The Beauty Mystique: Ethics and Aesthetics in the Bond Genre

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Physical beauty is widely identified in the Graeco-Roman Western tradition as a symbol of moral beauty and goodness. Ever since Plato, the good and the beautiful have been a unified conception. The phrase “She’s a beautiful person” merges ethics and aesthetics to neatly identify both the moral and physical dimensions of beauty. Similarly such descriptions as “divinely beautiful,” looking “angelic,” and especially “looking good” all equate beauty and goodness.

Beauty and goodness (or virtue) are therefore semiotically reciprocal. The signifier and the signified are one, albeit in different cognitive dimensions. This semiotic reciprocity thus reflects and reinforces both the physicality of moral beauty and the morality of physical beauty.

Conversely, physical ugliness and moral evil are also reciprocal. The ugly and deformed are feared, and are often depicted in mythology, the media, literature, fairy-tales, and especially in the imagination as evil and vicious. The evil—villains, devils, monsters, bogeymen—are believed to be ugly “inside and out.” These connections are clear in such phrases as “looks like hell,” “ugly as sin,” and “evil-looking.”

These associations all suggest a pervasive ideology of beautyism which exalts and institutionalizes the primacy of the beautiful over the ugly. Physical beauty in our culture is inseparable from the face. Similarly, “beautyism” is inseparable from “facism,” or the belief that the face, as the pre-eminent symbol of the self, is the mirror not only of the personality but also of the soul, as it often is of the

1 However naive and even silly these equations and polarizations may seem to our modern and scientifically “enlightened” ears, we must recognize that the “beauty mystique” is very much part of our culture and is as old as our civilization itself. It goes back at least as far as Homer and Plato. Indeed, Plato argued in the Symposium (211-2) that the love of the physical beauty of a particular boy is the first step on the “heavenly ladder” to knowledge and love of Beauty to the divine beauty which is God (1963: 562-3). This idea was further developed and sanctified by Augustine and Aquinas, secularized during the Renaissance, lauded by the Romantics, and is only now being researched by social scientists (cf. Synnott, 1989, 1990).
emotions. The linkage of beautyism and facism has resulted in great value being placed on facial beauty and facial ugliness which are widely perceived as defining the moral and spiritual value of the individual. And researchers have clarified the "halo effect" of beauty and the "horns effect" of ugliness (Berscheid and Walster, 1972; Dion et al, 1972). Indeed the semiotic power of beauty is all the greater for being denied by some—Tolstoy, for example, wrote: "It is amazing how complete is the delusion that beauty is goodness" (1978: 538)—and deprecated by others, including many feminists (e.g., de Beauvoir, 1953; Greer, 1971; Baker, 1984, to name just a few) as well as the ascetic and Puritan traditions in the Christian ethos.

The beauty-ugliness distinction—perhaps the last major area of prejudice and discrimination to be socially appreciated—is congruent with such other dualisms as black-white (racism), male-female (sexism), and young-old (agism). In this sense, the body and how it is evaluated can be regarded as a significant political problem, and may even by the source of many of our current controversies and conflicts.

Beauty is normative; and ugliness is normative. Physical beauty or ugliness is never simply a physical state. However they are defined, and definitions are culturally relative, as well as subjective, these physical states are always evaluated. And they are evaluated as positive or negative respectively. Thus they are perceived (or decoded) as signs and symbols of something else: good and bad.

If so, "beautyism" is not likely to be a problem with which we can easily and readily come to terms. Indeed, the moral evaluations associated with beauty and ugliness are such pervasive features of our civilization that they have become central motifs in the popular culture. Nowhere, perhaps, is this more evident than in the James Bond novels of Ian Fleming, the most popular literary works of the twentieth century and, perhaps, of all time.2

This paper examines the Bond novels to demonstrate how "the beauty mystique" is persistently used to distinguish the "good" guys from the "bad" guys. It should be understood that these novels not only equate physical and moral beauty (thus differentiating "us" from "them"), but they also socialize the readers into the beauty mystique, thereby reinforcing its meanings and social consequences.

2The 12 James Bond novels and two collections of Bond stories are perhaps the best known series of literary works in this century. By the time of Fleming's death in 1964 they had sold more than 40 million copies in 26 languages. With most still in print, their total sales have now topped 100 million. In addition, 18 James Bond movies have been produced in the last 25 years, with 1.5 billion tickets sold. The James Bond character has outlived his creator to become the subject of new thrillers, written by Robert Markham (Kingsley Amis) and John Gardner, and new movies. The latest film, License to Kill, with Timothy Dalton as James Bond, premiered in 1989.
The Good and the Good-Looking

James Bond is constantly described as good-looking by all the beautiful women in his life. Vesper Lynd, in Casino Royale (ch. 5), says “He is very good-looking. He reminds me rather of Hoagy Carmichael.” Lisl Baum in Quantum of Solace remarks “he has a rather cruel smile. But he is very handsome.”

Such compliments are deficient in detail; but a more detailed and more ambiguous description is given in Casino Royale (ch. 1), the first of the Bond novels, when Bond is asleep:

with the warmth and humour of his eyes extinguished, his features relapsed into a taciturn mask, ironical, brutal and cold.

Bond is seemingly a contradictory character: warm and humourous (readable in the eyes) and also brutal, cold and taciturn (readable in the other features of the face). A clearer description, and analysis, is given in From Russia with Love (ch. 6):

It was a dark, clean-cut face, with a three-inch scar showing whitely down the sunburned skin of the right cheek. The eyes were wide and level under straight, rather long black brows. The hair was black, parted on the left, and carelessly brushed so that a thick black comma fell down over the right eyebrow. The longish straight nose ran down to a short upper lip below which was a wide and finely drawn but cruel mouth. The line of the jaw was straight and firm... General G. held the photograph out at arm’s length. Decision, authority, ruthlessness—these qualities he could see.

Where did General G. see these qualities? Was decision in the level eyes? Authority in the line of the jaw? Ruthlessness in the level eyes or the line of the jaw? It is not facetious to wonder what the short upper lip means, and whether the mouth was cruel because it was down-turned like a shark or snapped shut like a trap or had thin lips or wet lips or a short upper lip. The physiognomist must enquire how General G. knew the mouth was cruel. (Can one have cruel ears?) Whatever the difficulties with physiognomies, however, the value of the face is clearly paramount.

Bond, as good-looking, is immensely attractive to women but he is not just “a pretty face.” He is also brutal, cold and cruel, capable of decision, authority and ruthlessness. For a man, in Fleming’s semiotic equations, beauty is not enough. (For women, according to Fleming, it is).

But is the good-looking Bond good? He is not good in the Platonist ideal of the philosopher-king in the pursuit of wisdom, nor good in
the Christian sense of loving God, following the eight Beatitudes, and obeying the Ten Commandments. And he was no ascetic, but a gourmet of wine, of food, a lover of women, and a gambler and a killer. He spent his spare time "making love with rather cold passion, to one of three similarly disposed married women." He was not as virtuous as Richard Hannay, the hero of many of the novels of John Buchan, nor "such an ideal example for the young," observed Bergonzi (1958: 222).

Yet Bond has remained a hero, of sorts, for 37 years; and the age of Fleming was a nuclear era and a holocaust away from the age of Buchan. In this new era, perhaps, readers could no longer believe that victory went to the virtuous, or that virtue was its own reward.

Goodness is not enough to ensure the triumph of right over wrong—or in these novels, the triumph of Britain and her allies over the forces of evil—but it is still essential to justify and legitimate that triumph. Thus Bond is good (as well as good-looking). His "virtue" can be shown in various interlocking dimensions. First, it has to be seen in contrast to the immensity of the evil against which he fights. Bond clearly believes in his causes. Beginning one adventure, he considers: "It had the right ingredients—physical exertion, mystery and a ruthless enemy. He had a good companion. His cause was just" (Dr. No, ch. 7). And at another time Bond echoes Henry V at the battle of Harfleur: "Once more into the breach, dear friends! This time it really was St. George and the dragon" (Goldfinger, ch. 18).

Beauty, justice, goodness, sanctity, and England are all one, united against the dragon, injustice, ugliness, and so on.

Bond is not a simple automaton; he is portrayed as a thinker. For him, patriotism is not enough. He does not believe in the slogan "My country, right or wrong." This defense of action had gone out with Nuremberg, as Fleming was well aware. Bond explained to one friend that his motives are personal, not political: "If he [Le Chiffre] were here now, I wouldn't hesitate to kill him, but out of personal revenge and not, I'm afraid, for some high moral reason or for the sake of my country" (Casino Royale, ch. 20).

While this defense would hardly hold up in a court of law, the point is that Bond expresses a personal ethic of morality. One might not like his Hobbesian world, but in his own terms Bond can and does justify his actions to himself, and rationally. He is therefore good by his own subjective criteria—as well as in contrast to the evils he fights.

In the later Bond novels, Bond's ethical sense shifted its base from private to public. A particularly unpleasant (and physically

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"Good" is a term which Bond and Fleming would have probably disdained: they might have preferred the term "honourable," or even "quixotic."
grotesque) villain named Hammerstein has had killed a very pleasant, elderly English couple, the Havelocks, who happen to be personal friends of M, Bond’s chief. Legal proof is not available. What is the moral, ethical, thing to do?

There were no doubts in Bond’s mind. He didn’t know the Havelocks or care who they were. Hammerstein had operated the law of the jungle on two defenseless old people. Since no other law was available, the law of the jungle should be visited upon Hammerstein. In no other way could justice be done. If it were revenge, it was the revenge of the community. (For Your Eyes Only)

As Bond explained it to M: “This is a case for rough justice—an eye for an eye.” Nothing personal, as there had been in Casino Royale. “This was merely his job—as it was the job of a pest control officer to kill rats. He was the public executioner appointed by M to represent the community.”

Not only does his stance against evil make Bond morally good, but he is also an honourable man, in his fashion. Bond has his own code of values, his own sense of honour and of what is or is not appropriate. Although he kills, it is only in the line of duty, usually after considerable provocation and in self-defense, and he takes no sadistic joy in the killing (unlike, say, Mickey Spillane’s Mike Hammer). He does not steal. He does not cheat at cards, except again in the line of duty. He does not use people. He risks his life for his friends and for his country. He refuses rewards (e.g., a knighthood), which makes him modest, perhaps. He is brave (“If you get killed, you get killed, Okay?” “That’s all right.” Risico). In his friend’s words “he fears nothing save the emotions” (Risico). He behaves like a gentleman at all times. He is essentially, but perhaps not typically British, which in Fleming’s view was “a good thing.” Thus, Bond is good both by objective criteria and by his own lights.

But Bond is also Fleming. Pearson, Fleming’s biographer, makes the astute point that James Bond “is Fleming’s dream of a self that might have been—a tougher, stronger, more effective, duller, far less admirable character than the real Fleming.” He was “the ideal Walter Mitty type figure for Fleming and for all of us who watch and want but do not do” (1966: 199-200). Fleming was well aware of this, for although he once dismissed Bond, in his self-deprecating way, as a “cardboard booby,” he also remarked, when beginning a new book, that he was engaged in “the next volume of my autobiography” (1966: 303, 300). He dressed Bond in the same clothes, they smoke the same cigarettes, have the same views on women and men. They enjoy gambling, fast cars, good food, etc.; Both were born in Scotland, and both went to Eton; both are Commanders in the Royal
Navy, Fleming’s war-time rank; and, more to our present purposes, they even look alike. In the first two volumes, Bond is “shadowy and unreal”—he is only seen in a mirror, but, to quote Pearson, “The face the author described staring back, with its ‘black hair and high cheekbones’ is unmistakable. James Bond is simply Ian Fleming daydreaming in the third person.” The “cruel face” of Fleming, as one of his girl friends described it, was passed on to Bond; so was the comma of hair, the left hand parting, the long nose, the black hair (1966: 218, 51, 81). Bond’s face is a self-portrait by Fleming, except for two things: Fleming did not have Bond’s scar, and Bond did not have Fleming’s broken nose. But the saturnine good looks are identical.

Bond’s friends and allies are also good-looking. Just to cite two: Sable Basilisk “was rapier-slim, with a fine, thin, studious face that was saved from seriousness by wry lines at the edges of the mouth and an ironical glint in the level eyes” (On Her Majesty’s Secret Service, ch. 7). Strangways had “the sort of aquiline good looks you associate with the bridge of a destroyer” (Dr. No, ch. 1).

The good women, as Amis has observed, are of “uniformly stunning beauty,” but very similar. They are usually blonde, always blue-eyed (except twice), often suntanned, with a wide mouth, small nose and high cheekbones. “She is tall, five foot seven or above, and not thin. Her most frequently mentioned feature is her fine, firm, faultless, splendid, etc., breasts” (1966: 45). Not that the women are flawless. Domino Vitale in Thunderball had a “gay, to-hell-with-you face” and a limp; and Honeychile Rider (in Dr. No) had a broken nose. Bond loved it, and “it suddenly occurred to him that he would be sad when she was just an immaculately beautiful girl like other beautiful girls” (ch. 13). The “just” is superb, but by his fifth book, Fleming was becoming more subtle.

Fleming did not usually exert his physiognomic skills in the description of women, but one exception is Solitaire in Live and Let Die (ch. 7), who is described and judged as follows:

The eyes were blue, alight and disdainful, but, as they gazed into his with a touch of humour, he realized they contained some message for him personally. It quickly vanished as his own eyes answered. Her hair was blue-black and fell heavily to her shoulders. She had high cheek-bones and a wide, sensual mouth which held a hint of cruelty. Her jawline was delicate and finely cut. It showed decision and an iron will which were repeated in the straight, pointed nose. Part of the beauty of the face lay in its lack of compromise. It was a face born to command.

Humour, disdain, and the wish to communicate are located in the eyes; sensuality and cruelty can be seen in the mouth; decision and
will may be seen in the jawline and the nose; and command in the face as a whole. However, Solitaire was beautiful and like all the beautiful women she was on the side of the angels. Indeed, all the women on the good side are beautiful. The opposite is true for the villains, both male and female.

The Bad and the Ugly

The villains are uniformly ugly, indeed usually grotesque; they look as evil as they are. They are also foreign. Ugliness, evil and foreignness go together, complementing and reinforcing each other. Ugliness symbolizes evil and evil is symbolized by ugliness and foreignness.

In the Bond novels, the evil of the villains is gargantuan in scale. Goldfinger, for instance, planned to take all the gold in Fort Knox; he cheated at golf, apparently a reliable indication of major villainy. He certainly looked the part:

Goldfinger was short, not more than five feet tall, and on top of the thick body and blunt, peasant legs, was set almost directly into the shoulders, a huge and it seemed almost exactly round head. It was as if Goldfinger had been put together with bits of other people’s bodies. Nothing seemed to belong.

In You Only Live Twice (ch. 12) Bond admits that he, like General G., is “something of a physiognomist.” But he is also a psychologist, and applied Neo-Freudian compensation and repression theory to a psychoanalysis of Goldfinger (ch. 3):

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 repression.

Dr. No, another villain, was an agent of the Soviet Union who interfered with the navigational systems of the United States’ guided missiles programs, therefore upsetting the balance of power

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4This physiognomics is well within the Aristotelian tradition, but the most striking aspect of this description is the similarity to the description of Bond. Fleming cited earlier.
and threatening international peace. He was six feet six, a mixture of German and Chinese ancestry, and illegitimate; his name symbolized his rejection of his father "and of all authority." "The head . . . was elongated and tapered from a round, completely bald skull down to a sharp chin so that the impression was of a reversed raindrop—or rather oildrop, for the skin was of a deep almost translucent yellow." No lines showed on his face, and his forehead was "as smooth as the top of the polished skull"; "slanting jet black eyes stared out of the skull. They were without eyelashes. They looked like the mouths of two small revolvers, direct and unblinking and totally devoid of expression" (Dr. No, ch. 14).

There is a point, however, at which description shades off into invective, as Bond ponders on Dr. No:

The bizarre gliding figure looked like a giant venomous worm wrapped in grey tin-foil, and Bond would not have been surprised to see the rest of it trailing slimily along the carpet behind.

As if this were not enough he had two pairs of steel pincers for hands, which had been chopped off for theft, and his heart was, by a one in a million chance, on his right side.

Mr. Big, a black master criminal in Live and Let Die, was a known killer, an agent of the Soviet Union, a voodoo leader, and the captor of the beautiful Solitaire. His evil is evident not only in his gross body but also in his ugly head:

It was a great football of a head, twice the normal size and very nearly round. The skin was grey-black, taut and shining like the face of a week-old corpse in the river. It was hairless, except for some grey-brown fluff above the ears. There were no eyebrows and no eyelashes and the eyes were extraordinarily far apart so that one could not focus on them both, but only on one at a time. . . . They were animal eyes, not human, and they seemed to blaze.

Bond surmised that "so ghastly a misfit must have been bent since childhood on revenge against fate and against the world that hated because it feared him" (ch. 7).

It is worth noting that the deaths of these villains is congruent with their evil and the ugliness. Goldfinger is sucked out of the cabin of an aircraft, Dr. No is buried under a pile of guano, and Mr. Big is eaten by sharks.

Fleming's semiotic techniques are fairly clear; he plays with size, weight and hair, comments particularly on the eyes and the mouth and slips in the occasional, quite imaginative but horrible invective. On the short end of the spectrum is the aforementioned Von
Hammerstein, only five feet four; for him, hair is the relevant signifier of the self (cf. Synnott, 1987):

A mat of black hair covered his breasts and shoulder blades, and his arms and legs were thick with it. By contrast, there was not a hair on his face or head and his skull was a glittering whitish yellow with a deep dent at the back that might have been a wound or the scar of a trepanning.

His eyes were “piggish,” and the large mouth had “hideous lips—thick and wet and crimson.”

One villain had lost his lower lip: “perhaps he had talked too much—and this had given him a permanent false smile like the grin of a Halloween pumpkin” (Goldfinger, ch. 17). Another had a syphilitic nose and another had a “neck like a white slug.”

If their faces did not give the villains away, their bodies did: too tall, too short, too fat, too thin. Scaramanga, in The Man with the Golden Gun, has three nipples. “Shady” Tree is a red-haired hunchback with “a pair of china eyes that were so empty and motionless that they might have been hired by a taxidermist” (Diamonds are Forever, ch. 7). Dr. No had steel pincers, as well as a misplaced heart, Von Hammerstein had matted body hair, and Goldfinger “had been put together with bits of other people’s bodies”.

In most cases, therefore, face and body spoke the same language and reinforced each other. Soul and body are one, and the body, especially the face, is portrayed as the physical expression of the soul, for better or for worse.

The female villains were equally ugly. Irma Bunt planned to infect England with cattle pests and, after the plan was foiled by Bond, she shot and killed Tracy, Bond’s newly married wife.

She looked like a very sunburned female wardress. She had a square, brutal face with hard yellow eyes. Her smile was an oblong hole without humour or welcome, and there were sunburn blisters at the left corner of her mouth which she licked from time to time with the tip of a pale tongue (On Her Majesty’s Secret Service, ch. 9)

From Russia with Love details the Soviet effort to assassinate Bond. The plan is co-ordinated by the sexually neuter Colonel Rosa Klebb:

The thinning orange hair scraped back to the tight, obscene bun; the shiny yellow-brown eyes that stared too coldly at General G. through shard-eyed squares of glass, the wedge of thickly powdered, large-
pored nose; the wet trap of a mouth, that went on opening and shutting as if it was operated by wires under the chin. Those French women, as they sat and knitted and chatted while the guillotine clanged down, must have had the same pale, thick chicken's skin that scragged in little folds under the eyes and at the corner of the mouth and below the jaws, the same big peasant's ears... And their faces must have conveyed the same impression... of coldness and cruelty and strength (ch. 7).

There are only three other female villains in the Bond canon. One, the beautiful Vesper Lynd in the first novel, Casino Royale, is a British double agent and commits suicide. Her death resolves the inconsistency between evil and beauty. Another is the beautiful blonde, Soviet sniper in "The Living Daylights" who, because of her beauty, lived. Bond, refusing to kill her, only shot her in the hand so she could not kill again. Note that the ugly villains, male or female, die. Death is the penalty of ugliness; life is the reward for beauty.

The only other female villain in the Bond stories is the French-born Maria von Freudenstein in "The Property of a Lady" in the Octopussy collection: "She was an unattractive girl with a pale, rather pimply skin, black hair and a vaguely unwashed appearance." On the principal, apparently, that physical appearance is all, Bond reckoned that she "would be unloved, make few friends, have chips on her shoulders—more particularly in view of her illegitimacy—and a grouch against society... It was a common neurotic pattern—the revenge of the ugly duckling on society."5

The "ugly duckling" syndrome was Fleming's usual device to explain crime and evil, and was applied specifically, as we have seen, to Goldfinger and Mr. Big. It was also applied to Drax in Moonraker and to one Slugsgy, whose friend Horror (Fleming did enjoy his names; cf. Amis, 1966: 38) explained: "Slugsgy gets mad easy. Thinks he ain't had a fair deal from society. You had that puss of his, mebbe you'd be the same" (The Spy Who Loved Me, ch. 8). In this respect Fleming agreed with Bacon, who suggested that deformed persons are "for the most part (as the Scripture saith) void of natural affection; and so they have their revenge of nature: (1985: 191). The ugly, therefore, are prone to evil, according to Bacon and Fleming. In this way, and others, the stereotypes of the ugly as evil and the evil as ugly are perpetuated.

Yet surely Bacon was wrong. The more fundamental point is not that the deformed or ugly take their revenge on society, but that

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5The "ugly duckling" syndrome is not well-named, since the original ugly duckling in Hans Christian Andersen's tale was not anti-social, merely unhappy, and anyway it eventually became beautiful and happy: a triumph of the beauty mystique.
society takes its revenge on deformed persons for being deformed, and for being symbolically evil. Mary Shelley made this point in *Frankenstein* (1817) long ago: the monster was good, in the romantic tradition of Rousseau, but ugly; and because it was ugly it was thought to be bad; and because it was thought to be bad, it was treated badly, and so, in a classic example of the self-fulfilling prophecy, it became bad: a moral as well as a physical monster.

Similarly the hunchback of Notre Dame in Dumas’ story was a kindly soul—but society had its revenge on him for his deformity. The idea that the ugly not only get less of life, but even deserve less of it, is deeply entrenched in Fleming’s works. In *You Only Live Twice*, Tiger Tanaka, the head of the Japanese Secret Service, has instructed Bond on the assassination of a villain, and adds: “If his wife is with him, you will throttle her too. She is certainly involved in all this business, and anyway she is too ugly to live” (ch. 12. Emphasis added).

This is a precise statement of the implications of beauty mystique. The right to life is a function of beauty. Nor is this an isolated example. The Saint expounded a similar philosophy in Leslie Charteris’ *The Brighter Buccaneer*: “Hags” have no right to their own property. In one situation, a certain lady has a pink diamond, which bothers the Saint (1933; 1962: 136-7):

> “[The] idea that such a woman should have a jool like that keeps me awake nights,” he complained. “I’ve seen her twice, and she is a Hag.”

... it was worth mentioning that neither of Simon Templar’s guests bothered to raise any philosophical argument against his somewhat heterodox doctrine about the right of Hags.

The corollary of the facist doctrine that the Hags do not have the same rights to life and property as the beautiful people, good-looking men like Bond and Templar, is surely that the good (or good-looking—the equation is the same) have the right to take such lives and property. They are, in the convention of the genre, above the law. They are as gods. And they are immortal.

The “ugly mystique” is exceptionally clear in Fleming, for all his major villains, male and female, are either ugly or physically deformed or both. None are handsome or beautiful without qualification. This would have posed for Fleming an inconceivable contradiction between beauty and goodness, face and nature, body

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*It must be admitted that not all the villains are quite as grotesque as the examples cited, e.g., Red Grant, the assassin in *From Russia with Love*, and Count Lippe in *Thunderball*. But experienced physiognomists, like Bond, can tell immediately, nevertheless.*
and soul, appearance and reality. In Fleming's simple, dichotomous view of the universe, at least as it was presented in these novels, life is a struggle of the good against the evil, the beautiful against the ugly, us against them, St. George against the dragon, life against death. One stereotype against another.

The power of these simple but fundamental dichotomies no doubt accounts, at least in part, for the enormous success of Fleming's novels.

**Bad, Ugly and Foreign**

"The villains, of course, are foreigners," comments Price (1962: 69). Of course. This follows the conventions of the spy stories, as Amis observes, and a long tradition of British xenophobia, as Richler points out; indeed he adds that "only Jewy or black or yellow men fill the villain's role" (1973: 78). Physical ugliness and deformity, foreignness, and moral evil are therefore mutually congruent.

Fleming was essentially ensconced in a cricketing view of England versus the Rest of the World, with the exceptions of the United States and the Dominions. It was a view experientially and ideologically based on World War II and the Cold War, and ethnically as well as ethically the issues were black and white—or, strictly speaking, non-British and British. Fleming's fantasy self, Bond was far removed from the reality of espionage, despite Fleming's background in Naval Intelligence, and despite his claims to authenticity in details. The reality of the enemy within, the British mole and the Cambridge-educated traitors, was perhaps too difficult for Fleming (and others) to grasp.

The enemy in eleven of the twenty stories or books is the Soviet Union or SMERSH, directly or indirectly. This proportion may seem unduly high given that the Korean War was still in progress when the first Bond book was published, but Fleming had experienced the Soviet Union at first hand when covering the trials during the 1930s, and had been appalled. Furthermore, the Soviet Union was not only geographically closer than Korea and China but was also militarily stronger and had expanded enormously during and after World War II.

The other villains are often German. Blofeld, the head of SPECTRE (the Special Executive for Counter-Intelligence, Terrorism, Revenge and Extortion) and the villain of three novels,
used to be in the Gestapo. Drax, in *Moonraker*, is German, although a British citizen. Von Hammerstein is German. Krest in “The Hildebrand Rarity” is an American of German origin. Goldfinger is a Balt from Riga, Latvia, now in the U.S.S.R. Non-whites are also often villains: Blacks (*Live and Let Die*), Chigroes and Chinese (*Dr. No*), Koreans and Germans (*Goldfinger*), and Japanese (*You Only Live Twice*). Other minor villains are of numerous nationalities; but there are only two English villains: the major in *Octopussy* and the double agent Vesper Lynd in *Casino Royale*.

Many of the villains, in fact, are doubly foreign, such as Count Lippe (“Portuguese with a dash of Chinaman”), Le Chiffre (“some Jewish blood . . . a mixture of Mediterranean with Prussian or Polish strains”), Dr. No (German-Chinese), Grant (German-Irish), and Blofeld (Polish and Greek). Bond and Britain are perpetually fighting villainous foreigners and foreign villains: the meanings interpenetrate.

The nastiness and evil of many of these foreign nationalities is occasionally spelled out. For example:

The Russians: They are “cold, dedicated, chess-playing” (*Diamonds are Forever*, ch. 12). And: “They simply don’t understand the carrot. Only the stick has any effect. Basically they’re masochists. They love the knout. That’s why they were so happy under Stalin. He gave it to them: (*From Russia with Love*, ch. 19).

The Germans: “The old Hun again. Always at your feet or at your throat” (“The Hildebrand Rarity”).

The Japanese: “a violent people,” “a pack of militant potential murderers . . . snarling behind their subservient smiles.” They “have only been operating as a civilized people . . . for fifty, at most a hundred years,” and have both a “profound love of horror and violence” and an “automatic, ant-like subservience to discipline and authority” (*You Only Live Twice*, chs. 9, 8, 4, 17).

Blacks: When Mr. Big is being discussed in *Live and Let Die* (ch. 2), Bond remarks:

“I don’t think I’ve ever heard of a great negro criminal before . . . Pretty law abiding chaps I should have thought except when they’ve drunk too much.”

“Our man’s a bit of an exception,” said M. “He’s not pure negro. Born in Haiti. Good dose of French blood. Trained in Moscow, too, as you’ll see from the file. And the negro races are just beginning to throw up geniuses in all the professions—scientists, doctors, writers. It’s about time they turned out a great criminal. After all, there are 250,000,000 in the world. Nearly a third of the white population. They’ve plenty of brains and ability and guts.”
At first glance the discussion may seem fair-minded, but there is the crack about “just beginning,” as though Black and African culture date from the 1950s. And for Mr. Big to be “great,” he apparently required a “good dose” of French blood, also Moscow training and, M forgets, training by the O.S.S. as well. Elsewhere Blacks are dismissed simply as having a “feral smell” and being “clumsy black apes” (Live and Let Die, chs. 5,6). “The Jamaican,” Bond is informed, “is a kindly lazy man with the virtues and vices of a child.” On the other hand: “The Chigroes are a tough, forgotten race . . . They’ve got some of the intelligence of the Chinese and most of the vices of the black man. The police have a lot of trouble with them” (Dr. No, ch. 6).

Nigerians have “simple kindly natures” but the women “don’t know anything about birth control” (“Quantum of Solace”). Fleming points out, however (Diamonds are Forever, ch. 13. Emphasis added):

Bond had a natural affection for coloured people, but he reflected how lucky England was compared with America where you had to live with the colour problem from your schooldays up.

The “but” is instructive, and the translation is that England was fortunate for having fewer Blacks. In Live and Let Die (ch. 4), Felix Leiter allows that “I like the negroes and they know it somehow.” This may seem suspiciously close to the colonial “I know the Blacks”; but Leiter’s love of jazz did save him from serious injury.

Bulgarians are “stupid but obedient” (Casino Royale, ch. 4). Turks are “ugly” but Greeks are “handsome” (From Russian with Love, chs. 13,23).

Koreans: The most blatant racism is reserved for the Koreans. Goldfinger, before he is unmasked as a villain, explained that he has Koreans as guards because they have no respect for human life. “That is why the Japanese employed them as guards for their prison camps during the war. They are the cruelest, most ruthless people in the world.” Bond apparently did not disagree, for he later intends “putting Oddjob and any other Korean firmly in his place, which, in Bond’s estimation, was rather lower than apes in the mammalian hierarchy” (chs. 11,16).

Jews: There are a few clearly Jewish villains, such as Sol (“Horror”) Horowitz in The Spy Who Loved Me (ch. 8), who had a “grey drowned look” and lips “thin and purplish like an unstitched wound.” Two others barely discussed, have bit parts in Diamonds
are Forever, and Meyer ("nice chap") was Goldfinger’s accomplice. But many of the best/worst villains are “Jewy,” in Richler’s term (1973:78), notably Le Chiffre in Casino Royale (ch. 2) who, apart from being an agent of SMERSH and a flagellant, is described as having small ears “with large lobes, indicating some Jewish blood.” Comments Richler (1973: 58): “a new one on me.” Goldfinger, Drax and Blofeld are also “Jewy” by implication, as are Von Hammerstein, Bunt, Klebb, and von Freudenstein, by name, suggestion, and physical or stereotypical characteristics (Richler, 1973: 58-65). None of the good guys are Jewish or even “Jewy.”

All of the villains are foreigners, with only two exceptions: Vesper Lynd in Casino Royale and the marine major in Octopussy, both of whom die in the end. However, not all foreigners are villains. Apart from the women, these exceptions are either members of the police [Mathis (French), Leiter (American), Henderson (Australian), and Tanaka (Japanese)] or are personal friends [Quarrel (a Cayman Islander), Darko Kerim (Turkish), and Draco (Corsican)]. According to the conventions of the beauty mystique, they should “look good.” The two non-whites, however, are hardly described, save for a passing reference to Quarrel’s “splendid mahogany face.” Darko Kerim in From Russia with Love is described as having “a startlingly dramatic face, vital, cruel and debauched, but what one noticed more than its drama was that it radiated life. Bond thought that he had never seen so much vitality and warmth in a human face.” Given the beauty mystique and facism, such a man could not be evil. Similarly, in On Her Majesty’s Secret Service, Draco, the head of the Union Corse and a man who would normally be a villain “had such a delightful face, so lit with humour and mischief and magnetism that . . . Bond could no more have killed him than he could have killed, well, Tracy.” The semiotics of beauty saved Draco’s life. The face that delights indicates a delightful, and therefore good, person; and the beauty of warmth, light, life (vitality), and humour signify goodness. In these two cases, goodness means being on Bond’s side, perhaps a double standard.

Fleming’s critics differ considerably in their assessments of his racial stereotyping. Amis, for example, argues that the Bond works contain “no hint of anti-Semitism and no feeling about colour more intense than that, for instance, Chinese Negroes make good sinister minor-villain material. (They do too).” He also suggests that the conventional portrayal of villains is “perfectly harmless” (1966: 70). Richler, on the other hand, was so outraged by Fleming’s portrayal of Jews and, one gathers, by Fleming himself that he found it self-evident “that [Fleming] had infinitely more in common with his
pushy, ill-bred foreign villains, and one is obliged to consider all his sophisticated racialism as no less than a projection of his own coarse qualities" (1973: 77). Eco (1981) ducks the question.

However one wishes to evaluate Fleming’s use of racial stereotypes, use them he did, as even a cursory summary demonstrates. For example, the Russians are “masochists”; the Germans are “always at your feet or at your throat”; the Japanese are “violent” and barely civilized; Blacks are “clumsy apes” and have a “feral smell”; Jamaicans are “lazy”; Nigerians are “simple” and ignorant; Bulgars are “stupid”; Turks are “ugly”; but Greeks are “handsome.” Chigroes have “most of the vices of the black man” and the Koreans are the “cruellest, most ruthless people in the world” and “rather lower than the apes in the mammalian hierarchy.”

This catalogue of invectives at least has the merit of originality: Fleming rarely offers the same insults to two different nationalities. Even so, these depictions offer a telling contrast to the English, as described by Bond’s friend and colleague Mathis (Casino Royale, ch. 20):

> Englishmen are so odd. They are like a nest of Chinese boxes. It takes a very long time to get to the centre of them. When one gets there the result is unrewarding, but the process is instructive and entertaining.

> It is a joke, and Bond laughs—funny because so obviously not true (presumably), and designed to amuse Bond as well as the English readers. They might not have been so amused at being described as ugly, stupid, smelly, violent, subservient, cruel, ignorant, cold, masochistic clumsy apes! Indeed the English are exactly the opposite of all these evil things. The basic assumption of the entire Bond canon is the superiority of the English (Cannadine, 1979). The English are, after all, stereotypically good and beautiful, while the foreigners, with a few male exceptions (but with many female exceptions), are stereotypically bad and ugly.

**Implications**

The semiotic formula for success in the Bond novels can be summarized in three equations, and their converses:

1. The good guys are good-looking and the good-looking guys are good. This applies particularly to Bond, but in lesser degree and in different styles of good looks to the minor good guys.
2. The villains are ugly and the ugly are villains. Most of the villains are extremely ugly, even grotesque. The only exceptions are two women: Vesper Lynd, the beautiful double agent whom Bond had hoped to marry, and the blonde Soviet sniper, saved by her beauty from death.

3. The villains are foreigners and, albeit to a lesser degree, foreigners tend to be villains. None of the foreign women who love Bond, and whom he loves, are ugly, and none of the true villainesses are beautiful (Klebb, Bunt and von Freudenstein), except the sniper.

These equations have a corollary: most of the villains are White, either Russian or German, but a substantial number are Non-White. Thus, non-Whites tend to be villains—Blacks in *Live and Let Die*, Chigroes (Chinese and Blacks, mixed and separately) in *Dr. No*, various Japanese in *You Only Live Twice*, and various Koreans in *Goldfinger*. The only non-White good guys are Quarrel, who is killed, and Tiger Tanaka.

The chauvinism and even racism in the Bond canon may transcend the conventional demands of the genre, but they are totally unrealistic in the age of Burgess, Maclean, Philby, and Blake. Furthermore, Fleming claimed that his work was not only realistic but that it was based on his experiences as Personal Assistant to the Director of Naval Intelligence during World War II. Yet, the “real” English traitors and villains of the nineteen fifties and sixties do not exist in Bond’s world, while a range of totally “unreal” villains, of “Jewy,” black, and yellow persuasions do. Thus, “facts” which Fleming claimed to present in his novels appear to be fictional, whereas the “real” facts are ignored. The true traitors at this time were white, English, Cambridge educated, upper class, occasionally homosexual, once idealistic, later often alcoholic and, above all, employed at high levels in the Foreign Office, M15 and M16. That is, the real enemy was an English Wasp, like Fleming himself. In this sense, Fleming’s world is completely divorced from the real world of spies and traitors. In his simple, uncomplicated but unreal world, there are only two kinds of people: the beautiful good and the ugly evil.

This tradition of facism and the beauty mystique is perhaps too deep-rooted in the culture to disappear soon. Even so, recent writers in the espionage genre notably Le Carré and Deighton, have developed far more complex themes of Britain at war with itself and

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"The uncovering of Blunt came later; but the verdict is still open on many other British spies and traitors. The truth is much stranger than the fiction."
individuals in conflict with themselves, their families, nameless civil servants, faceless bureaucrats, and unfinished business. To the extent the face is meaningful for such writers, it is as a mask, not as a mirror of the soul. They focus attention much more on the mind than on the body.

Nonetheless, facism is not merely a literary device, a blip of minor academic interest in the vast landscape of life, nor is it only a convention of the genre. It is certainly not restricted to Fleming. Indeed, the entire mystery-thriller genre, to take one example, is riddled with facism, although the various authors have their own "styles." For example, Sapper (H.R. McNeile), one of the best known novelists of the twenties and thirties, described Hugh "Bulldog" Drummond as follows (1920/1989: 14):

Slightly under six feet in height, he was broad in proportion. His best friend would not have called him good-looking, but he was the fortunate possessor of that cheerful type of ugliness which inspires immediate confidence in its owner. His nose had never quite recovered from the final one year in the Public Schools Heavy Weights; his mouth was not small. In fact, to be strictly accurate only his eyes redeemed his face from being what is known in the vernacular as the Frozen Limit.

Deep-set and steady, with eyelashes that many a woman had envied, they showed the man for what he was—a sportsman and a gentleman. And the combination of the two is an unbeatable production.

Similarly, Agatha Christie's hero in A Secret Adversary (1922) is described as "pleasantly ugly—nondescript, yet unmistakably the face of a gentleman and a sportsman" (1981: 8). Her villains also looked like villains with "close-cropped hair" or "a weak, unpleasant face" or "low beetling brows, and the criminal jaw, the bestiality of the whole countenance . . ." (1981: 51,48,53).

Of course, not all authors employed these stereotypes. Chesterton's Father Brown, for example, was not good-looking, although he was very good. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes was also not good-looking, nor was Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe. And Inspector Maigret is quite homely looking.

These exceptions, however, do not diminish the pervasiveness of facism in our culture. Indeed, Fleming was unique not in his facist portrayals of good and evil, but only in the degree to which he portrayed the evil as grotesquely ugly. And his technique is by no means restricted to novelists. Journalists also, consciously or otherwise, may camouflage their value judgments as objective physical descriptions, thus blurring the distinction between ethics and aesthetics (Booker, 1969: 283). Furthermore, the beauty mystique
and facism have been virtually institutionalized in films, television, and advertising, and are maintained and developed by big business—the media, entertainment, advertising, and cosmetics industries—and so they will not soon disappear.

The Bond canon makes only a small contribution to these moral (ethics) and physical (aesthetics) constructions of reality. But the fact that Bond reflects and sustains these constructions may help to explain his enduring popularity, for Bond presents us with a possibly romantic ideal of cosmic harmony: that the good is beautiful and the beautiful good, and that in the end beauty-good will triumph over ugliness—evil. The fact that these ideals may have no basis at all in objective reality makes them no less effective as popular mythology.

References

Ian Fleming’s James bond novels were all published by Jonathan Cape, London. The dates are presented below. The two collections are marked with an asterisk.

Casino Royale (1953)
Live and Let Die (1954)
Moonraker (1955)
Diamonds are Forever (1956)
From Russia with Love (1957)
Doctor No (1958)
Goldfinger (1959)
For Your Eyes Only (1960)*
Thunderball (1961)
The Spy Who Loved Me (1962)
On Her Majesty’s Secret Service (1963)
You Only Live Twice (1964)
The Man With the Golden Gun (1965)
Octopussy (1966)*
