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## **“The Little Black Dress of Scandals”: The Significance of the Profumo Affair**

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“The Little Black Dress of Scandals”: The Significance of the Profumo Affair

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>Introduction</b> “The Scandal of the Century”	1
<b>Chapter 1</b> Before the Affair	4
<b>Chapter 2</b> The Famous Affair, 1961-1963	11
<b>Chapter 3</b> The Portrayal of Women	30
<b>Chapter 4</b> The Social Significance of the Profumo Affair	48
<b>Conclusion</b> “A Model Girl”	64
<b>Appendix</b> Important Documents	67
<b>Notes</b>	74
<b>Works Cited</b>	95

### **“The Scandal of the Century”**

Scandals are an inevitable occurrence in countries with a lively political culture like Great Britain. Throughout the twentieth century Britain experienced scandals both large and small, but only the Profumo Affair garnered the title of “The Scandal of the Century.”<sup>1</sup> This designation can be attributed in part to the breadth of issues involved in this scandal. The mixture of adultery and espionage along with class, race, youth, gender and sexuality forced British society to confront these issues directly. The photograph of Christine Keeler seductively straddling a chair has become a cultural icon, a snapshot of a critical moment in Britain’s social history. In his family memoir, John Profumo’s son David referred to the event as “the little black dress of scandals.”<sup>2</sup> This phrase is an apt description; the Profumo Affair is not only a classic tale of a politician’s downfall, but also a story filled with the strange behavior of peripheral characters.

At the time of the Profumo Affair in 1963, British society was caught between tradition and modernity. Differences between rich and poor, white and black, young and old, male and female, and puritanical and liberal lifestyles divided the way people perceived their country. World War II and the ensuing periods of austerity and affluence created changes to which many people were not fully reconciled in the early sixties. The ubiquitous nature of the Profumo Affair helped to bring these issues into clearer focus.

The Profumo Affair also occurred in the context of the Cold War. In the early sixties, the tensions increased between the United States and her allies against the Soviet Union because of the building of the Berlin Wall and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Both sides engaged in espionage to subvert the plans of their enemies. Therefore, government officials needed to take special care to

avoid compromised positions that could lead to blackmail by the other side. Unfortunately for Profumo, his proximity to the Soviet spy Yevgeny Ivanov put him into a precarious situation.

The media sources of newspapers and film affected the way people approached the scandal. As a vital source of information, the serious and tabloid newspapers presented the story in a different way that shaped people's opinions of the players involved. In the years preceding this event, films were already exploring the various themes of the Profumo Affair in a way that revolutionized the British cinema. Both media were at the forefront of the evolution of British society before people recognized and understood that fundamental changes were transpiring around them.

Christine Keeler emerged as an important figure in the scandal because people did not know how to react to her behavior. Her lifestyle and promiscuity disturbed many, causing people to resort to the language of prostitution in describing her, a label that destroyed her reputation for life. In actuality, she was on the cusp of a society in transition, and her actions were a few years ahead of their time in order to be considered acceptable. Her plight is an important moment for British women, who began to fight against belittling labels and for equality in personal relationships by the end of decade.

The Profumo Affair awakened many in Britain to the enormity of the changes happening around them. The widespread attention troubled many who clung to the idea of Britain as a moral nation, at the same time that the country's political power in the world declined. The Profumo Affair is a defining event of "Sixties Britain" because it brought attention to the transformations of society on a variety of issues and accelerated the changes that were already underway.

Because of the complexity of the events of the Profumo Affair and the issues raised, this thesis is divided into four parts so that the story can be told to its fullest extent. The first two chapters present the biographies of the people involved in the scandal and a narrative account of the Profumo Affair itself. The third chapter focuses on the newspaper coverage of Keeler and the way her negative image coincided with the treatment of women offered in contemporary works of literature, drama and film. Lastly, the fourth chapter ties together the events of the Profumo Affair with the prevailing issues of class, race, youth culture, gender and sexuality in Britain during the early sixties. An appendix of important documents follows the text in order to give a better understanding of the events discussed in the narrative.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Before the Affair**

The players involved in the Profumo Affair all hailed from drastically different backgrounds. They represented the range of classes in British society and included one Soviet agent who successfully infiltrated the scene. Their paths crossed through mutual acquaintances and chance meetings. In the end, their lives until 1961 were on a collision course with notoriety that was unbeknownst to everyone at the time.

### **The Leading Man: John Profumo**

Before his name became synonymous with scandal, John Profumo led a full and distinguished life through his service in the military and Parliament. He was born on January 30, 1915, into a titled Italian family that had relocated to England two generations earlier.<sup>1</sup> Profumo's father, Baron Albert Profumo, was a barrister who reached the level of King's Counsel.<sup>2</sup> The combination of the Baron's foreign title and occupation allowed the family to be well established within the English aristocracy by the time of Jack's birth.<sup>3</sup> The younger Profumo attended the prestigious Establishment schools of Harrow and Oxford where he befriended future ministers who served with him in the Macmillan government.<sup>4</sup> After graduation, Profumo started his involvement with the Conservative party through the East Fulham Association where he became chairman at age twenty-one, working with the local MP Bill Astor.<sup>5</sup> This campaign experience brought Profumo to the attention of people within his party who kept track of potential candidates. At a time when Profumo's political career was on the rise, he decided to join the Territorial Army in June 1939.<sup>6</sup> When Profumo subsequently became the candidate for Kettering in a 1940 by-election, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain

allowed him to campaign in his uniform and attend to his military duties simultaneously.<sup>7</sup> His successful election to office at age twenty-five earned Profumo the title of “Baby of the House.”<sup>8</sup> Despite his lack of political experience in the House of Commons, Profumo made the shrewd decision of rebelling from his party by voting against Chamberlain and his appeasement policy.<sup>9</sup>

With the engagement of Great Britain in World War II, Profumo had to fulfill his military commitment. In the North African campaign, he coordinated airplanes that were used to gather intelligence for the Army.<sup>10</sup> He later went on to the Italian front where he accompanied the German officers when they surrendered to the Allied troops.<sup>11</sup> Even with his military obligations, Profumo was still able to fulfill his Parliamentary responsibilities. On one occasion, he was granted leave so that he could deliver the opening speech for a debate concerning the welfare of soldiers.<sup>12</sup> In 1950, Profumo was voted out of office so he worked as Chief of Staff to the British liaison mission in Japan under General Douglas MacArthur.<sup>13</sup>

After Profumo returned to England from this assignment, he focused his attentions on moving up the ladder of the Conservative party. Prime Minister Winston Churchill utilized him as a consultant on dealing with the media and the nascent medium of television until he was elected back to the Commons in 1952.<sup>14</sup> His military experience led to positions dealing with defense at the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation and then to Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Colonies in 1957.<sup>15</sup> His promotions continued when he became Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in 1959 and Secretary of State for War in 1960.<sup>16</sup> Some people within the party questioned this last selection because they felt that Profumo was ill-qualified to handle this vital post.<sup>17</sup> Profumo, however, was a suitable choice because he understood how to use the media to his advantage through photo opportunities at a time when he needed to raise recruitment levels for the transition to a voluntary army.<sup>18</sup> More importantly, the military



personnel respected him because of his previous experience as an officer and his empathy for the plight of the common soldier.<sup>19</sup> The office of Secretary of State for War was the culmination of Profumo's military and political experience.

While Profumo was ascending the political ladder, he was accompanied by his wife Valerie Hobson, whom he married on December 31, 1954.<sup>20</sup> Hobson was a talented actress who made forty films during her career.<sup>21</sup> Three of the most notable were *Bride of Frankenstein*, David Lean's *Great Expectations* and *Kind Hearts and Coronets*.<sup>22</sup> Hobson was never the most famous or loved star of the British Cinema, but she was respected by audiences for her ability.<sup>23</sup> She met Profumo at a party in 1947, when she was still married to her first husband, producer Anthony Havelock-Allan.<sup>24</sup> Profumo and Hobson soon began an on-off relationship that would cover the seven years until their marriage.<sup>25</sup> Even though her husband was engaging in adulterous affairs, Hobson could not seek a divorce with the involvement of Profumo because of the damage it would cause to his political career.<sup>26</sup> When her divorce was finalized on the grounds of Havelock-Allan's indiscretions, Profumo was not ready to settle down into a long-term relationship.<sup>27</sup> At this time, he was too busy enjoying the high life with the likes of the Duchess of Kent, Noel Coward, and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.<sup>28</sup> In the interim, Hobson was able to revive her flagging career by earning the role of Anna in *The King and I* on the West End Stage.<sup>29</sup> During the show's run, Profumo was finally ready to commit and the couple were married.<sup>30</sup> Because he wanted Hobson to act as a full-time political wife, she reluctantly quit the show early.<sup>31</sup> Profumo's marriage was a positive move for his career because he left behind his high society bachelorhood in favor of a traditional family life.<sup>32</sup> Profumo's job required a great deal of travel, more than most of the Government's Ministers, and Hobson proved a great asset.<sup>33</sup> Profumo remarked of her, "When I married my beautiful and talented wife I quickly found that I

had become a most popular speaker. People used to invite me to open their bazaars, adding, ‘You’ll of course bring along your charming wife.’”<sup>34</sup> Hobson sacrificed her career so that she could stand by her husband’s side.

### **The Supporting Actor: Stephen Ward**

Stephen Ward, the son of the Reverend Arthur Ward, was born in Hertfordshire in 1912.<sup>35</sup> His father’s position allowed the younger Ward to attend public school, but his lack of studiousness kept two medical schools in England from accepting him as a student.<sup>36</sup> An alternate path was forged when Ward was accepted into the Kirksville College of Osteopathy and Surgery in Missouri in 1934.<sup>37</sup> Upon his return to England after his service in World War II, Ward moved to London to begin his osteopathy practice.<sup>38</sup> One day, Ward answered the phone call of the American ambassador and treated his ailments successfully.<sup>39</sup> This stroke of luck opened the door for Ward to begin treating an elite class of patients, including Winston Churchill.<sup>40</sup> The positive word of mouth from these patients began to grow to the point that Ward was treating foreign royalty, A-list actors, and politicians, but he chose not to neglect the less successful entertainers as a part of his clientele.<sup>41</sup>

Even though Ward’s associations with his patients allowed him to enter high society, his big break came in 1950 when he met Bill Astor, a former MP and future Lord.<sup>42</sup> Because of the myriad of minor medical problems from which Astor always seemed to suffer, Ward’s extensive training and counsel made him a trusted ally.<sup>43</sup> In exchange, Astor accelerated Ward’s upward mobility on the social ladder.<sup>44</sup> In 1956, the two men became neighbors when Astor allowed Ward to clean up the cottage at his Cliveden estate and stay there in exchange for his medical services being at the disposal of Astor’s guests.<sup>45</sup>

Another of Ward's patients helped him in expanding upon his hobby of sketching portraits. Hugh Leggett, a gallery owner, set up Ward's first show and put him into contact with famous people like Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to sketch, in addition to his drawings of his friends, so that the show would appeal to a larger audience.<sup>46</sup> This show impressed the people at the *Illustrated London News*, who decided to hire Ward to produce portraits for the newspaper, including a series of the Royal Family.<sup>47</sup> Sir Colin Coote, the editor of the *Daily Telegraph* also employed Ward to cover the Eichmann trial in Israel through his drawings, instead of sending a photographer.<sup>48</sup>

Even though Ward's medical and artistic careers made him a member of high society and the Establishment, Ward enjoyed living a "classless" existence.<sup>49</sup> He would often cavort with prostitutes to learn about their lives and hardships.<sup>50</sup> In addition, the parties that he hosted at his flat included people from all walks of life.<sup>51</sup> Ward explained, "Any evening at my flat would bring in an odd assortment of visitors as it was possible to find- a barrister, a barrow-boy, a writer, a motor salesman, a peer, and always, for some reason, a steady stream of pretty girls of every type."<sup>52</sup> This double life among the classes would be the source of many of Ward's future problems.

### **The Leading Lady: Christine Keeler**

Christine Keeler was born in 1942 during World War II.<sup>53</sup> She grew up with her mother and step-father in Wraysbury, Berkshire, in two amended railway cars, a product of the housing shortage that plagued post-war Britain.<sup>54</sup> Keeler's relationship with her step-father was strained because he was the disciplinarian and she rebelled against his strict hand.<sup>55</sup> Keeler physically matured faster than the other girls in town, and the women of her community labeled her a

trouble-maker early in her life.<sup>56</sup> By the age of fifteen, she began to escape to London to work as a model in a dress shop, where she started a short affair with the black son of the store owner.<sup>57</sup> She left home permanently after a botched home abortion that resulted in the birth of a premature baby that soon died.<sup>58</sup> Once she was established in London, Keeler quit a job as a waitress to work at Murray's Cabaret Club because the pay was better and the possibility to live a more glamorous life existed.<sup>59</sup> As a showgirl at the club, Keeler's job was to stand on stage topless as a decoration for the wealthy membership to enjoy.<sup>60</sup>

This new life introduced Keeler to numerous foreign boyfriends, including the Arab members who frequented Murray's, and most importantly Stephen Ward.<sup>61</sup> Keeler's platonic relationship with Ward would alter the course of her young life.<sup>62</sup> Ward was immediately captivated by Keeler and soon invited her to move into his flat despite the thirty year age difference.<sup>63</sup> For Ward, this was not the first time that he had taken in a young girl in hopes of making her acceptable in the upper echelons of society.<sup>64</sup> Ward, acting in the capacity of a father figure, became the champion of Keeler's more legitimate modeling career, which had previously resulted in a small spread in *Tit Bits* magazine in 1958 before she joined Murray's Cabaret Club.<sup>65</sup> Despite Ward's efforts, Keeler was never successful in establishing this career because of her lack of a work ethic.<sup>66</sup> She later moved out of Ward's flat to move in with the notorious housing owner Peter Rachman.<sup>67</sup> Keeler's actions at this point in her young life exhibit a girl without roots all alone in a big city who was easily taken in by men who would give her attention. She also yearned for a more insouciant lifestyle than she was afforded during her upbringing at home. This behavior led to a nomadic existence for Keeler, yet she always returned to the care of Ward.<sup>68</sup>

### **The Spy: Yevgeny Ivanov**

Captain Yevgeny, or Eugene Ivanov was born in Pskov, Russia, in 1926 to a mother who had belonged to the Russian aristocracy before the Bolshevik Revolution and a peasant father.<sup>69</sup> His father worked his way up the command structure of the Red Army to officer status.<sup>70</sup> Ivanov opted to join the Navy in 1944 and was later selected to attend the “military diplomatic academy,” the school for Soviet spies.<sup>71</sup> Upon graduation, Ivanov entered the GRU, the secret intelligence agency of the Soviet Union and married Maya Gorkina, the daughter of the head of the Soviet Supreme Court.<sup>72</sup> After working in Norway until 1958, Ivanov’s next assignment brought him to London as the assistant naval attaché on March 27, 1960.<sup>73</sup> Ivanov possessed several traits that the Soviet bosses felt would be assets for his posting to Great Britain.<sup>74</sup> His lively personality was in sharp contrast with the staid Soviet diplomats in residence at the embassy and was combined with his gift for languages and command of the English language.<sup>75</sup>

Ivanov’s aims as a spy were aided by his fortuitous meeting with Stephen Ward. Sir Colin Coote, newspaper editor and Ward patient, introduced the two men because Ward was experiencing trouble in obtaining a visa to Moscow so that he could sketch Soviet leaders.<sup>76</sup> Even though Ward never embarked upon the trip, he gained an immediate friend in Ivanov.<sup>77</sup> Ivanov began to meet Ward several times a week, including trips to his cottage at Cliveden on the weekends.<sup>78</sup> These social engagements with Ward introduced Ivanov to the British way of life in a deeper way than most spies would be able to accomplish on their own volition.<sup>79</sup> This relationship would prove to be a great advantage to Ivanov for his future endeavors on behalf of his country.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Famous Affair, 1961-1963**

For a political event to develop into a scandal, several elements are required. The politician first commits personal misconduct, such as adultery or espionage. If the sexual relations cross class or racial boundaries, the drama becomes heightened. Finally, society exacts a form of public retribution, especially through a highly publicized trial. The Profumo Affair involved all of these components among a wide cast of characters.

### **The Sexual Affair**

The weekend of July 8-9, 1961, marked the beginning of the events that would later be called the Profumo Affair. Lord Astor utilized his Cliveden estate for an escape from the summer heat of London for his group of approximately twenty-five guests, including Pakistani President Ayub Khan and John and Valerie Profumo.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Ward hosted a party of his own at his cottage on the property.<sup>2</sup> After dinner on Saturday, Keeler swam naked in the pool and Ward threw her swimsuit into adjacent bushes as a joke because he noticed Astor and Profumo approaching them.<sup>3</sup> Before their wives reached the scene, the two men mischievously chased Keeler around the pool as she put on a towel.<sup>4</sup> Upon the arrival of the lagging party guests, Astor invited Ward and Keeler to join his company in the main house, a first for Keeler.<sup>5</sup> In the mansion, Profumo acted as tour guide to Keeler despite the presence of his wife in the house.<sup>6</sup> The following day both sets of guests met at the pool after lunch with the addition of Ivanov who had come to meet Ward.<sup>7</sup> A swimming race ensued with the men partnering up with the women on their shoulders.<sup>8</sup> Profumo and Keeler won the contest because Profumo used his legs at the end, a movement deemed against the rules.<sup>9</sup>

At the conclusion of the weekend, Ivanov drove Keeler home to Ward's flat.<sup>10</sup>

Discrepancies exist in regard to the final events of this Sunday. Both Keeler and Ivanov claim that a sexual encounter took place, but their word is the only evidence of this occurrence.<sup>11</sup>

Because Keeler initially denied the incident, her later critics believe that she might have lied about the one-night stand for her newspaper stories during 1963 in order to make her story more salacious.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the insinuation of a liaison proved damaging whatever the truth of the situation.

For such an infamous entanglement, the relationship between Profumo and Keeler was rather perfunctory. Profumo contacted Keeler through Ward the Tuesday after their introduction and took her on a drive through London in the afternoon.<sup>13</sup> Within a few meetings, their flirtation morphed into a sexual relationship.<sup>14</sup> The exact meeting dates and length of the affair remain difficult to pinpoint, but Profumo spent the majority of his free time from work and his wife with Keeler.<sup>15</sup> Even though their meetings were always furtive, Profumo became more audacious in his choice of venues. For one rendezvous, he borrowed the car of the Minister of Labour John Hare, an easily recognizable vehicle because of the rabbit located on the front.<sup>16</sup> The emboldened Profumo even brought Keeler to his own home for a tryst while his wife and family were away on vacation.<sup>17</sup> Throughout their brief time together, Profumo bestowed perfume, a cigarette holder and £20 meant for her mother to Keeler, but he never paid her for their sexual encounters.<sup>18</sup> Profumo never suspected that Keeler was a call girl even though Lord Denning asserted that these gifts were an unacknowledged payment for services rendered.<sup>19</sup> Profumo later commented of her, "I simply thought that she was a very beautiful little girl who seemed to like sexual intercourse."<sup>20</sup>

Before the conclusion of the relationship, issues regarding national security emerged. Keeler claimed that Ward asked her to question Profumo about the transfer of American nuclear warheads to West Germany, for Ivanov's use.<sup>21</sup> The validity of this claim has always been questioned.<sup>22</sup> Keeler never asked Profumo for the information, and later admitted that Ward made the request in jest and did not intend for her to act.<sup>23</sup> Ward denied the charge, noting, "Quite honestly, nobody in their right senses would have asked somebody like Christine Keeler to obtain information of that sort from Mr. Profumo- he would have jumped out of his skin."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Profumo's non-Cabinet Ministerial post did not grant him access to sensitive intelligence about the movement of nuclear warheads.<sup>25</sup>

Although the couple avoided Ward's company throughout the entirety of their relationship, the osteopath still played a part in its end.<sup>26</sup> At the time of the affair, the Security Service began meeting with Ward because of their concern over his growing friendship with Ivanov.<sup>27</sup> During one of these discussions, Ward casually mentioned that he knew Profumo, which concerned the security agency because of the close proximity of Ivanov.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, Sir Norman Brook, the Secretary of the Cabinet, met with Profumo on August 9, 1961, to tell him to be vigilant in his association with Ward due to suspicions that he might be an intermediary with the Soviets.<sup>29</sup> This meeting spurred Profumo to end his affair with Keeler.<sup>30</sup> In a note that would become known as the "Darling letter" because of its salutation, Profumo cancelled a planned engagement.<sup>31</sup> Though it is difficult to discern the last date of the affair, this letter marks the last phase of their acquaintance.<sup>32</sup> All parties agreed that by the end of 1961, the affair had reached a definite conclusion.<sup>33</sup>



### **The Espionage**

As the Profumo-Keeler affair ended behind the scenes, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union continued to strain international relations. By August 1961, the immediate concern involved the attempts of the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev to thwart Western admittance through East Germany to Berlin by any means.<sup>34</sup> This posturing concerned the Western allies and Stephen Ward believed that he could be of assistance through his connections with the ruling class of Britain and Ivanov. Ward convinced Lord Astor to write a letter to the Foreign Office on his behalf.<sup>35</sup> He offered to open diplomatic back channels, hoping to lower the tensions of this Berlin Crisis, so that both sides would have a clear understanding of their enemy's plans. After an interview with Ward, the Foreign Office rejected his aid.<sup>36</sup> Despite this setback, Ward persuaded his patient, Sir Godfrey Nicholson, a Conservative MP, to meet Ivanov and discuss the situation.<sup>37</sup> This attempt to help proved more fruitful and resulted in an interview and subsequent correspondence between Nicholson and Ivanov, an exchange of official British policy sanctioned by the Foreign Office.<sup>38</sup>

As a result of this minor success, Ward made similar entreaties during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962.<sup>39</sup> Ivanov devised a plan meant to diffuse tensions through a summit between the two superpowers, with Britain playing the role of mediator.<sup>40</sup> Due to a chance encounter with MP William Shepherd in a coffee shop during the crisis, Ward facilitated a meeting for Ivanov.<sup>41</sup> The cautious Shepherd reported the conversation to the Security Service, in part because of his qualms that Ward worked as a Russian spy.<sup>42</sup> Through Lord Astor, Ward and Ivanov were also in contact with Lord Arran, an intimate friend of the Foreign Secretary Lord Alec-Douglas Home.<sup>43</sup> Arran reported the contents of his discussion to Home in a letter that was forwarded to the Prime Minister's office.<sup>44</sup> Home dismissed Ivanov's overtures as an

attempt to damage the alliance between Great Britain and the United States at a time of great peril and uncertainty.<sup>45</sup> A week after the successful settlement of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Ward sent a letter to Harold Wilson detailing his exploits, which included the phrase, “since I was the intermediary.”<sup>46</sup> Though Wilson ignored and filed the letter, its later relevance allowed him to paint a negative portrait of Ward, who truly believed at the time that he was working towards peace in order to curtail an international impasse.<sup>47</sup>

Much speculation still exists concerning Ward and his possible ties to espionage. In her autobiography, Keeler alleged that Ward was a Soviet spy and a superior to Ivanov, who was sent to London in order to assist Ward with his work.<sup>48</sup> Keeler possessed ulterior motives for making this unsubstantiated claim because it elicited more sympathy for her situation if she was under the control of a communist spy. Conversely, others have asserted that Ward worked for MI-5 in order to encourage Ivanov to defect to the West.<sup>49</sup> No definitive proof of either story has ever been released. In 1963, Harold Wilson shared his thoughts on Ward, “He was too unstable for the Soviet authorities who usually make use of better material.”<sup>50</sup> Ward was a notorious gossip, an unsuitable trait for a spy. If he were a spy, it would be unnecessary for him to work diplomatic back channels because he would have the power to change the situation through his work. Ward’s actions indicate that he informally aided both sides when he could gain the most personal benefit.

### **Court Cases and Parliamentary Questions: The Deepening Scandal**

At the same time that Ward pursued a role in international diplomacy, Keeler’s associations with two West Indians, Aloysius “Lucky” Gordon and Johnnie Edgecombe, set in motion events that would lead to revelations about her involvement with Profumo. The Gordon

relationship commenced in October 1961 when the two met at the Rio Café, a West Indian establishment that Ward enjoyed patronizing.<sup>51</sup> Gordon, a violent and controlling man, possessed a long criminal record of numerous assaults.<sup>52</sup> His brief courtship with Keeler soon soured after he threatened Keeler and a friend at axe-point for two days.<sup>53</sup> Once the danger had subsided, Keeler made the foolish mistake of not pressing charges against Gordon.<sup>54</sup> Though Keeler attempted to avoid him, Gordon continued to stalk her.<sup>55</sup>

Soon, Keeler was introduced to Edgecombe through Paula Hamilton-Marshall, a friend she met through Ward.<sup>56</sup> Subsequently, Keeler moved in with Edgecombe for a brief period.<sup>57</sup> In October 1962, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Keeler ran into Gordon, who attacked her in the street, and left her with multiple bruises.<sup>58</sup> Both Keeler and Edgecombe sought out Gordon at his favorite nightclub, where an inevitable clash ensued between the two men.<sup>59</sup> At the conclusion of the knife fight, Edgecombe left Gordon in need of seventeen stitches.<sup>60</sup> Though Keeler remained with Edgecombe after his defense of her honor, she left him in December despite his many attempts to stay together.<sup>61</sup> During a visit with Mandy Rice-Davies, a friend and current roommate of Ward, Keeler refused to allow Edgecombe to visit her, prompting him to discharge three or four shots into the door and a few more at the window where Keeler had been located.<sup>62</sup>

During the aftermath of the Edgecombe shooting, Keeler indiscriminately disclosed her associations with both Ivanov and Profumo to politically aware people, who led her to grasp the implications of her affairs.<sup>63</sup> The first person that Keeler approached for advice on the situation with Edgecombe was Michael Eddowes, an older lawyer whom she knew through Ward.<sup>64</sup> In the course of their conversation, Keeler divulged her relationships with Ivanov and Profumo, a troubling juxtaposition for a conspiracy theorist like Eddowes.<sup>65</sup> In addition, Keeler mentioned

that Ward had asked her to retrieve information on nuclear weapons for the benefit of Ivanov.<sup>66</sup> Eddowes filed away this data for later use. Keeler next shared her story at a party with John Lewis, a former Labour MP.<sup>67</sup> Coincidentally, Lewis harbored a grudge against Ward because of his belief that Ward assisted his wife during his divorce case in 1954.<sup>68</sup> Lewis shared his trepidations over national security to his friend George Wigg, a current Labour MP.<sup>69</sup>

Wigg conducted a one-man research mission into Profumo's transgressions.<sup>70</sup> Wigg's antipathy to Profumo stemmed from his interest in Britain's military. As a veteran, his main policy area of concern was the management of the army, requiring him to interact closely with the Secretary of State for War.<sup>71</sup> When the army was sent to Kuwait as a buffer to Iraq in July 1961, reports surfaced that the men were not outfitted with adequate provisions for the desert climate.<sup>72</sup> Even though the soldiers did not engage in battle, the Adams Report was produced by the Army a year later with alarming results.<sup>73</sup> If the troops had been involved in fighting, heat exhaustion would have inhibited their ability to defeat the enemy.<sup>74</sup> As the debate on the Adams Report approached in the House of Commons, Wigg and Profumo strategized together on the best course of action for the discussion of the findings.<sup>75</sup> On the day of the debate, however, Profumo outmaneuvered Wigg: he made a statement that praised the planning of the mission at a time when parliamentary procedure prohibited Wigg from responding.<sup>76</sup> From this point forward, Wigg's distrust affected the way he perceived statements from the Minister.<sup>77</sup> After hearing Lewis's story, Wigg initiated his inquiry, which resulted in a dossier worthy of being passed on to the Leader of the Opposition, Harold Wilson.<sup>78</sup>

By July 1962 the rumors of a Keeler-Profumo relationship had reached print through a small publication called *The Queen*.<sup>79</sup> Based upon the advice of two friends with backgrounds in journalism, Keeler decided to pursue money for her story through tabloid newspapers like the

*News of the World* and the *Sunday Pictorial*.<sup>80</sup> Because negative publicity from the Edgecombe shooting had halted her modeling career, she needed a new source of income.<sup>81</sup> Before speaking to the police in late January 1963, Keeler shopped her story to the two tabloids, attempted an unsuccessful bidding war, and settled on the *Sunday Pictorial*.<sup>82</sup> Her total contract was worth £1000 with £250 paid at the beginning when she handed over the “Darling” letter.<sup>83</sup> Upon hearing about the newspaper article, both Ward and Profumo sought to stop publication.<sup>84</sup> Their lawyers were brought in to negotiate with Keeler, but a misunderstanding led to the accusation that Keeler attempted to extort money by asking for £5000 in return for terminating the article.<sup>85</sup> Negotiations ceased, and Ward attempted a more successful course.<sup>86</sup> He contacted the paper himself, told them Keeler was lying, and offered a counter article that was later run in the paper.<sup>87</sup> Sensing a gathering storm of publicity, Ivanov and his superiors agreed he should leave Britain before the end of his tenure in order to avoid future attention.<sup>88</sup>

Even though Keeler’s newspaper article had been stifled, her court appearance at the Edgecombe trial remained imminent. The trial was originally slated for February 1963, but the illness of a key witness, Edgecombe’s taxi cab driver from the night of the crime, forced the court date to be postponed until March 14.<sup>89</sup> In the meantime, Ward and Profumo continued to worry about Keeler’s testimony because she would be free to bring up Profumo’s name as a figure from her romantic past.<sup>90</sup> If this admission occurred in court, the newspapers could legitimately publish the rumors as fact.<sup>91</sup> The two concerned parties met to discuss their quandary, but concluded that they could not interfere with her testimony.<sup>92</sup>

Meanwhile, the rumors of the Profumo-Keeler relationship gained more steam through publication in the *Westminster Confidential* on March 8, 1963.<sup>93</sup> The article referred to no specific person, but instead utilized thinly veiled descriptions of the parties involved whom

knowledgeable readers could easily identify.<sup>94</sup> Despite the small circulation of the newspaper at about two hundred, the copies reached important interested observers in Parliament.<sup>95</sup>

On the same day of this printing, Keeler embarked on a trip to Spain with her friend, Paul Mann in order to escape the pressures around her, even though it meant missing her court date.<sup>96</sup> Her absence was unknown to the authorities until the day of the Edgecombe trial when rumors began to circulate that Profumo played a role in her escape from the country.<sup>97</sup> The case opened without Keeler's testimony about the night of the Lucky Gordon knife fight.<sup>98</sup> The trial ended abruptly the next day with Edgecombe acquitted on three of the four charges.<sup>99</sup> Found guilty of possessing a firearm, he received a seven year sentence because of previous convictions.<sup>100</sup> The quick conclusion of the trial raised questions because one of the principal witnesses was unaccounted for.<sup>101</sup> It fell on the newspapers to investigate Keeler's whereabouts, with the *Daily Express* succeeding on March 24, 1963.<sup>102</sup> Because she was in a remote area of Spain, Keeler lived blissfully unaware of the attention thrust upon her.<sup>103</sup> After contacting the British Embassy in Spain, the *Daily Express* arranged for her transport back to Britain.<sup>104</sup> She returned home to a newfound notoriety.

Before Keeler was located, George Wigg decided the time had come for him to use his Parliamentary privilege and demand answers on the Profumo rumors, though he did not name the Minister during his speech.<sup>105</sup> Two Labour colleagues added their own entreaties for the truth. One of these MPs, Barbara Castle, used Keeler's name.<sup>106</sup> With this pressure from the Opposition, Conservative leaders knew that a response had to be prepared quickly because the debate ended at 1 a.m. on a Friday.<sup>107</sup> In order to avoid negative publicity from the unanswered allegations over the weekend, a meeting of five Ministers, Profumo and his lawyer was hastily assembled in the early morning hours to devise a response.<sup>108</sup> Profumo, absent from the late

night debate at the Commons, had taken a sleeping pill before the call for the meeting and was less coherent than usual.<sup>109</sup> Despite this slight incapacity and the “Darling” letter, Profumo convinced his contemporaries that he did not engage in an improper association with Keeler.<sup>110</sup> The vehemence of his denials and willingness to seek damages for libel convinced the men to proceed with the preparation of a personal statement for delivery the next day.<sup>111</sup> The personal statement was chosen as the proper outlet for a response because no questions can follow it; the speaker is, of course, expected to utilize this tool with a reverence for the truth.<sup>112</sup>

Much of Profumo’s statement presented on March 22, 1963, with the full support of the Prime Minister, was true: he laid out the facts on how he met Keeler and he asserted that he played no role in her disappearance.<sup>113</sup> He reiterated the presence of his wife throughout the length of the friendship so that the phrase, “There was no impropriety whatsoever in my acquaintanceship with Miss Keeler,” would carry more credibility.<sup>114</sup> By continually mentioning his wife, Profumo implied that Hobson was present at his casual meetings with Keeler. Though the statement satisfied many of its listeners, Wigg understood that Profumo had sidestepped the larger issue of the security threat involved with Ivanov, Keeler, and himself.<sup>115</sup> Wigg was furious, “I left with a black rage in my heart because I knew what the facts were.”<sup>116</sup> Profumo had jumped another hurdle, but lingering doubts remained among his detractors.

After Keeler returned from Spain, her persistent problems with past lovers continued to plague her. On the night of April 18, 1963, Gordon attacked her outside of a friend’s apartment, leaving her with numerous bruises.<sup>117</sup> This criminal act against her required Keeler to appear in court again.<sup>118</sup> Gordon countered Keeler’s version of the incident by claiming that Keeler tripped over a piece of luggage while in his presence.<sup>119</sup> In addition, he expressed concern over her condition because she was pregnant with his child when she embarked on her trip to Spain.<sup>120</sup>

The trial commenced on June 6, 1963, when Keeler testified against Gordon's allegations and described her trepidation when in his presence.<sup>121</sup> Upon the end of her testimony, Gordon fired his lawyer and began defending himself.<sup>122</sup> His line of questioning toward Keeler meandered away from the case, causing the judge to interrupt him repeatedly to keep him on topic.<sup>123</sup> Gordon's lack of legal knowledge was evident in his request to gather Ward and Profumo as witnesses, two men whose actions had no pertinence to the case.<sup>124</sup>

The crux of the trial centered on two West Indian men, Commachio and Fenton, whom Gordon wanted to call, but the judge could not locate.<sup>125</sup> Keeler denied under oath that the witnesses were at the scene of the crime.<sup>126</sup> Without Commachio and Fenton, Gordon commanded the floor on his own and made wild assertions, such as that Keeler had given him venereal disease, prompting Keeler to scream from the back of the courtroom.<sup>127</sup> She was escorted outside. Gordon was finally sentenced to three years, a judgement compounded due to prior convictions.<sup>128</sup> When the case went to the Court of Appeals, a tape of Keeler and her manager discussing the trial revealed that Keeler lied about the presence of Commachio and Fenton.<sup>129</sup> In addition, the discovery that Commachio resided in jail during the trial awaiting his own court date called into question the conduct of the Gordon case.<sup>130</sup> The combination of these two disclosures allowed Gordon's release from all of the charges.<sup>131</sup> Instead, Keeler was sentenced to nine months in jail after pleading guilty to a charge of perjury.<sup>132</sup> The evidence from this case would have lasting consequences on another trial yet to come.

### **The Affair Goes Public**

Profumo's personal statement in late March did not halt the investigations of the Security Service, reporters, and politicians like George Wigg.<sup>133</sup> After a Wigg television interview on the



BBC on March 25, Ward contacted him to clear up what Ward viewed as inaccuracies in Wigg's account, especially about Ivanov.<sup>134</sup> In the meeting, Ward dismissed the possibility of a security threat stemming from the close proximity of Profumo and Ivanov because the Security Service monitored Ivanov's activities.<sup>135</sup> In addition, Ward mentioned that he had lost influence over Keeler and her misadventures with low-class criminals.<sup>136</sup>

This meeting led Wigg to consult with Wilson, his party leader, in order to discuss the letter Ward said he had written following the Cuban Missile Crisis.<sup>137</sup> Because Ward termed himself an "intermediary" in regards to a relationship with Ivanov in the letter, Wigg and Wilson became concerned about the risk Profumo subjected himself to through these acquaintances.<sup>138</sup> Wilson later described the Wigg/Ward meeting as "taking a lid off a corner of the London underworld of vice, dope, marijuana, blackmail and counter-blackmail, violence and petty crime together with references to Mr. Profumo and the Soviet attaché."<sup>139</sup>

Meanwhile, Profumo, oblivious to this behind-the-scenes sleuthing, maintained his innocence by suing an Italian and a French newspaper for libel and won damages of £50.<sup>140</sup> Yet the various threads of the affair were coming together. On April 1, 1963, the police began investigating Ward's activities after receiving an anonymous tip that he was "living on the immoral earnings of the girls."<sup>141</sup> This investigation soon extended to Profumo's activities.<sup>142</sup> At the same time, Wilson sent Wigg's findings about Ward and Profumo to Prime Minister Macmillan, only to be rebuffed with a promise to contact him "if this seems necessary."<sup>143</sup> By the time Macmillan determined he was not going to gather additional information in order to satisfy Wilson, Ward had begun writing letters to the Home Secretary and his representative in Parliament because of the pressure of the police inquiries.<sup>144</sup> Ward proceeded to send a letter to Wilson in which he said that Profumo had lied in his personal statement to the House of

Commons.<sup>145</sup> Because of this new information and the continuing pressure of Wilson, Macmillan resolved to call for an inquiry from the Lord Chancellor, Lord Dilhorne, without releasing this information publicly.<sup>146</sup> In reference to this order on May 30, Macmillan wrote to Wilson, “I am sure in my own mind that the security aspect of the Ward case has been fully and efficiently watched, but I think it is important that you should be in no doubt about it.”<sup>147</sup>

During the Whitsun Parliamentary recess, Profumo and his wife holidayed in Italy and Lord Dilhorne asked to see Profumo upon his return.<sup>148</sup> Profumo concluded that he could no longer continue with his lies so he confessed the truth to his wife, who encouraged him to go home and accept the consequences of his mendacity.<sup>149</sup> Following his early return, Profumo met with leading Government officials, related the truth, and wrote a letter of resignation to the vacationing Macmillan on June 4, 1963.<sup>150</sup> After Macmillan received Profumo’s notice, the public outcry began.<sup>151</sup>

Since the unraveling of Profumo’s deception took place behind closed doors, the public announcement of his resignation evoked quick and heated responses in the Sunday papers. The comments of Lord Hailsham, the leader of the House of Lords and a Conservative, exemplified the attitude of those who focused on the moral aspects of the Profumo case.<sup>152</sup> In his view, the continual prevarications of Profumo challenged the sanctity of public life and the proper actions of a gentleman in office.<sup>153</sup> He concluded his thoughts with the following defiant take on the future of the Conservatives, “A great party is not to be brought down because of a squalid affair between a woman of easy virtue and a proved liar.”<sup>154</sup> The Profumo revelation acted as a catalyst for rumors to begin to swirl about the private misdeeds of other Ministers.<sup>155</sup>

Wilson, however, wanted to steer the Labour Party to focus on the implications to national security.<sup>156</sup> To add fuel to the fire, Michael Eddowes, the Ward and Keeler

acquaintance, released to the public a letter that he sent to Macmillan describing the conversation he had with Keeler about the request for information about nuclear weapons in Germany.<sup>157</sup> Because of the strong feelings aroused in the country, the House of Commons debate on June 17, 1963, had the public lining up for three days in advance to witness this political spectacle.<sup>158</sup> During the debate, Wilson, who spoke first, criticized the “indolent nonchalance” of Macmillan because of his inert responses to any new development that was passed along to him.<sup>159</sup> He expressed his concern that the Security Service was unaware of the activities of Profumo-Keeler-Ivanov, meaning they could not determine if Profumo leaked sensitive information, and he accused Macmillan of attempting to suppress the entire scandal by not immediately publicizing the Dilhorne inquiry.<sup>160</sup> Lastly, Wilson questioned British society when he said, “I say to the Prime Minister that there is something utterly nauseating about a system of society which pays a harlot twenty-five times as much as it pays its Prime Minister, two hundred fifty times as much as it pays its MPs and five hundred times as much as it pays some of its ministers of religion.”<sup>161</sup>

When Macmillan began speaking, he explained his willingness to believe Profumo because he acted like an innocent man, especially when he sued for libel.<sup>162</sup> In his diary, Macmillan explained the requirements and aims of his speech, “I had to defend the police, the Security Service, and Civil Service and myself.”<sup>163</sup> Macmillan reluctantly admitted that vital intelligence was not passed on to him immediately from the Security Service and that he first heard of the situation when a newspaperman volunteered information in February about the Keeler statements to the press.<sup>164</sup> Despite his skepticism over the veracity of Keeler’s claims, Macmillan tried to exonerate his actions through calling for the Dilhorne inquiry.<sup>165</sup> At the conclusion of the debate, a vote of confidence in the Government took place.<sup>166</sup> As a result of the absentions of twenty-seven Conservatives, Macmillan eked by with a majority of sixty-

nine.<sup>167</sup> In the aftermath of the vote, the Conservative Party attempted to force Macmillan into an early retirement.<sup>168</sup> Disagreement on a successor and Macmillan's dogged determination to keep his job defeated this challenge.<sup>169</sup>

The Ward trial developed into the most widely chronicled event of the Profumo Affair even though it lacked the involvement of Profumo himself. On June 6, 1963, two days after the resignation of Profumo, Ward was arrested for living on money earned from the prostitution of Keeler and Rice-Davies.<sup>170</sup> This charge resulted from a two-month investigation, involving between one hundred twenty-five and one hundred forty witnesses including Keeler's twenty-four visits.<sup>171</sup> Additional charges alleged that Ward procured minors for the sexual benefit of others and that he arranged illegal abortions for young girls.<sup>172</sup> By the time of Ward's trial in July, the two abortion charges were dropped, leaving a total of five for the court to consider.<sup>173</sup> The presiding Judge Marshall and prosecutor Mervyn Griffith-Jones spoke of Ward's alleged activities in disgusted tones.<sup>174</sup> This subtle tactic distinguished the men from Ward in the minds of the jury members. In fact, Griffith-Jones gained fame through his participation in the 1960 case about the publication of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, where he famously asked the jury, "Frankly, is this a book you'd want your wife and servants to read?".<sup>175</sup>

Griffith-Jones's case relied upon the testimony of suspected prostitutes, including Keeler and Rice-Davies.<sup>176</sup> As the first witness, Keeler testified that she continually owed Ward more money than she could reimburse him for, but she always contributed a small portion of her earnings to him for household expenses.<sup>177</sup> She also admitted to sleeping with men for money on occasion if she knew them well, yet she did not think of herself as a prostitute.<sup>178</sup> Similarly, Rice-Davies supplied a portion of the money she received from her lovers because she did not pay an adequate rent to Ward.<sup>179</sup> Because Keeler and Rice-Davies sold their stories to

newspapers for substantial sums, both women were accused of exaggerating their statements, though both denied this contention.<sup>180</sup> The next witness, Ronna Ricardo, admitted to lying during the preliminary hearing and in her written statement because the police threatened to take away her baby if she did not cooperate.<sup>181</sup> Lastly, Vickie Barrett, a convicted prostitute, became involved in the case when the police discovered Ward's name in her address book during an interrogation on another matter.<sup>182</sup>

At the inception of the defense's case, Ward's lawyer, James Burge, argued that the police went overboard in their investigation based on the charges they were seeking and that the prosecution's contempt for Ward was no substitute for actual evidence.<sup>183</sup> Burge later expounded on Griffith-Jones, "My learned friend would make even a honeymoon sound obscene."<sup>184</sup> In addition, Judge Marshall insisted on Ward's proving his innocence with an implied assumption of guilt, the opposite way that the justice system was meant to operate.<sup>185</sup> Through his statements and questioning, Burge aimed to portray Ward as an immoral man in comparison with society's conventions, but not the proprietor of a prostitution ring.<sup>186</sup> Surprisingly, Ward's testimony served as an asset for the defense. He was poised and spoke well.<sup>187</sup> The theme of Ward's evidence hinged on the lying of the girls.<sup>188</sup> He asserted that the inadequate payments he received from Keeler and Rice-Davies were small compensation considering the value of the room he allowed them to stay in relatively rent-free.<sup>189</sup> Additionally, Ward disputed the dates of the Keeler charge since he had believed he was under surveillance by MI-5, an unwise time period to engage in illegal activities.<sup>190</sup> Burge's questions led Ward to explain that his sources of income came through his practice and drawings, a combined salary which did not require Ward to resort to sponsorship of prostitution.<sup>191</sup>

Despite this composed testimony, Ward's statement ended badly when the judge asked him if he possessed an "insatiable" sexual appetite.<sup>192</sup> Burge's case was also undermined by the abandonment of Ward by his friends, including Lord Astor, who refused to testify as character witnesses because of the negative impact on their good names.<sup>193</sup> Concurrently, Gordon's case arrived at the Court of Appeals, though the details were not released publicly.<sup>194</sup> Even though Keeler lied during the Gordon trial, Judge Marshall allowed her statements in the Ward trial to stand.<sup>195</sup> Following the first day of Judge Marshall's biased closing remarks, Ward ingested an overdose of nembuttal.<sup>196</sup> In his suicide letter, Ward wrote, "I am sorry to disappoint the vultures."<sup>197</sup> With Ward hospitalized, Judge Marshall continued with the trial. The jury found Ward guilty on the charges involving Keeler and Rice-Davies.<sup>198</sup> Ward's death on August 3, 1963, seemed a fitting end to an unorthodox trial.<sup>199</sup>

The publication of Lord Denning's Report closed the Profumo case. On June 21, 1963, Macmillan asked Lord Denning to conduct an inquiry into the security aspect of the affair in order to stop the flood of rumors against other Ministers.<sup>200</sup> Wilson disagreed with this course because Denning held no legal authority to compel his subjects to divulge the entire truth.<sup>201</sup> Nevertheless, Denning spent forty-nine days interviewing one hundred sixty witnesses, including Profumo, Hobson, Keeler, and Ward.<sup>202</sup> He acknowledged that the forum of an inquiry contained drawbacks compared to a tribunal or Select Committee of Parliament because it is carried out in private, but the lack of public attention allowed the witnesses to speak uninhibitedly and for Denning to seek the truth amidst conflicting statements.<sup>203</sup> In the end, Denning placed the foremost culpability upon Profumo for engaging in the affair and incessantly lying about his actions.<sup>204</sup> Denning cleared the police and Security Service since they were not meant to monitor the private lives of Ministers or to handle political problems.<sup>205</sup> He did hold

responsible the Ministers who attended the meeting the night before Profumo's personal statement. They should have insisted on reading the "Darling" letter, which would have created some skepticism over the story Profumo was selling them.<sup>206</sup> Lastly, Denning dismissed all of the rumors against other Ministers as false products of a hysterical environment.<sup>207</sup> After Macmillan received the report and consulted his Ministers and Wilson, he determined to publish it, against the mild objections of Wilson who wanted a recall of Parliament before the final decision was made.<sup>208</sup> The release of the Denning Report on September 26, 1963, satisfied Macmillan because it successfully quelled the propagation of further rumors.<sup>209</sup>

For other observers, lingering questions remained. First, Denning did not examine the actions of the justice system for proceeding with the Edgecombe trial without its principal witness or the intensity of the police pressure directed at Ward.<sup>210</sup> Denning also avoided delving into the possibility of Profumo's putting himself in another precarious position or probing into Profumo's past behavior for other affairs, which would have raised more doubts about his statements on Keeler.<sup>211</sup> In addition, the furious efforts of Profumo to stop Keeler's newspaper article did not lead anyone to inquire into his motives since he claimed to be an innocent man.<sup>212</sup> Even with these unanswered queries, the Denning Report reached its objective since the tumult surrounding the affair began to dissipate.

For Macmillan, previous security breaches during his tenure as Prime Minister affected the way he approached the Profumo Affair. Beginning in 1961, Macmillan faced numerous leaks of varying degrees, the most important of which occurred during the Vassall Case.<sup>213</sup> This crisis began in September 1962 when it was discovered that William Vassall, an employee at the British Embassy in Moscow, was blackmailed, on the basis of his homosexuality, into divulging secrets.<sup>214</sup> Even after his sentencing in October 1962 to eighteen years in prison, the newspapers

continued to probe into the relationship between Vassall and his superior, the Civil Lord Thomas Galbraith, and implied that the two men had been engaged in an affair.<sup>215</sup> After the publication of correspondence between the two men, Macmillan reluctantly accepted the resignation of Galbraith, who insisted on stepping down until the investigation was completed.<sup>216</sup> The subsequent tribunal of the case occurred during the beginning of 1963 and consumed Parliament during the midst of the Profumo rumors.<sup>217</sup> The publication of the tribunal's report in April 1963 exonerated Galbraith and left Macmillan wary of accepting any other premature resignations based on rumors.<sup>218</sup>

The structure of the security system also influenced Macmillan's treatment of Profumo's case. Because Macmillan lacked adequate experience in security when he became Prime Minister, he compensated by selecting skilled men in the top posts to report to him.<sup>219</sup> Macmillan's tendency to delegate forced his Head of Security to decide on the proper time to notify the Prime Minister of impending issues and potential crises.<sup>220</sup> If the developments were a possible political hazard for Macmillan, the Head of Security could not always anticipate these scenarios because his job was not a political one.<sup>221</sup> It fell on Macmillan to act in a proactive manner to seek the truth, especially in the case of Profumo.<sup>222</sup> Macmillan later admonished himself for not interrogating Profumo directly instead of leaving this important task to his subordinates.<sup>223</sup> Because Profumo made a statement in the House and sued for libel, Macmillan had no reason to distrust him and he did not want a repeat of the Galbraith situation.<sup>224</sup> Without the Vassall Case and the structure of the Security Services, the Profumo Affair would have been handled in a different manner that might have avoided the public scandal.



### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Portrayal of Women**

Newspapers, literature, drama and films all reflect the societal attitudes of the time in which they are produced. In Britain in the early 1960s, these media maintained conventional images of women. When women began to act in ways that defied these norms, people had no language with which to mark these transformations. In Keeler's case her promiscuity perplexed the British people who resorted to the language of prostitution in order to cope with the social changes that she represented.

#### **Newspaper Coverage of the Profumo Affair**

Because newspapers were one of the main sources of information during the Profumo Affair, the medium possessed the power to shape the public perception of the girl at the center of the scandal. Their sources ranged from the country's leaders in Parliament to the lawyers at the Ward case and to Keeler herself, as she attempted to shape the story for her own interests. An amalgamation of serious newspapers, tabloids and satirical journals each covered the story utilizing different journalistic styles that reached varying readerships. The language employed to describe Keeler indicated that British social attitudes remained conservative toward women.

The early 1960s marked a difficult period for the British newspaper industry. The libel laws in effect placed constraints on the way newspapers reported stories from their sources. The restrictive measures were enacted during the eighteenth century and remained largely untouched, despite reform efforts.<sup>1</sup> These laws inhibited the type of investigative journalism lauded in the U.S. as an additional form of checks and balances on governmental actions from developing in Britain.<sup>2</sup> Further pressure on the industry stemmed from judgments in July 1961 where both the

*Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* were ordered to pay libel damages over £100,000 each to John Lewis and his company over stories pertaining to a police investigation into the business.<sup>3</sup> Even though these large sums concerned both reporters and judges, the newspapers had to adapt to these tightening controls.<sup>4</sup>

The Vassall Case tested this renewal of concern over libel and further damaged the standing of the press. The allegations regarding an inappropriate sexual relationship between Vassall and Galbraith arose through publication in papers, including the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Sketch*.<sup>5</sup> The ensuing tribunal investigated every aspect of the case and discredited the rumors of the intimate association between the two men.<sup>6</sup> When two reporters refused to expose their sources, they were imprisoned.<sup>7</sup> As numerous letters to the editor expressed, this action damaged the public faith in the press.<sup>8</sup> In turn, the *Times* published an editorial entitled “It is Happening Here,” which lamented the loss of the media’s ability to function as the “watchdog of freedom.”<sup>9</sup> The entire situation angered Fleet Street, but forced editors to remain on their guard.<sup>10</sup> Had the Vassall Case not occurred, the *Sunday Mirror* most likely would have published Keeler’s story and the “Darling” letter. The paper’s editors later had to justify their choice not to publish these accounts in June 1963.<sup>11</sup> In the end, Profumo’s threat of litigation against libel served as a sufficient deterrent to action and hindered the press in its search for the truth.<sup>12</sup>

During this turbulent period in the newspaper industry, Keeler’s public persona emerged. The first published photograph of Keeler created a negative impression of her in the public eye. On February 3, 1963, the *News of the World* utilized a provocative shot of Keeler to advertise the upcoming Edgecombe trial before its postponement.<sup>13</sup> Denning later expressed his feelings on the photograph when he wrote in his report, “Most people seeing that picture would realize what

she was.”<sup>14</sup> Denning’s snap judgment represented the opinion of the older generation of people who immediately assumed that Keeler was a prostitute because she posed for a photograph in a way they deemed unseemly for a young woman. This viewpoint was bolstered by the fact that Keeler was labeled a “model” in the caption.<sup>15</sup> To many at this time, the term model was considered a polite way of referring to a call girl.<sup>16</sup> The continual use of the designation in the *Times* prompted one model agency owner to complain in a letter that Keeler’s actions impugned the modeling profession.<sup>17</sup> Models themselves later spoke out in defense of their legitimate occupation. Pat Knight explained in the *Sunday Mirror*, “The very word these days seems to conjure up a vision of a naked girl leaping over a leopard-skin couch.”<sup>18</sup> This initial impression of Keeler negatively affected her subsequent characterization during the scandal.

During Keeler’s disappearance, one newspaper resorted to an innovative technique in order to intimate the story they dared not publish because of libel laws. On March 15, 1963, the *Daily Express* employed a careful placement of two seemingly unrelated articles about Profumo and Keeler.<sup>19</sup> The first story carried a picture of Profumo and his wife with the headline “War Minister Shock,” in reference to Profumo’s tendered resignation.<sup>20</sup> The other story about Keeler was titled “Vanished Old Bailey Witness,” and detailed the circumstances surrounding her unknown whereabouts.<sup>21</sup> Even though the Profumo story was inaccurate, the contiguous stories implied the true connection between the two and possible wrongdoing on the part of Profumo.<sup>22</sup> Although most readers overlooked the significance, the intended audience understood the suggestion of the front page.<sup>23</sup> In addition, the interior pages of the paper featured four photographs of Keeler, including one where she donned only a towel.<sup>24</sup>

The respectable broadsheets such as the *Times*, strictly recounted the events surrounding Keeler and Profumo. By quoting public officials, the papers did not directly make accusations

against Keeler's character. In the *Times*, Keeler first appeared as the missing witness from the Edgecombe case.<sup>25</sup> The very idea of a young woman being involved in a shooting by a black man and then fleeing from her judicial responsibilities signaled to the readership that something was amiss with Keeler. The ensuing questions in the Commons added another dimension to Keeler's public image through the query of MP Barbara Castle. She asked, "It would suit the book of many people no doubt to deplore the avidity with which the press are at this moment pursuing the question of where is Miss Christine Keeler, the missing call girl, the vanished witness?"<sup>26</sup> If the term model raised eyebrows among the readers, then Castle's use of "call girl" confirmed their suspicions. In actuality, Castle possessed no hard evidence to substantiate these claims at this point in the proceedings. Interestingly, the first public statement against Keeler was made by a woman. Keeler's subsequent trouble with Gordon further influenced the way people perceived her. As Iain Crawford commented in his contemporary book, "Being friendly with Christine Keeler seemed to be a highly perilous association."<sup>27</sup> Yet at this point Keeler's public relations problems were only beginning.

The satirical newspaper *Private Eye* published the Profumo story in its entirety before any other competitor.<sup>28</sup> Because the names were changed to funny pseudonyms, *Private Eye* was able to print an accurate account without the threat of legal action for libel. On March 22, 1963, the paper ran the story of Keeler's disappearance and her involvement with Ward, Ivanov, and Profumo.<sup>29</sup> Keeler's codename was "Miss Gaye Funloving," the most insightful public characterization of her.<sup>30</sup> At this point in her life, Keeler constantly sought fun and frivolity with her myriad of boyfriends and sexual partners. This relaxed promiscuity did not make Keeler a professional call girl, as Castle and others charged. Since *Private Eye* was founded in 1962 and

was only printed every two weeks, it reached a small niche audience, an unfortunate fact for those seeking the truth of the situation.<sup>31</sup>

The June 11, 1963, editorial from the *Times* titled “It is a Moral Issue” shifted the Profumo debate from security to public morality.<sup>32</sup> By doing so, a previously silent middle class found an outlet to express its concerns.<sup>33</sup> Sir William Haley, *Times* editor, blamed the new age of affluence and materialism under the Conservatives for the problems the nation faced.<sup>34</sup> He wrote in the editorial, “One of the paradoxes of modern war is that defeat is more likely to restore a nation’s fibre than victory. All too dangerously comfortable is the slow insidious, almost imperceptible but inexorable ebb tide.”<sup>35</sup> In addition, Haley deemed Profumo’s actions as “the last straw” of the Conservative administration.<sup>36</sup> In the following days, the readers reacted favorably to these sentiments through a flood of letters lamenting the nation’s deterioration.<sup>37</sup> One reader, Frank McCleary, summed up the alarmed mood, “The decline generally in morality is one that should cause grave concern. Unless we can arrest it, the whole society will be engulfed.”<sup>38</sup> For the first time, it became apparent that the Profumo Affair pointed to larger changes occurring in Britain.

Although the *Times* was a main forum for discussion, other newspapers and their readers chimed in on the event monopolizing Britain’s attention. Unlike the *Times* readers, these others mentioned Keeler by name in their letters. The *New Daily* published a letter by D.O. Lath, who was upset by the designation “Miss” being used in reference to Keeler: “ ‘Miss’ is a title of courtesy for a young girl or maiden lady. Do not continue to apply this word to Keeler because it would be very unjust and unfair to millions of decent girls.”<sup>39</sup> Another letter directly stated, “It seemed as though the entire national life of Britain had passed through the loins of a girl of twenty-one.”<sup>40</sup> Other papers utilized their own editorial space to enter the national discussion.

The *British Weekly*, the paper of the Church of Scotland, mourned the tarnish to Britain's image in the international arena as "a moral power" due to the scandal.<sup>41</sup> The major headline of the *Daily Express* concisely encapsulated the tumult caused by the affair, "What the hell is going on in this country?"<sup>42</sup> For the average British person, the Profumo Affair opened their eyes to the changing moral attitude that crossed class barriers.

Through the tabloids, Keeler presented her version of the events of the Profumo Affair. Tabloids practiced "checkbook journalism," where the papers paid thousands of dollars to the leading figures of the latest sensation in order to share their story with the public.<sup>43</sup> This trend coincided with the industry's preoccupation with profits over responsible journalism, one byproduct of the strict libel laws because of the inability of journalists to fully investigate stories.<sup>44</sup> One of the beneficiaries of this system was Vassall, who signed a contract for £7,000 with the *Sunday Pictorial* after his conviction for betraying his country in November 1962.<sup>45</sup>

After the renamed *Sunday Mirror* decided against publishing Keeler's memoirs, the *News of the World* snatched up the rights and began with the publication of her biography on April 7, 1963.<sup>46</sup> In the story, the reporter Peter Earle described his first meeting with his subject, "She welcomed me at the door, wearing skin-tight jeans and nothing else."<sup>47</sup> When the story of Profumo's resignation broke, the *News of the World* was positioned to triple Vassall's price at a total of £23,000.<sup>48</sup> The first section of Keeler's "Confessions" employed a familiar tone when depicting all of the societal elites present at the Cliveden weekend. In the piece, she mentioned that she borrowed Hobson's bathing suit in addition to grabbing her husband's attention.<sup>49</sup> Keeler also chronicled her strange behavior with Ward when she related, "For instance, one of his little jokes was to put a dog collar round my neck and take me along the street on a lead. Ivanov was often with us and we would go into a pub and talk as if there was nothing unusual."<sup>50</sup>

Though colorful, this strange behavior confirmed the public image of Keeler and Ward as immoral.

In the second chapter published the following week, the ghost writer made the conscious decision to amend the tone of the article, especially by avoiding outrageous anecdotes.<sup>51</sup> Instead, the story focused on the passive participation of Keeler as events occurred around her. She was portrayed as an innocent bystander who unknowingly became embroiled in an explosive international imbroglio. This section concluded, “I never dreamed I might be the girl who rocked the Government. I know nothing of high affairs, or wanted to. All I know is that when I allowed Eugene to love me I was young and free.”<sup>52</sup> This toned-down presentation portrayed Keeler as much more of an “ordinary girl”- but an ordinary girl of the postwar era proved shocking to many. The “Confessions of Christine” struck a chord with the public, as evidenced by the sale of an additional 250,000 copies of the *News of the World*.<sup>53</sup> In addition, both the *Sunday Mirror* and the *News of the World* accompanied their coverage of the Profumo Affair with nude pictures of Keeler strategically concealed by a chair.<sup>54</sup> One contemporary observer depicted the shot of Keeler astride the chair as “possibly the most erotic photograph ever in the British Press.”<sup>55</sup> Beyond the sexuality of the story, the series also mentioned that Keeler was asked to gather information on nuclear weapons.<sup>56</sup> The potent combination of immorality and treason captivated the British public.

Keeler’s tabloid attention further damaged her public image even though she was the direct source for the information. Many people were offended that Keeler earned an exorbitant amount of money for, at the very least, committing adultery with a Government Minister, at a time when Britain’s economy was floundering compared to other nations.<sup>57</sup> She later defended her actions and acceptance of the money, “It’s for me to live on. My reputation is gone and I

have to think of the future.”<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the press continually printed stories of offers Keeler received for jobs in night clubs that would have paid her a salary of a few thousand pounds a week.<sup>59</sup> Though Keeler rejected these proposals, she attempted to jumpstart a film career that ultimately failed when the British actor’s union denied her admission.<sup>60</sup> Keeler’s repeated attempts to cash in on her notoriety perpetuated her image as a girl with no comprehension of the depth and consequences of her actions. To the average British observer, it was indecorous that a girl earned large sums because she not only slept around with notable people, but was willing to talk about it. Because people accepted that Keeler was a call girl, these subsequent payments seemed another form of public prostitution.

Because the charges against Ward at the time of his arrest involved the alleged illegal activities of Keeler, MPs became more aggressive in characterizing Keeler as a prostitute. During the June 17, 1963, debate on Profumo’s resignation MPs attempted to utilize every synonym for prostitute in existence. None of the parliamentarians believed that the young Keeler voluntarily committed adultery with a government Minister without receiving recompense. In the opening statement of the day, the Labour leader, Harold Wilson, referred to Keeler as a “harlot.”<sup>61</sup> While alluding to the numerous night club offers Keeler later collected, Wilson questioned, “or should I now refer to her as Miss Christine Keeler Limited?”<sup>62</sup> The Liberal party leader, Jo Grimond, focused on the gullibility of the five Ministers who helped Profumo craft his personal statement.<sup>63</sup> Between the “Darling” letter and Keeler’s youth and good looks, Grimond inquired, “I would also ask for what purpose did they think Mr. Profumo saw Ms. Keeler? Did they think it was merely to make conversation?”<sup>64</sup> Nigel Birch, a Conservative MP, did not mince words when he described the misdeeds of his former colleague through this statement, “I must say that he never struck me as a cloistered monk; and Miss



Keeler was a professional prostitute.”<sup>65</sup> To put it more succinctly, Birch added, “What are whores about?”<sup>66</sup> The most sympathetic tone of the day came from MP Ben Parkin. He asked the Members, “Is no one in the House today going to say a word of compassion for the poor little slut who is at the center of all this?”<sup>67</sup> Even the kindest declaration used disparaging language against Keeler. Because all of these statements were made in the House of Commons, a highly respected institution in British society, by the nation’s leaders, the public had credible evidence of Keeler’s illegal occupation. The repeated employment of negative epithets irretrievably harmed Keeler’s reputation.

Keeler’s multiple court appearances and police station visits throughout 1963 kept her profile in the newspapers. These photo opportunities allowed for her figure and clothing choices to be minutely dissected to the last detail. Clive Irving commented on Keeler’s photogenic quality, “She had a figure which made the kind of photograph that helps to lighten the burden of the news, especially at a time when all the news seemed to be so bad.”<sup>68</sup> The intense focus on her looks and fashion sense established Keeler as a sexual object meant only for titillation. When she visited the police on a regular basis, the incessant pictures showed her “climbing leggily out of a mini-car,” an exacting sexual observation.<sup>69</sup> Her propensity for wearing young fashions, such as mini-skirts and leather boots, resulted in such a sensation that the boots were mass marketed.<sup>70</sup> This act showed that there was a demand for young women to look like Keeler, an indication that they could relate to her in some way. With the involvement of numerous young women in the Ward trial, spectators saw the important legal proceeding dwindled to the status of a “fashion parade.”<sup>71</sup> The concentration on the superficial with Keeler belittled her.

The intense media attention surrounding Keeler on her court dates denigrated the justice system to a public spectacle. For the Gordon trial, Keeler was chauffeured around in a Rolls

Royce, an extravagant choice.<sup>72</sup> This flippant action added to the public discontent, which resulted in aggressive reactions at her appearances. On one occasion when leaving court, women jeered Keeler and Rice-Davies and hit their car with their umbrellas.<sup>73</sup> While on a lunch break another day, one person hurled eggs and tomatoes in order to demonstrate his or her disgust.<sup>74</sup> The courtroom provided no immunity to Keeler. As Keeler explained that she dated one boyfriend at a time, a public spectator chortled in disbelief.<sup>75</sup> These multiple displays of hatred and dissatisfaction illustrated the extreme emotions that Keeler evoked in people.

The coverage from the Ward trial permanently entrenched Keeler's public reputation because of the disparaging comments made by both lawyers and the judge. The trial garnered tremendous attention because many observers dubbed it "The Trial of the Century."<sup>76</sup> Prosecutor Griffith-Jones intended to convince the jury that Keeler and Rice-Davies were prostitutes so that he could convict Ward. Because both women worked at a night club, Griffith-Jones believed the next logical step for their career progression would be prostitution.<sup>77</sup> In his closing statement, he triumphantly asserted, "On the evidence, both these young ladies were prepared to go to bed with any man- certainly a good number of men- for money."<sup>78</sup> Conversely, Ward's counselor, Burge, wanted to demonstrate that though Keeler was a young girl, she was capable of acting on her own volition without the goading of Ward.<sup>79</sup> While he cross-examined Keeler on the stand, Burge stated, "It is quite obvious to anyone who has seen you, if you wished to earn money by selling your body you could have made very large sums of money."<sup>80</sup> The way in which Burge phrased the question reiterated the image of Keeler as a sexual object. Judge Marshall not only assumed the guilt of Ward and Keeler, he also publicly condemned Keeler for profiting from the scandal: "The widespread and exaggerated publicity surrounding this case has brought these girls to the pinnacle of notoriety which feed and fan their vanity."<sup>81</sup> Ward's subsequent conviction

served as a condemnation for Keeler as well. The British justice system seemingly confirmed the suspicions of the British public, who always assumed as much.

The degree of Keeler's bad press can best be exhibited by comparing it with the treatment of Valerie Hobson, as the wronged wife. Starting with the rumors in the *Westminster Confidential*, observers assumed that Hobson would leave Profumo because of his adultery.<sup>82</sup> When the public learned the entirety of the story, the intensity of the speculation increased and even reached the American tabloids.<sup>83</sup> Against convention, Hobson remained loyal to her husband during his public shaming. In his report, Lord Denning remarked of the famous couple, "Her support of him over their difficult days is one of the most redeeming features of the events I have to describe."<sup>84</sup> The public shared his view, as evidenced by the reception Hobson received at her first public appearance after the resignation, at the opening of a children's hospital.<sup>85</sup> At the conclusion of her speech, the crowd vigorously applauded Hobson, which visibly affected her. Keeler could never hope for such approval. In this situation, the public will always approve of the wronged, but loyal wife against the adulterous woman. Since Keeler's fame stemmed from immoral behavior that produced wide reaching consequences, the British public would never embrace her.

### **Angry Young Men and Old Wave Women:**

#### **The Depiction of Women in Literature, Drama and Film**

Like the newspapers, the creative arts propagated a conservative representation of women, a reflection of the dominant view of British society. In the years preceding the Profumo Affair, movements in literature, drama, and film began to explore working class themes and stories for the first time. Even though the works explored new subject matter, women continued

to be portrayed in a narrow manner. Christine Keeler, a working class girl, fit the mold of the fictional women presented in this era, a fact that also affected the way people perceived her. By 1963, when more realistic and positive working class young women were portrayed in films, Keeler possessed a striking resemblance to these characters, an indication that she was the product of societal changes and not a strange anomaly.

The “Angry Young Men” of British literature and drama in the late 1950s voiced the lingering unhappiness in the country despite the implementation of the welfare state following World War II.<sup>86</sup> This group was not a formal one, but a loose confederation of predominantly male writers who focused on similar themes.<sup>87</sup> The playwright John Osborne and novelists Alan Sillitoe and John Braine were a sample of the major writers within the movement.<sup>88</sup> Although most of the “members” hailed from the lower middle class and benefited from the reorganization of the British educational system in the postwar era, their protagonists were working class men who tried to escape their station in life through their own individual effort.<sup>89</sup> These young men were “angry” because the cultural changes promised after the victory of the war and the ensuing affluence did not transpire for everyone.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, the sense of contentment that pervaded the nation struck these authors as more of a cultural stagnation.<sup>91</sup> They directed their criticism of the inert and still unequal postwar era at the “Establishment,” a term referring to the ruling elites and accompanying societal beliefs that allowed the maintenance of the status quo.<sup>92</sup> For many critics, the national event that best represented the problems with the Establishment and British society was the Suez Crisis of 1956.<sup>93</sup> The political debacle was monumentally mishandled by government leaders and illustrated the decline of Britain’s national prestige on the world stage.<sup>94</sup> Without the fortuitous timing of Suez, the Angry Young Men most likely would not have remained as prominent in the national consciousness.<sup>95</sup>

The climax of the Angry Young Men movement was John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, a play that debuted in May 1956.<sup>96</sup> The main character, Jimmy Porter, spends the entire play lambasting against the "Age of Affluence" and political consensus.<sup>97</sup> Because the working-class Jimmy married the upper-class Alison, she bears the brunt of his excoriation.<sup>98</sup> Jimmy equates Britain's regression with femininity.<sup>99</sup> In addition, Jimmy's own masculinity is vulnerable because of Alison's greater wealth and his lack of initiative in utilizing his University education.<sup>100</sup> For much of the play, both Alison and Helena, Jimmy's later mistress, are entrenched behind an ironing board, a reiteration of Jimmy's view of the proper domestic role of a woman.<sup>101</sup> Despite Jimmy's censure of Alison, she succinctly defines his worldview while conversing with her father, a retired Colonel in the British Army. She states, "You're hurt because everything is changed. And Jimmy's hurt because everything is the same."<sup>102</sup> The preeminent movement of the play relied upon gender conflict and unfavorable treatment of women. This view would be perpetuated in the film genre inspired by these Angry Young Men.

The British New Wave owed a large debt to the Angry Young Men since most of the films were adaptations of those works.<sup>103</sup> For the first time in the British cinema, working-class characters became protagonists in films.<sup>104</sup> This innovation in storytelling coincided with the rise of the independent British film producer.<sup>105</sup> Because of economic hardships within the industry due to flagging attendance, distribution companies allowed more autonomy for filmmakers in choosing their own projects.<sup>106</sup> Consequently, the filmmakers of the New Wave made the conscious choice to seek out working-class stories in order to make movies reflect a larger sector of society and therefore become more relevant.<sup>107</sup> Interestingly, the majority of the people involved in the movement did not have working-class backgrounds so they approached the projects with an outsider's view.<sup>108</sup> Some critics felt that the directors and producers

exploited the working class by projecting their own worldviews on to the characters they depicted.<sup>109</sup> Conversely, the fact that the filmmakers were not of the class they were portraying perhaps allowed them greater insight into their subjects because they brought in a different perspective. Director Tony Richardson explained the lofty goal of engaging the whole of society on screen, “Films should be an immensely dynamic and potent force within society.”<sup>110</sup> In order to make their films, the directors wanted to establish “poetic realism,” a style that sought both to depict working-class life with accuracy and to show the filmmaker’s imprint through the technical way the film was shot.<sup>111</sup> This emphasis can best be seen through the location shots that provide a sense of place for the scenes even though they provide no narrative function.<sup>112</sup>

In New Wave films, the roles of women were marginalized in order to serve the journey of the male protagonist.<sup>113</sup> Women fell into the strict delineations of wife or mistress, with each possessing different attributes.<sup>114</sup> Not surprisingly, the more exotic and complex women of the screen were the mistresses. Even though they were fun and exciting characters, they were ultimately rejected because marriage was portrayed as a suffocating institution.<sup>115</sup> For the men, marriage was viewed as a “castration,” a loss of male identity since the husband must bow down to the wife in later life, a fate illustrated through the depiction of older marriages shown on the screen.<sup>116</sup> The female characters deemed worthy of marriage normally were of a higher class which resulted in material gain, an ulterior motive for the protagonist.<sup>117</sup> In a few instances, a pregnancy out of wedlock hastened a marriage because these films eventually reaffirmed traditional family values.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, the possibility of abortions, though mentioned, was dismissed as unacceptable options.<sup>119</sup> Ironically, then, the most innovative films of the period reinforced the existing mores of British society towards females.<sup>120</sup>

The adaptation of John Braine's *A Room at the Top* in 1959 exemplified the objectification and manipulation of women. As one of the earliest New Wave films, along with *Look Back in Anger*, the movie set the tone for the genre while garnering commercial success.<sup>121</sup> The marginalization of women begins early in the film when the lead character, Joe Lampton, explains his system of ranking women. He devised a complex grading scale with the components of money, background, and his own instinct as the criteria. His physical attraction to the woman is a prerequisite to his evaluation. Based on her top ranking, Lampton pursues Susan Brown, the daughter of one of the richest families in town. As a result of Susan's initial rebuffs, Lampton begins an intense, sexual relationship with the older Alice, who is already married to a controlling husband. Lampton's first fight with Alice occurs when he discovers that she once posed for a nude photograph, because Joe wants to monopolize Alice. Despite his fulfilling affair with Alice, Lampton continues to seek out Susan and becomes more successful in his wooing. When Susan later announces her pregnancy to Lampton, he is forced to marry the girl he does not love, yet he gains wealth and social position. As a result of this turn of events, Alice commits suicide, an act that illustrates the disposability of women when they are no longer of use to men.<sup>122</sup> In the end, Lampton forfeits personal happiness for material gain by manipulating Susan into believing that he reciprocated her love. This stark characterization of women set the standard for the way they would be portrayed in this genre.

Tony Richardson's *A Taste of Honey* from 1961 was the rare film in the British New Wave because it depicted a female protagonist- the result, most likely, of the choice of Shelagh Delaney as scriptwriter.<sup>123</sup> The main character Jo sports a masculine haircut with uneven bangs which emphasizes her lack of traditional beauty and femininity, yet the film downplays this fact. She engages in a brief and furtive love affair with Jimmy, a black sailor, who then leaves town

for the next port. When Jo discovers that she is pregnant after Jimmy has left, she worries about the consequences of her miscegenation upon the appearance of her child. The latter part of the film focuses on Jo's friendship with Geoffrey, a homosexual, who wants to act as the father to her unborn child. Despite his adept skill as a nurturer, Geoffrey's "abnormal" sexuality impedes him from performing this role in this society. The ending of the film rejects men, as Jo is reunited with her troubled mother in order to raise her child to reassert a semblance of a functioning family unit.<sup>124</sup> Even though this film explored unique subject matter, it ultimately endorsed a conservative lifestyle.

*A Taste of Honey* explored not only such daring themes as premarital sex and homosexuality, but also the even more explosive issue of interracial sex. The negative reaction to the news of Jo's interracial relationship in the film mirrored the disgust that the public felt toward Keeler and her interactions with Edgecombe and Gordon. Delaney, however, went against the stereotype of the young black man as a criminal, an image Keeler's two lovers helped to perpetuate. Despite Delaney's surprisingly sympathetic portrait of Jimmy, the film does not allow the interracial romance to persist. Jimmy does not return, and thus conservative social attitudes again triumph, even in this daring film.

John Schlesinger's *Billy Liar* of 1963 presented the most truthful characterization of a young woman in the early 1960s through the character of Liz, played by Julie Christie.<sup>125</sup> One explanation of this progressive choice may be that *Billy Liar* is a comedy and not a serious drama. Liz is portrayed as a free spirit, as is clear in the first shot of her almost skipping happily down the street. Sue Harper described this side of Liz in the following way, "With no visible means of support, she floats free above the world of goods in pursuit of her own quixotic desires."<sup>126</sup> Liz's ultimate goal is to move away to London. This aspiration is also vocalized



through the character of Gladys in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. Gladys, like Liz, wants to escape the dreariness of her working-class town for the glamour, affluence, and freedom that London represented to outsiders.<sup>127</sup> Liz attempts to get Billy to go with her to London on a whim, but his inability to fully understand her and his family obligations dissuade him from moving away, forcing Liz to go on her own.<sup>128</sup> Unique to the genre, the relationship does not end because of the perceived deficiencies of the woman. Julie Christie credits this role as one of the best in her long career because she had the opportunity to portray young women as they were in 1963.<sup>129</sup> She stated, “How we were is how we were allowed to be presented.”<sup>130</sup> As one of the last films of the British New Wave, *Billy Liar* broke the mold that the earlier films established for women.

Keeler’s life and background resembled that of Liz and Gladys, evidence that she was a typical girl of the time period. Keeler moved to London because it afforded her the opportunity to live an easier life than her hometown of Wraybury provided. She was an insouciant girl who sought pleasure and shirked taxing work. Her jobs at Murray’s Cabaret Club and modeling were better and easier than waitressing or working in a factory. To Keeler’s detriment, however, her public image became that of a British New Wave film mistress, not a Julie Christiesque free spirit. The conservative values of British society that were reasserted in these films contributed to Keeler’s negative image.

The treatment of women as objects was not relegated to the “kitchen sink” genre of film. In 1962 and 1963, the first two James Bond films, *Dr. No* and *From Russia with Love* were released. The opening sequences establish the tone for the series because women’s bodies are used as canvasses for the credits, a trait that became more pronounced with each film. The famous scene in *Dr. No* of Ursula Andress as Honey Ryder emerging from the sea like Venus

augments this point. In both films, James Bond remains in control of his relationships with women. The character of Tatiana from *From Russia with Love* makes this easier for Bond by throwing herself at him for the majority of the film. This film also presents an interesting scene of sexual voyeurism in the case of the first encounter of Bond and Tatiana. When the two sleep together in a hotel room on the night of their first meeting, the evil plotters observe the activity from behind a glass wall. This scene combines the “behind closed door” mentality of British sexuality with the voyeurism allowed through the stories in the Sunday tabloids. The timing of the Bond franchise is interesting because it presented espionage as a sexy occupation through Bond a year before the Profumo Affair and thus ultimately helped sharpen public intrigue with the real-life scandal.

## Chapter 4

### **The Social Significance of the Profumo Affair**

World War II constituted a major turning point for British society. In the aftermath of total war, Attlee's Labour government consciously attempted to make changes through the introduction of the welfare state. While the changes enacted improved the standard of living for many, they did not fundamentally alter the social fabric of the nation. Instead, the affluence of the fifties became the catalyst for social change, aspects of which caused many conservative British people to fear for the moral decline of the nation. Because the Profumo Affair encompassed a wide range of issues in flux in Britain, it forced people to confront issues directly and aided in the acceleration of changes throughout the remainder of the decade.

#### **“Respectable and Disreputable People All Mixed Together”: Class Ambiguities**

Because World War II was a total war, the contributions of the entire society were integral to the achievement of victory. Early in the war, the British government wanted to spread the idea that the war would create lasting changes in the country.<sup>1</sup> Only three months into the conflict in December 1939, Anthony Eden professed that the war would “bring about changes which may be fundamental and revolutionary in the economic and social life of this country.”<sup>2</sup> This viewpoint was strengthened by the publication of the Beveridge Report in 1942, a document that contained proposals for national assistance to all people through family allowances, a national health service, and social security.<sup>3</sup> The British people overwhelmingly concurred with the plan, as evidenced in an eighty-six percent positive result in a poll conducted soon after the release of the report.<sup>4</sup>

Both the soldiers and factory workers shared a hopeful idealism for their country after the war ended. The soldiers wished that their service to their country would translate into better economic circumstances for them when they returned home.<sup>5</sup> A minister who worked with soldiers divulged, “Most of them are thinking of a world where there will be better opportunities for everyone, and more economic security than there has been since the early ages of mankind.”<sup>6</sup> On the home front, the workers performed an integral task in producing war materiel so that the soldiers were well-equipped on the battlefield, giving them a greater bargaining position to increase their standard of living.<sup>7</sup> The experiences in air raid shelters, in some instances, threw together people of disparate backgrounds into a situation of common anxiety.<sup>8</sup> The post-war celebrations further allowed people to revel together as fellow countrymen without focusing on their economic and social differences.<sup>9</sup>

After the Labour victory in the 1945 election, the social proposals from the Beveridge Report turned into a reality. The intention of this “welfare state” was to make social services available to everyone, instead of the select wealthy few.<sup>10</sup> Surprisingly, the middle class took greater advantage of the new programs over the working class, who were not always as eager to seek help.<sup>11</sup> The periods of austerity and affluence were intended as “classless.”<sup>12</sup> In 1959, many wanted to believe “that once class was swept away, proud old England would reassert herself as a society both humane and industrially efficient and capable of exercising by her example a moral force for good in the world.”<sup>13</sup> In reality, however, class barriers still existed.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1960s, British society had not become classless because the people still identified themselves with class labels.<sup>15</sup> Polls conducted throughout the decade revealed that ninety percent of those surveyed acknowledged the existence of stratified groups within society.<sup>16</sup> For members of the working class, upward movement into the more comfortable middle class

existence remained difficult, though not impossible.<sup>17</sup> In the sixties, about two thirds of the British population considered themselves members of the working class.<sup>18</sup> In order to improve their standards of living, members of the lower class had to work more hours at their monotonous manual labor jobs.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, some important changes in the class system occurred. Exact boundaries between the classes became more difficult to ascertain.<sup>20</sup> If workers could reach middle class status, their children benefited from more educational opportunities while the entire family enjoyed a more secure lifestyle.<sup>21</sup> The power and wealth still remained firmly with the upper class of society, especially in important leadership positions in the government.<sup>22</sup> The lack of change in Britain spurred on a movement like the Angry Young Men who recognized the hypocrisy between the rhetoric of classlessness and the reality of everyday life for the majority of people in the country.<sup>23</sup>

Opportunities for social mobility existed, but the Profumo Affair reveals their limits. Ward and Keeler serve as examples of the way social mobility worked in Britain. Ward, born into the middle class, was able to rise because of the stewardship of Lord Astor. Even though he worked with upper-class clients before he met Astor, Ward was unable to gain entry into elite parties and the overall lifestyle without the sponsorship of his friend. In Keeler's case, she left Wraybury for London because she realized her life would remain static at home. Her job at Murray's Cabaret Club afforded her the opportunity to earn a decent salary and make connections with members like Ward. After she quit the club, her sporadic modeling jobs, the support of her boyfriends, and rare instances of sex for money sustained her. The diversity of possibilities in London allowed Keeler to live a more comfortable life, than was available to her at home, but her lifestyle seemed unorthodox and even criminal to many.

The Profumo Affair also underlines the continuing power of traditional social standards. The cover-up attempted by Profumo insulted his Conservative colleagues because he did not act in accordance with the unspoken rules of gentlemanly conduct.<sup>24</sup> Since the majority of the Tory MPs were born into elite families, they strove to uphold the proper behavior appropriate for gentleman of generations past.<sup>25</sup> Prime Minister Macmillan elaborated on this point in his autobiography, “But Profumo does not seem to have realized that we have- in public life- to observe different standards from those prevalent today in many circles.”<sup>26</sup> By lying about his adultery to his fellow ministers, Profumo violated the trust essential to dealings in public life.<sup>27</sup> Through not resigning immediately as other lower members of the party had done in the preceding years, he prolonged and intensified the negative attention upon his party.<sup>28</sup> His private life became the story and threatened his party’s standing.<sup>29</sup> In order to compensate for Profumo’s transgression, other Conservative Ministers made sure that their wives conspicuously escorted them to any public outing they attended.<sup>30</sup>

The Profumo Affair was an important event in British society because it illustrated the double standard of a pure public image coupled with private misdeeds among upper class officials.<sup>31</sup> Macmillan commented on the changes he witnessed, “No doubt Profumo had frequented circles, which in my youth, it would have been thought inappropriate for a Minister to move.”<sup>32</sup> He continued, “Respectable and disreputable people now seemed to be all mixed together.”<sup>33</sup> The revelation about Profumo shattered an image of probity among the nation’s leaders. His transgression would make it more difficult for others to project an image of decency while engaging in immoral behavior behind closed doors.

### **“Engaging but Primitive People”: The Question of Race**

After World War II, the British government wanted to bolster the relationship between Britain and the Commonwealth countries. The British Nationality Act of 1948 granted a right of entry to people from the former colonies and Commonwealth nations into Britain.<sup>34</sup> This policy coincided with an influx of white Eastern Europeans, who were granted the status of “European Volunteer Workers” and were considered “ideal immigrants.”<sup>35</sup> Throughout the early 1950s, the government publicly celebrated the “open door” policy because it allowed Britain to project an image of tolerance, a vital attribute for a moral nation.<sup>36</sup> In 1954, Henry Hopkinson, the Minister of State for Colonial Affairs boasted, “In a world in which restrictions on personal movement and immigration have increased we still take pride in the fact that a man can say *civis Britannicus sum* whatever his colour may be, and we can take pride in the fact that he wants and can come to the Mother country.”<sup>37</sup> This policy had unintended consequences because of the popularity of the legislation.<sup>38</sup> While the public stance of the government remained complementary, in private, committees colluded to curb the immigration of black and Asian peoples to no avail.<sup>39</sup>

Before the establishment of secret committees, other officials expressed concern over the increase of blacks in the homogenous British society. A majority of the black immigrants into England originated from the West Indies. In 1948, the *Empire Windrush* carried Jamaican war veterans, who served in England during the war, back to the mother country.<sup>40</sup> Concerned Labour MPs voiced their trepidations to Prime Minister Clement Attlee: “An influx of coloured people domiciled here is likely to impair the harmony, strength and cohesion of our public and social life and to cause discord and unhappiness among all concerned.”<sup>41</sup> In 1958, tensions erupted through riots in Notting Hill and Nottingham.<sup>42</sup> The fighting occurred when young

white working-class males attacked West Indian males because of racial prejudice.<sup>43</sup> In order to avoid future outbreaks, the government sought informally to limit Caribbean immigrants.<sup>44</sup> When the West Indian government did not cooperate fully, more drastic measures were required.<sup>45</sup>

The Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 was openly race-based.<sup>46</sup> It sought to limit the numbers of black and Asian immigrants and not Irish or other white Europeans.<sup>47</sup> The law instituted a hierarchical system through vouchers which allowed people with jobs waiting for them to have first priority, followed by skilled workers who could contribute to a lagging industry.<sup>48</sup> The Labour party leadership denounced the law as discriminatory, but the rank and file members supported the limits.<sup>49</sup> The British government was able to enact a quota system in the early sixties because of the waning focus on the Commonwealth.<sup>50</sup> As a result of decolonization, especially after Macmillan's "winds of change" speech in 1960, the government shifted its concentration from the Empire to Europe in order to establish a new identity for the nation.<sup>51</sup> Even though subsequent legislation throughout the decade sought to hinder racial intolerance, the British government promoted a racist immigration policy.<sup>52</sup>

The *Sunday Mirror* ran a story entitled "This Subject is Dynamite" in its May 12, 1963, issue, which explored the viewpoint of the average British person on the subject of race. The opening paragraph of the article set the scene: "Let us be brutally frank from the start. Nothing riles some of the readers of Britain's newspapers more than to be told that they must be kinder to their coloured brothers living and working alongside them."<sup>53</sup> The story bluntly stated that the British people were hypocritical: they denounced the racial problems in the American South and South Africa while rampant prejudice abounded in Britain itself. Since 1958, the paper had attempted to infuse the racial discussion with practicality, such as the acknowledgement that all



social groups contain a criminal element that impugns the law-abiding majority. Additionally, the racial tensions exacerbated the housing issue along with the overall economic apprehensions of Britons. By voicing the taboos of the subject, the paper hoped to encourage people to move past these difficulties in order to attain tolerance. The article ended with an entreaty for understanding, “Until racial tolerance is established in Britain, our protests against racial intolerance elsewhere will continue to ring abominably false.”<sup>54</sup> A sidebar further chronicled incidents of racial violence and discrimination dating back to 1948, an exhibition of the problems faced at a local level. The publication of this article in one of the popular tabloids showed the depth of the race problem plaguing the nation.

Because of these racial tensions in 1963, Keeler’s relationships with Edgecombe and Gordon contributed to the negative image of her behavior. In this society, interracial relationships were a great taboo. In her autobiography, Keeler addressed her feelings in the aftermath of the Edgecombe shooting, “I was thinking about being asked in court if I had had sex with a black man, which in the early 1960s was a great stigma.”<sup>55</sup> When she was engaged in the relationship, the association with a black man did not bother Keeler because of the private nature of the affair. She now, however, faced public ignominy. Ward’s article in the *News of the World* did not help to allay Keeler’s fear of public scrutiny. In one of his articles, Ward portrayed himself as a friend who tried to shield Keeler from this shame when he said, “But she was utterly oblivious to my warnings that she could not trifle with the affections of engaging but primitive people.”<sup>56</sup> Ward’s sentiments discredited both Keeler and her black lovers in the same breath. Because Keeler’s relationships with black men made the news because of their criminal activity, her public image worsened, with both her judgment and her morality questioned.

**“New, Uninhibited, and Kinky”: Youth Culture in Postwar Britain**

Because of the post-war baby boom, the number of teenagers in Britain increased dramatically in the late fifties. Between 1951 and 1966, the under-twenty population rose from three million to four million.<sup>57</sup> These young people enjoyed greater independence than the generations before them for a few reasons.<sup>58</sup> The 1944 Education Act changed the school leaving age from eleven to fifteen, which meant that most working class teenagers opted to work immediately after the cessation of their education.<sup>59</sup> The concurrent economic reorganization in manufacturing took advantage of the influx of youthful laborers because they were cheaper and their jobs did not require a great level of skill.<sup>60</sup> With few responsibilities, these young workers spent their wages on ephemeral pleasures, such as clothes and records.<sup>61</sup> The establishment of the National Service for boys at the age of eighteen also forced the teenagers to relish their carefree autonomy before the beginning of their real responsibilities.<sup>62</sup> The development of a separate youth culture was first believed to be a classless movement because adults believed that teenagers connected more through their age than economic background.<sup>63</sup> In reality, the youth movement was a working-class phenomenon because the majority of middle-class adolescents stayed in school for a longer period of time.<sup>64</sup>

Several disparate youth subcultures emerged during this time period. In the late fifties, the Teddy Boys surfaced as the first distinguishable subculture.<sup>65</sup> Because the group first captured headlines over one member's involvement in a murder, the public developed an image of the Teddy Boys as violent thugs.<sup>66</sup> Subsequent violent actions seemingly justified this image because of further fighting amongst Teddy Boys and against other groups like the West Indians in the Notting Hill riots.<sup>67</sup> The hyperbolic treatment of these incidents in the press instilled a fearful and negative view of the Tedds among the rest of society.<sup>68</sup> The Mod scene developed a

few years later.<sup>69</sup> The Mods inspired a more sophisticated image because of their enjoyment of Italian clothes and their adoption of black cultural influences, particularly music.<sup>70</sup> Even though they were initially praised as style icons, the Mods eventually received bad press through their skirmishes with another subset called the Rockers.<sup>71</sup> Before the negative attention was thrust upon them, these different groups all became trend-setters for a brief period of time in British society.<sup>72</sup>

Because each youth subset made news by committing violent acts, they were labeled “juvenile delinquents.”<sup>73</sup> Convinced their children were not only violent but oversexed, adults began to fear an impending moral collapse among teenagers.<sup>74</sup> The formation of a chasm between the acceptable actions of the old and new may be a natural reaction that every generation experiences. As Geoffrey Pearson has explained, “Each succeeding generation has understood itself to be standing on the brink of some radical discontinuity with the past, and in which the rising generation has been repeatedly seen as the harbinger of a dreadful future.”<sup>75</sup> In Britain in the 1950s, however, the generation gap seemed especially wide. Since there were more teenagers, the misdeeds were believed to be a more prevalent problem than the reality of the situation. In addition, the reforms enacted during the establishment of the welfare state and ensuing affluence fundamentally altered the youth experience for the children of the 1950s compared to what their parents lived through during their formative years. The problems with youth became another area of concern for those who feared the moral collapse of Britain.

The youth of Britain responded to the Profumo Affair with an unconcerned amusement. A young Conservative group from Bournemouth East reacted to the scandal by changing a themed party from a “Pyjama and Nightie Dance” to a “Tarts Dance.”<sup>76</sup> These young people embraced the situation with a sense of fun. Young girls did not see Keeler as a figure of horror;

instead, they wanted to look like her. The fact that young girls wanted to emulate Keeler's fashion sense shows that to the younger generation- in sharp contrast to the older- Keeler was the new "normal." Instead of being a part of an established subculture, Keeler's lifestyle made her a precursor to the movement known as "Swinging London."

In 1966, *Time Magazine* published an article entitled "London: The Swinging City," which created an image that came to define the era.<sup>77</sup> The story presented London as a forward looking city that was developing into an innovative culture worthy of emulation around the world.<sup>78</sup> *Time Magazine* explained, "Youth is the word and deed in London seized by change, liberated by affluence... everything new, uninhibited and kinky is blooming at the top of London life."<sup>79</sup> The movement was again thought of as classless because the majority of the *nouveau riche* celebrities on the scene came from working-class backgrounds.<sup>80</sup> The mainstream attention of this movement translated into a degree of acceptability. Keeler's behavior can aptly be described as "new, uninhibited and kinky" at the beginning of the decade before it became more popular and widespread later. In the end, Keeler came along too early for the public to consider her respectable.

### **"It Shouldn't Actually Be Seen": Changing Gender Roles and Sexual Behavior**

World War II altered the opportunities for women in the British work force. The government required the contributions of women in vital areas because so many of the men were fighting in the war.<sup>81</sup> Women were no longer relegated to traditional female roles like secretaries and maids.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, married women could augment the work force even on a volunteer basis if they had young children.<sup>83</sup> During the first five years of the war, one and a half million women worked in industry despite the apprehensions of the men at the top.<sup>84</sup> Though a similar

trend occurred during World War I, many of these female workers wanted to maintain the changes forced by this second conflict.<sup>85</sup>

The end of the war marked the beginning of the difficulties for women who wanted to keep their wartime positions. The returning soldiers wanted to reassert the status quo in the workplace and expected their wives to return home to their domestic roles.<sup>86</sup> The nation as a whole assumed that the female participation in the workforce was a temporary aberration caused by the war, which was no longer necessary during peace.<sup>87</sup> In addition, women were viewed as “the heart of the New Britain,” when the rebuilding efforts commenced in full force.<sup>88</sup> If women wanted to continue in their jobs, they faced a multitude of challenges. Government-sponsored daycare was no longer readily available as it had been during the war.<sup>89</sup> Women were also expected to shoulder the load of the domestic duties at home whether they worked or not.<sup>90</sup> During the years of rationing in the age of austerity, grocery shopping was a time-consuming endeavor because of the long lines.<sup>91</sup> Society also worked to make women feel guilty for leaving their children through the popularity of the “maternal deprivation” theories, which stated that irreparable harm would be done to children who were not in their mother’s care during the day.<sup>92</sup> For the women willing to tackle these challenges, part-time jobs were their primary option, especially when their children were of school age.<sup>93</sup> The essential services that women provided during the war did not change the attitudes of British men about a woman’s proper place.

The gendered language used in describing the overall flaws of postwar society further hindered the position of women. Because women were the principal shoppers during the Age of Affluence, they were turned into scapegoats by social critics like the Angry Young Men.<sup>94</sup> Because greater wealth in Britain coincided with national decline, these writers blamed women for the ills in society. *Look Back in Anger*’s Jimmy Porter represents this viewpoint because he

pins all of society's shortcomings upon his upper-class wife.<sup>95</sup> Beatrix Campbell summed up the problem women faced in the public discourse: "Women became the metaphor for the loss of control- they were the victims of strangers."<sup>96</sup> The movements of the counterculture in the late sixties continued the practice of marginalizing women. They regarded women as representations of the family and therefore the Establishment, the monolith that the young people were protesting against.<sup>97</sup>

When Valerie Hobson married John Profumo, she embodied the role of the ideal wife. Before her second marriage, Hobson enjoyed a long and largely successful acting career. Because her first husband also worked in the movie business, it was acceptable for her to perform as an actress, an elite and unique profession. As the wife of a prominent politician, however, Hobson was forced to leave her career behind. This action fit in with society's idea of the perfect wife, a professional supporter of her husband's career and ambitions.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, Hobson's identity became inextricably linked with her husband and his accomplishments. Hobson received positive attention during the Profumo Affair because she did not threaten society's conservative view of the proper role for women.

In contrast, Keeler was victimized because she lived outside of the acceptable sphere for women. Keeler did not hold a respectable job for a young single woman, nor did she seek to find a husband so that she could settle down and start a family. When she supported herself as a showgirl or a model, Keeler acted in a manner deemed inappropriate. The widespread belief that she was a call girl was a further perversion of her earlier activities, which has remained with her throughout her life.

In order for women to change the conservative ideas of British society, they had to start acting on their own behalf. Buoyed by the example of the American women, British women

founded organizations aimed at “Women’s Liberation.”<sup>99</sup> The goal was to overhaul women’s entire position in society and the workplace so that they could reach an equal position with men. The Profumo Affair was one of the events of the sixties that emphasized the need to change the double standard thrust upon women.

Conservative social attitudes also dictated a condemnation of homosexuality and promiscuity. In the late fifties, the British government attempted to cover up what were regarded as “perverse” sexual activities. The publication of the report from the Wolfenden Committee on Homosexuality and Prostitution in 1957 after a three year examination signaled a stricter stance on these practices.<sup>100</sup> The recommendations of the committee were to raise the fines of prostitutes working on the streets while simultaneously stiffening the penalties for men suspected of “living off immoral earnings.”<sup>101</sup> By hiding prostitution behind closed doors, polite society could forget the depraved practice took place.<sup>102</sup> These suggestions became codified two years later in the Street Offenses Act of 1959, a time lag that demonstrated the uneasiness of Parliament in dealing with these sensitive issues.<sup>103</sup> David Renton, the Under-Secretary of the Home Office, expressed the greatest concern not covered in the law, “The most important question is how we can prevent the needless flow of young and sometimes beautiful girls, many from good homes, reaching this terrible market.”<sup>104</sup> The legislation forced prostitutes to become more furtive in attracting business while shrewd entrepreneurs adapted by opening up more strip clubs.<sup>105</sup> Murray’s Cabaret Club benefited from this law because a large membership paid dues in order to see the dancers and showgirls perform. Even though girls were taken off the streets, the sex industry grew underground outside of the judging eyes of the moral nation.

Paradoxically, the Obscene Publications Act of 1959 allowed more sexually explicit material to be published on the grounds of literary merit.<sup>106</sup> Before this law, great works like *The*

*Decameron* were vulnerable to destruction by puritanical bookstore owners because of the inclusion of material they considered obscene.<sup>107</sup> In order to combat this censorship, D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover* was utilized as the first test of the new law.<sup>108</sup> Penguin Books won the case with a plethora of expert witnesses who proved that the work was of a high quality worthy of public scrutiny.<sup>109</sup> Even though a conservative backlash occurred with various book burnings, the overall curiosity of the British public triumphed through the purchase of two million copies.<sup>110</sup> Contemporary observers recognized that *Lady Chatterly's Lover* marked the beginning of a transformation of British sexual mores.<sup>111</sup>

Censorship laws also became less restrictive for films.<sup>112</sup> Since 1950, an X certificate symbolized that a film contained material only meant for adult viewing.<sup>113</sup> With the arrival of the British New Wave, films like *A Room at the Top*, which merited an X certificate, became more popular and profitable.<sup>114</sup> Many critics lauded the film for its unapologetic treatment of adult sexual relationships.<sup>115</sup> Leonard Mosley, the film critic at the *Daily Express*, wrote of *A Room at the Top*, "For here was a British film which, at long last, got its teeth into those subjects which have always been part and parcel of our lives, but have hitherto been taboo subjects on the prissy British screen."<sup>116</sup> The possibility for profits with more realistic films caused an increase in depictions of sexuality on the screen. Upon the release of *Of Human Bondage* and its inclusion of a semi-nude Kim Novak in bed with Laurence Harvey, the *Sunday Mirror* featured an article called "Are we going too far in films?"<sup>117</sup> Most of the average people interviewed in the piece felt that this content negatively affected teenagers by inspiring them to emulate the images they witnessed on screen. One housewife named Phyllis Barker remarked, "It shouldn't actually be *seen*- nice people always put the light out."<sup>118</sup> Despite the growing ubiquity of sex on the screen, many people resisted the frank coverage of a very private matter.



The public also had a taste for real-life sexual scandals through the Sunday tabloids. Before the Profumo Affair, the British public was enthralled by the expensive divorce case of the Duke and Duchess of Argyll.<sup>119</sup> A mysterious picture of a naked Duchess engaged in adulterous activity with a man, whose head was cropped out of the photograph, captivated readers.<sup>120</sup> Rumors that the man was a member of the government, prompted political leaders like Lord Hailsham to deny any involvement with the Duchess.<sup>121</sup> The extensive closing statement by Lord Wheatley, the judge, condemned the Duchess as “a completely promiscuous woman whose sexual appetite could only be satisfied by a number of men.”<sup>122</sup> Lord Wheatley also censured the “moderns” in society who were complicit in such behavior by not speaking out against it.<sup>123</sup> Despite this negative assessment of her character, the Duchess claimed her public revenge in a series of tell-all *Sunday Mirror* articles beginning in the May 19, 1963, issue.<sup>124</sup> In retrospect, this case was a rehearsal for the scandal that followed.

Because the Profumo Affair touched on so many aspects of British society, it gained prolonged and widespread attention. The scandal forced the public to confront issues of sexuality across class and racial boundaries even though it made many uncomfortable. Despite the misconduct of Profumo, the Ward case especially worried many about the shifting sexual mores within the country. Even though prostitution had been largely concealed after the ratification of the Street Offenses Act, the Ward case proved to many that the problem still plagued the country, as evidenced by the carousel of young women in the courtroom. Hiding the problem did not eradicate it. More importantly, the case revealed the need for a new way of thinking about young women’s more liberal behavior instead of resorting to the epithet of prostitute. The Profumo Affair also compelled people to step back and make an honest appraisal of the changes happening around them. The case did not revolutionize British sexuality, but it

did point out the transformation already occurring and so made it impossible to ignore. The Profumo Affair became a turning point because there was no going back to the ignorance, evasion, and double standards of the past.

For the remainder of the decade, Britain underwent a “Sexual Revolution.”<sup>125</sup> The Labour Government made a conscious effort to deregulate people’s personal freedoms.<sup>126</sup> In 1967, birth control pills were made available to single women along with legalized abortions.<sup>127</sup> The Divorce Reform Act of 1969 meant that married couples could receive a “no fault” divorce; neither party had to produce evidence of impropriety against the other person.<sup>128</sup> Despite these monumental reforms, men still viewed women as sexual objects who would be easier for the taking because of the easy accessibility of birth control.<sup>129</sup> One of the goals of the Women’s Liberation movement was to combat this notion and gain respect for women’s abilities rather than merely their bodies.<sup>130</sup> Important strides were made so that women could fight for themselves.

### “A Model Girl”

The superficial version of the events of the Profumo Affair is so well known in Britain that they were adapted into a musical. *A Model Girl* opened for a brief run in early 2007.<sup>1</sup> The reviews revealed that Keeler’s public image has not changed drastically in the more than forty years since her rise to infamy. Emma Williams, the actress in the role of Keeler, previously worked as the understudy to Maria in *The Sound of Music*.<sup>2</sup> In the *Evening Standard*, drama critic Kieron Quirke explained how this previous casting created a problem for the actress, “Lovely of voice and fresh of face, Williams would have made an excellent Maria, which means she’s a game but rather wholesome Christine Keeler.”<sup>3</sup>

Even after Keeler served her time for perjury, life remained unkind to her. She married and divorced twice and had two children.<sup>4</sup> Her mother raised her first child and denied Keeler custody, which resulted in a complete breakdown of both relationships.<sup>5</sup> Keeler remained eager to cash in her public image as a steady means of money. For her 1969 memoirs in the *News of the World*, the paper paid her £21,000, a sum of money difficult to turn down.<sup>6</sup> Whenever her name sporadically made the newspapers, the public still responded with scorn. After the birth of her first child, an article in *People* prompted readers to respond with vigorous disapproval.<sup>7</sup> In 1986, Keeler served on a jury and newspapers “reported with some shock, that I was sitting in judgment of others.”<sup>8</sup> Despite the struggles, Keeler has survived through a series of odd jobs and repeated reprisals of her story.<sup>9</sup> By resorting to incessant retellings of her story, Keeler reinvigorated her negative image in the public.

In contrast, Profumo successfully rehabilitated his public image. After a year out of the public eye, he decided to alter his vocation in life from ambitious politician to humanitarian.<sup>10</sup> The work Profumo began in 1964 at Toynbee Hall sustained him until his death at ninety-

one.<sup>11</sup> Although he initially started at the bottom, Profumo's extensive government contacts allowed him to foster the growth of Toynbee Hall to heights the original founders never dreamed of.<sup>12</sup> At this institution, Profumo performed a wide range of tasks with the poor people of the East End, such as washing dishes, dancing with the older ladies, and counseling drug users. In the meantime, his public image slowly improved because people respected his new role in society. The extent of this rejuvenation became clear during the public outcry over the revisiting of Keeler's memoirs in the *News of the World* in 1969.<sup>13</sup> An editorial from the *Daily Express* epitomized the public sympathy for Profumo, "He has long since paid the price, which many think an excessive one for his indiscretion. It is an affront to the standards of British journalism that he should now be pilloried again in such a way."<sup>14</sup> By 1971, even the Queen made a concentrated effort to be photographed with Profumo at the opening of Attlee House, another of Profumo's charity projects.<sup>15</sup> She later rewarded him with the CBE for his charity work.<sup>16</sup> Upon Profumo's death, he had spent more years as a humanitarian than he had in Parliament, a fact that greatly rehabilitated his public standing in Britain. When he died at age ninety-one in 2006, the country recognized that Profumo had acted in a courageous manner by emerging from his disgrace through selflessly giving his time to help the less fortunate people of the East End.

For Hobson, the scandal held unintentional consequences for the remainder of her life. Profumo no longer required a companion by his side so she was forced into a domestic role that she had never experienced as an actress or political wife.<sup>17</sup> She never returned to her acting career because the long lull left her options for parts at a minimum.<sup>18</sup> Instead, her life remained adrift until her death in 1998.<sup>19</sup> Though her obituaries recounted her acting accomplishments, she was still identified primarily as Profumo's wife. The *Liverpool Daily Post* captured the

feeling, “No wonder Profumo had lied to Parliament, you could see them thinking, he would not have wanted to lose a wife like that.”<sup>20</sup>

The divergent paths of Keeler, Hobson and Profumo in the aftermath of the explosive scandal demonstrates the double standard for men and women that remains a part of British society. As a man, Profumo was able to reshape his public persona through good works. His supportive wife suffered because her traditional role as a housewife proved to be a stifling existence. The scandal forced her to lose her own identity even though she had been the more famous of the two at the time of their marriage. For Keeler, the constant sully of her name in the press in 1963 created a burden that she could never drop. She herself added to the weight of this burden by continually cashing in on her story. Yet what other choices did she have? Social pressures and her public image forced her into a position that made it difficult for her to earn a living quietly. She continues to pay the price for the mistakes that she made as a young woman; never a prostitute, she will always remain the most notorious call girl in Britain.

## **Appendix: Important Documents**

### **Document 1**

#### **The “Darling” Letter**

**August 8, 1961**

Darling,

In great haste and because I can get no reply from your phone-

Alas something's blown up tomorrow night and I can't therefore make it. I'm terribly sorry especially as I leave the next day for various trips and then a holiday so won't be able to see you again until some time in September. Blast it. Please take great care of yourself and don't run away.

Love J.

P.S. I'm writing this 'cos I know you're off for the day tomorrow and I want you to know before you go if I still can't reach you by phone.

**Document 2**

**Profumo's Personal Statement**

**March 22, 1963**

With permission, Sir, I wish to make a personal statement.

I understand that in the debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill last night, under protection of parliamentary privilege, the Hon. Gentleman the Members for Dudley (Mr. Wigg) and for Coventry, East (Mr. Crossman), and the Hon. Lady the Member for Blackburn (Mrs. Castle), opposite, spoke of rumours connecting a Minister with a Miss Keeler and a recent trial at the Central Criminal Court. It was alleged that people in high places might have been responsible for concealing information concerning the disappearance of a witness and the perversion of justice.

I understand that my name has been connected with the rumours about the disappearance of Miss Keeler.

I would like to take this opportunity of making a personal statement about these matters.

I last saw Miss Keeler in December 1961, and I have not seen her since. I have no idea where she is now. Any suggestion that I was in any way connected with or responsible for her absence from the trial at the Old Bailey is wholly and completely untrue.

My wife and I first met Miss Keeler at a house party in July, 1961, at Cliveden. Among a number of people there was Dr. Stephen Ward, whom we already knew slightly, and a Mr. Ivanov who was an attaché at the Russian Embassy.

The only other occasion that my wife or I met Mr. Ivanov was for a moment at the official reception for Major Gagarin at the Soviet Embassy.

My wife and I had a standing invitation to visit Dr. Ward.

Between July and December, 1961, I met Miss Keeler on about half a dozen occasions at Dr. Ward's flat, when I called to see him and his friends. Miss Keeler and I were on friendly terms. There was no impropriety whatsoever in my acquaintanceship with Miss Keeler.

Mr. Speaker, I have made this personal statement because of what was said in the House last evening by the three Hon. Members, and which, of course, was protected by privilege. I shall not hesitate to issue writs for libel and slander if scandalous allegations are made or repeated outside of the House.

**Document 3**

**Profumo's Letter of Resignation**

**June 4, 1963**

Dear Prime Minister,

You will recollect that on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March, following certain allegations made in Parliament, I made a personal statement.

At that time rumour had charged me with assisting in the disappearance of a witness and with being involved in some possible breach of security. So serious were the charges that I allowed myself to think that my personal association with that witness, which had also been the subject of rumour, was, by comparison, of minor importance only. In my statement I said that there had been no impropriety in this association. To my very deep regret I have to admit that this was not true, and that I misled you, and my colleagues, and the House. I ask you to understand that I did this to protect, as I thought, my wife and family, who were equally misled, as were my professional advisors.

I have come to realise that, by this deception, I have been guilty of a grave misdemeanour and despite the fact that there is no truth whatever in the other charges, I cannot remain a member of your Administration, nor of the House of Commons.

I cannot tell you of my deep remorse for the embarrassment I have caused to you, to my colleagues in the Government, to my constituents and to my Party which I have served for the past twenty-five years.

Yours Sincerely,

Jack Profumo

The Right Hon. Harold Macmillan, M.P.



**Document 4**

**Prime Minister Macmillan's Letter of Response to Profumo**

**June 4, 1963**

Dear Profumo,

The contents of your letter of 4<sup>th</sup> June have been communicated to me, and I have heard them with deep regret. This is a great tragedy for you, your family, and your friends. Nevertheless, I am sure you will understand that in the circumstances, I have no alternative but to advise The Queen to accept your resignation.

Yours very sincerely,

Harold Macmillan

The Right Hon. John Profumo, O.B.E., M.P.

**Document 5**

**Stephen Ward's Suicide Letter Addressed to Noel Howard-Jones**

**July 30, 1963**

Dear Noel,

I am sorry I had to do this here! It is really more than I can stand- the horror, day after day at the court and in the streets.

It is not only fear, it is a wish to not let them get me. I would rather get myself. I do hope I have not let people down too much. I tried to do my stuff but after Marshall's summing-up, I've given up all hope. The car needs oil in the gear-box, by the way. Be happy in it. Incidentally, it was surprisingly easy and required no guts.

I am sorry to disappoint the vultures. I only hope this has done the job. Delay resuscitation as long as possible.

**Document 6**

**Contact Sheet of Christine Keeler's Photo Shoot with Lewis Morley  
1963**



**Document 7**

**The Iconic Photograph from the Lewis Morley Photo Shoot  
1963**



## Notes

### Introduction

1. Alan Cowell, "John Profumo, 91, Dies; Focus of Scandal," *New York Times* 11 Mar. 2006: B14.
2. David Profumo, *Bringing the House Down: A Family Memoir* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2006), 8.

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25. Profumo 105.
26. Profumo 107.
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28. Profumo 116-117.
29. Profumo 118.
30. Profumo 125.
31. Profumo 130.
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38. Knightley and Kennedy 18.
39. Knightley and Kennedy 19.
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13. Keeler and Thompson 112.
14. Profumo 162.
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18. Profumo 164.
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64. Knightley and Kennedy 122.
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82. Denning 21-22.
83. Irving, Hall and Wallington 83.
84. Denning 26.
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101. Crawford 15.
102. Denning 46.
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104. Denning 46.
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107. Irving, Hall and Wallington 102.
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175. Knightley and Kennedy 214.
176. Young 79.

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181. Crawford 143.
182. Crawford 145-146.
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184. Knightley and Kennedy 213.
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### **Chapter 3**

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