

THE SECRET ORIGINS OF JAMES BOND

7

Spy novelist Jeremy Duns presents an in-depth analysis of how one of Britain's most successful thriller-writers influenced the creation and development of Ian Fleming's character

You Know His Name?

During the Second World War, he worked in the upper echelons of Britain's intelligence establishment, helping to plan ingenious operations against the Nazis. He was one of the most popular thriller-writers of the 20th century, but his literary reputation has faded in recent years, with critics lambasting his novels as xenophobic, sexist fantasies. And he created a suave but ruthless British secret agent who was orphaned at a young age, expelled from his public school, smoked exotic cigarettes, had a scar on his face, bedded beautiful women and repeatedly saved the world from the threats of megalomaniacal villains.

His name? Dennis Wheatley.

In 1968, Richard Boston wrote in the New York Times that 'the short step from Bulldog Drummond to Ian Fleming's James Bond consisted in giving the hero a sex life'. Kingsley Amis, O.F. Snelling and several literary critics since have supported the idea that Fleming updated the 'clubland heroes' created by HC 'Sapper' McNeile, John Buchan, Dornford Yates and other writers. But in fact the clubland heroes had already been updated, and given a sex life, nearly two decades before James Bond's first appearance in 1953. There are several characters and incidents in Fleming's novels inspired by the above-named writers, but Wheatley's influence has gone almost entirely unacknowledged despite being much more significant, and playing a crucial role in the development of James Bond.

Born in 1897, 11 years before Fleming, Dennis Wheatley fought in the trenches in World War One before taking over his father's wine business in London. In 1933, he embarked on a

new career as an author, and soon became a best-seller. Dubbed 'the prince of thriller writers' by the Times Literary Supplement, he wrote over 70 books, which have sold over 50 million copies in 28 languages. Today, he is best remembered for his novels dealing with black magic and the occult, but he also wrote straight suspense stories, swashbuckling historical adventures and spy thrillers.

By the time the Second World War began, Wheatley had established himself as one of the country's best-selling writers. At 42 he was too old to fight, but he desperately wanted to help his country. Thanks to a chance encounter made by his wife, a chauffeur for MI5, in May 1940 he was asked to submit ideas to the War Office on how Britain could resist an invasion. Two days later, Wheatley delivered a 7,000-word essay stuffed with inventive suggestions. He was immediately asked to write another paper, this time from the perspective of the enemy: if he were in the Nazi High Command, how would he go about trying to defeat Britain? After completing this and several further papers, he was invited to become a member of the London Controlling Section (LCS), a seven-man team within the Joint Planning Staff of the War Cabinet that was responsible for devising deception operations against the Axis powers. To celebrate his new position, Wheatley had his tailor create a greatcoat lined with scarlet satin, and persuaded Wilkinson's to design him a couple of swagger sticks concealing 15-inch blades 'as a precaution against trouble in the blackout'.

Wheatley was now in his element, given free rein to exercise his thriller-writer's imagination to help defeat the enemy. In 1943, he was one of the planners of Operation Mincemeat, whereby a corpse was dressed up as a major in the Royal Marines and washed ashore in Spain

with forged documents that suggested the Allies planned to invade Greece and Sardinia, rather than their real target, Sicily. The German High Command fell for it, diverting a significant number of troops and shipping as a result. Wheatley was also involved with Operation Copperhead in 1944, whereby an Australian soldier impersonated Field Marshal Montgomery, this time to make the Axis powers believe the Allies were planning to land in southern France on D-Day, rather than Normandy.

During the war, Wheatley became both a colleague and friend of another well-known writer, albeit of travel books rather than novels: Peter Fleming, who worked on deception planning in India and the Far East, and often collaborated with the LCS. Like Wheatley, he was a keen advocate of the use of deception as a weapon, and was sometimes frustrated by the lack of resources assigned to it. 'This is a one-horse show and I am the horse,' he complained in a letter to Wheatley from India in mid-1942. Fleming felt that what was needed from the LCS was not merely red herrings to mislead the enemy, but 'purple whales' – the phrase was later given as a codename to a Chinese agent used to sell false documents (written by Fleming) to the Japanese.

Wheatley also knew Peter's younger brother Ian, who was thinking up his own outlandish ideas for operations over at Naval Intelligence, where he was the influential personal assistant of the Director, Admiral John Godfrey. According to Dennis Wheatley's biographer, Phil Baker, Ian Fleming and Wheatley dined together from time to time. One such occasion was on November 10, 1942, and took place at Wheatley's home in Earl's Court. Fleming was accompanied by Joan Bright, an assistant to General Ismay, and the two other guests were Roly Vintras of the Joint Planning Staff and Colin Gubbins, who would later become head of the Special Operations Executive.

We have no idea what was discussed that evening, or on other occasions when these two men met, but it seems likely that they would have been intrigued by each other: they were engaged in much the same sort of secret work, and had a similar approach to it, both being noted for their ability to concoct ingenious if occasionally overly fanciful ideas. On the evening of November 10, Wheatley would have had good reason to have been pleased: Operation Torch, the Allies' successful invasion of north Africa two days earlier, had been aided by several deception operations cooked up by

the LCS to once again fool the enemy into believing that the real objective had been elsewhere.

Fleming would also have been in a celebratory mood: 30 Assault Unit, the intelligence-gathering commando group under his command ('my Red Indians', as he called them), had just captured the Italians' naval code-books from a villa near Algiers. Wheatley would, one suspects, have been eager to hear the details of that mission, as it was both a success story related to his own work with Torch and just the kind of daring escapade that featured in his thrillers – despite his day job, he had published seven novels since the start of the war.

Fleming and Wheatley had quite a lot else in common. Both appreciated the finer things in life: Wheatley liked to savour elaborate meals, followed by Hoyo de Monterrey cigars or his favourite cigarettes, a Turkish mixture made by Sullivans in the Burlington Arcade. Fleming preferred a Turkish and Balkan mixture by a rival tobacconist, Morlands, who were based in Grosvenor Street – in 1944, one of his girlfriends was killed in a German bombing raid a few hours after collecting two hundred cigarettes for him from the shop.

Wheatley and Fleming also shared a boyish delight in gadgets and weaponry: Wheatley had his special swagger sticks from Wilkinson's, Fleming a small commando dagger made by the same company that he carried with him on foreign assignments. Both men were keen book collectors, and relied on a mutual friend, the antiquarian dealer Percy Muir, to suggest suitable investments. Fleming was also acquainted with Maxwell Knight, an agent-runner at MI5 who was a close friend of Wheatley's, although the idea that the three men were all involved in an operation in 1941 featuring Rudolf Hess and the occultist Aleister Crowley seems to be a myth created by Fleming biographer Donald McCormick. Fleming did approach Crowley about trying to influence Hess after his arrival in Scotland, but nothing came of it.

Wheatley did know Crowley, though, and, like Fleming, was fascinated by him, using him as the basis for two of his villains: Mocata, the black magician in 1934's *The Devil Rides Out* (later played in the film adaptation by Charles Gray opposite Fleming's cousin, Christopher Lee); and Sean O'Kieff, an occultist with 'a hard rat-trap of a mouth' who condescendingly calls the hero 'my dear boy' in the 1939 novel *The Quest of Julian Day*. We don't know if Fleming

read this novel, but one can't help feeling it would have been to his liking. Day, a half-Austrian half-British old Etonian with a double-first from Oxford in Oriental Languages, is up against not just O'Kieff but the rest of 'The Big Seven', the men behind a massive criminal organization involved in espionage, blackmail, dope-running, diamond-smuggling and white-slave trafficking. The other members are revealed to be an English aristocrat, Lord Gavin Fortescue; Ismail Zakri Bay, an Egyptian; Inosuki Hayashi ('the Jap'); Azreal Mozinsky, a Polish Jew; Count Emilio Mondragora; and Baron Feldmar von Hentzen.

At any rate, one suspects that thrillers would have been uppermost in Ian Fleming's mind while dining with Dennis Wheatley, for in 1942 he was a long-standing *aficionado* of the genre, and harboured the ambition of writing such novels himself after the war. Somewhat ironically, his brother Peter beat him to it – in a manner, anyway. The Sixth Column, published in 1951, was a light send-up of the books he and Ian had enjoyed since their schooldays at Eton, when they had devoured the works of Sapper and Sax Rohmer. One of the main characters is a former commando, Archie Strume, who has had unexpected success with a thriller based on his war-time experiences, which he has written as 'an antidote against boredom'. Strume is visited by British intelligence, who ask him to use his thriller-writer's brain to think of ways the enemy might try to harm Britain, so that they can take precautions against them. This, of course, is precisely what Dennis Wheatley had been asked to do in 1940, and as he was the only thriller-writer to have been asked to carry out such a job, it seems certain that Peter Fleming got the idea from his friend and former deception-planner.

Strume's melodramatic best-seller featured a dashing commando called Colonel Hackforth, who is fond of saying things like: 'Tell the Minister of Defence to have a midget submarine alongside the Harwich customs jetty not later than last light on Tuesday. It's important.' This, too, appears to be a reference to Wheatley, whose secret agent Gregory Sallust behaves in a similar manner. In *The Black Baroness*, published in 1940, Sallust calls his superior from the Netherlands to ask if permission can be obtained for him 'to be taken on board any naval vessel which might be leaving Harwich for Belgian waters'. His boss says he will 'get in touch with the Admiralty at once'.

Peter dedicated his novel to Ian, and it may have been a spur for the younger brother: a few months after the publication of *The Sixth Column*, he started writing *Casino Royale*. Strangely enough, its protagonist would also resemble Gregory Sallust.

Scars and girls

Ian Fleming was not a plagiarist, but he often used other authors' characters or plot ideas as springboards. When asked by *Playboy* what writers had influenced him, he pointed to Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, adding almost parenthetically:

'I suppose, if I were to examine the problem in depth, I'd go back to my childhood and find some roots of interest in E. Phillips Oppenheim and Sax Rohmer. Perhaps they played an important part.'

This is what his brother might have called a 'purple whale'. Hammett and Chandler were influences on his prose style, but they also had great cachet for Fleming, who wanted to be as up-to-date and hard-boiled. Oppenheim and Rohmer were both rather forgotten and fusty English thriller-writers, but their influence on his work was far greater. Rohmer's 'Oriental mastermind' Dr Fu Manchu was the inspiration for Dr Julius No, while Oppenheim's glamorous spies were precursors to his hero in a way Philip Marlowe and Sam Spade never were, as Fleming obliquely acknowledged through Gala Brand's musing about James Bond in *Moonraker*:

'Well, at any rate she had put him in his place and shown him that she wasn't impressed by dashing young men from the Secret Service, however romantic they might look. There were just as good-looking men in the Special Branch, and they were real detectives, not just people that Phillips Oppenheim had dreamed up with fast cars and special cigarettes with gold bands on them and shoulder-holsters.'

Oppenheim and Rohmer were nevertheless largely indirect influences, predecessors who had helped establish the formula of the thriller. But Fleming sometimes drew on other authors' work much more extensively, working directly from scenes, adding dozens of new elements and ideas, as well as his own glittering prose style, to transform them into something else

entirely. But the original can sometimes still be seen peeking through.

An example of this can be found in chapters 5 and 6 of *Thunderball*, in which we are introduced to one of Fleming's most famous villains, Ernst Stavro Blofeld. The basic idea and structure of these chapters stems from *The Outlaws of the Air*, an 1894 novel by George Griffith. By the time Fleming sat down to write his ninth James Bond novel in 1960, basing it partly on his aborted film script with Kevin McClory and others, Griffith's book was rather obscure. However, its opening scene had been extracted in *The Spy's Bedside Book* by Graham Greene and his brother Hugh, published in 1957. This is a book Fleming is very likely to have read: as well as short excerpts from work by many of his favourite writers, including E Phillips Oppenheim, William Le Queux, Eric Ambler and Graham Greene himself, it also included excerpts of his own work, meaning he would have been forewarned of it by his publishers. He would also probably have been sent a copy, especially as it was published by Rupert Hart-Davis, who was a family friend.

The excerpt from *The Outlaws of the Air* – which is preceded by one from Peter Fleming's *Invasion 1940* – follows 'the most dangerous man in Europe', Max Renault, through the streets of London as he makes his way to a secret meeting of 'Autonomie Group Number 7', the anarchist terror group he heads. The group's headquarters are in the building of the 'Social Club and Eclectic Institute', all of whose genuine and law-abiding members have long since gone home. As he enters the premises, Renault greets the four men and three women seated around a table, then draws a gun on one of the men, Victor Berthauld, and accuses him of being a traitor:

'Berthauld sat for a moment speechless with fear. Then, with an imprecation on his lips, he leapt to his feet. Not a hand was moved to restrain him, but as he rose to his full height, Renault's arm straightened out, there was a crack and a flash, and a little puff of plaster reduced to dust leapt out of the angle of the wall behind him; but before the bullet struck the wall, it had passed through his forehead and out at the back of his head, his body shrank together and collapsed in a huddled heap in his chair, and Max, putting his pistol back into his pocket, said, just as quietly as before:

"It's a curious thing that even among eight of us we must have a traitor. I hope there aren't any more about. Take that thing down to the cellar, and then let us get to business; I've something important to tell you."

In *Thunderball*, we are taken inside a meeting of the Special Executive for Counterintelligence, Terrorism, Revenge and Extortion at the Paris headquarters of its front organization, the *Fraternité Internationale de la Résistance Contre l'Oppression*. Unlike Renault, Blofeld deliberately accuses the wrong man first, and the method of execution is different – he is electrocuted in his chair rather than shot. The corpse is also left in the room rather than being cleared away, which is rather nastier. But the idea is just the same as Griffith's scene: a terrorist group meets around a table at its headquarters and the ruthless leader kills one member on the spot on suspicion of treason, thereby setting a chilling example for the others. Griffith's traitor was called Berthauld, Fleming's Borraud (perhaps a dry admission that he had borrowed the idea?); both are Corsican.

Also excerpted in *The Spy's Bedside Book* was Dennis Wheatley's short story *Espionage*, featuring a showdown in a bathroom at the Paris Ritz, and it was to Wheatley's work that Fleming would most often return, in particular to his character Gregory Sallust. Sallust first appeared in 1934 in *Black August*, a bleak tale set in an undated future in which Britain is rapidly descending into anarchy. Advance copies sent to libraries and booksellers led to so many orders that the book had to be reprinted six times before it was even published. The 'cruel', 'cynical' and 'fatalistic' Sallust is a journalist who initially appears to be in a similar mould to Leslie Charteris' *The Saint*: a devil-may-care lady-killer with scant respect for the law. His response to the crisis is to hire a general's uniform and commandeer an unwitting platoon to help him make good an escape to the West Indies. But along with the heroics customary for a thriller of the time, Sallust is unusually brutal and cavalier, at one point confessing that while the worsening situation has been hell for many people, he's enjoying it. Facing the prospect of being shot by firing squad towards the close of the book, he quotes Rudyard Kipling's bawdy poem *The Ladies*: 'I've taken my fun where I've found it and now I must pay for my fun.'

Another inspiration for Sallust was Sapper's *Bulldog Drummond* – we learn that a scar on his 'lean, rather wolfish face' is a result of a

blow received during his night-time excursions across the trenches in World War One; Drummond famously favoured precisely the same sort of expedition. Nevertheless, Sallust in *Black August* is no closer to James Bond than half a dozen other heroes of the time. All that would change with the next novel to feature the character.

Published in 1936 after being serialized in the *Daily Mail*, *Contraband* was in many ways the real start of the Sallust series. Wheatley dedicated the book to a friend who liked 'straight' thrillers, and that is just what it is. A gentleman adventurer reports to an older man in the secret service, and is given a mission to stop a villainous plot that has international implications; he races through glamorous casinos and hotels at home and abroad, using his fists and firearms against assorted henchmen until he is drugged, struck unconscious and captured by the rich, deformed villain, who interrogates and/or tortures him; after learning the full particulars of the villain's plan (usually from the villain himself), he escapes, saves the beautiful woman in the cocktail dress he took a fancy to in the first chapter and assures the safety of the realm.

This had been the formula of British secret service stories since the 19th century, and all its elements are present in *Contraband*. But the tone of the novel is innovative: casinos and luxury hotels had never before been pervaded with quite such a feverish atmosphere of sweat, fear and danger, and the hero's ethics are, as in *Black August*, unusually ambivalent – he ends the book by protecting one of the villains from the law because he has fallen in love with her.

In the first chapter of *Contraband*, titled 'Midnight At The Casino', we are introduced to Gregory Sallust as though for the first time: he has been transformed from his previous incarnation as a journalist in a dystopian future into a secret agent in the here and now, gambling in Deauville ten days before *la grande semaine*. He is about to call it a night when he catches sight of an English aristocrat he recognizes, who is accompanied by a beautiful woman he does not:

'She must be a *poule*, Gregory decided, but a devilish expensive one. Probably most of the heavy bracelets that loaded down her white arms were fake, but you cannot fake clothes as you can diamonds, and he knew that those simple lines of rich material which rose to cup

her well-formed breasts had cost a pretty penny. Besides, she was very beautiful.

A little frown of annoyance wrinkled his forehead, catching at the scar which lifted his left eyebrow until his face took on an almost satanic look. What a pity, he thought, that he was returning to England the following day.'

The line about Sallust's scar giving him an almost satanic look appears, with minor variations, in several novels in the series: it tends to show 'a livid white' against his dark features when he is angry. Like *Contraband*, *Casino Royale* opens with a handsome, world-weary British secret agent gambling late at night in a casino in northern France (the fictional resort of Royale-les-Eaux, which Fleming modelled on Deauville). In Chapter 8, we are told Bond also has a scar on his face, although it runs down his right cheek rather than lifting his left eyebrow. It makes him appear 'faintly piratical' and, along with his comma of black hair and cruel mouth, would become part of Fleming's standard description of the character. In the same chapter, we are given the following description of Vesper Lynd:

'Her dress was of black velvet, simple and yet with the touch of splendour that only half a dozen couturiers in the world can achieve. There was a thin necklace of diamonds at her throat and a diamond clip in the low vee which just exposed the jutting swell of her breasts. She carried a plain black evening bag, a flat oblong which she now held, her arm akimbo, at her waist. Her jet-black hair hung straight and simply to the final inward curl below the chin.

She looked quite superb and Bond's heart lifted.'

In *Contraband*, the woman who lifts Sallust's heart is a Hungarian, Sabine Szenty, and she turns out to be part of a smuggling gang (the English aristocrat, a half-crippled dwarf, being the master-villain). Sabine has 'sleek black hair', a 'fresh and healthy' complexion, and wears 'light make-up'. In *Casino Royale*, we are told that Vesper is 'lightly suntanned' and wears no make-up, except on her mouth. But as well as sharing their taste in women's looks, Bond and Sallust have remarkably similar attitudes to the fairer sex:

'He knew from past experience that he could sweep most women off their feet

inside a week with the intense excitement of a hectic, furious, laughing yet determined pursuit, and what magnificent elation could be derived from carrying a rich man's darling off from under his very nose despite her better sense and the rich man's opposition. Gregory had done it before and he would certainly have attempted it in this case if only he had had a few days left to work in.

The more he studied her, between making bets, the more the desire to do so strengthened in his mind. He could never bring himself to be anything more than "uncle-ish" to "nice" girls, however attractive, and he barred respectable married women, except on rare occasions, on practical grounds. The aftermath of broken hearts and tear-stained faces with possible threats of being cited as co-respondent by an injured husband was, he considered, too heavy a price to pay. He preferred, when he took the plunge into an affair, a woman whom he could be reasonably certain was content to play his own game. Nothing too easy – in fact it was essential to his pleasure that she should move in luxurious surroundings and be distinguished of her kind, and so quite inaccessible except to men of personality even if they had the wealth which he did not. Then, when victory was achieved, they could laugh together over their ruses, delight in one another to the full and, when the time came as it surely must, part before satiation; a little sadly, perhaps, but as friends who had enriched life's experience by a few more perfect moments.'

This, despite being written by another writer in 1936, will nevertheless be recognizable to anyone familiar with Ian Fleming's work as a depiction of the essential nature of James Bond. *Casino Royale* again:

'With most women his manner was a mixture of taciturnity and passion. The lengthy approaches to a seduction bored him almost as much as the subsequent mess of disentanglement. He found something grisly in the inevitability of the pattern of each affair. The conventional parabola – sentiment, the touch of the hand, the kiss, the passionate kiss, the feel of the body, the climax in the bed, then more bed, then less bed, then the boredom, the tears and the final

bitterness – was to him shameful and hypocritical. Even more he shunned the *mise en scène* for each of these acts in the play – the meeting at a party, the restaurant, the taxi, his flat, her flat, then the weekend by the sea, then the flats again, then the furtive alibis and the final angry farewell on some doorstep in the rain...'

Published 17 years later, this is more sexually explicit than the passage from *Contraband*, as well as being notably darker, more cynical and better-written. But the core of it is the same, with Sallust's desire to avoid 'the aftermath of broken hearts and tear-stained faces' echoed in Bond's disdain for 'the tears and the final bitterness'. Wheatley's depiction of sex was also notably graphic for the time: he has his hero ponder whether a major character is a high-class prostitute – while desiring her.

After the opening chapters, the plots of *Contraband* and *Casino Royale* diverge considerably, although the tone is markedly similar. One major difference is the villain: in *Contraband* this is Lord Gavin Fortescue, who would return in *The Quest of Julian Day* as one of the Big Seven group. The villain of *Casino Royale* is Le Chiffre, who Fleming is thought to have modelled on Aleister Crowley: like Sean O'Kieff, he calls Bond 'my dear boy', apparently one of Crowley's most-used expressions.

After *Contraband*, Wheatley left Sallust for a while and experimented with other characters, including Julian Day. But Day was too ineffectual a figure to deal with the changing nature of the world, and so in 1939 Wheatley returned to the rougher and crueller Sallust. He started writing *The Scarlet Impostor* on September 3, just three days after Britain declared war, and finished it on October 19. It was published on January 7 1940, making it one of the first spy novels to be set during World War Two.

It is also one of the most exciting thrillers of any era, with Sallust jumping from frying pans into fires at every turn. In *Contraband*, Sallust had been working in an unofficial capacity with the understanding that official backing would be provided if necessary; now British intelligence wants him to make contact with an anti-Nazi movement in Germany, and so he is put on a more formal footing, and is even allotted a number:

"In view of the importance of your mission, it's a very special number, too;

one which has long been vacant and about which there can be no possible mistake. You are now listed by us as Secret Agent No. 1.”

Gregory grinned. “I’m deeply flattered.”

There is significantly more action in *The Scarlet Impostor* than *Contraband*, and Wheatley had to work much harder to make his often-implausible plot developments convince. He did this by supporting the breakneck pacing with a carefully cultivated insider’s tone. Publishers generally required authors to rename any real-life brands they featured, not wishing to provide free advertising. So E Phillips Oppenheim’s novels featured the Milan Hotel, modelled on the Savoy, and Valentine Williams’ characters smoked Melania cigarettes, a non-existent brand that could only be bought at London’s non-existent Dionysus Club. In Sax Rohmer’s novels, real-life political figures were also disguised, so Hitler became ‘Rudolph Adlon’ and Mussolini ‘Monaghani’. An exception seems to have been cars. Although Leslie Charteris’ Saint drove non-existent Furillacs and Hirondeles, and Dornford Yates’ characters favoured the equally fictional Lowland, many other thriller characters drove Rolls Royces, Daimlers, Mercedes-Benzes and Bentleys. Another exception was EF Hornung’s Raffles, who smoked Sullivans, perhaps inspiring Wheatley to do the same (there are several references to Raffles in his novels).

At any rate, Wheatley took this idea and ran with it – his thrillers were set in the real world, with real people in the midst of real events using real brands. While other writers had dabbled in this sort of ‘product placement’, with *The Scarlet Impostor* Wheatley became the first to feature it on a grand scale. During the course of his mission, Gregory Sallust smokes Sullivans’ Turkish mixture cigarettes, which he keeps in a ‘plain engine-turned gold case with no monogram or initials’, escapes from pursuing Nazis on a twin-cylinder BMW motorbike and tells a beautiful German aristocrat he hopes to dine with her in the Ritz after the war. He drinks two Bacardis and pineapple juice (his favourite cocktail, we are told), some pre-1914 Mentzendorff Kümmel, a Vermouth Cassis and a few swigs of unspecified brandy, and we learn that his gun is a Mauser automatic and his tailor West’s of Savile Row.

Wheatley made sure to integrate these details into his plot. When Sallust is in danger of being interned in a concentration camp in Holland for the rest of the war, he sends a message to Sir

Pellinore that he knows will be intercepted, asking after an ‘Otto Mentzendorff’. His chief immediately recognises the name of the Kümmel they drank together a few weeks earlier and sends Sallust’s former batman Rudd to help him escape. Rudd turns up disguised as an English gent:

‘He was wearing one of Gregory’s smart blue lounge suits with a Sulka tie, Beale and Inman shirt, Scott hat and Lobb shoes – all from Gregory’s wardrobe.’

The tie is later revealed to have a hidden compartment (and in a subsequent novel Sallust’s Beale and Inman shirt stops him from getting shot, after a Russian general checks the label to make sure he’s not a Nazi spy).

But despite the luxuries, and the nod to Baroness Orczy’s *Scarlet Pimpernel* in its title, *The Scarlet Impostor* is not a gentlemanly affair: Sallust is as ruthless as they come, and his enemies even more so. In this novel, Wheatley introduced Gruppenführer Grauber, who plans to drop our hero into an acid bath: he would become Sallust’s arch-enemy as the series progressed.

The Scarlet Impostor was a turning point for Wheatley, who had been trying for several years to create a hero in the vein of Raffles, Bulldog Drummond and the Saint. Like all of them, Sallust is a ‘bad hat’ with vigilante tendencies. But he is also on the right side of the law, a professional secret agent working in Britain’s interests. He has the derring-do and unabashed patriotism of Richard Hannay and the streak of hedonism and decadence of Simon Templar, but a fondness for ungentlemanly behaviour that would have outraged both. Wheatley wanted to avoid being associated with any single character, as he felt it had hindered writers before him, but Sallust would prove so popular (several books in the series sold over a million copies) that he would write more adventures for him than he had foreseen, and in doing so open the way to a new breed of secret agent characters: darker, more ruthless and more morally complex than the clubland heroes who had gone before.

‘A good spanking’

In the next novel in the series, *Faked Passports*, published in June 1940, Sallust travels to the Arctic Circle. We are given the most complete description of the character to date, learning that he is in his late thirties, ‘dark, lean-faced’ with ‘smiling eyes and a cynical

twist to his firm, strong mouth.' After taking a hit to the back of his head with a spent bullet near Petsamo, he loses his memory. In and of itself, this is not a particularly unusual plot device, but amnesia has an unusual effect on Gregory Sallust, as his girlfriend, the Countess von Osterberg, reflects:

'In those hectic days they had spent in Munich and Berlin together early in November they had been the most passionate lovers. When they had met again in Helsinki his absence from her had seemed only to have increased his eagerness; but their opportunities for love-making had been lamentably few. Then his injury at Petsamo had changed his mentality in that respect as in all others. On waking on their first morning in the trapper's house he had accepted quite naturally that he was in love with her, but it had been an entirely different kind of love. He was tender and thoughtful for her and followed her every movement with almost dog-like devotion, but he did not seem to know even the first steps in physical love-making any more.

Erika had known the love of many men but to be treated as a saint and placed upon a pedestal was an entirely new experience to her and she had thoroughly enjoyed it. There was something wonderfully refreshing in Gregory's shy, boyish attempts to hold her hand or steal a kiss on the back of her neck when the others were not looking; and she had known that at any moment she chose she could reawake his passions...'

This is strong stuff for a novel published in 1940, with broad hints at both pre-marital sex (the pair would not wed until *They Used Dark Forces*, published in 1964) and promiscuity. But of course the most striking thing about it is its similarity with the closing scenes of Fleming's *You Only Live Twice*, in which James Bond also loses his memory and in doing so becomes an innocent regarding 'physical love-making':

'The doctor was surprised by Bond's lack of progress and resigned himself to the conclusion that Bond's amnesia was total, but soon there was no cause for further visits because Bond's physical health and his apparently complete satisfaction with his lot showed that in

every other respect he was totally recovered.

But there was one thing that greatly distressed Kissy. From the first night in the cave she had shared Bond's futon and, when he was well and back in the house, she waited every night for him to make love to her. But, while he kissed her occasionally and often held her hand, his body seemed totally unaware of her however much she pressed herself against him and even caressed him with her hands. Had the wound made him impotent? She consulted the doctor, but he said there could be no connexion, although it was just possible that he had forgotten how to perform the act of love.'

Kissy Suzuki promptly buys some toad sweat, dried lizard powder and a pillow book to bring Bond round, but Erika von Osterberg would have to wait for her man until the next book in the series, which was published in October 1940.

The eponymous villain of *The Black Baroness* is a middle-aged Frenchwoman with a 'dead white face' and jet-black eyes and hair who acts as 'Hitler's great whore mistress'. Using her position in society, she discovers the types of women senior military figures in Allied and neutral states are attracted to and gives instructions to the Gestapo, who consult their 'list of beautiful harpies' and send the appropriate matches to her; she then sets them to seduce their intended victims. Sallust meets one of these women, Paula von Steinmetz, who naturally tries to seduce him, but he fends her off by pretending he isn't man enough for her:

"The sort of man you want is a chap who'd treat you rough and give you a beating if you played him up."

"*Mein Gott, nein!*" Paula protested quickly.

"Oh yes, you do," Gregory assured her. "Every woman does. I don't mean a drunken blackguard or anything of that kind, but a chap with a will of his own who wouldn't stand any nonsense and if he saw you flashing those lovely eyes of yours at anybody else would take you home and give you a good spanking."

Paula's colour deepened a little under her make-up and Gregory knew that he had judged her rightly. She was a strong,

highly-sexed young woman who would thoroughly enjoy occasional rows with her lovers and derive tremendous kick from a mild beating-up in which she was finally possessed forcibly, so that her sobs of anger gave way almost imperceptibly to gasps of passionate emotion.

“Well,” she admitted slowly, “if one loves a man one naturally expects him to assert himself at times, otherwise how can one possibly respect him?”

The irony, of course, is that Sallust is precisely the sort of man he is describing, as is made clear elsewhere in the series. The reference to every woman wanting to be treated rough would find a faint echo in *The Spy Who Loved Me*, in which the female narrator remarks that ‘all women love semi-rape’ after being made love to by James Bond.

Towards the end of *The Black Baroness*, Gregory Sallust meets the baroness herself, who takes the opportunity to poison his wine. Sallust is pinned to his chair, paralysed, and the villain, in the traditional style, calmly discusses his imminent death:

“Good-bye, Mr. Sallust; you will die quite peacefully and in no great pain.”

But she is proven wrong, of course: Sallust is rushed to a doctor and soon recovers. In *From Russia With Love*, published in 1957, James Bond would also be poisoned by an older female villain with a penchant for pimping out beautiful young women to extract information from the enemy, although it comes not in a glass of wine but from a dagger concealed in Rosa Klebb’s boot.

After *The Black Baroness*, Wheatley left Sallust again to write a standalone thriller, *Strange Conflict*, which was published in 1941. This, too, seems to have been on Ian Fleming’s radar. It features a privileged group of British and American agents trying to discover how the Nazis are predicting the routes of the Atlantic convoys. The trail leads to Haiti, but before the group even arrive on the island they are attacked by sharks. They are saved by a Panama-hatted Haitian called Doctor Saturday, who puts them up at his house and then takes them to a voodoo ceremony, where they witness a sacrifice to Dambala. Two women wearing black are shoed away by the priest; one of the group asks Doctor Saturday why:

‘He replied in his broken French that they were in mourning and therefore had no right to attend a Dambala ceremony, which was for the living. Their association with recent death caused them to carry with them, wherever they went, the presence of the dreaded Baron Samedi.

“Lord Saturday,” whispered Marie Lou to the Duke. “What a queer name for a god!” But the Doctor had caught what she had said and turned to smile at her.

“It is another name that they use for Baron Cimeterre. You see, his Holy Day is Saturday. And it is a sort of joke, of which the people never get tired, that my name, too, is Saturday.”

It is, of course, not a joke at all: Doctor Saturday, they soon discover, is the physical incarnation of Baron Samedi, and the villain they have been trying to track down. In *Live and Let Die*, published in 1954, Ian Fleming featured a villain with the same name transplanted to Jamaica, where he wrote all his books.

From Germany, With Love

After another Sallust novel, *V For Vengeance*, Wheatley left the character for a while before returning to him in 1946 for *Come Into My Parlour*. The premise of this book, and the events of three of its chapters, directly inspired *From Russia With Love*, published 11 years later. It also contains the seeds of James Bond’s biography.

The novel opens with a description of Berlin on the morning of June 23, 1941, introducing us to the status of the war at that date, including the Germans’ attitude to it:

‘For them, to expect victory had now become a habit of mind, and defeat unthinkable.’

After a few paragraphs on this subject, we move indoors:

‘Their confidence was shared by the quiet little middle-aged man who sat at his desk in a spacious second-floor room that looked out on a sunny courtyard at the back of the great S.S Headquarters on the Alexander Platz.’

Fleming used information from dozens of sources, mixed and distilled through his imagination, when writing *From Russia With Love*, but one extended scene was directly

inspired by this chapter. Chapter Four of Fleming's novel, 'The Moguls of Death', begins with a short introduction to SMERSH, 'the official murder organization of the Soviet government'. Then we again move indoors, only this time to SMERSH headquarters at 13 Sretenka Ulitsa in Moscow:

'The direction of SMERSH is carried out from the 2nd floor. The most important room on the 2nd floor is a very large light room painted in the pale olive green that is the common denominator of government offices all over the world. Opposite the sound-proofed door, two wide windows look over the courtyard at the back of the building.'

In both Wheatley and Fleming's scenes, we are introduced to a very senior figure in the hierarchy of the hero's deadliest opponents – the Nazis in Sallust's case, SMERSH in Bond's – as they prepare for an important meeting at enemy headquarters. Cementing that Fleming worked directly from Wheatley's scene, both characters also happen to work in *large* offices on the *second* floor that overlook courtyards at the *back* of their respective buildings.

Around four hundred words later in *Come Into My Parlour*, the inhabitant of the office – Heinrich Himmler – has moved into his conference room to hold the monthly meeting of the country's intelligence chiefs:

'The three Directors of Intelligence for the Army, Navy and Luftwaffe were present, and the civilian Intelligence Chiefs for the Foreign Office and Economic Warfare. At the far end of the table sat Himmler's Principal Assistant, the S.S. General Kaltenbrunner; the only man, so it was whispered, of whom Himmler himself was afraid. Behind Kaltenbrunner, at a small separate table against the far wall, two S.S. majors waited, unobtrusive but observant, to act as secretaries and take notes of all that passed at the meeting.'

Around one thousands words later in *From Russia With Love*, we are also in a conference room:

'On the far side of the table sat Lieutenant-General Slavin, head of the G.R.U., the intelligence department of the General Staff of the Army, with a full colonel beside him. At the end of the table sat Lieutenant-General Vozdvishensky of R.U.M.I.D., the

Intelligence Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with a middle-aged man in plain clothes. With his back to the door, sat Colonel of State Security Nikitin, Head of Intelligence for the M.G.B., the Soviet Secret Service, with a major at his side.'

Wheatley's detail that two S.S. majors sit at a separate table unobtrusively taking notes is a nice touch: it sounds authoritative, as though Wheatley really knew how these meetings worked, and it's also rather sinister. Fleming improves on it by having each officer in the room accompanied by an A.D.C.:

'In the Soviet Union, no man goes alone to a conference. For his own protection, and for the reassurance of his department, he invariably takes a witness so that his department can have independent versions of what went on at the conference and, above all, of what was said on its behalf. This is important in case there is a subsequent investigation. No notes are taken at the conference and decisions are passed back to departments by word of mouth.'

This is even more sinister – 'in case there is a subsequent investigation' – but essentially it performs the same task: it sounds like Fleming knows how these meetings really take place, and that we're getting an inside look.

Wheatley's chapter continues with several paragraphs relating the meeting's progress, which is mainly about the progress of the war. And then Himmler comes to the next item on the agenda:

'At item thirteen, he read out: "Gregory Sallust" – paused for a moment, frowned, and added: "What is this? I seem to know that name."

"I had it put on the agenda, Herr Obergruppenfuhrer," said Canaris, quietly.

Himmler squinted at him. "Well, Herr Admiral?"

The Admiral looked round, gathering the attention of his audience. "As you are all aware," he began, "in some respects the British Intelligence Service has deteriorated since the last war. It cannot be denied that they are extremely efficient in securing certain types of

information. For example, captured documents prove beyond dispute that their appreciations of our 'Order of Battle' in various theatres of war are uncannily accurate. On the other hand, they seem to have very little idea as to what is going on inside Germany itself. Generally speaking, our internal security is highly satisfactory; but the British do possess a limited number of ace operators who, from time to time, have succeeded in penetrating some of our most closely guarded secrets, and my people tell me that Sallust is the most dangerous of them all."

The raising of Sallust's name is not to everyone's liking: Grauber immediately protests his surprise that 'the case of any individual enemy agent' would be of sufficient importance to occupy the time 'of such a high powered meeting as this'.

In Fleming's novel, the Russians also discuss the progress of the war – the Cold one – with references to events in Morocco, Yugoslavia, Cyprus and elsewhere. They speak rather more highly of the British than the Germans do, however, and their meeting does not have any other points on the agenda but Bond. But scepticism regarding the importance of the enemy agent under discussion is similarly expressed by one of the attendees:

"Within the Secret Service, this man may be a local hero or he may not. It will depend on his appearance and personal characteristics. Of these I know nothing. He may be fat and greasy and unpleasant. No one makes a hero out of such a man, however successful he is."

In *Come Into My Parlour*, Canaris defends his decision to raise the question of Sallust:

"The progress of our 'K' series of new secret weapons has now reached a point at which their further development necessitates a much greater number of people having knowledge of them. This will automatically increase the danger of the enemy getting wind of these immensely important devices, by which we hope to bring the war with Britain to a successful conclusion without undertaking the hazards of an invasion. If a leak does occur, the British will obviously put their best men on to the job of securing for them the secrets of Peenemunde. Sallust speaks German as well as if he was born here, so all the

odds are that he will be allocated to this task. Prevention being better than cure, I should like to have the Herr Gruppenfuhrer's assurance that adequate precautions are being taken against him."

The petty politicking continues; Himmler is not amused and asks Grauber what he knows about Sallust.

'Grauber shrugged his great shoulders. "The Herr Admiral exaggerates the danger. Sallust is certainly a man to watch. He is resolute and resourceful, and he has pulled off some very clever coups. So far he has always managed to elude us; but if he puts his nose inside Germany again, I'll get him."

Examples of coups Sallust has pulled off are then given:

"He even had the effrontery to beard Reichsmarschall Goering at Karinhall, and got away with it; and I have good reason to believe that he completely fooled von Geisenheim, one of our astutest Generals, less than a month ago in Paris."

The Goering and von Geisenheim incidents appeared in previous Sallust novels. Fleming gives us a similar potted history of Bond's previous exploits:

"There was this affair in France, at that Casino town. The man Le Chiffre. An excellent leader of the Party in France. He foolishly got into some money troubles. But he would have got out of them if this Bond had not interfered. I recall that the Department had to act quickly and liquidate the Frenchman. The executioner should have dealt with the Englishman at the same time, but he did not. Then there was this Negro of ours in Harlem. A great man – one of the greatest foreign agents we have ever employed, and with a vast network behind him..."

Several of Bond's other missions are also mentioned. Wheatley concludes his chapter with Himmler rapping out his verdict on the matter:

"If this man is so dangerous he must be eliminated before he has a chance to do us any further mischief. Lure him here. Set a trap for him and kill him. See to

that, Grauber, or I will make you answer for it personally. Within three months, I require a certificate of Sallust's death from you.”

One can almost follow Ian Fleming's thought process as he read these lines. The idea of Grauber having to not only kill Sallust but also provide his death certificate is great, menacing stuff, but Fleming thought of a way to better it: he ends his scene with the men at the table passing around Bond's death *warrant*, with each of them signing it in turn.

There are, naturally, thousands of differences between these episodes, but their structure and tone are strikingly similar, and the core premise the same in both: the generals of the enemy camp hold a meeting at their headquarters, snipe and bicker with each other, and eventually agree to set a trap and kill Britain's greatest secret agent. In Wheatley's book, the Germans predict that this agent will be sent to find out about their new 'K' series of weapons. SMERSH's *konspiratsia* adds a sweetener to the British to make sure Bond is sent – Tatiana's supposed adoration of him – but the main lure is also a piece of top-secret technology, the Spektor cipher machine. Both plots also involve the manipulation of a beautiful woman, albeit in rather different ways.

But this is not the end of Come Into My Parlour's influence on Fleming. He also drew on it for another of his novels, and in a way that goes to the heart of James Bond's identity. In the chapter following the meeting at SS Headquarters, Grauber approaches Canaris to ask his advice on trapping Sallust, asking if he has any further details about the man. Canaris' response is worth quoting at length:

“Sallust comes of good middle-class stock, but his parents were only moderately well off and both of them died when he was quite young. He was an imaginative and therefore troublesome boy and after only two and a half terms was expelled for innumerable breaches of discipline from his public school, Dulwich College. With the idea of taming him, his uncle sent him as a cadet to H.M.S. Worcester. The freer life seems to have suited him, but again, owing to his refractory nature, he was never made a Petty Officer, as they term their Prefects. On leaving he did not go to sea, because he did not consider that such a career offered a sufficiently remunerative future: instead he used a portion of his

patrimony to give himself a year on the Continent. He has a quite exceptional flair for languages so he could soon speak German and French like a native. He was still at an age when he ought to have been at school, but he was already his own master and a handsome, precocious young blackguard. The women adored him and he had an insatiable curiosity about the night life, both high and low, of all the cities he visited, so there wasn't much he hadn't done by the time the war broke out and he returned to England.”

Canaris paused for a moment, then went on: “He got a commission at once in a Territorial Field Artillery Regiment, and in due course was sent to France. At the age of twenty-one he was serving on the staff of the Third Army. At the battle of Cambrai he was wounded and carries the scar to this day. It lifts the outer corner of his left eyebrow, giving him a slightly satanic appearance. He showed great gallantry at the time he was wounded and was given the M.C.

“After the War he took up journalism; not regular work, but unusual assignments that took him abroad again. As a special correspondent he saw the high spots of the Graeco-Turkish war of nineteen nineteen, and the Russo-Polish war of nineteen twenty. Then he spent a lot of time in Central Europe, studying the development of the new states that emerged from the Versailles and Trianon Treaties – Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and so on. It was through his articles on such subjects, I believe, that he came into touch with that formidable old rascal Sir Pellinore Gwaine-Cust.”

Grauber's solitary eye flickered slightly and he suddenly sat forward. “So you know about him, do you? My compliments, Herr Admiral; he keeps himself so much in the background that I thought hardly anyone here had the least idea of the power he wields behind the scenes on every major problem concerning the British Empire.”

“Oh, yes, I know about him.” The Admiral's thin mouth twisted into a cynical smile. “He took seven thousand marks off me at baccarat one night at Deauville in nineteen twenty four, drank me under the table afterwards and sent

the money back next morning with a charming little note to the effect that, seeing the poor state of Germany's post-war finances, he did not feel it fair to take such a sum off one of her secret agents at a single sitting. You can repeat that story if you like. I have often related it as a lesson in good manners to my subordinates..."

Fleming and Wheatley both added a great deal of their own tastes and experiences to their characters, and fictional secret agents tended to be good-looking, fluent in languages, with extensive combat experience. But the similarities between the biography of Sallust presented here and that given for Bond in his obituary in *You Only Live Twice*, published in 1964, go far beyond the conventions of the genre, or coincidence:

'James Bond was born of a Scottish father, Andrew Bond of Glencoe, and a Swiss mother, Monique Delacroix, from the Canton de Vaud. His father being a foreign representative of the Vickers armaments firm, his early education, from which he inherited a first-class command of French and German, was entirely abroad. When he was eleven years of age, both his parents were killed in a climbing accident in the Aiguilles Rouges above Chamonix, and the youth came under the guardianship of an aunt, since deceased, Miss Charmian Bond, and went to live with her at the quaintly-named hamlet of Pett Bottom near Canterbury in Kent. There, in a small cottage hard by the attractive Duck Inn, his aunt, who must have been a most erudite and accomplished lady, completed his education for an English public school, and, at the age of twelve or thereabouts, he passed satisfactorily into Eton, for which College he had been entered at birth by his father. It must be admitted that his career at Eton was brief and undistinguished and, after only two halves, as a result, it pains me to record, of some alleged trouble with one of the boys' maids, his aunt was requested to remove him. She managed to obtain his transfer to Fettes, his father's old school. Here the atmosphere was somewhat Calvinistic, and both academic and athletic standards were rigorous. Nevertheless, though inclined to be solitary by nature, he established some firm friendships among the traditionally famous athletic circles at the school. By

the time he left, at the early age of seventeen, he had twice fought for the school as a light-weight and had, in addition, founded the first serious judo class at a British public school. By now it was 1941 and, by claiming an age of nineteen and with the help of an old Vickers colleague of his father, he entered a branch of what was subsequently to become the Ministry of Defence. To serve the confidential nature of his duties, he was accorded the rank of lieutenant in the Special Branch of the RNVR, and it is a measure of the satisfaction his services gave to his superiors that he ended the war with the rank of Commander...'

Bond and Sallust both lost both their parents at a young age: Fleming specifies at what age and how it happened. Both were sent to public school (the same one as their respective authors), but expelled after similarly short amounts of time. As terms at Eton are known as 'halves', this may be why Bond did not last quite as long as Sallust: 'two and a half halves' wouldn't have worked. Wheatley was himself expelled from Dulwich, whereas Fleming lasted the duration at Eton.

Both Bond and Sallust had naval training while young, although Bond's is significantly more extensive. Wheatley based his character's experience on his own: he had also been a cadet on HMS Worcester. Bond ends the war a Commander in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, as did Fleming. (In *Traitors' Gate*, published in 1958, Sallust would become a Wing Commander in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, which was Wheatley's rank by the end of the war.) Both Bond and Sallust have fluent German and French. Both discovered the attentions of women at a young age, Sallust while roaming the cities of Europe and Bond a little earlier with the maid incident. Both are decorated: Sallust an MC and Bond a CMG.

Then there is Canaris' anecdote about losing money to Sir Pellinore at baccarat in Deauville during the war. This is reminiscent of the incident that Fleming claimed, in his interview with *Playboy*, had inspired *Casino Royale*:

'I was on my way to America with the Director of Naval Intelligence, Admiral Godfrey. We were in Estoril in Portugal, and while we were waiting for transport, we killed some time in the casino. While there, I recognised some German

agents, and I thought it would be a brilliant coup to play with them, break them, take their money. Instead, of course, they took mine. Most embarrassing. This incident appears in *Casino Royale*, my first book – but, of course, Bond does not lose.'

Fleming told several versions of this story, but Germany's fortunes suffering via a loss to a British agent in a casino is the 'hook' of the anecdote in all its forms, and it's a fairly unusual idea. In *Casino Royale*, the location of Estoril was changed to Royale-les-Eaux, a fictionalised version of Deauville, and baccarat was also the game played. Perhaps there was some version of the story that both Wheatley and Fleming had heard that led to them both writing it up differently. It is even possible that Fleming told Wheatley a version of the incident, and that it caught Wheatley's imagination and he rendered it in this way. If so, it would be highly ironic.

Yes – considerably

Come Into My Parlour was an unusually violent novel for 1946. Erika von Osterberg falls into the clutches of Grauber, who forces her to watch a woman being tortured with electrodes. After escaping from the Lubyanka and the bowels of a U-boat, Sallust infiltrates the *Schloss* in which Erika is being held and follows Helga, a vivacious Gestapo gaoler with 'good legs and provocative breasts' to her room, where she strips off her fur coat for him. He shoots her in the back, but the bullet goes through her spine in the area of her kidneys and doesn't kill her outright. Reasoning that the lower part of her body *is* the life of such an 'over-sexed young animal', Sallust doesn't hesitate:

'He knew what he would have wished himself had he been her. Putting the point of his gun within a few inches of the base of her skull he blew out her brains. He felt no compunction at all about the act. It was the merciful thing to do.'

Four more Sallust novels followed, the final adventure in the series, *The White Witch Of The South Seas*, being published in 1968. Wheatley outlived Fleming, but doesn't seem to have ever publicly mentioned that his work was an influence on James Bond. This may be because to have done so would have detracted from his sense of his own achievements. Wheatley often blew his own trumpet – sometimes even within the pages of his own novels – but having sustained millions of sales

over several decades, he would have had good reason to believe that his characters would be regarded by subsequent generations in much the same way as the Scarlet Pimpernel, the Three Musketeers or Richard Hannay. But his star quickly faded, and he is all but forgotten now. He had always felt that other writers had trapped themselves by focussing on just one character, so he had alternated his series; perhaps as a result he was never remembered for one character, the way Fleming is for James Bond. There were successful film adaptations of Wheatley's work, but none of them captured the public's imagination to anything like the same degree as the Bond films.

It is also possible Wheatley was unaware of the extent to which he had influenced James Bond. In his memoirs, he mentioned that he and Fleming had been friends, but did not elaborate further. But he was certainly aware of Fleming's success. In his novel *The Unholy Crusade*, published in 1967, Wheatley referred to himself in the same sentence as Fleming, who had died three years earlier. His hero, aspiring novelist Adam Gordon, visit his cynical publisher, from whom he learns the hard facts of a writer's life:

'He must not be misled by the incomes made by such writers as Agatha Christie, Somerset Maugham, Dennis Wheatley, Ian Fleming, J.B. Priestley, A.J. Cronin, Howard Spring and a few others of that kind. They could be counted on the fingers of two hands.'

This is a classic piece of self-advertising from Wheatley, although there's a hint of desperation in it, almost as if he is reminding himself that he is in the same class as the others. Later in the same book, he makes a bid for establishing himself as one of the thriller greats, when he has a Wing Commander marvel at his hero's adventures:

“So you are now Richard Hannay, Gregory Sallust and Uncle Tom Cobley and all.” His face suddenly became serious. “But this is a dangerous game you're playing, and your pals in the Mexican Security set-up won't equip you against all emergencies. I mean, real secret agents don't have daggers that spring out of the soles of their shoes, cars that eject flame and tintacks in the path of their pursuers, and all those other silly, amusing gadgets that one reads about in the Bond books.”

A few paragraphs later, this character warns our hero that if his enemies realize what he is planning to do he may find a knife stuck into him faster than he can 'take the first sip of a dry Martini'. Wheatley is going to some lengths to position Gregory Sallust as having followed in the line of Buchan's hero. At the same time he appears to be belittling Bond, who is not just heroically intrepid like Hannay and Sallust, but completely unrealistic to boot. Or perhaps not, because both the 'silly, amusing gadgets' he mentions were in fact used by real secret agents – something that Wheatley, with his experiences in the war, might well have known.

However, Wheatley doesn't seem to have known James Bond all that well: 007 drinks *vodka martini*, of course. This chimes with research done by Phil Baker: according to an exhaustive catalogue Wheatley made of his 4,000-strong library in 1964 for insurance and tax purposes, he didn't own any of Fleming's books. Nevertheless, he did comment directly on Fleming's work on at least one occasion. In 1971, Swedish thriller expert Iwan Morelius asked Wheatley what he thought of James Bond. 'I enjoyed Ian Fleming's books,' he replied, 'particularly the first, *Casino Royale*, which I thought was his best, but some of the others such as the one about the Chinese doctor in the Caribbean were, I thought, so improbable as, to my mind, he was written out.'

This seems a peculiar remark coming from Wheatley, whose plots were often extremely improbable, but perhaps he felt that Fleming's strengths lay more in traditional spy novel territory: *Casino Royale* was certainly much more low-key than *Dr No*.

It may also be that Wheatley was aware of his influence on Fleming, but did not think it particularly remarkable. Fleming took some elements of his work, but dramatically refashioned them into something entirely new. One could call it derivative, but Wheatley was himself a highly derivative writer: Gregory Sallust was built on the shoulders of *Bulldog Drummond* and the *Saint*. He added fresh twists to them, and Fleming did the same to Sallust. In his memoirs, Wheatley remarked of his 1938 novel *The Golden Spaniard* that 'the main theme was a plagiarism of Alexandre Dumas' *Twenty Years After*', before commenting that he felt it was one of the best books he had written.

Fleming also never acknowledged Wheatley's influence on his work – but, then, why should he have? As well as his own experiences and fertile imagination, he drew on a large and

disparate body of material to write his novels: it was the way in which he collated it all that created their magic. So he might take a dose of authoritative-sounding facts from EH Cookridge's *Soviet Spy Net* and first-person testimony from Russian defector Grigori Tokaty-Tokaev, add it to a plot premise and the structure of a couple of chapters from Wheatley's *Come Into My Parlour*, throw in his own observations of the international situation, and fashion from it all a rich but distinctive stew. One testament to Fleming's originality is that his voice is so unmistakeable – wherever the ideas came from, he transformed them into something else entirely.

Fleming was also notably innocent of the perils of using others' ideas as a springboard for his own work; his use of George Griffith's *The Outlaws of The Air in Thunderball* went unnoticed in the storm of accusations of plagiarism and, eventually, legal proceedings over that novel, which producer Kevin McClory claimed was too alike the script he and others had worked on prior to its publication. Fleming settled out of court.

It should also be noted that although Dennis Wheatley and Ian Fleming's plots, characters and even world views were similar in many ways, both the style and pacing of their novels were very different. Fleming removed pace almost entirely from his thrillers, concentrating instead on the excitement of the various elements: the outlandish villain, the beautiful girl, the extraordinary conspiracy, all pulled together by his unique voice and filtered through the eyes of James Bond. Wheatley used incidental atmospheric details to make his peripatetic plots more realistic; Fleming used peripatetic plots as diversions to showcase the main action of his novels, which was the atmospheric details.

But despite these differences, there can be little doubt that Wheatley's novels were a lodestar for Fleming, and the seeds of both the character of James Bond and of many of his adventures are contained within them. It is high time to declassify this writer as a major influence on the work of Ian Fleming.

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