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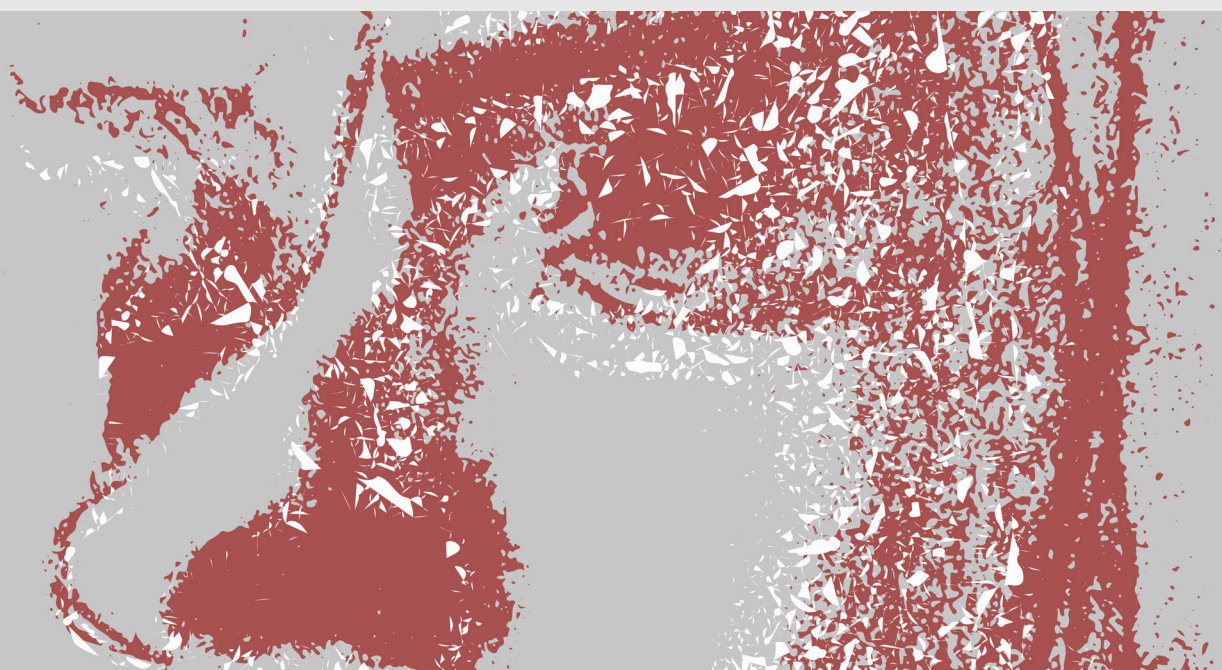
Crime Fiction, Femininities and Masculinities

Proceedings of the Eighth Captivating Criminality Conference

Kerstin-Anja Münderlein (Ed.)

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Introduction
Whose Body in the Library? Why Gender Matters in Crime Fiction

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Crime Fiction Matters

Crime fiction matters. Not *even though* it is popular literature, but specifically *because* it is popular literature. It constitutes a significant part of contemporary entertainment and thus reaches a high number of readers. As such, it must be treated as a powerful influencer of public opinion just as contemporary public opinion finds itself represented to varying degrees in the genre. In the literary market, crime fiction "is one of the most popular genres in the international market, even in the face of a largely stagnant or declining global book trade" (Stinson n. pag.) and, taken together, "thrillers and detective novels now [2018] outsell all other fiction" (Singh, n. pag.). This is not only valid for the UK, but, according to Emmet Stinson, a global phenomenon as "[d]ata shows that crime fiction is among the bestselling genres of fiction in major international book markets across languages" (40). In literary research, the interest in crime fiction is equally significant; the *MLA International Bibliography*, for example, lists 2,936 hits for "crime fiction or detective fiction" published only in the last ten years (2013-2023),[1] ranging from dissertation abstracts via academic journals to monographs and essay collections. Hence, the genre is omnipresent and an important mainstay in contemporary literary consumption and research. Despite the (academic) disrespect the genre met with in the past, crime fiction (and popular literature in general) has been given much room in critical discussions in the last decades and studying crime fiction no longer carries the nimbus of triviality, as the ever-increasing output of volumes on the subject attests to. The obvious question is thus: Hasn't everything been said about crime fiction by now?

As with so many areas of research, the answer must be: absolutely not! For one thing, crime fiction is a best-selling genre and there is always a new book, a new sub-genre, or, broadly speaking, a new trend to investigate. Close to the end of each year, newspapers, blogs, and sales platforms abound with articles along the lines of "the best crime novels this year". While these articles predominantly entice readers to buy more or specific books, they also help chronicle trends and trending authors and thus both record literary fashions and establish them. Some of these articles create causalities or at least correlations between (global) events and literary fashions attempting to explain why a certain sub-genre of crime fiction has been particularly popular; or, conversely, such articles create this popularity by forging or buying into

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[1] This search was conducted on 8 December 2023.

a narrative of popularity in keeping with the spirit of the time. The British newspaper *The Guardian*, for example, introduces its "Best crime and thrillers of 2023" list with a vague reference to the events of the year and creates such a causality, "[g]iven this year's headlines, it is unsurprising that our appetite for cosy crime continues unabated" (Wilson, n. pag.), before moving on to introduce the most popular cosy crimes of the year.

In retrospect, the changing fashions and prevalence of certain sub-genres within crime fiction at certain points in time have been helpful tools for researchers to group texts and canonise different types of crime fiction, such as the aforementioned cosy crime, Golden Age detective fiction, hardboiled crime, noir, domestic noir, etc. However, while the generic markers within these subgenres of crime fiction exist all over the globe, much of crime fiction studies, like much of literary studies overall, has long been centred on anglophone texts – particularly texts from the UK and the US. Despite the global prevalence of anglophone texts, non-anglophone text can be ridiculously successful in their own language region, such as for example German regional crime fiction, called "Regionalkrimi" or "Lokalkrimi" and often named after the region they are set in, e.g. "Alpenkrimi" (crime fiction set in the alps) or "Frankenkrimi" (crime fiction set in Franconia). Since 1989, when the publisher Grafit-Verlag published the first highly popular regional crime novel, *Eifel-Blues* by Jacques Berndorf, the regional crime novel has never abated in popularity and despite having been criticised for its tendency to incorporate more than its fair share of cliches and escapism (see e.g. Heinrich), the genre is still going strong (Venske n. pag.). Yet, notwithstanding their popularity within Germany and the attention this literary phenomenon has received,[2] many of these novels are virtually or entirely unknown outside of the German-speaking regions of the world. As Jesper Gulddal, Stewart King and Alastair Rolls, editors of *The Cambridge Companion to World Crime Fiction* (2022), assert in their preface,

> [t]he various crime fiction traditions from around the world have frequently been considered at the national level . . . . However, it is only in recent years that scholars have started investigating crime fiction as a global form of writing, focussing on both the genre's unique global distribution and the transnationalism that defines its past and present; although important advances have been made, a distinctive field of world crime fiction studies has not yet been firmly established. (xiii)

In an age of ever-increasing globalisation and intercultural exchange on all types of platforms – which allows researchers to quickly and often efficiently exchange ideas and readers to get access to national crime fictions that had previously been difficult if not impossible to obtain, providing the reader speaks the language of the book –

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[2] See for example the essay collection *Der Regionalkrimi* (Brylla and Schmidt, 2022) or section II on regional crime novels in *Facetten des Kriminalromans* (Parra-Membrives and Brylla, 2015).

researching such a global phenomenon as crime fiction is far from finished. Moreover, globally recurring topics within crime fiction, such as the central topic of this volume, gender, are now also being studied from multicultural and transnational perspectives.

Another unifying factor of (world) crime fiction is the genre's versatility, in particular in regard to the degrees of conservatism it presents. Calling crime fiction an inherently conservative genre, as it tends to present the detective as an agent of socio-legal order and thus a means of establishing desirable normativity, has long been identified as a truism. It is certainly true that crime fiction *can* be morally and socially conservative – even to an extreme – but it can also be the exact opposite, liberal, transgressive, deviant – and equally extremely so. In other words, crime fiction as a genre encompasses all sorts of ideological positions and, depending on the individual text or subgenre, upholds, negotiates, questions, or attempts to downright expunge them. Thus, crime fiction is indeed for everyone as everyone will find something that appeals to them and something they reject, potentially even rigorously so. But does that mean we should close the case of crime fiction and simply state that anything goes and be done with it?

Instead of closing the case of crime fiction, let us return to the beginning of this introduction: Crime fiction matters *because* it is popular literature and thus reaches a large audience. As such, the genre both produces and examines contemporary discourses. Crime fiction cannot but react to contemporary demands by meeting them, scrutinising them, or overriding them; and again, the genre does *all* of this at the same time. In the representation of gender and gender roles, this ideological broadness and versatility is particularly visible. It is visible because it *does* matter whose body we find in the library. Because it matters who kills who and who has power over who – the power to murder and also the power to detect, a decision that is automatically gendered and consciously so more often than not.

Casting victim, murderer, and detective is inherently a question of gender and power; of being empowered or powerless as well as of empowering and disempowering individuals and groups. Gender fundamentally shapes the area of tension of interpersonal hierarchies and power imbalances represented in crime fiction as it already is one of the 'traditional' reasons for power imbalance in itself – like race or class. Intratextually, characters in crime fiction physically overpower a victim, mentally outsmart a perpetrator, wield legal power, and thus subvert and adhere to social power structures showing them as order affirmative or corrupt, as unjust and flawed or legitimate and beneficial. Extratextually, writers of crime fiction can direct the readers' gaze to the lifeless woman in the library and make them scrutinise (or even revel in) her ultimate objectification and lack of agency, or they can avert this gaze and turn the readers' attention somewhere else and refuse to continue the narrative reduction of the woman's body to an object of male scrutiny.

Such gender hierarchies, which privilege men over women, cis over trans people, and straight over queer people, become even more pertinent in stories that centre on the ultimate power imbalance, that of murderer over victim. Crime fiction, thus, is driven by gender representations while the genre in its turn renegotiates the public discourse through its depiction of gender roles and expectations.

Gender in Crime Fiction

The representation of gender (roles) within the genre is just as varied as crime fiction is overall: We have crime fiction that asserts heteronormativity, crime fiction that asserts conservative gender constructions and gender roles, or TERF and misogynist crime fiction alongside feminist or queer crime fiction that renegotiates gender roles and expectations or sexual normativity. It is precisely because crime fiction is so varied that we find a representation of more or less every variety of gender depiction in it. Just as crime fiction provides a platform for all types of gender identities to be presented, it also proves to be very diverse in the importance gender (representations) occupy within the individual narratives. While gender relations can be little more than the prerequisite for the action or the clue-puzzle to be solved, it can also be a forum for a discussion of, or even an outlet for frustration about, gender inequalities, something we find especially outspokenly discussed, for example, in domestic noir. In some novels, as Katarina Gregersdotter writes in regard to three exemplary crime novels of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries,[3] "[t]he link between gender anxieties and violence almost overshadows the mystery" (47).

Because of this ideological versatility in theory and the simple existence of the diversity of representations in practice, crime fiction has the potential to examine or re-examine readers' perceptions of gender and gender-specific expectations. And it does so with gusto and sometimes with a lot of subversion. Think of the character of the old spinster, whose advantage over all other characters is her perceived harmlessness as an old lady because, as Adrienne Gavin formulates it, her power "lies in her apparent innocuousness" (263). Not only is she constantly underestimated by those who should know better, but she also refuses the male gaze because her age and thus sexual unavailability provide her with an outsider position from which she observes and deducts. Writers casting this type of woman as their sleuth then defy the invisibility the spinster suffers from:

> By portraying older women as skilled, successful, and central to their narratives, their creators insist that these mature women *are* made visible to readers. In this way, these sleuths

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[3] Gregersdotter uses Thomas Harris's *Silence of the Lambs* (1988), Val McDermid's *The Mermaids Singing* (1995) and Unni Lindell's *Night Sister* (2002) as examples for her analysis of masculinity in modern crime fiction.

become surprisingly subversive figures, possibly more so even than the tough-talking, phys-
ically-active 'female hard-boiled' detectives who later take on patriarchy more directly and
reactively. (263)

By the time the spinster sleuth of the likes of Miss Marple appears on the scene,
female detectives have already looked back at more than half a century of fragmented
existence. More than the male detective, the female detective has come a long way
from the few Victorian detectives inhibited by contemporary socio-legal require-
ments to today's wide array of police detectives, amateur sleuths, and private eyes.
Even though female detectives did feature in nineteenth-century literature, such as
Mrs Paschal, appearing in 1861 as the first woman detective in fiction (Scowcroft
12), the private investigator Loveday Brooke, created by C. L. Pirkis in 1893, or Grant
Allen's nurse-turned-detective Hilda Wade (1899-1900), they were much less repre-
sented and tolerated than their male colleagues. Yet, despite their verifiable exist-
ence, these women were not as successful as their male counterparts. It is rather the
likes of C. Auguste Dupin or Sherlock Holmes – or even his sidekick Dr Watson –
that are associated with nineteenth-century crime fiction than Mrs Paschal or
Loveday Brooke.

Part of their lack of the same success might lie in the construction of these detectives
in opposition to men and in the frequent conclusion of their sleuthing career in
heteronormative marriage and thus in their reduction to what has been perceived as
acceptable representations of women more generally. Nearly seventy years after Mrs
Paschal sounded the bell for women detectives, in 1928, Queen of Crime Dorothy L.
Sayers criticises the early women detectives for their lack of success and states that

> [t]here have also been a number of women detectives, but on the whole, they have not been
> very successful. In order to justify their choice of sex, they are obliged to be so irritatingly
> intuitive as to destroy that quiet enjoyment of the logical which we look for in our detective
> reading. Or else they are active and courageous, and insist on walking into physical danger
> and hampering the men engaged on the job. Marriage also looms too large in their view of
> life; which is not surprising since they are all young and beautiful. (Sayers qtd. in Pyket 48)

Instead of subverting gender representations in presenting women detectives, it
seems as if their genderedness even exacerbated the rigidity of gender assumptions
– however, the mere existence of female detectives achieved more than Sayers gives
them credit for: they became thinkable. And thus, they *became*, which must be read
as a huge success in and of itself, and have so far remained, transformed, adapted,
transgressed, regressed, oppressed, liberated, and much more until we today, in
2023, can look back at the history of the woman detective and find her a metaphor
for women's lot in the last two centuries. Caught within the network of gendered
demands and possibilities, women detectives have sounded out roles for and expec-
tations of women – and they continue to do so worldwide. In representing not only
what has been done to women as victims but also what women can do as detectives,

forensic analysis, and even perpetrators, crime fiction is deeply implicated in the topical negotiation of women's roles and, moreover, diverse readings of femininity.

Then again, take the hardboiled male detective whose identity is thoroughly based on his deviance from the authorities and his masculinity – one might even call it toxic masculinity – to present himself as a 'real man' and a juxtaposition to the more feminised male detectives of Golden Age detective fiction. Both types and their often diametrically opposing masculine gender identity serve as socio-literary comments to be studied, just like the spinster sleuth, the hardboiled female PI, or the prom queen amateur detective.

In fact, following Gill Plain's assessment, the understanding of crime fiction as inherently gendered is especially visible in some of the representations of masculinity in the genre:

> [T]he genre itself – its formal structures and stylistic features – has long been considered gendered. This is particularly evident in the mid-twentieth century when . . . the dialogic tough talk and urban grit of the so-called "hardboiled" school came to be regarded as a "masculine" mode, against which the clue-puzzle world of amateur intellects and well-regulated crime was rendered irredeemably "feminine". The instability of such a binary is evident – but it acts as a potent reminder that detective fiction has, throughout its history, valorised modes of knowledge conventionally associated with masculinity: Rationality, logic, the primacy of empiricism and the refusal of emotion. (Plain 102)

Indeed, representations of masculinity are often constructed in opposition to femininity or queerness, as both feminine and queer-coded masculinities have frequently been read as a threat to heteronormativity – the examples of Wilkie Collins's Count Fosco (*The Woman in White*, 1860) or Dashiell Hammett's Joel Cairo (*The Maltese Falcon*, 1930) easily come to mind. Conan Doyle's heroin-abusing Sherlock Holmes, his borderline-queer sidekick John Watson, or Dorothy L. Sayers's shell-shocked dandy aristocrat Lord Peter Wimsey – all representatives of alternative or deviant masculinities – show how complex masculinity in crime fiction has always been.

It would therefore be another truism to assume that masculinity in crime fiction has always worked along the lines of normative ideas of physical and mental strength, virility, and compulsory heterosexuality. Especially the interwar detectives, themselves the model the hardboiled school of detective fiction would come to juxtapose itself against, present a departure from the logic driven Holmesian detective type by foraying into the 'feminine domain', as Susan Rowland points out:

> [T]he rotund Hercule Poirot, delicate Wimsey and morally role-playing Campion and Alleyn constitute a significant modification of the self-contained rationality that the novels attribute to Holmes. Golden age detectives detect as much through connection and immersion in their suspects' worlds as they do through detachment and logical analysis of clues. They are

intuitive and they value intuition; they bring into the crime-solving field nonrational, emotive, so-called 'feminine' methods to rank equally with hard "masculine" rationality. (Rowland 121)

It is also not only the interwar detective who blurs the artificial demarcations of 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Within crime fiction, the same plethora of masculine identities is represented today as it is for feminine identities. Ranging from the 'man's man' of the hardboiled detective, or as defined by Raymond Chandler, "a man who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid . . . a man of honor . . . a poor man . . . a common man . . . [and] a lonely man" (n. pag.) to the fussy, meticulous, and somewhat feminine interwar detective of the kind of Hercule Poirot by Agatha Christie and then to the openly gay police detective Milo Sturgis created by Jonathan Kellerman, depictions of masculinity in crime fiction are neither limited to heteronormativity nor are queer masculinities automatically presented as the abject or the Other. Even though toxic masculinity still exists in crime fiction, it does no longer dominate – if it ever has – the genre; as with representations of femininity, masculinity has become a pluralist concept and it is presented as such in the broad diversity of global crime fiction today.

The Present Volume

Given the intricacies of gender in crime fiction and the opportunities for in-depth analyses it provides, it is unsurprising that this topic made for a very interesting conference. The present volume is a collection of select papers presented at *Captivating Criminality 8: Crime Fiction, Femininities and Masculinities* (Bamberg, July 2022), the eighth annual conference of the *International Crime Fiction Association*. As the programme impressively attested to, gender in/and crime fiction is a popular topic with researchers from all areas of (world) crime fiction and the contributions ranged from Elizabethan texts like *Arden of Faversham* (1592) to contemporary domestic noir novels written by authors such as Gillian Flynn. The presenters covered texts from all continents in a joint effort to show that crime fiction (studies) is omnipresent, diverse, and – above all – topical and that gender is one of the mainstays of the genre and a determinant of its topicality and diversity.

When the topic of femininities and masculinities in crime fiction was first announced in 2019, little did we know that the events of 2020 – the COVID-19 pandemic and its (inter)national fallout – would render the study of gender in crime fiction even more pertinent than before. While the world went into a series of lockdowns, intimate partner violence reached new heights, rising by up to 33% (see Boserup et al.), and women in particular found themselves victims of abuse in their own homes. The pandemic, it seems, thus exacerbated power imbalances to the disadvantage of women yet again and necessarily forced researchers and the general public to admit that gender equality is still far off. Similarly, equality of all genders,

as well as trans people, is equally far off, as the recent online increase of transphobia that has been stylised into a 'culture war' led by reactionary forces against trans rights activists, climate activists, and 'Woke' culture in general shows. All of these discourses can be found in contemporary crime fiction and many of them were debated at the conference in 2022. Out of the eighty-four papers and four keynote lectures, this volume picked sixteen contributions that represent the broadness of topics as well as the diversity of contributors, ranging from early career researchers to full professors, from tenured lecturers to independent researchers.

Given the diversity of the papers in the collection, the volume provides a kaleidoscopic look at the study of gender in/and crime fiction. To organise the papers very broadly by topic, the chapters in this volume are sorted into three parts, Part I "Gender(ed) Identities", Part II "Agency and Corporeality", and Part III "Gender and Genre", analysing the intricate connections of generic considerations within crime fiction that are inherently tied to gender.

Part I covers the broad range of plural femininities and masculinities, looking at constructions and deconstructions of gendered identities in crime fiction within six individual chapters. Starting with four chapters on diverse femininities, Suzanne Bray opens the volume with her analysis of the surprisingly non-radical depiction of female queerness in several Lord Peter Wimsey mysteries by English interwar Queen of Crime Dorothy L. Sayers and discusses how women living with other women in the novels has been translated to the BBC adaptations of Sayers's novels (I.1). Elena Ippendorf then sheds light on the rise of contemporary Welsh TV series and their international popularity by predominantly looking at the construction of feminine identities in *Hidden/Craith* (2018-2022) with a special focus on the trope of the "Welsh mam" (I.2). Crossing the Atlantic, the next chapter (I.3) looks at American hardboiled crime fiction of the late twentieth century with Monika Večeřová comparing the women characters in Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990) to the trickster figure. Janine Schwarz's chapter (I.4) on Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects* (2006) then introduces the concept of new momism and critically assesses how Flynn's novel, despite having been hailed for its feminist content, still continues the established narrative of the patriarchal nuclear family. The last two chapters in this section then turn to masculinities. Kristina Steiner examines two fictional serial killers in Marie Bellow Lowndes's *The Lodger* (1913) and Meg Gardiner's *Unsub* (2018) and compares these perpetrators to real-life male serial killers, showing that normative masculinity and a desire to reach out to the media go hand in hand (I.5). Lastly, Šárka Dvořáková's chapter (I.6) analyses how a central (but failed) rite of passage dominates Peter May's *The Blackhouse* (2009) and specifically assesses how the novel negotiates the effects trauma has on the developing masculinity from adulthood to manhood experienced by the characters.

Part II discusses the nexus of agency and corporeality in four chapters that all centralise the importance of the body and bodily presentation to ascertain or undermine choice and self-presentation. The first chapter in this section, Alan Mattli's examination of Marcia Muller's hardboiled novel *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* (1977; II.1), introduces the concept of the *copie conforme*, the authentic copy, and shows how Muller translates male-dominated hardboiled crime fiction into her feminist novel with a focus on emancipatory revisionism that is projected onto the protagonist's gendered appearance, among other aspects. Following that, Renáta Zsámba presents an in-depth study of S.J. Watson's novel about an amnesiac woman, *Before I Go to Sleep* (2011), and shows how its filmic adaptation renegotiates the agency of a woman who is effectively locked into her house and dependent on her partner because of her physical and mental state (II.2). Heike Henderson then goes on to analyse the position of the 'human' body in Tom Hillenbrandt's techno thrillers and thus continues the discourse of corporeality in sci-fi with a crime fiction twist posing the question of how the division of mind and body plays out in crime detection and the representation of gender in novels where bodies can be switched at will (II.3). In the last chapter in this section (II.4), Monika Jurkiewicz takes us to Argentina in her analysis of Claudia Piñero's novel *Catedrales* (2020), in which she sheds light on the impact of Catholicism on the Argentine society during and after the military dictatorship of 1976-83 and shows how the legislative overreach by a society dominated by Catholic sexual mores affects women's sexual choice and thus their bodily integrity.

The last part of this volume, Part III, explores the nexus of gender and genre and highlights the mutual influences generic elements have on the depiction of gender and how gender affects generic elements or even the subgenre itself. The first chapter in the section, Somjeeta Pandey's study on gender and genre in contemporary Indian crime fiction (III.1), explores women's crime writing and their depiction of independent women detectives in Indian society, creating spaces for new roles for women in the process. Olga Thierbach-McLean then continues the section with her analysis of the highly publicised Gabby Petito murder case of 2021 and showcases how women's foray into the public eye is still framed as dangerous, which effectively limits women in their agency, even in cases where their self-presentation on social media (like in this case) has little or nothing to do with the crime they fall victim to (III.2). The next chapter provides an overview of an alternative theory of the Jack the Ripper case, namely the concept of Jill the Ripper (III.3); Moritz A. Maier exemplifies how this theory has been negotiated in popular culture and how the reframing of Jack as Jill can offer a new perspective on the agency of women in this iconic case of gender power imbalance, but often does not. Stephanie Sumner then examines the sidekick character in select short stories by Arthur Conan Doyle and Ernest Bramah and shows how these characters exemplify gender expectations within the fraught discourse of gender roles (III.4). In the following chapter, Sercan Öztekin takes us back to the hardboiled novel and assesses how the representation of gender

and space, which can be read as symbolising gender identities, are closely connected in Raymond Chandler's short story "Trouble is my business" (1939; III.5). The last chapter in this volume, Deren Gülsever's comparative study of Nancy Springer's Enola Holmes (2006-2010) and her literary model Sherlock Holmes (III.6), then closes the book by closely looking at how adaptations of classical detectives in contemporary crime fiction adapt but also develop the mould of the typical detective.

Just as the genre provides something for everyone, the present volume evidently highlights the dimensions of crime fiction studies. With sixteen contributors from ten different countries covering crime fiction from all over the world, the diversity of the topics within the chapters is equally mirrored by their authors. Hence, returning one last time to the beginning of this introduction, the broad array of topics and researchers in this volume show how diverse and topical crime fiction has always been and continues to be. In short, they show that crime fiction matters, they show that is matters who kills, who narrates, who detects, – and who writes about it.

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Part I:
Gender(ed) Identities

Portraying Lesbians and Other Happy Single Women without Shocking Her Readers in Dorothy L. Sayers's Detective Fiction

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Abstract

In 1927, Dorothy L. Sayers published, without attracting any unfavourable attention, a novel entitled *Unnatural Death*, in which most of the main characters are single women and some are obviously lesbians. Later, in both *Strong Poison* and *Five Red Herrings*, she depicted independent, artistic women who live either completely or partially together. In these cases, the women's sexuality is not even mentioned, and it is up to the reader to follow the clues and decide if they are lesbians or not. In the context of the suspenseful detective plot, the women's private affairs, and in particular those of the happy couples who live uneventful lives, remain almost unnoticed. Fifty years later, the BBC adaptations of the novels chose different options: one miniseries preserving the ambiguity of the novel while the other depicts an obvious, stereotypical lesbian couple. This chapter examines the author Dorothy L. Sayers's attitude to female homosexuality and how she managed to include clearly or potentially lesbian characters in her fiction without shocking her contemporaries.

Keywords

Single women, lesbians, Dorothy L. Sayers, television adaptations, stereotypes

Analysing crime novels inevitably involves talking about secrets, because every criminal investigation requires the investigators to unearth hidden facts and motives. Criminals, for obvious reasons, feel obliged to keep their identities hidden from both the police and their friends and families. Even if the detective knows very well who is guilty, he may well have no idea why or how they committed the crime. Readers, caught up in the plot and trying to discover all the relevant clues for themselves before the detective reveals them in the last chapter, may easily ignore or skim over other, subtler, aspects of the work; secrets which are irrelevant to the detective plot, but relevant to the author's worldview. For the author knows very well, as T.S. Eliot states in his famous article "Religion and Literature", that: "the literature which we read with the least effort . . . can have the easiest and most insidious influence on us" (398). Dorothy L. Sayers provides a clear example of this phenomenon. She is principally famous for her detective fiction and for her aristocratic hero, Lord Peter Wimsey. However, she frequently included comment on social and moral issues in her fiction. A year before the huge scandal triggered by Radclyffe Hall's portrayal of a lesbian relationship, *The Well of Loneliness* (1927), she managed to publish a novel entitled *Unnatural Death*, where the majority of the main characters are single women, some of whom are clearly lesbians. One balanced, happy couple, one ill-

matched couple, and one intelligent, single professional woman join Lord Peter Wimsey and his policeman friend Charles Parker in a tale of murder, suspense, lies, and a contested will. Despite the fact that *Unnatural Death* "is a book about odd women . . . in the sense of their living outside of society's heterosexual patterns" (Kenney 129), its publication did not give rise to any scandal and triggered very little comment. Although female homosexuality has never been illegal in Britain, it was generally frowned upon in the interwar period, and many, like James Harris, the fifth Earl of Malmesbury, in 1921, considered it "a most disgusting and polluting subject" (Wakefield), while admitting that the practice had been increasing as a result of the war.

Three years after *Unnatural Death*, the first Harriet Vane novel, *Strong Poison*, describes a third female couple who are intelligent, pleasant and prepared to do all they can to support their friend, falsely accused of killing her lover. Then, in 1931, Sayers created two very agreeable independent women artists who live together in the picturesque Scottish community depicted in the novel *Five Red Herrings*. The private lives of these women, which remain ambiguous, are never accentuated, nor even discussed. These female characters have their role to play in the detective plot and the reader, at least when s/he reads the novel for the first time, is much more interested in their role in the investigation than in their sexual orientation, allowing Sayers to portray lifestyles which, in other forms of literature, may well have shocked the average reader at that time. However, the television adaptation of *Strong Poison* (BBC, 1987), produced when British attitudes to homosexuality had become much more relaxed, removes the ambiguity present in the written text and presents a couple of women whose clothing and gestures indicate, to an almost caricatural extent, that they are lesbians. On the other hand, the earlier BBC mini-series of *Five Red Herrings* (1975) appears to stick more closely to the author's intentions in its portrayal of the two lady artists. This chapter will examine how Sayers managed to tackle such a controversial topic without disturbing the public, to work out what she actually thought on the subject, and finally to analyse how at least one of the BBC adaptations, created half a century later, brought to the screen what Sayers had left implicit.

The Author's Point of View: a Well-Guarded Secret

If the vast majority of the critical analysis of these three novels does not mention the sexual orientation of the characters at all, a minority of critics suppose that Dorothy L. Sayers must have been opposed to homosexual relationships, sometimes because they know she was a practising Christian. For Katherine Bischoping and Riley Olstead, she presents lesbians as monsters, "exceeding the boundaries of law and nature" (2). Florence Tamagne only sees a "depraved lesbian . . . upstaged by an old maid full of Victorian prejudices" (140). Nina Auerbach, from a feminist point of

view, even if she is hostile to some aspects of Sayers's female characters and in particular to the Peter/Harriet relationship, is ready to admit that in *Unnatural Death*, "her serpentine lesbian . . ., the poisonous and negative aspect of the Amazon, murders her healthy and affirmative aspect" (60). On the other hand, Alzina Stone Dale, from a more traditional perspective, supposes that the Anglo-Catholic Sayers could not possibly approve of lesbian relationships because they are "unfruitful" and states, inaccurately, that "lesbianism . . . was not a way of life among her circle of friends" (73). Philip Scowcroft, who has analysed all the novels in detail, only sees the unhealthy lesbian couple in *Unnatural Death*, and expresses the opinion that it is "surely no accident that both women having a lesbian relationship come to sticky ends" (17). Scowcroft also explicitly denies that the women in the two other novels have any lesbian tendencies (16).

Sayers's actual opinions and experiences are certainly not so simple. In *Unnatural Death*, when discussing the young and naive Vera Findlater's love for the criminal Mary Whittaker, Miss Climpson, Wimsey's colleague in the investigation, quotes "Miss Clemence Dane's very clever book on the subject" (Sayers, *Death* 84). This novel, *Regiment of Women* (1917), the work which probably incited Radclyffe Hall to write *The Well of Loneliness* (Julien 126), describes a destructive lesbian relationship in a girls' school where the headmistress dominates and manipulates a young teacher. Sayers knew Clemence Dane personally, as they were both members of the Detection Club and were both close to Helen Simpson. However, her admiration for Clemence Dane's book could well have been the result of her own experience of the atmosphere that could sometimes be found in girls' schools at that period. According to her friend and biographer Barbara Reynolds, Sayers had known several "highly charged friendships" (*Letters 1* 15) at the Godolphin School, and the author wrote home with a certain disgust about the feelings of passionate love felt by some of her fellow students for "the wonderful Miss Westlake, the games mistress . . . everybody is so cracked on", deploring in particular the obsessional way some girls "go on about her" (21). Fortunately for Sayers and her friends, the teachers were well aware of the danger and Miss White, the French mistress, had amused Sayers by quoting lines 73 to 78 of Wordsworth's "Laodamia"[1] in a young admirer's autograph book (23).

In any case, we know that Sayers had at least one lesbian friend in her youth because she discussed her with Dr Eustace Barton in November 1928 after the publication of *Unnatural Death* and the scandal surrounding *The Well of Loneliness*. In a previous letter, Sayers had asked him several questions about homosexuality from the medical viewpoint and he had recommended she read a scientific work on the subject,

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[1] Be taught, O faithful Consort, to control / Rebellious passion; for the Gods approve / The depth, and not the tumult, of the soul ;/ A fervent, not ungovernable love. / Thy transports moderate, and meekly mourn, / When I depart, for brief is my sojourn.
http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174795.

probably Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion* as the third edition came out in 1927. Sayers's reply reveals her general attitude to the subject at that period:

> I must get the book you mention about Inversion – not that I am personally much affected by the subject, but because one is so often asked questions and it is well to give a reasonable and scientific answer. People's minds get so confused on these subjects, and they will suppose that if one stands up for these unfortunate people, one is advocating all kinds of debauchery! As a matter of fact, inverts make me creep, but that is no reason why one shouldn't face the facts. Lunatics and imbeciles make me creep too, if it comes to that. Besides, the normal person often makes the invert creep; I had a friend who was rather that way – a very fine person of powerful intellect – but she won't see, speak or write to me now I am married, because marriage revolts her. (289)

Barbara Reynolds identifies the friend as Muriel Jaeger, one of Sayers's closest friends during her studies at Oxford, and the person who encouraged her to write *Whose Body?*, her first detective novel. It is interesting to note that Sayers claims that she defends homosexuals, that she uses the scientific word, invert, instead of the more widespread and pejorative word, pervert, in her letter. Equally, we can see that she describes the physical reaction of repulsion and disgust that she gives her lesbian character Mary Whittaker, who wants to vomit when Lord Peter embraces her (Sayers, *Death* 174). We may however note that the disgust Sayers herself claims to feel when faced with lesbians must have disappeared later on as, in later life, she considered the openly lesbian Norah Lambourne among her closest friends. She was also fully accepting of the lifelong partnership between two other Somerville friends, Muriel St Clair Byrne and Marjorie Barber. This conclusion may also explain the famous little ditty she liked to quote:

> As years come in and years go out
> I totter toward the tomb,
> Still caring less and less about
> Who goes to bed with whom. (B. Reynolds 363)

Unnatural Death: The Happy Couple

Sayers's notes and her first manuscript for *Unnatural Death*, currently at the Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College, show that her initial title was *The Singular Case of the Three Spinsters* (Kenney 134). She probably abandoned it when she realised that there were going to be more than three single women in her story. Nevertheless, the title shows that, for Sayers, the three women from the Whittaker/Dawson family, all lesbians, were at the centre of her preoccupations in this novel. The final title, *Unnatural Death*, is, according to Aoife Leahy, "humorous rather than judgemental" (91), not only because the word "death" was already at that time a euphemism for an orgasm,[2] but also because Sayers wanted to show that it was not so much these

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[2] Sayers, who spoke fluent French, would have been aware of the French equivalent expression 'la petite mort', used as a euphemism for an orgasm in works of literature by such well-known

women's lives that were unnatural, but their deaths, as the lesbian niece, Mary Whittaker, murders both her lesbian aunt and her own female lover.

The only "happy couple" (Rowland 163) in the story are Clara Whittaker and Agatha Dawson, who meet at school and remain inseparable throughout their lives until Clara's death a few years before the beginning of the action. In their youth, Clara was the more eccentric of the two. During the 1870s, "she was considered very advanced and not quite nice because she refused several good offers, cut her hair SHORT (!!!) and set up in business for herself as a HORSE-BREEDER !!!" (Sayers, *Death* 84). For Ben Cobling, who worked in the stables for Clara for fifty years,

> [a] rare young lady she was in them days. Deary me. Straight as a switch, with a fine, high colour in her cheeks and shiny black hair – just like a beautiful two-year filly she was. And very sperrited. Wonnerful sperrited. There was many a gentleman as would have been glad to hitch up with her, but she was never broken to harness. Like dirt, she treated 'em. Wouldn't look at 'em, except it might be the grooms and stable hands in a matter of 'osses. (137)

In addition, instead of deploring Clara's anti-man attitude, Ben is entirely devoted to her and proud to work for her. Rather than considering Agatha and Clara's life together as in contradiction with his religious values, he believes that "[t]he Lord makes a few of 'em that way to suit 'Is own purposes, I suppose" (138). Ben's "that way", in context, clearly indicates women with a preference for their own sex.

Agatha Dawson, the "domestic partner" (85) of the couple, with her "sweet, smiling face" (133), is "deeply attached to" (84) Clara, to the extent that she does not want to "let her out of her sight" (131). From her adolescence onwards, she refuses to flirt with young men and tells her maid, who loves her very much, that "I mean to be an old maid and so does Miss Clara and we're going to live together and be ever so happy, without any stupid, tiresome gentlemen" (141). Once again, this decision is accepted by her family and friends. Mrs Piggin, the innkeeper's wife, appreciates Agatha and tells Lord Peter Wimsey: "We can't all be alike" (131). Clara and Agatha live together in harmony and, thanks to Clara's talents, make a huge fortune. What is more, their partnership can hardly be considered barren. Not only does Clara's work, breeding and training horses, give life to numerous little colts, but their friendship enables Clara's brother and Agatha's sister to meet, marry and give birth to Mary Whittaker, their mutual niece. In addition, Ben, Clara's devoted groom, marries Betty, Agatha's much-loved maid, and they live happily ever after, producing a family with many children and grandchildren. Everyone who is questioned about Clara and Agatha during the police investigation has only good things to say about them. In fact, as Leahy remarks, "the highly successful union of Agatha and Clara goes unquestioned" (94), because the readers' attention is fixed on their wicked

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authors as Verlaine and Balzac or in René Maran's award-winning 1921 novel *Batouala*. See
https://www.lalanguefrancaise.com/dictionnaire/definition/petite-mort.

niece, her crimes and her unhealthy, manipulative relationship with the pretty, blonde Vera Findlater.

Unnatural Death: the Unhealthy Couple

If it is true that Sayers "never questions the validity of the nineteenth-century lesbian relationship" (Leahy 92) between Clara and Agatha, her presentation of the relationship between Mary Whittaker and Vera Findlater is very negative, even if it is clear that the reasons for her disapproval have nothing to do with the fact that the partners are both women. Mary is an attractive woman, of the same style as her Aunt Clara:

> With her handsome, strongly-marked features and quiet air of authority, she was of the type that does well in City offices. She had a pleasant and self-possessed manner, and was beautifully tailored – not mannishly, and yet with a severe fineness of outline that negatived the appeal of a beautiful figure. (Sayers, *Death* 52)

Miss Climpson, who is used to meeting all kinds of single women in the 1920s as a result of the huge number of young men killed in the First World War, notices immediately that Mary is not interested in getting married:

> With her long and melancholy experience of frustrated womanhood, observed in a dreary succession of cheap boarding-houses, Miss Climpson was able to dismiss one theory which had vaguely formed itself in her mind. This was no passionate nature, cramped by association with an old woman and eager to be free to mate before youth should depart. That look she knew very well – and she could diagnose it with dreadful accuracy at the first glance. (52)

She therefore concludes that "Mary Whittaker is not of the marrying sort" (177) and wonders at first if she is not just "a professional woman by nature" (177). However, Mary is a qualified nurse and shows no desire to return to her nursing career after her aunt's death. For Sayers, who wrote a lot about women and work, this was Mary's main problem. Unlike the older women in the novel, Mary has not "found her proper job" (Kenney 130). Life as a nurse "demands too much sympathy – and one is under the authority of the doctors" (177), but instead of turning towards the world of business, Mary decides to buy a chicken farm with Vera Findlater. For Miss Climpson, Mary "prefers to control the lives of chickens" (177) and the reader gets the impression that Vera is just another one of her chicks.

From the beginning, Vera is presented as a petite blonde who is not very bright. Her relationship with Mary is said to resemble the one between Clare and Alwynne in Clemence Dane's *Regiment of Women*, although Alwynne is a little more dynamic than Vera. Vera is "a very gushing and rather silly young woman" (84), a typical victim, "a slight, fair girl with a rather sentimental look – plump and prettyish" (224), the youngest daughter of a pleasant family, loved by all, active in the community. She clearly has "quite a pash" for Mary Whittaker, who dominates her completely. It is obvious to all the other characters that Vera is "the weaker character of the two"

(84). For Miss Climpson, Mary encourages Vera to spend time with her, not because she loves her, but because she "likes to have someone to admire her and to run her errands" (177). What is more, she prefers her admirer to be "a stupid person who will not compete with her" (177). When Mary and Vera live together for a month, we note that Vera spends her time doing unpleasant household tasks, "scrubbing floors, laying fires and things" (179), while Mary only cooks. Vera, who admits that Mary "is so much cleverer" than herself, has fairly extreme ideas about the nature of their relationship. For her: "A great friendship does make demands . . . . It has got to be just everything to one. It's wonderful the way it seems to colour all one's thoughts. Instead of being centred in oneself, one's centred in the other person. That's what Christian love means – one's ready to die for the other person" (181).

In the context of the plot, this passionate declaration provides a clue that Vera would be prepared not only to die for Mary, but also to lie for her, which she does to provide Mary with an alibi. Ironically, she will end up dying for Mary too as Mary kills her out of fear that the younger girl will inadvertently give her away. In any case, for Miss Climpson, and almost certainly for Sayers as well, "that kind of love might become idolatry if one wasn't very careful" (181), and such abject devotion takes away the victim's personal dignity. Sayers would have expected her educated readers to notice that Vera talks about giving her life for just one friend, while the Bible claims that there is no greater love than that of the person who "gives up his life for his friends" in the plural. Towards the end of the novel, Miss Climpson learns that Vera has become aware of her mistake and confessed her idolatry to her parish priest (252).

However, the first-time reader of *Unnatural Death* is unconcerned about the state of the characters' souls and is mainly interested in the murders. In this context, Mary's homosexuality is interesting merely because it will cause her to give herself away when she is pretending to be someone else and thus allow the detectives to uncover her guilt. Mary's second identity, as the glamorous Mrs Forrest, who is separated from her husband, in London, allows her to hide from the police. As she is afraid that Lord Peter has evidence against her, she tries to seduce him, to make him stay at her flat, probably with the intention of drugging and eventually killing him. Pretending to believe in the sincerity of her act, Lord Peter kisses her, and the lesbian's reaction, "that awful shrinking, that uncontrollable revulsion of the flesh against a caress that is nauseous" (174), makes him think that she has never had a sexual relationship with a man and is therefore a liar.

For Philip Scowcroft, it is very unlikely that a lesbian would even try to seduce Lord Peter (17). Julian Symons agrees and finds the situation "coarsely wrong" (114). However, Sayers may well have based Mary's reaction on her own above-mentioned reaction to lesbians at this period of her life or on Muriel Jaeger's reaction to men. In any case, Mary Whittaker, "Sayers's most consistently evil character" (Brown 58),

fits all the most blatant stereotypes of the butch, dominant lesbian. She exploits without pity those who love her and ends her criminal career by trying to murder Miss Climpson, the fulfilled single woman, happy in her work, attacking her in a way that resembles an attack by a vampire, leaving the poor detective unconscious on Mary's bed, "her grizzled hair hung in a dank rope over the pillow and blood on her head and her throat" (273), looking as if she had been bitten in the neck. After such a dramatic scene, the example of Mary's aunts and their harmonious life is liable to be forgotten.

The Ambiguous Couples: *Strong Poison* and *Five Red Herrings*

The majority of Sayers's novels, although not *Unnatural Death*, were adapted for television by the BBC: the early novels in the mid-1970s and the later novels, with Harriet Vane, in the late 1980s. Philip Scowcroft writes in 1988 about the novel *Strong Poison* that "[t]hose with suspicious minds might suspect Harriet Vane's friends[,] . . . Eiluned Price and Sylvia Marriott, of having a lesbian relationship" (16). Even if nothing in the text explicitly states that such a relationship exists, the BBC adaptation, directed by Christopher Hodgson in 1987, twenty years after the decriminalisation of male homosexuality in Britain and fifteen years after the first Gay Pride march in London, chose to show a stereotypical lesbian couple, butch and femme. Sylvia, blonde, feminine and artistic, is paired with a very masculine Eiluned, with very short hair and wearing men's clothes. This decision was based on a specific, unsubtle interpretation of the text and was typical of the later series. As William Reynolds explains: "The 1987 television adaptations . . . reshape Dorothy L. Sayers's characters into stereotypical figures" (31) and remove all ambiguity.

The novel simply says that after splitting up with Philip Boyes, Harriet Vane moves in with Sylvia Marriott while she looks for a suitable flat for herself. Although the text does not state that Eiluned also lives with Sylvia, the reader knows that Sylvia has a house and not a flat (10) and that the two women testify together at Harriet's trial about her state of mind at the time. Later, when Peter Wimsey visits Sylvia, Eiluned opens the door, answers the telephone and serves the drinks, giving the impression that, even if she does not live there, she is completely at home in her friend's house. Eiluned is also presented as being strongly feminist, even "anti-man" (74), as Sylvia explains. She "scorns everything in trousers" (64), although she herself wears them, "disapproves of conventional courtesies between the sexes" (73) and refuses Peter's help when she needs to carry a bucketful of water. As she explains her friend's attitude to men, Sylvia says ironically: "She likes to treat 'em rough" (72), an expression much more frequently used to describe very macho men's attitude to girls. In the same way, she refers to the sculptor Marjorie's male friends as her "male belongings" (72), implying that Marjorie owns them and thus reducing men to the status of objects. She refuses to lend money to men and has

many negative prejudices about them, deploring at the same time their habit of putting sugar in their coffee and their tendency to expect their wives to devote one hundred percent of their time to their interests and comfort. At the end of the novel, when Harriet is finally set free, Sylvia and Eiluned are there, together, to welcome her once again. In spite of her general hostility to men, at that moment Eiluned is finally prepared to approve of Lord Peter as a potential companion for Harriet in the future.

However, despite the "aggressive women's lib stance forty years ahead of its time" (Scowcroft 16) adopted by Eiluned, absolutely nothing may be found in the novel about her sexuality or her relationship with Sylvia. The police, and also the reader, are mainly interested in her testimony about the lives of the protagonists in the murder case. It is possible that Sylvia and Eiluned are a lesbian couple, but it is also possible that only Eiluned is a lesbian, or that neither of them is. It is up to the readers to decide for themselves. For Philip Scowcroft in the 1980s, unlike the BBC, such an idea would be "misconceived" (16), while these days critics and readers tend to assume almost automatically that they are a lesbian couple. For example, a recent blog describes Eiluned and Sylvia as "a hilarious lesbian couple" (Solinas), and Robert Kuhn MacGregor asserts that "Harriet Vane's closest friends and supporters in *Strong Poison* are a lesbian couple" (69).

It may also be noted that in the BBC adaptation, after her trial, Harriet does not return to the solidarity and support of Sylvia's home. She sends Peter away and walks off alone towards an uncertain future. This modified ending for television underlines "Harriet's independence as the governing principle behind all she does" (W. Reynolds 37), but it also creates a distance between the clearly heterosexual heroine, Harriet and, in the series, her openly lesbian friends.

Five Red Herrings is similar to *Strong Poison* in that an ambiguous pair of female artists play a role as witnesses, but they have attracted less attention from critics. Philip Scowcroft declares: "Still less do we suspect the artists Miss Selby and Miss Cochran . . . who share living accommodation in Blue Gate Close near Lord Peter Wimsey" (16) of having lesbian tendencies. Practically all critics and scholars who have written about the novel seem to be of the same opinion. This time, the 1970s BBC adaptation is less stereotypical. Miss Cochran is of medium height, slim and very feminine, while Miss Selby, who is very tall and thin, smokes cigarettes without a holder, sits with her knees apart and speaks very bluntly. However, she wears a long tweed skirt under her man's hat and masculine jacket. Unlike Eiluned Price, the BBC's Miss Selby does not immediately make viewers think that she is a lesbian, but rather invites the viewer to wonder. The ambiguity of the novel is respected.

In the text, the two ladies, both artists, "occupied adjacent cottages and were continually to be found taking tea in each other's living-rooms or bathing together on the sands at the Doon" (65). Every time Lord Peter sees them, they are together and,

while their separate little houses are side by side (although under the same roof), they appear to live more or less together. The reader learns that they also share a vegetable garden where they grow flowers and vegetables which they bring round as presents for Peter (65). In the text, unlike in the BBC adaptation, Miss Cochran is described as "round, cheerful, humorous and grey-haired" (65), while her friend is "tall, dark, rather angular, rather handsome in an uncompromising kind of way and painted rather good, strong, angular and handsome figure-studies in oils" (65). Using the adjectives tall, dark and handsome in the same sentence reminds the reader of the stereotypical ideal man, implying that Miss Selby is a masculine woman, an impression reinforced by her style as an artist. On the other hand, Miss Cochran also has some masculine characteristics. When she wanted to accentuate her argument, "she planted her plump feet squarely on the ground and leaned forward with a hand on each knee, like an argumentative workman in a tram" (68), a distinctly unfeminine posture, especially in the 1930s.

Once again, the two women's happiness comes not only from their domestic life and their friendship, but also from the fact that they have found their vocation. They are successful artists, recognised as such by the artistic community.

Like Eiluned and Sylvia in *Strong Poison*, Miss Selby and Miss Cochran only play a small part in the criminal investigation. They are not suspects and the reader is mainly interested in their testimony, which enables Lord Peter to accuse or clear one or other of the suspected men. Their lifestyle and their sexual preferences are irrelevant and do not concern anyone, either within the novel or among its readers. Everyone is much too preoccupied with finding out which of the six male artists has murdered the obnoxious Sandy Campbell.

The Secret of Unorthodox Women?

Dorothy L. Sayers's detective novels are concerned predominantly with crimes, investigations, guilt and innocence. The main characters, and thus the principal focus of attention, are the detectives. However, the author did try "to broaden and deepen the moral and ethical background of the form" (Panek 75). Among the issues discussed in Sayers's fiction, we could mention the role of women in post-war Britain. Sayers is often mentioned as one of those who used the detective genre to "show women coping with masculine definitions of femininity" (Smith 80). The three novels examined in this study show how the author wished to illustrate, very discreetly, other possible lifestyles for women than those generally approved of in the society she lived in. The eight happy single women she portrays, Clara Whittaker, Agatha Dawson and Miss Climpson in *Unnatural Death*, Sylvia Marriott, Eiluned Price, Marjorie Phelps and again Miss Climpson in *Strong Poison*, as well as Miss Selby and Miss Cochran in *Five Red Herrings* show very clearly, without ever stating explicitly, that marriage to a man is not the only road to happiness for a woman, and that

it is entirely possible for women to live either on their own or together with another woman and be fully integrated into British society and fulfilled in their professional lives. Agatha Dawson's decision to take on a domestic role is presented as positively as Miss Selby's artistic vocation or Clara Whittaker's managing her stables, because it is a deliberate choice. Clara and Agatha are clearly lesbians, Marjorie is clearly not, but all the other women's sexual interests remain ambiguous – not because Sayers does not approve of lesbians, but because she wanted to fight against the idea that single women, whether they had a sex life or not, were "superfluous women" (Kenney 128), a frequently used term at the time which insultingly implied that once every man who wanted to marry had found a wife, society did not need any more adult women. Each of Sayers's happy spinsters has found a lifestyle that suits her and respects others with, as the author explains in her well-known article "Are Women Human?", "interesting occupation, reasonable freedom for their pleasures and a sufficient emotional outlet" (44). The second half of that sentence, "what form the occupation, the pleasures and the emotion may take, depends entirely on the individual", shows that the author considered that women ought to be free to manage their own lives as they saw fit, without interference from her or from anyone else.

For this reason, the unhealthy couple formed by Mary Whittaker and Vera Findlater is clearly not condemned because of the women's sexual preferences, but because of the women's behaviour. Mary Whittaker does not engage in a relationship with another woman out of "sheer exuberance of animal spirits" (Sayers, "Deadly Sins" 86) which, for Sayers, would be easily understood, but out of a desire to gain more money and to dominate another person. Vera submits herself completely to a stronger personality and, despite her good moral and religious education, deliberately lies to the police.

However, the lifestyles and sexual preferences, or lack of them, of all the single women are swallowed up in the fascinating and suspenseful detective plots. The reader actively seeks the clues needed to solve the mystery and accepts the setting and the characters without questioning them. At the time of writing *Unnatural Death*, Sayers was already aware of the need for "cunning craftmanship" (*Letters 1* 241), trying, with some trepidation, to discreetly combine "the appeal to the emotions with the appeal to the intellect" (241), but her controversial themes remain hidden in her plots, where the principal secret is the answer to that famous question: "Whodunnit?"

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"What kind of a woman are you?": Policing Femininity in Welsh Television Crime Narratives

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Abstract

The Welsh TV crime drama *Hidden/Craith* (2018-2022), one of many TV crime dramas set and produced in Wales to have come out in recent years, scrutinises socially constructed notions of femininity. It does so in a way that both appeals to a broad audience, ensuring its marketability across national borders, as well as by exploring culturally specific concerns of how Welsh notions of femininity are entangled with narratives of nation. This chapter examines the representation of constructs of Welsh femininity in the first season of *Hidden/Craith* on the level of characterisation, production, and reception and contextualises it within dominant narratives of nation and the current political representation of Wales as well as the phenomenon of transnational TV crime dramas. The cultural trope the series is engaging with most clearly is that of the 'Welsh Mam', showcasing both its enduring legacy in defining 'acceptable femininity' as well as subverting it in the portrayal of one of the central transgressors by means of grotesque exaggeration. The exaggeration of the trope in the 'monstrous Mam' of the series draws attention to its own artifice as well as questions its place in contemporary Wales.

Keywords

Welsh crime narratives, femininity, 'Welsh Mam', transnational crime television

The Gateway

Picture the following scene: Darkness. The rumbling of an engine. Then, blinding headlights, mounted on the roof of a pickup-truck piercing the darkness. Their light bouncing off trees as the car makes its way through a woodland road – fast. The eyes of the driver reflected in the rear-view-mirror. Then, the headlights catch onto something. Someone? A woman? Fleeing from their path. The driver gets out and pursues his prey on foot, by the light of his torch. Intense staccato music, the sound of leaves crushing under heels, then that of water falling. And then she is caught, in the beam of the torch, standing in front of a waterfall barring her way, wearing nothing but a thin white dress. She turns around, facing the camera, facing her attacker, tears running down her cheeks, looking almost resigned then, cut.

Sketched above is the opening scene of the first episode of the Welsh TV crime drama series *Hidden/Craith* (2018-2022), the first season of which will serve as the central case study of this chapter. The following pages examine the series' scrutinisation of social constructions of femininity and the ways these are entwined with constructions of nation.

This very first scene must seem eerily familiar to anyone who has seen the Danish TV series *Forbrydelsen (The Killing)* (2007-2012), one of the classics of 'Nordic Noir', that widespread, transnational brand of crime narratives which has come to dominate TV screens in recent years. *Hidden/Craith* is only one of numerous widely received quality crime dramas set and produced in Wales to have come out over the past fifteen years, resulting in headlines such as: "From Hinterland to Hidden: Why We've All Fallen for Welsh Crime Dramas: Welsh Crime Series are the New Scandi Thrillers" (Bennion) and "Forget Scandi: The Natural Home of Dark Drama Is Wales Now" (Hughes). These recent Welsh TV crime dramas are discussed in the press, invariably it seems, in terms of similarity to Scandinavian formats which have travelled across national borders to great success. Understandably so, since *Hidden/Craith* indeed shares several characteristics with what has been termed 'Nordic Noir'. It does so aesthetically, such as in its dim lighting, and sprawling longshots of bleak yet beautiful landscapes, as well as in its slow, atmospheric pacing, and, albeit to a lesser degree, its troubled investigator. And yet, as this chapter will go on to show, discussing *Hidden/Craith* exclusively with regards to its similarities to other transnational crime dramas fails to grasp a crucial, culturally specific dimension. Next to the series' site-specific engagement with place, a characteristic it shares with the great majority of recent crime narratives from Wales, regardless of medium, this culturally specific dimension is clearly noticeable in its exploration of questions of gender.

Alongside and by means of the central criminal investigation within the narrative, *Hidden/Craith* manifestly investigates social constructions of femininity. Throughout the series, characters both male and female 'police' what they consider to be 'appropriately gendered' behaviour. Be that in the myriad of ways different characters respond violently to assertive women, of which *Hidden/Craith* boasts a considerable number, or more insidious ways in which women transgressing socially constructed boundaries are judged in a gendered way. Both crime and investigation in *Hidden/Craith* prove to be inextricably entangled with questions of gender which in turn show themselves to be entangled with Welsh cultural tropes.

There is a certain self-consciousness in *Hidden/Craith*'s use of Nordic Noir conventions. This is particularly apparent in the initial scene sketched above. By closely paralleling the opening credits of *Forbrydelsen*, *Hidden/Craith* already primes the knowing audience for its engagement with Nordic Noir tropes. Throughout the series, *Hidden/Craith* cleverly uses features of Nordic Noir and narrative patterns prevalent in other transnational TV crime dramas to explore Welsh concerns, including but not limited to gendered ideologies and the "particularities of women's experience in one minority culture" (Aaron and Rees xv), that of Wales. As the infamous 1888 *Encyclopedia Brittanica* entry "for Wales: see England" brutally demonstrates,

Welsh cultural specificity is not something that can be taken for granted. Its articulation is a constant political effort. *Hidden/Craith* asserts its cultural specificity and demands a closer look at a nation which is seldom afforded one; the previously hidden, forgotten, and neglected 'hinterland'(s) of Britain, to borrow the title of another recent Welsh TV crime drama. Women in Wales have, as this chapter will show, similarly been rendered 'invisible', been neglected from dominant narratives of nation for a long time. Moreover, Dawn Mannay asserts, "the lives of Welsh women have been shaped by Nonconformity, religion, industrialization and a virulent strain of patriarchy, which have meant that in Wales, more than in other parts of Britain, women have been denied access to the public sphere" (66).

Transnational Legibility vs. Welsh Cultural Specificity

In a special issue of *Television & New Media* titled "Broken Bodies/Inquiring Minds: Women in Contemporary Transnational TV Crime Drama" the editors Lisa Coulthard, Tanya Horeck, Barbara Klinger, and Kathleen McHugh establish "a dominant trend in contemporary transnational crime television: quality dramas featuring serial criminals who break the bodies/psyches of young women or children, thereby attracting the inquiries of female detectives who have suffered trauma themselves" (507). Coulthard et al. propose that the "intersection of formal and gendered conventions and their evocation of feminist concerns" in series like *Forbrydelsen*, *Bron/Broen (The Bridge)* (2011-2018) and *Top of the Lake* (2013-2017) is central to their "intelligibility . . . across borders" (508). They go on to delineate a number of shared aesthetic and storytelling elements, which they term "staples of transnational language" (507), in these and other series such as "an emotionally complex female detective and an abject female corpse, pervasive and brutal violence against women, and affectively charged investigative scenarios" (510). *Hidden/Craith* certainly fits well into this line-up.

However, despite clarifying their use of the term 'transnational' by referring to Michele Hilmes' definition as "constituted by both the demands of the nation and the equally compelling impulse to go beyond, to provide a conduit to speak to other nations and to let other influences stream into the national space" (Hilmes 2), the analysis of Coulthard et al. exclusively looks beyond. It is entirely concerned with the translatability of these series into other national contexts. The following pages will show that gendered ideologies in *Hidden/Craith*, apart from rendering the series legible across national borders in the ways delineated by Coulthard et al., also possess a distinctly Welsh dimension, speaking to the "demands of the nation" (Hilmes 2).

One of those shared patterns Coulthard et al. credit with the translatability of the transnational TV crime dramas is the initial discovery of what Klinger terms the "gateway body" (521) of a young, white, female victim that serves to "galvanize police

investigations, serve[s] as gothic spectacle . . ., and animate[s] family melodrama" (515). At the level of reception, Klinger argues, the "gateway body" "is a vehicle of commercial accessibility and meaning across borders – a coin of the realm" (518). In *Hidden/Craith*, it is the body of Mali Pryce, the young woman being chased in the opening scene, which is discovered. Her flight in nothing but a thin white dress can certainly be described as a gothic spectacle. The charge of "propagating the worst kinds of misogyny, as they revel in images of violated female bodies" (Coulthard et al. 509), which is often levelled at the TV series Coulthard et al. discuss, seems much less pertinent in the case of *Hidden/Craith*, where the victims' bodies are always almost chastely covered and the audience's gaze is limited to faces and wrists. Following the initial discovery of Mali Pryce's "gateway body", DI Cadi John and her colleagues start to investigate what turns out to be a number of previously dismissed and forgotten connected missing person cases spanning over fifteen years. The young women, hailing from council estates and foster families, were abducted, imprisoned in the cellar of a remote cottage, raped, and murdered by the quiet, unassuming Dylan Harris, with the help of his formidable mother.

What is it then about *Hidden/Craith* that is not quite represented in this approach of breaking down crime dramas to elements constituting their, to stick with Klinger's monetary language, cross-cultural 'currency'? How might one go on to examine the other side of the transnational coin, what Hilmes calls "the demands of the nation" (2)?

Welsh TV Crime Drama

Coulthard et al. pose the question: "how does crime TV designed for export become sufficiently deterritorialized in viewers' imaginations?" (509). Still, characterising *Hidden/Craith* as "designed for export" would be misleading – a half-truth. *Hidden/Craith* was shot twice, back-to-back, once entirely in Welsh and once in a bilingual version where those parts of dialogue that transpire in Welsh are subtitled for the non-Welsh speaking viewer. The Welsh language version was first broadcast in 2018 on the Welsh language channel S4C under the Welsh title *Craith*, which translates to 'scar' and the bilingual version on BBC One Wales and BBC 4 as *Hidden*. The series' third and final season aired just last year in 2022. Since it is the bilingual version this chapter is concerned with, the series will from now on be referred to as *Hidden*.

This two-pronged process of production and subsequent distribution is something *Hidden* shares with *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* (2013-2016), both created and produced by Mark Andrews and Ed Talfan. *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* was the first of these Welsh crime dramas to travel across national borders to great success, prompting headlines in the press as quoted above. The very fact that two distinct versions were produced speaks to a real need for the series at home in Wales as well as abroad. This need

being one of the Welsh-speaking minority in Wales to see themselves, or rather hear themselves, represented on national television. The cultural 'currency' of a Welsh television programme (partly) in Welsh is not on par with that of, for instance, a Danish one in Danish such as the aforementioned *Forbrydelsen* (*The Killing*), whose opening sequence *Hidden*'s first scene resembles so closely. They both may be marketed as 'exotically foreign' or "cosmopolitan-European" (126) outside of their national contexts, as Elke Weissman demonstrates in the case of *Hinterland* (119-37) which was broadcast on BBC Four alongside "international crime programming, including the Swedish Wallander (TV4, 2005–2013), The Killing (DR1, 2007–2012), Bron/Broen (SVT1, DR1, 2011–18), Inspector Montalbano (RAI, 1999–) and Engrenages (Canal+, 2005–)" (126) but that does not take into account how the spoken Welsh in the bilingual version serves as a clear, audible marker of difference inside Wales as well as outside. The Welsh dialogue puts non-Welsh-speaking audiences, regardless of nationality, in the position of the outsider and bears a potentially defamiliarising effect.

Currently, less than a third of the Welsh population are able to speak Welsh (Welsh Language Data). To take *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* as an example, since it pioneered this bilingual production process which has subsequently been taken up by other Welsh TV crime dramas such as *Hidden/Craith, Keeping Faith/Un Bore Mercher* (2017-2020), and *Y Golau/The Light in the Hall* (2022-), this foregrounding of the Welsh language can be seen as a conscious effort of nation-building. Ed Thomas, a producer of the series, explained his reasoning behind choosing Aberystwyth and surroundings as a setting as being down to the landscape and that "Welsh is spoken enough there" (Thomas qtd. in Weissmann 125) to justify an all-Welsh series as 'authentic'. The National Welsh Language Use Survey of 2013-14, when the first season of *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* aired, includes a census from 2011, which shows that in the mid-Ceredigion region, where Aberystwyth is situated, between 50% and 70% of the population (aged three and older) were able to speak Welsh. The survey also included questions about how comfortable people were speaking Welsh or English respectively and how regularly Welsh speakers were speaking Welsh at work. Only one third of the Welsh speakers replied that they always communicate in Welsh at work, one third sometimes used Welsh in the workplace and the last third never did (National Survey 9). So, in depicting the world of *Hinterland* as one where the police officers always communicate in Welsh, unless speaking to their only non-Welsh-speaking team member, and that of *Y Gwyll* as one where everyone speaks Welsh in every social context, the series "centrally takes part in the construction of Wales as a nation in which Welsh is a national and regional language" (Weissmann 125).

There is no clear correlation between language use and gender of the characters in *Hidden*. Both male and female characters code-switch between Welsh and English.

What does emerge as a pattern is that Welsh is predominantly spoken at home, English in the workplace. This bears further significance, given that one of the defining characteristics of the trope of the 'Welsh Mam', which will be dealt with in greater detail in the following subchapter on 'Welshness and Femininity', is the confinement to the domestic sphere. Cadi and her family, who speak English at home, are the exception to this rule. Possibly, this is a choice made by the production team in order not to alienate the non-Welsh speaking viewer from Cadi, the nexus-figure of the narrative.

Both *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* and *Hidden* are characterised by a strong sense of place, showcasing the beautiful, rugged landscape of Aberystwyth and surrounding Ceredigion and the North-Walian region of Snowdonia respectively. Numerous scenes show a small car making its way through the vast landscape, and geographical proximity or isolation as well as ownership over land often prove integral to solving cases. Furthermore, characters ponder questions such as 'when something evil happens somewhere, does it leave a mark on the place?'. The home of Dylan Harris, for instance, serves as a teenage hangout in the second season of *Hidden* for that very reason. Cast and crew of both series have stated in several interviews that the landscape is a character in its own right. The beauty of the landscape is contrasted with the poverty, lack of prospects, and crime dominating the lives of its inhabitants. As Dylan Harris, the main perpetrator of *Hidden*'s first season, states sourly to an affluent Welshman who moved to North Wales from an urban background, "A view doesn't pay the bills" (season 1, episode 7, 06:48).

Hidden significantly differs from its predecessor *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* structurally in its seriality, since it does not follow a case per episode format but rather one where one central case spans the entire eight-episode season arc. This format is another one of the familiar patterns assuring transnational legibility as delineated by Barbara Klinger, one of the editors of *Broken Bodies/Inquiring Minds: Women in Contemporary Transnational TV Crime Drama* in her contribution to the volume (Klinger 517). As producers and cast have repeatedly stated, *Hidden* is not a whodunit but a whydunit. Accordingly, the identity of Dylan Harris is revealed to the viewer from the start. In fact, in that opening scene so closely resembling that of *Forbrydelsen*, quite unlike the Danish point of reference, *Hidden* shows us the killer, or at least his eyes in the rear-view mirror, before we even see the victim. Another marked difference to *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* directly relates to questions of gender.

Masculinity and Femininity in *Hidden*

Whereas the world of *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* is dominated by a corrupt old-boys-network, *Hidden* puts female characters front and centre and presents viewers with a world populated by a surprising number of women in positions of power. In the

police department alone, DI Cadi John leads the investigation, reports to Superintendent Susan Lynn and counts on the expertise of a female medical examiner as well. The medical examiner does not appear on screen until season two, when she eventually becomes Cadi's love interest, but she is discussed in the very first episode between Cadi and her father. The father, himself the former chief of the police department, enquires about the ongoing investigation and whether the medical examiner is any good. The name of the medical examiner is unfamiliar to him, yet he nevertheless assumes them to be a man. Cadi quite pointedly replies "yes, *she* is" (season 1, episode 1, 40:04, emphasis added), drawing her father's and the viewers' attention to insidious ways in which gendered ideologies are naturalised and internalised. Given the great influence of *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* on subsequent Welsh TV crime dramas in general and the fact that *Hidden* in particular is produced by the same team, Cadi's father as the former chief of police can be read as a conscious reworking of the old-boys-network of *Hinterland/Y Gwyll*. An all-important gut-feeling of a female PC, who questioned Dylan Harris on routine house to house calls in the area, is initially dismissed by her male partner with the words "we're at the arse-end of nowhere, everybody is slightly off around here" (season 1, episode 4, 44:22), but ultimately leads to the investigative team connecting the dots and identifying Dylan Harris as the perpetrator. Beyond the investigative team, women are well represented in positions of power and previously male-dominated professions as well. For instance, Dylan Harris' boss at the slate quarry is a woman who reprimands him on several occasions and eventually fires him. The girlfriend of DS Owen Vaughan, DI Cadi John's partner, is an assertive, heavily pregnant lawyer. A circumstance, which leads a real estate agent, who briefly comes under suspicion, to hurl at Vaughan "You got a bitch at home telling you what to do and a bitch at work bossing you about. You oughta grow some balls, man!" (season 1, episode 3, 24:25). The shouty real-estate agent came under suspicion in the investigation because he aggressively stalked his ex-girlfriend who was then targeted by Dylan Harris. His outburst quoted above shows any 'policing' of socially acceptable boundaries of femininity to be inextricably linked to the 'policing' of borders of masculinity which is co-constitutively defined.

Putting women front and centre leaves men on the margins of *Hidden*'s world and the characters respond very differently to their individual feelings of powerlessness or being side-lined. Cadi's ill father is preparing for death, for passing on the torch to his three daughters, Cadi in particular, given their shared profession. This sense of being replaced is aggravated by the fact that Cadi is re-opening one of his old cases, where it turns out he got it wrong and arrested an innocent man for Dylan Harris' crime. The aggressive real-estate agent-cum-stalker violently lashes out against assertive women and against anyone preventing him from getting his way. DS Owen Vaughan deals with, or rather avoids dealing with, the feeling of important life decisions being made for rather than by him, "new house, new baby" (season 1,

episode 7, 36:29), by means of a flirtation at work. He, however, shows himself capable of reflecting on his irrational behaviour, reining it in before it goes any further. When Cadi calls him out on it, he self-ironically responds with the words "I don't know, I guess I'm feeling a bit ... hormonal" (season 1, episode 1, 25:27). The exchange between Cadi and Owen quoted above once again demonstrates how *Hidden* draws attention to the subtle and not so subtle ways in which behaviour is judged in a gendered way. And lastly, there is Dylan Harris, the character with the most extreme reaction to his individual feeling of powerlessness and, arguably, emasculation. Dylan Harris' characterisation blurs the boundary between victim and transgressor, a common characteristic of literary Welsh crime fiction, as delineated by Catherine Phelps (187). The examples Phelps bases that distinction on are, however, all of women who were subject to violence exercising some form of 'retributive justice' on their abusers, not a male victim of abuse attacking random women. Dylan Harris' childhood and ongoing trauma of living with his physically and mentally abusive mother led him to move quietly around the margins of his own home, trying not to cause offence. He is compensating for his lack of control in his relationship to his mother and over his own destiny, moving from one precarious employment to another, by imprisoning, raping, and murdering young women.

Where then, does *Hidden's* representation of North Wales, populated by a striking number of women in previously male-dominated professions and positions of authority and yet equally striking violence against women, fit into feminist discourse? This may not be a feature unique to *Hidden*. Coulthard et al., too, speak of "the paradoxical gender-based violence and female empowerment at their [i.e. the crime dramas'] core as crucial to their transnational legibility" (507), but I would nevertheless like to point to a particularly Welsh contextualisation. In 2003, the National Assembly for Wales, now Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament, set a world record by achieving perfect gender parity with its seats being evenly distributed among male and female representatives (Mannay 66). In 2006, the scales even briefly tipped towards a female majority of 52% (Aaron 24), a trend which has since been in decline. Currently 43% of the seats are filled by women (Thomas et al.). However, much has been made of women's greater political representation in post-devolution Wales. An overemphasis that, as Paul Chaney argues, has created the false impression that devolution has fundamentally transformed gender relations in Wales when this is, in fact, far from the case (220-38). It is my contention that, quite apart from the argument to be made about the importance of role models in feminist discourse, *Hidden* purposefully presents its audience with this world where women are well represented, analogously to their political representation in the Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament, in order to explore persistent gendered biases, systemic inequalities, and (un)conscious 'policing' of the borders of 'appropriately' gendered behaviour instead of being blinded by apparent parity.

On the subject of borders, Wales has still only relatively recently become a nation with a border in the sense that those living west of that demarcation are under the governance of the Welsh government and have a distinct civic identity. In all discussion of Welsh crime narratives following transnational patterns, it is worth remembering that from a Welsh perspective, a nation-state remains something aspirational, a hope to gain further decision-making powers in the ongoing process of devolution, not something to be overcome. As Kirsti Bohata has argued in her keynote titled "Wealish: Transcultural Experiments in Plurilingual Writing", which she gave at the conference of the European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies in 2021, "post-nationalism is the privilege of those who have a well-established nation state to reject". And there is a "danger of erasure in some transnational theory". For a nation that has never existed as an independent nation-state, imaginative narratives of nation carry particular weight. As the renowned Marxist historian Gwyn A. Williams so famously and polemically put it, "Wales . . . is a process . . . . Wales is an artefact which the Welsh produce; the Welsh make and remake Wales day by day and year after year. If they want to" (23). Gender ideologies are undoubtedly a part of constructing and maintaining a sense of Wales and Welshness.

Welshness and Femininity

Historically, dominant narratives of Wales and Welshness have been gendered in a decidedly male way. The national anthem's title "Hen Wlad Fyn Nhadau" ([Old] Land of My Fathers) is taking on emblematic significance in this context. In her influential 1987 essay on "Images of Welsh Women", Deirdre Beddoe went so far as to characterise Welsh women as "invisible" in narratives of nation or national character that centred around coal mining, rugby, and male voice choirs (227). Recent publications revisiting the subject keep referring to Welsh women as doubly under-represented within the dominant English and male-oriented culture (Mannay, "Introduction" 2-3). The roles that were available to women in these dominant narratives of nation are that of the woman in traditional Welsh costume and that of the 'Welsh Mam'. The first is heavily influenced by, and arguably constructed to oppose, the characterisation of Welsh women from an outsider's, a coloniser's gaze in the infamous *Reports of the Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales* (1847). Those nineteenth-century reports, commonly referred to as the Blue Books, not only revealed hostile prejudices against the Welsh language as degenerate and a hindrance to societal progress, but also painted a picture of Welsh women as inferior, immoral, licentious, lawless, and dirty. It is this image which the invented tradition of the Welsh national costume can be seen to be combatting with its emphasis on pious, chaste respectability, showing "pressures that circumscribed Welsh women's lives were not engendered solely from Welsh culture itself, but from

tensions between Wales and England" (Mannay, "Introduction" 5). The pervasive cultural trope of the matriarchal 'Welsh Mam', a nostalgic idealisation of the mother, is represented in *How Green Was My Valley*, the famous novel and its subsequent screen adaptations which were instrumental in reinforcing said stereotype (James 69), as hardworking, pious, and clean, a mother to her sons and responsible for the home. The notion of cleanliness is central to that of the 'Welsh Mam', indeed, the proverb 'cleanliness is next to godliness' is often quoted in this context (James 78; Amgueddfa Cymru). Likewise intrinsically linked to the stereotype is the "location . . . in the home" (James 78). It is the cultural trope of the 'Welsh Mam' which *Hidden* is negotiating and which this chapter examines at the level of characterisation.

True to *Hidden*'s oft-proclaimed format of the whydunit, the series does not end with the identification and apprehension of the Harrises. The penultimate episode ends with Iona Harris being led off her property in handcuffs and Dylan Harris on the run. The last episode is entirely concerned with the why. Again, indicative of the female-driven narrative of the series, it is not Dylan Harris who is confronted with their crimes and the faces of their victims, but it is Iona Harris sitting opposite Cadi John in the interrogation room, photographs of the young women violated between them. It is from this interrogation sequence this chapter gets its title and I will now go on to consider questions of policing femininity first in the figure of the investigator, then that of the perpetrator.

Policing Femininity – The Investigator

DI Cadi John only recently returned to her childhood home in North Wales from serving in the army to be with her ailing father. The main investigator coming to a rural part of Wales, mostly from an urban background, at the start of the narrative is a very common pattern in Welsh crime narratives on screen as well as on page which lends itself as a device to dispel common prejudices by charting a learning curve on the part of the investigator.

She also fits well into the line of "strong female leads" as Coulthard et al. put it in their analysis of contemporary transnational TV crime dramas, in reference to a sorting category on the streaming platform Netflix (509). Cadi calls people out on their casual misogyny, victim blaming, and trivialisation or naturalisation of predative behaviour such as when the scrapyard owner whom DS Vaughan and she question about the murder of one of the young women replies, "She was a pretty girl. If you bring a girl like that to a place like this, boys will be boys" (season 1, episode 7, 10:48). Cadi also shows herself perfectly capable of throwing the aggressive real-estate agent up against a wall when he takes a swing at her. One difference in the portrayal of Cadi John to most other 'strong female leads' that have come to populate crime dramas is at the level of production. In an interview, Sian Reese-Williams, the actress playing Cadi, revealed that a conscious decision was made to limit the time

she spent in the make-up trailer to twenty minutes in order to show a woman who looks "*actually* rough around the edges" (Reese-Williams, original emphasis), like she slept at the office. In contrast, when a female character does so in most other TV series, the actress portraying them nevertheless appears without a hair out of place, thereby implicitly 'policing' acceptable femininity along the lines of physical appearance and beauty.

A more subtle 'policing' of femininity takes place among Cadi and her two sisters, who accuse her of not showing enough interest in caring for their father. Since there is no brother in the family, it remains unclear, however, how much of that expectation to act as a caregiver is tied to notions of acceptable femininity. In Elin, one of Cadi's sisters, we can clearly see what Mannay diagnosed in her study of the division of household labour in south-Walian valleys in 2016, namely that the "legacy of the myth of the 'Welsh Mam' in maintaining acceptable feminine identities" ("Introduction" 7) still looms large and "in contemporary Wales, the domestic sphere remains a site of inequality, where women are negotiating the impossibility of being both in full-time employment and meeting the ideological tenets of the 'Welsh Mam'" (7-8). Elin, who works as a doctor at the local hospital is similarly struggling and facing divorce and resentment from her teenage daughter. Though the cultural trope of the 'Welsh Mam' is certainly not limited to working-class women, it is nevertheless most readily associated with them. The historical image of wives of miners in the valleys, as perpetuated by *How Green Was My Valley* in particular, is closely tied to the term. Mannay speaks of "the myth of the 'Welsh Mam' . . . alongside the bread-winning Mam" as "dual expectations of acceptable working-class femininity" ("Who Should" 81) specifically and the application of her findings to the portrayal of Elin, a highly educated and well-to-do doctor, presumably with the means to hire help, should be qualified correspondingly.

Policing Femininity – The Transgressor

The shadow of the cultural trope of the 'Welsh Mam' looms even larger in the characterisation of Iona Harris, who is in many respects a grotesque exaggeration of that very trope – a 'monstrous Mam'. Until she is forcibly removed from it during her arrest, we never see Iona Harris outside of the house or at least off the property, taking the "location . . . in the home" (James 78) to the extreme. She is most often found in the kitchen preparing meals for Dylan and Nia, the little girl Dylan had with one of his victims now buried on the property. She does so unfailingly. Such as when she wordlessly presents Dylan with a thermos and lunchbox to take to work after she brutally beat him and made him sleep outside with the dogs the night before (season 1, episode 2, 06:24-07:00). Iona Harris is berating her son, telling him she should have drowned him at birth in one breath, noticing a missing button on

his shirt and telling him to remind her to fix it for him in the next (season 1, episode 2, 09:21-09:42).

She too seems to consider cleanliness one of the highest virtues, repeatedly ordering others to scrub things clean, to wash themselves or to "clean up their filth" (season 1, episode 2, 08:52; episode 4, 29:19; episode 5, 40:48; episode 6, 37:59). Strikingly, it is the suggestion that the police might find a trace of Llinos Evans, Nia's mother, in the house that gets Iona Harris talking in the interrogation room, where she previously sat silent, refusing to co-operate. She breaks her silence to assert that they will most certainly not find any such trace, as if insulted by the suggestion of a less than spotless home (season 1, episode 8, 20:03-20:25).

This grotesque exaggeration of the trope of the 'Welsh Mam', the continuing pervasiveness of which has been demonstrated by Mannay, reveals it to be a cultural construct and questions both its essentialist claim and its place in contemporary Wales. Iona Harris' commitment to cleanliness extends to 'cleaning up' after her son's rape in the most horrific way, namely performing a forced late-term abortion on Mali Pryce, which leads Cadi to pose the question: "What kind of a woman are you?" (season 1, episode 8, 17:52). Cadi frames Iona Harris' crime not simply as a crime against humanity but as a crime against her femininity specifically. 'How could she – as a woman – do this to another woman?' 'How could she violate another woman's body in such a way?' Cadi, the character the audience is most clearly invited to identify with, thereby 'polices' acceptable femininity along the border of forming a united front against violence against women. The question "What kind of woman are you" almost denies Iona Harris womanhood altogether. Cadi implies Iona Harris is 'less of a woman' for her crimes.

Conclusion

Hidden is not a crime narrative that provides easy or satisfying answers; the crimes may be solved, one young woman recovered alive from the Harrises' clutches, Iona Harris incarcerated, and Dylan Harris dead by his own hands, but there is little sense of resolution. What *Hidden* does instead is raise uncomfortable questions, including such questions as what it is that makes people do unspeakable things to one another, about how notions of place are operational upon people, and about intersections of gendered ideologies and narratives of nation. The feminist discourse the series is engaging in both makes it legible beyond its national borders, in the ways delineated by Coulthard et al., and speaks to specifically Welsh contexts and concerns. These concerns include the cultural trope of the 'Welsh Mam' and its place in contemporary, 'post-devolution' Wales, the limited meaningfulness of gender parity in political representation in questions of gendered ideologies of the everyday and persisting systemic inequalities, and the role of the Welsh language itself. Reiterating the impression of a self-conscious employment of 'transnational' tropes in

Hidden to make Welsh concerns visible, and audible, beyond its national borders, the growing list of Welsh-set and -produced series in recent years ranging from *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* and *Hidden/Craith* to *Keeping Faith/Un Bore Mercher* (2017-2020), *Bang* (2017-), *Requiem (2018), The Pembrokeshire Murders* (2021), *The Pact* (2021-) and *The Light in the Hall/Y Golau* (2022-) certainly suggests it is working. At the start of the year 2023, news even broke of Netflix streaming its first Welsh-language-only drama, *Dal Y Mellt* (20-22-). In the world of TV crime dramas at least it seems, Wales is all around.

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Ambiguity of a Woman Trickster in Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress*

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Abstract

Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990) revises the traditional hard-boiled genre according to a societal system based on racial inequity in the United States. African American hard-boiled authors present African American communities amid a continuous sociocultural and political divide underscored by systemic racism perpetuated by institutional powers. Resulting in Du Boisian double consciousness and internalization, the narrative comments on these internal and external behavioral factors as it follows Daphne Monet, a passing femme fatale. This chapter casts Daphne in the role of a woman trickster, a rare sight in patriarchal mythologies, and comments on the African American hard-boiled decision of writing back to African folklore and African American ancestral heritage dating back to times of enslavement of African peoples in the Americas. The essay implements Umberto Eco's theory of interpretation to emphasize various roles of and the relationship between the sender and receiver of a literary text and discusses the woman trickster's adapted qualities to fit the twentieth-century hard-boiled narrative.

The African/American Sociocultural Divide

In her introduction to *Shades of Black: Crime and Mystery Stories by African-American Writers*, Eleanor Taylor Bland notes that the development of extended family is "the most significant contribution" African American writers have made to mystery fiction. Bland likewise compliments Black writers adding "a new depth and dimension to members of the opposite sex. Women write about caring and compassionate men who are also strong and self-sufficient. Men write about women who are independent and intelligent and also affectionate, giving, and accurately strong" (1-2). Classical detective fiction has primarily aimed at entertainment with its whodunit stories and puzzle-typical plot where the committed crime is the central plot point to be solved by the main character, the detective, and the end marks the final resolution of the mystery. In African American crime fiction, ethnicity and race relations in the United States seep through the stories to uncover the impact of systemic racism and associated omnipresent race and class conflicts that the figure of the detective can never resolve or diminish. The portrayal of living conditions in American capitalist

society includes the close-knit relationship between crime and socioeconomic inequity which results in conflicts leading to criminal behavior.

For mystery writers, and specifically for hard-boiled fiction writers, including Chester B. Himes and Walter Mosley, the social – or, what Stephen Soitos calls vernacular – criticism does not translate into abandoning traditional detective formulas of American crime fiction, be it the fast-paced nature of the novels, the dangerous and violent environment of the underground organized crime or the lonesome figure of the protagonist. Rather, Black American crime fiction incorporates these relations and aids the progression of African American culture "not only in reinterpretations of its past but in preparation for its future" (Soitos xiii). As Soitos argues, vernacular criticism develops "critical vocabulary based not on Euro-Americentric models but on African American and Afrocentric worldview" (xii). Vernacular theory further writes back to the notion that African Americans have had "no real culture of their own" and demonstrates "ways in which average rural and urban African American people transformed the dominant folk and cultural formulas, indicating their own cultural survival and triumph over oppression" (xii).

In hard-boiled fiction, the tension between an individual and society translates into the notion that everyone is guilty. The qualities of an individual hero commonly exhibited by the protagonist cease and are replaced by complexities of internalization resulting in amoral behavior of even sympathetic characters. African American crime fiction presents individuals who create a fraction in the system by crossing established conventions of institutional powers, and whose relationship with the police is antagonistic due to the rigidity of the establishment. Revealing society as dominated by whiteness, Black American detective novels shift from plot to character. In order to criticize race-related discrimination, the genre builds upon its characters' awareness of their Blackness and applies popular cultural forms to African American experience (Gray 489). In sociopolitical terms of the United States, the Black characters' dubious and oftentimes unsettling behavior has sparked conversations among the Black American intellectual movement about whether violent portrayals and crime-ridden lifestyles of especially Black men do not only perpetuate the stereotypical American vision based on racial discrimination. However, the versatility of presenting various character types supports Soitos' thought of abandoning Euro-Americentric ways of thinking while keeping in mind the role institutionalized forces play in the characters' forming and upholding criminal conditions in the urban and rural parts of the US. Moreover, this notion also draws upon Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s elaboration on Black rhetorical systems and literary traditions:

> I have liberally borrowed related examples from Western critical arguments . . . to argue, implicitly, that the central questions asked in Western critical discourse have been asked, and answered, in other textual traditions as well. The Eurocentric bias presupposed in the ways terms such as canon, literary theory, or comparative literature have been utilized is a culturally hegemonic bias . . . that the study of literature could best do without. Europeans

and Americans neither invented literature and its theory nor have a monopoly on its development. (xiv)

One instance of what Soitos calls "textual exploration connected to sociohistorical and socioreligious value systems" (Soitos xii) ties to the vernacular rhetorical tradition of Signifyin(g) which Gates connects to individual moments of self-reflexiveness (Gates xxi) and which can be traced to the African/American cultural divide.

One archetypal figure originating in African folklore and navigating the African American lore and literature from the times of slavery is the trickster who appears either as one of the mythical gods who, originating from oral tribal cultures, rebelled against his family and was banished to live on earth, or more often as an animal. As a shapeshifter and boundary-crosser, the trickster passes between worlds of contradictions, blurring the lines between life and death, godly and ungodly, moral and amoral, and serves as a messenger between the human and the divine world. However, when the path between heaven and earth gets blocked, tricksters change their messenger role and become thieves, stealing from the gods what humans need on earth to survive (Hyde). Whether stealing fire as Prometheus, plums as Coyote, or cattle as Hermes, the first theft of a trickster bears meaning only once the stolen item appears in an altered context, highlighting its previous worth and defining what it is by realizing what it is not. In trickster tales, thieving epitomizes the birth of meaning (Hyde 64). As Robert D. Pelton writes, misunderstanding a trickster largely depends on the trickster's embodiment of vivid and subtle language "through which he links animality and ritual transformation, shapes culture by means of sex and laughter, ties cosmic process to personal history" (Pelton).

Among the tricksters originating from West African folktales, we can identify Anansi of the Ashanti from Ghana representing the trickster's foolery; Esu Elegbara of the Fon from Togo and Benin concerned mainly with sexuality and language; Eshu of the Yoruba from Benin, Nigeria, and Togo responsible mainly for the disturbance of social peace; or Ogo-Yurugu of the Dogon from Mali experienced in rebellion and banishment. Each of these tricksters' characteristics overlap and react to each ethnic group's religious practices; in African tribal religions there is a common belief that in nature and the universe alike, there is a celestial power available to use to those who have the ability to master it in regard to people, divinities, ghosts, or ancestral spirits (Lawson). In reaction to European missionaries as early as 1805, new ways of thinking and living combined with old customs of the ethnic groups to create adapted traditions; a parallel later exhibited during slavery when enslaved Africans transported through the transatlantic slave trade from the coastal West African territories combined African cultures together with customs of white settlers on the American continent.

Hence, the African/American cultural divide resulted in many practices and behavioral patterns inherited by descendants of enslaved African peoples in America, including double consciousness, or, what W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* described as an act of looking at oneself through the eyes of others. As a psychological concept, Du Bois specified double consciousness as possessing a national, American identity while being Black. The concept of a minority ethnic group internalizing xenophobic, exclusionist values draws upon assessing one's intellectual abilities and physical attributes by a majority's standards. In American terms, the trickster figure was the enslaved person outwitting their master, being thus titled a "trickster hero" by folklorist Roger D. Abrahams and challenging the prevailing trickster paradigm of West African customs. It was another instance of blending cultures and transporting African epic performance lore into American association with tricksters and European ties to epic heroes (Rutledge 2). Rutledge ties the social hierarchical origins to Antiquity and states that "this Great Chain of Being . . . was believed to range from God and the angels down to humans, in descending order from whiteness to blackness, then to animals, and finally to the demonic beings anchored by Satan" (3). The intersections of European focus on the epic and American racial divide posed a new environment for the slave-era trickster to navigate the new role as a messenger, shapeshifter, master of disguise, and thief.

What Gates described as a "Blackness of the tongue" has served as Black people's coding since the times of slavery to engage in "private yet communal cultural rituals" (xix). These verbal tactics which derive from African trickster mythologies and which slaves transferred from African traditions have developed into an African American literary tradition where two prominent trickster figures, called Esu Elegbara and the Signifying Monkey, appear. The slaves shared many characteristics with Esu, the divine Yoruba trickster, and the Signifying Monkey, Esu's successor, and took advantage of their masters' unfamiliarity with their oral customs, manipulating them through deceit, theft, shapeshifting, and double-voiced narrative. While Esu possesses two mouths and functions as a symbol of a double-voiced tradition and interpretation, the Monkey "serves as the trope in which several other black rhetorical tropes [are encoded]" (xxi). Pre-world myths about Esu transported to the New World connect him to the Signifying Monkey's exaggerated Black vernacular. While retaining Esu's traditional features from African folklore, the slaves turned to the Signifying Monkey as their liberator controlling and dwelling at the crossroads where they found themselves (Gates 31).

Gates compares practicing the method of Signifyin(g) to finding oneself in a hall of mirrors:

> the sign itself appears to be doubled . . . and (re)doubled upon ever closer examination. It is not the sign itself, however, which has multiplied. If orientation prevails over madness, we soon realize that only the signifier has been doubled and (re)doubled, a signifier in this instance that is silent . . . a "sound-image" [without] the sound. (44)

The unsteadiness that arises from one signifier disappears when these signifiers multiply; the duality generated by two and more signifiers is a natural occurrence. In Standard American English (SAE), the word "signification" bears a homonymous meaning to the word in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), reflecting two outwardly identical concepts. However, the collision between two paralleling universes, American and African American, determined by meaning of words or definitions, becomes notable when only one person confronts the linguistic elements of SAE and AAVE that may be both familiar and alien to them. Identities of the signifiers and the feeling of otherness connect to the sign they decide to assess in their signifying practices. Deciding to criticize the generally accepted meaning of a sign that the mainstream culture bestowed upon it through SAE, the signifiers underline how Blackness and AAVE represent the other in the central political climate (45).

Interpretations of Gendered Trickster Tradition

The canonical trickster figure operates in patriarchal mythologies, and it thus follows the establishment of male actors as dominant, whether their presence is centered or marginal. While Lewis Hyde notes that in certain situations, women characters with a considerable share of power in tribal cultures do resemble tricksters, such as the female Coyote, the origins in Native American lore are attributed to matrilineal and matrilocal cultures. Further, the male-centric portrayal of the trickster derives from the trickster lore not focusing on procreation, and the character traits are thus attributed to the sex which does not give birth (Hyde). Because lust is not the driving force of the female Coyote, the equivalent mythological positioning of women characters in the role of mothers incites the notion that the sexual nature of the trickster contrasts the traditional women's roles which then oppose tricksters' "on-the-road and opportunistic sexuality," consequences of which are "clearly more serious for women than for men" (Hyde). In her 2018 study on Afghano-Persian women tricksters, Margaret A. Mills asks the question of why certain folktale characters who deceive are or are not labeled as tricksters, and notes that due to the comparative trickster theory having not implemented sufficient tools to think about women tricksters, "the existing theoretical literature on tricksters and tricksterism up to the late 1990s continued to be virtually devoid of considerations of women's tricks or women tricksters" (34). Hyde admits that there is no lack of women employing tricks, but only a few of these can pride themselves on the "elaborated career of deceit that tricksters have" (8).

The division between women in myth who are skilled in the art of deception and women tricksters employing traits attributed to mainly male actors potentially rests

on the structure of established storytelling and consequent limits of semantic interpretation. On the one hand, Maria Tatar explains the absence of women tricksters as follows:

> [It] is also possible that the female trickster has carried out her own stealth operation, functioning in furtive ways and covering her tracks to ensure that her powers remain undetected. Perhaps she has survived and endured simply by becoming invisible and flying beneath the radar that we use to understand our cultural stories. And now, in cultures that grant women the kind of mobility and subversive agency unknown in earlier ages, she can join up with the more visible postmodern female counterparts that appear in cultural production today. (40)

This correlates with the growth of ethnic literatures and blurring the boundaries in American canonical literary tradition. Just as Bland commended African American crime fiction authors for giving the opposite sex an unexplored authority in their texts as senders, semantic theories centered on the reader – or, receiver – assume that meaning of each signifier depends on the interpretative choice of the receiver (Eco 53). While Tatar's reasoning of women adopting the role of the trickster results from women being granted an agenda in modern American storytelling to establish societal non-conforming characteristics of the mythical figure, I argue that another possible hypothesis for the development of the woman trickster is based on Umberto Eco's interpretative (im)balance between the author–sender and reader-receiver dichotomy.

While especially works of fiction are open to numerous interpretations and signs are identified by their capacity to induce a thought in the receiver's consciousness, Eco adds that it is important to study interpretation according to both the receiver's point of reference and the sender's semiotic signifiers (56). The critical debate on interpretation focused largely on deciphering the sender's intent and the textual meaning regardless of the sender's aim. The Renaissance intellectual movement mapped the hermeneutical textual possibility of limitless or unspecified interpretations; with the Renaissance model in mind, this hermeneutic-symbolical reading can either invoke a limitless number of signifiers as formulated by the sender, or infinite interpretive meanings that the sender has ignored (Eco 60). For that reason, trickster discourse in a more contemporary setting of the twentieth-century United States adapts the trickster figure working cross-culturally to showcase varying types of both cultural and individual survival. While some of the most successful women writers, including Toni Morrison or Louise Erdrich, introduced a range of women tricksters, thus structuring their stories accordingly as a part of feminist literary criticism, the theory of interpretation indicates that textual signifiers do not necessarily need to change to recognize women tricksters in a non-traditional trickster setting.

In an African American male-oriented hard-boiled genre, the most notably recognized female character is that of the femme fatale. The femme fatale figure has been tied to the dark forces of nature as she abandoned traditional romance and passive

domesticity, and instead chose to apply her sexuality to homicidal plots in the service of greed. Mark Jancovich mirrors the 1940s and 50s sexual, social, and ideological unrest in the US and the European economic crisis by commenting on women's positioning at the center of means of production during the war. Jancovich further argues that the femme fatale's inclusion in literature and film served to vilify women in the working force as an attempt to restore the pre-war patriarchal system with women returning to their role as stay-at-home wives and mothers. The femme fatale's refusal to comply with societal expectations aligned with the imagery of menacing women driven by uncontrolled sexual appetites. In works of Raymond Chandler or Dashiell Hammett, the independent femme fatale becomes active and vicious, losing the capacity to love as she abandoned her role as a mother figure, and likewise becomes sexually promiscuous, driven by lust and sexual aggression, which consequently generates her tendency to immoral, monstrous, and corrupt behavior. In hard-boiled fiction, the femme fatale is closely tied to what Jancovich describes as the "dark forces of nature" which supports Bernard F. Dick's conclusion that "the western had long freed the villain from the obligatory black hat. Her emancipation, however, has more to do with ambiguity than equality. To appear less monolinear and capable of nonlethal moods, she frequently wears white. If she appears in black, her innocence is even more dubious" (158).

While this positions clothing of the female villain as one of the cornerstones of the femme fatale vilification, the correlation between white color signifying virtue and black evil showcases one instance of African American crime fiction authors' revision, counterbalancing this dichotomy of white-male-oriented texts. In her theoretical approach to intertextuality, Linda Hutcheon writes of a "de-hierarchizing impulse, a desire to challenge the explicitly and implicitly negative cultural evaluation of things like post-modernism, parody, and now, adaptation, which are seen as secondary and inferior" (39). In her study, Hutcheon focuses on adaptation studies and how the original source material and its multiple adapted versions exist not vertically but laterally (46-8). While Hutcheon's theory aims primarily at diverse media and genres, in the context of this article, we may look at the transfer not of stories but of traditional and/or stereotypical portrayals of women characters specifically between Black and white authors of hard-boiled fiction. While the inclusion of the femme fatale character in works of Chester B. Himes, including *A Rage in Harlem* (1957), or Walter Mosley, notably *The Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990), remains largely unchanged from the typical hard-boiled tradition, the plot reflections on the impact of systemic racism on socioeconomic and political conditions of Black characters also effect the somewhat antagonistic portrayal of women characters who could be classified as femmes fatales. Despite being labeled equally as destructive, deceitful, and monstrous as her white counterpart, the African American femme fatale further discloses the legacy of standardized gendered racism Black American women have been subjected to since the period of colonization.

Suren Lalvani further adds that when lust, promiscuity and violence are associated with the Black femme fatale, her masculine and aggressive features tie to the nineteenth-century European image of the "exotic woman of color" who "represented uninhibited sexuality to be enjoyed by Western men" (Lalvani). The Black hard-boiled continuation with this stereotype not only culminates in detailed testament of the Black woman symbolizing the image of the other who is "trapped in the double bind of a colonial discourse which either objectifies her for a narcissistic gaze or views her as potentially threatening to the western male psyche" (Lalvani). Therefore, Dick's notion of predictability of the white femme fatale wearing black sustains the ongoing commonality of separating the two colors as antitheses. However, it elevates the concept in the racialized context of Black hard-boiled fiction where the characteristics of both the customarily white femme fatale and the tribal male folk trickster intersect in the depiction of a deceiving, boundary-crossing, sexually active, shapeshifting, and signifying African American woman trickster.

Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* can be viewed as an example of intertextuality as the novel translates the African American memory exhibited in other genres, including spiritual autobiography, captivity narrative or sentimental novel, and simultaneously signifies upon mainstream tropes of the hard-boiled genre. What Hutcheon calls transcoding, or a change of frame and thus context of a duplicate narrative form narrated from a different point of view (166), is demonstrated on the central woman character of the novel named Daphne Monet. Daphne is presented as the femme fatale; a white woman with a daring and mysterious aura involved in a few romantic relationships who seduces Easy Rawlins, a Black detective amateur and a former war veteran hired to find her. Amidst the 1940s urban anxieties of Los Angeles, Mosley introduces Daphne's character when Easy examines a black and white photograph given to him by Mr. Albright, a white associate of Daphne's fiancé, as we find out that the case of a missing "pretty young white woman" with "light hair coming down over her bare shoulders and high cheekbones and eyes that might have been blue" would be "worth looking [into] if you could get her to smile at you that way" (Mosley 25). Daphne ultimately reveals herself to Easy, withholds information, deceives him, and is depicted as a thieving seductress on whose accord Easy finds himself among numerous crime endeavors including multiple murders.

At the same time, Daphne is revealed to be passing, and the concealment of her true identity and race lead to the ultimate solidification of her othering and resulting exile from the Black Watts community. As Daphne's relationship with Easy progresses, Daphne exhibits both animal-like and masculine behavior which leads Easy to question Daphne's true intentions. Interpreting Daphne solely as the femme fatale may be limiting towards other semiotic readings because, as John W. Roberts argues, construing western mythic traditions as universal "turns out to be extremely narrow

and ethnocentric, especially . . . in the American context" (qtd. in Smith 4). Considering the mythical role of the trickster as a destroyer and creator of the world, the figure focuses on the transformation of cultures whether the cultural values or prosperity are endangered internally or externally. Traditional tricksters bring moments of fundamental change, and the supernatural and imaginary elements in trickster stories serve as a presentation of an artificial world to examine if the new world of artifice can combine with the old one and survive.

Daphne's role as a trickster is highlighted as her ghostly absence permeates the first eleven chapters which aids her ambiguity and dwelling at crossroads, able to remain hidden and calculating. Positioning Daphne at the center of the narrative, just as the novel's title itself, demonstrates her role as a trickster who challenges the established social and political order and its limitations. One of the trickster's skills is imitation; as Lewis Hyde notes, while each animal has an inborn knowledge, a way of being in the world and has its nature, way of hunting and satisfying their hunger, the trickster, on the other hand, does not possess this way, nature, or knowledge common to communal species such as herds, flocks, or schools (Hyde). Following the trickster's path of having no way and thus being able to skillfully copy others and adapt to changing environments, Daphne conforms to white supremacy to get fairer treatment in American society and even get away with murder. As a passing woman, she tricks Easy before even meeting him, and her most guarded secret remains hidden from him till the end of the novel. With other people telling Easy that Daphne is white, he never doubts her race despite strong evidence laid in front of him, including one of Albright's first depictions of her when he tells Easy that "Daphne has a predilection for the company of Negroes. She likes jazz and pigs' feet and dark meat, if you know what I mean" (26). Easy can only think of how he knows Albright's implications but does not like to hear it. His subconscious avoidance of the truth is confirmed when Daphne calls on his landline, using a fake French accent. While he contemplates how it does not sound French exactly, he later addresses her as "the French girl" (95) to the extent that even his friend Odell criticizes him of "[m]essin' with French white girls, who ain't French" (104). At that point, Daphne has lost her accent, however, Easy's initial reluctance to trust his instincts becomes an even greater example of Daphne's mastery of disguise when Easy reveals he served in France where French girls wore simple blue dresses (96). His familiarity with French culture is exemplified upon his reminiscence of the time in the army and of dancing figures portrayed on paintings reminding him of "waltzing men and women . . . dressed like courtiers of the French court" (121). Consequently, Daphne possessing no way as the trickster here shows the signature trickster paradox; her alienation from society as a passing woman, suggested at this point, makes her first uncomfortable to be found which makes her then comfortable in every place she chooses to travel to.

Despite Easy being capable of revealing Daphne's fabricated identity, his lust for Daphne overshadows his better judgment and his own forming of a newly acquired identity as a detective. The femme fatale is introduced by Albright's statement of her being "not bad to look at but [being] hell to find" (Mosley 26) which draws upon the United States' portrayal of the figure reacting to her sexual nuances in the 1940s and 50s to emphasize the undercurrents of sexual, social, and ideological unrest. Daphne's ability to deceive is complemented by her disappearance after she steals a suitcase full of money from her fiancé, white businessman Todd Carter who Albright works for. While the view of the independent and thus dangerous woman served as an attempt to overturn the failing patriarchal order in European countries, in the US, the antagonistic nature of the trope had been affiliated with the domestic rather than the public sphere and classified the femme fatale as greedy and selfish by refusing to "subordinate her personal concerns" and not joining the war (Honey qtd. in Jancovich 13). The femme fatale's refusal to comply with societal expectations aligned with the imagery of menacing women filled with greed and uncontrolled sexual appetites. Through the femme fatale stereotype, society confirmed the woman's dishonest nature and thus the inferiority in her social standing due to immoral, monstrous actions.

Misogynoir and the Double-Voiced Discourse

Jeanne Rosier Smith extrapolates Yoruba trickster Esu Elegbara's tales to the life journey of "la mestiza," a woman of mixed racial or ethnic ancestry who is blessed by Esu on her choice of path:

> The new mestiza copes with her tricksterlike position "by developing a tolerance for contradiction, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode. . . . Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else." (Anzaldúa qtd. in Smith 25)

The connection between the trickster and Daphne as a passing woman of mixed cultural heritage suggests what bell hooks calls the trickster's duty, albeit negative, of "destroying dualism and therefore obliterating systems of domination" (qtd. in Smith 27). From Albright's first mention of Daphne, it is clear how normalized sexism and sexual ideologies in American society in the 1940s are, supported by the hard-boiled femme fatale portrayal, and it positions Daphne, a Black woman passing for white, as the woman figure who will cross gender, race, and class boundaries as a characteristic notion for any representation of people from a minority. Daphne is expected to challenge this two-fold combination of racism and sexism – or, misogynoir, a term coined by Moya Bailey in 2010 – directed at Black women. While the trickster's role as a destroyer works in some narratives, the hard-boiled setting of Mosley's novel reverses even this somewhat positive outlook on the interrogation of the distribution of institutional power based on one's ethnicity. Daphne's pretended

whiteness shields her throughout the story till the end, even after she admits to Easy she is passing: "I'm not Daphne. My given name is Ruby Hanks. . . . I'm different than you because I'm two people. I'm her and me" (Mosley 208). She further confesses that her maternal half-brother Frank killed her father due to sexual abuse Daphne was subjected to. These events lead to her existence as a wanderer on the crossroads between the two opposite worlds and thus her own narrative voices. Unlike a traditional detective story involving crime, a police force, a detective, and a solution where the story must incite a major interest in finding the solution (Soitos 16), in the hard-boiled setting, a certain ambiguity and nihilism as prerequisites will always be preserved based on the real implication of an unjust and irredeemable world that will never change.

Gerald Vizenor argues that because the trickster is a figure created by the tribe and not by an individual author, the tribal trickster is a communal sign shared between listeners and readers (Vizenor 187), making the story a communal experience by linking a variety of viewpoints. Mosley's intent as the sender is to comment not only on the explicit racial divide but to further disclose an individual double consciousness within the Black American communities and diverse strategies of many characters. Consequently, the characters cope with this internalization in different ways but overall there is a general inner conflict of each individual character that stems from the psychological divide between how a person is perceived by the society they live in and how they decide to operate with these external projections, whether they employ or defy them. Easy's friend Mouse summarizes this issue of internalization of two-ness that Daphne possesses: "She wanna be white. All them years people be tellin' her how she light-skinned and beautiful but all the time she knows that she can't have what white people have. So she pretend and then she lose it all. She can love a white man but all he can love is the white girl he thinks she is" (Mosley 209).

The sender's interpretative intent is unequivocal; Daphne's two-ness is the burden of her passing and her freedom. Before meeting Easy, Daphne was a traveler, and there has never been a possibility for her exposure. Her freedom has been secured by benefiting from the illusion of her white privilege, of constant vigilance and observation. Recognizing underprivileged conditions that she would be met with as being both Black by the white society and a light-skinned mulatta within the Black community, passing as white has served Daphne's boundary-crossing and shapeshifting identity. While the teachings of Du Bois comprised of evaluating American ideologies regarding race, class, and nation, and of intertwined social, economic, and cultural patterns that have shaped the US system, his acknowledgement of Black women's suffering was that of a revolution. Their roles in private and public spheres presented Black women with unique circumstances due to managing oppressive attitudes that race, class, and nation exhibited (Collins 42).

Similarly to Du Bois, hooks' thought of women tricksters destroying dualism reflects the trickster's inclination to challenge the established order. Daphne manages to kill Matthew Teran, a man formerly running for mayor and a pedophile keeping a neglected Mexican boy as a sex slave. When Easy asks if she killed Teran, she replies: "'I pulled the trigger, he died. But he killed himself really. . . . He had his hands in that little boy's drawers and he laughed.' Daphne snorted. I don't know if it was a laugh or a sound of disgust. 'And so I killed him'" (Mosley 207). In the strongly patriarchal social system, Daphne defies presuppositions about male power and validates the notion that traditional tricksters have been identified as male by default due to them operating within the rigid value system based on male and female stereotypes alike. As a trickster in the nonmythic genre of crime fiction, Daphne as the central woman character can be compared to Stieg Larsson's Lisbeth Salander. Unlike Daphne, Lisbeth in Larsson's Millennium trilogy intentionally embarks on a revenge mission to kill rapists and murderers of women and thus becomes what Maria Tatar calls "a crusader for social justice" (50). Both characters' murders directed at sexual abusers do indicate a certain cultural shift, one "that acknowledges women's mobility and access to skills traditionally coded as masculine" (52). Just as Lisbeth, in her confession to Easy about killing Teran, Daphne attains a level of composure, a combination of the cool calculating trickster spirit combined with her survival instincts as a victim of sexual violence.

As Mills notes, "while the male trickster is categorically mobile, women's 'proper' space . . . was culturally understood to be the stable and secure interior of households, not the . . . road" (48). Nonetheless, with the reinvention of new identities in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the woman trickster can and oftentimes does exit the communal domestic space and suddenly navigates the spaces strictly limited to men. Daphne's survival in the high-risk environment through continuous movement shows her resilience and the role of a survivor and a cheater of death which in the novel is interchangeably understood and negatively perceived by Easy as her personifying the devil. While at first Easy overlooks Daphne's complicity, his first-person narration subjectively constructs Daphne as the villain as his infatuation with her ceases. White femme fatales have been habitually categorized into two roles, as phantoms of male desire and fright, or as symbols of power entailing social commentary on unlimited female power whose lust is driven by a greater, ambiguous motivation (Grossman 19). It is thus the two-fold interpretative decision reliant on the receiver's semiotic judgment that, by considering feminist literary criticism, positions Daphne's verbal and physical belligerence to fit the "agent of evil" trope of other femme fatales and their intent to murder and defraud. Propelled as the typical femme fatale and corresponding to gendered fantasies, Daphne's intricate backstory gets deluged by the central story of Easy's own development. According to the theory of interpretation, Daphne's ambiguous portrayal illustrates the critical interpretative

debate of how to first classify what the sender as the author aims to reveal and second what the text indicates separate from the sender's intention; the text itself is therefore fragmented into its textual cohesion and information the receiver retrieves based on their individual suppositions (Eco 59).

The sender's revision of the femme fatale in the novel avoids the common divisive hostility between the femme fatale and other female characters since Daphne interacts almost solely with men. Employing the motif of the fatal woman as a self-governing and psychologically driven antagonist with an equivocal set of morals eventually ends with the continuation of Daphne's independent nature. Although the end suggests Daphne escaped to refrain from further confrontations, her exit more likely proposes the need of agents of the patriarchy to classify her as deviant. When Daphne first meets Easy, she adjusts her trickery to feminine stereotypes by appearing innocent and smiling "like a child" (Mosley 98). Categorizing herself as "just a girl" (97) further leads to Easy infantilizing her, which offers Daphne leverage in Easy's certainty of her white woman's purity. As the first example of her shapeshifting abilities, her femme fatale nature is at first concealed. In a matter of seconds, Daphne is capable of switching to her other identity of the femme fatale when she and Easy find her former boyfriend Richard dead in his house. It is she who acts coolly and efficiently – something more expected of Easy as the war veteran – when she tells him to "go to sleep and treat it like a dream. . . . That's a dead man, Mr. Rawlins. He's dead and gone. You just go home and forget what you saw" (101). She does not need to play a child in front of Easy anymore; despite being shocked that Richard died, there is no remorse preventing her from giving Easy direct orders. Daphne's behavior is unpredictable; she suddenly changes from a childlike-looking virtuous woman into one of mystery and temperament with salacious manners when she kisses Easy unprompted and explicitly suggests that under different circumstances, she would let him "eat this little white girl up" (101); the moment marks her transformation from a girl into a woman lacking morals and control, resembling a trickster unable to resist the temptation to satisfy her hunger.

Easy identifies Daphne as a "chameleon lizard" who changes "for her man" (187) and observes her capacity to change her demeanor further reflects in her later behavior, which is conventionally perceived as masculine. Daphne's double-voiced narrative lies in her Signifyin(g); Daphne within the narrative becomes the sender, verbalizing a thought in a specific way with the other person as a receiver being deceived and offered a limitless amount of meanings. With Easy as the narrative voice, stereotypical male projections about female desire become one of *Devil*'s central plot aspects. Furthermore, as a shapeshifter and boundary-crosser, Daphne is likewise compared to a man in her effortless embodiment of conventional mannerism of both genders when she "[urinates] so loud that it [reminds Easy] more of a man" (Mosley 186).

Tied to her skillful imitation, she further exhibits shamelessness and explicitly expresses her sexual desires. She does not wait for Easy's consent when she grabs his penis and asks if it hurts him to love her. Daphne's shameless speech is the first sign of her appetites, the neediness and greed that drive a trickster's belly. Easy notes how shameful Daphne's words make him feel when she holds him around the testicles, looking straight into his face while stroking his "erection up and down" (Mosley 186). When she stands over the tub and looks down on Easy, she tells him: "If my pussy was like a man's thing it'd be as big as your head" (186). This time, it is not Easy who views Daphne as a man, it is Daphne herself. Her deliberate behavior mixed with vulgarity proves the multiple identities that hide behind her two-ness. Because words are the trickster's medium, the trickster becomes the embodiment of a fluid, flexible, and politically radical narrative form. If we see Daphne's femininity and masculinity as interacting languages within the novel, it represents the release of diverse voices from what Smith calls "the hegemony of a single and unitary language" (Smith 12). Smith further notes how "tricksters can parody languages and worldviews because of their liminal cultural position. Their location outside the rigid social structures gives them a privileged perspective. A feminine language lives on the boundary and overthrows the hierarchies. The female voice laughs in the face of authority" (12).

Daphne challenges the binary and the established order including individual and communal identity. As the woman trickster, she is adjusted to the stereotypes of femininity and manages to pretend to be white, and look innocent, shy, and childlike. She is aware that being perceived as a girl would spark protectiveness in Easy, which is how she masks her secrets. Daphne's amorality manifests itself in stealing money from a dead man. She decides never to be seen again, and thus reveals the possibility of her trickster nature as a restless traveler, belonging to both worlds and not fitting in either. Despite her actions leading to the death of multiple people, Easy lets her go in the end with no repercussions and neither regards her complicity despite his strict classification of Daphne as the devil. Hence, to Easy, this villainous nature does not tie her to the murders. Due to exerting socially inappropriate behavior, Easy labelling Daphne as evil in the end is not deemed surprising. Despite Easy dealing with racism and racist hate crimes against him and the African American Watts community, he is still protected by established sociocultural norms of the patriarchy.

Nonetheless, according to Hyde, "the Devil and the trickster are not the same thing, though they have regularly been confused" (Hyde). Misinterpreting one for the other may aim at constructing trickster figures as homogenous entities, when in fact it is the ambiguity of tricksters' amorality that sets them apart from the devil. Furthermore, the uncertainty of Daphne's persona is emphasized by her femme fatale traits

that lead to even lesser clarity about her character. Daphne's refusal to abide by societal rules by passing shows her daring nature. Daphne's two-ness lies in not distinguishing between life and death; she appears in between one world known for its opportunities, and another known for irreversibly taking them. This chaos that Daphne inflicts upon Easy prevents him to see her as a potential perpetrator. Easy feels alive when he is with Daphne, at the same time, his thoughts of death further point to Daphne's trickster traits and her effortless traveling between opposing layers of one's being. In twentieth-century hard-boiled fiction, Daphne displays how trickery commonly associated with male characters, and the femme fatale trope usually associated with white women characters, pose political resistance and a change in constructing trickster character traits in a postcolonial narrative.

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Blaming the Mother: New Momism and Failed Matriarchy in Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects*

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Abstract

This chapter investigates the representation of motherhood in Gillian Flynn's novel *Sharp Objects* (2006). The novel's focus on the domestic and maternal illustrates its participation in contemporary thematic trends in two broader genres: crime fiction and domestic noir. Based on a close reading of the novel's representation of motherhood, this chapter argues that *Sharp Objects* reinforces patriarchal ideology on two levels. Firstly, the novel echoes the cultural myth of Mother Blame by creating a genealogy of perverted motherhood in the family of protagonist and first-person narrator Camille, connecting them through Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy as a plot device. In so doing, it also reinforces the essentialist gender ideology of New Momism, coined by Douglas and Michaels, because motherhood is perverted either through neglect or 'over'-nurture. Secondly, the novel implies that these perversions of motherhood are connected to a 'lack' of patriarchal order by representing Camille's family as matriarchal, and therefore 'toxic,' because fathers are absent and passive. The chapter shows how the novel meaningfully contrasts Camille's biological, matriarchal family with an idealized example of a nuclear, patriarchal family particularly towards its end: because Camille experiences a significant improvement of her mental health while staying with the nuclear, patriarchal family, *Sharp Objects* thereby valorizes this family unit, suggesting that motherhood becomes perverted and harmful for children especially within familial structures that 'lack' a patriarchal order.

Keywords

Introduction

Towards the end of *Sharp Objects*, one of the novel's mother figures, named Adora, tells a story about her mother Joya to her adult daughter Camille:

> "When I was a little girl, my mother took me into the North Woods and left me," Adora said. "She didn't seem angry or upset. Indifferent. Almost bored. She didn't explain why. She didn't say a word to me, in fact. Just told me to get in the car. I was barefoot. When we got there, she took me by the hand and very efficiently pulled me along the trail, then off the trail, then dropped my hand and told me not to follow her. I was eight, just a small thing. My feet were ripped into strips by the time I got home, and she just looked up at me from the evening paper, and went to her room." (304-05)

When Camille asks Adora why she is telling her this story, Adora responds: "'When a child knows that young that her mother doesn't care for her, bad things happen'" (305). This is a key moment in the novel for two reasons. First, Adora's story and evaluation of it clearly echo the concept of Mother Blame. According to this concept, a child's development is dependent primarily on their mother and, thereby, any 'defects' in children are the fault of mothers alone for failing to conform to societal ideals of mothering. Adora's story does exactly that: It characterizes Joya and her performance of motherhood as not conforming to essentialist ideals of it as inherently nurturing and loving. In the story, Joya is, after all, "[i]ndifferent" to Adora, "[a]lmost bored" (304). Adora's suggestion that "bad things happen" when a child does not receive love from their mother then anticipates her own version of mothering, although Adora herself does not evaluate it as bad (305): Because Joya did not provide loving care, Adora developed an obsessive need to care for her daughters. She even explains this to Camille once she is done with the story: "I wanted to love you, Camille. But you were so hard . . . . Let me take care of you, Camille. Just once, need me" (305).

Second, Adora's story also reproduces the concept of Mother Blame in the sense that she holds Joya responsible for her own non-conformity to essentialist ideals of motherhood. A few pages before Adora tells the story, Camille is at the local hospital to investigate the death of her younger half-sister Marian. Before Marian's death, Adora used to frequent that hospital with her daughter because Marian was often sick. There, however, Camille talks to a nurse who had filed a report years earlier in which she describes her suspicion that Adora suffers from Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy (MSbP) and that Marian's symptoms of illness are induced by Adora. The nurse even provides a, if somewhat biased, definition of it: "The caregiver, usually the mother, *almost always* the mother, makes her child ill to get attention for herself" (293; italics in original). She continues: "You got MBP, you make your child sick to show what a kind, doting mommy you are" (293).[1] When Camille learns about her mother's illness, she also concludes that Adora must have poisoned Marian for years, killing her eventually when Camille was thirteen. Just like her mother Joya, then, Adora does not conform to essentialist ideals of motherhood and, in fact, perverts motherhood through 'over'-nurture that results in murder. Whether Adora herself is aware that she suffers from MSbP is unclear, but it is also not relevant.

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[1] Although the term MSbP is no longer in usage in medical discourse, I am adopting it here because it is employed in the novel's story world. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2022) terms the disorder not MSbP but "Factitious Disorder Imposed on Another (Previously Factitious Disorder by Proxy)" and defines it as the "Falsification of physical or psychological signs or symptoms, or induction of injury or disease, in another, associated with identified perception" (367). The diagnosed individual thus "presents another individual (victim) to others as ill, impaired, or injured" (367). Importantly, then, "the perpetrator, not the victim, is given the diagnosis," whereas "the victim may be given an abuse diagnosis" (368).

What is much more relevant is the causality Adora and her story imply: By juxtaposing Joya's and her own version of mothering, Adora implies her version of mothering to be reactive to her mother's and thereby reproduces the concept of Mother Blame.

Such cautionary examples of 'bad' mothers who are allegedly responsible for defects and developmental issues in children are ubiquitous in *Sharp Objects*. And, as I will show, they are always placed within family structures that suggest a matriarchal hierarchy. I argue here that, through this interplay of representing motherhood as perverted *and* as originating from matriarchal family structures, the novel eventually valorizes the patriarchal, nuclear family and thereby patriarchal ideology. To show this, I first demonstrate how the novel represents motherhood as perverted either through neglect or 'over'-nurture in the form of MSbP. The novel thus perpetuates a narrow and essentialist ideal of motherhood that is similar to the one propagated by what Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels have called "New Momism," a gender ideology they claim emerged in the 1980s (4). By employing MSbP in the first place, the novel also echoes the concept of Mother Blame and creates a genealogy of perverted motherhood within Camille's family that intensifies from generation to generation. In a second step, I show that *Sharp Objects* and particularly its ending further valorize the patriarchal, nuclear family by contrasting Camille's biological family with her boss and his wife. While the former is represented as a 'toxic' and matriarchal family because fathers are absent either literally or figuratively by being passive and motherhood is perverted, the second family unit represents the ideal of the patriarchal, nuclear family. Importantly, Camille can improve her mental health only within the latter. The novel thereby implies that motherhood becomes perverted and harmful for children especially within familial structures that 'lack' a patriarchal order.

While I concur with interpretations of *Sharp Objects* that point out the novel's subversive potential regarding gender roles, I argue that this potential is not fully realized. Alyson Miller, for example, claims that the novel negotiates cultural anxieties about the "monstrous mother" who poses a threat to the patriarchal system by not conforming to hegemonic ideals of motherhood (495). Through its insistence on the superiority of the nuclear, patriarchal family at the end, however, I argue that *Sharp Objects* not only dramatizes patriarchal anxieties, but also reinforces patriarchal ideologies. Similarly, Malinda K. Hackett interprets the female characters in the novel as "creat[ing] a visual rhetoric that disrupts idealized versions of femaleness" (81). According to her, the women "partake in performative acts of pathology to reject notions of idealized femininity, beauty, and motherhood" (80). This is true: By perverting motherhood in the first place, the novel reconceptualizes and, to some extent, challenges essentialist conceptions of it as inherently nurturing. However, I contend that this critique has its limits because other essentialist and patriarchal

ideologies, most importantly those of New Momism and Mother Blame, are perpetuated at the same time.

Such ideological tensions and contradictions regarding gender are ubiquitous in contemporary crime novels that focus on the domestic – and *Sharp Objects* clearly is part of this trend, too. In fact, with the onset of the twenty-first century, the crime novel has seen a growing interest in the domestic, not only as a geographical location but also as a spatial meaning-making entity regarding gender roles and motherhood. Nowhere does this become clearer than in the name 'domestic noir,' a currently immensely popular subgenre in crime fiction, whose beginnings are commonly traced back to Gillian Flynn's 2012-bestseller *Gone Girl* (Joyce 4). Scholars of crime fiction locate one of the reasons for this contemporaneous interest in the domestic in the rise of neoliberalism, that is, the expansion of political and economic thinking into all public and private spheres governed by an emphasis on, i.a., privatization, individualism, and entrepreneurialism. Ruth Cain, for example, argues that the dominant neoliberal ethos of individualism and the growing privatization of family life lend themselves to a dramatization of "crucial conflicts of neoliberal maternal life" in the genre of domestic noir (290). While I concur with this contextual reading of domestic noir texts that focus on the maternal, neoliberalism as a concept does not explicitly factor into my interpretation here for reasons of brevity. A more holistic interpretation of motherhood in *Sharp Objects* could include pondering the question of how neoliberal contexts influence the understanding of this text's representation of motherhood.

Sharp Objects and New Momism: A Genealogy of Perverted Motherhood

The genealogy of perverted motherhood, as mentioned in the introduction, reaches over three generations in the family of protagonist Camille. At the same time, it intensifies from generation to generation. This section unravels this genealogy and shows how the novel's three central mother figures – Camille's grandmother Joya, her mother Adora, and her half-sister Amma – pervert motherhood through either neglect or 'over'-nurture. In the novel's present, Camille travels from Chicago to her hometown Wind Gap as a journalist to investigate the murders of the local teenagers Ann and Natalie. Because Camille stays at her mother Adora's mansion, she must confront memories of her childhood and her deceased half-sister Marian. As explained earlier, she learns towards the novel's end that Adora, suffering from MSbP, killed Marian. While the novel conditions readers for a long while to assume that Adora has killed Ann and Natalie, too, they learn in a final plot twist that it was Camille's thirteen-year-old half-sister Amma. Although Amma is not a mother biologically, the way she kills Ann and Natalie echoes Adora's perverted performance of motherhood and murder of Marian, and she thus appropriates motherhood

through these murders. As such, Amma stays true to her telling name, itself an anagram of 'Mama.'

Through these perverted performances of motherhood, I argue, *Sharp Objects* perpetuates a motherhood ideal as promulgated by the gender ideology of New Momism. Coined by Douglas and Michaels in 2004, New Momism prescribes hegemonic ideals of motherhood that are based on an essentialist perception of gender and rests on three core beliefs: It insists "that no woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she has kids, that women remain the best primary caretakers of children, and that to be a remotely decent mother, a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being, 24/7, to her children" (Douglas and Michaels 4). In so doing, the ideology promotes a mothering ideal coined "intensive mothering" by Sharon Hays, requiring women to define themselves exclusively through their role as mother, to "expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children," and to exhibit "unselfish nurturing" while doing so (Hays x). These markers illustrate that New Momism is a distinctly narrow ideal: After all, it also "insist[s] that mothers perfectly regulate their behavior, that they never become over-invested in their kids but never seem underinvested, either" (Douglas and Michaels 152). Ultimately, women must walk a fine line to be deemed a good mother: They must be caring, but not too caring, and their mothering must be, above all, selfless.

What New Momism's narrow motherhood ideal reveals, then, is the ideology's propensity to reinforce the concept of Mother Blame. The ideology suggests that a mother's failure to conform to the ideal results in long-term damage in her children. It implies that "[i]f mothers screw up" by failing to perform motherhood according to the three core beliefs named earlier, the result would be "permanent psychological and/or physical damage" (6). This causality is also evidenced by a case study conducted by Douglas and Michaels in which they analyze news stories from the late 1980s until the mid-90s which put forth the narrative that the largest threat for children comes "from mom herself" (140). They show that, within that period, the media "built an interlocking, cumulative image of the dedicated, doting 'mom' versus the delinquent, bad 'mother'" (7). Mother Blame thus is a central myth propagated by New Momism.

As I have already detailed in the introduction, Joya deviates from the New Momism ideal through her neglectful and loveless mothering. In addition to how Adora's story, quoted in the introduction, depicts her mother, Adora also tells Camille that Joya "never loved [her]" and characterizes her mother as "cold and distant" (190). Other characters in the novel describe Adora and Joya's relationship as similarly lacking affection. For example, one of Adora's childhood friends explains to Camille that Joya never "smile[d] at [Adora] or touch[ed] her in a loving way" (258). Instead of such "loving" touches, she recalls that Joya treated Adora like an object at her

convenience. When Adora needed some form of nurture, Joya seemed to hierarchize her own pleasure. For example, "[w]hen Adora peeled from a sunburn . . . Joya would sit next to [her], strip off her shirt, and peel the skin off in long strips" (258). And, most importantly: "Joya loved *that*," meaning the pleasure Adora's body could afford her but not Adora herself (258; emphasis added). Joya's performance of motherhood as loveless thus perverts New Momism's essentialist conception of it.

Importantly, the same childhood friend who describes Joya and Adora's relationship as lacking love also contends that "Adora was . . . overly mothered" by Joya (258). This suggests that Joya, too, may have suffered from MSbP. After all, the same childhood friend also remembers that "'Adora was sick all the time. She was always having tubes and needles and such stuck in her'" (259). The novel thereby draws a connection between Adora's illnesses as a child and those of her daughter Marian, and this connection is reinforced by using similar imagery. An image similar to the "tubes and needles" stuck in Adora also appears in one of Camille's childhood memories of her sister: "Marian was a sweet series of diseases. She had trouble breathing from the start," Camille narrates (96-97). "Later she had trouble digesting and sat murmuring to her dolls in a hospital bed set up in her room, while [Adora] poured sustenance into her *through IVs and feeding tubes*" (97; emphasis added). Through this, the novel equates Adora's and Marian's experiences, implying that Adora may have been the victim of MSbP as well. In the end, whether Joya really had MSbP or not is not relevant. What is important is that the implication of her *potentially* having suffered from it and then having passed it on to her daughter Adora is there, and the novel thereby clearly echoes the concept of Mother Blame.

Although my focus here is on the mother figures in Camille's family and how they pervert motherhood ideals, various other 'bad' mothers appear in the novel, adding to its perpetuation of New Momism's narrow motherhood ideal. As the first-person narrator in *Sharp Objects*, Camille functions to connect these examples of 'bad' motherhood through her judgmental narration. In fact, the first quarter of *Sharp Objects* functions as a general introduction to the theme of motherhood with a focus on 'bad' mothers who deviate from the ideal by being neglectful. One of these examples appears on the novel's first page. Working as a journalist, and before traveling from Chicago to Wind Gap, Camille tells the story of Tammy Davis whose version of motherhood she clearly evaluates as 'bad':

> My story for the day was a limp sort of evil. Four kids, ages two through six, were found locked in a room on the South Side with a couple of tuna sandwiches and a quart of milk. They'd been left three days, flurrying like chickens over the food and feces on the carpet. Their mother had wandered off for a suck on the pipe and just forgotten. Sometimes that happens. No cigarette burns, no bone snaps. Just an irretrievable slipping. I'd seen the mother after the arrest: twenty-two-year-old Tammy Davis, blonde and fat, with pink rouge on her cheeks in two perfect circles the size of shot glasses. (1)

That Camille judges Tammy is clear because she introduces the story to readers as a "limp sort of evil" in the first place. Although Camille concedes that Tammy had "just forgotten" her kids and "[s]ometimes that happens," her initial description of the story as "evil" implies a degree of intentionality on Tammy's part. Particularly the image that Camille's narration invokes in the reader's mind of a young, drug-abusing mother who forgot about her children for a quick drug fix establishes that Camille is speaking from an assumed moral high ground. The description of Tammy's "pink rouge on her cheeks in two perfect circles the size of shot glasses" only broadens the notion of drug abuse through the reference to alcohol. At the same time, Tammy's neglect of her own appearance – suggested by her 'bad' make-up application and because Camille describes her as "fat" – implies a similar neglect towards her children. Tammy's 'fatness' furthermore characterizes her as selfish in Camille's eyes: while her children are "flurrying like chickens" over the inadequate food Tammy left for them, her body bears signs of overeating. Camille's judgment becomes more explicit later when she describes having had a dream about "the item on *miserable* Tammy Davis and her four *locked-up* children" (33; emphases added).

This introduction of 'bad' mothering via Tammy conditions readers to perceive neglectful mothering as most harmful for children through Camille's narration. In this context, Adora's performance of motherhood becomes significant: her version of mothering is introduced to readers as diametrically opposed to Tammy's, the 'bad' mother, because she is hyper-focused on nurturing and her mother role, among other things. Adora thus fulfills, or at least seems to fulfill, the ideal of "intensive mothering" purported by New Momism (Hays x). Importantly, though, Camille's narration still conditions readers to perceive even Adora's version of mothering as 'bad' by presenting it as peculiar and inappropriate, on the one hand, and by establishing that it continues the genealogy of perverted motherhood in the family initiated by Joya, on the other hand.

The peculiarity and inappropriateness of Adora's performance of motherhood is most obvious in her tendency to 'babyfy' her thirteen-year-old daughter Amma. This is exemplified best by the first representation of Adora in her role as mother that the reader encounters. A few days into Camille staying at her mother's house, she narrates the following episode: "Amma and my mother sat on the couch, my mother cradling Amma – in a woolen nightgown despite the heat – as she held an ice cube to her lips. My half-sister stared up at me with blank contentment, then went back to playing with a glowing mahogany table" for her dollhouse (Flynn 73). Although Amma is thirteen years old at the time, Adora still "cradl[es]" her daughter like a baby, something that seems even more peculiar when considering the size of Amma's body at that age. That Amma is playing with furniture for a dollhouse only intensifies the peculiarity. Like Camille's judgmental description of Tammy earlier, the way she narrates this scene between Adora and Amma as peculiar achieves a

similar effect in the reader, namely, to judge Adora's performance of motherhood as undesirable and transgressive. This becomes clearest in the way she introduces the episode to readers: "The scene was startling, it was so much like the old days with Marian" (73). As such, the "scene" not only functions to condition readers to evaluate Adora's version of mothering as "startling" and, therefore, peculiar, but also to foreshadow her suffering from MSbP by comparing the episode to Camille's memories of her deceased half-sister Marian.

The scene furthermore exemplifies how Adora perverts motherhood through conditional motherly love. In fact, as detailed in the introduction already, Adora herself suggests that because her own mother Joya neglected her, she developed a reactionary version of mothering that is conditional on her daughters' readiness to accept her love. Adora even admits this to Camille: "'You remind me of my mother. Joya. . . . My mother never loved me, either. And if you girls won't love me, I won't love you'" (190). Adora thereby also stays true to her telling name: She wants to be loved and 'adored' by her daughters, and only then does she love them back.

What is more, Adora's conditional motherly love and her habit of babyfying Amma are linked, showcasing her insistence that her daughters perform their role in alignment with her performance of motherhood. The scene quoted earlier where Adora "cradl[es]" Amma exemplifies that Adora and Amma's respective performances of mother- and daughterhood are reciprocal: Adora nurtures and Amma happily and passively receives her mother's care, evidenced by her "star[ing] up at Camille with blank contentment" (73). Adora's children thus only receive her love if they readily accept her mothering and thereby perform daughterhood in alignment with her role as mother. Camille, for example, remembers that she often refused her mother's 'care' in the form of medicine, or rather poison; her half-sister Marian, by contrast, did not. In the novel's present, Camille realizes that this made her lose Adora's "full attention as a mother" (74). This is even corroborated by Adora herself. In a diary entry from 1982, six years before Marian's death, she explains: "I've decided today to stop caring for Camille and focus on Marian. Camille has never become a good patient," which is, of course, Adora's way of expressing that Camille has never been a 'good daughter' (309). In fact, Adora's identity as a mother is dependent on her daughters being both: daughters *and* patients. This becomes clear when Adora continues explaining that "'Camille doesn't like me to touch her. I've never heard of such a thing. . . . I hate her'" (309). Camille's half-sister Marian, on the other hand, is a good patient/daughter: "Marian is such a doll when she's ill, she dotes on me terribly and wants me with her all the time. I love wiping away her tears" (309).[2]

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[2] It is meaningful that Adora refers to Marian as "a doll" when she praises her performance of daughterhood. In fact, Adora not only babyfies her daughters but also 'dollifies' them, thereby imposing specific gendered performances onto them and effecting, as Miller argues, "a static vision in which girls are little more than objects of beauty and play" (497). Although Adora's habit

Adora's and Camille's relationship thus exemplifies Adora's conditional motherly love. In the scene quoted earlier in which Adora "cradles" Amma, for example, Adora ignores Camille consciously precisely *because* Camille does not conform to her mother's insistence on an idealized performance of daughterhood. Camille explains that she "was about to linger near [her] mother, waiting for her to put an arm around [her], too" (74). Adora, however, does not show any reaction: "My mother and Amma said nothing. My mother didn't even look up at me, just nuzzled Amma in closer to her, and cooed into her ear" (74). While this description of Adora might be read as her conforming to motherhood ideals because she is seemingly so invested in her role as mother that she forgets her surroundings, it must be read instead as a conscious choice by Adora to ignore Camille because Camille has never performed femininity in alignment with her performance of motherhood. In fact, Camille's stepfather Alan acknowledges and even speaks to Camille in the same scene, meaning that Adora not noticing Camille's arrival is even more unlikely.

On a broader level, Adora's insistence that her daughters match her performance of motherhood relates to further, collectively perceived gendered ideals in Camille's hometown, Wind Gap. According to Miller, because the novel is set in Missouri, this local ideal of femininity is highly influenced by "the social rules of Southern etiquette" which insist on "feminine behaviors that fulfil gendered stereotypes of passivity, silence, and compliance" (495). Adora herself regards these ideals highly in her daughters and attempts to enforce them through her mothering. Therefore, her loveless relationship with Camille must also be understood as Adora despising Camille's infringement of these local ideals of femininity: Precisely because Camille does not perform her role as daughter by passively accepting her mother's nurture, she fell out of favor with Adora. Adora's conditional motherly love is thus dependent on her daughters not only matching her performance of motherhood but also conforming to the local ideal of femininity.

The genealogy of perverted motherhood then finds its climax in Adora's daughter and Camille's half-sister Amma. Her murders of the local teenagers Ann and Natalie must be read as a climactic doubling of Adora's actions and recall both Adora's and Wind Gapians' insistence on idealized femininity. The novel introduces Ann and Natalie to readers as violating these ideals, thereby equating them. Ann's father, for example, tells Camille a story of Ann rejecting markers of idealized femininity: "My wife wanted to put her hair in rollers the night before school photos. Ann chopped it off instead. She was a willful thing. A tomboy" (26). Similarly, Natalie's brother describes Natalie as "kind of a tomboy," too (160). The girls are also equated through their propensity for violence. According to stories by police chief Vickery and other

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of dollifying her daughters is another example of how she perverts motherhood, I am not further elaborating on this here for reasons of brevity.

locals, "[t]he girls weren't friends. Their only connection was their shared viciousness" (90). Vickery, for example, tells Camille that Ann "had killed a neighbor's pet bird with a stick" and Natalie and her family had "moved here [to Wind Gap] two years ago because she stabbed one of her classmates in the eye with a pair of scissors" (57). He even agrees with Camille's sarcastic comment that everyone in a small town like Wind Gap "knows who the bad seeds are" (57). Vickery's agreement suggests a communal perception of the girls as "bad" and highlights that these ideals of femininity are not just reinforced by Adora or a few locals but rather by the community generally.

Considering both Ann and Natalie's obvious rejection of idealized femininity, then, Amma murdering them functions as a symbolic correction of the other, 'not-ideal'-feminine. This is evidenced by Amma's *modus operandi* both before and after the killings which imposes stereotypical feminine beautification onto them. According to the FBI agent supporting the police investigation, "Natalie's fingernails were painted a bright pink. Ann's legs were shaved. They both had lipstick applied at some point" (299). In so doing, Amma exaggerates Adora's perverted performance of motherhood to an extreme: While Adora 'nurtures' only those daughters who conform to idealized femininity, Amma violently imposes those ideals onto Ann and Natalie. As Miller argues, Amma's murders enforce "an ideological framework" of ideal femininity by "ironically expos[ing] an insistence on the articulation of feminine behaviors that fulfil gendered stereotypes" (495).

What is more, Amma's *modus operandi* after the murders recalls the babyfying she experiences at the hands of Adora in a much more perverted way: By pulling the girls' teeth, Amma symbolically babyfies Ann and Natalie and violently enforces herself as their mother figure.[3] When Camille finds Natalie's corpse in the middle of town, the way Amma has placed her body functions as a symbolic reminder of how to perform femininity 'correctly': Her body is "aimed out at the sidewalk," visible to passengers, and she is "[w]edged in the foot-wide space between the hardware store and the beauty parlor" (34), two places denoting stereotypical masculinity and femininity. This placement comments on Natalie's liminal position as "tomboy," on the one hand. On the other hand, it reflects Amma's criticism of exactly that: Natalie's gendered performance is liminal, a death sentence in a town that, according to Camille, "demands utmost femininity in its fairer sex" (17).

As I have shown, *Sharp Objects* establishes a genealogy of perverted motherhood that intensifies from generation to generation. While the novel only implies that Joya

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[3] That Amma pulls the girls' teeth also recalls Adora's habit of dollifying her daughters – which I mentioned in the previous footnote – albeit in an exaggerated way. Camille's description of Natalie's corpse corroborates this: With her teeth pulled, Natalie's "lips [cave] in around her gums in a small circle. She look[s] like a plastic baby-doll, the kind with the built-in hole for bottle feedings" (35).

may have suffered from MSbP, a nurse diagnoses Adora within the story world. Moreover, it is never clear whether Joya had any other children apart from Adora, but she clearly never killed Adora – although Joya abandoning Adora in the forest could be interpreted as attempted murder. Adora, on the other hand, *has* killed Marian. Joya and Adora's perversions of motherhood thus focus on their biological children. Amma, by contrast, and of course this is also because she is only thirteen, kills children who are not her biological children, imposing her role as mother onto them violently. Through this genealogy of perverted motherhood within Joya, Adora, and Amma, the novel suggests that their versions of motherhood are causally connected. In so doing, *Sharp Objects* perpetuates the myth of Mother Blame, also one of the central beliefs of the New Momism ideology, and thereby also supports the patriarchal system within which this ideology and myth are fostered in the first place.

Sharp Objects and Failed Matriarchy: Valorizing the Patriarchal Family

Apart from its propagation of Mother Blame and New Momism, *Sharp Objects* furthermore reinforces patriarchal ideology because it valorizes the patriarchal, nuclear family both throughout the novel and particularly through its ending. Tellingly, the novel's tagline on its front cover already suggests with a pun that non-patriarchal family structures, such as matriarchally hierarchized ones, are a breeding ground for toxicity, to use the terminology in the tagline. Referring to Camille's family, it declares that "[t]his family isn't nuclear, it's toxic." Importantly, the previously analyzed perversions of motherhood in Camille's family – the toxicity to which the tagline refers – originate from family structures that 'lack' a patriarchal order. *Sharp Objects* thus implies that matriarchally structured family units are a 'toxic,' unhealthy breeding ground for perverted motherhood because they cannot produce children without developmental issues. In so doing, the novel ultimately valorizes the patriarchal, nuclear family by representing it as the only family unit able to do so instead.

The 'lack' of patriarchal order within Camille's family, just like perverted motherhood, is multi-generational, and reaches across two generations. Camille's family is matriarchally structured because, on the one hand, husbands and fathers are absent either literally – such as Camille's biological father about whom she "knows almost nothing" (96) – or figuratively because they are quiet and passive. Camille's grandfather, for example, was so passive that a family friend "do[es]n't even remember his name. Herbert? Herman? He was never around, and when he was, he was just quiet and... away" (259). The same family friend also equates both father figures in Camille's family by describing them as similarly passive and by explaining that Camille's grandfather was just "like Alan" (259), Marian and Amma's biological father and Camille's stepfather. On the other hand, the mother figures in Camille's family,

particularly Adora, hold more power than the father figures. Early in the novel, Camille explains that Adora insisted that she "was to be considered Alan's child" (96). Both Camille and Alan lived by that rule, negotiating Adora's position of power in the family. As a father figure, however, Alan was only a façade, a means to portray a public image of an idyllic nuclear, patriarchal family. Camille remembers that she was "never really fathered by him, never encouraged to call him anything but his proper name" (96). Instead, Camille explains that "Adora prefers [them] to feel like strangers" and "wants all relationships in the house to run through her" (96), further cementing her position of power within the family. Adora's powerful position as matriarch is substantiated by Camille's characterization of Alan, which underlines not only his passivity but also his subordination to Adora: Alan is "a ribbon-winning equestrian who doesn't ride anymore because it makes Adora nervous" and who "seems content to let my mother do most of the talking" (96). Evidently, then, the family structures within which perverted motherhood is fostered in *Sharp Objects* are distinctly non-patriarchal.

In this context, Camille's relationship to her boss at the newspaper in Chicago, Frank Curry, referred to as Curry, and his wife Eileen is meaningful. As a family unit, they function as a foil to Camille's biological family and represent the ideal of a nuclear and patriarchally structured family. Although Curry and Eileen seemingly deviate from this ideal because they have no children, Camille's relationship to them mirrors that of a child-parent relationship. Importantly, Camille assumes that Curry and Eileen are not without children by choice. Instead, she suspects that "they'd been unable to conceive" because they married late (100). Unlike her biological family, they provide comfort to her, Camille phones them regularly for advice, and especially Eileen has a soothing effect on her. Eileen conforms to essentialist ideals of femininity and, by extension, motherhood, although she is not a mother per se. When Camille phones the Currys one time and Eileen picks up, for example, Camille describes her voice as "soft and steady as a hill" (295). Another time, "Eileen was warm when she answered the phone, which was what [Camille] needed" while staying at her mother's house (101). Eileen's warmth thus contrasts with Adora's coldness, a characteristic Camille even points out to Adora: "I never felt anything but coldness from you" (190). Ultimately, Eileen is characterized to readers as particularly nurturing, and she thus also functions as a foil to Adora whose conditional motherly love deviates from idealized motherhood.

What is more, Eileen and Curry represent the ideal of a nuclear, patriarchal family because they perform their gendered roles within this unit in a way that matches idealized and essentialist conceptions of gender. As I have shown, it is particularly Eileen's warmth and soothing effect on Camille that mark her as conforming to idealized woman- and motherhood. Curry is also nurturing towards Camille, not only

in his roles as her boss and professional mentor but also as a substitute father figure.[4] Importantly, however, he retains a relative distance as well as a gender and age hierarchy and thereby performs his role in a way that matches essentialist and patriarchal conceptions of it. This is exemplified by Curry's nicknames for Camille. He refers to Camille either as "kiddo" (2, 6) or "my girl" (80, 101), two nicknames which invoke a stereotypical father-daughter relationship, or as "Cubby" (102, 215, 216, 296), an endearment of "cub reporter" (102). Curry's double role of professional mentor and father figure is also implied in the nickname "Cubby": it is both close to his own name, 'Curry,' and, at the same time, marks Camille as a "cub," that is, 'young reporter.' What is more, by calling Camille "kiddo," "girl," and "cub," Curry clearly establishes a hierarchy between the two based on their age difference, thereby retaining distance while expressing his fondness for Camille at the same time.

Another instance towards the novel's end furthermore exemplifies both Curry and Eileen's adherence to traditional gender roles in a rescue scene Camille imagines. This imagined scene highlights not only that Curry and Eileen represent the ideal of a nuclear, patriarchal family but also that Camille obviously yearns to be part of such a family unit precisely *because* she imagines them as conforming to that ideal in the first place. By the time in the novel when Camille imagines the scene, she has already grown increasingly suspicious and afraid of Adora, suspecting that she has killed her half-sister Marian and possibly also the local teenagers Ann and Natalie. Paralyzed by fear, with her "hands . . . sweating" while her mother is outside her room, Camille turns her mind to the Currys for comfort and imagines them rescuing her: "I had a flash of Curry, one of his crappy ties swinging wildly over his belly, bursting into the room to save me. Carrying me off in his smoky Ford Taurus, Eileen stroking my hair on the way back to Chicago" (244-45). It is telling that, even though the scene only happens in Camille's mind, the way that Curry and Eileen perform gender here conforms to essentialist conceptions of it and, by extension, to an idealized image of the patriarchal, nuclear family: Frank is strong and active, performing a fatherly and heroic role by "bursting into the room to save" Camille (244-45); Eileen, at the same time, is calm and comforting, simply "stroking [Camille's] hair" (245).

Eventually, this imagined rescue scene becomes a reality, albeit not as Hollywood-esque as in Camille's imagination. Regardless, the scene recalls the same values that the imagined one did because Curry and Eileen still adhere to traditional gender roles. For my final line of arguments to make sense, I want to summarize the order of events towards the novel's end: The police arrest Adora for the murders of Marian,

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[4] Although I stated in the introduction that neoliberalism does not factor into my interpretation, it is worth noting that Curry strikingly functions to connect neoliberalism and the domestic by being both Camille's professional mentor and a father figure for her. Through this, *Sharp Objects* links neoliberalism and patriarchy and equates them as positive systems.

Ann, and Natalie, assuming they are connected. Camille becomes Amma's guardian, and, together, they return to Chicago. There, Amma kills another teenager with the same *modus operandi*, thereby acquitting Adora of killing Ann and Natalie but not of killing Marian. Eventually, Amma is found guilty of murdering Ann, Natalie, and the teen in Chicago. Once both Adora and Amma are incarcerated, Curry and Eileen take Camille into their home. Now, their formerly childless family is no longer childless because Camille functions as their substitute child:

> Curry and Eileen packed my things and took me to their home, where I have a bed and some space in what was once a basement rec room. . . . I am learning to be cared for. I am learning to be parented. Eileen and Curry wake me in the morning and put me to bed with kisses (or in Curry's case, a gentle chuck under the chin). . . . Eileen runs my bath and sometimes brushes my hair. (321)

Although equality is suggested between the two, the way they care for Camille still recalls the separation of gendered roles in the earlier rescue scene. Eileen puts Camille "to bed with kisses," emphasis on the plural. Curry, on the other hand, gives Camille "a," meaning one, "gentle chuck under the chin." Curry retains his relative distance, and Eileen continues her nurturing care. The Currys thereby confirm their role as a patriarchal, nuclear family.

Within this family, Camille can now find comfort and improve her mental health. Recalling the novel's tagline, Camille's biological family is established as distinctly non-patriarchal and, therefore, 'toxic' and unhealthy. The Currys, by contrast, are the exact opposite, and only this family unit can allow Camille to better her mental health which has suffered greatly in her biological family. This is evidenced by the fact that neither her tendency to self-harm (which started in her youth and lasted into her adulthood), nor the genealogy of perverted motherhood continue now that she is living with Curry and Eileen, the ideal nuclear family. In fact, "[a]ll sharp objects have been locked up" by the two, but Camille explains that she "ha[s]n't tried too hard to get at them" anyways (321). She does not need to, she can now be a child, or rather, child-like, because she is now "learning to be cared for . . . learning to be parented," as she puts it (321).

Ultimately, the novel's last lines and particularly Camille's thoughts effect a final valorization of the patriarchal, nuclear family. *Sharp Objects* ends with Camille pondering the question whether she "was . . . good at caring for Amma because of kindness" when she was her guardian, or whether she "like[d] caring for Amma because [she] ha[s] Adora's sickness," that is, MSbP (321). Camille's answer to her question again suggests that the order the patriarchal, nuclear family provides and the development of idealized mother- and womanhood are connected: "Lately," Camille says, referring to her staying within the 'healing' patriarchal, nuclear family, "I've been leaning towards kindness" (321). By juxtaposing "kindness," connoting idealized motherhood as promulgated by New Momism, and "sickness," connoting perverted

motherhood, both Camille and the novel clearly hierarchize one over the other. At the same time, Camille's self-assessment of having been "good at caring for Amma" and her final "leaning towards kindness" imply that a woman is inherently 'good' and can perform motherhood with "kindness" if – and only if – she is part of a patriarchal family. The ending thus also implies that Camille can figuratively break the cycle of "sickness" within her family precisely because she is willing to join a patriarchal family.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have shown that *Sharp Objects* reinforces patriarchal ideology by creating a genealogy of perverted motherhood in Camille's family and thereby echoing the cultural myth of Mother Blame. Because these instances of perverted motherhood are placed within family units that 'lack' a patriarchal order, the novel also advocates for the superiority of the patriarchal, nuclear family. This is also evidenced by the 'healing' powers Camille experiences regarding her mental health while staying with Curry and Eileen, who represent an idealized version of the nuclear family and thereby function as a foil to Camille's biological family. While I acknowledge that the novel does reconceptualize motherhood to some extent by subverting essentialist conceptions of it as inherently nurturing, I have shown that this reconceptualization is limited precisely because other essentialist and patriarchal ideologies are clearly perpetuated at the same time.

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Serial Killers, Media Involvement, and the Layers of Masculinity

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Abstract

This chapter explores fictional representations of serial killers with respect to gender and behavioural patterns in Marie Belloc Lowndes' *The Lodger* (1913) and Meg Gardiner's *Unsub* (2018). Both novels draw from true crime events and feature fictionalised representations of two of the most notorious serial murderers in history: Jack the Ripper and the Zodiac. While both murderers' identities are still unknown, they are still commonly read as male – a conception also reproduced by the authors of the two novels. Simultaneously both fictional serial killers showcase instances of media involvement. This chapter argues that these literary representations of serial killers exaggerate stereotypical notions of masculinity similar to true crime narratives and are even more facilitated by the fictional perpetrators' ambitions to 'reach out to the media'. This analysis will be supported by a theoretical foundation of sex differences and (violent) crime in the real world, underpinned by a reflection on gender in true crime. This chapter will then juxtapose fact with fiction and examine to what degree the fictional offenders portray realistic or overdone representations of (male) serial killers.

Keywords

Serial killers, masculinity, gender stereotyping, true crime, media, media involvement

Serial killing is a staple of Western popular media. Although this type of crime is exceptionally rare,[1] it does not fail to attract enormous public interest and media attention which is why we seem so familiar "with the serial killer's domain of violence" nowadays (MacDonald 4). Having become ubiquitous in the late 1970s and 1980s, depictions of serial murderers have been circulating within our cultural discourse in various forms. While real-life cases are naturally covered largely by news media, representations of serial killers have also spilt over to entertainment media, including books, TV shows, films, video games and, most recently, podcasts.

Yet, considering both news and entertainment media, these characters are "almost always 'white' males" (MacDonald 8), whereas most victims are readily pictured as female. This might appear a logical implementation if we consider that about 60% of serial killers' victims are indeed women (Haggerty 181). Further, this paradigm

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[1] In the US, serial murder comprises approximately 1% of all homicides committed per annum, potentially even less (Jenkins 13).

also frames serial killing as an act stereotypically represented as inherently masculine which is enhanced by popular media representations, especially in true crime. Overall, "many more media portrayals focus on male serial killers, with an implicit assumption that such violence and aggression is an inherent male trait" (Silva and Rousseau 67). Correspondingly, MacDonald argues that within these portrayals, "[t]he assumed 'maleness' of the serial killer serves to reinforce patriarchal notions of female public activity – particularly female violence – as a disruption to 'natural' order. Traditionally, aggression and violence are associated with masculinity which, within patriarchal constraints, is to be embodied by men" (8).

From this perspective, the male perpetrator does not perform a "radical transgression against gender norms" as compared to female offenders (Binder 75). While a woman's act of violence is predominantly considered a threat for deviating against gender expectations, the male offender does not face the same societal verdict. Instead, many get glorified. Especially true crime narratives have been instrumental in elevating individuals like Ted Bundy, Charles Manson, or Jeffrey Dahmer to celebrity-like status while fortifying gender essentialist notions.

This chapter aims to explore the *gendered* issue of serial killing from a literary perspective and will investigate fictional representations of serial killers with respect to gender and behavioural patterns in Marie Belloc Lowndes' *The Lodger* (1913) and Meg Gardiner's *Unsub* (2018). Both novels draw on true crime events and feature fictionalised representations of two of the most notorious serial murderers in history: Jack the Ripper and the Zodiac. While both murderers' identities are still unknown, they are still commonly read as male – a conception also reproduced by the authors. Often, literary representations of serial killers tend to exaggerate stereotypical notions of masculinity, similar to true crime narratives. These, I claim, are even more facilitated by the novels' fictional perpetrators' ambitions to intentionally seek attention by reaching out to the media. Hence, I argue that the 'media involvement' of these male serial killers serves as an expression of their masculine identities. The following analysis will be supported by a theoretical foundation of sex differences and (violent) crime in the real world, underpinned by a subsequent reflection on gender in true crime. At the same time, this chapter wants to examine to what extent these fictionalised characters' media involvement constitutes an intensification of their embodied masculinity as represented in the novels.

Sex Differences and Gendered Perspectives on Extreme Violence

Statistically, about 85% of all recorded serial killings are perpetrated by men (Wilson 149). This paradigm is also reflected in the majority of academic discourse and media which "gives the impression that men are the only sex that repeatedly kills" which is by no means accurate (Gavin and Porter 146). Yet women exhibit a different relationship to aggression: qualitative studies show that girls' aggression is more

subtle and indirectly expressed compared to boys', usually resorting to gossip, forms of manipulation, slander, or even withdrawal of friendship (Micus-Loos 221). This divergence of aggressive behaviour can also be examined in the ways that women kill.

Women make up approximately 10% of registered serial murderers, though it is assumed that some cases – especially sexually motivated killings – may go unnoticed because they are attributed to male perpetrators (Neubauer-Petzoldt 165, 167). According to Harrison et al., "[m]ale perpetrated serial murder . . . is characteristically violent, sexually sadistic, and frequently committed against women" who are typically strangers to them (298). Female serial killers, in contrast, tend to target similar victims from their professional and private environment, that is, people whom they share personal relationships with like their husbands, children, parents, or even patients (Neubauer-Petzoldt 167).

From a patriarchal view, it seems that "fatal violence has a much easier fit with masculinity than it does with femininity" (Wilson 152). While women are typically regarded as sensitive and gentle, men get readily characterised as rational, independent, and dominant (see *Table 1*). Many cultures share similar gender stereotypes concerning masculinity which view men "as stronger, more active, and higher in achievement, autonomy, and aggression" than women (Deaux 291-92). Yet, to "believe [that] men are inherently more violent than women" would suggest a gender-essentialist perspective that exaggerates "male propensity" for fatal violence, normalises violence as an attribute of traditional masculinity while failing to acknowledge similarities across the gender spectrum (Marganski 5).

Masculinity	Femininity
Rational	Emotional
Active	Passive
Independent	Dependent
Ambitious	Content
Competitive	Cooperative
Sexually aggressive	Sex object
Insensitive	Sensitive
Analytical	Intuitive
Selfish, purposeful	Selfless, altruistic
Provider	Carer / nurturer

Table 1: Stereotypical Traits of Masculinity and Femininity (Wilson et al. 151).

Much of male-perpetrated violence can be traced back to learned behaviour within and between social groups including gender expectations about what a (wo)man should be(have) like (Wilson et al. 151; *Table 1*). Thus, gender, not biological sex, is

instrumental in shaping and impacting (violent) behaviour. From an early age, "men and boys tend to experience pressure to conform to group norms of stereotypical or dominant masculinity characterized by toughness, assertiveness, and risk-taking behaviors" with anger being the only outlet acceptable to be externalised (Marganski 5). This understanding of masculinity can be translated to "hegemonic masculinity", a concept developed by sociologist Raewyn Connell in 1985, which is built upon

> understandings that men embody diverse relational, context-specific gendered performances that shape and are shaped by an array of alignments to dominant or hegemonic masculinities . . . [which] are also patriarchal and imbued with power that is wielded to marginalize and subordinate women and other men. (Oliffe et al. 474)

Aggression and violent behaviour may then pose as a tried and tested means to exert power and control over 'inferiors', increase self-esteem, or gain social and material advantages (Micus-Loos 221). This behavioural pattern is also activated when masculine identity, and thereby, patriarchal authority is threatened (e.g. instances of rejection, humiliation). On such occasions, men who are inclined to follow hegemonic masculinity ideals may settle for violence to retrieve power and control "as a resource to assert one's masculinity and contest being marginalized or 'othered' [by ostracization, harassment, etc.]" (Oliffe et al. 474). Particularly in the forensic field of mass murder and murder-suicide, some researchers suggest that "M-S[2] is an extreme end-product of failed manhood at work, school, and/or within family milieus" (474). In addition to social and financial stressors, the perceived loss of manhood and victimisation constitute motivating factors for these individuals to kill.

Yet, research on serial murder remains scarce "due to the lack of consensus on a definition, the continued use of primarily descriptive statistics, and linkage to popular culture depictions" (Gurian 544). Nevertheless, there are two studies that investigate the phenomenon of serial killing and sex differences from a scholarly perspective: firstly, Harrison et al. (2019) who proposed and tried a "'hunter-gatherer' model of serial murder"; secondly, a survey of global serial killer cases between 1900-2013 undertaken by criminologist Elizabeth A. Gurian (2017). To assess sex differences in serial killing from an evolutionary-psychological lens, Harrison et al. compared data about 55 male and 55 female serial killers from the US. They were able to determine "that MSKs more frequently act as 'hunters,' stalking and killing targeted strangers in dispersed areas, while FSKs more frequently are 'gatherers,' killing those who are around them and . . . gaining profit from their crimes" (295).[3] The researchers ascertained that male serial killers "more frequently kill strangers they stalk, travelling distances to 'hunt' and kill" (296).[4] Gurian's survey provides similar findings and concludes that solo male serial killers are likely to kill strangers only

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[2] Abbreviation for murder-suicide.
[3] MSK = male serial killer; FSK = female serial killer.
[4] This method is exemplified by the hedonistic serial killer who is known to lust after strangers and stalk them for personal thrill, sexual gratification, and feelings of power (Harrison et al. 297).

and employ a combination of killing methods, ranging from strangulation, shooting, and stabbing to blunt force (551-52).

Additionally, Harrison et al. found that male perpetrators' predatory behaviour usually consisted of "methodically select[ing] and stalk[ing] previously unfamiliar victims, patrolling and waiting, often for days, for the right time to attack, capture, and force the victim into submission" which implies animalistic undertones (297). Moreover, many of these perpetrators were also shown to have "disarticulate[d] or otherwise butcher[ed] their victims" or collected trophies of their deeds, such as body parts, jewellery, or clothing (298). An example of such a killer would be Jeffrey Dahmer, who not only dismembered his victims and kept their body parts in his apartment but also took photographs of them to keep as trophies. Body dismemberment, by contrast, is not distinctive of female-perpetrated serial murder. Instead, these criminals commonly operate as "quiet killers" and resort to using poison or suffocation which makes it hard for doctors to discern these murders as such, especially within care facilities and hospitals (Neubauer-Petzoldt 168). After all, women's delinquency is not a question of nature but opportunity: historically relegated to the "feminised" domestic sphere and excluded from the world of work, women had above all the opportunity to poison relatives or kill their partners or children (Neubacher 87).

Another striking, yet media-constructed divergence between the sexes is the way they are portrayed by the media. Male perpetrators are often given names that highlight the brutality and uncanniness of their crimes, frequently containing descriptors such as "*ripper, stalker, slasher, butcher* and *vampire*" (Wiest 331). Female serial killers, in comparison, get reduced to their gender with less grave monikers like "Giggling Grandma, Lonely Hearts Killer, Lady Rotten, Black Widow, Angel of Death, Barbie Killer, Death Row Granny" which mirrors the gendered nature of serial killing which is reinforced by the media (Vronsky 3). Nevertheless, some (male) killers also title themselves and actively seek media attention (e.g. Zodiac, BTK, Son of Sam). Indeed, many offenders "desire to make the headlines and realize that sensational murders draw a good deal of [such]" (Fox and Levin 415). In this context, Harrison et al. also detected that most male serial killers in their sample came from lower-middle-class and lower-class backgrounds and displayed lower levels of education; bragging about their crimes may then demonstrate a desire for status elevation (303).

True Crime and Gender: Reinforcing Stereotypes?

> "It's a discounting of the stories of the women in favour of the central hero being the most important character in the narrative . . . and that is the failure to look deeper and think harder about violence against women in our culture." – Ginger Strand in *Ted Bundy: Falling for a Killer* ("Boy Meets Girl", 01:45-02:04)

The statement by author Ginger Strand quoted above highlights the ethical dilemma that true crime deals with. Designed for entertainment purposes and heavily influenced by our late-modern fascination with violence, true crime has jumped on the bandwagon of entertainment and news media. "True crime", according to Murley, "is a genre that claims a strict and tidy relationship with 'reality' or 'truth,' and many of its creators and consumers believe it to depict 'just the facts'" (13). Although the genre suggests an objective standpoint, it frequently misconstrues reality and uses dramatisation and exaggeration to keep up with modern culture's fascination for violent crimes. It "always fictionalizes, emphasizes, exaggerates, interprets, constructs, and creates 'truth,' and any relationship to the facts is mediated and compromised" (13). What might seem like a contradiction to its name has become the recipe for true crime's success.

The overwhelming majority of true crime narratives portray "white, middle-class killers and victims" (Murley 2), focusing intensely "on both serial killing and murder in the domestic sphere" (5-6). In almost 80% of all true crime narratives, the crime is one or more murders while predominantly white people fall victim to the perpetrators, especially women or children (Sahner 145-46). True crime further represents white women as most likely to fall victim to violent crime, which ignores the fact that women of colour get killed at much higher rates (Webb 163). In addition, this frame suggests that women are essentially most at risk regarding violent crimes; however, men constitute the vast majority of victims globally in different kinds of interpersonal violence, except for sexual offences (Möller-Leimkühler 70).[5]

As mentioned above, serial killing constitutes one of the rarest crimes but is extensively reproduced in popular media. Interest in this sort of violence peaked in the 1990s with genre-defining film productions such as *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) or *Se7en* (1995) while media-intensive incidents like the trials of Jeffrey Dahmer, Joel Rifkin, and Aileen Wuornos dominated the media landscape (Jenkins 3). These instances not only helped shape our cultural imagination of the violent white serial killer but also assisted in situating this figure as a stock character in contemporary public discourse.

Traditionally, serial killers have been depicted "as individualized monstrous psychopaths" (Schmid 176). Earlier portrayals of such individuals – factual and fictional alike – usually pictured them as "an evil Other, a Gothic monster, or criminal mastermind" and inspired horror in contemporary audiences (Milde 82). However, the prototype of "the serial murderer as sexually motivated killer in culture" only prolif-

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[5] Following police crime statistics, two-thirds of all victims of violence are young men; compared to women, they have a three to four times higher risk of becoming victims of violent crimes (Möller-Leimkühler 70). Regarding homicide, men constitute about 80% of victims (Harrison et al. 298).

erated after the Whitechapel murders in 1888 which incited the production of numerous popular cultural texts "which adopted the familiar template set by the murders" (Wattis 284-85). Similar to its nineteenth-century predecessors, modern true crime still heavily relies "on horror and a rhetorical distancing of the killer through the language of monstrosity" (Murley 6). Nevertheless, real serial murderers "tend to look very ordinary . . . [which] makes it difficult to distinguish serial killers from 'normal' men" (Schmid 177). Consequently, true crime frequently accentuates the criminals' transgressions by scrutinising their childhood for premonitions of potential deviance which also "impl[ies] that the apparent ordinariness of serial killers is, paradoxically, the most convincing sign of their wickedness" (177-78).

Although nowadays true crime narratives still aim to portray these individuals as aberrations, another rendition has developed in the late-twentieth century – namely, "the idea of the serial killer as attractive and intelligent, and crucially someone with whom we could identify" (Wattis 288). The newly heightened visuality of serial killers through new sorts of mass media beyond newspapers and true crime books (e.g. TV documentaries, crime dramas) fomented this new kind of "celebritization" as purported by Schmid (2005).[6] By turning these individuals into modern "celebrities", the violent masculine subject becomes "nameable and creates parameters for what this violence looks like" while the violence against the victims becomes peripheral (Compton 58).

Thus, true crime often trades in gender-essentialist views and silences groups perceived as inferior, especially women. From a feminist perspective, Jarvis argues, "the killer/victim dyad produces a polarization of gender norms: the killer embodies an über-masculinity while the victim who is dominated, opened and entered personifies a hyper-femininity (irrespective of biology)" (333). Yet, these gendered power dynamics do not end when the crime has occurred. By commercially exploiting the fascination with violent crime as stories, real violence against people becomes an entertainment factor (Sahner 150). Further, the accumulation of female murder victims in true crime expresses a conservative gender image that distinguishes between passive female victims and active male perpetrators, investigators, or protectors (Harms 4).

Serial Killers, Media Involvement, and Layers of Masculinity in Marie Belloc Lowndes' *The Lodger* (1913) and Meg Gardiner's *Unsub* (2018)

In the following part, this chapter looks at two novels from different time periods that both draw on true crime events and use fictionalised representations of male

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[6] A current case would be Netflix's *Dahmer* (2022) and Berlinger's *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* (2019). Casting objectively attractive, popular, and charming actors like Zac Efron or Evan Peters helps secure these killers "a place in an American celebrity culture of infamy, which . . . fetishizes, romanticises, and traffics in the 'careers' of such killers" (Murley 5).

serial killers. The subsequent section analyses these fictitious perpetrators with regard to gender and gendered behavioural patterns, particularly scrutinising the ways in which these characters utilise the media and even interfere with them. I argue that their respective 'media involvement' is not only a way to seek attention but to express their respective masculinity.

The Lodger (1913)

The Lodger starts with the Buntings, an elderly lower-middle-class couple out of service, who offer lodgings in their home to earn their living. They rent a room to the mysterious Mr Sleuth – a "long, lanky figure of a man, clad in an Inverness cape and an old-fashioned top hat" (Belloc Lowndes 19). He has "a dark, sensitive, hatched-shaped face" and frequently rubs "his long, thin hands together with a quick nervous movement" (23). Although Sleuth seems rather dodgy from the novel's beginning, Mrs Bunting regards him as a proper gentleman which secures him not only accommodation but a questionably strong trust from his landlady. This is surprising in so far as at the same time that Mr Sleuth finds lodgings with the Buntings, a notorious killer – "The Avenger" – roams London and terrorises its residents.

From the onset, Belloc Lowndes subtly nudges the reader to find the necessary evidence to conclude that the lodger and the Avenger are indeed the same person. For instance, he has no belongings aside from cash and a leather bag he never leaves unaccompanied. Later, the witness statements support that the killer was always seen with a bag in hand where he presumably hid his murder weapon (50, 183-84, 211). Sleuth, a self-proclaimed "man of science", further aggravates his conspicuous behaviour by performing "all sorts of experiments [at night]" (23), reminiscent of Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Whenever the "Avenger" strikes, the lodger is out the same night and feigns being ill the following day (64, 71, 147), growing more nervous and behaving even queerer when he hears the newsboys shouting about the Avenger's latest deeds (112, 151-52).

Sleuth's "mask of sanity" finally falls when he, Mrs Bunting, and her stepdaughter visit Madame Tussaud's where they meet Chief Commissioner Burney accompanied by friends, whom he tells about the police's ongoing investigation. Overhearing Burney talk about a suspect who escaped from the asylum "with extraordinary cunning and intelligence" (242-43), the lodger feels betrayed and flees, believing his landlady responsible for giving him away to the authorities. This apparent deceit by the one person he trusted activates Sleuth's aggressive, dangerous 'serial killer alter ego' and turns him into a monstrous figure: "there came a terrible change over his pale, narrow face; it became discomposed, livid with rage and terror" (243). His transformation is complete when he throws his last threats at Mrs Bunting:

> "Do not think to escape the consequences of your hideous treachery. I trusted you, Mrs. Bunting, and you betrayed me! Put (sic!) I am protected by a higher power, for I still have

> much to do. . . . Your end will be bitter as wormwood and sharp as a two-edged sword. Your feet shall go down to death, and your steps take hold on hell". (244)

Overall, the lodger displays a high emotionality and sensitiveness which rather fit with notions of a deviant and somewhat feminised masculinity which is also evident in descriptions of his "sensitive face", frequent emotional outbursts, and altogether nervous demeanour. In addition, Sleuth exhibits a fanatic religiousness which is manifested in his abhorrence of alcohol and "queer kind of fear and dislike of women" (44). The latter further suggests a degree of misogyny that is also depicted in his killer persona and respective killings. His deviant masculinity, hence, is similarly riddled with misogynist tendencies as normative masculinity.

As the Avenger, Sleuth acts as a visionary serial killer with a misogynist ideology. He kills dipsomaniac women and pins "three-cornered piece[s] of paper, on which was written, in red ink, and in printed characters, the words, 'THE AVENGER'" to his victims' clothing (12). Apart from a stark sense of mission, this method suggests a desire to gain recognition and claim his victims as possessions and mark his trophies. Also, the fact that the murderer deliberately chooses his own sobriquet conveys a certain self-proclaimed grandeur and that he has a purpose to fulfil – to avenge. Moreover, the term 'avenger' in itself possesses a masculine connotation which can also be found in the *OED*[7] (emphasis added): "*He* who avenges (the injured or the injury). / *He* who takes vengeance on, or punishes (the offender)." Even in the *OED*, the term 'avenger' is associated with a certain maleness and violence as exemplified by the words "punished" and "injury". Similar links are drawn in the observation of the murderer's killing scheme: "'he moved swiftly and silently Westward [for his next murder] . . . choosing a time when the Edgware Road is at its busiest and most thronged, did another human being to death with lightning-like quickness and savagery'" (Belloc Lowndes 138). This description vividly lends the Avenger's violence animalistic undertones and hints at predator-like schemes characteristic of male serial killers as proposed by Harrison et al. and Gurian. Moreover, we learn that the criminal only kills alcoholic women but fails to dispose of his victims' bodies. Consequently, the killer must have either aimed to draw attention or was interrupted by pedestrians before finishing his plans. Considering that the Avenger leaves his signature, "'the usual now familiar triangular piece of grey paper—the grimmest visiting card ever designed by the wit of man'", pinned to his victims' corpses suggests that the first option seems more probable (139).

Additionally, the culprit also employs letter-writing to draw attention from the media and police. One such letter is sent to the police "signed 'The Avenger,' in just the

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[7] This online entry was revised in July 2023 and now reads "a person" instead of "he" in the depicted examples which was not the case at the time when this chapter was originally produced. Hence, in this part, I refer to the non-revised entry and not the latest version that can be found on the current website.

same printed characters as on that bit of paper he always leaves behind" (87). The author ultimately leaves open the press's reaction to this correspondence and though the letter's contents are not disclosed, this deliberate act of seeking attention by correspondence implies that the Avenger has intended to irritate the authorities and gain recognition. Sleuth also follows up on his crimes in the newspaper to countercheck his persecutors' progress but feels disturbed whenever there are indeed new traces (214, 224). Yet, while his ways of reaching out to the media are too implicit to make conclusive remarks, I would still consider him for this analysis because he represents an active 'media influencer' who partakes in his own mythologisation. His ways to draw media attention may seem indirect and subtle but effective enough to keep him in the newspaper headlines and help shape his serial killer persona in the public eye.

Indeed, the public's verdict demarcates the Avenger as a true incarnation of the "evil Other" and readily reads him as male. Mr Bunting, for example, comments on the Avenger as being a "man's dead to all human feeling—saving, of course, revenge'" (192). Detective Chandler further proposes the criminal is either a sailor who can up and leave without a trace, a butcher from the Central Market who is naturally used to killing, or an escaped lunatic (231) – all male. In all public assumptions, we find stereotypical links between violence and masculinity: the idea of vicious brutality, apparently analytically planned, and passive female victims inspire this certain "maleness". Further, the image of the 'wicked madman' also dominates in Belloc Lowndes' novel since she deliberately frames the Avenger as an asylum escapee (242-43). Hence, Sleuth's impulsiveness and rage may be caused by an alleged mental illness which renders him a hybrid on the verge of hypermasculine violence and murderous impulse control disorder. At the same time, Sleuth/Avenger is hybridised by his deviant, somewhat feminised masculinity and sensitive appearance as opposed to his violent, hypermasculine 'serial killer alter ego'. By feminising the murderer, the author utilises another othering mechanism that further marginalises the criminal and shows a rare case of deviant masculinity.

Unsub (2018)

Moving on to Gardiner's *Unsub*, the novel revolves around the life of Detective Caitlin Hendrix who is assigned the "Prophet" case – an unidentified serial killer of eleven people formerly active from 1993-98 (18). Having remained dormant for twenty years, the Prophet makes a sensational return through a gruesome double murder marked by his typical signature which is exemplary of his *modus operandi*:

> [H]e'd take two victims at a time and pose them in grotesque scenes, like mannequins in display windows from hell. The way he'd etch his signature into their flesh: the ancient sign for Mercury [☿], messenger of the gods, guide to the underworld. He sliced into one victim with a box cutter and poured liquid mercury into the wound. (17)

This passage is not only indicative of the killer's brutal, strategic, sadistic, and well-organised killing mechanisms but also highlights how the offender wants to be portrayed: as "Mercury, the messenger. The Prophet" (3). While the moniker "Prophet" is given to him by the press (36), the perpetrator prefers to be affiliated with the Roman god Mercury who is mentioned further in the context of Dante's *Inferno* – the killer's playbook. Here, Mercury personifies "'[t]he messenger of death, punishing a world that heaven hates'" (261). Thus, by materialising the "Nine Circles of Hell" as depicted in Dante's *Inferno*, the Prophet hopes to punish "humanity with all the contempt and creativity that poetic justice required" (280). Seeking out victims who embody sin (similar to Fincher's *Se7en*), the killer uses a different killing method in every episode and stages them accordingly. Considering the Prophet's strong sense of mission, the killer appears to be very strategic, ambitious, and purposeful. Carving in his badge, the Mercury symbol, also illustrates the killer's sadism and desire for possession similar to the Avenger.

According to his persecutors, the murderer – later identified as Titus Rhone – is someone with "social skills . . . [who] could probably lure people into his orbit with charming talk, before he isolated and killed them" (142). He does not kill impulsively but strategically plans his deeds by drawing maps of the victims' neighbourhoods, including potential escape routes if he needs to flee (142). These characteristics demonstrate an evil mastermind at work who hides in plain sight behind his apparent ordinariness and charming appearance similar to modern portrayals of serial killers. Throughout the novel, the murderer chooses strangers whom he stalks before attacking them. The catalyst for Rhone's crimes, aside from his apparent vision, derives from an experience of rejection by Giselle Fraser – his first victim – whom he also calls "The Tease" (284):

> The jogger who smiled at him, who said hi to him, then ignored him. . . . Leading him on, then running with another man and never speaking to him again. Whispering with the other guy, and laughing . . . at him, undoubtedly. . . . When he first began, Giselle the Tease had lured him into acting out of season. (284)

His first murder is marked by injured pride, misogyny, and a perceived loss of manliness. Since Rhone was unsuccessful in securing his desired sexual partner and felt humiliated, he resorted to murdering the person who threatened his masculinity to regain his power. Similar to mass murderers, the formerly weak man now takes up the role of "punisher" to restore the social order in his hegemonic ideology. Another way the Prophet implements control is evident in his predatory behaviour when obtaining his victims. For instance, in the case of Stuart Ackermann, he observes his target with binoculars from inside his black pickup (33); in yet another scene, he spies upon the police investigating one of his crime scenes (244). Both instances highlight the murderer's extreme predatory antics which supports the hunter-typi-

fication posited by Harrison et al. The Prophet's predatory behaviour is further highlighted when he murders Ackermann to stage the Sixth Circle by chasing his victim through the woods and shooting him with bow and arrow (49).

Overall, the Prophet enjoys "to test and taunt" (19). He tortures not only his victims but also their families via phone calls and videotapes of their beloved. The Prophet deliberately plays with people's feelings and deceives them by "[g]iving hope, [while] dangling the lure" which again demonstrates his perverse desire to exert control over his victims, persecutors, and the public (40). Moreover, the Prophet's crimes are characterised by an extraordinarily high media presence, including a media persona he predominantly shaped himself. Already at the beginning of his criminal career, Rhone "sent recordings [of his victims being tortured] to the police and television stations" (39). He frequently contacts the KDPX TV station by letter, including one addressed: "RUSH TO NEWS EDITOR" (63). The note inside, however, only consisted of a URL that subsequently leads to a website "designed to be accessed once, then to self-destruct" (65). On the one hand, this example shows how technophile the murderer is and how he has improved his skillset over the years; on the other hand, this act is yet another method to mislead the police and taunt them. Another scene in which this behaviour is emphasised is the Prophet's live call to the "Chaz and T-Bone" radio show. Even on the phone, the killer keeps taunting the investigators by saying "'Time is ticking, ticking . . . You got nothing'" (202), and "'Where are the sirens? Is that what I hear?'" to show off his superiority (208). Consequently, broadcasting his minutely planned show on the radio and internet is "all a mind job, meant to embarrass law enforcement and terrify the public" in which the culprit thoroughly succeeds (103).

All in all, the Prophet sends twenty-seven communications to the press and police. Several of these letters not only contain threats by the killer but passages quoted from literary works (e.g. Milton's *Paradise Lost*, T.S. Eliot's "East Coaker") and the Bible. Although these messages are not encrypted like the Zodiac's, they form a code – an acrostic that spells the phrase "Abandon Hope, All Ye Who Enter Here" from *Inferno* (255, 257). Throughout the novel, Titus Rhone grows bolder with his correspondence "[to] clarify to the bumblers in law enforcement and the media what his grand plan entailed" (282). He recruits *East Bay Herald* reporter Bart Fletcher by posing as an insider at the Alameda Sheriff's Office only to dispose of him after Fletcher served his purpose (248, 285). Moreover, the Prophet also shares an element with Mr Sleuth – keeping up with the news: while Mr Sleuth is anxious to know whether the police might be on to him, the Prophet's "palms itched with anticipation . . . [while] counting down to the next outpouring of poetic vengeance" (282).

Overall, Gardiner's Prophet provides an abundance of features that can be attributed to stereotypical masculinity ideals. He is a strategic, analytical thinker who follows a

purpose: a fantasy he wants to perfect that is supplemented by an urge to kill and a desire for power and possession (273). The Prophet embodies the evil mastermind which has become a popular trope in modern fictional portrayals of serial killers since Thomas Harris created Hannibal Lecter. By corresponding with the media, the Prophet succeeds in staying relevant and in the limelight. Moreover, activities like calling the victims' families or radio stations, playing videos or sending letters to reporters and TV stations fuel the killer's self-esteem and competitiveness. By reaching out to the media the way he does, Rhone ultimately brings more anguish to his victims' families, keeps the public in constant fear, and puts himself on the pedestal of power. In this sense, he embodies an idealised version of hegemonic masculinity that aims to dominate those deemed inferior by him.

Conclusion

This examination has shown that even in cases where the identity of the perpetrator is completely unknown, the typical male perpetrator profile is perpetuated. Similar to modern depictions of the "superstar serial killer", their fictional counterparts also exhibit distinctly stereotypical character traits but differ in the way these novels apply archetypes to them. Belloc Lowndes' Avenger is still more akin to the nineteenth-century tradition which favours Othering by a "language of monstrosity" to distance the killer from society. This is done through a strong feminisation as well as the subtextual notion that the serial killer is a madman on the loose. This twofold hybridisation is more in keeping with the discourse on violent criminals as monstrous figures rather than the modern image of the charming, socially capable celebrity-like serial killer that continuously graces the screens of our cinemas and streaming services. Of course, Gardiner's Prophet is dreaded for his atrocious crimes but is still portrayed as a wicked mastermind reminiscent of Harris' Hannibal Lecter, who is described as charming, socially capable, and exceedingly cunning. This character personifies the modern celebrity-like serial killer as purported by Schmid (2005) – a figure to admire and abhor. Moreover, we get to glimpse inside the killer's mind, feelings, and experiences of rejection which may warrant sympathy from the reader.

Overall, each novel's serial killer protagonist is stereotypically male, white, violent, and middle-class with misogynist ideologies. They target predominantly (white) women and, in the Prophet's case, men he regards as threats or weak. Both characters are renowned for their assertiveness, brutality, strength, and independence. From their point of view, both killers are providers of vengeance and recompense. Measuring up to Wilson's table (*Table 1*), Sleuth as well as Rhone behave strategically and analytically when "at work". Both follow a stringent purpose that encompasses their lives which they aim to fulfil. Conversely, the Avenger is more act-focused than the Prophet, who frequently resorts to torturing techniques and staging

his victims in degrading positions. It has been highlighted that both murder protagonists appear realistic in the way that they display hunter-like behavioural patterns as proposed by Harrison et al. (2019) and thus resemble typifications also drawn in criminology: both Avenger and Prophet kill strangers in different places and use hands-on tactics like guns and knives to kill. However, both perpetrators are depicted as overly intelligent and do not come from lower-class backgrounds, which is in opposition to empiric data.

Additionally, both fictional serial killers actively seek media attention but for different reasons. While the Avenger employs the media more indirectly by, for instance, anxiously counterchecking news reports and leaving his "visiting cards" at the crime scenes, the Prophet is more daring: he wants to punish and take revenge but also enjoys fearmongering, playing with other people as well as subjecting himself to a race with the police. All of his correspondence to the press and police perpetuates a constant mockery of state authorities, particularly the investigators' failure to identify and catch him. In contrast, Belloc Lowndes' Avenger does not display such traits. Although he is seen following up on his crimes in the news and leaving his "card" for the press and police to find, his acts of reaching out to the media appear rather characteristic of his deviant masculinity. This is in stark contrast to Gardiner's Prophet who almost singlehandedly feeds the media circus by contacting different media outlets, leaving personal notes on crime scenes, and becoming part of the media himself by hacking and broadcasting content. Rhone's way of reaching out to the media, therefore, emphasises strong nuances of hegemonic masculinity including insensitivity, ambitiousness, and competitiveness. Hence, in the case of the Prophet, this act can be read as an intensification of hegemonic masculine identity.

Overall, there seems to be a divergence in masculinity portrayals and a shift from deviant to hegemonic masculinity from 1913 to 2018, which is also evident in the way these fictionalised male serial killers harness the media and aim to seek attention. While reaching out to the media is employed as a determinant of normative masculinity in Gardiner's novel, media involvement in Belloc Lowndes' *Lodger* is more subtle and characteristic of his deviant masculinity. To conclude, in these literary examples, publicity and the urge for it are closely interwoven with hegemonic masculinity but also play a modified role in deviant masculinity. While normative masculinity is characterised by an overt inference with the media and taunting mechanisms, deviant masculinity, while also being interspersed with an urge to gain recognition, is also interlaced with anxiety. So, the conclusion of my analysis is – the more hegemonic the masculinity, the more self-assured the handling of the media of the fictional perpetrator.

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"You'll go out there as boys and come back as men:" Masculinities and Rites of Passage in Peter May's *The Blackhouse*[1]

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Abstract

This chapter traces the rites of passage depicted in Peter May's 2009 novel *The Blackhouse* and analyzes how these rites, involuntarily undergone by the male characters, often fail, resulting in the construction of various adult/masculine identities. For the descriptions and theories of rites of passage, the chapter relies on the work of anthropologist Arnold van Gennep and Ronald L. Grimes, founder of the interdisciplinary field of ritual studies. The aim of this chapter is to observe the negative impacts of poorly organized rites of passage in the novel and relate them to Carole Jones's observations on the changes in the depiction of masculinities in Scottish fiction during the last forty years as outlined in her *Disappearing Men* (2009) and later works.

Keywords

Peter May, *The Blackhouse,* rite of passage, Lewis trilogy, Scottish crime fiction

Introduction

The Blackhouse (2009) is the first installment of Peter May's Lewis Trilogy which continued with *The Lewis Man* (2012) and concluded with *The Chessmen* (2013). The trilogy is primarily set on the largest island of the Outer Hebrides, Lewis and Harris, with occasional ventures to other isles of that archipelago. For these novels' plots, the Outer Hebridean setting is essential, and Alison Jack even referred to May's Hebrides as "a character in their own right" (30). I prefer viewing the role of the islands as setting rather than "character," namely as thematized space. As per Mieke Bal's definition, thematized space is space which "becomes an acting place rather than the place of action" (127). The plot "becomes subordinate to the presentation of space" (127) in the sense that the setting determines the types of plot which it can accommodate (Lane 26).

Islands in themselves are convenient environments for the observation of literary masculinities as they have been portrayed, since Homer's *Odyssey*, as feminized spaces, free to be appropriated and subjugated by the many male castaways, explorers, and colonizers (Billig 20). Scottish islands, such as May's Outer Hebrides, are doubly convenient because the setting, especially when thematized, magnifies Scotland's already "masculinized national identity" (Jones, *Disappearing Men* 17). As discussed by Carole Jones, Scottish literature has recently seen a significant shift in its

portrayals of male characters. The notion of dominant masculinity became contested in Scottish fiction roughly after the failed 1979 devolution referendum as a result of the twentieth-century challenges to the patriarchy which exposed masculinity as merely another gender category (12) with no justified reason to position itself as superior. According to Jones, the "masculinised Enlightenment liberal humanist self" was "disappearing" in post-referendum fiction – it was either not present at all or was depicted as dying or dead ("Coming in From the Cold" 1). Jones has since supplemented her statement to note that in post-millennial Scottish fiction, "dominant masculinity . . . returns from the borders of its banishment" (2). Dominant masculinity, she concludes, is at home in contemporary Scottish fiction yet again as a symptom of the "neoconservative nostalgia for traditional values" (4), and it currently coexists with the still popular post-referendum trend of disappearing men (16).

An interesting aspect of *The Blackhouse*, and arguably the entire Lewis Trilogy, is its strong emphasis on the portrayals of several male characters' developments from boyhood to manhood. May depicts these characters facing dangerous situations in their teenage years, and these situations, usually unintentionally, function as rites of passage into adulthood and shape these boys' futures by setting them on a path to their unique brand of masculinity. I am going to focus on these formative events in the lives of the series' protagonist Fin Macleod and his childhood friend Artair Macinnes and relate them to Carole Jones's theory of the two post-millennial trends in Scottish portrayals of masculinity.

Rites of Passage

Rites of passage enable individuals to transition between two vastly different states or stages of life. According to anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, in crossing from one such state to another, a three-step process is involved. I will illustrate these phases using the rite of passage this chapter is most concerned with, namely the transition from boyhood (childhood) to manhood (adulthood).

The first step involves rites of separation (also referred to as preliminal rites by Van Gennep) which serve to separate the boy from "the world of women and children" (74). Van Gennep observes that this phase often involves secluding the boy, usually in a place dedicated to the purpose, where he is supposed to behave or, sometimes more importantly, not to behave, in certain ways according to established rules (75). Obeying these rules may lead to physical and mental exhaustion and a symbolic death of the child (75). The second step are rites of transition, also known as the liminal stage. In this phase, the boy is instructed in the ways of adult men with methods specific to his culture. The last step, or the postliminal stage, involves an act of incorporation. Ritual branding or mutilation are often involved after which "the novice [is] forever identical with the adult members" of his community (75).

Observing the rising interest in the rites of passage in the Western world on the cusp of the millennium, leading ritual studies scholar Ronald L. Grimes's 2000 study *Deeply into the Bone* revisits the concepts introduced by Van Gennep in 1909. As Western society is largely secularized, ritualized rites of passage have either completely disappeared or become voluntary and opting out of them no longer "amount[s] to self-exile" since an individual is frequently able to exit a community where they are not comfortable and find a home elsewhere (Grimes 90). "Because personal autonomy is so highly and unquestioningly valued," Grimes adds, "ritual structures are questionable and ritual authorities suspect" (90). Compounded by the West's cult of youth and lack of respect for the older generations, the act of transmission of knowledge from the old to the young is viewed as unattractive or downright undesirable (94). The role of initiators therefore sometimes passes to the peers (e.g., in cases such as college fraternity initiations), and undergoing the rite becomes a matter of proving oneself as a worthy member of a peer in-group. Such rituals are typically traumatizing and violent, and often only exist for the sake of being degrading (94).

Grimes also draws attention to the spatial aspects of the rites of passage and notes that several of the examples which Van Gennep cites in his seminal work directly involve movement away in space during the preliminal stage (104). Initiands are taken to the wilderness, where they are left to their own devices, or to inaccessible or sacred places. Grimes also offers a long list of some frequent component elements of rites of passage, four of which are of special interest for the purposes of this chapter, namely: "gaining access to previously off-the-limits areas," "having to keep secrets from those who are younger or uninitiated," "partaking in celebratory meals," and "mastering difficult tasks" (106-07). Curiously, Grimes leaves out any mention of bleeding or the shedding of blood in his discussion of boys' rites of passage while first menstruation is in many cultures seen as a naturally occurring signal of a girl's (sexual) maturation. Interestingly for the purposes of the present chapter, he also mentions that in many societies, the result of the rite is not only the emergence of an adult man or woman but that of a potential father or mother (34).

While the rites are designed to cause a permanent change in the individual, Grimes warns, the process does not always prove successful – the actual effect should not be conflated with the desired effect (98). In other words, not even tried and tested rites are guaranteed to always work, let alone the impromptu ones or the ones presided over by the initiand's inexperienced peers. When a rite fails or backfires, the consequences for the initiand might be far more serious than his appearing as an individual unfit to progress in his society's hierarchy. It seems important to add that the ritual might be successful on the surface, but deeper down the individual emerges from the postliminal stage traumatized and fully aware that he is unable to fulfil the role into which he seemingly graduated. All of these trappings of transitioning from

boyhood to manhood can be observed in *The Blackhouse* in which this potentially problematic cultural act meets with the condition of islandness and the confines of crime fiction on the unique backdrop of Scottish cultural traditions.

The Blackhouse

The Blackhouse begins with the protagonist Fin Macleod losing interest in the relationship with his wife Mona after the tragic death of their son in a hit-and-run. Fin is forced to return to work as an Edinburgh police detective and is immediately sent to the Isle of Lewis, his birthplace, to investigate a brutal murder which resembles an unsolved case Fin worked on in the past. This enables Fin to escape from his wife, whom he blames for failing to protect their son, but only at the cost of returning to his childhood home in the small village of Crobost from which he escaped twenty years previously. On Lewis, Fin is forced by the investigation and by his own memories to face former friends and negotiate deeply rooted traumas. The murder victim is Angel Macritchie, the local bully with whom Fin had numerous unpleasant encounters during his childhood and teenage years, but what is most difficult for Fin is meeting his childhood best friend Artair Macinnes, his wife and Fin's former girlfriend Marsaili, and their son Fionnlagh who bears Fin's first name. The novel alternates between chapters narrated from the third person point of view treating the investigation, and chapters narrated in the first person by Fin which treat his past starting in early childhood, progressing to his early adulthood.

Fin and Artair were neighbors growing up. Fin lost his parents in a car accident at the age of eight and moved in with his eccentric aunt. Mr. Macinnes, Artair's father, took on the role of the father figure in Fin's life and devoted his free time to improving both boys' academic prowess, later giving up on his own son and continuing only with Fin, who is eventually accepted to a university and thus gets the chance to leave the Isle of Lewis forever. A crucial piece of information Fin suppresses in his mind, however, is that Mr. Macinnes was, most likely sexually, abusing him and Artair behind closed doors. During the summer before Fin's departure to Glasgow and Artair's entry into the local workforce, Mr. Macinnes arranges for the boys to come with him and a team of nine other local men to the traditional gannet hunt which takes place on an isolated rock in the middle of the ocean. During the hunt, Fin slips on wet stone and falls off a cliff, injuring his head. In an apparent attempt to help Fin, Mr. Macinnes falls to his death into the sea and his body is never recovered. While Fin is able to leave Lewis for Glasgow, forgetting all about the abuse due to his concussion, Artair enters a dead-end job, is obliged to take care of his invalid mother and, even though he marries Marsaili, the woman he has always loved, he ends up raising a son whom he (rightfully) suspects not to be his. This all is, in Artair's mind, Fin's fault. He cannot forgive him for getting the chance to leave the island and for forgetting about being abused. Artair lives a bitter and unhappy life

and eventually hatches a monstrous plan to get revenge. He kills the local bully in a gruesome way to make it resemble a murder Fin unsuccessfully investigated in the past and so ensure that it would be Fin the police send to Lewis. Then Artair plans to tell Fin that Fionnlagh is his son, only to kill the boy and deprive Fin of another child.

The Guga Hunt: Fin's and Artair's Rites of Passage

In this section, I am going to look in more detail at the first rite of passage depicted in the novel – Fin and Artair's first gannet hunt. Mr. Macinnes, acting behind their backs, has negotiated two spots for them on the hunt which takes place during the summer after both boys, aged seventeen, have finished secondary school. Known on the island as "gugas," gannets are a local delicacy in the new millennium while in the previous centuries, they were hunted out of necessity to prevent starvation. The gugas nest on An Sgeir, a remote rock in the ocean where men from the northern Lewis Ness area are allowed to kill two thousand birds yearly thanks to an exemption from European law. The hunt is spoken about as a rite of passage several times in the novel. Fin and Artair's participation is referred to as an "initiat[ion] into the ancient rite" (May 224), and Mr. Macinnes presents the trip to the boys as an "honour . . . a time of great comradeship and togetherness," emphasizing that they will "go out there as boys and come back as men" (238). Fin and Artair fail to see the hunt in this way and are reluctant to join it. Later in life, and in spite of his own horrific experience during the first time at the hunt, Artair identifies with his father's view, employing the very words "rite of passage" to describe the hunt and saying that it will turn his "soft" son Fionnlagh into a man (222-23).

Curiously, when the boys dare protest against Mr. Macinnes's plan, he ends the discussion by saying that the "village elders" have agreed to their participation. This is a very odd way of referring to the guga hunters which does not appear anywhere else in the novel. It seems somewhat out of place since the team comprises men of all ages and they are not described as having any other leading roles in the Ness community; on the contrary, they are said to be an "unlikely assembly of weavers and crofters, electricians, joiners and builders" (230). The title of "village elders" clearly sets these men apart as wiser and much more experienced simply on the basis of them participating in the centuries-old tradition of the gannet hunt which in turn endows the hunt with a near-sacred meaning. While the guga hunters are not defined as "village elders" by any other character, they are indeed viewed as an "exclusive club" (224) whose members do something extraordinary for their community. They have proven themselves against the elements, and even though the hunt is no longer a necessity undergone for the sake of preventing starvation, the task is no less perilous, which makes it prestigious. In her analysis of the novel, Alison Jack notes

that the notion of the guga hunters as "chosen people" is also corroborated by their total number being twelve, like the twelve apostles (33).[2]

According to the unwritten rules of the hunt, no-one is invited or forced to participate; whoever feels ready negotiates his (never her!) participation with the other hunters. An Sgeir, the wind-swept rock on which the hunt takes place, is inscribed with several characteristics which make it a fitting site of sacred ritual. It is repeatedly spoken of as a hostile environment and a wilderness, a "most primeval of places" (May 257). No information about what goes on there must ever be shared with outsiders as "[w]hatever happens on the rock stays on the rock" (232). The rock itself and especially the hunt is viewed as a chance to reconnect with the ancestors – the men who took part in the hunt in the previous centuries. It is no wonder, then, that for most boys and men, it is an honor to become a member of the team and Fin and Artair's peers fail to understand their unwillingness to participate. A schoolmate expresses his regret that his father was not able to get him on the team, calling Fin a "lucky bastard" (243) and Marsaili, then Fin's girlfriend, chastises him for not wanting to win the respect of everyone in Ness.

Gigs MacAulay is the man most qualified for the role of the main initiator. In fact, Alison Jack even views him as "Moses-like" (32). At the time of the two friends' initiation, Gigs has already been to the rock over a dozen times and while he is not formally dubbed one, everyone considers him the leader of the hunt. To Gigs, all the trips to An Sgeir stand out as unique in his memory. Not all involve taking a new member on board or initiating a seventeen-year-old, but Gigs compares them to "songs in a hymn book, they're all different" (May 231). Gigs's own motivation for continuing the guga hunt, even though it is no longer necessary for his community's survival, is its uniqueness as a tradition no-one else has. Gigs is also the one to whom Fin decides to confide about Mr. Macinnes's abuse after he gets drunk days before the hunt. Originally wishing to involve the police, Gigs is persuaded by the humiliated Fin not to tell anyone and instead decides to take justice into his (and the other guga hunters') own hands, an unorthodox decision which is however aligned with his perception of the rock as a sacred site and validates Mr. Macinnes's view of the hunters as the village elders. Gigs decides to use the environment of An Sgeir to try, condemn, and punish Macinnes by having him live alone on the rock for fourteen days. He is also to be forbidden from ever returning to the sacred site because he has proven unworthy of spending time in the presence of his ancestors, whose memory still lives on An Sgeir in the form of commemorative stone piles.

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[2] It is important to point out here that the gannet hunt is a real tradition which exists on Lewis and May is following its descriptions closely. The usual number of hunters, however, has been ten, not twelve, since 1975 (Murray 239). The number being a conscious change made by May might be a nod to the twelve-member crews of the early 1970s and late 1960s but, at the same time, it can still corroborate Jack's view that the number serves as a Biblical reference.

Angel Macritchie also participates in the hunt with Fin and Artair, but he is much more knowledgeable of what awaits him. He takes on the role of the cook which was previously held by his recently deceased father. Even though he is generally unpopular, Angel does his job well and thus far he is respected as a member of the team. Therefore, having morals or a good reputation outside of the guga hunt are not necessary prerequisites to qualify for this exclusive group, which obviously raises doubts about the authority and worthiness of Gigs's impromptu tribunal. Moreover, the fact that Angel knows everything about the sins of Macinnes senior grants him new incredibly cruel ways of torturing Artair for the rest of his life.

Before it even takes place, there is a clear indication that the rite of passage might (and will) fail. The most important rule of the guga hunt is broken: Mr. Macinnes arranges for the boys' participation without their knowledge and they would clearly never decide to participate themselves. It is difficult to imagine that a rite of passage might be effective when the participant is clearly not in the proper state of mind to undergo it. After being tried and condemned by the other hunters, Macinnes is absent and cannot perform the role of initiator he originally plays which, at least in Fin's case, falls to the much more suitable Gigs.

Participation in the rite of passage on An Sgeir involves a significant movement in space. The crossing to the rock is heavily dependent on the weather, which is mostly unpleasant or downright dangerous, and it takes about eight hours. During Fin and Artair's crossing, the journey is undertaken at night and, when out of sight of any lighthouse, Fin acutely experiences the separation from civilization manifesting as "abject terror" (May 250). He does manage to fall asleep, however, and is as if miraculously transported to the sacred site. A normal day on the rock is filled with hard physical work and communal breakfasts and dinners are non-negotiable. All men wash their hands before meals in water which seems too dirty for this act to be anything but symbolical and they listen to Gigs reading from the Gaelic Bible while eating. In the morning, the hunters rise early to listen to more Bible reading – "soft Gaelic incantations" – at dawn (263). One dinner on the rock consists of guga. This meal is especially ritualized as the men who had so far only eaten preserved food they brought with them are looking forward to the meat and they are not allowed to use cutlery eating the guga, just their hands. These men keep in close contact with their food until the very act of consumption, having killed, plucked, gutted, and cooked the birds by themselves.

Fin starts learning how to hunt guga on the second day. He is assigned the gruesome task of cutting off the heads of freshly killed gannet chicks and he is quickly covered in their blood. Blood-related rituals are curiously absent from Grimes's enumeration but being supposed to kill living creatures to obtain food can fall under his other points such as "overcoming pain and fear," "assuming new responsibilities," or "mastering difficult tasks" (Grimes 106). At first, Fin is disgusted by the slaughter

but then is forced to pick up speed not to slow down his team; he soon becomes desensitized to the blood splatter and the killing becomes "mechanical and mindless" (May 266). He even forgets to pay attention to his surroundings and only later realizes the dangerousness of the wet cliffs and ledges he moves on. He is similarly desensitized to all the other monotonous and painful tasks like plucking and cleaning up the birds' entrails. So, even though he is actively being instructed in the sacred ways of the guga hunters, desensitized and bathed in blood, the hunt does not have the desired effect of rite of passage on Fin. He does not feel any connection with the older men and avoids their company because they always fall silent when he approaches them, which is probably the consequence of their knowing what Mr. Macinnes has done to him. Instead of experiencing the advertised togetherness, Fin "cannot ever remember feeling so alone" (259). Having experienced eight other men learning about his sexual abuse, Fin is further traumatized by their silence. In other words, he is not entering Van Gennep's postliminal stage and becoming incorporated into the group since he has not completed the previous stages. Not ready for the rite to begin with, he is now even less ready and the instruction in killing and communal living serve to further alienate him from the society rather than helping him become part of it.

On the very last day of hunting in the most dangerous location, Fin is attacked by a large bird and falls off a cliff, suffering concussion and several broken bones. He survives this near-death experience and is saved only by Mr. Macinnes, who, perhaps in an attempt to redeem himself, helps to get Fin to safety and then jumps or falls to his death in front of Artair's eyes. Rites of passage often involve an experience resembling death at the end of the preliminal stage, seen as a symbolic death of the child. However, Fin's fall and serious injury fulfill the role of this symbolic death only partially because they do not lead to Fin's shedding his childhood identity. Not only is Fin immediately removed from the island, whereby the rite of passage is interrupted, but also, since the concussion he suffers allows him to forget about Mr. Macinnes's abuse, he is never able to come to terms with that part of his childhood and consciously decide to leave it behind and move on. And, as the proper adult identity emerges only at the end of the postliminal phase after all the instruction and transition rites have taken place in the liminal phase, it can be said that Fin somewhat imperfectly dies as a child in the rite but is not reborn as an adult man.

The adult Marsaili, who was never told anything about what happened on the rock eighteen years earlier, feels that the guga hunt had changed both Fin and Artair in mysterious ways. "There was more than Artair's dad died," she tells Fin. "You and I died. And you and Artair died. It was like everything we'd all been before, died that summer" (361). She captures the situation well because both Fin and Artair died as boys but were not reborn as men. In Carole Jones's terms it could be said that Fin, stuck at the end of the pre-liminal stage, is a disappearing man. All his traumatizing

experiences are pushed out of his consciousness, and he is forever aware of some void inside of him which prevents him from becoming a committed, responsible adult and father. It makes him spend his life constantly running away from responsibility, never quite finding himself.

Artair's rite of passage seems on the surface to be finished and dramatically cemented by the death of his father. Instead of embracing the role of the main breadwinner of his family, however, Artair refuses that identity which he perceives was unfairly bestowed on him by Fin's breaking the unwritten pact of silence about Mr. Macinnes's abuse. As a result, Artair performs the adult role only shallowly. Unlike Fin, Artair has no means of escaping his past. He does not move away from the island because he needs to take care of his mother, and the education he has received only allows him to do menial jobs. Moreover, Angel Macritchie takes care to constantly remind him of the circumstances of his father's death and, in Artair's mind, Fin is to blame for the turn his life has taken and deserves to be punished. With Fin no longer living on the island, Artair displaces his anger and tyrannizes and beats Fionnlagh whom he believes to be Fin's son. Interestingly, Artair seems to bridge both of Carole Jones's categories. The victim of bullies during his childhood due to his physical weakness and asthma, Artair adopts the guise of a violent dominant male. What he hides behind this façade is his true identity of a disappearing man who blames others (Fin, his wife, his mother, his deceased father,...) for the situation he is in and foregoes his own agency and any attempts to better his lot in life (Jones 33).

Fin's Second Chance

Fin manages to finalize his rite of passage eighteen years after the failed attempt when he visits the rock during a guga hunt again, this time voluntarily. After discovering that Artair murdered Angel Macritchie in order to bring him back to Lewis to witness the death of Fionnlagh, the son he did not know he had, Fin rushes to save the boy who has left for An Sgeir only a few hours before. The circumstances of Fin's second journey to the rock are somewhat similar to the previous one when, beyond distraught, he is still able to sleep through the passage during a night so stormy that he has to persuade the skipper to sail against his better judgment. In this way, Fin is able to gather strength to take on the turbulent sea in a small inflatable boat to cross from the trawler to the rock. He is as frightened as never before, thoroughly humiliated by the forces of nature, and he experiences his own insignificance in comparison with the elements. All these emotions can be said to be desirable during the initiation process. When Fin finally reaches the shelter of the titular blackhouse, Artair and Fionnlagh are conspicuously absent. Gigs dissuades Fin from looking for them before sunrise, and, in front of the nine other men, he re-

freshes Fin's incomplete memory of his first guga hunt. Fin's fragmented recollections of his experience eighteen years ago start making sense after he is reminded that Mr. Macinnes was an abuser rather than the helpful tutor Fin remembers him to be. Upon hearing about the events, Fin rushes outside to vomit, symbolically purging this long-lost part of his childhood.

Coming to terms with what he had forgotten allows Fin to progress into the liminal stage of his re-started rite of passage. He confronts Artair who is balancing the tied-up Fionnlagh over a cliff, and, without knowing the truth himself, manages to persuade everyone present that Artair is Fionnlagh's father, implying that Artair spent his life torturing his own child, which makes him no better than his own abusive father. This is Fin's transitional task in the liminal stage, which he voluntarily undertakes and successfully accomplishes. Artair releases Fionnlagh but, riddled with guilt, commits suicide by jumping off the cliff.

On his way back to Lewis with Fionnlagh, Fin feels "hollowed out. A husk. Emptied of everything that might once have defined him" (May 472). He has entered the postliminal stage and is now ready to start developing a functioning adult identity and, notably, a functioning father identity. The ending of the novel reveals that Fionnlagh is indeed Fin's genetic son, and it is implied that Fin feels confident enough to immediately take on the father role as, in the last sentence, he offers to take Fionnlagh to a football game, arguably a stereotypical male bonding experience.

Conclusion

Due to both their rites of passage being unfinished, Fin and Artair originally develop dysfunctional adult identities. Both fail as husbands and fathers, and neither is in full control of his life. Fin is a disappearing man *par excellence*, struggling against his own unconscious mind to complete his identity. He manages to finalize his interrupted rite of passage after eighteen years by voluntarily revisiting the same distant sacred location in the same context of the gannet hunt. The presence of the same initiator, Gigs, allows him to finally complete the preliminal stage and progress into the liminal stage in which he manages to save his son Fionnlagh's life – something which he thinks he failed at in the case of his second son Robbie. Ready to develop into a functioning and responsible adult, Fin seizes the new chance at fatherhood allowed to him by the DNA test and spends the two following novels of the trilogy negotiating this role, becoming a new post-millennial variation of the disappearing man which Carole Jones describes as "positively drawn" – not defined by negative features and looking into the future (16).

Artair, on the other hand, after his failed rite, positions himself as a victim of the circumstances which were brought about by one person: his former best friend Fin who betrayed Mr. Macinnes's crimes to others which may or may not have led the

man to suicide. Either way, if Fin had never spoken up, Artair's father would probably have survived the guga hunt and Artair might have had a chance to live his life at least somewhat differently. In order not to show weakness, Artair hides his inability to positively influence his life behind the construction of a monstrous dominant masculine identity which he uses to negatively influence the lives of others, most notably that of the child he is supposed to raise. In killing Angel Macritchie in a way that imitates the *modus operandi* of a killer Fin has not managed to catch, Artair begins to punish and remove those who, as he perceives it, are the originators of his suffering. Angel is killed as this is the only way for Artair to get rid of his nagging reminders of the past. Fionnlagh is supposed to die too, not only because he is the living reminder of Fin's alleged victory in life but also because killing him is the best way of punishing Fin who needs to suffer (as opposed to, for example, being merely killed). It appears that Artair is not planning to return from the final guga hunt where he intends to kill Fionnlagh, which is corroborated by the fact that he leaves his life-saving asthma medication at home. His intention to kill himself on the sacred rock points to his inability to continue living after taking his revenge, presumably because the desire for this revenge is what keeps him alive. Once those he blames are punished, the only available next step is to die, literally giving in to Jonson's "disappearing."

It remains to be seen what new trends of depicting Scottish masculinities will emerge in the post-Brexit environment and in what ways they will be reflected in crime fiction as the depictions of dominant, extreme, and violent masculinities (and other gender identities) are staples of the genre. In view of the recent boom of true crime serial killer narratives, it seems likely that criminal masculinities are about to reach new extremes in the 2020s and beyond and that Scottish crime fiction will definitely not merely watch that development from the sidelines.

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Part II:

Agency and Corporeality

"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 Shiff'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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Agency and the Amnesiac Woman in S.J. Watson's *Before I Go to Sleep* and Its Film Adaptation

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Abstract

Female characters demonstrate new forms of agency in domestic noir as it is exhibited in S.J. Watson's novel as well as in its film adaptation: in middle-class homes of the twenty-first century, housewives are active participants of their own lives and ably interpret their victimisation against which they fight with alternative strategies in the hope of making a change. This chapter relies on Carisa R. Showden's hypothesis which holds that female agency can develop in situations where it is the least accounted for, such as in abusive relationships. Both texts give special attention to the relationship between female agency and victimisation, although the two texts apply different strategies to illustrate how the amnesiac protagonist, Christine Lucas, fights for the (re-)construction of a conscious and independent self. While the book is rather backward-looking in the treatment of the female experience, the movie takes a much broader view in opening up a dialogue with the technological challenges of everyday life. In domestic noir, instead of a reassuring ending where the victim becomes a hero, the aim is more to demonstrate the recognition of victimhood and the emergence of agency in tension.

Keywords

Introduction

Domestic noir, which entered the literary market and the film industry in English-speaking countries in the 2010s, is one of the latest subgenres of crime fiction. The most famous productions, like Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* (2010), Paula Hawkins' *The Girl on the Train*, Susan Harrison's *The Silent Wife* (2013), or Liane Moriarty's *Big Little Lies* (2014), all became bestsellers, and the film adaptations of Flynn's and Hawkins' novels as well as the HBO series of Moriarty's book brought international fame. Steve John Watson, who is publicly known as S.J. Watson, was similarly successful with his 2011 novel *Before I Go to Sleep*, which was adapted to the screen by Rowan Joffé in 2014. Nevertheless, both the book and its film adaptation have been critically neglected despite being among the first pieces of this newly recognised field of crime fiction. Domestic noir mostly concentrates on domestic violence and often (re-)articulates the horrors of the female experience in middle-class homes. Watson's novel also builds on the expected thematic blocks of the genre, but the

reason it is worthy of critical consideration is the way the author exhibits the entanglement of memory and agency in the identity construction of the female victim. *Before I Go to Sleep* recounts the story of 47-year-old Christine Lucas, who lives in a London suburb with Mike, who pretends to be her former husband, Ben. After a violent attack and serious head injuries, Christine suffers from anterograde amnesia, so her mind deletes all memories during the night while she is asleep. Every day when she wakes up, she does not know who she is, whether she has a job or a family, and often takes herself to be a vulnerable child. Christine's first-person narration reveals that her present condition is due to an accident and all the memories related to the past and the present are controlled by Mike.

The female narrator's amnesia creates a hierarchy between the couple because Christine's mental condition completely limits her potential to act and, as a result, the 'husband' acquires full control of his wife's life, identity, and body. The possibilities and limitations of female agency are a determining motif in domestic noir (Waters and Worthington 210), so too in Watson's novel and its film adaptation, but the author challenges the concept of female agency by showing that it can also develop in situations where it is the least accounted for, such as in the case of memory loss. The author's diagnosis stems from the idea that agency and amnesia are mutually exclusive conditions because the latter creates a situation where the amnesiac patient becomes fully dependent, needs care and guidance. The patients are unable to make decisions and act according to their will resulting in the disability of regaining control over their lives. Christine's injuries and ensuing amnesia necessarily result in a loss of her agency, thus it is the acquisition of control over memories that primarily determines the power relations as well as the degree of freedom and autonomy in the novel and the film adaptation.

Traditionally, the concept of female agency is determined in opposition to that of men, as Mary Evans remarks in her reference to Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, "the agency of women has remained secondary to that of men and it is determined by women's relationship to the male" (51). Evans goes on to argue that Beauvoir's reading of gender relations in this context defines agency "as the capacity to make choices about a particular situation, as a form of the human condition that convention did not allow women to experience: the model for agency was therefore to be acquired from male behaviour" (51). According to Evans, this inevitably led to the view that agency is primarily identified with a male pattern of behaviour, and as a result "a pattern of behaviour of that ideal type of the market economy: the autonomous male actor, the individual who assumes responsibility for his own moral and social position but is not beset by ties or responsibilities to others" (51-52).

This assumption is also the starting point in the monograph of the political theorist Carisa R. Showden, *Choices Women Make* (2011), which, apart from assisted reproduction and participation in commodified sex, specifically prostitution and porno-

graphy, thoroughly analyses the relationship between domestic violence and female agency and is intrigued by observing how female victims respond to violence or what decisions they make in an emergency. Dealing with feminist political theory, Showden takes a sensitive approach to the complexity of the concept of female agency, which she explores by not only considering the social and political factors that the individual is exposed to but also through a combination of various theories, such as feminist political and legal theories, as well as phenomenological and post-structuralist approaches. She is convinced that women's agency can only be understood by relying on all of these components, not to mention the possibilities and conditions that can trigger agentic attitude (xi). In the author's interpretation, agency is not necessarily synonymous and interchangeable with the notions of freedom and autonomy, but it incorporates both: the former is understood as "the conditions that facilitate action" and the latter is "the individual capacity to act" (ix). Only by having both without limitations can one develop or gain agency to stand up and act in the world. Showden's argument stems from the recognition that women who fall prey to domestic violence come from fairly different cultural and social backgrounds, so their reactions and decisions are also strongly dependent on their cultural and social contexts. This realisation has also allowed her to counter the traditional views on women's agency measured in lack rather than gain and the insistence on such essential categories as hero or victim, which would necessarily limit the recognition of agency in subjects who leave a violent partner and discriminate the ones that stay. The root of the problem in understanding agency, as Showden further argues, "arises from the tension over the nature of subjectification . . . that one is either a victim, unable to see her way clear of her situation, or a heroic individual, an agent who liberates herself, either individually or in conjunction with others" (x). To overcome the difficulty of thinking in essentialised categories, she suggests giving up the result-oriented view in favour of focusing on "the space between these two . . . impossible-to-realise categories" and recognising that "agency is manifest in the mediation between structural determinism and self-determining autonomy" (x). This approach, as Showden proposes, allows for a revision of challenging situations that victims of domestic violence experience as well as their response to tension. Therefore, agentic attitudes must be explored and examined through considering both "the subject who acts and the conditions within which she operates, particularly the conditions that produce her self-understanding" (ix).

Considering it all, agency is "a form of resistance" (xi), which eventually leads the individual who is acting "to a broader understanding of the conditions that both limit action and construct what kind of action makes sense in different circumstances" (xi). While Showden's monograph is mostly based on empirical research involving a critical study of institutional factors in the development and exercise of women's agency, the present chapter still borrows her hypothesis that "agency and victimization are coincident rather than mutually discrete categories" (38). In other

words, she proposes that agency in the female victim can develop even in situations where it is the least accounted for, such as in abusive relationships and among limited circumstances. S.J. Watson's Christine Lucas is a helpless middle-aged housewife, whose amnesia prevents all types of action or self-understanding. She has no past, or present, no access to information, and is completely out of control. Yet, her story challenges and deconstructs traditional ideas about housewives, and their abilities to act. Relying on Showden's critical insights on women's agency, the present chapter seeks to explore the interconnection between victimisation and agency as well as to analyse the strategies that the two texts, the novel and its film adaptation, apply for its demonstration.

Generic Strategies of Domestic Noir and Female Agency

Julia Crouch coined the name for a different sub-genre called "Domestic Noir" in a blog in 2013 after facing the challenge of not finding any appropriate categories within crime fiction into which her novels would fit. According to Crouch's short definition, domestic noir "takes place primarily in homes and workplaces, concerns itself largely (but not exclusively) with the female experience, is based around relationships and takes as its base a broadly feminist view that the domestic sphere is a challenging and sometimes dangerous prospect for its inhabitants" ("Genre Bender").

The first relevant criticism of the genre appeared in 2018 with *Domestic Noir. The New Face of 21st Century Crime Fiction*, edited by Laura Joyce and Henry Sutton. The articles in this collection exceed Crouch's short description and locate the genre through comparative analyses within the literary history of crime fiction. The editors of the volume provide a more detailed definition by shedding light on the main themes, the attributes of the setting and the impact of space on its inhabitants:

> The main themes are family, motherhood, children, marriage, love, sex and betrayal. Setting is important: the home a character inhabits, and the way they inhabit it, can tell us as much about them as what they say or do. At the centre of these stories is a subversion of the idea of home as sanctuary. Home can also be a cage, a place of torment, of psychological tyranny, of violence. (vii)

Beyond the often-quoted generic features of the genre taking the female perspective at its centre,[1] Fiona Peters argues that it is also "control in all its forms [which] is a

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[1] Fiona Peters argues that the female perspective should not necessarily be associated with the biological sex of the protagonist by referring to Patricia Highsmith's *Deep Water*, where there is an "inversion of masculine and feminine in ways that may not on the most obvious, literal level meet the criteria of writing from a predominantly female narrative perspective" (16). There are other examples for this phenomenon in popular fiction, such as in the science fiction film *Upside Down*, where male protagonist Adam is fighting for Eden's love. Norbert Gyuris points out that while the film creates the impression that Adam is in control, in reality, it is Eden, his love, who influences his acts and decisions (39).

central element of domestic noir: thwarted desire to escape the control of others while conversely exerting one's own control over them" (14), which is also an essential element in Watson's novel.

At this point, it is worth considering some of the subgenres emerging in the 1940s, such as marriage and amnesia thrillers like Patrick Hamilton's *Gas Light* (1938), Graham Greene's *The Ministry of Fear* (1943), and Margery Allingham's *Traitor's Purse* (1941), or other fields like noir and noir thrillers to see how domestic noir interacts with other genres and whether this newly labelled category in crime narratives has any impact in hindsight on the literary antecedents in their generic evaluation. While domestic noir defines itself according to the abovementioned parameters, it cannot deny its heavy reliance on the several subgenres and styles that it blends, just to mention some: the 'whodunit', the marriage and amnesia thriller, noir thriller, psycho-thriller, and female gothic that comments on the dangers, the physical and emotional abuse that women in modern middle-class households are exposed to. Although the present chapter cannot give a complete picture of all the generic features of each trend preceding the birth of domestic noir, I intend to mention the ones that can be traced in Watson's novel as well as in its film adaptation in the hope of delineating a more profound portrait of the female protagonist.

In Watson's book and its film adaptation alike, the hopeless, or even deadly domestic environment offers Christine Lucas the opportunity to change her life, and even if it does not provide an ultimate solution, it still triggers action. The narrative is controlled by Christine's amnesia, and it is exactly this mental vulnerability which facilitates the emergence of agency. As opposed to the whodunit, the solution in domestic noir is not achieved through reasoning and reconstruction of the crime event but through a series of events and the psychic state of the characters. While in classic detective fiction, the past enjoys a priority as the present is controlled by the investigation (Todorov 44), thrillers foreground the present, so the past is replaced with anticipation (47). Watson's book, however, locates the relationship between the past and present differently since the secrets and the crimes of the past, which led to Christine's present condition, are as important in the present as the succeeding events in reconstructing the protagonist's identity, which is a characteristic trait of amnesia thrillers. Unlike in the whodunit where the causal connections are reconstructed by the detective's logical reasoning, Victoria Stewart points out that "the thriller typically depends more on the protagonist's ability to interpret events as they happen, rather than retrospectively, but here too the recall of significant details can prove crucial to the satisfactory resolution of the plot" (64). Furthermore, she adds that "[i]ntroducing an amnesiac protagonist necessarily disturbs this reliance on memory" (64) but in certain books, like in that of Watson, the loss of memory has other effects because "it is not only semantic memory . . . and episodic memory . . . but also autobiographical memory . . . that are lost" (65). The loss of autobiographical

memory is peculiarly intriguing in some amnesia thrillers where it "can lead to a profound disturbance of the role of the investigating protagonist" (65). Recovering lost memory in these narratives, however, becomes indispensable for the protagonist in order to "evade dangers in the present" (61). Christine's situation reflects on the detectives of twentieth-century, like Margery Allingham's Mr Campion, for whom remembering becomes a nightmare in *Traitor's Purse*. Campion feels that he should do something but remains confused for much of the novel and "does not know what to do for the best" (66). Nevertheless, one needs to consider the differences between male and female detectives, as well as those between amateur female detectives and housewives, since "[t]here are new models of agency in domestic noir, models that are more suited to their moment" (Waters and Worthington 202). Unlike Agatha Christie's shrewd spinster detective, Miss Marple, or Dorothy L. Sayers's and Margery Allingham's upper-middle-class and aristocratic sleuths, who are preoccupied either with their own career or the solution of a challenging puzzle, it is "ordinary wives and homemakers" in domestic noir, who, as Anna Snoekstra notes, "becom[e] pre-emptive detectives, investigating their own potential victimhood" (qtd. in Waters and Worthington 201-02).

As regards the strong emphasis on the protagonist, the subjective point of view, "his perceptions, (both accurate and deluded), his state of mind, his desires, obsessions and anxieties" (Horsley 8), domestic noir benefits greatly from noir thrillers. In Lee Horsley's interpretation, the addition of the adjective 'noir' to the thriller does not only show their strong interaction but it serves to enhance some of the characteristic features of the thriller, such as fear, anxiety, and vulnerability (8). Horsley's definition of the noir encompasses such traits as "the shifting roles of the protagonist" (8) between that of the victim, transgressor or investigator, and "the ill-fated relationship between the protagonist and society (generating the themes of alienation and entrapment); and the ways in which noir functions as a socio-political critique" (8). The characters in noir are ambiguous and complex, the protagonists often cross moral boundaries and their oscillation between the roles of the victim, detective and criminal explicitly deconstruct the clearly established triangle of the classic whodunits. The diversity of the female characters and their opportunities and limitations in domestic noir seem to fill in the missing gap in the history of noir with a view to the traditional representation of women, who are either marginalised or appear as *femme fatales*.[2] Domestic noir heavily relies on the aforementioned traits, it foregrounds the subjective point of view and concentrates on the emotional and often troubled psychic state of the (female) protagonist. The female characters recognise and interpret the abusive relationship they live in and fight back with alternative

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[2] Julie Grossmann's *Rethinking the Femme Fatale in Film Noir* (2009) revises the notion of the *femme fatale* and explores whether the traditional approach labelling them as monstrous and evil still applies by foregrounding their diversity in film noir.

strategies, which inescapably overrides their allegedly fixed identity. The struggle for autonomy aims to end their suffering which is the result of long-standing emotional and/or physical abuse. Suffering as a central motif becomes a prerequisite of female agency in domestic noir, especially because it functions as a trigger in the female protagonist's taking (brutal) revenge on her abuser.

Amnesia, Agency and Writing in Watson's Novel

Christine Lucas' situation resembles the lives of millions of middle-class white women in the West of the previous centuries and echoes feminist ambitions of the twentieth century. Considering the treatment of women's fate, experience, and agency, Watson's novel looks back on the past to articulate the challenges of self-realisation that enterprising women have faced over the past two hundred years. Christine's everyday struggles are shared with the reader through her journal, which she starts writing upon the request of her neuropsychologist, Dr Nash. The opening scene of the novel starts with Christine's inner monologue, which highlights the disorientation of the unknowing character one morning when she rises from bed. The reader quickly realises that the protagonist is amnesiac from the outset and cannot share any details about the past or upcoming events. Therefore, the story developing in the narrative and controlled by the amnesiac protagonist's point of view is completely unknown for both the reader and the protagonist. Christine's total confusion after her awakening is first attended to by her pseudo-husband, Mike, who provides some details about her identity, and later by Dr Nash, who returns her journal – including her records of the preceding three weeks – during a short meeting on the same day. This is the point where Christine's real story starts. The act of reading and writing the journal secures the ground for constructing a coherent identity on the one hand, and, on the other hand, warns her unknowing self about the anticipated threats even if she has trouble trusting her own judgements of people and events. According to Dr Nash's instructions, Christine's task is to record anything that occurs each day, such as her emotions, impressions, memories, and even little mundane things, yet the journal plays a more significant role in establishing a bridge between the past and the present through the process of writing as well as the evocation of past memories. Although the journal links different stages of time, the first few sections of the diary place a larger emphasis on the past, which is not surprising because the pains and losses that haunt Christine's recollections have a great impact on the series of events that she is forced to face in the present. On the one hand, writing appears as a form of psychotherapy – an imaginary conversation between patient and doctor – but on the other hand, it is also a means of investigation. The ability to remember helps to construct a coherent narrative identity and recollect the day of the attack. Keeping a journal of everyday events stimulates Christine's memory so much that she slowly abandons the position of

the victim and shifts into that of the detective. In her ambitions to regain control over her mind and memories, the reader recognises the emergence of agency even if it is considerably limited by her amnesia.

The novel heavily exploits the connection between the female experience and the act of writing. Christine's journal analyses the themes characteristic of domestic noir in depth: marriage, sexuality, motherhood, and the life of a suppressed housewife. The journal introduces the reader to the deepest corner of her soul, she honestly writes about her feelings, the inability to act, the imprisonment in the house, but most of all, her desperate struggle to remember her son and herself as a mother. The act of writing provokes the recall of memories which randomly appear in Christine's consciousness as if it were a film with loosely connected images. This is called FBM (flash bulb memory) "which is a form of autobiographical memory with an astounding perceptual clarity we are able to retrieve (seemingly) intact" (Groes 23). The following quote from the novel illustrates this mental process:

> A pen was tucked between the pages of the journal and almost without thinking I took it out, intending to write more. I held it, poised over the page, and closed my eyes to concentrate.

> It was then that it happened. Whether that realization – that my parents are gone – triggered others, I don't know, but it felt as if my mind woke up from a long, deep sleep. It came alive. But not gradually; this was a jolt. A spark of electricity. Suddenly I was not sitting in a bedroom with a blank page in front of me but somewhere else. Back in the past – a past I thought I had lost – and I could touch and feel and taste everything. I realized I was remembering. (59)

It is also through these flashes that Christine awakens to the fact that she had a successful professional career as a writer and acquired a Ph.D. in English Literature: "The image vanished. My eyes opened. . . . Was it true? Had I written a novel? Was it published? I stood up; my journal slid from my lap. If so, I had been someone, someone with a life, with goals and ambitions, and achievements. . . . Was it true? Ben had said nothing to me this morning. Nothing about being a writer" (99). Christine's unreliability as a narrator manifests several times; her journal abounds in inconsistencies as she often confuses her own memories with the ones that Mike implants in her head.[3] The awareness of her inability to make a difference between reality and fantasy ceaselessly recreates the tension in the novel. Since Christine is uncertain about the reliability of her memories, she relies on Mike's reinforcement so that she can trust herself. Mike, however, either lies or keeps silent about the

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[3] For example, when they are on a walk, Christine asks Mike to tell her about them:
"'I don't know anything about me and you. I don't even know how we met, or when we got married, or anything.'
He smiled, and shuffled along the bench so that we were touching. He put his arm around my shoulder.
I began to recoil, then remembered he is not a stranger but the man I married" (63) and then again, in the next line, she claims to remember nothing about their story.

whole truth, which he believes must be hidden to avoid causing more pain. Although Christine is inclined to accept Mike's responses uncritically, she feels more and more empowered by the journal containing all of her confidential information:

> But then I began to imagine what would happen if I did stumble upon a copy of my novel in a cupboard or at the back of a high shelf. What would it say to me, other than, *Look how far you have fallen*. . . . It would not be a happy moment. . . . The effect might be devastating. No wonder Ben might want to hide it from me. I picture him now, removing all the copies, burning them in the metal barbecue on the back porch, before deciding what to tell me. How best to reinvent my past to make it tolerable for the remainder of my years. But that is over now. I know the truth. My own truth, one I have not been told but have remembered. . . . I know that the book I am writing – my second, I realize with pride – may be dangerous, as well as necessary. (103, emphasis in original)

Although Christine keeps rejecting the idea that Mike intentionally manipulates her memories, she slowly starts to realise that the passive, helpless, and unskilled woman she should identify with is an invented model her husband/lover has created for her. The silence that surrounds Christine's true profession is due to the fear of female agency, the woman who can take control of her own life. Furthermore, the fear of the competent woman also conjures up the threatening image of the conscious and creative female artist from the turn of the nineteenth century, who, as Cecily Hamilton argues, was regarded as rather unwomanly and a danger to society: "Any woman who has attained to even a small measure of success in literature or art has done so by discarding, consciously or unconsciously, the traditions in which she was reared, by turning her back upon the conventional ideas of dependence that were held up for her admiration in her youth" (qtd. in Showalter 225). From Christine's perspective, writing means both the resistance against patriarchal control, which has to be kept a secret, and "a liberatory activity" (Ledger 27) at the same time. The protagonist's sense of guilt stemming from the act of writing reminds the reader of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's unnamed narrator in "The Yellow Wall-Paper" (1892), who crosses moral boundaries by keeping a journal and whose inhibitions Christine shares: "I have the bedroom door closed. I am writing this in private. In secret. I can hear my husband in the living room . . . but I will hide this book if he comes upstairs. I will put it under the bed, or the pillow. I don't want him to see I am writing in it. I don't want to have to tell him how I got it" (Watson 49). Christine's fears of being revealed keep returning in other scenes where she thinks of keeping the journal as some form of crime: "I was nervous, though I didn't know why. The journal felt forbidden, dangerous" (95).

While Christine's journal means a form of revolt against oppression that constantly recreates the possibility to become free and independent, for the amnesiac patient, it is almost impossible to fully experience this condition. Writing and (re-)reading her records ceaselessly recreate the possibility of agency, yet amnesia strictly limits Christine's movement or access to various means. Without Dr Nash and an old

friend, Claire, she would be unable to regain control over her memories. These helping characters, or 'sidekicks', however, cannot be present in the closing chapter of the novel where the female protagonist's life is threatened and although she tries to maintain her agency by facing the dangers that originate from writing and remembering her past associated with mostly traumatic events, she cannot defend herself against Mike's brutality. Unlike in the film adaptation, Christine's taking action is differently depicted in the novel's closing scene, which also takes place in a hotel room. In the respective passage, the reader sees Christine sitting on a chair with wrists and ankles tied up, a sock in her mouth. This part is an explicit example of the power relations where the man exerts control over the woman and which implies a return to the model of the passive, helpless woman: "I try to speak, but cannot. I realize something is in my mouth. A sock, perhaps. It has been secured somehow, tied in place, and my wrists are tied together, and also my ankles. This is what he wanted all along, I think. Me, silent and unmoving" (360). This form of female passivity in Watson's novel seems to go against a characteristic trait of domestic noir, which, as Diane Waters and Heather Worthington argue, portrays a woman as an active agent who goes as far as getting herself into life-threatening situations: "Although she is active, the female protagonist of domestic noir may use her agency in destructive or self-destructive ways, in pursuit of and to protect her notions of love, family, and home" (210). Nevertheless, Christine's agency is established not in her physical actions but in her mental capacity to remember. As a result of realising that she is unable to escape or fight Mike, her active and passive roles merge, certainty replaces her fears, and her recollections no longer need reinforcement: they build up a crystal-clear narrative in her head. Therefore, her last words preceding her loss of consciousness in the burning hotel room imply her full awareness of her situation, solace, and surrender to danger:

> I am beginning to choke. I think of my son. I will never see him now, though at least I'll die knowing I had one, and that he is alive, and happy. . . . I think of Ben. The man I married and then forgot. . . . I want to tell him that now, at the end, I can remember him. . . . And yes, I can remember loving him. I know I do love him and I always have. . . . Things go dark. I can't breathe. . . . There were never going to be any happy endings for me. I know that now. But that is all right. That is all right. (363)

Female Agency, Technology, and Amnesia in the Film Adaptation

The film adaptation of the novel pays as much attention to the themes of domestic noir as the novel, yet it also attempts to stretch the boundaries of the genre in order to establish a dialogic relationship between control and high-tech devices which sheds light on a different aspect of agency in the victim. Robert Stam argues that film adaptations "take an activist stance toward their source novels, inserting them into a much broader intertextual dialogism. An adaptation, in this sense, is less an attempted resuscitation of an originary word than a turn in an ongoing dialogical

process" (64). This approach allows for discarding the conventional critical attitude which claims that the source text is superior and examines adaptations through the lenses of fidelity. Understanding that the two texts not only interact but co-exist, they also acquire equal status and thus, both become sources for analysis without having to account for the hierarchy between source text and adaptation. In the film, the journal is replaced by a hand-held camera that Christine talks to. This replacement was not only necessary – writing as a silent activity can hardly be put on screen – but a witty solution that locates the text of the film in a wider context since it is not only human factors and records of external memory like the journal and photos that play a significant role in the question of authority to control memories, but more developed technology. Thus, the film not only addresses violence stemming from traditional gender roles performed in middle-class suburban homes but also the crisis of memory and identity related to digital amnesia,[4] which can be viewed as common symptoms of the experience of isolation and the condition of amnesia.

The film adaptation foregrounds the questions of unequal power relations stemming from the uneven degree of the control over different types of technology. Dominance is embodied in several forms of technology: the husband fabricates photos to create an imaginary past for the wife while Dr Nash, the neuropsychologist, instructs Christine on the phone on how to start investigating her own identity. Due to her amnesia, the victim does not know her own story, so she passively internalises the narrative which the male figures in power positions, – mainly Mike –, have made for her. The opening scene of the film foregrounds all the themes that epitomise a helpless middle-class housewife's everyday reality, isolation, and memory in a technological setting. The camera shows Christine waking up beside a man in the bed, she is disoriented in an unknown world; the only reference points she has are the pictures on the bathroom wall, which do not show anything else but some moments with her (pseudo-)husband. Although the question of the photos' authenticity also appears in the book, the pictures can only be vitalised in this visual context and they play a determining role in the construction of Christine's missing identity. In this scene, her identity merges with technology since she cannot distinguish between herself and the woman in the pictures. According to Sebastian Groes, "[m]emories are not something we necessarily control: often it's the memories that control us, and in doing so, determine our self-perception and behaviour" (17).

Christine's identity-making is dependent on the technological medium that provides her with a discontinuous set of images. Thus it is crucial to examine who or what controls this medium and who selects the images from which she can reconstruct

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[4] The term "digital amnesia" was coined by Kaspersky Lab in 2015 for "the experience of forgetting information that you trust a digital device to store and remember for you" (Finley et al. 170).

her memories and existence. Christine's identity is essentially defined by prese-lected, filtered, and prearranged images and narratives. The first dialogue of the film objectifies Christine and establishes a predefined model that she is obliged to iden-tify with: Christine's reality is constructed by Mike, who plays her husband Ben in this male narrative; she has difficulty recalling anything since her "accident" and her brain cannot store memories for more than one day. In this case, the memory of the woman is dominated by male discourse whose authenticity cannot be questioned since the photos are the imprints of a reality the wife has already forgotten. The only option left for Christine to reveal her true identity is to record the events of each day to warn her unknowing self the following morning and to evade dangers. Neverthe-less, the recordings on the camera mediate her memories only in fragments, in a less organised way than her journal in the novel. Furthermore, the intimacy and introspection developing through the writing of the journal cannot be replaced by the camera, so a stronger emphasis is placed on constant fear and Mike's violence in the film adaptation. Beyond the filmic text, the act of storing memories on a cam-era on an everyday basis also sheds light on the impact of digital tools on our memory which is conceptualised by the term of digital amnesia. In *Memory and Technology*, Jason R. Finley et al. claim that "[w]hile researchers can measure the amount of information that people choose to internally memorise in the presence or absence of external memory, a broader open question is whether our very *ability* to internally memorise new information is atrophying with disuse in the long term" (Finley et al. 170, emphasis in original). Related to this dilemma, the writers refer to Andrew Hoskins's study, *Archive me! Media, Memory, Uncertainty*, in which the au-thor warns us that "the increasing entanglement of human and digital memory leads to a potentially dangerous ceding of control over our memories to networks, with uncertain consequences such as loss of privacy and security, degradation of the spontaneity and schema formation of human memory, and alienation of memory from the self" (qtd. in Finley et al. 171).

Considering the circulating debates about the future of human memory, Christine's amnesia reaches beyond the filmic text, and the individual level connects to global phenomena that highlight the indispensability of digital tools in one's identity-mak-ing. At the same time, however, the film ironically reflects on the everyday practices of digital memory in the scene where Christine comes across a memory stored in one type of medium through another piece of recollection stored in a different one. Nevertheless, the verification of the authenticity of memories still depends on the subject and his/her episodic and autobiographical memory. The aforementioned scene is related to the credibility of the photos. Christine records her videos in the bathroom every day with some of the photos in the background on the wall. When one day she watches a video of the previous day, she notices a difference between the photos on the wall on that morning and those at the time of the recording. She quickly realises that the photos removed from the bathroom are all hers, which she

found in her husband's study. Although she cannot make sure whether the photos hanging in the bathroom are manipulated or not, she understands that they are assembled by her husband to construct her life story, which obviously lacks her own story. Consequently, the victim's agency in the film largely depends on the acquisition of control over the external memories accessible in different types of technological media because these contents determine the degree of her freedom. The information she receives about her present and past is kept in various technological forms, such as photos, videos, and telephone calls from Dr Nash, who appears as a more dominant character in the film than in the novel. He telephones Christine every day, tells her that she is amnesiac, needs his treatment and explains why and how she needs to use the camera. Although Dr Nash is fighting for Christine's mental recovery and finding her true identity in his function as a doctor, he is still an authority figure who has control over his patients and expects them to obey his instructions.

Nevertheless, as Claude E. Shannon points out, a medium or channel of information always has a distorting effect: the desired information or the message is called the signal, which can be modified by distortion or noise (447). To be able to evaluate the information that is filtered through the channel or the medium means to have the ability to differentiate between the signal and the noise. In other words, Christine needs to find useful information in the array of non-essential or useless information. She is provided with different types of media by male figures, and all these channels are filled with signals and noise. She needs to separate the available information so that she can find out who she really is. Also, she has to cope with her social and informational isolation, which hinders understanding herself and building up her earlier authentic identity. Christine's feeling of imprisonment is undoubtedly enhanced by the suburban home. While both the book and the film adaptation intensively reflect on the psychological impact of feeling lonely and trapped in the house, there are no exact details of either the location or the surroundings, which implies the fragility of our concept of the home, exactly because they are perfect sites for torture and violence regardless of where they are. Christine's experience of her everyday reality in the house is, however, more explicitly described in the novel than in the film:

> I look up at the wipe-clean board that Ben had shown me before he left. . . . [W]ords have been scrawled on it and wiped out, replaced, amended, each leaving a faint residue. I wonder what I would find if I could go back and decipher the layers, if it were possible to delve into my past that way, but realize that, even if it were possible, it would be futile. I am certain that all I would find are messages and lists, groceries to buy, tasks to perform. Is that really my life? I think. Is that all I am? (29-30)

The feeling of isolation in the film adaptation is illustrated from both an external and Christine's internal perspective. The house is often shot from angles where it seems to be standing alone, or Christine's monotonous, wasted life when she is led

to the board by Mike in the mornings or when she is just browsing in the house. The house gradually transforms into a prison where the female victim is going to be exposed to suffering and fatal risks. The lonely suburban house reminds the reader of the haunted castles from early gothic stories where the cruel male character tortures the woman held in captivity, but these types of houses with their isolated characters also feature in the horror genre, such as Alfred Hitchcock's film adaptation of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938). The film greatly benefits from the exploitation of gothic traits in the representation of the house; the ruling darkness, Christine's futile attempt to escape, and Mike's aggressive intervention in one of the last scenes do not only intensify tension but prevent all of Christine's efforts to acquire control over her memories and the different types of media. It seems that her endeavours are all in vain, the next morning she wakes up with no memory of Mike's brutality of the previous day.

The closing scene of the film, however, serves as a remedy to Christine's inability to act. The viewer sees a more active and aggressive Christine in the filmic text, who would even be willing to sacrifice her own life to get her family back. In the hotel room by the airport, Christine is not a passive observer of the events: when Mike attacks her, she fights back and escapes from the scene, taking her camera with herself. Practically, the film could end with the arrival of the ambulance car when Christine is recording her vow that she will never let anyone take her life again. While the novel ends with Christine hoping and remembering, the last scene of the film overrides this optimism. Robert Stam argues that "[f]ilm adaptations can also add events . . . these additions can have any number of motivations: to take advantage of a brilliant actor, to suggest contemporary relevance, or to 'correct' the novel for aesthetic reasons" (72). Christine's story is taken further in the film adaptation. When she wakes up in the hospital, she does not remember anything except for her son, and Claire's hair-colour. Although the fact that her sufferings have terminated might be a relief, the inability to remember what has happened to her undoubtedly leaves her fate open, views the maintenance of agency sceptically, and foregrounds the temporal indeterminacy of amnesia.

Conclusion

S.J. Watson's novel *Before I Go to Sleep* and its film adaptation bring to light the oppression that women experience even in the twenty-first century. Both texts depict domestic violence against women, and as a consequence, the female victim's declining mental health. Beyond the recurring themes of domestic noir, Watson's story extensively reflects on the possibilities and limitations of female agency, but the novel and its film adaptation apply different strategies to illustrate the connection between victimisation and the patterns of agency. The novel primarily looks back on

the past to comment on the middle-class housewife's fate and her struggles for autonomy, but the film establishes a more active dialogue with the challenges of the contemporary world. While the amnesiac protagonist develops agency through the act of writing her journal and constant self-reflection in the novel, it is control over memories stored in different types of media that determines the degree of agency and freedom in the film adaptation. Showden asserts that "[h]aving 'agency' involves both deliberating on choices and having choices on which to deliberate" (ix). Nevertheless, it is not so much the dialectics of success and failure that determine the degree of agency in female victims of domestic violence as how the recognition of their emotional and physical abuse can trigger resistance and self-care which necessarily affect the degree of freedom in light of their decisions. In domestic noir, just like in Watson's novel and its film adaptation, the aim is not to offer a reassuring ending where the female victim becomes a heroine but rather to illustrate the awareness of the subject's own victimisation as well as her actions and revolt shaped by her temporal and relational circumstances.

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Nothing but a Vessel? Investigating the Role of the Body in Tom Hillenbrand's Techno Thrillers

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Abstract

This chapter examines the role of the body, and its possible uses, in two recent techno thrillers by German author Tom Hillenbrand: *Hologrammatica* (2018) and *Qube* (2020). It explores the boundaries between humans and machines in a futurist/dystopian scenario that allows people to replace their organic brain with a digital "cogit" (a small quantum computer) and switch bodies at will. Theories of posthumanism and transhumanism serve as a backdrop to analyze relevant aspects of the novels and to consider ramifications of technologies that might be possible in the not so far future. It questions the role of artificial enhancements to bodies, of the connection between bodies and brains, and of fundamental concepts like identity, body, and humanity.

A particular emphasis of the chapter will be placed on the role of gender. The interchangeability of bodies (i.e. vessels) in Hillenbrand's techno thrillers invalidates clear gender distinctions, along with other physical characteristics. While moving beyond human limitations allows for a certain playfulness in transgressing boundaries, Hillenbrand's novels fail to live up to the full spectrum of their possibilities. They do, however, allow readers to envision future constellations of non-binary ways of being, and of forming relationships that transcend traditional ideas.

Lastly, the chapter examines the novels' setting in a world that has been altered by severe environmental threats, and it investigates how the mind-body split impacts issues regarding crime, detection, and identity. The cautionary function of Hillenbrand's texts thus urges us to consider future ramifications of current developments in regard to technology, culture, and environment.

Keywords

Body, gender, artificial intelligence, transhumanism, techno thrillers, Hillenbrand

As Nicoletta Vallorani asserted in her contribution to the 2020 *Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction*, "Crime Fiction and the Future," the body "has become a keyword for the future in both crime and science fiction. The increasing instability of a physical frame that we used to consider as something we were born with and bound to keep from birth until death has become one of the favourite topics in science fiction and also affects crime fiction" (411).

In this chapter, I intend to question the role of the body, and its possible uses, in two recent techno thrillers by German author Tom Hillenbrand. Specifically, I will examine the boundaries between humans and machines, at a time when robots become more and more like humans, and humans are able to incorporate more and more artificial enhancements, from widely accepted prosthetics, pacemakers and cochlea implants to more controversial modifications like implanted microchips and genetic modifications. This leads to the following research questions that I would like to address in more detail: What constitutes a human body, how does it differ from an artificial body, and how can it be used?

By exploring the interplay of biology and technology, body and mind, virtuality and physicality, this article tackles issues that have been brought into the cultural mainstream by the cyberpunk movement. The question of how to establish identity beyond physicality – also in the specific context of gender roles, crime detection, and punishment – has been a central topic of cyberpunk works from William Gibson's genre-defining novel *Neuromancer* (1984) to Annalee Newitz' more recent *Autonomous* (2017).[1]

Since the stated purpose of this volume is to examine the ways in which crime fiction as a genre incorporates and (re-)negotiates gender and sex, and how it represents and/or questions normativity and deviance in gender and sexual identities, I will extend these questions to consider the role of gender and sex in Hillenbrand's thrillers. Will gender still be an appropriate category to identify and classify human beings when the borders between genders, and between humans and machines, become more and more permeable? How do definitions of gender and sex change when bodies become less fixed and more adjustable? How do ideas about gender and sex relate to the body?

Tom Hillenbrand's Techno Thrillers

To approach these questions, I will look at Tom Hillenbrand's techno thrillers *Hologrammatica* (2018) and *Qube* (2020). Tom Hillenbrand is a German writer who first garnered popularity for a culinary mystery series (six mysteries to date) that features a chef from Luxemburg. In my opinion, his more interesting novels are located at the intersection of crime fiction and science fiction. The first of these novels, *Drohnenland* (from 2014, published in English translation as *Drone State*, 2018), won both the Glauser Award for Best German Crime Novel and the Lasswitz Award for

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[1] I would like to thank reviewer 2 for the suggestion to situate Hillenbrand's novels more clearly in the broader sci-fi tradition.

Best German SF Novel (in 2015). It is set in 2049 and invites readers to imagine a future marked by constant surveillance and predictive technology.[2]

Hillenbrand's next thriller *Hologrammatica* (2018), also a bestseller, and its sequel *Qube* (2020) will be the basis for this article. Both texts shine a fascinating light on future ramifications of technological progress and efforts to optimize human life and society. *Hologrammatica* takes place in 2088 and technological inventions like the holonet, a permanent holographic augmentation of reality, have become ubiquitous, while society also deals with a backlash against constant surveillance, including new privacy laws. New technologies such as mind uploading allow people to effortlessly switch identities by uploading digital copies of their brains into a body of their choice; this blurs the boundaries between humans and artificial intelligence. It also raises questions about what makes humans human. People who have replaced their organic brain with a digital "cogit," a small quantum computer that runs the brain emulation, are called "quants," or hollow heads in the vernacular. For those people, (gendered) bodies have become mere vessels that are exchangeable at will. Consequently, gender as well as descriptive attributes have ceased to play a role in identifying people, both for official purposes such as passports, and in crime and detection.

Hologrammatica's protagonist is Galahad Singh, a private detective who specializes in finding missing persons – not an easy job, when people can just upload their minds into bodies of their choice. Due to the ease of changing one's looks, most of the current arsenal of personal traits that we employ to describe and find people, such as physical characteristics, photos, gender identities or names, is no longer useful. Consequently, most people in *Hologrammatica* and *Qube*'s world pick their own name(s), and passports do not include photos anymore. This challenges our current reliance on physical characteristics in identifying humans, with its over-reliance on visual aspects. It also urges us to consider fundamental questions, including the following: what is real, what is just imaginary, and does it even matter?[3] What makes humans human?[4] What is the relationship between bodies and minds? And, last but not least, what role will gender play in artificially augmented bodies of the future?

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[2] For a detailed analysis of *Drohnenland,* see Henderson, "Crime and Detection in a Virtually Mobile World" and Henderson, "Mapping the Future? Contemporary German-Language Techno Thrillers."

[3] Most of the visual world in *Hologrammatica* and *Qube* is just a projection; one needs special glasses to strip away levels of holographic augmentation.

[4] Possible answers to the question of what makes humans human are individuality, relationships, social interactions, empathy, free will, and awareness – although all of those are presently challenged by current developments in artificial intelligence.

Qube, set in 2091, includes some of the same characters as *Hologrammatica* and provides a continuation of the main storyline. By now, a significant part of the population, about 10%, has become quants. *Qube*'s protagonist Fran Bittner, a UNANPAI agent,[5] was Galahad Singh's love interest in *Hologrammatica* and first taught him about quant customs and etiquette. Although some quants have professional reasons for the conversion from sponge skulls[6] to hollow heads, many quants, according to Fran, enjoy body swapping as a way of life. They appreciate the changeability and fun that is associated with choosing and changing one's body, and they quite often prefer to stay unrecognizable. The only question that is therefore considered taboo when interacting with a quant is the following: what do you look like in real life?

The Role of Gender and Artificial Intelligence

Qube's protagonist Fran is a quant who uses both male and female bodies. He/she (the pronoun changes according to the body being used) is referred to as Francesco or Francesca, or, in a version that works for both genders, just Fran. He/she chooses whichever body appears most advantageous – for example, Fran uses a female body, perceived as less threatening than a male body, to approach and talk to another woman more easily. Occasionally, Fran also uses an everyman suit – a holographic outfit, loosely based on Philip K. Dick's 1977 novel *Scanner Darkly*, that continuously alters a person's appearance: their face, height, silhouette, and clothes. This comes in particularly handy when following or shadowing people, as it makes it very hard to be detected.

Interestingly enough, in the world of *Hologrammatica* and *Qube*, where gender is interchangeable at will, it is used in a rather stereotypical way to play with people's expectations and to gain advantages. I am not sure whether Hillenbrand intends to highlight the possibility of playfully exploiting people's weaknesses, or if he is rather caught up in his own gendered prejudices, similar to how AI bots and voice assistants like Siri and Alexa tend to reinforce gender biases – despite claiming they do not have a gender, they more often than not use female names and female sounding voices along with 'female' traits like helpfulness and giving the impression of being there for you whenever you need them, just like a (female) friend. As Sabine Heuser observed, "[t]heoretically speaking, artificial intelligence need have no gender characteristics at all; nonetheless, they often do display gendered features or gender-specific behaviour" (129). Heuser goes on to speculate that perhaps "AIs are also an expression of the human race's dream to perpetuate and recreate itself without the limitations of the human body as reproductive organ" (129).

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[5] The acronym stands for United Nations Agency for the Non-Proliferation of Artificial Intelligence.
[6] Sponge skulls is the vernacular for 'normal' people with biological brains.

Fran's main antagonist is an artificial intelligence called Nemo. Of course, despite all safeguards, having a digitized brain, as Fran does, makes one susceptible to an artificial intelligence accessing and manipulating one's brain – one of the not too surprising plot twists. In *Qube*, Nemo specifically chose Fran as an unwitting accomplice because Fran is changeable and gender fluid – which both parallels the AI's own *modus operandi*[7] and is beneficial for the AI to accomplish its goals. Since the AI does not have a body, it needs human proxies like Fran.

Although the AI possesses an extremely superior intelligence, there are nevertheless aspects of human behaviour that are difficult for the AI to grasp. Both as a male or female, Fran appreciates having a beautiful body. When the artificial intelligence Nemo uses brainbeam to download Fran into a breathtakingly gorgeous woman, Nemo expects Fran to be pleased. Fran instead complains that this body is too perfect – i.e., not human. For the AI, this is hard to understand – since it obviously knew of Fran's preference for having a beautiful body, it wanted to give her the best, and from an AI's perspective 'too perfect' is just not possible.

The Permeability of Borders Between Bodies and Machines

Hillenbrand's novels thus explore the permeability of borders between bodies and machines. While the mind uploading as it is portrayed in *Hologrammatica* and *Qube* is clearly a futuristic technology, the basis for it is less far-fetched than it would appear at first glance. In his 2016 nonfiction text *The Age of Em: Work, Love, and Life When Robots Rule the Earth*, Robin Hanson discusses the social implications of minds uploaded into computers (brain emulations or 'ems' for short). Futurologist Ray Kurzweil, in *The Age of Spiritual Machines* (1999) and *The Singularity is Near* (2005), also examines the union of humans and machines. Kurzweil predicts that our descendants will live a virtual or purely cybernetic existence without people's identities being closely tied to their bodies. Through mind uploading, it would be possible to live an almost unlimited life as software on a computer.[8] Alternately, people might even be uploaded into physical bodies produced by nanotechnology, composed of nanobot swarms that could take new forms in fractions of a second (*Spiritual Machines* 145). Kurzweil predicts this will come true by the end of the twenty-first century – just after the fictional setting of *Hologrammatica* and *Qube*.[9]

Hillenbrand's fictional texts explore the human ramifications of these futurist and dystopian scenarios. As N. Katherine Hayles already stated in her 1999 classic *How*

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[7] The AI appears in a variety of different shapes.

[8] Although I would question if this would indeed fulfil the definition of 'life.'

[9] In order to judge the validity of Kurzweil's predictions, it might be helpful to look at some of his predictions for 2019 and 2029: For 2019 he predicted that computers would be embedded everywhere, and for 2029 that there would no longer be a sharp division between the human world and the machine world.

We Became Posthuman, if "there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation," there are no more experiences or emotions that truly reside outside of the digital world (3). The *Black Mirror* episode "Be Right Back" raises similar questions about data and identity: Is a person more than the accumulation of their vast digital footprint over time? And, if we contend that the essence of a person is more than their digital footprint, what exactly is most essential in being human, at a time when artificial intelligence gets better and better at mastering such human skills as imagination, abstraction, and induction – in addition to those skills in which computers have long outperformed humans, like precision, recall and memory?[10]

Transhuman arguments derive from ideals of human perfectibility, rationality and agency inherited from humanism and the enlightenment. In many ways, transhumanism also challenges Western humanist tenets, including the sanctity of the soul, the unity of body and mind, and the uniqueness of every individual. Transhumanism can thus be perceived as a radical refiguring of what it is possible to do as a human.[11] While not as extreme as mind uploading or body modifications, participants of the quantified self movement treat their bodies as data sets and attempt to optimize this data – which, according to Andrew Pilsch, "responds to the transhuman perspective that the human is nothing more than an information pattern that happens to be currently instantiated in fleshy form" (4). For many transhumanists, the availability of life-enhancing technologies suggests an imperative to use them to remake ourselves into something more than merely human.[12]

Sex with Interchangeable Bodies

The interchangeability of bodies, as it is explored in Hillenbrand's world, has thought-provoking consequences in regard to sex and pleasure. Quants can change their bodies into whoever they think would be most appealing to the person they want to be intimate with – and Fran does exactly that, both in regard to his/her own pleasure, and in the fulfilment of official duties. When Fran and Galahad Singh first have sex in *Hologrammatica*, Fran asks Singh to choose from ten possible vessels, five male and five female, that are at Fran's disposal. Professional escort services like "vessel vixens" go even further in that they allow customers to choose a body

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[10] For another interesting exploration of the ramifications of the integration of humans and robots, see Theresa Hannig, *Die Optimierer* (2017) and its sequel *Die Unvollkommenen* (2019).

[11] For a thorough analysis of transhumanism, see Pilsch. See also Braidotti, who raises the question of what the post-human might be in a post-anthropocentric perspective, and who argues the case for a posthuman theory that considers feminist subjectivity (101).

[12] Rodney A. Brooks, the director of the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at MIT, also predicts that the distinction between us and robots is going to disappear (236), and that what starts out as bizarre will become the norm (230). He envisions that we will not download ourselves into machines; rather, over the course of our lifetimes, we will morph ourselves into machines through the merger of biotech and robotic technology (212).

from a catalogue. A quant then uploads his/her cogit into the requested vessel. It is even possible to pre-order a complete memory erasure, in which case the escort makes a backup of his/her brain prior to the body swap and thus retains no memories of the encounter.

Sophie Wennerscheid, in "Not in the Image of Humans: Robots as Humans' Other," analyses the depiction of interactions between humans and posthumans in contemporary science fiction films and literature. She asserts that although sex robot manufacturers try to create robots in the image of humans and market them as perfect partners for human beings, generally men, it is, on the contrary, the otherness of posthuman figures that makes it possible to transgress human's self-centeredness and arouse strong feelings. According to Wennerscheid, "as long as robots are designed in the image of humans, they will not be able to do anything else other than to mirror existing needs, experiences or imaginations" (569). If we hope for "challenging new experiences, transgressive new affects, new forms of encounters and hierarchies undermined . . ., we need robots that challenge our restricted self-understanding as humans superior to all other nonhuman beings" (569).

Hillenbrand's quants only fulfill this desire to a certain extent. While some of the encounters between Fran and the novels' other characters are certainly transgressive and invite us to expand our imagination of what is possible, many interactions also reproduce and reinforce existing heterosexist patterns. The most popular vessels, for example, are small Asian females and strong Black males – it is difficult to get more stereotypical than that. Or, in another parallel to contemporary behaviors, people clamor for designer bodies as many people clamor for designer clothes today. The technologically enhanced humans as they are depicted by Hillenbrand try to move beyond human limitations, but in many ways, they still seem to be caught in an early twenty-first century mode of imagining life and human relationships. It might be up to future literary manifestations to imagine something that is more than a mere copy of existing bodies, that is truly original and transcends the split between the virtual and the natural world.

Struggling with Gendered Expressions of the Body

One of the issues that Hillenbrand seems to particularly struggle with is gender: how to imagine gender in a non-binary and yet relatable way. The reason for this might be that Hillenbrand's thrillers are produced for a mass market and therefore rely on easy marketability for robust sales. Gender is deeply connected to embodiment, with all its trappings and cultural connotations. While Hillenbrand portrays gay relationships (Galahad Singh identifies as gay and prefers Fran in a male body), and the joys of body swapping, he does not move beyond contemporary images of male and female bodies. There is no in-between, no both, and no as-of-yet unimagined bodies – which I guess would be hard to describe.

In *Trans**, Jack Halberstam charts the undoing of certain logics of embodiment, and asks how gender might be imagined in the future.[13] Halberstam describes transgenderism as "a desire for forms of embodiment that are necessarily impossible and yet deeply desired" (20). It therefore "has long been situated as a site of futurity and utopian/dystopian potential" (21). Reflecting on the tendency to associate body with home, Halberstam suggests thinking of embodiment as a series of "stopovers" instead (24). This, I believe, is useful in reflecting on Hillenbrand's novels – although, as mentioned above, these texts fail to live up to the full spectrum of their possibilities.

Fran does not ever appear to be at home in his/her body. The chosen vessel merely provides a necessary embodiment to move around in the world. The series of stopovers in male or female bodies fulfils desires of the moment, but as soon as the requirements of the time, place and/or environment change, the body gets discarded. Although Fran acknowledges that multiple body swaps in a short period of time make her/him tired (psychologists recommend people do not change bodies so often), Fran just uses the body as a means to an end. While pleasure can be obtained through the use of the body, it does not appear integral to Fran's definition of self. This coincides with a larger de-valuation of the body in society. When everything is possible, as far as embodiment is concerned, nothing truly matters.

Transgressing the limitations of the human body is a prevalent aim of the characters in Hillenbrand's novels. By foregrounding the notion of role play and examining the possibility of gender and body switching, Hillenbrand opens some interesting lines of investigation into character and gender in fiction. Identity is no longer tied to an identifying body, proper name, or pronoun. Bodies, names, and genders are merely indicators of the many roles that people can play, or the personas they can assume. The real, original body is just one of many vessels to which the cogit in Hillenbrand's universe occasionally returns – although at one point in the novel, too many body swaps within a short period of time leave Fran disoriented and suffering from vessel vertigo. Like business travelers who wake up in the morning in yet another hotel room in another city and wonder where they are, Fran wonders: who am I and where am I?

Body and Mind

Although transgressing the limitations of the human body through body swapping sounds very playful, futuristic and advanced, it does not really overcome the old dualistic separation of body and mind. Thus, the question arises: can the human body be entirely separated from the mind, or does one always leave traces on the other?

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[13] The asterisk, according to Halberstam, modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination (4).

In the context of Hillenbrand's novels, this issue is referred to as the Descartes problem: the impossibility of permanently separating body and mind. If they do not want to risk the possibility of a brain crash, cogits need to return to their original body within 21 days.[14] While this mind-body problem features prominently in both novels and, to a certain extent, even forms the basis for the plot, Hillenbrand does not examine the deeper connection between the two. Even though there are obviously no clearcut answers, one must consider the marks that the mind leaves on the body, and the body's impact on the mind. I therefore question whether erasing the fallible human body and substituting it with a vessel is truly desirable, or is it not rather the uniqueness and fundamental irreplaceability of the body that bestows it its value? Shouldn't we thus value our bodies more?

As Jennifer L. Creech and Thomas O. Haakenson assert in their introduction to *How to Make the Body: Difference, Identity, and Embodiment*, the body "is the physical manifestation of our presence in the world" – "one of the most fundamental aspects of being human" (4). Not surprisingly, the materiality of the body has been and continues to be the focus of much cultural and political concern. If we agree with Creech and Haakenson that "bodies walk through the world and accumulate different experiences according to their legibility and assigned cultural meanings" (4), then I cannot help but wonder what the implications are for cogits and/or, to tone it down a bit, changeable bodies. What kind of experiences would a permanently changeable human being accumulate, and how would that impact further manifestations of the body? Maybe ultimately, Hillenbrand's texts remind us that bodies are never just natural and biological, they are always changing, transforming, and constructed within a cultural context.

Environmental Threats and Cyborg Metaphors

In Hillenbrand's novels, the role of the body is examined in connection with existential threats like climate change that have made large parts of the earth uninhabitable, and the possibility of space exploration and colonization.[15] As one of the characters in *Qube* mentions, it is indeed possible to live anywhere and everywhere if we just change our ideas of what it means to be human (65). Of course, changing our ideas of what it means to be human might necessitate very real material changes. Yes, we can change our bodies, with the help of technology, genetic modifications, and artificial intelligence. This does, however, go to the very heart of the question of

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[14] One of the plot lines in both novels consists of people working to extend this time frame, to allow people to stay longer or maybe even indefinitely in a different body – which would ultimately result in a form of immortality.

[15] In *Hologrammatica*, climate change forms the backdrop of the novel (setting) and functions as the instigator for the development of the artificial intelligence tasked with curbing it (basis for the plot). The text could thus also be classified as an ecothriller. *Qube* further deals with the aftermath of climate change and explores issues of space exploration and colonization.

what constitutes a body. Does the human body have any inherent value and meaning, or is it just, as it is described in Hillenbrand's futuristic world, seen as nothing more than an antiquated machine of tendons and bones (122) that begs to be optimized?

The cyborg metaphor is commonly employed to discuss bodily changes and optimizations that are necessitated by environmental threats and other cultural developments. As Rosi Braidotti explains in her chapter "The Posthuman as Becoming-Machine," the issue of technology is central to the post-anthropocentric predicament:

> The relationship between the human and the technological other has shifted in the contemporary context, to reach unprecedented degrees of intimacy and intrusion. The posthuman predicament is such as to force a displacement of the lines of demarcation between structural differences, or ontological categories, for instance between the organic and the inorganic, the born and the manufactured, flesh and metal, electronic circuits and organic nervous systems. (89)

From its earliest manifestations, gender has been intimately connected to the concept of the cyborg (Haraway). As Katherine Hayles points out, the question of gender has also been used to distinguish between thinking humans and thinking machines. Since it is the part of the Turing test that most often has been forgotten, Hayles asks: "Why does gender appear in this primal scene of humans meeting their evolutionary successors, intelligent machines? What do gendered bodies have to do with the erasure of embodiment and the subsequent merging of machine and human intelligence in the figure of the cyborg?" (xii).

While Hillenbrand only touches on these issues, I contend that the role of environmental threats, specifically climate change, and its effect on (gendered) bodies, warrants further investigation. How do bodies adapt, and how do they need to adjust, in order to survive in an ever-more hostile environment? Gabriele Dürbeck, in "The Anthropocene in Contemporary German Ecothrillers," observes that "ecothrillers often oscillate in a tension between enlightenment and entertainment" (316). This fluctuation between fact and fiction certainly applies to Hillenbrand's futuristic thrillers as well. His novels undulate between real concerns and as of now still farfetched but fun-to-imagine and entertaining solutions. Like ecothrillers, techno thrillers have a function of popularizing knowledge and stimulating our collective imagination.

Techno Thrillers' Cautionary Function

Hillenbrand's thrillers clearly also fulfil a cautionary function. Leila E. Villaverde and Roymieco A. Carter, in their discussion of SF films, focus on the ways in which these films have illuminated the possibilities of the future while providing "cautionary tales that ask us to reflect on the outcomes of our current behaviours and choices" (123). Particularly relevant in this regard is dystopian literature's potential

to portray possible futures not just as the consequence of individual choices, but systemically: "Dystopia's foremost truth lies in its ability to reflect upon the causes of social and ecological evil as systemic" (Moylan xii). Hillenbrand's thrillers' ability not only to depict troubling issues today, but also to envision future developments, along with their widespread popularity across socially and politically fragmented parts of the population, make them thus well suited to contribute to and even generate difficult discussions about the type of society that we want to live in.

An investigation of *Hologrammatica* and *Qube* also points to deeper issues regarding crime, detection, and identity. How will we treat crimes committed in virtual reality? Is it still murder, if I shoot one of many interchangeable bodies, or just a destruction of personal property? And, maybe most importantly: how can we hold people accountable, if they can just upload their minds into different bodies – or, in another iteration of the same predicament that is maybe even a little closer to becoming a reality, change their bodies through genetic modifications?[16] Personal identity has been the cornerstone of our legal justice system, but contemporary techno thrillers like *Hologrammatica* and *Qube* alert us to the fact that in the not-so-distant future, the question of what constitutes identity might become even more fraught and open to interpretation.[17]

As we can see in Hillenbrand's novels, bodies that are modifiable at will, and ultimately detachable from the brain, provide both potential for new engagements and challenges for human life and life experiences. Crime and detection are at the forefront of establishing these modes of operation. These thrillers thus invite us to reflect on the ever-shifting boundaries between human and machine. Questioning the uses and the potential of human and artificial bodies necessitates deeper engagement with culturally relevant topics like gender, (sexual) identity, and the bodies' relationships – with other bodies, with (biological or artificial) brains, and with the environment.

Qube's last fight and big showdown takes place within a game. This further muddles the distinction between 'real' life and simulation. The AI can access every quant's brain, and readers as well as protagonists are left wondering who is a 'real' person (in a vessel) and who is just an avatar. While this is clearly a ploy (some crimes that are committed within the game turn out to be just simulations), it does raise interesting questions about the similarities and differences between human bodies, technologically enhanced bodies, cyborgs, quants and avatars. It also points to pertinent issues regarding the definition of what constitutes a crime and what needs to be done to solve crimes of the future.

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[16] Daniel Suarez's 2017 sci-fi thriller *Change Agent* explores this issue of genetic modifications.
[17] See also Kenley who contends that "digital technology stands out as a harbinger of the new types of crime, new criminal methodologies and new crime-solving techniques that mark contemporary crime fiction as somehow distinct from its more analogue forebears" (261).

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Illusions of Choice: Examining the Consequences of Social Pressure, Religious Fanaticism and Legislative Overreach in Claudia Piñeiro's *Catedrales*

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Abstract

The following paper examines the theme of institutional violence in contemporary Argentine crime fiction by focusing on the analyses of fictional individual instances of violence in Claudia Piñeiro's 2020 novel *Catedrales*. Set against a contrasting backdrop of post-dictatorship (1976-1983) and present-day Argentina, the novel spans a thirty-year period, centring around the death and dismemberment of an adolescent, Ana. As the story unfolds, we discover Ana's death to be a direct result of a clandestine abortion, and her mutilation being an attempt at its concealment. Through Ana's experience, Piñeiro demonstrates how restrictive laws and enforced social norms around abortion, sex, and family structure, which in the case of the novel are propagated by religious fanaticism, can drive individuals to engage in unregulated illegal activities and unimaginable acts of violence. The purpose of this chapter is to examine Piñeiro's portrayal of past instances of violence, arising as a direct consequence of restrictions imposed on individuals by the state, religion, and society. Consequently, the paper focuses on exploring these three elements by addressing the issues of illegal abortion and legislative overreach, social pressure as well as religious fanaticism. Moreover, the lingering effects of the Argentine 1976-1983 military dictatorship are addressed due to their influence on the fictional instances of violence. In this context, the paper aims to illustrate the ongoing institutional violence in contemporary Argentina while simultaneously highlighting the legacy of the military regime.

Institutional violence has become one of the most widely scrutinized topics in contemporary crime fiction, particularly in the Latin American *novela negra*. Critics such as Amelia S. Simpson explain that the *novela negra* alters the traditional representation of crime as a disruption of an orderly society by portraying it "as a symptom of a disordered society and as part of a system that fosters criminal activity" (46). The Argentine bestselling novelist Claudia Piñeiro, much like many contemporary crime authors, engages with this topic in her literary work, with her novels frequently addressing the adverse effects of institutional violence through the portrayal of a society which often chooses to engage in illegal activities as a result of governmentally and socially imposed restrictions and norms. Accordingly, the following chapter

aims to examine the crimes committed by individual characters as a symptom of institutional violence in Claudia Piñeiro's 2020 novel *Catedrales.* The novel offers an insight into how governmentally controlled legislation and religiously enforced social norms around abortion, sex, and family structure can push the public to take part in unregulated illegal activities and compel family members to perpetrate unimaginable acts of violence against each other. Subsequently, the main objective of this chapter is to examine how Piñeiro uses the fictional instances of individual violence to reflect on the impact the Catholic Church and Argentine legislation had on the general public. Furthermore, the 1976-1983 dictatorship and its lingering effects will form part of the discussion of the driving forces behind the instances of violence in the novel.

The novel opens in present-day Santiago de Compostela, Spain, one of the world's most iconic pilgrimage destinations and cathedral shrine to Saint James. Contrary to this distinctively Spanish backdrop, the plot of *Catedrales* fundamentally centres around Argentina and the death of adolescent Ana, whose dismembered corpse was discovered in a quiet neighbourhood in the province of Buenos Aires thirty years ago. Prior to her death, Ana unwittingly became entangled in a deathly love triangle involving a young seminary student, Julián, and her oldest sister Carmen. Julián and Carmen both felt an attraction towards each other but due to their mutual devotion to the Catholic Church denied themselves the experience of love. Meanwhile, Ana fell in love with Julián and managed to seduce him while attending a Catholic youth camp. However, her feelings were not reciprocated and instead, the resemblance she bore to her sister was exploited by Julián, who used her body to satisfy his own sexual desires denied to him by his calling. When Julián and Carmen eventually give in to their passion and pursue marriage, following his decision to leave the seminary, Ana discovers she is pregnant, which jeopardises the pair's dreams of forming an exemplary Catholic family and poses a threat to their reputation. Desperate to preserve their social image and achieve their goals at all costs, ironically Carmen and Julián relinquish their values by committing a cardinal sin against the teachings of the church through arranging a clandestine abortion for Ana. When she dies following the botched procedure, in order to conceal evidence and avoid social shame, Carmen resorts to dismembering her body and incinerating it in her pottery furnace before discarding her sister's remains in a back alley. While it could be argued that simple human lust and hypocrisy are major factors in manifestations of violence in the novel, this chapter aims to broaden the discussion by examining how Piñeiro uses these brutal acts of violence as a way of portraying the effects of socio-religious influences acting on ordinary individuals, subsequently exposing the intricacies of ongoing institutional violence.

The following chapter approaches the novel through the lens of institutional violence, which according to Ruggiero "is the outcome of violations perpetrated by individuals and groups against their own official principles and philosophies, those principles and philosophies which allow them to hold positions of privilege" (29). Examples of such practices in the novel abound if we take into account the lack of separation of Church and state, illegal abortions carried out by medical practitioners for financial gain, family members renouncing their principles and committing murder for the sake of preserving their image, as well as police corruption obstructing the proper course of justice. However, in order to conceptualise instances of institutional violence in Piñeiro's novel, we must also observe its function within the wider context of structural violence. Structural violence was first coined by Galtung and "is normally taken to mean the harms that are created through preventing people meeting their basic needs" (Cooper and Whyte 210). Turvey et al. expand this view by stating that this type of violence "refers to the way that social structures and social institutions may cause harm to individuals by depriving them of basic needs" (211). As argued by Drymioti,

> [s]tructural violence is generally understood as an arrangement deeply rooted in a system of relationships within a socio-economic and political apparatus that results in the restriction of enjoyment of fundamental rights to the degree that certain social groups are constrained from achieving the quality of life that would have otherwise been possible. (58)

As outlined above, structural violence results from the socio-economic and political apparatus at play. Institutions lie at its core, as suggested by Winter and Leighton, who claim that this type of violence is "embedded in ubiquitous social structures [and] normalized by stable institutions and regular experience" (qtd. in Rylko-Bauer and Farmer 47). Drymioti also argues that "[d]epending on the arrangement found at a structural level, normalization or execution [of violence] usually originates in institutions that have authority over the particular subjects that the arrangement concerns" (60). Taking this approach into consideration, we can closely examine the role of institutions in the novel and see how their ability to naturalise the often harmful reproduction of structural violence through legitimate means contributes to the characters' criminal activity and serves as an overall critique of the issues presented in the novel. Furthermore, the broader application of institutional roles within structural violence, allows us to conceptualise how it impedes the characters from exercising what we would consider, their basic human rights.

Moreover, in order to understand the motives behind the characters' heinous acts, we must also consider how institutional violence operated as part of the particular socio-cultural context presented in the author's work by examining the level of influence of the Catholic Church on both the Argentine government and society over the past century. Since the establishment of the Argentine state in the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church has played a key role in the shaping of the nation through education, imposition of social norms and interference in governmental

procedures and legislative changes. As expressed by Esquivel, "[i]n political, social, and cultural terms, the Catholic Church has played a significant role in the construction of the identity of Argentine society and has been a principal source of legitimacy for the political process" (136). Consequently, over the past century, religious institutions formed an integral part of the political system in Argentina, frequently endorsing administrations favouring orthodox ideology, although this relationship was more strained at times under Juan Perón. Nonetheless, the 1976-1983 dictatorship further solidified the Church-State relationship in Argentina. The ruthless regime lasted for almost seven years, claiming many thousands of victims, with an estimated 30,000 disappeared. The military claimed that their chief goal laid in the restoration of law and order and ending of governmental corruption through what they coined as the National Reorganisation Process or *el proceso*. However, the utopian image of an economically prosperous and socially stable nation quickly turned into widespread civil subjugation and repression, focused on re-shaping the society and re-establishment of traditional values the nation supposedly lost due to the foreign influence of liberalism. "According to the authorities, the propagation of foreign ideologies, defined as anything that deviated from the traditional Western Christian canon and traceable back [sic] to the values of the colonial period, challenged the nation not only at the material level but also at the moral level" (Juárez-Dappe 85). This social reorganisation and reconstitution of the supposedly lost orthodox values was carried out through extremely violent means including unlawful imprisonment, torture, and mass murder, on the part of the military government.

Given its strong fundamentalism, the dictatorship proved to be an ideal political opportunity for the Catholic Church to increase its governmental influence and aid the military in the systemic implementation of ideologically driven social norms on gender roles, dress code and more importantly family structure. Under the new regime the new norms around male appearance dictated that "[m]en were to avoid long hair or any clothing that may have cast doubts on their heterosexual orientation" (Sutton 67), while women were encouraged to wear traditionally feminine clothing and embrace the idea of motherhood. In addition to strict aesthetic rules based on the sex of an individual, gender roles were also strictly defined in line with the traditional idea of males being seen as the breadwinners and females as mothers and housewives. The Church strongly supported this orthodox hierarchal family structure favouring the dominant male role while diminishing the female position to the domestic sphere. Furthermore, the Argentine law at the time, which "vested *patria potestad,* or parental power in husbands" (Htun 120), allowed for further reductions of female social and legal status. The same law also "distinguished between children born to married parents and those born to nonmarried parents, granting 'marital' children more rights than 'nonmarital' children" (120). The establishment of these highly prejudicial standards contributed to the stigmatisation of illegitimate children, simultaneously curtailing women's rights by removing their parental claims.

Ultimately, these restrictions and strong emphasis on family structure led to the disapproving perception of single, unmarried mothers and illegitimate children in a society urged to embrace conservative values. Moreover, by taking absolute control of the education system, the military junta was able to impose a rigid curriculum based heavily on religious ideology which arguably led to a form of social conditioning of children. According to "María Vergara's analysis of the civics curriculum, . . . the authorities relied on an authoritarian discourse in their attempts to create a disciplined and obedient society based on Catholic and nationalist values" (Juárez-Dappe 83). Inevitably, from an early age, Argentinians were forced to act in accordance with the strict religious norms and reject liberal ideologies.

Correspondingly, the end of the dictatorship did not terminate the close-knit relationship between Church and state, as highlighted by Esquivel, who argues that "[t]he return to democracy in the 1980s did not modify the traditional modus operandi of political society in its links with the ecclesiastical establishment" (138). For instance, the requirement for the president and vice president to be Catholic was enforced until constitutional change took place in 1994. As a result of this excessive influence of the Church over the presidential seat, legislative reforms regarding family and reproduction were also severely delayed. Argentina was one of the last countries to legalise divorce in 1987 and "[b]y doing so, [president] Alfonsín angered church leaders who mounted a series of protests and compelled some to align themselves with the antigovernment [sic] opposition" (Burdick 219). Therefore, owing to the growing resistance from the Church, additional changes to both contraception and abortion laws were impeded. The hostility towards the aforementioned legislative reform continued throughout the 1990s as President Menem maintained close ties with the Vatican and held a firm stance on the criminalisation of abortion. "In 1994, Menem proposed that the presidents gathered for the Fourth Ibero-American Summit in Cartagena, Colombia, sign a declaration that explicitly condemned abortion" (Htun 161). Even though the attempt proved unsuccessful, Menem was thanked by the Pope for "[h]is initiatives aimed at promoting family values and defending life" (161). Moreover, "[i]n 1998, Menem issued a presidential decree declaring March 25 the 'Day of the Unborn Child'" (162), a day which explicitly coincided with the Roman Catholic Feast of the Annunciation. As a result, "[p]owerful ideological influences embedded in Argentina's cultural norms and institutions have encouraged women always to embrace motherhood regardless of their own needs and aspirations" (Sutton 97). Consequently, laws on neither contraception nor abortion were implemented until the twenty-first century. The Argentine nation was forced to wait until 2003 to see the passing of a decree which "[g]uarantees free access to contraceptive methods and . . . the right to avoid pregnancies" (Barrancos 138). The implementation of the new law was made possible due to the weakness of the Church at the time. Following a strong public backlash, resulting from the revelation of scandals around the abuse of minors, the institution lost its credibility

giving way to the easing of restrictive laws on reproduction. Moreover, the National Campaign for Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion had submitted demands for the right to safe and regulated abortion systematically since its foundation in 2005. The campaign's "main strategy has been political mobilization and the fight for abortion legalization through the drafting of a bill that was introduced at the National Congress for the first time in 2006, but was not discussed in plenary session until 2018" (Rubial and Anderson 699). Additionally, the eruption of the *green wave* in 2017, a feminist-led movement for safe abortion across Latin American countries, led to major protests in Buenos Aires shortly after in the summer of 2018. This resulted in the aforementioned historic Congress vote on the abortion bill which unfortunately was unsuccessful. However, the growing discontent continued to manifest in the form of a series of mass protests demanding freedom of choice, ultimately culminating in the passing of the law on the legalisation of abortion up to 14 weeks in December 2020.

The strong institutional influence of the Catholic Church and its systemic social conditioning is chiefly represented in the novel through Carmen's religious fanaticism. She is the embodiment of religious extremism given her unconditional devotion to the church and unrelenting desire to form the perfect Catholic family, especially as a way of compensating for Julián's renunciation of the priesthood. She portrays this by stating: "'We would marry, we would raise a family, we would be such good Catholics together that we would make up for any guilt he could feel for not having realised his calling'" (295).[1] Her radicalism is further expressed through her adherence to orthodox social norms and preservation of appearances. Fearing the judgement of others, she forbids Julian from paying her a visit in her neighbourhood prior to the announcement of their engagement. She explains: "'I just don't want you showing up in Adrogué until we can announce our engagement. . . . It wouldn't look good if we were to announce our courtship shortly after you leave the seminary'" (261).[2] Her fundamentalist views coupled with her fear of social shame, ultimately drive Carmen to resort to violent acts towards Ana through organising her illegal abortion, resulting in her death. Desperate to preserve their social standing, secure her future with Julián and supposedly spare her family from humiliation, Carmen obtains the details of a clandestine abortion clinic while Julián arranges the procedure. Julián recounts: "'Carmen also obtained the details of the place where you can have an abortion. I took care of calling them, asking for instructions and

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[1] Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from Spanish to English are my own; "'Nos casaríamos, formaríamos una familia, seríamos tan buenos católicos juntos que repararíamos cualquier culpa que él pudiera sentir por no haber cumplido con el llamado'" (295).

[2] "'Solo no quiero que aparezcas por Adrogué hasta que podamos anunciar nuestro compromiso. . . . No estaría bien visto que anunciemos un noviazgo al poco tiempo de que dejes el seminario'" (261).

gathering the necessary funds'" (267).[3] Moreover, Carmen urges him to influence Ana in the decision to abort by stating: "'Don't leave it up to her erratic adolescent thinking. Guide her, lead her without her realising, nudge her to the point where she's about to make the decision'" (267).[4] Carmen rationalises her behaviour based on the assumption that had she not acted in this way, her little sister would otherwise humiliate her family and become a social outcast. She argues:

> "My mother would have been stricken with grief upon learning that her youngest daughter – still a little girl – had lost her virginity in a casual relationship that lacked commitment, a sexual exchange without true love. And mom, who was also very sensitive to the judgment of others, would have had to endure the criticism of the neighbours, friends, our relatives, shocked by Ana's actions, who in turn would have been tarnished forever as a single mother, a girl who needed to have a premature and irresponsible sex life". (282)[5]

Carmen's actions therefore demonstrate how institutionally imposed conditioning offers individuals a framework within which to rationalise and justify their actions as if they were responding to a higher moral power, thus illustrating Ruggiero's point on the violence which occurs when individuals renounce their own principles. Furthermore, strict social norms originating from legitimate religious institutions reflect the wider issue of structural violence in the form of an imposition of orthodox ideology which curtailed individuals' rights to freedom of thought.

Besides the overt manipulation on the couple's part, it is also the lack of education on the topic both in school and at home which preclude Ana from making an informed decision, consequently leading to her death. This issue of the lack of information on abortion is portrayed in the novel through Ana's friend who explains that: "'No schoolteacher ever mentioned it. If we had asked, they would have told us that it was a sin and without any further explanation, they would have sent us off to the principal or to say a few Our Fathers'" (140).[6] Similarly, Ana's father, upon learning the truth about his daughter thirty years later, expresses that perhaps if abortion and sex were not stigmatised, it could have prevented her premature death:

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[3] "'Carmen consiguió también el dato de un sitio donde poder hacer un aborto. Yo me ocupé de llamar, de pedir las instrucciones y de juntar el dinero necesario'" (267).

[4] "'No la dejes librada a su pensamiento errático de adolescente. Conducila, llevala sin que lo note, guiala hasta el punto inmediato anterior a tomar la decisión'" (267).

[5] "'Mi madre se habría enfermado por la pena, al enterarse de que su hija menor – una niña aún – había perdido la virginidad en una relación casual, sin ningún compromiso, un intercambio sexual donde no había habido amor verdadero. Y mamá, que además era muy sensible a la mirada de los otros, tendría que haber soportado los cometarios de los vecinos, de sus amigas, de nuestros parientes, azorados por los actos de Ana, que habría quedado manchada para siempre como una madre soltera, una chica que necesitó tener vida sexual prematura e irresponsable'" (282).

[6] "'Jamás la mencionó una profesora en el colegio. Si hubiéramos preguntado, nos habrían dicho que era pecado y, sin muchas más explicaciones, nos habrían mandado a la dirección o a rezar padrenuestros'" (140).

> "We never talked about it . . . . Abortion wasn't just a dirty word in our family, it was forbidden. . . . I should have been a more reliable father to Ana, I should have taught her to believe in herself and trust her own judgement, I should have educated her so that she wouldn't feel ashamed for not agreeing with everything the religion we instilled in her preaches. . . . Because I didn't do what I should have done, I, her father, am responsible for Ana's death". (324)[7]

It is interesting to note that even though social norms around family had been primarily implemented by patriarchal institutions, the exercising of these standards within the household unit comes from the female characters in the novel. At home, it is Ana's mother who is mostly opposed to the discussion on abortions, as explained by her father who states: "'And if somebody mentioned it, I went along in silence with your mother's expression of horror'" (324).[8] Her avid religiousness and opposition to the freedom of choice is further exemplified by the father who expresses that:

> "I feel like a hypocrite, because clearly, if I had known what was happening to Ana, I would have helped her to terminate the pregnancy. I would have done so in spite of her mother's opposition, who would have been forced by Catholicism to choose between her obedience to God and her daughter, and I know which she would have chosen". (324)[9]

Furthermore, it is Carmen who brutally mutilates her sister's body in order to preserve the family image and abide by the social norms in place. She is the enforcer, she arranges the abortion, and it is she who takes action to conceal Ana's 'crime'. This represents the influence of the institutions on the society as a whole even further. Seemingly, the patriarchal systems in place led to the growth of similarly restrictive matriarchal structures at a domestic level. While the school system prohibited any conversations on the topic of contraception or abortion, the domestic environment did very little to remedy the issue. As seen in the novel, the matriarchal domestic spheres supported the restrictive nature of the patriarchal laws in place and thus exacerbated the issue, which is exemplified by Ana's tragic demise. The propagation of these institutionally imposed restrictions in the domestic sphere once again reflects the problem of structural violence given that orthodox patriarchal ideology was widely accepted as the norm, it was legitimised by both education and

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[7] "'Nunca hablamos de este tema . . . . Aborto no era una mala palabra en nuestra familia, era prohibida. . . . Yo debí haber sido un padre confiable para Ana, debí haberle ensenado que creyera en ella y en su propio criterio, debí haberla educado para que no sintiera vergüenza por no estar de acuerdo con todo lo que pregona la religión que le inculcamos. Por lo que debí haber hecho y no hice, yo, su padre, soy responsable de la muerte de Ana'" (324).

[8] "'Y acompañe con mi silencio el espanto de su madre, si alguien la pronunciaba'" (324).

[9] "'Me siento un hipócrita, porque por supuesto yo, de haber sabido lo que le pasaba a Ana, la habría ayudado a interrumpir ese embarazo. Lo habría hecho aún con la oposición de su madre, a quien el catolicismo la habría obligado a elegir entre su obediencia a Dios y su hija, y sé que habría elegido'" (324).

family institutions and ultimately deprived women of their right to freedom of choice.

Ana's innocence and unfamiliarity with the intricacies of abortion procedures, as a result of both educational shortfalls and abortion being a taboo in the domestic sphere, is demonstrated yet again in a conversation with her closest friend and confidant, Marcela, who asks: "'And how do you get an abortion, Ana?' I asked her. 'He's going to find out the details, he's going to explain it to me and he's going to give me the money, I don't have that much. He let me decide for myself, he doesn't want to decide for me'" (140).[10] Furthermore, Carmen and Julián consistently deny their involvement in Ana's decision to abort claiming it to be her choice. Julián explains: "'I did not force Ana to have an abortion. . . . I did as planned, I let her come to the conclusion that the best thing for everyone – including her parents, but mainly for her – was to get rid of that pregnancy'" (268).[11] Similarly, Carmen argues: "'I did not tell her to abort, I did not make the decision for her; I didn't even talk about it with my sister: she didn't tell me, and I didn't tell her'" (279).[12] She continues her excuses by claiming: "'If I hadn't given her the address, I don't think it would have made a difference. And Ana would still have died because it was God's will'" (280).[13] However, in reality and as indicated above, Ana did not have a say in the matter per se given her obliviousness to what the procedure entailed, her complete lack of education on the topic and her lack of direct participation in the organisation of the clandestine abortion. Moreover, due to the restrictive social norms, Ana felt compelled to save Julián's reputation considering his position as a clergy member in training and was thus pressured to engage in an unregulated, illegal act rather than making an educated decision. As demonstrated, Piñeiro, through Ana's lack of choice in the matter, draws attention to the adverse effects of social restrictions, and illustrates the lengths religious fanaticism will push people to, even if it results in violent acts which go against the teaching of the church.

Ana's tragic demise resulting from strict social rules also translates to a broader issue of institutional violence in the form of legally imposed constraints on female reproductive rights at the time, thus illustrating the structural control over individuals' lives. In spite of their criminalisation, clandestine abortions were extremely common as according to Sutton, it was "estimated that up to 522,000 abortions take

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[10] "'¿Y cómo se hace para abortar, Ana?', le pregunté. 'Él va a averiguar en detalle, me va a explicar y me va a dar la plata, yo no tengo tanta. Igual me dejó libertad de decisión, no quiere decidir por mí'" (140).

[11] "'No obligué a Ana a abortar . . . Hice lo planeado, la dejé llegar sola a la conclusión de que lo mejor para todos – incluidos sus padres, pero principalmente para ella – era deshacerse de ese embarazo'" (268).

[12] "'No le dije que abortara, no tomé la decisión por ella; ni siquiera hablé del asunto con mi hermana: ella no me contó, y yo no le dije'" (279).

[13] "'No creo que, de no haberle dado la dirección, habría cambiado el hecho de que Ana muriera. Porque eso, su Muerte, fue voluntad de Dios'" (280).

place annually in Argentina" (27), making it the leading cause of maternal mortality. The high death rates were often linked to the poor sanitary conditions of illegal clinics in which abortions took place. Piñeiro captures this through her portrayal of the environment in which Ana's surgery occurred: "The clinic was not a clinic, just a poorly maintained cabin with overgrown grass and peeling paint. . . . There was only a narrow table, with an oilcloth on top. And a pink sheet, folded, on the headboard, next to a small pillow. There was a small table beside an improvised stretcher containing elements of medical equipment" (146-47).[14]

Through this harrowing depiction Piñeiro sheds light on the detrimental effects of legislative overreach which deprived women of regulated medical attention, subsequently contributing to the increase of maternal deaths. Additionally, the staggering number of illegal abortions alone demonstrates that restrictive laws around female reproductive rights did not prevent women from choosing to terminate. Unsurprisingly, illegal abortions became a profitable business as physicians charged fees in exchange for breaching the law. In her study on the experiences of nurses attending to pre- and post-abortion patients in two regions in Argentina, Sjöstrand highlights the profitability of the business by stating that "the physicians that did not provide abortions for free within the public health care system . . . profited on the necessity [sic] of the women by performing abortions in other settings and charging the women" (21). This is reflected in the novel firstly through Julián's responsibility for gathering the necessary funds for the procedure, and secondly by the female physician carrying out Ana's abortion who asks her for money in advance. Ana is asked to hand over the money prior to the procedure, suggesting it to be a common and frequent practice: "'But first, give me the money sweetheart,' . . . The woman looked at me, I've never forgotten her face: she was serious, with an expression conveying no other message than the one she had just uttered; one more step in the procedure she performed frequently" (147).[15]

In addition to abortion laws, Ana's experience also highlights the absence of contraceptives at the time. According to Barrancos "[s]ince the return of democracy in 1983 and the reappearance of feminist movements, the demands for legitimate access to birth control methods and techniques and for the legalization of abortion increased" (137). However, in spite of the rise in the demand for legislative change, strict controls persisted until the passing of the 2003 law on access to free contraception. Piñeiro illustrates this through Carmen's explanation of the reason why Ana became

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[14] "La clínica no era una clínica, apenas un chalet mal mantenido, con el pasto crecido y la pintura descascarada. . . . Sólo una mesa angosta, con un hule arriba. Y una sábana rosa, doblada, en la cabecera, junto a una pequeña almohada. En una mesita auxiliar, a un costado de la improvisada camilla había elementos de instrumental médico" (146-47).

[15] "'Pero antes, linda, dame la plata, . . . La mujer me miró, no me olvido de su cara: estaba seria, sin un gesto que me trasmitiera ningún mensaje diferente del que acababa de decir; un paso más de un trámite que repetía con frecuencia" (147).

pregnant: "'What crime or sin could be attributed to Julián other than having had sex with Ana? The fact that they had done it without protection? It is very easy to talk about it now, thirty years later, but who used a condom back then?'" (277).[16] What's more, through this statement, Carmen subtly hints at the double standards around male and female social roles. Women are somewhat culpable for their actions while men are spared from the consequences. Evidently, the ramifications caused by the lack of contraceptive methods favoured men and punished women through strict legislation. This illustrates instances of structural violence in the form of imposition of orthodox ideologies, which prevented individuals from achieving basic rights to control over the decisions regarding their own reproductive choices.

The portrayal of institutional violence in the novel is not limited to Ana's abortion. Subsequent to her demise, even in her death, Ana continues to be subjected to violence. Following the botched procedure, Carmen is desperate to disassociate herself and Julián from taking any responsibility for their active participation in the abortion. She attempts to conceal the evidence by dismembering and incinerating her sister's corpse in a pottery furnace before discarding the body in a back alley. The manner in which Ana's mutilation occurred shares an almost disturbing similarity with the treatment of bodies during the era of the 1976-1983 military regime and serves as a reflection of the ongoing shortcomings in the Argentine judicial system and the frequent coverups of institutional violence against civilians since the dictatorship era. Throughout the military regime, the Argentine forces, heavily influenced by the Catholic Church, concentrated their efforts on capturing the so-called 'subversives', defined by their threat to nationalist ideology and more importantly the Argentine Christian identity.

> For the Argentine military, religion upheld a sense of social and political order, and created a historical teleology. Thanks to the persistent and prolonged work of the indoctrinators, the Argentine military took the Catholic religion as the principle for ordering Argentine society. This type of Catholicism therefore became a cultural model. (Ranaletti 150)

Consequently, those who posed a threat to the Christian social norms were routinely captured, tortured, murdered and disappeared. This ensured absolute control over the public and contributed to the wide expansion of clandestine detention centres spread across the city of Buenos Aires. These unlawful prisons, *Centros de Detención Clandestina* or CDCs, were often hidden in plain sight in the basements of prominent institutions such as official government buildings. "The detainment of victims in CDCs followed a sequence of five basic steps: (1) abduction; (2) torture; (3) continued clandestine detention; (4) murder or release; (5) concealment of the remains of those killed" (153). According to Crenzel the bodies of the detainees were "buried

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[16] "'¿Qué otro delito o pecado se le podría atribuir a Julián que haber tenido sexo con Ana? ¿La circunstancia de que lo hayan hecho sin protección? ¿Es muy fácil responder que sí ahora, treinta años después, pero ¿quién usaba un condón en aquella época?'" (277).

in unmarked graves, incinerated, or thrown into the sea" while "their property was looted; and their children snatched by members of the repressive forces" (16). Similarly, in the description of various methods of corpse disposals at the time, Ranaletti highlights the incineration of the bodies of the detainees by confirming that:

> this procedure took place in the following CDCs: El Banco (San Justo, Buenos Aires province); the School of Naval Mechanics (Buenos Aires city), in the sports field; 'Pozo de Arana' (La Plata, Buenos Aires province); 'Vesuvius' (La Tablada, Buenos Aires province); and 'Arsenal Miguel de Azcuénaga' (Tucumán province). The crematorium of the largest cemetery in Buenos Aires city was also used to dispose of the corpses of the disappeared detainees. (163)

This last step in the macabre and illegal military procedures in particular resonates with Piñeiro's description of the treatment of Ana's cadaver. Threatened by the consequences of Ana's deviation from Catholic teachings and the exposure of the truth behind her sister's demise, Carmen dismembers Ana's body and, piece by piece, chars her remains in a small pottery furnace. Painting a rather gruesome image, she explains: "'I estimated how much of Ana could fit into my oven. . . . Only three cuts: head, one leg, another leg'" (311).[17] Comparable to the practices of the military just a decade prior, driven by a political ideology, Carmen's actions were also motivated by the adherence to social norms driven by religious extremism. She explains her motives in the following:

> "It was not about dismembering my sister for pleasure, as a psychopath who enjoys every cut might do. Nor was cutting her designed to cover up any crime, as a murderer might speculate. It was, in fact to hide why she died, a death that we had not caused, but which if the motive were to come to light, would only bring more pain". (311)[18]

Carmen's justification for her involvement in the concealment of Ana's abortion allows Piñeiro to draw attention to the impact of the legacy of the widespread institutional violence both during and in the aftermath of the dictatorship era. These brutal acts of violence taking place almost a decade after the regime still bore a striking resemblance to the practices of the Argentine forces and were also motivated by the prevailing need to preserve the traditional, national and Christian ideology at family level.

In addition to Carmen's callousness, the depiction of the mishandling of Ana's murder investigation by the local authorities contributes to the novel's critique of the lingering judicial restrictions in post-dictatorship Argentina, which denied justice to thousands of its citizens. Due to the nature and state of Ana's cadaver, its location

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[17] "'Calculé a ojo el pedazo de Ana que podría entrar en mi horno. . . . Solo tres cortes: cabeza, una pierna, otra pierna'" (311).

[18] "'No se trataba de descuartizar a mi hermana por placer, como puede hacer un psicópata que disfruta en cada corte. Ni tampoco se trataba de cortarla para tapar un crimen, como puede especular un asesino. Se trataba, sí, de ocultar por qué murió, una muerte que no habíamos provocado nosotros, pero cuyo motivo, de salir a la luz, sólo traería más dolor'" (311).

and its resemblance to the practices of the military junta, officials ordered the local police to close the case rapidly, ruling it to be a sexually motivated crime. According to the private detective who took an interest in Ana's case at the time, he was not in the least surprised at the push from the higher up officials to hastily terminate the investigation. By stating that "'[w]e were already in the democratic period, but the dictatorship was still there'" (187),[19] the PI is alluding to the prevalence of coverups of violent crimes, as a hangover from the dictatorship era. Consequently, Ana's family never truly achieved justice, something which was highlighted by Ana's father in the statement "'[t]he truth we're denied hurts till the end of times'" (322).[20] The manner in which the case was handled also reflects the systemic effort to eradicate the memory of the dictatorship. In the new democratic era, the state had been guilty of several coverups of crimes by the military designed to deny justice to its victims. At the end of the dictatorship, the junta introduced a self-amnesty law endorsed by the Catholic Church which "proposed a law to forget, *ley de olvido*, as the necessary prerequisite to a law of amnesty" (Burdick 229) which would prompt society, falling in line with Catholic teachings, to move on by forgiving and forgetting these criminal actions. However, after taking office in 1983, the new democratically elected president, Raúl Alfonsín, implemented a series of legislative changes, allowing for the prosecution of the military junta and those responsible for the brutal violence which took place during the dictatorship. Sadly, the prosecution of the perpetrators was short-lived, and upon taking office in 1989, President Menem issued a number of decrees that benefited junta members who were serving time as well as other human rights offenders. Consequently, the silencing of the victims, frequent coverups, and presidentially issued pardons continued for a decade to come. Therefore, the denial of justice for Ana and silencing of the crime committed against her depicts the wider web of institutional violence through the government's attempt to eradicate the memory of the dictatorship. Through this, Piñeiro demonstrates the strong legacy of the regime and its effects on the practices of the judicial systems at the time of Ana's demise. Ultimately, this highlights the broader issue of structural restriction of the fundamental right to justice, implemented through legitimate institutional means.

This analysis of Piñeiro's novel demonstrates the degree to which the genre serves as a critique of institutional violence in Argentina and its close links to structural violence. By depicting individual brutal acts, the author draws attention to the extensive network of institutional violence endured by the general public. While fictional, Piñeiro's characters represent the experiences of thousands of Argentinians deprived of access to sexual education and birth control and limited in their actions through fear of social shaming and strict legislation. Similarly, by depicting the

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[19] "'Ya estábamos en democracia, pero la dictadura estaba ahí nomás'" (187).
[20] "'La verdad que se nos niega duele hasta el último día'" (322).

events which took place thirty years ago, Piñeiro manages to address the ongoing issues faced by a society continuously tormented by its religiously driven dictatorial past. As described above, legislative reform in Argentina was an agonisingly long process. After all, the nation did not see legislative change with regards to contraception until 2003, with abortion being legalised quite recently, in 2020. Therefore, Piñeiro's novel is a prime example of how the genre can be used for socio-institutional critique, demonstrating the importance of contemporary crime fiction more broadly, as a medium for illustrating the ills and injustices of today's societies worldwide.

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Part III:
Gender and Genre

Gender and Genre: A Study of Indian English Women's Crime Fiction

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Abstract

Crime fiction was long considered unsuitable for local production in India or the Global South (Meyer, *Glocalizing* 1). However, a radical change has been increasingly evident in recent years, where a surge in the production of Indian crime fiction has been observed and Indian writers in English have taken up the genre with an unprecedented enthusiasm. Indian English crime writers are certainly influenced by their American and European counterparts, but they appropriate the genre to suit the local Indian contexts. This trait is prominently evident in the increasing presence of women writers who often employ female detectives to investigate crimes against women. This chapter will study two Indian crime fiction series by women writers which provide a corpus to assess how the generic conventions have been modified to accommodate a female detective and to root these novels in an Indian milieu. It will discuss how these women detectives can be seen as a reflection of the uninhibited independent twenty-first century Indian woman and as Maitreyee Chaudhuri suggests a "celebration of the new-found 'self' of Indian women" (152). It will also discuss how these works provide a space for creating new roles for women while also illustrating a wide spectrum of female experiences. Lastly, this chapter will try to explore these works in the context of India's economic growth and how they affect and are affected by India's publishing industry.

Keywords

Introduction

Crime fiction has enjoyed an undying popularity across ages and countries and has "come to have a worldwide literary market with substantial economic consequences" (Nilsson et al. 2). The genre has a recognisable form, since every crime narrative has almost the same elements, and that contributes to its sustained success across boundaries (14). The globalisation of crime fiction, leading to translation and adaptation, has made the genre popular with Indian readers and writers as well. India has experienced a recent rise in crime fiction which has become, as Emma Dawson Varughese says, "a dominant trend in the development of the post-millennial writing scene" (100). However, that does not mean that the Indian crime novel in English has an international presence. It is still written and marketed for the English-speaking, urban reader, with city book stores and social media promoting the niche content through hashtag campaigns and social media contests. Neele Meyer states

that the "the rise of crime fiction in India can be linked to efforts of multinational publishing corporations such as HarperCollins or Penguin Random House" ("Challenging" 107) which promote genres that are popular with the global market but do not usually find an audience in India. The integration of India's publishing industry with the global industry has stimulated the growth of crime fiction in India.

Moreover, another reason, cited by Meyer, is the rise of a heterogenous middle-class that "increasingly read in English and want to read about themselves in novels that include characters and settings that they can relate to" (108). Donner, in her book *Being Middle-Class: A Way of Life* (2011), discusses the growth of this heterogenous middle-class who wish to be identified as being in the middle, not poor nor rich, and this new middle-class is identified and differentiated on the basis of economic grounds and consumption practices (3). Claudia Kramatschek, in her essay "Farewell to Spice and Curry" (2007), has explained the phenomenon of the younger generation of authors, writing in English, saying that one can clearly see a shift towards localism – that is, towards the history of the particular cities where these authors choose to live and the microcosm of one's own experienced reality. In terms of literature, this comeback is connected to an opening towards genre fiction and what might be called the tiny form (Kramatschek). Detective fiction, produced by contemporary Indian English writers, mainly caters to these same Indian readers, and strongly reflects a "turn to localism in India's post-millennial literature" (Meyer, "Challenging" 106). This fiction has given birth to diverse forms of genre literatures like sci-fi, detective fiction, chick-lit, young adult literature, and mythological thrillers. Suman Gupta says that the commercial fiction produced in English can be rightfully called the product of the traction between the global and the local forces:

> the condition of English-language commercial fiction in India has something to do with the English-speaking middle-class youth and with global awareness or globalization processes in relation to a changing sense of national awareness or local lives. These are obviously closely intertwined; arguably it is the youth in question who cultivate the local/global awareness, and equally the local/global awareness in question appeals to the youth. (*Consumable* 26)

Indian English crime fiction writers certainly draw inspiration from their Western counterparts but adapt them to local themes and contexts. For instance, Lalli mysteries focus on the unspoken horrors of homicide, a theme that has been explored by international authors like Liza Cody and Eleanor Taylor Bland. But Lalli mysteries are always set in Mumbai and focus on specific neighbourhoods and have an array of Indian characters who belong to various strata of the urban middle-class group. Shrehya Taneja asserts this view: "The Indian detective negotiates an epistemological framework that borrows from European form to express a non-European reality. Subject to its own forces of production in the marketplace, detective fiction is a dynamic literary form responding to the cultural expectations of a changing Indian society" (38).

The novels thus produced offer a variety of choices and topics that display "the tensions and contestations that result from a wide span of different views that coexist in a coherent Indian middle-class space and are often played out in the private sphere" (Meyer, "Challenging" 108). These developments and complex tensions have also affected women's writings in India. Indian English writings have long portrayed the women as the victims of social injustice and exploitation. However, critics like Lau (2010, 2013) and Varughese (2013) note that the past decade has witnessed a radical change in the portrayal of women. Indian English women are now writing more about the new Indian women who are educated, career-oriented and usually belong to the urban middle-class strata (Meyer, "Challenging" 108). The portrayal of women has moved beyond the self-sacrificial Sita-Savitri archetype and instead now portrays women who can exercise their personal autonomy without any guilt or social censure (Lau, "No Longer" 283). The crime novels under analysis here move beyond the traditional discourses and stories of motherhood and marriage and instead provide the writers with an alternative space to create new roles. These novels tell the story of "the 'new Indian woman' working, living alone in the cities, hanging out with women friends, drinking, dating and having fun in spite of the enormous social pressure to get married" (Lakshmi).

Such narratives of detection have also frequently been the subject of postcolonial analysis. However, academics like Emma Dawson Varughese and Neele Meyer have questioned the applicability of such postcolonial readings. They disproved the pervasive postcolonial myth that reads these narratives as an appropriation of the literary style of the coloniser and a subversion of the dominant form. The post-millennial Indian detective fiction has its roots in this historical context and is clearly a product of the changing consumer habits. For instance, Meyer presented a Scandinavian example where authors altered the basic norms of detective fiction to create noirs that evolved to be more of native forms than borrowed forms, escaping the "writing-back formula" (Meyer, *Glocalizing* 9). The development of Indian detective fiction can also be seen in light of this process of innovation.

Shobha Dé was a pioneer of Indian popular fiction written in English, and Rachel Dwyer has noted that Shobha Dé projected a confident nativism that pushed the west and anxieties about the west into the background: "the west is not seen as being of great importance to anyone; it is sketchy and unreal, more of a giant supermarket than a place of interest" (211). The development of modern Indian detective fiction, where the genre is appropriated into a regional, more especially Indian, idiom, can be traced back to a similar argument. The structure is creatively altered to reflect the goals, insecurities, and lives of a burgeoning new middle class as well as an Indian perspective. Once again, according to Dawson Varughese, "post-millennial fiction in English from India is not recognisable by the tropes and guises of Indian postcolonial texts" (143). Indian contemporary genre fiction is shaped by the needs of

the local market and is written in English for the local market. In order to read selected works from modern Indian English detective fiction, this chapter aims to employ a critical framework that goes beyond the postcolonial paradigm and takes into consideration the social and historical aspects of the genre's creation and circulation. It will make an effort to follow the example set by academics who have closely read genre fiction without imposing a postcolonial framework, such as Suman Gupta, Emma Dawson Varughese, and Neele Meyer.

This chapter will analyse the Lalli series by Kalpana Swaminathan and the Simran Singh mysteries by Kishwar Desai and will closely study the detectives in these series. The attempt will be to understand how these female detective characters contest and challenge the patriarchal hegemonies that exist in Indian society. For this, the chapter will examine the ways in which these female sleuths blur the lines between the private and public spheres by negotiating the gendered spatial practices which link men to the public sphere and limit women to the private sphere. The chapter will also explore how a genre like detective fiction, in the hands of these women authors, can make space for these liberated fictional women, and simultaneously create a space to voice the many oppressions women face. Such modifications and adaptations of the generic conventions of detective fiction are significant for any understanding of the social history of the genre. To do so, the rest of the chapter has been divided into two broad sub-sections. In the first section, the chapter will discuss crimes against women in modern-day India and how these narratives present such crimes with the female detectives fighting them. The section will also attempt to put forward the voices of the victims/survivors as presented in the novels and will focus on the avoidance of closure, a technique used by the authors that critiques the conservative form of detective fiction and instead focuses on the crimes rather than on providing an infallible solution. The second section shows the female detectives as urban *flâneurs* and how they critique and resist the gendered spatial practices.

Swaminathan's Lalli novels use a Holmes-and-Watson-like narrative situation by including Lalli's niece Sita as a homodiegetic narrator (Meyer, "Challenging" 109). Lalli is "sixty-three, five foot six barefoot" (*Page 3 Murders* 3), has eyes that are "black and gleaming when quiescent" (3) and her hair is "a silvery froth" (3). Lalli has an MD in forensics (189) and is famously known as Lalli L.R., where L.R. stands for "last resort" because she is the last resort of the police, and every homicide file has a blank sheet of paper at the end which is kept reserved for Lalli to fill in (10). In all of the Lalli mysteries to date, Lalli has been portrayed through the narrator Sita's eyes, and very little has been mentioned about her past. Lalli is a descendant of the spinster detective type, the "elderly busybody" (Craig and Cadogan 11), a worthy successor of Christie's Miss Marple (11). And, although she descends from a band of spinster detectives, what separates her from her literary predecessors like Miss

Marple is her training and experience as a homicide police detective. Kishwar Desai's detective mysteries introduce Simran Singh as an uninhibited woman in her mid-forties, a psychologist-cum-amateur sleuth. Simran Singh is a forty-five-year-old "professional but unsalaried, social worker, rudely called an 'NGO wali' and a rather amateur psychotherapist" (Desai, *Witness* 5) whose only aim is to make sure that there has been no "miscarriage of justice" (8). Like the hard-boiled detectives, Simran is a chain-smoker, loves her whiskey, and she is least bothered about what others might think of her habits.

Female Detectives Fighting Against Crimes Against Women

William Stowe credits detective fiction's conservatism as the reason behind its continuing appeal. According to Stowe, traditional detective stories tend to affirm rather than to question social structures, moral standards, and ways of knowing, rather than subjecting them to thorough, principled criticism. Crime is typically seen as a symptom of personal evil rather than social injustice, and the detective is portrayed as the quintessential embodiment of competitive individualism. However, the gradual development of the genre has witnessed detective writers re-moulding and modifying the conventions of the detective novel to use the genre "as vehicles for social and cultural criticism" (570). Contemporary detective stories of Hispanic, Kenyan, African, and Scandinavian writers have tended to offer a commentary on the societies in which the texts are produced and on which they are based. It is now known for its sociopolitical analysis, its evocation of catharsis and vicarious justice in an unrelenting social landscape, its capacity to amuse, and its potential to enlighten (Naidu and Roux 284). Authors like Margie Orford have brilliantly used the crime genre to address concerns about gender and violence. The crimes that Orford portrays are crimes that are specifically committed against women. For instance, *Daddy's Girl* (2009) depicts not only the kidnapping of a young girl, the shooting of two sisters, and the brutal stabbing of a gang leader's daughter, but a culture of violence against women and children. In India, women writers of the genre have used detective fiction, much like Kenyan noir, as a "genre of social critique" (Augart 82), and they have frequently adopted as well as modified the generic conventions to discuss the oft-silenced femicides and domestic abuse. Augart writes: "Since the crime novel which has as its setting a society which the author wishes to critique, one can find reflected within the genre the values and beliefs, but also the shortcomings of a society. Thus, crime novels are enabling spaces in which to criticize society from within the literary and fictional framework" (82).

The female detective not only exposes the societal prejudices that are still lurking in twenty-first century Indian society, but she also unabashedly debunks traditional concepts of family honour. Crimes against women like rapes, infanticides, homicides, domestic abuse, and forced surrogacy, which are usually brushed under the

carpet, are taken up in these crime narratives and the female sleuths are seen deftly solving them. A feminist perspective can be effectively included into detective fiction, according to Nina Molinaro, by analysing sexism and misogyny as well as by creating settings in which women gain agency and legitimacy (100).

In both *I Never Knew It Was You* (2012) and *Witness the Night* (2010), the narratives of Lalli, Sita and Simran are juxtaposed against narratives of other characters whose belief in systems and opinions towards social institutions such as family and marriage are completely at odds with that of these three women. In *I Never Knew It Was You*, the heterogeneity of the middle class is underscored through the narratives of Aftab, the jyotish (astrologer), and the Pereira family. Swaminathan's *I Never Knew* is a story of murder and detection only on the surface, and as the female sleuths delve deeper into the mysteries, they discover the price Indian women have to pay to uphold the abstract concept of family honour. Maybelle, a Christian woman, falls in love with Aaftab, a Muslim man, and the consequences are harrowing; she is declared a schizophrenic by the family doctor and is issued a certificate for "mental unsoundness and insanity" so that her family will be able to "control her" movements of all kinds, by holding her captive inside the house (168, 169). Similarly, another character, Anais, is renounced by her family for marrying a man outside her religion. Swaminathan, here, underscores the toxicity of home spaces, spaces which often secretly serve as breeding grounds for crimes; crimes which are driven by "embarrassment" (175) and are never even often perceived as crimes (176). 'Crime' and 'criminality' are shown as problems situated often within families and homes in these novels. In *I Never Knew*, the jyotish (astrologer) is a man who commodifies religion and spirituality, and advises the family to commit a 'crime'.

In *Witness the Night*, Simran Singh returns to her homeland of Jullundhar, a small hamlet in Punjab, to help Durga, the lone survivor of a brutal murder case in which all of her family members were discovered dead. Simran finds Durga in a deplorable condition. Simran Singh decides to solve this case despite the police's near complete lack of cooperation because she has a gut feeling that Durga was more of a victim than the suspected killer she was being shown as, and Simran Singh feels "that the evidence was too obvious" (5). Singh reveals the harsher truths that exist in suburban Indian communities in spaces such as Jullundhar where female foeticide is still pervasive, as she goes deeper into the unhappy lives of Durga and her older sister, Sharda, through Durga's journal entries. When Sharda fell in love with a man below her social status and was found to be pregnant, she was called "disobedient" and was taken far away from the family home. To save the family's honour, Sharda was declared "possessed" and she was also "exorcised" because she had been "spoilt" (144). Sharda, Durga's elder sister, thus, also met with the same fate as Maybelle, because she had fallen in love with her private tutor and was impregnated by him.

The family as a site of violence against female family members is a leitmotif in both these novels.

"Feminocentric texts" are books that place women at the centre and are motivated by heinous crimes including rape, violence, industrial malfeasance, and social injustice. According to Kathleen Klein, such works go beyond the reductionist framework of detective fiction, which is predicated on a society where the values of sex and gender uphold masculine hegemony (*Woman* 228). Such works reject the notion of murder as the only gory and heinous crime worth investigating. Women authors, such as Swaminathan and Desai through their works such as *I Never Knew It Was You* and *Witness the Night*, thus, not only modify the generic conventions, but also portray strong women characters who dauntingly take up a male-dominated profession and fight against crimes against women. Purnima Mankekar has shown how 'entertainment' narratives in India perpetuate the idea that it is the women's virtuous behaviour that distinguishes middle-class respectability (152). Lalli and Sita do not operate within such stereotypes and are not afraid to lay bare the crimes that happen within the domestic sphere in the name of family honour. Lisa Lau correctly notes that although images of modern-day women have surfaced in Indian writing before, these narratives mark a radical shift in that these new-age women are "no longer posited as the outsider, the lost, the depraved" (Lau, "Good Girls" 290). Simran Singh rebels against small-town gender norms by fleeing from Jullundhar at the age of twenty and recounts the time with a flippancy that is the mark of her revolt:

> I broke all the rules and my mother's heart, as well as my engagement to a Sardar who appeared to have a Very Promising Career in Hosiery. Initially, because all around me girls were being 'arranged' into marriages, I assumed that I had no choice, even though I was eighteen and above the age of consent. Fortunately, the lingerie business can be very liberating. Once I thought I had learned enough about v-fronts and padded bras, and the difference between synthetic and natural fibres . . . I felt I should move on. (*Witness* 11)

Singh is neither portrayed by Desai as a vamp nor an outcast. The easy tone with which she talks about her past shows that her choices are normalised in the narrative (290). She confesses to having multiple love interests and claims unabashedly that most men she has come across are "self-obsessed and boring" (177). She smartly keeps dodging her mother's concerns about her unmarried status and shows no regrets, whatsoever, at being single and childless at the age of forty-five. She meets Gurmit Singh, a young reporter, during the course of the investigation, and immediately initiates a love-affair with him. Set against the norms of gender behaviour in small-town India, her acts of selecting a much younger partner and openly talking about her sexuality are signs of 'liberated behaviour', and the narrative normalises these choices. Such narrative choices are more than female assertion via sexual liberation and are also a rebellion against the conventional wisdom of home and domesticity being safe refuges.

Both *I Never Knew* and *Witness the Night* do not find conventional closures and are only partially solved at best. In another essay titled "Habeas Corpus: Feminism and Detective Fiction" (1995), Klein discusses how the satisfaction of a perfect closure in detective fiction has been challenged by the hard-boiled writers. She writes:

> The satisfaction of the classic detective novel, with solutions to criminal behaviour which depended on the security of police action, legal systems, and judicial disinterestedness to produce a return to the Edenic world that had been disrupted by crime was rightly critiqued by hard-boiled initiators . . . But the optimistic kind of conclusion to detective novels, singling out the criminal and reifying the innocent, has not disappeared but merely changes configuration. The detectives of such hard-boiled authors as Robert B. Parker or Andrew Vachss recognize that the world is corrupt in ways they cannot hope to change, they settle for intervention on a small scale. (181)

The convention of providing one 'infallible solution' by the earlier detectives is also critiqued by the hard-boiled writers. Desai and Swaminathan follow a similar strategy and avoid bringing closures to these novels. Klein believes that to contest the formulaic nature of the detective fiction genre, women writers should revise and reconstruct the structure of the narratives. Klein believes writers need to move beyond the closure of the traditional detective format and adhere to an open-ended narrative which would not necessarily end with the re-establishment of the status quo because "this attitude about conclusions might then suggest how fluid and political any society's definitions of justice can be" (*Woman* 228). Throughout Desai's narrative, the identity of the culprit is never revealed, nor does the novel end with any hint of legal action being taken against the perpetrator, much like Sayers's *Gaudy Night*, which also does not reach a complete solution, despite Peter Wimsey solving the puzzle. Maureen T. Reddy writes that female readers of crime fiction are usually taught to read as males while holding the feminist sensibilities in abeyance (12). When narratives of crime allow an unconventional reading, from a female point of view, she states, the texts turn richer and more interesting. Desai's *Witness the Night* does not reach a proper closure, but just like *Gaudy Night*, the novel emphasises more on offering an insight into the intimate lives of women in an orthodox small-town. Desai here also offers a voice to the victim/survivor, Durga, a voice which her family and society had till then silenced. In the guise of a detective novel, *Witness the Night* introduces the victim's voice through her diary entries and the murkiness behind the façade of upper-middle class respectability. In *I Never Knew*, the narration is interspersed with Sita's reflections about the difficult life that the now-dead Anais had led because of the unconventional choices she had made. Also, *Rassiwala* (the astrologer), who provides easy solutions to disturbed people and provokes people to murder in the name of spirituality, is never caught. While Durga ends up being adopted by Simran, making it an all-women family, Swaminathan ends the novel with a hint of the *Rassiwala* case being pursued in the future. One can argue that the avoidance of closure is a narrative strategy frequently used by

these women writers, "to draw attention to other problems such as impunity or corruption" (Meyer, "Challenging" 112). One can also argue that this lack of closure indicates that though the novel might have ended, the crimes that the novels have dealt with might never be eradicated in the real world, even with policing, and the judiciary system unless there is a radical restructuring of the social order.

Female Detectives as *Flâneurs*

Crime narratives are thus concerned with the prospect of reconstructing, remapping, and thereby remaking the city in addition to the true representation of the city and the disclosure of its secrets (Andrew and Phelps 3). According to Rowland, "the city became not simply the setting for crime fiction but a character and text in its own right" (19). Readers "can safely walk streets that normally they may fear to tread" when they see the world through the eyes of the detective *flâneur*, according to Andrew and Phelps (3). Elfriede Dreyer and Estelle McDowall claim that the *flâneur* "garners meaning from urban space, thereby adding meaning to the space itself, and can be viewed as the symbolic representation of 'modernity and personification of contemporary urbanity', specifically in the realm of social and literary analysis" (30). Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin, who regarded Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) as the foundation of the *flâneur* theory, are responsible for the *flâneur* theory's inception. Traditionally, the city is seen and experienced more through the male consciousness than the female, since women did not always have the liberty to access public spaces as freely as men. Walter Benjamin's theory of the *flâneur* is an interesting critical tool in understanding this gendered perception of the urban. Benjamin sees the *flâneur* as a modern urban spectator, who, as Ann Davies writes, "moves without specific purpose through the public and through public spaces but is not himself of the public and rather he observes it" (101). Therefore "the *flâneur* is someone who seeks meaning from city spaces but also bestows on them individual meaning" (101). The *flâneur* is somebody who is a part of the crowd but is still detached from it, reading the city and its people from a distance. As Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson argues, in the original theorisation of *flânerie* a woman cannot adopt the role of *flâneur* because she can never achieve the necessary detachment/distance to observe. Ferguson writes that women undermine the objectivity that characterises the authentic *flâneur*. It appears that no lady is able to separate herself from the city and its charms. She acts on her yearning for the objects strewn out in front of her, making her unfit for *flânerie*. The *flâneur*, on the other hand, is interested in the city as a whole rather than a specific area. Women are crucial elements of the urban drama that *flâneurs* see, which is another reason why they should not be included in the fraternity of *flâneurs*. Along with the other attractions that the city offers, a woman standing on the street is to be "consumed" and "enjoyed" (27-28).

Davies argues that even if a woman cannot be a *flâneur* in accordance with the original notion, she might now play a position that is quite similar: investigator (102). Ferguson notes that the *flâneur* is connected to information, just like the narrator and detective (31). However, the theorisation of the *flâneur* is a gendered one –there cannot be a female counterpart of the *flâneur*, or a *flâneuse*, because a woman cannot observe the city spaces as detached or dissociated observers; she herself becomes the object of the gaze. Although she cannot be a full-fledged *flâneuse*, the role of a detective is a similar one for her (Davies 102). Typical to the investigative process, these Indian women detectives enter and exit crime scenes incognito, to track down criminals in the pursuit of justice. In all this, they are seen crisscrossing the cities and the towns they live and work in. The stories go beyond the processes of crime and detection and the narrators are seen also to comment on the changing dynamics of modern Indian cities. The women detectives, Lalli, Sita, and Simran turn *flâneurs* by observing, or rather detecting city spaces and by drawing conclusions from their observations (107). The streets of these Indian cities are usually 'owned' by normative heterosexual males, yet these new women walk the mean city streets, making their ways past the female fears of being stared at or groped or followed.

Feminist critics agree that female detectives bring a different sensibility into the act of detection and solve crimes like no male detectives would (Craig and Cadogan 13; Reddy, 20; Makinen 99). Women's lived experiences are different, as are their experiences with law enforcement, which is often reflected in fiction written by women, with characters of female detectives at the centre. Women detectives decidedly have some advantages over their male counterparts as they are perceived as harmless and are often entrusted with information that would otherwise be difficult for many men to elicit. The paradigm of the "spinster detective", Miss Marple from Agatha Christie, is described as a "garrulous and nosy", "gossipy old lady" (Reddy 20). Typically, people "underestimate her intelligence, allowing themselves to be deceived by appearances" (19), but Reddy demonstrates to the readers the benefits of feminine ways of thinking:

> Miss Marple's interest in people is not mere nosiness, but evidence of a lifelong study of human nature to which she has brought, and through which she has cultivated, acuity, insight, intelligence, and imagination. Miss Marple invariably sees something about people that others do not, evidencing a shrewdness and an awareness of a potential (or realised) evil that does not belie, but explores, her conventionally feminine exterior. Miss Marple's habit of disguising her sharp mind is a conventionally feminine strategy akin to Christie's portrayal of her character as no threat to established social arrangements. (20)

Lalli is a descendant of the legendary figure of the spinster detective, the "elderly busybody" (Craig and Cadogan 11), a worthy successor of Christie's Miss Marple. The appearance of an elderly spinster allows Lalli to "cluck like a harmless motherly hen, a ruse that both [Miss Marple and Lalli] adopt to fool others" (Taneja 38). Lalli "could be anyone she chose with practically no change in costume" (Swaminathan,

Gardener's Song 37) to extract the required information. She is a chatty old lady and, like Miss Marple, nothing escapes her eyes as she moves around in the city, looking for clues to solve the mystery. Her appearance as a harmless elderly spinster brings her in contact with other women and she engages herself "with the casteist, class-based and patriarchal structure of the Indian society" (Taneja 40), detecting the social. Many "defects and deficiencies popularly attributed to women may acquire a positive value in the context of detective fiction" (Craig and Cadogan 174). For example, nosiness – "a fundamental requirement of the detectives – is often considered a feminine trait" (13). Lalli and Simran's nosiness play a vital part in establishing the truth of an occurrence. Simran Singh, again, calls herself "a powerless social worker" and only gets into the system when she feels there "has been a miscarriage of justice" and that the criminal community trusts her "when I tell them I want to see them free and living in a just world, they know I mean what I say because I wear my idealism like a brahmastra, ready to slay all the rakshasas" (Desai, *Witness* 8). In both cases "women sleuths are far more than gimmick-like stand-ins for the male detectives of a masculine genre" (Gavin 269).

The readers travel across the rapidly transforming landscapes of Bombay in Swaminathan's Lalli series. Sita observes:

> Vile Parle is quickly reinventing itself as Lalli and Sita stroll through the alleyways of the Bombay marketplaces, evading dawdlers and ignoring hawkers). . . . Although, for the time being, one can still reflect on the gushing nalla at Irla and meander through the labyrinth of Parla, the communities of Edla and Pedla will soon be little more than colloquialisms (*I Never Knew* 37, 32-33).

The women in these novels are seen to not just access the public space for work; they also loiter, without anything specific to do. This act of loitering in the public spaces of Indian cities and towns, by these female detectives, again symbolises an act of resistance against the traditional gendered spatial practices; and as Meyer notes, they "appear as urban *flâneurs* who are aware of the changes in society as well as in the cityscape, which is continuously modernized and rebuilt" (Meyer, "Challenging" 115). These female sleuths are shown as possessing a unique position in the city-space that allows them to unravel the "flaws and tensions inherent in the new middle class" (115). Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade in their seminal text *Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets* (2011) write about the significance of loitering:

> Loitering is significant because it blurs these boundaries – the supposedly dangerous look less threatening, the ostensibly vulnerable don't look helpless enough . . . For women, such a space of ambiguity can be powerful. Since the very act of being in public without purpose is seen as unfeminine, loitering fundamentally subverts the performance of gender roles. It thwarts societal expectations and enables new ways of imagining our bodies in relation to public space. This can be very liberating since any performance of femininity is otherwise inadequate to counter their out-of-placeness. (182-83)

During a visit to a market, Lalli reminisces about old mansions and "raddi shops" (scrap dealership) that used to exist there when she was young. But the old mansion has given way to a "conglomerate of offices and shops" and every doorway at Vile Parle is packed with tutorial classes where kids appeared with "laptop, iPod, Blackberry and gizmos" (Swaminathan, *I Never Knew* 48). These changes in the cityscape are clearly results of South Asian globalisation and technological modernity, which are often also related to the rise in crime and criminality and the need for increased policing of urban spaces. The modernisation evident in the reconstruction of Vile Parle appears to be synonymous with the rise of the middle class and their newly-found wealth. Such 'upgradation' shows catering to global from local tastes. Lalli and Sita are not just detectives here, but they are elevated to the position of philosopher and commentator of urban modernity.

Simran Singh, the *flâneur*/detective, comments on the gendered spatial practices in a small town like Jullundhar, "a dusty, haphazardly constructed city in Punjab" which resembled "an ambitious village" (*Witness* 10). The patriarchal and orthodox mindset of the town makes it a claustrophobic space for women like Simran who do not conform to conventional norms. She has returned to her hometown "still unmarried but a woman of the world, veteran of several love affairs, seasoned traveler" (11), but has a "very good idea what it was to grow up as a small-town girl" (9). This understanding immediately helps Simran not only to form a bond with Durga but also to comprehend the trauma that Durga has had to go through. Simran, however, is not Durga, does not care to adhere to the societal norms, and chooses to move freely through the small-town cartography. But once in a while, she takes a rickshaw instead of walking, in order to save herself from being teased by "the Roadside Romeos, that peculiar species of Indian male which prefers to abandon all other activity in favour of a boisterous attack on unsuspecting women of all ages" (40-41) which points to the male perception of women in public spaces as "improper" and "sexually available" (Ganser 76), a reason why the act of flânerie becomes difficult for women. Simran's act of going to a liquor store by herself is a huge taboo for women and therefore stands out in the town (Desai, *Witness* 86). It is only in a metropolis like Delhi that Simran can be anyone she chooses to be without being judged and she returns to the city when she can.

Conclusion

The changes in the Indian publishing industry, which in turn were influenced by the emergence of a new confident middle-class with disposable income and a model of Indian womanhood hitherto unseen, have given birth to this new genre of detective fiction written originally in English, with female sleuths at the centre, which as Khair says is "a marker of significant cultural and economic changes" (71) and "is consumed primarily within India, seen to display a kind of Indianness that Indians

appreciate" (Gupta, "Commercial" 47). The authors are undoubtedly inspired by their Western counterparts, but they have modified the generic conventions to suit the local needs and have appropriated the genre by embracing an array of Indian settings and characters. This allows the authors to choose topics that suit and are symptomatic of the Indian context. Kishwar Desai chooses to expose the hypocrisies of the upper-class Indian society, by revealing the shams that lie beneath the façade of respectability. Kalpana Swaminathan chooses to discuss crimes that are usually normalised within the family, crimes which are not even conceived as such. Both the authors focus on women's concerns and depict the various shades of Indian women, from the detectives to the victim/survivors. The crucial question that needs be asked at this point is, of course, do these representations have the ability to change centuries of expectations and perceptions? Kathleen Gregory Klein believes that "the persistent undermining of the woman detective's credibility is located in three competing and cooperative arenas: the literary, economic, and political" (*Woman* 224) and the strength of this triad makes a female representation of the male heroic detective a kind of a parody. The world that this genre creates, like its glorified detective, is illusory and the way justice is served and the social order restored artificial (228). In lieu of the changes in the woman's social and economic conditions, the readers have certainly expected changes in the portrayal of the women detective figures and such an expectation is not unrealistic (223). With an increase in the number of working middle-class women with disposable incomes, and more at ease in the public space, the readers definitely want realistic and relatable portrayals of women in fiction. The female sleuths under analysis here are Indian urban women who have rejected marriage and motherhood and are in the unusual business of solving crimes. Lisa Lau writes:

> The pressures on and expectations of single women are significantly different in urban India from that of their married counterparts. It may be assumed that single women, without roles and duties associated with husband, in-laws, children, would have more freedom to negotiate their identities and also more freedom of personal autonomy; but even scratching the surface rapidly reveals that the single status for a young woman in India may not necessarily be an advantageous one in these terms, and that they function under different but still considerable constraints. ("Literary Representation" 272)

However, we do not see "the pressures on and expectations of" Lalli, Sita, and Simran Singh in very telling ways. The two women authors largely create them as aspirational figures to be looked up to as influencers, moving beyond stereotypically defined roles of a wife, a mother, or a daughter-in-law. Kathleen Klein believes that detective novels should cast "plausible women", "real women portraying authentic, lived experience" (*Woman* 228). The detectives, Simran Singh wearing a "shabby saree, bright yellow" with a "bindi" on her forehead (*Witness* 115), and Lalli in a "burnt orange Kalakshetra sari" with a "pendant at her neck" (*I Never Knew* 74), seem

relatable enough, despite their rejection of several patriarchal norms. A deeper engagement with the preferences and predilections of these fictional women reveals that "many Indian women live in worlds that bear no resemblance to those in chick-lit novels. Nearly two-thirds of the population here still lives in rural areas, where girls grow up in families that provide many opportunities to boys but none to girls" (Lakshmi). But these novels can be seen as an important harbinger of change, with women not only as objects in detective fiction, but as subjects, with agency. Women in crime writing have been carelessly offered roles of victims and even perpetrators, but women dedicated to ideals of law and order go against traditional expectations from them, with their irrationality and excessive emotional behaviour. In Lalli, Sita and Simran, as Maitreyee Chaudhuri puts it, there is "the celebration of the new-found 'self' of Indian women" which is in turn a marker of the "celebration of India's economic reforms" (152). Indian fictional detectives such as these allow the readers to escape from their real world to a fictional world that offers women choices beyond "falling in love, going mad or dying" (Russ 80). Finally, to refer to Klein again, "if women's stories are to be authentically told, they must be spoken in women's voices" (*Woman* 228), and these stories exactly do that: they present the interior lives of women and tell their stories that deserve to be told and heard, by other women and men.

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Digitalizing Femicide: The Gabby Petito Case as a Technocentric Crime Narrative

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Abstract

Few criminal cases have galvanized the global public like the murder of travel vlogger Gabby Petito in 2021. The fact that it was solved with the help of social media has perceivably shifted public discourses on the merits of amateur internet sleuthing. But at the same time, media narratives of Petito's death have been widely framed as a cautionary tale about the dangers of the online environment for women, thus reproducing a centuries-old pattern of linking female victimization to female public visibility. This article examines the Gabby Petito case as a cultural phenomenon, illustrating how collective perceptions of crime are shaped by the social concerns of the day – and how timeworn gender biases are replicated in allegedly disembodied virtual spaces.

Keywords

Gabby Petito, femicide in popular media, cultural impact of social media, domestic violence, online misogyny

"She touched the world," Joseph Petito posted on Instagram the day after the body of his daughter Gabrielle "Gabby" Petito was found in late September 2021. Repeated in countless press releases, makeshift memorials and murals, this phrase became shorthand for the extraordinary level of public interest in the young woman's fate. Almost immediately after the twenty-two-year-old travel vlogger was reported missing, her story was taken up by the press and quickly grew from a national to an international news item. Mainstream networks breathlessly reported on every new development, and an army of internet sleuths from all over the world sifted through emerging footage with forensic interest, some of them even physically travelling to the site of the crime in search of evidence. Within a few weeks, the hashtag #FindGabby amassed a billion views, and the production of a film about her disappearance and death was announced even before the basic facts of the case had been established.[1] The media spectacle also featured colorful figures like Duane Chapman, better known as television personality Dog the Bounty Hunter, who inserted himself into the investigation (Jancelewitcz). Even QAnon weighed in to claim that the entire incident was a 'false flag' operation to distract the world from President Biden's failings (Palmer).

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[1] *The Gabby Petito Story* was released in October 2022 on the Lifetime network to mostly unenthusiastic reviews.

There is ongoing speculation as to what made this particular case such a media magnet. Almost unanimously, Petito's physical attractiveness and girl-next-door charm have been identified as the factors that elevated her story above the more than 90,000 other active missing persons in the US at the time. As legal analyst Mary Fulginiti has commented in a recent interview, "there seems to be a tendency in these types of cases to give a disproportionate amount of attention to a certain type of individual, and I think Gabby Petito was a young, beautiful, blonde, blue-eyed girl" (Fulginiti 27:47-27:59). In other words, hers is a prime example of the 'missing white woman syndrome,' a term famously coined by US journalist Gwen Ifill for the tendency of media coverage to focus on white, middle-class, female victims while disappearances of people of color, especially if they are male and come from the lower strata of society, usually go unreported.[2]

This article examines the Gabby Petito case as a cultural touchstone. In keeping with the understanding that "the cultural dynamics carry within them the meaning of crime" (Ferrel et al. 2), it seeks to go beyond generalized explanations based on sensationalism, racial bias, and stereotypical images of female innocence by exploring the strong collective response to this personal tragedy in the context of social debates that are unique to the present cultural moment. These include the increased public attention to issues of sexism and domestic violence in the wake of the #MeToo movement, the collective longing for personal mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the growing discontent with traditional career paths especially among young people. But most crucially, it looks at the ways in which media narratives of this murder reflect the deeply ambiguous contemporary attitudes towards social media, which are cast both as a utopian realm of new possibilities and a crime-ridden danger zone. Reflecting this dichotomy, the online community was widely celebrated for its constructive role in solving this case at the very same time that Gabby's victimization was conflated with her online presence, thus reproducing a centuries-old narrative about the dangers attached to female public visibility. The following case analysis draws on cultural studies, media studies, and criminology to interrogate what makes certain crimes representative of their time – and to highlight how true crimes are framed, and often misframed, by collective anxieties.

A Crime of the Digital Age

Since the emergence of mass media, crime has been a staple of the public news diet. In fact, the history of crime and the evolution of media have often gone hand in

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[2] A 2016 analysis of race and gender disparities in the treatment of missing person cases arrives at the conclusion that "[n]ot only are missing blacks and missing men less likely at the outset to garner media coverage than other types of missing persons, but they also receive a lower intensity of coverage when their stories are, in fact, picked up by news outlets. In other words, there is a two-stage discrepancy that limits the amount of coverage certain types of missing persons receive" (Sommers 280).

hand. For instance, the Jack the Ripper murders of 1888 ushered in a heyday for daily newspapers in England, the massive public interest in the legal proceedings against Ted Bundy in 1979 spurred the decision to allow cameras in US courtrooms, and the O.J. Simpson trial boosted the popularity of cable TV in the 1990s. By the same token, the Gabby Petito case has been momentous for the digital age not only because it generated record-breaking levels of online attention, but also because it gave credence to 'armchair detectives' as genuine assets to law enforcement. Although this is not the first time that hobby criminologists have helped solve crimes, the sheer scale of the publicity surrounding this murder has caused a marked shift in the discourse on citizen participation in criminal investigations.[3] Traditionally, criminology professionals have tended to take a skeptical view of amateur involvement, citing its propensity to sensationalize crimes, foster vigilantism, misdirect resources towards false leads, interfere with the work of trained experts, and destroy people's lives through false accusations (Fisher et al.; Marx and Archer; Ortiz; Powell). By contrast, in the context of the Gabby Petito case, eminent members of the legal and law enforcement communities have encouraged laypersons to come to the aid of a chronically understaffed police force. One of them is criminal justice professor and former NYPD detective Michael Alcazar, who pointed out in a *Washington Post* interview that "[m]ost agencies don't have that many detectives to canvass for witnesses, to canvass for any kind of evidence. Now we have so many eyes out there, millions of civilian investigators, because now they're on the lookout. It's kind of like an Amber Alert, but more effective" (Anders and Kornfield). Along the same lines, Adam Scott Wandt of *NBC News* has stated that

> The phenomenon of Americans crowdsourcing their time and attention to assist law enforcement is not new. But Petito's case adds a new wrinkle, because it shows what a difference these citizen detectives can make when armed with social media . . . . Indeed, widespread citizen engagement on social media could be the secret weapon that turns the tide in the fight for missing persons. (Wandt)

But in parallel to this enthusiastic view of new media's impact on fighting crime, there has been a counter-narrative which makes sense of Gabby's death within the context of her social media activity. Although her aspiration to become a successful blogger was merely circumstantial to her death, her murder has been widely construed as a cautionary tale about the pitfalls of the online environment. This ties into a broader historical pattern of associating women's victimization with their forays into public territory. Incidentally, it is probably more than a coincidence that many of the landmark cases that shaped the relationship between crime and media are femicides. Throughout history, the female body has been a canvas for the projection of moral standards and cultural anxieties, with public discourses on crime, victimhood, and punishment habitually revolving around the question of women's proper

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[3] For instance, the online forum Websleuths.com has had a crucial role in solving multiple cold cases, and police have actively reached out to individual users for help (Murphy).

conduct in public spaces, whether it be the streets of Whitechapel in the nineteenth century or online dating sites in the twenty-first. The true crime genre in particular has been noted for its conservative bent. Combining "intensely gendered appeal and misogynist subject matter" (Murley 3) with "prurient interests in the untimely demise of 'innocents'" (3), it has tended to reinforce rather than challenge traditional gender norms.

Gabby Petito's murder is no exception. While her wholesome appearance does not easily lend itself to overt moralistic judgment, press coverage of her death has been following a familiar discursive norm by portraying her as an example of fragile female innocence in a treacherous, male-connoted online world. If, as Jean Murley has stated in her book *The Rise of True Crime*, true crime is "a cultural barometer that registers shifting fears about crime and violence" (Murley 44), then what does it say about our culture that the death of a young woman is almost universally associated with the dangers of new technology despite her killing being unrelated to her online activities? Before going on to examine this question, the following section provides an outline of the case as a basis for my argument.

Synopsis of the Gabby Petito Case

On July 4, 2021, Gabby Petito and her fiancé Brian Laundrie of New Port, Florida, embark on what is supposed to be a four-month road trip across the US. Their plan is to visit various national parks in Gabby's converted van and post about their travel experiences on Instagram, YouTube and TikTok under the popular hashtag #vanlife. Both had previously quit their jobs – Gabby as a nutritionist and Brian as a content manager – with the aspiration of building a large enough social media following to become full-time influencers. The photos and clips they post along the way show a happy couple enjoying the trip of a lifetime. But on August 12, 2021, police in Moab, Utah receive a 911 call by a passerby who reports witnessing a physical confrontation between Gabby and Brian. Police quickly spot the couple's van, which is driving erratically, pull them over, and proceed to question them separately, with bodycam video recording the entire incident. While Brian seems relatively collected, Gabby is visibly distressed. Crying, she tells the officer that her relationship with Brian is going through a difficult phase because her "really bad OCD" (Moab Police bodycam video 2:38-2:40) keeps colliding with his more relaxed attitude towards tidiness. She also mentions feeling stressed by the work it takes to start up her blog and expresses her disappointment at the lack of support from her fiancé who "doesn't really believe that I can do any of it" (3:30-3:34). Police notice scratches and bruises on Gabby as well as Brian, but both downplay their altercation. Based on Gabby's repeated assertions that it was her who had initiated the physical fight, officers identify her as the main aggressor but decide to make no arrest under the

condition that the couple keep apart for the night, with Gabby staying in the van and Brian checking into a nearby hotel.

A video posted on the couple's YouTube channel some days later shows them laughing and kissing. Gabby's last social media post is made on August 25, 2021. In the following days, texts sent from her phone notify her family that there will be no cell service at the pair's next destination. Although the wording of the messages strikes Gabby's mother as unusual for her daughter, she is not immediately alarmed. But after ten days without any contact or social media activity from the otherwise communicative Gabby, her family decides to file a missing person report. The ensuing police inquiry finds Brian already back in New Port where, it turns out, he had been already for nearly two weeks after having returned in Gabby's van alone. Refusing to talk to authorities about his fiancée's whereabouts, he is declared a person of interest. Despite being put under surveillance, he evades police by absconding to an unknown location. With the case already in the public limelight, speculations, conspiracy theories, and false sightings of Gabby and Brian proliferate particularly on social media. But all the online publicity also reaches genuine witnesses, who turn out to be valuable sources of information regarding the couple's last interactions and movements. The most important lead comes from a couple who, much like Gabby and Brian, had set out to document their cross-country journey for the online community. They provide the FBI with coincidentally captured footage which shows Gabby's van parked at Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming around the time of her last sighting. Only hours later, a search of the surrounding area results in the discovery of Gabby's body, with autopsy later revealing manual strangulation as her cause of death. A month later, following an intense manhunt, Brian's remains are found in the Carlton Reserve in Florida. It is determined that he died by a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. Among his belongings is a notebook which contains his written confession to killing Gabby.

A Picture-Perfect Femicide

The media frenzy that accompanied these events was to a large extent fueled by the wealth of audiovisual material, which not only appealed to the voyeuristic appetites of our visual culture but also catered to the participatory ethos of digital networking sites. Gabby's active social media accounts, the ubiquity of CCTV recordings, and the publicly released police bodycam footage yielded digital puzzle pieces that piqued the public's curiosity and spurred the ambitions of hobby detectives. The online peeks into Gabby's private life combined with the rawness of the police video showing her in a moment of extreme vulnerability created a sense of intimacy which made her seem particularly relatable.[4] This identification effect was even amplified

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[4] Similar viral phenomena developed around other missing young women who have left large digital footprints, for instance twenty-one-year-old Canadian student Elisa Lam, who went missing

by the fact that her story contained key elements that reflected profound collective shifts impacting people's realities across the globe. Most notably, the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted accustomed ways of living, drastically limiting personal freedom of movement and making people more than ever reliant on online communication. Concomitantly, it exacerbated preexisting social inequalities and intensified the widespread discontent with the economic status quo which has been fermenting since the financial crisis of 2008. With working conditions rapidly deteriorating in numerous sectors, especially young people began quitting their jobs in record numbers in what has been dubbed "The Great Resignation." Publicly deplored by many employers as a sign of the young generation's lack of work ethic, it is in fact the culmination of growing collective disenchantment with the labor market after decades of decreasing upward mobility. In this atmosphere of precarity, where good qualifications and hard work no longer come with the promise of professional advancement or, for that matter, even a minimal level of financial stability, many young people are on the lookout for alternatives to traditional career options.

This is one of the reasons why 'influencer' or 'social media star' has become one of the main career aspirations for young people in the West. According to a much-quoted US-based survey conducted in 2019, as many as 86 percent of respondents aged 13 to 38 say "they're willing to try out influencing on their social media platforms," and 54 percent would become full-time influencers, given the opportunity (Morning Consult). Similar findings have been reported from other countries like Great Britain and New Zealand (Harris Poll; New Zealand Tertiary Education Commission). And so, in the midst of a once-in-a-century public health crisis, when many people were spending increased amounts of time online, craving physical travel and contemplating alternatives to dead-end jobs, the story of a young couple trying to carve out a better future in the online universe struck a nerve with a worldwide audience, speaking to major collective desires as well as to major collective frustrations.

The deeply conflicted contemporary discourse on social media falls into both these categories. As numerous scholars have noted, especially the last decade has seen a shift from a predominantly optimistic to an ambiguous and even dystopian view of new media (Schradie; Salter). When the first networking platforms cropped up in the mid-noughties, they were widely heralded as emancipatory forces that would encourage social collaboration, enable more rewarding modes of working, and amplify the voices of subaltern groups. In many ways, this vision has indeed come true as the online environment has veritably created new career options, and hashtag campaigns such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter have had a game-changing im-

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in Los Angeles in 2013. In her case, the interest was additionally fueled by the fact that her disappearance and death were tied to the notorious Cecil Hotel, the site of multiple well-publicized murders and suicides.

pact on public conversations on sexism and racism. But at the same time, the proliferation of misinformation, political extremism, and hate speech in online spaces has cast a negative light on the internet and social media as sinister tools of corporate control and the romping ground of terrorists, frauds, and sexual predators. In medical and psychological research, online activity has been associated with mental health issues such as depression, stress, and suicidality (American Psychological Association). Warnings against mind-corroding tech industry practices have also been issued by several whistle blowers, and popular documentaries like *The Great Hack* (2019) and the *The Social Dilemma* (2020) have sounded the alarm over the detrimental effects of social media particularly on the mental health of young people. It is this discursive tension between technological optimism and moral panic that has also provided the framework for the press narratives of Gabby Petito's murder.

Technocentric Framing of Physical Violence

Significantly, the killing of Gabby Petito by her fiancé occurred at a time when the #MeToo movement had brought violence against women to the forefront of public awareness. Especially during the pandemic, when lockdowns increased the potential for domestic conflicts and at the same time cut victims off from their support networks, intimate partner abuse gained widespread attention as a high-priority social problem.[5] Against this background, it is noteworthy that even though domestic violence was consistently brought up as a catchword in Gabby's case, engagement with this issue was tangential at best. In interviews, her friends and family were regularly asked whether they had witnessed any tell-tale signs of Brian's violent nature, which most of them negated, conversely describing their impression of him as good-natured, polite, and quiet. And yet, the fact that the toxicity of the relationship evidently went unnoticed for what experts retrospectively concluded must have been years of abuse did not elicit further reflections on the dynamics in the couples' immediate social environment. Instead, it typically served as a thematic gateway to discussing Gabby's activity on social media. What emerged as the overwhelming leitmotif was the perilousness of the online environment, with the language typically evoking a deadly clash between reality and fiction. To give just a few samples, a report by *60 Minutes Australia* opened with the ominous commentary that

> Gabby Petito and her fiancé Brian Laundrie were a young couple who seemed to have it all . . . . Like so many others, they also had a desire to show off their idyllic and carefree lives on YouTube and Instagram. But now we know the postcard images and million-dollar smiles were hiding an ugly and murderous truth. (0:05-0:32)

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[5] According to *The American Journal of Emergency Medicine*, domestic violence cases increased by 25% to 33% globally during the first weeks of the pandemic (Boserup et al.).

Along the same lines, the 2021 documentary *The Murder of Gabby Petito: Truth, Lies, and Social Media* concluded that "there was more to the relationship than we saw on social media," and an episode of the true crime show *48 Hours* titled "Gabby Petito: The Untold Story" kept reminding viewers that "Gabby posted constantly, every little detail. But all those selfies may have been hiding a darker story" (9:55-10:15). In a similar vein, an op-ed in *Teen Vogue* titled "Gabby Petito's Seemingly-Idyllic Online Life Highlights a Dark Side of Social Media" issued a warning to its young readers that "just because you're passively consuming images and stories of a stranger's life in unprecedented detail doesn't mean you're friends" (Kabas). What is revealing about this social-media-centered angle is that it explicitly or implicitly conflates Gabby's murder with her online presence. Instead of focusing on the reasons for the *actual* violence levelled at the *actual* victim, it redirects attention to the perils which arise to her audience from social media's deceptive potential. In other words, the discrepancy between Gabby's offline life and her carefully curated online showcase is honed in on as the main transgressive moment while the concrete act of killing fades into the narrative background.

The collective reflex to package this femicide as a dark tale about the hazards of social media is particularly telling because it is utterly at odds with the facts. Unlike in other instances where victims have attracted the attention of stalkers through social media posts, were deceived by fake online personas, or became the targets of cyber-bullying, in Gabby's case the online realm is not a functional element of the crime. After all, she neither encountered Brian online – they had known each other for many years from high school – nor was she an online recluse with atrophied social skills, which would have made her particularly vulnerable 'in real life.' By all accounts, the very opposite was the case, as Gabby has been universally described as an exceptionally active and socially well-adjusted young woman. Given that her death had nothing to do with her online presence and everything to do with her real-life environment, the thematic fixation on social media says less about the intrinsic logic of the murder than about the cultural preoccupations of our time.[6]

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[6] The fascination with female visibility on social media is also dominating the reporting on a more recent sensational crime, the so-called Idaho student murders of 13 November 2022, when four University of Idaho students, three females and one male, were fatally stabbed in their residence by an intruder. Ever since the suspect, a 28-year-old doctoral student in criminology from nearby Pullman, Washington, was arrested, there have been speculations as to whether specifically the female victims caught their murderer's attention online. For instance, in a podcast episode of the true crime show Dateline tiled "The Killings on King Road," host Keith Morrison repeatedly ponders the vulnerability of "young, open lives on campus, people who loved and lived on social media" (6:38-6:46). After presenting TikTok clips of two female victims, he goes on to explain that "this is how life is lived for millions, out loud where everybody can see, no matter what a secret observer's motive might be" (7:15-7:26), which is followed by further discussion of how people can be contacted and tracked by strangers through social networking technology. As of the time of writing in June 2023, no evidence has been published to suggest that the contact between the murderer and his victims was made through social media.

This is not to deny that the cultural obsession with glossy self-promotion may well have played a role in this tragedy. For instance, one cannot help but wonder whether Gabby's unwillingness to open up to friends and family about her abusive relationship can be at least partially ascribed to a perceived need to maintain a flawless veneer in order to be appealing. But whatever the personal reasons for her silence, they ultimately reside in psychology rather than technology. Hence, the technocentric fixation on social media is unwarranted and misleading. It speaks to a problematic collective tendency, as observed by Salter for previous cases, to "inaccurately conflate physical offences with online abuse" (Salter 27), which not only obscures the broader cultural contexts that enable violent behavior but also shifts the focus from the aggressor's wrongdoing to the victim's risk-taking in showing herself online. However, this discursive pattern is not new to the internet age but represents a digital extension of longstanding gendered norms when it comes to safety in public spaces.

Offline Patterns in Online Spaces

In the 1970s, the infamous Yorkshire Ripper spread fear and panic in Northern England. For five years, during which the serial killer murdered at least thirteen women and violently attacked eleven, the Yorkshire police failed to make any progress in the case – in large part due to the false assumption that the Ripper attacked 'only' prostitutes. But instead of reevaluating their methods, officials' response was to effectively impose a nightly curfew on women. As the murders continued, media voices started expressing disapproval of those women who put themselves at risk by venturing out of their home after dark. In response, women took to the streets in what would be the first of a series of Reclaim the Night protest. One of the original organizers, feminist activist Julie Bindel, remembers:

> The Reclaim the Night march was saying, the night, the evening, the dark is as much ours to claim as it is men's. There were women from all walks of life on that march, shouting at the police, they were shouting about the media coverage, they were shouting about male violence. It was never just about this killer, it was never just about these murders. Men did commit acts of rape and domestic violence on a regular basis. And I think the women were recognizing that this killer would not have done what he'd done were it not for the culture of misogyny we were living under. ("Reclaim the Night" 35:44-36:31)

Half a century later, the feminist movement has doubtlessly achieved significant progress in asserting women's entitlement to move safely in public spaces. And yet, sexist premises still shape discussions of violence against women. Consider, for example, the social construction of sexual violence on US university campuses, which has been widely recognized as a collective crisis.[7] As Hayes and Luther have discussed, a common explanation "blames victims for being intoxicated or dressing

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[7] In response to what is often described as a national epidemic of sexual violence on US university campuses, in 2014 the Obama Administration established the White House Task Force to Protect

provocatively and encourages college students to avoid behaving in ways that 'ask for' sexual assault" (Hayes and Luther 12). The same logic is applied to online spaces where, on the one hand, "young women and girls are at disproportionate risk of humiliation and intimidation" (Salter 17) and, on the other, questions of their safety tend to be formulated around a "moralistic focus on personal responsibility" (82). In stark contrast to male users, who seldom face serious fallout from transgressive online postings like 'gross-out videos' or 'dick pics,' girls and women are habitually branded as 'attention seekers' and 'sluts,' even when the humiliating or provocative content is published without their consent.

Big Tech has been slow to respond to online misogyny, as evidenced by the initial *laissez-faire* attitude towards concerted and sustained abuse campaigns such as 'Gamergate,' which explicitly mobilized around the goal of ostracizing female members of the gaming community for challenging misogynist norms, or by the success of *IsAnyoneUp.com*. Famous for contributing the term 'revenge porn' to common parlance, this site's business model was built on humiliating women by uploading nude photos which had been obtained in breach of their privacy. And yet, for the longest time, the victims' complaints were met in the spirit of Google CEO Eric Schmidt's oft-quoted statement that "[i]f you have something that you don't want anyone to know, maybe you shouldn't be doing it in the first place" (qtd. in Esguerra).

Media scholars have interpreted such reactions as part of a broad sexist backlash against the massive influx of female users which social media has brought to the previously male domain of the internet. Counter to the common notion of cyberspace as a sphere of disembodiment where identities can be constructed beyond the restraints of sex and gender, the online world has become an aggressively gendered arena. By leaving it to individuals to grapple with the cultural problem of misogyny in what has been labelled 'digital Darwinism,' internet and social media are effectively sustained as techno-masculinist territory, in spite of the majority of social media users today being female (Salter; Hayes and Luther). The implicit message is that women enter the jungle of social media at their own peril.

Although online sexism does not relate directly to Gabby Petito's case, public perceptions of her murder have been informed by the knee-jerk response to invoke social media as a dangerous place for women. The paradoxicality of such technocentric narratives becomes most glaring when even those closest to Gabby adapt their accounts to the social media template. For instance, one of Gabby's best friends stated in an interview that "anyone that's met [Gabby and Brian] has been like, they seem like such a nice couple," then adding with a meaningful expression that "a lot of

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Students from Sexual Assault and launched the Not Alone initiative to provide support for victims.

couples look nice on Instagram" (*48 Hours* 2:22-2:29). Similarly, Gabby's father reflected that "[o]utside looking in she did look happy," even though in hindsight he concedes that "[i]t might not have been as great as people online perceived" (*60 Minutes Australia* 1:22-1:29). Both these perspectives suggest that, even to family and friends, Gabby was knowable mainly as an online presence, so that her online visibility ironically becomes an explanation for why her struggles remained unnoticed and unaddressed in real life.

All this speaks to a collective subconscious that is all too willing to accept the internet as a no-go zone for women and to pin the blame for longstanding patterns of female victimization on new technology. The gendered dimension of this case is not least underscored by the fact that the narrative focus on social media continued even after new information surfaced which suggested that Brian may have been suffering from mental health issues. The contents of his notebook, in which he bizarrely described Gabby's murder as a mercy killing, also point in that direction.[8] And yet, to this day, there has been surprisingly little public interest in the possible mental disturbance of the perpetrator as opposed to the online activity of the victim.

Conclusion: Something Old, Something New

The Gabby Petito case is a prime example of how individual criminal cases become paradigmatic for their time by providing a projection surface for collective desires and anxieties. It also illustrates how easily ingrained cultural assumptions can override the facts of a crime and bend them into a master narrative that blocks more cohesive avenues of interrogating its underlying dynamics and motivations. In our digitally saturated world, this case has marked a new milestone in the ever-evolving symbiotic relationship between crime and media by validating the criminological potential of social networking sites. But at the same time, it has revealed a persistent undercurrent of age-old misogynist tenets which run even through sympathetic portrayals of female victims. While social media has certainly brought new collective challenges, few of them can be grasped through a purely technocentric lens. This is particularly true for domestic abuse. As Gabby Petito's murder illustrates, the widespread impulse to outsource the issue of women's victimization to the online realm

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[8] In his notebook, Brian claimed that Gabby sustained injuries while crossing a river, so that he felt he had no choice but to kill her: "I don't know the extent of Gabby's ingerys [sic] only that she was in extreme pain. I ended her life, I thought it was merciful, that it is what she wanted, but I see now all the mistakes I made. I panicked. I was in shock. But from the moment I decided, took away her pain, I knew I couldn't go on without her" (qtd. in Lynch and Woody). This is a perplexing explanation, especially given that there was good cell service at the location where Gabby's body was found. Besides, as has been established thanks to social media, the couple's van was parked nearby at the time of her death, so that Brian could have easily called for help or driven her to a place where she could have received medical attention.

stands in the way of recognizing the offline conditions that enable violence against women.

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Jill and Jack, the Rippers? Gender Politics and Constructing the (Female) Sex Murderer

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Abstract

Jack the Ripper has never been definitively identified. And yet, the image constructed by Ripperologists and writers of Ripper fiction alike is strangely unequivocal in one aspect of identity, the masculinity of the serial sex murderer already encapsulated in his name Jack. "Jill the Ripper" by contrast, a theory attached to writer Arthur Conan Doyle, basically has no impact on the mythic image of the gentleman killer in popular fiction. But why is this? This chapter departs from the traditional gender politics of the Ripper and examines instances of Ripper fiction wherein Jack turns out to be Jill. Presumably no closer to historical truth than any of the theories, stories of female Rippers perform cultural work beyond speculative solutions in the sense that they question how we read and mentally construct the sex killer and his relationship to his victims.

Feminist scholars criticise the one-dimensional portrayal of female characters in the Ripper story, stereotypically reduced to victims. Only occasionally, writers involve them in the narrative in a less passive manner, for instance focus on their experience or give them active roles, e.g. as (amateur) detectives. This sets up a binary opposition between them and the male killer, a conflict that almost amounts to 'gender war'. But what if these expectations are subverted? From partnered killers to solo female Rippers, can such texts tell a new narrative, offer a different perspective? Or do they remain caught up in the existing myth and essentially become accomplices in the project of patriarchal terrorism?

Jack the Ripper, as is well known, is the identity universally given to the Whitechapel murderer, a serial killer at large in the London East End around 1888. Never conclusively identified, however, any identity attributed to 'Jack' cannot be anything but hypothetical, constructed out of fragmentary facts, circumstantial evidence and mostly speculation. Nevertheless, the name given to the killer, which originates from a taunting letter to the press supposedly written by the killer,[1] is not only a cultural fixture but in turn fixes the images conjured up when reading it. Certainly,

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[1] The authenticity of the 'dear boss' letter remains questionable. Some Ripperologists claim it as support for various theories, while others consider it a hoax – possibly penned by a journalist to raise the public excitement. Either way, the signature as 'Jack the Ripper' is clearly indicative of someone consciously creating a persona rather than genuinely reflective of the author.

most people will be at least vaguely familiar with one or more of the theories; diverse as those may be, they are united by the stereotype of the solo male sex murderer. Or sometimes a conspiracy of them.

Jill the Ripper, by contrast, is the mostly unknown counterpart to the unidentified but male killer. According to the *Jack the Ripper A-Z* (*JtR: A-Z*), the idea is most notably associated with crime fiction author Arthur Conan Doyle (Begg et al. loc. 5089),[2] even though he never went so far as to incorporate it or the Ripper as such into his Sherlock Holmes fiction himself. In reality, Jill the Ripper refers to a small set of related obscure theories or is their amalgamation (loc. 5089). According to one, the Ripper might have been a midwife, the reasoning hinging solely on the premise that her professional status enables her to move about at all hours unsuspiciously and even provides an excuse if seen blood-smeared. Supposedly, as fellow female she would be able to approach her victims without alarming them. A second theory follows a similar logic with a man disguised as a midwife, which already brings us back to the male killer. At any rate, neither gives any reason or motive why said midwife would even want to murder, so the theory must be identified for what it is: a narrative construct and device familiar to readers of crime fiction, no more than a clever ploy to temporarily obscure the killer's identity rather than to explain it. This of course is mirrored by some of the Ripper fiction which uses the female killer simply as a novelty to surprise readers at the resolution as opposed to actually offering a solution. Nonetheless, what can narratives of female Rippers offer on a deeper level? By their existence as fictional counterpoint, they can shed light on how (female) serial killers are typically constructed and gendered in the public imagination as the following review of this specific subset of the corpus illustrates.

Reflections on the Status Quo of Phallic Violence

The Ripper is almost irrevocably envisioned as male because of at least two aspects. One is the identity, or rather persona, constructed around – and by – the name. A second aspect is the stereotype of the sex killer interwoven with the popular-cultural image of serial murder, of which Jack acts as a prototype. This idea is not a new one, it in fact predates serial murder as recognised phenomenon. It has persisted in Ripper discourse since Krafft-Ebing's contemporary concept of *Lustmord*, one of the male deviances collected as *Psychopathia Sexualis* (Curtis 176). The image of the male sex killer has since been only further hardened by feminist scholars such as

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[2] A word on Ripperology, sources and references: adherence to academic standards is flexible within the genre, occasionally resulting in the proliferation of what basically become legends. Although the theory of a female (or crossdressing) Ripper is frequently associated with Doyle, direct citations are absent with allusions to private conversation and correspondence at best. Tellingly, the *JtR: A-Z*, itself a reference book, fails to provide concrete references but at least describes the entry as a "generic term for stories suggesting that the murderer was a woman" (loc. 5086), and lists more (and better referenced) examples prior to and after Doyle.

Jane Caputi, who in her 1987 book *The Age of Sex Crime* imbues the principally in-dividual psychology of the deviant with an ideological dimension affecting if not shared by audiences as well as copycats. The phallic violence in which a hard object penetrates the female body is equated by Caputi, directly drawing from Krafft-Ebing, with a form of displaced sexual act or fetish (129-30, 134), but beyond the individual this is claimed to align with systemic patterns of patriarchal violence. Patriarchy not only produces the occasional sex murderer, but condones him, celebrates him, per-petuates him "as a *hero* to his culture" (50, original emphasis). The individual release of perverted drives or their satisfaction transforms into ritualised violence against symbols of femininity, an ideology linked to the Ripper also by Alan Moore in his graphic novel *From Hell* as "social magic" (Moore and Campbell 4.8, 4.30, also ap-pendix I.11). Back on the individual level, it is not difficult to see how this perception conversely resonates with images projected back unto the unidentified killer. The identity of the killer who is still unidentified must remain fragmentary, speculative, and fictional; yet paradoxically, it is recognisable by expectations alone.

Expectations play a role from yet another perspective as well. Accepting the cultural existence of female serial killers, it is likewise clear that neither their perceived im-age nor status is equal to their male counterparts'. Caputi attests a certain element of hero worship for male serial killers in patriarchal culture, but the exact opposite appears to be going on with female serial killers. In two related articles, Caroline Picart develops a Gothic criminality in which the standard metaphor for the male serial killer is the glamorously sexy vampire, whereas her metaphor for female serial killers is Frankenstein's disfigured monster as a necessary counterpoint ("Crime and the Gothic" 6). While Picart's analysis heavily relies on fictionalisations of real-life killers, in particular films about Aileen Wuornos, and does not entirely match the purely fictional dazzling *femme fatales* of cinema, the Frankensteinian metaphor has implications for their perception. Constructed of parts, the female serial killer is an aberration containing traditionally male aggressiveness in a female body in which it culturally has no place. Then again, the shallowness of such sexism is easily re-vealed when the opposite is also true, as in the Hammer film *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* (1971), where rational masculinity is corrupted by the transformation into evil femininity, which unleashes the monstrous Jack or rather Jill the Ripper. But what if the text leaves this question of gender lingering indeterminate, forcing readers to wonder?

Defining Ripper Fiction

Speaking of contradictions, at this point my conception of what constitutes Ripper fiction warrants explanation. I define it as a highly inclusive and open-ended cate-gory primarily characterised by its fragmentary and intertextual nature. Put simply,

Ripper fiction concerns itself explicitly with the Whitechapel murderer and the historical case, implicitly mimics either, or otherwise invokes either in meaningful ways. This sounds deceptively simple yet implies a wide spectrum of possibilities as well as complexities. Consequently, Ripper fiction also covers a variety of media and genres from speculative fictionalisation about the actual historical case to symbolic work that merely appropriates the character for completely different contexts. In other words, it ranges from true crime to pure fantasy, from rational detective story to irrational horror and even sensational adventure. Either way, the disassociation of character from plot, as well as the fragmentary nature of either with no definitive ur-text, result in what Alexandra Warwick once called a "narrative machine" (84). It produces endless possibilities for narratives, and hence endless intertextual connections to give the stories significance in turn. Given such a loose definition of Ripper fiction and the abundance of material, and acknowledging a consequently selective analysis, what are the possible narratives and how do they empirically stack up?[3] This question requires a very brief dissection of the Ripper myth as a whole and the gender dynamics within it to contextualise and differentiate available roles and the female Ripper subset productively.

Introducing the villain: Historically, the Whitechapel killer, though never identified, has been envisioned in practically every theory and representation as male by default. This was only further reinforced by the taunting 'dear boss' letter supplying the name Jack and a melodramatic villain personality. Most Ripper fiction reflects this male persona, merely over time shifting his narrative role from antagonist to occasional villain protagonist. Aside from Doyle's contemporary midwife theory, the female Ripper is the absolute exception to the rule and relatively recent. This move may be based on or at least be inspired by recent speculation, but more often seems simply a narrative device to disrupt expectations within the genre. The 2017 novel *Jack the Ripper Is Not a Man* casts historical Ripper suspect James Maybrick's wife Florence, and thus exploits the controversy still surrounding the Maybrick diary, while the 2021 movie *Ripper Untold* sets up a Jekyll/Hyde-like plot involving a pathologically alcoholic police surgeon, only to have him exonerated when his jealous wife is implausibly revealed to be murderously insane.

Falling victim: The victims historically appear to be invariably presumed impoverished female prostitutes, although that occupational status has been challenged recently by historian Hallie Rubenhold (2020). Most fictions simply follow this prem-

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[3] Given the mass of Ripper fiction even under narrower definitions combined with the never-ending flood of new titles, a fully exhaustive empirical study now seems almost impossible; commendable efforts are Coville and Lucanio 1999, Meikle 2002, and chapters in Woods and Baddeley 2009. Despite the lack of focus on female Rippers hitherto, the selective corpus here can be considered fairly comprehensive and is a byproduct of research for my own forthcoming book on the Ripper myth and its fictionalisations.

ise, sometimes merely substituting other women of low repute for explicit sex workers. Frequently, this status directly justifies their demise, as for Lulu in *Pandora's Box* (1928). Male victims, appearing occasionally, must be differentiated as victims of circumstance rather than targets, unless part of a feminist copycat revenge plot conceit, for instance see the 1999 erotic thriller movie *Jill Rips* (based on Frederic Lindsay's eponymous 1987 novel) and to a lesser degree also the unfinished podcast *Jane the Ripper* (2019-?), or the logical consequence of gender-swapping shenanigans of the podcast *Jackie the Ripper* (2021-2022). What has changed recently is the victim's role within the narratives, from passive objects providing spectacle and clues to more pronounced and active roles as well as sympathetic portrayals. Examples are the graphic novel *From Hell* (1989-1998), or 2019's vengeful *Get Jack: A Killer Musical*.

Playing detective: In fiction, the distribution of stereotypical Victorian (professional) gender roles remained firm until recently, for instance in the German Sat.1 TV production *Jack the Ripper: Eine Frau jagt einen Mörder* (2016), where protagonist photographer Anna Kosminski seeks to prove her brother innocent by identifying the true Ripper. Tellingly, though, she remains an amateur detective and ultimately needs rescuing by her love interest Inspector Abberline. A similar photographer, added as secondary protagonist in the latest comic adaptation of *Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper* (2010), fares worse; true to Bloch's original, the Ripper triumphs. This seems to be not an isolated trend; the last five to ten years have seen a noticeable rise of often self-published romance and young adult fiction involving girl detectives, of which *Stalking Jack the Ripper* (2016) is only one example that made it to the bestseller lists. One notable early exception is Mrs Bunting in *The Lodger* (1913), who is described by Elyssa Warkentin as an early pre-Marple female amateur proto-detective, who snoops after her suspicious lodger (xxi).

Finding Complicity: Traditionally, the Ripper is envisioned as a solo perpetrator. With male Rippers, the major exception since the 1980s is the Masonic conspiracy narrative, in which the killer has accomplices or at least is covered up by complicit elements in the police force. The few female Rippers in fiction, to my knowledge, operate exclusively solo. Interestingly though, there are a few instances of partnered offenders, where the male Ripper has a female accomplice, as in Bloch's *Night of the Ripper* (1984), which highlights an uneven relationship of power. Bloch casts semi-historical suspect Alexander Pedachenko and invented Eva Sloane as murderous partners, yet the pair's status is uneven: as in their professional roles, a doctor and a nurse, he operates with sharp blade while she holds and strangles. And of course, he is semi-factual, she is fictional, as if to further underline their inequality. This is not the end of female complicity in Ripper fiction, however. Mrs Bunting is not an accomplice to the murders but is complicit in harbouring her lodger despite her

strong suspicions. The element of perceived female complicity in the Ripper narrative is even more insidious, though, when it comes to the victims. In contemporary press discourse, they were practically accused of bringing it upon themselves by their disreputable lifestyle or disregarding warnings to stay off the streets instead of presenting themselves to their would-be killer. Thus states Mrs Bunting, "[i]t serves that sort of hussy right!" (Lowndes, "The Lodger" 267). So, where does this uneven distribution of power, responsibility, and agency lead the female Ripper?

Who is Jill the Ripper? A Typological Identity Parade

Aside from Florence Maybrick in *Jack the Ripper Is Not a Man* and Elizabeth Cree in *Dan Leno & the Limehouse Golem*, hardly any fictional representation of Jill the Ripper is based on a historical person. Even if the latter novel creates a compelling illusion through historiographic metafiction, what Lizzie the Golem has in common with most representations of Jill is that they may pretend historicity but in fact arguably avoid getting too close to the actual documented case. Stories about Jill frequently invent either plots set in the context surrounding or adjacent to the historical murders or move away from the original setting entirely and create Ripper-inspired imitations transposed to a therefore unlimited range of settings. This makes the identification of Jill the Ripper with any given historical figure a mostly moot exercise, but consequentially draws attention to the issues of stereotypes and themes in so far as focus shifts from limiting historical fidelity to a wider scope of imaginary scenarios in which nevertheless commonalities manifest and become apparent. Both perspectives offer interesting frameworks to categorise the few distinctions apparent across representations of Jill.

A first category can be termed the **'hysterical Ripper'** and is the oldest type of female Ripper. It connects with assumptions about hysteria already floated in the context of the midwife theories after Doyle, some of which speculated female agitation variably caused by jilted jealousy or scorn (e.g. a convicted abortionist supposedly turned against the source of her criminal punishment) (Begg et al. 5089). This partially reflects lacking imagination concerning feminine motives for murder and partially has to do with limited understanding of, yet nonetheless socially prevalent concepts such as hysteria, mania, madness, (mis)used to label irrational behaviour. Consequently, the hysterical Ripper as a category is in a sense equally vague and confused; then again, its elements feed into most of the other manifestations. Examples of mania and mental illness include for instance the 1971 Hammer horror movie *Hands of the Ripper*, in which the Ripper's daughter suffers the trauma of seeing her mother killed by her father and is somehow triggered to also kill when conditions recall this childhood experience. In *Ripper: Letter from Hell*, a 2001 slasher movie, protagonist Molly masquerades as the survivor of a prior serial killer massacre which she may have conducted herself and ends up in an asylum cell which insinuates that

her study of psychology and psychopaths was a manifestation of her own mania. In *Ripper Untold*, the killer is the hysterical and pathologically jealous wife of Locque, police surgeon and part-time red herring, bent on retaking control over her husband. Mrs Bunting in the 2009 version of *The Lodger* suffers from manic and hallucinatory episodes about her stillborn child as well as "a lodger, whom she invented recently, a kind of romantic fantasy, [a] self-delusion that she was not the person imitating Jack the Ripper and killing these young women" (*Lodger* 2009, 1:25:15). All of the narratives expressly connect murderousness and mania in its feminine-coded form hysteria but fail to deliver much beyond this since mental illness itself is a fairly intangible concept in its folkloric or popular cultural understanding (as opposed to in clinical contexts).

A second category can be termed **'victim turned avenger'** and hinges on themes of revenge. The crucial aspect is the object at whom this revenge is directed and its causality. In one sense, the neglected wife in *Ripper Untold*, too, performs some form of revenge when she punishes prostitutes for her husband's infidelities, and similar motives could in principle be projected into the hysterical midwife narrative. Likewise, the aspect of victimhood has appeared elsewhere; the killer in *Ripper: Letter from Hell* is initially depicted and negotiated as survivor of a prior serial killer attack in her youth even if it is later insinuated that this might already have been her work, yet as follows there is logically no apparent motive besides mental disorder. However, the combination of themes of victimhood and revenge produces a distinct set of stories resonating with the larger cultural discussion of gendered violence that becomes visible in the following texts.

An early example is *Jill Rips.* The alternative title for the home video release, *Jill the Ripper,* makes the allusion even more overt, but as with other examples in this chapter this manoeuvre is more a case of Ripper exploitation than denoting a text about 'the' female Ripper. Rather, 'a' female Ripper is at large in present-day San Francisco, and it cannot even be stated that this is a copycat case in the strict sense since it remains ambivalent whether imitation is the killer's intention or merely the result of interpretation – in a twofold sense. The film makes the connection explicit in a newspaper article reporting on a female Jack the Ripper, but this speculation on the part of a fictive reporter of course also doubles as a marker to reinforce the intertextual point of reference for the reader or audience. Arguably, this move is a necessary one because the actual similarities are vague enough to slip by or be dismissed: while there are slashed throats, mutilations by knife, and sexual scandal, instead of the historical alleged prostitutes murdered in the notably impoverished part of town, the victims in *Jill Rips* are powerful businessmen moving as clients in the high-class circles of S&M culture. At best, the victims function less as an analogy between original and copycat than as the exact opposite, a stark contrast that highlights differences in the gendered distribution of power and agency between both situations.

Nevertheless, the exploitative invocation of the cultural signifier 'Ripper' and the reversal of gender roles associated with it posit the killer as an avenger out to seek retribution for wrongdoings against herself and women in general, overlapping the historical violence against prostitutes in Whitechapel and modern-day sex workers.

This theme has become more prolific and popular recently, appearing in multiple stories nearly simultaneously, notably resonating with emerging cultural developments such as the '#MeToo' movement. One such example is *Jane the Ripper*, a crime thriller produced in podcast form which ran for six episodes from 2019-2020. It unfortunately remains unfinished[4] but is remarkable for the current context in its conspicuous absence of engagement with the gender switch of its killer for most of it so far. Although the idea itself is obviously present from the onset, unavoidably looming from the paratext of the title, this does not find its way into the story proper until much later. In classic crime fiction fashion, the perpetrator remains absent from the narrative until one of the characters, Claire, is herself attacked at the cliffhanger closing of episode 3; up to this point, the killer exists (in a narratological sense) only in the speculations of Detectives Liam Morris and Holly Grant as they deal with the aftermath of each crime. This is also where the Ripper angle is shoehorned in because the setting is present-day Bristol, not Whitechapel in 1888, and the text consequently is Ripper copycat fiction rather than 'true' Ripper fiction, a point made mostly through Detective Morris who insists that the inflicted knife wounds remarkably resemble those of the original Ripper. The same seemingly applies to the choice of victims, women with an allegedly disreputable way of life, without the text bothering to make any of this much more than vaguely explicit apart from name-dropping Jack and his infamous moniker denoting the distinctive *modus operandi*. Nevertheless, the insinuation summons the image of the Ripper which henceforth must inform the imagination of the listener with all the intertextual implications this entails, i.e. the potential imposition of the popular cultural canon or even specific Ripperology possibly known to the individual recipient (one example the text obviously appropriates from Ripper lore is the existence of another 'double event'). When the killer eventually enters into the narrative discourse during the attack on Claire (e3, 30:55[5]), he manifests in typical Ripper fashion as a shadowy intangible form. He is as an active presence wreaking havoc yet remaining bare of any identifiable features. This is a genre convention typically achieved in visual media by camera work keeping the perpetrator partially off-screen or obscuring techniques of shadow play during scenes of action (which often is used to at least make

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[4] It appears that the production of originally ten episodes was stopped short in early 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic. A post from 9 July 2020 on the Facebook page of the project cites this and further complicating circumstances such as the concurrent issue of police brutality that fuelled the 'Black Lives Matter' movement as momentary cultural deterrents. As of February 2023, no new episode has been published.

[5] A note on podcast timecodes: references may be only approximate since platforms, in this instance Audible, have started to insert ads into streams and downloads.

visible culturally entrenched iconography such as knives, top hats, and opera cloaks that make the Ripper immediately recognisable in his function as the archetypal gentleman killer, though not his specific identity), or in narrative media simply by omitting any descriptive details. Since this podcast is basically a radio play, a mixed methodology applies; in this instance, the narrative voice makes an effort to obscure the attacker's gender by the use of ambiguous pronouns such as 'they' and 'their' rather than the cultural default 'his' or a revealing 'her' (alternatively, in an instance of internal focalisation the victim herself might simply be oblivious – this is reinforced by a revisitation of the scene in a nightmare by Claire, which highlights explicitly and repeatedly the shadowy aspect in the description of the assailant (e4, 09:30)), and yet the sound effects underpinning the scene feature male grunting, which reinforces the image of a 'Jack' at work.

One significant difference from history is the existence of a survivor, Claire; this allows not only for the narrative (re)construction of the crime by the investigators after the fact, but a narrative account of its experience. Claire must work through not only her trauma, but also deal with instances of victim shaming (e4, 28:00). From here on, things get more interesting as the relative focus on the victim takes a darker turn; the victim's feelings of powerlessness slowly transform into aggression and dreams of revenge. Indeed, she manages to find her suspect and take her empowering revenge, inadvertently complicating the serial killer case by creating the echo of the historical 'double event' and leaving clues that point to a female perpetrator. At least temporarily, this is ostensible empowerment in two different senses; one is on a level of personal satisfaction, the other rewrites the narrative (albeit accidentally and to Claire's disadvantage) as the usually so dominant original (in this case original copycat) is further obscured by her, a copycat's copycat. Unfortunately, it can only be speculated how this unfinished narrative might resolve itself, but the integrity of the temporary empowerment must be regarded as questionable and indeed collapses again in related narratives.

If *Jane the Ripper* offers both a male Ripper copycat targeting female victims and doubles him with a female secondary copycat targeting men, another podcast named *Jackie the Ripper* and running for 15 episodes from 2021-2022 takes a different approach reminiscent of *Jill Rips* but with a postmodern twist. One more text set in the present, this one takes interesting measures to conflate Ripper history and his story. Unlike the Ripper signifier simply imposed on a copycat as in the previous two examples, *Jackie the Ripper* deliberately blurs boundaries by superimposing as well as inverting the historical narrative over its own fiction. For instance, crime scenes match up and the victims (and other characters) are all named after historical figures, sharing surnames and only slightly adjusting first names (e.g. victim Martha Tabram becomes Marcus Tabram; there is a Chief Inspector Donna Swanson), which helps to construct the illusion of originality and insinuate that Jackie is not a

copycat but *the* Ripper transposed to the present. This can apply only within the storyworld, of course, since from an extratextual perspective the work is clearly an inverted derivative resulting in the opposite effect of recognition, which still has consequences for how Jackie is constructed and perceived. Whereas the avengers of the previous texts are obscure and silent, speaking only figuratively through the bodies they leave behind, Jackie is just as vocal as Jack the Ripper was with his alleged letters. Likewise, Jackie communicates via social media proudly announcing her (gender) identity, garnering not just antipathy but also admiration from her audience: "I like her... I like her, I think she's got style!" someone exclaims during the title sequence each episode. As this already suggests, the inversion seems to be largely a playful game and is full of comical moments, often related to inverted situations, gender stereotypes or genital puns, but there is also a more serious note to this. Although it transpires that Jackie is another victim of childhood trauma, she furiously refutes this as a patronizing simplification of her motives when confronted with this in the final episode showdown. "Shut up, you transparent arsehole! I don't need help now, I needed help then!" she retorts (e15, 10:20). However, she also dismisses the feminist vengeance angle: "You think I'm mean because of men. [laughter] Men don't define women . . ., I made my own journey. I wrote my own story. I'm not a man-hater, I'm a murderer! I'm a serial killer, I'm an icon!" (e15, 10:35). She draws the line in terms of gender when it comes to recognition, where in the public eye only men like Dahmer and Bundy are allowed to be truly evil, while women could only be evil because of men's wrongdoings, thus resonating with Picart's dichotomy. Ultimately, however, her aspirations and confidence are her downfall and end her project of female empowerment. Unlike the forever unbound male historical Ripper, the female Ripper is arrested, rendered powerless, safe.

A quite similar project to gain personal infamy and celebrity is thwarted for Elizabeth Cree in *Dan Leno & the Limehouse Golem.* Concentrating on her character and ignoring the novel's metafictional bent and its crucial intertextual flirtation with De Quincey's "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts", Lizzie's project is arguably worse off by paradoxically both succeeding and failing spectacularly. Taking up the previous angle, her murder career can either be read as a quest to wreak vengeance on those who wronged her or as petty and opportunistic self-centredness. Parallel to the struggle for female empowerment, in effect limited to her own benefits, her concern is with artistic recognition. In this she fails, because the persona of the Golem she creates takes on a life of its own, leaving her behind to fall into obscurity. Like the roughly formed creature of folklore, the features of the killer disappear in disparity because her murderous career is barely uniform enough to be recognisable (prostitutes, a male Jewish scholar, an entire shopkeeper family), and many more of her private murders are not even registered. While she, the bad wife, is executed for the poisoning of her husband and doomed to obscurity, it is only the unidentified Golem which enters into legend.

Another, quite different approach can be termed **'queer Ripper'**, one more type rendered problematic by its tendency to interweave its nominal subject, female killers defying sexual and gender heteronormativity, with secondary, decidedly gothic themes of the Other, transformation, and the unnatural, often manifesting as supernatural. Examples include for instance *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll & Ms Hyde*, *Jaclyn the Ripper*, and again *Dan Leno & the Limehouse Golem*. The latter novel along with its film adaptation ranges at the more rational end, despite its otherwise pervading gothic influences. Deviances of gender as well as sexuality relate to both Lizzie and the Golem. On the music hall stage, she portrays male roles, which also reflects private predispositions including her penchant for masculine violence. However, where her (gender) identity is difficult to pinpoint (the text at times insinuates lesbian relations with fellow performers along sadomasochistic favours to her manager, at times expresses asexuality in marriage; she prefers to adopt and 'live' her male roles as identities off stage), that of the Golem is impossible – at least in theory. A sexless creation in folklore animated by inscription of the Hebrew word for 'truth' (Pulham 160), the persona of the killer is instead brought to life by imaginations of a male killer, reflected by the set of male suspects which in the film version each in turn visually re-enact the murders on screen, while the possibility of a female killer is narratively denied. Even when the reader must guess Lizzie's murderous guilt after the ambiguous denouement, what is left to the public within the text is the monstrous woman in the form of the bad wife (breaker of the sanctimony of marriage and husband poisoner), executed and rendered safe, as opposed to the monstrous but unidentifiable serial killer remaining unchecked. In terms of queering the Ripper, the Golem therefore stands out for three reasons from the rest of Ripper fiction. The first is the relative rarity of the female killer, the second is her complex but plain queerness. This is in contrast to serial killer fiction in general, where it is a common trope embodied in such figures as Buffalo Bill or Hannibal Lecter (Picart "Crime and the Gothic" 6). Not so in Ripper fiction, where the usual *modus operandi* both constructs and in turn depends on masculine violence to be recognisable – and this is the third stand-out aspect – when this is how the gap is filled contrary to apparent fact as long as there is ambiguity.

Other Ripper fictions toying with ideas of queerness are less subtle, going for the theme of metamorphosis and literal transformations instead. *Dr Jekyll & Sister Hyde* is a gender-twisting spin on the infamous novella and Ripper-crossover, in which the doctor's experiment with splitting his personality into a good and an evil part does not produce the atavistic criminal troglodyte Mr Hyde of the original text, but instead transforms him into the attractive Sister Hyde. Unlike the unspecified chemicals in the original, this time female sexual hormones are necessary for the transformative potion and altered sexuality is the by-product. Whereas in the original the stock of chemicals simply diminishes and drives Jekyll to despair because he will no longer be able to transform back from troglodyte to gentleman, stuck in the

disgraced form of Hyde, in the adaptation already the substance or rather the act of its procuring is correlated with evil. In a spin on the well-established duality between Jekyll/Hyde, good and evil, the text frames Jekyll as well-meaning, restricting himself to harvest the necessary hormones from female corpses as a necessary evil, while Hyde resorts to more immediate measures to prolong her selfish existence by simply producing corpses. Thus, it is kind Jekyll who eventually pays the price for Hyde's promiscuous and murderous drives, framing femininity as monstrous as opposed to benevolent masculinity. At least, this is what the text suggests on the surface, although just as in the original novella things are less clear-cut upon closer inspection.

Without the presence of such a canonical key intertext in direct juxtaposition, *Jaclyn the Ripper* is even more blunt. A sequel to *Time after Time*, here the transformation is explained away by sci-fi technobabble as an accident with the time machine, dropping off the Ripper in present-day Los Angeles stuck in a woman's body due to an irreversible genetic mix-up. Ludicrous premise aside, the text is relevant for its clumsy negotiation of the difference between male and female versions of the killer. On the one hand, this is reflected in the flimsy rationale *"Because all chromosomes are not created equal"* (Alexander 294; original emphasis). Protagonist H.G. Wells, slipping into language of sexual domination, reasons a latent prior genetic deficiency in the Ripper has been reconstituted. Alluding (erroneously[6]) to "classic Turner syndrome", a "pitifully weak Y chromosome" is "trampled by a full-blown X chromosome" (22) and the Ripper's body is overtaken by monstrous femininity. On the other hand, said femininity is portrayed as stereotypically and unbelievably as only a male author can fantasise. Appalled and yet strangely self-conscious about the new body Jack hates, this version of the Ripper has to deal with sexual desires and even love which, although not staying her hand, make her emotional after killing her lover, a detective on the hunt for the killer. Ultimately, then, reconstructing Jack as Jaclyn remains a hollow gesture rather than serious engagement with female serial killers. Despite appearances, the narrative remains largely phallocentric, a point reinforced by the fact that the Ripper started out as an inarguably male monster (there is indeed the entire prequel) and voices his disgust for his new body throughout most of the novel, reflecting his still masculine personality and perspective. While the hesitant adjustment of Jaclyn to an existence now governed less by rational decisions than irrational impulses driven by hitherto unknown female hormones echoes the transformation of Dr Jekyll into Sister Hyde, both women cannot be female serial killers but stay caricatures of how male authors might imagine them. In the end it all comes back to Jack, whose masculinity is – at the most –

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[6] If at all, the description is closer to Klinefelter syndrome.

compromised as deficient to distance his feminine-coded monstrosity from the masculine norm: as Wells reasons about genetic disorders, "that would explain Jack the Ripper's murderous psychiatric pathology" (294).

'The possessed Ripper': A fourth category moves even further along the gradient to the supernatural Other and involves the theme of spiritual possession. This topic is worthy of a full study of its own but must be touched on here for its implications in a few directly affected female Ripper narratives. Whereas the above texts suggest monstrous femininity taking over masculine rationality in abstract terms, the possession of a vessel through the spirit of Jack, i.e. an individualised entity and personality, operates on a different order. Although sex and, more importantly, gender of supernatural entities and spirits are open for debate, it is telling how this is framed differently across the corpus. Jacks are commonly possessed by evil forces and the Other, sometimes literally aliens, which arguably function as a partial excuse for masculine violence caused by outside influence, but this is less the case with Jills. *Hands of the Ripper* frames Anna as possessed by the spirit of her father, an only crudely veiled metaphor for her resurfacing childhood trauma. "The Final Stone" operates with a different metaphor; here the Ripper is an ancestor of the current killer, which ambiguously may be read as literal or as her obsession with the Ripper story manifested, and a similar perspective can apply to Mrs Bunting and her perhaps real, perhaps imaginary lodger in the 2009 version. The point is, however, that in each case the possessing influence is definitive: Jack. Only "The Final Stone" is an exception (because within the story the ancestral Ripper was ironically the wife of a male suspect). This has implications for the agency of the female killer; Jill is not acting of her own free will but rendered out of control as either driven by some mental disorder or steered by the will of another.

One last category, **'the indeterminate Ripper'**, has no attached character type but is its antithesis; yet it surfaces persistently, particularly in the later texts where it touches on the more abstract themes of ambiguity and expectations, and their media-specificity. Unlike the majority of stories which suddenly reveal female killers as an implausible final twist to surprise genre readers, two exemplary texts, one pulpy, one literary, actively play with these very expectations in a more productive manner or at least demonstrate their cultural entrenchment: William F. Nolan's short story "The Final Stone" (1986) and Peter Ackroyd's historical metafiction *Dan Leno & the Limehouse Golem* (1994), and their film adaptations from 1985 and 2017, respectively. In "The Final Stone", the Ripper reappears in Arizona in the present, when the titular final stone is placed back on London Bridge, transported, and reconstructed there. In the text, the Ripper is present from the beginning, but only as a disembodied voice via stream of consciousness. Finally, the killer is revealed to be Lenore Bascum, a family descendant. Yet the narrative remains ambiguous between supernatural and uncanny, and whose stream of consciousness is presented; Lenore

may have been literally possessed by the Ripper's spirit (just like Jack's daughter in *Hands of the Ripper*) or the voice is her own, a psychological explanation rendering her a copycat. Tellingly, the adaptation leaves no such ambiguities. The male Ripper is depicted literally materialising in Dracula-like fashion out of thin fog and commences to run amok. Additionally, he is not finally shot by protagonist Angie, but by the detective played by David Hasselhoff, her lover.

The Limehouse Golem is more intriguing. Likewise ambiguous yet much more complex, the novel goes out of its way to insinuate that the titular killer is male. 'His' own voice is presented in the form of entries from a journal attributed to John Cree, which the chapter structure as well as narrative misdirection further connect to him as not suspect but openly identified. And yet, the denouement appears to reveal the unreliable protagonist and wife Elizabeth Cree as not only the killer but also writer of the hoax journal, or so she claims. While ultimately even this must remain ambiguous, the text unmasks the reading process and the mechanisms that have almost naturally conjured the imagination and roles attributed to the male monster and the innocent damsel. The film, albeit restructured as detective story, achieves a similar effect by completely different means appropriate to its own medium. While the journal is unattributed in this version, its existence is not only known within the story but serves as the primary clue for the detective. Thus it is the detective who serves in the role as intermediary reader, and it is he who visualises the killings. Acted out in the theatre of his mind by the various male suspects, their alternating portrayals reveal not only the detective's subjectivity but also his and thereby the unresisting viewer's gender bias. Tellingly, however, neither novel nor film can resolve the bias, only make it visible. Within the story, Lizzie never achieves the fame she craves as an original artist of murder in her own right, but only solidifies the legend of the unidentified Golem.

Empowerment or Illusion: The Female Ripper and Her Discontents

Despite their relative minority role within the corpus of Ripper fiction at large, Jill the Ripper narratives are far from a homogenous subset. And yet, despite the more or less diverse cast of types, Jill is just as much a split personality as Jack is, but for different reasons. More explicitly framed by gender differences than the normative narratives of unambiguous male monsters, female Ripper stories are torn between making monsters of women, the demonisation of femininity on the one hand, and the struggle for female empowerment and gender equality for better or worse, given the nature of the leading figure. This in itself reveals problematic underlying gender dynamics and politics in the perception of serial killers and the corresponding (sub)genre in crime fiction. Whereas criminological studies (for instance Gurian 2021) slowly dismantle the stereotypical differences between male and female serial killers, the fact is that in the cultural sphere their representations are much more

distorted as well as entrenched after they overcame the hurdle to manifest in the first place; after all, "the idea of them as a recognisable entity, the serial killer, is a social construction, emerging in the 1980s as a perceived new phenomenon taking a stereotypical form" (Dyer 19) it arguably requires to even become recognisable. Although the Ripper crimes predate this and therefore are an individualised image before becoming category, most Jill the Ripper stories appear later as if in reaction to a new paradigm.

However, if Jill the Ripper represents a challenge to serial killer stereotypes and gender norms, it is apparent she faces resistance in more ways than by sheer number of publications. On the one hand, some of these stories simply turn and exploit different stereotypes of feminine monstrosity retrofitted into a masculine framework they can hardly escape even through literal metamorphosis. On the other hand, projects of female empowerment are frequently undermined (often by conventions of the genre of crime fiction), considering they nevertheless deal with a criminal, who then is rendered powerless and faces justice unlike the historical perpetrator and the myth. Nevertheless, arguably slow progress is discernible in the renegotiation of roles and stereotypes of the victims, and even if Jill the Ripper stories fail to significantly change the popular narrative, some of them make its cultural construction visible, sometimes by breaking expectations and temporarily disrupting patterns, sometimes by making fun of them and even the underlying language when for once – to quote the title sequence of *Jackie the Ripper* – "Whitechapel in East London is home to not a manhunt, but a womanhunt".

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Writing the First World War at Home: Exploring Gender Representations in Selected Short Stories of Sherlock Holmes and Max Carrados

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Abstract

The First World War with all its unimaginable horrors had an unprecedented impact on British society. Both at home and abroad, during and after the war, (gender) roles had to be redefined, renegotiated, and rediscovered. The negotiation of these changing and often conflicting gender expectations happened quietly, subtly, and away from the public eye to keep the 'stiff upper lip' the British were so famous for. Nevertheless, popular literature such as detective fiction – which is already walking the tightrope between what is right and what is wrong, what is normative and what is deviant – gave these negotiations room and agency, if only at a second, deeper glance.

In this chapter, two short stories, "His Last Bow" (1917) by Arthur Conan Doyle and "The Secret of Headlam Height" (1925) by Ernest Bramah, are examined with regard to these negotiations and how they could be represented to the readership. The focus here lies particularly on the sidekick characters, an aspect of detective fiction largely neglected in scholarly research so far, and the two female aides in the stories. The characters of John Watson and Parkinson, as well as housekeeper Martha and "professional lady cryptologer" Clifton Baker, manage to show through their actions and absences, as well as their words and silences, the multi-faceted and contradictory gender identities and expectations which resulted from the societal discourse at the time, and provided members of both sexes with extraordinary challenges in these tumultuous times. In particular, the sidekick character showcases these contradictions and how they were dealt with in a fascinating way – despite the predefined role(s) and audience expectations, it needed to adhere to while also having to fit the mould the generic conventions had shaped for it.

Keywords

> Crime as a social construct inhabits a liminal position. Like gender, it crosses boundaries and is thus positioned on a perpetual threshold between what is read as "order" or "normality" and "chaos" or "deviance". Crime Fiction provides the space to investigate this liminality and to open up stereotypical concepts of normativity in crime, gender and sexuality. (Münderlein, "Call for Papers")

Arthur Conan Doyle's "His Last Bow" (1917) and Ernest Bramah's "The Secret of Headlam Height" (1925) are situated at several thresholds, both historical and literary. They are, thus, excellent examples to explore a variety of ways in which crime fiction can represent this liminality, this 'hanging in limbo' between 'order/normality' and 'chaos/deviance', and gender representations are just one of many aspects worthy of further investigation when discussing the two short stories in question.

Of course, Sherlock Holmes and the vast variety of works he has appeared in has been the topic of many a discussion already, but his contemporary Max Carrados, the blind supersleuth created by Ernest Bramah, has largely been omitted from scholarly research. Published between 1914 and 1934 in *The Strand Magazine*, Carrados was once considered to be one of Holmes' most notable competitors,[1] and he and his sidekicks Parkinson and Mr Carlyle offer a great insight into the ideological possibilities of detective fiction, which go beyond a discussion of both the detective's abilities and blindness.

Set in the last days of July 1914, both stories give the reader a glimpse of Britain on the precipice of war with Germany, capturing the calm before the storm with a nation collectively holding its breath. Meanwhile, unbeknownst to almost everyone, the famous detectives (and their sidekicks) are saving the nation from yet another threat. This first divergence from what was traditionally expected from classical serialised detective fiction, namely that it deals with "family irregularities and the consequences of selfishness, rather than dangers endemic to the system" (Kayman 49) invites the question in how far these stories deviate from the norm in other ways, and how the reality of being situated at a variety of thresholds may inform or cause this deviance. Looking at the range of characters in particular, a threshold of a more ideological nature in terms of the representation of unstable gender roles and changing societal expectations becomes obvious. Here one may ask in how far contemporary ideas and discourses regarding male and female identities and roles, their behaviour, and their agency were mirrored in popular literature, and subsequently, how this liminality is translated into detective stories. Lastly, the two stories find themselves on a literary threshold concerning the genre of crime/detective fiction as well. Published shortly before ("His Last Bow",[2] 1917) and shortly after ("The Secret of Headlam Height", 1925) Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), a book often hailed as the first novel of British Golden Age crime fiction, Holmes and Carrados find themselves at the literary thresholds from detective fiction with firmly Victorian roots and celebrating remnants of a time gone by to

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[1] Bramah's stories frequently outsold Doyle's (Bramah, "Complete Works" 1127).
[2] Hereafter: "HLB"

Golden Age fiction with its country houses and (upper) middle-class concerns, and simultaneously, from short story to novel.[3]

The question then arises, how may the historical reality of the First World War that is at the centre of the plot influence the representation of gender here despite the difference in publication date? And additionally, how can these aforementioned thresholds be understood and interpreted in terms of the prevailing hegemonic ideologies at the time? Pierre Macherey and Etienne Balibar argue that

> [i]t is important to "locate" the production of literary effects historically as part of the ensemble of social practices. . . . Literature and history are not each set up externally to each other . . . but are in an intricate and connected relationship. . . . Very generally, this internal relationship is what constitutes the definition of literature as an ideological form. (6)

William Stowe makes a similar argument by emphasising that "popular art . . . is a vehicle by which a society teaches and perpetuates its values" (590). Simultaneously, Terry Eagleton reminds one that "ideology is not consistent or coherent in itself . . . – rather it conflicts with and contradicts itself. It is built out of fragments of discourse that, precisely because they are misrepresentations of reality, fail to constitute a single, homogeneous account of that reality" (qtd. in Ferreter 132).

Nevertheless, it may be worth remembering that it does not fall to writers to "manufacture ideologies" as they are "formed independently of [them]" (Macherey qtd. in Porter 128), but to make "ideologies visible and they achieve this through the very activity of writing them into the forms of their fiction" (Porter 128). It should, therefore, not be surprising to find this variety of historical, ideological, and literary thresholds represented in detective fiction at this particular point in time, with some more nuanced than others, some on the verge to being crossed, while others may disintegrate again and, thus, become obsolete. How this impacts the represented ideas and expectations towards gender will be explored in the following.

To explore the 'making visible' of ideologies within the two short stories, especially regarding gender roles and (normative) gender representations, this chapter will investigate more closely the various characters and relationships, first and foremost the sidekicks and female aides. The sidekick is of particular interest here, not only

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[3] This shift is referring here to the ongoing popularity of serialised (British) detective fiction, which regularly appeared in magazines such as *The Strand Magazine,* and the subsequent shift to longer detective novels with the onset of the Golden Age. While the short story allowed for a series of self-enclosed cases with a range of familiar, recurring characters to be regularly published in popular (middle-class) magazines also containing several other "texts dealing with history and biography, travel and adventure, and information on contemporary society and public affairs" (Kayman 41), the much longer 'clue-puzzle' of the Golden Age allowed some of the newer generic conventions such as the multiplicity of suspects the required space, which simultaneously made the cases more complex. This change can further be discussed in the context of other Golden Age developments regarding the form and genre, but this has been done in a number of publications already. An introductory text to the subject is "The golden age" by Stephen Knight, published in Martin Priestman's (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* (2003).

because of the overall lack of scholarly research on the topic so far.[4] He also lends himself to the exploration of stereotypical representations and normative patterns in terms of gender (roles) while taking into consideration the narratological function he is meant to fulfil and respond to. The female aides are of interest as they appear to differ greatly within both stories, and yet the question arises whether they really are that different or can simply be read as two sides of the same coin. An examination of the concepts of gender representation in classic British crime fiction on the threshold from 'Victorian' (in its widest sense) to Golden Age is thus inevitable. The figure of the detective has been consciously omitted here as it has already been discussed at length in a large number of other publications. The sidekick and supporting characters often get no attention at all and this chapter aims to change this.

Watson

John Watson is a character much-loved and well-known. Readers of the Sherlock Holmes stories will be familiar with the doctor's chronicles of the famous detective's adventures with his commentary on the action and other parties involved, and his (more or less) useful questions and additions to the overall processes of deduction and investigation. Concerning the sidekick's narratological function, the stories, traditionally, follow a familiar formula, which can be found – sometimes with slight variations – in other works of detective fiction involving the sidekick character such as Agatha Christie's Poirot novels. Usually, they begin with an 'introduction by Watson / the sidekick', followed by

- comments on the peculiarities of Holmes / the detective
- presentation of the mystery that is to be solved
- Holmes / the detective comes up with the solution without disclosing it, and Watson / the sidekick follows along, not always privy to his plan and thought process
- the culprits are confronted
- the mystery is solved
- Holmes / the detective provides the sidekick / reader / other characters with the solution, enjoying his moment in the spotlight.

"His Last Bow" does not play out according to these rules. Being one of only four Sherlock Holmes stories in the entire canon not narrated by Watson, the reader is deprived of the doctor's entertaining interludes relating Holmes's eccentric habits and extraordinary skills – aspects often embellished much to Holmes's dismay. The reader is also deprived of the insights and the commentary of Watson, both relating to the crime and criminal, as well as to the witnesses, the police, and the deductive methods of Holmes. But why reduce the sidekick's "complex and multifarious role

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[4] A notable exception here is the 2021 book *The Detective's Companion in Crime Fiction* by Lucy Andrew and Samuel Saunders (eds.)

as the detective's loyal companion, protector and sounding board, as well as the narrator and intermediary between the detective and the reader" (Miranda 20-21) to one of "thickset chauffeur" ("HLB" 502), who seems entirely oblivious to the bigger threat at the (metaphorical and literal) doorstep of the British nation?

The reasons for the lack of Watson's voice in this particular story are manifold, with the most obvious being that Watson would have given Holmes's involvement and disguise away too early for the reader, thus eliminating the element of surprise. His lack of voice may also be symptomatic of the shift some have observed towards the end of the First World War in relation to the display of "militaristic and robust hypermasculinity, which found its apothcosis [sic] in the homosocial world of the boy's adventure story" (Francis 640), and which "in the aftermath of the mechanized slaughter of the 1914-1918 war . . . suffered a fatal blow" (640). As a consequence, one was able to observe "a reaction, a reassertion of the domesticated and private categories of masculinity" while "interwar boys' fiction, in contrast to late Victorian adventures, tested the manly resolve of its heroes in the familiar surroundings of the school or playing field, not in the wilds of Africa" (644). Obviously, detective fiction is not strictly speaking a 'boy's adventure story' nor 'interwar boys' fiction'. Nevertheless, it shares certain elements with adventure stories, for example, its formulaic nature as well as the extraordinary "hero – individual or group – overcoming obstacles and dangers and accomplishing some important and moral mission" (Cawelti 39), among others, which may allow for this connection to be made here. The shift from foreign settings to familiar ground and the closely linked "reassertion of the domestic . . . categories of masculinity" (Francis 644) would explain the lack of Watson's admiring interludes regarding Holmes's daring and intellectually superior exploits – he is less of a physical fighter than an intellectual one, although he is fond of boxing[5] –, as well as the fact that rather than defeating a foreign spy on European soil, they managed to defeat him on home turf, and therefore brought the adventure 'home' at the same time. This is not to say that the shift from what John Tosh calls 'flight from domesticity' (*A Man's Place* 170) to the domesticated man was a sudden one if it has even been completed. Martin Francis recommends, instead,

> replac[ing] the simplistic narrative of a "flight from domesticity" between 1870 and 1914, followed by a "re-domestication" of the male in the interwar years, with an awareness that men were continually seeking to reconcile and integrate the contradictory impulses of domestic responsibility and escapism, both of which could, at various times, find sanction in the polyphonic voices of popular culture or politics. (643)

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[5] In "The Yellow Face", Watson mentions that "Sherlock Holmes was a man who seldom took exercise for exercise's sake. Few men were capable of greater muscular effort, and he was undoubtedly one of the finest boxers of his weight that I have ever seen; but he looked upon aimless bodily exertion as a waste of energy, and he seldom bestirred himself save when there was some professional object to be served" (547). Nevertheless, Holmes is generally presented as someone interested in intellectual sparring with his opponents rather than physical altercations.

I argue that "His Last Bow" is such a polyphonic voice attempting the reconciliation of sparring societal expectations towards the Edwardian man at a time when Britain had been at war already much longer than originally anticipated. Simultaneously, it also strived to provide the sense of escapism that its (male) middle-class readership desired to experience. This may also be observed in the somewhat ambiguous or even contradictory persona of Watson, most obviously in his inability to retire from his adventures with Holmes ("HLB" 503). As a former army doctor and member of the "Berkshires, with whom [he] served at the fatal battle of Maiwand" (*A Study in Scarlet* 3) he is more than familiar with frontline experience. This in turn resulted in him both being injured and subsequently falling ill, thus ending his career in the British Army.

Simultaneously, though, he is frequently portrayed as being "unable to draw the proper inferences from his observations" (Miranda 31), which may be read as symptomatic of this 're-domestication' already completed, albeit in a somewhat radical, even unbelievable way. He displays utter ignorance of the incoming threat of war at the end of "His Last Bow" in this final scene with Holmes:

> "There's an east wind coming, Watson."
>
> "I think not, Holmes. It is very warm."
>
> "Good old Watson! You are the one fixed point in a changing age. There's an east wind coming all the same, such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared." (507)

As a former army doctor embroiled in battle on the frontlines, it is unlikely he would be unable to draw quick (and, even more so, correct) conclusions from his surroundings, even at times of great stress and peril. Then why portray him as this "one fixed point in a changing age" ("HLB" 507), that is entirely incapable of grasping the severity of the situation, despite having just been involved in the capture of the German spy von Bork himself?

One explanation could be that he needed to fit the mould of what Ronald Knox described as "the stupid friend of the detective" (15) or the "admiring, thick-headed friend" (Sayers 13), as Dorothy L. Sayers wrote in her 1929 omnibus. This argumentation would fall in line with the convention that Watson is often positioned in contrast to the average reader in regards to intelligence and overall deductive abilities – a comparison he has to lose by default.[6] The lack of his narration and, thus, his voice

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[6] Ronald Knox wrote further in his 1929 essay on *The Best English Detective Stories of 1928* that
Watson . . . must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader. . . . [I]f he does exist, he exists for the purpose of letting the reader have a sparring partner, as it were, against

in "His Last Bow" would, therefore, symbolise the inability of the 'average man' to comprehend and 'narrate' these (political) realities of war, echoed in the final inability to grasp the severity of the incoming threat. Yet, at the same time, as the representative of the common man (compared to the eccentric detective with extraordinary abilities and knowledge in a variety of areas), he is, nevertheless, there until the very end, ready or at least expected to face the horrors of the upcoming years, and carrying the 'burden' of such large political events on his very human and fragile shoulders, similarly to the (young) soldiers fighting and dying on the European battlefields.[7] Holmes emphasises this inevitable human sacrifice when he says that "a good many of us may wither before its [the East Wind's] blast" ("HLB" 507). Another explanation for Watson's contradictory portrayal could be that he is, in fact, more than a narratological device, more than a "companion", "narrator", and "intermediary" (Miranda 20-21). Rather, he is the "ideology made visible", to return to Porter's claim, because of his inability to be a reliable narrator, competent army doctor, 'adventurer', as well as functioning, re-integrated, 'domesticated' member of society – his role as husband let alone father are rarely to never mentioned in the overall Holmes canon – is an expression of the struggle Francis talked about when he discussed the "complexity of Edwardian masculine sensibilities" (643).

Watson's lack of voice in this particular short story has another effect, one that helps to promote an aspect that the sidekick would be unable to emphasise as strongly even if he was narrating the story. By taking away the narration and commentary of Watson, Conan Doyle substitutes another, more hostile voice in its stead. Throughout the earlier scenes of the story, the ones prior to the revelation that the Irish-American Altamont is in fact Holmes in disguise, the reader gets an insight into the thoughts and opinions of the two Germans, von Herling and von Bork. The latter's opinion on his host country of the last couple of years could be better indeed when he claims that "they are not very hard to deceive [and] a more docile, simple folk could not be imagined" ("HLB" 492). Von Herling is slightly more reserved in his dismissal of the British, nevertheless, he agrees with von Bork's general assessment that the British are too slow, too preoccupied with other things to be able to react

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whom he can pit his brains. "I may have been a fool," he says to himself as he puts the book down, "but at least I wasn't such a doddering fool as poor old Watson". (15)

This stands in constant contradiction, however, with his experience as an Army doctor or member of the medical profession in general as well as a loyal and recurring companion of Holmes, through which he will see and experience a multitude of different scenarios and cases which should, in theory, further train his brain and make him more receptible for anything regarding crime, danger, etc. This contradiction is never fully explained and may be a reason why the sidekick has been omitted from research for so long.

[7] At the time of publication, the battle with the largest loss of life for British troops up to that point – the Battle of the Somme – had just witnessed its first anniversary, which may be one of the reasons the short story's full title originally read "His Last Bow: The War Service of Sherlock Holmes", and was later changed to "His Last Bow: An Epilogue of Sherlock Holmes".

appropriately to the German threat of war.[8] While this concession of agency for the German enemy seems counter-intuitive at first, in regards to the overall plot and particularly the element of surprise, it makes absolute sense. By distracting and potentially enraging the (British) readership with remarks such as those, while simultaneously not providing the explanatory commentary of Watson's narration, the story allows the final revelation of Holmes as Altamont, Watson as chauffeur, and Martha as an accomplice of the famous detective to be even more powerful, patriotic even. And yet, even this patriotism, which found its expression in what Tosh describes as "patriotic militarism in August 1914" ("Masculinities" 342), needs to be negotiated in a much more careful tone already by 1917. Holmes's statements both in the final scene and shortly before, when he warns von Bork that "the Englishman is a patient creature but at present his temper is a little inflamed" ("HLB" 507) reminds one less of "patriotic militarism" than of the 'stiff upper lip' attitude commonly associated with the British.

Parkinson

Parkinson as a sidekick differs from Watson, who is generally considered the archetypical sidekick, in a variety of ways. First of all, he does not narrate "The Secret of Headlam Height" nor any other Max Carrados story. The narration is instead done by a third-person narrator who is not involved in the action directly. Secondly, he also inhabits a very different position to Watson, which is a clear marker of class difference between him and the detective. Obviously, it is the upper-/middle-class eccentric detective with his financial independence, above-average deductive abilities, and specialised knowledge of all things crime and criminal who takes centrestage in these stories. The sidekick, meanwhile, is required to be on a more or less equal (class) footing with the (middle-class) readership in order to emphasise the credibility of himself as narrator and/or mediator. Watson is a doctor and former member of the Army, for instance. Other sidekicks, such as Arthur Hastings, Mr Brett, or Nigel Bathgate are either also (former) Army personnel (Hastings), or journalists with more or less enough financial means to allow them the luxury and pleasure of accompanying their respective detectives on various exploits and adventures (Brett and Bathgate). Parkinson, however, is Max Carrados's personal attendant, which changes the relationship and interdependence between these two (and between the reader and the sidekick) significantly. In addition to the lack of (narratological) voice, which we already witnessed with Watson in "His Last Bow", albeit for

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[8] While pointing out that the British "have strange limits and one must learn to observe them" (HLB 492), he, nevertheless, concludes that "England is not ready. It is an inconceivable thing, but even our special war tax of fifty million, which one would think make our purpose as clear as if we had advertised it on the front page of the *Times,* has not roused these people from their slumber" (494).

different reasons, Parkinson's lack of voice in this and every other story is also expressed through his very employment with Carrados. As Carrados's attendant, and often also as his pair of eyes, he must come along and fulfil the role he is paid to do. That does not necessarily mean that he does not enjoy the thrill of the chase, or the new and often uncommon tasks that these adventures entail. Nevertheless, it highlights the very different circumstances this sidekick has been positioned in, namely a master-servant relationship.[9] Admittedly, the Watson-Holmes relationship also features echoes of this type of relationship, but in terms of dependencies Watson is not reliant on Holmes's pay and employment, though he does appear to rely on the thrill of the chase Holmes enables him to enjoy more or less regularly.

Selina Todd writes in her article on "Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950" that "servants lived by their labour; their social position was defined by it, their daily lives shaped by this reality" (188). This is true for Parkinson at least to some extent, although one should keep in mind that the way a servant's life was "shaped by this reality" differed greatly depending on the gender of the servant and the position he or she inhabited.[10] As alluded to above, Parkinson's everyday life is defined by his role as an attendant. This role is never clearly defined for the reader, which allows for a certain ambiguity regarding his exact relationship with Carrados. References to Carrados as his 'master', however, allow one to make the necessary deductions regarding Parkinson's responsibilities and also the limitations which come with this 'servant reality'.

The presence of Parkinson as a personal attendant to Carrados also allows for the emphasis of an aspect previously discussed in the context of Watson in "His Last Bow". I am referring here to the "awareness that men were continually seeking to reconcile and integrate the contradictory impulses of domestic responsibility and escapism" (Francis 643). By including the persona of a domestic servant, Bramah avoids this need for "domestic responsibility" in the sense that a (male) servant's focus was primarily on their work and duties (both obviously in the context of the domestic) rather than on finding a wife and settling down themselves. Then again,

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[9] Lord Peter Wimsey's manservant Mervyn Bunter is a similar, if more defined and further developed character to Bramah's Parkinson. He enjoys more agency than Parkinson and appears more engaged within the progress of the plot, too. His position within a larger hierarchy of domestic staff adds to this extended agency, wherefore I am hesitant to treat these two pairings as equal. Bunter could rather be interpreted as an extended version of Parkinson, and a more in-depth study of the two may be worthwhile.

[10] In her text, Todd focuses exclusively on the experience of the female domestic servant, which is interesting because she criticises "major historical studies of class in twentieth-century Britain" for the "silence on service" (Todd 181), yet she herself leaves an entire gender out of her discussion of domestic service and class. I am clearly not in a position here to rectify this, but, nevertheless, the reality of male domestic servants needs to be taken into consideration, particularly in this context.

the role of personal attendant to an amateur detective still allowed Parkinson to indulge in this 'flight from domesticity'. This is mirrored in the very substance of detective fiction itself. On the one hand, detective stories embrace the "homosocial world of the boy's adventure story" (Francis 640) by sending detective-sidekick duos out into the dangerous underworld of crime.[11] On the other hand, detective stories can also be considered 'domesticated' as they are more constrained than adventure stories,[12] and bound to certain generic conventions, such as location, characters (and classes) involved, types of crimes, etc. Additionally, and this was already mentioned above, detective fiction of the time – and here the classic, late-nineteenth-century fiction as well as works produced in the genre's Golden Age can be subsumed under one canopy – traditionally dealt with "family irregularities and the consequences of selfishness" (Kayman 49).

A second way in which Bramah tries to bridge this gap between the "romantic language of heroic masculinity" and the "reassertion of the domesticated and private categories of masculinity" (Francis 640) is the portrayal of Parkinson as an "unquenchable stickler for decorum", or a "punctilious attendant" with a "perfectly controlled respectful voice" (Bramah 7). This portrayal echoes not only these "nostalgic laments for the faithful Victorian maid" (Todd 181), which Todd says were an ever-present part of 1920s press coverage of the "'disappearance' of service" (181), as well as the nostalgia that the sidekick himself is representative and the embodiment of, and which is one reason why Holmes described Watson as "the one fixed point in a changing age" ("HLB" 507). It is also yet another example of the 'stiff upper lip' attitude previously expressed by Holmes, and it alludes once again to the patriotic undertone these stories possess. In "The Secret of Headlam Height" such patriotism is expressed through the repeated notions of 'doing one's bit' or 'business as usual', both of which seem to be considered "the most patriotic thing to do" (Bramah 18). Parkinson in particular is 'doing his bit' by securing the encoded message meant for the German spy at the end of the story, which may not prevent the war – similar to Holmes's intervention in "His Last Bow" –, but which gives the British at least a strategic and military advantage. Parkinson's reply to Carrados's praise of his actions in light of the impending threat – "If you really have got the message, Parkinson, you will deserve a knighthood" (Bramah 40) – is the perfect embodiment of this stoic patriotism when he declares "[t]hank you, sir, but I hope you won't mention it to anyone. It would be very uncongenial to me to become notorious in any way" (40).

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[11] Of course, not all detective fiction features a sidekick persona. Nevertheless, even with characters that are not recurring or more limited in their actions than the sidekick – or less constrained – the homosocial aspect so familiar from adventure stories can be observed in a lot of stories that feature a male detective.

[12] As Cawelti points out, adventure stories typically featured "a villain, and . . . one or more attractive young ladies" (39-40).

Martha & Clifton Barker

The representation of the few female characters in both stories looks very different from that of the male ones. At first glance, Martha appears to be a stereotypical representation of an older, female servant. Frequently referred to as "that one old woman" ("HLB" 497), "old Martha" (502), or "the old lady" (503), one is led to believe she is inconsequential both for von Bork and Holmes. This is further emphasised by the fact that she, as opposed to the male characters, who are generally addressed by their last name, is known only as 'Martha' or a variation of the phrases used here. This can be seen as symbolic of her servant/employee status, where individual identities in general were of no consequence, even less so for women.[13] However, there are two passages in which Martha's particular role within the development of the plot and the solution of the case is recognised and emphasised further. The first situation takes place during a conversation between von Herling and von Bork shortly before the former takes his leave. After musing about the British and their potential inability to react to the German threat adequately, von Herling remarks that "she [Martha] might almost personify Britannia . . . with her complete self-absorption and general air of comfortable somnolence" (497). This situation may not be considered anything more than another dig at the British if it were not for a later scene, during which Holmes clarifies her level of involvement in the entire operation of thwarting von Bork's plans. After von Bork has been apprehended, chloroformed, and bound, Martha joins the successful detective and his sidekick, and following a brief reassurance that von Bork was indeed unhurt, the importance of her work for the whole cause becomes clear as Holmes states, "[s]o long as you were here I was easy in my mind" (502). Shortly after, he continues with a full explanation of the extent of Martha's contribution and what it means for the British position in this conflict. Unlike Watson, who seems to have only been involved in the final apprehension that night, Martha had been an ongoing accomplice, acting as a housekeeper in von Bork's employ, and supplying Holmes constantly with letters and addresses that allowed him to successfully intervene in von Bork's grand scheme for months. And here I would like to return to von Herling's assessment of Martha as "Britannia". What was meant as a deprecating remark, if not an insult, is in fact an excellent description of Martha's stoic, reliable, if not extraordinarily heroic personality. With her pleasant, polite, and dutiful attitude, she, similar to Watson, represents the "one fixed point in a changing age" as well as the "cleaner, better, stronger land [that] will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared" (507).

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[13] Given that Britain is a patrilineal society, women's initial maiden names were 'given to them' by their fathers and would only ever be replaced by a name given to them by their husbands. A British woman's last name can, therefore, be seen as never truly her own. Thus, while the omission of her last name may be read as a deviation/escape from the patriarchal system in any other context, here it is solely emblematic of her servant status.

Simultaneously to the notion of patriotism and 'Britishness', Martha also represents what has been mentioned in connection with Parkinson already, namely the "nostalgic laments for the faithful Victorian maid" (Todd 181) as the representative of a better time gone by, particularly in the context of an ongoing war where much of daily life had changed significantly already.[14] The much feared "'disappearance' of service" (181) never materialised in the 1920s, and in fact "the number of servants increased over the course of the 1920s" (185).

Not necessarily the opposite of Martha, but younger and more flamboyant is Clifton Baker. The "professional lady cryptologer" with her "hermaphroditic name" (Bramah 29) appears to be the epitome of the modern woman of the 1920s, but Bramah took it even further than that. Her initial introduction reads as follows:

> [a]t the age of fifteen Clifton Baker had made up her mind – a considerable achievement of itself in that era. At twenty-five she spoke all the most useful living languages and wrote the four most important dead ones. Eight letters (which she never by any chance used) after her hermaphroditic name were some evidence of a scientific grounding, while the recital of her attainments in the higher planes of mathematics made elderly professors who were opposed to the movements ooze profusely in the region of the collar. Then chance, in the shape of a baffling testamentary puzzle, threw destiny across her path, and on the assumption that there was room for one professional lady cryptologer in the world Clifton took an office and passed the word round among her friends. (29)

This description appears somewhat flippant and dismissive, particularly because throughout the following pages she is continuously referred to as "the girl" (30), or "the girl . . . forgetting to be coy" (31). Her flirtatious utterances towards and in regard to Max Carrados's secretary Annesley Greatorex, who apparently "fear[s] and shun[s] her" (30) add to this almost childlike depiction. In addition, the almost condescending tone of the narrator regarding her behaviour, for example her "squeal of maidenly delight" (31) when she spots Max Carrados, is not helpful either. Nonetheless, Clifton's abilities as a cryptologer are kept in the highest regard by Carrados – why else would he have had her picked up in London and driven down to the coast with such urgency –, and his trust in her being able to finish the difficult if not impossible task at hand in such a short amount of time never seems to waver. And yet it is interesting that the "[g]ood girl" (32) suddenly transforms into a "wonderful woman, Clifton" (33) when the task is indeed completed in time. But if her abilities are so incredibly admirable and her achievements thus far so extraordinary, why the dismissive commentary on her overall behaviour and way of life? Does it matter that "[u]p to that time [when she first started her business] the girl had never really done her hair, and she regarded boots merely as things to protect her feet?" (30). The

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[14] With the young male workforce now shifted as soldiers to the frontline, women, who already "made up a substantial part of the industrial workforce even before the First World War", had to fill even more vacant spaces now as well as being "brought into munitions manufacturing in large numbers" ("12 Things").

depiction of Clifton Baker might be fuelled by an underlying anxiousness of the (intended) readership towards the flapper culture as Bramah also writes in regards to Clifton that "[e]verybody smiled indulgently and said how typical a product of the age Miss Baker was, and how hopeless it would be, except in this London nineteen-dash, to look for such another" (30). It is interesting, however, that she is paid for her service (to the country) while it is continuously repeated in regard to the efforts of Parkinson and Byles – another (minor) male character formerly employed by Carrados – that they are indeed only 'doing their bit' with no payment mentioned for their contribution. This displays a very contradictory attitude when it comes to expectations of duty for one's own country. Men are expected to step up (for free) whereas women are not, and in the case of Byles, this 'stepping up' has the most fatal consequences.

I have alluded previously to the idea that Martha and Clifton Baker could be potentially read as two sides of the same coin, and I would like to return to this thought now. At first glance, the two women are very different and so is their involvement in the respective cases. Martha represents the old in terms of age and times gone by, the traditional and familiar, the reliable. Conversely, Clifton stands for the young, the new, the somewhat unfamiliar, unpredictable, and to some even frightening future of the young (female) generation. At close observation, one can see certain similarities between the two. To begin with, their overall appearances and involvement in the stories are relatively brief, especially compared to the male sidekicks and other minor male characters. Furthermore, their agency is incredibly limited. Both are employed by the respective detective and thus tasked with a particular role to play and assignment to complete. Their dialogue is brief and largely inconsequential. And last but not least, both women are not given much chance to display their own personalities, which is partly due to the limiting generic conventions. Martha is the stereotypical representative of the reliable, old female servant while Clifton Baker is an exaggerated, partly androgynous (name), partly hysterical (behaviour) woman continuously belittled as a "girl" who may be read as somewhat of a 'deus ex machina' plot device because her incredible credentials and talents as a cryptologer are almost too good to be true – especially considering she is not the main detective, who the readership expects such extraordinary skills from.

Conclusion

To conclude, it appears that the male gender identity as it is presented in these two short stories is inextricably linked with the notions of patriotism or nationalist pride while at the same time teetering on the threshold between flight from or to domesticity. This first idea is expressed not only through a strong sense of duty inherent in the two sidekicks but also through the calm – in the case of Watson almost ignorant – attitude towards the impending threat of war. The British were famous for

their 'stiff upper lip' attitude after all, and both Parkinson and Watson are, in their own ways, excellent expressions of this. At the same time, the constant negotiation of "contradictory impulses of domestic responsibility and escapism" (Francis 643) found expression in what Francis called "polyphonic voices of popular culture and politics" (643), which I argue these short stories are an example of. These contradictory impulses are less obvious when assessing the female characters, which may be explained by the very different legal, political, and historical realities for women at the time. While the two sidekicks can, thus, be read as a visualisation of the threshold British masculinity found itself on at the time, the two women Martha and Clifton Baker appear more representative of an entire nation and generation respectively. On the one hand, the "old housekeeper" ("HLB" 497) Martha is a nostalgic reminder of 'the good old' Victorian times that are slowly losing their hold on Edwardian society, and yet she also represents the reliable, strong Britannia that is much needed in these difficult times, and which always has been and always will be a cornerstone for British identity. And on the other hand, there is the young flapper Clifton Baker, who herself appears to be in perpetual limbo, stuck and almost undecided between her female, almost exaggeratedly girlish self, and her hermaphroditic, uber-intelligent cryptologer persona. They, too, can be read as a wonderful example of an "ideology . . . not consistent or coherent in itself" (Eagleton qut. in Ferreter 132), but one 'made visible' through and in detective fiction (Porter 128). Two sides of the same coin at a time of thresholds, expressing the hopes and fears and worries of a British nation faced with the destructive and uncontrollable forces of war.

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Raymond Chandler's Hard-Boiled Representations of Gender, Crime, and Space in "Trouble is My Business"

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Abstract

Hard-boiled crime fiction is generally set in urban areas in early twentieth-century USA. Raymond Chandler, as a pioneering author of the genre, incorporates gender roles in his portrayals of the criminal underworld in the post-war era. He portrays men and women engaged in law and order in different ways in relation to current situations of the period. Regarding these understandings of gender and crime with Raymond Chandler's attitude to these concepts in his early writing career, this chapter aims to explore representations of gender roles in his short story "Trouble is My Business" (1939). Chandler's representations of space are closely connected to gender because spaces symbolize gender identities in their structures. In addition, this chapter also focuses on spatial representations of such depictions of gender identities and how space is understood in relation to gender stereotypes in the story.

Keywords

Introduction

Raymond Chandler is recognized as one of the most influential writers in the development of American crime fiction. Although his style and content have been discussed extensively, his challenging the norms of Victorian and early twentieth-century crime fiction is still foregrounded. He is hailed for his more realistic and violent representations of crime and policing in post-war America in contrast to idealized detectives and simple plots in classical crime fiction before the appearance of the hard-boiled genre. In his seminal essay "The Simple Art of Murder" (1944), he claims that detective fiction evolved into "the realistic style" by depicting the American society of this age and the verisimilitude in the investigation of crimes and criminality (Chandler, "Simple Art" 217).

Chandler mirrors and criticizes social circumstances in the period through his portrayals of law and order. In Warpole's words, the hard-boiled genre in general functions as "a vehicle for radical criticism" in terms of class, gender, and race (qtd. in Pepper 141). In his commentary on social and financial issues in the country, Charles Rzepka points out that excessive wealth in the roaring twenties led to "corruption at the highest levels of government" (185-86). Larry Shillock describes this corruption as the one "that exists when police are bought off and judges spend evenings with bootleggers and criminals" (7). Chandler unravels the criminal underworld of mostly gangsters and wealthy people, which is linked to bootlegging and

becoming financially powerful in a short time because of ongoing prohibitions. Like many writers during that time, he wrote in response to those social issues because he perceived "the socio-political sickness in American society" (Rzepka 153). In other words, he wrote his detective novels when insecurities and skepticism about the American Dream were evident in public. Moreover, his detective Philip Marlowe is thought to have a "more socially conscious code of ethics than that typical of the genre's heroes" (Athanasourelis 3). In this way, he incorporates his social criticism in the context of crime stories in a realistic way.

Apart from his "reputation as a realist" (Rzepka 153) and a social critic, Chandler is usually criticized for being sexist through specifically his depictions of women as merely seductive, dangerous, and materialistic (Madden 4). Additionally, his female characters usually take up a very small space in his works compared to male characters, who are involved in the main action and violence. He also foregrounds tough masculinity with especially his detective characters who usually possess masculine traits and fight the male dominated criminal underworld in big urban cities.

Different understandings of space may reflect cultural constructs and ideas which can be related to the social structure of a society. As hard-boiled crime stories are generally characterized by their urban setting together with portrayals of organized crime dominated by men in post-war USA, Chandler's representations of space are highly connected to gender because spaces symbolize gender identities in their structures. As Theda Wrede points out, space is ideologically constructed and "shaped by the dominant power structures . . . including gender discourse" (11). Thus, space reflects some implications of gender stereotypes as social and cultural constructs, and the hard-boiled genre's being set in urban areas is very appropriate for these spatial representations of gender which this chapter aims to examine. For instance, while urban and public spaces stand for heteronormative hegemony, private and domestic spaces symbolize women's being controlled by this order (McDowell 168). These reflections of gender disparity in spatiality could be used to maintain socially prescribed gender roles such as men's freedom and dominance in public spaces and women's exclusion from these areas in their private and domestic places.

Most academic studies address Chandler's novels, so some of the short stories from his early career suffer critical neglect. Regarding these understandings of gender and crime, this chapter aims to explore representations of gender roles in Raymond Chandler's short story "Trouble is My Business" (1939). Rather than merely focusing on Chandler's portrayals of gender, it aims to explore his attitude to gender and crime, especially in his early writing career and the effect of his personal life on it. After that, it focuses on the story's spatial representations of such depictions of gender identities in early twentieth-century USA.

The *Femme Fatale*

"Trouble is My Business," first published in *Dime Detective Magazine* in 1939, is like an early version of Chandler's novels, for it encompasses almost all the stereotypes in hard-boiled crime fiction such as the *femme fatale*, tough detectives, gangsters, and villains. It is set in 1930s Los Angeles, and Philip Marlowe is hired to deal with a gold digger woman to keep her away from a millionaire's adopted son. When this son is killed later, the fortune hunter and her boyfriend are the usual suspects; however, the plot twist at the end reveals a greedy scheme.

Depictions of women as *femmes fatales* are among the most recurrent themes in Chandler's fiction, which also receives the most critical response in academic studies. The *femme fatale* is generally described as a woman "who lures men into danger, destruction, even death by means of her overwhelmingly seductive charms" (Allen 7). As clarified before, Chandler is usually criticized for being sexist by reinforcing male hegemony; however, his representations of femininity and masculinity sometimes subvert mainstream understandings of gender identities. Chandler's ambiguous attitude towards gender identities is generally associated with his familial ties and war trauma.[1]

In addition to biographical influences, Chandler's inclusion of dangerous and beautiful female characters in almost every story seems relevant to his time as well. Regarding social conditions of the period, it is not wrong to claim that the fictional figures of the *femme fatale* and the transgressive woman challenging social boundaries coincide with the changes in the rights of women and their social positions in the USA such as women's getting right to vote and the Flapper movement. Similarly, Mark Jancovich points out that the ascendancy of these resourceful female characters in the post-war era parallels women's changing place in society after their indispensable contribution to the workforce during the First World War and their efforts to keep their social status after that (100). Gender roles and perceptions went on changing as female employment increased by twenty-five percent and all women got the right to vote in 1920 (Rzepka 185). Another group of women identified with this development in the USA were the Flappers "whose behavior and appearance constituted a major break with western, male-dominated civilization and was seen, in fact, as a dangerous threat to that civilization" (Yellis 63). Obviously, the *femme fatale* could be read as a reflection of those shifting gender dynamics in early twentieth-century America.

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[1] Lyumba Pervushina and Richard R. E. Kania, drawing on Frank McShane's (1976) and Judith Freeman's (2007) biographies of Chandler, point out that Chandler had ambiguous relationships with "the women in his life and fiction" (306). Additionally, in their books on Chandler, Sarah Trott and Stephen Knight recurrently emphasize the influence of the First World War on Chandler's life and fiction.

The *femme fatale* Miss Harriet Huntress's name is a deliberate reference to her position in the story. She is the only major female character who triggers the action with a significant function in the plot. Marlowe's agent Anne Halsey initially mentions her as a "redheaded number with bedroom eyes" who is "shill for a gambler and she's got her hooks into a rich man's pup" (Chandler, "Trouble" 255). To illustrate, she is portrayed as a typical red-haired gold digger looking for money through manipulation and seduction, and Marlowe is hired by Mr. Jeeter to talk to her and warn her. On his first encounter with her, Marlowe describes her hair as "dusky red, like a fire under control but still dangerous" which suggests that she may not be controlled fully (262). This portrayal emphasizes her strength and unusual personality as well.

Alcohol is a prominent way of characterization for such female figures. While excessive drinking of alcohol is a reference to the roaring twenties and bootlegging, it is a definite proposition for women's changing attitudes and demeanors in the period. Simkin points out that the Flappers in the 1920s were engaged in drinking as a way to react against mainstream patriarchal gender roles, in addition to a reaction against the prohibition of alcohol during that time (100). Alcohol is in almost every part of Chandler's fiction, and not only male but also female characters consume it. Miss Huntress is usually described as "drinking her Scotch" (294) or "holding a glass in which there was half a drink" (286). Furthermore, there's always praise for the Scotch, another aspect for which Marlowe pays respect to her. Nevertheless, Trott argues that Marlowe uses alcohol as "a relaxant to numb his memory and senses" (239) not only in this particular incident but for any pain which could be triggered by his past war trauma. While alcohol is very much related to men's vulnerability and psychological states, the opposite holds true for women as it signifies their efforts to challenge heteronormative hegemony. That is to say, Chandler engages alcohol as a significant element in order to question standard perceptions of gender.

Beside alcohol, women's involvement in criminal activities is acknowledged as an embodiment of crossing boundaries (Athanasourelis 163). Crime has been a significant notion in the definition of nonconformist femininity, as criminality was not ascribed to female behavior because it was still considered a masculine activity. Maysaa Husam Jaber describes the *femme fatale* as "a woman who goes beyond the arena of dangerous sexuality to enter the realm of criminality" (2). Hence, Miss Huntress's incursion into masculine domains of crime, law, and order is an allusion to her unconventional womanhood in reaction to male authority. When Marlowe says, "Miss Harriet Huntress was a nice girl. She knew a few wrong numbers, but who didn't?" (265), it is understood that he admires her having such contacts and survival skills as a woman in a criminal environment. He does not judge or condemn this figure of a woman in contact with dangerous or criminal individuals.

Although she does not commit any crimes, Young Jeeter is killed partly because of her, for she is the one who is used by Mr. Jeeter in the case.

Ronald R. Thomas notes that in those hard-boiled stories "the woman's access to power is transformed into a form of sexual and cultural perversion that must be corrected" (433). To illustrate, female power is generally connected with licentiousness and criminality. Heather Worthington argues that such unorthodox women being punished in crime fiction "function[s] to enforce properly feminine behaviour" and to "valourise the male protagonist and endorse properly masculine behaviour" (45). This also reflects gender dynamics and conflicts in the post-war era. Similarly, Stevie Simkin claims that "the death of the transgressive woman is seen as an act of purgation" (89). As observed, several scholars agree that *femmes fatales* are punished and cleansed in different ways; however, Chandler does not display such an action in this story. Miss Huntress is not eradicated or killed; on the contrary, she just gets away without any form of legal or extra-legal punishment. She is let off scot-free because she does not have direct relevance to the murders committed. She does not commit murder, and the crimes in the story are all linked to Mr. Jeeter's grudge against his adopted son. Additionally, after the incidents, she can freely try to seduce Marlowe by calling him or sending him messages. Her relaxed attitude after so much violence and her flirting with Marlowe could be read as another disparate feature of Chandler's early fiction because women are not that unorthodox and openly flirtatious in his later fiction.

The term 'hard-boiled' is generally associated with male writers and tough masculinity, and it is defined as a "men's genre" (Irwin 273). It is usually set in a man's world where the tough detective deals with gangsters and organized crime. Similarly, Stephen Knight points out that the genre "is deeply implicated with masculinism" (*Crime Fiction* 163). Nonetheless, Philip Marlowe in *Farewell, My Lovely* indicates that he likes "smooth shiny girls, hardboiled and loaded with sin" (qtd. in Madden 5). As toughness is a characteristic many female figures in Chandler's fiction share, he subverts gender identities and expectations. He shows that supposedly submissive women can become active and engaged in crime in a similar way to men. About Miss Huntress' character, Marlowe says: "She didn't look hard, but she looked as if she had heard all the answers and remembered the ones she thought she might be able to use sometime" (262). That is to say, she is not that tough, but she is not very fragile and vulnerable either. Although she is surrounded by men most of the time, she is courageous enough to keep company with these men without getting harmed where most of these men fight and kill one another.

Later, it is revealed that Mr. Jeeter had his adopted son killed in order to get the money the son would receive. In this way, it is understood that Miss Huntress was used by Mr. Jeeter for his greedy aim. Rather than being the son's lover, she was possibly cooperating with Mr. Jeeter because Marlowe finds her in his house with

his men after the murder of the son. For this reason, the initial presupposition that Miss Huntress was looking for his son's money turns out to be a scheme. Chandler also presents how Mr. Jeeter takes advantage of mindsets about such beautiful and dangerous women to plot his adopted son's murder. Because of that, her previous story about her life and revenge plot seems doubtful now. Thus, her obscure position in the story refers to the contradiction about gender stereotypes and ideologies ascribed to Chandler and its reflections in his fiction.

In spite of her function in the story, Miss Huntress still does not take up much space like other women in Chandler's fiction. Although scholars like Jaber (66) emphasize the *femme fatale's* absence and invisibility in a huge part of the narrative, this also fortifies her power to some extent. As Stephen Frosh points out, "the stronger the negation, the more important the truth of what has been negated" (121). In other words, no matter how much they are portrayed as suppressed or repudiated, Chandler shows that women are actually prominent in society as much as they are in his fiction. In spite of her inaction and disappearance throughout most of the story, Miss Huntress is able to control the plot and induce damage. Young Jeeter is found dead in her flat and she appears in Mr. Jeeter's house, which displays her collaboration with him for the murder.

As observed, Chandler had more ambiguous but less sexist portrayals in the beginning of his writing career. Rather than being sexist, his remarks about Miss Huntress reflect something fundamental he finds in her nature and manner. Marlowe describes her as "nice" and "swell," and he expresses that he is generally fond of her by saying he "was for her" (Chandler, "Trouble" 266). While describing the night on his return from her place, he says, "Venus in the west was as bright as a street lamp, as bright as life, as bright as Miss Huntress' eyes" (266). Hence, he emphasizes her brightness which could be her physical appearance literally but a reference to her wit and power as a woman as well. Consequently, Chandler's portrayal of Miss Huntress makes the reader ponder his understanding of sexy and dangerous women because he does not treat her in a stereotypical way but as a character that deserves respect in many terms.

Hard-Boiled Masculinities

Beside female characters, Chandler reinforces mainstream masculinity and portrays some male characters differently with regards to their weaknesses and their relationships with women. The *femme fatale* challenges the detective's power by preventing his efforts to enforce law and order, and most importantly, by questioning traditional cultural gender norms. Apart from his fight against crime, Marlowe confronts deviant femininity, which reveals his acknowledged sexual anxiety. Moreover, Jaber explains that "the anxiety that Marlowe displays towards women is not only sexual

but also relates to power" (53). Rather than a male antagonist or rival, Philip Marlowe is in conflict with this *femme fatale* from the beginning. He cannot control her and her engagement with the criminal underworld. On the contrary, he respects her and does not deny his interest in her unorthodox femininity. At the end of the story, Marlowe goes "out with her twice" and sits "with her twice at home" (294), something he does not often do in his later novels. Nevertheless, he does not materialize his interest in her and refuses her in his realistic way of thinking.

Marlowe is generally considered as a reflection of Chandler himself, or the form of masculinity he is yearning for (Trott 215). In addition to the idea that Chandler's detective stories unveil a lot about him and his war trauma, Sean Carswell indicates that Marlowe "represents the man that so many soldiers returning from World War II hoped to become: a man able to shake off the horrors of the world and end up clean" (11). In relation to his desire for quintessentially masculine traits, in his article "The Simple Art of Murder" Chandler describes the ideal hard-boiled detective as follows:

> He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man . . . a man of honor. . . He will take no man's money dishonestly and no man's insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge. He is a lonely man and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man or be very sorry you ever saw him. He talks as a man of his age talks, that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness. (219)

Thus, through his idealistic masculinity, Chandler's portrayal of Marlowe is definitely a threat for the corrupt criminal world of urban post-war America. Although he gives a clear description of a tough and manly detective, there is still an ambiguity in this passage when he paradoxically describes a common but an unusual man. This issue is noticed in his representations of gender stereotypes as well.

Marlowe deals with his dilemma and conflict with the *femme fatale* in his own ways. His dilemma is rooted in his interest in her and his evasion of her flirtations. Dennis Porter underlines that Marlowe builds his "mastery over women by rejecting, arresting or in some cases killing them," in what is a "fantasy-fulfilling display of male invulnerability" (185). Although Marlowe meets Miss Huntress a few times, he firmly rejects her sexual overtures to him. He states that "It was nice but I didn't have the money, the clothes, the time or the manners" (294). This remark by labelling her as a pretentious fortune hunter is sexist, but he is an "unromantic, realistic . . . materialistic" character in Stephen Knight's words (*Form and Ideology* 136). Marlowe's attempt to stay away from her shows his anxiety and realistic side regarding her character; nonetheless, he meets her a few times. When he says: "I was glad when she left," he mentions her as something dangerous to get rid of rather than trying to fight against (294). Hence, his conflict with the *femme fatale* is not resolved clearly, and he keeps indecisive about her until the very end of the story.

Although some scholars mention how dangerous and unconventional women are cleansed from Chandler's narratives, some particular types of men are eliminated, too, which evidently happens in closed and private places in the story (Pepper 141). Hegemonic masculinity attempts to create a form of masculinity "characterized by a dominance, aggression, independence, emotional invulnerability, physical strength and toughness, heterosexuality, wealth, and a propensity for violence" (Carswell 18). Marlowe demonstrates almost all of the above-mentioned attributes, and some male characters lacking these features are excluded in different ways. While referring to *Farewell, My Lovely*, Stephen Knight notes that the *femme fatale*'s "victims are doubles for, extensions of Marlowe. They are men he feels close to" (*Form and Ideology* 156). Knight connects this situation to Marlowe's homo-erotic interest and repulsion in such male characters, and these men die in settings that include him as well.

Regarding Knight's remark about this male anxiety, the character of Young Jeeter could also be seen as another ego or self of the writer that he tries to avoid. When Marlowe visits Miss Huntress the first time, he suddenly sees Young Jeeter behind him. Young Jeeter hides in Miss Huntress's flat and appears to beat Marlowe. He is attacked and beaten by this strong, seemingly masculine man who is manipulated and controlled by the *femme fatale*. She tells the boy to "ruin him . . . to see these hard numbers bend at the knees" (265). In other words, Marlowe is indirectly attacked by a woman and his hardness is partially ruined. This might be one of the stories in which Marlowe is physically attacked the most. Chandler's early short stories featuring Marlowe include more violence than the later novels, and the use of violence enhances "[Marlowe's] heroic status" due to his ability to use guns and show courage during violent encounters with gangsters (Athanasourelis 78; 94). The fact that he is physically attacked more than he attacks reflects his aversion for physical violence and perhaps wars in general. He rarely beats other people apart from using his gun when he has to. Marlowe says he "never really got to like killing people" which also discloses his war trauma in his opposition to violence (271).

Young Jeeter is a comparatively weaker character because he is easily manipulated by Miss Huntress. He does not have autonomy and capability because he is under the influence of Miss Huntress and his father. His being hidden in her flat refers to his vulnerability and possibly unconventional gender identity, although he is physically strong. He does not have his own voice and barely speaks in the only scene when he appears, and he is almost invisible in the text. These are actually the characteristics associated with a suppressed female character, so Chandler attributes these characteristics to a man who is killed a short time after he appears in the story. Moreover, his father's having him killed at the end does not only reveal a financial motive and greed, but also patriarchy's attitude to such abnormal forms of manhood.

In addition to the figure of Young Jeeter, generally fat or physically smaller men are killed, and this illustrates male anxiety and the predominance of tough men. Stephen Knight claims what Chandler unravels about the sexual anxiety is that "clearly effeminate men are described in absorbing detail but firmly rejected by the persona – too firmly perhaps for conviction" (*Form and Ideology* 158). In the story, it does not happen with obviously effeminate characters, but with male characters such as short, small, or fat men that do not conform with the conceptions of established hard-boiled masculinity.

One of the first examples for that is the private investigator John D. Arbogast. Marlowe visits him to talk about the case, but he finds him murdered in the office. The place is depicted as a dark and suffocating office which has several doors. Furthermore, there is a very detailed description of the murdered man as "enormously fat, fatter by far than Anne Halsey. His face . . . looked about the size of a basketball" (259). What also draws attention is Chandler's descriptions of minute details, in the manner of body shaming. Every inch of this fat man's body is described in the position in which he was killed. The dead body is on his knees as if he were begging and his head is leaning on the side of the table, which implies vulnerability. Chandler possibly tries to emphasize his fatness as a physical and unmasculine attribute because it signifies weakness and inability which he tries to avoid and cover up.

Another example of male weakness is the presence of "little" men. Marlowe often comes across gangsters trying to kill or overpower him, and he generally puts physically smaller ones down in the story. When he finds two men in his flat, he takes "the little man" and "his little gun hand" down and beats that "little punk" (267). Also, when he is attacked in the car by the same men, he shoots that little man. However, this little man is killed on the street, which means he is manly enough with his violent actions although he is humiliated for his physical appearance.

As observed, specific forms of tough masculinity are reinforced both in the detective figure and criminals in the story. On the other hand, characters not conforming with mainstream constructions of masculinity are eliminated and Othered in different ways (Pepper 147). It is obvious that these men not conforming to traditional understandings of manhood are simply cleansed, similar to the non-conforming female character. Stephen Knight suggests that such instances of vulnerable and nonconformist male characters are controlled by the use of excessive violence in Chandler's short stories in his early fiction (*Crime Fiction* 118). Thus, Chandler endorses masculine hegemony in many of his male characters more obviously than in his portrayals of female ones.

Spatial Representations of Gender

One of the peculiar features of Chandler's style is his description of places in extreme detail. In addition, Chandler's setting the story in several different places invites an exploration of spatial representations of gender. Studies of space generally focus on dualisms like urban vs. rural, and public vs. private, which symbolize men and women. Urban and public places stand for male mobility, freedom, and interaction in business, while rural and private places refer to womanhood and their domestic place (McDowell 148). Urban setting clearly denotes the men's world which Chandler depicts in detail in his plots, yet the rural environment is supposed to indicate vulnerable and innocent femininity. One of the most important elements of the story is that it is set in metropolitan Los Angeles, and male characters are predominant as a characteristic of Chandler's fiction. Still, Chandler's destruction of such typical views is observed through the environment and spaces attributed to men and women.

Unlike in classical crime stories preceding the hard-boiled genre, Chandler narrates the story from the detective's point of view, and this subjective narrative endows him with authority and power. The readers learn the story only through his point of view and thoughts, so this makes him the authorial voice which the readers have to believe. In addition, with first-person narration, Marlowe describes the objects in detail whenever he enters an unfamiliar place. Stephen Knight declares that "Chandler habitually uses the physical surroundings to foreground his hero's feelings" (*Form and Ideology* 144). The only place he does not describe is his own flat, which suggests privacy and individualism in Marlowe's lifestyle.

That the story is usually set in closed private places evinces the socio-cultural dynamics of the early twentieth-century, where the male criminal underworld is governed secretly. Marlowe's frequent driving through the streets of urban Los Angeles apparently signifies freedom and mobility for men. These spatial representations stress the social atmosphere of Chandler's age, when gangsters and bootleggers loom. Although many places are private in the story, most of them are generally crowded with men engaged in organized crime. This also contradicts the thesis that private places are feminine and blurs the line between privacy and publicity, which refers to subversion of gender stereotypes. Private places like Marlowe's flat are not actually very private because they might be intruded by dangerous and criminal men any time. In a similar way, the *femme fatale*'s suit does not offer privacy and domesticity, which symbolizes her unorthodox femininity.

The building where Miss Huntress lives looks more like a hotel rather than a domestic place, which is an obvious reference to her transgressive femininity. She does not lead a conventional family life there but she carries out her engagement in the criminal underworld. There is an attendant in the lobby who always accompanies her guests. In addition, Miss Huntress seems to welcome men all the time and she

is never alone, although her flat is seemingly a private place. Her statement to Marlowe, "I've been expecting lads like you any day" (263), could be criticized for establishing her dangerous sexuality and objectification under the male gaze. As an unusual woman, it also indicates her inclusion in a criminal male world Chandler often pictures. At first, she is portrayed like a Madam running an illegal business or a boarding house. Thus, the description of her place as different from a domestic space seems to contest the public/private binary of spatial representations of gender. Furthermore, Marlowe again describes his feelings in her place with "Scotch and swish on a tabouret, ice in a bucket, everything to make a man feel at home" (262). Hence, Marlowe ironically acknowledges that her unorthodox femininity would make him feel at home there, although it seems to emphasize domesticity at the same time.

As a usual element of Chandler's style, each chapter starts in a new setting where the detective carries out his investigation, which suggests male mobility. Nonetheless, Miss Huntress is possibly one of the most mobile female characters in Chandler's fiction so far. She appears in different places, once in her flat and then in Mr. Jeeter's house with his men. Finally, she appears on her dates with Marlowe at the end. Ronald R. Thomas claims that such uncommon representations of women "reflect, perhaps, the political and economic mobility women were beginning to gain in the culture, developments that were interpreted here as criminal threats to masculine power" (433). That is to say, Miss Huntress's movement parallels her transgressions of social and moral certitudes about gender identities.

As observed, Chandler complicates gender stereotypes through these spatial representations as well. As Theda Wrede emphasizes, "[s]pace is dynamic and simultaneous, just as gendered identity is multiple and in flux" (13). Chandler places some of his characters in settings which are not congruous with the aforementioned gender ideologies associated with these specific places. Because of that, these spatial representations are relevant and appropriate for Chandler's reorientations of gender relations and interactions. He does not only perpetuate gender stereotypes but also demonstrates subversion of them through spatial representations.

Conclusion

Regarding his portrayals in his early short stories or novellas like "Trouble is My Business," Raymond Chandler cannot always be considered sexist in his portrayals of gender. Although the story incorporates typical aspects of the hard-boiled genre, it generally lacks some established and biased representations of gender ideologies. Chandler associates toughness and hard-boiled not only with male but also female characters to some extent. Moreover, he keeps the ambiguity in all aspects throughout the story, from the characters and gender identities to spatial representations.

Although portraying some women as pernicious and scheming *femmes fatales*, these depictions function as subversions of gender roles, too. His female characters are not often passive, domestic, and merely subservient, which signifies Chandler's unorthodox reflections on gender in his early fiction. Miss Huntress is never portrayed as a mere victim of a man-made order and justice system; on the contrary, she is an ambitious character who engages in the male business of crime. Furthermore, she eventually survives in such a dangerous environment, while some male characters, both the father and the adopted son, die. Finally, she can get away with this incident in spite of her connection with the case and the culprit.

On the contrary, Marlowe cannot often restore order like Sherlock Holmes or other fictional detectives. Although Marlowe's failure to bring criminals to justice represents the complex criminal underworld in post-war America, it also refers to his inability in spite of his seemingly tough and invulnerable personality. Additionally, themes like male anxiety are in control with excessive action and violence which does not often feature that much in Chandler's fiction; nevertheless, he cannot eradicate the *femme fatale* as expected. In addition, he implies that female irregularities were harshly denounced while organized crime perpetrated by men was largely ignored and even tolerated.

As the two world wars had tremendous influences on him, Chandler might have become more concerned with masculine ideology and competence after the impact of the Second World War. That might be one reason why he is not so biased about gender differences in the early stages of his writing career. It is observed that he is not as sexist as he is in his later novels. As his portrayals of male and female characters sometimes subvert understandings of gender stereotypes, his attitude towards gender ideologies is more ambiguous in his early writing career. Accordingly, it would be right to state that Chandler's representations of gender transformed to become more sexist gradually compared to his previous works before his reputation as a novelist.

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A Comparative Analysis of Enola Holmes and Sherlock Holmes

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Abstract

Arthur Conan Doyle's famous fictional detective Sherlock Holmes is an icon of the detective genre and has been adapted into various media and reimagined in countless stories and novels. Nancy Springer's *Enola Holmes Mysteries* (2006-2010) adapts and expands the Sherlock Holmes universe, and centres on a female protagonist, Enola, who, as Sherlock's sister, becomes a detective specialising in locating missing individuals and items.

This chapter explores the influence of the original Sherlock on Enola's character and examines the extent to which the author, Springer, modifies these influences. The argument presented here is that Enola embodies a combination of traits, highlighting the significance of her distinct personality in shaping her detective work. To do so, this chapter employs comparative analysis to delve into the character of Enola Holmes by first analysing the traits and investigative methods Enola shares with her predecessor and then showing where Springer deviates and develops distinctive traits and abilities for Enola that demarcate her from Sherlock. Eventually, Enola is shown as a detective with her own identity and methodologies, elevating her beyond a mere replica of Doyle's Holmes.

Keywords

Sherlock Holmes, Enola Holmes, adaptation, investigative techniques

Introduction

Numerous adaptations and rewrites of Sherlock Holmes stories (or simply the character) have been made to date. Readers have maintained a strong desire to read more of the established formula of conventional detective fiction embodied by Holmes, and the fascination with Sherlock Holmes has not abated. As a result, he continues to be imitated, adapted, and rewritten. These reinventions have also gone beyond continuations in recent years, significantly diversifying the Sherlock Holmes universe with new additions that expand its scope. Despite the creative diversifications, a significant number of these reinventions incorporate characteristics of Sherlock found in the original Sherlock Holmes short stories and novels by Arthur Conan Doyle. This means that even as these narratives take on new forms, they often preserve the essence of Holmes as a character by incorporating familiar traits. The maintained characteristics of Sherlock often include his exceptional intelligence, an interest in science – primarily chemistry –, advanced reasoning methods – commonly referred to as the deductive method, but more accurately described as the

inductive method (Knight 86) –, observation skills, a commitment to rationality, proficiency in acting and disguise, and boredom leading to drug use when not engaged in complex investigative cases.

However, as Polasek notes, "the attributes of the character [Sherlock Holmes] are merely at the disposal of each adaptation, which will both draw on them and rewrite them" (3). In other words, adaptations and rewrites may preserve some of Sherlock's traits while introducing new elements to create a blend. Therefore, this chapter focuses on tracing Sherlock's investigative techniques in the character of Enola in *The Enola Holmes Mysteries* and on identifying characteristics added by the author to differentiate the character.

In *The Enola Holmes Mysteries*, American writer Nancy Springer creates a female detective, Sherlock Holmes's sister Enola, and places her in the same Victorian setting the original stories were set in. Enola, even though she is not a reinterpretation of Sherlock's character himself, shares several attributes with him – underlining the idea of her being his sister, a distinctive person but somehow "related" (i.e. similar) to him – while employing her own methods of detection. In these adventures, Enola Holmes is a 14-year-old girl living with her mother Eudoria Holmes, another original character by Springer, and separate from her brothers. With the disappearance of her mother on the day of her fourteenth birthday, Enola becomes a perditorian (a detective who finds missing persons), initially to find her mother. However, even beyond her first case, Enola's attention is drawn to cases involving missing or distressed individuals, which ultimately compels her to pursue finding missing persons as a professional endeavour. While she evades her brothers, who insist on sending her to a boarding school to turn her into a 'proper lady', Enola pursues her career as a scientific perditorian.

This chapter will first explore the common traits shared by Sherlock and Enola Holmes by briefly recalling the original Sherlock Holmes's characteristics and investigative methods and comparing them with Enola's. Second, it analyses how Enola's distinctive traits are employed. My focus will be limited to their respective traits and investigative techniques to showcase the differences that set Enola apart in terms of how she solves cases through a comparative analysis of these two fictional detectives.

Shared Traits

Sherlock Holmes has iconic traits that are often carried over into adaptations and rewrites of Doyle's universe. Even when the protagonist is a different character than Sherlock, the new character often contains (modified) variants of some of these iconic traits. This chapter will provide an analysis of how the character Enola in *The Enola Holmes Mysteries* retains certain core characteristics associated with Holmes,

which are intelligence, scientific knowledge, disguise, and solving ciphers, but also reshapes these traits to align with her own character.

Intelligence

In some adaptations or interpretations, Sherlock has an additional sister or a brother (such as the BBC series *Sherlock*, which features a sister named Eurus Holmes, and the movie *The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother*) to make possible the competition for mind games and to provide Sherlock with an equal opponent. In line with that tendency, Nancy Springer invents a fictional sister for Sherlock and makes her an intelligent detective.

Sherlock Holmes is renowned for his exceptional intellect, which is one of his defining characteristics. There are many examples where Sherlock's wit is on display in the original, but perhaps one of the most striking and most impressive is found in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band". In this story, a young woman named Helen Stoner seeks Holmes's help in investigating the strange death of her sister, Julia. Holmes claims that he solved the case when he entered the room of their stepfather, Dr Raymott. Utilising his observational skills and intelligence, Sherlock reveals that Julia was bitten by a snake, which was released through a ventilator by her stepfather (Doyle 273).

Sherlock is the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has ever seen, Watson further comments in "A Scandal in Bohemia" (155). Sherlock's reasoning method, a testament to his remarkable intelligence, starts with observations and the essential facts related to each case. From these foundational details, he proceeds to make connections and construct theories. Another instance that shows his intelligence and rapid comprehension is when Watson visits him after getting married. Sherlock notices the exact amount of weight that Watson has gained since his marriage and that he has started to practice medicine again (see Scaggs 39-40). He is inclined to draw conclusions from seemingly insignificant observations, which proves his intelligence. Christopher Redmond emphasises his ability to discern even the smallest details, ultimately leading him to arrive at the solution for each case. He quotes Sherlock explaining where to focus one's attention during observations, which is the first step of his method:

> I can never bring you to realize the importance of sleeves, the suggestiveness of thumbnails, or the great issues that may hang from a bootlace. . . . Never trust to general impressions, my boy, but concentrate yourself upon details. My first glance is always at a woman's sleeve. In a man it is perhaps better first to take the knee of the trouser. (Doyle 196)

Enola's intelligence and her role as a detective become evident as she embarks on various adventures and successfully solves cases. The first case Enola undertakes is *The Case of The Missing Marquess*. Upon receiving news about Lord Tewksbury's disappearance, Enola delves deeper into the matter. Seated in a tea shop, she scrutinises

the news about the missing Lord Tewksbury, particularly focusing on the photograph of him dressed in Fauntleroy fashion. Expressing a hope that "he wasn't made to wear velvet and frills every day" (111), Enola thinks his mother had been influenced by the *Little Lord Fauntleroy* book and dressed him accordingly. As she continues reading the news, Enola exclaims upon discovering that Tewksbury is twelve years old, as his clothing had led her to believe he was younger. She comments on how the boy should be attired in a manner suitable for his age "a woolen jacket and knickers, an Eton collar with a tie, and a decent, manly haircut" (113). Subsequently, Enola decides to visit Basilwhether Park, claiming that she "just knew where Lord Tewksbury might be" (114).

Empathising with Tewksbury, Enola considers that he may need his own place to be alone. In the woodlands of Basilwhether Park, she searches for a distinctive tree. She discovers a location constructed atop the convergence of four trees that have grown from a single base and gets all the clues from the hideaway. On her way back, she crosses paths with Inspector Lestrade and elaborates on her theory that Tewksbury has not been kidnapped but has instead chosen to run away, possibly with the intention of leaving the country by ship (114-130).

In the final novel, Enola proves herself to be a smart and capable detective to other characters. She faces a challenge when she receives a skytale from her mother, not knowing how to decipher it since she needs the correct cylindrical object. When she needs to ride a bicycle to reach the train station, she starts to think about the connection between her bicycle and her mom. "Mum had taken quite a bit of trouble to teach me to ride a bicycle, now that I thought about it, and that was extraordinary, for Mum had not generally troubled herself much about me" (*Gypsy Goodbye* 143). Recalling the lessons and recognising Eudoria's passion for cycling, Enola sees the bicycle as a symbol of her mother's beliefs:

> Evidently the ability to ride a bicycle had been important to Mum, Suffragist and reformer that she was. Indeed, standing on a cold floor barefoot in my nightgown and recalling various conversations, I realised that a bicycle was a symbol of sorts for Mum's beliefs: A bicycle offered freedom of movement to females whilst defiantly flaunting the fact that they were, indeed, bipeds, just like those who wore trousers. (143-144)

Drawing these connections, Enola, noting the bicycle's various cylindrical components, deduces that the letter, to be deciphered, requires the presence of a bicycle. Moreover, as Enola pursues her "calling" of locating missing individuals (*Missing Marquess* 121), she also demonstrates her cleverness in evading her brothers when they cross paths. For instance, when she unexpectedly runs into Mycroft, she must think and act swiftly to evade him:

> Simultaneously I shrieked "That man laid hands upon me!" An accusation so shocking that bystanders gasped with outrage and turned upon Mycroft with shouts and stares. Meanwhile, dodging between skirts and ducking beneath gentlemanly elbows, I took refuge once

more in the Ladies' Lavatory, whisking past the doorkeeper with a gabbled tale of having forgotten something. (*Pink Fan* 19-20)

In the face of the unexpected confrontation with Mycroft, her quick thinking ensures his inability to capture Enola, allowing her to persist in her duties. Enola's ability to promptly devise and execute an escape route underscores her intelligence.

It seems clear that Enola demonstrates her intelligence by investigating and following clues when looking for missing individuals. Similar to Sherlock, who is the epitome of intelligence and defeats villains with his superior intelligence (Asomiv qtd. in Redmond), Enola is no less formidable, skilfully unravelling mysteries and showcasing her sharp mind.

Scientific Knowledge

Sherlock is a representation of a scientific mind and for him science is the ultimate way of unravelling mysteries. Christopher Clausen points out that "he is conceived – and conceives of himself as a man who applies scientific methods to the detection of crime and that his success as a detective is due to those methods" (109). In *A Study in Scarlet*, Watson lists and evaluates his scientific knowledge to demonstrate his limits according to the fields. He writes:

> 1. Knowledge of Literature. — Nil.
> 2. Knowledge of Philosophy. — Nil.
> 3. Knowledge of Astronomy. — Nil.
> 4. Knowledge of Politics. — Feeble.
> 5. Knowledge of Botany. — Variable.
> Well up in belladonna, opium and poisons generally. Knows nothing of practical gardening.
> 6. Knowledge of Geology. — Practical but Limited.
> Tells at a glance different soils from each other. After walks has shown me splashes upon trousers and told me by their colour and consistence in what part of London he had received them.
> 7. Knowledge of Chemistry. — Profound.
> 8. Knowledge of Anatomy. — Accurate, but unsystematic.
> 9. Knowledge of Sensational Literature. — Immense. (31-32)

In addition to these scientific pursuits, it is noteworthy that Sherlock is an expert in forensic science employing several techniques, including the analysis of fingerprints, footprints, and handwritten or typewritten text (O'Brien). Furthermore, he mentions authoring several monographs, one of them being *Upon the Distinction between the Ashes of the Various Tobaccos* in *The Sign of Four* (91).

In "The Adventure of the Boscombe Valley Mystery", a man's murder results in the police wrongly accusing his son. Sherlock thoroughly examines the crime scene, combining various clues to construct a profile of the murderer. Discerning from the

footprints, Sherlock concludes that another individual, the actual murderer, was present at the crime scene. The footprints indicate this person wears thick-soled shooting boots and limps with the right leg (213). Another significant clue Sherlock uncovers pertains to ashes at the crime scene. These ashes reveal important details about the murderer: "He had stood behind that tree during the interview between the father and son. He had even smoked there. I found the ash of a cigar, which my special knowledge of tobacco ashes enables me to pronounce as an Indian cigar" (214). The footprints and ashes provide crucial clues for identifying the real murderer, firmly establishing that the culprit is someone other than initially suspected.

Chemistry holds a significant role in Sherlock's life. Watson frequently informs the reader of Sherlock's engagement in experiments and his dedicated pursuit of chemical investigations. In "The Naval Treaty", Sherlock mentions one of the chemical investigations he is working on to solve what he calls a "commonplace little murder" (448). He explains, "If this paper remains blue, all is well. If it turns red, it means a man's life. He dipped it into the test tube and it flushed at once into a dull, dirty crimson" (448). Sherlock's ingenious use of a chemical experiment, then, shows his scientific acumen and also serves as the decisive element leading to the resolution of a case.

Enola also possesses a scientific mind. The scope of her scientific knowledge becomes apparent in the first case she takes on. Enola encounters an astral perditorian named Madame Laelia Sibyl de Papaver, who claims to find missing people by communicating with spirits. Enola becomes irritated by Madame Laelia calling herself a perditorian "with all her blather of spirits" (*Missing Marquess* 120): "I was a perditorian. Or I would be. Not astral. Professional. The world's first professional, logical, scientific perditorian" (120). It is evident that Enola is committed to approaching her work in a scientific and methodical manner, and she lacks respect for those who do not share this approach.

Unlike Sherlock, Enola Holmes only has knowledge of botany as her scientific expertise and utilises it during her investigations. While Sherlock's utilisation of botany may be limited, it is still a method Enola inherits from her literary template and thus worth mentioning. Enola's botanical knowledge stems from her mother, Eudoria Holmes, who has a deep affinity for flowers and even engages in botanical illustrations. In addition, Enola mentions that flowers and botany are considered to be a female hobby, and half the genteel ladies in England might thus be considered botanists (*Bizarre Bouquets* 48).

In *The Case of The Bizarre Bouquets,* she finds out that Dr Watson has been kidnapped and pays a visit to his wife, Mary Watson. A peculiar bouquet catches her attention among the flowers sent by those who are concerned for Watson's wellbeing. When Enola recognises the strange flower arrangement, she starts to think about the conditions in which these plants grow: "The poppies must have been

forced in a hothouse – all flowers except snowdrops came from hothouses at this time of year; nothing remarkable in that. But that the asparagus should have been so cultivated – most peculiar" (46). Drawing upon her botanical knowledge, Enola deduces that the sender of the bouquet must possess a keen understanding and must have cultivated those specific plants in an enclosed location: "Who on earth would trouble with such a useless prickle-bush as hawthorn in a hothouse, when like a weed it grew everywhere in the countryside?" (46). The bouquet must have come from "[s]omeone eccentric, petty and spiteful in quite a creative way, someone enjoying an interesting 'garden' variety of gleeful madness. And someone so dedicated to the pursuit of botanical malice that he—or she—grew hawthorn in a hothouse" (57). Later, Enola resolves to keep an eye on the house of the Watsons, anticipating the possibility of another delivery. She manages to catch another bouquet and speaks to the boy who delivered it, acquiring a crucial clue that sheds light on the identity of the perpetrator.

Enola sees herself as a rationalist (*Pink Fan* 146) and prioritises logic. She remarks that she has read her father's logic books, Malthus and Darwin, and holds rational and scientific views like her parents (*Missing Marquess* 19). Although Enola may not have expertise in chemistry or other sciences (except botany) as Sherlock has, she is enthusiastic about learning about sciences such as chemistry, higher mathematics, and modern literature. She has strong aspirations of attending university to further her knowledge which is a testament to her scientific disposition (*Gypsy Goodbye* 107).

In short, both Enola and Sherlock exhibit a profound reliance on scientific methods in their approaches to solving mysteries. Sherlock's primary scientific pursuits revolve prominently around the field of chemistry. Enola's scientific interest, on the other hand, lies predominantly in botany. Despite the divergence in their specific scientific focuses, both characters share a commonality in having scientific minds. This shared trait becomes evident as they integrate their scientific knowledge into the process of solving cases.

Disguise

Sherlock Holmes is portrayed as a master of disguise, which is an indispensable tool in his detective work. Through adopting various personas, Sherlock blends into environments without drawing attention. Disguising himself enables Sherlock Holmes to infiltrate diverse social circles, gaining trust and collecting information from suspects and witnesses.

Sherlock Holmes uses various personas, including that of a drunken-looking groom, an Italian priest, an elderly man, an elderly woman, and the plumber Escott among other notable examples. His mastery of disguise is so exceptional that on numerous

occasions Watson struggles to recognise him at first glance. In "A Scandal in Bohemia", Watson describes an encounter where Holmes enters the room disguised:

> It was close upon four before the door opened, and a drunken-looking groom, ill-kempt and side-whiskered, with an inflamed face and disreputable clothes, walked into the room. Accustomed as I was to my friend's amazing powers in the use of disguises, I had to look three times before I was certain that it was indeed he. (Doyle 167)

Enola's ongoing escape from the Holmes brothers necessitates her to perpetually conceal her true identity. Initially, Enola transforms her appearance into that of a widow by pilfering a dress from her mother's wardrobe. Clad in black attire, she not only ages her look by a decade but also renders herself unidentifiable. This allows her to reach London without getting noticed and to initiate her mission to find her mother (*Missing Marquess* 104-105).

Another reason for her to be in disguise is that Enola, as a young girl devoid of any professional titles, finds herself compelled to maintain a constant state of disguise while detecting. Hence, in *The Case of the Left-Handed Lady*, Enola creates a persona named Ivy Meshle to navigate her daily life. In this guise, she assumes the role of the made-up perditorian Dr Ragostin's secretary. Within the same novel, she further conceals her identity by posing as Dr Ragostin's wife, a necessary adjustment to appear as more refined. Thanks to her clever disguise, Enola is able to be taken seriously and to conduct her interrogation with the mother of the missing Lady Cecily.

In *The Case of the Bizarre Bouquets*, she chooses to disguise herself as an attractive woman named Miss Viola Everseau to approach Mary Watson under the guise of being a former patient of the doctor, gathering information about the missing Dr Watson. She must alter her appearance and earn the trust of individuals connected to the investigation. Potentially because of that, the series is suffused with descriptions of attires, of makeup, and of hair. Additionally, her disguises involve an awareness of fashion and trends that she needs to consider to meet society's expectations:

> The hair was a problem. In order to pass as a woman, you see, I had to wear it up. Girls wore their frocks short and their hair long, but women had to wear their dresses long and their hair 'up.' While almost every other inch of a gentlewoman must be covered during the daytime, her ears, it seemed, must be always bared. (*Left-Handed Lady* 36)

Enola recognises the importance of disguise to establish and maintain her assumed identity and to blend in or stand out as needed to solve the mysteries she encounters. In *The Case of the Peculiar Pink Fan,* Enola must blend into an environment without attracting too much attention, so she disguises herself as a female scholar: "I was got up as a female scholar, with my unlovely hair in a plain bun and my narrow, sallow face disguised by ebony-rimmed spectacles. These, while minimising my alarming nose, also made me an object rather beneath notice, as no fashionable lady would ever wear glasses" (*Pink Fan* 8).

While Sherlock Holmes has shorter periods of disguises and is able to rid himself of his disguises during an investigation, Enola has to remain disguised due to her being on the run in order to live freely and because she is too young to be a trustworthy detective. Nonetheless, both Sherlock and Enola have remarkable abilities in disguise and acting, which play a pivotal role in their detective work.

Solving Ciphers

Sherlock's expertise in deciphering codes allows him to solve complex cases and uncover hidden meanings within mysterious texts. Sherlock remarks on his familiarity with all forms of secret writings, having written a monograph analysing one hundred and sixty ciphers (Doyle 523).

In "The Adventure of the Dancing Men", Holmes is faced with a perplexing case where a cipher is the key to solving the mystery. The enigma unfolds when Mr Cubitt becomes aware of his wife's unease, brought on by a series of encrypted letters from America, containing hieroglyphs of dancing figures. Sherlock cracks the cipher of the dancing men by analysing the frequency of "x"-shaped figures and considering the fact that the most commonly used letter in English is "e". After deciphering the cryptic code, Holmes sends a message to the person who is behind the coded messages, the murderer, requesting a meeting. The coded summons reaches the culprit, who believes that the woman he loves has issued the call. The murderer is caught thanks to Sherlock's decoding of the dancing men and writing a coded message in response.

Enola's interest in ciphers is evident from the beginning of the series. Her passion for codes mirrors her mother's, and it is further nurtured by a small cipher booklet that her mother thoughtfully compiled and left for her prior to her departure from home. Enola expresses this interest as follows: "I enjoyed the ciphers after all, for I loved finding things, and Mum's ciphers gave me a new way to do this, first discovering the hidden meaning, then the treasure" (*Missing Marquess* 88). Enola finds this treasure as she deciphers messages in her mother's cipher booklet. After deciphering one of the messages and finding a "Bank of England note for a hundred pounds" (81), she realises that her mother has hidden riches for her.

Another cipher that leads to money is written on a page of the booklet decorated with ivy trailing along a picket fence. At first, she struggles to decipher the two-lined code. However, she looks at the cipher again and picks out her name in the first three letters of the top line combined with the first two letters of the bottom line. Realising her mother's intentional depiction of the ivy zigzagging up and down the picket fence, she follows the same pattern to rewrite the cipher. Additionally, she observes that the ivy in the painting grew from right to left, prompting her to read the words in the same direction (89). With the financial resources she discovered,

Enola attains the freedom to reside independently in London, allowing her to pursue her passion.

Enola also solves ciphers in her quest to solve mysteries. *The Case of the Cryptic Crinoline* revolves around the abduction of Enola's landlady, Mrs Tupper. The young detective starts searching the landlady's ransacked room and finds an old crinoline on the floor belonging to Mrs Tupper with some embroidery on it. When she finally understands that the crinoline actually conceals a Morse code in its embroidered pattern, she goes to the Women's Club's library to crack the code by learning international Morse code (83-84).

Enola's interest in the arrangement and composition of words and letters can also be seen when she devises word games to name the personas she assumes by manipulating letters. When she chooses the name Miss Ivy Meshle, for instance, she combines "Ivy", signifying "fidelity" to her mother, with "Meshle", a sort of cipher derived from reversing "Holmes" into "mes hol" and spelling it phonetically (*Missing Marquess* 115).

Moreover, in her quest to locate her mother, Enola creates ciphers for communication. Placing cryptic advertisements in newspapers, she hopes that her mother will recognise her unique style and respond. Enola crafts a coded message requesting communication. Adopting her mother's approach, she then reverses and zigzags the message into two lines. Enola believes that this message will capture her mother's attention and prompt Eudoria to answer: "I knew that my mother, who could not resist a cipher, would give this one her fullest attention if and when she saw it" (207).

Enola and Sherlock share a proficiency in solving ciphers, enabling them to unravel mysteries effectively. Furthermore, both employ ciphers to draw individuals to themselves, with Sherlock using one to ensnare a criminal and Enola employing them to reach out to her mother. Unlike Sherlock, ciphers are not confined to Enola's investigations; they permeate various aspects of her life.

Distinctive Traits of Enola Holmes

Enola Holmes shares some traits with the original Sherlock Holmes. However, she also exhibits distinct characteristics and interests that set her apart as a unique detective. These traits, namely writing down her reasoning process, interest in fashion, understanding encoded social cues, and a talent for sketching, will be analysed by showing how she utilises them to solve cases.

Writing Down the Reasoning Process

Enola's reasoning method differs from Sherlock's. She employs her own method, effectively unravelling the unknown aspects of mysteries and answering questions

that perplex her. While concurrently pursuing the secondary investigation involving the missing Lord Tewksbury, Enola's primary focus in *The Case of the Missing Marquess* is to solve the mystery of the disappearance of her mother. With the drawing kit her mother has given her, she makes a list of questions:

> If she had any distance to travel, why did she not use the bicycle?
> Why did she dress so oddly?
> What did she do with all the money?
> If she were running away, why did she carry no baggage? (56-57)

Enola identifies the critical questions that must be addressed in the case by listing all the unknowns and points that need to be investigated. Thus, she proceeds to search for answers to these questions, and gradually sheds light on the case as she finds information.

In *The Case of the Left-Handed Lady*, Enola demonstrates another instance of documenting her reasoning process. Engaging in a careful examination of the case, she weighs the pros and cons of various possibilities, studying the investigation. She then draws a conclusion according to this process:

> Regarding the first objection, it could be explained away by saying that the kidnapper, or kidnappers, had rendered the lady unconscious before she could scream, perhaps by the use of chloroform. And regarding the ransom and the choice of victim, it was possible – just possible – that Lady Cecily had been taken for another, nefarious purpose on which I preferred not to dwell; indeed, I only dimly understood this practice called "white slavery." (87)

As a result, her practice of documenting her thought process leads her to solutions of the mysteries' unresolved aspects or the entire case itself.

Sherlock embarks on his reasoning process drawing from gathered information and inquiries. However, the reader mostly gains insight into his journey of logical reasoning at the denouement. While Enola's observational skills are less extraordinary compared to Sherlock's, her approach to solving mysteries revolves around logical thinking. However, she employs a different technique in her approach. She methodically records the unknown aspects of the case and documents her logical reasoning. Given that Enola is the narrator in *The Enola Holmes Mysteries*, readers are privy to her logical thought process throughout the narrative.

Interest in Fashion

Throughout the series, the author often highlights Enola's relationship with clothing. Apart from the necessary disguises, Enola not only knows how to dress accordingly in various surroundings, but she is also well-versed in older fashion trends. At a first glance, it may appear that Enola's keen interest in clothing is simply a trait associated with her gender, but a closer examination reveals that her attention to fashion is a vital aspect of her detective work. As mentioned earlier, in *The Case of*

the Cryptic Crinoline, Mrs Tupper's room is ransacked by her abductors. Enola, as she inspects the scattered belongings on the floor, stumbles upon a crinoline frock that surprises her due to its old-fashioned appearance: "Very well made this dress was, with a ruffled peplum, ruffles at the shoulders also, and yards and yards of Prussian blue silk in its vast skirt, which spread full circle in the style of thirty years ago" (36). Enola has a hard time understanding why Mrs Tupper, who generally avoids keeping outdated items and alters her dresses to match current trends, would keep this outdated dress. The confusion deepens as Enola discovers its crinoline, an antiquated petticoat. Upon closer examination, she observes the seams being covered by sturdy grosgrain ribbon embroidered with flowers and she finds herself gazing at the embroidery: "Perversely, then, I quite admired the crinoline's adornment of blue ribbon embroidered with flowers of pink, peach, yellow, lavender, and other lovely pastel hues, for I thought embroidered posies very pretty indeed and wished I knew how to make them" (39). Enola later figures out that the embroidered flowers conceal a hidden message coded in Morse code and ultimately unveils a crucial discovery on the way to finding Mrs Tupper. That is to say, Enola's fashion awareness impacts her observations of Mrs Tupper's dressing habits, leading to questions about the old-fashioned dress and its equally old-fashioned crinoline. This attention ultimately drives her to inspect the embroidery on the crinoline, contributing to the progression of the case.

In *The Case of the Peculiar Pink Fan*, while Enola is in the London Ladies' Lavatory, one fashionable lady stands out with her latest fashion and striking dress: "Two richly dressed matrons, their voluminous skirts trailing, flanked a younger, slimmer female in the very latest Paris fashion—indeed, it was the first time I had seen a bell skirt on an actual person rather than a department-store mannequin" (9). As the visibly constrained lady turns towards Enola, she immediately recognises her, recalling a previous case she undertook; it is Lady Cecily. The strangeness of Lady Cecily is cemented by her holding a pink paper fan that does not match her outfit at all. Enola does not understand why Lady Cecily, who is dressed in a "lime skirt, creamy kid leather gloves and boots" (13), would wear such a mismatched folded paper pink fan. Lady Cecily manages to sneak the fan to Enola, and in the following pages of the book it is revealed that it was written on in invisible ink to ask for help. Once again, Enola's rigorous observation of clothing and fashion proves instrumental to her solution of the mysteries. The abovementioned analyses are done by Enola, owing to her knowledge of and interest in fashion, and these perceptions substantiate her claim: "My dear brother, dresses are as distinctive to me as cigar ashes are to you" (*Gypsy Goodbye* 104).

Understanding Encoded Social Cues

Eudoria Holmes leaves behind a parcel that she instructs Mrs Lane, the cook, to deliver to Enola on Enola's birthday – the same day she mysteriously disappears. The gift consists of (among other items) "a stout book entitled *The Meanings of Flowers: Including Also Notes Upon the Messages Conveyed by Fans, Handkerchiefs, Sealing-Wax, and Postage-Stamps*" (*Missing Marquess* 6). This booklet, which contains a detailed account of encrypted communication, shows Enola how people, particularly women, exchanged messages covertly. There are multiple instances in which Enola relies on the contents of the booklet to decipher secret codes and messages, enabling her to tackle several cases with quick understanding. For instance, in *The Case of the Peculiar Pink Fan*, during their encounter in the Ladies' Lavatory, Lady Cecily reaches out to Enola, using her pink fan to convey that something is wrong and that she requires help:

> Lady Cecily seized this moment, when their attention was distracted, to send her fan into a frenzied fluttering, clearly a signal of agitation and distress.
> I let my fan rest for a moment upon my right cheek. Yes. Telling her that I understood; something was wrong. (14)

By deciphering the meaning of the fan, Enola becomes aware of this distress call and takes on a case of coerced marriage to rescue Lady Cecily.

The unusual bouquet sent to Dr Watson's residence displays another instance of Enola's understanding of social cues. What makes this bouquet peculiar is the inclusion of asparagus, hawthorn, convolvulus, and white poppies. In the section "Scientific Knowledge", I already mentioned that Enola employs her scientific expertise in botany to analyse the circumstances in which these strange flowers were cultivated. Additionally, she simultaneously tries to figure out the significance behind this unusual choice, suspecting that the arrangement might carry a hidden message or symbolic meaning. As it turns out, her analysis is correct:

> [T]his was England, and in British folklore, hawthorn—what she called 'may'—was a shrub long associated with pagan deities and with faeries, a powerful symbol of bad luck. No countrywoman would ever bring a sprig of its pretty cluster blossoms indoors, for to do so might bring down calamity upon the house, even death. (45-46)

Enola is drawn to the bizarre bouquet, prompting her to inquire about the sender of the "hatred in floral form" (59). She writes a message to be placed in London newspapers' personal columns, signed as Mrs Watson, asking "Hawthorn, convolvulus, asparagus, and poppies: what do you want?" (58). The response states: "M.M.W.: Deadly nightshade. Thank yew" (94). Enola deciphers the message's meaning, knowing that deadly nightshade is a wildflower with poisonous berries, while "yew" symbolises the graveyard (94). This reveals that it is a death threat directed at Dr. Watson. Through her observation, she manages to obtain a lead on the kidnapper of Dr Watson thanks to her knowledge of the language of flowers.

In conclusion, Enola can discern when something is wrong and find the clues leading her very close to answers due to her ability and expertise in deciphering encoded social cues.

Sketching

Similar to her other interests and abilities, Enola's talent for drawing also comes from Eudoria Holmes. Among the gifts left by Enola's mother, along with the aforementioned booklet, is a drawing kit consisting of paper, lead pencils, a penknife for sharpening them, and India rubber erasers. Although Enola could only "draw to a limited degree" (*Missing Marquess* 6), her mother encouraged her with this kit. *The Case of The Missing Marquess*, which revolves around the runaway Lord Tewksbury, takes an unexpected turn with Tewksbury's imprisonment, leading to an unexpected set of issues. At first, Enola thinks that Cutter, the villain, and Madame Laelia (the astral perditorian) are in the kidnapping business together to profit from abducting people and collecting ransoms. However, the case is solved when Enola uses her drawing kit to make sketches of the two suspects, revealing that they are the same person. In the end, Enola leaves these sketches for Inspector Lestrade, hoping he understands their significance. The sketches serve as a facial composite, helping to identify and apprehend the suspect.

Enola's sketching proves crucial once again when Mrs Tupper disappears. While investigating the case outside, Enola senses she is being followed and sketches the man tailing her. Upon returning, the household assistant of Mrs Tupper identifies the man from the drawings, claiming that he is the same person who previously hit her and abducted Mrs Tupper (*Cryptic Crinoline* 66). Alarmed by this revelation, Enola comprehends the danger she is in and hastens her investigation.

In the case of Dr Watson's disappearance, Enola employs her scientific knowledge of botany and understanding of the meaning of flowers to gather clues. Her investigation leads her to the suspect, Flora, a middle-aged woman with a tragic past – her face was disfigured by rats as a baby. Cared for by her sister Pertelote, Flora resides with Pertelote and her husband. However, Pertelote's husband has Flora institutionalised by order of Dr Watson who concludes Flora is a potential threat to society. When released by Pertelote, Flora takes revenge by killing Pertelote's husband and holds a grudge against Dr Watson as well. While Enola identifies the suspect and unravels her motive, the mystery surrounding Dr Watson's whereabouts persists. Feeling helpless, she reflects on the known facts and engages in doodling to help her thinking process: "While far from being an artist, I have a knack for drawing people's faces in an exaggerated sort of way, and I have found that doing so helps me think" (*Bizarre Bouquets* 140). As she sketches Flora's disfigured face, she transforms her features into flower elements of the bizarre bouquet: "I had given her a convolvulus mouth, an upside-down rosebud for a nose, and now I went on to give

her poppies for eyes, and for hair, asparagus fronds, of course, wild and stringy" (143). Enola understands the floral symbolism of the bouquet, except for asparagus. She starts to ponder the significance of this plant and Flora's abundant asparagus cultivation. Ultimately Enola realises the plant's association with the word "spear", implying violence. Connecting the dots, she decodes "a-spear-a-gus" as "Spear of Gus". The revelation strikes Enola as she understands that "Gus" refers to Augustus, undoubtedly referring to Pertelote's husband. Following Flora's act of murdering Augustus, she retaliates by confining Dr Watson to an insane asylum under the name of Augustus Kippersalt as revenge. In this instance, Enola's sketching of Flora leads to the questioning that unravels the mystery and facilitates the rescue of Dr Watson.

Enola's sketching, at times, as in the first example, serves as an illuminating tool, bringing clarity to the situation. It also functions akin to a facial composite, aiding in the identification of villains. Additionally, sketching enhances her cognitive process, enabling her to think more critically and delve deeper into her examination of the mysteries. In conclusion, Enola's artistic talent, showcased throughout the novels, not only adds depth to her character but also functions as a tool in the investigation process.

Conclusion

The Enola Holmes Mysteries, a book series for young adults, introduces the 14-year-old sister of Sherlock Holmes as an original protagonist within the setting created by Arthur Conan Doyle. The novels incorporate familiar characters such as Sherlock, Mycroft, Dr Watson, and Lestrade, alongside original characters by Nancy Springer like Enola and Eudoria Holmes, as well as other side characters encountered by Enola.

Enola's sleuthing combines elements both shared with and distinct from her famous 'brother'. However, the two traits Enola shares with Sherlock are notably not on the same level as his. While Doyle's Sherlock is primarily presented as a scientific person with remarkably sharp intelligence, Springer's Enola exhibits a limited and more subtle manifestation of these traits respectively. Despite these differences, they both have expertise in solving ciphers, making them adept at unravelling mysteries involving various codes. Additionally, Enola's proficiency in disguise closely resembles Sherlock's mastery in this domain. They both adeptly assume different identities to gather clues and unravel the mysteries they face. Intelligence and knowledge are common qualities for traditional detectives, and Sherlock possesses these features. However, it is through her expertise in solving ciphers and disguises that Enola establishes a solid connection to Sherlock, evident to the reader.

Yet, besides sharing traits with her literary predecessor Sherlock, Enola is a detective in her own right, who stands out with her own methods and interests. She benefits greatly from writing down the reasoning process, her interest in fashion, her ability to understand encoded social cues and her sketching while investigating. These characteristics empower her to forge her own path distinct from Sherlock. Enola manages to carve out her own identity within the Sherlock universe, emerging as a new addition to the Holmes legacy.

Overall, introducing a new detective to the Sherlock Holmes universe offers a connection with the iconic Sherlock through his prominent features. While Springer does incorporate certain elements of Sherlock's and his methods, Enola's distinctive traits take precedence as her defining characteristics. These traits are indispensable to her success in solving mysteries and set her apart from Sherlock.

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The present volume is a collection of select papers presented at Captivating Criminality 8: Crime Fiction, Femininities and Masculinities (Bamberg, July 2022), the eighth annual conference of the International Crime Fiction Association. As gender and crime fiction is a popular topic with researchers from all areas of (world) crime fiction and the contributions ranging from the highly popularised Victorian Jack the Ripper case to contemporary domestic noir novels written by authors such as Gillian Flynn, this book covers crime fiction studies from a broad variety of angles. The chapters in this book cover texts from all over the world in a joint effort to show that crime fiction (studies) is omnipresent, diverse, and – above all – topical and that gender is one of the mainstays of the genre and a determinant of its topicality and diversity.