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Putting England Back on Top? Ian Fleming, James Bond, and the Question of England

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'How has literature in England since 1945 addressed its time and place in "history", its relationship to the past, its responsibility towards the present and the future?' This is one of the pivotal questions John Brannigan asks at the beginning of his *Orwell to the Present: Literature in England, 1945–2000*.[1] Brannigan's timespan is considerably larger than that under scrutiny in the present volume. The question, however, remains pertinent. The 1950s and 1960s were turbulent decades in Britain, a nation slowly emerging from the shock and privations of the Second World War. Britain had entered the war in 1939 as a world power; it emerged, severely shaken, six years later, confronted by its decreasing status in the world and the almost immediate dissolution of the Empire. On the home front, the 1950s and 60s saw similar groundbreaking changes once the immediate postwar austerity years had been overcome: the creation of the Welfare State promised a fairer, less class-ridden society; employment, and with it individual affluence, rose steadily, and consumerism increased; the arts became seemingly more liberated — more (for want of a better word) expressive — and sexuality more emancipated. In theory, this meant that Britain was fast becoming a more exciting place in which to live — a perception probably best encapsulated by the popular expression of the time, the 'Swinging Sixties'.

While many applauded these changes, for others they had come too quickly and at too high a price, the loss of traditions, manners, and morals effectively culminating in a selling out of those very national characteristics that had once made Britain great. Alistair Davies and Peter Saunders explain that '[m]any groups [within British society] probably did feel a sense of alienation from the society which was being forged at that time'.[2] Authors such as Angela Thirkell

The title of this article, 'Putting England Back on Top', is borrowed from Tony Bennett, 'James Bond as Popular Hero', in *Politics, Ideology and Popular Culture (2)*, OU course *U203: Popular Culture*, Block 5, Unit 21 (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1982), pp. 5–33 (p. 20).

[1] John Brannigan, *Orwell to the Present: Literature in England, 1945–2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 11.

[2] Alistair Davies and Peter Saunders, 'Literature, Politics and Society', in *Society and Literature, 1945–1970*, ed. by Alan Sinfield (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 13–50 (p. 21).

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and Evelyn Waugh, for example, bemoaned the rapid social changes: their fiction was wistful and inward-looking, lamenting the 'Age of the Common Man', as Waugh repeatedly put it.[3] Whereas many authors dealt with individual facets of these changes, there is one whose work seems to encapsulate all of them: Ian Fleming. His Bond novels, despite their seemingly superficial celebration of violence, sex, and consumerism, chart the social, cultural, and political changes Britain underwent in the 1950s and 1960s. Behind the façade of the suave secret agent lurks a character both at ease and at odds with his time: a man steeped in Victorian values of duty, yet at the same time celebrating the (especially sexual) freedoms that came with the more permissive postwar decades. Celebrated by some critics as superb thrillers while derided by others as 'harmful and pernicious',[4] the Bond novels offer their readers a kaleidoscope of social, cultural, and political developments that, ultimately, reflect the confusion of a time of widespread and rapid change.

The aim of this essay is to read Fleming's work in the context of its time, predominantly the 1950s, and with an emphasis on three different, though interlinking, issues: Fleming's celebration of conspicuous consumption through the repeated 'branding' which can be found in his novels and which reflects the shift from austerity to affluence in 1950s and 1960s Britain; his engagement with the sexual revolution of the period, which, effectively, allows for Bond's (often unnecessarily glorified) promiscuity but, ultimately, reveals Fleming's own somewhat troubled attitude towards emancipated women of the time; and, finally, his implicit and rather problematic call for a new sense of national identity that shows an awareness of waning British influence in the world while also trying to maintain the myth of British — and here, particularly English — superiority. Fleming's novels, consequently, not only have to be read as 'tracts for their time', as James Chapman has stated,[5] but also, crucially, as tracts *against* their time. In the process Fleming is revealed as a strangely ambiguous writer: both modern and old-fashioned, both in favour of some social changes yet fundamentally opposed to (many) others.

In an interview in 1963 Ian Fleming claimed: 'I am not "involved". My books are not "engaged". I have no message for suffering humanity [. . .] [My books] are written for warm-blooded heterosexuals in railway trains, airplanes or beds.'[6] Fleming seems to plead something that could be labelled '*a*political

[3] See, for example, Evelyn Waugh, 'Fan-Fare' (1946), in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. by Donat Gallagher (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 300–04, or his depiction of 'Common Men' such as Hooper in *Brideshead Revisited* or Trimmer in *The Sword of Honour Trilogy*.

[4] James Chapman, *Licence to Thrill: A Cultural History of the James Bond Films* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), p. 3.

[5] Chapman, *Licence to Thrill*, p. 34.

intent', maintaining that his books were written merely for amusement, not with any political or ideological message in mind. By contrast, Michael Denning argues that, '[s]ince the turn of the century, spy thrillers have been "cover stories" for our culture, collective fantasies in the imagination of the English-speaking world, paralleling reality, expressing what they wish to conceal, and telling the "History of Contemporary Society"'.[7] For Denning, spy thrillers 'take their plots from cover stories of the daily news', thus 'translating the political and cultural transformations of the twentieth century into the intrigues of a shadow world of secret agents'.[8] Fleming's and Denning's statements seemingly contradict each other. Historically speaking, it is the very political content of the spy thriller that sets it apart from other thrillers: one has only to think of the political component of such early spy thrillers as Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands*, first published in 1903, or John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, published during the early stages of the First World War in 1915, to see that Fleming's claim appears to be untenable. As Chapman has argued:

> Fleming's Bond was a product of the historical and ideological conditions of the Cold War [. . .] in which the enemy was the Soviet-dominated Eastern bloc; an enemy which was no longer just a country (Russia) but an ideology (Communism) which presented a very real threat to the 'free' West.[9]

Despite Fleming's protestations to the contrary, his novels seem to respond to and comment on the sociopolitical context of their time: regardless of the author's intentions, they do have a political and even potentially ideological message that, from a contemporary viewpoint, makes them into highly charged and problematic texts.

Dates and events are important for Fleming's work and this chapter will look at three key years in particular: 1951, 1953, and 1956. Of these, 1953 was the year that saw, so to speak, the birth of Bond with the publication of *Casino Royale*, and was also a pivotal year in postwar British history, as it seemed to herald a new age with the coronation of a new monarch. At the end of the Second World War, Britain was faced with continued rationing and austerity. Large cities all across the country had suffered heavily during the Blitz, whole industries lay in ruins, and the process of rebuilding was a slow and laborious one.[10] It was only in

[6] Ian Fleming, 'How to Write a Thriller', *Books and Bookmen* (May 1963), p. 14.

[7] Michael Denning, *Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 1.

[8] Ibid., p. 2.

[9] Chapman, *Licence to Thrill*, p. 30.

[10] For more information on the immediate postwar years in Britain see, for example, *Age of Austerity, 1945–51*, ed. by Michael Sissons and Philip French (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1963).

the early 1950s that this austerity began to make way for the stirrings of something resembling a new affluence. By 1951 the nation felt cheerful enough to celebrate the Festival of Britain. Initially conceived to mark the centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851, a time when Britain's rise towards world dominance was approaching its zenith, the 1951 Festival was soon enthusiastically supported by a 'Board of Trade committee, who saw it as a chance to demonstrate Britain's "moral, cultural, spiritual and material" recovery' from postwar austerity.[11] What had started with the nationwide celebrations of the Festival in 1951 saw its culmination in the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 2 June 1953. The coronation seemed to ring in a 'New Elizabethan Age' of confidence and increasing affluence. When, on the morning of Coronation Day, the news broke that Edmund Hillary and his Sherpa, Tenzing Norgay, had reached the summit of Mount Everest on 29 May, the jubilant mood was only increased: Hillary (though a New Zealander) had planted a Union Jack on Everest, thereby putting Britain, literally and metaphorically, 'on top' of the world.[12] The bleak, austere mood of the postwar years made way for a new optimism, and this was also echoed in politics with what Davies and Saunders refer to as a period of 'remarkable consensus between both main parties'.[13] Living standards increased steadily over the next few years, and in 1959 Prime Minister Harold Macmillan told the British people that they had 'never had it so good'.[14] The nation turned wholeheartedly to worshipping material goods and celebrating materialism. This improvement in material wealth also had effects on the country's culture. Britain, as the 1950s made way for the 1960s,

> underwent a profound and far-reaching social and cultural revolution. The background [to this] was the affluence, full-employment and materialism of the 1950s which released people from the immediate disciplines of survival and turned their attention to their 'expressive' needs — self-discovery, self-assertion, sensation. [. . .] The old structures, old values and old certainties which for over a century had made Britain a disciplined, deferential society, were increasingly derided and rejected. Violence, profanity and sexuality, hitherto rigorously suppressed by puritanical social and legal codes, were unleashed and became prominent in both high culture and low. Personal style, cool, chic, cynical and consumerist, became the ideal — self rather than service, immediate gratification rather than long-term spiritual or intellectual development.[15]

[11] Robert Hewison, *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War, 1945–60* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1981), p. 48. See also Michael Frayn, 'Festival', in *Age of Austerity*, ed. by Sissons and French, pp. 330–52.

[12] See, for example, '1953: Hillary and Tenzing Conquer Everest' <http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/29/newsid_2492000/2492683.stm> [accessed 3 December 2011].

[13] Davies and Saunders, 'Literature, Politics and Society', p. 20.

[14] Harold Macmillan, cited in ibid., p. 20.

[15] Jeffrey Richards, 'Imperial Heroes for a Post-Imperial Age: Films and the End of Empire', in *British Culture and the End of Empire*, ed. by Stuart Ward (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 128–44 (p. 137).

In the literary world, 1956, labelled by Hewison an 'annus mirabilis', saw the performance of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, openly and critically taking on the Establishment and tackling class divisions head-on.[16] Clearly, a new wind was blowing: an attempt to dispel the cobwebs of the past and to look ahead optimistically towards a future that would be less class-bound, less ruled by a privileged old boys' network.

It is against this backdrop, therefore, that we should begin to read Fleming's Bond corpus. From the very first novel, *Casino Royale*, onwards, Fleming celebrates consumerism in general and brands in particular. Hugh David lists just some of the luxury items and brands that Bond enjoys throughout the novels:

> [He] smokes 'a Balkan and Turkish mixture made for him by Morlands of Grosvenor Street', lives in a Chelsea flat, drives 'one of the last 4½-litre Bentleys with the supercharger by Amherst Villiers', wears Sea Island cotton shirts, snorkels in a Pirelli mask, dines at Blade's and kills with a .25 Beretta.[17]

Bond, to be perfectly honest, is a snob: if he has it, he flaunts it, and he is scathing of people who do not come up to his standards. However, despite this attitude and his air of effortless superiority, Bond is far more a 'hero' of his time than his predecessors (such as Buchan's Richard Hannay, for example) in that he is less class-bound. Fleming's biographer Ben Macintyre has pointed out that 'Scottish born Bond, for all his clubbable ways and public school education, is intended to be classless', and he quotes Fleming himself as saying '"I wanted the simplest, dullest, plainest-sounding name I could find [. . .] brief, unromantic, Anglo-Saxon and yet very masculine"'.[18] Although, potentially, Bond reflects the privileged lifestyle of his creator, he is — and this is an important development — no longer an amateur but a professional: a man who has no personal funds but, on the contrary, has to work (hard) for his (standards of) living. As such, Bond certainly reflects his time and its belief in hard work, which might, eventually, reap just rewards.

But it is perhaps the preoccupation with food and drink, even more than brands, that is discernible in all of the novels and is symptomatic of the time. Food — be it an impromptu lunch, a formal dinner, or even just a quick snack — is something that Bond celebrates and cherishes. In *Casino Royale*, for example, his dinner order is bordering on the pretentious: '"I myself will accompany Mademoiselle with the caviar, but then I would like a very small

[16] Hewison, *In Anger*, p. 127.

[17] Hugh David, *Heroes, Mavericks and Bounders: The English Gentleman from Lord Curzon to James Bond* (London: Michael Joseph, 1991), p. 240.

[18] Ben Macintyre, *For Your Eyes Only: Ian Fleming + James Bond* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p. 48. See also Christine Berberich, 'At Her Majesty's Service: Bond, Englishness and the Subversion of the Gentleman Ideal', in *The Cultures of James Bond*, ed. by Joachim Frenk and Christian Krug (Trier: WVT, 2011), pp. 105–14.

tournedos, underdone, with *sauce Béarnaise* and a *cœur d'artichaut*."'[19] In *Goldfinger* Bond celebrates a lonely dinner with 'one of his favourite meals: two *œufs cocotte à la crème*, a large *sole meunière* [. . .] and an adequate Camembert. He drank a well-iced pint of Rosé d'Anjou and had a Hennessy's Three Star with his coffee', and later instructs Tilly Masterson to buy him precisely '"six inches of Lyon sausage, a loaf of bread, butter, and half a litre of Mâcon with the cork pulled"' for a roadside snack.[20] This obsession with food could be explained in a variety of ways, starting with Fleming's own passion for it and his wish to impress his readers with his knowledge of the local delicacies of various corners of the globe. It could also be based in the wish to instruct his readers in how to act and what to order when abroad; after all, we must not forget that Fleming aimed his books at 'warm-blooded heterosexuals in railway trains [or] airplanes', presumably on their way to and from 'exotic' locations newly accessible through mass tourism. Overall, however, this seeming gluttony of the series' protagonist could be rooted in the fourteen long years of wartime and postwar rationing that ended fully only in 1954.[21] It appears as if Fleming is revelling in the fact that food, so long on the restricted list, was gradually becoming easier to obtain. In a similar vein, Evelyn Waugh's wartime novel *Brideshead Revisited*, published in 1945, displays a comparable focus on food and, especially, expensive drink. In a new Preface to the novel written in 1962, Waugh tried to make amends for this emphasis:

> It was a bleak period of present privation and threatening disaster — the period of soya beans and Basic English — and in consequence the book is infused with a kind of gluttony, for food and wine, for the splendours of the recent past, and for rhetorical and ornamental language, which now with a full stomach I find distasteful.[22]

According to Macintyre:

> It is almost impossible to exaggerate the allure of Bond's lifestyle to a postwar Britain strained by rationing, deprived of glamour and still bruised by the privations of war. Bond is, quite simply, a stylish, fast-shooting, high-living, sexually liberated advertisement for all the things ordinary Britons had never had, yet dreamed of.[23]

On that level, one could read Bond's obsession with luxury goods, brands, and expensive foods as innocent, a mere means of trying to put some colour back into monochrome postwar British life. On a more critical note, however, one

[19] Ian Fleming, *Casino Royale* (1953; London: Penguin, 2002), p. 63. (In-text quotations from the Bond novels are taken from the editions cited, and page numbers, preceded (where necessary) by the relevant abbreviation — here *CR* — will be given in parentheses.)

[20] Ian Fleming, *Goldfinger* (1957) [*GF*], in *From Russia with Love; Dr No; and Goldfinger* (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 405–640 (pp. 521, 529).

[21] See '1954: Housewives Celebrate End of Rationing' <http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/july/4/newsid_3818000/3818563.stm> [accessed 3 December 2011].

[22] Evelyn Waugh, 'Preface', in *Brideshead Revisited* (London: Penguin, 1962), pp. 7–8 (p. 7).

[23] Macintyre, *For Your Eyes Only*, p. 141.

could say that this makes the Bond novels part of what Arthur Marwick terms 'exploitative' literature, 'referring to works which quite nakedly set out to exploit the public appetite for sex, violence, the occult and the doings of the rich'.[24]

When it comes to sex, however, Fleming's novels become extremely ambiguous. Yes, of course, there is much of it in the novels: Bond enjoys sex, and he enjoys it with a sheer unending succession of beautiful girls; no questions asked, no commitments, no regrets. As far as 'relationships' (surely a euphemism in this case) are concerned, his motto seems to be the saying that comes to his mind in *Goldfinger*: '"Some love is fire, some love is rust. But the finest, cleanest love is lust"' (p. 444). Much has been written about Bond 'girls' such as Vesper Lynd, Honeychile Rider, Tiffany Case, Solitaire, or — the most famous of them all — Pussy Galore, and clearly a link between Fleming's presentation of women and the more sexually open and permissive society in Britain, certainly of the 1960s, could be drawn. Without these new trends in society Bond's highly successful sex life would simply be impossible, so clearly this should be an added bonus of modernity he wholeheartedly endorses. However, his attitude towards the women he works alongside and/or seduces is surprisingly old-fashioned and often seems to express a problematic attitude towards the female gender in general and sexuality in particular. In *Casino Royale* Bond feels an almost instantaneous 'vague disquiet' (p. 39) at the prospect of working with Vesper Lynd, and after her 'abduction' he concludes:

> This was just what he had been afraid of. These blithering women who thought they could do a man's work. Why couldn't they stay at home and mind their pots and pans and stick to their frocks and gossip and leave men's work to the men. (p. 116)

Bond applies the same double standards to his secretary, the beautiful Loelia Ponsonby, describing her thus:

> tall and dark with a reserved, unbroken beauty to which the war and five years in the Service had lent a touch of sternness. Unless she married soon [. . .] or had a lover, her cool air of authority might easily become spinsterish and she would join the army of women who had married a career.[25]

Bond's and, through him, Fleming's hypocrisy is evident: while it is perfectly acceptable for Bond that women might have liberated themselves sexually, which makes them more readily attainable for his pleasure, it is not so as far as their professional development is concerned. While doing their job they can be a mere hindrance for Bond ('she was dragging at him, checking his speed' (*GF*, p. 604)), good enough to do secretarial work ('"Can you do shorthand and

[24] Arthur Marwick, *Culture in Britain since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 6.

[25] Ian Fleming, *Moonraker* (1955), in *Ian Fleming's James Bond: Moonraker; From Russia with Love; Dr No; Goldfinger; Thunderball; On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (London: Chancellor Press, 1994), pp. 11–140 (p. 13).

typing?"' (*GF*, p. 563)), function as eye-candy ('The girl [. . .] had one beautiful silken leg on the road. There was an indiscreet glimpse of white thigh' (*GF*, p. 526)) or as his sexual reward ('Solitaire, the ultimate personal prize'[26]). Despite all the overt sexuality on display, for Bond the girls are turned into mere objects, something to pick up and enjoy and then discard at will. More than that, however, there is also a clearly ideological component in this, as Bond, by (ab)using women in this way, reinforces an age-old patriarchal order, generally — in the words of Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott — by 'putting [the girl] back into place beneath him (both literally and metaphorically)'.[27] At the same time, Bond appears to challenge traditional morals: Bennett and Woollacott write elsewhere that 'Bond thus embodied male sexuality that was freed from the constraints and hypocrisy of gentlemanly chivalry' while still upholding an age-old patriarchal order that relegates women to the inferior role.[28]

Most interestingly, despite his sexual prowess Bond seems not to like women greatly. The word 'bitch' rolls off his tongue rather easily when talking about those women who have either disappointed him after a love affair (as in the case of the double agent Vesper Lynd in *Casino Royale*, a novel that infamously ends on the words '"The bitch is dead now"' (p. 213)) or who have kept themselves unaffected by his manly charms, as in the case of Tilly Masterton in *Goldfinger*, whose tragic death at the hands of Oddjob, Goldfinger's henchman, Bond merely acknowledges with the words '"Poor little bitch. She didn't think much of men"' (p. 606).

Similarly troublesome is Bond's actual interaction with his 'girls'. At best, though obviously problematic in the context of a sexual relationship, his behaviour is that of a condescending uncle talking down to a small child. In *From Russia with Love* Bond patronizes Tatiana Romanova without taking into consideration that she works for the Russian Secret Service and, consequently, might have had a similar training to his own.[29] In *Dr No* he explains his professional background to Honey 'in simple terms, with good men and bad men, like an adventure story out of a book'.[30] And in *Goldfinger* Pussy Galore, former scourge of the New York underworld, is ordered peremptorily by Bond to '"get back to [her] basket"' and '"take off that sweater and come into bed"', which

[26] Ian Fleming, *Live and Let Die* (1954; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988), p. 124.

[27] Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1987), p. 116.

[28] Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, 'The Moments of Bond', in *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Christoph Lindner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 13–33 (p. 24).

[29] See, for example, Ian Fleming, *From Russia with Love* (1957) [*FRWL*], in *From Russia with Love; Dr No; and Goldfinger*, pp. 1–208 (p. 145).

[30] Ian Fleming, *Dr No* (1958) [*DN*], in ibid., pp. 209–403 (pp. 301–02).

relegates her to the role of 'an obedient child' (pp. 623, 624). In fact, Bond even compares her to a '"waif [. . .] brought in to a children's clinic"' (p. 624), which, in the context of their ensuing sexual relationship, smacks of the unsavoury, not to mention the paedophilic. His insistent referring to the women as 'girls' rather than grant them the right to (responsible) adulthood has to be further problematized by the fact that, despite the women's obvious beauty — Romanova, for example, is described by Bond as '"one of the most beautiful women in the world"' (*FRWL*, p. 143) — and despite an ubiquitous plethora of 'heaving breasts' (*FRWL*, p. 130), 'fine breasts out-thrown and unashamed under [. . .] taut silk' (*GF*, p. 529) with 'point[s] hard with desire' (*GF*, p. 625), Bond's women are often given masculine attributes, or rather those of adolescent boys: consider the 'hard, boyish flanks' of the gypsy girls in *From Russia with Love* (p. 130), for example, or Honeychile Rider's often-quoted 'behind [that] was almost as firm and rounded as a boy's' (*DN*, p. 276). Bond's sexual desires thus seem to be confused: rather than a desire for real women, his predilection seems to be for girls and young boys. What could, at one level, be read as homoerotic desires, could, at an altogether different one, be read as Fleming's inability to reconcile a liberated female sexuality with his traditional conception of a woman's role and place. In historical precedents ranging from Elizabeth I to Margaret Thatcher, powerful females have assumed or been given male attributes to prove their equal status with men: Elizabeth's speech to her troops at Tilbury in which she famously conjured up the image of having the body of a feeble woman but the heart and stomach of a king of England is just one case in point, and comments about Margaret Thatcher allegedly having 'more balls' than her male counterparts is another. In a similar vein, Fleming might have given his female characters male features and attributes, effectively 'Othering' them, to suggest that modern 'girls' are no longer 'proper' women.

This leads to the final, even more problematic point, namely that Bond talks to and about the 'girls' in terms bordering on the violent or downright criminal: '"Honey, get into that bath before I spank you"' (*DN*, p. 328) and '[Bond] decided it would be ungallant to spank [Tilly Masterton] [. . .] on an empty stomach' (*GF*, p. 562) are just two examples among many, the supreme instance being Bond's (often-quoted) pondering in *Casino Royale* that 'the conquest of [Vesper's] body, because of the central privacy in her, would each time have the sweet tang of rape' (p. 186). Bond's attempt to silence Tilly Masterton when he stumbles over her while spying on Goldfinger has similar undertones of rape:

> Carefully Bond gathered the two hands behind the girl's back and held them with his right. Beneath him the buttocks began to squirm. The legs jerked. Bond pinned the legs to the ground with his stomach and thighs, noting the strong muscles bunched under him. Now the breath was rasping through his fingers. Teeth gnawed at his hand. (*GF*, p. 540)

The quasi-rape scenes are probably best summarized by Vivienne Michel's troubling statement in *The Spy Who Loved Me* that 'all women love semi-rape. They love to be taken'.[31] Despite Bond's protestations that the women he sleeps with are consenting and have no 'regrets' (*GF*, p. 444), his own attitude towards them shows the (if one wants to be charitable) confusion of an alpha male brought up in one code of behaviour (the patriarchal one, in which men are always considered the superior species) when confronted with changing moral codes and increasing freedoms for all. Bond's relegation of his women to the status of 'girls' shows clearly that he cannot cope with the fact that he is now faced with women who have rights, who demand equal treatment. Instead of accepting and celebrating these changes and promoting equality between the sexes, he hides behind a barricade of Victorian hypocrisy and chauvinism and repeatedly puts women in the role of 'slave' to his role as 'master' (*GF*, p. 529), a fact already recognized by Vesper Lynd, who sardonically responds to Bond's proposal of marriage with '"You need a slave, not a wife"' (*CR*, p. 188). Potentially, this hints at the fact that, although Bond, as Bennett and Woollacott have stated, repeatedly succeeds in 'putting [the girl] [. . .] beneath him' he might have problems maintaining that position indefinitely without resorting to subduing them (physically) or putting them in a subordinate position.

This is an attitude reflected in much male writing of the 1950s and 1960s. Anthony Powell, whose epic *A Dance to the Music of Time* can be read as a social and cultural history of Britain spanning the period from the early 1920s to the 1970s, features a number of female characters whose liberal attitude towards sex is at best belittled (the case of Gypsy Jones, for example), but at worst seen as something deeply problematic and disturbing (Pamela Flitton, for instance, who consciously uses her sexuality to manipulate men). Such women are described as 'un-natural' and at odds with a woman's traditional roles, best embodied by the narrator's unassuming (but highly pedigreed) wife Isobel, née Tolland. In a similar vein, Evelyn Waugh, who like Powell was a close contemporary of Fleming's, celebrates modern, sexually liberated women, only then to punish them for that very behaviour. A case in point is Virginia, the former wife of the *Sword of Honour* trilogy's Guy Crouchback: her sexually liberated attitudes are the object of Waugh's moral condemnation and culminate in her untimely death in an air raid during the Blitz. Authors such as Fleming, Powell, and Waugh, conservative at heart, were men of their time, struggling to marry concepts of consumerism and generally liberated ideas about life in general and sex in particular with their own deeply ingrained notions of manners and morals. The fact that Fleming himself liked to 'live the

[31] Ian Fleming, *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1962; London: Coronet, 1989), p. 15.

life of Riley' and enjoyed a succession of affairs did *not* mean that he approved of others engaging in such behaviour.[32]

While the above examples predominantly reflect the social and cultural changes that Britain underwent in the 1950s and 60s, it is, in particular, the political changes linked to national identity that give the Bond novels an especially problematic dimension, and it is for these political developments that we need to return again to 1951 and 1956. The year 1951 saw an event that rocked the Establishment and may have prompted Fleming to create his super-spy: the defection of the so-called 'Cambridge Spies' Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean to Moscow on 25 May of that year (their 'comrade' Kim Philby was to follow them in 1963). For years Burgess and Maclean had been able to spy for Russia precisely because of their own privileged background and upbringing at prestigious public schools and at Cambridge, institutions that opened the doors into the British Establishment and allowed them to gain unique insights into state affairs.[33] Their betrayal and defection showed the underlying problems of a postwar British society that still trusted too much, and too implicitly, in the old boys' network. For Fleming, however, the case of the Cambridge Spies again linked to the shortcomings of the 'modern time' in which he found himself, a time when a man's fervent patriotism was no longer a given. As his biographer Andrew Lycett points out, Fleming attempted to 'reflect the disturbing moral ambiguity of a post-war world that could produce traitors like Burgess and Maclean'.[34] In *Casino Royale*, published only two years after the spies' disappearance, Fleming created an English super-spy for whom patriotism is more than a mere duty. At the heart of the novel's plot is the betrayal by Vesper Lynd, ostensibly Bond's assistant in his case against Le Chiffre but secretly in the pay of Moscow. Her treason not only reconfirms Bond's prejudice that women should not meddle in affairs of the state: Vesper's betrayal of Bond is ultimately a betrayal of her country. James Bond, the ultimate British spy, is the response to those double-crossing agents Burgess and Maclean, and ultimately represents Britain as a whole. Once Bond has found out about Vesper's deceit, all feelings for her are forgotten and his own duty towards his country is foregrounded: 'he could only think of her treachery to the Service and to her country and of the damage it had done' (*CR*, p. 211). Bond's ultimate victory over his emotional attachment to the treacherous Vesper and his defeat of Le Chiffre is presented

[32] See Anthony Powell, *A Dance to the Music of Time* (1951–75), 4 vols: *Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter* (London: Mandarin, 1997); Evelyn Waugh, *Men at Arms* (1952; London: Penguin, 2001), *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955; London: Penguin, 2001), and *Unconditional Surrender* (1961; London: Penguin, 2002).

[33] For further background on Burgess and Maclean see, for example, Martin Green, *Children of the Sun: A Narrative of 'Decadence' in England after 1918* (London: Constable, 1977), pp. 427–34.

[34] Andrew Lycett, *Ian Fleming* (London: Phoenix, 1996), p. 221.

not just as a moral victory but also as an ideological one: the British agent takes on the ills of the world, largely (at least in the early novels) represented by the agents of the Soviet Union.

With this, Fleming not only turned Bond into a highly ideological figure, but he also responded to those political events of his time that led to Britain's loss of status as a major player on the world's stage. The year 1956 is now most commonly associated with Britain's demise as a global power. The Suez Crisis of that year has been described as 'an imperial reflex — a reaction based on prejudices and attitudes inherited from the nineteenth century but quite inappropriate to the modern world'.[35] As Christoph Lindner explains:

> the Suez fiasco marks a decisive moment in Britain's post-war history. In many ways, it publicly signalled the end of Britain's international clout — a death rattle from the British Empire. As Suez made clear, in the geopolitical reshuffle that followed the end of World War II, Britain lost out to its more influential wartime ally, the US. And with its Empire contracting rapidly, Britain was rapidly losing its remaining spheres of influence to what was diplomatically termed 'decolonisation'. By the 1950s, further frustrated by the US's reluctance to admit it fully into the 'atomic club', Britain had no choice but to recognise what historian Kenneth Morgan aptly calls its 'second-rate-power status'.[36]

From the independence of India in 1947 onwards the British Empire gradually vanished: state after state declared its independence from Britain, leaving the former 'Motherland' unsure of her continued role in the world. Dean Acheson stated poignantly in 1962 that 'Britain has lost an empire; she has not yet found a role'.[37] This, we could argue, is where Fleming's novels come in. Fleming's reaction to the diminution of British power and influence in the world was not only (largely) to ignore it, but, far more proactively, to create a British super-spy who claims to be the best in his field and is indeed acknowledged as such by the rest of the world. In this way the novels comment not only on the state of Britain overall but help create a new notion of Britishness that continues to advocate British dominance over the rest of the world. More specifically, the fact that it is a particular Englishness that the novels seem to celebrate is even more problematic in the social and political context of the time, as it highlights not only a misguided belief in British supremacy but also one in English superiority over the United Kingdom as a whole. Nick Roddick labels Britain 'a small country with a sometimes disproportionate belief in her world significance', and this attitude is clearly discernible in the

[35] Robert Skidelsky, 'Lessons of Suez', in *The Age of Affluence, 1951–1964*, ed. by Vernon Bogdanor and R. Skidelsky (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 168–91 (p. 169).

[36] Christoph Lindner, 'Criminal Vision and the Ideology of Detection in Fleming's 007 Series', in *The James Bond Phenomenon*, ed. by Lindner, pp. 76–88 (pp. 85–86).

[37] Cited in Vernon Bogdanor and Robert Skidelsky, 'Introduction', in *The Age of Affluence*, ed. by Bogdanor and Skidelsky, pp. 7–16 (p. 8).

Bond novels.[38] In *From Russia With Love*, published only a year after the Suez debacle, Bond's standing in the world of spying and the superiority of the British Secret Service as compared with those of other nations are even acknowledged by his arch-enemies in Moscow. When aiming to strike a decisive blow against 'the heart of the Intelligence apparat of the West', the Soviet Secret Service quickly dismisses countries such as France, Italy, and even the US, pondering that '"it is not always the biggest countries that have the most or the best [spies]"' before focusing on the English Secret Service as its most promising target, as '"we all have respect for her Intelligence Service"' (*FRWL*, pp. 34–36). Needless to say, the Bond novels always portray the British secret agent as the victorious one at the end — that is a foregone conclusion. But it is interesting to see how Fleming achieves this.

First of all, it is not only the fact that Bond defeats a mere enemy: he usually defeats an organization, most commonly SMERSH or SPECTRE. In doing so, not only does he save himself and ensure the safety and, crucially, the honour of his country, but, by extension, also that of the world. Thus the agent from the small islands of Great Britain, long since surpassed in general political and diplomatic importance by other nations, is repeatedly called upon to rescue the world from the machinations of megalomaniac institutions or individuals that threaten the world with extortion, genocide, or nuclear holocaust. Not that Fleming is completely oblivious to the diminution of British power abroad, but he uses it for his own means. At the end of *Goldfinger*, for example, Bond admonishes his opponent '"[not to] underestimate the English. They may be slow, but they get there"' (pp. 616), presumably by public-school-instilled discipline, determination, and sheer Boy Scout pluck. And to spur himself on Bond does not shy away from appealing to both historical predecessors and the patron saint of England, St George, himself: 'Bond sighed wearily. Once more into the breach, dear friends! This time it really was St George and the dragon' (p. 581).[39] He also takes recourse to conjuring up visions of England, including:

> tennis courts and lily ponds and kings and queens, [. . .] London, [. . .] the forsythia that would soon be blazing on the bypass roundabouts [. . .] [and] the douce weather of England: the soft airs, the heat waves, the cold spells — 'The only country where you can take a walk every day of the year'. (*DN*, p. 396)

[38] Nick Roddick, '"If the United States spoke Spanish, we would have a film industry . . ."', in *British Cinema Now*, ed. by N. Roddick and Martyn Auty (London: British Film Institute, 1985), pp. 3–18 (p. 4).

[39] In *Goldfinger* Fleming clearly had fun inserting intertextual allusions. In addition to referring to Shakespeare's Henry V speech before the battle of Agincourt, he also adapts Rupert Brooke's 'The Soldier' when Bond faces death in one of Goldfinger's smelting works: 'And here he would be buried "in some corner of a foreign blast furnace that is for ever two thousand degrees Centigrade"' (p. 550). Importantly, both the speech and the poem are iconic literary expressions of Englishness.

It is curious that Bond, despite his own (little-known) Scottish descent, repeatedly falls back on quintessentially English stereotypes.[40] This conflation of English with British, and vice versa, in the novels has to be seen as an example of internal colonialism, with Fleming still taking the supremacy of the English over the other nations within Britain as a given. Even more far-reaching, however, it also symbolizes his belief in English supremacy in the world. In the context of national identity, Chapman suggests that the Bond novels represent a 'nationalist fantasy in which Britain's decline as a world power did not really take place. One of the ideological functions of the Bond narrative is to construct an imaginary world in which the *Pax Britannica* still operates', while Bennett and Woollacott, similarly, talk about the 'mythic conception of nationhood'.[41] In Fleming's 'nationalist fantasy', England always takes the leading role. His attitude towards his all-conquering, supremely superior, and always victorious super-spy could, potentially, be read as a mere figment of his imagination, a harmless fantasy, were it not for the nationalist and, by extension, ideological message. Both Chapman and Bennett and Woollacott are correct in referring to Bond's world as 'imaginary' or 'mythical'; but would it have been read as such by the majority of readers at the time? As Cynthia Baron has argued, 'the novels and the films have allowed, and perhaps even encouraged audiences to heroicise and glamorise Bond, rather than see him as a parodic anti-hero'.[42] At a time of publicly recognized political decline, it is all too easy to close one's eyes to the reality and, instead, not only indulge in fantasies of continued national importance but also take them as reality.

Overall, Fleming's upholding and celebration of a quintessential Englishness would not be quite so problematic if it did not always come at the expense of the 'Other' or the subaltern. Bond's strait-laced, stiff-upper-lipped Englishness can be upheld only by comparison with his enemies, who, mostly and emphatically, are not English: in *Casino Royale* Le Chiffre's origin is 'unknown' (p. 16), which immediately raises suspicions; Sir Hugo Drax in *Moonraker* is of German origin; Goldfinger is from the Baltic; Dr No is half-Chinese and half-German. Fleming also repeatedly takes recourse to tapping into British anxieties about the Second World War and its aftermath: many of Bond's enemies are either German, or have the help of Germans who had learnt their devious skills under

[40] See, for example, Bond's mocking outburst in *The Man with the Golden Gun*: '"EYE AM A SCOTTISH PEASANT AND EYE WILL ALWAYS FEEL AT HOME BEING A SCOTTISH PEASANT"' (Ian Fleming, *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1965; New York: New American Library, 1966), pp. 157–58).

[41] Chapman, *Licence to Thrill*, pp. 38–39; Bennett and Woollacott, 'The Moments of Bond', p. 18.

[42] Cynthia Baron, '*Doctor No*: Bonding Britishness to Racial Sovereignty', in *The James Bond Phenomenon*, ed. by Lindner, pp. 135–50 (p. 137).

the Nazis, or, alternatively, they are Russian, once tolerated as an uncomfortable wartime ally, but now elevated to the role of Cold-War enemy.[43] If they are not recognizably foreign 'Others', they are presented as 'different' in other ways, for example by physical features, the colour of their skin, their potential sexual preferences, or their religious affiliations — the list is long. As John Cawelti has shown: 'The British Empire and its white Christian civilization are constantly in danger of subversion by villains who represent other races or racial mixtures.'[44] The year 1948, as well as seeing the beginning of the breakup of the British Empire with Indian Independence, had also witnessed the arrival in Britain of the *S.S. Empire Windrush* and with it the first decisive wave of immigrants from the (former) colonies. From the late 1940s onwards Britain was slowly turning into a multicultural society. Yet Fleming seems to have closed his eyes to that fact. Two of the early Bond novels are particularly indicative of his message of not only white but also Anglo-Saxon supremacy. In *Dr No* we are presented with the constant juxtaposition of the 'natives' of Jamaica with their white British counterparts, and, furthermore, are confronted with the case of the 'Chigroes', whom the Colonial Secretary describes as follows:

'Chinese Negroes and Negresses. The Chigroes are a tough, forgotten race. They look down on the Negroes and the Chinese look down on them. One day they may become a nuisance. They've got some of the intelligence of the Chinese and most of the vices of the black man. The police have a lot of trouble with them'. (*DN*, p. 257)

This is enough to stigmatize an entire group of the population in the eyes of the British on the island, and Bond has immediately found his 'enemy'. Baron has made a convincing case for the continued Orientalist discourse prevalent throughout *Dr No*. She argues that '*Dr No* defined Britishness as racial sovereignty, with the racial Other, and particularly the racially mixed Other, presented as the threat to British "truebloods"'.[45] A similar reading could be offered of *Goldfinger*. Auric Goldfinger's Korean minions are a particular thorn in Bond's side and he does not mince his words when describing them, referring to them repeatedly as 'apes' (pp. 562, 593, 599) and taking recourse to racial stereotyping by describing them as having 'flat yellow face[s]' or 'flat yellow mask[s]' (pp. 473, 507, 509) with 'slanting eyes' (p. 507) and being unable to speak 'any civilized language' (*GF*, p. 457) — for which, presumably, English alone qualifies.

[43] See, for example, *Goldfinger*, where the villain has obtained 'small quantities of a highly concentrated opiate devised by the German chemical warfare experts' (p. 579) — which brings up uncomfortable associations with the Holocaust — and has the help of professional pilots who 'were formerly of the Luftwaffe' (p. 615).

[44] John Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 31.

[45] Baron, 'Bonding Britishness to Racial Sovereignty', p. 146.

Bond's first description of Oddjob, Goldfinger's right-hand man, is telling:

> He was a chunky flat-faced Japanese, or more probably Korean, with a wild, almost mad glare in dramatically slanting eyes that belonged in a Japanese film rather than in a Rolls Royce on a sunny afternoon in Kent. He had the snout-like upper lip that sometimes goes with a cleft palate [. . .] In his tight, almost bursting black suit and farcical bowler hat he looked rather like a Japanese wrestler on his day off. But he was not a figure to make one smile. If one had been inclined to smile, a touch of the sinister, the unexplained, in the tight shining patent-leather black shoes that were almost dancing pumps, and in the heavy black leather driving gloves, would have changed one's mind. (*GF*, pp. 496–97).

This brief paragraph is, effectively, one long Orientalist diatribe and includes every conceivable racial stereotype. Bond denies Oddjob human qualities by aligning him more with an animal than with a man, something repeated later on when he describes the Korean as 'not a man of flesh and blood [. . .] [but] a living club, perhaps the most dangerous animal on the face of the earth' (p. 508) who, in another stereotype, also seems to feed off domestic animals, such as Goldfinger's disgraced cat (p. 508). These animal characteristics also seem to explain Oddjob's 'sickly zoo-smell' (p. 550). Crucially, Bond depicts the Korean as clearly not belonging in his rural English environment, and certainly not in such privileged surroundings as 'the greatest seaside [golf] course in the world' (p. 476) or driving a Rolls Royce, ever a marker of quintessentially English 'quality', in the sense of both class and production. His attire also marks him out: his suit does not fit properly and looks awkward, suggesting that 'civilized' clothing is not for him. And the bowler hat — in the 1950s still part of the traditional 'uniform' of, say, the middle-class English clerk — looks merely 'farcical' on him, out of place, a vain attempt to make him seem part of his new environment. The bowler hat, a marker of Englishness, is, in the hands of Oddjob, further subverted into a deadly weapon, as it conceals a circular saw that he can throw with murderous precision and which he repeatedly aims at Bond, that pillar of Englishness. Fleming thus taps into prevalent fears regarding the racial immigrant, the 'Other' who, ostensibly, comes to live and work peacefully in Britain but who may seek to undermine the status quo from within.

Bond's reaction to Oddjob is one of (entirely unexplained) violent urges. On virtually their first meeting, Bond, without exchanging so much as a word with Goldfinger's servant, feels 'a desire either to stamp on his neat black feet or hit him very hard indeed in the centre of his tightly buttoned black stomach. This Korean matched up with what he had always heard about Koreans' (*GF*, p. 498). As readers, we are left in the dark as to what, precisely, Bond had 'always heard about Koreans', but his violent and aggressive attitude towards Oddjob continues throughout the book, and his officially authorized investigation of Goldfinger soon turns into an entirely personal vendetta against the racialized Other, Oddjob, whom he wishes to put 'firmly in his place, which, in Bond's

estimation, was rather lower than apes in the mammalian hierarchy' (p. 556). Why, then, does this particular and vitriolic singling out of the Koreans occur in this novel? One possible reason could be the Korean War of 1950–53, which saw the United Nations, spearheaded by the USA, take the side of the Republic of Korea, with China and the Soviet Union aiding the Democratic People's Republic. The Korean War, consequently, was a clearly defined ideological war, with the capitalist, Western 'free' world pitched against the Communist East. For Bond, then, Goldfinger's (presumably Communist) Korean minions represent not only the racial but also the ideological Other, and are thus a double danger to his England.

With all of this evidence for, in Bennett's words, the 'sexist', 'imperialist', and 'phallic codes' in Fleming's work, is it still possible to read the Bond novels as not 'involved' or 'engaged'?[46] Certainly not. As Alan Sinfield has argued:

> literature [. . .] is involved in the process of self-understanding in the past and present. [. . .] These are, inevitably, interpretations and evaluations of perceived possibilities in the real world. And these constructions are not just responses, they are interventions: their publication feeds back possible images of the self in relation to others, helping society [. . .] to interpret and constitute itself. The social identities so formed in recent history dominate our current perception.[47]

Fleming's novels, despite his claim for their apolitical content and message, are not only products of their time but also, inevitably, the expression of their creator. In them we can see Fleming's personal bewilderment at the changing times: the liberation of women, for example, which he welcomes on a purely sexual level but which he fears for the impact it might have on society as a whole; and the rapid decolonization, which saw Britain's role in the world diminish and his predominantly white England slowly changing into a more multicultural society. What he is attempting in the Bond novels is to find a place not only for men such as Bond and, by extension, himself, still brought up in a predominantly Victorian value-system of honour and duty, but for his country as a whole. At a time of national decline all around — of political influence, of manners, of morals — he seemed to cast around desperately for something that England, his England, was good at. What this patriotically inspired search resulted in was a series of novels which have become part of British popular culture but which are deeply problematic because of their roots in a sexist and racialist/imperialist code that, in the wake of the Second World War, Britain might reasonably have been expected to have left behind.

[46] See Bennett, 'James Bond as Popular Hero', pp. 5–33.

[47] Alan Sinfield, 'Introduction', in *Society and Literature, 1945–1970*, ed. by Sinfield, pp. 1–10 (p. 1).