POPULAR TELEVISION GENRES

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For Jeffrey Richards
Scholar, mentor, friend

SAINTS AND AVENGERS

British Adventure Series of the 1960s

James Chapman

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Preface

There are good reasons for writing this book beyond my affection for the British adventure series of the 1960s and the opportunity, welcome though it is, to indulge my infatuation with Honor Blackman and Diana Rigg. The academic rationale behind this book stems from the dearth of scholarly interest in popular television genres in general and in the adventure series in particular. Other than David Buxton's pioneering *From The Avengers to Miami Vice* and monographs by Toby Miller on *The Avengers* and Chris Gregory on *The Prisoner*, British adventure series of the sixties and early seventies have hitherto been beyond the pale of academic respectability. Those works mentioned above, moreover, are written very much from the theory-driven perspective of cultural studies, whereas my own approach is that of a cultural historian, exploring the contexts of production and reception as well as the narrative ideologies and generic characteristics of the series themselves. While I have no axe to grind with the cultural studies scholars, it is my contention that the importance of the adventure series both in British television history and in British popular culture more generally is related to the specific historical circumstances of the 1960s. The demise of the genre in the 1970s is evidence of this contention. The aim of this study, therefore, is to make the case for that sixties generation of Saints and Avengers to be regarded as legitimate objects of historical inquiry.

Acknowledgements

My thanks are due to all those friends and colleagues who have helped to make the twin processes of researching and writing this book over the past two years so pleasurable. Philippa Brewster, my editor at I.B.Tauris, has supported the book and the larger project of which it is part ever since I first 'pitched' it to her over lunch at the Museum Café early in 1999. Tony Aldgate, Steve Chibnall and Thomas Ribbits all provided invaluable assistance by loaning various primary source materials. Alma Hales kindly assisted in arranging for the loan of the surviving episodes of *Adam Adamant Lives!* from the BBC Television Archives. Susan Burnett read drafts of individual chapters; her rigorous comments on the introduction, especially, have been of enormous value in helping me clarify my own position in the relatively new field of television studies. My colleagues in the History Department of the Open University have ensured that I temper my enthusiasm for popular culture with the scholarly rigour demanded of a professional historian, while the many participants in seminars held by the Sixties Research Group have provided a discerning sounding board for some of my more imaginative interpretations. Arthur Marwick's indefatigable researches into the sixties continue to provide a solid bedrock of historical scholarship; my own work, more modest in its scope, reinforces his argument that the sixties were a time when British popular culture enjoyed unprecedented prestige and influence. Whilst acknowledging these intellectual debts, however, I should emphasise that I alone am responsible for any faults, flaws, errors or omissions that readers may detect.

Like all historians, I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to those archivists and librarians who help to facilitate research and deal so efficiently and patiently with the researcher's enquiries. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the staff of the BBC Written Archives Centre at Caversham Park, especially Susan Knowles and Julie Snelling, the British Film Institute Library and the Open Univesity Library. The costs of research were partially offset by the Open University Arts Faculty Research Committee, a small beacon of light in the financial gloom currently affecting research in British universities.

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A special note of thanks, as ever, to my parents, who must sometimes have wondered why at various times I have had them recording hours upon hours of television series. I hope this book justifies my claim that all those videotapes of *The Avengers* were essential research materials.

This book is dedicated to Jeffrey Richards. It was through working with Jeffrey that I came to realise the possibility of taking popular culture seriously without theorising it into abstraction. Of all the intellectual debts I owe, this is the greatest.

Abbreviations

ABC	Associated Broadcasting Corporation (Britain)
ABC	American Broadcasting Company (US network)
ATV	Associated Television (Britain)
BFI	British Film Institute
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System (US network)
ITC	Independent Television Corporation (Britain)
ITV	Independent Television (Britain)
LWT	London Weekend Television (Britain)
MGM	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
NBC	National Broadcasting Company (US network)
WAC	Written Archives Centre (BBC)

Introduction

Two secret agents – one a bowler-hatted, umbrella-wielding Old Etonian, the other a trendy young woman with a penchant for black leather and martial arts – are Britain's last line of defence against the nefarious schemes of diabolical criminal masterminds (*The Avengers*). A debonair international playboy with a permanently raised eyebrow travels the world offering a helping hand to damsels in distress (*The Saint*). A Victorian gentleman crime-fighter, frozen alive at the turn of the century, is resurrected in 'Swinging London' (*Adam Adamant Lives!*). Three secret agents return from Tibet with super-human powers (*The Champions*). Members of a top-secret international organisation are called in to solve bizarre and perplexing mysteries (*Department S*). The ghost of a dead private detective returns from beyond the grave to solve his own murder (*Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)*). A celebrated crime novelist and playboy with highly eccentric fashion sense finds real life mirroring his own books (*Jason King*). A sophisticated English aristocrat and an American self-made millionaire team up to fight criminals the law cannot touch (*The Persuaders!*).

One of the most distinctive features on the landscape of British television during the 1960s and early 1970s was the prominence of series featuring secret agents, gentleman detectives and all manner of flamboyant and unusual crime-fighters. One commentator remarked in the autumn of 1962 – coincidentally also the time when the first James Bond film *Dr No* was released in British cinemas – that 'the undercover men are thicker on the ground than ever this season'. The same critic pointed out how all these series tried to differentiate their protagonists from others of the same stable. 'Extraordinary

attempts are made to establish separate identities for them,' wrote Peter Black; 'elaborate biographies, couched in a weirdly serio-comic style, the fruit of hours of earnest script conferences, flutter on to my desk.'[1] The roll-call of spies, sleuths and private eyes called into service for British television is long and distinguished: *The Four Just Men*, *The Third Man*, *Interpol Calling*, *Danger Man*, *Jango*, *Top Secret*, *Spy-Catcher*, *The Planemakers*, *The Avengers*, *Ghost Squad*, *The Odd Man*, *The Saint*, *Man of the World*, *The Sentimental Agent*, *Zero One*, *Public Eye*, *The Mask of Janus*, *Adam Adamant Lives!*, *The Baron*, *The Prisoner*, *Man in a Suitcase*, *The Man in Room 17*, *Sexton Blake*, *Virgin of the Secret Service*, *The Champions*, *Department S*, *Paul Temple*, *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)*, *Jason King*, *The Persuaders!*, *The Protectors* and *The Adventurer* all came and went (some of them quicker than others) between 1959 and 1974. While many of these series have faded into obscurity, a number of them remain 'cult' classics which are not only remembered fondly by their original fans but also win new aficionados through repeats on cable television and release on video cassette.

Yet despite the prominence of secret agents and other assorted crime-fighters in the generic profile of popular television during the 1960s, these series have received scant attention beyond the realms of the cult television fan culture. A conventional map of British television in the 1960s would privilege serious drama such as *Armchair Theatre* and *The Wednesday Play*, topical magazine programmes such as *Panorama* and *Monitor*, cutting-edge satire such as *That Was The Week That Was* and socially aware comedy such as *Till Death Us Do Part*. It would be a map shaped by the contours of social realism (in both drama and comedy) and by the still prevalent Reithian principle of public service broadcasting. It would be a map which, if it found any space at all for popular genre fictions, would almost certainly limit it to a select few series such as *Z Cars* (regarded as bringing a new realism to the police drama) and *Doctor Who* (arguably the most influential fantasy series in television history, but even then one that was characterised by moral and philosophical issues in a manner not entirely dissimilar to serious drama). The secret agent and crime-fighter series, however, remain an unmapped territory, unexplored by television cartographers and known only to a few bold explorers who have ventured beyond the map of social realism and the public service ethos. The retrospective cult appeal of *The Avengers* or *The Prisoner* might just earn those series a place near the edge of the map, but it is unlikely there would be any space at all for the majority of the others listed above.[2]

Why have this sixties generation of Saints and Avengers yet to find their place in the canon of respectable television history? Film studies has brought

popular genres such as the western, the gangster film, the musical, the horror film and the science-fiction film within the bounds of academic respectability, but their television equivalents remain, for the most part, left out in the cold. There are three broad reasons why popular television series (as opposed to serials or single plays) have been marginalised in the writing of television history. The first of these is the privileging by most television critics and historians of the traditional concepts of 'realism' and 'quality' in assessing television drama. In this respect the writing of television history has exhibited much the same critical preferences as the writing of cinema history. British television drama has been acclaimed for two outstanding traditions: social realist docu-dramas (what, for want of a convenient label, might be termed the *Cathy Come Home* paradigm) and handsomely mounted serialisations of classic literature (what, similarly, might be termed the *Pride and Prejudice* paradigm). In contrast, popular genres such as the detective or thriller series have all too often been dismissed as imitations of American television lacking the social realist import or the literary pedigree seen as the hallmark of the 'best' (meaning the most critically respectable) British television. It is significant, moreover, that when popular genre series have attracted some measure of critical acclaim they have almost invariably done so not on the basis of their own generic characteristics but through their perceived relationship to either the realist tradition (as is the case with *Z Cars* and more recent police series like *The Cops*) or the quality literary adaptation (exemplified by the vogue for 'heritage' detective series, such as *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and *Poirot,* which adhere closely to the original stories and are characterised by their highly detailed period *mise en scène*). In contrast, the contemporary secret agent and crime-fighter series of the 1960s, most of which make no pretence of realism nor possess any literary pedigree at all, fall outside these paradigms.[3]

A second reason for the marginalisation of popular genre series has to do with the nature of television authorship. Whereas in film studies theories of authorship have privileged the director as the most significant creative influence in the filmmaking process, television has been regarded predominantly as a writers' medium rather than a directors' medium. This has been especially apparent in work on British television, due in large measure to the strong literary bias within British culture as a whole. Thus there is an approach to television history that privileges particular writers who are acclaimed for their outstanding and innovative work, usually in writing serials or single dramas that stand apart from the generic norms of popular television. Undoubtedly the foremost television 'auteur' in Britain is the late

Dennis Potter (*Pennies from Heaven*, *The Singing Detective*, *Lipstick on Your Collar*, *Karaoke*, *Cold Lazarus*), though others would include Alan Bennett (*An Englishman Abroad*, *Talking Heads*) and Alan Bleasdale (*Boys from the Blackstuff*, *GBH*). In contrast, writers who specialise in genre fictions, and especially in genres such as the thriller and science-fiction (Brian Clemens, Philip Levene, Roger Marshall, Terry Nation, Dennis Spooner, Tony Williamson) have generally been dismissed as mere hacks.[4]

A third reason for the lack of critical attention afforded the thriller series, or indeed almost any type of episodic fiction, is the nature of the format. Unlike the serial (which features a continuing story over a set number of episodes) or the single play (a now virtually defunct form of drama that has been all but replaced by the made-for-television film), the series form resists conventional methods of filmic or literary analysis due to the necessarily repetitive and formulaic nature of each self-contained episode. The episodic series represents the *reductio ad absurdum* of generic entertainment patterns: once the characters and situations have been established then only minimal variation is possible within each episode. The series form therefore relies upon highly standardised narrative conventions, plotting and characterisation. This degree of predictability was a bugbear for critics, for whom the familiarity of the series form quickly bred contempt. 'Most of television is unvaried, predictable and unimaginative,' said the respected Milton Shulman, television critic of the *Evening Standard*, in 1970. His views, which were broadly representative of his fellow critics, provide a revealing insight into prevailing attitudes towards popular television:

> The routine fodder of the chuckle box deliberately aims at familiarity for its major appeal. If a formula works, don't change it; if someone else has a popular idea, copy it; if someone offers you something really different, throw it out. That is how most TV executives think. . . . Critics, therefore, faced with the daunting sameness and repetitiveness of the average light entertainment series tend to avoid talking about them. It is not only an essential self-protective measure to avoid galloping infantilism, but the task of trying to apply critical standards to most of this mindless pap is like attempting to assess the aesthetic quality of blotting paper.[5]

Shulman's outburst was inspired by having watched *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)*, which he considered was so bad it exhibited 'a contempt for the public', but his comments applied to popular television in general and would surely have found sympathy among other critics who habitually derided the efforts of television producers to wring the changes on familiar genres. His

opinion of television audiences, moreover ('The mass public – docile, comatose, undemanding – have been conditioned to sit in their armchairs without moving, only rarely daring such an individualistic act as changing channels or switching the set off, and absorbing without protest the enervating visual opium of the box'), echoes the views of the Frankfurt School intellectuals who despised the standardised nature of all mass-produced popular culture and held its consumers to be no more than passive dupes who accepted uncritically all they were served up in the name of entertainment.[6]

The intellectual snobbery that is inherent both in the work of the Frankfurt School and in the opinions of critics like Shulman presents a huge obstacle for the study of popular television. Fortunately, this type of snobbery is gradually becoming less prevalent than it has been in the past. Some more recent commentators have displayed their willingness to accept genre series on their own terms rather than judging them by the same criteria as serials or single plays. Umberto Eco, using the methods of structuralist analysis that he had previously applied to the novels of Ian Fleming, argued that the formulaic narratives of television series, rather than revealing their paucity of imagination, actually provided the source of viewer pleasure that accounted for their popularity. 'With a series one believes one is enjoying the novelty of the story (which is always the same) while in fact one is enjoying it because of the recurrence of a narrative scheme that remains constant,' he observed. He suggested, furthermore, that '[t]he series consoles us. . . because it rewards our ability to foresee: we are happy because we discover our ability to guess what will happen.'[7] Indeed, extending Eco's point, it could be argued that it is reassuring for the viewer to be able to predict the outcome, especially in those television series where a hero-figure (Captain Kirk, Marshal Dillon, Simon Templar, Xena, or whoever) faces a test of his or her abilities and attributes. If the viewer is able to predict that 'good' will triumph over 'evil', for instance, then it affirms the viewer's faith in the value systems and moral codes which the hero represents.

Chris Gregory, furthermore, suggests that 'this convention of predictability is not necessarily a limitation, but merely a conventional dramatic framework no more restrictive than, say, the limitations imposed on the novel in the nineteenth century'.[8] Just as many of the now canonical Victorian novels were written for monthly magazine serialisation, with each instalment written to order, so too the television series is regulated by external constraints which make standardisation not merely desirable but in fact essential. For one thing, standardisation is a means of streamlining production and reducing costs: television series are produced to much tighter schedules and budgets than

films made for cinema release. And for another thing, television broadcast schedules determine the length of each episode, which generally have to fit into one-hour or half-hour time slots, and, in the case of commercial television, must have regular breaks for advertisements. The standardised narratives of television series, therefore, are the inevitable consequence of a number of industrial and economic determinants.

The norms of television production had become well established by the early 1960s, with the episodic series the dominant form of fictional entertainment. This had not always been the case. The earliest form of television fiction was the single play, regarded as the 'natural' form of television because the small screen was seen as a more intimate medium than either theatre or cinema and thus offered scope for the exploration of human emotions.[9] The 1950s are regarded, in hindsight, as a 'golden age' of live television drama both in Britain and in the United States. This golden age was short-lived. The arrival of video recording technology (the first Ampex machines were in service with the US television networks by the end of 1956) signalled a shift to recorded drama. Although some critics regretted the loss of immediacy and spontaneity this entailed, recorded drama was preferable from the point of view of the television networks as it could be repeated without the necessity for restaging the play all over again.

By the late 1950s, however, the episodic series was the norm for popular television both in Britain and in America. The two most prominent American television genres of the late 1950s and early 1960s were the western (*Gunsmoke*, *Cheyenne*, *Wagon Train*, *Maverick*, *The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp*, *Tales of Wells Fargo*, *Have Gun, Will Travel*, *Wanted – Dead or Alive*, *Sugarfoot*, *Bonanza*, *Rawhide*, *The Rifleman*, *The Westerner*, *The Virginian*) and the police/detective series, the latter split into the two distinct lineages of the 'cop' series (*Dragnet*, *The Naked City*, *The Untouchables*, *The FBI*) and the 'private eye' series (*77 Sunset Strip*, *Hawaiian Eye*, *Surfside 6*). The western and police/detective series have much in common: both present a relatively straightforward Manichean view of the world divided into 'good' and 'bad' and both are predominantly 'law and order' narratives. The police/detective series was also an early staple of British television, where the 'Scotland Yard' tradition was represented by the BBC's *Fabian of the Yard* (1954) and ITV's *Colonel March of Scotland Yard* (1955) – both half-hour episodic series made, like their American counterparts, on film. The pioneers of television film production in Britain in the late 1950s were the Americans Harry and Edward Danziger who specialised in cheaply-made crime and thriller series (*Mark Saber*, *The Vice*, *The Man from Interpol*) for the ITV network.

The most successful genre of British television during the late 1950s, however, was the cycle of costume swashbucklers produced during the early years of ITV. *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1955–59), starring Richard Greene, was produced by Sapphire Films for Associated Television (ATV), one of the companies that held regional franchises as part of the independent television network. The most significant thing about *The Adventures of Robin Hood* was that it was sold to American television where it was successfully shown in syndication for many years. It was reported in December 1955 that the sale of the filmed series to America 'has brought to England a million and a quarter dollars – nearly half a million pounds'.[10] *The Adventures of Robin Hood* was followed in quick succession by *The Adventures of the Scarlet Pimpernel*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot*, *The Buccaneers*, *Ivanhoe*, *The Adventures of William Tell*, *Sword of Freedom* and *Sir Francis Drake*. All these half-hour series were made on film with a view to international sales, and ATV became the first British television company to set up its own international distribution arm. The managing director of both ATV and its subsidiary Independent Television Corporation (ITC) was Lew Grade, a flamboyant, cigar-smoking entrepreneur and former theatrical agent who cast himself in the mould of the 'movie moguls' of Hollywood.

Yet despite the success of *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, the adoption of film methods in Britain lagged behind America and proceeded at an uneven pace. At a time when film had become the preferred mode of production for American television, the leading British film industry trade journal *Kine Weekly* was reporting that '1960 saw the virtual cessation of large-scale tv film production. Only ITC made a series and several pilots . . . while independent companies interested in the field became fewer and fewer'.[11] The ITC series being referred to was *Danger Man*, the first of the new vogue for secret agent action dramas that would dominate Grade's international production strategy for the next decade. By 1965, however, the same journal could report 'a vast new enthusiasm for tv film production' in the wake of Grade's 'decisive victory in selling three tv film series to the US networks'.[12] The three series concerned were *Danger Man*, *The Saint* and *The Baron*.

Grade's successes notwithstanding, however, shooting on videotape rather than film remained the norm for British television. The differences between the formats – economic, technological and aesthetic – were significant determining factors on the style and nature of British television series. Shooting on videotape was cheaper than film, but, in the early days of video recording, it was also more cumbersome and more limiting. When videotape arrived in Britain in the late 1950s (the ITV company Associated-Rediffusion

was the first in Britain to acquire an Ampex machine in 1958) the technology did not yet exist to edit it, meaning that a video recording had to be done, to all intents and purposes, 'live'. The aesthetics of live television and video recording, therefore, were initially very similar. In 1959, however, technicians worked out a method of cutting and splicing videotape – a discovery that Denis Forman, an executive at Granada Television, described as 'rather more important than the invention of sliced bread' – and shortly afterwards electronic editing of videotape became possible. Even so there was some resistance to the changes, which did not immediately result in a fundamentally different style of television. 'This advance in technology was not altogether welcome to managements,' Forman recalled. 'Rules were set down – shows must be recorded in real time, edits must be authorised by a member of the board, there may be only two edits in a show, three edits, six edits, and as the months went by a show may take no more than 50% more time than it did when it was being transmitted live.'[13] Videotaped programmes of the early 1960s, therefore, are characterised by relatively long takes and by a preponderence of interior shots (film would be used for outdoor sequences and then edited in to the show). The use of multiple cameras as the decade progressed allowed greater freedom for directors, while further technological developments, including the introduction of a second-generation Ampex that could record in colour in 1965, meant the limitations of video were gradually overcome. Live television drama had all but disappeared by the end of the decade, while by the 1970s videotape had become so versatile that it could do almost everything film could, including outdoor shooting (through mobile cameras) and special effects (in which field the BBC's *Doctor Who*, produced on tape since its inception in 1963, led the field).

The longest-running secret agent series of the 1960s, *The Avengers*, is paradigmatic of these technological and aesthetic developments in that it encompassed all three modes of production (live performance, videotape and film) during its history. Of the 161 episodes of *The Avengers*, nine were broadcast live, 69 were recorded on videotape and 83 were shot on film; the filmed episodes, furthermore, included 26 monochrome and 57 in colour. The videotaped episodes were recorded in 'real time' and reshooting was evidently not a standard policy as there are occasions when the actors fluff their lines or can clearly be seen to be add-libbing. Thus there are remnants of the tradition of live television even in those episodes recorded on tape. The budget for the first series in 1961 (which included live and videotaped episodes) was £3500 per episode, rising to £4500 for the second series in 1962–63 and £6000 for the third series in 1963–64.[14] The visual style of the

videotaped episodes is determined by a preponderence of interior shots and close ups. When *The Avengers* switched to film in 1965, the result was a more polished and sumptuous visual style and more exterior sequences. Julian Wintle, who was brought in to supervise the filmed episodes, was firmly of the opinion that film was preferable to videotape: 'Tape is very restricting. We could never have done most of the stories we are now making if we had been confined to TV cameras and tape-recording.'[15] But film was also more expensive: colour filmed episodes of *The Avengers* cost between £35,000 and £40,000 each.

It is necessary to understand the technological and economic determinants involved in television production in order to place popular genres within their proper historical and cultural contexts. The limitations of early video recording technology predisposed certain genres towards film. The costume swashbuckler and the contemporary adventure series, both of which include elaborately staged outdoor action sequences and chases, obviously inclined more towards film production methods. This in turn opened up the possibility of accessing the American market, where film production was the norm. As Milton Shulman observed: 'The American public is conditioned to the pace, the production polish, the range of locations, [and] the sound recording quality that only a story made on celluloid can give.'[16]

The international ambitions of British television, and of Lew Grade's ITC especially, have significant implications for the study of its generic products. One of the themes of this book is the way in which popular television contributed to what might be termed the economic and cultural export of 'Britishness'. The 1960s, as Arthur Marwick observes, were a decade when 'British popular culture enjoyed unprecedented prestige and influence'.[17] Both contemporaries and historians have identified a renaissance in British popular culture during the 1960s following the long hangover of the Second World War which had lasted well into the post-war years. It was a renaissance led by pop music, but which also encompassed developments in fashion, art, photography and film, giving rise to a range of new and often highly innovative forms of cultural expression. The massive success of the British-made James Bond films was one highly visible symptom of the international prestige enjoyed by British popular culture, while the impact made by the Beatles when they first toured America in 1964 was of such proportions that commentators were soon talking of a 'British invasion'.

British commentators, predictably, were enthusiastic about the international success achieved by home-grown television series. The economic benefits of selling series to overseas markets was a recurring theme in the

trade press. When the first series of *Danger Man* was sold to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, for example, *Kine Weekly* described the sale as 'one of the best deals yet achieved' for British television.[18] The most important overseas market, of course, was America, and in this regard 1965 was something of an *annus mirabilis* for British producers. In October of that year Grade announced that the sale of three of his series to the American networks – *Danger Man* to CBS, *The Saint* to NBC and *The Baron* to ABC – would net a total of $10 million. The trade press trumpeted it as nothing less than 'the most significant breakthrough for British tv film production in the history of the industry'.[19] In his autobiography Grade was keen to stress that 'my relationship with all three major American networks was very strong'.[20] Grade's success was followed by news that episodes of *The Avengers*, produced by another ITV company Associated British Corporation, had been bought by the ABC network. Howard Thomas, Managing Director of Associated British, predicted a bright future for British television: 'We feel the economics and creative demands of the medium are fast making television essentially international, with exceptional opportunities for advancement in the quality and appeal of British programmes and co-productions for export to the United States and the rest of the world.'[21] *The Avengers* was to be the first British series screened on primetime network television in the USA (the other series had been bought primarily as schedule fillers) and, pound for pound, was probably the most profitable television export of the decade. The total income generated from all the ITC-produced series, however, was to make Lew Grade the main beneficiary of British television's export drive. By the mid-1960s ITC was 'the biggest and fastest-growing film organisation in the United Kingdom': its foreign earnings amounted to $10.5 million in 1965 and $15 million in 1966.[22] While it would be wise to lodge a few caveats regarding the sale of British series to America in particular – the sums of money paid by the American networks were relatively modest in their own terms and the various options were not always taken up if viewing figures were disappointing – there is no doubt that the income they generated was a welcome boost to the flagging British economy. 'From a national standpoint, it means that TV finally will be making an important contribution to our balance of payments problem and doing something significant for the export drive,' Shulman declared, a view that was shared in other quarters.[23] Grade himself was knighted in 1968 (a peerage followed in 1976) and ATV was twice presented (in 1967 and 1969) with the Queen's Award to Industry for its export achievements.

However, the international profile of British television in the 1960s should not be judged solely in economic terms. As well as exporting commodities,

British television was also exporting values and ideologies. This is what I refer to as the cultural export of Britishness. The secret agent and crime-fighter series are notable for their representation of certain characters and archetypes that are rooted in British culture and tradition. As one commentator remarked: '*The Saint* is not only one of our biggest dollar earners, but a glossy tourist board advertisement for the gin and tonic Englishman on whom the sun never sets'.[24] Shulman, too, approved of the export of British values: 'The fact that these very British characters in stories that suit the taste of the British public have finally broken into the American market in a big way is a major development in the TV world.'[25] The significance of these 1960s television series in the representation of British national identity cannot be overestimated. Hitherto the dominant medium for the representation (indeed for the construction) of national identity in the twentieth century had been the cinema. This was no longer the case, however, by the 1960s. 'By the late 1960s,' Jeffrey Richards rightly observes, 'television had definitively taken over from the cinema as the mass medium and it is to television thenceforth that we must look for projections of the national image.'[26] This inevitably begs questions, of course, as to precisely what images of the British character and British values were being represented.

There were some who disputed that the sixties adventure series had much to do with Britishness at all. One of the charges frequently levelled against ITC's television fictions was that they compromised their British values by imitating the style of American television. Dennis Spooner, who was involved in many of these series as writer or script editor, recalled:

> During the Sixties I was bitterly attacked by somebody who said: 'Look! There's Spooner sitting at Elstree pandering to the Americans'. I wrote him a letter saying: 'You're quite wrong. I'm pandering to the Japanese and the Germans and everybody.' ITC was basically an exporting company. We were earning foreign currency. We got the Queen's Award to Industry. It's no good trying to sell a locomotive in America if you insist on building it for the gauge of track that's relevant in Britain. I don't see why people get upset when you do the same thing in television.[27]

It would be fair to say that some series made more concessions to American tastes than others. *The Baron*, *Man in a Suitcase*, *The Champions* and *Department S*, for instance, all imported American actors for starring roles. Paradoxically, these series were less successful in America than those, such as *The Saint* and *The Avengers*, which had remained insistently British in casting and content. While British critics resented the Americanisation of

British television, however, overseas commentators regarded these series as indisputably British.

The secret agent adventure series of the 1960s share much in common with the James Bond films, which also projected a particular image of British national identity to audiences around the world.[28] It would be entirely misleading, of course, to suggest that the success of the Bond films was the sole reason for the high profile enjoyed by fictional secret agents on British television. *Danger Man*, which began in 1960, and *The Avengers*, which began in 1961, both pre-dated the cinematic incarnation of James Bond, while *The Saint*, which starred a future James Bond actor, Roger Moore, premiered on British television a week before the first Bond film was released. Nevertheless, the Bond films were undeniably very influential. The glut of secret agent dramas came in the wake of the first Bond films, and even those series which had started earlier modified their formats in response, to some extent at least, to Bond. The style of the Bond films influenced filmed television, especially in the fast editing of the action sequences and in the vogue for 'teaser' sequences preceeding the main titles. The most significant points of comparison, however, are to be found in the narrative ideologies of the Bond films and the television secret agent adventures. The Bond films, beginning at the moment when the process of decolonisation was accelerating, can be seen as national fantasies in which the decline of British power never took place. They present a world in which the *Pax Britannica* still operates and Britain assumes the role of a world power. Similar assumptions about British power and prestige on the world stage can be detected in popular television. As Shulman observed:

> Although Britain's power position is declining, it is heartening to see that every week foreign nations still go to incredible lengths to steal our military secrets, undermine our industrial potential or subvert our interests abroad. . . . An added fillip to the national image will be the fact that no foreign saboteur or subversive can match the cunning, the courage, the dexterity, the ingenuity, the wit or the insouciance of the British agent, counter-spy or private eye.[29]

It is ironic, indeed, that spy narratives should be such a prominent component of British film and television culture at a time when the reputation of the British intelligence services, still reeling from the Burgess and Maclean affair of 1951, was further undermined by the embarrassing cases of Soviet moles Kim Philby and George Blake.

Not all the series discussed in this book are strictly speaking spy or secret agent narratives. While *Danger Man*, *The Avengers*, *The Champions* and

Department S all feature protagonists who may be described as secret agents in so far as they are empowered by national or international security organisations to counter the activities of enemy spies and saboteurs, the protagonists of *The Saint*, *Adam Adamant Lives!*, *Man in a Suitcase* and *The Persuaders!* are independent troubleshooters and crime-fighters who become involved either on their own or on others' behalf (though even so these series all feature episodes where the protagonists are employed by some official agency). None of the series included here belong to the lineage of the police/detective series, as none of their protagonists are policemen or policewomen, though *Man in a Suitcase* and *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)* can be placed within the private-eye genre. The difficulty of classifying these series in conventional generic terms is aptly illustrated by the critic who described *The Avengers* as 'farcical melodrama', echoing another critic who had been so dumbfounded by the first Bond film that he thought it could best be labelled 'a bizarre comedy melodrama'.[30] Some series, furthermore, include trappings of science-fiction (*The Avengers*, *Adam Adamant Lives!*) and fantasy (*The Champions*, *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)*). The label 'telefantasy' has gained currency in the discourse of cult television fan cultures as a cross-generic term that includes any type of series that is not determined by the conventional dramatic notions of psychological realism.[31] But while seven of the ten series I have selected for case studies could reasonably be described as telefantasy (*The Avengers*, *Adam Adamant Lives!*, *The Champions*, *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)*, *Department S*, *Jason King*, *The Persuaders!*), there are still three (*Danger Man*, *The Saint*, *Man in a Suitcase*) in which psychologically-oriented plot motivation remains in the ascendancy. I prefer the label 'adventure series' as one that is flexible enough to include the slightly different generic regimes which regulate the secret agent, crime-fighter and private-eye narratives. The adventure series is characterised not by cerebral detective work in the tradition of the classical detective story, but rather by an emphasis on action and suspense. The adventure thriller had been a staple genre of British cinema since the 1930s, but it was not until the 1960s that it emerged as a mainstream television genre.[32]

David Buxton has suggested another way of conceptualising popular television of the 1960s which cuts across generic and national boundaries. He posits a difference between, on the one hand, what he terms the 'human nature series' which is driven by social, moral and existential themes, and, on the other hand, the 'pop series' in which style and design take precedence over content. Buxton suggests that the 'human nature series' may encompass different genres, including crime (*The Untouchables*, *The FBI*), western

(*Gunsmoke*, *Bonanza*) and science-fiction (*The Invaders*, *Star Trek*). The narrative ideologies of these series are concerned with finding consensual and morally justifiable resolutions to social problems and conflicts. The 'pop series', in contrast, is a product of the social and cultural changes of the 1960s and revolves around the themes of modernity and consumerism. The spy/secret agent genre became 'the dominant fictional form of the pop ethic', with 'pop texts' in different media including the Bond films, the books, comic strip and film of *Modesty Blaise* and television series such as *Danger Man*, *The Prisoner*, *The Avengers* and, to take an American example, *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* 'Inextricably linked to patriotism and the overcoming of class divisions,' Buxton writes, 'the spy genre becomes additionally coded with discourses pertaining to tourism, conspicuous consumption and sexual pleasure, an ideal terrain on which to confront and explore the tension between duty to a higher authority (the state) and the individualism produced by the new consumer culture.'[33]

Buxton's definition of the 'pop series' is extremely useful. Certainly there is evidence from the reaction of contemporaries that some adventure series were seen as privileging style over content. The foregrounding of artefacts of consumer culture, for example, is reflected in the frequency with which critics compared them to advertising. These comparisons were not meant to be complimentary. '*The Saint* is glossy British rubbish with Roger Moore, who looks like an ad for after-shave', wrote Philip Purser, while Peter Black remarked contemptuously that the protagonists of *The Champions* 'reproduced the look of brimming health and lightness of step of the characters in the commercials when they've got hold of the right laxative or hair shampoo'.[34] This attitude is summed up perfectly by George Melly's verdict on *The Avengers*: 'It made the commercial break seem terribly honest.'[35]

As important as these 'pop' elements are to the British adventure series, however, they should not exclude other analytical frameworks. For one thing, the discourses of 'pop' are unevenly represented in different series: they are prominent in *The Avengers*, apparent but not dominant in *The Saint*, hardly evident at all in *Man in a Suitcase*. And, for another thing, the adventure series of the 1960s also form part of a generic lineage that predates the emergence of 'pop'. *The Saint* was based on a character invented in the 1930s, and other television series, too, harked back to a tradition of British gentlemen heroes that had earlier been represented by characters such as Richard Hannay and Bulldog Drummond. Perhaps the most interesting aspects of these series, indeed, are the strategies they employ for containing the social and cultural forces of the 1960s within the terms

of a tradition of generic representation that has much deeper historical roots.

My approach in this book follows the same method of cultural-historical analysis that I have previously applied to the James Bond films.[36] My case studies of the ten series are concerned with identifying their generic codes and conventions, analysing their narrative structures and ideologies, discussing their formal and stylistic properties, examining their representations of class and gender and considering their critical and popular reception. The case studies have been chosen both for their richness as cultural artefacts in their own right and to reflect which series are accessible to the general reader (with the exception of *Adam Adamant Lives!*, the sole BBC series included, all these series are available on home video). My sources, in addition to episodes of the series themselves, include production documents, scripts, publicity materials, trade papers and newspaper and magazine reviews. The latter are interesting not only because they often highlight differences between the reactions of critics and audiences, but also because they offer an illuminating insight into a critical discourse that has consistently proved unable to find evaluative criteria appropriate to non-realist forms of representation. The adventure series has for too long been ridiculed by television critics; it is time to redress the balance.

1

Dirty Work
Danger Man

Danger Man was the first and, in the opinion of many commentators, the best of the British secret agent adventure series of the 1960s. As the television critic of the *Guardian* remarked: '[John] Drake was the first of the two-fisted British tele-agents, and is still by far the best man in a punch-up on either channel.'[1] *Danger Man* received good notices from the critics, became a major overseas money-earner for Lew Grade's ITC and made Patrick McGoohan into an international television star. Its success marked a decisive shift away from the costume swashbucklers that hitherto had been British television's most exportable commodity in favour of the contemporary crime-fighter whose adventures were located recognisably in the present rather than in an imagined past. In contrast to the more fantastic and parodic series that were to follow later in the decade, *Danger Man* was characterised by its relative realism and seriousness – a trait which probably accounts for its favourable critical reception. Its popularity has endured, and, if not quite matching the cult status of *The Avengers* or of McGoohan's later series *The Prisoner*, David Buxton nevertheless calculates that '*Danger Man* has rarely been absent from the world's television screens since 1965'.[2]

The production history of *Danger Man* falls neatly into two periods: a continuous first series of 39 half-hour episodes originally broadcast between the autumn of 1960 and the spring of 1961; and an intermittent second series of 45 one-hour-episodes, broadcast in batches between 1964 and 1967. All