A Fish Out of Water

Crises of Masculinity and Environmentality in "The Hildebrand Rarity"

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Ian Fleming's James Bond series has most often been considered in the Cold War context in which it originated, and, when it comes to acknowledging the cultural distance of this period, accounts have tended to address some of the more obvious issues that contemporary readers might have about the depiction of female characters or those who are not of white Anglo-Saxon heritage. One respect in which Fleming might be more closely in line with a twenty-first century reader's expectations, however, is that of environmentalism; nevertheless, the author's evident engagement with the non-human world has merited little critical discussion thus far. An environmental reading of the Bond canon at this time may exemplify a broader movement in critical studies over the past twenty to thirty years from a concern with marginalised humans to a concern with marginalised non-humans, as seen in the emergence of the field of environmental humanities, including literary ecocriticism.

In this article, I will therefore turn an ecocritical focus on one of Fleming's short stories in which concern for the natural world is most evident, and paradoxically, most problematic. For to read "The Hildebrand Rarity" ecocritically cannot simply be an affirmative gesture, recovering Fleming as a writer of value

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to green politics: the story finds itself entangled with issues that are fundamental to environmental representation, as I will demonstrate by comparison with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, published two years after Fleming's story first appeared in 1960. Carson's book, regarded as a landmark in environmentalism, gives a detailed account of the effects of pesticide use in the USA, and, as such, offers an extended and detailed engagement with the same kind of confrontation around which Fleming's story pivots. To read "The Hildebrand Rarity" against her work is to identify some key difficulties in writing environmental crisis as well as the different resources fiction and non-fiction offer in this regard. To think of those available to Fleming, we can consider the features of the spy thriller.

FISH FICTION

In his critical survey *Anthropocene Fictions*, Adam Trexler suggests that genre fiction "offer[s] extraordinary resources to think about complex issues like climate change" (2015, 13), and, in rounding up the qualities of different genres, he comments that "suspense novels [...] specialize in international conflict, the motives of countries and industries, and diplomatic intrigue", identifying these as "mainstays" of the environmental crisis (13-14). At the same time, Trexler notes that "[s]afe identification with the hero of a suspense novel breaks down when he drives sports cars and exotic yachts, not to mention serves a government that has repeatedly thwarted climate accords", and that "[i]t is even more difficult to condense the distributed, impersonal causes of global warming into a climate villain" (14). In these ways "the genre helps construct the meaning", while at the same time "the narrative difficulties [...] threaten to rupture the defining features of genre" (14).

While Trexler's work concentrates on fiction that deals topically with climate change – and thus predominantly works written around the turn of the twenty-first century – his analysis may still be productively applied to "The Hildebrand Rarity" in order to examine the ways in which the story creates and explores a prototypical environmental crisis. While the poisoning of a reef ecosystem does not, on the story's terms, operate on the same scale as climate change, it is instructive to see how Fleming writes environmental crisis at the moment environmentalism is coming into being in its modern form.

The Bond stories as a whole already typify two qualities of the thriller genre as Trexler describes it. First, the fiction is preoccupied with "things": Ben MacIntyre claims that Fleming "understood the extraordinary attraction of

'things'", and especially "things that did things" (2008, 105); that is, "things" that have agency within the Bond universe. While in Fleming's fiction such "things" tend to be artificial – gadgets, vehicles, weapons, and so on – in "The Hildebrand Rarity", at least, the category is widened to include animal and elemental agency. Another aspect of Trexler's analysis that can help in reading the story is the consideration that, according to Umberto Eco in his essay "Narrative Structures in Fleming", the author opted to "transfer characters and situations to the level of an objective structural strategy" (2009, 36). This effectively collapses several different levels of significance into the story, so that characters sometimes act in accordance with their own motivation, but at other times behave in ways that can only be described with reference to external considerations such as the political context. A third, distinct quality of Fleming's fiction pertinent to discussion of environmental crisis is his interest in natural history. In his biography of Fleming, Andrew Lycett suggests that the author "was an ecologist *manqué*" (1995, 355), while in *James Bond: The Man and his World*, Henry Chancellor points to the agential role afforded to animals in Fleming's fiction: "Animals not only set the scene, they are also on occasion instruments of death" (2005, 183).

"The Hildebrand Rarity" can therefore serve as a useful illustration of the opportunities and challenges the genre presents to engage with environmental crisis; how, in Trexler's terms, the text constructs meaning and results in narrative difficulties. The story establishes a clear network of comparisons that re-inscribe characters in conventional roles according to gender and nationality, but, ultimately, this network can neither prevent nor contain the inaction on which the crisis depends. Meanwhile, the evident environmental attentiveness required in the hunt for the titular "rarity" – a tropical fish – fails to foster an ethic of care towards the natural world, as some ecocritics have claimed it ought,[1] because that attention is directed toward the fish's capture and cannot satisfactorily resolve the consequences of the anthropogenic act of ecocide in which it results. Yet the resources of form and genre foreground these problems, as Trexler proposes, while the figure of Bond himself, as a locus for the reader's identification or the

1 Lawrence Buell, for instance, posits an "environmental unconscious [that] in its negative aspect refers to the impossibility of individual or collective perception coming to full consciousness at whatever level", but has the potential to be "an enabling ground condition as it becomes activated in the work of composition and critical reading" (2001, 22). That is to say, literary attention might "activate environmental perception to the end of social improvement" (21), among other things. However, as I will show in the context of "The Hildebrand Rarity", such attention commodifies the natural world and enables ecocide.

projection of their fantasies, becomes an innovative way for situating individuals in the drama of ecological destruction. In its Cold War context, "The Hildebrand Rarity" sets up a specific set of political resonances, which are all the more evident because of the compression of form the short story requires. While that same compression also enables – indeed, demands – a satisfactory conclusion to the narrative at one level, in which an animal proves to be an "instrument of death", it leaves unresolved the matter of an entire ecosystem's destruction and draws attention to Bond's own sense of his lack of agency in preventing this.

I BUY IT FOR THE ENVIRONMENTALISM

Some background may illuminate these idiosyncrasies. "The Hildebrand Rarity" was initially published in the March 1960 issue of *Playboy,* before appearing the next month in Fleming's first collection of Bond short stories, *For Your Eyes Only*. As Claire Hines points out in her essay "'Entertainment for Men'", *Playboy* thus became "the first American magazine to publish Ian Fleming's British spy adventures" (2009, 89), and while she notes that the periodical was seen to provide "a ready-made male audience" (92), the content of "The Hildebrand Rarity" makes it a peculiar and downbeat choice for the presumed readership. Apart from the story's sour depiction of both gender and transatlantic relations, Fleming was at this stage – seven years and seven novels into the Bond series – affected by what Lycett calls a "mood of weariness and self-doubt [that] was beginning to affect his writing", noting that "the more perceptive critics picked up the signs his hero gave off about this when *For Your Eyes Only* was published" (369). This is true in formal terms as well: Eco observes that, although "Bond does not meditate upon truth and justice, upon life and death […] in the novels" – with the exception of *Casino Royale* – the character "does indulge in such intimate luxuries in the short stories" (35-36).

This is not the only departure from our expectations of the Bond canon in "The Hildebrand Rarity". For instance, the story – in which the reader finds an off-duty Bond hunting a sting-ray in a coral reef in the Seychelles – is not a secret service adventure. Once Bond has landed the creature, he is persuaded by his friend and contact in the islands, Fidele Barbey, to join a US millionaire's expedition to recover the eponymous fish. The titular, docile reef-dweller has, as its name suggests, been infrequently sighted since Professor Hildebrand from the University of Witwatersrand caught, identified, and named the first of its kind, which was discovered off Chagrin Island in 1925 ([1960] 2012, 215). Barbey introduces Bond to Milton Krest, who has a financial interest in the fish because, in

pledging to collect specimens for the Smithsonian, he is able to reduce the tax liability of his maritime lifestyle. Bond's relative impotency in the narrative can be noted by the fact that, although he takes against Krest, he nevertheless agrees to participate in the hunt for the fish. The night after it is killed and caught, the specimen is forced into Krest's mouth as he sleeps, choking him to death. Bond disposes of the body uncertain of who it is that has killed Krest, but his suspicions are levelled at both Barbey and at Krest's English wife, Liz.

THE NARRATIVE NETWORK

To make some initial and relatively obvious observations, there are a number of equivalences that are already evident even from the brief summary above. The dead fish's enactment of its own vengeance through the figure of either a woman or an inhabitant of the Seychelles is of a piece with the way Fleming rather chauvinistically sympathises with the story's marginalised figures,[2] who have themselves been terrorised by the tycoon in the course of the story. By leaving the culprit's identity a mystery, Fleming somewhat achieves a vindication of three marginalised groups – woman, colonised, and animal[3] – although that very commonality of status is problematic given that it reduces any entity that is not a white Western man to the status of the Other. In opposition to this oppressed grouping, Fleming grants himself a poetic licence to kill Krest by associating the villain's death with the sting-ray Bond was hunting. Krest keeps the tail of one such creature as a whip with which he disciplines his wife:

> Casually Bond walked over to the side of the bed and picked it up. He ran a finger down its spiny gristle. It hurt his finger even to do that. He said: 'Where did you pick that up? I was hunting one of these animals this morning.'
>
> 'Bahrein. The Arabs use them on their wives.' Mr Krest chuckled easily. 'Haven't had to use more than one stroke at a time on Liz so far. Wonderful results. We call it my "Corrector".' (211)

2 Strictly speaking, Fidele Barbey, for all the "noble savage" resonances of his name, is described by Fleming as a "short, fat white man", "the youngest of the innumerable Barbeys who own nearly everything in the Seychelles" (196 and 197).

3 Lisa Funnell and Klaus Dodds identify a broader trend along these lines, noting that "the franchise sets up and maintains an interesting relationship in which women and men of colour are associated with water while Bond is envisaged as a 'master' of that elemental and 'atmospheric' sea" (2017, 4–5).

Note that, in his own encounter with the sting-ray, Bond had "proposed to kill" it seemingly only on the basis that "it looked so extraordinarily evil" (192); by establishing an equivalence between the fish and Krest, Fleming lines the latter up for a similar fate, although the author confounds expectations in that it is not Bond who becomes the agent of that fate, but the unknown culprit.

The story's alignments between characters and fish are not particularly coded, but their multiplicity, and the ways in which, together, they do not establish but re-inscribe conventional equivalences, is worthy of comment. Eco observes that Fleming's novels "build up a network of elementary associations to achieve something original and profound" (47). In the case of "The Hildebrand Rarity", Fleming explicitly establishes the way we are to read certain characters and thus enables the story to signify at different scales: as a domestic thriller; as a commentary on both sexual and international politics; and as a critique of Western interaction with the natural environment.[4] Given both the structure of the short story and what we know of Fleming's own interest in the animal kingdom, especially tropical reefs,[5] the engagement with the problem of scale seems conscious rather than accidental, using the particular resources of the thriller which Trexler mentions in *Anthropocene Fictions*.

To outline these equivalences in more detail, I will begin with Bond's hunting of the ray at the opening of the story. Although he thinks the creature appears to be "extraordinarily evil", the hunt is depicted as a single combat between two well-matched rivals rather than privileging the human over the animal. Indeed, the projection of such characteristics as the ray's evil visage, as well as Bond's later recognition that "Fish sometimes scream when they are hurt" (95), are needed to anthropomorphise the animal and legitimise his hunt, because together these (perversely) align the fish with Bond's usual, human quarry. While we may think this ascription of moral qualities to the animal kingdom peculiar to fiction, it has also served as a strategy for engagement with non-human creatures in environmental non-fiction. In her investigation of the impact of pesticide use in *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson draws a similar moral distinction when she writes: "Is it reasonable to suppose that we can apply a broad-spectrum insecticide to kill the burrowing larval stages of a crop-destroying insect, for ex-

4 In employing these three tiers, I am borrowing the approach that Timothy Clark takes in his reading of the Raymond Carver short story "Elephant" using "a series of increasingly broad spatial and temporal scales" (2012, 156).

5 As Funnell and Dodds point out, "Bond mirrored Fleming's lifestyle, [which was] shaped by a nearly daily exposure to swimming and diving off the coastline of his home Goldeneye, in Jamaica" (2).

ample, without also killing the 'good' insect whose function may be the essential one of breaking down organic matter?" ([1962] 2000, 64). In the opening of "The Hildebrand Rarity", Bond's encounter with the sting-ray is framed as a clear contest between good and evil; but later, as in Carson, the waters become murkier with the application of poison that lays waste to the entire reef system.

Thus, as well as ascribing moral qualities to animals, Fleming also gives implicit value to the means of killing them. In engaging with the sting-ray *mano a mano* (or rather, *mano a aleta*), Bond exercises respect for the animal kingdom:[6] he enters the ray's native environment to pursue it, and even once it is landed he remains wary and "still kept away from it" (196). This caution seems warranted, given that, shortly afterwards, "in the hope of catching its enemy unawares, the giant ray leapt clean into the air" (196). Most significantly, Bond is himself described by Fleming at one point during this episode as "the big fish on the surface" (193), as though he is part of the ecology of the reef himself.[7] Lisa Funnell and Klaus Dodds point out, more generally, that "the success of Bond depends on his ability to overcome these watery elements" (2017, 4). The hunt, then, is a struggle between near-equals, established explicitly to contrast with the poisoning of the Hildebrand Rarity itself later in the story.

While this equivalence holds between Bond – in a leisured variation of his role as state-sanctioned killer – and the ray, it is also clear that animals represent a commodity for him as they do a challenge for his masculinity. Before meeting Krest, he is already aware that the tail of the ray is used as an instrument of chastisement: "This tail was the old slave-drivers' whip of the Indian Ocean. Today it is illegal even to possess one in the Seychelles, but they are handed down in the families for use on faithless wives" (196). The living ray becomes dead and functional, serving an oppressive role in an economy based on the labour of the disempowered: that is, slaves or wives. When Barbey offers to recover the tail of the ray, "Bond smiled. 'I haven't got a wife'" (197), indicating something of his complicity in such misogyny.

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6 Chancellor remarks that the Bond of the books "doesn't much care for killing animals. Over the course of twenty adventures, he never kills a mammal (except for men), and rarely kills a fish, except to eat", although he does note the hunt of the sting-ray here as one of the "exceptions" to this pattern (182).

7 The equivalence of hunter and hunted is also alluded to in the 1989 film *Licence to Kill*, which borrows elements from "The Hildebrand Rarity"; in this instance, Bond (Timothy Dalton) disguises himself as a ray to sneak aboard Krest's boat to investigate a drug drop.

The ray is not the only sea life that is open to commodification. Bond also suggests to Barbey, albeit in an offhand fashion, that the island economy could benefit from its marine resources: "Everybody moans about how poor they are here, although the sea's absolutely paved with fish. And there are fifty varieties of cowrie under those rocks. They could make another good living selling those round the world" (199). Bond's entertainment of the idea of commodification goes a little way to align him with Milton Krest, who also regards the natural world as a resource to be exploited:

> Since I happen to like yachting and seeing the world I built this yacht with two million of the money and told the Smithsonian [...] that I would go to any part of the world and collect specimens for them. So that makes me a scientific expedition, see? For three months of every year I have a fine holiday that costs me just sweet Fatty Arbuckle! (212)

Krest's desire to acquire the titular fish is as a result of the value placed upon it by scientists in New York, and he sees the hunt as a purely economic transaction rather than a reckoning of the creature's intrinsic or ecological value. He has acquired some of the poison Rotenone to kill the fish, deeming this the most effective means of doing so.[8] In this respect, Krest's use of wealth to command resources distinguishes him from Bond; in fact, given that Barbey passes Bond off to Krest as an underwater expert, the agent effectively allows himself to become another of the American's resources, like the ray-tail – albeit a far less crude one. Here, Bond's role in the story again shadows his professional work. Edward P. Comentale, in his essay "Fleming's Company Man", describes Bond's "replication of managerial identity" (2005, 12) in achieving a middle way between "unrestrained free trade and socialist revolution" through his adventures (3). Comentale proposes that "For every violently ideological socialist [...] there is an equally reprehensible capitalist" in Fleming's work (5). Auric Goldfinger may well be the epitome of the "reprehensible capitalist", but Krest too falls into this category.

Another key distinction between Bond and Krest is the different terms in which they regard women, which can be seen through their interactions with the solitary female figure of the story, Liz Krest. Liz stands in for a string of Mrs. Krests, with the tycoon emphatically declaring her to be the fifth woman to hold

8 In *Silent Spring*, Carson notes that "[R]otenone [is] from leguminous plants of the East Indies" (32), though she does not consider it in the front rank of dangerous insecticides. According to Krest, the substance is something that "the natives fish with in Brazil" (223).

this title (204), and as such she is implicitly part of another of Krest's collections. Bond on the other hand regards her more sympathetically and humanely, and their relationship is one of just two that Kingsley Amis in *The James Bond Dossier* identifies as platonic (or at least as platonic as Bond is allowed to be). He writes that "Bond's habitual attitude to a girl is protective, not dominating or combative. This holds even when, as with Liz Krest […] no sexual advantage is in prospect" (1965, 52) – thereby distinguishing Bond from the sadistic Krest. Casting his eye over Mrs. Krest, Bond reflects that "There was no lipstick on her mouth and no lacquer on her fingernails or toenails, and her eyebrows were natural. Did Mr. Krest perhaps order that it should be so – that she should be a Germanic child of nature?" (208). Given the story's implicit valorisation of what is natural for its own sake rather than as a commodity, Bond's observation, here, recovers Liz, or attempts to recover her, from the status of possession. Nevertheless, by aligning her with nature – an alignment ambiguously confirmed by the possibility that she may make use of the dead Rarity to dispose of her husband – Bond makes a similar equivalence between woman and nature as Krest himself does. The parallel between hero and villain in Fleming has already been seen in Bond's earlier retort to Barbey that he does not have a wife and thus (by implication) has no need for a ray-tail of his own; it is re-affirmed when the agent, having seen Krest's "Corrector", thinks, albeit rather sourly, that "Mr. Krest had chosen well. She [Liz] was the stuff of slaves" (219), an allusion to the historic "slave-drivers" already mentioned. Both men thus see a commonality between women and animals, although for Bond this seems to be a broadly essential equivalence of the kind he also tacitly perceives between himself and the sting-ray, whereas for Krest it is more or less a commercial one.

The equivalence of animals and humans is again evident in the crisis of the story, where Bond, entering the waters of the reef, envisages the creatures inhabiting a "little community, everyone busied with his affairs", and anticipates that when Krest empties his poison over the reef "a hundred, perhaps a thousand small people were going to die" (224). Here, in an even more pronounced fashion than in the hunt for the ray, Bond anthropomorphises the underwater world. While this may seem an overtly sentimental strategy it is also a literary one, as we can see by comparing Fleming's use of the term "community" with Carson's in *Silent Spring*. Like Fleming, Carson repeatedly invokes the term to refer to ecosystems: "This soil community [...] consists of a web of interwoven lives, each in some way related to the others" (63); "natural plant communities" (82); or "a healthy plant or animal community" (112). This usage suggests a kinship – an

equivalence – between what is non-human and human, and the kinds of relations they maintain. Indeed, Carson also uses the term on several occasions to refer to human groups such as neighbourhoods or towns, as in the economic context of "the communities paying for the insecticide" (89). In other places, the word could refer either to natural populations or human geographies, or possibly both: "By 1959, a thousand poisoned birds from this single community had been turned in or reported" (105). In both fictional and non-fictional contexts, the terminology of human societies is applied to non-human contexts in order to foster our sympathy and to scale down our attention to bear witness to what is happening below the surface of either the sea or the soil.

The crucial juncture of Fleming's story has Krest standing above the surface awaiting Bond's report from underwater so he can deploy the poison; he not only lacks Bond's observational skills but also the imaginative apparatus to engage with the reef community, and thus has an agent perform the role for him. This standing apart is in keeping with Krest's desire to maintain a separation between natural and human environments when on board his boat, the *Wavekrest*. Fleming has already established that, upon entering the lounge of the yacht, Bond had decided that "It was not a cabin. […] The impression [was] of a luxurious living-room in a town house. […] Bond shook his head admiringly. 'This is certainly the way to treat the sea – as if it damned well didn't exist'" (201-202). This positions Bond between both the natural and the human world, much as he fulfils (in Comentale's account) a managerial middle way between the extremes of capitalism and communism. Despite the sentiments Bond voices to Krest, he is himself able to move freely through the water like a "big fish" (193). It is only at the point in the narrative where the reef ecosystem is threatened that he realises the consequences of treating the sea as though it does exist, and, at this point, he comes to regard the ocean's inhabitants as a "little community".

Having sketched in some of the equivalences that Fleming establishes between Bond and Krest, we are left with a marginal difference between the two characters, and this can be described in two related ways. The first is that the two men represent different aspects of masculinity – Bond's is a stoic, reserved individualism and Krest's a grandiose assertiveness. When Bond tells Krest, not entirely untruthfully, that he is a civil servant, "Krest gave a short barking laugh" and tells Bond "'Civility and Servitude. […] Civil Servants are just what I like to have around me'" (203-204). Later, in turn, "Bond toyed idly with the notion that the man was impotent and that all the tough, rude act was nothing more than exaggerated virility play" (208); unlike Krest, Bond does not think aloud, even

though his observation hints at a further equivalence between the two men in that Bond is himself later shown to be impotent in his powerlessness to intervene and save the Rarity. This distinction between un-self-conscious and self-conscious masculinities can also be seen in the way Krest aspires to dominate both the environment and women, whereas Bond is more engaged with them. Bond is at least able to imagine some kind of parity between himself and the ray, as we have seen, while his reaction to Liz Krest mingles sympathy and disgust: "what must this woman have to put up with, this beautiful girl he [Krest] had got hold of to be his slave – his English slave?" (206). Again, though, in his view of her as "an English slave", there is a hint of self-disgust about the role he has assumed as a "civil servant". Fleming further draws the distinction between different conventions of masculinity in reflexively literary terms when he has Barbey jokingly refer to Bond as "The Old Man and the Sea" (196), whereas Bond regards Krest on their first meeting with scorn, thinking "this man likes to be thought a Hemingway hero" (203).[9]

NARRATIVE AND NATIONALITY

The invocation of Hemingway suggests another level at which Bond and Krest can be distinguished – that of national character and identity. When told by Liz that Krest's father was a German, Bond mulls on the man's ancestry: "So, that was it! The old Hun again. Always at your feet or at your throat" (206). Krest is, in contrast, characteristically direct in expounding on the English, declaring "You English make the best goddam butlers and valets in the world" (203). The fact that Bond's reflections are shared only with the reader but that Krest is shown to announce his freely enacts the respective expectations of protagonist and antagonist – Bond diplomatically keeps his thoughts to himself, but Krest, with American swagger, imposes his views on the others present. The latter's boorishness also reinforces the relationship established with his wife; not only is there an imbalance of power in their marriage, it signifies, too, Krest's vision of American superiority over the British. The millionaire believes that

> there were only three powers – America, Russia and China. [...] Occasionally some pleasant little country – and he admitted they'd been pretty big

9 The film *Licence to Kill* also makes an allusion to Hemingway, with Bond being summoned to meet M at the author's house in Key West to have his licence revoked, as though the American writer were a symbol for the emasculation of an Englishman. Bond quips: "A farewell to arms" ([1989] 2006).

> league in the past – like England would be lent some money so that they could take a hand with the grown-ups. But that was just being polite like one sometimes had to be. (230)

This explicit political discourse allows the Cold War world to be brought into the contained space of the narrative. At the same time as the Krests and Bond represent three typical relations between the genders – Bond's reserved masculinity sparring with Krest's braggadocio; Krest's own domineering ego oppressing his wife's; and she in turn finding some fellow feeling between herself and Bond – they are also tokens of international relations during the Cold War. The characters behave not (or not solely) as expressions of their individual identities or sense of themselves, but according to their passports. Moreover, none of the characters challenge the identities that are imposed on them by this schema. Although Bond chafes at Krest's sneering, he largely keeps his own counsel, fulfilling the role of "Civil Servant" with which Krest ironically furnishes him (in itself a species of managerial function of the kind Comentale describes). Throughout his novels, Fleming had established that Bond's potency and prowess existed in inverse relation to the declining fortunes of Britain after 1945: MacIntyre writes that "Bond is […] a promise that Britain, having triumphed in the World War, was still a force to be reckoned with in the dull chill of the Cold War" (6). However, the network of relations that Fleming builds around his agent in "The Hildebrand Rarity", in particular his reluctant though entirely voluntary subservience towards Krest, serve to deprive him of agency, as though for once Bond's fortunes were to stand more directly for those of his country.

Having established these relations, Fleming sets up as the dénouement of the story a situation in which an American depends on British intelligence to conduct an atrocity. Bond mulls over the political ramifications in no uncertain terms: "I feel like the bomb-aimer at Nagasaki" (225). This analogy could be read as the pay-off to the international relations paradigm that Fleming has set up through the story: rather than being about the poisoning of a reef, the story is another expression of nuclear anxiety that does not so much riddle Fleming's writing as serve as its foundation. Within the space of a tightly plotted short story – one where Bond is off duty and is not confronted with a world-endangering scenario – it enables Fleming nevertheless to address one of the salient preoccupations of the Cold War thriller. Bond's ineffectual attempts to protect the Hildebrand Rarity may also be compared, in domestic terms, with his frustration at the social ties which forbid him to rescue Liz from her evidently abusive mar-

riage: “To hell with it! Don’t interfere with other people’s lives. […] Bond put the Krests out of his mind” (219). Thus, the climactic crisis of the story not only stands for the decline of British power in the 1950s but also signals the triumph of an economic, prodigal masculinity – that is, an American one, at least in Fleming’s view – over the managerial values espoused by Bond’s.

Nevertheless, while the characters conform to national type, this cannot satisfactorily explain the moment of the fish’s poisoning. The literal subservience of a British character to an American seems the product of Fleming’s own anxiety rather than a literal rendition of contemporary political events into fiction. Furthermore, while the reflections on national identity that both Bond and Krest make are entirely plausible within the context of men from two countries meeting one another in a third country, Bond’s self-conscious vision of himself as “the bomb-aimer at Nagasaki” represents a sudden rupture of such discourse. Within the terms of the Bond canon, the invocation of nuclear apocalypse is less implausible, admittedly; but it is still marked in this context, as though Fleming were shoehorning it in in order to maintain narrative consistency across his oeuvre. This non-sequitur constitutes what Timothy Clark has, in relation to environmental crisis, called a derangement of scale, which he describes as follows:

> One symptom of a now widespread crisis of scale is a derangement of linguistic and intellectual proportion in the way people often talk about the environment, a breakdown of “decorum” in the strict sense. Thus a sentence about the possible collapse of civilization can end, no less solemnly, with the injunction never to fill the kettle more than necessary when making tea. (2012, 150–1)

NARRATIVE AND NATURE

An alternative reading of this particular incident might then help. As the first wave of ecocritics were fond of pointing out, literary scholars have spent a long time working out a meaning for nature in texts, though in fact there was no need to transfer its significance elsewhere because nature need merely stand for itself. In his formative work of ecocriticism, *The Environmental Imagination*, Lawrence Buell critiques “the hastiness of diagnosing environmental representation […] as a screen for another agenda” (1995, 14). There is no reason to doubt, then, that Fleming’s expression of environmental concern is genuine, even if his analogy with the nuclear threat may seem hyperbolic. This can be confirmed by reference to another national stereotype, albeit one that remains implicit in the story:

the supposed sentimentality of the British towards animals is evident in Bond's anthropomorphism of the reef creatures before they are poisoned, and perhaps, too, in Fleming's anticipation of the reader's sympathy.[10] Fleming had himself seen scientists use poison in a similar fashion to Krest closer to home: Chancellor writes that the author "had witnessed scientists using this method to collect specimens at Pedro Cays, two small islands off the south-east coast of Jamaica [...] in 1958" (149). While unexpected in the Cold War context, Bond's concern, here, is consistent with Fleming's. This means that the story functions simultaneously as a microcosm of the political situation and as a magnifier of environmental crisis. In light of Fleming's use of the word "community", Funnell and Dodds' observation – that "allowing Bond to 'go elemental' is a way of acknowledging that the world is undeniably vulnerable to those who would seek to unleash elemental forces on the fixed infrastructure and communities that make human life possible" (19) – applies at both global and ecosystemic scales; both in political and ecological terms. This equivalence between political and environmental anxiety can be further attested by the fact that the Cold War culture of fear related to more than ideological conflict and nuclear danger alone.

Throughout *Silent Spring*, Carson draws on readers' cognisance of the nuclear threat to emphasise the intensity of the threat from pesticides to which the US population was also subjecting itself:

> Along with the possibility of the extinction of mankind by nuclear war, the central problem of our age has therefore become the contamination of man's total environment with [...] substances of incredible potential for harm. (25)

She goes on to ask: "We are rightly appalled by the genetic effects of radiation; how, then, can we be indifferent to the same effect in chemicals that we disseminate widely in our environment?" (49). As Linda Lear notes in her afterword to the Penguin Modern Classics edition of the book, Carson "began her research when the US military was trying to hide the details of the atomic tests in the Bikini Islands, and published it a few months after the world was brought to the brink of nuclear holocaust with the Cuban Missile Crisis" (259-260). Because the Cold War context makes the nuclear narrative so current and available, it is not always clear to see when and how far it is being employed metaphorically in

10 Assuming that is was written with a British readership in mind, even if its first appearance was in a US publication.

"The Hildebrand Rarity"; but I would contend that Fleming, here, is foreshadowing Carson by doing exactly this: using the magnitude of the nuclear threat on a smaller scale to suggest a fallout of similar intensity.

Accepting that we need not ignore the referential quality of "The Hildebrand Rarity" to prefer an ideologically inflected reading, we should not overlook the fact that the text's attentiveness to natural surroundings is itself somewhat problematic. Buell advocates "representational projects that aspire to render the object world" (1995, 99), so as "to see what without the aid of the imagination isn't likely to be seen at all" (102). Fleming certainly exhibits such attentiveness to the natural world; in the opening episode, we are treated to passages such as this, just before Bond encounters the ray:

> It was like arriving in a town from open country. Everywhere the jewelled reef fish twinkled and glowed and the giant anemones of the Indian Ocean burned like flames in the shadows. Colonies of spined sea-eggs made sepia splashes as if someone had thrown ink against the rock, and the brilliant blue and yellow feelers of langoustes quested and waved from their crevices like small dragons. Now and then, among the seaweed on the brilliant floor, there was the speckled glitter of a cowrie bigger than a golf ball – the leopard cowrie – and once Bond saw the beautiful splayed fingers of a Venus's harp. But all these things were now commonplace to him and he drove steadily on. (193-194)

As Eco points out, "Fleming abounds in […] passages of high technical skill which makes us see what he is describing, with a relish for the inessential, and which the narrative mechanism of the plot not only does not require but actually rejects" (51). And yet, for all the apparent authorial indulgence of this passage, it does serve the narrative mechanism. The prose picks out in detail what Bond glides over, lifting the underwater locale from the reader's environmental unconscious while simultaneously making clear that Bond is so familiar with it that "all these things were now commonplace to him". The comparison between reaching the reef and coming into town also lays the ground for Bond's later likening of the creatures on the reef to "a little community". According to Eco, Fleming's narrative technique works precisely because:

> Our credulity is solicited, blandished, directed to the region of possible and desirable things. […] the narration is realistic, the attention to detail intense;

> for the rest, so far as the unlikely is concerned, a few pages and an implicit wink of the eye suffice. No one has to believe them [...] The minute descriptions constitute, not encyclopaedic information, but literary evocation. Indubitably, if an underwater swimmer swims towards his death and I glimpse above him a milky and calm sea and vague shapes of phosphorescent fish which swim by him, his act is inscribed within the framework of an ambiguous and eternal indifferent Nature, which evokes a kind of profound and moral conflict. Usually Journalism, when a diver is devoured by the shark, says that, and it is enough. If someone embellishes this death with three pages of description of coral, is not that Literature? (52-53)

Given such a distinction between the lyrical and the functional, we could be expected to read the reef episodes of "The Hildebrand Rarity" as aspirational exotica – that is, "Our credulity is solicited, blandished, directed to the region of [the] possible and desirable" – in the form of the mimesis of that environment. But in "The Hildebrand Rarity", Fleming's attentiveness to the natural world is also necessary to the plot, and Fleming barely conceals his own, more journalistic, voice as he offers an insight into Bond's methods:

> When you are looking for one particular species underwater – shell or fish or seaweed or coral formation – you have to keep your brain and your eyes focused for that one individual pattern The riot of colour and movement and the endless variety of light and shadow fight your concentration all the time. Bond trudged slowly along through the wonderland with only one picture in his mind – a six-inch pink fish with black stripes and big eyes – the second such fish man had ever seen. (218)

While it may be argued that the focusing of consciousness, here, specifically excludes the wider environment in trying to isolate a single species, Fleming's prose conversely exhibits the close attention to the natural environment Buell requires of the environmental imagination. Nevertheless, for all this, no effective ethic of care is fostered in the story, and Bond's enforced hunt for the Rarity becomes an off-duty variant of the missions he is set by M in other contexts, demonstrating the necessity of detection in Bond's profession.[11] The focus on the

11 Christoph Lindner even sees the figure of Bond *qua* agent as "embod[ying] a new breed of detective trained and despatched to avert the crime against humanity" (2009, 84).

fish is required because Krest has prospectively commodified it, being essential to his tax dodge, and the way Fleming has Bond reflect on his own technique shows that this focus operates in contradistinction to a sense of being in a place or an environment.

The amoral quality of attention can be seen from the fact that it enables both the fish to be hunted as well as Bond's anguished observation of the subsequent destruction of the reef system:

> Everything was as before in the little community. And then, with stupefying suddenness, everyone went mad. It was as if they had all been seized with St Vitus's dance. Several fish looped the loop crazily and then fell like heavy leaves to the sand. The moray eel came slowly out of the hole in the coral, its jaws wide. It stood carefully upright on its tail and gently toppled sideways. The small langouste gave three kicks of its tail and turned over on its back, and the octopus let go its hold of the coral and drifted to the bottom upside-down. And then into the arena drifted the corpses from up-stream – white-bellied fish, shrimps, worms, hermit crabs, spotted and green morays, langoustes of all sizes. As if blown by some light breeze of death the clumsy bodies, their colours already fading, swept slowly past. (226-227)

The attentiveness Bond displays both before and after the poisoning of the reef betrays his sympathy with the reef creatures, though he is as self-conscious about this as he is about the process by which he locates the fish: "Fidele Barbey had spent his life killing animals and fish. While he, Bond, had sometimes not hesitated to kill men. What was he fussing about? He hadn't minded killing the stingray. Yes, but that was an enemy fish. These down here were friendly people. People? The pathetic fallacy!" (225-226). More specifically than pathetic fallacy, this is another instance of anthropomorphism, which, while valuable for bringing the natural world into human relation, is only able to do so in human terms. Here, it re-inscribes the participatory equivalence of Bond in the ecosystem, while at the same time showing him as helpless as the other creatures of the reef.

THE AGENT WITHOUT AGENCY

How, then, do we read Bond's complicity with Krest in the capture of the Rarity? We have already seen how difficult he finds it to differentiate himself from the American, and at a literal level it is only barely plausible that he is so keen not to break cover that he does not disrupt Krest's scheme and save an environment for

which he clearly feels an affinity. At the level of international relations, Bond's inaction is a comprehensible if unwieldy analogy for Britain's inferiority complex in the presence of a German-American. Neither of these are very satisfactory interpretations of Bond's lack of agency, and they illustrate something of what Trexler has identified as the difficulty of reconciling our expectations of a genre with environmental crisis. A further possibility is that, shorn of his secret service status, Bond is even more in the position of the reader than usual.[12] Eco has already distinguished between those sequences in Fleming that are designed to appeal to the reader's sense of the world, conjured through detail, and those that more functionally advance the thriller elements of the plot. By situating the metaphorical nuclear attack of "The Hildebrand Rarity" in a desirable destination, the author juxtaposes those two worlds, however, with a resultant derangement of scale. What Fleming thus achieves, here, is a personal environmental drama that also has ready access to a global scale, thanks to the easy resonance of the characters with their national stereotypes.

Compare Bond's first-hand experience of environmental destruction with a similar episode in *Silent Spring*:

> In the spring of 1955, some 2,000 acres of salt marsh in St Lucie County were treated with dieldrin in an attempt to eliminate the larvae of the sandfly. [...] The effect on the life of the waters was catastrophic. Scientists from the Entomology Research Center of the State Board of Health surveyed the carnage after the spraying and reported that the fish kill was "substantially complete". Everywhere dead fishes littered the shores. From the air sharks could be seen moving in, attracted by the helpless and dying fishes in the water. No species was spared. (137)

With its aerial view, followed by a citation of the survey team's data, Carson's matter-of-fact account is a good fit with Eco's definition of "Journalism" in contradistinction to "Literature", lacking the unexpected affect of Fleming's prose. Improbable as it may seem, the failure of the poisoning episode in "The Hildebrand Rarity" to resolve satisfactorily in terms of character or politics – a rupture of generic convention – actually makes an effective environmental point, arguably before environmentalism as such existed.

12 Indeed, it is only when he is called on to do something akin to his job and dispose of Krest's body that Bond's managerial professionalism kicks in again: "They were certainly all going to be in one hell of a mess unless he could tidy things up... Bond got moving" (204).

In this regard, we may also bear in mind Alexis Albion's suggestion, in the essay "Wanting to be James Bond", that part of the success of the series is Bond's availability for the reader as a locus for identification, "an intercultural experience" that transcends nationality and one "in which both men and women participated" (2005, 203). In Albion's argument, this is an aspirational identification, Bond acting as a wish-fulfilment figure. In "The Hildebrand Rarity", by contrast, the effect of this is to position the reader in the grotesque moment of wanton pollution and identify with the helpless protagonist, who is in turn identifying with the "little community" of sea creatures. This identification effectively characterises our individual environmental transgressions at the cusp of their global significance. Bond is now the perpetrator as much as the hero.[13] Carson makes clear that the US householder of this era would himself have been in a similar position of power over the environment, albeit unknowingly:

> Lulled by the soft sell and the hidden persuader, the average citizen is seldom aware of the deadly materials with which he is surrounding himself; indeed, he may not realize he is using them at all. [...Yet c]onsidering the number of [dispensing] devices that are in use, and the scarcity of warnings [...] do we need to wonder why our public waters are contaminated? (158-160)

In such a reading of "The Hildebrand Rarity", therefore, Bond is an individual, albeit every individual in the West; Krest is an economy driven by the commodification and despoliation of the natural environment; and the reef in the Seychelles not just a rendering of Fleming's Caribbean but a microcosm for the entire ocean.

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13 In "Bond 89" on the Ultimate Edition DVD of *Licence to Kill*, Timothy Dalton comments that Fleming "makes [Bond] very human and makes him one of us and so we put ourselves in his place but recognise that side to him which probably does lurk in all of us, in some small degree" ([1989] 2006).

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