Violent Femmes

Women as spies in popular culture

Rosie White

Violent *Femmes*

The female spy has long exerted a strong grip on the popular imagination. With reference to popular fiction, film and television *Violent Femmes* examines the figure of the female spy as a nexus of contradictory ideas about femininity, power, sexuality and national identity. Fictional representations of women as spies have recurrently traced the dynamic of women's changing roles in British and American culture. Employing the central trope of women who work as spies, Rosie White examines cultural shifts during the twentieth century regarding the role of women in the professional workplace. Beginning with an examination of the male spy in popular fiction, White's revealing book then moves on to examine female spies, comparing and contrasting numerous female spies in investigative case studies with the aim of answering the following questions:

- How have depictions of the female spy changed over the twentieth century?
- What can Modesty Blaise tell us about women in the 1960s and 1970s?
- Does *Alias* offer an ideal vision of the working woman in the twenty-first century?
- Are women in Western culture now seen as agents of their own futures?

In the twentieth century, a period when women's relationship with public life and state authority was changing radically, the female spy in all her forms offers a suggestive account of the effects of, and resistances to, such transformations. *Violent Femmes* examines the female spy as a figure in popular discourse which simultaneously conforms to cultural stereotypes *and* raises questions about women's roles in British and American culture, in terms of gender, sexuality and national identity.

Immensely useful for a wide range of courses such as Film and Television Studies, English, Cultural Studies, Women's Studies, Gender Studies, Media Studies, Communications, and History, this book will appeal to students from undergraduate level upwards.

Rosie White is Senior Lecturer in English and Programme Leader for the degree in English and Film Studies at Northumbria University.

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For my mother and father, Ann and Bill White

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Introduction

The spy is a suggestive figure. While spies and espionage have existed at least since biblical times, popular accounts of the secret agent are wired to a distinctly twentieth-century anxiety regarding personal and national identity. The spy embodies fears that national identity is under threat and that in order to maintain the status quo, clandestine activities normally considered illegal or invasive must be endorsed – that special measures must be taken (Cawelti and Rosenberg 1987: 2). Spy fictions, often come to the fore at moments when social and political change is being felt; James Bond in 1950s fiction and 1960s film reflects upon a new era while also displaying a nostalgia for a disappearing world. This book is concerned with how the fictional female spy-protagonist reflects upon such modern and postmodern unease, particularly at those moments marked by changes in gender roles. My examination of women spies in a variety of media across the twentieth and into the twenty-first century thus maps the construction and reconstruction of femininity as a shifting, multiple discourse. Women as spies in popular culture are read as commentaries on specific temporal and cultural femininities, from Mata Hari to Sydney Bristow, aligning them with other indicators of cultural anxiety about femininity, such as the femme fatale and the New Woman.

Spying is an appropriate trope to employ when discussing gender, as femininity, like masculinity, is always undercover – a covert operation with powerful far-reaching effects. Women spies are violent *femmes* because they expose some of the contradictions embedded in those covert operations. In particular, women spies in fiction, film and television are licensed to be violent agents and, thus, confound the western binary understanding of gender that aligns femininity with objectified passivity. Unlike the femme fatale, however, the 'good' woman spy disturbs any easy recuperation of the violent or active woman, again doing violence to the symbolic map that has structured popular understandings of gender in the past two centuries. The woman spy also offers a version of the New Woman across the twentieth and into the twenty-first century; she is rarely depicted as maternal and more often situated within the professional workplace. The fictional spy may be aligned with doctors, teachers, managers, lawyers and architects

and, thus, understood as an account of the cultural shift a growing number of women in the professions have effected and experienced. The female spy-protagonist is doubly contradictory by being a female protagonist in a male-dominated genre, just as female spies are out of place in a male-dominated profession. In short, this study reads espionage fictions as critical accounts of bureaucracies in which the woman spy is an inherently volatile signifier.

Although the fictional spy is most often characterised as male, the covert aspect of espionage links it to an attribute pejoratively ascribed to femininity – it is based on deception. Spying employs 'feminine' skills such as disguise and dissimulation, while spies are masculinised as observers and agents. The spy is, thus, a hermaphrodite figure within popular culture, destabilising unitary formulations of gender identity in favour of a more mobile subjectivity. In popular imagination, spies operate between legal and illegal spheres, between public and private spaces, between fact and fiction. The operations of secret agents and secret agencies are, by definition, clandestine, uncharted and unseen and, therefore, unverifiable. Spying in this way lends itself to fiction in its creation of cover stories, false identities and conspiracy theories. Intelligence agencies' refusal to release information has led to more, rather than less, fictional accounts of the work they do (Miller 2003: 38). Spies trade in information which is 'classified' but not always reliable, a discourse which is authoritative but also unofficial and, consequently, a source of knowledge which relies on trust. In fiction and in fact, espionage makes apparent the link between knowledge and power. Spy fictions in print, on film and television may thus be understood as a means of examining the operations of hegemonic discourse. This makes academic study itself a covert operation. In the wake of post-structuralism, the project of late twentieth-century cultural studies has been to decode popular texts. Arthur Asa Berger goes so far as to propose that the academic is also a spy:

> I am a self-employed secret agent who searches, relentlessly, for hidden meanings and latent functions. I like to think that, like all secret agents, I shake the very foundations of society. For if society maintains itself on the basis of the unrecognized functions people engage in, when I point out these latent functions I make them recognizable (manifest), and the equilibrium of society is disturbed.
>
> (Berger 1974: 70–1)

That is the ambition of this book: to examine women spies and spy fictions as complex and contradictory accounts of the modern and post-modern West. Women as spies in fiction, film and television map shifts in the politics of gender across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, disturbing the equilibrium of popular culture.

Like most popular genres, spy fictions do not constitute a singular dynamic. Popular fictions reach into the labyrinthine imagination of their

many readers to produce often contradictory and unstable renderings of power and resistance: 'Successful story patterns like the western persist ... not because they embody some particular ideology or psychological dynamic, but because they maximize a great many such dynamics' (Cawelti 1976: 30). It is thus not a case of 'one size fits all' in popular culture – the dismissive idea that genre fictions offer all readers all the same pleasures all the time – but of a formula that is sufficiently elastic to engage with a range of readers and readings. Spy fictions are particularly elastic; there are certain formulae, yes, but an infinite range of combinations and readings to be made of those formulae (see Atkins 1984, Denning 1987, Bloom 1990). In her examination of British genre film, Marcia Landy proposes that spy films are fictions of identity and power, with women often central to a nexus of public and sexual politics (Landy 1991: 124–6). This book takes that definition to heart by making women spy-protagonists its focus. Like their sisters in hardboiled detective fictions and film noir, women in spy narratives have often meant trouble, following the long shadow cast by the myth of Mata Hari (Miller 2003: 154–69). Yet, by the late twentieth century, female spies were emerging as protagonists and heroes, rather than the marginal love interest or villain. This intervention, however rare, is significant because espionage offers an overt account of power through representing both the power of the individual and the power of the state. Moreover, the spy thriller usually deals with threats to the state and to the status quo (Chapman 2002: 20). The *good* female spy thus offers a powerfully ambivalent account of the nation-state and the status quo because of the discrepancy between femininity and public forms of power in the history of Britain and the USA. Figures released on 5 January 2006 by the British Equal Opportunities Commission as part of its annual survey of women's representation in positions of power suggest equality between men and women will take twenty years in the top management of the Civil Service, forty years at the director level of FTSE 100 companies, forty years in the senior judiciary, and up to 200 years – another forty elections – in Parliament.

By her very existence, the female spy comments on her male counterpart in her role as femme fatale (Mata Hari), the desirable 'girl' (Bennett and Woollacott 1987), or the female professional (*Alias*). The first two figures are visible in most popular spy fictions, but the third became more prevalent as the twentieth century drew to a close. This refracts political and social change as more women entered the professions, but it does not represent an equality that has been achieved. Spies, doctors, actors, poets and artists are seen as predominantly male in the West; hence, the *woman* doctor and the *woman* poet. In this fashion, women remain spies within Western culture – still added on as a prefix to distinguish us from the 'real' doctors, the 'real' poets. British and American cultures still struggle to make room for women. Women are still forging roles for themselves within the public arena; the calls for universal childcare in the feminist movements of the 1970s have not been heard, and women entering a male-dominated profession often find

themselves subject to abuse. If spies are agents, then the woman spy is doubly transgressive because she crosses the line that ordinarily designates woman as object rather than subject. Women spies in popular fiction, film and television represent an uneasy rapprochement between women spies as agents/subjects *and* as objects. Depictions of female spies thus reflect upon women's conundrum at the turn of the twenty-first century in the wake of alleged equal opportunities: the doubled emphasis on work *and* on the work of femininity – that women be beautiful, make a home, have children, care for them. Where John Berger once asserted that, 'men act and women appear' in his foundational account of art history, in the twenty-first century, privileged white women are often required to both act *and* appear (Berger 1972: 47). Women spy-protagonists in popular fictions map this dynamic. In many popular narratives, women spies cross the boundaries of femininity and are shepherded back to it by visual codes of beauty, whiteness and heterosexuality. They both break out and are contained, becoming an amphibious combination of radical and reactionary. In this way, the woman as spy in popular culture tests the bounds of gender and is encrypted both as a cipher of social change and of resistance to change.

Hence, this study examines women spies who are protagonists in popular fiction, film and television, rather than the more prevalent character who appears in the margin of spy narratives. In their exhaustive list of female spies from 1960s film and television, Tom Lisanti and Louis Paul categorise women as falling into four main character types: 'the helpful spy … the innocent … the bad-girl-turned-good … the villainess/*femme fatale*/assassin' (Lisanti and Paul 2002: 14–16). Of the 107 women profiled, few play protagonists. Honor Blackman (Cathy Gale), Diana Rigg (Emma Peel) and Joanna Lumley (Purdey) share a central status in *The Avengers* and *The New Avengers*, and Stefanie Powers is an exception as the short-lived *Girl from U.N.C.L.E.* (Lisanti and Paul 2002). Yet, by the 1990s, one could cite a range of active female protagonists in film and television series: Ripley, Sarah Connor, Thelma and Louise, Lara Croft, Buffy, Xena. Feminist academics in Britain and America, such as Yvonne Tasker (1993, 1998) and Lynda Hart (1994), began mapping this phenomenon in the 1990s, while collections such as *Action Chicks* (Inness 2004) and *Reel Knockouts* (McCaughey and King 2001) contribute to a continuing debate about what such representations mean. *La Femme Nikita* and *Alias* are part of this contingent in representing a new kind of female spy, one who is objectified but also represents a version of the increasing numbers of women entering the professions. They are professional spies and the protagonists of popular adventure series but are still the exception rather than the rule.

During the twentieth century, spying became a business, with the British and American intelligence agencies developing their own systems of training and bureaucracy (Knightley 2003). As with many professions, twentieth-century espionage devoted itself to specialisation and produced experts in a range of fields (Miller 2003: 28). Unlike most professions, however, the

intelligence service has an intimate history with fictions about itself. In Britain writers such as E. Phillips Oppenheim and William Le Queux fuelled popular concerns about enemy spies operating on British soil before and during the First World War (Murray 1988, Radaker 1988). Such fictions fed into the political will to establish a British secret service in 1909, as a means to combat the perceived enemy at the gate (Knightley 2003: 7–28). The twentieth century has subsequently established an elastic boundary between fact and fiction regarding popular conceptions of espionage that continues into the twenty-first century (Knightley 2003, Der Derian 1992: 40–70, Beer 2001, Wark 1990, Hiley 1990). It is, therefore, not surprising that spy fictions have consistently shadowed our understanding of modern society since the early twentieth century in their representation of white-collar work. British and American intelligence agencies, from their inception in the early twentieth century, were part of the move towards a bureaucracy of surveillance as a means of social control (Dandeker 1990: 110–49, Lyon 1994: 114–16). Consequently, fictional accounts of espionage both glamorise and critique modern bureaucracies, such as le Carré's arcane and inefficient Circus, or the hyperreal office space of *24*. This fascination with the mundane details and working practices of intelligence agencies is evident even in early cinema. In his account of Fritz Lang's *Spies* (1928), Geoffrey O'Brien writes:

> Spy stories are a century-long graphing of our psychic (spy-kick?) relation to an eluctable bureaucracy conceived alternately as protector and oppressor, invader and home team. Bureaucracy is everywhere and nowhere; like the Chinese poet trying to describe the mountain, we can hardly conceptualize it because we're inside it. ... In *Spies* Lang constructs a model kit of modernity ...
>
> (O'Brien 1995: 68)

If Lang produced a 'model kit of modernity' in 1928, the fictions that followed, in print as on film and television, have offered their own accounts of spying as an indicator of modernity and postmodernity. Unlike its close relations, the western, detective fiction and science fiction, the spy narrative thus offers a particular frisson regarding its relation to the real (Wark 1990). On the one hand, Dame Eliza Manningham-Buller, the current Director General of MI5, recently commented, 'I wish life were like [the BBC television series] *Spooks* where everything is (a) knowable and (b) soluble by six people', and a former MI6 agent asserted: 'A lot of the time you spend at the desk.' Yet MI5 was said to be delighted with *Spooks* and the rise in applications it produced, while the MI6 website both distances itself from the Bond myth and employs it as an aid to recruitment (Norton-Taylor 2006).

Although intelligence agencies may be pleased to employ fictional spies as aids to recruitment, they are not so sanguine where it comes to questions of authentication. Espionage deals in information, and intelligence agencies'

status is dependent on their ability to provide the right information at the right time. This makes spying a particularly pertinent business in modern corporate culture, where information as a currency is privileged over hard industries and hard cash. It is logical, therefore, that the twentieth century should be the moment when espionage became subject to bureaucratic structures, as a means of certifying the accuracy of the information which it accrues and as a means of legitimating its existence as a profession. It has been said that, 'modern intelligence systems emerged not so much by the conscious will of the central government as by a process of creeping bureaucratic growth' (Christopher Andrew, cited in Knightley 2003: 264). Those twentieth-century spy fictions with claims to realism thus tend to describe professional bureaucracies. Norman Mailer, in his best-selling spy novel, *Harlot's Ghost*, examines the workings of the CIA, an allegory not just of the USA but also of the white-collar bureaucracies which have come to dominate late Western capitalism. The titular 'Harlot,' a CIA maven called Hugh Montague, describes his profession to an audience of trainees and upper-echelon officers:

> 'This, gentlemen,' said Harlot, 'is espionage – a middle-class activity that depends on stability, money, a keen eye for the architecture of anxiety, large doses of hypocrisy on both sides, insurance plans, grievances, underlying loyalty, constant inclinations towards treachery, and an immersion in white-collar work.'
>
> (Mailer 1991: 412)

Spying, from this account, is inherent to the functioning of bureaucratic capitalism and ineluctably masculine – 'gentlemen'. What Harlot does not countenance is the impact of the female spy within this masculine environment. Yet women have been at the centre of espionage bureaucracies from their establishment. Tammy Proctor, in her account of the founding of British intelligence during the First World War, cites the central role of women in MI5: 'As clerks, supervisors, report writers, translators, printers, searchers, messengers, and historians, women made it possible for a tiny spy-tracking office created in 1909 to become a massive information clearinghouse by the end of the war' (Proctor 2003: 53). More recently, Dame Stella Rimington became the first woman Director General of MI5, having worked her way through all areas of the secret service. This is not to say that espionage is an equal-opportunities profession. While most of MI5's staff is female, few women occupy senior positions (Bennett 2002: 207–9).

As spying became a bureaucratised profession and spy fictions followed suit, they imbued the commonplace with meaning – the everyday phrases employed as passwords or recognitions and the mundane locations used for exchanging information. The fictional spy is, thus, a fantasy of agency for the subject in an increasingly confused and confusing world. Spies offer a material sense of self and agency that appears to be increasingly unavailable

in Western culture. Michael Denning argues that this is a central aspect of spy fictions' popularity:

> it serves as a way of narrating individual political agency in a world of institutions and states that seem to block all action and paralyze all opposition. In its two main traditions, the thriller redeems the worlds of white-collar work and consumerist leisure: in the thriller of work, the anxieties of the organization man take on a secret coherence, and bureaucratic routines are invested with political meaning; in the thriller of leisure, the sports and games that kill time become a killing time, a time of dangerous political contests.
>
> (Denning 1987: 151)

Women spy-protagonists offer women readers and viewers this fantasy of individual agency. There are not many such figures in fiction, film and television, but this book examines some of the most popular women spies. In the process of that examination, it becomes evident that rather than 'redeem[ing] the world of white-collar work', women spies do not sit easily within such bureaucratic power structures. If, as Denning argues, spy fictions invest bureaucracies with political meaning, women spies in such settings raise questions about the kinds of politics such fictions endorse. Female spies in these terms work against the grain of the genre and mirror the poststructuralist practices of feminist academics. Christine Bold, in her rereading of women in the James Bond novels, argues that 'Reversing dominant reading practices in this case may be a step towards rewriting women's agency within the closed world of fictive clandestinity, refeminising the secret sphere of influence, and changing the rules of the "great game" and the socio-political matrix it trails with it' (Bold 2003: 181). Women spy-protagonists in fiction, film and television begin that process of rereading by raising questions about 'the "great game" and the socio-political matrix' which are never fully resolved.

As I began researching this book, the materials around it expanded at an exponential rate so that the story of its writing is also one of attempting to manage a baggy monster of sources, contexts and media. My focus, therefore, became very selective, moving from mythologies about real women in the early twentieth century to the most hyperbolically fictional representations of the woman spy on twenty-first-century television. This movement from historical to cultural material mimics the shift from modern to postmodern, in an attempt to chart the archaeology of mythologies around women as spies since 1900. Chapters 1 to 4, therefore, present a historical overview of mythologies, fictional representations and critical work regarding women spies in popular culture, while Chapters 5 and 6 offer more detailed analyses of popular television representations of the woman spy since the 1980s. My research proposes that the fiction of the female spy is emblematic of the changes wrought in understandings of white middle-class

femininity across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. From Mata Hari to Sydney Bristow, fictional spies may be read as indicative of debates about professional women's role in Western culture.

My research has been informed by a number of cognate works. There are now several volumes examining the recent phenomenon of active or violent women in popular media. Yvonne Tasker's *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema* (1998) focuses on 'new Hollywood' and takes the figure of the prostitute or 'working girl' as a central trope. Sherrie Inness's *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture* (1999) takes a broader view, including contemporary television, film, women's magazines and comic books. Other writers have provided invaluable historical and cultural resources, including Julie Wheelwright's *The Fatal Lover: Mata Hari and the Myth of Women in Espionage* (1992) and James Chapman's *Saints and Avengers: British Adventure Series of the 1960s* (2002). A number of statutory texts on popular culture include material on the spy but tend not to deal in detail with female spies in popular fiction or on film and television. Toby Miller's *Spyscreen: Espionage on Film and TV from the 1930s to the 1960s* (2003) is one exception, as it includes a chapter on the woman spy: 'Women Making Trouble: *The Avengers*, *Honey West* and *Modesty Blaise*'. This study endeavours to expand that account by assaying a broader historical scope and including examinations of printed media. Nevertheless, there are gaps and elisions in any survey, and I am all too aware of the absences.

One of the areas of examination barely touched upon is the spy spoof. A notable cinematic example merges spy-action-comedy with teen movie (in the tradition of John Hughes and Amy Heckerling) to produce the lesbian spy film, *D.E.B.S.* (Angela Robinson, 2005). Set in a college for super-spies, the top trainee is captured by a master criminal, the famous Lucy Diamond (Jordana Brewster) and willingly held hostage, only to be rescued by her teammates. Sending up the conventions of the teen drama and the spy film, these young spies are, as the strapline says, 'crime-fighting hotties with killer bodies.' Seductively presented for the viewer as Britneyesque teens in tartan mini skirts, *D.E.B.S.* nonetheless demonstrates the cultural elasticity of the female spy in twenty-first-century media. Disney/Pixar animation feature *The Incredibles* (Brad Bird, 2004) literally presented an elastic female spy – a family of superhero spies with Elastigirl, the stretchably strong working mother, Helen Parr (voiced by Holly Hunter). *She Spies* (2002–3) was a one-season attempt to capitalise on the success of the *Charlie's Angels* films, with Natasha Henstridge, Kristen Miller and Natashia Williams playing convicted criminals recruited by a secret government organisation. These and other examples demonstrate how the woman as spy fits neatly into the multigenre, multimedia economy of twenty-first-century popular culture, yet also has the potential to expand and subvert its limited account of femininity.

The first chapter examines male spies in British popular fiction, with particular reference to the Scarlet Pimpernel, Richard Hannay, James Bond

and Alec Leamas. The focus is entirely on British fiction, as this tradition established grounding assumptions that continue to resonate in popular understandings of espionage. Nevertheless, such masculine models are less monolithically secure than they at first appear. My reading of Orczy, Buchan, Fleming and le Carré consequently unravels the ambivalence within espionage as a masculine endeavour. This leads to a closer examination of the women who surround the male spy in popular fiction. While such women appear to shore up his masculinity, they also, by their very presence, indicate anxieties regarding 'innate' or 'natural' discourses of gender. Chapter 2 discusses representations of the female spy from the turn of the twentieth century to the 1950s. The mythologised and demonised Mata Hari inflects all subsequent accounts of women in espionage, while Edith Cavell offers an early incarnation of the woman spy as hero. These opposing figures, whose stories were mobilised as propaganda in the First World War, lay the foundations for debate about the woman as spy in popular culture. The chapter concludes with a selective survey of cinematic accounts of the (good) woman spy on film from the 1930s to the 1950s. Women spies in the early twentieth century chart anxieties about the New Woman – those white, middle-class professionals who were gaining the franchise and moving beyond the domestic arena.

Chapter 3 focuses on the 1960s, with male and female spies featuring in popular television series. Beginning with an overview of critical work to date on central figures such as Emma Peel, I then address less well documented women spies. Modesty Blaise and Emily Pollifax are eccentric in that they have few peers during the 1960s or since. While Modesty Blaise is often mentioned in critical works, she is rarely examined in detail. The comic strips and novels in which she appears offer unresolved and contradictory accounts of Modesty as an active and attractive woman spy. Emily Pollifax is less well known but has featured in a series of popular novels by Dorothy Gilman since the 1960s. As an elderly spy, and as an account of an ageing woman in active work, she has few peers. The 1970s marked a renegotiation of women's social roles in response to second-wave feminisms. While many of the aims of those 1970s movements have not been met, they shifted the terms of debates about gender. In Chapter 4, *The Bionic Woman* and *The New Avengers* are examined as popular responses to the second wave, as attempts to imagine women as heroes rather than heroines (Brunsdon 1997: 48). Jaime Sommers and Purdey were new women addressing a new audience – the so-called 'Cosmo Girl' – but they are often unconvincing in their efforts to represent 'liberation'. Jaime and Purdey are hermaphrodite heroes, combining hyper-feminine appearance with masculine activities, and the contradictions of their roles do not sit comfortably within the medium they inhabit. Purdey and Jaime's power and femininity are commented upon within both series and, particularly in *The New Avengers*, humour is employed as a way of dealing with the paradox – but this does not render such contradictions invisible and nor does it ultimately resolve them.

Chapter 5 moves on to the 1990s to study three versions of Nikita: Luc Besson's 1990 film, its American remake and the subsequent television series *La Femme Nikita*. The spy drama as an allegory of corporate culture comes to the fore in this examination of a postmodern female spy. In the Nikita narratives, modern bureaucracies are fictionalised as dramatic arenas in which world-changing events occur. Yet such spy dramas may also be read as indicative of the inadequacy of late Western capitalism's response to feminism in their depiction of professional women in the new economy. The final chapter focuses on the most hyperbolic representation of the woman spy to date: Sydney Bristow in *Alias*. *Alias* is one of many new quality television drama series designed to appeal to an affluent, urban demographic. In this sense, it is as incorporated as *La Femme Nikita* or earlier television spy series such as *The Avengers* or *The Bionic Woman*. Yet, in its multiple address across genres, media and demographics, *Alias* is open to a range of readings. This concluding account of the woman as spy in popular culture does not attempt to classify Sydney Bristow as a progressive or reactionary representation of a woman in the professions. Instead Sydney, like many of her earlier sisters, is a mobile and suggestive signifier.

Just as espionage itself tracks the shifts from modernity to postmodernity, so women spies in popular culture shadow the advances and compromises of feminist politics in Britain and the USA. Although women spies in fiction, film and television often appear to follow the most conformist agendas – mimicking their male counterparts in serving the nation – their activities as women lend them a queer inflection. Women have often been regarded as suited to spying because white middle-class women are seen as above or beyond suspicion. One of the reasons women have been successful as spies – in fiction and in fact – may be the talents engendered by a career in femininity. As a subordinate group, even within a privileged class or race, women are often forced to work undercover to gain some measure of power over their own lives. In this way, as this book argues, representations of women spies make explicit the continuing contradiction between femininity and agency in Western culture across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

1 Spies, lies and sexual outlaws
Male spies in popular fiction

This chapter examines the male spy in twentieth-century British popular fiction. While this may appear to reinforce the cultural authority of masculinity, proposing the male spy as origin and the female spy as his pale imitation, that is not my intention. The purpose of this approach is, rather, to trace contradictions and absences within literary representations of masculinity, following the growing body of work which bears witness to its social and historical specificity (see Mangan and Walvin 1987, Roper and Tosh 1991, Rutherford 1997, Boyd 2003). To this end, the discussion centres on four influential fictional spies: the Scarlet Pimpernel, Richard Hannay, James Bond and Alec Leamas. These characters mark shifts in literary accounts of espionage, from the 'great game' to a more muddied world. They also map an eccentric history of modern England from 1900 to the 1960s. This was a foundational period for the mythology of the spy. British fictions established a template against which later spies in fact and fiction are measured; yet, these figures are shaky constructs, embodying fantasies of monolithic power and agency while barely suppressing the Others they allegedly oppose. This chapter thus examines four male spies in the light of so-called 'queer' theory, which argues that dominant social norms are predicated upon subordinated categories (see Butler 1990, Sedgewick 1991). Fragmentation, foreignness and femininity haunt these heroes, yet they also depend upon these opposing forces. Male spies in fiction consequently initiate debate about spies in the early twentieth century, while the femmes fatales and good women who inhabit the margins of their narratives call attention to the mutability of masculinity and to contemporary debates about the role of women in public life.

At the turn of the twentieth century, English masculinity was understood as white, middle-class and heterosexual (Rutherford 1997). The Victorian and Edwardian cult of 'manliness' may have been established in Britain through the public-school system, but was exported to the USA as part of a new fascination with physical and mental health (Park 1987). Contrary to such ideals of nobility, Christianity and honour, the male spy is required by his profession to acquire skills that are antithetical to his national and gender identities. In particular, the spy is required to develop criminal

attributes, to deceive others and disguise himself to evade capture or to gain information. Such masquerades run counter to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century accounts of white masculinity, as they employ characteristics more often projected onto a deviant other. Despite his role as a heroic protagonist, the male spy is thus shadowed by deviance; to spy is to be *devious*, after all. In effect, the male spy must acquire skills that are stereotypically and pejoratively ascribed not only to criminality but also to femininity – he must be sneaky, double-faced and underhand. In early spy fictions, such as Buchan's Hannay novels, these skills are primarily evident in his foreign foes; hence, femininity and the foreign threat to England's nationhood are frequently elided (Hiley 1990: 73). This trope is depicted variously in the work of key authors who have helped shape popular understandings of espionage, from Buchan to Fleming and le Carré, as they refract the concerns and contexts of their particular moments.[1] As the twentieth century advances, fictions about the English spy present a gentleman whose profession works against any gentlemanly mode of conduct.

The aristocratic spy: Baroness Orczy's *The Scarlet Pimpernel*

In her essay on spies in nineteenth-century American popular fiction, Christine Bold notes how authors 'masculinized the "great game," allied espionage with the frontier myth to discover heroic characteristics for the spy, and used the figure to make sense of a social order undergoing rapid change' (Bold 1990: 18). Although the frontier spirit is specific to an American context, the difficulty of ascribing a properly heroic character to a spy protagonist is a problem common to all spy fiction. Many representations of the spy compensate for this by emphasising the pleasure he takes in adventure, moral standpoint and appropriate resolution, yet such emphases also serve to highlight the contradictory nature of the spy's role. While spy protagonists may represent attempts to 'make sense of a social order undergoing rapid change' during the twentieth century, they also indicate absences and inconsistencies in the ideologies that shape such social orders. Male spies are thus hegemonic characters, as they serve the dominant order *and* question it. One such contradictory figure appears in an early twentieth-century popular novel which struggles even to achieve classification as spy fiction: the Scarlet Pimpernel. If William Le Queux wrote spy novels that veered into the genre of the 'love-romance', Baroness Orczy's most famous creation is lodged in the romantic genre and often only considered spy fiction on sufferance (McCormick 1977: 147, Panek 1981: 5–16). *The Scarlet Pimpernel* was initially rejected by at least a dozen publishers. Orczy and her husband, undaunted, made the manuscript into a play, which was performed to great success in Nottingham in 1903; the novel was subsequently published in 1905 (McCormick 1977: 147–8, Staples 1988: 232–3). The main character, Sir Percy Blakeney, survived for several more novels and inspired a number of film and television adaptations. The most successful film

version, which is largely faithful to Orczy's novel, is Harold Young's *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1934) starring Leslie Howard.

Set during the French Revolution, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* recounts the adventures of a French actress, Marguerite St Just, married to Sir Percy Blakeney and unaware of her husband's secret identity as the Scarlet Pimpernel, mysterious liberator of the French nobility. The narrative follows a romantic trajectory, as the estranged husband and wife are unwittingly united against Chauvelin, the devious republican spy, and ultimately restored to marital union. At the beginning of the novel, they have been married for a year but were separated twenty-four hours after their wedding by Marguerite's inadvertent betrayal of the Marquis de St Cyr and his subsequent execution. All the major characters are secret agents; Percy Blakeney as the leader of an amateur English spy ring, Chauvelin as professional spy for Revolutionary France and Marguerite who, with her history of betrayal, is forced by Chauvelin to betray the Pimpernel in order to save her brother, Armand. The distinction between the heroic Blakeney and the villainous Chauvelin is made clear throughout; their opposition endorses the innate dominance of the 'natural' aristocrat over the common man. Yet Blakeney constitutes a mercurial hero whose skills in disguise and dissimulation are preternatural.

Part of Blakeney's 'cover' is his role as a foppish nobleman. Sir Percy is a distinctive character in English high society, obsessed with the minutiae of fashion and leisure, yet able to disguise himself with ease on the other side of the Channel. He first appears in the novel as an old woman driving a cartload of concealed aristocrats through the gates of Paris; in the final adventure of the novel, he is back on French soil and disguised as a Jew. The Pimpernel thus cross-dresses in terms of gender, class and race, confirming his reputedly magical ability to evade capture. His performances also compromise his identity as an Englishman, however; if he is such a skilled actor, then the 'true' identity of Percy Blakeney may also be a disguise. This early example of the spy as romantic hero reveals the contradictions upon which British spy fiction rests. Blakeney's aristocratic birth, thirst for adventure and omniscient leadership make him a typical *fin-de-siècle* protagonist. Kelly Boyd argues that the function of such heroes in Victorian boys' magazines was to 'crystallise the link between masculinity and class status ... at a time when the category was undergoing refinement, especially for the middle classes' (Boyd 2003: 47). Blakeney fits this model but also problematises it through his theatrical use of disguise. While his exploits conform to those of a *Boys' Own* hero, the means by which he achieves his successes do not.

In *Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller*, Michael Denning describes how the spy thriller is formally constructed in terms of a game, with its own rules and set players:

> Moreover, this concern for games is founded historically in the ethic of sportsmanship of the public schools of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, an ethic that was disseminated and popularised by

> the 'school stories' of popular boys' weeklies, by a variety of popular fiction forms including the thriller, and by youth organisations like the Boy Scouts. The myth of the Newbolt man with his mystical loyalty to school, nation and Empire, and his philistine muscular Christianity, set the tone for the early thrillers of Childers, Buchan and Sapper. It was an ethic that took the school cricket pitch, the celebrated playing fields of Eton, as a figure for social life, thus combining an institutional loyalty and reverence for hierarchical structures with a sense that social and political conflict was a game, to be played in a spirit of fairness, amateurism, and manliness.
>
> (Denning 1987: 33)

The novel's account of Blakeney's fairness and amateurism is aligned with his social role as an English aristocrat, but his manliness is compromised both by his foppish masquerade in London society and by his disguises in France. The reader sees little of the 'real' Blakeney or his manliness, as that is his *secret* identity as the Scarlet Pimpernel. While *The Scarlet Pimpernel* is a historical novel, it is a fiction that engages with concerns regarding national identity and gender at the turn of the twentieth century. Blakeney's heroic deeds make him a *Boys' Own* hero, but the ease with which he becomes the dandy feminises him. The setting of the novel places Blakeney as a contemporary of Beau Brummel, the nineteenth-century dandy, but its publication in 1905 places the narrative in the wake of a *fin-de-siècle* decadence that gave the dandy a new significance. The aesthete's obsessive interest in clothing and decor aligned him with women's role as consumers in the new department stores and thus made him a rare and exotic creature; the 'feminized male' (Felski 1995: 91–7).

Blakeney's ambiguity is most evident in the competing generic demands of romantic fiction and the spy thriller, where the former requires the hero to be an object of desire and the latter requires him to be an active subject. The narrative point of view in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* is primarily that of Marguerite, who spends much time observing her husband and musing on the change he has undergone since they were first married. In this sense, he plays the role of the hero in romantic fiction who remains an enigma until the final denouement (Modleski 1984):

> Marguerite looked at him tentatively once or twice; she could see his handsome profile, and one lazy eye, with its straight fine brow and drooping lid.
>
> The face in the moonlight looked singularly earnest, and recalled to Marguerite's aching heart those happy days of courtship, before he had become the lazy nincompoop, the effete fop, whose life seemed spent in card- and supper-rooms.
>
> But now, in the moonlight, she could not catch the expression of the lazy blue eyes; she could only see the outline of the firm chin, the

> corner of the strong mouth, the well-cut massive shape of the forehead; truly, nature had meant well by Sir Percy ...
>
> (Orczy 1905: 141)

As with Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), *The Scarlet Pimpernel* offers an external view of Englishness, told largely from the point of view of the French exile Marguerite rather than Blakeney. The effect of this is to make Blakeney strange, so that *he* becomes the mysterious 'other' rather than Marguerite, who is a point of identification for the reader. For Marguerite and for the reader, Blakeney is unknown and unknowable. Even as he masterfully drives his coach and four on long journeys through the night, he holds the reins 'in his slender feminine hands' (Orczy 1905: 78). His gender identity is fluid, and the implication throughout the novel is that Blakeney, while powerful, is mercurial in his ability to transform himself.

The second Scarlet Pimpernel novel attempts to fix Blakeney more securely as a heroic figure:

> The full magnetism of the man was apparent now. ... The man of the world – the fastidious dandy – had shed his mask; there stood the leader, calm, serene in the very face of the most deadly danger that had encompassed any man, looking that danger fully in the face, not striving to belittle it or to exaggerate it, but weighing it in the balance with what there was to accomplish; the rescue of a martyred, innocent child from the hands of fiends who were destroying his very soul even more completely than his body.
>
> (Orczy 1913: 71)

This description is much more aligned with the adventure heroes of the late nineteenth century, which promoted a Victorian manliness based on aristocratic birth, arrogance and omniscient leadership (Boyd 2003: 50–1). Yet Blakeney compromises even this already-outdated heroism by slipping back into the dandy persona: 'His usual *débonnair* [*sic*] manner was on him once again, his laziness, his careless *insouciance*. He was even at this moment deeply engaged in flicking off a grain of dust from the immaculate Mechlin cuff at his wrist' (Orczy 1913: 77). In *Eldorado* (1913), Blakeney is engaged in a plot to rescue the infant dauphin from the squalid Temple Prison; once again, the innate heroism of the nobility wins out against brutish Republican foes. Set amid such a rigidly delineated battle between the upper and lower classes, Blakeney cuts a strange figure, able to pass as a common stonemason and furniture remover, due to his 'abnormal physique and iron nerve' (Orczy 1913: 127). Blakeney's double identity as foppish English aristocrat and Scarlet Pimpernel, compounded with his many transformations, contradict any secure heroic persona.

This unstable hero is also an odd English gentleman, for while he is a nobleman with the ear of the Prince of Wales, his background is compromised

by a mentally unstable mother, apparently driven mad by marriage: 'His father, the late Sir Algernon Blakeney, had had the terrible misfortune of seeing an idolised young wife become hopelessly insane after two years of happily married life' (Orczy 1905: 48). To avoid the scandal of insanity in the family, Algernon Blakeney takes his wife and child to an unspecified 'abroad', where Percy grows up, eventually settling in England with his French bride. Blakeney's fluency in French is thus explicable, but his background is consequently more European than English. This is another aspect of the novel where the genres of romantic and spy fiction clash: Blakeney's background and mysterious identity make him an effective romantic hero but, as a spy, his skills in deception and disguise ally him with the evil Other of the novel, the wicked Chauvelin. Blakeney's mutable identity also problematises his motivation for becoming the Scarlet Pimpernel in the first place; if Blakeney is faking it as an aristocratic English buffoon, Englishness is also part of his motivation. Blakeney is nothing if not a gentleman spy setting out with his followers to play the 'great game' on French soil. Why, with a childhood spent 'abroad', does Blakeney assay an English cause? Within the novel, such concerns are explained in terms of class loyalty; Blakeney sets out to save fellow aristocrats, although the narrative asserts the superiority of English aristocracy above all others.

The Scarlet Pimpernel thus offers an early example of the confusions and contradictions of spy fiction and the male spy. The plot transports the protagonists from France to England and back to France, ending as the happy couple set foot on English soil again with all misunderstandings resolved and Monsieur Chauvelin banished from London society. As a romantic adventure, Orczy's novel offers the pleasures of foreign travel without any of the inconveniences. The reader is transported from the cosy order of the Fisherman's Rest in Dover to the squalid chaos of the Chat Gris in Calais, without any doubt that these hostelries represent the opposing characteristics of England and France. In Harold Young's film, the adventures of the Pimpernel are irrevocably linked to a 'timeless' Englishness by Leslie Howard, as Percy Blakeney, reciting the 'this England' speech from *Richard II* in the closing scenes. Such romances seem to offer simple oppositions between masculinity and femininity, England and the enemy, but they also raise questions about such apparently simple categories.

The gentleman spy: John Buchan's Richard Hannay

Like Percy Blakeney, John Buchan's Richard Hannay is also an amateur spy, although he arguably becomes more of a professional as the series of novels progress (Cawelti and Rosenberg 1987: 90, Bloom 1990: 5, Trotter 1990: 42). Buchan's hero embodies principles of amateur gamesmanship which are pitted against a narrow professionalism (Panek 1981: 56). Hannay first appears in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) and is inadvertently caught up in international espionage. He thus enters the world of the spy by

chance rather than choice, and this, to a large extent, absolves him of the need to examine too closely the ethics of spying (Macintosh 1990). In this first novel, he adopts the disguises and deceptions of the spy out of necessity, as he is on the run from the fellowship of the Black Stone and also from the police. Hannay's motive for becoming involved is explained as a personal obligation and sense of duty: 'Somehow or other the sight of Scudder's dead face had made me a passionate believer in his scheme. He was gone, but he had taken me into his confidence, and I was pretty well bound to carry on his work' (Buchan 1915: 27).

'Schoolboy-honour' runs high in these novels (Atkins 1984: 140), and Hannay's subsequent comment – that the 'long knife would not be the end of Scudder if I could play the game in his place' (Buchan 1915: 27) – speaks of a social contract rooted in class, gender and nation. While such language recalls public-school Englishness, it is confounded by Hannay's initial impression of England. As a Scottish ex-pat recently returned from South Africa, Hannay confesses that he regarded England as an exotic destination – 'England was a sort of Arabian Nights to me' – and a huge disappointment: 'I had been three months in the Old Country, and was fed up with it. ... The weather made me liverish, the talk of the ordinary Englishman made me sick, I couldn't get enough exercise and the amusements of London seemed as flat as soda-water' (Buchan 1915: 13).

England is both strange and decadent to this returning colonial. The unhealthy Englishman Hannay describes is indicative of contemporary concerns regarding the physical and mental health of the nation; an anxiety also felt across the Atlantic (Park 1987, Richardson 2004). Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys* (1908) made a direct connection between the colonial experience and a manliness that many saw as lacking in native Englishmen (Warren 1987). The Hannay novels outline a debate about what constitutes Englishness – and what kind of England is being fought for. *The Thirty-Nine Steps* was published a year into the Great War but is set shortly before it begins. From the outset, Englishness appears vulnerable – in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* the threat is envisaged as an insidious foreign invasion of master spies on British soil, yet the solution to that threat also comes from beyond the national boundaries of England itself. Franklin P. Scudder, the agent whose death invokes Hannay's allegiance, is a journalist and linguist from Kentucky who brings news of an international conspiracy against England.

In this first novel, 'the ordinary Englishman' appears ill-equipped to fight such cunning foes; while Hannay admires the working men that he meets, he is scathing about the chattering middle classes (Panek 1981: 58). The old country is in danger of losing its ability to fight, having become fat and lazy on the profits of Empire. Hannay has little time for bureaucracy and middle-class suburbia, as the Englishness favoured here is that of an idealised working man who knows his place, together with a ruling class who know theirs. Scudder describes the conspiracy he is fighting in the following terms:

> I gathered that most of the people in it were the sort of educated anarchists that make revolutions, but that beside them there were financiers who were playing for money. A clever man can make big profits on a falling market, and it suited the book of both classes to set Europe by the ears. ...
>
> When I asked why, he said that the anarchist lot thought it would give them their chance. Everything would be in the melting-pot, and they looked to see a new world emerge. The capitalists would rake in the shekels, and make fortunes by buying up wreckage. Capital, he said, had no conscience and no fatherland. Besides, the Jew was behind it, and the Jew hated Russia worse than hell.
>
> (Buchan 1915: 16–17)

This statement makes clear the ground of battle; this conflict is about national and racial identity. Scudder's story of an international conspiracy, later exposed as an overheated interpretation of events, is superseded by a less complex but equally terrifying plot to steal British naval secrets: 'By displacing one plot by another, one villain by another, Buchan is able to produce a more convincing if no less implausible plot and villain' (Denning 1987: 47). Nevertheless, the echo of Scudder's voice resounds throughout the Hannay novels, for there is no convincing explanation as to why foreign foes so regularly assault English territories. To provide one would involve a more critical scrutiny of the British imperial project.

As a colonial, Hannay appears eminently qualified to combat the pernicious forces that assail England, primarily because of his idealistic patriotism, keeping the flame of Englishness alive in the healthy environment of the colonies. He is also, as the text notes at several points, 'a white man', where whiteness indicates integrity and honour; the enemy organisation is predictably named the Black Stone. As with *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, Scudder's narrative is casually anti-Semitic – in both cases, the figure of the Jew is employed to represent contemporary discomfort with the cosmopolitan modernity of the early twentieth century (Rutherford 1997: 57). Despite their disparate settings, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *The Thirty-Nine Steps* each evoke a nostalgic account of homogenous Englishness; Blakeney, like Hannay, offers an idealised representation of the true Englishman who is a last line of defence against foreign invasion. In neither case should this be taken as a simple reflection of their author's political tendencies; nor should it be read as a straightforward reflection of contemporary attitudes (Butts 1990: 53, Donald 1990: 60–5). John G. Cawelti asserts that such simple oppositions tend to indicate a cynicism on the part of the author regarding his or her perceived readership, that formula fictions offer lazy archetypes as a matter of course to provide their readers with simple solutions to difficult issues (Cawelti 1976: 31–2). In Buchan's Hannay novels, however, there is increasing evidence that such simple solutions are insufficient even for the narratives themselves.

The Thirty-Nine Steps is set shortly before the First World War, and Hannay remains within the British Isles, travelling only from London to Scotland and back again. Scudder, however, offers a different kind of modern subject, as his evidence for the conspiracy has been gathered all over Europe:

> 'I got the first hint in an inn on the Achensee in Tyrol. That set me inquiring, and I collected my other clues in a fur-shop in the Galician quarter of Buda, in a Strangers' Club in Vienna, and in a little book-shop off the Rachnitz-strasse in Leipsic [*sic*]. I completed my evidence ten days ago in Paris.'
>
> (Buchan 1915: 19)

Scudder represents a spy more familiar to later readers in the form of Fleming's Bond and his imitators. He is a cipher of modernity, able to move across Europe at the speed of a sentence and not entirely approved of by the intelligence hierarchy. *The Thirty-Nine Steps* introduces Hannay's 'M', Sir Walter Bullivant of the Foreign Office, who says of Scudder, 'He was half crank, half genius, but he was wholly honest. The trouble about him was his partiality for playing a lone hand. That made him pretty well useless in any Secret Service – a pity, for he had uncommon gifts' (Buchan 1915: 93). Scudder also mirrors the Scarlet Pimpernel's ability to transform himself:

> 'I left Paris a dandified young French-American, and I sailed from Hamburg a Jew diamond merchant. In Norway I was an English student of Ibsen collecting material for lectures, but when I left Bergen I was a cinema-man with special ski films. And I came here from Leith with a lot of pulp-wood propositions in my pocket to put before the London newspapers.'
>
> (Buchan 1915: 19)

Scudder's disguises move him across race and class but also indicate the coming information technologies. The diamond merchant and student can also become a 'cinema man' or supplier of raw materials to the papers. Scudder works in the modern profession Richard Hannay tumbles into; the world of international espionage in which anyone can be anything. It is also a world already informed by popular fiction: as the literary innkeeper gasps, 'it is all pure Rider Haggard and Conan Doyle' (Buchan 1915: 41). For Hannay and his allies, however, this is not an egalitarian Europe but a dangerous world where traditional hierarchies are under threat and in need of protection. Scudder's disguises provide a dark warning about the ability of enemy agents to transform themselves; indeed, much of Hannay's work is to discern the enemy behind an English façade. The Hannay novels clearly perceive the emergence of a new world order, evoking conservative fears of what such change may bring and concomitant anxieties about national security and the demise of a mythic Englishness.

After a breathless chase across the Scottish Highlands, Hannay returns to England to identify his foe and is horrified to discern the lineaments of the Black Stone on a village tennis court in Kent. The enemy is truly at the gate and so well disguised as retired stockbrokers that Hannay continues to doubt his own instincts until the final showdown. The chief skill of enemy agents rests in their ability to become someone else: 'Those chaps didn't need to act, they just turned a handle and passed into another life, which came as naturally to them as the first' (Buchan 1915: 118). The Black Stone, and their leader, whom Hannay first encounters as 'the bald archaeologist', are not adept at disguise; their skill comes from a *lack* of identity. In this novel, as elsewhere, there is a horror of fluidity, of the abyss, of the unknown futures that modernity offers. The Black Stone are able to pass as Englishmen, as archaeologists, as a First Sea Lord of the new British Navy. They are able to do so because they are nebulous wraiths, diametrically opposed to the secured identity of the true Englishman, Richard Hannay: 'In this way, the enemy is that which the hero is not: *faceless*, soulless, amorphous automata who blindly obey unseen masters and whose autonomy and individuality is absolutely curtailed by obedience to absolutism itself' (Bloom 1990: 4).

Yet, Hannay also employs disguise in order to evade capture. In this first novel, he is a milkman, a road mender and a beggar called Ned Ainslie. The good spy is thus allied with the bad, and the narrative works hard to provide some distinction between the two. In *The Thirty-Nine Steps* it is a matter of ability. As the bald archaeologist says to Hannay, 'You are a clever actor, but not quite clever enough' (Buchan 1915: 74). Hannay is hampered in his abilities as a spy by too secure an identity – he is too much an Englishman to dissemble. His lack of 'cleverness' in this regard marks him as morally superior to the brotherhood of the Black Stone, who stand for slippery modernity. Disguise is thus an indicator of evil; where Hannay employs disguise, he only succeeds in fooling the enemy for a while. The distinction is also that of the professional and the amateur. Where the Black Stone are professional spies, trained in disguise and subterfuge, Richard Hannay is an amateur whose skills rely on his background as a soldier in the Boer War and his friendship with the Afrikaner scout, Peter Pienaar. Pienaar appears in later novels, but in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, he is present only in Hannay's memory, proving invaluable as Hannay attempts to unmask the Black Stone. Modern professionalism is thus set against the traditions of amateur gamesmanship, and, in this first novel, the latter is clearly the victor. As the Hannay series progresses, however, the distinction between the modern and the traditional – England's future and its past – are less distinct, as the narratives address the question of what will become of England and Englishness after the Great War.

For Buchan's protagonist, this is a moral journey, and Peter Pienaar, together with the constant references to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, represents Hannay's spiritual and ethical touchstone (Cawelti and Rosenberg

1987: 82). Leroy L. Panek notes the link between the spiritual and the physical in Buchan's novels, particularly apparent in Hannay's largely pointless trek across the Alps in *Mr Standfast*: 'The point is that Buchan *via* Bunyan saw climbing as a means of showing character and that one could not accept a final reward without having been pitted against the physical and psychological stress of climbing' (Panek 1981: 52). Hannay, at this point, as in the rigours of his flight across Scotland and England, exhibits an almost masochistic pleasure in the privations thrust upon him. The notion of duty, of having to strive to *deserve* the 'final reward', is embedded in the discourses of masculinity which prevail in the early twentieth century:

> The imaginary Englishman with his stiff upper lip and masterly control over world affairs was invented during another era of uncertainty, in the years between 1870 and the outbreak of the First World War. This period saw the appearance of hundreds of boys' adventure stories, eulogising Britain's empire builders. Life for the fictitious imperial hero was a series of opportunities to exercise his prowess and demonstrate supremacy over foreigners and the working classes.
>
> (Rutherford 1997: 12)

The 'stiff upper lipped' Englishman does not tell the whole story regarding masculinity at this time; Kelly Boyd and others have mapped the move away from the manly hero as an aristocratic individualist to a more community-oriented subject (Boyd 2003). Victorian and Edwardian middle-class masculinity was reformulating itself to deal with the new challenges of the twentieth century (Mangan and Walvin 1987). One aspect of this shift is apparent in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, in Hannay's relation to middle-class England. The novel ends as it begins, with Hannay finding himself in an exoticised urban environment where he is ill at ease. Still doubting his own instincts, Hannay meets the brotherhood of the Black Stone in their suburban Kentish villa. The enemy spies are hiding in plain sight, pretending to be Englishmen. During this final confrontation, Hannay is thrust into the one arena where he is uncomfortable:

> A man of my sort, who has travelled the world in rough places, gets on perfectly well with two classes, what you may call the upper and the lower. He understands them and they understand him. I was at home with herds and tramps and roadmen, and I was sufficiently at my ease with people like Sir Walter and the men I had met the night before. I can't explain why, but it is a fact. What fellows like me don't understand is the great comfortable, satisfied middle-class world, the folk that live in villas and suburbs. He doesn't know how they look at things, he doesn't understand their conventions, and he is as shy of them as of a black mamba.
>
> (Buchan 1915: 119)

Hannay is finally able to discern the enemy who gives himself away by repeating a small gesture that Hannay recalls from his flight through Scotland. Sitting in an ordinary suburban house, surrounded by the police, the alien threat has truly come home to roost, and the location of this final sequence is heavily symbolic. The expanding suburbs and their inhabitants are thus depicted as ripe for infiltration by foreign enemies and alien ideas, such as socialism and feminism.

This mistrust of the middle classes is significant, for concurrent with Richard Hannay's development as a professional spy is the development of Hannay as domesticated Englishman rather than restless colonial. If the Hannay novels take the protagonist on a journey from amateur to professional, they also map his development from lonely bachelor to contented husband. Hannay's emotional journey in the novels represents a spiritual journey towards an understanding of England and Englishness (Panek 1981: 57). The quest is played out through Hannay's romance with Mary Lamington, whom he first encounters in a shell-shock hospital in the Cotswolds in the third novel of the series, *Mr Standfast*. Mary is burdened with symbolic weight, which may explain why she appears as little more than a cipher, and an ambiguous one at that: 'She smiled demurely as she arranged the tea-things, and I thought I had never seen eyes at once so merry and so grave. I stared after her as she walked across the lawn, and I remember noticing that she walked with the free grace of an athletic boy' (Buchan 1919: 17).

Mary is suggestively associated with the traditional English song 'Cherry Ripe' and, like England, she is the motivation and destination for Hannay in this novel. The dissatisfaction with England, which Hannay voiced at the beginning of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, is resolved in *Mr Standfast*. At the beginning of the latter novel, Hannay notes his changing perspective, as he arrives at Fosse Manor and surveys the rolling countryside of the Home Counties:

> In that moment I had a kind of revelation. I had a vision of what I had been fighting for, what we were all fighting for. It was peace, deep and holy and ancient, peace older than the oldest wars, peace which would endure when all our swords were hammered into ploughshares. It was more; for in that hour England first took hold of me. Before my country had been South Africa, and when I thought of home it had been the wide sun-steeped spaces of the veld or some scented glen of the Berg. But now I realised that I had a new home. I understood what a precious thing this little England was, how old and kindly and comforting, how wholly worth striving for.
>
> (Buchan 1919: 21)

The characteristics of this 'little England' are difficult to pin down, and that difficulty may be perceived via the figure of Mary Lamington. Mary's

ambiguity – her boyish femininity – together with her lack of characterisation in the novel represent the problem that Hannay wrestles with in *Mr Standfast*. Men of Hannay's generation faced a conflict between manliness and domesticity: 'The generation which grew up after 1860 displayed an insecurity in their masculine identities which manifested itself in a flight from domesticity, a growing disparagement of the "feminine," a readiness to go abroad and an increasing refusal amongst late Victorian men to marry' (Rutherford 1997: 19). *Mr Standfast*, thus, represents an attempt to reconcile the hero not only to domesticity, as home for Hannay becomes little England rather than the sweeping vistas of the veld, but also an attempt to imagine a future for the hero in peacetime. While the novel is set during the First World War – and the closing chapters take place on the Front Line in France – it was published in 1919 and offers a prescient account of the interest in new social movements that was to dominate political life in the inter-war period (Boyd 2003: 101).

Mary represents one aspect of this despite her flat characterisation; she is a version of the New Woman in her role as female operative and professional colleague (Felski 1995: 146). Towards the end of the novel, she allows herself to be used as a decoy, a 'honey-trap' for the enemy agent, Moxon Ivery. When Hannay primly objects to this degradation, she is the one to talk him round:

> 'Look at me, Dick, look at your someday-to-be espousèd saint. I'm nineteen years of age next August. Before the war I should have been the kind of shivering débutante who blushes when she's spoken to, and oh! I should have thought such silly, silly things about life. ... Well, in the last two years I've been close to it, and to death. I've nursed the dying. I've seen souls in agony and in triumph. England has allowed me to serve her as she allows her sons. Oh, I'm a robust young woman now, and indeed I think women were always robuster than men. ... Dick, dear Dick, we're lovers, but we're comrades too – always comrades, and comrades trust each other.'
>
> (Buchan 1919: 230)

This proto-feminist sentiment sits strangely in the deeply traditionalist Hannay novels. Buchan's own politics were not simple, however: 'although he was politically a Tory, Buchan supported many of the progressive issues of his times: he wrote in favour of women's suffrage, voted for the recognition of the Soviet Union, and appealed for the release of conscientious objectors after the First World War' (Panek 1981: 43). Whether Mary's speech is a reflection of Buchan's more liberal political leanings or not, this account of gender relations and the 'ideal' partnership of (relatively) equals echoes the socialist ideals of the radical suburban community which Hannay initially has to infiltrate. Hannay is forced to live in the environment he most despises – middle-class suburbia – amongst the people he most disapproves

of – a community of cranky pacifists – and this, like his tramp across the Alps, is part of his pilgrim's progress towards a fuller understanding of England. He and Mary work together in the Garden City of Biggleswick, and their emotional bond, together with his friendship with the conscientious objector, Lawrence Wake, map a discussion of the value and political constituency of Englishness.

Hannay's relationship with Lawrence Wake moves from deep suspicion of his principles as a conscientious objector and a mistaken assumption that he is an enemy spy, to frank admiration for his courage in death at the Front Line: 'He was the Faithful among us pilgrims, who had finished his journey before the rest. Mary had foreseen it. "There is a price to be paid," she had said – "the best of us"' (Buchan 1919: 341–2). Naturally, at the end of the novel, thoughts of Mary lead to thoughts of England and peacetime:

> I had a vision of a green English landscape, with its far-flung scents of wood and meadow and garden. ... And that face of all my dreams, with the eyes so childlike and brave and honest, as if they, too, saw beyond the dark to a radiant country.
>
> (Buchan 1919: 342)

What emerges from Hannay's meditations on England is a liberal form of Tory politics based on Christian fortitude and morality. Hannay's time in Biggleswick is unusually stationary – he is forced to meditate on the shortcomings and the strengths of the cranky radicals who live there. His purpose in Biggleswick is to flush out the enemy spy, Moxon Ivery, another blank-faced foe who, according to Hannay's colleague Blenkiron, 'hasn't got any personality either – he's got fifty, and there's no one he could call his own' (Buchan 1919: 55). Yet Hannay's own identity is strangely difficult to pin down; if Moxon Ivery is the evil other, Richard Hannay is the good self – a self based on a set of assumptions about masculinity and Englishness that are being renegotiated as the novels progress.

The gender politics of Buchan's Hannay novels are less confused than those of Orczy's *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, but they rest on a model of difference which requires the reader to agree with a logic which is full of absences. This is most explicit in the novels' female characters. While Richard Hannay is the protagonist, and his male friends and colleagues mark a wider understanding of the world in which he operates, Mary Lamington and Englishness constitute a symbolic destination for the hero and little more. Hannay appears strangely sexless, commenting in *Greenmantle* on his monk-like existence at the age of forty and admitting that he has little knowledge of women (Buchan 1916: 256). Such distance from femininity tallies with Hannay's Edwardian manliness. To be a man is to serve the Empire, to do one's duty and avoid the emotional messiness represented by the world of women, whether domestic or sexual. Women in the novels are ciphers; whether coded as good or evil, they are equally blank. Hilda Von

Einem, the villain at the centre of *Greenmantle*, lacks background or motivation; she simply exists like some force of nature. She is described as a fanatic, an ancient god and as having a mask-like face; she first appears disguised as 'The Lady of the Mantilla'. Despite her role as villain, both Hannay and Sandy Arbuthnot have romantic and/or sexual feelings for her; at several points, Hannay admires Hilda as one would admire a splendid wild animal. *Greenmantle* ends with the death of Hilda Von Einem and Sandy's noble desire to give her a burial on the mountaintop: 'Dick, we must bury her here ... You see, she ... she liked me. I can make her no return but this' (Buchan 1916: 335). Hilda barely exists in the novel except as a trope loosely based on Mata Hari, her only purpose to demonstrate the nobility of a good man. The Hannay novels are largely concerned with homosocial relationships (Panek 1981: 45). Hannay's male friends are his personal and professional touchstone, but Mary represents an ideal that is essentially untouchable. In the opposition between Mary and Hilda Von Einem, Buchan establishes the trope of the good and bad female spy discussed in the next chapter. Mary is associated with nation and (in later novels) motherhood, while Hilda represents a decadent, oriental sexuality which Hannay and Arbuthnot find fascinating (Donald 1990: 69–70). Despite Sandy's laudatory – and fearful – description of Von Einem as a 'Superwoman', neither she nor Mary is made complex in this novel; their common difference *as* women is mobilised to confirm the masculinity of the hero.

Bond's girls

Of all the spies examined in this book, James Bond is the most analysed and theorised. In addition to essays and chapters devoted to Bond in books that generally examine spy fiction and film, there are several academic studies of Fleming's hero. Of these, Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott's ground-breaking *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero* (1987) remains an authoritative examination of the novels and films. It is supplemented by more recent studies such as James Chapman's *Licence to Thrill: A Cultural History of the James Bond Films* (1999), Jeremy Black's *The Politics of James Bond* (2001) and Christoph Lindner's *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader* (2003). Bond has also caught the attention of high-profile theorists such as Umberto Eco (1981) and Roland Barthes (1982). James Bond, as these commentaries attest, is more than a fictional figure; he is a cultural phenomenon. Far more than the Scarlet Pimpernel or Richard Hannay – or later fictional spies translated for film and television such as Deighton's Harry Palmer or le Carré's George Smiley – Bond has a visual role in popular culture, albeit one which changes as the actors have changed. It may seem perverse, in the light of that dominant visual field, to focus on the novels which feature James Bond, yet it is in the novels that Bond's gender is most problematic: 'the films ... reconstruct Fleming's plots,

add the gadgets absent in the novels, rewrite the dialogue and provide a stable image of the hero unavailable in the books' (Panek 1981: 201). In a doubly perverse move, the discussion will centre on the women in Fleming's texts as particular moments in the novels that question Bond's status while appearing to endorse it.

In *Bond and Beyond*, Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott examine the structural function of the Bond girl in Fleming's fictions and conclude that she embodies two forms of narrative 'problem': the enigma of her gender, as a 'girl' who is not fully aligned with heteropatriarchy, and the question of whether Bond can or will act to 'fix' her into normative femininity, usually through sexual conquest or awakening. Through her encounter with Bond, the 'girl' is thus cured of her problematic sexual identity, whether she is frigid, a virgin or a lesbian. The Bond girl is thus put back into place within 'the regime of the phallus'; she embodies a 'free and independent sexuality' but only insofar as it conforms to hyperbolised heterosexuality (Bennett and Woollacott 1987: 118). This reading of Bond marks him as an exemplary figure of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich 1981, Bold 2003: 173). While the 'girl' is put in her place by Bond's dubious sexual therapy, James Bond is also 'fixed' within 'the regime of the phallus' by his relations with her – an unequal relationship which is just as circumscribed by the sex/gender system (Rubin 1975, Butler 1990: 72–5). While the Bond girl's purpose in the novel is to service Bond, she also indicates how Bond's heteromasculinity is dysfunctional. The repeated sexual conquests bespeak a narrative anxiety about Bond's gender identity, which is inseparable in these fictions from his sexual performance. Several critics, from Bennett and Woollacott on, have focused their attention on Bond's phallic persona, but few have acknowledged the extent to which it is a delicate construct, so vulnerable that it requires constant support (Bennett and Woollacott 1987: 114–27, Miller 2003: 122–53). Christine Bold cites Judith Butler in her argument that Bond needs his 'girls' in order to assert his gender and national identity (Bold 2003: 177). Bond's sexuality is hysterical in its repetition; his role as a hysterical subject is manifest in the repeated ordeals each job entails (Woolf 1990: 87). To be a spy, for James Bond, is to suffer torture at the hands of England's enemies and to encounter exotic women who serve to reiterate his sexual potency. In Bennett and Woollacott's analysis of the 'phallic code' of Fleming's fictions, the 'girl' and the 'enemy' are aligned:

> Ultimately, the threat of ideological disruption embodied in both the villain's conspiracy and 'the girl's out-of-placeness' is avoided because Bond – as delegated representative of M, the holding centre of England and the patriarchal order – proves 'man enough' for the task. It is also by the operation of the 'phallic code' that the two centres of narrative tension constituted in the relations between Bond and the villain and Bond and the girl are connected: figuratively speaking, their interconnection might be expressed by saying that Bond puts England

> back on top at the same time as he places 'the girl' back in place beneath him.
>
> (Bennett and Woollacott 1987: 140–1)

Bond and M also need the girl and the villain in order to certify their patriarchal roles. The villain allows M to be confirmed as good rather than evil, while the girl allows Bond to be confirmed as fully heterosexual.

While popular fiction in general, and spy fiction in particular, is based on the pleasures of repetition, Fleming's novels mimic the structures of pornographic literature in their mechanical reproduction of heterosexuality (Denning 1987: 102). As *Bond and Beyond* notes, James responds to the challenging enigma of 'the girl' by 'putting her back into place beneath him (both literally and metaphorically)' (Bennett and Woollacott 1987: 116); for Bond sex is always penetrative, he is always on top (literally and metaphorically), and it is always the missionary position. As in much pornography, in these novels, sex is always the same thing. It is also similarly commodified. Just as Bond fixes 'the girl' within the libidinal economy of heterosexuality, so the pleasure she represents is fixed within consumer culture by Bond's gaze. There is little explicit description of the sexual act in these novels, but much description of the visual pleasure of looking at 'the girl'. Her unusual and suggestive name – Pussy Galore, Honeychile Rider – merely marks her as a different brand in the stream of disposable consumer goods that pass through Bond's hands. 'The girl' is thus part of Bond's role as consumer and connoisseur, and his pleasure in looking invites the reader to join him in his voyeurism. The Bond girl is 'part of the "view"' (Denning 1987: 105), while Bond's role as spectator is part of his professional, phallic persona: 'For Bond's pornographic imagination is structured not so much around explicit depictions of sexual acts as around Bond as voyeur, Bond as spy' (Denning 1987: 110). In this sense, Bond is the ultimate male spy as he embodies and repeatedly demonstrates anxieties about heteromasculinity.

For the desiring subject, of course, one 'view' is never enough. Bond himself appears to acknowledge this problem at the end of *The Man with the Golden Gun*, where he muses on a happy convalescence with Mary Goodnight after his battle with Scaramanga: 'he knew, deep down, that love from Mary Goodnight, or from any other woman, was not enough for him. It would be like taking "a room with a view." For James Bond, the same view would always pall' (Fleming 1965: 191). This odd statement, while consistent with Bond's lifestyle, is indicative of the problem Bond constitutes as a heteromasculine figure. Bond refuses to contemplate homosexual desire – the narratives instead project homosexual characteristics and tendencies onto his opponents (Bold 2003: 175–6) – but he is unable to satisfy himself within heterosexual terms. Bond can never settle for domesticity in the form of a single lover and is thus condemned to endless repetition. Even novelty can pall because, for James Bond, 'the same view' is always the next Bond girl. The weary statement at the end of *The Man with the Golden Gun*

is a metaphor not only for the sexual cul-de-sac which Fleming's protagonist represents but also for the potential boredom of his readers. It is appropriate that *The Man with the Golden* Gun first appeared as a serial in *Playboy*, for it represents the jaded appetites to which many of that magazine's readers aspire (Panek 1981: 214). If Bond's many conquests ultimately represent 'the same view', then Bond himself is always the same and unable to change. On the one hand, as many critics have affirmed, Bond appears to be a constant in Fleming's novels. Confronted by marriage, impotence, madness and the loss of his identity, Bond suffers momentarily but is always ready for his next job (Bennett and Woollacott 1987: 125–6). He is unable to cope with an ordinary life of routine, cast into 'dog-days' depression by unwelcome inactivity. Even when, as at the beginning of *The Man with the Golden Gun*, Bond is clearly unfit for his job, M appears to correctly prescribe another assignment as a means of helping him recover from brainwashing by the KGB.

When we are offered a different view of Bond, however, the gaps and contradictions become apparent. *The Spy who Loved Me* is narrated by Vivienne Michel, a French Canadian who stumbles on an insurance scam and is rescued by Bond. When she first encounters Bond, she mistakes him for one of the gangsters who are holding her hostage in a remote motel in the Adirondacks:

> At first glance I inwardly groaned – God, it's another of them! He stood there so quiet and controlled and somehow with the same quality of deadliness as the others. And he wore that uniform that the films make one associate with gangsters – a dark-blue, belted raincoat and a soft black hat pulled rather far down. He was good-looking in a dark, rather cruel way and a scar showed whitely down his left cheek. I quickly put my hand up to hide my nakedness. Then he smiled and suddenly I thought I might be all right.
>
> (Fleming 1962: 108)

Vivienne ventriloquises the usual narrative voice of these fictions – a voice which is confidently aligned with Bond's world view, including his obsessive concern with clothing and accessories. Yet this odd novel is not a comfortable read. Divided into three sections, it addresses Vivienne's background in 'Me', the threatening appearance of the gangsters in 'Them' and Bond's heroic rescue in 'Him'. For the Bond series, this is something of an experimental, even modernist, work, allowing Fleming to replicate gangster slang in an unusual American setting. Fleming admired the American hard-boiled school of detective writing, particularly the work of Raymond Chandler (Chapman 1999: 2), and Vivienne even gives Bond a classic hard-boiled persona: 'No woman had ever held this man. None ever would. He was a solitary, a man who walked alone and kept his heart to himself' (Fleming 1962: 130). This novel also contains one of Bond's attempts to think about

his role as a spy. Aligning himself with the tradition of spying as the 'great game', Bond describes his work as 'a complicated game', but then quickly agrees with Vivienne that his profession is outdated, implying that he is less than convinced by his own role (Fleming 1962: 120). Significantly, this conversation takes place when Bond is forced to sit quietly, having been captured by Sluggsy Morant and Sol Horowitz, and the intelligence work he indiscreetly outlines to a complete stranger is that of Cold War politics. The peculiar juxtaposition in this novel between Vivienne's narration, the hard-boiled gangster formula and Bond's Cold War persona make for uncomfortable bedfellows. *The Spy who Loved Me*, with its experimental format and comparatively realist plot and setting, can be read as a sustained example of the tension apparent throughout the Bond series between the spy fiction of sensation – of action, sex and excitement – and a more realist spy fiction of meditation, frustration and doubt (Chapman 1999: 32). In these terms, Bond straddles the early twentieth-century certainties of Buchan's Hannay and the Cold War uncertainties of later fictions by writers such as Deighton and le Carré (Chapman 1999: 26–7).

Other moments where this tension breaks through include the opening passage of *Goldfinger* where Bond thinks about life and death in existentialist terms: 'It was part of his profession to kill people. He had never liked doing it and when he had to kill he did it as well as he knew how and forgot about it. … Regret was unprofessional – worse, it was death-watch beetle in the soul' (Fleming 1959: 7). It is also visible in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, where Bond, for once, appears to be about to have a life beyond his work. He marries Tracy (La Comtesse Teresa di Vicenzo) at the end of the novel, and she is almost instantly killed, thus fulfilling the traditional role of the good woman in thrillers – to provide a motive for the hero. While the conclusion of the novel puts Bond neatly back in his place in the patriarchal world of Fleming's fictions, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* also reveals a surprising aspect of Bond's character:

> I'm fed up with all these untidy, casual affairs that leave me with a bad conscience. I wouldn't mind having children. I've got no social background into which she would or wouldn't fit. We're two of a pair, really. Why not make it for always?
>
> Bond found his voice saying those words he had never said in his life before, never expected to say.
>
> 'Tracy. I love you. Will you marry me?'
>
> (Fleming 1963: 183)

The notion of a conscience about his sexual relationships, the desire for children and for long-term female companionship via marriage is a surprise to any reader familiar with the Bond character. It is as if Bond himself has suddenly realised the limitations of his character and attempts momentarily to break out of the endless cycle of repetition. The sensational Bond, who

thrives on constant action and sexual conquest, confronts the realist Bond, who admits to conscience and desires a future rather than a repetitively existential present.

It is no surprise when Tracy dies so soon after their marriage – a death almost invited by Bond's assertion that they have 'all the time in the world' (Fleming 1963: 258) – for Bond represents a fantasy of masculinity that does not allow for attachment to women. Even his impulsive decision to marry seems little more than a momentary desire to be ordinary. He barely knows Tracy, and their relationship is predicated on her submission to his orders; he tells her what to do and how much to drink. Bond's affection for her father, Marc-Ange, is far more palpable. As head of the Corsican Mafia, the Union Corse, Marc-Ange Draco should be one of Bond's enemies but is instantly recognised as a friend: 'The man had such a delightful face, so lit with humour and mischief and magnetism that, at least in the man's present role, Bond could no more have killed him than he could have killed, well, Tracy' (Fleming 1963: 37). The connection that Bond makes between Marc-Ange and Tracy is more than familial here. Marc-Ange is an unconventional father; his first action on meeting Bond is to bribe him to marry his daughter and rescue her from suicidal tendencies. This attempt to straighten his daughter out (in every sense) is highly symbolic, as it makes explicit the position of women in the Bond narratives – as gifts between men, rather than subjects in and of themselves. It also makes explicit the nature of Bond's relations with men. This is what Luce Irigaray terms homosexual relations, more commonly known as homosocial relations – an exchange which employs the body of a woman to express desire between men, sexual or otherwise (Irigaray 1981, Sedgwick 1991). As with Buchan's Hannay novels, the purpose of women in Fleming's fiction is to certify the hero's masculinity.

Doubtful professionals: le Carré's Alec Leamas

The success of Fleming's hero produced imitations in fiction and on film and television (see Cawelti and Rosenberg 1987: 151–2), but Bond also spawned his antithesis. While Fleming's fictions were regarded as 'dirty' in some quarters because of their pornographic tendencies, Deighton and le Carré offer a differently dirty evocation of espionage – a far muddier account of the profession. Their worlds are not the glamorous jet-set lifestyle of James Bond, nor the upper-class society of Richard Hannay. Instead, their heroes are seedy little men, who are professionals but not gentlemen. The British secret service in these fictions is a bureaucracy in decline, liable to inter-agency rivalries, betrayal, infiltration by enemy operatives and the human emotions of greed and ambition. Several critics have noted that Deighton and le Carré's secret service is peopled by white-collar workers, where the old school tie is often a cover for something more sinister (Cawelti and Rosenberg 1987, Denning 1987, Bradbury 1990).

Michael Hayes cites Kingsley Amis's comment on *The Spy who Came in from the Cold* (1963) as 'a farewell' to the subject and genre, and this early novel certainly contradicts the heroic exploits of Orczy's, Buchan's and Fleming's spy heroes (Hayes 1990: 116).

The Spy who Came in from the Cold begins with the death of an agent and a failed mission in East Berlin. There are no clear distinctions between le Carré's Circus and the enemy. The novel's protagonist and anti-hero, Alec Leamas, offers a direct contrast to Bond:

> His eyes were brown and small; Irish, some said. It was hard to place Leamas. If he were to walk into a London club the porter would certainly not mistake him for a member; in a Berlin night club they usually gave him the best table. He looked like a man who could make trouble, a man who looked after his money, a man who was not quite a gentleman.
>
> (le Carré 1963: 15)

Leamas is distanced from the public-school tradition of espionage; indeed, the description above questions his national identity – is he English at all? Like le Carré's other anti-hero, George Smiley, Leamas has a personal code of honour, but he is unable to put it into practice and finds himself at odds with the British secret service, used as their patsy to ensure the position of a Soviet double agent. Leamas's world view is shaped by a post-war political landscape that questions the certainties Blakeney, Hannay and Bond take for granted, to the extent that any nostalgic belief in Englishness becomes untenable (Bradbury 1990: 134–5). Like many of le Carré's protagonists, Leamas is a burnt-out professional, the opposite of Buchan's breathless amateur (Cawelti and Rosenberg 1987: 159). Leroy L. Panek astutely states that le Carré, 'uses the spy organization to examine not necessarily spies, but the way in which men serve institutions and institutions serve men' (Panek 1981: 236), inadvertently marking the gendered focus of the novels. As with class and national identity, however, Leamas offers a different masculinity to that of Hannay and Bond.

This is apparent in his relations with women in the novel. While establishing his cover identity working in a library, Leamas becomes involved with Liz Gold. Liz is the only character to call Leamas by his first name, and their intimacy leaves him professionally vulnerable. At the end of the novel, after he has been interrogated by the East German secret service and his target, Mundt, stands accused of being a double agent (which, in fact, he is), Liz is called upon to give evidence that discredits Leamas as a witness. Ultimately, both Liz and Leamas are shot while trying to cross the wall into West Berlin. Liz is not the glamorous 'girl' who appears in the Bond novels but an ordinary woman and a member of the British Communist Party who, through her encounter with Alec, is caught up in a dangerous game. Nevertheless, she fulfils a stereotypical function in the narrative, as a romantic

spinster who subsumes her own needs and desires to those of Leamas. This is a different representation of femininity and heterosexual relations from that in Fleming's work, but one which still places women within recognisable gender roles – in this case, woman as helpmeet and inadvertent trap.

Other female characters do not fare much better. In the process of being recruited as a KGB informer, Leamas is taken to a strip club in Soho where the scenario is, again, the antithesis of Bond's glamorous milieu:

> A girl performed a striptease, a young, drab girl with a dark bruise on her thigh. She had that pitiful, spindly nakedness which is embarrassing because it is not erotic; because it is artless and undesiring. She turned slowly, jerking sporadically with her arms and legs as if she only heard the music in snatches, and all the time she looked at them with the precocious interest of a child in adult company. The tempo of the music increased abruptly, and the girl responded like a dog to the whistle, scampering back and forth. Removing her brassière on the last note, she held it above her head, displaying her meagre body with its three tawdry patches of tinsel hanging from it like old Christmas decorations.
>
> They watched in silence, Leamas and Kiever.
>
> (le Carré 1963: 60)

Le Carré offers the reader a different view of espionage than that presented by Fleming, but the women in these narratives perform a structural function similar to that of Bond's girls: they are on the periphery of the action and, if not part of the scenery, then an obstacle to the hero's success. Just as Bond's desiring gaze fixes the girls he meets in the masculine economy – insuring his position as vendor/consumer rather than object of exchange – so Leamas and Kiever's dispassionate gaze reasserts that economy, albeit in a more self-conscious manner. There is a different mood here, but the power structures are the same. The lush description of Honeychile Rider's first appearance on the beach in *Dr No* is in sharp contrast to this strangely disembodied account of a young stripper, but it is still men who look and women who are the objects of their attention. The difference resides in a lack of confidence in the view; these fictions foreground the seedy desperation of both the viewers and the object of their gaze. Le Carré's fiction is premised on a postmodern society where hope is a nostalgic emotion.

If there is a difference between the masculinities of Fleming's and le Carré's male protagonists, it is that of emotional focus. Bond is largely emotionless, whereas le Carré's heroes are emotionally complex, often damaged and damaging to those around them. The dramas in these later spy fictions are also more clearly played out against a corporate background. The organisation of espionage is as much the subject of these narratives as the spy protagonist. Where Fleming's fiction offered 'comforting fantasies' about intelligence agencies as benign bureaucracies that license

secret desires for violence and sex (Cawelti and Rosenberg 1987: 136), le Carré's narratives are played out against a background of private and professional betrayal. Liz Gold's arrival in the East German courtroom makes this evident, as she is forced to betray Leamas and he is made to betray his affection for her (le Carré 1963: 162–98). For Leamas and Smiley, espionage entails a binding of their personal and professional lives, where their profession is not about combat and action but the slow accumulation of information (Denning 1987: 136–7). These later twentieth-century spy fictions map a society where agents' motives are always suspect and hopelessness is all pervasive. *The Looking-Glass War* marks out a new world of pointless operations in its account of misguided and mismanaged expeditions into Soviet territory:

> Avery was already familiar, during his short association with the Department, with the phenomenon of organic motivation; with operations which had no discernible genesis and no conclusion, which formed part of an unending pattern of activity until they ceased to have any further identity; with that progress of fruitless courtships which, in the aggregate, passed for an active love life.
>
> (le Carré 1965: 128)

This mindless bureaucracy, symbolically aligned in this passage with sexuality, represents a late-twentieth-century response to the successful agents of Buchan and Fleming. The Deighton and le Carré school of espionage is populated by failed operations and betrayed agents. Where Buchan and Fleming describe fantasies of individual agency, Deighton and le Carré indicate a lack of agency, describing anti-heroic little men locked within bureaucratic machines. The female spy protagonists discussed in the following chapters offer different views on twentieth-century society. It is notable, however, that as the twentieth century draws to a close and second-wave feminism begins to take effect, representations of female spies follow their male compatriots in their focus on the profession as a public and private arena of betrayal.

2 Femmes fatales and British grit

Women spies in the First and Second World Wars

This chapter examines representations of women spies from 1900 to the 1950s. This was an era of dramatic change in women's public life, particularly for the white middle classes of Europe and the USA. Suffrage campaigns on both sides of the Atlantic, together with the prospect of higher education and a professional career for some privileged women, were accompanied by shifting discourses of gender and modernity. My discussion begins with Mata Hari, the infamous spy executed by the French during the First World War, whose name shadows all subsequent accounts of women spies. Since Mata Hari, the female spy has most often been understood as a femme fatale. Her real story is a morality tale of a different kind, as it maps the changing roles of women in modern Europe. In this sense, she may be a feminist forerunner, but her myth is dependent on derogated accounts of gender, race and class. Above all, Mata Hari's mythology feeds into the stereotype of the villainess. William Le Queux's novel *The Temptress* (1919) depicts a French femme fatale who brings disaster with her fiendish plans to seduce and murder any who get in her way. Like Buchan's Hilda Von Einem, she exhibits no motivation other than desire for wealth and lack of inhibition. Finally unmasked, she commits suicide with an overdose of morphine, and the remaining characters are married off. Lord Hugh Trethowen, the central protagonist and victim closes the novel: 'I feel assured we shall now be happy and contented. Let us look only to a bright and prosperous future, and let us forget forever the grim shadow that fell upon us, the shadow of THE TEMPTRESS' (Le Queux 1919: 250).

Le Queux's novel was published two years after Mata Hari's execution and employs that 'shadow' of continental femininity to naturalise Trethowen's aristocracy, wealth and honour, just as Mata Hari's prosecutors mobilised gender and racial stereotypes to represent her as the source of France's troubles. Mata Hari fed into projections, fears and anxieties regarding women and modernity that emerged in the late nineteenth century (Huyssen 1986: 52). This archetypal spy, like other femmes fatales, is thus 'not the subject of feminism, but a symptom of male fears about feminism' (Doane 1991: 2–3). Mata Hari is complemented by the emergent figure of the good woman spy. The propaganda surrounding Edith Cavell, a British

agent executed during the German occupation of Belgium, together with later films such as *Nurse Edith Cavell* (Herbert Wilcox, 1939), depict women spies who are pure, white and feminine. In the early twentieth century, the female spy thus represents a modern femininity which is either eroticised and demonised as exotic or fetishised as the epitome of pure British womanhood. As the century proceeds, however, these binaries disintegrate, and a more complex account of the woman spy begins to appear on film.

Mata Hari (1876–1917): female spy as femme fatale

The femme fatale, like her sister the New Woman, shadows nineteenth-century *fin-de-siècle* shifts in gender roles. The suffrage movements in Britain and America, together with legislative changes in marital property law and the development of university education for some privileged women, produced the distinctly middle-class phenomenon of the New Woman (Richardson 2004: 242–3). The femme fatale was less distinct in her class identity, often moving up the social scale through her immoral activities. Like the cities she inhabited, the modern femme fatale presented a fluid identity which combined new technologies and 'primitive' cultures:

> If, as Christine Buci-Glucksmann points out, the archaeology of modernity is 'haunted by the feminine,' the femme fatale is one of its most persistent incarnations. She is associated with the styles of Decadence, Symbolism, and Art Nouveau as well as with the attention to decoration and excessive detail linked to a persistent and popular Orientalism (in the constant return, for instance, to the figures of Salome and Cleopatra). Her appearance marks the confluence of modernity, urbanization, Freudian psychoanalysis and new technologies of production and reproduction (photography, the cinema), born of the Industrial Revolution.
>
> (Doane 1991: 1)

Although the focus in this chapter is femininity, the assertions made in the preceding chapter regarding masculinity continue to resonate; if the femme fatale represents a projection of fears around masculinity, then she, with the New Woman, is the opposite number of the Newbolt man. Rebecca Stott, in her examination of the late Victorian femme fatale, maps anxieties apparent in late-nineteenth-century British imperialism, as opposed to the more confident colonialism of the early Victorians. This produced fictions about external threats to the nation, as evident in Orczy's *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, Buchan's Hannay series and boys' magazine stories (Stott 1992: 10–11). Yet, where such fear of the Other focused on a woman, it became doubly virulent in its condemnation of sexualised femininity and exoticism.

Born in 1876 into a middle-class Dutch family, Margaretha Geertruida Zelle, or Mata Hari, is emblematic of the opportunities and dangers that

fin-de-siècle Europe offered women. Margaretha arrived in Paris in 1904, following a disastrous marriage to Rudolph MacLeod, a Dutch colonial army captain twenty-one years her senior whom she met through a newspaper advertisement. Their son had been murdered by his Malay nurse in Sumatra, in revenge for disciplinary action MacLeod carried out against one of his own soldiers, and Rudolph had taken their daughter, leaving Margaretha penniless. By the time she began her dancing career, Margaretha was already a femme fatale, as a woman whose sexuality was not confined to marriage and as a divorcée who did not fulfil the maternal ideal. Whereas the fictional femme fatale is rarely given a history, one does not have to read too deeply into accounts of Margaretha's early life to imagine its effect. Her mother died when she was fourteen, following a nine-month separation from her father, leaving Margaretha in the care of her godfather (Wheelwright 1992: 8–30). Margaretha was, thus, already modern in her experience of trauma, familial separation and migration.

Margaretha's response to Rudolf's advertisement, despite its unhappy outcome, indicates her desire for activity rather than the passivity assigned to respectable middle-class women in this period (Dijkstra 1986: 26). This active role marks her out as not 'proper', not 'feminine'; in her wifely behaviour as in her subsequent career, she exceeded the bounds of her gender, class and race. Rita Felski notes the different models of modernity offered by Marshall Berman and Gail Finney, the former arguing for a masculine modernity, focusing on the importance of Faust, Marx and Baudelaire, and the latter arguing for the 'imaginative centrality of female psychology and sexuality to representations of modernity in the European *fin de siècle*,' citing Hedda Gabler, Salomé and Lulu (Felski 1995: 2–3). Margaretha as Mata Hari does not fit either model. Like the 'hysterics' who fascinated Charcot and Freud, Mata Hari performed femininity for a range of spectators (Showalter 1985: 145–64). Her final audience, the prosecution at her trial in Paris in July 1917, imagined her as the threat of unconfined femininity – worse, a woman who allegedly engaged in the masculine sphere of international intelligence. In these terms, Mata Hari offers a transgender account of modernity, slipping between masculine and feminine, public and private, self and other, Occident and Orient.[1]

During their marriage, the MacLeods had lived in Sumatra and Java. This brief encounter with the East was later mined for Mata Hari's public persona. After her marriage, Margaretha headed for Paris, initially existing on the margins of respectable society. The Paris of 1904 was the modern metropolis par excellence (Wilson 1991: 47–64). A first attempt to be an artist's model sent her back to Holland, but she returned and, with the help of a French diplomat whom she had met at The Hague, launched herself in 1905 as a dancer in the Parisian salons (Wheelwright 1992: 13). Mata Hari placed herself beyond respectable middle-class femininity by entering a profession allied to that of the courtesan. Rita Felski notes the mythic position of the middle-class woman as angel of the house: 'woman

became a symbol of nonalienated, and hence nonmodern, identity' (1995: 18). In real terms, this bore little relation to an urban environment where many women were moving into modern forms of industrial labour (Wilson 1991: 49). The streetwalker epitomised such contradictions, combining commodification, sexuality and contamination (Felski 1995: 19). Such women exemplified the dangers and desires of the modern cities, and Mata Hari, like the prostitute, was a 'figure of public pleasure', her artificiality visible in her use of veils, exotic make-up and props (Baudelaire, cited in Felski 1995: 19).

Mata Hari's persona fed into contemporary fascination with the Orient as a feminised and decadent territory where 'nature' in all its savagery still reigned (Wheelwright 1992: 14). This rich terrain was mined by other dancers of the period, such as Maud Allan, in her performances as Salomé (Showalter 1990: 144–68, Bentley 2002). The perceived threat of the new dancers – whose number included Isadora Duncan – was rooted in their implicit and provocative questioning of the absolute separation between public and private life, as many of them performed both in theatres and in private salons. They also raised difficult questions about what their performances meant to different viewers:

> Male viewers might appreciate their form and applaud the rebellion of their naked limbs and fluid movements, but the men were disturbed when their wives or daughters imitated these steps. The dancer's threat to the 'sanctity of the fireside' offered upper-class ladies the fantasy of release from stifling social constraints.
>
> (Wheelwright 1992: 23)

For many women, Oriental performances, literature and fashions were emblematic of an escape from modern constraints into a world of premodern pleasures and unconfined eroticism (Felski 1995: 115–41, Fawcett 2004). Yet, this fantasy of an elsewhere beyond the modern worked to consolidate the 'hegemonic centrality of the European perspective that it simultaneously seeks to escape' (Felski 1995: 141). It also played to dominant understandings of race and gender. Male members of Mata Hari's audiences could view her performances as evidence of Woman's innate atavism: 'turn-of-the-century men adored the stage spectacle of a woman who lapsed into self-induced fits of orgiastic transport – and all in the name of art. What could be more intriguing than to watch a woman, safely isolated from the audience, revert publicly to the "savage" source of her being?' (Dijkstra 1986: 246).

Fin-de-siècle discourses of gender, sexuality and race, thus, gestured towards liberation but also served to reinforce a colonial politics that aligned women and non-Europeans as regressive and aberrant. Women were seen as more closely related to the mysterious East, particularly when that Orientalised version of the Other was perceived as harbouring some ancient

thrilling secret (Stott 1992: 34). The fascination of *fin-de-siècle* scientists and sexologists with the mystery of women's sexuality is thus aligned with the fascination of imperial powers with their colonial spoils (Stott 1992: 35–6). Mata Hari embodied such Orientalist fantasies in her fictitious Eastern character and performances, which were loosely based on Margaretha's memories of life in the Dutch East Indies.

After early successes, Margaretha became fully absorbed in her new identity, outdoing rivals in her determination to continue the illusion beyond the stage door (Wheelwright 1992: 17–18; 27–8, Proctor 2003: 127). In interviews, she created stories about her background, the sources of her inspiration and the character of the Oriental woman, fascinating audiences in Paris, Berlin and Monte Carlo. Once the novelty had worn thin and Margaretha began to get older, however, her performances as Mata Hari became increasingly problematic, but that persona was difficult to replace. Despite forays into Spanish dance and other forms, Margaretha was unable to find an equally profitable act. Her role as a courtesan was a logical sideline. As a woman working in an unstable profession, Margaretha was practical about the financial realities of her situation, often attracting older men who could become her patrons. This was another aspect of her life that would play into the hands of her accusers; the seductive spy-courtesan was a potent myth – and one that Margaretha herself perhaps believed (Wheelwright 1992: 28–39, Proctor 2003: 124–5). By 1913, Mata Hari was already past her peak and worried by the resurgence of interest in rivals such as Isadora Duncan. While the 'divine Isadora' played the grand theatres, Mata Hari was consigned to a 'café-*chantant*-cinema' in Palermo, where she performed in front of a rolling film on a bill that included a performing dog (Wheelwright 1992: 38).

Mata Hari was, literally and metaphorically, out of place as the war began, stuck in Berlin, waiting for her show at the Metropol to commence. Struggling to get back to Paris, already accused of being a spy, she must have also been struggling to come to terms with the speed at which her fortunes had changed (Wheelwright 1992: 39–41). In a Europe already anxious about the New Woman and changing gender roles, the First World War brought scrutiny of any individual or group perceived as threatening the status quo (Ledger 1997). The woman as temptress, as carrier of sexual diseases and as a mother of fatherless children was a particular concern. New acts were introduced in Britain and France to regulate women's movements and sexual conduct; few voices raised the issue of men's role in sexual activity (Grayzel 1999: 121–56). Even before the war, anti-feminist sentiments were circulating in popular literature and high culture. Michelle Perrot cites writers such as François Mauriac and André Breton: 'These men denounced the social and domestic power of women (as did Georges Deherme in *Le pouvoir social des femmes*, 1912) – perceived as an occult, diffuse and secret power for which men are mere playthings' (Perrot 1987: 59). In the popular imagination, female spies embodied such feminine

power, crossing the line between domestic and public spheres. Like the prostitute, the woman spy laboured in public and private arenas, making her doubly effective but also doubly dangerous (Proctor 2003: 124). The war made Mata Hari's exotic image a liability, and it was only a matter of time before she was charged.[2] Remaining quietly in Holland for a year, she missed her Parisian life. Attempts to revive her career on the Dutch stage faltered, and Mata Hari returned to Paris in 1915, travelling via England and Spain in order to gain access. In returning to France, she was placing herself in extreme danger. As a woman and as a public figure, Mata Hari presented a disturbingly mobile femininity. Her trial became an attempt to fix that mobility within the regime of French sexual and imperial relations. It was not important what Mata Hari had actually done but, rather, what she represented; the profitable image that Margaretha had created became her worst enemy and, ultimately, the cause of her death (Wheelwright 1992: 60). Mata Hari is, consequently, not only a femme fatale, fixed within the terms of the period's sexual politics but also an archetypal woman spy, existing in the half-light of fact and fiction.

Arrested in her hotel room on 13 February 1917, Mata Hari was prosecuted by Captain Pierre Bouchardon, acting on information provided by Georges Ladoux, whom she knew as her contact in the *Deuxième Bureau*, French military intelligence. Ladoux had recruited Mata Hari as an agent at their first meeting in August 1916. Mata Hari sought Ladoux's help in getting a travel pass to visit her lover, and, in the course of the meeting, he suggested that she could work for French interests, despite his alleged suspicion that she was already a German agent (Wheelwright 1992: 51–2). The assignments Mata Hari conducted between this meeting and her arrest were neither discreet nor successful; she had little idea of how to go about being a spy, beyond the dramatic images rendered in popular fiction and theatre of the time (Wheelwright 1992: 50–64). Wheelwright argues that Ladoux used the Mata Hari case to consolidate his position as the wartime head of French counter-intelligence, and Bouchardon was a willing aide in this, regarding Mata Hari as a 'savage' and a 'negress'. In her abject state as an exposed traitor and imprisoned woman, Bouchardon appears to have projected onto Mata Hari 'the underside of the racist "Oriental" fantasy' (Wheelwright 1992: 77). As Tammy Proctor observes, Mata Hari fitted the stereotype of the female spy and filled a convenient role as scapegoat: 'Mata Hari died not for her great success as a master spy but because she was a symbol of the contagion of decadence and treason that seemed to be undermining France, especially in 1917, when widespread mutinies infected the French armies at the front' (Proctor 2003: 126).

In addition to representing all that was rotten within French culture, Mata Hari also served as a symbolic Other to French European identity. She was implicitly condemned for being a woman whose nationality was not easily defined and as a woman whose sexuality had run beyond the bounds of bourgeois respectability:

> 'Neither the type, nor the character, nor her culture, nor her coloured skin, nor her mentality – nothing of her belongs to our latitudes,' commented Inspector Alfred Morain, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner of Paris. 'She had something of the primitive savage about her and at the same time something refined – sacerdotal.'
>
> (Wheelwright 1992: 84–5)

Morain, like Bouchardon, was aware that Mata Hari's Oriental persona was an invention, yet her abject role as prisoner and traitor appeared to entail identification with racist forms of Otherness. This was aided, for such commentators, by their recognition that Mata Hari was no longer young. Bouchardon was disgusted by the deterioration in her appearance, as the grey began to show through her dyed black hair. He equated this appearance with her alleged racial difference and inferiority, as did the prison doctor, Dr Bizard. In the latter's description of her ambivalent appearance, he alleges that she is 'not at all feminine' (Wheelwright 1992: 85). Such accounts clearly made it easier for her prosecutors to convince themselves that Mata Hari was not only guilty but also something less than human. Her sentence to death by firing squad on 15 October 1917 continues to be contested. Most biographical accounts now acknowledge that the French had little or no evidence on which to convict her and that some evidence was probably invented to support the prosecution's case.

Mata Hari in Hollywood

The fictions perpetuated first by Mata Hari and then by her prosecution have proved resilient through her many mythic rebirths across Western culture.[3] It is no coincidence that the rise of the femme fatale mirrors that of new technologies of mass communication – in particular, the prevalence of photography and cinema (Doane 1991: 1). Mata Hari employed tinted photographic postcards as part of her publicity material, and the images of Mata Hari as an Oriental beauty in jewelled headdress and breastplates have informed subsequent fashion and films. Oriental stylings are to the fore in cinematic accounts of Mata Hari, but they are invariably inflected by contemporary concerns. The most well known Hollywood version is Greta Garbo's *Mata Hari* (George Fitzmaurice, 1931). The film was one of Garbo's early talking roles. *Anna Christie* (Clarence Brown, 1930) was the first, with a German-language version made in the same year, directed by Jacques Feyder and completely recast apart from Garbo. When the talkies arrived, the Hollywood studios were keen to capitalise on foreign stars' ability to perform in English and foreign-language versions of the same film (Berry 2000: 117). Garbo's multilingual skill suited the star persona fostered by MGM; she was one of a number of non-domestic stars marketed as an exotic product:

> The European stars Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich and Lil Dagover were … 'Orientalized' in many films and described as embodying a 'pale exoticism.' The casting of Euramerican actors in 'ethnic' roles was commonplace in Hollywood, and the process of transforming them via elaborate character-makeup techniques was often discussed and illustrated in magazines.
>
> (Berry 2000: 111)

Such trans-racial performances were often cited as evidence of actors' versatility, but the cross-dressing was only one way; 'ethnic' actors rarely played 'white' roles (Berry 2000: 111). Hollywood studios thus engaged in a raced doublespeak in which ethnicity was free-floating *and* carefully policed.

Garbo's star persona tapped into similar discourses to those that had surrounded Mata Hari as a New Woman and through her identification with the aesthetic of art deco. Garbo's roles on screen and in her Hollywood publicity depicted her as an avatar of unconventional and independent femininity; one commentator even described her as 'an outgrowth of modernity' (Biery, cited in Fischer 2002). Garbo's version of the modern woman lent itself to the art-deco style of the studio era. The deco style was an international aesthetic in furnishings, fashion and jewellery popular between 1910 and 1935. Its name came from an abbreviation of the Paris International Exposition of Decorative and Industrial Modern Arts of 1925, and it epitomised modernity in its fascination with advanced mass-production techniques and synthetic materials, together with 'ancient' styles and exotic motifs (Fischer 2002). Art deco had a significant influence on Hollywood, particularly art directors such as Cedric Gibbons and costume designers such as Adrian; both worked at MGM with Garbo. Several of Garbo's films explicitly reference deco style and relate her independent, sensual persona to that of the New Woman, none more so than *Mata Hari* (Fischer 2002).

From the 'Oriental' music that accompanies the title sequence to the sumptuous costumes and sets, Mata Hari is fetishised as an exotic woman. The star persona of Garbo, like the deco style, exemplifies the interchangeability of ethnic identities, as this Mata Hari expands the boundaries of the Orient to Eastern Europe, several of the costumes evoking a Russian or Cossack style. Orientalism is, thus, mobilised to offer a potent fantasy of liberation from modern constraints, just as it had earlier been deployed to market consumer goods (Berry 2000: 133, Fawcett 2004). Garbo, performing as Mata Hari in costumes designed by Adrian, was part of an Orientalist fashion during the 1930s which 'also signified stylistic modernity' (Berry 2000: 136). Three years later, Garbo starred in *The Painted Veil* (Richard Boleslawski, 1934), in which Chinese-style costumes indicate her modern sophistication (Berry 2000: 137). Discursive shifts regarding the Orient, femininity and modernity are, thus, made evident in these popular products. Mata Hari's famous dancing is barely visible in the Hollywood film – the critic Mary Cass Canfield wrote in her 'Letter to Garbo' in

Theatre Arts Monthly that she, 'walked through it like some superior and unperturbed mannequin' (Bainbridge 1955: 161). Just as the role was rife with contradictions regarding ethnicity – a Swede playing a Dutch woman pretending to be a Javanese dancer – so the role contradicted Garbo's star persona. Mata Hari's dance of Eastern passion became what *Variety* called 'a polite cooch', in a brief scene where Garbo moves slowly round a huge statue of Shiva (Paris 1995: 213). This desultory performance did nothing to dent the film's success – 'Its windfall $879,000 profit for MGM was larger than that of all but one of the films she ever made' (Paris 1995: 213) – and endorsed the idea that Garbo was more potent as a static rather than a moving image, inviting the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of the Hollywood goddess (Mulvey 1989: 19).

Mata Hari's East Indian Orientalism is commuted to Eastern European Orientalism in the Garbo film to fit with the persona of the star and avoid the taint of miscegenation, just as the complexities surrounding Mata Hari's conviction were elided and made secure.[4] Yet, as with any stereotype, contradictory aspects of Garbo-as-Mata-Hari cannot be fully contained. With the advent of talking pictures, Hollywood found itself serving at least three different audiences: the home market, which enjoyed the 'spice' of exoticism; the newly immigrant Americans (mainly Jewish, Italian and Eastern European

Figure 2.1 Greta Garbo and Ramon Navarro in *Mata Hari* (dir. George Fitzmaurice, 1931).

migrants); and the global audience outside the States (Berry 2000: 117). In such a polyphonic context, images, narratives and characters are liable to elicit a variety of responses despite the studios' attempts to control their product by producing films geared to particular markets, such as the German-language version of *Anna Christie*. Barry Paris notes that the German Anna is 'more relaxed, less declamatory – and a heavier smoker' (Paris 1995: 194). The studios' desire to promote their films across a range of markets also made some of their product inadvertently more liberal than the race politics of 1930s America in which they were produced (Berry 2000: 117). It allowed for a complex intersection of discourses regarding race and gender to appear on screen in films such as *Mata Hari*.

The contradictory discourses surrounding Mata Hari continue to resonate in later representations of her, albeit transformed to fit new contexts. Just as Mata Hari constituted an Orientalism which fed into the desires and fears of her audiences (and later her interrogators), so Garbo's Mata Hari fed into the desires and fears of audiences in the 1930s. Mata Hari continues to represent an ambivalent encounter between white and non-white; West and East; modern and ancient. Mata Hari as a spy is similarly equivocal: professional and amateur, masculine and feminine, active and passive. Garbo's Mata Hari is unequivocally guilty; as the foreword to the action asserts, 'In 1917, war-ridden France dealt summarily with traitors and spies.' She is an archetypal femme fatale who appears to betray France for little reason other than pure evil; there is a symbolic sequence where, in the process of seduction, Mata Hari insists that a lamp on a house shrine to the Madonna is extinguished.[5] Yet, the film also represents her as a sympathetic figure, a woman caught because of her love for the heroic Alexei (Ramon Navarro). *Mata Hari* was a vehicle for the two stars, the narrative played for melodrama. There is no doubt in this film that Mata Hari is anything but a bad woman redeemed by the love of a good man. The contradictions and complexities of the historical Mata Hari are subsumed in her image so that the questions she raised are answered by the drama of her appearance. Just as the face of Garbo was enshrined on celluloid as a blank page which offers everything and nothing to its reader, so Mata Hari has become a stereotype onto whose surface an audience can project their fears and desires.[6] The resilience of this image indicates Western culture's continuing fascination with the exotic and, through Mata Hari's mythic heritage, a nostalgic past in which the East, the Other and femininity remain mysterious territories.[7]

The good spy: Edith Cavell (1865–1915)

While Mata Hari has come to represent the female spy as femme fatale, she is historically complemented by Edith Cavell. Cavell established the role of the good female spy, primarily because she worked for the right side but also because she was understood as a secular saint and martyr through her

role as a nurse rather than as a spy. Despite their distinct differences within the popular imagination, both Mata Hari and Edith Cavell were necessarily engaged in contradictory discourses surrounding women and war work during the First World War. Sharon Ouditt describes the Voluntary Aid Detachment as providing a place in which middle-class English women could take an active role in war work; work which was understood as a natural extension of the feminine predilection for nurture: 'This form of public recognition was dependent on a feminine piety that implied deference to masculinity, militarism and the patriarchal nation state' (Ouditt 1994: 7). Women who took on caring roles during the war were thus understood in terms of a conventional bourgeois femininity. Women who stepped outside such roles were regarded with some horror. The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps of the British Army, for example, was greeted upon establishment in 1917, by letters to the papers decrying the unnaturally militaristic tendencies of its officers. Such evident discomfort was riddled with overt or implicit concerns about the connections between any change in women's roles and the issue of the franchise – a debate that had effectively been halted at the outbreak of war – and by the not unconnected question of deviant sexuality. The pre-war association of feminism with lesbianism continued to effect discussion of women's roles:

> Women who displayed 'symptoms' of lesbianism (an inclination to dress up in masculine clothes, to drill, and to shoot) were considered not only distasteful but abnormal and in need of medical help. Any attacks on them were thus fully justified. Women in military organisations were a target for those who held such views, and it was not uncommon during the First World War for women who joined the military services to be regarded as peculiar at least, if not downright immoral.
>
> (Gould 1987: 121)

Yet women had been active in intelligence long before the war began, and became key during the First World War – indeed, their diligent and poorly paid work kept the British intelligence services going (Proctor 2003: 27). In roles ranging from the Girl Guides employed as messengers in MI5 to the employment of more than 3,500 women by MI9, the Postal Censorship Branch, women were central to the daily functioning of British intelligence services (Proctor 2003: 53–73). Even here, however, there was ambivalence about women's work. While women offered a plentiful, cheap and obedient workforce, the organisations that employed them began to develop a gendered understanding of agents in the field as opposed to intelligence-gathering: 'Espionage was generally referred to as domestic, hidden, and sneaky – in other words, it was feminine. Intelligence, on the other hand, was professional, bureaucratic, and officially secret – or masculine in its endeavours' (Proctor 2003: 30). This was also an attempt to draw a moral distinction between the imagined enemy agents who threatened Britain from

within before and during the First World War and the developing secret services established by the British Government. The artificial distinction between feminine and masculine roles bears no relation to the numbers of women employed within the bureaucracy of intelligence gathering.[8]

The imaginary distinction between the bad, feminine spy and the good, masculine intelligence officer is visible in the opposing figures of Mata Hari and Edith Cavell. Like Mata Hari, Edith Cavell's public image owed much to popular mythology. In their examination of women spies in fiction of the First World War, Craig and Cadogan note that, like Mata Hari, Edith Cavell, 'seems to be as much the end result of late Victorian and Edwardian fictional projections as an influence on the espionage stories that came after her' (Craig and Cadogan 1981: 54). Both women are, thus, framed by discourses that preceded and succeeded them. During the First World War, women played key roles not only in British intelligence but also in the intelligence networks in occupied countries. The *La Dame Blanche* network in Belgium was a militarised espionage group for both men and women – albeit dropping the term 'spy' in favour of 'agent' or 'soldier' (Proctor 2003: 78–9). *La Dame Blanche* was remarkably egalitarian, basing its rankings on service to the organisation rather than an individual's age, class or gender and often including whole families within its ranks (Proctor 2003: 91–2). After the war, however, the women of *La Dame Blanche* were largely forgotten, in part because of fluctuating definitions of wartime activities, 'soldiers' and the home front. Proctor asserts that for the women of *La Dame Blanche*, their homes were in occupied territory so that the distinction between the battlefield and the domestic arena was not absolute: 'The women of *La Dame Blanche* had no concept of a home front because their own homes became fronts when their nations were occupied' (Proctor 2003: 98). Once the war was over, such women were rapidly erased from public memory in favour of more sensational images of female spies – namely, Mata Hari and Edith Cavell. In this manner, the contradictions evident in wartime femininity were effaced, just as distinctions between the battlefield and the domestic arena were re-established after the war.

Cavell was a middle-class Englishwoman who grew up in East Anglia and trained as a nurse. In 1907, she moved to Brussels to establish a nursing school, having already worked as an instructor in Britain. She was forty-eight when war broke out in August 1914 – ten years older than Mata Hari and far more successful as an agent of the Allied resistance in occupied Belgium. She was not really a spy as such; Cavell's resistance work consisted not of gathering information or passing on secrets but of organising an escape network for Allied soldiers (Proctor 2003: 100–1). The humanitarian aspect of her work fitted well with public perceptions of the nursing profession, so that when she was caught, arrested and imprisoned in August 1915, she was a martyr-in-waiting. Unlike Mata Hari, Edith Cavell freely admitted her role in hiding and transporting Allied soldiers out of Belgium. She was tried with thirty-five other prisoners, found guilty and executed on

12 October 1915. Philippe Baucq, a Belgian architect who helped to plan and organise the escape routes, was executed with her. Comtesse Jean de Belleville, Louise Thuliez and Louis Severin had their death sentences commuted following appeals on their behalf (Proctor 2003: 102).

The story of Cavell's life and death was immediately employed in a propaganda war between Germany and the Allies. While the Germans sought to use Cavell's fate as a warning to other activists in occupied territories, the public outcry in several countries, particularly the USA and Canada, quickly produced a backlash from the Allies that began the reconstruction of Cavell as passive victim rather than active agent (Proctor 2003: 102–3). Cavell's death inspired a range of patriotic images on postcards distributed as propaganda by the Allies; they present a marked contrast to the publicity postcards promoting Mata Hari's exotic image. Cavell is almost exclusively depicted clothed in white and either nursing soldiers or lying supine as a monstrous German shoots her. A series of six cards published in 1915 depicts her 'story' from 'Miss Cavell as a nurse' through to the memorial in Brussels, while the Italian artist Tito Corbella designed an allegorical series which pits Cavell against 'Kultur' and the 'Kaiser'.[9] Cavell is described as a 'martyr' or 'victim' in the captions for such images, reiterating the visual depiction. Cavell was represented as madonna in opposition to Mata Hari's archetypal whore and femme fatale. This binary understanding of the two women is endorsed by one of Cavell's colleagues. Louise Thuliez, who escaped execution for life imprisonment, commented in her 1934 autobiography:

> In trying to defend themselves the Germans have pushed their insolence so far as to compare Edith Cavell to Mata Hari. Edith Cavell had worked for her country, consecrating to this noble task all her career of faith and sacrifice. Mata Hari, thinking only of her personal charms, had sold herself to the highest bidder. While Edith Cavell, at the bedside of the wounded men she was tending, wept over the sufferings of her fellow-countrymen, Mata Hari in the luxury of palaces betrayed indiscriminately all who approached her. Which of these two women deserves to be called a 'spy'?
>
> (Thuliez, cited in Wheelwright 1992: 120)

If nothing else, this statement, written nearly two decades after the deaths of Cavell and Mata Hari, denotes the extent to which both women have entered the realm of mythology. They have exceeded the limits of memory and been rewritten as types instead of individuals. While Mata Hari is the villainous traitor, femme fatale and spy, Cavell is the innocent, virginal patriot. Whereas her prosecutors saw Mata Hari as 'primitive' and 'savage', Cavell has become whiter than white – representing a femininity symbolic of Great Britain's 'civilisation'. The discourses surrounding both women are written across stereotypes of gender and of race, making them complicit with debates about racial purity and difference during the first half of the

twentieth century (see Bergman 2004, Richardson 2004). Rather than examining the work of women in intelligence, post-war accounts of espionage on the Allied front tended to ignore women's activities as spies or to forget them altogether: 'Descriptions of spy-martyrs usually emphasized the moral character, generosity, patriotism, and naïve spirit of the women who died for their nations. Why are these women celebrated more than the female agents who survived the war without declaration or capture?' (Proctor 2003: 100). Cavell's white garb in images contemporary with her death continued to resonate as she was recreated on celluloid.

Cavell on film

Such a simplified understanding of Cavell is evident in *Nurse Edith Cavell* (Herbert Wilcox, 1939). Wilcox had already produced a silent version of the Cavell story, *Dawn* (1928), starring Sybil Thorndike, which was censored by Austen Chamberlain, then Foreign Minister of the Conservative Government, as likely to damage British relations with Germany but nevertheless exhibited with the approval of the London County Council (Wilcox 1967: 73–4, 79–83). The talking version of Cavell's story was no less controversial. Released as the Second World War began, the patriotic iconography of Cavell's life was replayed for British and American audiences in this film – a reminder to the former of what was being fought for, and to the latter of what was at stake in the battle. The director/producer Herbert Wilcox claimed in his autobiography that it was 'the first British-Hollywood co-production' but also stated that the film led to accusations of propaganda: 'There was a broadside of criticism alleging breach of the Neutrality Code; but *Nurse Cavell* weathered the storm and was accepted as a film of first-class entertainment' (Wilcox 1967: 124). Indeed, its star and Wilcox's later wife Anna Neagle was nominated for a Best Actress Oscar for her performance. While Wilcox and Neagle were not official propagandists, it is hard to miss the ideological thrust of their work. Herbert Wilcox directed Neagle in thirty-two films, often in historical roles with national resonance, such as Queen Victoria, Florence Nightingale and Amy Johnson (Dolan 2000: 26). Contemporary critics saw Neagle as 'as much a part of Britain as Dover's white cliffs' (Street 1997: 124), and that appeal was to the fore in *Nurse Edith Cavell*:

> Her screen roles ... celebrated individual stoicism in the face of adversity as a means of communicating the overall liberal-conservative political ideology of the Wilcox-Neagle films. Neagle epitomised middle-class values of thrift, hard work, stoicism and feminine modesty. Just as the White Cliffs of Dover are associated with Britain's self-consciousness as an island, vulnerable to foreign invasion, Neagle also represented a resolutely British, non-European and white identity.
>
> (Street 1997: 126)

Questions of class and conflict are repressed in these films in favour of a mythologised English stoicism. This elision is evident in *Nurse Edith Cavell* where Cavell mixes happily with the soldiers she rescues, most notably a chirpy cockney, and reminisces with one of the men she is treating about cricket and Norwich. There are no apparent divisions between this middle-class woman and the men she tends and commands.

In this biopic, Neagle as Cavell takes on a saintly aura, inspired to set up the escape route while reading the Bible in her bed. Even captured, imprisoned and informed of her fate, Cavell is a model of otherworldly calm, saying, 'I thank God for these few quiet weeks … This time of rest has been a great mercy.' At times, Cavell's stoicism appears trance-like as she floats through her scenes, dressed throughout in her nurse's uniform. Anna Neagle's performance in *Nurse Edith Cavell* reiterates her cinematic persona through costume, physical posture and acting style. Marcia Landy describes her performance in *Victoria the Great* (Herbert Wilcox, 1937):

> The actress looks and behaves according to preconceptions and myths of 1930s female gentility. Her demeanor, not unlike that of the other British female stars of the era, such as Deborah Kerr and Phyllis Calvert, is restrained. Her status is defined by rather stiff body movements, a walk that is measured, giving her the impression of gliding, and gestures and looks that are imperious. Her expensive costumes are fashionable but decorous, unlike the sexually provocative costumes of the 1940s Gainsborough melodramas. Her image is matronly. … The men in the film are dwarfed by her presence. As actress and as character, she monopolises the screen.
>
> (Landy 1991: 69)

While Edith Cavell is a different role to Queen Victoria, Neagle's performance draws upon a similar range of reference. Both films, released in 1937 and 1939, are examples of the roles that made Neagle a transatlantic star during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. The film foregrounds her professional identity as a nurse, prefacing the narrative with a tribute to Cavell's fortitude and that of her profession:

> This is a tale, based on fact, of heroic life and a conflict of loyalties, told in reverence and without bitterness. … Nursing is a dedication to mercy and healing. War is a dedication to brutal force. Neither admits distinction of race or person. Each is the uncompromising foe of the other.

Thus, even in the opening titles, Cavell's role as an active agent of resistance in occupied territory is obscured in favour of a more passive representation of saintly femininity. Cavell is made to represent the ultimate nurse-mother-virgin, inhuman in her heroic fortitude. While *Nurse Edith*

Cavell does show the escape route through Belgium as a group effort, the other women are merely supporting characters, often given comedic or pathetic roles. Their main function is to be displayed as victims of an oppressive German military and thus to remind audiences of the moral distinction between the Allies and the enemy. In this way, the film offers a depiction of strong women but curtails their radical potential by emphasising the individual hero rather than a collective enterprise. Richard Dyer writes how such whiter-than-white women were lit in photographs and films; the use of lighting effects and filters combine to make such figures appear saintly, often giving them a literal 'halo' of light: 'Idealised white women are bathed in and permeated by light. It streams through them and falls from above. In short, they glow' (Dyer 1997: 122). In the sequence following the announcement of her death sentence, Cavell is shown kneeling in her cell before a crucifix; a beam of light shines down on her face so brightly it erases her features. While Neagle's heroic performance often depicts Cavell as the 'glowing' white woman Dyer describes, this image takes that trope to its mythic limit in virtually erasing Cavell's face.

English women spies on film, 1930s–1940s

Spy films between the two world wars were inevitably 'attuned to the possibility of another war' (Landy 1991: 123), and women playing spies were often depicted as ambiguous figures, drawing on the mythologies of Mata Hari and Edith Cavell. Marcia Landy writes of Vivien Leigh's role as a First World War double agent for the British in *Dark Journey* (Victor Saville, 1937): 'Characteristic of the espionage film, the female is treated as a mysterious, exotic object of desire whose motives are ambiguous. ... Before her identity is known, she is presented as a femme fatale, a mysterious Mata Hari' (Landy 1991: 124). Towards the end of the 1930s, there was a flurry of spy films (Aldgate and Richards 1986: 79; Landy 1991: 126; Chapman 1998: 93–4), several of which placed their female leads at the centre of a nexus of public and sexual politics regarding identity and power. Anna Neagle's role in *The Yellow Canary* (Herbert Wilcox, 1943) played upon public expectations and her star persona; trailers promoting the film implied that she was cast against type (Street 1997: 127). The film opens in London, September 1940. Air-raid wardens debating Shakespeare, Bacon and Samuel Johnson as bombs rain around them epitomise the spirit of the Blitz as Buckingham Palace comes under attack. A 'timeless' Englishness is thus evoked via literary history and royal heritage. In the middle of this, Sally Maitland, played by Neagle, is signalling enemy planes. In subsequent scenes, she is publicly humiliated by a nightclub comedian and endures an uncomfortable breakfast with her family because of her notorious reputation as a Nazi sympathiser. Sally is a double agent for the British, assigned to infiltrate the ranks of Nazis hiding in Canada. She succeeds, unmasking a spy ring in Halifax, Nova Scotia, which plots to destroy the harbour, the 'gateway to

the battle of the Atlantic' and falling for Lieutenant Commander Garrick (Richard Greene) who is assigned to watch her during her mission. The film closes with Sally, already married and in uniform, restored to her family. Family, nation, heterosexuality and femininity are thus aligned and given closure in *The Yellow Canary*. Casting Neagle against type, however, sets an odd precedent in a film where many of the characters have double identities and even the staunch patriot, Miss Cholmondley (Margaret Rutherford), inadvertently consorts with the enemy. Wartime identities are shown to be deceptive and changeable.

Valerie Hobson played several leading roles as a spy. During her early career, she had been under contract to Universal, starring in Hollywood shockers such as James Whale's *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935). In the late 1930s, Hobson returned to England and developed a successful career in roles that depicted her as the quintessential Englishwoman. She took the female lead in three spy dramas at the end of the 1930s: *Q Planes* (Tim Whelan, 1939), *The Spy in Black* (Michael Powell, 1939) and *Contraband* (Michael Powell, 1940). In *Q Planes*, Hobson plays Kay Lawrence – an investigative journalist who at one point is called 'a newspaper spy'. Lawrence/Hobson is working undercover in the cafeteria of a factory developing experimental aircraft which are being stolen by enemy forces who shoot them with a ray-gun over the sea and then 'rescue' the plane and its crew once they have crash-landed on water. The main protagonist is Kay Lawrence's brother, an intelligence officer called Major Hammond, played by Ralph Richardson, while Laurence Olivier has a romantic role as the test pilot Tony McVane. Major Hammond was an inspiration for Steed in 1960s spy series *The Avengers* (Rogers 1989: 18, Richards 1998: 247). Hobson's role appears influenced by the style of the Hollywood screwball comedies of the 1930s but is also a forerunner of Diana Rigg as Emma Peel: a woman who stands her ground as a professional. Indeed, Kay's spirited defence of journalism elicits a soliloquy from Major Hammond that aligns women with destructive modernity:

> That's the modern woman for you. … Women, women, what should we do without them? I tell you, McVane, I love everything about them. Their touching loyalty. Their astonishing self-sacrifice. Their still more astonishing sacrifice of everybody else. Their modesty. Their conceit. Their preposterous dress. Their ridiculous hats. Their silly little handbags with the pathetic little bunch of things they carry around inside. Little purses, mirrors, sticky lipsticks, nonsensical compacts …

In this ambivalent list of women's characteristics and consumer goods, Hammond light-heartedly voices discomfort with the new woman. *Q Planes*' odd mixture of witty romantic comedy, spy thriller and science fiction offers a foretaste of 1960s spy films and television series that dealt lightly with changes in gender relations while portraying a nostalgic Englishness.

Richardson's intelligence officer is an endearing eccentric who sniffs out the truth, while Hobson's 'newspaper spy' is confident and right-headed, despite early intimations that she might be an enemy agent. The film ends with Hobson marrying Laurence Olivier's test pilot, while Hammond is comically astonished that 'Daphne', whom he has repeatedly stood up throughout the film in a running-joke phone-call sequence, has married someone else. Threats to national borders and gender roles are, thus, neatly curtailed, and espionage is once again depicted as a great game.

In Michael Powell's *The Spy in Black*, also released in 1939, Hobson plays another ambivalent character; indeed, in her early scenes, it is not clear who she works for. The film is set during the First World War and begins with an innocent schoolmistress killed on her way to a job in the Orkneys by two female German spies. Hobson takes her place, working as a double agent for the British, and becomes a schoolmistress on the Old Man of Hoy, a strategic naval outpost. Conrad Veidt, as a German U-boat commander, is put ashore and hidden in Hobson's schoolhouse. The relationship between them is ambiguous throughout. While Veidt plays a naval captain, Hobson's undercover schoolmistress is in command. Gender roles are topsy-turvy, and this carries through into the dialogue, as they debate the ethics of war. This is followed by a scene in which Hobson is distressed that her actions have led to the death of the U-boat crews. The simple moralities of a propaganda war are questioned in *The Spy in Black*. Sue Harper notes an exchange between Hobson and Veidt at one point:

> 'You are English! I am German! We are enemies!'
> 'I like that better!'
> 'So do I! It simplifies everything!'

She reads this as evidence of a moment in Veidt's career when Britain mobilised for war: 'The balance between the good and bad Germans which had informed Veidt's earlier 1930s films was no longer welcome' (Harper 1998: 135). The exchange may also be read as a comment on the oversimplification of national identities during wartime. Veidt's U-boat captain becomes increasingly hysterical, Hobson's spy increasingly confused; the absolute binaries mobilised in wartime propaganda are challenged as the film draws to a close. In the final minutes, Veidt follows Hobson onto the steamer taking her back to the mainland, then takes over the boat by freeing the German prisoners of war on board. Hobson voices her feelings against the war shortly before the steamer, commanded by Veidt, is shelled by his own craft. The film ends with Veidt's U-boat sunk by a British destroyer while he remains on board the sinking steamer. Hobson weeps on a life-raft as she sees him go down with the boat. Hobson's ambivalent role in *The Spy in Black* is carried through into the narrative itself; nothing is secure in this film, and the conflict of war is exposed as traumatic and complex, rather than straightforwardly patriotic. By *Contraband* (1940),

another Hobson and Veidt/Powell and Pressburger production, such ambiguities had been closed off: even Powell noted that Pressburger's script was 'all pure corn, but corn served up by professionals, and it works' (Harper 1998: 136).[10]

Nevertheless, such films reveal a potential for ambiguity. The English female spy is a figure ripe for multiple readings which may be made available by the script, the production or an actor's performance. Some of the films cited explore that ambiguity – *Q Planes*, *The Spy in Black* – while others attempt to contain it – *Contraband*, *The Yellow Canary* – or to shut it down completely in favour of a more straightforwardly patriotic narrative – *Nurse Edith Cavell*. All these films are more or less successful in their resistance to the unsaid other of white femininity, for they are shadowed by the figure of Mata Hari and her sisters. The slur of aberrant feminine sexuality tracks such narratives, and each film attempts, in its own way, to 'purify' its heroine; most obviously in *Nurse Edith Cavell* by creating a mythic figure who is almost inhuman in her stoical martyrdom. These dichotomous stereotypes even impinge on autobiographical accounts of the real women involved in secret-service work during the First and Second World Wars, as Deborah Van Seters observes in her examination of such writings:

> Consciously and unconsciously, these women indicate the extent to which, as individuals, they both conformed to, and departed from, contemporary stereotypes. Thus, not only do these accounts illustrate certain traits that have previously been noted as being common to female autobiographies in general, they also offer reflections specifically concerning the realm of the secret services that are more complex and less predictable than those characterising their fictional sisters.
>
> (Van Seters 1992: 412)

It is important to note, again, the distance between women's real experience of the secret services and representations of such women in popular fiction and film. Antonia Lant remarks how such representations attempted to close down or efface the contradictions inherent in wartime reformulations of femininity even as they bore witness to the anxieties such contradictions aroused. She cites Christine Gledhill's argument that stereotypes 'potentially open up a challenge to patriarchal assumptions, making visible a whole regime of practices, modes of feeling and thought which generally go unrecognised even by women themselves' (Lant 1991: 89). It would seem, from Van Seter's account, that even women who understood the gap between their real secret-service work and fictional versions of it were unable to ignore the cultural weight of Mata Hari/Edith Cavell – to the extent of measuring their experience in relation to such popular stereotypes. Despite, or perhaps because of, that binary heritage, the woman as spy, agent or resistance activist throws into question the West's investment in passive femininity.

Women spies on film in the 1950s: *Odette* and *Carve Her Name with Pride*

If this was visible in films made before and during the Second World War, it was to become increasingly evident after the war, as cinematic styles changed and a new realism was possible. While Garbo's performance as *Mata Hari* in 1931 and Neagle's performance as Cavell in 1939 were informed, respectively, by Hollywood and the British theatre, the realism introduced during and after the Second World War in Hollywood and British cinema made a grittier representation of women spies possible. Such realism led to strange hybrids in American film, such as the bizarre marriage of expressionism and realism in film noir, while in Britain it marked a journey towards the British 'new wave' of the 1960s. Two popular post-war British films offer differing accounts of the female spy during the Second World War: *Odette* (Herbert Wilcox, 1950) and *Carve Her Name with Pride* (Lewis Gilbert, 1958). These films chart a parallel course: both are based on the real experience of women agents in the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) in occupied France. *Odette* is based on the autobiography of Odette Churchill, who was also technical adviser on the film (Wilcox 1967: 183–9), while *Carve Her Name with Pride* is based on the life of Violette Szabo. Both Odette and Violette were captured on active service in France, taken to the notorious Fresnes prison in Paris, interrogated and tortured at Gestapo Headquarters in the Avenue Foch and finally sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp. Violette was executed at Ravensbrück, but Odette survived and married her SOE colleague Peter Churchill. While on active service, she already had three children by her first marriage, and Violette also had a daughter by her French husband, Etienne Szabo, following a wartime marriage. All of these aspects are visible in the two films, but they are employed in different ways.

The Wilcox–Neagle production of *Odette* moves a little beyond their usual style; as Jeffrey Richards observes, it is a 'memorable account … filmed in 1950 on the actual locations of the events themselves in a sober semi-documentary style' (Richards 1997: 132). Herbert Wilcox was keen to stress the documentary aspect of the film, writing in his autobiography how he and Anna Neagle took Odette and Peter Churchill, together with the writer Warren Chetham Strode, on a tour of Odette's wartime operations in France. However harrowing the experience may have been for the Churchills, Wilcox asserts that it produced the best performance of Neagle's career, albeit pushing her to the point of breakdown (Wilcox 1967: 183–9). The film also featured a cameo role by Odette's commanding officer, Colonel Maurice 'Buck' Buckmaster, playing himself, as head of the French office of the SOE. This is a shift from the virginal English heroism of Nurse Edith Cavell, as Odette is a Frenchwoman separated from her English husband. Neagle's performance is less stiff and glamorous than in *Nurse Edith Cavell* or *The Yellow Canary*. Her first appearance on screen is in her living room,

listening to the Home Service on the radio, a scenario frequently employed in wartime British cinema to connote domestic order and national spirit (Lant 1991: 45). The settings and costumes throughout tend towards realism rather than glamour, an effect produced by location shooting and low-key dialogue, costumes and performances. Trevor Howard, as Peter Churchill, reproduces a form of irascible Englishness on screen, at first unsure of Odette's abilities but rapidly becoming convinced of her courage.

Despite the realist tendencies of *Odette*, however, the production perpetuates Wilcox and Neagle's conventional understanding of the individual heroine. Odette's struggle with her maternal instincts is depicted in harrowing phone calls to her daughters before and after her SOE work, while the romance between Odette and Peter Churchill provides a romantic frame to the narrative, ending with a kiss. Thus, the unconventionality of Odette's active service is mitigated by more conventional feminine traits. Most tellingly, the epilogue provided by Odette Churchill contradicts the narrative, as it states, 'I would like [the film] to be a window through which may be seen those very gallant women with which I had the honour to serve.' Yet the film only features Odette herself, surrounded by men in the SOE offices in London and on active service in France. The conflict within the film between Odette as an exceptional heroine and the attempt to depict the real experience of an SOE agent becomes most evident in the torture sequences. While the cinematography to this point largely follows the conventions of narrative realism in not disrupting spectatorial viewpoint with unusual or expressionist camera techniques, the scene in her cell in Fresnes with Henri (Marius Goring), the German intelligence officer, introduces off-kilter camerawork with low- and high-angle framing. The subsequent scene, where Odette is tortured at Gestapo headquarters becomes distinctly *noir*, with low-angle shots and shadows offering a distorted perspective and only a partial view of this graphic scenario.

On the one hand, such techniques from film noir offer a means of indicating the horror of such events without having to depict them explicitly, thus avoiding censorship. Yet they also indicate a tension within the film between Neagle's star persona and the character she is playing; if the part pushed its star to the point of breakdown, then the film itself breaks down in its struggle to represent a 'real' woman and an heroic figure. Odette after the torture sequences is very different; lighting and make-up contribute to her gaunt expression, while Neagle twists her body and shuffles on her heels to indicate the pain Odette was subjected to.[11] The distorted camera angles and expressionist lighting are complemented by Neagle's performance, which extends from her physical transformation to the hysterical repetition – 'I have nothing to say' – in response to her interrogators. Despite all these indications that the world is out of kilter, Odette continues to be the moral centre of the narrative, concerned to protect Peter Churchill from her own fate and berating those who deny their responsibility for her condition. At one point she wittily responds to the news that she has been condemned as

'a French woman and a British agent' with the retort: 'You must make your own choice. I can only die once.' The contradictions within Neagle's performance and the visual style of the film expose an unstable narrative which is uncertain how to treat a female protagonist who is not easily assimilable within binary understandings of femininity.

Eight years later, the parallel narrative of Violette Szabo's life story was rendered for the screen in *Carve Her Name with Pride*. While there are some similarities in style between the two films, I want to focus on their differences. Violette, played by Virginia McKenna, is framed in this narrative by her 'ordinariness': she is of a different class and generation to Odette Churchill in the Wilcox–Neagle film. The opening and closing sequences of the film are crane shots which zoom in on an 'ordinary' London street, with children playing. Violette is introduced within a family of respectable working-class Londoners, though her mother is French. Life during wartime is shown as disruptive of normative gender roles; Violette meets an old schoolfriend who is now a woman conductor on a London bus, and asserts, 'If I'd been a man, I'd like to have been a professional soldier.' Even before she is recruited by the SOE, she voices her desire for a more active role, and the film does not present this as a problem but rather as an indication of changing sensibilities. Violette's athleticism is commented upon within the film, and her father describes her as 'the toughest one in the family' following a play fight with her brother. McKenna's youth and energy represent a younger generation bringing with it a new modernity and the 'new woman' (Geraghty 2000: 21–37, 155–74).

Throughout the narrative, Violette is surrounded by female friends. When she first meets her husband-to-be, Etienne Szabo, an officer in the French Foreign Legion on leave in London, she is with her friend Winnie Watson (Billie Whitelaw). In the subsequent whirlwind romance, the visual vignettes offer a comic subtext as the camera repeatedly pans from the happy couple to Winnie, their chaperone and gooseberry. Even the relationship with Tony Frazer (Paul Scofield), which develops during her training for the SOE following Etienne's death at El Alamein, is initially secondary to her camaraderie with fellow female trainees. This is another way in which *Carve Her Name with Pride* differs from *Odette*. Whereas in *Odette* the female spy is represented as an exceptional individual and a lucky amateur, Violette is shown in several sequences training in hand-to-hand combat, with weaponry and as a parachutist. This later film offers a version of the female spy as a trained professional, whose femininity does not preclude success. Indeed, her friendship with Denise Bloch and Lilian Rolfe lasts throughout the narrative, ending when they are shot by a firing squad at Ravensbrück. Before they die, Violette's only comment is, 'We're all together.' While this can be related to a late-1950s nostalgia for the communal spirit of the Blitz, it can also be understood as a commentary on the film's representation of the life of a female spy.

Rather than a solitary and eccentric heroine, Violette Szabo, in *Carve Her Name with Pride*, is part of a community. While the officers at her training

camp are all male, they are not offered the reverent portrayal of *Odette*. Following her chastisement by a judo instructor, Violette makes an aside to her friends, 'If only he'd break his bloody neck!' During their training, the 'girls' are constituted as a disobedient but proficient group; in a prank raid on command headquarters to steal whisky, Violette knocks out the commanding officer with one punch. As a more youthful, working-class woman, McKenna's performance as Violette Szabo indicates the possibilities of representing a professional female agent on screen, without the necessity of enshrining her as a national heroine, as in *Odette*. This version of the female spy may be understood as a forerunner of later representations, in its matter-of-fact account of a woman at work. The SOE in this later film, while dominated by male officers, also features 'Vera Atkins', a senior officer involved in Violette's recruitment and whom Violette entrusts with her will. Again, there is a sense here that women are supporting women. The film's conclusion indicates that, while Szabo's death marks the end of her espionage career, she is remembered as a public and as a private figure. The closing scenes offer a sentimental depiction of Szabo's young daughter going to Buckingham Palace to collect the George Cross for her mother. The final shot reverses the opening sequence, as her daughter joins other children playing in the street and the camera zooms out. Virginia McKenna, like Anna Neagle, was associated with a specifically English identity, but McKenna's 'English rose' star persona 'operated … in ways that shed light on the difficulties that the new woman posed for fifties [British] cinema' (Geraghty 2000: 160). McKenna was one of the few women stars that British cinema produced in the 1950s. British popular films often featured accounts of femininity that were 'out of line with the contemporary views about mature femininity that found a ready outlet in other forms of popular culture such as women's magazines and fiction' (Geraghty 2000: 159). *Carve Her Name with Pride* offers one of the few attempts to represent a mature woman on screen and, despite its limitations, marks a distinct improvement on many earlier cinematic accounts of women spies.

This chapter has traced an optimistic trajectory in the historical development of representations of women as spies. From Mata Hari to Virginia McKenna as Violette Szabo, these figures mark particular moments in twentieth-century accounts of femininity and modernity. In many ways, this is a progressive narrative, conjuring a positivist history of women that moves from a myth to more complex and contradictory accounts of femininity. To some extent, this indicates the changes that have occurred for many middle-class women in Britain: better access to education, to work and to public life. But it is also a fictional account of representations rather than women's experience. Even for the privileged white middle classes, early twentieth-century histories are more complex than representations of those experiences can allow. I hope that some of the gaps between the real and the representation were evident in my accounts of Mata Hari and Edith Cavell. In the next chapter, however, my focus moves to entirely fictional

and fantastic accounts of women as spies. If, as Mary Ann Doane argued, the *fin-de-siècle* femme fatale found a home in the 'new technologies of production and reproduction (photography, the cinema)' (Doane 1991: 1), post-war women spies were drawn to postmodern technologies. *Odette* and *To Carve Her Name with Pride* are cinematic attempts to deal with the new woman of the 1950s, but by the 1960s a newer and more malleable medium – television – was presenting even more challenging representations of women as spies, as professionals and as sexual beings.

3 Dolly birds

Female spies in the 1960s

By the 1960s, spies were in fashion. Following the success of *Dr No* (Terence Young, 1962), spy fictions proliferated across a range of media in Britain and the USA. Numerically, there were more spy series on American networks in the 1950s, but the end of sponsors' direct control of programme content as post-McCarthyite blacklists loosened their grip and the Kennedy presidency began made the spy series a logical apogee for the newly affluent pop culture (Andrae 1996: 113–14, Worland 1994: 152–4). Conspicuous consumption, the 'white heat' of new technologies, an ambivalent fascination with new freedoms – 1960s modernity inhered in television series such as *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, *The Prisoner* and *The Avengers* (Sandbrook 2006: 44–56). Spy fictions on film, television and in print reflected on social shifts and, although such representations looked glossily modern, they were often infused with nostalgia for the old order. Many of the more successful British spy series on television, for example, present a fantasy England in which the establishment is challenged but ultimately triumphant. These are agents of the state, after all. This chapter examines women spies on television, in strip cartoons and popular fiction. Emma Peel, Modesty Blaise and Mrs Emily Pollifax offer an optimistic narrative of changing social mores, but they each represent different negotiations with the 1960s.

Women spies on television: *The Avengers*

In her study of women and popular cinema, Janet Thumim notes the 1960s' central concern with personal liberation, together with 'an insistent privileging of the young and the new … structures of class, nationality and power being interrogated to reveal their justifications in terms of the individual' (1992: 74). There are few mainstream 1960s films with women in key roles, and those which do have female protagonists often focus on debates about shifts in power, in particular, 'the question of power, its morality and its meanings' (Thumim 1992: 81).[1] A similar dynamic is visible on the small screen. In Britain, television was linked to national identity through institutions such as the British Broadcasting Corporation and events such as the screening of the Coronation in 1953. After the war, television sets began to

sell in earnest, so that by 1963, 89 per cent of the British population had a television in their home: 'The television set was a signifier of modernity, and its ownership signified not just status among friends and relatives, but also the presence of the "modern home"' (Oswell 1999: 67; see also Sandbrook 2006: 376). Although the television set signified wealth and modernity, the spy series broadcast through the 1960s offered a more contradictory account of the modern West, as an expanding middle class and an increasingly affluent working class brought fresh concerns about social mobility and national identity. Television spies like John Steed, Catherine Gale, Emma Peel (*The Avengers*), Richard Barrett, Sharron Macready (*The Champions*) and John Drake (*Danger Man*) offered a newly exportable Englishness. Like the cinematic Bond, television spies negotiate a new modernity *and* myths of national identity embedded in discourses of class, tradition and empire (Buxton 1990: 86–7).

The Avengers spanned the 1960s, offering a vision of that era refracted through the lens of a rapidly developing British television industry. As part of the movement from film to videotape, from live recording to edited transmission and from black and white to colour, *The Avengers* also marked a shift from domestic product for a home audience to an exportable account of British culture for American viewers (Chapman 2000: 37–46, O'Regan 2000: 315–16, Chapman 2002: 7–9). James Chapman observes that the most successful series were those that offered a predominantly English cast and that such 'national fantasies in which the decline of British power never took place' were entirely out of step with reality. In particular, they contradicted the spy scandals of the 1950s and 1960s featuring Burgess, Maclean and Philby (Chapman 2002: 11–12). *The Avengers*' fantasy England was designed to appeal to American audiences. Brian Clemens, the series' producer, writer and story editor, commented, 'We became terribly British ... A car is a car is a car, and not an automobile. A lift is a lift is a lift, never an elevator. It is this Britishness that fits the fantasy world so appealing to the Americans' (Rogers 1989: 90). The postmodern reflexivity of *The Avengers* is visible in episodes such as 'Never, Never Say Die' (Series 5, Episode 10, 18 March 1967), which opens with Emma Peel watching 'The Cybernauts' (Series 4, Episode 7, 16 October 1965) on her black-and-white television, until the transmission is interrupted by Steed appearing on screen in colour to say 'Mrs Peel – we're needed.'

John Steed (Patrick McNee) was a constant throughout the series; a whimsical English gentleman with bowler hat and umbrella, which often doubled as his only weapons. By the time Cathy Gale (Honor Blackman) was replaced by Emma Peel (Diana Rigg) in the autumn of 1965, it was widely acknowledged that Steed represented English tradition, despite his modern tailored suits; as *The Avengers Annual* 1967 stated: 'Emma Peel plays mod to Steed's trad' (Chibnall 1985: 476). To complement Steed's benevolent account of the establishment, the producers invented Mrs Peel as a youthful model of the 'swinging London' which spy fictions were keen to emulate:

> the England of 1965 *was* a radically different place from its predecessor of, say, 1960. There was a Labour government; unemployment was low, exports high, the touted 'white heat of technological change' cast a morale-boosting glow in which the newly empowered 'young meteors' (as Jonathan Aitken, then a journalist, apostrophised the yuppies of the time) could caper unconstrained. Even the BBC, under Hugh Carleton Greene, was casting aside its Reithian hauteur, and not merely joining, but often hosting the party. Not everyone was in favour of the new society, but the old guard were definitely in retreat.
>
> (Green 1999: 71)

Like many of its peers, *The Avengers* was Janus-faced in its vision of England's mythic imperial past beside a youthful London-based culture. This combination of pastiche and nostalgia was part of the new medium's postmodern appeal (Jameson 1988: 15–20). The Bond films' stylised sets, costumes and gadgets were imitated in British and American spy series such as *Danger Man*, *The Prisoner*, *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* and its female spin-off series, *The Girl From U.N.C.L.E.* These were dramas of surface appearance rather than realist 'depth': 'Characters in [television] series were no longer social archetypes representing various facets of "human nature" but designed to double as fashion models' (Buxton 1990: 74).

Yet, this playful concern with fashion and artifice also raised questions about gender, class and sexuality. Bond films marked the advent of targeting consumers across a range of markets, so that 'Masculinity [was] no longer the exclusive province of men, either as spectators, consumers or agents of power' (Miller 2003: 139), and television spies followed that route. The marketing of *The Avengers* via fashion, and fashion via *The Avengers*, is well documented (Rogers 1989: 89–90, Buxton 1990: 75). By 1965, 'The Avengers Collection' – modified versions of Diana Rigg's costumes – was available on high streets across Britain and overseas: 'the collection took as its theme the black and white of the television medium – the "lines" from which the TV screen is made up' (Rogers 1989: 89). Women and the new popular medium were thus united in a democratisation of style. Whether this offered liberation through consumption, however, is debatable. David Buxton proposes that 'the spy genre became the dominant fictional form of the pop ethic' because of the spy's characteristic 'cultural mobility' (Buxton 1990: 76), but Jonathan Green argues that, barring a few token figures, class divisions did not shift in the 1960s but were merely repackaged (Green 1999: 69, 72).

Series like *The Avengers* did, however, reveal a fascination with the *idea* of mobility. This is evident in episodes such as 'The £50,000 Breakfast' (Series 5, Episode 20, 14 October 1967), where the plot centres on Steed and Mrs Peel's investigation of the Litoff corporation, a multinational company they suspect is illegally trading in diamonds. The narrative gradually reveals that Alex Litoff, the Armenian industrialist who owns the company, is dead, and

his assistant, Miss Pegram, is the mastermind behind a diamond-smuggling caper. During the investigation, Emma visits Litoff's niece, who works in a Carnaby Street-style tie shop decorated in op-art monochrome. The shop sells a variety of school ties, both genuine and fake, such as the 'Old Anonians' for those without a public-school background. 'The £50,000 Breakfast' overtly references social mobility through the tie shop and covertly indicates anxieties about women in senior management through the vilification of Miss Pegram. No one in this episode is what they seem: Litoff's presence is faked via impersonation and audiotape, while the woman in the tie shop is actually the niece of his butler, Glover. Glover himself is revealed as an avaricious underling who declares a passionate desire to be 'rude to a great number of women' once he has his £11 million cut. Litoff's doctor is complicit in the deception, also swayed by the financial imperative. These English gentlemen professionals are exposed as grasping criminals and foolish dupes of Miss Pegram; they appear unaware that she has murdered her boss. Class and gender are mobile in this episode, but they are also the focus of anxiety; the shifts in class order and gender distinction within the workplace are irrevocably linked to deviant practices. Miss Pegram, in particular, represents a counterpoint to Emma's jaunty heterofemininity, in her role as head of a financial and criminal organisation and as a masculinised woman; she describes herself as an 'ideas man'. Clearly, such ideas are dangerous in this context, but the status quo is inverted only temporarily with Steed and Mrs Peel on hand to restore order.

Despite such reassuring conclusions, 1960s spy series were offering new accounts of the modern man and woman. That such representations engaged with fantasies and anxieties regarding individual agency, sexual liberation and class mobility is entirely predictable. The new spies were also complex amalgamations of generic forms. James Chapman argues that *Danger Man* was related to the police/detective series of the late 1950s but was also the first of the new, stylish secret agent series (2002: 19). Like *The Avengers*, *Danger Man* went through different phases of production and broadcast, adding to its visual and generic diversity as its production team kept pace with a rapidly changing industry (Chapman 2002: 16). Series featuring female protagonists added further complexities. Toby Miller argues that women spies 'make trouble' by adding femininity and feminism to the mix (2003: 154–69). Where the woman is a protagonist rather than a marginal dalliance for the hero, she presents a structural problem *as* an agent in the very fact of her agency: 'there is a question of legitimacy hanging over the female agent – a fundamental untrustworthiness pervades her representation, and not only in terms of her honesty' (Miller 2003: 155).

Nevertheless, 1960s series appeared to accommodate female spies more easily than female private eyes. Charting the distinctions between British series featuring secret agents (*Danger Man*, *The Avengers*, *The Champions* and *Department S*) and those featuring crime fighters (*The Saint*, *Adam Adamant Lives!*, *Man in a Suitcase* and *The Persuaders!*), James Chapman

inadvertently highlights a gender gap; three out of four of the former feature female protagonists but none of the latter do (Chapman 2002: 12–13). It is tempting to argue that hard-boiled detective fiction privileges masculine heroes, while espionage is open to more feminised figures. Whatever the case, detective stories and spy thrillers share a common focus on identity that highlights the contradictions inherent in bourgeois society (Mandel 1984: 65). In the 1960s, such contradictions were played out through an expanding consumer culture. Although the USA had enjoyed an affluent consumer culture since the early 1940s, a comparable economy was not visible in Europe until the late 1950s (Marwick 1998: 41–2). As in the America of the 1950s, British women in the 1960s were central to domestic consumption. Much like the television set itself, women were at the heart of the home and the consumer economy, but female spies on television mark disparities between women as consumers and as consumable images.

Television spies and the new women professionals

In the 1960s, female spies on screen and in print in Britain and America traced changes in the workplace as consumer culture took precedence over heavy industry, and 'feminine' skills began to take priority over masculine inheritance. Thomas Andrae describes this 'crisis of masculinity' in Freudian terms: 'The paternal signifier was further undermined by the erosion of bourgeois entrepreneurship by the corporate state: the male's desire for autonomy and independence, ideals inherent in proprietorship, were displaced by the organisation man syndrome in which he became an alienated but conforming employee of a large corporate bureaucracy' (Andrae 1996: 119). If the new era threatened some middle-class men, the 1960s offered opportunities for women, ethnic minorities and the working classes which were largely unavailable to their parents' generation (Marwick 1998, 2000). In Britain, there were shifts in the education and class systems that had their roots in a move towards a more egalitarian social framework, even if the material effects of such shifts in ideology would not become visible until the 1970s. Male spies inadvertently embodied the disturbance these changes caused amongst those who had come to see themselves as inevitable inheritors of such benefits. *The Prisoner*, for example, offers itself as a subversive text, with a title sequence showing the male spy's rebellion against corporate bureaucracy, and the protagonist's resistant assertion, 'I am not a number: I am a free man!' Yet, the series tended to treat its female characters 'with a mixture of fear and suspicion'; the protagonist's struggle is with men and masculinity (Gregory 1997: 199–208):

> Like Leavisite literary criticism, to which the series is distantly related, this was a gratifying world view for an educated middle class, enabling at once resistance to a commodified, mass-mediatised society and a rejection of the mindless consumption habits of the 'masses.' The right

> to have a 'name' and the cultured sensitivity that went with it, to exist as more than a cog in the machine, was finally founded on the value of rejection. It is only by resigning and positioning himself against the backdrop of the village – which, without work, is also without social classes – that Number Six can impress upon us the true singularity of his existence.
>
> (Buxton 1990: 96)

The 1960s may have presented uncomfortable choices for men on television – to become a 'cog in the machine' or to break out of the new corporate prisons – but for women, the 1960s offered greater access to professional roles (Andrae 1996: 121). This was camouflaged by their performance as 'dolly birds' – women who are decorative and consumable.

In her famous 1929 essay on masquerade, Joan Riviere describes how 'women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men', referring specifically to the woman intellectual (Riviere 1986: 35). The dolly-bird spies of the 1960s enacted a similar masquerade, disguising professional ability with a coating of acceptable femininity. The contradiction between what women television spies did and how they appeared may explain why there were few equivalent examples of Cathy Gale or Mrs Peel in American television series. Toby Miller follows Julie D'Acci in arguing that ABC's *Honey West* was a spy by proxy, as she 'referenced espionage in her visual style rather than her actantial [*sic*] position, which was as a private detective' (Miller 2003: 160). Agent or detective, *Honey West* only lasted one season, as did NBC's *The Girl from U.N.C.L.E.*, starring Stephanie Powers, in the following year: 'The networks found it more fiscally sound to channel their efforts involving the new single woman into cheaper, more formulaic, and more predictable situation comedies' (D'Acci 1997: 87). Like most successful American spy series, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* treated its intermittent female spies in much the same manner as the cinematic Bond; women provided scopophilic pleasure and shored up the heteromasculinity of the male leads. One of the few exceptions was the comedy spy series *Get Smart*, where bumbling Agent Smart (Don Adams) is repeatedly saved by efficient Agent 99 (Barbara Feldon). This was hardly an ideal pairing, however: 'Though he would take credit for her ideas, take advantage of her devotion and his seniority as a CONTROL agent, and make a snide comment or two (he once remarked, "You're too statuesque, 99!"), 99 endearingly followed him through adventure after adventure' (Lisanti and Paul 2002: 126). Agent 99 was often undercover in stereotypical roles – manicurist, harem girl, maid – and the series ended with her marrying Smart and having twins. Despite this, Barbara Feldon later claimed that 99 had inspired women: 'Because she was smart and she always had the right answer. And that was one of the first roles on television that showed women that way' (Lisanti and Paul 2002: 127). While the variety of viewers' responses cannot be underestimated, the

predominance of stereotypical accounts of femininity cannot be denied. In one of the novels based on *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, an enemy spy constitutes little more than an extension of the setting:

> Napoleon Solo studied the long-legged brunette raising herself from a languorous position on the gilded love seat. Denise Fairmount was worth more than one look. Her amber eyes looked beautiful even in anger. Her silver lamé gown shimmered as she rose, emphasizing the almost feline beauty of her body. Solo reflected briefly that the Hotel Internationale's plush, brocaded Suite Four One One was a completely appropriate setting for her. She was like some regal holdover from another century of French beauty – with just enough Americanizing to make her doubly interesting.
>
> (Avallone 1965: 10)

Denise Fairmount is disembodied, her physique compared to that of an animal and aligned with the hotel furniture. The shimmering gown fits her into the 'brocaded' suite, and the final sentence positions her as a fascinating object within a neo-colonial museum of culture. Like Bond's girls, Denise Fairmount is 'put back in her place' by this description (Bennett and Woollacott 1987: 116).

April Dancer (Stephanie Powers), the girl from U.N.C.L.E., fared little better. The publisher's blurb on the back cover of her second published adventure is ambivalent:

> She moves with trained-to-kill reflexes, clicks with an IBM brain. She's cool, ingenious ... and sexy. She's a pro from the top of her beautiful head to the tip of her painted toenails. She's Mr. Waverly's right-hand girl and her heart belongs to U.N.C.L.E.
>
> Watch her infiltrate the ranks of THRUSH as she tries to reach kidnapped Mark Slate, an U.N.C.L.E. agent who's being held for ransom that's too high to pay. See her in action – 5ft. 5ins. ... 108lbs of dynamite ... U.N.C.L.E.'s newest weapon ... APRIL DANCER
>
> (Avallone 1966)

This passage speaks of a discomfort with the new women of the 1960s.[2] April Dancer is, first, a computer with 'an IBM brain' and, last, a 'weapon', 'dynamite.' She is an explosive combination of machine and sexuality – 'a pro' with 'painted toenails', which begs the question of whether the 'pro' is an abbreviation for professional or prostitute – and she is infantilised as 'Mr. Waverly's right-hand girl' whose 'heart belongs to U.N.C.L.E.' All this works against the main thrust of the narrative, that she saves her colleague Mark Slate from enemy agents. This short piece of copy outlines the contradictions the female spy embodies as a woman in a professional role. April Dancer, like the women who briefly appear in *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, is

contained by a femininity that constantly works to 'put [her] back in her place' (Bennett and Woollacott 1987: 116). Such tension cannot be maintained if the female spy is to be anything but a clownish figure; April Dancer could not last.[3] This is not to say that women were not watching spy series in significant numbers. Women were one of the main audiences for *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, leading to sponsorship from Chanel and Maybelline. A *Newsweek* article claimed the series was an 'aphrodisiac', and much of the fan mail from women was directed to David McCallum, the British actor who played Illya Kuryakin. Nicknamed the 'blonde Beatle', McCallum's fan base was so strong that when he was shown kissing a woman in one episode the studio was besieged with threatening letters. A promotional appearance was cancelled when more than 15,000 fans began to riot in a New York branch of Macy's (Enns 2000: 130–1). It was these fans who were most vociferous in their opposition to *The Girl from U.N.C.L.E.*, as they feared that the spin-off series would lead to the demise of *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (Enns 2000: 131). Female fans, it appeared, were more powerful than April Dancer.

Dolly-bird spies and the new England

Across the Atlantic, the British 'dolly bird' offered a different kind of femininity. This is not to say that she was an ideal – she represents a disturbingly pre-pubescent femininity (Green 1999: 76) – but this version of the 1960s 'dolly bird' was a more *mobile* figure. Twiggy and Jean Shrimpton were often photographed as if caught in motion, and the mini-skirt, although 'sexy', was also supposed to introduce a new freedom of movement for the women who wore it. Carnaby Street fashions broke away from the corseted female figure embodied by Dior's New Look silhouette of the 1940s and Hollywood icons in the 1950s (Green 1999: 79). These skinny, gawky British girls challenged the static 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of classical Hollywood (Mulvey 1989: 19). The 'dolly bird' was borne out of a mythic recreation of London as a 'happening' city, the focal point of everything youthful, modern and hip, which was largely the creation of features editors on either side of the Atlantic (Green 1999: 70–2). While they mythologised the new London, even these fictions offered a thinly disguised version of past mores. The 'shocking' new styles and behaviours catalogued by newspapers and magazines were dependent for their shock-value – and saleability – on the perceived entrenchment of the Establishment (Marwick 1998: 56). The central figure of 'swinging London' was the 'dolly bird':

> topless dresses, mini-skirts, hipster trousers, edible knickers, see through blouses, nudity onstage, streakers, the word 'fuck' first heard on British television – all the ephemeral images of Swinging London said that Britain had abandoned conventional morality and replaced it with the most frivolous forms of hedonism. The culture of fun cohered in the

> single icon of the dolly-bird. She symbolised everything that was new, liberated, daring, sexually abandoned, independent and free.
>
> (Linda Grant, cited in Green 1999: 76)

Female spies appearing on British television were inflected by this mythology of a new, youthful femininity. It was a symbolic shift when *The Avengers* replaced Honor Blackman as Cathy Gale – a figure still embedded in 1950s style – with the young Diana Rigg as Emma Peel (Chapman 2000: 53–4). Such women spies were not simply 'new' or completely removed from their forerunners. Rather, the swinging chick or dolly bird offered a modern take on the femme-fatale/angel-of-the-house dichotomy. The female spies of the 1960s, like the medium on which they were appearing, were as full of contradictions as ever. British television, with all its aspirations to modernity, was still looking to the future and chained to the past.

The high modernity of the 1960s gradually shifted into an ironic, self-reflexive postmodernity visible in *The Prisoner* and later seasons of *The Avengers*, both offering refractory accounts of debates about Englishness and modernity (Chapman 2000: 58–64). Figures such as Cathy Gale and Emma Peel represent contradictory versions of 1960s British femininity. Despite the different connotations of their roles, Blackman's and Rigg's professional backgrounds in theatre, together with their cinematic predecessors, connected both actors and their characters to a distinctly British tradition:

> Cathy Gale and Emma Peel belong to the same tradition of well-bred upper-middle-class girls portrayed in British films by the likes of Madeleine Carroll and Margaret Lockwood. They are sophisticated, fashionable, witty, and above all modern; they have careers of their own, they do not need men to look after them, and while they may resort to domesticity in the end this is the result of a conscious choice rather than patriarchal oppression.
>
> (Chapman 2000: 53; see also Chapman 2002: 76–7)

Gale and Peel offer a fantasy of the empowered white, middle-class woman professional as unthreatening. Sherrie Inness argues that such figures are contained by their lack of 'toughness' – that Emma Peel is 'semi-tough' because her active role is mitigated by her sexualised appearance and repeated use of disguise – yet these new women are also more directly engaged in the action than their predecessors on the cinema screen (Inness 1999: 33–7). Such characters rarely found depiction other than as femme-fatale figures, and even then their weapons of choice rarely included hand-to-hand combat. For the women of *The Avengers*, the 'sex war' found literal representation in their physical challenges to opponents of both sexes. Both these performances are more central and more physically active than Alexandra Bastedo's performance as Sharron Macready in *The Champions*, or

Figure 3.1 Diana Rigg as Emma Peel.

Rosemary Nicols' performance as Annabelle Hurst in *Department S*. Macready and Hurst were the only women in the team, often appearing token and stereotypical as they reacted emotionally in dangerous situations and rarely engaged in active combat.

An indication of the industry's view of such female stars may be gleaned from promotional trailers for *The Champions*. Filmed towards the end of 1967 and aimed primarily at the American market, three trailers each

featured a lead actor speaking to camera and introducing him/herself and the series as an exciting new addition to the schedules. A fourth featuring all three rounded up the campaign. The difference between the trailers for the two male leads and that for Alexandra Bastedo now appears comical. William Gaunt and Stuart Damon walk through a studio set in shirt-sleeves carrying their scripts, but Alexandra Bastedo is dressed in a shimmering off-the-shoulder, short, blue evening gown carrying an evening bag. Her hair and make-up is immaculate, while Gaunt and Damon appear in casual clothes and adopt a businesslike manner, addressing the camera with information about the new show and ending the sequence by sitting with their backs to the viewer to study their scripts in canvas chairs featuring the actors' names. Having invited the viewer to 'make a date with me each week', Bastedo closes her sequence with, 'Keep that date, won't you. See you soon.' She also turns to sit with her back to the camera, but in this case she faces a studio make-up mirror which frames her in mid-shot and in which she combs her long blonde hair.[4] While the two male leads are depicted as serious professionals, concerned to study their lines, Alexandra Bastedo is eye candy. Rosemary Nichols, who played Annabelle Hurst in *Department S*, later said that she felt she 'was only there to add glamour to the show' (Lisanti and Paul 2002: 228).

The Champions and *Department S* offered cosmopolitan English spies for American audiences; both series were produced by Lew Grade's ITC for export to the USA and were not located in the quirky 'England' of *The Avengers*. Despite their limitations, female spies and spy series were at the cutting edge of the developing television industries in Britain and America. These shows offered a fantasy of modern consumer capitalism and began to break boundaries – not merely in terms of international travel and trade but also as a form of fictionalised proto-feminism. Before the second series of *The Avengers* began transmission in September 1962, Honor Blackman stated in a publicity interview: 'I'm a first for television. The first feminist to come into a television serial; the first woman to fight back' (Rogers 1989: 32). In contrast to film, where Bond girls were interchangeable and marginal, television in the 1960s could give women a more central role as modern professionals whose glamorous façades belie a steely determination. Spies like Emma Peel represent a 1960s femininity, which was physically active, intelligent and sexualised, and yet they were not demonised as femmes fatales.

Women spies in print: Modesty Blaise

While there are many critical accounts of *The Avengers* (Buxton 1990, Andrae 1996, Inness 1999, Chapman 2000, 2002, O'Day 2001, Miller 2003), as well as useful fan literature and journalism (see, for example, Rogers 1989 and Chibnall 1985), other female spies from the 1960s have not garnered such detailed attention. Several of these accounts briefly mention Modesty Blaise (Buxton 1990, Chapman 2002, Miller 2003), but there is little sub-

stantial analysis of the novels or the daily newspaper comic strips in which she first appeared. Miller, in particular, focuses on the Joseph Losey film, *Modesty Blaise* (1966), which bears little relation to the original print versions by Peter O'Donnell (Miller 2003: 163–9). Most critics tend to write Modesty Blaise off as an ersatz female Bond. In *The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction*, for example, Modesty Blaise only takes up a couple of pages, and she is dismissed as 'a sexual object' (Craig and Cadogan 1981: 220). It is for this very reason that I want to examine Modesty Blaise, in the comic strips and the novels, as an exemplary account of the 1960s spy in all her contradictory glory.

In the form of a comic strip in the London *Evening Standard*, a series of popular novels and a bizarre film adaptation (*Modesty Blaise*, Joseph Losey, 1966), Modesty Blaise takes a parallel course to Cathy Gale and Emma Peel. In 1962, Peter O'Donnell was commissioned by Beaverbrook Newspapers to create a new daily comic strip (O'Donnell 2004, Paterson 2004). The Modesty Blaise strip narratives first appeared in 1963, written by O'Donnell and drawn by Jim Holdaway (1963–70), Enrique Badia Romero (1970–9), John Burns and Pat Wright (1979–80) and, finally, Neville Colvin (1980–6) (O'Donnell and Holdaway 2004). The strips were initially published in the *Evening Standard* but were rapidly syndicated worldwide, giving rise to thirteen novels by O'Donnell (1963–96) and three film versions, of which Losey's is the most well known.[5] Fans and critics regard O'Donnell as the 'author' of Modesty Blaise, despite the crucial role of the artists who gave her visual form. O'Donnell's account of her creation offers two significant contexts in which she can be understood: as a character who moves across popular genres and as a character who represents particular ideals regarding human agency.

O'Donnell cites his career trajectory in the early 1960s, which saw him as a freelance writer providing copy for comic strips in national newspapers, most of which featured 'macho male heroes', and serial fiction for women's magazines which largely focused on romance (O'Donnell 2004). He describes the effect of these genres in the following terms:

> For some time before the call from [the Strip Cartoon Editor of the *Express* group of newspapers] Bill Aitken, I had been intrigued by the idea of bringing these two genres together by creating a woman who, though fully feminine, would be as good in combat and action as any male, if not better.
>
> (O'Donnell 2004)

This brief account situates Modesty Blaise as a product of consumer culture and an epitome of 'the pop ethic'. David Buxton argues that the strength of 'pop' culture is 'its ability to take form in several different media', citing *Modesty Blaise* as one of his examples (Buxton 1990: 76). Adding O'Donnell's account to Buxton's analysis makes evident the extent to which Modesty Blaise not only moves across media but also across

genres. She appears in comic strips, novels, films and graphic novels while the narratives in all these media combine action and romance – the 'macho' genre of the comic strips and the women's magazine romance genre. Modesty Blaise has also become a cultural signifier, referenced in 1960s novels (Diment 1967: 47) and in contemporary film, such as the scene in *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) where Vincent Vega (John Travolta) sits on the toilet reading a Modesty Blaise novel. The 'brand' signifies subcultural knowledge; while not being so obscure that most of the readers or viewers will fail to recognise her, Modesty Blaise offers cultural capital. Although the trans-media aspect of 'pop' figures like Modesty contributed to their mass dissemination and consumption, the trans-genre aspect of Modesty Blaise was less successful. The clash between Modesty's femininity and her masculine role is evident in the comic strips and becomes a subject for comment in the novels.

There is a visual contradiction between Modesty's role and her appearance in the comic strips. For example, in *La Machine*, the first strip story published in the *Evening Standard* from May to September 1963, Modesty is drawn as a classic femme fatale, with full, dark lips and eyes and a voluptuous figure (O'Donnell and Holdaway 2004). This gives her fight scenes a curious twist; while her partner Willie Garvin is clearly designed for action, Modesty appears more at home in the frames where she assumes the poses of a porn star such as Betty Page. She is frequently depicted half-naked, in bed or changing her clothes (see Figure 3.2). *La Machine* is also notable for its gendered division of labour when it depicts violence. Willie is shown punching two women (for their own safety) and dealing with assassins who have been set up to kill him; Modesty, however, merely executes some basic self-defence in order to dispose of an over-eager date (see Figure 3.3). Most disturbingly, the frames where the women are knocked out are drawn in a cinematic style that invites voyeurism; Modesty lies below Willie in a seductively unconscious pose while Willie's girlfriend Pernod Mimi is pictured in the foreground, her ecstatic face dominating the frame and emitting an orgasmic 'uhh!' (see Figure 3.4). Neither woman is seriously hurt, and one could argue that they appear if not to enjoy the experience then at least to be *designed* to be struck in such a manner. There is also a gender division in terms of Modesty and Willie's responses to the aftermath of their adventure; Modesty weeps in Willie's arms, while Willie relies on his 'little address book' to unwind (see Figure 3.5). O'Donnell's account of the cross-genre inspiration for the Modesty stories does not include the pornographic reference of the comic-strip narratives.[6] In visual terms, Modesty, like other young women in the series, is fetishistically depicted, with an emphasis on her lips, eyes, jutting breasts and elegant legs. She is also frequently shown as a captive, tied up and reclining, in frames that suggest sadomasochistic scenarios. The cultural sophistication of the newspaper comic strips entails a 'liberated' heterosexuality, referencing the 'kinkiness' for which *The Avengers* was also famous. In effect, the beautiful artwork of the strip illustrators

works to elide the contradictions at the centre of Modesty's characterisation; her hyperbolic appearance insists that we don't examine too closely the logic of her character but focus on the spectacular reproduction of her physical attributes.

O'Donnell and Holdaway appear conscious of these contradictions in their attempts to explain Modesty's exceptional status. O'Donnell has given several interviews about the inspiration for Modesty and has published an autobiographical account which provides the background to Modesty's

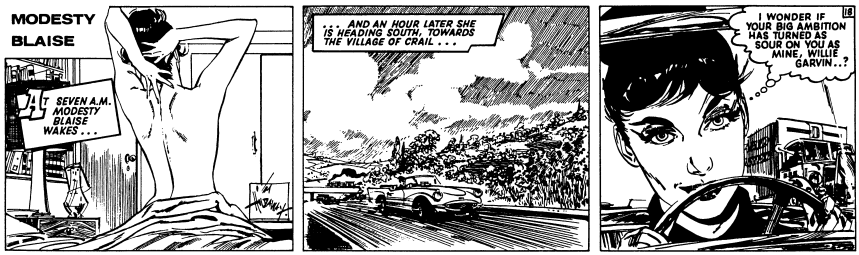

Figure 3.2 Modesty Blaise in 'La Machine', from *The Gabriel Set-Up*, by Peter O'Donnell and Jim Holdaway (Titan Books, 2004).

Figure 3.3 Modesty Blaise in 'La Machine', from *The Gabriel Set-Up*, by Peter O'Donnell and Jim Holdaway (Titan Books, 2004).

Figure 3.4 Willie Garvin in 'La Machine', from *The Gabriel Set-Up*, by Peter O'Donnell and Jim Holdaway (Titan Books, 2004).

Figure 3.5 Modesty Blaise in 'La Machine', from *The Gabriel Set-Up*, by Peter O'Donnell and Jim Holdaway (Titan Books, 2004).

creation. When stationed with a mobile radio detachment in Persia (now Iran) during the Second World War, O'Donnell encountered a young girl travelling across country on her own, one of the trickle of refugees fleeing the Balkans ahead of the German invasion:

> I was very curious about her because although her hair was black and she was deeply tanned, she didn't seem to be an Arab child. This was hard to define, but she was simply not quite like the many Arab children we had seen during our time in Persia and Iraq.
>
> I told Jock to heat another tin of McConnochie's [stew], and as the four of us talked, I found we all had the same feeling – that this child might well be one of the long term refugees from the Balkan country who had lost whatever group or family she had been with. If this was so, the loss was surely not recent, for the little girl was very much in charge of herself, clearly used to being alone, wary but not afraid, and with no expectation of help from anybody.
>
> (O'Donnell 2004)

The soldiers offer the girl stew and tea, which she warily takes, and then she walks away across country: 'To this day I can see in my mind's eye the smile she had given us and the sight of that upright little figure walking like a princess as she moved away from us on those brave skinny legs' (O'Donnell 2004). This episode forms the origins of Modesty Blaise, fleshed out in the 1966 strip narrative 'In The Beginning', which was designed to introduce the character to new readers whose papers were picking up the strip in the middle of its run (O'Donnell and Holdaway 2004). In the strip narrative, O'Donnell invents a more detailed background for the girl: she is a Hungarian orphan and refugee in the displaced-persons camps of the Second World War, who makes friends with a Jewish professor from Bucharest. They travel around the Middle East together, and he teaches her all he knows. The professor gives Modesty her first name, and she chooses her surname from the stories of King Arthur; Merlin's tutor was named Blaise. After the professor's death, the seventeen-year-old Modesty works

for a gang in Tangier and takes over the operation when its leader is killed, eventually building it into a multinational criminal organisation called The Network.[7] This is Modesty's back story to the newspaper comic strips and the novels, a criminal past which is oddly honourable:

> She was, as far as she knew, only twenty – and the name of Modesty Blaise was already notorious. But nothing could ever be proved against her. … The Network dealt in many crimes, but never drugs or vice. Modesty Blaise loathed human degradation and those who dealt in it. For this she would kill …
>
> ('In The Beginning', O'Donnell and Holdaway 2004)

Indeed, according to Modesty's sidekick Willie Garvin, in one of the later novels:

> She didn't just run the smartest organization since crime began, she ran the cleanest. Sometimes it seemed we spent more time breaking up dirty mobs than bringing in loot. And I remember we passed up a fifty-grand job once, because we couldn't figure a way to do it without a couple of fuzz getting hurt. Certainly she's signed a few people off, but it's always been the kind of bastard whose going leaves the world smelling a lot sweeter.
>
> (O'Donnell 1972: 66)

Like Philip Marlowe, Modesty Blaise operates with an old-fashioned sense of honour in the dirty modern world. While money and perverse pleasures drive her opponents, Modesty and Willie, after their retirement from The Network, follow sybaritic lifestyles and egalitarian principle, motivated only by a need for excitement and a desire to uphold the law. In this, *Modesty Blaise* represents a particular formulation of post-war ennui; like the demobilised forces returning from the Second World War, Modesty and Willie find it hard to settle down in civilian life. As Willie's comment indicates, the background of The Network endorses a mythology of honour amongst thieves, while also casting Modesty Blaise simultaneously as criminal and judiciary.

The first novel opens after Modesty and Willie's retirement, when Sir Gerald Tarrant of the British Secret Service asks for their help, setting in motion their friendship and professional alliance. Like her contemporaries – Bond, the U.N.C.L.E. agents and the Avengers – Modesty is a model of urbane living. The novels are packed with detail of her apartments, her clothes and the meals she eats. Like other spies of the 1960s, Modesty and Willie are at ease with the burgeoning global consumer culture. On Tarrant's first visit to Modesty's Hyde Park penthouse, he observes furnishings drawn from a museum of international culture and colonial history: 'a scattering of ornaments – a porcelain-mounted lion clock after Caffieri,

backed by a pair of Sèvres plates; a jade dragon bowl of the Chia Ch'ing period, and a silver vinaigrette; three superb ivories, a Clodion statuette, and an antique mahogany knife-urn' (O'Donnell 1965: 11).

The list indicates that Modesty has good taste, a characteristic narratively aligned with her role as moral arbiter. Unlike Bond and Mrs Peel, however, she does not have a class background, which makes her relation to such items that of the colonial inheritor. Modesty's origins as an orphaned refugee from Eastern Europe, together with the cockney heritage of Willie Garvin, give her a different position in relation to such cultural capital; in short, both she and Willie are self-educated and self-made. As Robbie Goh observes:

> In this period of transition [Britain's construction of its national image in the 1960s and 1970s], Fleming's works must be seen as a retrospective, inertial vision of an older, imperialistic Britain, while O'Donnell's novels develop a 'new liberal' image of Britain as a racially tolerant system governed by the motor forces of 'enterprise.'
>
> (Goh 1999: 29)

Where Cathy Gale and Emma Peel are eminently British, Modesty's origins are in the Eastern deserts, making her an 'ideal immigrant':

> Not only is she essentially law-abiding, moral and patriotic, she also brings into the nation the at that time fabulous fortune of half a million sterling, as well as the peculiar professional skills (surveillance, disguise, security, and occasionally execution) that suit her to serve the interests of the nation and its people.
>
> (Goh 1999: 33)

Modesty Blaise, with her companion Willie Garvin, represents a fantasy of the new England; C. P. Snow's vision of a national meritocracy (Sandbrook 2006: 48–9). Despite the egalitarian ethos of the novels, however, Western culture is always dominant. Like the objects in Modesty's apartment, the clothes she wears and the cuisine she favours, non-European culture in *Modesty Blaise* is to be consumed and assimilated. While Modesty herself is of Eastern origin, her allegiance is unquestionably to England and Englishness. Her surname, linking her to Arthurian legend, together with her platonic partnership with Garvin – he is described as being a courtier to her queen and fondly refers to Modesty throughout as 'princess' – attaches her to English mythologies of monarchy and heritage.

Despite this traditional frame, Modesty Blaise pushes the boundaries of nationality, legality and gender identity. She does go beyond the 'placed' identities of the Bond girls or of Cathy Gale and Emma Peel (Bennett and Woollacott 1987: 116). Her back story is one part of this, but her criminal past and incongruously moral agenda also entail a different relation to the

state authorities she sometimes works for. While Sir Gerald Tarrant uses her services, she is not paid by him and is not an employee of the secret service he represents. In this sense, Modesty and Willie are not agents of the state, but independent operatives who have an ethical role. Modesty and Willie represent the triumph of good over evil, and this reassuring aesthetic fuels much of the pleasure in reading these popular fictions. Such narratives offered fantasies of freedom and agency in an era when the power of multinational capital was becoming increasingly evident. In these terms, Modesty and Willie represent modern ideals in a postmodern setting; like James Bond, they are able to assert their will over that of their enemies, many of whom are engaged in global enterprise.

Modesty's independence is evident in *The Long Lever* strip, originally published 23 September 1963–15 January 1964 in the *Evening Standard* (O'Donnell and Holdaway 2004). In this story, Modesty and Willie are called on by Sir Gerald to rescue a Hungarian scientist, Dr Kossuth, who has been kidnapped by Soviet agents. Modesty takes on the 'caper' because she recognises Kossuth as a fellow refugee; he spent time in a Greek internment camp after the Second World War, and Modesty recalls her experience of the same 'hell-hole' when she was six years old. When they find Kossuth, it emerges that he is returning to Hungary willingly, as his daughter is being held in a prison camp there, her mother having died during the birth. This again strikes a chord with Modesty's own childhood in the camps, and she sets Kossuth free to return to Hungary, knocking Willie out so that he doesn't have to take responsibility for her actions. In her report to Sir Gerald Modesty, she states, 'I don't give a damn about a scientist going one way or the other, Sir Gerald – it's nothing new, and it never seems to make much difference in the long run … For me, what twisted the thumbscrews was choosing whether to fail *you* or fail the child' (O'Donnell and Holdaway 2004). It emerges that Kossuth has been killed by a Soviet agent in any case, but the child is now freed from hostage, and Sir Gerald's response is to forgive Modesty's insubordination, seeing the event as a 'non-recurring factor'. Modesty takes the moral high ground and provides an opportunity for Sir Gerald to implicitly endorse such moral fortitude, thereby shoring up the image of the state as an honourable entity rather than a body driven by economic imperatives.

In this narrative, Modesty's choice is driven by emotion; her memories of a childhood in the displaced-persons camps and her desire for parents who would return. This is a rare insight into Modesty's interior life; most of the strip and fiction narratives represent her as completely self-contained. The skills exhibited by Modesty and Willie in their various adventures are professionally honed, the result of many years' training. In addition to remarkable physical ability and skill with their chosen weapons, Modesty and Willie are able to suppress anxiety, pain and even to lose consciousness at will. In this sense, Modesty Blaise represents the perfect modern agent – the epitome of Enlightenment individualism, she is a fantasy of agency in a disorienting

post-war environment – a subject who is able to effect change and take control of events. Above all, she is in control of her body, using it in several adventures to gain control of dangerous situations. In a later novel, *The Night of Morningstar*, Modesty employs muscular manipulation, based on a technique learned from an Indian holy man, to expel a drug injected into her thigh (O'Donnell 1982: 199, 234). Most notoriously, Modesty occasionally employs The Nailer, walking into a room of armed men naked to the waist in order to gain a few seconds' advantage (O'Donnell 1965: 26; O'Donnell 1966: 153–4). In this manner, Modesty is constructed as a masculine agent in a feminine body, able to compartmentalise her experience and employ her stunning physical attributes as weapons. Throughout the strip comics and the popular novels, Modesty's sexuality and gender are in the spotlight, ostensibly marking her as a product of the new freedoms of liberated sexuality and consumerism, but also indicating how *strange* this female agent is. There are many examples of the narratives themselves commenting upon Modesty's uniqueness, and it is notable that other women who feature in the novels are also often marked as 'different', albeit not as perfect as Modesty herself.[8]

Bond and the other male spies of 1960s fiction, film and television enact similar fantasies of affluence, ability and agency. Philip McAlpine (Diment 1967, 1968) and Napoleon Solo, like Bond, demonstrate such agency through their sexual prowess. Modesty, like the masculine models she emulates, is also depicted as sexually liberated, yet this is a problem for the narrative. Modesty's sexuality is a topic of debate, whereas for Bond et al., it is simply a given, providing evidence of their heteromasculinity. When Modesty is working for Tarrant in *Sabre-Tooth*, she encounters an old flame, Mike Delgado:

> It was five years or more since she had last felt the touch of his hand and the weight of his lean body upon her, but now it might have been yesterday. She had known other men through the years ... not many, not few. With them she had given, and been given, warmth and joy and the great leap to the summit and the glowing peace of fulfilment. But of them all, only three had carried her beyond the summit and into a blazing golden world of the eternal moment, when it seemed that the body's very essence was on the verge of being unmade.
>
> (O'Donnell 1966: 99)

This passage offers another rare insight into Modesty's psyche, but what a strangely purple turn of phrase she adopts, employing the euphemistic language of romantic fiction, with a 'great leap to the summit' rather than 'climax' and a 'blazing golden world of the eternal moment' rather than 'orgasm'. This sits strangely with the more graphic language of action sequences:

> Modesty took a long swerving stride. The bottle dropped from Emilio's hand and he snatched for his gun. Her leg swung with the whole impetus of her body behind it. Her toes were arched back and the ball

> of her foot hit Emilio squarely on the solar plexus with the explosive energy of her hundred and thirty pounds behind it.
>
> (O'Donnell 1966: 154)

The novels draw on incompatible styles of popular genre fiction. While popular fiction is notable for its ability to synthesise forms and produce new subgenres and combinations, in this case it offers a disjunctive style and narrative voice (Gelder 2004: 40–74). Modesty's transgenre representation is less than successful, but all the more interesting. The novels themselves appear to acknowledge such interest in their repeated return to Modesty's gender identity.

Steve Collier, Modesty's lover in *I, Lucifer*, describes her as 'a splendidly earthy creature' (O'Donnell 1967: 69), and this attempt at categorisation continues throughout the novels. By *A Taste for Death* (1969), Collier's appreciation of Modesty's sexuality is mitigated by an understanding of her professional abilities:

> Collier watched, not speaking. There was something in her face and in her manner that he did not like, a kind of animal ferocity, a controlled fury against her enemies which made her incapable of compromise. . . .
>
> . . . again he saw something flare deep in her eyes, like the momentary red glow of a dog's eyes picked out by headlights in the dark; or a wolf's eyes, Collier thought. He knew that it was the feral glow of her will, that this quality alone had kept her alive against all odds in early childhood, and that this alone might save his own life now, as it had done before.
>
> But still, in some strange way, it repelled and saddened him. She had been all things to him and he loved her, but this was a part of her with which he could make no contact. He knew that she had surprising depths of charity and compassion, of humour and warmth; that she was intelligent, with a serene but joyous zest for life; that she could give a man supreme happiness or give him rest; and that, despite her dangerous skills, she was wholly feminine. But this, now, was something else. She was on ground where he could never hope to walk with her, where perhaps Willie Garvin alone could walk with her.
>
> (O'Donnell 1969: 210–11)

By the end of this novel, Stephen Collier has begun a relationship with Dinah Pilgrim, whom he later marries, so this passage marks the end of his sexual relationship with Modesty, yet it is not unique in its elaboration of her 'difference'. Here is Modesty herself, reflecting on her own femininity in conversation with Garvin:

> 'I grew up as a kind of hermaphrodite polecat, all sharp teeth and claws.' She gave a half laugh. 'It hardly dawned on me that I was a girl until I looked down one day and found I was growing knockers. But I

> went on being just as mean and nasty and bloody-minded as before. So I'm sort of different.' She touched his hand as it lay on the balustrade. 'Not better. Worse if anything, but different.'
>
> (O'Donnell 1977: 150)

These awkward passages set out to solve the ideological problem of Modesty's 'difference'; while 'wholly feminine' (whatever that means), she is capable of performing as well as, if not better than, the men around her.[9] Her predilection for combat is attributed to her childhood, yet this alone is clearly not enough; both passages are notable for their use of animal imagery to denote how far beyond ordinary humanity Modesty is. The novels thus admit to the central contradiction of Modesty's characterisation; she is, indeed, a 'hermaphrodite'. These passages describe how Modesty differs from normative femininity; but they also expose the artificial construction of gender difference per se. Modesty's own language – the peculiar use of the word 'knockers' to denote her breasts – indicate the extent to which she embodies heterofemininity; she cannot see herself as a woman because a woman could not do what she does. Therefore, she sees herself in masculine terms, through masculine eyes and in masculine language. Modesty may be self-made in the novels and the newspaper comic strips, but she is made in man's image. Like the fetishised femme fatale figure of classic film noir, Modesty is a woman who seduces and kills; unlike the femme fatale, she is depicted as the protagonist in these adventures and also given a voice. It is when she attempts to describe herself that the characterisation begins to unravel. At these moments, Modesty Blaise inadvertently exposes the contradictions of heterofemininity.

Continually marked as 'different' from other women, Modesty is a fantasy of 'liberated' (hetero)sexuality and super-human ability. When the narratives examine Modesty, however, the answers are not satisfactory. In *Sabre-Tooth*, Modesty and Willie adopt Lucille, who, like Modesty, is an orphan. Lucille is taken hostage and used by the villain, Karz to ensure Modesty and Willie's cooperation in a planned attack on Kuwait. Both Willie and Modesty admit that they do not feel much connection with Lucille but take on the challenge because of the more abstract threat to children in Kuwait. Once they have succeeded, Lucille is shipped off to a family in America, with Willie/Modesty and the child declared 'incompatible' by psychoanalysts (O'Donnell 1966: 278). In this 'caper', Modesty puts herself in a military bordello, where she is raped by Karz's mercenaries. This aspect of the job distresses Willie (and Tarrant) more than Modesty herself:

> 'My bit wasn't funny. … ' A spark of wry humour touched her eyes.
> 'But it wasn't a fate-worse-than-death, either!'
> She pressed his hand a little tighter against her cheek.
> 'Listen, Willie. You know I never lie to you. I was a thousand miles away.

> 'It was nothing like when it happened to me long ago, when I was twelve. I was frightened then, until I passed out.
> 'And even that's gone now. I shut it out long ago. It happened to somebody else. So did this ... '
>
> (O'Donnell 1966: 145)

On the one hand, these aspects of Modesty's character – her confessed lack of maternal feeling, her refusal to be defined by sexual assault – suggest a feminist sensibility, but this sits ill with the constant references to her *über*-femininity and sexual appeal. While many aspects of Modesty Blaise imply liberation and a new world order – her stateless origins, her passionate friendship with Garvin, her role as central mover in these narratives – ultimately, she is delimited by the insistence on her 'femininity' as something that demands comment, as expressed by her tears after a difficult job and her pointed heterosexual prowess. This makes Modesty a fascinating subject for analysis, just as the novels and strips make fascinating popular fiction.

Women spies in print: Mrs Pollifax

Dorothy Gilman's Mrs Pollifax novels take the female spy a step further than Modesty Blaise. Emily Pollifax is a widow and grandmother from New Brunswick, New Jersey, who first appears in *The Unexpected Mrs Pollifax* in 1966. This is the only novel of the series published in the 1960s, however, and these fictions, as a serial narrative, are more in tune with the politics of 1970s left-wing liberalism than 1960s ideas about sexual liberation.[10] In the first novel, Emily Pollifax asserts her dissatisfaction with the usual round of volunteering and offers her services to the CIA, fulfilling a childhood ambition to be a spy. Despite their initial reluctance, she is employed as a courier by Carstairs who, with his assistant Bishop, becomes Mrs Pollifax's agency 'handler'. From the outset, Mrs Pollifax does not fit the stereotype of the spy, and, indeed, that's what gets her this first assignment:

> 'I've come to volunteer. I'm quite alone, you see, with no encumbrances or responsibilities. It's true that my only qualifications are those of character, but when you reach my age character is what you have the most of. I've raised two children and run a home. I drive a car and know first aid, I never shrink from the sight of blood and I'm very good in emergencies.'
>
> Mr Mason looked oddly stricken.
>
> (Gilman 1966: 9)

Naturally, Mrs Pollifax takes to spying extremely well, embarking on a series of adventures that take her to a variety of exotic destinations. Unlike Modesty Blaise, who is at home everywhere, Emily Pollifax is an American abroad (one of the novels is titled *Mrs Pollifax, Innocent Tourist*), yet these

fictions do not espouse a neo-colonial ethic but rather seek to efface the realities of American foreign policy in the 1970s. Where the USA engaged in forays into South American politics, Mrs Pollifax, in this first novel, is kidnapped in Mexico by Chinese agents and transported to Albania where she befriends her fellow prisoner and captured agent, Farrell. In her encounter with the 'Red Chinese', Emily Pollifax's main weapons are her ability to improvise and to forge connections with those around her, including a Soviet agent and her Albanian guards. She represents the triumph of Western liberal ideals over the totalitarian regimes of communist states – the eccentric individual is lauded over the political masses.

As a depiction of the female spy, however, Mrs Pollifax is a radical departure; she is supremely conventional, and this ordinary quality, together with her age, brings her through the most dangerous escapades. The novels are told in the third person but largely from her point of view, so that we do get an insight into Mrs Pollifax's mind, unlike that of Modesty. These are clearly designed to be comic thrillers, gently satirising the conventions of 1960s spy fictions, yet also quietly examining the role of the professional spy. Farrell, a CIA operative she encounters in the first novel, reappears in several later novels, including *Mrs Pollifax on Safari* (1976), *Mrs Pollifax and the Second Thief* (1993) and *Mrs Pollifax Unveiled* (2000) as a disaffected retired agent who occasionally freelances for his former employers. In the second novel, *The Amazing Mrs Pollifax* (1970), Emily is dispatched to help another woman spy escape from Communist kidnappers in Istanbul. Their encounter is an interesting depiction of what Mrs Pollifax herself describes as 'an amateur confronted by her professional counterpart' (Gilman 1970: 2). Magda Ferenci-Sabo has been a spy since the First World War, becoming a member of the French resistance in the Second World War and then a Cold War agent in the 1950s. By the time in which the novel is set, this professional agent wants to retire, admitting, 'agents are not supposed to survive as long as I, they are supposed to die violently and early' (Gilman 1970: 82). Magda lists her reasons for wanting to retire from the 'double game':

> 'I am tired of violence, of uncertainty and betrayals, of remaining always detached lest someone I grow to like must be betrayed, or betray me. Most, I am tired of acting the double part ... '
>
> Mrs Pollifax looked at her and was curiously touched. She thought of the *Times* biography which could not know or possibly describe – no-one could – the complications or dangers which this woman must have met and mastered with intelligence and courage, and always alone. But she thought the story was written clearly in the lines of Magda's face: *Those are good lines*, she thought, *lines of humor and compassion and deep sadness. And I heard her laugh – how did she escape corruption from all this?* Her hand went out to touch Magda's hand and squeeze it.
>
> (Gilman 1970: 82–3)

In this encounter, Mrs Pollifax acknowledges the personal cost of professional espionage and respects her colleague's experience and fortitude. In this the Pollifax novels differ from the 1960s female spies on film, television and in popular fictions, as they indicate specific problems regarding espionage as a profession – the cost to the individual and the dubious intentions of state bodies. While the CIA remains largely unexamined, the Pollifax novels travel beyond the internal politics of the USA to investigate apartheid in South Africa (Gilman 1976: 92–3) and the politics of the Middle East (Gilman 1973: 175), as well as noting feminist and ecological issues.

Emily Pollifax, thus, offers a gently critical account of the violent fictional world she inhabits. Each novel begins with her being called to Carstairs' office for another assignment, and her domestic life in New Brunswick acts as an amusing counterpoint to the dangerous international locations she travels to. Mrs Pollifax breaks new ground as an older woman who reflects on the decline in her own body but refuses to be defined by the stereotype of aging femininity: ' "Wrinkled," she noted crossly as she glimpsed herself in the mirror, and sighed over her multiplying hobbies – environment, karate, Garden Club, Yoga, a little spying now and then – that left her so little time for grooming' (Gilman 1973: 8). Unfortunately, she has few peers in popular spy fiction and even fewer in depictions of women as spies in popular film and television. Her closest sister, as many reviewers have noted, is Agatha Christie's Jane Marple, but Emily Pollifax goes further than Christie's spinster detective; she encounters romance as well as danger in the Mrs Pollifax novels, eventually marrying the American lawyer Cyrus Reed, following their liaison in *Mrs Pollifax on Safari* (1976), and sharing a tender moment with the mysterious Tsanko in *The Elusive Mrs Pollifax* (Gilman 1971: 177–80). The examples of women spies in the chapters which follow map her development through the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, with reference to some of the most high-profile representations of the female spy on the large and small screen. They are, without exception, white, young, slim and heterosexual. Like Modesty Blaise, aspects of these representations disrupt the smooth surface of white heterofemininity, but none of them mark as critical a departure from the mainstream as Mrs Emily Pollifax of New Brunswick, New Jersey.

4 English roses and all-American girls

The New Avengers and *The Bionic Woman*

This chapter examines parallel representations of the female spy on British and American television during the 1970s: Purdey in *The New Avengers* (1976–7) and Jaime Sommers in *The Bionic Woman* (1976–8). In each series, the female protagonist is framed within a masculine economy; they are both employed by government agencies with a male commanding officer. Steed is Purdey's superior, just as Oscar Goldman is Jaime's 'manager', although there are ambiguities in these relationships. Unlike 1960s spy series such as *The Avengers*, however, *The Bionic Woman* and *The New Avengers* were produced and screened at a time when feminist politics were the subject of popular debate, elements of which are visible in television and film (Wood 1986: 202–5, Brunsdon 1997: 48). Second-wave feminisms were offering radical reassessments of gender relations, and traces of this are evident in *The Bionic Woman* and *The New Avengers* – in the performances of Lindsay Wagner and Joanna Lumley and in narrative references to the difficulties and possibilities such changes involved for women. Charlotte Brunsdon argues that female protagonists on screen from the 1970s to the 1990s renegotiated femininity in relation to three ideas: women's right to fulfilment beyond domesticity; women's financial independence; and women's sexuality outside marriage: 'In narrative terms, what was posed was the existence of female characters who were more like a hero than a heroine' (Brunsdon 1997: 48). Jaime and Purdey were such heroes. *The Bionic Woman* and *The New Avengers*, thus, represent attempts by the popular media to incorporate social change – attempts which, however modified and diluted, make feminism and femininity visible.

Although *The Bionic Woman* and *The New Avengers* sought to market the new middle-class professional woman as a consumable item, they also represented contradictions confronting such women in a society that had not substantially risen to the challenge of second-wave feminism. Indeed, the New Woman with her recently acquired disposable income was perceived as a market for consumer goods: 'The "new woman," as she is defined by aspects of the mass media, is indeed independent and self-assertive, but the implications of her new identity are not altogether what the women's movement had in mind' (Cagan 1978: 6). As representations of this 'New Woman', Jaime Sommers and Purdey are inevitably compromised in

their delicate negotiation of popular feminism and consumer culture. Jaime and Purdey, like the public personae of the actors that played them, were thoroughly imbricated in 1970s discourses of femininity and consumer culture (Douglas 1994: 211; Inness 1999: 46–8). Both characters were a means of marketing their shows and the focus for various forms of merchandise, such as the Bionic Woman doll complete with 'the mission purse, faithful tote bag for hair brush, make-up, secret plans, and orders from O.S.I.'[1] Purdey's mushroom bob was widely imitated, much like Farrah Fawcett-Majors' 'flick' hairstyle in *Charlie's Angels*. Jaime and Purdey were active, intelligent and (largely) independent professional women, but all these qualities were contained in a glamorous and marketable package. These 1970s female spies are active women *and* consumable images, so that Jaime Sommers and Purdey, like Modesty Blaise, expose contradictions within hetero-femininity. Jaime's bionic powers enabled her not only to serve as an agent for the Office of Strategic Intelligence (OSI) but also to do her housework in double-quick time. Was this the brave new world women were being offered? Purdey defeated her (male) opponents in hand-to-hand combat wearing high heels and trailing chiffon scarves. Would other female professionals also have to overplay their femininity while taking on more 'masculine' roles?

Production histories

The Bionic Woman and *The New Avengers* were popular prime-time dramas running concurrently on British and American television. The original broadcast dates of the series offer them as historical parallels, but they emerged from different national contexts of production and reception. *The Bionic Woman* was first broadcast on prime-time network television in the USA from January 1976 to May 1978, running for three seasons before it was dropped from the schedules. Like its close relation, *Charlie's Angels*, *The Bionic Woman* was produced by the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) under the reign of Fred Silverman, president of ABC's Entertainment division from 1975 to 1978. Throughout his career, Silverman was notorious for lowest-common-denominator programming (Gitlin 1994: 68). Master of the spin-off series, Silverman's success at ABC 'set the tone for American network television for the balance of the seventies' (Baughman 1997: 152). Under his direction, ABC broadcast a range of dramas and sitcoms with ambitions only to garner the largest viewing figures; sexual images and activity featured prominently in the drama series, while the sitcoms were designed to be as inoffensive as possible. Despite this limited remit, several series, such as *Roots* and *Charlie's Angels* tapped into contemporary concerns regarding race and gender. This is not to say that a liberal ethos was behind such programmes, rather that these were shows that people would watch in large numbers:

> In 1976, [Silverman's] first full year at the network, ABC's earnings rose 186 percent. *Charlie's Angels* and *Roots* (some 130 million Americans,

> or 85 percent of all TV homes, watched all or part of the miniseries) had allowed ABC to overcome CBS for the overall ratings leadership for the 1976–77 season.
>
> (Baughman 1997: 153)

Like *Charlie's Angels* and *Roots*, *The Bionic Woman* was successful in packaging a quasi-liberal politics within a deeply conservative medium.

The production history of its English equivalent is very different. The first season of *The New Avengers* was broadcast on British television from October 1976 to March 1977, but even before it was shown, the programme was dogged by disagreement. The ITV network could not agree a common slot for the show, so that it was shown at different times in different regions, none of them as high profile as the Saturday-night slot which *The Avengers* had occupied (Rogers 1989: 226). American networks bought the series two years later, but CBS once again buried *The New Avengers* in the schedules, broadcasting it at 11.30 p.m. due to its violent content (Rogers 1989: 227, Lumley 1989: 146). The production was dogged by dissent, and funding wavered. Dave Rogers argues that the show's demise was due to pressure from the French financiers to cater to their home market by making Purdey 'more sexy' and dressing her in French *haute couture* rather than British-designed outfits. The British cast and crew resisted these attempts to change the Avengers brand and secured backing from a Canadian company for the second series, which was aired in Britain from September to December 1977, but this was its last season (Rogers 1989: 226–7).[2] While *The Avengers* provided the initial impetus to produce *The New Avengers*, the latter was inevitably in its parent's shadow.

Like *The Bionic Woman*, *The New Avengers* was a spin-off series. *The New Avengers* was broadcast on British television seven years after the last episode of *The Avengers*; *The Bionic Woman* was an American network spin-off which ran concurrently with *The Six Million Dollar Man*, ending its run when the parent show was dropped. Although both programmes were spin-offs, they each had different relations to their originary series. *The New Avengers* was defined by *The Avengers*. Linda Thorson, who played Tara King in *The Avengers*, was very popular with French audiences, and this is widely cited as the reason the series was initially produced with French funding (Rogers 1989: 218). Crew who had worked with Diana Rigg on the earlier series called Joanna Lumley 'Diana' onset (Lumley 1989: 133). *The New Avengers* had little identity of its own; it was not so much a spin-off as an attempt to remake the 1960s series, and, in these terms, it was doomed to fail. Most popular and academic accounts mention *The New Avengers* only as an afterthought and compare it unfavourably with *The Avengers* (Chapman 2002: 94–7, Miller 2003: 97, Britton 2004: 74–7). *The Bionic Woman* had a more distinct identity. Although it was an attempt to capitalise on the popularity of *The Six Million Dollar Man*, it outdid its predecessor in the ratings and garnered its female star a more generous salary – Lindsay

Wagner earned $500,000 a season, while Lee Majors got $300,000 a season for his role as Steve Austin in *The Six Million Dollar Man* (Inness 1999: 46). *The Bionic Woman* was clearly a product of American network television in the 1970s, but *The New Avengers* had a more international background, funded by French and Canadian money and devised and produced by a British team.

Feminism and television in the 1970s

The Bionic Woman and *The New Avengers* were part of an array of mainstream films and television programmes in the 1970s which not only represented the 'New Woman' but were also addressed to a 'new' audience, the liberated '*Cosmo* girl':

> White, youngish, heterosexual and an aspirant professional ... *Cosmo* girl aspires to the sexual satisfaction that was connotatively denied to the 'career girl' of the 1960s. Moving into the 1980s, *Cosmo* girl has options and makes choices. However her new subject position is potentially contradictory, retaining femininity, while moving into traditionally masculine modes (alert, aggressive, ambitious). There is thus a constant tension in the way she must always already be desirable (feminine), as well as desiring.
>
> (Brunsdon 1997: 54–5)

Jaime and Purdey were not fully *Cosmo* girls; they displayed little desire for sexual satisfaction and were primarily desirable rather than desiring. Nonetheless, as active 1970s female protagonists, they predate the 1980s *Cosmo* girl in their contradictory assumption of masculine and feminine roles. The tension between their desirability and their actions is evident in each series; there is an overt contradiction between how they look and what they do.

As new women, Jaime and Purdey were part of a shift in television roles for women which was typified by Mary Richards, the lead character on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (Dow 2005). Women had long been a target audience for commercial television in North America and Britain: 'Since researchers first identified the quintessential consumer as female and between the ages of 18 and 35, television has pandered to women, promoting a vision of the good life in which they play a key part and feeding an obsession with youth, affluence, beauty and glamor' (Cashmore 1994: 115). Yet, despite their power as a desirable consumer group, women on television in the 1950s and 1960s tended to be placed within domestic settings and in subordinate roles (Downing 1974; Cashmore 1994: 115–16; Dow 2005: 379). As Nancy S. Tedesco observed in her study of gender roles on prime-time American television 1969–72:

> Males have adventures and get into violent situations. They are powerful and smart, and their independence requires that they be relatively

> unattached (not married) and thus able to take risks. Females, on the other hand, are presented as lacking independence. They are not usually found in adventure situations; they are younger, more likely to be married, and less likely to be employed.
>
> The focus on different dramatic situations and other dissimilarities based on sex alone makes it difficult for men to view women as equals, for women to view themselves as equal to men, and for both sexes not to view the male role as necessarily the more active, powerful, and independent role.
>
> (Tedesco 1974: 122–3)

In this fashion, series such as *The Bionic Woman* and *The New Avengers* did push the boundaries of traditional prime-time drama by placing Jaime and Purdey in 'masculine' roles which were relatively independent, central to the action and engaged in adventures which often led to violent situations.

Not only did Jaime and Purdey engage in 'masculine' roles, but they also played central roles in action-adventure series, a genre not known in the 1970s for its female protagonists or as a form of programming which delivered the desirable female demographic to advertisers. Sitcoms and soap operas were the locus for female protagonists and 'women's issues', offering 'a reformist or liberal feminism as "progressive" even while it simultaneously [worked] to disavow it' (Rabinovitz 1989: 3). Popular television thus works to contain disruptive images and ideas, rendering the new and the radical as safe and traditional in an attempt to attract viewers but not to disturb them. Nonetheless, in representing shifts in social structures, popular television retains a potential for divergent readings. Mary Ellen Brown argues that soap operas both construct women as a consumer group and offer pleasures that are not easily defined: 'I am suggesting that consumers can use the products of a consumer society, in this case television, in order to constitute acts of resistance while still remaining within the dominant economic order' (Brown 1990a: 210). A 1970s study of daytime soap operas not only acknowledges the low status of the genre but also alludes to the space it offers older, powerful female characters: 'The woman in primetime drama is under a greater compulsion to be young, insignificant, and subservient to the interests of the male characters' (Downing 1974: 134). *The Bionic Woman* often conforms to elements of soap-opera style in its attempts to render Jaime unthreatening, with its contemporary small-town setting and emphasis on the emotional aspect of the plot (Downing 1974: 131). Jaime also accedes to the demand for youthful glamour and is 'subservient to the interests' of Oscar Goldman, yet she often works alone and is invariably successful in her endeavours. She is hyper-feminine *and* heroic, a combination that makes her appear comical or 'camp' to contemporary viewers.[3] In these terms, figures like Jaime and Purdey offer contradictory accounts of popular feminism on television in the 1970s.

The ambiguities in Jaime's role are reflected by the production process itself. Ben Stein and James L. Baughman bear witness to the constant struggle between production companies and networks, together with the centrality of Hollywood as a location and cultural influence (via the film industry) for American television series (Stein 1980: 3, Baughman 1997: 143–74, Cantor and Cantor 1992: 66–7). These are not accounts of an industry which is

Figure 4.1 Lindsay Wagner in *The Bionic Woman*.

unified or politically motivated; rather, they make clear the extent to which television production in the 1970s was driven by economic imperatives above all, and if feminism was a selling point, then feminism was incorporated into the television series. Christine Gledhill cites this type of manoeuvre as an example of cultural hegemony: 'In this process, bourgeois society adapts to new pressures, while at the same time bringing them under control' (1998: 242). *The Bionic Woman*, like *Charlie's Angels*, was not enlightened broadcasting; initial intentions to make *Charlie's Angels* a feminist detective series were quickly brought into line so that the show was derided as 'jigglevision' (Baughman 1997: 153, Gitlin 1994: 71–3).

The success of series such as *Charlie's Angels* and *The Bionic Woman* is indicative of the popular media's ability to incorporate feminist issues and language for consumerist ends (Cagan 1978, Rabinovitz 1989, White 2006). Once feminism became a popular movement, advertisers were quick to respond to the shift in their target audience. Despite direct action by feminist groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW), mainly responding to advertisements which insulted, exploited and stereotyped women, advertising agencies were able to employ the language of liberation to sell their products: 'By the early 1970s both the advertisements and the editorial copy of popular women's magazines had become fixed on redefining feminism as simply a new form of consumerism' (Craig 2003: 20). Most notoriously, the campaign to promote Virginia Slims cigarettes, launched in 1968, was one of several new brands specifically designed to draw on the cultural capital created by feminism. Marketed to women as a cigarette that promoted weight loss and offered the smoker both glamour and independence, the campaign slogan became a national catchphrase: 'You've come a long way, baby.' NOW condemned the campaign, and feminist graffiti appeared on the posters, reading ' ... and don't call me baby', but the Virginia Slims campaign was a huge success, changing the terms of advertising campaigns aimed at women in the USA (Craig 2003: 18–19).

The first episode of *The Bionic Woman*, 'Welcome Home Jaime, Part 2', ('Welcome Home Jaime, Part 1' was initially broadcast as an episode of *The Six Million Dollar Man*), directly references the Virginia Slims campaign, as Jaime is shown in her classroom on Ventura Airforce Base engaged in discussion with her students about the Declaration of Independence. An African American girl asserts that while there were no women signatories on the Declaration, there would be a lot of women signing it now, to which a young white boy responds, 'You've come a long way, baby', and the class laughs. *The Bionic Woman* thus takes a phrase from popular feminism and employs it to establish the show's liberal agenda. The series presents a muted version of 1970s liberal politics, endorsing equal rights, civil liberties and social justice. These issues are frequently diluted beyond recognition and never examined in a manner that advocates disrupting the status quo. Yet, that these issues are referenced at all on a popular prime-time series indicates change in the USA's political geography. When Lyndon B. Johnson

was elected in 1964, he introduced a raft of legislation combating racism and expanding welfare provision. Despite the Cold Warrior persona that took America into Vietnam and eventually lost Johnson the Presidency, the 1960s continued to represent an era of collective action and the radicalisation of subordinate populations: women, African Americans, Native Americans and Chicanos (Reeves 2000: 179–97). This is the perspective that *The Bionic Woman* offers, albeit in very curtailed form.

David Allen Case argues that 'American culture in the seventies ... can be defined as the extension of avant-garde sixties values to a suburban audience, the domestication of rebellion', citing *The Partridge Family* and *Bewitched* as examples (2000: 196). *The Bionic Woman* also domesticates rebellion, from Jaime's progressive classroom debates to the moral authority of her actions on OSI assignments. Jaime is always related to state authorities; even her work as a schoolteacher is located on the Ventura Airforce Base. This conveniently puts her on the spot for her work with OSI, but it also situates her as representative of a benevolent, humanitarian government that has the interests of all its people at heart. Jaime's domestic, amateur status makes her an advocate of the American way as both private individual and government agent. Just as her feminine exterior masks a complex technological interior, so Jaime's political and social positioning is often ambiguous. She is a double agent in terms of the ideologies she deploys, always undercover, with bionic powers that are harnessed to endorse US policy at home and abroad.

The Bionic Woman as social commentary

Although *The Bionic Woman* may have cynically referenced feminism, this counters assertions that television drama did not acknowledge the women's movement at all. In her survey of prime-time American network television during 1973, Jean C. McNeil argues that:

> Television series programming does not acknowledge the existence of the feminist movement. ... this is a world without feminism, a world in which the truly independent woman is so rare as to have little meaning as representative of an alternate lifestyle. ... If feminism is, as one historian has said, 'the most radical social phenomenon in all history,' it is clear that the average viewer will not know of its significance from television.
>
> (McNeil 1975: 267, 269)

McNeil's evidence regarding television contradicts Steve Craig's discussion of 'post-feminist' advertising in the early 1970s – one could deduce that advertising campaigns aimed at specific markets were quicker to employ 'feminist' terms than prime-time series aimed at the widest potential audience. Nevertheless, it does indicate the extent to which programmes such as

The Bionic Woman were breaking new ground, albeit in a tentative manner. Jaime is an independent working woman. She is the title character of a prime-time action-adventure series. Her past as a professional tennis player, as well as her present roles as schoolteacher and bionic agent, takes her away from the usual domestic soap and sitcom roles for female characters. Yet, Jaime is situated within *The Bionic Woman* in a manner that limits her independence and 'alternate lifestyle'. Jaime lives in a converted barn on the Austins' ranch in Ojai; she is their surrogate daughter and potential daughter-in-law, frequently depicted in a family setting. While Steve Austin works in Washington, Jaime lives and works in provincial California, and their long-drawn-out romance is a constant reminder of Jaime's status in relation to him. Several of the plots centre on characters Jaime knows in Ojai, such as 'A Thing of the Past' (Series 1, Episode 3, 18 February 1976), where the school-bus driver is exposed as the witness to a mob killing in Chicago, or 'Claws' (Series 1, Episode 4, 25 February 1976), where Jaime helps a female animal trainer who buys a local ranch. In this way, Jaime remains local, while Steve is more often situated within the OSI headquarters as an international agent. She is coded as domestic and provincial, an amateur part-time agent – a willing volunteer for Oscar – rather than a full-time professional.

The series' ambivalent account of feminism is carried through in other political issues *The Bionic Woman* addresses. In 'Canyon of Death' (Series 1, Episode 9, 14 April 1976), for example, Jaime has a new and troubled Native American student, John Littlebear, who has constructed a fictional identity for himself as a warrior brave, performing rituals for his dead grandfather on the Native American burial grounds at the edge of the Ventura base. John's aunt visits Jaime at school, and it emerges that his identity is based on a fallacious book about American Indians by a white author from Brooklyn. His aunt also corrects John's account of his grandfather as a great warrior: 'His name was Many Horses. The kids used to call him Many Bottles.' He was an alcoholic who died of exposure and was found by John. Jaime's response is to assert that John (who calls himself Paco) is struggling to find an identity. Following a parallel story in which the burial grounds are exposed as the hiding place of a mercenary gang who are trying to steal OSI's latest invention, Jaime identifies the burial platform John/Paco has built as inauthentic for the tribe he is from. She and the boy end the episode as friends, Jaime asserting that they will have to get him some books written by 'real Indians'. It is a white teacher who will restore him to his culture. Clearly, this narrative offers a paternalistic and patronising solution to a complex historical and social situation, but the episode does not entirely efface the issues it references. The complexity of John/Paco's identity is not dismissed or demonised; his grandfather's real life of alcoholism and early death, as opposed to the heroic life his grandson constructs, indicate the social reality of many Native American people (Reeves 2000: 191). What the episode does not do, of course, is acknowledge the

extent to which this was a situation created by an American government who, by the end of the nineteenth century, had settled Indian territories and destroyed their means of survival (Reeves 2000: 18). In this way, *The Bionic Woman* dips its toe into contemporary political debate but rapidly backs away as the water gets too hot.

Jaime's beauty – predicated on a dominant white, slim, middle-class model – is offered as the angelic solution to such problems; John/Paco, on witnessing her bionic abilities, symbolically decides she is a 'spirit'. Episodes like 'Canyon of Death' endorse the status quo; the governmental system is not questioned; rather, it is depicted as being led by just and moral figures (represented by Jaime Sommers and Oscar Goldman) who are not driven by monetary gain: 'The military men who send Jaime off on her missions are invariably good and well-intentioned people' (Stein 1980: 39). The threat in this episode, as in many others, comes from external forces – in this case a criminal gang who want to sell military secrets to the highest bidder. In several episodes, political issues are addressed in a superficial manner, often with the effect of simultaneously implying liberal and conservative agendas. In 'Angel of Mercy' (Series 1, Episode 2, 28 January 1976), Jaime goes undercover as a squeamish army nurse on a mission to save an American diplomat and his wife trapped in a military base in South America. Her gruff helicopter pilot, Jack Starkey, is not happy about taking this pretty young woman into a war zone and derides her 'sense of duty'. During their adventures en route to the base, she twice hides her abilities from Jack, despite his sexist remarks, pretending that it is his bravery and strength that saves them. They find the ambassador and his wife, acquiring a friendly Chicano boy on the way, and all take off for São Paolo. The boy, Julio, goes to a foster home, accompanied by Starkey, who has been converted from a sexist, uncaring old soldier to a rehabilitated new man. He tells Jaime, 'I think you're some special lady.' Jaime is the one who saves the day, not only with her bionic skills but also with her positive, can-do attitude. This liberal feminist agenda sits ill with the national politics of the storyline, as the South American country is clearly Cuba, and the guerrillas are depicted as crazed fighters. What they are fighting for is not made clear; but in case there should be any doubt as to the location, the leader of the guerrilla group is credited as a character simply called 'Castro Beard.' Contemporary politics – be it feminism, Native American rights or American foreign policy – are thus referenced in *The Bionic Woman*, but they are inevitably framed by a personal, rather than a political context. A similar dynamic was visible in 1970s cinema: 'In Hollywood films – even the most determinedly progressive – there is no "Women's Movement"; there are only individual women who feel personally constrained' (Wood 1986: 202). Rather than the 'personal is political', this is a liberal agenda where the political is personal; in *The Bionic Woman*, radical politics are disassociated from their social and historical context and defused by each episode's happy ending.

'Some special lady': Jaime Sommers' bionic powers

Although feminist politics were defused in *The Bionic Woman*, questions surrounding Jaime's femininity are rendered more contradictory by her exceptional qualities. Jaime Sommers differs from the other female spies discussed in this book because of her bionic abilities; she represents a link between the spy and the superhero. Superman, Spiderman and Wonder Woman are related to the spy in their 'undercover' roles as Clark Kent, Peter Parker and Diana Prince, as well as in their efforts to fight crime and uphold the American way. In the mid-1980s, several comic-book heroes were rewritten in a manner that reflected critically on the conservative politics of the original stories; most notably Batman in the Dark Knight series of graphic novels (Miller 1986, see also Moore and Gibbons 1987). Jaime Sommers precedes such radical rereadings, offering an overtly uncritical account of American politics: she is made by the state and endorses the US government as a benevolent power which is unremittingly masculine. Jaime's bionic transformation is entirely governed by male figures. In 'Welcome Home Jaime, Part 1', Steve Austin (the 6-million-dollar man) demands that his boss, Oscar Goldman, make Jaime bionic following a fatal skydiving accident. Oscar accedes to Steve's requests, and the government Office of Scientific Information provides facilities and finance for the medical work. Dr Rudy Wells oversees the initial operation, and Dr Michael Marcetti saves Jaime when her body rejects her bionic implants. There are no women here, and in these terms, Jaime is a classic 'cyborg' figure; like a car or a computer, she is something that men work upon, which has an unpredictable tendency to break down (Plant 1997: 503).

In the novel based on the 'Welcome Home Jaime' episodes that chart Jaime's reconstitution as a successful bionic experiment, she is referred to as 'the second bionic creature' and 'a most gratifying example of creative scientific progress' (Willis 1976: 27, 32), thus situating her as an example of quasi-biblical evolution. Only when Jaime returns to Ojai does she encounter another significant female character, Helen Austin, Steve's mother, who is a surrogate mother to Jaime and an occasional figure in her adventures. In this manner, *The Bionic Woman* conforms to traditional binaries regarding gender and professional life; the male characters are skilled professionals, scientists, doctors and managers, while the women are amateurs, primarily concerned with the domestic and emotional realm. Jaime is the character who bridges this gap. She is both feminine and masculine, domestic and professional. When on assignment, she is usually an autonomous agent, clearly able to think for herself in a crisis, so that in narrative terms she is both hero and heroine (Brunsdon 1997: 48). Jaime's secret bionic identity is at the centre of this transgender boundary-crossing.

Like the 6-million-dollar man, the bionic woman is an all-American weapon, built by the OSI and paternally 'owned' by them through the figure of Oscar Goldman. Contemporary reviewers saw her bionic powers as comical:

> inevitably, with the perfect American woman came a whole new package of realized dreams: horror-stricken, I watched last night as the perfect housewife cleaned house bionically, scrubbing floors, polishing windows, killing all known germs dead, in less time than it takes to tell. Juggling three-piece suites as a wonderful prospective daughter-in-law, bringing order to classroom chaos as a bionic schoolmarm, plonking warm and wonderful kisses from her superlips on all and sundry, she filled one not with misery at the depths to which bionics had plummeted, but also with dread for the further depths yet to be plumbed.
>
> (Coren 1976)

In the 1990s, critics have noted the compromised quality of Jaime's special powers, calling her a 'bionic bimbo' (Douglas 1994: 211) and arguing that her 'ladylike' qualities undermine her toughness (Inness 1999: 48). I want to take those accounts a step further to argue that the very elements that undermine Jaime Sommers' feminist credentials also open up a space within the series for a feminist critique of femininity. In many episodes, as Alan Coren notes above, Jaime's bionic abilities are used to domestic ends, often to comic effect. Although Jaime's bionic running and strength is depicted in slow motion (as is Steve Austin's bionic activity), her bionic cooking and cleaning activities are speeded up, adding to the comic effect. While this can be read as trivialising Jaime's 'unnatural' strength, it can also be read as an ironic comment on traditional femininity and how this was beginning to change.

Although Jaime's 'angelic' persona is offered as the solution for a variety of political and social problems, her bionic identity problematises any notion of natural or innate femininity. *Charlie's Angels* began its broadcast life in the same year as *The Bionic Woman* – 1976 – but, unlike Jaime Sommers, the Angels continued until 1981 and have recently been revived in a series of movie remakes.[4] One reason for this longer shelf life may be that the Angels offer a less problematic account of femininity. They are fully human, all-natural, all-American women, embodying ideologies regarding what it means to be human, natural and American through their performances. Sabrina (Kate Jackson), Jill (Farrah Fawcett-Majors), Kelly (Jaclyn Smith) and their successors on the small screen represented a surprisingly moral depiction of women as the ethical and legal arbiters in a variety of familial and criminal disputes. Referred to as 'Angels' by their employer, the eponymous Charlie, and Bosley, his comedic ambassador, they represent a 1970s account of the Angel in the House – the Angel in the City, perhaps. The Angels' labour is often tempered by an insight into their compassionate personae, such as in 'To Kill an Angel' (Series 1, Episode 7, 10 November 1976), where Kelly's friendship with an autistic boy highlights her maternal qualities. The Angels' physical beauty is matched by an inner sweetness. The Angels are never angry or unhappy. Unlike the demonic femme fatale, these beautiful women offer exactly what the viewer sees – goodness all the way through.

Despite their 'feminist' sorority and frequent references to 'chauvinism' in the shows, the series is careful to distance the Angels from anything that is not heterofeminine, as in the notorious 'Angels in Chains' episode (Series 1, Episode 4, 20 October 1976), where the imprisoned Angels are hosed down by a 'butch' female guard called Max, or in 'The Killing Kind' (Series 1, Episode 6, 3 November 1976), where the main villain is Inge, a murderous Swedish masseuse. 'Lesbian' figures are included to spice up the action, but they are inevitably villains defeated by the Angels' skill and their witty dialogue. Such characters guarantee the Angels' heterofeminine credentials, despite their lack of long-term boyfriends, fiancés or husbands. Once fiancés or husbands appear, they usually herald a character's departure (Dresner 2007: 67–8).

Jaime's inside, by contrast, does not match her heterofeminine appearance. While she is blonde and beautiful, she is also superhumanly strong and fast. In effect, she should be a femme fatale but is depicted as another angelic woman, resolving conflicts and setting the world to rights. She is a violent *femme*; a *femme* who does not prove fatal for her male colleagues and whose actions are driven by truth, justice and the American way, rather than selfish avarice. This contradiction is most overtly expressed in Jaime's use of her bionic power for domestic purposes. 'The Deadly Missiles' (Series 1, Episode 5, 3 March 1976) begins with Jaime in the kitchen using her bionic speed to make a pie, rolling out the pastry superfast and bionically pushing in a bolt that has come loose from her cooker; she is food processor and power drill in one short sequence. Jaime becomes a domestic appliance again in 'Mirror Image' (Series 1, Episode 12, 19 May 1976), where Steve's father takes Jaime to task on the state of her apartment as she leaves for a holiday in Nassau. There follows a sequence where Jaime bionically cleans up – dusting, doing her dishes, watering her plants, etc. – as Mr Austin looks on, smiling approvingly: 'All that in five minutes? Jaime you're incredible!' Jaime's professional, undercover role thus becomes an aspect of her domestic life, creating a ridiculous spectacle which contemporary commentators noted:

> What distinguishes [*Charlie's Angels*] – and a number of other TV excursions into feminine adventure, such as *Police Woman* and *Bionic Woman* – is a frank and total lack of pretence. They all seem to proceed from the belief that a television series should not aspire to any greater emotional or intellectual depth than a standard comic book. The dialogue is apparently borrowed from old *Batman* balloons.
>
> ('Charlie's Trio of Sexy Angels,' *Time*, 22 November 1976: 65)

The series itself acknowledges Jaime's incongruity with an early reference in the second episode of the first season, 'Angel of Mercy'. Oscar arrives to collect Jaime for an OSI assignment and, when an audiotape machine will not play the tape he has brought with him, Jaime uses her bionic hand to

rewind it manually, at which point Oscar comments, 'Do you realize how much money we could make if I patented you as a household tool?' He then immediately voices his misgivings about sending Jaime on her own, specifically because of how she looks; he can think of her as a cyborg, but he sees her as a woman. In 'Welcome Home Jaime, Part 1', an episode originally broadcast as part of *The Six Million Dollar Man* (11 January 1976), Jaime responds to concerns about sending her out on assignment with the comment, 'You guys are afraid that I'm going to blow another fuse, aren't you?', overtly referencing her status as a man-made machine.

In this way, *The Bionic Woman* registers its own contradictions and, by extension, contemporary discomfort with the new women professionals. While working women had been a feature of company offices since the Second World War, the 'feminine mystique' had followed them from the suburban home:

> By 1971, the usual median weekly wage for full-time clerical workers in the United States was lower than that in every type of 'blue-collar' work. The only occupational category remaining below clerical work was service work, also predominantly female. Technological and structural changes in clerical work had facilitated women's entry into it; the preponderance of women clerical workers led, in turn, to further downgrading and deskilling of the work itself.
>
> (Gatlin 1987: 28)

Yet, by the early 1970s, new legislation was expanding the kinds of work women could apply for and was also beginning to offer protection rather than prejudice in the workplace (Gatlin 1987: 42; see also Tarr-Whelan 1978). By the late 1960s, there was a burgeoning women's movement visible in a range of women's groups, many of which engaged in direct action (Echols 1989). Television series such as *The Bionic Woman* were probably derided at the time by such activists, but even in this most conservative of media there is an acknowledgement that women's roles are shifting. In its unwieldy combination of technology and femininity, action and glamour, *The Bionic Woman* highlights political and social discomfort with newly independent white middle-class women – even if these women were not a majority but merely a potential.[5] As Shulamith Firestone wrote in her scathing critique of the modern media's role in disseminating the heteropatriarchal 'Culture of Romance', 'in its amplification of sex indoctrination, the media have unconsciously exposed the degradation of "femininity"' (Firestone 1979: 146).

A 'no-nonsense head girl of a secret agent': Purdey as New Woman

If *The Bionic Woman* offered viewers an all-American spy, *The New Avengers* was emphatically British. Yet, the impetus and initial funding to produce the series came from a French producer, Rudolf Roffi, who employed

Linda Thorson and Patrick MacNee in a 1975 French television commercial for champagne. Thorson had played Steed's third female partner, Tara King, in the sixth and final season of *The Avengers* broadcast in 1969. She was very popular with French audiences and, following the commercial's broadcast, Roffi approached Brian Clemens to produce a new *Avengers* series, possibly assuming that Thorson would play the lead again (Lumley 1989: 133). Clemens rapidly formed an independent production company with two other members of the original *Avengers* team, Albert Fennell and Laurie Johnson. They auditioned new faces for the roles of Purdey and Gambit once Patrick MacNee had agreed to reprise his role as Steed. The original *Avengers* double-act was now a three-part piece, with Gareth Hunt as Gambit providing a rough-diamond substitute in action sequences for an ageing MacNee (Rogers 1989: 218–25). On 8 March 1976, the *Daily Mail*'s Nigel Dempster announced that 'debby-voiced Miss Joanna Lumley, 29' had got the part of the new Avengers girl, and from the beginning the publicity campaign promoted her sexuality and sexual liberation as a means of selling the show: 'Prior to filming, Clemens told the media, "Purdey will be a stockings and suspenders girl – giving lots of glimpses of thigh. She will be tough, yet vulnerable, with a huge sense of humour. The *Avengers* girls will have gone full circle with Joanna. So much so that she won't have to burn her bra – she can put it back on"' (Rogers 1989: 221). Purdey was, thus, presented as a New Woman in terms of feminism and femininity, 'post-feminist' in her return to a more traditional femininity. In 'Dirtier by the Dozen' (Series 1, Episode 12, 13 March 1977), Purdey and Gambit are cornered, and she gives him her bra to use as a slingshot. Gambit asks her why she didn't burn it, and Purdey replies, 'I didn't need to. I knew I was liberated.' Purdey is 'liberated' only as a consumable image. As with *The Bionic Woman*, the feminism that *The New Avengers* occasionally referenced was a domesticated, consumer-friendly version of the second wave.

Joanna Lumley appears to have been aware of the contradictions of her role, recounting comic tales of ill-conceived Purdey merchandise and promotional appearances, as well as the rigours of low-budget filming (Lumley 1989: 125–44). Purdey was launched much like a 'Bond girl'. Lumley, unlike Honor Blackman and Diana Rigg, who went on from *The Avengers* to be 'Bond girls', had already appeared in a Bond film. She had one line in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (Peter R. Hunt, 1969), which starred Diana Rigg as the first and only Mrs Bond (Lumley 1989: 84–8). Purdey's stockings and suspenders were a short-lived publicity stunt, resisted by Lumley, who deliberately turned up to the press launch in tights (Lumley 1989: 127).

While she had little control over her costumes, Joanna Lumley did manage to negotiate a new hairstyle – the Purdey 'mushroom' cut designed by John Frieda – and suggested the name 'Purdey' when the original 'Charley' was rejected because it was also the name of a high-profile perfume (Lumley

Figure 4.2 Joanna Lumley as Purdey.

1989: 127, Rogers 1989: 221). Revlon's *Charlie*, launched in 1973 in the USA, was one of a range of products (like Virginia Slims) marketed to women via 'counter-stereotype' advertising: '*Charlie* advertisements featured what purported to be a no-nonsense single and independent working "girl" with a fashion model face and figure, usually pictured in a pantsuit. *Charlie* swept the market in less than a year, and other fragrance companies rushed to introduce their own "liberated" scents' (Craig 2003: 21). In Britain and

America, the perfume was promoted by a television advert featuring an androgynously beautiful model in a mannish three-piece suit who enters a gentleman's club in disguise, then sweeps off her hat to reveal tousled blonde hair. The commercial was produced in the USA and first broadcast in 1973 to launch the new perfume. The model was Shelley Hack who later played Tiffany Wells in the 1979 season of *Charlie's Angels*. *Charlie*'s androgynous name, together with an image signifying independence, adventure and playful femininity, sold well, giving it a shelf life that extends into the twenty-first century.

Joanna Lumley as Purdey offered a similarly potent combination of glamorous 'New Woman' and nostalgia for a mythical English upper class: 'I had taken pains to present Purdey as a keen, no-nonsense head girl of a secret agent, with easy-to-keep hair and no real boyfriends. I wanted her to be tough and reliable, competent in scrapes but in bed alone by eleven' (Lumley 1989: 133). Purdey is a visibly classed model of English femininity redrawn to fit the New Woman refracted in media accounts of second-wave feminism. Lumley's 'debby' accent, together with Purdey's background – the daughter of a spy, whose stepfather is a bishop and whose early career includes a stint in the corps at the Royal Ballet – are signifiers of her upper-class persona. Lumley has employed this persona through much of her career, inflecting the 'posh' element of her roles with the humour that Purdey displays in *The New Avengers*.[6] Like the woman in the Charlie advertisement, Purdey represents tradition and modernity – a woman who doesn't need to 'burn her bra' because if she is playfully feminine, all doors are open to her. Purdey, like Jaime Sommers, is a double agent within 1970s discourses of feminism and femininity; she smuggles the latter under the guise of the former, and vice versa. Like Jaime, Purdey is a hyper-feminine woman capable of killing and authorised by the state to do so. These are not representations of female spies as femmes fatales but as skilled chameleons; in this sense, they may be understood as representing the contradictions that women in 1970s Britain and America frequently had to negotiate. If Jaime and Purdey offer acceptable accounts of women who are 'liberated' and 'feminine', they also represent overtly artificial versions of femininity. The delimited femininities they offer are grounds for feminist critique, but the overtly fictive, fantastic aspect of those representations are grounds for feminist analysis.

Neither show is realist in outlook. *The Bionic Woman* is clearly grounded in a science-fiction tradition, and the special effects that accompany Jaime's bionic actions signal their fantastic nature. While *The New Avengers* aimed for a more realist style than *The Avengers*, the dialogue frequently undermines any realism or makes reference to Purdey's unusual status. In 'The Midas Touch' (Series 1, Episode 4, 7 November 1976), Purdey and Gambit casually discuss who directed *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* during a high-speed car chase, with Purdey peeling and eating an orange. *The Avengers* was famous for this ironic style, but it jars with *The New Avengers*'

more realist approach. Purdey's femininity is often the subject of comment. In 'Obsession' (Series 2, Episode 5, 7 October 1977), Purdey is central to the narrative, as an old flame attempts to destroy the Government in revenge for his father's death. Purdey finds this encounter with her past traumatic, and the story is played as romantic melodrama, but she also disobeys Steed and Gambit to engineer a final confrontation with her former lover. The episode begins and ends with Steed and Gambit agreeing, 'She's Purdey. She's a woman.' This dictum appears both to comment on Purdey's universality as 'a woman' *and* on her exceptional status: 'She's Purdey.' The contradictions Purdey represents as a woman who is feminine *and* active are exposed in *The New Avengers* by the emphasis on her flawless appearance; like the bionic woman, Purdey is clearly a fantasy. In 'Trap' (Series 2, Episode 6, 14 October 1977), a visiting CIA agent (played by Stuart Damon, former star of 1960s spy series *The Champions*) asks Steed, 'She's not bionic is she? Purdey, I mean, she's just so perfect I thought maybe somebody had made her.' Lumley's brittle, witty performance as a 'no-nonsense head girl' elides the contradictions of her role by foregrounding Purdey's English upper-class persona, but this strategy also serves to highlight the character's artificiality.

Purdey's contradictory features are visible from the first episode, 'The Eagle's Nest' (17 October 1976), where she demonstrates an improbable fighting skill. Whereas Catherine Gale was a judo expert, and Emma Peel excelled at karate, Purdey has a more girlish talent. Trained at the Royal Ballet (a background later fleshed out in 'Obsession'), Purdey employs ballet moves in hand-to-hand combat (Lumley 1989: 128). In the final fight sequence in 'The Eagle's Nest', Purdey strips down to a low-cut green spandex leotard and red ankle boots, pirouetting towards her nonplussed adversaries before kicking them unconscious. The scene is played as light comedy, Purdey telling Steed that she was thrown out of the Royal Ballet for being too tall. In this, as in many other aspects of *The New Avengers*, Purdey does not fit. Other episodes employ similarly disjointed scenarios, often playing on Purdey's appearance. During 'Three Handed Game' (Series 1, Episode 11, 19 January 1977), Purdey is assigned to protect Masgard, an agent who has a 'memory man' act. While he is onstage, she waits in his dressing room and, apparently to pass the time, puts on full clown make-up, complete with wig. The subsequent sequences, which feature Masgard being captured by the enemy agents and Purdey searching for him backstage, have a surreal quality as her immaculate dress is topped by a clown face and fright wig. Surreal touches were typical of *The Avengers*, but *The New Avengers* careers between realist and surreal modes with Purdey often central to such dislocations.

Most notably, Purdey's outfits often involve an element of cross-dressing. One aspect of this is visible in terms of the gendering of her outfits. This is driven by the 1970s fashion for 'mannish' evening suits in 'To Catch a Rat' (Series 1, Episode 7, 28 November 1976), where Purdey has a dinner date

with a double agent, Cromwell, and wears a dark velvet dinner suit, shirt and tie. The outfit recalls Yves Saint Laurent's reinterpretation of the tuxedo as evening wear for women in his *le smoking* outfit for the 1966 Rive Gauche *prêt-à-porter* collection, a ready-to-wear style that epitomised glamour, independence and chic (Arnold 2001: 104). When Cromwell expresses surprise at her evident skill in needlework, Purdey responds that she has 'all the virtues', listing a range of feminine attributes and concluding with the ability to 'break your back in three places.' Her cross-dressing clearly extends from fashion to behaviour. Elsewhere, as in 'Cat Amongst the Pigeons' (Series 1, Episode 5, 14 November 1976), Purdey's costume shifts from a formal black and white dress, then jeans, T-shirt and biker boots and, finally, a diaphanous green off-the-shoulder gown. At one point, Purdey rides her motorbike in the green dress; one of many scenes where her clothes are overtly impractical. As Joanna Lumley comments in her autobiography, the skills required for the role were varied: 'I learned how to skid a car with the handbrake, how to strip down and reassemble a Beretta and how to run over rocks in high heels' (Lumley 1989: 131). Lumley's costumes, while sometimes including trouser suits or leggings, are almost invariably paired with high-heeled boots, shoes and strappy sandals, so that it seems incredible that she can move at speed, let alone engage in hand-to-hand combat.

More specifically, Purdey's class background, endorsed by Lumley's performance and her public persona, is cross-dressed as she transgresses the early twentieth-century stereotype of the Lady, an arbiter of upper-class 'good taste' and modest behaviour. The Lady was allied to the Angel of the House in her passive dependence on her husband or father's wealth (Arnold 2001: 13). Purdey is a 1970s adaptation of the Lady, whose status relies on her class background but whose independence is visible in her professional expertise. Much of this expertise is made palatable in *The New Avengers* through Purdey's effortless femininity; her many costume changes and unruffled appearance following combat bespeak a gendering that is 'natural' and innate – that she can wear anything because underneath it all she is a Lady. Lumley's account of making the series undermines this smooth surface, as she describes the discomforts of filming and the labour involved in her earlier career as a model (Lumley 1989). Even within the two seasons of *The New Avengers*, such 'natural' femininity is parodied and placed in the foreground of the visual narrative.

In 'Sleeper' (Series 1, Episode 10, 19 December 1976), a gang steals a new sedative 'dust' and uses it to put central London to sleep. Steed, Purdey and Gambit are immune as they have been inoculated during a demonstration of this new weapon and spend the episode moving about a ghostly modern cityscape. Steed and Gambit work together, but Purdey is on her own and, chased by some of the mercenaries guarding the perimeter of the 'sleeping' area, takes refuge in a boutique, posing as a mannequin in the window. She fools her two pursuers for a moment, despite assuming different 'model'

postures, as her silk pyjama pants keep falling down. This finally gives her away, and she kicks one opponent unconscious, then uses a rail of dresses to fend off the other, taking his belt once he is defeated. The sequence references Lumley's earlier career as a model and parodies Purdey's 'natural' style, for Purdey, like the mannequins she imitates, is fleshless, blonde and flawlessly made up. While she sucks in her cheeks and assumes the strange postures of a shop dummy, her appearance allows her to pass as something other than human.[7] A similarly parodic moment occurs in 'Emily' (Series 2, Episode 12, 25 November 1977), where the only lead on a double agent is his handprint on the roof of a vintage car. When the Avengers track the car down, it is about to go through a carwash, so Purdey throws herself across the roof and is shown going through the carwash, only to emerge as if from a beauty salon, with her wool sweater and skirt having shrunk. Such sequences play on Lumley's appearance and background and, while the intention may be to amuse and titillate the viewer, they also inadvertently throw Purdey's femininity into sharp relief. Her willowy, girlish character precludes any convincing performance as an action hero, so that the series becomes increasingly dependent on Lumley's 'head girl' persona and comic timing.

This led to a new career for Joanna Lumley once her roles in popular television action series had dwindled. She was a regular guest on Ruby Wax's comedy series *The Full Wax* in the early 1990s, where she sent up her star persona:

> [her performance] ... as a washed-up drugged-out actress ... initiated the revival of her career. This performance instantly transformed her from an idealised myth of feminine perfection, to reveal a more complex and humorous persona. Shortly after revealing her talent for comedy and self-parody, through a stroke of pertinent casting, Joanna Lumley became Patsy Stone, the ageing, neurotic 'Fash-Mag-Slag' for *Absolutely Fabulous* (1992–95). ... Lumley gives an immensely entertaining performance, but also, because of her on and off-screen persona, she creates in Patsy a hilarious and hideous satire around the expectations of glamour and refinement assigned to her.[8]

Yet, this satirical undertone is already evident in *The New Avengers* and is not merely an autonomous production by an individual actor but an indication that social and political debates about gender were visible in mainstream popular media. One of Lumley's appearances on *The Full Wax* featured Ruby Wax persuading her to relive the role of Purdey. She does indeed appear as 'a washed-up, drugged out actress' in a Purdey wig and leotard, struggling to reprise her former role. Barely fifteen years after *The New Avengers* was first broadcast, Purdey was an anachronism. Purdey, like Patsy Stone, was a woman out of step with the 1990s, but they are both characters whose independence and ruthless ability to survive are part of their appeal.

Joanna Lumley's performance of upper-class English femininity in *The New Avengers* may recall older and more restrictive national models of class and gender, but by the 1970s, the British class system was in flux. Purdey as a 'no-nonsense head girl of a secret agent' offered an upper-class femininity which was clearly a performance, not a natural or ahistorical phenomenon. Arguments over Purdey's costumes were not only national struggles between the French funders and British production team but also part of wider debates about fashion in the 1970s. Haute couture had lost its role as an arbiter of good taste in the 1960s with the advent of more youthful, disposable styles. Feminist debates about fashion in the 1970s and 1980s also challenged high fashion and high-street styles in questioning the role of fashion in women's subordination. As Elizabeth Wilson argues, however, feminist fashion – even when it represents itself as anti-fashion – is a style in itself, and one where the 'natural' look is as artificially constructed as anything on the catwalk (Wilson 2003: 228–47). In the mid-1980s, Wilson noted that 'an unresolved tension between "authenticity" and "modernism" haunts contemporary feminism' (2003: 231), and *The Bionic Woman* and *The New Avengers* can both be read in these terms. Jaime Sommers, with her 'natural' hair and make-up, casual jeans and knitwear, visually referenced the American 1960s liberation movements (Brunsdon 1997: 49). She represents a new 'authenticity', yet one which is clearly a construct of particular geographic, historical and political moments. Jaime's authenticity is, moreover, undermined by her bionic additions; she is nature and science combined. She is not entirely human, as contemporary critics and characters within the series noted, and thus offers an awkward compromise between competing discourses of feminism and femininity. Purdey, however, represents 'modernism' through the brittle wit of her repartee and her many (and inappropriate) costume changes, yet the series attempts to 'put her in her place' (Bennett and Woollacott 1987: 114–27) as both a Lady and as 'woman' – the eternal feminine. Neither of these characters are feminist figures, but they trace the dynamics around which late-twentieth-century representations of feminism and femininity vacillate.

While *The New Avengers* was produced and broadcast in the 1970s, 'Purdey was a girl of the 1980s' (Rogers 1989: 221). If Jaime Sommers looks back to 1960s egalitarian ideals – a domesticated version of liberal feminism – Purdey looks forward to the 1980s and what Susan Douglas terms 'narcissism as liberation' (Douglas 1994: 245–68). Noting the success of Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* in 1979, Douglas argues that such narcissistic individualism and insecurity were things that women were all too familiar with. In the 1980s, this reached its apogee in the figure of the 'New Woman' in advertisements featuring a white, middle-class woman cognisant of the cultural capital of masculinity yet still a lady: 'These women were huge successes at managing the impressions they gave to others, coming across as distinctive, nonconformist women who nonetheless conform perfectly to dominant standards of beauty' (Douglas 1994: 249). In

The New Avengers, this is summarised as 'She's a woman. She's Purdey', which could easily be the slogan promoting a new scent. At times, Purdey's beautiful façade slipped, as when she put on the clown make-up or imitated the mannequin, yet this façade did not conceal an 'authentic' inner core, but merely a more playful account of femininity as masquerade, as always-already in disguise. As Susan Douglas states above, the 'New Woman' of 1980s advertising was all about appearance, about 'managing the impressions they gave to others', and, while these appearances may be seen as part of a backlash against the feminism of the 1970s, they also offered an account of femininity that was compromised. When Purdey emerges from the car-wash with coiffed hair and a mini-skirt that was once maxi, it does not simply put her back in her place with the Bond girls of the 1960s; it also sends up the construction of appearance that constitutes feminine beauty.

5 *Nikita*

From French cinema to American television

Luc Besson's 1990 hit *Nikita* spawned two Hong Kong versions in 1991 and 1992, a Hollywood remake in 1993, and an American television series in the late 1990s. The Hong Kong films *Black Cat* (dir. Stephen Shin, 1991) and *Black Cat II* (dir. Stephen Shin, 1992) take the narrative of *Nikita* as the basis for a series starring Jade Leung (see Grindstaff, 2001). For the purposes of my argument, however, the American remake *Point of No Return* (dir. John Badham, 1993), also known as *Assassin*, continues the transatlantic dynamic of earlier chapters and offers a rereading of the French original. It also introduces the Warner Brothers series *La Femme Nikita* (1997–2001), as the studio produced both Badham's film and the television series having bought the rights to Besson's *Nikita*. While *Nikita*, *Point of No Return* and *La Femme Nikita* may be understood as a series of adaptations across different national contexts, they offer a consistent focus on the corporate organisation of espionage as well as the corporal form of its central protagonist. This chapter reads the three Nikita narratives in relation to two main frameworks: French and American cinema and television in the 1990s and discourses of modernity and postmodernity after the 1980s. Although *Nikita*, *Point of No Return* and *La Femme Nikita* are inflected by different national and institutional backgrounds, all offer accounts of how film and television have attempted to address shifts in the professions; in particular, the growing dominance of bureaucracies and responses to the New Woman in Western culture.

These are very different accounts of the female spy than those examined in previous chapters. Whereas *The Avengers*, *The New Avengers* and *The Bionic Woman* offered little evidence of the organisations that employed their protagonists, all three Western versions of Nikita depict her in relation to an espionage bureaucracy. In the 1990s, it appeared, female spies were incorporated into late Western capitalism, offering more cynically postmodern representations of femininity, morality and state powers. In the French *polar* of the late 1980s, police and criminals were almost indistinguishable:

> This type of thriller suggests not just the increasing Americanization of French society as French cinema audiences began to be attracted more

> to American films, but also a more general amorality prevalent throughout the western world during the materialistic 1980s. Typically, it was women characters who carried the burden for a changing society which no longer quite knew what its identity was in a postmodern and increasingly Americanized environment.
>
> (Powrie 2003: 124)

The Nikita films and television series grew out of and spoke to this moment. In each case, the narrative recounts that she is a drug addict and criminal rehabilitated by an intelligence organisation to serve the state as an elite assassin. This story of capture, reform and incorporation alludes to cultural discomfort with the alleged rise of the female professional. Combining the fetishistic image of the femme fatale with an ongoing narrative about Nikita's emotional life – in particular, her relationship with her agency mentor – each version of Nikita offers an explosive combination of narrative genres and symbolic modes.

The films and television series also offer an exemplary account of current representations of active/violent women as targeting a range of spectators, epitomising shifts in the organisation of cinema and television industries in response to an alleged liberalisation of gender politics. While the New Hollywood appears to offer a more liberal and liberated account of female professionals, Nikita exemplifies the extent to which such representations are still dependent on historical types such as the femme fatale, employing them as a means of marketing films across a range of audiences in a global market. Thomas Austin's account of the marketing of *Basic Instinct* (dir. Paul Verhoeven, 1992) describes that film as a 'dispersible text':

> The film's multiple address across genders and diverse sexualities was amplified, and its commercial and social reach extended, by a proliferation of secondary texts. Canonical references to film noir and Hitchcock were stressed in the press pack circulated to journalists, and were picked up in some magazine and broadsheet press reviews. The film's sex, violence and stars were pitched at a wider audience, flagged in television spots, cinema trailers, press advertising and poster art. Invited to approach the film in various ways, prospective spectators were promised these attractions and others, such as a 'whodunit' thriller plot, auteurist touches, glossy visuals, the topicality of Stone's character as a 'post-feminist' New Woman for the 90s, or the 'must-see' appeal of a controversial film which 'everyone' was talking about. The interpretations and uses made of *Basic Instinct* by its audiences often drew on these popular media readings and on criticisms of the film. But real spectators' reactions were far from being confined by such frameworks. The array of secondary texts worked to cue, inform or guide spectatorial interpretations and responses, but never simply determined them.
>
> (Austin 1999: 148)

Nikita, *Point of No Return* and *La Femme Nikita* are borne of the same commercial moment and also tap into this range of address, albeit with differing emphases in each case. This chapter charts some of the hegemonic strategies evident in the films and television series, strategies which evince a late-twentieth-century sensibility regarding the moral authority of state powers, the role of the individual and the position of women in corporate settings. In these fictions, the motives of the secret service are questionable, and the demands and desires of the main protagonists are often in conflict with those of their employers. These narratives of individual rebellion do not, however, inevitably make Nikita a radical figure in any of her incarnations.

Nikita (dir. Luc Besson, 1990)

As with Thomas Austin's account of the marketing of *Basic Instinct*, a number of contexts inform critical understandings of Besson's film and Badham's remake. The most prolifically documented is that of American film noir and Hollywood neo-*noir* cinema of the 1980s and 1990s. The American thrillers which were produced during and after the Second World War, and released en masse in France once the war was over, were recognised by French critics as offering a literal and metaphorical darkness. While films noirs addressed a variety of topics, they tended to represent a corrupt and dysfunctional society, often employing the family as an allegory of wider social ills (Harvey 1998). The most scandalous and charismatic figure in many classic American films noirs from the 1940s to the 1950s was the femme fatale. While the femme fatale had emerged in visual art and theatre of the nineteenth century (see Chapter 2), film noir offered a particularly deadly version of the femme fatale's combination of desire and fear (Doane 1991: 1). In Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944), she was a vampiric figure, her face mask-like with pale skin and dark lips. Barbara Stanwyck's performance as Phyllis Dietrichson was one of the most extreme representations of the femme fatale as a manipulative serial killer, drawing the male protagonist into her net and shooting him when he threatened to betray her. The femme fatale of American *noir* in the 1940s was bad through and through – and enough of a stereotype that Rita Hayworth as Gilda in Vidor's 1946 film of that name was able to play against narrative expectations. As police inspector Obregon (Joseph Calleia) says to Johnny Farrell (Glenn Ford), 'Gilda didn't do any of those things you've been losing sleep over – not any of them. It was just an act, every bit of it.' The *noir* femme fatale thus carries a heavy symbolic load; she is a deathly figure who signifies the mutability of identity, her appearance concealing a lack of identity rather than a true self. Such authenticity was often assigned to the male protagonists she destroyed, and the lack of it placed the femme fatale at the centre of *noir* cinema's critique of Western society.

When *noir* stylings were reincarnated in the Hollywood neo-*noirs* of the 1980s and 1990s, the femme fatale was once more at the centre of the

plot. Sharon Stone as Catherine Trammell in *Basic Instinct* (dir. Paul Verhoeven, 1992) was an icy blonde who visually referenced Hitchcock's women but had none of their sexual repression. The neo-*noir* femme fatale is all about sexuality, often representing 'deviant' desires and straddling the narrow margin between mainstream cinema and pornography (Stables 1998). Yet the neo-*noir* femme fatale also offers a commentary on the rise of women in the professions, most overtly in *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987), where Glenn Close as Alex depicts the female professional as an insecure, sexually frustrated hysteric who quickly turns into a psychotic killer. While some neo-*noirs* offered misogynistic accounts of the New Woman, others were more ambivalent: Kathryn Bigelow's *Blue Steel* (1990) put a female police officer at the centre of the cinematic narrative and presented an *homme fatal* in the psychotic stockbroker who stalks her. With a critical mass of theoretical work on both film noir and the femme fatale behind them, the films of the 1980s and 1990s were self-conscious, often overtly referencing the scenes and styles of classic *noirs* (Erickson 1996). Luc Besson is of this generation of film-makers: aware of the kudos *noir* stylings entail and of the symbolic heritage they offer as a means of social commentary (Tasker 1998: 117).

Nikita visually references *noir* from the opening shot of a wet Parisian street lit with neon. Nikita and her fellow junkies march towards the pharmacy to find their fix, but the visual reference to *noir* is quickly combined with other generic styles such as action cinema and the road movie. Critical accounts of the film have noted its range of reference, from the music video and comic strip in its fast-cut aesthetic, to French New Wave directors such as Godard in its radical use of colour (Austin 1996: 130, Hayward 1998: 16, 128). In the context of French cinema studies, Besson's films are classified as *cinéma du look*: 'characterised not by any collective ideology but rather by a technical mastery of the medium, a cinephile tendency to cite from other films and a spectacular visual style (*le look*)' (Austin 1996: 119). Besson is bracketed with other *cinéma du look* directors, such as Jean-Jacques Beineix (*Diva*, 1980) and Léos Carax (*Mauvais Sang*, 1986) but is also differentiated from them as the director 'who has received the most sustained ridicule from the critics while proving a consistent hit with the public' (Austin 1996: 126). Besson, like Beineix and Carax, was critiqued by *Cahiers du Cinéma* for his dependence on 'inferior' popular culture rather than the psychological realism of 'great' French cinema (Austin 1996: 119). Such combinations of high/low art forms and the alleged superficiality of the *cinéma du look* were taken as a sign that political cinema was finished in France; its 'postcard aesthetics' cynically postmodern (Vincendeau 1996: 50). Yet the transcultural referentiality of Besson's work may also be understood as the sign of a new politics, and one which does not merely endorse the superficiality of appearances in the *cinéma du look* but also critiques it. Despite the critical attacks cited above, Besson has also been seen as a 'new moralist of the 1980s and 1990s', particularly in regard to consumer culture (Hayward

1998: 17). In *Nikita*, Besson deploys American popular culture – including film noir – but does so with a critical European eye, often turning the table on transatlantic influences (Powrie 2003: 123).

The visual and narrative references in *Nikita* to both French and American cinema may be read through the use of colour – the opening sequence sets the blue light of the pharmacy against the red night-sights of the armed police called to quell the gang. The red and blue of the French and American flags are already visible, and the white light which presages Nikita's fake death and quasi-rebirth in the cell of the secret service rapidly completes the tricolour. Besson has asserted his desire to combine American and French cinematic styles, and *Nikita* apparently succeeded in this, garnering healthy audiences in France (3.7 million), the USA (3 million) and worldwide (nearly 4 million) (Hayward 1998: 40–1, 52). Yet Anne Parillaud's performance as Nikita does not sit easily with the neo-*noir* femmes fatales of American cinema. Parillaud herself regarded the role as a significant career move – 'it broke the entire baby-doll image I had been dragging behind me' – but if it destroyed this childlike image, it was only to reassert Parillaud's persona as a different kind of youth (Hayward 1998: 55). While she is 'dressed to kill' by her mentor Amande (Jeanne Moreau) in a fetishistic outfit for her first assignment, which references both classic and neo-*noir femmes*, she is not the overtly sexualised woman of the new Hollywood *noirs*.[1] Instead, she appears androgynously pre-pubescent, boyishly gamine in her little black dress, despite her ability to attract and desire both her mentor (Bob, played by Tchéky Karyo) and her boyfriend (Marco, played by Jean-Hughes Anglade). While Nikita is often in disguise, and the viewer gets little sense of her inner life, she is also coded as authentic rather than as a hollow façade. This compromises Nikita's construction as femme fatale as, in classic and neo-*noir* cinema, the male protagonist, however 'dumb', is the source of authenticity (Rich 1995). In Besson's film, however, Nikita's childlike responses are visually and narratively linked to a symbolically 'authentic' youth culture.

The gang with which Nikita is first seen represents a disenfranchised generation of French youth, the alienated *génération Mitterrand*, borne out of a period of economic recession and widespread unemployment during the Mitterrand presidency 1981–95 (Hayward 1998: 25). Nikita's rehabilitation and employment by the state as a government assassin may be read as an ironic allegory of youth training and redeployment which endorses the more cynical responses to Mitterrand's attempts to alleviate youth unemployment in the early 1980s (Hayward 1998: 23–4). Her punk background also gives a different slant to the film's take on the New Woman. If *The Bionic Woman* and *The New Avengers* had attempted to incorporate and adapt feminism in the 1970s, Hollywood continued this strategy through the 1980s and 1990s, specifically through its depiction of women as managers and professionals. French popular culture also pursued this issue, albeit layered within national debate about indigenous French culture and the prevalence of American popular forms:

Figure 5.1 Anne Parillaud in *Nikita* (dir. Luc Besson, 1990).

> [French] popular culture both reflected and portrayed the maelstrom of sociocultural developments in the 1970s: the films of the period were either American imports or French analyses of the new complexities of – say – relations between men and women, or the difficulties of life in an increasingly post-industrial society.
>
> (Dauncey 2003: 13)

During the 1980s, audiovisual media became a prime platform for and subject of French debates over popular culture and national identity. The freeing up of television and radio broadcasting in 1982 precipitated shifts in the economic organisation of production, with the emphasis on technology and commerce, which have informed Besson's work (Dauncey 2003: 13).

Central to such shifts in political economy and social debate in Europe and in America is the figure of the New Woman. Yvonne Tasker proposes the figure of the 'working girl' or prostitute as a literal and metaphorical allegory of how Hollywood has responded to the New Woman, arguing that sexuality is still central to the ways women are represented in mainstream cinema: 'Across a variety of popular genres, Hollywood representation is characterised by an insistent equation between working women, women's work and some form of sexual(ised) performance' (Tasker 1998: 3). Tasker argues that the New Hollywood has moved the sexually attractive woman of classical Hollywood from the home or social space (bars, dancehalls,

etc.) to the workplace (Tasker 1998: 121). *Nikita*, however, is not merely a hyperbolic representation of a working woman but also a redeployment of the female professional in a critical examination of white-collar work. While films such as *Presumed Innocent* (dir. Alan J. Pakula, 1990), *Disclosure* (dir. Barry Levinson, 1994) and *The Last Seduction* (dir. John Dahl, 1993) offer 'a distinct inflection of the [femme fatale] archetype, literalising/embodying the threat of male redundancy whilst retaining the association between working women and sexuality' (Tasker 1998: 5), the Nikita narratives take that equation a step further. These narratives are not only about the rise of women in the professions – or rather male paranoia about that perceived shift in gender roles – they also raise questions about the professional environments which women are beginning to inhabit in more significant numbers. *Nikita* may be understood as a narrative not only of (resistance to) socialisation, as Hayward proposes in her psychoanalytic readings of *Nikita* (Hayward 1997, 1998: 127–68) but also as a narrative of disillusionment. In the films and the television series, the protagonist rejects her employment, her employers and, by extension, the principles on which they work. In each narrative, the organisation – more or less explicitly attached to the state – is shown to be morally questionable, employing Nikita to assassinate targets which are not evidently aggressive. By the time *Nikita* became reinscribed as John Badham's *Point of No Return*, the first Gulf war (1991) had taken place, and American foreign policy was once more under scrutiny. The Nikita narratives are, thus, debates about moral imperatives; most clearly about state violence but also about the (a)morality of bureaucracies. In these late-twentieth-century representations of the workplace – for spies are nothing if not agents of a secret *service* – corporate organisations are figured as complex, compromised and ultimately corrupt.

This is most visible in *Nikita*, as in the American remakes, in its representation of surveillance. Susan Hayward aligns surveillance in Besson's film with French discourses of youth in crisis – the *génération Mitterrand* and fears about social disorder which served to justify forms of social surveillance such as CCTV – and with psychoanalytic theories of the cinematic gaze (Hayward 1998: 80–99). It may also be understood as emblematic of modern bureaucracy. While forms of surveillance such as census have existed since the fifteenth century BC, modernity made it central to all institutions in a manner that pervades every aspect of social life: 'Systematic surveillance … came with the growth of military organization, industrial towns and cities, government administration, and the capitalistic business enterprise within European nation-states' (Lyon 1994: 24). In particular, modern surveillance is concerned with the management of workers within modern bureaucracies (Lyon 1994: 25; see also Dandeker 1990). Bob manages Nikita's training, and his surveillance of her in her room or in training becomes an extension of the camera's point of view. His gaze is enabled by a (post)modern grey workspace of glass and steel; this is a panoptical office without walls where all employees are visible all the time. Once she has

graduated and is on assignment, the surveillance implicitly continues so that her employers are able to locate and activate her at any moment. This is the carceral society that Nikita can only escape by disappearing completely, enacting a symbolic death (Foucault 1977: 293–308).

Visible and invisible forms of surveillance have become central to spy fictions in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In *La Femme Nikita*, the open-plan command centre is overlooked by Operations' glass-panelled eyrie, a workspace replicated in *24* with a central raised glass-walled office within a larger open-plan space. Both *24* and *Alias* employ their glass-panelled offices to narrative effect with shots of the main characters watching each other and being watched. Such set designs reference the Benthamite panopticon and science-fiction cinema in a suitably post-modern combination of early and late modern styles. New communications technologies are also fetishised in spy fictions. In *24*, as in *Casino Royale* (dir. Martin Campbell, 2006), mobile phones become a part of the action, while in *La Femme Nikita*, as in *Alias*, ear-pieces are dispensed with to imply a high-tech communications system that is completely invisible. In the television movie *Jane Doe: Yes I Remember it Well* (dir. Armand Mastroianni, 2006), the central protagonist is a retired secret-service agent called back into the field. Thinking she is being followed by another car, 'Jane' (Lea Thompson) phones her commanding officer and asks if he can use the car's satellite navigation system to track her; he replies that they've already located her via her mobile phone. Contemporary spy fictions depict the technology of surveillance and, in doing so, dramatise a paranoid state which is all seeing.

Modern bureaucracy is, thus, aligned with capitalism, state power and surveillance: 'Like the capitalist enterprise, the modern state is a rational structure of domination and surveillance, in that it comprises a relationship between leaders and led that is mediated by a bureaucracy' (Dandeker 1990: 10). Postmodern spy fictions such as the Nikita narratives, *24* and *Alias* play out this relationship but do not necessarily endorse it. Weber argues that, 'The legitimacy of the modern state rests on the fact that its orders are established and exercised in a way that is recognised to be legal' (Dandeker 1990: 11). While Weber's definition does not entail substantive or ethical legalities such as freedom and democracy, the Nikita narratives are notable for their consistent representation of the secret service acting in an illegal manner. Legality, in Weber's model, recruits a minimal level of consent, which the modern state requires to sustain its bureaucratic system of control, yet, in *Nikita*, the central protagonist is recruited without her consent and in an illegal manner. In order to conscript Nikita, the state first 'kills' her and then gives her no option but to comply under threat of real annihilation. Thus, from the outset, all the Nikita narratives are predicated upon a state that is questionable. The secret service into which Nikita is conscripted is both mundane in its representation of a bureaucratic organisation and sinister in its account of what the organisation does and how it

does it. By extension, the state itself is morally redundant, and the Nikita narratives thus (inadvertently) provide a critique of late Western capitalism.

In this light, the reason Nikita is offered for submitting to her new role may only be understood as ironic. When Nikita asks why she should submit to the 'education' Bob describes in the initial scenes in her cell, he responds that she will be educated 'To serve your country.' But serving her country in this case means doing 'wet work' – becoming an assassin for a state that also requires that Nikita does not question its motives: 'she is obliged to recycle her murdering skills within the legitimate arena of the State – more specifically within the arena of France's Secret Service, surely *the* institutional centre of the centre (within the social order, the law), *the* eye of the society of surveillance' (Hayward 1998: 87). Serving one's country is offered as an outmoded ideal in all the Nikita narratives, where countries are no longer ideologically unified or morally accountable. The interests of multinational corporations have inflected the nation-state, and the Nikita narratives offer a critique of this shift; the secret service is no longer driven by a government concerned with the welfare of its subjects but by a state engaged in global commerce. Nikita, in each version, is not recruited but conscripted; her very employment puts the state apparatus in question. How can one endorse a system that is so clearly undemocratic, so clearly dependent on violence? The figure of the spy – and, most pointedly, a female spy – is called into play in all three versions to offer a perspective on state organisations that are dehumanised and dehumanising. In *Nikita* and *Point of No Return*, Nikita and Maggie both assert that Bob is damaged by his work: in the Besson film, Nikita says, 'You're sick Bob ... your job's a sewer for you' and accuses him of sadism. The emphasis on service, on work and training – on a promotional structure, as Nikita moves on to bigger tasks each time – widens the scope of this commentary to include corporate bureaucracies.

If serving one's country is outmoded, then so is the ideal of serving the company. In all the Nikita narratives, serving one's country has been absorbed into the interests of the corporation. Bob is a company man, whose only aberration appears to be his affection for Nikita. In Besson's film, Bob is initially a humourless, efficient government servant, but his encounters with Nikita break through that carapace to reveal a vulnerable masculinity. Witness, on the one hand, his evident delight at Nikita's unorthodox early responses to combat training, and on the other, his devastation at her assertion that she will never kiss him again. Nikita is a redemptive figure for Bob, but while she asserts that Bob is 'sick', she tells Marco that he is a 'beautiful person'. Marco is Bob's opposite: shy, vulnerable and completely loving. Whereas Bob is a cog in the corporate machine, Marco is an ineffective supermarket cashier, who gives up his job to become a boatbuilder. If Nikita is a version of the New Woman, Marco is an account of the much-derided New Man. He is the one who taught her to smile, Nikita says, not Amande. Amande's demand that Nikita perform femininity through

a vacuous grin clearly requires that she fake it. In this way, *Nikita* sets authentic emotion – expressed by Nikita before *and* after her training – against the roles she is taught to perform. Corporate culture requires not only that Nikita look a certain way but also that she expresses only the right emotion at the right time. White-collar bureaucracy and bourgeois femininity are aligned here as something to be mastered and then rejected.

Despite this critical approach to bureaucracies, *Nikita*, *Point of No Return* and *La Femme Nikita* (and later *Alias*) offer pleasurable depictions of the working environment as one of clean efficiency and organisation – a rational world. Recent television series, such as *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and its franchises, offer similarly pleasurable depictions of rational, dedicated teams of individuals who subsume their personal lives into the world of work and science in search of a higher, purer truth. As the producers of *La Femme Nikita* comment in their DVD commentary on the first episode, both reviewers and fans rapidly understood the series as 'an extreme version of what it's like to go to the office every day' (see also Britton 2004: 260). Yet these spy narratives, which centre on female protagonists, also depict the rational bureaucratic world of work as oppressive systems to be negotiated and resisted. These hegemonic depictions of work offer viewers a perversely pleasurable account of white-collar labour in late Western capitalism, where information is the main currency. Besson's *Nikita* sets off this narrative stream, and the remakes take it in different directions by placing it within other national and media contexts. These accounts of transformation, incorporation and disillusionment offer a useful commentary, not only on white-collar bureaucracies but also on the female professional.

Women in the professions have had a chequered history on screen; as characters who combine femininity and authority, they are always already-ambiguous figures, contradicting the traditional formation of femininity as powerless and passive. Amelia Jones describes how such women are punished in mainstream Hollywood cinema: 'The intensity with which these films work to mutilate or reincorporate the characters who represent a new femininity suggests that the new woman is a highly threatening figure to a still extant, if floundering, fantasy of the nuclear family' (Jones 1991: 298). The Nikita narratives, however, offer a version of the New Woman who is not simply 'mutilated' nor fully 'reincorporated'. In each version, Nikita represents a challenge to the symbolic order – a deviant, androgynous female – who is apparently reincorporated through her grooming as an agent and as a fully feminised woman and then rejects the role she has been trained to play. In Besson's film, the targets she is assigned to kill are not anarchic or even apparently deviant, but simply foreign: 'The violent elements in society, tamed, are to be used not to repress violence, then, but difference' (Smith 2001: 31). In walking out of the frame, away from Bob and Marco, Nikita refuses to repress difference – either her own wild femininity or the targets chosen by the state. This is the radical, pleasurable element of the Nikita narratives, and while that element is not unmitigated, it still offers potential pleasures.

Point of No Return (dir. John Badham, 1993)

> *Nikita* presents itself as a fantasy about 'justice', seen as the neutralisation of a danger to all the values of an ordered society, a danger constructed by the film in the first sequence. This fantasy, however, is not unequivocally endorsed by the film at any time and, indeed, is more and more clearly shown to contain within itself elements which negate it.
>
> (Smith 2001: 29)

'Justice' is a central thread running through all the Nikita narratives – as through all thrillers – and in the two American remakes that succeeded *Nikita* on film and television, justice appears increasingly equivocal. *Point of No Return* and *La Femme Nikita* both go beyond Besson's *Nikita* in questioning the state organisation by which the protagonist is conscripted. *Point of No Return* distinguishes itself from *Nikita* by placing the action at the heart of American national politics, with opening shots of Capitol Hill, and by recreating Nikita as Maggie (Bridget Fonda), an American protagonist who moves from East to West Coast. In its locations as in its protagonist, *Point of No Return* is fully Americanised, and this extends to a more emphatic connection between the agency which conscripts Maggie and the US government and judicial system. Unlike the Bob character in *Nikita*, Bob (Gabriel Byrne) in *Point of No Return* is visibly present in the courtroom as Maggie is sentenced and is also at the scene of her 'execution'. This does not, however, lend Badham's film an unequivocally radical edge as an indictment of American justice, for Maggie as an American protagonist is inevitably located within a cinematic history in which the renegade individual has an impressive genealogy. Maggie's idiosyncrasy resides only in the fact that she is female, rather than male; and even this has become a new variant on old stereotypes in 1990s Hollywood.

In addition to the cinematic contexts that informed *Nikita*, *Point of No Return* may also be understood in relation to a new type of Hollywood product which centres on violent female protagonists. By the late 1990s, feminist academics were responding to a new kind of fatal woman on screen – a woman who kills for all the 'right' reasons rather than the femme fatale who kills for all the wrong ones – with a range of studies (see, for example, Tasker 1998, Inness 1999 and 2004, Read 2000, McCaughey and King 2001). As Jacinda Read argues, in her succinct account of these discussions, the debate has often been tied to two binary axes: the alignment of masculinity-activity/femininity-passivity and an oppositional account of feminism and femininity (Read 2004: 205–10). Such binaries are difficult to sustain in the face of the New Hollywood, or what Thomas Schatz describes as 'the "new" New Hollywood' (2004: 7). Critical accounts of Hollywood cinema have come to acknowledge a shift in aesthetics in the late 1960s and early 1970s towards a more art-house style of film-making, in part as a consequence of the foreign films imported to American audiences in the 1950s and 1960s. Schatz cites Japanese, Italian and British cinemas as

influential sources, but French New Wave directors also had an impact on emerging American film-makers such as Martin Scorsese. The Hollywood New Wave of the 1960s, like the French New Wave, was attuned to the emerging youth cultures and political movements of that era. Another shift is visible in the 1980s with the emergence of a 'new' New Hollywood, which Schatz characterises: 'with its commercially savvy producer-auteurs like Lucas and Spielberg, its obsession with big-budget blockbusters and multimedia franchises, its multiplexes and younger-skewed youth market, its increasingly stabilized ratings system, its ever-growing ancillary markets and a resurgent "studio system" geared to an era of global media consumption' (Shatz 2004: 7–8).

This is the context in which Badham's *Point of No Return* was released in 1993. As a faithful remake of Besson's film, it gestured towards the politics and aesthetics of the 1960s New Hollywood, while as commodity ripe for television adaptation it was very much part of the 'new' New Hollywood Schatz describes above. At this moment, in this form, 'Nikita' became a brand, with the willing cooperation of Besson, who approved the American remake (Hayward 1998: 54). Warner Brothers bought the rights to *Nikita* to make *Point of No Return* and went on to produce *La Femme Nikita*; footage from Badham's film (such as the explosion in the kitchen and Maggie's exit through the rubbish chute, copied from *Nikita*) were recycled in the opening episode of the television series.

The Nikita narratives thus represent an alliance of left aesthetics and corporate multinationals. As with the deployment of liberal politics in 1970s series such as *The Bionic Woman*, commercial film and television are more than happy to depict anti-establishment renegades if that is what sells. In this sense, these products are always already politically compromised; incorporated into the marketplace of late Western capitalism. The contradictions between what the narratives represent and the contexts of their production and distribution remain startling, however. They each raise a number of questions, not least because of the differences between the three versions. In Badham's film, one notable difference from Besson's *Nikita* is the stress on Maggie's feminine education. Unlike *Nikita*, where there are only two scenes regarding Nikita's transformation from androgynous punk to chic femininity – and these scenes only feature Nikita and Amande – *Point of No Return* offers a series of sequences regarding Maggie's acculturation. While this begins with an individual consultation with Amanda (Anne Bancroft), it also extends to group lessons where Maggie is taught posture, elocution and how to behave at a dinner party. Amanda also provides her with a phrase that Maggie eventually employs when confronted with the full horror of Victor's role as 'cleaner':

AMANDA: What do you do when you're uncomfortable? When you're angry or scared?
MAGGIE: I hit.

AMANDA: You might want to try smiling. Just smile a little smile and say something offhand. It doesn't have to fit the situation really. Say ... say 'I never did mind about the little things.'
(MAGGIE is silent.)
AMANDA: *Say it!*
(MAGGIE tries to move away, but AMANDA, with a roar, grabs her arm.)
AMANDA: Please dear. The smile and the sentence.
MAGGIE: I never did mind ... I never did mind about the little things.

Amanda literally puts words into Maggie's mouth, a phrase that is later used in the most incongruous circumstances. This airy dictum represents not only Maggie's rebirth as a properly smiling, 'feminine' woman but also her reinvention as a middle-class professional. *Point of No Return* places more emphasis than *Nikita* on Maggie's acquisition of feminine skills, and these skills are evidently classed as well as gendered. In this sense, the masquerade which Maggie's transformation makes visible is, like Nikita in Besson's film, comparable to other Pygmalion fictions (Grindstaff 2001). Jeffrey A. Brown contrasts *Point of No Return* with *Educating Rita* (dir. Lewis Gilbert, 1983) and *Pretty Woman* (dir. Garry Marshall, 1990) on the grounds that these films are more about class transformations than Badham's film (Brown 1996: 67). Yet, Maggie's transformation is about class as it maps her movement from anarchic street person and drug addict into the role of the professional. In the sequence where Maggie shows her 'finished' self, she is not only visually transformed into acceptable white femininity (as was Nikita), but also socially transformed, in her ability to speak grammatically correct American English and fluent French. The acquisition of such language skills gives Maggie the appearance of a refined education and an aura of social sophistication – she gains cultural capital. As in Besson's film, Maggie's transformation sequences make explicit the labour involved in (re)producing white middle-class femininity. This transformation is given an additional twist in Badham's film as Bridget Fonda, playing Maggie, comes from a famous Hollywood dynasty.

The American remake of *Nikita* is interesting for these minor differences; on release, it was recognised as a largely slavish reproduction of the original (see, for example, Brown 1996: 63, Durham 1998: 175–7). Carolyn Durham argues that the sexual relationship between Maggie and Bob is more highly eroticised in *Point of No Return*, but its perversity is downplayed, as Bob's parental role is not as evident as in *Nikita* (Durham 1998: 176). The eroticisation of Maggie is along the lines of the neo-*noir* femme fatale, as her sexuality – particularly in relation to Bob – is far cruder and more overt than in Besson's film. It is signified through 'sexualized speech', a prime characteristic of the new *fatale* for whom talking about sex is graphically aligned with sexual acts (Stables 1998: 174–8). Maggie first cites her name as 'Maggie Blowjob' and her translation of Nina Simone's 'Put a Little Sugar in My Bowl' is, 'She's just saying, "Ooh baby, stick it in me twice a

day and I'll do anything for you. I'll lick the ground you walk on."' Yet this does not appear to represent any authentic desire on Maggie's part. Both these exchanges are with male characters symbolic of state control: her police interrogator and Bob. Outside state institutions, however, Maggie is similarly unsexed. Her boyfriend, J.P. – the equivalent of the Marco character in Besson's film – says that living with her 'is like living with a ghost', and this comment offers a tacit summary of Fonda's performance. Maggie is, in every sense, a 'spook'. Where Anne Parillaud's Nikita is feral and lively, Fonda's Maggie always appears to be faking it. There is no *jouissance* in the American remake; rather, this is a disillusioned rebel who drifts through the film as an absence, an *aporia*. Maggie's final disappearance into the mist is emblematic of her role throughout the film; she is barely present. This makes *Point of No Return* more problematic than *Nikita*; whereas Parillaud's performance speaks of wildness in Nikita's raucous moments of glee, Fonda's Maggie is barely alive. Yet the ethereal quality of Fonda's performance also aligns femininity with artifice, femininity as masquerade. Maggie is always and only performing, thus offering a different critique of the cultural conditions from which she emerges to that in *Nikita*.

Both *Nikita* and *Point of No Return* may be termed postmodern films, but the former evokes a revolutionary postmodernity – the deconstruction of cultural hierarchies – while the latter suggests a more reactionary postmodernity of hopelessness and *ennui*. Where Nikita is shown in her spray-painted cell watching an old black-and-white costume drama, Maggie watches MTV. *Point of No Return*'s landscape is that of social and cultural pastiche, in Jameson's sense of the word (1988: 15–16). There is no common language here, no authentic traditions or gestures on which Maggie can call, only depthless imitation. *Point of No Return* problematises the linear trajectory of the remake (from original to copy) because it was based on a film that was already American in style: 'All creations involve re-creations, and all presentations re-presentations' (Grindstaff 2001: 151). The film's use of Nina Simone as a soundtrack gestures towards some vaguely historical authenticity, but even this device is evidently flawed, as a skinny white woman professes her liking for the work of a black singer with civil-rights credentials. Maggie likes Nina Simone because her mother would play the records, and this background, like the film's cinematic source, offer an artificial 'taste' of difference, of other cultures beyond white America. 'Nina' is also her codename for assignments, rather than the 'Josephine' of *Nikita* and *La Femme Nikita*, as a reference to the music Maggie describes as 'so passionate, so savage.' Black American music is thus reduced to yet another element of cultural capital, yet another element of the film's 'multiple address' (Austin 1999: 148). In this sense, critical responses which saw Badham's remake as a hollow copy arguably miss the point, because the point of *Point of No Return* is that there is no original, authentic source to call upon. This pessimistic reading echoes both films' account of professional bureaucracies as hollow and life-denying. Nikita/Maggie is literally

an assassin, but the state agency for which she works is killing by more subtle means.

In all these versions, espionage is a simulation of corporate business; the office sets of the agency (symbolically located below ground in both films and the television series) replicate the open-plan offices, hierarchies and promotional structures of multinational corporations. Such fictions offer a fetishised account of white-collar labour as glamorous and important – the office worker as government agent, as part of a whole which is impacting on world politics, and all the while looking stylish and in control. The literal connections between office work and espionage here feed into fantasies of agency in situations where agency is often unavailable; the office worker as assassin, as spy, becomes someone more important than a cog in a paper machine. Yet, these narratives also present Nikita as a double agent within the secret organisation; she is not fully incorporated, does not fully believe in her assigned role. While the environment is postmodern, the Nikita narratives evince a modern desire for authenticity. In all her guises, Nikita is rehabilitated to become a good worker, a professional woman, learning to dress and pass as a white middle-class operative, but the organisation is questioned and questionable. In *Nikita*, she rejects her role as assassin of difference; in *Point of No Return*, Maggie also rejects the homogeneity of the organisation that recruits her. In these films, corporate life requires its workers to become grey and undifferentiated; Maggie is taught to be the same but rejects sameness. Her story fits with ideologies of American individualism; as the renegade, the rebel, she refuses to be incorporated. The irony is that, in an American context, Hollywood itself is bounded by corporate capital, and the renegade thus becomes a saleable item. The films and the television series all endorse the individual as source of authenticity and agency, a mythology embedded in Western culture; the only wrinkle here is that the individual is female, and a female protagonist has rarely had such cultural weight behind her.

La Femme Nikita (1997–2001)

In her transition from film to television, Nikita traces shifts in the landscape of visual media. Just as *Point of No Return* may be understood in terms of 'new New Hollywood', so *La Femme Nikita* may be understood within the context of New Television. While the link between Hollywood cinema and television was not new, it entered a new phase in the 1990s: 'In contrast with the present moment, earlier stages of television might be usefully designated as Live Television, Filmed-series Television and "Quality" Television' (Moran 2005: 291). Because of changes in the technologies of transmission and reception, we are now in the era of New Television, characterised by 'the rapid multiplication of services of every kind' (Moran 2005: 292) and marking a distinct break from the histories of centralised broadcasting focused on British and American markets. The multiplication

of channels, networks, forms of broadcast and distribution have opened the industry to new corporate interests, both within the industry and from related sectors, such as computing and newspapers. Concurrent developments in interactive media, such as computers and mobile phones, have further changed the ways in which television is consumed and have opened up greater potential to cater for specific interests (Moran 2005: 292–3).

Contemporary spy series overtly reference such shifts through their use of computer and communications technology. One has only to consider how *24*'s Jack Bauer employs his mobile phone. *La Femme Nikita*, also produced by *24*'s Joel Surnow, introduced this emphasis on new technologies with spectacular visuals such as the holographic screen employed during briefing sessions, as well as the more mundane image of characters frequently working at computer consoles. In the producers' DVD commentary on the opening episode, they describe the set design for Section One as 'five minutes into the future' with a 'no paper' aesthetic. While the intention may have been to make the series appear futuristic, it also represents a stylish version of contemporary office space. As the series progressed, computer-screen graphics often overlaid live-action shots, implying the scope of Section One's surveillance and the pervasiveness of information technology. In this way, like the films that preceded it, *La Femme Nikita* represents white-collar work as primarily engaged with new technologies; several episodes feature virtual-reality devices and even, in 'Getting Out of Reverse' (Series 4, Episode 1, 9 January 2000), a holographic Michael (the equivalent of the Bob character in the films). The use of information technology is a logical step for a programme about espionage, yet, like other American television series that represent the professions (such as *ER* and *CSI*), *La Femme Nikita* also fetishises the accoutrements of labour, so that the style of the series becomes paramount.

La Femme Nikita was rapidly noted for its stylish aesthetic, with an emphasis on the visual representation of the secret service that conscripts Nikita – here called Section One – and on the framing and costumes of its lead characters (Tung 2004: 97–8). The Australian Peta Wilson was cast as Nikita for her non-American accent, as was the French-Canadian actor Roy Dupuis, who played Michael, the series equivalent of the Bob character in the two films. Only one of the six central characters – Operations (Eugene Glazer) – was played by an American actor. *La Femme Nikita* was shot in Toronto, which, Surnow claims in his DVD commentary for 'Mercy' (Series 1, Episode 22, 5 October 1997), gave the outside broadcast sequences a fresh and European feel, as the city had rarely been used as a location for American television series. In these ways, the series is given an international quality designed to offer a taste of sophistication to home audiences and potentially making the programme more exportable as a product which is not easily classifiable *as* American. This transcultural chic is naturally linked to class as to race. The series looked European, looked 'classy' and offered a beguilingly hyperreal account of white-collar labour.

Symbolically, the producers decided not to have a literal communications system for agents on assignment but rather have the actors speak as if they can be heard, an 'invisible' earpiece that *really* isn't there. The style of *La Femme Nikita* thus offers a fetishistic account of white-collar work, replicating the glamour and social aspiration of the professions. The class aspirations of the narrative also extended to race aspirations, as in Peta Wilson, Nikita reaches her apogee as an Aryan figure: athletic, blonde and blue-eyed. In this series, as in the earlier films, white Europeans do white-collar work. While *Point of No Return* gave Maggie several African American colleagues, *La Femme Nikita* featured few non-European characters. Black actors rarely appear, and the few roles for Asian or Asian American actors (such as Michael's wife Simone in Episode 3 of the first season, members of terrorist groups or characters in the background of scenes in Section One) tend to conform to stereotypes of helplessness and inactivity (Tung 2004: 116). In its representation of Section One and Nikita as glamorous and efficient, as in the homogeneously Eurocentric focus of its casting, *La Femme Nikita* offers an account of professional lives that are unproblematically corporate and incorporated. Like the films, however, the television series also examines the cost of the work in which Section One and Nikita are engaged. From the first episode, where the back story of Nikita's recruitment is quickly glossed, she is placed at the moral centre of the series.

In contrast to the films, this Nikita is *falsely* accused of killing a police officer; each credit sequence shows her being discovered with a bloody knife, but as the opening episode makes clear, she has stumbled upon the crime scene and is thus not a killer at the outset. While this shift in Nikita's back story is driven by the constraints of network television – a prime-time protagonist who is a killer being perceived as problematic – it also lends weight to her moral dilemma. In the television series, Nikita is not so effective an assassin. In a number of episodes, such as 'Mercy', Nikita refuses to kill in cold blood and thereby puts Section One at risk, forcing Michael to cover for her. Consequently, the morals of Section One itself are consistently under scrutiny. In her essay on the series, Charlene Tung argues:

> While Nikita may continuously question the killing Section One engages in, the viewers do not. We are to see that Section One is the only thing between us (the West) and chaos. Taken from this perspective, the show is anything but transgressive, relying as it does on Western imperialist discourses.
>
> (Tung 2004: 107)

Yet, *La Femme Nikita* does not offer its viewers such a unitary position on the activities of Section One. From the outset, with Nikita being *mistakenly* recruited as an innocent rather than a natural-born killer, the television series presents Section One as fallible; it makes mistakes. Throughout its five seasons, the ethics of this secret service are questioned, in part

through the emotional response and moral position of Nikita herself but also through revelations about the techniques Section One employs to gain information.

The character of Madeline (Alberta Watson) is central to this questioning. Madeline is *La Femme Nikita*'s version of Amande in Besson's film and Amanda in *Point of No Return*, an older woman employed by Section One to convert Nikita from street punk to glamorous young woman. In the first episode, the scene in front of the mirror from the films is replayed, with Madeline saying, 'There's no weapon as powerful as your femininity.' Yet even here, a conflict emerges: when Madeline asserts, 'They own you now', Nikita replies, 'I didn't know I was for sale.' The punk rebellion of Nikita against the totalitarian regime of Section One is rapidly established and becomes a central theme within the series. Nikita is constantly battling for freedom, to escape from Section One and its surveillance, while Operations and Madeline work to confound her efforts. That the series was partly inspired by cult 1960s series *The Prisoner* comes as no surprise.[2] There is a Freudian structure to the drama, with Madeline becoming increasingly significant; in the first episode, Michael tells Nikita before her first meeting with Madeline that he is taking her to meet her 'new mother', and Madeline tells Nikita, 'We're family now.' In the fourth season ('No One Lives Forever,' Series 4, Episode 8, 12 March 2000), Nikita is told that Operations is her father, a plot twist which is a logical extension of the familial structure of Section One. By Season 5, Nikita learns that her *real* father is 'Mr Jones' (Edward Woodward), the mysterious head of Center. While this mystery over Nikita's origins lends itself to a psychoanalytic reading of the series, it also emphasises the hegemonic power of masculinity. One father figure is easily replaced by another so that the system that entraps Nikita is all-pervasive and inescapable. The family is linked to the bureaucracy of Section One, which, in turn, is linked to state power. Nikita and Madeline are caught up in this power structure, and, while Nikita fights to escape and Madeline plots to entrap her, both are emblematic of the New Woman within late Western capitalism.

As the series progresses, Madeline becomes increasingly compromised. During the first season, it emerges that while her role involves psychologically monitoring the operatives in Section One, particularly Nikita, Madeline's job also involves the torture and interrogation of enemy agents. Although she does not do the dirty work herself, it is Madeline who appears at the beginning and end of interrogation scenes, often introducing a pair of besuited torturers, male and female, who carry metal cases and leave their subjects slumped and docile. These ordinary, sinister figures do something unspecified to their victims, leaving two small incisions under their eyes. Physical and psychological torture is implied but not shown, and Madeline is the commanding officer in this scenario. Throughout the series, Section One subjects enemy agents to torture, and innocent bystanders are caught in the crossfire during active operations. This inevitably distresses Nikita:

'Section let those people get slaughtered. Who are these butchers we're working for Michael?' ('Love', Series 1, Episode 6, 17 February 1997). By the fourth season, Nikita's lack of distress at such slaughter is seen as evidence of her successful 'reprogramming' at Madeline's hands. Right from the start, Madeline is the voice of Section One's (lack of) ethics: 'Shades of grey. There's no such thing as the enemy any more. As long as Bauer [a dealer in chemical weapons] is willing to play both sides of the fence, we'll continue to do business' ('Love', Series 1, Episode 6, 17 February 1997). From the outset, Section One's 'business' is compromised, shown to be ethically and morally unsound. Nikita's resistance to Section One's demands, and her on-off relationship with Michael, sets an Orwellian humanity against the needs of Big Brother. 'Gambit' (Series 1, Episode 14, 29 June 1997) opens with Madeline engaging in a homicidal scenario in virtual reality, effectively aligning the new technologies which saturate Section One's activities with its moral redundancy.[3] Madeline faces the cliché of psychological profilers in television drama when in this episode her opponent, Gregor Koestler, says they are the same. Yet unlike many detective series (such as *Millennium* or *Cracker*) where the moral distinction between detective and criminal is made clear, *La Femme Nikita* constantly reminds its audience of Section One's lack of ethics. Madeline and Operations often consider killing, or 'cancelling', their own agents, including, at various points, Nikita and Michael. In 'Treason' (Series 1, Episode 7, 24 February 1997), Nikita asks what happens to older agents, and Madeline's response – that it's 'highly classified' – implies that they are simply disposed of. This leads into a story regarding one of Nikita's colleagues, Roger, being blackmailed by an enemy organisation which has kidnapped his son. The child is returned to his adoptive parents and never discovers that Roger is his real father, but the episode closes with the revelation that Roger has been 'cancelled' because he betrayed Section One.

Section One's scant regard for the lives of its operatives, together with its disregard of their human rights, offers a scathing critique of both the espionage bureaucracy and the powers that support it. Section One's ethics – that the requirements of Section One are paramount and that any and all its operatives may be sacrificed for its survival – are those of a totalitarian state. Section One displays many of the characteristics of Orwell's Big Brother, yet this is an American agency with links to the CIA. In its cynical account of American intelligence agencies, *La Femme Nikita* is post-Watergate and pre-9/11. Arguably, the series' dark view of American politics derives from the perspective of its Canadian-based production team, offering an external commentary on a near-neighbour (Takacs 2005: 154). Yet, while the show is 'a veritable postmodern pastiche of intercultural referents' (Grindstaff 2001: 162), the profits go back to Warner Brothers, the kind of organisation that *La Femme Nikita* appears to critique. In this way, narrative agency is counterbalanced by economic determinism in a hegemonic strategy that deploys 'radical' politics in the service of containment. In the economic

realpolitik of the television series, as in its internal storyline, the status quo remains. Internally, in its account of Section One and its use of information technologies, and externally, in its production and marketing, *La Femme Nikita* is, thus, an exemplary account of the new television and the new economy. It is also an account of women's position within that economy through its representation of Nikita as a woman constantly fighting to escape incorporation – and here, unlike the films, constantly failing – and in its representation of Madeline as a professional woman profoundly implicated in the darker dealings of the agency.

Stacy Takacs defines the 'New Economy' as a particularly American phenomenon, closely linked to new technologies:

> Technology, enthusiasts contend, has enabled corporations to decentralize their networks of production and distribution, institute 'flexible' labor relations, and specialize production and delivery, thereby distributing goods and services to consumers more efficiently. Unlike the older, more sluggish, mass-production economy, this New Economy would evade the crises of overproduction that stall economic growth and achieve virtually unlimited expansion.
>
> (Takacs 2005: 148)

Those who support this 'electronic capitalism' advocate its democratic ethos, its potential to transform the workplace and distribute its profits through the 'trickle-down' effect of laissez-faire economics. The social responsibility of the state for its citizens is replaced by multinational corporations competing within a global market (Takacs 2005: 148–50). While the New Economy is often sold (in the UK as in the USA) on the basis of individual rights, its effect on those at the bottom of the economy becomes ever more evident. Takacs argues that the original broadcasts of *La Femme Nikita* (1997–2001) coincide with the booming New Economy in the USA: 'Unlike New Economic discourse, however, the program emphasizes the desocializing effects of a networked society in which power is deterritorialized and dispersed but omnipresent' (2005: 152). In her incorporation into Section One – ultimately moving beyond it as head of Center – Nikita represents the ideal subject of electronic capitalism. She is self-surveilling, has no life other than Section One and is willing to 'cancel' any opposition: 'like the common labourer under electronic-capitalism … her subjection reveals the negative impact of the New Economy on the lives of individual workers' (Takacs 2005: 165).

There is a deep irony in this account of a glossy television series read as a neo-Marxist account of labour relations, yet Takacs' argument is convincing. If anything, Nikita's haute-couture outfits and the stylish sets, together with statutory music-video action sequences, underline the extent to which the glossy surfaces of late Western capitalism disguise the poverty of groups beyond the white middle class. In these terms, *La Femme Nikita*'s 'whiteness'

is completely appropriate, as is the protagonist's visual framing as a femme fatale:

> The femme fatale has typically responded to her reduction to an image-commodity by inhabiting the role and turning it to her advantage. An astute information processor, she becomes the ideal postindustrial laborer whose behavior, nonetheless, reveals some of the cracks in the monolith of the New Economy and its Empire of control.
>
> (Takacs 2005: 166)

La Femme Nikita coincides with, and comments upon, not only 'New Television' and the New Economy but also the New Feminism. I take this term from the title of Natasha Walter's book about a necessary shift in feminist thought away from the second-wave feminisms of the 1960s and 1970s rooted in Left politics and towards a more commercially viable 'new' feminism which is allegedly less constricting (Walter 1998). Walter is an English author, but her work echoes that of American writers such as Naomi Wolf, Katie Roiphe, Christina Hoff Sommers and Camille Paglia. All emerged in the early 1990s and rode a wave of publicity fuelled by the 'scandal' of feminism being attacked from within. While such accounts of the second wave were often unrecognisable, they brought debates about gender to the media table and also inspired a number of academic publications and conferences on the state of feminist praxis in the 1990s. Bonnie Dow summarises the New Feminism advocated by the American authors in the following terms:

> All see feminism strangling in the grip of an ideology that claims all women are passive victims of sexual violence, economic exploitation, beauty images, or sexual harassment (in particular, they share a profound distaste for antipornography feminists such as Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, to whom they attribute hegemonic power over feminist ideology). All reject difference feminism and claim for women the right to be as sexually aggressive and power seeking as men are presumed to be, and all have a tendency to cite the discourse of academic feminists as evidence of the feminist 'party line' they are critiquing. Finally, all of these authors are privileged, well-educated white women, and they clearly presume their target audience to be much like themselves.
>
> (Dow 1996: 203)

The Nikita narratives ironically reveal the consequences of such New Feminism in their accounts of femininity and incorporation. The two films and the television series indicate the lack of room for women in the new economy. Nikita, in all her incarnations, is required to perform white middle-class femininity (albeit while shooting people) while remaining under

the surveillance and control of the agency that recruits her. Her only escape, in the films, is to disappear from sight, to go underground and escape the gaze of the screen, the social gaze of Bob and his superiors. New Feminism is anti-collective, pro-individualism, but the Nikita narratives reveal the consequences of such strategies: entrapment and coercion or a symbolic death. Bonnie Dow critiques the white middle-class heroines of prime-time television for being what the New Feminists would regard as ideal role models: 'As these critics describe it, feminism is being undermined by an emphasis on collective victimization, and the individualism that has always ruled television's representations is precisely what they claim the movement needs' (Dow 1996: 210–11). *La Femme Nikita* indicates the limits of such individualism and, as the series progresses, Madeline represents the destination of women who align themselves with corporate power; she is absorbed by it and becomes Nikita's greatest threat. By the final series, Madeline is dead, and Nikita has been conscripted to become head of Center. There is no feminist future here.

6 *Alias*
Quality television and the working woman

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, spies in television series such as *Spooks* and *24* represent a hyperreal vision of corporate professionals within a homogenously affluent, postmodern milieu. This chapter finally focuses on a single television series; *Alias* (2001–6) is the most recent and most hyperbolic account of the woman spy. Sydney Bristow is a fantastic representation of the new New Woman in twenty-first-century economies of white-collar labour. She is fetishised as a femme fatale – an active woman who kills – yet also occupies the role of central protagonist and moral touchstone. In this, *Alias* continues the debate begun by *La Femme Nikita*, and the two series have much in common – not least the drama around Sydney and Nikita's parentage. As a far more successful series, however, *Alias* (re)negotiates its version of the spy as New Woman across discourses of American quality television, placing Sydney in debate with the new New Hollywood and the new femmes fatales. As a postmodern figure in a postmodern medium, Sydney takes the discussion regarding women spies as representations of New Women in the New Economy to its limit. *Alias*, like the Nikita narratives, may be read as feminist and reactionary at the same time. This chapter does not attempt to claim either position as a final destination for the series, even after its demise in 2006, but seeks to map the means by which it keeps a foot in every camp, satisfying no one but its producers in their hope of garnering the largest audience for their product.

Like *La Femme Nikita*, *Alias* offers an intricately plotted version of the female spy. Sydney is a college student recruited by SD6, a division of the CIA, as an intelligence agent engaged on international missions that require her to adopt a range of glamorous disguises. Her father also works for SD6, and during the first series, she discovers that SD6 is not the CIA but an enemy agency engaged in selling secrets to the highest bidder. Sydney approaches the CIA with this information and is recruited as a double agent – like her father. The production values of the series, together with its complex storylines, make *Alias* a typical example of American 'quality' programming within the new television economy (Moran 2005). Like other American 'quality' series featuring a female protagonist (such as *Ally McBeal* or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), *Alias* focuses on the conflicts of

Sydney's professional and emotional lives. As the series progresses, Sydney not only works with her father, Jack Bristow, but also with her mother, Irina Derevko, and her half-sister, Nadia, and is often engaged in conflict with her aunts, Yekaterina and Elena Derevko. In its representation of post-Cold War espionage and familial relationships, *Alias* straddles the drama series and soap serial, with long-term story arcs as well as short-term gratification in its episodic action sequences. While the series offers scopophilic pleasure in seeing Sydney in a range of fetishistic costumes and Hong Kong-style action sequences, the plot centres on her relationships with family, friends and CIA 'handler'. *Alias* attempts to rationalise and efface the contradictions of public and private demands on the female professional, consequently opening up gaps and elisions in the series' internal logic; not least in the juxtaposition of fast-paced action and soft-focus melodrama. The series is also an evocation of contradictions inherent in American white middle-class femininity, played out in the continuous procession of revelations about Sydney in which her family background is entwined with sinister machinations by intelligence agencies. In this way, *Alias* relates the personal to the political, the familial with the social and the private family dynamic to the public question of American state governance. *Alias* offers a range of (feminist) reading positions to its viewers: it can be read as a celebratory account of 'post-feminist' agency, as a fetishistic representation of the female professional, or as a contradictory narrative which makes explicit the mismatch between femininity and power. Like much quality television, the series' self-conscious multiplicity of address renders it available to a variety of interpretations.

Spy series as quality television

Spy series in the twenty-first century have become a staple of prime-time television drama (Britton 2004: 252–5). In Britain, there is currently *Spooks* (BBC, 2002–), together with a range of historical dramas about spies and spying, such as *The Cambridge Spies* (BBC, 2003), which returned to the story of Blunt, Burgess and MacLean. Such dramas address mythologies of nation and identity; at once questioning such mythologies, in their narratives of treachery and betrayal, and shoring them up, through a nostalgic account of 'traditional' values. On British television, contemporary series stand in the shadow of BBC mini-series of the 1970s and 1980s, particularly those based on John le Carré's spy novels, such as *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (BBC, 1979), *Smiley's People* (BBC, 1982) and *The Perfect Spy* (BBC, 1987). These British series were rapidly imported by the American PBS network: 'Le Carré's world of shadow governments and suspicious double-dealings within intelligence organizations can also be seen as the precursor to many [American] shows with similar themes, such as *The Equalizer*, *The X-Files*, and *La Femme Nikita*' (Britton 2004: 213). *Spooks* continues that transatlantic drift: 'In July 2003, *Spooks* came to the American A&E cable

network, retitled *MI-5* in the spirit of other acronym titles like *CSI*, *JAG*, and the new *NCIS*' (Britton 2004: 254). In this way, espionage series, like the forensic detection series which are their close cousins, constitute a strand of contemporary quality-television programming. The espionage series also shadows critical discussion about what constitutes quality television, not least because the spy as an indicator of national identity is implicated in long-standing debates regarding culture, class and entertainment on the small screen.

British television dramas addressing espionage, such as those cited above, frequently represent quality programming in very British terms; they turn upon a heritage version of Englishness, however skewed (Brunsdon 1997, Thomas 2002). Charlotte Brunsdon characterised a specifically British understanding of quality television in the late 1980s as 'Brideshead in the Crown,' following critical accounts of *Brideshead Revisited* (Granada, 1981) and *The Jewel in the Crown* (Granada, 1984). This British notion of quality is predicated on its literary source, 'name' actors, high production values and its potential as an exportable account of heritage culture (Brunsdon 1997: 142–3). While there have been shifts in this debate since the 1980s, the 'heritage' aspect of quality British television remains. Recent dramatisations of *Bleak House* (BBC, 2005) and *Jane Eyre* (BBC, 2006) maintain the British tradition in quality programming. Contemporary British spy dramas, however, borrow from their American counterparts in equal measure; the transatlantic exchange works both ways (see Rixon 2003). Spy thrillers such as *The Grid* (BBC, 2004) and *The State Within* (BBC, 2006) depict a global political arena, featuring American actors and an international plot. These series lean toward a Hollywood aesthetic in offering cinematic production values and a complex multilayered narrative style. This has also produced a shift within long-running series such as *Spooks*, whose fifth season featured fight sequences and camera work clearly influenced by American spy series such as *24*.[1]

American television offers a different account of quality, relying less on the guarantees of literary source and heritage than on the 'high-concept' production values of new New Hollywood (Smith 1998: 12–13). Aesthetically and economically, the Hollywood studios have had a hand in the North American networks since the early days of television; in the 1950s, movie executives were quick to recognise the competition television represented and also the outlet for cinematic product that it provided (Neale 1998). By 1955, MGM, Fox and Warners had followed Disney in producing filmed series for television and also selling their movie stockpile to the networks for screening on television: 'By 1960 virtually all prime time fictional series were produced on film in Hollywood, with the traditional studio powers dominating this trend' (Schatz 1993: 12). In the 1970s, this relationship between the New Hollywood and television was further cemented with the use of television as an advertising medium for cinematic product, the end of tri-network domination of commercial television with the development of

pay TV and satellite services, and the development of home video systems with a subsequent demand for Hollywood blockbusters in the video market (Schatz 1993: 21–2). One consequence of this fiscal intimacy between the large and small screen was that since 1975 many mainstream films have been made with the knowledge that they are more likely to be viewed on television than in the cinema: 'cinematic technique is adjusted accordingly, conforming with the small screen's "most hypnotic images," its ads. Visual and spatial scale are downsized, action is repetitiously foregrounded and centered, pace and transitions are quicker, music and montage are more prevalent, and slick production values and special effects abound' (Schatz 1993: 32).

While Thomas Schatz is addressing New Hollywood, this is effectively a description of American networks' version of quality television and also an accurate description of the aesthetic that drives *Alias*. Like classical Hollywood, the television networks have had to confront the threat of new media – the multifunctionality of the television set (as games console and computer screen, for example) is matched by a 'multiplying non-exclusivity of content' (Moran 2005: 292–3). The relationship between film and television in the twenty-first century is more than intimate; it has become interchangeable as stars, directors, producers and narratives shift between media. The moving image is now available across a range of viewing technologies and can be redeployed across a range of media; as comics, computer games, novels, soundtracks and so on (Moran 2005: 294). In these terms, popular television dramas are brands rather than bounded narratives. *Alias* is currently available in game format – *Alias: The Game* (2003) – and as a series of novels, including a range of prequels that fill in the back story to the series.[2]

Such multimedia awareness is clear in the content and the style of *Alias* as a quality programme; as with *La Femme Nikita*, microtechnology is to the fore, with Marshall J. Flinkman the equivalent of 'Q' in the Bond films. While 'Q' is an elderly upper-class English gentleman, however, Marshall represents the stereotype of the Silicon Valley computer geek. He is young, gauche and engagingly eccentric, not only producing gadgets for Sydney's assignments but also collecting Pez dispensers and making paper pop-up books in his spare moments (Ruditis 2005: 43). Marshall offers a point of identification for fan cultures around *Alias*; like the Lone Gunmen in *The X-Files* and the Three in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, he is a representation of the fan-boy. *Alias*, thus, follows its predecessors in courting an active fan-base (Gwenllian Jones 2003: 166). While Sydney lives a fantasy urban professional lifestyle, Marshall's home life is clearly suburban and domestic; living with his mother in the first two series, by Season 3, Marshall has a wife and young son. In this way, the content of quality series like *Alias* combines high technology and the everyday to produce a glossy and often comic juxtaposition. Such programmes are aware of the world around television, self-consciously offering themselves

as subjects for debate in magazine reviews, online discussions and academic studies. By the second season, the promotional material around *Alias* was 'self-reflexive, parodying the show itself and reflecting an understanding of its own audience' (Coon 2005: 8). Kevin Weisman, who plays Marshall, is the nominal editor of an 'unauthorised' collection of essays on the series: *Alias Assumed: Sex, Lies and SD-6* (2005). This is one aspect of television's postmodernity, evident in series like *Alias* that 'demonstrate an increasingly sophisticated knowledge of the conditions of their production, circulation, and eventual reception' (Collins 1992: 332). Such intimacy should not be taken as a sign of democratisation, however; while online fan sites and chat rooms are a rich source of information for journalists and programme-makers, the production companies are also concerned to police their copyright (Gwenllian Jones 2003).

Alias's visual style is also tempered by a multimedia aesthetic; Sydney's action sequences are cut with the speed of a music video and invariably feature an appropriate soundtrack. This technique is brought to the fore in the title sequence for the fourth season, where a montage of Sydney's disguises is cut to the rhythm of the title music. This is the high-concept new New Hollywood aesthetic Schatz, Smith and Maltby describe, and Jennifer Garner has successfully used her role as Sydney Bristow as a calling card for film work. As Sydney Bristow, she has received four consecutive Emmy nominations, four Golden Globe nominations – winning one – and two Screen Actors Guild nominations, again winning one. Garner's role as Electra in *Daredevil* (dir. Mark Steven Johnson, 2003), and the subsequent *Electra* (dir. Rob Bowman, 2005), took the fantasy element of *Alias* to its logical limit by literally presenting her as a superhero. The multimedia aesthetic of *Alias*, together with its status as an award-winning show, lends itself to the quality aspects of Hollywood television.[3] Like other quality series (such as *CSI* and *ER*), *Alias* has featured a list of high-profile guest stars (such as Quentin Tarantino, Faye Dunaway, Ethan Hawke, Christian Slater and Ricky Gervais) and co-stars (such as Angela Bassett, Lena Olin and Isabella Rossellini), who add their film and television star personae to the 'high-concept' *Alias* aesthetic (Maltby 1998: 37–8). Such exchanges are characteristic of the twenty-first century mediascape that *Alias* both replicates and comments on, to the extent that the competing agencies in *Alias* appear to echo the multiple mergers and buy-outs of the new Hollywood (Maltby 1998, Balio 1998). When ABC (the network that bought *Alias*) was bought by Disney in 1995, it was a move that mirrored the vertically integrated production and distribution system of classical Hollywood. In 1999, the two corporations merged their production and programming to create the ABC Entertainment Television Group, one of several bodies to take advantage of the deregulation of American television in the mid-1990s (Holt 2003: 19–20). *Alias*'s burgeoning landscape of competing agencies offers a hyperbolic account of this corporate arena in which new competitors are constantly emerging. Unlike the media landscape from which it emerges,

however, *Alias* delineates 'bad' and 'good' agencies: on the sinister side, the Alliance, Section Disparu (Cell 6) (SD6), K-Directorate, FTL and Prophet Five; and for the American government, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), National Security Agency (NSA), Department of Special Research (DSR), National Security Council (NSC) and 'Authorized Personnel Only' (APO) (see Ruditis 2005: 50–7). In this way, despite the variable allegiances of individual characters (notably Arvin Sloane), *Alias* puts a moral gloss on its corporate environments.

Quality and middle-class professionals

American quality drama in the early twenty-first century thus exhibits these characteristics: it is glossy, self-aware, visually informed by new New Hollywood and new media, recruits an active fan base and promotes itself as a quality product. Above all, it is a 'dispersible text' (Austin 1999: 148), addressing a range of audiences, with the potential to be franchised across a variety of media. *Alias* neatly fits this definition; indeed, popular discussion about the series makes clear the extent to which the discourse of quality is now employed by television companies as a means of marketing its product. In a November 2005 press release from ABC announcing the end of the series, Mark Pedowitz, President of Touchstone Television which produces *Alias*, said, '*Alias* has sustained its identity as a critical favorite because J. J. Abrams and everyone in this series set the bar for quality entertainment.'[4] This statement underlines the extent to which 'quality' has entered public discourse and also how it remains attached to notions of authorship, in naming Abrams as the show's 'creator'. Despite (or because of) the new-media emphasis in quality American television and its multiple address to a range of audiences, there is still a nostalgic desire for the Romantic ideal of the author as a source of originality and creativity.

Genre television drama, like the generic product of classical Hollywood, combats any denigration of its mass-produced consumer aesthetic with claims for the *auteur* status of the creative geniuses behind them (Feuer 1992: 142). Joss Whedon became the public face promoting *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and, in the case of *Alias*, J. J. Abrams is promoted as much as the stars of the series. In American television, the producer of a programme is its 'author' rather than, as in British television, its writer (Shattuc 2005: 142–3). Just as Joel Surnow is cited as the creator of *La Femme Nikita*, and later *24* (2001–), so Abrams has become synonymous with the stylish visuals and complex story arcs of *Alias* and, more recently, *Lost* (2004–). Ironically, the similar style of these series indicates the limited originality of such products, contradicting the promotional and critical language that heralds their creators' innovations. Like Surnow, Abrams' style rewards viewers who follow the series religiously. They are, thus, part of a new shift in quality broadcasting toward 'must-see TV': 'These programmes have also been referred to as "date" or "appointment" television, and they

are distinguished by the compulsive viewing practices of dedicated audiences who organize their schedules around these shows' (Jancovich and Lyons 2003: 2). This is a style of drama that offers little in the way of exegesis but demands that viewers have a thorough knowledge of the programme and take inexplicable plot twists on trust. It is also television that demands that the viewer watch attentively; another indicator of quality drama, as opposed to the 'lesser' quality of so-called wallpaper television such as soaps, lifestyle programmes or reality series.

These characteristics are driven (but not determined) by the economic requirements of the medium. The growing phenomenon of 'must-see TV' (a phrase originally used as a brand slogan for NBC) was one result of declining viewing figures for the networks following the spread of cable and satellite channels. American networks fought back by specifically targeting a 'quality' audience:

> In other words, the compulsiveness of 'must see' television is designed to appeal to affluent, highly educated consumers who value the literary qualities of these programmes, and they are used by the networks to hook this valuable cohort of viewers into their schedules. The other transition discernable here is the shift from networks as facilitators of a national public sphere to a situation in which these organisations are increasingly preoccupied with garnering international niche audiences. Interestingly, this transition has also been instrumental in television acquisition of greater cultural legitimacy. As Nicholas Garnham points out, the decline in the audience for a popular medium means that a taste for it becomes increasingly rare. The result is that the medium is then open to appropriation and legitimation by the middle classes.
>
> (Jancovich and Lyons 2003: 3)

The deregulation of broadcasting, and the subsequent pressure to access affluent 'international niche audiences', has put an industrial emphasis on producing middle-class product targeted at the middle classes (Mullan 1997: 76–7). Espionage and detection series are at the heart of this strategy, refracting the professional middle classes back to themselves at twice their original size: 'while many "must-see" shows have been praised for their quality, they have also been criticised for displaying an overwhelming preoccupation with the white, affluent, urban middle classes' (Jancovich and Lyons 2003: 3). Such series are designed to attract this most lucrative audience by presenting drama that satisfies their newly defined cultural capital. Thus high-end detection and espionage series flatter their viewers with intricate story arcs and transcultural references, often acquiring 'cult' status. As Diane Werts of *Newsday* noted when *Alias* premiered in 2001, the series is an example of 'TV's longtime trend toward delayed drama gratification. Trying to reflect reality and deepen character, plots can stretch on for weeks' (Werts, cited in Britton 2004: 250). Whether the delayed gratification

of these story arcs is an attempt at realism or rather a technique to keep those white, affluent middle classes watching is open to debate. Certainly, both *Alias* and *La Femme Nikita* have become recognisable as 'cult' series, thus tapping into the paradox of a niche market which is open to a range of viewers. *La Femme Nikita*'s status as a 'cult' show supported by an active fan base was clear: when the series was cancelled after four seasons by the USA Network cable channel, an internet campaign crashed the channel's e-mail system and inspired the screening of a further eight episodes in a curtailed 'final season' (Tung 2004: 108). Tim Cuprisin argues that this is not the full story:

> Neilsen Media Research data released by USA Network shows that nearly a quarter of the show's viewers live in households earning more than $75,000, 27% of the households tuning in are headed by college graduates and 60% of the audience comes from the 18–49 age group. That's the demographic group advertisers want most. The big lesson of the *Nikita* fan campaign is that you have greater chance of success saving a cable show than you would a network program. Cable shows can survive, even thrive, with audiences that would be considered microscopic by the network standards. But the key is just who makes up that tiny audience.
>
> (Cuprisin 2000)

In this way, the audience for such shows has a limited power to influence their production and distribution but only because they constitute a desirable market for advertising and only, in this case, because cable channels are more reliant on their profit margins. *Alias* fans have not been so fortunate; following ABC's press release, at least two websites were set up to coordinate online and postal campaigns to avert the show's demise, but this did not prevent the series ending with its fifth season (Blair 2005).

The corporate culture required to produce such television is apparent both in the working conditions of *Alias*' production team and in the work ethic of its characters; in this sense, art imitates life. Raymond Williams saw television as paradigmatic of late twentieth-century cultural production in its emphasis on market value: 'This dependency on the market presaged the final and current phase of artist in the marketplace – the corporate professional – the term Williams applies to television makers. Here, the writer or artist is wholly an employee of a corporation' (Shattuc 2005: 149). Jane M. Shattuc cites *Law and Order* as the most pronounced example of working practices in new television's deregulated media economy: '*Law and Order*'s makers are interchangeable – actors, writers, and directors have rotated in and out of the program for over a decade. They are the embodiment of classic corporate professionals' (2005: 150). *Alias* operates within a similar economy of labour. The series composer Michael Giacchino offers the following account of his experience of working on *Alias*:

> The thing that always sticks in my mind is that I get about three days to do a show. That's regardless of how we're doing it. I get three days to do 20 to 25 minutes worth of music. Which is a lot. I end up working night and day doing it, but it never bothers me because I know the guys who have handed off the tape to me have been doing exactly the same thing. Everybody is working just as hard. You never feel, 'God, I can't believe I have to do this.' You feel like you have something to live up to, because the people behind you just handed you something that's great and you have to do something that's worthy of that product.
>
> (Gross 2003: 52)

This brief statement offers one account of corporate labour within the new economy: tight deadlines, long hours and a great deal of pressure to 'live up to' an ideal, all framed within a market economy where 'product' must sell to exist at all. While television drama is not a simple reflection of social reality, it does have the capacity to refract social experience. In *Alias*, professional experience is refracted back to its (middle-class professional) audience through a lens that repackages 'life at the office' as a glamorous, jet-set lifestyle. The glossy surfaces and scopophilic pleasures of *Alias* – not least of which feature Jennifer Garner in a range of fetishistic outfits on assignment – would seem to predicate the series as a fantasy which bears little relation to most people's working lives. Yet, like the fast-forward schedule of its production crew, the content of *Alias* represents an articulation of contemporary corporate life.

Sydney Bristow and the New Economy

Alias is, like *La Femme Nikita*, a representation of the new economy of 'electronic capitalism' (Takacs 2005), which has brought with it a new style of management. Several terms have been coined to describe this shift: 'New managerialism, which is also referred to as neoliberalism in the United Kingdom and Total Quality Management in the United States, is a system of the government of individuals invented during the Thatcher and Reagan years' (Davies et al. 2005: 360). In an article that examines the effects of this shift on women at work in academia, Bronwyn Davies and her colleagues describe the philosophy of this new managerial approach: 'Neoliberalism is characterized by the "death of society" and the rise of "individuals" who are in need of a new kind of management, surveillance and control' (Davies et al. 2005: 344). Sydney Bristow, like Nikita before her, embodies such control in her professional behaviour and her physical prowess. She is both surveilled and self-surveilling in her role as agent for SD6 and double agent for the CIA. As the perfect spy, and thus the perfect subject, Sydney has internalised the panoptical gaze of her employers and, while she may question the motives of individuals within the CIA, she does not question its moral right to use extreme force. In this way, Sydney represents a postmodern shift in

working practices, which may be seen within education and other public services:

> The cold instrumentality of these new work practices is neatly encapsulated in the notion of 'performativity' ... Drawing on Wittgenstein's philosophy of 'language games,' Lyotard suggests that the knowledge sector of society has, in the postmodern era, undergone a shift of interest from concerns with human life, to pragmatic concerns interested only in the optimal performance of means; a move to performativity.
>
> (Whitehead 1999: 110)

Sydney does not simply represent a shift from the human to the performative, however, as the series is as much concerned with the contradictions between her private life and her professional performativity. Sydney is undoubtedly efficient – to an extreme that suggests both a superhuman ability to perform and a parodic account of the professional sphere – yet, she is also caught in a nexus of emotional issues: moral, familial and romantic. This provides melodrama, the series' soap heritage, which is a feature of other American quality dramas, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The Sopranos* and *The X-Files*. The contradictions between Sydney's professional and private lives were played out in early seasons through the destruction of her friends because of her work, and continued in later seasons through the on-off relationship with Vaughn and her tangled familial relations.

Sydney thus embodies the new 'New Woman' in the neo-liberal New Economy: she offers a hyperbolic account of the contradictions between professional and personal life. Most obviously, this is played out in the professional demands which make it impossible for her to have a social life outside the workplace (Nye 2005). This corresponds to the New Economy's stress on its professional workforce, that personal needs be subordinated to the needs of the corporation. In this twenty-first century working environment, the individual is placed under enormous pressure to perform a variety of roles, and failure to perform effectively entails the threat of demotion or dismissal:

> In neoliberal discourse primacy is given to the flexible individual who acts 'responsibly' in relation to the market and who is valued in market terms. Individuals must respond to the market and also anticipate it, and must always be ready to be rejected as relevant players if they are no longer of any (monetary) value.
>
> (Davies et al. 2005: 347)

Nikita in *La Femme Nikita*, like Sydney in the first two seasons of *Alias*, is under constant threat of 'cancellation' or assassination by the agency that employs her. While such extreme practice does not hold in 'real' life, few

working in the public sector are unaware of the threat of redundancy. *Alias* thus comments on the New Economy through drawing parallels between Sydney's espionage adventures and her cover as a bank executive. Following an assignment where she is unable to prevent a CIA team being killed, Sydney catches up with best friend and housemate Francie, who believes she works for an international bank:

> FRANCIE: 'Hey, how was your trip?'
> SYDNEY: 'Oh ... not good ... I was working with these people who ... um ... they were terminated.'
> FRANCIE: 'Oh man. The economy *sucks*.'
> (*Alias*, 'Reckoning', Series 1, Episode 6, 18 November 2001)

This brief exchange makes explicit the linguistic and allegorical resonance between Sydney's missions and her day-to-day cover story as a banking executive and, thus, between Sydney and the New Economy. The resonance is echoed in 'Bob' (Series 5, Episode 8), where Sydney's new colleague, Rachel, is undercover as an IT executive at a convention. She describes her working life in terms that cover both her espionage work and her corporate cover story: 'Sometimes at these work events I feel that I'm in over my head. I just started in a new division. It's a lot more responsibility, more risks.' Despite the fact that recent studies have disputed the decline in long-term employment (see Perrons 2003: 71), working practices are increasingly predicated on a mobile economy and a flexible workforce. The information age, founded on communications and computer technologies, has allegedly introduced a much more fluid employment market. Some commentators see this as the way forward, offering potential benefits to those traditionally excluded from the labour market: 'The Internet is said to be free of gender (and race) bias because communication is impersonal and gender-neutral. Thus Internet-based trade and business (e-commerce) could be a fruitful source of new occupations for women on an equal basis with men' (Stanworth 2000: 21). The potential for flexible working hours in a range of locations (including the home) is often cited as beneficial to women, particularly those with children. However, this optimistic scenario is undermined by evidence that information technology, computers and telecommunications (ICT) work 'physically and contractually outside organisational boundaries is often isolated and exploitative, for women especially where skills are low, easily replaceable or undervalued' (Stanworth 2000: 21).

Yet Sydney and her colleagues emphatically do *not* represent such a dispossessed underclass of low paid, out-sourced workers; instead, they offer one of many accounts of a super-competent professionals on the small screen. Sydney, Nikita and their television sisters in quality drama perform the role of the privileged middle-class professional. They are separate from the masses, from the often unseen and undifferentiated 'ordinary' women

who exist around them (Radner 1995: 5). Slim, (predominantly) white, immaculately presented and committed to their work, they embody professional efficiency. Vivian Johnson (Marianne Jean-Baptiste) in *Without a Trace* (2002–), Neela Rasgotra (Parminder Nagra) in *ER* (1994–), Alexx Woods (Khandi Alexander) in *CSI Miami* (2002–) and Cristina Yang (Sandra Oh) in *Grey's Anatomy* (2005–) are notable exceptions to the Eurocentric casting of professional women. Most prime-time dramas feature female professionals with a Hispanic or Italian-American background – such as Stella Bonasera (Melina Kanakaredes) in *CSI New York* (2004–) – but they tend to be assimilated as a different kind of glamour. Professional women on television are compromised by problems in their personal life, just as such characters are punished and demonised in mainstream Hollywood films, indicating the threat they still hold for masculine forms of power (Jones 1991, Brunsdon 1997: 90–4). In Sydney's case, the threat of her professional ability is also contained through hyperbole and fetishisation. Sydney's ability to perform on assignment is clearly superhuman; like her avatar in the *Alias* computer game, she is knocked down only to revive again, time after time. Her indestructibility is matched by her hyper-sexualisation on assignment. Sydney on the job is almost unfailingly dressed to kill in revealing outfits; Sydney in the office is a paragon of twenty-first-century officewear, in dark colours and body-concealing suits. Sydney's spy work is here aligned with that of the 'working girl', as in Yvonne Tasker's analysis of contemporary Hollywood product: 'Across a variety of popular genres, Hollywood representation is characterised by an insistent equation between working women, women's work and some form of sexual(ised) performance' (Tasker 1998: 3).

Sydney and Nikita are supremely professional *and* supremely feminine – and those two skills are combined in the many sequences where they perform their femininity as a professional alias, where they go undercover. In this, they overtly mimic the 'working girls' that shadow working women on screen; through their cross-dressed identities, Sydney and Nikita embody the 'head for business and a bod for sin' which Tess McGill (Melanie Griffiths) ascribes herself in *Working Girl* (Mike Nichols, 1988) (Tasker 1998: 39–43). Femininity and female sexuality thus become *work* for these female spies, an image to be performed and discarded. John Berger famously argued that 'men act and women appear' (Berger 1972: 47); in these new fictions on television, as on the cinema screen, that simple binary is disturbed by women who occupy both sides of the divide. Such women act and also appear – like their real counterparts, these fictional figures have double the workload: to play the man at work and also to accomplish the role of femininity. These figures do not represent a feminism that is achieved but, rather, a mutable account of femininity. Most notably, both Peta Wilson and Jennifer Garner, like many of their cinematic counterparts, are physically different from action women on screen in the 1960s and 1970s. Unlike Lindsay Wagner or Farrah Fawcett-Majors, these women are muscular and

visibly strong. While they wear fetishistic outfits, there is little movement on their fleshless frames and, at the moments where they are hyper-sexually dressed, they often appear masculine – there is a mismatch between the hyper-feminine costume and the muscular female body. Such moments offer a discomforting vision of transgender identities. What Nikita and Sydney's aliases make evident is the transgender identity of the woman in the professions, that they are women out of place, in environments that clearly do not account for femininity but only work on masculine frames. While *La Femme Nikita* and *Alias* offer problematic accounts of living through the 'third wave' – echoing the gaps and elisions of many real women in the professions – they can gesture towards a third sex, a different performance of gender.

In this, they echo a shift in roles for women on the big screen. Hilary Radner notes the emergence of the 'psycho*femme*', or the neo-*noir* femme fatale, as a figure that 'rock[s] the boat of heterosexuality' upon which Hollywood predicates its profits (Radner 1998: 248). Radner elaborates with reference to Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (James Cameron, 1991) and Marge Gunderson (Frances McDormand) in *Fargo* (Ethan Coen, 1996). Linda Hamilton's muscular physique represents a body which 'positions itself at the limits of erotic fascination, a gesture that reworks the status of that body as the limit between that which is human and that which is machine,' a theme which *Terminator 2* plays out repeatedly (Radner 1998: 251). Frances McDormand, on the other hand, was padded out to appear pregnant and ungainly throughout *Fargo*, representing a body which refuses to be eroticised, refuses the traditional scopophilic role of women within Hollywood cinema (Radner 1998: 253). These strategies are echoed in *Alias*, where Sydney initially plays out a version of Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2*, taking her professional (and personal) ethos to the limit, in a body that privileges muscularity over feminine softness. In Season 5, however, Sydney's body changes dramatically (as Jennifer Garner also became pregnant), offering an unprecedented representation of the pregnant woman spy. *Alias* is, thus, an instance of Hollywood-inflected American quality television offering its viewers something other than contained femininity. This is not to say that the series is 'feminist' or that it reflects any current social reality for women, simply that these diversions from the mainstream open up cracks in the façade of heteropatriarchy.

In many ways, the visual images presented by these models of the new young woman conform to contemporary critiques of the 'third wave' or 'new feminism.' Both Nikita and Sydney are fetishistically dressed for action in leather and rubber outfits. The producers' DVD commentaries on episodes from the first season of *Alias* make reverent reference to the electric blue rubber mini-dress that Sydney changed into from a maid's uniform on her assignment in 'So It Begins' (Series 1, Episode 2). In this sequence, Sydney simply changes from one fetishistic costume to another, in a paradigmatic

example of the many outfits she dons during the series. These early aliases epitomise the working woman as 'working girl' (Tasker 1998), but the sequences that precede and succeed such costumes undermine any single reading of their significance; Sydney is also an obedient worker and a killer. The blue-rubber-dress image featured on an early poster promoting the series: 'Written across her left breast in small text are two phrases: "Not just a secret agent. She's a concealed weapon"' (Coon 2005: 7). These series are written across the small screens of contemporary television whose aesthetic increasingly appears to epitomise postmodernity: 'a world where notions of metaphysical truth, being and identity are deconstructed and replaced with an emphasis on flux, becoming and subjective perspectives' (DiTommaso 2003: 1). In postmodern adventure series such as *La Femme Nikita* and *Alias*, the lengthy story arcs, together with generic attributes that play with the boundaries of realism and fantasy, offer them as an ongoing debate over modernity/postmodernity. As these are spy fictions, this becomes a debate over the subject and agency; and because they are women at the turn of the twenty-first century, this debate entails feminist contexts.

Although these fictions are often claimed by those espousing a 'third wave' or 'new feminism' as the sign of cultural if not social change in gender relations, they may also be understood as revealing the political limitations of so-called post-feminism (Levy 2005: 75). Many advocates of the third wave offer distorted and homogenised accounts of 1970s second-wave feminist politics which, albeit inadvertently, support negative media stereotypes of feminists as shrill, unreasonable and outdated (Segal 1997: 6–7). While women's poverty on a global scale has increased in the past twenty years, some Western women have benefited from changes in legislation in the aftermath of the second wave (Segal 1997: 11). It is largely this privileged group that writes about, endorses or espouses a 'third wave', a politics complicit with the shift to the right in American politics which is echoed in other Western nations: 'neo-conservative politicians and corporate marketing strategies have successfully normalized an astonishingly reactionary definition of feminism in the United States. Feminist success is now widely equated with any socio-economic gain that is achieved by any individual woman by any means necessary' (Smith 1997: 33).

Nikita, Sydney and their sisters on prime-time television appear to embody such a limited understanding of 'feminist success', yet they also give the lie to any unquestioning celebration of a third wave. The conflicts between these characters' private and professional lives are played out on the small screen as fantasy, but they also refract the realities of audiences which are tuning in; that desired, affluent middle-class international niche market. Television may be a hydra-headed media oligopoly – 'the Disney-ABC/Time Warner-Turner-CNN/General Electric-NBC/Westinghouse-CBS/Murdoch-Fox/Viacom-Paramount-MTV/Bertellsman swamp' – yet it also offers a terrain for debate, for instances of momentary questioning of the very corporations that dominate its production (Smith 1997: 33).

The new New Woman as a 'free agent individual'

Nikita, as a conscripted agent for an agency which appears increasingly sinister, may be read as an overtly critical account of the New Economy, whereas Sydney is more fully incorporated and uncritical of the organisations that employ her. Once Sydney discovers SD6 is not the CIA, her allegiance is quickly switched to the CIA, and she remains within its hegemonic discourse of American patriarchy. Even when operating outside the remit of her agency, she still works within a patriarchal structure, often with her father or with Vaughn. In this way, Sydney Bristow represents the ideal (fantasy) subject of the New Economy. She is self-motivated, driven and highly efficient. Most importantly, she can deal with dramatic changes in structure – such as the revelation that SD6 is not the CIA or that she has been a brainwashed enemy assassin (working undercover for the CIA) for two years – without compromising her professional role. Sydney's professional life is totally geared towards the exigencies of the New Economy, making her a dream employee for neo-liberal employers. Most accounts of the New Economy in the information age note the increasing stress (both literal and rhetorical) on the individual:

> The theme of employment-by-self and the growth of 'enterprise' runs through both the European and the US information age literature. Technical work transforming information into knowledge, the archetypal work of the information age, is predicted to be carried out in 'virtual' organizations, described as dynamic coalitions of technical specialists linked by global computer networks. The diffusion of the 'virtual' organizational form is said to be driven both by the technological imperative and by the chaotic external environment. One form of virtuality is the sophisticated subcontracting chain, another is the lean hub of employed staff surrounded by a shifting army of own account self-employed workers. Negroponte (1995) and Barnatt (1997) foresee the predominance of 'free agent individuals' in future labour markets.
>
> (Stanworth 2000: 24)

While within the series both SD6 and the CIA have a visible 'hub of employed staff', they are supported by a network of independent agents and offices, linked by information technology. In 'So It Begins' (Series 1, Episode 2, 7 October 2001), Sydney tells her new CIA handler, Michael C. Vaughn, that she intends to help them destroy SD6 and then leave espionage behind her. He shows her the CIA's organisational map of SD6 – a huge grid covering most of the world – and tells her that her work is 'complicated, political and long term'. If the CIA in *Alias* is organised along the same lines – which it must be in order to combat a network like SD6 – then, like SD6, it must have a similarly 'virtual' structure. Both agencies are hierarchical, with a clear sense of management structure, yet, within the series,

Sydney appears to confound this with her startling insight and professional prowess. In 'Parity' (Series 1, Episode 3, 14 October 2001), when the CIA attempt to replace Vaughn with a more experienced officer, she bluntly rejects the replacement and gets Vaughn promoted in the process. It is notable that Vaughn's replacement, Seth Lambert, is characterised as not only older but as representing an 'older' sensibility, as he comments on Sydney's good looks and arranges a pointless meeting with her where he gets her murdered fiancé's name wrong. This is a rare instance of an inefficient operative in *Alias*, and he is quickly dispatched. Sydney, Vaughn and their colleagues (including enemy counterparts) are unfailingly efficient and dedicated to their work.

If *Alias* represents the CIA, SD6 and APO as 'virtual' organisations in the information-age economy Stanworth describes above, it is tempting to see Sydney Bristow as a model of the 'free agent individual'. This ideal employee is incorporated into predictions regarding the future of information technologies and the professional workplace: 'A scenario of atomized individuals bearing the risk of generating a sufficient income flow and operating in a global environment is predicted for the majority of the workforce' (Stanworth 2000: 24). In this sense, Sydney represents the future, but only a future for the white middle classes – a future that entails inordinate pressure to perform unfailingly in dangerous (economic) environments across the globe. In the face of a 'chaotic external environment', whether it be the threat of terrorism in *Alias* or the chaotic imperative of the new economy, the new professionals are expected to deal with it. While this is a fantasy, it may also appear to offer some form of agency in the person of these agents who individually (and regularly) save the world. Sydney Bristow and her sisters can be seen as allegories for 'the neoliberal/new managerialist demand for personal control of and responsibility for the self, which may seem liberating but is also dangerous in that the self is compelled never to rest. The controlled self must always be flexible, propelling itself into the ever-reinvented demands of the institution' (Davies et al. 2005: 351). Joanne Entwistle reads this new self within an explicitly Foucauldian frame, employing Foucault's 'technologies of the self' to propose that power-dressed career women in the 1990s constituted 'a technology of the (female, professional) self' (1997: 315):

> This 'technology of the self' can be seen to correlate with new work regimes developing from the 1970s onwards, a technology of the self commonly referred to as the 'enterprising self' because it is produced by a regime of work which emphasises internal self-management and relative autonomy on the part of the individual.
>
> (Entwistle 1997: 316)

Nikita (specifically in *La Femme Nikita*) and Sydney Bristow represent a fantasy of this self-managing self; a (female) self that goes to extreme

measures to ensure that the job is done. The thin, muscular bodies of Peta Wilson and Jennifer Garner make evident the labour involved in maintaining such a self, while Nikita and Sydney's emotional crises indicate the cost and psychic discipline required to continue in their roles. It is no coincidence that these figures emerge on television and on film in parallel with the effects of second-wave feminism; Nikita and Sydney represent one outcome of that social shift: that women are present in the professional workplace, but that the demands made on professionals are increasingly inhuman. Such figures are fantastic representations of the New Woman which reflect upon the limitations of liberation.

Other significant female figures in the series – Sydney's mother, Irina Derevko, her aunts, Katya Derevko and Elena Derevko, and Vaughn's wife, Lauren Reed – are revealed as duplicitous figures working with enemy agencies. *Alias* plays upon the early twentieth-century opposition between evil, Oriental spies (feminine) and good, Occidental intelligence agents (masculine). In this sense, the series is a return to the old order of representation regarding women as spies, despite its postmodern credentials. *Alias* thus offers a 'double articulation' (Fiske 1987: 189), perpetuating the Mata Hari stereotype but also commenting upon it in early seasons by revealing that Irina is 'the Man', the mysterious leader of an enemy organisation dedicated to collecting the Rambaldi artefacts, and by offering Sydney as her opposite number. By the end of the series, however, Sydney and her mother are directly opposed as the good and the bad spy. Although Sydney is of mixed parentage, the child of an enemy Russian agent and a CIA father, she is subsumed within a masculine economy that is explicitly aligned with American interests. The Derevko women are increasingly revealed to be duplicitous, interested only in their own power. *Alias*, thus, takes a step back from addressing its own politics by presenting them as excess, and thus unresolved: 'Excess does not necessarily lead to subversive or interrogative readings: it allows for an overspill of meaning that escapes ideological control and that makes alternative readings possible' (Fiske 1987: 193). Any alternative reading in this case involves a critical account of Sydney Bristow, which the series itself gestures towards but never fully confronts. While many of the characters around her may switch their allegiances, if only temporarily, Sydney remains a touchstone of truth with a clear moral vision. It is left to the viewer to critique her monotonous success in the workplace and the crises in her private life.

By Season 4, Sydney's life beyond the new 'black ops' agency, APO, is almost indistinguishable from her life at work, as work also concerns her family relationships. Sydney no longer lives in a graduate-student house in a leafy suburb but a slick urban apartment which she invites her half-sister, Nadia, to share. In 'Détente' (Series 4, Episode 7, 16 February 2005), Arvin Sloane, the morally ambiguous leader of first SD6 and then APO visits his daughter Nadia at Sydney's apartment, and she is horrified to find him there; yet, this is only the most extreme example of how work enters Sydney

Bristow's personal life, and vice versa. This is true for most of the major protagonists in the series who have family within secret agencies and, in the case of Vaughn, Sydney and Nadia, are fascinated by a deceased parent. The internecine familial plots in *Alias* would appear to offer it for psychoanalytic interpretation, yet the extreme nature of the family relationships are, like the account of professional life, a hyperreal pastiche of familial dysfunction. Sydney's mother Irina Derevko is first thought to be dead, then is found to be alive but working as an enemy agent who takes out a contract on her daughter's life. Sydney's father, Jack Bristow, has Irina killed in order to save Sydney, but it later emerges that a genetic duplicate of Irina was killed in her place, so she is still alive but being kept prisoner and tortured by her sister, Elena Derevko. Towards the end of the fourth season, Nadia and Sydney rescue and release their mother, Irina, with Jack Bristow's help. The family narratives of *Alias* grow ever more bizarre as the series progresses, so that by the fourth season, Sydney's private and professional worlds have effectively combined.

Mothers and daughters

Alias represents a masculine economy of emotion where 'male power … is associated with lack of emotion … the ability to keep one's vulnerabilities concealed' (Wright 2005: 203). It also privileges masculine forms of power, (self-)control and cultural capital. The emphasis on family drama, together with a romantic narrative, allies *La Femme Nikita* and *Alias* to soap opera, a form which has traditionally been seen as privileging feminine concerns (Modleski 1984: 85–109, Fiske 1987: 179–97). Yet, these series inevitably return to the father as a source of epistemological authority. In *La Femme Nikita*, this is played out by the revelation that Nikita is the daughter of the power behind Section One, a daddy's girl after all, despite her punkish rebellion. Sydney, likewise, is caught up in her relationship with her father, Jack Bristow, who is her prime source of truth and knowledge. Mothers are always untrustworthy, as older women in these series tend to occupy a sinister role – exemplified by Madeline in *La Femme Nikita* and Irina, Katya and Elena Derevko in *Alias*. Yet, all these characters offer accounts of women who are subsumed within a masculine economy: they are women whose role in the professional sphere has become their identity, but they have conformed to its demands rather than shifting the terms on which it operates. In this sense, Madeline and the Derevko sisters do not represent a post-feminist aesthetic but, rather, the politics of a pre-feminist work environment. With Sydney following their lead, it appears that little has changed, even in this apparently post-feminist and postmodern fantasy.

Madeline and the Derevko sisters represent a potential (and feared) future for Nikita and Sydney. Their roles as manipulators and traitors are contrasted with the moral and ethical figures of Nikita and Sydney. While they are desired (by Operations in *La Femme Nikita* and Jack Bristow – despite

himself – in *Alias*), they are not authentically desiring as Nikita and Sydney are. The younger women have 'real' emotions, while the older women fake emotion in order to get what they want, and their aims are not ethical. Because such quality television privileges a masculine economy – and a 'New Economy', which is as damaging for men as it is for women in the workplace – older female characters like Madeline and Irina Derevko reveal the limited options open to professional women when they are no longer young. Whereas Nikita and Sydney might be proposed as representations of an 'empowered' new feminism, their older counterparts give the lie to any assumption that the workplace has changed. In the fifth and final season of *Alias*, maternal issues are foregrounded by Sydney's pregnancy and final revelations concerning her mother, Irina Derevko.

Irina is gradually revealed as the mastermind behind the machinations of APO's latest adversary, Prophet Five. In a grandstanding finale where Irina destroys both the twelve members of Prophet Five and APO's Los Angeles base, she is also revealed as an 'unnatural' mother who has relinquished any bond with her child in favour of her own power. This revelation begins in the appropriately titled episode 'Maternal Instinct' (Series 5, Episode 11). As Sydney gives birth to a daughter, Irina states that she had never wanted a child and that she had Sydney on KGB orders, to cement her relationship with Jack. Once she had a child, Irina decided that she couldn't be an agent and a mother, so she decided not to be a mother, and tells Sydney, 'You can't do both.' This bizarre commentary on working motherhood proceeds to the final episode where Irina tries to kill Sydney, calling her a 'complication in my life' before falling to her death through a glass skylight (a glass ceiling?) as she reaches for the precious Rambaldi artefact she dedicated her life to obtaining. The morality tale is fairly explicit: Irina relinquished her 'natural' role as a mother, and her desire for power ultimately destroys her. Sloane is left in a similar predicament. Haunted by Nadia, the daughter he killed, he is destroyed by a dying Jack Bristow, who heroically blows them both up so that Sloane, who has achieved life everlasting from the Rambaldi artefact, is entombed for eternity. There is an unambiguous natural justice for 'bad' mothers and fathers in this explosive finale.

Sydney's role as the moral arbiter of *Alias* is endorsed both by her battle with Irina and by the concluding frames of the series. In the final episode, Sydney is tasked by her father to eliminate her mother – 'You're the only one who can beat her … You have to stop your mother' ('All The Time In The World,' Series 5, Episode 17) – and, thus, becomes his avatar in their battle. Sydney's position in the masculine economy is underscored once again. As her mother says before their final confrontation, 'We're very different Sydney. You still cling to naïve ideals. I learned at a very young age the only currency worth anything in this world is power.' Sydney is positioned against this raw expression of unnatural desire, not only through her battles with enemy agencies and the Derevko women throughout the series but also through the different representation of maternity she offers in

Season 5. In early episodes, the heavily pregnant Sydney is shown in active service, still playing out a number of aliases and employing her pregnancy as part of her performance. In 'Mockingbird' (Series 5, Episode 4), Sydney is undercover at a casino in Monte Carlo, rolling dice on her belly and referring to herself as 'Momma.' The manager is disgusted when he discovers that the pregnant American has been cheating, to which Sydney responds, 'What can I say, sir. I'm not like other moms.' Indeed, despite Irina's claim that 'you can't do both', Sydney appears to be a successful working mother. In 'There's Only One Sydney Bristow' (Series 5, Episode 12), two besuited CIA babysitters arrive to provide security and childcare for her newly born daughter, Isabelle; as Sydney states, 'Momma's got to go to work.' Above all, Sydney is depicted as a good and 'natural' mother, nervous before the birth but overjoyed by her daughter and expressing fears in 'Reprisal' (Series 5, Episode 16) that Isabelle might have to grow up without her.

The different kind of mothering Sydney represents is crystallised by the final sequence of the series. Jack and Irina are dead, Sloane is buried alive and Marcus R. Dixon, Sydney's former partner, is Deputy Director of the CIA. Isabelle is now a young girl and living with Sydney and Vaughn in a beach house far removed from the dramas of espionage. 'Uncle Dixon' arrives and meets Sydney and Vaughn's new son, Jack, before asking Sydney to come back to work and assume another alias for a job that needs her special talents. Vaughn suggests they discuss it after dinner, and they all go out for a walk on the beach. Isabelle follows them, having completed a wooden puzzle which we saw the child Sydney complete in an earlier flashback; it is a CIA 'indicator' of exceptional skill in three-dimensional reasoning. The final frames are a slow motion long shot of Sydney, Vaughn, Dixon and the two young children, walking towards the surf. The beach is symbolic within the fifth season as an ideal fantasy or dream space for Sydney: in 'The Horizon' (Series 5, Episode 9) Sydney is drugged and interrogated by Prophet 5 and imagines herself on a beach talking to Vaughn. Are we then to understand this final sequence, with its saturated colours and slow motion, as a dream rather than a reality? Sydney appears to have been recuperated within the economies of heterosexuality and femininity: she is no longer in her work suit or the glamorous outfits of her aliases but in a simple cotton dress, the epitome of contented motherhood. She appears to have given up her professional role for the 'real' work of being a wife and mother. Is this the 'real' Sydney? Considering the twists and turns of the preceding five seasons, it is hard to take this final episode as a conclusive ending. Will Sydney return to active service? Will Isabelle, as the puzzle sequence implies, follow her mother into a career in espionage?

While this final sequence reproduces the hegemonic ideal of the nuclear family, neatly arrayed as mom/dad/daughter/son, the cosy advertisement-style scenario raises more questions than it answers. Any viewer who has watched the series and followed Sydney through the twists and turns of her

familial, romantic and social relationships knows that anyone can betray her, and anyone (even Sydney herself) can be replicated and replaced. It is hard to see this final attempt to 'fix' Sydney as successful. The dreamlike quality of the beach scene, its heightened colours and temporal disjunction, all tend to undermine its status as a *final* scenario, as Sydney's destination. For, if nothing else, *Alias* has always been about movement, about Sydney strutting to pounding music in a tight dress and a different wig and the protagonists travelling between global locations with impossible speed. More than this, however, *Alias*'s central philosophy is that everyone has an alias, all the time. At work, at home, at play, the characters are always performing different identities, for better or worse reasons. In this, *Alias* epitomises the central trope of espionage as effecting change by employing deception; more, it reifies the woman spy as the embodiment of an unfixed signifier. Despite her worthy moral perspective, Sydney Bristow's world is a frightening melange of betrayal, conspiracies and false identities. Nothing is secure. Sydney, like her professional compatriots across the television-drama spectrum, is not a role model. Instead, the multiple address of *Alias* as a high-concept example of quality in North American new television's landscape opens it up to multiple audiences, for multiple identifications and interpretations. One result of this is that *Alias* as a whole, and Sydney in particular, makes available divergent accounts of dominant Western discourses regarding femininity and the family. Consequently, the attempt to close down that multiplicity of gazes, both within the series and in its external reach as it references other formats and other visual and aural texts, is marked only by its impossibility. Sydney at rest, at home and at peace appears as fictional as any of her other aliases.

Alias embodies the multiple subjectivities of contemporary television; its multi-audience and multimedia appeal epitomise quality American series. Yet, while *Alias* speaks to these postmodern indicators, one reading of the series is as a commentary on late Western capitalism. More than this, because of its multiplicity of address, its slippery social and political perspectives, *Alias* exemplifies the complexity and contradictions of femininity and feminism within contemporary British and American culture. Setting this most postmodern of spies against the mythologised modern figure of Mata Hari offers a vertiginous perspective on Western popular culture. It is tempting to argue for some progressive historical overview here, yet it is hard to see the playful and exploitative surfaces of *Alias* as an unequivocally positive replacement for the abject, othered figure of Mata Hari, the female spy as femme fatale.

Notes

1 Spies, lies and sexual outlaws: male spies in popular fiction

1 It is interesting to note that all three authors were, at some point in their careers, involved in the British intelligence services. It would be dangerous to assume, however, that any of these fictional representations of espionage offer realist accounts of the profession. Clearly, such a professional background enabled these authors to draw upon experience, but their fictions are also riddled with the ideologies, prejudices and stereotypes of the worlds into which such novels were cast, as well as the worlds out of which such novels emerged. Under Lloyd George, Buchan became Director of Information and later Director of Intelligence; in 1939, Fleming became the Personal Assistant of Admiral John Godfrey, the Director of Naval Intelligence (McCormick 1977: 34, 72). Le Carré, aka David Cornwell, may have worked for the British secret services in the Second World War, but the 'disinformation' about his life, much like his fiction, makes it difficult to establish concrete facts – some commentators believe him to have been directly inspired by his own experiences of espionage (Britton 2005: 126).

2 Femmes fatales and British grit: women spies in the First and Second World Wars

1 My references to Orientalist fantasy are inevitably informed by the work of Edward Said (1978). For a succinct account of the absence of women in Said's work see Lewis 1996: 15–35.

2 Mata Hari's rival, Maud Allen, also became embroiled in a London libel case based on fears regarding national security. In the summer of 1918, Noel Pemberton Billing MP claimed to have a 'Black List' of high-ranking traitors and spies in Britain, many of whom were said to attend Allen's performances as *Salomé*:

> Maud Allen, accused of immorality and lesbian proclivities, became a central figure in this national spectacle as an outsider (Canadian), an exotic dancer (she was compared to Mata Hari, who had been executed less than a year before in Paris), and the lead actress in a play whose central themes were symbolic castration and sexual perversion.
>
> (Proctor 2003: 40)

3 Mata Hari's name has been used as a brand for such diverse products as on-line slot machines and absinthe. See http://www.igtonline.com/games/new_games/mata_hari.html and http://www.absinthe.at/productinfo_e.html. Both sites accessed 19 September 2003.

4 'Miscegenation was identified as "race suicide" and was included in the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) list of representational prohibitions when Will Hays became president in 1922, removing the possibility that any Hollywood film narrative could include a non-tragic cross-racial romance' (Berry 2000: 116).
5 British censors objected to the use of a religious image in this scene, and a retake, in which a picture of her lover's mother is substituted for the Madonna, was edited into the version released in Britain (Paris 1995: 215).
6 This is a reference to the notorious episode during the filming of *Queen Christina* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1933), where Garbo asked for direction on how to play the final shot of Christina at the prow of a ship leaving Sweden, and Mamoulian replied, 'Darling, just make your face a blank' (Paris 1995: 305). For a seminal account of Garbo's mythology, see Roland Barthes (1972: 62–4).
7 Mata Hari remains a potent reference in glamour and fashion photography. One recent example of this may be seen in *Femme Fatale: The Timeless Style of Beautiful Women*, a collection of images celebrating the work of hairstylist Serge Normant which offers an imaginary history of the twentieth century decade by decade. The 1910–19 section features 'Elizabeth Hurley: The Temptress'. While Mata Hari is not mentioned by name, the metallic breastplates and kohl-eyed make-up clearly reference her Oriental image (Normant 2001).
8 Tammy Proctor notes that the Postal Censorship Branch (MI9) had 'more than thirty-five hundred women on its payroll in November 1918, compared to only thirteen hundred men' (2003: 55) and that 'MI5's Registry – a huge card file of suspects and information – was staffed entirely by women after November 1914' (2003: 57).
9 See http://www.ww1-propaganda-cards.com/miss_edith_cavell.html. The site also has a range of Mata Hari postcards: http://www.ww1-propaganda-cards.com/mata_hari.html. Both sites accessed 5 September 2005.
10 Harper also notes that the shift between the two Powell and Pressburger productions was driven by their contract, for *Contraband*, with British National: 'a less ambitious studio' (Harper 1998: 136).
11 In his autobiography, Herbert Wilcox recounts Odette Churchill's torture, together with her miraculous recovery from tuberculosis in her cell at Ravensbrück. He also writes about an accident on location, where Anna Neagle had a bad fall which injured her back, 'At the very same spot Odette had injured her spine.' Such injuries may have contributed to the verisimilitude of Neagle's performance (Wilcox 1967: 184–5).

3 Dolly birds: female spies in the 1960s

1 Thumim examines *Marnie* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1964) and *Mary Poppins* (Robert Stevenson, 1965) as popular examples which place a female character at the centre of the narrative. One could also cite more art-house productions, such as *Darling* (John Schlesinger, 1965) and *Girl on a Motorcycle* (Jack Cardiff, 1968), which offer representations of the 'dolly bird'.
2 And also, possibly, a discomfort with the depiction of a female spy battling THRUSH.
3 It is notable that April Dancer's male partner, Mark Slate, was very specifically located as not only English but part of the 'swinging' culture of the time:

> The confirmed bachelor bought all his clothes on Carnaby Street and one of the closets was a veritable warehouse of tweeds and loud westkits [*sic*]. Another contained a guitar, and stacks of rock-and-roll records. In line with inverse snobbery, belied by his indolent manner of speech and languorous movement, a

> third closet secreted almost everything that an RAF veteran might find worth keeping. Ever since Slate had transferred from London Headquarters to New York, he had tried to keep England with him wherever he went. But his love of women, his passion for sports cars, his Cambridge attainments and his Olympic ski skills, marked him for the international man of the world that he was.
>
> (Avallone 1966: 19)

4 See Disk 2 Extras, *The Champions: The Complete Series* (ITC Entertainment Group Ltd, 1968: Carlton Visual Entertainment Ltd, 2004). For a critical account of both *The Champions* and *Department S*, see Chapman (2002: 171–98).
5 Peter O'Donnell scripted a television film in 1982, the ABC pilot for a series which never went into production, and also gave his approval to the straight-to-video *My Name Is Modesty* (Scott Spiegel, 2003), marketed with Quentin Tarantino's name over the title, which tells Modesty's back story in Tangier. O'Donnell was not happy with Losey's version; it was very different from his vision of Modesty and was a commercial flop (Sandbrook 2006: 381–2).
6 For an account of female protagonists in 1960s comic strips, see Horn (1977: 188–221), where the *Modesty Blaise* strip is listed alongside *Barbarella*, *Jodelle* and *Blanche Epiphanie*. The pornographic reference of Modesty Blaise continues, with a contemporary burlesque artiste naming herself Immodesty Blaize.
7 This account of Modesty Blaise's background is reproduced, with minor variations on a number of websites; see, for example, the 'Introduction to Modesty Blaise' at http://www.cs.umu.se/~kenth/Modesty/mbintro.html and 'Interview with Peter O'Donnell' at http://www.cs.umu.se/~kenth/Modesty/podint.html (both accessed 11 June 2002). An interview with Peter O'Donnell in which he recounts his career and the inspiration for Modesty Blaise is an extra on the DVD of *My Name Is Modesty*.
8 Examples of other 'exceptional' women in the novels include Dinah Collier, née Pilgrim, who is blind but has extra sensory perception (O'Donnell 1969, 1972, 1977) and Lady Janet, who lost a leg in a car crash but manages a farm near Willie's pub, the Treadmill (O'Donnell 1972). In an online interview with Kent Hedlundh, Peter O'Donnell responds to questions from fans, the first of which is why he has introduced disabled characters like Dinah, Janet and Lucifer to the Modesty Blaise narratives. O'Donnell responds that there is no conscious reason for this and that he would rather not examine any 'subconscious reasons'. See http://www.cs.umu.se/~kenth/Modesty/podint2.html (accessed 11 June 2002).
9 An earlier discussion of this issue was published as 'Agents of the State? Violent Women in Popular Culture', in *Diegesis: Journal of the Association for Research in Popular Fictions*, 2 (summer 1998): 10–17.
10 There are two film versions of the Mrs Pollifax novels. *Mrs Pollifax-Spy* (Leslie Martinson, 1971) stars Rosalind Russell (who also allegedly wrote the screenplay) and is fairly faithful to the plot of the first novel in the series, *The Unexpected Mrs Pollifax* (1966). The television film, *The Unexpected Mrs Pollifax* (Anthony Pullen Shaw, 1999), starring Angela Lansbury, changes the initial location from Mexico to Morocco and mixes the plot of the first novel with that of the fourth, *A Palm for Mrs Pollifax* (1973).

4 English roses and all-American girls: *The New Avengers* and *The Bionic Woman*

1 See http://www.bugeyedmonster.com/toys/smdm/bionicwoman.shtml (accessed 31 October 2001).
2 See also Dave Matthews at http://www.personal.u-net.com/~carnfort/NewAvengers/navg.htm, and http://theavengers.tv/forever/newave-prod2htm for similar accounts of the production problems.

3 Twenty-first-century students viewing episodes of *The Bionic Woman* as part of a third-year course on active female protagonists have invariably found Lindsay Wagner's performance amusing.
4 Whitney Womack offers an interesting assessment of the television series and the recent films in her article 'Reevaluating "Jiggle TV": *Charlie's Angels* at Twenty-Five', in Inness (2003: 151–71); see also Jacinda Read's essay ' "Once Upon a Time There Were Three Little Girls ... ": Girls, Violence, and *Charlie's Angels*' (Read 2004).
5 For example, a 1977 *Joint Economic Committee Report on Women and Full Employment* comments on the increase in women working as managers: 'In that area, women have moved from nine percent to 21 percent of the manager job titles in the period of 1960–1974, but during that same period, there was a growth in the occupation of 2,000 percent' (Tarr-Whelan 1978: 13).
6 Joanna Lumley's subsequent roles included Sapphire in *Sapphire and Steel* with David McCallum, the former man from U.N.C.L.E., as Steel; the louche Patsy Stone in *Absolutely Fabulous*; and a current advertising campaign for Privilege Insurance, in which Lumley again sends up her upper-class persona with the slogan, 'You don't have to be posh to be privileged.' For a reading of *Absolutely Fabulous* as a comedy about the impossibility of femininity, see Kirkham and Skeggs (1998).
7 Denys Fisher produced a Purdey doll, presented on a card which featured a drawing of Purdey in her leotard, although the doll itself was fully clothed. The back cover of the packaging endorsed her chameleon quality: 'Purdey leads such an exciting life, she needs an outfit for every occasion', urging the consumer to 'complete your collection of exclusive Purdey outfits.' Although Steed and Gambit figures were advertised, they were never issued. See Rogers (1989: 280) and http://deadduck.theavengers.tv/images/purdeydollfront.jpg (accessed 9 January 2007).
8 Nicola Foster's biography of Joanna Lumley is published online at http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/L/htmlL/lumleyjoann/lumleyjoann.htm (accessed 10 July 2006).

5 *Nikita*: from French cinema to American television

1 Jeanne Moreau is a very symbolic choice for the role of Amande, as one of her most famous roles was the femme fatale Florence Carala in *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*/*Lift to the Scaffold* (dir. Louis Malle, 1958).
2 Audio commentary by Joel Surnow, creative consultant Robert Cochran and director Jon Cassar on 'Nikita' (Series 1, Episode 1, 13 January 1997).
3 In 'A Girl who Wasn't There' (Series 5, Episode 2), the dead Madeline is resurrected as a holographic simulation, once again aligning her with new technologies.

6 *Alias*: quality television and the working woman

1 I'm indebted to Peter Hutchings for noting this shift.
2 Bantam Books, an imprint of Random House, produce the prequel series, including titles such as *Alias: Father Figure* by Laura Peyton Roberts (2003).
3 David Roger Coon's essay on the marketing of *Alias* argues that it is comparable to the promotion surrounding *Charlie's Angels* (McG, 2000) and that both campaigns play to a regressive account of gender regarding their female stars (Coon 2005).
4 See 'ABC set to begin countdown to *Alias* series finale' at http://www.abcmedianet.com/pressrel/dispDNR.html?id = 112305_01.

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