

# Die Another Day

DAVID RIMANELLI ON LAURENCE RICKELS'S *SPECTRE*

*SPECTRE*, by Laurence Rickels. Fort Wayne, IN: Anti-Oedipus Press, 2013. 132 pages.

I CONFESS THAT I have always found James Bond somewhat dull, but apparently that was the idea. Ian Fleming, author of the Bond novels, conceived his hero as a boring character, a cipher, around whom interesting things happened. Indeed, he lifted the moniker James Bond from an ornithologist of the time, for its exemplary blandness. Betraying his own preferences, theorist Laurence Rickels has titled his new study of Fleming's spy novels *SPECTRE*, not after Bond or Fleming but in honor of the Special Executive for Counterintelligence, Terrorism, Revenge, and Extortion, Fleming's fictional United Nations of villainy, which sought to rebalance the economic and political dynamic of the era via a strikingly contemporary business plan structured around cells of international operatives. *SPECTRE* is a "freelance third party operation" set up in the Cold War conflict between East and West and providing *Thunderball* (1965) and several later Bond films with their campy evildoers, exotic females, and extravagantly scaled and decorated sets. In a gesture of recognition, Fleming gives *SPECTRE*'s Ernst Stavro Blofeld, aka "the Big One," the author's own date of birth.

With the Freudian literalness that fuels counter-intuitive readings, Rickels takes *SPECTRE*'s acronym at

its ghostly word. Continuing an approach that he began with his first book, *Aberrations of Mourning: Writing on German Crypts* (1988), he traces the cultural displacements of melancholic response. Rickels lays out Bond's milieu, the Cold War, as a burial site for the unprocessed losses of World Wars I and II; his interrogation of the undead includes Fleming's father and brother, both British war casualties. Throughout Fleming's novels, the perpetrators and victims of the wars are resurrected in *SPECTRE* in multiple guises. Thus *SPECTRE*, an underworld organization in every sense, is seen to contain and manage losses that cannot be faced or mourned directly. The dead, kept safe inside the living or displaced within art and literature, along with the far-reaching effects of such denial and entombment, populate Rickels's studies of mourning from Goethe and Shakespeare to Anne Rice, Philip K. Dick, and a three-volume study of psychoanalysis carried out under the Nazi regime. Doubling as a template for Fleming's internal world, as well as the Cold War's symptomatic containment of the aftermath of World War II, *SPECTRE*'s organizational structure forms a holding pattern for traumas that required a license to kill.

IN RICKELS'S WORK, as, for instance, in Lars von Trier's films, misery is not a problem to be resolved and overcome, but the foundation for future insights, a setting

in which new and difficult material will be revealed in a dialectic that often includes disaster. Fleming's relation to Britain's wartime enemies is also characterized by ambivalence, but perhaps on a less conscious level. In the Berlin section of his 1963 travelogue *Thrilling Cities*, he tells us, "From this grim capital went forth the orders that in 1916 killed my father and in 1940 my youngest brother," while in *Thunderball* we hear that the malevolent Blofeld's charisma "is of the same unbounded kind that alone explains how Hitler could have enthralled 'the most gifted nation in Europe.'" Mourning becomes melancholia, and the process of introjection entails the swallowing whole of losses that cannot be consciously acknowledged. As

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Rickels demonstrates, Fleming presents a wide array of signifiers and circumstances conjoining persecutors and victims alike: A Nazi rocket ship is constructed on the White Cliffs of Dover, in view of unsuspecting locals; in a chapter from *Goldfinger* (1959) titled "Journey into Holocaust," proud lesbian Pussy Galore stands by "like some young SS guardsman." The early novels' images of Bond's "hard body smashing enemies that are represented as slimy decaying bodies or monsters from the deep" restage primordial threats to individuation; as *SPECTRE* emerges from this amorphous swamp, its futuristic villains retain the image of a sea creature, "a clearly outlined octopus icon," as their secret insignia.

Though it falls outside of Fleming's oeuvre, Rickels includes in *SPECTRE* an example that illustrates the ghostly hangover of World War II: the story of Friedrich Jürgenson, a Russian exiled to Sweden by the war. In the late '50s, while using the wartime Nazi invention of magnetic tape, Jürgenson discovered "the voice phenomenon." The deceased "rearrange white noise, the static between radio stations . . . into communications from the beyond for which the tape recorder serves as the essential answering machine." The taped sounds are then played backward and forward until the static clears and the specters are heard to speak in languages that include German, Swedish, English, Italian, Polish, Russian, and Yiddish. Jürgenson's recorded voices are those of World War II dead: Hitler, a singing Göring, Churchill, the host's own dead relatives, and Jews, one of whom says that Hitler loves her.

This obscure historical anecdote encapsulates the link between wartime inventiveness and increased psychic phenomena, which has previously been a theme in Rickels's work, but even more strikingly, the removal of ambient noise from the spirit tapes echoes the process by which Rickels's readers engage with his layered web of narratives. History, vernacular culture, camp, and puns create an excess, a literary static that interferes with the

Terence Young, *From Russia with Love*, 1963, 35 mm, color, sound, 115 minutes. Ernst Stavro Blofeld (Anthony Dawson).





Left: Terence Young, *Thunderball*, 1965, 35 mm, color, sound, 130 minutes. Largo (Adolfo Celi) and James Bond (Sean Connery).

Above: *Homeland*, 2011—, still from a TV show on Showtime. Carrie Mathison (Claire Danes) and Saul Berenson (Mandy Patinkin).

convenient linear consumption of knowledge, and that echoes Walter Benjamin's use of collage and quotation. As Hannah Arendt observed, Benjamin "discovered that the transmissibility of the past had been replaced by its citability, and that in place of its authority there had arisen a strange power to settle down, piecemeal, in the present and to deprive it of 'peace of mind,' the mindless peace of complacency." Rickels, too, unsettles the past; his cumulative research unearths unexpected affiliations. Through inquest and interpretation that denaturalizes the suspension of disbelief, Rickels insists on the uncanny side of the mundane: When we talk on the phone, we address our comments to someone who is no longer around.

**SPECTRE'S WEALTH OF EVIDENCE** allows us to read the Bond stories, and those of *SPECTRE* in particular, in an increasingly broad register: first as Fleming's autobiography, then as an autobiography of the postwar era, and finally as an allegory for the childhood construction of object relations and their connection to fantasy, fear, and death. Rickels draws on the work of British psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, a pioneer in the analysis of children, whose work inaugurated attempts to address psychosis through psychoanalysis, to extend the world of object relations to the encrypted past. I confess that when I first used Klein's writing in my teaching, her techniques of interrogation and interpretation struck me as rather horrifying. The phrase *child abuse* came immediately and forcefully to mind. Her analytic play technique with children, including her own, dispenses with privacy (involvement with her young son's masturbation provides one memorable example), and her interpretations can be aggressive, if

not brutal. Foucault's criticism of psychiatrists as the "other Victorians" seemed particularly apt.

Klein's texts, with their descriptions of fragmented body parts and infants who fantasize about scooping out and destroying maternal bodies, her warring worlds of internal objects, personality split into bits, and fears expelled through projective identification, often read like science-fiction novels. Rickels's linking of Klein's essays and Fleming's vocabulary as an aging former espionage agent provides a dual register for fantastic descriptions of evil. But despite her historical importance, I cannot refrain from picturing Klein among *SPECTRE*'s cast of criminals, and, worse yet, as I make notes on my cell phone for this piece, the device keeps "correcting" the spelling of her name to "Melanie Klebb." This technological parapraxis confirms my association of Klein with *SPECTRE*'s Rosa Klebb, whose reputation as an interrogator rests on her ability both to call out specialty tortures by number and to coo softly to her victim, "There, there my dove. Talk to me, my pretty one, and it will stop. . . . Your mother is here beside you, only waiting to stop the pain."

Of course, Rickels's revisitation of Bond emerges at a moment of public and private familiarity with torture and psychological warfare, in addition to ongoing foreign wars and domestic threats, the aftermath of recession, and the alienation of what has been called networked capitalism. The television series *Homeland* has recently reinvented the secret agent, formerly typified by Bond, with his suave self-control, as Carrie Mathison—bipolar, blonde, and now pregnant. Mathison is an archetype for the present-day worker, as Bond was a fantasy role model for the Cold War executive. Her persistent facial tics are linked to betrayals by her govern-

ment, her coworkers, and especially Saul, her paternalistic agency director. If Carrie becomes the avatar who suffers, Bond remains a fantasy of composure, his more troublesome anxieties outsourced to *SPECTRE*. Death and trauma threaten to undo these precariously balanced substitutions, and it is the nearness of this threat that generates fascination. As Rickels notes, "The first strike of loss shakes the inner world at its foundations."

Rickels tells us that "the work of mourning from the outset consists in re-securing the inner world," a task that is never truly completed. It is no surprise, then, that the American Psychiatric Association's recently updated *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (aka the *DSM-5*) has for the first time included grief as a billable mental disorder. The fields of psychotherapy and psychiatry, the pharmaceutical companies that have delivered the dubious wonders of SSRIs—all are designed to manage disappointment and its aftermath. The very pervasiveness of these remedies betrays the existence of what I tend to think of as a new misery, but Rickels's studies of literature take us somewhere else. In Goethe's or Shakespeare's narratives of losses that cannot be mourned, the supernatural comes to the forefront, and devils and ghosts take their place as "the other next generation." Fleming's *SPECTRE* is organized around the residue of his father's death. As his own *SPECTRE* comes to a close, Rickels returns again and again to Hamlet, whose failed retributions reverse the pattern of object relations. The doubling of Hamlet's words, "I am dead, Horatio. . . . Horatio, I am dead," externalize the identification with a ghost world that has come to define him, at first figuratively and then, finally, physically. □

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