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A taxonomy of the female private detective in contemporary literature

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A taxonomy of the female private detective in contemporary literature

by

Michele Marie Regenold

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of MASTER OF ARTS

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INTRODUCTION: A BRIEF HISTORY OF DETECTIVE FICTION

The name Sherlock Holmes is nearly synonymous with the word detective for many people due to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s vastly popular ratiocinative detective stories. However, Edgar Allan Poe is considered the author of the first ratiocinative or classical detective story in the 1840s. Poe introduced and Doyle masterfully articulated the classical detective formula while writers such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers continued the classical tradition well into the twentieth century (Cawelti 80).

The classical formula, based primarily on Poe’s work, begins with an unsolved crime. The action then revolves around the puzzle; thus, the detective’s investigation and his or her solution to the crime are the most important elements (Cawelti 80-81). The climax is usually the detective’s announcement of the solution (Cawelti 87). The classical formula has four main roles: the victim, the criminal, the detective, and the people involved in the investigation but who need assistance in solving the crime. Writers must take care not to make either the victim or the criminal too sympathetic since the focus of the story is on the detective’s investigation (Cawelti 91-92). The final part of the classical formula is the setting, such as a country house, which, in its isolation from the rest of the world, "furnishes a limited and controlled backdrop against which the clues and suspects so central to the story can be silhouetted" (Cawelti 97).
The hard-boiled detective story formula, whose differences from the classical formula will be elaborated on later, was created by many authors whose work appeared in the pulp magazine *Black Mask* in the 1920s. The salient differences are that the focus of the story is on the detective's investigative process rather than the solution, that the setting is a modern city rather than an isolated place, and that the detective is threatened with violence endemic to his society.

The history of the female detective in fiction is nearly as old as that of the male detective. Her debut is sandwiched between the first detective mystery, Edgar Allan Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, 1841, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes adventure, *A Study in Scarlet*, 1888. The first fictional women detectives were Mrs. Paschal in W. Stephens Hayward's *The Experiences of a Lady Detective*, 1861-1864\(^1\) and Mrs. Gladden in Andrew Forrester's *The Female Detective*, 1864. Both characters worked for the British police as well as doing private investigations\(^2\) (Craig 15).

The woman detective was not nearly as anomalous in fiction as she was in fact from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. From about 1875 to 1919, many of the women detectives in fiction were working not to earn a living but to clear a male relative's good name. Intuition was often an important resource of these detectives rather than the ratiocination of Sherlock Holmes. Baroness Orczy's *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* and Wilkie Collins's *The Law*...
and the Lady are just two examples among many of the woman detective working to restore some injustice (Craig 21).

Anna Katherine Green was the first American woman to write detective fiction. Her early novels centered around a male police detective with an unofficial female assistant. Miss Butterworth, a prelude to amateur "old-maid detectives whose nosiness suddenly finds a respectable outlet," first appeared in 1897 (Craig 38-39). Green also created a younger detective, Violet Strange, who appeared for the first time in The Golden Slipper and Other Problems in 1915 (Craig 42).

But interestingly enough the first American woman detective was a detective’s wife who assisted her husband in Harry Rockwood’s Clarice Dyke, The Female Detective which was in print in 1883 (date of the first edition is unknown) (Craig 42).

Not all of the early female detectives relied on their so-called "feminine" traits, ie. intuition, to solve crimes. Hugh C. Weir’s Miss Madelyn Mack, Detective, 1914, relies on Holmesian deduction and a Watson-type assistant. Mack is clever and capable (Craig 43). But these early female detectives were created to generate sales and not to exemplify the emancipation of women.

During the Golden Age of detective fiction, the time between the world wars when the classical formula was at its peak in popularity, the old lady sleuths of Britain’s Agatha Christie and Patricia Wentworth became increasingly popular. Miss Jane Marple first appeared in the early thirties and continued the tradition of Holmesian elucidation and
deduction. In their study, *The Lady Investigates*, Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan write

Miss Marple stands for intelligent, moderate conservatism although, in the tradition of the deferential female, she is always hesitant about proffering an opinion. She has been brought up to accept masculine authority. In one sense, of course, her principle (sic) activity is subversive of this concept, although basically it is designed to support the theory that a woman's talents will find a suitable outlet in her own sphere (168-169).

Like some of her male counterparts, Patricia Wentworth's Miss Maud Silver has eccentricities: a former governess turned "professional enquiry agent" and a wearer of old-fashioned Victorian-style clothing (Craig 172).

The American precursor of the female private investigator was Rex Stout's Theodolina "Dol" Bonner in *The Hand in the Glove*, 1937 (Klein 116). Although Dol Bonner successfully discovers the mentally ill criminal, Kathleen Gregory Klein argues in *The Woman Detective* that Stout has undermined Dol's competence as a detective. According to Klein, "Stout validates Archie Goodwin's [Nero Wolfe's sidekick] suspicions of women detectives; even though Bonner's success is apparent in her brief, subsequent appearances, this first impression establishes readers' limited expectations of her" (118).

Although the female private eye often appeared in the pulps of the thirties, the first independent female detective to appear in "sustained, full-length works" (Klein 126) was Gale Gallagher's (aka Will Oursler
and Margaret Scott) *I Found Him Dead*, 1947 and *Chord in Crimson*, 1949. A. A. Fair’s (aka Erle Stanley Gardner, author of Perry Mason stories) detective Bertha Cool predates Gallagher, first appearing in 1939, but she worked with a younger male partner (Klein 126).

The modern female private investigator of the seventies and eighties is dealt with by her creators in various ways. In Britain, P.D. James arguably uses Cordelia Gray in *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, 1972, and *The Skull Beneath the Skin*, 1982, to conclude that private investigation is unsuitable for women. Liza Cody’s Anna Lee is a peon in a detective agency in London. Both characters are considered "soft-boiled" since the violence is less frequent and their investigative styles are more similar to the classical pattern than the hard-boiled pattern of intimidation and temptation (Klein 160).

In the United States, Marcia Muller published her first Sharon McConne mystery *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* in 1977. McConne is the lone investigator for a legal cooperative in San Francisco. She is the first modern American female hard-boiled private detective, but she is soon overshadowed by the smart and savvy characters created by Sara Paretsky and Sue Grafton in the early eighties.

The eighties saw an even greater variety of female detectives: policewomen, amateur sleuths, hard-boiled and soft-boiled. Some are married, some single, some divorced, some heterosexual, some homosexual.  


First, the conventions of the hard-boiled detective, as distinct from the classical or "gifted amateur" detective, will be examined. A brief discussion of feminism and how one might interpret a feminist hero will follow.

Using selected novels by three women authors, Linda Barnes, Sue Grafton, and Sara Paretsky, I will discuss the ways in which each author utilizes and varies the hard-boiled conventions: the introduction of the hero, the introduction of the investigation, the detective’s loner status, the detective’s sexual relationships, other female characters, and finally, violence.

With the expansion of the genre and the development of new sub-genres such as lesbian detectives, detective fiction is bound to undergo some change. But can hard-boiled detective fiction embody feminist perspectives without violating the traditions of the genre? Yes, feminist revision of the hard-boiled formula is possible.
CONVENTIONS OF THE HARD-BOILED DETECTIVE

In order to understand the significance of the differences between the female hard-boiled detective and the male hard-boiled detective, one must first understand the conventions of the hard-boiled formula. And the hard-boiled formula must be briefly compared to the classical or "gifted amateur" formula. The pattern of classical detective fiction is as follows: the introduction of the detective, the presentation of the crime, the investigation, and the solution and apprehension of the criminal. Hard-boiled detective fiction has two important distinctions from the classical pattern. First, the hard-boiled detective's quest to discover the criminal and accomplish justice is more important than the drama of the solution. That is, Hercule Poirot, a classical detective, rounds up his suspects, explains the crime, and reveals the criminal. In other words, the process of figuring out whodunit is more important than the puzzle's solution in the hard-boiled formula. Second, the detective is subjected to intimidation and temptation during his investigation unlike Hercule Poirot who questions and suspects numerous people without being shot at or beaten up later (Cawelti 142).

The male hard-boiled detective was made famous by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler in the thirties. Ross Macdonald and Robert Parker have continued the hard-boiled tradition, making some minor adjustments to the tough-guy detective. The character of the
detective is very important in hard-boiled fiction since its emphasis is more on the detective and less on the puzzle.

Characteristics of the hard-boiled detective are familiar. He's a tough guy who "paradoxically mixes cynicism and honor, brutality and sentimentality, failure and success" and he has learned through experience that evil is endemic to the social order (Cawelti 149). He makes his living as a private detective. Having chosen a marginal way of life, he is often out of money, but he can function with the wealthy (Cawelti 145). He also conducts business on the mean streets of a city. His office is usually in a low-rent neighborhood and is shabbily furnished. He consumes a lot of alcohol, often having a bottle stashed in his desk. He not only works alone but is a loner. Friends are few and family non-existent. In his essay, "The Hard-Boiled Detective Novel", George Grella argues that "the detective is finally alone, not only because the romantic hero is doomed to solitude, but because he is too good for the society he inhabits" (110). He uses violence and wit to protect himself. According to Grella, "Their [Marlowe's and Archer's] insults and wisecracks are the badge of their courage; refusing to show pain or fear, they answer punishment with flippancy" (107).

Unlike the classical ratiocinative detective, the hard-boiled hero becomes emotionally involved in his cases and takes a moral stance toward the criminal, often becoming judge and jury (Cawelti 143). A case in point is the final confrontation between Sam Spade and Brigid
O'Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon* when Spade turns her over to the police. Spade is definitely tempted not to turn her in but he resists, telling Brigid "I won't because all of me wants to--wants to say to hell with the consequences and do it--and because--God damn you--you've counted on that with me the same as you counted on that with the others" (Hammett ch. XX 439).

Brigid is the perfect example of the trouble-causing woman or the woman as evil in hard-boiled fiction. Women are both a source of pleasure and a possible threat to the detective since sex is pleasurable but also a potential trap. Cawelti says women are usually described as blonde and "aggressive-breasted" (large pointed breasts) (153-154). In hard-boiled fiction, women have undergone a transformation, arguably a negative one, from victim to villain. But even if a woman is not the murderer, she still threatens the detective (Cawelti 156). According to Cawelti, "the real hostility of the hard-boiled story is directed toward women and the rich" (158).

**A Definition of Feminism**

But how might one use the hard-boiled formula to express a feminist perspective? Possibly the most basic meaning of feminism is a doctrine advocating social and political equality with men. But the extent of social and political equality depends on the kind of feminist you talk to. Radical feminists insist that true equality will only be
attained when we have gotten rid of all the patriarchal structures in our society, i.e. government, education, medicine, law, etc., and replaced them. For radical feminists, social and political change cannot come fast enough. Since the hard-boiled detective’s job is to bring the criminal to justice, thereby restoring some order, however briefly, to society, a radical feminist approach to the formula would be largely impossible unless the novel were set in a future time or on another planet.

For mainstream feminists, a reorganization of the above-mentioned patriarchal structures seems more pragmatic. In her book *Sisters in Crime: Feminism and the Crime Novel*, Maureen Reddy defines feminism to mean a way of looking at the world that places women’s experiences at the center. It sees women as capable of intelligence, moral reasoning, and independent action, while also giving attention to the multivarious social, legal, and psychological limitations placed on women by the patriarchal societies in which most live. Feminism is always aware of the complexity and diversity of women’s lives, especially those dissimilarities arising from differences of class, race, and nationality; however, it also insists that within this pluralism is a shared core of experience that is overlooked only at peril. Feminism asserts that women may indeed be different from men, but that few of these differences are biologically determined and that different ought not be used as a code word for lesser (Reddy’s italics) (9).
The assumption that men and women were different was "ingrained in our earliest upbringing," according to Gloria Steinem in "Humanism and the Second Wave of Feminism" (14). Steinem says, "In trying to realize our full humanity, we are not only finding women's full humanity but men's too . . . . In trying to complete the full circle of ourselves, we have our whole selves to gain" (49). A goal of feminism has been that women be treated as human beings, not as female objects or female men. In that vein, I suggest that feminists' ultimate goal is respect for the individual regardless of gender, race, class, etc.

In a collection of essays on detective fiction, Carolyn Heilbrun suggests the connection of androgyny and detective fiction. To explain what she means by androgyny she quotes psychologist Sandra Bem:

"But I would argue that a healthy sense of maleness or femaleness involves little more than being able to look into the mirror and to be perfectly comfortable with the mirror and to be perfectly comfortable with the body that one sees there . . . But beyond being comfortable with the body, one's gender need have no other influence on one's behavior or life style" (2).

Androgyny then is treating people first and foremost as individual human beings, who happen to be X gender, X race, X class, etc. Heilbrun's interpretation is that an androgynous person "is characterized by an ability to cope. Those who are stereotypical males and females are unable to act
when they do not know what the appropriate action is. Placed in an unprescribed situation, they sink into bewilderment and inaction" (2).

Women detectives must be able to cope with their worlds both as females and as detectives. A feminist perspective which incorporates respect for femaleness with the respect for individual abilities and skills can be found in the novels used for this study.
COMPARISON OF THREE HARD-BOILED WOMEN

How does putting a woman into the role of hard-boiled detective alter the genre? Women detectives open up new thematic inquiries important to late twentieth century readers and thinkers. They also offer a new perspective on what is now a seventy-year-old formula.

This paper will compare three female hard-boiled detectives--Linda Barnes' Carlotta Carlyle, Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone, and Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski--with the conventions of the male hard-boiled detective. The purpose of the comparison is to show that hard-boiled detective fiction can embody feminist perspectives without violating the traditions of the genre.

I will use the first novel in each author's series as well as a later novel. Each author published a novel in 1990, so I used that novel, no matter where it falls in the authors' series to examine character development since the first novel. In 1990 Barnes' Coyote, her third female detective novel, was published; Grafton's "G" Is for Gumshoe, her seventh, was published; and Paretsky's Burn Marks, her sixth, appeared. Both Grafton and Paretsky published their first female detective novels, "A" Is for Alibi and Indemnity Only, respectively, in 1982. Since then, their works have been the subject of much attention, literary and otherwise, especially Paretsky's. Barnes' female detective appeared in 1987, after Barnes had already achieved some success with a
mystery series about a male detective, Michael Spraggue. As a relative newcomer to this subgenre, Barnes has received scant attention from literary critics and undeservedly so. Her writing is engaging, fresh, and funny and her themes are timely and relevant.

Introducing the Female Hero

The introductions of both the detective and the purpose of his investigation are the usual starting points for a hard-boiled detective novel and all three authors used this basic formula in their first novels. But none of the introductions is an exact replica of the traditional formula. Grafton, Paretsky, and Barnes challenge the conventions by changing the usual ingredients of tough-guy detective, seedy office, and sexy woman client.

Gender as a factor

The first obvious change in the convention of the tough-guy detective is that all three are female. All are private investigators, that is, professionals who are paid to do detective work, their main source of income. Grafton’s Kinsey Millhone introduces herself immediately in "A" Is for Alibi, a pattern Grafton uses in Kinsey’s subsequent adventures as well:

My name is Kinsey Millhone. I’m a private investigator, licensed by the state of California. I’m thirty-two years old, twice
divorced, no kids. The day before yesterday I killed someone and the fact weighs heavily on my mind. I’m a nice person and I have a lot of friends. My apartment is small but I like living in a cramped space. I’ve lived in trailers most of my life, but lately they’ve been getting too elaborate for my taste, so now I live in one room, a "bachelorette." I don’t have pets. I don’t have houseplants. I spend a lot of time on the road and I don’t like leaving things behind. Aside from the hazards of my profession, my life has always been ordinary, uneventful, and good. Killing someone feels odd to me and I haven’t quite sorted it through (1).

The fact that Kinsey is female is not that obvious. The only hard evidence about Kinsey’s gender in the first paragraph of "A" Is for Alibi is the reference to her apartment as a "‘bachelorette’" (1). Her androgynous first name gives no clue to the detective’s gender. The personal details Kinsey reveals, that she has no children and is a nice person for example, suggest that this first person narrator is a woman since male detectives tend to disclose work-oriented details rather than personal-life details. Since Grafton does not draw attention to a woman private investigator, the implication is that the combination of female and private detective is perfectly reasonable and natural. The real issue in this introduction is not Kinsey’s gender but the fact that she killed someone. Although she is not a man, she is tough enough to kill someone, yet she is sensitive enough to worry about the effects of killing.
Sara Paretsky’s V.I. Warshawski takes a bit longer to get acquainted with. She doesn’t introduce herself the way Kinsey does. The opening paragraph of Indemnity Only sets the scene, July in Chicago. The first-person narrator enters an office whose door reads "V.I. Warshawski. Private Investigator" (1). The reader learns bits and pieces about the narrator: "I’d learned how to repair most of what could go wrong with it [the building], including the bathroom on the seventh floor, whose toilet backed up about once a month" (3). Warshawski also usually pays bills after receiving the third notice. Paretsky draws indirect attention to V.I. Warshawski’s gender: "I stuffed the insurance into my shoulder bag" (2).

But the reader is given no specific evidence that V.I. is a woman until her client arrives. V.I.’s client, a middle-aged man, is reluctant to hire her when he finds out she doesn’t have a partner because "‘this really isn’t a job for a girl to take on alone’" (5). V.I. replies, "‘I’m a woman, Mr. Thayer, and I can look out for myself. If I couldn’t, I wouldn’t be in this kind of business. If things get heavy, I’ll figure out a way to handle them—or go down trying. That’s my problem, not yours’" (5). The overwhelming impression V.I. leaves is one of competence and self-reliance.

For both Grafton and Paretsky, gender is a simple fact of life, something not worth mentioning unless someone else brings it up. Since their novels are narrated in first-person, it is perfectly natural for ordinary facts like name or gender not to come to light immediately.
People don’t usually think to themselves "My name’s Emily and I’m a woman" unless prodded by unusual or external circumstances. However, Grafton and Paretsky are making an important point about women as private detectives with the detectives’ introductions in the first novels. By making the detectives’ gender a non-issue, they made it an important statement and a response to the hard-boiled literary convention of the tough-guy detective. In Grafton’s and Paretsky’s later novels for this study, "G" Is for Gumshoe and Burn Marks, the detective’s gender is made obvious within the first two pages, either by stating her gender--Kinsey’s "118 pounds of female" ("G" 1)--or by stating her first name--"‘Victoria, sweetie, you look terrific!’" (Burn Marks 2). The female hard-boiled detective is no longer unusual and may even be a convention, so her authors don’t need to highlight in an elaborate way the fact that the detective is a woman.

Although Barnes doesn’t give the reader a list of traits like Grafton does, the readers are given plenty of clues about the narrator’s identity and gender in Barnes’ first novel, A Trouble of Fools. The first-person narrator is reading junk mail addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas C. Carlyle while "the vacuum cleaner hummed pleasantly. If you’ve never considered your Hoover’s voice soothing, you’ve probably been shoving it across a high-pile carpet. From the right distance, propelled by other hands . . . vacuum cleaner buzz could make the lullaby obsolete" (Trouble 1). The narrator dislikes household chores so much that she gives reduced rent to her tenant, Roz, in exchange for
Roz doing the basic cleaning. The narrator goes on to explain why she’s reading mail to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas C. since there is no such couple. She started getting mail for Thomas C., a more formal name for her tom cat (aka T.C.) when she listed her home phone under that name "first because women get crank calls, and second because ex-cops get crank calls" (2).

Attention is drawn to the narrator’s gender repeatedly in the first chapter, without revealing her first name, Carlotta. Barnes is advertising the fact that being raised female in American culture leaves an indelible print which is simply part of Carlotta’s personality. Although it is true that male hard-boiled detectives are also products of their culture, Hammett and Chandler, as members of a dominant group (ie. white men) in American society, were not writing about gender as a challenge to patriarchal systems. Carlotta not only reveals numerous aspects of her character and past but she describes her physical appearance, which also affects her identity:

I've got red hair, really red hair, the kind that beggars adjectives like "flaming," and Mom always told me to wear blues and greens, but every once in a while I break loose. For the rest, I was barefoot, and hadn’t even thought about makeup. I go barefoot a lot because I'm six one and I wear size 11 shoes. You may not realize this, but for all practical purposes, women's shoes stop dead at size 10. Much of my life is spent shoe shopping (Trouble 4).
Unlike Grafton and Paretsky in their first novels, Barnes has made Carlotta's gender evident from the beginning. Grafton and Paretsky had to deal with the reader expectation of a male detective in their first novels since so few hard-boiled female novels had preceded theirs. But by 1987 when Barnes' first Carlotta mystery was published, Grafton and Paretsky had published more novels and other women detective novels were beginning to appear as well. As a result of the popularity of Grafton, Paretsky, and others, Barnes no longer needed to deal with the reader expectation of a male detective. Nor did she need to prepare her readers, in a carefully androgynous introduction like Grafton's and Paretsky's, for a detective who does not fit the hard-boiled convention. A competent woman working as a private detective is expected now.

The office

The introduction of the detective is often accompanied by a description of his office, which is inevitably seedy and in a disreputable building or neighborhood. For her office space, Kinsey has a business arrangement with California Fidelity Insurance: "I do a certain number of investigations for them in exchange for two rooms with a separate entrance and a small balcony overlooking the main street of Santa Teresa" (1). Although Kinsey doesn't describe her office in detail, there is no evidence that it is shabby or squalid, like offices of male detectives often are. There is a "Sparkletts water bottle" from which
she gets water to make fresh coffee. She even has a little refrigerator for half-and-half and "clean mugs" rest on top.

V.I., who operates in Chicago, has an office on the fourth floor of the Pulteney Building, on the Wabash El side of the building where the rents are cheaper. The elevator is often not working and the toilet in the bathroom on the seventh floor backs up regularly. V.I. describes her office as "Spartan but not unpleasant... Unlike my apartment which is always in mild disarray, my office is usually tidy" (Indemnity 2). Her office furniture consists of a big wooden desk, a green filing cabinet and two straight-backed chairs. The two personal items in the room are an Olivetti portable that belonged to her mother and a reproduction of the Uffizi on the wall. V.I. says "I didn’t spend much time here and didn’t need any other amenities" (Indemnity 2). Several years later in Burn Marks V.I. remarks:

... last year I’d decided its [Uffizi’s] intricate black detail looked too drab with all the olive furniture. In its place I’d put up some splashy posters of paintings by Nell Blaine and Georgia O’Keeffe. They gave the room a little color, but no one would mistake it for the hub of an international business (15).

Like many modern business women Carlotta works out of her home, a Victorian house she inherited from her Aunt Bea. Her office is a rolltop desk and client chair at one end of her living room. The furniture is basically the way her aunt left it, including the "dumb parakeet, but I moved the cage to one side of the bay window so it
didn't block the light" (A Trouble of Fools 5). The oriental rug is a bit "threadbare" but "looks terrific when the sunlight pours in" (Trouble 5). The sofa velvet is worn and Carlotta steers "plump clients away from the couch" because of the danger of collapse (6).

None of the three offices could be described as seedy, although V.I.'s office building certainly is. The offices are functional. Kinsey's and Carlotta's are even pleasant. Even though a detective has to work in the "mean streets," it does not mean she has to work in a shabby, unappealing office. The office, after all, is where clients often form an impression of the detective. Even if the detective is rarely in her office, as in V.I.'s case, she still attempts to make it seem a pleasant place to work by hanging a picture or two. The office for all three women detectives is a more personal space than for the male detectives who seem not to notice their surroundings nearly as much.

The investigation

The introduction of the detective is closely followed by the introduction of the investigation. Both Grafton and Paretsky begin their first novels with near parodies of the hard-boiled convention of an unknown woman coming to the seedy office and hiring the detective to do one thing when she is really using him for something else.

In "A" Is for Alibi, Nikki Fife, a woman convicted of murdering her husband, is waiting outside Kinsey's office one morning. Since Kinsey had been present at Nikki's trial eight years before, Kinsey
recognizes her and invites her inside. Kinsey notices that Nikki’s "lean face had filled out some, probably the result of prison food with its high starch content, but she still had the ethereal look that had made the accusation of murder seem so incongruous at the time" (2).

Kinsey fixes them both coffee: "I liked it that she didn’t protest the trouble I was going to" (2). Nikki, who was only recently released from prison, hires Kinsey to discover who really killed her husband Laurence. Nikki has no hidden agenda. She just wants her name cleared.

For V.I. Warshawski the case doesn’t seem quite as simple. In *Indemnity Only*, she meets with a middle-aged man at nine in the evening in her darkened office while "a five-foot-high sign from Arnie’s Steak Joynt flashed red and yellow across the street, providing spasms of light" (3). Her client introduces himself as John Thayer, Executive Vice-President of a bank, but V.I. later finds out that he was lying, attempting to hide his real identity as head of the Knifegrinders Union. However, he does tell the truth about what he wants V.I. to do--find his daughter.

V.I.’s client is a variation on the hard-boiled convention because he is a middle-aged man rather than a beautiful woman and although he deceives V.I. about his true identity, he tells the truth about the purpose of the investigation. Kinsey’s client is an attractive young woman but she never tries to deceive Kinsey about her reasons for finding the real killer. By varying this particular convention, Grafton
and Paretsky reverse the woman-as-evil theme in hard-boiled fiction and deny its legitimacy.

In *A Trouble of Fools*, the first Carlotta Carlyle mystery, Barnes further debunks the woman-as-evil theme. Carlotta is home reading junk mail when an elderly woman client comes to her door. Margaret Devens wants Carlotta to find her brother, with whom she lives, because he's been missing for ten days. Carlotta mentally compares Miss Devens to her late Aunt Bea, a woman who "could see clear to the back of your soul, and plumb the depths of unworthiness lurking there" (*Trouble* 10). Carlotta recognizes Miss Devens as one of the women of steel who grew up in an era when feathers and fans and ladies learned the score, played along. I recognized Margaret Devens's silly gestures and flowered dresses and wooly pink coats and white cotton gloves for what they were: camouflage fatigues. She might have slipped past me if she hadn't been sitting in Aunt Bea's chair. Aunt Bea's shawls and scarves and bangles and hats were armor-plated, every one (*Trouble* 10-11).

Margaret Devens is certainly not evil nor is she trying to cause trouble, although she arouses Carlotta's suspicion when she pays her with ten hundred-dollar bills. Margaret Devens' deception is a lifelong role she has perfected in order to get along in society, not something she adopted in order to hire a private investigator.

Like their male counterparts these three women detectives barely make enough money to get by, and the business certainly isn't making
them rich. As Kinsey says, "I don't earn a lot of money but I make ends meet" ("A" 1). For V.I., "If my checking account hadn't been so damned anemic, I'd have ignored this phone call" (Indemnity 2). And Carlotta meets with a client on a Sunday afternoon: "With a caseload so light I was reading the cat's mail, I figured I ought to welcome any nibble . . ." (Trouble 5). They charge various fees. Kinsey demands thirty dollars an hour plus mileage and likes to have "at least a grand up front" ("A" 18). V.I. charges one hundred twenty-five dollars per day with a five hundred dollar deposit. Carlotta’s fee depends on her prospective client's shoes:

I glanced down at her [Margaret Devens] shoes. My full-price clients are mainly divorce lawyers with buffed cordovan Gucci loafers. Margaret Devens wore orthopedic wedgies with run-down heels, much worn, much polished, shabbily genteel. My pay scale started a downward slide (Trouble 11).

Carlotta usually charges five hundred dollars a day plus expenses, and she also works part time as a cab driver for Green & White Cab.

Connections

Both Grafton's and Paretsky's first novels are acknowledgments of the hard-boiled literary tradition, not only in their imitative introductions of detective and investigation, but in other conventions such as the detective as loner. Barnes' variations of the conventions are responses
more to her female counterparts than to her male counterparts. But by combining some of the formulaic aspects of hard-boiled detective fiction with a woman-centered perspective, Grafton, Paretsky, and Barnes offer new visions of what detective fiction can be.

The constructed family

In Grafton's first novel, "A" Is for Alibi, Kinsey is unquestionably a loner, more similar to her male predecessors in that respect than either V.I. or Carlotta. At the age of five her parents were killed in a car accident, and Kinsey was raised by a maiden aunt who has since died. Although Kinsey has friends, she does not allow anyone past a certain level of intimacy. However, Kinsey has important people in her life who take the place of family. Since she has chosen these relationships, they form a kind of constructed family, which makes her loner status inherently different from that of male detectives. In her study Sisters in Crime, Maureen Reddy argues that "the female hero is shown both to relish her independence and to seek intimate connections with others; however, for that cherished independence to be preserved, the connections must fall outside the boundaries of those socially sanctioned relationships that have defined and oppressed women" (105).

Henry Pitts, Kinsey's eighty-one-year-old landlord, would seem to fill the role of father or grandfather in Kinsey's life, perhaps offering sage advice about men.11 But in "A" after Kinsey has had a "sleep-over date" with a man, Henry asks 'How was it?' (150), not adopting a
very fatherly attitude. Kinsey gives no indication that she thinks of him as a father figure:

Henry Pitts has an amazing set of legs. He also has a wonderful beaky nose, a thin aristocratic face, shocking white hair, and eyes that are periwinkle blue. The overall effect is very sexy, electric . . . He was putting suntan oil on his knees, which were already a gorgeous shade of caramel. I wondered how much it really mattered that there was a fifty-year difference in our ages (150-151).

In "G" Is for Gumshoe, Kinsey hires another detective as a bodyguard after she learns she is on a killer’s hit list. Dietz, the detective, moves in with Kinsey while protecting her. Henry comes over and immediately wants to help when he learns what is happening. Kinsey mentally compares the two men:

Henry was tall and lean, the blue eyes in his narrow, tanned face giving him the look of an ascetic; someone otherworldly, aged and wise. Dietz was compact, more muscular, a pit bull of a man with a thick chest and a brazen manner, his face marked by life, as if he’d had lessons hammered into him since birth (123).

The comparison is interesting because Kinsey and Dietz eventually become lovers, which she and Henry would never do because of the age difference.

Another character who reappears throughout the series is Rosie, owner of Kinsey’s favorite hangout. Rosie is in her sixties, dyes her
hair red, and serves Kinsey whatever Rosie feels like serving, usually something with a Hungarian twist. Initially Kinsey’s relationship with Rosie is based mainly on the conveniently close location of the bar to Kinsey’s apartment rather than any special affection, but as the series progresses Rosie’s role in Kinsey’s life evolves slowly to a point where Rosie hosts a surprise birthday party for Kinsey in "G" Is for Gumshoe.

Vera is a friend, close to Kinsey’s own age, who works for California Fidelity Insurance in the office next to Kinsey’s. Vera represents everything that Kinsey is not. Vera is savvy about clothes and make-up. She wears things like a "black leather miniskirt that fit her like automobile upholstery" ("G" 141) whereas Kinsey usually wears jeans. She considers Kinsey "hopelessly conservative when it comes to men" ("G" 141). By the end of "G" Is for Gumshoe, Kinsey convinces Vera to marry the doctor Vera had tried fixing Kinsey up with and Kinsey promises to be her bridesmaid.

Kinsey has three people in her life with whom she maintains regular contact and with whom she has become more intimate during the series. Her friends allow her some emotional growing room as a character since she has people with whom she can gauge her progress. Her growth isn’t completely internalized. But by remaining essentially alone, she is still a loner like her male counterparts. She has no children or significant romantic interest who could be threatened by any enemies Kinsey may encounter through her work.
Like her colleague, Kinsey Millhone, V.I. has no immediate family; her mother died when V.I. was fifteen and her father died ten years before the events in *Indemnity Only*. But unlike Kinsey, V.I. has a profound attachment to her parents. The red Venetian glasses V.I.’s mother, Gabriella, left her are just one symbol of Gabriella’s continued presence in V.I.’s life. V.I.’s work as a private investigator is the legacy from her father, Tony, who was a Chicago police officer.

Like Kinsey, V.I. has a constructed family which prevents her from being a true loner who is isolated from society as hard-boiled male detectives often are. Lotty Herschel is a doctor who fled the Nazis and ended up in Chicago where she operates a clinic for low-income people. She and V.I. met when they were both working for the abortion underground in the late sixties while V.I. was in college. In *Indemnity* V.I. takes shelter at Lotty’s after V.I.’s apartment is completely ransacked and she has been beaten up by a mobster:

She [Lotty] pursed her lips at the tale of Smeissen but wasted no time arguing about whether I ought to go to the police or drop out of the case or spend the day in bed. She didn’t always agree with me, but Lotty respected my decisions (83).

Lotty acknowledges her motherly feelings towards V.I.: “Still, Vic, be careful: you have no mother, but you are a daughter of my spirit” (221), yet their friendship is so reciprocal and non-judgmental that Lotty’s role in V.I.’s life extends beyond the often tumultuous mother-daughter
relationship. In her "Popular Literature and Postmodernism: Sara Paretsky's Hard-Boiled Feminist", Linda S. Wells remarks:

Nowhere is Paretsky more modern than in her treatment of the friendship between V.I. Warshawski and Lotty Herschel. Lotty serves as a maternal figure and a kindred spirit . . . [V.I.] processes the effects of her work upon her psyche through conversations with Lotty. In this we see the intuitive understanding these two women have of each other, as well as their ability to be critical of each other when the need arises (54).

Bobby Mallory, a self-appointed father figure, is an old friend of the family, having worked with V.I.'s father, and a police detective. He believes "Vicki", as he calls V.I., should be married, with a couple of kids and living in suburbia. Bobby and V.I. invariably clash about her work and lifestyle. Bobby is not the least bit supportive of V.I.'s career, but he does feel as though he owes it to his old friend Tony to keep an eye on his daughter. Bobby's opinion about V.I.'s work is reiterated throughout the novels: "You know, if Tony had turned you over his knee more often instead of spoiling you rotten, you'd be a happy housewife now, instead of playing at detective and making it harder for us to get our job done" (28). In Burn Marks after V.I. has exposed Bobby's protege as a dirty cop, Bobby comes to a realization:

And you just didn't seem like a real girl to me, the things you wanted and wanted to do. I'm not even sure I liked you all that
well. I just thought I owed it to Tony to look after you... Eileen--Eileen [Bobby's wife] never minded a minute, she always loved you like you were her own daughter. But I just couldn't deal with it... I love my girls. I don't want them any different from how they are. But you're the daughter of the two people I loved best, next to Eileen, and you can't do things different than you do, shouldn't do them different, not with Gabriella and Tony bringing you up. Do you understand? (339-340).

Mr. Contreras came into V.I.'s life when she moved into a condominium after her apartment was burned in *Killing Orders*, Paretsky's third novel. Somewhat like Kinsey's landlord Henry Pitts, Mr. Contreras is an older retired man who lives in the apartment below V.I.'s. Of their relationship V.I. says "During the three years we've been living in the same building he's attached himself to my life like an adoptive uncle--or maybe a barnacle" (*Burn Marks* 8). Mr. Contreras keeps a close watch on their building and knows who is coming and going. He is very protective of V.I., especially when she has been injured or when she is with another man: "If he was twenty years younger, he'd be beating up any guy who came visiting me. It's tiresome, but he's essentially so good-hearted I can't bring myself to punch him down" (*Burn Marks* 209).

Two other friends with generally smaller roles in the plots are Sal, owner of V.I.'s favorite bar the Golden Glow, and Murray Ryerson, an investigative reporter and occasional lover. V.I.'s relationship with Sal
doesn't extend beyond the bar. And Murray and V.I. usually use each other for mutual benefit to their work. V.I. is often willing to trade a hot story for information about people, for example.

V.I. is more emotionally available to her friends, particularly Lotty, than Kinsey is to hers. And Lotty plays a large role in V.I.'s life and often in the plots. But Lotty is an adult and can take care of herself. So although V.I. has intimate relationships, she too has no one who could easily be perceived as a possible hostage for ransom.

Like Kinsey, Carlotta has no family left, and like V.I.'s, Carlotta's family is still a presence in her life. Both Carlotta's parents died when she was a child and she moved to Boston to live with her Aunt Bea. Carlotta's father was a "Scots-Irish Catholic cop, at war with himself when he wasn't doing battle with Mom" (A Trouble of Fools 27). Carlotta's mother was a union organizer like her grandmother, whom Carlotta never met. But as the source of the stories and Yiddish proverbs her mother passed on, Carlotta felt she knew her grandmother. Living in her Aunt Bea's house surrounded by the woman's things, Carlotta has a connection to her family similar to V.I.'s familial connection through Gabriella's Venetian glasses and Olivetti typewriter.

Carlotta's friends form a much different kind of family than either V.I.'s or Kinsey's. Rather than having a mother or father figure as a friend, Carlotta has a daughter figure. Paolina is a ten-year-old girl Carlotta was paired with through the Big Sisters organization three years
earlier. Carlotta acts as a friend and role model for Paolina whose Colombian mother believes that education for girls is wasted. The emotional attachment between Carlotta and Paolina is deep. Carlotta is constantly trying to protect Paolina from the hazards of her environment. For example, Carlotta regularly reports to the local police the activities of a drug pusher near Paolina's school.

Two other women in Carlotta's life are Gloria, the wheelchair-bound co-owner of Green & White Cab, and Roz, Carlotta's tenant and sometime assistant. Carlotta has known Gloria for years ever since Carlotta first worked as a cab driver to pay her way through college. When Carlotta worked as a cop, she did Gloria a couple of favors and Gloria has reciprocated by sending clients to Carlotta. Although they don't socialize together because Gloria doesn't go out, Gloria likes to discuss Carlotta's love life.

Roz has a love life Carlotta envies. A petite woman in her early twenties, Roz is an artist who rents the third floor of Carlotta's Victorian. In exchange for reduced rent she does basic cleaning:

As a cleaner, she's a great artist. My spice rack is color-coded, my knickknacks adroitly arranged. Books and papers are stacked in tidy piles at attractive oblique angles. My floors have never been filthier, but then Roz doesn't have much time for nitty-gritty cleaning. She dyes her hair a new color every three days and that takes up the hours. I like Roz (Trouble 1-2).
Carlotta also hires Roz on occasion to help her out on a case. In *A Trouble of Fools* Carlotta hires Roz and her boyfriend to clean up a client's house after it has been thoroughly and savagely ransacked. In *Coyote*, Roz does some research at city hall.

Carlotta's one close male friend is Mooney, a police lieutenant and Carlotta's former boss. Mooney is nearing forty, has "a few gray streaks, and you can see crow's-feet when he smiles, but he keeps in shape, and it shows" (*Trouble* 34-35). He and Carlotta are attracted to each other but have never done anything about it since their timing is always off. When Mooney suggests they go out sometime, Carlotta declines, saying "'Besides, I need somebody to talk to.'" Mooney replies, "'I can talk anyplace, Carlotta. Even on a date'" (*Trouble* 38), but Carlotta lets it drop.

Carlotta fits the loner convention because of the technicality that none of her intimate friends, except Roz who isn't really intimate, lives with her. Paolina, the little girl with whom she has a very strong emotional attachment, was actually kidnapped and held for ransom in *Coyote*. But the kidnapping was partially Carlotta's fault because she told the Immigration man about Paolina way before she realized the man was dangerous. And even then it was Paolina who went to him, hoping he could help her with her own immigration problem, rather than his preconceived plan to kidnap her.

Although Grafton, Paretsky, and Barnes have varied the loner convention by giving their detectives intimate friends, they observe the
convention by making the detectives single--each is divorced--and living alone. Kinsey’s loner status is reinforced by her choice of living arrangements, an apartment converted from Henry Pitts’s garage: "The room itself is fifteen feet square, outfitted as living room, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, closet, and laundry facility" (14). There is virtually no room for any other living being so it’s no surprise that she has no pets or houseplants. She considers this apartment the best she’s lived in yet: it is compact with no room for anyone but the occasional visitor. In "G" Is for Gumshoe the apartment has been totally rebuilt and redecorated after a bomb destroyed it in "F" Is for Fugitive:

The entire apartment had the feel of a ship’s interior. The walls were highly polished teak and oak, with shelves and cubbyholes on every side. . . . The dimensions of the main room were still roughly fifteen feet on a side, but now there was a sleeping loft above (4-5).

Now that Kinsey has room for a guest, she discovers that she will need the extra space for her bodyguard. As soon as Kinsey’s nest has been enlarged, it is filled.

V.I. Warshawski occupies two different apartments over the course of her series. But V.I. is "messy but not a slob" (Indemnity 11) in each. Housekeeping is done only when necessary. In Indemnity Only when her apartment is ransacked, V.I. is most upset that one of her mother’s red Venetian glasses is broken:
My mother had carried those glasses from Italy in a suitcase and not a one had broken. Nineteen years married to a cop on the South Side of Chicago and not a one had broken. If I had become a singer, as she had wanted, this would never have happened. I sighed (101).

After her apartment is badly burned in *Killing Orders*, V.I. puts a down payment on a condominium. Although her apartment is larger than Kinsey's, V.I. likes living alone just as well as Kinsey does. V.I., however, has a golden retriever which she shares with Mr. Contreras. Though Peppy usually stays in Mr. Contreras's apartment, V.I. is free to take her for runs and visits to her own apartment any time.

Both Kinsey and V.I. fit the convention of a loner in their living arrangements, but Carlotta is really only a loner in the sense that she has no human dependents living with her. Her tenant, Roz, lives on the third floor, but she has access to the rest of the house since she and Carlotta share the kitchen. And Carlotta has two pets, her tomcat T.C. and her Aunt Bea's parakeet Fluffy, who Carlotta has renamed Red Emma, after Emma Goldman. Carlotta is also different since she owns a house, "absolutely. Aunt Bea paid off the thirty-yearmortgage eight months before she died. The only hitch is that the place is so close to Harvard Square, in such a desirable neighborhood, that property values shot through the roof. I pay so much in taxes that it might as well be rent" (*Coyote* 42). The one room Carlotta has made truly hers is her bedroom:
I chose it for the three wide windows—they give plenty of morning sunlight for my jungle of plants. I started from scratch on that room. I sanded the floorboards. I steamed off the wallpaper. . . . The bed is huge, king-sized, because I finally got fed up with mattresses that dangle my feet over the edge. . . .

Plants, books, my big illuminated globe, my record and tape collection, and my guitar are the decorations (*Trouble* 68-69).

All three authors pay more attention to their detectives’ home and how it looks and reflects the women’s personalities than their male counterparts. This attention to personal space reflects how interconnected a woman detective’s life is. Her often dangerous work affects how she regards her home—as a haven and sometimes as a trap—and therefore the authors devote attention to the details such as number of rooms, type of furnishings, and decor.

**Sexual relationships**

Although Kinsey, V.I. and Carlotta live alone, each was married at one time. Kinsey does not reveal why she divorced, twice, but V.I., who was married for fourteen months eight years before *Indemnity*, says that "some men can only admire independent women at a distance" (*Indemnity* 28). Carlotta’s ex-husband was an "addictive personality" who discovered cocaine and "found that he loved, adored, worshipped that white powder he snorted up his nose more than he loved or needed" Carlotta (*Trouble* 70). Carlotta’s marriage may have worked if
Cal hadn’t discovered cocaine, which may be one reason her relationships with men have been few compared to Kinsey and V.I. Carlotta has "kind of come to terms with life minus sex" (Trouble 38) Kinsey and V.I. regard sex as a casual occupation but they are by no means falling into bed with every man they meet. They treat each as individuals.

In "A" Kinsey becomes involved with Charlie Scorsoni, the former law partner of Nikki Fife’s husband. Kinsey’s attraction to Charlie becomes a problem of professional ethics for her, being involved with a man who is part of her investigation. Although Kinsey admits, "I’m a real hard-ass when it comes to men" (49), her "early-warning system was clanging away like crazy and I wasn’t sure how to interpret it. It’s the same sensation I have sometimes on the twenty-first floor when I open a window--a terrible attraction to the notion of tumbling out" (52). Men in general seem somehow dangerous to Kinsey. She is extremely attracted to Charlie and the way she describes their lovemaking is portentous:

All of the emotional images were of pounding assault, sensations of boom and buffet and battering ram until he had broken through to me, rolling down again and over me until all my walls were reduced to rubble and ash. . . . We lay there afterward, laughing and sweaty and out of breath and then he compassed me in sleep, the weight of his big arms pinning me to the bed. But far from feeling trapped, I felt comforted and safe, as though nothing could
ever harm me as long as I stayed in the shadow of this man, this sheltering cave of flesh . . . (148-149).

The woman-as-evil is a conventional hard-boiled character who uses her sexual wiles to tempt and ultimately trap the detective hero; Charlie is a variation in this formulaic character. Charlie uses his sex appeal to keep Kinsey off balance in her investigation, playing the wounded boyfriend when Kinsey calls a halt to their relationship until after the investigation is concluded. But she immediately questions her decision:

Maybe I was just being perverse, pushing him away because I needed space between me and the world. The job does provide such a perfect excuse. I meet most people in the course of my work and if I can’t get emotionally involved there, then where else can I go? Private investigation is my whole life (183).

But Charlie also serves as the man who implicitly questions Kinsey’s ability to do what has traditionally been men’s work. He develops a relationship with her and then keeps just ahead of her during her investigation, meanwhile telling her things such as: ‘Sometimes you disappear like a shot and I can’t cope with that. I will try to tread easy. I’ll try not to be a horse’s ass myself, I promise you that’ (176).

In "G" Is for Gumshoe, Kinsey and Dietz, the private detective she has hired to protect her from a hit man, become sexually involved. The relationship is not a struggle for power as it was with Charlie:

This is what I understood: this man was like me, my twin, and suddenly, I knew that what I saw in him was a strange reflection
of myself--my bravery, my competence, my fear of dependency... Making love with this man was like no other lovemaking I've experienced... some external chord resolved at its peak, ageless music resonating through our bones, the spilling of secrets, flesh on flesh, moment after moment until we were fused (225-226).

Dietz stays with Kinsey for three months before moving on.

Throughout V.I.'s encounters with men runs a theme of male disbelief in V.I.'s ability to do her job and Ralph Devereux, V.I.'s romantic interest in *Indemnity*, falls into this category. Upon meeting V.I., who has just introduced herself as a private detective, Ralph says: "'You? You're no more a detective than I am a ballet dancer'" (23). Ralph's sarcastic remark "'What's up, Miss Marple?'... I thought you were out after Professor Moriarty until tomorrow'" (223) shows that he does not take V.I.'s work seriously. His belief that she couldn't possibly be right about his boss being involved in a huge insurance fraud leads him into a violent encounter from which V.I. must rescue him. Not until after he has been shot does Ralph admit "'I couldn't believe you knew what you were talking about. I guess deep down I didn't take your detecting seriously. I thought it was a hobby, like Dorothy's [ex-wife] painting'" (236).

Although Ralph is not involved in any of the crimes, he nevertheless fills a role similar to Kinsey's romantic interest, Charlie Scorsoni, in that he is sexually tempting to V.I. After questioning Ralph with regard to her case V.I. wonders "Was he just another pretty
face or did he know anything?" (26). Her attitude is a variation of the sentiment Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe might utter about a female suspect. But V.I. does not automatically regard all members of the opposite sex as potentially dangerous to her professionalism as hard-boiled male detectives often do. The violent confrontation at the end of the novel between V.I. and the bad guys is brought about through Ralph's stubbornness and stupidity, not intentional malice, and his stupidity is rewarded with a bullet in his shoulder.

The two men who are interested in V.I. in *Bum Marks* represent opposite ends of the spectrum. Although Michael, who turns out to be a corrupt cop, says he respects V.I.'s work, he does not understand why she is upset when he leaves her with "the girls" at a political fundraiser while he talks with the men. Robin, an Englishman working for Ajax Insurance, shows his respect for V.I.'s work by hiring her to investigate an arson case for Ajax.

None of the romantic relationships either V.I. or Kinsey has becomes long-term, at least not thus far in their respective series. Carlotta, on the other hand, has two important men in her life: Mooney, discussed above, and Sam Gianelli. Sam is a former lover from Carlotta's first stint at Green & White Cab while hacking to pay her way through school. He is the son of a local mobster but he vigorously maintains that he has nothing to do with the family business. Sam is trying to make it on his own, which is how he hooked up with Gloria and is the other co-owner of G&W. Carlotta
becomes involved with Sam again in *A Trouble of Fools* against her better judgment:

> I have unerring chemistry with men. If I breathe faster when they enter the room, if the hairs on the nape of my neck stand up, and my pulse races, I know, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that I have found the wrong guy for me. The kind of man I like, and the kind of man who'd be good for me, make up two nonintersecting sets (104-105).

Because of Sam's family connections to the mafia, Carlotta does not trust him, thinking he may be involved in the drug case she is investigating. Her lack of trust endangers their relationship at the end of *Trouble*, but by the third novel, *Coyote*, they have made up.13

Female Characters

Women as the source of evil is a convention that none of the authors in this study perpetuates. In "A" Is for Alibi, there are two murderers, a man and a woman. Gwen murdered her ex-husband Laurence several years after their acrimonious divorce but Laurence’s second wife, Nikki, was convicted of the crime. Once Kinsey bluffs Gwen into confessing to the murder, Kinsey becomes angry, saying: ‘You’ve lied to me since the first minute we met. I can’t believe a goddamn word you say and you know it’ (188). When Gwen becomes worried about Kinsey’s intentions, Kinsey replies: ‘Blow it out your
ass . . . You'd better hire yourself a hot attorney, babe, because you're going to need one' (189). Kinsey is angry with Gwen not only for lying but for just standing by when Nikki is sent to prison.

Kinsey asks: 'What did she [Nikki] ever do to you?' (188). Gwen evades the question saying she thought Nikki would be acquitted. Like the hard-boiled males, Kinsey has become emotionally involved in the case and adopts a moral stance, but rather than making a statement about female solidarity, she sticks with the conventional theme of greed:

"Somehow I was more offended by the minor crimes of a Marcia Threadgill [a woman who filed a false insurance claim] who tried for less, without any motivation at all beyond greed. I wondered if Marcia Threadgill was the new standard of morality against which I would now judge all other sins. Hatred, I could understand—the need for revenge, the payment of old debts. That's what the notion of 'justice' was all about anyway: settling up (192).

Unlike the female characters found in much of male hard-boiled detective fiction, the female characters in "A" and "G" defy easy classification. Some of the women are devious but they are not evil and their motivations are understandable. Gwen murdered out of hatred and revenge. Marcia Threadgill, a woman Kinsey is investigating as part of her office-space-for-investigative-work bargain with California Fidelity, is trying to make a false insurance claim. Kinsey's opinion is that she "is the kind of person who would write to the Pepsi-Cola
bottling plant claiming to have found a mouse hair in her drink, trying to net herself a free case of soda" (46). Kinsey’s client in "G" is a profoundly ill woman who is extremely dependent upon her husband. Although Kinsey does not sympathize with every woman she encounters, she does respond to each as a unique individual.

V.I. deliberately tries to help women and prevent them from becoming victims. Anita McGraw, the woman V.I. is hired to find, discovered her boyfriend Peter’s body and ran away, afraid she would be killed too. After V.I. finds Anita she tells her:

You can’t hide here forever, though, and I think that I’m tough enough, quick enough, and smart enough to get things settled so that you can come out of hiding. I can’t cure the pain, and there’s more to come, but I can get you back to Chicago–or wherever else you want so that you can live openly and with dignity (202).

V.I. doesn’t try to shield Anita from the reality of the situation but she does give her options. V.I. does the same for fourteen-year-old Jill Thayer, daughter of a banker involved in the insurance fraud, advising Jill that "... how you make those events [father’s and brother’s murders] part of your life is under your control. You can get bitter, although I don’t think you have that kind of character, or you can learn and grow from it" (136).

V.I. also wants to empower women and this attitude is especially clear in Burn Marks, in which part of the plot is about women in
politics. V.I. is persuaded by a former colleague to show support for Roz Fuentes, who is running for office in Chicago:

Marissa said earnestly, 'Vic, we need more women out there. Otherwise it's going to look as though Roz has sold out to Boots [male politician who is sponsoring Roz] and we'll lose a lot of our grass-roots support. And even though you're not with the PD anymore, your name still commands a lot of respect with local women.'

Anyway, to make a long story short, she'd used flattery, Fuentes’s pro-choice record, and my guilt for having dropped out of political action for so long to get me to agree to be a patron (Burn Marks 20).

Although V.I. has demonstrated considerable financial support for Fuentes by donating two hundred fifty dollars to her campaign, Roz suspects that V.I. is trying to sabotage her campaign. V.I. is irritated by this continual questioning of her support so she begins to investigate Roz and discovers that a Hispanic contractor has begun getting bids for city construction work. But as V.I. points out, that is business as usual for Chicago. Roz, however, is concerned that if it were publicly known, her campaign would be endangered. In a conversation with one of Roz's supporters, V.I. says:

Does being a feminist mean you have to support everything [emphasis Paretsky's] your sisters do? Even if you think they're abusing you? . . . She [Roz] just wants those golden apples too bad, Velma. I'm sure she'll do a good job. She'll be better
than most, I expect. But she isn’t enough of a risk-taker to try for the apples without getting some worms to help her (Burn Marks 334).

But V.I. succeeds in making public information that political supporters have a right to know. In her study The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre, Kathleen Gregory Klein states:

... Paretsky’s detective expands the collective base of power; her style is inclusive rather than exclusive. Certainly in this so-called age of information, nothing could be more valuable to the powerless, the unwillingly ignorant, or the disadvantaged than knowledge (216).

By sharing information, V.I. is countering the hard-boiled tradition of guarding information in order to make the detective powerful. On the contrary, as part of a socially and politically oppressed group, V.I. creates power for herself and others by sharing her knowledge. Unlike Kinsey Millhone, V.I. Warshawski works not only for herself and her client, but for the greater good of the empowerment of women.

Carlotta is less self-conscious about what she wants for women than V.I. However, she has great respect for her friend Gloria, who was paralyzed from the waist down in a car accident and then put the insurance money into Green & White Cab. Carlotta also respects women like her client Margaret Devens and Aunt Bea, who are strong in the face of societal pressure to be frilly and silly. In Coyote Carlotta’s investigation is directly related to the empowerment of women
illegal aliens from Central America. She is hired by such a woman to get her green card back. When that woman turns up murdered, Carlotta feels she owes it to the woman to continue the investigation. Carlotta discovers that the woman was just one of many female illegal aliens working at a pillow factory for wages well below minimum wage. Carlotta learns that an Immigration agent has been providing female illegals with illegitimate green cards in return for money. When one of the women discovers that what the INS man is doing is illegal, he murders her and three other women he thinks are aware of his illegal activities.

Violence

Violence is one of the main elements in hard-boiled fiction. A dangerous and violent confrontation between Kinsey and the killer is a consistent part of Grafton’s formula. In "A" Kinsey discovers that Charlie murdered a woman eight years previously because she had figured out he was embezzling from his clients. But Charlie also followed Kinsey to Las Vegas and murdered another woman to prevent her from talking to Kinsey about the case. In a suspenseful conclusion Charlie chases Kinsey down the beach late at night, he in a car on the cliff, she in the cold water. He confronts her with a butcher knife and she shoots him to defend herself. Charlie not only endangered Kinsey’s life but also her professionalism because she
allowed her attraction to him to cloud her judgment about the case. In "G" Kinsey is being stalked by a hitman, who gets pleasure out of scaring her a couple of times before he actually captures her and attempts to kill her. In this case, the hitman's ex-wife shoots him. In Grafton's novels, violence as a main part of the action is usually limited to a couple of different scenes in each story, one scene near the middle of the story and one at the end. In both "A" and "G", Kinsey is directly threatened by the violent behavior of a man, but the possibility of rape is never mentioned. The threat in each novel is death.

The use of violence in Paretsky's *Indemnity Only* is very much reminiscent of hard-boiled detective fiction. V.I. is intimidated both physically and verbally throughout the novel. She is attacked in the hallway outside her apartment by two thugs, although she is able to get in a few good licks, and hustled away in a car:

The one with the separated ribs was driving; I'd thrown up on the other one, and the smell was rather strong. His face was very set and I thought he might be close to tears. It's not nice for two men to go after one woman and only get her after losing a rib and a kidney, and then to have her vomit down your jacket front and not be able to move or clean it off--I wouldn't have liked it, either. I fumbled in my jacket pocket for some Kleenex. I still felt sick, too sick to talk and not much like cleaning him up, either, so I dropped the tissues on him and
leaned back. He gave a little squeal of rage and knocked them to the floor (59).

V.I.'s internal comments about her situation reflect her "wise-ass" attitude. She is by no means cowed by these men, especially since she tries to help one man clean himself up after throwing up on him. Her flippancy in the face of violence is similar to the reaction of male detectives.

V.I. uses her sharp tongue to advantage in the final confrontation between her and the instigator of the insurance fraud, the man also responsible for two murders, in order to manipulate the situation so she can act rather than react:

‘Oh, jeez, Yardley,’ I said. ‘You big he-men really impress the shit out of me. Are you telling me Tony’s going to rape that girl on your command? Why do you think the boy carries a gun? He can’t get it up, never could, so he has a big old penis he carries around in his hand.’

I braced my hands on the couch at my sides as I spoke. Tony turned crimson and gave a primitive shriek in the back of his throat. He turned to look at me.

‘Now!’ I yelled, and jumped (232).

V.I. is able to disarm the bad guys, breaking one man’s arm in the process, and turn them over to the police, all in a descriptive suspenseful scene.

Violence is also a staple in Burn Marks. At one point V.I. goes to a deserted, run-down hotel to look for her Aunt Elena. V.I. was
lured there and just barely escapes with her aunt from the burning building. Later Elena and V.I. are forced to the top of a building under construction where their captors intend to kill them. V.I. is able to shoot two men, killing one of them, and prevent any harm from coming to herself or her aunt.

Violence is, of course, one of the main ingredients of hard-boiled detective fiction and was originally thought to lend realism to the stories. In her article "Living 'Openly and with Dignity'--Sara Paretsky's New-Boiled Feminist Fiction", Jane Bakerman argues:

In Paretsky's fiction, then, the formulaic anger and consequent violence basic to the subgenre augments the realistic tone, extends to permit open expression of women's fury as opposed to the encoded belligerence characteristic of other fictional women, and dramatizes the protagonist's full adulthood. Unsavory though they be, these are very workable devices. Moreover, this treatment allows Paretsky to set violence in a different light; it is no longer a given, the right of the rebellious, isolated, angry hero, but rather sometimes a necessity into which V.I. is forced, sometimes a reflexive response triggered by danger and abuse (130-131).

The violence also shows that V.I. is capable of taking care of herself; she does not need to be rescued.

Barnes handles violence differently than Paretsky. Rather than making violence central to the action, Barnes makes it occur offstage so that assisting victims of crime is the focus of the plot. In A Trouble of Fools, a group of older Irish-American male cabbies become
unwittingly involved in running drugs while they think they are helping the Irish Republican Army to buy guns and munitions. One of the cabbies turns up missing and his sister, Margaret Devens, hires Carlotta to find him.

Once Carlotta has collected evidence to show the men that they have been ferrying drugs around Boston, Miss Devens calls the men together to confront them about their supposed collecting for the IRA:

'It's true they should be ashamed. Big shots, every one of them. They know what IRA money buys. Bombs at holiday resorts to kill hardworking people who've finally saved enough for a trip to the seaside. Plastic explosives in department stores the day before Christmas. Machine guns, maybe, to murder mothers and fathers in front of their children--' . . .

'The British have no right--' somebody started to say.

'No right?' Margaret echoed, cutting the protest short. 'No right? Who cares who's got rights? Children with their arms blown off, and their legs left bloody stumps? Shut up, you fool. Don't talk to me about rights!' (160-161).

The cabbies were sanctioning violence but were really played for fools by a clever drug dealer. Carlotta reluctantly admired the drug dealer's plan to use a well-established group of people. The cabbies were "a whole fleet of unpaid, dependable mules, dreaming outdated dreams of glory. An unquestioning army brimming with unexploited loyalty" (Trouble 167). But Carlotta devises a plan to catch the drug dealer without having to turn the
cabbies over to the police. Although Margaret Devens believes the cabbies deserve to go to prison, Carlotta says, "'The Old Geezers didn't know what they were doing--and I, for one, don't think they should go to jail for being half-assed romantic jerks who live in a time warp'" (171). Contrary to the stereotype of feeble old women who must be protected, the old men have to be protected whereas women like Margaret Devens are strong enough and smart enough to comprehend the consequences of their actions.

But the real violence occurs in an amusing sub-plot. Since Carlotta's phone number is listed under Thomas C., the FBI suspects that he is the Thomas C. Carlyle, wanted criminal, for whom they have been searching. The FBI tries to lure him out of hiding by saying he and "Mrs. Thomas C. Carlyle" have just won twenty thousand dollars. Annoyed with not getting the twenty grand and with having her phone tapped, Carlotta, with the help of her old friend Mooney, lures the FBI to the site of her impending drug bust. The FBI attempts to arrest the man they believe is Thomas C. Carlyle and then the Boston police step in, reveling in their upstaging of the FBI. But the situation loses its humorous side when in the midst of chaos, partially due to the presence of too many cops, the drug dealer is shot, execution style, by a black-hooded IRA gunman. By not sharing information and cooperating with the local police, the FBI may well have been responsible for the drug dealer's death.
Unlike Grafton and Paretsky, Barnes allows Carlotta to react to the killing she witnessed. As a cop she never cried; "it was a point of honor ... As a private operative, I'd made peace with my tears" (201). While at a band concert her "little sister" is playing in, Carlotta excuses herself to go "wail" in the restroom. Mooney joins her and tries to comfort her.

'Mooney,' I said. 'I appreciate it, but I don't need a man to lean on. I don't burst into tears in the hope one will come along.'

His face got red . . . 'For Christ's sweet sake, Carlotta, will you stop treating me like some goddamned representative male! It's because I'm a cop, right? Just because I'm a cop doesn't mean I'm some kind of fascist macho asshole. I see rooms full of women in tears every week, and I don't want to comfort them. I want to comfort you. You, Carlotta. I don't mean it as an insult, dammit. I saw the bastard die too, goddammit, and it would comfort me to hold you' (202).

In *Coyote*, the serial murders are offstage and Barnes defuses the violence of the final confrontation. Clinton, the immigration agent responsible for murdering four women, has kidnapped Paolina, Carlotta's "little sister." He wants to trade Paolina for another illegal alien who knows about his immigration scam (the man is psychotic) in a subway station. Paolina gets away from him because of the pushing, shoving crowd. Clinton shoots a pedestrian and the cop posing as the illegal
alien, then blends in with the crowd and makes his escape. Carlotta grabs the cop's gun and goes after Clinton:

My hand shook. I wanted to shoot the bastard, kill him. Shoot bullet after bullet into his dying body, yelling their names, Manuela, Aurelia, Delores, Amalia-- . . .

I knew if I saw Clinton, I'd never get a clear shot off. I'd hit some poor kid reaching for his father's hand.

I remembered Ramirez, bleeding on the ground. And the anonymous kid who'd fallen. And Paolina, crouched on the staircase, vulnerable. . . . I crammed the gun in my pocket, turned, and raced back up the stairs . . . Paolina was where I'd left her (253-254).

By not having Carlotta pursue Clinton, Barnes puts the focus on the victims of crime rather than on the criminal and his behavior.¹⁴
Kinsey's investigations do not reflect a radical feminist ideology. In "A" Is for Alibi the murderers are not linked with any existing structure in society which perhaps led them to perform their crimes. In "G" Is for Gumshoe the killer committed the crimes to collect his victims' retirement pensions and then to cover up his crimes. In "G" the murderer runs a small retirement home in his house. Nursing home care is mentioned throughout the novel and it is not described at all favorably. However, there is no particular link between the inadequate way American society cares for its elderly and a feminist ideology. Grafton doesn't even pose any questions beyond "Gosh, this is awful, isn't it". In The Woman Detective, Klein argues, and I would agree, that Kinsey's "... latent feminism is individual rather than communal; she sees both problems and solutions in personal rather than systemic change" (206).

In an interview in The Armchair Detective Grafton was asked about any themes or messages she may be trying to get across. She responded:

I take homicide seriously, but I don't have a message about it--beyond the obvious one of "people shouldn't kill each other." I view the mystery novel as a vantage point from which to observe the world we live in. What I hope to do is engage in a kind of truth-telling about what I see. I try to keep politics out of it. I try to keep Sue Grafton out of it. I have taken some
potshots at religion, but I try to be fair in that I bad-mouth all of them equally. I personally don’t feel it’s the job of a mystery writer to convert anyone to anything. A writer’s job is to entertain in the best sense of the word. Indirectly, we’re all infusing our work with our personal viewpoints. I don’t feel I need to take a position beyond that (Taylor 12).

In terms of an overall feminist perspective, Grafton’s novels are the least self-conscious. There is no sense, as there is in Paretsky’s books, that the detective is operating under a clearly articulated ideology. Kinsey makes comments such as: "The basic characteristics of any good investigator are a plodding nature and infinite patience. Society has inadvertently been grooming women to this end for years" and "One of my old cohorts used to claim that men are the only suitable candidates for surveillance work because they can sit in a parked car and pee discreetly into a tennis-ball can, thus avoiding unnecessary absences" ("A" 27). Kinsey’s remarks challenge men’s assumed fitness for the job of private investigator. However, Kinsey’s character is not markedly different from that of the conventional hard-boiled detective.

V.I. Warshawski, on the other hand, does challenge the conventions by being self-consciously feminist in her attitudes and actions. V.I. more often becomes involved in an investigation because of familial ties than because she is hired by a stranger needing her expertise in ferreting out corporate crime. But even V.I.’s client in Indemnity sought her out because of his ties to her father. In Killing Orders.
Paretsky's third novel, V.I. reluctantly looks into a problem for her Aunt Rosa on her mother's side. And in *Burn Marks* V.I. becomes involved in an investigation because of the arrival of her Aunt Elena, her father's sister, in the middle of the night. Even so, V.I. doesn't have a real client until well into the story. After *Indemnity Only*, V.I.'s cases have become more and more personal.

But some critics don't think Paretsky is doing enough to challenge the hard-boiled genre and its inherent complicity with patriarchy. In his article "It Was a Man's World" Robert Sandels argues that Warshawski often exposes the crimes of powerful men, but nothing she does is subversive and threatening to the system. While she solves corporate crimes from deep within the system, she does not suggest that crime is characteristically endemic to that system but specific to the individuals working in it. The institutions themselves seem morally neutral instruments, susceptible to criminal manipulation whether in the hands of men or women (391).

Sandels makes two assumptions which aren't necessarily valid, however. First, he is assuming that there is indeed something inherently wrong with the "system," with the patriarchal structures that govern our society. His second assumption is that institutions are in fact not "morally neutral instruments." The problem with this approach to V.I. is that she treats people as individuals, responsible for their own actions, and not as representatives of some system or institution. To do so would be antithetical to her feminist beliefs. People are first and foremost human.
beings, unique and separate individuals. Certainly individuals can be and are influenced by societal structures but they still have choices. Andrew McGraw, the head of the Knifegrinders' union, knew his union was connected with "muscle" but he made the decision to stay with the union anyway and then to deal in phony insurance claims. V.I.'s Aunt Elena chooses to drink alcohol and consequently endangers her life.

V.I.'s feminism is very much in the political/social norm. She believes women should have the freedom to make choices governing their own bodies, for example. She also consciously works to empower other women she comes in contact with, like Anita McGraw, discussed above. She supports strong women in political office. She also refuses to take responsibility for her Aunt Elena, an alcoholic, because V.I. recognizes that Elena's lifestyle is Elena's business. In a way then, V.I. is a reflection of her society rather than a reflection of the way people could think and act and is therefore continuing the tradition of detective fiction by being essentially conservative.

"Learn and grow" is what Linda Barnes has done with her Carlotta Carlyle mysteries. They are a response to female hard-boiled detectives rather than their male counterparts. Barnes' use of hard-boiled conventions in her novels is altered much more than in either Grafton's or Paretsky's works. This is reflected not only in Carlotta's feminist beliefs, which aren't as self-conscious as V.I.'s, but in Carlotta's tenuous loner status and her lessened participation in violence. Carlotta's investigations are politically significant--drugs/IRA and female
illegal aliens--and personal to a certain extent. In Trouble the client, Margaret Devens, is a stranger to Carlotta in that they have never met before. Yet Carlotta recognizes the type of woman Miss Devens is, seemingly an old biddy but really a very shrewd woman. And Miss Devens is referred to Carlotta by Carlotta’s friend and former boss at Green and White Cab Company, Gloria. In Coyote, Carlotta’s client is an illegal alien referred by Paolina, the little girl Carlotta spends time with through the Big Sisters organization.

Grafton and Paretsky have opened up the hard-boiled detective genre to new possibilities and they have explored them to a certain extent with Kinsey Millhone and V.I. Warshawski. But both characters are atypical of women, not only in their profession, but in their habits and abilities such as having one all-purpose black dress and being able to physically battle two men at the same time.

V.I.’s ability to take care of herself in the face of violence and is both a strength and a weakness. It is wonderful to see a woman who doesn’t need a man to protect her from harm. But why is it that V.I. is never threatened with rape when she repeatedly finds herself in situations confronted with one or more dangerous men? In Indemnity Only when she is kidnapped by two thugs and taken to see a local mobster, the possibility that V.I. may be raped if she doesn’t stop her investigation is never mentioned or implied. She is threatened with physical harm and is beaten by the mobster, but the beating has no sexual overtones. In this scene, V.I. is first and foremost a private
detective and not a woman vulnerable to attack. Yet this implication contradicts other reactions V.I. has received from men, including her client at the beginning of the novel. To them, she was a woman and therefore an inferior detective.

V.I. becomes involved in dangerous situations like the one with the mobster throughout the series. The non-existence of a threat of rape detracts from Paretsky’s credibility because although she is attempting to infuse the hard-boiled genre with a feminist ideology, she is denying an everyday fact of life. V.I. is female and is therefore inherently more vulnerable to sexual assault than her male counterparts. Even though V.I. demonstrates repeatedly that she can defend herself, she can’t get away from the societal belief that females are generally physically weaker and easier to subdue than men. The repeated demonstration of V.I.’s physical abilities also makes the violence central to the action. Certainly violence is an important staple in the hard-boiled tradition, but how it is used in a story makes an important statement.

Barnes has given her detective ample means of defending herself as Paretsky has done. Carlotta is physically intimidating at six one and was a police officer for several years, so she knows self-defense and how to use a gun. Yet Carlotta does not become a victim of violence the way Kinsey or V.I. does. She is not kidnapped or beaten up or stalked by anyone. Since Carlotta is not involved in such situations, she is not threatened with rape as V.I. realistically should be.
The murders in both Barnes’ novels occur before the story and off stage. The confrontations between Carlotta and the murderers at the end result in Carlotta drawing a gun, but the murderer is either shot by someone else or captured by the police. Carlotta effectively traps the criminal but other people do the work of subduing him because Carlotta’s real concern is for the victims of crime. While Barnes has effectively used violence to further the story line, it is rarely central to the action as in Grafton’s and Paretsky’s novels.

V.I. is versatile, able to cope with nearly every situation that arises, including violence, and this coping ability is her strength. But by emphasizing V.I.’s role in the violent parts of the plot, Paretsky does not offer a truly feminist perspective on hard-boiled detective fiction because she does not challenge the use of violence as part of the plot.

Carlotta, although not as outspoken about her feminist politics as V.I., embodies a feminist outlook on life and can cope with the unexpected. But Barnes’ treatment of violence as peripheral to the main action rather than central to the plot is a feminist revision of a hard-boiled tradition. To reiterate the original question: Can hard-boiled detective fiction embody feminist perspectives without violating the traditions of the genre? The answer is a resounding yes.
ENDNOTES

1 There is some dispute about the actual date of the first edition.

2 The British police didn't actually begin to hire women until 1883.

3 She appeared in thirty-two novels beginning in 1928.

4 Dol also makes brief appearances in some Nero Wolfe novels.

5 Detective novels featuring lesbian protagonists are a fascinating new sub-genre and part of the recent feminist subversion of the traditional hard-boiled detective, epitomized by Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade.

6 In 1988 each author also published a novel in her respective series but it was only Barnes' second. A later novel was selected in order to see if the character had changed over time.

7 Each author has since published another novel in her series.

8 Readers later find out it was her mother's birth name.

9 Readers don't learn Carlotta's first name until chapter 2.

10 V.I. blows a fuse in the electrical system when she turns her air conditioner on high.

11 Henry's character becomes increasingly more important to the plots throughout the series. In "C" there's a subplot involving Henry and a woman trying to sweet-talk him out of lots of money.

12 In Killing Orders, Paretsky's third novel, V.I. and Lotty are estranged for most of the story, which really takes its toll on both women. They eventually discuss the problem.

13 Sam is in Italy during the whole novel.

14 Clinton is caught emerging from the station anyway.
However, Carlotta is aware that assault of any sort is a possibility when she drives her cab. But when she tucks her hair under a cap while driving, she says her passengers rarely notice she's female. And like most other cabbies, male and female, she keeps a length of pipe under the front seat since guns are forbidden.
WORKS CITED


