



Radboud University Nijmegen

The American Villain

The Portrayal of Richmond Valentine in *Kingsman: The Secret Service*

BA Thesis

Rozemarijn Zwitter

First Supervisor: Dr. C.J.J. Louttit

Second Supervisor: Prof. dr. O. Dekkers

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Name of student: Rozemarijn Zwitser

ABSTRACT

By investigating the significance of cultural heritage in the portrayal of the villain throughout popular British spy cinema this thesis aims to demonstrate how the villain from *Kingsman: The Secret Service* is both a continuation as well as a discontinuation of the British spy villain archetype. It will do so by studying archetypal villains in all kinds of cinema as are already established in academic literature on villainy in film, which includes several interpretations on how to classify and distinguish between types of villains and by investigating which of these types fits the villain from the film *Kingsman: The Secret Service* best and argue why that is the case. The choice to portray the villain as American is discussed in light of the function that a villain inherently occupies within the narrative. Since that function is generally perceived as representing an anti-type to the hero, both of which represent cultural identity in terms of “self” and “otherness”, this particular villain’s heritage compared to the main outline of the plot and the cultural heritage of the actors chosen to portray the main characters is telling, especially in a transatlantic framework.

KEY WORDS

Kingsman, British, American, villains, film studies, spy fiction, James Bond, cultural identity, transatlanticism

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INTRODUCTION

I Too Bond, Or Not Too Bond?

From its very opening scenes the 2015 film *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (Vaughn, 20th Century Fox) follows in the footsteps of the James Bond spy films. The viewer is transported straight away to the Middle East where a helicopter comes flying overhead, with two men carrying big guns hanging on a rope on either side of it as they go about killing guards and bombing a to the viewer unknown –but without a doubt significant building– all to the soundtrack of the Dire Straits' *Money For Nothing* (Mark Knopfler and Sting, Vertigo (UK) and Warner Bros (US), 1985) as the opening credits appear on screen. The action sequence at the very beginning of the film and the way in which the audience is immediately exposed to a situation on screen for which they have no other relevant information is a clever work of pastiche, instantly reminding the audience of the opening scenes of classic Bond films such as *Die Another Day* (2002) and *GoldenEye* (1995), to name just a few of the Bond films to which this scene pays a clever homage.

II Casting the American

Kingsman: The Secret Service stars amongst others renowned British actors Colin Firth, Michael Caine and Mark Strong, and surprisingly, in a film that obviously builds on a great British cultural tradition and also seems to breathe a sense of Britishness throughout, the acclaimed American actor Samuel L. Jackson. That the film is a transatlantic UK-US production is to be expected mostly because of the fact that it is based on the British-American spy-action comedy comic book *The Secret Service* (Miller, 2014), a product of the collaboration between American author Mark Miller and British author Dave Gibbons, which is the first volume of the Kingsman comic book series. The Kingsman franchise therefore finds its roots in both America and the United Kingdom. However, the choice to cast an American as the main villain in the film adaptation in a predominantly British main cast is interesting and expresses itself in the roles that the British and American actors are assigned. In an all British environment, surrounded by British heritage and values, suddenly a villain appears; the American. In order to save the planet, he vows to destroy its population, and who else is there to stop him but the noble and gentlemanlike British spies from the organisation Kingsman?

The plot is fairly similar to that of the original comic book, but the interpretation of the villain as well as the Kingsman agency appear to have gone through small yet significant changes. Where the secret spy agency in the graphic novel reminds strongly of a military base

and is referred to as MI6, in the film it is depicted as a private agency run by funds from upper-class British members of society with a desire to do something good in the world. This alters the location of the facility, the dress code and mannerisms of the agents and, most importantly, the moral and motif of the agency and the agents. The villain, too, has been given a makeover. The graphic novel and the film both depict a self-made billionaire as produced by the global modern technology market, however, in the graphic novel the villain is a young, Caucasian, well-dressed and presumably European male whereas in the film he is an older African-American man who dresses more like a wealthy rap artist than a successful businessman. In fact, appearance-wise he is probably the opposite of the villain that is depicted in the comic book. The directors of the film chose to interpret the villain in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* in a certain way and move in a different direction. What makes this choice interesting is that the academic discussion on villainy in fiction and in film specifically has formed a consensus on how the villain is a product of its own day and age and, by functioning as an anti-type to which the hero can respond, personifies a threat to a certain class, society or nation (Black 2005, Buckton 2015, Cawelti and Rosenberg 1987, Comentale et al. 2005, Davis 2015, Dittmer 2011, Gainé 2011, Grandy 2014, Lambert 2009, Leitch 2016, Luu 2017, Newland 2013, Powell 2011, Schmitt 1994, Stanfield 1987, Tasker 2012, Taylor 2007, Wark 2006).

III Spy Villains as the “Other”

British action-spy cinema has already seen many villains. The long-running James Bond film series offers a wide spectrum of them, arguably all products of the changing threats in real-life Britain and all representatives of “otherness” as opposed to the identity of the British “self”, both of which are fluid constructs. As Edward Said explains in his book *Orientalism*, cultural identity is constructed in the process of defining itself against something else, i.e. the “self” and the “other” (137). This entails that it is not always defined in the same manner by the same people or in the same moment, but the opposite: it is dependent on who is defining and interpreting and both the definition of “self” and interpretation of “other” can change over time. This translates to villainy in spy film in the background, heritage, ethnicity, motif and goal of the villain which are all heavily influenced by the interpretation and character of their heroic antagonist(s) and vice versa (Schmitt 855). This co-dependent relationship symbolises a nation, culture or society through the moral and deeds in the representation of the hero, and the main threat posing against that structure through the interpretation of the villain (Jenkins 185).

IV Villains in British Spy Cinema

Oliver Buckton illustrates how this co-dependent relationship meant that in popular British cinema the villains were often of a melodramatic fashion in pre-war cinema in his book *Espionage in British Fiction and Film Since 1900: The Changing Enemy*. The villains were corrupt profiteers of a broken nation during the interbellum of the twentieth century. This was directly related to the Nazi regime closely after the second World War, and mysteriously threatening Soviets during the Cold War that followed. Buckton explains that this was also the period that spy cinema began to gain ground in popular culture as the KGB, CIA and other Intelligences Services got more coverage in the press due to global international tension between countries, the Soviet Union and the United States in particular. He illustrates how villains in British spy cinema adjusted along with the change in the interpretation of “self” as a British nation. Culturally British Cold War cinema saw the influences of Nazi Germany in villain Max Zorin (*A View To a Kill*, 1985), the threat of the Soviet’s advancements in military technology and science in villains Kronsteen (*From Russia With Love*, 1963) and Emilio Largo (*Thunderball*, 1965) and KGB agents Anya Amasova (*The Spy Who Loved Me*, 1977) and General Georch Koskov (*The Living Daylights*, 1987). Loyalties of other nations to opponents of the United Kingdom could be found in villains whose background or heritage was not necessarily important to the narrative, such as Aristotle Kristatos (*For Your Eyes Only*, 1981) who was a smuggler for the KGB, or Xenia Otopp (*GoldenEye*, 1995) who was a sadistic lust murderer hired by the Soviets. Outside the James Bond franchise the villains in popular British spy cinema were similar representations of national threats, such as East German Intelligence in *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* (1965), neo-Nazis in *Funeral in Berlin* (1966), scientific military advancements in Soviet Russia in *The Quiller Memorandum* (1966) and the British anxieties regarding the KGB in *The Fourth Protocol* (1987). British spy cinema acknowledged a threat from the United States of America too, but to a lesser extent. Of the main villains in all twenty-four Bond films only two are recognised as distinctively American by the fan page James Bond Wiki, namely the arms dealer Brad Whitaker in *The Living Daylights* (1987) and Tiffany Case (*Diamonds Are Forever*, 1971). Several other villains were portrayed by American actors, but their characters did not necessarily share that heritage.

V The British Villain

A reversal of the situation, i.e. a British villain in a culturally American production, is found more easily. Take for example Anthony Hopkins as the cannibalistic serial killer in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), Tom Hiddleston as Odin’s evil son Loki in the Marvel film franchise, or

Ben Kingsley in *The Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* (2010). Even the American Walt Disney Company goes so far as to cast English (voice) actors for their most evil characters: Jeremy Irons gave his voice to Scar in *The Lion King* (1994) and George C. Scott portrayed the heartless tiger Shera Khan in *The Jungle Book* (1967). And when the Disney Company could not find British actors to provide a voice to a character they would find Americans who could do a British accent so well a native speaker would not hear the difference, such as the portrayals of Jonathan Freeman as Jafar in *Aladdin* the film as well as *Aladdin* the musical (1992 and 2011 respectively), Lucilla La Verne as Queen Grimhilde in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), and Eleanor Audley as both evil stepmother Lady Tremaine in *Cinderella* (1950) and Maleficent in *The Sleeping Beauty* (1959). Relating this to the film at hand, it would appear that the American villain of *Kingsman: The Secret Service* as antagonist to the British protagonists is a lot rarer than the other way around.

VI Academic Discussion on Villainy

Villainy on screen has been the subject of critical academic discussion for a couple of decades. Most of the researchers take on case studies in order to argue for a villain's position or interpretation in society, and a select few have dared to take on broader subjects and studied villainy in relation to a certain nationality, be it the hero's or the villain's, or in relation to a particular historical moment. Amy Davis belongs to that first group and studied villainy in relation to popular Disney films. She found a distinction between six different types of villains who all have their own characteristics and even a couple of communal traits in her book *Handsome Heroes and Vile Villains: Masculinity in Disney's Feature Films*. Aaron Taylor also distinguishes between different types of villains in film and argues that the 'melancholic villain' in particular is dominant in early cinema in his publication "Twilight of the Idols Performance, Melodramatic Villainy, and Sunset Boulevard".

Villainy in American productions is researched more specifically by Vincent Gainey who defined types of villains that can often be found in American spy-action films, focussing in particular on the Bourne film series, and ascertained that those villains were direct products of the American war on terror and an attempt at political critique. American villainy in relation to the war on terror was also examined by Liz Powell in her article "The Good, The Bad, and the American: Interrogating the Morality of the Western in A History of Violence", where she argues how the war on terror brought about a shift in the meaning of American patriotism, which in turn strongly influenced the portrayal of villainy in the well-known American film genre that is the Western. Peter Stanfield, who studied the same genre, mentions how a villain

can only be defined in relation to its counterpart in his article “The Western 1909-14: A Cast of Villains”. This notion reflects the core of the academic discussion on theory, which accepts the notion that the fluid interpretations of the villain and the hero as well as their co-dependent relationship represent the “self” and the “otherness” of a nation, culture or society as established under section III.

VII Transatlanticism

Transatlanticism is a term that was most appropriate between 1500 and 1800 when nations and cultures around the Atlantic became increasingly involved with one another and began to influence each other. Today the term is meant to represent the transfer of people, goods or beliefs across continents. In that sense the term also inherently describes a moment or period in time of change and/or uncertainty. (Stevens 93)

As the following chapters will illustrate, *Kingsman: The Secret Service* is an example of a product of transatlanticism in many different ways. The film itself is a US-UK production, which is clear cut transatlantic in itself. Furthermore, the relationship between the hero and villain will be shown to be transatlantic in nature, and the villain himself can be said to embody a sense of transatlanticism in that he aims to cure the entire world rather than one nation. Most importantly however, the film highlights how two major global powers, the United Kingdom and the United States, once brought together by transatlanticism during the Cold War (Webber), have continued a special relationship that is now turning on its axis.

VIII Thesis Outline

It is because of this co-dependent relationship between the hero and the villain and their symbolising existence within the spy narrative that directly relates to cultural identity that the heritage of the villain in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* is an interesting choice regarding previous villains in British film. The main question in this thesis therefore is in what ways he relates to villains in other popular culturally British spy action films.

This question will be answered by exploring the differences between this villain and other villains in culturally British productions. In order to do so the position and relevance of the villain within a spy narrative will be studied with a focus on the influence of cultural identity on the villain’s existence. He will be deconstructed and compared to villains of popular spy-action films. Finally, this particular villain will be discussed in the light of transatlanticism.

The research will be guided by the following sub-questions:

- How and why is this villain's background relevant?
- What is the academic discussion regarding villainy in film, and how does this villain relate to that discussion?
- How are villains in other culturally British spy action films portrayed?
- How and why is their background relevant?
- How is the villain in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* portrayed and how does that interpretation relate to the original comic book?
- What are the consequences of those changes when looking at the audience's interpretation of the villain?
- Does that interpretation of the villain also say something about the interpretation of the hero?

These questions will be discussed in the chapters and answered more directly in the final conclusion.

In order to shed a light on villainy in the spy-action genre, the first chapter will provide a quick overview of villainy in early cinema will be given, followed by the cultural interpretation of villainy and their function within narratives. It will continue with an overview of villains in other instances of popular culturally British spy genre villains and the relevance of those villains' cultural identity and heritage. Problems with the representation of identity in film will also be discussed. The chapter will conclude with an overview of similarities and discrepancies between the Kingsman villain and villains in other popular culturally British spy films.

The second chapter will discuss the Kingsman franchise and villain more directly. It will show how the film directly challenges British class systems through a representation of both hero and villain and discuss the co-dependent relationship between these two characters. By comparing the film's villain to the original villain from the graphic novel, this chapter will illustrate the deliberate choice and significance of the villain's portrayal in the film. The villain will be deconstructed and classified. Finally, this chapter will mention the special relationship between the UK and the US from a transatlantic point of view, which will further clarify the villain's representation in the film. Guided by a framework of transnationalism, this chapter aims to suggest a change in the British-American relation in the 21st Century as portrayed in this particular example of popular culture.

CHAPTER 1 – Villainy in Popular British Spy-Action Cinema

1.1 Villainy in Early Cinema

Villainy in early film can roughly be defined as melodramatic (Lambert 2009, Taylor 2007). In *Heroes and Happy Endings: Class, Gender, and Nation in Popular Film and Fiction in Interwar Britain* Christine Grandy explains how melodrama was an important form of entertainment in the eighteenth and nineteenth century for the working classes, and it was the aristocracy and monarchy who were villainised. The villain would therefore have the appearance of an upper-class aristocratic gentleman and his crimes would be related to his position in society, such as fraud or seducing girls from lower classes, by means of which the working class could articulate itself through of the hero and his deeds (87).

Through all of villain history in popular fiction, the villain is shown to be the “other” from the very beginning of a narrative and appears to be the embodiment of all stereotypes connected to that “otherness”. According to Oliver Buckton in his book *Espionage in British Fiction and Film since 1900: The Changing Villain*, the spy agent’s main enemy will have the full characterisation including but not limited to physical features and traits that instantly signify the alien hallmarks of the character (227-229). Since spy fiction as a genre partly stems from the Victorian imperial romance, it is not surprising that a certain level of xenophobia has become prominent in these stories (Buckton 229). By discussing British spy fiction in the twentieth and twenty-first century, Buckton shows how the ever-changing enemy is essential to a greater understanding of British culture and society, both historically as well as in the modern age. He argues that the enemies in British spy fiction have always resembled a threat to the nation as a whole and how the platform of spy fiction allows for a simple black and white demonstration between good and evil, and between friend or ally and enemy or threat. Looking at the transatlantic nature of the relationship between the UK and the US it can be concluded that over their long history together either nation has been both friend and enemy to the other. Such a representation is therefore to be expected in cinema in terms of both villains and allies.

1.2 The Adapting Villain

This function of villainy in general has been acknowledged by many academics. Canon Schmitt, for example, illustrates how the foreign villain acts as an anti-type in his case study of *The Italian* and how he functions as an exemplar of “otherness” (885). As cultural identities transform, so does the identity of the “other”. Nations change and so do the threats to those

entities, and therefore the villains. Because of the cultural symbolisation of “otherness” and the threats they personify, villains in spy-action films can be seen to have moved from the barbaric types in the James Bond films to more human characters in more recent spy fictions (Buckton 229). Yvonne Tasker argues that this development is strongly influenced by the 9/11 attacks in America and functioning on a transatlantic global level. She notes how the hero has changed accordingly along with the villain. For example, where first only the villain could enjoy violence or even sadistic behaviour, now the hero can be found to do that too sometimes (45). The villain, she continues, has progressed too. Rather than being a mere symbolisation of a looming threat to a nation, he is given a personality, a background, and a complex motif. The terrorist becomes a person who makes available to the audience his appearance, ethnicity, behaviour, language and accent, and sometimes even religion (Tasker 49). This aligns with Buckton’s views in that the villain in spy-action films is often highly visible as opposed to the heroic protagonist spy, whose goal it often is to remain invisible to the knowledge of that villain (Buckton 227). According to Tasker the villain then becomes a ‘recognisable type’, both affirming and questioning stereotypical ethnical behaviour and appearance (60).

Christine Grandy continues by illustrating how popular culture in interwar Britain sought out the villain trying to make a profit from the post-war society. This was even reflected in legislation by The Profiteering Act of 1919 which criminalised everyone that was aiming to benefit from a family, business or nation as a whole that found itself ruined by World War I. According to Grandy, greed for wealth and villainy were clearly intertwined during the interwar period, and the villain’s traits within that culture ‘marked moral boundaries that reflected intensely contemporary concerns: the actions, speeches, beliefs and appearances of villains constructed a definition of what was wrong with society for the reader and viewer and drew upon headlines of the day to do so’ (85). Grandy distinguishes between two interwar dominant types of villains, namely the older wealthy man, and the younger wealthy man. The hero, on the other hand, would not be interested in wealth or power (85).

1.3 The Villain as National Threat

Looking more closely at the villains of British spy cinema they can indeed be seen to embody a certain national threat to the British empire of their time, and their ethnicity certainly plays a role in that threat. Furthermore, the threat that Germany was becoming to the rest of Europe led to an increase in the popularity of the spy genre in the 1930s. In 1935 the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation released *The 39 Steps*, a film that shows spy agencies as figments of mystery and secretiveness but is not too clear on motif. Only five years after the war the British

Lion Film Corporation released a film set in post-war Vienna occupied by the British, American, French and Soviet, called *The Third Man*, the screenplay of which was written by English author Graham Greene. Not just ethnicity and nationality but villainy too are complicated terms in this film. One of the characters who is supposed to be bad turns out to be a hero, and one of the truly good is unjustly punished for somebody else's wrongdoing. It illustrates the post-war atmosphere as it was in Britain at the time where nobody could be sure whether they really knew each other, and profit was made over the heads of people that were wronged or had gotten afflicted in the war, as it turns out the villain in this film also does.

Ethnicity is further complicated by the influence of transatlanticism, since the British protagonist is portrayed by an American actor. Furthermore, the leading Czechoslovakian woman is portrayed by an Italian actress. This makes the interpretation of ethnicity of the main characters increasingly difficult for the audience.

When after the second World War the Cold War between America and Russia set in, room was created for a new kind of villain and the spy genre in British fiction became very popular (Grandy 87). For example, two British spy films were released in 1965 and another two were released the following year: *The Ipcress File*, *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, *The Quiller Memorandum* and *Funeral in Berlin* respectively. The first film is mainly about problems between the British Ministry of Defence and the CIA. The second is set in Berlin and the British Secret Intelligence Service in West-Berlin. The protagonist spy falls into the hands of the East German Intelligence Service and it does not end well for him. The other two involve prominent anxieties of a post-war United Kingdom, such as neo-Nazis, concentration camps and scientific advancements in Soviet Russia. These enemies and villains reflect the dangers those nations had posed to Britain over the two decades and possibly of the years to come.

1.4 The Bond Franchise

The first film of what might be the best known culturally British spy-action film franchise was released in 1962 when the Canadian American company EON Productions breathed life into Ian Fleming's famous protagonist. The Bond franchise, like the Kingsman franchise, is therefore of a transatlantic nature, product of a cooperation between Canada, America and the United Kingdom.

The adventures of James Bond and the villains he encounters are representative of a post WW II Britain. The MI6 agent James Bond was originally created by English writer Ian Fleming in a series of novels and a couple of short stories. Several writers have continued Bond's literary life after Fleming's death. Bond was first adapted to film in 1962 with British

icon Sean Connery fulfilling the role of the main character, and the film franchise is still running. The most recent Bond film *Spectre* came out in 2015 and the next one called *Bond 25*, since it is the 25th film of the James Bond franchise, is expected to be released in October 2019 in the United Kingdom and November 2019 in the United States (007.com). The films are American adaptations of the originally British novels, but through the main character still promote the British nationality and the values and characteristics that come with it.

1.5 Bond Equals Britishness

The casting for the role of Bond shows this as well. Five other actors have portrayed James Bond in the film series after the first five films that featured Sean Connery, three of whom have British nationality (Roger Moore, Timothy Dalton and Daniel Craig), one of whom is Irish (Pierce Brosnan) and only one who was born on another continent but still recognises the same monarch (Australian George Lazenby). Sean Connery eventually starred as James Bond in six of the twenty-five films, which means that Roger Moore has doubled as Bond most often with seven. Third in line is Daniel Craig, who will portray Bond for the fifth time in *Bond 25*. (Shoard)

In his book *The Politics of James Bond: From Fleming's Novel to the Big Screen* Jeremy Black argues that as a character, James Bond embodies gentlemanliness and class by being a man of action rather than empty convention, a national stereotype conveyed in an 'image of toughness, sharpness, cleverness and male sexuality' as was newly identified with the British by author Ian Fleming after the impact and in the middle of the consequences of World War II and the Labour governments of the years directly following the war (x). The strength of James Bond's character lies in that it was multi-interpretable. Particular audiences would be able to identify him differently than other audiences (x). Perhaps this lies in the fact that Fleming modelled the character of James Bond on many different men he had met in his lifetime, specifically during his time in the Naval Intelligence Division during World War II (Macintyre). Black also argues that via the main character and his actions, the films present a national character that is counterpointed by the villains and their identity (x). And the villains were bountiful.

1.6 Bond's Villains

The impact of the second World War on Britain is reflected in the villains that Bond encounters, as was intended by Ian Fleming, who wanted to show how the war had led to an ambivalent transatlantic relation between the United Kingdom and the United States in which the United

Kingdom was declining due to war damages and repair costs and a decrease in (male) population, and the United States became ascendant because of the advantageousness of the Marshall Plan and a following booming economy (Black x). As Black illustrates, the villains in Fleming's novels are never British, nor are they class enemies. This 'reflected the role of ethnicity and racialism in [Fleming's] politics and a disinclination to look for evil among the British', a notion very common in interwar and post-war literature where the own nationality is portrayed as heroic and danger comes from outside rather than inside a nation (19). Black argues that to this purpose Fleming relied heavily on ethnicity in his villains and reflected that in their names. If the name did not convey a clear ethnicity, in the very least the name did obviously not originate anywhere in the United Kingdom. Some examples of these names are those of characters Emilio Largo in *Thunderball* (1961), Mr. Osato in *You Only Live Twice* (1964) and Karl Stromberg in *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977). If the villain had a name that did not convey a certain otherness or used a pseudonym through which his or her ethnicity did not become clear, their choice of associates would reflect their foreign interests. Hugo Drax, for example, whose background and heritage is a mystery even to himself, was aided by German rocket scientist in *Moonraker* (1955), and in *Goldfinger* (1959) Auric Goldfinger operates from New York and is protected mainly by Korean assassins.

1.7 Complications in Character Ethnicity Portrayal in Film

These cultural influences become a bit more complicated in the film adaptations because of the added ethnicity that actors inherently bring to the table. Audiences are shown to relate to the actor as well as to the character they play in the film because the actors have made appearances in other films and because their personal lives are recorded in magazines for everyone to read (Taylor 14). In "Twilight of the Idols: Performance, Melodramatic Villainy, and Sunset Boulevard" Taylor continues to argue how this has a direct influence on the interpretation of not just the character but also the film as a whole, because the audience is sympathetic to both the actor as well as their character and very likely to let those images influence each other and confuse methods of interpretation. Ethnicity also plays a role in that confusion, because if an audience is already aware of an actor's background but on screen he has a different nationality, the background of his character might not come across. In that case, no matter how good someone's acting is, to the audience it will always become clear which nationality is "real" because of the actor's own background and his previous appearances and publicity. Another clue for the audience might be that the actor is putting on an accent, or, as was very common in the early James Bond films, because they were dubbed by someone else.

1.8 Complications in Character Ethnicity Portrayal in Bond Films

A good example would be the character of Auric Goldfinger in *Goldfinger* (1964), who was portrayed by German actor Gert Fröbe only to be dubbed by an English stage actor, even though the character was supposed to have a German background and the actor was cast specifically because of it (*Behind the Scenes with 'Goldfinger'* 1995). Ethnicity also plays another role in casting, namely that a character with an unknown background promptly gets one after all. An example of this can be found in *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974) in which main villain Francisco Scaramanga is portrayed by British actor Christopher Lee. The character's name is evidently not English, but Lee does not try and hide his heritage. The same goes for villain Hugo Drax who, as mentioned earlier, does not have a clearly defined background but is portrayed by a French actor in *Moonraker* (1979) and therefore instantly obtains one. This illustrates how the question of identity and representation of national identity in the James Bond film franchise is both problematic and complicated, and therein lies the multi-interpretable approach to not just plot lines but characters as well.

In the book *Ian Fleming & James Bond: The Cultural Politics of 007* James Chapman shows how Bond can be described as both the 'old-fashioned British imperial hero' as well as quite the opposite, namely as a personification of American cultural imperialism or simply as a modern classless figure (Chapman 130). The problem of cultural identification and representation is also present in the depiction of the villains in the James Bond films. Soviet generals can be portrayed by Dutch actors, like Jeroen Krabbé in *The Living Daylights* (1987) portraying General Georgh Koskov, and Russian KGB agents are just as easily given life through the hands of Scottish actor Robbie Coltrane as Victor Zokas in *The World is Not Enough* (1999). The villain that remained more mystifying than any of the others was finally given a face in the last film to come out, in which the Polish Ernst Stavro Blofeld was portrayed by German-Austrian actor Christoph Waltz. Blofeld had already been portrayed by six other actors, three of whom were English, one was Scottish, one was Austrian, and one was American. The portrayal of this character, amongst other characters and features of the James Bond franchise, illustrates how it could be argued that cultural identity and nationality are multi-interpretable in the James Bond films simply because they are multi-layered to begin with. James Chapman also argues that it is precisely those cultural politics of national identity that account for the popularity of the films and of James Bond as a character in general (130).

1.9 Britishness in 21st Century Spy Cinema

Moving on to the twenty-first century there appears to be an eruption of spies in popular cinema. We are not even twenty years in and already there are plenty of top-20 or even top-30 spy film lists to be found on popular social media environments such as Collider, IMDB, Pinterest and Quora. Interestingly, the vast majority of the films on these lists are American productions, literally as well as culturally. Three British productions, other than those of the Kingsman franchise, stand out: *The Quiet American* (2002), *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (2011) and *The November Man* (2014). The first two are both set in Europe during the Cold War period and only the third film is set in modern-day Europe.

The November Man is a transatlantic production but is culturally fully American. The film is based on an American novel, the main protagonist portrayed by Irish Pierce Brosnan is an ex-CIA agent, other characters are either American or international (but not British), and the directors and producers were all Americans.

Unfortunately, the same is true for *The Quiet American*. The protagonist is portrayed by renowned British actor Michael Caine, but his character is the only one with a British background. All the other characters are American, and the film is mainly about the debate surrounding American involvement in the Vietnam War which took place after World War II. This film is culturally only slightly less American than *The November Man*, since it is based on a novel by British author Graham Greene and features a British actor who portrays a British character. That is, however, one of the few British connotations it has.

Definitely the most culturally British of the three is *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, based on the novel of the same name by British writer John le Carré, with a predominantly British main cast (Gary Oldman, Colin Firth, Tom Hardy, Mark Strong, Cairán Hinds and Benedict Cumberbatch) and a plot that involves British Intelligence MI6. True to the novel, the narrative takes place in 1973 and has a plot that contains MI6, the CIA and Soviet Secret Intelligence. It reflects Britain under threat from those two great nations, itself suffering from an economic and imperial decline after the second World War (Black x). The film illustrates how during the Cold War there was not so much one particular villain, but that Britain struggled to find a way to keep its head up in between these two ascendingly powerful nations. All the companies that collaborated in the film's production were European.

1.10 Similarities: *Kingsman: The Secret Service* vs. Popular Culturally British Spy Cinema

In terms of culturally British spy film productions in general, *Kingsman: The Secret Service* would appear to be a lot closer to the James Bond films of the previous century than to the film *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, in the previous paragraph shown to be the one of the most culturally British spy film productions of the 21st century, even though they were released in the same decade. This becomes clear from the interpretation of the hero, the villain, and the relationship between the two. First of all, there is the emphasis on the importance and interpretation of British gentlemanliness in both the Bond films and *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, which *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* lacks. Secondly, as is the case in most spy cinema productions, in all these films the villain is representative of a greater threat to the nation personified by the hero of the narrative. The villain in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* is one man embodying the “otherness” of the self-made wealthy transatlantic megalomaniac as opposed to the “self” of the composed British upper-class gentleman spies. Like many of James Bond’s villains, Richmond Valentine is just one man trying to take over the world. The plot of the Kingsman film is even quite similar to the one of *Moonraker* (1979), in which villain Hugo Drax wants to poison all human beings and repopulate earth from his spacecraft. Valentine, too, wants to kill all human beings and repopulate earth in his own fashion. But there are other Bond villains to which Valentine bears similarity, in the sense that in the majority of the films Bond has to fight one particular villain rather than a larger construct, as is the case in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. Finally, these villains all represent the “otherness” as seen through British eyes, as does Valentine. The villains could be interpreted as threats to the British nation as a whole. Such an interpretation is not hard to find in the representation of Richmond Valentine either, mainly because he is such a clear outsider to the rest of the characters. Valentine also fits in with the Bond villains because of his megalomania. He is egocentric in making the decision that he is the one who will survive and to determine who will re-populate the new earth with him. Furthermore, he too is the embodiment of a modern threat to not just the United Kingdom but every other country on earth, which is the effect current human behaviour has on the well-being of our planet.

1.11 Discrepancies: *Kingsman: The Secret Service* vs. Popular Culturally British Spy Cinema

However, the Kingsman villain also distinguishes himself from the typical Bond villains. His portrayal could not be more distinctive from the early British cinema melodramatic villain to which at least a couple of Bond villains were fashioned (Hugo Drax, Auric Goldfinger and Max

Zorin), since Valentine wears flashy clothes and a cap with plenty of bling at all times as opposed to the dark and classic evening attire of the melodramatic villain. This might stem from his transatlantic nature, which not many villains in popular British spy films have had. His motif is different from that of the Bond villains as well. The majority of the Bond villains either wants to destroy the planet or humanity in one way or another (Emilio Largo, Hugo Drax, Max Zorin, Elliot Carver) or is directly targeting Britain or the MI6 (Victor Zokas, General Georch Koskov, Raoul Silva), but all of them do so out of self-obsession and greed for power. Valentine is trying to kill all of humanity not necessarily because he wants to dominate the world, but because the earth is dying and he wants to cure it in the only way he sees fit. His motivation is that of serving the greater good, whereas the Bond villains typically act only for themselves or for their country. Valentine may channel his megalomania in order to achieve his goals, but those goals are nonetheless serving more people than just himself or from his own nation. Then again, he also appears to feel fine ordering from the large environmentally threatening cooperation that is McDonald's, thereby placing his own needs above those of others.

1.12 Conclusion: Valentine's Purpose

In the portrayal of one main villain hides a deeper meaning and message to the audiences about the influences of modern society and questions where the real evil is. Is it Valentine the villain, or is it the audience? In *Kingsman: The Secret Service* the transatlantic villain is used to address a problem in modern day society. It may not seem Bond-like, but director of *Quantum of Solace* (2008) Marc Forster told the actor who portrayed main villain Graham Greene that he too symbolised 'the hidden evils in society' and therefore could not be too grotesque (Conant). Samuel L. Jackson may not have gotten the same direction from Matthew Vaughn, but the incentive and purpose of the villainous character in both films is rather similar.

CHAPTER 2 – Introducing the Villain: Richmond Valentine

2.1 Kingsman as a Culturally British Product

Although *Kingsman: The Secret Service* technically is an American production by Twentieth Century Fox, it is British in a cultural sense because it encompasses British cultural heritage in an overwhelming manner. As defined by Hafstein, cultural heritage means as much as ‘a system of values, a set of practices, a formation of knowledge, a structure of feeling and a moral code’ (504), but also involves an active management of that heritage through protocol, legislation and safeguarding measures (Gradisnik, qtd. in Furlan 13). A hyperbolic representation of British cultural heritage is overtly present in the film. Not only was the multitude of scenes filmed at Camden and Imperial College London (FilmFixer) but the cast is overwhelmingly British as well. The film stars amongst others Colin Firth, Michael Caine and Mark Strong, all of whom are acclaimed British actors. Main character Eggsy is played by Taron Egerton, an up and coming actor and singer from Wales. There are only three exceptions to the ethnicity of what appears to be an all British main cast. Firstly, the American professor in ecology called James Arnold is portrayed by Mark Hamill, an American actor from California. Secondly there is Sofia Boutella, who is an Algerian actress and plays Gazelle, Valentine’s assistant. Finally, there is Richmond Valentine himself. The American self-made billionaire is portrayed by famous American actor Samuel L. Jackson. The main villain is the only one whose ethnicity is truly relevant and plays a role in the plot of the film. Professor James Arnold does not have a lot of screen time before he is killed and Gazelle’s background is not referenced to nor of any significance to the film, since her entire motivation for wanting to help Valentine in his schemes is not mentioned either. Villain Richmond Valentine therefore becomes the only character that stands out from the rest of the characters in terms of background and nationality, and the film itself can be interpreted as a product of transatlanticism, combining American and British elements in its production and in the film itself. As will be mentioned under section 2.3, the franchise as a whole owes its presence to a transatlantic collaboration.

2.2 Reception

The film was generally well received. It grossed 24.2 million dollars in the United Kingdom and 128.3 million dollars in North America. It scored a 7.7 out of 10 on IMDB based on 506.728 votes. On Rotten Tomatoes it scored 75% and an average rating of 6.8 out of 10 based on 236 critical reviews, with a slightly higher audience score of 84% based on 124.605 ratings. The

critics' consensus is that the film is 'stylish, subversive, and above all fun'. MetaScore reflects a general reception of 'average' by critic reviews (out of sixty reviews) and a much higher 8.0/10 user score (based on 1.304 viewers). British newspaper *The Guardian* awarded it four out of five stars, calling the film 'wildly enjoyable'. The British paper *The Independent* was a bit more critical and illustrates how some of the scenes would not be out of place in either a Roger Moore Bond film or a film starring working class actor Danny Dyer. On the whole the review is positive, stating the movie is funny because of all the in-jokes and self-parodic references and that 'there is so much going on that whenever one scene falls flat, something livelier and more effective soon follows'. In American biweekly popular culture magazine *Rolling Stone* columnist Peter Travers gave the film an overwhelmingly positive review and said that it is 'a high-octane combo of action and comedy that breathes sweet and surreal new life into the big-screen spy game where Bond meets Jason Bourne and Jack Bauer'. Travers has apparently not missed the transatlantic theme that is further developed in this thesis, comparing the very British Bond to two very American comedy-action heroes. However, he also mentions that the film at times relinquishes a sense of realism, but according to Travers that does not have an influence on its success. Compared to the general rankings of critics and regular viewers, the film got an extremely bad review in *The New York Times*, where Vaughn was criticised for not understanding 'violence as a cinematic tool' and the film for 'bludgeoning to a halt, its gears clogged by viscera and narrative overkill' (Dargis). In both the United Kingdom and the United States the film received mostly positive critiques. *Kingsman: The Secret Service* won in the category Top Box Office Films in the 2015 ASCAP Film and Television Music Awards and two 2015 Empire Awards in the categories Best British Film and Best Male Newcomer (Taron Egerton). It also won in two categories in the 2015 Golden Schmoes Awards, namely Most Underrated Movie of the Year and Best Action Sequence of the Year. The film also won two IGN Summer Movie Awards in 2015 in the categories Best Comic Book Adaptation Movie and the People's Choice Award for Best Comic Book Adaptation Movie. Finally, it won Best Fight in the 2016 Best Stunt Awards. In total, the film was nominated for fourteen awards in 26 different categories.

2.3 The Kingsman Agency and the Significance of Heritage

Vaughn's *Kingsman: The Secret Service* was released early 2015 in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Based on the British-American comic book series *Kingsman* in which Vaughn was credited as a "co-plotter" (Millar 3), the film follows Gary "Eggsy" Unwin as he is introduced to and becomes increasingly involved in a British secret spy organisation.

Kingsman is an independent, international intelligence agency that operates at the highest level of discretion, according to spy Harry “Galahad” Hart, played by Colin Firth, who trains Eggsy to become a part of the agency. Kingsman’s history is intertwined with that of Great-Britain, highlighting the significance of old money and inheritance as can still be perceived today in modern British upper-class citizens, which can be concluded from real-life TV series such as *Weekend Aristocrats* and *The Aristocrats*, both of which show contemporary upper-class Brits and their private life. Their interests, hobbies and moral all stem from old traditions passed down by previous generations which are heavily influenced by large amounts of capital, either in the form of money or property (Bryant). For the Kingsman agency, it all began with a tailor shop of the same name that was established in 1849. The tailors that were working there quickly became very rich as they clothed the most influential and powerful individuals in the world. A lot of their sons and other family members were lost during the First World War, which meant that their wealth was left without a suitable heir. The tailors decided to channel their wealth and influence out of a desire to preserve peace and protect their country and its inhabitants. All their resources went towards the greater good, and the secret spy agency was born. It is also Harry “Galahad” Hart who explains to Eggsy that Kingsman is a privately funded cooperation and it therefore functions ‘above the politics and bureaucracy that undermine the integrity of government-run spy organisations’ (*Kingsman: The Secret Service* 27:00).

2.4 Challenging Kingsman’s Class System

The film constantly challenges the ideals and prejudices of the British upper class towards the lower class and vice versa. Eggsy’s life is defined by his upbringing in working class society, which shows in his family history as well as through his interests and choice in friends. Because of the Kingsman agency, he suddenly finds himself in a completely different corner of society. He is tested and valued by his new surroundings continually. Members of the organisation do not really believe in his capabilities and his fellow recruits aim for a position within the corporation and will do anything they can to get it, assuming they will not need to worry about a low life like Eggsy as serious competition. The disputatious nature of class hierarchy works the other way around as well. Eggsy is not afraid to question certain beliefs and principles that he encounters. Sometimes he is proven wrong and stands corrected, but that is not always the case. There is a scene that illustrates the film’s motive of this clash between the classes, when Galahad and Eggsy stand in front of a mirror and Galahad points out that ‘The lack of a silver spoon as set you on a certain path in life, but [Eggsy] needn’t stay on it’ (*Kingsman: The Secret Service* 26:00). Galahad advocates for the idea that social mobility between classes is possible.

He also points out that being a gentleman is not related to his accent, but to him being confident in his own skin and a constant self-improvement.

2.5 Challenging Britain's Class System

The film itself, however, does not necessarily illustrate this concept, as Eggsy is the only gentleman not to come from an upper-class background. The film does however challenge the British class system as a whole because of the film's villain, the American philanthropist and internet billionaire Richmond Valentine portrayed by Samuel L. Jackson. As a self-made man of means he personifies the threat that new money is to old money and that the powerful wealthy American is to the higher class British individual. This is predominantly evident in the character portrayal of the film's villain and heroes, who are extreme opposites of each other. The transatlantic nature of the villain is highlighted because he is the only main character with a distinctive non-UK background.

2.6 Film vs. Comic Book: Cultural Identification

Casting an American villain is one of the aspects with which the film distinguishes itself from the original comic book. In the original story, James Arnold is the self-made billionaire who wants to cure the world of that disease called overpopulation, whereas in the film that is the name of the environmental scientist. The villain in the comic book is a young Caucasian male and his nationality is unknown, yet all the scenes in which he is featured that indicate a certain location hint at somewhere in Europe rather than America, such as Cannes in France and Mount Olympus in Greece.

Another area where the film clearly distinguishes itself from the comic book is the structure of the Kingsman organisation itself. In the comic book it is referenced to as MI6 and therefore directly reminds the viewer not only of James Bond, but in a wider perspective also dictates that it concerns a spy agency run by the government. The training of the recruits takes place in a military establishment close to London. In the film however, it is emphasised by multiple characters that the Kingsman organisation is private and does not have to be regulated by government or any other political instance, and is located at a mansion in the countryside rather than a military base. Furthermore, all the agents have names from the folklore tale of King Arthur that reflect their position within the organisation. The head of the organisation is called Arthur and the spies under his authority carry names of Arthur's knights. The technological support is aptly named Merlin. Significantly, the recruits are not trained at a military base but at a large estate somewhere in the British countryside.

2.7 Film vs. Comic Book: Consequences of Changes

Because of these small changes to the original setting, British heritage and the significance of that heritage is incorporated into the representation of the agency itself and highlighted. It is also because of this emphasis that the transatlantic nature and nationality of the villain becomes even more significant to the plot of the film and contrasted against the nationality of the members of the Kingsman agency, even more so because of the fact that he was given a clear nationality as opposed to the vague representation of his ethnicity in the original comic book. It can therefore only be assumed that to portray the Kingsman agency as an overtly British establishment and the villain as the embodiment of the American dream in the film were deliberate and well thought out choices made by the director and his team of writers.

The decision to emphasise nationality becomes even clearer when looking at the second film in the Kingsman franchise, *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017). This film takes place one year after the first one. The Kingsman agents are made aware of the existence of an American secret spy agency very similar to the Kingsman agency, which is called Statesman. The names of the agencies alone reflect the importance of their different background and heritage. This film revolves mainly around the need for both agencies to collaborate in order to stop a –yet again– American villain and builds on the groundwork regarding the importance and influence of ethnicity and cultural background that was generated in the first film. This film, like *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, highlights the differences in the transatlantic relationship that exists between the US and the UK, but also shows how those differences can be overcome.

2.8 The Villain as Product of Cultural Identity

To have a villain with an American background and nationality in a culturally British production is an interesting choice. Nationality of villains in film in relation to their motives as the topic of academic discussion circles mostly around the term “otherness”. This term was first coined by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (2016) in which he illustrates how an identity of the self, be it an individual, culture or society, is always established through a comparison to the interpretation of the “other”. Because interpretations of both the self and the “other” can vary and are subject to change over time, the construction of an identity, or in Said’s argument a nationality, which is a construction indeed, is therefore fluid and active rather than fixed and passive. In film studies and theory on villainy the term is used to illustrate how the identity of the hero can only be construed against that of the villain. The villain then becomes the “other” and the process of his interpretation a historical, social,

intellectual and political process, similar to the process of the construction of the identity of a nationality, which construes their co-dependent relationship.

2.9 A Special Relationship

A lot of the works on villainy in film in general at some point emphasise this co-dependent relationship that exists between the hero and the villain (Buckton 2015, Davis 2015, Gaine 2011, Lambert 2009, Luu 2017, Powell 2011, Schmitt 1994, Stanfield 1987, Taylor 2007, Tyree 2009). Amy Davis argues how it is precisely this co-dependent relationship that enables the hero's transcendent journey that the audience is looking for: audiences love the villain because they give the hero the ability and momentum to be heroic. Furthermore, she illustrates how villains are usually the catalyst for action: without them there would hardly be an interesting plotline (187). This is also true for *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, as it is only because of Richmond Valentine's plan to have a large part of the population kill each other that Eggsy can show what he is worth. Had Valentine not infiltrated the Kingsman agency by corrupting its head, Chester "Arthur" King, then Eggsy would not have felt the need to step up and warn Merlin, the only member of the agency he feels he can trust at that moment, at the same time putting himself in a crucial position to try and stop Valentine.

2.10 The Special Relationship as Product of Cultural Identification in Comic Book Adaptations

An interpretation of the relationship between the villain and the hero that is even more closely related to *Kingsman: The Secret Service* can be found in J.M. Tyree's article "American Heroes". In this article Tyree emphasises how the hero can only be heroic because of the villain's existence. Tyree explains that relationship using three recent American films from the Marvel industry, which are *The Dark Knight* (2008), *The Incredible Hulk* (2008) and *Iron Man* (2008). All of these are not only part of the action comedy genre that *Kingsman: The Secret Service* also belongs to, they are also all based on action comic books. Comparing the moral complexity or lack thereof in each of these films, Tyree argues that the representation of the villains as well as the hero's response in these films is not only very different but also affirmative of the pessimistic times during which they were produced and released, not just in America but globally. This is also the case in *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, where Valentine both represents and fights global modern-day threats such as the danger of technological advancements and the damage humans are causing the environment.

The films mentioned by Tyree reflect their grasp on reality through the ethnicity of their villains. In *The Incredible Hulk* the main villain is a Russian soldier, and in *Iron Man* the main villain's heritage is unknown but he operates through a terrorist organisation in Afghanistan. Both of these nations have been the cause for long lasting debate in America for various reasons. *The Dark Knight* embodies the pessimistic reality in America more so than the other films, since its villain, the Joker, personifies an 'authentically haunting connection to the uncanny' (34). This film's villain's heritage is unknown but presumably American, by means of which the film shows how modern America can also be its own enemy. Valentine, on the other hand, represents a more global threat, an evil that is equal and relevant to every individual.

All three of these films, as well as the comic books they are based on, highlight how the American military-industrial complex has spiralled out of control and Tyree directly links this to Bush's presidency and the wars across national borders and even continents that he has funded and promoted. *Iron Man* on the other hand is a lot less serious about its politics as 'it pre-interprets itself as frivolous entertainment and it does not try to be anything more' (34). *Kingsman: The Secret Service* would appear to combine these two elements. On the one hand it pre-identifies itself as a comic interpretation of the canonical James Bond genre, yet on the other hand it serves as a quiet reminder of the dangers of modern technology and smart phones as well as how everything is easy accessible to the rich and how much influence they can have if they so choose.

2.11 Classifying Valentine

Interestingly, Richmond Valentine is not that far off from the Criminally-Dangerous Villain category as defined by Amy Davis (224). Valentine too derives his strength from a twisted soul and an unbalanced mind and is completely quixotic because of his extreme megalomania. Take for example the scene in which the computer that enables the function of the microchips is programmed by Valentine and his assistant Gazelle. Two thirds into the film the audience has long established that Valentine is extremely intelligent and dangerous, but also bordering on the insane. He complains that the instalment of the authorisation to activate the programme, i.e. a scan of his hand and fingerprints by a machine, is very painful. Gazelle asks him why he did not simply go for a red button or switch, to which he replies that this machine is so dangerous that naturally it should only be operated by someone as responsible and sane as he is. This is just one of the many moments in the film where Valentine's megalomania shines through, which translates to the audience as comedy because of its irony.

Davis also points out that the Criminally-Dangerous Villain's madness 'is their greatest strength and their undoing – it drives them to keep going even after it is obvious that they have failed, and so it leads them to their deaths' (224). This is also true for Valentine. During Eggsy and Merlin's attempt to stop Valentine, Merlin activates the failsafe that is in the chip that Valentine has had implanted in the heads of the people he corrupted to accept his terms and conditions, which causes all of their heads to explode. There is now no-one other than Gazelle and himself who will survive his plan because everybody who he thought was safe and ready to build a new world with him after his plan has succeeded has died and all the other people in the world will kill each other. However, he still presses his hand against the computer screen to keep the technology that influences those people into violent behaviour activated. He has obviously failed, because he has not saved the world and a tiny fragment of humanity, but still he keeps going. It is also because he has to stand still behind his desk in order to keep the mechanism activated that Eggsy is able to throw a sharp object at him and kill him. Samuel L. Jackson himself explains Valentine's megalomania and madness as a result of Valentine not being taken seriously when he was younger because of his lisp, which would on the one hand have driven him become an achiever but on the other would have caused him to become slightly insane (O'Connell), making him the prototype of Davis' Criminally-Dangerous Villains category.

2.12 A Special Transatlantic Relationship

Great-Britain flourished as a nation of trade in colonial times when America was only just establishing itself as an entity. With its much younger history it could be argued that America is still defining itself even today. America had gone through the Great Depression in the 1920s and 1930s but had slowly started to rebuild itself when they sent troops and ammunition to Europe in World War II in return for which they received capital. This meant that after World War II Britain was slowly deteriorating and functioning as a post-war society whereas America was able to rebuild itself more rapidly than ever, creating a new global super power while the World Wars demolished the world power that Britain had been until the 20th Century due to monetary reparations that had to be invested in their own country. America has kept gaining power and status as a global force whereas Britain was never able to retrieve a position as influential as they had before the wars.

From a transatlantic point of view the film illustrates a shift in these world powers. The American villain not only fails, but does so because of British intervention. The film shows a Britain risen from the ashes, having regained power and now able to fight back against

America's globalisation. This also illustrates the term transatlanticism itself, as Stevens explains it to mean a world that is bound by uncertainty and continuous change. The world powers that are America and Great-Britain are shifting and, as highlighted in the film, most people are not aware of it, let alone of its consequences.

What makes the transatlantic nature of the film more intriguing is the special relationship between the UK and the US, a term that has been used to describe their collaboration on issues of trade, technology and intelligence and many others that has been 'unparalleled' in world history (Wither). The film could therefore also be interpreted as Britain not wanting to provoke the US, but merely highlighting their differences in terms of cultural identity and heritage in a comedic way. The film is brimmed with instances of parody and pastiche that directly relate to the Hollywood film business and their interpretation of British society and vice versa. An example would be the violent church scene which functions as Valentine's testing ground. Harry has found out that the church ceremony has something to do with Valentine and decides to join, but he then is also affected by Valentine's technology and ends up killing all American stereotypes present, or rather, helps them kill each other.

Another example of transatlantic parody would be the direct comparison character Harry makes between this narrative and popular Hollywood narratives, in which a lower-class person makes his/her way into an upper-class world: 'Did you see the film *Trading Places*? How about *Nikita*? *Pretty Woman*?' Eggsy is unfamiliar with them. Harry's point is that the lack of a silver spoon does not mean that Eggsy's life has already been determined for him, and that if Eggsy is willing he will be able to transform. To which Eggsy replies: 'Oh, like in *My Fair Lady*!' (*Kingsman: The Secret Service* 26:00).

2.13 The Transatlantic Power Struggle

The power struggle between the United States and the United Kingdom is overtly present in the film. The monologue Harry holds when confronting Chester about his inability to adapt to modern day society and the changes in both values and villains is very interesting. 'Still, evolving with the remains an entire foreign concept to you. (...) The world is changing.' (*Kingsman: The Secret Service* 11:00). Note how Harry uses the word 'foreign' in order to convey something that could also be called 'different' or 'unfamiliar', highlighting the importance of British moral code and heritage. Furthermore, he does notice how the power between two great transatlantic nations is shifting. In that sense Valentine and Harry are similar. Both of them are aware of the power struggle between the United States and the United Kingdom, and both are powerful themselves. They stand on opposite ground of one another,

both literally and figuratively. They are also the most transatlantic characters in that they try to show the other that national borders are merely a construct. Harry does so by going to America and visiting, not infiltrating, the church that is Valentine's testing ground, yet killing everyone in the process. Valentine does the same when it is revealed that he has infiltrated the Kingsman agency by corrupting Chester King. Both these events illustrate how Valentine and Harry are gaining power in a transatlantic sense, across the borders the other's nation.

2.14 Conclusion

Richmond Valentine is a modern villain with modern ideas. Wanting to save the world from its death in a century where the effects of pollution, waste, consumerism, materialism, or in other words human influence on the earth's wellbeing have never been more well-researched and clear, Valentine is a villain that reflects modern day threats. His entire personality is modern as well, from his behaviour to the way he dresses. Not only is he well aware that anything is accomplishable when you offer enough money, he also embodies the modern notion of the American dream in his background, having become a billionaire through creating advancements in technology. It could be argued that he actually is an environmentalist's hero, since he is trying to save the earth and put an end to all the problems that make the world's health deteriorate. It is the main ingredient to that solution, killing almost every human being on the planet, that shows his insanity and twisted soul. That places him among many other spy-action film villains who dwell in their own megalomania and selfishness. The way in which he is portrayed and the significance of his existence within the narrative also highlights a transatlantic message concerning a shift in power between two dominant nations.

CONCLUSION

I Kingsman vs. Bond

The Kingsman franchise is in itself aware of the connection to the Bond franchise, from the multitude of action sequences to dialogue that directly refers to the classic British spy films. The writer of the Kingsman comic books Mark Millar for example mentions in his dedication on the first page of the comic *Kingsman: The Secret Service* how Eggsy is an old school friend of his and that Eggsy cannot wait to become the ‘new James Bond’ (Millar 2). The script indirectly references the Bond films too, especially in the conversation between Harry “Galahad” Hart and Richmond Valentine during which Valentine asks Harry if he enjoys spy films. The answer: ‘Nowadays they all seem a little serious for my taste. But the old ones, marvellous. Give me a farfetched theatrical plot any day’ (*Kingsman: The Secret Service* 56:00). Not just the characters but the actors that portray them are aware of the homages (or, as Innat points out, rip offs, depending on the interpretation of the film) to James Bond as well. Samuel L. Jackson mentions in an interview with Guardian columnist Megan Conner that he had always wanted to be in a Bond film and that the opportunity to portray Richmond Valentine meant being able to ‘play a really great Bond villain’ (Conner). In relation to its villain, *Kingsman: The Secret Service* on the one hand distances itself, yet on the other still reminds of the great Bond villains. Richmond Valentine in his scheme to destroy most of humanity and repopulate earth in his own fashion closely copies the evil plan of Hugo Drax in *Moonraker* (1979), yet because of his motif, cultural background and heritage he is hardly similar to Drax nor other Bond villains. Concerning his motif, he is, like the classical Bond villain, a megalomaniac driven by madness, but his reason for destroying humanity cannot in full be attributed to those characteristics. As opposed to most other Bond villains Valentine is actually trying to save the world rather than destroy it and he does not even seek a reward in doing so.

When it comes to ethnicity, only a few Bond villains were given background narrative let alone one that involved cultural influence or heritage. Richmond Valentine however is clearly African-American and the embodiment of the American dream by being a self-made billionaire who worked hard to achieve his goals and was able to climb to the very top of society. From a transatlantic viewpoint it is interesting that a film that is technically an American-British co-production yet giving the audience the essence of a culturally British film would choose to cast a renowned American actor and have him portray that in every sense too, in an otherwise fully British main cast. This does not correspond with the way that he was portrayed in the original comic not the typical villain of popular British spy cinema. However, the academic

discussion concerning villainy in film strongly suggests that villains represent something larger than themselves, that they serve as the personification of a threat to a certain culture or society that is in turn represented by the hero of the film. Taking this into account, *Kingsman: The Secret Service* might be sending the audience two messages concerning its villain. The first message is of an ecological nature and is addressed to the audience via Valentine's motif for his evil schemes. Throughout the film he is lobbying to explain to people that humanity is killing the earth and has made it a time bomb that will eventually explode and kill everybody anyway, which has also been a topic gaining more ground in both academic and popular discourse over the past few decades. The second message is slightly more obscure and resonates the theory on villainy concerning ethnicity and cultural heritage, and conveys that America might be posing as a threat to the United Kingdom as a global power and carrier of dangerously advanced technology.

II Kingsman vs. Hollywood

As established earlier, popular British spy cinema has not seen many American villains. The opposite, i.e. British villains in culturally American productions, appears to be a lot more common. Hollywood has a long history of portraying villains as culturally British in films ranging from Disney to classic westerns and contemporary films. In the article "Very British Villains (and Other Anglo-Saxon Attitudes to Accents)" Chi Luu notes how many of Hollywood's villains have one thing in common, and that is their Received Pronunciation of the English language. Why would American producers choose to portray their villains as Brits? Research by Mark Stewart, Ellen Bouchard Ryan and Howard Giles has shown that their American respondents that took part in the study judged standard British speakers as higher in social class, more successful and more intelligent than speakers of standard American English, arguing that speakers of standard American English might consider themselves as inferior to standard British English speakers. Another study of standard British English was carried out by Davis and Houck. They found that non-RP speakers as well as speakers of standard American English not just evaluated RP speakers to be of a higher social class, to be more intelligent, competent and even physically attractive in the same way that the American subjects perceived the standard British English in the research by Stewart et al., but the non-RP speakers and American speakers also noted that the RP speakers were 'less trustworthy and kind, as well as less socially attractive, sincere, and good-humoured', which corresponds with previous studies on the subject (115). These studies points towards a general negative interpretation of people with a British accent by non-RP speakers, which aligns with the representation of British

villains in Hollywood. Julia Dobrow and Calvin Gidney argue in their study on villains in children's cartoons and films that this portrayal of villainy may be rooted deeply in American culture since television functions as a source of information to the younger generation (118) and they found that 'speakers of British English are portrayed dichotomously as either the epitome of refinement and elegance or as the embodiment of effete evil' (117). This in turn may be a cause for the continuation of stereotyping in the film industry aimed at older generations (118).

The producers of *Kingsman: The Secret Service* are not afraid to serve in-jokes when it comes to the James Bond franchise or any other classic spy-action fiction plot, so it could be argued that their interpretation of the villain as the American outsider in a culturally British film is another in-joke in the form of a cheeky wink at Hollywood and its interpretation of the British villain in American cinema.

III Conclusion

Villains in popular culturally British spy action films have been portrayed in many different ways. The thing they have in common is that all of them are representations of something bigger, often a threat to a nation or a society. As the previous chapters have illustrated, the villain's background is highly relevant when interpreting his/her existence. This is because of the co-dependent relationship that exists between the villain and the hero, in which the hero is often interpreted as a nation's ideal of something and the villain as its antagonist. More importantly, the villain often symbolises a concrete threat to that nation. In this film Valentine embodies the threat that modern-day America and modern technology are to a global power such as Great Britain. The fact that *Kingsman's* villain is represented in a different manner than in the original graphic novel shows the director's deliberate choice of highlighting Valentine's transatlantic background in the film. He is the embodiment of American cultural heritage. This background does not necessarily explain his motives or choices, but in reference to the co-dependent relationship to the hero it does make it clear to the audience that possibly there is a modern-day threat against the UK in the form of a nation and/or modern technology being accessible to the wealthy rather than the educated, depending on which interpretation is preferred.

The villain is slain by a young British man who works with a British intelligence office that is predominantly upper-class, where he stands out with his lower-class background. The fact that he is able to defeat this villain internally challenges the British class system and externally serves to show how Britain is getting closer to regaining the global power and status

it once had. Valentine is a personification of the American dream, yet he also pays homage to many villains of popular culturally British spy cinema in his megalomania and his scheming. However, he is distinguishable from that archetype because of his motif and drive for his madness, in which his transatlantic cultural background and modern threats to all of mankind play a large role. He also differs from the other villains in that British spy cinema has not often seen an American villain.

Kingsman's American villain is both a continuation as well as a discontinuation of the spy action villain stereotype. Valentine too, represents a national threat to the hero's cultural identity and the two exist in a co-dependent relationship. However, it is not common for a culturally British production to include an American villain. From a transatlantic point of view this can be interpreted as a power shift between two nations with a long and intertwined history. The America that was able to benefit from a Britain rattled by wars and become of great influence globally once again has a powerful opponent. Valentine himself is transatlantic in nature too, because he is trying to gain power across transatlantic borders, and his aim is to fight a problem that exists not only in the US but worldwide. An interpretation of that evil therefore can be seen as a global problem, rather than one that only exists in the nation or society that the hero represents.

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