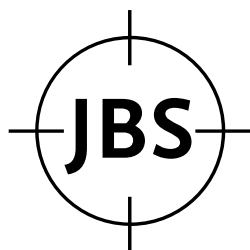


“It’s called life, James”

Deconstructing Inclusivity in *Skyfall* and *No Time to Die*

ERIN ISELY

As conscientious consumers in a century inundated by multiple forms of media entertainment, it is irresponsible to ignore the messages that are put forth in popular culture that stand as a reflection of, and an influence on, societal consciousness. In the ever-circular relationship of culture-influencing-media-influencing-culture, it is imperative to take note of the messages put forth about groups or individuals, as well as noting who is making these statements. The Bond franchise has a long history of production by white, heteronormative men (current producer Barbara Broccoli aside), and their perspective in/of the world is reflected in the way the Bond films are written and produced. The opinions and perspectives written into the films may be absorbed by the audience, and these perspectives may be considered to be a realistic expression or reflection of the current world and culture – including the objectifying and tightly-controlled roles of women, the suggested inferiority of people of colour, and the misunderstanding and villainising of queer individuals. Audiences must consider their personal position in society and its influence on their opinions, as well as the position and opinions of those in power, or those creating and producing the media that is available for consumption. When



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consuming media, “appropriating, transforming, and, most of all, using performatively this insight of deconstruction is a chief task”, as is “actively reappropriat[ing] or performatively liberat[ing] a past text for present uses” (Miller et al. 1995, 86). Whether in reading, viewing, or listening, audiences should consider who is being portrayed, how they are portrayed, and the voices being heard – including who is left out or marginalised. The Bond franchise has generally lacked representation of minorities in key roles, or has represented minorities largely as criminals. While the franchise has diversified its casting in recent years, there certainly remains problematic representations of minorities. Even with semantic changes and less harmful language and caricatures, the dominant message is that women, people of colour, and queer people remain in supporting roles to the normative, white, heterosexual James Bond.

THE PAST AND PRESENT OF BOND

James Bond is dead: long live James Bond. With the conclusion of Daniel Craig’s five Bond films in the explosive *No Time to Die* (2021), audiences around the world saw a franchise arc end in a way it never has before. James Bond (at least in his current iteration) has served his final mission, leaving a mess of bodies and broken hearts in his wake. Perhaps to be viewed as the Bond of a new generation, Craig’s Bond films saw increased inclusivity practices of adding Black actors as main characters, hinting at or stating main characters’ queerness, and a self-awareness and toning down of the objectification of its female characters. This increased inclusivity also comes with the re-imagining of the franchise formula, with Craig’s Bond films proving more serial than episodic in nature and showing a narrative continuation of Bond’s relationships, allowing for longer and stronger emphasis to be placed on the “proper” role of Bond opposite his companions (Dodds 2012, 118; Funnell 2018, 16). These changes to formula and increases in inclusivity are welcomed; however, the aspects of exploitation and minimisation remain in the last of the Craig Bond films. *No Time to Die* and one of its predecessors – namely, *Skyfall* (2012) – stand out from the five films starring Daniel Craig due to their changes in casting and their narrative similarities, including: the disappearance and reinstatement of James Bond; the forefronting of Black female actors and agents; and the hints at queer characters as exemplified by villains and/or supporting cast. This article explores *Skyfall* and *No Time to Die*, two films from the last decade of the franchise, and highlights the importance and meanings of the diversification of its cast and characters.

This discussion of inclusivity hinges on three sociological concepts: ethnicity variation; sex/gender expectations and placement; and sexuality, or the

“queering” of the Bond franchise. Anyone who is familiar with the franchise, even at a glance, recognises its historical stereotyping of people of colour, women, and, when apparent, queer characters. The original James Bond texts were written by an assumingly cisgender and heterosexual white man in the 1950s, and they offer insights into Ian Fleming’s attitudes towards his titular character, James Bond. The novels follow a now-familiar formula of saving the Western world while operating within exotic locations, as well as the conquering of both the villain and title’s main love interest, or “Bond Girl”. The films, the first of which emerges almost a decade after the first book’s publication, follow this formula fairly closely, and present concerning caricatures and stereotypes. With this history in mind, there is no doubt an observable improvement in these representations, including the accurate casting of actors to play their represented ethnicity, a lessening of the obvious objectification of female characters, and the inclusion and fusion of queer actors’ identities in influencing the portrayal of their characters. However, an improvement from past portrayals is hardly to be praised when current representation continues to do injustice to characters who are not a white, heteronormative men; or, more specifically, those who are not James Bond himself. Allied to him or not, any characters who have been cast with Black actors, any female character, and any characters whose potential queerness is even hinted at faces erasure, minimisation, and ultimately inferiority when compared to the leading man. And despite some of these characters sharing the same fate – yes, James Bond does die – the messages entangled in these characters and their deaths are not the same. The characters around Bond who die on the proverbial field of battle serve to propel Bond’s story forward, at the cost of their own; meanwhile Bond’s passing cements his standing, both as the iconic 007 as well as the irreplaceable sacrificial (father) figure, and as the ultimate hero.

BLACKNESS AND BOND: MONEYPENNY

Three supporting and essential characters spearhead this discussion of Blackness in *Skyfall* and *No Time to Die*: Eve Moneypenny (Naomie Harris), Felix Leiter (Jeffrey Wright), and Nomi (Lashana Lynch). It bears noting that only one of these characters (Eve Moneypenny) appears in both *Skyfall* and *No Time to Die*, questioning not Black characters’ importance to the franchise but rather the dedication of the franchise to consistently including Black characters as part of the main ensemble. Additionally, both Moneypenny and Leiter were predominantly played by white actors until recently, with Nomi being the only character written

specifically to be Black (and her heritage is an action-driving detail in her character's storyline). It is only after scientist Obruchev threatens Nomi with eliminating anyone sharing her African heritage that she pushes him into the acid below, suggesting her symbolic responsibility for millions of people simply because of her genetics. The treatment of these characters, whether written as Black or after their recasting from white to Black, is telling in terms of the franchise's position on Black agency and the role of Blackness in film. To better understand the importance of the franchise's presentation and treatment of these Black characters, we must explore their recent changes and the exact in-universe details as to their involvement with Bond and the development of his story.

Eve Moneypenny has been involved in the film franchise since its canonical conception, first introduced as a flirtatious admirer of James Bond in 1962's *Dr. No*. Traditionally, Moneypenny was only ever a secretarial assistant to M (another character played by white actors) and was only seen on the field in temporary informational handoffs and for a moment to flirt with 007, until her recasting with Naomie Harris in 2012, fifty years later. Moneypenny was notably absent from the first two Craig films, as the character had previously appeared in all the others in some brief iteration. Her introduction in *Skyfall* is unique to the character, as she is first seen in the field as an active agent working alongside Bond on a mission that eventually goes awry and results in her accidentally shooting Bond. Even in its opening sequence, *Skyfall* presents an interesting distinction between this Moneypenny and her previous iterations: played by a Black actress with an increase in agency, Moneypenny's effectiveness is suddenly brought into question, whereas before she was always perceived as useful, if not somewhat love-struck (though it is worth noting that, in terms of the film's chronology, the audience is not yet meant to realise that this character is Moneypenny until she introduces herself at the end of the film). After her initial introduction as a field agent, she continues to work with Bond throughout the film and is placed in a flirtatious role opposite him, as is common for her character. Harris's Moneypenny might be compared to the character of Rosie Carver, the first Black love interest in the film franchise in 1973's *Live and Let Die*, and whose competency is similarly put into question as a Black female (double) agent (cf. Alexander 2020). Next to Bond, whose multiple layers of privilege support his position and prevent his "competenc [...] and accomplishments [from] being diminished or undermined" (Funnell 2015, 91), Moneypenny's competency is brought into question during most conversations, especially by Bond himself. She responds to any quips questioning her efficacy as an agent with clever retorts that. However, the audience is allied with Bond's point of view in not wholly trusting Moneypenny; after all, she

did shoot 007. The audience is also allied with Bond in the fact that they do not know that she is Eve Moneypenny until the very end of the film; and until that point, the assumption is that she is just another agent posited as the inferior antithesis (Black female) to Bond (white male). Her reveal as Moneypenny, however, cements her proper place in the franchise as supportive and/or assistive to Bond (but not equal) and subservient to M (once again played by a white male).

With this first instance of Moneypenny being Black and a field agent, the film offers approximately two hours of Black female agency until it is voluntarily “declined” at the end of the film, as Moneypenny takes her place behind the desk as M’s secretary, leaving the field for Bond to dominate. *Skyfall* has many more instances where going back to tradition is emphasised, including the replacement of Judi Dench’s M by Ralph Fiennes, and the overcoming of technology-savvy Raoul Silva by “old school” and traditionally masculine ways. Thus, it is unsurprising that Moneypenny’s relegation to secretary can also be seen as a reversion to the “old ways”, which are deemed best. Moneypenny’s role in the Craig films continues in *Spectre* (2015) and *No Time to Die*, where she is presented as helpful but inferior, flouting the rules alongside Bond and Q, and against M’s wishes. Her agency is clearly diminished through her edited characterisation and shortened screen time, and she is re-positioned as a minor character. In *No Time to Die* she assists Bond, works with Q, and allies with Madeleine and Nomi, but she no longer has her field agent status – or, arguably, even half of her importance to and involvement in the plot. After all, this is the 007 franchise, not the MI6 franchise; the importance must always be on James Bond. By recasting Moneypenny with a Black actress, making that character an active field agent, and then revoking her licence to kill, Moneypenny’s “proper” place is shown to align with the franchise’s earlier rendition of the character – an unfair treatment after a teasing glimpse at Black agency in a franchise fraught with racism and sexism.

BLACKNESS AND BOND: NOMI

Much like Moneypenny’s role in the Craig era, the role of Nomi is one that starts off strongly in terms of agency (and a numbered title) and ends with a revocation of her title and relegation. After the pre-title sequence in *No Time to Die*, Bond is no longer on active service (as in *Skyfall*, where he disappears from service after being shot by Moneypenny), but he is brought back into the fold via Nomi’s attempted recruitment and Leiter’s convincing. As the audience comes to find, Nomi has taken up the mantle of “007”, a title which previously only ever be-

longed to James Bond, a white male, ending the franchise-old assumption that “007” and “James Bond” are synonymous with one another. When the casting was revealed, there was considerable backlash at the idea that Lynch was playing 007 – despite her not actually playing James Bond, but rather a new agent holding the Double-0 title. This backlash demonstrated the general public’s feelings about the “suitability” of an actor to play Bond, and particular hostility at the concept of a Black woman being the ostensible lead of the franchise (cf. Funnell 2019). Now the numbered moniker is held by a Black female, and while it previously held authority and unquestioned control, Nomi’s ability to uphold the title is (like Lynch’s casting) questioned at every turn, in spite of the fact that the moniker previously connoted (for Bond) a great amount of respect and assumed competency. Despite her holding the title for most of the film, Nomi is clearly relegated to a supporting role, and she receives a similar treatment to Harris’s Moneypenny as an inferior supporter of Bond’s storyline.

In *No Time to Die*, Nomi is not thrilled about working with Bond, and initially tries to complete the mission without him, as he technically has no right or licence to be working alongside her. But as soon as Bond is back in commission (MI6-sanctioned or not) his superiority is put on display as he handles things in his own style, undercutting Nomi’s authority at every turn. Nomi herself regards the title of “007” as unimportant, saying that “it’s just a number”, implying that she has (or should have) the skills to complete the mission with or without the title. Meanwhile, Bond’s cocksureness in the field proves superior to Nomi’s status, and Nomi even goes so far as to return the title to him towards the end of the film as though confirming his authority. With Nomi devaluing the title, and with both MI6 and the CIA seeking out Bond to aid them, it seems that the title holds less power and efficacy now that it is in the hands of a Black woman: rather than Double-0 status lending power to its bearer, it is the bearer (Bond) who gives the title its power. With Bond reclaiming the number shortly before his death, it is solidified as belonging to him, since it is not returned to Nomi at the end of the film and is supposedly retired in the film’s final toast to the fallen agent.

The film’s ending suggests that the title “007” belongs only to – and thus dies with – Bond; that his white, male role is irreplaceable, even after having abandoned the role of agent in the first place. Nomi is still an agent with MI6, but it is unclear whether she picks up another title or whether she will return in future films. As the credits roll at the end of the film, the audience sees the expected “James Bond will return”. Although the title of 007 was temporarily Nomi’s, it is James Bond – the name and the man, rather than the number – that

is the true axis upon which the franchise spins, and it is unlikely that Bond will be recast with anyone besides a white male actor.

BLACKNESS AND BOND: FELIX LEITER

Lastly regarding race is a discussion of Felix Leiter, another character who was missing for the middle period of the Craig-era films, but who conveniently reappears only to perish in *No Time to Die*. Until 2006 and the revamp of the franchise with Daniel Craig, the character of Leiter has almost exclusively been played by a white male actor, until the casting of Jeffrey Wright. The one exception is Bernie Casey in 1983's *Never Say Never Again*, the only other time that Leiter was played by a Black man (and in a non-canonical film). Since the inception of the film franchise, Leiter has been seen as Bond's somewhat less capable American counterpart, and occasionally served as the *deus ex machina* for the sake of plot resolution, especially if the plot treads on American soil. The audience is meant to see Leiter as a reliable but inferior ally; and, more recently, as Bond's friend and brother, expanding on the title of being Bond's "brother from Langley". 1989's *License to Kill* also shows Bond and Leiter having a brotherly relationship, with Bond performing the role of groomsman at Leiter's wedding.

In each film that Leiter appears in, and despite the character's increased presence and role, it is Bond who comes out as the dominant player in the game of espionage. After an absence from both *Skyfall* and *Spectre*, Leiter is reintroduced in *No Time to Die* as Bond's ally once again, and he could be credited as the main inspiration for Bond's return to the field. Leiter's similarity to Nomi is noticeable, here, in that they are both Black characters who are required to bring back Bond, since they apparently cannot complete the mission themselves and require the help of a white man (or "white savior"). In what seems to be an attempt to fully wrap-up the arc of Craig's Bond, Leiter's return to action results in his untimely death and his excision from the story. With Wright being the only Black actor to play Leiter in the official Eon series, the relegation and erasure of this character's role in the franchise seems pointed. Every appearance of Leiter in the Craig era shows him to be a less skilled or less resourceful agent than Bond, placing him in a supporting role and emphasising that his Blackness is inferior to Bond's whiteness (as is his Americanness to Bond's Englishness). The franchise thus "stays true to the typical biracial buddy narrative whereby the white protagonist is the primary hero and the black buddy offers him support, much of it vital but support nonetheless" (Funnell and Dodds 2015, 370). With Leiter's disappearance and death, his role as helpful ally is secured, but his im-

portance to the plot and efficacy as an agent himself is lessened as he disappears from the narrative – just as he conveniently disappeared from the Craig era for its third and fourth films. Leiter is often necessary for Bond’s success, but he could never stand as Bond’s replacement. Even fulfilling his supportive role to Bond’s heroism to the point of erasure, Leiter’s death and disappearance are quickly minimised in comparison to Bond’s heroic sacrifice, a sacrifice emphasised and recognised by characters within the narrative and the audience outside of it.

Casting these recurring and new characters with Black actors, and treating them with demotion, relegation, and death shows the franchise’s opinions of Black leading characters. It may at first appear to be a “progressive” choice in casting, and while the more recent films do have a more diverse cast of main characters, it is important to note exactly what happens to these characters now that they have been cast or recast with Black actors (cf. Funnell 2019). In Nomi’s case especially, it is important to note that this character, specifically written to be a Black female, is relegated to an inferior role in comparison to Bond, while Moneypenny and Leiter play into a larger history of their characters being mostly white, with agency given and shortly rescinded. Including Black actors and characters is not enough when they are treated as less-than-equal to the longstanding titular character, even if it is “better” representation than the previous sixty years.

QUEERNESS AND BOND: BEYOND THE VILLAINOUS OTHER

The Bond films of the 1960s look much different to the films produced in the 2000s onward, with changes in casting and characterisation which downplay the dependence on the heterosexual male gaze. The constant objectification and minimisation of the feminine, queer, or non-white “Other” is a large part of the Bond franchise’s lasting popularity: without the continued positioning of white-male-Bond as dominant, the franchise may not maintain its iconic status and lasting impact within the popular culture landscape. Recently, this minimisation is less overt, but still powerful in its message. In *Skyfall* and *No Time to Die*, there are multiple instances of sex and gender power dynamics that, although apparently diverse or progressive on the surface, serve to reiterate the franchise’s decades-old formula of white-heteronormative-male dominance.

Many of the villains in the franchise, mostly female and/or those who are queer-coded, pose threats to Bond’s masculinity as well as his role as active subject. Historically, the franchise has placed thinly-veiled threats of the sex/gender “Other” in opposition to Bond (Pussy Galore, Wint and Kidd, Raoul Silva, to

name a camp few), yet Bond conquers the threat and maintains his heterosexual-ity. However, Bond's character often emphasises the fragility of his heterosexual masculinity, a masculinity that in fact relies on the objectification of the feminine and the minimising of non-heterosexual characters in order to confirm his own dominance. No matter the increase in female leads, or the suggestion that supporting characters and antagonists are queer, such brief moments of supposed inclusivity pale when placed alongside the continually dominant heteronormative male that Bond exemplifies. With the most recent addition to the franchise killing the main character after his acceptance of being a father and his role in the heteronormative nuclear family, even the brief inclusion of female agency or passively queer characters does nothing to change the franchise's standing on Bond's "proper" sexual persuasion(s). Actors and characterisation may change, but the message stays the same: Bond is the lead, heterosexual subject, and the final subject; his story, and the people involved in his story, cannot be rewritten or diversified in a way that changes its underlying message.

A glaring example of the villainising of queerness lies with Raoul Silva, the villain of *Skyfall*. Silva's similarity to Bond, in that they both have a complicated mother-son relationship with M, is only part of the reason he poses such a threat to the leading character. While his abandonment by M and MI6 as an agent causes him to seek revenge against the "mother" who betrayed her agent/child(ren), there is more to his characterisation that places him as the undesirable "Other" compared to Bond's seeming consistency as heteronormative civil servant. Rather than exist as a simple opposite number to Bond, Silva acts as a reminder – a threat – of what Bond is or could become; that is, the threat both of queerness (adverse to the heteronormative history of the franchise) and of resistance to or active rejection and destruction of the British institution and its values. Silva earnestly emphasises their similarities, pointing out how they were both raised and abandoned by their leader M and by their country, at large; and how their skillsets make them particularly suited for their jobs as agents of the empire: "the two survivors. This is what she made us. [...] Mommy was very bad".

With all their similarities being emphasised, Bond's understanding of his role as agent, and the audience's understanding of his characterisation, is brought into question. Most notably, Silva's flirtatious behaviour towards Bond, behaviour that Bond stiffly jokes about and rejects, raises questions about Bond's sexuality and romantic sensibilities. The scene wherein Bond has been "captured" places him in an objectified position under Silva's gaze. Silva teases Bond physically and verbally, chastising Bond for having to "remember his training" in

order not to give in to Silva's homosexual advances. Calling back to Bond's interaction with Le Chiffre in *Casino Royale*, when the latter strips Bond naked and beats his genitals with a heavy rope, Bond brushes aside Silva's flirtations ("What makes you think this is my first time?"), though neither Silva nor the audience are convinced that Bond is being serious about having (consensual) sexual encounters with men. With Bond placed in the role of object under Silva's control, Silva acts as the threat of queerness – the "Other" to Bond's emphatic heteronormativity – and their interactions threaten to break down the previous sixty years of Bond's aggressive heterosexual façade (Dodds 2012, 124). Arguably, Silva's existence forces Bond onto shaky ground, a position brought about by the uncertain sexuality of both Bond and Silva: with another man threatening Bond's sexuality, Bond has little choice but to attempt to maintain control of his masculinity with carefully-worded quips and tightly-controlled physical responses, playing off his fear (of death, of castration, of objectification) with his words and his limited actions. Bond and Silva are intentionally juxtaposed: Bond's abandonment resulting in his return to active service and reaffirmation of his masculinity stands against Silva's retaliation against MI6, including his less-than-heterosexual behaviour in general, and specifically toward Bond. Arguably, audiences are meant to deduce that whatever Silva was or became, an existence that is oppositional to the traditional British male agent, Bond himself *could* have a "queer monstrosity [...] linked to sexual deviancy" (ibid., 126) at odds with British (supposedly heteronormative) values. But Bond defeats Silva, with a notably phallic knife to the back, proving that Bond's way (heterosexual; devoted to the Crown) is dominant to Silva's (queer and subversive). Bond's deflection of the queer threat within the narrative is a rejection of queerness and queer behaviour, and the end of the film confirms Bond's overall subjectivity and agency, if not his heterosexuality.

Writing *Skyfall*'s villain as queer, a queerness that seems to fuel Silva's strange obsession with Bond as well as his motivation for revenge, villainises the concept of queerness itself when contrasted with the heroic heterosexuality the franchise is known for. Until *No Time to Die*, there have been no positive representations of queerness in the franchise; there have only been a handful of instances of queer "representation" that denigrate the concept of queerness, positing it only as villainous, subversive, or comical at best (à la Wint and Kidd from *Diamonds are Forever* (1971)). The most recent effort at LGBTQ+ inclusivity in the franchise comes with Q, played by queer actor Ben Whishaw since 2012. Since his introduction in *Skyfall*, this rendition of Q has put a new spin on a familiar character, with his youth being the first defining difference between him and his

predecessors Desmond Llewelyn and, briefly, John Cleese. After the Quartermaster's absence from *Casino Royale* and *Quantum of Solace*, the reintroduction of the character in *Skyfall* seems to be an attempt to appeal to perhaps younger and even more progressive audiences. Q's reappearance coincides with Moneypenny's, another character who, until *Skyfall*, had been played by an increasingly younger white woman. When taken alongside Moneypenny's new persona, Q's youth is not a wholly unexpected development within the franchise's revamp; the more marked difference, however, is Q's change in (or confirmation of his) sexuality, given a throw-away line when Bond and Moneypenny attempt to recruit him again in *No Time to Die*. Until this film, Q acts as the frustrated but ever-helpful technological ally to Bond's antiquated antics, and the way that the two actors play off each other is perhaps more flirtatious than in past films. Now, two films after Q's reintroduction to the franchise, the character alludes to having a male guest over for a meticulously-planned dinner, indicated by the six-word line "he'll be here in twenty minutes". Some might not consider this to be a surprise if we are to take the actor's sexuality into account and the likely ways in which Whishaw's own public identity may be perceived to have influenced his performance. This brief allusion to queerness, however, is easily missed in a scene which clearly does not focus on Q, and it is certainly not enough to unravel sixty years of the heteronormative marginalisation of queer peoples and identities. The Bond franchise has always had a tumultuous relationship with anything outside the realm of white heteronormativity; the only other times a male character's sexuality has been hinted to be anything besides heterosexual is with Silva, who harasses both his female captive, Sévérine, and his male target, Bond; and with two of the villains of *Diamonds Are Forever*, Mr. Wint and Mr. Kidd, whose gay relationship is viewed as a joke. Gently suggesting that this Q is queer does not remedy a past filled with homophobia and a present which emphasises the (white) nuclear family model that is offered at the conclusion of Craig's saga. With Q's sexuality seemingly cemented as queer, Bond's heterosexuality in contrast is emphasised. The homosexual threat that Silva very briefly posed in *Skyfall* is essentially erased by Bond's status as father figure, as the role of queer character can be benignly filled by Q.

MOTHER, MAIDEN, MONSTER: THE "BOND GIRL" OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In addition to addressing queer inclusion in the Bond franchise, discussing sex and gender politics in *Skyfall* and *No Time to Die* requires a look at the head of MI6, Judi Dench's M. In a bold break from tradition, 1995's *GoldenEye* placed a

woman as the head of MI6, a decision that was met with criticism from both characters and fans within and without the franchise. Although Bond and M have always had a strained relationship with one another, this relationship evolved into a struggle of gender dynamics in the 1990s and into a pseudo-maternal relationship in the twenty-first century. The choice to keep this version of M in Craig's films is one of the few links to the rest of the film canon, as Craig's early films do not have iterations of either Q or Moneypenny until *Skyfall*. Casting a female M in a previously male-only role prompted questions about the character's femininity and, on the other side of the proverbial coin of gender dynamics, about her competency as a female head of MI6. It is Craig's films, however, that do the most with her complicated relationship with Bond, particularly in *Skyfall*, as the two characters discuss their strained but oddly familial relationship, with M ostensibly raising Bond within the Secret Service after the loss of both of his actual parents:

M: So this is where you grew up. How old were you when they died?

Bond: You know the answer to that. You know the whole story.

M: Orphans always make the best recruits.

It is this maternal relationship, in fact, that puts Bond at odds with Silva, who himself felt a similar familial connection to M, exacerbated by his abandonment by her and MI6 during his time in the Service. And it is this relationship of head-woman-to-younger-male-agent that seemingly brings about M's demise, as Silva's revenge on MI6 involves killing the woman who left him for dead for working outside of MI6's sanctions. Outside of the Craig era, no other Bond film has placed Bond and M in such a relationship, and M was never previously in danger for being involved with Bond (perhaps with the exception of her relationship to Elektra King in *The World is Not Enough* (1999)).

While the earlier Bond films offer little more than the brazen objectification of their female characters, later films change the ways in which women are presented and seen, including adding a mother-child dynamic to the films that had not previously existed. In Dench's case, one might argue that the only "acceptable" role for a woman of her age would be that of a maternal figure (it is implied throughout Dench's tenure as M that her character is widowed at some stage and has little communication with her biological children: M mentions her "late husband" in *Skyfall*, a man vaguely introduced in *Casino Royale* and *Quantum*

of *Solace*; and their children are briefly mentioned in the Brosnan era). M's death in Bond's family chapel, next to the graves of Bond's deceased parents, links her further to Bond. Despite Dench's M surviving two decades as the head of MI6, her death as Bond and Silva's symbolic mother brings about the hiring of Gareth Mallory (Ralph Fiennes), who effectively reconstitutes M as white and male. With this return to twentieth-century tradition, Mallory/M is unlikely to be complicated by a paternal relationship with Bond in the future, putting the past formula once again into place.

This forced family dynamic at MI6 has softened the character of Bond in a notable character arc that ends in *No Time to Die* with his marital and paternal affection for his final "Bond Girl" and their child. Although it remains true that the recent films in the franchise have downplayed their blatant objectification of the female characters, particularly during and after *Skyfall*, the female characters' importance to the plot, as well as their autonomy as individuals, is still diminished. In addition to Moneypenny and Nomi, another female character remains in *No Time to Die* whose characterisation is diminished due to the choice to place her in the role of mother. Madeleine Swann (Léa Seydoux) is one of the few recurring Bond Girls to have survived her initial film appearance. Madeleine maintains the professionalism with which she is introduced in *Spectre*, but it is clear that even her professional position and academic training as a psychologist is not enough to save her from Safin's gaze and possessiveness. What does save her, though, is her connection to Bond: despite them parting ways when he believes her to have betrayed him, they reconnect in Madeleine's family home, where her child Mathilde is revealed. Upon seeing this unknown child, Bond becomes almost immediately protective of her, and projects his desire to possess her by asking Madeleine who her father is. Madeleine denies his fatherhood, wanting to protect Mathilde, shielding the both of them from Bond's aggressive affection. Bond's new-found, if somewhat estranged, nuclear family is the driving force for his confrontation with Safin. Further cementing Madeleine's standing as Bond's "true love", the song "We Have All the Time in the World" is referenced in the film's dialogue, and is played over the film's Mateira scenes. This song and its associated sentiment were first used in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969), the only Bond film in which Bond gets married, and in which Bond sees his new wife brutally murdered before his eyes. There is no more obvious way to emphasise the importance of Bond's relationship with Madeleine than by connecting it to Bond's first and only wife.

Nevertheless, while Madeleine is placed in the role of Bond's partner/pseudo-wife and mother to Bond's child, her agency as a character is diminished. Unlike in *Spectre*, Madeleine's ability to protect herself (as displayed by her knowledge of guns and general bravery during their fight against Mr. Hinx on the train) transforms into a maternal protection of Mathilde and is supplemented/replaced jointly by Bond's paternal protection and his skills as an agent. Although Madeleine's ending differs from M's, it can be said that the choice to place them both in the role of mother, connected in some way to Bond, alters the trajectory of their stories and their characterisation.

CONCLUSION: NO TIME TO DIE(VERSIFY)

The question remains, now, whether the changes in casting and characterisation outlined above will continue into the franchise's future. There may have been a notable increase in non-white, non-heteronormative actors in the Bond films considered in this article; however as George Gerbner and Larry Gross notes, "representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation" (2006, 182). That is to say, diversifying the franchise is insufficient when that diversity is merely used to prop up the harmful hegemony of the past. Simply casting a Black actor in the role of a previously exclusively white character is not enough, especially when the treatment and importance of these characters diminishes after their recasting. Black characters, too, cannot act simply as counterpoints to Bond's character, swayed in the end to agree with or submit to Bond's behaviour and authority. Similarly, the diversification of sexuality and gender, while an improvement from the blatant objectification and vilification of the past, needs to be more than a passing line and secondary or antagonistic character roles. A queer villain, or a queer Quartermaster, is not genuine diversification when compared to the repeated and aggressive heteronormativity of the leading man threatened by queer existence or jokingly brushing it off. Having a female head of M16 arguably means very little when that character does not survive the franchise: even more so when they are replaced by the traditionally male rendition of the character, seemingly negating all or most of their past influence. And developing the roles of female characters beyond sexual objectification only to place them in the role of mother or sidekick shows the franchise's dedication to the reduction of female agency. While *Skyfall* reverts the Craig era back to a more recognisable and formulaic iteration, and *No Time to Die* breaks many of the rules of the formula in terms of Bond's aging and death, both films staunchly reinforce anti-inclusivity. Although the franchise has made (some) strides in terms of representation, the films have never strayed far from

the same conclusion: Bond, and Bond alone, is the ultimate white, masculine, heterosexual hero, and one can only hope that the franchise might grow beyond this conclusion in the near future.

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