

BELOW Figure 1: Colonel Rosa Klebb (Lotte Lenya) caresses Tatiana Romanova (Daniela Bianchi) in *From Russia with Love* (Eon Productions, 1963)



When Can Homophobia Live and Let Die.?: An Examination of Sexual Deviance in the James Bond Franchise

By Lauren Spungen

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THERE ARE CERTAIN EXPECTATIONS – necessities to many fans – that come along with the release of a James Bond film. As a result of the fairly predictable nature of the films, the franchise has become a popular phenomenon, evidenced by total box office earnings of over \$7 billion (“Box Office History”). Beginning with a silhouetted, hyper-sexualized credit sequence, Bond is equipped with unrealistically high-tech gadgets and sent on a top-secret mission in an exotic, jaw-droppingly beautiful location. He makes an impossibly gorgeous woman

fall in love with him, rescues her from a dangerous villain, and saves the world – all within the course of a two-hour screening time. But there is one aspect of this formula that goes mostly unacknowledged by fans: many of the evil geniuses Bond faces off with are minorities in terms of their sexuality. Christine Bold, a professor of English literature, notes about the franchise, “beauty, heterosexuality, and patriotism go together; ugliness, sexual ‘deviance’ and criminality are linked equally irresistibly” (174). Although Bold primarily focuses on the book series authored by Ian Fleming,

sexually deviant villains have been present throughout the films. From one of the first installments, *From Russia with Love* (1963), to one of the most recent, *Skyfall* (2012), many of Bond’s enemies fall on the LGBTQ+ spectrum.

As of 2015, in which the most recent Bond film, *Spectre*, was released, about 60% of Americans were in support of gay marriage, a 200% increase since only 2004 (Koplowitz). The same holds true in Britain: since legislation has been passed in 2013 allowing same-sex marriage in the UK, approval of gay marriage has risen

But when examining the conflict between Bond and Klebb – good and evil – the film reveals a simultaneous battle between heterosexuality and homosexuality.

to 60% in 2015 (Bingham). Despite the rapidly expanding societal acceptance of sexual minorities, however, the Bond series seems to be stuck following an outdated formula. The franchise attempts to fill a predictable trope by portraying characters in a comedic fashion, but, underneath the lighthearted tone, the villains are depicted in a manner that perpetuates anti-LGBTQ sentiments by vilifying sexual minorities. It is important to note that I am not claiming that the antisocial nature of the villains is a result of their sexuality – that the series is portraying the characters as evil *because* they are homosexual – but instead I argue that, within the context of the franchise, there exists a *correlation* between homosexuality and evil that perpetuates ideas of homophobia. This link between deviant sexuality and morality is more distressing now than ever before; the most recent Bond film, *Spectre* (2015), did not introduce any new villains to the franchise, simply showcasing the notorious villain Blofeld in a new manner. However, as the series continues to grow, the introduction of new villains is inevitable. And as Eon Productions continues to make more films and the population grows in support of the LGBTQ+ movement, the liberal Bond fan is compelled to ask: will a

non-heteronormative character be vilified yet again?

Vilifying characters that present as non-heteronormative can be traced back to the very beginning of James Bond: the 1953 novel *Casino Royale* by Ian Fleming. The story's arch-villain is Le Chiffre, an agent of the USSR who enjoys high-stakes gambling. In the beginning of the novel, M16 (Bond's agency) receives a dossier describing Le Chiffre's physical appearance and background, detailing the villain's habits as, "Mostly expensive, but discreet. Large sexual appetites. Flagellant" (14). This characterization of Le Chiffre as into BDSM appears later in the novel too; Bond is captured by the villain and seated in a bottomless chair, and his wrists and ankles are tied in a manner reminiscent of bondage. Le Chiffre enters the room with a carpet-beater and a cane and begins to torture Bond by thrashing him through the hole in the chair. As Bond cringes in pain, Le Chiffre seems to derive enjoyment from the torture, merging his non-heteronormative expression of sexuality with an evil to oppose Bond's good.

The same pattern of linking deviant sexuality and evil emerged as the book series was adapted to film. With the release

of the second Bond film, *From Russia with Love*, directed by Terence Young, Eon Productions was able to set a precedent for how the film franchise would play out. At this point, the "Bond formula" had not yet been cemented; the classic plot staples and viewer's expectations were flexible since there had only been one previous film, *Dr. No* (1962).¹ The impressionable nature of the series at this point made it easy for tradition to start within the franchise. Unfortunately, the initial choice to make Bond overly masculine and have him fight against a non-heterosexual villain began a trend throughout the films.

In *From Russia with Love*, Bond (Sean Connery) is painted as a champion of heterosexuality; within a mere two hours of film, he has sexual relations with four different women. Although humorous, this extreme manifestation of a heterosexual Bond is problematic because his arch-nemesis in the film, Colonel Rosa Klebb (Lotte Lenya), is overtly depicted as lesbian. The film's plot revolves around Bond trying to retrieve an important device stolen by Klebb's criminal organization, and Bond's arch-nemesis, SPECTRE. But when examining the conflict between Bond and Klebb – good and evil – the film reveals a



BELOW Figure 2: Colonel Rosa Klebb (Lotte Lenya) in *From Russia with Love* (Eon Productions, 1963)

Pussy Galore is a lesbian until she falls in love with Bond and simultaneously becomes “good.”

simultaneous battle between heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Klebb's lesbianism becomes apparent when she invites the film's "Bond girl," Soviet intelligence agent Tatiana Romanova (Daniela Bianchi), into her office to explain her mission. Almost immediately, Klebb, a butch-presenting woman sporting a masculine haircut and a light brown suit, tells Tatiana to take off her jacket and turn around. Tatiana sits in a chair in Klebb's office and the camera is positioned at eye level with her, making the viewer aligned with Tatiana rather than Klebb. "You're a fine looking girl," Klebb comments, her eyes scanning Tatiana's figure. Klebb explains that Tatiana is supposed to seduce Bond and give him false information, but while discussing this assignment, the villain approaches her and rests a hand on Tatiana's bare leg. Tatiana flinches out of discomfort. Later in the scene, Klebb positions herself directly behind Tatiana; she then initiates physical contact again by putting her hand on Tatiana's shoulder. Tatiana consistently demonstrates resistance to Klebb's sexual advances by avoiding eye contact, instead gazing at the floor out of the frame. "You are very fortunate to have been chosen for such a simple, delightful duty," Klebb says as she caresses Tatiana's neck and chin, "a real labor of love." With the mention of the word "love," Klebb's voice slows down and rises slightly, indicating an aspect of romance as she strokes Tatiana's face (Figure 1). Throughout the scene, Lenya's acting alienates Klebb from the viewer – her expression is consistently harsh, even when she attempts to be romantic, and her movements indicate an almost-inhuman stiffness. Accompanied by Lenya's restrained blinking during the interaction, the viewer is made to see Klebb as foreign and not relatable, allowing further dehumanization.

Unable to resist his hyper-masculine charms, Tatiana ends up becoming attracted to Bond over the course of the film. This seduction is more than just physical; as is typical with the "Bond girls," Tatiana becomes emotionally attached to him. She ends up abandoning her duty to the Soviet state and to Klebb in order to help Bond when he is attacked at the end of the film. Klebb, dressed up as a maid, pretends to be cleaning Bond's hotel room when she pulls out a gun (Figure 2). Tatiana distracts Klebb, playing on her sexuality, and the villain quickly drops the gun. Klebb and

Bond fight, and Tatiana, using the gun that Klebb dropped, shoots at the colonel. Klebb collapses to the ground as Bond walks away from her, unscathed. In Tatiana's actions to protect the man she loves, she kills Klebb, restoring the heteronormative balance of the film.

When *From Russia with Love* was released in theaters, homosexuality was officially categorized as a mental disorder in the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual*, a psychologist's tool for classifying and diagnosing mental disorders (Drescher). If homosexuality were still classified as a disorder today, the growing number of people who support gay rights would be outraged. Bond fans that fall under this category still should be – even though society has changed, the James Bond franchise still employs the same formula as seen in *From Russia with Love* when characterizing their villains, only adapting the archetype to the plot of each individual film. Upon the release of the twenty-third installment in the series, *Skyfall*, directed by Sam Mendes, the arch-villain was, yet again, portrayed as non-heteronormative.

The arch-villain of *Skyfall* is Raoul Silva (Javier Bardem), a former M16 operative turned evil, desperate to get revenge after the organization abandoned him in a Chinese prison. Although attempting to harm the whole of M16, Silva takes a special interest in 007; his attraction to Bond mirrors that of Klebb's to Tatiana. Once captured by Silva on a deserted island, Bond is tied to a chair (appearing to the viewer as though he were in bondage). With Silva standing rather than sitting, Bond is forced to look up at his enemy and the unequal power dynamic of the scene is communicated to the viewer. The same image is present in *From Russia with Love*; Klebb demands that Tatiana be seated, making her unwanted sexual advances

appear more forceful since Klebb's victim is visually below her. After Silva stands over Bond for a minute, just long enough to assert that he is in charge, he pulls up a chair and sits down in front of Bond. The two men begin to speak about M (Judi Dench) – 007's boss – and the villain becomes touchy. He undoes the top few buttons in Bond's shirt, revealing a scar from a previous bullet wound. Silva begins to caress it with his hand; an image comparable to the careful way that Klebb touched Tatiana's shoulders almost fifty years prior. As Silva's hand grazes the wound, Bond, defending his boss against the villain's criticism, says, "She never tied me to a chair." "Her loss," Silva replies as he remains focused on the scar. As they further discuss M, Silva moves his hands from Bond's chest to his neck and eventually to his legs (Figures 3 and 4). With his hands still on Bond's thighs, Silva's dialogue continues to take a sexual undertone as he says, "there's a first time for everything," implying that he would like to be the first man Bond has sexual relations with. Unlike Tatiana was, Bond is unable to defiantly glare out of the frame – the way in which Craig and Bardem are staged forms an inevitable eye contact between Bond and his tormentor. In response to Silva's flirtatious comment, Bond replies, "What makes you think this is my first time?" Although presented in a manner that could perhaps suggest Bond is bisexual, this conclusion seems unlikely. Taking into consideration the discrepancy between how he has always treated women and men, the franchise has never explicitly claimed or even implied that Bond is sexually attracted to, or has had sexual relations with men. Rather, his out-of-character retort seems to simply mirror Bond's usual playful, yet strategic banter with his enemy.

In "Age, Gender, and the Resilient Agent in *Skyfall* (2012)," Klaus Dodds discusses the



ABOVE Figure 3: Bond (Daniel Craig) is captured by Silva (Javier Bardem) in *Skyfall* (Eon Productions/Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2012)



ABOVE Figure 4: Silva (Javier Bardem) places his hands on Bond's (Daniel Craig) legs in *Skyfall* (Eon Productions/Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2012)

When Pussy Galore betrays her sexual identity and Goldfinger's evil scheme simultaneously, the film and novel reinforce an implicit link between heterosexuality and goodness, and homosexuality and evil.

implications of this scene in terms of how sexuality is portrayed. Dodds contends, "The scene in question reinforces a well-established tradition within the James Bond series of vilifying homosexuality and the homosexual body" (124). He interprets Silva's actions as a threat to Bond and his ideals, saying, "[Silva] challenges his resilience by probing his heterosexuality. Can Bond endure a heteronormative challenge—one in which he is caressed by Silva where his restrained body cannot protect him" (124).

Dodds notes an important feature of the scene that intensifies the threat to Bond: the fact that his hands are tied up. Not only does this make Bond unable to fight back, but it also makes Silva seem like a more forceful character—a depiction that unfortunately might amplify homophobic feelings toward Silva. The fact that Bond's hands are tied back marks one of the largest differences between the seduction scenes in *From Russia with Love* and *Skyfall*; Tatiana's reluctant compliance with Klebb's caresses, despite not being physically restrained, has a slight discomforting effect on the viewer. But when Bond is "challenged" by Silva, he sits up rigidly in his chair, unable to move his arms, yet still overtly conveying through body language that he is not compliant with Silva's advances—a struggle that is uncomfortable to watch. The decision to have Bond's arms tied up while receiving unwelcomed physical contact from Silva makes the villain seem like more of a monster than in past Bond films

and portrays homosexuality as a larger evil that is being forced upon the "good" in society.

Silva seducing Bond is an anomaly; 007 is almost always the one to initiate a sexual relationship, a reminder to the viewer of his occasional animal-like, almost-primitive masculinity. Bond has initiated relationships with uninterested colleagues—Miranda Frost (Rosamund Pike) from *Die Another Day* (2002), married women, and even recent widowers—namely Lucia Sciarra (Monica Bellucci) from *Spectre*. Many of these women are initially reluctant to become involved with Bond, but in one instance, Bond attempts to pursue a woman who is adamantly uninterested in him—in addition to every other man.

Pussy Galore is not the average "Bond Girl"—rather than fall head-over-heels in love with Bond upon meeting him, she shows contempt for and disinterest in his charm. In both the novel and the film *Goldfinger* (1964), she is introduced as one of Auric Goldfinger's subordinates. As his private pilot, she serves an essential role in his villainous plan to orchestrate an aerial attack on Fort Knox and contaminate its gold supply, which will in turn increase the price of his gold due to a lower circulation in the market. Although there are discrepancies between the novel and the film adaptation, they both employ the same problematic story line: Pussy Galore is a lesbian until she falls in love with Bond and simultaneously becomes "good."

In the novel written by Ian Fleming, Pussy Galore's character is explicitly homosexual. Fleming makes it very clear that she is attracted to only women by referring to her as a Lesbian (always with a capital "L"). Often said in conjunction with her name, Pussy Galore's sexual orientation becomes the identifying feature of her character. However, even though so much emphasis is placed on Galore's homosexuality, Bond is unable to accept her disinterest in a romantic relationship, viewing her sexuality as a small hurdle in his inevitable conquest. Fleming shows that Bond blatantly disregards her attraction to only women, claiming, "[Bond] felt the sexual challenge beautiful Lesbians have for men" (197).

Although her attraction to women is played down, Pussy Galore (Honor Blackman) has a similar depiction in the film *Goldfinger*, directed by Guy Hamilton. As Elisabeth Ladenson discusses in her article "Pussy Galore,"

It is still fairly obvious... that Pussy Galore is a lesbian, who is then converted by Bond. We are tipped off by Honor Blackman's brusque butch manner, her team of all-girl aviatrixes and also, certainly, by her initial resistance to Bond's charms. (229)

This resistance to Bond most obviously captures the way Miss Galore's lesbianism is mocked. After being captured by Goldfinger, Bond wakes up on a private jet with Pussy



ABOVE Figure 5: Pussy Galore (Honor Blackman) meets Bond (Sean Connery) in *Goldfinger* (Eon Productions/MGM/UA Studios, 1964)

Galore leaning over him (Figure 5). Upon hearing that she is Goldfinger's personal pilot, Bond begins his usual flirtatious comments, smirking as he asks, "And just how personal is that?" Miss Galore's eyes narrow to slits, indicating that she is offended by his question. It seems that Bond refuses to acknowledge her professionalism. "I'm a damn good pilot. Period," she says. Still not listening to her, Bond adds, "This is going to be a memorable flight," to which she responds in a harsh tone, "You can turn off the charm. I'm immune."

To a viewer who has never read the Bond novels, Miss Galore simply seems uninterested in having sexual relations with Bond. But with the knowledge that her character is homosexual in the book, it seems like this scene is an attempt to replicate her original character in a very muted way (perhaps in order to prevent

public ridicule of the franchise). Although Miss Galore's usage of the phrase "immune" is ambiguous, when interpreted with the context of the novels, it becomes clear that she is not attracted to any men – not just Bond. She reinforces her sexuality later in the film, when she and Bond are in a barn together. Bond flirts with Galore once more, and she defiantly responds, "Skip it. I'm not interested. Let's go." Still unwilling to accept this, Bond forcefully grabs her arm, pulling her back toward him, saying, "What will it take to get you to see things my way?" She continues to resist, prompting Bond to throw her into the hay and lay on top of her, reversing the power dynamic of the scene where they first meet on the plane (Figure 6). As Galore attempts to fight his advances, he kisses her, and her reluctance gradually fades into lust as she wraps her arms around him passionately.

Despite being a lesbian, Pussy Galore ends up falling victim to Bond's charms after they have sex. Her admiration for him causes her to betray Goldfinger; intentionally ruining her part of the plan to help Bond. This betrayal mirrors the way that Tatiana abandons and kills Klebb in *From Russia with Love*, yet again showing how much control Bond has over women throughout the films. When Pussy Galore betrays her sexual identity and Goldfinger's evil scheme simultaneously, the film and novel reinforce an implicit link between heterosexuality and goodness, and homosexuality and evil. Ladenson further discusses this problematic depiction of Miss Galore's lesbianism: "[Pussy Galore] switches sides and betrays [Goldfinger], and James Bond and heterosexuality are able to carry the day" (234).

Although each individual character or Bond film may not be very well-known in society, the Bond franchise still is as a whole. Its influence is undeniably everywhere; I had heard of James Bond and the number 007 years before seeing him in action at the movie theater. Modern parodies such as *Austin Powers* allow Bond's influence to expand beyond the action genre and reach a new, younger demographic. International screenings and translation into numerous other languages, such as Japanese, French, German, Spanish, Chinese, and more, allow Bond to be a global sensation. It's inevitable: James Bond reaches everyone in some way.

This widespread influence and power gives the Bond franchise a rare opportunity to spread stories and ideas to people around the



ABOVE Figure 6: Pussy Galore (Honor Blackman) and Bond (Sean Connery) in *Goldfinger* (Eon Productions/MGM/UA Studios, 1964)

globe. And it has. The series has been used to promote the idea of a progressive woman (as is the case with Judi Dench's "M") and has also helped foster positive international relations by depicting alliances between Britain and nations such as the United States, Russia, and Japan. But this is not enough; to this day, James Bond reaches millions of people with story lines perpetuating homophobia. The first step to changing this message is updating the Bond formula. As Craig's era as 007 ends, the prospect of a new Bond presents an opportunity to make significant changes in the franchise. Fans already have ideas on how to modernize Bond. Julie Bindel, in her article "Forget Idris Elba—it's time for a lesbian Bond," suggests that Eon change the casting of 007 completely, making Bond a lesbian. "Swap the tuxedo for dungarees, the sports car for a low-emission Mini and the martini for a pint of Stella, and you have the perfect Bond for the 21st century," Bindel proposes. Whether the franchise decides to employ this suggestion or another, it is undisputable that there needs to be some change to the Bond formula. And once the series is rid of homophobic and heteronormative messages, perhaps the widespread phenomenon and power of James Bond could be used to foster global LGBTQ+ acceptance.

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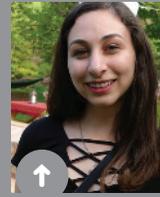
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Note

1. It is also the case that Dr. No (Joseph Wiseman) is implicitly coded as non-heteronormative. The villain makes continuous attempts to impress Bond with the lavishness of his evil lair, and Wiseman's acting indicates that Dr. No takes a special interest in Bond, pausing momentarily before speaking to him and allowing the corners of his lips to slightly rise upon interacting.



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Department Overview

The Program in Film and Media Studies at Washington University in St. Louis examines film, television, radio, and other electronic media as aesthetic and cultural forms. Research for this article began in a freshman seminar, Mr. Kiss Kiss Bang Bang: James Bond in Film, Literature and International Popular Culture.

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