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Mulder, Scully and the Wild Thing: Sex and the Monster in *The X-Files*

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A number of feminist critics have argued that men use the classic triangle of the horror film –formed by the monster, the hero and the heroine he must rescue– to represent woman as the Other, tacitly enjoying her complicity with the abject monster (Dika 1990, Clover 1993, Creed 1993). Many feminist scholars have denounced, as Nina Auerbach does, the "titillating alliance between Beauty and the Beast, the powers of monsters and of women," (1982: 67) lying at the core of these patriarchal films. Surprisingly, feminism has claimed this misogynistic titillation for women. In her influential essay on the classic monster film, "When the Woman Looks" (1984), Linda Williams interpreted Auerbach's alliance as a significant gap in the patriarchal representation of monsters and women as man's dark Other. For Williams, woman should use her Otherness as a source of empowerment, and her implied monstrosity as an instrument of resistance. The patriarchal manoeuvre to diminish woman is thus defused: misogynist horror filmmakers turn out to have placed in women's hands an enticing instrument to resist the very image of female helplessness the classical monster films thrived on.

There is, however, a very important snag in feminist argumentation. Even accepting the risky proposition that monstrosity automatically means empowerment –one must just recall the figure of the Elephant Man to question this premise– there remains the issue of how woman is to benefit from being represented as a monster, powerful or not. The diverse vindications of the demonic woman as a monstrous figure of power, hence as a most valuable tool in the deconstruction of patriarchy (Creed 1993), and the decrying as patriarchal dummies of heroines seen to fight monsters in modern horror films (Clover 1993) has placed the feminist analysis of woman in popular narratives –specifically in the Gothic mode– in a quandary. Nobody seems to know at all what a positive representation of woman might be in this context. When a female character succeeds among the

audience, she is often interpreted as part of man's Otherness rather than as part of *human* identity. This is because positive images of woman are routinely linked to anti-patriarchal resistance, the defence of an essential difference from man, and, in consequence, to monstrosity as an expression of radical difference. The comparison with new images of masculinity is hardly ever considered and, so, many aspects beyond gender issues are missed in the analysis of popular texts.

Dana Scully, the heroine of the popular TV series *The X-Files*, is one of the new positive heroines emerging from the popular texts of the last two decades - perhaps the only truly positive heroine together with her immediate predecessor Clarice Starling of *The Silence of the Lambs* in a cultural world clearly dominated by the multiplication of the images of masculinity. Yet, Williams's questionable example has tempted feminist critic Lisa Parks to read FBI agent Dana Scully of *The X-Files* as a (powerful) monster. This is paradoxical, given Scully's confrontations with all kind of monsters in the series, punctuated by her frequent shows of fear and loathing for them. In Parks's view, Scully is monstrous because she is an abnormal woman, a masculinised agent granted an extraordinary amount of power (for a woman, that is) by a patriarchal institution like the FBI, which places her at the same level as her male partner Mulder. Scully's exceptionality in a men's world (there are, after all, very few women in her work environment) is celebrated by Parks. This would be fair enough, if it were not because Parks roots Mulder's agency in his alternative masculinity –alternative to that of the patriarchal structure that employs him, and that he both uses and resists– while, in contrast, she attributes Scully's capacity to resist to her monstrosity rather than to her combative personality and her professionalism. Her anti-patriarchal, positive monstrosity –her awakening to full resistance of the system through her agency– lies, according to Parks, not so much on her legal authority as a law-enforcement agent as on her having become the mother of little Emily[1], a hybrid born of her stolen ova and, presumably, extraterrestrial semen. Scully's exceptionality as the mother of a singular yet monstrous baby (significantly female) makes her likewise singular and monstrous – a victim elevated to the category of angry mother, *the* main anti-patriarchal monstrosity (Creed 1993). In *The X-Files*, since the hero is also the heroine's partner, he is in no position of superiority enabling him to rescue her from the monsters to confirm his own masculinity. Not yet powerful enough, for she is a woman in a man's world, Scully cannot protect herself either and, so, once she has been secretly raped and made pregnant, her only source of resistance is her awareness of her difference as Emily's mother, rather than her condition as her partner's equal within the FBI.

[1] Scully becomes aware of the existence of her baby only in season five. Scully's is a most strange case of mysterious motherhood: a mother who ignores that, somewhere, she has a baby of her own. In this, Scully's technological rape and the enigmatic breeding of baby girl Emily parodies and perverts the condition of the man who ignores he has fathered a baby, a stock motif in sentimental fiction.

This is controversial, to say the least, for it seems evident to me that most spectators applaud Mulder and Scully's joint resistance as a *team* against the technological, patriarchal conspiracy that threatens the whole human race. Scully is by no means a lonesome figure fighting for her fellow women victims. I should think that very few female spectators see or would welcome an alliance between Scully and the monsters (against Mulder? apart from him?). Even fewer, except for feminist scholars, appear to have seen any sign of monstrosity - powerful or not - in Scully's anomalous status as a mother; quite another matter is the monstrosity of the method of violent impregnation, of which Scully is wholly innocent and, which, in any case, is no matter for celebration. Scully has been accepted as a positive representation of woman precisely because of her partnership with Mulder, one of the main innovations of the series and an essential key to its success. The image of Scully as raging mother is there –quite subdued, perhaps smouldering rather than seething with anger– but it is by no means the main core around which her personality is built. She is exceptional because she is equal to Mulder, rather than because she is Emily's mother and, so, a different person from any other men and from most women[2].

Here I want to move away from the perplexing feminist interpretation of monstrosity to argue that in *The X-Files* monstrosity is represented as the embodiment of both men's *and* women's fears. More specifically, my contention is that those fears relate to the intrusion of AIDS and technology into sex and reproduction, and also to the increasing influence of the puritan works ethos in the private lives of career-minded men and women. I wish to consider two particular episodes *Genderbender* (first season) and *Small Potatoes* (fourth). These otherwise very different episodes are thematically related, focusing as both do on Scully, presented here as a potential victim of seduction by an alien monster. In the first case, seduction is about to lead Scully to death, since her seducer is a lethal alien creature. This episode should be linked to the fear of AIDS, which is closely related to the general impression that not even our advanced technoscience can protect us from fast-spreading disease. In the second case, *Small Potatoes*, Scully's seduction would mean the birth of a monstrosity since the seducer is a freak fond of fathering tailed babies on his victims. While the series' mythology –to which *Genderbender* partly belongs– bespeaks the fear that sex in the era of technoscience is no longer felt to be a natural process, *Small Potatoes* questions specifically Mulder's inability to seduce, contrasted with his monstrous double's constant but treacherous ability to breed. In both episodes, Mulder arrives in the nick of time to save Scully from the monster of sex. His rescuing Scully from the arms of her would-be-seducer in *Genderbender* should be read as an altruistic, protective gesture in the face of the threat of death rather than as a patriarchal

[2] Most women for, as it turns out, she is but a member of a group of women selected by the sinister syndicate for experimentation. Presumably, all these women have mothered babies like Emily; only Scully, though, survives thanks to Mulder's help the so-called black cancer that the syndicate uses to kill them all.

action aimed at controlling Scully's sexuality. In *Small Potatoes*, the same response to seduction is used parodically with the aim of exposing Mulder's insecurity and short-comings as a man but also Scully's empty sex life.

Here, as I see it, lies the main attraction of *The X-Files*: it is an erotic fantasy that is trying hard to transcend the exhausted narrative of romance by exploring other possibilities for (repressed) men and women to interact. The monsters indicate the pitfalls in the construction of this new narrative, which always lingers on the verge of erotic realisation for Mulder and Scully only to pull back at the latest moment. Their relationship, grounded on their partnership and their FBI eccentric careers, is erotic without being sexual, perhaps because sex would turn them into an unexciting, common couple. It is hard, in any case, to see them making their careers compatible with parenting children. They relate instead through work into which they pour all their bodily and mental energies. His obsession for work seems to have deprived him of empathy towards other human beings - Scully excepted; work has entailed for her the loss of her capacity to bear children. This is why I want to argue here that they are a representation of the neo-puritan, careerist sex and work ethics inflicted on the 1990s men and women told to sacrifice it all – including love and children– for the sake of their professional life.

Genderbender concerns a pseudo-Amish community, calling themselves the Brethren, upon whom Mulder and Scully stumble in their search for a mysterious serial killer who has murdered several men and women. This killer, we know from the teaser, is a non-human creature with the ability to metamorphose into a man or a woman depending on the person s/he wants to seduce. Hetero-sexual seduction acts as a prelude to a ghastly death which surprises the victim after apparently very pleasing sex with the pseudo-human. As it turns out, the killer –androgynously named Marty– is an errant Brethren who, having discovered the pleasures of seduction through the alluring images of desire published in po-pular magazines, cannot have enough of trying them in the flesh. S/he bears with just a certain guilt the cost in human lives that this narcissistic search for pleasure involves. Marty's freakish behaviour alarms the strict Brethren -actually an undercover alien colony apparently unrelated to the syndicate's big-headed grey aliens. They discipline Marty and put also a check on the somehow abnormal behaviour of another of their own, brother Andrew, after he attempts to seduce Scully only to be interrupted by Mulder.

Genderbender presents seduction under the epigraph of the 1990s fear of AIDS. The ambiguous Marty embodies both the Byronic Don Juan and the female vamp[3], but s/he is literally lethal in a graphic, physical sense, as they are not. Carol Clover maintains that in horror films, regardless of the actual sex of the

[3] An interesting coincidence: William Fox, creator of 20th C Fox – the studio whose TV division produces *The X-Files* - transformed actress Theda Bara into the first screen vamp in the 1920s. She gave, thus, life to the mythical figure that would inspire countless masculine fantasies centering on their fears of heterosexual sex. Marty included.

monster or the victim, the victim function wants manifestation in a female, whereas the monster and hero functions want expression in a male, as sex proceeds from gender, and not gender from sex (1993: 12). In contrast, Leslie Fiedler proposes an alternative view by which "the primordial model for our notions of the monstrous is each sex's early perception of the other's genitalia in adult form" (1993: 32). Yet, *Genderbender* seems to disprove both: the monstrous here is not a particular gender or a set of genitals, but sexual intercourse. Marty is not primarily a monster because s/he shapeshifts constantly, which places him/her apart from the human race, but because sex with him/her kills. As happens with HIV carriers, Marty is just the vehicle through which death may spread. Since it would be politically incorrect to place an HIV carrier at the centre of a plot concerning monstrosity –they are victims indeed, not monsters– the always latent fear of them is displaced towards fantastic creatures like Marty. The androgyny and bisexuality of the alien evince a fear of sex that is not exclusively men's but also women's –human, in short, as opposed to the alienness of the AIDS virus. Marty is, thus, both a sexual fantasy– wouldn't many heterosexuals like to experiment sex from the other side of the gender barrier? And also a sexual nightmare: death lurking in the corners of casual sex. Today, when all of us are exposed to AIDS, the tension between the pleasure and the fear of sex has to be represented by a creature that is ambiguous and lethal, ordinary and extraordinary, human and alien, and this is what Marty is.

Marty's victims die after suffering a massive heart attack following a toxic shock after –not during– sex. The cause of death is not Marty's sucking vital fluids out of them, as vampires do, but the enigmatic fluids s/he puts in them as part of sex's natural processes. This shows that Marty transcends the vampire, whose modern cycle begins with *Dracula* (1897) and reaches a point of exhaustion precisely because of AIDS (Auerbach 1995: 192). This does not mean that the vampire is disappearing from the popular imagination –it clearly is not– but that the plots are increasingly repetitive, moving against the grain of the present, AIDS included. The male vampire and the female vamp emerged in the late 19th century as a response to the fear of syphilis and to medical theories preaching that man's precious vital fluids were depleted every time intercourse with a woman or masturbation took place. Bram Dijkstra observes that the vampires surfacing in literature, painting and film at the turn of the century were not "part of a supposedly 'subconscious' sexual imagery... but a direct medical truth" expressed in tales which were "cautionary directives against sexual incontinence" (1996: 88). The same could be said about *Genderbender*, always bearing in mind that, given the changes introduced in sexual behaviour from the 1960s onwards, in the context of the 1990s both men *and* women are exposed to the monster of AIDS. This disease, needless to say, is still being used by moral minorities and, especially by the Catholic Church. These have been preaching for almost two decades since AIDS appeared a neo-puritan approach to sex based on monogamy within wedlock and abstinence out of wedlock. Ironically, Scully and Mulder preach with the example, appearing to practise sexual abstinence throughout the series out of need rather than principle.

Unlike most vampires and vamps, Marty is just average in looks both as male and female. S/he can silently seduce anybody by means of always effective pheromones secreted into his/her victims by the touch of his/her hand. Scully is seduced in the same way by brother Andrew. In the logic of the series seduction is contrasted with abduction, but both are seen as part of sexual aggression and, intriguingly, of sex as contact with an alien species. Errant Brethren like Marty can have sex with humans but they cannot procreate: sex is an end in itself for aliens like these; seduction, just their means towards gratification. In this way, seduction, which seems an outmoded concept belonging to sentimental fiction, resurfaces now as part of the complex sexuality of modern men and women. Significantly, Jean Baudrillard, one of the main philosophers of post-modernity, devoted a whole book to seduction just two decades ago. Trying to asses what the women's movement opposes to the phallocratic structure, he wrote:

> Autonomy, difference, a specificity of desire and pleasure, a different relation to the female body, a speech, a writing, *but never seduction*. They are ashamed of seduction, as implying an artificial presentation of the body, or a life of vassalage and prostitution. *They do not understand that seduction represents mastery over the symbolic universe, while power represents only mastery of the real universe*. The sovereignty of seduction is incommensurable with the possession of political or sexual power. (1990: 8, his emphasis)[4].

Ironically, the aliens of *Genderbender* turn out to be accidental followers of Baudrillard's provocative views. Michael, Marty's only surviving victim, is appalled simultaneously by two things: one, that he fell for such an ordinary-looking being and two, that what he thought was a woman transformed into a man before his very eyes. "The club scene," he tells Mulder, "used to be simpler." Michael's implicit mastery of the real universe –he is described as a 'Don Juan' by Mulder– is challenged by Marty's mastery over the symbolic universe. Michael's confusion of sexual codes places him in a humiliating position. It must be remembered, though, that Marty's freedom is only apparent. S/he is subordinated to a strict group that tolerates no dissent and that considers him/her a sinner deserving the harshest punishment. Seduction is stigmatised here as deception acting against both men and women - but also as deception acting against oneself, a point that Baudrillard chooses to ignore. The series' motto 'Trust no One' unexpectedly acquires a clear sexual, personal dimension for, as Michael's case indicates, one cannot even trust oneself, much less the Other.

[4] Does Baudrillard mean that women should be content with being seducers of men? I want to believe – no pun intended on Mulder's motto –that Baudrillard intends to vindicate the *pleasure* of seduction for both men and women of any sexual orientation. As as Frenchman –if I am allowed to use a national sterotype– Baudrillard must have certainly been scandalised by the feminist puritanical strain shown in the rejection of seduction and also in the frequent attacks against pornography.

"Sex in the conventional sense", Linda Badley writes, "is 'safe' (non-existent) on *The X-Files* because it is not safe in an age, like that of the Victorians, of anxiety about diseases; it must resonate from iconographies signifying its absence or alienation" (1996: 157). Badley highlights Scully's position as the spokesperson for the new Victorianism of the 1990s, though *Genderbender* also exposes the contradictions inherent in her position. In this episode, the narrative actually moves from the moment when, appalled by the ghastly spectacle of the first victim's body, Scully says that "it is hard to believe in this day and age someone would have sex with a complete stranger" to the moment when after rescuing her from brother Andrew's bed, a no less appalled Mulder tells her "I saw you about to do the wild thing with some stranger." After which, she is sick.

But what makes Scully sick? That she was about to be seduced at all? That it was precisely the rather unattractive brother Andrew who almost succeeded? That she jeopardised her life? That the encounter diverted her from her professional duties? Angela Carter describes Sade's Justine as "almost a monster of [the] fear of sexuality" (1979: 49) and this is what Scully seems to be here: a hysterical woman reacting hysterically to her own sexuality; also a representation of our own hysteria before sex. Yet, as the series progressed and she came to discover the extent of the horrors inflicted on her body –cancer included– her being sick by the thought of sex seems more than justified.

As I have noted, she has been mysteriously abducted, raped and rendered sterile. The trilogy about her daughter Emily in the fifth season re-reads the Virgin Mary's pregnancy as a sinister impregnation by an alien agency, and Scully as the Virgin's contemporary double - no blasphemy intended here. Little Emily is the result of a radical separation between sex and reproduction in which seduction has been also replaced by abduction. The nightmarish creature that makes Marty seem harmless is this other faceless patriarchal rapist who impregnates Scully with both a mysterious cancer and a mysterious baby destroyed as soon as she is seen to be too ill to be of any use. The alien Marty and Scully's semi-alien daughter are two sides of the same coin: the fear of sex and reproduction. This fear is the underside of an age that has proclaimed itself *the* age of sexual liberation and of triumphant technology-aided reproduction, but in which both AIDS and the complex politics of the relationships between men and women have turned natural processes into literally or figuratively alien processes. This anguish before reproduction might well also reflect a specific fear of the white race, secretly appalled by its own difficulty to breed and by the Other's –the 'coloured' peoples– ease to engender the many children that might swamp white civilised countries in the near future, or so white supremacists claim[5]. This is possibly the politically very suspect fear that the series dramatises at heart through its view of sex as

[5] Richard Dyer expounds this theory in relation to the horror film in his book *White* (1997). This is the first study to consider whiteness as a factor as significant in the mental make-up of white people as gender or social class.

alien contact. This is what may be obscured by focusing on Scully as a woman and Mulder as a man, rather than as representatives of white ethnocentrism, if not of white (technological) supremacy, which they no doubt are.

Scully may seem repressed and puritanical in *Genderbender*, but Mulder's sexuality is not less problematic. More often than not, Mulder himself appears to be if not a monster, at least a freak, especially as regards his sexual behaviour. Again, one must be cautious, for the series has developed the rare ability to parody itself; any reading can be refuted with its counterexample. My impression is that David Duchovny is playing up Mulder's least likeable qualities out of a feeling of boredom with his role. Increasingly, Scully has come to signify not Otherness, but stability – normality – in a context in which Mulder signifies if not abnormality itself, at least eccentricity.

The best joke cracked at the expense of Mulder's inability to relate to women in a romantic way is the episode *Small Potatoes*, which also implicitly parodies *Genderbender*. Again, the main subject is sex tinged with supernatural aspects. Eddie Van Blundht, an ordinary-looking, stout janitor of low IQ, is found to be the father of five tailed babies by five different women. Apparently moved by an urge to reproduce and pass on his freakish tail (no longer visible because of surgery), Eddie has managed the feat by making love to the mothers of his children under the identities of their husbands and, in one case, of Luke Skywalker, his victim's hero. Scully explains that, apart from his excised tail –is this, after all a Freudian episode on castration?–, Eddie possesses muscular skin that allows him to assume any (male) shape he wants to. The comedy of this bleakly comic episode –it deals, after all, with secret rape– is rounded when Van Blundht targets Scully as his next victim. For this, he impersonates Mulder, wrongly assuming that he must be Scully's partner in more than one sense.

This gives Duchovny the chance to play Mulder as Eddie would impersonate him. When he visits Mulder's apartment, we discover through a message in his answer machine that Mulder is addicted to erotic hot-lines, which he uses under the pseudonym Marty, maybe echoing *Genderbender*. The episode also parodies Scully's idea of fun for a Friday night, which involves studying the data from the post-mortem of Eddie's father. In a very funny scene, Van Blundht as Mulder interrupts her evening, calling on her armed with a bottle of wine. The wine and Mulder's invitation to discuss personal matters warm her up to share with him pleasant memories about her first boyfriend and an apparently normal life as a teenager. Scully, nicely surprised by Mulder's new, receptive attitude, is just about to let herself be kissed when, as happens in *Genderbender*, the real Mulder bursts in to 'save' her and unmask his impersonator. Scully is horrified by the deception but the joke is on Mulder, for it is obvious that the mock Mulder is a charming, appealing man - something the wry, obsessed, maniac Mulder is not. Once in jail, Eddie allows himself the luxury of having Mulder visit him just to tell him that he should have more fun and enjoy life, for he is nothing but a loser. Scully overhears the conversation and though she bolsters Mulder's badly bruised ego by telling him he is not such a loser, she just half smiles when he replies he is not Eddie, either.

The episode partly reverses Scully's positioning in *Genderbender* as a neo-Victorian, repressed woman to reveal Mulder as the one who is really repressed. This repression is, interestingly, tied up with his professional performance. For Eddie, the humble janitor, FBI agent Fox Mulder is a failure because he is blind to Scully's sex appeal, and, more generally, to the pleasures of life. As happens in *Genderbender*, sex appears to be a mixture of horror and pleasure: Eddie is, after all, a rapist and Scully would have become the mother of yet another tailed baby, but it is also obvious he gives her something Mulder can never give her.

Mulder and Scully are, in essence, a sublimation of the puritan sexual and work ethos for the 1990s. If they are interesting at all, it is not so much for what they are as for what they encounter in their work - the wild thing, the monsters which rape, impregnate, devour its male and female human victims. They are our very conservative surrogates in a world in which the monster is felt to reign in the shadows: Mulder's and Scully's inability to establish contact with each other and to unmask the abusers in power is ours. What the series shows through Mulder and Scully's partnership is that woman is not on the monster's side but in the same fight as man in a world in which abnormality is not absolute but a relative value, as relative as Marty's sex, as Mulder's belief in the paranormal, as Scully's faith in God and as changing as Eddie's physical appearance. *The X-Files* deals, ultimately, with workaholism and asks men and women to consider how much should be sacrificed to professional advancement.

Mulder's and Scully's professional life *is* their personal life. No matter how often she vows to get in touch with herself, Scully always succumbs to the demands of work; Mulder does not even pretend there is a life to be lived outside his job. This is why the series actually demonises enjoyment, especially sex, which is what makes it so puritanical. Marty and Eddie must be exorcised because they disrupt an ordered universe in which men and women work, breed and die in a controlled environment. Our post-modern, late capitalist world is beginning to be perceived a laboratory in which higher agencies (whether human or alien, that is irrelevant) test products or theories on us, while we have much less fun than we would like to. The series itself is possibly one of the few spaces in which the carnivalesque, the forbidden, the Other, enter the life of the many ordinary working men and women who watch it. We envy Mulder and Scully –we follow them– because their job involves exciting encounters with monsters while ours is, mostly, as demanding as theirs, but much more boring. Otherwise, Mulder and Scully are dull people who work too much and miss all the fun. This must be the reason why actors Duchovny and Anderson insist again and again that they are livelier, wittier, prettier than their screen roles.

To conclude, the straight drama of *Genderbender* and the parody of *Small Potatoes* use the oversexed monster to highlight the repressed sexual behaviour of neo-puritan career people like Mulder and Scully – the 1990s career everyman and everywoman. The monstrosity lies in the result of the sexual encounters with Marty and Eddie –death or the pretty tailed babies– but these aliens are otherwise led by an uninhibited sexual appetite that Mulder and Scully lack. Marty's sexual shapeshifting is especially interesting because it breaks away from traditional

notions about gendered monstrosity. S/he provides the sexual thrill that viewers miss in their lives, but death and tailed babies spell a clear message: the wild thing must be tamed.

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The Saint as Playboy-Adventure Masculinity, Consumption and Bri Television during the 1960s.

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The Saint – an 'international man of mystery'

Simon Templar stands as one of the most enduring heroes of Br lar fiction. A suave swashbuckler whose flair for fisticuffs was comple an impeccable taste for the finer things in life, Templar –or 'The Saint known to both his adversaries and his erstwhile police confederates– wa created by author Leslie Charteris in the 1920s. Conceived by Cha romantic yet roguish hero, The Saint proved a popular character and an array of books, films, comics and radio series throughout the inter war years. Yet in the early 1960s Templar found a new lease of life. In Grade, head of the independent television company ATV, secured televi to the Charteris stories and the following seven years saw the producti one hundred episodes of *The Saint* television series, with the rakishly Roger Moore in the role of Templar.

Initially, at least, the television series stuck closely to the plots ginal Saint stories. The sixties version of Templar, however, was no same as the tough, hard-hitting adventurer originally envisioned by The television series certainly captured the character's combination charm and square-jawed ruggedness yet, compared to his earlier incarn sixties Saint was distinctly more stylish and sybaritic. While the no 1930s and 1940s had certainly seen Simon Templar at ease in the chi opulence and high-living, the sixties television series took this a hedonistic pleasure and conspicuous consumption to new lengths. Ea of *The Saint* elaborated a male fantasy of luxury and laid-back coo would invariably find himself either in the heart of the throbbing me