

Tying Victorian Bond(s) for the Resurrection of Her Majesty's Secret Service*

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Abstract. The James Bond phenomenon has been approached to discuss notions of British identity, imperialistic ethos, issues of masculinity and commodified middle-class. However, the critical canon of the James Bond mythos has not delved into the ideological origins of the myth, namely Thomas Carlyle's (1795-1881) myth of the Hero, the "blueprint" of Victorian ideology. The article explores Sam Mendes' *Skyfall* (2012) as a thorough analysis of the Bond mythos as Carlylean—say Victorian—construct, most notably through the notion of "resurrection"—a significant motif in the film. The article concludes the film embraces and celebrates Victorian ideology, laden with notions of stability and dependence, embedded in the James Bond mythos.

Keywords: James Bond; Victorian ideology; Thomas Carlyle; Hero; *Skyfall*.

[es] Lazos victorianos para la resurrección del Servicio Secreto de su Majestad

Resumen. El fenómeno James Bond ha sido abordado para discutir nociones de identidad británica, ética imperialista, revisiones de la masculinidad y comodificación de la clase media. Con todo, el canon crítico que ha tratado el fenómeno no ha explorado los orígenes ideológicos del mito, a saber, la teoría del Héroe de Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), patrón principal de la ideología victoriana de la norma. El presente artículo explora la película *Skyfall* (2012) de Sam Mendes como análisis profundo del mito Bond como constructo carlyleano (vale decir también, Victoriano), a través de la idea de "resurrección" (uno de los motivos más significativos del film). El artículo concluye que la película abraza y celebra la ideología Victoriana (con sus ideas de estabilidad y dependencia) integradas en el fenómeno James Bond como mito.

Palabras clave: James Bond; ideología victoriana; Thomas Carlyle; héroe; *Skyfall*.

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1. Introduction: General considerations

The James Bond mythos has proven very productive in order to problematize notions of British identity, imperialistic ethos, issues of masculinity and commodified middle-class ideology consistently. Critical assessments of the James Bond phenomenon (Lindner *Phenomenon*), however radical their stance, seem to agree that the Bond mythos has tapped into the collective unconscious by exploiting the ideological dynamics such issues share. “It [was] no accident” that the phenomenon—first in book, then in film—“took off in the 1950s” (Lindner “Size”, 236) in order to reimagine topical “ideological conflict[s]” through “a geopolitical fiction” informed by “geopolitical fact” (Lindner “Criminal”, 87). The “geopolitical fact” was of course the ancillary role in world diplomacy allotted to Great Britain at the end of her run as imperial superpower (c. 1945-1950) (Black 50). The “geopolitical fiction” was, in turn, the fantasy that Britain’s ability to shape the world had not so much disappeared as transformed. Admittedly, the Empire, fraught with its grand illusions of a male-driven, middle-class, stable and dependable civilization, as well as its captivating ability for “agency” had just been repressed rather than suppressed, that is, it had become secret.

Likewise, Fleming’s books, as well as the long-running series of films made by Albert R. Broccoli’s EON Productions, brought on a “particular conception of large-scale crime” (Lindner “Size”, 236) that

Created a contemporary audience in whose collective consciousness such large-scale crime would find deep resonance. By first magnifying the scope of criminal vision to include crimes against humanity and then locating those crimes politically in a postwar world order—however fictional and fantastic—Fleming effectively captured the popular cultural imagination with a fear that has been haunting it ever since. Recently, in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, this fear has been greatly accentuated. (Lindner “Size”, 236).

Indeed, that “[the Bond phenomenon] uncannily anticipates the contemporary state of global terrorism both in strategy and representation” (Watt 246) cannot be contested. Nor can the way Bond films have addressed, coded and decoded late 20th century anxieties regarding technology and the body (Willis 174-176); fantasies of masculinity enacted through progressively complicated scenarios of gender politics (Tremonte and Racioppi 187-189; Cunningham and Gabri 88-97) as well as issues of British identity and cosmopolitanism in the crisis of the Nation-State (Chapman “Britishness” 130-131; McMillan 196-198). Through various “big bangs, including the glamorous fantasies of gadgets, girls, and globetrotting” (Lindner “Size”, 237), the mythos has proven capable of negotiating most cultural and political anxieties embedded in past and present world-orders with a very specific albeit “remarkably adaptable” narrative (Tremonte and Racioppi 187-189).

What the canon devoted to Bond criticism has consistently overlooked is the actual origin of the ideological substratum that spawns the Bond mythos. Surely the “phenomenon took off” in the 1950s (Lindner “Size” 236), against the backdrop of the Cold-War; but history of ideas shows that its ideological origins founded on class-order, masculinity, dependability, Empire and agency can be traced back to way before the 1950s, probably a hundred years earlier, to the heyday of the Vic-

torian period. Arguably, Victorian ideology contributes most meanings of stability, dependability and order that can be ascertained in British identity; and these are meanings 20th century master narratives have definitely played upon. For instance, the Victorian century can be formulated as an over-orderly social project devoted to challenge the modern subject, who nevertheless manages to transcend the oppressive conditions of the 1800s and rebels against the said project at the turn of the century (Matthews 175-176). Or, rather, the Victorian century can be divined as a golden age of cosy political certainties that lead into a state of gloomy despair qualified by war, corruption and dehumanization (Matthews 177-179). Both visions have cropped up prominently at different points in the 20th century. But however dystopian or utopian these ideas might be; whether aimed at proving or disproving the foundations of unstable modern and / or postmodern identities, the reception of Victorian culture has been consistent in construing Victorian ideology as a narrative of order, civilization (coded in the Empire), stability and dependability (Matthews 272-285; Valls Oyarzun 11). Thus, it is no wonder Fleming would resort to such an ideological substratum, laden with fantasies of British agency, as a means to dispel the waning power of what once was the only dependable *truth* in the world: the British Empire; and neither should be that both novels and films—and arguably any other text orbiting the constellation of the myths—alike draw from the “blueprint” (Auerbach 200) and dynamics sitting at the core of most Victorian master narratives, to wit, Carlyle’s ideas on Heroes and Hero-worship (Auerbach 200-201; LaValley 201-219; Bentley 7-39).

As these pages will show, Sam Mendes’ *Skyfall* (2012) embraces and celebrates the Victorian heritage of the phenomenon, *as* well as the Carlylean ideology embedded in the mythos wholeheartedly. *Skyfall* acknowledges the Victorian element by playing out the Bond mythos in Carlylean terms, most notably through the motives of resurrection and the Old vs. New dynamics. A brief description of Carlyle’s interpretation of the hero will lead up to a thorough analysis of the ideological substratum of the film in Carlylean terms, in order to unveil the Victorian myth behind the James Bond mythos. Ultimately, this article will show how the 21st century take on the Bond phenomenon has managed to update Victorian master narratives of order, empire ethos, stability and dependability in the present day postmodern context.

2. Victorian bonds

Shortly before the end of the second act of *Skyfall*, M (Judi Dench) appears in a public hearing conducted by a junior minister of the cabinet (Claire Dowar, MP, played by Helen McCrory), to account for the attacks recently endured by MI6. At the end of her deposition, M quotes the closing lines of Alfred Lord Tennyson’s “Ulysses”.

We are not now that strength which in old days
 Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
 One equal temper of heroic hearts,
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield (Tennyson 81).

M resorts to a poem by Queen Victoria's Poet Laureate to endorse her conduct in the political / military crisis Britain undergoes during the film. Through Tennyson, M addresses a temperate, stout, brave, "strong in will", political subject ("a we") that, strangely enough, happens to be at odds with "time and fate", but comes off as impervious to change. The "one heroic heart" (Tennyson 81) at the core of Victorian identity seems to be simultaneously subject and alien to reality as becoming, so much so that not being *now* that "strength in the old days" (Tennyson 81) does not prevent the Victorian "we" from being "that which we are", ultimately, "a strong [will]" (Tennyson 81). However, since the poem encodes Victorian identity in terms of will, that is *force*, time and becoming seem of essence to unfold its full potential, thereupon "the strong will" realizes only "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" (Tennyson 81). In other words, despite History, the qualities that inform Victorian identity remain unaltered, whereas only by virtue of History, these qualities become apparent.

The Neo-Platonic flair Tennyson's lines (wilfully embraced by M) showcase disclose both the nature and the governing dynamics of political identity in the film, which, in turn, and not coincidentally, match Carlyle's² theory of Great Men superbly.

Carlyle, like Tennyson, contends that heroism constitutes a Force that runs *under*, but *parallel to*, and is constantly preserved *despite* the flux of history. At the same time, history informs the factual identities individual heroes eventually acquire. These depend not so much on the underlying Force of heroism as on the historical context that witnesses the rise of the hero. Thus, Carlyle implies that the history of Great Men mirrors that of the world:

The Great man is a Force of Nature: whatsoever is truly great in him springs-up from the inarticulate deeps (...). The hero is he who lives in the inward sphere of things, in the True, Divine and Eternal, which exists always, unseen to most, under the Temporary, Trivial: his begin is in that; (...) His life, as we said before, is a piece of the everlasting heart of Nature herself (Carlyle 112, 155)

For Carlyle, "heroic hearts" (Tennyson 81) spring from the solid *bond* that links Divine substance to human greatness, since "the boast of Carlyle's hero is the submergence of his humanity in the Force to which the privileged have access" (Auerbach 200). "Carlyle's heroes", Albert LaValley claims, "possess a common ground, which he establishes by attributing to them characteristics which depict their union with the central fact of the universe" (241-242). Carlyle refers to "the central fact of the universe" in different ways, sometimes theologically ("Godhead", "Divinity", most notably the "Law"), sometimes epistemologically ("Truth"), oftentimes both. Inevitably, Carlyle's rhetoric in this matter brings about serious consequences into the actual individuality of the hero. These consequences operate mainly in the realm of will. Since the bond that links Carlyle's heroes and Truth—the Law—is so inextricable, the individual hero cannot turn his back on it without querying and destabilizing his own identity. The existing bond between heroism and Truth effectively sets limits to the hero's will and subjectivity, insofar as the hero feels essentially

² Incidentally, "Ulysses" was one of Thomas Carlyle's favourite poems, and so he let know Tennyson in a letter addressed to celebrate the heroic qualities of the poem (Sanders 82-83).

bonded to a certain duty, a duty to Truth, i.e. the Law. It should be no wonder therefore that Carlyle posits “sincerity” and “duty” (31) as the first and foremost traits of the hero, who nevertheless becomes thusly “a monolithic creature with no trace of [...] individuality” (Auerbach 198); a human signifier (Carlyle 121) of an otherwise “nonhuman Force” (Auerbach 199); or purely a “blunt instrument [...] [with no] ego [left in] the equation” (*Casino Royale*) designed by culture to enforce an “inward indissoluble bond of common” (Carlyle 33) Victorian willpower.

Carlyle conceives “sincerity” as the ability to identify, penetrate and construe the signs encoded by the Law. Carlyle probes the idea through the notion of idolatry:

Idol is *Eidolon*, a thing seen, a symbol. It is not God, but a symbol of God; and perhaps one may question whether any the most benighted mortal ever took it for more than a Symbol. I fancy, he did not think that the poor image his own hands had made was God; but that God was emblem'd by it, that God was in it some way or other. And now in this sense, one may ask, Is not all worship whatsoever a worship by Symbols, by eidola, or things seen? Whether seen, rendered visible as an image or picture to the bodily eye; or visible only to the inward eye, to the imagination, to the intellect: this makes a superficial, but no substantial difference. It is still a Thing Seen, significant of Godhead; and Idol. (...) All creeds, liturgies, religious forms, conceptions that fitly invest religious feelings, are in this sense, *eidola*, things seen. All worship whatsoever must proceed by Symbols, by Idols (...). Where, then, lies the evil of it? Condemnable Idolatry is insincere idolatry (Carlyle 121-122).

Herein lies the key to the significance of heroism *à la Carlyle*. Sincere idolatry means recognition of the true meaning through “things seen”, that is, through a systemic structure of signs and symbols. Any individual willing to see the Divine Truth through the proper *idols*—“things seen”—should wherefore become a hero. The idea prompts Carlyle’s theory of *hero-worship* (133-134), a dialogical structure of society whereby the negotiation between symbols and meanings cohere into a *bond* of togetherness and commonality. The hero constitutes a human signifier other individuals feel bounded to by virtue of his divine meaning, which is, naturally, Truth, the Law.

Worship of a Hero is transcendent admiration of a Great Man. I say great men are still admirable; I say there is, at bottom, nothing else admirable! No nobler feeling than this of admiration for one higher than himself dwells in the breast of man. It is to this hour, and at all hours, the vivifying influence in man’s life. [...] Hero-worship, heartfelt prostrate admiration, submission, burning, boundless, for a noblest godlike Form of Man (Carlyle 11).

Cunningly, though, Carlyle brings off an appealing side to this somewhat misleadingly primeval perception of society, enforced by faith, blind submission, privileged insight and, ultimately, fine-tuned instincts. Since “the faculty of hero-worship is itself a form of heroism” (Bentley 20), adherence to the cult of Great Men would provide its followers with a meaning and a sense, a privileged look into the “inward sphere of things, the True, Divine and Eternal,” into “the Law” (Carlyle 112; 39). That is, any individual inclined to *see* divinity in the hero would become—wittingly or unwittingly—a hero.

Which leads to a final, but critical point regarding Carlyle's (and Tennyson's and M's) idea of the heroic: its *significance*. Hero-worship deviates from any other type of idolatry (i.e. devotion to "things seen") in that the meaning of its core symbol is Truth. Carlyle promotes hero-worship passionately, yes, as passionately as he condemns *false idolatry*, namely, any type of idolatry that glorifies *false idols*. Considering things as they stand, the issue boils down to the process of significance, that is, how *eidola*, "things seen" get to signify Truth, the Law. Oddly enough for a thinker that has come to be regarded as the epitome of conservatism—his "aristocratic radicalism" (LaValley 256-257) vouches for that—Carlyle shows a post-structuralist slant *avant la lettre* when dealing with significance. As I have already explained, Carlyle contends that history enacts the outward form of the hero and, in so doing, history, too, brings the ultimate substratum of *reality*—"the inward sphere of things, the divine" (Carlyle 112)—into presence. That is, Carlyle posits the hero is constituted as signifier by virtue of his being present in the process of significance ruled by history as discourse (*not reality*, therein lies the ideological rub). Or, in other words, history establishes the hero as signifier by exacting his presence. Nevertheless, in order to enforce the structure of presence, history must first acknowledge the *absence* of the heroic. Indeed, Carlyle's theory on heroes revolves around a cyclical concept of history, which progresses and regresses indefinitely, each time around revealing a new type of hero. Presence and absence must alternate recurrently and repeatedly. Carlyle seems to agree with Judith Butler—and others—that the fundamental systemic opposition of presence / absence realizes "a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules" (198), effectively investing the hero with meaning in every iteration.

Furthermore, the systemic opposition at the core of the hero's significance spawns a singular, yet meaningful by-product in the form of *immanence*. By bringing the hero into the structure of discourse, history brands *absence* as prerequisite to enforce the process of significance through *presence*. Still, the system works both ways. When the hero is constituted as a meaningful *presence*, his absence, too, becomes paradoxically meaningful, inasmuch as the absence is devoid of sense outside its structural correlation. Carlyle benefits from this by forcing the meaning of "truth" into presence as well as absence, and consequently manages to enact a higher structure of immanence by virtue of which the heroic stands true and real regardless of its status. Therefore, Carlyle never misses the mark, since both the absence and the presence of the hero serve as indisputable proof of the Truth in the heroic.

Immanence, in turn, proves very productive for Carlyle, for immanence holds the momentous connotation of Truth within the limits of absence, while setting in motion the dynamics of significance in history. Namely, recurrent realization of heroism through history occurs in the form of an immanent (absent *but* true) force becoming apparent (present *and* true) at a given point in time. The recurrent nature of the process calls for infinite iterations, whereby the hero in present form must return to a status of immanence (absence) in order to become present again. In so doing, the process positively (re)affirms his meaning. It is high time the process received a functional name — *resurrection*:

Curious: this law of mutation, which also is a law written in man's inmost thought, had been deciphered by these old earnest Thinkers in their rude style; and how, though all dies, and even gods die, yet all death is but a phoenix fire-death, and a

new-birth into the Greater and the Better! It is the fundamental *Law* of Being for a creature made of Time, living in this Place of Hope. All [*sincere*] men [i.e. heroes, great men] have seen into it; may still see into it (Carlyle 39; emphasis added).

The dynamics of resurrection is deeply rooted in the significance of Bond as myth. Consider Judith Roof's remarks on Bond's style:

Bond's style signifies. It is actually performative in the sense that it does what it is in so being. [...] Style gives Bond authority; Bond's style is the word that enacts the Law. But Bond's style is never style alone; it is the signifier of a being whose existence equals authority. Bond's style enacts a perpetual return to a mythic moment when the *Law* was the word and the word was uttered by the Father in a hierarchical vision of order and emplacement. Bond's style is always retro, mummified. Bond's style returns the past to the present, even, and especially, in its most futuristic moments, and it is in this constant temporal inter-referentiality that Bond can make style work as Law. (Roof 78; emphasis added).

Roof's remarks on authority—which nonetheless seem to acknowledge the nature of 007 as Carlylean hero, as “enactment [i.e. outward performance] of the Law” (78)—bring home an interesting side note that helps navigate Bond in Carlylean terms. Arguably, it is not that James Bond takes authority back to “a mythic moment when Law was the word” (78) so much as that Bond signifies the inner power of authority by virtue of the narrative (i.e. the myth), “the signifier of a being whose existence” in the narrative “equals authority” (78). The “perpetual return to a mythic moment [Bond enacts]” (78) *performs* meaning inasmuch as it brings the style into the system back and forth. Iteration surely reinforces its presence, but cannot *perform it per se*, insofar as the structure of “presence” requires the “absence” in order for Bond's style “[to do] what it is in so being” (Roof 78), effectively branding absence as immanence. In other words, the performative, almost ritualistic nature of Bond's style—which covers the widest array possible of cultural constructs, ranging from clothing, food and drinks, to quips, witticism and one-liners—requires its absence in a sort of cyclical way (ritualistic in nature) thus reaffirming its character. It needs death as well as resurrection. It is in this constant, recurrent iteration of “resurrections” where myth arises; but also where the actual myth acquires its authority (meaning) of *thing seen*, of *eidolon* (Carlyle) resurrected.

At the end of *Quantum of Solace* (Marc Forster, 2008), M (Judi Dench) asks Bond to come back, whereupon Bond responds, “I never left” (*Quantum of Solace*). No, he did not. Resurrection, the dynamics of significance in the Bond mythos, through its endless movement from absence—i.e. immanence—to presence and back, assures the meaningful existence of “the inward sphere of things, [...] the True, [...] Divine and Eternal [...] vital Force” (Carlyle 155, 138).

3. Dialectics of resurrection in *Skyfall*

The Bond film series had played on the idea of resurrection before *Skyfall*. The pre-title sequence in *From Russia With Love* (Terence Young, 1963) introduced a pattern whereby Bond's death is hinted at early on in the film, only for the audience

to quickly (and amazingly!) discover that 007 is alive and well, and that they had been led on to a trick of representation³. Different iterations of the character suffer almost sure-deaths in nearly every instalment of the series. These are sometimes highlighted by a shift in POV⁴, aimed not so much at misleading the audience into actually believing Bond's death as at performing the customary "implicit wink in the eye" (Eco 167; Hitchens xi) most Bond texts—whether books or films—boast. Resurrection is rooted deeply in both the Bond narrative formula and the visual expectations that inform the film series⁵.

What *Skyfall*—and arguably most films under Daniel Craig's tenure—contributes to the idea, though, is a thorough look into the systemic performance of the motif as well as a methodical analysis of the concept in the context of heroism, not surprisingly, after Carlye. The film punctuates the resurrection motif prominently through various examples. The iconic British Bulldog, for instance, survives after "the whole office goes up in smoke" (*Skyfall*), to intertwine British values with the Carlylean mythos visually. The figurine becomes the "last gift bequeathed" to Bond "from M" as a token of "stability and authority" (McMillan 204). Twice in the third act, Raoul Silva (Javier Bardem) believes Bond is dead: once after *Skyfall* Logde blows up; and then another after 007 falls into the ice-covered swamp fighting one of Silva's hoodlums. The shift in perspective (from Bond to Silva) in the latter example plays on the expectations of the audience, so much so that the sequence comes off as a bleak version of Eco's "implicit wink in the eye" (167; Hitchens xi).

And then, of course, there is the resurrection motif at the beginning of the film. "In *Skyfall*, Bond (like a twenty-first-century King Arthur) returns from the grave

³ The filmmakers cherished the idea of killing Bond and "making him resurrect" recurrently as a way of introducing the early films (Field & Chowdhury). In *From Russia With Love*, Red Grant (Robert Shaw), the psychopath henchman whose presence hovers ominously through the film, kills James Bond (Sean Connery) in the pre-title sequence. Shortly after the murder, an instructor (Walter Gotell) of Spectre Island reveals that the killing was an exercise and the dead man was a stand-in for 007. Right after the gun-barrel sequence in *Thunderball* (Terence Young, 1965), a tracking shot shows the initials JB on a coffin, thus suggesting it is Bond's. The shot pans away and shows a thickly veiled widow before cutting to a low-angle shot of James Bond (Sean Connery) and Madame LaPorte (played by French-Japanese actress Mitsouko), who watch over the coffin. However, the most popular use of the motif belongs to *You Only Live Twice* (Lewis Gilbert, 1967). After a prologue relating the hijack of a US space capsule, the pre-title sequence cuts to Bond (Sean Connery) in bed with a Chinese agent (Ling, played by Tsai Chin) in Hong-Kong. Apparently, Ling betrays Bond by trapping 007 in an automatic folding-bed (oh, the ingenuity!) and letting a crew of hitmen in the room. These shoot Bond mercilessly. After the title-credits, a bombastic funeral and a fancy recovery, the audience finds out that Bond is alive. His death was truly an elaborate plan concocted to mislead Bond's closest enemies (*You Only Live Twice*). Despite the pattern being ostensibly absent in the rest of the series (up until *Skyfall*), the death / resurrection dynamics, whether in form of plot-device (*You Only Live Twice*), visual joke (*Thunderball*) and / or inside joke (*From Russia With Love*) has permeated deeply into the mythos.

⁴ Examples of deaths of the character, followed by miraculous re-entrance, feature prominently in *Moonraker* (Lewis Gilbert, 1979) and *Tomorrow Never Lies* (Roger Spottiswoode, 1997).

⁵ Like most of the pinnacles of the films, the motif of resurrection, too, can be found in Fleming's book series. James Bond's (Daniel Craig) death in *Skyfall* can be traced back to the original literary source material (namely, *You Only Live Twice*, 1963, and *The Man With the Golden Gun*, 1964). The *fall* displayed shortly before the title sequence is taken from *You Only Live Twice* (1964) (Fleming *YOLT* 198-199), as is M's obituary of Commander Bond (Fleming *YOLT* 200-203) and the latter's retirement to a fishing village in the company of a lady (Fleming *YOLT* 204-208). The "resurrection", as well as Bond's rehabilitation for service mirror most of the first three chapters in *The Man With the Golden Gun* (Fleming *Golden Gun* 1-23) Incidentally, Bond had already resurrected in the book series, at the beginning of *Dr. No* (1958) (Fleming *NO* 219-228) after Bond's unexpected demise in the previous book, *From Russia With Love* (1957) (Fleming *From Russia* 208).

just in time and eliminates the threat to British *stability* and *authority*” (McMillan 204; emphasis added). Bond’s death—a *fall* from the *sky*, visually speaking—and his subsequent resurrection re-enact the constitution of his identity (say meaning) as a formal reincarnation of the “inner sphere of things, the Truth, the Divine, the Eternal” and “the Law” (Carlyle 112, 39). And in so doing, the character manages to uphold the seminal values embedded in the ideological framework of the Carlylean narrative. When Bond dies, the character sinks “down into the underworld, down and down and down, like Alice through the rabbit-hole” (Sam Mendes qtd. in Field & Chowdhury), that is, down into the psychological depths of identity (and meaning!). In that context, the film plays out as a bizarre revisit to the origins of the character, the trauma at the bottom of Bond’s stone-cold personality as a ruthless assassin. By “re-imagining the female M (Judi Dench)” through the two previous instalments (*Casino Royale* and *Quantum of Solace*) (McNeely 160), *Skyfall* benefits from exploring M as Bond’s surrogate mother (McNeely 161); and eventually codes her as a Freudian transference of Bond’s trauma. Psychological reading notwithstanding, the death sequence supports a cultural interpretation as well. The visual sinking into the gloomy depths of death refers to a space of absence whose actual decoding is delayed until resurrection is performed. The interplay between death and resurrection, like the “ellipsis” in *Casino Royale* (Sperb 58), thus creates a signifier of absence enforced and heightened by the actual lack of (cultural) significance, but precisely because of its being a signifier (meaning purely, abstract *absence*) playing on the expectations arisen by virtue of the death / resurrection trace in the mythos, the signifier comes off as absence *inherent to, indwelling in* the structure of meaning, that is, *immanence*.

The enactment of resurrection completes the structure of immanence / presence; and the structure, in turn, sets in motion the performative process of constituting Bond’s identity as a Carlylean hero. After the attack on MI6, the film shows a dishevelled Bond suffering from an acute access of ennui he in turn tries to dispel through hedonism—informed by sex, pills, alcohol and gambling, albeit with an ominous, menacing twist in the form of a poisonous scorpion (*Skyfall*). Bond’s identity crisis stems from the displacement of the character’s drive, which shifts from the *bond* he kept with truth and community to the realization of an individual self. The disarray of desire triggers the character’s dysfunctional behaviour. Herein the film reimagines the character, who now tackles hedonism not as a means to make up for the threat of death his commitment to “the Law” and community entailed in the past (Butterfield 14-15), but rather to serve as ultimate object of desire constituted to fulfil the wrecks of a formerly selfless operative force. “Yet it is through [Bond’s]” Carlylean “submission to the law,” rather than through self-realization “that Bond achieves pleasure” (Johnson 122), so much so that, after Bond learns of the attack on MI6, the film’s first act painstakingly sets out to both reinstate and relocate the cultural foundations (based on duty, truth and *agency* through willpower) in the character’s main drive.

Suitably enough, the resurrection is put into effect in the privacy of M’s house, one of the fewest spaces in the film that is coded as “stable, conservative and dependable” (Stock 252), a fitting combination of private, personal trustworthiness paradoxically subjected to the service of the law. After attending the funeral of six agents killed in the attack on MI6, M finds Bond has broken into her house yet again:

M: Where the hell have you been?

BOND: Enjoying death; 007 reporting for duty.

M: Why didn't you call?

BOND: You didn't get the postcard? You should try it some time. Get away from it all. It really lends perspective.

M: Ran out of drink where you were, did they?

BOND: What was it you said? «Take the bloody shot» (Skyfall; emphasis added).

The conversation adequately reinstates Bond's submission to duty and the Law at the core of the character's drive. And Bond reaffirms it right after he quips about his belonging to the Carlylean structure of immanence / presence suggested by his "death". Furthermore, 007 challenges M's lack of instincts and / or confidence implied in her not letting Bond finish the job she herself entrusted him with ("What was it you said? 'Take the bloody shot'").⁶ Both the character's assertion of *duty* as main drive—his only source of pleasure (Johnson 122) much like Carlyle's heroes'—and Bond's demands of blind trust on behalf of M point out to the basic structure of commonality based on hero-worship Carlyle posited. Bond, the hero, is established as a full-fledged signifier of the Law, whereupon *duty* negotiates a *bond* between the individual and the collective. This bond is exacted through the leap of faith Carlyle demands from hero-worshippers, whose *sincere* and "earnest recognition" (17) of the hero, as well as of the meaning (Truth, Divinity, the Law) encoded in him, coheres into a complex network of individual willpower enhanced by loyalty and trust, as well as *compellingly tied to collective duty*. Through hero-worship, the heroics in history transcends the individual and becomes as much a collective meaning as a collective signifier of the Law. And precisely because of that, Carlyle contends that the bond of *duty shared* by the community of hero-worshippers and the actual hero must work both ways. Bond's *duty* is to preserve the Law through the preservation of the community ("007 reporting for duty"), which become one and the same thing by virtue of the hero-worship ethics. So, from Carlyle's perspective, Bond is right in rebuking M's behaviour ("take the bloody shot") insofar as her not trusting Bond leaves hero-worship devoid of collective meaning. Furthermore, in so doing, she jeopardized the collective embodiment of the Law. In any case, the bond between 007 and M comes off as representation of hero-worship dynamics.

Shared bonds of commonality notwithstanding, 007's resurrected willpower must remain individual and self-governing. Shortly after Bond's return to active duty, he meets MI6's new Quartermaster (Ben Whishaw). The following conversation ensues:

Q: Always makes me feel a little melancholy: a grand old warship being ignominiously hauled away for scrap (sighs). The inevitability of time, don't you think?

⁶ The pre-title sequence runs as follows: "Silent killer, Patrice, has stolen an MI6 hard drive containing the names and deep cover details of NATO agents embedded in terrorist organisations around the world. Hot on his trail is 007, assisted by field agent Eve. They are in communication with MI6 headquarters as they chase the assassin through Istanbul and continue their pursuit on top of a moving train. In the event that Bond is unsuccessful in eliminating Patrice, Eve has a rifle uncertainly trained on the target while Bond is fighting him. As Bond is running out of time, Eve is ordered to shoot Patrice by M. She, however, misses Patrice but instead hits Bond who falls from the train into a river below" (Field & Chowdhury). M gives the order, as she cannot decide whether Bond will kill Patrice. Bond hears the order, which leads to the conversation at hand.

What do you see?

BOND: A bloody big ship. Excuse me.

Q: I'm your new Quartermaster.

BOND: You must be joking.

Q: Why, because I'm not wearing a lab coat?

BOND: Because you still have spots.

Q: My complexion is hardly relevant.

BOND: Your competence is.

Q: Age is no guarantee of efficiency.

BOND: And youth is no guarantee of innovation.

Q: I'll hazard I can do more damage on my laptop sitting in my pyjamas before my first cup of Earl Grey than you can do in a year in the field.

BOND: Oh, so why do you need me?

Q: Every now and then a trigger has to be pulled.

BOND: Or not pulled. It's hard to know which in your pyjamas, Q. (Skyfall)

The tension between the New and the Old—I will come back to it further below—sits at the core of this repartee. Q does not care much for the actual effectiveness of the old double-0 agent in the present context of cyber-terrorism, global surveillance and technological warfare. The Quartermaster deems Bond as the executive end of his branch, arguably *his subordinate agent*. Bond, in turn, queries Q's somewhat cocky demeanour on the grounds not so much of the character's experience as of the dubious ability the New selfless cyber-world order displays to intervene in reality. Bond tackles the issue in terms of decision-making, responsibility and, ultimately, *agency*. The novelty of Bond's argument, though, lies in his Derridean critique of the Butlerian concept of *agency* Q upholds. The *new* Quartermaster conceives Bond as an *agent* of the male-driven, penetrating gaze of global surveillance and cyber-espionage; namely, the remote-control enforcer programmed to provide Q's selfless structure with identity through *performative agency*: "Every now and then, a trigger must be pulled" (*Skyfall*). Bond, conversely, takes a radically different stance. Surely, a trigger must be "pulled"; but also, "not pulled"⁷, insofar as the possibility of the latter belongs to the structure of the former. Derrida would agree with Bond that there must be a possibility of not taking action ('not pulling the trigger') written into the fact of taking action ('pulling the trigger') (444), whereby either option would necessarily constitute a performative act of *agency*⁸ that, in turn, "[enables] and [restricts] the intelligible assertion" of identity (Butler 198). Hence, *agency* can only be established by the performative act embedded in or exacted through the responsibility prompted by the decision, not the action, effectively locating the enactment of the self *in the realm of individual will*. And this is not a minor issue. Through Bond's deconstructive quip, the secret *agent* vindicates his identity as a self-governing individual force juxtaposed against the New, the selfless, "hidden and internalised [...] networks" of cyber-power "that cannot be seen on satellite photographs,

⁷ Gareth Mallory (Ralph Fiennes), M's eventual replacement, dwells on the same subject in a key moment (ideologically speaking) in *Spectre* (2015): "Have you ever had to kill a man, Max? Have you? To pull that trigger, you have to be sure. Yes, you investigate, analyse, assess, target. And then you have to look him in the eye. And you make the call. And all the drones, bugs, cameras, transcripts, all the surveillance in the world can't tell you what to do next. A license to kill is also a license not to kill" (*Spectre*).

⁸ Butler herself hints at this in locating "agency [...] within the *possibility of variation on [the] repetition*" (198).

thermal images, or with the naked eye” (Willis 181). But perhaps more significantly, by coding *agency* as individual willpower, the film firmly establishes Bond, after Carlyle, as a self-ruling manifestation of the Force, capable of *causing reality*. Bond hints at this earlier on in the film, during the psychological evaluation he undergoes. Doctor Hall (Nicholas Woodeson), the psychiatrist in charge of assessing Bond’s health, performs an exercise of “simple word associations” (*Skyfall*) and pitches the word “agent” nonchalantly, to which Bond responds: “provocateur” (*Skyfall*)⁹. Bond seems to understand—actually seems to embody, provided the context in which he delivers the line—that establishing the meaning of agency—either through “pulling” or “not pulling” a trigger—*provokes*, namely *causes* significance. Last, but not least, Bond’s vindication of agency as willpower once again highlights the notion of immanence in the significance of resurrection. Bond’s Derridean take on the concept of agency relocates the actual performance of identity to the undercurrent Force of will—a will, a drive, the character has explicitly tied to duty.

Furthermore, as I have already suggested, the sequence in the National Gallery locates Bond and Q within the Old vs. New dynamics that pervades the film. Q’s first remark—“a grand old warship being ignominiously hauled away for scrap (sighs); the inevitability of time, don’t you think?” (*Skyfall*)—in the conversation describes J. M. W. Turner’s painting *The Fighting Temeraire* (1838), which features early on in the scene. The thematic projection of the painting onto the film—Bond, the Cold-War (should I say Victorian?) dinosaur might be conceived as the old *Fighting Temeraire* being “hauled away for scrap”, in more ways than suspected¹⁰—helps establish the analogy between Bond and “the Old”, and, moreover, helps associate (tie) the concept of “the Old” with the notion of immanence. And it makes perfect sense, since “the Old” must be absent as a prerequisite to become present, but then again, it must become and constitute himself as present in the structure pertaining the governing discourse of reality *in order to signify*. The same dynamics between life and death is put at work here, but within the Old versus New structure. The significance of both depends on their mutual interdependence as well as on the immanence / presence structure of resurrection. This is what the New, conversely, does not seem to understand, inasmuch as Q *subordinates* the functional meaning of the Old to the selfless willpower of the New, but naturally, the New world-order does not see this “because it is hard to know [...] in your pyjamas” (*Skyfall*).

In visual terms, the film ostensibly codes the Old as *immanent*. Furthermore, in the context of the Old / New dynamics, the film displayed a somewhat Victorian look that is worth checking. Not only the main visual strategy of the film aims at a “still” and “classical” appearance (Field & Chowdhury) that would deviate from the postmodern “Jason Bourne” look (Field & Chowdhury)—featured prominently in the previous instalment, *Quantum of Solace*—by drawing on “crane and dolly [shots] much more than [on] jerky hand-held” camerawork (Field & Chowdhury); but also, production designer Dennis Gassner took pride in creating a sharp contrast between the Old / London and the New / Shanghai that underscores some of the meanings I have delved into so far. Incidentally, or perhaps coincidentally, Gassner made London in the film ingrained with Victorian aesthetics. M’s apartment is no

⁹ Doctor Hall’s follow-up word is “woman”, to which Bond responds, “provocatix” (*Skyfall*), seemingly playing upon a Butlerian issue of gender in the structural meaning of agency.

¹⁰ See below, p. 22.

longer the fancy penthouse it was once in *Casino Royale* and *Quantum of Solace*. Instead, she lives in a Victorian redbrick house set in Cadagon Square, that is, in bohemian—for Victorian standards—Chelsea (Field & Chowdhury). Bond meets Q at “Room 34 of the National Gallery” building (Field & Chowdhury), which was furnished and opened in 1838 only to become one of the prides of early Victorian London. The look of the new headquarters of MI6 coalesces from the conflation of different parts of Victorian London. The main area was shot in the Old Vic tunnels (Field & Chowdhury), a large subterranean junction of disused railway vaults hidden beneath Waterloo Station, opened in 1848. The entrance to these tunnels, conversely, was shot in West Smithfield, opposite to Smithfield Market in Holborn, a well-known Victorian background, famous for featuring in several novels by Charles Dickens (*Bleak House* and *Great Expectations* being notable examples). The warehouse where Bond keeps his Aston Martin DB5 is in Parkside Industrial Estate, Arklow Road, Deptford, Lewisham, a Victorian development of the then-declining 18th century Deptford Dockyard. The exterior sports the same redbrick look as M’s house, but with an extra layer of (industrial) grit. Last but foremost is, perhaps, the *subterranean* London. The tunnels of the Underground Railroad were built and opened in the second half of the nineteenth century¹¹ and due to the compelling technological awe they created quickly became part of the Victorian collective imaginary (Daly 49). It is true that *Skyfall*’s London showcases, too, prominent examples of neo-classic and Edwardian architecture—from Whitehall to Trinity Square, which stands in for the former as the venue in which M’s public hearing takes place—but notice how these are mostly associated with public governance, reason, procedure, order and justice, whereas the afore-mentioned examples (the home of the head of the Secret Service; the subterranean headquarters of MI6; the venue of a clandestine meeting between Bond and Q; the hiding place of Bond’s car, which is used, in turn, to hide M; and, finally, London’s underground) suggest, more often than not, secrecy, concealment and, literally, underground resistance—ultimately, *immanence*.

Indeed, the Victorian flair of subterranean *immanence* (the audience knows the Victorian / Carlylean mythos is there, albeit in secret, in hiding, unseen, concealed) plays on the Old vs. New dynamics and stresses their inextricably mutual interdependence. It also serves the purpose to denounce the *false* attitude of the New towards the Old, most prominently in Silva’s island. The *false*ness stems from the way in which significance is enforced. In keeping with the visual strategy of the film, the sharp contrast between the Old and the New supports too the aesthetics in Silva’s lair—exteriors shot at the island of Hashima, in Japan (Field & Chowdhury). Nevertheless, the interplay between the Old and the New in Silva’s lair has reached a certain level of closure beyond which significance seems to collapse. Shortly after reaching the island, the character of Severine (Berénice Marlohe) informs Bond that Silva got rid of the entire population of the island by “making them think there was a leak at the chemical plant. It’s amazing the panic you can cause with a single computer” (*Skyfall*). Shortly after, Bond meets Silva (Javier Bardem) in a room full of stashed network-servers among the ruins of the, one can only surmise, once successful outfit of the now desert island. The visuals, indeed, introduce the notion of *ruins*, which Silva readily acknowledges:

¹¹ Temple station, whose tunnels—albeit an on-set reconstruction—feature prominently in the film, opened in 1870.

SILVA: Oh, Mr. Bond! All that physical stuff... So dull, so dull. Chasing spies... (laughs) so old-fashioned! Your knees must be killing you. England. The Empire! MI6! You're living in a ruin as well, you just don't know it yet. At least here there are no old ladies giving orders and no little... Bip! Gadgets from those fools in Q-Branch. If you wanted, you could pick your own secret missions. As I do. Name it. Name it. Destabilize a multinational by manipulating stocks... Bip. Easy. Interrupt transmissions from a spy satellite over Kabul... (pops) Done. Hmm. Rig an election in Uganda. All to the highest bidder.

BOND: Or a gas explosion in London.

SILVA: Just point and click.

BOND: Well, everybody needs a hobby.

SILVA: So what's yours?

BOND: Resurrection.

For Silva, there is no opposition between the Old and the New. For Silva, the Old is just "ruins", a somewhat melancholic by-product of the New's triumph over the Old ("the Empire, MI6"). Silva thus aims at cancelling the Carlylean structure of significance, the structure of immanence / presence encoded in both the opposition between Old and New and the structure of resurrection. What Silva fails to understand, though, is the inescapability of the structure, which Bond embodies conversely to the letter. Bond's retort to Silva's question, the "resurrection" motif, once again reinstates immanence (the Old) to the structure of significance as well as reveals the falseness (and falsity!) of Silva's stance. Silva's lair, ultimately, constitutes a *false* triumph of the New over the Old, since the former cannot transcend the structure of significance that imbues both with meaning.

It should be no wonder then that Silva's character mirrors the falseness of his lair. In the Carlylean mythos, Silva easily fulfils the role of the *false* idolater. Silva's "theatricality" and bombastic style (Field & Chowdhury) reinforces this idea, in contrast with Bond's *true* adherence to the Law. The conflation between both characters reveal that Silva is coded as Bond's double, arguably his *false* brother. Notice, for instance, the similarities in appearance both characters share: flat nose, blonde hair and blue eyes—they even share the same name: James and Tiago (from "Santiago," Saint James) (*Skyfall*). Bond and Silva shared and compete for the same M[other]: "SILVA: Back then I was her favourite, and you're not nearly the agent I was, I can tell you that" (*Skyfall*). The clash between the two conspicuously enacts the Oedipal struggle of the brothers (Freud 98-102) to gain their Mother's love, albeit with a perverted twist: Silva's plan aims at killing M, who, on the other hand, emblemizes, for 007, the bond of trust, loyalty and truth encoded in hero-worship. Most significantly in this sense, perhaps, is the reversal of roles at the end of the film. *Skyfall* establishes Silva's *falseness* as an individualistic force of annihilation, devoid of meaning¹², which penetrates the Old simply to make it ruins (thus effectively cancelling the structure of "resurrection"). Interestingly enough, the twist at the core of the final act's showdown poses Silva (the *false* idolater) penetrating Bond's (the hero's) lair, Skyfall Lodge, positively playing on the classic *Goldfinger* formula

¹² M actually identifies individualistic falseness as the main political threat of present-day Britain: "M: I'm frightened because our enemies are no longer known to us. They do not exist on a map. They're not nations. They are individuals" (*Skyfall*).

(Field & Chowdhury) of 007 penetrating (and impregnating!) the villain's hideout. The twist proves meaningful in the context of the Carlylean mythos, insofar as Silva's attack on Skyfall Lodge aims literally at destroying the institutional foundations of hero-worship, the ultimate stronghold of Victorian values—à la Carlyle—whilst Bond's resistance strengthens the notion of immanence at the core of the hero's significance through resurrection.

But "sometimes, the old ways are the best" (*Skyfall*), both Money Penny and Kincaid (Albert Finney) claim. In the final act, Bond takes M in a journey "back in time" (*Skyfall*), to his ancient home in Scotland, ultimately to gain the upper hand against Silva by exploiting the structural dynamics of Carlylean significance. Indeed, not unlike the scenes set in Whitehall, Bond manages to "resurrect" by using the *underground*, i.e. the tunnel leading from Skyfall Lodge to the chapel at the other side of a swamp (*Skyfall*). Here the interplay between the Old and the New renews its sense as visual metaphor of immanence thus: whereas the New accomplishes the blowing-up of Skyfall Lodge, the Old manages to survive and "resurrect" by resorting to the underground space—already associated to *immanence*. The result, besides, is twofold. The *false* idolater is proven wrong by virtue of the reaffirmation of "resurrection", and even though the actual emblem of hero-worship (spawned by faith in the hero) is finally killed (M), her death plays out as a reinforcement of the heroic inscribed in the immanent (character of) [B/b]ond.

4. Conclusion. Afterword

All in all the film brings off the Victorian ideological blueprint (Auerbach 200) to the letter. The structure of resurrection both represents and constitutes Bond as Carlylean hero, as the secret embodiment of the material representation of the Law, the Truth and the heroic Force, whose meaning, in turn, stems from a carefully instated balance of immanence and presence. It also ties individual willpower to a fundamental idea of duty and agency; and, finally, sets out to re-enact hero-worship as Victorian collective identity. *Skyfall* plays upon this balance through the dynamics of the Old and the New, which sits at the core of the signifying strategy the narrative enforces. In addition, the film sets out to debunk falseness as meaning, that is, to defy and deactivate falseness as conceived in the Carlylean / Victorian mythos. Falseness slices through the structure of meaning in the character of Silva, the false idolater. Silva poses menace to hero-worship as the essential bond that ties and prompts collective Victorian (Carlylean) identity through hero-worship. Ultimately, Silva, the menace of falseness, collapses when faced with the structure of resurrection as embodied in the character of Bond.

Thus, *Skyfall* reveals, acknowledges and embraces the key foundations of the very ethos sitting at the core of the Victorian myth, a myth that, in turn, somewhat helps define Modern (and Post-modern!) British identity¹³, the political agenda set out to reaffirm the "old ways", "one equal temper of heroic hearts", or simply, "that which we are" (Tennyson 81). Indeed, the film not only represents, but also *performs* the actual ways in which present-day British identity resorts to *the* Victorian myth

¹³ See above, p. 3.

for ideological support. Admittedly, the subtle Victorian look and narrative approach to the Bond mythos *Skyfall* displays might be a consequence of the filmmakers' desire to "make [the film] ingrained with core British values" (Craig, qtd. in Field & Chowdhury). But, whatever its causes, what becomes apparent in the film is that the wide array of British values¹⁴ the filmmakers cared to celebrate are here served in the silver platter of the Victorian ideological "blueprint" (Auerbach 200), the mythos endorsed by Carlyle, which makes the said values inherently Victorian. *Skyfall* somehow resembles Turner's *Fighting Temeraire*¹⁵ in this sense. The painting, it is worth remembering, depicts the mournful story of a warship that fought in the Battle of Trafalgar—arguably the greatest founding myth of the Victorian collective unconscious (Spiers 82)—but is now on the brink of being "hauled away for scrap" (*Skyfall*). Turner's painting performs here a *mise en abîme*, for not only it comments on Bond's relationship with the world, but also epitomizes the mythic strategy of the film. Turner's painting is, indeed, a Victorian narrative: it showcases a secret story of Old dwelling on the corners of the *immanent* founding myth of Victorian culture (Spiers 82); on a myth of endurance, bravery, duty and willpower, made present—i.e. "thing seen"—in and *through* the painting. Both the painting and the film negotiate their mythos as identity in relation to permanence and immanence, the Old and the New, thus capitalizing on the structure of *resurrection*, the actual enactment of immanence made presence. Hence, meaning is constantly re-imagined and reinstated the moment the narrative is established. Both *Skyfall* and Turner's painting resort to mythologizing the scraps of history ostensibly on the lookout for stability, endurance, dependability, Britain and the Empire. That is their contribution to Her Majesty's Secret Service — not Elizabeth's — Victoria's.

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¹⁴ Not coincidentally, the film premiered in 2012, the year of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympics.

¹⁵ See above, p. 16.

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