

Feminist Crime Fiction and Female Sleuths

Adrienne E. Gavin

There is a modicum of truth in the generalization that some genres of fiction appeal more to one gender than the other. Romance novels, for example, tend to be written and read more often by women, while Westerns more typically attract male authors and readers. Crime fiction, by contrast, has flourished in both male and female hands and appeals to both genders. When detective fiction took root in the nineteenth century, female crime writers and sleuths challenged general expectations about both women's writing and female characters. The standard critical inclination has been to see female crime writers and detectives as also subverting a specifically male "norm" for crime fiction. Women crime writers and investigators, however, while clearly expressing issues of female concern, have from the start been an integral part of the history of crime writing rather than simply an adjunct or reaction to it. As female detective fiction passed from Victorian originators through twentieth-century godmothers of crime such as Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, and P. D. James and on to rebellious goddaughters like Sara Paretsky, Sue Grafton, and Patricia Cornwell, a female and feminist vision of crime became a clear norm. The proliferation of female crime writing and fictional detectives since the early 1980s, ranging across styles as various as "cozy," "hard-boiled," "forensic," and "humanist," shows the female tradition in crime literature continuing to innovate and flourish.

Both male and female authors created fictional female sleuths in the nineteenth century. These "lady detectives" are independent, confident, clever women who variously use knowledge and observation of domestic environments and human behavior, female intuition, and their capacity for going unnoticed or being underestimated in solving crimes. They usually become detectives either because fate has made it necessary for them to find employment or, as Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan observe, in order to clear the name of a male relative (Craig and Cadogan 1981: 21). Those female sleuths who work to restore masculine honor, and those who are young and attractive, generally cease detecting once they solve their cases or marry. Older spinsters, widows,

and female investigators created by women authors often, if only implicitly, have longer detecting careers.

The first professional female detectives in fiction are Andrew Forrester, Jr's Mrs G— (possibly Gladden), who appeared in the casebook *The Female Detective* in May 1864, and William Stephens Hayward's Mrs Paschal, who appeared six months later in *The Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1864). Both are first-person narrators who work for the British police. Mrs G— keeps her name and marital status hidden, does not reveal to her friends that she is a detective, and uses logical and practical methods of detection. Mrs Paschal is a widow of almost forty who needs to earn money. She carries a gun, is intelligent and active, and is herself threatened with violence and murder. Kathleen Gregory Klein suggests that these early female investigators are simply "honorary men" (Klein 1995: 29), but this undervalues the female presence in pioneering detective fiction. E. F. Bleiler observes that one of Mrs G—'s cases, "The Unknown Weapon," has "some reason to be called the first modern detective novel" (Bleiler 1978: x), along with *The Dead Letter* (1864) by American author Seeley Regester (pseudonym of female author Metta C. Victor), and Emile Gaboriau's *L'Affaire Lerouge* (1865–6).

While Forrester and Hayward's protagonists were the earliest female detectives, properly speaking, critics such as Maureen T. Reddy suggest that tendrils of fictional female detection reach back to the Gothic novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Reddy 1988: 7–9). In Gothic texts such as Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) women are typically victims of crime and held captive, but also escape through proto-detective methods to triumph in the end. Other sleuth-like forerunners appear in Catherine Crowe's *Susan Hopley* (1841), which features a female servant tracking her brother's murderer, and Wilkie Collins's "The Diary of Anne Rodway" (1856), in which a seamstress seeks to solve her friend's murder. Sensation novels of the 1860s were also influential in the rise of female crime fiction. Condemned in some contemporary quarters as inappropriate and dangerous for women to read, let alone write, sensation fiction – like Gothic novels – held great appeal for female authors and readers. Writers like Collins and Mary Braddon took female characters beyond victimhood into roles as criminals and sleuths that subverted gender expectations. Most famously Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) reveals the blonde, child-like, angelic-looking Lady Audley to be a ruthless criminal who commits crime after crime in order to maintain the luxurious life into which she has bigamously married, until her husband's nephew, in detective-like manner, uncovers the truth.

Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860) features daring, intelligent, feminine-figured but masculine-faced Marian Halcombe, who with Walter Hartright sets out to solve a mystery. Although ultimately a sidekick, she is a confident one, telling Walter at the outset: "This is a matter of curiosity; and you have got a woman for your ally. Under such conditions success is certain, sooner or later" (1996: 48). Success is the mark, too, of Collins's amateur sleuth in *The Law and the Lady* (1875), Valeria Woodville, who, despite her uncle's contempt for "lawyers in petticoats," sets out to

prove her husband innocent of murdering his first wife. Rare even in today's fiction, Valeria is a pregnant sleuth, and the gestation of her baby parallels that of her detection. Having cleared her husband's name and given birth to a son (into whose infant hand the proof of her case is put), Valeria, not without regret, gives up detecting in favor of family life.

The eruption of interest in both detective fiction and the short story in the 1890s fired writers to create a range of notable female detectives, who often appeared first in periodical short stories, then in volume collections. One of the most significant of these late Victorian sleuths is Catherine L. Pirkis's Loveday Brooke, whose cases were collected as *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective* (1894). After "a jerk of Fortune's wheel" left her "penniless and all but friendless" Brooke became a detective, working her way up to a respected position with a London detective agency (Pirkis 1986: 2). Slightly over thirty, she knows her own mind, argues with her male employer over theories of detection, and is intelligent, physically fearless, and highly observant. She draws on "female" knowledge of such things as servants, love, and domestic environments in solving cases but never resorts to stereotypical feminine wiles or "weaknesses." Devoted to her profession, she keeps her private life private, behaves and is treated professionally, and is admired for her detective ability by her employer, clients, and the police. One of the comparatively few female detectives created by women in the 1890s, Brooke is notably not married off, nor is her physical appearance emphasized; it is her professional skill and dedication that is highlighted.

Also not married off, possibly because her series was incomplete, is detective Florence Cusack, co-created by prolific female author L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace. Appearing in five *Harmsworth Magazine* stories in 1899 and 1900, Miss Cusack, as her "Watson" Dr Lonsdale reveals, detects not for financial reasons but because she has promised to do so. Attractive, highly skilled, and admired by Scotland Yard detectives, she solves cases using ingenious methods including her sense of smell.

Late nineteenth-century male-authored works more frequently end women detectives' careers in marriage. Fergus Hume's gypsy detective Hagar Stanley of *Hagar of the Pawn-Shop* (1898) solves mysteries connected with pawned items before marrying and leaving detection in favor of bookselling on the open road. Grant Allen's "New Woman" sleuth Lois Cayley of *Miss Cayley's Adventures* (1899) travels the world foiling dangers before marrying and proving her own and her husband's innocence of will tampering. Similarly, the nurse protagonist of Allen's *Hilda Wade* (1900) travels widely, using intelligence, feminine intuition, and an eidetic memory to solve cases and prove her father's innocence before marrying. The Cambridge-educated protagonist of M. McDonnell Bodkin's *Dora Myrl, The Lady Detective* (1900) is athletic, observant, very successful, and carries a gun, but leaves detecting in a later volume, when she marries Bodkin's male series detective Paul Beck, becoming mother to subsequent sleuth *Young Beck: A Chip off the Old Block* (1912). A rarer married female detective is George R. Sims's protagonist in

Dorcas Dene, Detective (1897) – a former actress, Dorcas Dene’s theatrical skills are useful in the professional detective work she undertakes when her husband becomes blind.

As Klein points out, female detectives were rare in American nineteenth-century dime novels, but do appear in *The Lady Detective* (c. 1890) by Old Sleuth (Harlan P. Halsey) and *The Female Barber Detective* (1895) by Albert W. Aiken. Representing two patterns for the dime-fiction female detective, the former novel features Kate Goelet, an intelligent, physically skilled New York detective whose attractiveness leads to marriage and her departure from detecting. The latter focuses on police spy Mignon Lawrence, who sets up a barber shop as a cover for her skilled detecting, but is described in very masculinized terms including having a moustache (see Klein 1995: 31–52).

The most significant American contribution to the development of fictional female detection in the nineteenth century is the work of Anna Katharine Green. Her bestselling *The Leavenworth Case* (1878), featuring New York police detective Ebenezer Gryce, is one of the earliest detective novels by a woman. In *That Affair Next Door* (1897) Green introduced Amelia Butterworth, an amateur detective who in this and two later volumes assists Gryce with his cases and is central to the plots. The original elderly “spinster sleuth,” Butterworth investigates mysteries in Gramercy Park New York City, detecting not out of financial need, for she is well-bred and wealthy, but from human curiosity, or as it often appears, nosiness and a busybody disposition.

Nineteenth-century detective fiction is frequently seen as conservative and conventional, with cases neatly solved and moral order restored. Female detectives of the period, however, operate subversively; when they solve a case moral certainties may be re-established but gender role expectations are broken down. In the first two decades of the twentieth century similar patterns of female detection continued, with questions now being asked about whether a woman could embark on marriage and yet retain a detecting career. In two British novels by Marie Connor Leighton, *Joan Mar, Detective* (1910) and *Lucille Dare, Detective* (1919), as Carla T. Kungl points out, the detectives must decide between love and detection, and both choose career (Kungl 2006: 93).

Early twentieth-century American fiction also keeps female detectives single. Mary Roberts Rinehart’s amateur sleuth Tish Carberry is a lively spinster who with two female friends solves crimes in stories collected in *The Amazing Adventures of Letitia Carberry* (1911) and other volumes through to 1937. In 1914 Rinehart also began stories about nurse detective Hilda Adams (dubbed Miss Pinkerton for her detecting skills) who assists the police with investigations that continued in serialized novels including *Miss Pinkerton* (1932) and *Haunted Lady* (1942). Hugh C. Weir’s *Miss Madelyn Mack, Detective* (1914) is a female American Sherlock Holmes. She travels more widely than Holmes and her drug is cola berries rather than cocaine, but like Holmes she runs her own detective business, asks seemingly

innocuous questions, and has little interest in matrimony, although her female Watson finds love.

Fictional women sleuths up until 1940, as Kungl notes, tend to be middle class, to confirm class boundaries, and often use their knowledge of class differences to solve crimes (Kungl 2006: 64–73). Some, like Lady Molly of Baroness Emmuska Orczy's *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* (1910), are upper class and useful to the police for their aristocratic knowledge. Lady Molly heads a "Female Department" of Scotland Yard, solving mysteries narrated by her adulatory former maid Mary Granard. It is eventually revealed that Lady Molly's motive for entering upon detective work is to clear her imprisoned husband of murder and she gives up detecting when she succeeds. Anna Katherine Green's short story collection *The Golden Slipper and other Problems for Violet Strange* (1915) features an aristocratic young woman sleuth who helps the New York police with society cases. This collection possibly served as a model for Nancy Drew (Della Cava and Engel 2002: 169). (See Routledge, chapter 25 in this volume.)

Nancy Drew and other "girl sleuths" that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s cannot be underestimated as influences on the women writers of detective fiction who followed, especially those who emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1920s British girls' magazines saw a proliferation of schoolgirl sleuths, such as Sylvia Silence, created by Katherine Greenhalgh (pseudonym of John W. Bobin). Silence first featured in the *Schoolgirls' Weekly* in October 1922. Even more influential were American teenage amateur detectives, most notably Nancy Drew, who first appeared in *The Secret of the Old Clock* (1930) and who still solves cases in later series and spin-offs. Created by Edward Stratemeyer and written by Mildred Augustine Wirt Benson and other writers under the syndicate pseudonym "Carolyn Keene," the original Nancy of the 1930s and 40s is an inspirational female investigator. Young, attractive, affluent, brave, confident, and multi-skilled, Nancy has her own blue roadster and gun, faces dangers boldly, and solves cases neatly. With her mother dead and her father a criminal lawyer who appreciates her detecting abilities, she has untrammelled autonomy to go, do, and detect as she pleases. Other long-running girl detective series also provided exciting templates for female detection, including the Stratemeyer Dana Girls series (1934–68), Margaret Sutton's Judy Bolton series (1932–67), and the Trixie Belden series (1948–86) by Julie Campbell and syndicate "Kathryn Kenny."

The inter-war years saw the development of daring and active girl sleuths and the rise of male hard-boiled detective fiction in which the primary female role was *femme fatale*. Women fictional detectives, by contrast, became older, less physically active, and more concerned with crimes in their immediate locale. To accord with, or arguably take advantage of, the retrenchment of gender roles that followed World War I, the British female sleuth – who in this period dominates the female tradition – becomes a less threatening figure: elderly, amateur, and detective by accident rather than design (Kungl 2006: 12).

Often unwarrantedly seen as a retrograde step in the development of feminist crime fiction, the "spinster sleuths" of golden age detective fiction of the 1920s

and 1930s, in which the puzzle of crime was central, have a power that lies in their apparent innocuousness. Neither noticeable nor notable to other characters, they regularly use underestimation of their capabilities to their advantage. Being largely invisible is an invaluable attribute for a detective (or criminal), but clearly reflects sexist and ageist cultural values. By portraying older women as skilled, successful, and central to their narratives, their creators insist that these mature women *are* made visible to readers. In this way these sleuths become surprisingly subversive figures, possibly more so even than the tough-talking, physically-active “female hard-boiled” detectives who later take on patriarchy more directly and reactively.

Traces of Green’s prototypical Amelia Butterworth can be found in these golden age female sleuths, the most famous of whom is Agatha Christie’s Miss Jane Marple. Making her novelistic debut in *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930), Miss Marple appeared in novels and short stories until the 1970s. Distinguished by her village geography (St Mary Mead) and pastimes – knitting, gardening, and bird-watching – Miss Marple has moral force, intelligence, an inquisitive nature, excellent knowledge of human behavior, and pays attention to details. Patricia Wentworth’s Miss Maud Silver, too, is an older single woman who knits and solves. Dowdy, inconspicuous, and using gossip to her advantage, this ex-governess private investigator is featured in 32 novels from *Grey Mask* (1928) to *The Girl in the Cellar* (1961). Not spinster but widow, Gladys Mitchell’s Mrs (Dame) Beatrice Adela Lestrangle Bradley is a psychoanalyst/psychologist who solves cases in 66 books from *Speedy Death* (1929) to *The Crozier Pharaohs* (1984). Small like Miss Silver, Mrs Bradley is described as crocodilian or “saurian” and makes her own decisions about justice. Initially an amateur, but later Psychiatric Consultant to the Home Office, she uses psychological methods of detection.

Golden age female detective fiction is often concerned with human relationships, social and cultural concerns, and women’s position. One of the most significant younger women sleuths of the period is Dorothy L. Sayers’s Harriet Vane. Featured in four novels, Vane is independent, around 30, has studied at Oxford, and is herself a writer of detective stories. Sayers’s male series detective Lord Peter Wimsey falls in love with her and detects to clear her name in *Strong Poison* (1930) when Vane is on trial for the murder of the lover whose marriage proposal she has refused. Sayers regarded work as an essential part of a woman’s existence, and the Vane novels reveal the difficulties women face in balancing professional and private life. Fearing it may damage her independence, Vane refuses Wimsey’s marriage proposals until *Gaudy Night* (1935), which has been termed “the first feminist detective novel” (Reddy 1988: 12). Set in an Oxford women’s college, the novel raises significant questions about women and higher education and about love and work. Although she included romance between Wimsey and Vane, Sayers believed that love had little place in crime fiction as it distracted from the detective focus. Like other contemporary crime novelists she also rejected female intuition as a way to solve cases, in part because of the fair play rule of golden age detective fiction that required providing the reader with

the same clues the detective has, and in part because it marginalizes female logic and intellect (Kungl 2006: 148).

Sayers's Vane influenced academic sleuth Kate Fansler, created by American feminist academic Carolyn Heilbrun writing as Amanda Cross. Introduced in *In the Last Analysis* (1964), Fansler is an intelligent, wealthy, successful feminist professor of literature who, like Vane, believes in the importance of work for women. An elegant dresser, she drinks and smokes, has occasional lovers and, later in the series, marries. As Reddy argues, Cross "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*" (Reddy 1990: 174). She also provided inspiration for later academic sleuths including Theodora Wender's American protagonist Gladiola Gold, who appeared in *Knight Must Fall* (1985), and Joan Smith's British Loretta Lawson of *A Masculine Ending* (1987). Another intriguing academic sleuth is Oxford law Professor Hilary Tamar, whose gender and sexuality remains unstated in the series by Sarah Caudwell that begins with *Thus Was Adonis Murdered* (1981).

Another important descendant of Harriet Vane is British writer P. D. James's Cordelia Gray who appears in *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1972), the title of which encapsulates the gender biases fictional female private eyes face as they conduct their investigations. Often regarded as a forerunner of the American female private investigators of the 1980s, Gray is 22, independent, lives alone, and inherits a detective business after the suicide of her partner Bernie Pryde. Proving herself brave and highly capable, she has her own code of justice. Gray appeared again in the less successful *The Skull beneath the Skin* (1982), which sees her feminist status reduced by her failure in the central case, and her agency now specializing in finding lost pets. (See Harrington, chapter 40 of this volume.)

The next major impulse in feminist detection came with the development of the American female hard-boiled investigator. Klein finds the "first independent woman hard-boiled detective" in *I Found Him Dead* (1947) and *Chord in Crimson* (1949) featuring and narrated by P. I. Gale Gallagher (pseudonym of Will Oursler and Margaret Scott), who tracks missing persons, handles guns, is physically active, threatened, shot at, and finds corpses (Klein 1995: 127). There had also been highly sexualized, often naked, "she-dicks" created for the male market including Honey West, protagonist of eleven novels by G. G. Fickling (Gloria and Forrest E. Fickling) between 1957 and 1971, and Marla Trent of Henry Kane's *Private Eye* (1959) (Klein 1995: 128–34). Even as early as the 1930s, however, hard-boiled female PIs like Clive F. Adams's Violet McDade were appearing regularly in the pulps (Rzepka 2005: 185; Drew 1986).

More influential, however, were Marcia Muller's Sharon McCone, Sara Paretsky's V. I. Warshawski, and Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone, who made their mark in the early 1980s (see Effron, chapter 43 in this volume). Introduced as single, intelligent, and in their thirties, these urban private investigators take a physically active approach to crime that is far from "spinster cosy." Fit, self-contained, and street-wise, they handle guns, face threats and attacks from men, and kill when they have to. Their

first-person narratives reveal women's experiences in the face of patriarchal systems of both crime and justice, and despite their detective successes their vulnerability is in places acknowledged. Taking detection in new overtly feminist directions, Muller, Paretsky, and Grafton are often seen as rewriting the male hard-boiled tradition into a counter-tradition or, as Glenwood Irons suggests, in fact inventing a new tradition (Irons 1995: xiii–xv).

The female hard-boiled tradition is in part a feminist response to male hard-boiled writing, but also owes much to previous female detection. Entering seedier streets and more dangerous terrain, these tough private investigators reflect a maturing into adult territory of the earlier bold "girl detectives" like Nancy Drew. That these juvenile sleuths were influential is acknowledged by Muller, who cites Judy Bolton as an influence on her detective Sharon McCone (Muller 1998: 67–9). Making her first appearance in 1977's *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*, McCone is a staff investigator for the San Francisco All Souls Legal Cooperative who later opens her own investigating agency. She is part Native American, has earned a degree in sociology and has had several love affairs. Muller's series was notable for its emphasis on the ways in which gender affects the detective's role, and led a vanguard of crime writers with similar concerns.

In 1982 the second McCone and the first Warshawski and Millhone novels were published, consolidating a new vision of female detective fiction. Introduced in *Indemnity Only* (1982) V. I. [Victoria Iphigenia] Warshawski is an ex-public defender private investigator based in Chicago. Herself divorced and her parents dead, she is without family but has close women friends, and female community is important in her life. Having been involved in political feminist work, her cases often take on patriarchal institutions like the Church, corporations, and local government, but also often have links with people she knows. She experiences abduction and violence, gets a gun, kills, and is frequently told that detecting is no job for a woman. Known for its revision of masculine hard-boiled tropes, Paretsky's work, as Linden Peach suggests, also "looks back to British, feminist writers of the 1920s and 1930s, especially Virginia Woolf" (Peach 2006: 104), and reflects Christie's and Sayers's detective fiction in representing a woman struggling against "Victorian ideals of womanhood" (Peach 2006: 117).

Kinsey Millhone, introduced in Grafton's *"A" is for Alibi* (1982), is an ex-cop private investigator. A loner without ties or possessions, she has occasional lovers and ends her novels like case reports. Investigating crime in fictional Santa Teresa, California, she talks tough and holds her own, but has also been beaten up and can mete out violence and kill when she needs to. In much-quoted lines, she states in the opening paragraph of *"A" is for Alibi*: "I'm thirty-two years old, twice divorced, no kids. The day before yesterday I killed someone and the fact weighs heavily on my mind" (Grafton 1982: 1). Killing, she feels, "has moved [her] into the same camp with soldiers and maniacs," which disturbs her (Grafton 1982: 209), but what resonates most for feminist development of detective fiction is the closing line of the body of the novel. When her knife-wielding criminal ex-lover lifts the lid of the trash bin

in which the terrified Millhone is hiding, her gun ready, she states: "I blew him away" (Grafton 1982: 208).

Millhone enacts the feminist desire to "blow away" male violence towards women. The issue of violence, or what Glenwood Irons and Joan Warthling Roberts identify in the detective fiction of British writer Liza Cody as "the sense of victimization which seems to equate the woman detective with the murder victims themselves," is foregrounded in much women's crime writing from the early 1980s onwards (Irons and Roberts 1995: 67). Cody's young investigator Anna Lee, for example, who first appears in *Dupe* (1980), is an ex-police officer employed by Brierly Security Agency in London. Independent, fit, and interested in cars, Lee faces decisions about the balance of career and personal life, but is also beaten in an attack and held prisoner.

Violence is also central to several female hard-boiled variants that appeared in the late 1980s and 1990s, such as Denise Danks's British "techno hard-boiled" series featuring journalist investigator Georgina Powers. Hard drinking, sexually active, and often physically endangered, Powers uses computer technology to solve cases in London's East End. Janet Evanovich's "comic hard-boiled" series about bond reinforcement agent Stephanie Plum began with *One for the Money* (1994). Investigating in Trenton, New Jersey, Plum is not highly skilled at her job, but nevertheless succeeds in plots that mix violence with comic moments.

Feminist hard-boiled detection is a strand of women's crime writing that continues to thrive. Muller, Paretsky, and Grafton's series are all current (with, for example, Muller's McCone in the 1990s developing a long-term relationship and in the twenty-first century marrying). Their private investigators also influenced the creation of many long-running series sleuths including American Linda Barnes's six-foot-one, ex-cop cab-driver Carlotta Carlyle who appeared in *A Trouble of Fools* (1987) and Val McDermid's British series about private eye Kate Brannigan which started with *Dead Beat* (1992). Grafton's and Paretsky's work also partially inspired McDermid's journalist sleuth Lindsay Gordon who was introduced in *Report for Murder* (1987), the first lesbian detective novel published in Britain.

The first fictional feminist lesbian sleuth was Chicana detective Kat Guerrero who appeared in M. F. Beal's *Angel Dance* (1977). Canadian Eve Zaremba's Helen Keremos followed in *A Reason to Kill* (1978), and Katherine V. Forrest's novels about Los Angeles lesbian police detective Kate Delafield began with *Amateur City* (1984). The best-known lesbian amateur detective is Barbara Wilson's Pam Nilsen. In a pattern that developed in lesbian crime fiction, as Nilsen solves her first case she also solves her own sexuality, coming out in the first novel *Murder in the Collective* (1984). Wilson's novels focus on lesbian experience, female community, and gendered issues such as prostitution, pornography, and violence against women, including Nilsen's rape by a criminal in *Sisters of the Road* (1986).

In 1990 Patricia Cornwell staked out forensic detection for female crime writers by introducing forensic pathologist Dr Kay Scarpetta, chief medical examiner for

Richmond, Virginia, in *Postmortem*. Intelligent, divorced, and devoted to her job, Scarpetta across the series becomes involved romantically with FBI profiler Benton Wesley, develops a working relationship with sexist cop Pete Marino, and is a loyal aunt to her computer-expert niece Lucy. Including precise details of autopsies, the novels show Scarpetta solving crimes, battling the justice system, and dealing with violence against women professionally and personally, often becoming involved with serial killers. Forensic detection is also central in Kathy Reichs's series featuring forensic anthropologist Dr Temperance Brennan, which began with *Déjà Dead* (1997). Set mainly in Montreal and North Carolina, the novels are inspired by Reich's own career as a forensic anthropologist.

With the exponential growth in female detective fiction from the 1980s onwards there also developed a line of "humanistic crime fiction" (Della Cava and Engel 1999: 38). This tradition moves away from hard-boiled, streetwise toughness and places the detective's psychology and human and social issues at its core. Cases in such novels resonate with contemporary issues, often those of particular concern to women such as domestic violence, abortion, and child abuse. Race and class issues are also often central. Barbara Neely's series beginning with *Blanche on the Lam* (1992) about African-American domestic-worker sleuth Blanche White foregrounds the racism White meets, while both her race and her job give her a cultural invisibility that aids in her crime solving. American author Elizabeth George's British-set series, which focuses on an ensemble of characters including detective duo Inspector Thomas Lynley, an aristocrat, and working-class Sergeant Barbara Havers, highlights Havers's awareness of class differences. Generally a sidekick, in *Deception on His Mind* (1998) Havers takes on the central detecting role.

The major female presence in twentieth-century crime writing was also accentuated by authors not known for creating female detectives but whose contributions to crime fiction through male detectives or psychological novels of crime are undeniably significant: Ngaio Marsh, Margery Allingham, Patricia Highsmith, Ruth Rendell/Barbara Vine, and Minette Walters. Twenty-first century female detective fiction continues to proliferate outwards into variants and continuations of subgenres: cozies about elderly amateur female sleuths remain popular, hard-boiled private investigators multiply, academic sleuths continue, historical female detectives burgeon, forensic detectives persist, and humanist concerns prevail. As in the nineteenth century, but less so in the twentieth, male authors are again increasingly creating female detectives: Jasper Fforde in his science fictionesque literary detective Thursday Next, Alexander McCall Smith in *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series featuring Botswana detective Precious Ramotswa and his Edinburgh-set Isabel Dalhousie series, James Patterson's Women's Murder Club series, and Boris Akunin's historical Russian nun detective Sister Pelagia.

Three elements prevalent in twenty-first century feminist detective fiction are ensemble characters, issues surrounding motherhood, and violence against women. The starkly lone female detective is less common; often women investigators are

now part of an ensemble of characters as Havers is in George's novels or the two female crime solvers are in Karin Slaughter's Grant County series. Increasingly prominent, too, mirroring contemporary concerns, are detectives questioning whether to become mothers. Detection and motherhood in fiction still rarely mesh, although proportionally more black female detectives than white seem to be mothers. Nevertheless, "[c]hildren do not come first," are old enough "to look after themselves if need be" and other people help with them when the detective is on the case (Décuré 1999: 165), as Nicole Décuré notes of black women detectives such as Valerie Wilson Wesley's Tamara Hayle, Eleanor Taylor Bland's Marti MacAlister, and Terris McMahan Grimes's Theresa Galloway, who all first appeared in the 1990s. Whereas for earlier twentieth-century elderly sleuths and 1980s hard-boiled female detectives motherhood is marginalized, for contemporary female detectives it is, if not always central, at least mentioned. Detectives are still seldom mothers, especially of young children, but infertility, unplanned pregnancy, miscarriages, or abortions are dealt with in works such as Danks's *Baby Love* (2001) and Slaughter's *Faithless* (2005). Such personal experiences leave emotional marks upon female sleuths, while still leaving them free to detect without encumbrances.

The central concern of feminist crime fiction remains violence against women. Women are victims: captured, raped, murdered, butchered and in the hands of forensic detectives dissected into evidence. In emphasizing violence against women, feminist detective fiction makes a gendered protest. It also implies a gendered question: if even the detective figure is violated and attacked, is justice possible? Some critics argue that, in portraying such shocking scenes, violence against women is condoned or capitalized upon by authors. Others respond that in describing confrontations with violence the feminist detective and writer are simply telling it like it is, and in so doing are asserting, if not control over violence, then the power to express it in their terms.

A writer like Karin Slaughter in her Grant County series, which began with *Blindsighted* (2001), perhaps best illustrates the tendencies of early twenty-first century female detection. The series melds subgenres: part hard-boiled, part forensic, part humanist, part police procedural, part crime puzzle. Its ensemble cast features two female investigators: pediatrician and medical examiner Sara Linton whose portrayal draws on forensic and humanist models, and heavy-drinking, downward spiraling, police detective Lena Adams whose origins are clearly hard-boiled. The women do not directly work together but are linked through police chief Jeffrey Tolliver: Lena's boss and Sara's ex- and sometime husband. Both women have been raped, as a result of which Sara is infertile and, wanting to become a mother, plans to adopt. Lena experiences repeated episodes of violence including rapes and abuse from a partner. She also has an abortion to end an unplanned pregnancy. These female sleuths survive and solve, but their sisters are also victims of violence: Linton's sister loses the baby she is carrying after a brutal attack and Lena's sister is raped and murdered. These novels insist that for the female inves-

tigator crime is not simply a professional interest, but a devastatingly personal concern.

Despite the violence it often openly depicts, feminist crime writing itself is alive and thriving. As the historical development of female fictional detection reveals, women sleuths are far more than gimmick-like stand-ins for the male detectives of a masculine genre. Female detection has its own genealogy, characteristics, and subgenres and its future manifestations promise to be among the most interesting in the ever-expanding story of literary crime.

FEMINIST DETECTIVE FICTION AND POPULAR CULTURE The Second Wave feminists like Betty Friedan, Kate Millet and others recognized the power of popular culture in influencing society. Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) studied the growing despair of women in middle-class American women "the problem that has no name" (10) - and found that it was directly related to the messages of popular culture. Gavin, Adrienne G. "Feminist Crime Fiction and Female Sleuths". *A Companion to Crime Fiction*. Ed.