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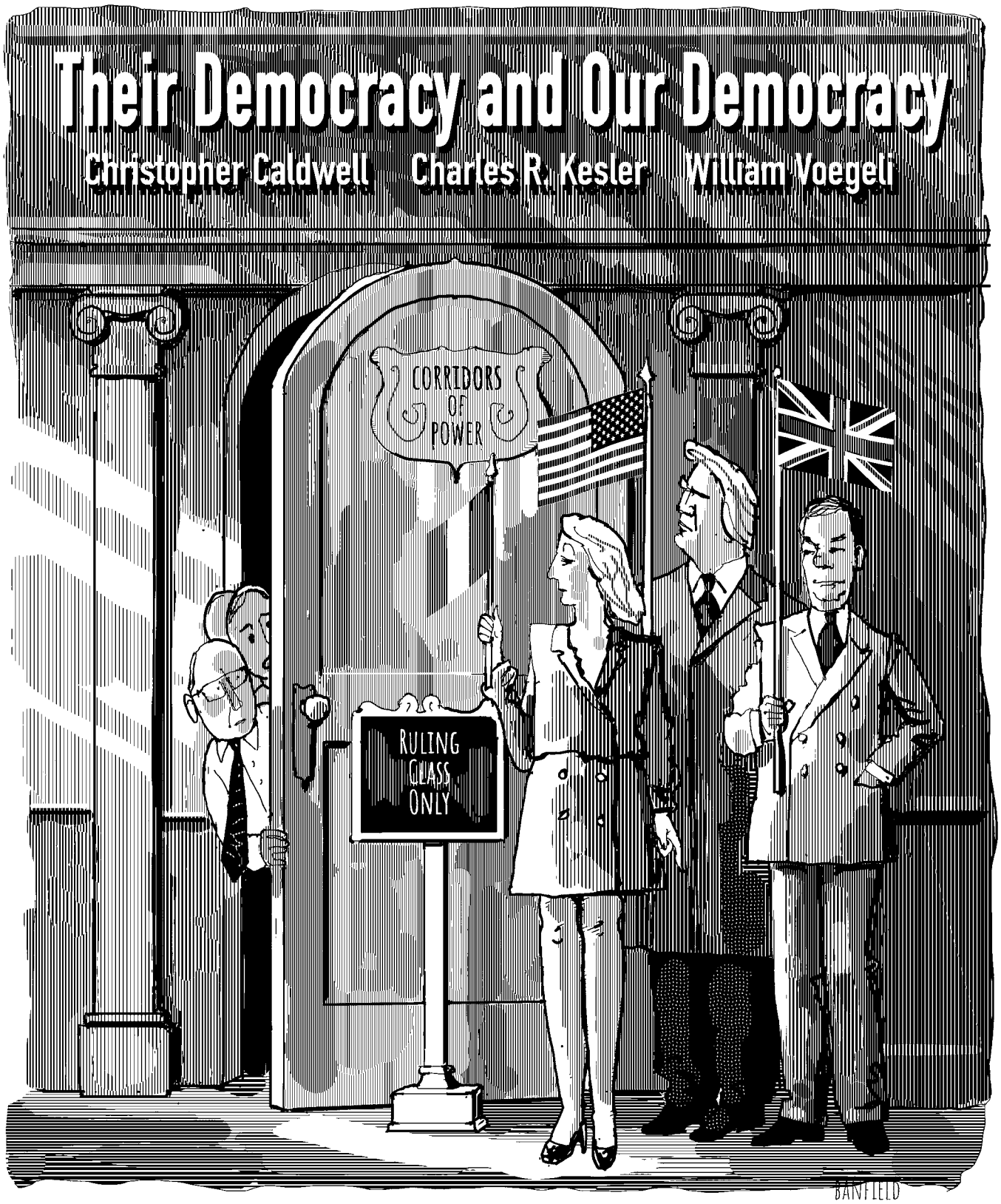

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Book Review by Christopher Flannery

Mornings at Goldeneye

Ian Fleming: The Complete Man, by Nicholas Shakespeare.
HarpersCollins Publishers, 864 pages, $45

"I am proposing to write the spy story to end all spy stories." So said Ian Fleming in response to his friend Robert Harling while they sat eating K rations on a roadside in France after D-Day in 1944. Harling worked with Fleming in British Naval Intelligence and had asked his friend what he planned to do when the war was over. Harling almost "choked on [his] Spam" when he heard Fleming's answer. Spam-choking or no, on the morning of the third Tuesday in January 1952, Fleming took his customary ocean swim, breakfasted, and began to write what was to become the first James Bond novel, *Casino Royale*. The words "clattered out in a rush" on his typewriter, morning after morning; he finished on March 18 and put the completed manuscript in a blue manilla folder in his desk drawer. He was 43. In six days, he was getting married for the first and last time. The legend grew, with Fleming's help, that he wrote the book to keep his mind off the pending nuptials, the prospect of which put the dedicated womanizing bachelor a bit on edge.

Fleming wrote a new Bond novel every year until he died in 1964 at 56: twelve thrillers in all and two collections of stories. His last novel, *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1965), and one collection of stories, *Octopussy and The Living Daylights* (1966), were published posthumously. His six wartime years in Naval Intelligence, enhanced by a very active imagination, provided much of the material for the books. He researched, cogitated, and took notes during the working year, but wrote all his books during the two-month annual paid vacations he had negotiated for himself as the foreign manager of the Kemsley Newspapers. He worked for the Kemsley organization from the end of the war almost to the end of his life. He spent his enviable and productive vacations at the spartan getaway he named Goldeneye, which he had built on a beautiful stretch on the north shore of Jamaica. There, after his "early-morning bathe, breakfast of pawpaw, Blue Mountain coffee, scrambled eggs and bacon," he would sit at his brown roll-top desk, closed off in a "cool, big, shaded room," and type from about nine to noon, producing some 2,000 words. In the evening, he would look over what he had written and settle into his first drink of the day.

Fleming died the wealthy and famous creator of the most famous fictional spy in history—or most famous "secret agent," as some Bondomaniacs insist. But his fame—or his hero's fame—was just beginning. The first James Bond film, *Dr. No*, based on Fleming's sixth novel and starring Sean Connery, premiered in London on October 5, 1962, the same day as the Beatles' debut single "Love Me Do." No one expected it to make a splash, much less make history. In America it premiered not in New York, but in Oklahoma. A co-writer of the script, out

of professional self-respect, refused to have his name associated with it. Its production budget was under a million dollars. But it grossed nearly 60 times that, and the second Bond film, *From Russia with Love*, also starring Connery and with a larger production budget, premiered in London a year later. Fleming himself had very little input on the adaptations, and this was the last Bond film he would see. He had his first great heart attack not long before the *Dr. No* premiere, and he declined so rapidly that by the time of the premiere of *From Russia with Love* his wife arranged for his personal physician to be in the audience in case of emergency. (Despite his illness, he invited 70 guests home for supper, "consisting of £300 of caviar!!" as one of them recorded, in honor of the Russian theme.)

Goldfinger, the third Bond-Connery film, premiered in London in September 1964, five weeks after Fleming's death. It was the highest grossing film in U.K. history to that point. Over the next 60 years 24 more Bond films would be produced, making the franchise one of the highest grossing of all time. Bond's global fame was given memorable demonstration at the opening of the 2012 London Olympics, when James Bond (played by Daniel Craig) and Queen Elizabeth II seemed to leap out of a helicopter and descend into the Olympic Stadium before the eyes of an estimated one billion viewers, to whom Bond may have been more familiar than the queen. The five most recent Bond films—from 2006 to 2021, starring Craig—have enjoyed greater box office revenues by far than most of the earlier films. His third, 2012's *Skyfall*, is the highest grossing Bond film of all time, raking in $1.1 billion upon its release. So, as it says at the end of the films' credits, including Craig's last: James Bond will return.

"Like most baby boomers in Britain, America, Canada and Australia," novelist and screenwriter Nicholas Shakespeare admits he "had grown up on James Bond." But he knew very little about Ian Fleming before the Fleming Estate offered him access to family papers that had not been made public before, and invited him to consider writing the first authorized biography since John Pearson's *The Life of Ian Fleming* in 1966. He looked at these papers and some of the other new material that had emerged since Andrew Lycett's 1995 biography, *Ian Fleming*, and became convinced that the "popular image" of Fleming was a "caricature," in "many surprising respects inaccurate and unfair." Malcolm Muggeridge, a friend who socialized frequently with the Flemings, can stand in for the many acquaintances, colleagues, friends, enemies, and critics of Fleming who created the unfavorable popular impression. "Ian's life was one of the most squalid, unillumined ever lived," Muggeridge wrote to Fleming's first biographer in 1966. And in a column published just a few months after Fleming's death, Muggeridge wrote that Fleming was an "Etonian Mickey Spillane"; his hero was "utterly despicable; obsequious to his superiors, pretentious in his tastes, callous and brutal in his ways, with strong undertones of sadism, and an unspeakable cad in his relations with women."

Shakespeare finds that Fleming himself was partly responsible for cultivating the unflattering image, and his *Ian Fleming: The Complete Man* opens with an amusing dialogue illustrating the point:

> "Mr. Fleming," she said in her deep voice, "to me you're the epitome of the English cad."
>
> "Mrs. Leiter, you're so right. Let's have a Martini."

In a recent interview, Shakespeare sums up what he thought his biography could contribute:

> People tend to have made up their minds about Fleming as a sardonic, wife-beating cad who strutted about pretending to be more important than he was. What decided me to write the book, after completing two months of due diligence, was to discover that his war work was indeed significant, much more than anyone had thought, although he couldn't for security reasons talk, let alone boast about it. And how much kinder he was in life than his posthumous caricature suggested.

After writing his book, Shakespeare came up with an entertaining moral of the story: "Don't run off with the wife of the proprietor of the *Daily Mail* if you want to avoid being forever after rendered into tabloid fat." Fleming married Ann Rothermere, former wife of the owner of the *Daily Mail*, impregnated by Fleming while still married to Lord Rothermere.

Throughout most of four years of work on his biography, Shakespeare remained uncertain about Fleming. But in the end he found that, despite Fleming's many flaws, he liked the man. This shows in the biography, though Shakespeare is good at not grinding axes. Often he provides an abundance of conflicting evidence and leaves it to

the reader to make up his own mind. Shakespeare tells a good story, rich with detail, and brings to life the very interesting world Fleming lived in—the world of what really was a ruling class in Britain and in America from the 1920s through the 1950s. He claims that the new material he has worked with—"unpublished letters and diaries, declassified files, previously uninterviewed witnesses"—places Fleming and his life "in a new light" and allows us to draw "new conclusions about the man."

Those mornings at Goldeneye, starting when four-fifths of his life was behind him, brought the attention of the broader world to Fleming because of the fictional hero he created there. Then the world turned even more admiring attention to his hero on the big screen. Shakespeare attempts to show that, before ever typing a word about James Bond, Fleming was a much more interesting man than the one he created.

The subtitle "the complete man" was a phrase used by Fleming himself to Mary Pakenham, a young woman who knew him well in his late twenties and wrote in her diary one of the most reliable portraits of him at that stage. She recalls him telling her that he aspired to be "the Renaissance ideal, the Complete Man." She initially thought him to be "Byronic," but ultimately concluded that he was more like Falstaff—"fascinating, but also ridiculous," and somewhat irresponsible, to say the least, with women. But she recorded his aspiration, and Shakespeare shows this aspiration working its way, with many lapses and digressions, through Fleming's colorful life: as "the son of wealth, but the grandson of poverty"; as second son of a war hero killed in the Great War when Ian was just a boy; son of a beautiful, impulsive, domineering mother with exaggerated social ambitions for herself and her sons; younger brother to a brilliant and successful older brother who outshone him all his life until his (dubious) Bond fame; a disappointment at Eton, Sandhurst, and on the Foreign Service exam, who only seemed to come into his own with the coming of war; a notoriously promiscuous bachelor who finally married trouble, and slowly and uncertainly got rich and famous in the last years of his life writing what his wife called pornography.

The Complete Man enters the story again from a different angle when Shakespeare reflects on Fleming's wartime service. Shakespeare invokes Australian World War II war correspondent Alan Moorehead, whose book *Eclipse* (1945) offers an eyewitness account of the last couple of years of the war in Europe. Moorehead observed that the experience of war could transform "the ordinary man": "He was, for a moment of time, a complete man, and he had this sublimity in him." Shakespeare thinks something like this happened to Fleming in his six years working for the Admiralty from before the beginning to after the end of World War II. As Shakespeare puts it, "Ian never lived at such an intense level again." If Ian's life had ended before the war, the general opinion of his family, which Shakespeare seems to endorse, was that his life had been "rather wasted." After the war, spending the rest of his life in peacetime, he did what he could with the Bond novels to recapture, for himself and his readers, the intensity and sublimity he had experienced in war.

In his *History of the American Revolution* published in 1789, historian David Ramsay—himself a veteran of the war—reflected on how a moment of time can rouse or awaken the completeness in a man. He wrote that the Revolution "called forth many virtues, and gave occasion for the display of abilities which, but for the event, would have been lost to the world." The moment of time that called forth Fleming's completeness was the moment of facing and rising to the crisis of Hitler, Nazism, and World War. Fleming's fictional hero would face and rise to the crisis of Stalin and his successors, Communism, and the Cold War—and later, international criminal conspiracies.

The manly response that in a moment of time rises to the crisis and overcomes it is an inspiration for all time.

There is much to lament about the times that try men's souls, but there is some consolation in our human tragedy if, in trying men's souls, these searing moments can also help complete them. The manly response that in a moment of time rises to the crisis and overcomes it—or even is destroyed by it—is an inspiration for all time. The great-souled man, in Aristotle's treatment of him, can only show the fullness of his virtue in the greatest crises. There is a reason why George Washington's, Abraham Lincoln's, and Winston Churchill's greatness shines forth so radiantly: the crises of their times called forth, shaped, and illumined it. The worst of times are necessary if we are to experience "our finest hour." Fleming's James Bond was meant to perpetuate the spirit of Britain's finest hour even as the British Empire was crumbling. The war had been won heroically. Britons were morally and financially exhausted. Their great heroism was behind them and their heroic sons were dead. But that heroism lived on in James Bond. Bond's England remained crucial to the defense of Western civilization, as an active and even a kind of senior partner in collaboration with America.

Shakespeare also calls our attention to a more down-to-earth and surprising reflection on the "complete man." Tiffany Case, the "Bond girl" in the fourth novel, *Diamonds Are Forever* (1956), reminds Bond, the confirmed bachelor, that "you can't be complete by yourself"—another Aristotelian observation. As early as the first Bond book, the hero falls in love and hopes to complete himself by marrying the beautiful Vesper Lynd, who turns out to be a double agent. In an 800-page biography, "complete man" can obviously also mean the man, warts and all—the whole story. Fleming had plenty of warts, as Shakespeare relates. But Shakespeare thinks that in the established view of Fleming the warts have been allowed to obscure the better parts of the man that make him complete and worthy of our attention.

Something Shakespeare learned after finishing his book confirmed for him what his subtitle was getting at. As he related in an interview:

> Only after my book went to press did [John] le Carré's biographer Adam Sisman alert me to this other quote, in Raymond Chandler's essay "The Simple Art of Murder": "But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero; he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man."

Fleming was an admirer of Chandler's writing, and Chandler gave encouragement—and an important "puff"—to Fleming when the critics were lacerating him and he was losing faith in his Bond books.

"What I like about the phrase 'complete man,'" says Shakespeare, "is that it suggests one of the central themes to have emerged [in his research]":

> there is much more to Fleming than Bond, a character he created almost as

> an afterthought in the last twelve years of his life, when the most interesting part of it was essentially over. To simplify horribly, there would be no James Bond had Fleming not led the life he did, but if Bond had not existed, Fleming is someone we should still want to know about.

Secret work is intended to be difficult or impossible to uncover. Shakespeare emphasizes that much of the evidence of Fleming's intelligence activities was deliberately destroyed (for good reason) and other evidence, if any, would be classified. But he makes a strong case that Fleming was doing intelligence work unofficially or officially from 1933 until his death over 30 years later—and quite significantly during the war. Between 1933 and 1939, first as a 24-year-old journalist for Reuters, then as a freewheeling merchant banker and stockbroker, Fleming travelled to Moscow, Berlin, New York, Washington, D.C., and back to Moscow, gathering intelligence which he reported to the British Foreign Office and intelligence agencies. His German was impeccable, his French fluent, and his Russian passable. In June 1939, he officially became the personal assistant to the director of Naval Intelligence (DNI) and stayed in that position until the end of the war. In popular gossip during the war, Fleming was called a "chocolate sailor"—a frivolous good-looking playboy in a uniform playing at war from behind a desk in between cocktail parties and cheap romances. Shakespeare shows that to be slander. Already 60 years ago, Fleming's first authorized biographer could see that "before the war had lasted many months this reserve lieutenant knew more secrets and had more real power than most of the senior officers in all three Services with whom he came into contact."

Shakespeare shows that Fleming did not just work for the director of Naval Intelligence, but was, in effect, himself the DNI. The biographer quotes, among others, Sir William Stephenson, Britain's top intelligence official in the U.S., who headed the British Security Coordination: "Really, it was Ian who was the DNI through most of the war. In all those conferences I saw them at in America, it was Ian who could have been the Admiral. It was evident that he was more the DNI than DNI himself." Fleming's boss, Rear-Admiral John Godfrey—who *was* the DNI for the first few years of the war—confirms the point: "I once said that Ian should have been DNI and I his naval adviser."

From his position in the Admiralty, Fleming created and supervised a private army called 30AU (Number Thirty Assault Unit), whose job was "to seize enemy equipment, ciphers, scientific know-how before such material can be destroyed." This covert intelligence-gathering unit grew from 24 men in 1942 to 450 in 1945. It operated "in France, Germany, the Mediterranean and North Africa, the Greek islands, Norway, Pantelleria, Sicily, Italy and Corsica, and a section was posted to Lebanon." Much of their work is shrouded in secrecy so "[i]t is still difficult to tell their full story," but many of Bond's improbable adventures are less creations than reimagined memories of the activities of this unit.

One of the surprising contributions Fleming himself claims to have made during the war was to assist "Wild Bill" Donovan in "writing the original charter of the OSS [Office of Strategic Services]," which after the war became the CIA. Shakespeare is careful in sifting the evidence for this claim, but in the sifting he presents a remarkable picture of Fleming's high-level involvement with and influence on America's nascent intelligence services. Much will presumably remain forever secret, but as Shakespeare writes: "Ian's role in American Intelligence has earned him and his fictional hero an exhibition room at the International Spy Museum in Washington."

Immediately after the war, Fleming considered continuing full time in official intelligence work. Instead, while remaining active in the Naval Reserve, he negotiated his unprecedented two-months guaranteed paid vacation contract with the Kemsley Newspapers. His job as foreign manager for the Kemsley group was to direct the work of scores of foreign correspondents deployed all over the world. He did this work the way he ran foreign intelligence agents out of the Admiralty's Naval Intelligence Division during the war, and many of the correspondents he hired were former intelligence colleagues. As Christopher Moran, a specialist in Fleming's intelligence work, wrote: "It looks like a spying operation, it smells like a spying operation, ergo I think it is a spying operation." Fleming himself said in 1951, when appealing unsuccessfully for exemption from the mandatory two-week annual training in the Naval Intelligence Division: "I am engaged throughout the year in running a worldwide intelligence organisation…. I also carry out a number of tasks on behalf of a department of the Foreign Office."

A few months before the premiere of the first Bond film, *Izvestia*, the USSR's propaganda newspaper, reported: "Fleming's best friend is Allen Dulles…who even attempted (but unsuccessfully) to try methods recommended by Fleming in his books. American propagandists must be in a bad way if they have recourse to the help of an English retired spy turned mediocre writer." According to Moran, KGB defector Oleg Gordievsky "claimed the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party watched each new Bond film in the hope of copying some ingenious bit of kit." In fact, Fleming did have a close relationship after the war with CIA Director Dulles. When Fleming died, Dulles published a eulogy in the August 28, 1964 issue of *Life* magazine :

> It is time to put to bed the notion that Ian Fleming, in marked contrast to le Carré and other cerebral chroniclers of espionage who served in British intelligence, was an insignificant or juvenile actor in the spy business. Based on the available historical record, the reality is that his dealings with the real world of spies were far more extensive and important than has been acknowledged, encompassing not only the war years but also the inter-war period and the early Cold War.

Dulles's contrast between Fleming and le Carré has another dimension. In Shakespeare's view, David Cornwell, writing under the pseudonym John le Carré, aimed to make his anti-hero George Smiley "an embodiment of everything Bond was not—cuckolded, ugly, old, unsporty, cerebral, morally torn." Fleming's Bond was a man's man and a ladies' man, young, strong, handsome, athletic, a man of action, a patriot in a good cause, to whom right and wrong were essential even though he recognized the unavoidable shades of gray. Jackie Kennedy introduced Dulles to Fleming's *From Russia, with Love*, and he became a big James Bond fan, as were all the Kennedys. Dulles and the Kennedys seem to have gotten a little carried away with Bondomania. As Shakespeare writes, "Bond was the sort Kennedy admired, a sexy public servant protected by the state and yet sanctioned to do unstatesmanlike things in the line of duty." Upon meeting "the overweight commander of Task Force W, the CIA team that carried out the Bay of Pigs landing," President Kennedy sneered: "So you're our James Bond?" After the Bay of Pigs debacle, Bobby Kennedy complained, "Why can't you get things cooking like 007?" When American U-2 pilot Gary Powers was shot down over Soviet territory on May 1, 1960, an American television crew was dispatched to Jamaica to get Fleming's perspective—not

because of Fleming's intelligence experience, but because he was the creator of James Bond.

Since the earliest days of the novels, it has been common to suppose that Fleming was the model for Bond. He certainly was, to some extent. They are the same height and weight, good looking, athletic, involved with secret work, proud Scots who had been booted out of Eton. They liked women and women liked them. They both flourished in bachelorhood. They both liked scrambled eggs. ("Ah, scrambled eggs and coffee," Ian enthused as a young man in Austria, "the only two things in the world which never let you down.") They both liked clever gadgets and exotic cars, enjoyed a drink, and smoked about 70 Morland Specials a day—handmade Turkish cigarettes with three gold bands round them. The smoking and drinking killed Fleming early. Bond (in the books) continues to smoke and drink in the eternal vigor of his prime.

Should we join nicholas shakespeare in liking Ian Fleming? Certainly, Fleming could be charming to women and to men. Many different kinds of witnesses describe what an impact he could have just walking into a room. He was a brilliant conversationalist when he was in the spirit. He could be inspirational and loyal to those who worked for him, in war and peace. Shakespeare was surprised to discover that Fleming was a notable book collector. He served his country honorably and vigorously in war. He could be generous, indeed, and kind. But he could also be cruel, especially to women, though many of his lovers remained lifelong friends. The older brother of one of the girls he mistreated came to his door with a riding crop once, but Fleming was out and missed the horsewhipping he deserved. In any case, he might have enjoyed it. Shakespeare works hard to minimize the widespread observation that Fleming was a sadist (and I would say a masochist). Here, I'm with Muggeridge.

A couple of anecdotes (out of many) give the general odor of Fleming's moral character and the character of the social world he lived in. When his wife, Ann, was traveling once, she wrote him a letter from New York with the postscript: "It is astonishing that I cannot be in any capital in the world for more than a day without meeting some woman with whom you have had carnal relations." For his part, at a dinner to welcome to England David Bruce, America's new ambassador, a Frenchwoman sitting next to Fleming asked who was the man at the head of the table. The ambassador's wife overheard Ian's answer: "That's my wife's lover. His name's Hugh Gaitskell." Broadmindedness can be an appealing quality, but this kind of broadmindedness even Fleming found painful. That is to his credit. But he would have been a better and more likable man if he didn't work so hard to live up to this pose. Hamlet reminds Polonius that in this fallen world we all deserve whipping. Fleming was self-conscious enough to know that he did, but he also knew it wouldn't do him any good.

Through bond, fleming became a celebrity of a new kind—"the oldest Beatle," as Ann cynically sniffed. Even before the films, Fleming's admirer, the poet Philip Larkin, worried about the burden on Fleming of "the staggeringly gigantic reputation, amounting almost to folk-myth" that the popularity of his Bond novels had created. The films magnified that fame enormously. His old boss, Admiral Godfrey, thought "Ian has achieved a unique worldwide acclaim and more publicity, I believe, than any other human being this century." When Mary Pakenham saw Fleming's name in lights at the London Pavilion, she asked him what it felt like to be so famous. Shakespeare tells us that "[i]n his last letter to her, Ian wrote back saying that she 'was vulgar to congratulate him on having his name in lights.'" His old friend Selby Armitage asked him not long before he died, "What's it really like to be famous? It's a thing you always wanted when you were young. Are you enjoying it now you've got it?" Looking "very sorry for himself," Fleming replied: "It was all right for a bit…. But now, my God. Ashes, old boy. Just ashes."

There were many great houses on the shores of Jamaica when Fleming first visited and fell in love with the island in 1942. "When I came to Jamaica," he later reminisced, "I was determined that one day Goldeneye would be better known than any of the great houses that had been there so long and achieved nothing." In that, the old spy succeeded. The location of Fleming's spartan Jamaican getaway is now the site of a very exclusive resort—still named Goldeneye—owned by the son of Blanche Blackwell, the woman Shakespeare calls Fleming's "last love." Today, during the season when Fleming wrote there, you can rent the "Fleming Villa" for $16,000 a night.

Christopher Flannery is a contributing editor of the Claremont Review of Books.