Gals With Guns: The Changing Role of the Female in Detective Fiction

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Gals With Guns: The Changing Role of the Female in Detective Fiction

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DEDICATION
This thesis is dedicated to my four wonderful children: Michelle, Greg, Doug and Laurence.

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Introduction

Only a few examples of the better known male and female literary detective characters are cited in this introduction. Numerous additional examples, some that are famous and many that are lesser known, written by both male and female authors, abound on both sides of the gender issue and will be introduced in the main part of this work. We expect to demonstrate that the fictional female detective has progressed from a dabbling busy-body detector of things available only to “women’s intuition and sensibility,” to the stand-up and stand-alone gun-toting modern woman of today’s female and feminist hard-boiled detective fiction. This
movement will be presented as a direct advancement, and a departure from the ways and customs of their maidenly and conventionally correct forebears.

The seeds for the detective story, the mystery, and gothic fiction of the late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century written in England and France, were sown circa 1790. In the early 1790s, Ann Radcliffe set the Gothic in one of its basic formats: a novel in which the major character is a young woman who is both a persecuted victim and a courageous heroine. Unfortunately, few books or manuscripts are available from that period. In the 1830s, the first group of American writers arrived on the scene, and began writing in the style that would become typical of the mystery and detective novel a few decades later. Perhaps the most notable of this group were Edgar Allen Poe and Herman Melville. Most modern literary critics generally credit Poe with inventing the modern form of the detective novel. It was his trio of stories that began with the introduction of his detective, C. Auguste Dupin, in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), that established the fundamental style, structure, and content to be found in the mystery and detective fiction that would follow. One year later, Poe published *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* (1842), followed by the third of the Dupin series, *The Purloined Letter*, (1844.)

From 1841 and forward i.e., throughout most of contemporary literary history, the detective novel has been dominated by the male figure. Although featured female characters with significant roles in the story could be found in the romance novels of the day, and were beginning to make an appearance in early gothic fiction, it would be decades before female detectives made their first tentative appearance as leading characters in early mystery and detective fiction. When they did appear, it was to be as refined and ladylike renditions of middle or upper class British society women.
Male detectives appeared in various guises ranging from intellectual dilettantes, like Dorothy Sayers’s Lord Peter Wimsey, to the hard-boiled and hard-nosed Sam Spade, created by Dashiell Hammett. Throughout the history of detective fiction, detectives, for the most part, had retained traits of gentlemanly conduct. Eventually detective fiction trended away from the genteel lady detective, and the gentlemanly male sleuth gave way to what is seen by many critics as the ultimate hard-boiled private detective. Mike Hammer is frequently pointed to as the stereotypical cynical loner hard-boiled private detective. Invented by Mickey Spillane in the mid-twentieth-century. Spillane’s hard-bitten and violent character took the detective novel to a new level of brutality, blood, and gore.

The female presence in most of the early works, written almost exclusively by male authors, was, for the most part, relegated to a place of little more value than that of a decorative and charming accessory. The majority of the women characters in these stories were either included as attractive scenery, to render consolation, or possibly to provide for the principal male’s (offstage) physical needs. On those occasions when female personas were included in a more prominent position, they were typically cast in the role of the daughters of Lilith, the elemental and nefarious female villain.

Patriarchal writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as a rule, did not endow their female characters with the sense, mental capacity, agility of mind, or physical wherewithal to move in police and criminal circles and solve crimes on their own. When these male authors characters were allowed to solve puzzles and crimes, the solution was usually cast in terms of “women’s sensibilities,” with the plots turning on some trivial matter of feminine behavior noticeable only to the astute female observer. However, some women writers, although they also did not stray very far from the established norm of subservient and
decorous female characters, took a different path in the genre. They introduced female
detectives, both amateur and professional, who were able to think for themselves, do their own
investigations, and solve mysteries and crimes. However, to conform to the acceptable
realities of society so as not to offend the sensibilities of women at large or incur the ire of male
writers and critics, the female detectives were usually presented in such a manner that they
worked within the system. This meant that rather than being able to act on their own, they
required a male partner to handle the arrests, address physical threats, and perform other police
functions. Several of the earliest detective and mystery novels featuring women detectives of
various ilks, whether written by
men or women, dated from Poe’s time and, in some cases, were virtually contemporary with
Poe’s premier mystery novel written in 1841.

Catherine Ross Nickerson, in the afterword of her book, The Web of Inequity: Early
Detective Fiction by American Women (1998), proposes a fascinating possibility: she suggests
that perhaps the modern detective novel is not derived from the historically and traditionally
accepted linear progression dating from Edgar Allen Poe’s 1841 novel, Murders in the Rue
Morgue. Instead it arises from the efforts of those early female authors to establish a tradition
of female detectives, a tradition that may be found to have roots in the gothic and early mystery
novels, written in large measure by women authors, and pre-dating Poe. In contemporary times,
the fictional female detective has evolved from a domestic garden-and-drawing-room sleuth, a
housewife, a typist-detective, a nosy busy-body interfering with police procedures, and a
strictly amateur and occasional detective, to find her place among the front ranks of
present-day fictional private investigators, detectives, and professional law-enforcement
officers.

Modern female hard-boiled detectives, like Sara Paretsky’s V.I. Warshawski and Sue
Grafton’s Kensie Millhone, can and do stand toe-to-toe with the traditionally tough macho
detectives. Different in approach and style from their antecedents as these new female
detectives might be, they can trace their roots, and owe much of their existence, to the unsung
and mostly unknown female writers and characters who preceded them. These latter-day
female detectives may be, as Catherine Ross Nickerson theorizes, the direct descendants of
Amelia Butterworth, Lovelady Brooke, and all of their predecessors, rather than the daughters
of a generally accepted canonical linear history that dates only from Poe and C. Auguste
Dupin.

Within a growing circle of researchers and critical analysts, pioneering works are being
written to positively link the development of the gothic novel to early mystery tales and to
formative detective and police novels. This line of research inevitably leads to the possibility
that the modern detective novel may be seen as having direct ties to the gothic tradition.
Actually, it is not much of a stretch to view gothic tales as early forms of what was to become
the mystery stories of the mid-to-latter nineteenth-century. Even a casual perusal of those
early mysteries reveals that they borrowed many features from the gothic tale. An examination
of the gothic tradition and stories leads one to discover some of the earliest successful women
writers, such as Ann Radcliffe. Unusual for the patriarchally focused writing conventions of
her times, Radcliffe was one of the most prolific writers of the early nineteenth century.
Radcliffe’s works and the manner in which she depicted her female leading characters, might not qualify as work in the feminist tradition by modern standards. Yet, a close reading of the way she presents her heroines demonstrates that those characters clearly possess attributes of self determination and individuality. These same traits are integral and fundamental elements in the feminist formula. Her otherwise maidenly characters have a definite female point of view, and Radcliffe expresses those views in what could only be considered a radical departure from the more common, traditional, and acceptable “sensibility” novels of her time.

The journey toward equality has not always been a direct path. The course of a feminist rendering of female detective fiction was long delayed in beginning, and then was only a small part of the overall movement toward feminist goals. However, a history of the detective novel and woman’s place in that history, reveals that many of the issues and concerns of the “modern” feminist movement were realized and addressed more than a hundred years ago by the resolute female authors who dared to enter a field of literature essentially closed to them. It was a field that excluded them as effectively as if “men only” signs had been posted over the doors of the literary guilds. Even when male authors such as Wilkie Collins introduced their amateur female detectives, those that Wilkie created were most often presented as an adjunct to the “proper” male authority, rather than a meaningful presence that could function autonomously.

The beginnings of independent fictional female detectives only came about when courageous female authors like Anna Katherine Green, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Metta Fuller Victor, and others, writing in the mid to late nineteenth century entered the field and found commercial success. Critical success was generally much longer in arriving. The first lady
detectives were novelties, and seen as characters meant to appeal to the female readership. It was to attract this mainly female audience that many of the earlier works included elements of the romantic novels of the day. It was at that time that the female detective finally began to take shape and grow into a tradition that would eventually become the V.I. Warshawski, Sharon McCone, and Kensie Millhone characters of twenty-first century, cutting-edge female detective literature.
As Chris Willis\(^1\) notes in his 2002 essay, “Detective Fiction (1830),” Dorothy L. Sayers cites early examples of detection in the Bible and Aesop's fables in her 1928 anthology, *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror*. Sayers notes the story of Aesop’s wily fox who, coming to the lion’s cave, opts for the better part of valor and refuses to go further when he notices that several footprints enter the cave while none leave. Sayers also uses the biblical tale of Susanna and the Elders to establish another form of detection. Daniel discovers and reveals religious fraud, as would later detectives, through tracking footprints and discovering a hidden conspiracy when he (like a detective) questions two witnesses separately to uncover discrepancies and contradictions in their evidence. Additional examples of the kind of thinking that leads critics and analysts to find and expose what might be construed as nascent detective trends, or additional examples of investigators finding sleuths in unlikely places, are numerous. Some contemporary critics, including Umberto Eco, frequently refer to Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605) as being perhaps not only the first book written in the form of the novel, but also the formative example of the first detective novels.

In Great Britain, even before Poe’s C. Auguste Dupin, writers of gothic tales and romances were creating female characters who would eventually assume the mantle of fictional investigator; however, it was only the years after Dupin, dating from approximately 1865 to the 1930s, that saw what amounted to an explosion in the growth of writers of both genders creating leading female characters in mystery and detective fiction.
In the United States the first book recognized as a complete detective novel rather than a short story or novella, was written by a female author, Metta Fuller Victor, in 1866. This book, *The Dead Letter*, inaugurated the female “domestic detective” as a major character in detective fiction. In English speaking countries and in France, it is customary to view the evolution of detective novels as originating with Poe in America, and traveling to England and France where the Golden Age of the genre is characterized by authors such as Arthur Conan Doyle, Emile Gaboriau, and Agatha Christie. It then returned to American shores with the arrival of Dashiell Hammett’s and Raymond Chandler’s hard-boiled detectives, Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe. LeRoy Panek, in his 1987 essay “Turn-of-the-Century Writers,” states:

> [...] The turn-of-the-century vogue for women detectives reflected an attempt to recapture the female reading public. As opposed to the characters and atmosphere of stories about male detectives, stories about women detectives slanted toward perceived women's interests. The setting and the details of stories like Rinehart's *The Circular Staircase* portray the trivia of household affairs and make incidental points like the heroine's valuation of her Spode over her Limoges china. As significant as this, we find the lady typist emerging as a popular character type. E.

Phillips Oppenheim peoples his novels with lady typists, and we can note Tom Gallon's *The Girl Behind the Keys* (1903) involves a typist detective. All this reflects writers' attempts to appeal to a new class of readers upon whom the naked vigor of masculine intellect was supposedly wasted.
This approach was, however, a minority one. Women detectives became popular because, paradoxically, they were unusual. Here, women sleuths simply fit into the general search for unconventional or eccentric characters to turn into detectives. (10)

Anna Katherine Green was first published in 1878, and became one of the first popular mystery and detective authors. Her career stretched through 1923, and her first published book, *The Leavenworth Case* (1878), was also the first American best-selling novel with more than 250,000 copies sold. Her influence on the detective novel continues to resonate in contemporary works of the genre. Green was an innovator, and a significant number of the literary devices she inaugurated in her works are considered elementary components in the fabric of detective and mystery novels. Many of those devices and plot ingredients are still used in detective fiction around the globe more than a hundred years after the publication of her breakthrough novel.

Green introduced a new kind of detective in *That Affair Next Door* (1897). This was Amelia Butterworth, a spinster in her late forties or early fifties, intelligent, resourceful, upper middle class, and respectable. Although Green’s Amelia Butterworth was not the first female sleuth to be featured in mystery and detective fiction, she was the first to stand alone as an amateur detective (not merely an adjunct to a male investigator), the first to be the principal investigator, and the first of the major fictional female detectives (either amateur or professional) not created by a male writer.

Male authors writing about female detectives tended to have their women sleuths (somewhere before the end of the book) discover either that detective work is not a suitable
undertaking for females, or that they needed to get engaged or even married by the time the mystery was resolved. But other female authors and other female detectives would follow Anna Katherine Green’s and Amelia Butterworth’s examples. Perhaps the best known of these (certainly the best selling) is Miss Jane Marple, created by Agatha Christie for several short stories in the late 1920s, and featured for the first time in a book-length narrative, *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930). For numerous novels thereafter, she served as the iconic grandmotherly, octogenarian, spinster busy-body amateur detective.

Anna Katherine Green pioneered different ground in fiction than did other detective authors, male and female. She forever changed the role of females in detective fiction, and established a place for them that ranked alongside more famous and popular male detectives such as Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes. Throughout the Golden Age of detective fiction, female sleuths occupied a near-center stage presence until the advent of the hard-boiled detective novels in the late nineteen twenties. These strong new male detectives dominated detective fiction, once more returning female detectives, amateur or professional, written by male or female authors, to the margins of the fictional genre.

The success of latter-day female sleuths, whether housewifely amateurs or professional private detectives, owes much to the ground-breaking efforts of writers working in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century gothic tradition. Although one would not normally classify gothic novels as detective fiction, many of those early works, just like detective fiction, contained a mystery as the central part of the tale. The element of suspense found in almost all gothic works functioned in exactly the same manner as suspense was later to be used in the prototypical mystery novels of the early eighteenth century. According to the entry on Gothic
Literature in “The English Gothic Novel: A Brief Overview,” some of the elements of a gothic
tale, found also in many detective narratives that create suspense, are:

- Ruined buildings which are sinister or which arouse a pleasing melancholy,
- labyrinths, dark corridors, and winding stairs, shadows, a beam of moonlight in
the blackness, a flickering candle, or the only source of light failing (a candle
blown out or, today, an electric failure), omens and ancestral curses, and
- extreme landscapes, like rugged mountains, thick forests, or icy wastes, and
- extreme weather, a curious heroine with a tendency to faint and a need to be
rescued,
- horrifying (or terrifying) events or the threat of such happenings.

(English Gothic Novel 2-3)

Most of these elements can be found in stories like Conan-Doyle’s The Hound of the
Baskervilles (originally published as a serial in nine parts in the Strand, 1901). When young
Henry Baskerville first catches sight of Baskerville Hall over the moors, his experience is
described in this passage:

Over the green squares of the fields and the low curve of a wood there rose in
the distance a gray, melancholy hill, with a strange jagged summit, dim and
vague in the distance, like some fantastic landscape in a dream [...] behind the
peaceful and
sunlit countryside there rose ever, dark against the evening sky, the long,
gloomy curve of the moor, broken by the jagged and sinister hills. (Doyle 59)
Another example is found in Agatha Christie’s *Ten Little Indians* (1939), where the landscape and the buildings themselves, just as they are created to function in a gothic tale, operate almost as principal characters in the story.

Mystery stories appearing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries used and built upon these components of the gothic tale to form a base of suspense and mystery for the tales that later evolved into the detective fiction produced by writers in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. These mystery stories, and the detective fiction that came after them, whether written by male or female authors, almost panoptically cast women in the same subservient and submissive role as earlier fiction of all genres. That entrenched trend began to slowly change with the rise in the number of female writers, congruent with the increased popularity of the gothic novel. Many of the most successful of the gothic tales were written by female authors such as Anne Radcliff. Women heroines in these stories began to show signs of a new certainty and a solid placement within the boundaries of the literary milieu that had not existed for them before.

Preceding Poe by a few years, L______ , never identified by her proper name, was created by William Burton and appeared in “The Secret Cell,” a two-part serial story that was published in *Gentleman’s Magazine* (1837). L______ was the wife of a professional detective who was stymied by a stalemate in his search for a kidnaped girl. In a most unusual action for the times, he asked his wife (L______) to help him. She went into the neighborhood of the girl’s family and began chatting with the residents. Of course, this was a reflection of “woman’s sensibility” and “gossipy women” syndromes commonly used in fiction as a variant method of
investigation which relied on such belittling women’s potentials, capabilities, and methods prevalent in that era (and others). L_____, portrayed as easily doing what a male detective could not do in any sense, works her way into the confidence of a female member of the kidnaper’s band, elicits the information her detective husband needs to resolve the case and make an arrest, and thereby solves the mystery. As a reward for her help, her detective husband essentially gives her half his pay (or reward) for the job. This act makes L_______, perhaps, the first fictional female detective to be paid to investigate crime, or to act as a paid professional, even if it is in a role that is, from a strictly feminist view, still subservient to that of her less-than-effective detective husband.

Ellen Moers, writing in Literary Women (1976), created a feminine identity she labeled “heroism,” a kind of literary feminism, as a description of women (principally in the gothic tradition) who avoided the customary role assigned them in literature by the predominantly patriarchal writers of the period. Moers notes that although literary feminism and real-life feminism may have many similarities, they are not the same.

A writer who adopts heroism as an element for a character is not necessarily a feminist. Moers says there are differing forms of heroism. The heroinistic character may have any, or a combination, of the following traits. She can be an intellectual heroine; or a heroine that adopts male attributes, such as traveling alone and standing on her own ground; a woman-in-love heroine; or a woman possessing other autonomous properties of character that were principally lacking in earlier heroines in all literary genres. These same characteristics would later be assigned to, and help define, the newly created heroines in the mystery and detective fiction that followed these early women. Female detective characters, ranging from Anna Katherine Green’s mild-mannered busybody, the nosy Amelia Butterworth, to Sara
Paretsky’s macho-like, yet feminine, V.I Warshawski, were women who would progressively move away from the corseted and strictured confines of the male-defined “ideal woman,” i.e., the woman who remained in the background and served only as an accouterment to the male character’s ego, physical needs, and emotional requisites (if any). Women in detective literature would become staunch and independent personas in the fiction bequeathed by C.L. Pirkis, Anna Katherine Green, and others who wrote alone and against the tide.

The mid-nineteenth century saw not only the emergence of the “sensation novel,” such as Wilkie Collins’s The Woman in White (1860), and the numerous works of Mary Elizabeth Braddon, but also an increase in novels that employed the use of more realistic police methodology for the solution of crimes. This segment of the detective fiction genre is generally known as “casebook fiction,” and uses techniques such as deduction, reasoning, disguises, and interpretation of physical evidence at the crime scene. The most famous of the casebook detectives was Arthur Conan Doyle’s creation, Sherlock Holmes. Holmes also used turn-of-the-century science and technology to aid his detective work, and so would more properly be seen as a persona bridging the paths of case-book fiction and scientific detection. Many writers of the times used detective characters who relied on science, particularly the newly evolving forensic sciences, to propel their characters into popularity. Mary Roberts Rhinehart was a popular and leading author who created both male and female detectives, and used this method to some extent in her novels.
A story type also popular with female authors at the turn of the century was the “rogue” story. Usually this involved a charming thief who stole only from the very rich, having frequent sexual liaisons along the way. This allowed the female author to not only create a detective story, but to also include elements of the romance novel within the plot. One modern example of this story type is the movie To Catch A Thief, which featured a very suave and charming second-story burglar who specialized in stealing rich women’s jewelry. Another such was the highly successful Blake Edwards production, The Pink Panther.

Another popular story type during this time, one that can be directly tied to the gothic tradition, was the “impossible crime” tale, an example of which is the “locked room” motif, still used in detective fiction today with some success. In this instance the crime (usually murder) is committed in a room locked from the inside with no evidence of tampering with the locks, doors, windows, skylights, or other entrances. In the gothic tales, this is the type of crime that is usually accomplished through the use of hidden passageways, or secret doors, in the castle or manor house.

As illustrated by Cheri Ross, the turn of the century saw the defined conventions of the principally male dominated detective fiction firmly in place. These conventions were typically acknowledged as being the following:

- the commission of a baffling crime by an unknown person; a professional male detective who may need assistance in solving the crime from an amateur (also male); the arrest of an innocent person; the use of devices such as locked rooms
and red herrings; a suspenseful narrative; emphasis on observation and deduction; a visit to the scene of the crime; identification of the criminal who is usually the least likely suspect; and a credible solution based on information in the fiction itself. (Ross 77)

Anna Katherine Green challenged the established male-dominated conventions and supplanted them with a new direction for fictional detective characters. Following her best-selling novel The Leavenworth Case in 1878, she wrote three additional detective novels between 1897 and 1900. It was this trio of works that introduced Miss Amelia Butterworth whose popularity was to make Green’s novels the best selling books of her time. It was also in these three novels that Green would feature Miss Amelia Butterworth as a principal character and an independent female investigator. That Affair Next Door, the first of the three, marked her debut and became the leading wave for this new brand of fictional detective that would, over time, swell into a tide of assertive, self-reliant, and knowledgeable female sleuths. Anna Katherine Green developed two conventions adopted by future generations of female and male mystery writers. The first and most basic was the criminal investigation as a battle between the sexes; secondly, the criminal investigation as a battle between the professional policeman and the sharply observant (usually female) amateur detective.

It can be said that other writers had cast women in supporting roles in detective fiction prior to Anna Katherine Green’s That Affair Next Door, but these earlier editions were almost unanimously written by male authors and, as noted above, the female characters were strictly
added for effect with little or no real presence in the story. Green’s Amelia Butterworth became the pathfinder for numerous take-charge female detectives, amateur and professional, who followed her from near obscurity to prominent and leading roles along the new by-ways of detective fiction where other writers created detectives patterned after Green’s Butterworth.

Concurrent with the introduction of Amelia Butterworth, another female author, Catherine Louisa Pirkis (C.L. Pirkis) was introducing her version of the female detective, Lovelady Brooke. Differing from Butterworth, Brooke is a professional private investigator who works for a London detective agency. Cast in a familiar part as the outside female detective theoretically working under the auspices of the official police detective assigned to the case, Lovelady Brooke goes her own way and finds connections between widely disparate occurrences separated in time and distance from the primary crime scene. Several of the Lovelady Brooke adventures were first published as a series of short stories in *The Ludgate Monthly* between February and July 1893. These and others were later collected and published in a book titled *The Experiences of Lovelady Brooke, Lady Detective*. Pirkis describes her heroine in these terms:

Loveday Brooke, at this period of her career, was a little over thirty years of age, and could be best described in a series of negations.

She was not tall, she was not short; she was not dark, she was not fair; she was neither handsome nor ugly. Her features were altogether nondescript; her one
noticeable trait was a habit she had, when absorbed in thought, of dropping her eyelids over her eyes till only a line of eyeball showed, and she appeared to be looking out at the world through a slit, instead of through a window. Her dress was invariably black, and was almost Quaker-like in its neat primness. (3)

Echoing the theme so often quoted in critical works devoted to the female detective figure, Pirkis too implies that Lovelady Brooke, finds herself, like Cordelia Gray does, in An Unsuitable Job for a Woman (1973), P.D. James’ fifth novel. Pirkis describes Lovelady’s situation:

(B)y a jerk of Fortune's wheel, Loveday had been thrown upon the world penniless and all but friendless. Marketable accomplishments she had found she had none, so she had forthwith defied convention, and had chosen for herself a career that had cut her off sharply from her former associates and her position in society. (3,4)

It seems clear that although her heroine is defying convention by her choice of profession, she is an independent woman who can think for herself, act alone, and function as well or better than her male counterparts. Pirkis thus illustrates the dominant theme in fiction, and no doubt in her society, that women are only in the detective business on a pass. The real detective work is done by the male detectives and agents. A woman entering this patriarchal arena does so at the risk of becoming not only the “monster female” and the “other,” but also ostracized by the society in which she must function, shunned by male and female alike.
Other echoes resonate in this passage. A clear parallel exists between the female
detective and the female author. Both, in Pirkis’s era, are seen as outside society’s approval,
and alien to the concept of a “proper lady.” Both author and female detective seem to bear the
mark of Sandra Gilbert’s and Susan Gubar’s “madwoman in the attic,” especially when
appraised by the societal norm of their times. Certainly, in the cultural ambiance of the late
eighteenth century, a woman working as a professional private detective would have been far
outside the pale. For a female to not only compete with male detectives, but to actually
outperform those institutionally acceptable investigators, would have been close to
unthinkable.

This concept defines the new path blazed in early detective fiction by Green, Pirkis,
and a handful of other adventurous female authors. They were soon to be joined by a
near-flood of
others and their fictional sister detective characters.
The “Lady” Detectives

In England, beginning with the turn of the nineteenth-century, some of the leading authors of the day began writing stories that introduced female sleuths. Wilkie Collins created Mrs. Yatman in “The Biter Bit,” a short story that appeared in *The Queen of Hearts* (1859). Shortly after that he wrote another story, “The Diary of Anne Rodway,” that appeared in the same book. Anne Rodway, a professional seamstress, became an amateur detective, almost by accident, in order to find the murderer of her friend.

Collins used a number of female sleuths in the stories he wrote between 1850 and the end of the century. His most famous female character, Marian Halcombe, in *The Woman in White* (1860), is readily perceived as an amateur detective when she attempts to unravel the mystery posed by the woman in white. Halcombe also attempts to solve the mystery because it involves her family and friends. This motivation, or spur to enter into detection, is seen in many of the early amateur female detective stories. In 1875, Collins wrote another female detective story. This was “The Law and the Lady,” and featured the lady amateur detective, Valeria Woodville. Essentially a housewife, Valeria undertook an investigation to clear her husband's name. A decade later, the short story, “I Say No” (1885), saw another lady detective born of Collins’s wide-ranging creativity. In this instance, the lady was Emily Brown who, like other amateur lady detectives both before and after, entered the investigatory field to solve a
personal or family problem. In this case, Brown undertook an investigation to solve the mystery of her father's death.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon wrote “Eleanor's Victory” (1863), and presented her readers with yet another amateur detective, Eleanor Vane, who, like Emily Brown, engaged in detection to find a murderer and avenge her father's death. Fergus Hume gave his readers a female detective in “The Greenstone God and the Stockbroker,” printed in The Idler 4 (1893-4). His amateur lady sleuth, Clara Ford, was by profession a hospital nurse, and was yet another woman who entered into detection almost by accident. In what was by this time becoming a familiar scenario, Clara began investigating to clear her fiancé who had been framed for murder. Hume also created another, recurring, character, Hagar Stanley, in the short story, “Hagar of the Pawn-Shop” (1898). Hagar, as indicated by the title, was a professional pawnbroker and, in a foreshadowing of motives and devices to be used in tales to come twenty years later, was also a busybody (like Miss Jane Marple would be shortly thereafter) who essentially snooped into her customers problems.

There were many others, men and women, of varying degrees of fame and success who were writing females into detective fiction in the period between 1841 and 1900. This was also the time period that saw Catherine Louisa Pirkis introduce Lovelady Brooke, in the collection of her short stories titled, The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective (1894).
Whatever their experience, success, or fame, these authors, male and female alike, brought women into detective fiction and led them to a place that would assume a dominant role in the genre overshadowed only by Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, and, in the Golden Age, the beginnings and the development of the hard-boiled school in America in the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties.

In Victorian and pre-Victorian fiction, a significant number of detectives, principally amateur females, emerged. Many of these female detectives were titled Ladies from aristocratic families or marriages. Others were ladies in the traditional sense, possessed of some money, breeding, manners, and social position. Perhaps due to the conditions of the times, only wealthy ladies had the freedom, education, and desire to involve themselves in solving crimes and mysteries. Or, perhaps, conversant with the structured British class-conscious times, and as distasteful as some found female detectives in literature, and as unthinkable as it might have been for a woman in real life to enter into police matters as a detective, it was beyond comprehension to imagine a woman of the working class aspiring to a calling so far above her station in life.

Lady detective Lovelady Brooke may at first glance appear to be an exception. A casual look suggests that she rose from the working classes, however, as Pirkis tells us in the citation above, she was “thrown upon the world penniless and all but friendless.” This is certainly a direct allusion to the stated fact that Brooke was sharply cut off from her friends and (apparently) her family. Brooke’s opting for employment in the detection field would have made her an outcast throughout her social circles. This concern with her choice of profession
by her friends and family would also appear to lend credence to the assumption that she came
from a good family with the upbringing common to a “proper lady.”

The earlier women detectives differed from the nosy, noisy, irritable amateur sleuths
later epitomized by Agatha Christie’s Miss Marple. Although they stayed within proper
bounds of lady-like behavior, they too advanced the position of women in detective fiction and,
knowingly or not, laid the roots for future feminist interpretations of their fictional actions and
of their “real” milieu.

In her book The Web of Inequity: Early Detective Fiction by American Women,
Catherine Ross Nickerson illuminates the works of American authors Metta Fuller Victor,
Anna Katherine Green, and Mary Roberts Rhinehart. Nickerson demonstrates that these
women, writing within the times and customs of their epoch, provide a window into a world
where women, the “madwom[e]n in the attic,” without a “room of [their] own,” wrote in
secret,

between tending to babies, late at night, or other times when it would not interfere with their
womanly, matronly, and wifely duties. Metta Fuller Victor essentially invented the concept of
the female domestic detective which survives to this day. Nickerson points out here that there
is a conflation of the female body and the writings of these pioneers in female detective fiction.
They are, in the words of Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, “writing the body.” These writers,
like their British counterparts, wrote tales that cast light on the inequities perpetrated as a result
of wealth, class, education, and the privileges enjoyed by moneyed middle and upper class
citizens, but not shared by the numerically superior worker class.

Nickerson also alludes to the possibility that, instead of the linear progression of
detective fiction from Poe to England and again back to America, perhaps the ontogenesis of
the genre is fiction growing from the domestic detective novel, which, in itself, contains
elements
that are derived from early detective fiction, the gothic tradition, and domestic novels of the
nineteenth century.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon, although not strictly a writer of detective fiction, is accorded
the title of inventor of the “sensation novel.” Writing at the same time as Green and Pirkis,
Braddon’s stories also provide much material that would later be incorporated into female
detective novels. Her stories, typified by Lady Audley’s Secret (1862) and The Doctor’s Wife,
(1864), contained a mixture of sensationalism, secrets, clues, romance, one or more subplots,
long and detailed descriptions of manners, furniture, and clothing, plus a strong love interest.
However, the tales also contained crimes to be solved, and detection featuring a varied cast of
amateur and professional detectives. The amateurs outnumbered the professional, or official,
detectives who were often portrayed as incompetent, unimaginative, and primarily focused on
monetary concerns such as rewards.

Jeanne Bedell, in her essay in Clues (1983), tells us that in the majority of Braddon’s
stories the female characters are usually victims rather than the pursuers of criminals. Two
notable exceptions are found in the characters of Mildred Griswold in The Fatal Three (1888),
and Kathleen Mortemar in Under the Red Flag (1886). Griswold is a wife who successfully
uncovers her husband's secret past which destroyed their marriage. Mortemar systematically goes alone and searches the dangerous streets of Paris just after the failure of the Commune. Proceeding through harrowing escapades, and despite what appears to be great personal risk, she doggedly ferrets out her husband’s murderer.

However, with the two above exceptions, most of Braddon’s detectives are male, and, in a foreshadowing of things to come, develop characteristics that would be cornerstones of the hard-boiled detectives of the 1920s and 1930s. Braddon’s detectives have questionable ethics, employ other than purely legal means, and justify their actions as necessary to get results.

Again, two exceptions are found in Braddon’s work. Henry Carter, a police investigator who appears in *Henry Dunbar* (1864), is one, and John Fuance, who debuts in *Rough Justice* (1898), is the other. Both of these (male) detectives are presented as having unquestioned character, honor, and integrity.

Braddon’s novels, like those of Green, Rhinehart, Pirkis and a few others writing at the turn of the century, not only opened the door to the creation of female detectives acting in roles that had previously been reserved for the males of fiction and society, but her novels also laid the groundwork for a style of detective fiction that traverses time and finds applications in the most modern detective fiction of the present.

The competitive tenacity and resourcefulness of the early female sleuths are mirrored in today’s tough, self assertive, resourceful and resolutely determined women of detective fiction exemplified by the heroines of contemporary writers, such as Sara Paretsky’s V.I.
Warshawski, and Sue Grafton’s Kensie Millhone. Other sister private detectives, and amateur investigators can be found in abundance on the bookshelves of bookstores everywhere today.

The Rise of the “Pulps,” and the Birth of the Hard-Boiled Detective

Close on the heels of the early writers, and just behind those of the mid-twentieth century, a tendency appeared in detective fiction. There was a sudden growth of female
detectives that dominate the years known as the Golden Age of detective fiction, from 1918 to 1945. This period between the two “Great Wars” saw a major increase in the numbers and types of police narratives, crime stories, and detective fiction produced. Many of the genre’s most celebrated names achieved popularity and fame during this time.

The pulps gave birth to detective stories published as series. The series detectives appeared in numbers of short stories, typically on a monthly or quarterly basis. Favorites of most readers, these fictional detectives had careers that frequently spanned more than ten years and were spread across twenty to thirty tales, or more. Many of those tales of adventures often included a lighter side, a side filled with pleasant elements of excitement, that provided the reader with the sought-after escape from the mundane and gray world the denizens of the Great Depression faced in their daily lives.

The lighter-toned writing of the period might be exemplified by the works of Frank Gruber and Norman Davis. Both men, writing principally for the pulps in the nineteen-thirties, exhibit similar styles and character development in their amateur detective heroes. Both write their stories so as to mix comedy and detection. Each of the writers frequently portrays his leading character in physical danger. Davis’ Bail Bondsman cum detective has a business that brings him in close contact with criminals. In a manner of writing far different from the hard-boiled fiction that was already born, these two authors presented women in an Amazonian mold. Their women possess skills that deal with violence, and have a
predilection for subjecting men to physical beatings and punishment. They are depicted as comic on one level, yet carry with them a frightening undercurrent on another.

The male authors notwithstanding, the leading British crime writers of this period, and throughout the Golden Age of detective fiction, were Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham, and Ngaio Marsh. This quartet of British women authors were far and away the most successful writers of the period. They were sometimes referred to as the four “Queens of Crime.” In almost all of their books, their heroines employed the tried and true female investigatory methods. They are nosy, noisy busybodies, using feminine intuition and gossip. A strong male counterpart, usually at a ranking level in the police department is an obligatory, though virtually helpless, accessory to their efforts.

Among the names of those authors growing to immense popularity was, arguably, the most renowned of them all, the British author, Agatha Christie. Stories involving Christie’s two best-known detectives, Miss Jane Marple and Hercule Poirot, are still being reprinted, copied, and made into films more than thirty years after Christie’s death. Miss Jane Marple, Christie’s busybody octogenarian amateur, served as a blueprint for many female amateur detectives that followed her through the twentieth-century and into the early years of the twenty-first.

One character adopted by many of the Golden Age writers is that of the “intuitionist” detective who solves crimes by the use of his/her intelligence and reasoning power alone. Christie’s detectives were almost invariably intuitionists, as were those of S.S. Van Dine. Another famed detective writer of the time, Ellery Queen, an early follower of Van Dine and a
member of the intuitionist school, utilized very complex plots in his stories, unnatural or
bizarre events, and crimes that required solution through elaborate chains of nothing less than
brilliant reasoning.

In Britain another school of detective fiction flourished at this time, that of the
“realists.” Most of the crimes investigated and solved by this school of detectives were
resolved by the exercise of realistic police procedures, as well as the use of criminal and
medical forensic science technology and methods.

The Golden Age of mystery and detective stories increased the public’s appetite for
such works, but in many ways it was a step back for women in detective fiction. With a few
notable exceptions such as the work of Agatha Christie and Mary Roberts Rhinehart, much of
the fiction featuring women detectives was either a shallow copy of the works of Rhinehart and
Christie, or outright appealed to the very things that had made the popular view of women’s
writings as light fluff for the bored housewife and not literature to be taken seriously. Once
more female authors and their characters were pushed into the margins of the fictional world.
The rise of the “Dime Novel” and the “pulps” in the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties
saw the emergence of the hard-boiled detective. The dominance of a violent macho portrayal
of the private detective would once more overshadow the writings that featured female
detectives who used mind, reason, and intuition to solve crimes would appear to go
unchallenged.

Late nineteenth-century dime novels, such as Black Mask and Dime Detective,
(forerunners to the twentieth century pulps) were small, inexpensive books that arose based on
the success of Beadle's and Adams's “yellowbooks” published in the 1860's as a one time
printing on cheap paper made of wood pulp only. Manufactured without the inclusion of rag content, as was contained in the more expensive papers, the pulps allowed for inexpensive printing and made large numbers of books available to equally large numbers of new readers at low prices. The prevalence of low-priced books also made it feasible to provide compartmented marketing, i.e., the ability to print books that would appeal to virtually every segment of the public’s every literary taste or need.

Dime libraries paved the way for serialized recurring characters. However, since the major marketing thrust of these adventure-type detective novels was directed to the male population, the female figure in detective fiction was once again relegated to a back seat, personified by the sexy damsel in distress. In dime novels, the women were objectified and rarely depicted in real physical danger or partaking of the significant action of the plot in any meaningful manner.

In the earliest American pulps, frequently featuring pioneer stock American woodsmen and adventurers, females looked on from the sidelines as their male protectors played rugby, fought Indians, or, in the case of the more exotic “travel books,” battled witch doctors and wild animals. A classic example of this trend is James Fenimore Cooper’s most popular work, *The Last of the Mohicans*.

Adhering to an increasingly invalid Victorian moral code, publishers targeted women and families with their own “Story Papers” and novels that focused on strong messages about social responsibilities and situations centering around home and family values. There seemed to be no interest in tales that depicted strong women involved in detection and crime solving. Detective fiction was again moving away from the drawing room and garden and becoming “man’s work.”
The pulps arose at a time of other significant events occurring in the rapidly growing and congested American urban areas, coming to prominence at the onset of the great depression of the nineteen-thirties. Financial disaster and poverty became the order of the day throughout the land. One can easily trace a relationship that existed between the deteriorating economic conditions of the urbanized parts of the nation, and the growth of magazine readership. Just as the movie industry experienced a huge audience growth during the depression, the pulps expanded readership for the same reason. Like the movies, the pulps played to a public’s need to escape the grayness, cares, needs, and the grim realities of daily life. The pulps and the cinema offered a low-cost avenue of escape from the crushing economic and social problems besetting the entire nation, and indeed, the entire industrialized world, throughout the thirties.

Another major influence in the popularity of the pulps was the rise in the number and visibility of crime and criminal figures that attained news and entertainment importance in the mind of the average American. Prohibition created a large criminal underworld, populated by bigger-than-life criminals whose exploits occupied major amounts of newspaper space and radio news air time. Many of these figures became almost folk heroes to some Americans. Some were equated to Robin Hood and some earned their place by their sheer bravado, daring lifestyle, close scrapes with the police, and audacious escapades. Figures like John Dillinger, Al Capone, Frank Nitti, Lucky Luciano, Bonny Parker and Clyde Barrow, were looked up to just as rock celebrities and screen idols are today.

Then, too, the work of government agents, the “G-men” of the F.B.I. and the Treasury Department, were also made into fare for the American reader. Melvin Purvis, became famous by the feat of finally tracking down and killing Bonny and Clyde. By the same means, the
flamboyant J. Edgar Hoover became a popular hero by leading the F.B.I. into a place of respect and authority on the American justice scene in the turbulent and violent decade of the nineteen-thirties. Internal Revenue Service agents such as Eliot Ness, who led raids to stop bootlegging alcohol ventures, ended the reign of Al Capone. In so doing, Ness and his “untouchables” became household names.

The pulps glamorized all these elements. The atmosphere of lawlessness and violence associated with the late nineteen-twenties and throughout the nineteen-thirties also provided fertile ground for the development of tough, smart-talking, and hard nosed fictional detectives. The times provided a foundation for the beginnings of the hard-boiled tradition in detective fiction. It elevated fictional characters to the status of national heroes, some of whom were loosely based on real persons.

The easy accessibility and proliferation of pulp magazines and the modern printing techniques that developed initially to service the pulps, made many fields of publishing affordable, and soft-cover books sprang up in great variety. Tales featured in these new low-cost books and magazines ranged from saucy “French” tales boasting nude women and barely concealed sex, to science fiction novels which, at least in the early days, rarely had women in them at all.

The pulps died out after World War II due to a series of problems including a shortage of paper. Readers and audiences shifted their attention to new means of entertainment such as movies, television, traveling (made easy through new and improved roads), ready access to low-priced gasoline, a booming post-war economy, and the ready availability of personal automobiles. Although the pulps generally disappeared, they left a legacy of hard-boiled
detective fiction born of Dashiell Hammett’s Sam Spade, and Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe among others. They evolved into a new breed of anti-heroes typified by Mickey Spillane’s Mike Hammer. These modern detective characters inhabited a brutal, gray, and sparse world, filled with bristling male ego. Women were relegated to one-dimensional, unbelievably sexy, and alluring mysterious figures such as Velda of Mickey Spillane’s Mike Hammer stories. In the first chapter of the book, I The Jury, Spillane has Mike describe Velda:

I closed the door and followed her into my sanctum sanctorum. She had million-dollar legs, that girl, and she didn’t mind showing them off. For a secretary she was an awful distraction. She kept her coal-black hair long in a page boy cut and wore tight-fitting dresses that made me think of the curves in the Pennsylvania Highway every time I looked at her. Don’t get the idea that she was easy, though. I’ve seen her give a few punks the brush off the hard way. When it came to quick action, she could whip off a shoe and crack a skull before you could bat an eye. (11)

Most of these women had little or no real role in most of the stories. In the odd case where women were featured, they were most often portrayed as the epitome of deceit and treachery, and the hidden source of the crime under investigation. For the most part, these women functioned as nearly invisible organic office fixtures: comfortable, attractive, and created to provide the detective with occasional solace and support.

The detective novel featured by the pulps and soft-cover books (which became known as pocket books due to their smaller size) was very likely the overall best selling genre of them all. New issues were eagerly anticipated by the public. Former principal characters like clean cut all-American boys such as Frank Merriwell and the Hardy Boys, soon found themselves
pushed off the newsstands by books featuring hard-boiled detectives and Tommy-gun toting G Men. Allan Pinkerton’s terse prose, developed in the 1870s was turned into Raymond Chandler’s and Dashiell Hammett’s smart-talking, street wise, protagonists who were quick to employ violence and who were continuously portrayed in the company of sexy women of questionable or no virtue. A prime example of the detective’s relationship with women and adherence to the detective’s code is illustrated in a passage from Dashiell Hammett’s *The Dain Curse*, originally written as a four-piece story for Black Mask in 1927.

Gabrielle is a drug addict and attracted to Hammett’s detective hero in this tale, the never-named Continental Op. She attempts to convince the Op that she is still a virgin, despite the fact that she has had sexual relations with three men. When Gabrielle approaches him and opens her dressing robe to bare her body to him, the Op keeps Gabrielle at arms's length:

I said: “I'm twice your age sister; an old man. I'm damned if I'll make a chump of myself by telling you why I did it, why it was neither revolting or disgusting, why I'd do it again and be glad of the chance.”

She jumped out of her chair, her eyes round and dark, her mouth trembling.

“You mean--?”

“I don't mean anything that I'll admit,” I said; "and if you're going to parade around with that robe hanging open you're going to get yourself some bronchitis.”

(178)
Not all critics agree that Gabrielle is offering herself to the Op, but from the foregoing passage it would appear that this is indeed the case.

Another side of the tough-guy hard-boiled detective is seen in Hammet’s *Red Harvest*, “I've arranged a killing or two in my time, when they were necessary. But this is the first time I've ever got the fever. It's this damned burg. You can't go straight here. I got myself tangled at the beginning. . . . I had to swing the job the best way I could. How could I help it if the best way was bound to lead to a lot of killing?” (142-43).

This fast-paced, tough-guy style, originated by the pulp magazine, *Black Mask*, infiltrated Hollywood and the cinema, eventually becoming the Film Noir genre of the thirties and forties. *Black Mask* and the concept of the hard-boiled detective launched the paperback writing careers of the originators of the hard-boiled tradition. This was where writers such as Micky Spillane, Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and numerous others, well known and not, and who quickly joined the parade, made major writing reputations. Targeted to an all-male audience, the covers of the pulp mystery and detective novels most often depicted a tough looking private detective (gumshoe, dick, private eye, P.I.), breaking down a door, guns blazing, to save an overly endowed, sexy female (dame, broad, skirt, twist,) from a less than genius, ogre-featured villain. In some cases, the private-eye hero was depicted on the cover as a prisoner of the criminals, tied up and unable to interfere while low-life thugs stripped and attempted to assault a helpless, sexy, nearly nude damsel in distress.
The cover art of the pulp and soft-cover books of the era gave eloquent evidence of their intended market. This art work also contributed to the perception of the female character, again relegated to an objectified woman helplessly dependent on the male hero for sustenance and rescue. None of the Black Mask type publications were by women authors or featured female investigators and detectives. The closest thing to an independent female investigator to be found in the pages of the pulps and hard-boiled detective novels might be a secretary who was also licensed as a private detective “operative.” Sam Spade’s secretary, Effie, in Hammett’s novel The Maltese Falcon; and Velda of Micky Spillane’s Mike Hammer series are two examples of this relatively minor exception.

Micky Spillane, like those who went before him, portrayed women either as alluring objects of sexual desire, or as the incarnation of ultimate evil. However, it is interesting to note that the femmes fatale in stories like Dashiell Hammett’s The Maltese Falcon, and James M. Cain’s The Postman Always Rings Twice, never kill anyone themselves. Perhaps this is a reflection of the societal perception of women of the time, or it may simply be writers reverting to archetypes. Women are demoted to a position of either virtual non-existence as individuals, or as they who inspire evil actions in others. In that era of detective fiction, and in some fiction being written today, the female protagonists tend to act like seductresses of mythology, using feminine wiles to entice men into doing murder for them, rather than committing their own iniquitous deeds.
Although there is ample evidence that Velda holds a place of emotional attachment in Mike Hammer’s heart, in the works consulted, there is never any evidence that the relationship is anything other than professional and platonic. Male heroes, especially during the Depression, were described and portrayed as men whose psyches were barely held together as they attempted to cope with overwhelming personal difficulties. Many critics depicted the hard-boiled detective characters as “brittle,” and some attribute the birth of the term hard-boiled to this brittleness, as in the friable shell of a hard-boiled egg. However hard or brittle the shell may be, a hard-boiled egg might have either a tough and hard interior or it could have a near-liquid soft inside. The hard-boiled detective typically had only a hard and tough interior, a toughness and hardness that did not allow for the softness and warmth of females as equal partners either in life or in profession.
Golden Age Detective Fiction

At the time **Black Mask** was creating the American hard-boiled detective sub-genre, Great Britain was giving birth to another tradition. This was what has become known as the Golden Age of detective fiction. Immediately prior to, and during the heyday of the hard-boiled era, the Golden Age of detective fiction was also enjoying great popularity with writers such as Agatha Christie, A.A. Milne, Margery Allingham, G.K. Chesterton, John D. Carr, Dorothy L. Sayers, H.C. Bailey, Ngaio Marsh, R. Austin Freeman, and Ronald Knox. Some of these authors remained in vogue for a long period of time, others slipped off the literary map at the end of the Golden Age. A few, like Agatha Christie, are still being reprinted and avidly read by an apparently growing league of new readers today.

The popularity of the works generated and created during the Golden Age begs a question today: What makes the Golden Age such a draw for readers, even now? For many, including numerous critics, that period of detective fiction is the apex of the genre. The Golden Age is the period where all the major elements that give the form its appeal were developed. Many of these elements are regarded as beneficial in modern works just as they were in the first three decades of the twentieth-century. The aura of the Golden Age was
produced by a combination of atmosphere and ambience, complex puzzles solved almost entirely by sheer wit, little or no modern forensic science, a more innocent and leisurely time, and nostalgia for a long gone and simpler era, where good was everywhere and evil was easily discerned from the good.

It is probable that all of these factors contribute to the on-going popularity of Golden Age detective fiction.

During the Golden Age the rules of fair play were introduced:

The idea is that readers should be able to solve the crime along with the detective, if their wits are sharp enough. The rules of fair play prevent the author from throwing in unforeseen surprises that would prevent readers from solving the mystery themselves. Basically the rules state that there must be no bizarre breaks or surprise solutions that are hidden from the reader until the end and that the reader must be in possession of all the clues; nothing should be withheld by the author. and the audience was invited to participate, to puzzle out the solution along with the detective. The British authors were by far the masters of the genre, their plots frequently set in the heart of the English countryside or in London. (Baker 2)

Typically seen as a principally British movement, the Golden Age also saw a large increase in the popularity of the female amateur sleuth. Agatha Christie’s popular Miss Jane
Marple shared her acclaim with the prolific author’s equally famous male detective, Hercule Poirot.

In 1929, Ronald Knox formulated and formalized his set of rules, called the Ten Commandments of Detective Fiction, which would serve as guidelines for mystery and detective authors for many years into the future.

Knox’s Ten Commandments are:

I. The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow;

II. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course;

III. No more than one secret room or passage is allowable. I would add that a secret passage should not be brought in at all unless the action takes place in the kind of house where such devices might be expected;

IV. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end;

V. No Chinaman must figure into the story [This was not racism on Knox's part. It was a reference to the frequency with which mysterious Chinamen and opium dens appeared as plot devices.];

VI. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right;

VII. The detective must not, himself, commit the crime; VIII. The detective
must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader;

IX. The stupid friend of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but only very slightly, below that of the average reader;

X. Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them. (Willis 3)

Theoretically, the rules of fair play introduced by Knox allowed the reader an equal chance to solve the crime, if he/she was sharp enough to recognize the clues and interpret their importance to the solution.

Many of the Golden Age mysteries and detective stories were set in English country manors, just as their predecessors, the gothic tales, were placed in castles. Agatha Christie was one of the writers who particularly liked to use the country manor or the attached grounds for her detective fiction. The entire story is generally confined to the manor house and its environs. The persons in the manor house are almost invariably there as invited guests, and no one leaves until the murder is solved. However, the detective, or the detective’s assistant, professional or amateur, might leave to go to the city to check records, an alibi, or – in later stories – to obtain police results of forensic evidence. Upon returning, and having had time to cogitate upon the results of his/her work as well as the evidence, the detective is usually prepared and ready to
present the solution to the guests, staff, and owners of the manor who are almost invariably assembled in some great room, or at the scene of the crime, for the purpose of the denouement.

Another setting (sometimes used in conjunction with the English manor house) is the locked room mystery. As the term suggests, the crime takes place in a room or place locked from the inside with no apparent way in or out. It seems to be a supernatural or impossible crime to even an astute reader, but the detective finds it to be completely rational and can readily deduce what happened. This particular convention was favored by John Dickson Carr, who found it a handy and flexible device to be used in many of his novels. Similar to the impossible crime is the “paradox,” a favorite of G. K. Chesterton. The paradox is a mystery containing numerous contradictions, several plot twists, a tangled skein of events, a mixed cast of characters (any or all of whom could be the guilty party or parties), and seemingly inexplicable aspects.

Both of the above formulas were virtually made to order for the fictional female detective, whether professional investigator, policewoman, or amateur sleuth. Within the manor, and in dealing with the serving staff, a woman’s knowledge, experience, and intuition appeared to always be able to provide clues that her male associates either never seemed to notice, or were unable to elicit. Additionally, since the majority of staff and persons in the manor house were almost always women, it meant that the female detective could go places the males could not, and were able to insinuate themselves into the women’s confidence more easily than the men. Some see this ploy as a comment on the “gossipy” nature of women where a woman is more likely to tell something to another woman because she thinks it will probably be held in confidence, even if the other woman is a detective. It is noticeable, too, that female
authors impart more detailed descriptions of the houses and the grounds, and pay more attention to manners, dress, and customs of the household than do the male authors of the period. These very observations were frequently employed as the key to unlocking the mystery or puzzle. In fact, women wrote to conform more closely to Thomas Godfrey’s “Rules of the House.” “The house itself must have character (whether pleasant or dreary), ought to have some secrets and maybe even reports of ghosts, needs at least a few servants to vouch for people’s whereabouts at the time of the crime and should have an unreliable telephone system” (Baker 3). In this way, the house itself is another character of the story with its own persona, a persona felt by the female detectives and generally unnoticed or deliberately ignored by their male detective colleagues.

Puzzles were another story plot favored by female writers such as Dorothy L. Sayers. Puzzle stories were not necessarily crimes, although crime plots were to be the most numerous of these tales. Frequently they were mysteries not involving a murder, but instead featuring a very puzzling circumstance or situation that had to be thought out and unraveled. A last, final story type used in the Golden Age is the “inverted tale.” This is a story plot conceived so that the reader first sees the criminal in the act of committing the crime, and then follows the detective who pieces together what happened, and who did it. In this type of story, the perpetrator is known, and it is the path taken in the investigation to solve the crime that holds suspense and the reader’s interest and involvement. This particular type of tale is much used in cinema today.
Generally speaking, all of the story types described above suit the amateur female detective. Women like Miss Jane Marple, who must rely on her wits and her thinking power to solve the crimes, seem to be favored in Golden Age detective tales. Usually, she has neither the resources nor the ability to move about and research alibis, examine forensic evidence, and interview casual witnesses. These story plots allow a platform for female psyche and intelligence to shine (but not brightly enough to dim the light of their “superior” male counterparts).

Willard Hungtington Wright, in his essay of 1927, “The Great Detective Stories,” writing in the midst of the Golden Age, provides a real-time look at how women detectives and their authors were regarded by the critics of the time:

As soon as the detective story became popular it was inevitable that the woman detective would make her appearance; and today [1927] there are a score or more of female rivals of Sherlock Holmes. The most charming and capable, as well as the most competently conceived, is Violet Strange, who solves eight criminal problems in Anna Katharine Green's The Golden Slipper. Lady Molly, in Lady Molly of Scotland Yard by the Baroness Orczy, is somewhat more conventional in conception but sufficiently entertaining to be regarded as a worthy deductive sister of Violet Strange. (13)

Wright is less enthusiastic about Agatha Christie’s most famous detective, Hercule Poirot. He describes Poirot as “Agatha Christie's pompous little Belgian sleuth,” and adds, “the stories in
which he figures are often so artificial, and their problems so far fetched, that all sense of reality is lost, and consequently the interest in the solution is vitiated” (12).

In regards to Poirot’s performance in Agatha Christie’s The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, and his impression of the novel in general, he says, “The trick played on the reader in The Murder of Roger Ackroyd is hardly a legitimate device of the detective-story writer; and while Poirot’s work in this book is at times capable, the effect is nullified by the denouement” (Wright 12).

It would appear that Wright’s opinions have been proven somewhat less than accurate by time and history. Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot is one of the most famous fictional detectives that the literary world has produced, and his stories are the most widely read except for the adventures of Sherlock Holmes.

Books in the style of the Golden Age were still being written in the 1960s, and even into the 1970s. Agatha Christie was still producing Golden Age stories and books until her death in 1976. Christie and a few others were, notwithstanding the time, holding on to the conventions of detective fiction that were developed and perfected in the Golden Age, bucking the tide of a changing society that increasingly demonstrated more interest in newer, more realistic detective fiction.
The Golden Age classic tale exerts an enduring attraction that stretches from the early twentieth-century to the nascent years of the twenty-first century. This attraction is evident in the on-going popularity of the television mystery show, Murder She Wrote, starring Angela Lansbury as a 60ish widow (Jessica Fletcher), cast as a best-selling mystery novelist living in a quiet little village in New England called Cabot Cove. True to the formula developed in the Golden Age novels, the creators of the show have Jessica Fletcher always stumbling upon the scene where a murder has just taken place. The busy author invariably makes time in her schedule to solve the crime. She frequently comes upon the body first. The police never seem to be able to find the right culprit or to “get it right.” Her friend, who is often accused, is almost always innocent. Fletcher is always around when crucial evidence is found or produced; or, she finds the evidence herself.

A typical story plot might run like this:

Jessica encounters several people displaying animosity toward a mean person.

An innocent person, often a friend or relative of Jessica's, publicly threatens or criticizes the bully. The audience sees the bully murdered, but the killer's identity is hidden. The authorities accuse Jessica's ally, based on circumstantial evidence. Jessica notices--and the camera lingers on--details that seem inconsequential but later prove central to the solution. She investigates, uncovering various means, motives, and opportunities and eliminating suspects. A few minutes before the program ends, she suddenly realizes the last piece of
the puzzle and announces that she knows who the killer is. She confronts the killer, privately, in a group, or with authorities observing off camera. Almost always, the killer confesses, and Jessica presents the person to the police.

(Riggs 2)

Reminiscent of so many Jane Marple stories, a final scene often shows Fletcher sharing a good-natured exchange with someone, either the police detective, her doctor friend, or the innocent party that her work has freed, to explain just how she solved the mystery. Fletcher does in her tales as Miss Marple would do to conclude hers.

Running in prime time from 1984 to 1996, the show produced 284 episodes and four made-for-TV movies. The series is still being shown in syndication on the Biography channel and its sister network, A&E.

Television is home to other detective fiction that emulates the style and formulaic approach to the genre that prevailed and was perfected in the Golden Age. Diagnosis Murder features a doctor who also serves as an amateur sleuth to help his son, a police detective, to solve many cases that stymie the police.

Another show that would appear to be destined to live a hundred years in syndication is Columbo. The short Italian-American detective with his fumbling ways is every bit as much an intuitionist as Fletcher, Poirot, and Miss Jane Marple. He seems to stumble and grope his way
through one case after another, using much the same techniques that were made famous by the many noteworthy female writers and female fictional detectives in the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties Golden Age of detective fiction. However, although Columbo uses intuitionist techniques like Jane Marple, he hides his obvious intellect behind the demeanor of a buffoon.

Unlike Sherlock Holmes, Poirot, and other Golden Age detectives, Columbo has a wife and a happy home life. He shares this trait with Georges Simenon’s Jules Maigret, who also has a home life and a wife that figures largely in his life. These women, although never or rarely on-stage or in the story-line, influence the detectives, and through that influence, the story-line itself. It is an example of how the feminine influence can be exerted through indirect means and establish a place for the female in stories that, on the surface, do not feature women or feminist concepts in the plot.

Other examples of the ongoing popularity of these and other Golden Age-type shows featured on specialty cable channels and on PBS channels throughout the world are re-makes of the Sherlock Holmes tales, Inspector Morse, Poirot, Jane Marple, John Mortimer’s Rumpole of the Bailey, and the newer members of the Golden Age tradition illustrated above. Television syndication assures that these and other shows will be enjoyed well into the twenty-first century.

In another vein of detective fiction, Dashiell Hammett’s Nick and Nora Charles were finding great popularity in print and in the movies. Their light-hearted, semi-comedic approach
to detection was in direct contrast to the thrust of emerging hard-boiled fiction and Hammett’s other creation, Sam Spade. The pairing of the retired professional detective and his amateur detective wife made for interesting entertainment and demonstrated that women could still function in detective fiction, regardless of the onslaught of hard-boiled tales being churned out by the pulps and paperbacks.

In the majority of current female detective fiction authors work, the women are not professionals like Paretsky’s V.I Warshawski or Grafton’s Kensie Millhone. Rather, they reflect a varied bag of personalities and differing walks of life. However, they all share the same ability to reason and ferret out clues that go undetected by the male detectives in the stories in which they appear.

The female presence in many detective tales is presented through a wife who is frequently in the background, but provides a foil or sounding board for her detective husband. Hammett’s team of Nick and Nora Charles was an exception in that they were equally featured from the beginning. Horace Rumpole has his wife, the socially ambitious Hilda. Although their marriage seems dysfunctional to an outside observer, they always stick together when things are not going well. Columbo’s wife, although not seen on-stage in the show, created sufficient interest to have a television show of her own. Created as a spin-off from her husband’s successful forerunner, the show did not find immense success. Perhaps the message found in this outcome is that a wife should not compete with a famous and successful husband in the fictional world of detective stories.
British writers still created variations on the traditional detective fiction formula well after the Golden Age of classic detective tales had passed. At the same time however, other crime writing story lines began to emerge. Some of these plots were closely related to the ‘‘noir thrillers’’ that were finding acceptance as the American hard-boiled writers came to the fore. British crime writing of the time contributed the so-called ‘‘serious thrillers’’ of the nineteen-thirties and the early nineteen-forties.

In the decades just after World War II, a much lighter story type began to appear in British detective fiction. Hundreds of cheap paperbacks were published in England and Great Britain during the late nineteen-forties and the nineteen-fifties. These low-priced paperback publications were essentially copies of American hard-boiled detective and gangster pulps. It
was apparent that a British appetite for American hard-boiled detective fiction had taken root and begun to bloom in Britain in the nineteen-forties.

In France, the war curtailed French production of detective novels to a large extent. However, Leo Malet, writing in occupied France, created the first French private detective, Nestor Burma. Today a weekly series, “Nestor Burma,” starring Guy Marchand as the detective, draws large viewing audiences in France. Private detectives are rare in French literature of any period. Obviously influenced by Dashiell Hammett and the burgeoning American hardboiled school, Malet sets his novel in occupied Paris during the reign of the Vichy government. This work is accorded recognition as a seminal work in the birth of the French 'noir' novel. Burma, Malet’s detective, risks his life in the pursuit of the truth about the murder of a friend. He is seen in much the same character type as Sam Spade and Phillip Marlowe. Characteristically, he is independent and resorts to unconventional means to solve his mysteries. Also like Chandler and Hammett, Malet allows his detective to trust no one before he can assess him/her for himself. Also like the American hard-boiled detectives, Burma has no visible relationship with women other than with his secretary (and more?), Helene. She seems to be more than a passing interest, and exhibits jealousy in regard to his male colleagues. Perhaps this is a sign of professional envy, and a small battle in the war of the sexes in detective fiction.

After the second world war, the French readers had a consuming love affair with American hard-boiled and Noir publications. In her enlightening essay on French Noir and the detective novel in general as produced in France, Sue Neale in her essay, “An Introduction to French Crime Fiction,” says:
This passion for foreign crime fiction still remains and certain imprints feature specific styles of work. Few women, until recently, were published by the Série Noire as the imprint's desire was to give their readers sleepless nights with non-conformist amoral stories where action, anxiety and violence were key elements. Police were often portrayed as more corrupt than the criminals and the detective would not always solve the mystery, if there was one, and sometimes even the detective would not exist. There was no introspection, just action. Love, if it was included was preferably bestial, passion disorganized and hate without (merci). (My translation of the founding editor, Marcel Duhamel's formula for the imprint.) (3)

The post-World War II years ushered in a new breed of private detective stories in other parts of the world as well. The British PI stories written during this period, tend to have the private investigator hero in warm, cooperative relations with the police. They also tend to follow the sort of plodding, systematic investigative techniques of their fictional police allies. Their American cousins, however, trod another road. These American private detectives were a new breed of anti-authoritarian loners. This new breed of detectives were ultra-male, cynical loners, and completely convinced that the world was corrupt, and that everyone in it was guilty of something. Their approach to detection was cynicism, violence, and a curiously strict adherence to a personal code of honor. The fictional detectives, regardless of their differences
in style and approach, all seemed to have that in common. The code is eloquently spelled out and expressed by Dashiell Hammett’s Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*:

“Listen. When a man’s partner is killed he’s supposed to do something about it. It doesn’t make any difference what you thought of him. He was your partner and you’re supposed to do something about it. Then it happens we were in the detective business. Well, when one of your organization gets killed it’s bad business to let the killer get away with it. It’s bad all around—bad for that one organization, bad for every detective everywhere.” (213-14)

In Raymond Chandler’s words, as cited by T.R. Steiner, "Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid" (1). Chandler’s “mean streets” have become synonymous with the corrupt urban society against which Mickey Spillane’s Mike Hammer and Robert Parker’s Spenser must pit themselves to find answers to personal crimes. By addressing himself to the more intimate transgressions against individuals, rather than confronting the institution of crime itself, the new breed of detective operates on an intense and closely-focused personal level. He functions in close contact with the mean streets. The street is as much a metaphor for the arena in which the detective-gladiator faces the beasts of the pit as it is a real geographical fixture. As such it is rendered in metaphoric blacks and grays. The detective has an uncontrollable need to traverse the mean streets, and it is this need to go “down the mean streets” that describes a deeply underlying function, basic to the definition of the detectives’s code.

The prevalence of male detectives and a scarcity of significant female characters in most of the detective fiction of the era leads many critical analysts to wonder if, “in connection
with the mystery genre, the current big issue seems to be the extent to which the detective story can be regendered as nonsexist narrative or whether, like many popular genres, the form is inherently and inescapably patriarchal” (Cawelti 3).

It has been said that the new crop of mystery and female detective writers are only appropriating male roles for their female heroines. Others disagree. Sally Munt, in her book, *Murder by the Book: Feminism and the Crime Novel* (1994), says that new mystery sub-genres featuring lesbianism, psychoanalysis, and African American woman detectives have created an authentic feminist tradition within the detective story. Moreover, she argues that even traditional mainstream women writers like Christie, Sayers, Patricia Highsmith, and Ruth Rendell brought feminist perspectives to the mystery. In effect, Munt argues that rather than merely copying customary male roles from the traditional patriarchal styles of history, the new writers are indeed creating a new feminism within the detective genre.7

It is evident that in the period between WWII and the 1980s that there was little room in most of the popular detective works for female investigators the likes of Philip Marlowe, Sam Spade, Spenser, or Mike Hammer. There are some hints in Spillane’s novels that Velda might have all the attributes that later female hard-boiled detectives would have. After a ten year hiatus, Spillane returned with a new Mike Hammer Story, *The Girl Hunters* (1962). In this book the reader is informed that Velda has been kidnapped and is thought to be dead. Hammer finds out that she is alive and goes after her abductors with a vengeance (as usual). Although filled with all the mayhem, murder, and carnage found in most of the Mike Hammer narratives,
the reader is also allowed to see into the mysterious Velda’s past. Velda, it seems, is a gal who can take care of herself in most situations. An ex-CIA operative, she is skilled in martial arts, a firearms expert, and knows her way around the criminal world. Written during the height of the “Red Menace,” and the “Communist Conspiracy,” The Girl Hunters focuses on communist espionage machinations and under-the-radar spy capers, along with ordinary murder and torture. Velda survives and is able to stand on her own two feet as Mike goes about eliminating all the bad guys with her help.

But this is the only one of the more than half-dozen or so Mike Hammer novels to feature a woman as anything other than insignificant sex object or the soul of evil. Mike Hammer has his own sense of what constitutes justice, and deals with women in a manner uniquely fashioned for the character by Mickey Spillane. The end of Spillane’s novel, I the Jury, is pure Mike Hammer. The detective has cornered the beautiful but evil Charlotte Manning, the woman Hammer has found to be guilty of murder. He knows that if he turns her over to the law, she would not be convicted. He cannot “send her over” as Sam Spade did with Brigid O’Shaunnessey, and so Mike Hammer becomes a law unto himself: “No, Charlotte, I’m the jury now, and the judge, and I have a promise to keep. Beautiful as you are, as much as I almost loved you, I sentence you to death” (146). Charlotte disrobes and comes toward Mike, she reaches her arms out to him, then:

The roar of the .45 shook the room. Charlotte staggered back a step. Her eyes were a symphony of incredulity, an unbelieving witness to the truth. Slowly, she looked down at the ugly swelling in her naked belly where the bullet went in. A thin trickle of blood welled out.... When I heard her fall I turned around.
Her eyes had pain in them now, the pain preceding death. Pain and unbelief.

“How c-could you?” I only had a moment before talking to a corpse, but I got it in. “It was easy,” I said. (147)

Other females in different novels by other authors fared no better. Brigid O’Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon* is confronted with this dilemma when she tries to talk Sam Spade out of “sending her over” to the police. Spade has enumerated seven reasons for him to not trust her and for him to give her over to justice. He then replies to her plea: “Now on the other side we’ve got what? All we’ve got is the fact that maybe you love me and maybe I love you” (Hammett 214). A minute later, he says:

“Well, if I send you over I’ll be sorry as hell — I’ll have some rotten nights — But that’ll pass. Listen,” [...] “If that doesn’t mean anything to you forget it and we’ll make it this: 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.” (214-15)

When one considers this mind-set of the detectives of the hard-boiled era, and the immense popularity the hard-boiled detective fiction enjoyed, the reasons become clear as to why female detectives did not fare as well during the heyday of the hard-boiled era as they had before and would once more in the near future.

A theory as to why the fiction of the day did not allow female detectives of the hard-boiled stripe to exist in any significant way is possibly explained by author Lawrence Block’s quote in *New York Times Book Review*, April 28, 1985, “That's not something
women normally relate to. Women aren't cynical loners. ... [If] they want to go into the profession seriously, women writers will have to change the myth itself, instead of trying to fit themselves into it.” Not everyone would agree with that appraisal. Sandels, in his essay, says that Sara Paretsky and by implication, Sue Grafton, come close to creating a female version of detectives like Hammer and Spenser.

It is also illuminating to examine what was happening with the female detectives appearing in print at the same time that Spenser and Hammer novels were selling off the shelves. Agatha Christie was still writing and selling Miss Jane Marple mysteries by the millions, and in 1951 she created another female amateur detective of quite another description. This was the youthful Victoria Jones, introduced in *They Came to Baghdad*. Victoria was just about the absolute opposite of Miss Marple. She was young, energetic, roved all over the world, was full of fun, and an accomplished liar. In many ways, Victoria reminds one of Baron Munchausen and his fabulous tales of adventures.

On the Continent, in France, Georges Simenon was writing detective novels that combined aspects of both the American hard-boiled tradition and the novels of Christie, P.D. James, and others. Simenon’s novels investigate the utter depravity and darkest corners of society. His tales have the facility of being both frightening and illuminating and, in this sense, Simenon’s writing has been compared to that of Balzac, Dickens, and Faulkner. Like those previous authors who wrote within and about a world of dark psychology, Simenon laid claim to a forlorn and futureless terrain. He deals in a wasted desert of the human heart and soul that
was unique to his style of writing. Simenon’s universe was founded in a violent world where passion and suffering were everywhere, a desert where chaos reigned, a dark empty space that created a brooding presence surrounding Simenon’s brilliant detective, Jules Maigret, like a dark mist of foreboding.

Simenon’s fictional world is one of murder and criminals who commit the most depraved acts. But Simenon’s detective, Maigret, sees these criminals not as animalistic objects of contempt fit only for destruction, as might Mickey Spillane’s Mike Hammer or Robert Parker’s Spenser. Instead, Simenon endows Maigret with a more human quality and an ability to meld his own personality into the life and society of the criminals themselves. Maigret’s techniques and methods have little in common with his American male contemporaries. It is worth noting, however, that Maigret uses feelings and empathy to solve crimes without resorting to the usual police apparatus of fingerprints, forensic evidence, bone wearying searches, and foot tiring canvassing, used in normal police investigations. His technique lies much closer in approach, style, and execution to that of the intuitionist female detectives of the Golden Age and the post WWII period, who had only their senses and sensibility to rely on in solving their cases. Like those earlier detectives, Maigret does not rely on outside sources. Maigret immerses himself into the minds and environs of the wrong-doers, and relies on his own empathic connections to the criminals, becoming in a sense, a part of their world. Maigret feels pity and compassion for the criminals he stalks, rather than the primordial anger and contempt prevalent in modern American hard-boiled detective fiction.
Like Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie before him, Simenon tries to do away with his famous detective and for a little over a decade, there are no Maigret stories. However, after ten years, just as Arthur Conan Doyle found it necessary to resurrect Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie reinstated Poirot, Simenon brings Maigret back in a series of short novels, and continues to do so until 1972.

At a time when the leading wave of feminism was rising to high visibility and activity in France, Simenon seems to have completely avoided the issues in his principally psychological detective fiction. The women are simply women as Simenon and his detective, Maigret, see them in daily life. By portraying his characters as neither chauvinists nor overt feminists, Simenon may be demonstrating true equality between the sexes. Simenon wrote many other novels that were not detective fiction, and he may have explored the realms of feminism in those other works. However, other than Simenon’s descriptions of Maigret’s relationship with his wife, very few, if any, elements of feminism are to be found in the Maigret detective novels that made him a household word in France, on the continent, and around the world.

Maigret has a very warm relationship with his wife, but although she appears in all of the Maigret stories, she is always presented as a lesser detail of the story. One exception to this is found in case twenty-four where Louise Maigret undertakes her own investigation and finds clues that lead to the solution of Maigret’s case. Notably, the clues that pique Louisa Maigret’s interest are the same kind of clues that were attributed to “woman’s sensibility” early in the
genre: she notices a young mother’s manner of dress is inconsistent. The woman wears an inexpensive off-the-rack suit with custom made shoes and hat. It may be a reversion to an older style, but more likely it is simply that Simenon used this technique of “female sensibility” to portray an aspect of Madame Maigret’s timid nature.

Simenon wears the mantle of Emile Gaboriau (1835-1873) and Leroux comfortably and maintains France as one of the innovators of detective fiction. Gaboriau, writing in France twenty years after Poe created C. Auguste Dupin in America, invented two of the genre’s most memorable characters: Tabaret, and later, the now legendary M. LeCoq. Burton Stevenson in his critical essay “Supreme Moments in Detective Fiction” states:

[Among] all the detectives, amateur and professional, who have appeared before the public and performed their little tricks, there are only four who are classic--C. Auguste Dupin, Tabaret, M. Lecoq, and Sherlock Holmes. These abide. Beside them, the others are mere shadows. And these four are memorable not because they never bungled, not because occasionally they struck home with a cleverness and certainty which makes us forgive their mistakes. Their supreme moments are moments to be remembered with delight.

(Stevenson 1)

Regardless of the skill with which the European detectives are rendered, it seems that, barring a few outstanding exceptions, only within their own borders are the ranks of European authors
able to produce detective fiction that is accorded the full measure of popularity and success the genre has earned in its nearly two hundred year history.
Modern Women in Detective Fiction

The period that ushered in the modern detective novel, the Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett stories, and created lasting fame for characters like Sam Spade, Nick Carter, and Old Sleuth, grew out of the pulp fictions and Dime Novels. This era influenced and virtually controlled detective fiction in America, and to some extent, detective fiction written on the European Continent, for decades thereafter.

The apparent trend of thought in critical circles of the time would seem to indicate that it would not be possible for female authors to create believable female detectives that could operate in the, so far, all-male environment of hard-boiled detective.


When Carolyn Heilbrun published her first mystery novel under the name Amanda Cross in 1964, she began the revival of the feminist crime novel, a literary form that had been moribund since the publication in 1935 of Dorothy Sayers' Gaudy Night. In the Last Analysis, the first Amanda Cross book,
appeared just a year after Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* brought feminist issues back to public attention, following Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* by nearly two decades. (1) Reddy traces the effect the Amanda Cross books had on detective fiction as they were written by a leader of the “second wave” of feminists. The growing consequences of the feminist movement on literature pushed detective fiction into a new direction, a direction that gained momentum as even long-established and more conventional writers such as Agatha Christie and P.D. James began to demonstrate more feminism in their latter characters. Agatha Christie introduced Victoria Jones, and others followed. One feels that Victoria Jones would be at home in much of today’s feminist-oriented detective fiction.

One of the major underpinnings of Victoria Jones’ character is her apparent lack of respect for “authority.” It is this implicit denial of established dominance that is the basis of much contemporary feminist detective fiction. Traditionally, authority is vested in the male (patriarchal) figure in literature, as it is in life. But writers like Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky attack this concept of authority. Paretsky has V.I. Warshawski find that business leaders are corrupt, men are either abusive or child molesters, police and other civil administrators and officials are corrupt, and the authority and power held by these males is often little more than a means to suppress women.

The culprits are men of authority in powerful positions. The institutions they control operate in a manner that systematically persecutes women. In fiction by many modern feminist
detective story authors, the government, organized crime, and big business, along with a fundamentalist church, and a large and famous university, all serve as fictional examples of institutions under patriarchal control that oppress women. The trend toward disruption of the established order of authority and power remains at the core of many feminist writings in all literary genres, but is most visible in the modern detective fiction created in the female hard-boiled sub-genre that gains greater popularity with each passing year.

Moving away from a trend established through her first ten detective novels, P.D. James created a female detective side-kick, Kate Miskin, to accompany her major character, Commander Adam Dalgliesh. Kate Miskin is presented as a likeable but somewhat contentious female who, although working in the shadow of her more famous lead detective, has appeared in six of the Adam Dalgliesh series since *A Taste for Death*, (1985). Kate certainly does not share Cordelia Gray’s doubt as to whether or not detective work is suitable for her gender. The question as to whether Kate will grow into an independent series of her own has not been answered at this time, but given the breadth of development James has invested in the character in one of her latest novels, *The Lighthouse* (2005), it seems likely that she too will walk her own path in the future. Unlike her American sisters who are marking new territories in hard-boiled fiction, she is steeped in British police tradition and techniques. She relies on tried and true detection methods to solve crimes. In this respect, she may be viewed as an outgrowth of the
realist school of detective fiction, but she leavens her traditional approach with a taste of her female heritage, and also takes into account her instincts about people and circumstances.

The current market provides a large number of fictional female sleuths that do not take the hard-boiled path, but their combined sales are a mere fraction of those of writers like Sara Paretsky, Sue Grafton, Patricia Cornwell, and Marcia Muller. However, the roles and lifestyles of the newer female detectives certainly take many branches of the fictional road. Women in all walks of life are portrayed in the detective role. Here are some summaries of current fictional female detectives:

* Nancy Atherton, Aunt Dimity - A mystery series featuring a gentle ghost.

* Stephanie Barron, Jane Austen - mystery series depicting the well known author as a sleuth that imitates Jane Austen's style and humour.

* M. C. Beaton, Agatha Raisin - detective adventures of Cotswald village resident, Agatha Raisin.

* Nancy Bell, Biggie - featuring sleuth Biggie Weatherford, a true southern lady and the richest woman in town.

* Veronica Black, Sister Joan - Sister Joan is a member of the Order of the Daughters of Compassion and lives in a convent on the Cornish moors. Her murder investigations depict both cloister and English village life.
*Simon Brett, Mrs. Pargeter - Melita Pargeter is a genteel wealthy widow and the star of this 'cozy' mystery series.

*Buckley, Fiona  Ursula Blanchard - A series about an Elizabethan sleuth.

*Heron Carvic,  Miss Seeton - A retired English school teacher solves mysteries with ease.

*Agatha Christie, Miss Marple series

*Barbara  Comfort, Tish McWhinny - A series set in Vermont featuring 70 year old Vermont woman Tish McWhinny and a pug named Lulu.

*Jeanne Dams, Dorothy Martin - American widow and amateur sleuth relocates to a small village near London.

*Jo Dereske, Miss Zukas - Librarian and sleuth Miss Zukas investigates murder while having a romance with the local police chief.

*Carola Dunn, Daisy Dalrymple - The Honorable Daisy Dalrymple solves murder and mayhem in 1920's English country houses.

*Margaret  Frazer, Sister Frevisse - Mysteries set in fourteenth century England involving Sister Frevisse and a Benedictine like order of nuns.
*Anne George, Southern sisters - Mystery series featuring sixty something sisters, Mary Alice and Patricia Anne.

*Dorothy Gilman, Mrs. Polifax - Grandmother and part-time CIA agent, Mrs. Polifax undertakes adventures that lead to exotic international locations.

*C. L. Grace, Kathryn Swinbrooke - Mysteries featuring a 15th century physician and her partner, King's Commissioner Colum Murtagh working in Canterbury.

*Gallagher Gray, Hubbert and Lil - Eighty something Lil assists her nephew to solve murders, providing a woman's intuition to tense situations.

*D. M. Greenwood, Theodora Braithwaite - Deaconess Theodora Braithwaite assists the police in murder investigations.

*Carolyn Hart, Annie Laurance and Max Darling - Sleuthing adventures of mystery bookstore owner and her future husband.

*Carolyn Hart, Henrietta O'Dwyer - Series featuring sixty something former journalist and amateur detective.

*Laurie R. King, Mary Russell - Series featuring Mary Russell, a fifteen year old girl and student of Sherlock Holmes who solves mysteries in a style similar to the former investigator.
*Margaret Lawrence, Hannah Trevor- Hannah Trevor, a widow and midwife solves mysteries in 18th century Maine where memories of the War of Independence still linger.

*Gillian Linscott, Nell Bray - Suffragette and part-time sleuth Nell Bray solves mysteries in the early twentieth century.

*Miriam Grace Monfredo, Glynis Tryon - Unmarried librarian Glynis Tryon solves crimes in the small town of Seneca Falls, New York during the mid 19th century.

*Sharon Newman, Catherine LeVendeur - Mysteries set in 12th century Scotland featuring Catherine LeVendeur, a married scholar.

*Anthony Oliver, Elizabeth Thomas and John Webber - English mysteries featuring retired police inspector and village woman Elizabeth Thomas.

*Anne Perry, Charlotte and Thomas Pitt - Charlotte assists her policeman husband to solve murders in Victorian London.

*Elizabeth Peters, Amelia Peabody - Thirty something Victorian heiress undertakes investigations in Egypt during the early 1900s.

*Nancy Pickard, Eugenia Potter series

*Elliott Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt - Mysteries featuring 1930s First Lady set in the White House.

*Peter Tremayne, Sister Fidelma - 7th century mysteries featuring Sister Fidelma, an educated court advocate and sister of the Celtic Church in Ireland.

*Patricia Wentworth, Miss Silver - Mysteries often featuring an English country house setting.

*This fairly extensive list is by no means exhaustive, but is representative of the American and British female detective fiction, other than best sellers, that is available in bookstores today. Within the thirty-four selections mentioned above, there are nine female detectives who are over sixty-years old, one teen-age girl (apparently without a blue convertible), three teachers or librarians, four nuns or clerics, and seven period detectives ranging from the seventh century to the eighteenth. These women are representative of the de-sexualized portrayal of female detectives that reigned in the Golden Age.

None of these female sleuths are cast in the mold of V.I. Warshawski or Kensie Millhone. Most are reminiscent of the pre-Golden Age and Golden Age female detectives created by Katherine Anne Green, Elizabeth Braddon, Agatha Christie, P.D. James and Ngaio Marsh. Except for the on-going popularity of the Miss Marple series of Agatha Christie, it is
unlikely that many of these latter day female detectives will be found on supermarket book shelves twenty years from now.

What is likely to be found are the current best-selling works of Grafton, Paretsky, Muller, and Cornwell, along with their future creations and the books of a handful of other female authors writing to the previously male-only fictional detective traditions established by the Black Mask authors of the period incorporating the pre WWII period, 1920-1939, and the years 1939 - 1945 during WWII.

In the seventies, British and American writing in the detective genre diverged. Perhaps influenced by Margaret Thatcher’s reign as England’s prime minister and her government’s return to modified Victorian principles, many of the British detective novels written at this time depicted the type of genteel, polished, and socially acceptable female detectives, that were seen in prior novels of the early twentieth-century.

Agatha Christie’s Miss Marple was at that time still selling in the millions, and P.D. James’s Adam Dalgliesh was doing well in what seemed an unlimited series of adventures. P.D. James also introduced Cordelia Gray in 1972 who, although still operating in the understated style of the Golden Age, began to show signs of the independent aggressive woman detective who would be greatly enhanced and ultimately define the female hard-boiled detectives emerging in America at the time.

Across the Atlantic, American writers were inventing female versions of the hard-boiled dick. Patricia Merivale’s critical essay, “An unsuitable Genre for a
Woman...” examines Glenwood Irons’s Feminism in Women’s Detective Fiction, a collection of critical essays specifically targeting feminist detective fiction. Irons’s essay looks at some of the many feminist discourses revealed by the split in emphasis between the more sedate British female detectives and their American cousins.

Since the 60s, women in detective fiction, particularly in the United States, have changed from one- or two-dimensional figures into a multi-hued rainbow reflecting manifold facets in the feminist body of critique. Where women had been seen predominantly as essentially heterosexual patriarchal non-entities, they began to flourish in a panoply of discourses. Lesbian female detectives vied with African American and Hispanics in an explosion of minority voices. Heterosexuals existed alongside lesbian and indifferent or bi-sexual heroines. Feminine empowerment and independence of movement and profession became coin of the realm in female-written detective fiction. This proliferation of viewpoint has altered the manner in which women are portrayed in most male-oriented fiction as well. It is rare to find a modern male action-hero who treats women like objects as they were portrayed in many of the earlier works. In reading current literature of the genre, it is impossible to separate the role of women in detective fiction today from the larger arena of feminist discourse.

Modern fictional female detectives, modeled on the standard of male hard-boiled detective figures, have come a considerable distance down the road to self-sufficiency and
independence since the inception of female sleuths born into the gothic tradition. Robert Sandels notes in his essay, “It was a Man’s World,”

Contemporary writers such as Sara Paretsky, Sue Grafton, and Marcia Muller are only a few of the growing number of female authors who have developed female private eye characters in recent years. Lady detectives are, of course, nothing new. Nor is the feminism implicit in their choice of profession new. What is new, of course, is the imitation of the violent and cynical [vengeful] male hardboiled detective. (1)

The traditional female detective in the mold of characters created by Dorothy Sayers, P.D. James, Agatha Christie and Amanda Cross, displayed a nicety of manners common to British social customs and the Victorian society they represented and, for the most part, confined their activities to the drawing room or their garden. In the Golden Age of mystery and detective fiction, the reading public accepted without question that an elderly, interfering, busybody grandmother (like Miss Jane Marple), or, on the other end of the scale, a sixteen-year-old female teenager in a blue convertible (Nancy Drew), could ramble around and insert herself into the middle of an official police investigation and solve the crime where all the techniques and manpower of the established police departments failed. Somehow, Coleridge’s “willing suspension of disbelief,” stretched almost to the breaking point by today’s standards, was apparently a norm in this fiction.
In the early nineteen-thirties, the development and huge popularity of the hard-boiled detective novel, with its emphasis on strictly male values, effectively barred women from the role of fictional detective. As Sandels notes in “It Was a Man's World,” “the solution to crimes of the real world did not yet depend on some vaguely laughable faculty of the mysterious and irrelevant mind of the rooted female. The disorderly world of the hard-boiled detective was far removed from railway-timetable crimes” (2). The new crop of female detective writers, arriving on the American fictional scene in the nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies, appropriated the patriarchal territory of the hard-boiled detective and imbued it with a sense of feminine intuition and sensibility. However, those feminine sensitivities did not exclude the ability of the female detectives to function in the hard-nosed world of criminals, and capably address crimes of the most abhorrent kind.

Not all of the new female detectives, either American or British, were of the hard-boiled ilk. As may be seen from the representative list cited earlier, some of them were grandmothers, teachers, librarians, nuns, and other clerics. These lady-like snoops of the fair sex operated with a nicety of manners, and approached crime solving with techniques reminiscent of the Golden Age. But these women detectives, principally amateurs, paled in comparison to the new dynamic characters created by Sue Grafton, Sara Paretsky, Patricia Cornwell and a few others.

Both Paretsky and Grafton write women as full-fleshed persons; not simply as a collection of clichès and manners. Paretsky’s V.I. Warshawski elicits comparisons to Sam
Spade and Philip Marlowe. She speaks in a clipped and terse manner evocative of the hardboiled dicks of the nineteen-thirties and nineteen-forties. Warshawski introduces herself in *Indemnity Only* in much the same manner as Philip Marlowe or Sam Spade would have done fifty years before:

“I’m looking for V.I. Warshawski,” he said, his voice husky but confident—the voice of a man used to having his own way.

“Yes,” I said, going past him to sit behind my desk.

“Yes, what?” He demanded.

“Yes, I’m V.I. Warshawski. You call my answering service for an appointment?”

“Yeah, but I didn’t know it would mean walking up four flights of stairs to a dark office. Why the hell doesn’t the elevator work?”

“The tenants in this building are physical fitness nuts. We agreed to get rid of the elevator-climbing stairs is well known as a precaution against heart attacks.” (3,4)

This glib repartee would have been perfectly at home in a Chandler, Hammett, or a Spillane novel. Moments later, her new client says, “Look, I’m not trying to get your goat. But you are a girl, and things might get heavy.” Warshawski responds, “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” (5). Later in
the story, questioning a suspect, she wonders, “hopefully if he could be tortured into talking” (52). In an even closer simile to the hard-boiled dicks of past eras, Warshawski is “taken for a ride” to see “the boss.”

“Yeah, I know about you Warchoski. I know what a wise-ass you are, and I heard how you offed Joe Correl. If Freddie knocked you out, I’ll give him a medal. I want you to understand, you can’t mess around with me.”

I sank down into a wide armchair. My head was throbbing and it hurt to focus on him. “I’m not messing around with you, Earl,” I said earnestly. “I’m not interested in prostitution or juice loans or—”

He hit me across the mouth. “Shut up.” (62)

In contrast to Miss Marple’s careful shopping for just the right dishcloths and bed-linens, yarn for her incessant knitting, and the implied concern for having things neat and orderly (an assumed female trait), Warshawski says, “I stacked my dishes by the sink and eyed them thoughtfully, one more day and I’d have to wash them” (11).

These passages could easily be read as an appropriation of the loner male detective who has little knowledge of, or care for, the niceties of life. It can also stand for the chaos, messiness, and disorder of the detective business and crime in general. Agatha Christie has her Miss Marple winding up her case in At Bertram’s Hotel via a quiet conversation with Inspector...
Davy. V.I. Warshawski calls Detective Mallory, and closes her case like a female edition of Mike Hammer:

“Bobby? Vic. I’m at two-oh-three East Elm with Earl Smiessen, Tony Bronsky, and a guy from Ajax named Yardley Masters. Masters has a shattered knee, and Bronsky a broken ulna. I also have the gun that was used to shoot Peter Thayer.”

Mallory made an explosive noise into the phone. “Is this some kind of joke, Vicki?”

“Bobby, I’m a cop’s daughter. I never make that kind of joke. Two-oh-three East Elm, Apartment seventeen-oh-eight. I’ll try not to kill the three of them before you get here” (Paretsky 234).

Sue Grafton’s Kinsey Millhone is smoother, and uses diction elevated from that of Paretsky’s female detective, but there is equally no doubt that she “is a woman and can take care of herself” (Ibid.). Grafton introduces Millhone in “M” is for Malice, in this manner:

For the record, I’m Kinsey Millhone, female, single, thirty-five years old, sole proprietor of Kinsey Millhone Investigations in the southern California town of Santa Teresa. I was trained as a police officer and served a two-year stint with the Santa Teresa Police Department before life intervened, which is another tale altogether and one I don’t intend to tell (yet). (2)
Grafton allows her heroine a healthy sex life, but even in this we are reminded of who and what she is. Grafton provides a glimpse into the intimate interior of Millhone when she describes one of her detective’s love trysts: “I’d first seen him in this outfit, leaning against the wall in a hospital room where I was under observation after a hit man ran me off the road.—We’d spent the last three months of our relationship in bed together when we weren’t up at the firing range doing Mozambique pistol drills” (17).

Grafton ends her story with an introspective look into her heroine’s inner character. She reveals the feminine side of Kinsey and allows her to grieve, “I said a prayer for the dead, opening the door so all the ghosts could move on. I gathered them up like the petals of a flower and released them to the wind. What’s done is done. What is written is written. Their work is finished. Ours is yet to do” (337).

Perhaps these female hard-boiled detectives do not use the brutal language and sadistic techniques of their male predecessors, but the message is just as clear. Whatever it takes, they will see justice done and the guilty will be punished, either by the law or whatever other method is necessary. In “M” is for Malice, Sue Grafton has Millhone approach Claire, the culprit, and try to talk her into giving herself up. Instead, Claire runs into traffic and is killed by an automobile. In keeping with Millhone’s character, Grafton has her say: “She ran on, stumbling as she entered the far lane. An oncoming car caught her and she sailed overhead, as limp as a rag doll, as joyous as a bird” (335).
Conclusion

From the early days of the birth of the domestic detective, the busybody “spinster lady” sleuth to Christie’s rainbow of female characters, the face of woman in detective fiction changed, and changed yet again. The history of the genre has seen the female character evolve
from a near-cloying female, burdened with Victorian values and sensibilities, to a strong independent woman who can stand alone and meet the male detectives on their own turf, trading punches and bullets with them on an equal footing. In the wake of this feminine intrusion into formerly male-dominated fiction, a new wave of detectives, both male and female, are arriving on the scene. John Cawelti posits a cultural slant on the detective story and concludes his essay, “Detecting the Detective,” with this passage:

Whatever may be the reasons for the detective story's remarkable popularity since Poe created it over a hundred years ago, one of the genre's central features is the kind of light it sheds on particular cultures. The criminal act disrupts the social fabric, and the detective must use his unique investigative skills to sew it back together again. (10)

As Cawelti indicates, this illumination of cultural differences and varieties of ethnic and demographic mixes can provide fertile ground for current and future areas of development for writers in the genre. Current female detective fiction is predominantly gendered in a manner that espouses female roles in all the hues of Adrienne Rich’s lesbian continuum, ranging from purely heterosexual readings to confirmed lesbian feminist interpretations of the text.

Gay males, lesbian females, black detectives, Hispanics, and Native Americans, have their own counterparts in modern detective stories, not as props, curiosities, spear carriers, or
sidebars lending color to the story, but as principal characters bringing their original vision and sensitivity into the arena of detective fiction.

Regardless of how the current crop of authors and female sleuths is viewed, no matter whether they are hard-boiled or softly feminine, they all owe their existence to those early writers (generally women) who first introduced female detectives in the “sensation novels” of early Victorian times. On the brink of the nineteenth century, and in the early Victorian years, writers like Mary Elizabeth Braddon followed in the footsteps of Wilkie Collins, her mentor. Braddon's first success was her novel, Lady Audley's Secret. The heroine of this tale is outwardly pictured as the sweet-tempered, contented, “blonde angel” so often seen in Victorian literature. This angel, however, is soon revealed as a bigamist, arsonist, and would-be murderess. This portrayal of Braddon’s “blonde angel” foreshadows the dichotomy of female figure that would be seen in future detective fiction. Braddon, and those who followed, Dorothy Sayers, Agatha Christie, Amanda Cross, and others, blazed a trail and cleared a path for the Graftons, Paretskys, and Mullers of today’s detective fiction. The female detective’s face in the mirror has changed from that of a simple, almost one-dimensional female to an entire range of female characters, differing widely in type and feature, filling the facets of the mirror with faces and voices as varied as the complex world they inhabit. No longer do female detectives solve crimes by intuition and railroad timetables; Now they move within those spheres of influence once the sole
domain of the patriarchal male detective. There is no longer any venue of detective fiction that does not feel the soft tread of feminine footsteps.

One notion seems clear at this time; no matter in which direction detective fiction goes, one may feel reasonably certain that the female presence will be more central than ever before. It will be a presence no longer lurking in the shadows or hovering in the background. She will not be invisible or overlooked, nor will she be included merely as an attractive prop to lend balance to a patriarchal canvas. She will be a crafted and fully developed character, able to function on her own. She will address the sly and the sinister, the crafty and corrupt, and the innocent and the guilty. She will be found in the forefront of the detective fiction literary movement, strong, smart, and triumphant.

Something else seems certain at this time. Regardless of the author’s intent or which characters are created for the genre, wherever the fictional hard-boiled detective is found the soft squish of the hard-boiled detective’s rubber-heeled gum-shoes on the mean streets of detective fiction will be accompanied by another sound striding step by step by his side — or ahead. Those mean streets will echo to the sharp click of Steve Maddon high heeled shoes.

NOTES:

1 The Chris Willis essay was first located through the encyclopedia web-site, http://www.litencyc.com/php/topics.php?rec

2 Metta Fuller Victor’s first book, The Dead Letter, written in 1866 was accorded the first American novel status because it was the first to include all the elements of what constitutes a novel by modern standards. Other books of longer length had been written prior to this but hers was the first full novel to be published in America.

The term “the madwoman in the attic” is attributed to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar as part of the title of their breakthrough feminist collection, The Madwoman in the Attic (1979) which broke away from identifying women writers as “images of women” and objects of writing, to identify women as subjects of writing.

Used by Virginia Woolf to describe the conditions under which a woman had to work if she wanted to write. The term relates to the title of an extended essay derived from Woolf’s lectures at women’s college in Cambridge University 1927, and was published as an essay in 1929.

Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, James McCain, and other hard-boiled writers of the 1920s and 1930s, attempted to delve into the psychological reasons behind the anti-social behavior of their heroes. Many were shown to be neurotic, vindictive, guilt-ridden, and trying to expunge some personal or family guilt-laden psychological baggage.

Munt explains that the new feminist detective exemplified in works of Amanda Cross, Sara Paretsky, and Sue Grafton, “are an attempt to vocalize the liberal feminist idea of the liberated woman, who is equal to the male role but still retains femininity – strong within her gender role” (33).


The list was compiled from a website dedicated to listing detective fiction, authors, characters, and summaries. The site is: http://www.mslit.com/details.asp?bookid

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ABSTRACT
In creating this thesis, my aim is to argue that the role of women in detective fiction has undergone a major change. In the earliest renditions of the genre, women did not occupy a major role in this form of literature. Over time, particularly since the 1970s, that role has changed dramatically. The advent of the self-assured, assertive, independent, female detective, private, amateur, or professional, has emerged and is solidly in place at the beginning of the twenty-first century when she takes her place in the forefront of detective fiction.

In establishing my argument, I attempt to begin at the beginning, and include research into the works of the earliest male and female authors who created and featured women detectives of any description in their work. I then develop a historical trace of the evolution of the detective novel in general, and the place of the female in that history, arriving at current trends and works that reflect the changing position of women in the genre.

The conclusion demonstrates, through inclusion of excerpts of present-day writers and their fictional female creations, that women detectives, amateur and professional, have arrived at the apex of their journey toward complete equality, and now stand side-by-side with their male counterparts, whether they are the toughest hard-boiled detectives, or the most innovative, intuitive, and intelligent.
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Warren J. Graffeo was born of Elmo and Thais Graffeo in New Orleans, Louisiana on October 6, 1938. He graduated from Fairleigh Dickinson University, Rutherford, NJ in May, 1976. He has been the director of several private technical colleges, and has written and had published numerous poetry pieces, two television play adaptations, three stage productions, one of which has been produced, and one novel to date. Mr. Graffeo will be employed at Texas A&M International University at Laredo, Texas beginning with the Spring semester 2006.

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