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### **The Physiognomy of Evil in *From Russia With Love***

„He is a creature of his time. I wouldn't say he's particularly typical of our times, but he is certainly a man *of his times*“ (Haining 42). This statement by the creator of James Bond, Ian Fleming, from an interview conducted less than a year before Fleming's death, points out an important aspect about his secret agent, the novels and their huge success. As is typical of a novel series belonging to the genre of the spy thriller, the Bond novels are very much a product of their time. As Donald McCormick and Katy Fletcher put it in their introduction to *Spy Fiction. A Connoisseur's Guide*:

[It] is important to look at spy fiction, not just as an enjoyable form of entertainment, but also as a reflection of the social and political values of our time.

All forms of literature reflect the social and political attitudes of the author and the culture of the country in which he or she lives. Spy fiction is no exception, and in some cases this can add to our knowledge of espionage. John le Carré once wrote that the British secret services were 'microcosms of the British condition of our social attitudes and vanities'. This statement can be applied to the spy fiction of any country, the background of which is the real world of politics and international intrigue; moreover it is this reality that provides the stories and events of the modern spy novel (McCormick and Fletcher 1).

Fleming's Bond novels react to and reflect society's contemporary concerns and fears, its attitudes and beliefs, the general *Zeitgeist*. These fears are embodied by 007's opponent, the villain with his evil plan, who thus becomes a blueprint on which to read what troubled British society in the 1950s and 1960s, while of course we must bear in mind that these are fictional renderings mediated by an author and not documentary evidence. But they can still serve as commentary of the period, the country and its society. Thus, just like James Bond himself, the villain is also a man of his times.

As has often been noted, Bond's opponents share certain characteristics, and much speculation has been made on the real-life or literary models on which they are based. This paper will look at the villains created by Fleming in the novels. After outlining the possible models for Fleming's villains, painting a general picture of them as regards their appearance, character and other hallmarks, juxtaposing the villain with James Bond and drawing on the framework of physiognomy, I will concentrate on one novel, *From Russia With Love*, which was published in 1957. Much has been written about the Cold War context within which the novel is set. This paper will focus on the hitherto neglected image presented of the Irish in the novel within the framework of Ireland's decolonisation and Britain's post-imperial state of decline. I propose to show that the portrayal of Red Grant can easily be placed in the long-standing tradition of popular British portrayal of the Irish and as such echoes British society's prejudices and fears awakened by contemporary developments.

There has been a great deal of speculation on Fleming's inspiration for his villains. The origins of some can be traced to either literary or real-life figures. Le Chiffre from the first Bond adventure, *Casino Royale*, published in 1953, is said to be modelled on the notorious black magician and drug fiend Aleister Crowley, who was known as „The Wickedest Man in the World“, who referred to himself as „The Great Beast“ and ran an abbey in Sicily which became notorious for sex and drug orgies. When he returned to England just before World War II, Fleming – who was working for Naval Intelligence - contacted him to request his services in a military operation (Haining 60-61). Le Chiffre is described as having a very pale complexion, red-brown hair, expensive false teeth, hairy hands, masochist tendencies, a benzedrine addiction and „[l]arge sexual appetites“. He never laughs and rarely smiles (20). It is quite possible that Fleming used Crowley as a model for some of Le Chiffre's characteristics.

A certain Baron Hofflinger is supposed to have been the model for Auric Goldfinger. With his short, thick, ugly body, round head, „crew-cut carrot hair“ and a passion for

winning at cards and acquiring gold the villain seems very closely modelled on Hofflinger who was „short, swarthy and with black eyebrows (...) a round, domed head (...) a passion for horses (...) and diamonds“ (Haining 67). The name Auric is obviously derived from the Latin for gold and the surname could be taken from a certain Berlin jeweller called Mendel Goldfinger who was involved in a smuggling operation with the British Secret Service after the Second World War (Walter 71-72).

For his characterisation of Dr No, a Chinese-German halfbreed, Fleming drew on Sax Rohmer's ruthless Chinese villain Fu Manchu, also called „the Devil Doctor“. Christopher Lee, who is a cousin of Fleming and played Scaramanga in the film version of *The Man With the Golden Gun*, is quoted as saying, „Ian told me all about him being modelled on Fu Mnachu“ (Haining 63).

Finally, the killer Red Grant in *From Russia With Love*, owes, if not his characteristics, then at least his name to a Jamaican cook admired by Fleming for his recipe for Strong Bak Soup (Pearson 198). Of course these sketchy outlines do not do justice to the sources and influences for 007's opponents, but they shall suffice here as a general idea as to where Fleming looked for inspiration for his villains.

In the above listing certain characteristics and hallmarks have already emerged. In fact, it is possible to draw up an entire catalogue of characteristics common to the typical – if not to say stereotypical – Bond villain. This catalogue would contain chapters on physical appearance, character and habits, and origin. In terms of physical appearance Fleming goes into great detail. „Grotesque“ and „ugly“ are the words most often used for the resulting overall impression. The villains' physical appearance usually includes a rather pale complexion, for example on Le Chiffre as mentioned above, on Goldfinger – who in his desperate attempts to cover it up with a tan makes, in Bond's words, „a fetish of sunburn“ (28)<sup>1</sup>, and on Red Grant whom we first encounter lying in the grass being massaged by a girl

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<sup>1</sup> The numbers in parentheses refer to the page numbers in the respective novels.

who comments on „the reddish colour of the sunburn on the naturally milk-white skin, the sort of roast meat look“ (11). The villain is very often of strong build, usually short and fat, has a huge head (Mr Big, Hugo Drax) and coarse facial features. Although Red Grant is in excellent physical shape, it is exactly this perfection which makes him repulsive. Other features described at length are the eyes, earlobes, mouth, nose, chin and jaw.

Hair is an extremely important feature, especially when it is found in excess in the wrong places: Hugo Drax has patches of hair on his cheekbones, Le Chiffre has hairy hands. What is most striking, though, is that a considerable number of Bond villains are redheads: Le Chiffre, Hugo Drax, Goldfinger, Jack Spang in *Diamonds are Forever*, Rosa Klebb and Red Grant, who is so much identified with his red hair that it becomes his nickname. (In addition, by referring to the colour red, Grant's name hints at his involvement with communist Russia.) Just as it is the aim of these features to create the impression of ugliness, monstrosity, evil or initially at least doubt about the integrity of the person, so does the red hair also serve this purpose.

Red hair as a stigma, the hallmark of a dubious character or the sign of evil looks back on a long tradition. In the medieval system of aesthetic conventions red hair was an indication of a generally evil disposition (Martin 233). The frequent assumption that red hair on a woman meant that she was a witch illustrates the strong prejudice and suspicion surrounding red hair which found their way into the literary conventions of character description and which Fleming clearly draws on. More shall be said on the significance of red hair within the context of discussing *From Russia With Love*.

Another aspect of aesthetic conventions is the praise of any feature that is well-formed and well in proportion (Martin 233). Many Bond villains are described as being the exact opposite. Goldfinger is a case in point. On scrutinizing him Bond even explicitly says, „Nothing seemed to belong“ (28). Also, deformities or artificial body parts are quite common:

Hugo Drax has a scarred face, Le Chiffre false teeth, Dr No metal pincers for hands. These features echo the Frankenstein motif which underlines the villains' monstrosity and otherness.

In the tradition of physiognomy, the face and the physical appearance in general serve as a map on which to read a person's character and disposition. Johann Caspar Lavater, who developed his theories in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, is considered the father of physiognomy, but it is in fact an ancient science. Its origins go back to Aristotle's *De Physiognoma*, and in this work Aristotle himself discusses even earlier works on the subject. Part of *De Physiognoma*, for example, is on the use of animal analogies in reading human character. It was Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente*, published between 1775 and 1778, that sparked off a wave of enthusiasm for this would-be science and influenced novelists in their descriptions of people (Fahnestock 334).

Fleming in his description of 007's opponents can be regarded as writing within this tradition. He gives his villains animal tags like dragon (Hugo Drax) and toad (Rosa Klebb). Red Grant is likened to several animals to emphasize his evil nature: snake, pig, and werewolf. These epithets add to the mythical quality often commented on that surrounds the Bond villains and their world of power, greed, wealth, vanity and self-confidence, and stands in stark contrast to Bond's more realistic world, which in the novels is made up of a desk job, paper work, a civil servant's salary and material detail such as Morlands cigarettes. Fleming said himself that the novels were „fairy-tales for grown-ups“ and that he put in such details not to make Bond out to be a snob but because „the readers enjoy such idiosyncracies“ (Haining 41).

Fleming's position within the physiognomical tradition is particularly evident from the narrative technique with which he introduces Bond and the reader to the evil character and lets Bond draw his conclusions from what he sees. A classic case in point is Bond's first encounter with Goldfinger. After giving a detailed description of Goldfinger's physical

appearance through Bond's eyes, Fleming lets the reader in on what 007 thinks of his opponent's looks:

To sum up, thought Bond, it was the face of a thinker, perhaps a scientist, who was ruthless, sensual, stoical and tough. An odd combination.

What else could he guess? Bond always mistrusted short men. They grew up from childhood with an inferiority complex. All their lives they would strive to be big. Bigger than the others who had teased them as a child. Napoleon had been short, and Hitler. It was the short men that caused all the trouble in the world. And what about a misshapen short man with red hair and a bizarre face? That might add up to a really formidable misfit. One could certainly feel the repressions. There was a powerhouse of vitality humming in the man that suggested that if one stuck an electric bulb into Goldfinger's mouth it would light up. Bond smiled at the thought. Into what channels did Goldfinger release his vital force? Into getting rich? Into sex? Into power? Probably into all three. What could his history be? Today he might be an Englishman. What had he been born? Not a Jew - though there might be Jewish blood in him. Not a Latin or anything farther south. Not a Slav. Perhaps a German - no, a Balt! That's where he would have come from. One of the Baltic provinces. Probably got away to escape the Russians. Goldfinger would have been warned - or his parents had smelled trouble and they had got him out in time. And what had happened then? How had he worked his way up to being one of the richest men in the world? One day it might be interesting to find out. (28/29)

So with no prior knowledge about this man Bond applies the classic method of deduction in using the clues from Goldfinger's outward appearance to form a picture of his character, motivation and origin. The assumption is of course that there exists a one to one correlation between outward appearance and inner life. The physiognomy provides the clues which the onlooker deciphers and puts together like a cryptanalyst.

The question of origin is a further aspect that clearly distinguishes the villains from 007. To begin with, they are not English. An obscure, shadowy, or ambiguous background is another hallmark that most villains share: Red Grant is Irish-German, Dr No is Chinese-German, Goldfinger and Le Chiffre are of mixed blood, Blofeld is the son of a Polish father and Greek mother, and although Hugo Drax claims to be English he turns out to be German. To use foreigners as villains is of course a well established literary strategy and the novels are full of sweeping general statements about other nationalities, most notably about the Russians as a cruel, hard, masochistic people with no sense of humour in *From Russia With Love*. The Bond villains' international background forms a distinct opposition to Bond's clearly defined

national world of Britishness along with such values as loyalty, patriotism, obedience and the fulfillment of duty. The villains' association with „trans-national organisational structures“ (Woolf 92) like SMERSH and SPECTRE only adds to the grand scale of their cosmic ambitions and ethnic elusiveness. Their international background suggests they have no loyalties except to themselves and, most of all, it means that they defy classification and upset a conveniently orderly view of the world. According to Michael Woolf, „Fleming sets up an ethical opposition between the national and the international“ and his view of the world „derives from a combination of traditional xenophobia with an essentially nationalistic view of the post-war world“ (Woolf 93). This post-war world was marked by the Cold War, the dissolution of the well-ordered world of the British Empire, the decline of Britain's international importance and the increasing racial diversity of a hitherto largely homogeneous society through the influx of immigrants from the Commonwealth countries. Looked at in this framework Fleming's novels, written in „the rhetoric of racial and national superiority“ (Goh 30), hark back to that glorious time when Britain was the leading world power. By constructing the image of the villains as foreigners and as in national terms ambiguous characters, Fleming follows a well-known fictional strategy as well as reflecting and underlining British society's concerns and fears of the time. This is nowhere as apparent as in *From Russia With Love*.

*From Russia With Love* was published in 1957 as the fifth novel in the series. At the beginning of the novel, the Russian secret service, wishing to strike a fatal blow at „the heart of the intelligence apparatus of the West“ (35), compares the Western secret services and conclude that Britain's is „the most dangerous“ and the one they „would most wish to damage“ (36) in order to weaken the entire Western alliance (39). The American secret service is quickly dismissed with the words, „I do not think the Americans need engage the attention of this conference“ (39). As Andrew Blake points out, the Suez crisis in 1956 and the discovery of traitors within the British system (Burgess and Maclean, who are mentioned

twice in the novel, and Philby, who was under suspicion in 1957) are important historical events connected with the construction of the novel and its themes of infiltration, deceit and the question of loyalty. In this context the fiction serves, for one, as „an assertion of British superiority over the wealthy ex-colonial upstarts who had domineered over Suez. It is also an assertion that despite the presence of known traitors within the British secret service, the enemy is still afraid of the British“ and „that the traitors had not in fact damaged the state“ (Blake 60). Fleming’s novel thus reflects the current concerns and reassures the public that as long as a figure like Bond exists no harm can be done to the established institutions and the status quo can be maintained.

There is another historical context centered around the killer Red Grant which has, to my knowledge, been neglected in discussions of the novel, although it adds considerably to understanding the scope and themes of the novel and contributes to illustrating how Fleming’s fictions respond to current concerns. Red Grant, whose actual name is Donovan Grant, is an Irishman of Irish and German descent born in Northern Ireland and brought up in Aughnacloy on the border with the Republic. Fleming’s characterisation of him is strewn with stereotypes. He of course has red hair. He is a violent loner and as an adolescent becomes involved with Sinn Fein, the political arm of the IRA, and with local smugglers. As befits an Irishman he is good at boxing, goes to Belfast to train and wins the North of Ireland light-heavyweight championship. His bloodthirsty werewolf nature breaks out at the full moon and drives him to killing people. But naturally his training in the National Service in England has a civilising effect on him. Instead, at the full moon, he now turns to that other ‘Irish pastime’ - drink. While stationed in Berlin he goes over to the Russians because he likes „their carelessness of human life“ and in time becomes their Chief Executioner (16-18). When given the order to kill 007, his „enthusiasm was genuine. He asked nothing better than to kill an Englishman. He had accounts to settle with the bastards“ (74).



Even this brief sketch shows the English prejudices and stereotypes towards the Irish: They are emotionally unstable, violent, good boxers, given to drink, treacherous. Grant's teaming up with the Russians against Britain echoes the age-old British fear of the Irish forming alliances with the enemy (historically, the French and the Spanish) and thus enabling him to enter Britain through the back door. This is underlined when Grant poses as fellow British agent Nash, and Bond, though his suspicions are aroused – not least of all by Grant's „hint of a brogue“ – cannot quite put his finger on what exactly is bothering him about Grant's imitation of a gentleman (180). Grant is the traitor from the inside as well as the enemy from the outside who has wormed his way in. Describing Grant as a pig, a snake, a werewolf places this novel within the long tradition of the simianization of the Irish as an exercise of Britain's superiority as the coloniser over the unruly Irish who were to be brought to order and discipline by British rule. Britain exerts a taming influence on Grant during his training in England, which causes him to stop his werewolf activities.

As mentioned in the introduction, the real world of politics is reflected in the story-line of the modern spy novel. Contemporary developments in the relations between Britain and Ireland provide the background for the figure of Red Grant in *From Russia With Love*, which Fleming wrote in 1956/57. In 1949 the Irish Free State declared itself a Republic, thus removing ambiguities in its constitutional position, giving up its dominion status, achieving freedom and thereby diminishing the size of the Empire. Britain reluctantly recognised the new Republic of Ireland. Northern Ireland, however, remained part of the United Kingdom. This provoked the IRA – an illegal organisation in both the North and the Republic – to start its Border Campaign in November 1956 in order to try to overthrow the North by force. The British government reacted to the IRA violence with internment, the campaign failed and was abandoned in February 1962.

By incorporating an Irish defector in *From Russia With Love* Fleming stretches the Cold War context to include contemporary developments in post-imperial Britain directly

connected to the process of decolonisation: the diminution of Britain's Commonwealth and its concomitant decline as a world power, the rebellion by an illegal organisation against Westminster rule on British territory, and the mixed reception of Irish immigrants in British society. After World War II Britain replaced the USA as the No.1 destination for Irish emigrants. I would also suggest that the eradication of Grant's Irish background from the 1963 film version owes much to changes in the political climate: The Border Campaign had been stopped in 1962, by 1963 the IRA was in eclipse, the leaders of the North and the Republic were meeting for talks towards constructive relations and the Republic was entering into close trade agreements with Britain. In such a positive political atmosphere to have depicted Grant in the film as he is portrayed in the novel would have been anachronistic. The movie makers had to move with the times to make the film Bond and his opponent men of *their* time.

To sum up, Fleming writes within the tradition of character description with the help of physiognomy and actively employs Bond in the process of using the physical clues to decipher the opponent's character. In the way they are depicted Fleming's villains are products of their times and embody society's concerns and fears of the time. The figure of Red Grant and the context of Ireland's decolonisation add another dimension to *From Russia With Love* and highlight its themes.

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