

(Re-)Bonded to Britain: The Meta-Heroic Discourse of *Skyfall* (2012)

A Popular Hero in Popular Cinema

Popular culture is marked by a special sensitivity not only to cultural markets but, even more importantly, the desires and anxieties of its audiences. That some of these desires and anxieties revolve around the heroic is most obvious in popular cinema, where heroes and their counterpart, the villains, are essential ingredients of some of the most successful genres: the Western, the war film, the action thriller, or the comic-inspired superhero movies that came to the fore in the post-9/11 world. Involving its audiences emotionally is a central goal of popular cinema, and its representational strategies intend to make spectators feel with and for the heroes, to be excited by their actions, to admire and sometimes be irritated by them. At the same time, popular cinema can also elicit a more analytic response to its heroes when it highlights qualities and structures of the heroic *per se* – through exaggeration, irony or parody, but also through a distinct level of meta-heroic reflection. The James Bond films are a case in point and a particularly instructive one because their protagonist has become a popular hero in quite a distinctive sense. As Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott note in their book about the “political career” of 007, Bond appears to have spilled over from fiction into everyday life:

Bond is and, from as early as the late 1950s, always has been more than just the central protagonist in a number of novels and the films derived from them. Rather, the nature of his existence has been that of a popular hero, a term which is often used quite loosely although in fact it refers to a cultural phenomenon of a quite specific type with quite specific – and complex – conditions of existence. [...] It is [...] in being granted a quasi-real status that a popular hero (or heroine)

constitutes a cultural phenomenon of a particular type, quite distinct from the hero (or heroine) whose existence is contained within and limited to a particular and narrowly circumscribed set of texts. Whereas popular heroes also usually have their origins in a particular work or body of fiction, they break free from the originating textual conditions of their existence to achieve a semi-independent existence, functioning as an established point of cultural reference that is capable of working – of producing meanings – even for those who are not directly familiar with the original texts in which they first made their appearance. [...] These figures are lodged in the memory bank of our culture. Functioning as focal points of cultural reference, they condense and connect, serve as shorthand expressions for, a number of deeply implanted cultural and ideological concerns. (13–14)

To Bennett and Woollacott,¹ the popularity of Bond as a cultural signifier has “consisted in his ability to co-ordinate – that is, to connect and serve as a condensed expression for – a series of ideological and cultural concerns that have been enduringly important in Britain since the late 1950s” (18). Bond also works as a trans-cultural signifier, however, and other critics have noted the Bond films’ more general sensitivity to *zeitgeist*:² 007 has been kept alive on the silver screen for more than half a century because, quite characteristically for a product of popular culture, the character has been continually adapted to changing fashions and tastes, and because the films have responded to prominent geopolitical issues (the Cold War, the power of media syndicates and global terrorism) as well as wider societal questions such as the negotiation of gender roles.

We can add heroes to that list because the Bond films are also indicators of shifting cultural relationships to the heroic. The humorous and almost parodic films with Roger Moore during the early 1980s exemplify an ironic attitude (at least in the West) towards the heroic, while the “grittier” films with Timothy Dalton – *The Living Daylights* (1987) and *Licence to Kill* (1989) – have been read by Jeremy Black as symptoms of “the more critical and sardonic, if not sarcastic, attitude toward heroism that could be widely seen on television and film in the period; the popular British television comedy series *Blackadder*, for example, closed in 1989 with programs presenting World War I as futile, cruel and unheroic” (149). I will argue that *Skyfall* (2012), the latest Bond film to date, exemplifies an approach to the heroic that is once more symptomatic of its time: Since 9/11 and the wars “against terror”, the Western world has seen a conspicuous revival of discourses about heroes and heroism from popular culture to academia, and it has led to an inflationary use of the word “hero” in all kinds of likely and unlikely contexts. It seems timely that a film about James Bond – one of the few major popular heroes apart from Robin Hood or Harry Potter which Britain can muster against a dominance of American popular-cultural productions – responds to the phenomenon, and with a pronounced level of meta-heroic reflection for that matter.

Skyfall shares such a level with other more intriguing instances of popular hero cinema such as Christopher Nolan’s Batman trilogy, and it is significant that, like these Batman films, the hero has a “dark” side to him that draws attention to the fact that a hero’s relationship to the community or communities he serves can be problematic: Heroes are admired because they exemplify and (over-)perform the values of a community, but their social meaning is more intricate where they irritate and provoke. The exceptionality, agency and autonomy of heroes can violate the rules and regulations of the social order; heroes transgress norms and boundaries in the interest of a greater good. It is this transgressive element which not only makes heroes outsiders or at least “difficult” members of a community, but which also creates a disturbing affinity to the villains they oppose. While Batman’s darkness results from his status as a vigilante, Bond’s darkness is linked to the fact that he is a secret agent: He is “licensed” to kill for his country like a soldier, but unlike a soldier, he can only act covertly and with “dirty” means, and he cannot be acknowledged publicly until his death. While the conflicted aspects of spy-heroism were over-written in many

of the earlier Bond films, they are brought fully to the fore in the Craig films and especially in *Skyfall*.³ While operating as an entertaining, emotionally gripping and sensational spy thriller (that also equips Bond with an unusual psychological depth), *Skyfall* addresses such questions as the timeliness of heroism in allegedly post-heroic times and the scope for heroism in the order of democratic and egalitarian societies. And quite strikingly, given the fact that the targeted audience of the Bond franchise is an international one, *Skyfall*’s heroic discourse goes hand in hand with a pronounced repatriation of its hero – a re-bonding of James Bond with his country and its national institutions.

Skyfall and the Revival of Bond’s “Patriotic Code”

The pronounced Britishness of *Skyfall* echoes a widespread revival of patriotism in 21st-century Britain whose origins cannot only be traced to Britain’s military engagement in the wars against terror but appear to be part of a wider cultural nationalism.⁴ This revival was staged for a worldwide audience during an event that preceded the release of *Skyfall* and to which the marketing of the film tied in, significantly activating the “patriotic code” (Chapman 158) that has always run through the Bond series, even if sometimes in a tongue-in-cheek mode. During the British-themed opening ceremony of the London Olympics,⁵ James Bond, impersonated by Daniel Craig, had a cameo appearance as a British institution when a short film insert showed him escorting another British institution, the (real) Queen Elizabeth II, to the stadium. The film – entitled “Happy and Glorious” after a line from the British national anthem – was meant to pay tribute not only to Great Britain and the Games, but also to the 60th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth’s ascension to the throne and the 50th anniversary of the first Bond film in 1962. It cited a well-known scene from *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) in which Bond jumps with a Union Jack parachute, but with an ironic twist, because here the Queen out-heroes Bond, leaping from the helicopter in front of her official bodyguard. Before this climactic moment, the film took the audience on a flight over London and its major icons and national institutions, including the Houses of Parliament and the (animated) statue of Winston Churchill on Parliament Square.⁶ Bond’s Olympic appearance thus prepared audiences for the conspicuous Britishness with which *Skyfall* unfolds its heroic theme, not without humour, but at

the same time with a seriousness reminiscent of the original Bond figure of Ian Fleming's novels. It is worth staying with Fleming for a while, because his presentation of Bond as a conflicted hero, and specifically one with misgivings about the country he still loyally serves, reverberates in *Skyfall* and reminds one of the fact that the film series with Daniel Craig was intended as a re-launch of the Bond series and a return to the character's origins.⁷ Fleming's Bond figure was linked to the situation of Britain at a decisive point in history, namely the decades following the Second World War, which the novels depict as a time when the heroism embodied by Bond is still needed but no longer properly appreciated by his country's society. In this context, Fleming's Bond figure raises a question that appears to be a fundamental one in all discussion of heroism: Why and when do communities need heroes, why do they admire heroes (or not), and how do heroes relate to "their" communities?

Ian Fleming's Hero

Fleming's Bond of the 1950s and early 60s came out of Fleming's perception of Britain as a de-heroised country.⁸ After its "finest hour" (in Winston Churchill's famous phrase⁹) during the Second World War, fifties Britain is no longer great but patronised by the US and in the process of losing its Empire.¹⁰ In *From Russia with Love* (1957), Fleming lets Bond characterise his country as an egalitarian welfare state and as a former lion that has lost its bite: "the trouble today is that carrots for all are the fashion. At home and abroad. We don't show teeth any more – only gums" (176). In *You Only Live Twice* (1964), England is described as a sick and lethargic nation that saw its last heroic "community effort" (248) during the war; that this verdict comes from the villain Blofeld does not make it less true but even more devastating.

Adapting terms by Herfried Münkler, one could describe Fleming's vision of wartime Britain as that of a heroic society, while post-war Britain has turned into an unheroic society whose security depends on remaining heroic communities within its midst:¹¹ Britain's war after the war is a "cold" one whose fighting is delegated largely to a small group of secret agents, and in consequence, the public has lost its instinct for true heroes. In *Moonraker* (1955), for instance, Britain's loss of a collective heroism is revealed by the fact that the public permits itself to be deceived by the villain Drax – the evil "dragon" it

mistakenly admires as a hero who will provide it with a powerful defence weapon while he actually plans to destroy the country right from inside of one of its national icons, the white Cliffs of Dover. In *From Russia with Love* Britain's incapacity to distinguish and appreciate heroes is once more diagnosed by the opponent when a member of the Soviet secret service pronounces that the English are no longer "interested in heroes unless they are footballers or cricketers or jockeys", while the true heroes are unrecognised: "This man Bond is unknown to the public. If he was known, he would still not be a hero. In England, neither open war nor secret war is a heroic matter. They do not like to think about war, and after a war the names of their war heroes are forgotten as quickly as possible" (48–49).

Fleming, then, created Bond as an agent who acts heroically in a context in which traditions of the heroic have become precarious. In this context, heroics often remain unappreciated, and the qualities of heroism have become so diffuse that even the hero is unsure about his heroic status. The very first novel of Fleming's series, *Casino Royale* (1953), communicates the precariousness of Bond's heroism in a torture scene in which the villain attacks Bond's genitals with a carpet beater (the *Casino Royale* film with Daniel Craig includes the scene with only slight variations), thus not only humiliating him, but severely threatening the pronounced masculinity which, in Fleming's view, seems inextricably linked with Bond's heroism and is accordingly staged in all of the novels.¹² The experience leaves Bond prostrate for weeks, and it is on his sickbed that he has a long and disillusioned discussion about heroism with his friend and colleague Mathis. As Bond tells Mathis, he finds it hard to define heroic behaviour at a time when the polarity of heroism and villainy has become disturbed: "The hero kills two villains, but when the hero Le Chiffre starts to kill the villain Bond and the villain Bond knows he isn't a villain at all, you see the other side of the medal. The villains and heroes get all mixed up". The Cold War and its dark practices have also devalued the patriotism through which the agent-hero's "dirty" methods might still be legitimised: "Of course [...] patriotism comes along and makes it seem fairly all right, but this country-right-or-wrong business is getting a little out-of-date" (158–160). This "out-of-dateness", the apparent anachronism, of Bond's heroism is emphasised in Fleming's novels by repeated comparisons between Bond and heroic types of antiquity and the Middle Ages.¹³ This is played out to grotesque dimensions in *You Only Live Twice* (1964), where Bond has to fight Blofeld in the

villain's pseudo-medieval castle. Here Bond has to act like St George, the English national saint, enter the "Castle of Death and slay the Dragon within" (105). What makes the theatre for heroism in this novel even more bizarre is that it is set in Japan, a country which Fleming portrays as a counterpoint to his de-heroised Britain. Japan, it is claimed, has preserved its tradition of heroism even though it lost the Second World War, and it therefore provides a suitable scenario for Bond's heroic performance, which in this scenario is also particularly spectacular. Bond's escape from Blofeld's exploding castle is rendered as a piece of swashbuckling heroics that ends with an injured Bond hanging from a balloon from which he drops into the sea, against a backdrop of fire:

There was a light night breeze and he felt himself wafted gently over the moonlit park, over the glittering, steaming lake, towards the sea. But he was rising, not falling! The helium sphere was not in the least worried by his weight! Then blue-and-yellow fire fluttered from the upper storey of the castle and an occasional angry wasp zipped past him. [...] now the whole black silhouette of the castle swayed in the moonlight and seemed to jig upwards and sideways and then slowly dissolve like an icecream cone in sunshine. The top storey crumbled first, then the next, and the next, and then, after a moment, a huge jet of orange fire shot up from hell towards the moon and a buffet of hot wind, followed by an echoing crack of thunder, hit Bond and made his balloon sway violently. What was it all about? Bond didn't know or care. The pain in his head was his whole universe. Punctured by a bullet, the balloon was fast losing height. Below, the softly swelling sea offered a bed. Bond let go with hands and feet and plummeted down towards peace, towards the rippling feathers of some childhood dream of softness and escape from pain. (254–255).

Not only with its hero's fall from the sky does *You Only Live Twice* appear to be an indirect pre-text for *Skyfall*. Bond is also believed dead here after he has survived the explosion of Blofeld's castle, and his obituary is published in the *Times*.¹⁴ And Fleming's novels in general seem to anticipate *Skyfall*'s motif of outdated heroism and its inquiry into the hero's vexed relationship with the two communities that frame the scope of his actions: first, the secret service, and second, his country and its institutions at large. The hero's troubled relationship with the communities he

serves was already indicated in the first two films of the Craig series, *Casino Royale* (2006) and *Quantum of Solace* (2008), both of which emphasise Bond's violence, unruliness and the (failed) attempts of his superior M and the government to discipline him.¹⁵ In *Skyfall*, however, Bond is seriously alienated from his service and has to be restored and re-instituted not only as an agent, but also as a hero for the country he serves.

The Heroic Argument of *Skyfall*

Bond's fall as agent and hero in *Skyfall* is staged in the pre-title and title sequences of the film. Accompanied by a female colleague (the still anonymous Moneypenny),¹⁶ Bond is in spectacular pursuit of a man who has stolen a hard drive with the names of British agents who have infiltrated terrorist organisations around the world. The operation is watched in real time by M via satellite, who observes Bond's man-to-man fight with the enemy on the roof of a moving train and orders the female agent to shoot Bond's opponent even though Moneypenny does not have a "clean" shot. As a result, she hits Bond by mistake, and he falls from the train, into a river and down a waterfall. While Bond is believed dead, M writes an obituary in which 007 is praised as "an exemplar of British fortitude", as the audience learns at the end of the film. By this time, Bond has lived up to this characterisation again, but the first part of the action portrays him as a fallen hero alienated from the MI6 because he feels betrayed by M and the way she has risked his life. He has therefore chosen to stay "dead" for a while and spends this time in the tropics, nursing his personal crisis and ruining his constitution with the excessive consumption of drinks, sex and dubious substances. Bond only returns to London after Silva, the film's cyber-terrorist villain (played charismatically by Javier Bardém), has blown up M's headquarters. Silva has also got hold of the stolen data and begun to kill British agents, leaking images of these killings to the British media. The film shows how Bond has to re-build himself in London, physically, mentally and attitudinally, as the agent he was, and his final restitution is staged at "Skyfall", the ancient family home of the Bonds in Scotland. Here Bond is fully reborn, in a scenario of mythic dimensions, and in a scene that echoes his fall from the beginning of the film he even literally rises from the ground of a lake.

Indeed, when Bond is shot at the beginning of *Skyfall* this event suggests a metaphorical reading as the fall of an agent who is not permitted to fully perform his heroic agency. The reason for this failure does not lie with Bond but in the fact that he is being observed by M, who can therefore take decisions out of his hand. M's fatal decision to have Moneypenny shoot, which is "punished" by the loss of the secret data to Silva, is the outcome of a new relationship between the government and the secret service. MI6 is meant to be placed under greater control and turned into a more civil, bureaucratised and transparent institution – one that fits a modern democracy but which would also, as the film suggests, be less heroic. The British government as portrayed in *Skyfall* stands for the "anti-heroic affect" (Bolz) that has been diagnosed for modern bourgeois and democratic societies whose social order and security are meant to be maintained by the state, and this anti-heroic affect is coupled with a belief that the old ways of MI6 have become obsolete. Politicians faced with new wars and new threats such as cyber terrorism no longer wish to depend for their security and that of their citizens on a community in their midst that operates with heroic individuals and their dubious practices. Instead, it believes in the value of transparency and relies on the open presence of security forces and on surveillance technology to ensure safety. Like Bond, M stands for an allegedly outdated secret service, a heroic community which a post-Cold War society no longer wants, and she is therefore to be pensioned off. It is Mallory (M's later successor as head of MI6), who is meant to supervise the implementation of change in MI6, and he spells out to M: "We're a democracy. We're accountable to the people we're trying to defend. We can't keep working in the shadows. There are no more shadows" (1:05:13–15).¹⁷ Bond significantly dismisses him as a bureaucrat (0:51:47), but the further course of the action shows that Mallory, who proved his own heroic spirit in the fight against the IRA, can be converted. When the killings of the first agents are shown on BBC World television and the government is embarrassed by "the greatest internal security breach in modern history" (1:04:46), M has to face an inquest ordered by the Prime Minister. Here she is challenged by an aggressive (female) minister: "It's as if you insist on pretending we still live in a golden age of espionage where human intelligence was the only resource available. Well, I find this rather old-fashioned belief demonstrates a reckless disregard for ..." The politician is here interrupted by Mallory, who wants to give M a chance to reply (1:32:43).¹⁸ As the audience knows, however, it is precisely

the new fashion of transparency and control that has prevented Bond from fulfilling his mission at the film's beginning and thus made it possible for Silva to pursue his terrorist aims. And M knows this, too, because Bond has already reproached her for her decision: "You should have trusted me to finish the job" (00:25:12), meaning that she should not have restricted the agency and autonomy that form the basis of heroic action.

Accordingly, during her inquest M defends the necessity of old-style heroic battle even in modern societies which, in her opinion, cannot be protected by transparent means:

Our enemies are no longer known to us. They do not exist on a map [...]. They're not nations. They're individuals. Our world is not more transparent now. It's more opaque. It's in the shadows. That's where we must do battle. So, before you declare us irrelevant, ask yourselves, how safe do you feel? (1:35:20–55)

And the film's rhetoric affirms M's position through its editing. While the head of MI6 is being questioned, the spectators see Silva and his men approaching the inquest room and eventually breaking into it. As a man from the shadows (1:05:26), the villain has been able to outwit all security measures through which the state tries to protect its institutions and its citizens and approached Westminster by Tube and in a policeman's uniform. All official security measures have failed, and only Bond, another man from the shadows who has pursued the villain through London's public space, can come to M's rescue.

The Westminster scenes are particularly significant for the film's defence of "old-fashioned" heroism. They establish Bond at the core of his country's governmental institutions, and they also inscribe him in a history of heroism that has left its imprint on icons of British cultural production. Following her claim that 21st-century Britain is still involved in a battle against the shadows, M cites key lines from a poem that belongs to the canon of English literature and is well-known at least to a wider British audience: The speaker of Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses" is Odysseus, who has finally returned from his adventures and taken up his duty as ruler of Ithaca. Odysseus is now an old man, unknown to his people, who are unaware of his heroic status and lead unheroic lives themselves: "[...] I mete and dole / Unequal laws unto a savage race, / That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me" (ll. 3–5). Since his new, post-heroic existence does not

satisfy him (“How dull it is to pause, to make an end / To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!”), Tennyson’s Odysseus and his followers decide to leave Ithaca once more and seek new adventures, their heroic spirit revived:

Though much is taken, much abides; and though
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are—
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. (ll. 65–70)

Tennyson wrote this poem in 1833, and it was published in 1842, at a time when attitudes towards heroism had also become precarious in the context of a more democratic and egalitarian bourgeois society. In 1840, Thomas Carlyle published his influential lectures on *Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, in which he complained that his time had forgotten how to admire heroes: “I am well aware that in these days Hero-worship, the thing I call hero-worship, professes to have gone out, and finally ceased” (12). When M cites Tennyson in *Skyfall*, she makes a similar statement about her own society, while maintaining that true heroism persists even when it is no longer appreciated.

Earlier in the film, soon after Bond’s return to London, the heroism embodied by Bond is inspected in another scene impregnated with cultural capital. A grey-bearded Bond meets a new, young Q who believes in hi-tech rather than old-fashioned gadgets and heroic stunts, and this juxtaposition of generations takes place in front of a famous painting in the National Gallery. Like Tennyson’s poem and composed at almost the same time, William Turner’s painting *The Fighting Temeraire*, first exhibited in 1839, shows how an old ship that fought bravely in the Battle of Trafalgar (1805) is towed off by a modern steamship in order to be dismantled. Q describes the scene as “a grand old warship being ignominiously hauled away for scrap” (0:37:25). However, Turner’s painting precisely does not portray the *Temeraire* as an ignominious wreck. On the contrary: the ship is depicted in an idealised manner, with all its sails blown up. The official website of the National Gallery offers the following interpretation:

Turner’s painting pays tribute to the *Temeraire*’s heroic past. The glorious sunset is a fanfare of colour in her honour. It can also be seen as a symbol of the end of an era, with the sun setting on the days of elegant, tall-masted warships. The

Temeraire is already a ghostly shape, fading away behind the solid form of the squat little steam tug that pulls her along to her fate. [...] Turner wanted viewers of his painting to think about how the *Temeraire* had served her country in the past, and how Britain now seemed to have turned its back on her. (“Heroine of Trafalgar”)

This reading can be transferred to the Bond we see in front of the painting, whose appearance – exhausted and visibly aged – is part of a whole sequence of images and motifs through which the film addresses the apparent outdatedness of Bond and the kind of heroism he embodies. Indeed, for quite some time, Bond’s body proves unfit for heroism because he has not taken care of himself during his time of exile.¹⁹ However, Bond does not permit himself to be scrapped. He re-builds his heroic body and regains the love of his country, as he tells Silva when the villain has captured him on his island in China and, a fallen former MI6 agent himself,²⁰ tries to tempt Bond to betray his community and enjoy full autonomy (“Pick your own mission”) without restraint or control of any kind.²¹ This first face-to-face confrontation between Bond and Silva establishes the disturbing affinity between hero and villain (underscored by the suggestion of homoerotic attraction)²² and the fragile borderline between them, but Bond resists and does not cross the line because of his basic integrity and his “pathetic love of country” (1:09:54).

The film underscores Bond’s patriotism by its prominent layer of British icons and myths. The Union Jack appears repeatedly, (mis-)used by the villain Silva as a background for his messages to M, but also as a sign of honour on the coffins of the agents killed during Silva’s attack on MI6 (evoking similar images of the coffins of soldiers brought home from the post-9/11 wars). Not least, the Union Jack appears on the trashy bulldog figurine on M’s desk – the only item saved, as Bond observes mockingly, from the MI6 headquarters after Silva’s bomb attack, and later M’s only bequest to Bond as a message that he must pursue their old ways because his country needs them. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, the bulldog is a traditional symbol “of what are regarded as British characteristics of pluck and stubbornness, and may generally denote a person noted for courageous or stubborn tenacity” (“Bulldog”). The most important association of the bulldog in *Skyfall* is that with Winston Churchill, the politician who led Britain through what, not only to Fleming, were its last moments of collective

heroism during World War II.²³ *Skyfall* refers to this phase explicitly and establishes a link between Churchill's war and that of MI6. After its modern headquarters have been destroyed, the secret service finds new quarters in the underground tunnels ("part of Churchill's bunker", 0:24:44) from which Churchill governed the nation during the war. In the argument of the film, this is a congenial choice not only because it is another marker of the need for "old-fashioned" heroism, but also because the Churchill association dignifies the fact that MI6 heroes have to operate from "underground" because this is also from where the villain attacks.²⁴

As hinted above, the climactic showdown between hero and villain takes place outside London, in *Skyfall*, a place distinguished not only by its remoteness, but also its pastness. It is here that Bond can overcome the childhood trauma of having lost his parents and make his peace with M,²⁵ but more importantly for the film's heroic discourse, his battle against Silva also has to end "back in time", as Bond tells M after he has rescued her after her inquest: *Skyfall* provides a temporality in which old-fashioned heroic figures like her and him still "have the advantage" (1:40:40), and it provides a scenario (filmed in "dated" sepia colours) in which Bond as hero can be fully resurrected with splendour.²⁶ The film presents *Skyfall* as a haunted archaic place steeped in religious symbolism and portrays it in sublime images (notably connected to the elements of fire and water). The laws of the Bond series demand that Bond must survive and eventually triumph. But the ending of *Skyfall* shows more than that: Not only is the hero reborn, but the kind of heroism he embodies – a traditional, individual heroism – is also fully vindicated. This heroism is not outdated, the film suggests, but still relevant for the security of 21st-century Britain. This is a message which Q and Mallory have understood even before the *Skyfall* sequence. Q, whose computers have not been able to resist the villain, assists Bond, and Mallory, whose eyes have been opened by Silva's attack in Westminster, covers Bond's and M's journey to *Skyfall*, thus qualifying as a worthy successor to M, who officially re-institutes Bond in the film's final scene, where 007 returns to the community of MI6 and does so "with pleasure". Bond, MI6 and his country have re-bonded, and this is emphasised by the images that precede the final scene in M's office. They show Bond on the roof of the Ministry of Defence, in front of a glorious panorama with Union Jack, Big Ben (the clock tower of Parliament) and Westminster Abbey (Britain's national site of commemoration).

Bond's re-institution is thus framed by an impressive array of national institutions. The sublimity of this image is broken with humour when Moneypenny presents Bond with M's bulldog, but even the reappearance of the bulldog signifies Bond's restoration as a British hero. Bond will continue to serve his country – not only as a secret agent, but also as an institution by himself who reminds his country of heroic values and the necessity of heroic action.

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Skyfall is a Bond film whose conspicuous level of heroic discourse responds to a current interest in heroes and heroism that is linked with an equally conspicuous patriotic theme. In both respects, *Skyfall* is a popular action film that speaks to desires and anxieties of a 21st-century Western audience, and notably audiences in Britain and the US, where the wars against terror have contributed to a new recognition and appreciation of military heroism,²⁷ and where patriotism never became as suspicious as in German culture. Nevertheless, the film's vindication of (Bond's) heroism also invites critical questions, not only in relation to the film's treatment of race and gender, both united in the new black Miss Moneypenny, who soon retires from field work after her own heroic appearance at the beginning of the film and leaves heroism to the white, blond and highly masculine Bond. As a simple internet search reveals, Bond – like the American superheroes – has often been discussed as a character with anti-democratic and even fascist tendencies, and the way in which democratic politicians are depicted in *Skyfall* might support such interpretations. One also wonders how the makers of the film would have tried to accommodate the transgressiveness of an Edward Snowden in their vindication of a heroic secret service. It speaks for *Skyfall*, however, that it makes its spectators think about such questions. Like the Bond films before it, *Skyfall* is ideologically conservative, but it does not promote naive hero worship. Rather, by making its audience watch how a hero relates to his narrow and wider communities, the film has the capacity, within the framework of a suspenseful and emotional action movie, to make its spectators ask how heroism can be defined, and in what – positive or negative – ways it is still meaningful in present-day societies and different national contexts.

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1 Bennett and Woollacott are two of a series of academics in various disciplines that have engaged seriously with the James Bond phenomenon. For essential work by other scholars, see Jeremy Black (cultural history), James Chapman (film studies), and Werner Greve (psychology) as well as the transdisciplinary collections of articles edited by Co-mentale et al.; Lindner; Frenk and Krug; and Föcking and Böger.

2 In a book that accompanied an Ian Fleming and Bond exhibition at the Imperial War Museum on the occasion of the centenary of the author's birth in 2008, Macintyre refers to Bond as "a cultural weathervane" (205); on the transformations of Bond, see also Greve and the contributions in Lindner, *The James Bond Phenomenon*.

3 As Chapman points out, Daniel Craig himself "spoke of finding a 'dark side' to the character" that would make the audience question 007's morals (242).

4 For a critical discussion of "the wave of the new British cultural nationalism", see, for instance, a 2011 article by Jonathan Jones in the *Guardian*.

5 See the description of the ceremony on the official site of London 2012: "On the evening of 27 July 2012, 80,000 spectators inside the Olympic Stadium, and a further 900 million who were glued to their television sets around the world, witnessed the magnificent spectacle of the Opening Ceremony of the Games of the XXX Olympiad. Conceived and produced by renowned British film director Danny Boyle, who chose as his theme Isles of Wonder, the Ceremony was a spectacular and panoramic celebration of the modern history and finest achievements of Great Britain, infused with humour, and the occasional surrealist twist, and played out against a musical backdrop that captured the essence of 'Britishness'" (London 2012).

6 The 10-minute Bond-and-Queen episode of the Opening Ceremony was also directed by Danny Boyle and produced by the BBC. It featured music by Handel, among others, as well as the Dambusters March from the 1955 British war film classic *The Dam Busters*, thus indirectly evoking a heroic World War II theme (see London 2012).

7 In this context, see Christoph Lindner's observations on an element that has lent Fleming's novels a new topicality in the post-9/11 world, namely their representation of large-scale crime: "By first magnifying the scope of criminal vision to include crimes against humanity and then locating those crimes politically in a postwar world order – however fictional and fantastic – Fleming effectively captured the popular cultural imagination with a fear that has been haunting it ever since. Recently, in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, this fear has been greatly accentuated. As a consequence, the original 007 novels have arguably become more relevant and resonant today than they have been for a long time" ("Why Size Matters", 236–237). See also Black, who reads Fleming's novels as being "primarily tales of antiterrorism, in the sense of identifying a source of terror and then destroying the most visible element of the terror at that time" (85).

8 For a more detailed discussion of heroism in Fleming's novels, see Korte.

9 It was pronounced in a speech in the House of Commons on 18 June 1940 and emphasised a communal attitude: "Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour'" (Churchill, 6238).

10 For a more detailed discussion of Englishness in Fleming's novels, see Berberich, while Chapman discusses Bond's Britishness more generally.

11 As Münkler emphasises, it is characteristic of Western democracies after 1945 that its societies develop heroic communities within themselves but take care that they have clear demarcations towards civil society (328–329).

12 The novels emphasise Bond's heroic masculinity with long descriptions of his physique, sometimes even his nude body, and so quite obviously tie in with traditional concepts of male heroism. The articulation of Bond's heroism with masculinity cannot be discussed here in detail. It should be noted, however, that this element was significantly revived when Daniel Craig became Bond. As James Chapman notes, *Casino Royale* (2006) offered Bond's muscular body "as an object of spectacle" (Licence 249), displaying the character in swimming trunks or in the nude during the torture scene. The attention to Bond's body is also reflected in the physicality of the film's stunts (rather than spectacular special effects as in earlier films).

13 See, for instance, *Live and Let Die* (1954), where Bond's mission is compared to a knight's quest (159), and where Bond anticipates his confrontation with the novel's hero as "a giant, a homeric slaying" (21). For a discussion of this aspect, see also Sternberg as well as Sauerberg (38–45).

14 M's obituary in *You Only Live Twice* praises his bravery ("The nature of Commander Bond's duties with the Ministry [...] must remain confidential, nay secret, but his colleagues at the Ministry will allow that he performed them with outstanding bravery and distinction", 258) and mentions his membership in a distinguished order of knighthood, the Order of St Michael and St George; he is also compared to Nelson, the hero of Trafalgar.

15 In *Casino Royale*, M has Bond equipped with a subdermal tracer chip. In *A Quantum of Solace* in particular Bond has to be disciplined repeatedly because he pursues his personal vendetta for Vesper Lynd's death with excessive brutality and is "running wild", but also because he rejects the way in which British politics is betraying its ethics and supports immoral practices of global trade. During a psychological test in *Skyfall* after his return to M16, Bond suggestively associates "agent" with "provocateur" (30:21), and is diagnosed as a case of "pathological rejection of authority" (1:10:37).

16 There is no space here to discuss the ways in which the Bond films portray women and have attempted to update in this respect as well. It should be noted, however, that *Skyfall* seems to restore Bond to a safely masculine world as Moneypenny gives up field service and M dies and is replaced by a man.

17 All times are taken from the DVD release of *Skyfall*.

18 Ironically, in this respect the politicians concur with the opinion of the villain by whom their country is threatened. As Silva tells Bond while he holds him captive on his island near Macau: "Chasing spies. So old-fashioned [...] England. The Empire. M16. You're living in a ruin as well. You just don't know it yet" (1:12:44).

19 After his return to M16, Bond fails his fitness tests and is, quite literally, on the floor, knocked out by exhaustion. Mallory even suggests that he had better remain "dead" because the secret service is "a young man's game" (33:41).

20 The reading of Silva as a Lucifer figure fallen from "heaven" is suggested not only by the film's title, but also by the fact that Bond first sees him in a lift descending from above. It also makes sense in the context of Fleming's novels, where Bond is compared to an unfallen archangel, St George. The reading of Silva as a Lucifer figure also corresponds to the religious overtones of the film's final scenes at *Skyfall*, where Bond experiences a resurrection and Silva finds it appropriate that everything, including his own vendetta against M, who once gave him up as an agent, should end in a chapel ("Of course. It had to be here. It had to be this way", 2:05:20).

- 21 On autonomy or independence as a distinguishing mark of the hero (that is restricted in developed states and becomes precarious in "prosaic states of affairs in the present"), see Hegel's lectures on Aesthetics, especially 183–196. Also see Carlyle, who emphasises the hero's "free force" (13) and how it is limited with the advance of civilisation.
- 22 For a general discussion of the Bond-villain relationship, see also Bannen.
- 23 Even during the war, propaganda posters and caricatures portrayed Churchill as a bulldog. See Rhodes, 111, 212.
- 24 This is suggested drastically by the scene in *Skyfall* that evokes the terrorist attacks on the London Underground on 7 July 2005: In one of the film's most spectacular action scenes, Silva crashes an underground train on Bond. The film takes care to let the audience see that there are no passengers on the train; the scene might otherwise have been too traumatic for an entertainment film.
- 25 The final confrontation of hero and villain is Manichaean, and M dies in the chapel and in Bond's arms, like in an inverted pietà. For a Freudian reading of the Bond-M relationship in the Craig films, see De Kosnik. The relationship becomes even more complex in *Skyfall*, as Silva has a similar relationship with M.
- 26 Fittingly, they reach *Skyfall* in Bond's old Aston Martin, which is still full of gadgets devised by the old Q, and they defeat the cyberterrorist with distinctly old-fashioned weapons and tactics, assisted by an old game-keeper.
- 27 See, for instance, a poll by Lord Michael Ashcroft, a Conservative British peer ("Armed Forces and Society").

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