

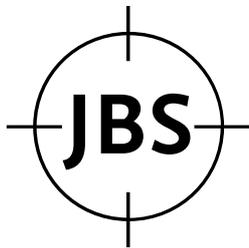
‘A thoroughly English movie franchise’

Spectre, the James Bond films, and Genre

JAMES CHAPMAN

The James Bond films are genre films par excellence: they demonstrate both the industrial processes of popular film-making and the narrative patterns of repetition and variation that underpin the idea of genre in popular cinema. Indeed the Bond films are such a unique and distinctive brand in their own right that the term “Bondian” has been coined to describe both the professional discourses of the film-makers on the one hand and the style and content of the films on the other. As Janet Woolcott noted after observing the making of *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) for an Open University case study of media production: “‘Bondian’ was the phrase used by [Cubby] Broccoli and other members of the production team to mean ‘in the spirit of James Bond’...To a certain extent the term ‘Bondian’ was used to describe the Bond films, which were seen as a distinctive formula, a specific genre of film” (1983, 210).

The emergence of new approaches to genre studies which extend beyond the reductive structuralism of the 1970s and which understand film genres and cycles in relation to their wider industrial and cultural contexts has seen the Bond films find their place on the agenda of academic film studies. This is amply demonstrated over the last decade or so by the growth of Bond scholarship that has seen the films analysed from a range of critical and theoretical perspectives,



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including film history (Chapman), geopolitics (Black, Dodds), cultural studies (Comentale et al) and gender studies (Funnell) among various others. It is no coincidence that much of this new wave of Bond scholarship has focused on the films of the Daniel Craig “era”, which seem to have brought a degree of critical respectability to the once-derided franchise. This article considers how the most recent Bond film, *Spectre* (2015), fits the “Bondian” formula. I will examine the production contexts and the genre conventions of the Bond films in order to assess the extent to which the Daniel Craig films represent either a new departure for the series or a continuation of the formula as before. In order to do this, it is necessary in the first instance to consider the history of the Bond series and its place in popular film culture.

THE CONTEXTS OF THE BOND FILMS

The origins of the James Bond film series are to be found in the institutional and economic contexts of the British and American film industries in the 1960s. The Anglo-American political economy of the Bond films with their combination of US dollars (United Artists) and British cultural capital (the novels of Ian Fleming) exemplified a process in the film industry after the Second World War in the emergence of so-called “runaway” productions: Hollywood films shot overseas, especially in Europe, which by the 1960s were estimated to account for nearly half of all American features (Maltby 1995, 70). Britain became a particularly attractive base for such “runaways” in the 1950s and 1960s: production and labour costs were cheaper, there were tax breaks for American artistes who made their permanent home in Britain, and the legal and regulatory frameworks were easier to navigate than the notoriously bureaucratic film industries of France or Italy. American producers could also benefit from the British Film Production Fund (popularly known as the Eady Levy after the Treasury official Sir Wilfred Eady who devised it), which had been established in 1950. The Eady Levy was an incentive for film production which returned a percentage of box-office receipts to producers and distributors: the more successful the film the greater the amount of the subsidy. To qualify for the levy, a film had to be produced by a British-registered company and shot in a studio in Britain or the British Commonwealth with seventy-five per cent of the labour costs paid to British personnel (Harper and Porter 2003, 114). According to Bond producer Albert R. “Cubby” Broccoli, the Eady Levy “was the carrot that induced American producers to come here” (“Broccoli’s Bond” 1986, 48). In the 1950s Broccoli was a partner with Irving Allen in Warwick Film Productions, which made a cycle of films in Britain for

Columbia Pictures, specialising in action-adventure subjects such as *The Red Beret* (1953), *Hell Below Zero* (1954), *The Black Knight* (1954), *Cockleshell Heroes* (1955), *Safari* (1956), *Zarak* (1957), *Tank Force* (1958) and *Killers of Kilimanjaro* (1959). American investment in the British production sector increased during the 1960s, when United Artists led the way in backing successful films including *Tom Jones* (1963), the Beatles films *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *Help!* (1965), and the James Bond movies.

Ian Fleming had tried, without success, to interest film and television producers in his Bond books during the 1950s – Sir Alexander Korda read the galleys of *Live and Let Die* and the Rank Organization briefly held an option on *Moonraker* (Lycett 1995, 250) – but the only Bond adaptation to date was a live studio dramatisation of *Casino Royale* by the American CBS television network in 1954. By the late 1950s, however, the public visibility of James Bond was increasing due to the publication of the books in paperback and the publication of a strip cartoon in the *Daily Express*. It was around this time that Broccoli, according to scriptwriter Richard Maibaum, first expressed his interest in filming the Bond books:

In 1956 or 1957, when I was in England writing for Cubby and Irving Allen, Cubby gave me two of the James Bond books to read. I read them and liked them enormously. Cubby was very excited, too, but Irving Allen didn't share his enthusiasm. So Cubby put them aside. It's my personal opinion now that that was a wise thing to do, because with the censorship of pictures that existed then, you couldn't have even the minimal sex and violence that we put into the pictures (McGilligan 1986, 284).

Around five years later, following the end of his partnership with Allen, Broccoli renewed his interest in the Bond books, only to discover that Fleming had sold an option to Canadian producer Harry Saltzman. Saltzman had been a partner in Woodfall Films, which he set up with playwright John Osborne and director Tony Richardson and was responsible for several early British “new wave” films including *Look Back in Anger* (1958), *The Entertainer* (1959) and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960). Broccoli and Saltzman went into partnership, setting up Eon Productions to make the films and turning to United Artists when Columbia balked at the proposed \$1 million budget for the first film, *Dr. No* (1962). Evidence that a series of films was envisaged from the outset can be found in the announcement in the trade press that Broccoli and Saltzman “have clinched a deal

with United Artists for 100 per cent financial backing and distribution of seven stories, which will be filmed here and on foreign locations” (*Kinematograph Weekly* 1961, 17).

Another context for the Bond films was the process that US film historians Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell have described as “genre upscaling” (1994, 391-5). This process began in the 1950s in response to the decline of cinema-going and the reduction in output by the studios which focused on releasing fewer but bigger films with high production values and employing colour and widescreen processes. Genres such as the Western, the historical epic and the musical were at the forefront of Hollywood’s obsession with blockbusters during the 1950s and 1960s, though another consequence of this process was that genres which had previously been regarded as low-budget fare, including horror, science fiction and thrillers, also benefited from lavishing “A”-feature production values on “B”-movie subjects:

The effect of amplifying B-film material was perhaps most visible in the rise of the big-budget espionage film. Hitchcock’s elegant *North by Northwest* (1959) featured an innocent bystander caught up in a spy ring, but the catalyst for genre upscaling was Ian Fleming’s fictional British agent James Bond. After two screen adaptations of the novels, 007 became a proven commodity with the phenomenally profitable *Goldfinger* (1964). The Bond films had erotically laced intrigues, semicomical chases and fight scenes, outlandish weaponry, wry humour, and dazzling production design (Thompson and Bordwell 394).

Terence Young, who directed the first Bond picture, *Dr. No*, similarly made the point that the Bond stories were the sort of subject matter generally associated with Hollywood’s Poverty Row studios: “Well, when you analyse it, and this is no disrespect to Ian, they were very sophisticated ‘B’-picture plots...If someone tells you, ‘A James Bond film’, you’d say, ‘My God, that’s for Monogram’, or Republic, who used to be around in those days. You would never have thought of it as a serious ‘A’ film” (Schenkman 1981, 3).

Historically the Bond films mark a transitional moment in the development of the thriller in popular cinema. On the one hand they look back to the tradition of the British imperialist spy thriller represented by “clubland heroes” such as John Buchan’s Richard Hannay and Sapper’s Bulldog Drummond – the latter incarnated in numerous films in Britain and Hollywood – and the BBC’s radio

detective *Dick Barton: Special Agent*, who also featured in three low-budget screen stories for Exclusive/Hammer Films in the late 1940s.¹ Indeed there is a sense in which Bond represents the end of this tradition: the character's ideological role as a defender of the British Empire was becoming anachronistic by the 1960s as that empire was being broken up. Raymond Durnat employs a characteristically British metaphor when he refers to Bond as "the last man in of the British Empire Superman's XI. Holmes, Hannay, Drummond, Conquest, Templar *et al* have all succumbed to the demon bowlers of the twentieth century, while *The Winds of Change* make every ball a googlie" (1970, 151). On the other hand, however, the Bond films can also be seen as the prototype of the contemporary action-adventure genre exemplified by the films of male stars such as Arnold Schwarzenegger (*Commando*, *True Lies*), Mel Gibson (*Lethal Weapon*), Bruce Willis (*Die Hard*) and Tom Cruise (*Mission: Impossible*) and directors such as John McTiernan, John Woo and Michael Bay. Screenwriter Larry Gross, for example, argues that the Bond films represented "an entirely new super-kinetic cartoon-type action movie" (1995, 8). Many of the characteristics of the contemporary action thriller – the narrative emphasis on action and movement, the structure built around a succession of set pieces, the foregrounding of technology and firepower, and the protagonist who never dispatches a villain without a throwaway quip – are all features of the Bond series.

The production ecologies of the Bond movies demonstrate perfectly the economic logic of the film industry: to spend money in order to make money. As the films became more and more successful, so their production costs rose in order to make each film bigger and more spectacular than its predecessor. Hence, while *Dr. No* was budgeted at a modest \$950,000, *From Russia with Love*, at \$1.9 million, was twice the cost of its predecessor, and *Goldfinger*, at \$3 million, cost as much as the first two films combined. In the early years of the series the choice of which books to film seems to some extent to have been economically determined: *From Russia with Love*, set entirely in Europe, was a way of shoring up Bond's popularity on the Continent, whereas *Goldfinger*, set mostly in the United States, seems like a calculated attempt to open up the American market which

1 Ronald Colman starred in two Hollywood "A" features – *Bulldog Drummond* (1929) and *Bulldog Drummond Strikes Back* (1934) – and Ralph Richardson appeared separately in the British-made *The Return of Bulldog Drummond* (1934). Paramount Pictures produced eight supporting features between 1937 and 1939: the first (*Bulldog Drummond Escapes*) starring Ray Milland, the rest of the series with John Howard. The three Dick Barton films – all starring Don Stannard – were *Dick Barton: Special Agent* (1948), *Dick Barton Strikes Back* (1949) and *Dick Barton at Bay* (1950).

had proved more resistant to the first two films. The strategy was evidently successful: *Goldfinger* earned domestic rentals of \$23 million, over twice the combined rentals of the previous two films. The budget rose to \$5 million for *Thunderball* (returning worldwide rentals of \$56.4 million) and \$9 million for *You Only Live Twice* (worldwide rentals of \$44.1 million). (“James Bond Dossier” 2002, 14).

Broccoli – who became the sole producer of the series following the dissolution of his partnership with Saltzman after *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974) – always maintained that the success of the films was due to their expensive production values. He explained his production ideology thus:

With each new Bond picture, we have to be bigger, better, more spectacular, more exciting, more surprising than the previous ones. Dreaming up new stunts, new twists, original gimmicks, new ways to entertain and thrill audiences can take months of discussions and meetings with scriptwriters, stunt co-ordinators, production personnel and those who take care of the mounting costs of each new picture. Costs are a big headache. But all the James Bond films have been very profitable. So I guess you have to be philosophical about it and lay out money to make money (quoted in Noble 1979,17).

The importance attached to production values and spectacle was further emphasised in the promotional discourses of the films which claim that each new film is the “biggest” or “best” yet: *Thunderball* (“Here Comes the Biggest Bond of All!”), *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* (“Far Up! Far Out! Far More!”), *The Spy Who Loved Me* (“It’s the Biggest. It’s the Best. It’s BOND – and B-E-Y-O-N-D”) and *Moonraker* (“Where all the other Bonds end...this one begins”). In the 1970s there was certainly a correlation between cost and box-office returns: Broccoli doubled the budget of *The Spy Who Loved Me* (\$13 million) from the previous entry and the film earned over twice the rentals (\$87.8 million) as *The Man with the Golden Gun*. While individual Bond films never matched the super-blockbuster status of films such as *Star Wars* (1977), *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) or *Titanic* (1997), the Bond series as a whole is the most successful in cinema history when adjusted for inflation: the cumulative box-office grosses of the Bond films passed \$2 billion with the release of *The Living Daylights* (1987) and \$3 billion following *Die Another Day* (2002) (“The James Bond Dossier”, 14).

“SAME OLD JAMES – ONLY MORE SO”: THE BOND FORMULA²

“Stated simply,” writes Barry Keith Grant, “genre movies are those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations. They also encourage expectations and experiences similar to those of similar films we have already seen” (1986, xi). The Bond films conform to theories of genre in so far as the narrative and character archetypes of each film are much the same and the films are characterised by recurring conventions and motifs including (but not limited to) the opening gun-barrel motif, the stylised title sequence, and the iconic “James Bond Theme”.³ One reason for the popularity and longevity of the Bond films is that they adhere to a consistent formula that has proved its success. As one critic wrote of the seventeenth Bond film, *GoldenEye* (1995): “We want to like most movies we pay to see but we already know the Bond formula – it has already earned our good will – so our pleasure revolves around seeing how the film-makers execute their turn” (Arroyo 1996, 40).

The formula of the Bond films had been established to a large extent in their original source texts. In his seminal reading of the narrative structure of Ian Fleming’s Bond novels, Umberto Eco used the metaphor of a game of chess to describe how their plots could be understood as a series of moves in which the same archetypal characters play out familiar gambits and situations: Bond is assigned to a mission of vital national importance by “M” (Head of the British Secret Service) which involves him travelling overseas where he meets an ally as well as encountering the Villain and meeting the Woman; the Villain makes his move by attempting to kill Bond; Bond makes his counter-move and gives first check to the Villain – often by beating him in a game that provides a symbolic rattling of sabres before the main confrontation (for example he beats Le Chiffre at baccarat in *Casino Royale*, bests Sir Hugo Drax at bridge in *Moonraker*, and out-cheats his opponent at golf in *Goldfinger*); Bond either seduces or begins the process of seducing the Woman, who is usually in the service of the Villain; the Villain captures Bond and lectures him on the nature of power before torturing him almost to the point of death; but Bond escapes, vanquishes the Villain and res-

2 “Same old James – only more so!” is Miss Money Penny’s response when Bond pinches her bottom in *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* (1969): it can be seen as a statement to identify a new actor (George Lazenby) as the “same” Bond following Sean Connery’s first departure from the role.

3 “The James Bond Theme” is credited to Monty Norman, though it is generally accepted that the arrangement in *Dr. No* was composer John Barry’s.

cues the Woman, with whom he convalesces at the end of the adventure. “The reader’s pleasure”, Eco avers, “consists of finding himself immersed in a game of which he knows the pieces and the rules – and perhaps the outcome – drawing pleasure simply from the minimal variations by which the victor realises his objective” (1966, 58). “The novels of Fleming”, he adds, “exploit in exemplary measure that element of foregone play which is typical of the escape machine geared for the entertainment of the masses” (ibid.).

Eco’s essay is a classic text of structuralist genre criticism but it is not without its problems. For one thing Eco ignores one of the novels (*The Spy Who Loved Me*) because it “seems quite untypical” (38), while several of the Bond short stories, including “Quantum of Solace” and “The Hildebrand Rarity”, also do not fit the narrative structure he identifies. And even the other books are more variable than Eco would allow: in *From Russia with Love*, for example, the nature of the conspiracy is known to the reader before Bond makes his entrance a third of the way into the novel. Bond does not always possess the Woman: he is left alone at the end of *Casino Royale* and *Moonraker*, and *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* ends with the murder of his new wife. Bond is presumed dead at the end of *You Only Live Twice*, while the next book, *The Man with the Golden Gun*, begins with a brain-washed Bond attempting to assassinate “M”. This is not to invalidate the basic tenets of Eco’s analysis, but rather to serve as a reminder that structuralism in its pure form can become overly reductive in its insistence that there is basically just one narrative pattern.

The same observation also applies to the Bond films. The first three films all follow slightly different narrative templates: an old-school mad scientist (*Dr. No*), a more traditional spy drama (*From Russia with Love*) and the first excursion into outright narrative and visual excess (*Goldfinger*). Contemporary critics were evidently unsure how to categorise *Dr. No*: the veteran British trade journalist R. H. “Josh” Billings, for example, called it “a bizarre comedy melodrama” (1962, 5). Broccoli felt that it was in *From Russia with Love* that “the Bond formula and style were perfected” (1996, 9). The second Bond adventure certainly seems more assured and polished than the first. “The success of *Dr. No* has no doubt given the James Bond team added confidence, if that was necessary,” wrote Penelope Houston, “and *From Russia with Love* is made by people who clearly know that they now have a gilt-edged formula to play with” (1965, 155). In fact *From Russia with Love*, which eschews the science-fiction trappings of *Dr. No* in preference for a more Hitchcockian narrative of suspense and pursuit, represents a direction that the Bond series did not, in the event, take. It was *Goldfinger*, with its technological

modernism, glossy visual style, and tongue-in-cheek humour, which really set the standard for the rest of the series. Penelope Houston, again, felt that *Goldfinger* “perfects the formula” and “assumes a mood of good-humoured complicity with the audience” that was the key to its popular appeal (16). And for Bond historian John Brosnan, “Goldfinger represents the peak of the series. It is the most perfectly realized of all the films” (1981, 75).

The first three films not only established the Bond formula: they also covered most of the narrative possibilities of that formula. Later films would simply represent variations of the same. *Thunderball* marked the height of Bond’s popular success in the mid-1960s but it was also the point at which the freshness of the early films started to wear off. *The Times*, for example, felt that it “does show alarming signs that the series is going to seed” and that “this film’s makers run into the law of diminishing returns” (“*Thunderball*” 1965, 12). Tom Milne in the *Monthly Film Bulletin* found *You Only Live Twice* “rather less enjoyable mainly because the formula has become so completely mechanical” (1967, 122). As the Bond series settled into what Bennett and Woolacott describe as an “institutionalized ritual” (1987, 38) in the 1970s and 1980s, so the critical reception of the films focused more on their familiarity and repetitive nature. While occasional films were seen as refreshing the formula to an extent, such as the more realistic *For Your Eyes Only* (1981) and *The Living Daylights* (1987), the critical consensus was that the later Bonds had lost the vitality which made the earlier films so exciting: “What was fresh in the 60s and had a certain faded charm in the 70s began to look dated and mechanical in the 80s, despite the usual technical expertise” (Bergan 1986, 305).

The institutionalisation of the Bond formula can be seen in the process whereby the later films took previous Bond films rather than Fleming’s stories as their source texts. This process began in earnest with *The Spy Who Loved Me* which not only borrowed the basic plot of *You Only Live Twice* (film) – a third party attempts to provoke a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union by hijacking their space capsules/submarines – but also included various set pieces which seemed to have been inspired by highlights of previous films including a ski chase (*On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*), a taciturn and physically imposing henchman (*Goldfinger*), a bruising fight in a train compartment (*From Russia with Love*), Bond’s modified sports car (*Goldfinger*) and an underwater battle (*Thunderball*). “*The Spy Who Loved Me* is basically an anthology of all the Bond films that have gone before,” avers John Brosnan. “It’s as if Broccoli and his

team deliberately set out to take a number of the more memorable set-pieces and remake them, even bigger and more spectacular” (1981, 256).

Yet to dismiss the later Bond films as wholly derivative is to underestimate the success of the “Bondian” production strategy. The Bond films have always sought to refresh and modernise the formula: this is most evident in the periodic recasting of the lead role and in the nature of their conspiracy plots which respond to changing political and technological landscapes. The first four films – *Dr. No*, *From Russia with Love*, *Goldfinger*, *Thunderball* – were all recognisable as adaptations of the books, though Fleming’s Cold War villains were replaced by the international criminal syndicate SPECTRE as part of a strategy to modernise the films in response to changing geopolitical circumstances in the 1960s (Black 2001, 93). *You Only Live Twice* was the first film to use no more than the title and characters of Fleming’s book, and, although *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* (1969) maintained the essence of the original story, including its downbeat conclusion as Bond’s new wife is murdered by his arch enemy Blofeld, the films thereafter became further and further removed from the books. The promotional materials for *Moonraker* (1979) demonstrate how far the films had detached themselves from the books, asking rhetorically “who today would be satisfied with such an unambitious piece of villainy as a nuclear bomb hitting London?”⁴ The film instead features an ideological megalomaniac who attempts to wipe out the entire human race with nerve gas. Its outer-space subject was partly a response to the success of *Star Wars*, and partly a means of maintaining the Bond films at the cutting edge of technological innovation: the US Space Shuttle made its first orbital flight in 1981, but James Bond had got there two years earlier.

REBOOTING BOND: THE DANIEL CRAIG FILMS

While the casting of a new James Bond always involves a change of emphasis for the films (see Stephanie Jones’ article in this issue), *Casino Royale* (2006) marked the first thoroughgoing “reboot” of the Bond series since it had begun in 1962. A “reboot” may be defined loosely as a process whereby a series or franchise is entirely reinvented to the extent of disregarding all established continuity and back-story. This had not been done before with the Bond series: *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, for example, which introduced a new Bond in the person of George Lazenby, nevertheless maintained continuity with the previous Sean Connery films, while both the Roger Moore and Timothy Dalton films included references

4 From an undated press release for *Moonraker* on the digitised press clippings for the film held by the British Film Institute Reuben Library, London.

to the death of Bond's wife in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. Pierce Brosnan's films had introduced a new "M" played by Judi Dench – part of a strategy to re-configure the gender politics of the films at a time when Bond was widely regarded as something of "a sexist, misogynist dinosaur" – though it was clear that this was still meant to be the same James Bond as before. However, this changed with *Casino Royale*, which presented not only a new star (Daniel Craig) but also an entirely new James Bond who has only recently been accorded his Double-O status: the short pre-title sequence of *Casino Royale* – a low-key monochrome section shot in the style of film noir – shows Bond making his first two "kills" that earn his promotion to the Double-O section.

On the face of it the decision to reboot Bond in *Casino Royale* might seem unusual: it is a strategy usually applied either when a series is ailing at the box office or when there has been a long hiatus since the previous film. Pierce Brosnan's last Bond film, *Die Another Day*, had been his most successful at the box office (\$432 million worldwide gross). However, there was a view within the Bond production team that the CGI-heavy *Die Another Day* had tipped the balance too far towards cartoonish spectacle and excess. According to co-producer Michael G. Wilson: "Even though the last film was the most commercially successful, I think we felt we were getting away from our roots, which is what made Bond so special. And that's what we were trying to find here – our basic Bond" (Landesman 2006, 13). The fact that the Bond producers had recently acquired the rights to the one Ian Fleming title they had not owned – there had previously been television (1954) and film (1967) versions of *Casino Royale* outside the Eon series – provided an ideal opportunity for rebooting the series: *Casino Royale* was the first Bond novel and it allowed the producers to make an origin story – a strategy that was popular in other franchise reboots around the same time, notably *Batman Begins* (2005). As Robert Wade, who wrote the first draft of *Casino Royale* in collaboration with his regular scriptwriting partner Neil Purvis, explained: "The book is the story of what actually forges James Bond as a secret agent. There is a James Bond that everyone knows, but it would be nice just once to show he got there" ("The Bond Supremacy" 2005, 8).

The popular and critical reception of *Casino Royale* suggests that the reboot strategy was wholly successful. Its worldwide box-office gross topped \$600 million – making it more successful than rival action franchises such as the Jason Bourne films – and the reviews were among the best ever seen for a Bond movie. In particular critics seem to have appreciated the greater depth to characterisation in *Casino Royale*. Charlie Higson – author of the acclaimed series of "Young

Bond” adventures commissioned by the Fleming estate – found “a greater depth to the movie and to the central character” (2006, 29). For Derek Malcolm, only an occasional Bond fan in the past, “Craig’s Bond helps propel Martin Campbell’s film into the realm of a serious thriller” (2006, 34). One of the few dissenters was Cosmo Landesman, who felt that “*Casino Royale* is the same old tosh the producers of the Bond franchise have been serving up since the glory days of the 1960s” (2006, 11).

Quantum of Solace (2008) continued the reboot narrative in so far as it was a direct sequel to *Casino Royale*: its plot – for the first time in the Bond series – picks up immediately where the previous film finishes, Bond’s grief over Vesper Lynd’s death is carried forward, and there is a recurring villain in the form of Mr. White.⁵ It would be fair to say that *Quantum of Solace* is a less satisfying film than *Casino Royale*: the script contains too many loose ends (even by the standards of a Bond movie) that was due in large measure to the effect of a writers’ strike. Its critical reception was mixed – the consensus was that the film was a “mess” and the elliptical editing of the action sequences was found by many critics to be disorienting – though its box-office returns (worldwide grosses of \$586 million) were only slightly below the level of its predecessor. In retrospect *Quantum of Solace* seems more significant in the evolution of the Bond formula than it did at the time: it is best understood as the conclusion of a “story arc” that began in *Casino Royale* rather than as a stand-alone film in its own right.

The critical and popular reputation of Bond was restored by the success of *Skyfall* (2012), which became the most successful film in the series since the 1960s. *Skyfall* stands apart from the narrative arc of the previous two films – there is no mention of the “Quantum” organisation, for example – and reintroduces certain elements of the “classic” Bond films, including the characters of gadget-master “Q” and Miss Money Penny, who had been absent from the previous two films. Its narrative also sees the transition from one “M” (Judi Dench) to another (Ralph Fiennes) – the latter assuming residence of the traditional wood-panelled office associated with the old “M” played by Bernard Lee (from *Dr. No* to *Moonraker*) and Robert Brown (*Octopussy* to *Licence To Kill*). In terms of its relationship to the source texts, *Skyfall* represents a half-way house between *Casino Royale*, which had used a large part of Fleming’s plot updated for the early twenty-first century, and *Quantum of Solace*, which bore no relation to the short

5 It had been intended that *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971) would pick up immediately following Tracy’s death at the end of *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, though George Lazenby’s decision not to accept a contract for further Bond films put paid to that idea.

story from which it borrowed its title. *Skyfall* uses aspects of both the novels *You Only Live Twice* (Bond's apparent death on a mission and "M" writing his obituary) and *The Man with the Golden Gun* (his "resurrection" and assignment to a mission that is supposed to redeem his reputation) as well as some visual and narrative references to Bond's childhood that are drawn from Fleming. At the same time, however, there are also references to the legacy of the Bond films that problematise the continuity of the rebooted narrative: Craig's Bond has the same Aston Martin DB5 as Connery's Bond in *Goldfinger*.

Skyfall grossed \$1.1 billion worldwide – at the time the fourteenth most successful film in cinema history unadjusted for inflation – and the critical reception was as positive as it had been for *Casino Royale*. The greater-than-expected success of *Skyfall* may be attributed to a combination of unique circumstances. Not only did it mark the fiftieth anniversary of Bond in the cinema but 2012 was also the year of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II and the London Olympic Games – events which both became a focus for the popular celebration of "Britishness".⁶ The opening ceremony of the Olympics had featured Daniel Craig's Bond escorting the Queen to the Olympic stadium, while another segment had Kenneth Branagh as Isambard Kingdom Brunel reciting the same passage from Tennyson's *Ulysses* ("We are not now that power that once moved earth and heaven...") that Dench's "M" quotes in *Skyfall*. At the same time, however, *Skyfall* was bound by the extent of its difference from the usual Bond formula to be a one-off: in particular the more personalised nature of the conspiracy stands apart from previous films.

REMAKING THE "BONDIAN": THE PRODUCTION AND RECEPTION OF *SPECTRE*

When it was confirmed at a media conference at Bond's spiritual home of Pinewood Studios on 3 December 2014 that the title of the film hitherto known as "Bond 24" would be *Spectre*, the announcement triggered much speculation about the forthcoming film. The word has long been part of the Bond mythology. SPECTRE – the acronym stands for Special Executive for Counterintelligence, Terrorism, Revenge, and Extortion – was originally invented as the antagonist of a film project that Fleming worked on with producer Kevin McClory and

6 It may only be coincidental but it is nevertheless symbolic that key moments in Bond's history as a fictional character have coincided with landmarks in the reign of Elizabeth II. The first novel, *Casino Royale*, was published in the Coronation year of 1953, and there were also Bond movies coinciding with the Silver Jubilee in 1977 (*The Spy Who Loved Me*) and Golden Jubilee in 2002 (*Die Another Day*).

screenwriter Jack Whittingham in 1959 (Sellers 2007, 22-3). The film was announced to the trade press as *James Bond of the Secret Service* (*Kinematograph Weekly* 1959, 21). In the end, the project was aborted when McClory was unable to raise the necessary finance, but Fleming used the plot and characters for his ninth Bond book, *Thunderball*, published in 1961, though without acknowledging his collaborators. McClory and Whittingham subsequently sued Fleming at the High Court in London: the court found in the plaintiffs' favour and later editions of *Thunderball* were obliged to state that it was "based on a screen treatment by Kevin McClory, Jack Whittingham and the author" (Lycett 1995, 432). Broccoli and Saltzman had intended to film *Thunderball* as the first James Bond film but the ongoing legal case caused them to turn to *Dr. No* instead. McClory was credited as producer of *Thunderball* (1965) – the actual extent of his contribution is disputed – while Eon licensed the rights to use SPECTRE and its head Ernst Stavro Blofeld for another ten years. Following *Thunderball*, Blofeld appeared in the next three films before disappearing from the series in the 1970s.⁷ McClory exercised his right to remake *Thunderball* as *Never Say Never Again* (1983), for which Sean Connery returned as Bond. In 2013 Eon Productions reacquired the right to use both SPECTRE and the character of Blofeld (Vejvoda 2013, n.pag.). It was widely speculated that Blofeld would return in the next Bond film: but how would the reintroduction of Bond's arch enemy from the "classic" Bond films be done in the rebooted franchise?

The success of *Skyfall* meant that the bar was set high for *Spectre*. Sam Mendes, who had originally said he did not want to direct a second Bond picture, was persuaded to return. John Logan, who had performed script revisions for *Skyfall*, wrote the first draft, which was subsequently revised by Neil Purvis and Robert Wade, the experienced Bond writers who had been involved with every film since *The World Is Not Enough*, with Jez Butterworth brought in to "polish" the final draft. Other members of the *Skyfall* production team who carried over onto *Spectre* were production designer Dennis Gassner, main title designer Daniel Kleinman, and composer Thomas Newman, while Hoyte van Hoytema replaced Roger Deakins as director of photography. To this extent the production of *Spectre* was consistent with the Bond series as a whole which historically has em-

7 It had been planned to reintroduce SPECTRE in *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) but this was blocked by McClory's lawyers. There are traces of the SPECTRE formula in the shooting script such as henchman Sandor referring to Stromberg as "Number One" – the designation used for Blofeld in the films. See the British Film Institute Reuben Library Unpublished Scripts Collection S4498: *The Spy Who Loved Me*, Revised Final Shooting Script, 23 August 1976.

ployed the same creative personnel many times over, including title designer Maurice Binder (fourteen films), screenwriter Richard Maibaum (thirteen), composer John Barry (twelve), cinematographer Ted Moore (seven) and production designers Peter Lamont (nine) and Ken Adam (seven). Also consistent with the “Bondian” production ideology was the idea that *Spectre* needed to surpass *Skyfall* in size and scope. According to Mendes: “*Spectre* is a bigger movie than *Skyfall*. It’s shot in more places [...] It’s been an enormous undertaking” (quoted in Lott-Lavigna 2015, n.pag.). This was also evident in the film’s budget, which at a reported \$250 million was the highest to date for a Bond picture.

Yet the production of *Spectre* was beset by problems, especially over the development of the script, which became public knowledge following the “Sonyleaks” episode in November 2014. A series of leaked emails revealed not only that there were creative differences between the different partners involved in making the film – Eon as producer and co-owner of the Bond franchise, MGM as the financing studio, and Sony Pictures as the international distributor – but also that there was much uncertainty about the type of Bond film that *Spectre* should be. John Logan’s original story outline of October 2013 suggested that it would be a “last mission” for Bond – perhaps intended to conclude the story arc begun with *Casino Royale* – and that Blofeld would be the villain in a plot involving “bio-espionage”. However, Hannah Minghella (Sony) felt that the conspiracy plot was not sufficiently developed, asking “what was Blofeld’s big plan? Blowing up the Nato event and causing the blackout doesn’t seem that much worse than prior villain plots [...] He has to be a serious threat in this movie – with a big enough plan for Bond to thwart – to help support his uber villain status” (quoted in Johnson 2015, n.pag.). This would suggest that Sony were angling for a return to the sort of super-villain world-domination plots that had featured in the Bond films of the 1960s – a narrative that Eon had sought to distance itself from since *Casino Royale*. It seems to have been decided from the outset that *Spectre* would partially “retcon” the three previous Daniel Craig films by revealing that Blofeld had been the unseen criminal mastermind behind Le Chiffre (*Casino Royale*), Dominic Greene (*Quantum of Solace*) and Silva (*Skyfall*). Minghella’s colleague Doug Belgrand was sceptical of this device: “The idea that Blofeld was involved with the plots and villains of each of the last 3 movies is interesting...right now it feels like a bit of a stretch. John will have to pay careful attention to connecting the dots in a strong way for this to be truly convincing” (ibid.)

Logan delivered a full first draft in March 2014 but there was evidently tension within the production team. According to co-producer Barbara Broccoli: “Sam and John have agreed to this under duress and we have all discussed major changes” (ibid.). In particular there seems to have been disagreement over whether Blofeld should be a principal antagonist in his own right or merely a pseudonym for a different character. At one point it was even suggested that Blofeld might be a woman. This idea was scotched by MGM’s Jonathan Glickman: “Blofeld as a woman is idiotic unless Meryl Streep does it. Doesn’t even make sense in any world of reality – that’s a tail wagging the dog here” (ibid.). Another idea that persisted was that Blofeld had a mole inside MI6: in early drafts of the script this turned out to be Bill Tanner, the chief of staff, played by Rory Kinnear in *Quantum of Solace* and *Skyfall*. “Love the idea that there is a mole inside MI-6 and it turns out to be Tanner”, wrote Belgrand (ibid.). This suggestion reveals how little understanding some studio executives had of the Bond genre: in the books Tanner is Bond’s “best friend” in the secret service. MGM’s Tabitha Strick even went so far as to suggest that “M” might be made into a villain:

Can we give M more agency throughout the movie so that we are left wondering whether M is secretly a bad guy? We liked the idea from previous conversations that M’s activities caused suspicion and while we don’t want him to be Blofeld, if possible can we blur the lines a bit so that it’s not clear whether he’s a good guy or a bad guy? (ibid.)

Again this reveals a complete lack of understanding, or even basic knowledge, of the source texts. In Fleming’s books – and in all the previous films – “M” is the authority figure who commands Bond’s loyalty without question: to undermine that authority would be a radical alteration of the politics of Bond.⁸

The first full shooting script of 17 October 2014 is recognisable as the blueprint of the finished film, though there are some significant differences, especially to the final act. In this script Blofeld’s name is never mentioned: the villain is called Stockmann and turns out to be the son of Hannes Oberhauser, a character mentioned in Fleming’s short story “Octopussy” who had been murdered by Major Smythe. In the script Oberhauser has become the orphan Bond’s adoptive father whose son has grown up harbouring a pathological hatred for Bond as he

8 The device of the head of the secret service being revealed as part of the villain’s conspiracy was used in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2015), Matthew Vaughan’s film of Gavin Millar’s graphic novel *The Secret Service*.

believes that his father had favoured the other boy. Nevertheless there are several references in the script – including Stockmann having a white Persian cat (a visual reference to the Bond films of the 1960s) and a henchwoman called Irma (Irma Bunt of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*) – which hint strongly that the character is Blofeld. The idea of either Tanner or “M” being the mole has been dropped: this role is transferred to the character of “C” (Bruce – in the film Max – Denbigh) who is head of the new Centre for National Security. Otherwise the script is a mixture of new and traditional “Bondian” elements. On the one hand it develops the themes of *Skyfall*, especially in its exploration of Bond’s childhood. On the other hand, however, it also includes clear references to the “classic” Bond films including the *Spectre* board meeting (*Thunderball*) and the extended sequence where Stockmann entertains Bond and Madeleine to dinner while threatening them with torture (a motif from several previous Bond films including *Dr. No* and *Octopussy*). Purvis and Wade also include a visual quotation from Carol Reed’s classic British thriller *The Third Man* (1949) in the script’s coda: “A black cat walks across an East End cobbled street. Rubs up against the leg of a figure dressed in black”. Bond’s final line to Madeleine (“We have all the time in the world”) recalls *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* except in so far as Madeleine, unlike Tracy, lives (“Untitled B24”).

Even at this late stage doubts persisted about the script. For Hannah Minghella: “The revelation that *Spectre* is run by Stockmann – a man still thwarted by the feelings of jealousy he has harboured since he was a young boy desperate for the affection his father showed to Bond – makes Stockmann feel like a petulant kid and somewhat disturbingly he links an incredible amount of death and destruction to Bond” (Johnson n.pag.). Sony’s Elizabeth Cantillon felt that Bond killing Stockmann with a single bullet to the head at the end of the film “seems brutal even for Bond” (ibid.). Jez Butterworth’s subsequent revisions of the shooting script made some cosmetic changes – Stockmann became Franz Oberhauser, for example, while the character of Irma has disappeared – but revised the final act to take some of these concerns on board. Oberhauser’s facial scarring caused by Bond’s exploding watch is another visual reference to “classic” Bond, recalling Donald Pleasence’s Blofeld in *You Only Live Twice*. Bond no longer kills Oberhauser but arrests him and throws his Walther PPK into the river (“Untitled Bond 24”). The finished film differs from the revised shooting script in so far as Oberhauser identifies himself as Ernst Stavro Blofeld (explaining this by saying that he has adopted his mother’s family name), it is “M” rather

than Bond who kills “C”, and Bond’s “We have all the time in the world” has been dropped.

Spectre was released in the United Kingdom on 26 October and in the United States on 6 November 2015. While not as spectacularly successful at the box office as *Skyfall*, it nevertheless grossed \$135 million in the United Kingdom, \$200 million in North America, and a total of \$881 million worldwide from its theatrical release (Fleming 2016, n.pag.). Unlike *Skyfall*, however, its critical reception was decidedly mixed. And one of the key issues for reviewers seems to have been its relationship to the Bond formula. British critics, for the most part, tended to see *Spectre* as a return to the style and formula of the “classic” Bond films. Peter Bradshaw, for example, welcomed the return of “a thoroughly English movie franchise” and described *Spectre* as “a terrifically exciting, spectacular, almost operatically delirious 007 adventure” (Bradshaw 2015, n.pag.). Mark Kermode felt that it was “bang on target in delivering what an audience wants from this seemingly indestructible franchise”, adding that Christoph Waltz’s Blofeld was “an old-school Bond villain, one of many throwback elements that make *Spectre* such fun” (Kermode 2015, n.pag.). Robbie Collins thought it “a swaggering show of confidence” and also liked the echoes of previous films: “No film series has been better at raiding its own mausoleum, and throughout *Spectre*, ghosts of Bond films past come gliding through the film, trailing tingles of nostalgic pleasure in their wake’ (Collins 2015, n.pag.). Among the “Bondian” elements that British critics particularly liked were the Oddjob-style henchman Mr. Hinx, the brutal close-quarters fight between Bond and Hinx on the train, Blofeld’s desert lair and the return of the iconic gun-barrel motif to its rightful place at the start of the film rather than being relegated to the closing credits as in *Casino Royale*, *Quantum of Solace*, and *Skyfall*.

However, most American reviewers were much less favourably inclined towards the film than their British colleagues: they tended to regard *Spectre* as a stale retread of the Bond formula without the same degree of psychological depth that had characterised *Skyfall*. Kenneth Turan felt that it was “exhausted and uninspired” and blamed the formulaic nature of the script: “[The] story itself is not convincing on its own terms, playing like a series of boxes (Bond asks for a Martini shaken not stirred) that need to be checked off and forgotten” (Turan 2015, n.pag.). Scott Mendelson predicted that “*Spectre* will bore the living daylights out of you while threatening to render James Bond an ultimately irrelevant relic of the past” (Mendelson 2015, n.pag.). And Matt Deitz found it “a weirdly patchy, often listless picture” that amounted to little more than a sequence of

“undistinguished chases and fights and quips patched together by exposition that’s half baked even by Bond standards” (Deitz 2015, n.pag.). In particular American critics seem to have seen *Spectre* as being undecided about what sort of Bond film it wanted to be: it was caught somewhere between the “broader and campier films that defined the Roger Moore era of the 007 franchise” and “the new world of exploiting continuity driven franchise filmmaking” with the consequence that it “unsuccessfully blends these two somewhat diametrically opposed elements while offering what plays like a dumbed-down and diluted remake of *Skyfall*” (Mendelson, n.pag.).

CONCLUSION

The divergent critical responses to *Spectre*, in contrast to its immediate predecessor *Skyfall*, are highly revealing about the nature of formula film-making in general and the place of the James Bond series in popular film culture in particular. On the one hand, as exemplified by the British critics, there is an identification with the familiar: *Spectre* was well received to some extent because it marked the return of some of the traditional “Bondian” elements that had been absent from the previous Daniel Craig films. On the other hand, as the American critical response demonstrates, there is also a sense of the formula becoming stale: and in this context *Spectre* suffered in comparison to its immediate predecessors in that it was not seen as being different enough from what had been done before. What the production history of *Spectre* also reveals is the extent to which these tensions were played out during the scripting process when there was evidently some uncertainty about what direction it should take. The desire to repeat the success of *Skyfall* while at the same time being different from its immediate predecessor seems to have pushed *Spectre* towards size and spectacle – a strategy consistent with the “Bondian” production ideology – and away from the greater psychological realism of the preceding films. For my own part, I welcomed this development, and also that *Spectre* had rediscovered something of the sense of fun that had rather been lacking from the series in recent years. And it was high time that Daniel Craig, an excellent Bond despite the initial misgivings about his casting, got the girl at the end.

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