

The Man with The Golden Gun film poster

(December 1974)



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Component 1: Exploring the Media

Focus areas:
Media language
Representation
Media contexts

PRODUCT CONTEXT

- *The Man with the Golden Gun* is a James Bond film released on 19 December 1974, starring Roger Moore as 007. This was only Moore's second appearance as the fictional MI6 agent.
- Based on a book of the same name, written by Ian Fleming, the film was produced by the British company Eon (Everything or Nothing) Productions and distributed by United Artists. The film was created with an estimated \$7 million budget and grossed over \$97 million at the world wide box office.
- To reflect the popularity of the Martial Arts film genre, with the rise of stars such as Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan, there were several Kung Fu scenes and the film was filmed predominantly in Asia, having being shot in Hong Kong, Thailand and Macau.
- The artwork for poster itself was produced by artist and illustrator Robert McGinnis.

PART 1: STARTING POINTS – Media language

Historical Context:

Prior to the 1990s, illustrations were much more commonly used on film posters due to the limited **technology** that was available.

The film was set in the middle of the 1973 energy crisis, when the oil producing Arab nations proclaimed an oil embargo causing an oil crisis which had both short and long-term effects across on **politics and the economy** across the globe. This is hinted at through the poster's

iconography of the power plant in the lower left corner and the energy beam directed at Bond.

Consider the codes and conventions of media language and how elements of media language influence meaning:

- Typically, film posters are very **visual** and rely on **images** and limited text to promote the film. The images need to give the audience an idea of the film **genre** and hint at the **narrative** – here, rather than just one dominant image, there is so much going on that the reader is expected to work through the images to understand the film's plot.
- The **central image** is a **mid-shot** of James Bond, smartly dressed holding a gun across his body. The dominance of his image suggests he is the film's **protagonist** and so probably a 'good guy'. According to Vladimir **Propp's** theory, he would be considered the '**hero**'.
- Bond's **attire** connotes business and professionalism and the gun, an iconic part of Bond's 'uniform', **signifies** danger and action.
- Bond is **looking directly at the audience**, seemingly making eye contact. The intensity of his stare and the lack of a smile could **connote** how seriously he expects to be taken and that he appears calm despite the chaos surrounding him. This informs the audience of one of his great strengths, his ability to keep his composure in any situation.
- A common convention for film posters is to have the **actor's name(s)** placed prominently as another way to entice the **audience**. Roger Moore had become a household name after starring in the well-known TV series *The Saint* and playing Bond in the previous film, *Live and Let Die*, so his name is placed directly above Bond's image to reinforce the link.
- The **title** of the film appears with the name of the author who wrote the books (on which the films are based) at the bottom of the poster. The

credit block, detailing **industry information** such as other star's names, directors and producers, is much smaller and tucked away so as not to divert the audience away from the main image or the rest of the poster.

Consider narrative:

- At the bottom of the frame, in the foreground, is an extreme close up of a golden gun. It is pointed right at Bond and someone is loading it with a bullet engraved with his name so the reader can interpret this as an attempted assassination on the protagonist.
 - » The **colour** of the gun **connotes** wealth and status and the fact we can only see the hand of the shooter creates intrigue and what Roland Barthes would term an **enigma** code for the audience, as we want to find out who is trying to kill Bond.
 - » Also, continuing **Propp's** character theory, we would consider this person to be the '**villain**'.
- Surrounding Bond are even more enemies and people trying to kill him. These images, combined with the images of destruction and explosions, are **codes that signify** to the audience this is from the action/thriller **genre**.
- As is **typical** of Bond films, the protagonist is flanked by **females** wearing very few clothes:
 - » Two of these women are highly **sexualised**: bikini-clad, slim with perfect hour glass figure and long flowing hair.
 - » **Body language**: one appears to be looking at the golden gun assassin whilst pointing at Bond whilst the other seems to be putting her arm out in front of him, seemingly protecting him. Barthes might argue that this is another enigma code, suggesting to the audience that Bond has female allies and enemies, yet all look the same making it hard for him to distinguish between them.

PART 2: STARTING POINTS – Representation

Social and Cultural Contexts:

At the start of the 20th century, many film depictions of minority ethnic groups supported the dominant **stereotypes** of the time: to be pitied, to be laughed at, the exotic and/or dangerous. While society was progressing towards racial equality by the 1970s, some of these stereotypes were still in evidence in mainstream films. In addition, it is interesting to consider this poster in the context of the move towards gender equality and

increased women's rights in the 1960s and 70s.

Consider the representation of gender and ethnicity:

- At this time, Bond was already **iconic**. He was the nation's favourite secret agent; charming, suave, good looking and, most importantly, always caught the 'bad guys'. This **representation of masculinity** told audiences that this was what a man had to be at the time – intelligent, strong and prepared to put yourself in dangerous situations. If you were all of those things, you would be successful, gain respect and women would want you. The assumption then is that men should also be heterosexual.
- Two of the three **females** on the poster are wearing bikinis which show off their slim bodies. Both are heavily made up and wear earrings and bracelets as accessories to the 'outfit'. The two women also have long flowing hair.
 - » A feminist theoretical perspective would argue that this **sexualised representation** of women suggests that they are little more than bodies to be looked at.
- Another female, however, is dressed in a karate uniform and is shown in a martial arts pose, and appears to go against this **stereotype**. She too has flowing hair but this time it is much darker and her skin tone suggests she is from a different ethnic group to the other females. This goes some way to explaining why she seems not to support the dominant sexualised stereotype portrayed by the other females; she is seen as exotic, different, the 'other'.

Consider the representation of issues and events:

- Interestingly, one of the main themes in this Bond film was an actual world event – the 1937 **global energy crisis**. With the embargo on oil, countries were considering alternative power sources and this is portrayed through the **iconography** of the power plant and the related explosions. By including this theme, the producers are encouraging audiences to consider what might happen if oil really did run out and predict what the outcomes would be for society.

Possible areas for further investigation:

- Consider ideas about **encoding** and **decoding** texts (could reference theorists e.g. Stuart Hall). The producers have encoded certain ideas into this text but it depends on the viewer's own social and cultural context how this image is decoded:
 - » **For example**, the depiction of a female

doing martial arts could be seen to support the idea that she is dangerous and to be feared or could be seen as a progressive way of looking at females, those who are strong, confident and fearless.

- **Feminist theoretical perspectives** - Laura Mulvey (in her 1975 essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema') coined the term the '**male gaze**' which discussed how the audience is put into the perspective of a heterosexual man. In this poster, the audience is forced to

focus on the curves of the women's bodies, putting them in the eyes of a male.

- » Mulvey goes on to argue then that this denies the women human identity and relegates them to the status of **objects** to be admired for physical appearance. This could be further argued as the producer of the artwork was a male, Robert McGinnis.