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“They weren’t all fakes”: Feminist Crime Fiction as an ‘Authentic Copy’ in Marcia Muller’s *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*

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Abstract

Crime fiction is, by design, a rather conservative genre, as its conventional narrative is built on an investigator re-establishing a ‘broken’ status quo that is deemed legitimate. However, therein also lies the mode’s subversive potential, as the initial disruption of the status quo necessarily calls into question the primacy of the normative social order. One prominent branch of detective literature that has capitalised on this opportunity for genre revision is feminist crime fiction, which blossomed into a thematically cohesive, commercially viable subgenre around 1980 – even though its practitioners routinely have to contend with the fact that appropriating the genre’s major tropes also means reaffirming some of its more ‘unsavoury’ tendencies, most notably its long-standing history of Eurocentrism, androcentrism, and heteronormativity. Indeed, Marcia Muller’s novel *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*, which was published in 1977 and which is generally considered to be a pioneering work of feminist crime fiction, effectively performs and explicitly reflects on this tension: the story of empowered female detective Sharon McCone solving a murder connected to the San Francisco antiques market offers a pointed counternarrative to the conventionally male-dominated genre and, through its prominent engagement with art fraud, critically examines feminist crime fiction’s status as an ideologically charged imitation of a pre-existing form. More specifically, *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* positions itself as a *copie conforme*, an ‘authentic copy’, of the model it appropriates, making the case that an emulative copy of a venerated original can ‘rise’ to the level of a venerable original in its own right.

Keywords

Hardboiled, feminism, revisionism, art in the second degree

The Revision of Traditional Crime Fiction – and Its Limits

In its most traditional form, crime fiction is a decidedly conservative affair. This is by no means a new observation, as the dynamic is coded into the genre’s fundamental conventions: a crime is committed, a detective sets out to reconstruct the mysterious events and apprehend the perpetrator, and in the end, order is restored. As Luc Boltanski succinctly outlines the detective’s task in his 2014 book *Mysteries and Conspiracies: Detective Stories, Spy Novels and the Making of Modern Societies*: “they solve mysteries that arise like shooting stars from the ether in the earth’s atmosphere, repeatedly penetrate our world and disrupt its seemingly stable and orderly arrangement of reality” (1). Indeed, it lies in the very nature of these mysteries to

offer a challenge to the status quo that is to be 'conserved' by the detective: "A mystery is thus a singularity . . . but one whose character can be called *abnormal*, one that breaks with the way things present themselves under conditions that we take to be *normal*" (3). Therein, however, also lies the genre's subversive potential: as it is built on the conventionalised violation (and eventual restoration) of established structures and normative assumptions about reality, it routinely has to question the legitimacy of these structures at least implicitly. Since traditional detective fiction commonly frames social categories like race, gender, and sexuality in starkly Eurocentric, androcentric, and heteronormative terms, this inbuilt structural critique is of particular relevance to those genre practitioners who seek to counteract, subvert, or revise its conservative Victorian sensibilities. The adventures of, say, Sherlock Holmes depict deviations from the perceived white, male, heterosexual norm as 'other' and thus as intrinsically suspect. On the other hand, revisionist authors – especially in the postmodern era – have seized upon and revised this normative outlook and, in the process, have renegotiated the genre's fraught relationship with non-white identity, femininity, and queerness.

Perhaps the most generically cohesive response of this kind, for which I use the term *emancipatory revisionism*, is feminist crime fiction. Informed by the discourses of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s and the narrative stylistics of the hardboiled mode, feminist crime fiction blossomed as a subgenre in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, producing numerous long-running series that explicitly explore their female investigator protagonists' struggles as women in a male-dominated world and an often openly misogynistic field. In short, these texts use the framework of detective fiction to "speak from a woman's perspective and address the problems which women face in modern society" (Irons xii) and to revise from within "a genre that has often demeaned, trivialized, and even demonized women" (Walton and Jones 94). However, from the very beginning, these emancipatory efforts, pioneered by authors like Marcia Muller, Sara Paretsky, and Sue Grafton, found themselves in something of a structural bind – one that was formulated by Tzvetan Todorov as early as 1966. In his essay "The Typology of Detective Fiction", he writes, "Detective fiction has its norms; to 'develop' them is also to disappoint them: to 'improve upon' detective fiction is to write 'literature,' not detective fiction. The whodunit par excellence is not the one which transgresses the rules of the genre, but the one which conforms to them" (43). The somewhat outdated division of works into literature and non-literature notwithstanding, Todorov neatly outlines the allure of genre revisionism and the dilemma it ultimately has to face: formulaic genres like detective fiction are delicate ships of Theseus that require only little modification in order to cease to be themselves, so to speak. The genre is ripe for innovation yet virtually unable to accommodate it.

Yet there is little indication that this ultimately irresolvable tension at the heart of feminist crime fiction proved paralysing. On the contrary, it is my argument that this paradoxical relationship between performing and subverting the ideologically tinged tropes of traditional crime fiction formed part of the emancipatory subgenre's own 'coming of age'. To that end, I am proposing a reading of Marcia Muller's novel *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*, which was published in 1977 and which introduced the private detective Sharon McCone, who has featured in more than thirty of Muller's books since. Commonly considered to be one of the foundational texts of feminist American crime fiction, *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* thematically performs the revisionist uncertainty implied by Todorov, suggesting that a critical engagement with this dilemma is coded into the very pillars of feminist crime fiction. More specifically, through her female detective protagonist, her uneasy existence in the male-dominated sphere of San Francisco law enforcement, and the conventional murder mystery at the centre of it all, Muller subverts the gender and broader social politics of traditional crime stories whilst largely leaving in place their narrative trappings and epistemological leanings. Even more strikingly, however, Sharon McCone's first case ends up being unexpectedly conciliatory, perhaps even somewhat defensive about its own position within the larger crime-fiction discourse: in keeping with its central mystery's focus on art fraud, it positions itself as what I call a *copie conforme*, an 'authentic copy', of a detective story – an overt reproduction of an existing form that can be understood as an original form in its own right.

The Feminist Revisions of Sharon McCone

From a narrative and epistemological standpoint, *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*' revisionist gestures are not particularly pronounced, as the novel indulges only in a few changes to the conventional genre formula, all of which fall well within the margin of error that is crime fiction's primarily surface-level evolution. By and large, the account of Sharon McCone's first reported case is, both in its construction and its outlook, the story of a traditional crime and its traditional solving. McCone, who is in her late twenties, of Irish and Shoshone extraction, and who works as a staff investigator for a legal services cooperative in 1970s San Francisco, is given the task of aiding in sorting out the affairs – and surreptitiously solving the murder – of Joan Albritton, a shrewd antiques dealer who is found dead in her shop, stabbed with a knife from her own collection. A series of leads, hunches, conversations, and coincidences, some of them provided to McCone by the latently racist and sexist SFPD Lieutenant Greg Marcus, ultimately results in the female detective solving the case. In the end, real-estate mogul Cara Ingalls is unmasked and neutralised, and she confesses to having killed Albritton over a botched exchange of illegally imported Renaissance art.

The reality of the proceedings in *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* is about as clear-cut as it gets, especially in the context of postmodernism-adjacent literature. There is a mystery – Albritton's death – that disrupts the Boltanskian normality of everyday life in Muller's San Francisco; there is a conventional investigation; and there is, eventually, a neat and satisfying solution and a return to the comforts of the *status quo ante*. Indeed, the novel's revisionist gestures are first and foremost concentrated on the crime fiction genre's traditional conceptions of gender. Although McCone's status as a feminist character has come under heavy scrutiny over the years (see Elliott 15; Walton and Jones 87), her debut is very much engaging in ideological revision, offering a partially feminist, partially more broadly emancipatory, anti-hegemonial counternarrative to crime fiction and its traditionally male perspectives and main characters. Most conspicuously, the novel centres strong, emphatically feminine women in roles that have traditionally been occupied primarily by male characters – specifically the investigator and the culprit. Indeed, one of the first major insights McCone's narration grants into her self-conception as a female detective underscores the sexism she has been primed to expect in her line of work: "I braced myself for one of the variants of the usual remark, along the lines of 'what's-a-nice-girl-like-you-doing-mixed-up-with-an-ugly-business-like-this?'" (Muller 2). Ingalls, too, is defined by both her femininity and her non-adherence to traditional gender roles, being described by McCone as "an intelligent, strong woman, and strikingly attractive" (133), and being given a backstory of personal, literally anti-patriarchal professional success. Reflecting on her giving up her architecture studies and moving into real estate, she tells McCone: "Then one day I woke up and said, 'What the hell am I doing busting my ass to become some sort of living monument to my old man, the son-of-a-bitch who thought me less than human?'" (131). Both McCone and Ingalls – and the murdered Joan Albritton, too – stand out in their respective male-dominated fields; McCone's 'unsuitability' to her investigator job is frequently remarked upon; and Ingalls is presented as an admirably emancipated oddity in a highly sexist business.

Moreover, Muller also frames her narrating protagonist as someone who is explicitly conscious of the fact that categorising lines of work as 'male' or 'female' is a problem in itself, as is the impulse to applaud women for being able to do 'male' tasks without 'diminishing' their own femininity. More than once, McCone chides herself for trying to leverage her conventionally attractive feminine looks to her advantage, such as when she seemingly tries to compensate for her own 'lacking' femininity as she prepares for her first official meeting with Greg Marcus at the police station: "I needed to change, since the soft red jumpsuit . . . didn't seem decorous enough for police headquarters", so she "dressed in a tailored denim pantsuit" and "pulled my long black hair in a tortoise-shell barrette" (22). Ultimately, however, she thinks better of her strategy: "annoyed at the conservative notions I was developing, I yanked the barrette out, brushed vigorously, and went off to the SFPD with my hair blowing

free in the breeze. Might as well be yourself, Sharon, I thought” (22). This moment puts in sharp relief the proverbial second-wave-feminist ethos of living consciously as a woman under patriarchal expectations: McCone tearing out her barrette, letting her hair blow “free in the breeze”, and going to see ‘the man’ as “myself” all evoke the popular image of the unshackling, public activism-oriented gestures of 1970s feminism; the “bra-burning, protest marches, and the sexual revolution” (Jacob and Licona 201; see also Elliott 14).

McCone’s characterisation as a liberal young San Franciscan also allows Muller to consider and tackle traditional crime fiction’s intrinsic scepticism towards other perceived social ‘others’. In what is essentially an extension of her status as a (quasi-) feminist, McCone undermines the conventional characterisation of the literary detective as a defender of the normative status quo, of what Franco Moretti calls “the existing order, which is also a *legitimate* state of affairs” (244). This is achieved most visibly through her distancing herself from the reactionary socio-political views espoused by the murderous Cara Ingalls: “this city doesn’t need another shoddy low-income housing project cluttering up the landscape” (Muller 129), Ingalls rants to a stunned McCone, denigrating, in thinly veiled racist terms, “the trash that moves into those places”, singling out families “with dozens of unruly kids writing on the walls – if they can write at all – and dirtying the place up” (129-30). McCone, herself a sociology graduate and an agent of a social justice-oriented legal cooperative, responds to this onslaught of prejudice with an affirmation of her more liberal politics, telling Ingalls that “I try to hang on to my beliefs” (130), and concluding that the successful businesswoman “had left a part of her humanity behind” (132-33) in her climb up the corporate ladder. While a more traditionally-minded detective might agree with Ingalls’ notions, McCone is aware – and wary – of such pathologizing generalisations, suggesting a more critical stance on the kinds of normative assumptions that underpin the crime fiction genre.

However, this feminist revision is ultimately not a frictionless one. Indeed, the novel’s more ‘progressive’, more subversive leanings chafe against the largely untouched genre formula, resulting in a case of narrative dissonance that threatens to undermine the overarching revisionist ethos. Yes, McCone is a feminist with an anti-establishment streak – but she is still a detective in a formulaic story, embodying, to a certain extent, her role’s conservative legacy. Most notably, for all her implicit and explicit social liberalism, she is prone to invoking the spectre of nineteenth-century race ‘science’ and subsequent racist ideologies, such as when she refers to a suspect’s “Prussian good looks” (29). Elsewhere, McCone’s narration evokes the legacy of blood-quantum laws when she discusses the difference between her and the rest of her family in terms of her ethnic heritage: “I’m what they call a ‘throwback.’ I’ve only got about an eighth Shoshone blood, but for some reason it all came out in me” (28). By contrast, her “brothers and sisters are all fair and look

like the Scotch-Irish brats they are" (28), making her something of a racial other within her own family unit. The novel also features a Latin-American henchman, whose main characteristics are his brute strength, macho demeanour, "thick Spanish accent" (103), and "the sickly odor of too much after shave" (105) – marking him as an iteration of what Charles Ramírez Berg has identified as the "bandido" (or "greaser") stereotype, who is "inarticulate, violent, and pathologically dangerous" (69), and who is a racially coded "threat that needs to be eliminated" (40). Thus, there is a conflict at the heart of Muller's novel: while it visibly styles itself as a feminist counternarrative to an androcentric canon that has historically privileged male characters and perspectives, it is still permeated by what have been called "the inherently conservative demands of the genre" (Walton and Jones 86). This is not to suggest that *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*' revisionist ambitions are irredeemably 'tainted' by these counterpoints, or that they fall short of an imagined subversive ideal. Rather, it is my intention to argue that even such a programmatically subversive text's revisionist impulse is closely intertwined with, potentially even dependent on, the very ideological gestures it sets out to challenge.

Feminist Crime Fiction as an 'Authentic Copy'

To a degree, *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* appears to be aware of this tension between revision and reproduction, as one can read Sharon McCone's first case as a knowing performance of that exact ideological uncertainty. Going back to Todorov's aforementioned point that to "develop" the norms of detective fiction is synonymous with "disappointing" them, one can find this dynamic playing out in Muller's novel: it deliberately "disappoints" the enshrined rules of its parent genre by starring a socially conscious female detective investigating against a powerful, empowered female perpetrator; and it "disappoints" its own subversion in turn, due to its concessions to the underlying narrative and some ideological structures inherited from traditional detective fiction. Yet one can undertake a reading of one of the novel's major narrative conceits that breaks this cycle of disappointments: the fact that the text places art fraud at the centre of the mystery McCone tries to solve has the air of a metafictional ploy, a thematic strategy to address the revisionist predicament Todorov and others had diagnosed well before the book's publication in 1977. By critically engaging with the difficulty of distinguishing between genuine and counterfeit works of art, *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* confronts its own 'unfaithfulness' to both its parent genre and its subversive ambitions. In doing so, it suggests that genre revision must needs be 'impure' or 'compromised', lest it discard the revised object wholesale, depriving itself of a *raison d'être*. Ultimately, the novel positions itself as what I deem a *copie conforme*: an imperfect copy of a venerated original – traditional crime fiction – that simultaneously has the potential to be, or to become, a venerable original in its own right.

Borrowed from Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami's 2010 film *Copie conforme* – released internationally as *Certified Copy* –, the term denotes a very specific shading of the phenomenon of 'art in the second degree,' one that is distinct from the related categories of ekphrasis and *mise en abyme*, and which is of particular relevance to the discussion at hand. Thus, while my understanding of 'imitations' and 'copies' in art is mainly based on work done by art historian Richard Shiff, I am using the term *copie conforme*, or its rough translation 'authentic copy', to describe the relationship between feminist crime fiction and traditional detective fiction as it is charted in *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*. In a legal context, the term describes a 'certified copy' of an original, i.e., a copy that is confirmed to be a copy of a specific 'original', regardless of whether the copied item is itself an original or not. In the current context, however, I am referring primarily to the meaning the term is given in Kiarostami's film. *Certified Copy*'s plot details are irrelevant here, apart from the fact that thematically, it turns on the question whether copies can be said to be authentic works of art in and of themselves, in contrast to Walter Benjamin's theory of the aura (103). What makes the use of this term particularly pertinent here is that Kiarostami's film implicitly affirms that copies can indeed 'rise' to the level of the original artwork.

This manifests itself in *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* through a strong thematic interest in the antiques business in general, beyond the mere fact that its mystery revolves around the murder of a specialised saleswoman. McCone's evaluation of Joan Albritton's inventory provides the necessary cover for the detective's murder investigation, meaning that antiques are instrumental to the novel's plot. As the story progresses, McCone uncovers a smuggling ring, of which both Ingalls and Albritton were members – a revelation that leads her directly to the solution of the murder mystery. Even the very title of the novel evokes Albritton's line of work, as it refers to a mannequin that stands in her shop and which has a crucial criminal purpose. These elements are by no means incidental, as Muller uses antiques, and antiques-related fraud, to call into question the viability of originality discourse and to destabilise the idea of the quasi-mythical original. Specifically, she achieves this by dwelling on the fuzzy and porous boundary between 'real' and 'fake' pieces, suggesting that, in certain contexts, the two sides may in fact be interchangeable.

Indeed, when Charlie Cornish, another antiques dealer, gives McCone an introduction to his business, it quickly becomes apparent that counterfeit objects are an integral, perhaps even inevitable, part of the antiques market: "Lately the trend is for dealers to order stock from Europe, through catalogues", he tells the detective. "But Europe has only so many antiques, too" – which prompts McCone to ask the obvious question: "Are you saying the antiques are fake?" (Muller 37). Cornish's answer is appropriately thorny: "Oh, the catalogues claim they're the real article. But when a big dealer or a department store orders fifty of number SS173X, oak washstand

with marble inlay, how many of those washstands to you think the European catalogue house found sitting around in somebody’s barn?” (37). Again, McCone’s response is obvious – and potentially troubling: “Not fifty, at any rate” (38). By raising this issue, the novel effectively maps the postmodern crisis of originality, the contested status of ‘the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction’, onto its version of the San Francisco antiques scene: the market is based not on “the real article”, – i.e., not on antiques possessing an aura of exclusivity and rarity – but rather on “products of an assembly-line process” (38). The text doubles down on this assessment in a later passage, in which the character Oliver van Osten, whose career path notably saw him “go from studying art to selling fakes” (40), explains: “They’ll make statement [sic] like “It’s in the style of Louis the Fourteenth,” but that doesn’t mean it’s ever been any closer to France than across the Bay Bridge” (79). Thus, the vast majority of what is marketed and sold is, to borrow Richard Schiff’s terminology, either an “emulative imitation” or an “aping copy” of an original (54), to the point where, at least to the untrained eye, the difference melts away: upon being shown some of the mass-produced counterfeits in Albritton’s office, McCone has to concede that they look “identical to the first in every detail” (39).

This pervasive uncertainty over the authenticity of individual pieces is precisely what Albritton, Ingalls, and their co-conspirators use to their advantage in their illegal operation, which ultimately costs Albritton her life: they work with an Italian fence who provides them with stolen masterpieces by hiding them in shipments of cheap imitations. This scam allows the group to circumvent the established checks and balances, because they are aimed at a completely different premise: “Fine art . . . is permitted to enter the country duty-free. . . . A lot of importers try to pass stuff off as fine art to avoid the duty, and the experts are kept busy detecting fraud” (148). So even though “[t]he Customs Bureau has highly trained art experts on its staff”, the masterpieces make their way in because “their job is to recognize fake artworks rather than the real thing” (147). What seems to be implied here is an invocation of Benjamin’s adage that “what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter’s aura” (104): if the original is lost in a sea of fakes, as is the case in Muller’s customs, and if fakes make up the bulk of a business ostensibly dealing in originals, does that not fundamentally undermine the assumed authority of the original? “They weren’t all fakes” (146), McCone says about Albritton’s inventory at one point – but the very nature of the trade calls into question whether that observation even matters in the first place.

However, *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* does not frame this realisation as a regrettable loss of artistic integrity but as a radically democratising development. If one lets go of the notion that there is a meaningful difference between expensive originals and cheap fakes, one must no longer bind one’s tastes in art and antiques to arbitrary

measures of value. Cornish outlines this in his rebuttal to McCone's question whether most of the objects in Albritton's store are deceiving falsehoods:

"Let's face it, we're not any of us big-name dealers down here. Mostly the people who come to Salem Street are looking for something cheap to fill space in their apartments. Or, if they have a little extra to spend, they want a conversation piece. They're none of the collectors, and they don't demand authentication on what they buy. A lot of them are tourists who want to take a souvenir of their trip to San Francisco – maybe something like a lacquered Oriental vase – back home to the Midwest". (38)

In Muller's estimation, the 'true' value of art lies in the eye of the beholder or the buyer; and if a customer is enticed by a fraudulent washstand, rather than the real Bellini that Albritton had hidden in plain sight, the practice of scoffing at the former and extolling the latter loses much of its lustre. It is ultimately the emotional value of art that the novel privileges, as exemplified by three literally invaluable, pet-named objects in Albritton's shop – Clothilde, a dressmaker's dummy, Bruno, a stuffed dog, and, most importantly, Edwin. In a discussion about the estate of the deceased woman, McCone narrates that one "would be hard-pressed . . . to place a value on Clothilde, Edwin, or Bruno" (80), and they remain unvalued for the rest of the book. Yet on the other hand, the emotional and narrative value of the titular Edwin is considerable, as he serves not only as a consoling presence to Albritton, and as a potential substitute for her dead grandson, but also as a secret signal to those interested in purchasing the smuggled masterpieces she kept in her store. The Benjaminian aura, to the extent that Edwin, Clothilde, and Bruno have one, is entirely predicated on the significance they have for Albritton, regardless of their provenance.

These thematic beats share textual space with both a programmatic feminist revision of traditional crime fiction and the highly noticeable remnants of more conservative genre tropes. Taken together, these elements seem to suggest that *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* actively negotiates its own uneasy status as an "emulative" or "aping" genre text – as a work of art in the second degree that attempts to ideologically revise its own generic heritage. The novel's dilemma, if we want to call it one, is as follows: while it offers a subversive, ostensibly liberal, even progressive retooling of the conservative crime fiction formula – such as by featuring an emancipated female protagonist – it cannot excise all of its 'offending' components, all of its structural holdovers from traditional detective fiction. Indeed, in places, it actually ends up cementing them. Thus, the novel is, in a sense, fundamentally 'compromised', because it undermines both its parent genre and its guiding revisionist ethos. However, if one views this contradiction through the prism of Muller's commentary on art, originality, and authenticity, rather than through that of Todorov's rather narrow critique of the revisionist project, one might be able to reconcile it: *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*, then, is not a failed or ideologically tainted rebellion against the literary mode whose laws and conventions it attempts to invert. Instead, one must conceive of it

as a copy, as a readily apparent reproduction of an 'original' that carries within itself its own independent artistic potential.

More specifically, it is a *copie conforme* – a work that can be understood both as an overtly backward-looking reproduction and a pointedly forward-looking 'original'. Muller 'copies' the narrative tropes that have long defined the genre in order to revise them into an ideologically specific counternarrative: the story structure that once signified stable social hierarchies and male rationality is refashioned into an explicitly feminist critique of said structures, led not by a singularly gifted man but an emphatically empowered, socially conscious woman. It is this ideological edge that necessitates the concept of the *copie conforme*, as its deliberate revision of the original is insufficiently expressed when associated with, for example, parody, satire, or Jamesonian pastiche: parody and satire strive to mock, yet feminist crime fiction seeks earnestly to harness and revel in the narrative gratification the detective fiction model can provide. Pastiche, meanwhile, is empty imitation, parody "amputated of the satiric impulse" (Jameson 17), which does not adequately reflect the highly specific motivations behind the kind of appropriation that is undertaken in a text like *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*. In this process of copying-with-a-purpose, Muller's novel may adopt several aspects of the mode it revises without giving them the emancipatory twist its overarching ideological outlook would suggest – but the narrative emphasis on 'real' and 'fake' art already accounts for this thematically: even though the copy is 'imperfect' from either perspective, its status as a work of art with intrinsic value – both as a pleasurable genre text and as a feminist rewriting – is affirmed.

In other words, what *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* self-consciously 'sacrifices' as a text in the traditional genre mould, it 'gains' as an act of feminist subversion, and vice versa. Although one should be wary of creating an overly teleological literary-historical narrative on this basis, it does seem significant that Muller's novel helped usher in a larger wave of feminist crime fiction, underscoring the potential of the 'copy' to become a copiable format in its own right. Indeed, when *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* was published in 1977, its subversive gestures hardly registered among critics. Harold C. Schonberg, writing under the pseudonym Newgate Callender, opined in his *New York Times* review that there was "[n]o new ground here, and all situations are predictable"; while Lenore Glen Offord – herself the first female member of the prominent Sherlock Holmes fan club known as "The Baker Street Irregulars" – conspicuously undersold Muller's deployment of a female investigator and misspelled two major characters' names in the process: "the police are investigating, especially Lt. Greg Marcua [sic] – but attractive Sharon McCune [sic] insists on taking a part" (54). Five years later, however, the publication of Muller's second McCone novel (*Ask the Cards a Question*), Sara Paretsky's first V.I. Warshawski case (*Indemnity Only*), and the first instalment of Sue Grafton's Alphabet series ("*A*" *Is for Alibi*) proved to be a "watershed for the mystery genre" (Howe 2), both in terms of commercial success

and critical attention. Those texts would wrestle with the revisionist's dilemma too, in their own distinct ways; but their subversion's guiding ethos had been formulated, thanks in no small part to Muller's *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*: if feminist crime fiction was to succeed, it was to make peace with its status as a double-edged approximation, as a *copie conforme* – being both a feminist revision of traditional detective fiction and a genre-fiction imbued branch of contemporary feminist writing.

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