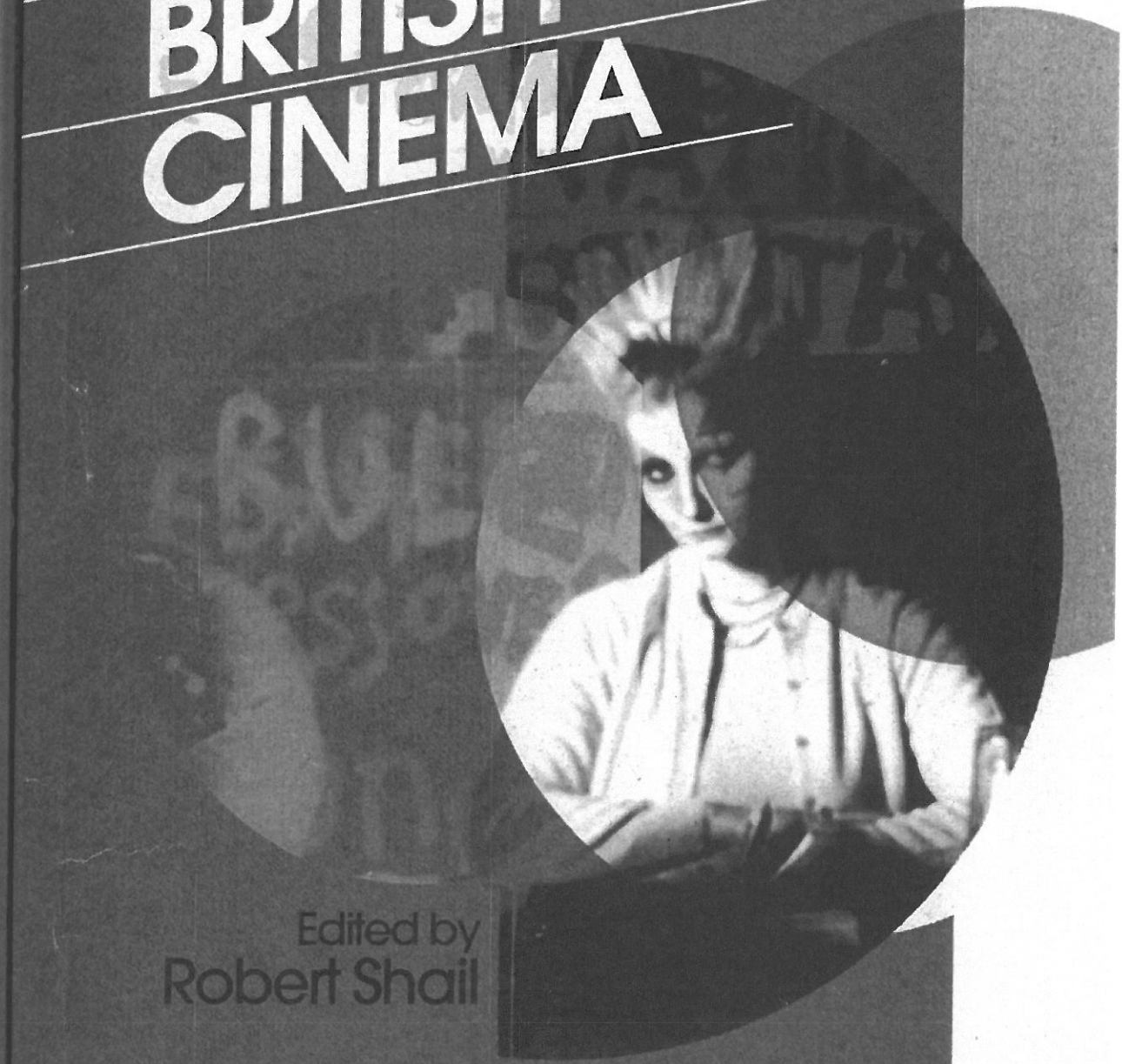
SEVENTIES BRITISH CINEMA



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Robert Shail

> And what, I can hear you all asking with bated breath, is Mr Roger Moore like as James Bond? Mr Moore as Bond is exactly like the Mr Moore who played The Saint, who in his turn is the nearest approximation to the Mr Moore who plays anything. There are no surprises whatsoever. Which is just as well, since it is extremely doubtful whether Mr Moore could register them. In *Live and Let Die* he is the perfect cypher through which the glamorous hardware of the later Saltzman and Broccoli Bond movies can express themselves.[1]

By 1972, Sean Connery, who had played Ian Fleming's invincible British secret agent James Bond in six highly lucrative film adventures, had seemingly tired of the role. Connery, keen to branch out into more demanding acting parts, had already handed over the mantle of Bond on one previous occasion (to the ill-fated George Lazenby for *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* in 1969) but had been persuaded back for a final outing with *Diamonds Are Forever* in 1971.[2] Unable to secure Connery for the eighth official Bond movie (1967's *Casino Royale* not being part of the main franchise), its American backers, United Artists, were in the market for a replacement. Despite the fact that both Burt Reynolds and Paul Newman were considered for the role, in the end it was given to the British actor Roger Moore. It might have seemed predestined, as Moore had been in the frame for the first Bond film, *Dr No*, back in 1962, and then was considered again as Connery's replacement for both *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* and *Diamonds Are Forever*.

Moore had obvious credentials for playing Bond. Although his acting career stretched back to 1945 and included a variety of bit-parts in films and a good deal of theatre work, audiences new him best as the star of the popular television series *The Saint* (1962–9), where he played Leslie Charteris's suave troubleshooting hero, Simon Templar. Moore had established a public persona as a debonair playboy figure, built principally on his role as Templar and then confirmed by his appearance as Lord Brett Sinclair in another escapist adventure series for television, *The Persuaders* (1971–2). Both parts had placed Moore against glossy backgrounds, put him behind the wheel of stylish sports cars, and frequently into the company of beautiful women. They also allowed him to develop a nonchalant, minimalist acting style that, as he put it, allowed him to 'cover up holes in acting talent by being charming'.[3]

Press coverage of the announcement that Moore was taking over as Bond confirms the sense that he was seen as the heir apparent. The report in the *Daily Mirror* is headlined 'For Simon Templar Read James Bond' and has a picture of Moore bare-chested but for a long cravat; the

caption reads 'Roger Moore: the man who had to be Bond'.[4] Moore is interviewed on the patio of the penthouse at the Dorchester Hotel, sipping Scotch and smoking a cigar. When asked if the public will accept him as Bond, he replies: 'I don't see why they shouldn't. I've been typecast for most of my life.' In public, Moore adopted a typically casual attitude to his new job; responding to the inevitable comparisons with Connery, he told the *Sunday Express*: 'The only thing I bring to the role that Sean didn't is slightly whiter teeth.'[5] This throwaway tone was to become central to his approach to the role.

Moore initially signed a contract for three Bond movies, starting with *Live and Let Die* (1973). It's useful to examine the way in which Eon Productions and United Artists incorporated Moore into their promotional campaign for the first film. The most striking thing about the posters for *Live and Let Die* is the degree to which the visual imagery of the franchise remained unchanged. This includes such basics as the typeface used, the pose struck by Moore (dressed in black suit and tie, arms crossed, gun raised to the side of his face) and the arrangement of the design in which all of the action (girls, cars, explosions) radiates outwards from Bond.[6] Above all else, the prospective audience are reassured that the formula remains unaltered. Similarly, the theatrical trailers, from which this essay's title is taken, promise business as usual, with the arrival of a new Bond comparatively insignificant in relation to the stunts, chases and exotic locales on offer.[7]

The new Bond arrives in *Live and Let Die* (1973)

When *Live and Let Die* was released in the summer of 1973, the press reception was lukewarm. The film itself was generally taken as a rather average addition to the Bond cycle, with some concern voiced over the blaxploitation elements in the story. Moore's performance divided opinion. British reviewers frequently refer to him as 'bland', 'lightweight', 'jokey' or 'plastic'. However, many welcomed the element of self-parody that Moore brought to the role, with positive reviews for his performance in most of the tabloids, as well as in the *Sunday Telegraph* and the *New Statesman*. Ian Christie in the *Daily Express* said, 'The new James Bond will do very nicely, thank you.'[8] Others were less complimentary, particularly when comparing Moore with Connery. Nigel Andrews's review in the *Financial Times* is typical:

> Roger Moore's ease, charm and competence are not enough to raise his Bond to the calibre of Connery's. Though the public school snobbery comes through loud and clear, Moore fails to convince either as a ruthless womaniser or as an athletic hand-to-hand fighter. What is needed is rather less of the suave, charm school badinages and rather more of Connery's aggressively mischievous way with his dialogue, his women and with the story's colourfully preposterous succession of villainous encounters and hair's breadth escapes.[9]

Similarly, Felix Barker in the London *Evening News* suggested that 'for all his easy, boyish charm, he lacks the hard sardonic quality of his predecessor'.[10] The repeated conclusion is that Moore's more comic approach had robbed the character of the authenticity that the tougher Connery had brought to it. However, this judgment requires further consideration, as it can be argued that Moore's characterisation was deliberately designed to undermine any 'real life' credibility the character might have contained.

Whatever reservations the critics might have had about the new Bond, the box-office response was clear enough. *Live and Let Die* was the fourth highest-grossing film in the American market during 1973. Although its takings in America were down on *Diamonds Are Forever*, this was more than compensated for by its international returns that made it the second most profitable Bond movie to date, only bettered by *Thunderball* (1965).[11] Moore's tenure as 007 was secure and he appeared in three further adventures during the decade – *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974), *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) and *Moonraker* (1979) – followed by three more outings during the 1980s. *The Spy Who Loved Me* recorded the third highest number of admissions at the British box office of any of the Bond movies, while *Moonraker* and *Live and Let Die* rank at four and five on this list.[12] Until the arrival of Pierce Brosnan in 1995, *Moonraker* had the highest gross of any of the Bond films. For audiences, if not for critics, Moore's version of the myth was successful enough to ensure the profitable continuation of the series.

The comparison between Connery and Moore remains a useful starting point for considering the direction taken by the Bond films in the 1970s. Connery's success in the 1960s was partially a result of his ability to translate the mythology of Fleming's original creation and make it relevant to the fantasies of a contemporary audience. Fleming's characterisation largely conforms to James Chapman's definition of the traditional British imperialist spy hero (as given in his exemplary study of the Bond films).[13] Fleming's hero was every bit the white colonialist abroad, restoring order and exhibiting reverence for the symbols of British power; the personification of a dominant race whose position in the world, as protectors of all that is civilised, has remained

Roger Moore adopts a familiar pose, with Gloria Hendry and Jane Seymour, for *Live and Let Die*

apparently unscathed by the impositions of the Cold War or the collapse of the Empire. The films toned down these elements, along with the sadomasochistic violence that sometimes characterises the books. Most strikingly, the images of Bond's lifestyle have been altered, taking him away from Fleming's gentlemen's clubs towards a more international style of consumerism. Connery's Bond often resembles an affluent holidaymaker out to enjoy the plush hotels, fine food and drink, exciting nightlife and good times offered by his trips abroad. This is particularly apparent in the depiction of his female conquests. The original Honey of Fleming's *Dr No* is a childlike waif who comes under Bond's fatherly protection. In the film, she has become Ursula Andress, emerging from the surf clad in a white bikini. The Bond of the Connery films is a charming womaniser, but the aristocratic dominance of Fleming's original has given way to a kind of international playboy whose aim is the pursuit of hedonistic pleasures that might seemingly be open (at least as fantasy) to all 1960s men.

Connery's Bond plays out an exaggerated projection of the archetypal 1960s 'Swinging' male lifestyle. Connery said of Bond: 'He enjoys the freedom that the normal person doesn't get. He likes to eat. He likes to drink. He likes girls.'[14] Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott are surely correct in observing that Fleming's innate conservatism had been replaced by a rampantly capitalist dream world,[15] but it is a world rooted in the context of 1960s Britain. The pleasures afforded

by the Bond films are those of an increasingly affluent male audience, experiencing their first foreign holidays, purchasing domestic 'gadgets' and feeling the beneficial effects of a gradual erosion of traditional moral straitjackets. The transition from imperialist gentleman-hero to 1960s hedonist was recognised in contemporary reviews of Connery's Bond. David Robinson in *The Times* suggested that over the first three films, the series had 'crossed the borderline from the baroque into the fantastic'.[16] The key factor in this success was clearly Connery himself. As an archetypal working-class hero of the period in his own right, he reflected one of the era's central myths. Both United Artists and the media were fond of reminding audiences of the actor's authentic streetwise toughness and his rise from the working-class neighbourhoods of Edinburgh. His Scottishness helped to distance Bond from the class connotations with which Fleming had defined him. Fleming's Bond is a class snob who carries his knowledge of wines, clothes and food with him as an indicator of his superior social status. In Connery's version, this connoisseurship is an indication of Bond's modern, and potentially classless, sophistication.

The figure of the hedonistic playboy became one of the central media myths of 1960s culture, and working-class male stars like Connery, Michael Caine and Terence Stamp were essential to its creation. Its main features were a dedication to conspicuous consumption and a freer attitude towards sexual morality, combined with a new form of democratic accessibility. The most public embodiment of this new lifestyle was offered by the American entrepreneur Hugh Heffner, both in his own personal life and in his creation of the Playboy clubs, with their promise of entry to a world of easy sex, gambling and self-indulgence. Such an apparent paradise was now to be available not just to those of a certain class but to anyone who could afford it (and who was also male). For a British heterosexual male emerging from the dreariness of the postwar period, the attractions of such a mythology, however shallow, are obvious enough. As James Chapman argues, for all of their fantastical absurdities, the Bond films of the 1960s were rooted in a form of aspirational imagining for their audience.[17]

It is in relation to this aspirational dimension of the character, as well as through their relationship to the wider context, that Moore's Bond films of the 1970s differ most strikingly to Connery's of the 1960s. The Britain of the 1960s out of which the series grew was a comparatively affluent, stable and optimistic place. Although eschewing generalisations, the historian Arthur Marwick describes the 1960s as a time when 'life was good and all seemed far from lost. Still there was a joy in the present, and hope for the future.'[18] By contrast, Marwick designates the 1970s as 'The Time of Troubles', among them accelerating economic decline, the collapse of traditional manufacturing industries, increasing numbers of industrial disputes marked by outbreaks of violence, rising racial tensions and the reawakening of sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland. For Marwick, the era saw the 'break-up of the optimistic consensus which had, according to one point of view, successfully carried Britain through the difficult post-war years into the affluence of the sixties'.[19] The response of the Bond films, which had always shown a remarkable ability to acknowledge the changing mood of their audience, was to shift decisively from the aspirational to the escapist.

One way in which this was expressed was in the increasingly self-deprecatory and humorous tone adopted by the films, a strategy designed to dispossess them of the rougher-edged authenticity of the Connery period. Connery had always employed self-consciously arch one-liners delivered with a deadpan wink to the audience, but Moore was to carry this much further. The

new attitude is established in *Live and Let Die* when Bond is invited to return to bed by one of his sexual conquests and replies: 'Well, there's no sense in going off half-cocked.' At the conclusion of *Moonraker*, Bond is inevitably caught in flagrante with his female co-star (Lois Chiles), this time while in outer space; Q's explanation is that he is simply 'attempting re-entry'. In an interview, Tom Mankiewicz, screenwriter on *Live and Let Die* and *The Man with the Golden Gun*, explained that he deliberately shaped the style of the scripts to take advantage of Moore's established skills as a light comedian.[20] In the Connery vehicles, the effect of the one-liners is to draw attention to the harshly amoral outlook of Bond, whereas Moore's elaborately risqué remarks tend simply to draw attention to themselves.

This approach is extended to other typical features of the Bond formula such as the chases and stunts, the gadgets and the villains. *Live and Let Die* features a chase with Bond at the wheel of a red double-decker bus (whose top half is removed by a low bridge), while *The Spy Who Loved Me* includes a fight in an ambulance that concludes with the 'heavy' zooming downhill on a hospital trolley and crashing into an advertising hoarding. In the same film, Bond's glamorous sports car turns into a submersible (providing one of the film's highlights as he drives it from the sea straight onto a crowded holiday beach). *Moonraker* provides Bond with a motorised Venetian gondola that then turns conveniently into a hovercraft that he drives nonchalantly through St Mark's Square. In both *The Spy Who Loved Me* and *Moonraker*, the villain is the gigantic 'Jaws'

Moore's James Bond gets to grips with 'Jaws' (Richard Kiel) in *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977)

(Richard Kiel), nicknamed for his metal teeth, a character who proved so popular with audiences that he is effectively turned into a hero at the end of the latter film and given his own love interest. Even the much-anticipated pre-credit sequences are handled in humorous mode; the opening of *The Spy Who Loved Me* finds Bond in bed with yet another conquest and then follows him, after a barrage of one-liners, through a superbly executed snow chase on skis to a finale where he plummets over a cliff-edge only to be saved by his Union Jack parachute. Again, these sequences invite the audience to applaud their ingenuity and wit, rather than thrill to their tense excitement.

One consequence of the humour in these films is to push the audience out from identification and involvement in the narrative. Although it may have been far from the minds of the films' creators, it gives the finished products a superficial air of postmodernism. By borrowing two terms, 'prefabrication' and 'intertextuality', from Susan Hayward's useful description of postmodernism, we can examine further the effect achieved by Moore's Bond movies.[21] Prefabrication describes the tendency to reuse motifs or plot elements from earlier films with the intention of playing on the audience's pre-knowledge of cinematic conventions. This is used quite blatantly in Moore's Bond films, although the references tend to invoke only those films featuring Moore, rather than the whole series. For example, the red-neck sheriff who is used for comic effect in *Live and Let Die* returns as a tourist in *The Man with the Golden Gun*. Moore's exit by car from the sea onto a beach in *The Spy Who Loved Me* is witnessed by a holidaymaker who thinks he is hallucinating from too much drink. This gag is then replicated in the St Mark's sequence in *Moonraker* with the same actor (his double-take is outrageously mirrored with a shot of the similarly amazed reaction of a pigeon). These running gags invite the audience to be complicit in the self-conscious artificiality of the films.

Similarly, intertextuality is used to reference contemporary films and genres in an overtly knowing manner. The most obvious point of filmic reference in *Live and Let Die* is blaxploitation, which features prominently in the Harlem sequences, with the 'Fillet of Soul' nightclub and extras kitted out in Afros. Yaphet Kotto's Mr Big is a caricature black drug baron, but racist overtones tend to be countered by the ironic handling of the stereotypes. *The Man with the Golden Gun* selects another contemporary genre that was then popular with audiences, the martial arts film. Here Bond infiltrates a kung-fu training school and is rescued by two high-kicking schoolgirls during a fight sequence that is again played largely for laughs. *The Spy Who Loved Me* manages a filmic quote from *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), but it is *Moonraker* that goes overboard on cinematic references. The current audience vogue for science fiction is structured throughout the film's narrative but appears specifically in the concluding laser-gun fight that is heavily reminiscent of *Star Wars* (1977) and in a joke where the entry-pad code for a secret laboratory plays the theme tune from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977).

These postmodern devices tend to draw the audience's attention to the film as text rather than as social practice. Susan Hayward suggests that postmodern strategies usually operate within two possible modes: parody or pastiche.[22] Parody implies an aspect of ideological critique that would necessitate a direct relation between text and context, whereas pastiche suggests a deliberate attempt to sever this connection and to offer text as playful distraction from context. The latter definition echoes Frederic Jameson's analysis of postmodernism as a symptom of the alienated subject in late capitalism.[23] It is difficult to discern much that might be described as parody

in these terms in the Roger Moore Bond films; a sympathetic reading might be made of elements in *The Spy Who Loved Me* where the narrative development offers a mild condemnation of Cold War politics and makes the case for détente between East and West – a reading made persuasively by James Chapman.[24] The films do, however, conform closely to the concept of pastiche. The pleasures they offer rely heavily on self-referentiality and intertextual knowledge on the part of the audience. Their form and tone repeatedly draw attention to their constructedness and status as cinematic objects, abstracting them from wider social discourse or historical placement. Playfulness is (almost) everything here; the audience are invited into an experience that is, in cinematic terms, hermetically sealed. Of course, as Jameson points out, such an exercise is always ultimately futile; by their very evasiveness, these films acknowledge that there is something that needs to be evaded.

Admittedly, there are aspects of the films which don't fit quite so neatly with this analysis of their ideological function. Moore's Bond occasionally exhibits signs of his innate chauvinism in an overt way. The narrative provides him with justification for physically abusing Maud Adams's character in *The Man with the Golden Gun* (albeit that Moore looks particularly unconvincing in this sequence), while his sexual dominance is reaffirmed by Solitaire (Jane Seymour) in *Live and Let Die* when, after she has lost her virginity to him, she confesses, 'You make me feel like a whole woman.' Elements of racial and class snobbery remain; Bond's treatment of the black agent Rosie Carver (Gloria Hendry) in *Live and Let Die* is bordering on the patronising. Topical references sometimes occur, such as the mention of the energy crisis as a plot point in *The Man with the Golden Gun*. Such features might be read as evidence of the inherently conservative nature of the franchise. Jeremy Black certainly interprets them as a means of hanging on to increasingly outdated attitudes and prejudices.[25] This in itself could be seen as a means of denying their interrelation to a contemporary context in which such attitudes were being challenged. However, these aspects are relatively secondary in relation to the overall strategy of pastiche. In some cases they are directly countered by other sections of the same film, so that Rosie is also treated with real affection by Bond, and Lois Chiles in *Moonraker* is given the chance to match Moore in one-liners and repartee. The scene of Bond hitting Andrea Anders (Maud Adams) was apparently considered a serious error of judgment by the film-makers themselves.[26]

In a promotional interview for *The Spy Who Loved Me*, Roger Moore, in a characteristically mock-grandiose manner, explained that the Bond films have a surprising affinity with classical Greek theatre in that they share the same aspiration to give the audience a glimpse of the Gods, to take them out of themselves and into another realm.[27] In the violently pessimistic political landscape of Britain in the 1970s, perhaps it was inevitable that the always fantastical world of the Bond movies should turn in on themselves in such an exaggerated fashion. It was a profitable response to the zeitgeist, but what the series had gained in sustainability it may have lost in cultural resonance. If Connery's Bond is a product of the aspirations of the 1960s, then Moore's 007 may be a symptom of their loss.

Notes

1 Derek Malcolm, *Guardian*, 5 July 1973.

2 There are many accounts of the Bond series but for a highly detailed production overview, see John Cork and Bruce Scivally, *James Bond: The Legacy* (London: Boxtree, 1972).

3 Roger Moore quoted by Deborah Murdoch, 'Why the Saint Is Pleased to Be Scared', *Daily Mail*, 30 August 1969.
4 Don Short, 'For Simon Templar Read James Bond', *Daily Mirror*, 2 August 1972.
5 Roderick Mann, 'The New Bond with the Whiter Teeth', *Sunday Express*, 22 April 1973.
6 Tony Nourmand, *James Bond Movie Posters* (London: Boxtree, 2001) provides handsome reproductions of promotional posters from a variety of territories.
7 The United Artists two-disc special edition DVD releases of the Bond movies contain a plethora of interviews, documentaries, artwork and trailers, which provide fascinating material for those interested in the marketing and promotion of the Bond franchise.
8 Reviews/previews of *Live and Let Die*: Margaret Hinxman, *Sunday Telegraph*, 8 July 1973; John Coleman, *New Statesman*, 6 March 1973; Ian Christie, *Daily Express*, 4 July 1973.
9 Nigel Andrews, *Financial Times*, 13 July 1973.
10 Felix Barker, *London Evening News*, 5 July 1973.
11 For box-office figures on the Bond films, see Cork and Scivally, *James Bond: The Legacy*, pp. 300–3.
12 Information on British box-office admissions can be found in The Ultimate Film Chart at <bfi.org.uk/features/ultmatefilm/facts> (accessed 7 August 2007).
13 James Chapman, *Licence to Thrill: A Cultural History of the James Bond Films* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), p. 20.
14 Sean Connery quoted in Sheldon Lane (ed.), *For Bond Lovers Only* (London: Panther, 1965), p. 75.
15 Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero* (London: Macmillan, 1987).
16 David Robinson, *The Times*, 17 September 1964.
17 Chapman, *Licence to Thrill*, pp. 68–9.
18 Arthur Marwick, *British Society since 1945* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 181.
19 Ibid., p. 184.
20 Tom Mankiewicz is interviewed in the documentary *Inside Live and Let Die* featured on the two-disc DVD edition of the film released by United Artists.
21 Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts, Second Edition* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 277.
22 Ibid.
23 See Frederic Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1983).
24 Chapman, *Licence to Thrill*, p. 189.
25 Jeremy Black, *The Politics of James Bond: From Fleming's Novels to the Big Screen* (Lincoln, NB, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), pp. 146–7.
26 Interviews with director Lewis Gilbert and writer Christopher Wood for the special edition DVD of *The Spy Who Loved Me* indicate that they wished to move away from any violence against women and adopt a much lighter approach.
27 Roger Moore interviewed in *My Word Is My Bond*, a promotional documentary for *The Spy Who Loved Me* featured on the DVD special edition of the film.