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Contents

Acknowledgements viii
Notes on Contributors ix

Introduction 1
Jean Anderson, Carolina Miranda and Barbara Pezzotti

Part I The Sum of its Parts: What Makes a Series?
1 Stephen Burroughs, Serial Offender: Formula and Fraud in Early US Crime Literature 11
Jon Blandford
2 The Myth of the Gentleman Burglar: Models of Serialization and Temporality in Early Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction 21
Federico Pagello
3 More than the Sum of its Parts: Borges, Bioy Casares and the Phenomenon of the Séptimo Círculo Collection 31
Carolina Miranda
4 Serializing Sullivan: Vian/Sullivan, the Série noire and the effet de collection 41
Clara Sitbon, Marie-Laure Vuaille-Barcan and Alistair Rolls
5 Armed and Dangerous: Le Poulpe and the Formalization of French Noir 52
Pim Higginson
Nick Heffernan
7 The Structure of the Whole: James Ellroy’s LA Quartet Series 74
Steven Powell

Part II As Time Goes By: Progressing the Series
8 The Maturity of Lord Peter Wimsey and Authorial Innovation Within a Series 87
Brittain Bright
Contents

9 Series Fiction and the Challenge of Ideology: The Feminism of Sara Paretsky 99
   Sabine Vanacker

10 From Conflicted Mother to Lone Avenger: Transformations of the Woman Journalist Detective in Liza Marklund's Crime Series 111
   Kerstin Bergman

11 It’s All One Book, It’s All One World: George Pelecanos’s Washington DC 122
   Eduardo Obradó

12 Serializing Evil: David Peace and the Formulae of Crime Fiction 133
   Nicoletta Vallorani

13 The Flavour of the Street: The Factory Series by Derek Raymond 144
   Anna Pasolini

14 Andrea Camilleri’s Imaginary Vigàta: Between Formula and Innovation 155
   Barbara Pezzotti

Part III Transposition, Imitation, Innovation

15 Sherlock Holmes in Hollywood: Film Series, Genre and Masculinities 167
   Maysaa Jaber

16 Murder, Mayhem and Clever Branding: The Stunning Success of J.B. Fletcher 177
   Rachel Franks and Donna Lee Brien

17 From Flâneur to Traceur?: Léo Malet and Cara Black Construct the PI’s Paris 188
   Jean Anderson

18 The City Lives in Me: Connectivity and Embeddedness in Australia’s Peter Temple and Shane Maloney 197
   Carolyn Beasley

19 ‘She’s pretty hardboiled, huh?’: Rewriting the Classic Detective in Veronica Mars 208
   Taryn Norman
Acknowledgements

The editors wish to acknowledge the School of Languages and Cultures, Victoria University of Wellington and the Australasian Centre for Italian Studies for their support, and all the contributors for their invaluable interest from the start of this project.
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Introduction

Jean Anderson, Carolina Miranda and Barbara Pezzotti

Most readers of crime fiction have ‘followed’ a series: many have also at some point abandoned that series, in all likelihood to begin reading another. In print form, public library shelves provide an ever-increasing selection of serial crime novels originally written in a range of languages, made available through what is probably the busiest sector of literary translation. A glance at any television programming guide will quickly reveal that crime series in all their denominations – from private eye fiction to police procedurals, from whodunit to hardboiled narratives – dominate the small screen.

But what makes a series a series? With regard to literature, definitions seem both vague and overgeneralized: ‘a set of books, periodicals, or other documents published in a common format or under a common title’ or ‘a set or sequence of related television or radio programmes’. What makes a ‘set’ or a ‘sequence’, or what ‘related’ might mean appears to be taken for granted. The scientific domain offers more precision: in mathematics, a series is ‘a set of quantities constituting a progression or having the several values determined by a common relation’; in physics and chemistry it is ‘a group of objects related by linearly varying successive differences in form or configuration’. Importantly, these definitions stress that similar elements are repeated not only as agents of coherence, but also as part of a progression. We would argue that this highlighting of sameness and difference is crucial. In crime fiction, the repetition of a formula is an integral part of the series, and yet, as we will show, it is not simply repetition, but the tension between repetition and development, between imitation and transformation, that builds the narrative chain, making reiteration an essential part of change, and change an essential part of reiteration.
Introduction

This dual aspect has to date largely been neglected in approaches to the crime fiction series: most have stressed its limitations and rigidity. Much of the critical commentary on twentieth-century crime fiction finds its formulaic nature to be either ideologically suspect or aesthetically unsatisfying. In particular, Todorov’s influential essay ‘The Typology of Detective Fiction’ (1977) highlights the predominance of conventions in crime fiction, thereby disputing its literary value. Cawelti (1976) insists on the conservative nature of crime writing, underlining the idea that ‘the pleasure and effectiveness of [...] formulaic work depends on the intensification of a familiar experience’: this establishes a ‘world with which we become familiar by repetition’ (10). Writing specifically about seriality as it applies to the 007 James Bond series, Eco (1966) refers to its limiting ‘grammar’. While ‘seriality’ and ‘repetition’ do not prevent ‘innovation’, for Eco this combination constitutes an ‘inseparable scheme-variation knot, where variation is no longer more appreciable than the scheme’ (1990, 97–8). Criticism such as this is based on a conceptualization of the series as a number of books that feature the same protagonists and a repetitive story, following alleged conventions of the genre, and allowing little room for development or complexity: quantity displaces quality.

Rushing (2007) gives a psychoanalytical reading of crime series, in which repetition remains central, but is re-evaluated more positively. For this scholar, ‘our engagement with classic detective fiction is fundamentally an obsessive-compulsive urge to repeat’ (91). This urge arises from an impulse to experience some degree of frustration:

The constant repetition of the same scenarios in detective fiction, the relentless insistence on identical situations, structures, gimmicks, characters, even the insistence on serial adventures, the same detective coming back again and again, points not to the satisfaction of a desire, albeit a disavowed one, [but] to the constant return to that which does not give us satisfaction: enjoyment. (110, emphasis in original)

For Rushing, this Lacanian concept of a deliberate structure of dissatisfaction is precisely why genre fiction, specifically crime fiction, attracts us in our search for the ‘always missed object’ (115). In other words, in knowing that our desire will inevitably be frustrated, we find solace in seeking again.

Both approaches, positive and negative, insist on an essential standardization: we maintain, however, that there are a number of aesthetic implications associated with serialization that warrant investigation,
specifically as they relate to the notion of repetition and variation. Far from being fixed and formulaic, crime fiction generally can take on a multitude of forms and functions. This is especially so, as the studies in this volume will demonstrate, for the series.

What do we mean, in fact, by this umbrella term of ‘crime fiction series’? Rushing’s focus on the recurring detective is echoed by Kayman (2003), for whom the ‘principal agent of coherence [is] the figure of the protagonist’ (43). Several other critics take it for granted that the detective is the key repeating element, but is this the only way to develop a series? Might not place also provide a base for multiple storylines? According to P.D. James, the setting for crime fiction ‘establishes atmosphere, influences plot and character and enhances the horror of murder’ (2004). In the case of the series, repetition generates a lasting familiarity with characters and places and contributes to the success of that series. The search for ‘whodunit’ intertwines with an investigation into the environment of both the victims and the suspected culprits. But arguably, sending the protagonist to different locations may provide the sense of variation just as essential to sustain reader interest. If crime writers can indeed create a ‘sense of a place’ (Lando 1996), then, as Geherin argues, in crime series ‘there is often an intimate connection between crime and its milieu, which thus comes to play a prominent thematic role in such novels’ (2008, 8), even, as we would add, in its variations.

Far from merely sketching out stereotypical violent cities relegated to the background, or familiar, peaceful villages troubled by murder, seriaity may become a useful tool for a sustained investigation into contemporary society and its problems. How do crime series engage with an increasingly changing world? How do they interact with globalization, the environment, gender and racial issues? If it is true, as Gramsci (1984) states, that serial fiction is ‘a powerful factor in the formation of the mentality and morality of the people’ (34), then these are compelling questions we need to ask.

There are other important dimensions to the question of development and progression in the crime series. It is capable of crossing borders, transplanting styles and characters into new countries and cultures, changing the protagonist’s gender or aiming for readers of a different age group. The genre is also open to hybridization, ‘since one of the defining characteristics of crime fiction is its generic (and subgeneric) flexibility and porosity’ (Scaggs 2005, 2). In pursuing that essential balance between repetition and innovation, a crime series may ‘host’ characteristics other than those of a ‘typical’ crime investigation, mixing in elements of adventure, science fiction, horror or the supernatural. How
(and why) do series transfer between media (for example, print to film or vice versa): are these extensions still part of the original series, and what factors determine the form and timing of this transfer?

Some critics have, admittedly, acknowledged the presence of progression and evolution in series. Collins (1989) and Neale (1990) argue that crime fiction is a genre that does not have enduring norms, but continually reworks or transforms its own conventions. Pyrhönen (1994) points out that as a dynamic process the crime genre is dominated by repetition, but also fundamentally marked by difference and evolution. None of these scholars, however, has highlighted the idea that the mechanism of enjoyment and, in some cases, ‘addiction’ to the most satisfying crime series may be located in precisely this dynamic. Moreover, to date, very little critical attention has focused on the many different ways in which serial crime fiction, ostensibly bound by its very seriality to repetition, might also rework and transform through, among other things, literary experimentation within series, the domestication of ‘foreign’ formulae, or marketing and editorial strategies.

As this book will amply demonstrate, not all series, or episodes of an individual series, develop according to the same structural pattern. The centre of the narrative may be the detective, the place, the social setting or timeframe; the medium may be print, film or television; some series transition between these. Form and content are flexible, not limited or limiting: our argument is that what ultimately distinguishes the series is the tension between sameness and difference, familiarity and strangeness, repetition and progression. In crime series that present this tension, the familiarity of situations that create cosiness is challenged by change, surprise and novelty that may come from the evolution of the detective, or the setting, the different historical periods, the protagonist’s personal story, or the fact that in each story different social and political issues are tackled; or again, because the genre successfully expands its boundaries to other genres or genders.

This book is divided into three sections. In Part I, ‘The Sum of its Parts: What Makes a Series?’, contributors look at the origins and some of the developments of serialized crime writing. The concept of the series as created by a single author or as following the investigations of a single, central protagonist is challenged by studies of transgeneric developments and multi-authored series. Marketing and production strategies, including translation choices, which help create the idea of a series as a ‘set’ are also examined. Chapter 1, Blandford’s ‘Stephen Burroughs, Serial Offender’, offers a prehistory of serial crime fiction, tracing its
origins back to the popular literary milieu of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America, showing how seriality may allow the development of different identities for the same protagonist. In ‘The Myth of the Gentleman Burglar: Models of Serialization and Temporality in Early Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction’ Pagello compares Leblanc’s cycle with two similar non-French ‘gentleman burglar’ characters, Ernest W. Hornung’s A.J. Raffles (1898), and his most explicit imitation, the German pulp hero Lord Lister (1908). In Chapter 3, Miranda shows how the intellectual patronage of two of the best-known writers in Argentina contributed to the establishment of crime fiction, and especially the whodunit, as an artistic endeavour in ‘More than the Sum of its Parts: Borges, Bioy Casares and the Phenomenon of the Séptimo Círculo Collection’. Sitbon, Vuaille-Barcan and Rolls comment on the way in which the revelation of single authorship can create a sense of collection not present when pseudonym and real name are used, in ‘Serializing Sullivan: Vian/Sullivan, the Série noire and the effet de collection’. In Chapter 5, Higginson examines the ways in which a famous multi-authored French series achieves continuity, in ‘Armed and Dangerous: Le Poulpe and the Formalization of French Noir’. This is followed by Heffernan’s ‘Acts of Violence: The World War II Veteran Private-Eye Movie as an Ideological Crime Series’ which argues that, in a number of thrillers produced between 1945 and 1949, the persona of a veteran functioned as a unifying historical figure for both audiences and reviewers. These films thus constitute an ideal series exposing social and political fissures of ‘home-front’ America. Finally, Powell’s ‘The Structure of the Whole: James Ellroy’s LA Quartet Series’ reveals how the quartet expands beyond the author’s intentions. In this instance, far from being contained and clearly delimited, the series overflows into previous and subsequent works.

Part II, ‘As Time Goes By: Progressing the Series’, is concerned with two principal ways in which a crime series may progress, rather than repeat. First, three chapters focus on changes in the protagonists over an extended period of time, both as they age and in response to social changes in the real world. In Chapter 8, ‘The Maturity of Lord Peter Wimsey and Authorial Innovation Within a Series’, Bright undertakes an analysis of Sayers’s Lord Peter Wimsey as an indicator of the impact of the author’s innovations on the whodunit and crime writing generally. Vanacker focuses on evolution and progression in the representation of feminist topics in ‘Series Fiction and the Challenge of Ideology: The Feminism of Sara Paretsky’. Bergman’s ‘From Conflicted Mother to Lone Avenger: Transformations of the Woman Journalist Detective in Liza Marklund’s Crime Series’ analyses the personal evolution of a woman investigator.
The following four chapters reflect on the importance of setting, both geographical and chronological, and the capacity of the series to evolve in engaging with contemporary socio-political issues. Obradó’s ‘It’s All One Book, It’s All One World: George Pelecanos’s Washington DC’ investigates police procedurals which embody an ‘urban reportage’ of life in America’s capital city over the last 50 years by showing different areas from the viewpoint of different protagonists. In Chapter 12, ‘Serializing Evil: David Peace and the Formulae of Crime Fiction’, Vallorani, herself a crime writer, examines Peace’s sophisticated construct of a web of interlaced stories where the protagonists are different while the always well-documented setting is described over a crucial period of Great Britain’s recent history. Pasolini takes us to the gritty and evocative setting of ‘The Flavour of the Street: The Factory Series by Derek Raymond’, which explores the relationship between a nameless detective and various marginalized areas of the city. The past of the protagonist and of the city are pieced together through progressive memories. Finally, Pezzotti reflects on the use of repetition in the world-famous Montalbano series as a way to create familiarity with a fictional environment hosting a wide range of social and political topics in ‘Andrea Camilleri’s Imaginary Vigàta: Between Formula and Innovation’.

Part III, ‘Transposition, Imitation, Innovation’, looks at some of the ways series cross generic and cultural boundaries. Three chapters analyse the intercultural transposition of crime fiction subgenres to highlight serial adaptability. Jaber looks at the cinematic transformation of one of the world’s most famous detectives in ‘Sherlock Holmes in Hollywood: Film Series, Genre and Masculinities’. The transposition of both media and setting reflects a political agenda during the troubled years of World War II. In Chapter 16 Franks and Brien discuss gender transposition, revealing the male antecedents of television’s Jessica Fletcher in ‘Murder, Mayhem and Clever Branding: The Stunning Success of J.B. Fletcher’. In ‘From Flâneur to Traceur?: Léo Malet and Cara Black Construct the PI’s Paris’, Anderson takes examples from two Paris-based detective series, one French and one an American hommage to the original, and considers to what extent they serialize investigative movement through the cityscape. Beasley’s ‘The City Lives in Me: Connectivity and Embeddedness in Australia’s Peter Temple and Shane Maloney’ examines the transposition of the hardboiled detective into an Australian setting: the sleuth becomes an informed observer in a changing world, leaving behind the hardboiled hero’s sense of social isolation. In ‘“She’s pretty hardboiled, huh?”: Rewriting the Classic Detective in Veronica Mars’, Norman analyses hardboiled traditions transferred into female
juvenile crime fiction in the popular young adult television series. The final chapter exemplifies the flexibility of the crime series in its ability to meld with the supernatural: in “Exspecta Inexspectata”: The Rise of the Supernatural in Hybrid Detective Series for Young Readers’, Andrews ponders the evolution of young adult detective fiction, an important and largely unexplored category of crime series, and its inclusion of supernatural elements.

As this collection of studies shows, we need to recognize the essential mutability amply demonstrated here. Reflecting as our contributors do on the nature of the crime series makes one thing eminently clear: contrary to what many critics suggest, it is in fact a platform that allows for a great deal of originality and flexibility in both its creative and commercialized aspects. In tackling the questions outlined here, this volume seeks to deepen our understanding of what is meant by the term ‘series’, of the mechanisms whereby series evolve and, over time, the ways in which they may cross formal and cultural boundaries.

Notes

1. Following Priestman (1998) and Knight (1980), ‘crime fiction’ should be understood as a general term covering a wide range of subgenres (for example whodunits, thrillers, police procedurals, detective novels, noir and the like).
2. In this book, detective fiction is considered as a subgenre of crime fiction, where the focus of the story is ‘on the detective and the process he or she uses to solve the crime’ (Wiegand 2006, 148). As variants of detective fiction, the private eye novel refers to a story whose main protagonist is a private detective, while in a police procedural the police detective ‘must function within the rules of the police department; he or she lacks the freedom of the private detective. Although the pattern may vary because of the personality of the detective, most police detectives work as part of a team (as opposed to the private detective, who is often a loner)’ (Wiegand 2006, 150).
3. According to Horsley the categories of detective fiction and the hardboiled are ‘loose groupings of texts’ (2005, 1). Classic detective fiction, also called whodunit or golden age-style detective fiction, usually follows a pattern of death–detection–explanation in which ‘the reader’s attention is focused on the process by which a brilliant or at least uncommonly perceptive detective solves a case so intricate and puzzling that ordinary minds are baffled’ (12). Chandler defined the hardboiled formula as an American variety of detective fiction whose authors ‘wrote or aimed to write realistic mystery fiction’ (1988, 13). Several scholars (for example Knight (2004); Priestman (2003)) have tried to give an account of the fluidity of the genre, identifying more specific terms for the great variety of novels within these two groupings. The terminological debate, although fascinating, is not a focus of this book.
Part I
The Sum of its Parts: What Makes a Series?
1

Stephen Burroughs, Serial Offender: Formula and Fraud in Early US Crime Literature

Jon Blandford

Much of the criticism on crime fiction – and on serial crime fiction in particular – faults its heavy reliance on formula and convention. To cite two (in)famous examples, Wilson ([1945] 2007) compares readers of detective stories to drug addicts and alcoholics, eager to get their next fix and unconcerned with the quality of the product they consume; and Eco describes Fleming’s spy novels as a narrative machine that ‘produces redundancy’ ([1966] 1983, 113).1 Crime fiction, then, is either a narcotic or an elaborate yet cheap carnival ride, offering thrills and distraction but little else. This indictment of crime fiction as subliterary is often accompanied by a second charge – that its formulae are ideologically conservative, and that thus, like a drug, crime fiction’s repetitive pleasures may have pernicious effects. Along these lines, Porter (1981) argues that crime fiction’s apparent redundancy serves the ideological purpose of reassuring readers, managing our anxieties about crime by containing its threat to social order within familiar and predictable structures.2 Although more sympathetic to the potential virtues of what he calls ‘formula stories’, Cawelti (1976) likewise concludes that the cultural work popular crime fiction performs is essentially reactionary.3

If formula and convention are to blame for the genre’s crimes against good taste and good politics, then seriality would seem to be a willing accomplice, heightening the repetition and reassurance that are crime fiction’s defining aesthetic and ideological features. The following discussion argues instead that crime literature’s seemingly endless recycling of characters and tropes can have unpredictable and potentially even disruptive effects. Eschewing the line-up of usual suspects – Doyle and Holmes, Christie and Poirot, Chandler and Marlowe, Fleming and Bond – this essay looks to complicate our understanding of the relationship between form and ideology by offering a prehistory of serial
crime fiction, one that traces its origins to the popular literary milieu of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century US. Although most of the texts about criminals and their crimes written during this period purport to be true accounts, they anticipate in striking ways the serial storytelling of the pulp fictions, detective novels and thrillers that comprise the more familiar popular crime fiction of the twentieth century. They also introduce a tension between repetition and innovation that is characteristic of serial crime literature more generally, spotlighting the ways in which seriality can undercut crime fiction’s orderly ideological script.

Crime literature in America begins with the Puritan execution sermon. These sermons, which were written by members of the clergy and which dominated American crime literature through the middle of the eighteenth century, fit the body of the condemned into rigid discursive scaffolding: each typically begins with a passage from scripture, which is then applied both to the life of the criminal about to be executed and to the spiritual welfare of the community as a whole. The sermon itself is often followed by a record of the supposed last words of the condemned. In most cases likely written by the clergy as well, these last words echo the sermon’s moral and theological message, aligning the criminal’s own interpretation of his or her crime and punishment with the interpretation voiced by the representatives of law and order. As Halttunen has shown, these sermons tend to de-emphasize or omit altogether the details of the particular crimes for which criminals had been sentenced to death, and instead portray each criminal as an ‘exemplary sinner’, ‘a moral representative of all of sinful humanity’ (1998, 9). This is repetition at its most reassuring, with each new reiteration serving to reinforce the authority of the law and of the church.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, however, the clergy lost its monopoly on the published representation of crime, a shift driven in part by new developments in technology that made print cheaper and more widely available than ever before. Crime literature became the business of enterprising printers, publishers and booksellers who sought to capitalize on the public’s fascination with criminals and their misdeeds by issuing a variety of texts and creating new forms. It is also during this period that US crime literature first began to be serialized. The inaugural issue of the luridly titled American Bloody Register, for example, concludes by informing readers that its accounts of the pirate Alexander White and of highway robbers John Sullivan and Richard Barrick will be continued in a forthcoming second instalment. The magazine’s
publisher, printer Ezekiel Russell, protests that he would have ‘readily gratified our Readers with [more] interesting particulars [about these three criminals], but it was out of our power, as the copy was handed to us but a few hours before this Publication’; and then promises to make up for this omission, ‘pending suitable encouragement to this infant Work’, by ‘furnish[ing] Number II with an elegant copperplate engraving, executed by an ingenious Artist’ ([1784] 1993, 243). While Elisha Brewer, William Billings and Isaac Bradish – the three amanuenses credited with transcribing the narratives in this early sensational magazine – may have, as Williams asserts, ‘acted as agents of social control’ (1993, 41), the division of the criminals’ stories into serial instalments allows White, Barrick and Sullivan to elude, however temporarily, representational capture in print, suspending the final sentences of their stories ‘pending suitable encouragement’ from readers willing to pay to spend more time in their company.

The introduction of seriality, then, frustrates the ideological closure offered by early US crime literature’s established formulae. For a readership that increasingly turned to popular literature for sensational stories, the execution of the criminal for his or her crimes was less important than the ingenious execution of the ‘Artist’ able to transform the spectacle of the scaffold into mass entertainment. To stand out from the rogues’ gallery of other published enemies, the criminals of this new popular crime literature had to be more individuated than the interchangeable sinners of the Puritan execution sermon. Publishers, faced with an increasingly crowded marketplace, attempted to outdo each other with hyperbolic claims about the content of their texts, ‘replacing an earlier, sympathetic view of the condemned criminal as moral exemplum with a view of the murderer as moral alien’, and ‘play[ing] up [the] monstrosity [of each individual criminal] for the benefit of his reading public’ (Halttunen 1998, 57). Thus, the second issue of The American Bloody Register is prefaced by a preview of even bloodier stories that will appear in future issues, including a ‘most surprising and shocking Account of the horrid Massacre of more than Twelve Hundred Men, Women and Children in Twenty-Five Years’, and ‘THE Confession of the barbarous MARGARET STILLWELL, executed in New-York for the Murder of a Child’ ([1784] 1993, 243). And yet, in spite of all of this emphasis on novelty, the criminals in these texts also had to fulfil readers’ generic expectations by being recognizably part of the same series, to be legible not just as criminals, but as certain types of criminals (murderers, highway robbers, confidence men, pirates and so on) whose stories fitted into pre-existing narrative schemas. In sum,
from its very beginning, serial crime literature in the US was animated by a dual and contradictory imperative to create something at once new and familiar, and these competing impulses caused criminals and their stories to mutate in ways that could undermine or even collapse long-standing ideological structures.

The remainder of this essay develops this argument through an investigation of *The Memoirs of Stephen Burroughs*, one of the earliest and most widely read works of autobiography published in the US. A confidence man and counterfeiter, Burroughs was run out of one town early in his criminal career for impersonating a preacher and passing off as his own sermons he stole from his father, and was later sentenced to jail – the first of many incarcerations – for attempting to pass off fake coins as legal tender. Among his other disguises, he posed as the shipboard doctor on a privateer and as a cosmopolitan gentleman forced to flee London because of pro-Irish sympathies, changing his name, adapting his appearance and reinventing his past whenever word of his former crimes caught up with him and forced him to move on to a new community. Like the shape-shifting titular character of Melville’s *The Confidence-Man* ([1857] 1991), Burroughs treated identity as he did money, as a productively empty signifier that makes meaning only in and through networks of contingent relations held together by shared beliefs he could manipulate to his advantage. Unlike Melville’s novel, however, Burroughs’s supposedly true-to-life account of his various fictive selves was a hit with readers, its first volume, appearing in 1798, proving so successful that its author followed with a second volume’s worth of adventures in 1804.

On its surface, Burroughs’s narrative has two principal purposes. First, like any work of autobiography, his *Memoirs* vouch that they will tell the truth about how their narrator came to be who he is by offering a coherent, unified record of his experiences, re-collecting and re-presenting the significant events of his life in an orderly sequence. Thus, while Burroughs, in the opening paragraph of his text, expresses regret that he did not keep detailed ‘minutes of the occurrences of [his] life, [...] when they were fresh in [his] memory, and alive to [his] feelings’, he nonetheless assures us that he will ‘give as simple an account of them as [he is] able, without any coloring or darkening of circumstances’ ([1798] 1988, 3). In the context of criminal recollections in particular, a memoir’s promise to provide a full account of an individual life doubles as a promise to account for how that individual came to lead a life of crime. As Fabian argues, the countless life stories authored by criminals during this period ‘had epistemological value for people learning to
place trust in printed words’, a value that went above and beyond other types of autobiographical texts:

the convicts who appeared in print had been convicted: their crimes had been proved at trial. With jury verdicts registered, facts in criminal cases were rarely in dispute, and readers could turn to accounts of crime with confidence that, at least on some level, what they read was true. (2000, 50)

To the extent that Fabian is correct, even the words of a serial liar like Burroughs would have been given the benefit of the doubt once they appeared in print, interpreted by readers as crime fact rather than crime fiction. What is more, Burroughs’s Memoirs are, among other things, a confession, and, as such, share in that genre’s privileged status in legal and theological discourse as the ‘queen of proofs’.6

A second and related purpose of Burroughs’s Memoirs is to set the record straight, to wrest control of its author’s representation in print from conflicting accounts that were circulating at the time. Burroughs was, to hear him tell it, the victim of numerous and erroneous reports about his life authored by others. He is especially galled, for example, by what he contends is a libellous claim that he stole a watch from a clergyman while he was himself posing as a preacher, an accusation that first appeared in a newspaper in Springfield while Burroughs was in jail awaiting trial for counterfeiting money and that resurfaced whenever he was suspected of some new offence. Burroughs’s notoriety as a master criminal, it would seem, eventually took on a proverbial life of its own, becoming a public persona – or, to put it more precisely, a series of public personae – over which Burroughs himself had little to no authorial control: ‘I do believe,’ he laments,

if I had set out with warmth, to prove to the world that I was a man, and not a woman, that a great number, from that circumstance, would have been able at once to look through the deception which I was endeavoring to lay them under, and known for certainty that I was, in reality, a woman. ([1798] 1988, 94)

To counter these misrepresentations, Burroughs positioned his text as the only reliable and complete version of his life story.

His attempts to account for his crimes and to corral and control his unruly representation in print, however, are thwarted by his seriality and multiplicity. Rather than a linear record of a unified self, the
Burroughs who appears in the *Memoirs* is plural, disintegrated and radically inconsistent, a serial offender who cannot be contained within the bounds of any one text. As a confidence man, he saw identity as superficial, relational and subject to perpetual transformations, not fixed, internal and discretely individuated. He has been called ‘a model of the performing self amidst the slippery circumstances of the revolutionary age’ (Gross 1993, 315) and the embodiment of ‘a uniquely American relativism of self’ (Williams 1990, 98). His popularity has been attributed to his cultural moment’s anxious fascination with ‘the ease with which persons could be separated from property in a mobile society in which traditional guides to an individual’s worth were unavailable [and] self-representation had to be accepted as the self’ (Ziff 1991, 56). As Ruttenberg observes, whereas this epistemological uncertainty created a crisis of representation for many of Burroughs’s political and literary contemporaries, his text ‘celebrates his own radical mutability, his progressive slide into a series of characters fully released from any governing authorial principle, as his emancipation from social and cultural forms that have no inherent legitimacy’ (1998, 271). For the purposes of this essay, what is most significant about Burroughs’s inexhaustible capacity for self-reinvention is that he is a ‘series of characters’, with each new change of costume carefully tailored to meet the needs and expectations of the different communities among which he plies his trade. Upon first arriving in Pelham, Massachusetts – the community in which he poses as a preacher for several weeks – Burroughs gathers the intelligence he needs to transform himself into a credible ‘Pelhamite’. Like a census-taker, he ‘gain[s] a pretty thorough knowledge of the people whom I was amongst’, and he uses that knowledge to integrate himself into the community, ‘endeavor[ing] to adapt my conduct to their genius as far as I was capable’ ([1798] 1988, 53). Burroughs is always both himself and not himself, and the serial nature of his confidence schemes anticipates the repetition with a difference that is the defining feature of serial crime fiction.

The seriality of Burroughs’s identities is paralleled by the episodic, (re)cyclical narrative structure of his text. Just as his various assumed identities are all permutations of one another, so too are his stories. Early on in his *Memoirs*, he repeatedly leaves his father’s home: in the space of just the first five chapters he joins the army, boards with a tutor, attends Dartmouth College and sets sail aboard a ship where he works as the crew’s physician. Each time, Burroughs is expelled and forced to return home in disgrace, a recursive movement that anticipates the misadventures of his adult life, which, time and time
again, end badly: in Pelham, he is chased out of town by an angry mob, and in Bridghampton, New York, where he becomes enmeshed in a controversy over the founding of a library, his political adversaries manufacture a charge of rape against him and bring him to trial. And yet, time and time again, Burroughs effects a daring, sometimes hair's-breadth escape. To read his Memoirs is an experience not unlike reading one of Chandler’s or Fleming’s novels. Knowing that sooner or later Marlowe will be sapped over the head or Bond will be taken captive by an arch-villain, the reader grows accustomed to the serial rhythms of the narrative – Burroughs imprisoned, Burroughs on the run and Burroughs starting over again somewhere else as somebody else. For all the excitement it generates, his story follows an established formula, one that quickly becomes familiar.

Burroughs’s Memoirs would have also seemed familiar to his eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers because of their similarity to other popular narratives. They draw heavily, as Jones (1995) has shown, on the tradition of the picaresque, and bear more than a passing resemblance to other criminal memoirs from the period, most notably Henry Tufts’s Autobiography of a Criminal ([1807] 1930). In Burroughs’s case though, this familiarity is as apt to breed confusion as it is to deliver conviction. According to Jones, Burroughs uses the familiar conventions of the picaresque to stage a hermeneutic revolt against the dominant interpretative regimes of his day, a post-Revolutionary insurrection that, while carried out in the spirit of his fledgling nation’s constitutive questioning of authority, also poses a threat to the legitimacy of that same nation’s social, legal, religious and political institutions. Burroughs’s uncanny resemblance to other published confidence men likewise has a destabilizing effect. The similarities between Tufts and Burroughs are many: both are late eighteenth-century confidence men who, at one point or another in their respective narratives, spend time in the army, pose as preachers in various New England towns, pass counterfeit money, engage in financial speculation and get into trouble for seducing women, with Tufts accomplishing the rather remarkable feat of marrying multiple women at the same time without those women being aware of one another. With all that these two criminals-turned-authors have in common, Tufts might as well have been another of Burroughs’s assumed identities. Indeed, we might imagine some readers would have had as much difficulty in telling the difference between Tufts and Burroughs as the communities that these two men exploited would have had in detecting the identities of the confidence men in their midst.
The similarity between Burroughs and Tufts is just one way in which Burroughs’s profuse, generic seriality pushes back against crime literature’s ostensible purpose of reassuring readers concerned about social disorder. Further adding to the confusion are the many different versions of Burroughs’s story that were issued, both during his lifetime and after his death. Enduringly popular, his Memoirs appeared in no fewer than 30 editions published in 14 different cities over the course of the nineteenth century, with many of these editions making significant changes to the two volumes Burroughs originally published. In addition to all these versions of the Memoirs at large, Burroughs achieved notoriety through competing accounts published in regional newspapers, including the aforementioned allegation that he had stolen a watch from a clergyman. Whether authored by others or by Burroughs himself, these conflicting reports have the cumulative effect of disintegrating Burroughs into a series of paradoxically interchangeable and inconsistent selves, a line-up of possible Burroughses that outstrips both Burroughs’s authorial control and the ideological control nominally exerted by crime literature’s repetitive formulas. To cite just one example, we might note the two different versions of the Pelham episode that appeared in 1798, one in the first volume of the Memoirs and the other in a pamphlet entitled ‘The Hay-Mow Sermon’. Both these texts describe Burroughs facing a mob of angry ‘Pelhamites’ who have cornered him in a barn in the nearby town of Rutland after learning he is not the preacher he has been claiming to be. The key difference between the versions of this episode published in the Memoirs and in the pamphlet is that while the latter finds Burroughs himself outwitting his opponents, the former puts his elaborate self-defence into the mouth of an unnamed and presumably disinterested bystander, a resident of Rutland who steps in to referee the conflict and finds in favour of the accused. Even in the act of authoring his official memory, Burroughs disintegrates into a series of different identities, imagining himself as an anonymous speaker in the midst of the public that gathers around spectacles of crime and punishment.

Even more dramatically, the troubling capacity of Burroughs’s seriality to create confusion becomes literalized in several instances in the Memoirs in which Burroughs recounts unexpectedly running into himself. While travelling in Massachusetts, he learns of a man who, going by the name of Stephen Burroughs, has seduced and run away with the daughter of a wealthy family; and another time, while travelling in Connecticut, he is arrested and taken to a local jail from which he is thought to have escaped, only to find, along with his captors, ‘the
Stephen Burroughs who had been committed for horse stealing, quietly remaining where he had been first confined’ ([1798] 1988, 222). On a third occasion, Burroughs meets a doctor who, not knowing the identity of the person to whom he speaks, explains ‘that he was acquainted with a certain character by the name of Stephen Burroughs, who, of all others, was the most singular’ (224). The doctor asserts that ‘[t]here ever was the appearance of deceit in his looks; and I should have known him to be a rogue, had I never heard of his character’, and goes on to remark ironically that he ‘never saw a more striking contrast, than between the designing, deceitful countenance of Burroughs’ and the ‘open, frank, and candid countenance’ (224) of the man seated before him, the actual Burroughs with whom, unbeknownst to him, he has come face to face.

This last episode is especially interesting in that it calls into question the predictability of crime literature’s serial repetitions. The doctor stands in for the reader of early US crime literature, someone who has become acquainted with criminal ‘character’ through the medium of popular representations. His confidence in his ability to ‘read’ Burroughs, however, is ultimately misplaced, subverted by the proliferation of Burroughses who are at once familiar and disconcertingly different. To push this further, we might conclude by arguing that the doctor’s confusion suggests that serial crime literature’s inscription of the criminal as a recognizable self is a reassuring fantasy if not an outright fraud; rather than the ‘most singular’ individual the doctor takes him to be, Burroughs, as it turns out, is irreducibly plural, a fugitive even from his own recognizance. Seriality, then, creates the illusion of social order and ideological control, and, instead of rendering judgement, can render judgement problematic.

Notes

1. For Todorov, where ‘the literary masterpiece does not enter into any genre save perhaps its own, [...] [d]etective fiction has its norms; to “develop” them is also to disappoint them: to “improve upon” detective fiction is to write “literature”, not detective fiction’ (1977, 43).

2. Recent scholars who follow this line of argument include Scaggs, who contends, for example, that the proliferation of formulaic police procedurals, both in print and in television series such as CSI, functions as ‘a powerful weapon of reassurance in the arsenal of the dominant social order’ (2005, 98).

3. Classical detective fiction, Cawelti argues, ‘reaffirm[s] the validity of the existing social order’, taking ‘something potentially dangerous and disturbing [and] transform[ing] it into something completely under control’ (1976, 105). Similarly, hardboiled detective fiction offers readers an ‘escape’ from social tensions, and ‘achieves this escape with minimal cost and maximal pleasure’
(1976, 161). A number of recent critics have challenged this paradigm by illuminating the diversity and instability of both crime fiction’s generic forms and its politics. See, for example, Knight (2004), Rzepka (2005) and Rushing (2007). This essay looks to contribute further to this conversation.

4. See also Cohen (1993, 41–114) and Williams (1993, esp. 1–11).

5. For a thorough account of these developments, see Gross and Kelley (2010).

6. For a fascinating and admirably nuanced analysis of the epistemological stakes of confession, see Brooks (2003).
2

The Myth of the Gentleman Burglar: Models of Serialization and Temporality in Early Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction

Federico Pagello

In an article entitled ‘Maurice Leblanc et la résurgence de la “série” dans la littérature romanesque française’ (Maurice Leblanc and the resurgence of the ‘series’ in French literature), Aranda argues that in two stories of the cycle devoted to Arsène Lupin’s adventures, ‘La Perle noire’ (1906) (The Black Pearl) and ‘L’Homme à la peau de bique’ (1927) (The Man with the Goat-Skin), Leblanc was the first French writer to adopt a specific serial structure that had apparently disappeared since the Arthurian saga by Chretien de Troyes (Aranda 2003, 114). This strategy involved the use of completely independent episodes, self-contained narratives providing no reference to any temporal continuity between them nor with previous or following parts of the same cycle. As in the case of the 1940s and 1950s classic Superman comics discussed by Eco in the essay ‘The Myth of Superman’ (2004), this type of serialization implies that the characters and their fictional universe remain unaltered after each story, thus allowing the authors to endlessly accumulate new narratives concerning the same subjects. In this type of series, consequently, the concept of chronological time is abolished. While this disjunctive format would become dominant in France in the twentieth century, the more traditional roman-feuilleton, that is an ongoing story serialized in newspapers or magazines, was still the hegemonic model when Lupin’s series debuted. Where then did Leblanc find his inspiration?

Whereas Aranda’s essay emphasizes the uniqueness of Leblanc’s use of this serial structure in the French context, putting forward the surprising association of Leblanc’s and de Troyes’s cycles, the goal of this chapter is to draw a parallel between the Lupin cycle and other coeval, international crime series. As Aranda suggests, although only in
a cautious footnote, the source of Leblanc’s innovation is to be found in contemporary Anglo-Saxon detective fiction rather than in any chronologically, and thus culturally, more distant French ancestor. I will discuss here two non-French series that share with Lupin both their content – the adventures of a gentleman burglar – and their form, the use of the short story format and a specific serial structure. Following the terminological distinction proposed by Dubois (2000) and used by Aranda, the serial structure characterized by self-contained episodes will be called here ‘series’ to distinguish it from the narrative-arc-dominated ‘macrocosmos’, which was the typical structure of nineteenth-century French serialized novels (for example Balzac’s *La Comédie humaine*, Dumas’s *Muskeheters* trilogy, Zola’s *Rougon-Macquart* saga).¹

As previously indicated, Leblanc’s predecessors can be located in the American dime novels and the British detective stories published between the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. The first series to which I will compare Lupin’s cycle is the one devoted to the French gentleman burglar’s most prominent predecessor, Englishman A.J. Raffles, created by Ernest W. Hornung in 1898; the second features one of the most explicit plagiarisms of the Raffles character, the German hero Lord Lister, who appeared in 1908 in a dime novel series published by Verlaghaus für Volksschulwissen und Kunst. The three series have several common features but also a number of individual characteristics relating to specific editorial choice, narrative structure and authorial strategies. By analysing their similarities and differences, I am able to sketch the state of serial crime fiction in three different countries and editorial contexts at the turn of the century. Finally, in the last part of this chapter I focus more closely on the contradictory situation expressed by Lupin’s body of work, and on the tactics employed to resist the new formula as well as the symptoms of the paradigm shift that can be found within it.

Maurice Leblanc’s world famous ‘gentleman burglar’ Arsène Lupin first appeared in *L’Arrestation d’Arsène Lupin* (The Arrest of Arsène Lupin), published in the French magazine *Je sais tout* in July 1905. The unexpected success of this short story turned the character into the protagonist of a series spanning several decades, eventually including 18 novels and three collections of stories and ending only in 1941, at the author’s death. Unlike French writers of popular literature during the previous centuries, Leblanc did not invariably link the different instalments of his series in a coherent chronological succession to create a single, epic narrative. In the short stories ‘La Perle noire’ and ‘L’Homme à la peau de bique’ he breaks this tradition, narrating two Arsène Lupin adventures that
contain no reference whatsoever to their chronological placement within the macrotext that would be formed by the large number of stories and novels eventually published.

According to Aranda (2003), the use of this ‘unusual’ narrative solution by Leblanc marks the beginning of the evolution of French serialized literature from the nineteenth-century dominance of the *feuilleton* in the national popular literature, and the move to the new strategy of serialization in the twentieth century. As Eco has also pointed out, in the years following the publication of the earliest Lupin stories, other crime series such as Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain’s *Fantômas* (1911–13) moved even more decisively away from the traditional serial format, with its more or less coherent, chronological structures, in favour of a juxtaposition of episodic texts which had in common only a group of recurring characters (Eco [1964] 2004, 160).

Most of Leblanc’s stories and novels do still maintain some loose continuity between the various instalments. For example, Aranda compares the macrotext formed by the Lupin stories and novels with Georges Simenon’s Inspector Maigret series (1931–72). While in Simenon’s work the reader can rarely guess at which point in Maigret’s life the single episode takes place, the opposite is true of the majority of Leblanc’s Lupin stories. In fact, critics and fans such as Lacassin (2004) and Ruaud (2001; 2011) have been able to reconstruct a hypothetical ‘biography’ of Leblanc’s hero, which includes all the episodes of the series and is based on the author’s intertextual references (although with some incoherence, as well as numerous disagreements between the two critics). Any similar undertaking in the case of Maigret would be frustrating and, ultimately, pointless.

Hornung’s tales of the adventures of the cricketer and ‘amateur cracksman’ A.J. Raffles are the most influential predecessor to Leblanc’s series. The protagonist of three collections of short stories (*Raffles the Amateur Cracksman*, 1899; *The Black Mask*, 1901; *A Thief in the Night*, 1905) and a novel (*Mr. Justice Raffles*, 1909), Raffles immediately became a transnational and transmediatic figure, generating literary translations, film and theatrical adaptations, as well as imitations and plagiarism all over the world. Although Leblanc never acknowledged its influence on the creation of Lupin, the series undoubtedly represents the emergence of a new figure of criminal hero, of which the French character would later become the most popular representative. By looking at the serial structure of Hornung’s work, we can therefore understand some of the characteristics of its continental counterpart. As is the case with Leblanc’s work, in fact, the English series clearly presents an ambiguous
treatment of chronology, anticipating and providing a background for the French cycle.

As a first step it is important to note that the French and the English writers had a common model for the creation of their series. The last decade of the nineteenth century, marked by the global success of Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, had imposed the short story as a leading format in the genre of crime fiction. If we exclude the final novel, added by the author only some years after the conclusion of the original series, Hornung adopted this form for all Raffles’s adventures. The use of the short story played a crucial role in Lupin’s cycle as well. Although Leblanc generally opted for the more traditional form of the roman-feuilleton, his use of the short story in the first volume of the series (Arsène Lupin, gentleman cambrioleur, 1907) represents without doubt one of its main innovations in the French context and the clearest sign of its derivation from an Anglo-Saxon model. Making explicit the influence of Conan Doyle’s works, Sherlock Holmes even featured in one of the stories included in that seminal collection of 1906 (‘Sherlock Holmes arrive trop tard’) and returned, thinly disguised, in the first Lupin novel (Arsène Lupin contre Herlock Sholmes, 1906–7).

The use of the short story is the obvious sign of an evolution of popular fiction in the direction discussed by Eco and Aranda. While most of the 27 instalments of the Raffles series contain precise references to the temporal and narrative position of each, we also find stories that are not placed in any continuity – for example the sixth episode of Hornung’s series, Nine Points of the Law (1898) – as well as an extensive and explicit use of flashbacks in order to expand the narrative span of the cycle: the entire third collection of stories (A Thief in the Night, 1905) focuses on events that necessarily precede the final episode of the previous book, which ended with Raffles’s death. We note here a tendency towards fragmentation of the chronological continuity of the narrative. In comparison to the long serialized novels, as well as the series of novels (à la Balzac or Zola) that characterized nineteenth-century popular literature, Hornung’s series was able to juxtapose fully autonomous, unrelated narratives, whose only connection is to be found in the presence of Raffles and his friend Bunny Manders (the narrator). The plot of the aforementioned Nine Points of the Law, for instance, is exemplary: on the first page of this episode the two protagonists come across an offer of a reward in a newspaper; they meet the person who published the advertisement; they solve the ‘case’, which of course implies some thrilling events, and get the money. This story is completely self-sufficient; the secondary character never returns; no reference to any previous
episode is made, and no trace of this adventure is found in the following ones. Not unlike the instalments of Superman adventures analysed by Eco, what happens in this episode would simply not fit in with any chronological account of the hero’s life.

As with Lupin, however, this new approach remains secondary to the overall structure of the series. In the first pages of the majority of Raffles’s stories, in fact, Hornung tells the reader in which month of the year the events took place, or how many weeks or months after the previous episode they are supposed to occur. Sometimes these specifications even include the day, month and year to which the story refers. More importantly from a structural perspective, many episodes are linked, presenting returning secondary characters and situations. Finally, the series mostly depicts events occurring within a relatively short timeframe, which classically begins with the encounter of the two protagonists and ends with the death of the hero. In Dubois’s and Aranda’s terms, therefore, the series mainly tends to give shape to a coherent ‘macrocosmos’.

Like Leblanc, Hornung intended to depict his character as a complex figure, provided with a detailed past and precise destiny. This sense of a unity and direction in the series is reinforced by the use of a companion first-person narrator, obviously modelled on Doyle’s Watson. Bunny Manders, moreover, appears to be deeply involved not only in the events he recounts, but in a strong, personal relationship with the central hero. The two are presented as old college friends, and Raffles’s affection for the narrator seems to grow stronger during the series, being explicitly addressed in the latter’s recollection, after the death of Raffles, of their common exploits. As I will point out in relation to Lupin, the creation of a consistent chronology is aimed at giving the reader a sense of temporality which has one particular function: to infuse the main character with a higher degree of ‘authenticity’.

The case of Lord Lister, whose dime novels were explicitly titled ‘Lord Lister, known as Raffles, the Master Thief’, is in some respects quite different from that of the first Raffles, his model. Launched by the Berlin publisher Verlagshaus für Volksliteratur und Kunst in 1908, Lister was an outright plagiarism of the earlier Raffles, trying to benefit from the success of this and other series focusing on the adventures of a gentleman thief. Written by Kurt Matull and other anonymous authors, the 110 issues of the series were distributed by Alwin Eichler all over Europe almost immediately after their first German edition. A Dresden publisher who from 1906 onward was responsible for the ‘invasion’ of the Old Continent by American dime novel series such as Nat Pinkerton and Buffalo Bill, Eichler had quickly become the international distributor of
original German titles trying to replicate the success of the American products. Among these European creations, Lord Lister soon proved to be one of the most popular.

Unlike (and despite) the examples of Raffles and Lupin, the serial structure adopted in the Lord Lister series was not based on previous European traditions of popular fiction, such as the newspaper feuilleton or the short stories published in literary magazines. Its explicit models were the American dime novels that had been conquering the imagination of continental readers over the previous two years. This type of publication made use of the same approach Eco discusses in his analysis of the 1940s Superman comic books (not coincidentally, another typical American periodical that represents one of the historical descendants of this genre of nineteenth-century popular fiction). Both comics and dime novels, in fact, usually provided the reader with self-contained stories. Their approach to serialization can thus be considered completely opposed to the French feuilleton, as well as to the strategy seen in the Raffles cycle, which aimed to create an ongoing narrative through connected short stories. The dime novel was typically marketed as a format which gave the buyer the possibility of reading a single completed story without necessarily being aware of its broader narrative context. An innovative model of industrial serialization of literature, this strategy would be adopted by all early comic books and would also be characteristic of American television series (with the notable exception of the soap opera) up to the late 1990s.

As Eco later remarks in relation to Superman comics, the Lord Lister stories insist neither on a chronological continuity nor, more generally, on the issue of temporality. Most of his adventures could be situated in any moment of the (literary) life of the character; as a consequence, the hero was represented as an immutable and immortal character. In fact, the Lord Lister texts seem to place much greater emphasis on space than on time: their hero is presented as a true globetrotter, involved in mysteries and cases in almost every European country, and living out other adventures also in more exotic settings, from Africa to Asia and the Americas. In an almost proto-postmodernist move, this fake Raffles deprives the model of any historicity and plays with space as much as with genre, as alternating episodes stress comedy and adventure, mixing crime fiction with the colonial novel, and the figure of the gentleman thief with that of the avenger.

It is also noteworthy that, unlike Hornung’s texts, which featured a first-person narrator, and differently also from Leblanc’s recurrent presentation of himself as an acquaintance of his character, the Lord Lister
stories never made use of an intra-diegetic narrator. By reinforcing the impression of atemporality, the anonymous writers of the series thus created a quintessential product of modern culture industries. Highly repetitive, and yet necessarily varied, the series consistently adopted, for the first time in the new subgenre devoted to the exploits of gentlemen thieves, the serial format that would become dominant in twentieth-century popular culture.

Interestingly, in stressing the novelty of the two non-chronological episodes of the Lupin series, Aranda addresses a crucial question: why did this narrative strategy re-emerge after so many centuries? The first and obvious response is found in the ‘technical’ features of modern popular fiction. An accelerated rhythm of production prompted the writers, as well as their publishers, to adopt a formula that would maximize their productivity and make potentially endless their exploitation of the same characters. Aranda, however, adds other, and more ambitious considerations. He first suggests that the new public for popular fiction, formed initially by people from the lower classes and young readers, would not be interested in the great philosophy of History that characterized nineteenth-century historicist culture, and thus were more attracted by narrative universes lacking any historical reference. More specifically, he then goes on to point to the broader ‘crisis of History’ and the collapse of the traditional concept of time that can be found in many cultural expressions at the end of the century, a key example being of course Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*, whose creation between 1909 and 1922 took place at the same time as the publication of Lupin’s first adventures (Aranda 2003, 120).

As I have already highlighted, however, it is necessary to keep in mind that the symptoms of the collapse of a sense of time and historicity in Leblanc’s work in just two stories are accompanied by an even stronger effort on the author’s part to include some sort of historical chronology in his series. This aspect is brilliantly discussed by Dall’Asta (2006) in her preface to a recent Italian edition of the first volume of the cycle. Dall’Asta stresses the way Leblanc built up a suggestive biography for his hero and, more interestingly, how he made his hero’s imaginary life intersect with the history of France. One of the key narrative threads that run through the whole saga does indeed connect the lives of Lupin and his ancestors to that of the French monarchy. The fifth short story of the series, included in the first collection (and which constitutes also, and not incidentally, the first flashback into the past of the protagonist) indicates that the career of the gentleman burglar started with the theft of ‘Le Collier de la reine’ (The Queen’s Necklace). This famous necklace
had belonged to Marie-Antoinette and was at the centre of a notorious scandal in the years preceding the French Revolution. The reference to this object, already the subject of a popular novel by Alexandre Dumas (\textit{Le Collier de la reine}, 1849–50), helped Leblanc to link his character not only to the history of the country but also to its aristocracy, to which Lupin is (not) surprisingly revealed to be distantly related.

Other elements and even a key figure of that scandal would return in two of the most celebrated novels of Leblanc’s series. In both \textit{L'Aiguille creuse} (1909) (The Hollow Needle) and \textit{La Comtesse de Cagliostro} (The Countess of Cagliostro) Lupin would be involved in the quest for the treasure of the royal family of France, which he locates thanks to his meeting (and love affair) with the apparently immortal Countess Cagliostro, pretending to be the daughter of the historical figure of Count Cagliostro (1743–95), who was involved in the necklace affair.\textsuperscript{4} What this clearly suggests to us is that the goal of Leblanc’s treatment of time and historicity is neither their outright annihilation nor their conservation, but rather a conflation of history and myth.

This point, which is crucial in any discussion of serialization and temporality, is confirmed and reinforced by another issue that Dall’Asta remarks on in her analysis, dealing with the importance of notions of truth and authenticity in the Lupin series, and, particularly, with the connection that Leblanc establishes between his hero and the arts. Dall’Asta stresses the way the ambiguity of the Lupin figure, his constant oscillation between the roles of burglar and detective, also reflects a deeper contradiction of the series: between its exaltation of the power of illusion, embodied by Lupin’s ability as a master of disguise, and the importance it gives to the revelation of truth, as proved by the character’s equally extraordinary skills as a detective. Contrary to reader expectations, Lupin is not presented only as a falsifier, but also as someone who incessantly unearths the most obscure mysteries, thus highlighting, and intensely enhancing, the value of truth. This aspect becomes particularly revealing when Leblanc stresses Lupin’s interest in \textit{authentic} works of art, which he is able to pick out among copies and which he delights in collecting in his hideout, where they are a private source of enjoyment and true emotions. What the figure of Lupin seems to express, in this respect, is the desire to recover the \textit{aura}, the \textit{hic et nunc}, of the \textit{authentic} aesthetic experience: the aura that, according to Benjamin’s famous analysis (2008), has been definitively lost in modern culture and society dominated by mechanical reproduction.

Aranda’s and Dall’Asta’s analyses could be read in parallel to better understand the peculiar temporality that Leblanc’s cycle gives form to
through its serial structure and its thematization of truth and authenticity. On the one hand, the Lupin stories and novels oscillate between the construction of a coherent, chronological macrocosmos, and the explosion of linear time in a phantasmagorical world mixing history and myth. In this sense, the series finds itself halfway between the linear time that, overall, guided the Raffles stories, and the absolute absence of chronology in the Lord Lister dime novels. On the other hand, the crucial role played by falsification and illusion in the narrative is juxtaposed with a yearning for an authentic experience of reality and time, whose model is given by the hic et nunc of the work of art. As a consequence, the contradiction between the immutable temporality of myth and the chronological time of the novel, which according to Eco is the basis of the dream-like atmosphere of twentieth-century serialization, becomes absolutely visible. However, unlike the Superman stories discussed in Eco’s essay, the same crucial contradictions here shape a more complex dialectics between the two opposing movements, a sort of fragile balance between the tendency of modern popular fiction to annihilate history and chronology and a vibrant nostalgia for a more traditional awareness of time and experience.

In this chapter I have discussed three early twentieth-century crime fiction cycles – French, English and German – comparing their serial structures. These case studies not only reveal the influence of the cultural and editorial context in which they were created, but also represent different stages in the history of European crime fiction, as well as its relationship with American popular culture. Leblanc’s Lupin was the protagonist of a large number of short stories and romans-feuilletons, published in magazines as well as in newspapers; with the exception of the single novel, Hornung’s Raffles appeared in a series of short stories featured in literary magazines; Lord Lister was the eponymous hero of a series of dime novels. The structures of the three series reflect their respective backgrounds. Inspired by both recent Anglo-Saxon models and the French tradition of nineteenth-century popular literature, Leblanc combined the logic of the short story with that of the feuilleton, creating a particular narrative continuity and a rich imaginary biography for his hero. Experimenting with the format of the short story that made Conan Doyle’s reputation, Hornung conceived of Raffles’s adventures sometimes as an ongoing narrative, sometimes as a series of self-contained instalments. In the Lord Lister cycle we find the structure of the American dime novel series, which typically presented stories having no narrative connection.

The specificity of Leblanc’s series is thus to be found in its paradoxical combination of the concept of history and temporality that was proper
The Gentleman Burglar in Early Crime Fiction

to the French *feuilleton* with the inclination of Anglo-American detective fiction to create achronological narratives. A figure between history and myth, crime and detection, illusion and truth, Lupin is a highly contradictory creation.

It is arguably for this reason that his fame surpassed (greatly), and eventually outlived, that of his direct competitors. Whereas Raffles and Lister have been largely forgotten by the international public, Leblanc's series would inspire a famous Japanese animated series of the 1970s and 1980s (*Lupin III*, first aired on YTV in 1971 and based on the manga created by Monkey Punch in 1967) and was adapted into a feature film as recently as 2004 (*Arsène Lupin*, directed by Jean-Paul Salomé). Moreover, Leblanc's play with reality and fiction, as well as Lupin's childish but irresistible charisma, still convincingly convey the author's nostalgia for the energy of youth and were possibly the reason that he was able to adopt seriality not as a purely industrial process of replication but rather as a way to express his childlike, unbridled imagination.

Notes

1. In his contribution to a seminal collection of essays on the topic of seriality, Eco had previously labelled the same object as ‘saga’ (Dubois’s ‘macrocosme’) and ‘series’ (Dubois’s ‘série’) (Eco 1984).

2. In addition to Raffles’s literary inspiration from Holmes, it must be mentioned that Hornung and Conan Doyle had a direct, very personal relationship. They were in fact brothers-in-law and it has been suggested that it was the author of Sherlock Holmes who prompted Hornung to turn one of his creations into a serial character (Green 2003). With regard to Leblanc, it is well known that the attempt to copy the success of Conan Doyle’s Holmes was the primary cause for the creation of Lupin, commissioned by Leblanc’s publisher, Pierre Lafitte. As a consequence of his character’s enormous fame, moreover, Leblanc was soon nicknamed ‘the French Conan Doyle’ (Derouard 1989, 163).

3. The name of the detective was changed as a consequence of Doyle’s claims of copyright infringement following publication of the first short story featuring this character.

4. In the novel, Lupin himself will prove eventually that the Countess’s claim is false.
Crime fiction has long been at the very heart of Argentine literature. Critics such as Lafforgue claim that no other genre has so strongly underpinned the system of Argentine literary fiction throughout the twentieth century (1997, 1). As early as the mid-1910s popular collections following the model of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American dime novel began to flourish in Argentina. While periodicals such as *La Novela Semanal*, *El Cuento Ilustrado* and *La Novela Universitaria* started featuring detective tales at regular intervals (mainly modelled after juvenile publications in the style of US imports Nick Carter and Buffalo Bill), it was not until the mid-1940s that the genre was transformed in terms of popularity and, most importantly, prestige (Lafforgue and Rivera 1996, 17–19; Miranda 2013, 87–97). This chapter investigates the ways in which the Séptimo Círculo collection, initially edited by Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares, radically altered the genre’s literary esteem.

The Séptimo Círculo collection released its first title in 1945: Nicholas Blake’s *The Beast Must Die* (1938) translated by Juan R. Wilcock as *La bestia debe morir*. Published by Emecé, the series issued 366 novels in total, the last one in April 1983. As editors-creators, Borges’s and Bioy Casares’s stamp was particularly evident in the first 121 issues when they were closely involved in the selection, supervision and translation of all titles. In 1955 the directorship was handed over to Carlos Frías. Although before the Séptimo Círculo crime fiction was frowned upon by ‘serious’ Argentine writers, after its reign the status of the classic detective novel was rebranded: it no longer classed as ‘literatura de kiosco’ (newsstand literature) (Mattalia 2008, 117).
The literary prestige associated with the collection resulted from the sum of its parts: it was shaped by the publisher’s and the editors’ authorial stamp, while paratextual elements turned each issue into a part of a whole. One of the most important cohesive elements binding a series is its title *Séptimo Círculo*, which appeared in capital letters at the top of the covers. Alluding to the seventh circle of Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno* in the *Divina Commedia*, it reinforces the idea that this will be a game of literary references. The names of Borges and Bioy Casares did not initially appear on the covers, but various other paratextual elements, such as typography, artwork and logo, contributed to a synecdochical reading of the series as a whole. The cover art was designed by artist José Bonomi, his style already recognizable as illustrator of many titles published by the group Sur (discussed in greater detail below). *Séptimo Círculo* covers presented cubist illustrations framed by two rectangular lines alternating three colours, one of them always black or dark brown. These concentric rectangles staggered the colour sequence in such a way as to create the effect of an out-of-focus frame inside which title and original author appeared in black letters against a pale background. The logo of a chess knight, representing the fetishization of the intellectual game of problem-solving characteristic of the series, appeared after 1955, at which point the iconic modernist covers disappeared; this logo and the name of the collection continued to feature on the cover until the end. In later issues the names of the original creators were also occasionally included, reinforcing the symbolic value of the series. At least for the first 121 issues, size was another characteristic feature. According to Borges, it took publisher Emecé over a year to come round to the pocket-size format; so popular were these that they soon had print runs of twenty to thirty thousand a month (García 2003).

A preference for foreign fiction is another characteristic element of the series. Aiming to provide their endorsement and in an effort to educate the readership, each novel carried a preface signed by Borges and Bioy Casares. Prefaces highlighted how worthy certain imports were, explaining that Nicholas Blake was the pseudonym of British poet Cecil Day Lewis, that Michael Innes was the *nom de plume* of a prominent English scholar, and that a particular author was not only a crime fiction writer but also a renowned Professor of Mathematics at Oxford University (Lafforgue and Rivera 1996, 17).

During the Borges–Bioy Casares period 90 per cent of the 63 writers included were imports. There are three titles by Anthony Berkeley, nine by Day Lewis (as Nicholas Blake), three by James Cain, four by Vera Caspary, two by Wilkie Collins. Agatha Christie, G.K. Chesterton and
Charles Dickens were all published once. John Dickson Carr features ten times; there were seven titles by Anthony Gilbert (Lucy B. Malleson), nine by Patrick Quentin and two by Graham Greene. Among the few Spanish originals are titles by authors closely associated with the editors: Uruguayan Enrique Amorín’s *El asesino desvelado* (1945) (The Wakeful Murderer), Biyo Casares’s and Silvina Ocampo’s *Los que aman, odian* (1945) (Those Who Love, Hate), Manuel Peyrou’s *El estruendo de las rosas* (1948) (The Thunder of the Roses), Alejandro Ruiz Guiñazú’s (aka Alexander Rice Guinness) *Bajo el signo del odio* (1953) (Under the Sign of Hate) and María Angélica Bosco’s *La muerte baja en ascensor* (1955) (Death Going Down).

Other important features, particularly for the first part of the series, are exploiting narrative as pastiche, exercising humour and satire (evident in titles such as Bioy-Ocampo’s *Los que aman, odian*), and the close focus on the whodunit. While retaining the subtle escapist effect of the reading experience, what is crucial to these works is that they adhere to the grammar of the clue-puzzle novel: having a rational rather than an active or intuitional method of detection, preferably rural settings, private crimes and a reduced number of suspects to account for seemingly accidental deaths (Knight 2003). Above all, there was to be no sign of realism or violence. Borges was clear about this: ‘no creo que las narraciones policiales puedan ser realistas’ (I do not think crime fiction should be a realist genre). For Borges, true crime fiction was ‘un género ingenioso y artificial. Los crímenes, en la realidad, se descubren de otra forma: No por razonamientos inteligentes sino por delaciones, errores, azar’ (in Lafforgue and Rivera 1996, 41) (a resourceful and constructed genre. Crimes in real life are solved by other means: not by intelligent reasoning but by betrayals, by mistakes, by chance). Lafforgue and Rivera point out that under Borges’s and Bioy Casares’s editorship most of the works included in the collection observed the ‘technical decorum’ of the puzzle novel (1996, 20).

In order to better appreciate the impact of this collection, it is important to see seriality as part of a cultural enterprise. In the 1940s, a wave of *literatura fantástica* (supernatural) and particularly classic detective fiction saw unprecedented growth in Argentina. Borges, Bioy Casares and other cultural agents such as Silvina Ocampo began promoting these genres by editing various collections such as *Antología de la literatura fantástica* (1940; *The Book of Fantasy*, 1988), which comprises over 70 short stories advertised as the best of the genre. Other important crime fiction collaborations also appeared, such as *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi* (1942; *Six problems for Don Isidro Parodi*, 1981)
by Borges and Bioy Casares writing under the pseudonym of Honorio Bustos Domecq, and Dos fantasías memorables (1946 [Two Noteworthy Fantasies]) which they wrote using their other *nom de plume*, Benito Suárez Lynch; Los mejores cuentos policiales (1943 [The Best Detective Fiction Stories]), a two-volume selection of the best, classic detective short stories; and Bioy Casares’s *El perjurio de la nieve* (1944 [The Perjury of the Snow]). The magazine *Sur* also served as a platform for further promoting and validating the collection: between 1940 and 1948 it published seven articles by the likes of Borges, Bioy Casares and translator Estela Canto, specifically referring to *Séptimo Círculo* titles.

Key to the reputation of the series were the promotion efforts of the close circle of educated writers, translators and editors at whose core were Borges and Bioy Casares. Two other important personalities associated with this group were sisters Victoria and Silvina Ocampo. Victoria was one of the most influential cultural agents of her time: she was a translator (mainly from French), founder and editor of the literary magazine *Sur* (1930) and of the publishing house *Sur* (1931). Silvina, a short story writer and poet in her own right, was often associated with co-author and husband Bioy Casares; she also collaborated with Borges. Frequently referred to as the Sur group, between the 1930s and 1940s these literati consciously promoted reading trends as part of a social and cultural praxis. Such reading preferences highlighted their stance against the changes in mass, urban culture brought about by the populist ideology of *peronismo*. It was through *Sur* (both magazine and publisher) that a particular exercise of translation as a socio-cultural praxis became a crucial factor in the project of incorporating foreign literature observed during these decades. This, as I argue, allowed for the *Séptimo Círculo* phenomenon to achieve the impact it had.

According to Rivera, as a group and in a characteristic process, *Sur* adopted the practice of closely reading a wide range of works: British Gothic novels, classic detective fiction, Jung’s theories of archetypes, the magic and religious studies of Sir James George Frazer’s 1922 *The Golden Bough*, new scientific theories by Albert Einstein and British astrophysicist Arthur Eddington, and the works of writers such as Virginia Woolf and Franz Kafka (Rivera 1972). Consequently, the 1940s were characterized by the promotion of ‘archetypal models’ (Rivera 1972, 174): a combination of fantasy and mystery which, as opposed to realism, tended to vindicate the ludic aspect of literature by detaching plots from the contemporary and the everyday. The promotion of a closed system of works exploiting ahistorical references and highlighting the fictional, playful character of literature reflected more than a mere aesthetic enterprise in
the context of the historical changes Argentina underwent that decade. Indeed, the ideological coherence of this endeavour became meaningful as the political and cultural hegemony of the patrician elite was undermined; what underscores the crisis these writers were undergoing is the group’s turning to peripheral models (European, mainly British) and to a distant personal genealogical past which granted them a certain cultural and political power (Rivera 1972, 202–3).\textsuperscript{11}

Thus, the adoption of imports by this generation is centred on the need of the Argentine intelligentsia to reject (and distance itself from) the emerging populist models stimulated by \textit{peronismo}. Part of the cultural operation of domesticating the puzzle novel relied on exploiting its artificiality to highlight the highbrow cultural rituals which \textit{peronismo} was so keen to disregard in favour of the urban mass that had started to consume its own cultural artefacts (Mattalia 2008, 119). While ostensibly for Borges politics had no place in literature (in Lafforgue and Rivera 1996, 43), his and Bioy Casares’s criticisms were introduced surreptitiously in their work. Thus, writing under the pseudonyms Bustos Domecq and Suarez Lynch, Borges and Bioy Casares voiced their anti-Peronist ideas loud and clear: the Parodi stories exploit the classic grammar of the whodunit to criticize the new political and cultural system.\textsuperscript{12}

Framed for a crime he did not commit, Parodi (an honest man and a hairdresser by trade), epitomizes the armchair detective who solves puzzles from his cell 273, without visiting the crime scene. His prodigious ability to solve the most intricate of mysteries makes him the most famous inmate. After helping a journalist clear his name, he is referred clients he takes on when he deems the challenge worthy. Proving his innocence should be no obstacle for a sleuth of such stature but a police official owes him money and it is against his interest to let Parodi walk free. Because he has been incarcerated by a petty official embodying the Peronist dogma, his ‘armchairness’ is a condition which is ideological as well as physical.

In addition, the works of both Bustos Domecq and Suarez Lynch feature many references to contemporary cultural practices covertly parodied in the stories. For example, in ‘Las noches de Goliardki’ (The Nights of Goliardki) (Bustos Domecq 1998, 40–61) Gervasio Montenegro, an actor accused of theft and murder, visits Parodi for help. Montenegro represents the rising \textit{nouveau riche}: described as tall, distinguished and with a dyed moustache, he uses circumlocutions and extremely affected language (over- and sometimes misusing French and Latin phrases), which becomes humorous as the register is clearly inappropriate for the situation. Montenegro comments in passing that he
shares Parodi’s dislike for the radio, and that, as a theatre actor, he finds the microphone a cold instrument to communicate with his audience (1998, 41). Like many of Parodi’s clients, Montenegro boasts about his supposedly expensive tastes and luxurious life: to celebrate a stroke of luck at a card game he drinks a particular brand of champagne, El Gaitero (The Piper), which is actually an inexpensive local brand of cider. Furthermore, he orders only half a bottle, keen not to overspend or rather unfamiliar with the appropriate etiquette, which hints that his wealth is recent, not from birth. As the name of Borges’s and Bioy Casares’s most famous sleuth suggests, these cultural references are (P)arodied, mocked, ridiculed. It is precisely here that the complicity with their readership lay: all these cultural notes had to be appropriately decoded and deciphered.

The impact of Borges’s and Bioy Casares’s collaborative work coupled with that of the Sur group was crucial for the development of modern Argentine literature. It was most successful, arguably, in the promotion by translation, imitation and ultimately in the creation of a canon of works marrying lo fantástico with the rational, deductive logic governing the British puzzle novel.

A further key factor contributing to the impact of the series was translation, or rather a particular ‘translational community’ (Krebs 2007): between the 1930s and 1950s, Argentina experienced translation as a collective social practice, when Buenos Aires consolidated as a prestigious publishing centre in Latin America (Miranda 2010, 92–3). Up to then, the translations that had circulated in the Americas were peninsular Spanish versions, often anonymous, produced in the late 1800s and early 1900s. According to Willson, during this period translation became one of the means by which a new repertoire of literary models could be developed (2004, 273). From the 1930s, as translators in their own right, Victoria Ocampo, Borges, José Bianco, Juan Rodolfo Wilcock and José Bonomi, among others, were instrumental in the project of constructing a new canon, which for Rivera marked a boom in Argentine cultural production (1986, 581). The project was ultimately consolidated with the establishment of a number of publishers such as Losada in 1938, Sudamericana (which later acquired Sur) and Emecé, both in 1939 (Willson 2004, 332–3).

Interestingly, during the first period of the collection under Borges’s and Bioy Casares’s watchful editorship, only translators closely associated with Sur were acknowledged: translating from English, the following authors are credited: J.R. Wilcock (issues 1, 8, 88, 139), Estela Cano (issues 10, 18, 74, 75), Borges’s mother, Leonor Acevedo de Borges (issue 12), Haydée
Carolina Miranda 37

Lange (issues 24, 82, 106), Silvina Bullrich (issue 72), Dora de Alvear (issue 78), José Bianco (issues 79, 89, 96), Cecilia Ingenieros (issue 85), Rodolfo Walsh (issue 93) and Carlos Peralta (issue 115). The only other translator acknowledged, for a translation from a French version of Chekhov, is Denis Roche (issue 9). Translators of the remaining 103 issues included in this period remained anonymous.

Arguably, one of the most intriguing phenomena reflecting the impact Borges’s and Bioy Casares’s editorial work had on the type of crime fiction promoted and demoted through the series is the relatively late proliferation of the hardboiled in Argentina. An important contributing factor to this delay was the fact that Borges did not consider it a genre worthy of reading, let alone promoting. He did not approve of the violent, gritty realism typically featured by authors aligned with it. In a conversation about crime fiction with two other influential authors of the time, Argentine Marco Denevi14 and Paraguayan Augusto Roa Bastos, Borges comments:

Raymond Chandler es un poco mejor; pero los otros, Dashiell Hammett, por ejemplo, son muy malos. Además, ellos no escriben novelas policiales: los detectives no razonan en ningún momento. Todos son malevos: los criminales y los policías. Lo cual puede ser cierto [...]. Pero es una lástima que la novela policial, que empezó en Norteamérica y de un modo intelectual – con un personaje como M. Dupin, que razona y descubre el crimen – vaya a parar en esos personajes siniestros, que protagonizan riñas donde uno le pega al otro con una culata del revólver, y este a su vez lo tira al suelo y le patea la cara. (In Lafforgue and Rivera 1996, 44–5)

[Raymond Chandler is a bit better; but the others, Dashiell Hammett, for example, are very bad. Besides, they don’t write detective novels: at no time do their detectives reason. They are all wrongdoers: criminals and policemen alike. Which could be true [...]. But it is a shame that crime fiction, which began in America and with an intellectual model – with a character such as M. Dupin, who solves crimes by reasoning – ends up with these sinister characters who get into fights in which one hits the other with the butt of a revolver, and in turn the latter knocks him to the ground and kicks him in the face.]

In the late 1950s resistance to the hardboiled began to lessen, as the association with this form of writing and a model initially considered vulgar began to crumble. A number of factors contributed to this. In 1955
Borges and Bioy Casares handed the editorship of the collection to Frías, who took over with the plan of keeping ‘el criterio de los maestros [...]'; la tendencia predominante es la novela inglesa clásica’ (Frias in Lafforgue and Rivera 1996, 18) (the criteria of the creators [...] ; the prevailing trend is the classic British novel). However, the new editor was less categorical about the lack of literary value of the serie dura (hardboiled) tradition than his predecessors, thus incorporating authors such as Ross MacDonald, pseudonym of American writer Kenneth Miller, who is considered one of the main successors to Hammett and Chandler.15

Another factor playing a part in the proliferation of the American model in the late 1950s was the creation of several literary prizes like those founded by publishers Emecé (1957) and Malinca (1960). In particular, Emecé’s initiative gave the serie dura a boost in respectability and recognition. While Chandler’s 1940 Farewell, My Lovely appeared as Detective por correspondencia in 1943 in the Biblioteca de Oro series, the incorporation of hardboiled novels by more prestigious publishers only started thriving in the 1960s. Translator and hardboiled author Eduardo Goligorski pointed out that it was only in this decade that readers seemed to overcome ‘ciertas barreras de lectura, o revertido algunos criterios de gusto’ (1975, 19) (certain reading barriers, or overturned certain criteria of taste).16 Furthermore, Goligorski claimed that ‘[p]or eso tal vez, inclusive un sello como El Séptimo Círculo abandonó la línea clásica de la novela-problema’ (1975, 19) (maybe for that reason, even a collection such as Séptimo Círculo abandoned the classic who- dunit model).

Finally, the unstable socio-political setting of Argentina at the time may have been another influencing factor. The fact that violence and corruption have typically been strongly represented in hardboiled novels could have contributed to turning it into the most suitable form of expression. After all, the hardboiled formula easily lends itself to the discussion of political or social topics. By the 1970s, the hardboiled school dominated local production.

As editors-creators of the collection, Borges and Bioy Casares transformed the genre in terms of literary esteem. By vigorously endorsing certain authors and actively demoting others they were responsible for both the validation of the puzzle novel, and the delayed impact of the hardboiled model. Overall, the collection marked a turning point, as after its reign crime fiction was no longer considered newsstand literature. Both as a literary phenomenon worthy of the educated reader and as a popular, albeit demanding, form of entertainment available to the less educated, crime writing began to find a wider readership, finally
consolidating its status as a serious read. Eventually, the series became a platform for the genre to cross cultural boundaries, turning a popular form into a key literary phenomenon which was to underpin the whole literary system of Argentina, an effect which continues to this day.

Instrumental in its success, the editors’ close involvement in the marketing and editorial strategies of the series became a trademark allowing for a genre to be imported, promoted and cultivated by national authors. Even long after they handed directorship to Frías in 1955, the series continued to benchmark the best the genre had to offer. It was the early endorsement of Borges and Bioy Casares that turned the Séptimo Círculo into more than the mere sum of its parts.

Notes

1. Starting in 2003, Planeta, one of the most prestigious publishers in Spain and Latin America, has reissued all the titles in the original collection.
2. Borges usually selected translators and worked alongside them revising final versions.
3. I am referring to Paul Groussac and Eduardo Holmberg. Groussac’s 1884 ‘El candado de oro’ (The Gold Lock) and Holmberg’s 1896 ‘La bolsa de huesos’ (The Sack of Bones) constitute two of the most influential pieces published before the 1900s. Both writers were distinguished scholars, translators and literati of their time; both published under pseudonyms as a means of distancing themselves from this popular genre. Their stories stand out as they use humour and satire, something later authors such as Borges and Bioy Casares (writing individually or together) also exploited (Miranda 2013, 91–2).
4. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.
5. This is also relevant for the Isidro Parodi series (see below).
6. As became a trademark of these editors, most of the writers included are imports: John Aubrey, Max Beerbohm, Lewis Carroll, G.K. Chesterton, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Rudyard Kipling, Guy de Maupassant, François Rabelais, Tsao Hsue-Kin and H.G. Wells, to name a few. Some Spanish-language authors included are: Argentine José Bianco, Julio Cortázar, Macedonio Fernández and Spaniard Ramón Gómez de la Serna. There are also stories by all three co-editors.
8. Some Spanish-language authors are included but most are imports: writers include Hawthorne, Poe, Stevenson, Conan Doyle, London, Chesterton, Phillpotts, Akutagawa, Berkeley, Ellery Queen, Borges, Peyrou, S. Ocampo and Pérez Zelaschi.
10. The name derives from General Juan Domingo Perón (1895–1974), three times President of Argentina. Peronismo ideology divided the population as political views promoted an underlying class divide: one sector viewed Peronism as the voice of the poor while detractors considered Peronists to be demagogues and Perón, particularly in his second and third administrations (1946–52 and 1973–74), a dictator.

11. Borges and Biyo Casares chose their pseudonyms by combining surnames of their highborn great-grandparents: Bustos for Borges and Domecq for Biyo Casares. The name Suarez Lynch, apocryphal disciple of Bustos Domecq, also combines their relatives' surnames. Rodríguez Monegal has pointed out that Lynch in real life was also related to José Hernández (1968, 90). A highly celebrated author, Hernández was the creator of Gaucho Martín Fierro (1872 and 1879), a pinnacle of gauchesque poetry and a touchstone of national identity. This connection further reinforces Suarez Lynch's literary authority.

12. Parodi's adventures also play upon the surreal; an educated reader could appreciate the homage to Chesterton.

13. This may be an allusion to Eva Duarte, Perón's second wife, a radio actress when she met Perón. Her life story, going from humble origins to model and actress (B movies and radio) in the capital, and soon to first lady and spiritual leader of the Nation (she was given a state funeral), was for her followers a fairy tale come true. Eva's quick rise to fame and power and her access to it through her relationship with Perón were constantly criticized by the highborn.

14. Denevi's first novel, possibly his most enduring, Rosaura a las diez (1955; Rosa at Ten O'clock, 1965) epitomizes the puzzle model. Translated into several languages, the novel also humorously exploits class stereotypes. It was made into a feature film with the same title (dir. Mario Soffici, 1958). In the interview, Denevi shares Borges's view favouring the British classic whodunit over the more realistic American hardboiled.

15. Under Frías Séptimo Círculo published six titles by MacDonald: The Chill (1964, El escalofrío, issue 188), Black Money (1966, Dinero negro, issue 200), The Far Side of the Dollar (1965, El otro lado del dólar, issue 206), The Instant Enemy (1968, El enemigo insólito, issue 217), The Goodbye Look (1969, La mirada del adiós, issue 227) and The Barbarous Coast (1956, Costa bárbara, issue 244). Interestingly, there are three titles by MacDonald's wife, Margaret Millar, published before 1955: Evil in Return (1950, Pagarás con maldad, issue 90), The Iron Gates (1945, Las rejas de hierro, issue 105) and Rose's Last Summer (1953, Muerte en el estanque, issue 122). Her novels, focused on mystery and suspense, align better with the model favoured by Borges and Biyo Casares.

16. Goligorski published more than 30 hardboiled novels between the late 1950s and 1960s for Malinca, Acme and Agency, considered pioneer publishers of the novela dura in Argentina.
In 2010, 51 years after his death in 1959, Boris Vian entered the canon of French literary immortals: he was published in Gallimard’s prestigious Bibliothèque de la Pléiade collection. Arguably, however, these are the complete fictional works of two authors: French writer Boris Vian and his black American pseudonymous creation, Vernon Sullivan. For critics like Edmund Smyth this must have represented long overdue recognition of the qualities of the latter’s work. As Smyth notes:

[...] though for many years critics tended to downplay the significance of Vian’s ‘paraliterary’ works, preferring the more literary L’Écume des jours (1946) and L’Automne à Pékin (1947), in recent times there has been a reappraisal of his noir novels, to the extent that they have been thoroughly assimilated into his varied and substantial œuvre. (2006, 48)

There is, however, a rub in this repatriation of Sullivan: it erases the identity of this creative Other. In the Pléiade edition the Sullivan novels are interspersed, chronologically, among the Vian novels. Our aim here is to reveal how the creation of a powerful Vian series has stifled Sullivan’s authorial identity. This process has included a complex relationship with Gallimard’s Série noire, translation and branding. To understand the impact of this relationship we will briefly compare his case with that of Douglas Kennedy, a contemporary example of another authorial identity forged and then reforged in French translation.

Kennedy is today very much part of the French literary landscape.¹ He has published 11 novels and three short stories with Belfond; translated by Bernard Cohen, these have become bestsellers. In 2006 he was made a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres, and in 2012 he was a guest speaker at
Les Assises Internationales du roman. All this, despite a relatively inauspicious beginning: it was only in 1994, after three books of travel writing, that his first novel appeared. Inspired by his travels in Australia, The Dead Heart was presented as ‘a crazy, compulsive, ultimately serious thriller and a bravura fictional debut from one of our best travel writers’. The book, rejected by publishers in the US, met with instant success in the UK. When the novel journeyed across the Channel, however, to be published in Gallimard’s famous Série noire, Kennedy officially – if perhaps, like his novel, crazily and then ultimately seriously – became a writer of crime fiction. Despite his success at Gallimard, Kennedy subsequently changed publisher and translator, to find his ‘true (French) voice’ and establish a homogeneous ‘Douglas Kennedy series’ at Belfond, where his work is included in the latter’s Littérature étrangère (Foreign Literature) collection and not Belfond Noir. The steps in Kennedy’s journey towards serialization in France, and the reasons behind this serialization, began at Gallimard when the manuscript of The Dead Heart was placed with the Série noire and entrusted to Catherine Cheval, a translator specializing in the roman noir, who translated it as Cul-de-sac. The Série noire owes its coherence as a series not only to its distinctive cover art but also to the style of its translations. Drawing on this tradition, predicated on Marcel Duhamel’s first translations in the 1940s, Cheval made full use of popular expressions and slang to render the novel into French, with the result that the humour of the original text was starkly amplified and its sordid atmosphere (re)cast in typically hardboiled terms. In spite, or rather because, of the liberties taken by the translator, this first French version was an instant hit with the public and was soon after republished in Folio’s crime collection. The non-literal approach adopted in the translation of Cul-de-sac becomes more obvious when it is compared to the second translation, undertaken for Belfond by Bernard Cohen 11 years later (Piège nuptial, 2008). Cohen, who had already translated a number of Kennedy’s other novels for the same publisher, produced a version much closer to the original English, and much less crime- or thriller-oriented, as if to accentuate its place within a literary series alongside previous novels and others still to come. In terms of French serialization, Kennedy had graduated from a position as a representative, albeit a prime one, of a successful crime series to a series of his own, a rise to fame that would perhaps have been unimaginable had he remained in the US and not been translated. There are clearly legitimate reasons for claiming that Kennedy, by changing genre and becoming a series unto himself, and through the mediating role of a single translator in a non-crime-oriented collection, gained access to a broader public
as part of Belfond’s *Littérature étrangère* (Foreign Literature) collection rather than their Belfond Noir crime series, in much the same way as Daniel Pennac had previously by moving from *la Noire* to *la Blanche* at Gallimard.⁶

In the case of Vian/Sullivan, there are only four Vernon Sullivan novels, with just four years separating the publication of the first and last texts. It may seem surprising therefore that the possibility of a Sullivan series, if perhaps not a tetralogy, has never been considered. Paradoxically, the principal reason preventing this is also the reason for Sullivan’s emergence as an author: Duhamel’s *Série noire* dictated not only the market but also the genre of his first novel. In the popular imaginary at least, the *Série noire* became instantly synonymous with hardboiled literature *traduit de l’américain* (translated from the American) and by extension crime fiction more broadly. Since that time the tendency to classify the *Série noire* as crime fiction has dominated critical responses to its constituent texts, so much so in fact that its radical and innovative force in the French reading market of the years following the Second World War has been understated; instead, for scholars like Sapiro (2010), it has been seen as metonymic of the Franco-American translation *Zeitgeist*, according to which Coca-Cola, jazz and the Marshall Plan are conflated in a unilateral wave of US financial and cultural exports into France.⁷

To complicate matters, Sullivan’s own contribution to post-war literature *traduit de l’américain* was itself something of a reaction to the hegemony, Parisian this time as well as American, of the *Série noire*. The story of Boris Vian’s pact with Jean d’Halluin, according to which he sought to rival the bestsellers of the *Série noire* by bringing the weight of a Latin erotic tradition to bear on the dominant paradigm of this American export, is by now well known.⁸ The complexity of Sullivan’s birth in the currents and counter-currents of cultural (and, in this case, ethnic) dominance through literary translation and export is still to be properly understood; our aim here, however, is to focus on the production of a Sullivan series. Suffice it to say that the immediate and dramatic success of *J’irai cracher sur vos tombes* (*I Spit on Your Graves*) worked against the Sullivan series in two ways: first, it has consistently been considered Sullivan’s masterpiece, in comparison to which his three subsequent novels have paled into insignificance; and second, the intensity of its relationship to the *Série noire* has earned it the label of crime novel (albeit as a noir parody, and this despite the already deeply parodic nature of much noir fiction).⁹ And so, as Vernon Sullivan has become synonymous with post-war French crime fiction *traduit de
l’américain, those of his novels that fit less comfortably with this classification have been deemed incompatible with their author’s flagship text. Sullivan’s trial by genre has seen his novels grouped into three categories. First, there is J’irai cracher sur vos tombes (1946), followed by Les Morts ont tous la même peau (1948) (All the Dead Have the Same Skin). Both novels are dominated by themes of race, particularly the idea of the passe-blanc and the passe-noir, respectively a black character passing for white and a white character passing for black. Scott (1998, 129–72) offers an interesting analysis according to which these two novels are mirror images of each other, the first being the tale of a black protagonist who crosses the racial divide, and the second that of a white protagonist who is convinced by his brother that he is one-eighth black and has therefore also crossed the line. The hero of Les Morts ont tous la même peau begins to act black, and as he finds himself increasingly attracted to black women, to feel and think black. Ultimately, it transpires that he is in fact white. Next in a typical classification comes Sullivan’s third novel, Et on tuera tous les affreux (1948) (All the Ugly Will be Killed). Thematically speaking, this text represents a radical departure: race is no longer on the agenda; instead, the plot has been considered more typical of science fiction. Rather than an angst-ridden protagonist obsessed with the social issues of his day, the reader is offered an archetype of masculine beauty, kidnapped by a mad scientist in a plan to eradicate ugliness. This novel’s origins are traditionally located by critics in Vian’s burgeoning interest in sci-fi, something that was to increase through the 1950s. The last stage of Sullivan’s development is marked by the fourth and final work, Elles se rendent pas compte (1950) (They Don’t Realize), the least studied by critics, because, as Arnaud has noted (2004–5, 69), it is usually considered flawed. Typically, references to this novel are framed in terms of sexuality, the plot revolving around a lesbian gang. Scott deals with the third and fourth novels together, arguing that they serve to bridge the gap between Vian’s literary texts and the crime fiction ones that, for him, constitute Sullivan’s work. This latter point notwithstanding, the very fact of finding a common skopos for the last two Sullivans suggests that a Sullivan series is at least conceivable. It would also appear that Et on tuera tous les affreux and Elles se rendent pas compte are perceived, by Scott at least, as the failed work of a fictitious author unmasked or as part of a prank that by the late 1940s and early 1950s had run its course. And yet, if we look more closely at the image presented to the world by the Sullivan novels themselves – via the cover, that most important of paratextual elements – the idea of a Sullivan series appears quite credible. To take Sullivan seriously is
to confront the question of why the Sullivan novels continued to be published after their ‘real author’ had been revealed. There is a deliberateness here that belies a simple last gasp of a dated prank.

And yet, the Sullivan brand has not been well served by its paratext. First, the covers have prevented the emergence of a Sullivan series by sheer weight of numbers: between 1946 and 2009, the four novels have seen no fewer than 42 editions, across 11 publishing houses, including Livre de Poche, Christian Bourgois and, perhaps the most familiar to the general French reading public, 10/18. It is noteworthy that of these 42 editions, 24 bear the name of Boris Vian, ten that of Vernon Sullivan and eight Boris Vian/Vernon Sullivan. Furthermore, the covers reveal phases of authorship that can be classified into three distinct periods: the first, unsurprisingly, is the Sullivan period, which began in 1946 with the first of the original editions and lasted until the 1970s and the 10/18 collection, when the name Boris Vian begins to appear on the cover. From the 1970s the situation becomes quite confusing for readers, especially in the 10/18 collection, which in 1978 published *Et on tuera tous les affreux* under the name of Sullivan but with a photograph of Vian as sole cover art. While such paratextual choices can hardly be arbitrary, the alternation of authors occurs seemingly at random in this second period, and at 10/18 this practice continues until 1993. From this point on, there is less alternation between authors: with one or two exceptions, this third period belongs to Vian. The subordination of Sullivan to Vian is echoed among Vian scholars, by whom Sullivan is variously dubbed the latter’s noir Other, alter ego or even his *alter-negro*.

Genette (1987) theorized what any bookseller or reader knows: covers are the book’s public face, pulling the potential reader in, extending the text out beyond its pages. They are also the first sign of serialization. In 1946, when Sullivan made his public début, Gallimard’s *Série noire* was the new face of the series. Duhamel’s promise of a new violence and eroticism came in a striking, if sober, package: its black cover, evoking the simplicity and French chic of the little black dress, was contrasted with yellow lettering for the title and a plain white border. Reflecting Vian’s and d’Halluin’s ambition to surpass Duhamel’s bestsellers, the paratextual marketing of the original editions of the four Sullivan novels is designed to demarcate them from the *Série noire*: there would be no simple black cover at Éditions du Scorpion; instead, Sullivan burst onto the bookshelves in vivid colour with an exclamatory lightning-burst design. Not only is this a countermeasure, or counter-series; it has all the trappings of a new literary series. The font chosen for all the titles adds to the visual continuity, and the famous words *traduit de*
l’américain, which were the hallmark of Duhamel’s success, appear on three of the four novels. Thus, the original Sullivan novels tapped into the reading Zeitgeist of the post-war years, simultaneously breaking away from and emulating the most famous French crime series of the day. Originally, Sullivan was packaged as a series. This act of serialization, which saw Sullivan sidelined from the Série noire, also saw him lined up alongside it. While critics continue to wish to conflate Sullivan and Vian, it is his ambivalent relationship to Duhamel (whose alter-negro he may also be considered) that has seen Sullivan denied membership not only of the Série noire but of adherence even to his own series.

The most interesting case, however, remains the publication in 1950 of Elles se rendent pas compte, precisely because it appears to work against our argument for a Sullivan series. It is the only Sullivan novel not marked traduit de l’américain, even though the author remains, and is announced in striking paratextual terms, as Sullivan, who is supposedly American. Were readers to believe that Sullivan had learned French, as Douglas Kennedy’s contemporary marketing drives are designed to show? Surely not, since Sullivan’s status as fictitious author had been outed in public two years previously. Vian’s ostensible translatorly absence from the fourth Sullivan novel was itself the subject of a form of translation compensation. In 1949, Vian and his then wife Michelle were translating Dames Don’t Care by Peter Cheyney, who was by this stage the darling of the Série noire and as such a product of Duhamel’s translation machine. In the year leading up to the publication of Elles se rendent pas compte by Éditions du Scorpion Les Femmes s’en balancent (Dames Don’t Care) appeared in the Série noire.

Cheyney’s Poison Ivy (1937) was his first in the Série noire – not just the first Cheyney novel in the series, but the first novel of the series itself. Duhamel had made it his own by re-contextualizing it: La Môme vert-de-gris is not only a French title; it is a title that grounds the novel in a specifically French context. For môme we can substitute that other French term for ‘dame’, souris, or ‘mouse’; and vert-de-gris is the colour of the uniforms worn by the recently departed occupying forces. Souris grise (grey mouse) was the term used popularly to designate female soldiers of the Wehrmacht. Given Vian’s role in the translation of Les Femmes s’en balancent, it is tempting to read the elles of Elles se rendent pas compte as standing in for the ubiquitous American ‘dame’. In this way, the title of the fourth Sullivan novel can be substituted for the English title Dames Don’t Care. This in itself serves to compensate for the absent slogan: but if more proof were required of a translatorly sleight of hand, Boris and Michelle Vian’s translation of Les Femmes s’en balancent contains this
link between the two texts: ‘Et c’est toujours les chouettes mômes qui font du vilain. Elles sont toujours pires que des tueurs. Elles se rendent pas compte’ (Cheyney 1949, 139) (An’ it’s always swell dames who start the trouble. They’re always worse than the worst he-killer. They just don’t care) (1952, 104).

Our contention here is that this reference, so typical of the intertextuality at work in Vian’s other, or own, novels, serves to align *Elles se rendent pas compte*, and by extension its predecessors, with the *Série noire*. It also delivers a poignant critique of Duhamel’s translation praxis, from two of his own translators, indicating that the *traduit de l’américain* of the *Série noire* (of which *J’irai cracher sur vos tombes* is deemed a parody) is more than simply a French translation of an American original. On the one hand, the translations, from the paratext to the text itself, are French appropriations of the ‘original’ (arguably symbolic of a broader French reaction to US cultural hegemony, and the very opposite of the literary importer’s weakness suggested by Sapiro), and thus more French than American; and on the other hand, the authors of the source text were themselves quite often not American (Cheyney was English, as was James Hadley Chase – the first French authors of the *Série noire* also passed themselves off as American). This reading of the *Série noire*, through and in translation, can therefore be seen equally as a reading of Vernon Sullivan: as an author who was not American and not translated, he is the very model of a *Série noire* original. By modelling the *Série noire*, Vian puts not the Vian, but the series, back into Sullivan. In this way then, this implicit *traduit-de-l’américain* reading of *Elles se rendent pas compte* delivers it from the status of ‘flawed novel’. By closing the Sullivan series it constitutes the coup de grâce not of a tired, angst-ridden and failed Vernon Sullivan but rather of an author at the top of his game. More than a simple canular (trick), the internalization of *traduit de l’américain* in *Elles se rendent pas compte* is a mise en abyme of a larger hoax, of the Sullivan affair itself, an affair that, like his compagnon de route Vian, Sullivan will transcend after death.

The Sullivan series remains a complex phenomenon, primarily because it has to be associated with the Vian series, which, as we have seen, now incorporates the Sullivans. It is this larger paratext, which includes the life as well as the works of one of France’s favourite sons (albeit one who until 2010 remained outside the French literary and academic canon), that has prevented the Sullivan series from being considered as such. Indeed, as a major part of that Vian paratext, the scandal that accompanied *J’irai cracher sur vos tombes* was one from which Vian emerged scarred and from which Sullivan and his work have yet to emerge.16
This subsuming of Sullivan to the Vian brand is evident in the successive editions of the four novels published by 10/18 between 1985 and 1993. Here the tension between the series of Sullivan novels and an *effet de collection*, based on both the 10/18 identity and the Vian brand within it, comes to the fore. Again, it is at the level of the cover art that a coherent brand identity emerges: there is a strong thematic unity, with similar background colours and analogous fonts. In terms of author accreditation, this unity breaks down: the first and fourth novels bear the name of Vian as sole author; the second and third have the double signature Boris Vian/Vernon Sullivan. This curious use of epanadiptosis, which sees the series begin and end with Vian’s name entirely eclipsing that of Sullivan, is unlikely to be an empty rhetorical flourish. Its effect is to remove the Sullivan brand from the novel with which it is most famously associated, the first title – Vian’s great success and nemesis – and the last, deemed a critical failure even when the other novels that had struggled during his lifetime (both those attributed to Sullivan and those written in Vian’s own name) were gaining posthumous redemption. The association of brand Vian with these particular novels frames the two others, dually attributed, effectively allowing Sullivan a glimpse of identity, a partial ownership that might give the texts some coherence as a group, while subsuming the whole series within Vian’s collected works and their thematic unity within the 10/18 collection.

What one might label the ‘Sullivan Series’ remains therefore in a state of perpetual incompletion. Even the original series of Sullivan novels published by Éditions du Scorpion can be argued to exist primarily as a counter-series, opening in a rivalry with the *Série noire* and closing with a veiled reference to Vian’s own inclusion (as translator) within Duhamel’s series. The editions that followed have seen Sullivan’s potential for serialization impaired by an overwhelming paratext composed of the life and works of two authors (one who ‘lived’ briefly but sensationally during Vian’s lifetime and another who struggled for success in his own lifetime but achieved canonization 50 years later) and the apparently arbitrary editorial choices of successive publishing houses. Paradoxically, the tension between the two authors, which drove the Sullivan novels and saw *J’irai cracher sur vos tombes* reach staggering sales figures, has been the major impediment to coherent serialization. We would argue that this combination of the Vian brand and the various *effets de collection* within and against which it has been positioned have played a far greater role in this regard than any ostensible generic variation across the four Sullivan novels.
It is far from clear that the concept of a literary series should be predicated on genre. As the recent case of Douglas Kennedy also shows, a series like the *Série noire* does not exist by virtue of the clear generic identity of its constituent novels. The *Série noire* is a diverse collection whose own market dominance has created an identity, and an identity- and prestige-conferring power, that is far greater than the sum of its parts. Not all the volumes in the *Série noire* are crime novels, for example, but the dominant place of translation early in the series allowed Duhamel and his team to re-badge them under French titles and to sell them as hardboiled thrillers. In this sense, the generic coherence of the most important French crime fiction series of the twentieth century is never more than superficial. These novels were, therefore, of the *passe-noir* variety, their tales of death each having the same skin. And if their noir status was only skin deep, their Americanness was equally so.

In the case of Sullivan, what began as a novel to rival the *Série noire*, and developed into a counter-series, with its black American author supposedly translated by a French writer, came to resemble its rival. If it was a parody, then it was in name only; or rather, it replicated the parodic, translatorly *skopos* of its model. Many authors’ careers were launched by the *Série noire*. The authorial identities it has created over the years have led in turn to series by individuals. The huge marketing success of Kennedy or Pennac owes as much to a name made in the *Série noire* as to any intrinsic generic continuity. Vernon Sullivan is one example – an identity *traduit de l’américain*. By having his cake and eating it too, by intervening in the final novel of the Sullivan series as both translator and ‘translated’, Vian continued to build his identity, not only posthumously but after two deaths. By outdoing, entering and exiting the *Série noire*, by creating a noir identity, Vian has perhaps finally become Vian. But he has done so at the expense of Sullivan, whose own series, like the *Série noire* itself, played the king-making role of a collection from which other series were able to emerge.

**Notes**

1. According to Morrison, ‘authors such as Diane Johnson, Nancy Huston, Jake Lamar, Douglas Kennedy and Paul Auster are treated virtually as adopted sons’ in France (Morrison and Compagnon 2010, 26).
2. This annual writers’ festival is jointly organized in Lyon by Villa Gillet and *Le Monde*. The 2012 festival was held from 28 May to 3 June.
3. This description, by Kerr, appears on the website of Kennedy’s first publishing house and can be found at www.littlebrown.co.uk.
4. Our thanks here to Catherine Cheval, who granted Vuaille-Barcan an interview in Paris in May 2012. For a stylistic comparison of the two versions, see Vuaille-Barcan (2013).

5. Kennedy has referred publicly to Cohen as his (own) ‘French voice’. By this he seems to imply rather more than the homogeneity that Cohen brings to Kennedy’s French series in translating all the texts; instead, not unlike this study of Vian’s relationship to Sullivan, Cohen becomes something of an alter ego for Kennedy, the articulation, or voicing, both mediating and non-mediating, of the latter’s own Frenchness. Gresset notes, ‘[i]n France, foreign authors are published as if they were French’ (in Cachin 2007, 22), which suggests that if Cohen’s version is closer to Kennedy’s original text, then that is by virtue of being allowed to incarnate more fully a Frenchness that was always already present. We agree with Cachin’s point and suggest further that Cheval’s praxis, which deforms the original, is itself very much a ‘French’ appropriation, and as such a means of making Kennedy French.

6. For Nettelbeck (1994, 132), the politics behind Pennac’s shift included ‘the decision by Gallimard to promote him from the “noire” to the “blanche” – that is, from the category of police fiction (which, since it gets little attention from critics, rarely extends its faithful, but specialized readership), to the mainstream category of “serious” literature’.

7. Sapiro sees France’s predominant practice in the post-war years of importing and translating American crime fiction (rather than exporting French literature to the US) as a sign of economic if not cultural inferiority.


9. For a nuanced reading of this aspect of the Sullivan affair, see Schoolcraft (2009).

10. Norman Mailer developed his own definition of the ‘white negro’ in an article for Dissent Magazine in 1957. Unlike Sullivan’s passe-blanc, Mailer’s white negro remains a white man, but one whose behaviour is identifiable as black as a result of his assimilation of the black cultural traditions of the period. The white negro is thus very different from the case of a black individual with a strong physical resemblance to a white man. The case of the passe-noir of Les Morts ont tous la même peau, on the other hand, fits well with Mailer’s definition.

11. The Sullivan novels were originally published by Éditions du Scorpion, then by Pauvert and Éric Losfeld’s Terrain Vague; and in English translation by TamTam, Canongate and Audubon Books.

12. However, when both names appear on the front cover, permutations can be noted: Vian/Sullivan, B. Vian/Sullivan.

13. One notable exception is the 2004 Christian Bourgois edition of Les Morts ont tous la même peau, whose authorship is given as Boris Vian/Vernon Sullivan.

14. Cheyney, who was himself American in the same way as Sullivan, which is to say virtually, in authorial, marketing terms only, inaugurated the Série noire, providing its first two titles in 1945: La Môme vert-de-gris and Cet homme est dangereux.

15. For a detailed reading of the way in which Vian made his translations his own, including, and especially, in the case of his work for the Série noire, see Lapprand (1992).
16. For more on the media scandal that surrounded *J’irai cracher sur vos tombes*, see Arnaud (1974).
17. His involvement and subsequent attempt to distance himself from the later film adaptation of the novel are another, and equally complicated, story, particularly in terms of the fluid dynamics of the Vian/Sullivan identity.
18. If, as Platten has pointed out (2011, 22–3), Pennac has his own inimitable style, redolent of Belleville where his works are set, his identity as a crime writer is a conferred one; little in his novels adheres to the usual characteristics of the genre.
5

Armed and Dangerous: *Le Poulpe* and the Formalization of French Noir

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This chapter focuses on Jean-Bernard Pouy’s *La Petite Écuyère a cafté* (1995) (The Little Equestrian Girl Tattled). This is the first volume in a French publishing phenomenon of the 1990s: the *Poulpe* crime series of over 200 novels, the precise construction of which will become clearer later. This synecdochical reading of the first book is appropriate here, because the entire collection is dedicated to a particular kind of experimentation on and within the crime genre, where the techniques and modalities inaugurated in *Oulipo* are applied to the noir formula. In fact, the collection developed out of the rubric of one of Oulipo’s lesser-known offshoots, *Oulipopo*, creating its own project out of the former’s interest in popular literary forms and formulae. *La Petite Écuyère a cafté* set the parameters for the grander exercise that is the whole series.

The results of this experiment are significant in that it radicalizes the idea of the formulaic in popular fiction by having a set of precise guidelines within which each author must function: central character; setting; specific features of the narrative arc. Whereas the idea of the formulaic had been an abstraction that authors understood in terms of editorial and readerly expectations, in *Le Poulpe* it becomes an explicit condition of the writing process: constraints are taken not as a limitation but as an impetus for the creative endeavour. The result provides a rich commentary on what crime fiction can do, but also underscores the genre’s boundaries. Given that the *Poulpe*’s parameters are in a sense an archetypal articulation of noir within the French context, they also show the very real (particularly heteronormative) limitations of the tradition and the reasons why, at a certain point, several authors created an offshoot of the series, which, as I will argue in my conclusion, further challenges the assumptions of the noir genre beyond the work begun by the *Poulpe* series.
French readers have enthusiastically demanded hardboiled detective fiction since at least the 1940s – as the over 2500 volumes edited by French editor, author and translator Marcel Duhamel’s famous and foundational *Série noire*, demonstrate. The first works of the *Série noire* that created the post-war market were British and American imports, with American ones being the most marketable. This led to French authors increasingly adopting American pen names: ‘[t]he names of [Terry] Stewart and [John] Amila hide the identities of Serge Arcouet and Jean Meckert’ who ‘published the first three French novels in the *Série noire*’ (Gorrara 2003, 597–8). After these feigned foreign origins, novelists such as André Piljean (*Passons la monnaie*, 1951 [Payback]) and Auguste le Breton (*Du rififi chez les hommes*, 1951 [Punch-up among the Men]) began to feature French settings while signing with recognizably Gallic names. These novels embedded the crime narrative in French national history and created their reality effects through identifiably French consumer culture – cars, alcohol, clothing. Just as importantly, as of the 1970s these thrillers carried increasingly political content about pressing issues of the day. In the wake of May 1968, the *roman noir* became, and remains, a *roman engagé* whose attention is local even as its ideology may be global. As we shall see, this is a crucial feature of *Le Poulpe*’s underlying geographical ‘constraints’ as well.

The *Série noire*,4 which creates its effect ‘en rassemblant sous cette étiquette des auteurs que la critique ou les éditeurs de leurs pays respectifs n’avaient pas songé à classer comme tels’ (by grouping together, under a common label, authors that critics and editors from their respective countries had not thought to classify as such) (Lacassin 1993, 17) is also an example of how French noir has developed. Most notably, it demonstrates the centripetal pull of Paris and its publishing houses which bring together cliques of writers who share similar preoccupations both politically and thematically. Authors tend to work regularly or exclusively within the genre, to have a particular political and artistic bias, and to have made a point of promoting the genre as a unique literary form with very distinct potentialities. For example, the *Le Poulpe* novels all appeared with Éditions Baleine and were one of the principal reasons for the house’s initial success.

The influence of particular houses, most notably Gallimard’s *Série noire*, on the French hardboiled crime novel is also literary: there remains an overriding and relatively invariable series of parameters (stylistic and linguistic) within which authors must operate for their work to qualify as noir. Differentiating between ‘high’ and ‘popular’ literatures, Lits notes that a Balzac or Hugo novel is read ‘pour ses
caractéristiques propres’ (for its own intrinsic characteristics) whereas a novel by Gaston Leroux or Stanislas-André Steelman will be judged ‘en fonction de sa conformité – ou de son écart – par rapport à la catégorie générique du roman policier’ (Lits 1999, 7) (in relation to its conformity to or departure from the generic category of the crime novel). Thus, the crime novel’s tropes provide its distinctive feel and value. Drawing on Cawelti’s notion of formulae, I contend that several features characterize most fiction in the noir vein. Among these are the urban setting of the story; a fascination with and critique of consumer culture; a place-specific vernacular; an emphatic heteronormativity in which women are commodified; a heavy focus on the various instruments of violence through which power is asserted (most notably, although not exclusively, guns). These tropes and familiar character types participate in an endless feedback loop in which readerly expectations are simultaneously produced and satisfied, a loop that, I will argue, is playfully ‘outed’ in Le Poulpe.

It is within and against this particular French sense of noir that Le Poulpe probes the limits of the polar as a literary genre. More specifically, it plays on a representative selection of the genre’s formulae and clichés by way of Oulipo. The Oulipo literary movement is most famous for what it calls ‘constraints’ – that is, various writing parameters consciously imposed by the author on him- or herself as a challenge, and Le Poulpe’s connection to Oulipo is not fortuitous. As Motte shows in Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature (1986), it was bent on categorically undermining the assumed high seriousness of the literary. Further, as Gayot notes in the Oulipo Compendium, Oulipo’s interest in the literary potential of the crime novel had been formalized in Oulipopo in 1973. He adds that ‘at many meetings, which took place until 1982 at François Le Lionnais’s, and since then at the Restaurant des Canettes, a number of well-known crime writers attended, from Léo Malet, in 1973, to Jean-Bernard Pouy in 1990’ (Gayot 1998, 251–2). Significantly for this study, Pouy was inspired by these meetings to launch the Le Poulpe experiment with La Petite Écuyère a café. Thus, it is via Oulipo that the features of the crime novel become codified in Le Poulpe. All subsequent authors contributing to the series must follow the rules of La Bible du Poulpe, where detailed rules for any episode are spelled out over four pages. Every volume must feature Gabriel Lecouvreur known as ‘Le Poulpe’ (The Octopus) because of his long arms; each must begin in the bar-restaurant ‘Le Pied de Porc à la Sainte-Scolasse’ (Pig’s Feet in the Saint-Scolasse Manner) with the protagonist learning about a murder from the newspaper, which he then
investigates; before departing, he must visit his girlfriend Cheryl (theirs is an open relationship); he then must see the old Spanish anarchist, Pedro, to obtain guns and false papers. Further rules include (as has been popular since Poe's Dupin stories) having a recurring character whose habits and condition the reader gets to know. This continuity may be intentionally captured in the alliterative series, 'Poe', 'Ouli-po', 'Poulpe', suggesting the way Le Poulpe combines rules with the tropes of the genre.

The interest of these stories is not their fairly routine tropes, but that each novel has a different author, with over 200 writers contributing to date within (and/or despite) these strict parameters. The series editorial policy quickly became that any manuscript submitted would be published, leading to a proliferation of titles of highly variable quality. So what has been achieved with this multi-authored literary performance? What has the series succeeded in saying about crime fiction, particularly in a French context? The best way to understand this is to look at how the series manages the individual tropes of noir.

At least since Hammett’s ‘Poisonville’ in Red Harvest (1929), the hard-boiled novel has been an urban genre. A history of the detective novel, beginning with Poe’s ‘Murders in the Rue Morgue’, could show that it has always privileged the city. Poe's novella is also crucial, because of the importance of Paris in the development of the crime genre: Gaboriau’s L’Affaire Lerouge (1861), often considered the first full-length crime novel of ratiocination, is set in Bougival, a Parisian suburb. Likewise, Le Poulpe always begins his adventures in the French capital. However, the series also expands the idea of the city well beyond the capital. Each story begins by describing the crime or its initial discovery: Lecouvreur is then seen in the 11th arrondissement bar-restaurant, which, in contrast to his other destinations, remains a homey place to begin or recover from adventures, and receive affection from the owners. From there, particularly in the earlier volumes, the Octopus travels to various usually unheralded parts of France. It is not Paris, the traditionally privileged petri dish for crime and corruption, but the ‘Provinces’ (all regions outside the metropolis) that become places of criminality.

This trend begins with La Petite Écuyère a café where Lecouvreur travels to Dieppe in the Seine-Maritime, becoming involved with the locals and inevitably discovering that things are not as they appear. The corruption normally associated with Paris turns out to be a national (and, in later novels, an international) phenomenon. Thus, in Pouy's inaugural text, the apparent suicide of two adolescents is the work of a rich father, a militant Catholic who feared his daughter would reveal
his commando raids against abortion clinics. Although residing in a far-flung province, the aristocratic de Bély de Longuevilles are connected to fascist groups throughout Europe. Since its beginnings with Poe, but more emphatically since the appearance of the hardboiled narrative, the crime novel had seen modernity’s corruption concentrated in the city;\textsuperscript{5} in \textit{Le Poulpe} decay is not exclusively urban but ubiquitous, forgoing any easy opposition between tradition (the countryside) and modernity (the city). These forays into the four corners of France show a country under siege from anarchist Lecouvreur’s pet peeves: capital, racism, militant Catholicism, fascism.

However, there are conflicting motivations for the settings: on the one hand they show how reactionary thinking has permeated the country, particularly through the potential conservatism of regionalism; on the other, they celebrate the regional specificities of France. The ‘Pied de Porc à la Sainte Scolasse’, \textit{Le Poulpe}’s base, is the essence of this tension. The specialty and namesake dish of Gérard’s restaurant is a ‘recette célèbre d’une petite ville de l’Orne d’où était [...] originaire le Patron’ (Pouy 1995, 9) (a famous recipe from the owner’s home town in the Orne). And while the local is intensely important to these novels, so is its dialectical negation: accordingly, the dish’s primary concocters are Gérard’s Spanish wife Maria and the Hungarian cook, Vlad. Thus, one need not be from the Orne to cook its food; rather, as Gérard says, ‘il faut être un intellectuel’ (10) (you have to be an intellectual).

The dish shows how the novels avoid a blind celebration of a folk aesthetic often associated with a fascist impulse, while valorizing local resistance to the invasion of capital and commodity culture. In this sense, \textit{Le Poulpe} novels are emblematic of noir’s contradictory relationship to the local: Lecouvreur’s peregrinations are designed to underscore the genre’s use of space, movement and locale. At the same time, the fundamental tension between the desire to maintain the anti-capitalistic individuality of the local without it becoming a reactionary mythology of blood and soil unsettles the entire project.

These spatial considerations raise the question of how regional differences are translated linguistically. In the crime genre, one of the most obvious ways is through the vernacular. Its central role has been understood from its inception; as Chandler noted, in ‘The Simple Art of Murder’, the language of noir is ‘the speech of common men’ that in turn becomes ‘a literary medium’ (1995, 989). Noir’s dialogue should reflect proletarian speech, but the clichés and formalization of ‘hardboiled’ discourse ironically flattened the differences between local vernaculars.
Perhaps the most powerful example of this homogenization happened when the hardboiled novel became French. Beginning in 1945, the Série noire established a house style which was relatively easy to sustain since initially many of the works were translated from English – the prose of a broad range of authors was being reproduced by a limited number of house translators. This translational gateway made it easier to impose a standardized working-class Parisian slang on the characters. As Rachels notes in his excellent blog on noir, the genre’s use of the vernacular was determined by readers’ expectations rather than linguistic veracity: ‘American native speakers of English [...] will likely find’ the voice of Lemmy Caution, protagonist of Englishman Peter Cheyney’s Poison Ivy (1937, 1945), the first novel in Duhamel’s famous Série noire, ‘laughable, and this comedy, whether intentional or not, may well dominate their reading experiences’. But as Rachels also observes, ‘Caution's voice would have been perceived differently by Cheney’s British audience’, for whom it would have represented their own expectations of hard-boiled American English, ‘and it would have been perceived even more differently by the Frenchman Duhamel’ (Rachels 2013). Essentially, the translation process allowed Duhamel to create a distinct product with a consistent lexical palette made up of a standardized French ‘hardboiled’ slang, that continues to influence French-language noir to this day.

With multiple authors, Le Poulpe takes this idea of a standardized language to its limit. The early volumes especially maintain a kind of anarchist realism tinged with the vernacular that clearly owes a debt to the Série noire while tempering the caricatured excesses of its earliest works. The cynical-yet-idealistic poetics of Lecouvreur’s speech represent one of the constraints of the series. Nevertheless, maintaining this also demands professionalism. That is, writing crime fiction, like any writing, is primarily a craft demanding mastery of a number of techniques; unfortunately, as the number of amateur manuscripts proliferated, the ability (or willingness) of authors to adhere to house style demands diminished.

If anything remains as a kind of relic of noir’s particular linguistic playfulness it lies in the titles. Following a long tradition (that exists in the English crime tradition as well), each Le Poulpe novel has a very deliberate and heavy-handed punning title. La Petite Écurière à cafété is a silly play on ‘la petite cuillère à café’ (the little coffee spoon). These titles were designed to wink at a particular ‘habit’ of the genre while alluding to the kind of literary experimentation that would go on within the narrative: it would be both deeply ironic and humorous, never taking itself too seriously. This nevertheless demanded an ability to walk a thin
line between heavy-handed farce and ironic stylistic quotation. Not surprisingly, then, this is another place where the principle of ‘constraint’ reaches its limit. The inability of later authors to maintain stylistic consistency and to avoid the pitfalls of what can only be described as bad prose only serves to emphasize the technical literary demands of the genre. This in turn suggests that, in the final analysis, *Le Poulpe* was unable to escape the literary conventions (individual authorship and ability) it questions.

If noir is connected to particular spatial configurations and its language is defined by specific lexical practices, one of the genre’s most obvious focal points is its fascination with consumer culture. As a commodity in its own right, the crime novel merges textual and paratextual preoccupations, and the specificity of the genre is largely determined by editorial practice and reader (consumer) demands. Thus, many – perhaps most – works are classified as crime novels principally because of where and how they were published. As a popular genre, the form was always concerned with sales and distribution. One of Pouy’s primary aims for the series was to keep it relatively accessible – pricing books at 39 francs. Folio’s ten-franc reprints also helped to keep La Baleine solvent.

If the crime novel brings the corrupting influence of money into the manufacture of a literary product, this same connection to capital appears in noir narrative’s own fetishizing of commodity culture. Thus, women, fast cars, jewels, good liquor and fancy houses merge as objects of desire for the narrative’s (largely male) actors. At some point, the ‘detective’ (whatever his or her form) will inevitably be confronted with a choice concerning the seductive power of capital. Just as inevitably, whatever the detective’s final choice, he or she will return to square one, still aspiring to bourgeois security but failing because the game is rigged.

*Le Poulpe* takes this trope very seriously, and the protagonist’s relation to money and material possessions is one of the pivotal elements of the series. It is repeatedly underscored that he owns little, staying in hotels and changing living quarters every time he leaves; his belongings fit easily into ‘deux gros sacs en cuir de voyage’ (two large leather travel bags) (Pouy 1995, 13). Although he owns nothing he clearly begrudges the influence of money on others. His adventures inevitably involve wealthy aristocrats or filthy rich bourgeois, speculators ready to sacrifice the soul of a place or a life for cash, or dealers in drugs and bodies for whom profit is the goal. Nonetheless, Le Poulpe himself does not avoid opportunities to benefit financially. In fact, one of the constraints is that Lecouvreur must take a large sum from the villains before the story’s resolution.
Despite his profits, the closing pages always find our hero at the small airport of Moisselles where Raymond, an Albanian communist mechanic, endlessly rebuilds Lecouvreur's Russian Polikarpov fighter plane. Another of the constraints is that it never be fixed and never fly; rather, the plane represents a bottomless pit into which Gabriel pours any money that he has made, returning him to his original pennilessness. Rather than being beholden to capital, as in the classic crime novel where the protagonist strives for but fails to achieve the big payday, Lecouvreur repeatedly makes large sums but feeds them into the negative speculation of his plane – a deliberate wasting of money where labour takes the largest cut and the cost of production swallows any notion of profit in and into a kind of miniaturized version of an ideal – that is decapitalized – social order. Ultimately, each adventure is not an absolute failure to solve the crimes of late capitalism, but a minor victory where capital is symbolically and materially employed against itself while never being fully vanquished.

Chandler in ‘The Simple Art of Murder’ argued that in classic noir a chivalric code regulated the detective’s quest for a pre-capitalist society (1995, 989). Significantly, because of chivalry’s hypermasculine ideal, men save women from various evil forces without consummating their relationship with these objects of desire because doing so would debase the quest. In the crime novel, women are, as they have been since the medieval romance, both virgin ideal (at least symbolically) and devious monster – the ‘femme fatale’.

How Le Poulpe takes up this trope adds to the novels’ processing of the genre. There are two important female figures in the series: the first is the older motherly Maria, whose shouting of Spanish anarchist slogans undermines the bourgeois stereotype of passive maternity. More important is Cheryl, who initially appears as the quintessence of femininity to the point of deliberate caricature: a hairdresser, she surrounds herself with stuffed animals, images of famous actresses and models and objects in her favourite colour, pink. As a result, her apartment, ‘aussi précisément rangé et décoré qu’une chambre de poupée Barbie’ (Pouy 1995, 13) (as neatly organized and decorated as a Barbie doll’s room) becomes a distillation of noir gender stereotyping, not to mention misogyny. What makes Cheryl different, however, is that she does not represent the risk and/or reward of domestication. It is essential, of course, that Lecouvreur ‘n’a pas d’attache, pas de môme’ (13) (nothing to tie him down, no kids), but Cheryl remains ‘[s]a seule base arrière’ (13) (his only base camp), and to the extent that domesticity has a place in this series, she represents it. However, the stereotype tapers off,
because while Lecouvreur is her privileged partner, the relationship is not exclusive.

Despite this play on the role of women in noir, the narratives still reside within the paradigm delimited by the genre’s heteronormative assumptions, even if their power has been limited by mutually agreed erotic freedom. These novels, while theoretically open to the idea of non-normative gender roles and sexualities, virtually never represent them. Instead, Lecouvreur remains circumscribed by a narrowly violent and virile masculinity. He is also limited to an equally banal male fantasy of emotionally distant sexual encounters with a series of consistently stunning young women while being guaranteed the equally stunning Cheryl’s presence ‘at home’. Although they never resort to blatant misogyny and homophobia, the novels nevertheless only minimally transform or examine crime fiction’s foundational masculinist assumptions. Instead, as with the previous tropes, these texts push the trope of the feminine to its limit without ever surpassing it.

If a certain virile ideal is central to the hardboiled genre, one of its more obvious manifestations is violence. As Rennison (2013) notes, ‘[v]iolence is crime fiction’s raison d’être [...] only crime fiction depends on it for its very existence’. It is unsurprising then that Lecouvreur is intimately connected to various forms of violence and that these texts once again maintain (while commenting on) the fundamental architecture of noir. In the famous *Série noire* manifesto (1948), editor Duhamel noted that the genre demands ‘de l’action, de l’angoisse, de la violence – sous toutes ses formes et particulièrement les plus honnies – du tabassage et du massacre’ (action, anxiety and violence in all its forms, particularly those held in the greatest contempt – beatings and massacres). Lecouvreur embodies this idea; his relationship to the world is inherently violent. Nevertheless, here, as with *Le Poulpe’s* engagement with the gendering of the genre (and the two tropes are clearly connected through the phallic investment in the gun), the series never escapes a fundamental fetishization of violence. Rather, it reinscribes one of the most persistent and problematic features of crime fiction: its fascination with violence and, more often than not, violence done to the female body.

This chapter had three aims: first, to introduce a particularly intriguing writing and publishing phenomenon that was an important part of the French noir landscape in the nineties and that remains alive today, though in vastly diminished form; second, to suggest how these novels critique the form by emphasizing its fundamental tropes through an ‘Oulipopocean’ series of constraints; finally, to note how they reinscribe some of the more problematic aspects of the crime tradition rather
than effectively critiquing them. Stated slightly differently, while these novels do critique the crime novel as a form through a kind of hyperformalization of the standard formulae on which noir has so consistently been based, particularly in its neo-polar iteration inaugurated by Manchette in the 1970s, Le Poulpe never escapes some of the genre’s problematic habits.

Blending influences from such high literary movements as Oulipo into the post-1968 influence of radical left politics, Le Poulpe does push genre and formulae to their absolute limit. In the process, it also shows precisely what those limits mean and how they continue residually to maintain reactionary elements. As proof of their hold, there remains an undiscovered offshoot of the series. While it has not had the same success, it points to one central problem of the Poulpe project. As intimated earlier, despite her oft-noted intelligence and independence of mind, Cheryl does not participate in the Le Poulpe intrigues. Rather, she sleeps with Lecouvreur and guards his belongings. The active role remains a male prerogative and when the series finally convinced women writers to become involved, they very quickly demanded that Cheryl become a detective.

In the first episode of this offshoot series, Crève de plaisanterie (Die from Joking, significantly, a pun on ‘Trève de plaisanterie’ or ‘Enough is enough’) by Stéphanie Benson, Cheryl rejects Lecouvreur’s advances and instead leaves to solve a crime in which he is uninterested. The series revisits many of the other assumptions of the Poulpe as well. Although the heroine receives assistance from various male figures, these, as in the case of the cross-dressing hippy gay Jeannot, escape Le Poulpe’s usually heteronormative universe. Interestingly, in the process, Benson brings back the figure of the femme fatale in full force since the mastermind of the novel’s murders is the gay mayor’s humiliated wife. In so doing, however, she also resuscitates one of the oft-forgotten features of the femme fatale: she is traditionally invested, however problematically, with a tremendous amount of power.

As the example of the 14 Cheryl novels shows, Le Poulpe clearly stretches the limits of the genre, occasionally reversing some of its more egregious stereotypes while remaining unable to escape others. The Cheryl novels comment on the remaining sedimented misogyny and homophobia, seeing them as ‘constraints’ that – beyond the playfulness of an Oulipopo game – still need challenging. Thus, while Le Poulpe represents a significant moment in the history of the crime novel, and is part of the genre’s recent evolution, its most radical contribution may not lie with the Octopus himself, but with Cheryl and the challenge within and to the series that she represents.
Notes

1. Oulipo or ‘Ouvroir de littérature potentielle’ (Workshop for Potential Literature) was a literary movement inaugurated in 1960 by author Raymond Queneau and engineer and mathematician François le Lionnais. Best known, perhaps, for author Georges Perec’s La Disparition (A Void), a novel of several hundred pages where the letter ‘e’ never appears (quite a feat in French), the movement imposed restrictions on the writing enterprise.

2. François le Lionnais inaugurated Oulipopo, or ‘Ouvroir de littérature policière potentielle’ (Workshop for Potential Crime Fiction) in 1976.

3. In Surrealism and the Art of Crime (2008), Eburne specifically addresses the complex relationship between ideological engagement and the development of French noir. His reading places particular emphasis—arguably too much—on the influence of Surrealism on the formation and evolution of the genre. Nonetheless, his understanding of a shift away from the purely instrumental function of the literary in the crime novel has significantly influenced my own thinking.

4. Other publishers’ series/collections include La Baleine, Fleuve noir, Le Pavillon noir, Le Masque. Each has its stable of authors, often an editorial language and style, as well as other distinctive features.

5. For a fuller theorization of these claims see Higginson (2011). For the most important authority on the subject, see Cawelti (1976).

6. There was therefore a link between Oulipopo and Le Poulpe from the outset. As the series developed there were further connections with Oulipo, most notably when Hervé Le Tellier, a card-carrying member of Oulipo, contributed the title La Disparition de Perek to the Poulpe series.

7. These rules and a great deal more information about the series can be found at www.editionsbaleine.fr/content/6-presentation-poulpe.

8. For more on the emergence of the city as a central character, particularly in the American strain of noir, see Willett (1996).

9. As noted in The Noir Atlantic (Higginson 2011), this becomes particularly odd when the translation is of an African American author such as Himes, whose work made extensive use of Harlem slang. If the translation process essentially erased one of the more interesting features of Himes’s work, in the case of Cheyney the translations are stylistically more consistent and smoother than the original.

10. Of, say, Gérard de Villier’s notoriously reactionary SAS series.


12. As evidenced by the poster for the 1998 movie version of Le Poulpe, which announced, ‘pour l’attendrir, faut taper dessus’ (to tenderize him/it, you have to beat it/him).

13. Beginning with Laisser bronzer les cadavres (1971) and L’Affaire N’Gustro (1971), Jean-Patrick Manchette transformed noir into an explicit tool for social commentary and heavily influenced subsequent authors of noir such as Pouy. Manchette himself was largely influenced by the anarchism of the Situationist International (1957–72) and brought its merging of ethics, aesthetics and politics to the crime genre.

Nick Heffernan

According to Gramsci, serial tales are ‘a powerful factor in the formation of the mentality and morality of the people’. ‘The serial novel’, he suggests, ‘is a real way of day-dreaming’ whose heroes ‘enter into the intellectual life of the people [...] and acquire the validity of historical figures’ (1991, 34, 349–50). The cultural power Gramsci attaches to fiction might be claimed with even more authority for film. During and immediately after World War II average weekly cinema attendance in the US reached an all-time high: between 1941 and 1945 it numbered 85 million; between 1946 and 1948, 90 million (Schatz 1999, 462). From 1944 onwards, the figure of the war veteran appeared as protagonist in increasing numbers of films watched by huge audiences. Demobilized servicemen and women were leading characters in films of all genres, but it was in a cycle of dark, violent private-eye crime thrillers released between 1945 and 1949 that the returning veteran most vividly entered the popular imaginary, taking on the validity – and the complexity – of Gramsci’s ‘historical figure’.¹

Arguably, these dozen films form a coherent crime series due to the close proximity of their release dates, the centrality of the veteran as protagonist and primary investigator, and the recurrence of themes, plot devices and motifs linking the stories in reviewers’ and audiences’ minds. But they are constituted as a series at a deeper level still by the ideological work they perform. The investigative projects forced upon the veteran compel him to re-evaluate domestic civilian life in the light of his overseas wartime ordeal. This experience grants him the alienated, detached and sometimes oppositional consciousness of the social critic, forming a lens through which he interrogates the new social order constructed in his absence. Moreover, the investigative structure of the private-eye narrative allows the makers of these films – some of them
committed leftists who would become victims of the anti-communist blacklist – to engage in similarly critical examination of that order. Yet the combination of Hollywood storytelling conventions and a rising tide of post-war conservatism prescribed that these narratives ultimately offer comfort to audiences and affirm the social order. Vacillating between social critique and mythic reassurance, the war-veteran private-eye series points to a set of broader tensions within post-war America connected to the displacement of a New Deal ethos of progressive reform by the corporate authoritarianism of the emergent Cold War epoch.

On 22 June 1944, preparing for the release of nearly 13 million Americans from the armed forces, Congress approved the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, popularly known as the GI Bill of Rights, the largest single welfare measure in US history (Adams 1994, 152). The same week, producer Walter Wanger assured *Motion Picture Herald* that Hollywood would play its part in the peace effort as it had in the war effort. Announcing that ‘post-war is now’, Wanger identified ‘the reincorporation into our national life of the men and women of the armed forces’ as ‘the most urgent homefront problem to be dealt with by screen and press’ (Doherty 1993, 200).

A prominent Hollywood liberal, Wanger envisaged that post-war problems would continue to be handled in the moderately progressive manner that characterized the movies’ treatment of social issues during the war itself. Encouraged by the government Office of War Information, which for the duration assumed film censorship duties from the industry’s internal Production Code Administration, a New Deal ethos of collectivism, inclusivity and pro-labour sentiment pervaded wartime films (Koppes and Black 1988, 142–6). Yet a conservative countermovement was underway well before hostilities ceased. From 1944 the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals devoted itself to combating what it described as ‘the growing impression that this industry is [...] dominated by Communists, radicals and crack-pots’. Its hard-line anti-Roosevelt leadership was as committed to driving New Deal themes from the screen and militancy from film industry labour unions as it was to inaugurating a ‘new Red-baiting era in Hollywood’ (Ceplair and Englund 1980, 211). Consequently, film treatment of post-war social issues would become the site of intensifying struggle between left and right.

The veteran was central to this struggle not just because the urgency of ‘servicemen’s readjustment’ commanded Hollywood’s attention, but also because of the peculiar ambiguity surrounding ex-servicemen in the popular mind. Even before demobilization, feverish public discourse
debated whether the veteran was a hero or a menace. ‘He is variously represented’, wrote one exasperated ex-soldier, ‘as a simple-witted boy whose only thought is coming home to Mom and blueberry pie’ and ‘a trained killer who will stalk the land with a tommy-gun shooting up labor leaders and war profiteers’. Was the veteran ‘a starry-eyed idealist who will fashion a perfect world single-handed’ or ‘a mental case whose aberrations will upset the tidy households and offices of America for a generation?’ Americans, it seemed, could not decide whether he was ‘a promise to democracy’ or ‘a potential threat’ (Bolté 1945, 1, 6).

Such uncertainty reflected deeper anxieties about the direction in which post-war America might develop. In film terms, however, the aura of unpredictability and potential violence surrounding the veteran appealed strongly to makers of thrillers who had been officially guided away from crime subjects in wartime in favour of more public-spirited fare (Koppes and Black 1988, 106–7). Moreover, so much had changed while GI Joe was away that the figure of the veteran was tailor-made to fill the role of unofficial detective probing into the nature of the transformed world. Thus a new inflection of the hardboiled private-eye thriller emerged. With regard to the ideological struggle in the post-war film world it was the radicals and New Dealers who struck first.

Cornered, released in December 1945, inaugurated the veteran private-eye series. Producer Adrian Scott and director Edward Dmytryk had been behind 1944’s hit Chandler adaptation Murder My Sweet. Now, though, communists Scott and Dmytryk, with screenwriter and fellow Party member John Wexley, retooled the hardboiled gumshoe yarn into an anti-fascist preachment reminding audiences of the need for continued vigilance against Nazism beyond Germany’s military defeat.² Lieutenant Gerard is a demobbed pilot tracking the collaborationist who in the war’s last days betrayed his wife, a French resistance fighter, to the Gestapo. Gerard’s investigations take him to Argentina where he uncovers a clandestine network of financiers, industrialists and socialites who are plotting a return to fascist world domination. Cornered climaxes with Gerard murdering shadowy fascist mastermind Jarnac – a celluloid ringer for real-life Nazi fugitive Martin Boorman – after Jarnac gloats that Western political complacency and the persistence of poverty and injustice will guarantee the re-emergence of fascism in the world. Thus the leftist film-makers issue a premonitory warning about residual Nazism while identifying fascism with the capitalist ruling class and suggesting that only progressive social reforms could prevent its recrudescence.

But it was its representation of the veteran rather than its anti-fascist message that sold Cornered to reviewers and moviegoers. Gerard’s
volatility and moral ambiguity – his hunger for bloody vengeance and his disgust at the decadence of affluent civilians – chimed with the American public’s contradictory image of the war-scarred ex-serviceman, making him an engaging noir protagonist and eliciting critical superlatives (Langdon 2008, 122). Special praise was reserved for the showdown with Jarnac in which a near-psychotic Gerard beats the Nazi kingpin to death with his fists. ‘I guess I was a little kill crazy,’ he admits, indicating that the veteran walks not just an emotional and psychological razor’s edge but an ideological one too, for killing Jarnac threatens to undermine the painstaking efforts of an anti-fascist cell to trace the full extent of the Nazi conspiracy. This being Hollywood, the hero gets to kill the heavy and see his entire organization wiped out. The film makes it clear however that Gerard’s instability and intrinsically American individualism might hinder as much as help the broader anti-fascist cause.

Cornered locates its fascists overseas; Orson Welles’s The Stranger (May 1946) places them in the American heartland. Though not strictly speaking an ex-serviceman, Allied War Crimes investigator Wilson embodies enough of the veteran’s qualities and experience to function as a clear surrogate. He returns from war-ravaged Europe on the trail of Kindler, a fugitive Nazi whom he suspects of masquerading as a respected teacher at an exclusive Connecticut school. To flush out his quarry Wilson requires the covert assistance of Kindler’s devoted new wife. When she refuses to countenance Wilson’s suspicions about her husband, the investigator resorts to shock tactics, forcing her to watch newsreel footage of Nazi death camps in order to shatter her complacency. Reminded that the horror of Nazism outlives its military defeat, the traumatized wife provokes Kindler into showing his hand and he and his visions of a Fourth Reich are extinguished.

Welles was an ardent Roosevelt New Dealer rather than a radical leftist, but The Stranger’s anti-fascism is at least as far-reaching as Cornered’s. Where the latter indicted the capitalist class as fascist running dogs while keeping its Nazis outside the US, Welles suggests they may find a home in the upper reaches of respectable American society, insinuating themselves seamlessly into ‘normal’ political and civic life. The Stranger’s key scene in which the usually restrained Wilson brutally compels Kindler’s fragile wife to watch the concentration camp footage draws its power from the investigator’s association with the veteran figure. Grim, relentless and unforgiving, Wilson here displays the impatience and contempt many veterans felt towards civilians oblivious to the horrors of war, and expresses their fear, as one veteran put it, that ‘the peace will be fumbled this time as it was last time’.
Stranger deployed the veteran private-eye narrative to counteract what many GIs came to understand only as a result of leaving the US – ‘the political naiveté of most Americans’ (Bolté 1945, 38, 3, 28). However, the fact that these narratives made women the principal obstruction in delivering this lesson – Gerard is nearly distracted by Jarnac’s alluring wife – suggested that the veteran’s cultural significance was bound up as much with his experience on the sexual battlefield as on the military and political ones.

Indeed, public discourse at the time was much concerned that the veteran would return from a shooting war only to find himself in a sex war. Wartime employment patterns and loosened moral strictures had made millions of American women economically and sexually independent. Anxieties about promiscuity surrounded the single woman and the inconstant wife alike, while it was understood (though seldom stated) that GIs might have been less than faithful themselves while overseas. Mass demobilization drove the divorce rate to an all-time high in 1946 with veterans’ marriages twice as likely to disintegrate as those of civilians (May 1988, 68–9; Childers 2009, 8), but the popular press uniformly exhorted women to stand by their men even if, as Good Housekeeping warned, ‘he may be a different person when he returns’ (in Childers 2009, 69).

This is the context into which navy veteran Johnny Morrison steps as The Blue Dahlia (April 1946) opens. He finds home-sweet-home the site of an orgiastic drinking party presided over by intoxicated wife Helen and her nightclub-tycoon boyfriend, Eddie Harwood. Discovering that Helen has become a good-time girl and that her wantonness caused the death of their child, a seething Johnny roughs her up. Later, regretful, he resolves to work at their marriage, but Helen’s murdered body is discovered and Johnny is the chief suspect. The veteran turns detective in order to clear his name, in the process uncovering a web of greed, violence and sexual anarchy that, the film hints, has characterized home-front America while the likes of Johnny have been fighting overseas.

Johnny is a credible suspect for Helen’s murder not just because of her aberrant behaviour but because it was commonly assumed that veterans would be prone to crime and outbursts of random violence. ‘Trained to kill: the coming veteran crime wave’ and ‘Will your boy be a killer when he returns?’ were two of many similar headlines adorning newspapers in 1944 and 1945 (Childers 2009, 4, 131). The spotlight of suspicion also picks out Johnny’s veteran buddy, Buzz, a wounded ‘psychoneurotic’ prone to violent mood swings and amnesia due to the metal
plate in his head. Johnny and Buzz represent two sides of the veteran’s threatening masculinity: the trained killer on an emotional hair trigger, especially regarding his sexual pride, and the damaged neurotic unable to control his volatile impulses.

The Blue Dahlia deploys the veteran private-eye narrative both to explore public anxieties regarding the veteran himself and to expose the venality and seediness of a home front officially represented in terms of collective sacrifice and co-operative endeavour. A 1945 Saturday Evening Post feature registered veterans’ dismay at the ‘cant, greed, luxury, hypocrisy, lust and avarice’ they found at home, and recorded their disgust at ‘the lascivious nightclub air of those who have fattened on war and death’ (in Childers 2009, 212). In this respect the film is a socially critical, demythologizing text, especially in its linking of playboy racketeer Harwood with the capitalists and entrepreneurs who made home-front hay while the bullets flew. Yet Johnny’s investigative activity partners him with Harwood’s estranged wife, Joyce, the incarnation of feminine fidelity whose testimony is vital in exonerating Johnny and Buzz. If the unruly Helen is the cause of the mayhem that engulfs Johnny on his homecoming and the object of his inquiry into the transformed social order constructed in his absence, Joyce is the agent of his successful reintegration into that order. As the attractive helpmeet she embodies the restored normality in post-war gender relations strongly encouraged by government and business (May 1988, 75–91). The Blue Dahlia’s home-front critique is tempered by a conservative gender politics in which the threat posed by the war-liberated woman is countered by the wifely nurturer who assumes responsibility for veteran rehabilitation and the restoration of domestic ‘normalcy’.

Dead Reckoning (January 1947) and The Guilty (March 1947) also portrayed veterans launched upon investigative quests by the unsettling conduct of libidinous sirens. In the former, demobilized paratrooper Rip Murdock discovers that a missing army buddy has been murdered after being lured into a sleazy underworld network by amoral beauty Coral Chandler. Though attracted to her, Rip rejects Coral, placing loyalty to his buddy first. ‘I loved him more,’ Rip informs Coral, coolly watching her expire from injuries he has inflicted on her in their eroticized struggle at the film’s climax. In The Guilty, ex-soldier Mike Carr investigates a murder, ostensibly to exonerate the chief suspect, his psychoneurotic buddy Johnny, whose amnesia leaves him without an alibi. Johnny is cleared, but only after we learn that Mike himself is the killer. Goaded by his girlfriend’s pursuit of other men, including Johnny, Mike attempts to murder her but mistakenly kills her twin
sister. His ‘investigation’ is a ruse to conceal his guilt and implicate Johnny. In its depiction of jealousy and betrayal between battle comrades, *The Guilty* subverts the romanticized ‘band of brothers’ mythology that dominates public perception of World War II veterans (Rose 2008, 1–4), but it locates that betrayal’s cause in the aberrant sexuality of the girlfriend, manipulating both vulnerable Johnny and unstable Mike for her own gratification. Thus the socially critical aspects of these films, expressed through the veteran’s disgust at home-front sleaze and corruption, are recuperated by a regressive gender politics which spills over into misogynistic glee at the demise or discomfiture of ‘bad girls’ who abrogate sexual norms and callously toy with veterans’ hearts.

Veterans reserved particular animosity for those who spent the duration accumulating private wealth. President Roosevelt denounced war profiteers and Senator Truman investigated them, but the considerable financial fruits of increased wartime production were nonetheless monopolized by a concentrated group of corporations and individuals (Adams 1994, 118). The veteran private-eye series articulated unease about wartime corporate expansion, asking whether the war was fought for democracy and the common man or for the benefit of big business. It hinted at the class-conscious anger that made the period 1944–46 one of unprecedented labour militancy (Zinn 1990, 408–9). Its narrative resolutions offered compromise however: the working-class veteran’s hostility towards the rich and powerful is ultimately subordinated to authority figures who represent the expanded post-war state apparatus and signal a recomposition of the New Deal relationship between labour, capital and government.

In *Somewhere in the Night* (June 1946) a wounded soldier emerges from a coma with no memory of the ‘George Taylor’ named in his identification papers. Seeking to reconstruct his pre-combat life, the amnesiac veteran discovers that Taylor is a fictitious identity he invented to enlist in the service and dodge his criminal past. Taylor is really Larry Cravat, a sleazy private detective involved in the appropriation of two million dollars of sequestered Nazi capital and entangled with a network of murderous American businessmen. Horrified by this discovery, Taylor assists the authorities in recovering the money and rounding up the thieves, repudiating the reprehensible Cravat and truly becoming George Taylor, the good citizen forged by military service.

Cravat and his business associates are clearly surrogates for war profiteers and the film’s association of their ill-gotten wealth with the Nazis recalls politicians’ wartime denunciations of profiteers as traitors. *The Chase* (November 1946) likewise draws parallels between the business
class and the organized criminal underworld, each characterized by greed and ruthlessness. Penniless amnesiac war hero Chuck Scott rebels against his domineering employer, gangster-plutocrat Eddie Roman, echoing the spirit of the great post-war strike wave. Yet Chuck is only able to bring Roman down due to the intervention of a kindly Navy psychiatrist who helps him recover crucial repressed memories. Again, the repudiation of the capitalist-profiteer is merely a stage on the way to the veteran’s ultimate accommodation with the benevolent authority of the state. The same pattern is repeated in *Ride the Pink Horse* (September 1947). Here, embittered veteran Lucky Gagin hunts down corrupt businessman Hugo who has made a fortune from fraudulent government war contracts. The veteran’s moral and ideological ambiguity is indicated by the haziness of Gagin’s motives: is he seeking revenge for Hugo’s murder of an army buddy, or does the impecunious Gagin want a slice of Hugo’s action for himself? That he finally cooperates with the FBI to bring Hugo to justice recuperates Gagin’s hostility to the business class and his cynicism about Uncle Sam, subordinating these subversive impulses to the imperatives of the post-war state.

These films, then, used the veteran to channel anxieties about the increased power of American business into resolutions that implied there would be no return to the class conflicts of the 1930s, for the state’s newly expanded role would manage relations between capital and labour in the interests of all. The post-war press was replete with articles hailing American capitalism’s miraculous recovery from depression, invariably attributing it to a new kind of partnership between bosses, workers and government (Bell 1949). However, the truth was that wartime economic priorities secured ‘the triumph of the large corporations’, boosted the dominance of ‘a wealthy elite’, and caused New Dealers to retreat from reforming capitalism into managing it in the interests of profits and growth (Adams 1994, 118; Zinn 1990, 408; Brinkley 1996). The veteran private eye’s hostility to business elites implicitly critiqued this new order, but his narrative capitulation to the leadership of state-sanctioned authority figures affirmed it.

However, certain veteran private-eye films went so far as to link America’s post-war pro-business orientation with the fascism just defeated. In *Act of Violence* (December 1948) ex-prisoner of war Joe Parkson tracks down fellow POW Frank Enley, not for a bonding session but to kill him. Enley betrayed an escape plan to their Nazi captors in return for increased food rations, causing the deaths of ten of his compatriots. While the traumatized Joe has struggled to readjust to civilian life, the plausible Frank has built a business empire. Before we know the cause of Joe’s hatred, he
resembles the post-war bogeyman of the unstable, potentially psychotic veteran; when Frank’s role in his backstory is revealed, Joe is refigured as the righteous nemesis of a business class whose selfishness and acquisitiveness are inflections of the fascist mentality and collaborationist ethos. Indeed, Frank’s perfect family and suburban home suggest that the conformity and materialism of the post-war boom are extensions of that mentality and ethos. Frank’s confession that he betrayed his comrades out of a desire to consume – ‘ten men were dead and I couldn’t stop eating’ – indicts both the greed of the entrepreneur and the consumerist foundations of the entire post-war capitalist order. Moreover, Frank’s offence is that he informed on comrades, the film drawing a parallel between Nazism and the anti-communist witch hunts that were by 1948 already prominent in American public life: the film’s writer Robert L. Richards was blacklisted after being named as a communist in a fellow screenwriter’s testimony to Congress’s Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) (Vaughn 1996, 295).

The same parallel between American business ethics and the mentality of fascists and collaborators is established in *The Clay Pigeon* (March 1949). Amnesiac veteran Jim Fletcher wakes from a two-year coma to find himself awaiting court martial for treason. Fleeing, he turns detective to illuminate his past, discovering he has been framed by a fellow ex-POW now running a multimillion-dollar counterfeiting business and who wants Jim out of circulation. Worse, Jim’s antagonist is partnered with a sadistic guard from their Japanese POW camp, now masquerading in the US as a respectable property developer. Like *Act of Violence*, the film pulls no punches in its attacks on the greed and amorality of business while puncturing the patriotic band-of-brothers myth that by the late 1940s was crystallizing around ex-servicemen, encouraged by right-wing veterans’ organizations such as the red-baiting American Legion (Childers 2009, 229–30). *The Clay Pigeon*’s themes of collaboration and informing likewise rebounded on its writer Carl Foreman who, like Richards, was blacklisted following a fellow writer’s HUAC testimony (Vaughn 1996, 157).

Again, though, these trenchant critiques of post-war complacency, consumerism and a quasi-fascist business class were tempered by affirmative endings in which the veteran is reintegrated into society through the intervention of state agencies and supportive, domesticated women. Yet their oneiric noir stylistics, and the unrelenting cynicism of their protagonists towards elites and patriotic bromides, unsettle these pat resolutions. *Collier’s* magazine observed in 1947 that ‘the selfishness, greed and dishonesty which total war has increased throughout the
country have poisoned many a veteran’s soul’ (in Rose 2008, 232). These films suggest, rather, that it is the nation’s soul that has been poisoned by capitulation to the imperatives of business and profit.

Playwright Arthur Miller described 1949 as ‘the last postwar year’ (1974, 31). Thereafter, ‘normalcy’ presided, but it would be a normalcy defined not by the reforming liberalism of the New Deal thirties but by a ‘conservative liberalism’ of capitalists and cold warriors pushing consumerism and anti-communism (Hodgson 1976, 90). The final entry in the war-veteran private-eye series bears this out. In *The Crooked Way* (April 1949) amnesiac veteran Eddie Rice investigates his pre-war past to discover that he is ‘really’ hoodlum Eddie Riccardi who joined the service under a false name to evade the wrath of gangland associates. Appalled at his former self, Eddie seeks redemption by bringing down his old racket while winning back estranged wife Nina who has divorced him and joined his former underworld partners. Eddie’s rehabilitation is completed as he helps police break up the old gang, regains Nina’s affections, and trades in anti-social Riccardi for war-hero and upright citizen Rice.

As we have seen, the reassuring narrative resolutions of other war-veteran private-eye movies are destabilized by socially critical themes, disorienting formal manoeuvres, and the protagonists’ cynicism and anger. In *The Crooked Way*, however, film noir mood and stylistics are vehicles for a celebration of two central discourses of the post-war order: domesticity and informing. First, Nina’s rehabilitation is as important as Eddie’s. His ex-wife initially rejects Eddie’s advances on the grounds that the war has made her economically and sexually independent, prompting Eddie to resort to kidnap and mild domestic violence to convince her of the desirability of remarriage. Second, the cause of the old Eddie’s rift with his hoodlum friends is that he had turned state’s evidence against them. New Eddie completes old Eddie’s work, assisting the police against the racketeers, vindicating himself and bringing in Nina as a fellow informer. Testifying against one-time colleagues is the sacrament that blesses Eddie’s and Nina’s personal rehabilitation, just as ‘naming names’ became central to discrediting New Deal liberalism and embedding paranoid anti-communism in the post-war order (Navasky 1981, 3–5).

For many veterans, war experience made it necessary to question power and criticize hierarchy: ‘the men once reverenced and dominant, the institutions and ways of society which confined us’, confessed one, ‘have lost much of their magic power to awe and oppress’ (Bolté 1945, 5). The veteran private-eye series reflects this spirit, depicting the veteran as an ‘historical figure’ large in the popular imagination, around whom a struggle over the meaning of the war and the ensuing social order
revolves. Gramsci notes that total war can prompt a progressive turn in ‘national-popular consciousness’, breeding ‘a deep-seated bond of democratic solidarity between directing intellectuals and popular masses’ (1991, 325). The left-inclined, socially critical aspects of the veteran private-eye series illustrate this. Yet *The Crooked Way* turns the subversive, questioning and volatile veteran into a compliant informer and apostle of the ‘marriage boom’ that underpinned a new political consensus in which ‘cold war policies abroad and anticommunism at home’ became tied ‘to the suburban family ideal’ (May 1988, 208). The film exemplifies how the democratic bond between intellectuals and masses nurtured by war could be colonized by the dominant culture ‘which, to exercise [its] hegemony better, accommodates part of proletarian ideology’ (Gramsci 1991, 363).

Ultimately, the veteran private-eye series fell victim to the Cold War culture its narratives showed emerging. In 1947 the major studios instituted the anti-communist blacklist, and ex-business mogul and new Motion Picture Association chief Eric Johnston instructed Hollywood that ‘we’ll have no more films that show the seamy side of American life’ (in May 2000, 177). With left-leaning creative film personnel on the run and even progressive veterans’ organizations forcibly disbanded as communist fronts (Childers 2009, 230), the industry prioritized films that celebrated American business, family life and capitalist democracy. The embittered, volatile and interrogative veteran was replaced by the unambiguous heroes of the post-war combat film, embodiments of a new movie regime in which World War II was presented in terms of ‘sanitized guts and glory’ (Doherty 1993, 272).

Notes

1. The online AFI Catalog suggests some 70 films featuring war-veteran protagonists were released between 1944 and 1949, about 5 per cent of total film production for the period.
2. John Paxton, who revised Wexley’s first draft, took final writing credit. Scott, Dmytryk and Wexley were later blacklisted, although in 1951 Dmytryk turned informer for Congress in order to salvage his career (Ceplair and Englund 1980, 323–60).
3. Ten per cent of servicemen – 1.3 million soldiers – were treated for psychological trauma, causing public paranoia about ‘psychoneurotic’ veterans (Childers 2009, 8, 230).
4. During the war industrial production doubled, US GDP and corporate profits nearly doubled, and from 1943 to 1946 over ten million American workers went on strike at some point (Brinkley 1996, 317; Zinn 1990, 408–9).
The Structure of the Whole: James Ellroy’s *LA Quartet* Series

*Steven Powell*

The *Los Angeles Quartet* comprises some of the most critically praised work in the career of American crime writer James Ellroy, yet despite its influence on the genre, the *LA Quartet* is not easy to define or quantify in terms of which works belong to the series, nor is its identity as a series fixed. Most sources, including the author himself, refer to the *Quartet* as the following four works: *The Black Dahlia* (1987), a novelization of the unsolved murder of Elizabeth Short; *The Big Nowhere* (1988), in which a string of homosexual murders are set against the backdrop of the Second Red Scare; *L.A. Confidential* (1990), a sprawling noir thriller which satirizes Hollywood and the Disney Corporation; and the concluding volume *White Jazz* (1992), where an uncontrollable outburst of violence takes LA to the brink of anarchy. The novels, however, are not bound together in strict narrative lines, but broadly cover the years 1947 to 1959: *White Jazz*, for instance, is narrated by the protagonist Dave Klein in an indeterminate present day looking back on events in LA in 1959. The titles of the second and fourth novels refer specifically to music, and the novels flow through Ellroy’s fictional reimagining of LA history not as direct sequels but as a form of literary music in which the narrative voice is another instrument added to the plotting and milieu, which is exemplified on an individual level: Ellroy once described his characters as people who ‘dance to the music in their own heads’ (Tucker 2012, 5).

But it is not only the narrative within the novels which avoids strict definitions: the series itself has been reformulated. Freiburger argues that Ellroy’s second novel *Clandestine* (1982) ‘ought to be included with the later novels to make up an L.A. Quintet’, as a scene from *Clandestine* involving Dudley Smith, who would later become a prominent *Quartet* character, was rewritten for *The Black Dahlia* (1996, 95). Freiburger’s argument has credibility, especially as in a 1987 interview...
Ellroy revealed that he was planning to make the leading character of *Clandestine*, Freddy Underhill, return in *White Jazz* (Swaim 2012, 18). In addition, Ellroy’s publishers have produced an alternative grouping of the *Quartet* as the pared-down anthology *The Dudley Smith Trio* (1999), which excises *The Black Dahlia* from the collection because it does not contain the Smith character. This editorial decision inadvertently questions the structure of the *Quartet*. The issue of whether Ellroy wrote a Trio, Quartet or Quintet or individual, stand-alone novels is further complicated by Ellroy’s own statements, retractions and redefinitions. Rather than trying, as Freiburger does, to redefine the *Quartet* by differentiating between which narratives belong or exist outside it, I would argue that Ellroy’s entire career is a form of para-oeuvre, in which he is continually expanding upon and complicating the *Quartet* narratives. In this chapter, I shall explore how Ellroy continued the *Quartet* even after he proclaimed its completion: ‘I have finished the L.A. Quartet. It is considered a monument of some sort – I consider it a great monument’ (in Duncan 2012, 74). Ellroy’s participation in this continued narrative was not always intentional, nor was his publicized change of direction and return to the *Quartet*’s themes straightforward. His drawing on memory and personal experience further complicates the question, what is the *LA Quartet*? Revisitings and reimaginings continue to elicit fresh emotional, and most recently novelistic, responses from Ellroy.

In his influential essay ‘The Typology of Detective Fiction’ Todorov defined it as the story of the crime and the story of the investigation, but added the caveat that the best of each new generation of crime writers would strive to break the rules:

> We might say that at a certain point detective fiction experiences as an unjustified burden the constraints of this or that genre and gets rid of them in order to constitute a new code. The rule of the genre is perceived as a constraint once it becomes pure form and is no longer justified by the structure of the whole. (Todorov 1977, 52)

Ellroy deviates from this pattern in that he is not simply trying to form a ‘new code’ within the novels, but is constantly redefining narrative boundaries outside the scope of both novels and series, so that the ‘structure of the whole’ becomes the story of the novels and the story adjacent to the novels. Seed has argued that Todorov’s definition requires an ‘ideally detached detective’ and makes the case that in other genres, such as spy fiction, the protagonist ‘is often himself an agent and therefore [...] implicated in the very processes he is investigating’ (2003, 115). In
the Quartet, Ellroy is both author and investigator. As Seed might put it, he is implicated in the very processes he is investigating through his continual need to adapt them into narrative and see where the results take him, even if it leads to him contradicting his earlier statements. Yet his ownership of the story as he lived it and wrote about it prevents the forced but necessary objectivity of the detective. The LA Quartet began before Ellroy was consciously aware of starting the series, as he has explained: ‘about mid-way through The Black Dahlia, I realized that I wanted to create a quartet about Los Angeles (my own smog-bound fatherland) between the years of 1947 and 1959’, and it would only reach its most dazzlingly complex forms after the final novel, whereas his previous attempt at a crime series was nondescript (Duncan 2012, 71).

This prior attempt consisted of the Lloyd Hopkins novels. From its inception, Ellroy seemed unsure exactly how to develop the series. The first novel, Blood on the Moon (1984), was based on a manuscript titled ‘L.A. Death Trip’ which had been rejected 17 times and was finally published by the Mysterious Press after extensive revisions. With the blessing of his editors, happy at the prospect of a profitable series character, Ellroy decided to write more Hopkins novels. At one point a Quintet was planned, provisionally entitled ‘Hopkins in Jeopardy’, but Ellroy only ever published three Hopkins books. To a degree, his ambivalence towards completing the series was deliberate: ‘I wanted to do a limited series with [Hopkins], chart his psychology over a set period of time, and then abandon him on some sort of ambiguous note’ (Silet 2012, 45). The three novels, since reprinted in a single volume, remain amongst Ellroy’s most orthodox fiction. He has since tried to draw a distinction between an author’s vision and the conventions of publishing:

The implications of editors – write a series character, a sympathetic private eye, British inspector, innocent person who keeps getting caught up in violent intrigue, so that readers can have somebody to come back to and come back to and come back to. I have decided to ignore that rule and forge my own territory. (Duncan 2012, 78)

The challenge to the reader is to navigate the unconventional narrative paths the Quartet characters take. With Dave Klein, the ending to White Jazz suggests continuation, with unsolved conflicts and violence looming:

*I’m going back. I’m going to make Exley confess every monstrous deal he ever cut with the same candor I have. I’m going to kill Carlisle, and make
Dudley fill in every moment of his life – to eclipse my guilt with the sheer weight of his evil. I’m going to kill him in the name of our victims. (Ellroy 1993, 359, emphasis in original)

Klein begins his narration to White Jazz with the lines ‘I want to go with the music – spin, fall with it’: by the final coda it is as though the music is beginning again, his voice speeding up as he goes from relaying his story to the brink of living a new chapter, but it would be some time before Ellroy returned to the Quartet series (1993, 1, emphasis in original). The passionate anger of Klein’s closing narration is left unfulfilled, although the energy is still present, to be rekindled later. Despite the narrative potential of the novel’s climax, Ellroy was unambiguous in declaring the volume to be the last of the series, his final Los Angeles-set novel, and his farewell to the city: ‘Noir is dead for me because historically, I think it’s a simple view. I’ve taken it as far as it can go’ (Hogan 2012, 54).

It could be argued, however, that with his next novel, American Tabloid (1995), Ellroy was pushing the boundaries of noir still further. The first of the Underworld USA trilogy, Tabloid was published three years after White Jazz and covers American history from 1958 to 1963, culminating in the assassination of President Kennedy. In both theme and style, the Underworld novels are the Quartet on an epic scale, with Ellroy applying the cover-ups, conspiracies and webs of intrigue to a revisionist view of America’s, rather than merely LA’s, history. This was not the defined break from the Quartet that he had claimed, indeed White Jazz and American Tabloid have overlapping timeframes and share several characters. However, within these similarities there are also discontinuities and contradiction. Mob hitman Pete Bondurant appears in both series, in the Quartet as a minor role and in Underworld as a leading character; then there are historical figures who appear or are alluded to in both novels, such as Howard Hughes and Sam Giancana. White Jazz ends with Bondurant being coerced by Hughes into giving Klein a fierce beating. Hughes, watching Bondurant pound Klein, is described as dapper, ‘in a business suit and wing tips’, and is presumably of sound mind and in good health (Ellroy 1993, 349). However, in the opening scene of American Tabloid, set prior to the ending of White Jazz, Hughes is injecting drugs into his penis and appears to be a total recluse, consumed by his phobias and obsessions. In part, the inconsistency reflects Ellroy’s pragmatism concerning the Quartet narrative: ‘you will find these inaccuracies throughout the text of my books, and you generally find they’re dramatically justified’ (Powell 2012, 190). Hughes the
impeccably dressed man-in-charge, and Hughes the desperate junkie exist simultaneously for Ellroy, and he is confident, given the complexities of the historical figure, that his fictional universe can accommodate both of them.

Ellroy’s approach to the Quartet series, especially after its apparent end, had become emotionally driven and more than just a carry-over as he transitioned into the Underworld series. In 1994 Ellroy published Hollywood Nocturnes after feeling ‘some separation pangs from Los Angeles’ (Duncan 2012, 76). The book is a collection of short stories which serve as mini-prequels to the Quartet, with Ellroy resurrecting several characters, including Lee Blanchard and Turner ‘Buzz’ Meeks, both of whom he had killed off in the novels. Hollywood Nocturnes may have been a sentimental revisiting of the Quartet for his readers, but Ellroy saw this revisionism as a necessary means of paying tribute to the characters who had brought the series to life. However, the main purpose of Hollywood Nocturnes was to acknowledge the man Ellroy had come to believe was a major unconscious influence on the Quartet. ‘Dick Contino’s Blues’ is a relatively modest, darkly humorous story in which Contino is pitted against a serial killer. It is preceded by a long introductory essay by Ellroy titled ‘Out of the Past’ originally published in GQ. Ellroy recounts how, reminded by chance of the 1950s celebrity accordion player Dick Contino, he built his research from a vague childhood recollection into discovering what had become of him in the intervening years. Contino’s promising career as an entertainer was derailed after he was jailed for draft dodging during the Korean War. A low point for Contino was his lead role in the ‘Grade Z’ film Daddy-O (1958). But for Ellroy, a re-viewing of this third-rate film after discovering a VHS copy would lead to a major narrative epiphany:

In 1990 I wrote White Jazz. A major sub-plot features a grade Z movie being filmed on the same Griffith locales as Daddy-O.

Jung wrote: ‘What is not brought to consciousness comes to us as fate.’

I should have seen Dick Contino coming a long time ago. (Ellroy 1994b, 6)

Ellroy tracked Contino to Las Vegas where they met and discussed the LA of the 1950s. Soon the distinction between Contino’s life story and Ellroy’s Quartet novels began to blur, a fated consciousness, as Ellroy saw it, that transcended the apparent coincidence of the subplot setting. The title of the introduction, ‘Out of the Past’, alludes to the 1947 noir
film directed by Tourneur and reflects Ellroy's view of Contino, the noir character who emerges unexpectedly and forces Ellroy to re-evaluate the Quartet's narrative past. In the film, Robert Mitchum plays a former private investigator who is living in the small town of Bridgeport, California, trying to escape his past. Ellroy was soon devising a way to retrospectively anoint Contino as a major Quartet figure in what would be informally a new Quartet narrative:

Because Dick Contino held me spellbound.
Because I knew – instinctively – that he held important answers.
Because I knew that he hovered elliptically in my ‘L.A. Quartet’ novels, a phantom waiting to speak. (1994b, 8)

The novella is not considered one of Ellroy's greatest works, coming as it does between the more substantial White Jazz and American Tabloid. The tone is pastiche and, somewhat aptly, the story behind the story is more interesting than the main narrative. Contino, the ‘phantom waiting to speak’, is more interesting as an embodiment of the Quartet than he is as the lead character of ‘Dick Contino's Blues’.

Minor works such as ‘Dick Contino’s Blues’ showed that Ellroy was drawing not just from a pool of characters and narrative lines he had created in the Quartet, but also a recognizable noir style he had adapted to his own needs. He would continue to produce minor Quartet narratives to experiment with the style he had created for L.A. Confidential and which now bore his name, ‘Ellrovian’, the term he adopted to describe the clipped, staccato style he produced after an editor demanded he shorten L.A. Confidential. He went through the entire manuscript removing what he deemed unnecessary words such as adverbs, adjectives and conjunctions and was therefore able to shorten the manuscript without losing a scene from his original outline. L.A. Confidential is Ellroy's paean to the tabloid magazines his father subscribed to, Confidential, Lowdown, Rave, Whisper and the original Hush-Hush, whose scurrilous content was delivered in a tone which combined titillation with hyperbolized moral indignation. In L.A. Confidential, these tabloids are represented by fictional Hush-Hush articles which bookend certain chapters. Instead of a reduction of words, these articles rely on an alliterative expansion. One headline reads, ‘L.A. D.A. TAKES TIME OFF FROM CAMPAIGN RELAXING WITH COPPER CUTIE!!’ (Ellroy 1994a, 88, emphasis in original). Significantly, Ellroy has co-opted this hyperbolic style, which shocks in an entertaining way, for his own autobiographical voice, to the frustration of some critics.
In reviewing Ellroy’s second memoir *The Hilliker Curse* (2010), John O’Connell decries ‘his weakness for jivey alliteration […]. Please God, make it stop’ (O’Connell 2010). The danger of this over-stylization is that it becomes impenetrable, and does not carry the narrative in the same way as the disjointed poetry in *White Jazz*.

In the short story ‘Hush-Hush’, published in *GQ* magazine in 1998 and reprinted in the anthology *Crime Wave* (1999), Ellroy continued to experiment with prose style here in an outwardly comic form which would be too jarring for the main novels. Events in the story are narrated by star *Hush-Hush* columnist Danny Getchell, who seems pathologically incapable of saying one word without following it with a series of words in an alliterative pattern, a family trait the Jewish Getchell explains as ‘my meshugenah mom mistreated me. She only let me read one book: a thick thesaurus’ (Ellroy 1999, 120). Thus, Getchell employs word chains in all his descriptions:

> I alakazammed to Allah, genuflected to Jesus, and called out to that cat the kikes call God. I said I’d keester communists and bash ban-the-bombers, and dig up dirt on that dowager dyke Eleanor Roosevelt. I’d donate dough to a Moslem mosque. I’d put in with Pat Boone, wear white buck shoes, and warble at a Billy Graham Crusade. I wouldn’t print my piece on Rabbi R.R. Ravitz and that Hebrew-school Hannah he humped last Hanukkah. (1999, 110)

Ellroy employs an idiosyncratically blunt and shocking style of humour whereby any topic or religious or ethnic identity is open to an unrestrained verbal onslaught through the loquacious Getchell. In the novels, casual racism is peppered throughout the text to reflect the subjective third-person views of the characters. Getchell treats everybody equally in his spiel, completely unencumbered by social conventions; the prose reflects his loyalty to a tabloid mindset rather than malicious intentions. The irony of Ellroy’s literary experiment in ‘Hush-Hush’ is that he breaks free of narrative conventions and yet follows an alliterative style which by its own internal logic has to be disciplined to a single, simple repetitive rule.

Ellroy’s next substantial revisiting of the *Quartet* narrative would be hinted at through his autobiography *My Dark Places* (1996). The book is subtitled *An L.A. Crime Memoir* and is both Ellroy’s life story and his account of the unsuccessful reinvestigation into the murder of his mother. In it, Ellroy includes an extensive discussion of the drafting process of *The Black Dahlia*, as the murder of Elizabeth Short is emotionally tied to his
mother’s murder. He claims that upon completing the manuscript of *The Black Dahlia*, ‘I wrote the last page and wept’ (Ellroy 1997, 209). Bucky Bleichert, the first-person narrator of *The Black Dahlia*, whose writing about the case is also consciously autobiographical, reflects this emotional tie: ‘I never knew her in life. She exists for me through others, in evidence of the ways her death drove them. [...] And since I owe her a great deal and am the only one who does know the entire story, I have undertaken the writing of this memoir’ (2006a, 3). Bleichert tries to understand the Dahlia first through evidence, but, when that fails to satisfy emotionally, he begins to see her in the relationships he has with other women, his lover and later wife Kay and the femme fatale Madeleine Sprague. ‘She exists to me through others’, then, is a form of transference, the victim he only knows in death, which he can create through the relationships around him. This second-hand relationship between Bleichert and the Dahlia is drawn from Ellroy’s melding of his mother and Elizabeth Short. In an afterword to the republication of *The Black Dahlia*, Ellroy describes how as a child he first learned of the Dahlia case in an emotional epiphany: ‘Jean Hilliker and Betty Short – one in transmogrification’ (2006a, 363). In the closing lines of the novel, Bleichert reveals he is on a plane for Boston to see his wife Kay for the first time since she left him over his Dahlia obsession. He carries the hope that having avenged Elizabeth Short he will be able to rededicate himself to Kay, although it is likely that his emotional ties to the Dahlia case will never wholly die.

As with Bleichert’s obsession with the Black Dahlia, for Ellroy the *Quartet* has never been wholly completed or closed as a series. More than 20 years after the publication of the last novel of the *Quartet*, *White Jazz*, Ellroy is to embark on writing a ‘Second L.A. Quartet’ as perhaps the last major project of his career. He describes it as ‘unprecedented in scope, stylistic execution and dramatic intent’ (2013). Taking younger versions of both fictional and real-life characters, he plans to place them in Los Angeles during World War II, with the action beginning on the eve of the 7 December 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The project is to be on a massive scale, with four 700-page novels, beginning with a first volume entitled ‘Perfidia’:

The story unfolds, in densely-structured real time, between December 6 and December 29, 1941. Los Angeles is at the cusp of a titanic and horrifying world conflict. Political divisions – Isolationism versus Interventionism – rage. Anti-Japanese rancor is escalating and then the bodies of a middle-class Japanese family are found, in their home. (Ellroy 2013)
To what extent Ellroy considered the possibility of prequels when he was writing the original *Quartet* novels is something that he has not revealed. The works ‘Dick Contino’s Blues’ and ‘Hush-Hush’ suggest that his willingness to return to the fictional world of the *Quartet* was part of a gradual process of writing experimentation and not a long-term plan. Events Ellroy has alluded to in his personal life also indicate that a return to the *Quartet* appeared to him more providential than pursuing other projects. In his autobiographical essay for the *L.A. Times* ‘The Great Right Place’ (2006), a reference to W.H. Auden’s description of LA as the ‘Great Wrong Place’, Ellroy discusses the series of events which drove him back to living in LA after an absence of 25 years. He had left his home city near the beginning of his literary career with no clear intention to return and none of the *Quartet* novels, despite their setting, was written in LA. His fictional depiction of LA’s past had always been made from a distance, as he was able to draw upon the city as inspiration from his preferred more comfortable settings of New York, Connecticut and Kansas City: ‘My alchemist’s license was issued in L.A. I know how to turn dung into gold’ (2006b, 7). The break-up of his second marriage, a physically exhausting publicity tour and lukewarm critical reaction to his novel *The Cold Six Thousand* (2001), his nervous breakdown and his brief dependency on painkillers were some of the gruelling factors which led him to resettle in LA: ‘This essay is a travel document and a homecoming brief. It will stand as my final autobiographical statement. The gist is simple: my birthplace made me, I ran away, I ran back’ (2006b, 7). In fact, it was not to be Ellroy’s final memoir, but he was definitely setting down a marker when he described himself as ‘a hometown writer exclusively’ (2006b, 7). For years he had been returning to *Quartet* narratives despite insisting that the series was over; now he had returned to LA, and the homecoming would precede his momentous decision to write a second *Quartet*. At the time of writing relatively few plot details about the new series or continuing series have been released, but the title ‘Perfidia’ is taken from the song originally written by Alberto Dominguez, which Kay and her first romantic interest in *The Black Dahlia*, Blanchard, dance to on New Year’s Eve, 1946. The song is an apt choice for their dance as it concerns a lover’s betrayal, and at this stage Bucky is already falling for Kay despite being Blanchard’s closest friend.

Ellroy’s new Quartet is part of his ongoing process of removing any remaining barriers between the author and his setting and characters. Ellroy had revealed (Wallace 2010) that ‘Perfidia’ was to feature Dudley Smith falling in love with a nurse named Geneva Hilliker. Plot details
that Ellroy alluded to in interviews were subject to change of course, indeed he was advised to drop overt references to his mother by editor Sonny Mehta, and it may be that Ellroy was feeding disinformation through speculation about his plans, but by linking one of his most famous fictional creations to his mother, he was implying that he is a hybrid of his own fictional and factual existence. The most remarkable chapter in the Quartet series was then still to be written. As he enters the later stages of his writing career, Ellroy has now revealed that the Los Angeles Quartet, or perhaps Octet, is only at the halfway point. The structure of the whole has yet to be revealed.

Notes

1. On the advice of his editor Otto Penzler, Ellroy had outlined a fourth Hopkins novel to continue the series before abandoning it in favour of writing *The Black Dahlia*.
2. *Perfidia* was published in September 2014, too recently to be fully analysed in the present study.
Part II
As Time Goes By:
Progressing the Series
Dorothy L. Sayers, dramatist, linguist, theologian, critic and theorist, is best known as one of the original ‘Queens of Crime’, and author of the Lord Peter Wimsey series of detective novels (1923–37). The aristocratic sleuth features in a relatively small body of work, only ten novels and 21 short stories, but is still one of the best-known fictional detectives in history. His continuous popularity is largely due, I will argue, to his growth within the series; he begins as a dilettante (his creator is reputed to have conceived of him as a combination of Fred Astaire and Bertie Wooster) but evolves into a scholar, diplomat and philosopher-detective. In the course of the series, the novels become markedly more complex and consciously literary. As the plots and milieus of the series become increasingly conceptual, multilayered and reflective of the world in which they were created, Wimsey himself develops and matures as a literary character.

Eco claims that ‘from the beginning the reading of a traditional detective story presumes the enjoyment of following a scheme’ (1979, 117–18). In his argument, the virtue of the series form relies on repetition of devices; he continues, ‘[n]or are we dealing only with a schematism in the order of a “plot”, but with a fixed schematism involving the same sentiments and the same psychological attitudes’. The repetitive nature of a series and the inherent comfort of this repetition is, in this theory, an indispensable part of its appeal. Series construction, Eco argues, relies upon a set of ‘recurrent stock situations’ which reappear in new guises but are essentially similar and familiar (1979, 119).

Sayers, a leading author and critic in the Golden Age of interwar British detective fiction, developed through her own experience a radically different opinion, writing, ‘if the detective story was to live and develop it must get back to where it began in the hands of Collins and
Le Fanu, and become once more a novel of manners instead of a pure crossword puzzle’ ([1937] 1983, 209). Her essay ‘Gaudy Night’ describes her approach to her own work, and the progress of her career and of her characters that led her to her penultimate and most literary novel, *Gaudy Night* (1935). In one of the most illuminating discussions of a crime series by its author, Sayers confesses that when she first began to write the series for which she became famous:

I had not properly realized – and this shows how far I was from understanding what it was I was trying to do with the detective novel – that any character that remains static except for a repertory of tricks and attitudes is bound to become a monstrous weariness to his maker in the course of nine or ten volumes. (1983, 210)

This late-career reflection, of course, allows Sayers to consider her earlier work in view of later novels and experience, and it is not surprising that she is critical. However, she considered the development of the detective story at other points in her career, and even contemplated, in earlier essays, the development of her series. Writing in her ‘Introduction’ to the *Omnibus of Crime* of the increasing complexity in contemporary detective fiction, she notes: ‘As the villain is allowed more good streaks in his composition, so the detective must achieve a tenderer human feeling beneath his frivolity and machine-like efficiency’ (1928a, 103). Wimsey may have begun as ‘tricks and attitudes’, but by this point Sayers had written four novels, and discovered that ‘[t]o make the transition from the detached to the human point of view is one of the writer’s hardest tasks’ (1928a, 102). Though she later found her work of the 1920s lacking, it is clear that she was making a conscious effort at that time to create more literary and novelistic works within the detective form.

For Sayers, the significance of her work lay in its evolution rather than its fixity. The development of her central character, though purposeful and painstaking, came from her own experience of life and of writing. Though many critics have recognized her self-portrait in Wimsey’s love interest Harriet Vane, her friend and biographer Barbara Reynolds indicates that Wimsey was also a distinct aspect of his creator, and that many of his mannerisms and characteristics were Sayers’s own:

He was almost her exact contemporary. He was up at Oxford […]. His bubbling cheerfulness, his habit of literary quotation, his manner of prattling, sometimes wittily, sometimes foolishly, his tendency
to burst into song or whistle a passage of Bach, his blithe impetuosity, his mental agility and energy, his untiring capacity to engage in exuberant flights of fancy in pursuit of an idea are all characteristic of his creator. (1998, 202)

Sayers acknowledged this relationship in passing, suggesting that as a method of character-creation an author might ‘take some passing mood of one’s own mind and say to one’s self, If this fleeting mood were to become a dominant attitude of mind, what would my behaviour be under given circumstances?’ (1983, 219).

Somewhat unusually for a series hero of the period, but possibly because of Sayers’s interest in creating a real ‘criticism of life’, Wimsey and his compatriots age in real time, and their activities and environments frequently relate to contemporary events and issues. Sayers introduced a number of socially progressive themes to her novels: her concern with the after-effects of World War I and with the changing role of women are particularly noteworthy. In her effort to reintroduce novelistic depth to the detective genre, she also explored her own interest in moral philosophy, and asked increasingly difficult questions about the role of intellectualism and professionalism in the career of the amateur detective. The change evident in the novels reflects change in the writer herself, her conception of the genre and the world surrounding her; all intertwine to produce a detective hero who is, among his fictional contemporaries, uniquely responsive and receptive to the real world.

The changes Sayers wrought in her central character, and the agenda with which she did so, are evident even within her first novel, *Whose Body?* (1923). Although she later proclaimed it ‘conventional to the last degree’ (1983, 208), it introduced a detective whose outwardly unprepossessing, though elegant, appearance and flippant demeanour conceal a sensitive interior far more exhaustively explored than that of contemporaries such as Christie’s Hercule Poirot or Marsh’s Roderick Alleyn. *Whose Body?* is structured in the Holmesian tradition: its focus remains on the detective and his activities, rather than on a whodunit puzzle. Wimsey himself is thus, at the beginning of the series, positioned as its most crucial element.

In an unpublished essay, Sayers enumerated the requirements of a detective hero, concluding with, ‘[i]f he is to feature in a series of books, he should not be too old to start with, he should have some loose ends hanging out to be developed later, and his character should evolve gradually’ (n.d., cited in Hannay 1979, 37). While they are lightly
introduced in this first novel, the moral questions that later pervade Sayers's work make notable appearances. The detective's ambivalence about his choice of hobby is opposed by the scientist/murderer's contention that '[t]he knowledge of good and evil is an observed phenomenon, attendant upon a certain condition of the brain-cells, which is removable' (WB, 188–9). Wimsey, unlike Holmes or Poirot, never approaches detection with absolute certainty of his own motives or of the righteousness of his work. Instead, beginning with this first appearance, he continually questions his own motivations and actions.

Like other less conflicted detectives, Wimsey's role is partially defined through its contradistinction to that of the police; his friendship with Inspector Parker is an important constant in the novels, but he says '[i]t affords me, if I may say so, the greatest satisfaction [...] that in a collaboration like ours all the uninteresting and disagreeable routine work is done by you' (WB, 239). His involvement in detection is first characterized as a 'hobby of criminal investigation' (WB, 12), marginalizing its importance; he later muses on the morality of approaching detection as a hobby, comparing his 'buttin' in' to the necessity of Parker's job (WB, 177). Sayers mocks the simple distinction that her detective (apparently) desires when Parker rebukes him:

You want to be consistent, you want to look pretty, you want to swagger debonairely through a comedy of puppets or else to stalk magnificently through a tragedy of human sorrows and things. But that's childish. If you've any duty to society in the way of finding out the truth about murders, you must do it in an attitude that comes handy. You want to be elegant and detached? That's all right, if you find out the truth that way, but it hasn't any value in itself, you know. (WB, 180)

This criticism of the heroic role is typical of the way Sayers punctures traditional generic expectations; she emphasizes, within the text itself, that even the artistic, aristocratic super sleuth, if he is to be a plausible fictional character, must be more than a 'repertory of tricks and attitudes' (1983, 210).

Whose Body? introduces the motif of the anguished questioner versus the absolutely confident, in which the latter is nearly always the villain. In nearly every Wimsey novel, he questions his own motives for his work. When he says, in the revealing Gaudy Night, 'I shouldn't recommend it as a comfortable occupation' (353), he refers not to the physical dangers of detection but to its moral conundrums. That novel
again pits him against a villain whose moral certainty is her justifica-
tion as well as her downfall. In Sayers’s work, those who question and
who make an effort to understand things greater than themselves are
those who create change. Those who embrace certainty may be wicked,
as are the villains of the above novels, or foolish, as are the communists
in *Strong Poison*, or behind the times, as are the older veterans in *The
Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*, but they cannot be heroic. Sayers’s
dictum seems to be that it is better to be unsure than to be too certain.

However, the detective is ultimately responsible for the solution, and
it is at this point that Wimsey’s greatest weakness, his fear of responsi-
bility, appears as a hindrance to his detective career. Near the conclusion
of *Whose Body?* he experiences a recurrence of shell shock, which often
results when he is faced with a crucial decision. Suddenly, the man who
first appears a connoisseur and a dilettante of crime is presented as both
a fallible human being and a competent and experienced ex-officer; this
revelation of vulnerability affects the character more profoundly than
his frequent psycho-moral musings may ever have done. Freedman sees a
reflection of Wimsey’s questions about his own responsibility: ‘it helped
establish the moral ambivalence of his enterprise as detective, and his
own complex and split subjectivity’ (2010, 373). Plain calls Sayers’s
creation of Wimsey ‘a careful and effective portrait of the survivor as
hero’ (1996, 46). By handicapping this hero, Sayers places him into a
contemporary post-war society, making him at once valorous and plau-
sible. Though he plays a lighthearted and debonair role, stepping into
another suit and his ‘other self’ (*WB*, 14), his affliction establishes the
all-knowing detective as someone far more human.

Self-doubt did not weaken Wimsey as a detective. Instead, it allied
him with the questioning spirit of the post-war world, in which change
felt both inevitable and unpredictable. His motivation of insatiable curi-
osity, while it retains echoes of the Holmesian savant investigator, also
makes Wimsey a distinctly contemporary detective. He finds his own
position morally questionable, particularly in the earlier novels, because
he is detecting for entertainment; his purposeful rejection of profession-
alism, however, allows him to claim an avocational impartiality that
makes him an ideal detective. Offended by the insinuation that he is
colluding with suspects in *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* (1928),
he retorts ‘[y]ou will permit *me*, Mr. Pritchard, to inform you that I am
not “employed” by anybody. I have been requested by Mr. Murbles to
ascertain the facts’ (87, emphasis in original). Wimsey rejects the idea
of ‘employment’ both because the idea that he is paid offends him as
an aristocrat, and because the connotation of bias offends him as a
detective. The liberty granted him by the first is inextricable from his motivations towards, and skill at, the second. Despite this status as an independent agent, Wimsey’s ‘hobby’ gradually appears in a more formal light. In *Unnatural Death*, he refers to ‘our professional reputations’ (272) when speaking to Parker and Dr Faulkner, thus equating his own professionalism with that of the policeman and the doctor, and claiming at the same time a firm association with the law.

Sayers observed that ‘the automata – the embodied vices and virtues [...] are all disappearing from the intellectual branch of [detective fiction], to be replaced by figures having more in common with humanity’ (1928a, 105). As illustrated above, Wimsey was, from his beginning, a new sort of detective, despite his aristocratic glamour; as Sayers wrote further novels, both the characters and themes therein became increasingly complex. By the time she wrote of the disappearance of ‘automata’, she had begun to address serious conundrums of detection in *Unnatural Death* and *Bellona Club*. In both instances, Wimsey expresses doubt about the benefits of his involvement in the case. He cautions the lawyer Mr Murbles when taking up the latter, ‘[l]ook here, sir! When you were a boy, did you ever go about pokin’ sticks and things into peaceful, mysterious lookin’ ponds, just to see what was at the bottom?’ (*BC*, 30). Though Wimsey’s poking leads to the inevitable establishment of truth, Sayers does not leave the reader with a comfortable confidence in the honour of the detective profession. Detectives, she implies, are selfishly curious, and may actually stimulate crime. Wimsey discusses the problem with a priest in *Unnatural Death*, describing how he ‘[s]tarted in like a fool to help somebody who’d got into trouble through having suspicions himself. And my beastly interference started the crimes all over again’ (226). However, even as Wimsey becomes more personally invested in his cases, he continues to present himself as an amusement-seeking adventurer. When, in *Strong Poison* (1930), he falls in love with the defendant, Harriet Vane, he conceals his anxiety and distress and maintains the pose of the dilettante, telling the defence barrister that ‘I wouldn’t lose the fun of this for the world. Sort of case I fairly wallow in’ (48). Whether he does so for self-protection, as Parker suggests, or because it enables him to get the job done, remains unclear, but such ambiguity bespeaks internal conflict and complicates the character.

*Strong Poison*, in which he must prove the innocence of the woman he loves, is the only novel in which Wimsey does not question his own motivations. Uniquely, he does doubt his own abilities: ‘His personal feelings [...] had never before clouded his mind. He was
fumbling – grasping uncertainly here and there at fugitive and mocking possibilities [...] the shortness of the time, which would once have stimulated, now frightened and confused him’ (104). The inversion of Wimsey’s world-view in this case (usually he has no doubt that he *can* solve a case, only whether he *should*) marks this novel as a point of transformation for the hero. For Hannay, ‘Harriet has the power to bring the superhuman into doubt; perhaps that is the most crucial step in making him [Wimsey] human’ (1979, 46). *Strong Poison* marks a crucial stage in Sayers’s conception of Peter; she began it with the ‘infanticidal intention’ of finishing the series by ‘marrying him off and getting rid of him’, but found that ‘the puppets had somehow got just so much flesh and blood in them’ that she could not write such an ending (1983, 210–11). Although the author describes her purposeful development of Peter’s character as stemming from this point, it is clear that ‘the sequence of novels as a whole resists the imposition of a definitive moment of transition’ (Plain 1996, 53).

From the beginning, Sayers’s novels posed questions deeper than ‘Whodunit?’, and the greatest evidence of her progress towards the ‘novel of manners’ is in her characters. Each successive novel, except perhaps the experimental throwback *Five Red Herrings* (1931), becomes longer, more densely populated and more multidimensional. Many of these books consider a particular milieu, and its reaction to the contemporary world. Sayers was herself a decidedly post-war character, and her engagement with the issues of her day, ranging from women’s rights and psychology to the death penalty and fascism, is evident in her novels. Some of her subjects are considered satirically, such as the lunching aristocrats in *Whose Body?* and the sniping writers in *Gaudy Night*, but many are plumbed with humour and sympathy. Her portrait of the advertising agency in *Murder Must Advertise* (1933) depicts a workplace full of creativity and boredom, antipathy and good will in equal measure; the soldiers’ club in *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* is plausibly stiff, detached and regimented. Sayers’s most notable character work was her portrayal of the female dons in *Gaudy Night*; this community is, not coincidentally, illuminated by Harriet Vane, who in the same novel illuminates a great deal of Wimsey himself.

Wimsey’s developing character is deepened through complement and contrast with these vivid milieus. *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* centres on a place resistant to change, and returns to the theme of damage wrought by the war. The death of an old colonel implicates a damaged veteran, his amoral soldier brother, and a young woman who is dissatisfied despite her financial and social liberty. The club is a
The Maturity of Lord Peter Wimsey

bastion of tradition, and houses a painful contrast between the young veterans of the Great War and their elders. George Fentiman becomes hysterical after his grandfather is discovered dead in his chair:

It is doubtful which occurrence was more disagreeable to the senior members of the Bellona Club – the grotesque death of General Fentiman in their midst or the indecent neurasthenia of his grandson. Only the younger men felt no sense of outrage; they knew too much. (BC, 12)

The failure of understanding between these two groups illustrates how wide was the gulf between those who had experienced World War I and those who had not, and how profoundly that experience changed British society. By associating Wimsey with the younger men, Sayers again asserts his modernity. At the same time, however, she positions him as a member of the establishment, an ambiguity that serves to strengthen his position as detective.

In this novel, as in several others, Wimsey is a fusion of pre-war advantages and post-war perceptions. One of his progressive positions is as an advocate for women’s equality. Sayers’s exploration of the changing roles of women began with Wimsey’s dissatisfied sister Mary in Clouds of Witness (1926), and her next novel, Unnatural Death, introduces Miss Climpson, a Miss Marple precursor. Not only was the middle-aged female detective an innovation in herself, but her role as sidekick integrates a post-war attitude towards women into Wimsey’s character. A comic but highly skilled lady ‘enquiry agent’, Miss Climpson’s work in the novel is part of its exploration of the roles possible for, and the work available to, women. One of the themes of the novel is ‘superfluous women’ who have no dependable societal place after the war. Wimsey fumes:

Thousands of old maids, simply bursting with useful energy, forced by our stupid social system into hydros and hotels and communities and hostels and posts as companions, where their magnificent gossip-powers and units of inquisitiveness are allowed to dissipate themselves […], while the rate-payers’ money is spent on getting work for which these women are providentially fitted, inefficiently carried out by ill-equipped policemen. (UD, 35)

While satirical, this critique signifies a consideration for such women as individuals. Women play a growing role in the concerns of the series,
and by the time Miss Climpson reappears in *Strong Poison* as the head of an enquiry agency, Wimsey is accustomed to intelligent working women and thus prepared for the introduction of Harriet Vane. So essential is the association of character and social view that Harriet and *Gaudy Night* ultimately complete Peter as a human being. The concern expressed above about the choices available to women lays the foundation for the man who asks, in the later novel, ‘Is [women’s education] still a question? It ought not to be’ (346).

Miss Climpson’s introduction also highlights the theme of an individual and his or her ‘proper job’, which, though present for Wimsey since *Whose Body?*, also reaches its culmination in *Gaudy Night*. Sayers wrote as passionately about work as she did on other major themes, and proclaimed that ‘it should, in fact, be thought of as a creative activity undertaken for the love of the work itself’ (1942, 3). As in other instances, the author’s engagement with the subject appeared with equal clarity in her detective novels. Wimsey’s early questioning of the legitimacy of his own work segues, as noted above, into an acceptance of his own professionalism, but detection continues to be opposed to ordinary jobs. Miss Climpson’s agency, while ‘ostensibly a typing bureau’ (*SP*, 58), operates a much larger and busier detective branch. In *Murder Must Advertise*, Wimsey takes on an undercover investigation and, with it, a job in an advertising agency. The dual role played by the detective in this novel is only possible because his true character is, by the seventh novel in the series, well known to the reader. He proclaims his ‘honest pride’ in ‘pulling down four solid quid a week. Amazin’ sensation. First time I’ve ever earned a cent’ (78). The proper paying job is opposed to the ‘improper’ work of detection-for-amusement, and the public-facing work of the advertiser by the hidden work of the detective.

However, in *Gaudy Night*, detection is classed among the things people may do as their ‘proper job’. Indeed, the intellectual interest in detection expressed by both Wimsey and Vane (who writes detective novels) is characterized as a duty towards the facts. She defends his choice of occupation when Miss Barton calls him a ‘dilettante gentleman’, saying, ‘[c]atching murderers isn’t a soft job, or a sheltered job. It takes a lot of time and energy, and you may very easily get injured or killed. I dare say he does it for fun, but at any rate, he does do it’ (*GN*, 39). The question of professionalism is at this point subjugated to the idea that work and life ought to be one integral experience, as Sayers later argued in *Unpopular Opinions* (1946, 122).

Wimsey’s personal life and his detective career are always closely allied; in *Whose Body?* he describes how he ‘took it up when the bottom
of things was rather knocked out for me’ (WB, 177). Later, he finds his partner (in life and detection) through his work, when he investigates Harriet’s case in Strong Poison, and, crucially, the resolution of their relationship and the final defence of detection-as-work are tightly bound together in Gaudy Night. Detection, Sayers argued, could not exist in a vacuum, or as a purely intellectual exercise; she writes of Poe, Gaboriau and Collins that they:

approached the subject in the spirit of the novelist: however complicated the problem, they never present the story as an isolated episode existing solely in virtue of its relation to the mechanics of detection. They are interested in social background, in manners and morals, in the depiction and interplay of character; their works have a three-dimensional extension in time and space; they all, in their various ways, offer some kind of ‘criticism of life’. (1936, viii–ix)

The later novels in the series, particularly Murder Must Advertise, The Nine Tailors (1934) and Gaudy Night, are manifestly detective stories, but integrate detection with theme and character development. Wimsey’s, and Sayers’s, acme comes in Gaudy Night, interestingly the only novel of the series not to feature him as the primary focalizing character. Hannay posits that Sayers uses Harriet’s perspective to ‘project [a more complex character] back into the past’ (1979, 48). Plain, however, argues that, ‘to situate the entire creation of Wimsey within the pages of Gaudy Night is to ignore the evolutionary details that emerge from the eight preceding novels’ (1996, 52). Many critics, perhaps following Sayers’s own lead, share the idea that Wimsey’s conscience, and his weaknesses, appear late in the series, between Strong Poison and Gaudy Night. However, this assumption is not borne out by a close reading of the earlier novels. Although their ‘psychological red-herring[s]’ (Sayers 1983, 217) may be fewer, they exhibit growing complexity in theme and character. Brabazon remarks that ‘[i]t is a mark of the soundness of Dorothy’s original instinct that the later, mature Wimsey is all there in his earlier, sketchier self’ (1981, 125). Indeed, though Wimsey appears differently to Harriet in this penultimate novel, a reader familiar with his entire series may glimpse reflections of a younger and more flippant, but no less conflicted and demanding, character from the earlier work. Sayers herself defended the character’s alterations, reasoning that, ‘[i]f, during the period, he had altered and mellowed a little, I felt I could reasonably point out that most human beings are altered and mellowed by age’ (1983, 212).
In her *Omnibus* introduction, written in the earlier part of her career, Sayers pointed out the danger of ‘allowing real human beings into a detective-story. At some point or other, either their emotions make hay of the detective interest, or the detective interest gets hold of them and makes their emotions look like pasteboard’ (1928a, 105). However, by the time she wrote the last books in the Wimsey series, she had committed herself to just such an experiment. Her later works are truly novels of manners, dealing with the contemporary concerns and looming anxieties of the 1930s. In this, they are forerunners of contemporary novelists as diverse as Kate Atkinson and Alexander McCall Smith, Tony Hillerman and Sara Paretsky, Elizabeth George and Henning Mankell. Though Sayers wrote that her struggle with the character of Wimsey ‘is a warning against inventing characters whose existence has to be prolonged through a long series of books’ (1983, 221), her detective, and her effort to develop the character, were ahead of the times. Detective novelists are now expected to incorporate human interest, complex morality and well-rounded characters into their plots. These characters interact with their societies, and encounter situations that develop and change them; a detective is no longer expected, or desired, to remain static and constant throughout a series. If once the great allure of the detective series was its schematism, it is now surely that the reader may become involved with a character, and his or her experiences and transformations.

Sayers’s efforts to make the detective novel a true *novel* were advanced, and their importance in this respect is frequently underestimated. At the centre of her Wimsey series she introduced a character who initially appeared shallow and foppish but revealed vulnerability and humanity, and he continued to develop along with his writer. Although Sayers claimed that Wimsey’s ‘random attributes [were] bestowed upon him over a series of years in accordance with the requirements of various detective plots’ (1983, 211), his character in fact matures as her novels become more complex, and their crimes increasingly morally ambiguous. The construction of his character throughout the series, and over 17 years, is intertwined with the growth of the novelist and the progress of her aspirations for the detective genre. Wimsey may sometimes present himself as a superman in the Holmesian mode, but Sayers’s consistent effort to integrate him into the real world, and to imbue him with appropriate humanity, makes him a much more complete character. As such, his growth, both as a detective and as a man, reflects the growth both of the novelist and of the detective novel itself.
Notes

1. This phrase originally described the oddly assorted quartet of Sayers, Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham and Ngaio Marsh.
3. Sayers wrote one novel, *The Documents in the Case* (1930), that did not feature Wimsey or any of her other regular characters. She did not consider it a success, though it is an excellent example of the epistolary crime novel.
4. All quotations in the text are from the first editions of the novels. For brevity, these will be quoted in the text as follows: *Whose Body?* (WB), *Unnatural Death* (UD), *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* (BC), *Strong Poison* (SP), *Murder Must Advertise* (MMA), *Gaudy Night* (GN).
Series Fiction and the Challenge of Ideology: The Feminism of Sara Paretsky

Sabine Vanacker

Sara Paretsky published *Indemnity Only*, her first V.I. Warshawski novel, in 1982. Coming hot on the heels of the second feminist wave of the late 1960s and 1970s, this book helped kick-start a new crime fiction subgenre, the feminist hardboiled detective novel. Paretsky’s success, along with that of contemporaries such as Sue Grafton and Marcia Muller, drew a large number of women writers into the genre, together with new, feminist readers of crime fiction. Paretsky’s most recent Warshawski novel, *Breakdown* (2012), is part of a chain that links the heady Reaganite 1980s with Obama’s America of 2012. The Warshawski series also traverses an important tranche of feminist history, between what are now commonly referred to as the second and third feminist waves. However, it would appear that a lifetime of feminism has brought both creator and protagonist to lassitude and despondency: ‘I am tired, V I is tired, but we both need to get back on our horses and try to raise the siege of Orleans’ (2009b, 50). Like Jeanne d’Arc at Orléans, however, neither the character nor the creator – who here aligns herself with V.I. – intends to give up the fight.¹

In her memoir, *Writing in an Age of Silence* (2009b), Paretsky explicitly reflects on the passing of time and the much-altered context – political, economic, international and feminist – for her current writing. Looking back on her first novel she highlights flaws in the construction of her detective, notably the failure to consider the ideological implications of her formula. Because she adopted the hardboiled genre, suggests Paretsky, her feminist detective was fundamentally flawed:

> When I began writing my first book, *Indemnity Only*, I was trying to create a woman who was a person, not an angel or a monster. But I wasn’t thinking of what it means to be a woman hero in a positive way.
I knew what I didn’t want my detective to be, but not what she should be. As a result, I put her into the mainstream of the hard-boiled form – orphaned, with a Smith & Wesson, drinking whisky – instead of thinking about what special role a woman detective might play. (Paretsky 2009b, 61, emphasis in the original)

Despite these regrets, there was a subversive elegance in the counter-discursive deployment of the noir subgenre for feminist purposes. Like her contemporary, black writer Walter Mosley, Paretsky chose to turn the ideology of a narrative tradition against itself. Into a genre that was essentially sexist and racist she projected a feminist and anti-racist detective. With the genre twisted in this way, the 1980s feminist hard-boiled detective novel may at times have creaked but it exemplified what was happening in society at large, the uneasy and uncomfortable intrusion of a feminist, woman-friendly message into an essentialist, sexist milieu. Not all critics would agree with this assessment: Reddy, most notably, makes a very persuasive case for the impossibility and unviability of such a project. Addressing mainly the issue of race, she points to the dangerously seductive elements of the hardboiled formula: the ‘I’ narrator, typically male, white and heterosexual, an impoverished, lonely hero but one whose voice rings loudly with his message of victimization by the female, black and homosexual Other (Reddy 2003, 10). Reddy represents the hardboiled genre as an invincible ideological machine leading the reader into complicity with its racist ideology.

Nevertheless, when Paretsky and other feminist crime writers first appeared, readers like myself were encouraged by the refreshing presence of a strong female protagonist, a feminist hero who delivered her womanist message with vigour. Warshawski was a utopian figure allowing her readers to inhabit, however briefly, a sense of agency they did not experience in their everyday activities.

Thirty years later, Warshawski is still a feminist, still fighting domestic violence (Body Work, 244), still objecting to grown women being addressed as ‘girls’ (Blacklist, 410). Despite the reservations in her memoir, Paretsky has retained the core features of the Warshawski persona: the love of clothes, the quick temper, the relationship with her over-solicitous neighbour Mr Contreras, the need to protect, the guilt towards her parents, and the dreams of powerlessness and anxiety that occur in every novel. These form the so-called ‘redundant information’ of a series character, as Eco so tellingly highlighted for the Superman series: ‘their reappearance is an essential condition of its reading pleasure’ (1979, 118). By no means ‘redundant’ in fact, these repeated,
recognizable scenes refocus the readers’ experience, realigning them with a character and atmosphere that link the whole series. The reader:

continuously recovers, point by point, what he already knows, what he wants to know again: that is why he has purchased the book. He derives pleasure from the non-story [...] in a withdrawal from the tension of past-present-future to the focus on an instant, which is loved because it is recurrent. (Eco 1979, 119–20, emphasis in original)

Equally as important as the crime novel’s drive towards closure, then, is this ‘non-story’, the affirmation that the reader is encountering the same, unaltered, beloved character. Its importance lies in the ‘now’, in a continuous reiteration of this moment. As a result each Warshawski novel iteratively performs Warshawski’s personality, angry, persistent, protective of the weak. Indeed, most centrally to the series, each novel reaffirms and re-performs its feminist identity: in every story Warshawski battles conspiring patriarchal institutions, the nationwide supermarket chains that deny their female employees full-time contracts and the global security companies that threaten to control and imprison their targets (*Fire Sale*), the hospitals or ‘medico-economic’ companies triaging patients foremost by their ability to pay (*Bitter Medicine*). In considering Paretsky’s work as series fiction, this chapter will cover three main areas: age and ageing in the characterization of the protagonist; fundamental changes in the societal context; and a concurrent development in the nature of the feminist movement.

Molander Danielsson (2002) suggests the term ‘dynamic detective’ for the protagonist of a crime series, especially those with a drive towards realism, in which the protagonist ages and which reflect societal change. Warshawski is just such a dynamic detective, in her forties at the start of the series and a more psychologically developed 50-year-old in the most recent novels. Because of its long duration – over 30 years – and the developments in its protagonist, it is useful to consider the Warshawski series as a ‘progress narrative’, a body of work that is coherent and yet has evolved with every instalment. In *Safe at Last in the Middle Years* (2000), Gullette applies this term to the development of an author’s oeuvre over time and the novelist’s meta-narrative reflection on his or her sense of self, on ageing, life stage and the connection with their writing. This is not to invite us into the trap of biographical fallacy, equating Warshawski with her creator. However, as Paretsky has ‘lived’ with her protagonist over decades, the Warshawski series does contain this sense of progress and meta-reflection. It evokes the qualities of a
**Bildungsroman**: a dynamic approach to characterization – adjusted and tweaked in every book – which is teleological at heart, always working towards keeping a narrative future open for the character. Most notably, the Warshawski series centrally considers the implications of ageing and maturing in its characterization of the protagonist.

Warshawski’s age has always presented a highly interesting feature of the series. In the first novel ‘thirty is a fond memory’ (*Indemnity Only*, 13). Warshawski is an experienced, well-regarded private eye who has already killed a man in the course of her work (120). She has passed the ‘dangerous age’ of early adulthood (Gullette 2000, 6). More importantly for a feminist series, Paretsky opted to write ‘beyond the ending’, beyond the romantic closure that end-stops so many novels with female protagonists (DuPlessis 1985). *Indemnity Only* introduces a post-matrimonial Warshawski, already divorced from her successful lawyer husband. She has by now relinquished a first career as public defender, along with her utopian dreams of improving society: she is already ‘safe in the middle years’. Indeed, Paretsky affirms Warshawski as an enduring feminist hero in a midlife progress series that shows her coming through crises and saying with every new novel ‘I’m still here to tell this story, and the next one too’ (Gullette 2000, xiv).

Despite this, there is in the latest novels, *Blacklist* (2003), *Fire Sale* (2006), *Hardball* (2009a), *Body Work* (2010) and *Breakdown* (2012), a real sense of midlife re-evaluation. A more mature Warshawski now contemplates her continued failings: her impetuousness, her tendency to antagonize suspects and witnesses, her inability to maintain a love relationship. She demonstrates more self-doubt and the questioning of identity so typical of her life stage: ‘And now, it just depressed me, how hard I worked, and how little I had to show for it’ (*Breakdown*, 200). In these recent novels, Paretsky also links Warshawski’s character more clearly with the trauma of her youth, the early painful death of her parents: ‘I wondered for a moment if my whole detective practice was built on my private history of being an adolescent caretaker’ (*Body Work*, 150; also *Breakdown*, 52; *Fire Sale*, 141). She is now more explicitly characterized as ‘a product of a particular personal history marked by a self-consciousness of ethnic, gender, and class marginalization’ (Paradis 2001, 91), rather than the less complex, self-created, free-fighting individual of the earlier novels, where the emphasis was more on second-wave, liberated, and liberal, female agency. In the twenty-first century the series can no longer shake off the past, which keeps catching up with Warshawski in novels that persistently and oppressively return the detective to her South Chicago origins (*Fire Sale, Hardball*). And indeed
the context is getting tougher: Warshawski has become more tired, like her author, and the recent novels often appear to be working through an assessment of the detective’s feminist life. Concomitantly, Paretsky notes a dwindling sense of progress in America, the disappearance of those utopian societal beliefs of the 1960s and 1970s.

Bakhtin famously lauded the novel for its ‘indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still living contemporary reality’ (in Wyatt-Brown and Rossen 1993, 1). It is this ‘living contact’, especially over the past three tempestuous decades, that exerts formidable pressures on the internal coherence of Paretsky’s world and particularly on its feminist interpretation. In fact the most recent Warshawski novels are so replete with commentary on the current political and economic context, that they have become ‘state of the nation’ novels.

A fundamental change to the life world of the detective is the explosion of the internet and electronic communication. In the latest novels Warshawski now routinely researches her subscription databases to check the background of her suspects and clients, as well as MySpace and Facebook (Body Work, 84). But the digital world intrudes everywhere, as when she discovers a murder at a nightclub: ‘I didn’t want to say too much in front of this texting, Tweeting audience’ (135). More poignantly, however, these novels reflect the national trauma of 9/11 and the resulting war on terror, especially in Blacklist where Warshawski voices her own shock. Terrorism and the national response to it inform the plot of Blacklist, about an innocent, hunted Muslim boy. Fire Sale investigates the uncomfortable link between patriotism and commerce, as a small company manufacturing flags rushes to increase production and cash in on the surge in patriotism after the twin towers attacks, leading to illegal working practices, people smuggling and even murder (Fire Sale, 332). But the national emergency has also resulted in what Paretsky has called ‘the age of silence’ in her memoir, or ‘the Age of Fear’ (Hardball, 325), the diminishment of civil liberties in the face of global terrorism. Writing in an Age of Silence fulminates against the Patriot Act, brought in by Bush after 9/11, ‘a law which undercut our most cherished liberties, including the right to be free from unreasonable search and seizure’ (Loc. 127–8) and Warshawski too reflects on the decline in democratic rights in post-9/11 America: ‘The Supreme Court’s recent ruling on the right to silence had alarming implications for anyone who said anything during an interrogation’ (Breakdown, 43). Freedom of the press too has been curtailed and Breakdown underlines the impotence of Warshawski’s journalist friend Murray Ryerson, whose
investigative and campaigning articles are scrapped by the global corporation that now owns his newspaper (176). Recent Warshawski novels have also addressed neo-conservatism and the resurgence of the right, the rise and mainstreaming of radical Christian evangelical politicians and the feeling of entrenchment among progressives. In *Breakdown* a perfect media storm arises when a rich Jewish girl and the teenage daughter of a female black Senate candidate are discovered acting out a vampire novel in a cemetery at night. The novel features the new anti-semitism, the new racism and the newly resurgent creationist beliefs, all commingled by Myerson’s now right-wing, Foxian news corporation. In the most recent novels, the tone is frequently more wry, more bitter as the detective realizes that, yet again, the true culprits – hypocritical capitalists, gangsters and self-serving politicians, brutal patriarchs all – will go unpunished:

> I think I’m driven more by despair, even, than confidence, especially the despair of seeing so much misery around me. And then I leap into action and make it worse. [...] I wish that my life had followed a calmer path. (*Body Work*, 448)

Along with a merciless analysis of American capitalism and political corruption, the most interesting characteristic in Warshawski’s series is the contextual change in feminism itself. From the very beginning, Warshawski’s feminism was characterized as already nostalgic. *Indemnity Only* (1982) was set in the 1980s, after the main thrust of the second feminist wave and with conservative governments in power in both the US and Britain. Thirty years later, feminism has undergone profound changes, countering the 1980s ‘backlash’ and the media-led concept of a ‘post-feminist’ era of equality where feminism had outlived its purpose, and witnessing the appearance of a new ‘wave’ of feminists, who became active in the 1990s and noughties.

Over the past decade the relationship between second- and third-wave feminism has become a much contested matter. The debates between these groups have occasionally been heated, in what sometimes appears to be a critical battle over the history of feminism. Early third-wave accounts, such as Hollows’s *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture* (2000), presented a particularly jaded perspective on the second feminist wave. These early third-wave texts frequently characterized second-wave feminism as a ‘victim’ movement active on behalf of a hegemonic group of women, white, middle-class and heterosexual. Conversely, the ‘third’ wave has been presented as a
feminism of ‘multicultural inclusion, identity politics, and intersectionality’ (Hewitt 2010, Loc. 1286), and a greater awareness of ‘the specificity of women’s experience’ (Budgeon 2011, 4). Hewitt’s *No Permanent Waves* (2010) and Budgeon’s *Third Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender in Late Modernity* have emphasized the continuities between second- and third-wave feminism (2011, 103). Issues such as racism, child abuse, domestic violence, rape, homophobia and reproductive rights, which came to the fore during the second feminist wave, have remained central to the third wave. However, as Budgeon highlights, twenty-first-century ‘late modernity’ also presents feminism with a new ideological context. Television, newspapers and other forms of popular culture confidently continue to assert that Western societies are now post-feminist, all gender inequalities having disappeared. Women, especially young women, are increasingly presented as ‘autonomous, self-making, self-determining’ individuals, fully emancipated subjects able to benefit from the choices presented by the modern, post-feminist world (Hewitt 2010, Loc. 1302–3). In an era now dominated by ‘the logic of neoliberal self-governance’ (Budgeon 2011, 48) young women are told they no longer consider themselves held back by gender discrimination. Autonomous individuals all, they must now rise above discrimination and other personal circumstances.

As the author of a feminist crime series, Paretsky has also had to respond to this feminist history. Her allegiance to second-wave feminism is firmly restated in her memoir: ‘The third chapter explains the importance of Second Wave Feminism in my life. It was feminism that triggered my wish to write a private eye novel, and it shaped the character of my detective, V.I. Warshawski’ (Paretsky 2009b, Loc. 103–5). More assertively, Warshawski herself tackles a stroppy, much younger policewoman about feminist history: ‘I am one of the old-fashioned feminists who helped open this door for you, Officer Milkova, so don’t get on your high horse with me’ (*Body Work*, 345). Moreover, in the later Warshawski novels, Paretsky makes a number of interventions in the debates between second- and third-wave feminism.

Centrally, the Warshawski novels emphasize continuity in the history of feminism. As they repeatedly affirm, the feminist issues dominating the present are still those of the second feminist wave: contraception, the right to abortion, wage inequality, freedom from violence and abuse, and a fairer division of care work. Indeed, in the case of reproductive rights the clock appears to have been turned back. In *Fire Sale* Warshawski encounters a level of sexual ignorance among young Mexican girls that shocks her. In twenty-first-century America,
evangelical Christianity and poverty seem to have rolled back all feminist advances. *Fire Sale* features two sisters from an impoverished Mexican family, living in an overcrowded apartment and caught in the poverty trap even though their mother is working two jobs. The older sister, Julia, has a baby, the result of her first sexual experience, and is now a dropout, passive, depressed and anaesthetizing herself with her daily TV soap. Concerned about Julia, Warshawski reissues core second-wave advice:

> Whatever your sister says, or your mother, or even your pastor, there’s no shame in what you did – in having sex, in getting pregnant. The shame is the boy who did it lying to you and you not knowing any better. And it would be another shame if you let your baby stop you from getting an education. (*Fire Sale*, 211)

In the latest novels, and in the face of proclamations of post-feminism and the neoliberal self-governing, self-actualizing individual, Paretsky continues to reaffirm that for many young women there are no choices. There can be no self-driven agency, no self-fulfilment for a character ground down by poverty, injustice or family abuse. Warshawski’s intervention is there to remind readers of the continuity between the second and third feminist waves, pointing out that hard, pragmatic, grassroots emancipation is still vitally important.

On other issues too, the Warshawski novels present a corrective. Paretsky explicitly counters histories of feminism that have overemphasized the ‘whiteness’ of the second feminist wave and underplayed the presence of black women. In her memoir, she links the start of second-wave feminism to the civil rights movement of the 1960s: ‘Just as First Wave Feminism grew out of women’s involvement in Abolition, the Second Wave grew out of women’s involvement in the Civil Rights movement’ (Paretsky 2009b, Loc. 165–6). In *Hardball* (2009) the impact of the civil rights movement and the race riots in Chicago feature as a prominent influence in Warshawski’s life – the actions of both her policeman father and her racist uncle during the riots are central to the plot and Warshawski’s investigation touches upon the core of her identity as a progressive and a feminist.

However, the impact of third-wave feminism and its perspectives is clear in the later Warshawski novels. There is power feminist Sophy Durango in *Breakdown*, the ambitious, sleek and aloof female Senate candidate whose campaign is under threat from right-wing racist television stations and who is therefore unable to voice her political convictions openly. Paretsky
highlights the paradox of a feminist political candidate who is more guarded, more embattled than her less successful second-wave precursors (Breakdown, 56). The clearest representative of third-wave feminism in the later novels is Petra Warshawski, V.I.’s niece, introduced in Hardball. Part of the ‘millennium generation’, Petra is a texting, tweeting young woman, perpetually plugged into Facebook, a recent graduate yet still wide-eyed, immature and naive. Petra is ‘a serious Millennium Gen fashionista’ (Hardball, 40), self-centred and spoiled, a ‘brat’ in Warshawski’s words. Paretsky satirizes her typical speech patterns: ‘Daddy was, like, do you have a job? And I’m, like, no, of course not’ (41). Petra befriends and ‘un-friends’ easily and casually; at the suggestion of her father she works for a political campaign, although unencumbered by any real political convictions. Petra has grown up benefiting from the advances of the second wave and wears her feminism lightly and confidently. A member of the ‘kidult’ generation, those young adults who still depend on their parents for financial and moral support, she later rejects contact with her disgraced father, but continues to go skiing in Utah at his expense with her mother and sisters (Body Work, 23). Petra’s representation as a sympathetic but relatively ‘light’ third waver suggests some of Paretsky’s irritation with younger feminists. The ongoing dialogue between V.I. and Petra, second and third wavers, comes to the fore in Body Work where Paretsky tackles another feature of third-wave feminism, its engagement with the ambiguities of embodied feminism.

A central characteristic of third-wave feminism is its recognition of the complexities surrounding sexuality, sexual identity and embodiment. As a movement it has had to confront the power of the ‘beauty myth’ as a factor complicating women’s emancipation and the return of pornography to mainstream patriarchal culture. Third-wave feminism has also benefited from poststructuralist feminist theories of the body such as those of Kristeva, Cixous, Irigaray, Braidotti and Butler. As a result, typical expressions of sexuality and embodiment in popular culture highlight the playfulness, the performativity of sexuality and embodiedness, the diversity of sexualities and sexual identities but also the involvement of sadism and masochism in love and sexuality. As Budgeon has pointed out, much third-wave feminist work on gender, the body and sexuality consciously responds to this situation by exploiting the ‘messy’, contradictory, flexible quality of our experience: ‘both feminist and anti-feminist messages are “entangled”, such that feminist “ideas are at the same time articulated and repudiated, expressed and disavowed” a situation resulting in the profoundly contradictory construction of contemporary gender relations’ (Gill quoted in Budgeon 2011, 111).
Paretsky explores these issues in *Body Work*, through character Karen Buckley, a performance artist whose work confronts her audiences shockingly with the female body. With this novel, Paretsky broke through a self-imposed taboo on using female sexuality in the Warshawski series. As she indicates in her memoir, she had originally decided these novels would avoid the standard hardboiled representation of women as sexual victims: ‘I vowed not to use sex to exploit my characters – or readers. I also wanted my hero, V.I. to be a sexual being and a moral person at the same time’ (2009b, 61). The Warshawski series has therefore mostly been characterized by the absence of sex crimes or sexuality as plot motifs and while Warshawski is beautiful and sexually active, Paretsky has refrained from using her body in a sexual context. Surprisingly, then, in *Body Work*, we suddenly encounter all these topics: the prostitution of young girls, lesbianism and homophobia.

Buckley’s feminist performance art in *Body Work* introduces a central debate in third-wave feminism (although equally present in second-wave discourse): how to critique society’s cultural images of the female body without repeating and reaffirming them. Subversively and dangerously, the Body Artist makes her naked body available for her audience to write on, turning it into a medium for their creativity but also in some cases their anger and aggression. When she says ‘I’m your canvas, your – bare – canvas’ (*Body Work*, 11), she subversively demonstrates the power of female sexuality to unsettle her audience:

The Artist was completely at ease, her bare legs crossed yoga style, her palms pressed together in front of her breasts. It was the audience that was disturbed: little rustlings, as people crossed and uncrossed legs or fiddled with zippers. Explosions of whispered laughter. (*Body Work*, 279)

Warshawski herself feels conflicted, uncomfortably aware of her own erotic responses and regarding these as ‘unpleasant’: ‘I resented my body for responding to what my mind rejected’ (*Body Work*, 10). However, the female body is a slippery tool for such a critique of its own cultural representation, an uncertain site for this contestation of power that threatens to undermine its feminist message. Buckley may enact a feminist critique on the female body but several audience members simply read it as a striptease show and the artist as a prostitute. As an artist she works with the third wave’s knowing slipperiness, recognizing that the female body is always already culturally inscribed as spectacular and counteracting this by a deliberate, upsetting display
of this spectacularity. Budgeon, quoting Lloyd, discusses this counter-discursive, parodic strategy among third-wave feminist artists and writers, combining it with a warning: ‘A parodic performance of gender seeks to destabilize the norms that serve to naturalize gender; but, because it is not possible for those performances to take place outside of gender, “politically parody may actually reproduce what it seeks to displace”’ (Budgeon 2011, 121). As Warshawski wonders: ‘Who was exploiter, who was exploited?’ (Body Work, 22).

In Body Work Paretsky engages with these debates around feminist body art: the often uncomfortable exploration of masochism, the ‘guilt’ of the audience, the sacrificial art that makes a spectacle of physical pain and the feminist artists who both exploit the body and denounce its exploitation. Via the second-waver Warshawski, Paretsky voices a nervous reaction to this ambiguity and it is down to Petra – the seemingly shallow young feminist underestimated by the detective – to counter Warshawski’s defensiveness when they discuss the surgery-based body art of some women artists: ‘Even you, mega-feminist, you’re laughing at me because I’m young and blond. If I put one of these horns on my head, people would think twice before they treated me like I have the brain of a two-year-old’ (Body Work, 248).

As series fiction, the Warshawski novels have overcome a number of major narrative challenges. With both protagonist and creator ageing, the series functions as a progress narrative, incorporating reflections on age, ageing and the passage of time. Moreover, the feminist message of the series has had to counter fundamental contextual and cultural changes, economic decline, neo-conservatism and the return of religion as a dominant force. Related to this are the evolutions and developments within feminism itself. In the discussions of feminist body art in Body Work, Paretsky clearly ventured outside her comfort zone in an interesting but at times anxious, self-conscious novel. However, in the slow, gradual progress of the series formula – novel upon novel – the Warshawski series acts as what has been called a ‘living memory’ (Hewitt 2010, Loc. 1455) of some of the complexities in twentieth- and twenty-first-century feminism.

Notes

1. Paretsky’s memoir reveals the extent to which Warshawski’s experiences are based on the author’s own biography, highlighting her work for the National Abortion Rights Action League in Illinois, her experiences doing clinic escort duty and the impact of Martin Luther King’s summer in Chicago (2007, 53, 63, 66).
2. Kinser presents a refreshingly simple definition for these two terms: ‘second wave’ feminism is used to ‘suggest the era of feminism rooted in and shaped by the 1960s–1980s political climate and “third wave” to suggest the era of feminism rooted in and shaped by the mid “80s-new millennium political climate’” (Kinser in Budgeon 2011, 7).

3. Wolf (1991) identified female beauty, as extolled in newspaper gossip columns and glossy women’s magazines, as a powerful anti-feminist tool, part of the nineties backlash against second-wave feminism.

4. Paretsky may have in mind the work of current feminist performance artists such as American-Iranian video artist Shirin Neshat, who projects Arabic text on faces (see www.gladstonegallery.com/neshat.asp) or Boston singer Amanda Palmer, who lets fans write on her naked body. Paretsky’s Body Artist also brings to mind the controversy around van Gogh and Hirsi Ali’s short film Submission (2004), an agitprop piece highlighting violence against women in some Islamic societies and shocking the Muslim world with its depiction of texts from the Qur’an written on women’s naked bodies, covered by only a semi-transparent abaya.
Other than Stieg Larsson’s Lisbeth Salander, the best-known woman hero in modern Swedish crime fiction is Liza Marklund’s journalist detective, Annika Bengtzon. Marklund is regarded as a pivotal figure in the breakthrough of women crime writers in Sweden in the late 1990s and early 2000s (see Bergman 2012b, 296–9). One of the more feminist writers of the Swedish crime fiction tradition, she has been prominent in discussing and criticizing the abuse and oppression of women in Swedish society (Bergman 2012a, 136; Kärrholm 2011, 135). Marklund also inscribes herself within an Anglo-American crime fiction tradition in which ‘most liberal feminist writers have chosen the female amateur as their series detective’ and where ‘[a] favourite choice has been the investigative journalist’ (Munt 1994, 52–3). Furthermore, Marklund’s woman hero is in many ways one of the genre’s forerunners that inspired Larsson’s Salander (Bergman 2012a, 136–7, 140, 142).

Debuting in 1998, Marklund’s Bengtzon series now consists of 11 novels. It has been claimed that a crime series today ‘is really an ongoing story about the character’s life’ (O’Callahan in Walton and Jones 1999, 153), and that ‘300 pages isn’t enough to complete a good, strong character’ (King in Walton and Jones 1999, 56). The series format gives the author an opportunity to create complex characters who develop over time and reflect changes in society and genre trends (Walton and Jones 1999, 56). When discussing seriality (what connects the novels of a series) in detective fiction, Molander Danielsson notes a recent shift in focus ‘from investigation and case to protagonist and life’, and that ‘the contemporary detective series [becomes] a chronicle of character development and a history of the characters’ lives’ (2002, 148–9). Walton
and Jones even compare the private investigator novel and series to an autobiographical style of writing (1999, 153–4). Detective ‘biography’ would thus seem to be an increasingly important component of crime series in general, and in this chapter I trace the continuous ‘subplot’ of the developments in Bengtzon’s life throughout Marklund’s series. Accordingly, instead of primarily analysing crimes and/or their detection, this study addresses one of the most important aspects of seriality: the depiction of the life of the detective protagonist. Throughout the series Bengtzon fluctuates between the roles of ‘conflicted mother’ and ‘lone avenger’: my aim here is to investigate and describe how this manifests itself so as to gain further insights into the serial function of the detective character.

Over the course of the series, Bengtzon experiences break-ups, love affairs, marriage, divorce, giving birth to two children and having an abortion, as well as moving from a small town to Stockholm, and then between different areas in the city. Professionally she works on and off in a number of different capacities at the tabloid *Kvällspressen* in Stockholm. While struggling with both her professional and private life, Bengtzon also develops and changes as a journalist and an individual.

Her development as a journalist does not run smoothly. In *Studio sex* (1999; *Studio 69*, 2002; *Exposed*, 2011), she is a new, young and idealistic temp, struggling to fit into her role. After being criticized on a televised news show that brings up the crime case she is working on, she falls apart completely, thinking that she will never be allowed to work as a journalist again; but through encouragement from her new managing editor, Anders Schyman, and her police informant, Q, she regains her confidence. Nevertheless, Bengtzon is torn between returning to her steady job at a small-town paper and her ambition to stay in Stockholm. When eventually offered six months’ work as a sub-editor at *Kvällspressen*, she decides to take it.

In the beginning of *Paradiset* (2000; *Paradise*, 2004/ *Vanished*, 2012), Schyman concludes that Bengtzon is:

too young, too immature, too excitable and too impetuous, but in his opinion she had far more potential than most people. She was naïve, but had a strong sense of ethics, driven by an undeniable belief in justice. She was fast, and she wrote well. And she showed definite signs of being a bulldozer, which was a great advantage for a tabloid reporter. If she couldn’t get round a problem she just rode over it. (Vanished, 26–7)

Schyman’s thoughts reflect the perspective of the novels’ implicit narrator, with the passage above summarizing Bengtzon’s ‘status’ at this point in the series. Klein notes that while male (hardboiled) detectives are often driven by an ‘abstract, judgmental, and rigid’ personal code of ethics, women detectives rather subscribe to an ‘ethic of responsibility’ that is more flexible and built on a ‘concern for how their actions and decisions will affect the other people involved in the scenario’ (Klein 1995, 235). Bengtzon can be seen to be closer to the more rigid, male model here at the beginning of the series, in contrast to later on when she develops a more context-sensitive ‘ethics of responsibility’. However, it is obvious to the reader that Bengtzon is not the driven working woman she used to be, and that she is still shaken by the deadly encounter with her boyfriend at the end of Studio sex. In spite of this, when her six months are up, Bengtzon manages to write a story that finally lands her a ‘real’ job at the tabloid’s crime desk.

In Prime time (2002; Prime Time, 2006), Bengtzon initially shows subservient tendencies, assisting Schyman in a power struggle at the tabloid. Afterwards, she realizes she did the right thing, legally and morally, and as Schyman is promoted to editor-in-chief, Bengtzon also gets a promotion. Prime time shows strong influences from the whodunit genre, and at the end of the novel Bengtzon displays new confidence as she coaxes the murderer to confess during a press conference at which most of the suspects are present, in true whodunit style.

With regard to genre, there is more focus on the journalistic procedural in Sprängaren (1998; The Bomber, 2011) than in any of Marklund’s other novels.² The novel starts with Bengtzon taking a taxi and the driver complimenting her on her work, thus confirming that she is now a well-established journalist. Her initial forays into investigative fieldwork are also marked by professionalism and experience. When Bengtzon is back at the office, however, it is clear that her authority is questioned and that her new position as head of the crime desk is complicated. Her responsibilities as a boss have turned Bengtzon’s workdays
into a constant power struggle – this is partly attributed to her being a woman in a position of leadership – a ‘problem’ that also constitutes the main theme of the novel. Eventually, Bengtzon questions whether it is possible for her to continue leading the crime desk, and attempts to resign. Schyman rejects this: he considers Bengtzon as his potential replacement. Her fighting spirit rekindled, Bengtzon is then kidnapped by the murderer, but is eventually rescued by the police.

At the beginning of the novel *Den röda vargen* (2003; *The Red Wolf*, 2010), Schyman once again reflects on Bengtzon’s qualities and shortcomings:

Hon har ingen självbevarelsedrift. Hon utsätter sig för vad som helst, saker som normala människor aldrig skulle drömma om, för något fattas. Något har försvunnit långs vägen, dragits ut med roten, ärren filats ner med åren, lämnat henne skoningslös, mot världen, och mot sig själv. Det hon har kvar är sitt rättspatos, sanningen som fyr i en hjärna fylld av mörker. (*Den röda vargen*, 18)

*She hasn't got any instinct for self-preservation. She gets herself into all sorts of situations, things normal people would never dream of doing, because there's something missing there. Something got lost long ago, yanked out, roots and all, the scar fading over the years, leaving her exposed to the world, and to herself. All she's got left is her sense of justice, the truth like a beacon in a world full of darkness.* (*Red Wolf*, 23–4, emphasis in original)

Once again, the narrator’s view of the protagonist is summarized. Compared with Schyman’s thoughts in *Paradiset*, it is clear that Bengtzon has grown out of her immaturity and naïveté, but has also lost her sense of self-preservation. In *Den röda vargen*, she also loses Schyman’s trust for the first time, something that makes her increasingly doubt herself.

When Bengtzon learns that her husband is cheating on her, she uses her position as a journalist to ruin the career of his lover, thus showing that her sense of ethics is not flawless. When Schyman finds out, he uses that knowledge to coerce her not to go public with an embarrassing story involving the owners of the tabloid. Bengtzon counters by similarly blackmailing him, and after a fight where it becomes obvious how similar they are in their work ethics and methods, they decide to publish her story, in spite of the repercussions which see the tabloid’s board chairman forced to resign. Bengtzon thus emerges victorious
from the conflict with her boss, her professional skills as an investigative journalist giving her the upper hand securing her job at the tabloid.

In Nobels testamente (2006; Last Will, 2012) she witnesses a murder. The police forbid her from talking about it – her position at the paper becomes more complicated. Coming across another murder victim, this time she refuses to adhere to the police request to keep quiet, instead showing loyalty to her work and the tabloid where she feels she belongs. In Livstid (2007; Lifetime, 2013), Bengtzon suppresses her feelings of despair and loneliness, resulting from her husband having left her, by throwing herself into her work. At the start of En plats i solen (2008; The Long Shadow, 2013), her status at work is once more open to discussion. But this time, being one of only very few people Schyman completely trusts, he asks her to step up in the hierarchy. Bengtzon turns down the offer, however, and ends up ‘demoted’ to the role of news reporter, working under an inexperienced and newly promoted news editor. Schyman urges her to take a freelance contract; the novel ends before her status at the paper is resolved.

At the beginning of Du gamla, du fria (2011; Borderline, 2014), the reader finds Bengtzon once again working as a news reporter after a stint as a foreign correspondent in Washington. Her predicament causes her to reflect that: ‘Livet var tillbaka på ruta ett. Exakt här hade hon börjat som sommarvikarie för tretton år sedan: som tipskontrollant, springschach, hantlangare i nyhetsbranschen’ (Du gamla, du fria, 21) (‘Life was back to square one. This was precisely where she had started as a summer temp thirteen years ago, in charge of the tip-off phone-line, running errands, a dogsbody in the service of news’ [Borderline, 25]). Having been reunited with her husband after the events in En plats i solen, four years have elapsed between the novels. Bengtzon’s husband has been kidnapped, and Schyman promises that the tabloid will help pay the ransom. In return, Bengtzon agrees to describe her experiences of the kidnapping to be published once her husband is safe – thus truly blurring the line between her private and work life. At the end of the novel, with Schyman deciding to leave the tabloid, a question mark is again placed over Bengtzon’s work situation.

Apart from experiencing problems at work, Bengtzon needs to tackle several issues in her private life. Despite a few rather extraordinary events, Bengtzon’s life should not be considered ‘extreme’ for an average Swedish woman of her age over a time span of nearly 15 years. At the same time, however, she is constantly struggling – perhaps more than most – as there is always something that prevents her from leading the happy life she so craves.
Bengtzon’s relationships are particularly prone to disappointment and hurt. In parallel to events in Studio sex, the reader also retrospectively follows Bengtzon’s personal diary, starting with when she is 17 and in an unhealthy relationship with Sven Matsson. By the time of Studio sex, she is 24 and has still not broken free of him: when she eventually leaves him he tries to kill her, but their violent encounter ends with Bengtzon killing him instead. This confrontation forms the grand finale of the novel and is clearly inspired by the psychological thriller genre. Simultaneously, this also marks the arrival of Bengtzon as an independent woman and a true hardboiled hero, ready to do what it takes to survive.

Nonetheless, Bengtzon’s world in Paradiset would seem to be lonely and grey. Once again finding herself in a life-threatening situation, she manages to save herself and a woman murder witness. When the woman is later killed, Bengtzon is devastated; and with the death of her grandmother, the only loving and supportive person in her life, Bengtzon finally breaks down. Her descent into fragility and depression thus contrasts with several occasions where she shows action-hero qualities by saving other people. Later Bengtzon has a brief affair with one of her informers, Thomas Samuelsson, who is married. Realizing she is pregnant, Bengtzon plans an abortion, and even contemplates suicide, before deciding to have the baby. The novel ends with Samuelsson leaving his wife for Bengtzon.

In Prime time, Bengtzon has taken on the same subservient role in relation to Samuelsson as she did with Matsson, and through a large part of the novel she blames herself for being a bad partner and mother, working instead of spending the Midsummer weekend with him and their two children. After a friend opens her eyes to her self-destructive behaviour, Bengtzon tells herself: ‘Jag behöver inte ha det så här. Jag förtjänar bättre’ (Prime time, 258) (‘I don’t have to live like this. I deserve something better’ [Prime Time, 296; emphasis in original]). Power is a central theme in Prime time, and Bengtzon’s dealing with her submissive tendencies constitutes her most important development.

In Sprängaren, Bengtzon tells Samuelsson, to whom she is now married: ‘jag är rädd att du ska tycka att jag sviker dig, men tidningen tillåter inte att jag sviker dem, och så står jag mitt emellan i nån sorts jävla korseld’ (63) (‘I’m worried you think I’m letting you down, but the paper won’t give me any slack, and I’m sort of stuck in between, in the crossfire’ [The Bomber, 90]). This spells out the conflict of interests that contributed to making Marklund’s debut novel in 1998 stand out
in Swedish crime fiction: that is, the difficulty for women in balancing work and family life which is one of the leitmotifs that makes Marklund an important figure in the recent wave of Swedish women crime writers (Bergman 2012b, 297; and 2013, 72). While the relationship between Bengtzon and Samuelsson comes under severe stress in *Sprängaren*, he is occasionally sympathetic to her struggles at work, although he clearly prefers her staying at home. Notwithstanding, Samuelsson still personifies what Reddy notes is a pattern in novels featuring hardboiled women detectives: ‘[v]irtually every man with whom these detectives become involved tries to change them in some way or reveals unexamined sexist assumptions once the relationship is under way, after a period of good behavior when he tries to establish his supposed respect for her work’ (Reddy 1988, 106).

After her experiences of being kidnapped in *Sprängaren*, in *Den röda vargen* Bengtzon repeatedly hears the voices of angels and experiences panic attacks. Before she can recover fully, she is struck another blow, discovering that Samuelsson is having an affair. At the same time, Bengtzon’s life is in danger as she investigates a series of murders that culminate in a violent showdown. Realizing how close he has been to losing her, Samuelsson finally decides that he wants to stay with her. The main theme of *Den röda vargen* is the importance of belonging. ‘Människan ska kanske inte lämna sina rötter, tänkte hon. Vår strävan efter utveckling kanske förstör den naturkraft som gjort oss till älskande varelser’ (*Den röda vargen*, 162) (‘Maybe people shouldn’t leave their roots, she thought. Maybe our longing for progress ruins the natural force that makes us capable of love’ [Red Wolf, 192; emphasis in original]). Belonging to a place, a context and with other people is what Bengtzon desires above all. However, like so many of the hardboiled women heroes of the American tradition, Bengtzon’s own roots have been severed (Reddy 1988, 104). Bengtzon’s very existence is a constant struggle, a fact which makes it clear that her primary literary forerunners are to be found among the hardboiled women heroes, originating with such writers as Sara Paretsky, Sue Grafton and Val McDermid. Bengtzon has left the small town where she grew up, her grandmother is dead and she has no contact with her remaining family. If she is to belong, it has to be based on something other than ‘roots’. While the American women detectives tend to create their own ‘chosen families’ of friends (Reddy 1988, 109–11), Bengtzon seeks to create her belonging primarily in the shape of a nuclear family. When she finds an enormous amount of cash, knowing she will get a huge finder’s fee, she decides to buy a house
Transformations in Liza Marklund’s Crime Series

for her family in one of Stockholm’s affluent suburbs, in an attempt to create a place where she can belong. Simultaneously, Bengtzon’s desire for a context highlights her growing alienation. In *Den röda vargen* things really begin to fall apart and Bengtzon’s ‘lone avenger’ characteristics become increasingly dominant. The abuse by and killing of Matsson in *Studio sex*, the recent traumatic experience in *Sprängaren*, the loss of Schyman’s trust and her panic anxiety (mentioned for the first time in *Den röda vargen*) are certainly enough to make anyone unstable.

In *Nobels testamente*, Bengtzon continues to have panic attacks and nightmares. When Samuelsson discovers that she knows about his affair, he leaves her for the other woman. This time she realizes that she can pull things back together. She is given no respite to collect herself, however. The same night, she is taken hostage by a murderer, but is saved by the police and returned home. The house is subsequently torched and she barely manages to save the children from the intense fire. Despite suffering from severe self-doubt and being quite unhappy about her life and situation, the end of the novel sees a Bengtzon who is true to the archetypal hardboiled hero: after repeated blows she still manages to save the day.

*Livstid* begins where *Nobels testamente* ends, and despite the seemingly hopeless situation, Bengtzon concludes that she still has what she deems most important: herself and the children. Once more, she shows her action-hero qualities and moral stamina when she manages to save a kidnapped boy.

While working in Spain in *En plats i solen*, Bengtzon has a brief affair with a Swedish police officer stationed there. ‘Det är inte kärlek, tänkte hon. Det är bara för att jag vill’ (*En plats i solen*, 234) (‘This isn’t love, she thought. This is just because I want to do it’ [*The Long Shadow*, 290]). For the first time, Bengtzon seems to enjoy life without feeling guilty about it, but this liberated feeling is soon replaced by severe self-doubt. Although Bengtzon and Samuelsson reconcile she knows he will eventually let her down again. *En plats i solen* ends with Bengtzon taken prisoner in Morocco, which culminates in another violent showdown, before she returns to Sweden. The pattern of the dramatic ending where Bengtzon, in grave danger, finally saves the day – or sometimes just survives – is thus once more repeated.

In *Du gamla, du fria*, Bengtzon is 37 years old, and in order to negotiate with Samuelsson’s kidnappers, his boss at the Ministry of Justice, Jimmy Halenius, virtually moves in with her and the children. Halenius becomes Bengtzon’s rock throughout the story; she grows to trust him
and eventually seduces him. The reader is left guessing when it comes to further developments in their relationship, but it seems that Bengtzon has finally met an equal. Simultaneously, *Du gamla, du fria* is Marklund’s least feminist novel, as Bengtzon, like the heroine of any traditional romance novel, adopts a passive role and lets Halenius, the strong, broad-shouldered man of the world, take charge of her life and affairs. After Samuelsson returns home safely, Bengtzon finally decides to leave him, the novel closing as she is on her way to tell him.

Marklund leaves the future open for a stronger and more composed Bengtzon to meet new challenges in subsequent novels, not just in her professional but also in her private life. Molander Danielsson stresses that the protagonist of a modern crime series ‘is likely to have some kind of unfinished personal business by the end of each book’ (2002, 153), while Walton and Jones suggest that ‘[t]he lack of closure in the personal narrative is one of the major draws for readers who are loyal to a series, ensuring their continuing emotional, ethical, and economic investment in the character’ (1999, 153). It is common in crime series that important events in the continuous subplots, for example the private life of the protagonist, ‘are found in structurally privileged positions, such as beginnings and endings. These positions further emphasize the subplots’ significance in the text, as well as their sequential function’ (Molander Danielsson 2002, 160). This seems to be true also in most of Marklund’s novels, where the reader is left ‘hanging’ until the next novel in regard to Bengtzon’s fortunes whether these concern her relationship status, work situation, mental health or other issues.

While the conflict between career and family depicted in *Sprängaren* is often pointed out as significant in Marklund’s series, it is not in this debut novel that Bengtzon really starts her ‘journey’. Instead, it is in *Studio sex* that the reader encounters a young, insecure woman who is new to the big city and to tabloid journalism, and living in an abusive relationship. By the end of *Du gamla, du fria*, Bengtzon is an experienced and independent journalist and mother of two, who is about to finally leave her notoriously unfaithful husband. In many senses, Bengtzon could be regarded as an excellent example of the kind of woman detective character Munt identifies as common in socialist feminist Anglo-American crime fiction of the 1980s – that is, ‘a strong female hero who is relatively whole and centered’ who is ‘[f]ractured and fragmented yet authentic and autonomous’, and who thereby ‘provides a re-entry for the marginalized into society in order to regain power’ (1994, 61; emphasis in original). Like these women heroes, Bengtzon comes from
a working-class background with a strong sense of social justice, as opposed to the upper-class values and social segregation often represented by Samuelsson and his family.

As previously discussed, Bengtzon’s primary literary forerunners are found among the women heroes of the hardboiled tradition. What singles Bengtzon out from these, however, is that while they are generally unmarried and have no children (Klein 1995, 232), Bengtzon is single in only three of the novels of the series; she also becomes a mother early on (after Paradiset). Additionally, unlike some of her American ‘sisters’, Bengtzon is rarely happy with her situation and constantly struggling not only with the patriarchal structures of society, but also with her mental state and low self-esteem. Fights with her mother and sister, neither of whom likes her, and with her only friend, who is quite nasty and takes advantage of her in the later novels, render Bengtzon’s loneliness all the more poignant.

Throughout the series, Bengtzon alternates between prioritizing and balancing work and family, between idealizing motherhood and independence, between striving for belonging and being a loner – sometimes even an outcast. The oscillation between these ‘roles’ does not constitute a continuous, chronological development; it is rather the playing field on which Bengtzon operates. Perhaps this lack of a clear linear development is a result of the long series, in which a continuous development in a certain direction would eventually lead to a scarcely credible extreme. Marklund’s depiction of a hero who is on a continuous emotional and psychological rollercoaster provides for drama writ large and change without ending up with a character that is no longer good detective material. Molander Danielsson points out that ‘repeated aspects of change, or anti-closural strategies, by their very repetition work toward stability and closure’ (2002, 156). In this sense, Bengtzon’s continuous struggles contribute to establishing her as a ‘stable’ presence throughout the series. Simultaneously, she does display some linear development, in particular from a young and inexperienced journalist into a more mature and experienced one. Marklund’s series can thus also be regarded as a kind of coming-of-age story about a young woman who gradually learns to navigate the world – its private as well as professional and political spheres – and who eventually matures into a true adult, not necessarily into someone whose life and career are perfect by any means, but someone who can deal with whatever she encounters, and who emerges from her struggles stronger and ready to meet new challenges.
Notes

1. Since this article was written, Marklund has published the final two novels of the Bengtzon series, *Lyckliga gatan* (2013) and *Järnblod* (2015). These novels do not call into question any of the more general conclusions made here concerning the series as a whole. For further information, see also my study *Swedish Crime Fiction: The Making of Nordic Noir* (Milan: Mimesis, 2014).

2. This is likely a consequence of this being Marklund’s first Bengtzon novel, of Marklund wanting to introduce Bengtzon and her work, in combination with the theme of discussing the difficult situation that women in leadership positions face in the workplace. Furthermore, it is an attempt to connect the novel to the police procedural that dominated Swedish crime fiction at the time of Marklund’s genre debut (Bergman 2012b, 292). Molander Danielsson stresses the importance of reading crime series chronologically, independent of publication order (2002, 147, 158). Although published first, *Sprängaren* is chronologically the fourth novel of the series, and in order to follow changes in Bengtzon’s character, it will be treated here as such.

3. The scene is one of many in Marklund’s oeuvre which clearly shows Bengtzon to be a forerunner of Larsson’s Salander character (Bergman 2012a, 140).

4. Following in Marklund’s wake, this conflict has become a staple in Swedish crime fiction by both men and women writers (Bergman 2012b, 299).
11
It’s All One Book, It’s All One World: George Pelecanos’s Washington DC

Eduardo Obradó

Across 20 novels George Pelecanos has written a series which does not portray the same character, as is common with other crime fiction writers. Instead, he uses different protagonists in his four series which, together with his other books, constitute an ambitious effort to describe and explore the city of Washington DC over the last 50 years.

This chapter will argue that in order to capture the full scope of the city Pelecanos had to create different sets of protagonists, each adding to a comprehensive view of Washington. These varied voices contribute to the picture of the ‘real’ city, populated by an overwhelming majority of black residents and still retaining a strong sense of neighbourhood life. But he also presents a relatively unexplored, anonymous element which strives to survive in spite of the effects of poverty, racism and crime. In this sense, his DC is paradigmatic of inner-city life in urban America, while at the same time preserving its own personality, observed not only through the descriptions of streets and buildings, but also thanks to the use of street talk and music or rich depictions of the characters’ dress and behaviour.

What is it that makes Washington DC a unique city? In his chapter on Washington in *The American City*, Hurtsfield (in Clarke 1998, 105–23) considers that the central feature of the American capital is its rootlessness, both literal and figurative, and the absence of a specific urban identity. There are several reasons for this. In fact, the words Washington, District of Columbia do not even sound like the name of a city. It lacks a defining characteristic: it is not an ‘import-replacing region’ (Jacobs 1984, 59–71). Neither an industrial centre, nor a commercial venue, its main activities are administrative, political, financial, in a word, bureaucratic. In fact, it was termed the ‘first post-industrial city’ (Hurtsfield in Clarke 1998, 108) even before America became industrialized.
Unlike other American cities DC was planned from its inception. President Washington appointed Pierre Charles L’Enfant, who laid out a rational city, a typical product of the Enlightenment, forming a grid of linear streets, crossed by avenues named for each state. These constitute the ‘Lines or Avenues of direct communication’ which L’Enfant devised, ‘in order to connect the separate and most distant objects with the principal, and to preserve through the whole a reciprocity of sight at the same time’ (L’Enfant 1962, 22).

This ‘sight’ is preserved by the city’s most striking feature: the absence of the element which makes other American cities individual, recognizable, unique. Because of the Heights of Buildings Act (1899), which restricts buildings to 130 feet, DC has no skyline, with the Washington Memorial being its tallest landmark.

Finally, DC is not politically represented in Congress, and as a result of the Home Rule Act (1973), limiting its ability to govern itself, the Federal Government can exercise power over local decisions.

All these elements help shape our image of the city, connected with politics and reinforced in film and literature by repeated use of Washington as the décor for political thrillers, or even murder stories, such as those by Margaret Truman,2 which take place in the most emblematic buildings of DC. These representations underline its character as an organized, efficient city inserted into a coherent space, or, to use de Certeau’s term, a ‘quadrillage’ (in Rigby 2003, 36), meaning both close surveillance by state forces – inherent to the federal status of the city – and the squared pattern of modern streets and avenues. However, such representations leave out the real city, the ‘secret city’, as McLaughlin Green calls it.3

Aside from 2003 Pulitzer winner Edward P. Jones,4 whom Pelecanos acknowledges as one of the few writers dealing with working-class DC (Charney 2012), the story of this secret city remains untold. For Weinman, ‘beyond Pelecanos never has […] any other crime writer who called Washington his or her fictional home, looked beyond the city’s political echelon’ (in Jakubowski 2010, 128). This void led Pelecanos to embark on the task of writing a chronicle of the real Washington:

There was a hole in Washington fiction […]. Most D.C. novels were about politics, or the federal city or people who lived in Georgetown or Chevy Chase […] there were some clichés that had risen out of that, the foremost being that Washington was a transient city and that there was no culture here beyond the culture that came in and out with the federal government. […] Washington is the home of generations of people, a primarily black city. (Donahue 2008, 1)
Described as ‘the Zola of Washington D.C.’ (Schuessler 2000), a term he does not feel uncomfortable with, Pelecanos admits that what he does is ‘writing social crime novels’ (Birnbaum 2003). His work has also been defined as ‘compassionate urban reportage’, while Geherin considers that Pelecanos deals with the present as ‘an urban anthropologist’ (2008, 63–4).

Unlike many fellow crime writers, Pelecanos has not used a single character in a chronological movement through his series. Instead, there are four different series featuring diverse protagonists and a further succession of books where characters appear just once. This strategy allows him free movement in time and space, from the 1930s to the present, from the Anacostia River to Georgetown, in an effort to explain the real story of the city. As Haut points out, one of his distinctive narrative features is a ‘beguiling sense of nostalgia’ (1999, 115). Despite the differences in characters and periods, all his books are nevertheless part of his fictional Washington, and cannot be analysed separately, since they share most of the same concerns.

His first novel, A Firing Offense (1992), starred Nick Stefanos, an advertising manager in a local electronics chain, turned Private Investigator. Strongly influenced by early hardboiled writers, especially Hammett and Chandler, and acting as a first-person narrator, the Greek-American Stefanos appeared in three books.

He was soon followed by Pelecanos’s first ‘salt’n’pepper’ team: Dimitri Karras and Marcus Clay, who appeared in what was soon known as The DC Quartet (Wiegand 2001), in the mode of James Ellroy’s LA Quartet. By featuring a black character, Pelecanos could describe more freely a part of the city only glimpsed in the first series. This strategy also allowed him to go back to the year of the bicentennial and the 1980s, when the city was ravaged by the cocaine epidemic that raised the murder rate to the highest in the US (Vuillamy 1994).

In 2001 Pelecanos initiated a new series, introducing another mixed-race pairing: Private Investigator Derek Strange and ex-policeman Terry Quinn. This duo appeared together in three novels: Right as Rain (2001), Hell to Pay (2002) and Soul Circus (2003), where Quinn is killed. Instead of ending the series, Pelecanos then took Strange back to his rookie days, during DC’s 1968 riots. Hard Revolution (2004) is Pelecanos’s inquiry into that moment when the city’s history changed. He later returned to a younger Strange, writing a prequel to the series, What it Was (2012), set in the 1970s.

After Hard Revolution, Pelecanos wrote several books featuring different characters: Drama City (2006), The Night Gardener (2006), The
Eduardo Obradó


If crime novels are ‘tours of the city, but [...] tours that take you out off the tourist map’ (Highmore 2005, 95), Pelecanos has used his various series to write a full journey around the real Washington DC, taking the reader on a ride, both geographical and chronological. The city is thus the most distinguishable feature of his fiction: ‘[j]ust as Faulkner used Yoknapatawpha County as the unifying element for a range of diverse novels, Pelecanos makes Washington the center around which all his novels revolve’ (Geherin 2008, 64). His Washington is, though, alien to the habitual landmarks: the Capitol or The White House. Allusions to these are few, and when they are mentioned, it is by real Washingtonians dismissing them as empty attractions for visitors. In A Firing Offense, Dante goes with Stefanos to the Old Post Office Building, one of Washington’s tallest structures, where they view Pennsylvania Avenue, Constitution Avenue and the Capitol. “I don’t really like this view”, Dante says, and they move south to the Potomac: “All those tourists”, he said. “They waste their time standing in line to get up the Washington Monument, when the best view of DC is right here” (179).

To get a real perspective of the city, one must avoid tourist spots. Guidebooks are useless for reading the metropolis. Meaningful places are those which only the inhabitants know. In Hard Revolution, Derek Strange finds an apartment at 13th and Clifton, with the best view of the city. Next to it stands Cardozo High School, ‘[t]op of the motherfuckin’ town’ (179). Formerly known as Central High, this is one of the landmarks that tell more about Washington than the monumental space:

For thirty-two years, when it was filled with whites of northern and southern European extraction, it was called Central High. [...] In 1950, four years shy of Brown v. Board of Education, Central was declared a school for ‘Negro’ pupils. The city needed the large facility for its black students, as their schools had become severely overcrowded [...]. Central’s name was changed to Cardozo High [...]. After Brown, despite the good intent and goal of desegregation, Cardozo stayed black. (90)

Local businesses, such as shops, the Greek diners visited by Stefanos or Lucas, Strange’s own office, with its sign showing a magnifying glass over his name, or even ‘The Big Chair’ mentioned in Soul Circus (14), a 20-foot-tall mahogany chair the symbol of a now disappeared furniture company, lying like a mock monument in the Southeast of the city,
George Pelecanos’s Washington DC are the real landmarks of this other Washington. The appreciation and knowledge of these landmarks, despite their being located in dangerous neighbourhoods, are symptomatic of how the residents perceive the city, alien to the official version. In fact, these are the places which show the true nature of DC, the evidence required for its decoding. As indicated by Benjamin, the trivial spots often reveal the real essence of the city.

Regarded by residents with mistrust and even suspicion, the presence of authority is limited. In Pelecanos’s Washington, institutions have failed the city. In Drama City police officers, whether good or corrupt, pass by Morton Street, shouting from their Crown Vics, moving the dealers and users on (172). ‘Law enforcement here – face it, Stefanos, it’s a joke.’ Local government is not positively depicted, either: ‘And the mayor? Well, maybe he could take care of things. If only he could pull his head up off the mirror’ (A Firing Offense, 1999, 202). With regard to federal government, schemes like the urban renewal projects started in the 1960s or the extension of the Metro Green Area have let down the population they were supposedly helping. Even media coverage has adopted the distorted vision of a city that, since the riots of 1968, has been falling to pieces.

Neglected by the federal powers, abandoned by the middle classes, either white or Afro-American, fleeing to the suburbs in Maryland or Virginia in search of the tranquility and protection they do not seem to find in an increasingly threatening environment, Washington must combat an image of violence, drug-trafficking and ghettoization. In short, it has been distilled down to the worst the city is associated with: poverty, delinquency, disorder and chaos. This Washington, for strangers, is the symbol of everything intrinsically evil in the city. It is perceived as a dangerous area: ‘a father would not let his daughter live among those low coloreds in a shithole such as this’ (2009, 178).

The name of the city is also the object of wordplays to underline its menacing nature. Washington is referred to as ‘Murder Capitol’ (1999, 127), ‘Chocolate City’ (2000a, 11) or even ‘War-shington’ (2009, 217). Residents are aware of this biased image. In Drama City, longtime friends Nigel Johnson, a drug trafficker, and Lorenzo, an ex-convict heading for redemption, talk about the city:

Nigel: ‘Remember back when they was callin’ this town Dodge City?’ [...] ‘The everyday people who lived in this city hated that name.’

‘As they should have,’ said Lorenzo. ‘Drama City be more like it.’

‘Like them two faces they got hangin’ over the stage in those theaters. The smiling face and the sad.’

‘City got more than two sides.’ (2006, 256)
In an ironic twist on one of the founding American myths, the rural ideal as opposed to the corruptive nature of the urban, some of the evils infecting the city come from the countryside, notably guns. Handguns, banned in DC, are easily (and legally) purchased in the neighbouring counties, ‘Simple as buying a carton of milk’ (2003, 51). Maryland is also where local druglord Dewayne Durham chooses to live, for, as he explains: ‘The rule was, you kept your business in the city, in the neighborhoods you came up in, but you lived outside of town’ (2003, 112).

The arrival of strangers, mainly from bordering states, often means trouble. From Sonny and Wayne in The Way Home trying to recover the money accidentally found by Chris, to Fanella in What it Was, or Cooper, Clagget or the Thomas Brothers, setting out to commit a string of robberies on a killing spree in King Suckerman, they usually bring more grief and violence. Behind the drama, drugs and violence lies, however, an active, vigorous city. This can be seen in Pelecanos's effervescent depictions of street life. It is not only the music filling the scene, coming from cars or apartments, but the clothes people wear in the avenues, the bars, the small shops, how people behave and interact, the hustle and bustle of a thriving city. Despite its problems, there is still something to Washington that makes it an attractive place. In The Way Home, a Maryland boy who sometimes goes to DC for fun, is excited before going into the city: ‘Their infrequent trips into DC always made Jimmy's pulse race, partly from the thrill of the new and partly from fear. [...] he liked the way driving into the city made him feel’ (2009, 66).

Fear and thrill may be simultaneously provoked by the city, in what Most has called ‘the metropolitan sublime’, that mixture of astonishment and fear which invaded newcomers to the nineteenth-century city (Most 2006, 58). These emotions are repeated in visitors to the most dangerous areas. Stopping off at Benning Road, near the Anacostia, Strange describes this twofold aspect of DC:

Many of the apartment buildings, three-story brick affairs with the aesthetic appeal of bunkers, showed plywood in their windows. Hard young men, the malignant result of years of festering, unchecked poverty and fatherless homes, sat on their front steps. Strange had always admired the deep green of Anacostia and the views of the city from its hilly landscapes. It was the most beautiful section of town and also the ugliest, often at the same time. (2003, 23)

But fear is also present in city no-go zones, especially for whites. Quinn, trying to help his girlfriend find a missing teenager her organization is
tracking, finds himself in one of these and realizes that unless he were trying to buy drugs, he has no reason to be there.

Williams considers that race relations play a key role in Pelecanos’s writing. In a city which is mostly black, racism is one of its defining issues. Looking back to the past, Pelecanos shows an apparently tight-knit community, where white immigrants of European origin lived alongside Afro-Americans. Greek-owned diners, similar to the one Pelecanos’s father ran, are paradigmatic of this relationship based on respect and appreciation. Although each racial group kept to itself, aware of differences, no tensions were visible. This idyllic picture is, nevertheless, threatened by certain attitudes. In _Hard Revolution_, a young Strange usually hangs out with Billy Georgelakos, whose father owns the diner where Strange’s father works. Although he knows it is not common, Strange does not mind going out with him, nor visiting his all-white neighbourhood. However, on one outing, Strange is asked from a distance: ‘What you hangin’ with that white boy for?’ (2004, 7). Later the eldest Martini brother, Angelo, challenges Strange, who realizes that what drives the Italian is fear of the coloured boys.

Pelecanos’s fiction is marked by yearning for the period before the 1968 riots. Crime was not a major issue in the city, for violence was limited to certain districts and usually affected adults at night (2004, 7). Children then knew the squad cars by number, the neighbourhood cops by name (2004, 16). These details add up to an image of a village where youngsters could freely stroll the streets and not risk taking a stray bullet, as Strange reflects: ‘For its permanent residents, D.C. was in many ways still a small town’ (2003, 30).

As the black population grew, the flight to the suburbs increased and the city became less mixed. Social mobility left entire neighbourhoods abandoned, a migration sometimes aggravated by unscrupulous real-estate agents, who moved black families into white areas to make the residents sell on the cheap and relocate to the suburbs (2012, 9).

The riots left a scar on the city. For young Pelecanos, riding the bus every day on his way to his father’s diner and passing through areas ravaged by the riots, this was the turning point in the history of the city. _Hard Revolution_ is an excellent illustration of the troubles DC was going through. Strange has become a policeman and must endure the patronizing attitude of some of his fellow white officers; Stewart and Hess chase a black teenager with a car, knocking him down and killing him. Strange’s elder brother Dennis finds himself in the middle of a plan devised by his partners Alvin Jones and Kenneth Willis to rob a store run by a Jew. All these elements underline the city’s grim prospects and forecast a terrifying future.
One consequence of the riots was the escape of middle-class blacks – as well as whites – to the suburbs, and the relocation of hundreds of small businesses from the city centre to the adjacent residential area, contributing to the abandonment of the downtown (Bean 2000, 174–7). Added to this, the controversial administration of Mayor Marion Barry (‘Former Mayor’s Victory’, 1992), who ran the city for three terms, from 1978 to 1990, left the city almost completely bankrupt. To make matters worse, the crack cocaine epidemic which peaked by the middle of the 1980s caused a massive increase in murders, giving DC one of the highest crime rates in the US.

Arguably, one of the aspects which makes Pelecanos’s writing remarkable is that he makes no attempt to hide the gloomy side of his home town. In this sense, the opening lines of his first book, A Firing Offense, are revealing:

Torn lottery tickets and hot dog wrappers – the remnants of Georgia Avenue Day – blew across the strip. At the district line a snaggletoothed row of winos sat on the ledge of a coffee shop. A poster of the mayor, a smiling portrait in debauchery, was taped to the window behind them. The coke sweat had been dutifully airbrushed from the mayor’s forehead; only a contaminated grin remained. (1999, 1)

This is a tough reality – neither concealed nor embellished. The reader can stroll U Avenue, once black Washington’s grand avenue, now ‘ragged, near defeated by crime and indifference’ (2000b, 4), or walk around Anacostia, almost 100 per cent black, thought to be so dangerous and violent that it prevented people from visiting the nearby National Arboretum (267). Characters are shot by random gunfire on Georgia Avenue (2003, 307). Life in that part of town, just a few blocks away from the Capitol Dome, is full of hardships.

This negative vision of DC is not only produced by the prevailing conditions, but distorted by the media, distorting the reality. Pelecanos is very critical of the way the press provides information about what happens in the city. Newspapers are to blame for naming DC ‘Dodge City’, and for their treatment of crime:

Meanwhile, you read The Washington Post – they supposed to be ‘the liberal watchdog of the community’, right? – well, check it out. Some white woman gets raped in the suburbs, it makes page one. Now go to the back of the Metro section, where they got a special spot reserved for the niggers. They call it ‘Around the Area’, some shit like
that. And it’s always the same little boldfaced type: ‘Southeast Man Slain, Northeast Man Fatally Shot’. [...] One little paragraph, buried in the back of the paper, for the niggers. (1999, 188)

This is exactly what Lucas feels: ‘You kill a Caucasian in this town, you make the front page. Specially a square or a child’ (2011, 183). Media coverage is biased, paying no attention to the majority of the residents, who see how day by day the news of Afro-Americans killed is hidden in a remote section of the paper, as if implying their lives are of no importance. Like other institutions, the press seems to turn a blind eye to the real Washington.

However, the anger this produces in Pelecanos’s work is outweighed by faith in the vitality of the small-town, friendly community that still inhabits the city. These instances are not just the individual struggle of some of its dwellers (Strange coaching a junior football team, Lorenzo Brown trying to lead a straight life, away from drugs and gangs) but the thriving of a city recovering from past suffering.

In reality, crime is currently down in the city, following a mixed effort in community policing and renewal projects which have regained entire areas once riddled with poverty and crime (Fisher 2012). This process of gentrification is another issue in Pelecanos’s writing. Strange looks sceptically on its outcome, for the renewed areas become artificial, impersonal spaces for affluent whites, who price the current inhabitants out and thus provoke a new sprawl – of poorer residents – to the suburbs. Some renewal plans, however, have had an invigorating effect on the city, knocking down old projects and substituting decent houses available through low-rate loans, such as the house where Ali Carter lives in Garfield Heights:

The development was on the new side [...] Communities such as this one, housing long-time residents and newcomers alike, had been appearing in several spots in Southeast. Only those who were unreasonably resistant to change could say that this was not a positive development. (2009, 187)

By setting his novels in different areas and timeframes, Pelecanos shows us a panoramic view of the city. Every novel, whether set in 1976 or in the 1950s, when the great black migration reached one of its highest peaks, gives us clues as to what has made Washington what it is now. The novels present dichotomies that help us understand the city: the secret versus the obvious, the rational versus the irrational, the orderly
versus the chaotic. It is also a constant struggle of federal versus local, black versus white, trying to come to terms and make the city hospitable and habitable. In a further strong dichotomy, passion and indignation fill his pages: passion for the city still evokes excitement and the thrill of walking its streets, but indignation remains in response to the poverty and inequality that can still be found there: 'Pelecanos’s affection for the city is mixed with anger over its decline to overwhelming social, economic, and political forces beyond its control' (Geherin 2008, 78–9).

Lucas, Stefanos, Clay and, above all, Strange share this passion for their home town. They are city-lovers, the same term Most uses to talk about European detectives. This is arguably something that separates Pelecanos from the American detective tradition and one of his distinguishing features.

In addition, his entire work dispute Hurtsfield’s statement that the defining feature of Washington is its rootlessness. Pelecanos has exposed the foundations of a very particular urban identity. The uniqueness of Washington DC is revealed through the minute details scattered throughout his narrative, allowing the reader ‘to discover in the analysis of the smallest individual elements of the crystal the totality of what exists’ (Benjamin in Keith 2002, 414). In Pelecanos’s writing, the city has a definite, distinct identity, assembled book by book. It is an honest depiction which makes his Washington a city as authentic and real as it can get, each book providing a different piece of its unfinished portrait, aimed to produce a serial representation of everyday reality.

Despite the crime, the discrimination and the unfairness in most of his books, there is always an element of hope and confidence that good things may happen. We might then agree with Strange who, listening on his car radio to a conversation between a young mother and the DJ of a local station, responds with pleasure: ‘Strange smiled. He did love D.C.’ (2003, 68).

Notes

1. This refers to a city’s ability to move from an economy based on importing goods and services to the capacity for replacing those imported items with home-made goods, thus boosting expertise and innovation and, eventually, wealth.
6. He has also edited two anthologies of crime stories set in Washington, *D.C. Noir* (2006) and *D.C. Noir 2* (2008), and from the first season has been writer and producer of acclaimed HBO series *The Wire*.
7. ‘Benjamin regards the marginalia of the city as the most important clues for its decipherment’ (Keith 2002, 414).
8. ‘If his work has a single subject it’s that of the racial divide. Almost all the crime in his novels is underpinned by this divide’ (Williams 2007, 140).
9. In 1991 there were 479 homicides in Washington DC (Noble 2012).
10. ‘The European detective is at home in his city: he admires the order his knowledge of it reveals to him, and he is relieved to restore it to that order by solving the crimes he regards as regrettable […]. We might say that he is first and foremost a city-lover’ (Most 2006, 69).
In discussing David Peace’s fiction, this chapter will focus on the persistence of the formulaic nature of the crime genre coexisting with repeated attempts at reversing a ‘grammar’ (Eco 1969, 123–62) that readers have learned to understand as fixed. Peace writes principally crime series, from the so-called Red Riding Quartet to the still incomplete Tokyo Trilogy, and we know that they do demand – as subgeneric manifestations of crime fiction in general – a defined set of paradigms and formulae, whose stability is reinforced by the popularity of crime television series today (Jermyn 2007, 19–48, 109–40). It is my position that Peace keeps within an identified and identifiable narrative field, but meaningfully rejects the stability of the central character, who normally survives many adventures and therefore functions as the basic device connecting the series (Ascari 1998, 146). More specifically, Peace reverses the usual formula, denying survival to his protagonist and choosing a different, more complex articulation of the plot. He identifies the central character at the beginning of the story, misleadingly presenting him as the plot’s hub; however, by the end of the novel, the protagonist has been removed – killed, imprisoned or condemned to madness – and, as the series goes on, is replaced by another protagonist, temporarily leading the action but bound to succumb at the end of the new story. Peace thus produces what might be called a fractal geography of evil, in a narrative that appears troubled to the end by a series of unresolved dichotomies, most of them articulated around the inefficiency of the symbolic body of the state in its task of looking after the actual bodies of the citizens.

A dialectics of power built on a sort of democratic sharing of sin marks Peace’s early experiments in crime series and may be partly influenced by the general atmosphere in the UK at the end of the 1990s. The
first novel of the *Red Riding Quartet* was published in 1999, as AIDS was raging through Europe. Perceived and labelled as a plague, it was also resulting in a symbolic infection that found its strongest expressions, on the one hand, in the marginalization and criminalization of gay people and on the other – and this is what interests us here – in the production of a general yet very intense fear of any kind of infection and a reflection on how easily one can be contaminated without even realizing it. This cultural and social atmosphere, strongly reproduced in Peace's *Quartet*, envelops the tale in a halo of disease, social upheaval and uncertainty that emphasizes the obscure fascination of a tale of crimes and murders.

Throughout his narrative, Peace tends to focus less on the new order to be built than on the functioning of power at various levels. On this issue, the novelist's position seems Foucauldian, apparently grounded in the assumption that the philosopher establishes in 'The Subject and Power': 'Power does not function in the form of a chain. It circulates' (1984, 422). In the tension between the individual body of the characters and the collective organism of the state, Peace shows the two as nested realities, mutually inclusive and needing each other. They produce a dynamics that is oriented towards the creation of an entropic system rather than a new balance; in a so-conceived community, individual and collective crimes reflect (and infect) each other, finally amounting to a poetics grounded in the notion of evil as a virus.

The functioning and spreading of this virus results in the maintenance of various kinds of patently unfair social relationships, as I believe is shown in the *Red Riding Quartet*. Developing in the time span from 13 December 1973 to 9 June 1983, the novels prepare and anticipate one of the most difficult periods in British history, culminating in the Falklands/Malvinas war and the Miners' strike. Peace draws a detailed, moving and sensitive portrayal of a provincial microcosm – the Yorkshire where the *Red Riding Quartet* is set – easily switching from the complexities of political life to their impact on the local contexts, and on ordinary people's lives, and confirming the sense of place typical of crime fiction (Geherin 2008). Within a provincial context, so far from the cosy image of a vanished rural England, Peace tells the story of a true serial killer who haunted the individual and collective life of a small community in Yorkshire. In Peace's version of the true crime of the Yorkshire Ripper, what is serialized is not a character, not even a set of characters, but evil itself, in several different forms, all of them
replicating and revising the notion of infection, sickness, plague and physical corruption:

A shocking place, an evil plexus of slums that hide the human creeping things, where men and women live on penn’orths of gin, where collars and clean shirts are decencies unknown, where every citizen wears a black eye, and none ever combs his hair.

An adventure playground.

Ring a ring of roses, a pocket full of posies. (2000, 145–6)⁹

The plague evoked here, through the lines of a well-known nursery rhyme, stands as a metaphor for something that can be neither cured nor resisted, and is ultimately unrelated to one’s own will. Being a plague – or defined as such – evil affects the community as a whole and it becomes the narrative of a social order bordering on its own breakdown.

Drawing his own cartography of personal and collective sin, Peace also relies on his highly specific knowledge of the Yorkshire Ripper’s murders and deep awareness of the political, economic and cultural conditions of England at that time. In fiction as well as in the real world, power is delineated as a process, a flow, later evolving into a vortex that sucks down all the characters with no possible redemption. Characters are organized into mobile webs, categories whose borders are permeable though well defined: good and evil, policemen and criminals, torturers and victims. The most successful profiles, those of surprising beauty, are the ones Peace entrusts with the most complicated task: they have to sew up the plot, lead the readers from beginning to end, watch and be watched while they tell the story. Whatever their position in the social hierarchy, and even when institutionally in charge of finding and punishing criminals, these characters appear prone to evil actions just like the others, and the infection of murder travels among them through contagion. The first figure of this kind appearing in the Quartet is Edward ‘Scoop’ Dunford, the protagonist of 1974. A reporter for the Yorkshire Post, he comes back from the south and is soon introduced as a loser:

About four months ago, soon after I’d first come back North, I’d spent almost an entire day, and some of the next, getting pissed out of my skull in the Gaiety with George Greaves, Gaz from Sport, and Barry.
About four months ago, when being back North was still a novelty and slumming in the Gaiety was a right laugh and a bit of an eye-opener.

About four months ago, when Ronald Dunford, Clare Kemplay, and Barry Gannon were still alive. (1999, 101)

Dunford seems driven by the dream of emulating Jack Whitehead, Reporter of the Year 1968 and 1971 (1999, 98). Whitehead is a person with a feeble grip on reality who will later develop into a psychiatric case with a mysterious likeness to the Ripper. Keeping our working metaphor, we may say that Dunford is infected by Whitehead, who is, in turn, infected by the Ripper himself.

From Hell.

Mr Whitehead,
Sir, this is a little something for your drawer, would have been a bit of stuff from underneath but for that dog. Lucky cow.
Up to four now they say three but remember Preston 75, come my load up that one. Dirty cow.
Anyway, warn whores to keep off streets cause I feel it coming on again.
Maybe do one for the queen. Love our queen.
God saves
Lewis

I have given advance warning so it’s yours and their fault. (2000, 187)

While Dunford dies at the end of 1974, Whitehead survives to become one of the main characters in 1977. Both Dunford and Whitehead – and everyone dealing with words, in Peace’s novels – seem to suffer from a professional propensity to schizophrenia. Apparently, what they come to know about the Ripper destroys any coherence in their lives and minds, taking them back to a pre-linguistic chaos that progressively isolates them in their private hells. This becomes particularly evident in the case of Whitehead. When Peter Hunter meets him, in 1980, he is a patient of the psychiatric asylum of Wakefield, the Stanley Royd Hospital, and keeps repeating an obscure sentence – ‘Sti rip sl lwl lik Hunter’ (2001, 115) – that is then also found on one of the Ripper’s tapes (2001, 129). Once again Peace presents a character who has eventually gone insane, but knows something that may be relevant. Whitehead is unable to reveal this ‘something’, in a comprehensible way, because
madness ‘has exploded every possible unity, whether on the level of the world, of language or of reason’ (Harter 1996, 85).

The same symptoms also appear among the criminals. In 1974, when the supposed murderer is arrested, Michael Myshkin appears as a sort of ‘patient 0’, representing the evil infection in its absolute purity: no resistance, no protection, no capacity to even see the difference between what is right and what is not. Accordingly, Myshkin reveals an absolute inability to articulate a defence or to produce any explanation of what happened. As the narrative proceeds, he also exhibits a lack of control of his physical reactions, a terminal disconnection between body and identity and an almost touching unawareness of the implications of his position:

Michael John Myshkin stood at the front of the dock in a dirty pair of blue overalls and a black donkey jacket, fat as fuck with a head too big.

[...]

Michael John Myshkin blinked and blew a bubble of spit with his lips.

[...]

Michael John Myshkin, looking older than twenty-two, grinned at us with the smile of a boy half his age.

[...]

Michael John Myshkin, Frankenstein’s Monster in manacles, rested his one free hand on the front of the dock and sighed. (1999, 175)

The evocation of Frankenstein’s creature reinforces the presentation of Myshkin as a totally naïve spirit. Accused of torturing and killing several children, he is unable to control the linguistic entropy that increasingly invades his replies. When we meet him again while still in jail and waiting for his appeal to be lodged, he resembles less a torturer than a victim:

He says: ‘The Wolf’.
You put down your pen: ‘The Wolf?’
Myshkin, in his grey overall and his grey shirt with his enormous body and oversized head, is nodding –
Nodding and laughing –
Really, really laughing –
The guards too.
Laughing and nodding and blinking and patting down his hair, the
spittle on his chin –
Michael John Myshkin, murderer of children, is laughing –
Spittle on his chin, tears on his cheeks. (2002, 13)

Peace’s portrayal of policemen is often even more pitiless than that
of murderers, because the policemen’s contiguity with crime normally
results from an evil deliberately willed and persisted in. Maurice ‘The Owl’
Jobson is a persuasive example here. Described in 1980 as ‘Detective Chief
Superintendent Maurice Jobson. Legend – The Owl’ (2001, 47), he is arguably
a crypto-protagonist of the Quartet since he plays a role in all four nov-
els. However he is not fully revealed – and labelled as evil – until 1980.
Before then, he resembles Kurtz from Conrad’s Heart of Darkness: a fading
profile, endlessly told and celebrated by others, but never fully shown. His
responsibilities in the corruption of the police gradually become clear in
the last two novels, to be made fully explicit only in 1983.

Quite a different case is Peter Hunter, the protagonist in 1980.
An Assistant Constable briefly introduced at the end of 1977, he is
appointed chief of a Super Squad in charge of the Ripper Investigation
in 1980. Initially honest and loyal, Hunter is gradually sucked into evil
while trying to cope with an increasingly difficult family life, made
worse by the need to move to Leeds and leave his wife Joan behind, and
by an investigation that seems hopeless.

The War Room –
My obsessions:
Murder and lies, lies and murders –
The War Room –
My War:
Motherless children, childless mothers.
I’m forty years old, Joan thirty-eight.
We have no children, we can’t.
[...] I catch him, stop him murdering mothers, orphaning children, then
you give us one, just one. (2001, 12–13)

The cruel mockery of the child that he never conceives with his wife
and that is instead aborted by his colleague Helen Marshall, whom he
does not know he has impregnated, erodes his initial moral balance
and, added to some shameful friendships (especially with the rich and
Nicoletta Vallorani

corrupt Richard Dawson), transforms the ‘hunter’ into a ‘hunted’ and then ‘haunted’ victim of circumstances.

Nowhere to run, nowhere to hide –
No way to kill this pain inside –
No escape from your heart –
No escape from your lips –
No escape from your baby, from your fingertips –
No escape from your darling, all night and day –
No escape from your baby, no place to stay –
No escape, no escape at all. (2001, 87–8)

The claustrophobic rhythm produced by these contrapuntal lines, obsessively repeated in Chapter Five of 1980, is reinforced by the text in between the italicized parts.11 It tells the story of the murder of Janice Ryan, a prostitute supposedly killed by Constable Bob Fraser in 1977, but also the lover of another corrupt policeman, Eric Hall, who is later cruelly murdered, while his wife, Elizabeth, is raped and tortured. In 1980, Elizabeth wants to talk to Hunter, but he slowly loses his grip on reality, revealing his inability to help the woman. In Chapter Seven, he is already lost:

No more sleep.
No more sleep, just –
Two huge wings that burst through the back, out of my skin, torn,
two huge and rotting wings, big black things that weigh me down.
Heavy, that stop me standing.
No more sleep, just –
Wings, wings that burst through my back, out of my skin, torn, two huge
and rotting wings, big black things that weigh me down, heavy, that –
And they’re gone –
Just like that.
Just Exegesis etched into my chest, my nails bloody, broken –
Et sequentes. (2001, 163)

Chapter Nine, in 1980, also opens and closes with these words, slightly rephrased. Peter Hunter is now infected, and cannot be rescued.12 In this respect, he resembles Myshkin: basically a victim, whose responsibility is not demonstrated by factual evidence but can be traced to reasons connected to his social and cultural position. In short, he is guilty not because he actually killed the children, but because he was
born into subjugation and his disturbed personality seems to fit the serial killer’s profile.

Our next step is a closer investigation of the mechanisms that Peace exploits in gradually building, and showing his reader, every phase of the evil infection. In each novel of the Quartet the author seems to build a very effective nexus of ideas linking linguistic coherence and health on the one hand and incoherence and disease on the other.

Probably the most brutal novel in the series, and the one that most openly courts the mythology of the Ripper, 1977 provides some effective representations of this process. In a time span from 29 May to 17 June 1977, Peace picks up and develops the narrative thread opened by 1974. What changes is the protagonist. Through his usual technique of alternate foregrounding, he returns to a minor character from 1974 and makes him the protagonist of 1977. It is now Bob Fraser’s turn to be closely observed while he is drawn down into the hell of the Yorkshire Ripper.

In 1974, Fraser is introduced as a young constable in the Manchester Metropolitan Police. Eddie Dunford – the journalist and main narrator of the story – considers him a ‘good’ policeman, young and therefore not yet corrupt. In 1977, Bob reappears, but is quite a different person. He is married to Louise (daughter of another, very famous, policeman, Billy ‘Badger’ Molloy) and has a son, Bobby. Fraser is also the lover of Janice Ryan, a beautiful, black and very young prostitute from Chapeltown in Leeds. This affair triggers his progressive descent to hell, described against the backdrop of a more general criticism of the police as an institutional structure. Again, as in the other novels in the series, the protagonists’ frantic search for a lost ethical dimension and the way they aredevoured by the two contexts they inhabit – police stations and newsrooms – posit the impossibility of resistance in a social and political community that is disintegrating and where the murdered prostitutes are blameless tools for purposes transcending them. In 1977, in a copycat imitation of the original Ripper’s murders, prostitutes are not only killed, but also symbolically presented as disposable bodies at the bottom of the food chain. At the same time, their ravaged bodies become symbols of an equally ravaged nation, home to criminals and the corrupt.

In the resulting topographical, social and symbolic wasteland stands Bob the Bobby. While his father-in-law is dying, a death that severs another link with a world of protective rules, Bob leaves his family for his scandalous but overwhelming love for Janice, condemning himself to a life on the margins of the social system he is supposed to protect as a policeman. His personal psychosis and the feeling of an increasing disorder, both physical and symbolic, develop in tandem. His gradual
departure from the law of the community, and implicitly of the state, interacts with and accompanies a parallel deviation from institutional love. The need to visit his dying father-in-law, thereby facing an icon of the successful policeman, coincides for Bob with the decision to desert his wife and son. As he moves into a psychotic obsession crowded with the ravaged bodies of the killed prostitutes, his professional and family contexts gradually disintegrate and madness overlaps with the absence of order, the denial of the law (both state and natural) and the erosion of the distinction between reality and imagination:

In my dream I was sitting on a sofa in a room. A nice sofa, three seats. A nice room, pink.
But I'm not asleep, I'm awake.
In hell. (2000, 147)

The evil virus replicating itself into Yorkshire's collective and individual life has already infected Bob. He is marked by a dual destiny: his physical death, though definitely possible, becomes much less relevant than his social death, a process he himself accelerates, soon developing what later appears as a pathological inability to distinguish what is real from what is not:

In my dream I was sitting on a sofa in a pink room. A dirty sofa with three rotting seats, smelling worse and worse, but I couldn't stand.
And then in the dream I was sitting on a sofa in a playing field. A horrible sofa with three rusting springs, cutting into my arse and thighs, but I couldn't stand, couldn't get up.
And then in the dream I was sitting on a sofa on a wasteground. A terrible sofa thick with blood, seeping up into my palms and nails, but still couldn't stand, still couldn't get up, still couldn't walk away. (2000, 201–2)

In this passage from Chapter 13, repeated in Chapter 15, the notion of truth is wiped out by the dirty little secret that Bob Fraser, the policeman and therefore the appointed preserver of legal order, has learnt to keep:

I'd been married for five years and I had one son, almost a year then, and wanted another.
[...]
And it never stopped
[...]
So I learnt to keep secrets, to lead two lives. (2000, 92)
The stages in the evil infection may be easily identified. As a policeman and as a man/husband/father, Bob experiences a swift change, and switches from wise observance of the law to inability to resist crime. His journey is symbolically marked, in his narrative, by the proliferation of metaphors connected to symbolic and physical waste. At least in the first stages of this process, Bob maintains full awareness of the irreversible change he is experiencing, and of the role his affair with Janice has played in the whole process:

She’s twenty-two, I’m thirty-two.

She’s a half-caste prostitute and I’m a white Detective Sergeant married to the daughter of one of the finest Yorkshire coppers there ever was.

I have an eighteen-month-old boy called Bob.

After me. (2000, 93)

The affair seems to draw Bob into a universe totally different and separate from his everyday life. The gap between the two worlds widens as Chapeltown replaces the home where Bob is unable to fulfil the role of good father and son-in-law that everyone expects from him.

The physical/topographical gap separating him from his family coincides metaphorically with the crevice splitting Bob from his institutional loves, duties and ethics. Chapeltown, ‘my town for two years’ (2000, 3), resembles an updated Whitechapel, whose contradictions and isolation are highlighted by its being located not in the heart of London, like Spitalfields, but in a marginal area of the state (Yorkshire).

Peace seems to provide his personal version of the Whitechapel murders, relocating the story while keeping the same resolution to destroy even the idea – or the hope – that life could be a cosmos, rational and orderly, or at least potentially so. Evil may be identified and the criminal may be punished, but the two operations by themselves are insufficient to re-establish balance in the community. The order/disorder dialectic typical of crime fiction formulae is rewritten with an eye not so much to ethics or justice or state laws, as to representing what happens in life, here and now, to everyman and everywoman, in the shadow of an infection that has as yet no cure.

Nor is this pessimism unique to this series: in his following novels, Peace continues to portray this kind of world: an out-of-synch universe where a Bakhtinian heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981, 55) is exploited in order to identify the different voices of evil as a virus not to be resisted.
Notes

1. Peace normally chooses male protagonists. Women tend to be presented, quite traditionally, as either victims or lovers and wives.
2. The term ‘fractal city’ (Soja 2000) is used to refer to the metropolis as a place of intensified inequalities and social polarizations.
3. On this issue, see Vallorani (2011).
4. A more detailed elaboration of the topic is to be found in Grover 1987; Haraway 1989; Edelman 1989; Sontag 1989; Berridge 1996.
5. This is the critical stance taken by Meek in his ‘Polly the Bleeding Parrot’: while discussing Peace’s Occupied City (2009), Meek wonders whether the novelist’s sophisticated choice of style could prevent readers from approaching his novels instead of mesmerizing them (2009).
7. The Red Riding Quartet is a series of four novels developed around the figure of the so-called Yorkshire Ripper within some ten years of British history. Each novel bears a year as its title (1974, 1977, 1980 and 1983). They were published in the time span between 1999 and 2002.
8. Peace approaches this issue in GB84 (2005), essentially coda to his Yorkshire fresco.
9. Peace uses italics and layout in an unconventional way (see note 11), which will be reproduced here in all quotations.
10. This aspect is of primary relevance in Occupied City, published in 2009 (see Vallorani 2014).
11. As is frequently the case with Peace, a variety of different typographical formats is used to represent different, sometimes competing narrative personae or to voice a kind of interior monologue, very effective in translating the thoughts of the characters.
12. Madness is anticipated by the impossibility of sleeping, clearly evoking William Shakespeare’s Macbeth: ‘No more sleep, no more sleep, no more sleep’ (Peace 2001, 55).
13. The same issue is also developed in Tokyo Year Zero (2007).
The five novels included in the *Factory* series by the British writer Derek Raymond (*He Died with His Eyes Open*, 1984; *The Devil’s Home on Leave*, 1985; *How the Dead Live*, 1986; *I Was Dora Suarez*, 1988 and *Dead Man Upright*, 1993) encompass the core issues in Raymond’s literary and political project: a representation of the margins of society and of its evils aimed at uncovering and overthrowing the power relations embedded beneath its apparently plain surface. One shared element that allows the five novels to be recognizable as part of a composite project is the interaction between the characters and the urban landscape; both bodies and the city are represented and can be analysed in spatial terms, as ‘cartographies of meanings and identity’ (Pile 1996, 178), surfaces of signification where geographies of power are inscribed in a way that is productive and constraining at the same time: ‘The individual is to be mapped by the spatial specificity of their subject position, [...] but [...] space is not an innocent backdrop to position, it is itself filled with politics and ideology’ (Keith and Pile 1993, 4). Moreover, in the spaces in Raymond’s novels, bodies and subjectivities are caught in a relationship of identification: ‘The body [...] is not distinct from the city for they are mutually defining’ (Grosz 1995, 108). Both the bodies of the protagonists and the city of London are very specifically located, their interactions covering a fairly well-defined time span – the 1980s, during Thatcher’s mandates.

The productive interrelatedness of the body and the city is so central to Raymond’s narrative that he comments that he chooses the noir genre precisely because it allows him to account for forgotten facts and marginalized people by setting their stories in the places they live in, that is urban peripheries where criminality and violence rule (Raymond 1992, 134–8). More to the point, since the definition of ‘noir’ was and...
still is a matter for debate, Raymond prefers the label ‘black novel’. In his autobiography, *The Hidden Files*, he explains the implications of this term and his intention of recovering ghost memories of both people and urban spaces, giving an account of neglected facts and stories taking place in the shadows of equally neglected urban peripheries: ‘Where I go, the ghosts go. I go where the evil is’ (1985, 22). Not only is the close relationship between space and subjectivity called into question, but it also becomes one of the main features of the series, constituting a repeated theme across all five novels. At the same time, it develops a new understanding of reality, a counter-narrative that helps make sense of history in a new way. This chapter will discuss the *Factory* series, with a focus on the second book, *The Devil’s Home on Leave*, as an example of Raymond’s subversive ‘black novels’ since it encompasses all the features of this new formula, found in all the novels.

We should first consider what kinds of connections can be drawn between the body and the city, between subjectivity and space/place. In this regard it is useful to refer to Grosz’s definitions of city and body. The former is:

a complex and interactive network that links together, often in an unintegrated and ad hoc way, a number of disparate social activities, processes, relations, with a number of architectural, geographical, civic, and public relations. The city brings together [...] social relations, and the aesthetic/economic organization of space and place to create a semi-permanent but everchanging built environment or milieu. (Grosz 1995, 105)

In contrast to this environment, the body is defined as ‘a concrete, material, animate organization of flesh, organs, nerves and skeletal structures, which are given a unity, cohesiveness, and form through the psychical and the social inscription of the body’s surface’. The body is ‘organically, biologically “incomplete”; it is indeterminate, amorphous, a series of uncoordinated potentialities that require social triggering, ordering and long term administration’ (Grosz 1995, 104).

Comparing the two definitions helps disclose the parallels between these entities covertly drawn within Raymond’s novels, the hidden threads that bind them as a series. First, these bodies and cities can be understood in spatial terms, as surfaces inevitably infused with power and inscribed with meanings. These meanings and power relationships in turn are ordered and signified through constant negotiations with coercion, imagination and desire, which aim at stabilizing them
enough to be kept under control. Thus, space and subjectivity are seen as maps of ‘meanings and identities’, as ‘intensified grids of power, desire and disgust’ (Pile 1996, 178), but also as discursive constructions, since they are the outcome of power relations and struggles over meanings. Inasmuch as they are surfaces, their definition is mapped on them, so that the hidden hierarchies of power which shape the architecture of the city and discipline the bodies of its dwellers can be traced and kept alive by analysing the way space is ordered and by interpreting the bodily language and interactions of the people who inhabit it.

Social interaction is to be marked as another core link between these two surfaces of inscription. According to Grosz, both the body and the city need ‘interaction’ and ‘social triggering’ to be signified and understood: the built environment ‘provides the context and coordinates for contemporary forms of the body’, and ‘the order and organization that automatically links otherwise unrelated bodies’. Conversely, ‘the processes of social inscription of the body’s surface construct a psychological interior’, so that the relation between bodies and cities becomes a ‘constitutive and mutually defining’ one (Grosz 1995, 104). As a result, the city (as a product of discursive relations) establishes geographic as well as symbolic boundaries, such as the distinction between public and private. Appropriate role positions and relationships between the individuals are set up which are to be internalized and complied with, and are to take place in purposely designed areas and buildings. Likewise, as ‘the city’s form and structure provides the context in which social rules and experiences are [...] habituated in order to ensure social conformity’, it also develops marginal roles/places for those people and activities that fail to comply with the rules through a process which Grosz calls ‘ghettoization’ in order to prevent disruption. The city is thus a primary site for the ‘production and circulation of power’ (Grosz 1995, 109), a space where a ‘power geometry’ can be identified, since ‘as a result of the fact that it is conceptualized as created out of social relations, space [the city in particular] is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation’ (Massey 1994, 265).

The parallel between bodies and cities that has been drawn so far also assumes that the complex relations, exchanges and inscriptions of meanings and definitions of identities should not be ‘a product, but a process’ (Pile 1996, 236), the provisional outcome of constant negotiations. The active role of the city in shaping the identities of its dwellers, which are subject to change and reconfiguration, is even more
important with regard to noir fiction in general and to Raymond’s ‘black novels’ in particular. Threatened in its symbolic meaning by internal as well as external forms of aggression, the urban milieu whose landscape is redeveloped according to ideal configurations sustained by political authorities is invariably the privileged setting of these narratives, to such an extent that it is arguably a protagonist. Finally, the role of context is crucial to understanding the significance of the link between the city and the network of relationships between the individuals who interact within and with its landscapes.

In Raymond’s novels, I will locate these interactions within the framework of the postmodern city, focusing principally on the ways in which individuals tackle the new, unstable and ungraspable spatiality. In the postmodern metropolis, the focus shifts from temporal to spatial categories (Soja 1989; Keith and Pile 1993), as ‘a different lived experience of the urban [...] calls for a different theoretical paradigm and critical practice’ (Mahoney 1997, 169). The postmodern city ‘as a site of difference, fragmentation, conflict and plurality’ seems to defy conventional diachronic representations so that it could be defined a ‘non-place space’ (Featherstone in Mahoney 1997, 169). The only viable way of trying to give an account of this displaced, entangled, seemingly irrational space is to try to grasp small fragments of it with provisional snapshots which attempt to render the sense of simultaneity, but are doomed to be soon devoid of sense due to the speed of change. As Sinclair whose work is a restless attempt at representing the postmetropolis through psychogeographical journeys puts it, fragments of the city can only be temporarily perceived like ‘polaroid epiphanies, signed and abandoned’ (Sinclair 2003, 35).

The most relevant repercussions of this new conceptualization seem to be the consequences of such a shift on the subject’s positionality. If the city is to be read in spatial terms, then the standpoint of the subject who is interpreting and interacting with this space should be the new focus of analysis. What needs to be stressed, then, is how individuals produce and represent this city space more or less consciously according to their own needs, fantasies and cultural frames of reference. At the same time, their interactions with and relationships within the city can be mapped dynamically, by piecing together multilayered stratifications of fragmented meanings (Vallorani 2003, 41). The positionality of Raymond’s characters, as well as their mutually productive relationship with the urban landscape, are made explicit in *The Hidden Files*, where the author also explains the narrative strategies he deployed, as a kind of connective tissue, throughout the *Factory* series to represent
Raymond’s unconventional autobiography, *The Hidden Files*, would be better defined as a ‘literary manifesto’ where the author retrospectively accounts for his experiences, while obsessively trying to ground his writings in a composite narrative and political framework. This effort results in an unprecedented, brilliant reflection upon a genre which seems to defy characterization while at the same time being particularly suited to conveying reality as Raymond interprets it:

The black novel is a means of destroying evil by defining it, by demonstrating everything in our society that is negative.

The black novel [...] describes men and women whom circumstances have pushed too far.

It exists to get people to see what true despair [...] really is.

[...] It seems to me that the fundamental purpose of writing must be to investigate reality as deeply and thoroughly as possible. (Raymond 1992, 97–8, 144; emphasis in original)

Drawing on his sharp-tongued nameless detective, Raymond unmasks the subtle signifying and defining strategies of institutional discourse, and investigates its mechanisms of exclusion, thus opening up the possibility of identifying political responsibilities for people’s dissatisfaction and unrest. He links criminal behaviour to social unease, and pays particular attention to recovering and giving voice to seemingly unconnected individual stories while sketching a broader socio-historical background.

Particularly evident throughout the *Factory* series is a harsh critique of British society during Margaret Thatcher’s rule. Raymond underlines one of the most sensitive issues of this period, namely a widespread disappointment with law-enforcement institutions: his protagonists repeatedly question the new conservative values grounding British social organization. Even if Raymond never refers overtly to Thatcher in the *Factory* series, there are hints between the lines, reflecting the author’s insistence on the wider historical reality. As Pepper points out while outlining the correlation between social instability, the repressive power of the state and the visible punishment of crime represented in the series: ‘[w]hile Raymond’s novels are not explicitly political and cannot be read as direct anti-thatcherite allegories, they do, to some extent, reveal [the] authoritarian potentialities of the capitalist state’ (Pepper 2010, 145).
Hence, Raymond's fiction can be considered as deeply rooted in the socio-cultural context he writes about, with noir being the genre which best allows the writer to declare his dissent and represent subversion. While Raymond acknowledges his debts both to the hardboiled tradition of detective fiction and to some elements of French film noir, he needs nonetheless to distance his novels from them, and to state the specificities of his literary project, insisting on the attempted creation of a new genre. The *Factory* novels therefore, all the more since they build up a series, encompass the most relevant features of the 'black novel', '[s]eries [...] permit a writer to develop an idea or philosophy more fully than might be expected in a single work' (Herbert 1999, 402).

One of the most significant features Raymond borrows from the hardboiled tradition is the centrality of the urban milieu, which 'assumes the status of a character with whom the protagonists interact' (Herbert 1999, 475). More precisely, 'Raymond forged his unique series in an urban landscape of real and metaphysical despair and disillusion, playing with literary conventions to forge visceral stories looking for morality in the unlikeliest surroundings of Soho and an amoral London' (Earwaker and Becker 2002, 158). His stories are invariably set in the outskirts of London, in the neglected margins of the city where criminal organizations rule over a nocturnal maze of abandoned warehouses, squalid pubs and council housing, where society's rejects dwell, abandoned and forgotten by the institutions. The focus on the street – 'the black novel is that part of the new classics which observes the street' (Raymond 1992, 134) – is always paired with the representation of its inhabitants: marginal individuals and groups who have been forgotten.

Besides the centrality of the urban milieu, another important recurring feature in the *Factory* novels is the protagonist. Raymond's nameless detective embodies some traits of the hardboiled private eye, but defies complete identification as such. He is an outcast, who acts on his own and with his own methods, his values being 'defined by his rejection of a social world viewed as a hostile and corrupt unit' (Knight 1980, 138): 'I do all that [interviewing suspects] in my own way, catching the man I want to see on his manor – as often as not at his own place' (Raymond 1985, 16). The protagonist is 'disgusted' but not 'disengaged', because he is an idealist after all, seeking to purge evil from society and to eradicate crime, despite possible frustration. He works on the edge of legality, frequently adopting unorthodox methods even if he is a policeman, thus belonging to the very institution he despises. He is not part of the prestigious Scotland Yard, but works for the Bureau of Unexplained Deaths: the A14, a fictional, neglected branch of the
London Metropolitan Police where unsolved crimes around the outskirts of the city are investigated, and whose nickname, ‘The Factory’, gives its name to the series (Raymond 1985, 16). Dealing with marginal victims and criminals, the nameless detective’s cases are not covered by the press. Rather, they are given low priority, although they are frequently particularly heinous: ‘We work only on cases where the victims have been written off upstairs as unimportant, not pressworthy, not well connected and not big crime’ (1985, 16).

The investigator is a ‘tough guy’, physically strong, aggressive, surly, proud and often using vulgar language; he always turns down promotion and does not care about hierarchies, as he is perfectly satisfied with his job at the Factory: ‘Justice is what I bother about – not rank. I admit that with my attitude, it really is a good thing I’m just a sergeant. It certainly suits me being down the ladder […]. Yes, I’m happy to work at Unexplained Deaths’ (1985, 17).

In fact, he is an outsider who intentionally occupies a liminal position, and is thus able to handle law-abiding citizens and law-enforcing institutions, but also to infiltrate and intermingle with criminals and their lawless gangs. Although he works alone, the way he treats the characters he meets is not solipsistic. Unlike Chandler’s Marlowe, he does have ‘something to share with other people’ (Knight 1980, 144).

More to the point, the sergeant is an unconventional and subversive character first and foremost because of his namelessness, suggesting the impossibility of precise definition, an identity in progress, unpredictable and displaced, but also allowing for a creative and revolutionary potential to emerge: ‘In [his] pursuit of social justice [which he knows] is the one freedom that society is never going to offer, [the nameless detective] continually finds himself up against a series of brick walls inside as well as outside’, and occasionally is able to make justice triumph, even if in the end he knows that he counts ‘far too little ever to deal the enemy a major, decisive blow’ (Raymond 1992, 156). One may wonder then what the point is in his idealistic stubbornness. Perhaps, rather than eradicating crime, the main task the protagonist is called to perform is accounting for it, for the sake of forgotten corpses left to rot in the shadows of peripheral city streets and dilapidated buildings.

It is exactly his lack of identity, or rather of identification, that links him inextricably in productive relationships with the city and with the victims of his cases. The nameless detective wanders the same streets where the criminals gather and strike and where their victims live; he shares their hopelessness, abandonment, loneliness and decay. What distinguishes him is that he has consciously given up his identity in
order to atone for the guilt of his unbearable past, and assigned himself the mission of taking care of unmourned deaths and forgotten lives.

The detective’s gruesome past is pieced together throughout the series: in the same scattered and apparently irrational fashion, a number of dramatic stories of unimportant people are told, gathered by the sergeant who has collected and vowed to remember them in order to keep them alive. Just as the ghosts of the protagonist surface in his nightmares and draw up the itinerary of his identity quest through sorrow and guilt, so the private stories of these deliberately forgotten individuals shape an alternative map of the cityscape, and the abandoned snapshots taken are left to fade away in the waves of change in the postmetropolis.

In light of these considerations, Raymond’s ‘black novel’ can be considered a narrative which treats both bodies (the detective’s and the victims’) and the urban landscape as surfaces where new meanings can be inscribed and articulated without leaving behind the traces of the fabric upon which they are built.

This process of recollection and representation across the five novels is best exemplified in the second Factory novel, The Devil’s Home on Leave (1985), as it is set in London’s outskirts and the Docks and includes hints of the detective’s past as well as of the seemingly irrelevant stories of other minor characters. Moreover, the novel shows how the processes of human and urban interactions and interdependent development can be mapped and kept alive through specifically designed approaches to storytelling.

In order to understand how memory, the body and the city are intertwined and how the narrative strategies deployed to represent complex relations constitute the core of the Factory novels, two main frames of reference must be considered. First, the way in which London’s built environment is produced, signified and ordered by power relationships in an effort to stabilize meanings and subject positions (at either an individual or a social level) and to circumscribe them in appropriate spaces/places. Second, this has to be linked to the characters’ location in space, to account for their point of view in the narratives, something which, in turn, will clarify the way Raymond manages to bring back to the surface ghost memories of both marginal people and places.²

It is useful here to recall Grosz’s contention that ‘the city helps to [...] orient and organize [...] social relations insofar as [...] it divides cultural life into public and private domains, geographically dividing and defining the particular social positions individuals and groups occupy’ and devises strategies aimed at distancing what is disruptive or threatening
for the ruling institutions (1995, 109). Obviously, crime in general and murder in particular are violations of the private–public division, since they open the doors of the private domain to public knowledge and inspection. After classic detective fiction exposed the secrets of the bourgeois home and the hardboiled showed the stark violence of the city streets, usually linked to places where gangster organizations gather and strike, the ‘black novel’ designed by Raymond unveils a buried geography, opens the doors of violated private spaces, but also reveals how private lives can be violated in public, institutionalized spaces.

The very first lines of *The Devil's Home on Leave* are devoted to the description of the killer’s house: ‘I knocked at a second-floor flat in a dreary house, one of two hundred in a dreary Catford street’ (1985, 9), and similar descriptions follow throughout the novel where the names of real, disreputable pubs, streets and districts are mentioned (1985, 10, 22–3, 59–60, 67, 99, 155, 194–204). The main and cruellest murder takes place in an abandoned warehouse in Rotherhithe. The novel thus draws a map of urban peripheries, a path along which the detective and the criminals move. The protagonist’s personal story follows this itinerary, since it often brings him to marginalized places of isolation, punishment, loneliness and constraint. Paradoxically and at the same time tellingly, these are always public, ‘institutional’ places, such as interrogation rooms, prisons and asylums, where justice should rule, but where on the contrary the outcasts of society are confined, kept out of sight, repudiated and ignored (128–9, 93–8, 25–30).

Other interesting parallels further draw together the body, the city and identity in the novel. The body of the victim, to begin with, has been deprived of its features: ‘He’s stapled up in five Waitrose plastic bags. [...] The killer knocked [the victim’s teeth] out [...] It was all boiled’ (1985, 10–11). Just as the memory of the suburban city has been buried under layers of bricks and mortar, its buildings demolished and rebuilt, or simply left to decay, the identities of both the dispossessed inhabitants of these abandoned peripheries and of the detective have been wiped away, deliberately forgotten. Raymond resorts to a spatial metaphor to describe the detective’s painful memories, reflecting on his wife’s madness:

> [It] changed me into a man with a sparse emotional map: much harder, the peaceful places and the civilized building in me had gone, leaving just main roads to a few goals through bleak, mountainous country, roads carried frequently on precipitous lips that I don’t care to look over often. (1985, 59)
Somehow, the way the nameless detective manages to piece together scattered fragments of memories and to reappropriate his own identity in the process, echoes and mirrors another space, that of the River Thames. Traditionally represented as London’s structure of permanence, the river’s presence haunts the novel. Its meanings are contradictory, since it both conceals and reveals. Its water unexpectedly releases pieces of forgotten memories, but also hides murder weapons, as is the case for *The Devil’s Home on Leave*, where the serial killer chooses an abandoned warehouse close to the river so that he can get rid of the weapon by throwing it out into the stream (1985, 37–40, 59–60, 78, 158, 161). The river characterizes London, making the city recognizable and circulating its memories despite the uncontrollable changes of the postmetropolis, even though its flow is irrational and arbitrary. Furthermore, the river physically marks the boundaries of the ghettoized city, and while mapping the cityscape’s memories, it draws symbolic borderlines between the disciplined spaces and ‘power geometries’ and those unmapped places where what has been marginalized and criminalized is confined.

According to these physical and symbolic divides, the bodies of the postmetropolis are located in cartographies where ‘the streets become the map of visible and invisible relations of meaning, identity and power into which the subject is placed and has to find their way around’ and where the bodies’ location entails ‘not only the spaces of the subject, but also the ways in which people move through spaces which are constitutive of subjectivity’ (Pile 1996, 245, 255). Thanks to his misplacement, and to his self-denied but fluid identity which belongs to the margins but is also part of the city’s power institutions, the nameless detective is able to cross the borders, to identify himself with the outcasts (victims or criminals), and also to detach himself in the light of his role and his mission. His violent behaviours and use of language tellingly encapsulate this conflicted position: ‘He employs the language valid at the level of society that he lives in and deals with because it is the only language that gets results there, even though his behaviour appears totally at odds with the thinning and reflective level of his personality’ (Raymond 1992, 157).

Hence, Raymond’s ‘black novels’ ultimately succeed in giving a reliable if brutal account of reality, through their representation of London as a ‘city that generates text and also functions as a text, one characterized by intertextuality, intangible relationships and instability’ (Willett 1996, 7); through the identification of its spaces (both built environment and natural elements, such as the river) with the characters’ bodies and identities; and through the choice of a protagonist whose
slippery, unstable identity allows him to embrace marginality, move across boundaries and collect forgotten memories of the metropolis and its dispossessed dwellers. By borrowing some typical elements from hardboiled fiction and film noir and reworking them into a socio-politically committed series, the Factory ‘black novels’ become an example of how serialized crime fiction can develop through hybridization, by celebrating those slippery, ungraspable features which link space, body and identity, and which can also symbolize and share the historicity, the context-dependent and arbitrary character of the nature of every literary genre:

Since every classification and genealogy involves historically determined criteria that are not a symptom of timeless transparency but which partly construct a phenomenon, tracing the borders of a genre is inevitably a somewhat arbitrary process. Not only is the ever-changing profile of a genre defined by conventional lines which are produced by an encounter between differences and which are continuously renegotiated, but the ‘land’ that stretches on both sides of the border is also a fertile site of exchange. It is in these border-territories that processes of creative innovation often take place, thanks to acts of transgression and occasions of hybridization. (Ascari 2007, xii)

Notes

1. The rate and unpredictability of the changes which take place in the spaces of the postmetropolis swallow up and distort its diachronic dimension. As a result, erased memories of what was there before form a multilayered residue whose traces occasionally and randomly surface like ghost memories.

2. The most telling examples of this strategy can be found in He Died with His Eyes Open (1984) and I was Dora Suarez (1990). In these novels tape recordings and a diary respectively enable the nameless detective to reconstruct the dead protagonists’ personal histories of pain and misery and to draw (and follow) a map of the often peripheral, forgotten, hidden, abandoned and/or squalid places they lived in.
Andrea Camilleri’s Imaginary Vigàta: Between Formula and Innovation

Barbara Pezzotti

Andrea Camilleri (b. 1925) is one of the most famous crime writers in the world. His Inspector Montalbano series has sold 65 million books worldwide and his novels have been translated into Greek, Norwegian, Turkish, Lithuanian, Japanese, Estonian, Hungarian and Gaelic as well as the most commonly used languages (Novelli 2002, 1650–1). Among other acknowledgements, in 2008 he was included in the list of ‘50 crime writers to read before you die’ compiled by the Daily Telegraph. His undoubted success has not been equalled by positive critical reaction: he is often unfavourably compared with his fellow Sicilian and mentor, Leonardo Sciascia, and is criticized for the ‘lightness’ of his novels (Past 2012, 83). He is also accused of having a bogus impegno (political commitment) that is merely a strategy to sell more books (Chu 2011, 79). I argue here that this criticism arises from a widespread mistrust of the culture industry, in Italian academic circles, and prejudices against serial publications which are still (too) often automatically considered as a synonym for poor literary quality. I also argue that Camilleri consciously exploits repetitions in his Montalbano series in order to powerfully evoke in readers’ minds an imaginary space in which to develop a discourse on a dynamic Sicilian society and to engage with a number of political and social issues related to contemporary Italy. The series also introduces a new language, a mix of Italian and Sicilian dialect, which has become very popular among readers and has revived the importance of local dialects in Italian culture.

While internationally crime writers such as Chandler and Simenon are now considered masters of literature, in Italy many critics of local crime fiction still stigmatize this form of literature as escapist reading and a product of low cultural value. When they do acknowledge the literary value of a few writers’ works – as in the exceptional cases of
Gatta or Sciascia – they hasten to specify that the particular author is not in fact a crime author, but a literary writer who, far from writing crime novels, ‘appropriates’ or ‘extrapolates’ crime fiction conventions in order to write more meaningful novels (Barbolini 1994, 8–9; Past 2012, 19). As Cannon puts it:

> From Fruttero and Lucentini to Camillo [sic] Camilleri, Carlo Lucarelli, Loriano Machiavelli [sic], Renato Olivieri, Marco Vichi, and Luciano [sic] De Angelis, contemporary Italian writers have exploited and continue to exploit the popularity of crime fiction for a variety of purposes. These novelists are known primarily for their formulaic detective fiction. [...] Sciascia, Maraini, and Tabucchi [...] resort to the detective genre, to the historical novel, and to the racconto-inchiesta not for diversion or entertainment, but in deadly earnest. (2006, 102–3)

Interestingly, Cannon makes a distinction between the ‘literary’ works of authors who have written stand-alone novels, and crime series which are invariably labelled as ‘formulaic’ and meant for ‘diversion’ and ‘entertainment’. This passage exemplifies a still widespread view according to which a series automatically equates with a fixed and formulaic structure. Camilleri’s impressive commercial success has also been an obstacle to his scholarly recognition. For example, Past (2012, 86) stigmatizes the ‘lucrative relationship’ between Camilleri and his publisher Sellerio. Camilleri’s adoption of the serial form and his success among readers seem to be unforgivable sins for Italian academics. These alleged flaws have made many critics overlook the social and political criticism he performs in his series and the innovative linguistic choices he pursues.

The Montalbano series began in 1994 with *La forma dell’acqua* (*The Shape of Water*, 2002), followed by 22 novels and several collections of short stories. It is a mix between a police procedural (as Montalbano leads a team of investigators) and a clue-puzzle story where all the clues are scattered through the story and the solution often comes as a revelation to the detective. The series gives wide exposure to Montalbano’s complex private life, following a common trend in recent crime fiction which registers a progressive shift ‘from investigation and case to protagonist and life’ (Molander Danielsson 2002, 148–9). This shift has allowed Walton and Jones to compare crime series to an autobiographical style of writing (Walton and Jones 1999, 153–4). Indeed, the series follows an ageing Montalbano who questions his relationship with his girlfriend Livia, and becomes more disillusioned about his job. All
Montalbano’s adventures, as Camilleri himself points out in the afterword of his books, are inspired by real criminal events, historical facts or other literary works.

One of the most original traits of this series is that it is set in an imaginary town, Vigàta, within a real geography, the island of Sicily. The Sicilian author explains his choice as the opportunity of ‘working’ with a place characterized by flexible boundaries that he can expand or contract according to his needs (Pezzotti 2009, 45). Camilleri sets Montalbano’s adventures in a fictional town but details its streets, cafés and restaurants, its beaches and sea front, frequently mentioning invented places. For example, ‘San Calogero’ and, starting from Il giro di boa, ‘Da Enzo’, are the restaurants where Inspector Montalbano usually has his lunch. These places are cited at least once in each novel (for example in Un covo di vipere ‘Da Enzo’ is cited seven times) and each time Camilleri indulges in describing the Sicilian delicacies the gourmet Montalbano is enjoying. Equally recurring in the series are the daily walks he takes along the Vigàta waterfront, a habit that helps him solve the crimes he is investigating. Likewise, his frequent swims at Marinella beach allow readers to visualize and familiarize themselves with a non-existent place. These repetitions of locations create a ‘sense of a place’ for an invented space. In this way Camilleri is able to create what de Certeau would define as a ‘habitable’ space (1984, 106) in the imaginary Vigàta. The little town and other locations cited in the books sound so real that internet websites associate them with actual names and sites in Sicily. A guide to Camilleri’s world has been published (Clausi 2006), while the municipality of Porto Empedocle, Camilleri’s native village, has changed its name to Porto Empedocle-Vigàta. Camilleri clearly belongs to a group of writers whose depiction of an area so captivates the collective imagination that they end up by creating a dominant depiction of that place (Logan 1992, 75–90).

This dominant image allows Camilleri to engage in a discourse on Sicily and its social changes. As I have argued elsewhere, Vigàta is a microcosm where the author describes a Sicilian society in constant evolution (Pezzotti 2012a, 129). His Sicily differs from a common perception of the South in Italian literature and culture as a backward area, and is presented as an environment which is not very different from the rest of Italy in both its positive and negative aspects. Drawing on the findings of so-called geographers of insularity, such as Péron (1993) and Bongie (1998), Camilleri depicts Sicily as a site of ‘double identity’, that is, a place that retains some local characteristics but is also open to the influence of broad social, cultural and economic trends, as opposed to
Andrea Camilleri’s Imaginary Vigàta

the traditional image of the island as a place of historical immobility. In particular, as Pischedda highlights, Camilleri has ‘inoculated the virus of modernity’ into a Sicily traditionally described as retrograde and prey to criminal organizations such as the Mafia (2007, 16).

The tension between the ‘repetitions’ in the series and the ‘progression’ in describing a dynamic social fabric generates continuous interest and enjoyment among readers who have been faithful for the last 20 years. Indeed, within the fictional but vivid geographical containment of Vigàta, Camilleri makes use of recurrent characters in order to highlight the idea of a new social environment for Sicily. Some characters are bearers of positive values. For example, a recurrent character, the retired teacher Clementina Vasile-Cozzo, is symbolic of a new Sicily that opposes the traditional omertà (code of honour) and helps Inspector Montalbano in his investigation. The police detective meets Clementina for the first time in Ladro di merendine (1996; The Snack Thief, 2003) as the potential witness of a murder. Before her questioning by the police, her nephew had suggested that the elderly woman should not get involved with the investigation. She refused because as she used to teach her students, ‘il “nenti vitti, nenti sacciu” era il peccato più mortale’ (Il ladro di merendine 2002c, 462); (‘the “see-nothing, know-nothing” attitude is the most mortal of sins’ [The Snack Thief, 2003, 63]). Clementina is the symbol of a new Sicily that refuses to look away from crime and finds it a moral duty to help the state. Her active role in the novels is a reminder for the reader of a new social environment for Sicily that makes Sicilians not too different from other Italians. This new environment is also mirrored in the nature of the crimes Montalbano investigates. The Mafia are still present in Sicilian life, but he and his team investigate a wider range of offences: from bourgeois crimes caused by greed or revenge, to false kidnappings and horse rustling. Moreover, private crimes often intertwine with political plots, or are mistakenly taken for Mafia deaths. In some cases, crimes are ramifications of offences that take place first in the north of Italy. This is the case with La pazienza del ragno (2004, The Patience of the Spider, 2007) where a local businessman, Antonio Peruzzo, is involved in the Clean Hands investigations. This judicial inquiry took place in the 1990s and unveiled an extensive network of bribery and corruption that involved Milanese politicians and businessmen:

‘Capitò Mani Pulite’.

‘Un momento’ interruppe Montalbano. ‘La storia di Mani Pulite è cominciata a Milano più di dieci anni fa [...]’.

‘Operation Clean hands happened.’

‘Wait a minute’, Montalbano interrupted. ‘Operation Clean hands started in Milan ten years ago [...]’

‘True. But you know how things go in Italy, don’t you? Everything that happens up north – Fascism, liberation, industrialization – takes a long time to reach us. Like a long, lazy wave.’ (*The Patience of the Spider*, 2007, 120)

In Sciascia’s *Il giorno della civetta* Sicily was seen as a corrupt place that was gradually infecting the rest of the country. By contrast, in *La pazienza del ragno* Sicily is contaminated by crimes that originated in the north. In Camilleri’s novels, many characters are not negative because they are Sicilian *per se*, but because they are the embodiment of some national flaw.

As well as characters, a number of situations are repeated from book to book. Some, such as the surreal conversations between Montalbano and a subordinate, the illiterate Catarella, or the telephone exchanges Montalbano has with the various servants of his Swedish friend Ingrid, become veritable theatre sketches and constitute the comic backbone of the series. Others serve to reinforce Camilleri’s political and social criticism. For example, each book starts with Montalbano’s dreams or, more often, nightmares. His thoughts often set the pace of the novels, introducing critical themes that draw directly on recent events in Italy. These recurrent nightmares allow Camilleri to deal with a number of different issues in Italian politics, keeping readers entertained with current events. In *Il campo del vasaio* (2008, *The Potter’s Field*, 2011), the inspector dreams that a notorious Mafia boss becomes Italy’s new prime minister:

*Qui i casi sono du. O tu pensi che il fatto che è addiventato primo ministro cancella automaticamente tutti i so reati precedenti, ammazzatine e stragi comprese, opuro appartieni a quella categoria di sbirri che servono sempre e comunque chi sta al potere senza taliare chi è, se omo perbene e se sdilinquente, se fascista o comunista.*  (14–15, emphasis in original)

There are two ways to look at this. Either you think that the fact someone’s becoming prime minister cancels out all his prior crimes, murders and
massacres included, or else you belong to the category of cops who always serve, no matter what, whoever happens to be in power, an honest man or a criminal, whether a Fascist or a Communist. (6, emphasis in original)

This extreme and improbable scenario is a device to comment on the fact that Berlusconi, Italian premier in the year the novel was published, had been accused of several crimes but had always been able to get away with it by exploiting his position of power. Likewise, in the first pages of La gita a Tindari (2000, translated as The Excursion to Tindari, 2006) Montalbano stigmatizes the appointment of Carlo Militello, former militant for the extreme left in the 1960s, as president of the second most important Sicilian bank. The fictional detective notices that many people who advocated for a fairer Italy during the 1960s ended up joining the establishment they fought in their youth. Instead of changing society, Montalbano bitterly comments, they changed themselves. Or, rather, they were only interested in power from the beginning. This former militant’s capacity to move easily from one party to another – ‘saltabecando da destra a sinistra’ (2002e, 837); ‘hopping from left to right and back again’ (2006, 5) – evokes the endemic Italian disease of political trasformismo (transformism). Indeed, trasformismo (literally transforming your enemy into an ally) started with the very beginning of the parliamentary institution in Italy as a method of making a flexible, centrist coalition government which isolated the extremes of the left and the right. It brought with it a series of loose and ever-changeable alliances between parties in order to retain power throughout Italy’s recent history (Clark 2008, 75, 394). Camilleri constantly condemns the Italian attitude of switching beliefs and alliances according to circumstances.

Another recurrent situation is the inspector watching TV news or reading the newspaper:

La disoccupazione nel Sud aveva raggiunto una cifra ch’era meglio non far conoscere. I leghisti del Nord, dopo lo sciopero fiscale, avevano deciso di sferrare i prefetti, primo passo verso la secessione. Trenta picciotti di un paese vicino a Napoli avevano violentato una picciotta etiope, il paese li difendeva, la negra non solo era negra ma magari buttana. (Il ladro di merendine, 2002c, 435)

The unemployment rate in the South had reached a figure that was better left unmentioned. The Northern League, after their tax revolt, had decided to expel the local prefects, a first step towards secession. Thirty youths in a town near Naples had gang-raped an
Ethiopian girl. The town was defending them: the black girl was not only black, but a whore. (*The Snack Thief*, 2003, 29–30)

Having Montalbano read or watch the news is an effective device to highlight some relevant issues. In this passage in particular, the narrator criticizes the Northern League, the secessionist and xenophobic party in power with Berlusconi’s Forza Italia. The reference to an assault on a young female migrant also stresses the difficult situation foreigners endure in an increasingly xenophobic Italy. The harsh living conditions of migrants are a topic dear to Camilleri, who tackles this issue in several works, such as *Il cane di terracotta*, *Il ladro di merendine*, *Il giro di boa* (2003, translated as *Rounding the Mark*, 2007), *La vampa d’agosto* (2006, translated as *August Heat*, 2008) and *Una lama di luce* (*A Ray of Light*) (2012). In these novels, the narrator or Montalbano himself refers to refugee camps along the Sicilian coast as ‘concentration camps’ and sympathetically describes the anguish and suffering of boat people who face a dangerous trip in order to make a better future for themselves and their families.8

It is clear, then, that far from writing highly entertaining stories that do not follow the Italian literary tradition of political commitment, as Serkowska puts it (2006, 170), Camilleri uses a crime series to maintain engagement with Italian society and deliver political and social messages. As Rushing argues:

> Camilleri […] has turned the Anglo-American emphasis on pure ratiocination and logic, a faith in reason that always seemed like a source of parody at best to the Italian mind, to an emphasis on social meaning. The cognitive pleasure produced by the unfolding of a Camilleri mystery is slight; what is significant is the reader’s initiation into a series of social problems ranging from the minor […] to the major. (2007, 33–4)

In other words, thanks to seriality, the fictional village of Vigàta becomes the setting for several inquiries into political corruption, xenophobia and marginalization, pollution and the Sicilian plague of unauthorized buildings, together with criminal investigations.

Camilleri’s novels are also notable for their style. Linguistically, they are based on a sophisticated web of languages which can be appreciated through his extensive use of dialogue. In particular, as Vizmuller-Zocco (2001) highlights, characters who are not Sicilian speak Italian, while older and underprivileged people speak the dialect of the Agrigento area. For all the other Sicilian characters, Montalbano included, and for
the narration of the story which often follows Montalbano’s stream of consciousness, the writer uses an artificial language, a mix of Italian, Sicilian dialect and invented words not actually spoken in any part of Sicily. This unusual combination creates a highly entertaining language, a versatile tool particularly suitable for the comic register which is a distinctive feature of Montalbano’s adventures.

As with his political engagement, Camilleri’s use of language has been widely criticized. It has been the topic of much debate and, as the author himself remembers, was questioned even by Sciascia (Novelli 2002, lxii). It has been defined as a hybrid, a mix, a pastiche and ‘dirty Italian’ (Mauri 1998) and a ‘language plunged in the dialect bowels’ (Onofri 1995, 239). Some critics, such as Collura (1998), have criticized Camilleri’s linguistic choice as a picturesque means of delivering a stereotyped and reassuring Sicily. As Vizmuller-Zocco has pointed out in a study of Camilleri’s popularity, these comments seem to be influenced by a negative attitude towards writers who enjoy commercial success and, above all, towards crime fiction. In analysing L’odore della notte in particular, Vizmuller-Zocco argues that the linguistic basis of Camilleri’s language is neo-standard Italian, into which is inserted a ‘Sicilian branch’ (2001, 39). This scholar convincingly argues that Camilleri does not convey a stereotypical image of Sicily, but rather performs a vital literary operation that places the official Italian language and the Sicilian dialect on the same level. It also gives the latter a literary dignity which mainstream scholarship still denies it.

Camilleri’s linguistic invention is also notable for its inclusiveness. This invented language has become easily comprehensible to all Italians thanks to comments, paraphrases and synonyms spread through the texts. If, at the beginning of the series, an essential dictionary was provided in the appendix, this disappeared from later novels. Readers have become increasingly familiar with it and in fact have begun using invented words and expressions in their everyday life. As Tomaiuolo puts it:

[t]hanks to such intelligent strategies Camilleri’s novels have succeeded in being understood by different categories of (low, middle or high-brow) readers coming from different areas of Italy and not exclusively of a Southern or Sicilian origin, creating a commonly-shared and easily recognizable code. (2009, 205)

In other words, in a society still culturally divided in north and south, Camilleri’s new language has become a sort of lingua franca for all Italian lovers of crime fiction.
In conclusion, Camilleri has invented an imaginary place, Vigàta, as well as a highly entertaining language to introduce his discourse on Sicily and Italy. Recurring characters and situations give him the opportunity both to describe a Sicilian society in evolution and to have a sustained engagement with broader, sensitive issues of Italian contemporaneity. In spite of enduring criticism, and thanks to a fruitful tension between repetition and progression, the Montalbano novels clearly show how seriality can have both a literary and a social value.

Notes

1. Leonardo Sciascia (1921–89) was the first writer to engage in literary discourse on the Mafia. In his crime novels this author incisively describes the depraved workings of Sicilian criminal organization, laying bare the network of political and social connivance that allowed this organization to flourish. Among his most famous novels are *Il giorno della civetta* (1961, *Mafia Vendetta*, 1963 and *The Day of the Owl*, 1984), and *A ciascuno il suo* (1966, *To Each His Own*, 1992).

2. The word *impegno* is often used to mean the strong relationship between the individual and his or her society. It indicates an attitude of social and political criticism. In this sense it can only be imperfectly translated by the English word ‘commitment’ that has strong relational and passional connotations and is attached more to the private than to the public sphere.

3. As Antonello and Mussgnug explain, Italian criticism ‘has been characterized by an Adornian mistrust of the culture industry and by a more or less explicitly elitist stance, which expressed itself – even in leftist quarters – in an open refusal of mass culture’ (Antonello and Mussgnug 2009, 15).

4. Carlo Emilio Gadda (1893–1973) was a poet and a writer notable for his innovative language, a mix of Italian, local dialects, technical jargon and wordplay. He wrote the crime story *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (1946, *That Awful Mess on Via Merulana*, 1984).

5. According to Eco, ‘from the beginning the reading of a traditional detective story presumes the enjoyment of following a scheme’. Moreover, ‘[n]or are we dealing only with a schematism in the order of a “plot”, but with a fixed schematism involving the same sentiments and the same psychological attitudes’ (Eco 1979, 117–18). A negative perception of serial novels can also be found in Cawelti (1976, 2–14), La Porta (2006, 70–2), Sciascia (1983) and Todorov (1977, 42–4).

6. Geherin argues that serial novels give ‘multiple opportunities to create a sense of place’ (2008, 8). This is particularly true with imaginary places.

7. Exemplary in this sense are the final pages of Sciascia’s *Il giorno della civetta* where a character comments on Sicily’s social and political corruption invading the whole of Italy: ‘Forse tutta l’Italia sta diventando Sicilia’ (*Il giorno della civetta*, 1993, 131); ‘Maybe the whole of Italy is becoming a sort of Sicily’ (*The Day of the Owl*, 1984, 117).

8. For a detailed analysis of the representation of migrants in Camilleri’s novels see Pezzotti (2012b).
Part III
Transposition, Imitation, Innovation
By examining three early films\(^1\) from the Universal Studios Sherlock Holmes series (1942–46) starring Basil Rathbone, and comparing them to adaptations of hardboiled crime fiction of the same period, especially those involving Raymond Chandler's detective Philip Marlowe, I argue in this chapter that Hollywood utilized the form of the film series, and the canonical figure of the detective within a formulaic framework, to stress a dominant war discourse. This film series creates an effect that dramatizes the shift from the classic detective story to the 1940s wartime milieu. This change in detective fiction is also interconnected with shifting gender roles and tensions surrounding issues of sexuality and identity. During the war years, unprecedented numbers of women entered the workforce, a change which brought about confusion and a need to redefine gender roles. However, during the early years of the war, Hollywood gave priority to more war-directed themed films. Renov argues that the years 1942 and 1943 did not see many noir thrillers. Hollywood was under pressure from the War Information Office to address the war directly, and this was exactly what the first three films of the Sherlock Holmes series did. There was, moreover, an increase in female audiences which resulted in more female-oriented films, and it was not until later that the boom of tough thrillers started. For Renov, post-war issues started to surface on the big screen from 1944, including the problem of working women (1988, 33). With this rather complicated chronology, the Holmes film series became a vehicle to convey an ideologically conservative discourse on gender (stressing the need to reassert masculinity), and using genre as a hook to tease out popular conceptualizations of crime, detection and order.

Perhaps more than any other fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes has achieved a remarkable reputation. He is the prototype of the English
detective, known for his exceptional ratiocinative skills and his use of forensic science to solve crimes. His relationship to his friend Dr Watson is another memorable component in the detective formula that Conan Doyle perfected. Over the years, critics have written extensively about Holmes, addressing different aspects of his characterization, his influence and his resonance in popular culture. One aspect of this popularity is shown in the numerous adaptations of the detective in cinema, television and radio, including productions that achieved commercial success at the box office. Indeed Hollywood produced films that draw on Sherlock Holmes's iconic status and audiences' familiarity with his character. Some of the Sherlock Holmes films, moreover, were made as a series, and Hollywood mobilized a number of detective film conventions – the mystery, the suspense and the puzzle-solving techniques – to market the series as genre films.

The film series in itself is a mode of production that depends on a set of generic conventions that create an impact and a need for continuity, and mainly relies on the central role of the main character. The Sherlock Holmes film series is a key ingredient in the legacy of the legendary detective in Hollywood, as Holmes, in Redmond's words, 'has appeared in more films, and been represented by more actors, than any other character' (2009, 232). Among these is the series produced by Universal Studios featuring Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce as Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson respectively. Initially Twentieth Century Fox produced two films, The Hound of the Baskervilles and The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (both in 1939), which presented Holmes in his original Victorian setting. Then Universal Studios took over, producing 12 films between 1942 and 1946. These films show a different facet of the detective who now carries out his investigations, not in the drawing rooms and libraries of Victorian times, but in war-torn 1940s England. Especially in the first three films of the Universal Holmes series, the Second World War is the primary setting, and the plots deal with the anxieties, fears and uncertainties that occur in wartime. The detective here is the figure who brings a much needed stability to fear-stricken England by solving crimes that affect the safety of the entire nation. The films therefore raise issues of national identity by portraying an elaborate, exaggerated or terrible sense of threat to a country at war with a vicious enemy. In this way Hollywood transforms Holmes into a modern detective and goes even further by suggesting that he is also a patriot and a saviour. The films also act as propaganda weapons to boost morale and to suggest that the nation is in safe hands.
Contemporaneously with the Holmes series, Hollywood was equally interested in creating a forceful image of a hardboiled detective on the big screen: a cynical city-dwelling male loner who is implicated in a world of violence and disorder. This project started during the war years but was not fully realized until the post-war era. For example, Chandler's detective Philip Marlowe was featured in a number of prominent films in the early 1940s. He achieved an iconic position as the hardboiled detective, especially when Humphrey Bogart and Dick Powell gave the detective his tough cinematic persona. This image arguably reshaped the type of masculinity that went on to dominate the cultural imaginary of the post-war era. Interest in the war was intrinsically tied to Hollywood's obsession with male figures who in one way or another reflect anxieties while affirming masculine ideals. These tough-guy noir films, or what Krutnik calls 'tough thrillers', derive their force from the 'challenges to the mutually reinforcing regimes of masculine cultural authority and masculine psychic stability' (Krutnik 1991, xiii). They were, in addition, a platform on which to present the complexities that surrounded gender representations of that time.

The question of adaptation is also a key ingredient in this scheme where genre, gender and seriality all interact. I agree with Maltby who argues that adaptation can be used as or be part of a 'conscious ideological project' (1992, 556). The Hays Office regulations, censorship and a vision of reinventing the classical detective are some of the tools with which the Sherlock Holmes film series promoted a more conservative agenda. In creating what were to become the prevalent film genres and in censoring what was aired, Hollywood played a role in constructing a dominant discourse and became an industry supplying carefully made 'products' for mass consumption. In the case of Sherlock Holmes, this discourse has many facets; it is rooted in the way the war helped to shift audience perceptions of gender identity, and at the same time it utilizes generic detective conventions to further a powerful narrative of law and order. Commenting on conservative practices relating to adaptation in Hollywood, Maltby explains:

the industry was less concerned with the adaptation of a work than with its adaptation to a set of external political conditions. The regulations it devised to render objectionable books or plays unobjectionable sought both to maximize commercial advantage and to distribute an affirmative cultural vision Hays shared with the
clubwomen. ‘The manhood and womanhood of America is sound and wholesome,’ Hays declared in 1925, ‘and it wants wholesomeness in its entertainment in accord with the wholesomeness in its life.’ (1992, 557–8)

It was with this vision that Universal Studios introduced the Holmes series. The first film of the series is *Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror* (1942). The film, a loose adaptation of Doyle’s ‘His Last Bow’, highlights the fear generated during the Second World War by the ‘voice of terror’ (Nazi radio broadcasts in which acts of aggression against Britain are foretold). Holmes is summoned to Inner Council, the government defence committee, to stop this voice of terror and to help find the person or persons behind this sabotage plot operating inside Britain. Holmes in the film is a modern detective whose reputation is part of his ‘ageless’ persona. The film starts with the following introduction to the detective: ‘The character of Sherlock Holmes, created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, is ageless, invincible, and unchanging. In solving significant problems of the present day, he remains, as ever, the supreme master of deductive reasoning’ (*The Voice of Terror*, 1942). This title sequence, which also appears in *Sherlock Holmes in Washington* (1943), operates as a rationalization of the transition from Fox to Universal. Since Holmes has a timeless persona, we are reminded not to dismiss the film as merely a war film, and not to regard it as yet another adaptation of Doyle’s story. Rather the film series is presented as a crossover between the two. Hollywood in this case creates a continuum between the Victorian and the modern Holmes, which serves to ‘naturalize a setting previously anachronistic to Holmes’ (Haralovich 1979, 54). However, the film series does not separate or divorce the detective from his universal attraction and his well-known characteristics. For example, the presence of Dr Watson is a reminder to audiences that this is the ‘same’ Holmes, though in a new context. The films also maintain some of the classical Holmes ‘props’: the pipe, the violin and his residence at 221B Baker Street. In so doing, the film series paves the way for the detective to function in a war environment. At the same time, the films sketch an image of Holmes as a masculine figure who is able to face the most challenging of crimes. In *The Voice of Terror*, Holmes demonstrates his deductive skills in revealing the identity of the voice as belonging to the head of the Council, and brings the conspirator to justice.

Set in England, the film invites patriotic sentiments from a nation under threat and emphasizes the urgent need to protect it. The ending
captures this as Holmes and Watson stand in a bombed church above the English Channel watching the dawn:

Holmes: There’s an East wind coming, Watson.

Watson: I don’t think so. Looks like another warm day.

Holmes: Good old Watson ... But there’s an East wind coming all the same. Such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it’s God’s own wind nonetheless. And a greener, better, stronger land will be in the sunshine when the storm is cleared. (The Voice of Terror, 1942)

Holmes invokes the storm as a device to allude to danger, but this final dialogue brings a sense of reassurance and re-establishes Holmes as a kind of superhero. Hollywood in the 1940s leaned heavily on the image of the archetypal detective to create the superhero for a time of crisis. There was a need to make sense of the war and the enormous injustices and losses accompanying it. The Holmes film series succeeded in this through politicizing the popular character of the detective. It not only altered the English tradition of crime writing, but reconstructed new ‘English’ masculinities on a par with the model of hardboiled American toughness, best encapsulated in the iconic image of the on-screen detective.

Although the hardboiled investigator is not directly fighting the Nazi enemy, like Holmes in the Rathbone series, he is in an urban setting fighting gangsters and mobsters. The hero (Hammett’s Sam Spade, Chandler’s Philip Marlowe or Spillane’s Mike Hammer) is a cynical, tough, male detective whose masculinity is always challenged by the dangerous sexuality of a femme fatale. He does not have super detective powers but constantly strives to establish his authority. Paradoxically, perhaps, we should note that hardboiled detective fiction was a response to the classical detective fiction that Holmes represents: the main differences between the two genres are the characterization of the detective and the methods used to solve crimes. While the classical detective is the master of rational thinking and prevails at the end by his mental superiority over the criminals, the hardboiled detective is deeply implicated in the world of crime and disorder that he tries to resolve. In Hollywood, however, comparing the Holmes film series and different adaptations of Chandler’s novels, we can see that the paradoxical distinctions between hardboiled and classical detective fiction are resolved by hybridization, creating a format that blurs the boundaries between Doyle’s and Chandler’s books.
Investigating the reasons behind this mixing of classical and hard-boiled genres in cinema, one might argue that the Sherlock Holmes film series is part of a trend of establishing a normative image of the detective: tough, knowing and intelligent. The films glossed over the complex motives and dynamics that exist in the fictional texts. These 1940s crime thrillers developed an image of a detective who is more assertive and more reassuring than in the books. For example, Bogart’s performance of Marlowe has, as Abbott suggests, shaped the ‘Chandleresque masculinity’ that centres on ‘toughness, honor, incorruptibility and slick, street-smart charm’ (2003, 307). This performance brings a different dimension to the characterization of the written Marlowe.12 Howard Hawks’s *The Big Sleep* (1946) presents a model of excessive masculinity – Marlowe in the film is not only involved in a romantic relationship with Vivian, a plotline that does not exist in the novel, but he has none of the uncertainty or vulnerability that we see in Chandler’s narrative. The femme fatale in the film is no longer a threat, but a means to assert hypermasculine identity. The cinematic Marlowe therefore ‘centralizes almost to the point of parody a potent heterosexual appeal and virility within its masculinity model’ (Abbott 2002, 144). After all, Hollywood was invested in adaptations that glorified the male hero. Krutnik argues that the American entry into the war after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 ‘set in motion a rapid process of cultural mobilisation, a wide-scale shift from a rather nervous ideology of isolationism to one of commitment and community’ (1991, 57). War propaganda, with a masculine detective at its heart, focused on reinforcing a nationalistic and uniform discourse.

The films that follow *The Voice of Terror* present variations on the same themes. It is notable that the titles of the first few films include the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’, stressing the detective’s reputation in a new context. Very loose adaptations of Doyle’s narratives are used, reinventing the story to suit the modernization of the setting. The second film in the series is *Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon* (1943). The subject is again a Nazi conspiracy to obtain a ‘secret weapon’, a very important bomb-sight developed by a brilliant professor called Tobel. The film features Holmes’s old arch-enemy Professor Moriarty who is now working with the Nazis. The only clue to the location is coded in a cipher, borrowed from Doyle’s ‘The Dancing Men’, which is finally cracked by Holmes, who circumvents the enemy’s plans.

Professor Moriarty’s presence is connected to the patriotic tone of the film. In addition to the Nazis and their spies in England, the idea of a more personal enemy is important in the series. Moriarty is an
accomplished scientist who matches Holmes in intellectual abilities, a villain who reinforces the binary of good and evil – where good is English and evil is the enemy. The rivalry between Holmes and Moriarty adds to Holmes’s relentless attempts to solve the mystery, something the audience expects in any Holmesian narrative. The film even sees a dramatic confrontation where Moriarty drains Holmes’s blood, telling him ‘I should win at the end’. Holmes, confident of his own superiority, replies: ‘I shall be conscious long after you’re dead, Moriarty!’ (The Secret Weapon, 1943). As in The Voice of Terror, this sequel sees Holmes showcasing the significance of solving the puzzle by offering to sacrifice himself and hence making the polarization of good versus evil clearer: ‘Don’t you suppose I’d give my life to decode the last name of that message?’ (The Secret Weapon, 1943).

The ending of this sequel also reinforces the image of Holmes as a saviour rescuing a country as he quotes Shakespeare’s Richard II: ‘Things are looking up, Holmes. This little island is still on the map,’ says Watson, and Holmes replies: ‘Yes. This fortress – built by Nature for herself. This blessed plot, this Earth, this realm, this England’ (The Secret Weapon, 1943). Although emphasis is laid on England here, the American flavour of this film and the Universal series as a whole is what makes them purveyors of a compelling detective narrative for American audiences. The blend is a recipe for bringing together the different elements of the detective genre and yet injecting the formula with variations appropriate to the 1940s milieu.

The Americanization and ‘Hollywoodization’ of Holmes emphasize the tensions around genre and generic conventions on both sides of the Atlantic. When Holmes lost his ‘Victorian elegance’ he began to develop ‘a barbershop Americanized look’ (Shaheen 1975, 36). This shift in characterization is integral to understanding how the films speak to larger issues and play a role in reshaping, and perhaps reinventing, notions of law enforcement and order, which resituate the main premise of the detective narrative itself. Attention is shifted from the thrill of solving puzzles towards a ‘bigger picture’, when the mystery is unravelled: solving the crime is a matter on which national security depends. Hence while generic conventions traditionally set up audience expectations, the mesh between the Holmes books and some elements of hardboiled detective films (for example, emphasis on the detective as a masculine figure) redefines the genre and reiterate the question, ‘what is detective fiction?’

The tension between genre and gender is revealed in the way the film series uses time and location. The temporal shifts (from
Victorian to modern times) and the setting of the films (adding an unmistakably American touch) help to set the necessary background for the war politics addressed. England was a surrogate for America at war, and the play with generic conventions created a new formula that built on the need for a detective who could function ably in wartime. Although the depiction of masculinity in Doyle’s fiction has been studied by a number of critics,\textsuperscript{14} 1940s Hollywood added a unique perspective. The Holmes series set up a model of masculinity that was more political, reliant on the idea of male toughness and shrewdness in the face of danger.

In the next film, Holmes takes the fight to America. \textit{Sherlock Holmes in Washington} (1943) brings Britain and America together in a film that Steinbrunner and Michaels describe as the ‘ultimate step in modernizing the Canon’ (1978, 100). The detective is informed that secret documents represent a significant danger for England if obtained by the enemy. When the documents and the agents carrying them disappear in the US, Holmes is assigned to find them. International spies, an assassination plot against Holmes and Watson, secret documents hidden as microfilm, make the film more of a spy thriller than a classic detective film. Holmes, moreover, uses disguise in his attempts to find the documents. Posing as a collector, he comes face to face with Richard Stanley, the head of the spy ring. When the latter discovers Holmes’s real identity, the film depicts a most intriguing exchange that shows a more urbane face to Holmes. Similar to the scene when Moriarty tried to drain Holmes’s blood, Stanley and Holmes have a cat-and-mouse encounter, with the latter surviving a death trap planned by Stanley. Holmes eventually reveals Stanley, respected in Washington, as a German agent and the brain behind the conspiracies.

As with the previous two films, this one ends in a Holmes–Watson conversation that draws attention to patriotism. In this case, however, the exchange takes place on Pennsylvania Avenue with the Capitol in the background, and clearly invites sympathies towards the alliance of Britain and America:

\begin{verbatim}
Holmes: It is a great country Watson.
Watson: It certainly is, my dear fellow.
Holmes: Look up there ahead. The Capitol – the very heart of this democracy.
Watson: Democracy – the only hope for the future, eh, Holmes?
Holmes: It is not given for us to peer into the mysteries of the future. But in the days to come, the British and American people for their
\end{verbatim}
own safety and the good of all will walk together in majesty and justice and in peace. (Sherlock Holmes in Washington, 1943)

The following films in the series, however, do not see Holmes in America, but returned to the old haunts and foggy streets of London. Although not all the next films in the Rathbone–Bruce series are directly about Nazi spies or conspiracies, they still make references to the war. The first three films, which might be seen as a trilogy, were the appropriate platform to introduce war masculinity at a time when wartime exigencies were at their height. By 1944, Hollywood was ready to move away from war films to address new upheavals that would be created by the end of the war, such as working women and the return of GIs – what was soon to be called the ‘feminine mystique’. Nevertheless, the three films discussed here capture an important trend in the study of Hollywood: film-making was not merely an entertainment industry. During the war years, Hollywood functioned as a proponent of propaganda to promote a political discourse aligned with a more conservative gender discourse. Universal’s Sherlock Holmes film series was, therefore, the meeting point where gender and genre came together to serve the ‘greater cause’. This ultimately showcases the fact that genre and film series in Hollywood opened a space to influence and reread popular culture at large.

Notes

1. The films focused on here are Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror (1942), Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon (1943), Sherlock Holmes in Washington (1943).
2. There is a massive body of scholarship on Sherlock Holmes. Some of the most prominent critical studies include Redmond (1987, 2009), Riggs (2009), Keating (2006), Smith (2009), Wagner (2006) and Paul (1997).
3. For a comprehensive survey of adaptations of Holmes, see Barnes (2004), Steinbrunner and Michaels (1978) and Nollen (1996).
4. For more on Sherlock Holmes films in the context of genre films, see Haralovich (1979), and for a broader discussion of genre and film see Longhurst (1989), Orr (1997) and Neale (1980, 2000).
5. The remaining films in the Universal series are: Sherlock Holmes Faces Death (1943), The Spider Woman (1944), The Scarlet Claw (1944), The Pearl of Death (1944), The House of Fear (1945), The Woman in Green (1945), Pursuit to Algiers (1945), Terror by Night (1946) and Dressed to Kill (1946). This chapter focuses on the first three films, which are directly concerned with the war.
6. Examples of memorable performances are Dick Powell’s role in the 1944 film Murder, My Sweet (adaptation of Chandler’s 1940 Farewell my Lovely) and Humphrey Bogart’s role in The Big Sleep (1946).
7. Krutnik distinguishes between the different kinds of 1940s film noir: the ‘tough thrillers’ (the hardboiled form of film noir), and other cycles of crime films of the period (for example what he calls ‘semi-documentary police films’, the ‘rogue-cop thriller’, the ‘women's-picture crime thriller’ and the gangster film). For more details on this distinction, see Krutnik (1991), chapters 2 and 3, and appendix 2.

8. The study of adaptation depends heavily on the notion of fidelity: how the text is faithful to the adaptation. However, more recent studies question the notion of fidelity and look at adaptation from different perspectives: see especially Andrew (2000), Kranz (2007), Leitch (2003) and Stam (2000).

9. It is important to note that the Sherlock Holmes film series started as ‘A’ studio category and changed into ‘B’ category when Universal took over from Fox. This change was due to economic reasons as Universal could not afford the expensive Victorian settings. In general, genre films and series, as Haralovich suggests, were ‘a good investment for B’ due to their plots which are ‘formulaic and therefore do not require expensive screenwriting’ (1979, 55).

10. For more on the image of the superhero in detective fiction, see Brunsdale (2010).

11. A good example of the readings that stress the centrality of masculinity in the hardboiled genre is offered by Nyman, who states that the genre primarily serves to reaffirm American masculinity and a ‘disturbed masculine social order’ (1997, 3).

12. Abbott states that Marlowe's masculinity in Chandler's work reveals a deep ambivalence about traditional notions of maleness, an ambivalence that reveals itself 'when Marlowe veers away from a masculinity emphasizing control, strength, heterosexual pursuit, and self-mastery, and instead finds himself dissembling, hysterical, fragmented' (2003, 307). Marlowe is often beaten and drugged in Chandler's later works. He reverts to humour and wisecracks when he faces situations over which he has no control. Also, Forter's interesting study, Murdering Masculinities (2000), argues that ‘crime novels’ provide unstable and multiple notions of masculinity, and also talks about lack of male agency more as a masochistic pleasure.

13. See Stowe (1986) on the question of reading detective fiction, for a comprehensive account of the debates around the genre explaining that there are two critical camps: elitist and populist.

14. For example, Kestner argues that the ‘paradigm’ of Sherlock Holmes ‘interrogated, constructed and reinforced male gender during the Victorian, Edwardian, and Georgian eras’ (1997, 200). Barsham (2000) investigates the motives behind Doyle’s creation of Holmes’s masculinity model, suggesting that the author’s involvement with the Boer War and the Great War resulted in his turning to spiritualism as a shift in his vision and representation of masculinity.

15. For example, the ending of *The Spider Woman* (1944), a film in the series with a plot that is not war-related, shows a shooting gallery with effigies of Hitler and Mussolini as its moving targets.

16. The ‘feminine mystique’ refers to Betty Friedan’s prominent work (1965) in which she addresses the oppressive post-war ideology in the US that aspired to place women within a social domestic order.
In 1929, cousins Manfred B. Lee and Frederic Dannay unveiled Ellery Queen. Their pseudonymous protagonist, a mystery writer and amateur detective, went on to enjoy commercial success as both author and editor in addition to popular acclaim as an invented character. The series of printed works that allowed readers to follow the numerous adventures of Ellery Queen were so successful that many stories about and ostensibly by him were converted to radio, film and television while the soon-to-be popular and well-respected *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine*, still published today, made its debut in 1941. In 1975, executive producers Richard Levinson and William Link brought the detective to television in a mystery series entitled *Ellery Queen* which challenged viewers to ‘match wits with Ellery Queen’. Starring Jim Hutton in the lead role and David Wayne as his father, Inspector Richard Queen, the series survived only a single season. It was not until Levinson and Link, wanting to rework the concept, collaborated with Peter S. Fischer, one of the producers of the failed television series, that a media phenomenon was created in the form of *Murder, She Wrote*, one of the most successful ever Western television mystery series.

This was, however, more than a second shot at success – it was a complete and highly creative reimagining of the central character of Ellery Queen as a small-town female, the now much-loved Jessica (Beatrice) Fletcher. The transformation was profound, the young New York-based bachelor re-emerging in 1984 as a middle-aged widow in the fictional fishing village of Cabot Cove. *Murder, She Wrote*, starring Angela Lansbury as Fletcher, was produced for 12 acclaimed seasons and inspired four movie-length episodes. This chapter examines how the character of Fletcher, a retired high school English teacher turned mystery writer and amateur detective, captured the imagination of viewers
throughout the US and around the world, when (it seemed) Levinson’s and Link’s traditional dominant male detective could not. We also consider the ongoing demand for the J.B. Fletcher brand, which continues to be met in a variety of ways, despite the series having wrapped up in 1996.

As the author and lead character of numerous novels and short story collections, Queen has provided entertainment for millions of readers since Lee and Dannay, then youngsters from Brooklyn, saw their debut novel *The Roman Hat Mystery* published in 1929; a novel in which their pen-name persona also starred as ‘a smug, brilliant, know-it-all detective’ (Wheat 2005, 87). In addition to some 40 novels and various short story collections detailing Queen’s adventures, Lee and Dannay also used the name to present a series of critical essays on the mystery genre, written in the 1940s and 1950s, and to edit dozens of crime fiction anthologies, from *Challenge to the Reader* (1938) to the posthumously published *The Best of Ellery Queen* (1983). They also produced two volumes of true crime writing in the 1960s and a series of radio plays, *The Adventures of Ellery Queen*, which ran from 1939 to 1948. Lee and Dannay also wrote for children, producing 12 mystery titles for younger readers between 1941 and 1966 under the name of Ellery Queen, Jr.

It is estimated that Ellery Queen-branded works have sold more than 150 million copies worldwide (Lorenz 2008), yet the majority of books by or featuring him are today out of print, and little has been written about their authors. This is despite the fact that Lee and Dannay made a major contribution to the American detective narrative as a genre through ‘the early 1930s, [when] the team took the intellectual game that was the formal detective novel to greater heights than any American writer, arguably raising it from a craft to an art’ (Breen 2005). Several of Lee and Dannay’s Ellery Queen narrative devices became hallmarks of the crime fiction genre more generally. These include the ‘dying message’ (where murder victims leave important messages to point to their killers), the ‘negative clue’ (when what is missing from a crime scene is as vital to solving a case as what is left behind) and the less frequently appearing ‘double solution’ (in which a mystery can be solved twice: first with a very logical solution and secondly with the correct one) (Lorenz 2008).

One of the signatures of the Ellery Queen mystery stories was the directness of the challenge to the reader. In what we would now call a postmodern disruption of the suspension of disbelief, the authors would interrupt the text’s action and challenge readers to identify the guilty party, since readers, like the detective, had been ‘provided the
necessary clues to name the murderer “by a series of logical deductions and psychological observations” (Breen 2005). When used in crime fiction, this technique ensures reader pleasure and engagement as: ‘the central focus is on complication and ingenuity in constructing the crime in the first place and in the devious stratagems involved in presenting the inquiry in such a way that the reader is deeply engrossed in trying to figure out the mystery’ (Cawelti 1977, 126). This enables authors to encourage readers to connect with them in a dialogue relative to the solving of a crime. When such a technique is deployed in a series, it also serves to heighten suspense, as readers, having learnt from experience to anticipate the challenge, pay particular attention to every detail – no matter how seemingly insignificant – so they are ready to respond when the question is asked.

Over time, the themes underpinning the Queen stories became more complex and, in some instances, more confronting. *The Origin of Evil* (1951) delves into the philosophy of religion while *The Glass Village* (1954) reflects on xenophobia and vigilante justice. Another later work, *Inspector Queen’s Own Case* (1956), considers some of the issues of ageing as Inspector Richard Queen, recently retired, adjusts to life without work, thus providing a ‘study in gerontology’ (Breen 2005). Ellery Queen, as a character, would also change through time, evolving from a ‘priggish youth to a more satisfyingly three-dimensional middle age’ (Lorenz 2008). It is important to note that, despite changes in themes and character traits, the men behind Ellery Queen, although they turned to ghost writers late in their careers to maintain the franchise, did not retreat from their guiding formula and ‘never renounced their allegiance to the pure fair-play puzzle that was their early hallmark’ (Breen 2005). Over its single season, the Queen television series did not demonstrate the same level of engagement with any serious social issues or attempt major character development.

In sympathy with the original Ellery Queen books but in contrast to their television adaptations, *Murder, She Wrote* dealt with a variety of topical issues: domestic violence in *Terminal Connection* (1991), the challenges facing single mothers in *If the Shoe Fits* (1990) and *What You Don’t Know Can Kill You* (1996), sensitivities around land rights in *Indian Giver* (1987) and *Northern Explosion* (1994), and the threat of biological terrorism in *Mrs Parker’s Revenge* (1996). Jessica Fletcher would evolve over the years into a more three-dimensional character as she developed a range of meaningful interactions with an interesting suite of recurring characters, both men and women, that took her beyond the relationships she initially had with her extended family and closest friends. This
character development starts in the earliest episodes as Fletcher transitions from retired high school English teacher to world-famous mystery writer and amateur detective. Renewing and revitalizing her character through meeting personal and professional challenges would ultimately contribute significantly to her success: she appeared as a ‘real’ person facing ‘real’ problems. Her ability in overcoming these provided viewers with encouragement as well as entertainment. This is very different from the presentation of Ellery Queen who is continually given opportunities, facilitated by his father, to solve crimes in between working on his mystery novels. This seemingly straightforward and easy lifestyle of living at home, sleuthing and writing arguably makes Ellery Queen less ‘real’ and, therefore, harder for viewers to relate to.

The pilot for the television adaptation of the Queen adventures, *Too Many Suspects* (1975), saw a softening of Lee and Dannay’s original central character and storylines. Set in the years following World War II, the series presented an Ellery Queen who was disorganized and distracted but ultimately charming, much like his vintage Manhattan setting. The show also had a set of recurring characters, many played by actors who would later appear in episodes of *Murder, She Wrote.* The producers of the television series would, however, remain faithful to the most famous Ellery Queen motif: the challenge to the reader. This was achieved by Queen breaking the fourth wall and directly addressing viewers, challenging them to identify the murderer before the final scene played out and the who, how and why of the case were revealed.

In 1984, Queen was reborn and reintroduced to television audiences as Jessica Fletcher. Such reimaginings are not new – for example, Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes has been reinvented for television as Dr Gil Grissom of *Crime Scene Investigation* (2000–) and Dr Gregory House of *House, M.D.* (2004–12). Grissom, forensic entomologist, and House, Chief of Diagnostic Medicine, retain the original central character traits unchanged: gender, devotion to logic, a disregard for the feelings of others and, in the example of House, a penchant for drug use. Such stories present ‘a world of incontrovertible evidence where noble sleuths toil to reveal the truth’ (Harrington 2007, 366). More dramatic changes, such as those made to transform Ellery Queen into Jessica Fletcher, are however rare and even more rarely result in an almost instant success. Most striking in this reimagining is the protagonist’s gender change, a particularly bold move for those working within the mystery genre where, despite the presence of some female sleuths, male protagonists have dominated.
This seemingly high-risk gender-switching strategy was accompanied by numerous other changes. Viewers who came to know Ellery Queen in the mid-1970s met a youthfully mature man; Jim Hutton was in his very early 40s when the pilot episode went to air. The mystery writer was single and still living at home with his father whose employment with the New York Police Homicide Squad provided him, as noted above, with an entrée into the world of murder and detection. Jessica Fletcher was also a mystery writer but was decidedly middle-aged; Lansbury was almost 60 when she made her debut as Fletcher. A widow living on her own, she was presented as efficient, ordered and logical. She was also quite competent in the kitchen and, while some law-enforcement agents were fans of her fiction, her efforts to assist the police would often be resisted, and in some instances resented, by the professional investigator in charge. According to one of the producers of *Murder, She Wrote*, Peter S. Fischer:

*Murder, She Wrote* is the show that never should have been sold ... but was. Never should have been made ... but was. Never should have succeeded ... but did. In those days (and even now), conventional wisdom at the three major networks dictated that a gentle show without action, sex, or ‘meaningful’ topicality, and with a leading lady approaching the age of 60, was doomed to failure before it began. (1988, 30)

Yet part of the success of the reimagined Ellery Queen can be attributed to the fact that Jessica Fletcher was so ‘normal’: she was someone’s aunt, someone’s friend, someone’s teacher, and viewers, therefore, felt they already knew and liked her.

For *Murder, She Wrote*, the producers perfected a formula for the series. Cawelti suggests that for creators:

The formula provides a means for the rapid and efficient production of new works. Once familiar with the outlines of the formula, the writer who devotes himself to this sort of creation does not have to make as many difficult artistic decisions as a novelist working without a formula. Thus, formulaic creators tend to be extremely prolific. (1977, 9)

The staggering statistics for this crime series certainly support Cawelti. Two hundred and sixty-four episodes of *Murder, She Wrote* were produced over 12 seasons, and for eight of these, the show rated among the
The Stunning Success of J.B. Fletcher

top ten programmes in the United States. Lansbury received 12 Emmy Award nominations, ten Golden Globe nominations and a Screen Actors Guild Award nomination for her work as Jessica Fletcher; and more than 1400 guest stars appeared over the years (286 of whom were murdered) (Edmonton Journal 1996).

From each credit sequence on, Fletcher is presented as a powerful member of her community: she not only ‘constructs the story [...] she constructs her own life as well’ (Bell 1992, 308). Fletcher was almost immediately described as a ‘potent role model for females of any socioeconomic strata’ (Waters and Huck 1985, 107). Unlike Queen, who can be viewed as the predictable product of male privilege that is reproduced in many formats on numerous occasions, Fletcher is self-made and continues to work hard for her position as both author and detective. Her age also sends a vibrant message that it is never too late to follow your dreams and change your life.

Indeed, one of the factors behind Lansbury’s decision to take on the role was that the veteran stage and screen actress was attracted to playing a character who would challenge the prevailing views of television networks of the day, especially in terms of how the older woman was ‘not very often represented as a vital and intelligent being’ (Lansbury in Klein 1987, 43). Fletcher was also creative, independent, physically attractive and sensitive. Surrounded by family and friends and with a successful career that saw her travel across the United States and around the world, she was as comfortable fishing in Cabot Cove as she was wearing glamorous clothes and expensive jewels at a foreign embassy. In short, Jessica Fletcher was an excellent role model: the type of woman older women wanted to be and younger women could aspire to become.

It has also been suggested that the series considered its viewers as intelligent beings, ‘cerebral, thoughtful creatures who try to guess – even outguess – plots that often have more twists and turns than the letters in Mississippi’ (Klein 1987, 43). This conflicts with Breen’s suggestion that the last attempt to bring Ellery Queen to television screens in the 1970s failed because the puzzles were ‘too hard’, and that, therefore, the producers ‘dumbed down the clues in their subsequent project Murder, She Wrote’ (2005). The mysteries within Murder, She Wrote may have been much easier to solve than those presented in Ellery Queen but the idea of challenging the reader remained:

Just before the final act, the revelation of the killer, Jessica Fletcher jumps out of her chair and announces that she knows who did it. Cut to commercial. That gap between Jessica’s knowing and the
revelation provides the viewer with that same challenge: can you correctly identify the person whom Jessica will accuse, and can you match her reasoning? (Wheat 2005, 87)

Like Queen, Fletcher would also break the fourth wall in a number of episodes – which were designed to ease Lansbury’s workload – these would see her narrate rather than star in a story. In the first of this type of episode, *Murder in a Minor Key* (1987), in true Ellery Queen style, she issued a challenge to the viewer. But audiences preferred the original format: they wanted Fletcher to solve a crime, not describe how someone else worked out who the murderer was:

find[ing] satisfaction and a basic emotional security in a familiar form; in addition, the audience’s past experience with a formula gives it a sense of what to expect in new individual examples, thereby increasing its capacity for understanding and enjoying the details of a work. (Cawelti 1977, 9)

Such was the popularity of Jessica Fletcher and the faith that viewers had in the *Murder, She Wrote* formula, that these ‘bookended’ episodes were unpopular with audiences, despite the quality of the alternative detectives, who included reformed jewel thief turned insurance investigator Dennis Stanton and Bill Boyle, a former professional footballer, who worked as a private investigator with the assistance of an adorable French poodle. The stories were just as clever and engaging but they did not follow the formula or feature Fletcher in a leading role.

The long-running series has been so popular that it has infiltrated several domains within popular culture, generating book adaptations of the series, a number of spoofs, a spin-off television series, a series guide, and various tie-in products such as games, made-for-television movies, short story collections and even a cookbook. Soon after going to air in the mid-1980s, the *Murder, She Wrote* television series was supplemented by James Anderson’s book adaptations of some of the early episodes, including the pilot episode *The Murder of Sherlock Holmes* (1985). Fletcher’s intellect, as well as the inspiration for her character, are acknowledged in this first book version when one of her friends, Eleanor, says: ‘It’s just that you’re so good at mysteries, Jessica. Even Agatha Christie and Ellery Queen didn’t always fool you’ (Anderson 1985, 3). Anderson wrote two more adaptations, *Hooray for Homicide* (1985) and *Lovers and Other Killers* (1986), before Deutsch added a fourth volume, with *Murder in Two Acts* (1986). These works appeared
alongside early episodes of the television series, providing Jessica Fletcher's fans with multiple opportunities to follow her as she solved various murder cases.

Spoofs such as the one that featured in Mad magazine (1986) and the Murder, She Hoped clip (featuring 'Angela Lecture') available on media-sharing site YouTube, reflect an aspect of Murder, She Wrote popular with fans and critics alike – the way the programme quoted from, and paid homage to, a series of well-known crime narratives and characters from celluloid and print. There are many examples: the first pilot episode with its Holmes reference, and other episodes alluding to well-known films including Truck Stop (1989) which referenced Double Indemnity (1944), Family Doctor (1991) which referenced The Godfather (1972), and Incident in Lot 7 (1992) which referenced Psycho (1960). These and many other examples added another layer to viewers' pleasure, allowing them to recognize tropes within the show's characters, plotlines and settings, and predict how iconic scenes from some of the crime genre's landmark films would be reflected in their favourite hour of Sunday night viewing.

The Law & Harry McGraw, a Murder, She Wrote spin-off series which premiered in 1987, featured Jerry Orbach in the title role of Harry McGraw, the easily recognizable ‘traditional’ male private investigator, who had befriended Fletcher while working to solve the murder of his partner Archie Miles (another reference, this time to Miles Archer of Dashiell Hammett's 1930 Maltese Falcon) in Tough Guys Don't Die (1985). Without Fletcher's magic at its centre, this programme was cancelled the next year, its 16 episodes not even able to match the pilot plus 22 episodes of the failed Ellery Queen series just over a decade earlier.

Shortly after the final season of Murder, She Wrote went to air in 1996, The Unofficial Murder, She Wrote Casebook (1997), by James Robert Parish, was published. The cover of the volume claims the work is ‘the definitive unauthorized companion to TV’s most popular whodunit!' While presenting background information on the series, character profiles and an episode guide, it focuses on Fletcher. Other products generated in homage to the series and its central character include T-shirts, aprons, playing cards3 and coffee mugs, almost all of which prominently feature Jessica Fletcher's image.

In 1997, the Murder, She Wrote Cookbook was published, joining a long tradition of crime series ‘tie-in’ cookery books. These include Rex Stout’s The Nero Wolfe Cookbook (1973) and, more recently, Allen Rucker's The Sopranos Family Cookbook (2002) and Carolyn Keene's The Nancy Drew Cookbook: Clues to Good Cooking (2005). The Murder, She Wrote Cookbook,
edited by Tom Culver, who worked in the *Murder, She Wrote* wardrobe department, and food stylist and caterer Nancy Goodman Iland, features over 350 of the supposedly favourite recipes of the programme’s primary cast and crew as well as a number of the guest stars who made cameo appearances, such as Tippi Hedren, Anne Meara and Rod Taylor. Lansbury contributed a cheesecake recipe and this is often mentioned on the fan sites. The recipes are interspersed with information about the show, how it was made and the roles the crew performed. The book reflects the numerous culinary references within episodes of *Murder, She Wrote*. Sheriff Amos Tupper (Tom Bosley) and Dr Seth Hazlitt (William Windom) are both very fond of Fletcher’s cooking. Some episodes focus on cookery, including *Who Threw the Barbitals in Mrs Fletcher’s Chowder?* (1988).

There have also been four made-for-television, movie-length episodes: *South by Southwest* (1997); *A Story to Die For* (2000); *The Last Free Man* (2001); and *The Celtic Riddle* (2003). The sporadic screenings of these movies were, however, insufficient to meet the needs of Fletcher’s devoted followers. There are also three collections of short stories: *Murder, They Wrote* (1998); *Murder, They Wrote II* (1998); and *More Murder, They Wrote* (1999). These books, edited by Elizabeth Foxwell and Martin H. Greenberg, bring together the work of a variety of female authors writing within the crime fiction genre. Jessica Fletcher introduces these volumes in much the same way as she did the ‘bookended’ episodes featured in the television series.

By far the most successful project in prolonging the reach and life of J.B. Fletcher is the collection of novels that are marketed as the work of Jessica Fletcher and Donald Bain. These suitably reflect Fletcher’s profession as a successful mystery writer, with the first volume, published in 1989, followed by the regular release of new works twice a year. Each book has appeared on the *USA Today* bestseller list, and so great is the demand for these titles that none have ever been allowed to go out of print. Bain’s early career saw him work in advertising (Pippen 2007, 1); much like Lee and Dannay who had both had similar careers before turning their typewriters to the service of the mystery novel (Breen 2005).

The first book in this ‘co-written’ series, *Gin & Daggers*, appeared in 1989 and is ‘[d]edicated to the memory of Richard Levinson 1934–1987’, one of the producers who assisted in bringing Jessica Fletcher to the small screen. In 1988, Bain explains, he had lunch ‘with Russ Galen, a young agent at the Scott Meredith Agency, and Anne Sweeney, an editor from McGraw-Hill’ (2006/12). *Murder, She Wrote* was then, he knew,
‘immensely popular […] the third longest running TV series of any kind, and the longest running detective mystery series in TV history’ and MCA Universal had decided:

[to capitalize on the show’s popularity by launching a series of original murder mystery novels utilizing the TV characters, with the byline shared by the writer and Jessica Fletcher, who existed only as the character played by Ms Lansbury. (Bain 2012)]

Bain recognized then that the difficulty of the task ‘would be to bring to life and to capture the Jessica Fletcher character on paper as effectively as Angela Lansbury had on the screen’ and he attests that:

[t]o this day, and after 39 books […] I still find that to be a challenge, along with keeping the plots and storylines fresh and inviting. My most meaningful compliments come when readers write and say, ‘It sounds just like Jessica in the books’. That’s my job, and I love every minute of it. (Bain 2012)

There would be a significant lag between the first and second novels because the division of McGraw-Hill that published *Gin & Daggers* was closed down: Signet, a major publisher of popular paperbacks, ‘stepped into the picture and picked up where McGraw-Hill had left off, offering [Bain] a four-book contract’ (Bain 2012). The second volume in the series, *Manhattans & Murder*, was released in 1994. Over 20 years and 40 books later, Bain comments that ‘Murder, She Wrote is alive and well, in reruns of the TV show on cable television, and in the bookstores, while his volumes have not only been financially successful from the beginning, but have seen sales increasing with each new release (Bain 2012).

Well-known producers Richard Levinson, William Link and Peter S. Fischer experimented with the mystery formula for *Ellery Queen* but perfected it in *Murder, She Wrote*. The new series would undergo several changes, including the addressing of more complex themes, and the evolution of the character Jessica Fletcher alongside Lansbury’s increased creative control when she became executive producer in 1992. The series would, however, remain faithful to its viewers’ expectations, as each episode complied with the formula developed by the producers. Fletcher is very different from Queen in age, background, personality and gender, yet the most important difference is arguably in her accessibility. Ellery Queen is a character designed to entertain an audience: Jessica Fletcher is designed to engage with one. It is Fletcher
who can be related to and serve as an inspiration, she who provides a meaningful role model for women of all ages and who is the type of friend you would want as a companion and confidante in many situations, but especially, if needed, to get you off a murder charge.

The end of *Murder, She Wrote* was due to a combination of rising production costs and the loss of the prestigious Sunday night timeslot as CBS looked for programmes to appeal to a younger audience. The ‘genteel lady novelist’ (Fischer 1988, 30) would appear in the final episode, *Death by Demographics*, in 1996: a closure which reflected the ‘television industry’s fixation on wooing 18–49-year-old viewers at the expense of other audience segments’ (Parish 1997, 20). The demand for material featuring Jessica Fletcher continued and has not abated. This has been met in a variety of ways, as she continues to be ‘serialized’ through games, cookbooks and other paraphernalia, alongside book adaptations and short story collections. In this way, Ellery Queen has come full circle. The male crime mystery writer and amateur detective who initially appeared only in print, has, via radio, film and television and as a female mystery fiction writer and amateur detective, returned to print as the pseudonymous protagonist.

Notes

1. Manfred B. Lee was born Manfred Lepofsky, while Frederic Dannay was born Daniel Nathan.
2. These include David Wayne (Inspector Richard Queen) in *Murder Takes the Bus* (1985), Tom Reese (Sergeant Velie) in *Murder Through the Looking Glass* (1988), John Hillerman (the radio actor Simon Brimmer) in two episodes, *Magnum on Ice* (1986) and *Murder on Madison Avenue* (1992), and Ken Swofford (the determined reporter Frank Flannigan), as several different characters in 11 episodes of *Murder, She Wrote*.
3. In addition to playing cards a *Murder, She Wrote* board game was produced in 1985 and reissued in several new editions, with a large picture of Fletcher on the lid. A much-anticipated eponymous computer game was released in 2010, its promotional cover subtitle also focused on the character: ‘Solve 5 Murder Mysteries with Jessica Fletcher’. A new version was released in 2012.
4. In *Who Threw the Barbitals in Mrs Fletcher’s Chowder?* (1988), Sheriff Tupper’s brother-in-law, Elmo Banner, dies at Fletcher’s dinner table, a victim of barbitural poisoning. The amateur detective is immediately determined to find the killer and simultaneously clear her reputation in the kitchen.
5. Prior to his work on the *Murder, She Wrote* series Donald Bain wrote the very successful airline comedy *Coffee, Tea or Me?* (1967), which, with its three sequels, has sold over five million copies. Bain also wrote, with the byline Gerald M. Stein and Donald Bain, *Caviar, Caviar, Caviar* (1981) and, with the byline Joseph Scott and Donald Bain, *The World’s Best Bartenders’ Guide* (1998).
In Felicioli and Gagnol’s 2010 Oscar-nominated film Une vie de chat (English title: A Cat in Paris) Dino the cat lives two lives, by day with a little girl whose mother is a police officer, and by night with a burglar he follows across the rooftops of Paris. Although the directors explicitly acknowledge only classic American noir influences, it is clear that in choosing these somewhat unorthodox routes, burglar and cat are connecting to a well-established French topos: crime and detection in the city of light are not limited to ground level, nor to the classic ‘underworld’. The concept of fleeing a crime scene or following a trail, so central to crime and mystery fiction, has been strongly associated historically with the rooftops of Paris: that was where, after all, Poe chose to set the mysterious events of ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ (1841), in which the crime was committed by an orangutan swinging between buildings, leaving clues to be tracked and interpreted by Poe’s detective, Dupin.

Another of early crime fiction’s greatest French characters, Allain and Souvestre’s Fantômas, although not a detective, was a burglar and serial killer whose preferred method of access to and escape from the scene of his crimes was across the rooftops. As the hero of Louis Feuillade’s five-part film series (1913–14), Fantômas was depicted in cinema posters as towering over the Parisian skyline in an image that echoes nineteenth-century representations of the devil gazing down over the city. Feuillade would exploit the rooftop route again in his ten-part serial film Les Vampires (1915–16), which includes memorable scenes of female criminal Irma Vep (Musidora) creeping over the tiles in a skin-tight black silk bodysuit.

In addition to the indirect connection noted for Une vie de chat, classic French crime fiction continues to be a direct source of cinematic
inspiration: the latest in a series of film versions, Jean-Paul Salomé’s 2004 Arsène Lupin, loosely based on Maurice Leblanc’s La Comtesse de Cagliostro (1924), replicates the theme of rooftop acrobatics noted in Allain and Souvestre’s series. With such strong antecedents linking crime and elevated movement through the city, it is perhaps surprising that there has been more focus in crime fiction criticism on the flâneur than on someone who moves in less orthodox ways, the Fantômas-style criminal, a ‘créature de l’ombre et de la nuit, des toits et des égouts’ (Azoury and Lalanne 2002, 92); (creature of shadow and night, of rooftops and sewers), or the rooftop-and-sewer sleuth who follows in his footsteps.

I discuss here, in selected Paris-based novels by two writers, Frenchman Léo Malet (1909–96) and American Cara Black (1951–), the modes of both criminal and detective movement around the city, the former in order to commit the crime and escape detection, the latter in order to track the culprit. Focusing on the ‘how’ and ‘where’ of this movement, we will see that while the texts studied are not, together, a series sensu stricto, they are strongly linked through the way they construct their Parisian setting. The first novel in Black’s series contains elements directly imitating Malet’s work, but as we shall see they are also serially linked through their similar representation of the built environment. Their Paris is a three-dimensional city, that includes rooftop scenes – something that might remind us of Situationist philosopher Guy Debord’s 1955 recommendation that the roofs of Paris should be made accessible for strolling. I propose to compare the Situationist notion of dérive with Baudelairean flânerie to illustrate the extent to which unorthodox movement through the city of Paris can be seen as constitutive of, if not a single, unified series in the more traditional sense of the term, at least a set of elements of seriality replicated by the writers, what we might call the seriality of pursuit.

As Parkhurst Ferguson points out, the flâneur is not a Baudelairean invention, but first appears in an anonymous 1806 work (1994, 83). Essentially male, he evolves through the nineteenth century from an idle stroller into an observer-artist-creator figure grappling with the modernist urban landscape and its inhabitants. It is this later version that Benjamin describes – somewhat ambivalently – as being like a detective. As McDonough underlines, there is a possible double interpretation (referring to detective or criminal) of Benjamin’s declaration: ‘No matter what trail the flaneur may follow, every one of them will lead him to a crime.’ Scholars of crime fiction too numerous to list here have taken up the notion of the flâneur-detective, despite the fact that
his chief characteristic for both Baudelaire and Benjamin is arguably his lack of direction or specific purpose. As Butor (1961) and, after him, McDonough (2002) have pointed out, the detective tracks a specific, although usually unknown, culprit. This is what Turnbull, referring to Todorov’s 1977 analysis, calls the ‘double narrative’ (2014, 7): the pursuit at the heart of crime fiction is anything but random, anything but a stroll.

If it is not flânerie, then, how might we describe the movement through the city of both criminal and detective (bearing in mind that the latter’s movements, if successful, are essentially a copy)? I now consider whether the Situationist concept of the dérive might be more suited to our purposes in reflecting on methods of displacement.

As mentioned, the dérive as described by Debord is in some ways similar to the concept of flânerie. Hollevoet remarks, however, that the former allows for a non-visual perception of the city: the dériveur's ‘purposeless displacements’ (1992, 40) allow a physical appropriation of the city's spaces, the assertion of an often ludic human presence, a deliberate randomness (my emphasis) which differentiate it from flânerie. As Atkinson (2009) has argued further, there is a strong sense of this presence in the recently emerged practice of parkour or free-running, a discipline which is centred on the ability of the human, known as a traceur, to move through the built (or natural) environment with a profound disregard for what are habitually seen as barriers to this assertion of freedom.

While parkour features in dramatic chase or escape scenes in a number of films (for example, producer Luc Besson’s District 13 and District 13: Ultimatum), it has its origins rather in the concept of unimpeded movement for its own sake, and in this sense it can clearly be seen as an extension of the dérive. This again seems a mismatch with the crime-directed trajectory of the criminal and the pursuit of the detective. Of note, however, are two factors: parkour is a group activity in which practitioners follow a leader; and it allows them to respond to the city in a thoroughly three-dimensional manner: in combining strong verticality with the horizontal it escapes the flatness of Situationists' visual representations of urban dérive (McDonough 2009, 83), or indeed of any traditional map. Particularly in filmic representations, it also goes beyond the flâneur's solitary meanderings to take on a pursuit function, not entirely foreign to its original conception as a group exercise in which one member shows the way for others to follow. It can thus, I argue, be seen as an extended form of dérive that offers a better conceptual fit for the elusive pathways of crime fiction, particularly those that
strongly depict a physical intrusion and consequent pursuit (pace Miss Marple and company).

The two authors selected here, one French and the other an American following in his footsteps (Anderson 2014b), share the design of creating a series set in Paris, with one novel for each arrondissement. Both use a PI protagonist to track the perpetrators, and both can be seen as constructing a fictional Paris firmly anchored in the built reality, chiefly through specific toponymical references. To explore all 30 novels, 16 by Malet and 14 by Black, is clearly beyond the scope of this chapter: I will instead focus on a selection of examples from each series. My aim here is to investigate how two different authors, using the serial form, create through their use of verticality of movement (rooftops and sewers, but also attics and cellars) a strong sense of the three-dimensional city. This aspect of setting appears to have gone largely unremarked by research on the role of place in crime fiction (see Geherin 2008, James 2009, Howell 1998, Hausladen 2000): focusing on it adds greatly to the dynamism of the novels, an important element in the creation of suspense as victims are attacked from unexpected approach pathways and investigators literally ‘search high and low’.

Although he never achieved the notoriety of near contemporaries Georges Simenon or Frédéric Dard (‘San Antonio’), Malet published over 40 works of popular fiction, including a detective series which was to cover Paris’s 20 arrondissements. Beginning in 1954, he came to a halt in 1959 five short of his goal, discouraged, he stated, by the significant changes to a modernized and therefore unrecognizable eastern sector of the city. His protagonist, Nestor Burma of the detective agency ‘Fiat Lux’, is a nonconformist of the first order: arguably, the kind of ‘free-running’ detective work of interest here is best carried out by a PI, unencumbered by official procedures.

Reading the Nouveaux mystères series with a focus on the ways in which criminal and detective move through the city of light, it is very quickly evident that despite his sarcastic declaration that he solves crimes from his armchair, like ‘Néro Wolfe’ (Fièvre au Marais, 379), Burma is almost constantly in movement. He very rarely strolls: on the contrary, his movements are directed to precise addresses, whether cafés, residences or businesses. In the majority of cases, he has been summoned by a potential client or is pursuing his inquiries. Occasionally his tracking is uncertain, and he casts about, searching for clues: ‘Je rôdaille d’abord un peu, de droite et de gauche, au radar nasal’ (Cadavre, 671) (I wander about a bit, left and right, following my nose): such indecision is unusual. The police inspector with whom
he frequently works, commissaire Faroux, comments that Burma never visits for pleasure, ‘pour le plaisir’ (Micmac moche, 765). Instead, he attends crime scenes, frequently located several floors up: almost always mentioning the number of floors, sometimes in conjunction with comment on the functioning or otherwise of a lift. For example, ‘Il n’y a pas d’ascenseur. Nous entreprenons l’escalade’ (Boulevard, 279) (There’s no lift. We tackle the climb); or ‘Au cinquième, régnait un silence absolu’ (Linceuls, 276) (On the fifth floor there was total silence); ‘Sous les toits, dans une ancienne chambre de bonne’ (Fièvre, 382) (Top floor, in what used to be a maid’s room). Such mentions not only add to the realism necessary in crime fiction, but heighten the reader’s awareness of verticality. In Des kilomètres de linceuls Malet combines his key references to height with an allusion to Balzac’s Rastignac:

Je pris l’ascenseur à destination du bar du septième étage et m’installai devant un apéro sur la terrasse ensoleillée d’où on domine tout Paris. Depuis 1944, pas mal de Rastignac au petit pied étaient venus rêver là. (267)

[I took the lift up to the bar on the seventh floor and sat with my aperitif on the sunny terrace from which you tower over the whole of Paris. Since 1944, quite a few small-time Rastignacs had come up there to dream.]

In spite of this emphasis on height, and more than one mention of Lupin (for example Soleil, 86; Linceuls, 348), the notion of escape or pursuit across the rooftops does not figure large. Such attempts lead to death: the ambitious young criminal sought by Burma is pursued by two other villains, and loses his footing: ‘Il tente de se cacher, de fuir, de gagner, en empruntant la balustrade, une autre partie du bâtiment. C’est la glissade et la chute’ (Linceuls, 346) (He tries to hide, to escape, to reach another part of the building via the railing. He slips and falls).

Another criminal falls to his death in Fièvre au Marais: this time, Malet chooses the decrepit Tour Barbette as a setting for murder (435). Burma climbs a rickety ladder leading up to the remains of a partial floor inside the tower, discovering as he does so that it is the hide-out of an escaped prisoner, the previously unidentified murderer he has been tracking. From this vantage point he sees a faint light down in the depths of the cellar below, and descends to discover the corpse of the young man he had initially suspected of the killing, now the convict’s second victim.
The juxtaposition of height and depth here underlines the strongly vertical nature of Burma’s investigations throughout the series. It also highlights the repeated, arguably more traditional references to below-ground-level Paris as a threatening environment. Although there are instances of relatively positive use of such spaces (the sleazy basement cabaret Chez Colin des Cayeux in Micmac moche), overall Malet stresses their dank and dangerous nature. A corpse is found in a spider-infested cellar in the very first novel of the series (Soleil, 12, 109); forgers are interrupted at their work in a dingy basement beneath a fabrics warehouse (Linceuls, 348); and an extensive passage in Du rebecca rue des Rosiers details the ‘underground Paris’ that lends itself to criminal activities. Here another corpse has been secreted:

Plus exactement [dans] une sorte de puits sans margelle, [dans] une oubliette qui s’ouvre à ras du sol et qui doit conduire à d’autres galeries. Paris est bâti sur un fromage de gruyère, mais cette partie-ci de la rive droite est particulièrement riche en souterrains superposés. (228)

[More exactly, in a kind of well without a coping, an oubliette with an opening in the floor that must lead on to other galleries. Paris is built on Gruyère cheese, but this part of the Right Bank is especially rich in layers of underground tunnels.]

Malet’s detective is not only knowledgeable about the streets and buildings of Paris, but able, as if he were some chiefly indoor traceur, to scale the heights and depths of the city in his tracking of the criminal.

Black, like a number of other writers (Wigelsworth 2014), was initially inspired by Malet’s series, in particular by Du rebecca rue des Rosiers (Anderson 2014a, 66). She has created a hybrid detective, a young half-American, half-French woman who ekes out a living running the ‘Leduc Détective’ agency, specializing in computer crime. Although she has a business partner, dwarf René Friant, and a bichon frise dog named Miles Davis, Aimée Leduc regularly finds herself investigating murders, alone.

The plots are typically complex, involving other time periods and their repercussions into the 1990s present: Murder in the Marais connects with Shoah history; Murder in the Sentier with 1970s terrorist groups (a thinly disguised Baader-Meinhof gang); Murder in Montmartre features Corsican separatism; and Murder at the Lanterne Rouge mixes contemporary Chinese sweatshops and fourteenth-century Templars and medieval guilds.
Despite these differences, the two series have much in common in their interactions between characters and settings: their PIs are in almost constant movement between locations, by foot, car or métro. Black’s investigator adds Vespa, mobylette and motorbike to her means of transportation, and on a very few occasions, actually does stroll: ‘Paris was the city for walking when words failed [...] Down the elegant rue du Bac they strolled’ (Marais, 172). For the most part, however, she shares Burma’s urgency and sense of purpose.

Leduc’s Paris, like Burma’s, is strongly three-dimensional. The first novel in the series features a corpse in a lightwell, and a second victim who is murdered 50 years later in the same lightwell and dragged up several flights of stairs; there is extensive reference to the catacombs beneath the city, both as a location for trysting lovers during the Occupation (Marais, 156) and as the setting for the showdown 50 years later between former Nazi father and neo-Nazi son. A Jewish persecutor in 1943 takes an elevated route: ‘I saw Lili climb out the window over the rooftop, and escape’ (255). An extensive chase scene in the narrative present sees villains pursue the detective (Leduc, wearing black tights, a hiked-up black mini-skirt and improbably high heels) across the rooftops of the Place des Vosges (260–74). The closing confrontation between Leduc and an Occupation informer turned corrupt politician takes place on a roof, from which both fall through the rooftop skylight of a lower building (351), only the heroine surviving.

In Murder in the Sentier a mysterious woman who has previously contacted Leduc is murdered at the top of the four-storey Tour Jean-Sans-Peur (20–1) and a former terrorist and friend of Leduc’s vanished mother runs for his life over the rooftops (213). Murder in Montmartre begins with the rooftop attack on Leduc’s best friend, policewoman Laure Rousseau, during which Rousseau’s partner is shot dead. To prove her friend’s innocence, Leduc follows the trail the police have ignored: ‘she worked her way across the slick rooftop’ (17).

Both these novels also explore the lower levels of the city, whether these be cellars (Sentier, 171), the ‘bowels’ of a building (Sentier, 186) or the recurring mention of catacombs and the city’s limestone foundations – ‘Paris sits on a big Swiss cheese’ (171). Once again, the inclusion of both heights and depths ensures that the reader is given a strong sense of Paris as more than can be captured on a two-dimensional plan.

The complexity of Black’s plots, along with the fact that her books are typically between 300 and 350 pages, compared with Malet’s 200 or so, means that the narratives in places lack the urgent pacing of the earlier series. However, the energy expended by Leduc (and Burma) in scouring
the city in search of the culprit is occasionally equalled by that of the villain tracking the investigator, something that adds extra suspense to the dynamics of the quest. In neither case does the concept of casual flânerie or purposeless but pleasurable dérive seem especially applicable.

As Geherin has indicated, ‘[w]riters often do more than simply map out street names and familiar landmarks’ (2008, 5). His conception of place in the authors he studies seems essentially static, a series of images or locations evoked through descriptions, or contributing to plot and characterization largely through metaphors or symbolism reflected in those descriptions. For P.D. James, setting is something more dynamic, ‘where these people live, move and have their being and we need to breathe their air, see with their eyes, walk the paths they tread’ (2009, 110). To fully appreciate these aspects, however, we may need to pay particular attention, as we have done here, to the ways in which the detectives inhabit their spaces, and move through them. Perhaps the PI is a special case, the opposite extreme of the armchair detective, involved in constant pursuit, and thus a particular misfit for the flâneur label.

As demonstrated, Malet’s Burma and Black’s Leduc, and their villains, traverse their environments not just horizontally but vertically, and in that sense they are arguably much more traceur than flâneur. From catacombs to towers and rooftops, they frequently follow – or are followed along – unorthodox pathways, exchanging roles as leader and pursuer. That Black’s series also follows Malet’s in its intention to provide a story for each arrondissement is arguably yet another kind of serialization, tracking the earlier writer in a form of literary parkour.

Notes

1. In a 2010 interview they refer, as sources of inspiration, to Edward Hopper’s paintings and to three American film classics: The Night of the Hunter (1955), White Heat (1949) and The Maltese Falcon (1941).
2. Scholars have sometimes limited their reflections to street level: see for example Jacobs (1984, 1993).
3. Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre together wrote over 30 Fantômas novels, with Allain adding another dozen titles after Souvestre’s death in 1914. From the first co-authored work in 1911 to his final adventure (1963), Fantômas captured the imagination of readers and filmgoers, also impacting on the works of leading cultural figures (Cendrars, Jacob, Desnos, Apollinaire and Magritte).
4. As for example in Doré’s frontispiece to la Bédollière’s Le Nouveau Paris (1860) showing a devil watching old Paris being carted away (by Haussman’s restructuring): see Parkhurst Ferguson (1994), plate 12 (123–4).
6. Between 1905 and 1939 Leblanc authored over 20 works featuring Arsène Lupin, ‘gentleman burglar’.
7. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
8. Wigelsworth (2014) lists other writers whose work might be considered a continuation of Malet’s unfinished series. See also Anderson (2014b).
9. Debord presentation (1955), n.p.: ‘ouvrir les toits de Paris à la promenade’ (in English in McDonough 2009, 69). In French, Debord uses the term *promenade*, rather than *flânerie*, an important distinction.
10. This replication might of course also be considered a form of intertextuality.
12. McDonough (2002, 106) concurs with Michel Butor, whose *Histoire extraordinaire: essai sur un rêve de Baudelaire* he cites, in pointing out that the detective, in following the criminal, is anything but idle and directionless, a fact which rather stretches the definition of the *flâneur* or stroller.
13. For example, those used as prefatory paratexts in certain types of crime fiction works emphasizing physical location.
14. Practitioners are known in French as *traceurs*, from the verb *tracer*, to show the way.
15. Both authors also use historical references, arguably creating a fourth dimension, Paris through time: this is beyond the scope of the present study.
16. See Malet (1988, 224). In this, his attitude parallels Situationist responses to changes to the built environment.
17. Excepting perhaps Dard’s San Antonio, an equally nonconformist *commis-saire de police*.
18. All references to these works are to the Robert Laffont edition by Nadia Dhoukar. For reader convenience, the novels will be referred to by an abbreviated title, since several share the same publication date. The existing English versions being of variable quality (see Anderson 2014a), all translations given here are my own.
The serialized hardboiled hero, according to Moore (2006), has gone through three distinctive iterations of character development: the early period (1927–55), the transitional period (1964–77) and the modern period (1979–present). Constant throughout these stages, however, has been reluctance by the hero to connect with and embed him- or herself fully within society. Connectivity, Moore suggests, is a danger that can lead to obligation and makes a character susceptible to others’ influence at the cost of investigative integrity (2006, 227). I will argue, however, that popular contemporary urban Australian crime fiction frequently repositions connectivity and embeddedness as a useful tool that leads not to danger, but to greater investigative independence. Connectivity and embeddedness, I propose, are states that particularly suit serialized fiction.

In the decades from 1990 onwards, a range of Australian crime fiction serializations appeared that appropriated the consistent representation of the sleuth as a hardboiled informed observer in a changing world but left behind the hardboiled hero’s sense of social isolation in a way previously uncommon to the genre. These include Peter Temple’s Jack Irish series, Shane Maloney’s softer-boiled Murray Whelan and his political misadventures, Lenny Bartulin’s bookselling ‘everyman’ Jack Susko, and Leigh Redhead’s exotic dancer Simone Kirsch. Temple’s and Maloney’s series, however, stand as the most distinctive examples, and will be the focus of this study. Their publication and setting over the 1990s and well into the late 2000s position them on both sides of real-life watersheds in the political and social development of their cities.

One of the best-known conventions of hardboiled fiction is the protagonist as socially isolated observer, a type also commonly referred to as ‘the loner’ (Pope 1995, 161; Beinhart 1996, 116; Paretsky 2007, 91). ‘The loner’ is generally acknowledged as first appearing in American
private-eye fictions of the 1930s and 1940s as a response to the rise of urban violence, organized crime and police corruption (Scaggs 2005, 55), and the social anxieties that these provoked. This convention presents the sleuth as alienated from the ‘socio-economic order of family, friends, work and home’ (59). The loner observes his surrounds with a gaze that is detached and almost scopic, in the Freudian sense of gaining pleasure from the act of looking rather than from what is seen (Porter 2003, 95). The act of looking without seeing, however, only adds to the feeling of isolation as the looker cannot comprehend, decipher or create meaning from what he or she observes. This further reinforces their inability to develop emotional connection with those around them. Modern Australian examples abound, most notably Garry Disher’s Melbourne-based Wyatt series and Sydney-centred Cliff Hardy by Peter Corris.1 When analysing the form, however, it is most useful to call on the prototype himself, Philip Marlowe. Knight sums up the stoic life of the loner when describing this protagonist of Chandler’s novels:

He lives alone, in rented flats or houses. He works alone, in a cheap, comfortless office. He drinks and smokes a lot: a single, masculine lifestyle. He is choosy about his work, never showing much interest in money. In general, he has dropped right out of the normal family and financial patterns of modern culture. (1988, 78)

The distinct lack of connectivity to the environment positions the sleuth as distant from the city he moves through, almost as if he has been dropped there with neither past nor map (Moore 2006, 99). This distanced relationship between the sleuth and his world has a number of implications for serialization. The hero’s lack of personal growth and the absence of relationships that spill over from one novel to the next mean that the protagonist’s world does not widen or expand (Moore 2006, 126). Any change, whether social or private, has occurred in the character’s previous life, that is, in the time before the first novel. Stereotypically, because the protagonist is not engaged in a character arc, he does not evolve. Instead he merely encounters. The world is now unchangeable and the status quo of jostling dangers is never overturned or resolved. Thus each new instalment in the series does not have to account for the developments of the previous work.

This is very different from many Australian crime series. While Los Angeles had evolved in a way that caused many inhabitants, such as the fictional lone PI, to feel alienated, some Australian cities in the 1990s began to be rebuilt on a more human scale. For example, Melbourne,
the city setting for both Temple's Irish series and Maloney's Whelan series, became the centre of focus for a new neo-liberal state government determined to brand Victoria as the ‘event’ or ‘fun’ state as a way of increasing economic activity (Rintoul 1997). However, when in *Sucked In* (2007) Whelan disgustedly relays to the reader the official rhetoric that ‘this cutting edge development will guarantee Melbourne a place in the front row of the world’s leading cities for generations to come’ and that it will result in ‘enhanced competitive advantage’ (Maloney 2007, 33), we understand that his trepidation means these changes signal something dangerous to the life and wellbeing of the average citizen. To be able to contextualize and comment upon these changes, Whelan cannot be the detached loner typified by the hardboiled school.

While the redevelopments of this era offer a ready-made opportunity for crime authors to present and critique the problems of unfettered neo-liberalism, explaining these changes also requires a very particular type of character and voice. The remodelling was reasonably complex yet quite focused, and included the rezoning of key event centres and landmarks to ensure they fell within a central city council’s boundaries, alongside the invigoration of the once dead city centre with a festive culture of laneway cafes and eateries that connected to the nearby multicultural restaurant precincts, and the creation of new entertainment hubs of culture and consumption such as the seven-hectare Crown Casino precinct and Federation Square. The protagonist had to be able to move between these new worlds, be capable of understanding the political doublespeak and see the agenda behind it, as well as decipher it for the reader.

Maloney’s protagonist Whelan does this well by using the vernacular of the everyday infused with an educated tongue-in-cheek tone:

> The Premier’s presidential style, an innovation in Australian politics, was built on events like this. Announcements of landmark accomplishments. Policy launches. New initiatives. Son-et-lumiere. Colour and movement. A torrent of proclamations that kept his Highness on the front page and his critics scrabbling to keep up. (2007, 35)

There were a number of other social changes that resulted from this period (discussed later), but it is this sense of the city’s secret life being revealed, and of a new possibility of moving between the unknown and known spaces that can be read in the Whelan series and many Australian serial crime narratives emerging at that time.
These new cityscapes require an alternative type of protagonist to transition between communities and spaces. A greater sense of what could be labelled ‘connectivity’ began to emerge as the dominant aspect of the hero’s personality and life. In order to resolve the mystery at the heart of the crimes that are occurring, a protagonist must be able to read the city, its changes and the motivations of those in power with an insider’s eye. This notion of connectivity could be seen to parallel ideas in cultural geography that position landscape as text rather than as scenery. Just as a text requires an author and a reader, so too does the city. The landscape becomes a text open to multiple readings and questions about the authority of the author (Wylie 2007, 70). Of course, analysing landscape as text is not a new concept and, as Wylie notes, has long been a preoccupation of disciplines ranging from archaeology to history (2007, 71). However, the influence of Barthes’s theorizations of the semiotic nature of text, and the rise of cultural studies, have led geography-focused scholars such as Cosgrove and Daniels (1988) and particularly Duncan and Duncan (1988) to question the relationships between landscape, power, authority and influence and the covert codes that signal them. These questions are also formulated by the new protagonist in crime series such as Maloney’s.

Whelan’s role as insider to politics, Parliament and the manoeuvres of those wanting to increase their financial and political influence marks him as a prime example of this type of investigator and as an expert reader of codes. His sophisticated knowledge of the intricacies of civic governance and his duties as a shadow member of Parliament who must question and challenge those holding power are offset by his informal, bumbling and intensely likeable nature. He remarks in Something Fishy (2002) that:

> further downstream, a vast new casino was taking shape beside the Yarra. The plutocrats were at the helm and a veil of secrecy had descended over the processes of government. A cult of personality surrounded the Premier. The smirking bully was king and Fuck You was the official ideology. The public interest was a bankrupt notion in the heads of fools. (14)

He is here establishing himself as the colloquial guardian in the know and a typically cynical but approachable Australian. In Maloney’s own words, Whelan is ‘an idealist without being an ideologue’ (Phelan 2005, 137), a ‘big romantic’ and something of a ‘fuck up’ (Maloney 2012). He holds a position of privilege and yet remains an everyman. His role and
these qualities let him establish and maintain connectivity and also allow him to ‘read’ and interpret the city in ways others cannot. Indeed, Maloney has remarked that this idea of reading the less obvious changes in the city and city life was intentional: ‘I was interested in the way that the physical and social shape of the city changes and how we lose track of that. We don’t notice because they’re incremental changes. That’s true of political life as well’ (Maloney 2012).

This type of sleuth in this type of world is particularly suited to serialization because each stage or increment in a city’s development poses a new set of crimes and criminal influences to be explored. On a subtextual level, the sleuth’s adventures also map popular trepidation over the unfolding social effects of economic development and the impact of this on political freedoms. Maloney’s *Something Fishy*, for example, expresses the anxieties involved in the rebuilding of the state, the new relationships with capitalists and commerce that this engenders and what these new alliances will mean for the average man, for cultural diversity, for democracy and for the social fabric of the state. In contrast the later novel, *Sucked In*, presents the city as a space beyond anxiety and clearly entrenched in resignation. Implicit in this difference is the suggestion that there is no point being concerned about social consequences, now that the relationships between commerce and politics are as concretely set as the pillars of the Casino itself. Serialization, then, can be read as a method for capturing the unfolding of anxieties about the places and spaces around us.

Temple’s Jack Irish novels are another distinctive example of this evolution of character and of how the ‘connected’ protagonist leads naturally to serialization. The novels centre on the adventures of Irish, a nearly disbarred lawyer who also freelances as an inner-city inquiry agent and debt collector for a shady horse-racing identity and other ‘temporary employers’ (1996, 10). As a protagonist, Irish can be seen to engage in multiple levels of connectivity, the first being an ongoing set of relationships developed during his younger years as the son of a well-loved Fitzroy footballer and a soldier in Vietnam, and then nurtured through a dramatically different world of business arrangements and transactions.

It is this notion of transforming relationships from his past into a new arrangement in his present that begins to demarcate Irish from his hardboiled series antecedents. This continuity of relationships also lends itself naturally to serialization as there are more characters in the fictional world from which to draw investigative cases and dilemmas. In the Irish series, for example, 38 characters appear regularly
Connectivity in Peter Temple and Shane Maloney

(Onatade n.d.), and their stories can be mined for new but connected narrative seams. It is here, arguably, that arise the types of repetition that are at the heart of serialization. The danger in the serialization of the genre outlined by Moore (2006), that connections result in obligations compromising the sleuth’s independence, is neatly sidestepped by Irish’s ability to separate the world of mateship from the world of commerce. While he is a man for hire, he tends to keep his clients to a small trusted circle that he treats with almost disrespectful informality. One of his regular ‘temporary employers’ is Cyril Wootten of Belvedere Investments, whose long-term relationship with Irish stretches back to the Vietnam War. While Irish will take on work as a favour for a friend, he still positions it as a business arrangement and is quick to remind his occasional employers that it is not ‘a master servant relationship’ (1996, 17) and that any future work dealings are merely a possibility. Where the typical hardboiled sleuth will take on an unknown client by virtue of the fact that he or she knocked on the office door, and rarely re-engage with them once the investigation is completed, Irish requires both a pre-existing and an ongoing relationship. This difference signals that Irish has an alternative conception of safety and trust from that of the Chandleresque hero. For Irish, connectivity is safety, whereas for the traditional hardboiled investigator social ties increase the chance of personal danger (Moore 2006).

Essential to this skill of moving between worlds is Irish’s ability to assess which world he needs to enter and who he needs to be at that moment. Where Marlowe has to stumble across his informants or create new relationships to gain a source, Irish knows exactly who from his past interactions might provide information. The essential sociality of his personality and his street credibility function as a trust-building device. Irish is not only wise to the ways of the street and a familiar face to most, he is also fair. He offers payments for useful tips, an ear for listening when needed, and accepts hospitality. In Bad Debts, he can call on a prison officer he knew in his younger years to get the address of a former prisoner’s next of kin (1996, 48) and gather the unofficial background story on a crime from a disgraced policeman he first met while serving in Vietnam, in exchange for the promise of free drinks (1996, 45–8).

Maloney’s Whelan series also introduces a hero whose adventures are a direct result of interactions with existing friends, family, contacts and well-groomed sources. As a Member of Parliament, he encounters a parade of constituents who, like the most common clients of the private eye, have been denied justice through normal means. His availability to
constituents in his traditionally working-class and high-immigrant area means that his ‘clients’ include thuggish ex-criminals, both traditional and from new ethnic gangs, rough-and-tumble union officials, local business people and high-end party investors. The result is exposure to a range of violence, from overt physical assault to reputational destruction to death threats. As with Irish, these social linkages often lead to cases. For example, an anxious local restaurateur begs him to investigate her missing husband and he is entangled in what seems like the accidental death of an old union crony (Maloney 2002).

This sense of connectivity with the world of the city also calls to mind the ideas of Robert Park, a sociologist affiliated with the Chicago School. Park contended that changes in a city produce a new style of inhabitant who ‘pass[es] quickly and easily from one moral milieu to another’. City dwellers must live ‘at the same time in several different contiguous, but otherwise widely separated, worlds’ (1925, 40–1). The city, its people and its administration and machinery are ‘organically related’ and are in constant states of readjustment and mobility as they move in ebb and flow against one another (2). The city, suggests Park, is a ‘state of mind’ (1). The key to this ongoing series of readjustments could be seen as the idea of common links (Barth 1980, 232). These may be a shared space, consumption or experience that gives strangers a point of conversational or geographic convergence from which a relationship can be initiated or nurtured. These may include points of connectivity such as a sporting event, a department store, the city or local newspaper, or the more intimate spaces of pubs, restaurants and so on.

There is a sense that these sleuths are not only connected to their city and its ebbs and flows, but also embedded in it. This notion of embeddedness is also represented in their day jobs. Whereas the traditional hardboiled hero was most frequently a freelance operator with previous experience in a field that interacted with the law in some way, Irish and Whelan are employed respectively as lawyer and senior public servant. These jobs bear both the responsibility of upholding the social cohesiveness of their society and the burden of monitoring and remodelling the city.

Symbolically then, Irish and Whelan are the city. When Irish muses that ‘in my insignificant way, I represented the law. I was a sworn officer of the court. I was a thread in an ancient fabric that made social existence possible’ (Temple 2007, 16), he is inadvertently commenting on the nature of the functional metropolis. Yet he has also internalized the unlawful and unruly aspects of the city. In 1984, Irish’s wife Isabel was shot dead by one of his clients who felt he had been badly
defended. Irish’s devastation asserted itself as a rampage against the world through excessive drinking and random bar fighting. Hence he makes the city what it is as much as any criminal or corrupt person in authority. When in Bad Debts he explains ‘[d]eranged clients. It’s a risk you run. Isabel knew that. She practised family law, where practically all the clients are deranged to some degree. I didn’t blame myself. I just raged against fate’ (1996, 37), we see that he contributes to the fate of the city as much as he is fate’s victim. As a criminal lawyer he comes into contact with the seedier side of life and as a gambler with an addiction to horse racing, he is the seedier side of life. Whereas the traditional hardboiled hero like Marlowe is portrayed as a man struggling to make sense of his city and the strangers who people it, Irish spots the cultural and criminal undercurrents that run through Melbourne and can do so because he is an essential part of them.

Just as Irish is an essential component of the civilized city because technically he must defend every citizen in the court, Whelan must speak for every voice on the metropolis’s electoral roll. His occupation as a public servant and, as the series progresses, Member of Parliament means that he is, in the most literal sense, a representative of every man and woman in his district.

This embeddedness centres on not only participating, but preserving. Irish’s roots into his community begin two generations before him and are carefully nurtured. He continues to drink at the pub where both his father and his grandfather were barflies, works from an old tailor’s shop that still holds the original table the tailor would sit on when doing fine work, and can tell a story about the history of every shop and street near the lane that houses his office. His world is a chain of continuity: when he has a quiet moment he works in the cabinetmaker’s shop across the lane from his office where the owner has been training him in the finer points of making furniture for many years; he knows the history of the horses that he bets on across Melbourne’s main and regional race tracks, and can spot their scams and stable history; and he identifies inner-city suburbs by their long-gone football clubs. He is a passionate participant in his city’s sporting, drinking and traditional Australian gambling culture, and through his ongoing habitual interactions with it, inevitably preserves it. When it rains in Melbourne, he can ‘feel it in [his] heart’ (Temple 2007, 20) and so there is little point in him alienating himself from the city and its inhabitants the way Marlowe does, as it lives in him as much as he lives in it.

This notion of embeddedness and of the existence of a co-dependency between the metropolis and its inhabitants can be linked to postmodern
ideas about how people interact with their surrounds. If the city accommodates us as much as we accommodate it, then what is occurring is a two-way interaction with the space around us. According to Wylie, this space becomes a site of ‘mutual embeddedness and interconnectivity of self, body, knowledge and land’ (2007, 1). As Irish and Whelan move through their landscapes, they leave a part of themselves behind in a more permanent way than the classic hardboiled sleuth, whether in the form of redressing inequalities, changing the law, or protecting their city from the excesses of spectacle, consumption and distraction. It could be argued that they are engaging in a type of intertextual relationship with their surrounds. Just as they engage with and read the city as a text with easily deciphered codes, they can trace the strands that make up the city’s mesh of stories. Wylie suggests that the city has many plots and asks whether it is not ‘composed of many overlapping and even competing storylines’ (2007, 71). Irish’s ability to narrate the anecdotal history of each minor character could be seen as symbolic of this intertextual embeddedness. He is a repository of the city’s vernacular history and so the novels are a swirl of micro-histories: he knows the backroom political tales of the pubs he frequents, and that the driver of the airport transfer bus used to be a police officer, who, during a raid, ‘accidentally’ shot another officer who was sleeping with his wife. The stories he does not know are told to him by his raffish colleagues, and the Mr Bigs of the gambling world who employ him.

Temple’s use of micro-narratives as histories that swirl around Irish makes the character’s world and experiences in the city perfect for serialization. The stories never end, but continue to unravel and indeed spiral across the pages because Irish’s life itself is a series of stories, each of which is never over, merely lying dormant and ready in case the author wishes to draw it from the past and into the next plot point or indeed the next novel. Temple’s reliance on real locales and only vaguely disguised culinary landmarks also works well for the purposes of serialization, as ‘serials could become entwined with readers’ own sense of lived experience and passing time’ (Hughes and Lund 1991, 8). We invest in the ongoing nature of the story because we want to see the literary treatment of places we know. Author Maloney explains that the hidden story is an essential aspect of serialization. ‘I have to imagine the periods that aren’t written about in the books, so every book must now have its own subset of back stories. So there is the entire history of Murray Whelan which occasionally breaks the surface’ (Phelan 2005, 151).

The internalization of the city also has an impact on the relationship between the character, serialization and social change. It means that the
Connectivity in Peter Temple and Shane Maloney's sleuths are better equipped to unearth, investigate and rectify the darker aspects of social change because they are able to work from within the system through embeddedness and call on the voices and skills of those outside the system and outside the current novel through their connectivity. Whereas this connectivity allowed them to freely participate in the multiple layers of the newly expanded and fused city, it is their embeddedness that allows them to explore the political and governmental breaches of trust that built that fused city.

It is no coincidence then that most of the crimes in the Jack Irish series are not caused by violence between city dwellers or by the dangers of the urban environment. Instead, when the subterfuge is stripped away, the causes tend to be symptomatic of major social change: bribery of public servants over large-scale high-end housing and commercial developments in waterside areas, displacement of social housing estates in favour of luxury high-rise apartments, corrupt tendering processes. Landscape in its most physical sense is the contested, competitive space and, as cultural geographer Duncan (1990) argues when talking about the nature of landscape itself, is the vehicle through which society's environmental, cultural, political and economic relations are played out through multiple episodes.

The crimes at the heart of Maloney's stories, however, can be boiled down to a more personal interaction between the changes occurring in the city and its inhabitants. These include black jack debts from state-sanctioned makeshift casinos and self-defence during sexual assaults from aged politicians who still assume that all is within their dominion. Swirling around these crimes are other broader underminings of the law and democracy: pending amendments to the Gaming and Betting Act, the privatization of assets along the coast and increasing secrecy over the processes of government. Yet the battle against corruption by those in power is a constant theme. Whelan's role as a public servant for a Labor State Minister in Maloney's first two novels in the series, *Stiff* (1994) and *The Brush Off* (1996), places him in close vicinity to political corruption from both sides of Parliament, and his later adventures as a Member of Parliament in the final two works, *Something Fishy* and *Sucked In*, see him constantly questioning the 'kitchen cabinet' of cronies and business interests (2002, 22) that he feels powers the neo-liberal state government. In Whelan's world, the crime is usually covered up due to a betrayal from within the party he serves, lobby groups, or the unions that wet-nursed his political skills.

Marxist scholar Mandel states that the 'evolution of the crime story reflects the history of crime itself' (1984, 31). The serial works of Shane
Maloney and Peter Temple are effective examples of this idea in action. Writers want to write, and readers want to read, about the injustices of the world that surrounds them at this moment. Serialized crime fiction affords that opportunity by allowing the reader to experience these changes through a safe set of eyes that they have come to know and trust. Where the detached loner of the classic hardboiled genre communicates these experiences with a camera-like eye, it is the socially connected and culturally embedded hero who makes the reader feel the changes as they do. Metaphorically, this kind of crime serial lets the city live in the reader just as it lives in the fictional heroes who walk its laneways.

**Note**

1. Garry Disher's Wyatt series follows a professional thief who coldly moves through society with few friends and a range of false identities. Peter Corris's Private Investigator Cliff Hardy has an equally distant and observant gaze, but his family and romantic attachments position him as less of a loner than Wyatt.
‘She’s pretty hardboiled, huh?’: Rewriting the Classic Detective in Veronica Mars

Taryn Norman

The 2004–7, three-season television series Veronica Mars created by Rob Thomas follows its eponymous protagonist, a high school student played by Kristen Bell, whose life is turned upside down by the murder of her best friend, Lilly Kane (Amanda Seyfried). Following in the footsteps of her father (Enrico Colantoni), the county’s former sheriff, Veronica becomes a private detective and attempts to solve her best friend’s murder. While the new Sheriff, Don Lamb (Michael Muhney), identifies Veronica as ‘hardboiled’, traditionally this quality has fallen under the purview of masculine identity – for example, the genre’s most famous characters, Philip Marlowe and Sam Spade. Critics’ definitions of ‘hardboiled’ even appear to eschew feminine identity through an emphasis on a ‘tough, shell-like exterior, a prophylactic toughness that was organized around the rigorous suppression of affect and was mirrored by his detached, laconic utterances and his instrumentalized, seemingly amoral actions’ (Breu 2005, 1). The required geographical and social mobility of this figure that frequently leads him into violent interactions with the criminal underbelly and corrupt forces further aligns the hardboiled detective with traditional masculine identity. Despite his mobility, however, he remains isolated and always on the periphery of these communities and favours a masculine ‘romantic individualism’ (Routledge 2001, 70). As Rzepka argues, unlike classical detective fiction which typically expresses the belief that ‘society is worth redeeming’ and attempts to restore order through solving crime, the hardboiled genre depicts an unredeemable society corrupt to its core (2005, 186). Indeed, the hardboiled detective himself has often been understood as a rejection of the female or feminine figures of Golden Age detective fiction, such as Sayers’s Lord Peter Wimsey and Christie’s Miss Marple (Rzepka 2005, 180).
As an alternative to this masculine figure, women writers of the 1970s such as Paretsky and Grafton offered a female hardboiled detective: these ‘women protagonists contend with concerns that touch real [...] women’s lives on a daily basis’ (Schoenfeld 2008, 837). Such writers have, according to Walton and Jones, ‘strategically redirected the masculinist trajectory of the American hardboiled of the 1930s and 1940s to what we would argue are feminist ends’ (1999, 4). And yet other critics have noted that this translation is no easy task. Shuker-Haines and Umphrey analyse the oscillation of the female detective’s performance between traditionally masculine and feminine roles in Grafton’s and Paretsky’s detective novels, noting that ‘[g]ender relates to the female hardboiled detective in complicated and contradictory ways’ because these female detectives must negotiate this traditionally masculine genre (1998, 72).

*Veronica Mars* participates in the hardboiled tradition but draws freely upon the classical detective genre, while it simultaneously negotiates these genres’ gender politics. Veronica, in many ways, resembles the hardboiled men she is inspired by with her ‘tough, shell-like exterior’ coupled with wise cracks, overt cynicism and a predominantly loner status, which she has developed in order to survive the mean and corrupt streets of Neptune High School and the community at large. After Lilly’s death, Veronica finds herself no longer a part of the privileged 09er crowd – named after their zip code – but instead a social pariah. However, despite the similarities between Veronica’s character and the classic hardboiled figure, her actions betray a dedication – although intentionally and often aggressively concealed through her hardboiled *performance* – to the hope that order can be restored, that the community can be redeemed and rebuilt to form a cohesive and cooperative unit. Deviating from the hardboiled detective’s pessimistic attitude towards the community’s unredeemable nature therefore aligns Veronica with classical detection, which depicts the salvation of the community and a return to order. Furthermore, this revision upsets the gender politics of the traditionally masculine hardboiled figure by imbuing it with the stereotypical feminine qualities of valuing and prioritizing interpersonal relationships. In other words, the translation of the hardboiled detective in this series from male to female offers an antidote to the original genre’s pessimistic representation of disintegrating communities by drawing upon classical detection’s commitments to the restoration of order. Combining these hardboiled and classical detection qualities, the series encourages its audience to become regular viewers. The show promises through its formulaic narrative structure that each
season’s major story arc will be resolved – a promise the show delivers on, repeating the process of narrative resolution for each individual episode. Thus, while on the one hand it is an innovative hybridization of the hardboiled and classical detection, on the other hand, *Veronica Mars* paradoxically repeats its innovation, doing so to ensure repeat viewers.

The series’ status as a young adult show further complicates its use of hardboiled conventions, given the youth genre’s proclivity for happy endings and its focus on identity construction. Traditionally, young adult series present their protagonists with a series of formative obstacles that, when overcome, lead to a greater sense of self and a happy resolution. Veronica faces the death of her best friend, a rape, the loss of her mother, attacks on her reputation, and social ostracism, to name just a few of the major obstacles. Given the young adult format, these are grounded in her school experience. Neptune High School thus is a microcosm of Neptune the town: in other words, the high school functions as the location in which the larger community’s and adults’ anxieties are played out by its teenage children. Understanding *Veronica Mars* therefore requires taking into consideration the multitude of competing narrative impulses – traditional masculine hardboiled and feminist hardboiled revisions, classical detection and the young adult genre – that characterize this complex series.

The opening shot for the series zooms in on Neptune High School. Veronica immediately connects the high school to the town by informing viewers that ‘[i]f you go here, your parents are either millionaires or your parents work for millionaires. Neptune, California: a town without a middle class’ (*Pilot*). While this crime series revolves around a central character, the setting for the show with its polarized community also functions as a central character and unifying feature of the series. Just as Chandler explores the mood of a corrupt and morally disintegrating 1930s Los Angeles through Philip Marlowe’s investigations in *The Big Sleep*, Thomas explores the difficulties of the teenage experience through Veronica as she travels the corrupt, ‘mean streets’ of Neptune High School and Neptune town.

Highly attuned to the topographical features and cultural climate of place, and her place in the social hierarchy of the school and town, Veronica successfully navigates this bifurcated community, gaining her power from having once been an insider. She informs viewers that she was once an honorary member of the upper class because her ‘dad used to be the sheriff and that had a certain cachet [...]. Let’s be honest, though. The only reason I was allowed past the velvet ropes was Duncan Kane’, her boyfriend (*Pilot*). As the series begins, however,
viewers witness a Veronica who has been relegated to the lower class, to the ‘trash’ (*Ain’t No Magic Mountain High Enough*). Veronica takes advantage of her liminal status and familiarity with these divided communities to search for knowledge and to solve the cases which she takes on for both her classmates and even some adults, such as her school’s Vice Principal, Mr Clemmons. This liminal status is, according to Nash, a feature of ‘subversive power’ of the teenager who ‘cross[es] boundaries in the search for knowledge’ (Nash 2010, 72). Veronica therefore also frequently travels between the teen world and the adult world, trying to maintain good grades and cope with the social hierarchy of high school, while working as a private eye.

The *Pilot* episode establishes both the series’ hardboiled conventions and the deviations it makes from these conventions. For example, in the episode’s first classroom scene, Veronica reads aloud from Alexander Pope’s *An Essay on Man*: ‘Hope springs eternal in the human breast; / Man never Is, but always To be blest: / The soul, uneasy and confin’d from home, / Rests and expatiates in a life to come’ (2006, 274). While Veronica’s analysis of these lines – ‘Life is a bitch until you die’ – typifies her hardboiled pessimism and penchant for wisecracks, her teacher’s interpretation actually identifies the motivations that appear to characterize Veronica’s actions throughout the series: ‘The thing that keeps us powering through life’s defeats is our faith in a better life yet to come.’ While the feisty heroine would never openly concur – thus remaining, in some sense, true to the traditional masculine hardboiled detective figure who ‘suppresses [his] affect’ – her actions throughout the first two seasons reflect a commitment to such a ‘faith’ that the corrupt elements of society can be eradicated and order thus restored.

Her hardboiled performance protects her from the weaknesses traditionally associated with her gender – being emotionally and physically weak and fragile, sentimental and community oriented – even though, paradoxically, traditional femininity is simultaneously suggested as the influence behind her actions. Through flashbacks, viewers learn that once an honorary member of the 09ers, Veronica epitomized traditional notions of femininity through her physical appearance, with her long flowing blond hair, pretty dresses and pep squad uniform that are also meant to reinforce depictions of her naivety and innocence, and her former integration into the community. Furthermore, these flashbacks establish Veronica’s innocence by contrasting her with her seductive, femme fatale best friend, Lilly. The physical appearance of the current-day Veronica with the chin-length, spiky hair and tom-boyish clothing emphasizes her change into a cynical, unsentimental and ‘isolated’
Veronica Mars: Rewriting the Classic Detective

teenage girl (*Meet John Smith*). The present version of Veronica mocks such typically feminine teenage girl behaviour: ‘if you do this for me, we’ll be best friends forever’ and ‘Relax, Dad. I’m cutting pictures of Ashton out of *Teen People* as we speak’ (*Ruskie Business*). Highly aware of gender politics, however, she occasionally takes advantage of her gender to solve investigations, as seen in the episode *The Green-Eyed Monster* in which she dresses provocatively to test the fidelity of a client’s fiancé.

Such awareness and manipulation of gender stereotypes result from her knowledge of corruption within the community, and yet, despite her pessimism, she still expresses hope for improvement. For example, in the episode *Return of the Kane*, one of the lower-class students, Wanda, takes on Duncan Kane for student president, running on a platform of ‘real change’. Wanda explains that ‘[t]he rich kids, they run things around here. They’re the minority and they’re corrupt’, and she calls the situation ‘class warfare’. Her commentary on the problem at school reflects the wider social problem of the power struggle between the ‘haves and have-nots’. Veronica helps Wanda tackle corruption by proving that one of the rich teenagers, Madison, rigged the election. Interestingly, given the series’ proclivity for restoring order, its creator here refuses straightforward didacticism as Wanda herself then turns out to be corrupt and a ‘narc’. The anti-corruption message Wanda bases her campaign on and her insistence that she would have ‘changed the way things work around here’ are discredited by her ‘willing[ness] to wreck [Veronica’s] future to save [her] own’, and thus the corruption and class conflict at the high school remain.

The class tensions of the first season are carried into the second season as Veronica fails to eradicate all corruption and repair the fracture between the ‘haves versus the have-nots’. By the second season, Veronica has started dating Duncan Kane again and, through this relationship, regained some of her former status within the 09ers. Veronica bitterly comments that ‘[i]n Neptune these days, you’re forced to choose sides’ because the town has gone ‘crazy’ over the perception that ‘[a]nother rich kid’ (Logan Eckles) is ‘getting off scot-free’ (*Normal is the Watchword*). The lower-class students express their feelings of betrayal: ‘So, did you like your taste? Your little year of living dangerously? [...] As soon as they’ll have you back, you go running to the 09ers,’ and ‘[L]ast year was just some-some big old act for you’ (*Normal is the Watchword*). Such conflict mirrors what Harper has identified as a characteristic anxiety of nineteenth-century detective fiction that features a fictional detective ‘who had inside knowledge, who knew the language of the underworld, yet whose loyalties lay with the bourgeois, the property owners’ (2009, 69).
Veronica's lower-class classmates accuse her of this very misplaced loyalty. However, this belief that Veronica has chosen the side of the 09ers and has reintegrated into the school's privileged group is a misconception fuelled by the increasingly and vehemently divided community. Her peripheral membership actually fractures the 09ers because of Duncan's and Logan's competing romantic interest in Veronica.

This representation of the split community is partly necessitated by the fact that *Veronica Mars* as a television series must keep some conflicts ongoing, unlike the novels of, for example, Agatha Christie whose detective figure returns time and time again to solve new mysteries. While previous mysteries may be referenced in later works, the readers’ desire for resolution ensures that each remains its own discrete narrative. In *Veronica Mars*, the individual episode plot arcs are subordinated to several larger mysteries that run throughout the season – Lilly's murder and Veronica's paternity – and, as in the case for carry over even into subsequent seasons – Veronica's rape.

The continual divisions also arise, however, from the series’ divided commitments to hardboiled and classical detection. While Veronica’s actions betray a desire to restore order to her community, she aggressively conceals this through her hardboiled performance because it reinforces the boundaries between herself and the community that she feels has betrayed her and which contains many corrupt elements: ‘The fine people of Neptune gathered their pitchforks and torches, stormed the County Commissioner’s office, and ran Dad out of office [...] My friends got on the bandwagon as well’ (*Credit*). Because her father accused the ‘beloved’ Jake Kane whom ‘half the people in this town owe their fortunes to’, her former friends believe she ‘stabbed’ them in the back (*Pilot*). Veronica’s knowledge about and rejection of the corrupt elements within her community manifest themselves in the form of the ‘wisecrack, a stylized demonstration of knowledge which expresses an irreverence towards authority and institutional power. Wisecracks put to use as weapons are an assertion of autonomy, a defiant refusal to be browbeaten’ (Willett 1996, 7). Indeed, despite her isolation, and the general hostility and taunts she experiences, Veronica refuses to be browbeaten.

Veronica uses her experiences to ‘get tough’ and ‘get even’, exposing and eradicating the corrupt elements that fracture her community (*Like a Virgin*). The show suggests she must retain her hardboiled performance in order to successfully clean up the community because this hardboiled nature prevents her judgement from being clouded by emotion or misplaced trust. This lesson is most apparent through the plotline associated with her investigation into Lilly Kane’s murder, when she must
even investigate her former boyfriend and Lilly’s brother, Duncan, and her current love interest, Logan, who becomes a male version of the femme fatale. Both express great dismay over Veronica’s suspicion and refusal to trust them during the episode *Leave it to Beaver*. After a confrontation with Duncan, instead of ‘wallowing in the grief of betraying an ex-boyfriend’, Veronica tells herself that ‘a girl must prioritize’, and she continues to investigate her current case, thus refusing to succumb to the perhaps expected teenage girl emotional response and instead favouring a hardboiled performance.

Transferring the hardboiled persona to the young adult genre, the show’s creator, Thomas, had to transform the character and negotiate the traditional conflicts of the character with Veronica’s identity as a teenage girl. As Fisher puts it in her introduction to a collection of articles on the girl sleuth, traditionally this figure ‘require[s] lack of parental supervision’ and the ‘conviction of superiority over her parents, police officers, and other adult authority figures’ (Fisher 2009, 7). Veronica frequently demonstrates this sense of superiority throughout her investigations, especially with regard to her teachers, Vice-Principal and Principal. Veronica’s liminal state between youth and adulthood often causes concern to her father Keith and some adults, believing that she has grown up too quickly. While Keith frequently defends her against other adults’ criticisms by stating ‘[s]he’s not your average seventeen-year-old’ (*A Trip to the Dentist*), he reminds and encourages her to behave like one: ‘[y]ou’re a high school girl. Do some high school girl things now and then’ (*Ruskie Business*). The show thus expresses frequent anxiety about the rate at which teenagers lose their innocence and cross over into the realm of adulthood. Veronica’s experiences also function as exaggerated examples of the problems adults fear their teenagers will encounter during their formative years, such as underage drinking, sex, drugs and peer pressure. Paradoxically, on the one hand, Veronica’s hardboiled nature prevents her from succumbing to the pressures that many ‘normal’ teenagers face, and yet, on the other hand, her hardboiled nature leads her to confront exaggerated versions of these problems. For example, like many of her peers, Veronica struggles to communicate with her father, often keeping secrets from him for fear of his disappointment or reaction. However, it is her rape that brings this to the forefront – ‘I never told my Dad [...]. No good could have come from that’ (*Pilot*).

While Veronica is an abnormal teenager in many ways, she is also not totally immune to the difficulties of being a teenage girl. Martaus discusses ‘the centrality of the rape in creating Veronica as the vigilante
‘girl detective’, quoting Havrilesky who contends that Veronica is ‘stripped of all the teen girl insecurities’ (Martaus 2009, 75). Such a claim, however, fails to take into consideration Veronica’s hardboiled performance, consisting of a tough exterior that conceals and protects a soft centre. The need for this performance is pronounced in the series’ consideration of Veronica’s sexuality. Since Shelly Pomeroy’s party, Veronica’s sexual reputation has been tainted. Having been drugged, Veronica acts unlike herself and, as viewers learn in *A Trip to the Dentist*, her behaviour was largely interpreted by the other party attendees as promiscuous. Throughout seasons one and two, she is constantly reminded of this loss of reputation and often these reminders are meant to emotionally wound her: ‘[t]hings I hear about you’ (*Pilot*), and ‘[d]on’t go blaming me because you got all wasted and slutty’ (*A Trip to the Dentist*). Veronica’s hard exterior prevents others from knowing the ways in which their words wound her. She acts tough and tells those she perceives as weak to employ the same strategy: ‘you want people to leave you alone, Mandy, or better yet, treat you with respect? Demand it. Make them’ (*Hot Dogs*) and ‘You get tough, you get even’ (*Like a Virgin*). However, despite this act, Veronica acknowledges that ‘maybe once in a while’ it ‘bother[s]’ her ‘what people say’ (*Like a Virgin*). The series thus provides a vision of how to survive the common female high school experience of ‘slut bashing’ or shaming about sexual reputation.

However, despite this tough exterior, Veronica occasionally and explicitly reveals her softer centre. For example, in *Ruskie Business*, she explains to her father why she continued to investigate a case he had asked her to drop: ‘I just thought it would be nice if, instead of breaking people up, we brought them together for once.’ Keith reminds her that ‘we’re private investigators, not the frigging *Love Boat*’. He is highly aware of the ways in which his daughter has been hardened by their experiences: ‘I used to think that solving the case was the key to our happiness. Solve the case and my reputation is restored. Solve the case and your mom comes home. Solve the case and you go back to being a normal teenage girl’ (*Return of the Kane*). Veronica’s desire to bring people together represents what the series suggests constitute the hopes of a ‘normal teenage girl’, and, despite her continued hardboiled performance, one of her motivations for solving Lilly’s murder is her desire to ‘bring this family back together’. Refusing to show weakness, even to the series’ viewers, in her voiceover, Veronica mocks herself for this seemingly uncharacteristic goal: ‘I’m sorry, does that sound mushy? [...]. Veronica Mars, she’s a marshmallow.’
This performance of toughness that conceals and protects frequently holds her back from forming emotionally supportive intimate ties, and thus the limitations of the hardboiled performance are explored. While Wallace (Percy Daggs III) correctly identifies that ‘Underneath that angry young woman shell, there’s a slightly less angry woman. You’re a marshmallow, a Twinkie,’ he repeatedly struggles to access that soft centre (*Pilot*, my emphasis). In this episode, Wallace, having got himself into trouble with the motorcycle gang the PCHers, has been duct-taped to the school flagpole. He first meets Veronica when, in traditional hardboiled fashion, she rejects the majority’s response of passively standing by and instead supports the weak by cutting Wallace down. She then uses her sleuthing skills to repair the damage between him and the PCHers; however, while she and Wallace bond over this experience and become friends, Veronica often keeps him at arm’s length, unable to fully let him in and give up the security of her individualism. In *A Trip to the Dentist*, Wallace expresses frustration with Veronica’s secrecy, trust issues and unwillingness to establish intimate ties with people: ‘[y]ou know, I do these things for you and I never ask you why [...]. You know why? Because I know you would never tell me.’ Veronica views this dynamic positively, telling Wallace, ‘I’d do the same for you.’ For Wallace, though, this behaviour keeps them isolated from each other. As one would anticipate, then, despite the ways in which Veronica attempts to restore her community by ridding it of corruption and malign influences, she resists integrating herself fully back into the community, remaining committed to the individualism characteristic of the hardboiled detective. The series reinforces the advantages of this individualism through such plotlines as with Wanda in *Return of the Kane* (discussed above) and Veronica’s brief relationship with Troy Vandegraff (Aaron Ashmore), who turns out to be a drug dealer. While Veronica occasionally considers integrating herself and giving up her individualism, she frequently finds herself duped, and the show appears to reinforce the message that trust is dangerous. Instead, Veronica repeatedly returns to the general principle that emotions, such as love, are risky but ‘Information is insurance’ (*You Think You Know Someone*).

Her growing friendship with Wallace nevertheless operates as a normalizing influence through his role as her sidekick keeping her connected to the community. When Wallace briefly leaves Neptune in season two, it becomes clear to viewers that Veronica has grown to value and lean on him, as evidenced through the series of emails Veronica sends to him, although these emails are characteristically tongue-in-cheek in tone: ‘Wallace, Wallace, Wallace. Wherefore art thou? [...].
Things that have changed in the nineteen hours since my last email: I’ve grown four inches, changed my name to London, and have discovered that apparently I’m not the only love of Duncan’s life. You really need to start answering my emails. This is a little too Doogie Howser’s journal for me’ (Nobody Puts Baby in a Corner). Unlike the type of sidekicks who normalize by being so markedly Other, Wallace normalizes Veronica by keeping her tied to the community (O’Reilly 2008, 62). As he becomes more popular at school because of his integration through basketball, he simultaneously helps to keep Veronica connected too. Despite Veronica’s belittlement of the kinds of feminine and community-driven behaviours she used to exhibit and now mocks, she shows her appreciation to Wallace in the episode Betty and Veronica by giving him anonymous gifts.

Wallace’s friendship functions more, then, like that of a traditional sidekick from classical detection, such as Captain Hastings from Christie’s Hercule Poirot series, by keeping Veronica in the network. Like Poirot, however, Veronica sees what her sidekick does not because he is too integrated and often lets his optimism cloud his judgement. Indeed, this optimistic belief in the goodness of others leads Wallace into trouble in the episode Rashard and Wallace Go to White Castle. When Wallace defends Rashard as ‘cool’ and believes he can convince him to come forward and admit he was driving a car during a hit and run, Veronica argues that Rashard will be more interested in the money he stands to gain from a promising basketball career than in justice. Wallace responds by questioning, ‘[i]s there anybody you don’t think is corrupt deep down?’ This exchange thus emphasizes a key feature of their relationship: they balance out each other’s pessimism and optimism and compensate for the ways in which these outlooks damage them.

Veronica’s self-awareness of her individualism manifests explicitly in the season two finale, Not Pictured, when during graduation Veronica receives loud applause and people call her name as she takes the stage. She pauses with a stunned look. Vice Principal Clemmons asks, ‘[y]ou were expecting some other reaction?’, at which Veronica finds herself speechless. Despite her continued sense of isolation and individualism, then, Veronica finds she is a vital and, more importantly, valued member of the community. Even with her often superior knowledge, because of her hardboiled individualism and pessimism, Veronica fails to understand fully her role within and her identity in relation to the community.

This show reveals, then, that unlike similar young adult texts that draw upon the hardboiled genre, such as Rian Johnson’s noir movie Brick (2005), Veronica Mars refuses to conform entirely to the hardboiled
conventions that its detective protagonist performs in order to sur-
vive the difficulties that she faces throughout her high school career. The show’s use of the hardboiled genre ultimately provides a strategy through which Veronica negotiates the obstacles she faces at high school and in the community beyond, while the classical detective genre influences soften the hardboiled pessimism and the isolated individualism associated with its detective.

In the 2014 follow-up movie, Veronica has given up the detective trade because ‘the price was too high’ and she now lives in New York City. While she reluctantly agrees to assist Logan when he asks for her help to beat the charge of murdering his ex-girlfriend, Carrie Bishop aka Bonnie De Ville, Veronica’s initial reservations subside when she gets her first break in the case. Her father repeatedly encourages her to leave, urging her not to ‘let this town take you down like it does everyone else’. In line with the series’ propulsion towards narrative closure, the movie ends with Veronica revealing not only the murderer of Bonnie De Ville but another classmate as well. She and Logan also rekindle their ‘epic’ love story. In a closing scene monologue, Veronica verbalizes a philosophy that reveals how the series straddles the hardboiled and classical detective fiction genres, and demonstrates that she finally understands her role within the community:

Dad always said this town could wreck a person. It’s what happens when you’re playing a rigged game. I convinced myself winning meant getting out, but in what world do you get to leave the ring and declare victory? This is where I belong: in the fight. It’s who I am. I’ve rolled around in the mud for so long, wash me clean and I don’t recognize myself. So how about I just accept the mud and the tendency I have to find myself rolling in it.

Veronica acknowledges that the odds are against her, but she refuses to succumb to the nihilism of the hardboiled genre when she declares that she will remain in the fight to save the town from corruption and thereby restore the community.

Note

1. The DVD contains an extended version of the Pilot episode that begins with Veronica on a stake out, waiting to get the ‘money shot’ for an adultery case she is working on for her father.
Since its transference from an adult, professional environment to an amateur, child-centric one in the early twentieth century, British detective fiction for young readers has been a hybrid mode, attempting to blend detective elements with characteristics of other genres. The difficulty of achieving a balance between the genres employed, however, becomes apparent in the earliest hybrid form – the detective school story – which became popular in Alfred Harmsworth's juvenile story papers in the early twentieth century. While the shift to the school environment afforded juvenile detective characters a degree of investigative independence and, often, a prominent role within the series, the conventions of the school-story genre – such as schoolboy pranks, house rivalries and battles with acerbic schoolmasters – often clash with and overcome the detective elements of the narrative. This foray into the school environment paved the way for Enid Blyton's popular school holiday-set series, which blends detective elements with holiday-adventure fiction. Although series such as *The Five Find-Outers* (1943–61) and *The Secret Seven* (1949–63) have strong detective ties, her longest running, best-known detective-based series, *The Famous Five* (1942–63), is not always firmly situated within this genre: the characters’ interaction with and exploration of new environments often overwhelm the detective plot and obscure the protagonists’ detective role.

The hybrid mode popularized by Blyton thrived throughout the twentieth century, and the twenty-first century has witnessed the rise of new hybrid forms. Following its adult counterpart, historical detective fiction became a popular form for children in series such as Caroline Lawrence’s *Roman Mysteries* (2001–9) and *Western Mysteries* (2011–), Grace Cavendish’s *Lady Grace Mysteries* (2004–10) and John Pilkington’s *Elizabethan Mysteries* (2007–9).
blending the two genres to create a hybrid in which the detective plot and the revelation of historical facts complement each other, they often succumb to the temptation of simply utilizing the superficial structure of the detective plot as a means of making the educative function of the texts more palatable. There is a danger, therefore, that the real mysteries of the past will eclipse the fictional ones presented in the narrative and, consequently, that history will surpass mystery in these historical detective series.

The hybrid forms discussed so far employ variants of a formulaic detective plot, which is also intrinsic in purer, American juvenile detective series such as *Nancy Drew* and *The Hardy Boys*, produced by the prolific Stratemeyer syndicate. This plot structure is typified by a sense of resolution as the detectives solve the mystery and apprehend the criminals. This formula, Coats argues, is a product of modernist knowingness, characterized by a ‘teleological structure’ in which ‘closure is a key element’ and where ‘once an interpretation is made, that is once a mystery is “solved”, then the case is closed’ (2001, 189). In such narratives, closure is achieved through the detective protagonist’s process of knowledge acquisition by rational investigation. The introduction of the supernatural, however, challenges this formula, by bringing in elements of the unknown, unexplained and irrational to detective series. As Ascari demonstrates (2007), the supernatural has been present in adult crime and detective fiction from its inception, and was particularly prevalent in ‘the fin-de-siècle climate of syncretism’ at the end of the nineteenth century (77). By contrast, in children’s crime fiction, the introduction of the supernatural threats that defy rational explanation – as opposed to the ghostly hoaxes prevalent in series such as *Nancy Drew* and *The Hardy Boys* – is a relatively recent development. In *Mystery in Children’s Literature* (2001), Gavin and Routledge identify a shift from rational, modernist mysteries, which are explained and hence resolved and removed, towards irrational, supernatural mysteries, which remain as ‘an inherent and insoluble part of life’ and which adopt ‘postmodernist tropes of uncertainty, intertextuality and narrative instability’ (Gavin and Routledge 2001, 3, 4). In her exploration of this development in children’s mystery fiction, Coats compares modernist rational detective series like *Nancy Drew* to postmodernist supernatural series such as R.L. Stine’s *Goosebumps* and *Ghosts of Fear Street*, which sit more comfortably in the horror genre. Her focus upon Stine’s horror texts perhaps suggests that postmodernist supernatural mysteries depart so radically from the modernist detective formula that they break free from the confines of detective fiction altogether. Thus, the introduction of the supernatural,
like that of the historical, again indicates a potential disintegration of the detective form.

Other supernatural postmodernist mysteries, however, such as Justin Richards’s *Invisible Detective* series (2003–5) and Andrew Hammond’s *CRYPT* series (2011–14), signify a new possibility. Firmly situated within the detective genre, these texts offer a detective series model which modifies the modernist detective formula to create a postmodernist supernatural detective hybrid which seeks to rejuvenate and reinvent, rather than erode, the detective genre for young readers. Richards’s *Invisible Detective* series, as its title suggests, has strong and recognizable roots in the detective tradition, despite its incorporation of traits from several other genres, including science fiction, horror, time-slip and fantasy fiction. The texts focus on Arthur (Art) Drake, who exists simultaneously as a child in 1930s London and as his grandson of the same name in present-day London. In the 1930s, 14-year-old Art and his friends create fictional detective Brandon Lake, known as ‘the Invisible Detective’ because of his apparent ability to vanish into thin air. Art, in the guise of Brandon Lake, holds a weekly consulting session and invites the general public to call upon his services to investigate suspicious goings-on in the local area. The mysteries that Art and his friends encounter in the 1930s resurface for the present-day Arthur and his grandad, who is now in a nursing home.

Hammond’s *CRYPT* series, which consists of five texts, with one further projected, also offers a hybrid blend in which the detective tradition interacts with the horror genre and, more specifically, the ghost story. The protagonist, Jamie Goode, has been convicted of his mother’s murder which, he claims, was committed by ghosts. Desperate to prove his son’s innocence, American billionaire Jason Goode puts his fortune and efforts into scientifically proving the existence of ghosts and discovers that some teenagers have heightened extrasensory perception ‘which means they can see ghosts where others can’t’ (Hammond 2011, 2). Under the cover of MI5, Goode recruits teenage agents to his newly formed Covert Response Youth Paranormal Team to investigate ‘[w]hen crimes happen without any rational, human explanation’ (23–4). It is their job ‘to hunt down the paranormal entity responsible, to understand why it committed its crime in the first place, and to release it from its anger so it may truly rest in peace’ (24). Jason Goode makes it a condition of his service to MI5 that his son Jamie be released from prison to become a member of CRYPT and, under the new identity of Jud Lester, Jamie becomes the agency’s most valuable asset.
In their use of supernatural plots and villains that cannot be explained through rational means or human perpetrators, both series draw upon and play with aspects of the formula of modernist, rational detective fiction. In the earlier, modernist series, ghostly apparitions were a regular occurrence, but almost always had a rational explanation. These series followed the pattern of the ‘explained supernatural’ (Miles 2012, 102) dominant in early Gothic fiction such as the novels of Ann Radcliffe which attributed ‘all ghost-like effects to human agency’ (Napier 1987, 24). The Stratemeyer syndicate’s juvenile detective series frequently employed this technique. For example, in *The Secret of Shadow Ranch* (1931), Nancy Drew reveals that the ghostly stallion that has been terrorizing the ranch’s inhabitants is actually a real horse ‘covered with a soft thin material which had been coated with phosphorescent paint and exposed to light’ (Keene 1993, 140). This explanatory technique is borrowed from Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. In *Legion of the Dead* (2005), the final book in the *Invisible Detective* series, a similar explanation is initially used for the ghost of a Roman soldier who confronts Art and Jonny in the graveyard, ‘his face gleaming unnaturally in the darkness’ (Richards 2005a, 75). Despite the soldier’s ghostly appearance, it soon becomes clear that he is a mortal man, covered in luminous paint:

His face was still glowing, but the glow did not extend to his forehead, where it had been covered by the helmet. [...

Bizarrely, he was pulling out a cigarette and a box of matches. Art and Jonny watched in amazement as the soldier pushed the cigarette into his mouth. He struck the match on the side of the police box, let it flare, then lit his cigarette.

‘Blooming kids,’ he muttered after several drags. (Richards 2005a, 86)

In a comic parody of the modernist pattern, the text ostensibly provides its readers with a rational explanation for apparently supernatural occurrences. Yet the illusion is shattered when ghost Roman soldiers later appear to Art and the gang: ‘He hoped, really hoped, they were just play-acting, like the soldier at Sydenham had been’ (170). Art’s hope, of course, is in vain, as these Roman soldiers turn out to be genuine ghosts who have been summoned to fight an ancient force of evil that has been released. Here the text defies the rational conclusion that readers now anticipate. Moreover, the role of the ghost soldiers complicates the series’ representation of the supernatural since here the paranormal figures are positioned as allies rather than villainous opponents of the detective protagonists. The predictable modernist rational explanation
Lucy Andrew

is first parodied and later subverted to create an innovative and unpredictable narrative formula which denies closure and leaves elements of the unknown, ambiguous and unexplained to tantalize readers.

The CRYPT series, too, draws upon and modifies elements of the modernist detective plot structure, especially in terms of the cumulative nature of the supernatural, ‘criminal’ threats posed to the detective figures and the victims of crime. The Stratemeyer texts, in particular, rely upon a string of cliff-hangers, which increase in seriousness in terms of the threat posed to both their victims and the detective characters, from warning notes and hostile telephone calls to vandalism and prearranged ‘accidents’, culminating in the climactic, and often life-threatening, confrontation between the detective and the criminal. By the end of the book, however, this cumulative threat is always overcome through the detective’s triumph over the human and, thus, eventually conquerable criminal. Hammond’s CRYPT series extends this cumulative threat pattern to the series as a whole, rejecting the modernist conclusion of containment of threats in favour of a formula by which the menace – here supernatural in origin – increases from one book to the next. In the first book, The Gallows Curse (2011), the supernatural investigators’ ghostly opponents are simply attacking and killing humans in protest at the disturbance of their execution site at Tyburn by building works. Once the site is vacated by humans, the ghosts desist. In the second book, Traitor’s Revenge (2012), the relationship between the human victims and their ghostly attackers becomes more complex and invasive. Here the ghost of Guy Fawkes is ‘working with a human’ (Hammond 2012a, 90; emphasis in original) and he later possesses Black Rod during the State Opening of Parliament, ensuring that this figurehead ‘was no longer himself’ (291).

In the third book, Mask of Death (2012), the penetration of supernatural forces into the human world is even more pronounced, as present-day human victims are infected with bubonic plague via cursed rings from long-deceased Venetian plague victims, prompting the rise of spectral plague doctors to dispose of the new victims. Where Guy Fawkes’s possession of Black Rod signifies a singular, direct and temporary invasion of the human by the supernatural, here the contagion spreads to multiple victims through seemingly harmless objects, and often with permanent effects. The victims of these covert attacks in Mask of Death also become increasingly high profile and closer to the heart of the agency that is working to contain the supernatural opponents. Finally, the ghosts penetrate the CRYPT itself to retrieve one of the plague rings, injuring CRYPT’s co-founder, Giles Bonati, in the process, causing him to ask on
his recovery: ‘Is nowhere safe?’ (Hammond 2012b, 257). The implication of the series’ cumulative supernatural threat is that, no, nowhere and, by extension, no one is safe. The CRYPT, its founder and its agents are just as much at risk from supernatural penetration and contamination as the victims they are trying to protect. The threats also become less familiar as the series progresses, from highwayman Claude Du Val and gunpowder plotter Guy Fawkes in the first two books to fourteenth-century Venetian plague doctors in Book Three, ninth-century Viking warriors in *Blood Eagle* (2013) and animated statues of dragons in *Guardians’ Reckoning* (2014). While in modernist detective series like *Nancy Drew* the tension is built up to emphasize the greatness of the detective’s final triumph, this tension is never fully resolved in the *CRYPT* books, suggesting that the supernatural criminal threats cannot be completely contained by the series’ investigator protagonists.

Supernatural detective series for young readers, therefore, lack the closure of their rational, modernist predecessors. In the *Invisible Detective* series, the introduction of the supernatural not only contributes to the ongoing sense of mystification, but also, on occasion, actively prevents the resolution of the Invisible Detective’s cases. In *Legion of the Dead*, the principal villain is not Bablock, the human, criminal money forger, but a supernatural force which he accidentally releases: ‘the Darkening drains the life of men. It feeds on their souls and bodies and takes the very energy that binds us together’ (Richards 2005a, 185). Where in rational juvenile detective fiction the criminal is arrested and, presumably, imprisoned, closure is not so easily achieved in this text: since the ‘criminal’ force does not have a corporeal form or human limitations, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify, capture and contain. When present-day Arthur helps to overcome the Darkening, he looks to Miss Worthington, the museum proprietor, for reassurance that the threat has been vanquished:

> ‘Is it finished?’
> ‘Who can tell?’ she said. ‘But I think, yes. I think it is over. The Darkening was weakened by the water of the Thames. This really was its last hope, its last chance.’ (272)

This sense of closure, however, is undermined by a parallel conversation that occurs two pages later between Art in the 1930s and Miss Worthington’s father:

> ‘Do you think we did it?’ Art asked quickly. ‘Is it gone – the Darkening, I mean?’
Worthington nodded. ‘So our friend Centurion Gaius believes. He says that it will take it years to regain any sort of strength, if it ever does’. (274)

Readers are reminded that, since the Darkening was not thwarted in the 1930s narrative, there is no guarantee that it has been completely eradicated in the present day either. Thus, the presence of the supernatural in the texts unsettles readers as it deprives them of the reassurance that was systematically provided by the detective’s containment and punishment of human villains in earlier juvenile detective series.

A similar pattern occurs in the CRYPT series as figures from the past, and in many cases criminals, return to perform the same functions and to commit the same crimes in the present. The most obvious example occurs in Traitor’s Revenge, where Guy Fawkes and his fellow gunpowder plotters rise up in protest against the government’s proposed revision of the Act of Settlement – to ensure that the prime minister, as well as the monarch, cannot be Catholic – and mount an attack, once again, upon the Houses of Parliament. Their real-life punishment through death, the text suggests, is not enough to subdue these criminals of the past, as Jud himself recognizes:

He knew better than anyone how figures from history were not gone for ever. They lingered in the shadows, watching, waiting, biding their time. Only when you understood their grievances in life, the injustices that some had suffered, could you anticipate their return. (Hammond 2012a, 310)

Since the ghosts’ violent attacks are prompted by human sins and errors, their crimes are represented as a product of human degeneracy and corruption. While the human criminals are punished and their transgressions corrected, the ghosts themselves are beyond the control of human laws. Despite the fact that it is the ghosts who commit the most violent and heinous crimes in the texts, they are appeased rather than obliterated. For example, after committing several brutal murders at the State Opening of Parliament in Traitor’s Revenge, Guy Fawkes and his fellow plotters are assuaged as the prime minister agrees to pass a new bill which will abolish the anti-Catholic Act of Settlement against which they are protesting. Despite ‘[e]bbing away’ and ‘fading’, the ghosts are not overcome nor do they disappear completely, but instead remain as omnipresent ‘memories, left as residues in the great stones of the building. Never to be forgotten’ (Hammond 2012a, 338). There is a
sense, then, in this partial resolution that the ghostly figures – and the human vices that prompt their crimes – are pervasive, uncontainable and unconquerable.

The lack of containment and resolution in the two series, and their sense of indeterminacy, is not limited to the detective’s various supernatural cases and opponents, but extends to the identities of the detective protagonists themselves. In contrast to the two-dimensional, unambiguous heroes and heroines of modernist juvenile detective fiction, Arthur Drake – the ‘Invisible Detective’ – and CRYPT agent Jud Lester are products of enigma, a technique which Gavin identifies in ‘creative, innovative, and original mystery writing’ as a means to ‘encourage puzzling that extends beyond the bounds of the plot and which connects with deeper mysteries of life and art, involving issues of identity, reality, and fictionality’ (2001, 211). These concerns are clearly apparent in the series-long – or serial – mystery surrounding the identity of the Invisible Detective and the link between his past and present self. The mystery is characterized most strongly through the complex connection between Arthur in the present and his grandad in the 1930s:

Somehow he was linked to the old man sitting close by. Grandad seemed to know it too – did he ‘remember’ Arthur’s life just as Arthur could remember bits of his? Did it work both ways? Why did it work at all? (Richards 2003, 28)

The present-day Arthur reads about the 1930s investigations in the Invisible Detective’s casebook, written by his grandad, but swiftly forgets the details and only recalls them ‘when the time is right’ (130–1). Clues in the present trigger the memory of his grandad’s past escapades as the Invisible Detective – which present-day Arthur now experiences as if he were actually there himself. Thus, the present-day Arthur Drake finds it increasingly difficult to distinguish between words on a page and his own lived experience and, more crucially, to distinguish between his own identity and that of his grandad.

As the series progresses, the connection between Arthur and his grandad becomes stronger, further eroding the distinction between them. In each text, new elements are added to their relationship, which promise to help explain the mysterious link between them. In Book Five, *Faces of Evil* (2004), present-day Arthur uses a strange clock to communicate with his grandad in the past. In Book Seven, *Stage Fright* (2005), their relationship becomes even more complex as Arthur from the present...
trades places with his grandad in the past. As the series seemingly reaches its conclusion in *Legion of the Dead* (2005), readers might expect that their curiosity will finally be satisfied through an explanation of the key mystery. Yet, just as present-day Arthur is lamenting the fact that he has completed the Invisible Detective’s casebook, his grandad hands him another book: “The casebook of the Invisible Detective,” he repeated. “Only this –” he tapped the cover – “is volume two” (Richards 2005a, 279). The series taunts readers, luring them in with the promise of an explanation, but instead denying them the closure that they crave. In doing so, the *Invisible Detective* series rejects the modernist knowingness of early detective fiction in favour of a postmodernist mystery formula which, according to Coats, is defined by its lack of explanation and by the experience of not knowing: ‘when the book’s adventure is over, neither characters nor readers know anything more conclusive about the mystery or about themselves than they did before the book began’ (2001, 187; emphasis in original). *The Invisible Detective* books fit this postmodernist pattern: although some pieces of the puzzle fall into place, the anticipated explanation of the texts’ core mystery never arrives and, consequently, the series remains structurally open-ended and incomplete. This is a significant development from previous juvenile detective series such as those of Blyton and the Stratemeyer syndicate, which featured a recurring but static cast of characters in self-contained mystery plots. Like its adult counterpart, children’s crime fiction begins to respond to and experiment with earlier fictional models and, consequently, challenges the notion that crime fiction is a formulaic and conservative genre.

Hammond’s series, too, features a serial mystery which centres on the identity of the detective protagonist, Jud Lester – a mystery which is, perhaps, more accurately defined as the detective’s quest to recover his former self: Jamie Goode. As a CRYPT agent, Jud not only works to assuage supernatural threats but also to prove incontrovertibly the existence of ghosts in order to ‘clear his own name and live his life as Jamie once more’ (2011, 23). Paradoxically, in this quest, Jud has to dissociate himself from Jamie Goode and is shrouded in darkness as he appears under his new identity: ‘Black bike, black leathers, black helmet – he looked like a passing shadow as he wove in and out of the London traffic, bound for the CRYPT’ (12). Jud’s sense of alienation and self-erosion increases as the series progresses. In *Traitor’s Revenge*, Jud sees himself as:

a nonentity now; he didn’t exist. No history, no family, no friends – save his fellow agents at CRYPT. It had all been obliterated. [...] He
was, and always would be, a ghost – like the spirits he investigated, stuck forever in the realm between life and death. He was alive – and yet he had no life. He was visible, but invisible. His past obliterated. (Hammond 2012a, 217)

Despite Jud’s increasing identification with his ghostly opponents, however, his human identity – his former self, Jamie Goode – begins to resurface as he forges a relationship with fellow CRYPT agent Bex De Verre who, on occasion, can ‘see through the tough, dynamic exterior, past the secrecy and stand-offish reputation, and look deeper inside him’ (203). In *Mask of Death*, Jud’s icy façade begins to crack as he accidentally reveals part of Jamie Goode’s trauma to Bex, unearthing ‘something buried deep inside him. A pain that, for one brief second, had risen to the surface from where it had been festering’ (2012b, 182). In recognizing this slip, Jud realizes that his self-preservation relies on a suppression of his former identity and, consequently, what began as a quest to recover Jamie Goode becomes a search for a new identity. Jud’s journey towards self-discovery continues in *Blood Eagle Tortures* as, after a confrontation with a figure from his past, he reveals all to Bex and enters into a romantic relationship with her. Jud finally recognizes that ‘he needed a close relationship – he couldn’t lock up his emotions in solitary confinement forever’ (2013, 289). Thus, the mystery constructed around the detective’s identity is not so much concerned with who Jamie Goode was than with who Jud Lester will become, and the major conundrum that the detective must solve is how to conflate his former identity with his new one. In Book Five, Jud discovers that his mother was not killed by ghosts, but by human perpetrators hired by his father’s nemesis. This revelation complicates rather than resolves Jud’s identity issues, as the motivation behind the CRYPT and his role within it is removed.

Routledge suggests that ‘[f]or many child detectives [...] the pursuit of criminals also involves the exploration of their relationships with adults, with their understanding of the world, and with their own identities’ (2010, 330). This is clearly the case for Arthur Drake and Jud Lester, who learn about their own identities and the world in which they live through their detective role. They become investigators, not only of the criminal acts and supernatural occurrences but, more crucially, of the self. Thus, these series fit the pattern identified by Coats of the transition in children’s mystery fiction from ‘the epistemological concerns of modernism to the ontological concerns of postmodernism’ (2001, 192). Yet unlike the texts that Coats discusses, the
Invisible Detective and CRYPT series clearly retain their detective roots, drawing upon, developing and playing with aspects of the modernist detective formula and featuring protagonists who are clearly defined as detectives and whose detective role is firmly linked to their own journey of self-discovery. These postmodernist, supernatural investigators, however, are a different breed from their modernist predecessors: they are introspective and self-reflexive figures who encourage the child readers of their cases to interrogate their own worlds and identities rather than to seek comfort in that which can be known and explained away.

Through their introduction of the supernatural, Richards’s and Hammond’s series signal a new kind of juvenile detective hybrid. While the tension between the supernatural elements and the detective tradition is, perhaps, even stronger in these series than the competition between genres in the school-story, holiday-adventure and historical-detective-fiction hybrids, the Invisible Detective and CRYPT series exploit this tension in order to challenge more directly the conventions of the detective genre. While the other hybrid forms discussed oscillate between one genre and the other, as both struggle for dominance, the supernatural detective series rely on constant and direct interaction between the two primary genres. The supernatural elements of the series interrogate the very foundations of the detective genre, enabling the creation of a new hybrid form which seeks to preserve the juvenile detective tradition through reinvention, rather than perpetrating the anticipated erosion inherent in other detective hybrids. The serial nature of the writing is central to this process of interaction and reinvention, enabling a shift in focus from the finite, (re)solvable clue puzzles of modernist texts to infinite mysteries of self and society central to postmodernist fiction. These serial mysteries leave young readers with more questions than answers and, thus, encourage them to engage with crime fiction, and the world around them, in innovative and complex ways.

Notes


1. The Gem and the Magnet, launched in 1907 and 1908 respectively, were the dedicated school-story papers of Alfred Harmsworth’s Amalgamated Press. The papers’ most prolific author, Charles Hamilton, introduced several boy detective characters, including Dalton Hawke, Jack Drake and Len Lex, to the school-story setting.
2. The syndicate was established by Edward Stratemeyer in 1905. He expected his authors to maintain their anonymity, writing under series pseudonyms, while also following his creative vision by adhering to specific formulae and plot outlines (Rehak 2006, 25–6).

3. This technique is adopted by Matthew Lewis in his Gothic novel *The Monk*, in which the explained supernatural is employed and, later, displaced by real supernatural occurrences (Miles 2012, 106).

4. Ironically, the only CRYPT agent to die does so at the hands of a human foe. Jud's best friend and fellow agent, Luc, dies of a gunshot wound in Book Four. However, Luc's return as a ghost to aid an investigation in Book Five, *Guardians' Reckoning*, signifies the ultimate penetration of the supernatural into the CRYPT.

5. This constitutes a series within the series, introducing an element of metafiction which further augments the series' postmodernist status.

6. Brian McHale identifies this transition from the epistemological to the ontological as the shift in the ‘dominant’ from the modernist to the postmodernist movement (McHale 1987, 9–10).
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234  Bibliography


Bibliography

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Index

adaptation, 167–76
age and ageing see detective: woman detective
Alleyn, Roderick, 89
anti-communism see setting: period
Ascari, Maurizio, 154, 220

Bain, Donald, 185, 186, 187
Bakhtin, Mikhail, 103, 142
Baudelaire, Charles, 189
Bengtzon, Annika, 111–21
Benjamin, Walter, 28, 126, 131, 132, 189, 190, 196
Bioy Casares, Adolfo, 31–40
Black, Cara, 188–96
Blyton, Enid, 219, 227, 228
Bogart, Humphrey, 169, 172, 175
Borges, Jorge Luis, 31–40
Bruce, Nigel, 168
Budgeon, Shelley, 105, 107, 109, 110
Burma, Nestor, 188–96
Burroughs, Stephen, 11–19
Bustos Domecq, Honorio, 34, 35, 39, 40

Caution, Lemmy, 57
Cawelti, John, 11, 19, 54, 62, 179–83
Chandler, Raymond, 11, 17, 37, 38, 56, 59, 65, 68, 124
Chase, James Hadley, 47
Cheryl (girlfriend of ‘Le Poulpe’), 55, 59–61
Cheyney, Peter, 46–7, 50, 56, 57, 62
Christie, Agatha, 11, 32, 89, 98, 183, 208, 213, 217
Coats, Karen, 220, 227, 228
Cohen, Bernard, 41–2, 50
Cold War see setting: period collections (multi-authored)
Le Poulpe, 5, 52–62
Séptimo Círculo collection, 31–9
Série noire, 41–3, 45–9, 50
Stratemeyer, Edward, 220, 222, 223, 227, 230

conclusion see Burroughs
Conrad, Joseph, 138

Dannay, Frederic, 177–87
Debord, Guy, 189, 190, 196
detective (types)
armchair detective, 35, 191, 195
dynamic detective, 101
embedded detective, 197–207
hardboiled detective, 1, 6, 7, 19, 37–9, 42–9, 53–9, 60–5, 167, 99–101, 171, 197, 199, 201–7
loner detective, 7, 120, 169, 197–9, 207
woman detective
age and ageing, 89, 94, 96, 101–10
Gullette, Margaret Morganroth, 101–2
Drew, Nancy, 220, 222, 224
Fletcher, Jessica, 177–87
Leduc, Aimée, 188–96
Marklund, Liza, 111–21
Mars, Veronica see film and TV: TV series
Warshawski, V.I., 99–110
dime novels, 22, 25, 26, 29
Dmytryk, Edward, 65, 73
Doyle, Arthur Conan, 11, 23–30, 168–76, 180, 222
Drew, Nancy see detective: woman detective
drugs, 127, 128, 130
Duhamel, Marcel, 42, 43, 45–9, 53, 57, 60

Eco, Umberto, 11, 21, 23–6, 87, 100, 101, 133
Ellroy, James, 74–83, 124
embeddedness, 197–207
Fantômas, 23, 188, 189, 195
fascism see setting: period
Feuillade, Louis 188

*Les Vampires*, 188, 196

*feuilleton*, 21–30

film and TV

film noir, 72,

film series, 63–73, 167–76

TV series

*Ellery Queen*, 177–87

*Murder, She Wrote*, 177–87

*Veronica Mars*, 208–19

Twentieth Century Fox, 168, 170, 176

Universal Studios, 167, 168, 170, 175, 176

*flâneur, flânerie*, 189, 190, 195, 196

Fleming, Ian, 11, 17

Fletcher, Jessica *see* detective: woman detective

Frías, Carlos, 31, 38–40

Geherin, David, 124, 125, 134

Genette, Gérard, 45

ghost story, 221, 226

Golden Age, 7, 87, 208

Goligorski, Eduardo, 38, 40

Gothic fiction, 222, 230

Grafton, Sue, 99, 117, 209

Gramsci, Antonio, 3, 63, 73

Grosz, Elizabeth, 144–6, 151

Gullette, Margaret Morganroth, 101, 102

*see also* detective: woman detective

Halttunen, Karen, 12, 13

Hammett, Dashiell, 37, 38, 55, 124, 184

Hammond, Andrew, 219–30

Haraway, Donna, 143

hardboiled *see* detective

Harmsworth, Alfred *see* juvenile crime fiction

historical detective fiction, 219, 220, 229

Hollywood, 64, 66, 73, 74, 78, 167–75

Holmes, Sherlock, 24–30, 89–91, 97, 167–76

Hornung, Ervis W., 22–6, 29, 30

Huston, Nancy, 49

*Invisible Detective* series, 221–9

juvenile crime fiction

*CRYPT*, 219–30

detective school story, 219–30

*Famous Five, The*, 219

Five Find-Outers, *The*, 219

*Hardy Boys, The*, 220

Harmsworth, Alfred, 219, 229

hybrid, 219–30

*Nancy Drew*, 220, 222, 224

**Secret Seven, The**, 219

Stratemeyer syndicate *see* collections

*Veronica Mars* *see* film and TV: TV series

Kennedy, Douglas, 4–50

Knight, Stephen, 20, 149–50, 198

Lafforgue, Jorge, 31–3, 35, 37, 38

Lansbury, Angela, 177, 181–6

Larsson, Stieg, 111, 121

Leblanc, Maurice, 21–30

Lecouvreur, Gabriel, 54–61

Leduc, Aimée *see* detective: woman detective

Lee, Manfred B., 177, 178, 180, 185, 187

Leroux, Gaston, 54

Lister, Lord, 21–30

loner *see* detective

Los Angeles Quartet, 74–83

Lupin, Arsène, 21–30

Maigret, Jules, 23

Mailer, Norman, 50

Malet, Léo, 54, 188–96

Maloney, Shane, 197–207

Manchette, Jean-Patrick, 61, 62

Mandel, Ernest, 206

Marklund, Liza *see* detective: woman detective

Marsh, Ngaio, 89, 98

masculinity 60, 68, 167–9, 171–6

Mattalia, Sonia, 31, 35

McDermid, Val, 117

Miller, Arthur, 72

modernism, 228

Molander Danielsson, Karin, 101, 111, 119–21

dynamic detective *see* detective
Moore, Lewis D., 197, 198, 202
Most, Glenn, 127, 131

Napier, Elizabeth R., 222
noir, 5, 7, 41–52, 54–62, 66, 71–4, 77–9, 100, 144, 147, 149, 154, 167, 169, 176, 188, 217
novel of manners, 88, 93, 96, 97

Occupation see setting: period

paratext, 44–8
Paretsky, Sara, 97, 99–110, 117, 197
Parodi, (Don) Isidro, 33–40
Peace, David, 133–43
Pelecanos, George, 122–32
Pennac, Daniel, 43, 49, 50, 51
picarresque, 17
Poe, Edgar Allan, 39, 55–7, 96, 188
Poirot, Hercule, 89, 90
Porter, Dennis, 11, 298
post-feminism, 104–6
postmetropolis, 147, 151, 153–4
postmodernism, 228
Pouy, Jean-Bernard, 52, 54–9, 62
Queen, Ellery, 177–87

racism, 122, 128
Radcliffe, Ann, 222
Raffles, A.J., 21–30
Rathbone, Basil, 167, 168
Raymond, Derek, 59–62, 144–52, 154
Red Riding Quartet, 133–43
Reddy, Maureen, 100, 117
Richards, Justin, 219–30
Rivera, Jorge, 31–8
Roosevelt, Franklin D., 64, 66, 69
Sapiro, Gisèle, 43, 47, 50
Sayers, Dorothy L., 87–98
Scaggs, John, 20, 198
Scott, Adrian, 65, 70, 73
setting
period
anti-communism, 72, 73
Cold War, 64, 73
fascism, 56, 65, 66, 70, 93, 159
Hays Office, 169
Nazism (Nazi), 5, 65–71, 170–5, 194
Neo-Nazi, 194
New Deal, 64–6, 69, 70, 72
Occupation, 194
Perón/peronismo, 34, 35, 40
post-war, 43, 46, 50, 91, 93–4
second-wave feminism, 99, 102–10
Thatcherism, 144, 148
third-wave feminism, 99, 104–8
World War II, 63, 69, 73, 168, 170 see also historical detective fiction

place
London, 14, 142, 144, 149–53, 175, 217, 221
Los Angeles, 74, 76–8, 81–3, 198
Maryland, 126, 127
Melbourne, 198, 199, 204
Paris, 6, 43, 50, 53, 55, 57, 188–96
urban periphery, 144, 145, 152
Vigàta, 155–96
Washington (DC), 122, 125–7, 129–31
Yorkshire, 133–43
shell shock, 91, 94
Simenon, Georges, 23
Sontag, Susan, 143
Stefanos, Nick, 124, 126, 131
Stine, R.L., 220
Strange, Derek, 124–8, 130, 131
Stratemeyer, Edward see collections
Suarez Lynch, Benito, 34, 35, 40
Sullivan, Vernon, 41–9, 50, 51
supernatural, 219, 230
Sur (group, magazine, publisher), 32, 34, 36, 39

Temple, Peter, 197–207
third-wave feminism see setting: period
Todorov, Tzvetan, 2, 19, 75, 163, 190
Tokyo Trilogy, 133
traceur, 188, 190, 193, 195, 196
translation, 3–37, 41–3, 46–7, 49, 50, 56, 57
Truman, Harry S, 69
Truman, Margaret, 123, 131
Index

TV series see film and TV
Twentieth Century Fox see film and TV
Universal Studios see film and TV

Vane, Harriet, 88, 92–3, 95
veteran, 63–73
Vian, Boris, 41–51

Vian, Michelle, 46
Warshawski, V.I. see detective: woman detective
Welles, Orson, 66
Whelan, Murray, 197, 199, 200–6
Wimsey, Lord Peter, 87–98

Yorkshire Ripper, 134, 135, 140