

A Vintage Year for Scoundrels: Shapes of Villainy in *Adam Adamant Lives!*

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with the BBC television series *Adam Adamant Lives!* (1966-67), which follows the exploits of an Edwardian gentleman adventurer placed in suspended animation and awakened six decades later in Swinging London. It focuses on the show's representations of villainy and the ways in which these refract and engage with contemporary anxieties over aspects of 1960s Britain. *Adam Adamant Lives!* has been characterised as a reactionary critique of the Swinging Sixties. Through exploring the depictions of villainy as manifested in consumer culture, youth culture, crime, women, and otherness, in the form of racial and sexual difference, I demonstrate that this reading is overly simplistic. I argue that the series is not consistently conservative, exhibiting rather a tension between a critique and an endorsement of its era that reflects both the social progression and the perceived menace to the patriarchal status quo, the latter manifested especially in terms of gender, race and sexuality. While *Adam Adamant Lives!* shares its hero's wary view of modern Britain, the most sustained and insidious threat is invariably to be found in the supposedly besieged white middle class masculinity.

Introduction

My article is concerned with the BBC television series *Adam Adamant Lives!* (1966-67), which follows the exploits of an Edwardian adventurer (Gerald Harper), placed in suspended animation and awakened six decades later in Swinging London. Acquiring a young female sidekick, Georgina 'Georgie' Jones (Juliet Harmer), Adamant discovers that the modern world is in dire need of his services. I focus on the show's representations of villainy and the ways in which these refract and engage with contemporary anxieties over aspects of 1960s Britain. James Chapman states that the series' premise meant it 'responded more directly to social trends and attitudes than most examples of the [detective/adventure] genre' (Chapman 2002: 134; cf. Sandbrook 2007: 274). While this is an overstatement, *Adam Adamant Lives!* has been characterised as a sustained conservative critique of the Swinging Sixties (Wright 2005: 294). Through exploring the depictions of villainy as manifested in consumer culture, youth culture, crime, women, and otherness, in the form of racial and sexual difference, I demonstrate that this reading is overly simplistic. If the representation of women is problematic, for example, the depiction of middle-class,

middle-aged white masculinity is frequently negative, even Adamant himself not above criticism.

Adam Adamant Lives! occupies the periphery of debates on 1960s action television often grouped, however loosely, under the cult umbrella. Dominic Sandbrook prefaces two chapters of *White Heat*, his history of 1960s Britain, with quotes from the series, yet has little to say about the show itself (2007: 228, 434, 274). *Adam Adamant Lives!* is cited as an influence on the Austin Powers films (Storey 2001: 241), but apart from the suspended animation premise, the 1960s riffs and the fish-out-of-water theme, there is negligible common ground. By and large the series is acknowledged only to be dismissed as a copy of *The Avengers* (1961-69) (O'Day 2001: 223; Raw 2009: 1) or the James Bond films (1962-) (Parrill 2011: 28). There is little doubt that it was patterned on *The Avengers*, especially the latter's fourth season (1965-6) which introduced Emma Peel (Diana Rigg), from the partnership of a traditional English gentleman and a sixties new woman to the photo-montage credits to the hero's swordstick. Several episodes of *Adam Adamant Lives!* have near identical premises to earlier *Avengers* stories, such as 'The Last Sacrifice', and its ersatz Hellfire Club ('A Touch of Brimstone'), and 'Death by Appointment Only', with its murderous dating agency ('The Murder Market'). *Adam Adamant Lives!* invokes the Bond films directly, with a theme song patterned on *Goldfinger* (1964), in terms of arrangement and vocal style, and images of star Sean Connery. More generally it employs tropes associated closely with the Bond universe: casinos, aggressive pet fish, hidden control panels, secret bases and a non-specific Cold War backdrop also found in *The Avengers*. Adam Adamant has qualities in common with Bond and *The Avengers'* John Steed (Patrick Macnee). All three display impeccable manners and sense of style and serve a country shaken by the loss of empire and global status. Alexander Walker's comment that Bond 'was both a salve for the wound and a sentimental, nostalgic bandage' is also appropriate to Steed and Adamant (Walker 1986: 191; cf. Bennett and Woollacott 1987: 20). Bond and Steed are licensed to kill; Adamant follows the same policy, with questionable official sanction.

While *Adam Adamant Lives!* draws openly on *The Avengers* and the Bond films, it is of most interest in its departures from these blueprints, calculated or otherwise. In

terms of appearance, where Bond and especially Steed favour tailored suits Adamant wears gentleman's clothes of his era, not so much old-fashioned as anachronistic. Bond and Steed embrace both the traditional and the modern (cf. Bennett and Woollacott 1987: 20-1, 34), while Adamant is ill-at-ease with the latter, retreating to an apartment that replicates his Edwardian home. Nor does he indulge in their frivolities, such as pausing mid-investigation to pick a carnation or steal a grape from a suspect's room. More specifically, Bond and, by implication, Steed are comfortable with the sexually permissive society that is both alien and distasteful to Adamant (Steed's festive decorations in 'Too Many Christmas Trees' include a blonde doll in black underwear). While Adamant shares their staunch patriotism he displays a persistent ambivalence about the state of the country he loves. This uneasiness is also evident in others aspects of the show. Peter Wright argues that Adamant serves 'to defend an outdated morality' and that the series is in essence reactionary (2005: 294). In contrast, Sarah Edwards states that *Adam Adamant Lives!* often critiques Victorian male chivalry (2011: 215n). I argue that these two extremes remain in tension throughout the show, often within the same episode.

While the revived and delirious Adamant describes 1966 London as hell-on-earth, the show's depiction of modern Britain is more measured. Following a decade of post-World War II austerity, Britain enjoyed an economic revival in the mid-1950s: major industries were denationalised, American multinationals launched British divisions, the pound strengthened and employment rose, as did consumer demand, due partly to rising incomes and an easing of credit restrictions (Levy 2003: 4; Sandbrook 2007: xvi). Britain in the mid-1960s has been assessed in generally positive terms: a stable pound, a reduced bank rate, economic growth, low unemployment, high exports and a technological revolution were accompanied by a sense of optimism and social progression (White 2007: 60; Sandbrook 2007: xviii, 179). Changes in the class and education systems, such as the introduction of comprehensive schools intended to mix pupils from different backgrounds, were part of a move towards a more equal society that sought to eliminate both privilege and poverty (White 2007: 62; Sandbrook 2007: 19, 333). On the downside, 1966 witnessed violent protests against the Vietnam War outside the American embassy (Levy 2003: 221). The country also faced a lack of new housing, a rising cost of

living, mounting inflation and sluggish production levels, while a strike by the National Union of Seamen had major economic and political repercussions, especially with regard to Britain's balance of payments (Sandbrook 2007: 180, 275, 280; Levy 2003: 221). The *New York Times* stated that Swinging London had become eerie in its 'relentless frivolity', identifying a huge contrast between Britain's objective situation (as the paper saw it) and the national mood (Sandbrook 2007: 607; Levy 2003: 221).

BBC Head of Drama Sydney Newman felt that significant cultural products should stem and derive their essence from the period in which they were created (Sandbrook 2007: 597). While *Adam Adamant Lives!* was not heavyweight drama, Newman envisaged a relatively realistic take on 1960s Britain, 'we are revealing the sins and foibles of today using an adventure thriller approach' (quoted by Chapman 2002: 145). This is in contrast to *The Avengers*, which by the Steed-Peel era operated firmly on a fantasy level and touched on contemporary issues only in comic book or parodic terms (cf. Sandbrook 2007: 401); the Bond films likewise made token references to the real world, such as the 1963 Great Train Robbery, mentioned in *Thunderball* (1965). Chapman identifies a recurring narrative strategy in *Adam Adamant Lives!* 'to confront the hero with an aspect of modern life and then to reveal a sinister conspiracy behind it...responding, albeit in a much exaggerated way, to real social concerns' (2002: 148). Asa Briggs states that the show's villains were invariably topical (1995: 425), and Rosie White claims that in 1960s television shows generally and spy series especially: 'Shifts in class order and gender distinction within the workplace are irrevocably linked to deviant practices' (White 2007: 61). This argument that aspects of 1966 Britain, and Swinging London in particular, are equated consistently with treachery and murder is a generalisation, or at least a simplification, that requires further analysis.

Consumer Culture

Bill Osgerby characterises James Bond and Simon Templar in *The Saint* television series (1962-9), as male fantasies of luxury, affluence and conspicuous consumption, arguing that these aspects in part define the heroes' masculine identities (2001: 33; cf. Bennett and Woollacott 1987: 44). By the mid-1960s,

Connery's Bond was firmly associated with luxurious consumer goods and cutting-edge technology, combined in his signature Aston Martin DB5. Marc O'Day identifies similar forces at work in *The Avengers*, with added appeal to female viewers (2001: 222; cf. Sandbrook 2007: 400). Peak-time ITV shows such as this had to attract both audiences and advertisers in a socio-economic context 'increasingly dominated by commodity consumption' (Osgerby 2001: 43). The *Avengers* producers made product placement deals and promoted Steed-Peel fashion lines (Sandbrook 2007: 399-400), an unqualified endorsement of high-end consumer culture.

As a BBC production, financed by the television licence fee, *Adam Adamant Lives!* was not under the same pressures to depict the consumer society in glowing terms. In 'Village of Evil' an elderly country vicar describes London as 'the sinful city', with 'too much thought for material things'. While he does not elaborate on this link between materialism and sin, the sentiment echoes contemporary concerns, discussed by Sandbrook, that 'the social and cultural changes of the sixties were creating a society of materialism, alienation and immorality' (2007: xvii). *Adam Adamant Lives!* is critical of the consumer culture, which as White notes was now taking precedence over traditional heavy industry (White 2007: 62). Status symbols and desirable consumer goods are held to be suspect. In 'A Vintage Year for Scoundrels' and 'Sing a Song of Murder', villains travel in chauffeur-driven limousines; in the latter episode a Rolls Royce is used as a murder weapon. In 'More Deadly Than the Sword' and 'The Last Sacrifice', various forms of new audio-visual technology are put to nefarious use: cameras, miniaturised film projectors and tape recorders. At the lower end of the scale, 'The Sweet Smell of Disaster' features a detergent company promoting its new soap powder with plastic flowers that have an irresistible scent. Adamant's condemnation of 'evil sales practices' seems an overreaction from a man ignorant of modern sales methods yet his suspicion of underhand tactics to influence consumers is proved correct. Executive Benjamin Kinthly (Charles Tingwell) is pushing for total market domination by any means necessary. In 'Sing a Song of Murder' pop impresario Melville (Jerome Willis) tells Adamant: 'Everything is a commodity. Even people.' This ostensibly radical anti-consumerism is not sustained throughout the series. Adamant's luxurious bachelor flat attracts no criticism and while his car, a Mini Cooper S, is less ostentatious than

a Rolls Royce, it had a Swinging London cultural cachet (DeGroot 2009: 139). The digs at modern consumerism are tentative but suggest the aspirational society should be viewed with caution, not least because the trappings of prosperity and success are no gauge of moral character. If the show's take on consumerism is inconsistent, its depiction of youth culture is more developed and plays on viewer expectations in intriguing ways.

Youth Culture

Although 99 in calendar years, Adamant resembles a man in his mid-thirties, youthful yet mature. Georgie by contrast is in her early twenties and very much part of the Swinging London scene, working as a DJ in a discotheque and socialising with a young crowd. In the mid-1950s, Britain had a predominantly middle-class and middle-aged social and cultural scene, offering relatively little for the young (Levy 2003: 4). There were however emergent strands of counterculture, including Bohemians, leftists and teenagers, which tended to be defiant and anti-tradition (ibid: 4, 5). Adrian Mitchell cites the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament as a movement that helped inspire a sense of both anti-authoritarianism and solidarity among young people (1969: 41). Harford Thomas identifies 'a gradual relaxation in standards of personal conduct' originating in the 1950s that enabled 'the erosion of conventional taboos on freedom of expression' a decade later (1969: 9). By the mid-1960s, the younger generation was firmly associated with, among other things, modernity, mobility, pop music, cinema, fashion, celebrity, and sexuality (O'Day 2001: 226; Sandbrook 2007: 102; Levy 2003: 5). While the dominance of youth in these areas is easily exaggerated, there is a case for arguing that the young generation, educated, with access to birth control and freed from compulsory military service, forged 'a new culture of morals and sensations' (Levy 2003: 7; Thomas 1969: 9). As Thomas notes, however, levels of permissiveness varied greatly between social groups and locations; for many young people it was only 'an after-hours, week-end affair' (1969: 12, 13). I argue that *Adam Adamant Lives!* displays a cautious yet largely positive approach to mid-1960s British youth culture, touching on generational clashes while downplaying any sense of active threat.

In terms of pop music Chapman states that 'Sing a Song of Murder' 'represents an extreme, paranoid realisation of the fears expressed by some contemporaries' (Chapman 2002: 148). The episode opens with an emphatic close-up of a pop record playing at a party attended by Georgie. A young man, Felix Kincaid (Michael Standing), picks up a flintlock pistol, also in close-up, and everyone present, in the same trancelike state, leaves the party to take part in a bank robbery. Suspecting a link between the crime and the record, Adamant has Georgie play the song again. As the camera moves in to a close-up of Georgie, she assumes the blank expression seen earlier. Later on, Felix, brainwashed with a new record, is framed in an ominous low angle tracking shot as he stalks intended victim Adamant.

There was wide public debate on the issue of pop music at this time. Fans were held to be attracted to the cultural and social values projected by pop groups, as much as the music itself, prompting extensive press comment (Sandbrook 2007: 105). The *Daily Telegraph* likened Beatlemania to the Nuremburg rallies and described The Who as both anti-social and criminal (DeGroot 2009: 224, 169). Maureen Cleave, in the *Evening Standard*, berated the Rolling Stones for their lack of middle-class virtues, though perhaps the biggest issue was their image of 'aggressive, predatory sexuality' (Sandbrook 2007: 151, 154). In 1965, several of the group were convicted of public indecency and insulting behaviour and warned to maintain a better moral standard for their fans (Sandbrook 2007: 152; Levy 2003: 166). Despite the potential in these figures, there is scant acknowledgment of them in the series, though the Stones' 1964 cover of Bobby Troup's 'Route 66' is heard in 'A Vintage Year for Scoundrels' and their self-penned 'Now I've Got a Witness' (1964) features in 'Death Has a Thousand Faces' (rights issues prevented the songs' inclusion on home video releases). 'Sing a Song of Murder' is, however, not concerned with pop stars or their music as such. There is no questioning let alone demonization of the pop idol's effect on the young generation. The songs are just a cover; the real danger is a high frequency sound hidden in the recording. Melville, a suited businessman far removed from youth culture, later attempts to brainwash Adamant with a doctored Mozart record; neither popular nor classical music are intrinsically subversive or harmful. There is no critique of the pop music industry, only those using it for nefarious ends. If the younger generation is overly impressionable and susceptible, to the extent of

criminal behaviour, it is to the malign influence of their supposedly respectable and responsible elders.

Unlike pop music, the sex and drugs associated with the young generation are found elsewhere in *Adam Adamant Lives!* 'Allah Is Not Always With You' is centred on The Fluffy Club, a clear reference to the Playboy Club, the London branch of which opened on 1 July 1966 in Park Lane (Levy 2003: 207). The episode was screened just a few weeks later, suggesting a calculated attempt at topicality; the minimally clad waitresses, Fluffy Girls, are obvious stand-ins for Playboy Bunnies. While the Playboy Club catered to such youthful celebrities as The Beatles, Michael Caine and Sean Connery, the Fluffy club has a mainly middle-aged clientele. The major sex scandals of the 1960s, at least during the first half of the decade, were associated not with the young, but with older high-profile men and women from the respectable classes; the Profumo affair saw the activities of the Secretary of State for War, a Soviet naval attaché and two prostitutes help bring down the Conservative government. While *Adam Adamant Lives!* avoids any direct reference to these events, 'The Last Sacrifice' features a variation on the eighteenth-century Hellfire Club; the aristocratic ringleader and his fiancée are a swinging couple far removed from Georgie's group, expressing their passion with caresses and bites, and have more in common with the circles inhabited by John Profumo and his associates.

In contrast to relaxed standards of sexual behaviour, drug use was still frowned upon by most of society (Maddox 1969: 114). Discussing the history of substance abuse in Britain, Alex Mold notes how the medical and legal regulation of both drugs and users changed in line with the shifting addict profile: 'By the 1960s, addicts were younger, and had usually begun taking drugs for recreational reasons' (Mold 2011: 121). The response to this development was more stringent levels of control, with heroin use, in particular, seen as a major public health issue, affecting the wider community as well as individual users (ibid: 121). There was a huge rise in convictions for cannabis possession, from 235 in 1960, to 2393 in 1967, and increased drug use among the young became part of a wider anxiety over sexual promiscuity, delinquency and the corrupting influence of the affluent society (Sandbrook 2007: 550). While heroin circulated among the Swinging London set, many shunned it as dangerous and made a clear distinction between soft and hard

drugs; nor was there evidence of fast rising addiction to the latter (Mitchell 1969: 42; Maddox 1969: 116, 119). The drug most associated with this group is Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), a psychedelic hallucinogen with unpredictable, sometimes disturbing effects, which provoked extensive public debate, much of it ill-informed (Maddox 1969: 118; Levy 2003: 244-5). John Maddox, editor of *Nature*, argued that most young people seemed reasonably cautious in experimenting with drugs (Maddox 1969: 119).

Adam Adamant Lives! touches on the link between pop music and drugs, only to dismiss it out of hand. In 'Sing a Song of Murder', a middle-aged policeman suggests that the young people who robbed the bank were on drugs, yet this is revealed as a red herring reflecting the officer's conservative attitudes towards youth culture and a contentious link between recreational drug use and violent crime (cf. Sandbrook 2007: 572). Drug addiction is addressed directly in 'The Sweet Smell of Disaster', where the new laundry product 'Cloud Seven' is promoted as 'Britain's Sky High Soap Powder'. The notion of getting high had begun to acquire a new and specific connotation. The pop single 'Eight Miles High' by the US group The Byrds, released in the UK in May 1966, was widely associated with drug use. The promotional plastic flowers issued with Cloud Seven have been treated with an addictive substance which induces a state of blissful torpor. Georgie falls under the influence and undergoes painful withdrawal; desperate for a fix, she compares the symptoms to 'hot little needles'. Confronted by Adamant, Kinthly estimates that 99% of the British population is addicted to his special perfume, linking drug dependence to ruthless consumer manipulation with a respectable corporate face. Far from being confined to Georgie's generation, addiction is a nationwide issue, affecting all ages, classes and social groups.

If *Adam Adamant Lives!* depicts the younger generation in a form at odds with popular myth it is perhaps closer to the truth. Gerard DeGroot argues that 'of all the developed countries, Britain was least bothered by the generation gap' and while this seems a sweeping generalisation, for all the media-stoked fears of British youth rising up, most 'rebellion' amounted to little more than grooming, clothes, attitude and music (2009: 355, 18). As Sandbrook states, while young people were noted for

their sexual maturity, economic independence and cultural assertiveness, they were perceived as a commercial opportunity as much as a social threat (2007: 102). Mainstream public debate on the swinging generation was by no means invariably negative. Sir Edward Boyle, MP, a Conservative moderate, argued that young people displayed an admirable level of 'courage, thoughtfulness, and moral honesty' linked to self-discovery and maturity (Boyle 1969: 105, 106). At least some of these qualities are associated with Georgie as much as Adamant.

Crime

Britain had experienced a sharp rise in crime rates during World War II, followed by a brief decline during the period of post-war austerity, after which they rose again 'with renewed vigour' (Briggs et al 1996: 178). In 1945, less than 5,000 'offences of violence against the person' were recorded by the police; by 1960 the figure was nearly 16,000 and violent crime was regarded as a serious social issue (ibid: 178). In 'A Vintage Year for Scoundrels' the trendy discotheque where Georgie works is paying protection money to gangsters. This dark side of the Swinging Sixties had some basis in reality, though the bigger criminal gangs preferred more lucrative venues. Elite gambling clubs and casinos had been established around Mayfair and St. James in the wake of the 1960 Betting and Gaming Act (Levy 2003: 125). Criminal involvement became common even in 'top' places such as Esmeralda's Barn, in Knightsbridge, which was effectively controlled by the Kray brothers (ibid: 126), gangsters from the East End.

While Swinging London was associated with a new classlessness, much of Britain remained a stratified, class-bound society (DeGroot 2009: 171; Rakoff 1998: 14). *The Avengers*, which focused on the upper classes, has only a few prominent villains marked explicitly as working class, including a high-tech assassin in 'Dial a Deadly Number', and they are subservient to upper-class bosses. Sydney Newman felt strongly that working-class people were fit subjects for serious drama and should not be mere comic foils for middle-class characters (Sandbrook 2007: 597). *Adam Adamant Lives!*, however, depicts them as villainous foils, working-class boys made bad, as in 'A Vintage Year for Scoundrels', 'Sing a Song of Murder' and 'Death by Appointment Only'. One of the henchmen in 'The Sweet Smell of Disaster'

resembles a Kray-style thug, all suit and swagger. Confronting a villain in 'A Vintage Year for Scoundrels', Adamant remarks: 'The sword is the weapon of a gentleman, Mr Hicks, which is why you'll never master it', suggesting rigid class barriers and working-class degeneracy and inferiority.

The show avoided depicting big-time gangsters patterned on the Krays or Richardsons, who for a time enjoyed a controversial celebrity status which enabled them to mingle with actors and pop stars, part of a wider Swinging London enthusiasm for working-class culture (Levy 2003: 154, 156; Sandbrook 2007: 269-70). This may be because the Krays' activities were seemingly tolerated, to a point, by the police, as they were old school gangsters who kept order in their manor and cooperated with the law in cases such as child murder (Levy 2003: 156). There is no suggestion in the series of police corruption, though in 'A Vintage Year for Scoundrels' Georgie protests that they could be doing more to fight the protection rackets. 'D for Destruction', however, depicts the British armed forces as vulnerable to infiltration by criminal elements. Class is again a factor, with prime instigator Sergeant Major Jeffers (Michael Ripper) marked clearly as working class, in contrast to the upper-class Colonel Mannering (Iain Cuthbertson). Close-ups of Jeffers barking orders, calmly plotting Adamant's death and smiling after he knocks the latter unconscious reveal a calculating, ruthless and sadistic mind. Mannering is faulted for his gullibility and blinkered nostalgia yet remains an idealist and a patriot, while Jeffers is motivated solely by material wealth.

This is not to say that *Adam Adamant Lives!* consistently depicts criminal activity as a largely working-class pursuit. The lead villains are as likely to be outwardly respectable 'gentlemen' from the professional classes. In 'The Sweet Smell of Disaster', the main culprit is Kinthly, a middle-class white collar criminal, whose cold smile, emphasised in close-up, reflects a man prepared to kill his employees rather than meet new salary demands. Other examples include a Blackpool illuminations officer ('Death Has a Thousand Faces'), a funeral director and a psychiatrist ('The Terribly Happy Embalmers'), a fashion designer ('To Set a Deadly Fashion') and a doctor ('Village of Evil'). 'The Last Sacrifice' depicts criminal tendencies among the titled upper classes that include blackmail, murder and treason. It is however notable

that, with the exception of Adamant's valet, working-class characters can rarely be trusted.

There is a suggestion in several episodes that Britain harbours fascist, even neo-Nazi elements among its criminal ranks. In 'The Sweet Smell of Disaster', Kinthly's stance and salutes resemble those of fascist dictators. During a conference speech, a cloudscape projected behind him evokes the Nazi-sponsored films of Leni Riefenstahl, underlined by the militaristic music. 'A Sinister Sort of Service' appears to develop this angle further, featuring, as Chapman notes, a Nazi-tinged criminal organisation (Chapman 2002: 153). Adamant investigates a security company called Surveillance Services, the SS initials a clear reference to the Nazi Schutzstaffel, underlined by the black uniforms and Nazi-style salutes. Leader Jason Lang (T.P. McKenna) is introduced in a low angle long shot, framed through an arch of saluting guards. On the DVD commentary for the episode, producer Verity Lambert states that McKenna based his performance directly on Adolf Hitler. Clicking the heels of his jackboots, Lang is partial to looking at his own portrait, suggesting a narcissistic personality. A government minister declares: 'This is war, Adamant!' emphasising an already blatant parallel, as does stock film of a burning building that recalls (and may be) footage of the London Blitz. The episode was broadcast in March 1967, a month after the launch of the National Front party, which as Sandbrook states drew on 'an underground heritage of British fascism' to exploit the contentious immigration issue (Sandbrook 2007: 675). While it is tempting to draw a link I argue that 'A Sinister Sort of Service' is concerned with the surface trappings of fascism rather than its politics or ideology. Lang is motivated by financial gain, not a fascistic quest for power or racial purity. Sidestepping the notion that fascism remains a potent force in 1960s Britain, the episode is invoking more the cycle of 1960s World War II adventure films, albeit in more direct fashion than Steed's allusion to jackboots in the *Avengers* episode 'Economics and a Sense of History'.

The most interesting invocation of Nazi doctrine occurs in 'Beauty is an Ugly Word', where Sinoda (Peter Jeffrey) equates his conception of beauty, female and male, with sublime truth and genius. Sinoda's talk of 'perfect specimens' and 'the pick of the world' invites comparisons with Nazi theories of Aryan physical perfection (though his multi-racial recruits are not in keeping with Nazi ideology). The first of his

'specimens' to appear is Paula (Annette André), an attractive blonde young woman, very much in the Nazi-Aryan mould, and a cold-blooded killer. While Sinoda demonstrates his own strength and virility with weightlifting, the obsession with physical perfection is undercut by a close-up of his face, the pockmarked skin highly imperfect by his standards. Spurned by Adamant, he demands that the latter be beaten to death, reducing his body to a shapeless fleshy pulp rather than the strong, hard physique of the superior human.

Women

In 'Village of Evil', Adamant takes a reactionary – and long discredited – view of the seventeenth-century witch trials, referring to the mostly female victims as if they genuinely possessed satanic powers and deserved to be executed. While this extreme misogynist stance is atypical of the show, the depiction of women is consistently problematic. It is notable that Georgina Jones, a representative of the new sixties woman, is a sketchily constructed character who develops little over the 29 episodes. While Georgie shows initiative and courage this is undercut by naivety, immaturity and lack of judgement. From this perspective, her role as a counter to the female villains is tokenistic and insubstantial, even in comparison to the Bond films. The promotion for *Thunderball* sold new Bond girl Dominique (Claudine Auger) as a modern, emancipated and independent woman (Sandbrook 2007: 695); hype aside, Dominique, once subservient to the villain, kills the latter and saves Bond's life. *The Avengers'* Emma Peel is modern, tough and intellectual (cf. O'Day 2001: 225); Georgie, also upper middle class, shows no evidence of a scholarly mind. While Emma strikes fighting poses in the *Avengers* credits, Georgie performs dance moves or looks wistful. Steed recruits Emma for missions, whereas Georgie's proffered assistance is routinely spurned by Adamant. These disparities require qualification. Emma's debut episode, 'Town of No Return', introduces her practising fencing moves, connoting sporting prowess, discipline and channelled aggression; Georgie is first seen helping the ill and vulnerable Adamant, a more practical demonstration of initiative and determination. Like Georgie, Emma is captured on a semi-regular basis (eleven times in season four), requiring rescue by Steed. Emma's black leather fighting suit, highlighted in the opening credits of season four, features in relatively

few episodes (three of twenty-six) and she is seen more often in conventionally feminine outfits, including fur coats ('The Murder Market) and short skirts ('Town of No Return'). She is regularly objectified, more so than Georgie, as in 'A Touch of Brimstone', (un)dressed as the 'Queen of Sin', the camera tilting up her passive body in medium close-up. Georgie's relative lack of assertiveness, and aggression, was perhaps deemed in keeping with her 'dolly bird' image. This depiction also suggests an uncertainty over Adamant's masculine potency and appeal in comparison to Steed and Bond; paired – and compared - with an Emma Peel-style sidekick he could appear excessively naïve and ineffectual.

As White notes, women gained greater access to professional roles during the early 1960s (2007: 63), evidenced by Sydney Newman appointing Verity Lambert producer of the BBC television series *Doctor Who* (1963-89). Such high-profile opportunities were rare, however, and not always welcomed in heavily male-dominated industries, television or otherwise (cf. Drabble 1969: 27; Sandbrook 2007: 693-4). White argues that *The Avengers*, and other television series of the era, expressed anxieties over women in senior management positions through making them villainous (2007: 61), one example being 'How to Succeed...at Murder', where ruthless female careerists turn lethal. In the discarded pilot episode of *Adam Adamant Lives!*, a government agent known as 'Mr Smith' is revealed as both female and a traitor (Chapman 2002: 143).

The series repeatedly undercuts Adamant's naïve ideas of chivalry and feminine fragility, his old-fashioned romanticism hopelessly outdated. This could have been a progressive strategy, challenging longstanding gender stereotypes (cf. Cashmore 2000: 158) as the province of a man literally out of his time. While Adamant is made to look gullible, even foolish, the confident and powerful women he encounters are rarely shown in a positive fashion. Furthermore, despite this new assertiveness, many remain subservient to male colleagues and partners. In 'A Vintage Year for Scoundrels', his fiancée Louise (Veronica Strong) is established as a refined Edwardian lady, her dark hair contrasting with a white dress, gloves and feathers that suggest innocence, purity and vulnerability. Ensnared by his emotional attachment, Adamant learns too late that she is in thrall to his arch enemy, The Face, and has willingly betrayed him. The point is underlined with a medium shot of

Louise standing over the prone and helpless Adamant, caressing his face while she reveals her true nature. Louise's comment, 'So clever but oh so vulnerable', appears to challenge Adamant's assumptions of male strength and female weakness, yet when The Face moves into frame to take her hand, it is clear that the real power lies with a man. As The Face injects Adamant with a fiendish concoction, a montage of shots includes repeated close-ups of Louise's mocking face. White roses left on the block of ice that holds his body recall her white costume, suggesting the flowers are an ironic tribute to her lost 'love'. Despite being haunted by this betrayal, Adamant is repeatedly duped by attractive yet treacherous women who play on his old-style gallantry. In 'Beauty is an Ugly Word', Adamant is knocked out by Paula and seems astonished by her actions. It is notable that he threatens Paula with reprisals if she harms Georgie, and causes her to suffer facial injuries, destroying her good looks. This could be read as a displaced form of revenge on Louise, emphasised by Paula echoing the former's last words to Adamant.

As DeGroot states, shifting attitudes to sexuality meant that women 'could now admit to sexual desires and could openly pursue their fulfilment' (2009: 220-1). Women saw themselves as active and equal partners in marriage and relationships; sex was a matter of pleasure rather than duty (cf. Sandbrook 2007: 483). Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott note how the Bond girls' sexuality, though subordinated to Bond's desires, was not tied to marriage, family or domesticity (1987: 173). The most sexually forward women Adamant encounters are charity worker Prudence (Geraldine Moffatt), in 'The League of Uncharitable Ladies', and pub landlady Myra Bamford (Colette O'Neil), in 'Village of Evil', their sexuality linked to criminality and devil worship. Though soberly dressed in black, Prudence makes advances towards him that border on aggression, while Myra is a sensual, dominant figure who paws at the captive Adamant and suggests that the pleasures of the flesh lead to spiritual fulfilment. In both cases, the women reveal a sexual permissiveness unknown, or at least unshown, in Georgie's social circle. They are punished for their transgressions – ostensibly of the criminal variety – with penetrations of a non-sexual and fatal kind: Prudence stabbed with a poisoned charity flag and Myra impaled on a pitchfork. In these instances, at least, the female sexual revolution is an insidious and destructive force that must be quashed without mercy.

The female villain in 'A Vintage Year for Scoundrels' is neither youthful nor sexually alluring. Racketeer Margo Kane (Freda Jackson), middle-aged and working class, is the unacceptable face of the *nouveau riche*, travelling in a chauffeur-driven limousine equipped with a telephone. Kane can be read as refracting a fear of organised crime conflated with anxieties over increased class mobility and empowered women assuming traditionally male roles. 'The League of Uncharitable Ladies' appears to depict another female-dominated criminal organisation, though of a middle-class nature. Adamant traces a series of deaths to The Gentlewomen's Charity League, whose committee is sanctioning 'assassinations' in the belief that they are thwarting a corrupt, warmongering patriarchal order. Yet the ringleader is their mercenary butler, who hypnotises women into compliance during a ceremony that turns the dove of peace symbol into a Roman standard, perverting a pacifism associated, albeit contentiously, with femininity into a traditionally male militaristic aggression. Unlike Kane, these gentlewomen have only the illusion of power, their strike against patriarchy both misguided and misdirected.

Otherness

Like many British films and television programmes of this era, *Adam Adamant Lives!* employs racial and sexual stereotypes that would now be considered unacceptable. Casual racism manifested in all levels of 1960s British society, stemming partly from fears over assimilation, competition (for jobs, houses etc), cultural conflicts and interracial relationships (Sandbrook 2007: 663-4). The 1960s Bond films featured foreign villains often of indeterminate origin, minimising the risk of offence to overseas markets. Bond has several non-white allies, including Pinder (Earl Cameron), in *Thunderball*, depicted as a respected fellow professional yet serving largely as Bond's chauffeur. Non-white characters are handled differently in *The Avengers*, largely through their absence. While this approach is problematic, Brian Clemens, associate producer and script editor for season four, argued that the show's tendency to lampoon stereotypes was inappropriate for ethnic minorities, 'being black in racist Britain was not to be laughed at' (quoted by Rogers 1995: 132, 158). Exceptions include 'Small Game for Big Hunters', where a clichéd 'savage', framed in snarling close-up, is revealed as an agent for the Kalayan intelligence

service. Eloquent and English-accented, he literally speaks Steed's language but is killed before completing his mission, leaving the decisive action to the Great White Avengers, the tentative racial equality fleeting and quickly sidelined. 'Room Without a View' balances its sadistic East Asian guard with a sympathetic Chinese woman married to an Englishman, though their onscreen relationship is fleeting and traumatic.

The BBC sit-com *Till Death Us Do Part* (1965-75) directly addressed racism in humorous fashion, though it is arguable that some of the audience did not get the joke and took the main character's rants at face value (Sandbrook 2007: 661, 662). This attempt at countering entrenched racist attitudes is absent from *Adam Adamant Lives!* On the DVD commentary for 'A Sinister Sort of Service', Lambert suggests the series exhibited a level of xenophobia in several episodes. In the 1902 prologue of 'A Vintage Year for Scoundrels', Adamant kills two foreign assassins without hesitation and, revived in 1966, mutters about 'foreign devils' from his hospital bed. In 'A Sinister Sort of Service', crime boss Jason Lang has a Germanic surname and a hint of a German accent, while his henchman Miklo looks and sounds East European. Lambert draws a parallel with England's football victory over West Germany in the 1966 World Cup, which drew jingoistic comparisons with World War II. Sandbrook, however, argues that British antagonism towards Germany at this time has been exaggerated; the countries enjoyed a civil relationship during the 1950s and 1960s, and there was relatively little jingoism in media coverage of the build-up to the match (2007: 315).

'More Deadly Than the Sword' is set largely in Tokyo and aspects of Japanese culture are put to nefarious use, whether a geisha house or the sport of kendo. The racial politics in this episode are also problematic, with Georgie menaced by a Japanese henchman who represents a clear sexual threat, echoed in 'A Sinister Sort of Service' when Lang caresses her face with a gun barrel. The lead villain in 'Allah Is Not Always With You' is Vargos (Kevin Brennan), whose name and appearance suggest a Latin nationality, a sweaty sexual sadist who watches his victims on closed-circuit television, emphasising his voyeurism. The image of the white Englishwoman menaced by rapacious non-white foreigners had a longstanding

resonance in British culture (Dyer 1997: 186). *Adam Adamant Lives!* perpetuates this racist stereotype with no discernible sense of irony or counter-examples of more progressive foreign characters. Non-white characters are depicted as perpetrators and, occasionally, victims, as with an Arab prince targeted by Vargos, but are not permitted to be agents of positive action.

Along with lecherous foreigners, *Adam Adamant Lives!* touches on other forms of sexual 'deviance'. There are several instances of implied homosexuality, at a time when male homosexual acts were a criminal offence. In the 1960s homosexuality was widely regarded with, at best, pity and, at worst, violent hostility (Sandbrook 2007: 495). The younger generation showed a greater level of tolerance, however, and after years of political manoeuvre, a legalisation bill was introduced in July 1966, the month after the show premiered, becoming law in England and Wales in July 1967 (Rakoff 1998: 6, 15-16; Sandbrook 2007: 495, 497, 498). *The Avengers* features a few characters who can be read as borderline camp, such as Lovejoy (Patrick Cargill), in 'The Murder Market', and Arkwright (Bernard Cribbins), in 'The Girl from Auntie', who runs a knitting circle. While Arkwright is an innocent bystander who helps Steed, comparable figures in *Adam Adamant Lives!* are more overtly camp and invariably villainous. Laurence Raw cites Randolph (John Carson), in 'The League of Uncharitable Ladies', as exhibiting a camp manner, manifested in 'his mincing walk and fastidious gestures' (Raw 2009: 68). I argue that camp characteristics are displayed more openly by other characters. In 'To Set a Deadly Fashion', designer Roger Clair (Colin Jeavons) is effete, flamboyant and given to placing a hand on his hip or heart. Clair's office is decorated with pictures by Aubrey Beardsley, a Victorian illustrator associated with Oscar Wilde and known for his sexually explicit artwork. For much of the episode, Clair seems in control, summoning a sidekick with a nod of his head, yet lapses into camp histrionics when things go awry. Clair clearly admires aspects of Adamant, praising his Edwardian outfit and sense of style, a (homo)sexual *frisson* underlined by a veiled reference to Wilde. When Clair physically assaults Adamant, from behind, his weapon of choice, a female mannequin arm, affirms his lack of manliness. 'Sing a Song of Murder' features Melville, also prone to effeminate mannerisms, as when he adjusts his hair and clothes, and praises Adamant's 'perfect' wardrobe. Adamant refers to Melville as 'the charming gentleman with the perfume', suggesting a less than masculine

character. Melville seeks to emulate Adamant and suffers a case of swordstick envy; armed with his own blade, he adopts fencer's stances and practices his thrusts. Just as Clair's handshake lacks Adamant's firm grip, Melville cannot match Adamant in a duel, even with the latter handicapped by sonic assault.

Margo Kane is also marked by sexual ambiguity, with her gruff voice, hard features (emphasised in close-up), liking for cigars, and choice of wardrobe, especially her hat and jacket. It is notable that the younger and prettier Georgie wears a cap and trousers and smokes a cigar without unsettling her femininity or sexuality. In a DVD commentary, however, Lambert describes Kane's costume as a 'dykey outfit', suggesting this effect was intentional. White states that masculinised women on television during this era were invariably equated with subversion, danger and deviance (White 2007: 61). This argument is problematic, not least because the concept of masculinised femininity is hardly precise. Furthermore, in *The Avengers*, Cathy Gale and Emma Peel exhibit traits that can be termed traditionally masculine – independence, self-sufficiency, fighting prowess – yet are depicted in positive terms. Kane however reduces human interaction to sexual depravity and her threat to Georgie also carries an edge of sexual menace: 'Five minutes with me, ducky...'. The apparent homosexuality of Clair, Melville and Kane is not linked overtly to their criminality, though broadcasting standards of the day, along with the wider social climate, made any open depiction of the subject problematic. It is notable, however, that, as with foreign characters, there are no camp or butch figures depicted in positive terms. At a time when the legalisation of homosexuality was a public and controversial issue, these figures refracted the anxieties of a society implementing uneasy and uneven liberalisation, where mainstream representations of implicitly gay characters were usually comic, villainous or both.

The depiction of Clair and Melville also suggests anxiety over Adamant's sexuality. Ethan Mordden characterises Connery's Bond as an 'anti-romantic' who pursues and enjoys sex without love (Mordden 1990: 83; cf. Walker 1986: 191). Steed's relationship with Emma Peel is marked by mutual, if unstated attraction and sexual tension; he also flirts easily with younger women (as in 'Death at Bargain Prices' and 'Silent Dust'), ostensibly in the line of duty. By contrast, Adamant is a largely asexual

figure, uncomfortable with overt displays of female sexuality and, as his theme song emphasises, with no room in his life for love. While he kisses ladies' hands, this is the act of a gentleman, with no romantic intent; Steed, in 'A Surfeit of H₂O', accompanies the gesture with suggestive banter and body language. Adamant regards the Fluffy Girls in 'Allah Is Not Always With You' as connoting moral disintegration by their very appearance and his relationship with Georgie is one of avuncular concern and exasperation. Denied the badge of full-blooded heterosexuality, Adamant must reassert his straight masculinity in other terms; the clear contrast with Clair and Melville is an obvious, if contentious, means of achieving this status, underlined by his subjugation of these unmanly villains through violent action.

Conclusion

It would be straightforward to read *Adam Adamant Lives!* as a reactionary show through a selective analysis of its hero and villains. I have argued, however, that the series is not consistently conservative, reflecting rather a tension between a critique and an endorsement of 1960s Britain. White argues that while 'the new era threatened some middle-class men, the 1960s offered opportunities for women, ethnic minorities and the working classes which were largely unavailable to their parents' generation' (White 2007: 62). *Adam Adamant Lives!* refracts both the social progression and the perceived threat to the patriarchal status quo, the latter manifested especially – perhaps inevitably – in terms of gender, race and sexuality. The depiction of confident, assertive and powerful women is problematic, especially when their criminality is linked to overt sexual desire. As discussed, Georgina Jones could have served as a counter to this representation, yet she exhibits a positive independence and strength of will only intermittently. Racial difference is associated with sexual aggression and depravity, and homosexuality is linked, albeit not inextricably, with criminal tendencies. It could be argued that Clair and Melville are no more criminal, or deviant in their criminality, than their straight counterparts yet this still leaves them in poor company. Margo Kane's sadism is matched by that of Madame Delvario (Stephanie Bidmead) in 'Death Has a Thousand Faces', who puts Georgie on the rack, but exchanging homophobia for misogyny is hardly progressive. Elsewhere, however, subjects that seem an obvious target for conservative criticism

are treated differently. In terms of youth culture, pop music is shown to be misused but of no intrinsic threat in itself. Sexual abandon, commerce and blackmail are the province of older people from the respectable classes, while drug abuse is a potential threat to all generations and levels of society. The younger generation's greatest sin is being overly impressionable. The depiction of crime evokes negative stereotypes of working-class felony yet more frequently locates criminality among the middle and upper classes, with a hint of latent fascism. Even the representation of women and otherness, especially homosexuality, can be read, in part at least, as displaced anxiety over Adamant's masculine potency, sexual or otherwise. While *Adam Adamant Lives!* shares its hero's ambivalent view of modern Britain, the most sustained and insidious threat is invariably to be found in the supposedly threatened white middle-class masculinity.

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