

Bond Girls signifiers of the times?

Björn Nystedt

CULTURE
ENGLISH B, 20 CREDITS
UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

1999-03-12

18th June 2001

Contents

1	Bond Girls signifiers of the times?	2
1.1	What is a Bond Girl?	2
1.2	From Russia with Love	2
1.3	A View to a Kill	3
1.4	GoldenEye	4
1.5	Conclusions	5
2	References	7

1 Bond Girls signifiers of the times?

In John Storey's book *Cultural Studies & the Study of Popular Culture* one can read about Tony Bennett's and Janet Woollacott's work *Bond and Beyond*. They have studied how the figure of James Bond has been produced and reproduced, from a cultural aspect. They point out that the key to Bond's continuing popularity is his figure's ability to change with the times (36). Further more they claim that he has been able to express cultural and political changes in our society.

The claim presented by Bennett and Woolacott that Bond can be seen as a signifier of the times got me interested in writing this essay. Instead of studying how the figure of Bond has changed through the times, which I think Bennett and Woollacott have already done, I will try to find out if the same theories can be applied to the Bond Girls. Can they also be regarded as signifiers of the times?

To find out if this is the case I have studied three Bond films and focused my study on the girls. Th films that I have chosen are from three decades. They are: *From Russia with Love* (1963), *A View to a Kill* (1985) and *GoldenEye* (1995). For facts and background information I have used the James Bond Filmography website. Before I go indeep and portraying the females of the films and later try to draw conclusions I am going to describe what a Bond Girl is.

1.1 What is a Bond Girl?

A Bond Girl is a very beautiful female who often with ease will jump into bed with Bond. She represents free and independent sex. According to Bennett and Woollacott, together with Bond she set new norms of sexuality. She often tries to be as good as Bond, but always comes up short.

In addition to the Bond Girl I will also study Miss Money Penny. She is a very interesting character who appears in every Bond film. I will write more about her late, but now I am going to describe the Bond Girls in the films that I have chosen.

1.2 From Russia with Love

In *From Russia with Love*, the second film in the Bond series, there are two Bond Girls, Tatiana Romanova and Sylvia Trench. Tatiana Romanova is a corporal in the Soviet army. She is assigned to the Soviet embassy in Istanbul and is used as a pawn in a murderous double-cross orchestrated by the criminal organisation SPECTRE and former Russian Colonel Rosa

Klebb. The innocent and naïve Tatiana is ordered to seduce Bond, unaware of the extent to which she is manipulated. She seduces Bond by breaking into his hotel room and lying in his bed. When Bond, only wearing a towel finds Tatiana in his bed they have a small talk before they start kissing. Klebb has their lovemaking secretly filmed as part of a planned murder and sex scandal. I suppose it was a rather daring concept for a 1963 film. When Tatiana later in the film finds out that Klebb has tricked her, she is already in love with Bond. To Bond she says "I know I love you James, I love you ... I love you, love you, it is true." The film ends with Tatiana and Bond kissing on a boat in Vienna. It is very romantic.

Sylvia Trench appears only once in the film and that is when she is having a romantic encounter with Bond on the banks of the river. Sylvia is aggressive and seductive. They are interrupted by Bond's assignment, but still he finds time to entertain her in the back of his car. Sylvia's purpose in the film is simply to suit Bond's needs and consequently she does nothing for the story.

Miss Moneypenny is M's loyal and workaholic secretary. M is Bond's boss. Miss Moneypenny combine business with pleasure by trying to seduce Bond. The playful and flirtatious banter between Miss Moneypenny and Bond is a staple of the Bond movies.

1.3 A View to a Kill

In *A View to a Kill* the Bond Girls are Stacey Sutton and Pola Ivanova. Stacey Sutton is onetime heiress to Sutton Oil Company fortune. In the film she falls on hard times and works as a geologist for the California department of oil and mines when she teams up with Bond. The majority of her company has been swindled by the villain Max Zorin. When she refuses to sell him the remaining shares her life is in great danger. She teams up with Bond to fight Zorin. Stacey is not an inspiring and convincing character. She does little but dangle precariously in lift shafts and from cliffs and bridges screaming: "Help me, James!" while holding her hands to her mouth. In classic Hollywood manner Bond saves Stacey from a large building in flames. Bond carries her on his shoulders while going down a ladder, with a crowded street below. The crowd applaud James' bravery. Stacey delivers more laughs than credibility. For example when she dressed in a dress and high heels attacks a villain or when she drives a fire-car. She is very sexy. I think Stacey is very 80ish. She is more about appearance than content, like so many things in the 80s. One cannot take her seriously even if she tries to persuade us to do so. Furthermore, I think the whole film suffers from the 80s' lack of content.

Pola Ivanova is an attractive KGB agent who shares a little détente with

Bond between the sheets. She encounters him when they make simultaneous attempts to infiltrate Zorin's oil refinery. After the mission they end up in a hot tub where they reminisce about their previous erotic encounters over the years. Pola takes what she thinks is Bond's cassette of Zorin's conversation, but only to discover that Bond has switched it for a tape of classical music. This proves that Bond Girls always is losing against Bond although they try hard. Pola's purpose in the film is like Sylvia's in *From Russia with Love*, although Pola has some part in taxing the story forward.

Miss Money Penny's appearance in this film is very similar to the one she made in *From Russia with Love*. Although this time she only has a marginal part in a field assignment, when she goes to a horse race with Bond, M and Q. The film ends with Bond and Stacey making love in a shower.

1.4 GoldenEye

In *GoldenEye* there are once again two Bond Girls, Natalya Simonova and Xenia Onatopp. Natalya Simonova is a Russian computer programmer who is assigned to the Severnaya weapons facility in Siberia. When Natalya witnesses the destruction of the facility and the theft of the *GoldenEye* by General Ourumov, she is marked for death. She is a heroine of the 90s: independent, courageous and cynical. One example of this is when Bond and Natalya intrude the villain's fort at the end of the film and she takes her own path. She finds a computer and out-programs the computer genius Boris. Natalya shows great verbal courage when she stops a verbal quarrel between Bond and Russian Defence Minister Dimitri Mishkin. Natalya calls them "Boys with toys!" Her courage is not only words like Stacey's in *A View to a Kill*. Natalya takes her words to action and helps Bond at the end of his mission. She works along Bond like an equal partner. She is cynical when Bond approaches her in the scene where they are locked in a Russian prison cell. There she first refuses to co-operate with Bond, but after some persuading by Bond she changes her mind. Natalya is the girl who ends up in Bond's arms at the end of the film.

They are very much in love. Xenia Onatopp is a hit in the face of political correctness. She dresses exotically and has an unusual penchant for cigars - which she smokes in a most suggestive manner. Xenia stands out in every aspect, from her car-racing scene with Bond in the beginning of the film and throughout the whole film. A ravishing beauty who combines her love of kinky, S&M sex with her penchant for murder. Xenia likes to be in command. She also tries that method on Bond but fails. Her preferred method of assassination is to strangle her lover to death with her thighs. She is a former Soviet fighter pilot who hijacks a hi-tech Tiger helicopter from the French

Navy.

Miss Moneypenny has also, like the Bond Girls, changed to fit the 90s. In this film she is a very liberated woman who enjoys boasting to Bond about various dates and take delight in playing somewhat hard to get. Here Miss Moneypenny is the opposite in respect to what she is in the other two films I have studied. This "version of" Moneypenny still has eyes for Bond, but is obvious quite content with their platonic relationship. In this particular film I would also like to mention another woman and that is M. Up till this film none of Bond's superiors have been of the opposite sex. M is very feminist, bossy and a very quick talker. She takes Bond with his own medicine like when she says that he is a "sexist misogynist dinosaur, a relic of the Cold War." However there is still a mutual respect between the two.

1.5 Conclusions

Now when I have compared the Bond Girls in three films I will return to my reasoning in the introduction. My conclusion is that one can see the Bond Girls as signifiers of the times, because to me it appears as if the girls' appearances have followed the trends set by our cultural movement, through the last few decades.

In the first film that I studied, that is *From Russian with Love*, the concept of the Bond Girl was not established, like in the later films. She was a new thing. I think that the Bond Girls were not representative for girls at the beginning of the 60s, but she represents a new way of thinking. It is like Bennett and Woollacott have written in their work: "Between them, Bond and 'the bond girl' embodied a modernisation of sexuality, representatives of norms of masculinity and femininity that were 'swinging free' from that constraints of the past" (38). The Bond Girls was at the forefront of the sexual liberation, which had its culmination in the 70s. An example of this is when Tatiana is filmed while having sex with Bond. The Bond Girls in this film are very willing to go between the sheets with Bond, like Sylvia.

A View to a Kill was released in the middle of the 80s. It was a decade that from a cultural point of view for many people was more about appearance than content. Girls wore a lot of make-up, dresses, high heels and were having long hair. At the movie theatres films like *Rambo* and *Indiana Jones* were popular. In these films a strong male saves the world and of course a helpless, beautiful and screaming girl, Stacey represents this way of outlook. Pola on the other hand can be said to represent the women's movement that grew in power during the 80s. She is a very strong female, almost equal to Bond, but her reason for being in the film is to be seduced by Bond.

In *GoldenEye* the filmmakers have gone the whole distance in making

Natalya an equal figure to Bond. She is very independent and can make her own decisions and manages well on her own. She is not easy to seduce, like the other Bond Girls. When Natalya and Bond start kissing in the later part of the film they have previously already established a relationship. I think she is a very good example of a woman in the 90s. Xenia on the other hand represents another movement of the 90s. In the 90s people have become tired of the seriousness and political correctness of the late 80s.

I have not written much about Miss Money Penny, but her persona has also changed dramatically in the 90s. In *GoldenEye* she is an independent woman who no longer yearning for Bond. A great victory for female liberation is M in *GoldenEye*. She is a woman that can boss with Bond. A hit below the belt for every chauvinist pig.

Personally I think one can learn a lot about women's role in our society, how it has changed and developed over the years by studying the Bond Girls from different periods. In the Bond films they appear like fractions of their time. It is the way Bennett and Woollacott describe Bond: "If Bond has functioned as a 'sign of time', it has been a moving sign of times, as a figure capable of talking up and articulating quite different and even contradictory cultural and ideological values" (36).

2 References

Storey, John, *Cultural Studies & the Studies of Popular Culture*, Edinburgh University Press, 1996.

James Bond Filmography, <http://www.james-bond.net/>