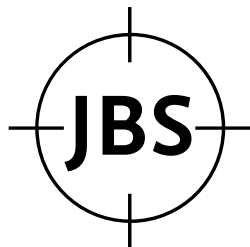


Ideological Instability and the Crisis of Capitalism in *From Russia with Love*

JULIAN GROSS

In espionage fiction, the villains are usually known from the outset; they are agents of the enemy of the state.¹ Occasionally, the plot involves their identification, but the problem is to undo their machinations. The enemy conspiracy must be thwarted by a skilful master spy who prevails against overwhelming odds through sharp wits, physical fitness, and technological advantage. The nationality of the main villains shifts in accordance with the foreign policies of the Western imperial powers, the US and the UK (Mandel 1984, 61). Works like Phyllis Lassner's *Espionage and Exile* (2016), in which she analyses the espionage genre as an amalgamation of "propaganda, popular entertainment and cultural history" (3), demonstrate the potency of espionage fiction as a politically and socially engaged form. The character James Bond has survived its author and through its immense adaptability remains an immanent cultural force, which has been impacted by and itself impacted historical and political formations. Michael Denning has called the spy novel "the war novel of the Cold War" (2013, 212) and none might be more easily recognisable as such than Ian Fleming's *From Russia with Love* (ibid.). Despite the moral ambiguity that espionage entails, Fleming's mystifying inclinations might have readers believe that the world of global capitalism is still essentially a struggle between "good" and "evil",² in which the "good"

1 This is one of the characteristics of the genre that sets it apart from detective fiction, in which the main objective is the identification of the villain, not to manipulate or control their actions (see Hepburn 2009, 210).



THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
James Bond Studies

Volume 9 · Issue 1 · Spring 2026

ISSN 2514-2178

DOI: 10.24877/jbs.151

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is sometimes compelled to resort to “evil” means. However, *From Russia with Love* is “not merely an object of Fleming’s time, neither a ‘relic of the cold war’ nor a ‘dinosaur’” (Kinane 2017, 3), because the lasting significance of James Bond in popular consciousness continues to shape the perception of the Soviet Union and communism in general. Fleming’s interest in shaping the ideological message of his Bond novels to fit the propagandistic purposes of persuading his readership of the evils of Soviet communism is indicated in his writing of *From Russia with Love*, which is representative of a broader campaign of British cultural imperialism during the Cold War.³ Denning observed that, in the 1980s, “tales of spies are no longer part of popular culture; they are at its center” (221), dominating the entire field of popular fiction. Aided by the rapid growth of the cultural

2 In thrillers, as Fleming notes, “heroes are white, the villains black, and the heroines a delicate shade of pink” (Fleming 1963, n.p.).

3 Other authors, like Eric Ambler, have an equally clear political perspective and know that bourgeois society and commodity production are responsible, but fall prey to cynicism and believe that nothing can be done about it. Ambler’s *The Mask of Dimitrios* (1939) – Bond’s choice of reading material in *From Russia with Love* – paints a picture of the 1930s, in which the imminent danger of World War II and the dishonesty of the globalised world serve as a warning of the Janus-faced character of capitalism. In the novel, a writer of detective fiction, Latimer, is violently stripped of his naive illusions about the rationality of the ways in which society is structured and thrust into a reality that is marked by violence and driven by profit maximisation. The villain, Dimitrios, is revealed to be a perfect capitalist that is merely playing by the rules of a game “as logical and consistent [...] as the poison gas called Lewisite and the shattered bodies of children killed in the bombardment of an open town” (Ambler 2023, 218). Ambler outlines the conditions in which “the dangerous class” of the Dimitrios type thrive, leaving his readers with the question: “[b]ut what is the remedy?”. The remedy is to change the conditions by way of a socialist revolution that does away with a system that needs reactionary ideologies to divide and rule its oppressed and use minorities as scapegoats for the miserable conditions that result from the crisis of capitalism. This interpretation is strengthened by offhand remarks throughout the novel, such as a warning that the spy Marukakis might have “communist tendencies”, to which Latimer replies that “all the communists I have ever met have been highly intelligent” (ibid., 54). However, Ambler does not follow through with this realisation. Having gained his insights, his protagonist finds himself “free and alive, but in a world of frustration” (ibid., 120). This frustration – likely stemming from the realisation of the amount of work required to effect lasting change – Latimer cannot bear and he decides he can live within his worlds of escape (ibid., 264). Nothing changes through the death of one of its master players; the game goes on. Latimer’s conclusion – “[i]t had all been a great waste of time” (ibid., 246) – is emblematic of the kind of leftist fatalism that Ambler may be said to fall prey to. I highly recommend Phyllis Lassner’s more in-depth analysis of the political engagement of Ambler’s work.

industries, popular fiction has increasingly become a major means by which mass consciousness is shaped and transformed (Temirbolat et al. 2016, 5). With his Bond novels, Fleming reinforces what Karl Marx in *Capital* referred to as the naturalisation effect of capitalism: “treating [the bourgeois mode of production] as the eternal natural form of social production” when, in reality, it has a historical and transitory character – which shapes the everyday consciousness of the masses (Marx 1990, 174). Stuart Hall states that the problem of ideology is “to give an account [...] within a materialist theory, of how social ideas [...] grip the minds of masses and become a material force, how a set of ideas comes to dominate the social thinking of a historical bloc, [...] and the languages of practical thought which stabilise a particular form of power and domination, or which reconcile and accommodate the mass of people to their subordinate place” (1986, 29).

My objective is an ideological analysis of *From Russia with Love* within a materialist theoretical framework, which gives an account of its role in the maintenance of bourgeois hegemony. However, a close-reading of the text with a Marxist theoretical framework reveals severe instabilities in its ideological messaging.⁴ While *From Russia with Love* is steeped in consumer capitalism and Red Scare politics, it also contains multiple contradictory elements. The almost comical, or even supernatural, evil of the novel’s SMERSH antagonists could be said to topple over into a parody of Red Scare tactics. The sexual politics similarly fall short of providing a coherent image of Bond’s heroic heterosexuality, which is destabilised not only by stark movements between patriarchal power and limp failure in “pimping for England”, but also by the intensity of his homosocial relationships with characters like Darko Kerim, a “wonderful man who had carried the sun with him” (Fleming 2024, 115, 214). These contradictions, I will argue, represent the dilemmas posed by the split subjectivity imposed by capitalism, and are in turn a reflection of the paradoxical nature of capitalism itself.

To this end, I will first outline the capitalist ideologies contained in *From Russia with Love* and Fleming’s social role as an “organic intellectual” in the Gramscian sense, and then explore the various contradictory elements that jeopardise the novel’s ideological persuasiveness. In concentrating on the text of the original novel, I hope to explore the tension with capitalist ideology that accompanies the espionage fiction genre, which reflects and shapes socio-political con-

4 The role of *The Mask of Dimitrios* as literally life-saving literature – as the shield that saves Bond’s heart from a fatal gunshot in *From Russia with Love* – serves as an example of this instability that exists even on an intertextual and metafictional level.

cerns and global anxieties from its emergence to the current day. Before moving on to my interpretation, I feel compelled to clarify my own ideological position, as I agree with Fredric Jameson, who states that we are not able to produce an ideological interpretation from a neutral position (1991, 64). My interpretive approach is shaped by my political activism as part of the Committee for Workers International (CWI), an association of Trotskyist political parties and organisations.

THE PROBLEM OF IDEOLOGY: A MARXIST READING

My analytical approach is informed by Marxist dialectics and historical materialism. Ideology is a thorny issue among academics who consider themselves Marxists. While I share the criticisms levelled at the New Left, whose methodologies have abandoned revolutionary change and produce a thinking of failure, I want to sidestep the discussion about Jameson's historicism and Althusser's anti-historicism and base this analysis on the work of a more foundational Marxist critic, Antonio Gramsci. Some on the left accuse Gramsci of being an idealist dissenter from historical materialism, when he was really defending Marxism from mechanistic or fatalist caricature.⁵ He gave emphasis to the role of the state and conscious human action in shaping historical developments and disparaged notions of automatic determination. Gramsci's imbalance is not entailed by his analysis of the role of the state or the *superstruttura*, but in his understatement of social conditions instead of scrutinising the reciprocity between the two in more detail (Klein 2023, 45). I have chosen Gramsci's ideas as the theoretical framework for my analysis because of the distinctive strength of his notion of "organic ideology" (Gramsci 1978, 4§49). Ideology is defined as a system of class rule (i.e. hegemony) which arranges all ideological elements into a unified system. This complex arrangement makes up the "organic ideology," that successfully articulates or expresses the most essential elements in the ideological discourses of the subordinate or subaltern classes in civil society in a coherent, unified fashion. The class that holds state power and social hegemony does so through economic

5 From May 1930, Gramsci began to develop an extensive programme of political and philosophical research in prison, which is documented in his *Prison Notebooks*. Notebook 4 was dedicated to "Philosophical Notes" and intended to theoretically work through the fundamental concepts of historical materialism in order to place Marxist theory into competition with the most advanced contemporary philosophy and contribute to it by responding to neo-idealist as well as vulgar materialist critical currents. For a more detailed account of Gramsci's work and theories, I recommend Wolfram Klein's *Gramsci: Seine Politischen Ideen* (2023) or Alvaro Bianchi's chapter "Materialism/Idealism" in *Gramsci's Laboratory* (2019).

supremacy and the formation of an organic ideology that naturalises bourgeois society. The function of organic ideology is therefore the reproduction of social relations of production and the generation and maintenance of hegemony. Hall explains that the ideological distortions of which Marx accuses political economy result from its ability to mystify the capitalist process by “substitute[ing] one part of the process as the whole”, by obscuring parts of the circuit of production, consumption, and reproduction (36).

Gramsci defined intellectuals not by their specific activities, but by their social role in the division of labour. Intellectuals are functionaries of the superstructure and play a central role as assistants of the hegemonic class in the private and public domain (12§1). His concept of power is divided into two relations, coercion (*dominio*) and consensus (*direzione*). The state exercises its power over private organisations (such as churches, schools, unions, etc.) and public coercive organisations (such as bureaucracy, military, police, courts, etc.) (ibid.). Hegemonic rule is characterised by a predominance of consensus over coercion, which creates a kind of equilibrium between the hegemonic class and the rest of civil society (Cammatt 1967, 204). Organic intellectuals share the interests of the dominant class and are responsible for the articulation and spreading of organic ideology. They provide personnel for the coercive organs of political society.

Out of Gramsci’s concept of state power maintained by organic ideology evolves Althusser’s notion of the “ideological state apparatuses” (ISA). Althusser calls the aforementioned public organisations the repressive state apparatus, which functions predominantly by violence, and secures by repression the political conditions for the action of the multiple private ISAs (1970, 13). According to Althusser, “[a]ll Ideological State Apparatuses, whatever they are, contribute to the same result: the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation” (ibid., 1). Among the ISA institutions, Althusser lists communications ISA (i.e. the press) and cultural ISA (i.e. literature) (ibid., 12). In this light, Fleming as novelist and journalist is an organic intellectual, a functionary of the private domains of press and literature, who articulates and spreads the ruling ideology of the hegemonic class. As a former British spy with strong ties to the CIA, Fleming’s writing during the Cold War was part of an ideological offensive against Soviet Russia (Moran 2013, 123). The outcome of World War II had left the US ruling class in a global conflict with Stalinism. The Soviet Union represented an alternative economic system, the appeal of which posed a threat to Western imperialism. Cultural imperialism refers to the cultural influence of one hegemonic culture over others, which shapes the perception of the

hegemonic culture by either legitimising its dominance or even making it attractive to subaltern classes. I argue that the depictions of affluent consumerism in the Bond novels make consumer capitalism seem desirable, superior, and preferable to Soviet communism in the eyes of British and foreign readers. The aim is to make Western hegemony, with its associated consumerist values, seem like an enrichment that is threatened by the Eastern enemy.

Bond as an agent of the public domain, which supposedly functions by violence first and ideology second, is an especially interesting object of analysis. As a functionary of the repressive state apparatus, his actions are supposed to embody bourgeois society, in which overt governmental processes are popularly endorsed and publicly ratified by law. As an agent of MI6, he is meant to act as a delegate and in defence of British society. However, espionage necessitates surreptitious activity – theft, secrecy, lies. As a secret agent, he is given the power to act clandestinely and therefore contradicts the myth of bourgeois democracy as a lone operative of covert government action.

JAMES BOND AS AN AGENT OF CAPITALISM

Historically, the espionage genre indulges paranoid nationalist fantasies of invasion and vulnerability and racist stereotyping (Sandberg 2018, 541). Passing itself off as portraying the world as it is, oversimplifying complex geo-political realities in the process, and ultimately seeking to justify the underhand means of espionage with the end of “defending the homeland” (ibid., 547), the genre remains ideologically tendentious and ethically dubious.

This section reads James Bond in the context of the genealogical ancestry of the imperial spy thriller. While *From Russia with Love* also exhibits typically sexist and racist cultural politics, I will focus on the characteristics that mark it as belonging to the era of the Cold War and consumer-capitalist society. James Bond’s image and activities will be shown to render Western capitalist ideology and cultural codes as heroic, especially in opposition to the moral duplicity of characters belonging to the cultural Other of the East. Bond can be read as an agent of capitalism in multiple ways. I will first focus on the novel’s propagandist invocations of “red intrigues” and anti-Soviet motifs (such as work to establish associations of totalitarianism and disloyalty with the Soviet Union) and then move on to its performance of capitalist consumption and the brand narratives embedded in the text.

In 1992, the UN Earth Summit was opened by Roger Moore, who stated that his embodiment of James Bond was fighting “evil men trying to destroy our planet” (qtd. in Harré et al., 17). Ralph Miliband calls Bond one of the quintessential “paragons of anti-Communist virtues” (1969, 226). Reactionary critics like Vincent Canby adore Bond as a “steadfast agent for the military-industrial complex, a friend to the C.I.A. and a triumphant sexist” (qtd. in Miller 2020, 128). *The Guardian* reported that MI6 still delights in the franchise’s free advertising, which assists in recruitment (Cain 2019, n.p.). In the following, I will demonstrate the discursive bias that *From Russia with Love* exhibits textually and examine Fleming’s interest and role in shaping the ideological message of his Bond novels to fit the propagandistic purpose of persuading their readership of the evils of Soviet Communism.

This reference to authorial intention is legitimised by Fleming’s work in the British intelligence sector as journalist and novelist, and his remarkable influence in establishing the public profile of the CIA (Moran, 123). While Bond commentators generally agree that the films are less anti-Soviet in tone,⁶ Fleming’s writing in *From Russia with Love* is:

representative of a broader campaign of British psychological warfare during the early Cold War. Fleming’s voice, in his journalism and his novels, is the voice of British superiority. His narratives, orientalist and ideological, ignore local political realities, concerned only for the maintenance of British power overseas. (Mitchell 2024, 2)

In “Trouble in Cyprus, Riots in Turkey”, David Mitchell lays out Fleming’s active role and complicity in the ethnic cleansing of minorities in Istanbul in the interest of positively influencing public perceptions of intelligence, furthering British geopolitical strategic interests, and contributing to the ideological division between West and East in the Cold War era. Propaganda is accomplished by the selection of right-thinking personnel, who make sure a paper’s policy is to prioritise reports as newsworthy that conform to the interests of the state (Chomsky and Herman 1988, x). Mitchell writes, “[i]f one man embodied this synthesis of secret intelligence and ‘right-thinking’ journalism, it was Ian Fleming – former naval intelligence officer, manager of Kemsley Imperial and Foreign Service, and, in September 1955, ‘Special Correspondent’ of *The Sunday Times* in Istanbul”

6 See, for example, Chapman 2024, 132.

(12). Fleming's eye-witness account of "The Great Riot of Istanbul" is just one example of his skill as propagandist. It deviates heavily from other descriptions of the event as a pogrom against the Greek community of immense savagery. *From Russia with Love* contributes to the creation of the myth of a "riot" and feeds a Cold War conspiracy narrative that communists were behind unrest, strikes, trouble and riots everywhere:

What fools we are making of them in the West! [...] we continue to forge everywhere stealthily ahead – revolution in Morocco, arms to Egypt, trouble in Cyprus, riots in Turkey, strikes in England, great political gains in France – there is no front in the world on which we are not quietly advancing. (Fleming 2024, 36).

However, it is not just through overt anti-Soviet conspiracy narratives that *From Russia with Love* emphasises the binary ideological axis of good and evil in the form of democratic countries in opposition to the Soviet Union. The story's ideological foes that Bond battles – the Soviet menace in the form of SMERSH agents – are directly based on the "real" backdrop of the threat of the Soviet Union. In "Constructing the Other", Katerina Lawless examines how negative bias against Russia manifests through linguistic indicators. She uses quantitative data analysis to determine that the "prevailing ideological message from the Bond movies about Russians and their culture is predominantly negative" (Lawless 2014, 89). If that is the case with the films, it is certainly true for the novels. The Russian men we encounter in *From Russia with Love* are cold and calculating, such as General Kronsteen, who the reader encounters at a chess tournament where he sits "motionless and erect, as malevolently inscrutable as a parrot" and is known to the spectators as "The Wizard of Ice" (Fleming 2024, 56). Exhibiting the same "coldness and cruelty and strength" as her male comrades, Colonel Rosa Klebb is described as a "neuter" whose "psychological and physiological neutrality [...] at once relieved her of so many human emotions and sentiments and desires. Sexual neutrality was the essence of coldness in an individual" (ibid., 65, 64). Yet she displays sexually predatory behaviour towards Corporal Tatiana Romanova, the lure, whose chief characteristics are that she is "a reliable and extremely beautiful girl" (ibid., 66). Unlike the Russian men and Colonel Klebb, who are associated with power and threat, "Russian women are associated with art" (Lawless, 90). Tatiana is a former ballerina, has the looks of "the young Greta Garbo" (Fleming 2024, 69) and when forced to discuss her sex life openly, she reveals that she had three lovers, whose names and ages Klebb makes her disclose

until she breaks down in tears (ibid., 79). The integrity of Russian characters is further undermined by their associate “Red” Grant, who is referred to as “bestial” and “reptilian” with a “drowned and morgue-like face”, and “liked all he heard about the Russians, their brutality, their carelessness of human life and their guile and he decided to go over to them” (ibid., 9, 11, 19). If Bond is a mythical good, his counterpart Grant is a mythical evil, more than just “a narcissist and asexual”, he is described as “an advanced manic depressive whose periods coincided with the full moon” (ibid., 25); he is an almost supernaturally evil, were-wolf-like villain. These exaggerations are part of the strategy of “positive self-representation and negative other presentation” (van Dijk 2001, 103). If freedom, individualism, virility, and loyalty are the values associated with Bond, then totalitarianism, bureaucratic rigidity, and disloyalty are associated with the Soviet Union. Russia is constructed as the Other in opposition to Bond’s explicitly British performance of national identity and patriotic values. As Lawless writes:

Bond’s adventures are steeped in the discourse of Orientalism which positions the East as shadowy, incomprehensible and pathologised in order to justify Western imperialism [...] All the values associated with Bond and, thereby, the West gain dominance over those associated with the villain. Although Russians are not the only ‘other’ featured in Bond films, the examination of the nationalities of Bond’s adversaries reveals that throughout the series Russians were featured on numerous occasions as villains to the British Empire and a threat to the rest of the world. (91)

Bond’s mission as a global agent is to protect the political status quo and guarantee the supremacy of the free world. He does so not just in the name of MI6, but also, much like Fleming himself, in close cooperation with the American secret service. Fleming, as someone who helped with the establishment of the CIA, seems to see himself as a traditional and experienced legitimising force (Bednařík 2015, 50). The ideology of capitalism is articulated as part of the democratic transformation of society, and the global market is a new territory within which Bond continues to save the world from the twisted intentions of the Russian villains, his ideological opposite in the form of Soviet communism.

ALIENATION AND ASPIRATION: BOND AS ADVENTURE CONSUMERIST

At the time of publication, the readership of the Bond novels was made up primarily of lower-middle-class women (Bennett and Woollacott 2003, 16). Accord-

ingly, they must be assessed in relation to the political concerns and consumer interests of this class in the late 1950s. The figure of Bond serves to condense cultural and ideological concerns that centred on the relations between East and West. In the words of Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, he “functioned first and foremost [...] as a Cold War hero, an exemplary representative of the virtues of Western capitalism triumphing over the evils of Eastern communism” (ibid., 16). To represent capitalist consumption as virtuous and aspirational, Fleming incorporates brand narratives that serve as *how-to guides of consumption* for his readers, and a protagonist whose adventures make his consumption seem meaningful, offering an ethical *redemption of consumption*.

In engaging with the texts of popular culture, readers as consumers engage in the story and the embedded brand narratives in that text. Consumers draw on cultural texts for directions in constructing their social reality and “learn to attach social and contextual meaning to products and brands through observing the character relationships with particular carefully placed objects in popular culture media” (Cooper et al. 2010, 558). Consuming and engaging with brand narratives in the Bond novels fuels the readers’ consumer dreams and cultural consumption ideals and gives direction in terms of consumption choices. *From Russia with Love* continues the product placement tradition of earlier Bond novels. From the “thick tube of Palmolive shaving cream” in his sponge bag and the “half-bottle of Calvet claret” he drinks on the BEA airlines flight, to the tools of the spy trade such as the Beretta and the “gleaming aristocrat of a car – an old black basketwork Rolls-Royce *coupé-de-ville*” that chauffeurs him around, everything is branded (Fleming 2024, 113, 119).⁷ Bond’s lifestyle paints a picture of easy consumer affluence, in which the decline of British power has never taken place. Such branding does more than simply place products in the text; it creates a narrative that communicates symbolic dimensions of the brand that align with a specific archetype such as “the lover, the superhero, and the outlaw” (Cooper et al., 564). The brand’s story is the key to creating a valuable brand identity, which readers can transfer into personal narratives through brand consumption (Holt, 2002, 71). This is also reflected in the significantly widespread use of the figure of

7 Fleming declares that his seeming obsession with prestigious brands is purposeful. In “How to Write a Thriller”, he explains that “the constant use of familiar household names and objects” serves to “comfort and reassure the reader” that they share the same reality as the novel’s hero. However, he also seeks to “interest or titillate the reader [...] all the way through, even to his taste buds” and states that a “strong hedonistic streak is always there” to pleasure the reader. He feels no need to hide that he writes “unashamedly, for pleasure and money” and “about what pleases and stimulates me” (see Fleming 1963, n.p.).

Bond in advertising and commodity design (Bennett and Woollacott, 22). For the predominantly female readership of the 1950s, the conspicuousness of James Bond as a romantic hero offers a consumption blueprint to mould their own partners after this image. Understanding the Bond novels as a “build-your-own-Bond” how-to guide underlines Bond’s role as a model for and object of consumption.

Ernest Mandel explains the broad popular appeal of Bond’s adventure-with-style way of life by the everyday reality of the lower middle class in Western Europe and the USA in the late 40s and early 50s:

The crime story is a response to the needs of alienated intellectual and service-industry labour, partially conscious of its alienation but not yet sufficiently so to understand that a scientific explanation of the mysteries of commodity production and bourgeois society is possible, and that collective emancipation is preferable to individual escapism. It is semi-emancipatory, as it is semi-civilized and semi-sublimating. It is bourgeois par excellence, bourgeois medicine for the middle class sufferers from the ills of bourgeois society. (73)

The transition from competitive to monopoly capitalism brought about general developments in bourgeois society: mounting mechanisation, further growth of technology and the productive forces, conveyor-belt labour, mass-produced consumer goods, standardised leisure, conformism, big-city loneliness and small-town boredom, further alienation of the individual, and the new and unforeseen dimensions of that alienation. A daily life of monotony, uniformity, boredom, and frustration came to dominate the lower middle class. Under these circumstances, the need for escapism into vicariously-enjoyed adventures increased. James Bond’s lifestyle may be an unattainable and even infantile fantasy, but it provides what the everyday life of millions of readers is lacking; he is all action, and leads a life defined by luxury living, exotic travel, speed, danger, sexual prowess, physical fitness, technological gadgetry, state secrets and heroism (ibid., 86). Readers are permitted their daydreaming while remaining in the security of a sheltered bourgeois existence (ibid., 71).

On a deeper level, it remains to be shown how such consumption is imparted with meaning. This is achieved via Bond’s public image and the political ideology he embodies. In *From Russia with Love*, Bond is ordered by M to go on a mission to Istanbul, where he is meant to seduce a Soviet cipher clerk called Ta-

tiana Romanova, who is said to have fallen in love with Bond via the photograph on his file and offers a Soviet encryption machine, the Spektor, to MI6 in exchange for emigrating to England with him. From the very beginning, the reader knows that this is a Russian plot to kill a British agent in a way that will humiliate the entire British secret service, whose “strength lies in the myth”, which presents a “hindrance which it would be good to set aside” (Fleming 2024, 44). To destroy the myth would be to “strike at the very motive force of this organisation” (ibid., 45). SMERSH settles on Bond as a target who fulfils their requirements, as he is where the myth resides:

Have they no one who is a hero to the organisation? Someone who is admired and whose ignominious destruction would cause dismay? Myths are built on heroic deeds and heroic people. Have they no such men? [...] There is a man called Bond. (ibid., 46)

It is Bond’s heroic image that is at stake, which is directly tied to the national myth of England. Here, the ideologeme of Bond’s almost messianic, but certainly heroic, dimension comes into play. In defence of the hegemonic principles of Victorian England⁸, Bond acts not in a private capacity, but always in the higher interest of maintaining the balance of global political forces. In the service of the British master narrative, Bond plays the Great Game of international espionage as part of his allegorical representation of, and in defence of, England. However, while writers of spy fiction like Ambler or John le Carré⁹ seek to demystify this game and infuse their narratives with literary realism, Fleming goes the other way. In his romanticisation and sensationalisation of espionage, he articulates that “it is still a heroic and necessary game and one that Bond enjoys playing; nevertheless, it is clearly a deadly serious game, one for professionals not amateurs” (Denning, 215). In “License to Look”, Michael Denning demonstrates how the twofold game of espionage and sportsmanship in Fleming’s novels render Bond’s adventures meaningful as part of his job, because their representation points towards a new ethic of consumption and leisure:

8 I speak of Victorian principles, because Bond defends an image of Britain that has already ceased to exist, that of an Empire at the height of its power, whose expansionist ambitions he nevertheless tries to further.

9 John le Carré called Bond an “international gangster” lacking “all political context” and driven by a “consumer-goods ethic” (qtd. in “Malcolm Muggeridge and John le Carré” 1966): a person for whom ordinary objects were transformed by the magic of espionage to induce materialistic pleasure.

Fleming's adventures are really tales of leisure, tales where leisure is not packaged, commodified 'holiday', filling up a space of 'time off' from work, an acceptable moment to 'kill time', but is an adventure, a meaningful time, a time of life and death – in the words of *From Russia with Love*, a killing time" (ibid., 218)

Denning accounts for the relation between ideologies and narrative codes by stating that the Bond tales' "clearly imperialist and racist ideologies are constructed through a narrative code of tourism" (ibid., 219), foregrounding acts of seeing and consumption.

Acts of seeing or voyeurism are also central to the Soviet plot, where the spy is himself spied upon. The British hero is designed to be humiliated by becoming vulnerable to blackmail and destroyed by a sex scandal. This humiliation via a sex tape of Bond and the British secret service points to the new place that sexuality takes in the organisation of consumer capitalism. Bond as consumer is intended to be emasculated by becoming the object of consumption himself¹⁰. The reversal is also true: as an agent of capitalism, the act of capitalist consumption literally gives him agency. In effect, Bond's heroic masculinity is directly tied to a consumer lifestyle – and the brand names that accompany it – which constitutes part of his job as the embodiment of the British national myth and defender of English virtues.

IN DEFENCE OF HER MAJESTY'S GENDER ROLES

The sexuality and gender of the British master spy are not only relevant with regards to consumption, but also another part of the trifecta of the capitalist mode of production: reproduction, which is linked to the social and economic role of the family under capitalism. The family has a dual role – on a personal level and as an economic and ideological unit geared towards capitalist interests. The historical development of the nuclear family, and its inherent antagonism between two genders due to the oppression of women, was traced by Friedrich Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, where he writes "[t]he first division of labour is that between man and woman for the propagation of children" (2010, 96). Capitalism has invested in the imposition of the gender norms it inherited from previous class societies and – although it has been able to adapt

10 I am grateful for the discussions on *From Russia with Love* with Dr. Lucas Townsend in his 2024 graduate seminar on British spy fiction, which helped to shape some of these ideas.

and be flexible when mass pressure has been exerted – has a material interest in maintaining them. As well as saving billions in care and other services¹¹, gender stereotypes aid the profits of the beauty, leisure, pharmaceutical, and porn industries.

Challenges to them cannot be benignly tolerated. Anyone who fails to conform to the nuclear family model (single parents, queer people, etc.) has been presented as a threat through laws, culture, and religion. The post-war period saw Western imperial powers compelled to invest in developing the economy as part of a challenge to the USSR for dominance and influence. But there was also a massive investment in divisive culture wars to undermine the working-class confidence that was developing. With reference to the Red and Lavender Scares, Allan Bérubé explains:

Churches, the media, schools and government agencies conducted a heavy-handed campaign to reconstruct the nuclear family, to force women back into their traditional roles, and to promote a conservative sexual morality. A tactic of this campaign was to isolate homosexual men and women and identify them, like Communists, as dangerous and invisible enemies. (1989, 391).

US President Eisenhower's Executive Order 10450 banned queer workers from federal jobs in 1953 on the basis that their supposed susceptibility to blackmail made them a threat to national security (ironically, this concept could only be conjured because it was illegal to be queer). This supposed threat of queer people to national security is especially relevant in the context of the humiliation of the British establishment by the Cambridge Five¹², at least three of whom were queer men who had been feeding British intelligence to the KGB (Kelly 2016, n.p.). In the United States, McCarthy's anti-communist campaign targeted scores of gay officials, explicitly linking queerness to subversion and Soviet sympathies. All the more important then that James Bond's heroic heterosexuality remain intact.

11 The UK Office for National Statistics worked out that in 2014 women carried out 60% of unpaid work in the home in Britain and that its value was just over £1 trillion, the equivalent of 56% of GDP ("Women Shoulder the Responsibility of 'Unpaid Work'" 2016, n.p.).

12 For more information on the Cambridge Five, I refer the reader to Richard Davenport-Hines' *Enemies Within* (2018), which attempts to elucidate how five Cambridge students became spies for Soviet Russia, rose through the ranks of the British establishment, and, in giving away its secrets, irreversibly damaged the public's trust in it.

DISCUSSION OF CAPITALIST CONTRADICTIONS

Now that I have established that *From Russia with Love* is anti-communist with a clear ideological endorsement of consumer capitalism, it is time to turn our attention to the various factors that destabilise Bond's hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality and thereby call the soundness of the novel's ideological messaging into question.

FROM A VIEW TO KILL: AN ICON OF INCOMPETENCE

Fleming's depiction of Bond in *From Russia with Love* is beyond ambiguous. He is at once the best that MI6 has to offer, a dangerous and unbribable man, successful and sophisticated, but also a naïve and trusting fool, an ignorant failure. On the other hand, his Russian opponents, albeit brutal, are perfect professionals. In fact, the first ten of the novel's twenty-eight chapters are devoted to a detailed biography of Grant and an account of SMERSH's scheme, while the first mention of Bond occurs at the end of the fifth chapter, where he is referred to as a "dangerous professional terrorist" (Fleming 2024, 53). Spending such a long period of time with the Soviet characters and their plan distances the reader from Bond. Instead of "bonding" with the protagonist, the reader is invited to sympathise with Bond's antagonist and learn to respect the Soviet operatives for their insight and planning. What makes this significant, especially considering how rare a setting east of the Iron Curtain was, is that Fleming presents his readers with his own fantasy introspection into his idea of a Communist country. We may therefore interrogate his fantasy of Marxism as one that, while it falls prey to (its own) anti-communist propaganda, also betrays some deep-rooted curiosity about alternative societal systems – and therefore some degree of dissatisfaction with the capitalist status quo.

Similar dissatisfaction may be inferred from Fleming's intention to kill off his protagonist. Knowing the machinations of the Soviet trap, the reader witnesses Bond stumble into it without giving it much of a second thought. Not only that, but Bond seems completely oblivious to his surroundings and actively ignores several warning signs. When his hotel room is swapped out for another, Bond does not check the new room for surveillance; when he meets Grant, he blindly assumes M must have sent another agent to lend him a hand; when he notices Grant's "opaque, almost dead" (ibid., 222) eyes and even briefly wonders if they might contain a warning message, he forgets about it the next minute; when he meets Grant's stare again and is met with a "red glare" that reminds him of the open "safety door of a furnace" (ibid., 225), he supposes it must be war

trauma; when Darko Kerim is killed and Tatiana faints after Grant knocks over and then replaces her wine, all he thinks is “[t]hank heavens for Nash” (ibid., 232). Even the most glaring of all, when Tatiana warns Bond directly about Grant because his cover name Nash “means ‘ours’. In our Services, a man is nash when he is one of ‘our’ men” (ibid., 229), he ignores her and promptly proceeds to give Grant his weapon to watch over him while he sleeps. After that, the trap snaps shut, and it is difficult to feel sorry for Bond, considering we watched him blunder into it with complete carelessness. Knowing the plan from the beginning, the reader is expected to judge this as a failure, noticing how every choice Bond makes along the way leads him to end up right where the Soviets want him – and (almost) completely unarmed.¹³ Now Bond admonishes himself, stating that the way he is about to die is “[t]hrough his own stupidity – blind, lethal stupidity” and admits his admiration for the Russian plot: “Bond thought: we knew SMERSH was good, but we never knew they were as good as this” (ibid., 243). Such stupidity casts serious doubt over Bond’s competence, which in turn signals his failure to embody the gendered expectations of dominance and unfailing heroism. He might still be the man, but he fails to be the myth.

LOVE M AND LEAVE M: QUEERING THE HETEROSEXUAL HERO

In his essay “Paradoxical Masculinity”, Toby Miller shrewdly examines how James Bond’s masculinity fails to live up to the standards of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal power. I already mentioned how Bond gains agency via consumption, but is also the object of consumption himself. The photographs of his intimate scene with Tatiana are precisely the kind of “cruel bodily scrutiny supposedly reserved for patriarchal surveillance and misogyny” (Miller, 139). However, this objectification is not restricted to the voyeurism of the SMERSH operatives. Bond was always meant to be “an exciting figure [...] designed to set masculine pulses hammering¹⁴ and feminine hearts throbbing” (“Dr. No” 1963, 785).

¹³ After his narrow escape, Bond walks into a second trap at the very end of the story and is overpowered by Rosa Klebb and is poisoned by the flick-knife hidden in the Soviet agent’s shoe. I must therefore disagree with Andy Wright, who also reads Bond as an “effective ideological cypher”, fighting Soviet communism for the “greater good” of Western democracy, but who boldly claims that “Bond’s ultimate success [...] breaks out of and evades the logical deadlock of the strategy of Mutually Assured Destruction” (Wright 2018, 3).

¹⁴ In “How to Write a Thriller”, Fleming states that his novels “are written for warm-blooded heterosexuals in railway trains, airplanes and beds”, but also hints, with tongue firmly in cheek, that the “target of my books [...] lay somewhere between the solar plexus and, well, the upper thigh (Fleming 1963, n.p.).

Bond's body and the people or things it encounters are equally commodified. In the political economy of consumer capitalism, which is characterised by looking and being looked at, Bond is just another "mundane object of desire" (Cockburn 1987, 31) that must objectify and be objectified.

His consumption by the female and male gaze alike is not the only way that Bond may be seen to fail patriarchal ideals. Several critics have examined the queerness of the character's various film incarnations. In *Male Bonding*, Grant Hester equates Bond's actions with those of a repressed gay man (2019, 14), and Jack Halberstam, in his *Female Masculinity*, notes that the "debonair action adventure hero [lacks] credible masculine power" (1998, 4). While an in-depth analysis of possible homoerotic acts in Fleming's novels has yet to appear,¹⁵ *From Russia with Love* is not short of scenes that invite similar speculation. The first direct mention of homosexuality appears when Bond recounts an argument he has had for several days over "the employment of 'intellectuals' in the Secret Service" (Fleming 2024, 100). Bond argues that they need agents who "can understand the thought processes of a Burgess or a Maclean" and are in a position to "frequent their cliques and get to know their friends and their secrets", while other agents are strictly against staffing the organisation with "longhaired perverts" and "pan-sies soaked in scent", stating that "I thought we all agrees that homosexuals were about the worst security risk there is" (ibid., 101). Bond, the self-proclaimed "one-man opposition", is so frustrated by the discussion that he considers taking the "unpopular step of entering a minority report" (ibid.). Then there is Bond's easy intimacy with men in stark opposition to his usual cool and reserved attitude towards women. When M calls him into his office, Bond is beyond excited at the thought of being "fired like a loaded projectile, across the world towards some distant target of M's choosing" and sits across him gazing into "the tranquil, line sailor's face that he loved, honoured and obeyed" (ibid., 104). It is left to the reader to speculate whether the reason that "the last thing [M] wanted was for Bond to be permanently tied to one woman's skirts" really is that they "hang on your gun-arm", or whether it might have something to do with Bond's "er, dashing features" and "what I believe they might call a 'crush'" (ibid., 105, 107). In any case, seeing "that glitter in M's eyes" that "betrayed their excitement", Bond accepts the order to "come up to [Tatiana's] expectations" (ibid., 109, 111).

15 See Ian Kinane's chapter "The Bi Who Loved Me: Bi-erotic Possibilities in Ian Fleming's James Bond Novels", in *Bisexuality and Popular Culture*, edited by Kinane, forthcoming from Palgrave.

In Istanbul, Bond meets Darko Kerim, who has a “startlingly dramatic face, vital, cruel and debauched” that “radiated life” (ibid., 125). Their meeting betrays an immediate and easy attraction:

Bond thought he had never seen so much vitality and warmth in a human face. It was like being close to the sun, and Bond let go the strong dry hand and smiled back at Kerim with a friendliness he rarely felt for a stranger. (ibid.)

Such scenes might suggest that queerness is not as maligned as one assumes. However, the queerness of the SMERSH opponents is also a factor that implicitly contributes to their villainy. While Bond is all action and attraction, the Russian characters (apart from Tatiana) are notable for their explicit lack of heterosexual desire. The Russian men are cold; Rosa Klebb is stated to be a “neuter” but is also depicted as a sexually violent threat to Tatiana; while Grant is labelled asexual. Bond’s heterosexual virility stands in necessary opposition to the villains’ queer impotence. We are again faced with a logical contradiction, which, roughly put, runs as follows: the Russians are queer, therefore queer is bad. Supposedly, Bond is straight, and straight is good. Or could Bond be queer, and queer be good?

Bond’s emasculation, gender instability, or even queerness becomes even more relevant when we consider the myth that he is meant to embody. While *From Russia with Love* acknowledges the shock to the British intelligence establishment that was the exposure of an entire Soviet spy network within its ranks (the infamous Cambridge Five), the novel seems to completely deny the marginality of British intelligence and its fast-eroding power, instead casting MI6 as the chief danger to Soviet intelligence that must be wiped out. The claim that a Soviet conspiracy would choose Bond as its target increasingly feels like an overcompensation for Britain’s growing irrelevance; or, as Christopher Hitchens puts it: “the penis envy of a declining power” (2006, n.p.). Akin to the way that the conspicuous overperformance of hyper-virile masculine fierceness or physi-

cal prowess can tip the scales over into effeminacy,¹⁶ Fleming's insistence on Britain's global significance effectually discloses a nationalist insecurity.

These anxieties – or maybe wishful fantasies – are also reflected in the Soviets' presentation. By taking the evil of the opponents to excess, the propagandistic portrayal of the communist threat crosses the threshold into the ridiculous. The incredible exaggeration of the Russian evil overshoots the target; instead of conveying a genuine Soviet threat, it feels more like a satirical inversion of Red Scare propaganda. Umberto Eco reads this exaggeration as intentional irony, agreeing that “the Soviet men are so monstrous, so improbably evil that it seems impossible to take them seriously” (2003, 46). However, considering Fleming's political and journalistic milieu, this assertion of humorous intention does not ring entirely true, especially taking the “Author's Note” into account. With an attempt at nonchalance, Fleming seeks to locate his story within a horizon of realist expectations: “[n]ot that it matters, but a great deal of the background of this story is accurate” and insists that everything from officials to the offices is “faithfully described” (2024, 1).

CONCLUSION: THE PARADOX OF CAPITALISM

Just as Bond oscillates between success and failure, sophistication and ignorance, commercial targeting and viewing pleasure, the genre of espionage fiction has been both condemned and valourised for its sexism, racism, imperialism, and consumerism in seemingly contradictory ways. The figure of the spy combines loyalty, patriotism, and the mundanity of public employment and fashions them into “plays with death, doom, and style” (Miller, 131). Infusing the game of international espionage with an ethic of Victorian sportsmanship, Bond heroises the capitalist state, endorses and enacts covert government interference, and delights in consumerism along the way (Denning, 216). This conjunction of spectacle and state violence leads to “paradoxical responses from both left and right [that] are present throughout espionage fiction” (Miller, 130).

In *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story*, Ernest Mandel charts the representation of crime in the popular imagination as a history of the emer-

16 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's notion of gender identities as “threshold effects” argues that this balance topples over in “places where quantitative increments along one dimension can suddenly appear as qualitative differences somewhere else on the map entirely” (1995 16). Applied to the figure of the spy, this means that the quantitative augmentation of heroism, can suddenly become visible as a qualitative difference, as something else altogether.

gence, rise, and consolidation of capitalist society. Mandel ties the popularity of espionage fiction to the split subjectivity that mass-consumption capitalism produces. Individuals are divided into workers and consumers, concerned for the general good and their own welfare, while the conditions of capitalist competition force them to uphold the laws of ownership as the only way to meet their needs (Mandel 65). In espionage fiction, the spy is an empty signifier, an arbitrary delegate of a people, nation, or military, who is given the power and responsibility to operate covertly, without public accountability or popular endorsement, and therefore in contradiction to bourgeois democracy. Fleming's reductive representations of good and evil, binary divisions between spy and counterspy, West and East, become unstable (ibid., 122). This can even lead to a sense of mutual recognition, or what Oliver Buckton describes as "a kind of professional brotherhood, reflecting a similarity of training, methods, and behavior in rival agents that at times overrides their opposing ideologies" (2015 133). The nature of the spy as a flexible subject, ready to be filled with purpose, ready to obey, to be "fired like a loaded projectile" (Fleming 2024, 103) means that Bond can never really know who he is beyond a "shifting sign of impermanent state labor" (Miller, 139). In short, James Bond is a symptom of the essential criminality of capitalist society.

The numerous contradictions of *From Russia with Love* can be read as a reflection of the paradox nature of capitalism. In *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Friedrich Engels describes the contradiction at the heart of capitalism as the "incompatibility of socialised production with capitalistic appropriation", which "contains the germ of the whole of the social antagonisms of today" and manifests itself as "the antagonism of proletariat and bourgeoisie" (2017, 67). Put in very simple terms, capital needs labour to exist, while the capitalist class itself fulfils no productive social functions in return. It is entirely superfluous and responsible for the exploitation and suffering of the working class. This is the fundamental contradiction from which numerous other contradictions of the capitalist mode of production arise. According to Engels, the only solution to these contradictions is a proletarian revolution, which can only be accomplished if the working class gains full knowledge of its oppression (ibid., 84).

Because capitalist ideology is always troubled by its own mechanisms, it always remains unstable and incapable of presenting a coherent image of itself. James Bond, the embodiment of the myth of British global power, has been shown to be fraught by internal contradictions, reflected by wildly diverse possibilities of his public perception. The agent of British intelligence and Western

consumer-capitalism is inherently unstable as a hegemonic figure, reflecting the fundamental contradiction of capitalism itself.

Whether Fleming intended to or not, he wrote a novel that reflects the inherent contradictions of the ideology of capitalism and contains a metafictional reminder of the Janus-faced character of capitalism today as it was then. Whether this reflects a false consciousness or ideological fantasy on the part of the author (i.e. if he does not know what he is doing, but is doing it; or if he knows what he is doing and still does it) is of no concern. Either way, I invite today's readers of *From Russia with Love* to ponder this implicit warning about the chaotic and underhand operations of capitalist society and draw their own conclusions.

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