**British Action and Adventure: a national take on a global genre**

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Action and adventure are prominent forms in contemporary commercial cinema, modes of filmmaking with a high degree of cultural visibility. Action as a genre is associated with both technical innovation in the service of visual spectacle, and with American or more precisely Hollywood cinema. An inventive use of 3D (with simultaneous 2D/standard release), mobilisation of a rich American cultural form (the comic book) and ensemble action is exemplified by the expense and commercial value of the twenty-first century superhero film. Though far from the only form of contemporary Hollywood action/adventure cinema (there are numerous variants), the superhero film underlines the scale of financial investment and spectator involvement in Hollywood action’s explosive scenes.

What does it mean then to conceptualise national or transnational action and adventure cinemas beyond Hollywood? One dimension of this question has to do with action as a global cinema: neither production nor exhibition is confined to the United States with action/adventure drawing on talent and technicians from around the world to produce films that are in turn exhibited across borders. Exploring action in a global context involves acknowledging firstly the vitality of action as a component of a number of different national cinemas and secondly the strength of international audiences for action. My starting point is that the meaning of “Hollywood action” is not as clear-cut as is often imagined. In this essay I would like to explore further these issues, in part by considering action and adventure as key elements of British cinema.

As scholars of transnational cinema effectively underline, the assumption that Hollywood genre forms the primary reference point of popular cinema involves a substantial erasure. Thus Meaghan Morris opens her introduction to the collection *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema* with the “proposition that Hong Kong cinema since the 1960s has played a significant role in shaping what is now one of the world’s most widely distributed popular cultural genres: action cinema.”[[1]](#endnote-1) It would indeed be difficult to imagine the development of 1970s Hollywood action without considering the impact of Hong Kong martial arts modes: Warner Bros’ attempt to exploit this via Bruce Lee’s stardom in *Enter the Dragon* (Robert Clouse, 1973) illustrates the point.

Appealing to the transnational aspects of the genre, Morris writes: “Action cinemas generally mobilise or reanimate aspects of an old form of story-telling (whether myth, epic, legend, folktale, saga, annals or chronicle) whereby a hero, or a band of heroes, faces an unknown land or confronts intruders at home.”[[2]](#endnote-2) Morris’ characterisation here speaks to traditions of genre theory in which cinema is understood culturally as a form of folk culture, modes of thinking about popular storytelling which by definition take account of national contexts. Such culturally specific myths and legends can travel rather effectively. The folkloric figure of Robin Hood, for example, inevitably features strongly in British cinema traditions while remaining comprehensible in wider cultural contexts. American cinema has no doubt produced some of the best-known films featuring the Robin Hood figure (for example, the award-winning *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (Michael Curtiz/William Keighley, 1938) starring Eroll Flynn in the title role). Yet such productions have relied heavily on British talent (Basil Rathbone as Guy of Gisbourne alongside Flynn; Alan Rickman as the Sheriff of Nottingham in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* [Kevin Reynolds, 1991]) effectively developing an adventure tradition that is both American and British.

The significance of Hong Kong action to the development of the genre globally provides Morris’ starting point. Yet as she notes, the meaning of genre beyond Hollywood here is not confined to production centres or to particular aesthetic strategies, extending across audiences whose patterns of consumption and local understanding generates action as a “transnational genre.”[[3]](#endnote-3) There are, as Morris argues, implications for film studies in thinking beyond Hollywood, extending the frame of reference whether in aesthetic or political terms. She writes: “…most work in English on Hollywood action reflects the wider moral and political priorities of (broadly speaking) contemporary ‘multicultural’ American and British criticism. Useful as it is, this literature mainly conceives of ‘global Hollywood’ as a distribution outlet for *American* stories of social and political conflict.”[[4]](#endnote-4) Morris argues for an increased emphasis on Hong Kong and Asian cinemas more broadly rather than mapping the politics of American culture onto our reading of action cinema.

Developing these questions in a rather different direction, in this piece I argue for a greater attention to British action and adventure cinema. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the iconic figure of James Bond provided my starting point for beginning to explore British cinema in this light. This is not to say that Bond begins or exhausts British action and adventure cinema - far from it as I will aim to sketch. Yet Bond raises an interesting feature of the growing body of scholarly writings on action cinema more broadly. This is in essence that the Bond films, despite their longevity, commercial and cultural prominence, do not conform to the genre parameters through which action is understood. As a result, they do not so much fall out of discussions of action – they are mentioned, footnoted and so on – but rarely, if ever, serve as exemplars in accounts of the genre.[[5]](#endnote-5) While the Bond films and Hollywood action may be discussed in tandem, they are typically kept as discreet categories within critical commentary.

Of course Bond has been discussed at length – there are several book-length studies of the novels and films as well as thoughtful explorations of the iconic dimensions of Bond.[[6]](#endnote-6) But the Bond films are evidently thought of as exceptions (as a franchise, as a relatively self-contained cycle, albeit influential) with respect to action cinema. And since they are exceptions, Bond films do not seem to contribute to or move on the broader over-arching discussions of the genre. Clearly Bond does not follow the same genre development as Hollywood action or adventure, a fact that has tended to obscure not only the series’ relationship to the genre but Bond’s centrality to action.

It is in large part, I argue, the Britishness of Bond that constitutes the problem here. That jarring element has become if anything more pronounced in the series latest instalments with Daniel Craig as Bond, films that are widely felt to have re-booted the series in a different direction. Put simply, a film such as *Skyfall* (Sam Mendes, 2011) is somehow both too Hollywood to be British and too British to be Hollywood.

In the final chapter of her *Contemporary Action Cinema* Lisa Purse interrogates the assumptions that underpin the omission. Purse notes the significance of European co-productions as commercial successes – citing among others the Harry Potter and Sherlock Holmes films which are considered in the frame of Britishness in the final section of this essay. Exploring the particularities of French action, Purse argues that “we may need to do away with notions of ‘Americanization’, problematize notions of cultural identity and cultural dominance, and complicate our accounts of how non-US film productions attempt to, and achieve, the global appeal that is all too often assumed to be the preserve of Hollywood.”[[7]](#endnote-7)

**Action and Adventure Genres: critical perspectives**

The majority of scholarship on action has centred on Hollywood, not as an instance of the genre, but as its defining form. In their hybrid character action genres have proven in some ways quite testing for genre theory. The presence of an action aesthetic and the widespread deployment of thrilling chase sequences well beyond films that can be unequivocally be described as “action”, lends a particular character to a film experience which is clearly generic: known and very much recognisable, yet retaining the meaningful intensity of the familiar made new. And yet the very pervasive quality of such techniques, their presence across cinema history and distinct national traditions, works against the ways in which genre tends to be specified – whether through reference to iconography, setting, narrative patterns or other recurrent features. It is also this lack of specificity to action (and indeed the related but more extensive category of adventure) that underpins its transnational character, its flexibility across a range of national cinema contexts.

Action and adventure cinemas thus pose something of a challenge to genre theory, at least as it initially developed within film studies. Despite the recognisability of particular action or adventure cycles – Warner Bros. historical adventures of the 1930s, say, the bi-racial cop movies of the 1980s, Italian westerns of the 1960s, Black urban action in the 1970s – the genre has no clear and consistent iconography or setting. There *are* some broadly consistent and identifiable themes underpinning action, to do with freedom from oppression, say, or the hero’s ability to inventively use weaponry and his/her own body in overcoming enemies and obstacles. Physical conflict or challenge – battling an imposing adversary or terrain – is, of course, fundamental to the genre in all its manifestations. Yet the very diversity of action and adventure requires thinking about genre in a different way than the familiar analyses of more clearly defined genres such as the western, long explored in terms of its rendition of themes to do with the symbolic opposition of wilderness and civilization, nature and culture.

Action films are not restricted to any particular historical or geographical settings (the basis for early iconographical models of genre). Indeed, the basic elements of physical conflict, chase and challenge can be inflected in any number of different directions. These elements are expressed cinematically in the action sequence. Action, we might say, is defined by characters and forms of narration that most effectively allow the staging of action sequences with their intense depiction of physical exertion, chase and combat. Within these terms action can be comic, graphically violent, fantastic, apocalyptic, military, conspiratorial, romantic. It can even be British.

**Action and adventure in British cinema**

Associated with narratives of quest and discovery, and with spectacular scenes of combat, violence and pursuit, action and adventure has figured strongly within both Hollywood and British film history. Both action and adventure are familiar generic descriptors, both widely used to promote and distribute films in theatres for home use. Those Hollywood genres which strongly emphasise action elements – including war movies, westerns and thrillers – have their own distinct generic histories and conventions. André Bazin noted with some admiration and surprise the widespread interest in myths so nationally parochial as those articulated in the Hollywood Western. “Its world-wide appeal is even more astonishing than its historical survival,” he writes.[[8]](#endnote-8)

Within and across national cinemas action genres and adventure narratives are multiple. Before turning to some specific cases of British action and adventure below, I briefly indicate something of the historical range. In the British context there are a number of distinctive traditions of action and/or adventure cinema. Crime and gangster films have long exploited post-war urban scenarios and the violent lives of ordinary men. The 1947 adaptation of Greene’s “entertainment” *Brighton Rock* provides a well-known example, exploiting location work, chase sequences and scenes of violence. More recent British crime films such as *Get Carter* (Mike Hodges, 1971), *The Long Good Friday* (John Mackenzie, 1980) and *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (Guy Ritchie, 1998) use very different mixes of violence, contemporary realist settings, stylized gangster figures and comedy. Without suggesting that they are interchangeable – clearly they are not - such films demonstrate the presence of a strong action tradition in British cinema.[[9]](#endnote-9)

British adventure cinema responds to a number of elements including the availability of material for adaptation and the historical context of empire. While, as Brian Taves has shown, Hollywood adventure cinema frequently involves a resistance to oppression in fantastical renditions of the past (Warner Bros’ 1938 *The Adventures of Robin Hood* being a case in point), British imperial adventure literature and film is more politically contorted.[[10]](#endnote-10) Empire provides a setting for adventure of a particular and rather uncomfortable kind. The spectacular Technicolor adventure *The Four Feathers* (Zoltan Korda, 1939) depicts melodramatic scenarios of male rivalry, loyalty and adventure against the backdrop of Empire, British men pitched against an enemy portrayed in crude racial terms. While the award-winning *Zulu* (Cy Endfield, 1964) posed some more demanding questions about colonial hierarchies and the racist frame of reference that underpinned them, it too renders the period and events depicted in sentimental terms of honour. David Lean’s epic adventure *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), centred on a complex British hero who is divided in his loyalties, similarly expresses ambivalence towards imperialist perspectives while nonetheless maintaining the hierarchies on which they are built. African settings serve as little more than the backdrop for the mercenaries in an adventure film such as *The Wild Geese* (Andrew L. McLaglen, 1978). [[11]](#endnote-11)

Rather different in tone from imperial adventure, historical and costume films are prominent in British adventure cinema. Examples such as Korda’s adaptation of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1934) with Leslie Howard in the title role come to mind. Less well-regarded titles such as Val Guest’s rendition of Robin Hood, *The Men of Sherwood Forest* (1954) can be identified as part of British historical adventure. The film featured American actor Don Taylor in the central role suggesting an attempt to appeal to the international markets which the studio (Hammer) would develop with its science-fiction and horror films. Often light in tone, British adventure cinema is quite explicitly played for comedy in Richard Lester’s *The Three Musketeers* (1973) and its sequel *The Four Musketeers* (1974), films which operate in part as pastiche (“One for All and All for Fun!”).[[12]](#endnote-12)

Finally, war cinema of course forms a significant element of British action and adventure. In addition to some of the Empire war films discussed above, British films of and about World War Two are particularly notable. British war cinema is rich and varied with action elements and adventure scenarios forming a crucial element. The action can be intimate as in *We Dive at Dawn* (Anthony Asquith, 1943) or *In Which We Serve* (Noel Coward and David Lean, 1942), or spectacular as with hits such as *The Dam Busters* (Michael Anderson, 1955) and *Battle of Britain* (Guy Hamilton, 1969). War cinema is also epic as exemplified by the award-winning David Lean film *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957).

As this brief summary indicates, action and adventure are long established features of British cinema. Many of the titles I have referred to are co-productions, though some are wholly British in finance. Some of the films mentioned here achieved international critical and or commercial success, while others required repackaging for international markets. If in some cases the Britishness of an action or adventure film is obscured, in others it simply passes unnoticed.

**British film franchises and global action/adventure cinema**

In this last section I turn to a consideration of three high profile series of British films, each centred on an iconic male character: James Bond (I focus primarily on those films featuring Daniel Craig in the role), Harry Potter and Sherlock Holmes (here the 2009 and 2011 films directed by Guy Ritchie). Each has a particular relationship to action as a global/Hollywood genre as well as to an outward-facing form of British cinema.[[13]](#endnote-13) Across these three film series a number of common characteristics are immediately apparent:

* The Bond, Potter and Holmes films are both British and global, clearly geared towards international markets.
* Produced wholly or partly in Britain, these film series all employ a predominantly British cast and settings – location or otherwise – that suggest Britishness.
* All three are adaptations from well-known examples of British popular fiction.

The Britishness of these film series thus lies in part with the source text (Ian Fleming/J.K. Rowling’s novels, Doyle’s stories), in part with the settings, and is also a product of the casting. At the same time recognisably global action/adventure elements are also apparent, unsurprisingly since these films are produced for a global action film culture.

Bond films have been a prominent feature of British cinema since Terence Young’s *Dr. No* was released in 1962. Bond exemplifies a British adventure cinema which emerged from the cold war interest in espionage. Not as dark as the award-winning film *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* (Martin Ritt, 1965, adapted from Le Carré’s 1963 novel of the same name), the Bond films developed a formula that coupled inventive action sequences, spectacle, humour, violence and sensuality. The use of multiple – more or less exotic - locations has long formed part of the series’ glamorous sense of modernity while contributing to an international feel. There have of course been many shifts in emphasis over the years which have been explored by critics seeking to trace shifting cinematic and cultural values through the changing representation of gender and of empire in the context of feminism and post-colonial politics.

Bond is frequented cited as both influence on and an exception to action cinema. This is a product surely of its relationship to Britishness and British cinema as much as to Hollywood and American cinema. Noting the frequent neglect of Bond within accounts of British cinema, James Chapman insists on the importance of the national. He writes that “the Britishness of the Bond films has been one of their main selling points, a factor which differentiates them from all the other action movies which have followed in their wake.”[[14]](#endnote-14) For Chapman the modern action film is one of the generic contexts in which Bond must be critically framed. Indeed Chapman follows Larry Gross in arguing that Bond is “the progenitor of the high-tech action film,” a key influence on the development of American action:

The characteristics of the modern Hollywood action thriller – the emphasis on (usually violent) action over plotting and characterisation, the reduction of narrative complexity to a series of set pieces and chases, the foregrounding of technology and firepower, and, perhaps above all, the hero who never dispatches a villain without a ‘witty’ one-liner – can all be traced back to the Bond films.[[15]](#endnote-15)

Ironically in this context, in relation to the later Daniel Craig’s Bonds, critics have remarked on a shift in the Bond franchise towards Hollywood action. Arnett writes: “The producers of *Casino Royale* have ‘sampled’ the transmediated mythos of James Bond and created a film remix: a transformation of the franchise that acknowledges previous iterations while claiming its own autonomy.”[[16]](#endnote-16) For Arnett British cinema is not the primary context for the remixed Bond – rather a double move involving a return to Fleming on one hand, and the use of superhero conventions on the other (his reference points here are Spiderman and Iron Man).

Specifically, it is the action sequences that for Arnett point to this reorientation: “The major action sequences of *Casino Royale* re-align Bond with the superhero genre and de-emphasise the thriller/espionage genre.”[[17]](#endnote-17) It is certainly the case that the action sequences presented in *Casino Royale* – the brawl on a building site, for instance – are in line with the expectations of the day. Thus they emphasise “individual performance” and physicality over Bond as government agent - a figure empowered by authority whose violence is signified by gadgets and weaponry. Yet these sequences of chase and pursuit have rarely been central to the thriller/espionage elements of the Bond films. Indeed the rebooted Daniel Craig Bond films, if anything, have done more to foreground this genre element. *Casino Royale* opens with an atmospheric black and white sequence depicting Bond’s first kills. This noir-inflected pre-credit scene with its canted frames and fractured narration pointedly uses espionage conventions to establish the dark tone of the film and of Craig’s Bond.

In contrast to Bond, the eight Harry Potter films (released from 2001 to 2011) sit within the broad generic category of fantasy adventure. They are sometimes described as family adventure since they are geared towards a younger audience familiar with the books. Both British and American, the Potter films were shot in the UK with a primarily British cast, adapted from a best-selling series of British novels that effectively couple a children’s literary tradition of boarding school adventure with the magical or fantasy narratives associated with Tolkien.[[18]](#endnote-18)

The first four Potter films function primarily as fantasy adventure, with spectacular elements a less pronounced feature of the magical world inhabited by the central child characters. There are conventional action sequences of course – Harry and Ron’s flight from the spiders in an enchanted car for instance. The airborne wizarding sport of Quidditch, and indeed flight (via broomsticks or magical creatures) more generally, provides the chief source of action spectacle. In *Prisoner of Azkaban* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2004) Quidditch, a game that poses dangers for Harry in the previous two films, transitions to a more sinister scene via the introduction of horror elements (driving rain, the monstrous Dementors, Harry’s fall). The climactic scenes feature a tussle with a violent tree (the Whomping Willow introduced in Chris Columbus’ *Chamber of Secrets*, 2002) and a chase/confrontation with a werewolf. From *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Mike Newell, 2005) an increasing emphasis on action sequences is apparent as the series progresses towards an ultimate confrontation with magical villain Lord Voldemort and the characters mature.[[19]](#endnote-19) *Goblet of Fire* features no Quidditch competition but does include a spectacular aerial action sequence in which Harry is chased by and outwits a dragon. A dragon features once more in *Deathly Hallows Part 2* (David Yates, 2011), here it becomes the vehicle by which Harry, Ron and Hermione effect a daring escape from the vaults of Gringotts Wizarding Bank.

A theatrical poster for *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1* (David Yates, 2010) depicts the three leads Harry, Ron and Hermione running through a forest, an image that refers to an intense scene towards the end of the film in which they are chased and ultimately captured. The image retains the character-focused element of the previous films’ promotional imagery while signalling the intensification of the pursuit and combat narrative elements. An elaborate pursuit scene early in the film has Harry and Hagrid chased in a flying motorcycle and sidecar. A section of the chase draws the pursuit down to earth, taking them through the busy Dartford Tunnel. The sequence playfully acknowledges the established conventions of the action movie (high speed pursuit against the flow of traffic) while insisting on the fantastical world of magic – Hagrid steers the motorcycle up the sides of the tunnel and drives along its roof.

Sherlock Holmes is undoubtedly the most frequently adapted of the examples discussed here with the Holmes figure an iconic presence in popular culture for decades. Holmes was explicitly recast as action in Guy Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011). Made for Warner Bros, Ritchie renders the Holmes/Watson duo as humorous male action film, Victorian London providing a spectacular CGI backdrop for the friendship between Holmes and Watson and the contest between Holmes and Lord Blackwood. The mysterious Moriarty remains a figure glimpsed only in the shadows, coming to the fore in the second film. The battle at the Reichenbach Falls notwithstanding, Moriarty is not a particularly developed figure in the Holmes stories; in various film and television adaptations however, Moriarty is given greater prominence, in part since he functions so effectively as an arch-villain in contrast to the discreet mysteries that so often feature in the stories.

While Bond is a relatively tightly controlled franchise, Sherlock Holmes is a character who has appeared in numerous cinematic, television and literary versions. His Britishness has typically been central to adaptations. Certainly the best-known cinematic Holmes is that of Basil Rathbone who starred in fourteen films from 1939 to 1946. As Mark Jancovich points out in his discussion of the various pressbook and other promotional material for the Universal series films, the Englishness of the cast was frequently foregrounded as a marker of authenticity not least when the series shifted from a period to a contemporary setting. According to Jancovich, both associations with Britishness and literary tradition “not only promoted [Roy William Neill’s *The Pearl of Death*, 1944], but gave it an air of respectability.”[[20]](#endnote-20)

Of course it did not go unremarked that Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes* features an American actor, Robert Downey Jnr, in the leading role. If Rathbone brought Britishness and respectability to the Universal Holmes films of the 1940s, Downey brings associations of Hollywood to this successful example of British action. Coming immediately after his role as arrogant genius Tony Stark in *Iron Man* (Jon Favreau, 2008), Downey’s performance resonates with both the global superhero film and the specificities of British action (qualities such as literary adaptation and period detail). Paired with British actor Jude Law to draw out the buddy qualities of the relationship, Downey plays ostentatiously British, drawing out a bohemian rendition of Holmes that resonates with both the American star’s well-publicised personal history and his more recent superhero role.

*Sherlock Holmes* deploys a playful action aesthetic from its opening sequence, an energetic juxtaposition of carriages speeding through the streets of London at night, Holmes’ rapid, agile movements and ability to navigate space. The opening scene also establishes the device of prefiguring Holmes’ violence, picturing in slow motion his anticipation of how the scene will unfold, Holmes’ own commentary anticipating the damage he is about to cause, then unfolding the action in all its violence. Having established Holmes’ brilliance and physical agility from the beginning, a second scene of combat underlines both the detective’s violent physicality and the action elements of the film’s portrayal. This scene shows Holmes in a bare-knuckle fight unconnected to any investigation; stripped to the waist the imagery connects to familiar action imagery whereby violence defines the hero. The scene in which Moriarty interrogates and tortures Holmes in *Game of Shadows* also evokes conventions of action rather than investigation.

While the image of Downey bare-knuckle fighting is far from the cerebral image of Holmes, the film here picks up on an important aspect of the character, one particularly suited to an action rendition. We may recall that when Conan Doyle first describes Holmes it is via the intrigued Dr Watson who produces a curious document entitled “SHERLOCK HOLMES – his limits.” The twelve qualities noted identify both abilities and absences beginning with a knowledge of literature, philosophy, astronomy deemed to be “Nil,” of politics as “feeble” and encompassing a “profound” knowledge of Chemistry and “immense” knowledge of “Sensational Literature.” Number eleven on Watson’s list, sandwiched between the violin and British law, is that which suggests action most immediately: “an expert singlestick player, boxer, and swordsman.” Watson throws his list into the fire with exasperation: “If I can only find what the fellow is driving at by reconciling all these accomplishments, and discovering a calling which needs them all.”[[21]](#endnote-21) Basil Rathbone’s skills as a fencer had been showcased in his (largely villainous) adventure roles, notably his duels with Errol Flynn in *Captain Blood* (Michael Curtiz,1935) and *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. His role as Holmes involved him in vigorous action, not least in the wartime stories, a spirit which Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes* elaborates.

The Potter, Bond and Holmes film franchises have all achieved commercial success, the third less spectacularly but nonetheless respectable. All three underline the limitations of thinking of action as a genre defined by Hollywood. To conflate action exclusively with American cinema is to obscure the specificity of national traditions. But the challenge is not simply to take note and develop an account of British (or indeed other) action and adventure cinema in parallel to Hollywood. As I have acknowledged in my discussion, these films are not Hollywood but neither are they removed from it. Thinking of action cinema beyond Hollywood means not just adding other national cinemas but taking account of the distinctive national traditions and the productive exchanges that take place between them. Thus while I have been arguing here for a greater attention to and awareness of British action and adventure cinema, my focus on Bond, Potter and Holmes suggests the need to take account of national specificity while acknowledging the continuing relevance of Hollywood as one component of the global “transnational genre” that is action.

1. Meaghan Morris, Siu Leung Li, Stephen Ching-Kiu Chan (eds) *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005, p. 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. p. 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. p. 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. p. 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. I include my own work on action here. Both *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993) and the forthcoming *Hollywood Action and Adventure Cinema* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015) mention Bond but the focus remains firmly on American cinema. An earlier edited collection on the genre, *Action and Adventure Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004) made a particular point on encompassing global action with essays on European and Asian as well as American national traditions. Once again Bond was neither different enough nor Hollywood enough to figure prominently. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. James Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero*, London: Routledge, 1987; James Chapman, *License to Thrill: A Cultural History of the James Bond Films*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1987. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Lisa Purse, *Contemporary Action Cinema*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011, p. 187. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. André Bazin, “The Western: or the American film par excellence” in *What is Cinema?* *Volume 2*, Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2005, p.141. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Television is also an important context to consider in relation to British crime film. British crime television whether violently modern (*The Sweeny,* 1975-8) or invested in nostalgic traditionalism (*Inspector Morse*, 1987-2000) has consistently secured audiences and provided employment for creative personnel. The debt is acknowledged in Nick Love’s action movie adaptation of the 1970s series *The Sweeney* (2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Brian Taves, *The Romance of Adventure: the Genre of Historical Adventure Movies*, Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1993. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. For a discussion of several of the films mentioned here in relation to empire adventure see: James Chapman and Nicholas J. Cull, *Projecting Empire: Imperialism and Popular Cinema*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2009. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Jeffrey Richards discusses the Lester Musketeer films in his *Swordsmen of the Screen, from Douglas Fairbanks to Michael York*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. I do not here develop discussion of national cinema with respect to finance, although clearly all the British films I discuss depend on international sources of finance whether for production, distribution or both. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. James Chapman, *License to Thrill: A Cultural History of the James Bond Films*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 14 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Chapman pp. 21-22. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Robert P. Arnett, “*Casino Royale* and Franchise Remix: James Bond as Superhero,” *Film Criticism* 33.3, 2009, p. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid, p. 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. With respect to defining British action and adventure we can usefully contrast the Potter series with Peter Jackson’s *Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) films. Here although a predominantly British cast features in what is an adaptation of a well-known British book which deals in mythical tropes of national identity (the Shire), Britishness is not at stake in the same way as it is with the Potter films. While Tolkien’s world certainly involved a particular rendering of Englishness, the filming of the *Lord of the Rings* cycle in New Zealand is the evocation of the fantasy dimensions of the text shifts from such national imagining.

In her discussion of the Potter films, framed within the large genre of fantasy, Katherine A. Fowkes firmly situates the series as exemplar of Hollywood cinema. Exploring the link to Tolkien, Fowkes also connects the series to successful Hollywood series such as *Star Wars* (1977-2005), *Spider-Man* (2002-2007, 2012-2014) and *Indiana Jones* (1981-2012). See *The Fantasy Film*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Recognising the darker themes and developing violence of the narrative, the film was the first to feature a 12A rating, PG-13 in the US. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Mark Jancovich, “The Meaning of Mystery: Genre, Marketing and the Universal Sherlock Holmes Series of the 1940s” *Film International* 17, 2005, p.37. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. The characters of both Watson and Holmes were introduced in Conan Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet* first published in 1887. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)