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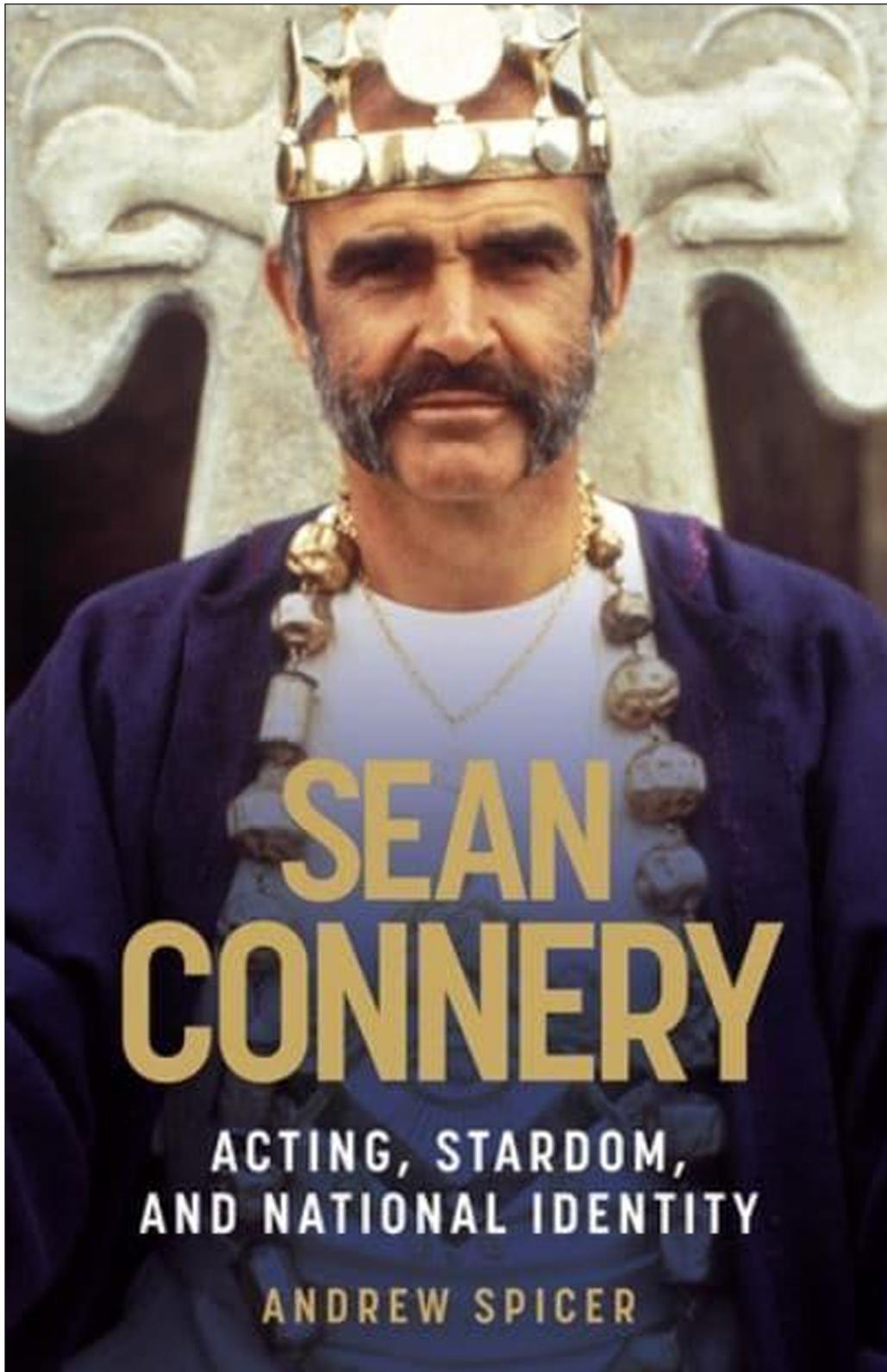
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Andrew Spicer, *Sean Connery: Acting, Stardom and National Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), pp. 336, ISBN: 9781526119117 (hb), £20.

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With *Sean Connery: Acting, Stardom and National Identity*, the eloquent Andrew Spicer makes an important contribution to the scholarly study of stars, while exploring the expansive career of the only true Scottish icon in cinematic history. Not only borrowing from his own significant work on British male stars, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema* (2003), Spicer engages with an eclectic range of sources from seminal and newly published scholarly work, archival material and the tabloid press. Spicer's approach includes examining, contextualising and interpreting data, including publicity, promotion, reviews, criticism and commentary, alongside Connery's films themselves. As part of the 'discursive construction' of Connery's star persona, Spicer aims to present the 'unstable amalgam' of a fictional image and real person through a detailed study of one performer (3). Noting that popular discourses on stars tend to omit the labour of acting, he aims to present 'a political economy of stardom as performative labour' which builds on previous work by Adrienne McLean, Paul McDonald and Barry King (4).

Divided into eight main chapters, each is dedicated to a specific facet of Connery's career or image. Chapter One covers 1953–61, Connery's pre-James Bond years, when he entered a profession long dominated by upper-class English men far removed from his identity as a working-class Scotsman. Spicer notes that, although the athletic Connery was offered a contract to become a professional footballer, he pursued acting instead since it offered 'longer-term prospects' (19). Exploring Connery's early image, Spicer views him more as a British version of American stars Robert Mitchum and Burt Lancaster than like his fellow Brits, but notes that Connery's male beauty and muscular frame led to quick stereotyping. Connery's decision to retain his Scottish accent, initially considered controversial, ultimately allowed him to become a star identified less with Britishness than an international, almost mythical appeal all of his own. Spicer investigates Connery's early theatrical and underexplored television appearances, some of which are now lost, alongside an early, mostly non-eventful cinematic career before his identity became blurred with that of the fictional Bond.

The layout of the following two chapters is both innovative and brilliantly executed. While Chapter Two covers Connery's work on the Bond films *Dr No* (1962), *Goldfinger* (1964) and *Diamonds are Forever* (1971), and the franchise's ever-increasing popularity, Chapter Three explores his non-Bond roles during the same timeframe, documenting his persistent struggle to be identified as a skilled performer away from the all-consuming role. Although Spicer argues that Daniel Radcliffe as Harry Potter is the only other actor so fully identified with a specific character, other Bond actors Roger Moore, Pierce Brosnan and Daniel Craig are also strongly associated with the iconic role. Moore's books *My Word Is My Bond* (2008) and *Bond on Bond* (2015) strongly link

character and actor, even suggesting that Moore is the ultimate Bond. With seven Bond performances each, Moore continued identifying himself with Bond throughout his life, while Connery 'took almost twenty years' to escape the image (82). Attempting to demonstrate his expansive acting range, Spicer notes that, while playing Bond, Connery also made *The Hill* (1965) and *A Fine Madness* (1966), films designed to break 'the Bond mould' (92).

For his discussion on the unrealised adaptation of Lesley Blanch's 1965 novel *Nine Tiger Man*, Spicer engages with the papers of intended director George Cukor, which have 'never been used with regard to Connery's career and which provide a rare archival source' (98). While Spicer deems *Shalako* (1968) to be perhaps the only British mainstream Western which presold 'a fantasy package of Connery and Brigitte Bardot', it was unprofitable and failed to provide Connery with 'a viable alternative persona to Bond' (102). However, he regards Connery as 'one of the very few British stars whose physique and strong masculine presence made him a plausible Western hero' (101). Conversely, *The Molly Maguires* (1970), set in the 'coal-mining belt' of 1870s' Pennsylvania, identifies Connery with the working class and the fight for social justice, just as he had been in the 1967 documentary *The Bowler and the Bunnet*, about Glasgow's Clydeside shipping industry.

Associated with Bond for so long, by the 1970s Connery was restlessly searching for an identity separate from the character which made him a star but had stifled him (114). *The Offence* (1973), which Connery considered his best film, explores paedophilia and mental illness and aided in distancing him from Bond. Spicer refers to his characters here and *The Hill* (1965) as 'antithetical to Bond', clearly not by chance (113). Chapter Four explores Connery's freelance work from 1974 onwards, including the 'mythic hero' of *Zardoz* (1974), which Spicer views as 'densely complex' and 'overloaded with concepts and allusions' (121). Better regarded was *The Wind and the Lion* (1975), in which Connery, dressed in all-black, 'resplendently incarnates the ancestral qualities of the nomadic Berber chieftain, riding on horseback to purge his lands of the hated foreigner' according to Spicer (122).

The Man Who Would be King (1975) paired Connery with fellow Brit Michael Caine, and Spicer provides excellent analysis of the interaction between these two icons with their own distinct personas. Calling *A Bride Too Far* (1977) his most notable film of this period, Spicer deems Connery the only actor to give a convincing performance, despite its all-star cast. Making his final return as a more mature Bond in *Never Say Never Again* (1983), Spicer declares his refusing of \$15 million to return for *Warhead* clearly indicates Connery no longer wished to be associated with Bond (151).

With close analysis of Connery's important post-Bond career as 'father-mentor', Spicer proves that not only did he finally succeed in distancing himself from Bond but once more achieved superstardom, an extremely rare feat for any actor. Fully embodying his roles, including an 'ageing bald monk' (163) in *The Name of the Rose* (1986), a cop in *The Untouchables* (1987) and Harrison Ford's scientist father in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), Spicer demonstrates that Connery proved his acting ability away from the Bond persona. During the final stage of his career (1991–2003), Connery founded the production company named Fountainbridge Films after his birthplace in Edinburgh, which ties to one of Spicer's key arguments about the actor's somewhat unique national identity and continued connection to Scotland, which he declares a surprisingly understudied element of Connery's image.

An important contribution to star studies, Spicer uses a vast array of material to present a unique perspective of Connery's star image and career from his early work to his iconic image as James Bond and his noteworthy second phase of superstardom as an ageing actor. The focus on the cultural context of the industry and Connery's version of Britishness aids in Spicer's discussions of actor as labourer and star as cultural icon. Connery's national identity is also explored through his political associations with the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) and his campaigning for Scottish independence, which Spicer notes brought some criticism late in his career. Overall, this admirable study of a complex actor covers much ground and presents readers with a unique perspective of an actor who, as Spicer persuasively argues, was much more than just James Bond.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.



Typesetting queries

1. Affiliation for author "Gillian Kelly" is not given. Kindly confirm.