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Ina Habermann/Christian Krug (eds.)

And Thereby Hangs a Tale
A Critical Anatomy of (Popular) Tales

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Telling Tales of Empire in Contemporary British Popular Culture

Lena Steveker

1. British Popular Culture and Stories of Britain in 2012

On 27 July 2012, the London Olympics kicked off with an opening ceremony which generated an estimated audience of one billion people around the world.[1] A few months later, in October 2012, the Bond film *Skyfall* broke box-office records within days of its release,[2] making it the most successful instalment to the Bond film series to date.[3] Consumed by large-scale global audiences, both the opening ceremony and *Skyfall* are products of popular culture engaged in representing Britishness. Following the by now well-established tradition of Olympic opening ceremonies, the London show "communicate[d] narratives about the host nation's past and present" (Baker 2),[4] thus serving to introduce the UK to both athletes and audiences. Putting it differently, the opening ceremony constructed a tale of Britain's past, present and future.[5] Directed by Sam Mendes, *Skyfall* is also engaged in representing Britishness. As it imagines British identity in the early twenty-first century, Mendes's film follows the Bond formula which packages a distinctive Britishness,[6] embodied by James Bond as the "British hero of and for his time" (Korte, 26),[7] for an international market (see Chapman 2003, 97).

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[1] According to the BBC, an estimated television audience of one billion people watched its broadcast of the opening ceremony, in addition to the stadium audience of 62,000 people (see "Media Reaction").

[2] For the film's box-office figures see Child 2012[a] and [b] as well as Gant and "Updated."

[3] According to *Box Office Mojo*, *Skyfall* has so far grossed 1,108,561,013 US-dollars at cinemas worldwide (see "Skyfall").

[4] As Catherine Baker points out, "the contemporary [Olympic] opening ceremony has consistently, since at least Moscow 1980, served as a vehicle for existing nationalist (and sometimes regional) ideas to be staged in this spectacular global setting" (4).

[5] For the *London 2012 Opening Ceremony* as a story also see Arlene Phillips who claims, in *The Telegraph*, that the show consisted of "lots of story-telling, and that story-telling was in no way lost in a stadium" (Goldsmith et al., n.p.).

[6] See Chapman who argues that "[t]he ideology of national identity which the films themselves embody is British" (2007, 13).

[7] Also see Chapman who identifies James Bond as the "traditional British gentleman-hero" (2003, 97). For a detailed discussion of Bond as representing the British gentleman ideal see Berberich 2011.

Due to the films' economic success and world-wide popularity, James Bond has become a globalized cultural phenomenon,[8] with each new instalment adapting Bond's heroism, and with it his Britishness, to each film's specific historical context. Each film tells a story of national identity as it negotiates British cultural anxieties within the larger context of its particular era's zeitgeist. While critics have discussed the *London 2012 Opening Ceremony* as well as *Skyfall* as negotiating post-colonial Britishness, I will argue in this chapter that the British empire as well as imperial ideology are central to both Boyle's and Mendes's tales of Britain in the twenty-first century. As I will show, the *London 2012 Opening Ceremony* and *Skyfall* are two high-profile examples of British contemporary popular culture that tell tales of empire at a time when the British Empire has long ceased to exist as a political reality.

2. Empire Retold: The London 2012 Opening Ceremony

Representing "ourselves as a nation, where we have come from and where we want to be" (Boyle qtd. in Gibson, n.p.), the *London 2012 Opening Ceremony* relied on a cast that was highly diverse in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity. It included British celebrities as well as thousands of volunteers from across the British society. Furthermore, it heavily drew on British popular culture. Using references to, and snippets from, British pop music, film, comedy, TV series, children's literature and fantasy fiction as narrative elements, the opening ceremony told a tale of Britain which represented the UK as an open, tolerant, and multicultural society. As Catherine Baker observes, the show "could be considered a counter-narrative to that narrative based on the country-side, the military, and the monarchy" (6) which has traditionally dominated public constructions of British national identity (see 6–7). Although the opening ceremony included rural, military and monarchical elements, it did not centre on them. For instance, the Olympic show opened on a scene entitled 'Green and Pleasant Land', but its rural vista, complete with cottages, live farm-stock and maypole dancing, soon gave way, in a sequence called 'Pandemonium', to a panorama of towering chimneys, steam engines and power looms which rose from the ground in a representation of the Industrial Revolution.

[8] As Chapman points out, the Bond series is "the most successful and enduring series of films in cinema history" (2007, 21).

In the following segment, called 'Happy and Glorious', the opening ceremony turned towards the monarchy. A video clip showed Elizabeth II boarding a helicopter at Buckingham Palace and flying across London. The helicopter took her across the Mall, which was decked out in Union Jacks and packed with crowds waving more of the same flags, and across Trafalgar Square, where a group of people sitting on its iconic bronze lions cheered her on. This clip was a celebratory display of the monarchy and also of the UK's former military power as it put into scene large-scale, flag-waving enthusiasm for the Crown's most senior representative and, with its images of Trafalgar Square, acknowledged the naval victory that is inscribed into British cultural memory as having consolidated Britain's status as a global superpower in the nineteenth century. At the same time, however, the clip humorously undercut any sense of national grandeur by linking the queen's arrival in the stadium to British popular culture, thus not only blurring the line between reality and fiction but also questioning cultural hierarchies. The person escorting Elizabeth II was the actor Daniel Craig whom a royal butler and the monarch herself addressed as "Mr Bond". Craig-as-Bond then appeared to parachute with the queen from a helicopter hovering above the stadium, their parachutes unfolding into Union Jacks while the Bond motif blasted from the stadium speakers (in a homage to the Bond film *The Spy Who Loved Me*, 1977). Inside the stadium, the camera zoomed in on the royal box as a speaker asked the audience to stand for the queen, who entered the box wearing the same dress as in the clip and as one of the parachutists. Scripting her entrance like a Bond scene, the opening ceremony represented the queen, tongue in cheek, not only as yet another actor in Boyle's show but also as an icon of popular culture.

Following upon Elizabeth II's arrival, the raising of the Union Flag was another example of how the opening ceremony reframed elements which have traditionally formed part of the country's narrative for its own tale of Britain. As representatives of the Royal Navy, Army and Airforce carried the flag in slow procession through the arena, the show shifted its focus from the monarchy to the military, but only for as long as it took the soldiers to reach the flag post. While the flag went up, the Kaos Signing Choir of Deaf and Hearing Children performed the national anthem. Dressed in pyjamas, the choir's visibly delighted members functioned as a counterpoint to the military display; they provided an utterly un-militaristic context to the flag-raising ceremony, thus

evoking a notion of patriotism based not on military discipline and ritual, but on social solidarity and inclusivity. The children also served as a link to the ceremony's next segment, which continued to foreground the idea of public service (as introduced by the members of the armed forces carrying the flag) by extending it to the NHS. Dressed in nurses' uniforms and doctors' coats, 600 members of the NHS and staff of the Great Ormond Street Hospital wheeled hospital beds into the stadium atop of which sat more children clad in pyjamas. Having danced to Mike Oldfield performing "Tubular Bells", the nurses and doctors put the children to bed; a young girl was seen reading J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904/11) under her bedcovers by the light of a torch; and J. K. Rowling appeared, reading out a short description of Neverland from Barrie's novel. Similar to the early nineteenth-century concept of folklore, which frames oral story-telling as a means of nation building, Rowling's public reading served to suggest a cultural community which included not only the children participating in the show, but also the audiences sitting in the stadium and in front of TV screens.[9] This community was threatened by an invasion of villains from British children's literature: Gigantic representations of Barrie's Captain Hook, Lewis Carroll's Queen of Hearts, Roald Dahl's Child Catcher, and Dodie Smith's Cruella de Vil hovered among the beds, while J. K. Rowling's Voldemort, largest of all, towered above them. Eventually, these threatening figures and their minions were banished by women who floated from the sky dressed as P. L. Travers's Mary Poppins. NHS staff and children alike celebrated their deliverance by another round of revelling before the scene concluded with the children being put to bed again and communal harmony being restored.

[9] See Doris Feldmann & Christian Krug who read Rowling's performance as follows: "Ein [...] immer noch sehr aktives viktorianisches Residuum lässt sich in Rowlings Auftritt bei der Eröffnungszeremonie für die Olympischen Spiele 2012 in London erkennen. Hier wurde die Autorin als Vorleserin und damit vor allem über ihre Stimme inszeniert. Diese verleiht der Märchenfigur des spätviktorianischen schottischen Autors J.M. Barrie aktuelle britische Autorität: Bei der Figur handelt es sich um Peter Pan, einen Jungen, der niemals erwachsen werden will. Wie beim Folklore-Konzept des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts wird dabei mündliches Erzählen mit Volksmärchen und Volkskultur assoziiert und für eine nationale Vergemeinschaftung eingesetzt; zudem wird diese Art des Erzählens, wie im Viktorianismus, mit weiblicher Autorschaft und insofern mit Kinderliteratur verbunden. Gleichzeitig hebt die Stimme eines männlichen Fernsehkommentators Rowlings karitative Tätigkeiten, speziell ihre Bildungsförderung für jugendliche Leser, hervor." (Feldmann & Krug)

As exemplified by the three segments I have outlined above, the opening ceremony can be read as telling a tale of Britain in which the welfare state took precedence over the military, humour subverted pomposity, and popular culture trumped the monarchy. It is above all due to its many references to British popular culture that the opening ceremony was perceived by the media, both national and international, as representing Britain as a progressive, diverse, and inclusive nation. According to the *Guardian* author Jonathan Freedland, the show celebrated "an ethos of public service and ethnic diversity" (Freedland, n.p.); it presented "Britain both big and small, urban and suburban, young and older" as Sarah Crompton put it in *The Telegraph* (Crompton, n.p.). Commenting on the show in the *Telegraph Blog*, Tim Stanley saw the opening ceremony as characterizing Britain as "a country that [...] has many identities, that is culturally rich" ("Media Reaction", n.p.). Mary Beard argued, also in *The Telegraph*, that the show contrasted sharply with "the pomp and majesty [of the queen's Diamond Jubilee]" because it told "the people's story" as it "play[ed] with the great symbols of Britain in a way that was both ironic and supportive" (Goldsmith et al., n.p.). Several reviewers also commend the opening ceremony for having been devoid of any nostalgia for the empire. Writing for *The New York Times*, Sarah Lyell pronounced that "[w]ith its hilariously quirky Olympic opening ceremony, [...] Britain presented itself to the world [...] as a nation secure in its own post-empire identity" (Lyell, n.p.); and according to Tim Stanley, "empire was never mentioned" ("Media Reaction", n.p.).

While I agree that the opening ceremony did not negotiate nostalgia for the former British empire, I would claim that its narrative of Britain's past, present and future centred on imperial ideology. As I will argue in the following, it is through its use of Shakespeare that the show told a tale of empire, a story of Britain which was imbued, in one of its key scenes, with imperial ideology. Entitled 'Isles of Wonder', the opening ceremony established Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610/11) as its main point of reference. Putting it in Boyle's words, "the whole thing is based on *The Tempest*" (qtd. in Prescott & Sullivan, 52). The play also provides a narrative framework as references to *The Tempest* marked the beginning and the end of the show's introductory segment, which defined Great Britain as its titular 'Isles of Wonder'. The opening ceremony kicked off with a brief video clip which took the audience onto a fast-forward trip from the source of the River Thames into the Olympic

Stadium in London. This clip began with an image of the stone that marks the river's head, its digitally altered inscription reading "Isles of Wonder / this stone was placed here to mark the source of the River Thames" (*London 2012*, DVD 1, 0:01:09). The titular phrase framed the show's tale of Britain as being set in a space which is as 'wondrous' as Prospero's island in Shakespeare's play. The process of establishing this setting was concluded at the end of the show's introductory segment when British actor and film director Kenneth Branagh, dressed up as the Victorian engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel, stepped from a horse-drawn omnibus, climbed the representation of Glastonbury Tor that dominated one end of the stadium and recited Caliban's account of his island:

> Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,
> Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
> Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,
> That if I then had waked after long sleep,
> Will make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming
> The clouds methought would open, and show riches
> Ready to drop upon me; that, when waked,
> I cried to dream again.[10]

As Graham Holderness notes, Branagh's performance served "as a preface to the [...] history of the Industrial Revolution" (95) which the opening ceremony offered its audience in its following segment 'Pandemonium'. Having assured the audience that they need not be "afeard", a benignly smiling Branagh-as-Brunel supervised the transformation of the 'green and pleasant land' into a noisy, smoking and bustling steel workshop which set into scene, and indeed celebrated, the technological, social, and political upheavals brought about by the Industrial Revolution. While Branagh's performance can be seen, as Collette Gordon suggests, as "a charm [serving] to dispel anxiety in the face of environmental destruction and rapid social change" (139), I would argue that its main function as a narrative element was to conflate the actual island of Great Britain with the isle invoked in Caliban's lines. The Shakespearean speech completed the imaginary transformation of Britain into a 'wondrous' isle of a magical, dream-like quality which served as the setting for Boyle's tale of Britain. Using *The Tempest* as a framing device

[10] *The Tempest*, III.ii.135–43; *London 2012*, DVD 1, 0:08:55–0:09:42.

for a national narrative which, as I have argued above, relied heavily on references to popular culture, the opening ceremony once more collapsed cultural hierarchies.

In terms of ideology, "[t]he use of Caliban's lines has baffled Shakespeareans" as Holderness points out (96). James Shapiro notes that "[i]f you gave those lines some thought, especially in the light of the Empire, it's an odd choice" (qtd. in Holderness, 96). Erin Sullivan ponders

> what kind of symbolic work Shakespeare was doing in these celebrations, which used a speech from Caliban – one of the most politically disenfranchized and dispossessed characters in all of Shakespeare's plays – to represent the dreams and ambitions of Great Britain, empire and all. (4)

Although both Shapiro and Sullivan refer to the British empire while contemplating the significance of Branagh's performance, neither of them continues to analyse this conjunction in more detail. Holderness sees the show's use of Shakespeare, and also of Brunel, as unconnected to imperial discourse, reading Branagh's performance as a "homogenous and harmonious reconciliation of Shakespeare with industry, science and technology, with global culture and with popular participation" (Holderness, 100). With Brunel's Shakespearean speech, Holderness argues,

> [e]ngineering had entered the realm of poetry. Art and science had become one, as they were in the Renaissance. Shakespeare and Brunel [...] had become one voice, one hand, one mind. And by the combination of their powers of vision and practice, the Olympic Opening Ceremony suggests, they had brought greatness back to Britain. (99)

In contrast to Holderness, for whom "Brunel and Shakespeare were [...] speaking on behalf of an extremely diversified, multi-ethnic and multicultural Britain" (99), I read the scene in which Branagh's Brunel delivered Caliban's lines as a revisionist moment which retold Britain's past. *The Tempest* is, as David Lindley points out, "not only a colonialist text, but has functioned historically to represent a colonialist ideology" (70). Holderness rejects "a particular critical orthodoxy that identifies Caliban as the oppressed colonial subject and Prospero as the imperial oppressor" (98), and he is right in pointing out that *The Tempest*, "which from its conception has been subjected to wide diversities of interpretation and adaptation" (Holderness, 98), cannot be reduced to a colonialist reading. However, as Lindley puts it, "[t]he argument that the action of the play and the issues it raises are connected to the colonisation

of the Americas has become, in the last forty years or so, the dominant critical perspective upon [*The Tempest*]" (10). The play's "latent themes of imperialism and power" (Lindley, 77) have also been foregrounded on stage. Since Jonathan Miller's 1970 production of the play, it has become something of a commonplace to have a black actor play Caliban who is set up against a white actor playing Prospero. Various high-profile productions represented Caliban "in a manner explicitly intended to recall the shameful history of colonial enslavement" (Lindley, 71).[11] I therefore assume that – in contrast to Shakespeareans, who would be more aware of the play's full, multifaceted critical history – members of a more general public familiar with *The Tempest* will have encountered the play in the theatre and, at the time of the opening ceremony, would have been likely to see the play as being tied to the themes of imperialism and colonialism.[12]

As Paul Brown states, the lines in which Caliban describes his island are of particular relevance to the play's negotiation of these themes. The island of Caliban's dream is a "site beyond colonial appropriation" (Brown, 65). Described by Caliban,

> the island is seen as to operate not for the coloniser but for the colonised. […] For Caliban, music provokes a dream wish for the riches which in reality are denied him by colonial power. There seems to be a quality in the island beyond the requirements of the coloniser's powerful harmonics, a quality existing for itself, which the [colonial] other may use to resist, if only in dream, the repressive quality which hails him as villain […]. (ibid.)

The *London 2012 Opening Ceremony* co-opted the dream island which represents Caliban's site of resistance into an unabashedly patriotic celebration not only of Britain, but also of British imperialism. Caliban's words were spoken by an actor personifying Isambard Kingdom Brunel, an icon of British engineering and a leading innovator of the steamship technology, which was instrumental in advancing British imperial

[11] See, for instance, the 2009 British-South-African co-production with John Kani as Caliban which *The Guardian* reviewer Michael Billington saw as being "anchored in an unsentimental recreation of the colonial experience" (Billington, n.p.). Other examples of post-colonial approaches to the play were also staged at the Stratford Festival in 2010 and in Julie Taymor's film adaptation of 2010.

[12] Writing in 2018, John Roe points out that "[i]n the theatre such interests have recently begun to fade, partly because they have been over-worked but perhaps more significantly because actors of varying ethnicity have taken on the play's major roles rather than being restricted to those of Caliban or of Ariel." (n.p.)

power in the Victorian era. The musical score that accompanied this performance was Edward Elgar's *Nimrod* (1899), a piece evoking "British nationalist sentiment" (Holderness, 95). While delivering his lines, Branagh-as-Brunel stood at the foot of a hill representing Glastonbury Tor, with an English oak placed on its top. Glastonbury Tor and the oak are symbols of England, the country that initiated British imperialism and colonial expansion. Within this context, I would argue that the opening ceremony's re-enactment of *The Tempest* appropriated the lines which Shakespeare wrote for a character who, in the last forty years, has come to signify the colonial other. Claiming the words of the colonised for a figure that symbolizes the British empire and Britain's colonial power, this scene not only silenced the voice of the colonial other, but denied the other's very existence.

Boyle's show told a tale of empire as it used Shakespeare's *Tempest* to purge the UK's imperial and colonial past from its narrative of Britain.

3. The Empire Strikes Back: *Skyfall* (2012)

The London 2012 Opening Ceremony is tied to James Bond not only because of its Bond scene, which I have discussed above, but also because the film *Skyfall* (2012), released a few months after the London Olympics,[13] evokes discourses of empire for its representation of Britishness.[14] In *Skyfall*, Bond fights former fellow agent Raoul Silva, who carries out terror attacks on MI6 because he wants to take revenge on M for having betrayed him to the Chinese secret service during the handover of Hong Kong in 1997. Silva hacks the MI6 top-security computer system and blows up the agency's headquarter in London. Though personally motivated, his revenge takes aim at the whole country's national security: members of the British government come under gunfire; and, in a reference to the 7/7 London bombings, havoc is wreaked in the tube.

With its plot of cyberterrorism, the film is set in the globalised world of the twenty-first century. The spatial strategy of *Skyfall*, however, is

[13] As Schwanebeck comments, "[t]he Bond producers and the London Olympics Team took the opportunity to create a paratextual relationship with mutual benefits, where either project could serve as an extended promotion for the other [...]. The campaign appears to have been beneficial for both parties: following the Olympic Games, London broke tourism records and *Skyfall* had a record-breaking run at the box-office" (171–2).

[14] My reading of *Skyfall* has developed from a public lecture which I gave, together with Joachim Frenk, in Saarbrücken in November 2013.

more constrained; it is local rather than global, thus differing clearly from its predecessor *Quantum of Solace* (2008), in which Bond moves between the European continent, the British Isles, and South America. By contrast, *Skyfall* is largely set in the UK and constitutes an act of pop-cultural British navel-gazing. The film's showdown is set in the Scottish Highlands, where M is murdered and Bond kills his adversary. What is more, the many scenes which are set in London turn the British capital into the film's second protagonist. Several of London's landmarks and tourist attractions appear on screen as Bond moves through the city by car and on foot. He is chauffeured past the London Eye and the Houses of Parliament; he runs down Whitehall towards the Cenotaph with Westminster Abbey in the background; and in the scene that ushers in the film's ending, he stands on the rooftop of MI6, looking out over London.[15] The rooftop scene is of particular significance for the film's narrative of Britishness as it shows the currently most successful pop-cultural embodiment of British heroism standing in front of the most well-known British icon, the Union Jack, looking out over Whitehall – that part of London which, for centuries, has represented the centre of British political power. This image of Bond looking out over London is part of the film's overall representation of British national identity which, as I will argue in the following, is invested with notions of power and 'greatness' that have their source in Britain's imperial past.

The British empire provides the narrative context for *Skyfall*'s version of the Bondian stock narrative that sees Britain under attack, because Silva's revenge originates in the handover of Hong Kong, the last British colony.[16] However, the British empire not only serves as a theme for the villain's backstory; it also has an ideological function in *Skyfall*'s story of twenty-first-century Britishness. In one of the film's key sequences, Bond is seen sprinting down Whitehall in a desperate, and eventually successful, attempt to prevent Silva from murdering M during her report to a ministerial committee that, contemplating the closure of MI6, investigates her handling of his cyberattacks. Having sketched the threats which Britain faces in the twenty-first century, M concludes her report by quoting the last lines of Alfred Tennyson's poem "Ulysses" (written 1833, publ. 1842):

[15] For a detailed discussion of London's topography in *Skyfall* see Schwanebeck.

[16] See Hoa who argues that several of the film's locations are "encryption[s] of Hong Kong" (6).

> 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.
> (Tennyson, ll. 66–70, *Skyfall*, 1:36:14–41)

Having M recite these lines while she is (though unknowingly) about to be attacked, the film invites the audience to see both her and, by implication, the UK, whose security and freedom M sees as being safeguarded by the MI6, in analogy to Tennyson's King Ulysses, who acknowledges his diminishing strength in old age, yet emphasises his power and resilience. Similar to the *London 2012 Opening Ceremony*, *Skyfall* collapses cultural hierarchies: the film frames its representation of Britain with lines written by a canonical author of 'high' English literature. This strategy of popularizing 'high' culture ties the film to notions of imperialism. Canonised as (one of) the most eminent poets of the Victorian age, Tennyson is a representative of the era which has been inscribed into British cultural memory as the British empire's 'golden age'. With M quoting "Ulysses" while Bond thwarts Silva's attack, *Skyfall* suggests that British identity in the twenty-first century is the same as it was in the Victorian age. Rather than nostalgically longing for its former imperial power, the film presents contemporary Britain as successfully claiming this power for the present.[17] With this scene, *Skyfall* tells a tale of empire as it contends that although the empire is no longer in existence, the power the UK used to yield in its imperial past still forms a constituent part of Britishness in the early twenty-first century.

In its ideological agenda, this scene is complemented by the film's ending which consists of both the rooftop scene mentioned above and the closing scene, in which Bond reports for duty in the new (male) M's office.[18] Standing on the rooftop of MI6, Bond is handed a bulldog figurine adorned with a Union Jack, left to him by M in her will. The figurine is a reference to Winston Churchill, also known as the 'British bulldog', who is inscribed into British cultural memory for having successfully defended the UK against Nazi Germany during WWII, the British empire's last large-scale military conflict. On the rooftop, Bond

[17] Cf. Hasian as well as Hoa for competing readings of *Skyfall* as "21st-century Anglo-American imperial nostalgia" (Hasian, 1) and "nostalgic fantasy" (Hoa, 10).

[18] See Anderson for a discussion of *Skyfall*'s regressive gender politics (79–82).

is thus symbolically handed the insignia of British resilience and imperial power before he then meets the new M in his office.[19] With its heavy wooden desk, wood-panelled wall, leather chairs and ornate lamp shades, this office is reminiscent of the office M occupies in the first Bond film *Dr. No* (1962). On a narrative level, this makes sense because *Skyfall*, together with *Casino Royale* (2006) and *Quantum of Solace* (2008), tells the story of how James Bond develops into 007, thus serving as a prequel to *Dr. No*. At the end of *Skyfall*, Bond is supposed to have arrived, in 2012, where he sets out from in the first film in 1962.

In the context of *Skyfall*'s construction of Britishness, however, M's office is indicative of the film's ideological agenda. *Skyfall* ends with the man who has just saved Britain standing in front of the head of the institution that has turned out to be the only safeguard of the UK's national security. The two men represent a contemporary Britain which the film conceptualizes as a powerful and resilient country. Two elements of the office's interior design indicate that the power Britain yields in the twenty-first century is rooted in its imperial past. Thomas Buttersworth's oil painting *The Battle of Trafalgar* (c. 1805–42)[20] hangs on one of the office walls, and two miniature reproductions of the bronze lions on Trafalgar Square decorate the desk. As in the *London 2012 Opening Ceremony*, these references to the Battle of Trafalgar (1805) evoke the naval power that facilitated the success of the British empire in both economic and military terms. Similar symbols of empire adorn M's office in *Dr. No*, but they serve different ideological functions. In *Dr. No*, M's office "stands in memorial to [...] a superseded empire" (Stock, 216); and M is a "fuddy-duddy Establishment figure" (Stock, 224) juxtaposed to Bond who "encapsulat[es] the then prominent ideological themes of classlessness and modernity" (Bennett & Woollacott, 34–5). While M and his office, in *Dr. No*, represent the past which Bond turns into a better present, *Skyfall* claims that the British empire is the source that provides the UK with the power and resilience it needs to defend itself against the threats it is faced with in the inherently insecure world of the twenty-first century. As it ties twenty-first-century British iden-

[19] *Skyfall* also refers to WWII when MI6 relocates, after Silva's bombs, to underground tunnels that are "part of Churchill's bunker" (0:27:42).

[20] The painting is held by the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, London; it is listed in the museum's online catalogue under the title *The Battle of Trafalgar, 21 October 1805: Beginning of the Action* (see "The Collections").

tity to notions of nineteenth-century imperialism, Mendes's film can be read as telling a tale of empire in a post-imperial time.

As I have shown, imperialist ideology is central to the representations of Britishness offered by the *London 2012 Opening Ceremony* and *Skyfall*. In a truly imperialist move, the Olympic show tells a tale of contemporary Britain which not only silences the voice of the colonial other, but negates the other's existence. The Bond film conceptualizes British identity, in the twenty-first century, as tapping into nineteenth-century imperial power. My readings of Boyle's show and Mendes's film thus reveal that powerful tales of empire were told in contemporary British popular culture long before they found their way into British political discourse via the Brexit-infused dreams of "Empire 2.0."

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