Ghent University
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

Gender, Race and Sexuality in Peter O'Donnell's Modesty Blaise Novels

Supervisor
Dr. Kate Macdonald

May 2012

Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of "Master in de Taal- en Letterkunde: Engels-Nederlands" by Ilke De Pauw

Ghent University
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

Gender, Race and Sexuality in Peter O'Donnell's Modesty Blaise Novels

Supervisor
Dr. Kate Macdonald

May 2012

Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of "Master in de Taal- en Letterkunde: Engels-Nederlands" by Ilke De Pauw

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, dr. Kate Macdonald for introducing me to the fantastic Modesty Blaise. I appreciated her helping me in trying to find a suitable thesis topic and useful secondary sources. I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandfather, whose dream it was to see me graduate from university. Although he cannot actually see his dream come true, I want to address my acknowledgements to him, for always believing in me. I also wish to thank my parents, for giving me the opportunity to attend university, for their love and support at times when my motivation reached rock bottom. An extra word of gratitude goes out to my brother Evert and sister Lisa, for being there when I needed them and for their patience with me. Thanks to all my friends and fellow students, for proofreading my thesis and for providing the much needed entertainment and moral support during these years at Ghent University.

And Fabian, for everything.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction ..... - 1 -

2 The Visual: a history of the Modesty Blaise cartoons ..... - 3 -

2.1 Visual Artists ..... - 4 -

2.2 Publishers ..... - 8 -

2.3 Success ..... - 9 -

3 The Verbal: a history of the Modesty Blaise novels ..... - 13 -

3.1 Publishers ..... - 14 -

4 Female stereotypes in spy- and thriller literature ..... - 18 -

4.1 John Buchan ..... - 21 -

4.1.1 Julia Czechenyi ..... - 22 -

4.1.2 Mary Lamington ..... - 23 -

4.1.3 Hilda Von Einem ..... - 27 -

4.2 William Earl Johns ..... - 31 -

5 Literary Analysis of Ian Fleming's James Bond Novels ..... - 35 -

5.1 Gender ..... - 39 -

5.2 Race ..... - 49 -

6 Image of women in the 1960s ..... - 53 -

7 Literary Analysis of Peter O'Donnell's Modesty Blaise Novels ..... - 60 -

7.1 Gender ..... - 60 -

7.2 Race ..... - 71 -

8 Conclusion ..... - 76 -

Works Cited ..... - 79 -

1 Introduction

The concept of independent women is already well established in our society: women today seem much more assertive and next to their role as mother, wife or girlfriend they often build out a professional career too. However, it seems that in the last decades a trend has developed where women are increasingly entering a more masculine world, taking up hobbies such as boxing and having more typically male professions. (Inness 2004: 3) Sherrie Inness has stated in her book *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture* (2004), that "recent years have witnessed an explosion of tough women in the popular media – including films, television series, comic books and video games." (2004: 1) Several examples come to mind, such as the television series heroines Xena, The Warrior Princess, La Femme Nikita and the female protagonist in *Alias* or the video game character Lara Croft. All these women are depicted as gorgeous, yet vigorous characters who regularly engage in dangerous actions that are normally perceived as belonging exclusively to the world of men.

History has shown that strong female individuals have always existed. We might consider women as Joan of Arc who fought together with the French soldiers against England's army in the Hundred Years' war (1337-1453) or Sacagawea, a young Shoshone Indian woman, who joined the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1805. (Quiri 2000: 22) Her contribution to the expedition was also noticed by the National American Woman Suffrage Association, who erected a bronze statue of her to celebrate her "heroic efforts". (Fresonke & Spence 2004: 202) Such mythical women served as an example to strive for gender equality and over the time many other examples, including fictional female characters, have influenced the image of women. In the 1960s, the audience was very fond of television series as *The Avengers* and *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, which featured heroines like Cathy Gale, Emma Peel and Lisa Rogers. The fact that these women also engaged in spying, is indicative of the

1960s spy craze. (White 2007: 58) According to Rosie White, the author of *Violent Femmes: Women as Spies in Popular Culture* (2007), there exist many "critical accounts" of series such as *The Avengers*, but Peter O'Donnell's Modesty Blaise has not "garnered such detailed attention.[...] there is little substantial analysis of the novels or the daily newspaper comic strips in which Modesty Blaise first appeared." (2007: 69)

Although White has labelled Modesty as a spy, we can argue that Modesty does a lot more than detecting. She is in fact a feminist caper thriller action heroine, who serves as a secret agent and 'thief' for the British Intelligence, together with her male sidekick Willie Garvin. Before that, she ran a criminal organization also known as The Network, which allowed her to make many contacts with the criminal underworld. Because of her independency and tough reputation we could consider her as a truly liberated heroine of a strong feminist series.

She originally appeared as cartoon strip character and these stories were later rewritten as prose texts without images. In the cartoon strip, these images proved to be very important, for White has pointed to the fact that O'Donnell used sexualised images of Modesty to lead the attention away from the contradictions in her character. (2007: 71) Since this sexualisation was for a large part responsible for the success of the cartoon strips, we can assume that O'Donnell probably tried to implement this visual titillation in his texts as well. However, can we consider Modesty as a truly powerful and feminist character if her sexuality and stunning looks are constantly emphasized?

This thesis aims to explore in what way O'Donnell has tried to emulate the success of his Modesty Blaise cartoon strips with his novels. Further, it will analyze how Modesty Blaise

answers to certain ideas in thriller and spy literature, if she deviates from female stereotypes such as the sexualised victim and what sets her apart from other thriller heroines. I will start with explaining the history of the cartoon strip and the novels, paying attention to why O'Donnell started to write novels about Modesty Blaise. I will then look at how female characters in earlier works of thriller and spy fiction are treated. As a final step, I will discuss the key factors in O'Donnell's literary style which, in my opinion, led to the success of his novels.

2 The Visual: a history of the Modesty Blaise cartoons

Modesty Blaise first appeared as the heroine of a British comic strip running in the newspaper, *London Evening Standard* on 13 May 1963. She was created by Peter O'Donnell, already an acclaimed cartoonist for *The Daily Standard* and *The Daily Sketch.* O'Donnell started his career as a writer when he was still at school. From a very early age, 16 years, he wrote several stories and sold them to youth magazines. Only a year later, he joined Amalgamated Press, which was an important periodical publisher. When the Second World War began, O'Donnell served in The Royal Corps of Signals, who were sent to Northern Ireland. (Harvey, "Some Further Adieu") After war ended, he returned to writing comics and stories and pursued his career as a freelance writer. In 1953, he began writing *Belinda* (1936 - 1959)and *Garth (1943-1997),* two newspaper comic strips, which had been waning in popularity. Because he managed to make these strips successful again, he earned himself other assignments such as *Tug Transom*, *Romeo Brown*, *Eve* and *For Better or Worse*; all comic strips. (Harvey, "Some Further Adieu"*)* He wrote romantic serials for women's magazines as well, but under the pseudonym Madeleine Brent. Examples include *Tregaron's Daughter* (1971), *Moonraker's Bride* (1973), *Golden Urchin* (1986) and others. (Hedlundh, *Modesty Blaise*)

In 1962, Bill Aitkin, the strip cartoon editor of Beaverbrook Newspapers contacted O'Donnell and asked if he would be interested in writing a strip to launch in *The Daily Express*. O'Donnell felt that the time had come to work out an idea he had carried in his mind for a long time:

> So in effect I was working in two different genres, one featuring macho male heroes and the other featuring romance, though there was always a strong element of adventure in the stories I wrote for the women's market. For some time before the call from Bill Aitkin, 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. The call from the Express made me decide that the time to start work on this idea was now. (O'Donnell, "Girl Walking")

And so Modesty Blaise was born. The first instalment of the strip, *La Machine*, was published on 13 May in 1963. It was followed by *The Long Lever* that came out on 23 September in 1963. Altogether, O'Donnell would write 95 strip stories revolving around Modesty Blaise and her companion Willie Garvin that would be printed in instalments every five or six months. The adventures of Modesty would be printed in the *Evening Standard* for 38 years, until 2001, when O'Donnell decided to retire from writing. However, one issue, *The Killing Ground*, was printed in the *Glasgow Evening Citizen* in November 1968, which can be attributed to a strike at the *London Express*. (Hedlundh, *Modesty Blaise*)

2.1 Visual Artists

Rosie White points out that although the public "regards O'Donnell as the 'author' of Modesty Blaise," a very crucial role can be ascribed to the artists as well, who visualized her in the cartoons.(2007*:6*9) Initially, Frank Hampson was hired in 1962 to illustrate O'Donnell's work because he had experience from his own science fiction comic, *Dan Dare: Pilot of the Future (1950-1969)* Nevertheless, O'Donnell was not satisfied with his work, arguing that Hampson "completely misunderstood the character". (Markstein, "Modesty

Blaise") He preferred the work of Jim Holdaway, who gave Modesty a sexy, yet sophisticated appearance. (Markstein, "Modesty Blaise") In fact, Holdaway and O'Donnell had already collaborated. In 1956, O'Donnell was offered the authorship of *Romeo Brown*, the strip narrative about the gallant and charming detective running in *the Daily Mirror (1954-1963)*. (Smith, Romeo Brown) Because Alfred Mazure, the original artist of *Romeo Brown*, had been recruited by *the Daily Sketch*, a new artist was needed. (Harvey, "Some Further Adieu") The newspaper noticed the talent of Holdaway and gave him the job, although he was reluctant at first because of the comic's content and because of his own presumed lack of experience in drawing female characters. When it turned out that Holdaway did a rather good job for the strip *Romeo Brown*, O'Donnell was convinced that he had found the perfect match to create the stunning action heroine that Modesty Blaise was about to become. Eventually, Holdaway would illustrate the Modesty Blaise strips until 1970, when he died of a sudden heart attack. (Harvey, "Some Further Adieu"). His job was taken over by Enrique Badia-Romero, a Spanish illustrator. He took care of the images of all the strips written until 1978. In that year, Romero wanted to take some time off to start working on a personal project, *Axa (1978-1986)*. (Harvey, "Some Further Adieu") He was replaced by three other artists, the first being John Burns, who illustrated *Yellowstone Booty (1978)*, *Green Cobra (1979)* and *Eve and Adam (1979).* In 1979, he was substituted by Pat Wright who provided the artwork for *Eve and Adam (1979)* and *Brethren of Blaise (1980).* Neville Colvin created the images for 16 Modesty stories, from *Dossier on Pluto (1980)* to *The Double Agent (1986)*. In September 1986, Romero returned from his break and illustrated the last 35 adventures of Modesty. (Hedlundh, *Modesty Blaise*; 2008: Modesty Blaise Books)

As mentioned above, the artists were as important as the author because they contributed in shaping the image of Modesty Blaise for a large part. Since Holdaway and

Romero have been illustrating the strips for a longer period than the other artists, their role in creating Modesty Blaise is also much more important. Holdaway's style was very dense and bold because he used a lot of ink. This was done to make sure the artwork attracted attention in the newspaper. (Valenti, 2008) He was also famous for adding a lot of detail in his illustrations. On the one hand, this added more realism to the story. Holdaway was very good, for instance, at drawing natural landscapes. (Valenti, 2008) Since Modesty and Willie travelled a lot, these detailed backgrounds contributed to the reader's imagination. On the other hand, the combination of his dense and detailed style and the rather small format of the strip had a very "claustrophobic" effect. (Valenti, 2008) However, by the time the third strip, *The Gabriel Set-up*, was published, Holdaway's illustrations had already become lighter. This improved the visibility of his action scenes too, as can be seen in Figure 1 below, which is a panel from *Top Traitor* (1965). (Valenti, 2008)

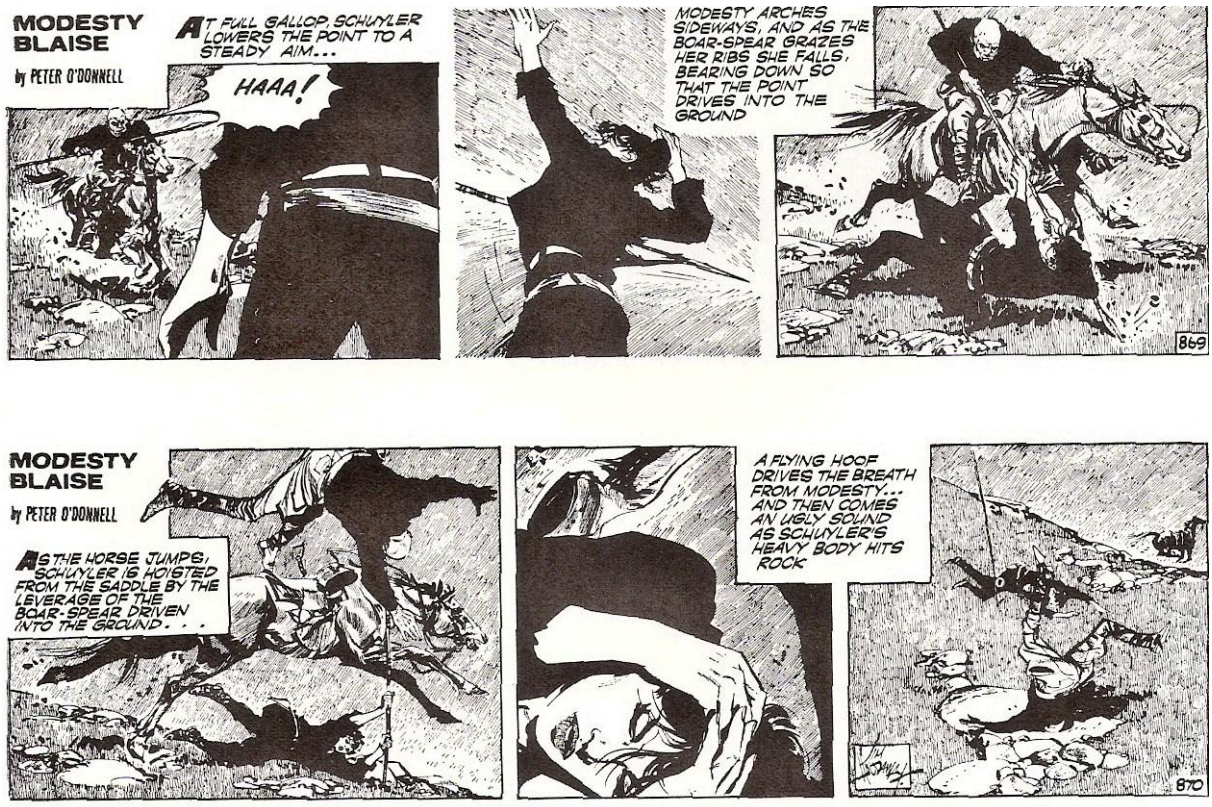

Figure 1: Action scene from *Top Traitor* (1965) from Kristy Valenti, "Peter O'Donnell: an Appreciation, Part Two" *Comixology. N.p.,* 3 June 2008. Web. 4 Feb. 2011.

The portrayal of action was not a quality of Romero. Often, these scenes appear to be rather stiff. For example, in the 31st strip, *Cry Wolf* (1974), Modesty and Willie have to jump across a ravine, while skiing. Instead of drawing this movement in a fluent way, it seems as if Romero has cut up the action in three pieces: in the first panel, they are about to take the jump, facing to the left, whereas in the second one, they are drawn in the opposite direction and also take a very unnatural position. The last panel then portrays them landing, while again turning to the left. (see Figure 2) (Valenti, 2008)

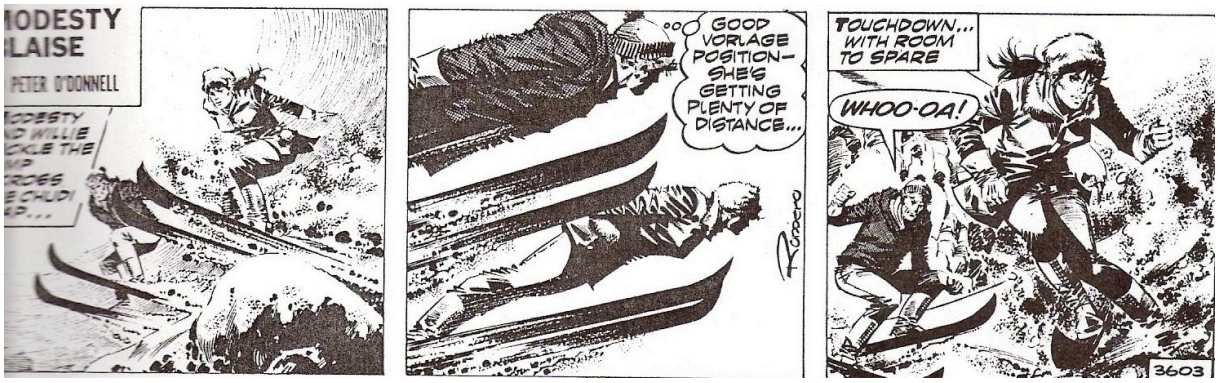

Figure 2: Modesty and Willie skiing in *Cry Wolf* (1974) from Kristy Valenti, "Peter O'Donnell: an Appreciation, Part Two" *Comixology. N.p.,* 3 June 2008. Web. 4 Feb. 2011.

When it comes to Modesty's appearance, Romero did better than Holdaway. He had a much lighter illustration style and seriously reduced the amount of ink Holdaway used for the images. Furthermore, he liked to draw women in a beautiful, yet natural way and restyled Holdaway's Modesty by giving her a more "romantic look." (Valenti, 2008). He did this, for instance, by paying a lot of attention to costumes and clothing, which he could draw very skilfully. This certainly contributed to her popularity and illustrated that women who perform a masculine job are not less feminine. But Romero was not fond of ugliness and when he had to draw hideous female characters for *The Bluebeard Affair* (1972), other people had to inspire him and show him examples of how he could create such figures. (Valenti, 2008).

2.2 Publishers

Although *Evening Standard* was still running the Modesty Blaise-strip, other book-publishers saw a hole in the market and made several reprints. This was mainly because they wanted the images to be of higher quality, which was not the case on newspaper. Some wanted to make cheaper versions available and others wanted to give non-*Evening Standard* readers the opportunity to get acquainted with Modesty's adventures as well. As there are numerous publishers who did this, only the ones who were the most popular will be mentioned and discussed here. (Friedrich, *Modesty Blaise*) The English publishing company, Titan Books, started reprinting the strips of Modesty Blaise in the 1980s and compiled them in a number of volumes: The Gabriel Set-up for instance, brought together the strips *La Machine*, *The Long Lever*, *The Beginning* and *The Gabriel Set-up*. In total, Titan would re-publish 23 strips in 8 paperback volumes. It was noted that the reprints were a "[...] nearly pristine reproduction of every line no matter how fragile." (Friedrich, *Modesty Blaise*) Since 2005 they started publishing new versions, including the strips that Romero illustrated until 1978, which are considered of being of an even higher quality. (Harvey, "Some Further Adieu") Ken Pierce Books is responsible for the first American editions of the Modesty Blaise strips. This collection consists of the strips that were illustrated by Jim Holdaway and the ones by Neville Colman. This is rather unique, since the strips with illustrations by Colman cannot be found anywhere else except in the London *Evening Standard*. (Friedrich, *Modesty Blaise*) This American publisher brought out 21 strips, of which three, *The Mind of Mrs. Drake*, *Uncle Happy* and *Bad Suki*, were also printed by Titan. Ken Pierce Books also published the strips in seven paperbacks, the only difference being that they had a smaller size than Titan's volumes. (Harvey, "Some Further Adieu") Rick Norwood, head of Manuscript Press and the editor of the *Comics Revue*, was responsible for reprinting and serializing the strips starting from *The Million Dollar Game* to the last one named *The Zombie* in the 26th issue of his bimonthly magazine. The previously written strips were reprinted from issue 188

in chronological order. Sometimes, he pubished special issues of the magazine under the name *Comics Revue presents Modesty Blaise*, who were dedicated to Modesty Blaise alone. He even established *the Modesty Blaise Quarterly*, a small magazine that ran for 5 years. In 2003, the paperback collections *Live Bait* and *Lady in the Dark* were published by Manuscript Press, which contained respectively *Live Bait*, *Samantha and the Cherub*, *Milord* and *Lady in the Dark*, *The Girl from the Future and The Big Mole*. (Friedrich, *Modesty Blaise*; Harvey, "Some Further Adieu")

It must be noted, however, that, in comparison to the previously mentioned publishing houses, these reprinted versions aren't always of the same high quality, but a specific reason for this cannot be applied.(Harvey, "Some Further Adieu")

In December 2008, *Evening Standard* announced that the "beautiful criminal-turned-unpaid-agent" and her sidekick would re-appear by running the comics again, beginning with *La Machine*. Due to a change in the management of the paper, however, this was not extended. (2008: Modesty Blaise Books)

2.3 Success

From the beginning, the strips around Modesty Blaise and her partner in crime Willie proved to be hugely successful. In an interview he did for a fanpage, O'Donnell himself remembers that the British public immediately accepted and welcomed her character:

> I was taken to lunch by the Editor of *Evening Standard* a few weeks after the launch, and he was in great glee because of reader response and also because he had taken the strip after a rival paper had turned it down. Also, there were immediate sales to syndication, approaches from publishers […] (Hedlundh, *Modesty Blaise*)

O'Donnell says in that same interview that "Modesty is certainly more popular in Scandinavia than anywhere else including Britain," but he cannot explain why. As a result of this popularity, the Swedish publishing house Semic dedicated an entire magazine to Modesty

Blaise, named *Agent Modesty Blaise (1967-1968).* (Hedlundh, *Modesty Blaise*) While it only lasted for a year, they published 14 magazine issues, each dealing with one Modesty Blaise story. It was succeeded by another Swedish magazine, *Agent X9,* in 1971. (2008: Modesty Blaise Books)

In 1973, it was recorded that 76 newspapers in 35 countries were running the comic strips, of which many were in The United States. But gradually, they started to appear less and less in American newspapers, until the *Detroit Free Press* was the only paper who ran it during the seventies. This had nothing to do with fading popularity. The assumed reason is that many American publishers felt that the instalments of the strip were too lengthy and wanted O'Donnell to reduce the length of each strip instalment to three months instead of the usual four. (Harvey, "Some Further Adieu") Yet, O'Donnell did not support that idea: "You'll end up with no depth of character, no humour, none of the fleshing out and asides that, to my mind, are vital parts of the success of the Modesty Blaise/Willie Garvin setup." (Harvey, "Some Further Adieu")

Another explanation that was given, had to do with American primness. Initially, people compared Modesty to the Daily Mirror cartoon character, *Jane* (1932-1959). (Harvey, "Some Further Adieu") Norman Pett created this bombshell at the dawn of the Second World War and she would become a means to keep up the morale of the troops. Although the stories were meant to be plain adventure stories, the nudity of Jane was accentuated more. In most stories, she strips until she is left with nothing than her undergarments, but in one particular scene she steps out of a bathtub completely bare. (see fig. 3) (*Original G.I.Jane*)

Figure 3: Jane in bathtub from *The Original G.I. Jane.*. *N.p , n..d*. Web. 14 November 2011. <http://www.skylighters.org/jane>

When looking at images from the first strip, *La Machine* (1963), the sexualisation of Modesty is indeed rather apparent. She is depicted as a gorgeous and exotic woman with sensual lips, who is not afraid to show her attractive figure. The comic strips also include some scenes in which Modesty and other women were scantily dressed or even nude. This could happen in an innocent way: Modesty sometimes has to change her clothes when she finds herself in a dangerous situation. Like Jane she then strips to underwear, leaving her normal daywear to put on camouflage garment. At other times, however, she takes off her clothing deliberately, for instance when she uses a trick called 'The Nailer'. Because the American public was not too fond of those scenes, *The Detroit Free Press* sought out a way to avoid what they saw as 'unnecessary' nudity by covering up the body with ink. Sometimes this resulted into odd images. For instance in a particular shower scene the water was not transparent but black. (Markstein, "Modesty Blaise"). Other ways to get around nudity or improper dialogues are apparent in figures 4 and 5:

Figure 4: Censorship in The Gallows Bird (1973) from http://agent-x9.blogspot.com/ *N.p* , *n..d*. Web. 14 November 2011

Figure 5: Censorship in The Gallows Bird (1973) from http://agent-x9.blogspot.com/ *N.p* , *n..d*. Web. 14 November 2011

Rosie White presents an important idea about the images. She argues that the images in the strip point to a "contradiction" between Modesty's role as a woman and her more masculine profession. (2007:70) Because of her attractiveness, she is often portrayed in poses that emphasize the most arousing parts of her body, for instance her long legs and her bosom when changing clothes. This makes it difficult for the reader to imagine her engaged in violent fighting scenes. White believes there is a "gender division of labour" when it comes to the performance of violence. (2007:70) In *La Machine*, Willie is, more often than not, taking care violently of the villains, whereas Modesty only occasionally knocks down a male counterpart, merely as self-defence.

White has also described the reason for this visualization of Modesty's sexuality:

> 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 reproduction of her physical attributes.(2007: 70-71)

Even though the Americans had problems with nudity, the visual aspect of the strip and the focus on sexuality were quite important for the success of Modesty Blaise.

3 The Verbal: a history of the Modesty Blaise novels

In addition to the comic strips, O'Donnell wrote novels of the stories of Modesty and Willie, which was a later development of his original idea. In 1965, plans were made by British Lion, which was a major British film company, to bring Modesty to the screen. The American Joseph Losey would direct the film and Monica Vitti, an Italian actress who did not speak a word of English, and Terence Stamp were hired to play respectively Modesty Blaise and Willie Garvin. When O'Donnell was asked in an interview who he would have picked to play Modesty and Willie, he recounts that Julie Christie, who "looked good, moved

beautifully and was a fine actress", and Michael Caine, who "would have made the ideal Willie Garvin" were his favourites."(Hedlundh, *Modesty Blaise*)

As a way of promoting the film, O'Donnell was asked to provide a book that dealt with the film's content, which he did by writing the script for the film. Much to O'Donnell's regret, this script was rewritten several times until only one line – "Have you ever wondered about Mr. Fothergill?" – remained from the original text. (Harvey, "Some Further Adieu") Eventually, the 1966 film version could not convince the public and turned out to be a fiasco. Some differences between the book and the film were that Monica Vitti, who played Modesty Blaise, did not want to dye her blonde hair black. This did not enhance the credibility of the film. Furthermore, there were indications that Modesty and Willie were romantically involved, whereas in the strips and the novel they were nothing more than business partners, having a purely platonic relationship. It seems as if the filmmakers wanted to benefit from the popularity of the James Bond films, by shaping Modesty as "an ersatz female Bond." (White 2007:69)

Conversely, the novel, entitled *Modesty Blaise*, proved to be hugely successful and it encouraged O'Donnell to write another ten novels and two collections of short stories between 1966 and 1996. (Harvey, "Some Further Adieu")

3.1 Publishers

As with the strips, the books were brought onto the market by different publishers. Souvenir Press was the first to publish all the novels, except *Pieces of Modesty* (1972). For cover illustrations, they used drawings by Jim Holdaway for *Sabre-tooth, I,Lucifer* and *Cobra Trap*; by S.R. Boldero for *The Impossible Virgin* and by Mike Codd for the books from *Last Day in Limbo* to *Dead Man's Handle.* (2008: Modesty Blaise Books) Since 2001, Souvenir Press has reprinted every Modesty Blaise novel into paperback and this time *Pieces of Modesty* was included. However, Souvenir Press is not the only company to

publish a complete collection of the Modesty Blaise novels. There are the 1960s and 1970s editions by Crest Books, an imprint of the American Fawcett Publications, with illustrations by Robert McGinnis, and the 1980s editions by Mysterious Press, another American publisher, who gave the covers rather erotic images. The novels were also released by Pan Books, an imprint of the British publishing house Pan MacMillan in the 1960s, the 1970s and two editions in the 1980s. (2008: Modesty Blaise Books)

Other publishers have printed a selection of O'Donnell's Modesty Blaise novels: Doubleday Company launched the first five books (1965-1971) with covers from Jim Holdaway and Saul Lambert. Tor Books, an imprint of the American Tom Doherty Associates, published The *Silver Mistress, Last Day in Limbo, Dragon's Claw*, *The Xanadu Talisman* and *The Night of Morningstar* between 1986 until 1988. (2008: Modesty Blaise Books) Some small publishers published only a few: *A Taste for Death*, *The Night of Morningstar* and *Cobra Trap* were printed by Ulverscroft Large Print Books between 1996 and 2001, and *The Silver Mistress* was printed by Archival Press in 1981. Oxford University Press and Hutchinson both adapted some of the novels to suit a more youthful audience. Oxford University Press did this for *Sabre-Tooth* and *I, Lucifer* in 1973 and in 1980, and Hutchinson for *Modesty Blaise*, which was rewritten by Jean Nobes in 1981 and had an image from the original comic strip as cover. (2008: Modesty Blaise Books) In 1994, O'Donnell created a Modesty Blaise-comic book, which included a graphic novel as well. Dick Giordano and Dan Spiegle provided the drawings and publisher DC Comics agreed to print it.(Markstein, "Modesty Blaise")

O'Donnell has expressed a liking for writing novels: "[...] I have to say that the book gives more satisfaction. Theres [sic] elbow room to give more nuances of feeling and to say whats [sic] going on inside your characters.[...]". (Friedrich, *Modesty Blaise*) In this aspect,

the novels offer some advantages that cannot be achieved by the comic. First of all, the form of the strip limits the amount of text that can be written; more than half of the frame is reserved for the illustrations. Secondly, because a book can afford to be lengthier, the author is able to pay more attention to the emotions of the characters and can create more depth. In the case of Modesty and Willie, this results into a deeper insight in their relationship, which is amicable and not sexual. Next to all the cold-blooded killing and hard action in the comic, there is space in the novel to focus on what they are feeling and thinking and this makes them look more 'human'. O'Donnell has expressed it in the following way:

> I would say that until you actually start to write the characters — to put dialogue in the mouth and to activate the strings of the [puppet] — they don't come to life. Not for me at any rate. I can only get so far in thinking about a character, and then I've got to start working them out — writing pages and pages of dialogue and action just to get the blood flowing through the veins — and then they'll begin to take on life for themselves and sometimes surprise me with what they say or do. (Harvey, "Some Further Adieu")

Moreover, the serial character of the comic strip does not allow for much detailed description or humour because there is the interval between the stories which leads to the fact that people are not able to remember complex things. (Harvey, "Some Further Adieu"; Friedrich, *Modesty Blaise*) However, O'Donnell admits that the most important reason for his preference of books over comics, is that he, as author is in full control: "[...] it´s a solo effort — no actors, no artist, no director, just you and the words and the reader. You can´t blame anyone but yourself." (Friedrich, *Modesty Blaise*)

When the last novel, *Cobra Trap*, was published in 1996, O'Donnell uttered that he had "sung his swansong" and that the novelised adventures of Modesty and Willie would end there. Nevertheless, by then, Modesty Blaise had already become a real female cult figure or "an epitome of the 'pop ethic'," as Rosie White indicates. (2007:69) She further mentions

David Buxton's argument that pop culture has "the ability to take form in several different media," to reinforce her statement. (2007:69) Indeed, as was already apparent, Modesty Blaise occurs as a comic strip heroine as well as the lead character of a series of novels. In the 1960's, Clyde Allison wrote parodies of Ian Fleming's James Bond novels. In *Modesta Blaze meets Agent 008*, he created a personage whose name, Modesta Blaze, is a clear reference to O'Donnell's action heroine. (2008: Modesty Blaise Books) Furthermore, she has been hinted at in Tarantino's film *Pulp Fiction (*1994), specifically in the scene where John Travolta, who plays the character Vincent Vega, is reading a Modesty Blaise book while sitting on the toilet. (White 2007:70) Because of the numerous references in other works – from fiction to songs – White argues that Modesty can also be regarded as a "cultural signifier". (2007: 70)

Several attempts have been made to bring her character to the screen too. There is the 1966 Losey-film of which O'Donnell jokes that "it makes his nose bleed" when he thinks of it and (Friedrich, *Modesty Blaise*) in 1982, arrangements were made to start a television serial around Modesty Blaise, which would be based on the first novel. However, they never got any further than the pilot of the serial. (2008: Modesty Blaise Books)

Over the years, O'Donnell became quite disillusioned with the many inadequate attempts to make a film and he was about to announce that the film rights were not on offer anymore. (Friedrich, *Modesty Blaise*). However, in 2001, Miramax was able to gain the rights anyway and this led to the film *My Name is Modest : A Modest Blaise Adventure* which was launched in 2004. (Friedrich, *Modesty Blaise*) It would be directed by Scott Spiegel, with Quentin Tarantino in the crew and the unknown British actress Alexandra Staden as Modesty Blaise. The content of the film was not based on any of the novels, but was inspired by hints about her childhood and from the years before she set up the criminal gang called 'The Network', which feature in the strip stories the *Xanadu Talisman* and *The Beginning*. (2008:

Modesty Blaise Books) In that sense, the film should be regarded as "a prequel, introducing the backstory of Modesty Blaise." (Friedrich, *Modesty Blaise*) Although the film looked promising, it was immediately released on DVD and never made it to the theatres. From then on, O'Donnell decided that no one would be allowed to make a film about Modesty Blaise:

> I have read screenplay adaptions for film and TV by eleven different highly-paid professional writers and they have caused me nothing but pain. They are probably superb writers in their own fields, but in every case when they come to Modesty and Willie the indefinable essence of the characters simply disappears. (Hedlundh, *Modesty Blaise*)

Regardless of the fact that the novels lack the visual quality that made the Modesty Blaise comics so popular and successful, their reception was just as positive. Several reasons can be appointed for the success of these novels, the main ones being O'Donnell's writing style and the way he deals with themes such as gender and race. These factors will be explored and analyzed in the final chapter.

4 Female stereotypes in spy- and thriller literature

In this chapter I will analyse a number of works by authors who wrote spy fiction, more specifically John Buchan and William Earl Johns. The focus of the analysis will be on gender, examining the roles women characters fulfil in these narratives. Occasionally, when this is important in the narrative, the issue of race will be hinted at too. Next to femininity, foreignness is also important with regard to the spy. He has developed rather feminine traits and techniques, which can be recognized in his foreign opponents as well. Therefore "femininity and the foreign threat to England's nationhood" often go together. (White 2007: 11) In the following chapter I will compare the traits of these woman characters to the women appearing in Ian Fleming's James Bond novels. Modesty Blaise and other women appearing in O'Donnell's novels will be examined in the final chapter. The narratives I will investigate

here, were all written between 1900 and the early fifties, because this was a "foundational period for the mythology of the spy," a period in which "British fictions established a template against which later spies in fact and fiction are measured." (White 2007:11)

I commence with explaining how the situation was for women from the 'fin de siècle' to the First World War. Modernity's vital flux had disrupted the stable traditions of intellectual and everyday life society. For instance, the suffrage movement is a phenomenon which signals the changes for women occurring at the dawn of the twentieth century. These early feminists not only fought for the right for women to vote, more generally they believed in what was called the 'New Woman' and they wanted to be treated equally to men. This 'New Woman' is described as the woman who "solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman's-sphere, and prescribed the remedy". (Grand 1894: 271)

Although war is generally seen as something only men contributed to, women gradually became involved as well. In the First World War, many women offered to do their patriotic duty. Most of them became nurses and were active in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, others took over the work of soldiers who were transferred abroad: they became "postal workers, tram clippies, delivery drivers, land workers and others." (Storey and Housego 2010: 65)

However, some women also engaged in more dangerous business, such as spying. Margaretha Geertruida Zelle was a Dutch woman, who became an exotic dancer in Paris in 1905. She launched her career after she decided to divorce her 'dominant' husband Rudolph MacLeod, a Dutch army captain active in several Dutch colonies. During their marriage, Margaretha and her family lived in Java and Sumatra, now Indonesia which were Dutch colonies. (Huisman 1998: 12) These cultures proved to be a source of inspiration for her dancing career: she chose the Malaysian words 'Mata Hari' as her stage name and used

various exotic props and provocative movements from Oriental dance styles in her performances. (Huisman 1998: 38-39)

Her erotic show garnered wide acclaim, fascinating men as well as women, who were intrigued by the unknown Oriental cultures and its customs and fashions. Moreover, she symbolised for women "an escape from modern constraints into a world of pre-modern pleasures and unconfined eroticism." Margaretha "became fully absorbed in her new identity", claiming that she had Oriental origins. (White 2007: 8) Her career also earned her love affairs with influential men. Being a divorced woman and working in a world which did not secure financial stability, she often depended on the munificence of such men. These relationships were especially important when she became older and was struggling to keep her dancing career vivid. (Proctor 2003: 128-129) This is presumably the reason why she accepted to be a double agent as well. According to Huisman, the German consul, Karl Cramer, persuaded Margaretha to become a spy coded H-21 by offering her twenty-thousand francs. Not much later, although warned that she was a German spy, the head of the French Espionage team, George Ladoux, also requested her to spy in exchange for a travel visa she needed to visit military domain. (Huisman 1998: 42) This was, however, a trick by Ladoux and soon Mata Hari would be unmasked as a traitor. She was arrested in February 1917 by the French in Paris and killed nine months later.

Assumingly, Ladoux used her as a "scapegoat" to cover up the failure of the French army and as such his own failure. (Proctor 2003: 126) He and the ones who charged her did this by projecting "gender and racial" stereotypes onto Mata Hari. (White 2007: 34, 39) Thus, the focus was not on the fact that she played a double roll, but on the decadent, sexualised and exotic image she had created for herself. This image of unconfined sexuality was presented as threatening to the nation. White indicates that Mata Hari died because of male "projections,

fear and anxieties regarding women and modernity that emerged in the late 19th century." (2007: 34)

Mata Hari can be aligned with the New Woman because she took matters in own hands. Although her marriage allowed her to move up the social ladder and provided her a safe income, she did not want to endure the many disappointments in her marriage and the violent behaviour of her husband. Instead, she left her husband and chose for an active career rather than to wait passively for a better life to come, which was the typical mentality of middle-class women. (White 2007: 36)

In the light of this background, I will now examine if this New Woman- figure can also be found in the novels written by the above mentioned writers.

4.1 John Buchan

Kate Macdonald makes clear in her article "Aphrodite Rejected: Archetypal Women in Buchan's Fiction" that Buchan mostly uses women in inferior roles. ("Aphrodite Rejected": 153) This can be attributed to the fact that he was "reflecting his own society, but was also participating in the Victorian literary tradition of the male romance, by, for example, H. Rider Haggard, Arthur Conan Doyle and even Joseph Conrad, which had little room for women protagonists." (Macdonald, "Aphrodite Rejected": 153) Not surprisingly, society, which was still dominated by men, did not yet accept this New Woman nor the new role for women she introduced. Another explanation could be that Buchan did not feel the need to insert women who perform an active role in his stories, because he was writing for a mainly male audience. These men were all born in the Victorian period and were raised as conservative and patriotic men, which means they would not identify themselves with a female lead character who performs a masculine profession because it was simply not realistic to them.

Furthermore, Macdonald surveyed the specific types of female characters present in the oeuvre of Buchan. She did this by using Vladimir Propp's system of archetypal roles and Algirdas Greimas's model of actantial roles. With regard to actantial roles, she found that many women were powerless and lacked responsibility and that they acted almost always as the object, the helper or the opponent. This supports the idea that Buchan casted women to function as "supportive individuals." (MacDondald, *"*Aphrodite Rejected*"*: 155-156)

4.1.1 Julia Czechenyi

An example of such a supporting function can be found in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. Buchan invented the amateur spy character Richard Hannay when he wrote this novel in 1915. In this story, Hannay is contacted by the spy Franklin L. Scudder who reveals to him that he has discovered a secret plot against Greek premier, Karolides. Initially, Hannay was not really interested and did not listen very carefully to what Scudder was saying:

> So a lot that he said, slipped clean out of my memory. I remember that he was very clear that the danger to Karolides would not begin till he had got to London, and would come from the very highest quarters, where there would be no thought of suspicion. He mentioned the name of a woman – Julia Czechenyi – as having something to do with the danger. She would be the decoy, I gathered, to get Karolides out of the care of his guards. (*The Thirty-Nine Steps*: 20)

A few days later, Hannay finds out that Scudder is murdered. Because he feels morally obliged to Scudder, he continues his search for the ones who are planning to assassinate Karolides. This leads him to Galloway, "the nearest wild part of Scotland", where he stays in a local inn. (*The Thirty-Nine Steps*: 25)

The woman mentioned in the fragment above, will prove to be highly important in Hannay's quest, but not really in the form of an actual character. In spite of creating an "enemy vamp coming into action", Buchan opted to use a woman's name as the key to solve

the mystery of the murdering scheme. ()When trying to decipher a code in Scudder's notebook, the name of the woman suddenly comes into Hannay's mind:

> The trouble was the key-word, and when I thought of the odd million words he might have used, I felt pretty hopeless. But about three o-clock I had a sudden inspiration. The name Julia Czechenyi flashed across my memory. Scudder had said it was the key to the Karolides business, and it occurred to me to try it on his cypher. It worked. The five letters of 'Julia' gave me the position of the vowels. […] 'Czechenyi' gave me the numerals for the principal consonants.(*The Thirty-Nine Steps*: 36)

Although no female personage appears in this novel, Buchan did allow the name of a woman, which can be seen as a female presence, to play a key element.

4.1.2 Mary Lamington

Mary Lamington seems to be more than just a code in Buchan's 1919 novel *Mr. Standfast*. Unlike Julia Czechenyi, she is really present and she also appears in the following Hannay novels *The Three Hostages* (1924) and *The Island of Sheep* (1936). This is rather unique, since female characters in Buchan's work rarely "carry their roles over several linked novels," as Macdonald points out. (Macdonald, *"*Aphrodite Rejected*"*: 158)

In *Mr. Standfast*, Hannay returns from the war to perform a new mission as a spy. He is sent to Fosse Manor, where he will get further orders. His superior, Bullivant, has arranged for him to stay with the ladies Claire and Doria Wymondham. In the meantime, Hannay also wants to visit a friend of his, Blaiki, in a shell-shock hospital in a nearby village. This is where he encounters Mary for the first time, since she is working there as a nurse:

> Someone put up a tea-tray on the table beside us, and I looked up to see the very prettiest girl I ever set eyes on. […] I thought I had never seen eyes at once so merry and so grave. […] "Who on earth's that?" I asked Blaiki. "That? Oh, one of the sisters," he said listlessly. (*Mr. Standfast*: 16)

Eventually she turns out to be the niece of the women Hannay is staying with. He meets her again when sitting at the dinnertable with both her aunts and her nephew Launcelot Wake.

One of the reasons why Mary's character appears in more than one work by Buchan, is that she fulfils a symbolic role. According to Rosie White, Buchan tried to show to his male public that femininity and domesticity do not need to be experienced as threatening and that their masculinity is not necessarily affected by them. On the contrary, both stand for a peaceful and warm environment, something the men of Buchan's generation had to miss because of the time they had to spend at warfront. He shows the effect of them on men through Mary's character and the relationship she has with Hannay. "*Mr. Standfast*," Rosie White argues, "represents an attempt to reconcile the hero not only to domesticity [...] but [is] also an attempt to imagine a future for the hero in peacetime." (2007: 23) Richard Hannay is in fact a Scotsman who emigrated for a long time to Britain's colony, South-Africa. When returning, he feels that Britain is subject to different changes and this has an alienating effect on him. In *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, Hannay initially has a negative feeling about Britain: "I had been three months in the Old Country, and was fed up with it. [...]But from the first I was disappointed with it. In about a week I was tired of seeing sights, and in less than a month I had enough of restaurants and theatres and race-meetings." (*The Thirty-Nine Steps*: 9) White has described the novels revolving around Hannay as perceiving "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." (2007:19) Hannay is depicted as such a conservative and anxious man, who tries to figure out his place in this 'exotic' English society and who tries to learn what Englishness is all about.

A change in his perspective on England is partly brought about by Mary. He eventually falls in love with her, just like he falls for England's nature and countryside. The

following fragment demonstrates how his mind is changed about domesticity: "The wide green spaces among the trees set my fancy dwelling on that divine English countryside where Mary and I would one day make our home." (*Mr. Standfast*: 225) Whereas in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, the bachelor Hannay still wanted to return to South-Africa, he now wants to settle down with Mary in England. His love for her and England have become the "motivation" for him to evolve into the 'ideal' English gentleman. (White 2007: 22)

Nevertheless, the role Mary is supposed to perform is still somewhat ambiguous. For instance, Buchan has ascribed some boyish features to her:

> I stared after her as she walked across the lawn, and I remember noticing that she moved with the free grace of an athletic boy. (Mr. Standfast: 16)
>
> I loved to watch her, […] with her elbows on the table like a schoolboy, her crisp gold hair a little rumpled, cracking walnuts with gusto, like some child who has been allowed down from the nursery for dessert and means to make the most of it. (*Mr. Standfast*: 227)

This is in line with the new ideas around womanhood, which were emerging in modern English society. By giving her these boyish traits, Buchan hints at the possibility that Mary could handle situations which require some male action. Nonetheless, he almost immediately nullifies this idea in the second fragment by comparing her to a child, underlining her innocence.

Although Macdonald states that the figure of the New Woman cannot be found in Buchan's work, White believes that "a version" of this New Woman can be found in Mary. (MaDonald, *"*Aphrodite Rejected*"*: 154; White 2007: 23) More specifically when she becomes a part of the plan Hannay's accomplices have set up to catch the villain. Mary had been in touch with this villain, Moxon Ivery, and made him fall in love with her. Because of this she became the perfect bait, "the one magnet" that would attract Ivery. (*Mr. Standfast*: 244) Hannay on the other hand, is not amused when he hears what his friends are up to. He finds it dishonourable that they would use her as a decoy, but he is also worried about 'his'

girl and jealous of the fact that Ivery would come near her again. Yet, he cannot come up with another or better trick. It is Mary herself, however, who is able to calm him down:

> Look at me, Dick, look at your someday-to-be espoused saint. I'm nineteen years of age next August. Before the war I should have only just put my hair up. I should have been the kind of shivering debutante 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. [...] 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. (*Mr. Standfast*: 246)

Mary wants to make clear to Hannay that women are not that helpless as he believes they are. She considers herself as equal to the other members of the team and believes it is her duty to contribute to the plan. Since she is not that strong and hard like a man, she has no problem playing out her attractiveness and sexuality. Mary here stands up for herself and presents some "proto-feminist" opinions, yet Buchan again weakens the idea of Mary having the capacity to handle tough situations. Throughout the novel, he mainly portrays her as a flat character, acting out the traditional female roles. (White 2007: 23) Occasionally, Buchan depicts Mary as a mother, pampering and nurturing others, which is inherent to her job as a nurse too: "Mary cosseted and fussed over Peter like an elder sister over a delicate little boy. She made him stretch his bad leg full length on the seat, and when she made tea for the party of us it was a protesting Peter who had the last sugar biscuit." (*Mr. Standfast*: 325) But more than anything else, we find descriptions of her as a young and innocent girl:

> Mary had suddenly woke, and was sitting upright with her fists in her eyes like a small child. (*Mr. Standfast*: 324)
>
> There was no answer but a sob and the sound of a timid step. I took four paces into the darkness and caught in my arms a trembling girl. […] By and by she slipped her arms around my neck and with a half sob strained towards me . She was still trembling.[…] "But, my precious child, how did you get here?" (*Mr. Standfast*: 214)

Instead of fleshing out this female character, Buchan went for the safest option. These descriptions encourage the idea that Buchan overall wanted to portray Mary as a victim, the most traditional role women were to play in fiction. The presentation of Mary as a victim is underlined even more in moments where Hannay's love for Mary flares up. He constantly feels as if she needs to be protected. For instance:

> "Hush!" I whispered. "There's someone in the next room." I swept her behind a stack of furniture, with my eye glued on a crack of light below the door.[…] I had my hand on my pistol, as I motioned Mary farther back into the shadows. (*Mr. Standfast*: 219-220)
>
> I had my eye on the very spot above his right ear where I meant to put my bullet. …For I was very clear that to kill him was the only way to protect Mary (*Mr. Standfast*: 312)
>
> I wrapped Mary in a fur rug, and after that, we did not speak a word. I had come suddenly into a great possession and was dazed with the joy of it. (*Mr. Standfast*: 222)

At the beginning of the next Hannay-novel, it is told that Mary has become Hannay's wife and mother to his son. Because of this, we might posit that she is merely treated like an object by Hannay; an object he wants to possess. Macdonald has described this type of character as a "marriageable prize" who "achieves the promise of marriage by the end of the story." ("Aphrodite Rejected": 158)

4.1.3 Hilda Von Einem

Hilda Von Einem proves to be of a different caliber than Mary. She is an important figure in Buchan's novel *Greenmantle*, which is written three years before *Mr. Standfast*, in 1916. In this novel, Hannay is saddled up with the task to investigate the Germans' and Turkish' plans to instigate a religious war in the Middle East and Africa. He chose a friend of his, an expert in Arabic culture, Sandy Arbuthnot, as his colleague and both are accompanied by the American agent Blenkiron. With nothing more than the clue "*Kasredin, cancer and*

v.I," they head towards Constantinople, each of them taking different paths. (*Greenmantle*: 11)

Step by step, Hannay and his companions are able to decipher the three words their predecessor had written down. The first word, *Kasredin*, is the name of a Turkish mystery play about the prophet Greenmantle, whose assistant appears to be a woman. (*Greenmantle*: 165) Cancer literally refers to the disease this word denominates. It is Sandy who informs Hannay that Greenmantle is dying as the result of this disease. (*Greenmantle*: 205) The final, and most important one for this research, is solved by Hannay himself:

> Before this I had always taken the I as the letter of the alphabet. I had thought the v. must stand for von, and I had considered the German names beginning with I – Ingolstadt, Ingeburg, Ingenohl, and all the rest of them. […] Now I found myself taking the I as the numeral one. Idly, not thinking what I was doing, I put it into German. Then I nearly fell out of the bed. Von Einem – the name I had heard at Gaudian's house, the name Stumm had spoken behind his hand, the name to which Hilda was probably the prefix. (*Greenmantle*: 107)

Although Hilda's name appears to be the answer to one part of the clue, the role she has to carry through goes much further than that of Julia in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. Unlike Julia, she is the "enemy vamp coming into action." (Macdonald, *John Buchan*: 52)Hilda fulfils the actantial role of opponent. She is a part of the German conspiracy and is portrayed as a ruthless, powerful and above all, foreign criminal who makes her opponents' blood run cold:

> But Blenkiron did not laugh. At the mention of Hilda von Einem, he had suddenly become very solemn, and the sight of his face pulled me up short. "I don't like it, gentlemen" he said. "I would rather you had mentioned any other name on God's earth. I haven't been long in this city, but I have been long enough to size up the various political bosses. They haven't much to them. [. . .] But I have met the Frau von Einem, and that lady's a very different proposition. The man that will understand her has got to take a biggish size in hats. [. . .] She married a diplomat who went to glory

three years back. It isn‘t what she has been, but what she is, and that‘s a mighty clever woman.” (*Greenmantle*: 167)

Unlike Mary, she is never portrayed as a ‘damsel in distress’. On the contrary, she is likely to be depicted as a character on equal footing with her male counterparts . The following extract proves that she is a woman who wants to be in complete control. Hilda visits Richard in his hotel room to find out if he is cut from the same cloth: “ ‘I may have need of you, and you assuredly will have need of me. [...]’ She could not mesmerise me, but she could strip me of my fancy dress and set me naked in the masquerade. ‘What came you forth to seek?’ she asked.” (*Greenmantle*: 201) Clearly, Hilda is testing if he really is on the side of Germany. When Hannay, not much later, explains to her that he and his companions are heading to Mesopotamia, this is not to her liking: “She picked it up, opened it, and then tore it in pieces and tossed it in the fire. ‘The orders are countermanned,’ she said. ‘I have need of you and you go with me.’” (*Greenmantle*: 203)She seems to have no respect for the plans of Hannay and feels that her own scheme is clearly much better. This is one example of a situation “where she disdains social and authoritarian dictates or personal danger and where she is completely confident,” as Macdonald puts it. (Macdonald, *John Buchan*, 54)

A part of her power also lies in her sexuality. In order to get her way, Hilda makes use of the advantages of her gender. This is quite uncommon for Buchan since sexuality was not something he felt comfortable with. As opposed to O’Donnell’s female characters, who will be discussed in the final chapter, the women in Buchan’s fiction are almost never sexually characterized. (Macdonald, “Aphrodite Rejected”: 160) In order to acquire a complete understanding of why Buchan portrayed Hilda as a vamp, it is essential to look at the archetypes Buchan used to describe his women personages. In short, Buchan was inspired by the Greek goddesses, Artemis and Aphrodite. These archetypes can be linked to chastity and

seduction, respectively. (Macdonald, "Aphrodite Rejected": 157) Although Buchan preferred the Artemis archetype, he knew he had to insert some qualities of Aphrodite in his female characters to reflect the changing status of women in society. With Mary Lamington for instance, he hinted at this qualities by letting her stand up for the fact that she is used as the decoy who seduces the villain. But she only does this because she is asked to; she is used for her feminine traits in a plan laid out by men.

In the case of Hilda, the roles are reversed: whereas Mary is dominated by men, Hilda tries to dominate men. She exploits her sexuality voluntarily to sabotage the male characters' plans, and as such to threaten the overall accepted male dominance in society. What Buchan tries to accomplish through her character, is to illustrate the male fear of female intimidation. The following fragment illustrates Hilda being a vamp, a gorgeous yet predatory women "who ruthlessly took advantage of others." (Caplen 2010: 63) Von Einem tries to seduce Hannay, who starts to doubt his own manhood:

> This slim woman, poised exquisitely like some statue between the pillared lights, with her fair cloud of hair, her long delicate face, and her pale bright eyes, had the glamour of a wild dream. I hated her instinctively, hated her intensely, but I longed to arouse her interest. To be valued coldly by those eyes was an offence to my manhood, and I felt antagonism rising within me. […] Suddenly I began to realise that this woman was trying to cast a spell over me. The eyes grew large and luminous, and I was conscious for just an instant of some will battling to subject mine. (*Greenmantle*: 194)

Despite the fact that Buchan realised he needed powerful female characters , who possess some of Aphrodite's characteristics, the virtuous Artemis archetype still held his preference. As mentioned before, he found it difficult to write about sexuality, because it was not really appropriate for a novel set in his own time . Moreover, Macdonald argues that he found it had "to be resisted and neutralised where possible". (Macdonald, "Aphrodite Rejected":160) On the one hand , Mary played out her sexuality briefly, but it was neutralised

by making her a wife and mother. Hilda, on the other hand, was ultimately portrayed as a sexually aggressive and dangerous woman. By having her killed in the story, Buchan neutralizes her feministic power, indicating that sexuality in itself is a dangerous characteristic that should be restrained. White has explained the dichotomy of these two characters:

> In the opposition between Mary and Hilda Von Einem, Buchan establishes the trope of the good and the bad female spy. Mary is associated with nation and motherhood, while Hilda represents a decadent, oriental sexuality which Hannay and Arbuthnot find fascinating. (2007: 25)

Because of this, White argues that her character symbolizes nothing more than "a force of nature", namely the sexual instinct. (2007: 25) Furthermore, she believes that Buchan presented Hilda as a "trope loosely based on Mata Hari" because Hilda only has to affirm the chivalrous traits and good nature of Richard Hannay. (White 2007: 25)

To conclude, we could contend that John Buchan certainly rejected specific types of women and was critical of certain female characteristics, which he deemed improper. More generally, we could argue that John Buchan's characters serve as symbols of his attitude towards the New Woman-figure.

4.2 William Earl Johns

The Second World War commenced around 1940 and lasted until 1945. It proclaimed for women more or less the same role they had to fulfil in the previous world war. Due to the mobilisation of men, including labourers, in the army, marine and air force, many factories were undermanned which would result in a collapse of the economy. Consequently, the recruitment of women to replace some of the army workforces and to pick up the work of men in the factories was vital to "perpetuate the war economy." (Caplen 2010: 66) In order to achieve this, many campaigns were started to encourage women in joining the war. Obviously, this shift in the role of women also transformed the overall image of women in the

popular media. Hollywood films for instance, showed female protagonists in several jobs often linked to the war: from welder in Since you went Away (1944) to military defense plant worker in Meet the People (1944), however, they also paid attention to the 'ordinary' "female professional" in films like What a woman! (1943). (Caplen 2010: 67)

Among the numerous advertisements to stimulate women, many included pictures of women helping the air force. At the beginning of the war some organizations such as the Women Air Force Service Pilots, the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, and others were set up to fly over equipment to different military bases abroad. To inspire more young women to join the latter organization, abbreviated as WAAF, the Air Ministry requested William Earl Johns, a former pilot himself and a writer of children's literature, to create a female counterpart of Biggles. (Ellis and Piers 2008) This was the male protagonist of a series of stories he wrote revolving around the Royal Air Force. In 1940, the adventures of Worrals started to appear as a serialized version in *Girl's Own Paper*. (Edwards 2007: 93) Eventually, Johns would publish eleven books about this spirited, feminist flight officer and her friend Frecks. In fact, both of these women had a different name: Worrals' real name was Joan Worralson and in the same way as Biggles, her name was an abbreviation of her surname. Frecks, on the other hand, was a nickname for Betty Lovell, derived from her freckled appearance. (Worrals Goes East: 7)

Accepting the task of the Air Ministry, Johns not only wanted to set focus on the propagandistic aspect of his stories, he also hoped to accomplish gender and class equality for women. (Edwards 2007: 535) Whereas in the previous era, women were mostly depicted in domestic spheres, the female protagonists of Johns clearly wanted some more action in their lives. In the novel Worrals Goes East, written in 1944, Worrals and Frecks are asked for help

by Major Kenton, the head of the British troops in Aleppo, Syria. He explains that the Nazi's want to instigate a civil war in Syria, because it would lead British troops away from the battlefield in Europe, which would offer them great advantage. (Worrals Goes East: 13)The Nazi's use Muslim women to spread propaganda as a way to cause unrest between the various peoples – "Arabs, Jews, Turks, Armenians, Circassians, Druses, Egyptians," that live in Syria. (Worrals Goes Eas: 12) He believes that they spread the propaganda in the form of leaflets and that they are delivered to Nazi's in Syria by means of airplanes. The reason why he has chosen Worrals and Frecks, lies within the fact that they are female pilots. In Moslem countries, foreign men are not allowed to make contact with Moslem women: "As girls you could do what no man dare do – go into places where no man dare venture. That is the basic reason why you are here." (Worrals Goes East: 12) In summary, both flight officers have to investigate who exactly gives orders to these Arabic women to hand out the leaflets and where the landing spot is for the planes to bring in the German propaganda. To make sure the girls receive enough protection, Major Kenton sends along a local, Nimrud. But when he informs them that Nimrud will serve as their bodyguard, the girls feel a bit offended and he rephrases that Nimrud is just someone who will guide them around in Syria. (Worrals Goes East: 20-21)

In fact, utterances of feminism can be found throughout the whole novel. One moment, Nimrud complains about the fact that Worrals and Frecks are doing all the masculine jobs, while they are *bints*, which is another word for women:

> Marshallah! [...] It is very much not good for a woman to lead, so that a man must follow. [...] Major Kenton said perhaps there would be fighting,[...] Yet when there is a promise of man's work you say to me, stay here, as though I were the *bint* and thou the warrior. (Worrals Goes East: 115)

Worrals, however, makes very much clear to him that war is something which affects both sexes and she deems it only fair that "women should do their share." (Worrals Goes East:

115) Not only Worrals is capable of dealing with sexist views, Frecks also knows how to put Nimrud into place:

> "The legs of a man like me were not made for walking," protested Nimrud. "What were they made for?" inquired Frecks. "For gripping the flanks of a thoroughbred mare," averred Nimrus earnestly. "Have you ever wondered about what the mare thinks about that?" asked Frecks. "What does it matter what she thinks?" returned Nimrud wonderingly. Once I am astride her, no power under God – to Whom all things are possible – can move me." "This should teach you to remember the mare's legs next time you are on her back," remarked Frecks calmly. [...] "Are all bints in thy land like thee, effendim?" inquired Nimrud curiously. "Most of them," replied Frecks brightly. (Worrals Goes East: 160)

Although they are talking here about a female horse, we might assume that Johns used the word 'mare' as a metaphor for a woman, and that the 'gripping of the flanks' refers to the sexual act, thus reducing the function of a woman to nothing more than a sexual object. But being a writer of children's literature, Johns could not afford to write about sexual activities and had to opt for a cleaner version of what he meant to say.

In this novel there is also a female opponent present, Hylda, who resembles, even by name, the villainess Hilda Von Einem in Buchan's novel *Greenmantle*. Through her actions she seems to precede other villainesses, such as Rosa Klebb in the James Bond novel *From Russia With Love,* who will be discussed in the third chapter. When Frecks tries to escape, her plane crashes and she is captured by the Nazi's. When she refuses to cooperate and answer the questions they pose, Hylda handles her quite roughly. In order to make Frecks talk, she threatens to press Frecks' hands in a pressing machine:

> "Now, dear English lady," sneered Hylda, "if you do not answer my questions thruthfully, and politely, I am going to crush your hands flat. Where is your friend?" Frecks took a grip on herself. "Find her, Nazi," she spat through her teeth. Hylda's face paled with passion. "Have it your own way," she rasped. (Worrals Goes East: 172)

Fortunately, Worrals is in time to rescue her friend and shows that as a woman, she is equally capable of handling a tough situation:

> "Get back against the wall, both of you," said Worrals, in a voice that the ring of steel in it.[...] the sheikh snarled, and moved like lightning. His dagger flashed. There was a deafening explosion. A stream of orange sparks leapt across the chamber. They began at the muzzle of Worrals' gun and ended at the sheikh's chest. He stopped, coughing. His knees seemed to sag. Then, in dead silence,[...] he slid forward on his face and lay still. (Worrals Goes East: 173)

Since this is only the second time she kills anyone, I believe that the firmness with which she has executed this action, demonstrates her capability and that she has a lot of courage for a woman. It should be noted, however, that Worrals and Frecks and all the other women who were active in several war-related movements, were but members of these movements and that their superiors were still men. Although female characters appearing in wartime media, from novel to film, were portrayed as being strong, patriotic and helping society, they were essentially "anomalies", invented to serve only as a way of propagating the many functions that were available for women in the war or to perpetuate this period. (Caplen 2010: 67)

5 Literary Analysis of Ian Fleming's James Bond Novels

This chapter is dedicated to the literary analysis of Ian Fleming's James Bond spy novels.

Similar to the previous chapter, the focus will lie on the function of female characters in the narrative in relation to the male protagonist and in what way they deviate from the stereotypes of 1950's society. The issue of race will be covered as well, although more thoroughly, since Fleming's novels are situated in the wake of the Cold War.

First of all, it is necessary to discuss the shift in the role of women after World War II.

When World War II came to an end, it also brought forth the end of the professional emancipation of women. With the male soldiers returning home, trying to find their way back into society, the working women had to clear room for the men to pick up their jobs where they had left t hem. It was said that by 1947, "over three million women either vacated or were removed from their wartime positions." (Caplen 2010: 68) This situation of course resulted into an alteration of the female image once again. Women were advised to return to the domestic sphere and to take on the traditional roles they were destined to fulfil: being a wife and a good mother. (Gourley 2008: 12) The ultimate goal of a woman in the war was to help the country and her men; women did so likewise in the 1950s, albeit in a different context. Gourley says in *Gidgets and Women Warriors: Perceptions of women in the 1950s and 1960s (2008)*, that even though women chose to be educated at an university, they did not do this for their own ambitions. Instead, society proclaimed that the education of a woman was only useful in relation to her family and to advance the career of her husband. (Gourley 2008: 13) Thus, women helped the country by assisting their husbands, keeping them happy and by providing a healthy offspring . In other words, marriage and motherhood were the new ideals of the 1950s. (Gourley 2008: 14)

Mothers also had a specific task in the upbringing of their daughters. Because society emphasized that "females were to be, above else, feminine," they were responsible for teaching their girls how women behaved and looked and as such to become a reflection of their 'perfect' mothers. (Gourley 2008: 17) In the 1950s, femininity was essential for a girl's future; the more feminine you were, the higher your chance at success and happiness. By giving your daughter the good example you secured her future as a married woman. (Gourley

2008: 18) Gourley is convinced you can measure someone's femininity according to the three A's. The first A stands for Appearance or the exterior of a woman. It includes her looks, her type, her figure and here fashion comes into play as well. Actions is the second A and this has to do with the behaviour of women. For example, women should act as humble as possible in situations involving men. Dominating conversations and driving the men into a corner was considered inappropriate. The last A is about Ambition. As said before, women did not strive for a career. Their greatest aspiration was to find a suitable husband and to raise a family. (2008: 18-19)

Naturally, the media adapted itself to these new ideals. Several magazines and advertisements helped to reinforce the gender bias. They idealized the woman as a perfectly equipped and fashionable housewife and portrayed the man preoccupied with male activities such as sports, repairing mechanical devices or discussing politics and finances. (Young & Young 2004: 47-49) 1950s cinema, Hollywood specifically, also produced films promoting marriage, such as *A Woman's World* (1954) and *Gentlemen prefer blondes* (1953). Both of these films center on women in search of a fine husband and they also end very romantically. Because of this, Robert Caplen explained that Hollywood was responsible for fibbing the public with " a false notion that marriage would ultimately and completely satisfy a woman while defining her role in life as a wife, mother and keeper of the home." (2010: 68) Despite of society's urge for women to resign from the professional world, a great deal of them refused to solely look after the domestic duties. However, this sort of ambition was not appreciated and the film industry reacted by depicting these women as "evil seductresses or emotionless wives". (Caplen 2010: 68)

Next to all the trivial female characters who were only concerned with marriage and motherhood, Hollywood films also focused on the other traditional female stereotype: the

woman as sexualized object. Women were not only expected to care about the household, they also had to please their husbands sexually. In order to keep their husband interested, women had to pay attention to their styling. Therefore, Hollywood focused on fashion in its films as well. The actresses often wore clothes that accentuated their hourglass-figure, such as a pencil skirt or a tight gown. The emphasis on the looks of women, however, became a tactic to diverse the public from the flaws in the characterization of female personages. A famous example of a woman whose "physical attributes became primary eye candy," is Marilyn Monroe. (Caplen 2010: 68-70) The iconic scene in the film *The Seven Year Itch* (1954), in which Monroe's dress is blown up by wind coming from an underground lattice, made her one of the most important sex symbols of all time.

The emphasis on the female physical attributes effected in a good girl and bad girl dichotomy, which is comparable to John Buchan's one between the good and the bad spy. (Caplen 2010: 70) An actress like Marilyn Monroe could serve as example of bad girl, for instance in the previously mentioned film *Gentlemen prefer blondes* (1953). In this film, she plays Lorelei, a real gold-digger only marrying her fiancé for his money. However, her future father-in-law does not approve of her and doubts her fidelity. Because of this he hires a private detective to spy on Lorelei and her friend Dorothy, while being on a trip. Here, Lorelei meets Sir Beeckman, the owner of a diamond mine, which attracts her immediately. When she is caught red-handed by the detective, flirting with Beeckman, she and her friend do everything in their power to prevent Lorelei's fiancé from finding out. It goes without saying that Marilyn's character here stands in large contrast to her colleague-actresses, among which Audrey Hepburn, who starred in films representing the faithful marriage. Regardless of this traditional good girl/bad girl dualism, the female characters in Ian Fleming's James Bond novels tend to differ from the stereotypical female images of the 1950s.

5.1 Gender

James Bond or agent 007 is the protagonist of a series of espionage thrillers in the 1950s. What enthralled the readers was the topic of the novels and their depiction of a male world full of testosterone, including "innovative gadgets, alcoholic beverages, fast cars [and] a demonic villain." (Neuendorf, et al. 2009: 747) Another aspect that contributed to their immense popularity, is the abundance of beautiful women in the novels. In every novel there is a dominant female character, nowadays referred to as the Bond Girl. This woman has been described as intelligent and sophisticated, having stunning looks, "an adventurous nature" and a "sense of self-assurance". (Neuendorf, et al. 2009: 748) She served as a representation of freedom, domestically as well as sexually, for the women. In general, she was seen as the epitome of female emancipation. (Caplen 2010: 14)

However, Caplen tends to challenge this classification of the Bond girl. He argues that the Bond Girl initially was but a shadow of what she represents today. The image she received of being strong-willed and independent was merely the result of an evolution elucidated in the film versions of the novels. (2010: 14-15) I believe that Caplen's opinion can be clarified by White's examination of the structural function of the literary Bond Girl. In order to endorse my findings, I will analyze a number of female characters with regard to gender and racial issues appearing in the novels. Characters that will be discussed are Honeychile Ryder from *Dr. No* (1958), Tatiana Romanova and Rosa Klebb, the villainess, from *From Russia With Love* (1957) and Pussy Galore and Tilly Masterson from *Goldfinger* (1959).

At first sight, the Bond Girls appear to be very independent. For instance, they all work and earn their own living, which immediately sets them apart from the stereotypical image of the 1950s housewife. Tatiana Romanova is an agent working for the Russian Secret Service, as is her superior, Rosa Klebb. Honeychile Ryder is a trader of a very rare type of

seashells and Pussy Galore is active in the Mafia with her own criminal organization. Tilly Masterson's profession is not explicitly given, but she also acts rather independently when trying to revenge her sister's death, often engaging in situations that demand courage. Most of them seem to serve as an assistant to Bond, already from the beginning or later in the novel, helping him to achieve result in his diverse operations. For example, in *Dr. No*, Honeychile Ryder is useful as a guide on the Jamaican Island Bond finds himself to be:

> Soon they came round a bend and into the open. Honey said, " Better watch out now. We'll be easier to see. It goes on like this for about a mile. Then the river gets narrower until the lake. Then there's the sandspit the birdmen lived on. (*Dr. No*: 290)

However, the seemingly useful nature of the Bond Girl's role is undermined by several sorts of flaws in her character. For example, when Bond questions Honeychile about the" Chinaman's" dragon, she vividly explains how the dragon looked like and how she had encountered it, as if this mythical beast truly was present. Her reaction towards Bond's expected disbelief points to her naïve and inexperienced personality:

> Bond said reasonably, 'Honey, there just aren't such things as dragons in the world. You saw something that looked very like a dragon. I'm just wondering what it was.'[…] "How do you know there aren't such things as dragons?" […] She said hopelessly, "Oh, you're just city folk like all the rest. (*Dr. No*: 281)

To compensate for the shortcomings in his female characters, Fleming spent much attention on describing the overall appearance of the women, endowing them with a gorgeous figure and breathtaking looks, which corresponded to 1950s feminine ideals. In this way, he could lead away the attraction and at the same time offer his public visual pleasure, which is in line with the ideas of consumer culture. (White 2007: 27) This tactic is similar to what 1950s filmmakers did. However, in a film, attention can be led away by zooming in on specific body parts or by certain movements the character makes, whereas in a novel this visual quality is missing. Therefore, Fleming adapted his writing style and sketched his

woman personages very detailed in order to stimulate the imagination of the readers. The aspect of appearance comprises several components, of which five will be discussed.

Firstly, we will be looking at the hairstyle and – colour of the female characters from the three novels. Fleming refers to Botticelli's painting of the goddess Venus when he describes Honeychile Ryder's ash blonde hair which reaches to her shoulders. (*Dr. No*: 276) This image of wet fair hair also has an arousing effect. Tatiana Romanova has "fine dark brown hair" as soft as silk. (*From Russia With Love*: 57) Her hair is cut to shoulder length too. Both Pussy Galore and Tilly Masterson have black, messy hair, with the difference being that Pussy's hair is quite short, having the typical urchin haircut, while Tilly's hair is longer "with a rather crooked parting." (*Goldfinger*: 528) The hair of the villainess, Rosa Klebb, is "orange" and because of her age, which is estimated somewhere in the forties, it is already growing thinner. (*From Russia With Love*: 54) She also does not wear her hair loose; it is "scraped back into a tight bun." (*From Russia With Love*: 54)

Secondly, the eyes will be scrutinized. Apparently, James Bond had a specific liking for the colour blue, since all of the Bond Girls seem to have 'wide-apart' blue eyes. Fleming, however, did vary by adding nuances to the eye colour. Pussy Galore's eyes, for instance, were not regular blue, but violet. (*Goldfinger*: 624) The exception here is Rosa Klebb, who has "shiny yellow-brown" eyes. She also wears glasses which make her look very severe. (*From Russia With Love*: 54)

The third component consists of the facial features. All of the Bond Girl-characters have the ideal oval face shape, with high cheekbones, a perfect jawline and a beautiful mouth with full lips. Their skin is overall pale, although Honeychile is said to be "café au lait with

the sheen of dull satin." (*Dr. No*: 275) Some of them have quite distinct features that are worth noting. Honeychile's nose was broken by the man that raped her when she was younger. The fact that it was never healed could be an indication that Honey has not yet overcome her trauma. Tatiana is compared to the Swedish actress Greta Garbo, but she has a "straight, imperious nose" and a "pointed chin", which seem rather typical Russian traits. (Fleming, From Rusia With Love, 57) Once more, Rosa's depiction is completely the opposite. She has a "thickly powdered, large-pored nose" and a very unattractive mouth. (*From Russia With Love*: 54) Her skin is described as resembling that of a chicken. Moreover, she has excessive skin under her eyes, cheeks and chin and large ears. (*From Russia With Love*: 54)

Fourthly, we will be discussing the fashion sense of the female characters. Honeychile first appears in the novel *Dr. No* dressed in nothing more than panties with her bosom uncovered. After meeting James Bond, she puts on some clothes that make her look like a "principal girl dressed as Man Friday." (*Dr. No*: 279) There are again similarities to be found between Tilly and Pussy: they occasionally wear black leather belts and seem to prefer rather masculine clothing. Tatiana Romanova and Rosa Klebb are both double agents For SMERSH, the Russian counterpart of MI6, and mostly appear in uniforms. But when involved in seducing, they put on lingerie.

The fifth and final component that will be dealt with is the figure of the women. Fleming has described Honeychile's body in comparison to that of a typical Classicistic statue, trying to simulate visual context:

> She was not quite naked. She wore a leather belt round her waist with a hunting knife in a leather sheath at her right hip. […] She stood in the classical relaxed pose of the

nude, all the weight on the right leg and the left knee bent and turning slightly inwards, the head to one side as she examined the things in her hand. (*Dr. No*: 275)

Fleming further adds that she has a beautiful bosom, but her bottom is quite masculine:

"the gentle curve of the backbone was deeply intended, suggesting more powerful muscles than is usual in a woman, and the behind was almost as firm as a boy's." (*Dr. No*: 275-276)

Similarly, Tatiana's behind looked rather manly: "Its muscles were so hardened with exercise that it had lost the smooth downward feminine sweep, and now, round at the back and flat and hard at the sides, it jutted like a man's." (*From Russia With Love*: 58) Besides that, it should be noted that she has a tall, yet elegant figure with "faultless" breasts, and moves gracefully due to her former ballet dancing career. (*From Russia With Love*: 57-58) Tilly Masterson's body is quite feminine, but her attitude is rather virile. This is also reflected in her posture. After Bond has wrecked her car, she comes up to him "with her feet slightly parted and her hands behind her back." (Fleming, *Goldfinger*: 529) On the other hand, Rosa Klebb's body is plump and short, with sturdy arms and legs. Because of her wide hips, Fleming has compared her figure to a cello and a pear. We can assume that her bosom is quite large, for the top of her uniform bulges out and looks like "a badly packed sandbag." (*From Russia With Love*: 53)

In general, we can say that these rich descriptions clearly contribute to the novels' visual quality; moreover they seem to encourage a sexual reading of these personages. Further, it seems like Fleming wanted to use the girls' looks to create a sort of good-bad dichotomy. The villainess is portrayed as a very unattractive woman, whereas the good girl is mostly typified as having a beautiful exterior. Although the majority of the female characters appear to have a considerably feminine charisma, it must be noted that a number of them

diverge from the 1950s ideals for having rather masculine qualities. From this, we might infer that those girls cannot yet be considered as completely good.

The reason why Fleming has not lived up to society's expectations, can be explained by an indication White made regarding the function of the Bond Girl. There seems to be a problem with her sexuality, which is problematic for the narrative's goal and for Bond's persona as well. (2007:26) Pussy Galore as well as Tilly Masterson are characterized as having a sexual preference for women, which is reflected in their clothing and their actions. In the novel *Goldfinger*, there are numerous situations in which this lesbianism becomes apparent. To begin with, Pussy Galore is the leader of a lesbian gang of thieves named 'The Cement Mixers' and is said to devour girls " in bunches, like grapes." (*Goldfinger*: 567, 586) Bond finds out about Tilly's orientation when they both meet Pussy at a gathering organized by the villain, Auric Goldfinger:

> Bond thought she was superb and so, he noticed, did Tilly Masterson who was gazing at Miss Galore with worshipping eyes and lips that yearned. Bond decided that all was now clear to him about Tilly Masterson. (*Goldfinger*: 570)

The attraction seems to be mutual, since Pussy coldly rejects talking to Bond and turns to Tilly instead, even calling her "yummy". (*Goldfinger*: 586) Homosexual orientation is also hinted at in the novel *From Russia With Love*. After Tatiana was summoned to Rosa Klebb's office, where she was tested and approved fit for the task to deceive Bond and MI6, Rosa seemed to make advances to her. She had put on her finest lingerie underneath a night dress in "orange crêpe de chine" and had used make-up:

> With a squeak of pleasure, Rosa Klebb threw herself down in the caricature of a Recamier pose. She reached up an arm and turned on a pink shaded table-lamp whose stem was a naked woman in sham Lalique glass. She patted the couch beside her. "Turn out the top light, my dear. The switch is by the door. Then come and sit beside me. We must get to know each other better." (*From Russia With Love*: 70)

Given that Fleming explicitly links this characteristic to an antagonistic personage, we can assume that it is experienced as very negative. His attitude towards homosexuality becomes evident through a remark Bond makes when discovering Tilly's sexual preference:

> He knew the type well and thought they and their male counterparts were a direct consequence of giving votes to women and 'sex equality'. As a result of fifty years of emancipation, feminine qualities were dying out or being transferred to the males. […] The result was a herd of unhappy misfits – barren and full of frustrations, the women wanting to dominate and the men to be nannied. (*Goldfinger*: 591)

It is not illogical that Fleming had this opinion about homosexuality, since he lived in a society that promoted marriage and therefore heterosexuality. Because James Bond is considered a partner of this heterosexual society, due to his profession, it is his task to protect the pillars on which the society is built. In order to achieve this goal, he has to readjust the girl's "problematic sexual identity", which can refer to lesbianism, virginity or frigidity, and "fix her into normative femininity, usually through sexual context or awakening."(White 2007: 26)

Indeed, at the very end of *Goldfinger*, Bond manages to rectify Pussy's wrong decision of becoming a lesbian. At first Pussy is not very impressed by Bond, neglecting his witty remarks and showing more interest in Tilly. However, Bond does not give up and continues to employ his natural charm and cunning tricks to seduce her. Step by step, Pussy starts to doubt her own sexuality and at one point she even ignores Tilly, paying attention only to Bond. When it turns out that Pussy is in fact a virgin, – she admits to Bond that she had never met a man before – Bond tells her she needs a "course of Tender Loving Care", like a doctor prescribing a medicine to cure a disease. (*Goldfinger*: 624) Eventually, he is able to conquer her in bed:

> She looked at the passionate, rather cruel mouth waiting above hers. […] 'When's it going to start?' Bond's right hand came slowly up the firm, muscled thighs, over the flat soft plain of the stomach to the right breast. Its point was hard with desire. He said softly, 'Now.' His mouth came ruthlessly down on hers. (*Goldfinger*: 625)

A lot of emphasis has been put on sexuality through the girls' appearance and Bond's erotic conquests to distract the reader from the lack of depth in the female characters and to provide visual titillation. However, it is also used for another purpose with regard to the protagonist, James Bond. Not only does the girl's problematic sexuality pose a threat to the nationhood, it also destabilizes Bond's dominant and sexual position. Bond clearly feels intimidated when he is rejected by women, which is for example illustrated by his 'sour smile' when he is left out from the conversation between Pussy and Tilly. (*Goldfinger*: 586) Bennett and Woollacott, the authors of *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a popular Hero (1987)*, have argued that the Bond Girl had to be pushed back within "the regime of the phallus, "for instance through sexual domination. (1987: 116) From the same remark Bond made about homosexuality, we can deduce Fleming's attitude about women, which is reflected through Bond: he clearly does not support the idea of gender equality, nor the thought of a woman being the superior of a man, whether this is professionally or sexually. The extract in which Bond is about to sleep with Pussy, presents the ideal position of a woman according to Fleming: beneath the man, both literally and metaphorically. (White 2007: 27) To underline his masculine domination even more, Bond does not treat Pussy with a loving tenderness, but kisses her rather roughly, like a predator wanting to devour his prey. It seems as if the Bond Girl is merely treated like an inferior sex object by James Bond. In *From Russia With Love*, Tatiana is selected by her superior Rosa Klebb only for her beautiful appearance to lure Bond, and MI6 as such, into a trap. She serves as the "the conduit through which SMERSH can compromise and kill Bond". (Caplen 2010: 93) Likewise, Mary Lamington was used as a decoy to trick the villain, Moxon Ivery, in John Buchan's novel *Mr. Standfast*. To succeed in SMERSH's plan, Tatiana has to act to have fallen in love with Bond and make him believe that her allegiance has switched to the British side. To make that look plausible, she promises to hand over the important 'Spektor' decoder, which is in fact what

SMERSH is after themselves. Initially, Bond and MI6 are only interested in Tatiana because she could deliver this important device, which is a reason to argue that Tatiana is nothing more but a "mechanism" for both SMERSH and MI6. (Caplen 2010: 96) She is thus not treated like a subject and when she finds herself to really have fallen for Bond, her superior has no regard for her feelings and orders that she should be killed.

Another means to remind the woman of her subordinate position is to address her contemptuously, like a master to his slave. When Bond offers Tilly a lift to Geneva, he also orders her to buy lunch and gives a very precise instruction about what he wants from the store, without even asking what she might want. It is followed by a moment in which "their eyes met and exchanged a flurry of masculine/feminine master/slave signals", as Fleming has described it. (*Goldfinger*: 529) He also uses a rather rude language when thinking about Honeychile as a "poor little bitch" or when Pussy is trying to impose her will on him, snarling that she should get back to her basket. (*Dr. No*: 286 – *Goldfinger*: 623) After that remark, it looks like he has succeeded in teaching Pussy her place, because she does everything he tells her to do, "like an obedient child." (*Goldfinger*: 624)

The inferior aspect of the women's characterizations is enhanced even more through the fact that they have to be rescued by James Bond himself. Although appearing strong, independent and able to look after their selves, Tatiana as well as Pussy and Honeychile are all at one point in the novel depicted as helpless victims who need "the guidance and protection of a man." (Caplen 2010: 57) When Bond and Honeychile are in a gun fight, it is Bond who takes the lead and has to calm her down:

> He felt her hand squeeze his arm.[…] He leant to the right to cover her head and pushed his face deep into the sand. […] The girl whimpered softly. Bond hushed her and held her tighter.[…] There were tear streaks down her face. (*Dr. No*: 286- 287)

It is also Bond who is able to save Tatiana in time when she is poisoned with chloral hydrate by a fellow SMERSH-agent who was ordered to get rid of her. (*From Russia With Love*: 189, 200) Even Pussy owns her life to James Bond, for he is able to give her first aid when she is unconscious in the plane: "He undid the seat belt and got the girl face down on the floor and knelt astride her. For five minutes he pumped rhythmically at her lungs. When she began to moan, he got up and left her […]." (*Goldfinger*: 620)

Usually, Bond succeeds in curing the girl from her sexual impediment, but the case of Tilly Masterson marks a failure in his career. Throughout the whole novel, Tilly had responded with "cool politeness" to Bond's attempts to pierce through her enigmatic character. (*Goldfinger*: 590) But nothing could come between her and her beloved Pussy Galore. Her blind obsession for Pussy even impedes Bond from saving her life. Atypically, she does not conform to the typical function of the Bond Girl and is therefore no longer of use. As a result, she dies:

> The girl's hand tugged at him. She screamed angrily, 'No, no. Stop! I want to stay close to Pussy. I'll be safe with her. […] Suddenly, she tore her hand out of his and made to dart into an open Pullman door. […] Ten yards away Oddjob hardly paused in his rush. One hand whipped off his ridiculous, deadly hat, […] Its edge caught the girl exactly at the nape of her neck. (*Goldfinger*: 604-605)

This reminds us of John Buchan's character Hilda Von Einem, who was also killed in the story because she did not answer to the specific image Buchan wanted to promote in his novel.

In conclusion, we could argue that the female characters in Fleming's novels continue to be depicted in a stereotypically negative way. Although they seem to represent a departure from the overall 1950s attitude towards women, for instance through their professional

occupation and independent sexuality, Fleming openly criticized such female types by writing in a style that counteracted these strong traits. A lot of attention was spent on looks and provocative descriptions, marking the females as sex objects not only for Bond, but also providing visual pleasure for the readers. Moreover, "the narrative reaffirms sexual stereotypes that convey the author's ideal gender dynamic: subordination," as Caplen has explained. (2010: 61) As with John Buchan's Hannay novels, the purpose of women in Fleming's fiction is to certify the male protagonist's masculinity and Bond's sexual triumphs must be regarded as a metaphor for male authority. Overall, "the bond girl served both as a character essential to the narrative structure and as a marketing tool." (Caplen 2010: 52)

5.2 Race

World War II was directly followed by a period in which new foreign threats set in political and military tension between the Western countries and the Communist ones: The Cold War (1945 -1991). Robbie Goh explicates that during this continuum Britain had lost a lot of its international influence, for instance illustrated by the loss of control over the Suez Canal in 1956. (1999: 31) This period in Britain was also marked by racially-motivated public violence, which was a consequence of the massive influx of Africans and other ethnic groups at the end of World War II. Examples of such violence include the race riots in Nottingham and Notting Hill, which both found place in 1958. (Goh 1999: 31) As a result, many Immigration Acts were ordained, with the purpose to "restrict the influx of specifically coloured immigrants." (Solomos 1989: 61) This situation, together with the curtailment of Britain's importance, led to a new form of patriotism, underlining the permissive and heroic character of the Anglo-Saxon culture, but in fact disguising the hostile attitude towards immigrants. The James Bond novels by Fleming contribute to this "nationalist project" through their depiction of British "racial and national superiority". (Goh 1999: 30) An indication of this nationalist project can be found in the polarized characterizations of the

villain and James Bond himself in Fleming's novels. According to Umberto Eco, the villain, on the one hand, is almost always

> [...]born in an ethnic area that stretches from Central Europe to the Slav countries and to the Mediterranean basin: usually he is of mixed blood and his origins are complex and obscure. He is asexual or homosexual, or at any rate is not sexually normal... [The villain represents] cupidity elevated to the dignity of paranoia, Planning as technological methodology, satrapic Luxury, physical and psychical Excess, physical and moral Perversion, radical Disloyalty. (Eco 1979: 151)

On the other hand, Bond is portrayed as reflecting:

> Loyalty to the Service, Anglo-Saxon Moderation opposed to the excess of the half-breeds, the selection of discomfort and the acceptance of Sacrifice opposed to the ostentatious Luxury of the enemy, the genial improvisation (Chance) opposed to the cold Planning which it defeats, the sense of an Ideal opposed to Cupidity... (Eco 1979: 153)

If we apply this theory to the villain in *From Russia With Love* for instance, we can ascertain that Rosa Klebb indeed fits as a good example: She is born in Russia, a communist country, and has a sexual preference for women. However, in the novel it is also mentioned that she would have been asexual, using sex only as a professional instrument to have her way and not feeling any emotional connection to the person she is involved with. Fleming has named this characteristic "the essence of coldness in an individual." (*From Russia With Love*: 53) Her emotional impediment also shows when dealing with enemies or even colleagues, for she does not feel any compassion and definitely has no mercy. In the story, it is assumed that she was capable of murdering her own boss and lover, Andreas Nin, only for the sake of the country. Likewise, she did not hesitate to have Tatiana eliminated, when she became a risk for the Spektor-operation.

Goh discovered that many of Bond's opponents "take a perverse delight in torturing and killing their enemies," and Rosa Klebb is certainly not different. (1999: 30) Her notorious

interrogation technique also reveals her cold and cruel nature. Before every interrogation, she would put on a certain apron already covered in blood to intimidate her victim. Then, she would whisper numbers that corresponded with a specific torture the "inquisitors" had to execute. (*From Russia With Love*: 60) During these moments of painful abuse, she would sit down relaxed, close to the face of the victim, breathing in "the screams as if they were perfume," which illustrates the immoral satisfaction and the excitement she feels when having power over someone. (*From Russia With Love*: 60) The final step in manipulating the victim emotionally and physically is her transfiguration into a mother-figure, soothing him or her like a mother would do when her baby is crying. She would speak in a loving tone, saying things like: "There, there my dove [...] Your mother is here beside you, only waiting to stop the pain," while gazing attentively in the eyes of the victim. (*From Russia With Love*: 61) In this way, she succeeded in breaking the victim, forcing him or her to confess.

In contrast, Bond represents everything the villain is not. He had no liking for extreme violence and he would not kill anyone without having a good reason. Whereas Rosa would definitely have impaled Bond with her poisoned knitting needles, Bond eventually spares her life and has the Parisian police arrest her. (*From Russia With Love*: 206) According to Goh, James Bond "subscribes to an absolute code of fair play." (1999: 33) Yet in *Goldfinger*, Bond is forced to kill Auric Goldfinger out of self-defence:

> Down, down went Bond's thumbs into the arteries. He threw all his weight forward, gasping for breath. Would he black out before the other man died? Would he? Could he stand the pressure of Goldfinger's strong hands? The glistening face was changing. Deep purple showed through the tan. The eyes began to flicker up. The pressure of the hands on Bond's throat slackened. The hands fell away. (*Goldfinger*, 620)

Auric Goldfinger is a Latvian emigrant, who has become very wealthy in England. However, being the chamberlain of SMERSH, he did not put his money away in a bank like a

good citizen would do. Rather, he spread it out in different countries, involving in tax evasion or he would invest it in a Soviet project. Fleming choose to depict Goldfinger this way in order to reflect the idea that immigrants pose an "economic threat" to the country, which in turn illustrates racial suspicion and even disdain. (Goh 1999:33) Through these opposing characterizations, Fleming manages to respond to desires of consumer culture. On the one hand, the readers identify with Bond because of his distinctive English manners and the fact that he is the ultimate hero who always accomplishes in the end. It is also fascinating that his dangerous missions include trips to foreign countries, where he is able to enjoy the company of local, beautiful women and satisfy himself with exotic goods. On the other hand, the moral depravation and cruel nature of the villains enhance the racial hatred and "the act of tricking and destroying a villain whose racial and national alienness makes him a dehumanized pest," gives the novels a psychologically and morally satisfactory quality. (Goh 1999: 35)

In summary, Fleming's novels merely reflected the mindset of British society with regard to other races. His novels were situated during the Cold War, a period full of crises and more generally for Britain, a period in which the country's political and economic position became weaker. The immigration of different ethnic groups since the end of World War II was an incentive to use them as a scape goat for the social changes that resulted into the collapse of the empire. Needless to say, the attitude towards these minority groups was rather hostile. "Fleming's Cold War political awareness dictates a moral story in which Britain survives […] only by the inherently superior qualities of the Anglo-Saxon race and culture." (Goh 1999: 35) These superior qualities emerge in the character of Bond who is contrasted with villains whose actions encroach the moral values and principles of Britain. The eventual subjugation of the enemy at the end of each story is necessary to assert Bond's, and therefore Britain's imperial authority.

6 Image of women in the 1960s

The following section aims to explore the way in which women are portrayed in the 1960s. I will build on my previous findings on this matter and start with a clarification of the overall image of women. Then, I will move on to discuss various female characters in the popular media, to search for changes in status and roles.

It was mentioned previously that not every woman in the 1950s dedicated herself entirely to a domestic life because of a professional career, which already implied a modification in the function of women. Yet, by 1963, "the lives of many women were still limited to domestic and nurturing activities", as Betty Friedan, a famous American feminist, pointed out in her book "The Feminine Mystique". (Ward 2010: 125) She explained that society was still controlled by men who confined women "to a very narrow range of acceptable lifestyle choices and left their other capacities, aspirations, and needs unrecognized." (Ward 2010:125) Nonetheless, it must be noted that a lot of women, as Friedan herself, did efforts to escape this stereotypical destiny and managed to become more than just a housewife. Gradually, it would become more common for a woman to participate in the professional world, due to alterations "in the workplace as consumer culture took precedence over heavy industry, and 'feminine' skills began to take priority over masculine inheritance […]." (White 2007: 62) Because of the convenience for women to find work, they also could afford to be more independent from men and maybe even take control over their own lives. The new opportunities for women were accompanied by reformed laws which led to profound changes with regard to divorce, homosexuality and abortion. (Landy 2010: 111) The latter, however, could be avoided by using the birth control pill, which is the most familiar form of contraception. In 1960, this pill became accessible for a great deal of women, and facilitated the way to sexual freedom for women. (Caplen 2010: 70) Paul Monaco, author

of *The Sixties: 1960-196 (2001)*, admitted that the use of contraception ameliorated the sexual situation for women and gave them more right to pleasure, but he did not believe that it would dissolve the gender disparities between man and woman: "The sexual revolution constituted a demonstrable shift in behavioural mores that did not necessarily redefine gender roles." (Monaco 2001: 121)

Although this might be the case, altered portrayals of women did start to appear in popular media, representing society's new conception of a woman. According to Marcia Landy, the author of the essay "Swinging femininity, 1960s transnational style", the British film industry corresponds to other 1960s West-European film industries "in their shared concern with the re-fashioning of the culture and politics of femininity within the emergent society of consumption." (2010: 111) She summed up a few examples of such British films, like Girl With Green Eyes (1964) and The Knack...and how to get it (1965). (Landy 2010: 111)

Another film she mentions, is *Darling*, directed by John Schlesinger in 1965. It starred Julie Christie, whom Landy has named an " icon of swinging femininity". (Landy 2010: 111) The film revolves around a young and free-spirited woman, Diana Scott, who earns a living as a model. Already in one of the first scenes of the film, a reference is made to the new image of women of the 1960s: When Diana is interviewed, she imparts to " hate convention" and believes you have to break away from it, because it is suffocating. (*Darling*) Diana is married to Tony Bridges, whom she loves dearly, but it is clear from the beginning that the marriage is not satisfactory to Diana. She is utterly bored and finds Tony "desperately immature". (*Darling*) When she meets the television-journalist, Robert Gold, she is immediately fascinated by him, calling him incredibly mature and sensitive. Because of his influence in the

television world, Diana is able to climb the social and professional ladder. Although Robert is happily married with Esther and has two children, he eventually succumbs for Diana's *joie de vivre* and both of them leave their partners to start an affair. After a while of living together, Robert feels they should get married to secure their relationship, but Diana declines his proposition, claiming to be happy with the way the situation is. However, this is already an indication of Diana's upcoming dissatisfaction and soon she would find another victim in Miles Brand, an important advertisement executive director, who introduces her to new professional circles. Meanwhile, Diana becomes pregnant with Robert's child and both are initially very pleased. Still, she decides to abort the baby because it would ruin her career and mess up everybody's life. (*Darling*) Eventually, Robert breaks up with her after he finds out she and Miles were on a trip together in Paris, where she cheated on him. Unfortunately for Diana, her relationship with Miles would not last long either and she falls in love with Prince Cesare della Romita, a widower and father of four children, while being in Italy for the shooting of a commercial for Cupid Chocolates. Although being a prince, this man brings her little happiness, often leaving her alone with his children in his exquisite palace. Diana ends up depressed and lonely.

With this film, Schlesinger attempted to reflect and rearrange conceptions of 1960s society. The film tackles some complex social issues such as adultery and abortion and also deals with traditional attitudes towards gender and sexuality. In the beginning of the film, Robert is interviewing people on the street, questioning them about what they thought to be a shame for Britain. One man from London, answered that "sexuality has become rife". (*Darling*)This overabundance of sexuality is of course impersonated by the protagonist of the film, Diana Scott, who uses sex as a way to work her to the top. What sets this female character apart from the other ones discussed in this thesis is that she is not portrayed as the

conventional victim, rather as a victim of her own reckless actions. Traditionally, women are used as objects by men, but in this film, it is the other way around. When she leaves prince Cesare, Diana bumps into Robert at the airport in Rome. Hoping to reconcile, they share the night together. Yet, Robert realizes Diana has not changed at all and refuses to start a new relationship with her. For the first time, Diana is rejected by a man and she cannot cope with this. She screams that Robert has used her and is a bastard, but Robert painfully makes clear that she is the one that used him. (*Darling*)

Since consumer culture transformed the nation into a permissive society, in which long-standing ideas about femininity and sexuality were falling apart, the media had to work in a style that addressed men as well as women. Landy has uttered that "the swinging 1960s film, adopts a cinematic language that invokes different clothing fashions, hairdos and mises en scène for addressing femininity (and masculinity)." (2010: 111) During the film, the outfits of Diana continuously change, as well as her hairstyle. Often, she is wearing elegant dresses with pearls or glittering ornaments and in one scene she demonstrates her collection of shoes. These element are of course very appealing to the female audience. But men's visual pleasure has not been neglected, for the film has a number of scenes focussing primarily on Diana's body. There is for example the moment where Diana undresses herself while standing before a mirror and a glimpse of her bosom is reflected in the mirror.

The journeys she undertakes for her job appear to be metaphorical ones, "across boundaries of social class, generation and sexuality." (Landy 2010: 111) Her character represents an evident departure from woman's typical domestic realm, for she prefers a career full of glamour over having a family. Furthermore, her promiscuous nature and urge for new experiences prevent her from having a proper and satisfying relationship, falling into one

affair after the other. It seems as if she is always in search for something more, but eventually finds nothing but emptiness. Schlesinger has depicted her as an adventurer, "escaping moral constraints about marriage and sexuality to pursue and independent existence," which is "indicative of a flirtation with the seductive but also threatening character of mass culture." (Landy 2010: 113)

This emancipated female character can also be found in 1960s spy fiction. An interesting case to consider, is the caper film, a subgenre of the spy thriller. (von Dassanowsky 2008: 108) Examples include *Ocean's Eleven* (1960), *The Italian Job* (1969) and *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968). The plot of these films revolves around the characters engaging in criminal 'white-collar' activities such as theft and swindle, and mostly the criminals would get away with it. In many films, the crime is shown as a moral act and in that way the criminals avoid being condemned by the audience. Robert von Dassanowsky states in his article "A Caper of One's Own" that although crime still did not pay, "criminality would no longer need to be punished in a moralistic manner," which is a result of the abrogation of the censorship. (2008: 108) This abrogation also provided the caper filmmakers more freedom to play with sexuality, which would modify the stereotypical presentation of female characters. They wanted to excite their viewers by combining " 'bad girl' sexual awareness with criminal intent." (von Dassanowsky 2008: 108) This depiction is in fact not new; the female characters of film noir were already presented as somewhat inconsistent with regard to ethics. (von Dassanowsky 2008: 108)

Similar to the swinging 1960s film, the caper film emerged in an era which was characterized by social shifts, rebellion against conservative trends and a flourishing consumer culture. To distract the viewers from the political and social instability, the caper

film provided entertainment by romanticizing crime as "a stylish adventure, complete with fashion, romance, and sex, to function as vicarious escape from the hypocritical structures of consumerist capitalism and the institutionalized heterosexual relationship." (von Dassanowksy 2008: 108) The caper film's treatment of women points to a change in the function they fulfilled. Von Dassanowsky mentions the example of *North by Northwest* (1959), a film by Hitchcock, in which the female character, Eve Kendell, could be regarded as the prototype of the "morally questionable" woman who seizes the 'bad guy', but only if her premises are fulfilled. (von Dassanowsky 2008: 108) In my opinion, this pinpoints a female personage taking over control for herself.

However, some of the viewers might not yet be adjusted to this new gender role division and would also feel unease when confronted with so much immorality. For this reason, von Dassonowsky assumed, the female personages in caper films, who originated from two distinct Hitchcock characters: the thief and the leading lady, were always dressed in fashionable haute-couture- outfits, underlining their femininity and concealing their manly profession. (2008: 110) White noticed that this focus on fashion in overall spy fiction seems to serve as a "masquerade" and von Dassanowsky joins her by stating that " women use costuming as a form of communication, which is both traditionally patriarchal (providing social-sexual signals and male visual pleasure) and counterpatriarchal (as a form of subversion or fantasy escape from strict gender role assignments)." (White 2007: 63; von Dassanowsky 2008:110)

The fact that filmmakers still adapted their female figures to meet up to the expectations of a part of the public, indicates to me that society had not yet accepted the concept of emancipated women. According to White, this becomes evident in one of the

novels written about the television series, The Man from UNCLE. (2007: 64), the writer, Michael Avallone in fact objectifies the female antagonist, Denise Fairmount, in the following extract:

> "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 lame 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." (quoted in White 2007: 64)

Denise Fairmount is definitely reduced here to a sexual object, since the emphasis is put on her long legs and her "languorous" position. Furthermore, her body is said to resemble that of a cat, marking that she probably is very limber. She is even literally compared to an object, for Napoleon imagines her being the perfect piece of furniture in a hotel suite. From this extract, we might deduce that the female spy in The Man from UNCLE functions more or less the same as the Bond Girl: they "provided copophilic pleasure and shored up the heteromasculinity of the male leads." (White 2007:63)

Before proceeding to the final chapter in which I will be dealing with Peter O'Donnell's Modesty Blaise novels, I should like to revisit some important points with regard to the presentation of female characters in the 1960s. Social changes, such as participation in the professional world and the approval of the birth control pill, enabled women to take control over their own lives, independent from men. This new situation was also reflected in the film industry, which started to break boundaries in their way of portraying the woman as a sexually liberated and self-employed subject, instead of the stereotypical, sexual object and victim. Spy fiction, with subgenres like the caper film, presents differences between the

woman as a consumable object and as a consumer herself. (White 2007:62) On the one hand, the female characters are used to titillate the public through the combination of sexuality and criminality. On the other hand, they offer proto-feminist ideas because of their engagement in dangerous actions and, for instance in the case of Eve Kendell, standing up for themselves.

Nevertheless, the extract from one of the spy novels from *Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, shows that the female spy embodies contradictions as a woman in a professional role.

7 Literary Analysis of Peter O'Donnell's Modesty Blaise Novels

Sprouted from a screenplay for a Modesty Blaise film, O'Donnell decided to write ten novels about the dashing action heroine and her sidekick, which garnered wide acclaim. But how exactly did he manage to emulate the success of the comic strips about Modesty Blaise, which were published earlier than his books? In chapter one, it was already mentioned that O'Donnell's writing style and the innovative way he handles complex social themes, contributed for a large deal to the popularity of the Modesty Blaise novels. In this section we will be discussing these success factors, through the analysis of two of his novels, *Modesty Blaise* (1965) and *Sabre-tooth* (1966).

7.1 Gender

From the first pages in the novel *Modesty Blaise*, we learn that Modesty and Willie are in fact former criminals, who are contacted by Sir Gerald Tarrant, the boss of the British secret service, to aid him on a dangerous caper mission. Tarrant revealed to his colleague, Fraser, while going over the ideas to convince Willie and Modesty to join them, that Modesty retired at the age of 26, having earned a fortune that was estimated at more than a half a million sterling. (*Modesty Blaise*: 7) When Fraser and Tarrant meet Modesty at her house, they go through her dossier and tell how she was able to obtain such a wealth:

> You were a stateless person, and at this approximate age of seventeen we have you working in a small gambling establishment in Tangier. It was controlled by the

> Louche-group – Henri Louche being a man who headed a small criminal organization. On his death at the hands of rivals one year later, you took control and there followed a remarkable expansion. […] The group […] under the - ah – new management, became known in due course as The Network and operated on an international scale. The crimes included art and jewel thefts; smuggling; currency and gold manipulations; and an espionage service. (*Modesty Blaise*: 13)

Because of this background, Tarrant deems Modesty, and her right hand Willie, capable of dealing with Gabriel, a dangerous thief, who, together with his gang, plans to intercept a cargo of diamonds and heist it.

The fact that Modesty became the head of a criminal organization is quite surprising, since her being feminine. This indicates that she has to possess a survivor's instinct and a tough reputation. In their encounters with fierce opponents, both Modesty and Willie can rely on their excellent fighting skills and their audacity to take risks. Although preferring hand to hand combat, Willie has a range of weapons, some of them self-invented, and because of this he seems to resemble Fleming's character Q, who provides James Bond with special gadgets. Near the little pub he runs, The Treadmill, Willie had a building constructed, serving as a depository for a very extensive collection of modern as well as ancient weapons and as a practising space for Modesty and himself, also referred to as a 'dojo'. In the fragment below, some examples are given to illustrate the varying weapons he owns:

> There were a dozen of bows, ranging from the short Mongol recurve to the long English yew, [...] Another rack carried rifles and handguns.[...] there was a hammerless Smith & Wesson Centennial and a .38 Special Colt Cobra. (*Modesty Blaise*: 68)

But these were only useful to Modesty, since Willie was a horrible sharpshooter who "couldn't hit a barn standing inside it." (*Modesty Blaise*: 69) He did have a talent for knife-throwing though and would always carry two of them wherever he would go. Although

having such a variety of weapons to choose from, Modesty would rarely use one and if she did, she would always stick with her favourite: the kongo or yawara, a Japanese stick used to "paralyse a limb, or stun , or kill."(*Sabre-tooth*: 45)

Next to great physical strength, they were extremely good at suppressing all kinds of emotions and pain. In *Sabre-tooth*, it is said that they would "set up a mental barrier", as a way of protecting themselves and the mission. (*Sabre-tooth*: 213) Modesty is even able to lose conscience at will, a result of her intense yoga training and concentration exercises. There is, for instance, the moment where Modesty is captured by Didi and tied up with sisal rope in a very uncomfortable and painful position. To deceive him, "she considered going unconscious. This was a trick she could perform at will, a self-induced faint." (*Modesty Blaise*: 87) This dodge proved to be very helpful when she had to endure two nights of rape by the troops of Karz. One of the men, Zechi, groused that she would lie there like a "big dummy" and that she did not move when he had his way with her. (*Sabre-tooth*: 234) Afterwards, Modesty explained that "for her, the bodily violation and pain of the past two nights had been a loathsome ordeal; but she could take the memories of all her senses and drop them into some deep cavern of her mind, where in a little while they would dissolve and strike no chord ever again." (*Sabre-tooth*: 243) Yet, Willie experienced more difficulties to cope with this.

Being a woman, Modesty has access to another powerful weapon: her gorgeous and curvy body. Just like she is able to control her mind, she is able to use her physical attributes to lead away the attention from her male opponents, without succumbing to desire or passion. When situations become risky, she resorts to a special technique called 'The Nailer': "She had taken off her shirt and was naked to the waist, ready for The Nailer,.[...] With wrists bent, the backs of her hands resting on her hips, she stood still. Her face wore a bright inquiring smile.

(*Sabre-tooth*: 154) Using this ploy, she could 'nail' a whole army of men and in those two or three seconds, while they were sitting or standing motionless, admiring the beauty of her body, she or Willie had the time to take the villains out." (*Modesty Blaise*: 23) In the extract above, Modesty reminds us of the Bond Girl, who is depicted similarly as a tough, yet sexualised character. They way in which she is portrayed, even resembles the women in pornographic magazines, standing in a compromising position with jutting breasts and an alluring smile on their face.

Jeffrey Brown poses an interesting question in his essay "Gender, Sexuality and Toughness: The Bad Girls of Action Film and Comic Books: "When women are portrayed as tough, are they being allowed access to a position of empowerment, or are they merely being further fetishized as dangerous sex objects?" (2004: 47) Indeed, Modesty's strong attitude might allow a revision of women's traditional roles and capacities, but the danger also exists that she reinforces the culturally laden figure of the sexualised victim, serving as eye candy for the male audience.

O'Donnell's detailed writing style has enabled him to accomplish a visual quality in his novels, which is normally missing in this kind of medium. Visual detail is very important with regard to sexuality: the readers have to be able to imagine Modesty's naked body from the narrative, just as they are able to see it in the comic stories. There are quite some moments in which the readers are granted a peek into Modesty's private life and in which they are able to behold her beautiful body. Paul Hagan, an acquaintance of Modesty, once made a nude painting of Modesty and while thinking back he describes her appearance:

> Her face was composed, the dark eyes warm and intelligent. The flesh was firm, the breasts round and full. Her shoulders were wide for a girl but right for her body, and curved superbly up into a long, smooth neck. (*Modesty Blaise*: 76-77)

Her alluring looks were also noticed by Tarrant, who led himself carry away once and a while:

> With gentle pleasure, void of desire, he dwelt on the smooth swell of her breasts beneath the silk blouse. [...] Tarrant looked at the bare arm close to his hand, at the long neck raising from the blouse, and the firm, lovely lines of breast, waist and thigh. (*Sabre-tooth*: 82, 84)

The fact that she is a sexually attractive woman participating in actions that are normally exclusive to men, did bring along some difficulties. Some men felt uncomfortable with the combination of her feminine gender and masculine attitude. When Modesty is introduced as the commander of Karz's R-section, she is having quite a hard time leading her crew, because they do not take her serious. To assert herself, she speaks with a "harsh, flat voice" and takes up a "mannish posture", disposed of all femininity. (*Sabre-tooth*: 199) She is also underestimated by Mike Delgado, an ex-lover and now enemy, who explicitly states that she cannot be capable of winning, because she is a woman "with all the hindrance of little scruples." (*Sabre-tooth*: 266) Even, Paul Hagan, who loves her dearly, is not too fond of having to take orders from Modesty. He tries to explain his discomfort by informing her that he had not had a female superior since he was a child, but that is not an excuse for Modesty. She bluntly makes clear that he has to play by her rules and no one else's. Hagan, clearly shocked by her perseverance, found this attitude "alien" to the femininity of her appearance. (*Modesty Blaise*: 82)

In order to survive, Modesty had to build up a tough reputation and the only way to achieve this was to take up a mannish attitude and by using a lot of violence. Brown found that every action heroine at some point "mobilizes the spectre of the dominatrix." (2004: 50) Modesty's description below, manages in recreating this image of the dominatrix, including

whip: "Controlling a crime network is different. Most of the people you hire are villains, so handling them, is something like being like a lion-tamer, I suppose. You have to make them perform the tricks you want in the way you want."(*Sabre-tooth*: 32)

As a counterweight for all that masculine action and violence, O'Donnell emphasized Modesty's female gender and enticing figure through meticulous descriptions of her outfits, which is, again, a good illustration of his visual writing style and appears to be similar to Fleming's attention to the Bond girls' appearance. One moment, Modesty is wearing "a wine-red skirt of fine tweed" and a "cling sweater in winter-white with a polo neck." (*Modesty Blaise*: 10) The other moment, she is dressed in an apple-green evening dress "with an embroidered bodice", "long, white gloves" and an "amethyst pendant" (*Modesty Blaise*: 31) Modesty is also said to have an aversion for girdles, suspenders, "straps, buckles, anything that confined," which is why she always wears stockings in one piece. (*Modesty Blaise*: 55) Of course, she also wears them because it is more comfortable when there is the constant danger she has to engage in physical, violent actions.

According to Brown, action heroines conjoin masculinity and femininity, through their violent capacities and toughness and through sexual charm or as he puts it: "She personifies a unity of disparate traits in a single figure. She refutes any assumed belief in appropriate gender roles via an exaggerated use of those very roles." (2004: 49) The following fragment illustrates nicely how O'Donnell combines masculinity and femininity:

> Her long legs flashed up, ankles crossed in a vee, skirt falling back to her hips. There came a jarring shock as the man's wrist was solidly blocked in the crotch of her ankles. She turned her toes in, licking the wrist, and in one smooth movement she arched up on to the crown with all the power she could muster. (*Modesty Blaise*: 108)

In the first sentence, O'Donnell sexualizes Modesty by pointing to her long, limber legs and her buttocks, which is no longer covered by her skirt. But he immediately concentrates on the physical action to disrupt the titillation and pulls the reader's attention to the smooth movements, just like *Modesty Blaise* forces her adversaries to ignore her female sex in the face of her masculine power. On the one hand, this masculine power is indicative for her toughness, but on the other hand, it is the combination between this physical strength and her outspoken sexual appearance which makes her truly dangerous. In general, we could argue that this combination makes action heroines more dangerous in a way that their male counterparts, as James Bond, can never be. (Brown 2004: 65)

Since Modesty is a product of a writer living in the era of the swinging sixties, she is granted a lot of sexual freedom. This translates into a non-traditional sexual moral like James Bond. Modesty does not attach herself to anyone in particular, meaning that she is always available to whomever she wants to be with. However, it should be noted that it is she who decides if she will sleep with anyone or not. When Mike Delgado, an old flame, tries to seduce her, she rejects him, although feeling the passion is rising up:

> His hand touched her brow, her cheek, her neck, and moved gently down to cup her breast. She felt the growing sweet-sour ache in her loins, and then her mind clamped down like a shutter of steel, severing every thread of physical sensation. [...] "Look at me, Mike. No, at my face." She held his eyes and said very quietly, very deliberately: "Not now."(*Sabre-tooth*: 102)

Having answered "because I say so" to Mike's question of why she would not sleep with him, it is thus clear that Modesty Blaise is a very independent character, who only works by her own rules, following her own judgement and never takes orders from anyone else. (*Sabre-tooth*: 102)

Although she can be compared to James Bond with regard to sexual independence, this comparison is only right to some extent. In contrast to Bond, who had or has many sexual partners, Modesty is more fastidious when it comes to her lovers. Further, Modesty confides to the reader that only three men in her life were able to give her the ultimate pleasure:

> 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. Of these three men , Mike Delgado had been the first, and in so being he had secured some small part of her as his own. (*Modesty Blaise*: 99)

White already pointed to the "euphemistic language of romantic fiction" which is being employed here and which is quite different from the more "graphic language" O'Donnell normally adopts. (2007: 76) The reason for this may lie with her gender. Instead of describing the sexual act in a brutal way, Like Fleming did to underline Bond's male dominance, O'Donnell presumably adjusted his language to emphasize Modesty's womanliness. Unlike Bond, it is not her dominant position that is at stake, but her female gender identity. It is well known that women experience sexuality in a different way; sex is intertwined with much more emotions. Through this more 'gentle' description, O'Donnell might have wanted to show Modesty's vulnerable side.

Even though I mentioned that Modesty does not attach herself to anyone, there is one person she could dare to rely on: Willie Garvin, her partner in crime. Modesty and Willie have a long history together, but their relationship is purely platonic and certainly not sexual, as following extract shows:

> it was an aesthetic pleasure to watch the swiftly circling body, the quick change of grip, the smooth transfer from one bar to the other. Willie returned from the workroom and stood watching. There was nothing of affection or admiration in his gaze now; it was the alert, critical gaze of the perfectionist. (*Sabre-tooth*: 41)

Whereas another man would certainly have noticed her agility and would have linked it to sexual context, Willie remains professional. Modesty saved Willie when he was imprisoned in Thailand, and changed him from a broken, unmannered brute into a confident and gallant man. The following fragment describes Willie's gratitude for this act: "[...] the new Willie Garvin had made himself – not her slave, for she would not allow that, but her eternally faithful follower, and though she raised him to become her right arm, he still sat at her feet."(*Sabre-tooth*: 34) Together with the fact that Willie always addresses Modesty as 'Princess' and Modesty calls him 'Willie, love' in return, this might give the readers the impression that Willie and Modesty actually feel more for each other than just friendship. There are also no mysteries between them, for instance, when Modesty strips to change clothes, Willie "neither looked, nor avoided looking at her." (*Sabre-tooth*: 143) However, the reality is far from this, for their relationship resembles one between brother and sister, where each one tends to the other.

What makes their partnership so unique and strong, and in my opinion also contributed to the success of the novels, is that they both work in a team as equals. They complement each other and "each one is half of an androgynous team". (Pringle and Stericker 1980: 205) Modesty already indicated herself that Willie's skills are much more diverse than hers and he also is a quicker learner than herself. (*Sabre-tooth*: 134) But Modesty is better in working out effective plans. Her solutions to complex situations, which are very often composed quite quickly, are always ingenious and clever. There are many examples in the novels that show how both of them know exactly how to respond to one another. Sometimes they move so uniformly that their "two figures" become briefly one. (*Sabre-tooth*: 44) Willie has saved Modesty numeral times, but that does not mean she fulfils the role of the victim more than Willie does. In the beginning of the first novel, it is Modesty who has to save Willie's life. During a one-man-, or in this case *one-woman*-mission, she manages to bring down several

heavy armed soldiers using her favourite weapon, the *Kongo*. Finally, when Willie is saved, they still have to secure a safe trip back. The whole way back, they constantly depend on each other's moves:

"She was moving half-turned to watch the rear and left, so she could not look at him but she knew that his eyes would be scanning front and right, calmly alert for the first hint of trouble. There was no point in telling him to use minimum force. He would know." (*Modesty Blaise*: 27)

Despite their uniformity, White argues that gender division can be noticed in the way they respond to the "aftermath of their adventure". (2007: 70) After they manage to bring the capers involving Gabriel and his gang and Karz and his army of mercenaries to a good end, Modesty briefly hugs Willie and starts to weep. But she expresses frustration when doing this: "Why the hell do I do it?" she said helplessly. "why do I always have to...to snivel when a job's over?" (*Modesty Blaise*: 217) Willie is clearly not bothered by her emotions, for he says that it does not do "any harm, though. Gets you unwound." (*Sabre-tooth*: 246) These moments are, however, rare, and as said before, Modesty does not allow herself to be swept too much in a sentimental mood.

Although O'Donnell tried to illustrate through Modesty that "gender is primarily a performance of culturally determined traits and conventions" and that these "do not have to symbolize sexual difference," (Brown 2004: 69) his other female personages were still depicted very stereotypically. In the first novel, *Modesty Blaise*, only two other women appear: Nicole, which is one of Willie Garvin's girlfriends and Mrs. Fothergill, who is one of Gabriel's most dangerous gang members. Nicole meets Willie in Antibes, France, and is immediately charmed by him. Her character reminds us of Mary Lamington, although her story does not end that well. Nicole is in fact the mistress of Paco, which is another

accomplice of Gabriel. He prefers her wearing tacky, "semi-transparent" babydolls "with infinite bows and frills" and stockings, which accentuates her feminine, sexy curves. (*Modesty Blaise*: 102) Furthermore, Nicole is a victim of Paco's vicious nature; he likes to hurt her physically to demonstrate his power over her: "His hands slid down her body to her thighs. Nicole braced herself inwardly, knowing what was to come. His fingers suddenly pinched hard, nipping the flesh, and he chuckled fatly." (*Modesty Blaise*: 102)

Although Nicole is aware he does not treat her well , she is has no choice as to obey, for it is part of her job as call girl. Willie likes her, although she is nothing like Modesty: "Nicole was twenty-three, a small girl with dark red hair and a body well-fleshed without being plump. She knew she was feather-brained, but the knowledge did not disturb her." (*Modesty Blaise*: 89)

Yet, her pre-pubescent attitude and her naivety will cost her dearly. To gain information for the caper, Willie wants to meet Paco, but Nicole warns him and tells him not to. She proposes to hear Paco out herself and assures him that Paco is rather talkative when they have a 'good time'. (*Modesty Blaise*: 89) However, Paco saw right through Nicole's plan and ordered to have her killed "to scare off whoever was using her." (*Modesty Blaise*: 111) Clearly, Nicole serves as nothing more than the traditional sexualised victim in this story.

Mrs. Fothergill is portrayed completely the opposite and shows resemblance to Ian Fleming's character Rosa Klebb. Her appearance is so sturdy that Ivor Grant, an agent from the British secret service, mistakes her for a man. (*Modesty Blaise*: 45) In describing her, O'Donnell seems to have looked very carefully to the style in which Fleming portrayed Rosa Klebb:

> She wore a grey shirt with long sleeves and dark, rumpled trousers held by a leather belt. Her feet, in grubby plimsoles, were curiously small. She might have been forty. The face was heavy-jowled and devoid of make-up except for a gash of carelessly

> applied lipstick. Inexpertly dyed blond hair rose in a short fuzzy crop from her head. Her neck seemed to slope out almost directly from below the jaws to the broad shoulders. Her breasts were large but tightly confined; there was little movement beneath the shirt. Mrs. Fothergill, thought Grant, and felt his stomach twist with a stab of nameless fear. (*Modesty Blaise*: 45)

Even though her reputation triggers feelings as fear, Grant at first still believes he is fit enough to handle her but at the end of their battle she kills him. When Modesty has to face her, she also experiences a lot of trouble and she can only come up with a clever solution in the final moment, while Mrs. Fothergill is trying to choke her. Rosa Klebb feels an immoral satisfaction when torturing, sometimes innocent, people. Likewise, Mrs. Fothergill feels pleasure when she is on the verge of killing someone. There are several moments in which this comes forward, for instance when murdering Grant: "His face was close to hers, and nausea swept him at the almost orgastic stare of pleasure in her eyes." (*Modesty Blaise*: 46)

When she successfully wards off one of Modesty's well-positioned kicks, she starts breathing very quickly, as an expression of excitement. Modesty noticed that "her heavy-jowled face was alight with lust." (*Modesty Blaise*: 198)

We can thus conclude that Mrs. Fothergill is presented as a typical example of an evil villainess, because she has ugly looks and a disturbingly strange form of sexuality.

7.2 Race

Rosie White believes that the 1960s were a decade in which spy fiction flourished, but she also argues that although "they reflected on social shifts" and "looked glossily modern", "they represented a fantasy England in which the establishment is challenged but ultimately triumphant." (2007: 58) O'Donnell's first Modesty Blaise novels were composed and published in the middle of the 1960s and are thus situated in the same cold war context as Fleming's James Bond novels. But it seems as if the way in which both writers treat the subject of race is radically different. Goh explicates that Fleming's novels must be regarded as

"a retrospective, inertial vision of an older imperialistic Britain," which conforms to White's argument. (1999: 29) O'Donnell, however, tried to break away from this imperialistic body of thought. I will now discuss how O'Donnell tried to accomplish a much more tolerant view on racially different groups.

Modesty's position as a woman operating in quite masculine fields, like spying, already marks that she is an unconventional character. There are of course other examples of such women in 1960s spy fiction, such as Cathy Gale and Emma Peel, who both starred in the immensely popular spy television series, *The Avengers*. (White 2007: 59) What sets Modesty apart from them, though, is her race. Unlike her colleagues, Modesty is not typically British.

Her origins are kept vague, but O'Donnell did reveal his inspiration for her character. During World War II, he was stationed in the Middle East, to lead a "mobile radio detachment". (O'Donnell, "Girl Walking") The area where they were dropped, was remote and the only people they came across with were exiles who fled their Balkan home countries to find a place where the Germans would not bother them. One day, a little girl appeared, all by herself, and O'Donnell was intrigued because "although her hair was black and she was deeply tanned, she didn't seem to be to be [sic] 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."(O'Donnell, "Girl Walking") He was so inspired by her audacity and will to survive, that he dedicated an entire series of cartoon strips and novels to her. Modesty herself seems to be of Eastern-European, probably Hungarian, descent. (White 2007: 72) She remembers being in several displaced-person camps from Greece to Iraq and became acquainted with an old Jewish-Hungarian professor who taught her six hours a day. (*Modesty Blaise*: 80) Many references to her exotic background are made throughout the novels, for instance:

> The voice held a mellow timbre with a slight foreign inflexion. The intonation was cool but not unfriendly […] The face was smooth and calm, with high cheekbones under dark [BLUE], contemplative eyes […] Her skin held a soft, matt tan that would have made a fortune for any man who could get it into a bottle. (*Modesty Blaise*: 9-10)

This depiction of her as an Eastern-European refugee is rather peculiar, since the time in which her story is written is characterized by racial intolerance and feelings of hatred towards ethnic minorities. Moreover, her origins fit perfectly as an example of those which Eco has described as belonging to the traditional villain in Ian Fleming's novels. Furthermore, it is said that she owns various houses in Britain and abroad, which points to her richness. A richness she obtained through criminal activities. These various houses all bathe in wealth and here O'Donnell's visual writing style comes into play again:

> The foyer was furnished with two chairs, Louis XVI bergère, and a drum table. […] the remaining walls were of golden cedar strip. They bore half a dozen pictures and a François Boucher tapestry. […] In one corner of the room, broad, curving shelves held 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; (*Modesty Blaise*: 8-9)

These are but a few of the very detailed descriptions O'Donnell wrote about Modesty's apartment in the neighborhood of Hyde Park. From these descriptions, we can deduce that Modesty has quite an exquisite taste. White postulated that, in accordance with other contemporary spies, "Modesty and Willie are at ease with the burgeoning global consumer culture." (2007: 73)

Normally, a writer like Fleming would use her origins and preference for luxurious objects to refer to the "economic threat" foreigners pose to British society, but O'Donnell attributes her with other traits that work against this vision. (Goh 1999: 33) Modesty explicitly states that she retired when she reached her goal: "When I was seventeen, I set my sights on

half a million sterling. I made it and I quit." (*Modesty Blaise*: 80) In other words, Modesty is not driven by money, which is what typical villains normally see as their motivation. Like Bond, she does not kill for fun and her actions are always morally correct, whether the persons involved are Caucasian, coloured, rich or poor. This is a character trait that points to a form of "racial tolerance and inclusivity," Goh believes. (1999:32) Modesty works according specific principles and she makes clear that everyone involved with her professionally, should also stick to those principles. Although being active in a criminal network, she claims to have never been involved with prostitution, nor "touched drugs" or "traded in secrets belonging to Her Majesty's Government." (*Modesty Blaise*: 86, 14) The latter points to a quality that cannot be applied to a foreigner either: patriotism. Modesty Blaise seems to feel devoted to Britain and its uses, which Tarrant has noticed as well: "Yes, she seems to have a feeling for this country […] After all, she chose to settle here." (*Modesty Blaise*: 5) In fact, her cooperation with the British Secret Service is an indication for her devotion too. Her love for Britain is even noticeable in her name. White argues that she picked out a name from a character in the tales of King Arthur as surname, more specifically, the name of Merlin's teacher: Blaise. (2007: 72)

However, she has not lost touch with her foreign heritage and the lessons she received from the professor have given her many advantages. Modesty speaks English, but she is also able to speak French and Arabic, sometimes mixing the languages: "Are you afraid of a *fait accompli*?" (*Sabre-tooth*: 80). She also uses this blend of languages to exchange cryptic messages with Willie, to avoid that opponents might decipher valuable information. Through her history of wanderings through Middle-Eastern territories, she also gained a lot of "knowledge of foreign customs," which "allow her to operate in situations where her more sheltered (and racially prejudiced) colleagues cannot." (Goh 1999: 34) When Modesty and

Tarrant visit Abu-Tahir, a rich sheik, whom Gabriel plans to rob, Modesty instructs Tarrant how he is supposed to eat from the bowls, in order to not offend the Arabs. That Tarrant has biases about the Arabic culture, is shown through his astonished reactions regarding the food and the sheik's manners: "As the meal progressed Tarrant found himself with a growing liking for Abu-Tahir. The man was rough-hewn but had a natural courtesy." (*Modesty Blaise*: 63)

According to Goh, Modesty's "desire for knowledge of the peculiarities of the other race and culture replaces the desire to exterminate the repulsive other that operates in Fleming's novels." (1999: 37) This desire has resulted into a profound knowledge of martial arts and other Oriental techniques, such as yoga. Together with her exotic appearance, she seems to be like a modern Mata Hari, but she is not condemned for her sexualised and exotic image. Instead it appears that O'Donnell wanted to portray her as the "ideal immigrant." (Goh 1999: 32)

Nevertheless, O'Donnell did not entirely succeed in presenting a completely objective and tolerant vision towards other races. Goh discovered that "the racial other can be accommodated into the dominant culture only by submitting to some extent to the homogenizing pressure of this global model of capitalist enterprise." (1999:38) Indeed, it seems as if Modesty and other characters with foreign origins are only considered positively because they have taken up "Westernized forms of behaviour." (Goh 1999: 38) In the meeting with the Arabic Sheik Abu –Tahir, it is the sheik himself who speaks English, albeit slowly and ungrammatically. He informs after the health of the members of the Royal Family, the famous football player, Stanley Matthews and the American actress, Mae West, thus displaying his knowledge about the Western world. (*Modesty Blaise*: 63) Although the food is supposed to be eaten with hands, the Arabs did serve wine and tea instead of coffee,

which is again a confirmation of their knowledge of British habits. (*Modesty Blaise*: 64) In other words, the racial other adapts himself constantly to the manners and habits of the Western world. Yet, O'Donnell does try to remind the reader of Abu-Tahir's Arabic heritage: "Modesty burped noisily, and Abu-Tahir beamed with pleasure and satisfaction. Remembering his manners, Tarrant tried gallantly, but the eructation eluded him. He uttered an imitation and hoped it would pass." (*Modesty Blaise*: 64) Apparently, burping out loud is a way of saying that the food tastes delicious in the Arabic culture whereas in Britain, and other western countries, it is perceived as rude behaviour.

8 Conclusion

In this thesis I hope to have proven that Modesty Blaise can be considered a worthy predecessor for action heroines as Xena, The Warrior Princess and Lara Croft. To point out that Modesty is one of the first female characters in spy- and thriller- literature to represent a departure from the typical ideas around femininity, I have discussed how other female characters are treated in older works of spy- and thriller literature.

John Buchan's female characters already hinted at the late 19th century- early 20th century New Woman-figure who proclaimed new social roles for women. Although some of his characters expressed protofeminist ideas, – Mary Lamington wanting to be involved in male business and Hilda Von Einem representing independent and sexual freedom – he still rejected those roles for women and eventually neutralized their ideas through portraying them as victims.

The children's literature by William Earl Johns offers more scope and allowed female protagonists to take up more active and sometimes dangerous roles. Flight officer Joan 'Worrals' Worralson and her colleague Betty 'Frecks' Lovell were recruited by the WAAF to

help deliver war aircrafts to several military bases. However, they rapidly get bored with their ordinary function and start their own missions, investigating suspicious Nazi cases. The involvement of women in masculine jobs was typical for that time. Because of World War II, the army needed all the available, fit men to join them in battle, which caused the need for women to take over their jobs to keep the economy going. Evidently, when the war was over, it is also proclaimed the end for women to be professionally active.

Ian Fleming's James Bond novels are situated in the 1950s, a period in which women were confined to domestic activities. However, Fleming's female characters, also known as the Bond Girls, might be seen as exceptions. Through their professional independency and sexual freedom, they seem to be the perfect examples of female emancipation. But Fleming's visual writing style and their narrative function counterwork this idea. The eventual conclusion is that they merely serve as sexual objects, providing visual pleasure to Bond as well as to the public, and underlining Bond's heterosexual masculinity.

We also need to consider the fact that Fleming's novels were written and published during the Cold War. Because of the political and economic instability, Britain viewed immigrants with suspicion, believing that these people were for a large deal responsible for the country's problems. This idea is also reflected in Fleming's novels, in which the racial others mostly fulfil the role of opponent and are depicted in a negative way. Together with the heroic character of James Bond, this depiction enabled Fleming to exalt the Anglo-Saxon culture.

Initially, Modesty Blaise's appearance as a cartoon strip character in the 1960s, whose gender and sexuality were constantly put in the centre of attention, might have led to the vision that she served primarily as eye candy for the male audience. When O'Donnell started

to write novels about Modesty's and Willie's caper adventures, he later admitted in an interview that he preferred writing novels. Because a novel offers more space for text and dialogue, O'Donnell is also able to pay more attention to emotions and the way in which his characters think. In the case of Modesty, he could illustrate her talent for assessing dangerous situations, executing complex plans and her excellent fighting skills, next to her appealing looks and independent sexuality. Modesty personifies the "transgressive action heroine" because her character critiques entrenched ideas about gender; she demonstrates that "toughness does not need to be conceived as a gendered trait." (Brown 2004:64) Thus, we could argue that Modesty is never portrayed as the typical female victim, she is in fact "constructed as a masculine agent in a feminine body, able to compartmentalise her experience and employ her stunning physical attributes as weapons". (White 2007: 76) This is, in my eyes, one key factor of the success of O'Donnell's Modesty Blaise novels.

The other one has to do with how O'Donnell's handles the theme of race. In contrast with Fleming's novels, "O'Donnell's novels must be seen as an early attempt to articulate a popular critique of Western imperialism[...]." (Goh 1999: 36) The fact that his protagonist is a woman with foreign origins already marks that O'Donnell tries to change society's perspective with regard to foreigners. Moreover, he shows the tolerant and open-minded character of Modesty through her role as "catalyst for seemingly unlikely alliances between new British interests and foreign parties," which illustrates his attempt to put racial others in a positive light. (Goh 1999: 37) Robbie Goh, however, already mentioned that O'Donnell's novels were just an "attempt" to criticize the intolerance of British society. (1999: 36) O'Donnell's does not manage to solve this problem, because the racial others are only viewed positively if they adapt to British customs. Nevertheless, I believe Modesty Blaise contributed to a greater tolerance with regard to other races.

Works Cited

Brown, Jeffrey. "Gender, Sexuality and Toughness: The Bad Girls of Action Film and Comic Books." *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture.* Ed. Sherrie Inness. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004. 47-74. Print.

Buchan, John. *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. Rockville, Maryland: Serenity Publishers, LLC, 2009.

---. *Greenmantle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993

---.*Mr. Standfast.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928. Web. 20 October 2011. <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015054070449;view=image;seq=316;num=312;q1=protect%20mary;start=1;size=10;page=search>

Caplen, Robert A. *Shaken & Stirred: The Feminism of James Bond.* Bloomington: Xlibris, 2010.

Darling. Dir. John Schlesinger. Perf. Julie Christie, Dirk Bogarde and Laurence Harvey. Anglo-Amalgamated Film Distributors, 1965. Film.

Dassanowsky, Robert von. "A Caper of One's Own: Fantasy Female Liberation in 1960s Crime Comedy Film." *Journal of Popular Film and Television,* 35.3 (Fall 2007): 107-118. Web. 7 December 2011. <http://search.proquest.com/iipa/docview/2081771?accountid=11077>

Eco, Umberto. *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979.

Edwards, Owen Dudley. *British Children's Fiction in the Second World War.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2007.

Ellis, Peter Berresford and Williams, Piers. "Johns, William Earl (1893–1968)". *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. January 2008. Oxford University Press, 2004. Web. 4 November 2011. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34199>.

Fleming, Ian. *From Russia With Love, Dr. No and Goldfinger,* London: Penguin books, 2002

Fresonke, Kris and Mark Spence. *Lewis and Clark: Legacies, Memories and New Perspectives.* Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004.

Friedrich, Peter. *Modesty Blaise*. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 June 2011 <http://www.sayyide.de/html/start.html.>

Gentlemen prefer Blondes. Dir. Howard Hawks. Perf. Marilyn Monroe, Jane Russell and Charles Coburn. Twentieth Century –Fox Film Corporation, 1953. Film.

Goh, Robbie B.H.. "Race Relations and National Identity: The Dynamics of Representation in 1960s and 1970s Britain" J*ournal of Popular Culture* 32: 4 (1999), 29-43.

Gourley, Catherine. *Gidgets and Women Warriors: Perceptions of Women in the 1950s and 1960s.* Minneapolis: Twenty-First Century Books, 2008.

Grand, Sarah. "The New Aspect of the Woman Question". *The North American Review,* 158.448 (1894): 270-276. Web. 3 November 2011. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25103291>

Harvey, R.C. "Some further adieu". *The Comics Journal. N.p.* 11 May 2010. Web. 25 June 2011 < http://classic.tcj.com/strips/peter-o%E2%80%99donnell-modesty-blaise-and-willie-garvin/>

Hedlundh, Kent. *Modesty Blaise. N.p.,n.d.* Web. 26 June 2011. <http://www8.cs.umu.se/~kenth/modesty.html>.

http://www.modestyblaisebooks.com . N.p., 2008. Web. 25 June 2011

Huisman, Marijke. *Mata Hari (1876-1917): de levende legende.* Uitgeverij Verloren BV Hilversum, 1998.

Inness, Sherrie. Introduction. *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture.* By Inness. Ed. Sherrie Inness. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004. 1-21. Print.
Johns, William Earl. *Worrals Goes East*. London: Hodder & Stoughton Limited, 1950.

Landy, Marcia. "Swinging Femininity, 1960s transnational style." *British Women Cinema.* Ed. Melanie Bell. New York: Routledge, 2010. 111-122. Print.

Macdonald Kate. *John Buchan: A Companion to the Mystery Fiction*. McFarland & Company, Jefferson/North Carolina/London, 2009

---. "Aphrodite Rejected: Archetypal women in Buchan's fiction." *Reassessing John Buchan: Beyond The Thirty-Nine steps*, ed. Kate Macdonald. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009. 153-169.

Markstein, Donald. "Modesty Blaise". *Don Markstein's Toonopedia. N.p., n.d.* Web. 26 June 2011 <http://www.toonopedia.com/modesty.htm>

Monaco, Paul. *The Sixties: 1960-1969.* Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001.

Neuendorf, Kimberley A. et al. "Shaken and Stirred: A Content Analysis of Women's Portrayals in James Bond Films." *Sex Roles*, 62.11-12 (2010): 747-761. Web. 7 December 2011. < http://www.springerlink.com/content/2l54051618834630/>

O'Donnell, Peter. *Modesty Blaise.* Souvenir Press London, 2005.

---, Peter. *Sabre-tooth*. Pan Books ltd. London,1973.

---. "Girl walking: the real Modesty Blaise." *Crime Time. N.p., n.d.* Web. 25 June 2011.

Pringle, Mary Beth., and Anne Stericker. *Sex Roles in Literature.* Longman Inc., New York, 1980.

Proctor, T.M. *Female Intelligence: Women and Espionage in the First World War.* New York and London: New York University Press, 2003.

Quiri, Patricia Ryon. *The Lewis and Clark Expedition.* Minneapolis: Compass Point books, 2000.

Smith, Kevin Burton. "Romeo Brown". *The Thrilling Detective. N.p.*, April 1998. Web. 16 August 2011. <http://www.thrillingdetective.com/romeo.html>

Solomos, John. *Race and Racism in Britain*. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989.

Storey, Neil and Molly Housego. *Women in the First World War*. Shire Publications Ltd. Oxford, 2010.

The Original G.I. Jane.. N.p , n..d. Web. 14 November 2011. <http://www.skylighters.org/jane>

Valenti, Kristy. "Peter O'Donnell: an Appreciation, Part Two" *Comixology. N.p.*, 3 June 2008. Web. 4 Feb. 2011.

Ward, Brian. *The 1960s: A Documentary Reader.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2010.

White, Rosie. *Violent Femmes: Women as Spies in Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Young, William H. and Nancy K. Young. *The 1950s.* Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004.