CLASSICS OF THE SPY NOVEL

Week 1: John Buchan’s *The Thirty-Nine Steps*
Week 2: Eric Ambler’s *A Coffin for Dimitrios*
Week 3: Graham Greene’s *Our Man in Havana*
Week 4: Ian Fleming’s *Goldfinger*
Week 5: John Le Carré’s *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*
Week 6: Daniel Silva’s *Portrait of a Spy*
Paul Johnson, British reporter for New Statesman (at time leftist), 1958 on Bond:

- “The sadism of a schoolboy bully,
- the mechanical two-dimensional sex longings of a frustrated adolescent, and
- the crude snob-cravings of a suburban adult.”

Bond character glorifies worst in contemporary culture – snobbery doesn’t protect us from sadism

Bond/Fleming part of Establishment “smart” – the Top People love these books – is what makes the books so awful – evil poison, Fascist
NEW BRITISH EMPIRE
TIMELINE - BRITISH EVENTS

- 1919 – 22 – Egyptian revolution, independence
- 1936 – Arab revolt in Palestine
- 1945 – 50s – Rebuilding physically and economically England, financial borrowing from US to stabilize economy (lend-lease)
- 1947 – Partition of India, Indian Independence (creating India and Pakistan)
- 1951 – Philby resigns/is fired from MI6 over 3rd man accusations
- 1952 – 60, Mau Mau rebellion, Kenyan independence
- 1953 – First Playboy magazine issue published
- 1953 – Casino Royale published
TIMELINE – BRITISH EVENTS CONT.

- 1955/6 – Philby re-hired, in Beruit as journalist/spy
- 1959–63 – New Wave, Angry Young Man film culture, working class, street-interested
- 1960s – Early swinging London culture, final recovery from post-WWII deprivation - fashion, sexual liberalism, rock music
- 1961 – George Blake discovered to be Soviet mole
- 1962 – Bond first film released, “Dr. No”
- 1963 – Philby defects to Moscow under accusations of being a mole by MI6
- 1966 – Peak of Swinging 60s Soho/Carnaby St./, Chelsea London culture - Beatles, Rolling Stones, Twiggy
Johnson’s hatred of Bond part of debates about ideal masculinity and Empire:

- Sexual revolution of 1920s to 1950s -> increase liberalism with respect to sex – who, when, why
- Liberalism = conservative ideas about sex and social roles leads to neuroses (Freud, Reich)
- Communism = supports sexual liberality, sexual conservativism linked to bourgeois values
- Conservativism = liberal ideas about sex and social roles leads to decadence, softness (declining birth rates, contraception)
CHANGING MALE IDEAL – HEROIC SPIES

- 1915-20s
  Richard Hannay

- 1930s
  Joseph Vadassy

- 1958
  Alec Guinness

- 1953-60s
  James Bond
GROUP ACTIVITY – QUESTION:

Spy heroes have different levels of action - man of action versus passive hero

- What social values motivate the hero?
- Are they heroes – in what sense?
  - Doing good because it is Personally Good?
  - Doing what is right because it is Socially/Establishment Right?
  - What is he willing to do to protect the Establishment?
    Does the End justify the Means?

Hannay – 1915 / Vadassy – 1930s
Wormold – 1950s/ Bond – 1950s-60s
Thrillers and morally complex spy stories share basic spy story elements but are very different:

- How author handles moral questions indicates whether thriller or complex fiction.
- Is the lead a “hero” (morally & ethically good) or man-of-action (morally & ethically neutral)?
- Spy fiction often probes the moral questions.
- Thrillers put distance from moral/ethical questions.
PROGRESS OF SPY NOVEL

- Spying as office job → glamorous, dangerous, jet-set lifestyle.
- Complex characters → static/flat; little reflection on choices, actions.
- Stage-like scenes → episodic action; no necessary link between events.
- Criticalness of establishment → nostalgic obedience to authority.
FLEMING INFLUENCES

- Early writing attempts for TV; episodic action.
- American noir, esp. Mickey Spillane violence and pulp novel formula.
- Gentleman hero of club-land mysteries.
- Violent or adversarial sex element from women’s romance novels.
- “Very bad” villains, high danger, exotic locations, patriotism of schoolboy adventures.
FLEMING STYLE

- Two types of Bond readers: humorous (better educated) and serious (less educated).
- Prose from Bond’s point of view: not literary or thoughtful but simple, direct, action-based.
- Two main periods of Bond books:
  - 1953-60: character and plot focus
  - 1961-66: detail and imagery focus
**BOND NOVEL THEMES**

- *Evil*: villains completely bad; no shades of goodness.

- *Fantasy*:
  - Politics – England’s 2nd power status erased in books; given equality to America.
  - Culture – Luxury goods attractive to British readers war-weary, envy U.S.
  - Travel – “Abroad” a place for partners/behaviour not acceptable at home.
Fantasy cont:

Social relations – Youth culture explores looser morality; social status based more on youth/wealth, not class.

Technology – Innovations in weapons, chemistry, medicine, communications (bugging, wireless), transportation make the Future/Progress seem immediate.
IAN FLEMING

- Born, 1908, London.
- 1917, Father dies in WWI.
- 1921, Attends Eton; expelled.
- 1927, Attends Sandhurst; expelled.
- 1927, Studies at Munich and Geneva universities.
- 1931, Fails Foreign Office exam; obtains Reuters editorial position.
IAN FLEMING

- 1933, Reports on Stalin show trials in Moscow.
- 1933-1936, Enters banking industry.
- 1939, Recruited to Naval Intelligence, personal assistant to Rear Admiral.
- 1939-40, Writes proposals for sabotaging German war effort.
1941, Co-writes draft of procedures for the U.S.’s OSS (later CIA).

1942, Oversees intelligence network, Spain; heads 30 Assault Unit (commandos).

1944, Less authority over unit.

1945, Moves to Jamaica; builds Goldeneye estate.
IAN FLEMING

- 1952, Manages newspaper group; begins *Casino Royale*; marries long-time mistress.
- 1953, *Casino Royale* published with help from brother
- 1953-66, Twelve stories published
- 1958, Hurt by Bergonzi’s criticisms; begins working on Bond screenplay.
1960s, Increasing criticism of stories; marital and creative decline.

1961, Bond sales increase with JFK endorsement; heart attack.

1961, Sells film rights to Saltzman and Broccoli.
1962, “Dr. No” film released.
1963, Publishes *Thrilling Cities*.
1964, Heart attack; dies.
Common opinions of the day:
Short men have inferiority complexes (28); Jewish people undesirable (18); gay people result of hormonal mix up (237).

Question: Are these serious opinions, jokes, or just signs the author knows what some of his readers may believe?
Fairy tale structures: Bond as British establishment hero always succeeds—gets the girl (a different one each book); and defeats villains thoroughly bad.

Question: Does this fantasy have any irony in it? Or does it support British status quo uncritically?
Journalistic explanations: How the gold trade works (58-62); what a drive through France is like (144-54); how golf is played (78-113).

Question: Why include these passages? As padding to hide skimpy plot? Or to satisfy readers who prefer magazine-like, realistic accounts instead of incredible action scenes?
GOLDFINGER – ELEMENTS

- **Hero**: practical, cold, charming, aggressive, handsome, gentleman; loyal; admiring villain’s cleverness; literary (E.g., 7, 20, 38).

- **Chief**: headmaster-like disciplinarian; respected military figure; solid Victorian values (E.g., 50-54, 70).
GOLDFINGER – ELEMENTS

- **Villain**: Gold-lust; Soviet banker; uses people as tools; a cheater in small and big things; vengeful; Eastern; ridiculous body; flouts law (E.g., 27, 132, 184, 212).

- **Love interest**: Tilly not interested in Bond, mannish style (E.g., 157, 257).

- Pussy warms up to Bond; abusive childhood (E.g., 211-12, 279).
1. *Episode set-up* – Bond’s dislike of killing; needs a light job (1-7).

2. *Coincidence* – Goldfinger’s card scam; stealing Jill, humiliating GF (41-42).


4. *Quest pursuit* – Trying to prosecute Goldfinger (golf game, 88; spying in GF’s house, 138; car ride, 146-151).
5. *Ordeal A* – Tilly interrupts Bond’s plan (171).


7. *Ordeal C* – Surviving torture; helping with GF’s Fort Knox robbery (147-202); crime boss meeting (209-11).
8. **Solution A** – Bond’s note to Leiter; U.S. forces interrupt robbery (238-42, 256).

9. **Solution B** – Bond kidnapped by Goldfinger; Bond takes over plane (265, 267, 272).

10. **Conclusion** – Bond converts Pussy back to a “girl” (279). Status quo preserved.
FLEMING & FILM BOND
CRITICS & FILMS

- Positive reviews for first five novels. Fleming “suitable heir” for Buchan
- Novels “entertaining” and “useful safety valve” for social violence
- Major criticism for emphasis of luxury brands/consumption. Immoral; inciting poor values
- Connery not Fleming’s first choice, nor Hamilton as director—Cary Grant, David Niven, Alfred Hitchcock – too expensive
QUESTION: BOND AS THRILLER?

- Moral questions – why is it right or wrong to me?
- Ethical questions – is it right or wrong to society?
- Who is a legitimate authority?
- Does Bond ask moral or ethical questions? Why or why not?
- Must spy fiction as moral/ethical questions?

Thriller

Complex fiction

Action-oriented

Morally complex