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**TERMS DEFINED: IAN FLEMING'S IDEOLOGICAL
FORMULATIONS IN *CASINO ROYALE***

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At the very outset a point needs be made that my reading of the first Bond novel, Ian Fleming's *Casino Royale* (1953), risks betraying what Wimsatt and Beardsley famously calls 'intentional fallacy'. It is perfectly understandable that the author while writing the first novel of a massive series could not possibly have anticipated the final shape the narrative would acquire over a period of more than half a century. However, in most cases and especially in the case of the Bond novels, it is true that the author's formulations in the first novel plays a dominant role in shaping and fixing certain basic tenets of the entire narrative of the series. And in this particular case, my reading of *Casino Royale* will carry and be informed by my awareness of the entire Bond narrative which includes the post-Fleming novels too. Since my interest in the novels lies largely in the portrayal of the 'political other' the identity of the agent of othering—in this case, the author-narrator, a perpetually vital masculine white Anglo-Saxon Christian lens as well as an amplifier—becomes a central consideration in my analysis. That said, I cannot help but state, in spite of the sanctions of the authors of "The Intentional Fallacy", that my study is, by and large, an analysis of authorial or narratorial intention. To bring in an architectural metaphor,

Casino Royale will be read as the base which supports, directs and limits the massive structure of the entire Bond narrative. Fleming through his first novel introduces a political and moral skeleton to which he and the other Bond writers would go on to add flesh and tissues. The political, moral, ethical and psychological subject-positions of the protagonist as well as the antagonist are defined. He himself and the other writers would largely remain faithful to these fundamental definitions only with varying degrees of deviations necessitated by the changing political scenario.

In the first chapter of the novel we are introduced to both Bond and Le Chiffre. But it is only in the second chapter that the profiling of Le Chiffre and SMERSH takes place. We come to know that Le Chiffre, the successful gambler of the first chapter, is an agent of the USSR and we are also introduced to the present crisis of both Le Chiffre and the novel. Le Chiffre is the ‘undercover paymaster of . . . the Communist-controlled trade union in the heavy and transport industries of Alsace’ (Fleming CR 14). His recent investment of fifty million francs of the union money in a network of brothels and the subsequent French law that criminalises ‘pimping’ and the sale of pornographic material results in an overnight deficit in the union fund. Le Chiffre has a choice of recovering the money—through gambling of course—or of eventual death in case of failure. This simple introduction of what we may call the central crisis or the problem of the novel has quite an ideological baggage. Firstly, we may note that the setting is France, a country with a sizable leftist presence in the immediate post-war era. And we are led to believe that direct—and not ideological—Soviet control exists over a section of French civil life, understandably that of the working class. Secondly, an a priori link is established between the Western Communists and the USSR. Alan Sinfield’s in his *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (2004) elaborates while discussing the Sartre-Camus rift that how it was a consistent tactic and tendency of the ‘intellectuals of the Western alliance’ to immediately

interpret and present any form of Western leftism as support for Stalinism and hence a stand against liberal Western values of democracy and freedom. Sinfield goes at length in deconstructing the inflated rhetoric of ‘freedom’ that the post-war Western alliance has repeatedly inflicted on Communism. And it is a proven historical fact that the liberal-capitalist powers in Western Europe and the USA have systematically stigmatised communism, and hence justifying its suppression, by publically invoking what Zizek goes on to call ‘the ghosts of Gulag’ in his preface to Lenin’s *What is to be Done?*, and by immediately associating Western Communism with Stalinism. Thirdly, in a seemingly casual manner criminality, immorality and ethical transgressions are rendered defining features of the communist bloc.

It is in the description of Le Chiffre that Fleming lays down the formula for the characterization of the later Bond villains. It may be noted that physical abnormality—and in most cases deformity accompanied by sexual deviance—would become a defining aspect of the antagonist. However, unlike many of the later villains Le Chiffre’s abnormality is toned down and his sexuality is spared to the extent of a huge sexual appetite:

. . . Complexion very pale. . . Eyes very dark brown with white showing all round iris. Small, rather feminine mouth. False teeth of expensive quality. Ears small, with large lobes, indicating some Jewish blood. Hands small . . . hirsute . . . Feet small. (Fleming CR 20)

Another important stereotyping is also formulated: the antagonists of most of the Bond novels—Fleming’s and post-Fleming—are racial hybrids constituted inevitably by non-Anglo-Saxon types. On this matter, it would be worthwhile to cite Umberto Eco from his “Narrative Structures in Ian Fleming”:

The Villain is born in an ethnic area that stretches from central Europe to the Slav countries and to the Mediterranean basin: as a rule he is of mixed blood and his origins are complex and obscure; he [/she] is asexual or homosexual, or at any rate is not sexually normal . . . (the racial convention blames particularly the Jews, the Germans, the Slavs and the Italians . . .) (Eco 249)

In the present case Le Chiffre 'is probably a mixture of Mediterranean with Prussian or Polish strains' speaking 'good German' with 'traces of Merseilles accent', 'smiles infrequently' and 'does not laugh' and, to add to this is 'flagellant' (Fleming CR 20). The essential German connection of the antagonists is also taken care of in order to establish an a priori similarity between Communist and Nazi symptoms. Apart from the formulaic portrayal of Le Chiffre, Fleming also lays down the formula for the characterizations of the Villain's accessories too. We come across the 'stupid' yet 'obedient' Bulgars who are used as petty murdering machines by the Russians. Le Chiffre's personal body-guards also bear the formulaic traits of physical ugliness and innate cruelty:

His face was wooden and grey, but his eyes flickered and gleamed like a conjurers . . . Bond guessed that he would kill without interest or concern for what he killed and that he would prefer strangling. He had something of Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*, but his inhumanity would not come from infantilism but from drugs. Marihuana, decided Bond.

The other man . . . seemed to be a cripple. . . His mouth hung vacantly half-open and revealed very bad teeth. He wore a heavy black moustache and the backs of his hands on the rail were matted with black hair. Bond guessed that hair covered most of his squat body. Naked, Bond supposed, he would be an obscene object. (Fleming CR 79)

It is understandable that the portrayal of antagonism necessitates violence as a primary trait. But in the Bond world, the antagonist is denied, in most cases, a political or personal logic in inflicting violence. Violence, apathy for life and cruelty are rendered natural, almost biological, characteristics of the political other. And this formula would largely define the portrayal of the grand megalomaniac antagonists as well as minor villains of the later Bond novels. While Bond kills for self-defense or political motives, the other kills by nature.

In a political reading of *Casino Royale*, the essentialist portrayal of the political other is not the most important aspect. We shall encounter an even more zealous, elaborate and subtle practice of othering in the later Bond novels of both Fleming and the post-Fleming writers. *Casino Royale* claims its uniqueness and relevance in the entire Bond narrative through the psycho-political interpellation of the nascent James Bond as the vanguard of the struggle of the Western alliance against the Communist world. And it is here that the entire politics of essentialist othering in the Bond world can be explained through a Saidian Lense. It is lesser in order to ethico-politically combat Communism that Fleming attributes—again staying by the Anglo-Saxon Christian value-system—the demonic qualities to the Communist antagonists than to render emancipatory the historical and contemporary war-politics of the Anglo-Saxon capitalist machinery.

In a conversation with his partner Vesper Lynd, Bond expresses cool skepticism about his profession and denies himself the very ethico-moral high ground that defines the authorial political position. Vesper refers to the heroic status of Double O section and Bond responds:

It's not difficult to get a Double O number if you are prepared to kill people . . . That's all the meaning it has. It's nothing to be particularly proud of. I have got the corpses of a Japanese cipher expert in New York and a Norwegian double agent in Stockholm to

thank for being a Double O. Probably quite decent people. They just got caught up in the gale of the world like that Yugoslav that Tito bumped off. It's a confusing business but if it's one's profession, one does what one's told. . . (Fleming CR 64-65)

This skepticism culminates in the lengthy conversation between Bond and Mathis in the chapter "The Nature of Evil". The conversation largely consists of Bond's pseudo-philosophical enquiry into the problems of detecting good and evil and Mathis' chiding assertion of the validity and the existential necessity of people like him and Bond. The conversation is almost like a psychoanalytical session that Bond undergoes in order to clear his troubled conscience and reboot once and for all for his future patriotic mission. The unavoidable relativity of the subject-positions of heroes and villains troubles Bond. For once, he goes beyond the Anglo-Saxon binary and looks at the scenario from a seemingly objective position. But he is immediately informed of the fallacy of his relativity theory and thrust back into his patriotic role from the brinks of resignation by Mathis:

Well, when you get back to London you will find there are other Le Chiffres seeking to destroy you and your friends and your country. M will tell you about them. And now that you have really seen an evil man, you will know how evil they can be and you will go after them to destroy them in order to protect yourself and the people you love. You won't wait to argue about it. You know what they look like now and what they can do to people. You may be a bit choosy about the jobs you take on. You may want to be certain that the target is really black, but there are plenty of really black targets around. . .

Surround yourself with human beings, my dear James. They are easier to fight for than principles.

. . . But don't let me down and become human, yourself. We would lose such a wonderful machine. (Fleming CR 146-147)

The importance of this episode is also noted by Bond critic Jeremy Black in a similar context. Mathis doesn't only clarify that the other is indeed evil, he also emphasizes that the evil other has widely infiltrated the world of the good and is relentlessly acting to destroy that world. This is primarily the ethical construction that justifies not only the fictional existence of Bond and his service but also has historically gathered internal consensus for the various political activities of the Western Alliance. The perceived threat to the ideals of 'freedom' and 'democracy'—the rhetoric around which helps the oppressive capitalist machinery of the Western world thrive—is a constant presence in the mainstream narratives of the Western Alliance. Only, historically, the agents of this threat had changed faces from the erstwhile communists through Al Qaeda to the contemporary menace called the ISIL. And it is the awareness of this threat that addresses the existential crisis of James Bond, rejuvenates his patriotism and clarifies his ethical doubt once and for ever. The political act of aggressive espionage is given an ethical mould; a war against an alternative economic, religious or political model is waged by rendering it evil. The language of politics, once again after the colonial era, becomes religious. And even Fleming's colour scheme adheres to the standards of classical racism, not only in *Casino Royale*, but also in his later novels, where recurrence of the word 'black' has almost an impressionistic effect.

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