

Bond, Bourne, and Unshed Blood

The thriller genre is a vastly beloved category of film that began its popularity around the 1960's. The genre encompasses other well-known story forms such as horror, spy, noir, and action. Yet, such a simple concept has been able to span genres and become a staple of film and literature. Through all of these spin-offs of thrillers, more often than not, the core themes persist. And ironically, it seems that one of the most valuable themes is immunity and immortality. These ideas originally make sense given the time of the 1960s with the main characters being white men, but because of that, the unkillable main character has become predominant within a genre that prides itself on being risky and unpredictable. Through the idealization of masculinity, the very concept of the thriller genre is altered and has become invincible.

During the genre's initial period of popularity, straight white men were always the main character. It was a constant in every movie and every book. These were characters that the everyday person was supposed to see themselves in. Even the (debatable) king of thriller, Alfred Hitchcock fit this bill. The majority of his pieces star a man, and the ones featuring women often categorize them as the love interest. Furthermore, as it was virtually unheard of for its time, none of the works have a person of color or a queer character as a lead. Having these straight white male leads required meant that a certain air of masculinity must be had for them to be seen as relatable. No man would feel comfortable identifying with a "weak" man. These ideals poured themselves into the protagonists audiences know in modern media such as; Jason Bourne and James Bond, the two characters that this essay will be focusing on.

“The Bourne Identity” came out in 2002. It stars Matt Damon playing as Jason Bourne, a spy with amnesia. It follows him remembering his old life, while also trying to escape it. Bourne is, for lack of a better term, owned by the United States Government. His character was created by this company to be invisible, to be able to live off the grid completely unnoticed. In this way, he becomes unkillable, after all, you can not kill what you can not see. Bourne is the hero of this story, the audience does not worry that he will die because he has no other choice but to prevail. But even in a world where he could die, his lack of personality made it hard to care. His character was simply a blank wall to project on and therefore uninteresting for someone who can not relate to an unkillable main character.

The same could be said for Daniel Craig’s James Bond in “Casino Royale.” Bond is a super spy employed by Britain. He kills carelessly and hardly ever asks for help. He is unkillable because it is part of his appeal. His character was created to be recreated and last through time, so there is no way a new film adaption of James Bond would kill him on first chance. Even his emotional despair is used to better his character. In the long run, his losses just strengthen his resolve, and by the sequel, James will completely forget about Vesper. Bond films stand alone. He is a masculine character created for men to feel better about themselves and for women to lust over. He does not feel real, he does not need to. He has already gone down in history as an iconic character.

Both of these characters are owned by a cooperation much bigger than themselves. James Bond works for The British International Secret Service and Jason Bourne works for The Central Intelligence Agency. When they cooperate with their respective companies, they are safe. Even if

their jobs are dangerous, their support of a patriotic industry makes them model civilians and therefore, unkillable. The ideal white man is emotionless, able-bodied, and loves his country. Bond and Bourne fill this role well.

In these narratives, the main character must seem killable. The writers need to trick the audience into caring about the protagonist and genuinely worry about losing him. To do this, the character must be torn from the organization that is protecting him. As both of these men respectively stray from their work, they become more at risk. It becomes more acceptable to emotionally hurt them and physically wound them. But as Bourne begins to find himself and Bond falls for Vesper, they begin to explore their individuality. They become a threat. Yet, this is a risk that must be taken in order for the audience to care for them. No one can be completely flawless. That is why when Vesper betrays Bond, the story is able to kill him while still keeping him alive. They are able to add more trauma to this mysterious and brooding character without completely ripping him from the viewer's hands. It also reverts the character growth from Bond and sends him right back into the hands of the country. Essentially, starting his story all over again to repeat his doomed narrative.

Jason Bourne's ending is slightly happier. He escapes from Conklin and retreats to Greece where he is reunited with his close friend, Marie. The movie goes to black after they share a hug. As sweet as this is, his story does not end there. Bourne has not only made a mockery, but an enemy out of the CIA. During "The Bourne Supremacy " he is forced back into his life as an assassin. This shows that if he had any plans on survival, he must retreat back into the cocoon of being owned by a power much bigger than him. It is what protects him. It is what

makes him unkillable. Once again becoming the “ideal” patriotic perfect white man he was destined to be.

It is not controversial to say that James Bond has had intimate relationships with many women. In “Casino Royale” he has relations with two. He seduces Solange, the enemy's wife, to gain information. He teases and plays with her flawlessly, showing he is experienced. Showing that he is masculine. Once he has gotten the information needed and proven that he can take what isn't his, he leaves. He leaves Solange wanting without an explanation or care. Later, when he finds out that she was killed (a fault that is completely his own), he does not show emotion. He is a man, and she is just an exploit. Then, his later sexual adventure is Vesper. For the majority of the movie, there is sexual tension between them. This eventually leads to the climax of the shower scene. First, he just looks at her, on-brand for him. He is neutral and careless. Instead, he sits. Ruining his nice tuxedo, he joins her in the pouring shower. She is crying, and he listens. This is a side of Bond we have never seen before. We see him start to care. Vesper begins to explain that she feels there is blood on her hands that she will never be able to wash off. Bond takes her hand, there is softness and vulnerability to it, but then he proceeds to put her fingers in his mouth. One by one he sucks on them. Bond is acting in a softer behavior, while still being sexual (aka masculine). In his sensuality to Vesper he manages to be delicate, tending to her needs and trying to wash off the imaginary blood while also staying alluring, mysterious, and in control. His sucking shows that he still has power and sexual magnitude, but his reason for sucking is one of genuine concern and vulnerability.

Jason Bourne only has sex with one woman in “The Bourne Identity”. Up until the actual act, Jason and Marie (the woman he had intercourse with) never showed potential for a relationship of that nature. There was no sexual tension, it was purely platonic. In fact, what sparked their coitus was a brush with death and a sensual haircut. After it (sex) Bourne and Marie never speak of it again, nor show interest in pursuing a sexual relationship. This scene is meant to establish Bourne’s masculinity. Because in a world perpetuated with the archetype of sexual male spy, the main character needed to have sex to be established.

In Hepburn's writing he mentions male spies have sex, not for pleasure (because they resist pleasure) but rather for the sake of masculinity, to prove that wounds cannot stop their body from functioning. Spies use sex to prove wounds can’t disable him. After Bond’s battle where he is injured, the shower scene proceeds, and he is thrown back into his sensual self. This also happens after he is poisoned, once he is cured he acts as if nothing happened. His naked chest simply gleams with sweat, and he is an object to be lusted after once more. The same happens to Jason Bourne and his rendezvous with Marie. These characters were almost killed. They were scared and had to disguise themselves (by cutting Marie’s hair). In this scene, sex was used as a distraction. Sex is a way to avoid connection and feel fleeting pleasure. One could say the only way for a spy to experience pleasure is because any emotion besides anger is considered feminine and weak.

The male spies' ability to resist emotion, stay able-bodied, and have a patriotic home within the government keeps them invincible. They need to be invincible so that the average white male civilian can idolize them. This idolization slowly becomes related, and figures like Jason Bourne and James Bond are spearheaded as icons within the spy genre. This makes other

creators want to write similar stories and continue the cycle. This, within itself, makes the thriller genre invincible. The emotionless sex perpetuates the generic masculinity perpetuates the need for an unkillable character, and perpetuates the inevitable narrative.

Works Cited

The Bourne Identity. Directed by Doug Liman, performances by Matt Damon and Franka Potente, Universal Pictures, 2002.

Casino Royale. Directed by Martin Campbell, performances by Daniel Craig and Eva Green, Columbia Pictures, 2006.

Hepburn, Allan. "Chapter 1". "Chapter 2." *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture*, Yale Univ. Press, New Haven, CT, 2005, pp. 3–48.