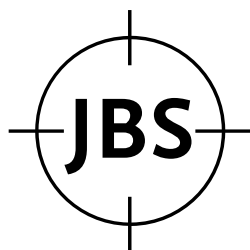


Epic Epistemology

Archipelagic Thinking in the Odyssean Adventures of James Bond

JONNIE ERIKSSON AND KALLE JONASSON

The James Bond franchise is a well-recognised popular cultural phenomenon, not least by virtue of the imagery and sound bites provided by the film series spanning over sixty years (1962-present). While being widely known, Bond has to a rather small extent been related to issues of knowledge. A reader on James Bond and philosophy contains a chapter on the epistemology of the secret agent, in which his phenomenal abductive reasoning is explicated (Abrams 2006). Furthermore, there are instances of when the content of the film series has been the lens used to communicate a certain educational topic, such as geographical didactics (Johansson 2025) and critical gender studies (Hackett, Coghlan, and Nolan 2023). Such studies show that the conspicuous character of Bond offers ample opportunities for students to engage with themes from highly differing fields. Here, however, we will look into epistemological implications of the Bondiverse, especially the film series by EON Productions. We will take the opportunity that Ethan Smilie (2025), among others, gives us, to compare Bond with another icon of Western storytelling: Odysseus. This article therefore aims to flesh out the similarities between Odysseus and James Bond as epic figures (which involves both a consideration of what kind of figures they are and what kind of



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Jonnie Eriksson is Senior Lecturer in the History of Ideas and Science at Halmstad University, Sweden.

Kalle Jonasson is Associate Professor of Educational Science at Halmstad University, Sweden.

epics they take part in), with a focus on how these crafty men of action move and think; in short, what is the significance of knowledge in relation to movement with regards to these dynamic characters?

ET IN ACEDIA EGO

Smilie addresses the ambiguity of both Odysseus and Bond as heroes in relation to their respective processes of gathering knowledge. Smilie's elaboration is based on the champions' shared aversion against sloth (or *acedia*, as early Christian philosophers called this vice). Their daring adventurousness comes from curiosity, a trait that makes them appear resourceful while it simultaneously poses danger to their surroundings and loved ones. But whereas Smilie leans towards the moral and ethical aspects of curiosity, in what follows we will tend to its epistemological significance in motifs of movement. To this end, we will focus on the spatial logic of adventure and its implied movements – the itinerary of travelling as well as the dynamics of action, the venturing out as well as the return. Along those lines, F. W. J. Schelling once said that the *Iliad* is a centrifugal poem (venturing out), while the *Odyssey* is centripetal (returning) (1989, 218). But there is also a peripatetic motion (itinerant) in the very story of Odysseus's journey in the Mediterranean archipelago, which is not unlike the adventures of James Bond. Given Bond's inclination to islands and archipelagos, in particular the Caribbean (Crane and Fletcher 2017; Kinane 2021), it might thus be worthwhile scrutinising his ventures around the West Indies.

The close connection between the character of Odysseus, the motif of journeying, and themes of knowledge (of different sorts) is even signalled by the usual epithets attached to him by Homer: he is a man who is interchangeably described as *polytropos* (of many turns, much-turning, multifaceted, or perhaps much-travelled, much-wandering), as *polymêchanos* (of many devices, many means; resourceful), and as *polymêtis* (in many ways cunning, wise in many ways, but perhaps also a teller of tales). In this latter sense, Odysseus is a typical figure of a particular form of knowledge – cunning or ruse (*mêtis*) – which had an important place in Greek culture, but was later denigrated by the main philosophical tradition after Plato and Aristotle (Detienne and Vernant 2018). But unlike the Mediterranean Odysseus, Bond's origin and recurring haunt is the Caribbean (Parker 2015; Kinane), and by moving in different archipelagos, different ways of moving emerge. While Bond travels to and fro much like Odysseus, his heroic exploits are usually executed not only in the form of battles of violence or wit, but also in the form of sporting activities such as surfing, water-skiing, and hang-gliding. Connections of Bond's heroism with the skills needed for governing the

natural elements in extreme sports has been explored by David Pegram (2018) as well as Jonnie Eriksson and Kalle Jonasson (2020, 2023). Much of the splendour with which Bond's exploits are associated emanate from his extreme acts of sport in hazardous settings. This is why an analysis of the *elementa* of epics must take into account the movements and displacements that embody the uncertainty and finality of fate.

ARCHIPELAGIC AND ABYSSAL THINKING

The theoretical and methodological framework for this paper combines inspirations from two seemingly disparate sets of ideas. One is the geophilosophical and geopoetical approach to the concept of "archipelagic thinking" and the thought of the "abyss" in Édouard Glissant's theory of non-systematicity and creolisation, inspired by the history and geography of the Caribbean (Glissant 1990, 1997, 2005, 2009; Wald Lasowski 2015; Wiedorn 2018; Pugh and Chandler 2023). Glissant views archipelagic thinking as a fractal form of conceiving the world as a kind of transformative mixing of differences (in what he calls a "Relation"), in opposition to the more established way of thinking continentally – that is, in terms of identity, homogeneity, and systematicity. Archipelagic thinking draws from the Caribbean experience of creolisation and is part of the history of colonisation and the slave trade; therefore, there is in the archipelagic mind a wariness of the "abyss" (*gouffre*), a deep dark fatality (as the bodies of slaves have sunk in the Middle Passage and lie dead at the bottom of the abyssal plain of the Atlantic) but also a creative force (as when submarine volcanic activity has been part of forming islands in the Caribbean sea). We will for our purposes draw from the more poetico-philosophical aspects of Glissant's thought, sidestepping its political aspects.

The other inspiration is the meshing of epistemology, aesthetics, and philosophy of nature in the work of the German idealist F. W. J. Schelling, who develops an idea of constructive but unconscious forces in nature which generate human consciousness and thought, and for whom art, especially epic poetry, is the foremost form of grasping that fundamental identity of mind and matter. Of particular importance in this context is Schelling's notion that thought is essentially *motion* and that it is navigational (Woodard 2020) – to which we might add his thesis that the epic is a genre for describing movement, of essentially setting things in motion and tracing their movements through actions or activities (Schelling 1989). Schelling, too, speaks of an "abyss" (*Abgrund*, or *Ungrund*): behind all "grounds" for existing things, there is a groundless force of creativity, an

abyssal dynamic freedom, from which springs both life and the possibility of evil (Schelling 2000, 2006; Thomas 2023). The story of the epic seems to take place bordered by a similar abyssal darkness, when Schelling says of the epic that its “beginning and end are just as indeterminate as the dark time of the primordial world and the future” (1989, 218). The epic is then the form of expression of the movement of actions and thoughts in a mythic space enclosed by an abyss of time.

In the following, we will trace the cinematic adventures of James Bond as an epic taking form in resonance with themes and structures in the *Odyssey*, viewed in the light (and darkness) of Glissant and Schelling. We will see how the Bond film series produces its epic characteristics out of piecemeal outings, and how this epic, like the *Odyssey*, is essentially an image of archipelagic thought confronting the fatefulness of the abyss. In this there is a question of how thought – whether conscious or unconscious – takes epic form. We will first see the part played by knowledge in the idea of the making of the epic, and we will then trace the movements in space that give the archipelagic shape to that “odyssey of the spirit” of which Schelling speaks when he conceives of the process of self-consciousness as an epic adventure through the poetry of nature: “[w]hat we speak of as nature is a poem lying pent in a mysterious and wonderful script. Yet the riddle could reveal itself, were we to recognize in it the odyssey of the spirit, which, marvelously deluded, seeks itself, and in seeking flies from itself” (1978, 232). Thus we can discern, through the adventures of Bond, the emergence of an epic epistemology from furtive movements becoming ways of thinking – an odyssey of the spirit which becomes a literal body of knowledge.

THE ODYSSEUS BOND

In *Skyfall* (2012), M recites the final lines of Lord Tennyson’s poem “Ulysses”: “[w]e are not now that strength which in old days / Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,— / One equal temper of heroic hearts, / Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will / To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield” (1999, 84). It would seem that the connection made is between an ageing conqueror-king still maintaining his adventurous spirit and the remnants of the British Empire clinging on to its ambition and belief in its resilience, the latter personified in an already ageing Bond. The connection even shapes the narrative structure: like Odysseus, Bond has in the film travelled to and returned from the land of the dead (the title song’s vignette stresses this motif, as does the dialogue: he is back from the dead; he is resurrected), and will return home (not to an Aegean island but to the Scottish highlands) in order to fight off hostile intruders

(the equivalent of the suitors). However, these intertextual connections, thematically and narratively, point in different directions. If Bond is associated with Odysseus, the question is just what kind of figure it is that they both represent; and if Bond has an “odyssey”, what kind of adventure is that – what travels, what experiences, what homecoming?

Tennyson’s version of Odysseus is one in a long line of characterisations. We can briefly compare three of them, noting the significant part that knowledge plays in all of them. First, Homer’s initial lines from the *Odyssey* introduces a figure of varied experience: “[t]ell me, Muse, of the man of many ways, who was driven / far journeys, after he sacked Troy’s sacred citadel. / Many were they whose cities he saw, whose minds he learned of, / many were the pains he suffered in his spirit on the wide sea, / struggling for his own life and the homecoming of his companions” (2007, 27; I:1-5). What we have here is a man who has had triumphant wartime experience but in his attempt to return home was thwarted to the cost of his company; Odysseus is a man of many ways or many turns (*polytropos*) who has been turned away from his return home, and in this has experienced all manner of different places and peoples and their ways of thinking.

Next, in Dante Alighieri’s *Divina Commedia*, Odysseus himself speaks to the poet from his place in the Inferno, condemned for his duplicitous nature, and reveals in his account the hubris of his ambitions, which turn out to be mainly moral: he says that nothing was able to defeat in him “the longing / I had to gain experience of the world / and of the vices and the worth of men”. And he recalls how he spoke to his companions: “[c]onsider well the seed that gave you birth: / you were not made to live your lives like brutes, / but to be followers of worth and knowledge” (*Inferno* XXVI; 1995, 172-174). For these reasons, instead of returning home to Ithaca to reunite with his wife and son, he sails past the pillars of Gibraltar, comes upon a huge mountain in new lands, where the ship is sunk by a whirlwind, the sea closing over their drowning bodies.

Lastly, Tennyson’s Odysseus appears to be an amalgam: he both has experience of travels and longs for new adventures. He is an old warrior-king who has returned home, reminiscing about his glory days while now weakened by time, as in M’s reading; but still he “cannot rest from travel” – he needs to return to the adventure itself. Ultimately, his longing reaches a fateful hubris, to go beyond the human limits of knowledge: “[a]nd this gray spirit yearning in desire / To follow knowledge like a sinking star, / Beyond the utmost bound of human thought” (83).

In sum, these three classics provide us with three portraits of Odysseus as a character having knowledge or longing for knowledge. In Homer, Odysseus is a man with much experience of the world because of his travels: he knows of places and people's minds, but he is also burdened by the experience of his sufferings. In Dante, Odysseus instead longs for knowledge as a striving for what is good in humanity: he yearns for experience of the world, mainly of the vices and values of men, and he affirms his humanity in quest of virtue and knowledge. In Tennyson, there is some kind of synthesis of these two prior versions: Odysseus has much experience of places and people – he has delighted in battle but also suffered – but now he yearns for new adventures which give a sense of life, to the extreme degree of seeking knowledge beyond human thought.

Odysseus (and with him, Bond) would then be either of three figures pertaining to knowledge: the man of multifaceted experience who is burdened with its *pathos*; the man of unavowable desire for new experiences to affirm humanist *ethos*; the man of multiform experiences who reflects upon them only to yearn for renewed discovery and ever-greater accumulation of knowledge as transhuman *logos*. For each figure, their travels trace varying spatial correlatives to their approaches to knowledge: Homer's Odysseus meanders the Mediterranean while fixing his mind on returning home to his island kingdom; Dante's Odysseus avoids this return and instead ventures onwards to his tragic abyss; Tennyson's Odysseus is already at home, and he uses his island as a place of reflection, longing for the expansive world outside it, an ever-beckoning horizon of possibilities.

Is any of these figures actually equivalent to James Bond, and if so, which one and how? Perhaps there are some elements of each – it might depend upon the actual portrayal by the different actors, who all represent different takes on the same character – but the James Bond mythos is an overarching epic form which takes shape from the pattern of his adventures, rather than the psychology of a character. In the following, we will first compare the epic-making processes of Bond's and Odysseus's adventures as instances of knowledge, and then we will look more closely at the ways of thinking that are instantiated by Bond's particular movements in archipelagic space.

ISLANDS OF MUSES AND SIRENS

The adventures of Bond and Odysseus, respectively, take epic form when they transform into a matter of knowledge: events that seemed circumstantial come to be significant when they are known and told; this is how action is not mere drama but becomes *epos*. For this reason, the telling of their heroic adventures it-

self thematises storytelling and stresses the importance of knowledge and memory for being able to do so.

In the *Odyssey*, this theme is introduced from the very beginning: it is the Muse who is invoked to tell the story of this man of many turns; it is the Muse who sings through the voice (or pen) of the poet. Then, the theme is repeated several times within the story, as a problematisation of who can actually tell it. A central catalyst for the telling of Odysseus's adventures is the blind rhapsodist Demodocus, who during the feast of the Phaeacians sings about episodes from the Trojan war: a dispute between Achilles and Odysseus, and then, on Odysseus's request, about his own ruse of the Trojan horse. Odysseus commends Demodocus on his keen knowledge of what happened in the war; it is as if the poet had been there himself, he says. Hearing the songs about his experiences, Odysseus both times weeps remembering what he and his compatriots had suffered. In the first event, the Phaeacian king proposes that they halt the festivities and distract themselves with athletic games (in which Odysseus excels); in the second event, when Odysseus weeps again, his hosts urge him to tell them about who he is and where he comes from. It is at this point that Odysseus starts telling of his adventures navigating the Mediterranean sea, facing the lotus-eaters, the cyclops, the enchantress Circe, the sirens, Scylla and Charybdis, and all the other fanciful encounters which decimate his men and render him the sole survivor.

Among these adventures in Odysseus's own tale of his travels, one brief but famous scene seems to address the nature of the epic and its relationship to knowledge. Demodocus could seem to have first-hand experience from the Trojan campaign because he was inspired by the Muse – the all-knowing font of stories whom Homer himself initially invokes. Now, within this developing epic, Odysseus takes over as narrator and recounts his recent experiences, one of which is his passage past the island of the sirens, who sing the following:

Come this way, honored Odysseus, great glory of the Achaians, / and stay your ship, so that you can listen here to our singing; / for no one else has ever sailed past this place in his black ship / until he has listened to the honey-sweet voice that issues / from our lips; then goes on, well pleased, knowing more than ever / he did; for we know everything that the Argives and Trojans / did and suffered in wide Troy through the gods' despite. Over all the generous earth we know everything that happens. (190; XII: 184-191)

The sirens are not only enticing Odysseus with the beauty of their voices – their sweet song pouring like honey from their lips – but also with *knowledge*. This knowledge is manifold: it is the knowledge of Odysseus’s fame (that he and his deeds are known throughout the world) which they call upon him with, as if appealing to his vanity; it is the knowledge that is promised to him if he stays to hear their song, as it makes all men wiser; and it is the knowledge that the sirens assure him that they possess of all things in the world, a wellspring of wisdom to draw from. Thus, three types of knowledge: renown, wisdom, and omniscience.

What the sirens sing about is that they, who know of all things that happen throughout the earth, can by their song impart to Odysseus this knowledge, primarily of his experiences in the Trojan war, and thereby make him wiser. (It has been noted that the sirens sing in a language reminiscent of the *Iliad* rather than the *Odyssey*, so it is like hearing a piece of the prior epic in this new one; cf. Pucci 1996; Citati 2010.) The sirens could then be seen to represent the power of the epic to bestow and enhance glory, and to transform glory into wisdom. Odysseus is seduced by the opportunity to hear the mellifluous sound of his own experiences becoming epic; but he passes it by, possibly escaping the deadly fate of languishing unto death on the shore of the sirens’ island. He literally moves on, and in doing so ensures that a new epic can take form: the one specific to the adventures of Odysseus’s return home, being told in the moment by Odysseus himself. It actually seems as if the character is made aware of himself becoming an epic hero, because just after evading the sirens, his company immediately faces new perils and he speaks to his frightened companions: “[d]ear friends, surely we are not unlearned in evils. / This is no greater evil now than it was when the Cyclops / had us cooped up in his hollow cave by force and violence, / but even there, by my courage and counsel and intelligence, / we escaped away. I think that all this will be remembered / some day too” (190; XII: 208-213).

When the cinematic Bond begins his adventures in *Dr. No* (1962), he also passes islands of sirens, so to speak. The general importance of music (the work of Muses) and of melody (honey-sweet song) in the Bond films is a vital part in creating an epic character to the Bond mythos, taking the place of the typically omniscient narrator in most Ian Fleming’s novels (an exception being *The Spy Who Loved Me* [1962], a subjective female account). One of the most archetypal scenes in all of the Bond films is perhaps to be construed as an equivalent to the sirens episode in the *Odyssey*: Honey Ryder (the sweet honey of a siren’s voice) is singing and humming a romantic ditty as she steps onto the Caribbean beach, her voice rousing Bond from his sleep in the sand: “[u]nderneath the mango tree

me honey and me can watch for the moon. / Underneath the mango tree me honey and me make booloolop soon”.

This is, however, not the first time we (and Bond) hear this particular song in the film; it plays on the radio in the party scene at Puss Feller’s bar when Bond, Quarrel, and Felix Leiter confront the undercover female reporter working for Dr. No, and it plays on a record as Bond seduces the secretary Miss Tao, who also secretly works for No. So before Bond finally meets the beachside siren Honey, the song has already called upon him twice in association with duplicitous women. In these earlier scenes there is a contrast between the naïve romanticism and exoticism of the lyrics and the iniquitous machinations of the villain, signalling that evil permeates the tropical paradise. When Honey arrives and takes over, and Bond joins in the singing, the song is “cleaned up” from its association with sinister intrigue and instead comes into its own as bucolic eroticism, as if there were two false starts foreshadowing this very scene.

Furthermore, it seems as if Honey has some of the omniscience of the sirens, as she later assures Bond: while lacking a formal education, she has worked her way through a set of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* that she inherited from her parents; starting with A, she is now up to T, so she probably knows more than Bond does, she claims. And aside from such encyclopedic knowledge, she has a superior experience of the natural world, challenging Bond rhetorically: “[h]ow well do you know about animals? Did you ever see a mongoose dance? Or, a scorpion with sunstroke sting itself to death? Or, a praying mantis eat her husband after making love?”. Bond can only admit that he hasn’t.

What is more important, though, is that the song also sets off a significant chain reaction of musical callbacks, as if the memory of the Caribbean beach echoes through the film series. In *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* (1969; a film without islands, though Corsica lurks in the backstory), there is a scene in which Bond resigns from service and goes to clear out his office. As he rummages through a drawer, the music shifts to a familiar melody; from the drawer, he picks up Honey’s knife, which she presented to him on their first encounter on the beach, and holds it up briefly reminiscing while a woman sings “Underneath the Mango Tree” non-diegetically on the soundtrack. Lazenby’s Bond here remembers Connery’s Bond, both on their first adventures and at the same time not.

In both the beginning and the end of *No Time to Die* (2021), the sonic palimpsest adds another layer: the song played is “We Have All the Time In the World”, a love theme from *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, which promises ever-

lasting romance (thematically not unlike the nuptial content of “Underneath the Mango Tree”). By virtue of the choice of soundtrack, *No Time to Die* thus calls back the memory of *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, which in turn called back that of *Dr. No*. Someone remembers the past, someone knows all that has happened, even across the many revamps and reboots, to let the past return repeatedly. There is a level of rhapsodic omniscience to this narratological twist of fate, where it is the Bondian epic itself which carries the memory in sound and image, not in the mind: Craig’s Bond can’t remember Lazenby’s Bond, just as Madeleine can’t remember Tracy, but the film as medium remembers musically (with Muse-like omniscience).

The ending of *No Time to Die* again plays “All the Time in the World” as the soundtrack of an almost explicitly epic-making process. When we hear it in the beginning, it is with tragic irony; we may take it, naïvely, as a promise of eternal love for James and Madeleine as he has escaped the danger of his line of work, or we may take it as a callback to *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* and suspect that this is a poet’s lying word, the cruel reminder that Bond can never have familial bliss and that most likely he will lose Madeleine (as he lost Tracy in that previous Bondiverse, and as he lost Vesper in the beginning of the Craig reboot). However, once we reach the end and the song replays, we know that both assumptions were false: it is not the woman but Bond who dies; the woman survives to tell the tale. And that’s the point – it is the woman, Madeleine Swann, the thwarted Penelope, who takes up the siren’s song (Bond’s “Swann song”) as she says to their daughter Mathilde: “I’m going to tell you a story about a man. His name was Bond, James Bond”. The true epic about the adventures of James Bond begins at this endpoint, beyond his death, where there is no (more) time for dying, and there is all the time in the world to tell his story.

The Bondian epic – the “Bondiad”, let’s say – could then be viewed as the canonical totality of Bond stories beginning with *Dr. No* and ending with *No Time to Die*. This is an epic cycle, the closed ring of a mythos, which can be read as a whole with its particular narrative structure, and whose structure traces a certain logic, irrespective of whether these were purposely planned or adventitiously formed (the truth is probably a mix of the two). Perhaps in this we can see an analogy with Schelling’s conception of aesthetics and its similarity with Greek mythology: that the work of art is the identity of a conscious and an unconscious activity (one of skill and freedom, the other of nature), so that it has on the one hand a “manifest intention” and on the other an “*unconscious infinity*”, much like Greek mythology has “an infinite meaning and a symbolism for all ideas” while there wasn’t “any comprehensive forethought in devising it” (Schelling 1978, 225).

The aspect of skill and intention lies at the surface of a work of art as an object of reflection, while unconscious intuition “loves to sink itself” into infinite depths of contemplation. There is by the virtue of creative genius an “unfathomable depth which the true artist, though he labors with the greatest diligence, involuntarily imparts to his work, and which neither he nor anyone else is wholly able to penetrate” (ibid., 224).

MOVEMENTS OF ARCHIPELAGIC THOUGHT

In *The Philosophy of Art*, Schelling defines the epic by, among other things, its negation of time for the benefit of movement; the epic as storytelling is at rest (the narrator does not step in to intervene), while the object of its storytelling is in constant forward motion (there is always progressive action): “[t]his is why even when the epic describes something at rest, that element of rest itself must be transformed into movement and progressive action. [...] In the epic, this forward progress coincides completely with the object itself, which is eternally moving; the element of rest is placed into the form of the portrayal” (1989, 214).

We move on, then, to the matter of epic movement. In this regard, there are two main issues to address: the spatial distribution of potential movement and the spatial displacement of actual movement. On one hand, the story takes place in different environments which provide the infrastructure for sundry significant actions. On the other hand, actions are carried out in dynamic structures that build significance in milieus which resonate with elemental mythology. This is the dual geopoetics of James Bond, with one topographic and one mythographic side. With regards to the Bond films, this means looking at Bond’s travelogue (which islands and archipelagos, in what order, do the stories take him to?) as well as Bond’s exploits (what does he do, how does he move, as the story is told through action?).

If one were to chart Bond’s route through archipelagic environments, a first travelogue might distinguish between different kinds of archipelagos. First, there are the British Isles (England, Scotland), seemingly representing the homeland, the core of the British empire and commonwealth which constitutes the claim to power and influence of Her Majesty’s reach, in whose secret service the Double-0s are; for the most part these are not represented in their archipelagic character but as a mainland place for recreation or as a base for receiving assignments, gadgets, and whatnot, before setting off to distant (is)lands. Second, there are the Mediterranean islands (Corfu, Sardinia, the Gibraltar peninsula) which harken back to milieus of Ancient Greece, to Homeric epics and to tragedy, and

these tend to be treated with a fateful sense of dread and suffering (symptomatically, the harrowing keel-hauling scene from the novel *Live and Let Die* [1954] is transplanted from Jamaica to Greek waters in the film *For Your Eyes Only* [1981] – though the scene was actually shot in the Bahamas). Thirdly, there are the Caribbean islands (Jamaica, the Bahamas, Cuba, Haiti) which cinematic Bond frequents from first to last, usually balancing lush exoticism and eroticism with the sinister intrigue of usually SPECTRE-related goings-on; these travels bring Bond into the luxurious environments of a jet-setting elite among which archvillains are nestled, often symbolised by monstrous sea creatures such as sharks or the SPECTRE symbol of the octopus, emphasising the dangers that lurk under the glittering surface of these tropical isles. Fourthly, and finally, there are the Asiatic islands (Thai and Japanese), dramatic extremes of potential fatality – where Bond confronts his evil twins of sorts (Scaramanga, Silva), where he comes after his “death” in the novel *You Only Live Twice* (1964), and where he comes to die in *No Time to Die*.

While Fleming’s novels and novellas set in the Caribbean almost obsessively restricted themselves to Jamaica (*Live and Let Die*, *Dr. No* [1958], “For Your Eyes Only” [1960], *The Man with the Golden Gun* [1965], “Octopussy” [1966]), with some excursions to the Bahamas (“Quantum of Solace” [1960], *Thunderball* [1961]), the films disperse a bit more varyingly. In chronological order, there is the following sequence: *Dr. No* to Jamaica and the fictional island “Crab Key”, *Thunderball* (1965) to the Bahamas, *Live and Let Die* (1973) to the fictional “San Monique” (standing in for Jamaica), *Octopussy* (1983) to Cuba, *Licence to Kill* (1989) to the Bahamas, *GoldenEye* (1995) to Cuba, *Die Another Day* (2002) to Cuba, *Casino Royale* (2006) to the Bahamas, *Quantum of Solace* (2008) to Hispaniola (Haiti), and *No Time To Die* to Jamaica and Cuba.

In this sequence we see that Bond begins in Jamaica with Connery’s first film (the very first scene shot for *Dr. No* was Bond arriving at Kingston airport [Chapman 2022, 91-92], so in terms of shooting the very first thing cinematic Bond does is to arrive in Jamaica), and only returns there towards the end, in Craig’s last film. The choice on the part of the various filmmakers not to have Bond return to Jamaica for almost sixty years, even though many of the Fleming stories were set there, may in actuality vary for whatever reasons, but in either case it was surely an intentional choice to have him return there in *No Time to Die*, according to the producers: “[w]e believe that Jamaica is Bond’s spiritual home, which is why we as filmmakers decided to choose it as the place for Bond to retire from the world in *No Time to Die*” (Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson, qtd. in Lovatt-Smith and McDonald-Whyte 2023, 133).

So, Bond begins in Jamaica and returns to it in the end – this is his true *nostos*. Throughout the Bond film series, unlike the novels, his return to Jamaica is delayed by all adventures to other islands, and especially Caribbean islands (a negation of sorts). This is reminiscent of the hypothesis of M.L. West regarding the creation of the *Odyssey*, that delaying the story by seven years by stranding him on Calypso's island was just a dramaturgical ruse to make sense of the timeline in which the adventurous *nostos* of Menelaus took seven years, and Telemachos should be able to visit Menelaus upon his return (2014, 29-30, 113-122). For some similar reason, Bond was delayed from returning to his spiritual home in Jamaica for 59 years, just in order to be extracted for an extravagant operation in Cuba, and then to face his fatal demise on that Russo-Japanese poison island of geopolitical catastrophic convergence.

We saw earlier how the singing of the story which moved Odysseus to tears is interrupted by an athletic distraction; here, sports are introduced as an interlude and set against the epic storytelling (even while the scene in the *Odyssey* recalls a similar scene in the *Iliad*, where athleticism celebrates the death of Patroclus and interrupts the lamentation at his funeral). In the Bond films, sports are instead elemental parts of the storytelling and usually enhance Bond's epic character, in that Bond's activities gain a kind of higher power by being performed athletically. Bond's ability to adapt to the situation and the sportive setting and to use it to his advantage is part of his cunning, but this is a tactic which develops over time. In *Dr. No* Bond does glide smoothly through the Caribbean milieu, but without sport; while in *Goldfinger* (1964) Bond tricks his way through a game of golf, but without any sense of adventure and without the archipelagic setting.

It is in *Thunderball* that things begin to come together: recreational scuba-diving develops through the film from romantic encounters to increasingly dramatic confrontations, ending up as underwater warfare. The staging of geopolitical conflict as aquatic submergence (the direct opposite of the farcical star wars in *Moonraker* [1979]) demonstrates the symbolic potential of elemental sports as a stratagem for war, and stands in contrast to the scouting scenes which survey the Bahamas archipelago by helicopter, peering down below the surface. In later Bond films, the act of soaring is emphasised: hang-gliding onto the island in *Live and Let Die*, the plane evading the Cuban army in the beginning of *Octopussy*, the plane flying over the cavernous hillsides of Cuba in *GoldenEye*. Then, Bond turns to gliding and sliding motions; much as he had previously slid and skated on snow and ice (in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, *The Spy Who Loved Me* [1977], *For*

Your Eyes Only, *A View To a Kill* [1985], *The Living Daylights* [1987], *The World Is Not Enough* [1999]), he begins experimenting with surfing (*Die Another Day*) and parkour (*Casino Royale*), only to give up these extreme sport achievements for rather more laid-back, cool runnings, ending up harpoon-fishing Fleming-style in *No Time to Die*.

Among these examples, an especially interesting case is a sequence in *Licence to Kill*: Bond has infiltrated the ship of one of the main villain's underlings, and he escapes by jumping into the sea without diving gear – but only after shooting a henchman with a harpoon. Once in the water, he pilfers the dead henchman's diving gear and starts sabotaging the villain's payload of narcotics. Four of the villain's henchmen set off in pursuit of him underwater, chasing him with harpoons; they catch up with him and come at him with knives, severing his air tube. A physical struggle ensues in a cauldron of air bubbles between a couple of underwater rocks. Bond seems overpowered and sinks downwards, but then Bond resists, fights them off, and grabs a harpoon; he shoots it not at the goons but upwards, towards the surface, where a seaplane is just taking off. Bond swooshes up, away from the henchmen's grip, and swiftly breaks the water's surface. Now, holding on to the harpoon, he shifts to get on his feet and proceeds to water-ski on his mere feet behind the plane, while other henchmen pursue him by boat, firing at him. Bond manages to grab onto the plane in time for it to lift from the water, and he hangs on to a pontoon while it flies up. Bond outsmarts the two hoodlums in the plane by sneaking up from behind and crawling inside the cockpit, letting one man drop into the ocean by unlatching the door, and using a large package with money to shield himself from the pilot's gunshots. Finally, he kicks the pilot senseless and throws him out of the plane as well, and flies away, laughing roguishly as dollar bills whirl around him.

What is interesting in this sequence is that it demonstrates an exploration of the schematic mobilities of archipelagic thinking; in other films, parts of this schema are essayed (underwater fighting in *Thunderball*, etc.), but here they are synthesised into one set of movements. Bond begins by submerging himself into the dangers of the deep; the violent altercation that leaves him breathlessly sinking in a plume of bubbles represents the abyssal aspect. His stratagem to latch onto the plane has him evading that imminent death, surfacing, surfing the sea, gliding along behind the plane. Then, as the plane starts ascending and Bond crawls onto it, a vertical movement begins: as he was earlier pulled from the ocean's depth by the plane, Bond is now soaring into the skies on it; he challenges the risk of falling to his death by outwitting and outdoing his opponents, finally taking control of the airplane to their demise. So the schema of move-

ments is: 1) abyssal submergence, 2) emergence to surface, 3) sliding on surface, 4) soaring to heights, 5) gliding on high. This is a succinct spatial representation of the idea of moving from risk of death to victorious vitality. It illustrates a technique of mastering the relations between depth, surface, and height, in the mobilities of sinking/rising, sliding, soaring, and a way of thinking which passes through them as so many methods of relating to material conditions. This is *polymêtis par excellence*.

CONCLUSION

James Bond is not a rounded psychological character, he is a mythological figure, a cipher who symbolises ideals and ideas, existing in a strange sort of time where things occur, recur, change guises, cease to exist, or suddenly never existed. He lives in a space where the home is a non-space, for the most part, a place from which one sets out on adventures all around the world. There is something to the fact that so many of his adventures take him to islands and archipelagos, not least the Caribbean one where he begins and where he tries to return, to retreat from the world, in Jamaica. Bond is thwarted from returning to this island for all of the films from *Dr. No* to *No Time to Die*, and he is pulled from his insular *nostos* in order to serve and save the world again, leading to his tragic demise on a Russo-Japanese island, virtually on the other side of the world.

But there is also something else. If we survey the general structure of the Bond film series, it is possible to discern the symbolic significance of archipelagic environments for an overarching archipelagic form: how the Bond franchise functions fractally, resisting norms of continuity, homogeneity, and evolution, that are commonly ideals in storytelling. The Bond epic has an internal structure which represents other ideals, such as variability, ingenuity, and invention. While most films and film series strive to “make sense” to its audience, Bond films prefer to be witty and full of tricks – they are, in this respect, essentially Odyssean in character. The internal logic of the Bond films, conceived of as epic, is a fragmentary whole consisting of the repetition of motifs, intertextual references, and cheeky callbacks. Perhaps it is the tendency in the Craig era to establish a more conventional sense of self-contained continuity, and thereby a more “continental” form, which necessitates Bond’s ultimate death and the closing of the epic cycle. Once Bond’s attempt to return to his origins in Jamaica is impeded and he is pulled back into action, he is – somewhat like Dante’s Odysseus – on course towards his demise in a strange island world which he does not master.

Then there is also a specific, twofold logic for the Bond movies, as regards the use of movements: one the distribution of his adventures in space across the world, the other his displacements in his often sportive ventures for dramatic effect. The first of these shows his proclivity for insular and archipelagic environments, especially the Caribbean, while the other shows his prowess in mastering aquatic and aerial milieus in diving, swimming, water-skiing, gliding, and flying. Bond demonstrates experiments in relating physically and dynamically to the world around him by transforming athletic activities into epic action – in this Bond could well be said to be *polytropos*, a man of many turns, and the thought demonstrated in these actions to be *polymêtis*, of many ruses.

Rather than staying with the conventional assessment of thought being “deep”, “superficial”, and “lofty”, perhaps the activities of sinking, sliding, and soaring instead represent what we might term “depth-thought”, “surface-thought”, and “height-thought”, because what we see is a spatially manifested way of thinking *of* material environments, connecting thought with space and matter, rather than judgements about intellectual or spiritual value. Bond is more of an athlete than an intellectual, it is just that he is a *thinking* athlete – or, perhaps more accurately, an *athlete of thought*.

There is a curious opportunity to unpack, by way of these observations, the epistemology of epics. While vaguely similar-sounding, these words do not share etymological roots. Whereas the prefix *epi-* in epistemology means “over” in Greek (while *histemi* means “to stand”, thus literally “over-stand”), *epic* denotes word, speech, song, or story. And this is what you get with Bond: stories in which the intent to sweepingly survey surroundings from above always is (and must be) accompanied by a risk of plunging into an abyss. Athletic endeavour is the way for this potentially fateful encounter. In this respect, a significant difference between Odysseus and Bond can be discerned: for Odysseus, the singing of his heroic efforts causes an emotional response which is interrupted by athletic games, while with Bond the athletic activities are no distractive games but integral parts of his heroic actions underscored by the melody of the familiar Bond themes. Action, athleticism, and music are for Bond all integral parts to his epic epistemology: to sport is a way of moving which sings in, of, and with space.

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