13
Negotiating Shifts in Feminism: The “Bad” Girls of James Bond

Lisa Funnell

As the longest running film series in history, the James Bond franchise currently includes 22 films released across 48 years. Armed with a licence to kill, the character James Bond is routinely placed in situations which necessitate his use of deadly force. In order to obtain audience approval for these violent exploits, Bond functions within a clearly defined political space. Historically, then, the franchise has relied on gendered, racial, and sexual stereotypes in order to differentiate Bond’s “normative” heroic identity from the deviant attributes and behaviours of his male adversaries (Black 96–97). Operating within a British heroic tradition that links masculinity with (heterosexual) romantic conquest, Bond’s serial seduction of women offers a “visual guarantee of the maleness of the Secret Service” and functions as a “tipping point” in the plot (107–09). By indiscriminately bedding “good” and “bad” women, Bond attempts to ensure the success of his missions by aligning his sexual conquests with his moral plights.

Since the start of the franchise, Bond’s phallic masculinity has been challenged by an array of villainous women. Each generation of female antagonists takes stock of contemporaneous attitudes towards feminism. More specifically, through the characterization and narrative treatment of “bad” women, the Bond series endeavours to register the political impact of the women’s movement and reflect popular attitudes to the evolving feminist agenda. In the 1960s, then, the Bond franchise uses the figure of the sexually liberated female villain to illuminate the new freedoms that feminism has accorded to women; while it does this, however, it also positions this woman as a locus for social anxieties about these freedoms – anxieties which are invariably borne out in her violent punishment and death. If the films of the 1970s and 1980s continue to operate in this “backlash” mode – marked, in particular,
by the gradual elimination of female villains from the series – then the 1990s augurs in a new generation of adversarial women who invite consideration alongside the fraught discourses of postfeminism. In this chapter, I conduct a close, critical examination of shifting representations of female villainy in the Bond films.¹ Through detailed reference to the ways in which violence is enacted by, and upon, the female body, I show how the Bond franchise has both registered and interrogated the feminist gains that have taken place since the initial release of Dr. No in 1962.

Establishing the female villain

Established during the “swinging sixties”, the Bond franchise initially engaged with the politics of the sexual revolution through its representation of “modernized” sexual identities, and a related querying of persistent gender stereotypes. According to Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, James Bond and his Bond Girl functioned as “key sites for the elaboration of a (relatively) new set of gender identities”. Bond embodied a male identity freed from the sexual restrictions of chivalry that had limited the traditional aristocratic hero, while the Bond Girl was depicted as “the subject of a free and independent sexuality liberated from the constraints of family, marriage and domesticity”.

Still, although she appears to embody the liberal sexuality of the emerging women’s movement, the 1960s Bond Girl is, perhaps, more accurately described as a “model of adjustment”, a dependent and derivative character that is tailored to fulfill the sexual needs of Bond (24).

Certainly, the Bond film consistently links sexual pleasure with powerful notions of duty and punishment. Examining female characterization in the James Bond novels, Christine Bold writes that women’s bodies are “designed to please others: notably, James Bond”. In this way, they function within a wider trope which draws connections between “lines of national affiliation and [those of] sexual attachment” (172). Bold’s argument can be applied to the depiction of “good” and “bad” women in the Bond film. Throughout the 1960s, the franchise both engaged with and recapitulated historical approaches to gender that situated female sexuality as suspect and dangerous when articulated outside the confines of heterosexual marriage. When women act as independent agents expressing sexual desire, they are typically considered threatening, deviant, and “bad”. According to Deborah Tolman and Tracy Higgins, “Women who wish to avoid the consequences of being labelled ‘bad’ are expected to define the boundaries of sexual behaviour, outlined by men’s desire, and to ignore or deny their own sexual desire as a guide to their choices” (205). Thus, in order to be presented as a “good” character, the Bond Girl is expected to submit to the will and libido of James Bond, forfeiting her own liberated sexual identity for a domesticated one. By comparison, women who embrace their liberal sexualities and refuse to adhere to the “Bondian” standard of normative femininity are presented as “bad” and are violently punished.

Interestingly, the first decade of the franchise (1962–69) featured the highest concentration of female villains in leading and supportive roles, and the films produced during these years relied on particular iconography to designate villainous and heroic embodiments of female identity. The image of the Bond Girl strongly adhered to the character template outlined by Ian Fleming in the James Bond novels. In the novels, for instance, Bond Girls are described as having either blonde or dark brown/black hair with no intermediate shades, and this trait is carried through into the cinematic imaging of the 1960s Bond Girl (Amis 55).² On the other hand, the most dangerous female villains of the decade – including Rosa Klebb (Lotte Lenya) in From Russia with Love (1963), Fiona Volpe (Luciana Paluzzi) in Thunderball (1965), Helga Brandt (Karin Dor) in You Only Live Twice (1967), and Irma Bunt (Ilse Steppat) in On Her Majesty’s Secret Service (1969) – are depicted with red hair and placed in stark visual contrast to the Bond Girl. In his novels, Fleming reserved the use of red hair for Bond’s most dangerous male adversaries: he employed the colour literally and metaphorically in order to express the sinister nature of the villain. As Kingsley Amis suggests, “The one sure way of spotting him is to watch his eyes. If you see a red blaze or even a glint of red in them, you know your man” (65). This convention was adapted into the imaging of villainous women (and not men) within the first decade of the cinematic franchise. Drawing on stereotypes relating to red-haired women, Bond’s early female adversaries were figured variously as hot-tempered, weird, clownish, wild, and/or oversexed (Heckert and Best 365). While these women were always positioned as social and/or sexual deviants, the franchise did distinguish between them through reference to the key factors of age and sexual availability. This, as I will go on to discuss, gave rise to two distinct categories of female villain: the oversexed siren (represented by Volpe and Brandt) and the middle-aged sexual deviant (exemplified by Klebb and Bunt).

All the Bond villains of the 1960s are affiliated with SPECTRE,¹ an international terrorist organization that is presided over by the megalomaniacal Starvo Blofeld. Consisting of 11 committee members and a variety of henchmen/henchwomen and spies, SPECTRE is a fairly
contained operation, and one in which women are accorded a certain measure of authority. Fiona Volpe is the trusted advisor and primary henchwoman of Emilio Largo (Adolfo Celi), second-in-command at SPECTRE, while Helga Brandt is an official member of SPECTRE, ranked eleventh in the hierarchy. Although both red-haired women are intelligent, competent with weaponry, and willing to use violence to achieve their objectives, they are not presented as physical threats to Bond; instead, it is their liberal sexual identities which work to endanger Bond’s phallic masculinity. Volpe, for instance, is a “black widow” assassin who uses her body to seduce and murder her prey. When she has sex with Bond in Thunderball, Volpe not only dominates him in bed, but also ridicules his phallic masculinity: “But of course, I forgot your ego, Mr. Bond. James Bond, who only has to make love to a woman and she starts to hear heavenly choirs singing. She repents and then immediately returns to the side of right and virtue. But not this one!” All at once, Volpe rejects domestication, challenges the notion of ideological repositioning, and unrepentantly proclaims her status as a “bad girl” in the film.

At the end of each film, Bond’s adversaries are expected to die. Bond typically engages in hand-to-hand combat with his male opponents and eliminates them in the film’s climax. Bond, however, does not use lethal force against villainous women in the first three decades (16 films) of the franchise. Bond’s restricted use of his “licence to kill” highlights the social and generic codes that govern the “proper” (and gendered) use of deadly retaliation in the series. In spite of the feminist struggle for equal opportunities, the Bond film creates a double standard that allows women to enact violence on the male body and then removes them from the arena of violent combat. Inevitably, this works to undermine the efficacy of women’s aggressive actions, which, in turn, results in the prevailing depiction of women as inferior adversaries.

The manner in which the deviant female body is disciplined in these Bond films draws attention to the franchise’s precarious attempts to balance patriarchal and commercial interests. Early in the series, Bond producers were concerned that audiences would experience an aversion towards Bond if he used his “licence to kill” against his female enemies. According to Ellen Willis, violence enacted on the female body is typically linked with notions of female victimization and only becomes palatable when it “can be blamed on deviant individuals rather than systematic male power. Most people, even antifeminists... condemn the perpetrators in principle” (47). In order to maintain a positive rapport with audiences, Bond producers shifted the responsibility of violence against women onto SPECTRE: Volpe is shot in the back by one of her henchmen and Blofeld drops Brandt into a pool of hungry piranhas. Both women are killed without warning and without the opportunity to defend themselves. The burden of their dishonourable deaths is placed on the shoulders of SPECTRE and works to further vilify Bond’s longtime rival Blofeld. Volpe and Brandt are thus depicted as disposable subjects whose violent deaths strengthen the heroism of Bond, while enhancing the villainy of Blofeld.

As well as the “oversexed siren” paradigm, the Bond franchise offered another model of female villainy in the 1960s. Rosa Klebb and Irma Bunt are highly influential members of SPECTRE: Klebb is designated third-in-command of the organization, while Bunt is the trusted advisor of Blofeld. Both of these women share a remarkably consistent image: they are short, stocky, middle-aged white women who are conservatively dressed and appear androgynous in their films. However, their strongest physical link is their red hair, cut short to emphasize age over aesthetics. Too old and too unattractive to pique or satisfy Bond’s libido, Klebb and Bunt retain a sexual currency in From Russia With Love and You Only Live Twice respectively through their erotic interest in the Bond Girl. Characterized as masculine lesbians, Klebb and Bunt pose an overt challenge to Bond’s (hetero)sexual potency and are thus condemned as symbols of an “aberrant” (homo)sexuality that threatens to destabilize the status quo.

Presented as sexually unavailable as a result of age and orientation, these middle-aged “deviants” deny Bond his plot “tipping points” and offer unbridled challenges to his phallic masculinity. Subject to the ideology of the franchise, which sanctions the disciplining of women who reject (hetero)normative gender roles, Klebb is killed in the final scenes of From Russia With Love. Pinned against the wall by Bond, an incapacitated Klebb is shot and killed by Bond Girl Romanova, who chooses her lover, James Bond, over her lesbian suitor. At once, Klebb is punished for her deviant sexuality while “normative” female heterosexuality prevails. As Christine Bold notes, “the equation never fails: beauty, heterosexuality, and patriotism go together”, and are, in turn, pitched against “ugliness, sexual ‘deviance’, and criminality” (174). Bunt’s fate, however, is markedly different from that of Klebb. The final scenes of On Her Majesty’s Secret Service feature the marriage between Bond and his Bond Girl Tracy DIVinzenzo (Diana Rigg). Moments later, DIVinzenzo is murdered in a drive-by shooting. Interestingly, it is Blofeld who drives the car while Bunt does the killing. Although both villains flee the scene and survive the film, Bond eventually exacts revenge on the elusive Blofeld.
in *For Your Eyes Only* (1981), Bunt, on the other hand, is never killed, captured, or punished. She is the only villain in the history of the film series to escape the violent retribution of James Bond. One of the reasons for this is that Ilse Steppat, the actor who played Bunt, died shortly after the film’s release. Considered irreplaceable, producers elected to honour Steppat’s memory rather than recast the role. At another level, though, Bunt’s evasion of “Bondian” justice might also be understood in terms of the franchise’s shift of narrative focus in the 1970s—a shift which corresponds to broader changes in the portrayal and treatment of female characters. Focusing more intently on the relationship between Bond and his Bond Girls, films of the 1970s relegate female antagonists to secondary and supportive roles in the franchise. In spite of these explanations, Bunt still remains the only female villain to survive the film, unpunished for the crimes she perpetrated against Bond and the social/sexual taboos she breaks.

**Mayday! disappearing women**

While the first decade of Bond films centred on the conflict between the protagonist and his adversaries, the films of the 1970s focused more closely on the relationship between Bond and his Bond Girl. This narrative adjustment coincides with what Susan Faludi refers to as a media-driven “backlash” against the feminist advances of the 1970s (50–54). According to Bennett and Woollacott, the Bond films of the 1970s pivoted on the “putting-back-into-place” of women who were perceived as having taken their independence and liberation too far. “This shift in narrative organization clearly constituted a response—in truth, somewhat nervous and uncertain—to the Women’s Liberation movement, fictitiously rolling-back the advances of feminism to restore an imaginally more secure phallocentric conception of gender relations” (28). As a result, female villains of the 1970s played relatively minor roles in the franchise and spent limited time on screen. Instead of portraying SPECTRE agents and henchwomen, these female antagonists were typically cast as incompetent spies (see Gloria Hendry’s portrayal of Rosie Carver in *Live and Let Die* [1973]), tragic mistresses (like Andrea Anders [Maud Adams] in *The Man with the Golden Gun* [1974]), and sexy secretaries (Caroline Munro’s “Naomi” in *The Spy Who Loved Me* [1977]). By the 1980s, the number of villainous women in the Bond franchise had contracted radically, and such roles were excised entirely from *Moonraker* (1979), *For Your Eyes Only*, and *The Living Daylights* (1987). Over a two-decade period, then, the Bond films gradually phased out any images of “bad” women that might detract attention away from the franchise’s new focus on female domestication.

May Day (Grace Jones) is the only female villain of the 1980s and is prominently featured in *A View to a Kill* (1985) as the girlfriend of villain Max Zorin (Christopher Walken). Not only does May Day outshine the rest of cast, but she is also privileged in the film’s promotion, standing back-to-back with Bond in movie posters that asked, “Has James Bond finally met his match?” (Black 226). In spite of Jones’s charismatic performance, May Day is considered an enigma by film critics, who struggle to read her character through the ideology of the film series. According to Black, May Day presents a challenge to Bond’s masculinity that is never resolved. Like Volpe, she poses a tangible threat to Bond’s physical safety and challenges his libido by dominating him in bed. While the film anticipates a showdown between Bond and May Day, this confrontation never occurs. Given that Bond does not use fatal force against women, the showdown between the charismatic enemies is perhaps eschewed on account of the likelihood that May Day would defeat Bond in a hand-to-hand combat scenario. Instead, the film skirts the issue by having Zorin betray May Day, which then commits suicide. In this way, the film conveniently forecloses any opportunity there might have been for Bond to assert the supremacy of his phallic masculinity (227).

Through the character of May Day—who seems to be influenced, in part, by the emerging discourses of third wave feminism—*A View to a Kill* offers a moment of feminist possibility at the height of the franchise’s feminist backlash. As a critical movement, the third wave is broadly defined by its prioritization of individuality, its rejection of essentialist notions of womanhood, and its sustained celebration of difference and contradiction (Tong 258). Critical of the “exclusive tendencies” of the feminist discourses that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, many third wave feminists take issue with the essentialist notion that all women share certain common characteristics which unify them as a group, preferring to investigate the role played by specific social and/or political factors in defining women’s individual experiences of oppression (Stone 85–87). “[S]haped by the racial and ethnic diversity of post-boomer generations” (Heywood and Drake 15), the third wave emphasizes racial, ethnic, cultural, and national difference, while pushing for the breakdown of ideological barriers, including gender binaries (Tong 288). This is most notable in the casting of Grace Jones as the first and only black female actor to portray a leading role in the Bond franchise. In
addition, May Day’s body performance subverts gender binaries by conflating the strength and masculinity expected of masculinity with the aesthetic beauty associated with femininity. Bond is at once fearful of and attracted to her body, and his competing feelings create confusion in a usually clear-cut narrative.

In order to generate this image of a female identity that cannot be easily understood, categorized, and/or contained, the makers of A View to a Kill treads heavily on the established star image of Grace Jones. Jones is part of the Brigitte Nielsen-era of action women and is best known for her “hypermasculine” performance of femininity. While feminist critics typically position Aliens (1986) and Terminator 2 (1991) as inaugurating the age of the Hollywood hard woman, the muscular women who feature in the action-fantasies of the early 1980s – such as Sandahl Bergman in Conan the Barbarian (1982), Grace Jones in Conan the Destroyer (1984), and Brigitte Nielson in Red Sonja (1985) – are typically overlooked. In fact, Jones’s characterization as Zulu in Conan the Destroyer appears to be transplanted wholesale into A View to a Kill. In the process, Jones’s iconic image and celebrity status became embedded within the Bond tradition. Certainly, the makers of the film struggled to adjust Jones’s star image to meet the gendered expectations of the franchise while still satisfying her fan base; as a consequence, the film does not establish any definite boundaries for her character. She is initially presented as an “other” in the film: she is wild, animalistic, hypermasculine, hyperviolent, oversexed, and amoral. Portrayed as a sadist, May Day obtains sexual pleasure by inflicting physical pain on her male victims. Her narrative treatment, however, changes when she is betrayed by Zorin. Granted the opportunity to explain her personal history to Bond, May Day reveals her motivations for employing excessive violent force and is, in the process, humanized. May Day then chooses to team up with Bond in order to exact revenge upon Zorin. When the trolley carrying Zorin’s bomb malfunctions, Bond abandons the revenge mission in order to find shelter from the impending explosion; May Day, meanwhile, remains to complete the task alone, offering a competing image of heroic competency in the course of her noble death. Although all Bond villains are expected to die, May Day is the only female adversary to determine her own fate, and her character is never contained or punished for her violent and sexual exploits.

In the political world of Bond, where codes and conventions clearly demarcate good and evil, May Day is a symbol of transgressive female identity that both upholds and subverts the sexist ideology of the franchise.

Postfeminist villainy

After a 6-year hiatus, the Bond film returned in the mid-1990s, having renegotiated many of its sexist codes. In order to maintain the generic integrity of the series, while still updating its identity politics, Bond producers chose “not to alter Bond’s attitude towards women, but rather [altered] the attitude of the women around him” (Chapman 256). Beginning with GoldenEye (1995), the franchise began to incorporate postfeminist sentiments into its characterization of violent women.

Although difficult to define in any categorical sense, postfeminism is a cultural phenomena that speaks primarily to the experiences of a white, middle-class “affluent elite” which has benefited substantially from the social and political gains made by second wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s (Tasker and Negra 2). Distinct from the third wave, postfeminism dismisses the need for continued political activism and tends to gloss over, rather than spotlight, social differences. As Jessica K. Taft observes in relation to “Girl Power”, postfeminist declarations of gender equality and female empowerment can work to distract young women from the realities of oppression, ignoring the extent to which forces like racism, classism, and homophobia continue to inform the current social order (73). In this (depoliticized) context, women can lay active claim to their sexuality, and “sexiness” – as we see in the case of the postfeminist Bond villain – can be portrayed without moral judgement (Owen et al. 10–11).

The Bond films of the 1990s feature the collision of Bond’s old-fashioned masculinity with the new sexual politics of the late twentieth century. By placing a deliberate focus on gender, the Bond franchise opens up a space for the emergence of new “postfeminist” female villains. These villainous women are invariably played by white American or European actors with pale complexions, shoulder-length brown/black hair, brown eyes, and petite, slender frames. As wealthy characters, their privileged backgrounds are notable through the quality and styling of their clothes, their ownership of consumer goods (like expensive cars and jewellery), and their participation in a variety of exotic leisure activities. In addition, these villains are presented as sexually empowered women who rely on duplicitous means to gain power and mastery over Bond. Recognizing his combined desire for sexual conquest and domestication, they use their bodies to develop emotional connections with Bond that render him vulnerable to attack. In GoldenEye, Bond is intrigued by the dangerous lifestyle and sensuality of Xenia Onatopp (Famke Janssen). She seduces Bond and then attempts to asphyxiate him.
between her legs during sex, bringing a new and violent meaning to the term “foreplay”. In The World is Not Enough (1999), Elektra King (Sophie Marceau) wins the affections of Bond by masquerading as a helpless Bond Girl in need of his protection. She sleeps with Bond and enters into a romantic relationship with him, using their intimate connection to cover up her multiple attempts to kill him. Finally, in Die Another Day (2002) double agent Miranda Frost (Rosamund Pike) attracts Bond with her frosty and standoffish demeanour. She seduces Bond in order to disarm him by literally stealing the clip out of his gun while they are making love. By retaining his old-fashioned notions of masculinity and conquest, Bond becomes a target for “empowered” 1990s women, who systematically use their bodies to seduce him, render him vulnerable, and then attack him.

If May Day exemplified a species of third wave feminism that prohibited Bond from validating his masculinity, then the “postfeminism” of Onatopp, King, and Frost seems to offer Bond the opportunity for phallic reclamation. This, in turn, opens up space for the reestablishment of the franchise’s sexist ideology and the re-subordination of female sexuality. Informed by “postfeminist” claims of gender equality, the franchise no longer restricts Bond from using lethal retaliation against villainous women: he engages in a violent fight sequence with Onatopp—which results, ironically, in her asphyxiation by a rope—and he also enters into a deadly confrontation with King, whom he shoots in the heart at point blank range in order to resist her attempts at sexual manipulation. On both occasions, the film permits Bond’s employment of fatal force in self-defence. Although the Bond films of the 1990s explore competing gender politics, then, Bond’s old-fashioned masculinity is presented as once again triumphing over dangerous women with liberal sexual identities.

The release of Casino Royale (2005) marks a new direction for the Bond franchise. The film reworks many of the conventions that define the genre, not least the heroic model that governs the series. No longer affiliated with the British lover tradition, James Bond is presented through the visual conventions and ideology of Hollywood masculinity. Bond’s body, rather than his libido, is the new locus of masculinity, and his heroic competency is now established through the body’s success within the space of physical action.4 By changing the parameters of heroic identity, the franchise has also adjusted the method through which Bond’s heroism is tested. Valenka (Ivana Milicevic) is the only female villain to be cast since 2006, and her characterization offers important insights into the gender politics at work in the current phase of the franchise.

In Casino Royale, Valenka is the girlfriend of the duplicitous LeChiffre (Mads Mikkelsen), and her identity is inextricably bound up with his; she is never featured on screen without him, she has little dialogue of her own, and she only acts upon his orders. Over the course of the film, she is paraded around in revealing costumes and her semi-nude body is placed on display in order to distract LeChiffre’s poker opponents. While alluring, Valenka does not interact sexually with Bond; because she is part of a monogamous relationship, she is already “domesticated” and as such does not represent an adequate sexual challenge to the British agent. When read through the original/presumed ideology of the franchise, Valenka is underestimated as a threat. And yet, she is arguably one of Bond’s most threatening adversaries and the only villain to succeed in (temporarily) killing him when she poisons his martini; indeed, Bond only survives this attack because he is resuscitated by Vesper Lynd.10

While sexy and dangerous (two characteristics typically associated with female villainy), Valenka is prevailingly disempowered: she is presented as a functionary of, rather than partner to, LeChiffre. Unlike the villainous women of the 1960s who made autonomous decisions while working under the megalomaniacal Blofeld, Valenka is defined exclusively in terms of her (heterosexual) relationship with LeChiffre. Her role in the film represents the trappings of postfeminism, which prefers reclaimed femininity and “sexiness” while overlooking residual gender, race, and class inequalities. This reading is supported by a consideration of Valenka’s death in the Casino Royale. While LeChiffre is killed during the climax of the film, Valenka’s death occurs off-screen and is only mentioned en passant during a conversation between Bond and M. Her death in the film is presented as a by-product of LeChiffre’s failed business transaction with Mr. White (Jesper Christensen) – another male villain of the film – rather than a punishment for her attempt on Bond’s life. Characterized as a sexy appendage to LeChiffre, Valenka is dislocated from the film’s narrative conflict in a way that facilitates the re-centring of male villainy within the series.

In the late 2000s, the franchise continues to renegotiate the gendered codes of villainy and violent conflict. Although Quantum of Solace (2008) exclusively features male villains, the film anticipates the emergence of a new generation of female antagonists. Midway through the film, Bond infiltrates a meeting of Quantum, a secret international organization resembling SPECTRE, which appears to be made up of various members seeking world domination. Although Bond does not uncover the identities of all the key players, he observes two female Quantum members (played by Alexandra Prussa and Uygar Tamer, respectively). Presented as
wealthy, powerful, and attractive middle-aged women, these characters gesture towards a potential new direction for the formulation of female villainy in the series. Motivated by personal ambition, these Quantum members have the capacity to project images of female transgression that are not contingent upon "aberrant" sexual behaviours.

Within the conventions of the Bond franchise, female villainy not only serves to strengthen Bond's heroic masculinity but also offers a perfect opportunity to demonize feminism as lesbian, deviant, threatening, monstrous, excessive, and other. As I have established over the course of this chapter, female villains are often punished for refusing to exchange their liberal sexual identities for domesticated ones, and their bodies are regularly situated as sites at which hegemonic masculinity can be reaffirmed. If the red-haired villains of the 1960s (and Grace Jones's May Day) asserted feminist possibilities that were unpopular and/or underrepresented at the time, they also projected images of individuality, liberal sexuality, female empowerment, and embodied resistance that are far less pronounced in current "postfeminist" constructions of female villainy. In order to recast female villains as strong, challenging, and competent adversaries for Bond, the franchise needs to take urgent account of the ways in which the discourses of postfeminism might work to limit, rather than enhance, women's agency. In this way, the Bond film might continue to engage with the politics of its context by responding to the increasingly complicated intersections of gender and power in the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. The Bond franchise is defined by its own, highly specific system of narrative codes and stock characters. While this chapter analyses the Bond film (and its representation of female villainy) as action cinema, its female characters might be further illuminated through reference to the conventions of the spy genre. See Rosie White's Violent Femmes: Women as Spies in Popular Culture (2007) and "Alias: Quality Television and the New Woman Professional" (in this book).

2. Elsewhere I have explored the characterization of cinematic Bond Girls and noted the transcription of Fleming's character template from novel to film. See "From English Style" (2008).

3. SPECTRE stands for Special Executive for Counter-Intelligence, Terror, Revenge and Extortion.

4. Relying on an outdated attitude to homosexuality, the Bond franchise frequently contrasted Bond's "healthy" (heteronormative libido with the "aberrant" and "dysfunctional" (homosexual) sexuality of his male adversaries. See Black.

5. Blofeld is portrayed by Anthony Dawson (1963, 1965), Donald Pleasence (1967), Telly Savalas (1969), Charles Gray (1971), and John Hollis (1981). With respect to Blofeld, the character, and not the actor(s), is considered irreplaceable.

6. According to Faludi, the antifeminist backlash was a pre-emptive strike against the increased possibility that women might achieve their goal of social equality (xviii).

7. According to Erica Scharer, hypermasculinity is "characterized by the idealization of stereotypically masculine or macho traits and the rejection of traits perceived as the antithesis of machismo" (160). Manifesting itself, most usually, as sexual and/or physical aggression, hypermasculinity acts as an apt framework for analysing the Grace Jones persona and the representation of May Day in A View to a Kill.

8. While these films have not been subjected to sustained analysis by feminist scholars, their influence is noted by both Tasker and Inness. The influence of the 1980s "tough woman" is also a point of reference for Purse in her delineation of the "angry woman" in contemporary cinema (in this book).

9. As I have argued elsewhere, in 2006 the Bond franchise changed the heroic model on which it turns and thus altered the iconography through which Bond's heroism is envisaged. See "I Know Where You Keep Your Gun" (2011).

10. Vesper Lynd is a foreign liaison agent who is dispatched by MI6 to monitor Bond's use of the funds allocated to him by Mfs. It later transpires that she is actually a double agent working for Quantum.

Works cited

“Everybody thought Dad was ruthless”, says Tony Soprano in the opening episode of *The Sopranos*, “but I gotta hand it to you: if you’d been born after those feminists, you wouldn’t have been the real gangster” (1.1). Livia Soprano, the “real gangster” of the above statement, represents a new kind of violent woman in visual culture. The “formidable maternal presence” of David Chase’s HBO mafia series *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) is mother to Tony Soprano (James Gandolfini): mob boss, protagonist, and usual subject of critical readings of the show. The focus in this chapter, though, will be on the character and influence of Livia (Nancy Marchand), whose position as an elderly, widowed grandmother carries far greater power than the archetype might suggest. She is in fact a “Caligula-like despot” (Hilden 38); “a demon-possessed matriarch” (Simon 4–5) whose authority pervades the violence that underpins *The Sopranos*.

“[W]hat really seems to have attracted feminist critics in recent years”, writes Jacinda Read, “is the violent woman or action heroine”, a figure whose very representation of femininity is defined by the embodiment of traditionally masculine traits (205). Such films as *Charlie’s Angels* (2000), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), *Larry Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001), and *Kill Bill* (2003 and 2004) are marked, says Lisa Cuthard, “by popular appeal, narrational centrality of active female characters, genre hybridity, and sophisticated fight choreography”, placing the female at the centre of “genres usually associated with male characters, actors, and audiences” (154). Arguably, these violent women are, to borrow Elizabeth Hills’ words, “figurative males”, appropriating the macho behaviour of the male action hero (205). Crucially, however, and as both Barbara Creed and Jane Usher have identified, such female