

“I’m not a Sporting Man, Fräulein”

The Tragedy and Farce of James Bond’s Heroic Prowess

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“Hegel remarks somewhere that all great events and characters of world history occur twice. He forgot to add: the first time as high tragedy, the second time as low farce”.

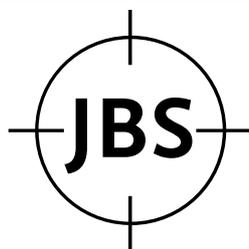
- Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” (1852)

“This never happened to the other fellow”.

- George Lazenby as James Bond, *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* (1969)

This article concerns repetition – theoretically, historically, and dramatically – in popular cultural expressions of sport in the James Bond films. As such it connects to how Hegel and Marx furnish the course of time with dialectical turnovers, implying repetition and negation as the key drivers of the pendulum of its trajectory; but it also addresses the problem raised in such a view of historical progression. This will be inquired by looking at the attempts at displaying and sustaining heroism in the Bond films, either when an actual risk generates tragedy or when, for whatever reason, there is instead a risk of degenerating into farce.

Marx’s quote *supra* has itself been repeated countless times, crystallised into an apocryphal tagline: “[h]istory repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as



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farce”. Furthermore, it was already a sort of repetition: distorted like in a game of Chinese whispers, Marx’s permutation is itself borrowed from a letter sent to him in 1851 from Friedrich Engels in which Engels comments that “it really seems as if old Hegel in his grave were acting as World Spirit and directing history, ordaining most conscientiously that it should all be unrolled twice over, once as a great tragedy and once as a wretched farce” (qtd. in Mazlish 1972, 336).

It has been remarked that Engels and Marx turn Hegel’s original statement about time on its head, inverting its meaning: for Hegel, historical repetition had the effect of consolidating an event in memory and giving it a meaning that it did not have to begin with. What Hegel says is: “[...] in all periods of the world a political revolution is sanctioned in men’s opinions, when it repeats itself [...] By repetition that which at first appeared merely a matter of chance and contingency, becomes a real and ratified existence” (1956, 313). Ironically, Marx’s repetition of Engels’ quip seems to be an instance that supports Hegel’s thesis, in that we remember Hegel’s statement mostly through Marx’s Engelsian amendment. Maybe Marx’s statement itself is a farcical repetition of Hegel – or the consolidating repetition of Engels’ farce. In any case, possibly the truth lies in a combination of both views: it is not exactly that things happen twice but rather that events or personages can be repeated on the stage of world history, sometimes consolidating for prosperity the meaning of the original occurrence, thereby cementing its sense of tragedy (as if it were fate), but other times confusing or deforming its meaning by appearing as a sort of travesty (seeming like farce).

However, there is yet another Hegelian ghost lurking in the Marxian library: even before Engels had provided the tragedy-farce dichotomy, Marx had himself attempted a variant. In the 1844 “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. An Introduction”, the relationship between the *ancien régime* (of France and Britain) and its return in the modern German state is described by Marx in terms of tragedy and comedy:

The struggle against the German political present is the struggle against the past of modern nations, which continue to be harassed by reminiscences of the past. It is instructive for them to see the *ancien régime*, which in their countries has experienced its tragedy, play its comic role as a German phantom [...] The modern *ancien régime* is merely the clown of a world order whose real heroes are dead. History is thorough and passes through many stages while bearing an ancient form to the grave. The last stage of a world-historical form is its comedy. (1992, 247)

As Slavoj Žižek comments, picking up on the ghostly metaphors in the passage, his “supplement to Hegel’s notion of historical repetition was a rhetorical figure that had haunted Marx years earlier” (2018, 2)

Now, few ghosts haunt the machinery of popular culture more than James Bond. Quite fittingly, the history of Bond is full of repetition. The already repetitive formulas of the Fleming novels (cf. Umberto Eco in Lindner 2009a) were largely transposed to the films, and new ones invented, as an intermedial repetition occurred from novels to films (via TV and cartoons), and later to video games. All sorts of intertextual references to or from these sources, not least the films, proliferate memetically in the realm of popular culture, as with the accessories, attributes, mannerisms, and quotations associated with the character. As Iwona Kurz notes, even Bond’s famous line of introduction is a repetition: “Bond. James Bond” (2016). So, too, one might add, is his codename: “007”, in a line of double noughts.

As the series went on, an uncanny variation was introduced into the repetition by having new actors take on the role after Sean Connery: George Lazenby, the second Bond, ironically laments that “[t]his never happened to the other fellow” at the beginning of the character’s first recasting. With a further twist of fate, Connery would himself return once more, confirming that he does indeed live twice, in *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971) – and then yet again in the non-canonic *Never Say Never Again* (1983), which repeats *Thunderball* (1965) most certainly, unnervingly incarnating the spirit of Bond who leaves in his wake a shadowy realm of phantoms and revenants to explore.

REBOOT MECHANICS: AN HAUNTOLOGY OF THE BONDIVERSE

The silver screen continues to serve up uncanny apparitions on its platter. When the French philosopher Jacques Derrida is interviewed about his views of cinema, this is discussed in terms of haunting. A frequent cinema-goer since childhood, Derrida’s inability to analyse film at any length is due to the “thoroughly spectral structure of the cinematic image. Every viewer, while watching a film, is in communication with some work of the unconscious that, by definition, can be compared with the work of haunting, according to Freud” (Derrida 2015, 26). A more distinct approach than Derrida’s personal capitulation to the phantoms and fantasies of moving images echoes is what he calls “hauntology”. A wordplay with its homonym “ontology”, hauntology is actually a theoretical antonym to ontology (roughly understood as “the teaching of what is”): Derrida’s hauntological

teaching precisely concerns that which is not, but still haunts us in the forms of apparitions, spectres, and ghosts. Coined originally in *Les Spectres de Marx* (Derrida 1994), hauntology has been applied in the analysis of late capitalism, post-Fordism, and neoliberal powers of the turn-of-the millennium societies; for it is time that concerns hauntology – a broken sort of time (Hägglund 2008), such as when Marx paraphrases Hamlet’s rant about it being out of joint (Fisher 2012).

Mark Fisher (2012) proposes hauntology as an approach apt for analysing film and exemplifies with British films from the era of a waning social democracy. Apostrophising the great temporal trail-blazers of the late twentieth-century, such as Fredric Jameson and Francis Fukuyama, Fisher sorts spectres into a category of entities not being (able to be) present, however delineative of relations to other temporalities. Moving images peculiarly seem to be able to summon both pasts that never were and futures that will never come. When time is corrupted and twisted, immense consequences for place and space await, and this is what cinema explicitly or implicitly can reveal.

Enter the ghost. (Hamlet’s quip “time is out of joint” is what Marx chips in with in his reworking of the Hegelian fateful cursor of history, and it is this discontinued trajectory that Derrida conjoins.) The nostalgia of the current movie industry is an example of reiterative hauntings (and not only then in horror movies, which, nevertheless, have their place in Fisher’s analysis). Although Bond seems to perfectly fit in the temporality of hauntology (Cold War and onwards), Fisher fails to mention him. While a symbolic SPECTRE certainly haunts Bond (i.e., the eponymous and clandestine organisation recurrently challenging our hero), the hauntological approach of the present article rather lets us follow the repetitions of Bondian themes connected to his heroism, such as his performance of physical prowess and sport (Pegram 2018). Bond’s heroics are often presented by the book or film titles as grandiose, metaphysical challenges to finitude, often in the face of his battle against his spectral nemesis. Aside from SPECTRE finally taking centre stage by laying claim to the title of the 2015 Bond film, life and death issues have been played out in several titles that obsessively express existential paradoxes: *You Only Live Twice* (1967), *Live and Let Die* (1973), *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997), *Die Another Day* (2002), and *No Time to Die* (2021). And through all of this, as the end credits roll, our hero is promised to return – even, in the latter case, as we have just seen him die in spectacular fashion. If anyone thought that death would be enough to stop Bond, they have not understood the hauntology that he inhabits.

When it comes to broken timelines and haunting spectres, the phenomenon of the “reboot” holds a special place in the world of films (Davis 2013). A re-

boot is precisely this: “Repetition and first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost” (Derrida 1994, 10). In the event of a new incarnation, there is the question of what remains of the past; how to fill the boots of one’s predecessors, as it were. When Lazenby remarks that “[t]his never happened to the other fellow”, he is but the first in line to allude to the Bondiverse as one of rebootisation; he is just making it explicit. For most of the Bond films, the character of Bond moves through a fictional universe where few things have continuity while many things repeat: always M, always Q, always Moneypenny, always the Walther PPK, always shaken martinis; but also always new Bond girls, new villains, new glossy gadgets, new exotic locales, new Felix Leiters, new Blofelds, and ultimately new Ms, new Qs, and so on. The most drastic reboot thus far is of course that by Daniel Craig in *Casino Royale* (2006), where a new actor returns the franchise to the first Ian Fleming novel to tell our hero’s origin story, setting him on a course which had a relatively continuous story arc throughout his tenure, ending with *No Time to Die*. Now, an even more drastic reboot will be necessary to affirm the truth of that latter title, considering its finale.

Many of these iterations follow a similar pattern that becomes especially evident when considering how sports are repeatedly used in more or less inventive ways to spice up action sequences. This is a formula which was introduced with Connery’s scuba-diving in *Thunderball*, which by the end of the film escalated into underwater warfare. It was further developed with Lazenby in *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* (1969), where skiing was used at several instances with similarly escalating dramatic force, as means of combat. Roger Moore would take up skiing in *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977), in *For Your Eyes Only* (1981), and in *A View to a Kill* (1985), adding a stint of snowboarding, while also making some foray into parachuting, hang-gliding, and mountaineering. Timothy Dalton, in turn, took up parachuting and mountaineering in *The Living Daylights* (1987) while moving to water-skiing in *Licence to Kill* (1989). Pierce Brosnan was introduced in *Golden-Eye* (1995) doing a bungee-jump, and later did variants of skydiving and parachuting, including a HALO-jump in *Tomorrow Never Dies*, culminating in the tsunami kite-surfing extravaganza in *Die Another Day*. Lastly, Daniel Craig made an attempt at parkour in *Casino Royale*, but then refrained from continuing down the path of extreme sports.

The theoretical and methodological point of departure of the present article is that by elaborating Marx and Engels’ interpretation of Hegel, new operationalisations of the latter’s scheme of how negation is the dialectical impetus of history emerge. Iterations in the world of James Bond as empirical *loci* admits

such an operationalisation in two levels of analysis: firstly, in order to lay out the temporal qualities of repetition and distortion of the saga, the reboot mechanics of the franchise will be outlined; secondly, a closer problematisation of Bond's sportive endeavours makes possible a scrutiny of the performance of heroism. Thus, by connecting the two Marxian quotes (the one of the passing of time as genre transition, focused by Žižek, and the one of haunting, focused by Derrida), the inquiry could be said to assemble a methodological approach that reinforces the theories of time and repetition at play as well as the analysis of film, with a particular focus on the dramatic use of sport.

The rest of the article is structured as follows: a brief overview of relevant literature will be presented. Next comes a section laying out the theoretical points of departure consisting of an exposition of heroism and its relation to tragedy and fate. The two analytical sections will follow the repetitions in and reboots of the films of James Bond and scrutinise them in relation to the main concepts of the study: heroism, dramatic genres, sport, and spectres. The paper concludes with a suggestion of how to see the Bondiverse's broken temporality as an integral cinematic universe, as disclosed by an hauntological inquiry.

SPECTACLE, SPECTRES, AND SPORT

To begin before the beginning, as demonstrated in a classic 1965 essay by Umberto Eco, there were repetitive formulas already in the narrative structure of the novels by Ian Fleming – a set of recurring motifs interpreted by Eco as binary oppositions in a Manichean ideology. However, the oppositions coalesce somewhat uncomfortably in Fleming's stylish literature “for the masses”, a kind of kitschy “unstable montage, alternating Grand Guignol and nouveau roman” (Eco qtd. in Lindner 2009a, 53). A similar ambivalence is evident in a cultural studies approach to the popularity of Bond as hero. For Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, Bond is a “popular hero” not only in quantitative terms of commercial success, which truly began with the serialisation of *From Russia with Love* in 1957 – ironically, the novel in which Fleming had intended to kill off his protagonist – but also in terms of a special appeal; this popularity made him “a political and sexual hero for the lower middle classes” (1987, 29). More recently, Aliocha Wald Lasowski discusses the melding of high cultural and low culture in the Bond movies, after having treated the mythological status of the Bond character in spectral terms: while Bond is not typically a superhero, he is the embodiment of the “superman” in the strictly Nietzschean sense—a figure of the “eternal return” whose constant brushes with death has him return in an ever stronger appreciation for the beautiful things in life (Wald Lasowski 2020).

A small number of studies have engaged in the hauntological aspects of James Bond in a more systematic way. Surely, there is a nominal reason to connect Derrida's necromantic approach to the Albion champion with the clandestine antagonist organisation of SPECTRE in the Bondiverse (cf Pierce 2021), but Kurz goes further in her essay by claiming that Bond, throughout the whole catalogue of his films, is chased by the "spectre of convention" on the one hand and by the "spectre of failure" on the other. Moreover, Kurz points to the popular cultural expression of the film medium itself, which she understands as "spectacle" in the sense of Guy Debord. Another instance in Kurz's analysis, which is of interest for the present article, is the comparison and contiguity between the first and last Bond in the film canon: Connery and Craig. To juxtapose Bond personages, almost as in a lineage, opens up a particular instance of a hauntological temporality that will be utilised in the analysis below (cf. Kurz).

Hauntology has also been applied to the use of Bond music in popular culture. Abigail Gardner and Ros Jennings (2020) analyse the untimeliness of Bond songs and the iterations of it in the music of hip hop artist Kanye West, in order to unpack the inherent racism and colonialism in the Bondiverse. The authors suggest that West's way of resummoning the voices of black female singers of Bond scores is a more political version of hauntology, a literal "presenting" that refuses to look upon the past as dead, and that thus is disinterable. This approach synthesises Fisher's introduction of hauntology to film studies with the inspiration he takes from how hauntology had been evoked in musical experimentation and research. Surely, spectacles are visual, but they are aural as well, which why Gardner and Jennings are right to point out and scrutinise the cultural significance of Bond songs. Songs, scores, and the occasional "needle drops" are haunting presences in the Bondiverse that await further analysis – such as when Roger Moore leisurely bushwhacks along a lethal off-piste route accompanied by The Beach Boys' surfing anthem "California Girls" in the first blockbuster display of snowboarding in *A View to a Kill*. Concerning the question of sports, a Bond quote quite similar to the one heading this article ("You're not a sportsman, Mr Bond") appears in the subtitle to an essay by Steven Zani, which in actuality, however, deals with a Heideggerian analysis of technology. The contention is that both the hero Bond and the typical Bond villain are defined by their relationship with technology, but in opposite ways. While the villains display an attitude of aggression, domination, or a desire to kill for amusement, Bond uses technology in self-defence: "[i]n a cinematic œuvre where both hero and villain are technologised, Bond's relationship is one of necessity rather than sport" (Zani

in South and Held 2006, 181). Zani chooses an exchange between Bond and Hugo Drax from *Moonraker* (1979) as a prime example of these respective relationships, as Drax uses his rifle for the fun of shooting pheasants while Bond resists and instead uses his to eliminate an assassin in a tree. Outside of the case of hunting being a “good sport”, Zani’s essay provides no analysis of sport in the sense that concerns the present article (though the remark that Bond represents “necessity”, and the question of whether this negates sport, has some bearing on its theme of tragedy).

Sport in the sense of physical activity, and more especially extreme sport, in the Bondiverse has been explored by David Pegram (2018). Pegram is doubly relevant for the present discussion, since he also embarks theoretically on discussions of heroes and heroism. In his exposition of Bond’s extreme sporting activity, the protagonist’s heroic persona is inserted into a discussion on archetypes, invoking the figure of both “warrior” and “male” – both of which Bond appears as specimen of. Even though the present article emphasises the tragic aspect of heroism, rather than the martial and masculine dimensions, Pegram’s solution to let Bond’s sport act as the empirical locus is retained and developed.

In another line of interpretation, Jonnie Eriksson and Kalle Jonasson highlight the social and political implications of the use of sports in the Bond films (Eriksson and Jonasson 2020; Jonasson and Eriksson 2022). They see a tendency in the Bond films to make use of outdoor sports mainly associated with a leisure class – some of them traditionally coded as “gentlemen sports”; some rather associated with an adventurous jetset crowd – but incorporating them in the narrative in ways that extremise their elements of risk and danger in order to make them vehicles for violence and death. They also see a trend in moving from leisure sports that are extremised by their use as action stunts to a practice of directly taking up new sports that are already “extreme”. In virtually all these cases, Bond demonstrates his prowess in performing sports beyond the limits set by the rules of the game. These tendencies and trends come to a head, and maybe to an end, with the parkour scene in *Casino Royale*, where Daniel Craig chases freerunner Sébastien Foucan as bombmaker Mollaka through a construction site in Madagascar, and for once is outmatched. After this initial failure, the franchise seems to have given up the sport scheme, if not counting Craig’s motorised adventures.

Nevertheless, sport and its high-end execution in the Bondiverse appears as a particularly strategic vantage point for inquiring both its dramatic qualities and its connection to culture at large. Concerning the concepts and values at play in the present paper, sport – whether we talk of ancient gladiator games or mod-

ern action sports – is a scene on which struggle could be seen, an agonal theatre of sorts. This article will connect with the idea of sports being used in extreme and spectacular ways as part of the narrative of Bond films as adventure or action movies, but will emphasise the importance of a structure not just of the individual films but of the franchise at large, in order to problematise genre conventions by looking at a historical dialectic of tragedy and farce at play in the Bondiverse. This dialectic brings with it another kind of social or political implication: a symbolic, internal class struggle, as the figure of Bond strives to avoid the implicit bourgeois mediocrity of the middle road, demonstrating the risks of going to extremes in his heroics.

THE UNHEROIC CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE: A DIALECTIC OF LORDSHIP AND BONDAGE

According to Marx, throughout history, the middle-class (the “bourgeoisie”) have lacked true heroism in its struggles to assert itself, but it has made up for it by borrowing the outer show of heroism which is inherent in tragedy:

But unheroic as bourgeois society is, it nevertheless required heroism, sacrifice, terror, civil war and national conflict to bring it into the world. And in the strict classical traditions of the Roman republic its gladiators found the ideals and art forms, the self-deceptions that they needed, in order to hide from themselves the constrained, bourgeois character of their struggles, and to keep themselves emotionally at the level of high historical tragedy. (2002, 20-21)

It is against this travesty of tragedy that the farcical repetitions of modern societies appear in their full clownishness. The problem for Marx lies in that we are making history in the image of the past, not the future of our own making; but sometimes there is monumentalising use of history (as later in Nietzsche), to “glorify” and “magnify” the revolutionary intent of the present: “[t]hus the resurrection in those revolutions served to glorify new struggles, not to parody the old; of magnify fantastically the given task, not to evade a real resolution; to recover the spirit of revolution, not to relaunch its spectre” (ibid., 21). It is not simply that we are ontologically (or hauntologically) determined to repeat the tragedy as farce but that we sometimes lose the true spirit of historical change, the spirit of revolution (cf. Heller 2010).

Robert Brandom looks back to Hegel for another kind of spirit, one of “trust”. By this Brandom means what he terms a “postmodern” condition of the mutual recognition of normative status within a community of subjects, which imparts a sense of objectivity to norms in any situation where the struggle for recognition is settled by shared normative attitudes, with the implication that everyone in the community takes responsibility for (or “forgives”) the action of one, thus making possible “heroism [...] without tragedy” (2019, 627–628). The resolution of the famous master-slave dialectic (or, depending upon the translation of “Herrschaft und Knechtschaft”, the dialectic of Lordship and Bondage, pun intended; Hegel 1977) into mutual recognition is an enactment of such a situation. In historical terms, Brandom contrasts this postmodern spirit of trust with two previous ideas of agency and responsibility: a modern one and a pre-modern/classical one. It is in the latter that we encounter the close ties between heroism and tragedy:

[T]he traditional heroic practical conception of agency is inevitably always also a tragic conception. The tragedy does not consist in the badness of the outcome. It consists in the fact that in acting at all one puts oneself at the mercy of forces outside of one’s knowledge and control. [...] Tragedy is the unavoidable submission of the heroic agent to fate. [...] Shouldering the responsibility that fate in this sense brings down upon one who acts is tragic heroism. This is the intimate relation of mutual presupposition between tragedy, fate, and heroism. (Brandom, 727-728; cf. 626, 754)

It is for the present purpose worth emphasising that the tragic element is defined by the fact that our actions are dependent upon external forces, upon circumstances that we do not control and maybe have no knowledge of, and yet we are responsible; and one might add that tragic irony accordingly, consists in others knowing of these external forces or circumstances even while the agent does not. This classical idea stands against the modern conception of agency, according to which the master/lord and the slave/bondsman vie for domination, one over the other, and the agent bears responsibility only for the intended consequences of his or her actions. Such a notion presupposes the idea of individual autonomy: that the agent knows what he/she is doing and acts freely upon these intentions. This would be an age of comedy, in which there is neither tragedy nor heroism. But this is exactly what Marx, in another famous quote from “The Eighteenth Brumaire”, says that men, as historical agents, do not do: “[m]en make their own history, but they do not make it as they please in circumstances they choose for

themselves; rather they make it in present circumstances, given and inherited” (2002, 19).

We are thus presented with a dual figure: on the one hand, the Hegelian heroic-tragic agent whose actions are at the mercy of external forces, and whose freedom is always subsumed by fate; on the other hand, the Marxian history-making agent who, in moving towards the future, is confronting present material circumstances always haunted by the past. There is in the first case the danger that the heroic agent fatally succumbs to destiny, and that the significance of tragedy will be confused with an unfortunate outcome, while there a risk in the second case that one may sometimes act not only under such circumstances that are mediated by the past, but by repeating the past in a way that loses the heroic-tragic character and instead returns the past as “farce”. This dual figure is James Bond, as the ensuing analysis aims to show.

Both Hegel and Schelling provide definitions of tragedy based on the conflict involved. It is typically a conflict between principles represented by the central characters: for Schelling the conflict essentially concerns the confrontation of human freedom (free will) with “necessity” (fate, or determinate nature), while for Hegel it concerns the collision between values in “ethical life” such as the state (an ethical community) and the family (natural ethical life); the conflict is resolved in a reconciliation of these principles (Young 2013). In other words, Schelling’s definition is largely metaphysical, while Hegel’s is ethical or political: one concerns mankind’s anxiety in the face of natural forces outside of our control; the other concerns a negotiation between extreme and contradictory moral positions which need to be synthesised. Tragedy is distinct from other genres in allowing these conflicts to be played out. In comedy, for instance, there is too much freedom, and the character is certain of success: “[t]he general ground for comedy is therefore a world in which man as subject or person has made himself completely master of everything [...], a world whose aims are therefore self-destructive because they are unsubstantial” (Hegel 1975, 1199). For Hegel the comical is not the same as the laughable, though; people may laugh at many things for different reasons, but comedy is defined by its content, for example that “the characters and their aims are entirely without substance” and “therefore cannot accomplish anything”, and that “petty and futile aims are to be brought about with a show of great seriousness” (ibid., 1200-1201).

We can then arrive at some working definitions of the tragic and the farcical. Tragedy implies an event which sets the powers of man against a greater force at the risk of death, a trial of the noble hero against “fate” at the risk of his

“fall”; it is a conflict of human freedom against the necessity of nature, and a manifestation of an existential or historical conflict between opposites that has serious meaning. Farce, on the other hand, implies a situation or an event in which man expresses his power or prowess (his presumed “nobility” or “virtue”) extravagantly while the circumstances do not match or measure up, and as a result the expression of power is ridiculous compared to the context; this would represent an excess of human freedom in void of nature and hence a lack of meaning in the struggle, effectively a negation of the content of the struggle even while its form persists. This is why there is a close connection between tragedy and farce in Marx’s dictum: what once was tragic may be repeated, and it may have the show of tragedy, but a lack in context negates the content.

To the dramatic terms of tragedy and farce must for the present purposes be added another form of expression of heroic powers: sport. In his book on the philosophy of sport, Steven Connor neatly points to the rare mentions of sport in Hegel in a way that sheds light on how physical powers and prowess relate to the necessary, serious, natural, and spiritual:

Sport itself is opposed to serious business, to dependence in need. This wrestling, running, contending was no serious affair; bespoke no obligation of defence, no necessity of combat. Serious occupation is Labour that has a reference to some want. I or Nature must succumb; if the one is to continue, the other must fall. In contrast with this kind of seriousness, however, Sports present the higher seriousness; for in it Nature is wrought into Spirit, and although in these contests the subject has not advanced to the highest grade of serious thoughts, yet in this exercise of his physical powers, man shows his Freedom, viz. that he has transformed his body to an organ of Spirit. (Hegel qtd. in Connor 2011, 36; Hegel 1956, 243)

While Hegel’s analysis of sport has the merits of connecting it to Nature, it lacks nuances of what sport has been (and what it could become), also in relation to Nature. According to Connor, the meaning of sport has drifted in its connotations over time, and in the “sea of empty signifiers, sport” (Andrews 2008, 50) then ought to be able to actualise the dramatic genres in question and reveal new ways of understanding the temporality of Marx’s metaphor, theoretically as well as dramatically. Connor has it that, after initially connoting amusement and gratuity when coined during the *ancien régime*, “sport” takes on a more tragic note in its cultural translation from its French origin to the English sphere during the same era. Invoking images of both malevolent devilry and the hazards of nature,

it ends up in carnage during early modernity, when sport referred to activities involving the letting of animal blood (such as in cock fighting, bear baiting, and the hunting parties of the nobility). As tragic as their premodern prequels were, as farcical the sterilised and clinical mass spectator events of modern sports appear.

This is nature not only wrought, but wrecked. No one dies and all remainders of mystery, religion, and fatefulness are banished. Sport competitions are veritable laboratory experiments, the trials and results of which only carry drama to the extent that they can be assigned to territorial belongings to nations and cities. However, Connor directs our vision to newer forms of sports – the extreme varieties – that reconnect us with the external forces of nature. His demonstration is a reminder that sport is an arena of struggle, one on which both tragedy and farce can prevail, and that this alters over time. The question is now: how does Bond, in his series of lives and times, struggle to display his mastery and express his heroism without turning into farce?

DISCUSSION

“Two heroes in a tragedy of our own making”.

– Safin, *No Time to Die* (2021)

It would seem evident that the Bond films are about a hero fighting against some varying set of nefarious villains; but overarching any such conflict there is the more general struggle over what heroism means within the internal logic of the Bond franchise. As a social subject, Bond may match the role of Hegel’s “master”, struggling for domination and recognition in a battle both within and against bourgeois norms (whose perverted figure is the villain), while dialectically being able to execute his lordship by being “on Her Majesty’s secret service”, thus serving at the behest of another master (symbolically M), and so in effect being in “bondage” to the lords and masters of the state. This dialectic is arguably a legacy from the Ian Fleming novels and their tales of serving the Empire, and it constitutes the tragic core of the literary Bond.

But in the cinematic universe, two subversive manoeuvres occur. On the one hand, figures of authority (on all sides) are almost consistently undermined, ridiculed, and caricatured, thereby belittling the political system that would support and motivate Bond’s power, while enhancing a kind of populist heroism on the part of a more self-serving Bond (it is symptomatic that the film precisely titled *Licence to Kill* involves Bond being stripped of that state sanctioned licence

while expressing his freedom to exercise it for personal revenge; it is like a variation on a theme from *Antigone*). On the other hand, sports assume the function of tragedy, in order to allow an expression of classical heroic-tragic agency more sublime than mere politically motivated squabble.

In truth, the grandiosity of the typical Bond villain's plans to dominate the world, in various fanciful ways, is but a parodic invitation to his (rarely hers) own usually ignominious demise, because the true battle has been shifted to a greater arena between Bond and "fate". which puts the nature of his heroism to the test. That arena is one of extreme sports: the challenge set by the forces of nature and the external circumstances beyond one's control. This scheme of things would institute a distinction between a tragic-heroic/noble element associated with extreme sports and a farcical-ignoble element associated with politics or social structures at large, almost equivalent to the distinction in Greek theatre between tragedies (delving into ethical or metaphysical problems) and satyr plays or comedies (treating base subject matter or critically debasing public figures in society). But the Bond franchise will find it difficult to uphold this neat distinction.

A HERO OF OUT-OF-JOINT TIME: CYCLES OF TRAGEDY AND FARCE

"Each time is a renewed pleasure".

- James Bond, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1963)

Who is really the hero of this story? The Bond movies as a continuing series are relying on the possibility to replace the lead actor and to "reboot" the character, facilitating a concept malleable to its contemporary contexts while needing, in some way, to stick true to a general formula. The character of Bond does not really develop, but is instead renewed and recontextualised as if he had the chance to live again, again, and again, in a world that changes around him. So, when Pierce Brosnan is introduced in *GoldenEye*, a new, female M makes the point that our rejuvenated hero is in fact a "dinosaur, a relic of the Cold War". Therefore, to sustain the "spirit" of Bond, the franchise develops a ritualistic method of repetition of attributes, quotations and situations, endlessly varied and appropriated with increasing self-awareness, and with the shared awareness of the audience of these tropes. Whenever Bond gets his vodka martini, he is secretly toasting the viewer.

As the character of James Bond is repeated throughout the franchise, there are evidently new actors incarnating him, putting their stamp on his characterisation, but at times he is also reframed or revised in the duration of one and the same actor, most clearly with Roger Moore. What one may notice in this seriality

is that while the Bond character strives to keep his cool, there is at every turn the risk of turning ludicrous. When Sean Connery made his brief return as Bond in *Diamonds Are Forever*, he was plunged into a world of kitsch, camp, vulgarity, and buffoonery – from mud-bath hijinks with Blofeld to cruising the seedy streets of Las Vegas, capped with a tinny moon-buggy ride in the desert of the real. No wonder a reboot was needed; and Roger Moore was introduced in the ominously titled *Live and Let Die* in order to reassert that Bond is indeed a matter of life and death. When Moore's Bond then veered into sci-fi farce with *Moonraker*, the franchise famously course corrected by bringing Bond back to basics in *For Your Eyes Only*, a tragic counterpart which, as if driving home the point, had a plot largely set in Greece and with a Bond girl bent on avenging the murder of her parents (a take on the Greek Elektra). And yet it took just one more film for Moore to (both literally and symbolically) end up as a clown at the circus, trying to defuse a bomb while the crowd roars with laughter – in an entry with the title *Octopussy* (1983), no less.

There is something more than the usual comic relief to this. These cycles of intermittent pratfalls are testament to the precarity of sustaining a certain kind of heroism over time, when time does not merely run along in a continuous character progression. Bond was never, at least not until recently, the stuff of a *bildungsroman*. Instead, he is heir to the classical hero who always seems to start his adventures anew – the epic hero who sets out traversing the world in pursuit of glory (note the illogical fame of a supposedly secret agent), or the tragic hero whose noble but flawed character sublimely runs up against a force which it is his fate to submit to. These classical kinds of heroism, quaintly unmodern and aristocratic (and totally opposite to the likes of Jason Bourne), are what generally marks the narrative structure of the Bond films. While most of the jetsetting espionage and assassination plots are driven by the element of epic heroism, the films interject a tragic element which is mainly expressed in the form of extreme sports.

Indeed, among the many repetitive formulas of the Bond franchise, the films have for a long time enhanced the employment of sports for the purpose of staging inventive action sequences. This tendency is intimated by the Fleming novels, certainly, and the early films pick up on them: the golf game in *Goldfinger* (1964), swimming and diving in *Thunderball*, and skiing in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. But while these occasional practices of leisure sports, being an integral part of the social *milieus* Bond operates in equivalent to the arguably more famous scenes of card games, the films cultivate the most extraordinary feats of

derring-do. The earliest instances in *Thunderball* and *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* show an escalation of the sport – scuba-diving and skiing, respectively – from picturesque leisure to spectacular violence in a process of extremisation. Later Bond incarnations will further experiment with extreme sports: mountaineering, parachuting, skydiving, hang-gliding, water-skiing, bungee jumping, HALO-jumping, etc. Here, sport is enacted as a conflict involving a confrontation with death materialised in a battle in/with the natural world, where the elements and the forces of nature represent something that sits outside of human control, but which one necessarily must engage with. This is the tragic element and the literal explanation of the “extreme” approach: going to the limit, to the outside.

The employment of extreme sports is a way of showing how actions are contingent upon external forces, because these sports depend upon the elements and the forces of nature which one submits to and adapts to but cannot really control. There is a tragic essence to extreme sports – irrespective of outcome – because they are a manifestation of man’s heroic agency under the auspice of fate, where the transgression of norms may sometimes seem like hubris. Modern sports are exercised under set circumstances, providing rules and restrictions according to which sporting men and women perform, usually in competitive settings where performances are measured by results. Here, someone at some time does better than another. What we may call “non-modern” sports engage in battles between human freedom and nonhuman “necessity” – the human body against the elements, adaptive actions against external forces – which preserve the heroic-tragic characteristics. By using such extreme sports to further dramatise action sequences, Bond is catapulted outside of the normative system (which was still kept intact in the golf game in *Goldfinger*), in a more direct confrontation between freedom and fate – a greater battle which encapsulates the master-slave struggle between Bond and the villain. Bond battles with the meaning of his own heroism much more significantly than with the interchangeable villains, large and small, that he disposes of, usually with a morbid quip: “I think he got the point”, “[h]e had a lot of guts”, etc. These two quotes happen to be from the two films that introduce and consolidate the use of sports for dramatic, violent purposes: *Thunderball* and *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. That very circumstance may be a testament to how the logic is taking form and practically becoming explicit. It is as if the tragico-comic formula is congealing the narrative tension of action and drama, the use of sports to express this suspense, and simultaneously the undercutting of drama with a jocular expression of cold-blooded cynicism, as if everything, after all, is at play.

But problems begin to arise when the components of this formula become confused. After the sequences of skiing that culminate in the bobsleigh battle with Blofeld and his goons, Bond for once marries the girl and seems set to leave Her Majesty's service in nuptial bliss, having "all the time in the world" to spend with Teresa, Mrs. James Bond. However, as they are driving away on a mountain road, Teresa is shot to death by Blofeld in an attempt on Bond's life. This ending is the only unequivocally unhappy one in the Bond series, and therefore the only "tragic" one in the more conventional sense, up until Craig's final stint in *No Time to Die*. It is therefore worth noting that *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* manifestly represents both the consolidation of sports used as tragic expression and, as if for emphasis, the "tragic" outcome in the conventional meaning of the word. The two senses of tragedy here reflect and enhance the significance of each other.

While Bond survives the attack, this symbolically marks the "death" of Lazenby as the character. In *Diamonds Are Forever*, Sean Connery returns, but almost with equal emphasis tragedy does not: Teresa's death has no real significance for the plot, which rather veers into burlesque (complete with Blofeld in drag); and instead of resuming the dramatic use of outdoor sports, Bond resorts to motor escapades in various Nevada settings. One of them, the car chase in Las Vegas that concludes with Bond raising his car on two side wheels in order to pass through an alleyway, turns hilarious with the infamous, physics-defying flip on the other two wheels midway through the stunt. Then the car flip, already ridiculous in *Diamonds Are Forever*, reaches new ludicrous lows with the slide-whistle twisting car jump in Moore's second outing, *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974), in an imitation of Evil Knievel.

As Moore is already inheriting the sins of Connery, demonstrating the precarious relation between tragedy and farce, his Bond can be seen as the first to be faced with the challenges of a narrative logic which begins to implement the extremisation of sports or existing extreme sports for dramatic purposes, in ways that depart from the literary sources. Beginning with Moore, the use of adventure or extreme sports becomes dispersed through the tenure of the actor, in a cycle of dramatic value: "tragic" conflict is repeated as "farcical" levity, which sometimes comments upon social context.

While Moore had done a brief bit of hang-gliding in his debut, *Live and Let Die*, the pivotal scene is the opening of *The Spy Who Loved Me*. Bond starts off on skis in a leisurely fashion down an alpine slope; at the start it is a means of transport, but suddenly some villains appear and go in pursuit on skis, and the scene quickly escalates into action, including some acrobatic excellence by Bond. The

scene culminates at a fateful terminus: they all reach a steep cliffside opening up to an enormous chasm; Bond alone goes over the side and falls helplessly into the abyss, his skis dropping away, and the music stops to let us hear the ominous silence of impending death. Then a parachute miraculously opens, unfolding the Union Jack, and the Bond theme music swells triumphantly. This scene is a splendid example of sports being used for dramatic effect, integrating them into the narrative, transforming them from mere activity to action practice, and ultimately to first existential and then political symbolism. And while the audience may in the end not only sigh in relief but also crack a smile at the visual joke, the scene does not descend into farce but rather deepens the tensions in tragedy, by meaningfully complicating the relationship between the fatefulness of nature, the vulnerability of the individual, the prowess of the hero, and the absence or presence of social structures for security (here signalling the ubiquity of Empire). It virtually brings into harmony, or reconciliation, all the forces involved in tragedy, at least in Hegel's and Schelling's conception of it.

It is therefore especially interesting to see the concept reprised in the beginning of the next film, *Moonraker*. In this case, Bond is pushed out of a plane without a parachute, so there is a similar fateful situation of falling without any support; there is a midair struggle between Bond and a parachute-equipped goon, whom Bond overpowers and secures the parachute from. Thus far, everything is appropriately tragic. But then comes Jaws (the monstrous villain from *The Spy Who Loved Me*; it is poignant that this character returns from one film to the next with regards to how one repeats the other). Just as Bond secures the parachute, Bond manages to push away from Jaws, who thereby falls head over heels, his arms flailing comically, his eyes bulging in a mute "oh-oh", and crashes down – into a circus tent. Just to be sure that the low farce is complete, the soundtrack fills with circus music before the title song takes over.

Moore then repeats the cycle: by having a soft kind of reboot in *For Your Eyes Only*, returning to tragic form with a ski chase scene to rival *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, Moore reasserts the tragic potential of sports, only to begin his final entry, *A View to a Kill*, with an arctic ski chase which roughly repeats the pattern of *Moonraker*. While starting off with quite dramatic seriousness, at one point Bond makes makeshift use of a bit of debris to do some snowboarding to the tune of "California Girls" by The Beach Boys. In this case, the cultural reference doesn't quite hold the significance of the corresponding scene in *The Spy Who Loved Me*; while the surf is up, it rather does evoke circus music.

Dalton squeezes the cycle into his very first film, *The Living Daylights*, as if testing the whole register. His introduction, parachuting with a group of Double-

Os onto the Rock of Gibraltar and into an assassination plot which sets off an intense action sequence which ends by parachuting, again, from a crashing aeroplane, is an emblem of tragedy and heroism. Conversely, the escape Bond makes from the KGB with cellist Kara Milovy down a snowy mountain slope over the border to Austria, using her cello case as a sled, is typically farcical. The cycle is then inverted in *Licence to Kill*: parachuting returns as farce in the pre-title sequence when Bond and Leiter descend to the latter's wedding in gleeful camaraderie, only for the story to forcefully insist on tragedy henceforth. Reflecting the ending of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, which the dialogue pointedly reminds us of, Leiter's wife is killed by the villain. This and the maiming of Leiter – his leg being bitten off by a shark – is the catalyst for Bond's unusually gruesome quest for vengeance, as if overcompensating for his blithe beginnings. The subsequent use of water-skiing – underwater, on the water, and onto an aeroplane – is a *tour de force* in sportive expressions of tragic heroism, which manages a synthesis of Connery's watersports with Lazenby's and Moore's skiing.

Brosnan continues the tragic route by leaning heavily into pre-existing extreme sports, mostly sports dealing with an existential fall. From the initial shots in *GoldenEye*, he breaks into a facility by bungee-jumping down a huge dam; after some explosive action scenes, he makes his escape from the same facility by skydiving without a parachute from a cliff, in pursuit of a plane which he catches up with and takes control of. Brosnan's Bond is here voluntarily put in the same situation as Moore was in the beginnings of *The Spy Who Loved Me* and *Moonraker*, but he is not rescued by the panoply of Empire nor does the scene crash land into circus slapstick. In fact, Brosnan succeeds in sustaining tragic heroism with uncommon consistency. Breakneck variations of parachuting occur in the helicopter scene in *GoldenEye* and the HALO-jump in *Tomorrow Never Dies*. However, in his last entry, *Die Another Day*, the initial, dark, and foreboding use of surfing to enter North Korea is perverted into hyperbolic farce with the infamous CGI-supported glacier avalanche and tsunami kite-surfing in Iceland later in the film. Never has there been a more distinct case of tragedy repeating as farce in any single Bond movie.

Craig represents a radical reboot, going back to the origin: both to Fleming's original Bond novel, and to a kind of origin story; how Bond becomes 007 in *Casino Royale*, and to his childhood in *Skyfall* (2012) and *Spectre* (2015). Significantly, a new extreme sport, parkour, is used in *Casino Royale* according to the same template as before, but this time Bond fails in the competition; it is clear that Mollaka is the most skilled performer and has the better of Bond, as their

competition becomes more typically sportive. It is a rare failure for his usual prowess, and he must resort to other, more directly violent means in order to triumph, affirming that heroics must be expressed by other means. Craig therefore represents an abandonment of the use of sports in the series even in his first outing, as if this new Bond could not compete in these new historical circumstances (symbolically represented by parkour) that this reboot lands him in. This is a new kind of tragedy, where not only time but Bond is out of joint. However, the abandonment of sport is in effect built into the dialectical logic of the Bond films from early on, indeed almost from the beginning of the use of sports. This is because aside from the poles of tragedy and farce in the dramatic structure of repetition, there is a third component: irony as a force of negation.

THE NEGATION AGENT: IRONY UNBOUND

“I’m not a sporting man, Fräulein. Even when I’m at my best”.

- James Bond, *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* (1969)

Let us return to *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, where the use of sports began to take hold as a formula. In the plot leading up to the sequences of skiing extravaganza, Bond himself is doing a bit of play-acting: he tries to infiltrate Blofeld’s lair at a ski resort in the Swiss alps by dressing up as a genealogist, Sir Hilary Bray, with the task of investigating Blofeld’s false claims to a noble title. Having just arrived, he is asked by the frumpy German woman who meets him whether he enjoys skiing or bobsleigh, to which Lazenby’s Bond responds: “I’m not a sporting man, Fräulein. Even when I’m at my best”. With this statement, if we trust to take him at his word, Bond denies that he is a man of traditional competitive or leisure sports. This is largely true to his general character: he does not engage in sporting activities for the sake of their sportiveness. However, it is of course an ironic statement, which is underscored by the fact that he speaks in the guise of another person: Sir Hilary Bray, baronet (like Bond’s ancestor) – an aristocratic genealogist or, if you will, an effeminate foppish nerd. We may surely believe that it is true for this person that he is not up to the challenges of sport; but behind the persona we are still aware of the capabilities of Bond, who seems to always be “at his best”. So while he negates his prowess in sports, he does so while in effect negating the “I” of which he speaks. It is a double irony, a sublative negation of negation: Bond is not a sporting man not due to any lack of prowess but in virtue of an excess of such a thing. It is this excess of sportive prowess which pushes him to the extreme, and which takes him beyond sportiveness through the sports themselves, and it is this “virtue” (*arete*) which, opposed to Blofeld’s

false claims, preserves his symbolic aristocracy. It might not be a coincidence that this is also the film which introduces Bond's actual aristocratic heritage (being the descendant of Sir Thomas Bond, baronet of Peckham, who can be traced back to Sir Otho le Bon, a genealogist explains). It seems, then, that Bond's name can be traced back to a word meaning "the good" (*le bon*).

It is especially when he is at his best that Bond is not a sporting man, because even when he pursues a sport such as skiing, as he will later on, he goes to such extremes that it turns into something other than sport. That he is not "sporting" could also signify that he is not doing things "in sport", that he is deadly serious; while involved in sport activities, he extracts the most violent traits and the most lethal force that the equipment and the moves would allow. For Bond, sport is a continuation of war by other means. Subsequent Bond incarnations implicitly repeat Lazenby's phrase with varying degrees of irony. Most often this involves a kind of negotiation of the relationship between sport and killing, on the one hand setting them up as opposites, on the other hand conflating them in a way that brings them back to the historical origins of "sport" in the hunt and other bloodsports. A piece of dialogue in *The Man with the Golden Gun* film, for example, makes explicit that Bond makes sport of his killing game:

Scaramanga: [...] the English don't consider it sporting to kill in cold blood, do they?

Bond: Don't count on that.

Two films later, in *Moonraker*, the main villain Hugo Drax expresses frustration with Bond's repeated ability to survive attempts on his life: "Mr. Bond, you defy all my attempts to plan an amusing death for you. You're not a sportsman, Mr. Bond". This is a reference back to an earlier scene when Bond is begrudgingly invited to shoot pheasants by Drax, with the promise that it is "such good sport", but it is in reality just another scheme to have Bond killed. Taking Drax's gun but using it to shoot one of the villain's henchmen perched in a tree with a rifle, Bond throws back Drax's words at him: "As you said, such good sport". To Drax, it is good sport to shoot for game (i.e., to kill birds, but also to cheat at games, in this case setting up an assassination of Bond), while for Bond, it is good sport not to kill birds, but to outwit the cheat and eliminate the assassin. Drax's bloodlust takes us to early modernity, the leisures of which posited the laying down of prey as sport, while Bond takes a more mercurial path, under the *aegis* of tricksters

and diabolical schemes. The different meanings meet here: life is a game; the best sport is to survive – perhaps the survival of the fittest, as Bond suggests in *Octopussy*, when another villain bemoans his ability to survive.

The association of sport with hunting, and with a context of struggles for survival on the bloody altar of nature, also recurs in *Casino Royale*: the parkour scene is prefaced by a brief shot of a cobra and a mongoose facing off in a pit surrounded by a clamouring crowd, a prefiguring of the violent battle between Bond and Mollaka which will ensue. With these many affirmations of the inherent violence in the struggle for life as confrontation with death, there is a truly tragic sense of heroism, in the philosophical sense of recognising that this constant battle is one's fate – in spite of the seemingly endless triumphs of our protagonist and the comedic puns that cap them. When Bond "fails" to measure up to Mollaka's freerunning expertise, he reverts to predatory violence in order to defeat him. Perhaps the true meaning of this is not just that the failure is tragic (though it demonstrates a flaw), but that with Craig sport is abandoned as a means of expressing the tragic function of heroism. It is significant that this failure, or this abandonment, happens with specifically parkour – which does not really connect with the sublime, external forces of nature which hitherto represented fate (most hyperbolically with Brosnan) – but rather with the disenchanting materials of a concrete cityscape; with second nature. Craig's Bond simply means business; he in earnest lives up to Lazenby's ironic phrase: "I'm not a sporting man". But Craig's rejection of sports also means a deferral of farce. With a touch of irony, one might note that with *Casino Royale* the usual order is inverted: *Casino Royale* was preceded by its own parody in 1967; here, history repeats first as farce, then as tragedy. The insistence of the tragic element, in the avoidance of sports, instead permeates the plot of the entire Craig tenure, delving deeper into the tragic elements of the character himself. This leads to the repetition of the lover as femme fatale (the romantic flaw in the killing machine), leading up to the actual demise of the hero, but it also brings up his background as orphan and brings him back to his derelict homestead. With Craig, the repetition of the past even comes to mean regression.

This sense of tragedy alters Bond's relationship with time and his own history. On the face of it, Craig's tenure seems like a hard reboot and a sort of closed circuit in relation to previous incarnations, held together by a story arc that connects romantically between the points of two tragic loves: Vesper Lynd and Madeleine Swann. But under the surface, the tragedy runs deeper, and ironically so, because there is not so much a negation of repetition as a repetition of negation. Rather early in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, Lazenby's Bond makes a

go at quitting his job (describing it as resigning from just that thing in the title, thereby exiting his own film, in a way). This gives Bond a rare chance to be nostalgic, as he cleans out his desk and finds mementos from the previous films – those with Connery which Lazenby was not part of. As he picks up each item and sentimentally fondles them, the soundtrack shifts back to a leitmotif from each Terence Young film: Honey’s knife from *Dr. No* (1962), Grant’s wristwatch from *From Russia with Love* (1963), a breathing device from *Thunderball*. Thus, Terence Young’s formative stamp on the cinematic version of James Bond is here cemented in sound; it is a comment not only on the past experiences of Bond at work but on the distinctiveness of the Bond that appears in the films – on the spirit of Bond given flesh by Connery, mediated by Young: the “other fellows”.

More than fifty years later, in *No Time to Die*, the sentimental education of Craig’s Bond has him end up in a similarly nostalgic soundscape. The soundtrack which echoes through the decades is in this case the unusually saccharine Bond song from *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*: “We Have All the Time in the World”. Craig even speaks the line of the song title in the opening moments, as he and Madeleine meander in a car along the Italian coastline in a way that mirrors Bond’s and Tracy’s postnuptial, fatal ride at the end of *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*. Much like Lazenby remembers Connery, Craig remembers Lazenby. Or, much like how Lazenby’s Bond mourns Teresa from the first reboot, Craig’s Bond mourns Vesper from his reboot; and, in turn, Madeleine mourns Bond as the reboot comes to a close. And of course, as the song returns in the end, Madeleine Swann, that doubly Proustian Bond girl who essentially remembers things past, repeats the tag of the legend for their daughter and all of futurity: “His name was Bond. James Bond”. The line refers back to the introduction of Bond in *Dr. No*, when Sean Connery first spoke it, so Madeleine brings us back to the beginning of the film series (notably, not the novels). But this neat return to the beginning, by a repetition of the line, is wrapped in the musical atmosphere typical of the audiovisual film medium, where both the song and the mountainous car-ride motif refers back to *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*. One film thereby overlays another in a cinematic palimpsest, as if you could see the one only through the other. In spite of the assumption, held by many and seemingly affirmed by *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, that Connery would be the primary origin to which the character might try to return, we twice discover here Lazenby’s key role: to open up the iterability of the character, the very futurity of Bond – even while enclosing the persona in the fatefulness of tragic character, whose fatality has finally caught up with him. History is repeated, shrouded in negations:

it is now Bond that is dead, not Teresa; it is now Madeleine who survives, not Bond.

All of this is prefigured symbolically and ironically in the employment of sports, and it gains increasing self-consciousness throughout the saga. At the outset, the use of sports in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* repeats a model from *Thunderball*. Lazenby's Bond incarnation here seems like an affirmation of Marx's dictum: it is a farcical repetition of Connery's Bond ("This never happened to the other fellow"). But in its dramatic use of sports (skiing, bobsleigh) it becomes an affirmation of Hegel: it consolidates the tragical element intimated in Connery's Bond by making it a paradigm for how the frivolity of sports as leisure is supplanted by the practical use of sports in combat ("I'm not a sporting man"). Farcical repetition and tragic negation are both the ambivalent but essential characteristics of the cinematic Bond; Craig only puts a further ironic spin to this by taking the latter seriously, while in effect, enacting the former.

CONCLUSION

By perusing the series of Bond films, what seems like a lineage of excellent sportsmanship, in a line of development into newer sports, pushed to and beyond the extreme, is in fact punctuated by instances of parody or mere silliness – pratfalls, of sorts. One might perceive it as yet another case of comic relief interspersed into the action, following an age-old convention, but there is something peculiar with how Bond's sporting activities almost work as comments upon how the franchise perceives itself at given points in relation to popular culture. While striving to sustain popularity for the franchise by making the character seem relevant to the cultural context, within the films Bond's continued struggle to avoid bourgeois mediocrity and preserve the nobility and virtue of tragic heroism brings him up against the danger of two extremes: either to fail in upholding his heroic *arete* and end up simply tragic, or to go too far in virtuosity so that virtue is lost in vulgar spectacle.

The dialectic of tragedy and farce becomes a logical structure for the whole Bond franchise which raises the problem of repetition. What worked for one Bond might not work for another at a later time, and sometimes not even for the same Bond; variations either in the expression or in the context can completely alter the function of an action or a situation. As the Bond franchise begins to pick up on the method of employing sports for narrative, dramatic purposes, the films experiment with transforming existing sports, pushing them to their extremes, and subsequently adapt existing extreme sports to action stunts. Usually, a type of sport becomes associated with one actor who incarnates Bond,

which is then “inherited” and modified by a succeeding actor; so, Moore inherits skiing from Lazenby, Dalton inherits parachuting from Moore, Brosnan inherits skydiving from Moore and watersports from Dalton. In this family line, Craig inherits nothing, it seems, but starts and stops with parkour.

In conclusion, using sports as an agonal theatre, an arena for the enactment of tragic conflicts, each actor seems to try to sustain his heroism by sustaining the principles of tragedy, forming the cycles of farcical repetition throughout the series. For instance, it seems as if Lazenby sustains tragedy by narrative enhancement in his one film, in that sports such as skiing are extremised for violent purposes, the upshot of which is the tragic ending which concludes the conflict between the state (Her Majesty’s secret service) and the family (the marriage to Teresa). While it is Connery’s return that completes Lazenby’s interrupted cycle, Moore falls into farce and must attempt to sustain tragedy by repeating the cycle, leading to a soft reboot within his own tenure. Dalton, on the other hand, sustains tragedy by overcompensating for his rapid fall into farce (and perhaps also by compensating for Connery’s farcical failure to match the tragic ending in *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*: a vicarious revenge story thus unfolds). Brosnan sustains tragedy by adjusting to a wide range of extreme sports already existing in popular culture, bringing consistency and routine to the use of such sports, but fails once the expression reaches hyperbole. Lastly, Craig sustains tragedy by committing completely to the drama of the narrative and thus avoids sports, after having been bested at his first attempt.

In this we can schematically see that the dialectic between tragedy and farce sustains the character of Bond in the long run even at the sacrifice of individual Bonds. The interplay of the tragic and the farcical creates a tension which brings about change, and this energises the whole of the franchise. With Craig, it is demonstrated that sustaining tragedy alone (fixing it in a conventional, narrative way) leads to the death of the character. However, the fatal conclusion to the story arc of this reboot ironically kept Bond in the loop of ghostly repetitions in spite of its apparent negations of what had come before. This leads us to a second general conclusion: aside from the general structure of a dialectic of tragedy and farce, irony works as a meta-level of self-reflection within the Bond movies, in which the films self-consciously problematise this dialectic. While the dialectical struggle keeps the spirit of Bond alive, this ironic reflection is what reveals the ghosts resulting from all these repetitions, recasts, and reboots, in what could be called the hauntology of heroism.

Firstly, and most evidently, Bond is haunted by his own past as a fictional character, in that every recast, full reboot or not, is haunted by previous incarnations. There is something intangible in Bond's relation to his past and to the past of the characters around him, as if we never know for sure whether Bond knows of events that have happened in the past. For example, while Lazenby knows that being ditched "never happened to the other fellow", does he know that Connery already met Blofeld/Donald Pleasence in *You Only Live Twice* when he meets Blofeld/Telly Savalas in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*.

Secondly, Bond is haunted by his own image, and thereby his historical obsolescence as a character, while he is being reintroduced into a changing world, as if being an atavism of an extinct type (a "dinosaur, a relic", as *GoldenEye* made clear). This is an effect of the reboot mechanics but takes into account the historical circumstances within which Bond is fated to act. The series moves on into a changing ideological landscape in popular culture, and yet some spirit of Bond must be preserved in keeping true to the character. Every reboot (soft or hard) is a new start that needs to begin again in a new time. Because of this, time is out of joint, as clearly shown by how the character ages and rejuvenates in fits and starts. With Craig, this is addressed on an individual level: he reboots to the origin in *Casino Royale* but is almost immediately washed up in *Skyfall*, just three movies in.

Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, Bond is haunted by a Marxian problem regarding historical agency: how to make a struggle heroic (i.e., how to make the historical drama meaningful) when so much of the Bond films is pure entertainment, glossy spectacle, slapstick and wise-cracks, wish fulfilment, and vicarious hedonism. While sports are used as an arena for the expression of tragic conflict, so much around them is comedy, and even the modifications of sports tend to render them farcical. It is Lazenby, in comical disguise, who formulates this Marxian problem: whether to sustain tragedy in the heroic struggle or to give over to the farcical repetitions of past glories. Lazenby's phrase "I'm not a sporting man" is an ambiguous statement which all other Bonds implicitly repeat. They are all negotiating whether to interpret the line literally or ironically: when they are at their best, are they sporting men or not? Craig, however, is the first one to take the phrase quite seriously and actually abstains from sports. This leaves him without sport as the venue for heroic/tragic display, and the only outcome possible is literal tragedy: his fateful demise. While Lazenby consolidates the tragic function of sport, making sports the means to a tragic end, as it were, Craig consolidates the tragic element into a rigid form, marking it as an end in itself. Here we have the illusion (and it is an illusion) of his hard reboot

and his closed story arc; but as an audience, we hear and we know that “we have all the time in the world” are the words of a ghost: first Lazenby’s, then Craig’s. We might echo Marx and say that much like Hegel, Craig too forgot to add that history may repeat itself as farce.

It is the meaning of “tragic irony” that the audience knows more than the characters. It may seem in the films that Bond is routinely, although in spectacular fashion, risking his life, even to the point of sacrificing it; and to some extent, his heroism could be measured by such feats, such bravery, such altruism. But as an audience we know that he triumphs in the face of all obstacles, and we know that Bond lives in a world of reboots, so that James Bond/007 always “will return” – that the spirit of Bond which reverberates through all incarnations is in fact a ghost. Still, maybe he does know after all, in a sort of sporting way, judging by an exchange in *Skyfall*:

Bond: Everybody needs a hobby.

Silva: So what’s yours?

Bond: Resurrection.

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