The Secret Agent and Maintaining National and Social Concepts in Great Britain In Selected Fiction of Ian Fleming

Ph.D. Thesis

Submitted by

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عميل الاستخبارات وترسيخ المفاهيم القومية والاجتماعية لبريطانيا العظمى فى كتابات مختارة لإيان فليمنج

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القاهرة

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Dedication

To my dearly loved parents and my precious Ramy

for their support and devotion…

& to:

My cherished folks overseas, May and Dhonanjoy

(for the London memorable adventures)

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Key of the James Bond narratives title abbreviation:

*The narratives are listed according to their original dates of publication in Great Britain. *Abbreviated titles are in bold. *Published Collections are separated by gridlines.

Omnibus Edition (2003)		
CASINO	Casino Royale	1953
DIE	Live And Let Die	1954
MOON	Moonraker	1955

DIAMOND	Diamonds Are Forever	1956

Omnibus Edition (2002)		
RUSSIA	From Russia With Love	1957
NO	Dr No	1958
GOLF	Goldfinger	1959

Quantum Of Sollace: The Complete James Bond Short Stories (2008)		
VIEW	From A View To A Kill	1960
EYES	For Your Eyes Only	1960
SOLACE	Quantum Of Solace	1960
RISICO	Risico	1960
RARITY	The Hildebrand Rarity	1960
DAYLIGHTS	The Living Daylights	1962
LADY	The Property Of A Lady	1963
YORK	007 In New York	1963
OCTOP	Octopussy	1965

THUNDER	Thunderball	1961
SPY	The Spy Who Loved Me	1962
MAJESTY	On Her Majesty's Secret Service	1963
TWICE	You Only Live Twice	1964
GUN	The Man With The Golden Gun	1965

PREFACE

During the unstable era that followed the devastating Second World War, known as the Cold War era, a particular genre of literature stood out as a significantly popular literary witness and commentary on the happenings of that turbulent epoch: the spy thriller. The most remarkable writer in this genre was, and interestingly remains, undisputedly Scottish author Ian Fleming, the creator of the legendary British Secret Service agent, James Bond.

The thesis aims at examining how Ian Fleming managed to project, comment on, and alter the prominent anxieties of Cold War Britain, namely the reinstatement of the notion of nationhood, the preservation of the British imperial and racial codes, and the maintenance of the codes of gender and the definition of masculinity and femininity. The thesis is, accordingly, divided into four chapters and a conclusion. Respective critical works of Michel Foucault, among other critical views, are used to examine the James Bond canon.

Chapter I, “The Cold War and the Rise of the ‘Ace of Spies’, James Bond: An Overview”, traces the beginnings and development of the spy fiction and its significance to the Cold War era. The chapter also introduces the writing career of Ian Fleming, and emphasises the rise of the iconic British agent, James Bond; along with reasons for his immense popularity

and manifestation in the British society, as well as his endurance worldwide, in comparison to other fictional spy figures.

Chapter II, “License to Save Britain”, is a critical examination of the unprecedented celebration and endorsement of the notion of a ‘licence to kill’ by an entire nation. The chapter also explores Fleming’s efforts to revive the ideal of nationhood in a society that was undergoing considerable frustration after the war, even if it were by creating yet another agent of surveillance, or a cog in a power machine working on maintaining the status quo and the codes of blind loyalty to the ruler. The chapter’s novelty lies primarily in incorporating Michel Foucault’s critical theories in the mechanics of power apparatuses to vindicate and preserve their hegemony over the subjects, towards an understanding of Fleming’s celebrated ‘world picture’. Other critical views are also employed to examine the Bondian canon’s devised method of maintaining the national concepts in Great Britain at that peculiar moment in her history.

Chapter III, “Master 007 and ‘The Crime de la Crime’”, deals with Ian Fleming’s attitude towards the British imperial codes and his ethnic and racialist views as depicted in the Bondian canon. Several critics have been preoccupied with the allocation of the Bondian saga’s racial codes. This chapter, however, balances the ambivalent critical theories, in an attempt to come to a firm understanding of how such strikingly ethnic and racial imperialist dogmas as presented in the canon managed to reach the British readership and maintain their strength through the James Bond phenomenon. Michel Foucault’s critical views on creating the idea of the ‘other’ is also incorporated here to appreciate the secret agent’s methods of

alienating, sentencing and punishing the ‘othered’ villain, in congruity with the British Secret Service power apparatus.

Chapter IV, “The James Bondage”, studies the features of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ in the British society of the Cold War, and how the western institutional gender codes were propagated effectively through the character of James Bond who was, and is still, considered a prototype of British manhood; regardless of Fleming’s notorious creation of yet another ‘phenomenon’, namely the ‘Bond girl ’. Michel Foucault’s critical study in this field is utilised here for a closer examination of how Fleming managed, through popular literature, to maintain traditional sexual ideologies in Britain, at a time when the British society was shifting rapidly towards modernist conceptualisation – at least as was propagated widely through the prominent media forces of the time.

The conclusion stresses the significant role of the timeless literary figure, James Bond, and his phenomenal ability to, not only convey the demands, ailments, and sometimes solutions to the concerns of the British society of the Cold War, but also the considerable influence he had on various fields of social development and media industry, not just in Great Britain, but also worldwide.

Chapter I: The Cold War And The Rise Of The 'Ace Of Spies', James Bond: An Overview

CHAPTER I: THE COLD WAR AND THE RISE OF THE 'ACE OF SPIES', JAMES BOND: AN OVERVIEW

> 'You didn't notice the moth with cryptic colouring that crouched quietly nearby, itself like a piece of the bark, itself just as important to the collector. The focus of your eyes was too narrow.' (GUN 93)

By the end of the Second World War in 1945, Great Britain, though victorious, was a viscerally traumatised nation. Her image as a great imperial power was shaken dramatically; having overcome the war only with the aid of the then two greater world powers – the US and the USSR – and having become economically indigent, socially depleted, and with a blurred futuristic insight. The subsequent Cold War era immersed Britain into further national and social conflicts and opened the nation's eyes to harsh realities and social oddities while searching for a solid British identity. For such peculiar moment of British history, Scottish writer Ian Fleming created an iconic national figure; a sort of demulcent to the battered nation: Secret Service agent, James Bond. The eminent figure became a popular and influential phenomenon whose double-0 digits ennobled the ignoble trade of espionage; mere silhouette was expressive, and whose name became as echoic as notable fictional figures that surpassed the fame of their creators.

Spy fiction was formalised as a genre before the First World War, at about the same time as the real-life intelligence agencies were originated; particularly with the publication of the French Army's notorious scandal known as the Dreyfus Affair (1894 – 1906)[1]. In *The Anatomy of the Spy Thriller*, however, Bruce Merry contends that the theme of this "plebeian art form" (1) can be traced back to the classical epic works of Homer and Virgil where the epic heroes of these works

connived with informants and crept into enemy territories to collect information or sabotage the adversary's weapons or foil its schemes [2]. In any case, the development of this art form into a genre of its own came afterwards with the First World War. Merry explains that "the popular *genre* of espionage fiction was … forged in response to political and social circumstances." (4) Indeed, one can tell that political motifs in particular, and the naturally accompanying social subject matters, have been primary inspirational tools to espionage fiction authors, since its beginnings. What else could trigger conspiracy theories and governmental secret intelligence operating on paper, better than a nation's political stance that would most certainly affect its respective society? This can be seen in the earliest narratives of the genre, as much as today's best-sellers.

Early spy narratives include James Cooper's *The Spy* (1821)[3], Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901)[4], and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907)[5]. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes saga is an early British forerunner of the spy genre as well[6]. Due to the peculiarity of the historic moment, nevertheless, the public demand for the spy thriller[7] grew stronger with the First World War, not just because of the heightened interest in intelligence and international espionage affairs, but particularly because of the genre's capacity to infuse escapism with reality.

During WWI, the need for escapism, even if it were through propagandist means, was evident among the British public; if only to distract the masses from the harsh reality of the war. One art form that perfected such a balance at the time, alongside the desired political and social messages population, was the spy fiction. Among the eminent writers of the genre at the time was Scottish novelist, Baron John

Buchan[8]. More ‘realistic’ spy thrillers followed during the interwar and were commuted by retired Secret Intelligence officers like William Somerset Maugham[9], who brought the themes of his thrillers to touch on political and military reality-grounded matters. The genre then further fledged with WWII and the accompanying war propaganda that brought the public attention closer to the intelligence profession and the role of espionage in winning wars. Ever since “the turn of the century,” as critic Michael Denning puts it, “spy thrillers have been ‘cover stories’ for our culture, collective fantasies in the imagination of the English-speaking world, paralleling reality, expressing what they wish to conceal, and telling the ‘History of Contemporary Society’.” (1)

Denning explains that though spy fiction contains in its essence more political topics than any other popular genre; these topics are “only a pretext to the adventure formulas and the plots of betrayal, disguise, and doubles which are at the heart of the genre and of the reader’s investment.” (2) This makes spy thrillers cover stories to the “so deeply lived as to be almost unconscious” ideologies of a community, necessary for each individual in such community to be able to escape daily life. (2) These cover stories enable their readers to evade their daily realities, while at the same time bring them to “a place in a particular society, a particular history, a particular culture, and, like newspapers, diaries, or government document, they can be used as evidence in restructuring the lineaments of that history or culture.” (3)

The popularity of the spy genre took several stages to develop, or rather proliferate the classes of their audience from the lowbrows to the highbrows[10]. Denning renders the expansion of the reading variety to the significant transition in generic patterns that were instituted by the genre’s forerunners and furbished by later spy fiction veterans, shifting

the patterns from the ‘blood novel’ to the more intricate ‘espionage narrative’. (25) These eminent writers transformed the type of the hero from Buchan’s Richard Hannay and Maugham’s Ashenden – the archetypal espionage heroes – to more advanced realistic heroes. Eric Ambler’s Charles Laitmer or Josef Vadassy, Graham Greene’s ‘D’ or Holly Martins, John le Carré’s George Smiley, and Leonard Deighton’s anonymous ‘Charles’, were all based on their respective creator’s intelligence or military professions, which shifted their heroes’ characters and descriptive capabilities into new meticulously portrayed realms of reality – sometimes referred to as ultra-reality[11]. This shift managed to attract the earlier dissatisfied highbrows into the ultra-realistic ‘serious’ world of espionage, to go along their already favoured detective fiction reading, for instance.

Though detective fiction is one literary trigger[12] to the spy cult; what readers, of all sorts, realised in the latter – contrary to the earlier – is the pleasurable ends of finding themselves, as critic Umberto Eco explains, “immersed in a game of which he [the reader] knows the pieces and the rules – and perhaps the outcome – drawing pleasure simply from following the minimal variations by which the victor realises his objective.” (58) This exorbitant transition, as critic Ann Boyd calls it in *The Devil with James Bond*, from the forerunning pattern of detective fiction, amounts in the fact that the hero, the secret agent, here has to be able to manage all potential risks and contingent dire, “and to think on his feet.” (55) The readers, thus, become absorbed in the actuality of the present instead of speculating over a dead past. This adds to the new sense of reality for the reader, who is, not only familiarised with the background against which the action would happen, but also steadily living the secret agent’s character.

Added to the above, spy thrillers have achieved their popular appeal by precipitating the story's events, as Bruce Merry puts it, "down a narrowing funnel to the plot's climax", depending on "sub-division and acceleration through well-sign-posted narrative co-ordinates in five continents." (2) Thus, by deploying vivid description of locales and focusing the reader's attention on characterisation, violent incidents, propagated community principles – such as democracy, subjective heeds or personal attractive qualities even; the spy narrative, not only "shifts with adventurous fluency between a plurality of exotic settings, it also professes to depict characters who deploy violent means to uphold the values of [conventional] democracy." (2) The critic, furthermore, establishes that "spy fiction nurtures paranoid emotions and brings to the front stage polished hero figures projecting instrumental qualifications alongside inclinations to retire. Merry elaborates that a typical spy plot "involves an agreeable measure of aesthetic redundancy. If closely examined, it can be seen to provide the reader with multiple permutations for a plot with uniform and recognisable solutions." (3) One may consider this an added pleasure to live a virtual reality, a sense of satisfaction and assurance that the world is safe and secure, thanks to the hero spy.

Merry explains this sense of assurance in terms of the mechanics of the spy thriller. The critic identifies the genre as "a form of readable evasion" because the espionage narrative offers an existential variance to normal life-style. "Agents act *different*. Spy heroes are hard-boiled and they speak in a 'tough' manner". (5) This, however, is not necessarily realistic. In fact, Merry contends that this *hard-boiled* attitude, that has interestingly become regarded as an elemental component of the espionage business, is essentially contra-realist because the