

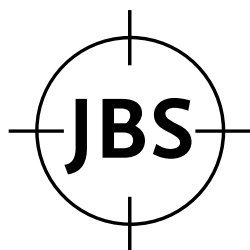
“No Longer a Man”

Refuting Binarism and Uncovering a Queer Bond in *Casino Royale* and *Live and Let Die*

JO JONES

In Ian Fleming’s first novel featuring James Bond, *Casino Royale*, originally published in 1953, our hero is subjected to prolonged genital torture. The villain Le Chiffre describes its psychological as well as physical consequences: “[i]t is not only the immediate agony, but also the thought that your manhood is being gradually destroyed and that at the end, if you will not yield, you will no longer be a man” (Fleming 2012a, 149). Ultimately, Bond does not yield; instead, he is saved by the intervention of a SMERSH agent who spares his life but brands his arm. This then begs the question: in refusing to yield, is he indeed “no longer a man”? “None of the functions of your body will be impaired” (ibid., 162), the doctor attests in the aftermath, but what of Bond’s “manhood”? What *is* lost in this crucial event that takes place swiftly after James Bond’s introduction?

This article will argue that something is in fact gained through this torture scene: Bond’s crisis of manhood triggers the repudiation of established and simplistic worldviews in favour of ambiguity and nuance – characteristics which are presented as essential to modern existence. Bond’s resulting philosophical malaise around his employment, as a defender of the British nation, shows disil-



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lusionment with the black-and-white binarism of his world. In the post-war era, he finds that “[t]he villains and heroes get all mixed up” (ibid., 170) and even patriotism can no longer justify violence enacted in the nation’s name: “this country right-or-wrong business is getting a little out-of-date” (ibid., 171). His new interrogation of the boundaries separating foreigner and native, them and us, is catalysed by a breaking down of the boundary that delineates man from woman as Bond confronts emasculation at the hands of Le Chiffre. I maintain that instead of coming to maturity through cisheteronormative means – consolidating adult male identity through sleeping with a woman, marrying her, and having children together – Bond’s identity, from the start of Fleming’s series of novels, is founded upon castration, and consequently a refusal of these pre-war proofs of manhood. By the 1950s, “Britain’s paternalist traditions began to crumble” (Lawrence 2013, 288), and I aim to show how Bond contributes to this demolition.

In this article I want to put forward a productive queer reading of the novel *Casino Royale*, in contrast with the normative values maintained in contemporary filmic Bond: Erin Isely (2023) critiques the franchise for only paying lip service to diversity in its casting choices of Moneypenny, M, and Q, while in their case study Lisa J. Hackett, Jo Coghlan, and Huw Nolan discovered that undergraduates felt the representation of Bond girls was “strongly grounded in patriarchal practices”, and concluded that “recent efforts to soften Bond’s hegemonic masculinity [were] seen by students with some scepticism” (2023, 1). In the films Bond is unambiguously an action hero: an aspirational figure whom men want to be and women want to be with. In Fleming’s novels, however, Bond is more human than superhuman, navigating troubles such as feeling his age, falling in and out of love with women, experiencing intense physical suffering, and actively pursuing masochistic scenarios. The negotiation of bodily ills and mental discomforts is crucial to this Bond’s character and Fleming’s narrative voice, in contrast with the unyielding body and opaque mind of filmic Bond.

I position Bond in these early novels as a queer anti-hero, capable of troubling conceptions of the 1950s as hegemonically conservative and opening up space for countercultural thinking. In this, I take my lead from Meg John Barker and Alex Iantaffi, whose work *Life Isn’t Binary: On Being Both, Beyond, and In-Between*, declares that “inviting you to consider life from a non-binary perspective is about shifting our framework away from a rigid either/or perspective, towards both/and possibilities, which embrace paradox and uncertainty” (2019, 16). This seemingly very contemporary understanding of gender and sexuality should not be taken as antithetical when applied to novels from the mid-century, as this ar-

ticle builds on the conception of the post-war era theorised by Heike Bauer and Matt Cook. They draw a distinction between the lived experience of individuals and the ideals and ideologies promulgated in press and other media to show that “the 1950s should not be defined only by overtly repressive and conformist attitudes towards gender and sexuality, as queer life sometimes flourished despite persecution” (2012, 2). As such, I put forward a nonconformist and even non-binary reading of Fleming’s Bond, to show how his challenging of outdated models of masculinity and conservative sexual norms creates space for queer joy.

In close readings of two texts, I focus on the torture and recovery scenes of *Casino Royale* and Bond’s relationship with Solitaire in *Live and Let Die* (1954). In the first, I argue for a reading of Bond as gender non-conforming, staking a distance between this new dissident hero and a patriarchal wartime hegemony that fails to dictate manhood in the modern era. In the second, I explore the experimental sexuality of *Live and Let Die*, as the novel presents an alternative to cishet desire and sexual activity, instead proffering an assertion of the pleasure of non-procreative, and even queer, sex.

CASINO ROYALE AND CONTESTING BINARY THINKING

The boyishness of Fleming’s Bond girls is recurringly highlighted in scholarship; as Elizabeth Ladenson comments, and Vesper Lynd’s unfussy appearance and short unpainted nails illustrates in *Casino Royale*, Bond “seems to have a taste for masculine women” (2001, 421). Fleming’s unexpected focus on desirable female masculinity has perhaps overshadowed the tomboyishness of Bond himself, and his precarious relationship to manhood and masculinity. As Ellen Sharman notes, the Bond of the novels in particular “should be re-evaluated as a figure of masculine paradox and tension” (2024, 5), and *Casino Royale* is a prime example. Bond’s manhood, before his capture by Le Chiffre, is achieved through constant iteration of a denigratory attitude towards Lynd and womanhood at large: they cannot do a good job (Fleming 2012a, 33), are emotional (ibid., 35), and exist to be “ravaged, never pandered to or pursued” (ibid., 53). That he is particularly vituperative in these assertions belies an anxiety about what it might mean for a woman to have the traits that he values in himself, and are required by his employer.

With numbers of women in male-dominated professions on the rise between the two World Wars (Braybon and Summerfield 1987) – compounded by encouragement in girls’ magazines to train and take up careers – and 92 percent of single women in employment in 1947 (Jennings 2007, 47), Bond’s censure re-

flects a general anxiety about women in the workplace post-war and the possibility of men being replaced. This was also true of the forces, as 12% of British military strength resided in women's services (De Groot and Peniston-Bird 2000, 101). The removal of the marriage bar in 1949 also allowed women who were married to continue working; the Report of the Royal Commission on Population of 1949 which came out in favour of this shows that even official documentation acknowledged that "traditional 'normality' could not be reimposed" on women (Thane 2003, 208).¹ Indeed, there are several parallels between Lynd and Bond which indicate her equal footing with 007: his speaking French fluently with slang (Fleming 2012a, 57), and she like a native (ibid., 33); the great pleasure they both take in ordering their mound of hot toast that Lynd dubs "schoolgirl-ish" (ibid., 69); and the way that a cane chair can make both of them scream – Vesper at the way that it marks her black velvet dress (ibid., 66), and Bond during the torture sequence (ibid., 141). The revelation that Lynd is a double agent marks another parallel with Bond as she becomes more than an equal – an unseen antagonist who gets the better of him by being one step ahead at all times.

The threatened castration by Le Chiffre symbolises another likeness with Lynd as Bond faces both the threat of sexual violence and the risk of being "unmanned". Recklessly pursuing the kidnappers in the hopes of rescuing Lynd, Bond is himself captured, this conclusion foreshadowed by his earlier tirade against his fellow spy: "[f]or Vesper to fall for an old trick like that and get herself snatched and probably held to ransom like some bloody heroine in a strip cartoon" (ibid., 126). The similarity of their choices positions Bond here, too, as "[t]he silly bitch" (ibid.): his heroics are shown to be naïve and ineffectual, as this figurative emasculation leads to an attempt at literal unmanning. Forced to submit to the orders of Le Chiffre and his henchmen, Bond is "utterly and absolutely in their power" (ibid., 139) and must strip naked – his jacket having been cut from his body – and endure genital torture. With Lynd's skirt having being tied above her head in an exposing and disempowering humiliation, and then relegated to another room where Bond "could imagine how she was being used by the two gunmen" (ibid., 148), the parallel treatment between the pair continues, working to lessen the gendered distinction that Bond has tried to enforce.

1 This is not to say that great changes were made in favour of gendered equality in the world of work in the wake of World War II, only that men might have been concerned that this was the case. As Elizabeth Wilson (1980) shows, wartime progress towards gender equality was transitory, and much legislation was rescinded during the 1950s.

The torture sequence, presented in sexual terms, becomes a penetration that Le Chiffre employs to emasculate Bond. Fleming's description of the torture – where Bond's "whole body arched in an involuntary spasm" and "his head flew back with a jerk showing the taut muscles in his neck" (ibid., 144) – creates a masochistic scenario through which suffering becomes pleasure. An echo of this threat of sexual assault occurs during the attempt on Bond's life at the casino table, wherein "he felt something hard press into the base of his spine, right into the cleft between his two buttocks" (ibid., 104). The threat against his life is first and foremost a threat against his body, both the gun and the carpet beater working to annihilate Bond through the destruction of his genitalia. These penetrations further erase the difference between Bond and Lynd, as Leo Bersani explains in psychoanalytic terms how "[a] man being penetrated by a man is certainly not without its subversive potential: nothing is more threatening to the culturally enforced boundaries between men and women than a man participating in the *jouissance* of real or fantastic female sexuality" (1996, 121-122). Bond does seem to be participating in the feminising *jouissance* of penetration, which goes hand in hand with the shattering of his masculine identity, as he enters the "sexual twilight where pain turned to pleasure and where hatred and fear of the torturers turned to a masochistic infatuation" (Fleming 2012a, 146-7). Sex and death comingle in this scene to forcefully change Bond's gendered embodiment and the sense of self to which it is (assumedly) intrinsically tied. Indeed, Le Chiffre frames his assault as a psychic as well as physical castration: it is equally "the *thought* that your manhood is being gradually destroyed" (ibid., 149, my emphasis) that spells torture for Bond. The double meaning of "manhood" in this exchange shows that at this point in the text, masculinity and the penis are closely interrelated, and Le Chiffre understands these two things as being mutually constitutive, the one not existing without the other.

Unexpectedly, however, the penis is not of huge importance to Bond's psychic manhood: assured by the doctor that he "will recover completely and none of the functions of [his] body will be impaired" (ibid., 162), his genitalia goes unscathed but there is nevertheless a crucial transformation in his perspective. The assault catalyses a philosophical and ethical interpolation wherein he questions not only his own role in MI6, but the patriarchal system that organises British society and the new global state. The "culturally enforced boundaries between men and women" that Bersani describes are indeed broken down by the pleasure Bond takes in the penetrative torture ("[t]o be penetrated is to abdicate power", Bersani [1987, 212] also asserts, aligning power and manhood) but this is

not the loss of masculinity it is made out to be, only the loss of a rigid construct of what it is to be a man. Bond is not feminised, but instead made into a new kind of man – one for whom identity is not predicated upon the primordially of the penis. From his sickbed, Bond interrogates binaristic thinking, arguing that individuals cannot be split into good and evil, heroes and villains, and presents his case with childlike clarity: “[t]he hero kills two villains, but when the hero Le Chiffre starts to kill the villain Bond and the villain Bond knows he isn’t a villain at all, you see the other side of the medal. The villains and heroes get all mixed up” (Fleming 2012a, 170).² His new awareness is explicitly a critique of patriotism, which can no longer justify rigid delineations of national and ethical borders: “this country-right-or-wrong business is getting a little out of date [...] History is moving pretty quickly these days” (ibid., 170-1). It is therefore crucial that this new perspective comes in the post-war era, a time when the nation was re forging its identity in the wake of catastrophic and hitherto unknown levels of death and destruction.

Political allegiances and national borders were evolving on a wider global scale, and so too were social norms within individual societies. As a spy, Bond occupies a liminal position: an individual, isolated from others through the secrecy of his role, and yet representative of the nation as a whole. Mathis’s equation of these two aspects of Bond’s identity, as he contests Bond’s intention to resign, reveals their discord: a resignation would mean “a murder and a suicide with one bullet!”, “ma[king] a big hole in your country and your conscience at the same time” (ibid., 174). It is, in fact, Bond’s identity as an individual that interferes with his responsibility to his nation. This evolving sense of himself, separate from his patriotic duty, is what emerges from Le Chiffre’s torture: “[y]ou are not equipped, my dear boy, to play games with adults and it was very foolish of your nanny in London to have sent you out here with your bucket and spade” (ibid., 144-5). The war in which Bond had proven himself is connoted with childish games, and he now feels the need to adapt to post-war life: taking up Le Chiffre’s phrasing to assert that he must move past the infantile “Red Indians” (ibid., 169) stage, Bond seeks to adopt a new mode of masculinity appropriate to the modern age. As Christine Berberich describes the global context in which Bond appeared, “Britain had entered the war in 1939 as a world power; it emerged, se-

2 This meditation echoes the writing of Alfred Kinsey, who also lamented binary social constructs in 1953, and whose work I will return to in the second part of this article: “sexual behavior is either normal or abnormal, socially acceptable or unacceptable, heterosexual or homosexual; and many persons do not want to believe that there are gradations in these matters from one to the other extreme” (Kinsey 1998, 469).

verely shaken, six years later, confronted by its decreasing status in the world and the almost immediate dissolution of the Empire” (2012, 13). It seems fitting, then, that he undergoes a destabilising psychic castration rather than a consolidating puberty, signalling his coming into consciousness in England’s transitional 1950s.

The pre-war period is appealed to through an invocation of the *paterfamilias* figure, but this no longer applies, nor appeals, to Bond. A type from the nineteenth-century, harkening back to a construction of the family as a microcosmic version of English governance at the height of colonialism, the *paterfamilias* represented nostalgia for a form of respectable, authoritative, and powerful manhood. This image – of the father as unquestioned head of the household who acted as judge, jury, and executioner – had fallen out of currency even by the 1920s according to Laura King (2015, 142), but Mathis’s evocation speaks to the drive towards conservatism as a way of regaining normality in the 1950s. Modelled on imperial power structures, however, this mode of fatherhood was becoming hopelessly outdated by the mid-century. Mathis misguidedly summons an imaginary family in need of protection: “there’s still plenty for you to do. And you’ll do it. And when you fall in love and have a mistress or a wife and children to look after, it will seem all the easier” (Fleming 2012a, 175). Heteronormative relationships are presented as the unquestionable impetus – and reward – behind a man’s desire to fight for his country. In this equation, the nation *is also* the husband’s wife and children whose defence drives his behaviour and constructs his manhood. But, as Mathis’s concession to his having “a mistress or a wife” shows, the standard story no longer applies: “[t]his is not a romantic adventure story in which the villain is finally routed and the hero is given a medal and marries the girl” (ibid., 145). Indeed, Bond is not motivated by this *paterfamilias* role, but represents its opposite: as Claire Hines describes, Fleming “joked that he used his writing to escape the anxiety brought about by his imminent marriage and fatherhood at the age of forty-three, after years of bachelordom, creating James Bond as a fictional ego ideal” (2018, 15). A conflict exists, then, between the outdatedness of this ideal and the possibility of a new form of masculinity for the hero.

In terms of what Bond’s new masculinity looks like, critics disagree over whether his break from hegemonic ideals results in empowerment or crisis. Jaime Hovey argues persuasively for his manhood to be read as subversive in the film adaptations of the 1960s. Reading a powerful resistance to pre-war gender norms, she describes Bond – particularly when played by Sean Connery – as a “suave spy whose exaggeratedly masculine character emerges from the Cold War

as one fashioned to resist both national and feminine domestication” (2005, 53). Hovey goes on to claim that the “mobilization of his gender as if it signified sub-cultural resistance, makes his gender and sexuality subcultural” (ibid.). For Hovey, Bond’s excessive and stylised masculinity echoes that of butch women in the postwar era, whose gender expression – rather than seeking to imitate a purportedly innate manhood – drew attention to its inherent performativity. This Bond therefore appears as fully in control, his masculinity self-consciously curated. Her perspective is justified by the time difference between the novels and the films, as Connery’s Bond plays to the baby boomers who came of age in the late 1950s and 60s, his rebelliousness and charm chiming with the feelings of an unprecedentedly large youth culture (Hall 2000, 138). In the novels, however, Bond’s gender identity is less aspirational: *Casino Royale* maintains bathetic moments of realism, puncturing the superheroic Bond of the films: after all, “[t]hese things don’t happen in real life” (Fleming 2012a, 145). Each victory is punctuated by a failure where he requires the help of another: his loss of millions of dollars on the table means he needs a second chance from Mathis and Leiter, and upon falling into Le Chiffre’s trap and being captured alongside Lynd, he is only rescued by chance by a SMERSH agent who does not see him as a threat. In contrast with Hovey, Sharman contends that Bond’s “sense of masculine power is shaken to its core, leaving him extremely vulnerable” (4), citing his feminisation – specifically his “transition into a willing subject of the erotic gaze” (12) while swimming at the beach and Lynd’s subsummation of his position as she sacrifices herself in a heroic suicide – as symbolising a reduced position in *Casino Royale*.

To construct a productive queer reading of the novel, therefore, I interpret Bond’s crisis of masculinity as the path to empowerment, rather than debilitation. The attack on his all-too-human body, and the realisation of its fragility, invites his transcendence of its boundaries rather than confinement within them, as shown by his ability to interrogate the patriarchal, imperialist norms that had previously organised his perspective. “Don’t let me down and become human yourself [...] we would lose such a wonderful machine” (Fleming 2012a, 176), Mathis warns after Bond’s attempt to resign, but this fear of his becoming human is to misread the situation: it would be more accurate to describe Bond as verging on the posthuman. No longer just an unthinking “wonderful machine”, Bond is newly cognisant that his is a prosthetic rather than innate manhood, his body supplemented by external elements including his guns, cars, and Double-0 status as a government agent, to fashion a full identity. In this, he is one of Donna Haraway’s cyborgs – “a creature in a postgender world” (2016, 8) whose existence de-

nounces the dualism that organises Western society into meaningless categories of man and woman. Like the cyborg, Bond's body is not naturally occurring but produced by his society; as Haraway puts it, "[n]ature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other" (ibid., 9). The affirmation of his manhood by a medical team in the wake of psychological torture means that his recovery presents echoes of gender affirming surgeries: the skin graft required to cover the scar on his hand parallels the grafts from forearm or thigh required for phalloplasty – the surgical re/construction of a penis for cis and trans men. The reconstitution of his body, illustrating the fragility and plurality of sex and gender, allows him to take up a non-binary perspective, able to see the world through Barker and Iantaffi's "both/and possibilities, which embrace paradox and uncertainty" (16). This perspective is established not only through Bond's gendered embodiment, but also through the exercising of his desire, as the next section will explore.

LIVE AND LET DIE AND QUEER SEXUALITY

"My books are not 'engaged'. I have no message for suffering humanity [...] They are written for warm-blooded heterosexuals in railway trains, airplanes or beds", Fleming claimed (qtd. in Chapman 2018, 205). As well as his wilful oversight in purportedly targeting only "warm-blooded heterosexuals", men whose jet-setting lifestyle mirrors Bond's own, to the exclusion of the lesbian reader, Fleming's assertion does show an "engaged" position.³ In stating that sex does not cause suffering but joy between two consenting individuals, and advocating for the pleasure that can and should therefore be taken from reading his books, Fleming appears to be objecting to moralism. This is indeed a political position that he takes up, although perhaps inadvertently. Audre Lorde would dub the erotic a vehicle of power in 1978, describing how the personal is crucial to social change, in that the identity and actions of individuals inform larger society. She writes:

Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning in our lives. And this is a grave responsibility projected from within each of us, not to settle for the conve-

3 Fleming's refusal to acknowledge her does not, of course, refute the existence of the lesbian reader, especially considering his inclusion of lesbian characters in the novels. These include Rosa Klebb in *From Russia, With Love* (1957), and Tilly Masterton, Pussy Galore, and the latter's lesbian organisation, "The Cement Mixers", in *Goldfinger* (1959).

nient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe. (2007, 57)

Fleming's writing of sex – specifically that which falls outside of “the conventionally expected, [and] the merely safe” in the 1950s – can indeed empower his readers, and not only those “warm-blooded heterosexuals” he pinpoints. His presentation of free love between consenting adults has political implications, and prefigures twenty-first century advocacy, as I will show in my reading of *Live and Let Die*.

To build upon my productive queer reading of Bond, I identify subversive desire and its corresponding sex acts as part and parcel of his gender non-conformity, as he flouts hegemonic family structures in favour of non-procreative sexuality. Bond's queer sexuality begins with a refutation of heteronormative imperatives. In contrast with the paterfamilias image acting as motivation and model in Mathis's assertion in *Casino Royale*, in *Live and Let Die* the gender and sexual norms of the paterfamilias are consistently shown to be repulsive. Rather than a reward for a life spent in harness for one's country, growing old with a wife and boasting about your offspring is an empty – and even repellent – fate. Driving up Florida's Central Avenue, Bond catches “a whiff of the atmosphere that makes the town the ‘Old Folks Home’ of America” (Fleming 2012b, 167), the olfactory phrasing amplifying his disgust. There is little dignity in the accomplishment of these elderly people's graduation from the world of work into continuous leisure time: “everywhere, a prattling camaraderie, a swapping of news and gossip, a making of folksy dates for the shuffleboard and the bridge-table, a handing round of letters from children and grandchildren, a tut-tutting about prices in the shops and the motels” (ibid., 168). Bond adds to their regression into childish talk and games a depiction of deteriorating appearances. His gaze lingers on ageing bodies: “the stringy, collapsed chests and arms of the men displayed to the sunshine in their Truman shirts. The fluffy, sparse balls of hair on the women showing the pink scalp” (ibid., 167). It is not just growing older that Bond finds grotesque, but specifically participation in heteronormative narratives, as his concomitant reaction to an advertisement for maternity clothes shows:

“Stutz-Heimer & Block,” it said, “it's new! Our anticipation department, and after! Clothes for chips (1-4) and twigs (4-8).”

Bond groaned. "Let's get away from here," he said. "This is really beyond the call of duty". (ibid., 169)

The display of elderly men and women, compounded with the saccharine image of pregnancy and parenthood, indicates a hellish cyclicity. The euphemistic use of "anticipation" here implies an inescapable fate, as the years of parents' lives become instead the years of children's youths, but it also points towards the anticipation of one's 'second childhood' when growing older and becoming senile. Solitaire's mocking reference to going dancing with the "Kids and the Kubs" (ibid., 151), a seniors' softball team whose members must be over 75 years of age, also invokes this fear of infantilisation rather than gravitas in old age.

Participation in this timeline goes "beyond the call of duty", or beyond what Bond understands as part of his national role. In the post-war era, marriage and fatherhood should not be included in the job description of a man who serves his country, to his mind. Dana Luciano has termed this systemic organisation of human life chronobiopolitics, or "the sexual arrangement of the time of life" (2007, 9) of entire populations. As Elizabeth Freeman describes it:

In a chronobiological society, the state and other institutions, including representational apparatuses, link properly temporalized bodies to narratives of movement and change. These are teleological schemes of events or strategies for living such as marriage, accumulation of health and wealth for the future, reproduction, childrearing, and death and its attendant rituals. (2010, 4)

Fleming's image of growing old after establishing a familial legacy is a state-sponsored timeline – but one that Bond refutes. This resistance means he disrupts the heteronormative narrative of progress and purpose, his body not "bound into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation" (ibid., 3). Against monogamous family life organised around children, Bond instead stands for promiscuity and sex outside of marriage. Since his behaviour is non-procreative and non-marital, it runs counterculturally and threatens established norms. Within the context of the 1950s, therefore, as David Cannadine claims, "the Bond novels can be seen as a sustained attack on conventional morality, and as a powerfully-articulated argument in favour of those changing attitudes towards sexual behaviour which many of his critics regarded as the most telling symptom of a society 'in decline'" (1979, 49). Post-war reforms had

introduced birth control (or “family planning”) under the welfare state, manuals for sex education proliferated and showed a rising horror of celibacy whilst stating the necessity of sexual activity for healthy minds and bodies, and women had been granted additional rights to divorce (Wilson 1980, 94). These legal changes highlight a sea-change in the increasing sexual freedom of women, as well as men, in a society that was simultaneously attempting to impose a higher level of conservatism than had been seen during the wartime. As Lesley Hall argues, the 1950s were “a period of instability rather than unthinking smug conventionality” (147), and it is this instability to which Fleming’s novels contribute.

The relationship that Bond has with Solitaire is reflective of this counter-cultural move away from sex occurring only in monogamous marriage. When Solitaire is introduced, it is explained that this is not her real name but a moniker defining her sexuality: she “will have nothing to do with men” (Fleming 2012b, 86). Mr. Big is incorrect, however, as her refusal does not encompass all men, only those who seek a specific form of heterosexual relationship with her. He explains his desire: “[s]he can divine the truth in people. That is why she is to be my wife. She is too valuable to remain at liberty. And,’ he continued blandly, ‘it will be interesting to see our children” (ibid., 86). The relationship that Solitaire refuses is therefore one which entails marriage and child-bearing: similar to Mathis’s conception in *Casino Royale*, Mr. Big’s language equates “man” with both “husband” and “father”. After his epiphany in *Casino Royale*, Bond does not make the same association. On the train at the beginning of his and Solitaire’s escape, he wonders: “[w]as it true what The Big Man had said, that she would have nothing to do with men? He doubted it. She seemed open to love and to desire. At any rate he knew she was not closed to him” (ibid., 125). Bond establishes himself as different from other men, firstly because he does not offer marriage and parenthood to his romantic partners, only “love and desire”, and secondly in his capacity to recognise a distinction between what it is to be a man, husband, or father.

Here Fleming subverts the common association of women with domesticity and entrapment, highlighted by Lynne Segal as she writes that in the best-selling books of the 1950s, “women are never to be trusted but treated as part of the system trying to trap, tame and emasculate men” (1988, 80). Instead, he has both Solitaire and Bond looking for a romantic connection without any desire to start a family together. Their priority is the pleasure that they can share, without recourse to the production of children or the gaze of society. Solitaire anticipates Bond’s horror at Florida’s ageing population (“it’s a terrifying sight, all these old people with their spectacles and hearing-aids and clicking false-teeth [Fleming 2012b, 149]) and needles him over the possibility of his acceptance of this life-

style: “[y]ou’ll love it’, she smiled maliciously at Bond. ‘You’ll probably want to settle down there and be an “Oldster” too’” (ibid., 150). Her derision is a test, as she wants to draw out his intentions and ensure they align with her own: her sarcastic tone belies the real fear behind their conversation: that he might want to “settle down with [her] and grow old gracefully in St Petersburg” (ibid).

Appropriately then, the encounters occurring between Bond and Solitaire show a navigation of activities that run counter to sexual norms. In contrast to *Casino Royale*, prior to Bond’s assault by Le Chiffre, where it is described how he “wanted to see tears and desire in [Lynd’s] remote blue eyes and to take the ropes of her black hair in his hands and bend her long body back under his” (Fleming 2012a, 118), the sexual activity between Bond and Solitaire shows less pleasure taken in male dominance and more in shared power play. Fleming writes the following interaction when they are alone together on the train:

He pressed her up against the swaying wall and held her there. She took his face between her two hands and held it away, panting. Her eyes were bright and hot. Then she brought his lips against hers again and kissed him long and lasciviously, as if she was the man and he the woman (Fleming 2012b, 138).

Here, Solitaire’s desire to have nothing to do with men is figuratively upheld, as she takes on a man’s role and kisses Bond as if he were a woman. This cross-identification allows for the distinction between men’s and women’s sexuality to be erased: Solitaire’s desire for Bond is weighted equally with his for her. Indeed, Fleming’s advocacy for sexual freedom extended to women as well as men: “[s]ince it is impossible to suppress the weaknesses of mankind, I would at least put an honest face on the problem, and do something to release the *homme moyen sensuel*, or *femme* for the matter of that, from some of their burden of shame and sin” (Cannadine, 49).

Fleming’s reasoning coheres with that of sexological pioneer Alfred Kinsey, whose normalisation of sexuality outside of wedlock – including masturbation, “petting” between adolescents, and homosexuality – worked to increase tolerance and acceptance across the English-speaking world. Also writing in 1953, the same year as *Casino Royale* was published, Kinsey stated that “[i]n one or another of the cultures of the world, nearly every type of sexual behavior has been condemned, while in other cultures the same activities have been considered desirable sources of pleasure and socially valuable” (1998, 320). His scale of sexual

identity, ranging from 0 to 6 where 0 is exclusively heterosexual, 6 exclusively homosexual, and 1 to 5 encompass bisexualities, revolutionised cultural conceptions of sexuality. Fleming's description of the erotic cross-identification between Solitaire and Bond seems to intersect with Kinsey's theories: the conditional – "as if she was" – creates a palimpsestic identity as both partners retain their genders whilst playing the role of another. Here, queerness appears in the slippage between gender and role. Jonathan Dollimore's (1996) example of a bisexual scenario to illustrate the pleasure of cross-identification is useful here. He describes how the third participant in a threesome has their pleasure enhanced exponentially when watching their male and female partners having sex. By imagining themselves not only in the positions of the man in an active role – fucking, to use Dollimore's vocabulary – and the woman in a passive role – being fucked – the third person can go further and enjoy the idea of being fucked like a man, or fucking like a woman. Multiple identifications are the route to heightened ecstasy, and are also necessarily queer as they comprise a whole gamut of sexual pairings.

The way this sexual exploration distorts clear distinctions between man and woman upsets not only Mr. Big's definition of Solitaire as potential wife and the mother of his children, but continues the destabilisation of hegemonic manhood begun in *Casino Royale*. With the unravelling of fixed gender roles, Bond and Solitaire's bodies also become unfixed: instead of centring on the genitals, sexual contact between them takes place through the use of other body parts. On the train, for example, the pair cannot sleep together as Bond's hand is injured: "[c]urse this arm, I can't hold you properly or make love to you" (Fleming 2012b, 139). As in *Casino Royale*, the penis proves oddly unimportant, and it is his hand which Bond needs to have sex. The narrative reiterates, along with Bond's reported speech, that he "cursed the broken hand that prevented him exploring her body, taking her" (ibid., 138), further emphasising the hand and its fingers which he uses as his fundamental sexual tool. Instead, Solitaire possesses the phallic organ, with Bond "free[ing] his right hand and put[ting] it between their bodies, feeling her hard breasts, each with its pointed stigma of desire" (ibid.). The penis is displaced entirely, and its focal hardness taken on instead by Solitaire's body, while Bond correspondingly finds "the pounding of his blood softening" (ibid., 139) in response to her kiss. Here, the hand shows the plasticity of sex roles: although acknowledged as an active sexual tool, it can also play the passive, its palm penetrated by Solitaire's "hard breasts".

There exists between this couple an element of prosthetic masculinity, their sexual roles decoupled from their sexed bodies to make space for more

fluid experiences of desire. Hines reports how Fleming wrote that the target of his books “lay somewhere between the solar plexus and, well, the upper thigh” (18), and this euphemistic phrasing muddies the waters, blurring the boundaries of where the genitals begin and end and how the reader’s body might respond in a variety of ways to the stimulating experience of Fleming’s novels. Is the hand – considering Bond’s hand in this instance – in this zone between the solar plexus and the upper thigh? Can it include prosthetic additions to the body, such as sex toys? Bond goes on to comment that “we’ll have to be up at four in the morning anyway. So there simply isn’t time to begin making love to you now” (Fleming 2012b, 139). An over-exaggeration of the duration of heterosexual sex, perhaps, for the Bond of the books who is no superhero, but less so for an encounter between two women. One study, for instance, suggests that while heterosexual couples average sexual encounters of 15 to 30 minutes, and that penile-vaginal intercourse lasts less than 15 minutes, lesbian couples reported 30 to 45 minute durations, and recorded twice as many sessions longer than two hours than their mixed-sex counterparts (Blair and Pukall 2014).

Fleming’s inclusion, or at least suggestion, of differently coded sexual activities and body parts works to recognise sex acts outside of the heteronormative as pleasurable and legitimate. It is not a carnivalesque and therefore temporary stepping away from the norms, either, that he presents, as this sexual organisation of the body continues until the conclusion of the novel. Bond protests still that “I shan’t be able to make love with only one arm” but this is coyness overturned by Solitaire’s riposte: “What about my back?” Having been dragged over the coral and her back injured in the final action sequence, Solitaire “smile[s] innocently” to highlight the fact that the sex they will have is not going to be missionary style as if on a wedding night, but something more experimental. Bodily difference is retained in their finally realised sexual activity, as alternative sexual acts are signalled by the “open sensuality” (Fleming 2012b, 307) in Solitaire’s eyes.

CONCLUSION: QUEERING BOND IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In the early Nineties, Christine Bold queried the image of the archetypal Bond reader by introducing the overlooked reality of women as part of Fleming’s readership. Referring to Kingsley Amis’s statement that “[w]e don’t want to have Bond to dinner or go golfing with Bond or talk to Bond. We want to be Bond”, Bold pushes back on his assumed “we”. She continues, “[r]eading as a woman [...], I have no wish to be Bond, nor does any community of which I imagine myself

part need him as a hero” (1993, 313). Bold sees herself responding to the surprising agency of Fleming’s women characters, who frequently know more than Bond and are integral parts of the functioning governments, both at home and abroad. Her image of Bond, however, in contrast with her progressive reading of the Bond girls, remains traditional – bound by the regimented gender roles (and essentialist bodies) of second wave feminism. As her use of Laura Mulvey illustrates, Bold describes how the novels proffer “an invitation to women to submit to the patriarchal gaze, identify with James Bond, masculinize themselves as spectators of female objectification, and thus ‘other’ their own womanhood” (ibid., 322). I wonder then, where does this leave the queer woman reader, if her attraction to other women has already left her “masculinized” even before her encounter with Fleming’s novels?

From my own standpoint – as the aforementioned queer woman reader – Bond’s appeal exists in spite of (or perhaps, because of) his unstable and volatile relationships with women, his negotiation of gendered identity, and the impossibility of living up to these expectations. Instead of looking for resistance against masculinism in Fleming’s women characters, I advocate for the kinship that a queer reader can find in Bond himself and his antiheroic and oppositional masculinity. Hovey’s conclusions about “why dykes like 007” in the film franchise – that Bond’s stylised and exaggerated masculinity shows up the unnaturalness of gendered performance – can be extended to the novels. In fact, the queer baiting of recent instalments, and their re-enforcement of heteronormativity, as theorised by Isely, contrasts with the queer potential located in Fleming’s writing about men’s bodies and desires.

Bond’s interrogation of binarism shows a history of resistance all the more necessary in the cultural imaginary of the 2020s amidst a shift to conservatism: when queer existence itself is politically charged, and the validity of trans lives debated in parliament. I have demonstrated firstly how Bond’s character is founded on a refusal of post-war masculine ideals in *Casino Royale*: that he challenges imperial legacies and the patriarchal hierarchy categorising women as lesser than men by showing Vesper’s capability, and even superiority, over Bond as a spy. These conclusions allow me to claim that Bond’s gender nonconformity lays the foundations for continuing sexual experimentation and queer joy in *Live and Let Die*. Through close textual analysis, I thread a productive queer reading that stands up to misogynistic and essentialist conceptions of the novels. Bond does not have to be a great seductor or effortlessly successful in his work to appeal to queer readers – his troubled relationship to masculinity and resultant

opening to alternative sex acts and unashamed desire aligns with our own experiences of queerness in the twenty-first century.

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