

Death and Resurrection in *Skyfall*

Bond: Everyone needs a hobby

Silva: So what's yours?

Bond: Resurrection.

Synopsis

In the opening sequence of the movie *Skyfall*, we follow James Bond on a death-defying pursuit such as has become standard for all Bond movies. Although death awaits the smallest slip or fall, Bond engages in a car chase, a motorbike chase and a train chase to catch a villain who is in possession of information which could expose and kill a large number of fellow agents. But on this occasion Bond fails, already shot and weakened in the course of the pursuit, he is accidentally blown away by a fellow agent, falls hundreds of feet into a river, passes over a waterfall and sinks into the depths. Bond is dead. Back in London, 'M' writes his obituary. His flat is sold, his possessions put into storage, since he has no next of kin. The fellow agents are exposed and in danger; MI6 is in serious trouble both from a hostile strike on the heart of its building and from government criticising its role and ability.

Several months later we find Bond back from the dead. He has an option to stay 'dead' on a paradise island with (inevitably) an attractive woman in his bed, but he has a job to do, a love for country and friends which will not be put aside. So he comes back to put things right.

But in London there's a new message: it's time for the old to be replaced by the new. Things are moving on. New values are in place. The relationship between 'M' and Bond is outdated. Who wants what Bond stands for, - even if he has come back from the dead? No fancy gadgetry for him this time, just his gun and an old fashioned radio transmitter.

Bond and 'M' go out to prove that to lay down one's life for one's friends is still as important a principle to live by as ever. We see a rather different Bond here, - one with real wounds that he examines in a mirror, digging the shrapnel out of his shoulder, one who almost collapses from the pain and the suffering he has endured, one who looks haggard and tired, but who continues regardless. He can no longer properly aim a gun with rock steady hands. He is examined for fitness for duty and fails on all counts, but 'M' lies about his test results in order to allow him to continue. This means that all his unbelievable actions come with a new possibility - when he dangles one handed from a great height he might really die, and for good.

The villain is a rogue agent whose genius is cybercrime. He is seeking revenge and death and is fixated on 'M'. Bond has to fight to protect 'M' and rid the world of a dangerous menace who executes people for fun. Compared to Bond he has a command of all the new technology and Bond seems a failure beside him. When Bond tries to save a woman, Silva, the villain, kills her. Now Bond is a failed saviour. Surely all that he stood for is now gone?

Yet when Bond makes his last stand in Scotland, in a last ditch attempt to save 'M' from Silva and his accomplices, something interesting happens. Bond is stripped of all his accoutrements, even his Aston Martin is blown to smithereens. He and 'M' make makeshift protections, and bonds of family,

friendship and affection, including with the gamekeeper from his childhood, prove stronger than possessions or technology. 'M' ends up via an underground passage in the local church with the graves of Bond's parents outside. Silva finds her, intending to kill them both, but Bond kills him, not with a fancy gun, but an old fashioned knife. But 'M' cannot be saved. Already wounded, she dies in the church and Bond closes her eyes and weeps for her.

More failure? Out of the scene at the church we see Bond once more reporting for duty. The agent who 'killed' him is now at a desk job as Miss Money Penny and there is a new 'M' ready to send Bond out into the world to save others, and to die for them if need be. Asked if he is ready to do this. Bond replies 'my pleasure'.

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Some reflections

The film raises some interesting questions and perhaps offers some referencing of Bond as a Christ-like figure. He is expected to be a super-hero, indefatigable, superior, warrior-like. The person we meet is clearly fallible, weak, suffering, ageing and vulnerable. He is willing to die in pursuit of the greater good of others, but when he does 'die' he rises again to life and although he could stay happily in 'heaven' he returns to inspire and work tirelessly to protect those he loves from evil. A second strand within the film questions whether the old principles of loyalty, trust, love, friendship and standing up for the weak are relevant any more in a world of bureaucrats and technology and where lives are dependent on computers and financial resources. The answer seems to be that the old is still relevant and that it can adapt itself to the times in which we live, not by becoming absorbed by contemporary culture and its shifting values but by believing that some principles, such as protecting people from evil, remain authentic even through times of change. Is it significant that 'M' dies in a lonely deserted church, which is nonetheless the place of refuge?

Some questions

What do you make of how Bond and 'M' are presented in this film?

What do you think the film is saying about the idea of sacrifice?

What other elements of death and resurrection can you find in the film?

What kind of dialogue between 'science' and 'faith' do you think exists in *Skyfall*?