

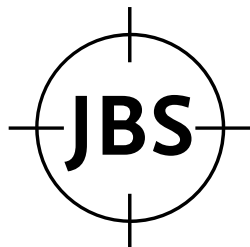
Monument of a Man?

Bernard Lee's and Robert Brown's M (1962-1989)

ANTTI KORPISAARI

After the titular character, James Bond's chief M is the most important and constantly recurring personage in the Bond franchise, appearing in all but one of the 25 Eon-produced films. There have been three distinct Ms, the first of whom was introduced in *Dr. No* (1962) and portrayed in 11 films by Bernard Lee. Lee passed away during the filming of *For Your Eyes Only* (1981), which thereby became the only Bond film to date from which the character of M is missing. Robert Brown stepped into the role in *Octopussy* (1983) and held it for four films. Subsequently, Judi Dench's M featured in seven films from *GoldenEye* (1995) onwards, dying in *Skyfall* (2012) and being replaced by Ralph Fiennes' Gareth Mallory.

Much scholarship has been dedicated to Dench's notable tenure as M (Boyce 2015; Hobbs 2018; Holliday 2015; Kunze 2015; McNeely 2011; Parks 2015; Patton 2015; Wight 2015), which re-gendered and otherwise changed the character, gradually expanding its narrative significance. However, academic studies focused specifically on the tenures of Lee and Brown are far fewer. On the contrary, this period is frequently discussed for only a page or two as background for



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the analysis of Dench's tenure. The focus in Paul Stock's article "Dial 'M' for Metonym", on the other hand, is more strongly on the first M's "museum of an office" (2009, 265) than on the narrative role of the character.¹ My aim in this article is to look beyond generalisations such as Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott's argument that the films portray "M as a fuddy-duddy Establishment figure" (34), and Brian Patton's claim that "Bond's meetings with his superior have largely been comic scenes" (247). In other words, my intent is to offer a more complete and nuanced analysis of Lee's and Brown's M.

In the main part of my article, I present a detailed, chronological analysis of the ways in which the characterisation and uses of the Bond series' first M evolved from *Dr. No* to *Licence to Kill* (1989). Towards the end, I consider the extent and limits of M's narrative role and his part in facilitating the transition to new Bond actors George Lazenby, Roger Moore, and Timothy Dalton. I then briefly discuss two new recurring characters introduced in *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977); namely M's superior, Minister of Defence Frederick Gray, and General Gogol of the KGB.

In addition to carrying out a close reading of the scenes in which M appears in the 15 films analysed here, I calculated the number and duration of his scenes.² I excluded those in which he is present only through his voice, such as when M communicates with Moneypenny (and often also with Bond) over the intercom in her office. I included the total duration of sequences in which M appears on and off but in which he is not necessarily the centre of attention, such as the wedding scene in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969). My data, then, is not without subjectivity, but I believe that it reflects M's on-screen presence rather accurately.³

THE BERNARD LEE YEARS (1962-1979)

Bernard Lee's only scene as M in *Dr. No* takes place shortly after Sean Connery's Bond is introduced at the Le Cercle club in London. Bond enters Moneypenny's office directly following the club sequence. He refers to the chief as "M" in their brief exchange, thereby introducing him to the viewers (Brabazon 2009, 242). As

1 Significant scholarly attention has also been given to the M of Fleming's source texts, and to the nature of the M-Bond relationship (Amis 1966, 72-77; Bennett and Woollacott 1987, 104-107, 129-141; Eco 2009, 37-38).

2 My calculations are based on the *Bond 50* collection's Blu-ray (Region A) versions of the films.

3 I also paid attention to dialogue references made to M in my analysis. However, in the following they are not treated as exhaustively as M's on-screen appearances.

in all conversations Bond has with M throughout the films analysed here, he addresses his chief as “Sir” in the briefing scene in M’s office (McNeely, 157).⁴ M, on the other hand, always addresses Bond as “Double-0 Seven” in the first six films. In *Dr. No*, M quickly and efficiently briefs Bond on the disappearance of the British spy Strangways in Jamaica, the toppling of American rockets, and Felix Leiter’s involvement in the case before telling Bond that he is to take a plane to Kingston in a couple of hours. M then calls in Major Boothroyd, the armourer (played this time only by Peter Burton), and makes Bond exchange his old Beretta for a Walther PPK, threatening to demote him to standard intelligence duties should he refuse. The fact that this extract from Fleming’s sixth Bond novel was retained in the first Bond film seems odd, but such a decision may have been made to give M more screen time and/or to introduce the character of the armourer. Be that as it may, this first M-Bond scene lasts for 3 minutes and 45 seconds, in addition to which M utters two short sentences over the intercom when Bond is in Moneypenny’s office. After this, M has no further role to play in *Dr. No*, and he is not even mentioned in any dialogue that follows. Nevertheless, in *Dr. No*, Lee’s pipe-smoking, authoritarian, and rather grumpy M is arguably the closest that Lee’s portrayal of him ever gets to Admiral Miles Messervy in the original Fleming texts.

Upon his arrival in Moneypenny’s office in *From Russia with Love* (1963), Bond finds M there, and the two men head into the latter’s room. The rest of this 3-minute-52-second sequence closely resembles the briefing scene in *Dr. No*, although this time M acts more amicably towards Bond. Both men agree that the story of the Russian cipher clerk Tatiana Romanova falling in love with a file photo of Bond and being willing to defect with the new Lektor cipher machine is ridiculous and most likely a trap. Still, in M’s words, “[i]f there’s any chance of us getting a Lektor, we simply must look into it”. He thus orders Bond to take a plane to Istanbul the next morning and to see to it that he will come up to Romanova’s romantic expectations. Having concluded the briefing, pipe-smoking M calls in the equipment officer (played for the first time by Desmond Llewelyn), who introduces Bond to the special features of the attaché case with which he is being issued. Afterwards, when Bond is back in Moneypenny’s office, M briefly interrupts them over the intercom. Unlike in *Dr. No*, however, M’s presence in

4 See Stock for a detailed description of M’s “stable, conservative, and dependable” (252) office space. According to Matthew Field and Ajay Chowdhury, “[t]he sets for both Miss Moneypenny and M’s offices were broken down at the end of each Bond film and stored at Pinewood” (2018, 328), thus providing great continuity from one film to another.

the story does not stop there. He is referred to in several conversations throughout the film and, just after the midpoint, there is a 50-second scene set in London where M, six other men, and Money Penny listen to a recording Bond made of Romanova describing the appearance and workings of the Lektor. M is clearly embarrassed when Bond begins answering Romanova's question "[a]m I as exciting as all those Western girls?" by referring to an "interesting experience" he once had with M in Tokyo. M stops the tape and dismisses Money Penny before resuming playback. Money Penny continues listening in over the intercom from her own room, however, and the camera stays with her for a further 16 seconds, never returning to M's office. M acknowledges Money Penny's eavesdropping in the final seconds of the sequence, and starts dictating a cable to her. The take on M in *From Russia with Love*, then, is already somewhat more playful than that in *Dr. No*.

Goldfinger (1964) finds Bond at a Miami Beach hotel where the CIA's Felix Leiter relays M's order to start investigating Auric Goldfinger, presently staying at the same hotel.⁵ Bond uncovers Goldfinger's card-cheating scam and Jill Masterson is murdered. The film then cuts to a shot of the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben, and then straight into M's office, where Bond and M are discussing the case. During this 1-minute-16-second scene, M warns Bond that should he, due to Masterson's murder, be unable to treat his assignment "coldly and objectively, Double-0 Eight can replace you". M then scolds Bond for not simply observing Goldfinger but, instead, "borrowing" his girlfriend, remarking that "it's only by the grace of God, your friend Leiter, and my intervention with the British embassy in Washington, that you're not in the custody of the Miami Beach police". Finally, he tells Bond to return that evening, wearing a black tie. Subsequently, the two men attend a dinner at the Bank of England, hosted by Colonel Smithers. This 2-minute-35-second scene functions as Bond's briefing, with Smithers doing the bulk of the talking. M is mostly left to silently smoke his cigar and marvel at his two companions' superior connoisseurship of brandies. Just before the scene's end, however, he does order Bond to draw the Nazi gold bar Smithers has provided as bait for Goldfinger "from Q Branch along with the rest of your equipment in the morning". The first Q Branch scene in the Bond series then follows (including the first reference to Llewelyn's character as "Q").⁶ Just beyond the midpoint of the film, Leiter calls M to tell him that the Americans have

5 In *From Russia with Love*, Bond always talks about M in a neutral or positive way, but his first reference to the chief in *Goldfinger* is rather different in tone: "[m]ight have known M wouldn't book me into the best hotel in Miami Beach out of pure gratitude".

picked up Bond's homer signal in Baltimore. This 35-second sequence, which alternates between shots of M in London and Leiter in Washington, continues making light fun of M. He requests that Leiter not charge in on Bond as "[h]e's evidently well on top at the moment", when Bond, held captive by Goldfinger, would most certainly welcome any intervention by the CIA. The call with Leiter ends M's involvement in the narrative.

About one third of the way into *Thunderball* (1965), Bond enters Moneypenny's office only to find out that the briefing he is about to attend will take place in MI6's magnificent conference room instead of M's office. During the 2-minute-58-second general briefing, chaired by M, Bond and eight other Double-0 agents listen silently as the Home Secretary speaks, followed by a high-ranking military officer identified as "Sir John", and lastly, M. Directly following this scene is Bond's 1-minute-9-second individual assignment discussion in M's office, also attended by his intended Air Force Liaison, Group Captain Pritchard. Given the magnitude of the threat posed by the criminal organisation SPECTRE, the tone of both scenes is rather restrained. Some typical Bondian humour appears in the next scene, however, when M enters Moneypenny's office for 16 seconds to overhear and scold her for referring to him in a discussion with Bond as "the old man". Compared to the source novel, M's agency has been reduced. For one thing, Bond's presence at the Shrublands health clinic earlier in the story is never explained as having been explicitly ordered by M, the temporary health enthusiast, as in the opening chapter of the corresponding novel. Much more importantly, in the novel it is M who has the hunch that SPECTRE may have the two stolen atomic bombs somewhere in the Bahamas, whereas in the film it is Bond who requests that his assignment be changed from Canada to Nassau based on his experiences at Shrublands and a file photo of Commandant Francois Derval together with his sister Dominique. Although M's initial reaction is to enquire "[i]s there any other reason besides your enthusiasm for water sports?", he quickly concludes that "[i]f Double-0 Seven says he saw Derval last night at Shrublands and he was dead, that's enough for me to initiate inquiries". M does appear in two additional scenes in the film, however, both set in the MI6 conference room. In a one-minute scene just before the midpoint, M, Moneypenny, the Home Secretary, and a dozen other people listen to SPECTRE leader Ernst Stavro Blofeld's taped ransom instructions before M shows the Home Secretary a "[s]ignal from Double-0 Seven in Nassau. One or two things that might interest

6 Interestingly, Lee's and Brown's M is never seen visiting the Q Branch's London facilities.

us". Later, M and the Home Secretary discuss Bond's apparent lack of progress in a 36-second scene that takes place when the SPECTRE ransom deadline is only 15 hours away. When the Home Secretary complains about Bond's highly developed sense of drama, M meekly tries to defend his agent.

You Only Live Twice (1967) is the first film in which Bond meets M outside of London. Following his staged assassination and burial at sea in Hong Kong harbour, which, in M's words, were arranged so that "perhaps some of your [Bond's] old friends will pay a little less attention to you for a while", he is taken aboard a British submarine, on which both Moneypenny and M have their separate offices. Despite its two concave walls, a metal hatch instead of a normal door, and low ceiling, M's office is still unrealistically spacious and decorated quite similarly to the one in London. M's line that "[t]his is the big one, Double-0 Seven. That's why I'm out here myself. I take it you're fully briefed?" both underlines and explains why the two meet under such exceptional circumstances and reveals that Bond is already aware of the case that he has been ordered to investigate. Therefore, the 1-minute-33-second scene offers relatively little new information not already presented in the pre-title sequence, apart from the fact that Bond's destination is to be Japan and that his contact person in Tokyo is a man named Henderson. In other words, the M-Bond scene seems to be in the film at least partly because it had become a mandatory part of the Bond formula. Once Bond has exited M's office and is talking with Moneypenny in hers, M tells Moneypenny over the intercom to give Bond the password agreed with the Japanese secret service. Untypically, however, during M's line the image switches for a couple of seconds to his office before returning to Bond and Moneypenny. M's only further on-screen appearance is in the closing moments of the film, when he is shown on the bridge of the submarine that has just surfaced under Bond and Kissy Suzuki's life-raft after their escape from SPECTRE's volcano base. The implication of this 8-second scene, then, is that M has spent the intervening couple of weeks aboard the submarine rather than returning to his London office. In all, M has significantly less screen time in *You Only Live Twice* than in any of the four previous films. He is, however, referred to in two discussions between Bond and the Japanese spy chief Tiger Tanaka.

As I will elaborate on towards the end of this article, M is the first character to appear on screen in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. Some 25 minutes of running time later, Bond enters M's office to find that after two years of trying to hunt down Blofeld, he is to be taken off the case, codenamed Operation Bedlam. When Bond asks whether this is because M has lost confidence in him, the chief answers that he is well aware of Bond's talents but that "a licence to kill is useless,

unless one can set up the target". Bond does not take this decision well, and after the 42-second scene in M's office, dictates his resignation letter to Money Penny, asking her to "present it to that monument in there", pointing at M's door. Bond is then shown in his own office, starting to pack up his mementos, before he is summoned back to M's office. This second M-Bond scene lasts for only 23 seconds and contains a single line, M's "[r]equest granted". Back in Money Penny's office, Bond learns that instead of his resignation, he has been granted two weeks' leave. He thanks Money Penny, as does M, over the intercom, once Bond has walked out of her office. Some 15 minutes of running time later, the film's third M-Bond scene takes place in M's manor house Quarterdeck, where Bond arrives to inform M about a new lead, Count Balthazar de Bleuchamp's correspondence with the College of Arms. The chief's first reaction to this news is to remind Bond that he has "been relieved from Operation Bedlam". Off screen, however, M apparently agrees to reassign Bond. The scene set in M's home shows him to be an avid lepidopterist and confirms his naval rank when Bond refers to him as "the Admiral" in conversation with the manservant Hammond. The fourth M-Bond scene takes place after Bond's visit to and escape from Blofeld's Piz Gloria base. Bond is eager to storm Piz Gloria, where Contessa Teresa di Vincenzo is held captive, but the United Nations and M see this "as too risky" due to the threat of Blofeld's omega virus. M is very blunt with Bond, telling him that "[t]his department is not concerned with your personal problems". Bond, however, blatantly disobeys M and attacks Piz Gloria with Marc Ange Draco and his Union Corse men. Even such a severe breach of loyalty does not seem to sour the two men's relationship, however, as M later attends Bond's and di Vincenzo's wedding. During this 2-minute-36-second sequence he is, among other things, shown in friendly conversation with Draco.

Although *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* contains four M-Bond scenes, none of these can be regarded as an actual mission briefing. Rather, M first orders Bond off the Blofeld case and then grants him leave of absence, during which Bond uncovers the crucial lead on Blofeld's current whereabouts. The scene at M's home that directly follows might then have been presented as a strategy meeting between M and Bond, but it is the agent who carries the conversation while the chief remains rather passive. Finally, in the film's fourth M-Bond scene, M forbids Bond to pursue the Blofeld case any further. *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, therefore, shows Bond openly questioning and/or disobeying M's orders twice, taking the two men's relationship in a new, much more tense direction. It is worth noting that this friction between the chief and the agent does not

stem from Fleming's source novel, but was introduced during the filmmaking. In the novel, Bond contemplates resignation because he sees his ongoing pursuit of Blofeld as a "misuse of [his] qualities" (Fleming 2003, 11); in other words he wants to be off the case. Furthermore, in the original text M endorses Bond's plan to storm Piz Gloria with Draco's help. Granted, Blofeld in the novel is "only" waging biological warfare against the UK, not threatening global food security. Nevertheless, M has Bond's back much more strongly in the novel than in the film.

During the briefing sequence in *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971), M first lectures Bond on the carat counts of some famous diamonds before the two meet Sir Donald Munger to discuss diamond smuggling. When Bond expresses doubt about the "need to bring in our section on a relatively simple smuggling matter", M's remarks that "Sir Donald has convinced the PM otherwise", indicating that he, too, harbours some reservations about Bond's new assignment. The tone and style of the rest of the sequence then closely resemble those in the Bank of England scene of *Goldfinger*, but this time M gets to marvel at Bond's connoisseurship of sherries. When it turns out that Bond's vast knowledge does not extend to diamonds, however, M remarks: "[r]efreshing to hear there's one subject you're not an expert on". Towards the end of the briefing sequence, M tells Bond that he is to go to Holland posing as the professional smuggler Peter Franks. What is novel about *Diamonds Are Forever* is that the 2-minute-56-second briefing sequence is cut into three parts, interspersed by scenes set in South Africa that show the workings of Blofeld's diamond-smuggling operation and, especially, the hitmen Mr. Wint and Mr. Kidd eliminating its operatives one at a time. Soon after, Q refers to M in a phone call with Bond. M does not appear on screen again, however, and is only mentioned in the dialogue one further time, near the film's end. As Bond and Tiffany Case are about to depart the United States aboard a cruise liner, Bond answers Leiter's "I'll wire M you're on your way home" jokingly saying, "[d]on't tell him which direction we've taken".

In *Live and Let Die* (1973), first M and then also Moneypenny arrive unannounced at Bond's home in the early morning. M notifies Bond that "[t]hree of our agents have been killed during the last 24 hours", two in the United States and one in the Caribbean, and orders him to fly to New York immediately to investigate whether the killings are connected. As Patton notes, this unorthodox briefing sequence "unfolds as a bedroom farce [...] prompting Moneypenny to collude with 007 to spare M a vision of Bond's naked female companion" (248; see also Jones 2017, 8-9). The whole sequence lasts for almost five minutes, M being present for 3 minutes and 31 seconds. In addition to the atypical location and the "comedy [that] has come fully into view" (Patton, 248) within this sequence, it

also contains the first instance of M referring to Bond by his surname. Once M leaves Bond's home, he is not seen or otherwise referred to in the film again.

Having had very limited screen time in the two previous films, M is again more extensively present in *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974). In a 3-minute-13-second scene in M's London office M, the Chief of Staff, and the Q-Branch-man Colthorpe inform Bond that the assassin Francisco Scaramanga has apparently set his sights on him. When Bond wonders "who would pay a million dollars to have me killed?", M replies dryly: "[j]ealous husbands, outraged chefs, humiliated tailors. The list is endless". M relieves Bond of his assignment to find the missing solar energy expert Gibson and tells him that "I'll endorse your request to resign. Or you can take a sabbatical and go to ground until this matter's settled". What M really means, however, is that Bond should find Scaramanga before the latter can make the kill. Later, when the Scaramanga and Gibson plots converge in Hong Kong, Bond is taken aboard the partly submerged Queen Elizabeth liner, inside which there is a secret British intelligence station. The film's second (3-minute-28-second) and third (1-minute-27-second) M-Bond scenes take place there, with Q and Lieutenant Hip present on both occasions. The first meeting is also attended by a Professor Frazier. In the first Queen Elizabeth scene, M explains that he and Frazier are in Hong Kong because Gibson, killed earlier that night by Scaramanga, "was prepared to come back under certain conditions". Before Bond heads to Bangkok to investigate the multimillionaire Hai Fat, Gibson's last employer, M orders him to take Mary Goodnight with him as his liaison officer. The second Queen Elizabeth scene takes place after Scaramanga manages to escape from Thailand with both Gibson's solex agitator and Goodnight. M acts very grumpily, twice ordering Q to "shut up" and cursing the "fouled-up, half-witted" operation. Once Goodnight's homer signal places her in "Red Chinese waters", M first forbids Bond to follow her and Scaramanga there, as "[i]f the PM gets to hear of this, he'll hang me from the yardarm". His opinion changes, however, when Bond reassures him that "[o]fficially, you won't know a thing about it, sir". Thus, here as well as in the first Queen Elizabeth scene, it is the agent rather than the chief who determines the next appropriate course of action. Finally, in a 48-second sequence in the closing minutes of the film M, quite implausibly, calls Bond on the telephone in Scaramanga's junk just when Bond and Goodnight are finally about to have sex.⁷

7 This comic sequence established a trope that was, with variations, repeated in the next three films. Additionally, in *The Man with the Golden Gun*, M continues from where he left off in the previous film, referring to Bond by his surname in their first and last conversations.

The pre-title sequence of *The Spy Who Loved Me* includes a 25-second scene in which M, in his London office, talks on the phone with the Prime Minister and then orders Moneypenny to recall Bond from his mission in Austria. Surprisingly, however, M is absent from the film's first briefing sequence, set on a Royal Navy base in Scotland. Rather, this meeting is presided over by Minister of Defence Frederick Gray, making his Bond film debut.⁸ Still, Gray's lines "I believe M told you about this" and "M will give you the details" indicate that the chief is deeply involved in the operation. Bond and M finally meet on screen a little before the midpoint of the film in a British intelligence complex situated, of all places, within an ancient Egyptian temple. In the spirit of "Anglo-Soviet co-operation", they are joined by General Anatol Gogol (sometimes referred to as Alexis) and Major Anya Amasova of the KGB and, later, by Q as well. M only gets a handful of short lines in this 3-minute-49-second sequence. For the most part, Bond and Amasova compete to demonstrate their competence, and it is Gogol who gets the last word, sending the pair on their way to Sardinia. M refers to Bond as "James" for the first time in the series and is also on first-name terms with Gogol. Subsequently, Bond mentions M in two different conversations he has with Amasova. On screen, however, the chief does not reappear before the very end of the film. Following the destruction of the villain Karl Stromberg's base, the escape pod containing Bond and Amasova is rescued by a battleship aboard which are M, Minister Gray, Q, and Gogol. During a scene lasting for 49 seconds they are appalled to find the two agents enjoying post-coital bliss.

Closely resembling *The Spy Who Loved Me*, the pre-title sequence in *Moonraker* (1979) contains a 26-second scene in which M talks on the phone in his office and then asks Moneypenny whether Bond is "back from the African job". Immediately following the title sequence is a 7-second scene in M's office without any dialogue, during which the chief, Minister Gray, and Q anxiously await Bond's arrival. After a short interlude in Moneypenny's office Bond enters and is briefed. It is Gray who approves Bond's suggestion that "California must be the place to start" his investigation into the disappearance of the Moonraker space shuttle, leaving M only to caution him against making any mistakes. During this 2-minute-8-second scene Q also equips Bond with his latest gadget – a wrist dart gun (which Bond test-fires into one of M's beloved paintings) – in a style resembling the first two films. A little before the film's midpoint, in a sequence lasting for 2 minutes and 38 seconds, Bond escorts M and Minister Gray into a building in Venice that, the previous night, had been the villain Hugo Drax's nerve-gas

⁸ Also present in this sequence is Admiral Hargreaves, played by the future M actor Robert Brown.

laboratory. Now, however, the gas-mask-wearing British trio enter a luxurious office space in which Drax awaits them. Once back outside, Gray tells M, “I’ve never been so humiliated in my life. Your man should be taken off the assignment”. M, however, shows strong agency and considerable faith in Bond, giving him “two weeks’ leave of absence” to continue his investigation into Drax in Brazil. M’s parting words to Bond underline the risk he is taking: “no slip-ups, or we’re both in trouble”. Some twenty minutes of running time later, Bond talks with M and Q for 1 minute and 11 seconds in a South American monastery housing a British intelligence station. Q’s analysis of a sample of Drax’s nerve gas indicates that its source is a rare orchid only found in the River Tapirapé area, and M tells Bond to “get up there...and fast”. The last time we see Bernard Lee’s M on screen is when he and Minister Gray are in a U.S. mission control centre following the destruction of Drax’s space station and nerve-gas globes. In this 1-minute-13-second sequence, M only mutters “Double-0 Seven” disapprovingly when video feed from Bond and Dr Holly Goodhead’s shuttle shows them making love in zero gravity. Had the production team known that Lee would die in January 1981, they might have wanted his M to depart on a more dignified note. Still, Lee is rather prominently present in his last Bond film, trotting the globe.

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY AND THE ROBERT BROWN YEARS (1983-1989)

Due to Lee’s passing, *For Your Eyes Only* is the only Bond film to date in which the character of M is absent. Before the film’s briefing scene, Moneypenny tells Bond that “M’s on leave”. In his absence, Bond is briefed and supervised by Minister Gray and Chief of Staff Bill Tanner. They have a strong presence in the first third of the film, having two joint scenes and one individual scene each. However, Gray and Tanner are sidelined as the action moves to Cortina and later to the Mediterranean, only reappearing in the final, highly comical sequence in which Max the parrot, “posing” as Bond, asks Prime Minister Thatcher to “[g]ive us a kiss”. In total, Gray’s and Tanner’s three joint and two individual scenes last for 4 minutes and 58 seconds, which as I show below, happens to be the average screen time for Lee’s and Brown’s M, too.

Roger Moore’s close friend Robert Brown stepped into the role of M in *Octopussy*. He had played Admiral Hargreaves in *The Spy Who Loved Me*, thus it could be argued that Lee’s character had been replaced by another Royal Navy Admiral, and that one of his first actions would have been to assign Moneypenny a young assistant, namely Penelope Smallbone. However, *Octopussy*’s dialogue contains no references to Brown’s M being new to the job, and the decor of his

office remains unchanged. I believe, therefore, that Brown's character should be understood as the same one Lee played. M is portrayed in *Octopussy* as a rather stern and stone-faced person, who is even – after a long hiatus – shown smoking a pipe in one of his scenes. Here and in his three other films, Brown's M is back to his literary roots in Fleming's rather more serious and dour characterisation. Brown had this to say about M in 1989:

He's very much a Royal Navy product but with an uncanny steeliness and resilience to run this business. He's got a personal feeling for his agents, because although he is a toughie – he'll make decisions that'll appal anybody – he is still worried about his people. Which is a Royal Navy thing. (quoted in Field and Chowdhury, 451-452)

Brown's first, 1-minute-44-second scene in *Octopussy* takes place in M's office, where Bond is briefed by a three-man team consisting of M, Minister Gray, and art expert Jim Fanning. Gray suggests that Bond should accompany Fanning to Sotheby's where the original of a fake Fabergé egg recovered by the late Double-0 Nine in East Berlin is to be auctioned that afternoon. M then assigns Bond to continue the murdered agent's investigation. After the Sotheby's sequence, Bond returns to M's office for a 1-minute-7-second scene. This time the two men are alone, and M reproaches Bond for having bid huge sums for the auctioned Fabergé egg. M then orders Bond to follow the egg's eventual buyer Kamal Khan to Delhi, discovering that Bond is already booked on the next flight there. Following the film's first, extended India sequence, Bond and M meet for a third time, now for 53 seconds in West Berlin. M provides Bond with some information and a fake ID, reminding him that he will be on his own in East Germany. Once M has stepped out of the car that is to take Bond across the border and disappears from the picture, the camera returns to his worried-looking face for a further 4 seconds. The last time M appears on screen is in the film's penultimate, 25-second scene in which General Gogol and Minister Gray are in his office discussing the return of the Romanov Star to the Soviet Union.

M is prominently present in the first fifth of *A View to a Kill* (1985). During the 2-minute-19-second briefing scene, set in M's office, Minister Gray, Q, Bond, and the pipe-smoking chief discuss the apparent KGB infiltration of an Anglo-French private defence contractor, Zorin Industries. Immediately afterwards, M, Q, Moneypenny, and Bond attend the Ascot races. During this 2-minute-38-second sequence M and Bond observe and discuss the villain Max Zorin, and M then introduces Bond to the horse trainer and fellow MI6 operative Sir Godfrey

Tibbett. Following Bond's interrupted dinner with detective Achille Aubergine in the Eiffel Tower, and an unsuccessful but destructive attempt to catch his murderer, M comes to Paris to bail Bond out. In a 30-second scene set inside a car M complains that "[a]ll it took was six million francs in damage and the penalties for violating most of the Napoleonic Code". However, once Bond and Sir Godfrey head undercover to Zorin's thoroughbred sale near Paris, M has no further part to play in the narrative until after the completion of Bond's mission. The film's penultimate, 27-second scene is set in M's office, where he again hosts Minister Gray and General Gogol, the latter wishing to award Bond the Order of Lenin for saving Silicon Valley and, therefore, "Russian research" (see Bennett and Woollacott, 290).⁹

As I will elaborate on towards the end of this article, M is the first character shown on screen in *The Living Daylights* (1987). He next appears when Soviet "defector" General Georgi Koskov is being debriefed at the Blayden safe house by Minister Gray, M, and Bond. Koskov carries most of the conversation, and M is shown to disapprove of the high cost of the food and drink Bond has brought him from Harrods. Interspersed within this 2-minute-18-second scene are two scenes showing henchman Necros gaining access to the safe house. When Gray, M, and Bond leave for London to "consult with higher authority", Necros "kidnaps" Koskov (really a part of the plan to repatriate the double agent Koskov), forcing the trio to hold an emergency meeting in M's office. During this 1-minute-51-second scene M orders Bond to assassinate General Leonid Pushkin, the new KGB chief supposedly behind the "Death to Spies" directive. Bond questions this order and even comes very close to shouting at M, who suggests that Double-0 Eight should carry out the hit instead. Eventually, Bond disregards the order to kill Pushkin, colluding with the Soviet intelligence chief instead in staging a mock assassination to get to the bottom of Koskov's and arms dealer Brad Whitaker's plans. In fact, Bond had also acted against orders earlier in the film, refusing to kill cellist Kara Milovy, the "KGB sniper" (who is really Koskov's girlfriend whom he sets up to make his defection appear authentic). Criticised for this by his colleague Saunders, Bond responds: "[t]ell M what you want. If he fires me, I'll thank him for it". In any case, M's presence in the first quarter of *The Living Daylights* is quite strong. However, he is sidelined when the action moves to Bratislava, Vienna, Tangier, and Afghanistan, and only reappears in the closing

9 In *A View to a Kill*'s last sequence, Q manages to locate the missing Bond at Stacey Sutton's house in California. Towards the end of it, M calls Q, but the chief does not appear on screen during this brief conversation.

sequence of the film, set at the Vienna Opera. M is on screen for 59 seconds, introducing Milovy to General Gogol, who is now working in the Soviet foreign service.

Licence to Kill is an atypical Bond film in many ways, including the fact that there is no briefing scene. When the drug lord Franz Sanchez has Felix Leiter maimed and his wife Della killed, Bond sets out on a personal vendetta against him and his organisation. About a quarter into the film, M comes to Florida to confront Bond, who was “supposed to be in Istanbul last night”.¹⁰ Bond resigns during this tense encounter, which takes place in the Ernest Hemingway House in Key West; then M revokes his licence to kill. This prompts Bond to reference Hemingway: “then I guess it’s a farewell to arms”. Bond subsequently flees, knocking down M’s two guards and avoiding the bullets fired by a sniper positioned in a nearby lighthouse. Thus, even though no violence is targeted at M, this is the first and only instance in any of his films when Lee’s and Brown’s M is present during a violent encounter. Following this 2-minute-10-second sequence, M appears on screen only one more time in *Licence to Kill*. Immediately before the action moves to the Republic of Isthmus, which is Sanchez’s home ground, M storms into Moneypenny’s office complaining about typing errors and discovering that she is trying to keep tabs on Bond’s movements. M then tells Moneypenny that Bond will “go after Sanchez. He’s got to be stopped. I’ve already alerted our man in Isthmus”. Here, therefore, M is actively working against the vengeful Bond, or at the very least very forcefully trying to save him from himself. This is verified when Bond is captured by a Hong Kong Narcotics team. Also present in their hideout is British official Fallon, the MI6’s “man in Isthmus”, who says that he has “got orders to take him [Bond] back, one way or the other”. Before he can ship Bond “straight back to London”, however, Sanchez’s forces attack, killing Fallon. Interestingly, Moneypenny and especially Q do their best to assist Bond in his rogue mission, thus setting up some of the features that would later come to define Bond’s relationship with Moneypenny, Q, and Tanner in the later Daniel Craig-era films. In any case, the 38-second scene in Moneypenny’s office is the last featuring Brown’s M. When Sanchez is dead Bond calls Leiter, who says, “M called. He tried to reach you. I think he may have

10 When Bond is intercepted on the street and escorted to see M, the first shot of the chief shows only his right arm and a passing cat that he briefly pets. As Ian Kinane and Lucas Townsend remarked during the 2nd James Bond Studies Conference (11th July 2025), this intimidating shot could easily give the impression that Bond would soon be facing Blofeld, not M, the former of whom is notoriously synonymous with cats.

a job for you”. Nevertheless, there was no on-screen reconciliation for Brown’s M and Dalton’s Bond. In hindsight, the clear and sustained undermining of M’s authority by Dalton’s Bond could be interpreted as setting the stage for his replacement by Judi Dench’s character in *GoldenEye*.

M’S SCREEN TIME AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The extent of Lee’s and Brown’s M’s narrative role certainly had clear bounds. Table 1 shows the number of M’s scenes and sequences, and their total duration per film. Over the 15 films the character’s on-screen exposure averaged 4 minutes and 58 seconds, and 3.3 scenes in each one. M gets the least screen time – a meagre 1 minute and 43 seconds – in *You Only Live Twice* and the most – 8 minutes and 56 seconds – in *The Man with the Golden Gun*. Compared with some Pierce Brosnan and especially Daniel Craig-era Bond films, even this exposure is quite modest: according to Lucinda Hobbs, Judi Dench is on camera for 52 minutes in *Skyfall* and Ralph Fiennes for 35 minutes in *Spectre* (250, 252). Lee’s and Brown’s M was always a rather minor supporting character, although integral to most narratives as Bond’s superior.

Film	No. of Scenes	Total Duration
<i>Dr. No</i>	1	3:45
<i>From Russia with Love</i>	2	4:42
<i>Goldfinger</i>	3	4:26
<i>Thunderball</i>	5	5:59
<i>You Only Live Twice</i>	3	1:43
<i>On Her Majesty’s Secret Service</i>	6	7:07
<i>Diamonds Are Forever</i>	1	2:56
<i>Live and Let Die</i>	1	3:31
<i>The Man with the Golden Gun</i>	4	8:56
<i>The Spy Who Loved Me</i>	3	5:03
<i>Moonraker</i>	6	7:43
<i>Octopussy</i>	5	4:13
<i>A View to a Kill</i>	4	5:54
<i>The Living Daylights</i>	4	5:44
<i>Licence to Kill</i>	2	2:48

Table 1: the number of scenes for Lee’s and Brown’s M, and their total duration per film.

M’s role as the one who “sets events moving”, as Umberto Eco put it in his analysis of the Fleming source texts (37), is clearly reflected in the placement of his

scenes within the films. When I assigned each M scene to its respective quarter within the film in question, 60.4 per cent of his screen time across the 15-film corpus was in the first quarter, falling to 23.5 per cent in the second and to less than 10 per cent in the third and fourth quarters.¹¹ Exceptionally, he appears on screen in each quarter of *The Man with the Golden Gun* and *Moonraker*. More typically, however, once he has “set events moving” he tends to be sidelined and often reappears on screen only after the conclusion of Bond’s mission. Here, however, it should be acknowledged that before the age of the internet and the mobile phone, M’s possibilities to maintain contact with Bond in the field would have been rather limited.

Lee’s and Brown’s M saw the handover of Bond actors from Connery to Lazenby, from Lazenby to Connery and to Moore in quick succession, and from Moore to Dalton. As I mentioned earlier, M is the first character to appear on screen in both Lazenby’s only Bond film *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* and the first of Dalton’s two, *The Living Daylights*. As the former film begins he is in his office with Q, and the 34-second sequence also includes shots of and a line by Money Penny in her office. Showing these three familiar characters and actors before introducing Lazenby’s Bond was certainly meant to reassure viewers that *yes*, this is a genuine Bond film even though the actor portraying Bond has changed (see Jones, 5-6). In total, M appears in six scenes in *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*; the combined length – 7 minutes and 7 seconds – is the third-longest among all the 15 films considered here.

The pre-title sequence in *The Living Daylights* features M briefing Bond and two other Double-0 agents on a Royal Air Force plane before the three parachute down on their training mission “to penetrate the radar installations of Gibraltar”. Quite implausibly, a temporary office with panelled walls, a rather substantial desk, and personalised decorations have been set up for M in the plane’s cargo hold, reminiscent of his submarine-based office in *You Only Live Twice*. M is the only person to speak in this 36-second scene, and the three Double-0 agents are only shown from behind. M, then, is the opening scene’s undeniable focal point. In total, he appears in four scenes in *The Living Daylights* that last for a total of 5 minutes and 44 seconds, which is far above the average for Lee’s and Brown’s M.

Moore’s first Bond film *Live and Let Die* is the outlier here. When the title sequence ends Bond is seen at home in bed with his latest sexual conquest, Italian agent Miss Caruso. M is already ringing Bond’s doorbell, however, and

¹¹ Third quarter: 6.3 per cent; fourth quarter: 9.9 per cent.

Money Penny arrives a little later. The unorthodox briefing sequence that unfolds marks M's only appearance in the whole film. Furthermore, he is portrayed in a very comical light, marvelling at Bond's espresso machine and misunderstanding Money Penny's line about Q having repaired Bond's wristwatch as a misuse of taxpayers' money. Perhaps the filmmakers thought that *The Saint* (1962-1969) and *The Persuaders!* (1971-1972) TV series had already made Moore too big a star to need much support from Lee's M in his first outing as Bond (see Jones, 8).

The third topic I particularly wish to address before concluding my article concerns the chain of command on display in the first 16 Bond films. As Patton points out, "[t]he royal authority behind the famous license [to kill] is never more than a dim presence in either the novel or films. Rather, the fullest visible embodiment of that licensing authority is M" (246). In the *The Spy Who Loved Me*, however, the Bond franchise introduced M's superior, Minister of Defence Frederick Gray, a recurring character in his own right. Always played by Geoffrey Keen, Gray appeared in six films in a row, the last of which was *The Living Daylights*. One of the reasons behind his introduction may have been Bernard Lee's advancing age, which would have forced him to retire from his role sooner or later. Another reason may have been Lee's alcoholism, of which Field and Chowdhury's interviewees give several examples (175, 198, 273, 328). Whatever the exact reasoning of the filmmakers may have been, Minister Gray's familiarity with Bond fans undoubtedly helped when Lee passed away during the filming of *For Your Eyes Only*. This was already Gray's third Bond film, and the fact that Bond is handled by the Minister and Chief of Staff Bill Tanner in M's absence does not feel strange at all. M appears in a total of 22 scenes or sequences in the five films that Minister Gray shares with Lee's or Brown's M, of which Gray is present in exactly half. He also appears in *The Spy Who Loved Me* in a rather lengthy sequence from which M is absent.

The Spy Who Loved Me introduced another recurring character in addition to Gray, namely Soviet spymaster General Gogol of the KGB, who was always played by Walter Gotell. Gogol was a deliberate "attempt at creating a sympathetic Russian in Western cinema" (Field and Chowdhury, 305), whose tenure exactly mirrors that of Minister Gray. Some hints of the Soviet chain of command were incorporated into the Bond films of the late 1970s and the 1980s through Gogol's scenes. He is the puppet-master behind villain Aris Kristatos in *For Your Eyes Only*, but otherwise, he remains on neutral or even friendly terms with the British and/or Americans. In *The Spy Who Loved Me*, Gogol is a Soviet mirror image of M, but later films portray him more as an M-Bond hybrid of sorts. As the

leader of the KGB, he, like M, wields much power. In *Moonraker*, it is Gogol who agrees to give the Americans the first go at Drax's space station, and in *Octopussy* he is shown to be the Soviet Chairman's close confidant. On the other hand, in *Moonraker* Gogol has a young mistress and in *For Your Eyes Only* is insinuated to have an intimate relationship with his secretary too. His other Bond-like characteristic is the tendency to involve himself personally in field operations, travelling to Greece to collect the British ATAC transmitter from Kristatos in *For Your Eyes Only* and acting as the Soviet agent Pola Ivanova's "getaway driver" in San Francisco in *A View to a Kill*. Although Minister Gray's and General Gogol's roles always remained quite small, both could certainly be considered key supporting characters of the Moore era who played important roles in the series' transition from Lee's M to Brown's.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As I have demonstrated in this article, previous generalisations do not do full justice to Lee's and Brown's M. In *Dr. No* and *From Russia with Love*, M is very much in charge and in possession of all necessary background information, while Connery's Bond still acts rather respectably towards his chief. *Goldfinger*, however, is the first in a long line of films in which M gradually becomes weaker and is portrayed in an increasingly comic light. The one-on-one briefings of the first two films are mostly abandoned in favour of meetings with three or more participants in which M gets fewer lines and, consequently, carries less narrative weight. In *Goldfinger* and *Diamonds Are Forever*, M, not knowing much about gold or diamond smuggling, plays second fiddle in the briefing scenes and is the target of one-upmanship by Connery's Bond. *Thunderball*, on the other hand, places M in a clearly subordinate role to the Home Secretary, and in *You Only Live Twice* he is quite irrelevant to the narrative, receiving less screen time than in any other film. *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* sees M trying to regain some of his former authority, but this attempt comes to nothing due to the rebelliousness of Lazenby's Bond.

Arguably, Lee's M is at his weakest in the first and third Moore-era films: in *Live and Let Die* he is portrayed in a very embarrassing light and in *The Spy Who Loved Me* is absent from the first briefing sequence. Although M receives significantly more screen time in the intervening *The Man with the Golden Gun*, he mostly snaps and grumbles at his subordinates rather than showing strong leadership and forward thinking. Furthermore, in the first two Moore-era films M expresses his disdain for Bond's playboy lifestyle very openly. However, Lee's last film, *Moonraker*, begins a move towards a more empowered and serious M that contin-

ues in the two films Brown's M shares with Moore's Bond. M's portrayal thus noticeably changed during both Connery's and Moore's lengthy tenures as Bond.

In Dalton's two Bond films, M's relationship with the agent is very conflictive. Brown's M, however, attempts to reign in Dalton's Bond more forcefully than Lee's M did with Lazenby's Bond. In *The Living Daylights*, he threatens to have Double-0 Eight replace Bond should the latter have problems with following orders, and in *Licence to Kill* M first flies to Florida personally to confront Bond and then tasks his people in the Republic of Isthmus to put an end to Bond's private vendetta. As for Stock's claim that "M seldom leaves his office" (253), only 21 of Lee's and Brown's M's total of 50 scenes – that is, 42 per cent – take place in his London office, with a further two in Money Penny's adjoining room. Furthermore, as the Bond series progressed, the association between M and his office space weakened. Indeed, M appears abroad in all his last seven films, as well as in two earlier ones, *You Only Live Twice* and *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. One important way in which Lee's and Brown's M notably differs from their successors, however, is that neither is ever physically threatened or captured, as both Dench's and Fiennes' Ms repeatedly are (McNeely, 159; Wight, 180). Bond's first chief is certainly a "grey-type character", as Connery once referred to him (quoted in Field and Chowdhury, 389), and a "signifier of Englishness" (Stock, 260). Nevertheless, he also significantly evolved and changed during his nearly 30-year run.

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