

Female Investigators: Rewriting the Masculine Narrative of Crime Fiction

Šárka Bubíková, Olga Roebuck

ABSTRACT

While the crime genre may have seemed as purely masculine for the greater part of its history, feminist critics looking for the roots of female crime writing have found a rich history of both the woman crime writer as well as the woman detective. Since the 1980s there has been not only a pronounced resurgence of interest in crime fiction, but also a boom of female detectives created by female writers. Focusing on works by Robert Galbraith, Denise Mina, Linda Barnes, Dana Stabenow and S. J. Rozan, this article explores some of the ways the traditionally masculine private eye subgenre can be appropriated to accommodate a female protagonist. Comparing a variety of protagonists and narrative strategies, it further argues that, perhaps paradoxically, the originally dominantly masculine hardboiled PI tradition seems well accommodating to female (even feminist) appropriations.

KEYWORDS

Crime fiction, hardboiled, female PI, Robert Galbraith, Denise Mina, Linda Barnes, Dana Stabenow, S. J. Rozan

Female sleuths

For the greater part of its history, the crime fiction genre has featured predominantly male protagonists, while the professional position of a female sleuth was rather shady. There is, of course, the tradition of the non-professional female investigator, whose only attraction to the process of detection is her nosiness, with the most immediate and notorious example, naturally, Agatha Christie's Miss Marple. The investigations of the matronly Miss Marple are usually non-committed, as she could hardly be held responsible for the result of an investigation with which she had never been charged. This lack of responsibility and weakened position (as she does not represent any authority), place the female investigator in the position of merely a helper. Maureen Reddy adds that such investigators, including Miss Marple, rarely receive recognition or appreciation for their successful resolutions of mysteries.¹

The position of professional women sleuths seems to be somewhat different, although they, too, often encounter gender stereotyping and a lack of respect. Even in the most recent Cormoran Strike series by Robert Galbraith, Robin Ellacot, a female assistant and later business partner in Strike's detective agency, also has to prove herself to be capable of working as more than just a helper. Throughout the series, Robin is repeatedly offended by people who dismiss her as merely Strike's secretary, and one of the agency's subcontractors is fired for constantly disobeying Robin's decisions, and finally, for overstepping the line by sending her an indecent picture of himself. Robin, on the other hand, is portrayed as helpless in such confrontations, with her objections to such displays of disrespect mostly taking the form of internal monologues. Galbraith thus takes the position of a female investigator only a small step further than the Golden Age writers. This

1 Maureen T. Reddy, "Women Detectives," in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 193.

lack of progress seems to prove John Scaggs's claim that the Golden Age crime novels written by women yield much less to feminist reworking than the obviously more misogynistic hard-boiled fiction that flourished at approximately the same time.²

Reddy agrees that the rise of the hardboiled fiction in the 1920's United States served merely to further push aside the female investigator, including the amateur variant, by insisting on the investigator's maleness.³ Sally R. Munt calls this male figure of the "man in the mac" messianic and archetypal, representing the iconically masculine mythic hero. She considers him one of the folk heroes of modern popular culture.⁴ Karen Seago likewise defines the typical hardboiled protagonist as heroic and exceptional, capable of solving "crimes where no one else succeeds."⁵ Drawing on the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (a self-rating list of gender attributes or personality characteristics), Seago further confirms that the PI of the hardboiled tradition "is an extreme personification of masculinity,"⁶ a description giving rise to the question as to what degree, if at all, the female protagonist can operate within the generic formula as anything but a parody or caricature.

Yet, the genre's recent development has shown that not only can a female investigator be successfully created, but the hardboiled tradition can in fact yield to appropriation for feminist purposes. In their comprehensive study of how female writers rewrite the hardboiled tradition, Priscilla L. Walton and Manina Jones note that since the 1970s crime fiction written by women and featuring female professional investigators "has virtually exploded onto the popular fiction market,"⁷ and by the 1990s the subgenre "had become well-established and was being publicly celebrated through unprecedented sales and economic rewards, as well as literary prestige and popular renown."⁸ They name the impact of women's liberation movements, the resurgence of the popularity of crime fiction since the 1980s and, last but not least, the power of the mainly female readership of contemporary crime fiction as among the reasons for this development. While the traditional Golden Age works appealed to female readership because they "domesticated crime fiction," Walton and Jones argue that the current boom of crime fiction has a strong appeal because the genre has been professionalized.⁹ That is, by depicting professional investigators (rather than amateur sleuths), contemporary crime novels center on working women operating successfully in professions previously considered unfit for them. Interestingly enough, although the amateur female sleuth does occasionally appear, especially in the noir variant of the genre, it does not represent the current mainstream. A unique example can be found in Denise Mina's *Garnethill Trilogy* (1998–2001) featuring Maureen O'Donnell, who starts her amateur investigation in order to prove to the police that she herself is not the culprit.

2 John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge: 2005), 77.

3 Reddy, "Women Detectives," 193.

4 Sally R. Munt, *Murder by the Book: Feminism and the Crime Novel* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 1.

5 Karen Seago, "Philip Marlowe in Drag? – The Construct of the Hard-boiled Detective in Feminist Appropriation and Translation," *Ars Aeterna* 9, no. 2 (2017): 40, accessed June 25, 2022, DOI: 10.1515/aa-2017-0008.

6 Seago, "Philip Marlowe in Drag?," 40.

7 Priscilla L. Walton and Manina Jones, *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard-Boiled Tradition* (University of California Press, 1999), 1.

8 Walton and Jones, *Detective Agency*, 11–12.

9 Walton and Jones, *Detective Agency*, 30.

In the modern variations of hardboiled fiction, the female protagonist has received much greater acclaim and became an equal character rather than the dangerous *other* of the traditional crime novels. Beth Schoenfeld in fact sees crime fiction written by women featuring women protagonists and concerned with women's issues as a new subgenre of mystery fiction.¹⁰ Since late 1980s, it has become clear that female crime fiction authors are not only finding their own voice, dealing with matters beyond the investigation which reflect the realities of a modern society, but often also seek to subvert traditional patriarchal structures and turn the male-dominated world of crime writing upside down. Walton and Jones point out the genre's ability to provide "not just an eye that sees but a voice that speaks from the margins," a quality allowing its protagonists to operate frequently as "vehicle[s] of social protest."¹¹ Or, in Seago's words, the "underdog challenging the norm" feature of the hardboiled protagonist is used as the "ideological springboard"¹² for constructing female (and often feminist) hardboiled detectives.

Sharon McCone, created by Marcia Muller (first in *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*, 1977), as well as Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski, and Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone, both debuting in 1982¹³ rank among the most important early examples of female professional detectives. Although the beginnings of Muller's career as a crime fiction writer were somewhat rocky (her early manuscripts repeatedly refused by publishers), all three writers and their protagonists have enjoyed popularity with the crime fiction readership and have received great scholarly attention. They have also served as inspiration, perhaps as encouragement, to a multitude of female crime fiction writers¹⁴ to create their own female protagonists. Their contribution to the detective genre spans decades, with Kinsey Millhone's last book published in 2017, the year Grafton died, with the most recent McCone mystery published in 2021 and V. I. Warshawski novel in 2022.

An interesting take on the female investigator appears in Linda Barnes's Carlotta Carlyle series of twelve novels set in Boston and published between 1987 and 2008. Drawing clearly from the hardboiled tradition, the PI protagonist Carlotta is strong and tough, her six-foot robust frame made muscular by regular exercise. She is a university-educated ex-cop who was forced to quit because of defiance, a feature alluding to Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, who also "test[ed] very high on insubordination"¹⁵ and therefore was fired from law enforcement. Another affinity Carlotta shares with earlier PIs is a lack of family ties – after losing both parents at an early age, Carlotta moved to Boston to live briefly with her aging aunt but soon was left on her own. Nevertheless, unlike her male hard-boiled predecessors who are, in the words of critics, "existential loners,"¹⁶ or "more or less eccentric dysfunctional loners,"¹⁷ Carlotta has a network of

10 Beth Schoenfeld, "Women Writers Writing about Women Detectives in Twenty-First Century America," *Journal of Popular Culture* (2008): 836 – 853, 837.

11 Walton and Jones, *Detective Agency*, 194.

12 Seago, "Philip Marlowe in Drag?" 42.

13 Interestingly, Marcia Muller's second book featuring Sharon McCone *Ask the Cards a Question* was published in 1982 as well.

14 In an article on Sara Paretsky wittingly sub-titled "A gun of one's own," S.J. Rozan, herself a crime fiction writer, confirms that Paretsky's creation "changed the face of crime fiction."

15 Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (1939, New York: Vintage Crime/Black Lizard, 1988), 10.

16 Lee Horsley, *The Noir Thriller* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 189.

17 Seago, "Philip Marlowe in Drag?" 40.

friends and acquaintances who give her a sense of belonging. She also functions as a surrogate sister to the immigrant girl Paolina, with whom she was paired through the Big Sister program when she was still a cop. Although Carlotta still in a way conforms to the earlier tendencies of creating female characters acting as men (muscular, physically strong and tough, free of family bonds), it is precisely her network of friends and her maternalistic care of Paolina that balance her otherwise stereotypically masculine characteristics. Providing believable human connections is not unusual in more recent hardboiled fiction. As Lee Horsley observes, the qualities of “integrity, loyalty and compassion” make the PI protagonists “more positive and resilient figures.”¹⁸ Some of the contemporary female crime fiction writers picture their protagonists functioning within a complex family context, with some even having family members who actively participate in many facets of their lives. Thus for example, a strong mother features in S.J. Rozan’s Chin/Smith series and an equally dominant grandmother in Dana Stabenow’s Kate Shugak Alaskan mysteries, both discussed below. In this way, the authors attempt to move away from simply placing a female character into a stereotypically male form and context.

Unlike Paretsky’s androgynously named V.I. (sometimes simply “Vic”), Barnes’ protagonist has a clearly feminine given name. Derived from the masculine Carl (Charles or Karl), the name Carlotta means “a free woman,” an epithet well-suited for the series central character. In the first-person narrative voice utilized in the series (rather typical for the private eye subgenre), Carlotta explains that although she liked police work, she had troubles dealing with male chauvinism in the workplace and thus decided to open her own private agency. When times are lean, she earns money as a cab driver. Being a self-employed female detective and a cab driver both represent forms of empowerment, providing Carlotta with a sense of purpose as well as freedom, which is particularly apparent in the style in which she negotiates the night streets of Boston. In fact, in an interview Barnes asserted that she understood her protagonist as a “one woman take-back-the-night movement,” and thus she created Carlotta as unafraid to move around the city at night, not because the detective was careless, but because she did not want to be “trapped in [her] household by fear.”¹⁹ Carlotta is well equipped for the night city – as a taxi driver she knows the cityscape very well and as a former police officer and active volleyball player, she is physically fit and knows how to defend herself.

Unlike Carlotta, Mina’s protagonist Maureen possesses no overt physical disposition for self-protection, yet she does not fear even the most dangerous night locations of Glasgow. Although without imposing physical stature, Maureen is socially predisposed for the night city. Characters representing mainstream values often label her a “low-life,” therefore the night streets represent her very own territory, and her own experience with crime and abuse make her immune to fear. While for Carlotta moving through the dangerous locations is a deliberate stance, Maureen came to this strength naturally through experience.

Although Carlotta is resolute and courageous, as a female investigator she is also vulnerable and can assess when a situation is getting out of hand: “There’s time for self-reliance and a time to

18 Horsley, *The Noir Thriller*, 189.

19 As quoted in Walton and Jones, *Detective Agency*, 177.

yell for help.”²⁰ Vulnerability and the admission of fear appears as a motif common to many female private-eye protagonists, perhaps to offset their necessary professional toughness and prowess in an attempt to make them more believable. Barnes seems to succeed in creating this balance: Carlotta is tough yet careful and cautious, independent yet socially well-rooted and connected. On the other hand, Mina’s protagonist neither declares nor admits any fear for herself. In the trilogy, she is fighting her own alcoholism, which often clouds her judgement. When she is concerned, it is for others rather than for herself: she has a great compassion for fellow victims of abuse. Without openly trumpeting a feminist agenda, both Carlotta and Maureen represent a liberal feminist voice.

While Barnes’s protagonist can be seen as a good example of a well-constructed, largely believable female PI, the Kate Shugak series by Dana Stabenow published since 1992 features a protagonist with qualities sometimes larger than human. As a female of Aleut origin, Kate represents a feminist and ethnic variation of the PI detective. A former law enforcement officer now for private hire, she is shown as an independent, strong personality, someone tough and shrewd enough to be able to take care of herself both in the harsh Alaskan environment and in confronting criminals. She thus also stands in the long tradition of American private investigators to whom, as John Scaggs puts it, “physical courage and fortitude are central,”²¹ although in Shugak’s case these qualities are not connected to the urban environment but to Alaskan wilderness.²²

Stephen Knight characterizes Kate Shugak as “a liberated spirit,”²³ while a character in the series calls her a Renaissance woman because she can deckhand on a crab boat, guide mountain climbers, mine for gold, butcher a moose as well as fix an engine. To Kate these abilities simply arise out of necessity, generated by the very place she lives in: “When you live in the Bush, you do what you have to get by. [...] If I want to eat, I get my moose. If I want to drive, I service my truck.”²⁴ However, the extreme range of activities in which she excels strains her credibility as a realistically drawn character. In assessing the series, David Geherin similarly points out the “uneasy balance between realism and implausibility,” characterizing the character of Kate as “pumped up larger than life.”²⁵ Among the difficult to believe aspects of this protagonist is for example the fact that Kate is known as a legendary investigator all over Alaska although she served only a few years in law enforcement, and even then was dealing with domestic violence cases. Further, as the granddaughter of the tribal elder Ekaterina Moonin Shugak, Kate is almost everybody’s candidate for tribal leadership after her grandmother’s death, despite her never having participated in tribal management. On top of that, although Kate is primarily pictured as a professional and independent woman with no desire for domesticity, possessing an almost limitless physical prowess and toughness, she is also very attractive to a majority of the male characters in the series, regardless of their ethnic background. The occasional implausibility of the protagonist’s toughness and skills in no way diminishes the series’ continuing popularity, with an impressive 23 volumes already in print.

20 Linda Barnes, *Steel Guitar* (1991; New York: St. Martin’s Paperbacks, 2005), 11.

21 Scaggs, *Crime fiction*, 64.

22 For more on the nontraditional setting of the series, see Šárka Bubíková and Olga Roebuck, *The Place It Was Done: Place and Community in Contemporary American and British Crime Fiction* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2022), in print.

23 Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction since 1800* (2004; Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 196.

24 Dana Stabenow, *Hunter’s Moon* (1999; London: Head of Zeus, 2013), 2.

25 Geherin, *Small Towns in Recent American Crime Fiction*, 52.

Kate's is a feminist voice, but it is also a voice speaking from the ethnic margins – she constantly foregrounds the history of Alaskan natives, the complexity of current ethnic relations in Alaska, as well as environmental issues and conflicts.²⁶

A voice from a different margin can be heard in Denise Mina's *Garnethill* trilogy. Here, the investigation format enables the author to question the functioning of traditional constructs, e.g. concerning family, employment, sexuality and other issues. The works extend to the very edges of Scottish society, raising a number of questions about poverty, mental health, alcoholism and abuse. Rather than functioning as the more sensitive sidekick, Denise Mina's protagonist Maureen O'Donnell operates alone. She is not even really a sleuth: her motivation to lead an independent investigation stems from her need to divert the police from believing that she herself is a serious suspect. However, as she gets the ball rolling and becomes more and more involved with investigating several crimes, her motivation changes into an impulse to bring relief or justice for other female characters, who have been abused or killed. In Mina's version, sleuthing becomes a helping profession.

In the second part of the trilogy, *The Exile*, the feminine and masculine roles are truly subverted when Maureen helps a man find his missing wife. While he remains saddled with the care for their sons, which he severely struggles with, enhancing his aura of ineffectualness, Maureen finds the missing wife to be guilty of a number of crimes, including cheating her family from receiving social benefits. In *Resolution*, the theme of the abuse of women becomes prominent, and Maureen sets off to avenge several female characters that have fallen victims to abuse. It is her own story of abuse that closes in this part too. Denise Mina reaches to the very bottom of the social scale and points out the dark corners of socially deprived urban housing schemes, where the traditional middleclass themes are overshadowed by dispossession, dysfunctional families, unemployment and general dependence on social benefits. As Schoenfeld suggests, "the ideological foundations of these novels and the social contradictions depicting that ideology are just as important as the solution of the crime."²⁷

The above examples of the female appropriation of the hardboiled genre therefore confirm what Walton and Jones claim about its earliest representatives, namely that their ability to open up "a site of discursive power that provides a unique space for self-conscious reflection on/of the laws of gender and genre."²⁸ These novels not only accommodate female protagonists, but create a new, altogether female narrative. Rather than simply imitating a masculine toughness, these female investigators have found their own voice expanding the traditional scope of crime fiction by exploring fresh themes and criticizing traditional ideologies.

26 For more see Šárka Bubíková, "Wilderness in Nevada Barr's and Dana Stabenow's Crime Fiction," in *Places and Spaces of Crime in Popular Imagination*, ed. Šárka Bubíková and Olga Roebuck (Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press, 2021), 95–108.

27 Schoenfeld, "Women Writers Writing about Women," 841.

28 Walton and Jones, *Detective Agency*, 194.

Partners in Investigation

Combining female and male investigators in a partnership represents a completely different set of challenges. Although partners in investigation are no novelty in crime fiction, their presentations are burdened by a lack of balance (i.e. inequality) in the partnership as well as by gender clichés. Robert Galbraith (a pen name of J. K. Rowling) places his crime series in the first two decades of the new millennium. Yet, this depiction of a partnership between a male sleuth and a female attempting that career is in many respects a throwback to portrayals of women detectives from the end of the 19th century, exploring a number of the stereotypes associated with these stories. As Maureen T. Teddy suggests, most female protagonists' detective adventures ended with their marriage.²⁹ Both partners in investigation, Robin and Cormoran, see Robin's upcoming wedding as an obstacle to her further sleuthing career. To some extent thus, Robin is in a very similar position to Marian Halcombe, a heroine of Wilkie Collins's *Woman in White*, whom Reddy sees to a great degree as a formulaic depiction of a female detective: deprived of physical beauty, but equipped with high intelligence, she is debarred from romantic fulfilment.³⁰ In the same light, throughout the series, Galbraith makes much of Robin's physical attractiveness, thus combating the 19th century stereotype that intelligent and capable women must lack beauty, but reifying the belief that professional and romantic devotion cannot be successfully combined. Robin is seen balancing between her marriage and career, finally prioritizing the latter, for which most of her friends and family show little understanding. When, clearly without a shade of malevolence, her cousin says that Robin seems to be "going in the opposite direction to everybody else,"³¹ Robin takes it as a rebuke, but feels unshaken in her decision.

Kimberly Maslin claims that when women attempt anything resembling a masculine tale of accomplishment, it requires a backstory featuring an explanation or is the result of some unexpected event or accident.³² This is Robin's case completely. She joins the Strike Detective Agency by chance as a temping secretary, and stays on only thanks to the failure of her marriage, when she accidentally finds the earring of husband's lover in their marital bed. Otherwise, it seems that her husband would have likely succeeded in gradually moving Robin away from her "unsuitable" profession.

Lydia Chin, a character in S.J. Rozan's Chin/Smith series (begun in 1994), is also seen by her family as somebody who has made a wrong decision about her future. Although Lydia is very proud of her professional life, she knows that her "license is in a profession [her] entire family abhors."³³ Lydia, a Chinese American private investigator living in the New York Chinatown, is part of an investigative pair where both gender and ethnicity play a role, as her partner is the white American Bill Smith. While partnership in fictional investigations is not unusual, the use of alternating narrative voices definitely is – Lydia is the narrator in the odd volumes of the series,

29 Reddy, "Women Detectives," 192.

30 Reddy, "Women Detectives," 194.

31 Robert Galbraith, *Troubled Blood* (London: Sphere, 2020).

32 Kimberly Maslin, "Writing a Woman Detective, Reinventing a Genre: Carolyn G. Heilbrun as Amanda Cross," *Clues, A Journal of Detection*, 34, no. 2 (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2016), 63

33 S. J. Rozan, *Reflecting the Sky* (2001; New York: St. Martin's Paperbacks, 2002), 5.

Bill in the even volumes. As Hans Bertens and Theo D'haen point out, this strategy creates “a tour de force that not many crime writers would be capable of” and it allows the author to explore male and female variations of the hardboiled narrative.³⁴ In the character of Lydia, many of the obstacles and prejudices female investigators face are exemplified, even magnified. Lydia's professional independence is contrasted with her familial dependency – as a respectful Chinese daughter she still lives with her widowed mother, and her brother tries to control her life decisions as is expected in a traditional Chinese American community. Firmly rooted in her ethnic and familial background, Lydia is thus burdened with far greater social responsibilities and pressures than many of her fictional peers. In this way, she shares more affinity with Galbraith's Robin than with Stabenow's Kate, even if Lydia is also an ethnic protagonist. Both Kate's and Lydia's position in their ethnic communities can be interpreted as evoking the stereotype of women as keepers of culture, a concept explored by Janet Mancini Billson in her analysis of the gender roles and opportunity structures among traditional communities of Canada, which resist feminism as a movement because they believe it is not taking into consideration the specific situation of ethnic and rural women.³⁵

Robert Galbraith's detective novels are rooted in middle-class values. The themes of possession, professional ambitions, the importance of education, family life, etc. are all based in the bourgeois ideal of stability and self-reliance. Yet, these themes are male appropriated, thus when related to a female character they often stand out as shocking or even objectionable. Throughout the series, Robin hides the less palatable facts of her job from her family in fear of being patronised and overprotected. Her achievements attract less attention than the true nature of her relationship with Strike, which people suspect must be an affair. Nevertheless, the abilities she brings to the agency are valuable precisely because they are associated with the feminine: she is compassionate and sensitive, with a knack for befriending people which often opens up doors that would be otherwise closed for the rough, direct and masculine Strike. Therefore, in spite of the author's clear attempt to create an active and well-developed character of a female investigator, most gender stereotypes and conventions remain unchallenged in the Strike crime series. In Rozan's series, Lydia's family shares many mainstream middleclass values in addition to the values relating to their ethnic background (such as “keeping face” and not causing shame to the family). Lydia's relatives are also less interested in her professional success than in the status of her relationship with Bill Smith, all the more so because he is an outsider to the Chinese American community.

Compared to Stabenow's Kate, Lydia is more realistically drawn. For example, the disadvantage of Kate's stature of five feet is diminished with the simple explanation that she “gave an impression of height, possibly because she held her spine so straight, possibly because her gaze was so level and direct.”³⁶ Also Kate's muscles are often mentioned to highlight her strength. Lydia, on the other hand, openly admits that “at five-one, a hundred and ten pounds, I'm not very intimidating”³⁷ and she is not afraid to concede her vulnerability. Also, contrary to Kate, who successfully takes on all investigations, even in predominantly male environments (a crabbing vessel or an oilfield),

34 Hans Bertens and Theo D'haen, *Contemporary American Crime Fiction* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2001), 207.

35 For more, see Janet Mancini Billson, “Keepers of the Culture,” *Women & politics* 14, no. 1 (1994): 1–34.

36 Dana Stabenow, *A Cold-Blooded Business* (1994; London: Head of Zeus, 2013), 1.

37 S. J. Rozan, *China Trade* (1994; New York: St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1995), 13.

Lydia's cases³⁸ revolve around minor crimes, such as thefts (of valuable porcelain, fashion show designs, jewelry), or a forgery of ink paintings. In these situations, Bill Smith can only serve Lydia as "big muscle"³⁹ simply because of cultural differences – he does not speak Chinese and does not understand the Chinatown milieu. Paradoxically though, even if Bill's cases are much tougher, messier and involve a greater deal of violence, Lydia's help does consist of more than just looking up information or interviewing potential witnesses. On occasions, she even accompanies Bill as a bodyguard, her petit physique an advantage because Bill's opponents either completely ignore her or dismiss her as harmless (a fatal mistake with someone who possesses a black belt in karate). When approached as the prime investigator, Lydia is stereotypically entrusted with only minor offenses, but when she assists in Bill's cases, which Bertens and D'haen characterize as masculine and urban, she often goes beyond the limits imposed by gender stereotypes, to the great discomfort of her partner, who worries about her safety even as he acknowledges her bravery and skills.

Conclusion

The presented analyses yield a number of interesting comparisons. While the crime novels depicting pairs of investigators may seem more open to creating an authentic female voice, the analyzed works suggest the opposite. Instead of using opportunities to explore possibilities of the representation of women, both Galbraith and Rozan, perhaps as a result of their attempts to write realistically, are predisposed to preserving masculine ideologies, while their works target only few of the prevailing paradigms. Galbraith's Robin is a typical middle-class woman. While she does transcend gender boundaries by her choice of profession, one generally regarded as unsuitable for a woman, that is as far as Galbraith takes his female protagonist. A number of features, e.g. Robin's need to choose between a career and a family, her sexual vulnerability, or the author's insistence on her good looks, in fact serve to reify received gender stereotypes. Her achievements are presented as happenstance rather than the result of her abilities, skills and strife, or they are completely overshadowed by the relationship with her male counterpart. Her position thus has to be repeatedly verbalized: she countlessly reminds other characters that she is a full partner, not a subordinate in the PI agency, and that she is just a good friend of Cormoran Strike's, not romantically involved with him. Galbraith's female voice is thus rather self-conscious and still often undermined by prevailing stereotypes.

Rozan's series is built on gender differences or even stereotypes. While the Bill Smith novels follow in the tradition of the tough urban PI, more or less a loner dealing with violent crimes, the Lydia Chin novels focus on small crimes. Her main investigation methods involve a perfect knowledge of the environment of New York's Chinatown, communication skills both in English and Chinese, and psychological insight. For her family, Lydia is in a profession unfit for a woman, and in her lack of subservience she breaks the gender expectations of her Chinese American community. She is viewed in her surroundings as a petit, (sexually) vulnerable woman

38 Because Smith and Chin are each a solo PI, they also have their own cases; occasionally they cooperate in solving them. Here we mean the cases Lydia was hired to solve.

39 Rozan, *China Trade*, 13. Italics in the original.

and in fact suffers assault during several investigations. Yet, she undermines the image of easy prey by her skill level in the karate she is occasionally forced to employ.

The hardboiled PI paradoxically seems more accommodating to feminist appropriation. The characters of Mina's Maureen and Stabenow's Kate are featured within an environment that is beyond the reach of social conventions. Their lack of fear or incredible toughness is not presented as extraordinary: within such a milieu it represents a necessity. They are both in the middle of the wilderness – be it nature or the city's most socially deprived area. Traditional mainstream ideologies, stereotypes and conventions no longer apply in these surroundings, and the protagonists' main goal is often simply survival. Furthermore, both environments in which Maureen and Kate operate are alien to the middle-class reader, thus the credibility of these protagonists is not questioned. Robin uses the stereotype of a fragile female to full advantage, often in contrast with her male counterpart. Lydia's actions are often modified to appease her family or to accommodate her partner's views and her voice is juxtaposed to his in a gendered duo. On the other hand, while Kate or Maureen may appear to be excessively tough, sometimes even tougher than some of the male characters, the authenticity of their female voice is not diminished.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This article is an outcome of the project GA 19–02634S “Place and Community in Contemporary Anglophone Crime Fiction” supported by the Czech Science Foundation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barnes, Linda. *Steel Guitar*. 1991. New York: St. Martin's Paperbacks, 2005.
- Bertens, Hans and Theo D'haen. *Contemporary American Crime Fiction*. London & New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001.
- Billson, Janet Mancini. “Keepers of the Culture.” *Women & politics* 14, no. 1 (1994): 1–34.
- Chandler, Raymond. *The Big Sleep*. 1939. New York: Vintage Crime/Black Lizard, 1988.
- Galbraith, Robert. *Troubled Blood*. London: Sphere, 2020.
- Geherin, David. *Small Towns in Recent American Crime Fiction*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014.
- Horsley, Lee. *The Noir Thriller*. 2001. London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Knight, Stephen. *Crime Fiction since 1800*. 2nd edition. 2004. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Maslin, Kimberly. “Writing a Woman Detective, Reinventing a Genre: Carolyn G. Heilbrun as Amanda Cross,” *Clues, A Journal of Detection* 34, no. 2 (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2016): 63 – 72.
- Munt, Sally R. *Murder by the Book: Feminism and the Crime Novel*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Reddy, Maureen T. “Women Detectives.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, edited by Martin Priestman, 191–208. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Rozan, S. J. *China Trade*. 1994. New York: St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1995.
- Rozan, S. J. “Sara Paretsky: A Gun of One's Own.” *Publishers Weekly* 246, no. 43 (Oct 25, 1999): 44–45. <https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/sara-paretsky-gun-ones-own/docview/197016872/se-2>.

- Rozan, S. J. *Reflecting the Sky*. 2001. New York: St. Martin's Paperbacks, 2002.
- Scaggs, John. *Crime fiction*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Schoenfeld, Beth. "Women Writers Writing about Women Detectives in Twenty-First Century America." *Journal of Popular Culture* 41, no. 5 (2008): 836–853. Accessed August 28, 2022. DOI: 10.1111/j.1540-5931.2008.00552.x.
- Seago, Karen. "Philip Marlowe in Drag?" – The Construct of the Hard-boiled Detective in Feminist Appropriation and Translation." *Ars Aeterna* 9, no. 2 (2017): 39–52. Accessed June 25, 2022. DOI: 10.1515/aa-2017-0008.
- Stabenow, Dana. *A Cold-Blooded Business*. 1994. London: Head of Zeus, 2013.
- Stabenow, Dana. *Hunter's Moon*. 1999. London: Head of Zeus, 2013.
- Walton, Priscilla L. and Manina Jones. *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard-Boiled Tradition*. University of California Press, 1999.

Šárka Bubíková, Associate Professor at the University of Pardubice, specializes in the American ethnic Bildungsroman, children's literature and crime fiction. She was a Fulbright Scholar at Amherst College, MA and a visiting researcher at UCSB. She also writes fiction.

Olga Roebuck is an Assistant Professor at the University of Pardubice. She specializes in Scottish fiction, identity in literature and crime fiction.

Together, Roebuck and Bubíková have recently co-edited *Places and Spaces of Crime in Popular Imagination* (Krakow, 2021) and are the co-authors of *The Place It Was Done: Location and Community in Contemporary American and British Crime Fiction* (McFarland, forthcoming).