

The Many Lives of 007: Negotiating Continuity in the Official James Bond Film Series

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I. Will the real 007 please stand up?

We all know his name. But just how many James Bonds are there? Given that the character combats not only Cold War and Post-9/11 saboteurs, terrorists and assassins, but periodically regenerates to stave off the ravages of old age, is 007 simply a codename bestowed upon successive secret agents rather than the identity of a single man? In short, is there any such individual as the character we know intimately as 'Bond. James Bond'?

For some, continuity between the various iterations of Bond is tenuous. But what I want to do in this chapter is explore how some fans provide textual evidence to support the notion that 007 is, indeed, one man with a cohesive biography. Like other long-running character-brands, such as Batman, Tarzan, and Sherlock Holmes, Bond is a mutable and elastic figure capable of being activated in multiple ways to take account of shifts in the socio-political and cultural landscape, as argued by Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott in their seminal study, *Bond and Beyond*. As such, Bond is not a stable site of personality and identity but a many splintered multiplicity spread across various transmedia locations. From this perspective, there is no such singular entity as 'James Bond,' only a plurality of James *Bonds* populating and dialoguing within a matrix of influence, appropriation and borrowing.

Despite this multiplicity, however, what I find fascinating is the way in which fans navigate and negotiate the official film canon – the series produced by Eon Productions beginning with *Dr. No* in 1962 through to *Skyfall* fifty years later – to repudiate the 'codename theory' and rationalise the incredible life of 'Mr. Kiss Kiss Bang Bang' as one bound to the principal of continuity. In so doing, fans act as what media scholar Matt Hills describes as 'textual conservationists' who work to preserve a rationale that follows serial principals of cause and effect thus constructing a constant narrative history even if the text resists taxonomies of durability and permanence.

II. Continuity, Canon and Hyperdiegesis

Continuity and canon are interrelated textual phenomena that govern the authenticity of what is 'real' or 'official' within a particular story-system, a system which is bound by spatiotemporal rules and an obeisance to principals of story logic. As Richard Reynolds puts it, the principle of continuity 'is a familiar idea for all followers of soap opera' where the back-story 'comprising all the episodes previously screened...needs to remain consistent with the current storyline as it develops.'

Tying in with continuity is the concept of canon which media scholar, Will Brooker, describes as 'the strict sense of what counts and what happened, what is true and what isn't.' To further complicate matters, it is possible to have multiple story-systems – and thus multiple continuities and parallel canons – populated by the same *dramatis personae*. Eon Productions' James Bond film series does not include the Ian Fleming novels as part of the continuity regardless of those books which have been adapted. In short, Ian Fleming's 007 oeuvre is a separate story-system to the film series and thus has a different canon and continuity. Further, *Never Say Never Again* (1983), is not a part of Eon continuity despite the fact that Sean Connery returned once more to play Bond. The same goes for the US TV adaptation of *Casino Royale*, (1954), the first audio-visual adaptation of a Fleming novel, and the 1967 spoof film of the same name. Thus, the Bond story-world is comprised of multiple narrative co-systems that all connect dialogically, but remain separate entities at the level of story.

Of course, we understand that fictional texts are not 'real' at all, but for fans of this-or-that serial narrative, the veracity of continuity is a cornerstone of imaginary worlds. In this way, continuity is the bedrock, the foundation whereby individual chapters are welded to an overarching narrative architecture; or, following narratologist Marie Laure-Ryan, episodic fragments – 'micro-narratives' -- interconnect to form a grand 'macro-structure' with a rationale timeline that sets 'the material preconditions for other episodes and are bound to a specific chronological sequence.' Consistency with an already-existing narrative sequence and 'the degree to which world details are plausible, feasible and without contradiction,' as Mark J.P Wolf puts it, are essential constituents of a functioning continuity.

By recognising the importance of continuity in serial fiction, whether in TV, film or comics or other narrative mediums, Matt Hills coined the term 'hyperdiegesis' which can be defined as 'the creation of a vast and detailed space...which...appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension.' This is not to infer that hyperdiegetic systems are strictly linear by design. In fact, many hyperdiegeses are created from an assemblage of temporal slices that may be produced 'out-of-sync' but combine and coalesce into a logical narrative sequence when cognitively re-arranged by the reader.

This principal of seriality – or, more pointedly, *sequentiality* – is the *sine qua non* of continuity: from the soap opera through the vast world-building continuities of DC and Marvel Comics to film franchises and television series/ serials, the concept of

sequence or, following Roger Hageborn, 'episodicity,' is 'the crucial trait which differentiates series and serials from the "classic" single-unit narrative text.'

But what about James Bond? Can one view the Eon canon as a composite of multiple micro-narratives that interconnect to form an overarching 007 hyperdiegesis? Do the twenty-three official Bond films cultivate a 'serial effect,' rather than a series of self-contained texts? Simply put, is there any such thing as a Bond story-world?

It is certainly true that one can watch individual Bond film without being concerned about continuity and sequence; but many fans turn to web 2.0 to marshal evidence to challenge the 'codename theory' and argue that 007 is one man, one secret agent with a license to kill. This is not to claim that people who regularly watch Bond films are tethered to the process of sequentiality, but, rather, that fans as a part of a larger 'coalition audience' occupy different interpretative positions for whom continuity is an important pre-requisite of the viewing experience.

III. 'Connect the Bonds'

In *Time on TV: Temporal Displacement and Mashup Television*, Paul Booth argues that certain online platforms, such as youtube, Twitter, Facebook, wikias and internet forums, are examples of what he terms as 'transgenic media' which 'refers to the specific type of online/ digital/ social/ new media that has become influential in the past ten years of our culture.' For Booth, transgenic media can be differentiated from all web content, and is 'specifically related to online media that invites user participation.' Youtube, for example, allows users to become producers through the creation of older media – I am thinking specifically of video here – which can then be uploaded to the platform and spread globally via internet connectivity.

One such example of transgenic performance is Bond fan, Calvin Dyson's YouTube video, 'James Bond Codename Theory Debunked,' which was uploaded to the platform on September 9th 2012. In this short video, Dyson sets out to challenge the codename theory by providing evidence from the film series to support the contention that Bond is, indeed, a singular identity shared by actors Sean Connery, George Lazenby, Roger Moore, Timothy Dalton and Pierce Brosnan (I shall return to the latest (re)incarnation played by Daniel Craig below). Produced by Dyson to review *Casino Royale*, he begins the video by stating that

there is a little matter that I want to discuss...a little matter that has been causing me some grief recently, and that little matter is the James Bond codename theory [which is] a theory used by "casual" Bond fans to explain why Bond has remained at relatively the same age for the past fifty years and why his personality has changed from incarnation to incarnation. It proposes that James Bond is not actually a person but a codename that MI-6 uses and shifts around from agent to agent...it annoys me so freaking much when people call this a "fan" theory 'cause it's not. "Casual" fan, maybe, but "actual" fan? No, why? Well because an actual fan would know that codename theory does not hold up at all

when it comes under scrutiny. So, with that in mind let's play a little game called "connect the Bonds."

Clearly, the notion that James Bond could be a codename irks Dyson – 'it annoys me so freaking much' and 'has been causing me some grief recently' – and he sets out to deconstruct 'that pesky theory' through textual scrutiny. What is also interesting here is how Dyson constructs a cultural value system between so-called 'casual fans' which, from Dyson's perspective, can be read as an affront, even insult, to 'actual' fans (the adjective 'actual' constructing a binary between 'real' and 'casual,' therefore 'not true' fans). The message is clear: 'actual' Bond fans would have no truck with this theoretical calamity.



IMAGE 1: Calvin Dyson's YouTube video, 'James Bond Codename Theory Debunked.'

Dyson then goes on to select snippets from the film series and seeks to dismantle 'that pesky theory' through textual exegesis. Firstly, he looks at the transition from Connery to second Bond in the official series, Lazenby, which Dyson contradictorily suggests that 'there is evidence for both sides of the codename theory presented in *On her Majesty's Secret Service* [OHMSS],' most notably when Lazenby breaks the fourth wall and says to camera and audience: 'this never happened to the other fella.' For Dyson, this episode 'really pisses me off' as it infers that 'this never happened to the guy who had the job before me [i.e, Connery]. It was always intended as a fourth wall breaking joke...it's stupid, but it doesn't prove that this Bond is a different character to Connery's Bond.'

Secondly, Dyson begins collating evidence from *OHMSS* to illustrate continuity. In the scene where Lazenby clears out his desk, we see artefacts from previous entries in the series such as Honey Rider's knife from *Dr. No*; Red Grant's garrotte watch (*From Russia with Love*); and the breathing device from *Thunderball* which are 'all objects that Connery's Bond obtained in his travels and as such we can deduced that Connery's Bond and Lazenby's Bond are the same character...existing in the same universe.'

Once more, Dyson recognises a paradox at play, that being the fact that Bond had previously met up with villain, Blofeld, in *You Only Live Twice*, yet the plot of *OHMSS* depends upon the two characters having never met before. Dyson brushes this aside

stating that this is 'an error and it must be treated as that ... an error on behalf of the film makers...does this mean that Blofeld is also a codename?'



IMAGE 2: Lazenby and Honey Rider's knife connects *Dr. No* with *OHMSS*

One could argue that Dyson is flouting the rules of continuity here to ensure that a stable Bond identity is promoted and cultivated despite numerous ruptures and puncture points in the timeline, if such a temporal trajectory can be said to exist at all. Regardless of Dyson's contention that these anachronisms are simply erroneous oversights on the behalf of Eon Productions, or 'stupid' intertextual jocularities, what becomes explicit is that it is incredibly important that continuity is somehow rectified and repaired at the point of interpretation. Through transgenic media, Dyson is performing a kind of textual surgery to stitch together what may be disparate episodes that play with intertextuality and self-reflexivity rather than a cohesive causality.

Arguably, the most compelling evidence that disputes the codename theory is in relation to the death of Bond's wife, Tracey, at the dénouement of *OHMSS* and the appearance of Roger Moore at her graveside in *For Your Eyes Only*. As 007 approaches, flowers in hand, we clearly see the markings on the gravestone which state: 'Teresa Bond. 1943-1969. Beloved Wife of JAMES BOND,' along with the inscription, 'we have all the time in the world,' a phrase from *OHMSS* and the title of Louis Armstrong's song from the film. For Dyson, 'this proves that all three actors portray the same man.' Even Eon Executive Producer, Michael Wilson, claims that director, John Glen, 'came up with the idea of going to Tracy's grave [as he] wanted to show that he's still the same character [and that] he has a history.' Hence, the notion that James Bond is the same character from Connery to Brosnan is reified by the producers as well as fans of the franchise.

The recasting of Bond with Timothy Dalton in *The Living Daylights* 'is where... people really get their knickers in a twist. On a chronological timeline, it doesn't make any sense: you can't go from being fifty-odd years old to thirty-odd years old.' Once again, Dyson negotiates and navigates this conundrum by arguing that Bond retains his name even when he resigns from MI6 in *License to Kill*, thus, solidifying the continuity rather than ratifying the codename theory. Indeed, long-running series, such as DC's Superman and Marvel's Spider-Man, exist in what Umberto Eco has described as an 'oneric climate,' where characters are inherently bound to a static existence where change is illusory. I do not agree with Eco entirely here. By promoting stasis at the

expense of other factors does not adequately account for the way in which serial characters achieve longevity: both Superman and Batman have been consistently published for seventy-five years; and Spider-Man and Bond, for over fifty. Revision and regeneration are at the heart of longevity which co-exists in an interminable tug-of-war with formula and immutability. This dialogue between contradictory forces is missing from Eco's 'oneric climate,' yet the fluctuating age of certain characters or, more pointedly, their eternal youth, is a case in point. However unrealistic, paradoxical or plain silly, fans accept these temporal anachronisms as par-for-the-course and one of the rules of the genre. Doctor Who may periodically regenerate as a part of the lore of the narrative universe, but Bond, and more besides, have no such quirk of science fictional logic to rationalise the regenerative forces at work. Despite the incongruity and irrationality of Bond's age, this is verisimilitudinous with serial continuity systems.



IMAGE 3: Roger Moore visits Tracy's grave in *For Your Eyes Only*.

Returning to Dyson's evidence in relation to Dalton, he proposes that an early scene makes the continuity explicit by symptomatically referring to Bond's wife once more (thereby linking Moore with Lazenby and, by extension, Connery). 'There's also a reference to a "dead wife" in *License to Kill*,' argues Dyson. 'Tracy isn't mentioned by name, but, still, it's obviously intended to be her.' By insisting that the preclusion of Tracy's name does not warrant further consideration – 'it's obviously intended to be her' – is another weak point of Dyson's argument, one which I am not out to dismantle, but to use as evidence that a lack of continuity can be spun as a rhetorical device to persuade and lead us away from the codename theory. Where Dyson's interpretation fails to convince is if one looks at the scene in question itself: there is no mention at all of a "dead wife," which Dyson relies upon to state his case, but, instead, an affective pause which may be interpreted as being filled by the spectre of Tracy Bond. In the scene, Della, Felix Leiter's spouse, newly married, throws her garter in the air and says: 'the one who catches this is the next one to...' Bond is shown vulnerable and hurt. Leiter explains to Della that 'he was married once, but that was a long time ago.' To be sure, this can be read as a reference to Tracy, but it is hardly concrete proof of the continuity theory; it is an interpretative position that Dyson selects, filters and rearranges as intractable even going so far as to invent mention of a "dead wife" which is not the case.

This point ‘proves that Dalton’s Bond, Moore’s Bond, Lazenby’s Bond and Connery’s Bond are all intended as the same man.’

Pierce Brosnan, too, who was the final Bond prior to the *Casino Royale* reboot, demonstrates this lineage, most notably in *Die Another Day* wherein ‘there’s like a million gadgets from the previous films and Brosnan’s Bond is clearly familiar with them.’ The ‘gadget scene,’ which takes place in Q’s workshop, functions like its counterpart in *OHMSS* where Lazenby clears his desk of Connery’s paraphernalia. Q’s workshop is, indeed, replete with Bond ‘moments’ from previous films including the jetpack from *Thunderball* (Connery); the cello from *The Living Daylights* (Dalton); *Octopussy’s* crocodile submarine (Moore); and Rosa Klebb’s weaponized footwear in *From Russia with Love* (Connery again). From Dyson’s perspective, then, ‘the events that happened to Connery’s Bond in *Dr. No* are the memories of Brosnan’s Bond in *Die Another Day*’ and all in between.



INAGE 4: Q’s Workshop from *Die Another Day*.

What is important from Dyson’s account is not whether or not he can be proved wrong. Clearly, there is evidence to support either argument given the multiple anachronisms that could be seen as counterpoint to the continuity theory. And while I lay no claim to Dyson as representative of the fan culture entire, what we can extrapolate here is that continuity is at the very least a crucial characteristic of *this* fan’s enjoyment who has shot a video to be disseminated via transgenic media to deal with ontological insecurities about the object of fandom as well as promoting a brand of sub-cultural capital – i.e, knowledge – about the Bond franchise. The codename/ continuity debate is one which Bond fans regularly engage with and a discussion with which each individual’s knowledge and expertise of the series, and other texts of Bond, can be brought out to stretch, mould and play with the narrative. In so doing, fans of Bond construct their own pathway through the 007 matrix. As Goggin and Glas explain, the Bond series entices viewers ‘to play a hermeneutic cat-and-mouse game, so that the text itself becomes a kind of a game.’

IV. Daniel Craig and the 007 Multiverse

In 2006, *Casino Royale* introduced Daniel Craig as 007. But this film is not a part of the Bond series from Connery to Brosnan, but a reboot – that is, a text which ignores or disavows an already existing narrative sequence in order to begin again with a new continuity. As producer Michael Wilson claims, ‘we approached [*Casino*] as if there hadn’t been a Bond film made before.’

In the film’s opening sequence, we see the ‘two kills’ that Bond has to make in order to receive his license to kill and double-0 status, but *Casino Royale* is not a prequel. *Casino Royale* marks the beginning of a second official Bond continuity within the ambit of Eon productions. As Jason Sperb argues, *Casino Royale* ‘attempts to create an alternate Bond universe’ and restarts the franchise while also restarting ‘an entire cohesive world in which Bond exists.’

One character who exists in both universes, however, is M played by Judi Dench. How do Bond fans navigate this conundrum, this puzzling paradox which would seem to collapse continuity into a hodgepodge of spatiotemporal contradiction? On Bond fan site, *HMSS Weblog*, Baack and Zielinski ask:

if the 007 series started over with *Casino Royale*, how can Judi Dench’s M still be around? One possible answer is this: The Bond movies starting with *Casino* comprise a separate fictional universe from the other 007 films.

To corroborate this theory, the writers posit that the concept of a ‘multiverse’ allows both co-iterations of M to exist without risking the continuity of either narrative sequence. A multiverse can be described as a nexus of parallel worlds which DC Comics popularised in the 1960s to allow multiple versions of their character population to co-exist within a vast continuity system. In this way, each iteration of a certain character can be explained as inhabiting different alternative universes and allows each a semblance of credence and authenticity. By explicitly drawing upon DC’s multiverse model, Baack and Zielinski argue that the Judi Dench-M of the Brosnan is a different M to the one that populates the rebooted timeline alongside Craig. To corroborate their argument, they marshal textual evidence to support this viewpoint.

In the third entry in the new continuity, *Skyfall*, M’s real, civilian name is unveiled as Olivia Mansfield (inscribed on the porcelain bulldog that is bequeathed to Bond following M’s death); yet in Raymond Benson’s Bond continuation novels, her name is Barbara Mawdsely, arguably a different iteration of the character which both use the M *nom de guerre*. This theory has gained significant traction in fandom, and a Twitter account has been created for this iteration of M.

This, of course, is not conclusive evidence and comes with its own contradictions, most pointedly, that the evidence is collected from a different continuity to support the rationale of another (the Benson novels are not a part of Eon film canon). What this does illustrate is the will to rationalise so that the text is played with as what Henry Jenkins describes as ‘silly putty’, and shows that continuity is constructed at the point of reception rather than a fixed, immutable entity encased in static amber. For example, Kanas, a commenter on the *HMSS Weblog*, interprets the ending of *Skyfall*, with the return of Money Penny, a male M and an office suite that bears a striking resemblance with early Bond films, as allowing ‘the Craig films to fit in with the same universe as the first 20 films.’



IMAGE 5: M/ Barbara Mawdsley's fan-created Twitter Account

Rather than rebooting and wiping the slate clean, however, *Skyfall* destabilises the second continuity explicitly by re-introducing the classic Aston Martin DB-5 from *Goldfinger* with matching number plate which suggests that this is the same Bond as Connery and so forth. One could argue that this is simply a question of homage as *Skyfall* was released to coincide with Bond's fiftieth anniversary; but this would also reinscribe the gadget scene in *Die Another Day* given that film's position as fortieth anniversary celebration. At the time of writing, James Bond exists in a kind of personality disorder, weaving in between ostensibly disparate universes and continuities. (Interestingly, Dyson's review of *Skyfall* does not engage with this at all.)



IMAGE 6: A guest appearance from the classic Bond car first seen in *Goldfinger*

Conversely, Devin Faraci of *badassdigest.com* argues that *Skyfall* puts to bed the codename theory once and for all. 'Of course,' writes Faraci, 'anyone paying attention to

the films themselves knows that [the codename theory] is simply not true. Still, the hints are vague enough that they can be ignored...Until *Skyfall*.' In the final act of the film, we briefly see the gravesite of Bond's parents, Andrew and Monique Delacroix Bond which establishes,

fully and once and for all, that James Bond is actually a guy named James Bond. It is not a name conferred by MI6, it is not a secret identity. It is simply a shittily-hidden actual identity. All of the previous James Bonds were definitely the same guy, and all future post-Craig Bonds will still be the same guy.

What we see here is, once again, evidence being marshalled to dispute the codename theory as hokum despite the uncertainty and flux provided by the source material.

For many fans, James Bond is emphatically *not* a codename and the principal of continuity between films in the official series is an important characteristic of the man whose name we all know well.

We may know his name. But just how many James Bonds are there? Fans who subscribe to the continuity theory argue that there is but one man, one singular personality, one solitary identity. Simply:

Bond. James Bond.

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