cooperation between European producers. In 1996, the EU built on these foundations with MEDIA II, which included more concrete proposals to develop pan-European distribution. Both Eurimages and MEDIA can point to specific successes, but an integrated European film industry capable of challenging Hollywood's domination of domestic markets remains a distant prospect. The principle reason for this is the absence of a homogenous culture, popular or otherwise, in Europe. Whereas the USA may identify itself as a single, relatively unitary structure, Europe remains an assortment of diverse, often fiercely independent nationalities. Consequently, films attempting to convey, as Eurimages puts it, 'the European identity' are in for a hard time. A second set of factors, and one more directly linked to Britain's present refusal to rejoin the Eurimages fund, is that European funding tends to operate according to cultural imperatives, whereas British film policy currently favours populist filmmaking. As John Woodward has so forcefully stated, art film production is no longer on the official agenda in Britain. It is conspicuous that Peter Greenaway, Ken Loach and Mike Leigh, arguably Britain's most distinguished *auteurs*, have been recruited into continental funding mechanisms. Greenaway's 8½ Women (1999), for example, was registered as a British/German/Dutch/Luxemburg co-production.

Contrary to many predictions therefore, the most successful British coproductions in the 1990s have been made with American rather than European partners. Examples include The English Patient (1996), financed with Miramax, The Full Monty with 20th Century Fox, and Chicken Run with DreamWorks. In some cases, successful British producers have been able to strike long-term funding deals with Hollywood companies. FilmFour's deal with Warner Bros. has already been mentioned, but more significant is the 1999 deal made between Universal Pictures and Working Title Films, producers of Four Weddings and a Funeral, Bean and Notting Hill, among others. The terms of the deal guarantee the company a reported \$150m per annum for five years and allows them to green-light budgets up to \$25m on their own, enabling the company, as Andy Beckett has put it, to smooth out British cinema's bumpy cycle into 'a more American pattern of steadily accumulating film releases and profits' (2001, 2). With Bridget Jones's Diary and



Captain Corelli's Mandolin (2001), Working Title added Miramax to its slate of investment partners.<sup>7</sup> Following this precedent, Fragile Films signed a 'first-look' distribution deal with Miramax in 2002, and in the same year lottery franchise DNA Films entered negotiations to sell 40% of their stock to Sony. Partnering with Hollywood companies has considerable economic advantages for British producers, not least because Hollywood companies generally have access to larger amounts of money than their European counterparts. More importantly, a Hollywood partner will effectively guarantee the kind of international distribution and exhibition that is needed to make a film economically viable. Until the European film industry provides a viable alternative to Hollywood's global infrastructure therefore, American coproductions will remain a more lucrative option for British filmmakers.

Anglo-US coproductions also make good commercial sense from Hollywood's perspective, particularly in light of the industry's changing business practices. With the average Hollywood release budgeted at around \$50m and prints and advertising costs at an additional half that figure, filmmaking has become an excessively risky business. Investment is high, the market is unpredictable and by the standards of other comparably sized industries, profits are low.<sup>8</sup> The logical, if not entirely obvious solution to this problem in Hollywood has been to move away from production altogether. In the last few years, the studios have turned a full circle from their roots in the 1920s as self-contained film factories and begun to act primarily as investors in films developed and delivered to them by small, autonomous production companies. As a result, it is the independent producers, rather than the studios, who shoulder the financial risk. Of course, independent production companies are nothing new in Hollywood. For years they have maintained close, if essentially subordinate relations with the major companies. What is new is the volume of their output – according to a Screendaily report, 49 of the 101 films released by the seven major studios in 2001 were co-produced by independent companies

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<sup>7</sup> Miramax handled North American distribution for the films while Universal dealt with the rest of the world.

<sup>8</sup> According to Roger Smith, the Hollywood's 'filmed entertainment' divisions had collective revenues of \$34.8 billion in 2000. Their profits, however, were \$2.3 billion, giving them an operating margin of just 6% (60). By contrast, Microsoft currently declares an operating margin over 40%.

(Goodridge). However, if Hollywood companies have been eager to turn away from production, they have been equally eager to intensify their control of domestic and international distribution and exhibition.<sup>9</sup> The international film industry is now structured so that distribution swallows up the majority of box office revenue, enabling Hollywood companies to profit directly from successful films in the world's major markets (Glaister, 15). Thus, even if a production company will on paper receive a larger percentage of a film's profit than the studio, this figure is liable to be very low once distribution and exhibition fees have been subtracted. In this way, Hollywood companies are able to shut out the producers who developed the material and took most of the risks from the real money. The recent success of British production companies such as Working Title, not to mention the failure of FilmFour, is very much a symptom of this massive restructuring in Hollywood. They assemble the packages, the Hollywood companies invest, often in association with other sources, and the product is delivered back to the studio to be distributed. Of course, there is still a great deal of money to be made in this way by successful production companies, but while Hollywood is able to weather the potential effects of a succession of unsuccessful films, smaller companies, as FilmFour discovered, will find themselves less well protected.

We can identify a subtle but substantial shift in British film policy during the 1990s. First, whereas British film producers had previously made half-hearted attempts to overturn Hollywood's domination of the British market, more recent policies have concentrated on colluding with Hollywood by developing coproduction relationships and encouraging investment. Second, whereas British film policy has in the past been fragmented and self-negating, in the 1990s it grew in cohesion. Rather than falling between stools, simultaneously resisting Hollywood and collaborating with it, the pursuit of profit has now overtaken the protection of indigenous culture as the motivating principle behind film policy. All of Britain's governmentally regulated production sources – the Film Council, the BBC, Channel 4 – are now committed to film subsidy as a commercial rather than an artistic endeavour. As a consequence, much of their capital

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<sup>9</sup> It remains to be seen how successfully Hollywood companies will hold on to their distribution networks as increasing numbers of people obtain films free of charge via peer-to-peer Internet file sharing systems.

remains invested in high-budget American coproductions aimed at international audiences. Of course, it should not be overlooked that Britain still sustains a vibrant, low-budget film sector that is committed to experimentation and risk-taking. Recent (critical) successes include Under the Skin (1997) and Babymother (1998), funded by Channel 4, and Ratcatcher (1999) and Last Resort (2000), funded by the BBC. However, this kind of filmmaking exists very much in the margins of British film culture and is catered to by side-projects such as the Film Council's New Cinema Fund and Channel 4's 'FilmFour Lab'.<sup>10</sup> It might therefore be argued that the Film Council, BBC Films, and (prior to its closure) FilmFour are much closer in ideology and operation to privately owned production companies than to publicly supported bodies, their implicit aim being to generate profit rather than to support indigenous film production. British film producers thus seem to have thrown in their lot with Hollywood, severing ties with Europe and sidelining ambitions for industrial self-sufficiency in the process. The benefits of this direction are obvious. As a result of Hollywood investment, British film production is enjoying a rare and prolonged period of prosperity. The majority of profits made by British films may be absorbed back into Hollywood, but enough remains to fund an active production sector. And as a result of their international popularity, British films may be reaching a wider audience than they ever have before. However, the disadvantages are equally apparent. As film is now almost entirely dependent on the support of Hollywood companies, it is more vulnerable than ever to collapse if this support bottoms out. Moreover, given its dependence on American support, the chances of an indigenous industry in Britain developing sufficiently to break its economic shackles seem slim. In the following chapter, I will examine the ideological implications of this economic situation for film production in Britain.

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<sup>10</sup> In keeping with Channel 4's contractual obligation to produce minority interest programming, the FilmFour Lab is due to survive the break-up of FilmFour.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Cinema/Nation/Globalisation

To live in one land, is captivitie,  
To runne all countries, a wild roguery.

– John Donne, 'Elegie III' (141).

#### *Who Do We Think We Are?*

Arguments in favour of indigenous British production and the resistance of Hollywood influence have frequently centred on the notion of 'national cinema' and its supposed significance to British culture. The term implies a relationship between a nation and the cinema that is produced within its borders, but what precisely is this relationship? Does a nation confer unique properties on its cinema? Is a national cinema nationalist in nature? On an economic level, some generalisations may be made. In many nations, filmmaking is supported by bodies that are regulated on a national, governmental level. The Film Council, for example, is bound by legislation to fund predominantly British projects.<sup>11</sup> In Britain then, as in many other nations, the production of a British cinema is promoted by the state as a matter of policy. In order to implement these policies, it has been necessary for governments to establish precisely what constitutes a 'British' film. The 1927 Cinematograph Act, this was determined by the proportion of labour costs paid to British nationals (Maltby & Vasey, 33). Similarly, current British legislation stipulates that to be classified as British, a film must spend 70% of its budget in the UK with a further 70% of labour costs spent on European and Commonwealth citizens (Dyja, 14). However, the association of capital with production is primarily a condition of a national film *industry* rather than a national cinema. It is entirely possible for a film made with, for example,

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<sup>11</sup> Government funding in Britain is also regulated through the Scottish Arts Council, the Arts Council of Wales and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. However, in each case, the level of investment in filmmaking is low, obliging many Scottish, Welsh and Ulster filmmakers to seek additional funding through the centralised Film Council.

British investment to bear no relation to Britain itself. Conversely, there is no logical reason why a film funded by sources outside the nation could not accurately depict Britain. The term 'national cinema', I think, refers not to an industrial infrastructure but to some degree of cultural specificity in the film itself. Given this distinction, the question of national cinema needs to be first of all addressed from a cultural perspective.

The best place to begin this consideration is with the meaning of 'nation' itself. As recent theorists have highlighted, the modern nation is articulated in a way that conceals its fundamental artificiality. The nation is typically constructed as a timeless, stable, homogenous, and above all, natural entity. In reality, the nation-state is a relatively recent invention, developed primarily for the purposes of political administration. According to Ernest Gellner, the formation of the nation was the inevitable outcome of modern industrialisation and the ensuing need to organise populations into 'large, centrally educated, culturally homogenous groups' that could be put to work in an efficient manner (35). Moreover, nations are rarely as mono-cultural as their construction suggests. In most cases, the rhetoric of homogeneity fails to represent the nation's cultural diversity, in the process reinforcing the interests of its dominant political groups. The ideology that creates and perpetuates these myths of nationhood is nationalism. Nationalism developed in North America and Western Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century as a doctrine of popular freedom and sovereignty, stressing particularly the desirability of independence and self-determination in political matters. However, inherent in nationalism's doctrine is the notion that the nation is the exclusive, historically determined possession of its inhabitants and that there is an absolute, biological connection between the nation's soil and the blood of its inhabitants. Because of this ingrained elitism, nationalism has often been associated with essentialist and discriminatory practices, particularly racism. Nevertheless, many critics have found it possible to speak of a 'national identity' shared by the citizens of a specific nation, although crucially they have emphasised that it is culturally rather than biologically determined. Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as an 'imagined political community' has been particularly significant in this regard. Anderson argues that as the inhabitant of nations will never know the majority of their patriots, any national comradeship they feel, any sense of community that goes beyond face-to-face contact, is

essentially a fantasy. The imagining of the nation tends to ebb and flow according to historical circumstance. When the stability or sovereignty of the nation is at stake, as for example in times of war, the nation may be united by a common sense of duty and purpose. In less eventful times, the national imaginary may be weaker. Far more than any political structure, it is this intangible sense of national identity that constitutes and holds together a nation. The fate of the nation and the national identity of its inhabitants are therefore bound together: a nation is born when a population begins to identify themselves as belonging to it; and its existence is threatened if the same population ceases to identify themselves with it. As Colin McArthur has noted, national identity is 'a process rather than an essence', the product of culture rather than nature (55). Because of this, national identity, and by extension the nation itself, are fundamentally unstable phenomena and are liable to shift, develop and even expire over time.

At the heart of Anderson's Imagined Communities (1983) is the notion that nations are formed through the conveyance of national identity via communicative technologies. Consistent with Gellner's modernist analysis, Anderson identifies the mechanised production and commodification of the novel and the newspaper in the eighteenth century as the primary agents in this process. Both media have the capacity to unite diverse populations by coordinating a 'homogenous, empty time' in a recognisable national terrain, enabling events to be 'imagined' and experienced simultaneously across otherwise unconnected spaces. In the same way, print technologies also have the effect of standardising a specific vernacular as the language of national communication, giving the inhabitants of a national space the means to understand each other (25-33). Anderson's interest is primarily in the way media facilitates the formation of the nation-state, but as Michael Billig has suggested, communication also plays a pivotal role in the way national identity is refreshed and maintained in the period that follows. Coining the term 'banal nationalism', Billig argues that for contemporary societies, national identity is so deeply embedded in the media that it functions on an almost subliminal level. Examples of this inconspicuous nation building include the mode of address adopted in news reports, the geography of weather forecasts and the reproduction of the national flag (70). The notion that a nation is constituted and then sustained by the discourses of communication has had an immense influence on contemporary thought. Although Anderson has not

extended his analysis of print technologies into the audiovisual sphere, modern conceptions of 'national cinema' are very much indebted to his writing. Of course, cinema cannot be regarded as a prerequisite for the formation of a nation in the way that newspapers and novels were. After all, cinema was invented and first developed in nations where stable national cultures and cultures were long established. In film studies, therefore, the emphasis has not been on the capacity of cinema to build nations, but on the role it plays in sustaining and circulating pre-existing national identities.

The principle that cinema is connected to the culture of its producing nation and thereby articulates national identity was actually embedded in film studies long before Imagined Communities was published. Most notoriously, in From Caligari to Hitler (1947), Siegfried Kracauer proposes that the films of the German Expressionist movement were evidence of a fundamental crisis in German society and prefigured the popular rise of Nazism in the 1930s. Similarly, Charles Barr's Ealing Studios (first published 1977) argues that Ealing films self-consciously set out to 'reflect and project' an image of the Britain and the British character as the nation went to war (8). Writing after Anderson in French National Cinema (1993), Susan Hayward states:

Cinemas that make up a national cinema will reflect both from within and without (centre and periphery). Reflecting from within the centre of a culture, cinema becomes autoreflexive, revealing the narcissistic trace of heritage. Reflecting from without, cinema becomes individuated – an individuated reflection of, and even upon, the nation (15).

Similarly, in Fassbinder's Germany (1997), Thomas Elsaesser devotes an entire chapter to exploring how the films of Fassbinder, and to some extent Fassbinder himself, can be considered representative of the German nation. He concludes:

In Fassbinder's work this field of [...] the politics of 'self' and 'identity' may well define differently what it means to be representative, and, with it, may have helped to redefine the cinema and its representations of history (43).

Following (and prefiguring) Anderson's groundwork, these film critics have sought to analyse national cinema in cultural terms, scrutinising films for their capacity to represent, reflect or project national identity. These approaches, and there are many other examples, share a confidence in the idea that individual films, when interpreted in a

certain way, will function collectively as absolute expressions of national identity. In this sense, French national cinema is inherently *about* the French nation, irrespective of the subject matter of individual films or the sensibilities of individual filmmakers. However, it should also be noted that critics have tended to identify only a specific range of films possessing this representational capacity. For Barr it is films made at Ealing Studios, for Kracauer German Expressionist films, for Elsaesser the films of Fassbinder, while for Hayward it is the rather less precise 'cinemas that make up a national cinema'. This is an important safety valve. Not all films produced in a particular nation can be considered part of a national cinema and thus as expressions of a national identity; only a select few, highlighted and canonised by critics, enjoy this capability. Thus, if a film fails to fit into the national project, as perceived by critics, it does not count as national cinema. It is tempting to conclude, based on the largely auteurist and art cinema selection of the critics mentioned above, that the films most commonly constituted as national cinema are those that are also recognised by critics for their aesthetic qualities. To put it bluntly, good cinema is national cinema; bad cinema is not. The principle flaw in the cultural approach to national cinema is therefore its high degree of selectivity and subjectivity. Rather than taking in national film production in its entirety, the cultural approach privileges certain films above others, separating the aesthetic qualities of films from the manner in which audiences receive them. Tellingly, the complaint most commonly leveled at Kracauer is that he fails to take into account the fact that few German Expressionist films reached popular audiences. Rather than reflecting the mindset of the entire German public, the films' impact was limited to an esoteric minority. It stands to reason that a film's ability to disseminate images of national identity is dependent on its ability to reach a wide section of the national population. Aesthetic factors remain secondary to this. Clearly then, a purely cultural definition of national cinema that excludes the bulk of national film production and fails to take into account the behaviour or even the existence of national audiences is inadequate. A national cinema means little if it is left to the critic to pick and choose what is and what is not representative of the nation.

In spite of these problems, the idea of a culturally defined national cinema has been prevalent in academic discussions of British film. Foremost among its proponents is John Hill. Hill distances himself from a nationalist perspective that imagines national



identity to be unchanging and monolithic, arguing that such an ideology imposes a false sense of unity and homogeneity on a given nation. Following Anderson, he suggests that national identities, being culturally constructed, are hybrid, fluid and subject to historical change. For Hill, British cinema has too often depended on restricted, exclusionary projections of national identity. In their place, Hill argues for British films that retain their national specificity while avoiding and even deflating the 'homogenising myths' of national cinema as it has traditionally been realised. He writes:

It is quite possible to conceive of a national cinema, in the sense of one which works with nationally specific materials, which is none the less critical of inherited notions of national identity, which does not assume the existence of a unique or unchanging national culture, and which is quite capable of dealing with social divisions or differences (1992, 16).<sup>12</sup>

Hill's argument thus rests on a distinction between two kinds of national film production: mainstream British films that reinforce reactionary images of national identity, and progressive British films that critique them. In Hill's analysis, only the latter category constitutes a 'proper' British national cinema (17). In keeping with the practices of the cultural approach to national cinema then, Hill self-consciously excludes a large section of British film production from his national film project in favour of a specific kind of filmmaking. While there can be no question that many British films do fail to represent the full diversity of modern Britain, it seems rather a large step to declare that these films therefore fail to count as a national cinema. Moreover, the sort of films that offer non-progressive images of a homogenous, unified Britain that is frozen in the past also tend to be the most popular kind of British production, both within the nation and outside it. Because of this, it follows that they are also more successful in disseminating their images of Britain, even if these images are inaccurate or otherwise ideologically unsound. Although exceptions exist, films depicting 'the lived complexities of British 'national' life' tend to reach to minority audiences (1996, 111). For better or worse then, it is the

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<sup>12</sup> A similar notion is can be found in the Film Council's policy statement, 'Towards a Sustainable UK Film Industry': 'The Film Council is committed to reflecting the richness and vitality of Britain's multicultural society and helping to create a culturally diverse film industry'.

former mode of filmmaking that has the greater connection to a national audience and thus contributes most to the way British national identity is imagined. Because of this, it seems necessary to invert Hill's dichotomy of British film production: it is the images of mainstream British filmmaking, not its vaguely defined alternative, which by virtue of their popular appeal have the closest relationship to the popular identity of the nation.

A different approach to the problem of British national cinema has been taken by Andrew Higson. Prefiguring to some extent the shortcomings of Hill's analysis, he notes:

Very often the concept of national cinema is used prescriptively rather than descriptively, citing what ought to be the national cinema rather than describing the actual cinematic experience of popular audiences (1989, 37).

Further, Higson has suggested that Hill's outline for British national cinemas is really a call for a very specific type of film, namely 'social dramas set in contemporary Britain, attending to the (2000b, 71). In order to rectify these problems, Higson displaces the critic as the gatekeeper of national representation and returns the initiative to the national audience, suggesting that the parameters of national cinema should be drawn not at the site of production but at the site of consumption (1989, 36). For Higson, any conception of a national cinema should therefore take into account 'the range of films in circulation within a nation-state', both in terms of how they are distributed and exhibited within that country and in terms of how they are absorbed by a nation's popular culture (ibid, 44). In other words, a national cinema is an inherently populist phenomenon, reflecting the ways in which a national population, in all its diversity, sees itself. As Higson puts it, 'what is a national cinema without a national audience?' (ibid, 46). In doing this, Higson self-consciously widens the scope of national cinema to allow the consideration of films produced by countries outside Britain. It is on this proposition that he has been most strongly criticised. According to Hill,

To elide the distinction [...] between the *cinema in Britain* and British *national cinema* seems not only to be conceptually unhelpful but also, by virtue of the emphasis on consumption, to blur the arguments for film production which is specifically British rather than North American (1992, 14).

As with Hill's other arguments, this statement relies on a confidence that it is possible to talk of cultural artefacts as being 'specifically British'. Despite his much stated belief in Britain's cultural diversity, Hill still seems to take for granted that British national identity is a singular phenomenon that may be distinguished from other cultural influences. As Higson has suggested in response to Hill's criticism,

There is even a sense in which Hill's argument depends on a rather enclosed sense of that national, in which borders between nations are fully capable of restricting transnational flow... Concepts like 'national life' and 'national culture' thus seem destined to imply a homogenising tendency (2000b, 72).

Although Higson has not taken his discussions to this conclusion, I would argue that it is disingenuous to suggest, as Hill does, that a clear distinction can be made between *cinema in Britain* and *British national cinema*. It seems to me that the process of viewing a film that depicts one's own nation is not a qualitatively different experience than viewing a film of any other national origin. It is nonsensical, therefore, to assume that British audiences derive their sense of national identity only from films depicting Britain, and that when viewing films depicting other nations they somehow deactivate this nation-building process. The mistake of Hill and others has been to assume that cinema informs national identity in a direct, uniform manner. Because of this, Hill suggests that British national cinema should consist only of films projecting a world that closely resembles contemporary Britain. However, it seems to me that cinema's structuring of national identity is a far more individual, mediated, and, to reference Anderson, imaginative process. For example, a recent survey revealed that Iceland has the world's highest rate of cinema attendance per capita ('Global cinema'). However, the production of Icelandic cinema occurs only on a very small scale: the Icelandic Film Fund, which supports 95% of all Icelandic production, funds just five to seven features a year ('Icelandic Film'). Do we conclude from this that Icelandic audiences abstain from a sense of their own national identity while at the cinema? Does it seem likely that they will eventually be brainwashed by this influx of foreign culture into imagining they are, for example, American? Or is it more likely that films watched by Icelandic audiences are understood in ways that makes them meaningful to their pre-existing national experiences and identities? A similar argument might also be made about Canadian

audiences. It seems to me that national populations draw their sense of national identity on a selective and highly individual basis from the range of cultural texts available to them. To borrow Michel de Certeau's phrase, national audiences are textual poachers, they 'raid' texts and take away materials that help them to make sense of their social situation, in the process contravening the meanings that the producers of the texts may have intended (165-76). Moreover, there is much more at stake for national audiences than an allegiance to their nation. For example, a factory worker from northern England in the 1930s may have preferred to identify with James Cagney's working class gangster than the kind of aristocratic heroes played by Robert Donat or Ivor Novello in British films of the period. Similar processes may be related to the race, gender or sexuality of audiences. In other words, the bond of an individual to his or her nation is likely to be mediated and in some cases overridden by a range of other social identifications. Because of this, the relationship between any one person and the nation he or she belongs to is unlikely to be the same as any other person. This plurality of cultural identifications plays a large part in explaining why modern nations are so culturally diverse. Referring back to Hill again, it seems more important to explain the role played by cinema in creating cultural diversity in Britain than it is to develop a cinema that reflects it. A good example of this is the recent success of Indian Bollywood movies in Britain: these films are obviously not British, but their popularity speaks volumes about the nature of contemporary British society.

I would argue, therefore, that all films available in Britain have the potential to be national cinema, in as much as they will be consumed, in varying quantities, by national audiences and will impact the way individual identities are structured. Of course, this is not to say that the subject matter of a film is not relevant. It is safe to assume that a film depicting Edwardian aristocrats and a film about Japanese Samurai will be received in different ways by British audiences. But it should also be stressed that this same depiction of Edwardian aristocrats will be received in different ways by different members of the same British national audience, depending on their individual circumstances and preferences. I do not wish to assert that a British or any other national cinema does not exist, or that the term 'national cinema' is obsolete, I would merely point out that a national cinema is a far more complicated and diverse phenomenon than it is

generally assumed to be. Indeed, by its very construction, a national cinema is as diverse and complicated as the national audience it caters to.

### *Films Without Frontiers?*

The entertainment industry of this country is not so much Americanizing the world as planetizing entertainment.

– Michael Eisner, Disney CEO (39)

As Philip Schlesinger has observed, post-Andersonian social communication theory is characterised by two distinct, largely unchallenged ideas: first, the tendency to perceive a close fit between communication and the nation, and second by an overwhelming interest in the nature of the national communicative space, both in terms of its formation and its maintenance. 'Taken together', Schlesinger concludes, 'these positions carry a major implication: that the politically salient container for communicative space is the sovereign nation-state' (24). While it may have been possible to conceive the nation as a discrete, bounded space in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (the period about which Anderson is most concerned) it has become increasingly difficult to do so today. As Higson has noted,

The maintenance of national boundaries is thus increasingly at odds with the potential of the mass media to cross national boundaries and create new, multinational, even global, imaginative territories and cultural spaces (1995, 8).

In other words, imagined communities of popular identity no longer end at the borders of the nation: they expand into new spaces, encountering new kinds of diversity and difference. It is perhaps for this reason that Anderson stops short of introducing twentieth century audio-visual technologies into his analysis. Rather than focusing on the interior of Britain's communicative space, it seems to me that cinema in Britain, and indeed all nations, is much better understood when examined as a fluid, transnational structure. Because of this, the notion of a British national cinema, with its necessary emphasis on national borders, is of limited use in understanding how British cinema works in the

1990s. National cinema relates to cinema within a specific nation; British cinema is multivalent and international. In the following section I will therefore examine the way British film production has responded to global economic and cultural changes, in the process challenging what we understand as British cinema.

Globalisation can be defined, very broadly, as the fusion of world economies and cultures into a global system. In economic terms, this has involved the organisation of industry on a global, rather than national or regional, scale. Four main areas of change can be identified with this process:

1. Cultural, economic and political processes are stretched across national boundaries, so that activities occurring in nations thousands of miles apart have significant, direct and often unpredictable impacts on each other.
2. Due largely to technological developments, the organisation of activities on a global scale compresses time and space, so that the effect of these stretched social relations across vast areas is often instantaneous.
3. Globalisation is characterised by a density in the flow of money, goods and information across borders, creating a system of exchanges too intense to be regulated by nation-states.
4. Finally, social relations that occur outside national controls have led to the development of global infrastructures, designed to facilitate the processes of globalised interactions. Examples of such organisations might include the World Trade Organisation, The European Union and the G8 (Cochrane and Pain, 15-17).

As Held and McGrew summarise, 'globalization denotes the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of interregional flows and patterns of social interaction' (4). Against this, sceptics of globalisation dispute that any of these processes mark a fundamental or permanent shift in the way society is structured. The international exchange of goods, for example, dates back at least to European Imperialism, while time/space compression began with the development of the telegraph in the 1850s. It is important to note, therefore, that globalisation does not mark a clear and decisive break with the past. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin note, globalisation did not 'spontaneously erupt' but originated in and built on the centres of capitalist power established through centuries of imperialist, capitalist trade (110). As James Carey has

suggested, globalisation might best be understood as the continuation of a process that began with the industrialisation of Europe in the eighteenth century, but which was interrupted by the Great War, the depression and World War Two – an argument supported by the fact that it was not until the 1970s that international trade recovered to pre-WWI levels.<sup>13</sup> What we know as globalisation, in other words, may merely be the second wave of a long-term historical process. In addition, globalisation needs to be understood as a fundamentally uneven phenomenon, occurring at vastly different rates in different regions and privileging certain groups at the expense of others. In this sense, globalisation has the capacity to fragment the world as much as it unites it, attracting popular resistance in the process.

Many early critics responded to globalisation by arguing that it was essentially an extension of American capitalism. A chief proponent of this position is Herbert Schiller, whose ‘cultural imperialism’ thesis argues that the dominant, American-owned media has forced itself on the rest of the world, exterminating local cultures and planting American products that promote American values in their place (see fig. 3). As Albert Moran has put it, US cultural exports are ‘doubly ideological’: they promote not only American manufacturing and secondary industries, but also the consumption of American goods as a way of life (4). From a somewhat different perspective, Henry Kissinger has argued ‘globalisation is really another name for the dominant role of the United States’ (Miller et. al., 17). Certainly, the dominance of the USA at the present time is hard to dispute. America possesses supreme power in the three areas crucial to international relations: political power, through state and military apparatus; economic power, through dominant multinational corporations; and power over opinion, through information and cultural organisations (Mosler and Catley, xiv). In other words, America has the means to exert control over the entire globe, and the means to persuade it that it does so in everyone’s best interests. However, more recent theorists, notably Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have suggested that globalisation is by nature decentred and deterritorialising, that establishes no absolute centre of power, American or otherwise. These critics point out that the world economy has made economic exchanges autonomous from political

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<sup>13</sup> In a public address at the University of Toronto, May 30th 2002.



Fig 3: An interpretation of 'cultural imperialism' (from *New Internationalist*, Dec 1998, p11)



controls to such an extent that no single nation can be said to wield sovereignty in the way that the Imperial powers of Europe once did (xi). As Mike Featherstone argues, it is no longer possible to conceive global processes in terms of the dominance of 'a single centre over the peripheries' (12). Instead, he suggests that globalisation is characterised by a number of competing centres, creating a complex and fluid balance of power (13). Or, as Arjun Appadurai expresses it,

For the people of Irian Jaya, Indonesianization may be more worrisome than Americanization, as Japanization may be for Koreans, Indianization for Sri Lankans, Vietnameseization for Cambodians, Russianization for the people of Soviet Armenia and the Baltic Republics (5-6).

It should also be noted that these centres of power do not necessarily correspond with nation-states. In many cases, modern corporations have replaced the state as the principle producers and distributors of money and culture. As Held and McGrew put it, globalisation 'is driven by companies, not countries'. Moreover, these companies generally seek to align themselves with global rather than national markets, in the process creating power-bases that cross state borders (17). Of course, many multinational corporations have their roots in American markets, but even they tend not to be national in outlook. As Kevin Robins has argued, modern corporations 'aspire to be stateless, 'headless', decentred [...] achieving a real equidistance, or equipresence, of perspective in relation to the whole world of their audiences and customers' (30). If anything, globalisation has eroded the supremacy of the American nation-state, creating new, overlapping hierarchies that transcend national boundaries. However, if globalisation shifts authority away from America, it does not follow that this power flows back to hitherto disenfranchised regions. Rather than changing the distribution of economic influence, globalisation merely elaborates on its pre-existing structure, in the process perpetuating long-standing political elites. As Toby Miller suggests, by moving the balance of power from the nation to the corporation, globalisation does not put an end to Western hegemony, it merely 'cuts the capacity of the state system to control such transactions' (2000, 50).

Obviously, these developments carry serious implications for the sovereignty of the nation-state and its usefulness as a means to organise populations. In his portentously titled The End of the Nation-State (1995), Jean-Marie Gu  henno writes,

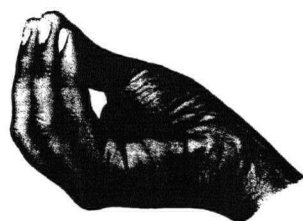
Everything is changed when human activity liberates itself from space; when the mobility of the population and the economy makes nonsense of geographical demarcations... The nation-state is prisoner to a spatial conception of power (17).

It is also tempting to conclude that a globalised economic system that does not heed national borders will create a global culture that operates along similar lines. Arguments of this sort have crystallised around the notion that globalisation has a commodifying, homogenising effect on culture: that corporations now have the power to impose a hegemonic, one-size-fits-all model of entertainment, depriving individuals of the choice and specificity offered to them by indigenous cultural forms. However, as already mentioned, the power of globalisation to fragment the world is at least as apparent as its ability to unify it. The same processes that have intensified the influence of Western culture have also increased awareness of and access to an enormous range of diverse global cultures (see fig. 4). Jean Francois Lyotard's ambivalent account of 'eclectic postmodernism', where 'one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonalds food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and 'retro' clothes in Hong Kong', is an apt description of these processes (76). Rather than homogenising culture, globalisation in this way fosters heterogeneity, bringing marginal cultures into sharper focus and giving individuals a new perspective on the relationship between local and global forces. It should also be pointed out that the fate of the nation-state is by no means sealed. As on-going ethnic conflicts in Europe and the Middle East suggest, strong nationalist sentiment lives on. Moreover, the widespread development of nationalisms within existing nations indicates that national boundaries are being erected as much as they are being torn down. In Britain, for example, devolved parliaments in Scotland and Wales, created in 1997, have the potential to transform the existing nation-state beyond recognition. National culture has also proved more durable than might have been imagined. In Britain, the press remains strongly local in content, despite the fact that many publications are owned by non-British corporations. Television and radio also remain strongly national: even though American products are imported in large



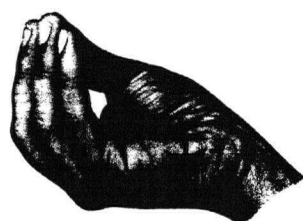
### EGYPT

*Be patient*



### ITALY

*What exactly do you mean?*



### GREECE

*That's just perfect*

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Fig 4: The corporate relationship between the global and the local (from The Economist, May 10th, 2002 )

quantities, the most popular programming is invariably produced in Britain. The partial, uneven impact of globalisation on national culture underlines its fundamentally chaotic nature. The national is no longer has an absolute hold over the spatial identities of national populations, but at the same time indigenous forms and identifications are far from obsolete. I would argue that as a result of this, national identities have become hybridised, comprising both national and transnational affiliations. Far from creating a homogenous, de-nationalised culture, globalisation can be seen to turn human identity into a site of cultural conflict, giving individuals the opportunity to negotiate ever more complex subject positions.

Broadly speaking, the effects of globalisation on cinema can be seen to fit in with these trends. As Tino Balio (among others) has argued, this process has in part been characterised by an intensification of export practices:

During the 1980s, the worldwide demand for films increased at an unprecedented rate, the result of such factors as economic growth in Western Europe, the Pacific Rim and Latin America, the end of the Cold War, the commercialization of state broadcasting systems, and the development of new distribution technologies (58)

However, it should be noted that cinema has been distributed on a global scale ever since the 1910s, when (as noted in my first chapter) Hollywood companies took control of their exports and stepped up trade with nations in Europe, Latin America and Asia. Since then, the values of markets beyond the centres of film production have grown steadily in value. Because of this, the global economy of film in the 1910s and the 1990s differs primarily in degree rather than in kind. The global exchange of cultural forms is also a far from recent phenomenon. As any standard history of the cinema will reveal, film form developed through the rapid exchange and adaptation of ideas between radically different national cultures. Perhaps more than any other medium, film has been locked into systems of global exchange almost since its inception. Because films are reproduced mechanically and rarely require specialist knowledge beyond subtitles or dubbing to be understood, they are more practical to export than other cultural commodities. Moreover, the sheer expense of contemporary production means that many films are explicitly tailored with the largest, most international audience in mind. Rather than changing the

way films are exchanged then, globalisation has essentially streamlined and accelerated processes that were already in place. It goes without saying, however, that these changes have for the most part been associated with the progress of films produced and distributed by Hollywood companies. Hollywood's proportion of the world market is doubled between 1990 and 2000, while cinema produced independently of it experienced no similar expansion (Miller et al., 5).

However, it should be pointed out that despite its geographical location, Hollywood is not, and may never have been, synonymous with the USA. As David Puttnam has argued,

[Hollywood has never] saddled itself with any allegiance to the United States as a production base, to American directors or even to American stars. The studios' strength has always been their utter flexibility, driven solely by an economic imperative based primarily on the taste of a global audience... Hollywood will set up shop wherever it needs to, and seek the best possible production values at the best possible price (347).

From its genesis as a collection of independent producers based in California in the 1910s, Hollywood developed to become a fluid, transnational phenomenon, with elements owned (at present) in Europe and Asia. Whereas in the past, Hollywood films were produced in California-based studios with American investment and distributed from America to the rest of the world, this is no longer the case. Film finance now comes from corporations that operate on a multinational level, and while America remains the centre of film distribution, the value of the international market means that decisions are made on a much more global basis. However, Hollywood's independence of American nationalism is far from a recent phenomenon. As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has suggested,

The American cinema set out in the first place to be popular in America, where it served an extremely diverse and largely immigrant population. What made it popular at home also made it popular abroad (1985, 152).

And as soon as America's international film trade took off, Hollywood proved eager to adapt its product to the various demands of the international market. As Ruth Vasey has argued, this policy may have had a homogenising effect on forms that Hollywood would come to adapt, leading to a non-realist aesthetic devoid of social or political

contentiousness (1997, 226). In other words, Hollywood films have never been preoccupied with any notion of national specificity: they go where the audience (and the money) is. Hollywood's much vaunted 'universality', its existence as 'a state of mind' rather than a geographical locale, is thus better understood as its rejection of national affiliation, its dedication to the market over any other ties.

In keeping with the notion that globalisation is about companies rather than countries, contemporary Hollywood may therefore best be understood as a cartel of ideologically aligned corporations. These six or seven major companies – Disney, Paramount, Columbia, 20th Century Fox, Warner Brothers, Universal and (arguably) MGM – have their roots in the genesis of the studio system in the 1910s and 1920s, but any sense of continuity with the past is misleading. Following a rapid decline of profits in the 1960s, the biggest of the original Hollywood studios were bought-out by much larger conglomerates with highly diversified business interests: Paramount was taken over by Gulf + Western in 1966, United Artists by Transamerica in 1967, Warner Bros. by Kinney National Services in 1969 and MGM by real-estate tycoon Kirk Kerkorian also in 1969 (Schatz, 15). Since then, takeover and mergers between Hollywood companies and other media firms have been commonplace, creating a new oligopoly of multimedia companies with interests in a range of interrelated activities, most notably television. A prominent example of this development is the progress of Warner Bros., which merged first with publishers Time Inc. in 1989 and then in 1999 with internet service providers AOL, creating AOL Time Warner, the world's largest media company. As with its competitors, AOL Time Warner invests heavily in its 'filmed entertainment' division, but film production and distribution is just one of its many media interests. Indeed, some critics have speculated that modern media companies involve themselves in the risky film production sector primarily in order to provide 'content' for their international television networks (Goodridge). Significantly, these successive waves of mergers and takeovers have meant that Hollywood is no longer an exclusively American entity. The process began in 1985 when Australian publishing conglomerate News Corporation purchased

20th Century Fox.<sup>14</sup> This was followed in 1989 and 1990 when Japanese electronics manufactures Sony and Matsushita acquired Columbia Pictures and MCA (including Universal Pictures) respectively. Since then, Universal has proven to be the relay baton of the globalised film industry: it was sold to Canadian liquor company Seagram in 1995 and merged with French media and telecommunications group Vivendi in 2001.

Globalisation has also unseated America's position as Hollywood's favoured production site. Deals with international production companies, such as those made with Working Title, have diversified production beyond US-borders. As a result of new production and post-production technologies, Hollywood production has become increasingly 'portable'. In this way, international production companies can make Hollywood films while remaining locally based. Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring (2001), for example, was shot and finished entirely in New Zealand; its only 'foreign' component was an orchestral soundtrack, which was delivered electronically from London (Parkes, 25). At the same time, American-based producers are increasingly abandoning American locations in favour of nations where costs are lower, principally Canada, which often masquerades as the USA. These 'runaway productions' currently count for 37% of all Hollywood's film output and 42% of its television and have cost the US economy an estimated \$4 billion between 1998 and 2001 (Miller et. al., 60; Katz, 1). In this way, Hollywood is distancing itself from the American nation-state. This gradual process may be attributed to three factors, each of which can be interpreted as a direct consequence of globalisation's broader influences: the relative cost-efficiency of overseas production, the economic power of non-American media conglomerates, and the need to tailor product to an increasingly valuable international market. Against this, it might be argued that Hollywood films have at least retained their predominantly American settings and characters. On the one hand, this reflects the fact that the USA remains Hollywood's biggest single customer. However, I would contend that Hollywood's Americancentrism has more to do with convention and audience expectation than deliberate ideological bias.

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<sup>14</sup> News Corporation later became an officially American company (and Australian owner Rupert Murdoch an American citizen) in order to facilitate further expansion into the American media market.

Despite the increasingly international provenance and market destinations of Hollywood products, representations of America remain most popular with global viewers.

Globalisation can be seen as a distinctly double-edged phenomenon: it perpetuates and even exacerbates global inequality, but at the same time it invites individuals to relocate themselves in relation to their home nations and the rest of the world. For the purposes of my thesis, this latter effect can be observed on a number of levels. First, globalisation dethrones the nation as the primary producer of human spatial identifications, allowing individuals the possibility of creating hybrid social imaginings that transcend national boundaries. Second, and closely related to this, it challenges received notions of 'national culture' and 'national cinema', undermining the efficacy of these categories as a means to reflect the production and consumption of cultural artefacts. Third, globalisation's streamlining and intensification of exchange processes has deepened Hollywood's global dominance, further marginalising alternative cinemas and narrowing the range of films available to the public. Fifth, at the same time globalisation has destabilised the relationship between Hollywood and America, creating a dominant cinema that has no national centre. And finally, globalisation forces us to reconsider the meaning and the relevance of the term 'British cinema'. It seems to me that British cinema cannot be considered synonymous with British 'national cinema'. As I have argued, national cinema is primarily a question of consumption, reflecting the range of texts consumed by a national audience rather than what these texts actually represent. Moreover, its emphasis on the geographical borders of the nation is very much at odds with the potential of cultural materials to be produced and consumed on a global scale. Nor should British cinema be defined as the cinema produced exclusively by Britain's film industry. At the very least, such a definition would reduce British cinema to an extremely small range of films. Furthermore, as so many contemporary Hollywood films demonstrate, the connection between nationality and economic capital is far from absolute. For example, in strictly economic terms, Columbia's Spiderman (2002) should be classified as a Japanese film, while Universal's A Beautiful Mind (2001) counts as French. It seems to me, therefore, that a national cinema must be defined very broadly as consisting of all films that represent a given nation. In other words, if a film can be said to depict Britain or British people on a diegetic level, it is a British film. Of course, this



definition allows that British films may have no economic relationship whatsoever with the British nation. The nationality of a film, I would suggest, is better understood as a question of *representation* rather than *ownership*. We might therefore include in this category Shakespeare in Love (1998) and Emma (1996), which were produced and funded by the American based Miramax. In the same way, the recent films of the Cohen brothers should be considered American, despite the fact that they were produced by Working Title, a British company. This definition also makes no concession to the question of how *well* a film represents a nation. For example, critics may argue that Braveheart (1995) is an inaccurate and politically naive representation of Britain, or rather the nations that would become Britain, but this does not alter the fact of the film's subject matter: for better or for worse, Braveheart is a British film. My definition also allows that film may depict more than one nation and still be regarded as British. In fact, nationally hybrid films may be the rule rather than the exception. For example, A Room With a View (1986) might generally be considered a quintessentially British production, but as the film opens in Florence and the city remains a constant reference point in the emotional development of the characters, the film might also qualify as Italian. Similarly, Mickey Blue Eyes (1999) is set exclusively in New York, but as its principal character is British, it also represents Britain. Obviously, this logic can be taken to an extreme. The multitude of national representations contained in The English Patient (1996), for example, makes it British, Canadian, Egyptian, Italian, Hungarian, Indian, American and German. Because of this, it is important to note that all films are structured in a way that foregrounds some national representations at the expense of others. The English Patient, in this sense, represents Britain more fully than it represents Germany or America.

What this means is that British films, particularly contemporary examples, are frequently the site of conflict between different identities and cultures. They are complex texts, engaging simultaneously with British and non-British audiences and creating meanings that are both specific and non-specific to the nation. As Forbes and Street have put it in relation to European cinema generally,

Contemporary cinema articulates the crisis experienced by European identities when challenged by the economic and cultural forces of globalisation... Indeed, negotiating a

cultural space for the fluid, unstable and ever-changing facets of European identity is the challenge which faces cinema in the twenty-first century (48).

Moreover, the association between representational matter and its national origin should not be considered absolute: films made in Germany may represent the Soviet Union (Enemy at the Gates, 2001) just as films made in France may represent Djibouti (Beau Travail, 1999). Given this potential for nationally specific images to transcend their circumstances of production, my final two chapters will examine the global prevalence of filmic representations of Britain in the 1990s, particularly as they occur in mainstream Hollywood filmmaking.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Uses of Britishness Part 1: Shooting the Past

The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there.

– L.P. Hartley, The Go Between (3).

If definitions of British cinema are moved away from questions of national borders and the economic ownership of individual films and into the realm of representation, its landscape becomes a good deal different. H. Mark Glancy has counted over 150 films made in Hollywood between 1930 and 1945 that were ‘based on British history or literature, or set geographically in the far outposts of the British Empire or in Britain itself, or located in time as period dramas or contemporary war films’ (1). In particular, he draws attention to Cavalcade (1932), Mutiny on the Bounty (1935), Rebecca (1940), How Green Was My Valley (1941) and Mrs Miniver (1942) – prestigious, star-led, high-budget films that each won ‘best picture’ Academy Awards. It is worth emphasising that these films do not depict a Britain that would have been immediately familiar to many people living in the country at the time. As Glancy puts it, ‘the characters tend to be venerable aristocrats, young officers and their comical cockney servants,’ while ‘the settings are often grand manor houses, idyllic villages that have not been touched by the modern age, and a London marked by Big Ben’ (3). In other words, the films present romantic, idealised images of a Britain dominated by the past. However, Glancy’s suggestion that these films were made because ‘Americans remained fascinated by the British’ during the period is unhelpful (4). As Ruth Vasey has pointed out, Britain was in fact Hollywood’s most valuable and influential customer during the 1930s. Despite its quota restrictions, Britain accounted for 30% of Hollywood’s overseas gross, while the British Empire made up the majority of Hollywood’s international English-speaking market (1997, 144-45). Hollywood films of the period were thus made with the British

market firmly in mind, not only because large numbers of British people were prepared to pay to see favourable representations of the nation on screen, but because unfavourable representations of Britain might impede trade with the entire British Empire.

Counter-intuitively, massive structural changes in Britain's political position since the 1930s do not seem to have been accompanied by a significant decline in representations of the nation. We might consider, for example, four of the most expensive and internationally successful Hollywood films of 2001: Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring, Shrek, and Moulin Rouge. Of these films, Harry Potter is perhaps the most forthright in its representation of Britain. Although the film was produced by US owned Warner Bros. and directed by an American (Chris Columbus), it stays very close to its British source material: the popular novel by J.K. Rowling. Indeed, this fidelity to the novel's perceived Britishness was presented as critical to the filmmakers' creative process. While the film was in development, numerous column inches were generated in the entertainment press by the supposed attempts by Rowling to maintain the novel's tone against American influence, specifically that of Steven Spielberg and his desire to cast American child-star Haley Joel Osment in the title role. According to one source:

Spielberg bailed over creative differences with Rowling and Warner Bros. Spielberg wanted Sixth Sense spook spotter Haley Joel Osment as the spell-spinner; the studio and author want to find an unknown British schoolboy (Grossberg).

Several months later, a Warner Bros. spokesman was quoted as saying 'this will be a British Harry. Chris is very protective of the integrity of the book. Not a single person in this film will be anything other than British' ('Warners Pledge'). The decision to effectively bar non-British actors from the production is an interesting one.<sup>15</sup> Equally interesting is the decision to narrativise this decision in the media as the David and Goliath conflict between Rowling, who is credited with no executive role in the film whatsoever, and Spielberg, who is perhaps the most powerful director in Hollywood. These extra-textual discourses, promoted by the studio's publicity department, suggest

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<sup>15</sup> Well, almost. Richard Harris, who played Headmaster Dumbledore, is actually Irish, but this presumably passed unnoticed or was deemed unimportant.

that Britishness was programmed into the film almost as a production standard, a guarantee to Harry Potter's considerable pre-existing fan-base that the film would be true to the novels.

Lord of the Rings was also adapted from a British novel and also features British actors in several key parts. However, unlike Harry Potter, there seems no particular reason for the film to represent Britain: as the action takes place in a historically and geographically unspecified fantasy world and was filmed in New Zealand with a New Zealand crew. Nevertheless, it seems to have been determined that the people of Middle Earth should at least sound as though they were British. Wizards, elves and humans speak with a neutralised kind of Received Pronunciation; dwarves are voiced as though Scottish; and Hobbits speak mostly with West Country accents. Third, in the animated fairy tale Shrek, the titular monster speaks with an unconvincing Scottish accent, again for no obvious reason as the film is certainly not set in Scotland and the majority of the cast speak with American accents. According to reports in the entertainment press, actor Mike Myers had originally voiced the character with his usual Canadian speaking voice, but after viewing a rough cut decided that the monster should speak with a Scottish accent. The producers agreed, and considered it worth spending an additional \$4m to reanimate the film and make Shrek a Scot. British accents crop up again in Moulin Rouge, and this is perhaps the most bizarre example of all. The film was made in Australia by an Australian production company with Hollywood capital and was set in nineteenth century Paris. Apart from Christian, who is meant to be Scottish, the film has absolutely no diegetic connection with Britain; yet the entire cast, most of whom are Australian, speak in British, mostly London, accents. The pattern can be observed again in Gladiator (2000), which depicts ancient Rome in the manner of a RSC production of Julius Caesar.

But Harry Potter aside, can any of these films be said to represent Britain in the same way that Rebecca and Mutiny on the Bounty do? Is a British accent really a meaningful representation of Britain? Against this, I would point out that the creative decision to produce a film in which British accents are prominent could hardly happen by accident, not least because, in each of the films mentioned, the decision does not reflect

the regular speaking voices of all the actors concerned. Nor could it be argued that the decision is an attempt to attract British audiences, as the British market has become far too small to support such expensive films. It might be argued instead that a British accent confers a sense of neutrality on characters, enabling him or her to exist unobtrusively in a variety of national or historical contexts. However, if this is the case, why should a British accent be considered more neutral than an American or an Australian accent? It seems to me that the proliferation of British accents in the films mentioned above must mean *something*. In terms of audiovisual representation, the accent is the primary external signifier of an individual's nationality. The national background of a character might be inferred through dress, gesticulation or social attitude, but none are effective in themselves if the accent is not perceived to fit. I would argue therefore that the decision to perform a character with a British accent, even if he or she is not intended to be British, constitutes a representation of Britain. But what kind of representation does this produce? Significantly, the four films I have mentioned are all set in environments that are strongly connected to the past. In Harry Potter, Shrek and Lord of the Rings it is a pre-modern, though historically vague, fantasy world ruled by magic. Moulin Rouge is ostensibly rooted in a more realistic sense of time and place, but given its high degree of anachronism and artifice its setting might equally be considered fantastical. I would suggest, therefore, that the proliferation of British representations in these films establishes an associative connection between idealised images of the past and Britain. In other words, according to Hollywood convention, the past speaks with a British accent, regardless of whether or not the past in question is actually connected to Britain. To refer back to L.P Hartley, the past is indeed a foreign country: Britain. In this chapter I will examine the ways in which representations of Britain's past developed and grew in popularity through the 1980s and the 1990s, ultimately providing Hollywood cinema with a rich visual vocabulary suited to invoking a sense of antiquity and the bygone.

### *Representation of Things Past*

Critical discussion of British cinema and its representations of the past solidified in the early 1990s around the notion of the 'heritage film'. The term was first used, almost in

passing, by Charles Barr in reference to the cycle of historical films made in the 1940s (1986, 12). It was subsequently appropriated by Andrew Higson in his 1993 article 'Representing the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film' to refer to the new cycle of 'quality costume dramas' that had developed in Britain in the 1980s (109). Of course, heritage cinema has many antecedents in British cinema prior to the 1980s. Korda's The Private Life of Henry VIII (1933) is the most striking example, both in form and international appeal, but David Lean's Dickens adaptations and Ken Russell's D.H. Lawrence films also come to mind. Heritage films also feature strongly in other national film cultures. Many of the most popular French films of the 1980s, notably Jean de Florette (1986) and Cyrano de Bergerac (1990), might be considered heritage films, as might almost the entire output of China's 'Fifth Generation' cinema in the 1990s. It is also worth noting that Chariots of Fire (1981) was described by Pauline Kael as 'probably the best Australian film ever made in England', presumably in reference to the aesthetically similar Picnic at Hanging Rock (1975) and My Brilliant Career (1979) (247). However, none of these film cycles have succeeded in attracting a comparable degree of public or critical interest. Higson's article, and the numerous writings that followed, gave the term 'heritage cinema' popular currency and aided the establishment of a 'heritage film' canon. At its centre were the Merchant Ivory adaptations of E.M. Forster's novels, A Room With a View (1986) Maurice (1987) and Howards End (1992), leading many to suppose that the production company was synonymous both with Forster adaptations and heritage filmmaking in general. However, Chariots of Fire, the TV drama Brideshead Revisited (1981), Forster's non-Merchant Ivory adaptation A Passage to India (1985) and Merchant Ivory's non-Forster adaptation The Remains of the Day (1993) have also received a great deal of critical attention.<sup>16</sup>

A factor regulating the films in this canon seems to be international, particularly American, success. A Room With a View and Howards End grossed \$21m and \$26m respectively at the North American box office – large amounts for low-budget films – and the films listed above won twelve Oscars between them. This indicates that despite its

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<sup>16</sup> Despite the centrality of several TV serials in the heritage film debate, most notably 'Brideshead Revisited', I shall focus the remainder of my analysis on feature film production to keep the subject at a reasonable size.

origins as critical term rather than an industrial category, heritage cinema is an essentially popular phenomenon: its existence does not reflect critical or intellectual fashions so much as public tastes. Indeed, as Claire Monk notes, the critical use of the term heritage cinema is 'almost always, by definition, ideologically pejorative,' implying an intellectually disdainful critical perspective (1997). The source of this critical disapproval can be located in the political context of Higson's 1993 essay. Drawing on Patrick Wright's On Living in Old Country (1985) and Robert Hewison's The Heritage Industry (1987), Higson identifies heritage cinema as a symptom of the cultural politics of the Thatcher administration. The 1980s were characterised by rapid social change: the British economy was restructured to allow service industries to replace the manufacturing sector, state controlled utilities were taken into private ownership and the welfare state was reorganised along free-market lines. In the process, public expenditure decreased, interest rates rose, unemployment became common and Trade Union power was severely compromised (A. Davies, 53). These changes were accompanied by an increasing interest in Britain's past. The number of museums in Britain doubled between the 1960s and the mid 1980s while organisations such as the National Trust and English Heritage (established 1984) became increasingly powerful (Hewison, 88). The trend was given official recognition by the National Heritage Acts of 1980 and 1983 and by the creation of the Department of National Heritage in 1992. Meanwhile, Thatcher spoke of the importance of 'Victorian values' to British life, which she interpreted as commercial enterprise combined with a stable family life (Bradbury, 451).

This appeal to the nation's past was widely interpreted as an attempt to naturalise the rupture created by the government's economic policies and to foster the illusion of continuity with less turbulent times. As Hewison puts it,

[Heritage] creates a sense of sequence out of aleatory chaos and, since change is inevitable, a stable system of ordered meanings enables us to cope with both innovation and decay. The nostalgic impulse is an important agency in adjustment to crisis, it is a social emollient and reinforces national identity when confidence is weakened or threatened (47).



Higson has argued that heritage cinema is complicit in this process, suggesting that 'by turning their backs on the industrialized, chaotic present, [heritage films] nostalgically reconstruct an imperialist and upper class Britain' (1993, 110). As a result of this process, 'the national past and national identity emerge in these films not only as aristocratic, but also as male-centred, while the nation itself is reduced to the soft pastoral landscapes of southern England' (ibid, 114). Against this, other critics have pointed out that many heritage films are acutely critical of the repressive societies they depict and often situate the most sympathetic characters outside it. The working class Leonard Bast in Howards End is a good example of this, as are Harold Abrahams (Jewish) and Eric Liddell (Scottish), the victorious athletes from Chariots of Fire. Jeffery Richards has gone as far as to suggest that heritage films are 'profoundly subversive' in providing a 'comprehensive critique of the ethic of restraint, repression and the stiff-upper lip' (169). The most obvious evidence of this may be found in The Remains of the Day, a melancholy disquisition on memory and regret.

Higson has dealt with these issues by arguing that any social criticism embodied in the films is overwhelmed by their visual grandeur and sensuality: the films invite 'a nostalgic gaze that resists the ironies and social critiques so often suggested narratively' (1993, 109). Or as Harlan Kennedy puts it, 'it's like being asked to bend over a luxurious perfumed ottoman while being given six of the best' (1985, 52). Higson's argument thus centres on the manner in which heritage films 'render history as spectacle', evoking the past through an accumulation of period details rather than through a 'critical historical perspective' (1993, 113). Similarly, Martin Hipsky argues that the films tend to

Fixate on the surface features, the spectacles, indeed the Baudrillardian simulacra of the traditionally defined locales of 'high culture'... Meticulously reproduced, these elaborate layers of setting are what take us back to the era being depicted. And yet in these movies the setting is overpowering – is in fact superfluous to plot, history and character portrayal (102).

Higson terms this visual quality 'heritage space': a space dedicated to 'the display of heritage properties rather than the enactment of drama' (1993, 111). In other words, the *mise en scène* of heritage films is motivated less by the contingencies of the narrative

than by the desire to showcase heritage landscapes, architecture, costume and production design (see fig. 5). For example, in Chariots of Fire, establishing shots are frequently allowed to linger on scenery beyond their narrative purpose. The 'college dash' sequence is introduced with a high-angle wide shot of the Gonville & Caius college quadrangle, but rather than focusing on the athletes, the shot foregrounds a large statue outside the building. A few seconds later, we see two masters observing the dash from their study window. Instead of filming them in a close or medium shot, as the situation might conventionally require, they are photographed right at the back of the room in another long shot with a plaster bust in the foreground occupying the centre of the frame. This sequence is followed by another race in the Scottish highlands. Again, long shots prevail, making it difficult for the viewer to follow the race but easy to appreciate the hilly landscape and the period costumes of the spectators. A similar emphasis on the pictorial quality of the image can be found throughout Howards End. The first shot of Margaret Schlegel, for example, has her seated in front of a mahogany dresser loaded with silver plates and an ornate fireplace lined with large candlesticks, while in the foreground a breakfast table is crowded with a silver and porcelain tea service. Again, this abundance of period detail serves no obvious narrative purpose.

Accordingly, Higson has defined what we may call 'the heritage aesthetic' in the following terms:

1. Heritage films move slowly and episodically rather than in a tightly causal manner.
2. They demonstrate a greater concern for character, place, atmosphere and milieu than for dramatic, goal-centred action.
3. There is a preference for long-takes and deep-focus and for long and medium shots, rather than for close-ups and rapid cutting.
4. Camera movement is fluid and even ostentatious, but is less dictated by a desire to follow the movements of characters than to offer an aesthetic angle on the period *mise en scène*.
5. The gaze is organised around props and settings as much as it is around character point of view (1993, 117-18).



The heritage aesthetic, therefore, can be defined in opposition to the 'classical style' of Hollywood films. This has led some critics to suggest that heritage cinema occupies a middle ground between the American mainstream and European art film. As Richard Dyer notes, heritage cinema borrows the pace and tone of European art cinema but avoids its 'symbolisms and personal directorial voices' (1995, 204).<sup>17</sup> It is this aesthetic, I think, that gives the heritage filmmaking its textual coherence. Claire Monk has recently complained that the 'heritage' label groups films together 'in face of clear aesthetic, thematic and ideological distinctions' (2002, 180). However, I would suggest that while the ideological and thematic distinctions between Chariots of Fire and A Room With a View, or even between A Room With a View and Howards End, are clear enough, the aesthetic distinctions are not. Moreover, this aesthetic also distinguishes contemporary heritage films from earlier filmic representations of Britain's past. According to Ginette Vincendeau, whereas pre-1980s literary adaptations 'tended to feature romantic, adventurous or melodramatic stories against a period background, without bothering too much with fidelity,' heritage films entail 'a change of emphasis from narrative to setting' (2001, xviii). For evidence of this tendency, we might consider MGM's 1940 version of Pride and Prejudice, which features actors in Victorian-era off the shoulder gowns (see fig. 6).

However, it seems to me that heritage cinema's 'aesthetic of display' involves more than just a *mise en scène* of heritage landscapes and artifacts. Equally significant to the heritage aesthetic is the exhibition of less tangible heritage properties. First, heritage films tend to derive their settings from specific periods of British history. It is conspicuous, I think, that the overwhelming majority of heritage films have restricted themselves to just five periods of British, or English, history: the Elizabethan era, the Regency era, the late-Victorian era, the Edwardian-era and the inter-war era (see table 1). As a result of this, heritage films tend to overlook large sections of history, not least the

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<sup>17</sup> It is curious that James Ivory has seldom if never been discussed as an auteur given his exemplary contribution to the heritage film



Fig. 6: Non-period costume in Pride and Prejudice (1940)

**Table 1: Distribution of Selected Heritage Movies by Historical Era, 1980-2002**

| Elizabethan Era<br>(1558-1603)                                                   | Regency Era<br>(1812-1830)                                                                                                                                                                                        | Late-Victorian Era<br>(1880-1901)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Edwardian Era<br>(1901-1914)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Inter-war Era<br>(1919-39)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>*Orlando (1992)</p> <p>Elizabeth (1998)</p> <p>Shakespeare in Love (1998)</p> | <p>Rowing With the Wind (1987)</p> <p>Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1994)</p> <p>Persuasion (1995)</p> <p>Sense and Sensibility (1995)</p> <p>Emma (1996)</p> <p>Jane Eyre (1996)</p> <p>Mansfield Park (1999)</p> | <p>The Age of Innocence (1993)</p> <p>A Portrait of a Lady (1996)</p> <p>Jude (1996)</p> <p>Wilde (1997)</p> <p>The Tichborne Claimant (1998)</p> <p>An Ideal Husband (1999)</p> <p>Topsy Turvy (1999)</p> <p>The Golden Bowl (2000)</p> <p>The Importance of Being Earnest (2002)</p> | <p>A Room With a View (1986)</p> <p>Maurice (1987)</p> <p>Where Angels Fear to Tread (1991)</p> <p>Howards End (1992)</p> <p>Stiff Upper Lips (1997)</p> <p>Titanic (1997)</p> <p>The Wings of a Dove (1997)</p> <p>The Winslow Boy (1999)</p> <p>The House of Mirth (2000)</p> | <p>Chariots of Fire (1981)</p> <p>Gandhi (1982)</p> <p>Heat and Dust (1982)</p> <p>Another Country (1984)</p> <p>A Passage to India (1984)</p> <p>A Handful of Dust (1988)</p> <p>Enchanted April (1992)</p> <p>Shadowlands (1994)</p> <p>*The Remains of the Day (1993)</p> <p>Carrington (1995)</p> <p>*The English Patient (1996)</p> <p>Gosford Park (2001)</p> |

\* Films occurring in more than one historical period. I have placed them according to their dominant setting.

English Civil War, the reformation, the American War of Independence and the Great War.<sup>18</sup> Of course, it would be wrong to expect heritage films to offer a comprehensive, pedagogical history of the nation, but it is worth noting that they tend to avoid periods of conflict and upheaval in favour of eras of relative stability. Second, heritage films frequently display the writings of privileged national authors through adaptations of their work, typically emphasising their fidelity to the original texts. Foremost in the heritage canon are the equally canonical works of E.M. Forster, Jane Austen and Oscar Wilde, all of which overlap with the favoured historical periods. Again, it might be noted that these authors, at least in the way they are adapted for the screen, tend to depict a society isolated from broader historical forces. Finally, heritage cinema is structured in a way that displays the British theatrical acting tradition. The films typically feature ensemble casts and are directed in a manner that plays to their strengths, notably voice-work, impersonation and interpretation of the text. Indeed, heritage cinema has made a virtual star-system of stage-trained British actors. Performers such as Helena Bonham Carter, Emma Thompson, Kenneth Branagh and Judi Dench are identified so closely with the movement that they are able to function as textual signifiers of a film's heritage status.

Heritage cinema may therefore be understood as a cinema organised around the selection and exhibition of privileged British cultural properties. Put simply, it produces attractive images of the nation and puts them on display. Two things should be emphasised about these images. First, they are either taken from the past or are strongly connected to it; second, they are idealised to the point where they bear no serious relation to British history. As Norman Davies has suggested, 'history is about change and conflict. It is not a comfortable subject. 'Heritage', in contrast, was developed as an idea for preserving the monuments and memories of the past in a prim, static mode' (862). I would argue, therefore, that heritage cinema functions by constructing the British past as a utopia; a sumptuous, aristocratic parallel universe drained of conflict and deprivation. As Richard Dyer has suggested, the utopian impulse is common to many forms of entertainment, cinema not least:

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<sup>18</sup> In fact, a new, British produced film about Oliver Cromwell and the English Civil War entitled To Kill a King will shortly be released. Given the critical and commercial failure of Cromwell (1970), the last film to tackle this sensitive frequently repressed period of history, its reception will be eagerly awaited.

Entertainment offers the image of 'something better' to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide. Alternatives, hopes, wishes – these are all the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and maybe realized (1999, 373).

As evidence of this, we might consider the responses of American reviewers to heritage cinema. In 1986, New York Times reviewer Vincent Canby wrote:

A Room With a View is like a holiday out of time. It's a journey into another dimension as it travels from the dangerously seductive settings of Florence, with its foul smells and Renaissance glories, to the more serene landscapes of England, where undeclared wars are fought over cups of tea (6).

Similar images of nostalgia and escape can be observed in Malcom Johnson's 1992 review from the Hartford Courant:

With Howards End, James Ivory has fashioned his finest film tribute to the works of E.M. Forster. Sweeping us grandly into a vanished Edwardian ethos when cars were brass-trimmed toys and horse-drawn coaches still filled cobbled streets with clapping echoes, Ivory sets forth a world that is remote and haunting yet oddly contemporary (1).

Of course, this utopian sensibility is hardly unique to heritage films: escapism and wish fulfillment are fundamental to Hollywood filmmaking and its genre system. Musicals, for example, create utopias through song and dance, while science fiction generally locates them in the future. The thing that makes heritage films unique is their association of utopia with the past, or more specifically the British past. Dyer goes on to suggest that the kind of pleasures entertainment offers are presented as solutions to the perceived inadequacies of our day to day lives. According to George Kateb, 'when a man thinks of perfection... he thinks of a world permanently without strife, poverty, constraint, stultifying labour, irrational authority, sensual deprivation (Dyer 1999, 375). Accordingly, heritage films present Britain's past as a utopia of material abundance, sensual pleasure and unlimited leisure time, where social roles are clearly defined and communities are strongly bonded – qualities that audiences might find lacking in their own lives.



The period 1981-1993 may be regarded as the 'first-wave' of heritage filmmaking in Britain. In this period, the rudiments of the heritage aesthetic were founded, a canon of favoured films emerged and an international audience established. Around all these things, a scholarly discourse was formed, giving critics an effective though ultimately pejorative framework for interpreting the films. In my next section, I will examine the way heritage cinema has developed between 1993 and 2002 in terms of its relationship to British culture and to the international film marketplace generally. In particular, I will look at the manner in which these representations have been absorbed by mainstream Hollywood filmmaking.

### *Heritage Cinema Redressed*

The shifting position of heritage cinema in the 1990s was heralded by the rapid decline of Merchant Ivory, who had established themselves as the most reliable contributors to the movement. After The Remains of the Day, the company seemed to lose its commercial instinct, and although they continued to produce films at a rate of almost one a year, they were unable to match their earlier successes. Jefferson in Paris (1995), for example, grossed just £137,000 at the British box office. However, the decline of Merchant Ivory did nothing to curtail heritage film production. Films such as Shadowlands (1994), The Madness of King George (1995) and Sense and Sensibility (1995) filled the vacuum Merchant Ivory had left, inheriting their aesthetic, their stars, their Academy Awards and their large international audiences. Heritage cinema also lived on in Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994), a film that showed how the heritage aesthetic might be adapted to a contemporary setting. This parallel is flagged initially by the film's ensemble cast of British character actors, most notably Hugh Grant, who was best known at the time for his work in heritage films such as Maurice and the Australian-British co-production Sirens (1994). More importantly, although Four Weddings is less visually lavish than the canonical heritage films it draws on, it is explicitly structured around the display of British heritage properties. The film is divided into six narrative blocks – four weddings, one funeral, and the purchasing of a wedding dress. Nothing that happens between these events makes it onto the screen. The narrative principle at work in Four Weddings is thus

the exhibition of the traditional British wedding and its stylistic trappings: the churches, the gowns, the liturgy, the speeches, the parties. Of course, this narrative progression is interrupted by the funeral, but its excessively drab setting among the smokestacks of an East London industrial park only serves to emphasise the sumptuousness in evidence elsewhere.

The film's utopian presentation of the weddings is reinforced by the kind of lifestyle attached to it. The episodic nature of the film's plot allows the principle characters to be depicted without any means of financial support. Scarlett refers briefly to getting a job at a sex shop, but it seems to be an idiosyncrasy rather than a necessity. Theirs is a semi-aristocratic life of unlimited leisure time, apparently isolated from the economic realities of regular life. Interestingly, *Four Weddings*' veneration of the wedding is tempered by an implicit criticism of marriage as an institution. However, as so many other heritage films, the visual spectacle is so strong that it negates any conflicting narrative messages. However, unlike these other films, *Four Weddings* also seems critical, or at least conscious, of its own idealisation of aristocratic British life. Faced with the crude Highland pastiche of Hamish and Carrie's Perthshire wedding, Gareth declares, 'It's Brigadoon! It's bloody Brigadoon!' Though it might be argued that it is unintentional, the remark creates an ironic parallel between the 1954 musical's notoriously trite images of Scotland and *Four Wedding*'s no less romanticised depiction of Britain. Also of note is the American love interest. Carrie is depicted as an outsider, a perennial tourist at the films' five ceremonies, but she is far from passive in her consumption of British tradition. Throughout the film she is fully in control of her relationship with Charles, appearing and disappearing at will and delaying her eventual commitment to him to the day of his own wedding to another woman. In this way, the film narrativises its American audience: the beguiled but powerful tourist, implicitly female, on whose approval the success of the film depends.

In the years that followed, the self-reflexivity of the heritage film increased, exhibiting, in Claire Monk's words, 'a deep self-consciousness about how the past is represented' (1995, 33). Monk identifies this trend with the intervention of art cinema directors in heritage filmmaking, notably Sally Potter's *Orlando* (1992), Martin

Scorsese's The Age of Innocence (1993) and Jane Campion's The Piano (1993), who revived the mode with a more critical approach to their historical and literary sources.<sup>19</sup> Although it should be stressed that the latter two of these films occur outside Britain, these revisionist readings quickly began to influence the heritage mainstream. Persuasion (1995), for example, repudiates the elegant Regency aesthetic established in the BBC/A&E serialisation of Pride and Prejudice (1995), Sense and Sensibility and Emma (1996) by insisting on a distinctly non-heritage visual austerity. Interiors are underlit, the camera is frequently hand-held, costumes are mud-speckled and the cast are often made to appear physically unattractive. Although these decisions may in part be attributed to budgetary constraints, they imbue the film with a naturalism previously unseen in heritage filmmaking. A similar approach was undertaken in the Hardy adaptation Jude (1996), which combines a Truffaut-influenced visual panache with dark, de-aestheticised images of late-Victorian England. The film's screenwriter Hossein Amini declared that his intention was 'to destroy the heritage film from within' (Church Gibson, 119). Elizabeth (1998) went even further in its repudiation of heritage representations of British history, creating what its Indian director Shekhar Kapur called 'the intrigue of The Godfather and the shooting style of Trainspotting' (ibid, 122). The decision to tell the story of Elizabeth's consolidation of the English throne as a violent, erotic political thriller rather than a drama orientated to mature audiences was strongly reflected in the film's advertising, which positioned the film at a distance from heritage norms (see fig. 7).

The most radical reinterpretation of the heritage aesthetic, however, may be found in Patricia Rozema's adaptation of Mansfield Park (1999). The film announces its independence from its original source at the outset by transforming the prim, timid Fanny Price of the novel into a far feistier character, based in part on Austen's letters and early stories. This iconoclasm is memorably developed in the scene introducing Henry and Mary Crawford, featuring upward full-body tilts borrowed from 'Baywatch', and the two scenes of lesbian flirtation between Mary and Fanny. However, the film is most

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<sup>19</sup> In a possible case of critical double standards, the visual excess that characterised The Age of Innocence was widely interpreted not as depthless prettiness but as evidence of Scorsese's artistry. According to Pam Cook, the ornate *mise en scène* and set design testifies to Archer's 'inability to see beyond surfaces' (162).



Fig. 8: The UK advertising poster for Elizabeth.

remarkable in its incorporation of post-colonialist discourse. In Culture and Imperialism (1993), Edward Said argues that the novel complacently glosses over the fact that the Bertram family's wealth is based on Sir Thomas' sugar plantations in Antigua (80-97). As though in response to this criticism, the film pushes the issues of imperialism and slavery to the foreground. During her journey from Portsmouth to Mansfield, the young Fanny asks her coachmen about the moaning coming from a nearby galleon. 'That's black cargo,' he replies. At Mansfield, Sir Thomas talks blithely of 'his' slaves in Antigua, and it appears that his son Tom has been traumatised and made ill by his experiences there. The slavery issue is paralleled thematically by Sir Thomas' attempts to marry off Fanny. When a ball in Fanny's honour is announced, she declares to Edward 'I will not be sold off like one of your father's slaves'. The source of Tom's trauma is finally made explicit when Fanny discovers his sketchbook, which depicts African slaves being tortured and raped by gangs of white men, including Sir Thomas. This scene causes a rupture in the heritage utopia that no amount of visual splendour can possibly conceal or negate. The revelation is shocking and excessive, as though a long repressed truth has manifested itself on the film in a manner that could not be anticipated or controlled. In this way, Mansfield Park lays bare the true economic foundation of the luxury we see on display elsewhere in the film and to some extent in the heritage aesthetic in general.

The changes that the heritage film has undergone have been paralleled to some extent by broader developments in British culture. Tony Blair's Labour party was elected to government in 1997 on the back of a promise to create a 'New' Britain. Shortly after the election, Labour think-tank Demos published a pamphlet stating, 'Britain is seen as a backward-looking has-been, a theme park world of royal pageantry and rolling green hills, where draughts blow through people's houses' (Leonard, 8). In order to combat these perceptions, Blair spoke of the need to 'rebrand' the nation, arguing 'I want Britain to be seen as a vibrant, modern place, for countries wrapped in nostalgia cannot build a strong future' (Norman, 3). As Driver and Martell note, appeals to national identity have traditionally been the province of Conservative politics (461). However, by defining Britain's newness in terms of youth, modernity and creativity, Blair effectively set up his image for the nation in opposition to the historical, Heritage vision prescribed by Thatcher. To underline the point, the Department of National Heritage was renamed the

Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Blair was greatly aided in putting his vision of a New Britain on the national agenda by the emergence of 'Cool Britannia', a term devised by the British media for the nation's putative cultural renaissance. Blair quickly aligned his party and his vision of Britain with the rhetoric and iconography of the movement. According to Andy Beckett,

By 1997, Cool Britannia meant rock bands and restaurants, football managers and fashion designers, Union Jacks on everything; by the beginning of this year [1998], it was shorthand for the government's entire arts policy' (1998, 2).

Whereas Thatcher shied away from popular culture, Blair has embraced it, apparently seeing it as key to establishing his new identity for Britain.

Alongside pop music, modern art and fashion, British films like Trainspotting (1996), The Full Monty (1997) and Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels (1998) were held up as part of Britain's cultural resurgence. In stark contrast to the stately, luxurious images of Britain associated with heritage filmmaking, these films presented noisy, upbeat and frequently violent subject matter in a visually dynamic and strongly intertextual style. Blair was keen to identify himself with the popularity of these films; in 1997 he even declared his intention to 'go the Full Monty' in modernising the British economy to an audience of presumably baffled Japanese industrialists. The fact that the film told the story of a group of steelworkers so dispossessed by modern economic developments they were required to take up stripping to make ends meet is an irony apparently wasted on him. At the same time, heritage films have been openly disparaged by the Labour government. In 2001, Films and Tourism Minister Kim Howells described them as part of 'the Cambridge Footlights and RADA School of filmmakers,' declaring 'we're cashing in too much on our heritage. It's the easy option' (Milmo, 7). However, despite their tendency to focus on a working-class milieu, these new films could scarcely be regarded as politically progressive alternative to heritage movies. As Claire Monk argues of The Full Monty and Billy Elliot (2000),

Both films achieve their inspirational effects by catapulting members of the workless (or, in Billy Elliot, striking) industrial communities into the new economy of the cultural and entertainment industries favoured by Cool Britannia's image-makers (2001, 34).

Moreover, in many ways, the British films of the late 1990s were as uncritically backwards looking and nostalgic as the heritage films they ostensibly replaced. For example, Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels and the legion of British gangster films it inspired are rooted in an idealised folk memory of 1960s East End London; a Dickensian underworld lorded-over by the even-handed savagery of the Kray brothers.<sup>20</sup> British cinema of the late 1990s therefore seems superficial in its repudiation of the heritage images and values so culturally prevalent throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. It should be noted that Cool Britannia itself drew heavily on the iconography and ideology of the 1960s 'Swinging London' movement. Indeed, it might be argued that whereas Thatcher appealed to the stability of the past in order to conceal the massive changes being made in British society, Blair's appeal to innovation and novelty was intended to obscure the fact that he was essentially maintaining the social and economic policies put in place by his right-wing predecessors.

In spite of the developments in Britain's social identity and the counter-heritage innovations of films like Elizabeth and Mansfield Park, the traditional heritage film lived on. However, where heritage films were formerly the province of independent, British based production companies, in the late 1990s they were increasingly aligned with the Hollywood mainstream. The company most closely identified with Hollywood's appropriation of the heritage film is Miramax, initially an independent company but a subsidiary of Disney since 1995. Miramax was involved in the distribution of British films throughout the 1990s, gaining plaudits for successfully marketing 'difficult' products such as The Crying Game (1992), Trainspotting and Mrs Brown to niche audiences in North America. The company built on this success by moving into production, most notably and successfully with heritage films such as Emma (1996), The English Patient (1996) and Shakespeare in Love (1998). These films were quick to exploit the utopian sensibility of the heritage aesthetic; if anything, they took it up a few notches. Emma, for example, is easily the most picturesque and lavish of the Jane Austen

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<sup>20</sup> The gangster film cycle reached its climax in 2000, with the release of Circus, Essex Boys, Gangster No. 1, Going Off Big Time, Honest, It Was an Accident, Kiss Kiss Bang Bang, Love, Honour and Obey, Rancid Aluminium, Sexy Beast, Shiner and Snatch.

adaptations, due in part to its substantial production budget, while Shakespeare in Love depicts Elizabethan London as a carnival of entertainment and sexual awakening. More recent examples of American heritage films include Gosford Park (2001), produced by USA Films, Iris (2001) and The Importance of Being Earnest (2002), both produced by Miramax. However, the visual and narrative tropes of the heritage aesthetic have also surfaced in Hollywood films less obviously connected to heritage filmmaking. Miramax currently specialises in prestigious, literary, European-based period films such as The Talented Mr Ripley (1999), Chocolat (2000) and Captain Corelli's Mandolin (2001), which rely heavily on heritage aesthetics in their appeal to popular audiences. Examples of this textual reinscription can also be found in Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone and Titanic (1997), the two highest grossing films of all time.<sup>21</sup>

Harry Potter begins by sketching a contemporary world characterised simultaneously by surreal cruelty and the mundane. Harry lives with his aunt and uncle in Privet Drive, a suburban cul-de-sac ostensibly in Surrey, which is lined with identical semi-detached houses and family cars. Behind this placid exterior, Harry is effectively abused by his Aunt and Uncle, who keep him locked in a cupboard while bestowing extravagant favours on their son. This excessive hardship is relieved by the intrusion of fantasy, a scenario familiar from Roald Dahl's books, and the revelation that Harry's parents were wizards. Rescued from his life of drudgery, Harry is taken to London by Hagrid so he can purchase the equipment necessary to attend wizard school. This contemporary location, signaled by a red double-decker bus crossing London Bridge, gives way to magical, Dickensian pastiche of its past when Harry and Hagrid pass through a brick wall into Diagon Alley. The location is strongly characterised by consumption and abundance: inheriting a vault of gold from his parents, for the first time in his life Harry is endowed with consumer power and embarks on the magical equivalent of a shopping spree. A similar transition occurs when Harry crosses from modern-day Kings Cross station to the magical platform 9¾. From here he takes an Edwardian steam train through a pre-industrial English countryside to Hogwarts School, an extravagant gothic castle surrounded by a moat. In both cases, the journey from reality to fantasy,

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<sup>21</sup> Titanic has a worldwide box-office gross of \$1.6b, while Harry Potter's total currently stands at \$0.97b.



from the mundane to the magical, is effectively the journey from the British present into the British past. Period elements continue to dominate in the rest of the film. Hogwarts School is an idealised, socially inclusive pre-war boarding school, complete with a labyrinthine layout, competitive school 'houses' and eccentric masters but without the sadistic punishments and bullying common to similar representations. Moving further back in time, the Quiddich game borrows the imagery of a medieval jousting tournament, while the frequent references to Dragons, Centaurs, Phoenixes and enchanted forests invoke a more European mythology. As with heritage films, this display of the past is highly utopian. As soon as Harry leaves the present, nothing bad happens to him: he's a powerful wizard, a school celebrity, a natural Quidditch player, and when he finally confronts his nemesis Voldemort, he only needs to touch him in order to see him vanquished. In this way, the magical realm, with its basis in the idealised British past, is constructed as the perfect utopian solution to the adversity Harry endures in the real world: abundance replaces deprivation, community replaces isolation and magic replaces mundanity.

Titanic may seem out of place in a discussion of British heritage films, but in addition to its action and romance elements, it draws heavily on the conventions of heritage filmmaking. Indeed, it is perhaps this synthesis of disparate generic elements that gave the film such a broad audience appeal. As with Four Weddings, Titanic's heritage pedigree is signaled initially by its cast, particularly Kate Winslet, a British actress best known at the time for her work in Jude and Sense and Sensibility. It should also be noted that Titanic is set at the end of the Edwardian era, perhaps the archetypal heritage film time-period, and that like A Room With A View it is in part a narrative of female sexual awakening and the loosening of class inhibitions. The film also draws heavily on a preestablished heritage aesthetic, combining the expensive digital effects familiar to the action film genre with the lower key spectacle of elaborate period *mise en scène*. The ship itself, created by a synthesis of special effects and conventional set design, is the principle vehicle of this heritage display: according to Cal, 'it's over a hundred feet longer than Mauretania, and far more luxurious. It has squash courts, a Parisian café, even Turkish baths'. From the outset, Titanic draws on this heritage luxury, which is associated with representations of Britain, to stress the social divide between Titanic's

passengers. First, we see the aristocratic/first-class realm inhabited by Rose and her entourage, who are members of the North-eastern American social elite, but are coded as upper-class British in their dress, gestures, speech and social attitudes (Ouelette, 176). According to the screenplay, they are 'a quintessential example of the Edwardian upper class' (Cameron). This group is contrasted with the working class/steerage realm inhabited by Jack, which is characterised by freedom, chance and community, and is coded in broad strokes as Irish or Irish-American. Despite its proletariat cargo, *Titanic* is very much the property of its aristocratic passengers, reflecting and enhancing their privileged social status. It is, after all, a British ship. However, the film achieves its romantic and ideological effects by promoting a union between these two social spheres via the sexual coupling of Jack and Rose. In this way, *Titanic* enables viewers to take pleasure in the heritage spectacle of aristocratic society while rejecting the exploitative values that underpin it, and to enjoy the supposed social freedoms of proletariat society without suffering the consequences of class exploitation, in this case drowning. This double-standard is clearest in the film's decision to play out its love scenes not in the steerage squalour associated with Jack but in the luxurious first-class quarters belonging to Rose (Ouelette, 179). On a narrative level, *Titanic* thus dramatises Rose's rejection of the aristocratic, British-coded 'old world' in favour of the supposedly democratic, modern, classless identity promised by America. Rose's journey from Britain to America and her emergence from *Titanic*'s wreckage in this way stands in for a more figurative process of survival and reinvention: it represents her defection from the privileged, outmoded social position of her birth, to a thriving, new one. *Titanic* may thus be understood as a distinctively Hollywoodian inflection on the heritage aesthetic. By using the iconography and visual style of heritage filmmaking to represent the 'old world' that the film consigns to the bottom of the Atlantic on the way to a new life in the USA, the film appropriates British representations in order to carry out a distinctly American ideological project.

Throughout its short history, heritage cinema has been inextricably connected to developments in British society, in particular the rise of Thatcherist politics and their conservative veneration of the British past. However, as the reinscription of heritage tropes in *Harry Potter* and *Titanic* indicates, heritage cinema also needs to be understood

as an international phenomenon. Heritage films are unquestionably *about* Britain; indeed, the foregrounding of national specificity is one of their key aesthetic strategies. But although films like Howards End and The Remains of the Day were consumed by large British audiences, they were also made with global audiences in mind. Because of this, critics should be careful not to exaggerate the ideological connection between heritage cinema and Thatcherism. Indeed, it is worth stressing that heritage films are often more popular in the USA than they are in Britain. Despite attempts to modernise the image of the nation therefore, and despite art-cinema derived efforts to counter the heritage aesthetic, the most recognisable and commercially viable images of Britain remain those based in its past. As Thomas Elsaesser puts it, heritage cinema raises the question of what kind of Britishness 'we' can sell to 'them' (1993, 61). As a consequence of this international marketability, heritage images of Britain, characterised by display and utopianism have begun to proliferate in Hollywood cinema, specifically as a means to invoke the past. We might separate these films into two categories: first, films like The English Patient and Titanic that employ elements of the heritage aesthetic as a means to index a realistic, though strongly idealised, sense of the historical past; and second films like Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings that use more general representations of Britishness to conjure a non-specific, fantasy-based sense of antiquity. In both cases, the deployment of British representations depends of the international perception that Britain is, in Patrick Wright's words, an 'old country', whose identity derives primarily from its history rather than its present situation. In this way, the migration of representations of Britain away from their nation of origin also entails a loss of control: because these representations are produced outside the nation and consumed on a global basis, their capacity to reflect modern British life may diminish. To refer back to Elsaesser's comment, as heritage filmmaking becomes more and more closely associated with Hollywood, it would seem that 'we' no longer own the images of Britain that are put on sale. However, it should also be noted that as a result of Hollywood's adoption of British heritage, its production of films that by the criteria of my previous chapter might be described as British, British cinema is currently experiencing a prolonged period of popularity, both in Britain and all over the world. In my final chapter, I will examine the

second dominant source of British representations in contemporary cinema: the British actor.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Uses of Britishness Part 2: Performing the Nation

Are you genuine? Or just an actor? A representative? Or that which is represented?

– Friedrich Nietzsche (65).

As I have already suggested, Britain's acting tradition is frequently put on display as a national heritage property. Although British film acting draws on a number of styles, including the vaudeville performances of the music hall, it has long been associated with Britain's theatrical tradition, a connection intensified by the geographical proximity to the nation's theatrical and filmmaking centres in London.<sup>22</sup> This tradition also embodies Britain's canon of 'classical' dramatic texts, most obviously Shakespeare, and its prestigious stage schools, notably RADA, LAMDA and the Central School, which were established in the early twentieth century and continue to train actors in the classic repertoire. In her interviews with British stage actors, Carole Zucker has highlighted some of the prevailing conceptions that define the British thespian tradition. Most conspicuously, the actors are keen to identify their craft as primarily logocentric, based on high quality, literary writing and the correct interpretation of texts. Ian Richardson has suggested that 'English acting tends to be understated and depends heavily on nuance and irony' while Simon Callow asserts that 'we do use words extraordinarily' (1995 139; 37). As a consequence, British acting is often regarded as a function of the mind first and the body second. According to Jane Lapotaire,

The physical side of our theatre is sadly way down the priority list. I'm ashamed when I direct English actors. Their sense of spatial relationships, their sense of the picture they create on stage is zero!' (ibid, 90).

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<sup>22</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, this factor does not apply in the USA, where the equivalent centres are separated by thousands of miles.

A similar distinction can be found in American actress Lindsay Crouse's comparison of British and American acting styles:

What we're great at is this kind of organic, shoot-from-the-hip, react-of-the-other person, casual arena of acting. What we're not so good at is the control – voice-work, interpretation, clarity, being able to use the text (1999, 152).

In other words, British stage actors take an intellectual and technical approach to their performances, whereas American actors are more physical and intuitive. As Eileen Atkins puts it, British actors are 'head-based, and not gut-based' (1995, 10). This generalisation has frequently been mobilised to account for the apparent shortcomings of British theatre actors when their craft is transferred to the screen. As Bruce Babington points out, the strengths of the British stage tradition, which he summarises as 'self-conscious virtuosity, impersonatory skills, wit and irony', are 'often taken for granted and even deemed somehow uncinematic' (12). Julian Petley, for example, has compared British film actors unfavourably to their American contemporaries, suggesting that the theatrical style of performance is 'in many cases inimical to the demands of film representation' (1985, 122).

British stage actors also differ from American actors in their attitude to the demands of stardom. As Sarah Street has argued, the relationship between stardom and certain elements of British culture has often been antagonistic: 'there has always been a tension between wanting British stars and resentment that, as a Hollywood invention, film stardom and all its trappings of gossip and scandal are somehow unseemly, *unBritish*' (119). Employing a similar vocabulary, Nigel Hawthorne has asserted that there is 'something slightly vulgar' about success for actors, a perception he associates with 'something in the national reserve' (Zucker 1995, 76). During the filming of *Dr Zhivago* (1965), Julie Christie stated the position more forcefully: '[David Lean] would prefer me to act like a star. But I can't' (Geraghty, 43). According to Richard Dyer's classic analysis, movie stardom is sustained by a balance between the image projected by an actor through his or her screen performances and the public perception of the way they live off screen (1979, 22). In this bi-partite model, the off-screen persona of the star – disseminated through public appearances, magazine profiles, and TV appearances – is

constructed and performed in a manner that offsets and compliments the fictional (or rather, more explicitly fictional) persona created on screen. However, whereas American actors have tended to be willing to sacrifice privacy to the demands of stardom, British actors have often proven less cooperative. As Street has suggested, the British theatrical tradition requires an actor to perform only when he or she is on stage. Away from the proscenium arch, stage actors are thought able to shut out the pressures of work and rid themselves of the personae they spend their working lives constructing (143). If an actor should happen to become famous, therefore, this ought to occur in recognition of his or her professional skills, not the intrigue surrounding his/her personal life. Public display is regarded vulgar and unprofessional. As Celia Johnson memorably put it, 'one doesn't talk about oneself, does one?' (Babington, 13). In other words, the duality between on-screen and off-screen personae is not perceived to exist for the traditional stage actor, motivating many British actors to intentionally hold back one half of the information required for them to be perceived as stars. The capacity of British stage actors to attain star status is also diminished by their reluctance to establish a coherent, recognisable persona across their body of work. Due to its basis in the classical repertoire, the British stage acting tradition has stressed that virtuosity stems not from specialisation but from the ability to succeed in a range of roles, styles and genres (Babington, 14). As a result, British stage actors have often proved better suited to 'character' work in cinema. The notion that acting should be undertaken as a strictly professional activity is also reflected in the disdain many British actors exhibit towards actorial egoism and preciousness. Despite her massive success and acclaim, Judi Dench has declared 'I just feel that I'm a jobbing actor' (Zucker 1995, 47). Similarly, Ian Richardson has suggested that British actors 'are ready to take on anything and are not ashamed of playing small parts' (ibid, 138). Adopting a different position, Simon Callow has complained that the British are most tolerant of actors like Dirk Bogarde who self-consciously deflate the pretentiousness of their profession (ibid, 41). This disingenuous attitude is most famously encapsulated in Noel Coward's advice to actors: 'speak clearly, don't bump into the furniture and if you must have motivation, think of your pay packet on Friday' (Ratcliffe, 3).

Despite these culturally based problems, British stage actors have maintained an almost constant presence in Hollywood cinema, providing unique pleasures for

international audiences. In 2002, for example, eight of the twenty actors nominated for Academy Awards were British. An important precedent for this popularity can be found in the career of Ronald Colman, a British stage actor who arrived in Hollywood in 1920 and was subsequently put under contract at MGM. Many silent stars suffered after the introduction of sound in 1927, finding it impossible to integrate their newly audible voices with their pre-existing personae.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, Colman found that sound upgraded his star status, revealing a mellifluous English accent that enhanced his aura of sophistication and otherness, leading some to regard him as 'Britain's answer to Greta Garbo' (Macnab, 105). Colman's Britishness quickly became his major selling point. Films like Bulldog Drummond (1929) and Clive of India (1935) established a persona that was heroic, reckless and debonair; a stock-type Geoffrey Macnab refers to as 'the English gentleman-amateur' (107). In this way, sound movies proved pivotal to the fortunes of British actors in Hollywood and to Hollywood's representation of Britishness generally. Cast in silent movies, the nationality of British actors was imperceptible, but with their theatre-trained accents on the soundtrack, it was pushed to the foreground. In the years that followed, a number of similar British actors arrived in Hollywood, each bringing with them a background in repertory theatre and a vaguely aristocratic social pedigree, forming a virtual British colony that was popularly referred to as 'the Hollywood Raj' (Sweeney 2002a). Prominent members in the 1930s and 1940s included Clive Brook, Basil Rathbone, Herbert Marshall, Leslie Howard, George Sanders, Laurence Olivier, James Mason and David Niven.<sup>24</sup> A smaller number of British stage actresses also became popular in Hollywood in the same period, notably Olivia de Havilland, Joan Fontaine, Vivien Leigh and Greer Garson. These actors were most successful in roles that emphasised the cultural heritage and social privilege that the British thespian tradition embodies: they were sophisticated, witty, emotionally restrained

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<sup>23</sup> For example, John Gilbert's slightly effeminate speaking voice proved incompatible with his matinee idol image, as did Norma Talmadge's Bronx accent with her refined, ladylike persona.

<sup>24</sup> Cary Grant might seem an obvious addition to this group, but despite the elegant, socially elite persona of his Hollywood films, he emerged from a working class British background and entered the entertainment industry as a music hall entertainer rather than a stage actor.



and physically reticent.<sup>25</sup> Given this class-based exclusivity, British actors in the 1930s and 1940s were not ideally suited to the more socially inclusive conditions of American stardom, and tended to be associated with a more limited range of supporting and character roles than might be available to them in Britain. As Gael Sweeney has suggested, British actors in Hollywood have generally been typecast as ‘duffers, butlers, villains and cads’ (ibid). British actresses have been afforded an even slimmer selection of characters, and in both cases British stage actors have often found themselves excluded from the heterosexual coupling on which so many Hollywood genres are premised. Supporting players, particularly duffers, butlers, villains and cads, rarely get the girl or the boy.

Christine Geraghty has recently drawn attention to the relationship between nationality and acting styles, suggesting that ‘a star performance involves an inflection of national positions’ (55). As such, Hollywood’s use of British actors in the sound films of the 1930s and 1940s was strongly influenced by Britain’s dominant stage tradition and the national cultural values it embodies. The actors employed tended towards cerebral rather than physical performances, were typically given roles associated with privileged social status and were often depicted in a desexualised manner. British actors and performance styles were also strongly associated with the historical past. Examples are abundant, but an illustrative list might include Clive Brook in Cavalcade (1933), Leslie Howard in The Scarlet Pimpernel (1934), Laurence Olivier in Wuthering Heights (1938) and Joan Fontaine in Letter From an Unknown Woman (1948). It should also be stressed that national representations are uniquely powerful and persuasive when physically embodied by charismatic individuals. As Ginette Vincedean has argued of Gerard Depardieu and the representations of Frenchness produced by his performances, ‘in a Barthesian sense of myth, Depardieu’s quaffing of red wine, for instance, becomes the signifier of truth about a nation’ (2000, 223). In this sense, actors, particularly those who have attained star status, are uniquely positioned to generate and naturalise national representations for international audiences. Based on the observations I have made about

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<sup>25</sup> Vivien Leigh is an interesting exception to this trend. Despite her RADA training and theatrical background, her most successful roles, Gone With the Wind (1939) and A Streetcar Named Desire (1951), cast her as an emotionally intense Southern belle.

British actors in previous eras, this final chapter will examine the performances of British actors in contemporary Hollywood and the representations of Britain they produce. I will approach this topic by examining British actors and British actresses in separate sections, as the performances of British actors are not only inflected by nationality but also by gender. Just as heritage cinema has provided Hollywood with an efficient vocabulary for the representation of the bygone, I will argue that the performances of British actors provide a specific range of national representations which Hollywood filmmakers have frequently drawn on.

### *An Englishman Abroad*

Given their common cultural and social associations, it should not be surprising that contemporary British thespian actors are strongly associated with heritage filmmaking. Established actors such as Anthony Hopkins, Jeremy Irons, Ian McKellen, Kenneth Branagh and Alan Rickman have made the transition from the stage to Hollywood via roles in successful heritage representations of Britain's past. The careers of younger actors such as Ralph Fiennes, Rupert Everett, Joseph Fiennes and Colin Firth, also adhere to this paradigm. In many cases, these actors have managed to transcend the heritage film and establish themselves in other genres. The recent films of Anthony Hopkins, for example, have situated him much closer to the Hollywood mainstream in roles that are either American or nationally indistinct.<sup>26</sup> However, in each case, the star personae of the actors remain contingent on heritage representations and perceptions of Britishness. In this way, Hopkins' performance in *Hannibal* (2001) draws heavily on the qualities of social refinement and physical containment that he established in his Merchant Ivory work. Similarly, Ian McKellen's performance in *Lord of the Rings* (2001) and Alan Rickman's in *Harry Potter* (2001) have their basis in the technical virtuosity and voice-work of theatre acting. British stage actors may therefore be able to abandon the theatre and the heritage film, but their background is constantly evoked through their performance styles, thus limiting the range of roles available to them. By contrast, performers from other Anglophone nations do not carry this representational baggage.

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<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Hopkins became an American citizen in 2000.

Actors such as Mel Gibson (Australia), Russell Crowe (New Zealand) and Colin Farrell (Ireland), for example, have been able to establish themselves as Hollywood leading men, typically in American roles, with much less difficulty than British contemporaries. Further evidence of this is provided by the career of Daniel Day Lewis, a stage-trained British actor who first came to attention in A Room With a View (1986). Since then, Day Lewis has become increasingly associated with Irish cinema and Irish characters – most notably in My Left Foot (1989), In the Name of the Father (1993) and The Boxer (1997) – and in 1993 he took Irish citizenship. Day Lewis' performances have also tended to focus on working-class characters and frequently centre on his body: he portrayed a quadriplegic in My Left Foot, bulked up for The Last of the Mohicans (1992) and took extensive fight training for The Boxer. Day Lewis thus broadened the range of his performance repertoire by distancing himself from Britain and its theatrical/heritage associations. As an Irish-identified actor, he has been able to work more freely as a Hollywood leading man.

In the 1990s it became commonplace for British stage actors to extend their repertoire by taking supporting roles as Hollywood villains. A list of the most prominent examples would include Alan Rickman in Die Hard (1988) and Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves (1991), Jeremy Irons in The Lion King (1994) and Die Hard: With a Vengeance (1995) and Patrick McGoochan in Braveheart (1995). Of course, the association of British stage actors and villainy is nothing new. Geoffrey Macnab attributes the trend to the performances of George Sanders in the 1930s, writing

In later years, whenever Hollywood wanted a more refined style of villain, it would invariably turn to English actors, whose qualities of refinement, mellowness of sneer and capacity for withering sarcasm could seldom be found back at home in the States (113).

The type of villain incarnated by British stage actors typically draws on the behavioral associations of their tradition – he is suave to the point of being camp, intellectually rather than physically menacing and occupies a privileged social position. In this way, Hollywood's deployment of British stage actors establishes a type of masculinity that is strongly at odds with its dominant representation of American masculinity. British men are physically weak, articulate, effete and well bred; American men are physically

powerful, heterosexual, verbally inexpressive and socially demotic. As Alexander Walker said of 'British-bred actors' in 1988:

All of them are sensitive actors, intelligent performers, handsome boys. But their physicality – no other word for it, I regret to say, than that Actors Studio neologism – is a mite on the light side. [...] Their charm no longer tips the scales when what's needed is the social attitude that goes with the look of the hard man, the cool customer, the self-reliant loner or whatever conviction the man-in-charge uses to enforce his presence in Hollywood films (210).

The films mentioned above thus operate by counterpoising British and American models of masculinity. In each case, the British, or rather English villain is pitched against, and ultimately defeated by, a younger, more sympathetic, more muscular American protagonist – Bruce Willis in the *Die Hard* films, Mel Gibson in *Braveheart* and Kevin Costner in *Robin Hood*.<sup>27</sup> In this way, the typecasting of British actors as villains does not imply that Hollywood regards British men as inherently evil, as various reviewers in the British press have suggested, but that British men are perceived in opposition to its dominant representations of masculinity. Gael Sweeney (who is American) has suggested that this perception is rooted in American anxieties about British masculinity. Describing the 'British body on film' as 'pale, slack, angular, hairless, narrow-chested and knob-kneed', she writes:

The British male represents one of the most troublesome Others for American masculinity: besides carrying an aura of class and erudition, he also stands outside the macho stereotypes that both limit and focus mainstream American stars (2001, 59).

Sweeney positions this in ideological terms, suggesting that Americans perceive Britishness as 'the like that is not like, the sexuality that is at once attractive and repellant, the power of class and position that we desire, but fear to possess and misuse' (2002b).

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<sup>27</sup> It is worth noting that the characters played by Costner and Gibson were, in a sense, British (although both films are set in periods that predate the formation of the British nation). However, in the social values and masculinity they embody, both are distinctly American. Costner even played Robin Hood with a US accent.

Interesting though this thesis is, it fails to take into account that fact that the roles played by thespian actors do represent the full range of British masculine identities in Hollywood. In the late 1950s and 1960 the introduction of educational grants ushered in a 'new wave' of actors from less privileged social backgrounds into British stage schools. Prominent examples included Albert Finney, Tom Courtenay and Glenda Jackson. Although this process went some way to democratising the British stage acting tradition, a bigger impact was made in the same period by the emergence of a generation of British film actors who bypassed the stage altogether on their way to Hollywood stardom. To some degree, Sean Connery might be considered a transitional figure. Raised in a working class Edinburgh community and working initially in the British Navy, Connery's early films cast him in tough-guy supporting roles. However, his stardom was established by his inauguration of the Bond film cycle between 1962 and 1971. The Bond persona of Ian Fleming's books was essentially a throwback to the pre-war 'gentleman amateur' persona associated with Ronald Colman and Clive Brook: he was debonair, socially privileged, phlegmatic and impeccably mannered. However, as Bond, Connery was a far more imposing physical presence than his thespian forebears: he was muscular, violent, virile and frequently forceful in his treatment of women.<sup>28</sup> According to Bond producer Cubby Broccoli, more traditional British actors like Rex Harrison and David Niven were turned down because they 'lacked the degree of masculinity Bond demanded.' Underlining the physical nature of Connery's appeal, he added, 'to put it in the vernacular of our profession: Sean had the balls for the part' (Spicer, 220). Three years after the release of Dr. No (1962), Michael Caine rose to stardom through his role in The Icpress File (1965). Like Connery, Caine was distinguished from his contemporaries by his working-class, non-theatre school background, this time in London's East End and the British Army. Later British films, notably Alfie (1966) and The Italian Job (1969), established Caine as a laconic, cockney variant on Connery's suave, hedonistic tough-guy. Connery and Caine continued to work both in Hollywood and Europe from the 70s through to the present, and although their careers have taken very different routes –

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<sup>28</sup> Connery's association with sexual violence continued beyond the Bond series: both Marnie (1968) and Zardoz (1974) feature rape scenes.

Connery works primarily as a Hollywood leading man, while Caine often takes supporting roles and works more frequently in Britain – both maintain a calculated distance from the mainstream of British thespian acting and the social and cultural values it embodies. As Walker suggests, ‘it is virtually impossible to imagine them playing in a theatre.’<sup>29</sup>

In the last twenty years, Caine and Connery have been joined by a range of British actors who have also eschewed the cultural trappings of the British thespian tradition on their way to Hollywood. Most prominent are Tim Roth, Jude Law, Ewan McGregor, Gary Oldman, Clive Owen, Christian Bale and Pearce Brosnan.<sup>30</sup> Collectively, these actors might be said to embody a different kind of British masculinity. In almost diametric contrast to the traditional British stage actor, these actors are defined by their heavily physical performance styles, which enable them to take on more action-based and often more explicitly heterosexual roles. These actors also embody a kind of masculinity that is far more strongly associated with the present than their thespian colleagues. Tim Roth, for example, is best known for his work in the contemporary crime genre, and although he, Ewan McGregor and others have also appeared in heritage films, their star identities are rooted firmly in the here and now. In the same way, these actors carry none of the associations of social privilege and that so often restricts the range of roles available to stage actors. With the possible exception of Pearce Brosnan, all have frequently and convincingly portrayed working class characters. However, more than anything else, non-thespian British actors embody a brand of masculinity that is *less British* than that provided by stage actors. They are able to downplay their nationality, and as a result they function unobtrusively in Hollywood roles that are not specifically flagged as British. Tim Roth’s performance in *Pulp Fiction* (1994) is a case in point: although Roth makes no attempt to disguise his British accent, the nationality of his character is never an issue. Similarly, Connery has seldom adapted his distinctive

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<sup>29</sup> Indeed, in his book *Acting on Film*, Caine is openly disparaging of theatre actors and their attempts to work in the film industry (14-17).

<sup>30</sup> Although Brosnan was born in Ireland, he spent much of his youth in Britain. Since making his first Bond film, he has primarily been associated with British roles (*The Thomas Crowne Affair* (1999), *The Tailor of Panama* (2001)).

Scottish accent to fit the characters he plays: like Arnold Schwarzenegger, his nationality never requires explanation. Moreover, non-thespian British actors have also been able to fit seamlessly into roles depicting Americans. Michael Caine's performance in The Cider House Rules (1999) and Jude Law's in The Talented Mr Ripley (1999) are good examples. In this way, the masculinity of the non-thespian British actors may be understood to occupy a middle ground between the British stage actor and the American star actor. By rejecting the high-culture, socially elite associations of the British stage, two generations of British actors, from Sean Connery to Jude Law, have forged a set of identities for British actors that adhere more closely to Hollywood's dominant representation of masculinity.

The extent to which representations of British masculinity have been ingrained by Hollywood can be observed in the career of Hugh Grant, perhaps the most successful British actor since Connery, and the manner in which his star persona has been perceived in America. To some extent, Grant stands outside the thespian and non-thespian models of British masculinity. Despite his privileged upbringing and education at Latymer Upper School and Oxford University, Grant bypassed stage school and the theatre altogether, entering filmmaking directly on graduating from university. Grant is also unusual in his willingness to cooperate with the demands of the Hollywood publicity machine, as his countless magazine profiles, press conferences and TV appearances testify. Moreover, whereas stage actors typically emphasise the value of diversity, Grant's performances tend to foreground the continuities of his star image over and above the differences between the characters he plays. He does not attempt to alter his appearance, voice or gesticulations to fit the roles he assumes; instead he makes his performance transparent so he is always recognisable to audiences as Hugh Grant. The effect of this policy is two-fold. On the one hand, it exposes him to criticism that he is merely 'being himself' rather than acting. Conversely, the narrowness of Grant's range has enabled him to make his persona something completely unique. Because no other star signifies in the same way he does, he is able to command what Barry King describes as a 'personal monopoly' over his image (MacDonald, 185). However, although Grant lacks the cultural gravitas of the thespian tradition, his star persona exudes its elevated social status. Right from the beginning of his career, Grant has been associated with the English aristocracy: he played

Lord Adrian in Privileged (1982), his film debut, Lord James D'Ampton in The Lair of the White Worm (1988) and Lord Byron in Rowing in the Wind (1988). In his own words, his star persona is that of 'this bungling, floppy-haired, upper-class twit' (Gleick, 1995 86). Moreover, Grant's identity has always been strongly dependent on perceptions of his Britishness. This emphasis has played a large part in his US press coverage: People magazine describe him as an 'irresistible Englishman' and 'the shy, beguiling Brit' while for GQ he is 'a suave British sweetie' (Scheider, 50; Kaylin, 226). More than any other British actor of his generation, male or female, it is inconceivable that he might play a character of any other national background.

Grant's strong association with Britain, specifically the English upper classes, is strongly evident in the range of representations produced by his performances. The development of his persona can be traced to Bitter Moon (1992) and Sirens (1994). In the former, he plays a nervous English honeymooner who becomes involved with a highly sexed French/American couple; in the latter he plays an English clergyman who journeys to Australia to persuade a bohemian artist to censor his sexually explicit paintings. Both films end with Grant's character defeated, humiliated and cuckolded. On both occasions, Grant embodies negative stereotypes of upper/upper-middle class English masculinity – he is prim, snobbish, hypocritical, physically awkward and sexually ambiguous – and is brought into conflict with a foreignness that is beyond his narrow comprehension. The resulting dialogue of national stereotypes articulates a mutual confusion in which Grant, and by extension England itself, invariably comes off worse. However, it was not until the release of Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994) that Grant was established as a star. The film employed the formula of Bitter Moon and Sirens, this time putting Grant up against a sexually dominant American woman, but crucially it emphasised the comedy inherent in Grant's humiliation, in the process making him appear romantic and sympathetic. Similar comic scenarios were engineered in The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill, But Came Down a Mountain (1995), where Grant encounters a town of belligerent Welshmen, Mickey Blue Eyes (1999), where he marries into a family of Italian-Americans gangsters, and Notting Hill (1999), which repeats the Four Weddings plot. In each case, Grant's repeated social humiliation is no longer excruciating but gratifying for the audience. According to Time magazine, 'part of the pleasure of following him has



been to see a fellow with leading man looks play so many variations of the upper-class twit' (Corliss 1995, 58). Similarly, Sweeney suggests that 'the viewer takes pleasure in Grant's masochistic display: to see the humiliation of a handsome, intelligent male with all the class privileges of a British identity, satisfies something in the viewer, especially the American viewer' (2001, 63).

Interestingly, the same formula can be read into Grant's arrest on Sunset Boulevard. In the hands of an eager world press, Grant was cast as an Englishman lost in America, a sexual innocent caught out by the mores of a foreign culture. As Sweeney suggests, 'the apogee of Grant's star ritual of humiliation and forgiveness would be played out not in any of his films but in the forum of public scandal and apology' (ibid). The incident is an interesting example of the 'star scandal' identified by Richard DeCordova, in which information is exposed that seems to contradict the off screen persona of the star (45). As Paul MacDonald notes, 'scandal discourse had a special status, for it appeared to tell the ultimate truth which the fabrications of film narratives and promotional campaigns could not hide' (178). In keeping with this model, the contradiction between Grant's behaviour and his star persona was quickly detected by the American press. As Richard Corliss put it in Time,

Snarly musclemen and tortured teen-types – the Stallones and Depps – are supposed to misbehave; it's part of their profile. But when the sinner is an Oxford grad peddling a boyish domestic charm – the last good hope of vanishing gentility – he can expect to face rude music. On his field trip into the Sunset night, Grant went out of character, played disastrously against type, punctured a popular illusion (1995, 58).

People magazine attempted to add credibility to this knee-jerk response by quoting a stunt coordinator who had worked with him as saying, 'It seems illogical, incredible and totally out of character' (Schneider, 50). Disbelief was also expressed at the idea that Grant had been unfaithful to a partner as attractive as Elizabeth Hurley. As a GQ writer asked, 'why would anyone with total access to the luscious Elizabeth Hurley risk it all for a quickie with a straight-up hooker?' (Kaylin, 226).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> This response was no doubt intensified by the stark physical contrast between the image of the working-class, African-American prostitute and Hurley's glamorous, English-rose persona.

However, even a week after the event, the idea that the incident might play to Grant's advantage was mooted in the American press. According to Newsweek, 'the hooker episode might actually improve his image, giving him a bit of a dark-side and quelling rumours that he is gay' (Seligmann, 54). More importantly, if Grant's lewd conduct was perceived to be 'out of character', his behaviour in its aftermath was not. As People noted, glowingly,

Grant may be guilty of dodgy behaviour on Hollywood's Sunset Boulevard, but no one can accuse him of dodging the consequences. In a statement released immediately after his arrest he fessed up completely. And according to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox [...] the actor will be keeping all his promotional appearances (Levitt, 91).

Instead of canceling the tour of American talk shows set up to publicise his new film Nine Months (1995) as might be expected, Grant fulfilled his obligations, discussing the incident with some candour on 'The Tonight Show', 'The Late Show', 'Larry King Live' and 'Live With Regis and Kathy Lee'. The publicity generated by these appearances was so positive that the release of Nine Months was bought forward by several weeks, and despite indifferent reviews, the film took an impressive \$70m at the North American box office. Grant's exemplary behaviour – his contrition, his good humour, his defence of Hurley and his utter awkwardness and embarrassment – was entirely in keeping with his star persona. According to Anthony Lane in the New Yorker, 'Hugh was funny, modest, perky with self-censure, and closer to imploding with distress than anyone I have seen on network television' (84). In other words, the qualities Grant exhibited in his talk-show performances were precisely those American audiences had enjoyed so much in Four Weddings. As Sweeney puts it, the scandal 'did not ruin Grant's career because his screen image was already one of sexual humiliation and contrition' (2001, 65). In this way, an incident that initially appeared to contradict American perceptions was quickly reinflected to underscore pre-existing notions about British masculinity, allowing Grant to continue working with the hapless, upper-class persona he had already perfected. Indeed, as the success of Nine Months indicated, the event may even have broadened his appeal, particularly with male audiences. The career of Hugh Grant may thus be seen to encapsulate the specific appeal that Hollywood's incarnation of British masculinity holds

for international audiences, while also highlighting its limited uses in mainstream filmmaking. Grant remains a bankable Hollywood actor, but as the American response to the Sunset Boulevard incident suggests, his star persona and the range of roles associated with it are restricted by perceptions regarding his Britishness.

### *I'm not an Englishwoman, but I play one on TV*

The careers of Britain's most prominent film actresses have generally been subject to similar, nationally inflected perceptions as Britain's actors. In particular, the star personas of Emma Thompson, Kate Winslet, Helena Bonham Carter, Judi Dench and Kristin Scott Thomas are resolutely bound up with socially elite, heritage representations of the British past. Indeed, it might be noted that whereas British males working in this tradition have been able to diversify into other Hollywood genres, the range of significations generated by British actresses has proved less mobile. For example, despite the range she has shown on stage, Judi Dench's recent film career has focused on ballsy matriarchs, dames and other authority figures; most notably Queen Victoria in *Mrs Brown* (1997), Queen Elizabeth in *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (2002) and 'M' in the Bond films. British actresses have also tended to embody a different kind of physicality and sexuality than American actresses in the Hollywood mainstream. Typically, they fall short of the standards of physical perfection and sexual spectacle, what Laura Mulvey terms the 'to-be-looked-at-ness', which characterise Hollywood's dominant representation of the female body (19). To put it in cruder terms, British actresses are not glamorous, or at least not as glamorous as their American counterparts. Christine Geraghty has argued that rather than presenting the body as 'a glamorous object to be looked at,' the performances of Emma Thompson are engineered to 'express control' of her environment (46). Geraghty traces this expression to Thompson's delivery of dialogue and her command of her voice, both key tenets of the logocentric British thespian/stage-school tradition from which Thompson emerged. In this respect, the uses to which Thompson's acting style has been put are very similar to those associated with Judi Dench. Of her performance in *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), Geraghty suggests:

Thompson's work draws attention to the process of acting, but acting here is a matter of control, of making ideas and emotions intelligible. It makes a virtue of restraint so that emotion has to be understood through the flatness of the performance (ibid).

In this way, Thompson's acting style is characterised by physical containment; the voice displaces the body as the enunciative centre. In the process, Thompson's body typically becomes a marginal, desexualized presence in her films, freeing the characters she plays from the controlling gaze of both the audience and other characters in the films. As Margaret Schlegel in Howards End (1992), for example, Thompson's vigorous, voluble performance diminishes the ability of Anthony Hopkins' less charismatic Henry Wilcox to assert power over her. Similarly, in Wit (2001), Thompson plays a literature professor who loses control of her body through cancer therapy while retaining her active mind.

Similar observations may be made of the performances of Helena Bonham Carter, an actress whose identification with heritage filmmaking is almost absolute. Bonham Carter's performances tend not to express the authority that distinguishes those of Dench and Thompson; indeed, the characters she plays are typically passionate and youthful and are frequently the object of sexual desire within the films. However, this passion is seldom expressed through Bonham Carter's body. For example, in A Room With a View, Lucy Honeychurch's incipient sexual awakening is signaled not by her physical presence but externally, by her performances at the piano. When she is first kissed by George Emerson, by contrast she responds by stiffening her body and freezing to the spot. Moreover, Bonham Carter's pale, somewhat sickly appearance, frequently described as 'pre-Raphaelite', is perhaps too esoteric to fall within the norms of Hollywood glamour. However, Bonham Carter has recently attempted to disassociate herself from heritage filmmaking with heavily physical Hollywood roles as a highly sexed sociopath in Fight Club (1999), and, unrecognizable under make-up, a chimpanzee in Planet of the Apes (2001). More conspicuously still, Bonham Carter promoted the latter film with a partially nude photo spread in Maxim magazine (see fig. 8). However, it remains uncertain how successful these attempts to move her star image into the present have been – perceptions



Fig. 8: Helena Bonham Carter in Maxim magazine, August 2001.

of her as a non-glamorous heritage actress seem hard to shift. In a Time profile, Richard Corliss described her as 'our modern antique goddess,' adding 'if Edwardian England hadn't existed, James Ivory might have had to create it for her' (1996, 56).

In contrast to Thompson, Dench and Bonham Carter, the performance style of Kate Winslet is strongly connected to her physicality, a factor most evident in her frequent decision to appear nude on screen. As Geraghty notes,

Titanic uses Winslet's body for some of its set-piece moments, loading it with narrative significance. Thus, the high-spot of the romance is the moment of unity when Winslet's body, supported by DiCaprio becomes the live masthead of the modernist ship, caught up the sensation of flying and moving towards the West (50-51).

Winslet's robust, assertive use of her body is also apparent in Iris (2001), particularly in her forthright seduction of her less experienced partner and her unabashed fondness for nude swimming. However, Winslet's confident exhibitionism is tempered by frequent press attention to her dieting and fluctuating weight. Interest was fuelled by a 2001 interview, subsequently circulated by the Associated Press, in which she stated:

I'm trying to diet. It's so insane and bloody boring. I despise myself for it, because I feel I'm letting a lot of people down. I constantly wave the flag of 'Don't go on diets because they're rubbish,' but I'd like to get a bit of the baby weight off or I won't work (Duncan, 8).

More recently, Winslet's appearance at the 2002 Academy Award Ceremony was followed by an article in US Weekly entitled 'Diet Secrets of the Oscar Women', which claimed she had lost 56 pounds in time for the ceremony after giving birth (R.S. Smith, 23). Though it is seldom suggested that she is any less beautiful than American actresses, Winslet's body is constantly presented off screen as a problem rather than an object of desire. These extra-textual discourses have the effect of undermining the control Winslet exerts over her body on screen, implicitly positioning her outside the physical standards promoted by Hollywood's dominant representation of femininity.

A rare exception to Hollywood's representations of British femininity can be found in Catherine Zeta Jones, whose star persona is contingent on the specularisation of her body. The Mask of Zorro (1998), for example, features a duel in which her negligee is gradually shredded by her (male) opponent's sword, while Entrapment (1999) showcases her body maneuvering between laser-beams in a cat-suit. The connection between these representations and Hollywood's dominant norms of femininity was testified in a 2001 Vanity Fair profile, entitled 'Glamour, Without Apologies' which stated 'Catherine Zeta Jones's combination of sex and toughness puts her in a class with the stars of Hollywood's golden age' (Bennets, 83). Zeta Jones's sex appeal thus distinguishes her from dominant representations of British femininity in favour of a performance more favourable to Hollywood. However, it should be pointed out that Zeta Jones' marriage to Michael Douglas and his dynastic Hollywood family and her preference for playing American rather than British characters have to some extent 'Americanised' her star persona.

The perception that British actresses lack glamour and fall short of the physical norms endorsed by Hollywood is perhaps most conspicuous in the frequent pairing of British leading men with American actresses. This formula has been most successful in Four Weddings and Notting Hill, but precedents can be found in A Fish Called Wanda (1988), Brazil (1985) and An American Werewolf in London (1981). Indeed the transatlantic love story can be dated back to 1923, when American star Betty Compson appeared opposite Clive Brook in Woman to Woman. However, more is revealed by Hollywood's recent policy of casting American actresses in roles depicting British women. The actress best known for her ability to 'pass' as British is Gwyneth Paltrow, whose performances in Emma (1996), Sliding Doors (1998) and Shakespeare in Love (1998) might constitute a trilogy of British features.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, it should be noted that Paltrow's early success was contingent on her identification with British heritage filmmaking and to a certain extent as a British actress. Geraghty suggests that Paltrow's performance in Emma takes its cue from the restraint, manners and control instilled in the performances of Emma Thompson, but adds to it 'another kind of look which is

<sup>32</sup> After a succession of less popular roles, Paltrow recently returned to British characters in Possession (2002).

connected to the type of glamour Thompson lacks' (53). In particular, Geraghty emphasises the unusual number of carefully lit close shots of Paltrow at various stages in the film, which draw attention to her complexion and features, giving her body 'a significance outside the conventions of acting and genre' (ibid). In other words, despite the film's heritage setting, the representations of glamour and sexuality generated through Paltrow's performance remain strongly contemporary. Paltrow's body is also at the narrative centre of Shakespeare in Love, another heritage film, where for much of the movie she is disguised as a boy. The contrast between Paltrow's femininity and the failure of almost the entire cast to recognise Viola De Lesseps as a woman provides the film with much of its ironic humour. However, this irony threatens to transgress heterosexual norms when Viola and Will Shakespeare make love, first on stage as director and star and later in private, when Viola's costume is removed. In order to negate these themes, the film concludes with Viola and Will performing 'Romeo and Juliet' with Viola, dressed in stunning bridal costume, in the woman's role. In this way, Paltrow's glamour and femininity are central to the film's ideological project: the image of her as a woman needs to exceed and overwhelm that of her as a man in order for the heterosexual love story to remain convincing.<sup>33</sup> Paltrow's acting style in these British heritage films is thus derived from those of British actresses, but it combines them with a glamour typically absent from dominant representations of British femininity: her social refinement and technical polish fit seamlessly into the heritage diegesis, but her physicality does not. In this way, Paltrow's persona in these films is bifurcated, enabling audiences to accept her character as British while recognising the individual beneath the performance as a Hollywood star.

The representations of femininity produced by American actresses 'passing' as British women can also be observed in Bridget Jones's Diary (2001) and Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001), films that take their cue from the British heritage filmmaking. Lara Croft belongs very much to the action film genre, with its set-piece orientated narrative and its emphasis on violence and technology, but it also works with the iconography of

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<sup>33</sup> By way of contrast, consider the more subversive representations of sexuality produced by Tilda Swinton's cross-gendered performance in Orlando (1992).



the heritage film. Lara, played by Angelina Jolie, is essentially an anachronistic figure: an aristocratic, independently wealthy archeologist residing in an enormous manor house. However, despite this almost parodically excessive heritage environment, Jolie's performance is emphatically centred on her body, which is presented in khaki hot-pants and tight fitting tank-tops with fetishistic weaponry strapped to her thighs (see fig. 9). The film opens with Lara battling a sexually aggressive robot and expressing a kind of post-coital enjoyment in its defeat, and proceeds with Lara in the shower, nonchalantly exposing her body to her butler. Throughout the film, Jolie's body is associated with violence and action – she is constantly depicted in motion, running, fighting, and riding motorbikes. But in contrast to the female action heroes of Aliens (1986) and Terminator 2 (1991), these activities also serve to sexualise Jolie's physique, displaying it as an object of desire. The Lara Croft character is thus distinctly British in her association with heritage and the class system, but she exists outside Hollywood's dominant representation of British femininity. Given these conditions, the role required an actress who, like Paltrow, could 'pass' as British while simultaneously remaining identifiable as a more glamorous non-British Hollywood star. The performances of Winona Ryder in Bram Stoker's Dracula (1992), Julianne Moore in An Ideal Husband (1999) and Reese Witherspoon in The Importance of Being Earnest (2002) can be read in the same way, as might those of Australian actresses Nicole Kidman and Cate Blanchett in The Others (2001) and Elizabeth (1998).

Bridget Jones's Diary also borrows from heritage film, importing the narrative of 'Pride and Prejudice' and establishing itself in a privileged social milieu in order to address itself to a similar audience. However, unlike Lara Croft, the titular role might easily have been taken by a British actress. Indeed, it was widely predicted in the entertainment press that the diet-obsessed diarist would be played by Kate Winslet. The casting of American star Renée Zellweger thus led to some consternation in the British press. As an article in The Observer put it,

Zellweger is a Texan blonde [...] a high school cheerleader who is said to have worked in a topless bar without taking her top off, and whose first acting job was an ad for Texan

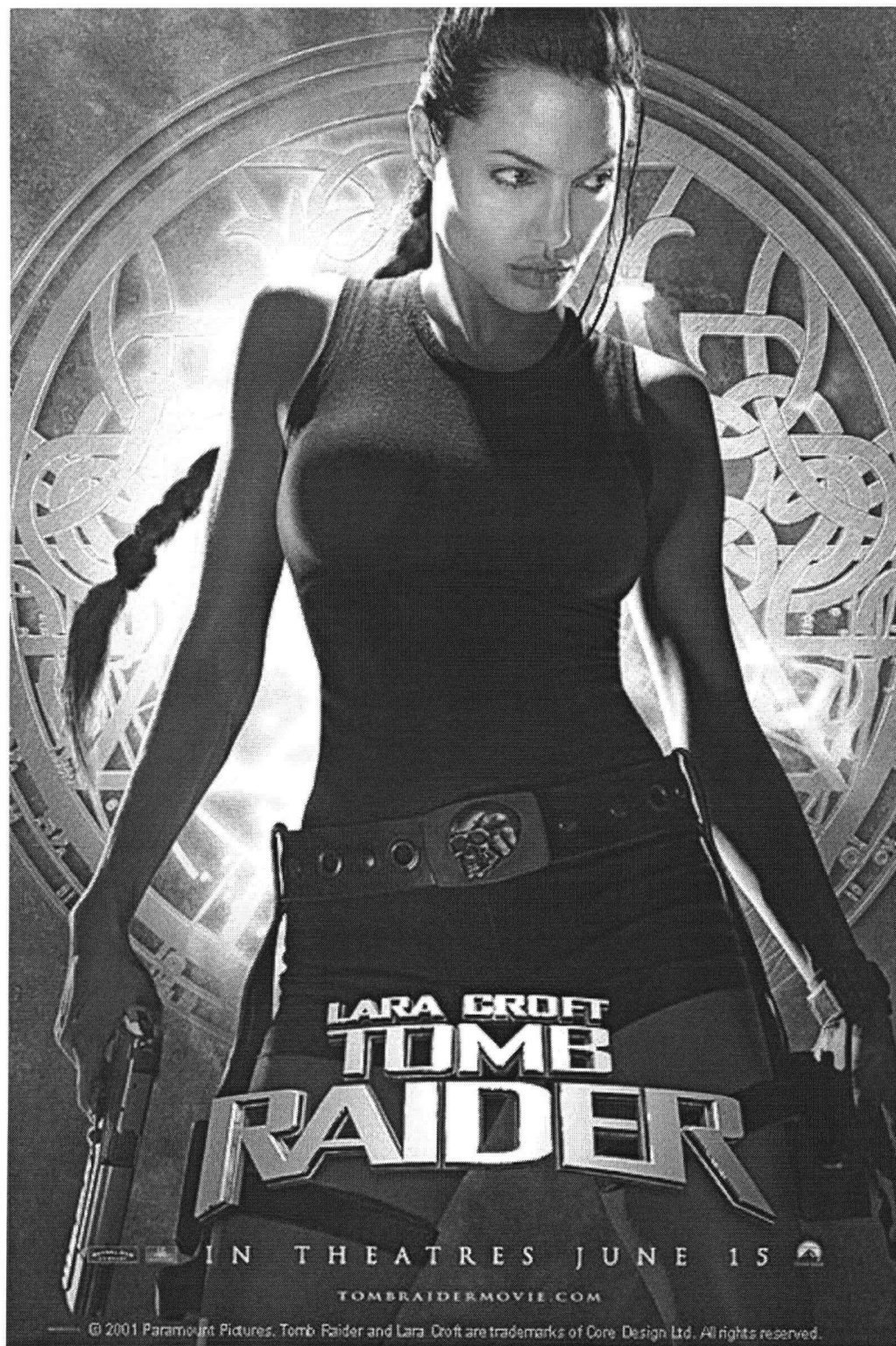


Fig. 9: Angelina Jolie in Lara Croft: Tomb Raider.

beef. She is, it would seem, as wholesome and un-Bridget-like as they come. In the words of a former school friend, 'you couldn't find anyone more American than Renée' (7)

But despite the improbable fit between star and character, Zellweger's performance met with good reviews once the film was released. Her accent was deemed convincing by the British press and it was noted that she had gained 20 pounds to take on the role. Predictably, Zellweger's body is central both to her performance and to the film generally, but instead of being presented an object of desire as with Paltrow and Jolie, shallow lighting and wide-angle lenses are used to make it appear as unflattering as possible. Indeed, the unsuitability of Bridget's body is the source of much of the film's humour, as when she mistakenly appears at a posh party in an ill-fitting bunny-suit and when her bottom is captured in close-up during a live TV broadcast. Interestingly, this depiction of uncontrolled physicality was contradicted by Zellweger's promotional appearances for the film, which revealed that she had lost a great deal of weight since playing the part, and her own repeated claims that she felt physically uncomfortable in the role. This opposition of body types was crystallised by the British tabloid The Daily Mail, who placed 'before and after' pictures of Zellweger side by side and asked a panel of experts whether they preferred 'Bridget Jones or Bridget Bones' ('Bridget Jones', 49). As with Paltrow and Jolie, Zellweger's ability to pass as a British character depends on a bifurcation of her star image. However, whereas Jolie and Paltrow can be identified by audiences as Hollywood stars through the nature of their performances, Zellweger's depiction of Bridget is very much in keeping with the dominant representation of British femininity. Zellweger's glamour and physicality therefore surfaces not within the film but through her performances outside it, by the vivid contrast between her appearance on-screen as a British woman and her appearance off-screen as a Hollywood star.

Hollywood's deployment of British actors very much draws on the same cultural and social cachet of the British heritage film: British actors tend to be cast in roles that emphasise their privilege, erudition and connection to the past. Much in the same way as the British heritage film created an iconography and an aesthetic that could be used by Hollywood to invoke the past, so the performance style associated with Britain's stage tradition, both in terms of technique and its high-culture status, has been employed by

Hollywood to create specific cultural representations that relate to international perceptions of Britishness. The effect of these representations is perhaps most evident in the treatment of these performers' bodies, which are typically depicted in opposition to mainstream Hollywood physicality. The type of masculinity created by this opposition can be observed in the career of Hugh Grant and the casting of British stage actors as villains. However, due to the much more limited range of roles available to women in Hollywood, the type of femininity produced has proved much less useful and remain strongly associated with heritage filmmaking. As a consequence, non-British Hollywood stars have frequently been called on to provide more glamorous portrayals of British women. Of course, not all British actors can be classified according to this criteria, but the fact that so many of them, from Sean Connery to Catherine Zeta Jones, have made careers for themselves by disavowing Hollywood's dominant representations of British masculinity and femininity is indicative of their continued prevalence. British actors thus feature strongly in contemporary Hollywood filmmaking, their performance styles – inflected both by nationality and gender – creating distinctive representations of Britain while also limiting the range of roles available to them.

## CONCLUSION

### The Other Side of Dominion

We're looking for people who can contribute to what England has given the world: culture, genius, sophistication. Bit more than an 'ot dog, know what I mean?

– Harry Shand, The Long Good Friday (1979).

In its hundred year history, British cinema has never managed to compete on equal terms with Hollywood, nor has it been able to protect its domestic market from the domination of Hollywood imports. The closure of FilmFour as I completed the final chapter of this thesis only served to underline the chronic circularity of British film production: dependent on Hollywood investments, the industry rises and falls according to the exchange rate and the international marketability of cultural British products. Numerous noble attempts have been made to liberate British production from this economic straitjacket, but as Neil Jordan has recently pointed out, the only thing liable to make a lasting difference would be the total collapse of the American economy (6). While such an event should not be ruled out completely, its occurrence certainly cannot be relied upon. This seemingly intractable situation has generally been regarded with a mixture of despondency and resignation by British film critics, several of whom have gone as far as to suggest that British cinema cannot even be said to exist. In particular, anxiety has been expressed at the potential for Hollywood cinema to 'brainwash' British citizens, compromising their sense of national identity and making them susceptible to Hollywood-promoted models of behaviour and consumption. Against this, these critics have valorised the creation and sustenance of a British 'national cinema' capable of reflecting the day to day experiences of life in the modern nation. However, it seems to me that such a model fails to take into account the manner in which modern British cinema is consumed and produced. First, individuals in Britain do not derive their sense of identity solely from images of Britain: they consume an enormous range of film texts, varying from Hollywood action movies to Bollywood musicals, and can be expected to negotiate their own, highly individual national subject positions accordingly. In this

sense, the weakness of British film production relative to the Hollywood leviathan should not be regarded as a threat to British nationalism but merely as a reflection of the complex manner in which national identities are formed. Second, British cinema is not, and rarely has been, consumed in Britain alone. The increasing intensity of international economic and cultural exchanges, known popularly as globalisation, has resulted firstly in British films orientated towards a global audience and secondly in films depicting Britain that are produced outside the nation. As a consequence of these changes, it is necessary to rethink what we mean by 'British' cinema. I would suggest that instead of focusing on national borders and the economic ownership of films, the nationality of films should be defined in terms of what is represented on screen. Clearly, if Shakespeare in Love (1998) does not count as a British film, we need to reconsider what does.

Thus defined, British cinema in the 1990s becomes a multivalent, wide-ranging phenomenon that can be discerned on a global scale. In particular, representations of Britain and British people have proved highly prevalent in contemporary Hollywood cinema, in the process bringing British films to an enormous global audience. These representations are centred primarily on two interrelated discourses: the discourse of the British past and the discourse of the British actor. Building on the aesthetic established in the British heritage film in the 1980s, Hollywood cinema has adopted representations of the British past as a means to index a sense of the bygone, both historical and mythical. Evidence of this can be seen in films as diverse and unlikely as Titanic (1997), which is based on historical events, Lord of the Rings (2001), which invokes the past as a form of fantasy, and Austin Powers (1997) which falls somewhere in between. Similarly, British actors, with their basis in theatrical tradition and training, have been used in Hollywood films to embody specific types of masculinity and femininity which are typically cast in opposition to Hollywood norms, reflecting social status and intellect and the expense of action and glamour. In both cases, these representations have their roots in the North American perception of British identity as a signifier of taste, refinement, social privilege and cultural capital, and the notion that Britain is defined by its age. Of course, these are merely value judgments and do not reflect the national experience of the majority of British citizens, but this does not militate against their international popularity and marketability. In this way, representations of Britain in the age of globalisation might be

described as itinerant; they have moved beyond the national borders of Britain to inhabit the decentralised, internationally orientated products of Hollywood. Of course, I do not wish to suggest that this is an entirely new phenomenon; precedents are particularly common in Hollywood cinema of the 1930s and early 1940s. The 1990s should therefore be seen as a period in which the migration of British images to Hollywood has accelerated rather than started afresh.

As a result of these changes, Hollywood's historical domination of British cinema seems distinctly double-edged: the production of cinema within Britain may be at a low ebb, but representations of Britain continue to flourish. Indeed, it might be argued that after the USA, Britain is the most represented nation in Hollywood cinema. And unlike the USA, this no longer bears any relation to the value of the British market. Against this, it might be argued that the kind of representations favoured by Hollywood, with their basis in the past and the upper classes, do not bear any meaningful relationship to Britain itself. However, I would suggest that the acid test for the meaningfulness of these images is their popularity with British audiences. If we compile the top ten British films and British co-productions at the UK and the top ten at the worldwide box office, strikingly similar lists are produced (see table 2). The representations of Britain most popular with international audiences, therefore, are more or less the same as those most popular with domestic audiences. There is no grass roots reaction against Hollywood's inaccurate depiction of Britain; instead, these representations seem to be embraced. Of course, it is possible to attribute this phenomenon as further evidence of Hollywood's conditioning of its audiences and its elimination of product choice, but this seems rather far-fetched and patronising. Instead, I would suggest that it testifies to the complex and unpredictable manner in which films are consumed by national audiences. Whether in Brixton or Khartoum, it seems to me that audiences will make sense of British films like Harry Potter (2001) in ways that are appropriate and unique to their own social predicaments. In the recent aftermath of the FilmFour closure, journalist Stuart Jefferies wrote:

'When the British film industry dies, the event will warrant a paragraph in a US trade mag blaming its expiration on insufficient demand among Britons for cinematic representations of their homeland' (16).

**Table 2: Highest grossing British films/British co-productions at UK box office:**

(source: [www.bfi.org.uk/facts/stats/alltime/uk10\\_ukboxoffice.html](http://www.bfi.org.uk/facts/stats/alltime/uk10_ukboxoffice.html))

1. Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (2001)
2. The Full Monty (1997)
3. Bridget Jones' Diary (2001)
4. Notting Hill (1999)
5. Chicken Run (2000)
6. The World is Not Enough (1999)
7. Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994)
8. Shakespeare in Love (1998)
9. Tomorrow Never Dies (1997)
10. Golden Eye (1995)

**Highest grossing British films/British co-productions at worldwide box office:**

(source: [www.us.imdb.com/charts/worldtopmovies](http://www.us.imdb.com/charts/worldtopmovies))

1. Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (2001)
2. Notting Hill (1999)
3. The World is Not Enough
4. Shakespeare in Love (1998)
5. Bridget Jones' Diary (2001)
6. Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001)
7. The Full Monty (1997)
8. Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994)
9. Bean (1997)
10. The English Patient (1996)



The notion of a functioning British film industry may be elusive, but the idea that its existence is somehow prerequisite for the representation of Britain remains a prevalent and damaging assumption. The demand for British images in the cinema is immense and self-evident, both within the nation and all over the world. The fact that this demand is met by Hollywood rather than a film industry based in Britain is unfortunate from the point of view of the national economy, but it does not alter the fact that films representing Britain are have a global currency. It should not be concluded from this argument that the production of British films within Britain is somehow unnecessary or irrelevant; indeed, some of the most aesthetically interesting representations of the nation continue to be produced in Britain, and for this reason alone British film production deserves all the public support and government subsidy it can get. I would merely suggest that the success of British film production is not necessary for the success of British cinema in its wider sense. Contrary to the nationalistic pessimism of so many British critics therefore, British cinema in the 1990s lives on; it has merely adapted to the demands and vicissitudes of the global market.

## Filmography

The 39 Steps (1935) dir. Alfred Hitchcock

8½ Women (1999) dir. Peter Greenaway

The Age of Innocence (1993) dir. Martin Scorsese

Alfie (1966) dir. Lewis Gilbert

Aliens (1986) dir. James Cameron

An American Werewolf in London (1981) dir. John Landis

Another Country (1984) dir. Marek Kaniévska

Austin Powers (1997) dir. Jay Roach

Babymother (1998) dir. Julian Henriques

The Battle of Britain (1969) dir. Guy Hamilton

Baywatch (1989-2001) various directors

Bean (1997) dir. Mel Smith

A Beautiful Mind (2001) dir. Ron Howard

Beau Travail (1999) dir. Clare Denis

Bend it Like Beckham (2002) dir. Gurinda Chandra

The Big Swallow (1901) dir. James Williamson

Billy Elliot (2000) dir. Stephen Daldry

Bitter Moon (1992) dir. Roman Polanski

Blow Up (1966) dir. Michelangelo Antonioni

The Boxer (1997) dir. Jim Sheridan

Bram Stoker's Dracula (1992) dir. Frances Ford Coppola

Braveheart (1995) dir. Mel Gibson

Brazil (1985) dir. Terry Gilliam

Brideshead Revisited (1981, TV) dir. Charles Sturridge

Bridget Jones' Diary (2001) dir. Sharon Maguire

Brigadoon (1954) dir. Vincente Minnelli

Bulldog Drummond (1929) dir. F. Richard Jones

Captain Corelli's Mandolin (2001) dir. John Madden

Carrington (1995) dir. Christopher Hampton

Cavalcade (1932) dir. Frank Lloyd

The Cider House Rules (1999) dir. Lasse Hallestrom

Chariots of Fire (1981) dir. Hugh Hudson

Charlotte Gray (2002) dir. Gillian Anderson

Chicken Run (2000) dir. Nick Park

Chocolat (2000) dir. Lasse Hallestrom

Clive of India (1935) dir. Richard Bawslawski

The Country Bumpkin and the Cinematograph (1901) R.W. Paul

Cromwell (1970) dir. Ken Hughes

The Crying Game (1992) dir. Neil Jordan

Cyrano de Bergerac (1990) dir. Jean-Paul Rappeneau

Death to Smoochy (2002) dir. Danny DeVito

Die Hard (1988) dir. John McTiernan

Die Hard: With a Vengeance (1995) dir. John McTiernan

Dr. No (1962) dir. Terence Young

Dr. Zhivago (1965) dir. David Lean

East is East (1999) dir. Damien O'Donnell

Elizabeth (1998) dir. Shekhar Kapur

Emma (1996) dir. Douglas McGrath

Enchanted April (1992) dir. Mike Newell

Enemy at the Gates (2001) dir. Jean-Jacques Annaud

The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill, But Came Down a Mountain (1995)  
dir. Christopher Monger

The English Patient (1996) dir. Anthony Minghella

Entrapment (1999) dir. Jon Amiel

Fight Club (1999) dir. David Fincher

A Fish Called Wanda (1988) dir. Charles Crichton

Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994) dir. Mike Newell

The Full Monty (1997) dir. Peter Cataneo

Gandhi (1982) dir. Richard Attenborough

Gladiator (2000) dir. Ridley Scott

The Godfather (1972) dir. Francis Ford Coppola

The Golden Bowl (2000) dir. James Ivory

GoldenEye (1995) dir. Martin Campbell

Gone With the Wind (1938) dir. Victor Fleming

Gosford Park (2001) dir. Robert Altman

A Handful of Dust (1988) dir. Charles Sturridge

Hannibal (2001) dir. Ridley Scott

A Hard Day's Night (1964) dir. Richard Lester

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (2001) dir. Chris Columbus

The House of Mirth (2000) dir. Terence Davies

Howards End (1992) dir. James Ivory

How Green Was My Valley (1941) dir. John Ford

How it Feels to be Run Over (1900) dir. Cecil Hepworth

The Icpress File (1965) dir. Sidney J. Furie

An Ideal Husband (1999) dir. Oliver Parker

The Importance of Being Earnest (2002) dir. Oliver Parker

In the Name of the Father (1993) dir. Jim Sheridan

Iris (2001) dir. Richard Eyre

The Italian Job (1969) dir. Peter Collinson

Jane Eyre (1996) dir. Franco Zefferelli

Jean de Florette (1986) dir. Claude Berri

Jefferson in Paris (1995) dir. James Ivory

Jude (1996) dir. Michael Winterbottom

The Lair of the White Worm (1988) dir. Ken Russell

Land and Freedom (1995) dir. Ken Loach

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001) dir. Simon West

The Last of the Mohicans (1992) dir. Michael Mann

Last Orders (2001) dir. Fred Schepsi

Last Resort (2000) dir. Paul Pavlikovsky

Letter From an Unknown Woman (1948) dir. Max Ophuls

The Lion King (1994) dir. Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff

Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels (1998) dir. Guy Ritchie

The Long Good Friday (1979) dir. Mike Hodges

Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring (2001) dir. Peter Jackson

Lucky Break (2001) dir. Peter Cattaneo

The Madness of King George (1995) dir. Nicholas Hytner

Mansfield Park (1999) dir. Patricia Rozema

Marnie (1968) dir. Alfred Hitchcock

Mary of Scotland (1936) dir. John Ford

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1994) dir. Kenneth Branagh

The Mask of Zorro (1998) dir. Martin Campbell

Maurice (1987) dir. James Ivory

Mickey Blue Eyes (1999) dir. Kelly Makin

Mike Bassett: Football Manager (2001) dir. Steve Baron

Mrs Brown (1997) dir. John Madden

Mrs Miniver (1942) dir. William Wyler

The Mission (1986) Roland Joffe

Modesty Blaise (1966) dir. Joseph Losey

Moulin Rouge (2001) dir. Baz Luhrmann

Mutiny on the Bounty (1935) dir. Frank Lloyd

My Beautiful Laundrette (1985) dir. Steven Frears

My Brilliant Career (1979) dir. Gillian Anderson

My Left Foot (1989) dir. Jim Sheridan

Naked (1993) dir. Mike Leigh

Nine Months (1995) dir. Chris Columbus

North by Northwest (1959) dir. Alfred Hitchcock

Notting Hill (1999) dir. Roger Michell

Orlando (1992) dir. Sally Potter

The Others (2001) dir. Alejandro Amenábar

The Paradine Case (1947) dir. Alfred Hitchcock

A Passage to India (1984) dir. David Lean

Persuasion (1995) dir. Roger Michell

Picnic at Hanging Rock (1975) dir. Peter Wier

The Piano (1993) dir. Jane Campion

The Pillow Book (1995) dir. Peter Greenaway

Planet of the Apes (2001) dir. Tim Burton

A Portrait of a Lady (1996) dir. Jane Campion

Possession (2002) dir. Neil LaBute

Pride and Prejudice (1940) dir. Robert Z. Leonard

Pride and Prejudice (1995, TV) dir. Simon Langton

The Private Life of Don Juan (1934) dir. Alexander Korda

The Private Life of Henry VIII (1933) dir. Alexander Korda

The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex (1939) dir. Michael Curtiz

Privileged (1982) dir. Michael Hoffman

Pulp Fiction (1994) dir. Quentin Tarantino

Ratcatcher (1999) dir. Lynne Ramsay

Rebecca (1940) dir. Alfred Hitchcock

The Remains of the Day (1993) dir. James Ivory

Rembrandt (1936) dir. Alexander Korda

Revolution (1985) dir. Hugh Hudson

Riff-Raff (1990) dir. Ken Loach

Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves (1991) dir. Kevin Reynolds

A Room With a View (1986) dir. James Ivory

Rowing With the Wind (1987) dir. Gonzalo Suarez

The Scarlet Pimpernel (1934) dir. Harold Young

Sense and Sensibility (1995) dir. Ang Lee

The Sixth Sense (1999) dir. M. Night Shamaylan

Shakespeare in Love (1998) dir. John Madden

Shadowlands (1994) dir. Richard Attenborough

Shrek (2001) dir. Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jensen

Sirens (1994) dir. John Duigan

Sliding Doors (1998) dir. Peter Howitt

Spider Man (2002) dir. Sam Raimi

Star Wars (1977) dir. George Lucas

Stiff Upper Lips (1997) dir. Gary Sinyor

A Streetcar Named Desire (1951) dir. Elia Kazan

Superman (1978) dir. Richard Donner

Suspicion (1941) dir. Alfred Hitchcock

The Tailor of Panama (2001) dir. John Boorman

The Talented Mr Ripley (1999) dir. Anthony Minghella

Terminator 2 (1991) dir. James Cameron

The Thomas Crowne Affair (1999) dir. John McTiernan

The Tichborne Claimant (1998) dir. David Yates

Titanic (1997) dir. James Cameron

Tom Jones (1963) dir. Tony Richardson

Tomorrow Never Dies (1997) dir. Roger Spottiswoode



Topsy Turvy (1999) dir. Mike Leigh

Trainspotting (1996) dir. Danny Boyle

Truly, Madly, Deeply (1991) dir. Anthony Minghella

Under the Skin (1997) dir. Carine Adler

Where Angels Fear to Tread (1991) dir. Charles Sturridge

Wilde (1997) dir. Brian Gilbert

The Wings of a Dove (1997) dir. Iain Softley

The Winslow Boy (1999) dir. David Mamet

Wit (2001) dir. Mike Nichols

Woman to Woman (1923) dir. Graham Cutts

The World is Not Enough (1999) dir. Michael Apted

Wuthering Heights (1938) dir. William Wyler

Zardoz (1974) dir. John Boorman

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