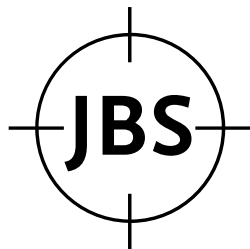


# Fiona Volpe: A New Perspective on James Bond's Iconic *Femme Fatale*

SHANA BETH MASON

In October 2017, I delivered a message to a Facebook page called “Luciana Paluzzi-Solomon”. Without expectation, I wrote that I was in the research phase of a book project about the Bond Girls. I was aware such material had been written before, but was convinced I could present a fuller, more nuanced, more personal experience of the women in the Bond films. I was adamant about calling them “Bond Women”, as I felt the “Bond Girl” moniker was both outdated and factually inaccurate (none of the actresses who appeared across the series’ 26 films were any younger than 19). I wanted to start with my childhood favourite. Would Mrs. Paluzzi-Solomon be interested in speaking to me? A month later, I received a reply. It was a personal response from the actress, herself, agreeing to a telephone interview the week before Thanksgiving. A thing to be thankful for, indeed. Over the course of an hour, I spoke to her primarily in English (and intermittently in Italian, where certain words or phrases needed translation or clarification) about her thoughts and experiences during the filming of *Thunderball* (1965, dir. Terence Young). The experience felt not like a professional interview, but a candid conversation with a friend. I sensed that this was her inherent state: one of candour, warmth, humour, with a bit of wistful nostalgia laced throughout. The book project never materialised, and I shelved the interview in the faint hope it might live twice. Somehow, it did.



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This paper will explore four elements surrounding *Thunderball's* primary female antagonist. First, classical definitions and applications of the *femme fatale* archetype and its presentation within the early Bond films. Second, the scripted origins and film synopsis of the character written as “Fiona Kelly”, who would then become “Fiona Volpe” once the Italian Paluzzi assumed the role. Third, Paluzzi’s personal and professional background leading up to, during, and after her work as Volpe. Finally, the legacy of Volpe as the most memorable and groundbreaking female adversary to the series’ hero, bolstered by Paluzzi’s reflections past and present.

### THE ORIGINS OF BOND’S CINEMATIC *FEMME FATALES*

The Oxford English dictionary reads thus: *femme fatale* (n.): “An attractive and seductive woman, *esp.* one who is likely to cause risk to or the downfall of anyone who becomes involved with her”, a literal translation of “fatal woman”. This stock character has appeared in the James Bond films from the beginning, as a woman who attempts to lure Bond with her body, in the hope of placing him in a vulnerable state. Ironically, the “fatal” element in Bond’s *femme fatales* end not with the woman’s intended victim(s), but of the woman, herself. Rather than experiencing jealous rages at her lovers or being prone to fits of hysteria and malady, Bond’s *femme fatale* is strictly bound to her sexual appetites and willingness to kill in hopes of defeating her chosen enemy, 007. Kirsten Smith, whose research explores the relationship between the British Intelligence services, gender warfare, and popular culture, notes that by the nature of her opposition to Bond, the *femme fatale* is destined to be killed off in order to preserve the franchise formula (2017, 44-45). Two female characters, in two of the three Bond films that preceded *Thunderball*, categorically match this description: Miss Taro (*Dr. No*, 1962, dir. Terence Young) and Rosa Klebb (*From Russia With Love*, 1963, dir. Terence Young). Taro, a Chinese woman portrayed by British actress Zena Marshall, is placed before Bond both as a spy and a sexual distraction from his pursuit of the elusive villain, Dr. No. While she succeeds at seducing Bond, she is quickly whisked away by the local authorities at his command, thus failing to lure Bond to his death. Klebb, the primary female antagonist in Fleming’s novel *From Russia With Love*, is described in blatant terms as a physically repellent, sadistic lesbian who attempts to seduce the fragile Soviet agent Tatiana Romanova. This imagery is significantly toned down for the 1963 film version, with Lotte Lenya portraying Klebb. Despite Lenya’s authentic grace as a theatre actress and singer (a frequent collaborator with her first husband, composer Kurt Weill), she conveyed the persona of the sexually undesirable, coldly calculated killer that would constitute the

*anti-femme fatale* of the Bond films. No character in the third Bond film, *Goldfinger* (1964, dir. Guy Hamilton), meets the criteria of the *femme fatale*: Tilly Master-son (who attempts to kill Bond to avenge her sister, Jill's, death) does not engage sexually with Bond, and Pussy Galore's shift in loyalty both from her boss, Auric Goldfinger, and from her declared sexual identity (as a lesbian) results in her being spared the inevitable death penalty.

### **FIONA VOLPE: CHARACTER INTRODUCTION AND SYNOPSIS**

Fiona Volpe (surname "volpe", *n.* Italian for "fox", also a feminine noun, *figurative*, meaning "sly", "crafty", or "deceptive"), is of non-specific Italian origin, mid to late 30s, with, presumably, an established criminal career. She is a high-ranking operative within the criminal syndicate known as S.P.E.C.T.R.E (Special Executive for Counter-intelligence, Terrorism, Revenge, and Extortion). While her past exploits are unknown, she is depicted as a critical asset in the organisation's so-called NATO Project: a scheme to extort £100 million from the governments of the United Kingdom and United States, combined, with the threat of nuclear holocaust courtesy of two warheads attached to a hijacked Avro Vulcan bomber. She is present, and instrumental, through multiple tiers of SPECTRE's complex plan.

First, she seduces a serving NATO officer, Comdt. François Derval, so that his SPECTRE doppelgänger, Angelo, can assume his place on a forthcoming test flight. Volpe equips Angelo with his dedicated oxygen system, the poison gas intended to murder the crew, as well as compensation for his services. He negotiates directly with Volpe, demanding additional payment from SPECTRE. Acting on her own authority – with apparent pre-approval from SPECTRE's criminal mastermind, Ernst Stavro Blofeld – she counter-offers, promising that "this is merely a down-payment". During this exchange, she prevents her overzealous accomplice Count Lippe from shooting Angelo on the spot. After the successful theft of the Vulcan bomber's weaponry, Blofeld declares that Lippe is an unacceptable liability, and sends a member of their execution branch to eliminate him with a pair of rockets launched from a BSA Lightning A65L motorbike (Parker 2005, 138). The deed complete, the rider then sends the motorbike to the bottom of a nearby lake, and Volpe is revealed to be the assassin, with her flame-red hair flowing down from her helmet.

Volpe next appears when Bond is sent by MI6 to the Bahamas. He makes contact with the now-deceased Derval's sister, Domino, the kept woman to SPECTRE's Number Two man (and Volpe's boss), Emilio Largo. After a failed

subaquatic pursuit by Largo's men, Bond escapes onto a deserted beach and conveniently encounters an approaching car. Flagging it down, he climbs in, with Volpe in the driver's seat. She scans him, then proceeds at high speed back towards Nassau. Her distinctive SPECTRE ring is shown, and noticing Bond's interest, she tucks it away beneath her hand. Volpe has now identified her adversary, and *vice versa*. Later, Volpe and Largo are seen clay pigeon-shooting at his palatial estate, Palmyra. She arrogantly chides him for trying to kill Bond the night before, pointing out that his government would have learned the location of the nuclear weapons had Bond been killed. She proudly volunteers to eliminate him. Next, she walks into Bond's hotel room, occupied by Bond's Bahamian assistant, Paula Caplan. Puzzled, but not particularly alarmed, Caplan greets Volpe. "Our Mister Bond must have a very high opinion of himself. He has a date with me, too", Volpe announces. Caplan excuses herself to respond to a knock at the door, and receives a violent reception by Largo's henchmen, Vargas and Janni. Volpe demands that they keep their victim quiet by drugging her with chloroform. She opens an envelope on the table and discovers infrared images of the underside of Largo's yacht, the *Disco Volante*, thus determining that Bond has, potentially, compromised SPECTRE's mission. When Bond returns to the hotel, having learned that Caplan committed suicide in captivity to avoid interrogation, he encounters two strange suitcases in his room. Hearing noise from the bathroom, he encounters Volpe, enjoying a bath. After a bit of small talk, she lures him to bed. She purrs, "Do you like wild things, Mister Bond, James Bond?". He replies: "Wild? You should be locked up in a cage". Ignoring her as a threat, they continue their sexual frivolity. After they dress, Vargas and Janni, arrive to escort to Bond and Volpe to the local street carnival. A confrontation ensues:

BOND

*(Looking down at Fiona's hand)*

Ah, you're wearing the same ring as Largo.

FIONA

It's a ring I like to wear.

BOND

Vanity has its dangers.

FIONA

*(Sneers, indignantly, then turns)*

Vanity, Mr. Bond. Something you know so much about.

BOND

My dear girl, don't flatter yourself. What I did this evening was for King and Country. You don't think it gave me any pleasure, do you?

FIONA

*(Slowly turns to back Bond, closes an open door. Pauses.)*

But of course, I forgot your ego, Mister Bond. James Bond, the one who has to make love to a woman, and she starts to hear heavenly choirs singing. She repents, and immediately returns to the side of right and virtue...*(walks menacingly towards Bond and stamps one foot on the floor)*...but not this one.

What a blow it must have been! You! Having an affair.

BOND

*(Resigned, quietly)*

Well, you can't win them all.

Bond manages to elude his captors in the local carnival parade before hiding out in a busy tiki bar. As he attempts to blend in by dancing with a stranger, Volpe interrupts, taking her place with him on the dancefloor. With tension building, Bond spots a gun pointed at him from behind a live band stage. He anticipates the inevitable path of the bullet, and yanks Volpe's body around, using her as a human shield. He then puts her lifeless body on a chair, and casually remarks to a nearby couple, "Do you mind if my friend sits this one out? She's just dead".

The conception of Fiona Volpe as a character in the film version of *Thunderball* was, like many elements of the production as a whole, last-minute. The first appearance of the *femme fatale* in *Thunderball* is not seen until a very late draft of the script, dated January 1965 (less than a month before principal photography began in Dreux, France). Fleming's novel makes no mention of a female member of the opposition, and screenwriters Richard Maibaum and John Hopkins appear to have created the character spontaneously. Nevertheless, an Irish assassin called "Fiona Kelly" appears as a "red-headed, Irish" woman who is, "the most beautiful, accomplished young witch since Morgan Le Fey" (1965, 26). Morgan (or Morgana) Le Fey, the Arthurian shapeshifter from the Lancelot-Grail, Post-Vulgate Cycle and works by Thomas Malory, is almost always classed as an antagonist. Hers is a fluid, complex character, classically mischaracterised

as one inciting fear and suspicion. Her relative independence (as a forest-dweller) allows her to critique existing power structures and to act outside the stringent paradigms within which Medieval women lived and behaved (Hebert 2008, n.p.). Appropriately, Maibaum and Hopkins' own "sorceress" would operate in a similar fashion in the finished film. In an early draft of the script, Fiona is depicted as even more sinister and dangerous than how she appears in the final film. The pivotal confrontation at the hotel, for example, was scripted to have Bond approach her at her dressing table. Attempting to overpower her, Fiona abruptly deploys a blade from inside her lipstick canister, pointed at Bond's throat. She holds a second blade at his stomach in her free hand. She forces him to wear a flamboyant costume to blend in with the carnival performers, mercilessly slashing his ego:

FIONA

*(triumphantly)*

Poor James! All this must be rather a shock. I mean, the girls you've made love to in the past...they've been only too glad to do anything for you. But this time...it's different. This time, lover – the great – charm – is wasted.

(Maibaum and Hopkins, 205)

But while scripted as a lethal woman, the final cut of the film discards a widely-unknown character element. The original exchange between Volpe and Largo at Palmyra originally revealed a small speck of her vulnerability – being indebted to Largo for her existence as a SPECTRE agent:

*(LARGO cradles FIONA's face in one of his hands. She does not move away from him. She does not react at all.)*

LARGO

I think you forget – I found you. I made you. (ibid., 90)

This would have been an Achilles' heel for Volpe, as her character's autonomy and authority in the final film would have been diminished by her deference to Largo. By scripting her as untouchable, Maibaum and Hopkins had, in essence, given Volpe the same damaging flaw consistently ascribed to Bond: ego. The transformation from the scripted 'Kelly' (an aggressive, hyper-sexualised "young witch") to the cinematic "Volpe" resulted in a cool, composed variant of the *femme fatale*, perhaps more progressive than similar films of the era would have

allowed. The film's plot is reliant on Volpe's professionalism as an enemy operative, not as a temptress. Although she will certainly have sex with Bond and pay for it with her life, it is her skill as an assassin that commands the respect of other SPECTRE agents in her orbit. Her assignment from SPECTRE's execution branch to eliminate Count Lippe is completed quickly, efficiently, and without revealing her identity to the opposition. Hers is the first – and, thus far, only instance in the film series – of a female agent verbally admonishing her superior officer, Emilio Largo. Largo does not dispute her, and his silent, downcast expression signals an almost shameful acceptance of her assessment. Largo stands next to and addresses Volpe as an equal, with neither derision or blind rage. Her own aims and desires in reaping any potential rewards from SPECTRE's NATO Project are unknown, but her unbending loyalty to the organisation and her capabilities as a counter-agent to Bond are well-known by those around her. Even her own demise was swift, almost “clean”.

Volpe's interaction with members of the opposition, specifically Bond's assistant Paula Caplan (played by Jamaican actress Martine Beswick) is notable. A report issued to Eon Productions in November 1965 by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) lists a number of potential objections that would prevent the film from being classed as a “Category A”, or widely universal film. The majority of the commentary refers to overtly-sadistic or gratuitously violent scenes. An objection regarding the subduing of Caplan in the hotel by Largo's men (instructed by Volpe) reads, “The violence to Paula should be kept to an absolute minimum, far less than is suggested by the script. It is a sadistic scene and should not be so” (4). The introduction of Volpe and Caplan to one another also constitutes a unique and, as of yet, unrepeated moment in the franchise. Two women, with Bond absent from view, seemingly aware of each other's existence address one another in an awkward, but non-violent encounter. This brief dialogue cancels the *femme fatale* archetype ascribed to Volpe, as she calmly interacts with another woman in the opposing camp. Her emotional register is not elevated, or even detectable, thereby placing her outside of the most common motivators for the classical, cinematic *femme fatale*: anger, insanity, jealousy, love, obsession, revenge and/or sociopathy (Deacon 2021, n.p.).

#### **LUCIANA PALUZZI: TOO “WELL-KNOWN”**

Luciana Paluzzi was born in Rome in 1937. Before becoming an actress, as a student, her primary interest was naval engineering, an influence attributed to her father's position as a naval officer. For two years, she attended the Scientific

Academy of Milan, the only female in her class (McVay 2021, n.p.). A chance meeting at a dinner party would secure her first walk-on role in Jean Negulesco's *Three Coins In A Fountain* (1954). French-Italian comedy *My Seven Little Sins* (1954) and Italian films *Il Vetturale del Moncenisio* (1954), *Adriana Lecouvreur* (1955), and *Faccia da Mascalzone* (1956) would follow. Her role in the 1956 thriller *The Lebanese Mission* was a starting point for both her and a then-unknown Omar Sharif. A year later, she arrived in the UK to film *Tank Force* (also known as *No Time To Die*), where she would meet director Terence Young for the first time. She came to Hollywood in 1959, under contract for Twentieth Century Fox Television, as a regular on the single-season series *Five Fingers* (that series' star, David Hedison, would go on to play Felix Leiter in *Live and Let Die* (1973, dir. Guy Hamilton) and, later, *Licence To Kill* (1989, dir. John Glen). Paluzzi's most notable role prior to *Thunderball* was as the glamorous Contessa Juliana ("Julie") Giotto-Borgini in the beach party-genre entry *Muscle Beach Party* (1964), starring Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello.

When casting for Terence Young's third Bond project began in early 1965, Paluzzi had auditioned for the "Bond girl" role of Dominetta Vitali: "I was living in Rome and went to London to do the [screen] test", Paluzzi recalls, "and three months later is when I learned I got the role. I didn't get to London until we started shooting, actually. We started shooting in the Bahamas, first." Producer Albert Broccoli's first choice for the role was for Julie Christie, having seen her in John Schlesinger's comedy-drama *Billy Liar* (1963). Disappointed by their first meeting, other actresses were considered such as Raquel Welch and Faye Dunaway. However, in keeping with their intention of launching an unknown actress to stand alongside the leviathan role of Bond played by Sean Connery, producers Broccoli and Harry Saltzman hired the first runner-up to the 1958 Miss World pageant, French model/actress Claudine Auger ("Claudine Auger" 2019, n.p.). Rejecting the notion that receiving the role of (what was then) Fiona Kelly was a kind of "consolation prize", Paluzzi recalls the casting process.

To me, it was not a consolation prize. It was, like, the most pleasant surprise that I could possibly receive. When they called back, Broccoli and Saltzman were on a conference call and they told me, "We have good news and we have bad news". I said, "What are the bad news?" Which I always want to hear first. They said, "Well, because you've already made so many movies, and we want to launch a new actress every time we do a movie now, you've already worked so much that people know you, we cannot give you the role of Domino". And I said, "Oh, so what are the good news?" They said, "Well,



we don't want to lose you, so we're going to give you the role of Fiona: we'll turn [her] into an Italian and you have it". I was ecstatic, because personally, I think that, usually, the villainesses or the villains are more fun to play than just a regular *ingenue*.

It is worth noting that although Paluzzi was a native Italian speaker, she did not dub her own dialogue for the Italian release (that task was given to veteran Italian voiceover artist Rita Savagnone), and her character's name was changed from "Fiona Volpe" to "Francis Walker". This was done to ease the fears of Italian censors, who felt that the first name "Fiona" sounded too similar to the crude term for a woman's vagina: "ficona" (*trans.* "cunt") ("The Making of *Thunderball*", 1995). Thus, an Italian audience for *Agente 007 – Thunderball (Operazione Tuono)*, would not have known the character's scripted name, nor Paluzzi's own voice in the role – which, ironically, did not actually require another actress to dub her dialogue into English in the same way that voiceover artist Nikki Van Der Zyl (a German actress by birth) had done for Claudine Auger as Domino and many others across nine of the Bond films.

Paluzzi's journey with *Thunderball* began with a hectic schedule in Nassau. Despite working alongside an ever-present gaggle of journalists and photographers, Paluzzi cited her experiences with Sean Connery and Terence Young to have been among "the easiest". She notes,

Terence, in my opinion, was James Bond. In every movie he directed, he was the soul and the intellect...all the humorous touches that made James Bond so likeable and sexy were created by Terence. Not scripted! In his private life, Terence was bigger than life: caustic, strong, debonair, intelligent, elegant, and he transferred all of those traits into the Bond character.

The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) were initially perturbed by the harshness of Bond's interaction with his opponent. A particular note reads, "All this is gratuitous sex, which goes much too far for the 'A' category [...] apart from the censorable details, which are obvious; we do not at all like the situation in which Bond makes love to this girl, knowing that is his enemy and claims afterwards that he did it for 'King and Country'!" (4). It is possible that this objection might have prompted the screenwriters to issue a robust comeback for Volpe, to balance the "terms of engagement", a meta-critique of *Goldfinger*, in which Pussy Galore (Honor Blackman) sides with Bond after he rapes her (Fergusson 2021,

n.p.). Paluzzi was, during the shooting, unaware of the subtextual gender politics that allowed Fiona Volpe to evolve into such a complex character. She recalled that most of the direction and executions of her scenes were “improvised” by the writers and Young. When asked specifically about the groundbreaking scene pitting her wits against Bond, Paluzzi channelled only her raw reaction as a woman scorned into her reading of the scene. She did not preemptively deconstruct the character’s intentions or machinations in accordance with the “black widow” archetype. “I did it the way I felt [it] was right,” she insists:

[It was] more instinctive than anything. I thought she was very feminine, but at the same time, she had a mission to accomplish. That was that. I didn’t really dissect that much. Thank God it came out okay! So yes, in a way, I used him as a sexual...how can I say, back then we wouldn’t think of *using* a man...had a lot of fun with him in bed, obviously [*laughs*]. Everything back then was, how can I say, more innocent. It wasn’t as explicit as scenes are today. But I was very happy about that because Terence did a great job [filming] from the back of the bed and the angle. After that, I was back in business! The next day, I got really upset when he (the character) tried to put me down. And that’s the way I reacted.

Upon *Thunderball*’s release during the Christmas season in 1965, James Bond became a global phenomenon. Akin to Beatlemania, Bond fandom exploded, and spilled out into games, household items, music, novels, comic books, films, cars, and even real-world military engineering and special operations. The engine of this sixty-year frenzy was, undoubtedly, its characters. “It was so pleasant”, Paluzzi said, “to work on the picture because they already knew it was going to be a success”. Paluzzi’s own career was somewhat muted after her appearance, as many of the women who worked on the Bond films later discovered. While Paluzzi’s performance in *Thunderball* was frequently noted as one of the film’s best elements – *The New York Times*’ film critic Bosley Crowther referred to her as “streamlined as the inevitable and almost insuperable villainous girl” (Crowther 1965, n.p.) – it did not produce any direct, long-term benefits for her as a working actress. She later recalled in the documentary *Bond Girls Are Forever* (2002, dir. John Watkin) that “[d]oing a Bond picture is a blessing, but its also a curse”. Upon her return to Italy, she observed that famed Italian directors such as Federico Fellini and Michelangelo Antonioni wanted “nothing to do with me. It was too much like a comic strip”. Indeed, a similar refrain continued even into the new millennium, as a phenomenon within the Bond phenomenon emerged: the

so-called “Bond Girl Curse”. Nevertheless, she continued acting for a further twenty-seven years before effectively retiring to raise a family in the United States.

### **FIONA VOLPE’S LEGACY AS *FEMME FATALE***

The tradition of the *femme fatale* in the Bond films would continue long after Fiona Volpe’s appearance in *Thunderball*. The film that directly followed it, *You Only Live Twice* (1967, dir. Lewis Gilbert), saw yet another red-headed, European villainess in Karin Dor’s portrayal of SPECTRE agent Helga Brandt. A categoric *femme fatale* would not be present, in earnest, again until Roger Moore’s third turn as Bond in *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977, dir. Lewis Gilbert). Played by English actress Caroline Munro, Naomi appears briefly in the film. She first brings Bond and his companion, Anya Amasova, to the aquatic estate of billionaire Carl Stromberg. Once Bond and Anya return to shore, Naomi is sent via helicopter to gun them down as they attempt to escape by car. After plunging his Lotus Esprit into the Mediterranean, Bond shifts the car into its submarine mode, with an on-board weapons system that includes a vertical rocket launcher. As Naomi scans the water below for wreckage, Bond sends up a rocket, destroying both the helicopter and its pilot.

The role of assassin-turned-ally May Day – as portrayed by Grace Jones in *A View To A Kill* (1985, dir. John Glen) – is less compatible with the standard definition of the Bond films’ *femme fatale*. While she is a skilled fighter and overpowers her boss Max Zorin both physically and mentally, her presentation as a part-Amazon, part-lover, part-sacrificial lamb disrupts the paradigm first established by Fiona Volpe back in 1965. May Day is, in fact, the sole female character within the Bond film series who overpowers Bond, himself, in the bedroom, though her presentation as a black woman – similar to that of Gloria Hendry’s character Rosie Carver in *Live And Let Die* (1973, dir. Guy Hamilton) – renders her an inevitable victim to the series’ positing of Bond as a defender of the white, heterosexual male’s British Empire (Funnell 2011, 205).

If there was a direct descendant of Volpe’s iteration of the Bond *femme fatale*, it would be Xenia Zaragevna Onatopp, an ex-Soviet fighter pilot-turned private mercenary portrayed by Famke Janssen in *GoldenEye* (1995, dir. Martin Campbell). Like Volpe, she deploys her sexuality to murder her victims (more violently, albeit, than Volpe had done with respect to SPECTRE’s henchman Angelo), and her status as a member of the Janus crime syndicate makes her an essential player in the primary villain’s sinister plot. She presents a direct threat to

Bond's position as a pillar of the hetero-masculine, hyper-sexual hero, with even more athletic rigour than Volpe. Yet, her scripted character falls into an exaggerated, almost humiliating parody, highlighted by her orgasmic panting shortly after gunning down a room full of Russian military analysts and officers. Her presentation harkens back to the pulp, comic book assertion of the *femme fatale*, with the actress, herself, powerless to imbue the role with any agency or credibility due to the character's lack of meaningful dialogue with Bond or, indeed, any of her compatriots. Nevertheless, Volpe's personal interest in her mission, her "black widow" methodology of kiss-and-kill, and her unceremonious death (not executed by Bond, himself, strictly speaking) serves as Onatopp's cinematic blueprint.

Fiona Volpe was, indeed, a "fatal" woman, but one that bucked the trend of those who preceded her, and many more who followed within the Bond cinematic canon. In a 1995 retrospective review of *Thunderball*, it is Volpe's character who receives particular praise from film critic James Berardinelli:

There is some compensation for the deficiencies of the lead villain, however. It comes in the person of *femme fatale* Fiona (Luciana Paluzzi), whose sophisticated, black widow-like personality makes her more dangerous than any male SPECTRE agent. (1995, n.p.)

Paluzzi herself has commented on her character's legacy within the Bond films as something both extraordinary and personally gratifying:

Maybe the role did start to evolve where the women had more power. But I was lucky. Did I know that it would be like this when I was shooting? No! Women in films have evolved a lot. You have women with more complex roles than just being there as the wife, the girlfriend. At that time, that was really a great role. That's why when Broccoli and Saltzman told me I would get that role that I jumped up in joy, because it was unusual to have those roles, at that time. I read a poll of the best Bond girls recently, and I was the only villainess in that poll, which was made a couple of years ago. So many Bond movies have been made since then, so the fact that people remember that far back is incredible.

But more than her pop cultural appeal, Volpe's scripted and presented role exceeds that of the stock *femme fatale* character. Her contribution to the film's storyline is critical; the construction of her character – courtesy of screenwriters

Maibaum and Hopkins – provided the actress ample opportunity to resemble a living, more relatable human being, and Paluzzi’s own reputation as an “experienced” actress (versus those selected to inhabit the “good girls” in Bond’s orbit) sets her apart from her peers. Volpe’s impact as a character is one that has endured prominently in the public imagination, one possessing equal parts power and allure. Paluzzi’s reflections on Volpe, in the present, have surprised even her as she continues to encounter film-goers who recognise and applaud her unforgettable presence.

In speaking with her, I sensed that Paluzzi’s experience of playing Volpe was life-changing, though perhaps not professionally so. The course of her life, afterwards, was consistently enriched by continuous, positive interactions and memories shared with fans of the Bond films. If it is any indication, this author falls within that grateful generation of youngsters growing up with James Bond as their hero. Yet, with a satisfying irony, it is Volpe and her lifeblood, Luciana Paluzzi, who has emerged as *Thunderball*’s true hero.

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