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You Know My Name, But Who Am I? Structure and Agency in the Making and Remaking of James Bond.

In 1969 the advertising campaign for the sixth James Bond movie, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, promoted both the movie and the new James Bond as “a little bit different”, while at the same time reassuring the audience through a montage of shots that the latest film would continue to provide action set pieces, beautiful girls and the most vile of villains. Of course the main focus of this particular advertising campaign was to promote the casting of George Lazenby as the new James Bond – the first actor to take on the role since Sean Connery (and who had played Bond in five successful films). The producers of the James Bond movie franchise had to juggle selling a fresh face and a revived franchise, with the reassurance that the things the audience liked with the Connery movies was still going to be present here.

Almost thirty years later in *Goldeneye*, the now female head of MI6 reminds Bond and the audience that he is a “cold war relic [...] a misogynist dinosaur.” The face may have changed–this time the role of James Bond had been taken by Pierce Brosnan, who became the fifth actor to appropriate the 007 moniker, but by the end of the film Bond has reassured both M and the audience that he can still defeat the villain (a rogue 00 agent, further reaffirming Bond’s credentials as the tried and trusted face of the Secret Service) and get the girl, as he walks off into the

sunset, literally carrying Natalya Simonova in his arms. As Miss Money Penny says of George Lazenby's Bond in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, "Same old James...only more so!"

These statements, both from the makers of the James Bond movie franchise, are contradictory - different but reassuringly the same. James Bond we are told, will return albeit in a reshaped, recycled form. With the release of the latest Bond movie, *Casino Royale* (2006), the recycling process continues apace, as the sixth actor, Daniel Craig dons the tuxedo and the producers go back to the first Ian Fleming novel of the same name, for their inspiration and indeed for the most part, the storyline. *Casino Royale* attempts not only to rewrite the character of James Bond by taking his story back to the moment he earns his licence to kill, but it also re-examines and ultimately reaffirms Bond's place in the narrative world, where British Imperialism is alive and well. This is most evident in the scene where Bond blatantly ignores international law and storms into an embassy to get 'his man'. *Casino Royale's* title song is called "You Know My Name" and while the audience would have to wait for two hours to hear Craig speak the trademark words "Bond, James Bond" it does play on the audience's familiarity with this recycled character. He may have a different face, a different accent and blond hair, but there are key elements that remain unchanged, fundamentally at least, after the plots, gadgets and girls have gone through the recycling process. This process is itself aided by a sense of familiarity with the character and formula of the films. It is arguable that we don't have to have seen

a James Bond film or certainly all of them to know what to expect from James Bond. As Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott suggest:

a popular hero (or heroine) constitutes a cultural phenomenon of a particular type... they break free from the originating textual conditions of their existence to achieve a semi-independent existence, functioning as an established point of cultural reference that is capable of working – of producing meanings – even for those who are not directly familiar with the original texts in which they first made their appearance.¹

James Bond has 'grown out' of the books and the films. His character has taken on a life beyond these texts. In this sense, the latest Bond movie can be read as an attempt to anchor the character back in his original context – in a film based on the first book, when the character was still 'learning to become 007'. While Bennett and Woollacott in *Bond and Beyond* analysed the moments of Bond within a political framework, or analysed how the novels of Ian Fleming transformed into the movies that bore little resemblance to their literary origins save the title, little work has been carried out to examine the recycling of the British hero and how this is inflected in the role of James Bond. Indeed one gets the sense that the movies serve to lock the hero in, contain him within the confines of formulaic narrative structure.

While there has been a concerted effort to examine the significance of casting in the Bond movies, for example Bennett and Woollacott draw on John Ellis' work on stars and how cinema stars "are composed of snatches and fragments,

¹ Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond* (London: MacMillan 1987), 13).

miscellaneous chunks of 'real life' and different and sometimes contradictory narrative identities which do not add up to a coherent or rounded whole"² They reach an impasse and conclude that Sean Connery and Roger Moore (ignoring Lazenby altogether) can never really be constructed as star on an equal level to that of the character, which they see as the dominant factor.

Of course to a great degree this is true, as typecasting bears out, but as with other fictional characters such as Sherlock Holmes and the Doctor from *Doctor Who*, where undeniably the character is bigger and more durable than the actor, it is too reductive to view these actors, in 'snatches and fragments' perhaps, and deny them the fact that they do bring something to the role and indeed, are integral to the recycling of that character.

In order to work through this approach, it is interesting and useful to recycle the structure and agency model, in particular drawing on Marx:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered by themselves, given and transmitted by the past.³

Paraphrasing Marx' notion of the structure and agency from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, one can reveal an interesting act of recycling in the

² Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond*. (London: MacMillan 1987), 13.

³ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1934), 10.

Bond movies, one which stands apart from Umberto Eco's structuralist approach to the novels (which can be equally applied to the subsequent movies). The structure is represented by two things. Firstly, the unchanging narrative formula, or what Tony Bennett refers to as the "regular and repeatable elements" of the Bond structure (first outlined by Umberto Eco in *The Narrative Structure in Fleming* in 1966). Within this first I would concur with Eco and include the figure of the enemy, the woman and her relationship with Bond. In terms of the movies, I would add to this formula the need for the hero to travel abroad and employ gadgetry and ingenuity in his quest. In terms of the aesthetic, the formula also incorporates the gun barrel logo, the John Barry signature tune, a pre-title narrative (usually, though not exclusively, self contained), and *the* Bond song. Secondly, there are also repeatable elements in the characteristics of Bond himself. Aspects of the character that remain constant, regurgitated rather than recycled through the novels and the films, in particular the introductory catchphrase "Bond, James Bond" (although Roger Moore in an effort to distinguish himself from Connery, refused to ask for his martini to be "shaken not stirred").

Bond the character is of course bound to the formula of the film series – we expect him to perform in a certain way, follow an established and oft repeated narrative journey. Bond as a male figure is also bound by certain constants – he has so far always been a white, middle-class, heterosexual male. His sexuality is never in doubt and to suggest that the 007 licence could be carried by anyone

other than a man is to bring disgust and derision in equal measure. The producers have used the template from the book and while disregarding plotlines, retain the 'essence' of the hero.

Agency is evoked in several ways, from the changing locations, changing Bond songs and movie titles (rather than refer to them as James Bond 1, 2, etc), gadgets and indeed the very performances of the lead character and other players. It is here where the relationship between structure and agency occurs most interestingly and here where recycling of the figure of the hero takes on a position beyond the structure. Combined with this is the position we as spectators and fans adopt against the text/structure, either aligned or opposed to what is shown on screen. Henry Jenkins and John Tulloch addressed the negotiated reading in terms of *Star Trek's* gay fan audience and suggested that:

The reading practices characteristic of fandom are never purely and rarely openly resistant to the meanings and categories advanced by programme producers... the fans' resistant reading occurs within rather than outside the ideological framework provided by the programme.⁴

While this suggests that it is the spectator's position that takes precedence here, I believe that it also alludes to the notion that as spectators we are not bound to the structure and not only have access to the actors behind the character, but also make as much meaning from them as their fictional other.

⁴ John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins, . *Science Fiction Audiences*. (London: Routledge 1995), 263

If we first acknowledge the narrative formula of the Bond movie franchise and then incorporate my previous discussion of the other constants to be found in each film, it is one of a massive recycling mechanism. However, this can only illuminate the recycling process so far and ultimately leads critics, spectators and academics to conclude that nothing new is being done in the films. Formula alone cannot dictate the success of the franchise, denying as it does the presence of the performer and through that the playing out of different versions of masculinity and through that, British heroism.

We each have a favourite actor whom we believe accomplished something in playing a particular popular character – whether it's Basil Rathbone as the definitive Sherlock Holmes or Tom Baker as the definitive Doctor Who in the series of the same name. What is it that they accomplish, stuck as they are in a formula and character structure? What do they offer and what are they recycling? One thing is certain, invariably these characters become revitalised and refreshed when a younger actor is cast in the role. Masculinity is allowed to renew itself, while retaining the wisdom and experiences of the character. In *Doctor Who*, the alien hero is allowed to regenerate while the likes of Holmes and Bond simply get recast. It is very unusual for the female characters to get the same privilege – Miss. Money Penny has only been recast twice in the history of the Bond movies and was completely absent from *Casino Royale*.

Of course all these actors are bound to a great degree by scripts, direction and marketing of their image, but they each bring with them an image and a character of their own. Behind the tuxedo, the gun, the sports car and the bevy of beautiful women the actor is still present, we cannot simply sweep their contribution under the carpet, whether we find their own performances wooden, camp or overly dramatic.

The assumption of a fixed fictional character such as James Bond is that while the actor changes (through reasons of age or box office appeal for example) the basic characteristics and function of that hero remain. As with the narrative formula, there are key aspects to the character that cannot change. While I am not contesting this, I do believe that *if* formula and character traits must remain constant, an analysis of these areas soon becomes redundant – what else is there left to say if these functions have been revealed? What interests me is the way in which, as I mentioned earlier, each actor brings with him a redefinition of this constant, revealing rather than concealing different aspects of Britishness and indeed heroism. One can perform a textual analysis of these formulaic traits with each actor that plays Bond. This is recycling of the role, the hero and what it is to be British not only to other British people but to the world at large. Going back to the advertising campaign of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, we see the little differences in the same old things. Of course, whatever each actor brings to this recycling process, the performance and the character are also bound by changing attitudes of Britishness and what it is to be heroic. Therefore while the

basic structure remains constant, external forces are continually repositioning the character in terms of what he represents. In this sense then, criticisms that the James Bond films *never* change, or that the character is outdated (that “Cold War relic”) soon become unjustified. James Bond actually works because he is always a little out of time. This is surely the escapist fantasy he provides. If he were a fictional character tackling very recent problems, the lines between fantasy and reality would become so blurred that the pleasures of losing oneself in the adventure would not only be lessened but would also force us to acknowledge a far more explicit political position within the films.

As mentioned earlier, everyone has their favourite or ideal version of Bond. As in the television series *Doctor Who*, a favourite actor can reflect tastes of a particular generation. For instance, the 1960s audience favoured Connery, the 1970s to the mid 1980s audience preferred Roger Moore and the 1990s audience have seen Pierce Brosnan become ‘their’ Bond (according to a 2006 public poll on the International James Bond fan club website places the ‘favoured’ actors *not* the films in ascending order – Dalton, Lazenby, Moore, Connery and Brosnan). It does appear that after initial concerns that Daniel Craig was wholly inappropriate as James Bond, the critical and commercial success of *Casino Royale* has since made audiences reconsider their verdict and Craig has subsequently been hailed as the next Connery in the British popular press. Of course, these may simply be reflections of the actor in place at a particular time, but by this rationale, no one under the age of 35 would consider Connery a

popular choice for the role. It also doesn't account for the fact Bond films still run on television today and with the increased ownership of the movies on video and DVD, the films' time of production becomes irrelevant to a certain degree and the results continue to favour the same three actors over Lazenby and Dalton.

Bennett and Woollacott reference to the political moments of Bond as "mobile signifiers"⁵ is a useful term not only for analysing the fictional character but also the actors who have played the role. On the surface they are the same character, the same constant hero but each offers a different version of masculine heroism. However, when a Bond movie does falter at the box office, the focus of blame is invariably on an alteration to the formula and on the actor behind the tuxedo. This was certainly the case for George Lazenby in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* and Timothy Dalton in *Licence To Kill*. Interestingly there is very little written on either Lazenby or Dalton, who between them only made three appearances in the series.

Looking at the nationality of the actors who have played Bond, it reads like a throwback to the old and rather politically un-correct Englishman, Irishman and Scotsman joke. This seems a somewhat appropriate analogy for a film series that is often cited as a parody of the spy genre and for a hero who has failed to embrace political correctness in all its forms.

⁵ Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond*. (London: MacMillan 1987), 42.

Sean Connery recycled James Bond from novel to screen and it is here that an actor *has* to contribute as a mobile signifier to the structure of the film and the character. The literary Bond was well educated at Fettes College, Edinburgh and of aristocratic stock. Connery however offers a much more rugged version of this well refined character. Connery was himself born in Edinburgh, but his working class background is a far cry from that of Bond and his work experience as a brick layer was well publicised when *Dr. No* was released in 1962. This can be seen as an effort to maximize audience acceptability.

Given that George Lazenby is Australian, it is little wonder that his incarnation was not considered a success, eschewing the very Britishness that defines James Bond. Lazenby was known as the Fry's Chocolate Man, a pin up for confectionary. As I said in the introduction, his Bond had to be marketed as different, although his persona and the character that comes out of it recycled the hero to a point where it became something other than the established hero, where the actors own self confessed weaknesses embody themselves into a weak, tearful and married (albeit briefly) Bond. When the character addresses the audience at the end of the pre-credit sequence with the lament that "this never happened to the other fellow", one suspects that the audience were as bewildered as Lazenby/Bond. It would take the reprisal of Sean Connery in the subsequent film *Diamonds Are Forever*, for the franchise to re-establish itself at the box office.

As if in response to the poorly received and very un-British character that Lazenby provided, the Bond producers would turn to the most British (or more pointedly, English) actor they could find after Connery fulfilled his one picture deal with the franchise – the very English Roger Moore. Already an actor who had established himself as several English hero's on television (*Ivanhoe* and as Simon Templar in *The Saint*), Moore offered a comedic version of the Connery template, recycling the British hero to the point of parody; where Britishness is reduced to post Imperial Englishness and where male dominance had to be both reaffirmed and undermined at the same time, whereby as Tony Bennett argues in his article 'James Bond and Popular Culture', "the films are experienced as a joyful send-up of redundant ideological categories"⁶. As Moore got older and more visually and physically impotent, to the point where stuntmen had to double for the actor running of the Eiffel Tower staircase, the parody grew.

The Welsh actor Timothy Dalton further expanded and perhaps challenged the notion of a British hero, in an attempt to break free from the parody established by Connery and cemented by Moore. Dalton is a Byronic figure in terms of stature and appearance and had played Heathcliff in a 1970s version of *Wuthering Heights*. He brought to the role intensity and sombreness that as with Lazenby's unsure performance, recycled the role to almost non-recognition. By the time of his second film *Licence To Kill*, not only had producers attempted to recycle the formula (Bond leaves the secret service and is considered a

⁶ Tony Bennett, 1982. "James Bond as Popular Hero In Politics" In *Ideology and Popular Culture* 2, ed. Tony Bennett, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press), 30.

renegade agent), Dalton too had reworked the character to incorporate a sadistic edge which, while alluding to the literary Bond, was a long way from its cinematic counterpart. With the exception of character names and the routine “Bond, James Bond” (delivered abruptly, almost apologetically) there is very little ‘cinematic Bond’ to be found here, rather an amalgamation of the literary and cinematic.

Pierce Brosnan like Moore had had a successful presence on television, particularly though in the United States with the series *Remington Steele*. His face and manner were already imprinted on the public consciousness. Brosnan develops what Dalton and indeed Lazenby offered in the opening up of the British hero. Brosnan is an Irish born actor and a bankable star internationally. His ‘Britishness’ is filtered by the fact he isn’t British but manages to encapsulate a version of Britishness acceptable to a much wider audience.

Daniel Craig has the ‘honour’ of being only the second Englishman to play the part of James Bond. However at this juncture in the James Bond franchise, is it still important that Bond should even be considered English? Adam Roberts suggests that we should view Bond as a European, the Englishman’s fantasy of being “as cool as a Frenchman, as sexy as an Italian”⁷ but I think this simplifies matters too much. Bond is very much the Englishman, but it’s a version of Englishness that is projected and perceived differently throughout the world. It’s

⁷ Adam Roberts, “An Englishman’s Word Is His Bond. Is Bond English?” In *James Bond in the 21st Century. Why We Still Need 007* ed. Glenn Yeffeth, (Texas. Benbella 2006), 179.

recycled Englishness and takes on aspects of Britishness (that so ambiguous of terms) and on nostalgic views of Englishness. All are constructs that bear little resemblance to an original form of Englishness because there is no such thing. Englishness and Britishness are constantly shifting and constantly undergoing a much wider recycling process.

Of course one must develop the idea of changing attitudes of Englishness/Britishness to best understand how the Bond formula, character and indeed performances are recycled. Britishness itself is recycled and repackaged not only to the rest of the world but also to the British (whoever they may be).

The Bond movie franchise survives because of its ability to recycle and repackage and while Eco may lock into the notion of the structure of the narrative one has to acknowledge the role played by agency in the development, reading and rereading on the series. In part this is what I see as the successful ingredient in the Bond 'formula', that it is one that constantly changes, not only with each new film, but over time. The actors themselves play no small part in this recycling process and it is fitting that when 'favourite polls' appear in relation to the series they invariably ask *who* is your favourite James Bond actor, not *what* is your favourite film?

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Filmography

Casino Royale (2006)
Diamonds Are Forever (1971)
Dr. No (1962)
Goldeneye (1995)
Licence To Kill (1989)
On Her Majesty's Secret Service (1969)
Wuthering Heights (1970)

Television

Doctor Who (1963-1989, 1996, 2004-)
Ivanhoe (158-1959)
Remington Steele (1982-1987)
The Saint (1962-1969)

Songs

You Know My Name (Chris Cornell, 2006, Polydor Records)