

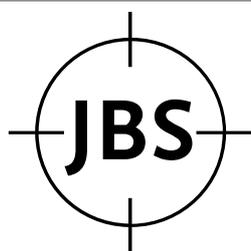
James Bond Studies

Evolutions of a Critical Field

IAN KINANE

From the twelve completed novels and two short story collections originally published by Ian Fleming between 1953 and 1966, the James Bond franchise has seen a near exponential growth within popular consciousness in the historical significance, political implications, and cultural influence of its central figure. Having spawned countless editions, adaptations, continuations, parodies, reissues, spin-offs, re-workings, and re-releases, Fleming's most memorable creative venture has – in the sixty four years since its inception – garnered somewhat of its own commercial mythology, and has been transformed into a virtually limitless and self-sustaining industry.

Even prior to Fleming's death in 1964, James Bond had already made the transition to both the small screen (in a sixty minute televised adaptation of *Casino Royale* [1953]) and onto the radio (in a one-off adaptation of *Moonraker* [1955]), before being immortalised in the guise of Sean Connery in the first of Eon Productions' Bond films – a relatively faithful adaptation of Fleming's 1958 novel, *Dr. No*. The continuing commercial success of the Eon film series need not be elaborated on here, but in addition to the official series, two non Eon-produced Bond films have been made: the 1967 spoof of *Casino Royale* as well as the 1983 *Thunderball* remake, *Never Say Never Again*. To date, a further ten authors have penned continuation Bond novels – including Kingsley Amis, whose novel



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Colonel Sun (1968) was the first of Bond's adventures to be released following Fleming's death. Amis was followed by Christopher Wood (who also wrote the screenplays for the films *The Spy Who Loved Me* [1977] and *Moonraker* [1979], on which his novelisations were based); John Gardner (who wrote a staggering sixteen further Bond adventures, including novelisations of the films *Licence to Kill* [1989] and *GoldenEye* [1995]); and Raymond Benson (who wrote a further six original novels). As Bond moved into the twenty-first century, high-profile writers such as Sebastian Faulks, Jeffrey Deaver, William Boyd, and Anthony Horowitz each penned a continuation novel, while Charlie Higson and Steve Cole have been responsible for inspiring the next generation of Bond fans with their "Young Bond" series of novels.

Beyond both literature and film, the figure of James Bond has continued to prove his adaptability across various different media, solidifying Fleming's popular reputation and drawing in an inclusive fan base. From the *Daily Mail* and *Sunday Express* comic strips in the 1950s, the Bond character has been reproduced in a number of graphic art forms – ranging from comic book adaptations of the film's screenplays and serialised cartoons (such as United Artists' *James Bond Jr.*) to graphic novel reissues of the "Young Bond" stories. Additionally, UK BBC radio has produced a number of adaptations of Fleming's novels, with all-stars casts; innumerable behind-the-scenes documentaries and making-of featurettes have been produced for television and DVD home movie release; the film's main title theme songs have traditionally been recorded by de rigueur musical artists and released to widespread commercial acclaim; and various computer platform consoles, from PlayStation to Nintendo, have also produced and developed interactive first- or third-person video games (either adapted from one of the Eon films or from an original story). Moreover, in terms of Bond's wider cultural significance, the franchise has inspired a large number of film and television projects that have their roots in Fleming's spy hero – from television series such as *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *I Spy*, *Remington Steel* (NBC), *Mission: Impossible*, *Get Smart* (CBS), *The Saint*, and *The Avengers* (ITV), to films such as the Derek Flint series, the Jack Ryan series, the *Kingsman* series, the *Taken* series, the *Bourne* series, and the overt parody of the Austin Power series.

Indeed, so far-reaching is Bond's popular cultural appeal that a cursory search of the internet reveals the extent to which the Bond phenomenon is firmly rooted in online fandom. From fan websites such as The James Bond International Fan Club (www.007.info) to The James Bond Dossier (www.thejamesbondossier.com); from MI6: The Home of James Bond 007 (www.mi6-hq.com)

to CommanderBond.net; and from jamesbondlifestyle.com to The Spy Command (www.hmssweblog.wordpress.com), it is evident that, rather than being, in particular, a figure that is representative of mid-twentieth century, post-Second World War social anxieties, James Bond has comfortably entered the twenty-first century and has become a vehicle through which more modern and contemporary cultural concerns are addressed. These concerns range from broad social and historical issues (masculinity and gender politics, racial politics, technological modernity) to more specific geopolitical issues (the pervasive influence of the media in *Tomorrow Never Dies* [1997], the oil crisis in *The World is Not Enough* [1999], and the threat of government surveillance in *Spectre* [2015], for example). What is also apparent from Bond's successful assimilation into the hyper communication age is the ardent desire of a large vocal fandom to *talk about* James Bond, and to debate endlessly the many facets of Fleming's literary works and the filmic universe. James Bond is not merely an object of Fleming's time, neither a "relic of the Cold War" nor a "dinosaur" (*GoldenEye* 1995); rather, this vocal fandom, many of whom populate the aforementioned forums, suggests that James Bond is an immanent cultural force, something live and ever-present – a powerful discursive conduit through which an understanding of late-twentieth century and contemporary socio-political currents may be channelled. Much fan discussion on these forums is preoccupied with trivial debates over who the best Bond actor is or which of the films is considered the best, and the commentary that is offered of the films (and the Bond universe, in general) is often lacking in structure or critical rigour. Nevertheless, the many online platforms that exist to serve the Bond fan community suggests the need for a more considered discursive approach not only to Ian Fleming's works and the Bond novels and films, but to the industry that has grown up around the character of James Bond – including the fandom itself.

In their introduction to the 2005 collection, *Ian Fleming and James Bond: The Cultural Politics of 007*, Comentale et al. defend the cultural study of Bond as little more than a "glorified form of fandom" (xviii). While it is probably true that a lot of academic interest in James Bond and Fleming, more broadly, derives from a combination of personal appreciation and nostalgia for the series, the small but growing number of scholars who have turned their attention to the study of James Bond and the related franchise have done so not merely because they enjoy writing and speaking about James Bond, but because the Bond franchise provides a particular framework through which scholars may observe and address shifts that have occurred in British and international cultural politics from

the post-war period through to the millennium and the immediate post-millennial period. James Bond Studies brings an academic rigour to the cultural discourse surrounding James Bond, offering an array of considered approaches to a popular cultural icon whose ubiquity within the mainstream has received relatively fractional critical attention.

Going back, the first major critical study of James Bond was Kingsley Amis's *The James Bond Dossier*, which was written in 1965 – just after Fleming's death and during the height of sixties' "Bondmania". A poet, novelist, and established literary critic, Amis's academic critique of Fleming and Bond steered the course of contemporary scholarship in this field, as Amis was one of the first literary writers to treat Fleming's novels and short stories with a degree of academic seriousness. Amis's book was also an early defence of genre fiction, in general, which argued that popular literature and the likes of Fleming should be read on their own terms, and not as inferior foils to more canonical literature. Following quickly on Amis's heels, Umberto Eco's oft-cited structuralist approach to Fleming's narratives appeared in *Il Caso Bond (The Bond Affair)*, a collection of essays edited by Eco and Oreste Del Buono in 1966. Eco's analysis focuses largely on certain oppositional relationships within Fleming's stories (for example, Bond and the villain; Bond and M) that have provided the later film series with its trademark formulaic structure (e.g. M briefs Bond on his assignment; Q briefs Bond on his latest consignment of gadgetry; Bond confronts the villain; Bond gets the girls, and so on). Further to Eco, Tony Bennett and Janet Woolcott's *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero* (1987) examines the political overtones (and undertones) of the Bond figure, tracing the development of Fleming's novels alongside dawning political concerns and global anxieties from the mid twentieth century onwards (ranging from post-war prosperity to Britain's decolonisation of many of its former territories). Raymond Benson's *The James Bond Bedside Companion* (1984) was the first of the Bond encyclopaedias to detail the broad extent of Fleming's heritage, and Benson provides analyses not only of Fleming's original works and their film adaptations, but also of the continuation novels by Kingsley Amis and John Gardner. Benson's initial consideration of the Amis and Gardner Bond novels is an important juncture in both the cultural economics of Fleming's creation and the development of critical scholarly approaches to James Bond: James Bond had survived the death of his creator and had continued to prove relevant – and commercially viable – in a post-Fleming world. Benson's *Companion* showcases the wide-ranging commercial appeal of the seemingly endless Bond merchandise and film memorabilia as well as

the critical and scholarly appeal of the continuation novels, demonstrating that James Bond (and the scope of academic inquiry into James Bond) is neither to be confined to the pages of Fleming's novels nor to the cinema screen.

Towards the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the new millennium, several further important works of Bond scholarship were produced that provided timely interventions in a (still) relatively fledgling field of study. James Chapman's *Licence to Thrill: A Cultural History of the James Bond Films* (1999) and Jeremy Black's *The Politics of James Bond* (2001) both expanded the study of James Bond beyond the literary and filmic texts, situating Bond within the socio-political concerns of post-imperial Britain and Anglo-American relations. Both works moved away from the close structuralist analysis of Bond to be found in Eco towards an understanding of the ways in which the assorted texts and signs of Bond pertained to British (and global) political, social, and cultural history. In Chapman and Black, James Bond is considered not so much a cinematic icon as he is a legitimate and authorised figure in and of cultural history; it is through Bond, these works assert, that much of the socio-political and cultural concerns of post-war Britain can be identified, assessed, and analysed in original ways.

By the turn of the century, the historical legacy of Fleming's creation – forged largely through the sheer longevity of the film series – suggested that the Bond franchise was now a ready and suitable frame through which to view certain developments in cultural attitudes and trends from the 1950s and 1960s onwards (such as the role that women played in the cultural and social polis; or the treatment of sex and sexuality on the cinema screen; or changing racialist assumptions). Christoph Lindner's collection, *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader* (2003, 2nd ed. 2009) was one of the first major works to offer a panoply of multidisciplinary critical approaches to the study of James Bond. The collection emphasises the social, historical, and political contexts of Fleming's novels and the Bond films, and draws together a net of critical and theoretical apparatuses used to explore the significance of Bond across the franchise's history – from narratological approaches to Fleming's novels to colonial and postcolonial considerations of Bond's Britishness; and from political concerns surrounding Bond's technological habits to socio-cultural discussions of Bond's penis. Furthermore, published in 2006 (directly between the first and second editions of Lindner's book), Glenn Yeffeth's edited collection – entitled *James Bond in the Twenty-first Century: Why We Still Need 007* – seemed (rightly) to issue an overt rallying cry. Though Yeffeth's title strongly suggests the need for a considered defence of James Bond's relevance in the (post)modern world, the collection itself

falls short of mounting such a defence. It should probably be noted that, by the mid-2000s, when Yeffeth published this collection, the Bond film franchise had descended into extreme self-parody with 2002's *Die Another Day* (Pierce Brosnan's final Bond film and a much-maligned, gadget-laden, sci-fi affair). In spite of the undoubted financial success of Brosnan's tenure (his four films grossed in excess of one billion dollars (Nash 2017, n.pag)), the critical respectability of the films had long been waning. It is, perhaps, little wonder that, at this time, even some of the most steadfast defenders of Bond's critical merit were hard pushed to marshal public opinion.

From the mid-2000s onwards, two occurrences in particular marked the contemporary resurgence of a dedicated James Bond scholarship. The first was the decision by Eon Productions to reboot the official film series: Daniel Craig replaced Pierce Brosnan as Bond in *Casino Royale* (2006), and the production opted to return to Bond's origins in Fleming's first novel, crafting a grittier, harder character. From about the same time, there was a spike in James Bond scholarship, as critical attention for the rebooted franchise mounted. Some of the academic works that followed (or coincided with) *Casino Royale*'s release include Edward P. Comentale, Stephen Watt, and Skip Willman's *Ian Fleming and James Bond: The Cultural Politics of James Bond* (2005); James B. South and Jacob Held's *James Bond and Philosophy: Questions are Forever* (2006); Christoph Lindner's *Revisiting 007: James Bond and Casino Royale* (2009); Robert G. Weiner, B. Lynn Whitfield, and Jack Becker's *James Bond in World and Popular Culture: The Films are Not Enough* (2010); and second editions of both Chapman's *Licence to Thrill* (2007) and Lindner's *The James Bond Phenomenon* (2009). The "second wave" in post-millennial Bond scholarship, which was also marked by a fervent interest in the critical discourses surrounding James Bond, coincided with the release of *Skyfall* in 2012. Coming off the back of the London 2012 Olympics (the opening ceremony of which included a scene in which Daniel Craig's Bond and Queen Elizabeth II appeared to parachute down from a helicopter to the Olympic stadium), national and international interest in James Bond had reached fever pitch. That 2012 also marked the Queen's Diamond Jubilee year, as well as the fifty-year anniversary of the Bond film franchise, meant that British national pride (and, indeed, international focus on all things British) was running high. The sheer wealth of scholarly and critical material on Bond that was published during this period speaks a great deal, once again, to the enduring mythos of Fleming's creation, and – perhaps, even more so – to the equally enduring impetus to *speak about* and *speak back to* Bond. A brief sample of the academic material produced around this time

illustrates clearly the increasing critical interest in James Bond as an academic subject from a number of diverse and far-reaching disciplinary fields: Robert A. Caplen's *Shaken and Stirred: The Feminism of James Bond* (2010, 2nd edition 2012); Jon Burlingame's *The Music of James Bond* (2012, 2nd edition 2014); Daniel Ferreras Savoye's *The Signs of James Bond: Semiotic Explorations in the World of 007* (2013); Thomas A. Christie's *The James Bond Movies of the 1980s* (2013); Michelle Brittany's *James Bond and Popular Culture: Essays on the Influence of the Fictional Superspy* (2014); Lisa Funnell's *For His Eyes Only: The Women of James Bond* (2015); Claire Hines' *Fan Phenomena: James Bond* (2015) Adrian Daub and Charles Kronengold's *The James Bond Songs: Anthems of Late Capitalism* (2015); Lisa Funnell and Klaus Dodds' *Geographies, Gender, and Geopolitics of James Bond* (2017); as well as Hines' forthcoming monograph on *The Playboy Bond: 007, Ian Fleming, and Playboy Magazine* (Manchester University Press) and Monica Germana's forthcoming monograph on *Bond Girls: Body, Dress, Gender* (Bloomsbury).

Given the serious scholarly attention that Daniel Craig's four Bond films alone continue to receive, it is evident that the James Bond franchise has begun somewhat of a cultural shift towards critical respectability. While no less explicitly commercial, the film franchise has opted for higher aesthetic (or more "arty") production values. The appointment of auteur director Sam Mendes to the helm of both *Skyfall* and its immediate successor, *Spectre*, as well as the attraction of high-profile, international cinematographers such as Roger Deakins and Hoyte van Hoytema to these films, respectively, suggests that this ethos is one that is favoured by Eon Productions – whose gamble has not only been met with critical but also commercial success (between them, *Skyfall* and *Spectre* grossed just under two billion dollars worldwide (Nash, n.pag)). In a sense, the film franchise's shift in focus has precipitated the need for a more sophisticated engagement with James Bond Studies. A growing number of scholars working in various disciplinary fields have come to recognise the potential of the Bond franchise as a conceptual framework, and the heightened artistry of the latest films – across all areas of production – has been met with a critical response that has augmented the level of discursive engagement with the Bond phenomena overall – including Fleming's original works and the franchise's associated media. James Bond Studies has evolved out of the growing need for a sustained critical and discursive framework by which to examine Ian Fleming and James Bond specifically, as well the political and socio-cultural importance of Bond's position within the spy genre and within popular culture studies at large. As James Bond has evolved from literary figure to film icon to computer avatar and to a veritable

mythology, it has become all the more important for critics and cultural commentators to pay attention to the ways in which developments within the Bond universe continue to ideologically shape contemporary cinema, media, and popular culture. Given the sheer amount of Bond texts, it has become necessary to devise strategies to interpret and critically assess the multiple strands of meaning that are attached to, created by, and encoded within the matrix of James Bond. *The International Journal of James Bond Studies* is the first journal of its kind dedicated to critical readings of all aspects of the Bond franchise. Bringing together a variety of new voices and leading scholars in the field, the journal seeks to expand on existing criticism – beyond what has already been said of and about James Bond – and to develop new critical and theoretical paradigms by which to view the Bond universe – and through which to view wider cultural, social, and political issues. The journal will draw together engaging critical material on James Bond’s position in popular culture as well as considered scholarly material on the franchise as a whole, so that a continuous and sustained assessment may be developed of one of the most culturally and ideologically entrenched figures in modern British literary, filmic, and cultural history.

In order to convey the trajectory of James Bond Studies, and to demonstrate (vis-à-vis earlier examples of Bond scholarship) from whence modern critical interventions in this field have come, it is important to ground considerations of the contemporary “Bond phenomenon” for the journal’s inaugural issue in the context of the “Bond phenomena” as a socio-historical whole. As such, Tony Bennett’s article, “The Bond Phenomenon: Theorising a Popular Hero” – which is reproduced here with the kind permission of the author – proves a fitting retrospective and an excellent example of early mainstream Bond criticism. Published initially in the *Southern Review* in 1983, Bennett’s article explores the multifarious ways in which the early texts of James Bond – from Fleming’s novels to the films; and from the continuation novels to published interviews with the film series’ leading men – contribute to a confused sense of who exactly James Bond is and in what textual form he is most authentically to be found. Bennett examines the relationships between various Bond texts, interrogating the perceived stability of James Bond’s signifiable identity through an examination of what he refers to as several intertextual or historical “moments” in the making of James Bond as a cultural icon. Bond’s intertextuality – or the ability of the Bond-signifier to move between various mediated cultural forms – has, in no small part, accounted for his continued success and for his “nasty habit of surviving” (*Octopussy*, 1983) various cultural and political upheavals that have struck Britain

since his appearance in the mid twentieth century. Bennett's article highlights some of the key moments in the historical development of the James Bond mythos, and is an important work in critical discussions of Bond's origins as a popular hero.

James Chapman's article, "A thoroughly English movie franchise': *Spectre*, the James Bond Films, and Genre", approaches the Eon-produced Bond films and the question of genre in much the same way that Bennett approaches the literary intertexts of Bond. Chapman adopts a chronological and contextual approach to the production of the films, addressing several important junctures in the invention of the cinematic Bond, whilst tracking the expansion of the film series from the 1960s to the present day. Much of the article focuses on the most recent film, *Spectre*, and Chapman considers the film in relation to the generic conventions of the series' history. The notion of particular "moments" in the development of the Bond mythos is further expanded upon in Stephanie Jones's article, "Mr. Bond, I've been expecting you': The Cinematic Inaugurations of a New James Bond". Here, Jones analyses six very specific moments in the Bond film canon: the scenes in which each of the actors to have played James Bond are introduced to audiences on screen for the first time. Jones explores the reception of each cinematic reincarnation of Bond, analysing the ways in which these six very specific scenes are both products of the time in which they were shot, as well as subtle indicators of British political, economic, and social change when considered collectively. Both Barbara Korte's article, "The Agency of the Agent in *Spectre*: the Heroic Spy in the Age of Surveillance", and Stephen Watt and Edward P. Comentale's article, "Of Migrants and Men: Networks and Nations in the Millennial Bond Text", are very much of this moment, as they take as their central focus certain widespread anxieties that define contemporary cultural politics (surveillance and migration, respectively) and place these within the context of the post-millennial Bond films. Both articles address the fluctuating politics of the figure of the spy in the twenty-first century, and, in particular, in *Skyfall* and *Spectre*. Finally, Lisa Funnell and Klaus Dodd's article, "You're a kite dancing in a hurricane, Mr. Bond': The Elemental Encounters of James Bond", explores the relationship between Bond and the natural elements (earth, air, fire, and water) throughout the film series, arguing that the elemental topographies of the Bond films are important facets of Bond's material identity, and that an elemental approach to the geographies of James Bond is one of the major directions James Bond criticism is moving in.

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