

## Adaptation & Transnational Remediation: Remix in *Bride & Prejudice*

In Chapter 2 of *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon identifies adaptation as “a creative and interpretive transposition of a recognizable other work or works,” a practice that she notes as often involving “a transcoding into a different set of conventions” (Hutcheon 33). She emphasizes that adaptation is neither mere substitution nor degraded copy, meant to reproduce, rather it is a material and semiotic re-expression of a text that responds to the constraints and assets of a new medium. Definitionally, Hutcheon provides a crucial framework through which to assert how a novel becomes a film. The act of adaptation in itself is transformational, but the re-articulation of a text as being expressed through distinct signs and codes—images, sound, and gesture—is where the transposition takes place.

Hutcheon frames this transposition through a debate surrounding medium specificity. When a story, narrative, or idea migrates from one medium to another, she notes, it inevitably provokes questions about what each art form can or cannot do. She cites, for example, the modernist claim that each medium must theorize or give rise to its own boundaries, even as critics have continued to negotiate “the formal and material specificity” of media (34). Furthermore, she delineates film’s status as “a composite language by virtue of its diverse matters of expression—sequential photography, music, phonetic sound and noise,” pointing to an inherent relationship between the visual and performing arts (Stam qtd. in Hutcheon 35). On her terms, then, any cinematic adaptation of Jane Austen will *have* to re-signify the novel through the expressive and composite languages available to film as a medium.

Gurinder Chadha’s *Bride & Prejudice* (2004) exemplifies this very transposition, while simultaneously exceeding it by pointing to something far more significant. The film reconstructs

Austen's *Pride & Prejudice* through the cultural logics of Bollywood, Indian-diasporic identity, and late-capitalist globalization. The London-Amritsar-Los Angeles traversal alone signals that Chadha's film attempts to perform a transnational remediation of authority and imperial aesthetics. This paper argues that *Bride & Prejudice* performs an adaptation on both Hutcheon's terms, as a transition of formal signifiers, but also on the basis of transnational remix. In blending musical form, carnivalesque festivity, and cultural critique, Chadha's film reimagines Austen's Regency-era romance through South Asian popular culture. To fully account for this analysis, this paper will draw upon Linda Hutcheon's formal framework and vocabulary of transcoding while also supplementing it with Robert Stam's writing on the Bakhtinian 'carnavalesque' in order to characterize the film's musical heterogeneity and disruption of authority. Furthermore, this paper will refer to Eli Horwatt's remix studies which allows a dive into how appropriation and recontextualization of texts can produce new meanings.

Hutcheon organizes adaptation's formal activity, or reactivity, into two movement-types. Moreover, these subcategories form the foundation upon which to understand *Bride & Prejudice*'s adherence to and elevation of them. First comes telling-to-showing, then second, showing-to-showing. Chadha's film deploys these movements, or transpositions, while also stretching their implications through transnational aesthetics.

Firstly, the most familiar adaptive pathway Hutcheon denotes is a movement "from the telling to the showing mode" (Hutcheon 44). Austen's novel narrates her characters' interiority through a free indirect style, and maintains subtle shifts of feeling, and social nuance and commentary. Chadha, however, externalizes all of *Pride & Prejudice*'s interiority through song, dance, gesture, score, costume, editing, and spectacle. Performance, here, "actualize[s] the text," effectively materializing tone and emotion through bodies in space. This performative

interpretation makes apparent, through sight and sound, “conflicts and ideological differences between characters” (39-40). Chadha’s most obvious realization of this transformation is the “Balle Balle” wedding dance sequence. This kind of interaction of festivities, merely described in prose, becomes literal festivity. Chadha is able to characterize the characters through participatory dance and therein demonstrates Hutcheon’s description of “dramatization” where this is “a certain amount of re-accentuation and refocusing of themes, characters, and plot” (40). Austen’s kindly balls are transposed to a distinctly South Asian festive practice that then further emphasizes her inference of kindness becoming observable performance.

However, the degree to which this transformation exceeds or elevates itself from Hutcheon’s formalist account can be investigated through Robert Stam’s analysis of the Carnavalesque. This literary mode, he writes, “rejects formal harmony and unity in favor of the asymmetrical, the heterogenous, and the miscegenated” (Stam 69). In *Bride & Prejudice*, the shift from telling to showing entails a representation of play; of carnival. The Bakhtinian “second life” materializes in dance that welcomes all bodies into a shared pleasure, further showcased by Darcy’s outsider stiffness, as a White American, being comically diminished. The hierarchy present therein dissolves, and what is left is a presentation of a new cultural logic foreign to Austen’s constructed world. Chadha stages a re-construction of a world that de-centers Anglocentric authority.

Second comes the adaptation as being intramedial. Namely, from “showing to showing,” when a film remakes another film (46). *Bride & Prejudice*, while not being a direct remake of a specific Austen adaptation, clearly participates in said category. This is a function of its responses to and departures from the long cinematic history of Austen adaptation. Chadha not only adapts the novel but the filmic grammar associated with the microgenre. Wit is expressed

through speech more than humor, and the comedy of manners reflect previous renditions of the very same text. However, Chadha appropriates the visual and dialogic tradition by rewriting its code. Eli Horwatt argues that remix practice can “transform music, narration, tone, or setting to reflect a new genre” (Horwatt 16). *Bride* effectively does this by retooling the propriety of Regency-era into the excess, color, and emotional directness/unsubtlety of the Bollywood musical. The “No Life Without Wife” sequence parodies and comments on both Indian matrimonial anxieties and Western views of arranged marriage, putting both a diasporic person and a resident family against each other in humorous juxtaposition. Mr. Kohli’s pompousness is directly in conversation with the modesty of the Bakshi family, distancing the Indian familial structure through comedy. A representational tradition associated with British cultural prestige inserts itself into Bollywood idiom and thus gets displaced from its place of origin. Horwatt’s description of remix as “recontextualiz[ing] images by inscribing new meanings onto materials through creative montage” applies here. Chadha “detours” the cinematic tradition of Austen adaptation through a distinctly Indian lens (Horwatt 2).

The Bakhtinian carnivalesque clarifies how this adaptation does more than transcend medium. Stam notes that the sphere of the carnival suspends all hierarchy and forms of inequality which manifest as “concepts of social emancipation” (Stam 71). Darcy, in *Bride*, is culturally displaced. Rather than being an upper/ruling class member reaching down to the working/middle class, he is a wealthy American placed in a foreign domain. His position of global privilege becomes subject to comic awkwardness, where he is forced to reckon with his ‘foreignness’ in a place where his misreadings of Indian custom and decorum transforms into Lalita’s performance for and against one’s community. Her participation in the various music numbers sprinkled throughout the film speak to this, and the film’s swapping of pianoforte for

Bhangra and Indian Classic music further emphasizes what Bakhtin calls “gay relativity, or the ludicrous suspension of the imperious rules of logic in the name of freedom thought” (Stam 69).

Moreover, *Bride* does not present Indian mores versus Western social logic as binary opposites. Rather, it displays Indian middle-class norms as valid while maintaining a tinge of satire. Lalita’s anti-imperialist stance is softened by the narrative (just as Elizabeth’s prejudices against the landed gentry), and her final capitulation to Darcy’s proposal comes comically after he is seen playing the *dhol* once, at her sister’s wedding ceremony. Both conclusions are framed through a similar breakdown of mindset, but in *Bride* it is tongue-in-cheek (happening as part of a festivity, as opposed to *Pride’s* more romantic one), further showcasing the carnival’s “alternative logic of permanent contradiction,” where neither binary falls into a “monologic true-or-false” (Stam 69).

Hutcheon’s conception of adaptation, while not outright declining a transposition of cultural logic, outline merely formal ones. However, her categories mark the formal movements through which this carnivalesque adaptation occurs. This cultural festivity is shown through performance, gesture, music, and imagery, and thus constitutes a generic remix where interaction with the text depends solely on the medium and its transnational movement.

Through Horwatt’s framework, Chadha’s reworking of the text is best understood, then, as a remix: a restructuring and recontextualization that produces new meanings by altering the primary text’s generic code, tone, and cultural address. In his terms, remix “[inscribes] new meanings onto works” while also challenging authorship and ownership conventions that uphold the “monopoly of the code” (Horwatt 2; Foster qtd. in Horwatt 22). In *Bride & Prejudice*, the object is remixed is not exactly a previously-existing piece of footage or text, but a British

literary-cultural structure and its eventual cinematic reimagining. Chadha's détournement happens at a generic level. *Hinglish* lyrics, Bhangra and Garba choreography, and crowd orchestration all substitute for the Anglo-realist decorum that marks earlier Regency-era films. The result, then, is not simply 'Pride & Prejudice but Indian,' rather it is Austen as Bollywood. This recoding, in Horwatt's words, becomes legible as a "reflection [of a] new genre" (Horwatt 16). Instead of simply recutting formal signifiers of earlier cinematic texts, which Horwatt points towards as being "re-cuts," *Bride* makes clear a different form of remix.

More specifically, this form of remix is inherently transnational. As mentioned previously, the film's location-switching reroutes Anglo-centric prestige through diaspora, tourism, and global media markets. This transnationality is inherent in the production of the film itself, within its status as an international co-production. More importantly, though, it is apparent through the film's transposition of Darcy as English gentry to an American figure of contemporary capitalism. His presence within the film is defined continually by his status as an owner and proprietor of a large hotel chain, and this then allows the audience to point out the political implications of such a characterization in a place like India, historically marred by Western imperialism. Enough of Austen's social grammar is present to point towards a remix, while also letting the film maintain its status as a product of an entirely different world and cultural system. The commentary present throughout the film is highly ethnically and culturally specific while still supplemented by Western appraisals of those very codes. The gaze of the 'upper-classmen', then, is absorbed into a diasporic media system through sonic, gestural, and comedic logics of South Asian culture, converting it into the gaze of the 'foreigner'.

Therefore, the film reframes who gets to look, speak, and interpret Austen's narrative authority, within her free indirect style, is provided to a South Asian middle-class dialect,

wherein spectacle and humor are not decorative or aesthetically charged, rather structurally relevant to the society and mediascape they inhabit. In this way, *Bride & Prejudice* performs a transnational remediation by reworking an imperial text without discarding its thematic prominence. Rather, Chadha claims a new cultural ownership with interpretive character and thus reallocates power over the 'look' from the British literary canon to a hybrid, diasporic viewing audience.

## Works Cited

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