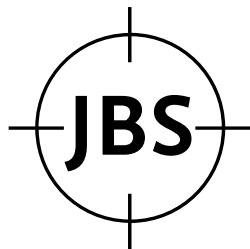


James Bond and Modesty Blaise

Comparing Ian Fleming's and Peter O'Donnell's Literary Creations

ANTTI KORPISAARI

The late 1950s and the 1960s witnessed a great increase in the popularity of Ian Fleming's James Bond books and the huge commercial success of the first Bond films. As such, it was more than natural that various filmmakers and authors would try to emulate the phenomenal success of Fleming's superspy. One of these people was comic strip author Peter O'Donnell, who had adapted Fleming's *Dr. No* (1958) as a strip cartoon for the *Daily Express*, standing in for the comic strip's regular writer Henry Gammidge ("Peter O'Donnell" 2010). When, some two years later, "O'Donnell was given the brief by Beaverbrook Newspapers [...] to create a new heroic character for a daily strip" (Paterson 2004, n.p.), he was well familiar with and undoubtedly influenced by Fleming's hero and his adventures. Mike Paterson very straightforwardly states that Bond "provided the template of the aspirational world of jet-set glamour and hyper-real espionage action" (ibid.) for O'Donnell's Modesty Blaise, but other contemporary adventure strips, *The Avengers* (1961-1969) television series, and the culture and aesthetics of early 1960s' Britain more generally also certainly contributed, as did O'Donnell's own wartime experiences (O'Donnell 2004a). The Modesty Blaise strip cartoon was eventually launched in *The Evening Standard* in May 1963. It soon gained



THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF

James Bond Studies

Volume 7 · Issue 1 · Spring 2024

ISSN 2514-2178

DOI: 10.24877/jbs.113

Distributed under CC BY 4.0 UK

Antti Korpisaari is University Lecturer in the Department of Cultures at the University of Helsinki, Finland.

popularity, became syndicated, and ran for 38 years. Between 1965 and 1996, O'Donnell also published 11 Modesty Blaise novels and two short story collections. A film version of the first novel, *Modesty Blaise* (1966), fell well short of the popularity of the Bond films, although it has since developed somewhat of a cult following. Decades later, another Modesty Blaise film, *My Name Is Modesty* (2002), was released direct-to-DVD in 2004. Since 2012, BBC radio dramatisations of some of O'Donnell's novels have also been produced. Therefore, one can hardly say that the various texts of Modesty Blaise were commercially unsuccessful and/or poorly distributed. Still, she never acquired such an iconic position in global popular culture as James Bond.

As a strong, independent, and sexually liberated female hero, Modesty Blaise was something rather new to the early 1960s. What is most pertinent to this article, however, is that allusions to James Bond were frequently used to describe her adventures (Chapman 2019, 200, 202). The cover of the first US edition of the inaugural novel, *Modesty Blaise* (O'Donnell 1965), for instance, contains the bold marketing statement that it introduces "England's fabulous, feminine answer to James Bond".¹ Although academic studies on Modesty are scarce, these, too, often take Bond and/or Fleming as a yardstick against which to discuss Modesty and/or O'Donnell's *oeuvre*; as Rosie White puts it, "[m]ost critics tend to write Modesty Blaise off as an ersatz female Bond" (2007, 69). Robbie Goh compares the two book series thus: "Fleming's works must be seen as a retrospective, inertial vision of an older imperialistic Britain, while O'Donnell's novels develop a 'new liberal' image of Britain as a racially tolerant system governed by the motor forces of 'enterprise'" (1999, 29).² Laura Crossley, on the other hand, takes as her article's starting point the 2016 discussion regarding the possibility of casting a female James Bond, as the Daniel Craig era was (seemingly, at that time) com-

1 At the 2023 James Bond Studies Conference at the University of Roehampton, London (where I presented the first version of this article), Ian Kinane raised the interesting question as to why the adjective "feminine" was used instead of "female". The answer to that, I suggest, may stem from the following quote from O'Donnell: "I had been intrigued by the idea of [...] creating a woman who, though fully feminine, would be as good in combat and action as any male, if not better" (O'Donnell 2004a; see also Chapman 2019, 200-201; White 2007, 77-78). That is, the word "feminine" was possibly used in marketing Modesty Blaise in order to emphasise that, in addition to being female, she was a "fully feminine" member of her sex.

2 Arguably, this tendency to advocate free enterprise is at its strongest in the short story "The Dark Angels" (1996), in which Modesty and Willie help bring down an organisation "dedicated to the sole purpose of keeping British industry British-owned by preventing the steady takeover of our [British] industrial base by foreign corporations" by murderous means (O'Donnell 1996, 83).

ing to a close. She concludes that “[w]e do not need to rewrite James Bond into a female version of the role; what we really need is lot more Modesty” (2018, 372). In their articles, Goh and Crossley distinctly favour Modesty over Bond. In the following, however, my intention is not to argue that one is better than the other. Rather, my aim is to explore the rather questionable validity of seeing Modesty only – or at least mainly – as a kind of female copy of James Bond. To do so, I will compare O’Donnell’s novels and short stories to Fleming’s original Bond texts.

In Bond’s case, of course, Fleming’s books are the foundational texts and preceded the strip cartoon launched in 1958 and the Eon Productions film series that began with *Dr. No* (1962). The situation with Modesty is markedly different, as the strip cartoon began running some two years prior to the publication of the first Modesty Blaise novel. Among other things, this meant that the strip cartoon’s first artist, Jim Holdaway, had already visually established the look of Modesty and many of the series’ staple characters, as well as the world they inhabited. Despite the primality of the strip cartoon, I will concentrate on O’Donnell’s Modesty Blaise novels and short stories. For one thing, their scope and level of description make them much easier to compare with Fleming’s prose than the condensed, highly visualised strip cartoon stories. Furthermore, with the publication of the first Modesty Blaise novel, O’Donnell partly rebooted his principal characters and their world, completely rewriting the first mission Modesty undertakes for the British intelligence chief Sir Gerald Tarrant. The Modesty Blaise books, then, form a somewhat separate narrative universe and are the most suitable corpus of analysis for this article.

Before proceeding to the analysis, it is important to emphasise that both James Bond and Modesty Blaise were created by white British males. Fleming was twelve years O’Donnell’s senior, but both served their country in World War II – the former in Naval Intelligence and the latter in the Royal Corps of Signals – and both came from rather well to do backgrounds,³ and presumably had a somewhat similar worldview. By modern-day standards, both the James Bond and the Modesty Blaise books are at times highly politically incorrect in their treatment of, for example, (de)colonised places and peoples (see Kinane 2021 and Goh 1999). Although Modesty Blaise certainly was a progressive character for her

3 Fleming’s father, who died when Ian was just about to turn nine, was elected as Member of Parliament in 1910 and was “a promising rising star of the Conservative Party” (Buckton 2021, 12). His mother was a “socialite from a distinguished Berkshire family” (ibid., 11), and his paternal grandfather the millionaire Robert Fleming. O’Donnell’s father was a “leading crime reporter” (Blackmore 2005, ix).

time, she is a beautiful young woman cast in a role traditionally reserved for men, and primarily created to entertain and excite a male audience.⁴ As White puts it, “Modesty may be self-made in the novels and the newspaper comic strips, but she is made in man’s image” and “[c]ontinually marked as ‘different’ from other women” (78). An illustrative case in point is the following account Modesty gives of herself in *Last Day in Limbo* (1976):

I grew up as a kind of hermaphrodite polecat, all sharp teeth and claws. [...] It hardly dawned on me that I was a girl until I looked down one day and found I was growing knockers. But I went on being just as mean and nasty and bloody-minded as before. So I’m sort of different. (O’Donnell 2003, 161)

Despite such emphasis on Modesty’s inner exceptionality, her outward appearance conforms closely to Western beauty norms. Furthermore, in the strip cartoon, if not necessarily in the books, her sexualisation became stronger and stronger with the passing of the years, especially during Enrique Badia Romero’s two lengthy periods as the strip’s artist (1970-1978 and 1986-2001), as his iterations of Modesty “are noticeably more voluptuous and exoticised than the original Holdaway drawings of the character” (Crossley, 373, note 3). Overall, I argue, Modesty can hardly be regarded as a particularly well-rounded feminist character by present-day standards (see Chapman, 202-204).⁵ Crossley, however, disagrees to a significant extent, writing that “while the novels frequently dwell on her [Modesty’s] physicality (and the comic strips can be almost fetishistic in their depiction of her), the emphasis is also placed on her capabilities as an operative” (361). Crossley argues that Modesty’s independence and empowerment are among the key aspects that make her appealing to a female audience, too. With this introduction to these two characters in mind, let us turn, now, to look at the similarities and differences in the life histories and skillsets of James Bond, Modesty Blaise, and the latter’s trusted companion-in-arms, Willie Garvin.

4 O’Donnell also wrote specifically for what he called “the women’s market”, including nine romance novels published under the pseudonym of Madeleine Brent between 1971 and 1986 (Blackmore, x; O’Donnell 2004a).

5 In an interview published in 2004, O’Donnell states that Modesty “is not a bra-burning feminist or anything”. The interviewer Nick Jones follows up with the comment that “[s]he is a very strong female character and could be seen as a feminist icon”. To this O’Donnell’s replies: “Yes, she could be, but the thing is she’s too much of an individual to be cast as a feminist because that puts her in a group – I think that’s the crux of the matter” (O’Donnell 2004b, n.p.).

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Fleming's James Bond had a Scottish father and a Swiss mother (Fleming 2003a, 57; Fleming 2006a, 256).⁶ Due to "[h]is father being a foreign representative of the Vickers armaments firm", Bond lived his early years abroad, acquiring a "first-class command of French and German" (Fleming 2006a, 256). His parents died when he was 11, and he then went to live with an aunt in Kent. In *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1963), Bond tells his soon-to-be father-in-law, Marc-Ange Draco, that he did not have any money as a child (Fleming 2003a, 252). This, however, has to be taken in relative terms, as Bond briefly attended Eton College (Fleming 2006a, 257) and, as a teenager, was privileged enough to learn skiing in Austria (Fleming 2003a, 114; see also Fleming 2003b, 114), during which time the ski-instructor Hannes Oberhauser became "something of a father" to him (Fleming 2006b, 38). In 1941, at the age of 17, Bond "entered a branch of what was subsequently to become the Ministry of Defence" (Fleming 2006a, 257), and saw at least some field action in World War II (see Fleming 2006c, 121; Fleming 2006d, 68).

Conversely, Modesty "was a refugee from somewhere in the Balkans [...] [who] lived alone and on the run from the war for several years [...] [before getting] to the Middle East – refugee camps, bedouin camps" (O'Donnell 1984, 71). She has no knowledge of her parents or her exact age (O'Donnell 1971, 67; O'Donnell 1996, 79; O'Donnell 2005a, 13). For much of her youth, she wandered around the Middle East and North Africa. From her travelling companion, the ex-professor Lob, Modesty received a basic education and learned several languages (O'Donnell 1996, 79-80; O'Donnell 2002, 166-167; O'Donnell 2003, 125; see also White, 72-73). Modesty's hard, undomesticated youth endowed her with many exceptional qualities that O'Donnell describes in very animalistic terms: she "grew up as a kind of hermaphrodite polecat, all sharp teeth and claws" (O'Donnell 2003, 161); "was well able to eat things no hyena would touch" (O'Donnell 1996, 116); and has "the recuperative powers of a cat" (O'Donnell 2006, 266) and an "internal clock [...] as good as an animal's" (O'Donnell 2002, 25). At 17, a little after Lob's death, Modesty started working for a small criminal organisation, the Louche group, in Tangier, Morocco. A year later, she took control of this group and quickly remade it into *The Network*, "which in a few years became the most successful criminal organization outside America" (O'Donnell

6 Fleming wrote little about his hero's childhood and youth, and the (late) decision to give him a Scottish father was most certainly influenced by the casting of Sean Connery as the first filmic Bond.

1972, 3) – and one that abstained from, and actively opposed, drugs and vice (O'Donnell 1996, 9; O'Donnell 2005a, 14). At 26, having made “well over half a million sterling” (O'Donnell 2005a, 5),⁷ she split *The Network* among its various branch-managers and retired into England (ibid., 15).

What is arguably the most interesting part of Modesty's backstory is that, from early on, she had her sights set on England as her future base. She never “traded in secrets belonging to Her Majesty's Government” and, in 1962, “married and divorced a derelict Englishman in Beirut [...] for gaining British nationality” (O'Donnell 2005a, 14; see also O'Donnell 2004c, 129). The fact that this rich, intelligent, and super-resourceful stateless person chose Britain over all other countries speaks as much for its continued greatness and geopolitical importance as Bond's heroics and, say, his spirited defence of the merits of post-Empire Britain in the conversation with Tiger Tanaka in *You Only Live Twice* (1964) (Fleming 2006a, 104-105). Goh sees Modesty “in one sense the fantasy of the ideal immigrant” (33). On the other hand, as Crossley points out, “[w]ithin the traditional world of British spy fiction she is [...] a problematic figure, with both her femininity and her foreignness marking her as unreliable: more an exotic and duplicitous Mata Hari than a stoically British Edith Cavell” (362-363).

As with Bond and Modesty, so too is the Englishman Willie (William) Garvin an orphan. His unmarried mother died when he was very young, after which an abusive, alcoholic “auntie” looked after him for some time (O'Donnell 1966, 149). He subsequently ended up in an orphanage, from where he ran away around the age of 15 (O'Donnell 1971, 48; O'Donnell 2002, 66). Several prison sentences and a spell in the Foreign Legion followed, before Modesty found Willie in Saigon (O'Donnell 2005a, 14). She recognised his hidden potential and recruited him to *The Network*, where he soon became her right-hand man (O'Donnell 1971, 122). According to Crossley, in the world of British spy fiction, “Willie is ‘othered’ through his class and criminal background and, arguably, is placed even further outside accepted societal norms in that he is second-in-command to a woman” (364).

Although Modesty and Willie come from very humble backgrounds, and although Willie has retained his Cockney accent, they have made themselves into surprisingly learned and cultured persons (see White, 74). Both speak several European languages and Arabic fluently (O'Donnell 2005b, 81) and continuously endeavour to learn new skills and languages (O'Donnell 2004c, 27, 29). They keenly follow the theatre and ballet scenes and enjoy discussing the merits of

7 Well over eight million pounds in today's money (“Inflation Calculator” 2023).

different classical composers, for example. Bond, on the other hand, shows little interest in such activities (Fleming 2006e, 99). He is, however, a much greater lover and expert of fine foods and alcoholic beverages than Modesty and Willie are. As Jeremy Strong puts it, “Bond’s culinary choices, and those meals chosen for him, form a substantial strand of his characterisation as a worldly, cultivated individual” (2018, 63).

Combat prowess, of course, is an integral part of the skillset of an agent licensed to kill. Bond is “the best shot in the [British Secret] Service” (Fleming 2006f, 5). In his youth, he “twice fought for the [Fettes] school as a light-weight and [...] founded the first serious judo class at a British public school” (Fleming 2006a, 257). While at headquarters in London, he regularly trains with firearms and in unarmed combat (Fleming 2006f, 3-5, 93). In *Goldfinger* (1959), we also learn that Bond is preparing “a handbook of all secret methods of unarmed combat” that “would contain the best of all that had been written on the subject by the Secret Services of the world” (Fleming 2006g, 59). Still, Fleming writes very economically about the many violent confrontations Bond faces. Bond is certainly very efficient in this area, but more of a brawler type than a martial arts master, and certainly not superhuman.

Modesty and Willie, on the other hand, have combat skillsets bordering on the impossible. She is “lethally fast and accurate” (O’Donnell 1996, 166) when it comes to handguns, while his knife- and other-missile-throwing skills are “beyond belief” (O’Donnell 2005b, 126). Both are very good with a rifle, and Modesty is a terrific archer too. Their hand-to-hand-combat skills are equally impressive and varied. Both have trained under combat master Saragam in Cambodia (O’Donnell 2001, 7; O’Donnell 2005b, 15) and master elements of *ninjutsu* (O’Donnell 2002, 242-243; O’Donnell 2006, 17). Hugh Oberon, the principal henchman of *The Night of Morningstar* (1982), places Modesty “among the six people in the world you’d find hardest to kill” (O’Donnell 2001, 63).

Long, drawn-out fight scenes are a central characteristic of O’Donnell’s stories, giving Modesty and Willie a chance to display their mastery. The ultimate expression of this trait is when O’Donnell makes Modesty or Willie duel a henchperson or, in one case, the story’s principal villain, who is even faster, stronger, and/or masterful in the form of combat involved. The clearest examples of such foes are the fencing-master Wenczel and the freakishly strong, nearly invulnerable Simon Delicata in *A Taste for Death* (1969), the supreme unarmed-combat master Mr Sexton in *The Silver Mistress* (1973), and the quick-draw specialist Reverend Uriah Crisp in *Dragon’s Claw* (1978). In each case, O’Donnell

builds up anticipation for the inevitable confrontation over the course of the novel, and Modesty or Willie's chances to prevail seem very slim indeed. Still, their experience, varied skillsets, and – perhaps above all else – excellence in “improvising with externals” (O'Donnell 2004c, 290) and making use of their surroundings, always help them prevail. In Fleming's stories, something similar most clearly takes place between Bond and Donovan “Red” Grant in *From Russia with Love* (1957). *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1965) could be considered another such example; although, contrary to the reader's expectations, a “classic” shootout between Bond and Francisco “Pistols” Scaramanga, “the greatest pro gunman in the world” (Fleming 2006d, 177), never actually takes place.⁸ In any event, Modesty and Willie certainly outclass Bond as fighting machines. Still, all three are at their best in life-and-death situations, when the fate of an operation is on the line. Their resilience and resourcefulness in the face of impossible-seeming odds are one of their strongest similarities.

The three main characters of the two series are all what we would today call “adrenaline junkies”; O'Donnell actually goes as far as stating in his last book that Modesty and Willie have an “adrenaline addiction” (1996, 253). Bond finds office work tedious and only enjoys the dangerous assignments his double-0 prefix brings him (Fleming 2006c, 22). As for Modesty and Willie, about a year into retirement from crime, they find that in order to feel fully alive, they need “the spice of occasional danger” (O'Donnell 1973, 12). As White states, “[i]n this, *Modesty Blaise* represents a particular formation of post-war ennui; like the demobilised forces returning from the Second World War, Modesty and Willie find it hard to settle down in civilian life” (73). A further common denominator between the three heroes is that they rarely receive – or even crave – public acknowledgment of their heroics. Modesty and Willie do their utmost to keep their names out of news stories, preferring to stay as anonymous as possible (O'Donnell 1996, 133, 153; O'Donnell 2001, 270, 273; O'Donnell 2003, 247-249; O'Donnell 2004c, 53, 312). Due to Secret Service policy, M does not allow Bond to accept high commendations in *Moonraker* (1955) (Fleming 2006f, 304) and *Goldfinger* (Fleming 2006g, 330). Somewhat paradoxically, in *The Man with the Golden Gun*, Bond does accept the Jamaican Police Medal and M seems to have no objection to the knighthood that Bond is also offered (Fleming 2006d, 189). Bond declines the latter, however, as “there was one thing above all he treasured. His privacy. His anonymity” (ibid., 196).

8 In the Bond films, of course, (final) duels between Bond and the villain or, most often, his principal henchperson quickly became a staple.

Bond's age is first discussed in *Moonraker*, where we learn that the statutory retirement age for double-O agents is 45. As Bond still has "[e]ight years to go" (Fleming 2006f, 11), in this third novel of the series he is around 37 years old. In the first Modesty Blaise book, Modesty is 26 and Willie Garvin 34 years old (O'Donnell 2005a, 21, 25). The two men, therefore, are quite similarly aged, while Modesty is significantly younger. Furthermore, in both series, the protagonists age little, although the politics and technology around them change according to the real-world rhythm. In his Bond books, Fleming paid very little attention to maintaining any kind of logical chronology (see Amis 1966, 41). The events described in the above-quoted *Moonraker* take place before the destruction of the South Goodwin Lightship on November 26th, 1954 (Fleming 2006f, 154). By the time of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, set in the autumn and early winter of 1962,⁹ Bond should have been reaching retirement age. On the other hand, had Bond been 17 years old in 1941, as M writes in his obituary in *You Only Live Twice* (Fleming 2006a, 257), Bond could, at maximum, have been 31 in *Moonraker*. O'Donnell's writing differs from Fleming's in that references to actual years or dates are very rare in his *oeuvre*. Although the Modesty Blaise books appeared over a span of 31 years, all but one are seemingly set within some three years, or "the turning of a dozen seasons" (O'Donnell 2001, 44), of one another. The staple characters, then, conveniently stay much the same age throughout the series, although weapons and communication technologies develop according to the period in which each story was written; for instance, mobile phones and camcorders figure in the "Old Alex" short story (O'Donnell 1996). There is one distinct outlier, however, as the closing short story of the final Modesty Blaise book takes place some 20 years after all the others, when Modesty is "about fifty-two" (*ibid.*, 234), and Willie, therefore, around 60 years old.

All three heroes are physically fit and sexually desirable heterosexuals who have very liberal views regarding sex and, when needed, are comfortable using it as a weapon, too (Fleming 2003b, 115; O'Donnell 2003, 43). Furthermore, all three have several regular sexual partners (but no children – although the amnesiac Bond does impregnate Kissy Suzuki in *You Only Live Twice* (Fleming 2006a, 272)). At home in London, Bond spends many of his nights "making love, with rather cold passion, to one of three similarly disposed married women" (Fleming 2006f, 11). Willie's most "regular girl" is the widowed Lady Janet Gillam, but he is "exclusive to her only within a limited radius" (O'Donnell 2004c, 24) and, in

9 The year 1962 can be deduced from the fact that Ernst Stavro Blofeld, born May 28th, 1908, is 54 years old in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (Fleming 2003a, 65, 69, 138).

Modesty's words, Willie "has a wonderfully varied list of girlfriends" (O'Donnell 2005a, 16). Modesty, on the other hand, prefers longer, approximately 2-4-week-long "intensive" periods with one of her semiregular lovers, separated by longish intervals. John Dall explains this setup to Stephen Collier in the following way at the end of *I, Lucifer* (1967):

She's not to be fought over [...] she won't come back home with me or go back home with you [...] then one day maybe she'll call you [...] Or maybe she'll call me. Or not. Of course, you can figure you're not the kind of guy that waits for a girl to say when. She won't mind. She doesn't reckon to have you on a string, so there'll be no hard feelings. (O'Donnell 1984, 318)

There is one striking difference between the sexuality of the two male characters and Modesty, however. Whereas Bond and Willie's strong sexual appetites need no explaining whatsoever, Modesty had to travel a long, hard road to find hers. In her childhood, she was raped several times, making her "an emotional cripple, only half a woman" and "scared out of my [her] wits at the idea of contact" (O'Donnell 2003, 100; see also O'Donnell 2002, 166). Significantly, in order to heal sexually, she needed male help; that is, help from *The Network's* "bedroom warrior" (O'Donnell 1996, 23) Danny Chavasse, irresistible to women "when he switched on the magnetism that was his peculiar gift" (O'Donnell 2003, 72). Over the few weeks Modesty and Danny spent together on Lanzarote, "somehow he wiped out all the bad times before" (ibid., 101). Equally problematically, because of her past experiences and "mental tricks", Modesty is now able to "ride" new rapes and other sexual violence (that she suffers in several stories), letting them dissolve without any lasting effect (ibid., 100). The narrative around some aspects of Modesty's sexuality, then, I argue, is one of the facets of her character that leans most heavily towards the realm of male fantasy. On the other hand, it is equally true that Modesty "is positioned in the novels as sexually active and sexually desiring, with her wants being the determining factor and not the other way around" (Crossley, 370).

Both Modesty and Willie seriously ponder the possibility of marriage in the fourth Modesty Blaise novel, *A Taste for Death* (O'Donnell 2006, 284). After their respective partners, Stephen Collier and Dinah Pilgrim, fall for each other during the course of that story, however, O'Donnell's protagonists never return to this topic. Fleming's Bond seems to have a much stronger longing for a lasting, more traditional relationship: In *Casino Royale* (1953), he falls hard for Vesper Lynd and is about to ask her to marry him before this double agent ends up tak-

ing her own life (Fleming 2006h, 193, 202-203). Bond then goes on to have a longer affair with Tiffany Case between *Diamonds Are Forever* (1956) and *From Russia with Love* (Fleming 2003b, 98-99, 104-105) – and, in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, “fed up with all these untidy, casual affairs that leave me [Bond] with a bad conscience” (Fleming 2003a, 183), marries La Comtesse Teresa (Tracy) di Vincenzo. When she is murdered only hours after the wedding, however, Bond becomes much more cynical about long-term relationships, and Fleming’s posthumously published final novel, *The Man with the Golden Gun*, ends with the pessimistic thoughts that Bond

knew, deep down, that love from [his former secretary and current love interest] Mary Goodnight, or from any other woman, was not enough for him. It would be like taking “a room with a view”. For James Bond, the same view would always pall. (Fleming 2006d, 200)

This, of course, is the image of Bond that was carried on into the films that, prior to the Daniel Craig era and with the notable exception of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969), portray him as a perpetual womaniser never even looking for a longer-term relationship.

Bond is “inclined to be solitary by nature” (Fleming 2006a, 257) and although he is often teamed up with other people – most notably with the American Felix Leiter – he prefers to work alone (Fleming 2006h, 24). In *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1962), Bond tells Vivienne Michel: “I’ve always had a preference for operating alone. It’s just the way I’m made” (Fleming 2006i, 138). Both Modesty and Willie are highly capable operatives in their own right, but they work best – and most enjoy being on capers – as a two-person team. They share “an effortless intimacy deeper than that of lovers” (O’Donnell 2005b, 63), but have never slept together nor entertain any romantic ideas about one another (O’Donnell 1971, 123). Importantly, one of the most progressive aspects of the Modesty Blaise series is that although Willie is no longer in Modesty’s employ, he still sees her as the leading member of the partnership. Furthermore, he feels in no way emasculated by this arrangement – something that Fleming’s sexist Bond would most certainly do.

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS AND PLOT ELEMENTS

Although the main characters in the Bond and Modesty Blaise books are ultimately quite different, O’Donnell’s Sir Gerald Tarrant resembles Bond’s chief M

in many ways. Both are old-fashioned gentlemen close to retirement age who preside over the British Secret Service. Both are also present in all novels and many of the short stories in their respective series. M, or Admiral Sir Miles Messervy (Fleming 2006d, 4), is a bachelor who made a long, successful career in the Navy prior to his current assignment. Although M has a “Victorian soul” (Fleming 2006g, 69) and is an impatient man prone to “occasional outbursts of rage” (Fleming 2006c, 39), Bond feels great loyalty towards him (Fleming 2006f, 18), and, in Miss Money Penny’s words, M “thinks the world of” Bond, in return (Fleming 2006j, 9). Still, with the exceptions of the chapters set at the Blades Club in the first part of *Moonraker* (Fleming 2006f, 38-87) and Bond’s visit to M’s home in *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* (Fleming 2003a, 189-214), their face-to-face interactions take place in M’s office, and the two men’s relationship is and remains mainly that of a superior and a subordinate. As Fleming writes in the short story “The Living Daylights” (1966), there have been “a hundred assignments when he [Bond] had been fired off by M, like a projectile, at some distant target where a problem waited for his coming, waited to be solved by him” (2006b, 97). In *Diamonds Are Forever*, Bond only half-jokingly tells Tiffany Case that he is “almost married” to M (Fleming 2006k, 245), while Kingsley Amis likens the relationship between Bond and M to that of a father and a son (72). Umberto Eco, on the other hand, writes that

Bond-M is a dominated-dominant relationship which characterises from the beginning the limits and possibilities of the character of Bond and sets events moving. [...] M represents to Bond the one who has a global view of the events, hence his superiority over the “hero” who depends upon him and who sets out on his various missions in conditions of inferiority to the omniscient chief. [...] The Bond-M relationship presupposes a psychological ambivalence, a reciprocal love-hate. (2009, 37)

Conversely, O’Donnell reveals very little about Tarrant’s professional background. In the Modesty Blaise books, he is around 60 years old (O’Donnell 1973, 14) and, like M, belongs to several exclusive clubs (O’Donnell 1996, 89). Lady Janet Gillam characterises Tarrant as “a courteous man with a rather Edwardian style of dress and manner” (O’Donnell 1973, 42). The relationship between Modesty and Willie and Tarrant differs very notably from that between Bond and M. Although Tarrant knowingly acts as the catalyst who helps Modesty and Willie find their post-retirement calling as crime-fighters and occasional spies (O’Donnell 2005a, 19) and gives them their first assignment, he is not and never was

Modesty and Willie's boss. Furthermore, Tarrant quickly becomes their close friend, with whom they spend a lot of time and even some holidays – a process that soon leads to Tarrant's resolution not to involve Modesty and Willie in any further operations for his department. In the short story "The Giggle-Wrecker" (1972), O'Donnell describes Tarrant's growing affection for Modesty in the following way: "He was a widower and had lost his [two] sons in the war. With sudden and painful perception he realized that this dark-haired girl [...] had in some measure filled the long emptiness in him" (1972, 38). The bond between the two grows ever deeper, and in *Dragon's Claw*, Modesty confesses that Tarrant is the nearest she has to a father (O'Donnell 2004c, 94; see also O'Donnell 1996, 130). Finally, in the short story "The Girl with the Black Balloon" (1996), we learn that Tarrant's "affection for her [Modesty] now could not have been deeper if she had been his daughter" (O'Donnell 1996, 206).

Much like Judi Dench's M in some of her Bond films, Tarrant is more deeply involved in many Modesty Blaise stories than Fleming's original M ever is in Bond's adventures. The plot of *The Silver Mistress*, for example, revolves around Modesty and Willie rescuing the kidnapped, presumed dead Tarrant from the hands of a blackmail gang pumping him for information; and in a subplot of the *The Night of Morningstar*, Willie puts down the Polish twins, relentless hitmen contracted to kill Tarrant. On other occasions, Modesty and Willie neutralise threats to Tarrant's position as the leader of British Intelligence.¹⁰

In the bigger picture, too, friendships are a much more central theme of the Modesty Blaise stories than they are of Bond's adventures. In *Moonraker*, we learn that Bond frequently spends evenings "playing cards in the company of a few close friends" (Fleming 2006f, 11); and in *Dr. No* that M's Chief of Staff Bill Tanner is "Bond's best friend at headquarters" (Fleming 2006c, 29; see also Fleming 2006a, 36). Fleming never follows up on such mentions,¹¹ however, and Bond's only truly developed long-term friendship is that which he cultivates with Felix Leiter in the course of their many shared adventures (see Hartvelt

10 In a subplot of the *The Impossible Virgin* (1971), Modesty and Willie save Tarrant's head from rolling when they steal compromising papers from the novel's villain, Brunel. In the short story "The Giggle-Wrecker", Tarrant is about to resign as he is unwilling to carry out his superiors' command to activate his sleeper network in order to get the bacteriologist Professor Okubo safely out of East Berlin. Modesty and Willie manage to pull the job off on their own and discover that the man purporting to be Okubo is actually a Soviet agent tasked to expose Tarrant's East German network.

11 In an interview published in 2004, O'Donnell argues that Bond "only exists for the period of the mission he's on – he doesn't have a home, interests, friends. Modesty Blaise has them all" (O'Donnell 2004b, n.p.).

2022; cf. Amis, 78-84); in *The Man with the Golden Gun*, Fleming writes that “Bond treasured his men friends and Felix Leiter was a great slice of his past (2006d, 190). In the Modesty Blaise series, on the other hand, Tarrant’s number two, Jack Fraser, and agent Maude Tiller become friends with Modesty and Willie – and the latter also one of Willie’s occasional lovers. Outside of the intelligence community, the repeating characters Professor Stephen Collier and his wife Dinah Collier (nee Pilgrim) – “closest of all friends to Modesty and Willie” (O’Donnell 1996, 133) – Dr. Giles Pennyfeather, Danny Chavasse, and Lady Janet Gillam all become Modesty and Willie’s dear friends and/or lovers, whom they often have to fight to protect. Ultimately, in the 1996 short story “Cobra Trap”, they even give their lives to save the Colliers (and about a hundred other people) from massacre at the hands of rebel forces in the fictitious Central American Republic of Montelero (ibid., 231-267). In fact, after the first two novels, most Modesty Blaise plots are driven by Modesty and Willie’s loyalty towards their loved ones or other people they feel indebted to. This central characteristic of their personalities is perhaps best captured in the following quote from *Dead Man’s Handle’s* (1985) villain Dr. Thaddeus Pilgrim:

[A]nalytical notations [...] have clarified and identified [...] the particular *flaw* in Miss Blaise and Mr. Garvin which makes them so highly vulnerable. [...] Simple friendship! That unnatural loyalty to another person which is perhaps the most truly nauseating of all human attributes. [...] But there can be no doubt that Miss Blaise and Mr. Garvin are slaves to it. (O’Donnell 2005b, 146-147; emphasis in original)

Modesty’s semi-permanent lover, the American multi-millionaire John Dall, one of “the dozen richest men in the world” (O’Donnell 1966, 94), deserves special mention here. In some ways, he is the Felix Leiter of the Modesty Blaise stories, representing the Special Relationship between Britain and the United States (see Hartvelt). Dall “has the ear of people in high places in Washington” (O’Donnell 1966, 277) and on several occasions uses his considerable influence and wealth to aid Modesty and Willie (see O’Donnell 1966, 228-229, 276-281; O’Donnell 1972, 50-51; O’Donnell 2003, 206-207, 249).

Bond is an agent of Her Majesty’s government and all of his assignments – perhaps with the exception of the revenge killing of von Hammerstein and his cronies in the short story “For Your Eyes Only” (1960) (Fleming 2006e; see also Amis, 26-29; Black 2001, 41-42) – are closely tied to Great Britain’s political and/or economic security interests. In the Modesty Blaise series, the same can be

said for the first two novels only. In the opening story, Modesty and Willie help protect a large shipment of diamonds Britain has given as down payment for access to the fictitious Sheikdom of Malaurak's oil. It has to be noted, however, that it is the "criminal heavyweight" Gabriel who is after the gems, not any foreign power (O'Donnell 2005a, 51). In the second novel, Modesty and Willie thwart a takeover attempt of Kuwait, presumably backed by the Soviet Union and/or China (O'Donnell 1966); that is, the plot is arguably O'Donnell's closest to those of Fleming's pre-SPECTRE-era Bond stories, and Modesty and Willie again ultimately safeguard Britain's/the West's access to oil. From the third novel, *I, Lucifer*, onwards, however, O'Donnell finds a style more of his own and his heroes start tackling international criminal groups and other adversaries for their private motives. That said, the short story "The Giggle-Wrecker" and the penultimate Modesty Blaise novel, *The Night of Morningstar*, do have geopolitically motivated plots. The former, like Fleming's short story "The Living Daylights", focuses on the spy war fought in divided Berlin. In the latter, a Kremlin-backed organisation calling itself The Watchmen is about to assassinate the heads of government of the US, the UK, West Germany, and France during a summit meeting held in Portugal in order to create major political unrest in Europe.

Bond, of course, is officially licensed to kill. Modesty and Willie are not, but in meting out their particular brand of vigilante justice, they use lethal force at least as frequently as Fleming's original Bond does. Both series feature much discussion concerning killing in cold versus hot blood that is often contradictory. In *Casino Royale*, for example, Bond tells René Mathis that a "Double O number in our Service means you've had to kill a chap in cold blood in the course of some job" (Fleming 2006h, 159); but in *From Russia with Love*, Fleming writes that "Bond had never killed in cold blood" (2003b, 175). In any event, Bond does indeed quite often brood over his kills, most notably in the closing chapter of *Diamonds Are Forever* and in the opening chapter of *Goldfinger*. In *The Night of Morningstar*, O'Donnell expresses Modesty and Willie's thoughts on the use of lethal violence in the following way: "no man who was not evil and a killer had died at their hands, and none had been destroyed in cold blood" (2001, 159). Indeed, Modesty and Willie often go to great lengths in order to force "a confrontation that would provide an opportunity to destroy them [their enemies] in hot blood" (O'Donnell 1996, 187). There are examples to the contrary too, however, most notably in the final chapter of *A Taste for Death*, where Tarrant delivers the following ultimatum and its justifications to the mastermind behind the novel's criminal plot, Sir Howard Presteging:

Modesty Blaise will kill you if you don't [commit suicide...] She doesn't object to the human predators of this world trying to kill each other off. And since she places herself in that category, she considers that she's fair game. [...] She certainly doesn't see herself as an instrument of justice. [...] She simply says you have to go. If you don't, you'll murder more people. Little, harmless people. [...] That's why she'll kill you, Presteign. As a deterrent. (O'Donnell 2006, 279)

Presteign refuses to shoot himself, and shortly thereafter, a scuba-diving Modesty draws the swimming man to his death in the Mediterranean in an act that certainly qualifies as premeditated murder. A more accurate statement regarding Modesty's policy on the use of deadly force, then, is her line from *I, Lucifer*: "I've never killed anyone who wasn't trying to [or as in the case of Presteign above, had tried to] kill me – or one of my friends" (O'Donnell 1984, 75).

Bond is backed up and funded by Britain's intelligence and administrative network, and occasionally by American and other institutions, too. Modesty and Willie get some support from British and other Western officials, but also make frequent use of the underworld contacts they established during their career in crime. O'Donnell's heroes are independently wealthy and finance their operations on their own. As temporary bases, they often make use of the over "half a dozen [...] occasional residences around the world" (O'Donnell 2005b, 33) that they own between the two of them, including ones in Paris, Malta, and Sausalito, California, not to mention Modesty's villa in Tangier.

The Q Branch and its ingenious inventions play a very small role in Fleming's original texts but, of course, became an iconic part of the Bond films from *Goldfinger* (1964) onwards. Although Modesty and Willie never use outlandish gadgets in the way the filmic Bond often does, O'Donnell's Willie Garvin is a sort of one-man Q Branch, highly skilled in electronics and micro-engineering (e.g. O'Donnell 1984, 155). In his workshop, he manufactures concealable weapons and other helpful accessories for Modesty and himself and is very resourceful in the field too, often coming up with improvised contraptions that help save the day. As for the "one-man Q Branch" analogy, there is one very clear difference between the Modesty Blaise novels and the Bond films, however: Modesty and Willie's equipment remains nearly unchanged from the first adventure to the last, that is, there is no tendency whatsoever to introduce one or several new gadgets per story.

Although the plots of many Bond stories are quite spectacular, they are still rather firmly grounded in the geopolitics and science of their day, with Solit-

aire's "truth divining" in *Live and Let Die* (1954) (Fleming 2003c, 64-66) being perhaps the most notable exception to this rule. O'Donnell's stories, on the other hand, frequently contain elements of what could be called "the supernatural". The blind Dinah Collier can locate subterranean water veins, pipes, and buried treasure (O'Donnell 2006) – and even pinpoint a missing person's whereabouts on a world map (O'Donnell 2003, 151-153). The paranoid Lucifer is "able to foretell the imminent death of an individual, if provided with a suitable object to use for psychometric contact" (O'Donnell 2005b, 66). Many of Dr. Giles Pennyfeather's patients benefit more from his gift for "psychic healing" than from the more formal medicine he practices (O'Donnell 2002, 98). Willie's ears often prickle when there is unknown danger ahead (O'Donnell 1984, 32-34, 53-54). Both Modesty and Willie possess "the ability to sleep at will and to wake up by an internal clock" (O'Donnell 2002, 227),¹² and Modesty has "a quite inexplicable gift of orientation" (O'Donnell 2004c, 29). On top of all this, there are the almost superhuman mental techniques Modesty and Willie learned from the old mystic Sivaji in the Thar Desert (e.g. O'Donnell 1972, 76-77; O'Donnell 1973, 58). In his later books, O'Donnell has Modesty and Willie dedicate time and energy towards "bonding" with certain inanimate objects as they believe that these "could be perverse or co-operative according to one's attitude towards them" (O'Donnell 1996, 54). Finally, in *The Night of Morningstar*, Modesty adds yet another otherworldly-seeming skill to her arsenal, using "muscular contractions" to get rid of some injected unconsciousness-inducing dope, which enables her to recover her faculties much earlier than the villains anticipate (O'Donnell 2001, 199, 234, 237). In many ways, then, Modesty and Willie are closer to superheroes than Fleming's rather human Bond.

From time to time, O'Donnell refers to famous popular culture characters and products in his stories, but he never directly brings up James Bond. Still, some clear nods to Fleming can be found in the early Modesty Blaise books. In the first novel, the engine of Modesty's Daimler Dart holds "no esoteric mysteries of adaptation" (O'Donnell 2005a, 32), which I take to be a tongue-in-cheek allusion to the literary Bond's supercharged Bentley, and perhaps also to the filmic Bond's Aston Martin DB5. In *Sabre-Tooth* (1966), as part of her cover story, Modesty acts as if gambling away most of her fortune in a rigged game of baccarat (O'Donnell 1966, 93-98), and the atmosphere is highly reminiscent of Fleming's

12 Bond has a similar ability; that is, a "curious extra-sensory alarm clock that some people keep in their heads and that always seems to know the exact time" (Fleming 2006d, 131).

famous gambling scenes in *Casino Royale* and elsewhere. In *I, Lucifer*, Tarrant has Willie as his guest at the Rand's Club (O'Donnell 1984, 97-101), clearly modelled after Fleming's Blades. Furthermore, the pair humiliates two ungentlemanly club members in snooker in a manner rather similar to that in which Bond and M expose Sir Hugo Drax's card cheating in *Moonraker*.

The Modesty Blaise stories characteristically contain much more humour than Fleming's Bond texts do. As Goh puts it, "Blaise and Garvin never take themselves too seriously, and are capable of childish pranks and self-mockery in between serious work in a way that Bond is incapable of" (41). In the characterisation of the eccentric villains and/or their principal henchmen, however, O'Donnell's debt to Fleming is apparent: the Modesty Blaise novels "almost invariably include larger-than-life villains and the sort of gruesome henchmen that even Bond himself might blanch at" (Crossley, 361; see also Goh, 33). A further point in common between the two series is that in O'Donnell's books "[t]here is also an emphasis on the sort of luxuries that characterise much of the Bond canon" (Crossley, 361).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There can be no doubt that James Bond's popularity contributed to the creation – and in all probability to the success – of Modesty Blaise in the early 1960s. In this cultural and temporal context, references to a "feminine answer to James Bond" made perfect sense from a marketing perspective. As I hope to have shown above, there also are certain similarities in the characters and plot elements employed by Fleming and O'Donnell. Furthermore, some features of the Bond films may have filtered into O'Donnell's writing. Overall, however, and especially from the third Modesty Blaise novel onwards, the two series are ultimately quite different. This seems to have been a deliberate strategy on O'Donnell's part, as he "was anxious to keep Modesty separate from James Bond" and therefore "stayed away from Intelligence stories pretty much" (2004d, n.p.). I therefore concur with Crossley when she writes that "[d]espite the superficial trappings of sex, violence and glamour, there is actually very little similarity between the characters of Bond and Modesty Blaise and the worlds in which they operate" (363). Nevertheless, there is only so much to be gained from debating how much of Bond can be found in Modesty, Willie, and the fictional world they inhabit. The more pressing issue, to my mind, is that Modesty Blaise remains sadly understudied. What is more, much of the existing academic work has concentrated on the 1966 film version that does nearly as little justice to the world and characters created by O'Donnell as the first *Casino Royale* film (1967) does to

Fleming (see Crossley, 359, 368; White, 68-69). Here and in future publications, I hope to do my part in expanding academic studies on the “real” Modesty Blaise, especially in regards to the frequent and rich – but simultaneously depressingly negative and stereotypical – depictions of Central and South America in O’Donnell’s stories.

REFERENCES

- Amis, Kingsley. [1965] 1966. *The James Bond Dossier*. London: Pan Books.
- Black, Jeremy. 2001. *The Politics of James Bond: From Fleming’s Novels to the Big Screen*. Westport: Praeger.
- Blackmore, Lawrence. 2005. *The Modesty Blaise Companion*. London: Book Palace Books.
- Buckton, Oliver. 2021. *The World Is Not Enough: A Biography of Ian Fleming*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Chapman, James. 2019. “The Extraordinary Career of Modesty Blaise”. In *Comics and Pop Culture: Adaptation from Panel to Frame*, eds. Barry Keith Grant and Scott Henderson. Austin: University of Texas Press: 199-213.
- Crossley, Laura. 2018. “An Absence of Modesty: The Male/Female Dichotomy in *Modesty Blaise*”. *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 15(3): 357-374.
- Eco, Umberto. 2009. “Narrative Structures in Fleming”. In *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader* (second edition), ed. Christoph Lindner. Manchester: Manchester University Press: 34-55.
- Fleming, Ian. [1953] 2006h. *Casino Royale*. London: Penguin Books.
- Fleming, Ian. [1954] 2003c. *Live and Let Die*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Fleming, Ian. [1955] 2006f. *Moonraker*. London: Penguin Books.
- Fleming, Ian. [1956] 2006k. *Diamonds Are Forever*. London: Penguin Books.
- Fleming, Ian. [1957] 2003b. *From Russia with Love*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Fleming, Ian. [1958] 2006c. *Dr. No*. London: Penguin Books.
- Fleming, Ian. [1959] 2006g. *Goldfinger*. London: Penguin Books.
- Fleming, Ian. [1960] 2006e. *For Your Eyes Only*. London: Penguin Books.
- Fleming, Ian. [1961] 2006j. *Thunderball*. London: Penguin Books.
- Fleming, Ian. [1962] 2006i. *The Spy Who Loved Me*. London: Penguin Books.
- Fleming, Ian. [1963] 2003a. *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Fleming, Ian. [1964] 2006a. *You Only Live Twice*. London: Penguin Books.
- Fleming, Ian. [1965] 2006d. *The Man with the Golden Gun*. London: Penguin Books.

- Fleming, Ian. [1966] 2006b. *Octopussy and The Living Daylights*. London: Penguin Books.
- Goh, Robbie B. H. 1999. "Peter O'Donnell, Race Relations and National Identity: The Dynamics of Representation in 1960s and 1970s Britain". *Journal of Popular Culture* 32(4): 29-43.
- Hartvelt, N.F. 2022. "'The Texan with Whom He Shared So Many Adventures': Reassessing the Role of Felix Leiter in Fleming's Bond Novels". *International Journal of James Bond Studies* 5(1): 1-24. <http://doi.org/10.24877/jbs.79>.
- "Inflation Calculator". 2023. Bank of England. <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>. (Accessed on 21 September 2023.)
- Kinane, Ian. 2021. *Ian Fleming and the Politics of Ambivalence*. London: Bloomsbury.
- O'Donnell, Peter. 1965. *Modesty Blaise*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- O'Donnell, Peter. [1965] 2005a. *Modesty Blaise*. London: Souvenir Press.
- O'Donnell, Peter. 1966. *Sabre-Tooth*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- O'Donnell, Peter. [1967] 1984. *I, Lucifer*. New York: The Mysterious Press.
- O'Donnell, Peter. [1969] 2006. *A Taste for Death*. London: Souvenir Press.
- O'Donnell, Peter. 1971. *The Impossible Virgin*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- O'Donnell, Peter. 1972. *Pieces of Modesty*. London: Pan Books.
- O'Donnell, Peter. 1973. *The Silver Mistress*. New York: The Mysterious Press.
- O'Donnell, Peter. [1976] 2003. *Last Day in Limbo*. London: Souvenir Press.
- O'Donnell, Peter. [1978] 2004c. *Dragon's Claw*. London: Souvenir Press.
- O'Donnell, Peter. [1981] 2002. *The Xanadu Talisman*. London: Souvenir Press.
- O'Donnell, Peter. [1982] 2001. *The Night of Morningstar*. London: Souvenir Press.
- O'Donnell, Peter. [1985] 2005b. *Dead Man's Handle*. London: Souvenir Press.
- O'Donnell, Peter. 1996. *Cobra Trap*. London: Souvenir Press.
- O'Donnell, Peter. 2004a. "Girl Walking: Modesty Blaise Creator Peter O'Donnell on the Real Modesty Blaise". In *Modesty Blaise: The Gabriel Set-Up*, by Peter O'Donnell and Jim Holdaway. London: Titan Books. n.p.
- O'Donnell, Peter. 2004b. "Modesty Maker: An Interview with Peter O'Donnell, Part 2". In *Modesty Blaise: Top Traitor*, by Peter O'Donnell and Jim Holdaway. London: Titan Books. n.p.
- O'Donnell, Peter. 2004d. "Modesty Maker: An Interview with Peter O'Donnell, Part 3". In *Modesty Blaise: The Black Pearl*, by Peter O'Donnell and Jim Holdaway. London: Titan Books. n.p.
- Paterson, Mike. [2001] 2004. "Blaise of Glory: The Modesty Blaise Phenomenon, Part 1". In *Modesty Blaise: The Gabriel Set-Up*, by Peter O'Donnell and Jim Holdaway. London: Titan Books. n.p.

- “Peter O’Donnell Creator of Modesty Blaise, Dr No Comic Strip Adaptation, Has Died”. 2010. *MI6-HQ.com*. 5 May.
<https://www.mi6-hq.com/news/index.php?itemid=8545>. (Accessed on 20 September 2023.)
- Strong, Jeremy. 2018. “James Bond: International Man of Gastronomy?”. In *James Bond Uncovered*, ed. Jeremy Strong. London: Palgrave Macmillan: 61-85.
- White, Rosie. 2007. *Violent Femmes: Women as Spies in Popular Culture*. Oxon: Routledge.