LICENCE TO THRILL

Third Edition

A Cultural History of the James Bond Films

JAMES CHAPMAN

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LICENCE TO THRILL

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Third Edition

James Chapman

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ILLUSTRATIONS

ABBREVIATIONS

BBFC	British Board of Film Censors/Classification
BFI	British Film Institute
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CGI	Computer Generated Imaging
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
MGM	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
PCA	Production Code Administration
SAS	Special Air Service
SMERSH	*Smiert Spionam* ('Death to Spies')
SPECTRE	Special Executive for Counter-intelligence, Terrorism, Revenge and Extortion
TNA	The National Archives
UA	United Artists

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been nearly a quarter of a century since I wrote the first edition of *Licence to Thrill*. In the time since the book was published in 1999, the field of James Bond scholarship has grown significantly. The opportunity to publish a third edition (the second edition, extending the original text up to *Casino Royale*, was published in 2007) is both welcome and a challenge. It is welcome in offering the opportunity to bring the content up to date and to revise the original text in light of new scholarship and the availability of new primary sources on the earlier films. While my 'take' on the historical contexts and cultural significance of the films remains much the same as before, my reading of the films has inevitably been nuanced and deepened over the years. It is also a challenge in so far as this new edition is now one of many critical studies of the James Bond films rather than having the field to itself. To this extent, I have rewritten the Introduction entirely to take account of recent trends in Bond scholarship and to position this new edition of *Licence to Thrill* in relation to the current state of the field.

The first edition of *Licence* was written at a time of emerging scholarly interest in British cinema and popular culture. I would like to reiterate my appreciation to friends and colleagues whose intellectual support was invaluable: Professor Tony Aldgate, Professor Sue Harper, Professor Matthew Hilton, the late Professor Arthur Marwick and the late Professor Vincent Porter. My IAMHIST colleague and occasional collaborator Professor Nicholas J. Cull is a sage and witty commentator on British spy and adventure fiction. This is an opportune moment to reiterate my thanks to Professor Jeffrey Richards, general editor of the 'Cinema and Society' series, whose scholarly example has been nothing short of inspirational, and to Philippa Brewster, commissioning editor at I. B. Tauris, whose faith in a book on a then critically unfashionable film cycle exemplified a more enlightened outlook towards film history than some academics. I had not planned on writing *Licence* when I did. I had proposed to follow my first monograph on film propaganda (*The British at War*) with a sober study of British historical cinema (what became *Past and Present*) and to save James Bond to write another day: Jeffrey and Philippa suggested pressing ahead with Bond. My thanks also to Rebecca Barden and Camilla Erskine at Bloomsbury, who suggested that '*Licence III*' should be a

thoroughgoing root-and-branch revision of the original text rather than simply an update, and to Veidehi Hans for overseeing the publication process.

Licence to Thrill has brought many invitations to deliver keynotes and public lectures. My thanks to Professor Steve Watt for inviting me to the 'Cultural Politics of 007' conference in Bloomington, University of Indiana, in 2003; to Professor Joachim Frenk for 'The Cultures of James Bond' at Saarland University, Germany, in 2009; to Professor Slávka Tomaščiková for 'James Bond and the Cold War' at Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, Košice, Slovakia, in 2010; to Dr Brittain Bright and the organizing team of the 'Marginalized Mainstream' at Senate House, University of London, in 2012; to Professor Jeremy Strong for 'Representing the British Spy' at the University of West London, Ealing, 2018; and to Professor Judith Buchanan and Dr Joyce Goggin for the Association of Adaptation Studies Conference at the University of Amsterdam in 2018, where I also had the opportunity to chair a Q&A with Bond continuation author Anthony Horowitz. Dr Rob Weiner kindly invited me to be part of a Bond panel at the Popular Culture Association conference in San Antonio in 2011, and Dr Jaap Verheul did the same for the Society of Cinema and Media Studies conference in Seattle in 2014.

The new edition has been able to draw upon archival records that were not available when I wrote the first edition of *Licence to Thrill*. The archive of completion guarantor Film Finances includes a rich tranche of documents on the production of *Dr No*: I am grateful to Film Finances' joint managing-director James Shirras and chairman David Korda for allowing access to their archive and to their PA Thoko Malvene for her exceptional generosity in hosting researchers in the boardroom. Researching during a global pandemic presents some unique challenges. I would like to express my thanks to Mary Huelsbeck at the Wisconsin Historical Society's Centre for Film and Theatre Research, University of Wisconsin-Madison, for providing digitized materials from the United Artists Collection, and to Lindsay Moen at the University of Iowa's Special Collections for script materials from Richard Maibaum's papers. I am grateful to Eon Productions for allowing access to the digitized Bond script materials.

Since the second edition in 2007, the rise and rise of online fandom has brought me into contact with fellow Bond aficionados around the world – many of whom have kindly expressed their appreciation of *Licence* for its accessibility and absence of theoretical jargon. The genesis and development of ideas are not always easy to trace, but the new content of this edition has undoubtedly been shaped through online discussions with fellow Bondologists including Craig Arthur, Mark Ashby, Raymond Benson, Matthew Bradford, Ajay Chowdhury, John Cork, Matthew Dewhurst-Grice, the late Andy East, Mark Edlitz, Matthew Field, Brad Frank, Bill Koenig, Mark O'Connell, Doug Redenius, Paul Rowlands, Bruce Scivally, Francesc Sirvent, Richard Skillman, Nicolás Suszczyk, Philip Whitfield and Tom Zielinski. My pre-Facebook Bond friends – Gary J. Firuta and Susan Edwards, Michael Coyne, Oliver Redmayne, Thomas Ribbits, Melanie and Reg Ruse – remain

constant sources of informed Bond-related discussion. I am especially grateful to the estimable Mr Firuta not only for sharing scripts and other primary sources that were not available in research libraries but also for his enduring friendship over many years (including the legendary Night of the Seven Martinis).

I am fortunate that my wife, Llewella, is also a Bond fan and scholar. A particular joy of writing this new edition has been the opportunity to share ideas and insights ('I am sure two such perceptive talents will enjoy working together in Sardinia'), to bounce around ideas ('This one I'm particularly keen about!') and to challenge received wisdoms ('Does this still work?'). We might not agree on who is the best Bond, but I know who is my Number One Bond Girl!

This edition of *Licence to Thrill* is dedicated to the memory of Sir Roger Moore (1927–2017). Sir Roger – you were *my* Bond. *The Spy Who Loved Me* was my first cinematic Bond experience – indeed the first film I saw on the big screen (at the Odeon, St Peter Port, Guernsey, in the summer of 1977). Nobody did it better.

INTRODUCTION

(STILL) TAKING JAMES BOND SERIOUSLY

The James Bond films, beginning with *Dr No* in 1962, are the longest-running continuous series in the history of motion pictures – and one of the most successful. The cumulative box-office grosses of the twenty-five Bond pictures produced by Eon Productions up to the most recent *No Time to Die* (2021) are estimated in the region of US $7.6 billion.[1] The Bond films have now been part of the landscape of popular cinema for half the entire period in which movies have been made. It has often been claimed (especially in the films' publicity discourses) that half the world's population has seen a James Bond film, either in the cinema, on television or home media.[2] Whatever one's opinions of the merits of the films themselves, their enormous popular success and sheer longevity are a quite remarkable production achievement.

I began the first edition of *Licence to Thrill* with the question: 'Why should we take James Bond seriously?' At the time (the late 1990s) there was very little scholarly interest in James Bond – Oreste Del Buono and Umberto Eco's collection *The Bond Affair* and Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott's monograph *Bond and Beyond* were the only academic studies – and no critical history of the Bond films other than several engaging but essentially anecdotal and unfootnoted fan tomes. *Licence to Thrill* was positioned intellectually within the context of a shift in British film historiography at the time from its privileging of realist traditions of film-making, exemplified by the documentary movement and the British new wave, to embrace traditions of genre film-making that may have been dismissed by critics but were popular with audiences. But it also had a polemical edge: to make the case for the Bond films – at the time regarded as beyond the pale of serious academic inquiry – as a subject of significant cultural and ideological interest. To that extent, the book aligned intellectually with the inaugural issue of the short-lived but

landmark *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, which set out 'to treat British film genres in relation to their cultural and historical conditions, as well as dealing with them as particular stylistic and thematic configurations'.[3]

A quarter of a century later, the question 'Why should we take James Bond seriously?' seems much less urgent. The expansion of Bond scholarship over the last two decades – driven to a large extent by the critical as well as popular success of the most recent films starring Daniel Craig – has seen the Bond films claim their rightful place in histories of popular cinema. It no longer seems quite so *outré* as it did in the 1990s to suggest a conference paper or a scholarly monograph on the Bond films: they are now recognized as being part of the landscape of British cinema alongside other popular cycles such as the Gainsborough costume melodramas, the Ealing comedies, Hammer's Gothic horrors and the 'Carry On' films. The Bond films have been acknowledged (if somewhat tardily) for their industrial and cultural contributions to British cinema: British films that have succeeded in the international market (a rare enough achievement in itself) and have become synonymous with the promotion of a particular brand of Britishness.

For these reasons it seems worthwhile to recap (and perhaps to remap) the history of Bond criticism and scholarship for this completely new edition of *Licence to Thrill*: to explain where the original book came from and to consider how the field has developed since. While it has been gratifying to see the intellectual currency afforded to *Licence to Thrill* in the history of Bond scholarship, it needs to be acknowledged that film history is a continually evolving discipline and that the methodological and intellectual paradigms that defined it in the late 1990s are not the same ones that prevail today. In this sense, there is a parallel of sorts with the Bond films themselves in so far as the industrial, economic and cultural determinants that shaped the origin and early history of the films in the 1960s were different from those that obtain in the third decade of the twenty-first century. While critical assumptions, ideological values, cultural attitudes and intellectual contexts have changed, however, the continuing popularity of James Bond has remained a constant. And the reasons for the longevity of a series that many commentators felt had run its course by the end of the 1960s is a phenomenon that requires explanation.

For many years the Bond films were regarded with disdain and even contempt within film studies. The Bond formula – outlandish plots, improbable heroism, colourful locations, bizarre villains, beautiful women, spectacular action set pieces, and a distinctive style of parodic tongue-in-cheek humour – was the antithesis of both the cinema of social realism (for many years privileged by British critics) and the formally complex tradition of European art cinema. The early Bond films were not the sort of fare to find favour with a middle-brow film magazine such as *Sight & Sound* (whose first review of *Dr No* was cursory to say the least) let alone the more polemical *Movie* (which began publication in the same year as *Dr No*) with its preference for American auteur directors. The tone was set by Robin Wood,

a regular *Movie* contributor, in his monograph *Hitchcock's Films*, the first major English-language study of the 'master of suspense'. In Wood's view the Bond films were mere formula pictures that lacked the thematic maturity and stylistic artistry of Hitchcock's altogether superior spy film *North by Northwest* (1959): 'If I fail to be entertained by *Goldfinger*, it is because there is nothing there to engage or retain the attention. . . . The essential triviality of the James Bond films, in fact, sets off perfectly, by contrast, the depth, the charm, the integrity of Hitchcock's film.' Unlike *North by Northwest*, which was 'thematically organic', *Goldfinger* (1964), or so Wood averred, was nothing more than 'a collection of bits, carefully calculated with both eyes on the box office, put end to end with no deeper necessity for what happens next than mere plot.'[4] Wood was also scathing of a sequence in the second Bond picture *From Russia with Love* (1963), where Bond is pursued by a helicopter, that is acknowledged to have been inspired by the famous set piece in *North by Northwest* where Cary Grant is attacked by a crop-dusting plane: 'The difference in quality will seem to some readers too great and too obvious for the comparison to be worth making; but its purpose is not to score easily off a bad film but to help us define the quality of the suspense in Hitchcock.' He went on: 'It is worth, perhaps, pointing out that *From Russia With Love* represents precisely that pandering to a debased popular taste that Hitchcock is widely supposed to be guilty of; the most hostile commentator would find difficulty in paralleling its abuses of sex and violence in any Hitchcock film.'[5]

It seems to me that what is at stake here is the distinction between auteur cinema, on the one hand. and popular genre cinema, on the other. Hitchcock is the example par excellence of the auteur director working in mainstream cinema: a master of narrative construction and mise-en-scène whose films were characterized by recurring thematic and stylistic motifs and which consistently set out the director's own distinctive view of the world posited on a sense of chaos and danger lurking beneath the surface of apparent social normality. It is easy in hindsight to point out the theoretical contradiction in Wood's position: concerned with elevating Hitchcock to critical respectability (his book began with the question 'Why should we take Hitchcock seriously?'), he dismissed the Bond films in much the same terms (commercial, insubstantial, low brow and pandering to the lowest common denominator in popular taste) that had for so long been used to condemn Hitchcock himself. Wood was writing at the time when the auteur theory held the intellectual ascendancy in film studies and when directors with a 'world view' were championed above mere genre films. The Bond movies, with their formulaic narratives and standardized conventions, were regarded as a sort of film-making by numbers, the antithesis of a cinema of personal expression exemplified by auteur directors such as Hitchcock.

The Bond films also merited only passing (and quite often dismissive) mention in the standard histories of British cinema. The biggest British box-office hits of the 1960s are absent entirely from Ernest Betts's *The Film Business: A History*

of British Cinema, 1896-1972 and warrant only two error-strewn paragraphs in George Perry's *The Great British Picture Show*.[6] Raymond Durgnat's *A Mirror for England* includes a characteristically idiosyncratic take on the early Bond pictures, which he sees as remnants of an ideologically regressive cinema of empire:

> Whatever Brand X critics may have written, Bond isn't just an Organization Man, but a rigid jingoist, almost loveably archaic. If you have forelocks, prepare to touch them now, in fond farewell to the Edwardiana in modern drag lovingly panoplied forth in the first half of *Dr No* (1962) as Bond glides along the Establishment's Old Boy Net. The British Raj, reduced to its Caribbean enclave, lords it benevolently over jovial and trusting West Indians and faithful coloured police-sergeants, the Uncle Toms of Dock Green. We might almost be back with Lieutenant Kenneth More on the North-West Frontier.[7]

Roy Armes's *A Critical History of British Cinema* acknowledges the Bond films as 'the most potent myth of British cinema in the 1960s': he likes the early films, rating *Goldfinger* as 'perhaps the best of the series', though he suggests that with the following films, *Thunderball* (1965) and *You Only Live Twice* (1967), 'the formula was already showing signs of becoming purely mechanical', and by the time of *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) there was evidence of an 'almost inevitable decline into routine'.[8] This subsequently became the critical orthodoxy. Ronald Bergan, for example, considered that by the time of the fourteenth Bond picture, *A View to a Kill* (1985), 'both the hero – as interpreted by the 57-year-old Roger Moore – and the formula were beginning to look somewhat old and tired. 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.'[9] Sarah Street's *British National Cinema* and Jeffrey Richards's *Films and British National Identity* both make brief (and not dismissive) reference to the Bond films, though it is clear that the authors' interests lay elsewhere.

Even among the scholars more favourably inclined towards the Bond films, however, there remains a degree of resistance to considering them as anything other than entertainment. For example, John Brosnan, whose book *James Bond in the Cinema* was the first to explore the production histories of the films in any detail, nevertheless held back from writing 'a scholarly volume on the Bond films that will dissect them in depth and place them in their proper context with the rest of cinema. . . . To me the James Bond films are fun, and to take them too seriously would spoil the whole game.'[10] Indeed, I saw some evidence of this resistance to the very idea of an academic study of the Bond films in one of the reviews of the first edition of *Licence to Thrill*. Giles Coren took me to task for not being serious enough ('F. R. Leavis this ain't'), but at the same time suggested I should have written a more trade-oriented book: 'If the publishers were to repackage the book as a large format hardback with colour pictures, and cut out words like "narrative

ideology" and "foregrounded" – which only flatter to deceive – I think they would take a fair slice of the Bondspotter market.'[11]

The principal exception to this orthodoxy is Bennett and Wollacott's *Bond and Beyond*, which takes its subject very seriously indeed in its exploration of (as the subtitle has it) 'the political career of a popular hero'. Bennett and Woollacott's interest in Bond emerged from their work for the Open University on the modules *Mass Communication and Society* – which included a six-part television series on the making of *The Spy Who Loved Me* – and *Popular Culture*, which included a unit on the cultural politics of Ian Fleming's novels. Their jointly authored book is interested 'in the figure of Bond, in the diverse and changing forms in which it has been produced and circulated, and in the varying cultural business that has been conducted around, by means of and through this figure during the now considerable slice of post-war history in which it has been culturally active'.[12] The theoretical framework informing *Bond and Beyond*, typically for cultural studies during the 1980s, is the Gramscian notion of hegemony which understands popular culture as a vehicle for the promotion and negotiation of competing ideologies:

> The ideological work effected by both the films and the novels, we suggest, is not that of imposing a range of dominant ideologies but that of articulating the relations between a series of ideologies (subordinate as well as dominant), overlapping them on to one another so as to bring about certain movements and reformations of subjectivity – movements whose direction has varied with different moments in Bond's career as a popular hero in response to broader cultural and ideological pressures.[13]

The ideologies at work in the Bond books and films revolve around structures of power. Bennett and Woollacott suggest that the Bond narratives are regulated by a set of overlapping narrative codes: an imperialist code, which regulates the relationships between Bond and the villain (usually foreign) and between Bond and his allies (invariably Anglophile); a sexist code, which regulates the relationship between Bond and 'the girl' (often characterized as being 'out of place' ideologically and/or sexually in so far as she is either in the service of the villain and/or is initially resistant to Bond); and a phallic code, regulating the relationship between Bond and the patriarchal secret service chief known as 'M' (who acts as a symbolic father figure and who endows Bond with lethal authority – his 'licence to kill').

A more historical dimension to Bennett and Woollacott's work is evidenced by their analysis of the various 'moments of Bond' throughout his 'career' as a popular hero. They identify three particular moments which defined Bond's place in popular culture. Pointing out that Fleming's novels did not immediately achieve best-seller status, Bennett and Woollacott identify 1957 – the year in which one

of the books (*From Russia, with Love*) was serialized in the *Daily Express* and when a 'James Bond' strip cartoon began in the same newspaper – as 'the first stage in the transformation of Bond from a character within a set of fictional texts into a household name'.[14] The second historical 'moment' of Bond was the mid-1960s when the success of the early Bond films 'both significantly broadened the social basis of Bond's popular appeal in Britain and extended the horizons of his popularity internationally'.[15] The films transformed the conservative, establishment figure of Fleming's books into a modern, classless hero more in tune with the social climate of the 1960s. The third historical 'moment' of Bond is the period since the early 1970s when the nature of Bond's popularity changed by becoming less of a cultural phenomenon and more of an 'institutionalised ritual' with the production of a new film on a regular basis every two years. Moreover, from 1975 onwards, 'the transmission of a Bond film by ITV on Christmas Day established a regular place for Bond in the "way of life" of the British people'.[16] Bond had now become a familiar and recognized institution, a 'dormant signifier' which is inactive most of the time but is 'capable of being periodically reactivated' with the release of each new film.

In contrast to the theoretical orientation of *Bond and Beyond*, my own methodology in *Licence to Thrill* (in all its editions) sits squarely within the approach that Jeffrey Richards has termed 'contextual cinematic history'.[17] This approach – based on case studies of individual films or groups of films and drawing empirically upon primary sources including production records, scripts, reviews and publicity materials, as well as narrative and formal analysis of the films themselves – revolves around three main concerns. The first is to establish the contexts of production: the industrial and ideological conditions under which the films were made, the agency of producers, directors, writers and others in shaping the content of the films, and the interventions of other parties such as studios and censors. The second is to analyse the films themselves: their narratives, formal properties and visual style (those aspects of a film generally referred to as mise-en-scène) and how these work to express themes and ideological positions. In the first edition of *Licence to Thrill*, I referred to the 'narrative ideologies' of the Bond films: this term was questioned by one reviewer – also responding to my book on British television adventure series of the 1960s (*Saints and Avengers*) – though I would maintain that narratives in popular fiction (whether film, television or literature) are ideological in the sense of expressing (either overtly or indirectly) political and social values.[18] The Bond films exemplify a range of narrative ideologies – around nationhood, imperialism, class, masculinity, sexuality and ethnicity – albeit often from an unfashionably conservative perspective. The third concern of contextual film history is to consider how the films were received and understood at the time of their release and subsequently: this involves documenting the responses of critics and (where evidence is available) cinema audiences. In this regard the history of Bond films reveals a significant disjuncture between the critical and

popular reception in so far as films that have for many years been dismissed by critics as formulaic and culturally regressive have nevertheless found a wide and receptive audience.

Licence to Thrill and *Bond and Beyond* came to represent paradigms of what Christoph Lindner has identified as the two dominant schools of Bond scholarship: what he terms 'Historical Bond' and 'Theoretical Bond'. He amplifies:

> 'Historical Bond' is the Bond produced by the Cold War, the Swinging Sixties, corporate England, the arms race, decolonization, globalization, and so on. 'Theoretical Bond' is the Bond produced by the subaltern, the hyperreal, the spectacle, commodity fetishism, *différence*, *jouissance*, and so on. In the past, there has been some palpable tension between these two critical constructions, and in many ways this is hardly surprising since 007 operates within and between a range of representational media, world-historical movements, and shifting cultural contexts.[19]

Lindner's categorization of Bond scholarship was made in a review of the infamous (within James Bond studies) Bloomington conference of 2003 which exposed significant intellectual differences in the interpretation of Bond.[20] Nevertheless, it provides a useful framework for mapping the post-*Licence* history of Bond scholarship. 'Historical Bond' is exemplified by work locating Bond in relation to changing geopolitical contexts (Jeremy Black's *The Politics of James Bond*), exploring the relationship between Bond, consumerism and sexuality (Claire Hines's *The Playboy Bond*), and positioning the films within histories of fashion and costume design (Llewella Chapman's *Fashioning James Bond*), while 'Theoretical Bond' persists in the form of studies rooted in semiotics (Daniel Ferreras Savoye's *The Signs of James Bond*) and critical gender theory (Monica Germana's *Bond Girls*). A third paradigm – what might be called 'Biographical Bond' – can be identified in works that place the focus back on Fleming: these include explorations of Fleming's wartime service (Mark Simmons's *Ian Fleming's War: The Inspiration for 007*) and his association with the Caribbean (Matthew Parker's *Goldeneye: Ian Fleming's Jamaica*).

A particular feature of Bond scholarship since 2006 – the year that *Casino Royale* 'rebooted' the Bond franchise and prompted some academic critics to take a new look at Bond in film and fiction – has been its expansion into other disciplines. Bond is no longer just a subject for film history or cultural studies: recent scholarship has seen interventions from cultural geography (Klaus Dodds and Lisa Funnell's *Geographies, Genders and Geopolitics of James Bond*), adaptation studies (Jeremy Strong's collection *Bond Uncovered*) and postcolonial studies (Ian Kinane's *Ian Fleming and the Politics of Ambivalence*). In the process, or so it seems to me, new paradigms have emerged that to some extent have displaced the historical-theoretical Bond debate. Now the intellectual line is drawn between

scholars who openly profess to liking the Bond films and others who in the wake of the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements are concerned to assert their critical distance from what are still often regarded as regressive cultural texts. So, for example, Steven Gerrard unashamedly parades his affection for the films in his preface to the collection *From Moneypenny to Blofeld: Gender in James Bond*: 'The first film I saw in the pictures was *Live and Let Die*, when I was three years old. . . . I consider this an excellent introduction to watching films on "the big telly", and which has violence, sex, mayhem at its core. And that was just the cinema we were in!'[21] In contrast Anna Everett, in her contribution to another recent Bond collection, suggests some difficulty in reconciling the politics of the films with their popularity: 'And yet, apparently, Bond fans routinely derive enormous pleasure as they negotiate the strange spectatorial sublime that is James Bond's complicated cinematic treatment of race and otherness, white male privilege and toxic masculinity, Anglo-American racial superiority and cool Britishness.'[22]

For this new edition of *Licence to Thrill* I have taken account of both the range of new Bond scholarship since the first edition in 1999 (the significantly expanded bibliography attests to the extent of this work) and the availability of archival sources that were not accessible when I was first researching the subject. In each edition *Licence to Thrill* places the Bond films in their historical and cultural contexts and analyses their thematic and stylistic configurations. The book's themes may be summarized as follows:

1. *The Bond films in British cinema history and film culture.* The Bond films are unusual for British cinema in so far as they have been consistently successful at the international box office. The failure of British films to compete in the international market has long been a stick with which to beat the domestic production industry. Nick Roddick, for instance, observes that Britain 'is a small country with a sometimes disproportionate belief in her world significance' and that this 'has fairly inescapable implications when it comes to film'.[23] The occasional high-profile international successes for the British film industry – from Alexander Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) to more recent hits such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), *Notting Hill* (1999) and *Mamma Mia!* (2008) – merely highlight how exceptional such films have been. But while most standard histories paint a gloomy picture of an industry unable to compete on equal terms with Hollywood, they tend to overlook the fact that in the Bond films, British cinema has produced a cycle that has enjoyed conspicuous and consistent success in the international market over a long period.

The Bond films represent a combination of British cultural capital (the novels of Ian Fleming) and US dollars (United Artists, latterly MGM). They exemplify an Anglo-American political and cultural economy that emerged in response to specific historical conditions in the 1960s – particularly the availability of subsidy in the form of the British Film Production Fund (popularly known as the Eady levy) – but which has persisted beyond the withdrawal of that scheme. The fact of

American financing has prompted some commentators to question the extent to which the Bond films are genuinely 'British'. As Lord Moynihan told the House of Lords in 1966:

> Your Lordships may perhaps feel slightly proud of the new craze which is sweeping the world – James Bond. One might feel that James Bond is an Englishman; that these films are English films. One would, on the face of it, be right in this assumption. Unfortunately, James Bond is an American financially. Last year, $1.5 million was paid out in 'Eady money' to the producers of *Goldfinger* – Americans. . . . This year a predicted all-time record of $2.1 million of British 'Eady money' is going to be paid on *Thunderball*. This is also going to the Americans.[24]

Yet by this argument, films such as *Tom Jones* (1963), *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *Zulu* (1964) would not be considered British either. The fact is that the Bond films met the statutory definition of British films – and have continued to do so. As Alexander Walker argued in his book *Hollywood, England*: 'The nationality of a film industry, considered in its narrowest definition, does not really matter. . . . The positive aspect is that American confidence lent the British industry drive and impetus and gave its film-makers a far wider creative horizon than anyone thought available in the previous decade.'[25]

2. *The Bond films and genre cinema.* Film historians Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell see the Bond pictures as examples of what they term the 'upscaling of genres': the production of what had previously been regarded as 'B'-picture material with the budgets and production values of 'A'-class features. This is a process that can be seen in the emergence of the big-budget western in the late 1950s, exemplified by films such as *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (1957), *The Big Country* (1958) and *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), and in the first science-fiction blockbusters, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and *Planet of the Apes* (1968), at the end of the 1960s. However, nowhere was the process of genre upscaling more apparent than in the emergence of the contemporary action thriller as a major production trend:

> 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).[26]

Terence Young, the first Bond director, held that Fleming's books, with their sensational plots and megalomaniac master criminals, were the sort of material

previously associated with the studios of Hollywood's 'Poverty Row': '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 Pictures, who used to be around in those days. You would never have thought of it as a serious "A" film.'[27]

The Bond series may be seen as sitting at the intersection of different film genres. On the one hand, they represent the last, glorious flowering of the British imperialist spy thriller: *Bulldog Drummond* (1929) – actually a Hollywood film but set in a British idiom and with a British leading man (Ronald Colman) – *Q-Planes* (1939) and *The Four Just Men* (1939). As Durgnat puts it: 'Bond J. is 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.'[28] On the other hand, the Bond films are the prototype of one of the major genres of contemporary Hollywood: the high-tech action movie. The screenwriter Larry Gross suggests that the Bond films mark the emergence of 'an entirely new super-kinetic cartoon-type action movie' – what he terms the 'Big Loud Action Movie' – exemplified by the vehicles of stars such as Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Mel Gibson, Bruce Willis and Tom Cruise.[29]

3. *The Bond films as formula films.* This is not (quite) the same as genre films. The Bond films are formula films in so far as they demonstrate a recurring set of narrative and other conventions: key elements of the Bond formula include the pre-title sequence that usually concludes with a spectacular stunt or gimmick, a stylized titles sequence and a theme song by a leading contemporary recording artist, international locations, extravagant sets, and elaborately staged chases and action set pieces. For many years the Bond pictures have set the standard for action cinema: the most memorable moments include (but are not limited to) the bruising fight on the Orient Express in *From Russia with Love*, the moonlit ski chase of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, the breathtaking ski/parachute jump at the beginning of *The Spy Who Loved Me*, the fight on the cargo net in *The Living Daylights*, and the free-running pursuit of *Casino Royale*. But formula is not only a matter of narrative: it is also evident in the outlook and ethos of the producers. The production ideology of the Bond films is posited on the notion of what is and is not 'Bondian': this refers to expectations of what a Bond movie should be like, what it should contain and how it should be made. This was a recurring theme of the interviews conducted for the Open University case study on the making of *The Spy Who Loved Me*. As Janet Woollacott explains: '"Bondian" was the phrase used by 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.'[30]

The 'Bondian' ethos may be attributed in large measure to the remarkable level of consistency in production personnel and creative artists. The first sixteen Bond

pictures – from *Dr No* to *Licence to Kill* (1989) – are sometimes described in the series' publicity discourses as the 'classic' Bond movies: they were made by five directors – Terence Young (three), Guy Hamilton (four), Lewis Gilbert (three), Peter Hunt (one) and John Glen (five) – and other key members of the production team included main title designer Maurice Binder (fourteen), scriptwriter Richard Maibaum (thirteen), composer John Barry (twelve), stunt co-ordinator Bob Simmons (ten), cinematographer Ted Moore (seven) and production designer Ken Adam (seven). While the films since *GoldenEye* (1995) have brought in more directors, the idea of a Bond 'family' persists in so far as following Broccoli's death the films have been overseen by his daughter Barbara Broccoli and stepson Michael G. Wilson.

4. *The Bond films as tracts for their times.* The idea that films 'reflect' or 'mirror' the societies in which they are produced and consumed has been challenged by theorists who see this as too reductive and who argue instead that films are better understood as cultural and ideological constructs that create meaning through their formal components. For example, Graeme Turner states: 'Film does not reflect or even record reality; like any other medium of representation it constructs and "re-presents" its pictures of reality by way of the codes, conventions, myths and ideologies of its culture as well as by way of the specific signifying practices of the medium.'[31] Nevertheless the Bond films, on account of their longevity, provide a fascinating case study of the relationship between popular cinema and wider cultural and ideological currents in society. Reviews of the early Bond films, especially *Goldfinger*, often saw them as expressions of the *Zeitgeist*: they captured the 'mood' of the 1960s in their technological modernity and their embracing of the 'permissive society'. However, this moment was short-lived, and many critics held that the films had outlived their cultural shelf-life by the end of the decade.

The continued success of the Bond series has depended on the films' ability to refresh the formula (most evident in the periodic casting of a new James Bond, which invariably excites a great deal of public interest) and to reposition themselves, ideologically and culturally, in response to changes in society at large. This process is evident on several levels. For example, the films have moved on from the Cold War background of Fleming's books and since the 1990s have featured conspiracy plots involving rogue states, international terrorism and cyber warfare. Nowhere is the modification of the Bond formula more evident than in their gender politics. While the Bond films can hardly be claimed as a site of progressive gender politics, the overt sexism of the early films (perhaps at its most extreme in *Goldfinger*) is no longer in evidence. Instead, later Bond films have either mocked Bond's chauvinism, such as *Moonraker* ('I was looking for Dr Goodhead . . . A woman!'; 'Your powers of observation do you credit, Mr Bond'), or have problematized it through the agency of women in positions of power who challenge Bond's masculine authority. This has been a conscious strategy,

highlighted in the casting of Judi Dench as the secret service chief 'M' in seven films from *GoldenEye* to *Skyfall* (2012).

5. *The Bond films as fantasy.* While they conform to the model of the 'classic realist text' in so far as their narratives work towards a point of closure that suppresses ideological contradictions (Bond accomplishes his mission and foils the villain's conspiracy, Western civilization is saved and the world order is restored), the Bond films are clearly not realist in the same way as, say, British new wave cinema or the films of Ken Loach. They are better understood as fantasy: not fantasy in the sense of magical or supernatural plot elements (such as superhero movies) but fantasy that gives expression to the conscious and unconscious desires of their audiences. In this context the work of Siegfried Kracauer, despite its age and methodological limitations, still has some relevance:

> What films reflect are not so much explicit credos as psychological dispositions – those deep layers of collective mentality which extend more or less below the dimension of consciousness. Of course popular magazines and broadcasts, bestsellers, ads, fashions in language and other sedimentary products of a people's cultural life also yield valuable information about prominent attitudes, widespread inner tendencies. But the medium of the screen exceeds these sources in inclusiveness.[32]

Bond speaks to a range of 'psychological dispositions'. On one level, Bond represents a fantasy of British power: Britain is constantly shown punching above its weight in global affairs. The films tend to vary between those which mock or parody Bond's patriotism, including *You Only Live Twice* and *The Spy Who Loved Me*, and others which either problematize Bond's role as a servant of the state (*On Her Majesty's Secret Service*) or which reflect critically on the decline of British power (*Skyfall*). While this narrative might help to explain Bond's popularity in Britain, other more universal fantasies are represented in Bond's materialistic lifestyle (high-end brand-name goods, fast sports cars, fine wines and expensive tailoring) and his proven success with women. As Alexis Albion has argued, the continuing success of the Bond films suggests 'that through 007 we might once again be able to better understand something about our own selves and our own times'.[33]

The new *Licence to Thrill* follows the same chronological approach as the original: it is important in this context to remember that this is first and foremost a historical study and the chronological framework is the most natural way of documenting how the content and style of the films have evolved over time as they have responded to the changing ecologies of the film industry and shifts in popular film culture. Critics who suggest (as with other genre films) that the Bond pictures are all the same miss the point: the films exemplify the pattern of repetition and variation that underpins all genres, while each new film builds

upon audience expectations arising from previous films. As one critic remarked of the seventeenth Bond film *GoldenEye*: 'We want to like most films 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.'[34] The popular discourses of the Bond films – exemplified by the many fan-authored histories and by Bond networks on social media – tend to distinguish between those films which represent the full range of 'Bondian' elements in perfect balance (*Goldfinger, The Spy Who Loved Me*), others that are derivative in the sense of being seemingly remakes of previous Bond films (*Moonraker*, *A View to a Kill*), and others that stretch the boundaries of the formula through their difference (*On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, *Licence to Kill*, *No Time to Die*). The Bond formula is not fixed or static: it is continually evolving and is modified with each new film.

Finally, I should repeat the point made in previous editions of *Licence to Thrill* that I am writing this book both from the perspective of a film historian and as a Bond fan. I hope that my analysis demonstrates that I am not blind to the culturally problematic aspects of the films. In this respect a notable feature of recent Bond scholarship has been the interest shown in the films from feminist critics, queer theorists and critical race theory: the trend seems to be moving away from an ideological critique of the films as irredeemably sexist, heterosexist, xenophobic and racist (they are all of those things to some degree) and towards a more nuanced position that understands them as sites for exploring these ideologies. Moreover, their continued hold on the world box office suggests that 'real' cinema audiences are perhaps less concerned about the cultural politics of the Bond films than with the narrative and visual pleasures they offer. *Dr No* was a popular success in Jamaica, as was *Octopussy* in India, despite the films' culturally problematic representation of those countries. It is beholden upon film and cultural historians to explore the nature of those pleasures as well as draw attention to their ideological shortcomings. It remains my contention that the Bond films deserve to be taken seriously both as a production achievement and for their cultural and ideological impact. And that as it enters its seventh decade, the most successful and enduring series of films in cinema history deserves its rightful place in the sun.

1 THE CONTEXTS OF BOND

IAN FLEMING AND THE BRITISH SPY THRILLER

The origins of the James Bond films are to be found in the series of books – twelve novels and two collections of short stories – written by Ian Fleming and published between 1953 and 1966 (the last two titles were published posthumously following Fleming's death in August 1964).[1] Fleming (1908–64) was a former Reuters journalist and stockbroker who had joined the Naval Intelligence Division of the Admiralty during the Second World War and later became foreign manager of the Kemsley Newspaper Group, owner of *The Sunday Times*. It was in 1952, while Fleming was on his annual winter holiday in Jamaica, that he took up writing spy fiction. He later explained this as a form of catharsis arising from his imminent marriage to his long-term mistress Ann Charteris: 'I was about to get married – a prospect which filled me with terror and mental fidgets. To give my idle hands something to do, and as an antidote to my qualms about the marriage state after 43 years as a bachelor, I decided one day to damn well sit down and write a book.'[2] The result was *Casino Royale* – intended by Fleming to be a 'spy story to end all spy stories' – which was published by Jonathan Cape in April 1953.

Like all popular culture, the Bond books are tracts for their times: they reflect – both consciously and unconsciously – the historical period in which they were written and published. The publication history of the Bond books spanned a period of significant and far-reaching change in British society and in Britain's place in the world. On the one hand, Bond's historical moment coincided with the long, inexorable decline of Britain as a global power, demonstrated by the Suez Crisis (1956) and the break-up of the British Empire; on the other hand, it was also an era that historians now see as marking the emergence of a more meritocratic social order, a more liberal and even permissive outlook towards personal morality and sexual behaviour, and the transition (as conventionally

described) from economic austerity to consumer affluence. David Cannadine has argued that the Bond books can be understood in relation to a historical narrative of decline: he points out that the first Bond novel, *Casino Royale*, was published shortly before the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, an event characterized by its imperial pageantry that represents 'a retrospectively unconvincing reaffirmation of Britain's continued world-power status', whereas the last full novel, *The Man with the Golden Gun*, was published in April 1965, just two months after the state funeral of Sir Winston Churchill, an event that 'was not only the last rites of the great man himself, but was also self-consciously recognised as being a requiem for Britain as a great power'.[3]

The Bond books were not immediate best sellers. Sales of the early titles were steady rather than spectacular: the first hardback edition of *Casino Royale* – now a highly prized item among book collectors – had a print run of only 4,750 copies in Britain (though this sold out very quickly). The second printing sold 8,000 copies. At a price of 10 shillings and sixpence, the early Bond editions were not for the mass market. Fleming himself maintained that his books were intended for a certain class of reader: 'In hard covers my books are written for and appeal principally to an "A" readership, but they have all been reprinted in paperbacks, both in England and in America and it appears that the "B" and "C" classes find them equally readable, although one might have thought that the sophistication of the background and detail would be outside their experience and in part incomprehensible.'[4]

From 1955, the Bond books were also published in paperback by Pan in the United Kingdom, and it was these cheaper editions that really drove sales. *Casino Royale*, for example, sold 41,000 copies in its first year in paperback and another 1.8 million over the next decade. Over the same period total sales of all the Bond titles in paperback amounted to 19.2 million. Fleming had toyed with the idea of killing off his hero at the end of *From Russia, with Love*, claiming to be running out of ideas, but the positive response of his publisher – and the serialization of the book in the *Daily Express* – persuaded him to continue the series.[5] It was between 1958 (total sales of 105,000 for four titles) and 1963 (total sales of 4,468,000 for nine titles) that Bond's popularity with the reading public grew exponentially.[6] The literary historian John Sutherland argues that the Bond books were a landmark in fiction publishing and that they represented 'a breakthrough comparable in some ways to [Allen] Lane's, thirty years earlier'. 'The importance of the Bond books', he explains, 'was that they revealed a new reliable market for a certain kind of book that was not trash and could be marketed as a "brand name" (i.e. "the latest Bond")'.[7]

Fleming seems to have had an ambivalent attitude towards his literary output. On the one hand, he disavowed any political or psychological significance in the Bond books. In an article for the magazine *Books and Bookmen* in 1963, he was at pains to distance himself from the so-called 'angry young men' who had emerged in the post-war British literary scene: