

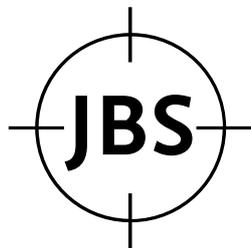
The Cultural Life of James Bond, **edited by Jaap Verheul**

(Amsterdam University Press, 2020, pp. 334)

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Arriving as *No Time To Die* continues to be delayed, *The Cultural Life of James Bond* serves as a timely reminder of the variety of ways in which Bond scholarship offers researchers unique perspectives on the franchise's impact on worldwide culture. *The Cultural Life of James Bond's* unique array of viewpoints should serve as an inspiration for scholars in the field, while simultaneously offering future researchers a number of alternative angles through which Bond can be interpreted. The text makes a conscious attempt to bring together perspectives from beyond the previous remit of Bond scholarship, though Jaap Verheul's introduction does review existing literature and identifies areas of prior investigation undertaken by Bond scholars (Bennett and Woollacott, 1987; Lindner, 2009). As Verheul states, the aim of his book is to identify the sustained increase in Bond criticism – with particular reference to Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott's "understanding of the James Bond phenomenon as a mobile signifier" (17).

The first section of the book pays tribute to the phenomenon's increasingly transnational configuration, while also tracing its historical origins to discern and deconstruct the conventional association of James Bond with imperial and masculinist "Britishness". The first chapter, James Chapman's "The Forgotten



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Bond”, undertakes the task of rehabilitating the 1954 CBS production of *Casino Royale* from the margins of Bond scholarship; Chapman does this by first identifying a series of “errors and myths” (27) related to the television episode before subsequently re-contextualising it, arguing that any analysis which locates a “one hour drama” (26) within the wider context of the Eon Productions’ Bond films will naturally be problematic. By establishing the contexts within which the 1954 *Casino Royale* was produced, Chapman provides a fascinating analysis of the Americanisation of Bond which takes place. As Chapman concludes: “[h]istorically it represents an alternative direction that Bond might have taken – as the other initiatives to launch Bond on television in the 1950s demonstrate – but in the event did not” (38).

The theme of recontextualisation continues in the following chapters by Mikolaj Kunicki and Ajay Gehlawat, who reposition analyses of the Bond phenomenon’s “global reach” (Kunicki, 41) towards Eastern Europe and Bollywood-centric contexts, respectively. Kunicki’s analysis is similar to Chapman’s in seeking to provide a productive reading of Eastern European analogs to the Bond films, while Gehlawat discusses the way by which the codes of action, melodrama, and Bollywood film are variously adhered to or removed within the Bond canon, with references to films such as *Agent Vinod* (1977/2012), *Don* (1978/2006), and *Don 2* (2011). The latter two chapters within this section – those of Melis Behlil et al. and Huw D. Jones and Andrew Higson – take broader approaches to analysing the Bond films in terms of their transnationality, with Behlil et al. focusing on the nature of the Bond films as “runaway production[s]” (81) – a “transnational, post-Fordist mode of film production in the 1960s” (84) that allowed both investment and risk to be spread across multiple countries. This analysis positions the filmic *Dr. No* as the beginning of “a peculiar exoticism; a colonial imagery of the Global South dreamed up, written, and produced in Britain at the twilight of Empire” (85). Behlil et al. then use this model to analyse the portrayals of The Grand Bazaar of Istanbul in *Skyfall* and the celebration of the Day of The Dead in Mexico City in *Spectre*. Jones and Higson also focus on transnationality, with a particular spotlight on the Daniel Craig-era films. Their analysis builds upon Chapman’s (2007) by identifying the key factors behind the franchise’s successful transnational appeal. The conclusion of the chapter argues for another way by which critical analyses of the Bond films can be resituated – in this case, away from a Britishness which focus group research has identified as compromised by “the use of fast-paced action and special effects, qualities many associate with American blockbusters” and “the fact that the Bond films are often dubbed into local [international] languages” (119).

The second section of the book provides multiple analyses of particular facets of the Bond character. The first chapter, Toby Miller's "Paradoxical Masculinity", synthesises Ernest Mandel (1984), Antonio Gramsci (1978), and R.W. Connell (1995) to highlight the difficulties in identifying a precise masculinity of the Bond franchise; Miller argues that

The series is definitely guilty as charged (and valorized) for its sexism, racism, imperialism and consumerism – but frequently in a chaotic manner that is more complex and contradictory than critical or welcoming accounts of a colonialist, snobbish, or phallic hero will allow. (131)

Miller applies this analysis to the portrayal of Bond by both Sean Connery and Pierce Brosnan, where Bond comes to represent "a weird mix of hyper-*bourgeois* individualist, technocrat and empty signifier" (ibid.). The following chapter by Moya Luckett focuses not on masculinity but femininity, rethinking "Bond Girls" as characters "framed as creatures of their time with limited capacity to progress and develop" (150). In their respective chapters, Lorrie Palmer and Anna Everett then bring together the two previous areas of discussion (transnationality and gender). For Palmer, Bond evidences a measure of "orientalism" and racial othering (183); for Everett, ethnicity is the key to interpreting the franchise – although this analysis is grounded in a slightly problematic reliance on contemporary news sources. What Everett offers, however, is a variety of possibilities for engaging with the Bond franchise on a number of race-related levels, acknowledging "James Bond's complicated cinematic treatment of race and otherness, white male privilege and toxic masculinity, Anglo-American racial supremacy and cool Britishness" (192). Everett's chapter evidences the very real need for future discussion of many of these issues, but its basis in popular culture sources evidences a concomitant need for further theoretical development. The proceeding chapter by Seung-hoon Jeong illustrates the potential for a fruitful comparison of the Bond and Bourne franchises, but the generalisations on representations of Bond's past in *Skyfall* make for complicated claims that are inventive but do not always feel fully supported. In general, both Everett and Jeong's chapters read as though the Bond franchise is being marshalled to support a particular theories rather than the other way round.

The third and final section of the text offers a variety of surgically-specific approaches to the trans-medial nature of the franchise. Christopher Holliday's chapter offers a fascinating interpretation of the potential interactions between

Bond and art cinema traditions, identifying “often overlooked points of intersection” between the two. Holliday’s conclusions are bold – that an intersectional analysis “offers the study of British national cinema rather than a false dawn” (244) – but they are sufficiently grounded in a broader analysis of British cinema. Similarly, Jan-Christopher Horak’s chapter on the films’ title sequences concludes that these sequences crucially important in that they “are successful as series branding” (266), even through the transition from analog to digital methods of production. Further specificity is offered in the next chapter by Meenasarani Linde Murugan, who discusses Shirley Bassey (singer of three James Bond title songs) within the context of “Black cultural production” and the wider context of “both empire and patriarchy” (271). In the following chapter, Joyce Goggin identifies global casino culture as one of many important signifiers of Bond, noting with particular reference to *Skyfall* that the Bond canon employs its casino settings “to communicate ‘nowness’ [...] by negotiating its relationship with the past and the future from its situation in the present” (304). References to casino culture, Goggin argues, links Fleming’s original conception to modern iterations of the character. The final chapter in this section is an analysis of the “Adaptive Fidelity and Fictional Coherence in the Videogame Adaptations of *Goldeneye*”. As with other chapters in this section, the analysis benefits from specificity, imbriating a discussion of transmediality, production context, and – in relation to the 2016 remake of the 1997 *Goldeneye* video game adaptation – nostalgia. Ian Bryce Jones and Chris Carloy argue that the key to the video game’s successful adaptation is primarily “fictional coherence”; the way in which the games offer a “successful eviction of the James Bond character and universe” (312).

Overall, the strengths of *The Cultural Life of James Bond* fall within two defined areas. In the first case, the variety of perspectives offered by the collection demonstrates the possibilities for a wider scope in analysing the Bond franchise; in the second, the specificity demonstrated by a number of the chapters within the collection showcases the ability of dedicated scholars to utilise the same franchise as a fulcrum for discussion of highly precise and individuated enquiry. As such, *The Cultural Life of James Bond* offers not only a variety of specialised perspectives but should also spur scholars on in evidencing the potential for future specialised research.

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