

Sample essay on the self-inserted male anti-hero in misery and moonraker

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



The antihero is a long-established literary convention, in which a main character does not have the normal trappings of heroism that you might normally find in traditional heroes. Antiheroes are not idealistic, they are pragmatic; self-centered instead of selfless; amoral instead of moral, and so on. These anti-heroes are not meant to be role models, but are often avatars for the desires and ideals of whomever is writing them, as well; in the case of Stephen King's horror novel *Misery* and Ian Fleming's James Bond novel *Moonraker*, the characters of James Bond and Paul Sheldon both carry many similar qualities, particularly in their contentious, power-based relationships with women, and their inherent selfishness. The exploration of their varying types and expressions of masculinity and how they relate to the female presences in the novels shows the commonalities of anti-hero literary types; their fealty is primarily to themselves, and they see women either as obstacles to be defeated or prizes to be won.

In *Misery*, the main character or anti-hero is Paul Sheldon, a horror writer clearly loosely based on Stephen King. Where Sheldon writes mystery novels, King writes horror fiction; both are deeply connected to the act of writing as a transcendent experience: "As always, the marvelous joyful nervy feeling of a journey begun" (King). Over the course of the novel, in which Sheldon meets a deranged fan who threatens violence and torture if she is not given the outcomes she wants in his novels, reads like a cathartic nightmare sequence from an author who must deal with his own masochistic demons regarding his fans (Keeseey 53). By writing this novel, Sheldon is shown to be representative of King's fears of meeting the expectations of his fans, and is a way for him to explore this extreme situation in order to reconcile his

desire to write what he wants with his desire to be well-received (Keesey 54).

Ian Fleming's James Bond character is the same way - an expression of the ideal version of himself as a spy, during his time in Naval Intelligence during World War II (Pearson, 2011). As Ian Fleming, it is clear in his novels he "was actually creating Bond in an attempt to ward off a profound mid-life crisis," in which he got to see the exciting action he did not get to see as a relatively mundane spy who never got to encounter any dangerous situations (Pearson, 2011). James Bond became the outlet for Fleming's desires to live out the life he wanted - a handsome, debonair spy who was able to get any woman he wanted and defeated bad guys on a regular basis. In the case of *Moonraker*, Bond himself is struggling to defeat an evil industrialist named Hugo Drax, who has a rocket he wishes to fire on London. Bond's taciturn, aggressive nature is a way for Fleming to be the man he always wanted to be.

These characters, despite being the idealized versions of their authors, are far from completely heroic; they have many antiheroic elements to them. Paul Sheldon, for instance, is a selfish, cowardly and spiteful man who vacillates between loving his fans and wanting them to leave him alone. During the events of the novel, he plans to kill off the main character of his popular book series Misery Chastain, because he feels his work is being stifled by having to do such low popular fiction. He is frequently a jerk to others, behaving in a condescending way that puts him at a distance from others - in a way, Annie Wilkes' imprisonment of him is a consequence of that. His skill and belief in his writing is part of his hubris: "if you want me to

take you away, to scare you or involve you or make you cry or grin, yeah. I can. I can bring it to you and keep bringing it until you holler uncle. I am able. I CAN" (King). In many ways, Sheldon represents both an idealized and realistic vision of King's attitudes toward himself - he thinks he is a great writer, but is also deeply insecure about it and about how self-centered it can be: " He felt as he always did when he finished a book — queerly empty, let down, aware that for each little success he had paid a toll of absurdity" (King). With all of these attributes and more, Sheldon's anti-heroic nature is assured; he reacts defensively, and is essentially a victim of Annie Wilkes' supreme sense of control.

James Bond, while being more of a hero in the traditional sense than Sheldon, is far from virtuous; he is a womanizer, a thug and a killer, who shows no remorse for what he does in the service of his duty. He drinks heavily and takes pills as well, rounding out a general list of character traits that should not be reasonably emulated by anyone. He is a member of the old guard, an aristocrat who enjoys the finer things in life while often taking it for granted; he is never truly vulnerable or self-effacing, simply acting as a finely honed weapon for his superiors. He very easily uses trickery and deceit to foil his enemies, such as when he essentially drugs himself (a combination of champagne and Benzedrine) in order to win a game of bridge against Drax. All of these tend to be trappings of the spy genre, but they do act as a power fantasy for those who read James Bond novels and want to envision themselves doing bad things and getting away with it. As these attributes are not things that can be reasonably called ' moral,' James Bond qualifies as an anti-hero.

Where these two antiheroic characters converge most easily is in their treatment of women; both characters are womanizing cads who offer little in the way of stability or long-term commitment. Romantically, Sheldon is shown to be a failure, with two marriages and two divorces, as well as a number of empty one night stands that do not bring him greater happiness. His primary relationship in the novel is his contentious, Munchausen-like feud with superfan Annie Wilkes, who imprisons him in her home in order to get him to write for her. Annie acts as a “mother-figure,” an infantilizing caretaker who essentially breaks Sheldon down until he can’t (or won’t) do anything for himself: “Paul’s misery is Stephen King’s masochistic fantasy, a nightmare of the male body emasculated, the male psyche stripped of its independence” (Keeseey 54-55). His hostile relationship with her is justified, at least on the surface, by his being kidnapped, tortured and mutilated; however, by the end of the novel, Sheldon’s trickery of burning the manuscript is a needlessly cruel way to escape from his situation, turning it into a direct statement against overbearing women in his life. When Sheldon gets to the point of shoving burning pages of his manuscript down Annie’s throat, it becomes less of a desperate attempt to escape than an attempt to reassert his sense of male power over a woman. To that end, his eventual escape is bittersweet for anyone who still harbors ideas that Sheldon is a hero of the standard mold.

In *Moonraker*, Bond’s typical womanizing is somewhat muted thanks to the rather chaste relationship he has with the ‘Bond girl’ of this novel, Gala Brand. Throughout the book, Bond questions the idea of women’s lib, believing that women should learn to find husbands: “Unless [fellow spy

Leolia] married soon, Bond thought for the hundredth time, or had a lover, her cool air of authority might easily become spinsterish and she would join the army of women who had married a career" (Fleming). In terms of Gala Brand herself, he spends the whole novel expecting to sleep with her, but soon learns at the end of the book that she is engaged to someone else in Special Branch; only then does he back off. It is a rather strange and archaic view of women that he holds, and yet another piece of evidence that he, like Sheldon, is antiheroic.

Through the antiheroic characteristics of both Paul Sheldon and James Bond, Stephen King and Ian Fleming are able to insert themselves into a fantasy that allows them to express their own anxieties in a realistic and cathartic manner. Sheldon's encounters with Annie, and his frustrations with his writing, mirror King's anxiety about being taken seriously by fans, or being able to escape the 'low-art' nature of his profession. Conversely, Fleming's James Bond allows him to have the exciting, booze-fuelled, sex-filled life as a spy that he came close to having but never quite reached. In this way, the anti-hero is shown to often be an expression of the dark side of an author's imagination, allowing them to get away with things in their imagination they would never dream of doing in real life.

Works Cited

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