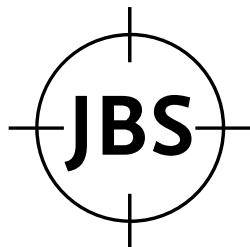


Shaken and Stirred

The Crisis of Masculinity in *Casino Royale*

ELLEN SHARMAN

The character of James Bond is (for better or for worse) a global icon of British masculinity. Ironically, given the frequent idolisation of Bond as a hyper-masculine hero, his 1953 literary debut in Ian Fleming's *Casino Royale* provides a matrix through which the masculinity crisis of the 1950s can be traced. Drawing upon Ernest Mandel's terminological framework of western spies' split-subjectivity, this article proposes that the constant oscillation between the binary ideals of Bond's gendered performance as a spy and his gendered performance as a "regular" (albeit a white, heterosexual, middle-to-upper class) citizen, push his character into a crisis of masculinity. The inner turmoil that arises from this constant swinging between competing masculine ideals means that Henry David Thoreau, even though writing almost one hundred years before *Casino Royale*'s publication, perfectly articulates Bond's predicament when he notes that "[u]nconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of manhood" (1971, 8). Beneath the fast cars, guns, girls, and booze, lies a figure of despair, a man in crisis. As Douglas A. Cunningham and Richard Gabri argue, in *Casino Royale* "something is [...] eating away at Bond's soul" (2009, 98). Arguably, this "something" can be understood as the pressure of hegemonic hyper-masculinity and the destabilising effect this has on the masculine psyche. In this context, the character of James Bond and his troubling encounter with masculine



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split-subjectivity will be re-evaluated as both symptomatic of and symbolic of the post-war masculinity crisis of the West, and I argue that Bond is a victim rather than a hero of masculinity.

Many have considered the 1950s as a period which generated a significant crisis in Western masculinity, where changes to traditional power dynamics in a post-war context shook the foundations upon which previous models of manliness depended for legitimacy.¹ The idea of “masculinity in crisis” itself is a recurrent theme in masculinity studies, theoretically underpinned by the idea of “hegemonic masculinity” (a concept coined by R.W. Connell in their 1993 book *Masculinities*). In this model, hegemonic masculinity is seen to embody “a ‘currently accepted’ strategy [to maintain the patriarchy]. When conditions for the defence of patriarchy change, the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded. New groups may challenge old solutions and construct a new hegemony” (Connell 2005, 77). Hegemonic masculinity as an identity is therefore always threatened, as it must constantly change and evolve to ensure that the patriarchal system of governance survives. Britain in the 1950s is a period in which the masculinity crisis can be seen to have been particularly present. The post-war nation experienced widespread social change resulting from developments in technology, women’s increasing participation in the workplace, and the decline of empire, all of which directly affected the hegemonic trope of the idealised British man. For a relatively long period, hegemonic masculinity in Britain had depended on a heterosexual male bread winner in a primarily white society, a figure not too far off James Bond (so long as he one day gave up womanising in order to marry and raise a family). The introduction of the contraceptive pill, for example, meant women were far more in control of their bodies and less reliant on a husband if they decided to be sexually active. In 1961, the NHS even subsidised the prescription of the contraceptive pill, meaning women from a wide range of social backgrounds were able to access contraception sanctioned by the state. Public debates around the decriminalisation of homosexuality also began to challenge the model of a nuclear heterosexual family as the only means of asserting manliness. Masculinity’s uncertain encounter with homosexuality was beginning to make itself apparent in popular culture, and is a dynamic Bond can be seen to struggle with in his erotically charged and phallocentric encounters with Le Chiffre (as explored below). The increasing multi-racialisation of Britain as people from former British colonies migrated to the UK was another source of anxiety for white men. For those who perceived foreign men in particular as a

1 For further discussion on the masculinity crisis see: Clare 2001, Levant 1997, Gilbert 2005, and Cuordileone 2000.

threat to “their” jobs, women, and rights, multiculturalism in the wake of the declining empire was seen with hostility. As Scott Burnett and John E. Richardson (2021) argue in their article on post-war British fascist discourse, the combination of immigration and women’s increasing autonomy bred a far-right political discourse which assimilated the control over race and “breeding” into a stance against anything foreign and a revival of traditional gender roles. Though primarily on the literature of the working class, Susan Brook’s (2003) discussion of “Angry Young Men” as a literary trope in post-war Britain speaks to the general sense of anger arising from unease in a period of widespread social change, and the changing masculine norms in particular. As a quick-to-anger agent of the British empire preoccupied with his position in relation to women, it is not hard to see how Bond as a fictional character spoke to these areas of social contestation. Crucially, all of these themes were seen as a threat to traditional white middle-to-upper class masculinity by those who still subscribed to it and self-fashioned in respect to it. Jeremy Black suggests Bond’s “mental battle is all about boundaries and the pressure of roles” which then manifest themselves as “psychological tensions throughout Bond’s career” (2005, 87). I would argue, instead, that it is Bond’s career as a spy itself (and the hyper-masculine demands this role places upon Bond) that generate the greatest source of psychological tension in the novel.

This article will propose that Bond is effectively trapped within an unstable masculine paradox, where the constant pressures of the binary codes used to differentiate between “ideal” masculinity and “deviant” masculinity propel him into crisis. This article will identify three sites of friction between ideal and deviant masculinity, explore their compounding pressures, and demonstrate how they push Bond into a deep masculinity crisis. Firstly, the tension between wealth and ruin will be explored. In this dichotomy, crisis arises from the fact that it is Bond’s job as a spy which gives him the financial ability to live decadently, yet only when he is on a job – not in his personal life. Scenes like that in the casino, where he gambles with a vast fortune borrowed from the state, enable him to embody the role of a vastly wealthy man, yet none of this wealth truly belongs to him. In his regular life he is not able to so carelessly and recklessly spend money, and his financial dependence on MI6 chains him to the role of spy if he wishes to keep play-pretending at his borrowed life of luxury. Secondly, it will discuss masculinity’s uneasy relationship with virility and castration, and how the premium placed on a hyper-virile masculinity makes it very easy for Bond to question his manliness when his phallic power is compromised. Both

Vesper Lynd and Le Chiffre will be explored as challengers to Bond's virile persona, physically and mentally, as his character negotiates dynamics of power based around the proving of sexual potency and agency. Thirdly, the inherent contradictions between the masculine and feminine dichotomy will be examined. This will be explored particularly in relation to the ways in which Bond can be considered to embody traditionally "feminine" desires and roles, such as the lover and the erotic object in his encounters with Vesper. This central relationship with Vesper is one which consistently shows how permeable the distinctions are between the "feminine" and the "masculine", as the typical gender roles are constantly reversed through both characters' careers and romantic pursuits. It will be argued that this inherently unstable balancing act between Bond's role as a lover and as a cold-hearted spy is the last push Bond needs to enter a full-blown masculinity crisis. Through becoming more "feminine" than his lover Vesper, his sense of masculine power is shaken to its core, leaving him extremely vulnerable. This article will conclude that the pressures of Bond's job as a spy heighten each of these tensions, and that there is a wider need to reassess which masculine issues Bond's character embodies. This framework loosely aligns itself with the chronology of the novel, starting in the casino with borrowed wealth, moving onto Le Chiffre's attempted castration and Bond's desire to re-assert virility with Vesper, and finally, how falling in love with Vesper forces Bond to reassess his own relationship to femininity.

As Ian Kinane observes, the academic interest paid to James Bond is a "small but growing" field (2017, 1). Kingsley Amis (1966) was the first to academically study the novels, with contemporary critic John Gardner arguing that Amis restored Bond into an "intellectual – and essentially male – cult" (1965, 883), highlighting a common tendency to reverentially associate idealised masculinity with Bond. Even though this first study focused exclusively on the Bond novels, proceeding work has tended to prioritise cinematic adaptations and scholars have largely ignored the original books. This article is the first to discuss masculinity in relation to the original 1953 novel *Casino Royale*, even though a great deal of scholarly attention has been paid to Martin Campbell's 2006 film starring Daniel Craig (the first cinematic adaptation of the novel and Craig's first outing as Bond)². Christoph Lindner's (2003) edited book is dedicated entirely to this

2 The very first adaptation of the novel was an episode of the American television anthology series, *Climax!*. Though it remains fairly faithful to the plot, Bond's character was changed to an American and it is not a full-length feature film. A 1967 satirical film also exists, however it is a parody of the novel and deviates significantly from the novel's plot.

film, whilst articles by Katherine Cox (2006), Sarah Gilligan (2010), and Lisa Funnell (2011) focus exclusively on the ways in which Craig supposedly embodies a new sort of masculinity compared to previous Bonds in the franchise. More recently, academic discussion has acknowledged that Bond's masculinity needs to be examined more closely, with Toby Miller arguing that it is "more complex and contradictory" (2020, 131) than critics and academics previously considered. Wickham Clayton proposes that Bond simultaneously represents "competing forms of hegemonic masculinity" (2020, 67), illustrated in the portrayal of Bond by seven different actors (each representing a different facet of his masculinity) in the satirical adaptation of *Casino Royale* (1967). Although these discussions shed light on the need to re-evaluate our understanding of Bond as a gendered subject, this work has exclusively focused on cinematic adaptations of Bond fiction.

This article uses the original Bond novel to address the emerging idea that Bond should be re-evaluated as a figure of masculine paradox and tension – rather than merely a sexist relic of the past or a figure of ideal male glory – whilst seeking to contribute to the significant gap in the literature related to critical analysis of the novels themselves. As the first novel in the entire series, *Casino Royale* is the origin myth of this now infamous character, and by extension, the origin myth of his troubled relationship with masculinity.

WEALTH AND RUIN

Although James Bond is widely perceived as embodying an "affluent lifestyle based on brand-name consumerism" (Linder 2003, 1), in *Casino Royale*, money and luxury become a great source of tension for the construction of his masculine identity. Consumerism and wealth (or at least the idea of them) are closely linked to the masculinity crisis, with Anthony Clare arguing that men in crisis use "possessions" (2001, 221) as a substitute for emotional attachment. Bond, as someone with seemingly no friends and whose "car [is] his only personal hobby" (Judd 2012, 39), embodies this argument. The entire novel revolves around gambling and the constant threat of losing, be this financially, romantically, or mortally. This lingering tension adds a new level of insecurity to Bond's decadent lifestyle as the possibility that the material luxuries he uses to hide his crisis could all be lost is never far away. In the novel, the game Bond plays with Le Chiffre (baccarat) is described as "plush but mindless" by the card historian David Sidney Parlett (1991, 82); while Jason Sperb suggests this game signifies a greater risk and need for luck than games such as Texas hold'em (which the 2006 film adaptation replaces baccarat with) (2009, 70). To compound the tension fur-

ther, all this wealth Bond plays with never really belongs to him. The title of the novel raises this idea, with the word “royale” being reminiscent of “Her Majesties’ Secret Service” that Bond belongs to, linking the gambling and the casino to MI6 from the very start. Even though Bond may well be the one enjoying the decadence of the casino with a “glass of champagne or whiskey at the elbow” (Fleming 2012, 53), it is ultimately MI6 who are gambling with this “small fortune” (ibid., 103), and gambling with Bond himself. Bond is merely the pawn, for after his stint of playing at being a millionaire he will have to return to his “gloomy” (ibid., 22) London office and re-join civilian life as an ordinary middle-to-upper class masculine citizen of reasonable, yet not outrageous, wealth.

When Bond’s unstable relationship to material wealth is paired with Ernest Mandel’s theory of a fictional spy’s split-subjectivity, Bond’s masculinity is sent even further into crisis. Mandel argues that in bourgeoisie society the individual “is divided” but that “under normal conditions, this contradiction is restrained and repressed” (1984, 65). Spy stories, on the other hand, “release these inhibitions, frustrations, and repressions, and allow the contradictions to flower” (ibid.) because the spy has the permission of the state to live outside the normal laws and orders that repress ordinary citizens. Mandel links this contradiction to consumerism, wryly observing that “clearly, a super-spy cannot prevail armed solely with an analytical brain” (ibid., 62). Because Bond’s profession as a spy facilitates this extraordinary life of luxury, his role as a Double-O agent is what enables him to be a hyper-masculine, hyper-consumerist hero. Spy work can therefore be seen to split the Western hero in two, and when added to the prospect of extreme wealth, Bond is both the spy who can have anything and the citizen who is relatively ordinary by the standards of upper-class white heterosexual masculinity. The demands and expectations of these two binary opposites means Bond’s subjectivity fluctuates as he embodies these two contrasting versions of masculinity.

Throughout the novel, Bond himself appears to be all too aware of this tension, frequently describing the scenes of glamour surrounding him as if he were in a play:

Bond liked being an actor and a spectator and from his chair to take part in other men’s dramas and decisions, until it came to his own turn to say that vital yes or no, generally on a fifty-fifty chance. (Fleming, 53)

This voyeuristic attitude aligns itself with Bond’s general tendency to objectify those around him, with women being the most frequent target. Bond is evidently

unable to engage in the world around him when performing the role of a hyper-masculine spy, and this tendency to participate in life as a dissociated voyeur worsens his already unhealthy obsession with consumerism and luxury.

Food is perhaps the most overt symbol of decadence and material wealth in *Casino Royale* and literalises the idea of consumerism and consumption by linking it to bodily ingestion. Elizabeth Hale connects Bond's eating habits to his paradoxical identity, arguing that "when Bond consumes eggs, he also consumes dual potentialities – the potential to spill out into violence [...] but also to bring things back to order" (2012, 89). In *Casino Royale*, Bond's regular consumption of eggs also links to the notion of extraordinary wealth, for as Edward Biddulph notes, "few in Britain had access to the range of foods that Bond consumes" (2009, 136), including eggs, for rationing only officially ended in Britain on 3 July 1954. On *The Food Programme*, Sheila Dillon proposes that "in the novels, food is almost as important as espionage" ("Food, James Bond's Food" 2021); however Bond himself is all too aware of the fact that this world is only open to him because of his profession. Bond reminds Vesper at the dinner table that "if it wasn't for the job, we wouldn't be here" (Fleming, 75), and even though Bond encourages Vesper to "be expensive" and behave "like a millionaire" (ibid., 67), this manly bravado of Bond as the male bread-winner (literally acted out as he orders vast amount of toast for Vesper and himself) is only temporarily afforded to him by his spy work for MI6. As a form of luxurious living, food is inherently paradoxical with the transformation of luxury to bodily waste: as a form of consumption, it is fleeting. By the end of the meal, all Bond has to show for this display of decadence is a sizable bill, and even this is picked up by MI6. When Bond ingests the wealth he has borrowed from MI6, he absorbs the tensions of this borrowed wealth into the very fabric of his being.

The decadence of the lifestyle that MI6 temporarily affords him whilst on a job means that when Bond tells Mathis "I've decided to resign" (ibid., 168), he is giving up more than just his vocation: he is giving up the very part of him which facilitates this luxurious lifestyle, the part which belongs to the state, and the part that crucially prevents him from forming any meaningful emotional attachments. Only by embracing "citizen Bond" is he able to form a meaningful romantic relationship with Vesper, suggesting that it is only when he no longer seeks to gilt his masculinity with expensive and beautiful objects (Vesper initially being one of these) that he can begin to develop a sense of emotional literacy. With this change of heart, Bond's attitude towards luxury shifts more generally. Bond appears to be immensely relieved by his resignation and delights in the "not

very grand” (ibid., 193) hotel Vesper takes him to for their symbolic honeymoon: as he muses to himself, “[h]ow many times in his life would he have given everything to have turned off a main road to find a lost corner like this where he could let the world go by” (ibid.).

The Casino as an arena for the performance of masculinity is re-defined by comparison. It is now clearly the domain of the consumerist MI6 machine, whilst the unassuming French hotel becomes the realm of a more emotionally capable and less materialistic Bond. Ultimately, however, Bond seems to be punished for displaying these more progressive masculine features with Vesper’s suicide and the revelation that she is really a double agent. Vesper’s betrayal causes Bond to defensively recoil back into his troubled existence as a Double-O agent who represses his emotional distress through the consumption of meaningless luxuries. In reverting back into this hyper-masculine spy self, Bond inevitably reverts back to his materialistic life of borrowed luxury. At the novel’s end, however, Thoreau’s “games and amusements of manhood” will do very little to quell the despair Bond feels after having lost something money cannot buy back: his first love.

VIRILITY AND CASTRATION

Published in the same year as the first ever issue of *Playboy* magazine, *Casino Royale* was, according to Michael Denning, the first British thriller “to make sexual encounters central to the plot and to the hero” (1992, 223). Although this age might have marked the birth of “mass pornography” (ibid., 224), James Gilbert argues that “the playboy philosophy only exacerbated the masculinity crisis” (2005, 78). Bond’s troubled sexuality exemplifies this, providing a constant source of unease throughout the novel. The desire to be a frivolous and unattached “playboy” contradicts – and to some extent, prohibits – his ability to fall in love without compromising his masculine libido, a trait lauded by the hyper-masculine ego. Sex and sexuality are central themes of the wider 1950s masculinity crisis, and Kyle Cuordileone discusses how a “cult of masculine toughness and virility” (2000, 516) emerged during the Cold War period, where the “language of perversion and penetration” (ibid., 552) dominated political discourse. James Gilbert suggests that this increasing pressure for men to embody a virile and potent sense of masculinity meant that “male crisis literature of the 1950s” was, in fact, deeply fearful of sex (78). Fleming can be seen to have contributed to this phenomenon, for as Arthur M. Schlesinger commented at the time, the ever-increasing number of literary heroes “preoccupied with proving [...] virility” (1963, 237) seemed to prove there was indeed a masculinity crisis. Although Fleming

himself set out to create a man who appealed to “red-blooded, heterosexual adults” (qtd. in “James Bond Special”, 2008), Bond struggles to bear the weight of masculinity’s demands that men be virile. In *Casino Royale*, the tension between virility as a source of power and castration as a permanent threat splits Bond into the virile self and the castrated self, worsening and to some extent self-actualising his underlying sense of crisis. Bond’s virility is firstly threatened by Le Chiffre, with the idea of physical castration, and then secondly by Vesper, with her challenging of the traditional active male/passive female sexual hierarchy.

Initially, it is the threat of literal castration that generates crisis for Bond. The vulnerability of the phallocentric location of manliness leads Toby Miller to suggest that “Bond’s penis is a threat to him” (286) and Christopher Lindner to argue that “Bond’s penis represents a source of insecurity and a threat of loss of control” (2003, 9). This idea of phallic threat and insecurity is prominent in the scene where Le Chiffre tortures Bond by lashing at his “buttocks and the underpart of his body” with a carpet beater (Fleming, 143). Bond is made to feel “puny and impotent” (ibid., 139) as Le Chiffre delights in the notion that Bond’s “manhood is being gradually destroyed and that at the end [...] [he] will no longer be a man” (ibid., 149). As Keren Omry suggests, “the spectacle of Bond’s masculinity is enhanced by the explicit threat to his masculinity” (2009, 170). In this scene, the penis becomes a source of vulnerability as opposed to virility, so with every twitch of the carpet beater, Le Chiffre is able to strike at the symbolic core of Bond’s masculinity.

Not only does the threat of castration destabilise Bond’s sense of masculine virility in a literal sense, the scene’s homosexual eroticism threatens his identity as a heterosexual hero, for as Lisa Funnell highlights, “heroic competency in Bond [...] is directly related to Bond’s (hetero)sexuality and libido” (2001, 458). Paul Willemen argues that in a patriarchal society, the male body “cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look” (1981, 16), so instead, masochism, sadism, and mutilation become the means through which a male body is eroticised under the guise of punishment. Le Chiffre’s torture complies with this notion, for he looks on “almost caressingly” (Fleming, 144) as Bond reacts to the torture with orgasmic pleasure and “masochistic infatuation” (ibid. 147):

Bond’s body arched in an involuntary spasm [...] his head flew back with a jerk showing the taut sinews of his neck [...] then his body sagged and per-

spiration started to bead all over his body. He uttered a deep groan, (ibid., 144)

Kyle Courdileone recalls how the male heterosexual became a “bogeyman by the early 1950s” and was perceived as a “threat to national security” (532). Across the pond, the United States Senate felt so threatened by what John D’Emilio termed the “homosexual menace” (2013, 57), it declared homosexuals could not work for the government as their “moral fibre” was compromised by their supposedly indecent indulgences (“Committee on Expenditures” 1950, 4). Courdileone argues that virile heterosexual masculinity was considered “necessary for the containment of Communism” (537), meaning that in this torture scene, Bond’s vulnerability becomes a threat to national security as well as the nemesis of heterosexual virility. Le Chiffre, as a communist agent working for the Russian organisation SMERSH, not only perverts Bonds body into masochistically enjoying homoerotic torture, but, more worryingly for the British Secret Service, perverts his mind. Bond begins to challenge the distinctions between Western heroes and communist villains, boldly claiming this “country-right-or-wrong business is getting a little out of date” (Fleming, 171). This statement, despite being one of the most progressive of the entire novel, represents the ultimate lapse in the white-heterosexual British masculinity which Bond has embodied up until this point. Will Scheibel argues that the scene in which Bond questions the “moral ambiguity of his profession” (2009, 16) is one of the most compelling moments in the novel, yet for Bond, it is one of the most significant points of his crisis. While Bond’s penis is ultimately spared, the close encounter with “the certainty of impotence” (Fleming, 178) triggers Bond’s resignation from the life of a Double-O agent, a role which up until this point, has defined who he is as a man.

In order to settle this masculine crisis brought on by his close encounter with castration, Bond seeks to heal himself through “experience”, and chooses Vesper as the subject with whom to “coldly put the repairs” (ibid.) of his body to the test. Unluckily for Bond, Vesper’s superior romantic maturity (in having already been in love with a Polish pilot) and her sense of post-war “female sexual assertiveness” (Cuordileone, 527) help her subvert the playboy sex/gender system based on “the narrative code of pornography” (Denning, 219). In *Casino Royale*, it is Bond who is ultimately made to feel like an “expensive gigolo”, and Vesper who leads Bond “into her bedroom” and proceeds to actively make “passionate love to him” (Fleming, 216). As it turns out, Vesper is able to gain more agency by penetrating Bond’s heart than he was ever able to gain with his penis. Vesper’s character proceeds to solidify this inverted power dynamic by committing suicide be-

fore Bond ever has a chance to resolve his virility complex. Since Bond has long seen women through the playboy-esque lens of male amusements, when Vesper deviates from this objectified norm, it comes as a great shock to Bond's system.

Overall, Bond's sense of masculine virility precariously sways between "patriarchal power and limp failure" – a tension Miller links to "the long crisis of [...] Atlantic masculinity that began after 1945" (132). The "unceasing pressure for penetration", as termed by Frank Costigliola (1997), generates a deep sense of unease within Bond as it ultimately makes him dependent on a woman; the ultimate figure of fear for the male in crisis. Scheibel proposes that "Bond's near castration at the hands of a foreigner followed by his betrayal at the hands of a woman" can be read as "Freudian primal scenes, which affirm his fear that one day he 'will no longer be a man'" (18). Fleming's representation of such events therefore speak to the post-war masculinity crisis in visceral terms and result in a Bond who, by the end of the novel, has been penetrated twice: once by Le Chiffre and once by Vesper, both with devastating effects upon his masculine psyche.

MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

The contradictions between masculinity and femininity provide another source of uneasy tension for Bond, concluding his detrimental journey into a full blown masculinity crisis. Cuordileone argues that during the Cold War era, "male prerogative in public life and patriarchal authority in the home were eroding" (528), with the shifting power dynamics between masculinity and femininity becoming increasingly unnerving for men in this period. This struggle for masculine agency lies at the centre of Bond's relationship with Vesper, and his constant oscillation between the conflicting ideas of masculine agency and feminine vulnerability permeate the novel. Gabriele Dietze observes that the hero in detective fiction of the 1950s "performs his masculine self-fashioning in relation to different contemporary configurations of femininity" (1998, 645). Because Bond seeks to self-fashion in relation to Vesper, who's "ironical chill" (Fleming, 40) and superior double-agent spy work arguably make her more successful by masculinity's standards, Bond can only appear feminine by comparison. The absence of the figure of a woman who "stands in patriarchal culture as the signifier for the male other" (Mulvey 1975, 7) casts Bond in the role of the feminine subject, a tension that he navigates throughout the novel, and one that ultimately contributes to his sense of masculine crisis.

Bond's transition into a willing subject of the erotic gaze is one of the most overt markers of his masculinity crisis. The scene where Bond emerges from the sea is an important moment in this transition, for it encourages a moment of what Laura Mulvey describes as "erotic contemplation" (11), a break in the action which gives the reader a moment to indulge in pleasurable image of a sexualised body. This device is traditionally used to invite a masculine heterosexual gaze, which therefore positions Bond as the effeminate erotic object and Vesper as the active male onlooker. Fleming writes that:

under the water he [Bond] imagined the tranquil scene and wished that Vesper could just then come through the pines and be astonished to see him suddenly erupt from the empty seascape [...] when after a full minute he came to the surface in a froth of spray, he was disappointed. There was no one in sight. (207)

This is a distinctly "feminised" image because of its obvious parallels to images of Venus erupting from the sea in a spray of glistening foam, a definitive image of femininity in Western visual culture. It is unsurprising that the 2006 film chose to accentuate this scene – and, it is equally unsurprising that a number of academics have chosen to analyse its gendered significance. Funnell discusses the scene in the greatest detail, arguing moments like this cast Daniel Craig as a "Bond-Bond-Girl Hybrid" (467). Funnell goes on to argue that this "Bond-Bond Girl hybrid is simultaneously active and passive, masculine and feminine [...] Bond and Bond Girl" (ibid.), highlighting the dualistic gendered identity the erotic gaze creates in Bond. Eva Green, the actress who portrayed Vesper in the 2006 film, commented in an interview that Daniel Craig "is the Bond girl, not me [...] He's the one who comes out of the sea with his top off" (qtd. in Jeffries 2007, n.p.). Although academic discussion has mainly focused on the cinematic preoccupation with water-laden Bond emerging from the ocean, the novel is arguably more interesting for it explicitly identifies Bond's desire to attract what Miller describes as a "cruel bodily scrutiny supposedly reserved for patriarchal ... misogyny" (139).

This idea of Bond as "feminine" and Vesper as "masculine" carries over into their professional lives, where it turns out that Vesper is the superior (and by implication more "masculine") spy. Dietze recalls how after World War II, the idea that women were taking men's jobs and dominating the workforce was closely linked to the anxiety which triggered the post-war masculinity crisis of the 1950s (648). As such, Vesper's professional superiority only adds to a pre-ex-

isting source of masculine crisis. Ronald Levant observes how many men in crisis are “caught up in denial” (1997, 224) that the workplace is the exclusive domain of men and “are more likely to distort reality than to question the code” (ibid., 223) by which masculinity positions men above women in the workplace. Bond’s condemnation of “blithering women who thought they could do a man’s work” (Fleming, 126) comes back to bite him, for his denial and disbelief that women are just as professionally capable as men causes him to fatally overlook the “question-mark[s]” (ibid., 205) aroused by Vesper’s suspicious behaviour. By the time Vesper reveals that she is a double agent, it is too late for Bond to restore his sense of masculine professional superiority as Vesper has committed suicide. He compensates for his failure with shame, anger, and emotional repression, the hallmarks of the 1950’s masculinity crisis. After reading her confession letter, Bond’s “body sweated with shame” as he compares his own ineffective “gallivanting around the world” to his mental fantasy of Vesper “quietly, coldly, without heroics” delivering state secrets to the Russians “on a tray” (ibid., 228). This almost masochistic imagining of his lover in a position which compromises one of the *loci* of his manliness is almost too much for Bond to handle. He regresses “mechanically” back into his old, emotionally-stunted masculine self, as the whole ordeal of “their love and his grief” is “relegated to the boxroom of his mind. Later, perhaps they would be dragged out, dispassionately examined, and then bitterly thrust back with the other sentimental baggage he would rather forget” (ibid., 227). Even the words “sentimental baggage” seems to resonate with the chauvinistic dubbing of emotionality as “feminine”, as something to be ignored and stored rather than unpacked. Once again, Bond is the mechanical masculine machine who feels nothing and taxonomises his emotions.

In the end, the turmoil of his shifting between “masculinity” and “femininity” proves too much for Bond. Despite having given up his role as a Double-O agent to pursue a romantic relationship with Vesper, Bond’s transition out of the role of spy and into the role of lover is ruined by the revelation that Vesper has been deceiving him the whole time. Not only is Vesper the better spy – having successfully hidden her double-agent status from Bond throughout the entire novel – she also becomes the archetype of the traditional masculine hero by choosing to sacrifice her own life to save Bond from SMERSH. Bond, who up until this point allowed himself to indulge in his more “feminine” side during this relationship, is humiliated, and this final blow to his masculine pride sees him self-defensively revert to his old ways. Bond’s last words in *Casino Royale* are “the bitch is dead now” (ibid., 229). Although Daniel Craig’s Bond is chastised by M

for this narcissistic response to Vesper's self-sacrifice in the 2006 film, the original 1953 Bond ends his debut with a bitter sense of resentment, ironically embodying the trope of the woman scorned.

CONCLUSION

By the end of the novel, the inherent contradictions of white heterosexual middle-to-upper class masculinity have not only worked to destabilise Bond to his core, they also become a catalyst for crisis. When luxuries are used to compensate for a lack of emotional literacy, unrealistic and damaging premiums are placed on the concept of virility, and femininity is perceived as a threat to masculine power, it seems unlikely that the model of hyper-masculinity can ever generate stability within its subjects. In *Casino Royale*, Bond's experiences show masculinity to be a source of perpetual crisis, something only made worse for male "fantasy figures" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 184) forced to bear the subjectivity-splitting weight of hegemonic symbolism.

Returning to Thoreau's quote, then, it appears that when the "games and amusements" themselves become a source of tension, masculinity is left solely with this sense of "unconscious despair" and ever-increasing crisis (8). Clare argues that men will have more fulfilling lives if they "become more capable of expressing [...] vulnerability[,] tenderness and [...] affection" and place a "greater value on love, family and personal relationships and less on power, possessions, and achievement" (221). According to the former director of MI6, Alex Younger, if Bond were "to apply to join MI6 now, he would have to change is ways" (qtd. in MacAskill 2016, n.p.); as it turns out, a melting pot of masculine insecurities and a severe case of emotional illiteracy do not make for a very good spy, anyway. Bond appears to not make a very good human, either, for as he walks away from Vesper's dead body "without a backward glance" (Fleming, 223), he walks away from the only thing that could save him from the plight of his masculinity crisis: facing his issues with emotional vulnerability. As Levant somewhat depressingly articulates, men are not equipped to address crisis in their masculinity because "to do so would require a degree of comfort and fluency with emotions" (222), something which is effectively prohibited by hyper-masculinity. However, as Amram Scheinfeld argues in the post-war context, qualities of kindness, warmth, and humanity are "evidence of an advanced state of civilisation" (1957, 25), and something which masculinity needs to adopt if it wishes to become a positive rather than detrimental force in the lives of those who ascribe to it. It seems then that there is very little hope for Bond and for masculinity in general if they continue to prioritise hyper-consumerism, hyper-virility, and hyper-masculinity

over humanising traits like vulnerability. When Mathis tells Bond “don’t let me down and become human yourself [...] we would lose such a wonderful machine” (Fleming, 176), he sets out the ultimate paradox that works to split Bond’s psyche: as a spy, he is a hyper-masculine killing machine, but if he is ever to become a functional human being, he would have to reject this identity and the masculine qualities so closely associated with it, qualities which are used as a compensation for the sense of having lost real masculine power in an ever changing world.

The continued appetite for Bond films bodes well for Hollywood’s finances, however it signifies something much darker and much more concerning about the state of modern masculinity. When the masculinity crisis is represented as flawed yet ultimately desirable blue-eyed anti-hero, the crisis of a white, middle-class, heterosexual man can be spun into a franchise that fetishistically depicts the male struggle for survival as an epic myth. In this narrative framework, anything perceived as a threat to this model becomes a dangerous enemy – be that financial dependence on the state, the threat of impotence, women’s increasing agency, or the abstract concept of femininity itself and its potential for subversion. Even in the most recent 007 film, *No Time to Die* (2021), Bond still assumes the traditional masculine role of the protective father who will go to violent extremes to protect the female members of his family. Even if this could be interpreted as symbolically removing a damaging masculine relic from the world to make a safer future for his daughter, being sacrificially killed rather than given a chance to enter modernity with emotional vulnerability does not provide a useful model for progress towards equality. Any long-term resolution to the masculinity crisis will surely require an educational and supportive welcoming of emotional literacy rather than the demonising or mere “calling out” of damaging masculine traits. As such, Bond’s 2021 obliteration, seemingly in penance for his sexist ways, feels like a nihilistically violent end to a violent cycle of masculine crisis.

What Bond really needs, more than any woman, drink, or fast car, is a group of supportive friends to help him confront and resolve his internal crisis on an emotional level. However, if he was ever given this truly happy ending it would signify the end of the franchise. By then, society would presumably have lost its appetite for indulging in the adoration or condemnation of men sipping martinis as they casually objectify women, and Bond would have become emotionally literate enough to finally overcome his real enemy: himself.

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