

Aalborg Universitet

# Do 'Manners Maketh Man'?

- An analysis of *Kingsman: The Secret Service's* relation to its cultural context of 21st century Britain



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## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the film *Kingsman: The Secret Service* in relation to the spy film genre as a whole and its cultural context of 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. The reasoning for this being an interest in how the film marries an older and well-established genre with the social dynamics of contemporary Britain in order to create its own new film – what parts of its genre traits it keeps, and which traits it discards, and how it combines this with modern social dynamics. The interest is how the film relates to its genre and cultural context, whether it is pushing against social constructions in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain or further cementing them.

In this thesis, the film is firstly analysed in terms of genre with the goal being to assess whether the film is a parody of the spy film genre or a pastiche thereof. The film's initial release material is studied for genre traits and other indicators such as the use of para-texts. This is done in order to understand what expectations the film is trying to build in terms of genre. The film's comic book source material is also brought into this genre analysis, and the similarities and differences are discussed in regards to what the film has kept, and what it has changed from its source text, and in turn what this means in regards to take on the genre and its cultural context.

After the analysis of the film's approach to its genre, where it is determined that it is a humoristic pastiche, the focus of the analysis is shifted to the topic of the two types of Britain the film is portraying. In this section of the thesis, the focus is on a character analysis of the two main characters, Eggsy and his mentor Hart, as representatives of each their end of the British class system. The two characters are also analysed in terms of intertextuality or lack thereof as well as the inclusion of genre tropes. It is discussed why the tropes are distributed the way they are between them, namely in terms of how the more flattering and gentlemanly traits are at large bestowed upon Hart, who represents the upper end of the British class spectrum. As an extension of how the film portrays social class, the *mise-en-scène* of the characters' surroundings and how the film portrays the two different social settings are analysed, and the use of colour and nostalgia to further a positive image the British upper class as a contrast to the British working-class is discussed.

Next, as it a large part of how the film builds the Kingsman spy organization and the spy up, the idea of the British gentleman is discussed both in relation to how it is married to the spy genre and in terms of current social class division in Britain. What it takes to be a gentleman, according to the film is analysed, and it is discussed whether this is as obtainable by everyone no matter class boundaries as it is initially argued in the film.

Furthermore, the female role is discussed in relation to the genre norm and whether the film broadens it or not, which in turn moves into an analysis of the role of people of colour in the film. The female and minority role are furthermore discussed in relation to the previous analysis of social class. Finally, the representation of people of colour in the film is discussed in regards to the African American villain, and how the film creates an othering of him to further the gentleman trope it celebrates.

Through the analysis and discussion of these matters, it is concluded in this that the film is paradoxical: It is concluded that the film does open up a discussion of class rather than dismiss it, and it does broaden otherwise quite limited roles in the genre for anyone who is not necessarily a well-situated British man. It is, however, also concluded that the film being a pastiche to a type of film of times gone by, and its celebration of the British elite means that it ultimately furthers the very same social constrictions that it initially appears to take a stance against.

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## Introduction

When thinking about spies - and more specifically spy films, surely one of the first images that comes to mind for many people is that of a tuxedo clad gentleman, speaking in a distinctively British accent, with slick back hair, a martini in one hand, and a gun in the other. The spy genre has had an overall constant presence in cinema history since the 1960's (Barr, C., 65), and this thesis will look into the genre as both a subject of idolization and parodying in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The British spy is foremost portrayed as a gentleman spy, a well-positioned man who speaks in a RP accent and drives fast luxurious cars with little care in the world aside from fighting foreign villains, and which woman he will invite to his hotel room this time (Powell, D. 132). However, while the genres popularity remains largely unaltered, the social dynamics of its cultural context of Britain have changed drastically since the genre's emergence (Evans, G., Tilley, J., 3).

This is where *Kingsman: The Secret Service* comes into the picture with its new take on the well-known genre. What sets *Kingsman: The Secret Service* apart is its broader range of characters from different parts of society in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. Most notably, the film's main character, Eggsy, is a young working-class man with an affection for sweatpants and hoodies over shaken martinis and tailored suits. It is through his journey of becoming the gentleman spy, with the help of his spy mentor, that the well-known genre tropes clash with the current day social dynamics in Britain, bringing two social groups together that are becoming increasingly socially divided.

The goal of this analysis of *Kingsman: The Secret Service* is to try to reach a better understanding of how the film relates to its historical context as well as the film tradition that it is rooted in. As the film features characters from very different social groups in current British society, as well having different roles for females and minority groups from the genre norms, there is an interest in looking into what social groups the film is portraying, and what role these are given in the film. By doing so, the goal is to get a better understanding of why this is so, and whether the film is pushing against the current social structures or cementing them. The analysis will also focus on how the film relates to its comic book source material – whether it is a parody or a pastiche of the genre on which it is based, and what parts of the genre conventions that are used, and what parts that are discarded, and if this might differ from the comic book. The spy genre is well-established (Cappi, A. C., 157) and so there is an interest in what aspects of the genre conventions that are used, either to be celebrated or ridiculed. The hope is therefore that by analysing the film in terms of how it relates to its genre to reach a better understanding of its cultural context. And so, the research question is:

*How does Kingsman: The Secret Service situate itself within the spy film genre, and how does it approach the social dynamics of its context of contemporary Britain?*

## Theory

For this thesis two different theories have been chosen to use in the analysis of the film *Kingsman: The Secret Service* in an effort to comprehensively answer the research question. For this reason, this section of the thesis will focus on covering the chosen theories.

### Genre Theory: Parody and Pastiche

In this analysis of *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, one of the aspects of the film that will be analysed is whether the film is a parody or a pastiche of the spy films, which it intertextually relies heavily on. The reason for the interest in whether the film is a parody or a pastiche, and in turn what aspects of the spy genre and the values it represents are either ridiculed or celebrated is, that this provides an understanding of today's Britain, by showing how it interprets and produces a new work in a genre that had its golden age around the 1970s.

In order to reach the subject of parody and pastiche, one first needs to understand genre: Genre film is one of the major types of film categories that exists today, along with the likes of documentary, animation and art film (Bordwell, D., 335). Genres are made up by works that share similarities such as theme, style, and more, and because of this are viewed as a collective – in essence; works that are part of the same tradition (Agger, G., 121) However, while these works are all related, they also have their own individual traits and are therefore distinguishable from one another (Agger, G., 124). It should also be noted that genres are not something that is necessarily considered actively, but rather it is always present in our understanding of film, whether we are the audience or the filmmakers who are creating the film, and this, in turn, colours how we make and perceive film (Bordwell, D., 335). Seeing as people are always (knowingly or not) trying to read genre into what they see around them, genre signals and genre markers are used by media to show what a film as a whole is about and by audience as to know what to expect from a film (Agger, G., 121) An example of this spanning back to the Greek dramas might be how the main character is portrayed: while tragedies have usually always had dramatic and larger than life heroes (Agger herself uses the example of the main character in *Mission Impossible*), comedies have heroes that are lesser than life, in a sense, more foolish/stupid, etc. (Agger, G., 125) - as we might see in the *Austin Powers* films, should we look at the other end of the spy film spectrum.

Genre is important when making and launching films as they show the audience what they might expect from their genre expectations when looking at posters and trailers which will, if there is

a consensus between audience and filmmakers, mean that the audience sees a film that they were expecting and wanting to see (Agger, G., 122) – it is therefore generally not good to give the audience something completely different than what was originally promised in terms of genre on the posters, etc. As a whole, audiences love genre movies because they are something they know, that reaffirm certain cultural values that the audience then can take part in – like taking part in a celebration like Christmas or Easter – while each year is different, it is more or less the same celebration of the same values, just like how each Bond movie is different, but it is still the same type of film (Bordwell, D., 326). Genres change as the society changes, and as an extension of this so does the views and moral compass that the characters are created from (Agger, G., 125). Films are usually mainly based in one genre, but that being said, they are rarely only part of one genre, rather they tend to mix and match a bit from several different ones (Agger, G., 127).

In terms of breaking with audience expectations of the genre there is a distinction between breaking with a genre and expanding a genre, however, it can be hard to pinpoint exactly where the line is drawn (Agger, G., 122) – this depends on the audience by how much they like it and follow you, and how much you go against the genre as it is always up for negotiation (Agger, G., 123). Generally speaking, when a genre has firmly established itself in the media picture, the ambitious and experimental directors can start to play around with it a bit more (Bordwell, D., 54). Most often, people will take to a traditional film easily, while it might not be the first audience, but the ones later in history, that will enjoy the more ground-breaking films (Agger, G., 144). So, while they can seem quite distinct at times, genre is not easy to put in a box and because of this a genre is only really complete when it is gone, and that is, as a whole, a rarity in film history (Agger, G., 129)

Seeing as genres are, by their very nature, always in process, always developing and changing (Agger, G., 127), in genre analysis, there is an interest in how these develop: The genre theorist Thomas Schatz was the one who distinguished the four distinct points in the development within a genre as being: 1. The experimental beginning that starts pinpointing what makes this genre its own thing. 2. The classical phase where everything goes after the genre's conventions. 3. When there have been too many classical films and the market is oversaturated by these, so the genre enters a more refined stage of self-reflection where it uses the genre as a theme to play around with and experiment with and lastly, 4. The parodying stage (Agger, G., 125). Though parody here is the last stage, it should be noted that Tynjanov, in a sense, considered parody as a dynamic transition into a new genre as the old is dying; so effectively more of a beginning than an end (Agger, G., 126).



And while parody and pastiche are quite similar in some regards, there is a distinct difference between the two - Fredric Jameson explains how pastiche differs from parody like so:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry without any of parody's ulterior motives amputated of the satiric impulse. (Jameson, F., 17)

In essence, this means that pastiche is similar to parody in the sense that it mimics a previous work, but it is not in order to mock it like seen in parody. However, it should be noted that while pastiche can still have humour, it is not created to make fun of what was before it, and furthermore, Jameson argues that pastiche rather than parody is so prominent today, because in our post-modern society everything “has turned into sheer images of itself” so that everything today is now a copy of a copy (Jameson, F., 18).

Linda Hutcheon has a different take on parody and pastiche than the one typically seen in e.g. genre analysis, such as seen with Jameson. While there are similarities between the two, she differs in her viewpoint on what can be considered parody having a broader perception and she does not necessarily consider parody as comedic such as the more conventional approach to parody, as Jameson has. Looking at her perspective might put why we today have so much parody and what it means in a different light, which could add to the understanding of *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, given that it does take its own new spin on an older film genre.

First off, Hutcheon uses parody quite broadly in comparison to how it is most commonly used, also in genre analysis, namely as comedy. According to Hutcheson, while a comedic/satirical remake is parody, parody is more than that as it does not have to be ridiculing, but rather that parody is something that takes in previous parts of history but adds its own post-modern spin on it, so both what one might call parody and pastiche, unlike Jameson who distinguishes the two (Hutcheon, L., 186)

Postmodernist art offers a new model for mapping the borderline between art and the world, a model that works from a position within both and yet within neither, a model that is profoundly implicated in, yet still capable of criticizing, that which it seeks to describe. (Hutcheon, L., 180)

Linda Hutcheon argues that postmodernism is in a sense paradoxical: According to her, we make use of parody in art all the time, both to point back to something, which we are fascinated by,

but also to point to and highlight what parts of the past, we are critical of by bringing it into a post-modern context (Hutcheon, L., 180).

“Parody seems to offer a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist to speak TO a discourse from WITHIN it, but without being totally recuperated by it” (Hutcheon, L., 206). Hutcheon’s argument is that because of how the world is today, mass culture is everywhere, and it is through parody that art confronts what it itself is part of, as there is an awareness of being incapable of escaping it, art makes use of parody in order to make its own what it cannot escape, putting its own spin on history and mass culture (Hutcheon, L., 183). So, rather than trying to break free from modernism and history, knowing this is impossible, post-modern art interprets it freely, creating distance by having its own spin on everything while also being historically aware as it “critically reviews it for its glories and its errors”, as Hutcheon puts it (Hutcheon, L., 193). This in turn can allow the artists to be critical of its context a creative way (Hutcheon, L.. 206)

Today, we see a lot of genre mixes, but when talking of adaptations, they do most of the time stay true to the genre that the original work was in, such as a book or a comic (Agger, G., 128). Comic book adaptation moved from being B-movies to block busters after the 1970s as Hollywood started to realize that a large chunk of the audience was teenagers and young adults who had an interest in this and it was the Marvel and DC superheroes that were (and still are) the most prominent (Bordwell, D., 54) - this is also the type of adaptation that *Kingsman: The Secret Service* is, but more on that later.

All in all, there are three different levels in which genre can be analysed: Macro, micro, and meso. In this analysis, it is the meso-level of analysis that will be made use of, and it is most often this level that is used when making an academic analysis of a film (Agger, G., 142). While macro level is interested in the difference between fact and fiction (Agger, G., 132) and the micro level with genre in language (Agger, G., 129), the meso level deals with why a particular work is made the way it is (as it is closely related to a stylistic approach to analysis), and how it relates to the genre traditions, it is part of, and by this, society around it (Agger, G., 142). In order make an analysis on this genre level, one would typically look at how the film is promoted on posters, trailers, and the likes, along with what para-text there is – such as the directors previous work or words of praise by a famous person on the cover, and by looking at this, try to understand what the audience are supposed to think of it and why (Agger, G., 143). Para-text is a term by Gerard Genette which has the purpose of describing the texts around a main text (the main text in this instance being the movie) – the para-

texts add meaning to and colours the perception of the film and are often viewed (or read) before the main text (Christensen, J. R., Hansen, O. E., Simonsen, T. M., 55).

Being aware of the genre, one is analysing a work from is crucial; Without knowledge of genre, it is impossible to say what is new and different in said genre (Agger, G., 156). While on one hand, it could be said that genre reflects society, that they change as the norm changes, on the other hand, perhaps this in reality is more adaptability as a way of selling the film to audiences rather than a natural reinvention of genre (Bordwell, D., 327). A new work always takes a stance on the past of its genre, whether it is positive or negative, and it is possible to learn about said stance and through this ponder why this is so by looking at what surrounds the work (Agger, G., 157).

### New Historicism

In this thesis revolving around genre and cultural context of *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, the theory that has been chosen in order to analyse how the film relates to its historical context of 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain is New Historicism.

It is difficult to write about the beginnings of New Historicism without including Stephen Greenblatt. Stephen Greenblatt is one of the most prominent people in the field of New Historicism (Parvini, N., 23-24) as he a kind of father figure of the theory as well as the term “New Historicism”, which was originally thought up by him, though he prefers the term “cultural poetics” to describe the literary theory (Brook, T., 4). While Greenblatt was inspired by a number of theorists when he was creating New Historicism (Parini, J., 455), the French theorist Michel Foucault was the person who Greenblatt was most inspired by, in particular in regard to Foucault’s view on power (Gearhart, S., 458). According to Foucault, power is an omnipresent part of every aspect of society, and this largely colours New Historicisms approach to culture (Robson, M., 20).

New Historicism is a literary theory that renounces the idea that history is something that should be considered as being something “static”, which can be viewed from the safe distance of the present (Robson, M., 2) as New Historicism considers texts as inseparable both from the time wherein they were made, and from the time where they are read, meaning that both the reception and production of said texts and the relation between the two, colours how a text is perceived (Robson, M., 4 ). Sussane Gearheart argues that what makes New Historicism “new” is that the texts being analysed have previously been thought of as a reflection of the historical context wherein they were written (Gearhart, S., 457). Rather than perceiving contexts as merely a backdrop to texts or texts as merely reflective, New Historicism considers texts as absorbed by context and vice versa, and that

culture itself is also something that is constructed (Robson, M., 22). This means that while the text is very much coloured by the cultural context, so the cultural context is also to a great degree coloured by the texts (Brook, T., 7).

“One of the things that characterizes New Historicism is the effort to take the imagination and things imagined seriously.” (Robson, M., 106). It is because of this interplay between cultural context and the text that the imagined is taken seriously, as Mark Robson writes. What is being imagined in a given text springs from the imagination of the artist, which will always be rooted in and a response to the world wherein said artist has written its work (Robson, M., 102). Given that the imagined is taken seriously and seen as a reaction, rather than being a reflection of a reaction going on in society, New Historicism considers the work itself its own reaction to its context (Gearhart, S., 457-8) and in that sense, the text should, according to New Historicism, be considered as serious and as much part of history as other kinds of text, be that e.g. political texts (Robson, M., 9).

This means that New Historicism is not strictly focused on one area like literature or history, but rather it looks at the intricacy that there is in culture between all these different forces and to do so, it may bring in aspects of different approaches and disciplines (Veeseer, H., 9). Texts and their cultural context are quite large grounds to cover, however, New Historicism tends to focus on texts and the parts of said texts that do not fit into the “usual”, as in what stands out against the overall picture of the given culture (Robson, M., 7) largely because of the interest in power and thereby also subversion and the interplay between these in a given cultural context (Robson, M., 72).

As the first successful counterattack in decades against this profoundly anti-intellectual ethos, the New Historicism has given scholars new opportunities to cross the boundaries separating history, anthropology, art, politics, literature, and economics. It has struck down the doctrine of non-interference that forbade humanists to intrude on questions of politics, power, indeed on all matters that deeply affect people’s practical lives—matters best left, prevailing wisdom went, to experts who could be trusted to preserve order and stability in “our” global and intellectual domains. (Veeseer, H., ix)

As Veeseer writes in the quote above, New Historicism is not afraid to borrow from and look into an array of different fields. However, while Greenblatt has been quite broad as to what can fit in under New Historicism both in terms of what fields to draw from and what works to look into, the main point is to have a closer look at the interplay between culture and given text which is being analysed (Brook, T., 4). Therefore, unlike other literary theories, New Historicism puts the majority

of focus on cultural context in the analysis of the work (Veesser, H., 9) and what literature does is that it shows what is/was allowed and what is/was not in the culture wherein it was written, in terms of how it complies but also in terms of how it might be revolting against cultural norms (Robson, M., 20) as people in a given society, wherever they might be placed in it, are always playing a part in the power dynamics in said society, complying with the status quo or pushing against, whether they are aware of this or not (Robson, M., 19).

## Method

Although they have been dominant in Shakespeare studies over the past three decades, new historicism and cultural materialism have never formed a homogenous movement or had a monopoly in the field, and there are many divergent positions both between and within those groups and among their adversaries. (Robson, M., 81)

As Stephen Greenblatt is a Shakespeare scholar it is primarily Elizabethan England that he has looked at using New Historicism. However, as mentioned above, New Historicism has branched out and was never meant to be tied to a specific time period or strictly to be used for literary texts only. However, when using a theory called New Historicism to analyse a work from 2014, which is quite close to being current day Britain, it is necessary to consider how this theory can be applied in an analysis of a current text:

As written above, New Historicism analyses text and its relation to its context in order to reach a better understanding of the time and what the text is saying about its context. While it is typically older texts that are being analysed, analysing a newer text and its context has its upsides and downsides: Analysing a newer text still has the same points of a text and a cultural context of said text as an older text. However, moving closer to the time the person analysing it lives in can mean that it is hard to see the forests for the trees, meaning that it can be hard to look at the issues that the culture is facing from a distance, given that one is to some extent a participant. As power, according to New Historicism is everywhere, this therefore means that oneself is part of the power structures that one is analysing, which complicates matters. On the other hand, there are some benefits to writing about a work and its context that is close to one's own current time, namely that one might have a better immediate understanding of said time and said power structures of society, whereas relating to the struggles of the Elizabethan society might be considerably more difficult and that the reader would still read its modern day context into an Elizabethan text. So, while not what New Historicism has been used most for, using New Historicism to analyse a current text, and that being a movie, is still

something that is possible, however one has to be aware of that one is not as removed in ones analysis from the cultural context, and that this can be both positive and negative. It should, however, also be noted that when using New Historicism one also runs into the issue of amount of context meaning that, it is extremely difficult to bring in every bit of information and pieces of cultural context wanted in an analysis of the given text, considering both time and page numbers factors in this issue

When thinking about context, it is also necessary to clarify with oneself how to approach this in a contextual analysis, which New Historicism lends itself to. In this thesis, the overall approach to context will be inspired by that which historian of ideas Mikkel Thorup puts forward in *Taget ud af sammenhæng* in regards to making contextual analysis. According to Thorup it is not the text itself which is in charge of what sort of context it has, but rather it is how we decide to approach it. This then means the context is created on the basis of what questions we try to answer when analysing it and in that sense, while the text will reveal some things to the person analysing it, by doing so it is also being reduced to the questions which it is being asked, as it closes off the possibilities of considering other aspects of its context (Thorup, M., 104). This idea of how to consider context marries well with both the aspects of genre theory which will be brought in, as well as New Historicism and it is how the text will be approached, namely that there is no such thing as an objective truth, or one unified context to a text, but rather it is created based on what elements of it that are being chosen to be analysed. The question then is whether it manages to be a good contextualization, which as Thorup argues is one where the chosen aspects of the texts manage to end up providing a better grasp of the text, its meaning and its context than the one that was had before (Thorup, M. 104). Along with this, Thorup argues that in order to not simply reduce the text to a basic level, one must be determined look at the text as more than just a reflection, but a voice of its own (Thorup, M., 98).

## Historical Context of *Kingsman: The Secret Service*

As this thesis focuses on the film *Kingsman: The Secret Service* both in its relation to the spy genre and its relation to its cultural context of 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain, this part of the thesis will focus on covering these contexts.

### British Cinema

James Bond is to many synonymous with the British gentleman spy on films. In fact, Bond is so much the archetypal film spy that if one decides to look at the index of David Bordwell's book on film tradition *The Way Hollywood Tells It* under spy films, one would find a *see also: James Bond films* in cursive (Bordwell, D., 293), and this is surely not the only example. To understand how Bond became a British spy film icon, one first needs to look at the development of British cinema: British film did well when the Hollywood films were closed off to the British market in 1947, but as soon as there was a reopening of the market in 1948, British films began to struggle again (Barr, C., 61). Because American film felt pressured from the appearance of TV in the competition for viewers, British films started to increasingly get backed by American investors (Barr, C., 62) and in the 1960's, where Bond would emerge, the percentage of British films with American backing was around 75% (Barr, C., 64). The collaboration between American and Britain was coloured by the two nations shared outlook on matters such as military imperialism, but as the British empire was collapsing, the Britain's outlook on these matters was changing, however, in the American mind, Britain still had to represent a European military power in films (Powell, D., 99). Overall, the spy film genre really gained traction, along with other genres like thriller and horror as there at this point in time was an increased interest amongst audience in darker cat and mouse type of films (Bordwell, D., 182).

Britain's outlook had changed, and this is where Britain became the center of attention with success from bands such as the Beatles and box office hits like James Bond (Barr, C., 65). Though based on books, it was the Bond movies that gained mass popularity, having reached about half of the world's population over the years (Cappi, A. C., 162). While Bond was not the only British spy to emerge in the 1960's, with the likes of Harry Palmer also appearing on the silver screen in *The Ipcress Files*, Bond was, and still is, by far the most popular (Powell, D., 100). The reason for the success of James Bond was that the character embraced both old and new outlooks – while he had started his career in the military, he was far less uptight than any predecessors, and this meeting ground meant that American backers were willing to take on the project, which in turn would shape a new sense of Englishness (Powell, D., 100).

“An American hero made classy by his British accent and suit” (Powell, D. 105). The new British man that Bond symbolized could still shoot a gun, but he was also a ladies’ man in beautiful suits, protecting the British/American notion of freedom from crooks and various underground organizations, often with a more eastern mindset (Powell, D., 100). While there are examples of e.g. a German/Chinese villain such as Dr. No, the main focus of the franchise has been on communist forces, specifically the Soviet Union (Russia in the later films) and its part in international terrorism and shifting, though never quite positive, relationship to Britain (Funnell, L., Dodds, K., 2017). What made Bond a middle-class ideal was that he fulfilled the dreams of these; Good cars, many good-looking women, interesting travels, and that he can do all this without being a millionaire (Cappi, A. C., 156). Bond is fun and lively, fitting into the 60s, but he also still very much reinforces a classical masculinity (Powell, D., 104) as well as the establishment, making him an ideal for the male audience and a traditional, conservative mindset (Powell, D., 106). The role of the female is usually quite limited as it is either that of a Bond Girl who is loyal to Bond and/or Britain (and in many cases romantically involved with him), or a so-called Bad Girl who is typically a singular woman who works for the villain (Funnell, L., Dodds, K., 2017).

It was not just British spy films that were popular: British spy television series were also produced, and they were popular amongst viewers both in Britain and in America following the success of the James Bond movies (Miller, J., 23). The shared love of spy stories and its relevance in terms of the Cold War tensions topic meant that numerous shows were produced, and amongst these television series were both shows such as *Danger Man* which was, perhaps not so coincidentally, written by Bond author Ian Fleming (Miller, J., 27)

Bond became so popular that the films are still being produced today, and the people who he inspires today are still the same as in the beginning, the usual Bond fan today being over 30 and male (Cappi, A. C., 157). What added to his massive appeal to a conservative middle class was due to him reinforcing the current establishment by being an articulate and well-mannered hero from a good background (Powell, D. 132), while also providing scope for the imagination, being himself a relatively unremarkable man who lives an interesting life, making him a somewhat relatable role model for the middle-class male audience (Cappi, A. C., 159)



## Class in Britain

One of the key elements which sets *Kingsman: The Secret Service* apart from other films in the spy genre is the coming of age element of the young, working class man, Eggsy, who sets out to become a spy. With his working-class roots, Eggsy stands out against the typical tuxedo clad and RP speaking spies in the British spy films. As one of the goals in this analysis of *Kingsman: The Secret Service* is to find out why the film is shaped this way, and considering that the analysis will be contextual, being aware of the social context that is working-class Britain is necessary in order to write said analysis.

It should be noted, that working-class is quite a broad label, and that the people in this social group are not part of a homogenous mass (Owen, J., 195). While using such a term does come with a risk of oversimplifying British society, a certain level of generalizing is necessary in order to cover the overall movements (Evans, G., Tilley, J. 3). It should also be noted that while there has been some research written about working-class Britain, works that deal with modern middle class Britain are few and far in between, and works on upper class Britain are even more rare (Edwards, J, Evans, G., Smith, K., 7). This, in turn, means that while there is a focus on working-class Britain, said focus might become more prominent than initially planned in contrast to the inclusion of other social groups in this section of the historical context to be used in the analysis.

## Working-Class Britain in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – The Thatcher Years

In order to understand how and why the social classes have developed to what they are today, it is necessary to look into the history of these, and especially the working-class, given that it is the active inclusion of this that makes *Kingsman: The Secret Service* stand out against the majority of British spy films.

It was during the 1980's that there was a shift in the perception of the working-class where the values, industries, unions and communities of the working class would change dramatically (Jones, O., 111). The pride that the working-class communities had had for generations and the strong social networks within it would be damaged from the political changes during the Thatcher years (Richards, G. 10). Before the changes in the 1980s, there were millions of working-class laborers in the various unions across Britain, and it was these unions that would found the Labour party in order for the working-class to have political representation in the British Parliament (Jones, O., 41). While women had fought for the right to vote since 1897 (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I., 251), the suffragette movement generally consisted of middle-class women (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I., 252).

Margaret Thatcher was a member the Conservative party and was the prime minister of Britain all through the 1980s, and one of the main points in her politics was that she wanted to change the focus from collective action to that of the individuals focus on improving and furthering itself as a way to move away from the focus on class and thereby inequality between said social groups (Jones, O., 47). In order to shift focus from class, Thatcher took on the unions, starting in 1980 with going up and winning against the steel workers after a strike lasting 13 weeks, costing thousands of steel workers their jobs (Jones, O., 50). The previous defeat of former PM Heath left the Conservative politicians, as well as a good portion of the civil servants, worried about how much the upper middle class and Britain in general was really being controlled by the might of working-class trade unions (Vinen, R., 132).

Though other parts of western Europe were also moving away from manufacturing, it was due to Thatcher's politics that Britain was the nation where manufacturing disappeared in the shortest period of time (Jones, O., 53). In 1980, because of the economic recession, not as much coal was being used, meaning that the British coal board was stock piling coal that they could not get rid of and started considering closing some of the least productive mines, however, this was leaked and a miners' strike began and was quickly won by these, leaving Thatcher and her cabinet humiliated (Vinen, R., 127). The coal board was still losing the state money in 1981 as none of the least productive mines had been closed, and so the Thatcher government planned their attack (Vinen, R., 127). The miners were the backbone of British industry, and when Thatcher also took on these, and won, the mining communities suffered greatly, to this date still being some of the most deprived communities in Britain (Richards, G. 4). As jobs had previously been passed down from generation to generation, the jobs available after the unions were weakened, challenged the previously clear distinction between male and female type of work and as these jobs were scarce, families were divided and communities brought to their knees (Richards, G., 4).

Another political initiative that caused trouble for the working-class was the Right to Buy, which was introduced by Thatcher (and would later be supported by New Labour) which meant that social housing was challenged as the previously nuanced communities in social estates ended up being made up by the people who could not buy and move out, such as the unemployed and single parents (Jones, O., 35). The pride of belonging to the working class and the perception of the social group as hard working and tough was lost (Richards, G. 10). Generally, Thatcher was successful in breaking down the working class, both in terms of removing its previously large political voice and economic resources as well as changing the mindset of a unified force as to that of individuals all

struggling against each other to be the one to manage to get out of the working class, making the individual personally responsible for the issues faced by being part of said social group (Jones, O., 48).

### Working-Class Britain in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

In current day Britain the working-class has earned the nickname of “chavs”, a word which is necessary to understand in order to understand the social dynamics and attitude towards the working class in Britain today: The word “chav” is commonly used to describe a person with unmannerly behaviour who wears designer goods and said person would usually be considered as part of the working-class (Bennet, J., 146). According to John Bennet, what sparked the move frequent usage of the word ‘chav’ in the public was that it got included in the Oxford English Dictionary in 2004, which was an event that got heavily promoted, causing the media to increase its use of the word and from that the public as well (Bennet, J., 147). Due to the social changes both during and since Thatcher, and because of the introduction of the word ‘chav’ a sort of caricature of the working-class, people’s perception of this social group has changed, and the percentage of people who believe that some live in poverty because of laziness or lack of ambition has increased from 19 percent in 86’ to 27 percent in the 10’s (Jones, O. 37).

Unlike the term working-class which has been worn with pride throughout the twentieth century, generally speaking, the word ‘chav’, like the word underclass, is not a word that the working-class people would use to describe themselves, rather, it is labels that other social groups uses to label people from the working-class (Bennett, J., 148). The stereotype of the ‘chav’ is based on that there has been issues with low employment numbers as well as higher crime rates in some working-class communities, in comparison to other social groups in Britain, according to Owen Jones, however, what is typically disregarded when talking about ‘chavs’ is the reason why the working-class faces such issues (Jones, O., 33). As ‘chav’ is a negative stereotype of a large group of people, and there are different ways of describing what makes a ‘chav’ a ‘chav. According to John Bennet, the ‘chav’ or ‘chavette’ stereotype is generally considered to be a person that is white, but borrows from African American culture in an inappropriate manner, not usually taking into account that multiculturalism plays a large role in the life of the working-class (Bennet, J., 149). According to Jones, the typical ‘chav’ stereotype, or caricature as he calls it, that the British media and public produces, is a person wearing faux designer goods – preferable athletic wear, wearing large pieces of gold jewellery (Jones, O., 108), their clothes being oversized and said person would typically also wear angled caps (Jones,

O., 120) with a particular preference for the Burberry brand without the income needed to buy it (Jones, O., 121). That British working-class youth is now making use of items of clothing typically associated with black American culture might be considered as bricolage:

Bricolage is a term used in cultural studies to describe the making use of things with a particular or no cultural connotations in a different way and thereby make them one's own (Hartley, J., 33). It was Lévi-Strauss who was the first to use the term bricolage, originally an art form, in the context of analysing culture (Foster, H., 285). Bricolage is commonly used in young sub-cultures in western society – an example might be the punk subculture in Britain in the 70s making use of items such as safety pins for decorative purposes, tying an otherwise fairly neutral item into a symbol of punk sub-culture (Hartley, J.34). Quite often bricolage is used as a criticism towards prevalent culture and is an attempt to go against typical norms, such as what a suit might represent in western societies, using cultural objects often in a manner opposite to the usual use (Hartley, J., 34).

Beyond clothing signifiers, a 'chav' is also often considered to be a person that is a racist skinhead and/or a single mom (Jones, O., 216). However, one is not only a 'chav' because one is wearing certain articles of clothing, rather the notion is that these signifiers are an indicator for a person who has a bad mentality and is of a different social rank (Bennet, J., 120).

The word chav is typically used by people in a higher social position in order to describe people who are in a less fortunate social position (Jones, O., 120). As a contrast to this, it is on the end of the class spectrum where we find another British stereotype: Like the idea of the 'chav', the idea of the gentleman is also in general considered as quintessentially British (and especially English) (Berberich, C., 13). The term stems from the social group that originated around the 16th century known as the gentry, a prestigious group just below the aristocracy, and so the term gentleman came to indicate high social status (Terci, M., 43). Whereas being a gentleman at first was heavily linked to birth, it became less so in the 19th century, however, to this day the term is still tied to a person of a specific social ranking (Berberich, C., 9). Unlike how being considered a 'chav' in current day Britain is entirely negative, to be a gentleman is to be a living upper-class ideal in terms of both attire and manners – however, it should be noted that some people today also consider gentleman quite negative as something old-fashioned and elitist (Berberich, C., 5). The reason for this potentially being that while social inequality is very prevalent in 21st century Britain, as a democratic country, the idea of some social groups being more privileged because of their social status is considered as being unjust and outdated (Terci, M., 49).

The most significant feature of the post-industrial class structure is not its disappearance, but the changing sizes of its classes. Inequalities have not only survived but have in some respects increased. (Evans, G, Tilley, J. 1).

If we go back to focussing on the working-class, the reasoning behind, that there has in some ways been an increase in inequality in Britain is that the jobs that provided the middle of the road levels of income are becoming fewer and far in between, meaning that there is now what one might call an hourglass economy where there is a greater division in income levels (Jones, O., 152). While there has been some focus on that the social elite has grown over the years, the changes in the working-class have been as dramatic (Evans, G., Tilley, J., 1). One of the reasons for the dramatic changes in the working-class today is that while there were jobs for the people who did not do well in education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such positions have become quite rare today (Jones, O., 36). Most of these jobs are to be found in the supermarkets, with these now being the second largest employer in Britain - the number of people working in such places having tripled since the 1980s (Jones, O., 145), as well as call centres which are also one of the biggest employers of the working-class (Jones, O., 147). The fight for equality has meant that there is a larger gap between women today, meaning that while many middle class women have benefitted, most of the lowest paid jobs in Britain today, such as the before mentioned supermarket jobs, are occupied by working-class females, single mothers being the hardest hit demographic (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I., 290). While the work that women today get is still typically at a lower salary than their male counterparts, it is the working-class women who have benefitted the least from the steps towards gender equality taken in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I., 13).

The issue with working-class stigmatization and loss of working-class pride is that the working-class has become much more removed from the rest of society which has meant it is now hard not to be pointed out and ridiculed (Evans, G., Tilley, J., 3). Especially in London, the working-class is physically removed from the rest of society, being pushed out of the city and into outskirt council estates and slums (Jones, O., 210). While the working-class is stigmatized and viewed as a somewhat homogenous group of lazy 'chavs', in reality it consists of many different types of people who can both be unskilled or skilled laborers as well as live in good housing or in the growing slums across Britain (Jones, O., 195).

However, despite the working-class consisting of people with a large variety of circumstances, the inequality has meant that the gap between the classes has become very large, resulting in that the

working-class is now perceived as one unified loser, far removed from the rest of society (Evans, G., Tilley, J., 3). As a result, there has been a surge in the attack on both working-class values and institutions, with both the politics, media and entertainment that are all dominated by the middle and upper class, being in the forefront of the attack (Jones, O., 108). Because of these changes, today, the white working-class has, strangely enough considered its previous large presence and proud traditions, come to be considered a sort of minority group by most of the British population (Evans, G., Tilley, J., 3)

### Youth in Modern Day Britain

When looking at the working-class of today in order to analyse *Kingsman: The Secret Service* in relation to its cultural context, an area that is particularly important to look at is the working-class youth, as it is the age demographic which the main character, Eggsy, is part of.

Within the UK, despite successive governments' attempts to address inequality and disadvantage, schools still have one of the widest attainment gaps in education within the developed world. (Richards, G, 2)

As well as the large gap in education that Gill Richards writes about, young people struggle in their time off school as well, with the social clubs disappearing; around 55% of the social clubs across Britain have disappeared (Jones, O., 176). While all students within the working-class are more likely to face issues in terms of achieving the same academic success as the rest of British society, the main group which is considered vulnerable is the young working-class male (Richards, G., 3). According to statistics, social class today has an effect throughout the entirety of a British child's education with boys who are in the demographic that can receive free lunch at school, in generally struggling with receiving as high marks more than boys from different social layers (Jones, O., 172). Recent studies focusing on top earning positions in Britain have shown that social class is an even more inheritable trait than height is (Clarks, G, Cummins, N., 260). The gap between academic achievement of the working class and their fellow students starts at the primary school years and becomes even wider when the children reach their teen years, with the gap in education based on social class in Britain being one of the largest gaps in the developed nations, according to a study made by Hutchinson in 2016 (Richards, G., 12). Even when some do manage to climb the social ladder and get an education and a job in an elite occupation, according to statistics, most of these will never reach a position in the top of their field (Clarks, G., Cummings., N., 262). As a result of the lack of overall possibilities and because of the closing of social clubs, some young people turn to anti-

social behaviour (Jones, O., 211) as gangs provide a sense of community and entertainment that the working class youth in Britain is lacking, which has resulted in the rise of sentences in Britain given to teenagers (Jones, O., 214).

### The Media and the Working-Class

Working class people have become objects of ridicule, disapproval and, yes, hatred. Welcome to the world of British entertainment in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. (Jones, O., 134)

The British media in current times consists of people who statistically come from a background where the family income is about 42.4 percent over the British average, which is a steep incline from the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Jones, O., 182) meaning that the people controlling and producing British entertainment come from quite a narrow group in society. This in turn means that there is a large gap between the working-class and the people who choose how the working-class is to be portrayed. As culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is considered to be something that belongs to only the middle and upper-class, the working class has been largely excluded from the talk of culture (Edwards, J, Evans, G, Smith, K., 7). The disconnection between the working-class and the people who work in media has meant that the portrayal of working-class people is most often far from flattering, whether it is reality TV or film, with the media reinforcing the ‘chav’ stereotype (Jones, O., 122). As this sort of rhetoric is not just part of everyday talk, but also shown and laughed at frequently in the media as well as used by politicians to further various political motives, it reinforces what is essentially of anti-poor discourse in British society (Bennet, J., 146). The result of this stereotyping of the working-class as lazy ‘chavs’ in the media means that fictitious persons end up being considered a portrayal of a real social group and this thereby furthers the notion that some people are at the bottom of the British society, not because of inequality caused by politics put in place from the Thatcher era and beyond, but because they are ‘chavs’ and therefore deserve being there (Jones, O., 137).

### Political Landscape in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain

Today, there is a lack of participation and of belief in the political system as a result of the working-class being marginalized and stereotyped both in British society, media, and in politics, (Evans, G., Tilley, J. 1). While the old Labour did not manage to stop Thatcher from winning over the unions and workers, a large portion of the working-class voters that used to be the party’s backbone have moved away from new Labour (Jones, O., 53). The difference between old Labour and new Labour is that while old Labour had a strong focus on the working class, in general it did not do much for the rights of either women or the different minorities, whereas new Labour focuses

greatly on these minorities and of the notion of climbing up the social ladder rather than improving life for the working class as a whole (Jones, O., 88). While women had previously been underrepresented in the male dominated old Labour's higher political levels (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I., 287), when New Labour won the election in 1997 there was a historical high number of female MPs, going from 37 to 101 (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I., 289).

While the British government did attempt to combat unemployment and social inequality to some extent, the funding was cut off when the financial crisis came (Richards, G., 4). This is one of the issues, seeing as while unemployment is considered a problem in Britain, it is not as politicized as it used to be, meaning that the working-class has no traditional political party to turn to in order to get their voice heard (Jones, O., 260). De-politicizing the issue of employment and instead viewing it as an issue of the individual means that the political landscape is furthering the notion in British society that the major class difference is so, not because of politics put in place, but because some people simply are 'chavs' who deserve to face the contempt and the issues the working class is facing because they are, by nature, 'lesser' (Bennet, J., 159).

Because New Labour had lost its working-class support it started targeting the voters in the middle more, however, so did the Conservative Party, hoping to pick up some of the voters Labour had lost, which has resulted in the political views in the British Parliament having, in some aspects, moved closer to each other (Evans, G., Tilley, J., 4). As the traditional political parties in Britain are not winning a lot of working-class voters, the BNP has managed to grow a fair amount, particularly in East London and the former mining communities (Jones, O., 103) and the reason for this is that the BNP is working to further the conception that the reason for the lack of money and housing for the white working class is not because there is not enough, but because all of it goes to immigrants (Jones, O., 231). This movement against immigration has led the former working-class party Labour to see the issue at face value as an issue of racism within the working-class, rather than an issue of lack of resources and aid (Jones, O., 103). While the working-class has always voted less than the other social groups, the margin between the groups have normally been quite small, but in 2010 nearly half of the poorest 5<sup>th</sup> of Britain did not vote, whereas that number was only one 5<sup>th</sup> on the other end of the scale (Evans, G., Tilley, J., .6).

The lack of voting, and then the voting for parties such as the BNP means that there is a lack of representation in the traditional political parties, and so, the traditional political parties are less interested in focusing on problems of the working class, as they are not trying to win their votes to



win the election (Evans, G., Tilley, J. 6). The distancing from the working-class in politics is happening despite the fact that monetary inequality is higher in Britain today than it was in the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bennet, J., 146). By now, the political left, who would traditionally be at the forefront of the political fight for the working class, has replaced their target group with other marginalized social groups (Jones, O., 256). This, in turn, has meant a distancing between the white working-class and other marginalized groups, as the working-class criticism of mass immigration is not well received in the political left (Evans, G., Tilley, J., 6). As well as immigrants, the new Labour also has a strong focus on females (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I., 290). As the working-class has lost its previous support from the political left, who it has both become more distanced from socially as well as ideologically, it has led to 6 in 10 people in the white working-class feeling like there is no one in the political spectrum who really speaks for them (Jones, O., 248).

Class-based inequality more than ever a material problem at whatever political level we look is recast as personal difference, as just being a matter of the kinds of people in the world... (Bennet, J. 160)

The politicians of 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain are predominantly from middle-class and upper-class backgrounds (Evans, G., Tilley, J. 4), and their denying of class as an issue in contemporary Britain has meant that they have lost voters (Jones, O., 258) who in turn have moved their support to the non-traditional political parties such as the BNP and UKIP in order to have a political voice (Evans, G., Tilley, J. 1). By politicians placing the working-class focus on immigrants however, it means that the blame for working-class issues caused by the elite are now being ignored (Jones, O., 264), which has meant that the elite does not feel challenged by the working class anymore but rather uses them for caricatures for entertainment in the media (Jones, O., 269). The issue of lack of representation means a further decreased political participation, which only causes there to be even less political representation in the traditional political parties, causing the British working-class of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to become even further socially distant than before (Evans, G., Tilley, J. 7).

## Analysis

This section of the thesis is the analysis of the film *Kingsman: The Secret Service*. The film is about a young man called Eggsy. After his father died in a secret mission when Eggsy was young, Eggsy and his family have been struggling. As a young adult, Eggsy is unemployed and dabbling in petty crime to pass time but gets recruited by Kingsman agent Harry Hart as a candidate for the position as a spy at the secret intelligence service Kingsman. Meanwhile, a megalomaniac is planning to wipe out most of the world's population with phone signals to halter climate change. It is therefore Eggsy's job to learn how to become a gentleman spy while also trying to save the population.

The analysis is divided into four different sections, each revolving around a different topic, in an effort to analyse the necessary aspects of the film in order to answer the research question.

### Parody or Pastiche?

*An analysis of the films approach to the spy genre and its comic book source material*

Valentine: Do you like spy movies, Mr DeVere?

Hart: Nowadays they're all a little serious for my taste. But the old ones... Marvellous! Give me a far-fetched theatrical plot any day.

Valentine: The old Bond movies - oh man! (*Kingsman: The Secret Service*, 00.52)

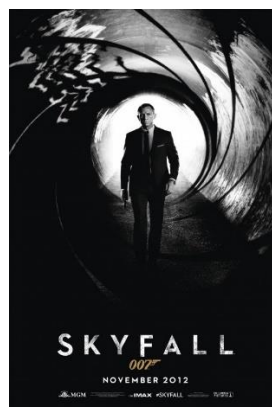
One of the main aspects of *Kingsman: The Secret Service* is perhaps its relation to the spy film genre. In this part of the analysis, the focus will be on how the film approaches its genre and its comic book source material. The goal by analysing these aspects of the film is to understand how the film positions itself in relation to its genre, and how its current cultural context might be affecting how the spy genre is approached. By reaching some understanding on the film's relation to its genre and context and whether it might be a parody or a pastiche, the hope is that this will aid the further analysis of the film and its relation to current social dynamics in Britain.

As Agger wrote, the meso-level of genre analysis is the one most commonly used when analysing film (Agger, G., 142), and it is also the one which will be used in the analysis of *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, as it is the level of genre analysis where the focus is on the film's relation to the specific genre traditions and history, as well as how it is stylistically interpreting said genre. As *Kingsman: The Secret Service* revolves around spies in a secret organization, it is fair to state that the film is mainly situated in the spy-film genre, though it has some genre hybridity, containing elements

of genres such as action, comedy, and science fiction, which is not abnormal seeing as genres after all do not have strict borders. However, the film is still overall a spy film and to understand how it relates to its genre, figuring out what stage of the genre it is part of is important.

As mentioned in the historical context of the spy genre, this genre tradition has been popular on the silver screen with the James Bond movies as the most notable of them all since the 1960s. Since the experimental beginning of phase 1, the genre has both seen the classical phase such as the Bond movies of the 80s and 90s and a large portion of the experimental phase such as in the film *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, the *Mission Impossible* franchise, and newer Bond movies. Therefore, according to Schatz's thoughts on genre development, it is largely the parodic phase that the spy genre is moving into at this current moment. This is despite that, as Hart and Valentine notes, the Bond movies and other spy franchises are still making very serious spy films; however, they are a continuation of franchises that came before and are therefore not following the genre development in the same way. The spy genre moving into the parodic phase would also make sense in terms of *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, as it needs a strong genre tradition in order to draw on it and make this type of film, whether it is a parody or a pastiche of the spy genre.

At the meso-level of genre analysis, which will be made use of in this thesis, it is customary to bring the initial poster and trailer into the analysis as mentioned in the theory section, as these are the primary and most concise indicators of what the people producing the film wants to communicate to the audience, in terms of what expectations they wish for these to have going into the movie theatre. This then means that the trailer and poster are usually the genre points as condense as possible at least from the filmmaker's perspective, whether that is true or not for the entire film.



The posters for *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, 2014 and *Skyfall*, 2012

Firstly, the poster: stylistically the poster to *Kingsman: The Secret Service* is action packed, with the use of the contrasting colours (please note: all pictures used in this thesis can be found in a bigger scale in the appendix). As seen in the posters above, the teal metal and orange burst of explosion against the sky creates a very dynamic looking poster, which signalizes to the audience that this is an action-packed film. If we look at what genre conventions it is highlighting to its potential audience, it features men in suits, guns, and a woman with blades as her prosthetic legs doing martial arts, as well as two characters in street wear, also with guns in their hands. Furthermore, the text informs the audience that this is about a secret intelligence agency, presumably British, and links it to the Marvel action/adventure film *X-men: First Class* through the director, using it as a para-text in order for the audience to establish link to an already widely known film in order to establish expectations for the audience. The other para-text the poster relies heavily on is the name of the actors and what connotations these might have for the audience, interestingly leaving out the name of the relatively unknown lead to make room for Colin Firth and Samuel Jackson, but also Michael Caine who has a significantly smaller part, but is universally known as an iconic British actor, usually portraying slightly troubled characters, such as spy Harry Palmer and thereby serves to indicate what expectations the audience should have.

If one was to strip most of this, however, and only left the circle and the man who is front and centre, the poster is essentially identical to the *James Bond: Skyfall* poster which was released a couple years prior to this film and revokes connotations to the old Bond opening sequence of 007 seen through the barrel of a gun. In addition, the fonts are in a similar colour scheme, however, the use of Times New Roman to write Kingsman gives the audience a sense of something traditional and classic tied in with the new film, like the iconic 007 logo in the same golden colour on the Bond poster that also signifies a continuation of something known, despite being a new film. Therefore, it could be argued that this is a clear indicator to the audience that it is related to the James Bond type of spy films, communicating to the audience that this film is based in a universally known tried and tested genre. Despite this, the adding of more colours and action in the poster, along with people who are dressing differently and dangerous prosthetic legs, in contrast to the classic black and white James Bond poster, the filmmakers indicate to the audience that this based on a tried and tested genre, but also that this is a new, lively, and colourful take on it in contrast to the classic but bleak black and white of the modern Bond.

The trailer promises the audience a film as much packed with actions as the poster, again drawing lines back to *X-men: First Class*, and showing a mise-en-scène that has a vast mix of

differences – The first clips are that of Eggsy causing trouble near the housing estate, and it is soon followed by clips of Savile Row and spy gadgets. This then communicates to the audience that it is interplaying the traditional upper-class Britain with a coming of age story of a young man from a very different background. While the main focus is on the seriousness of the situation the main character and the Kingsmen are facing, the trailer also adds some humoristic lines, making it apparent that the movie has humoristic elements, but it is not focusing on this aspect to a large degree. One of the humoristic lines is when Samuel L. Jackson with a heavy lisp and a thick American accent says “You people talk so funny” to one of the spies, in turn showing the audience that this film is based on old-fashioned British gentleman values and a British outlook and quirky humour, moving slightly away from the more Americanized James Bond type of British spy. Furthermore, the line “The Kingsman agents are the new knights” (Kingsman: The Secret Service Official Trailer #1, 00.01.15) combined with shots of high tech spy gadgets and fight scenes as well as fast paced editing indicates that there is an effort to create a mix of something old-fashioned and aristocratic, even slightly Arthurian, with an almost adolescent love for explosions and comically over the top action.

Combined, it could be argued that the expectations to genre that is put forward by the pre-premiere material, namely the poster and the trailer, to the film, are that of an action packed coming of age story of a young man from a rough background becoming a British gentleman spy of times gone by. The poster and the trailer make it evident that this is a spy movie, but the espionage is shown to be far more action and gadget packed than the more serious *Skyfall* that the poster is drawing direct parallels to. The choice of using the para-text *X-men: First Class* in both the poster and the trailer gives a clear idea of its intent in terms of its take on the spy-genre: the director Matthew Vaughn is, as it is written in the poster and trailer, director of an X-men film, however, he is also the director of *Kick-Ass*. This then becomes interesting because *Kick-Ass* is like *Kingsman: The Secret Service* also based on a comic by Mark Millar. The choice not to highlight the more comedic action film *Kick-Ass* on the poster and in the trailer despite it being the same writer and director duo lets us know that *Kick-Ass* is not the movie that they wish for audience to compare *Kingsman: The Secret Service* with. By providing the audience with connotations to a more serious action film like an X-men film instead, the genre codes that they wish to, at least initially, give out are more serious. While *Kingsman: The Secret Service* is made in the largely parodying phase of the spy genre, and while there are clear humoristic elements in the trailer, the choice of para-text indicates that the filmmakers are attempting to have the audience decipher it and chose to view it on the basis of it being more of a spy-film pastiche and celebration of old-time British spy films rather than a parody thereof. Again, while there

are humorous elements, these appear downplayed and to some extent this could be to not scare fans of the spy genre who dislike parodies away by its para-texts before seeing the film and making their own judgements.

In terms of the film itself, it is not far removed from its initial pre-release material in terms of poster and trailer. However, while *Kick-Ass* was not mentioned in the pre-release material, neither was its source material *The Secret Service*, and its relation to and differences from this, again, are useful in terms of understanding the film's approach to its genre:

Despite the film *Kingsman: The Secret Service* being based on a comic book, there are quite substantial differences between the two. The comic book *The Secret Service* was written by Mark Millar and illustrated by Dave Gibbons, and had the subsequent film's director, Matthew Vaughn, attached to the process of writing it as a co-plotter, and it was published in 2012 by Marvel under their Icon Comics sub-branch (Millar, M., Gibbons, D., 2012). Adaptations create a new version of a work that already exist and are often open about this relationship to a previous text and typically in a new medium, with book to film adaptation being one of the most popular (Hutcheon, L., 4). This is to some extent because of film and television's ability to reach a significantly larger audience than what either a book, a play or in this instance a comic book might (Hutcheon, L., 5).

When looking at the comic book and the film back to back, there are many similarities, however, the two works are far from identical. In terms of the differences between the two, Kirstine Moffat and Mark Bond have written some interesting points; According to Moffat and Bond in *'The Ultimate Version of Who You are Now': Performing the Gentleman Spy* in which they analyse the works and their differences, the main elements that sets the two works apart is how these approach the spy genre which both works rely so heavily on. Moffat and Bond write:

Millar and Gibbons's text engages in this testing of assumptions, evoking the standard narrative tropes of the gentleman spy to satirize and interrogate key aspects of the genre. In contrast, Vaughn's film alternates between pastiche and homage. It foregrounds its relationship to preceding British spy narratives, and celebrates its own recycling of core spy tropes, but does not sufficiently distance itself from its wider source material to interrogate the gentlemanly code it perpetuates... (Moffat, K., Bond, M., 357)

In essence, Moffat and Bond make the case that while the comic book have parodic elements, making use of the genre in order to point out its flaws and the flaws of its golden age and highlighting

these in a humoristic way in a current framework, the film they argue, is more so a pastiche as it is a celebration rather than a critique. One of the examples Moffat and Bond use to highlight their point of this main difference is how the comic plays with and makes fun of iconic spy tropes - they use the example of the Union Jack parachute (like the one Bond uses in *The Spy Who Loved Me*) failing to open before the Kingsman spy and his rescue target hit the ground, unfolding comically over the squashed bodies. This, Moffat and Bond argue, removes the upper-class male violence and spy conventions from the typical reward in the genre, indicating that these are different times (Moffat, K., Bond, M., 259). If one was to add to this, it could be argued that, beyond the humorous elements, the comic book is very much a parody in Hutcheon's way of describing these, bringing the genre conventions into a present-day work in order to highlight problematic aspects of history. By showing that the genre conventions fail the spy, it could be argued that the comic points out how privileged and easy life has been for the middle and upper-class males in the past, that their existence was made easy given that it was a white man's world, and by ridiculing and showing the failure of the iconic Union Jack parachute, it is emphasizing the change in the context today.

An aspect that Moffat and Bond do not highlight as much in terms of the differences is the monologues about the values of the spy organization Eggsy/Gary is being brought into made by Jack London/Harry Hart in the comic book and the film;

London to Gary: "We are going to teach you how to shoot properly, how to fly planes, how to do stunts in any kind of car and bring a woman to orgasm every time" (Millar, M., Gibbons, D., Issue 2, 22)

Hart to Eggsy: ... Our founders realized that they could channel that wealth and influence for the greater good. And so began our adventure. An independent international intelligence agency operating at the highest level of discretion. Without the politics and bureaucracy that undermine the intelligence of government-run spy organizations. A suit is the modern gentleman's armour. And the Kingsman agents are the new knights. (Kingsman: The Secret Service, 00.28)

While there are substantial differences to the introduction of the focus of the spy-organizations, both of these lines describe a suave, upper-class organization. The film, however, is replacing the satire of the comic book with lore - tying the spy organization in with both the notion of the British gentleman, as well as Arthurian legend. This indicates the seriousness that the film is taking in terms of how it celebrates the British spy today as an icon, and while sometimes humoristic, being dead set

on the greatness of this British institution. The comic book, on the other hand, while not disputing the British spy is an icon, highlights the vast excessiveness that said icon symbolizes, mocking the genre by pointing out its conventions and blowing them out of proportion, exemplifying the mismatch it is to a more current cultural context.

While London/Hart is, as also seen in the quotes above, far more animated in his mannerism as well as sexually charged, in the comic, being the one to have a sexual encounter with a female instead of Gary. This is in stark contrast to the far more pious man that he is in the film, and what else is different is the relation between him and Gary; the fact that London is the uncle to his spy-trainee Gary plays a large role in the comic, as it is from this relation that a lot of the conversation about class stems and the more serious topics of the comic are based on. London has himself left the council estate and his family behind in order to pursue his own gain and it is the reason for a great rift in the uncle/nephew relationship in a fashion reminiscent of current political views in Britain, especially New Labour. The comic continually throughout the story-line points out the personal shortcomings of the otherwise talented agent, and underscores how his beliefs are flawed in the sense that most people have skill and a wish to do well, and what is lacking for the struggling working-class is an opportunity for a decent job and housing rather than ambition. The change in family relations in the movie means that this element of social critique of the individual must escape its class rather than support the class as a whole, given that Hart is far removed from the life Eggsy lives.

By being based on a comic book, what the film has changed from its source material is interesting, given that it is then an active choice not to have it in the film, which in turn makes it even clearer how the filmmakers wish for the film to be perceived. Vaughn mentions in the behind the scenes material of *Kingsman: The Secret Service* that the choice of Hart and Eggsy not being related was one he was very keen on, because story-wise, he argued, it ruined the plot, as it was then already visible that the working-class boy could become a suave British spy (Vaughn, 2014). While this might be, it also explains the lack of social critique that there now is; seeing as the author according to New Historicism is not dead, given that these social background and cultural context shapes the work they produce. Vaughn being in charge of the film and removing this layer of social critique could be an effect of his social context, himself as many in the media business having a very wealthy lineage (Vaughn, 2015). Vaughn's discomfort with from the start showing that someone from the working-class could become a suit wearing spy results in him shaping the film after his own cultural context, as he himself would be, had it not been for Gary having a spy uncle, unsure of it is possible for a young working-class man to climb the social ranks and become a gentleman spy. In turn, this changes



the film quite a bit from the comic book, which also removes some of the more parodic elements, as the upper-class spy is something to be celebrated in the film, rather than mocked as seen in the comic.

Another element from which the film very much differs from the comic book is in terms of female representation: females play a much larger role in the film than the comic. While Moffat and Bond do point out how females are not always represented in the most positive light (Moffat K., Bond, M., 366), in the very least they are there, the spy trainee Roxy per example being just as capable spy as her male counterparts. Despite there being some problematic elements in regards to female representation, women are not used in the same way as in the comic: True to the genre the comic book is parodying females in *The Secret Service* serve as either motherly figures (as Money Penny is in the Bond movies) or as sex symbols that are simply there to be won over for the spies sexual gain and for a mission and nothing in between.

While the comic does contain elements of social critique, this is not extended to the female role in the spy genre which is kept oversexualized as part of the genre codes in order to be entertaining. Given that the film leans more towards pastiche rather than parody, it does not, to some degree, in the same way highlight the elements of the genre that perhaps did not age so well (aside from the final scene with Eggsy and princess Tilde) and rather places (at least some) females in roles in which they, too, can show just how cool British spy films, gadgets, humour and action were in the classic spy film era.

Despite the film overall being more of a pastiche to old-time spy films than a parody, it is not a direct copy of these as it brings in some modern dynamics, such as the females occupying different roles as well as its depiction of a more diverse and divided Britain, despite not being as direct a social critique as the comic book. Despite this, it is, at large, still a celebration of its genre traditions, highlighting the 60s and 70s as a golden age of cool gadgets, quirky plots and Britishness. What does, however, still make it approachable and seem something new, in contrast to being a 70s Bond film produced today, to a modern viewer is its relation to its source material. Moffat and Bond argue:

Kingsman's saving grace is its self-awareness of this pastiche. Not only does Valentine initiate the conversation about the spy versus megalomaniac, but he also taunts Harry after the church massacre, suggesting that there will be no chance of escape while the 'villain boasts of his convoluted plot'. He then follows through, shooting Harry in the head after declaring, 'this ain't that kind of movie'. (Moffat, K., Bond, M., 355)

Which one could argue means that rather than being a parody, the film highlights how a pastiche can contain strong humoristic elements: it is a glorification of the classic movies in its genre, and in turn, what makes it humoristic is that it is also, or perhaps mostly, a glorification of the slightly strange and quirky parts of the genre in its early phases, that have been removed from more serious modern spy films. The film is very obviously celebrating the wacky villain and all the genre tropes, which in a sense make it predictable, but by overdoing these and adding a coming of age story as well as packing the film with editing, the film appears as a so post-modern film that it is not only intertextual and relying on the audiences genre knowledge, it is highlighting and celebrating the fact. It is in many ways an incredible silly and humorous film, with many puns, the one mentioned in the quote above being one of countless examples. Categorizing it as a more of a pastiche than a parody then comes down to that, while it does highlight the obscurity of the genre, it appears to be doing so out of love and respect, rather than ridicule. This can be seen by how it builds up the spy institution Kingsman rather seriously, as well as how it brings in a serious coming of age story. The difference, and what sets it apart from the parody in the comic book then is ultimately that while the comic book makes fun of the spy itself, the film celebrates it and introduces humour through the clash between the upper-class secret service, the streets, and a psychotic villain with a lisp.

While *Kingsman: The Secret Service* does have humoristic elements, it does lean further towards being a pastiche of the spy genre, rather than a parody hereof. While the film itself is far more humoristic than what the initial poster and trailer sets forward of genre expectations, both in terms of what these show, and in terms of what para-text they link the film to, this appears as an attempt to lean the audience towards a more serious approach to the film: as it is tethering on the edge of being a parody like its comic book source material, by not linking to *Kick-Ass* and by focusing on the action, the film is downplaying the expectations of a parody, leaving the humorous spy intertextuality more as a surprise to when the viewer is watching the film. The need to indicate so clearly with genre codes that this is not a parody on the poster and in the trailer could be considered as a necessary step to take, as Jameson write that society today are used to genre films today being parodies, and given that this appears to be the stage the spy genre is also currently in on a level of the individual genre development. By linking it to something sillier or taking the spy organization itself less serious in the film (which could also be considered the result of the directors own cultural context) it would very quickly be read as a spy parody, and be at the risk of its audience being more prone to overlooking the genre aspects the film is trying to celebrate and, in turn, read it as a parody, given that this is something that would most likely be very familiar to the modern viewer.

## The Working-Class 007 and Mr. Darcy with a Poison Pen

### *An analysis of the "Two sides of Britain" Vaughn and Millar wished to portray*

Vaughn and I thought wouldn't it be fun to do something that combines two international views of Britain," says Mr. Millar. "You have your "Downton Abbey" Britain where everything looks great and then you have the Ken Loach-type of Britain which is a bit grimier. (Millar, M., 2015)

The quote above is about the making of *Kingsman: The Secret Service* by Mark Millar, the author of the comic book and co-writer of the film, from an interview he did with Wall Street Journal as the film had recently been released. What makes this quote interesting is that it provides insight into what he and director Matthew Vaughn wished to portray in terms of what cultural context they were rooting their spy film in, as well as it provides an idea of the notion that there might have been about Britain by these creators of the film, as they were making it. From the quote, it can be derived that the film deals with two sides of contemporary Britain – these two sides are the upper middle class/the upper class and the working-class. These two sides are represented through an array of characters throughout the film, however, the meeting (and sometimes clash) between these two views of Britain, Millar talks about, happens in the meeting between the two main characters who are the spy mentor and his apprentice, namely Harry Hart and Gary 'Eggsy' Unwin. For this reason, this part of the analysis will largely focus on a character analysis of the two main characters, what picture these portrayals of class dynamics are painting of Britain today, and how the spy tropes are working within this dynamic.

Out of the two main characters Harry Hart is, beyond being an almost visual copy of his namesake Harry Palmer, arguably the character most alike the spy icons of the films that *Kingsman: The Secret Service* is paying homage to: He is a middle aged, RP speaking, white and skilled, but otherwise unextraordinary man, similar to how both Cippi and Powell described Bond and, in addition, he appears to be from a financially well off background.

An important aspect to the Kingsman intelligence service is how these are presented as "the new knights" tying the secret organization together with a universally known cornerstone in British culture as well as the spy genre, both as an homage and an integration into the consciousness as something very British. Now, this Arthurian touch also provides some understanding of Hart as Hart's code name is the purest of Arthurs knights, Galahad (Encyclopædia Britannica). Even beyond his codename, his last name of Hart also nods towards a more sentimental and less crude than many of

his spy film predecessors. In that sense, the film does much to highlight Hart as the ideal modern gentleman. The most important factor in this, however, might be the choice of actor to play the British spy: Hart is portrayed by Colin Firth, a well-known actor who is perhaps most famous for the role of Mr Darcy, both in the mini-series adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* and in as Mark Darcy in the *Bridget Jones* movies. Having Firth play Eggsy's spy mentor further cements the role that Hart fulfils in the film, namely to be as much gentleman as spy and also underline the Britishness of the spy organization – Firth is therefore, based on his popular roles as a British gentleman in iconic British cinema, arguably a British icon in his own right. Firth being typecast builds up a conception of the spy organization in the film to be something distinctly British and guides the audience to see *Kingsman* as a serious pastiche while still being able to carry humoristic elements, as these are not unfamiliar in combination with a gentleman Firth in the *Bridget Jones* films. While Firth plays Hart, Egerton was, at this point in time, an unknown actor, and one could argue that he in a sense is also typecast: While Firth adds to the character of Hart and *Kingsman* in general by being widely known as Mr. Darcy and to some extent a British icon on the silver screen, Egerton being an unknown actor adds to the culture clash between the “two views on Britain” that Millar and Vaughn wanted to portray in the film. By being unknown, Egerton can more easily fall into the role of a young man that is part of the working-class masses in modern Britain, Vaughn being able to use Egerton's lack of celebrity status to his favour by highlighting the large gap in British society. As the historical context chapter revealed, the gap between the working-class and the rest of society is larger than it has been in recent history and so the typecasting highlights this by having the upper-class mentor be played by a household name and contrasting this so starkly with the working-class protégé being a completely unknown actor.

Eggsy is in many ways a contrast to Hart: he is young, speaks with a London street accent, has not finished any type of schooling beyond elementary and lives in a social housing estate with his mother, her boyfriend and his sister. Eggsy is, much like Harry, an unextraordinary man, besides being naturally skilled at the job of a spy. As far as the characters being representative of two sides of Britain, Eggsy does, in the start of the film, share some of the struggles that the real working-class British youth is facing, hereunder his struggles in the education system and his dabbling in criminal activities. Whereas both Harry Harts name and code name, as analysed earlier, nods towards numerous parts of British culture, this again is contrasted by the name of Eggsy being a made-up name, and while some other characters names are also perhaps not as rich in intertextuality as Harts, they are still commonly known English names. While Eggsy's birth name is Gary Unwin this is never

directly told to the audience of the film, unlike in the comic book where he mainly goes by Gary. The choice of changing the name used to his otherwise hardly used name in the comic, except for by his friends, could have to do with the interest in portraying duality in modern Britain in the film:

While it could be argued that the use of the name Eggsy is to emphasize Eggsy's young age, contrasting to Hart, as the other young spy trainee, Roxanne Morton, is continuously referred to as 'Roxy' throughout the movie, in particular by Eggsy. However, 'Roxy' is more so an abbreviation of Morton's real first name and while there certainly is a point to that it is two younger (and well-liked) characters that are called by their nicknames, Eggsy's odd name and lack of intertextuality could also be a result of how working-class is perceived in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain; While Hart's name is lathered with intertextuality, Eggsy's lack thereof once again appears as the contrast to his mentor. While the name Eggsy does provide some connotations to the sayings of being either a good or a bad egg, just as this remains undecided at first, it does not have the same level of intertextual depth as Hart's name and codename, which is deeply rooted in British culture and spy film history. Therefore, it could be argued that how the film portraying of two different social classes in terms of connotations in the characters names, Eggsy's lack thereof could be considered a result of the tendency, as mentioned in the historical context of how Edwards, Evans and Smith noted that culture in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain is only for the middle and upper class (Edwards, J., Evans, G., Smith, K., 7). By depriving Eggsy's character of the same level of intertextuality as Hart, he is excluded from being tied to previous parts of British culture, in a sense similar to the issue of working-class in Britain currently largely being excluded from British culture.

If one was to move more towards that of an analysis of the visual elements of the two characters in regard to them being representative of two sides of Britain and how these are presented, the mise-en-scène of them in their familiar territories is an interesting place to look at:



Stills of Harry Hart's workplace (Kingsman: The Secret Service, 01.08) and his neighbourhood (Kingsman: The Secret Service, 01.03)



Stills of Eggsy's and his family's neighbourhood (Kingsman: The Secret Service, 00.25) and their home (Kingsman: The Secret Service, 00.24)

The four stills depict where the two characters spend a large part of their daily lives, and therefore it is interesting to see how the film chooses to portray these as the characters are front figures of two different social background. Now, the two sets of pictures do not depict the exact same areas, as we are told that Eggsy, before meeting Harry, was unemployed and therefore the audience is only shown his homelife and not his professional. The reason for still including the still of the tailor Kingsman uses as its front and headquarters is because the impression put forward by the film is that Hart's focus and identity is as much, if not more, tied in with his workplace rather than his home. Now, the most significant difference in regard to the mise-en-scène in the two different sets of stills is the colours. While the colours in the stills depicting Hart's home turf are rich and with an abundance of yellow from tungsten lighting, dark green and wood brown with gold accents, the colours in the stills depicting Eggsy's social background are much bleaker. Here, there are no abundance of rich colours, but rather everything is in a greyish washed out hue. It is, of course, different places and it makes sense that a social housing estate and a tailor at Savile Row do not look identical, however, the difference in depth of shadows and colours tells us something about how the film is actively portraying the two characters' background, and through this what it is signifying in terms of class in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain: Millar said in the interview that one of the dual Britains was where "everything looks great" and then described the other side of Britain as to be "a bit grimier" and that is exactly the notion that is being put forward in this mise-en-scène in terms of colour grade.

The rich colours and deep shadows make Hart's social background look much warmer and comfortable, and while certainly also less modern, this is in a positive light which is underlined by the glamorous set design and props with cobblestones and tartan evoking imagery of Britain when it was most influential. The deep yellow of the tungsten lighting creates a heavy atmosphere that nods backwards, as the movie also does in terms of genre. This is contrasted by the bleak colours of the social housing estate paired with cold daylight lighting, and this means that even the few props that the two different settings have in common, such as some greenery in front of homes, are here an

unhealthy hue as if to underline that the housing estate is not a place for anything living to thrive. This is, like Hart's social setting, underlined with prop use, though in this case instead of having objects orderly placed, various items and mess are scattered all around, the clutter being in the foreground to the story in the still from the apartment, the framing of clutter in the golden ratio underlining the importance of these props as part of the storytelling. It could have been possible to build up a similar sense of nostalgia in terms of Eggsy's background, considering the posterity and rich culture some working-class communities had during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, rather than this, his home is portrayed as bleak and new but rundown at the same time.

One might then consider what the aspects *mise-en-scène* are telling the audience about Hart and Eggsy, and subsequently what notion of class the film is pushing forward is that of contrast. The two different worlds Eggsy and Hart are shown to live in are painted as to having no shared elements, even contrasting as far as pavement with cobblestones on one hand and concrete on the other. The notion that this then pushes forward is that of duality, yes, but a rather offensive take on this with no shared use of even grading or lighting, instead highlighting the gap in British society rather than focusing on unifiers.

What creates balance in the two worlds though in terms of colour and decor are another part of the *mise-en-scène*, namely the costumes: While the rest of the *mise-en-scène* showcasing Hart's cultural background is colourful, his suits are as grey as the concrete in Eggsy's council estate, and Eggsy too sticks out from his surroundings with his bright and colourful active wear. While it could be argued that this could be a choice to balance out the colours or lack thereof in the two different settings, Eggsy spends as much time on Hart's home turf as his own, if not more, and wears as colourful clothes here. Rather than being primarily a way of balancing out colours to make the film as visually pleasing as possible, the clothes of Eggsy and Hart underline what type of general perspective on British society the film is pushing forward: While Hart is cool and understated, though elegant, in his well-tailored suit, much like the spy-icons of days gone by the film is paying homage to, Eggsy's costume is almost identical to the perception of how middle-class people would stereotype a young working-class man, or a quote on quote 'chav', as Owen Jones wrote about, with a cap, gold chain and athletic wear.

Rather than choosing to have a more humorous approach, considering the film at times borders on parody, perhaps having Hart dressed more flamboyant in his spy attire making fun of the iconic suit as in a full blown parody such as Austin Powers, he is dressed in a steel grey colour, making him

appear sleek and savvy. This is because Hart in the film personifies both the prosperous parts of society, as well as the British gentleman spy, while Eggsy's tracksuit, on the other hand, is clashing with the scenery with obnoxiously bright yellow (and somewhat ironic given the modern working-class's financial struggles) large golden decorations all over his hoodie. The film could have made Hart's costume the one that was more of an eyesore and Eggsy's tracksuit more subdued, making Hart's costume as colourful as Valentino's suit in the example above, however, as the film is an homage to the British spy, and by aspects such as the *mise-en-scène*, the film is situating the familiar suaveness of the gentleman spy well within the upper-class. As it is also true for his character, Hart's clothing is constrained and elegant, making him appear elegant in a manner that would not be out of place in the more conservative Savile Row shop front he frequents.

So, Hart is generally the character in the film that personifies most of the spy tropes, as seen above, both in terms of age, general behaviour and skillset as well as social class, the typecasting of Firth cementing Hart's old-time British gentleman spy trope. However, if we move into the spy tropes that Hart has not been given, what sets Hart apart from Bond is, that he does not at any point in time in the film show sexual interest in anyone, which is strange in the sense that sex (and Bonds interest in so called 'Bond-girls') plays such a large part in the James Bond movies and is arguably one of the genre markers of the spy genre overall, which is seen by how it is routinely highlighted in parodies such as the Austin Powers films and *The Secret Service* comic - even other more serious films in the genre such as *The Ipcress File* features a woman that Palmer is interested in. Similarly, none of the other agents at Kingsman are shown to have or have interest in female company, however, it should be noted that Hart is the only agent that the audience gets to know. To understand why this element has been removed, at least from the one Kingsman agent we as an audience get to know, one can, once again, look at the approach to genre: The film is, as previously concluded, more so a pastiche than a parody, with the focus on highlighting the spy genre as a British institution and its seriousness towards paying homage to the notion of the British spy is evident in sides such as the film's choice of tying the Kingsman organization together with Arthurian legend in terms of the agents' code names being those of Arthur's knights, the table they all sit at, their tech 'wizard' Merlin and so forth - a type of symbolism that played no part in the more parodying comic.

Hart's protégé Eggsy, on the other hand, is, while certainly less persistent and forward than men in the old Bond movies, not one to say no when a woman offers her company in return for him saving the world. Having the character of Eggsy be a sexually active person sits in contrast to the pious and very serious spy organization that the film attempts to establish the Kingsman as of being.



In making a pastiche to the old time British spy films, being keen to keep in the quirky gadgets and to move away from treating women like sex objects might be a natural transgression of taking out the elements that perhaps do not sit as well with the film's cultural context, considering the strides made by feminism in Britain over the years, women having a significantly different role as a whole in current British society. At the same time, the film can then push forwards the ideals of chivalry, the (considerably less womanizing) gentleman and add some funny gadgets and one-liners for a humoristic effect. That is why, while stepping away from the sexual objectification of the comic book in terms of Hart, adding that layer to Eggsy is a bit of a clash:

Eggsy: If I do (let Tilde out), will you give me a kiss? I've always wanted to kiss a princess

Tilde: If you get me out right now, I'll give you more than just a kiss.

Eggsy: Sorry love, gotta save the world.

Tilde: If you save the world, we can do it in the asshole.

Eggsy: I'll be right back! (Kingsman: The Secret Service, 01.51)

Eggsy is portrayed as Hart's opposite in many different aspects, most importantly perhaps being class, Eggsy having been brought up in a working class dominated social housing estate. As uncovered in the section on cultural context, there is a tendency in British media today to use the working class as a humoristic element in various ways. As Hart is the figure head of the British spy icon in the film by being the most visible agent of the Kingsman organization in the film it would perhaps not be as flattering a homage if he was as sexually driven as Bond, but Eggsy on the other hand is the protégé. By making Eggsy be the one to be flirting with women the film can both manage to push forward the notion of the classy spy organization, while also adding some crude humour and slipping a perhaps less well aged part of spy movies into the film by having the working-class aspiring spy be the one to be chatting up women. Eggsy's quote of "I've always wanted to kiss a princess" (a reminder that he is a fish out of water in the upper-class setting) and excitement when the princess offers him even more works to make the audience entertained, lifting the stiffness of what could otherwise become a too serious and boring pastiche, by having the one who struggles to fit into the organization be the one to add the less modern gentlemanly humour and behaviour, following the pattern in modern British media of making the working class the humoristic element.

However, while the one to initiate the conversation is Eggsy, the one to make the explicit offer of sex is the Swedish princess, so it could also be argued that both sides of a class spectrum are parts of the interaction, but it should be noted that the British upper class is kept out, leaving the crude

sexual comment to a Swedish princess and Kingsmen the want nothing to do with the behaviour, as seen in Merlin's disdain with Eggsy's actions (Vaughn, 2014, 01.58.00). This could be due to that the strides of feminism in modern Britain mainly having benefitted the more well positioned women in British society, meaning that Eggsy being the one who is more blunt in his approach to females might be a result of the social context where, in the social background Eggsy represents, feminism is not as widespread.

While it could be argued that the parts of the genre that did not age well were added to the character of Eggsy in part because of his social background, the big question in terms of Eggsy is whether he is the hero and the one to succeed in the film because of his social background or in spite of his social background. The reason for why this is an interesting area to look at is because it can help provide insight as to how the film is situated in British culture, and what stance that is, consciously or not, being taken in regard to the social dynamics it is situated in.

Overall, the two types of 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain that Vaughn and Millar stated they were interested in portraying, namely the upper middle/ upper class and the working class and the clash between the two, are personified in the main characters: The spy mentor Hart and his protégé Eggsy. All in all, Hart personifies most of the tropes of the spy genre and the intertextuality in his name and codename, as well as in Firth playing the role cements him as a very British and gentlemanly spy, the intertextuality and typecasting being used to tie this new film in with established parts of British culture. In contrast to this, the character of Eggsy is denied intertextuality in terms of both casting and the character's name – his lack of such being a result of representing working-class youth and culture in 21<sup>st</sup> century being considered for the more well positioned in British society. The class gap is further emphasized through the *mise-en-scène*; Hart's social background being portrayed as warm and antique by set design and colour grade in contrast to the bleak concrete of Eggsy's housing estate – this is contrasted in the costumes where Hart is in a sleek grey suit, and Eggsy is wearing colourful athletic wear, furthering the division between the two. While Hart, in general, personified the old-time spy/British gentleman stereotype of the genre, the more problematic aspects of this, namely the objectification of women, is left to Eggsy. This is in line with the media in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain in general using the working-class for comedic effect, which allows the film to keep this part of the trope while keeping it at a safe distance from the British upper class, which it builds up through Hart in particular, keeping the film a pastiche.

## The Kingsman Gentleman Spy: Bred or Taught?

### *An analysis of what being a gentleman entails according to the film*

The idea on the gentleman spy, with heavy focus on the gentleman side of it, is a large part of the makeup of the film and the type of secret intelligence service that the film is making Kingsman out to be. As the film is about a young working-class man learning to be a gentleman spy, and considering that the 14<sup>th</sup> century saying ‘manners maketh man’ (Griffith, M., 1) is the catchphrase of the film, the question is then whether the film is going along with the prevalent power structure in 21<sup>st</sup> century British society. That is, at large, excluding the working-class from culture and halted social mobility or if the film is pushing against the current class structure in British, showing that anyone can be a gentleman spy, that it about one’s actions, not one’s social class. The question then is, given that the film has a working-class protagonist, whether he is shown to succeed because of or despite of his social background.

Yes, Harry opens the door of privilege to Eggsy, and, yes, Eggsy walks through this door. But, apart from retaining his accent and his duty of care to his mother and sister, Eggsy then proceeds to undergo the Pygmalion transformation the film references: casting aside working-class habits, behaviors, and modes of dress to become the socially ‘superior’ gentleman spy. (Moffat. K., Bond, M., 364)

If one was to look back at Moffat and Bond and their text *The Ultimate Version of Who You Are Now*, which was used in the analysis of the films genre, and ask this question, based on the quote above, their answer would be that Eggsy succeeds in the film because he sheds his working class roots. According to Moffat and Bond, the film does not have a working-class protégé in order to show how the working class are just as capable of being cool gentlemen spies as the upper classes, rather, they argue, Eggsy serves to make the elitist spy organization in the over the top pastiche more palatable to the audience (Moffat K., Bond, M., 364) such as the surface level critique in terms of Hart’s small, ‘quip’, as they call it, about inbreeding amongst the British elite (Moffat K., Bond, M., 363).

On the other hand, what Moffat and Bond writes off as surface level social critique that does not stem deeper could really be a direct push against the class issues in modern Britain –The film is a pastiche that is an adaptation of a comic book parody of the spy genre, and such a large scale film rooted in a significant part of British culture is interesting, because it lets us see what ideas it is pushing forward, and what part of the past it is distancing itself from, and given that the upper class

plays such a large role in the British spy trope, analysing how it brings in a working-class youth is important as this will, in turn, provide insight as to current British society.

Now, Hart's disagreement (or quip) with Kingsman leader Chester King, alias Artur, would be a good place to start this part of the analysis, as it is in the beginning of the film and the initial time social class and class differences are touched upon in the film:

King: And try picking a more suitable candidate this year

Hart: 17 years and you... Need I remind you that I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for him – he was as much Kingsman material as the rest. More.

King: But he wasn't exactly one of us, Galahad. Your little experiment failed.

Hart: With respect, Arthur, you're a snob.

King: With respect?

Hart: The world is changing. There's a reason why aristocrats develop weak chins.

(Kingsman: The Secret Service, 00.11)

The film is from the very beginning pushing Hart forward to be the good, likeable character. It is Hart that the camera follows from the title screen over the shoulder from a taxi, into the Kingsman tailor, up the stairs and into the conference room where he sits down and speaks with King. By building up the introduction to the world of the kingsmen in such a way, the angle meaning viewer being literally positioned like a person following Hart into the situation, he becomes the familiar and trusted person. This is furthered by the typecasting of Firth as the familiar and kind face, as mentioned in an earlier section of the analysis, in comparison to Michael Caine's usual more dubious characters and later introduction from a distance. This is backed up by the flashback in the pre-title screen scene where the audience saw the candidate, Eggsy's father, who King in this scene is talking down, sacrificing himself to save the other agents. All these things build up Hart's credibility as a character and creates a distance to King. In addition, the way Hart addresses King, after having been edged on by King's rather crude comments, is humorous in its straightforwardness, calling King out on his excluding view on people in a very direct manner which makes the character feel like an honest champion for the little man. Here, Hart, who is the hero of this situation and the one who we are made to feel connected to, does stand up against the elitism that is very much a real life and growing issue in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain, no point denying that this is a point the film is trying to get across as its face value to its audience. The question is whether this is simply an initial 'quip', as Moffat and Bond argues, in order to make what it actual pushes towards, in terms of the idea of the British gentleman

and the elitism that British spy films celebrate, less stiff and more palatable, being able to push these issues, now that Colin Firth has assured the viewer that everyone in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain can be a Kingsman.

To help answer this, one could have a look at how Hart in a scene approximately 8 minutes later in the film addresses the same social issues when having his first actual conversation with Eggsy, where he argues Eggsy's father would be disappointed in Eggsy's school performance and him not making something of himself despite good grades in the beginning:

Hart: Of course, always someone else's fault. Who's to blame for you quitting the marines? You're halfway through training, doing brilliantly, and then you gave up.

Eggsy: Because my mum went mad halfway into it, banging on about losing me as well as my dad. Then, I'm being made fun of by people like you – judging me from your high ivory towers with no thoughts about why we do what we do. We ain't got much choice, you get me? And, if we were born with the same silver spoons up our asses, we'd do just as well as you, if not better.

(They are interrupted)

Hart: Is this more examples of young men who are simply in need of a silver spoon suppository?

Eggsy: No. They're exceptions. Come on. (Kingsman: The Secret Service, 00.19)

Here, the working-class champion attitude which Hart was sporting no more than 8 minutes earlier in the film is not quite as visible, instead Hart is edging Eggsy on, pointing out his shortcomings. While it could be that Hart is trying to awaken a will to fight for opportunity in life, his complaints about Eggsy's lack of academic or other types of success in life rather makes him look like he is some upper class man who is mad about losing a bet to his friend King, like they were in a film like *Trading Places*. The whole issue that the film comments upon in this scene is interesting though, as the character of Eggsy's struggles with success in the educational system touches on a nerve: As written in the section on working-class youth, Richards notes how it can be seen on studies that it is especially young working-class males who are struggling in the British educational system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and this is a large part of the gap between the working-class and the rest of British society (Richards, G., 3).

Because of this, the film is to a very large degree pressing down on perhaps the biggest issue of the type of person that Eggsy is portraying. Moffat and Bond, of course, argue that the film does

not do anything to push against cultural issues, that it does not champion the working class, but rather that Eggsy is present to make elitism more palatable. Now, while Eggsy in this scene does push forward reasoning behind his lack of achievement in life that resonate with real world struggles in the film's cultural context, we are not made to feel particularly sorry for Eggsy. Rather. The struggles that he is highlighting when Hart is attacking his life choices appear more so like excuses rather than valid reasons and struggles. While the film does bring in issues of its cultural context, its solution to this is quite Thatcherite in that Eggsy, who is intelligent and skilled, in order to do better needs to pick himself up and work past the glass ceiling and leave his social background behind, rather than actually challenge the core issues there are in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain.

What further underlines this argument is, that when the two of them are interrupted by Eggsy's stepfather's rowdy, and very stereotyped, 'chav' gang, Eggsy's answers Hart witty comment to undermine Eggsy's reasonings for not advancing in life by that these young working-class men are the exception to the rule. But rather, how the film is build up, they are an entire group and almost the only working-class youths the film introduces (apart from Eggsy's friends we only see briefly and appear as limited by the issues in their social class as Eggsy), so really then while Eggsy says they are the exception, what the film is showing is really that Eggsy is the exception to the rather unflattering and heavily stereotyped working-class Britain it portrays.

However, it would be a disservice to the film to not consider that it is not only within its portrayal of the British working-class that there are unflattering characters. On the other end of the social spectrum the film is attempting to portray is where we find both King, of course, who turns out to be a villain in disguise, but also the secondary antagonist, Eggsy's Kingsman training rival, Charles Hesketh, and his gang. While the film does feature a heavily stereotyped gang of working-class youth, leaning very much so on the 'chav' caricature described by Jones, so too are Hesketh, and the other Kingsman cadets that treat Hesketh as their leader, upper class caricatures – their costumes an array of popped collars, sweater vests and polos. While Hesketh's minions are quickly discarded in the selection process due to cowardice and lack of skill, Hesketh proves himself to be intelligent and skilled, despite being elitist. The audience (along with Eggsy) gets to see the aftermath of Hesketh failed loyalty exam, Hesketh telling his 'kidnapper' everything about the Kingsman organization as he is threatened with being run over by a train:

Hesketh: I'm the fucking son of the... shit!

Merlin (Over loudspeaker): Charlie, it's time to go home.

Hesketh: Fuck you! Fucking dad is gonna hear about this! (Kingsman: The Secret Service, 01.03)

In this example, we see Hesketh in a wide shot, still tied to the tracks, the framing used in the shot underlining how small and undignified the character is in this moment. The sides of the upper class that the film is here portraying negatively through Hesketh is then how he naturally considers himself superior and deserving of the position as a Kingsman based on his parentage, which again could be in correlation to the glass ceiling working-class youths such as Eggsy are experiencing, only here the film highlights the other side of the coin. In that sense, it could be argued that the film is fairly distributing good and bad characters all over the two sides of Britain it wishes to portray. But, from the first instance that the working-class gang enters the shot, it is evident that these people are meant to be both unintelligent and mean, whereas Hesketh and his gang, while perhaps not the most pleasant, are eloquent and appear at least somewhat intelligent. So while both the groups of young males from different social settings are portrayed as unpleasant, in the case of the upper-class youths it is more so something that is discovered by their actions over time, a revelation as the element of surprise in that Hesketh (and King for that matter) are bad people only works because the film naturally builds the upper social class up to be naturally good, and while Eggsy has to prove his worth as a recruit despite his class, in contrast, the people from the upper class are having to prove their lack thereof.

Now, while the film does appear to be biased towards the British upper class, which is also underlined by its way of portraying the Kingsman organization and that it is an homage to the type of British upper class gentleman spy trope that the *James Bond* franchise popularized, its protagonist is a young man who the film constantly reminds the audience of is of a working class cultural background. Now, while it has been determined that the film is a pastiche, it could be helpful to remember how Hutcheon argues that pastiche is also parody and that parody oftentimes serves as a way for people today to create something within a known frame (here the spy genre) and make use of differences, or humour, in order to critique aspects of the creators cultural context. The main difference in this case is that of the protagonist's social class, and so, from Hutcheon's view on parody, should there be a critique of the film's cultural context, it is in regards to the narrow and elitist Britain that the genre typically portrays. However, considering power structure in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain and how much inequality is on the rise, the question is whether the film's cultural critique, while perhaps

intended to be pushing against the societal structure, is in reality doing so, or if this remains surfaced level as the cultural conception of the British social class in media is too powerful.

The film pays homage to the gentleman spy, and suave spy mentor Hart is avid to make a point of that it is not one's social upbringing that determines that one is a gentleman or not, which sounds very nice and well indeed. If we were to look at what one needs to be able to check off to consider oneself a gentleman though, this very nice statement perhaps starts to become a bit challenged:

Eggsy: So, are you gonna teach me to talk proper like in *My Fair Lady*?

Hart: Don't be absurd. Being a gentleman has nothing to do with one's accent. It's about being at ease in one's own skin. As Hemmingway said "There's nothing noble in being superior to one's fellow man". True nobility is being superior to your former self. Now, the first thing every gentleman need is a good suit. By which I mean a bespoke suit. Never off-the-peg. And Kingsmen suits are always bulletproof. (*Kingsman: The Secret Service*, 01.05)

What is interesting about this quote is that while we do see the social critique of the rigidity of the social class boundaries in contemporary Britain, the quote is paradoxical: Here, the beloved mentor Hart is telling Eggsy that in reality what really makes a gentleman a gentleman is all about how said person acts – that he is a good and skilled, but also compassionate and certainly not an elitist person. That those issues and prejudice faced by working class people such as Eggsy are not because they are not as capable of being gentlemen or that the societal structure in Britain is fair, no, according to Hart it does not matter what means the person has, only the person's nature. In the same breath, this sentiment is challenged as Hart says that to be a gentleman you also do need a bespoke suit. This in turn highlights the gap and opportunities based on class because, while everyone theoretically could purchase a bespoke suit, as touched upon in an earlier segment, the financial situation in the British working-class is dire, and, aside from cost, to be able to become a gentleman one would also need to know that one should buy a bespoke suit – inside knowledge that excludes people without a social background to inform one of this. Therefore, that Hart considers Eggsy's question of whether it will be a situation like in *My Fair Lady* absurd is, considering his own contradictions, absurd in itself, as he, despite his initial well-meaning words, lets Eggsy know that just like the professor in *My Fair Lady*, he will try to mould Eggsy into something completely new, shedding his working-class roots, in order for Eggsy to obtain gentleman status (Cukor, *My Fair Lady*). However, if there is a lesson to be learned from *My Fair Lady* it is that, while taking on new manners and a new dialect, Eliza



Doolittle decides to keep part of her own self and identity, and it is this that makes her a whole and strong woman, and because of this, the reference to this film is interesting considering the question is whether Eggsy manages because of or despite of his working-class upbringing.

Now, it could be argued that while the film is essentially excluding working-class people from an opportunity to be gentlemen because of this, a character such as Hesketh both has the means and the right cultural context to know that he needs said gentleman creating bespoke suit, however, in the film he is still not portrayed as a gentleman. In that sense, the film does show that one is not simply a gentleman because of one's birth into a financially well-situated family. However, without upper class mentor Hart, Eggsy, despite being the most suitable candidate personality trait wise to become a Kingsman gentleman spy, could never become a gentleman, as he would neither have known the social codes nor had the financial means to become one. So, though the film tries to push the sentiment of everyone being able to be gentlemen, its simultaneous homage to the British upper class and fascination with this culture in combination with the spy trope, knowingly or not, makes the film rather paradoxical in what notion it is pushing forward.

Hart: First mission: spoiled the assassination of Margaret Thatcher.

Eggsy: Not everybody would thank you for that one.

Hart: Point is, Eggsy, nobody thanked me for any of them. A gentleman's name should only be in the paper three times: When he is born, when he marries, and when he dies. And we are, first and foremost, gentlemen.

Eggsy: That's me fucked then. It's like Charlie said. I'm just a pleb.

Hart: Nonsense. Being a gentleman has nothing to do with the circumstances of one's birth. Being a gentleman is something one learns.

Eggsy: Yeah, but how?

Hart: Alright, first lesson. You should have asked me before you took a seat. Second lesson: How to make a proper Martini (Kingsman: The Secret Service, 01.03)

This scene is interesting for two reasons. The first is how, tellingly, Eggsy and Hart are carrying two completely different conversations while talking to each other about Margaret Thatcher: While Hart is busy talking about his endeavours, Eggsy humorously makes a politically insightful commentary about a figure that has played her part in creating the situation that Eggsy and his family, as a working-class family, are in. The question is whether Hart knowingly ignores Eggsy's comment about Thatcher, neither the Hart nor the film itself wanting to get too into politics, or if he is simply

busy talking about the importance of being a gentleman, the social critique that is to be found within Eggsy's comment completely going over his head in that moment. That saving Thatcher was Hart's first mission fits well in terms of his age, and it being a well-known political figure that is within reference for a wide audience, but the symbolism of a Kingsman agent saving the political figure which was in charge of much of the political class war in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain is interesting, given how set the film is on marrying secret intelligence with upper class Britain and old virtues. The second reason for why this example is interesting is because, much like previous example, it is solidified that, in actuality, Eggsy lacks knowledge and based on his social class the opportunity to achieve it, in order to know how to become a gentleman, despite Hart stating it has nothing to do with birth, as the film tries to show through Hesketh. Despite Eggsy having a leg up on Hesketh in terms of personal character, he has no way of knowing those unmentioned rules that Hart makes clear that one has to follow to be a gentleman. This is only underlined in the way in which Hart teaches him these aspects of being a gentleman, Hart (rather rudely himself), embarrassing Eggsy by pointing out how he should have asked to take a seat before he took one, affectively disproving his own point. After this, he then humorously manages to weave in intertextuality in terms of the spy trope of the martini into Eggsy's etiquette practice, the film here clearly merging the idea of the British spy and gentleman into one unified mass.

The comic book, as discovered in the first part of the analysis of the film, was socially critical of the clashes in the cultural context which both the comic book and the film are making use of. It is of course worth to remember that the author in the case of New Historical analysis is not dead, and this paradoxical attempt at being socially critical, while also supporting the societal status quo, could potentially be a result of the film's creation: many different people work on a film, which makes it, in some regards, harder to analyse and consider the author of an a book (though they too, of course, also pass through at the very least the hand of an editor). Should we pinpoint a person who has been the main force in this film's creation, however, it is Matthew Vaughn, though on the poster and in the trailer, he is referred to as "the director of x-men: first class" rather than by name. Vaughn, son of a socialite and a member of the British aristocracy, has stated that his idea to the Kingsman organization (something which is unique to the film – in the comic book it is the government run MI6) came, according to him, from visiting his tailor on Savile Row and noting how, as he put it, everyone that was someone came there, so it would be an excellent cover place for a hidden old-money funded spy organization (Vaughn, 2015).

Now, while what the author might say that the meaning of a film could be, or what they wished to portray, might not be the actuality of it all when one does ones analysis using New Historicism: the author is not dead as his cultural context is from which his world stems and so with what perspective he writes from. This, in turn, is also while Vaughn's considerations about the Kingsman organization are interesting since they let us know that his fascination when creating the film appears to be primarily on the notion of the British gentleman and homage to the spy genre. Now, this gets mixed with the comic book source material that is considerably more socially critical, at least more obviously so. In turn, the film is paradoxical as there is a level of social critique at times and a revolt against the power structure in contemporary British society, but often, as in the case of the example above, it is dropped quite quickly over the fascination with bespoke suits and marrying Savile Row with Arthurian imagery and x-ray glasses. The struggles that the main character in this film is facing in many ways are familiar to that of the working-class youth in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain, and this is quite far from the directors own cultural context, at least in terms of first-hand experience. In turn, the solutions to the struggles Eggsy's character is facing that are pushed forward, as in this example, does not necessarily fit the problem and so, issues of unemployment and social inequality in this film is easily fixed with a bespoke suit and a martini lesson, solutions that appear unrealistic for the real British working-class that is more culturally excluded and financially drained than ever before.

While some of the solutions that well-meaning mentor Hart, amongst others, throughout the film offer in order to help Eggsy with his struggles might be a mismatch to the issues he is facing, the question of whether Eggsy succeeds because of, or in spite of his social class still stands, and in turn if the film is trying to build up a working-class hero or create a hero out of a young working-class man still stands. Answering this, in turn, aides in the understanding of how the film situates itself in relation to its cultural context. In New Historicism a text is, after all, an equal actor in society and not a reflection standing on the side-line, and so, while some of the critique might be shallow, the question of whether the hero saves the day because of or in spite of his social upbringing is hugely important as the character is portrayed as part of a social group that at this moment in time is more excluded from the rest of society and talks of culture than it has been in recent history. *Kingsman: The Secret Service* is a major film that situates itself within a culturally important genre that has been part of shaping the modern notion of Britishness and so, considering the film as much an actor in history as any other, how it works with having a working-class protagonist in a genre where this social class has not typically been represented is hugely important as it, in turn, is part of either pushing against societal structures or solidifying them further through this piece of popular culture.

In order to answer this question, one needs to have a look at the confrontation between Eggsy and King. While Hart represents the British upper class, so does King, and considering their discussion of class in the beginning of the film, King is necessarily representative of the more negatively portrayed elitist aspects, Hart being less rigid and more including. After Eggsy discovers that King is in on the megalomaniac villain's plan, Eggsy manages to outsmart King by switching glasses as King attempts to poison Eggsy, ultimately poisoning himself instead:

Eggsy: The problem with us common types is that we're light fingered. Kingsman's taught me a lot, but slight of hand, I had that down already.

King: You dirty little fucking prick! (Kingsman: The Secret Service, 01.26)

As we can see here, it is not what Hart taught him that saves his skin so he can put an end to Valentines evil plan, but rather his social background. What the film is ultimately saying by this scene is that Eggsy because of his working-class upbringing has had to be resourceful and quick on his feet if he is to get anywhere or anything, as he is portraying a social group that has the cards stacked against them from the get go. And on the other hand, King is defeated by his own comfortable social position, not having to think on his feet like so and not considering the risk as he is usually secure in a situation like the one he is in here; drinking whiskey and having the main seat at the conference room table. Here, it is Eggsy that is having to think outside the typical rule set for these types of interactions to win, which he can to a large extent because he is not as root grown in them. The phrasing of the skillset Eggsy made use of, is however quite negatively charged and this could be down to different reasons: either the choice in wording is revealing that the social critique that the film has on a surface level is just that, as Moffat and Bond had argued, as this here shows that while there are some surface level strides, when it comes down to it, the notion that the film is pushing forward in regards to the British working-class is a negative one, furthering the degrading views that are already saturating British media. Or, if we were to look at this in a different way, this is a moment of empowering as Eggsy, knowing King is an elitist villain about to die, pushes forward all the prejudice King has against Eggsy's social class by articulating Kings prejudiced opinions. This Eggsy does while gloating that this is what will be the end of King, that King, despite thinking himself superior by his class, is still the one to lose and to a light-fingered working-class youth at that. Still, while it could be argued that Eggsy could be turning prejudice into something empowering the wording does point towards more so of a, perhaps unintentional, expression of the same negative portrayal of the British working class than what the film on the surface level is insinuating that it is pushing against.

In the end, Harts training of Eggsy plays a large part in stopping the world from ending, as he both fights highly skilled attackers with combat techniques, firearms and the different quirky Kingsman gadgets, such as the bulletproof umbrella and the poison blade on his shoe. However, in terms of surviving throughout the ordeal (especially his run in with King) his resourcefulness and thinking outside of the box in terms of what is expected of a gentleman spy is what gets him through, as it is his personal background what gives him the edge by him not playing by the same rules as everyone else, who are more so confined by the stereotypical behaviour and tropes of the gentleman spy – as there has been no one quite like Eggsy in those films, he is, in a sense, free from the genre constraints that the other spies, the villains and so on are bound by.

After the villain has been defeated, though, Eggsy's training is complete and the late Hart's position is now his to fill in. Moffat and Bond argue that he after Hart's guidance fully leaves his own self behind in order to become the gentleman spy. Now, in the post-credit scene where Eggsy revisits his old neighbourhood pub to bring his mother with him to his new home, but is stopped by his stepfather, is interesting:

Eggsy: As a good friend once said: Manners. Maketh. Man.

Eggsy's stepfather: Shut the fuck up. Eggsy, I'm gonna shove your manners up your fu-

Eggsy: So, are we going to stand around here all day, or are we going to fight? (Kingsman: The Secret Service, 02.01)

In this scene, Eggsy looks as a younger version of Hart, even down to the thick-rimmed square glasses and pin-striped suit and the repetition of Hart's line from the pub fight earlier in the film solidifies the parallel between the two. Eggsy having completed his personal journey to becoming a gentleman is underscored by it being a post-credit scene. And while Eggsy used what he had learned from his working-class upbringing earlier, here, it appears it has been shed as he is now a superior gentleman who decided to degrade himself by spend his day beating up working-class ruffians to save a damsel in distress. One can only wonder if this is meant to be Eggsy at all times after he has taken up a position at Kingsman or, if he still is the same Eggsy as always when he is off from work, Eggsy being a happy intermixing of social class into the perfect spy. Either way, this scene does underline the point that, according to this film, being a financially well-positioned gentleman should be the ultimate goal for working-class youth such as Eggsy. While the film makes a point out of arguing that it is about attitude and manners rather than to what social class one is situated in, Eggsy's transformation into this gentleman spy ideal only happens because Hart opens the doors to privilege

for Eggsy, and Eggsy subsequently using his new social status to do the same for his mother, in the end contradicts the very point the film is attempting to make.

Overall, the film does have a level of critique in terms of its cultural context. This is exemplified in critique of elitism which is seen in the short comings of characters such as King and Hesketh. Furthermore, the film makes a point out of challenging the status quo and glass ceiling the working class is facing by spy mentor Hart continuously making it evident that it is not by whom one is born that decides whether or not one is a gentleman. Nevertheless, based on this analysis, there is an inclination to agreeing with Moffat and Bond in, that this social critique remains surface levelled. The reason for this is, that while the film does make a case for that the gentleman ideal it celebrates is achievable by good behaviour, it also calls for aspects such as knowledge of unspoken rules and bespoke suits that in the reality of things are only realistically achievable to our working-class protagonist because of an extraordinary opportunity given to him. Furthermore, while the film tries to make it clear that most working-class youth are good people only in need of an opportunity, this point pales given that Eggsy is shown as the exception to the rule of negatively portrayed youths, him having to prove his worth, while Hesketh on the contrary has to prove his lack thereof. As to the question of whether the protagonist succeeds because of or despite his working-class roots, based on these findings, the answer is: yes. While it remains unknown whether the negative wording was meant as that or as a mockery of the elite, Eggsy does survive because of his working-class upbringing. However, in order to defeat the main villain he draws on his training as a spy and gentleman and in the post credit scene, he appears to have transcended fully into an upper-class gentleman, the film solidifying this as the goal but unless one has a spy mentor at hand, an unrealistically unattainable one at that.

## The Single Mum, the African American Megalomaniac and Bond with a Ponytail

### *The role of minority groups in the film and how they reinforce and/or differentiate themselves from the genre conventions*

As touched upon earlier, the gentleman spy has been particularly popular with men (middle aged ones today being the top demographic in terms of who aspires to be like and looks up to a character such as James Bond) and, as Cappi wrote, the reason for this might very well be that white males, for obvious reasons, identify more easily with the character. In contrast to the archetypal spy was the so-called ethnic other eastern cold-war reminiscent ominous villain the spy had to defeat in order to protect American/British values and power (Funnell, L., Dodds, K., 76). However, *Kingsman: The Secret Service* has a slightly different approach to cast than what has typically been seen; While the main character Eggsy and his mentor Hart are both British white men (though Eggsy differs from the typical social background as previously touched upon), the film contains an array of different characters that are not as usual in the genre the film is paying homage to. And, seeing as this thesis is aiming at finding out how the film approaches the social dynamics of its cultural context, this section of the analysis will focus on these social-groups' role in the film, spanning from mother, to friend, to super villain, and what their presence can tell us about this film's interplay with its cultural context of 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. As covered earlier, some of the key causes in contemporary British politics are those of the focus on equality for women and for ethnic minorities. Because of this, it is interesting to see how the film has changed from the genre norm, what the changes are and, in turn, what notion it is pushing forward with these changes from the genre tropes. In order to explore this part of the film and its context, it might be interesting to, for the last time in this thesis, look at what Moffat and Bond have written about the matter. Regarding this aspect of the film, they make an argument of the film on this area being more barrier breaking than they argued it was on the issue of social class:

While *Kingsman* reinforces the class hierarchies that *The Secret Service* disrupts, the inverse is true of the texts' treatment of female characters: the film broadens and interrogates the limited roles afforded women in both the graphic novel and the wider spy tradition that Millar and Gibbons's text recycles (Moffat, K., Bond, M., 364)

So, Moffat and Bond argue, that the film's representation of the female is more diverse and forward-looking than what has been the case of the genre as a general and, as uncovered earlier in the segment about the genre, the focus in spy films are on the male, the female and the different nuances of female characters being limited.

Now, if we were to have a closer look at the role of females in *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, a good place to start would be that of Roxanne Morton. While Morton and Eggsy certainly do have their differences, there are also parallels between them: neither of them are considered very highly by Hesketh and his group of privileged young men, they both end up being the morally good guys in the story line, and both are top of their class at the Kingsman training camp. The biggest differences between the two are social class and their genders. As touched upon earlier, women have not usually had the same role as males in the spy genre, the so-called Bond-Girl and the Bad Girl being the female archetypes (Funnell, L., Dodds, K., 80). However, in this film, we have Morton aiming at filling the same position as the male trainees, competing for it on the same aspects. Moffat and Bonds argument is that the female role in the spy genre is broadened as there is the duality of Morton who is both dressed and acting similarly to the male trainees while the film also has the villains sidekick, Gazelle, who is much more feminine in her expression. Now, let us look at how Morton is portrayed visually:



Still of Morton (front row) with the other Kingsman cadets (*Kingsman: The Secret Service*, 00.30)

In the picture above we see how Morton (though significantly shorter than the rest) practically blends in seamlessly with the other cadets, her hair tied back in a ponytail so it is not visible and her costume being similar to the males around her meaning that in this situation, Eggsy – despite being male – sticks out more from the norm than Morton. The colours used in Morton’s costume are browns and blues that are also to be seen in Hesketh and his friends clothing and her natural makeup means that she also downplays the very blatant femininity that is notable in this genre in particular in terms of Bond Girls. An argument could be made that the film is not as visionary in terms of the female role in the spy genre as Moffat and Bond are arguing given that, in order for Morton to be treated equal to the other cadets, she needs to be as similar to her male counterparts as possible, meaning that a female only has a place as a gentleman spy if she does everything to be as much like a man as possible. However, while Morton generally does wear garments that are tailored similarly to those of men’s fashion, she does sport a little black lace dress, hair down and heavier makeup in the spy exam at the night club. This means that while Morton generally dresses more so like her male counterparts, she is still considered as equal to the other agents (she is one of the few to pass the exam) while she



is dressing and acting more like the stereotypical female of the genre. And, despite Morton generally is not as active a part of combat as Eggsy is, she counters the somewhat general passiveness by being the only cadet to shoot her dog when asked to – meaning that, while she might not always choose to be more brawl than brain, she is as capable and lethal as the rest. In the case of the character of Morton, Moffat and Bond are right in that the limited role of a woman who is on good terms with the hero is broadened as she is not an over sexualized Bond girl (this being left to princess Tilde), but that she also can express femininity while being regarded equally to the male cadets.



Still of Gazelle and Valentine after the church massacre (*Kingsman: The Secret Service*, 01.23)

In contrast to Morton, we have Valentine's right hand: Gazelle. As mentioned, Moffat and Bond make the case of that Gazelle and Morton together showcase a much broader role for the female in the spy genre, arguing that the two characters show a much broader spectre than previously seen in the genre. However, while Morton certainly pushes some constrictions for the female gender in the genre Gazelle is more difficult to place: On one hand, Gazelle is a fighter and ruthless assassin, a female taking on the part that in the comic book was a male former elite soldier. But, on the other hand she also takes on a role of a mix between a maid and secretary for Valentine and sexualized in a way Morton is not, as we see Valentine casually slap her behind after she is done serving him and Hart dinner (*Kingsman: The Secret Service*, 00.56). Whereas Morton uses attire and behaviour to blend in with the men she is surrounded by, as we can see in the still above, Gazelle is more expressive in her femininity, wearing feminine and maid-like attire, frequently wearing her hair down and using more noticeable makeup. On a surface level, this does show a broader role of the female, however if we were to look at Gazelle alone without comparing her to Morton, she fits the quite narrow definition of a Bad Girl well in that she is a singular woman working for the villain who does not have any loyalty either to Eggsy or to Britain.

Though she is portrayed very feminine and certainly as a stereotyped working female in regards to her maid-like costume, she is still the brawl of the evil operation, and her covering her victims with fabric so that Valentine does not have to look at them as he cannot stand the sight of

blood underlines this. Still, her defeat comes at the hand of the now ultimate spy and gentleman Eggsy who uses the blade in his dressing shoes to give her a single small and poisonous cut. This can be considered in two ways: on one hand, it could be argued that Gazelle differs from the usual Bad Girl in that she is so strong and skilled in combat that the male hero of the film needs to make use of a more delicate and cunning way in order to defeat her, as she is physically superior, this being underlined by her bosses squeamishness. Another way of looking at her death is that it is because of her more obvious femininity that she is defeated. While Morton is covered every time, she is out to fight on a mission, it is Gazelle's bare arms on her maid like costume that gives Eggsy an opportunity to cut her with the small blade. Meaning that, had Gazelle dressed more covered and in a style that is traditionally masculine as we see with female hero Morton, she would have possibly survived.

While an argument can be made for or against whether Gazelle as a character helps further and broaden the limitations of the stereotyped female in the spy genre such as Moffat and Bond argue that she does, one character that they do not pay close attention to is Eggsy's mother. While largely left out by Moffat and Bond, she is an interesting character to look at regarding this matter:

Eggsy's friend: Why won't she leave him?

Eggsy: Low self-esteem.

Eggsy's other friend: But she's fit!

Eggsy: One of these days I'm gonna smash his face in. (*Kingsman: The Secret Service*, 00.13)

It can be said that the film's inclusion of a female character such as Morton challenges the limited roles of females in the comic book, however, one only needs to look at the quote above for this to be contradicted: in the comic book, Eggsy and his friends have a similar conversation only the reasoning Eggsy gives for his mother not leaving is that there is not enough social housing for her to be able to have a place to live, should she leave her abusive boyfriend (*The Secret Service*, Issue 1, 14). Now, having a maternal figure for the main character is not unheard of in the genre, but an actual mother rather than a nurturing female supervisor is not common. However, in a similar sense as to how she has been made more two-dimensional in terms of her character motives, as we see in the quote above, her presence appears to be more-so as to underline Eggsy's working-class background than to broaden the role of the female. We can see this how she is heavily caricatured as the working-class single mother 'chav icon' used in media (Jones, O., 216), the depth of her character in the comic book being stripped as she is simplified into a stereotype. While it could of course be argued that the

film has a larger array of female characters, it is only really Morton who steps out of the more limited roles of females in the genre, Gazelle not being far from genre-typical Bad Girl and Eggsy's mothers otherwise more nuanced comic book character being changed into a more two-dimensional one. Because of this, it cannot per se be said that the film is the only place where we see females in a broader role, given how especially Eggsy's mother is portrayed. The question is then why Morton is the female character who is breaking the most with the mould for females in the genre and in order to answer this, we must look to the cultural context:

As covered in the historical context section, Zweiniger-Bargielowska informs us that female equality has made serious strides in Britain from last century until today, but also that the gap between female equality has widened as it is to a large extent middle and upper class females that have benefited from the fight for equality (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 13). If we look at these facts about the cultural context of the film, it is perhaps not as surprising why we see this duality in terms of the female role. Considering the social dynamics, Morton is the character to challenge the otherwise rather restrictive role of the female in spy genre; namely because she is portrayed as part of the social group in Britain who has benefitted the most of the strides made for female equality, intentionally or not.

So, while Moffat and Bond argue that the film paints an entirely negative portrait of the working class, it was concluded in the previous part of this analysis that the film is, while to some extent elitist, more nuanced than they are arguing it is. However, this both ties in with the question of class and gender in that, regarding the female role, the film is less broadening of the genre constrictions than Moffat and Bond argue. While perhaps an attempt at making the film a modern homage and ridding it of the spy genre's more outdated traits, it does so while not managing to move past the current cultural issues in Britain concerning female equality. In turn, Morton is allowed to broaden the role of the female in the genre because she is part of the social group from which Vaughn himself stems – a social group in Britain where women have more opportunity to do so than their working-class counterparts.

This is no big surprise, given that the film is an homage to the gentleman spy and as a result of this colours the British upper class and their culture in a generally very positive light. This fascination with British elite and culture can also help explain why the role as directly sexualized females are left to foreign women, namely Gazelle and the Scandinavian princess Tilde. Much like how we saw Eggsy being given the sexual drive that appears to go along with the job description of

British spy, the sexualization of females which has perhaps not aged as well considering the strides in the cultural context, is turned into something humorous and left to women who are not part of the well positioned part of Britain that the film, given its fascination with the gentleman spy, is paying homage to. So, while the film does broaden the role of the female in the spy genre, it is perhaps no surprise considering its cultural context where class is more inheritable than height (Clarks, G., Cummins, N., 260) that this (as well as lack of British nationality) becomes the main determiner in what women in the film are afforded the more forward-looking female role.

Taking a step away from the female role in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* and focusing instead on the main antagonist, we are also faced with some quite drastic changes from the genre norm; as touched upon earlier, the stereotypical older spy films (and especially Bond) that the film is paying homages to typically feature eastern, and, more often than not, communist villains (Funnel, L., Dodds, K., 87). As especially the Bond films were as much funded by American money as British, the typical main theme was that a British spy would defend the British/American notions of freedom as entertainment and assurance to an audience where the real life threat of the Cold War was looming in the back of their heads (Powell, D., 100). It is therefore very interesting that a film that is a pastiche of the old spy films has a villain that is, in many aspects, the complete opposite of what such would be in what the film is paying homage to. Valentine is not only a capitalist tech tycoon, but also an American. Now, the answer as to how an American can be portrayed as a villain in this homage to a type of film where America is usually portrayed as anything but, could lie in the exchange between Valentine and Hart at the Kingsman tailor:

Valentine: ... And since I am going to Ascot, apparently you need one of these penguin suits.

Hart: ... A word of advice: Ascot requires top hat. I might suggest Lock and Co. – Hatters, St James.

Valentine: Lox as in smoked fish?

Hart: As in locked up.

Valentine: Oh... I have trouble understanding you people sometimes. You all talk so funny.  
(*Kingsman: The Secret Service*, 01.08)

Now, as much as the film makes use of old spy film references and pastiche in order to build up its own Kingsman universe, it also, as concluded earlier, draws heavily on aspects of British culture such as Arthurian legend and Savile Row and gentleman typesetting in order to create its own identity.

It does so in order to create an even more exaggerated British gentleman spy, which in turn distinguishes itself from the more British/American spy that we see earlier in the genres history – this works as an homage, but turning the British quirkiness up a notch also creates a humorous film that is very aware that it a pastiche and uses over exemplification and caricature of the British spy at times in order to be humorous as to remain palatable. Seeing as the cold war, which made the alliance and shared notion of freedom between America and Britain more of a pressing matter to be used in film, is over, *Kingsman: The Secret Service* has freer reign as to paint an American as the villain. While the earlier spy films used to focus on the shared ideologies between Britain and America, now this film is focusing on differences in order to create this American villain. The whole gentleman aspect of the gentleman spy, and the dress code and manners that goes along with it, is at the forefront of the film and therefore, Hart telling Valentine about the need for a top hat for going to Ascot serves to point out their differences. Hart has continuously throughout the film taught Eggsy about these manners, that Kingsmen are first and foremost gentlemen. In addition to this, the secret spy organization in the film is posing as a tailor on Savile Row which shows how large a part of the film and the heroes of it that proper garments and manners are. So, in order to villainize an American in a genre where these tend to appear as friends rather than foes, Hart points out their differences – how, despite an American and a Brit might share some cultural aspects, one thing that sets them apart is that Valentine is not, and will never be, a gentleman, and Hart makes sure that he and the viewer knows this. Valentine is knowingly invading the Kingsmen's private space and in this setting, he is portrayed like a fish out of water. Considering the films catchphrase of 'Manners maketh man.' and how it establishes the gentleman as the ideal hero, Valentines brash comment about Harts accent paired with his own lisp serves to drive this point home further.

While the point of the film using typecasting in order to paint Hart as the ideal modern gentleman by casting Firth has been made earlier, the opposite can be applied to Valentine: Valentine is played by Samuel L. Jackson who, with his catchphrase 'motherfucker', is known for portraying characters (frequently gangsters) that are quite far from the gentleman ideal to say the least (Dawson, J., 211). So, while the film is using references and older parts of British culture and nostalgia in order to build up the spy organization, Valentine, who beside Gazelle the only notable character in the film who is a person of colour, is a contrast with his gangster expression combined with being a sort of newly rich American tech giant. It is interesting that the film's only two major characters that are people of colour are foreigners and villains considering the political focus on minority groups in contemporary Britain given that the film does use the female role in order to interrogate the role of

(at least some) women in Britain, which is a political focal point that often goes hand in hand with that of minority groups. While there is focus on class issues and gender differences regarding Britain and a diverse set of characters considering the genre, the British characters are predominantly white, apart from one of Eggsy's friends who only has one line and is quickly forgotten. So, instead of exploring the role of coloured Britain, the film paints Britain as predominantly white. This perhaps is due to its at times quite old-fashioned notion of Britishness together with its fascination of the British elite and that it to some extent carries on the genre tradition of "other" with the villainous forces, only in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain, these do not necessarily have to come from the east.

While on the subject of Valentine as an African American villain, his clothes and typecasting, is also interesting to look at in relation to Eggsy: Eggsy is very much painted out to be part of the so called 'chav' culture in Britain when we first meet him. When looking at the list of stereotypes regarding appearance in section on cultural context, Eggsy is virtually as close to said stereotypes as possible. Because of this, in the beginning, he dresses in attire similar to that of Valentine, which coheres with what we see in terms of bricolage, given that British working-class youth culture draws on African American culture and dress code as a way to create their own sub-culture, as previously touched upon. Now, Eggsy is made into the ideal gentleman spy and a large part of that is shedding his attire and petty crime lifestyle as to live up to the ideal Hart sets out. So, while also considering the quote from the film earlier, the choice of having Valentine be not just an American tech giant (after all, this is what the villain in the comic book is), but an African American tech giant played by Samuel L. Jackson with a conspicuous lisp, sporting gold chains and sneakers, works as to provide a flip side of the coin; By having a villain who is part of a culture, which the main characters working-class subculture is inspired by means that the film can both use him to underline how working-class youth culture is inferior to that of the gentleman, given its visual similarity to that of the villain of the story, and at the same time, keeping a link to the spy genre by creating a sense of "other", considering its quite pale portrayal of Britain, while continuing the idea of the rich American megalomaniac from its comic book source text.

While the female role in the spy genre is broadened and explored to some extent in the film, this exploration is uneven given that it is only a female within the social group who has benefitted the most from feminism in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain who directly challenges the limited role of females. The affordances given to Morton however, are limited to her, which is consistent with its somewhat elitist portrayal of class, as the character of the working-class mother is limited further rather than broadened in contrast to what is seen in the comic book source text. The wide spectrum in between the character

of Morton and the character of Gazelle is not wide because of a general broadening, rather the wide spectrum is that of a new role for a female and a character locked into the archetypal bad girl character. While the film does stray away from the typical Eastern “other” villain as the Cold War is over, its portrayal of the villain as an American is based on differences – how he is far from the British gentleman ideal. The choice of having the villain and his sidekick be the only notable people of colour means that, considering the whiteness in the film’s portrayal of Britain, the villain can still in some regard hold a sense of “other” despite being American rather than Eastern. Furthermore, the film makes use of type casting and costuming in order to exemplify these differences in between Valentine and Hart who it portrays as the gentleman ideal. And so, it makes use of Valentine being an African American villain to underline the inferiority of the working-class youth ‘chav’ culture Eggsy is portrayed as being a part of, given the initial visual resemblance between Eggsy and Valentine, in order to further establish the upper class gentleman as the ideal to aspire to become.

## Conclusion

This thesis sought to examine how the 2014 spy film *Kingsman: The Secret Service* situates itself within the spy genre, and how it approaches the social dynamics of its context of 21st century Britain. Firstly, in terms of how the film situates itself within the spy film genre, it can be concluded that where its comic book source text sets out to mock the genre conventions and in turn the dated ideals represented in the old spy films, *Kingsman: The Secret Service* does the opposite: while still humorous, it is a new and colourful, but serious pastiche of the well-known genre and makes use of its release material to signify as much.

Where the comic book ridiculed, the film celebrates, and its focus is on the gentleman aspect of the gentleman spy. For that reason it builds up the idea of the Kingsman secret intelligence service around the upper-class British gentleman and pairs it with intertextuality in terms of spy tropes and other aspects of especially elitist culture, in order to firmly establish itself as something new that is rooted in aspects of older and quintessentially British pieces of culture. However, while the film does not mock the genre in the same manner as seen in the comic book, it does still challenge and highlight some of the parts of the old spy films that do not match up well with a modern cultural context: *Kingsman: The Secret Service* does break with a narrow female role, it does broaden the villain to being more than another communist threat, and it does have a working-class hero who is struggling both with saving the world and with the class dynamics in 21st century Britain. Despite this, there is a paradoxicality to it, as while the film challenges genre norms and portrays a wider spectrum of characters and social tiers than in the films it is an homage to, its challenging of its source text does not push to the social constrictions of its cultural context as much as it initially displays itself as of doing.

Where the genre conventions are broken, upon closer investigation, these are only broken or challenged to the extent of the cultural context. Considering the importance of the gentleman in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* in combination with it having a working-class protagonist, the question that arose was whether the manners are what makes the man according to the film or if it follows in line with the divide seen in the class structure of 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. Now, while the film is adamant about that it is manners that make the man, what it effectively shows through Eggsy's journey and Harts mentorship is that it is not only manners that make the man, but also clothes, social status and opportunity. At the same time though, Eggsy is the hero – the working-class hero - of a gentleman spy film. While we might be left wondering if he undergoes a full transformation by stepping into a



new social class, or if he retains a part of him in order to be the best version of himself he can be, as in the film *My Fair Lady* that this film itself discusses, Eggsy being a working-class hero in a film like *Kingsman: The Secret Service* should not simply be dismissed. As a result of its attempt to break with some of the spy genre tropes, while also celebrating that same genre and furthering those same class stereotypes and cultural patterns in Britain it appears to be fighting, the film remains largely ambiguous, pushing for change on some levels while simultaneously clinging to prevalent social structures and a type of film of times gone by.

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