

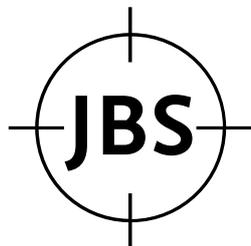
***Bond Girls: Body, Fashion and Gender*, by Monica Germanà**

(Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019, pp.264)

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Bond Girls: Body, Fashion and Gender by Monica Germanà reveals, through the history and language of clothing, new ways of understanding the women of James Bond. As fashion and the body are both literally and theoretically connected, Germanà's analysis draws in such embodied elements as race, class, nationality, beliefs around recuperative therapies, and even automobile use. Though academic work on Bond often treats Ian Fleming's novels and the EON Productions film series as discrete objects of study, *Bond Girls* develops a holistic reading of Bond across time and media. Likewise, rather than sequester each framework within its own section, each of the four chapters of *Bond Girls* is rich in complexities and considerations that drive home the intersectional natures of identity and representation. The result is a vivid understanding of Bond which makes room for the variety of spectatorship that the franchise has enjoyed for over half a century.

This is Germanà's second book and first on Bond, following extensive publication on clothing, body, and gender in literature and popular culture. Such a background has produced a perspective on Bond that is not beholden to canonical Bond studies texts, such as Umberto Eco's "Narrative Structures in Fleming"



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(1965) and Bennett and Woollacott's *Bond and Beyond* (1987), though both are cited. This troubles our own assumptions as Bond scholars; for example, Germanà's work is in sharp contrast to Eco's popular understanding of Bond as made up of formulaic binary oppositions. In response to James Chapman's understanding of women in Bond films as commodities, Germanà argues that "a close reading of fashion – and the structures of its consumption – encourages a more nuanced – and subversive – view of the Bond Girl continuum" (12). In Germanà's appraisal, it is ambiguity and uncertainty that mark the Bond franchise.

The first chapter, "Bond. James Bond': Masculinity and its Discontents", introduces Germanà's novel approaches. Though its subject, James Bond's masculinity, is well-trod territory, Germanà guides the reader through the cracks that fashion reveals in Bond's stoic English facade. The importance of fashion in Bond studies is asserted through the cultural crossroads of Ian Fleming's own interest in dress and the historical significance of the English suit during the post-war years. By traveling as far back in time as medieval knights, Germanà places Bond within a sartorial battleground for English male identity. He is revealed to be a Scottish-Swiss superhero with a deeply scarred, traumatised body, and whose "uneasiness about his performance of upper-class Englishness [...] reflects a deeper anxiety about national identity and class" (47). Though the English suit, in Germanà's words, "provided the fantasy of a coherent, unchanged and unchangeable identity" (60), the research and extensive quotations in *Bond Girls* ensures recognition of the messy cultural histories behind that fantasy. Indeed, the tense relationship between imperialism and Bond (both series and hero) can be more clearly understood through the semiotics of fashion.

After establishing the nuances of Bond as a "cross-gender lifestyle model" (13), Germanà and *Bond Girls* continue the excellent wave of scholarship revisiting the women of James Bond. Alongside Lisa Funnell's essential anthology *For His Eyes Only: The Women of James Bond* (2015) and the considerations of Tiffany Case in *The Many Facets of Diamonds Are Forever* (2019), edited by Oliver Buckton, women in academia have been breaking ground and pushing our scholarly understanding of Bond far beyond simple mid-century misogyny. In fact, Germanà opens her second chapter, "Dark Continents': Fashion, Foreignness and Femininity", by declaring that "James Bond is sexist. James Bond is racist [...]" (63) – that being fashion. Through the backgrounds, bodies, and style of Bond women, Germanà decodes a visual language of colonial resistance. Particular attention is given to the many responses to Orientalism and stereotyping through Miss Taro from the

novel *Dr. No* (1958), Sévérine and Wai Lin from the films *Skyfall* (2012) and *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997), and Kissy Suzuki from the novel *You Only Live Twice* (1964). The latter involves a considered history of the often-overlooked Ama community of Japan and the bold assertion that “[f]ar from embodying the Lotus Blossom [stereotype], the literary Kissy is a precursor of the empowered Asian woman, exemplified four decades later by the cinematic Wai Lin” (104).

This is not to suggest that Germanà is disregarding the Bond franchise’s often problematic racial and sexual politics. Instead, she elucidates the dark corners of Bond that are often shut down due to the sensitivity of their subject matter. As a particularly striking example, Germanà addresses the controversial passage of Fleming’s novel *Casino Royale* (1953), in which Bond, convalescing after his torture at the hands (or rather, carpet beater) of Le Chiffre, fantasises that “the conquest of [Vesper Lynd’s] body, because of the central privacy in her, would each time have the sweet tang of rape” (56). This passage becomes the starting point for a thoroughly researched history of virility in postwar rehabilitation practices and the relationships Bond and Vesper have to their bodies. Germanà explains that, in a challenge to usual assumptions of the male gaze, “[w]hat the scene emphasizes [...] is that the complex dynamics of human – rather than domesticated – sexual desire involve shifting patterns of mental and physical engagement, rather than binary male/female, active/passive patterns of mechanical behavior” (57).

The third chapter, “‘Cross-Dressing’: From the Field to the Boardroom”, continues to challenge assumptions about Bond Girls by rebuking the popular image of them as wearing nothing by skimpy lingerie and evening gowns. Like Bond’s scarred body, the women of Bond bear the marks of postwar modernity and efficiency through clothing that challenges gendered boundaries. Even the driving corset worn by Tilly Masterson in the novel *Goldfinger* (1959) is framed as athletic, rather than constraining: by citing a Victorian cyclist’s guide, Germanà explains that “the corset is regarded as a necessary undergarment to ensure safety and, consequently, enable, rather than hinder, female mobility” (122). The all-female communities led by Pussy Galore and Octopussy, as well as the “power dressing” of Tiffany Case and Judi Dench’s M, are shown to transgress male erotic fantasy and to reveal ambiguities in contemporary gender performance. Indeed, the final chapter, “Dressed to Kill: Power, Knowledge, Desire”, directly confronts the ways in which eroticism is often constructed in Bond alongside violence and death. The pinnacle of a book that is already provocative throughout, this chapter asserts that “Bond Girls and female villains twist the known paradigms of the

male gaze, restoring power to its fetishized object. Dead or alive, desired and desiring, rather than an assuaging strategy in support of the masculine ego, the unveiled phallicism of Bond female characters exposes the deep scars of Bond's wounded masculinity" (201).

Bond Girls: Body, Fashion and Gender is at once everything its title promises and far more. It is an elaborate yet clear and compellingly argued cultural history of identity, expressed through nearly every installment of one of the most important franchises in recent times. Scholars working in the field of Bond studies will find, here, a provocative and rewarding reconsideration of the series' place in the popular imagination. As Germanà writes, "a sartorial analysis of Bond Girls exposes their performance of femininity as an active challenge to sexist and racist ideologies", (7) a point which crucially makes space for Bond fans who are women, queer, and of colour. Feminists and cultural historians working beyond Bond will find in *Bond Girls* a powerful argument in favour of the complexities of culture as expressed through a single franchise. Each chapter contains worlds that could be spun off into their own book-length studies, ensuring that *Bond Girls: Body, Fashion and Gender* will remain an essential resource in the ever-growing field of Bond studies.