Introduction

Nicholas Barnett, Alan Burton, Laura Crossley

'The spy novel came into being in England and has largely remained a British preserve'. The assertion of American historian and political commentator Walter Lacquer (1983: 62) has received wide acceptance, such that American literary scholars Matthew Bruccoli and Judith Baughman have claimed the modern spy story a 'British genre'. 'If they didn't invent it', the critics claimed, 'they perfected it' (2004: xi). Similarly, American cultural scholar Michael Denning has maintained that, 'The spy thriller has been, for most of its history, a British genre, indeed a major cultural export' (1987: 6). The British spy story in popular literature has received considerable critical attention and authors such as Eric Ambler, Graham Greene, Ian Fleming, John le Carré and Len Deighton have been singled out for their importance and influence.[1] The spy picture has maintained a close relationship with the printed form, many films being adaptations of stories by popular authors; unsurprisingly, film versions have appeared of the best-selling novels and stories of the most acclaimed writers. This is evident with the spy thrillers of Alfred Hitchcock in the 1930s, which were adapted from such novelists as John Buchan, Somerset Maugham and Joseph Conrad (Burton 2017).

Spies and spying became a popular, durable and significant topic for British film- and television-makers. Eminent American film critic Richard Schickel has even gone so far as to claim the spy picture to be the 'greatest of English movie genres' (Review of *The Whistle Blower*, *Time Magazine*, 7 September 1987). Surprisingly then, the spy picture in Britain has not come in for much critical attention. Following recent work on crime, horror, comedy, historical and heritage films, espionage is, James Bond apart, arguably the last remaining of the significant British screen genres to receive detailed attention.[2]

This special edition redresses this imbalance and aims to develop scholarly interest in the British screen representations of espionage and spies. The articles were originally presented at the 'Spies on British Screens' conference held at Plymouth University in 2016. This conference featured over 25 presentations on the spy genre from the twentieth century to the twenty-first and the articles published here are a snapshot of the high-quality research that is currently being undertaken into British spy dramas. The papers selected are interdisciplinary in focus with authorship balanced between media scholars and historians. The significance of this collection lies in its examination of British spy dramas through multiple lenses such as genre, gender, morality, government propaganda, memory, and space. As spy dramas have re-emerged in an international context with productions like *The Americans* (US, from 2013), *Homeland* (US, from 2011) and *Deutschland 83* (Germany, 2015) this edition progresses the academic conversation and seeks to shape future debate.

The articles have a broad temporal span from the 1930s to the 2010s. They begin with Christopher Smith's article on cinematic representations of Sherlock Holmes during World War Two in which trans-Atlantic representations of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous detective turned to spying for the defence of Britain and America by combatting the Nazis. Smith demonstrates how the detective-turned-spy served Western propaganda aims by seeking out the fifth columns. The 1960s have often been seen as a golden age of spy dramas, (Oldham, 80) and the article by Alan Burton provides a wide-ranging survey of spy cinema of the 1960s as part of a genre life-cycle which ended in the 1970s with a shift to more televisual productions. The idea of the spy genre in the Swinging Sixties continues with Laura Crossley's exploration of Modesty Blaise as a female agent who rivalled her more famous male counterparts and offered a different perspective of women than that of 'the Bond girl'.

The television and cinema adaptations of John le Carre's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier Spy*, which originated in the 1970s with the remake in 2011, feature in Douglas McNaughton's article. He examines these productions in terms of how space and filming location effects the narrative of

the filmic productions. Joseph Oldham explores how one of the most infamous incidents of the Cold War, the Cambridge spies scandal, has been represented in television productions from the late 1970s to the early 2000s. Oldham connects the re-telling of this story to changing attitudes towards consensus politics. The 2000s feature in Barbara Korte's examination of the BBC spy drama series *Spooks* (2002-11), which explored a more modern and post-cold-war version of the British espionage establishment. Korte examines how the series depicts the Secret Service acting as moral guardians for a modern form of British identity. Finally, Nicholas Barnett's paper on the BBC historical drama *The Game* (2014) explores how the aforementioned 'golden age' of spy dramas has combined with Cold War nostalgia to produce a new way of looking at the past that bemoans the apparent loss of security that Mutually Assured Destruction was presumed to have given. The article combines this nostalgia with the loss of class and family communities from the 1970s and suggests that the programme looked back on this era as a form of interregnum between the Swinging Sixties' and the class war of the 1980s.

Spies and secret agents have fascinated readers and viewers for over a century. The British have been at the forefront of the fictional treatment of espionage, creating a seductive, imaginative realm of the clandestine, which assuaged anxieties and fears resulting from the Cold War, nuclear threat and global terrorism. It simultaneously conjured up popular fantasy heroes who served to mask national decline, gender inequality and class division, and probed the uncomfortable reality of betrayal and treachery in the highest echelons of power. With the continual shifting of global power relations, new alliances and new threats, spy fictions offer both a way of negotiating these real-world fears, and comfort in terms of presenting solutions and answers to those fears. Tales of espionage and security remain popular in the twenty-first century and seem set to continue to do so for decades to come.

References

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[1] See the extensive bibliography in Burton (2016).

[2] The Routledge series 'British Popular Cinema' has showcased recent work on British cinema genres, including *British Crime Cinema* (1999), *British Science-Fiction Cinema* (1999), *British Horror Cinema* (2001), *British Historical Cinema* (2002) and *British Comedy Cinema* (2012).