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Talking Back to Chandler and Spillane: Gender and Agency in Women's
Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction.

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I, Cathrine Avery confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the perceived incompatibility of incorporating feminist values into the hard-boiled detective novel. Critical responses to this crime form have argued that it endorses a formulaic, misogynistic violence. My argument is that this is a literature that offers women writers the means to express female agency and empowerment, through a genre that changes to fulfil current social needs. Through the work of Raymond Chandler and Micky Spillane I establish the model of the 'tough guy' detective as a product of the moment of writing, reflecting contemporaneous gender anxieties. Fundamental to this analysis is the concept of a 'surrogate public history', through which society promulgates mythological constructs to salve or remedy social unease. My proposition is that early hard-boiled texts contributed to a surrogate public history in which the mythology of the male detective was embraced as both desirable and necessary. Subsequently women crime writers of the 1980s and 1990s have adopted this gendered space, offering a powerful commentary on the condition of women through a surrogate public history that allows us to see how women are bound by a social contract that divides public and private spheres in gendered terms. Through a careful deployment of the detective's voice, authors such as Linda Barnes, Sue Grafton and Sarah Dunant, examine social inequalities and question how femininity is defined. These authors are defined as 'gestic' writers, who by giving precedence to the minutiae of the everyday open up to inquiry the practices by which women's lives are regulated. Additionally I examine the work of Val McDermid and Jenny Siler to consider what this extraordinarily mobile form can stretch to incorporate. Siler in particular reveals the capacity of the hard-boiled form to reject normative gender assumptions through a central investigative figure whose outlaw status challenges social expectations of femininity.

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Introduction

Women writers of detective fiction strategically talk back to a genre that has often demeaned, trivialised and even demonised women. The genre itself, however, offers an attractive position from which to investigate agency.¹

Genres fill a need for which no adequate alternative method exists. And when they change, it is as part of a change both in the need they exist to fill and in the means that exist for its fulfilment.²

My introduction to women writers of the hard-boiled detective novel came through the works of authors such as Sue Grafton, Sarah Dunant, Linda Barnes, Sara Paretsky and Judith Van Gieson, published in the late 1980s and 1990s. I read them for the characterisation of the ‘sassy’ detective and her messy personal life. I took pleasure in the seriality of these texts, with the constant reappearance of the detective, producing at a basic narrative level a sense of familiarity, one that allowed me to develop an ongoing sense of reader identification with these specific women and their habits. Nikki Gerard, reviewing the work of Linda Barnes in *The Observer*, commented:

The pleasure of *Fatlands* - as in so many of these thrillers - is not so much the competent plot but the excavation of an independent woman’s domestic life, which is both mundane and in crisis [...] we recognize and identify with her; not superhuman or stunning, but a bungling, touchy, anxious, ageing, not-so-modern modern woman.³

The narrative trajectory towards the solution of the crime was a secondary consideration, not because it was insignificant but because the nature of the texts, both formulaic and often predictable in outcome, meant that a resolution was a given. I read voraciously, working my way through Virago Crime, The Women’s Press, Arrow and Pan Crime. Without fully analysing the thought process I defined these texts as feminist because of their overt focus on the status and needs of women as distinct from men. The use of first person narrative allowed the female detective to comment directly on the inequalities that the crime highlighted and satisfyingly she always had the last word. Thus it was not until I began to consider the critical responses to the ‘female’ hard-boiled form in order to channel my reading pleasure

¹ Pricilla L. Walton, and Marina Jones, *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard-boiled Tradition* (California: University of California Press, 1999), p.94.

² Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600 to 1740* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), p.20.

³ Nikki Gerard, ‘Sleuth Sayings,’ *The Observer*, 27 June 1993, p.62.

into academic study that I began to realise the concerns that have been raised by this combination of feminism and a female detective. At the heart of these concerns is the adoption by women writers of what has been defined as a ‘masculinist’ literary form. Stephen Knight in his extensive analysis of the crime genre *Crime Fiction 1800 - 2000: Detection, Death, Diversity*, comments that there is ‘an inherent difficulty for writers speaking as women, usually as feminists, in a form which is deeply implicated with masculinism’.⁴ However, my reading of the hard-boiled detective novel by women writers, as my epigraphs suggest, is one of female agency, of empowerment, within a generic form that changes to fulfil a social need. The masculinist compulsion embedded in this literature is central to way these writers ‘talk back’ to the genre and challenge previously designated gender assumptions that ‘demean’ femininity.

Questions of gender and the hard-boiled detective form

So what are the attributes of this literary form that means that it has acquired this ‘masculinist’ designation? The following synopsis outlines the essential features of the hard-boiled novel and serves as a useful starting point in terms of understanding the basis of such critical concerns. Whilst abstracting a simple definition might appear to limit this literature to its formulaic components, understanding its structural framework is a vital first step in making sense of its complexity. My argument, as I will show, is that this is a dynamic, fluid form, one that has the capacity to change and change again, in response to social influences. In essence the hard-boiled detective novel is perceived as a formulaic sub-genre of the crime novel, founded by American author Carroll John Daly in the mid-1920s, popularised by Dashiell Hammett in the following decade, and then refined by Raymond Chandler during the 1930s.⁵ It is often defined in contrast to the then prevailing (largely) British crime form, that of the ‘clue-puzzle’ pioneered by Arthur Conan Doyle in the later decades of the nineteenth-century. The ‘clue-puzzle’ is categorised as ‘drawing-room’ crime with its emphasis on politeness and the maintenance of a class based social order.⁶ The hard-boiled format is broader in its social representation and relies

⁴ Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction 1800 - 2000: Detection, Death, Diversity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.163.

⁵ Heather Worthington, *Key Concept in Crime Fiction* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), pp.123-4.

⁶ Charles Rzepka, *Detective Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), pp.179-180.

on strong realistic characterisation and urban settings. John Cawelti in his text *Adventure Mystery and Romance* observes that whereas the ‘clue-puzzle’ is dependent on eliciting answers through observation and intellectual prowess, the hard-boiled novel is about action and intuition.⁷ The hard-boiled detective is seen as ‘tough’, a man of physical practicalities. When Daly said of his detective ‘There is nothing soft-boiled about him’ he established an approach and attitude that denied any sentimentality and thus the detective was defined as ‘hard-boiled’ giving the form its name and the detective his manner.⁸ Earliest versions of the hard-boiled detective story were published largely in the *Black Mask* pulp magazine, where the formulaic nature of the form was set out: its violence, colloquialism, ‘quest’ narrative and the uncompromising gendering of its characters.⁹ Within this popular literary format masculinity was systematically documented as tough and potent; the detective’s power invested not just in his gun but also in his language.¹⁰

This representation of masculine power within the hard-boiled detective novel has resulted in critics such as Sally Munt, Kathleen Gregory Klein and Gill Plain perceiving the female detective as a ‘fantasy figure’ whose politicized vision is at odds with the structure and gendering of the form which they believe is immutable.¹¹ Munt sees the attempt to assimilate feminist ideas into a conservative ideological framework as flawed.¹² Klein has argued that the structure of the hard-boiled novel will inevitably take pre-eminence over the expression of political values:

The predictable formula of detective fiction is based on a world whose sex/gender valuations reinforce male hegemony. Taking male behaviour as the norm [...] a detective novel with a professional women detective is, then, a contradiction in terms.¹³

Plain agrees with Klein when she refers to the work of Grafton and Paretzky as ‘feminist fairy tales’ which fail to dismantle the existing conservative structures of

⁷ John Cawelti, *Adventure Mystery and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976), p.144.

⁸ Daly is often cited as the detective’s ‘inventor’. Daly’s first hero was defined as ‘focussed, crude, illiterate, opinionated and a crack shot who slept with a gun in his hand’. William F. Nolan, *The Black Mask Boys: Masters in the Hard-Boiled School of Detective Fiction* (New York: The Mysterious Press, 1989), p.20.

⁹ John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2005), p.77.

¹⁰ Cawelti, p.151.

¹¹ Sally Munt, *Murder By the Book: Feminism and the Crime Novel* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.30.

¹² Munt, p.31.

¹³ Kathleen Gregory Klein, *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p.223.

the hard-boiled format.¹⁴ This failure to change the restrictive construction of the formula is seen as an immovable stumbling block for feminist writers, which is then exacerbated by the explicit physical violence within the form. The violence of the hard-boiled detective novel is perceived as an expression of dominant ideologies which reinforce gender difference and the organisation of power on the basis of this difference. As such this violence is understood as not simply about the fist or the gun but is systemic and institutional, in that it is the means by which women are regulated and categorised under the law. Additionally if we identify the male detective as a representative of the law, then his actions are endorsed by the mechanisms and the logic of the state. Jacqueline Rose, writing in the early 1990s, examines state violence in her text *Why War?* and argues that the ‘legitimization and rationalisation of violence’, seen through government decisions such as the endorsement of the Falklands War, can be delineated along gendered lines with masculinity as ‘the holder of state violence’. In turn femininity becomes ‘illicit and perverse’ and subject to systems of violent regulation.¹⁵ Thus violence is an expression of symbolic power, one which can endow subject status, and is clearly part of the process by which the male detective’s agency is established. Within this equation femininity comes to represent a weakness, a counter to masculine power. In response to this gender difference David Glover in his work ‘The stuff that dreams are made of’ argues that the hard-boiled form does not ‘allow an easy male/female transposition’ because women are too often the recipients of male engendered violence.¹⁶ Knight agrees, stating that the use of ‘brutality’ by women writers limits their feminist aims.¹⁷ As Pricilla Walton and Marina Jones point out in their work *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard-boiled Tradition*, the comprehensive nature of this gender division has meant that women have been ‘demeaned, trivialised and even demonised’ within the hard-boiled form.¹⁸ Thus a fundamental question arises: how can this literary format, one that works to expel and negate femininity, be desirable to women writers and readers alike? And why was there a

¹⁴ Gill Plain, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), p.142.

¹⁵ Jacqueline Rose, *Why War?* (Blackwell Press, Oxford, 1993), p.59.

¹⁶ David Glover, ‘The stuff that dreams are made of’, in *Gender, Genre and Narrative Pleasure*, ed. by Derek Longhurst (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p.78.

¹⁷ Knight, p.163.

¹⁸ Walton and Jones, p.94.

massive influx of women writers into the field in the 1980s who so confidently adopted the form?

Part of the answer to these questions lies in the ability of the hard-boiled novel to modify itself constantly, in response to social and cultural changes. Despite the issues raised about women using this literature to express feminist politics, there is critical agreement that the hard-boiled form for all its formulaic convention is reactive to external factors.¹⁹ Thus the 1920s hard-boiled stories published in the *Black Mask* magazines have been read as a response to the current social anxieties of the day.²⁰ In particular these anxieties centred on gender changes evident in the years following the First World War, but also a loss of individuality in the expanding urban city sprawl.²¹ Later versions of the fiction, as I will demonstrate within this thesis, reveal this adaptability and the form's ability to change in response to societal pressures. There is, for example, no single model of masculinity at stake here, since the work of Raymond Chandler and Mickey Spillane published decades apart reflect alternative representations of masculinity within this literature. Chandler's work was written in the Depression era of the 1930s when overbearing state responses to the financial crisis made Chandler's detective a champion of the individual. In contrast Spillane's initial output was published during the 1950s at a time of significant political unrest in the United States. The combined effect of Cold War paranoia and the demobilization of disillusioned and displaced armed forces returning home after the Second World War fed into the work of Spillane and produced a seemingly uncompromising and aggressive expression of masculine identity.²² These varied representations of the detective have modified to reflect societal developments and pressures, making the incorporation of feminist detective one in a long line of transformations.

The list of women contributing to the crime genre either as part of a broader narrative or as a 'murder mystery' novel is extensive with well-known British authors including Dorothy Sayers (*Whose Body*, 1923) and Agatha Christie (*The*

¹⁹ Scaggs, p.19.

²⁰ Cawelti comments 'the hard-boiled detective finds himself up against a corrupt and violent society that threatens to destroy him'. Cawelti, p.161.

²¹ Worthington, p.123.

²² Rzepka, p.219.

Mysterious Affair at Styles, 1920). The American contingent includes Anna Katherine Green (*The Leavenworth Case*, 1878) and Mary Roberts Rinehart (*The Circular Staircase*, 1908) amongst early contributors. All these women writers tended to favour male detectives as lead characters. Patricia Wentworth was one of the first women writers to include a female detective in *Grey Mask* in 1928. However, it was not however until 1972, when P D James introduced Cordelia Grey in the aptly named *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, that the hard-boiled novel with a central female detective was launched.²³ From the 1970s onward there has been a significant influx of women writers who have deployed the same basic formulaic components as male authors such as Chandler and Spillane and in many cases explicitly claimed them as antecedents.²⁴ The writer who is often cited as the initiator of the feminist hard-boiled novel is American author, Marcia Muller, whose book *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* established a new tradition of tough women detectives.²⁵ This was matched in Britain with Lisa Cody's Anna Lee in 1980.²⁶ A decade later *Publishers Weekly* declared that the phenomenon of the independent woman investigator has been the 'single most striking development' within the genre.²⁷ Walton and Jones comment on this change in their analysis of women writers:

By 1990 the female 'tough gal' outgrowth of the male hard-boiled novel was making waves in the mainstream of American popular culture. The sub-genre of the professional woman investigator had become well established and was being publically celebrated through unprecedented sales and economic rewards.²⁸

The contributors to this extraordinary development are numerous and many are now familiar names within the genre such as Sara Paretsky and Val McDermid, both of

²³ Dorothy Sayers, *Whose Body?* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1923). Agatha Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (London: Bodley Head, 1920). Anna Katherine Green, *The Leavenworth Case* (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1878). Mary Roberts Rinehart, *The Circular Staircase* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1908). Patricia Wentworth, *Grey Mask* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928). PD James, *An Unsuitable Job for A Woman* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972).

²⁴ Writers such as Sarah Dunant explicitly reference the original male writers within the body of their texts. In *Under My Skin* her detective comments 'Do the boys suffer this, I wonder, finding the hangover from the violence nastier than the one from the booze?' Sarah Dunant, *Under My Skin*, London: Penguin, 1995), p.35.

²⁵ Marcia Muller, *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* (New York: Warner Books, 1977).

²⁶ Lisa Cody, *Dupe* (London: Arrow, 1980).

²⁷ Carolyn Anthony, 'Mystery Books: Crime Marches On', *Publishers Weekly*, April 13 1990, p.24-29.

²⁸ Walton and Jones, p.11-12.

whom have had their work adapted for film or television.²⁹ My focus in this thesis however, is not a survey of these contributors, rather it is an examination of a selection of women writers who have explicitly utilised and ‘talked back’ to this genre to express agency and explore the possibility of female power.

Answering the critics: the hard-boiled form as an expression of agency

Academic study of a genre that reinforces the violent objectification and categorisation of women alongside an expression of feminist politics, might appear to require a methodology to explain and then ease the tensions that such a conflict produces. How can a form that seemingly sustains a masculine power base also offer a feminist reading pleasure? My approach, however, is not to clarify or ease this tension, rather it is to recognise the nature of a genre that can accommodate such a contradiction. The capacity of the hard-boiled detective novel to operate as a commentary on and an enquiry into forms of dominant gender ideology is evident from the moment it was named by Daly as ‘hard-boiled’. Criticism directed at the feminist use of this literature fail to take on board both its generic fluidity and its capacity to express alternative representations of the detective that question, challenge and at times repudiate this masculine power base. The 1980s and 1990s hard-boiled detective novels written by women reflected the moment of its writing. It explored the change in gender roles experienced by women and men at this time, as well as the political conservatism that dominated both America and Britain, which was shaping the social landscape. Significantly it offered ways of seeing the investigative process moving beyond the criminal event to the public and private lives of women. The achievement then of the hard-boiled form is that it has the capacity to encompass constant change. Despite a tendency on the part of some critics to rely on the 1920s definition of the detective as both formative and final, evidence from later texts shows that the 1920s taxonomy is only part of an ever shifting form. The fixity of the hard-boiled detective novel (if there can be said to be such a thing) lies in its investigative core, but equally this alters depending on what gendered dynamics the detective brings into play. Thus this combination within the

²⁹ *VI Warshawski*, dir by Jeff Kanew, (1991) starring Kathleen Turner. Based on the novel by Sara Paretsky, *Deadlock* (London: Penguin, 1984). *Wire in the Blood*, ITV, 2002 - 2009. The series is based on characters created by Val McDermid: a university clinical psychologist, Dr. Anthony “Tony” Valentine Hill.

form, that is its formulaic patterning, as well as a fluid responsive contemporaneousness, renders its historical context explicit. As such this is a literature that maintains a constant dialogue between its past formulations and its ongoing present re-appropriations, to achieve an expression of the wider social realities of gender relations.

The impact of this dialogue not only allows unexpected connections between apparently disparate authors and texts, it positively encourages an ongoing engagement between components of the form that would seem naturally to reject each other. The fact that the hard-boiled novel maintains an inherent social commentary means that even though this is a genre that has ‘demeaned, trivialised, and demonised’ women it is also a form that allows the expression of agency through a central character who can articulate choice, power and self-determination.³⁰ This thesis examines the way women writers have taken advantage of the ongoing evolution of the hard-boiled detective novel to consider the changing lives of women and the ways in which gendered identities are experienced. My analytical trajectory starts, however, with Raymond Chandler and Mickey Spillane to establish the masculinisation of the field. My textual exploration of these two authors highlights the way the form perpetuates the inextricable connection between masculinity and power. Munt suggests the central investigative figure in traditional hard-boiled detective fiction is ‘representative of Man [...] the focus of morality, the mythic hero’.³¹ But living up to this myth is simply not possible and the form unconsciously reveals through the voice of the detective not just a fractured individual, but a set of fractured masculinities. I then consider significant women authors, including Linda Barnes, Sue Grafton and Sarah Dunant, who are in differing ways strategically reformulating and ‘talking back’ to the hard-boiled novel for their own agendas. My focus is in agreement with Walton and Jones, who define women’s writing within the 1980s as:

Feminist detective fiction (which) constitutes a reverse discourse exploring positions of resistance and agency that were offered by previous practitioners but were inaccessible to women.³²

I concentrate on what I see as the accomplishment of feminist hard-boiled detective

³⁰ Walton, and Jones, p.94.

³¹ Munt, p.1.

³² Walton and Jones, p.93.

writers whose work engages with gendered identities. The re-writing of the form by feminist authors makes it possible to experience in reading the ways in which femininity is socially determined. Such a focus is not only a reflection of the feminist movement in the 1980s but also a way of exploring and challenging expectations about gendered behaviours.

My examination of the hard-boiled form necessarily explores the concept of a gender binary as a means of understanding perceived differences between men and women. This one-dimensional stereotype which at its most basic level denotes a masculine strength and a feminine weakness was under question even as the earliest *Black Mask* stories were being published, although the *Black Mask* stories were not foregrounding this gender change. Such stereotypes continue to be used as a shorthand and are part of cultural assumptions that define gender behaviours. Whilst such an examination might seem overly simplistic it is, if you like, the burden of this binary that defines and regulates us. However, by critically asking questions about these binary restrictions it is possible to perceive gender as fluid. My contention is that the hard-boiled detective novel, because of the way it foregrounds gender through its depiction of masculine dominance, suggests ways of recognising the opportunities inherent in both highlighting and jettisoning a reliance on a bipartite gender division. My focus on the work of critical theorists such as Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, Slavoj Žižek and Jacqueline Rose reveals how this binary divide maintains its hold over our perceptions of gender relations. Often it is the process of recognising the divide through linguistic markers and accepted gendered expectations that give a reader of this genre access to an alternative way of perceiving what it means and what it *might* mean to be a woman or a man. Many of these critics make use of Lacanian psychoanalytical theories to examine and challenge gendered definitions. In particular I am interested exactly how Lacan's work engages with notions of power in a way that illuminates the seeming fixity of gender that is central to the hard-boiled formula. One of the most germane elements that stems from Lacanian theory is a rigid gender division with masculinity as the holder of power or the subject, with women as the object. Whilst this has since been challenged by critics such as Butler and Žižek, and alternative ways of seeing gender division and relations have been formulated, Lacan's work remains a clear point of engagement for many gender theorists.

The powerful detective and Lacanian Symbolic Law

Lacan's conceiving of the Law can be usefully connected with key elements of the form, specifically the position of power held by the detective. It allows me to expand on the way in which the hard-boiled novel characterises the male detective, his status and in particular his responses to women within the texts. By considering the parallels between the structures of Lacan's Symbolic Law and the law of legal regulation, the detective's positioning, as potent and central, can be further understood. The law here refers to the institutions that regulate society and which determine what is and what is not categorised as criminal behaviour. I also want to make an explicit connection between these regulatory structures and the concept of a social contract. By this I mean the power of the detective is held in place not just by his extraordinary masculinity but also by an agreed social need for him to be powerful, that is, in control of the narrative, in order to solve the crime. The social contract is also a form of regulation that Kristeva has defined as part of a 'gendered binary', one that ascribes an unequal relationship between men and women.³³ What follows is a short discussion on concept of the Law. Although this thesis is not a psychoanalytical account of the hard-boiled novel I want to briefly consider the way Lacan defines our entrance into the Symbolic, which can be connected to the conservative and regulative structuring of the formula of the hard-boiled novel. My exploration of Lacan establishes the apparent totality of the Law that is its circularity and completeness, with masculinity at the centre. However my contention is that such a binary division between masculinity and femininity can only be maintained if both parts of the binary are given value and by giving meaning to femininity, the dominant status of masculinity must inevitably be changed.

The Symbolic-Real-Imaginary triad of Jacques Lacan's three psychoanalytic orders were developed during a series of lectures in the 1950s. In the Lacanian arena, the Symbolic-Real-Imaginary forms a trio of intra-psychic realms which comprise the various levels of psychic phenomena. They serve to situate subjectivity within a

³³ Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time' in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p.206.

system of perception and through a dialogue with the world around us.³⁴ Lacan's picture of the Symbolic-Real-Imaginary orders are deeply rooted in Freudian notions of the Oedipal phase, infantile sexuality, and the project of uncovering unconscious processes through language and associations. In Lacanian terms the Symbolic Law is a system of cultural and social regulation that we enter through the acquirement of language. Language here is the means by which we gain recognition of self through a shared knowledge with another subject, as such it is not about simple communication but rather connotes subjectivation.³⁵ The subject is made answerable to the Symbolic Law and works to maintain it through the acceptance of linguistic rules.³⁶ The acceptance of the rules of language is aligned with the child's passage into adulthood and entrance into its community through the Oedipal stage, where the phallic power resides with the male child and not with the female. Once the child accepts the Name-of-the-Father, or the laws that govern both one's desire and the rules of language, it enters successfully into the Symbolic Order. The parallels between the formula of the hard-boiled novel and this Symbolic Ordering offer ways of perceiving not just the status of the detective but also his masculinity. The detective is symbolically aligned with the Name-of-the-Father and works to outlaw those who do not conform.³⁷ The structuring evident here with its gender specificity establishes a binary division between the one that bears power and the one that does not, in Lacanian terms the 'other'.³⁸

³⁴ Amanda Loos 'Symbolic, Real, Imaginary' University of Chicago, Winter 2002 <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/symbolicrealimaginary.htm> [accessed 16 September 2013]

³⁵ Madan Sarup, in his examination of Lacan's theories discusses this concept thus 'Lacan stresses that speech is not simply a conveyor of information, but establishes a relation between speaker and hearer. In accordance with the dialectic of recognition the very being of the subject is dependent upon its recognition by its other subjects'. Madan Sarup, *Jacques Lacan* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p.46.

³⁶ Miller talks of the symbolic as the 'determining order of the subject' Jacques Alain Miller, 'Translator's Note' in Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1998), p.279.

³⁷ Sarup, pp.82-6.

³⁸ At a basic level the concept of 'other' suggests a way of perceiving a division between the sexes because it defines a difference between men and women. Simone De Beauvoir's use of the term is a good starting point in that it describes a male-dominated culture. De Beauvoir calls the 'other' the minority, the least favoured one and often a woman, when compared to a man, 'for a man represents both the positive and the neutral, as indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative'. Carole McCann, *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p.33.

If we connect this concept to the hard-boiled novel, the supposed extraordinary masculinity of the 1920s and 1930s detective relies on a separation from the ‘other’ that is femininity, and in order to maintain his prowess and his power he must deny what might weaken him, in effect the negativity that is implicit in femininity. Thus to control his potential for failure, the detective must repress femininity and by doing so makes it constitutive, the difference through which his meaning is made. As Stephen Frosh says in *Sexual Difference: Masculinity and Psychoanalysis* ‘the stronger the negation the more important the truth of what has been negated’.³⁹ In other words the very misogyny of the form means that women are central to the texts, and whilst ‘negation’ clearly implies refutation and prohibition, if we accept the perspective of Frosh then women become not ‘demeaned and trivialised’ but the important truth, powerful and central to the narrative.

Understanding the impact of generic change

An engagement with the categories of gender is then fundamental to a study of the construction of the hard-boiled detective novel. Part of this engagement with both gender and genre must also entail recognition of how the hard-boiled form itself has come to be classified; I am interested in how such classification can limit our view of this literature and therefore our perception of its ability to adapt and respond to differing gendered needs. Clearly the very term ‘hard-boiled’ sets out a way of defining the form such that it can be understood and recognised. Such definitional clarity is necessary: authors need to utilise familiar generic attributes; publishers and readers alike make choices based on a definable type and formulaic convention. However, the very fact that it is a literature that encompasses variety and the capacity to evolve, suggests that a simple categorisation will be inadequate; in effect it would threaten to limit our interpretation of a form that expresses something that is temporary and fluctuating. How then do we give meaning to a form that appears to be able to sustain a contradictory dichotomy of formulaic fixity and fluidity, particularly when this dichotomy suggests, on the one hand, a categorisation first set out in the 1920s, and on the other an historical flux?

³⁹ Stephen Frosh, *Sexual Difference: Masculinity and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.121.

Such questions about generic classification and the process of naming and defining a genre have been usefully explored by Michael McKeon in *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1700* in which he examines how a generic category comes into being.⁴⁰ His focus is the generic emergence of the English novel, but his abstractions are relevant to other genres and sub-genres and their implied historicity. McKeon argues that a genre becomes identifiable ‘through its estrangement’ or its separation from other literary categories.⁴¹ In this way the novel, positioned as it was in contrast to the established forms of ‘romance’ and ‘history’ was defined as different and new. Similarly the hard-boiled form was defined as different from the ‘clue-puzzle’. However McKeon makes it very clear that the separation of the novel as a genre was complicated by a number of issues; in particular the conflation of the terms romance, history and novel in the late seventeenth century meant that these categories were interchangeable and lacked precision. Also the ‘estrangement’ of the novel from other literary forms breaks down once the texts themselves are studied, revealing that many authors who have been distinguished as essential to our perception of the novel’s taxonomy, combined elements from romance and history with the formal realism that was said to be singular to the novel.⁴² The problem as McKeon sees it is a desire to divorce the history of *a genre* from the history of *genres*, which he suggests restricts our appreciation of the interconnectedness of generic categories. A *genre* will in turn become *the genre* and for the sake of simplicity is abstracted from the complexity of *genres* to stand alone. To facilitate a broader perception of genre McKeon argues against placing a fixed and therefore limiting time-frame on the formation of a genre, one that would by extension also restrict understanding of the genre itself. Rather he proposes that genres be seen as ‘part of a larger process from which they may be abstracted only provisionally’.⁴³ McKeon argues that much of the process of historical categorisation comes about as a product of:

Normative bias (which) is only the outward sign of what is fundamentally problematic: that historical process has been evacuated from the analysis of how a genre comes into being.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600 to 1740* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000).

⁴¹ McKeon, p.12.

⁴² McKeon comments that ‘Though Dafoe, Richardson, and Fielding explicitly subvert the idea and ethos of romance; they nonetheless draw upon many of its stock situations and conventions’.

McKeon, p.2.

⁴³ McKeon, p.xviii.

⁴⁴ McKeon, p.9.

He argues that an inquiry into a genre will be a process of giving it an historical framework, or what Northrop Frye in *The Secular Scripture: a Study of the Structure of Romance* calls a 'credible context' that is a context that conforms to this 'normative bias'.⁴⁵ However, the end result of assigning a fixed historical specificity to a genre is that this historical moment defines its parameters.

McKeon's model of generic inception is constructive in thinking about the origins of the hard-boiled novel in the 1920s. The hard-boiled form is not new in itself, in that it is part of the detective or crime novel, but it is defined as a new development and once named and classified it ostensibly becomes a stable fixity, which can be said to begin at a certain point in time. McKeon talks of 'generic coalescence', in which the constituents of a genre combine or are said to combine at a particular historical moment which then becomes accepted as the moment of its foundation.⁴⁶ For hard-boiled literature this 'coalescence' is often explicitly dated, in the 1920s, with the *Black Mask* stories. However, if the process of coalescence (that is the movement towards this 'beginning') is given attention, then a clearer and more developed perception of the hard-boiled novel is possible. The act of questioning the status of this 'new' crime form and its 'credible context' does not preclude the attributes that the historical moment of the 1920s attaches to it; rather it is a process of rethinking the boundaries that the 1920 inception has seemingly carved out. What this achieves, from McKeon's perspective, is a way of understanding things 'in which there is no single privileged view'.⁴⁷ Or in other words it avoids a 'totalising generic categorization'.⁴⁸ What McKeon argues for is an approach that allows the array of history to be considered in determining the nature of a genre. He comments:

Like all history, literary history aims to understand its object of study in both its continuity and its discontinuity. That is, history undertakes to treat its object as it displays both the continuity of an integral entity and, within that continuity, the discontinuity that confirms its existence over time and space, its capacity to change without changing into something else.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: a Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p.36.

⁴⁶ McKeon, p.xx.

⁴⁷ McKeon, p.xviii.

⁴⁸ McKeon, p.xvii.

⁴⁹ McKeon, p.xiii.

Consequently the object or genre can be explored on the basis of its relation to both the continuity and discontinuity of history and not determined by a partial view which would fix it for all time.⁵⁰ This offers a means of perceiving a genre as fluid, one that has the ‘capacity to change without changing into something else’ in that it responds to historical influences but is nonetheless recognisable. How then does this approach have relevance for the hard-boiled detective novel and the incursion of women writers and detectives? Perhaps significantly what this approach suggests is recognition of the hard-boiled form as intrinsically part of the crime genre and not separate and new. This in turn allows a broader more judicious view of the hard-boiled form. For surely the process of considering the history of the crime novel as shared by the history of the hard-boiled form must readjust the persistent view that the hard-boiled sub-genre is antithetical to women, particularly as there is clear ongoing evidence of the continuous presence of women writers within the crime genre as a whole.⁵¹

Generic change and the solution to ‘intractable’ problems

McKeon’s account also permits us to see that the crime genre and its diverse parts are open to modification in response to historical changes. As a result one might argue that a particular version of the crime genre emerged in the 1920s that responded to social and political changes in America which were manifesting in gendered terms. Charles Rzepka, who traces the history of the form in his text *Detective Fiction*, comments that writers responded to ‘new insecurities (which) were undermining public confidence in the promise of the American Dream’. He cites the economic boom, and the financial crash of 1929 as reflecting a ‘tottering foundation’ which gave rise to ‘corruption at the highest levels of government’.⁵² Gender changes were also evident in the figure of the ‘New Woman’ with female employment up by twenty five percent and all women receiving the vote in 1920.⁵³ These insecurities were directly addressed in the hard-boiled novel, not simply to

⁵⁰ McKeon, pp.xiv - xv.

⁵¹ Over 3,500 series mysteries have been written by women since 1878. In 1993 and 1994, over 200 new titles with series detective characters were released by women authors. In 1992, 40 percent of all mysteries published were by women. In 1995, titles published in paperback, a segment more sensitive to market demands than hardback sales, were nearly evenly divided between men and women authors. Dabney G. Hart ‘Women of Mystery’ Cosmos Club Web Journal. <http://www.cosmosclub.org/web/journals/1999/hart.html>. [accessed 5 May 2015].

⁵² Rzepka, pp.185-6.

⁵³ Rzepka, p.185.

document them but also suggesting a solution in the figure of the detective. Cawelti talks about how ‘the hard-boiled detective finds himself up against a corrupt and violent society that threatens to destroy him’. However, instead of succumbing to these ‘demands, threats and bribes’ he ‘exposes [...] corruption and phoniness’.⁵⁴ Thus the American hard-boiled detective novel, at its supposed inception in the 1920s, would appear to function as a self-reflexive cultural and social milestone, cataloguing its historical moment. By recognizing the hard-boiled novel as both a reflection of contemporary events and a possible solution to ongoing issues, the intricate nature of generic categorisation becomes clearer. McKeon comments that:

Genres provide a conceptual framework for the mediation (if not the ‘solution’) of intractable problems, a method of rendering such problems intelligible. The ideological status of genre, like that of all conceptual categories, lies in its explanatory and problem ‘solving’ capacities.⁵⁵

Thus genre as a method of categorisation ‘renders [...] problems intelligible’, in that it provides a means of understanding or resolving questions that arise out of social change. The process of rendering ‘intelligible’ is limited, however, by the existing social practices that organise and regulate relationships within society. McKeon continues by clarifying the basis of this function:

And generic form itself, the dense network of a conventionality that is both elastic and profoundly regulative, is the prior and most tacitly powerful mechanism of the explanatory method of genre.⁵⁶

What we have then is a category that attempts to give social meaning to ‘intractable problems’ which is both elastic and regulative, possessing the generic ‘capacity of change without changing into something else’. But social forms are as McKeon points out, ‘*profoundly* regulative’ and whilst genre has the capacity to change, this is likely to encompass further regulation. In what ways might this account relate to the hard-boiled novel and its use as a feminist tool to express women’s agency? McKeon defines genre as elastic, responsive to changes or shifts in society. He comments:

Genres fill a need for which no adequate alternative method exists. And when they change, it is as part of a change both in the need they exist to fill and in the means that exist for its fulfilment.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Cawelti, pp.160-1.

⁵⁵ McKeon, p.20.

⁵⁶ McKeon, p.20.

⁵⁷ McKeon, p.20.

Thus we might see the 1920s ‘needs’ as fulfilled by the larger than life male detective who sought to maintain his status as a ‘tough guy’. By extension then the 1980s version of the crime novel has a very different ‘need’ which is fulfilled, I will argue by a feminist incursion, adapting the representation of the detective to its own particular needs.

Both of these points in the history of the crime novel, in this instance the hard-boiled form of the 1920s and the flowering of the genre in the 1980s, are part of a historical generic continuum answering the differing, arguably conflicting needs of different communities of reader. McKeon sees conflict as a necessary corollary to generic construction. He argues that the novel, during its lengthy inception, revealed a ‘dynamic model of conflict’ in that the social changes of the time produced contrasting epistemological concerns that were then incorporated, in different and conflicting ways into the emergent genre.⁵⁸ The idea of a genre as a ‘dynamic model of conflict’ is a useful way to perceive the crime novel both in terms of the way it responds to historical and social events and how it is read. This is confirmed by Janice Radway in book *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*, who considers as part of her argument, the significance of popular culture in relation to reading pleasures. She suggests that genres such as romance and crime ‘express debates within society’ and reflect ‘struggle, tension, and conflict’.⁵⁹ She makes the connection between genre as a social form and ‘literary production and consumption as complex social processes’, commenting that ‘cultural forms are embedded in the social lives of their users’ such that these narratives offer a means of investigating conflicts in a medium that is at once familiar and accessible.⁶⁰ Walton and Jones agree that ‘trends in popular fiction are driven by changes in society’ and therefore expresses desires and fears that are very real.⁶¹ They comment:

In one sense realist fiction defines and conventionalises the limits of its audience’s shifting conceptions of reality at the same time that it allows

⁵⁸ McKeon, p.21.

⁵⁹ Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (London: Verso, 1994), p.4.

⁶⁰ Radway, p.6-7.

⁶¹ Walton and Jones, p.12.

its readers to explore, mediate, and manage their fantasies and fears about those limits.⁶²

Significantly this process ‘to explore, mediate and manage’ is not simply about interpretation and clarification of the texts, but about negotiation and renegotiation, such that ‘ideological investment’ is pleasurable.⁶³ Thus, arguably, for the male reader of the *Black Mask* stories the 1920 hard-boiled form offered a detective who resisted the corruption of the city and the ‘new woman’ and represented forms of idealistic justice based on male dominance and success. Walton and Jones see the 1980 hard-boiled version operating similarly, commenting that female readers invested in a crime novel that was a ‘reflection of and on, the changes in women’s roles and perceptions of them(selves) and their abilities’.⁶⁴ To return to McKeon’s point that genre works to ‘render intelligible’, this would seem particularly apposite for the crime novel as a form that offers readers a method of negotiating, debating, making sense of social changes, through a narrative that has investigation as its modus operandi. In effect this is a literature that encourages women writers to ‘talk back’ to past formations of gendered identities in order to ‘explore, mediate and manage their fantasies and fears’.⁶⁵

Genre, gender and social myths: creating a ‘surrogate public history’

Accepting the hard-boiled detective novel as a form that incorporates conflict, both in terms of its consumption and its subject matter, allows us to more fully understand how a text can embrace both a masculinist and feminist position. In McKeon’s example of the novel, these conflicts reveal the emergence or development of a genre, one that is ‘designed to confront, on the level of the narrative form and content, both intellectual and social crisis’.⁶⁶ My analysis of the hard-boiled novel establishes that conflict or confrontation is paramount to its construction in that it is a form that modifies and develops in response to change or crises in society. The investigative nature of the texts offers ways of negotiating and challenging the effects of these critical junctures because the criminal act exposes the workings of social regulation. However, and this is significant, hard-boiled literature does not just

⁶² Walton and Jones, pp.12-13.

⁶³ Walton and Jones, pp.12-13.

⁶⁴ Walton and Jones, p.13.

⁶⁵ Walton and Jones, p.13.

⁶⁶ McKeon, p.20.

question dominant ideologies, it contributes to the naturalisation of new ideologies. Walton and Jones argue that the hard-boiled novel is a means of subversion, in which women writers ‘resituate and redirect power’ offering women readers a means of ‘empowerment’.⁶⁷ Thus the hard-boiled detective novel is more than a simulacrum of ‘intellectual and social crisis’ or a site of cognition and challenge, it has the capacity to bring about a change beyond the text. But how is this change achieved? At what point might this subversion become part of social practice?

Mike Davis in his work *City of Quartz: Evacuating the Future in Los Angeles* argues that such changes are realized through the construction of social myths, ones that through the imaginary of cultural industries, such as Hollywood, become embedded in our collective public consciousness.⁶⁸ Davis uses the term ‘surrogate public history’ to explain the process whereby society promulgates ‘mythological constructs’ to salve or remedy social unease.⁶⁹ Through repetition of these myths they are accepted as reality and become part of our known public history and consequently impact on our understanding of the present. Davis’ example of the changing fortunes of Los Angeles shows that often one myth is substituted for another because external factors change or revise the original myth. His examination of pre-1900 Los Angeles is a clear example of how an imagined sunshine state was given veracity through a re-visioning of California’s native inhabitants. He examines the process of romanticising its indigenous population to sell land to property developers as an ancient Spanish mission – thus incorporating in ‘landscape and consumption’ an architectural style that sold Southern California as a place of romantic and historic sensibilities and habits, a style that concealed its racist and violent reality. The myth of Spanish romanticism became for Los Angeles its historical reality, giving meaning to a time that was not based on truth but formulated by a real estate profiteers to become part of its ‘surrogate history’.⁷⁰

Davis’ work is particularly relevant because it incorporates an analysis of Los

⁶⁷ Walton and Jones, p.13.

⁶⁸ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Evacuating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990).

⁶⁹ Davis, p.44.

⁷⁰ Those that embraced this myth were given a stylised image of ‘race relations as a pastoral ritual of obedience and paternalism’ and not the reality of ‘forced labour [...] racial terrorism and lynchings’. Los Angeles’ fictional Spanish past not only sublimated contemporary class struggle, but also censored, and repressed from all view the actual plight of [...] California’s descendants’. And so the sunshine state was born. Davis, p.27.

Angeles in the 1930s when hard-boiled detective writers were contributing to the Noir genre and participating in their own myth making. The Noir myth was born out of dissatisfaction with the existing Los Angeles mythology. The sunshine state enticed those keen to be part of a re-imagined Los Angeles, in particular to Hollywood, offering a creative outlet to East Coast intelligentsia desperate to be part of the new world. However, the reality of the sunshine state did not live up to its myth and the dream factory of Hollywood was an exacting employer.⁷¹ The Depression of the late 1920s fuelled in Los Angeles (more than many other American states) a ‘downwardly mobile middle stratum at war with itself’.⁷² Davis charts their demise through their loss of savings and the depletion of cheap labour (the product of the deportation of thousands of Mexican immigrants) and consequentially their impact on the mythology of the sunshine state.

These Depression-crazed middle classes of Southern California became, in one mode or another, the original protagonists of that great myth usually known as Noir. Beginning in 1934, with James M. Cain’s *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, a succession of through-the-glass-darkly novels – all produced by writers under contract to the studio system – repainted the image of Los Angeles as a deracinated urban hell.⁷³

In the 1930s, prior to the Paramount Decree, the Hollywood studios were king.⁷⁴ They largely controlled every aspect of their employees’ lives and gave rise to what was defined as the velvet trap of the studio system.⁷⁵ Many of the screenwriters who worked for them were hard-up novelists who had been scouted by the studios and forced into contracts that shackled and quashed their creativity. The characters they spawned were often the product of their own disillusionment, angry at those in authority, small ‘ordinary’ men, fighting the good fight against the ‘unscrupulous giants of the world’.⁷⁶ Thus another permutation of Los Angeles was manufactured, and through it another formulation of the detective, with his righteous antipathy towards those that threatened his own myth, that of masculinity. These ‘mythological constructs’ are temporary and necessary to a contemporaneous need, and they offer a

⁷¹ “You had to punch the Clock. They would walk around and see if everybody was typing.” Quoted in Neal Gabler, *An Empire Of Their Own: How The Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Crown, 1988), p.324.

⁷² Davis, p.36-7.

⁷³ Davis, p.37.

⁷⁴ The Paramount Decree of 1948 stopped vertical monopoly by the seven major Hollywood studios, Paramount, Universal, MGM, Twentieth Century-Fox, Warner Bros., Columbia and RKO.

⁷⁵ Davis, p.38.

⁷⁶ Davis, p.38.

desirable way of perceiving society irrespective of what one might know to be reality. Davis comments that Chandler's Marlowe 'symbolised the small businessman locked into a struggle with gangsters, corrupt police and the parasitic rich (who were usually his employers as well) - a romanticised simulacrum of the writer's relationship to the studio hacks and moguls'.⁷⁷ This revision is accepted as truth, a surrogate public history that enters the public consciousness and furnishes a collective understanding of that moment in history.

The hard-boiled novel as a form of resistance

Often, as Davis has shown with his analysis of Noir, these myths are a product of popular culture, created as a counter or answer to the regulative practice of social categorisation. In this way the formation of a surrogate public history can be said to be analogous to generic construction in that it fulfils a need and through repetition is given credence. McKeon comments are pertinent here:

Much modern criticism relies on a model of ideology that attributes to literature the basic function of reinforcing a 'dominant' or 'hegemonic' socio-cultural norm, conceiving literature as a regulatory system of 'containment' that only in unusual cases can be mobilised in the 'counter-hegemonic' direction of resistance.⁷⁸

Whilst I want to attribute 'resistance' to the feminist writings of the 1980s hard-boiled novel, it is also relevant to the work produced in the 1920s and 1930s (and beyond). It is the friction between 'reinforcing a "dominant" or "hegemonic" socio-cultural norm' and resistance to the norm that makes the hard-boiled novel one that is dynamic, fluid and open to subversive changes. McKeon goes on to say that 'containment and resistance (should be) mutually constitutive' in the process of study, but it is not just in terms of understanding hard-boiled detective literature that this constitutive aspect should be taken on board, rather it needs to be accepted as part of its very nature.⁷⁹ Thus recognising the myth of the 'tough' wisecracking male detective as a response to forms of social regulation is a necessary part of appreciating how the hard-boiled detective novel offers women writers a form to investigate, challenge and revise naturalised gender definitions. This literature has always offered ways of scrutinising gender relations and the way such relations are

⁷⁷ Davis, p.38.

⁷⁸ McKeon, p.xviii.

⁷⁹ McKeon, p.xviii.

perceived as natural. In effect it can reveal a surrogate public history that highlights how gendered lives are bound by structures of regulation both in terms of social expectation but also to the law (that which determines legitimacy), which is at the heart of the hard-boiled form. Through the myths that it creates this literature contributes to constructions of ideological naturalisation which are born out of conflict and dissatisfaction. As an extension of this myth making, the hard-boiled form is also one that has participated in the creation of socially relevant heroes. That these heroes become part of a collective re-telling of a moment in history because they answer a social need must be applicable to both the 1920s and the 1980s.⁸⁰ Crucially the hard-boiled format of the 1920s and 1930s is one that explores not just gender definitions but the regulation of gender divisions, in that it repeatedly locates women as the object within a binary relationship with men. Whilst reliance on the simplicity of a binary separation of masculinity and femininity is restrictive, it is often a default position that is given value. From Davis' perspective, such reliance can be understood as offering forms of reassurance, that social regulation of gender, or what it means to be a woman or a man, is sustained. However, the nature of a surrogate public history, that is the production of a new, substitutive myth, reveals not just the dominant, desired mythology, but also what it displaces and works to hide, and to return to Frosh's point 'the stronger the negation the more important the truth of what has been negated'.⁸¹ In this way, one might suggest, the hard-boiled detective novel is a form that generates, and re-generates 'positions of resistance and agency', that are open to succeeding generations of writers who wish to contribute to the production of new surrogate public histories and who wish to situate their female detectives as the important truth, forcefully at the heart of the narrative.⁸²

Chapter Outline

The process of 'challenging dominant perceptions' is fundamental to my approach throughout this thesis, both in term of genre and gender. In Chapter One I focus on the works of Raymond Chandler and his detective Philip Marlowe as a way of determining what McKeon calls the 'dominant norm'. I have chosen Chandler because of his status as a forerunner within the hard-boiled form and his evocation of

⁸⁰ Davis, p.37.

⁸¹ Frosh, p.121.

⁸² Walton and Jones, p.93.

a ‘tough,’ mythical masculinity. I have elected to concentrate on Chandler instead of Dashiell Hammett (the other influential crime writer of the 1930s) because Chandler contributed to the critical perception of the detective. The following quotation from Chandler’s seminal essay ‘The Simple Art of Murder’ has become synonymous with the form and the earliest evocations of the hero:

Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honour.⁸³

This quotation identifies not just the myth but the extraordinary masculinity that it demands. Using Chandler, I outline the way the power of the detective is defined. I consider the way the critical analysis of the hard-boiled detective is often limited by its failure to allow the conflicting and fluid elements of the detective’s representation to be made known. As a consequence Marlowe is defined as the ‘dominant norm’ both of the genre because he is the repeated prototype, but also as an evocation of what Chandler calls ‘extraordinary’ masculinity. I connect the characterisation of Marlowe to Judith Butler’s concept of repetition. Butler, who extensively discusses the politics of gender performance, comments that ‘gender is produced as a ritualised repetition of conventions, and that this ritual is socially compelled’ suggesting that without such a repetition gender specificity, that is, femininity or masculinity, is uncertain.⁸⁴ Thus we might see Marlowe’s gendered identity, his mythology, as performed to comply with or revise a socially inscribed set of behaviours.⁸⁵ My intent is to show that Marlowe is a man who struggles to maintain this myth and as such is vulnerable to societal pressures. By identifying the gaps in this myth I establish how the hard-boiled form is open to alternative representations of the detective. In doing so I reveal the fractures evident within this mythology and also how such myths contribute to a surrogate public history in which masculinity is dominant.

⁸³ Raymond Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder* (New York: Ballantine, 1972), pp. 16-17.

⁸⁴ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p.31.

⁸⁵ The concept of performativity to reveal the illusion of gender or its ‘phantasmatic status’ by effectively failing to produce characters that comply with the ‘ritual of socially compelled gender’ is a concept I return to when I discuss the work of Val McDermid.

In Chapter Two I move away from the foundational, critically esteemed work of Chandler to explore, as counterpoint, the ‘pulp’ writing of Mickey Spillane. My choice to use Spillane is not because he constitutes an easy critical movement between Chandler and my later analysis of women writers within the genre; rather it is because Spillane’s body of work is pivotal to my examination of the genre as one that evolves to address the complexity of gendered identities. Spillane’s evocation of the hard-boiled detective novel speaks of excess, of extremes of behaviour and response. Critical responses to Spillane’s crime writing have been caustic; Knight for example described his work as ‘sadistic’.⁸⁶ These extremes, whilst stylistically different from the careful detail and particularity of Chandler’s detective, can also be understood as a response to the timeframe in which they were written, that of 1950s America. His work offers a trajectory between Chandler and the women’s texts because Spillane’s writing opens up a very specific way of perceiving gender production. Spillane’s excess, despite its critical rejection, should not be ignored, since by expressing a violent repulsion of femininity it further identifies women as necessary, or in Frosh’s terms the ‘important truth’.⁸⁷

Having established the model of the detective in Chandler’s work and the ability of the hard-boiled form to encompass the extremes of Spillane’s characterization, I turn my attention to women writers and their revision of the hard-boiled detective novel. Chapter Three is pivotal to my argument about what happens to the form when women enter this perceived masculinised field. I argue that the hard-boiled detective novel is the perfect arena to consider feminism and the articulation of women oriented political agendas because this is a form that provokes forms of gender enquiry. As such it can offer an expression of a surrogate public history in which the lives of women are given value. The principal writers I examine are Sue Grafton and Linda Barnes, who are American and Sarah Dunant who is British. My decision to include British writers alongside American contributors is in part to illustrate how the form can bend to incorporate differing social influences but it is also a choice that reflects my own cultural history and reading pleasures. Whilst Grafton tends to be included in critical responses to the form neither Barnes nor Dunant have received much academic attention. Such exclusion suggests a gap in the critical body of work,

⁸⁶ Knight, p.123.

⁸⁷ Frosh, p.121.

which I address, but it also implies a limitation to the way the form is delineated in the 1980s, creating in effect a new ‘normative bias’ that accords literary status unevenly. I have chosen these authors because they offer levels of identification that exists in the daily experience of women. As a means of under-scoring the agenda of these 1980s writers I have developed the term ‘gestic’, drawing on Brecht’s concept of *gest* which I use as means of defining the distinguishing aspects of these women-centred texts. The term *gestic* underlines the repeated detail and particularity that expresses the habits and the everyday lives of women. As such my model of *gestic* writing connects directly to the production of a surrogate public history that reveals the gender inequalities evident in the 1980s and also works to create new histories for women in which the binary of femininity and masculinity, and its allocation of power, is substantively broken down. This *gestic* quality I argue is the means by which the private concerns of the female detective are given value sometimes at the cost of the public investigation and resolution of the crime. *Gestic* writing is also how these authors ‘talk back’ to Chandler and Spillane: firstly by drawing on the critically agreed formulaic typography and secondly by challenging previously incorporated negative portrayals of women.

In Chapter Four I consider the area of the hard-boiled detective form that has been persistently identified as ‘problematic’ in relation to feminist writers, that is violence.⁸⁸ My aim is to show that the violence of the formula can and should be accessible to the female detective as a form of agency without the encumbrance of social censure. Knight comments ‘the violence of language and action of the (female) private eye [...] seems contrary to the tenet of feminism’.⁸⁹ My intention here is to refute these claims. In order to achieve this I consider the ways in which women writers have deployed the formulaic violence in what I consider to be varying degrees of success. The criteria for this model of success are based on the how such violence is integrated. I want to establish the difference between violence that reinforces the regulatory inscription of women and violence that offers women opportunities to reject regulation and define their own agency, to take for themselves the constitutive properties of violence.

⁸⁸ Glover states that the violence of the form does not ‘allow an easy male/female transposition’ Glover, p.78.

⁸⁹ Knight, p.163.

In Chapter Five I illustrate the diversity and flexibility of the hard-boiled novel and its ability to modify in response to social and cultural change through the work of British author Val McDermid. My decision to focus on McDermid's work is because she has created three very different central investigators, all of whom offer commentaries on the social and political condition of Britain in the 1980s and 1990s. Through McDermid's work I explore by what means alternative evocations of the private investigator can open up our understanding of how gender is experienced. McDermid's three investigative characters offer the means to further consider how surrogate public histories might be formed and reformed to meet the differing needs of women and men. In this chapter, I explore the use of pastiche or parody and its relationship to the concept of gender performance. McDermid's investigative characters open up to question the fixity of identity through a form of 'parodic' performativity extending Butler's concept of gender as 'a ritualised repetition of conventions'.⁹⁰ McDermid's writing, as I will show, engages with the concept of performativity to reveal the illusion of gender or its 'phantasmatic status' by effectively failing to produce characters that comply with the 'ritual of socially compelled gender'.⁹¹

In my last chapter I consider a single text that rejects one of the most basic precepts of the formulaic patterning of the form that is the legal standing of the detective. In doing so this text offers what we might see in McKeon's terms, a more fully realised, literature of resistance. The text is *Easy Money* by Jenny Siler, published in 1998, and has as its key female character, Allie Kerry, a drugs trafficker.⁹² Through Kerry as criminal and outlaw, Siler I believe reworks the hard-boiled form by resisting or displacing the structural fixity of the form.⁹³ By this I mean that the elementary concept of what constitutes legality and criminality within the hard-boiled detective novel is questioned and revised by Siler, through the legitimising of Kerry as outlaw. Siler's characterisation of Kerry evokes a contemporary manifestation of the outlaw in a form that typically expels such a figure. Such a contradictory characterisation

⁹⁰ Judith Butler, 'Melancholy gender/ Refused identification' in *Constructing Masculinity*, ed by Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson, (New York: Routledge, 1995), p.31.

⁹¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp.146-7.

⁹² Jenny Siler, *Easy Money* (London: Orion, 1998).

⁹³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* Trans, Robert Hurley (London: Viking Penguin, 1977).

both challenges the conservative structuring of the form but also highlights what underpins the regulatory social and political structures of America in the late 1990s. Having removed this fundamental formulaic structure my contention is that Siler's investigative figure is powerfully situated beyond the law and indeed the binary division of gender as proposed through the Symbolic Law. Perhaps more than any of the other female authors I examine in this thesis, Siler's text posits a surrogate public history in which femininity is not defined through contrast with, or rejection of, masculinity.

Thus my approach to studying the hard-boiled detective novel aims to celebrate its fluidity, because it is this innate flexibility that has allowed this literature to become the site of peculiarly unexpected if not contradictory gender explorations, in which women are able to 'talk back' to a form that has previously negated them. The hard-boiled detective novel remains a recognisable formulaic form that critics and readers embrace, however, the fact that this is a genre that can encompass the diversity of Mickey Spillane, Sue Grafton and Jenny Siler also establishes its breadth and unpredictability, making it an extraordinarily mobile crime form.

Chapter One - Deconstructing masculinity: Raymond Chandler and the 'symbolic' Marlowe

Introduction:

He is the hero, he is everything. ¹

In *Farewell My Lovely* Philip Marlowe, Chandler's eponymous detective forcefully takes control when, as part of an ongoing investigation, he confronts armed guards on a gambling boat. In what has become seen as his typical assertive style he calculates the pace of an attack and then draws his gun:

I dropped and did a leapfrog sideways and the swish of the blackjack was a long spent sigh in the quiet air. It was getting to be that every blackjack in the neighbourhood swung at me automatically. The tall one swore. I said: 'Go ahead and be heroes'. I clicked the safety catch loudly.²

Despite the odds being stacked against him, Marlowe escapes unharmed, reinforcing his position of a man of power. This then is how the masculine world of the hard-boiled format is delineated; it consciously engages with the action and adventure stories of the 1920s published in the *Black Mask*, where the central male character was 'equated with action, speed, combat, confrontation and pursuit'.³ Within this world masculinity is self-sufficient, potent, aggressive and morally just. The search for solutions to the central mystery of the text necessitates a series of confrontations with other men in the masculine arena of bars and clubs.⁴ Thus when John Cawelti writes 'the world of a formula can be described as an archetypal story pattern embodied in the images, symbols, themes and myths of a particular culture' he is signalling the intensely masculine cultural patterning seen in this fiction.⁵ The rigid gendering of the hard-boiled format is the focus of this chapter. Through the works of Raymond Chandler, one of the leading figures of the form, I will detail the construction of this mythical hero. I will then identify alternative ways of reading this mythology, such that the detective as masculine hero is understood as both a product of his time and subject to the social regulation of gender.

¹ Raymond Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder* (New York: Ballantine, 1972), pp. 16-17.

² Raymond Chandler, *Farewell My Lovely* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1940), p.226. (All further references cited as *FML* and page number in the text).

³ Glover, p.75.

⁴ Cawelti, p.60.

⁵ Cawelti, p.60.

I want to use Chandler's novels as a starting point to illustrate the way the hard-boiled form has generated and maintained a rigid, historically determined definition of gender difference, such that masculinity is valorised at the expense of femininity. Academic criticism directed at the concept of a feminist hard-boiled detective novel is predicated on the ongoing belief that the form promulgates a hetero-patriarchal norm that in the words of Gill Plain is 'profoundly anti-feminist'.⁶ Whilst it is clear that Chandler's mythologizing of masculinity through the figure of the detective actively works to negate femininity, it is the process of understanding the contemporary societal pressure that produced such a myth which gives opportunities for women writers to re-vision the form. By examining Chandler's representation of the detective I will demonstrate Michael McKeon's premise, that placing a fixed and limiting time-frame on the formation of a genre, both restricts knowledge of the genre itself and defines its parameters. As McKeon argues 'genres provide a conceptual framework for the mediation (if not the 'solution') of intractable problems' and that this 'problem solving capacity' is relevant to the time of writing and therefore susceptible to change.⁷ John Peterson in his article 'A Cosmic View of the Private Eye' argued that Chandler's writing was born out of the Depression era. He commented that Marlowe 'must indeed have seemed a wonderfully attractive symbol to the men who lost their pride in the bread lines and employment offices of the decade'.⁸ Chandler was seen as championing the ordinary man in his construction of the detective as a potent, desirable symbol of his time thus delivering a way of perceiving masculinity with which male readers could identify.

Peterson goes on to reinforce his account of the contemporaneousness of this 'symbol' when he comments that Chandler's work was a response to the social conditions of America of the 1930s: in the process of registering the world of 'the Great Depression, flappers, gangsterism, and the Fascist Solution' his writing attempts 'to approximate the central experience of the age'.⁹ Peterson argues that Chandler's writing addresses 'an age of transition in which men are less confident of their values and their motives, less pleased with the society they have constructed'.¹⁰

⁶ Plain, p.212.

⁷ McKeon, p.20.

⁸ John Peterson, 'A Cosmic View of the Private Eye', *The Saturday Review*, 22 August 1953, p.33.

⁹ Peterson, p.32.

¹⁰ Peterson, p.32.

Chandler's work in response to the 1930's Depression participates in the process of creating a desirable social myth in the form of 'symbolic' Marlowe. The construction of this 'attractive symbol' to salve unease becomes, in Davis' terms, a form of surrogate public history.¹¹ Approaching Chandler's work in this way opens up to scrutiny the construction or the artifice behind this mythological detective and his idealised masculinity, and also offers a means of questioning its contribution to a surrogate public history that readers engage with.

In the first section of this chapter, I will use Chandler's writing to outline the way the detective's authority is defined and formalised. This will allow me to plot the model of masculinity that these texts appear to offer, but also to establish the way this masculinity is critically read. Academic analysis of the form has consistently reinforced a perception of masculinity that validates and endorses the detective's mythology and in doing so aspects of the detective's identity have been occluded. In this section I explore Chandler's approach to the creation of Marlowe as the archetypal detective. Foremost is the depiction of a 'tough guy' who endures hardship and withstands the seductive and tainting influence of femininity.¹² This initial analysis opens up the practices of gender identity in these texts, making it possible in the latter half of this chapter to examine the way the hard-boiled novel seems to unconsciously reveal through the voice of the detective a man who struggles to maintain this perfected masculinity. As a means of clarifying this alternative representation of the detective, I firstly consider the concept of gender performance. Using the work of Judith Butler I examine both the artifice and the regulation of gender seen in the figuring of Marlowe. Butler comments that 'gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame' suggesting that not only is the detective's idealised masculinity achieved through constant repetition, but also that it not something he can control.¹³ In addition to the performative nature of masculinity I examine the concept of 'gestus' and what Bertolt Brecht in his work *The Development of an Aesthetic* calls the 'realm of gest' in which the minutiae of everyday life makes visible a character's social positioning and the causality of their behaviour. For Brecht, whose work has

¹¹ Davis comments on the way Californian realtors created an idealised Spanish history for Los Angeles in order to sell it to prospective migrants. Davis, p.37.

¹² Cawelti, p.151.

¹³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.33.

as its focus the theatre, this allows an actor to pay critical attention to a character's 'manifold utterances' including 'physical attitude, tone of voice and facial expression (which) are all determined by social gest'.¹⁴ The detail within the hard-boiled detective novel can be defined as a type of gest, revealing the detective to be vulnerable and consequently not the 'extraordinary' man that Chandler insisted was a necessary corollary for the Private Eye.¹⁵ I also employ the concept of 'slapstick', which for the purposes of this thesis can be understood as a physical compulsion or a reaction to external pressure outside of a person's control. Walter Benjamin in his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' discusses slapstick in relation to the comedy of Chaplin, whose dislocated gestures 'dissect the expressive movements of human beings into a series of minute innervations' to reveal, according to Benjamin, the link between new technologies and the body.¹⁶ Benjamin connects Chaplin's jerky movements to the repetitive processes of the production line creating technologically mediated gestures over which Chaplin has little control. My intention is to explore slapstick as a means to further draw out my examination of the involuntary responses of the detective to the events of the investigation. Slapstick then has the capacity to expose the detective's failure to maintain the mythology of the 'tough guy'.¹⁷ Together gest and slapstick reveal the mechanisms that hold in place this 'tough guy' persona and by extension his contribution to the surrogate public history that identifies masculinity as powerful.

The hard-boiled hero – Chandler's 'extraordinary' creation

Raymond Chandler was an American author of crime stories and novels of immense influence, especially on the style of writing and attitudes now held to be characteristic of the hard-boiled form. My choice to focus on Chandler is significantly because he is thus perceived as instrumental in the development of the form in terms of the construction of the detective and his role at the centre of the formula. Equally important is Chandler's literary reputation; he is cited by many

¹⁴ Brecht, p.197.

¹⁵ Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder*, pp.16-17.

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: The Second Version," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 3, 1935-1938*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone, et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p.117.

¹⁷ Jonathan Goldman argues that 'slapstick treats both people and things as objects'. Jonathan Goldman, 'Double Exposure: Charlie Chaplin as Author and Celebrity' *M/C Journal* 7.5 (2004). <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0411/05-goldman.php> [accessed 1 April 2010].

critics as one of the formative ‘fathers’ of hard-boiled fiction.¹⁸ Balazs Biro comments ‘Breaking the Norms of the Detective Genre’ that Chandler is ‘revered as one of the most influential crime writers’ in American literature.¹⁹ Philip Marlowe, Chandler’s protagonist, is now synonymous with ‘private detective’ and Marlowe operates as a model for subsequent writers. To earn a living with his creative talent, Chandler taught himself to write pulp fiction. He explained in a letter to a previous school teacher how he perfected his art by copying successful stories by Erle Stanley Gardner, a current *Black Mask* writer, until he was satisfied that they matched Gardner’s for ‘pace and characterisation’. Chandler told Gardner of his efforts complaining that ‘In the end I was a bit sore because I couldn’t try to sell them. It looked pretty good’.²⁰

Chandler’s first story, ‘Blackmailers Don’t Shoot’, was published in *Black Mask* magazine in 1933. Frank Gruber, writing about the pulp-fiction market in the 1930s considered *Black Mask* the ‘goal of all pulp writers’ and the ‘elite’ magazine within its field.²¹ W.F. Nolan, who extensively documents the *Black Mask* writers, comments that ‘there is little doubt that the lurid adventures of the super-tough guy influenced many other pulp writers in the creation of a legion of gut-busting detectives’.²² The representation of this masculinity came in part from the perception of what the reader of the hard-boiled detective story wanted. Philip C. Cody, an early editor of the *Black Mask* magazine, believed its success was built on the ‘honest-to-Jasper, he-man stuff’ it gave its readers.²³ Joseph Shaw, one of the best known editors of the magazine, wrote in 1933 a heavily romanticised description of the ‘ideal’ male reader:

¹⁸ Haycraft establishes Marlowe along with Hammett as influential within the genre. Howard Haycraft, *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story*, revised edition (New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1941). Also see Knight, *Crime Fiction 1800 – 2000: Detection, Death, Diversity*. Chapter Five has a separate section on Chandler and on Hammett.

¹⁹Balazs Biro, ‘Raymond Chandler: Breaking the Norms of the Detective’ <http://www.allbookez.com/pdf> (2004) [accessed 21 September 2013].

²⁰ Roy Meador, ‘Chandler in the Thirties: Apprenticeship of an Angry Man’, *Book Forum*, 6.2 (1982), pp.143-153.

²¹ Frank Gruber, *The Pulp Jungle* (Los Angeles: Sherbourne Press, 1967), p.20.

²² Nolan, p.38.

²³ Nolan, p.23.

He is vigorous-minded [...] hating unfairness, trickery, injustice [...] responsive to the thrill of dander, the stirring exhilaration of clean, swift, hard action.²⁴

Chandler, who was ambitious to produce successful work, wanted to be published in *Black Mask* but unlike many of the ‘pulp’ writers of the time his perfectionism meant that he was slow to complete pieces of work. Roy Meador in his article ‘Chandler in the Thirties: Apprenticeship of an Angry Man’ comments that his ‘output was miniscule’ but written to perfection, with the result that Chandler achieved literary acclaim but was financially poor.²⁵ His first novel, *The Big Sleep*, was published in 1939 and was deemed a success.²⁶ Literary achievement led to work as a Hollywood screenwriter: he and Billy Wilder co-wrote *Double Indemnity* (1944), based upon James M. Cain’s novel of the same name. His only original screenplay was *The Blue Dahlia* (1946) and whilst Chandler has said that he did not enjoy the Hollywood experience his involvement with key, well known productions meant his influence and fame grew, as did his position as a crucial exponent of the hard-boiled form.²⁷

This reputation has been reinforced by critical analysis of the literature which has consistently lauded Chandler as central to the form’s development. Interestingly the first responses to the novels were from the writers themselves who no doubt had a vested interest in contributing to such canonisation. Dashiell Hammett, Chandler’s contemporary, reviewed recently published work from the perspective of both a writer and someone who had worked in the trade (he was a detective for Pinkerton National Detective Agency), arguing for realism and plausibility within the form.²⁸

²⁴ Nolan, p.28.

²⁵ Meador, pp.143-153.

²⁶ Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1939). (All further references cited as *TBS*, and page number in the text).

²⁷ Knight, pp.117-8. There are an interesting set of connections here in terms of Chandler’s influence and the interrelatedness of the form. The title of the screenplay and subsequent film, which achieved critical acclaim, was used as a nickname in 1946 when Elizabeth Short was murdered and given the moniker ‘The Black Dahlia’. The *Los Angeles Herald-Express* reporter Bevo Means, is credited with first using the “Black Dahlia” name. The events of Short’s death were then used by James Ellroy, a Noir writer whose career started in the 1980s, as the basis of his novel *The Black Dahlia*, (The Mysterious Press, 1987). Ellroy was an admirer of the 1930s detective novelists including Chandler and Hammett, although he favoured Hammett’s ‘mendacity and greed’. Nathaniel Rich, ‘James Ellroy, The Art of Fiction No. 201’ *The Paris Review*, <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5948/the-art-of-fiction-no-201-james-ellroy> [accessed 21 July 2015].

²⁸ Robert L Gale, *A Dashiell Hammett Companion*, (Connecticut Greenwood Press, 2000), p.32. Richard Layman, *Dashiell Hammett: A Descriptive Bibliography*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979).

Raymond Chandler's approach was more subjective, perhaps because his own style of writing was more emotively driven.²⁹ Chandler praised Hammett in pieces for the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine which were collected in *The Simple Art of Murder*, *Chandler Before Marlowe*, and *Raymond Chandler Speaking*.³⁰ The most important essay is 'The Simple Art of Murder' in which he singled out Hammett an 'ace performer'.³¹ Within this essay Chandler also set out what we might perceive as the 'rules' of the form, although these were more about the attributes of the detective than codes designed to fulfil the requirements of the formula. In his often repeated definition (indeed included in my own introduction) Chandler characterizes the hard-boiled detective as unequivocally extraordinary.

He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honour.³²

It is this contribution of Chandler to the critical process, as well as his creation of detective Philip Marlowe, that has made him an ideal starting point for my study.³³ Chandler and Hammett were contemporaries and grouped as the founders of the hard-boiled school; despite the fact that Chandler speaks of Hammett as the 'one individual [...] picked out to represent the whole movement' (noting Hammett's mastery of the American language and his adherence to reality) it is Chandler's perception of what the hard-boiled form is, as well as his status as Hammett's successor that establishes him as the key figure within the form, both in the 1930s and today.³⁴

Slightly more impartial criticism of the hard-boiled novel started in the 1940s with Howard Haycraft publishing *Murder for Pleasure: the Life and Times of the Detective Story* (1941) with separate pages on Chandler and Hammett, reinforcing

²⁹ Ian Fleming said that Chandler offered 'some of the finest dialogue written in any prose today'. His swift-moving, hardboiled style was inspired by Hammett, however, his work is punctuated by sharp and lyrical similes. Robert Moss, *Raymond Chandler A Literary Reference* (New York: Carrol & Graf, 2002), p.73.

³⁰ *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, ed. by Dorothy Gardiner and Kathrine Sorley Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962).

The Raymond Chandler Papers: Selected Letters and Nonfiction, 1909-1959, ed. by Tom Hiney and Frank MacShane, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2012).

³¹ Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder*, pp.16-17.

³² Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder*, pp.16-17.

³³ My choice to examine Chandler over Hammett lies in his style of writing and the everyday detail that he evokes. I examine this aspect of the women writers in Chapter Four, arguing that it opens up the texts to a fuller understanding of women's lived experience.

³⁴ Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder*, p.16.

them as the precursors of the form and classifying the hard-boiled novel as historically specific to the 1920s and 1930s. An emphasis on ‘tough’ masculinity was an ongoing theme in many of the texts, evident in *Tough Guy Writers of the Thirties*, edited by David Madden, the very title of which reaffirmed the prominence and inception of the detective.³⁵ This critical direction continued with works such as William Ruehlmann’s *Saint with a Gun: The Unlawful American Private Eye*, a study of the historic background and morality of the detectives in American fiction with a chapter on Chandler, another on Ross Macdonald (author of the Lew Archer novels), and a conclusion that reaches to Ernest Tidyman, the author of the *Shaft* novels and the screenplay of *The French Connection*.³⁶ In 1976 John Cawelti summed up the way many were critically reading and historically placing the hard-boiled form in his text *Adventure Mystery and Romance* when he starts his chapter on ‘The Hard-boiled Detective Story’ thus:

In the early 1920’s there emerged a detective story formula so different from the classical genre that it constituted a distinctive type. The formula was created by many authors, particularly those who wrote for the pulp magazine *Black Mask*.³⁷

Of Chandler, Cawelti said he ‘sought to create a hero who could encounter [...] pervasive corruption, protect the innocent, and maintain his honour’ and in doing so produced a detective who was ‘potent and courageous’.³⁸ As a result, Cawelti (who himself is endlessly referenced by post 2000 critics of the crime genre) reinforced not just past readings of the form and future interpretations of its historical and formulaic boundaries, but also the blueprint for the hard-boiled hero.

The idealised masculinity of the detective

Critical analysis of Chandler’s work underlines the mythology of the hard-boiled detective, reinforcing it with each evocation. Sally Munt suggests the central figure in traditional hard-boiled detective fiction is ‘representative of Man, yet more than a

³⁵ *Tough Guy Writers of the Thirties*, ed. by David Madden (Illinois: Southern University Press, 1968). Contributors to the text included Philip Durham, ‘The *Black Mask* School’; Irving Malin, ‘Focus on The Maltese Falcon’; Robert Edenbaum, ‘The Poetics of the Private Eye: The Novels of Dashiell Hammett’; and Joyce Carol Oates, ‘Man Under Sentence of Death: The Novels of James M. Cain’ all of which combine to confirm the status of these early ‘tough guys’.

³⁶ William Ruehlmann, *Saint with a Gun: The Unlawful American Private Eye* (New York: New York University Press, 1984).

³⁷ Cawelti, p.139.

³⁸ Cawelti, pp.176 & 157.

man' echoing Chandler's own definition of his detective as 'extraordinary'.³⁹ She goes on to identify this central character and the hard-boiled novel as 'iconically masculine'.⁴⁰ This gendering of the traditional hard-boiled text effectively equates the detective with what Glover calls 'an ecology of male power' defining a masculine world in which the detective not only exists but dominates.⁴¹ The hard-boiled detective novel of the 1930s is seen to have rejected the classic detective story that depended on intellectual rationality, in favour of a mental agility that was practical rather than cerebral.⁴² By rejecting the intellectual imperative set up largely by Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie, the hard-boiled formula established a pattern of behaviour and structure that insistently speaks of masculine physicality. Confrontation often involves violent interaction:

I laid the coil spring on the side of his head and he stumbled forward. I followed him down to his knees. I hit him twice more. He made a moaning sound. I took the sap out of his limp hand. He whined. (*FML* p.135)

John Scaggs comments that 'physical courage and fortitude are central to the figure of the Private Eye, who in many ways is defined by his ability to both inflict, and stoically endure, physical punishment'.⁴³ Unlike the detective of the classic novel, the hard-boiled Private Eye enters into the central mystery on a level that suggests a bodily, rather than rational agency, engaging with the threads of the plot in order to gain a personal, at times intimate, knowledge of the criminal act. At the close of *The Big Sleep* Marlowe concedes the level of his involvement 'Me, I was part of the nastiness now'. (*BS*, p.164) However the private detective is not seen to reject the intellectualism that is the basis of detective fiction, but rather to reconstruct this cerebral process; moving from a rationale that formally relies on decoding clues through cogent deduction, to a more practical, personal connection with the mystery. The hard-boiled detective's investigative engagement, the brand of insight that sets him apart as the detective, is one of the ways through which his self-determined masculine prowess is defined. The detective is thus seen as physically part of the investigative process in that he enters into the field of play and as such is said to move the action forward, towards a conclusion. Scaggs identifies this process on a

³⁹ Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder*, pp.16-17.

⁴⁰ Munt, p.1.

⁴¹ Glover, p.74.

⁴² Cawelti, pp.142-3.

⁴³ Scaggs, p.64.

more symbolic plane, commenting that the detective works to ‘restor(e) order [...] to make sense of a fragmented, disjointed, and largely unintelligible world’ establishing the ‘need’ for this figure.⁴⁴ At the level of the narrative his ‘I’ is a central determining force within the structure of the investigation, although his engagement with the criminal act at a personal level can make his choice of employment an uncomfortable burden to bear.

Surviving conflict: the heroic endurance of the detective

The physical prowess of the detective is thus fundamental to his portrayal. As such he is part of a history of ‘tough’ American heroes who prove their masculinity through the brutality of survival and conflict. Detective fiction, with its hero as a survivor, was influenced by the dime novel, which often used frontier settings (perceived as the ultimate physical challenge) which drew from the Leather-Stocking Tales of James Fenimore Cooper in the early 1800s.⁴⁵ Other versions of a ‘tough’ hero were evident in the works of American author Alan Pinkerton who wrote *The Expressman and the Detective* (1875) and *The Mollie Maguires and the Detective* (1877). Pinkerton defined what his detective should be able to withstand: he should be ‘hardy, tough, capable of labouring in season and out of season, to accomplish unknown to those around him, a single absorbing object’ all attributes that were later ascribed to the hard-boiled detective.⁴⁶ In addition connections have been made between the depiction of the hard-boiled detective and the ‘hardy independence’ of the cowboy.⁴⁷ There are strong and provocative parallels between the hard-boiled detective novel and the genre of the western. Critics of the crime novel have made links between the development of the hard-boiled format and the classic western story, with its confrontation between a lone heroic gunman and a seemingly inviolable group of powerful antagonists. Cawelti, in his analysis of formula fiction, described early hard-boiled detective books as ‘western-like in setting and in its violent and chaotic narrative of gang warfare’.⁴⁸ The physicality of the lone cowboy and the solitary private investigator is primary to this connection. Both are stylised

⁴⁴ Scaggs, p.72.

⁴⁵ Edmund Pearson, *Dime Novels* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1929), p.21.

⁴⁶ Alan Pinkerton, *The Molly Maguires and the Detectives* (New York: G.W. Dillingham reprint; 1905), p.17.

⁴⁷ Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p.152.

⁴⁸ Cawelti, p.159.

characters, whose masculinity is determined by the nature of the conflicts with their oppositional characters, the criminal or villain. In *Farewell My Lovely* Marlowe makes it clear that he is quicker than the criminal he confronts despite having been drugged. 'He had courage. He grabbed for the gun. It wasn't where he grabbed. I sat back and put it in my lap'. (FWL p.157) The detective and the cowboy embody an over-determined masculinity that is forcefully, often violently, given precedence at the climactic battle that concludes the plot.

Jane Tompkins, in her analysis of the western genre in *West of Everything*, presents this climactic point of ritualised violence as the summation of masculine self-determination through the ultimate confrontation with death.⁴⁹ Surviving death establishes the cowboy/detective as the final hero, who as cowboy has proved his potency, and as detective can have the last judgmental word on the solution of the mystery. The threat of death here is perceived as the greatest risk or test of masculine endurance, in a world where physical prowess is an essential quality. Tompkins talks of the 'fully saturated moment' where the challenge of daily survival exacts 'superhuman exertions'. She comments that 'frontier living is a way of imagining the self in a boundary situation', which for these embodiments of masculine heroism is a 'place that will put you to some kind of ultimate test'. And through a self-determined physical superiority, an ultimate test that they are likely to win.⁵⁰ The 'frontier life' of the detective, if we consider the crime genre in these terms, set as it is against the boundary line that separates the detective from those he has determined as criminal, must constantly be reviewed as the detective draws ever closer to those he investigates. The physical proximity of the criminal and criminal's world is seen as a constant lure and challenge to the detective. He needs to resist the seductive nature of the criminal, appealing as it does to the detective's innate understanding of those he hunts and his self-knowledge. At the close of *The Long Goodbye* Marlowe's sense of regret as he says goodbye to the criminal Terry Lennox is clearly evident. He watches Lennox leave and listens to his footsteps fade: 'I kept on listening [...] What for? Did I want him to stop suddenly and turn and come back and talk me out

⁴⁹ Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁵⁰ Tompkins, pp.12-14.

of the way I felt? Well he didn't'.⁵¹ The detective's battle for survival is played out against the background of hypnotic bright lights and sensual temptation of the city, rather than the harsh prairie plains of the cowboy but the detective's 'final confrontation' is as viciously brutal as that of the cowboy's, if not more so, because he is fighting his own desire to be seduced. Heather Worthington discusses this in terms of the 'corrupting effects of wealth' and the consequent impact of this on the detective's ability to remain separate and, in Chandler's own words 'a man of honour'.⁵²

Glover substantiates this reading of masculinity in the hard-boiled texts but also sees this emphasis on overt physicality as a response to the centralisation of state control and the expectation of self-restraint as government bodies take greater and greater responsibility for upholding the law and defending private property. Glover argues that:

Fantasies of adventure rooted in this manly ethic of performance have been amongst the principal carriers of an ideological version of masculinity fixated upon exceptional uses of physical violence, the skilled management of the body under conditions of pressure, and upon the reconciliation of these means with some personal or social ideal.⁵³

Glover's point that 'this manly ethic of performance has been amongst the principal carriers of an ideological version of masculinity' feeds into a surrogate public history in which masculinity is a larger than life entity. Equally Frank Krutnik in his work *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre and Masculinity* identifies the physical ordeal as a process of assessing 'how he (the detective) measures up to [...] extensive standards of masculine competence' and indeed how, after the final conflict, the detective remains the one who is both intact and in control, whilst those around him have been beaten or seduced into submission.⁵⁴ So this process of proving himself becomes part of the detective's professional qualification, a toughness that the practicalities of the investigation requires, but it is a double bind in that he must assert and reassert his physical dominance, in order to prove his worthiness to undertake the investigation.

⁵¹ Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye* (London: Penguin Crime Fiction, 1953), p.290. . (All further references cited as *TLG* and page number in the text).

⁵² Worthington, p.126.

⁵³ Glover, pp.75-6.

⁵⁴ Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre and Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.43.

'Mean streets' - the monumental city and masculine power

The location of the detective's confrontations contributes to his depiction as a man who is in control. His is the urban environment that spawns the crime that he investigates. Scaggs defines the city as a 'wasteland' echoing T.S. Eliot's poem of the same name in which the industrial city is depicted as a hell and the inhabitants have died a spiritual death.⁵⁵ Scaggs sees the threat of the city with its deception and violence as overwhelming, with the potential to 'poison and corrupt even the private eye'.⁵⁶ It is this threat that demands that the detective be 'more than a man,' to walk the mean streets but not himself be mean. The further parallels between the hard-boiled detective form and the western are evident in this locating of the hero. Tompkins talks of nature 'loom(ing) large [...] where it is grand, monumental, dwarfing the human figure with its majesty, the only divinity worth worshipping here, other than manhood itself'.⁵⁷ She goes on to establish that much of the action goes on outside, on the vast endless prairies, or in public male dominated places; the saloons, the sheriff's office, the barber's shop, the livery stable, but not significantly domestic spaces where femininity has the potential to weaken. The combination of the two elements, 'monumental nature' and the male public arena, are mirrored in the hard-boiled detective's urban setting. In this way the detective can be seen to embody a type of masculinity that offers a figure whose representation challenges perhaps more than anything the domestic; a space that fundamentally speaks of women and women's preoccupations, a space that in particular appears to limit male power. Worthington outlines this separation of gendered spheres in crime fiction:

Masculine and feminine roles were clearly defined: men dominated the public and social spheres while women were firmly contained within the domestic.⁵⁸

For the detective, the city, a vast metropolis, over-crowded, constantly moving, and never asleep, 'swinging, sprawling, rapidly changing disorganised but glamorous' might be seen to stand for the cowboy's 'monumental nature'.⁵⁹ It is in direct contrast to way Chandler defines domesticity in *The Long Goodbye*:

⁵⁵ Scaggs, p.70.

⁵⁶ Scaggs, p.70.

⁵⁷ Tompkins, p.12.

⁵⁸ Worthington, p.43.

⁵⁹ Cawelti, p.154.

The other part of me wanted to get out and stay out, but this was the part I never listened to. Because if I ever had I would have stayed in the town where I was born and worked in the hardware store and married the boss's daughter and had five kids and read them the funny paper on Sunday morning and smacked their heads when they got out of line and squabbled with the wife about how much spending money they were to get and what programs they could have on the radio or TV set. I might even get rich - small-town rich, an eight-room house, two cars in the garage, chicken every Sunday and the Reader's Digest on the living room table, the wife with a cast-iron permanent and me with a brain like a sack of Portland cement. You take it, friend. I'll take the big sordid dirty crooked city. (*TLG*, p.249)

Marlowe's rejection of domesticity is a product of its damaging, stultifying effects. Chandler paints and then discards a picture of suburban contentment because it will produce 'a brain like a sack of Portland cement'. His preference is the city, despite it being 'sordid dirty crooked'. This city is often described as corrupt, where violence is endemic and crime, part of the natural order of things. Cawelti defines it as 'a man-made desert or cavern of lost humanity'.⁶⁰ Its vastness is not the prairies of the cowboy, but of a throbbing network of human activity, where the detective's familiarity with street upon street seems to evoke in his character a parallel 'vastness' of knowledge. The potential damaging impact of this urban crush upon him necessitates a man of particular abilities. His knowledge of this environment and his ability to move through it to solve the crime is critical. The immense breadth of the city and its endemic crime presents a seemingly overwhelming task for the detective. His decision to engage with this metropolis, to battle the forces of evil in a landscape that is itself defined as part of the corruption, might act to render weak the figure of the avenging detective but part of his mythology is a willingness to engage with the insurmountable.

Chandler establishes this mixture of 'vastness' and 'limitation' in *Farewell My Lovely* when the complexity of the mystery and the body count bring Marlowe into confrontation with the police. A disgruntled Marlowe sits in the police station reviewing the case with a Detective Randall, pulling out the threads of corruption, greed and lust. Around him the business of city policing goes on – 'a nameless dick' talking on the telephone, a loudspeaker announcing a 'hold-up on San Pedro south of Forty-Fourth', followed by a 'hot car list in a slow monotonous voice that repeated

⁶⁰ Cawelti, p.155.

everything twice'. (*FML* p.184) The actuality of the city, its rhythm, is here an audible backdrop to Marlowe's focus. Marlowe sits transfixed by a 'shiny black bug', its smallness and perseverance mirroring Marlowe's own position:

The bug reached the end of Randall's desk and marched straight into the air. It fell on its back on the floor, waved a few thin, worn legs in the air and then played dead. Nobody cared, so it began waving the legs again and finally struggled over on its face. It trundled slowly off into a corner towards nothing, going nowhere. (*FML* p.184)

When Marlowe insists it is his right to stay on the case, Randall threatens him: 'If you crab this case you'll be in a jam [...] little by little you will build up a body of hostility in this department that will make it damn hard for you to do any work'. (*FML* p.184) Randall tells him to go home and mind his own business, and in return Marlowe retorts 'Look this room is eighteen floors above ground. And this little bug climbs all the way up here just to make a friend. Me. My luck piece'. (*FML*, pp.4-5) Despite the hostile police force and a crime whose tentacles reach from City Hall to the gambling rooms of down town L.A., Marlowe has no intention of going home. He says to Detective Randall, 'I don't expect to go out and accomplish things a big police department can't accomplish. If I have any small private notions, they are just that - small and private'. (*FML*, p.87) On his way out of the police station Marlowe puts the bug on a bush, wondering 'how long it would take him to make the Homicide Bureau again'. (*FML*, p.87) Meanwhile Marlowe heads for City Hall. Marlowe has no illusions about the role he plays. Later as he waits in a hotel room for night to fall and the players in the final scene to congregate he listens to the sound of the city.

Outside cars honked along the alley they called the Speedway. Feet slither on the sidewalks below my window. There was a murmur and a mutter of coming and going in the air. The air that seeped in through the rusted screens smelled of stale frying fat. Far off a voice of the kind that could be heard far off was shouting: 'Get hungry, folks. Nice hot doggies here. Get hungry'. (*FML*, p.206)

And Marlowe does exactly that - he gets hungry for closure.

I needed a drink, I needed a lot of life insurance, I needed a vacation, I needed a home in the country. What I had was a coat, a hat and a gun. I put them on and went out of the room. (*FML*, p.207)

Marlowe's smallness in this overwhelming city is not seen as a concern. The repetition of 'I needed' represents an idyllic suburban life; one that Marlowe

eschews with the donning of the iconic hard-boiled detective's armoury of 'a coat, a hat and a gun'. He is characterized as a man who knows the city, it might dwarf him, but it does not reduce his sense of self, his appetite, and his active, stubborn masculinity.

The ability to contain the city, to read its vagaries and minutiae and subdue it, is perceived as part of the way the detective's masculinity is represented. Scaggs in his analysis of the hard-boiled novels talks about the city as insubstantial and lacking depth. He comments: 'In this kingdom of illusion, Chandler focuses on architecture to expose the city's preoccupation with fakery and artifice'.⁶¹ Scaggs identifies this deception as having the capacity 'to drive a wedge between what is seen and what is known, and in this way the private eye's quest to restore order becomes a quest to make sense'.⁶² The process of attributing such skill to the detective establishes his dominance over not just the city as a physical structure but as an organism, its inhabitants and their interconnected lives. Scaggs goes on to define the detective as 'understanding its connections', that is its 'appearance and reality, surface and depth, past and present, and truth or falsehood'.⁶³ Scaggs refers to Paul Skenazy article, 'Behind the Territory Ahead' as a means of developing this point about the detective's skill to read the city. Skenazy observes that the Private Eye must 'impose form and causality on events and make the meaningless significant' not unlike the signification of Marlowe's bug, his 'luck piece' that is given value because it appears to parallel Marlowe's 'private notions'.⁶⁴ Thus implying still further the means by which the detective's masculinity is determined as powerful. In this way the city accentuates the detective's ability to remain in control despite the threat of the corrupt 'wasteland'.

Negating femininity/valorising masculinity

This process of shunning temptation and maintaining authority is vital for the detective and is extended to the containment of women or femininity. In the 1920s the transformation from an agrarian economy to urban living created new

⁶¹ Scaggs, p.71.

⁶² Scaggs, p.72.

⁶³ Scaggs, p.72.

⁶⁴ Paul Skenazy, 'Behind the Territory Ahead', in *Los Angeles in Fiction: A Collection of Essays*, revised edn, ed. by David Fine (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), p.113.

opportunities for women, particularly those who were young and single.⁶⁵ Rzepka comments on the ‘incursion’ of working women into America’s economy.⁶⁶ The opportunities that this opened up to women meant that they were no longer simply domestic and retail employees but part of the public world of business.⁶⁷ In this way women were perceived as a danger, a signal of modernity and its incumbent peril: ‘Many considered the new woman to be a threat to social morality and opposed the flapper, the icon of the new woman in the 1920s, and what she represented’.⁶⁸ This change in women’s social condition meant that they operated as a further anxiety for the detective to contain, reinforcing the clear cut gender divisions that have become part of the typography of hard-boiled detective literature, and in particular its depiction of male agency. The ideology that the detective expressed was defined and accepted as the epitome of masculine American individual agency; something that was seen as increasingly vital for men as the role of women fundamentally changed in the early decades of the twentieth century. Within this need for male agency is a corresponding need to contain femininity, embodied in the figure of the ‘new woman’ but also in terms of an implied loss of control, where femininity is an expression of weakness. Rigid masculinity, which Glover regards as ‘brutal’ and unrelenting, underlines a state of masculine separation. As such aspects of life likely to weaken a man, such as domesticity and dangerous sexuality, are forcibly discarded.⁶⁹ Limited by this construction, women are subjected to a series of negative definitions that, at least superficially, attempt to relegate and negate them. Thus pulp fiction at its simplest level allowed an expression of masculinity that gave back to the beleaguered men of Middle America the unquestionable right to stamp their authority, physically and linguistically, on the public consciousness. Despite the fact that Marlowe is frequently defined as chivalric and knightly, his misogyny according to Scott Christianson in his work ‘A Heap of Broken Images’ ‘goes

⁶⁵ The change from agrarian to urban living was substantial, almost twenty percent migration in less than fifteen years. Michael Parrish, *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920-1941* ((New York: Norton Paperbacks, 1994), pp.82-3.

⁶⁶ Rzepka, p.183.

⁶⁷ With the rise of the corporate office, a number of other types of jobs opened up. Typists, filing clerks, stenographers, and even some secretarial roles all became possibilities for the ambitious young woman. In an era with absolutely nothing in the way of mass data storage, entire floors of office buildings were filled with the sound of typewriters and filing drawers. Dan Bryan, <http://www.americanhistoryusa.com/working-voting-women-1920s/> [accessed 6 November 2013].

⁶⁸ <http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/mmh/clash/introduction/intro.htm> [accessed 6 November 2013].

⁶⁹ Glover, p.77.

without saying'.⁷⁰ Denis Porter in the *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* comments that Marlowe establishes his 'mastery over women by rejecting, arresting or in some cases killing them', in what is a 'fantasy-fulfilling display of male invulnerability'.⁷¹ In effect contributing to a surrogate public history in which the mythology of the detective was embraced as both desirable and necessary.

The women of the traditional hard-boiled text serve to reinforce the detective's particular form of potent masculinity. These women do not tend to be in positions where they can change this binary power relationship in which the detective has authority or subject status. Often they are sexualised and then dismissed. This then is seemingly the primary function of women in the early versions of the hard-boiled novels; that is, to validate the prowess and self-discipline of the detective. Their value is as sexual objects and they are punished for attempting to take subjectivity for themselves. The effect of women's physical presence serves as a challenge to the detective, and in order to maintain his authority he needs to contain and diminish them. As Worthington comments:

The negative representation of the feminine acts, in hard-boiled detective narratives and other strongly masculine sub-genres of crime fiction, to valorise the male protagonist and endorse properly masculine behaviour; the invariably unpleasant fates of transgressive women functions to enforce properly feminine behaviour.⁷²

Chandler's dismissal of sexually provocative female characters is brutal and their transgressions are punished. In *The Big Sleep* when Carmen Sternwood attempts to seduce Marlowe, his repulsion is evident in the language used to describe her.

The hissing noise came tearing out of her mouth as if she had nothing to do with it (and) her lips moved very slowly and carefully, as if they were artificial lips and had to be manipulated by springs. (*TBS*, p.157)

Her face becomes 'like scrapped bone' and she makes involuntary noises and movements: Chandler reduces Carmen to a fleshless automaton, with no self-will or control over her body. Carmen's negative representation works 'to enforce properly

⁷⁰ Scott Christianson, 'A Heap of Broken Images: Hardboiled Detective Fiction and the Discourse(s) of Modernity', in *The Cunning Craft: Original Essays on Detective Fiction and Contemporary Literary Theory*, ed. by Ronald G. Walker and June M. Frazer (Macomb: Western Illinois University Press, 1990), p.141.

⁷¹ Denis Porter, *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p.185.

⁷² Worthington, p.45.

feminine behaviour'. In this way she functions as Marlowe's binary opposite, revealing through this negative portrayal Marlowe's capacity for autonomy. Minor, inconsequential, female characters frequently take on unpleasant limited stereotyped personas. Often they are vain and greedy, with supposed feminized vices and restricted intelligence. Occasionally more central characters are allowed to portray sensibilities and morals akin to those of the detective; not untypically the central female character and the criminal are one and the same character. As such the descriptions of, and the responses to, these criminal women are aggressive and indicative of the detective's rejection of women who fail to submit to socially acceptable female roles. Knight comments:

As a rule the detective will be finally threatened with death, humiliation, identity-erasure by a woman whose physical attractions are only matched by the depths of her infidelity and depravity.⁷³

Knight goes on to establish that these are women in disguise and that 'the treacherous women of Chandler's novels reveal a deeply gendered set of evaluations at the core of his novels', one which necessitates the punishment of femininity.⁷⁴

The failures of women are bound up in their descriptions: which often incorporate references to animals and use negative adjectives that define them as sexual objects, ignorant, with the potential for violence. In *The Little Sister* Chandler's taut style reduces women to sexual terms:

"She's dark and lovely and passionate. And very, very kind."
"And exclusive as a mailbox," I said.⁷⁵

Whilst Chandler's simile based texts are lauded for their terse delivery, this method is used to describe female characters in overtly one-dimensional terms. His linguistic style, of developing a point to excess, reveals a caustic response to women, the terms of which is often repeated in more than one novel; the following quotations are from *The Lady in the Lake*, *The Long Goodbye* and *Farewell My Lovely* respectively:

One of those slinky glittering females who laugh too much and sprawl all over their chairs, showing a great deal of leg. A very light blonde with high colour and indecently large baby-blue eyes.⁷⁶

There are blonde and blondes and it is almost a joke word nowadays. All

⁷³ Knight, pp.119-120.

⁷⁴ Knight, p.120.

⁷⁵ Raymond Chandler, *The Little Sister* (London: Penguin, 1955), p.155.

⁷⁶ Raymond Chandler, *The Lady in the Lake*, (London: Penguin, 1943), p.175.

blondes have their points, except perhaps the metallic ones who are as blonde as a Zulu under the bleach and as to disposition as soft as a sidewalk. There is the small cute blonde who cheeps and twitters, and the big statuesque blonde who straight-arms you with an ice-blue glare. There is the blonde who gives you the up-from-under look and smells lovely and shimmers and hangs on your arm and is always very, very tired when you take her home. (*TLG*, p.89)

The women had good legs and displayed their inside curves more than Will Hays would have liked. But their faces were as threadbare as a book-keeper's office cat. Blondes, brunettes, large cow-like eyes with a peasant dullness in them. Small sharp eyes with urchin greed in them. One or two of the faces obviously vicious. (*FML*, p.31)

In all three passages, Chandler represents femininity in reductive terms, dependent on generalised references to hair colour and behaviour to produce simplified negative caricatures. At best these women laugh too much, show too much leg, 'cheep and twitter'. At worse, they are sexually unavailable, ('very, very tired when you take her home') cats, cows and 'obviously vicious'. Their transgressive nature is condemned, as Worthington puts it, to 'enforce properly feminine behaviour'.⁷⁷

When Marlowe's meets Amthor, a psychic, he is critical of a man who abuses his position of trust as counsellor. However it is the vitriolic aggression towards women who consult Amthor (in this instance wealthy women) that is the main focus of Marlowe's disgust:

Jules Amthor, Psychic Consultant. Consultations By Appointment Only. Give him enough time and pay him enough money and he'll cure anything from a jaded husband to a grass hopper plague [...] But mostly it would be women, fat women that panted and thin women that burned, old women that dreamed and young women that thought that they might have Electra complexes, women of all sizes, shapes and ages, but with one thing in common - money. No Thursday at the County Hospital for Mr Jules Amthor. Cash on the line for his. Rich bitches who had to be dunned for their milk bills would pay him right now. (*FML*, p.92)

Chandler presents Marlowe as a man expert in the foibles of the rich and needy. A man who can read: 'Jules Amthor, Psychic Consultant. Consultations by Appointment Only' and see the breadth of this 'Fakeloo artist's' reach, from tired husbands to biblical plagues. At the same time Marlowe has an understanding, a knowledge, of those that require Amthor's services. Marlowe's own status is

⁷⁷ Worthington, p.45.

reinforced through this prophetic insight of others weaknesses. He places himself both above and beyond such emotive vulnerabilities and anticipates meeting Amthor with a combative pleasure: 'This was going to be good'. (*FML*, p.92) His unspoken belief is that he will be the victor. His unquestionable, undisguised contempt for women here is unnerving. His condemnation of these women, dismissed uniformly because of their possession of money, hated separately because of the needs that make them a target for Amthor, is part of Marlowe's perception, his masculine right to classify women who do not fit into the mould of acceptable womanhood that is itself determined by Chandler's social view. Within this outpouring of disgust there is a raw anger against these 'rich bitches' that clearly reveals the persistent misogynistic masculinity that the hard-boiled detective novel propagated. The combined effect of this antagonism, both particular and general, is to create a form in which the rejection of women is absolute; the detective's response to them his physical disgust, discards them. There is no saving characteristic; the women of the novels who fail to comply with the demands exercised by the detective are cast out, at times figuratively, but also literally. The feminine here is illegitimate, and arguably it is a position that is not just inhabited by the 'rich bitches' by also by the pseudo male, Amthor, who as a 'fakeloo' fails to exercise as Worthington puts it 'properly masculine behaviour'.⁷⁸

This negation of femininity is necessary to achieve an idealised masculinity. Worthington comments that within the form 'men were perceived to be active socially and sexually, women to be passive and their sexuality directed by their "natural" desire to have children'.⁷⁹ Worthington also connects this separation to 'improper femininity and criminality' in Chandler's texts where the 'external plots revolve around public corruption, the inner plots are concerned with private and personal corruption usually figured in the feminine'.⁸⁰ Thus as the public space of masculine hegemony was reduced by the systematic increase of state control as well as by the ever growing number of women entering the work place, the men of the 1930s were left with no alternative but to engage with the domestic. At a time when the authority and reach of ordinary men was being curtailed, the detective offered a

⁷⁸ Worthington, p.45.

⁷⁹ Worthington, p.43.

⁸⁰ Worthington, p.45.

surrogate public history of masculine prowess that in part negated this loss.⁸¹ Whereas the domestic space was seen as both limited, feminine and defined by the needs of family responsibility, the masculine public space of the detective established a world that was vast and dangerous and where his responsibilities involved justice, morality and death. This then is the form that women writers of the late twentieth century have adopted, one that at first glance might seem to hold its shining light of misogynistic spite aloft with pride. As implausible as such an adoption may seem the transition is in fact relatively straightforward. The many seemingly rigid masculine attributes of the form are, less impeachable than they appear and in a form that is seemingly so restrictive in its representation of femininity, the sheer audacity of women writers who have chosen to take up this challenge is worth addressing. What follows is a textual examination of the male detective that offers a less rigid notion of gender identity, establishing the points or co-ordinates that allow entrance for women into this seemingly closed form.

Questioning the mythology of the detective

The myth of the detective and his extraordinary masculinity provides one way of reading the central character of the hard-boiled detective novel, but unless this reading is seen as merely an aspect of the detective's representation then we fail to move beyond the symbolic and ritualised nature of his masculinity. The constituent parts that underpin the mythology of the detective that I have outlined above, that is the practical 'tough guy,' his mastery over death, the emphasis on masculine spaces and the negation of women, combine to offer us an apparently perfected masculinity. However, an exploration of the way in which the detective is constructed reveals the dissonances within the mythology, gaps that cannot be occluded, but which allow alternative ways of understanding the masculinities that are staged within these texts. The process of changing this focus allows a more individualised detective to be identified, one who has vulnerabilities or potential weaknesses. This reassessment reveals a representation of masculinity that does not conform to what Glover calls the perfected 'ideological version of masculinity' that public history has adopted.⁸² Thus the individualised detective allows not simply a way of thinking about gender but also about the way gender identities are negotiated as a set of social relations. As

⁸¹ Cawelti, p.159.

⁸² Glover, pp.75-6.

such masculinity and by extension femininity can be understood more fully within a social context and not arguably shored up by a myth. Exploring vulnerabilities or what might be seen as failures of identity is inevitably a process of exploring the ways in which the detective does not or cannot live up to the demands of his gender. If we see identity within the structures of psychoanalytical thought as the yearned for self that lies unattainable within the Real, then to consider the vulnerabilities of the detective is to consider the gap between his desired, constructed mythical identity, and the conflicting, conflicted masculinities that operate instead.⁸³ Thus the detective's weaknesses and their expression through his voice offer alternative configurations of his mythology. It is through these alternative readings that we come closer to the individualised non-mythical detective whose struggle to counter such weaknesses opens up avenues to women writers in a form that, in McKeon terms, is a 'dynamic model of conflict' one that has the capacity to reflect a gendered struggle and tension at a personal and societal level.⁸⁴

(De)construction of the detective's voice

The means by which we are able to consider what this 'real' detective might be is through the uncertain discourse of his narrative voice. In simple terms the detective's first person narrative can be seen as the reader's admittance to the pragmatic nature of the detective. The voice also communicates to the reader a tangible sense of the detective's burdens, as well as his responses to those he meets. Marlowe's voice has been characterised as whimsical and world-weary, suggesting knowledge and cynicism.⁸⁵ Critical analysis of the detective's voice often presents it as an articulation of self. In other words this is our access to the 'private' detective; it reveals his sensibilities as a 'common man' as well as his mythology. The detective's voice would seem to present to the reader a character that is both brutal and quixotic: 'his action-orientated code of honour enables him to act in a violent world without losing his moral purity and force'.⁸⁶ Thus the detective's voice is read

⁸³ Prior to the beginnings of self (at infancy), the subject (which initially has no subject) resides in or is close to the Real. This is a place of need – where external factors do not have substance except to satisfy those needs. Lacan sees this order as complete but 'impossible' because it is lost the moment a subject becomes aware of its difference to external factors. However the Real does not simply vanish, it is the potential against which we judge ourselves (and ultimately fail to live up to because of its completeness) throughout our adult lives. Sarup, p.104.

⁸⁴ McKeon, p.21.

⁸⁵ Steven Powell, *100 American Crime Writers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.5.

⁸⁶ Cawelti, p.151.

as an entrance into cultural mythology, offering a knowledge that has a universal meaning, allowing understanding of a more expansive, almost symbolic truth. Madden defines Marlowe as ‘all-knowing’ and ‘innately good’ establishing him as intrinsically moral: ‘the truth that Marlowe, and Marlowe alone, finds’.⁸⁷ Rather than remaining within the tawdry minutiae of everyday life which is his field of action, the detective offers a kind of transcendent truth that particularises his complex masculine world, giving it an allegorical quality.

This emphasis on a symbolic detective is combined with a level of authenticity, a representation of criminal activity that is believable. Chandler’s aim was in fact to create novels that could be considered ‘realistic’, what Knight calls a ‘criminal reality’ that focussed on human interaction. Knight defines Chandler’s realism in contrast to earlier contributors to the crime genre whose work emphasised the solution of the crime and did not take into account the causes of criminal activity.⁸⁸ Lack of realism was something which Chandler saw as a major fault in the ‘clue-puzzle’ mysteries and was a necessary part of the formula to create the ordinary man within the myth. He commented in *The Simple Art of Murder* that the classic crime novel was ‘too little aware of what goes on in the world’.⁸⁹ According to Shaw, the editor of the *Black Mask*, Chandler’s emphasis on character and his ‘economy of expression’ created a tangible world that readers recognised.⁹⁰ Chandler’s desire for realism is evident in his detailed descriptions of Los Angeles. Roy Meador in his analysis of Chandler comments:

He was a scientist dissecting a native society and recording detailed notes. He classified the facts and resonances of Southern California with the precision of a cultural historian and anthropologist combined.⁹¹

Meador continues ‘his works surpass textbooks and maps in revealing the truth and texture of Los Angeles’.⁹² The use of realism to catalogue ‘truth and texture’ is discussed by Rzepka. He comments that writers, including Chandler, were responding to the ‘insecurities (which) were undermining public confidence in the

⁸⁷ Madden, pp.176-7.

⁸⁸ Knight, p.109.

⁸⁹ Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder*, p.10.

⁹⁰ Joseph Shaw, *Hard-boiled Omnibus* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1946), p.iii.

⁹¹ Meador, p.146.

⁹² Meador, p.148.

promise of the American Dream'.⁹³ Sean McCann sees Marlowe representing the fictional answer to a centralised state offering a 'kind of vernacular expression (that was) a repository of neglected popular virtues'.⁹⁴ In effect the hard-boiled detective novel is a form that gives expression to the contemporaneous lives of ordinary people that cannot and does not deliver simply a 'surface quest'. What we are presented with then is a narrative that is contradictory, one that arguably offers a simplistic answer to the criminal event, but also one that identifies the crime as socially and historically specific. Such incongruities in the depiction of Marlowe might simply suggest additional facets of his mythology, a means of voicing Chandler's 'ordinary man'. However, these contradictions or paradoxes do not comfortably exist together such that they can be subsumed within myth and appearance, rather they expose the fault lines within the form as well as within the figure of the detective.

The formulaic cycle of the hard-boiled novel, with its repetitive sequence of crime-investigation-solution suggests order and clarity and works to reinforce the detective's authority. However, the appearance of deliberate control that this cycle offers is simply that, an appearance. The beginning of the investigative process purports to establish the physical engagement of the private detective. He enters the plot, at times with force, and once there he remains part of the movement of the investigative structure. Cawelti sees this as both a physical movement as well as part of the narrative formation.⁹⁵ The structuring of the investigation is powerfully indicative of the engagement of the detective not simply because of his apparent willingness to become involved in the investigation but because of the level at which he becomes involved. In effect the 'hard-boiled detective's investigation becomes not simply a matter of determining who the guilty person is but of defining his own moral position'.⁹⁶ The narrative of the text is determined and controlled by the detective. The solution of the mystery, the closure that asserts the detective's primacy within the investigation, has already been achieved as the narrative opens. Fredric Jameson establishes the logic (and the artifice) of this narrative movement in

⁹³ Rzepka, pp.185-6.

⁹⁴ Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Duke University Press, London, 2000), p.147.

⁹⁵ Cawelti, p.144.

⁹⁶ Cawelti, p.146.

his essay 'The Synoptic Chandler' with his reference to the use of the past tense. He comments that 'the form redoubles the closure of the crime with that of the surface quest itself, which is also staged, after the fact, as a completed adventure'.⁹⁷ This closure is illusionary because it is created by a structure that defines, if you like, its own beginning and end, but which is constituted on a failure or unwillingness to recognise the way this structure is formed. Slavoj Zizek in his text *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitcock)*, argues that 'the successful final deduction in a whodunit "works" only if we see it "experienced" as the outcome of a series of (un)fortunate contingencies'.⁹⁸ Thus because this narrative is delivered to the reader after the event we are given its hermeneutic logic retrospectively.

The narrative voice then structures the investigation towards an already achieved closure, redoubling the journey, allowing the detective to make fundamental choices about inclusion and direction. The criminal act is already known, and the players in the crime already established, the narrative development that binds these elements together is shaped by the detective's prerogative. His voice retells a sanitised story, one that he knows through both specific and general experience. Thus the detective can choose the story that he tells and continue to maintain his authority and the regulative practices that maintain his gender identity. These texts are conservative, identifying this as a literature whose 'role is to reconcile, consolidate, obtain consent' which it gains from its capacity to provide reassurance through closure and an affirmation of the dominant value system.⁹⁹ However, this does not address the elision required to accomplish the sanitised version of the 'story'. This elision leaves an unexpressed remainder that does not answer to the controls that are designed to 'obtain consent' and which gives to us the vulnerable detective. Whilst the voice of the detective attempts to offer hegemonic reassurance instead it reveals the paradoxical nature of the hard-boiled novel. Our reliance then, on the detective is paramount. He guides us through the problematical terrain of overwhelming violence and offers through his subjugation of the anomalies, a textual logic. Thus the

⁹⁷ Fredric Jameson, 'The Synoptic Chandler' in *Shades of Noir*, ed. by Joan Copjec (London: Verso, 1993), p.36.

⁹⁸ Slavoj Zizek, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitcock)* (London: Verso, 1996), p.242.

⁹⁹ Glover, p.68.

narrative harmony is a construction designed to maintain the illusion of a detective who is ‘all-knowing’; but this is a disguise, a masquerade that cannot be preserved because it fails to take into account the elision that it depends on.¹⁰⁰ In particular the fantasy of narrative order that needs to be repeated to maintain the substance of the mythology is made apparent; and thus the gestalt of the detective, his extraordinary masculinity and its performative nature, is revealed.

Repetition: performance and gest in the construction of masculinity

The performance of the detective’s masculinity is achieved through the repetition of its constituent parts to produce the ‘tough guy’. This repetition normalises the detective’s gendered identity. Judith Butler’s concept of performativity in relation to gender, outlined initially in her book *Gender Trouble*, establishes the artifice of gender identity as well as its inevitability. Butler’s perspective on gender exposes the construction of the detective’s mythological masculinity. However, at the same time Butler’s model of performativity identifies the difficulty in negotiating the boundaries of socially agreed gender definitions. Butler comments that, ‘the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence’ establishing both the circulatory processes of identity, in that we must perform our gender to maintain our gender and vice versa; but also the social compulsion, the obligation behind this performance.¹⁰¹ Butler’s conception of identity also suggests a void, a space that must be filled to produce gender, she comments: ‘There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results’.¹⁰² Whilst this might imply a choice Butler makes it very clear that these ‘expressions’ are fixed and sustained by forms of ‘regulatory practice’.

Even when gender seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the ‘congealing’ is itself an insistent and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means [...] Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Madden, pp.176-7.

¹⁰¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.24.

¹⁰² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.25.

¹⁰³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.33.

What we have then is a set of repeated acts that appear natural but are in fact perpetuated within a 'rigid frame'. Whilst understanding the performative nature of gender identity suggests opportunities for alternative 'expression' this rigid, regulatory process is seemingly almost impossible to fracture. So though we might want to challenge this 'congealing' to make gender a matter of choice, it requires a rejection of the very things that would seem to validate us as gendered beings. As Butler says, 'this repetition is at once a re-enactment and re-experience of a set of meanings already established; and it is the mundane and ritualised form of their legitimization'.¹⁰⁴ In effect gender becomes legitimated through a repeated performance of its 'expression'.

The conceptualisation of the mythological detective as performative can establish how the myth is both produced and maintained. In Butler's terms the detective's masculinity can be seen as both 'sustained and regulated by various social means' and natural and legitimate. It is also in Davis' terms desirable as a 'surrogate' form of public history, adopted to answer the needs of the time. How then do we distinguish the flaws within this mythological construction such that it is possible to question the myth to see the performance of gender, the terms of its maintenance? One way in which access might be feasible is through the detailing or the minutiae within the textual narrative. Through such detailing the world of the detective story is made known; it engages its audience with the commonplace through the investigative process of meticulous observation. These observations become a matter of engagement in that the detective through his commentary responds to those he comes into contact with. These responses are akin to Bertolt Brecht's 'realm of gest' expounded in his text *The Development of an Aesthetic*. Gest according to Brecht allows an actor a method of focussing in detail on the physical attributes of a character in an attempt to create a portrayal that challenges the audience. In this way an actor can turn what Brecht defines as 'general principals' into the 'particular and unrepeatable'.¹⁰⁵ Brecht argues that the realm of gest is one that 'has to be defined in historically relative terms' and that consequentially characters on stage are 'moved

¹⁰⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.140.

¹⁰⁵ Brecht, p.201.

by social impulses and that these differ according to the period'.¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Wright in *Postmodern Brecht: A Re-Presentation. Critics of the Twentieth Century* comments that 'gest manifests itself as a set of social relations'.¹⁰⁷ If we consider the concept of gest in relation to the hard-boiled detective novel it reveals the historically specific 'social impulses' of the detective. In turn this can give meaning to his individuality outside the mythology of the form. As a means of scrutinising the minutiae of the text, gest for my purposes is a method of revelation, of exposure. Brecht's conceptualisation of gest produces an alienation effect; one that allows the actor to turn the familiar into the 'uncertain and the contradictory'.¹⁰⁸ Gest then is a means 'to free socially-conditioned phenomena from the stamp of familiarity'.¹⁰⁹ For the hard-boiled detective this phenomenon sustains the mythology of the 'tough guy' but by examining its detail (in Butler's terms in its 'repeated acts') the particularity of the detective and his social context is better understood. In doing so the extraordinary man of Chandler's premise is revealed as a man of contradictions and susceptibilities.

The revelatory gest of Marlowe

The textual gest of the narrative voice provides the reader with an almost instant access into the heart of the fiction, offering an understanding of the impossible moral code of the detective and in particular his logic and concerns. In part these codes define the ways in which the detective establishes and exercises his authority, drawn from his status as possessor of the symbolic. These codes can also be read as exemplary of the needs of its historical moment, fuelling the mythology of his extraordinary masculinity and offering the reader a hero who contributes to a desirable surrogate public history that confirms masculinity as powerful. However, through a consideration of the gest the desires of the detective and his contradictory social relations are also evident. For example the opening of *The Big Sleep* begins by detailing the basics - the time, the month and the weather. Chandler then gives an exhaustive list of Marlowe's clothing, closing the paragraph with:

I was neat, clean, shaved and sober, and I didn't care who knew it. I was

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Wright, *Postmodern Brecht: A Re-Presentation. Critics of the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.27.

¹⁰⁷ Brecht, p.190.

¹⁰⁸ Brecht, p.192.

¹⁰⁹ Brecht, p.192.

everything the well-dressed private detective ought to be. I was calling on four million dollars. (*TBS*, p.3)

This detailing is typical of the hard-boiled format. It gives visual acuity to the scene and at the same time establishes fundamental truths about the detective. In this instance, Chandler shows Marlowe making an effort to present an acceptable front. His statement ‘I was neat, clean, shaved and sober, and didn’t care who knew it’ has a tone of belligerence to it, a note of defiance; his appearance is what it ‘ought to be’, in a world where the rich have positions of power and authority. Also by extension it suggests this is not typical behaviour and Marlowe complies with social expectation. Chandler’s use of the word ‘ought’ shows Marlowe to be a man who sees the difference between obligation and choice. The combination of tone and linguistic emphasis determines the gest that marks out Marlowe’s social standing. His compliance with social expectation takes precedence and whilst his supposed choice to be ‘neat, clean, shaved and sober’ references his anti-hero representation, as a rebel who prefers to be shabby, what remains is social acceptability.

At times the textual examples of gest work to reinforce not just the social status of characters, but also specific forms of social division. The lack of identity accorded to the owner of four million that Marlowe is calling on can be connected to the antagonism that existed between the hard-boiled detective writers of the 1930s and 1940s and those who had wealth and prestige. Davis calls *The Big Sleep* ‘Chandler’s most anti-rich novel’ commenting on class a based work ethic:

There is a constant tension between the ‘productive’ middleclass and the ‘unproductive’ déclassé or idle rich. [...] The fictional opposition between these different middle strata suggests the contrast between the ‘lazy’, speculative Southern California economy [...] and America’s hard-working heartlands.¹¹⁰

When Marlowe arrives at the Sternwood’s house, the text establishes visually what four million can achieve, but we are also presented with the superiority and productivity of Marlowe. The Sternwoods might have wealth, but Marlowe’s code of honour takes precedence:

The main hallway of the Sternwood place was two stories high. Over the entrance doors, which would have let in a troop of Indian elephants, there was a broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in dark armour rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn’t have any clothes on but some

¹¹⁰ Davis, pp.40-41.

very long and convenient hair. The knight had pushed the visor of his helmet back to be social, and he was fiddling with the knots of the rope that tied the lady and not getting anywhere. I stood there and thought that if I lived in the house, I would sooner or later have to climb up there and help him. He didn't seem to be really trying. (*TBS*, p.3)

Despite the power that wealth bestows, evident in the figure of the knight, the 'sober' private detective recognises the ineffectualness of the rescuer and cannot but feel obligated by his own moral 'productive', code, to get involved. The humorous assessment of the situation by the P.I. is indicative of his dispassionate nature, a non-emotive engagement that allows him to interpret images, and establish his dominance in relation to those around him. His insight and his ethics are the traits that set him apart from those he observes. His belittling of the knight reinforces his own chivalric code and reaffirms Davis' reference to the 'unproductive rich'. This condescension towards those who might challenge his reputation is for Marlowe crucial, but it is complicated by the need to endlessly repeat the actions, making it a failing, a flaw in the mythology.

Within the environment of four million dollars Marlowe's performative masculinity is clearly discernible. His dismissal of wealthy excess establishes the arena in which his power must be exerted. Once inside the house Marlowe observes:

The room was too big, the ceiling too high, the doors too tall. [...] there were full-length mirrors and crystal doodads all over the place. (*TBS*, p.13)

The repetition of the word 'too' and the derogatory 'doodads' indicate Marlowe's lack of awe, but also his perception that the Sternwood's wealth creates its own 'larger than life' entity, one that Marlowe must subdue in order to maintain his mythical weight. We are introduced to the elder Sternwood daughter (Mrs Regan) who visually epitomises the idle rich as she 'stretched out on a modernistic chaise-longue with her slippers off'. When she diminishes Marlowe by defining him as part of the order of 'greasy little men snooping around hotels', he comments: 'There was nothing in that for me so I let it drift in the current'. (*TBS*, p.139) His unwillingness to engage with this epithet not only sets it up as significant, but marks it out as causative, a gest that might imply insouciance but is then followed by a particular set of behaviours that return to Marlowe his own 'larger than life' entity that of his idealised masculinity. When Mrs Regan attempts to interrogate Marlowe he grins at

her 'with his head on one side'. The gesture indicates that he has caught her out in her own game of snooping and that he is not going to play along. What follows is both antagonistic and aggressive as Marlowe reduces her to her social and gendered components:

I don't mind your ritzing me or drinking your lunch out of a Scotch bottle. I don't mind your showing me your legs. They're very swell legs and it's a pleasure to make their acquaintance. (*TBS*, p.140)

Until she retorts: 'My God, you big dark handsome brute! I ought to throw a Buick at you'. (*TBS*, p.140) And by doing so re-establishes Marlowe's superiority. The need to throw a Buick in order to subdue him is hardly immaterial. The use of the word 'ought' mirrors Marlowe's own use of the word earlier, implying his domination in this environment where he previously identified his necessity to be 'neat' and works to maintain his mythology.

Failing to fulfil idealised masculinity

Marlowe's assertion of 'productive' middle-class masculinity also requires that he forcibly define those who fail to live up to his own idealised gender. When he first meets the psychoanalyst Marriott, he comments on Marriott's apparent failure to remember his name 'The effect was as phoney as the pedigree of a used car'. (*TBS*, p.46) After Marriott shows Marlowe into his living room, Marlowe's commentary reinforces his earlier use of 'phoney':

It was the kind of room where people sit with their feet in their laps and sip absinthe through lumps of sugar and talk with high affected voices and sometimes-just squeak. It was a room where anything could happen except work. (*TBS*, p.46)

The language here is indicative of Marlowe's judgement, his analysis of people and their milieu often shows a dispassionate distaste, but also a wry perception of human nature. He perceives Marriott as a man without depth, whose conversation can deteriorate into a 'squeak'. Marlowe defines himself in contrast to Marriott: where Marriott is false affectation, Marlowe is a man of work, uncomfortable in this atmosphere of 'phoniness'. But Marlowe's rejection of this 'atmosphere' is telling; his distaste of a man who he sets up in opposition to himself is laboured. Ultimately it says as much about Marlowe's need to re-assert his physical control and distance himself from phoney men, as it does about the failings of Marriott. The snapshot of 'a room where anything could happen except work' operates as a gestic revelation of

a space that Marlowe labours to denigrate, his masculinity is clearly vulnerable within such surroundings. Davis makes a connection with the construction of Los Angeles and 'phoniness'. He comments on the simulacrum of the city, blending 'the real and the false' to create a culture of 'demeaned ambition' where reality was hallucinatory.¹¹¹ The virtue of Marlowe's masculinity, set in comparison with such falsity offers the reader a tangible realism: a man at odds with the fake Hollywood glitz, whose normality can be enjoyed, set apart as it is, from those who 'sip absinth through lumps of sugar'. That Marlowe's virtue is as much an affectation as the high voices of Marriott's clients is clear, but his masculinity adopted as a counter to this 'phoniness' assigns to his mythology a desired realism.

The pseudo reality of Marlowe's masculinity becomes evident when he is confronted by his own physical weaknesses, revealing a man, who despite his toughness and stubborn, self-preserving determination to succeed is very aware of his fragility. Often in an attempt to distract from his intellectual and emotional vulnerabilities, the detective will focus humorously on a physical weakness. Whilst this might appear to counter some of the questions about his self-mastery and inviolableness, there is no doubt that with every word the detective cannot but reveal the gest of his private self. In *Farewell My Lovely* when Marlowe is hit on the head and temporarily loses consciousness his attempt to regain control exposes a loss of confidence, his primary source of self-determining strength. The repetitive language here has an undermining process; it cuts away at Marlowe's reserve and reveals his panic. As it slowly dawns on Marlowe that he has been unconscious for some minutes he aggressively directs his wisecrack humour at the reader:

I got my chin scraped. It hurts. It feels scraped. That way I know it's scraped. No, I can't see it I don't have to see it. It's my chin and I know whether it's scraped or not. Maybe you want to make something of it. Okey, shut up and let me think. What with? (*FML*, p.59)

But he cannot hide his concern that he has been tricked and left for dead by unknown assailants. The enormity of this fact is revealed in his now familiar repetitive use of language:

Twenty minutes' sleep. Just a nice doze. In twenty minutes I had muffed a mob and lost eight thousand dollars. Well, why not? In twenty minutes you can sink a battle ship, down three or four planes, hold a double

¹¹¹ Davis, p.38.

execution. You can die, get married, get fired and find a new job, have a tooth pulled, have your tonsils out. In twenty minutes you can even get up in the morning. You can get a glass of water in a night club - maybe.

Twenty minutes' sleep. That's a long time. Especially on a cold night, out in the open. I began to shiver. (*FML*, p.59)

The concentration on events that can be achieved in twenty minutes shows Marlowe's train of thought. He compares his losses, of consciousness and eight thousand pounds, with violent images of war, of death and execution, countered by the everyday, the mundane, and the forgettable. But neither the thought of mass death or night club queues can remove the uncomfortable realisation that he has been outwitted, as revealed in his final sentence here, 'I began to shiver'. The reader is bullied into becoming his temporary 'side-kick', and forced to humour Marlowe as he works through his logic. His fear makes him querulous; his physical susceptibility exposes his capacity to fail. In a moment of self-revelation his antagonistic 'want to make something of it' does not portray a 'tough guy' but a man who needs to quantify and understand his experience. The comfort of formulaic certainty is replaced by the detective's need to reassert his standing without the linguistic power to achieve it. His tone becomes hostile to those to whom he is unwillingly revealing his loss of control. What we are given here is the gap between the performative masculinity that offers us a readily adoptive gendered identity and the vulnerable, inadequate detective. Arguably the reader might wish for both these formulations, to give a narrative outlet to the gender tensions that exist within the myth. However, this does not equate to a wish for an alternative form of closure one that fails to represent the detective exercising authority and solving the crime. Nor too does this depiction of the detective diminish our desire for the symbolism of idealised masculinity that critical analysis has generated. However, such vulnerabilities ultimately cannot be assimilated into the detective's performance because it is the very 'repeated stylisation' of Marlowe's masculinity that exposes the counter evocation of an uncertain man.¹¹²

'Slapstick' and the individualised detective

Whilst the gest of the detective reveals his social position, it is the excess of detail that provide us with his involuntary responses. Ostensibly the people who inhabit

¹¹² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.33.

the hard-boiled detective novel are made known to us through an emphasis on over-determined and exaggerated detailing (a particular stylistic motif of Chandler), which might be seen as a form of 'textual slapstick'. The concept of 'slapstick' suggests a force, both a bodily compulsion as well as external physical propulsion. In Walter Benjamin's terms it is a force that cannot be avoided because it cannot be controlled.¹¹³ Slapstick then is an external force that has the capacity to affect actions and comment on behavioural gestures. In his article 'Double Exposure' Jonathan Goldman argues that 'slapstick treats both people and things as objects' and that at the same time, slapstick operates as a form of 'chaos'.¹¹⁴ Goldman, like Benjamin, focuses on Charlie Chaplin, and sees Chaplin's erratic physicality and his bodily momentum as allowing him to exercise some self-control outside this state of chaos and that his centrality to the film and celebrity status allow him to employ a level of self-determination. It is useful here to see the 'chaos' and by extension, the slapstick as situational such that they can be defined, like gest, in social terms. The event or situation which Chaplin enters generates forms of social commentary, exposing the mechanisms of social regulation through character interaction and response. Chaplin uses his own physical momentum, his comedic energy or force to challenge the impact of this situation and in doing so takes control of the episode. Like Chaplin we might see the detective as being at one remove from the chaos of textual slapstick. If we see the voice of the detective as structurally retrograde, being applied to an event that has concluded, then the detective gains through his retrospective expression, some self-control. However, this assurance is constantly under threat by the revelatory gest of the detective because gest draws out the 'uncertain and the contradictory'.¹¹⁵ As a consequence it is not then the considered rendering of the actor performing a familiar role, but the personal response of a man to a situation that cannot be completely known. The process of focussing on this slapstick reveals not the answer to the unknown, but the man himself.

Thus whilst the notion of textual slapstick might suggest a means of accessing the performative 'mime' of the detective it can also reveal the impetus of this slapstick identifying the way external factors and involuntary responses affect the detective.

¹¹³ Benjamin, p.117.

¹¹⁴ Goldman, p.3.

¹¹⁵ Brecht, p.192.

Such involuntary actions are in contradiction to the apparent considered choices that mark out the detective as 'in control'. In Chandler's *Farewell My Lovely* Marlowe's engagement with the investigation is initiated by what seems an involuntary decision to follow the character Moose Malloy into a bar. Essentially Marlowe is struck by Malloy's appearance and seems to have an almost instinctual response to Malloy visually, as if Malloy operates as a symbolic trigger, forcing Marlowe to respond. Malloy's over-blown costume, which draws Marlowe in, is described in terms of excess, as if each successive reference to colour and texture provokes Marlowe's inquisitiveness, building up a picture of an over-determined character for whom Marlowe generates an almost immediate protective sense of camaraderie.

He was worth looking at. He wore a shaggy borsalino hat, a rough grey sports coat with white golf balls on it for buttons, a brown shirt, a yellow tie, pleated grey flannel slacks and alligator shoes with white explosions on the toes. From his outer breast pocket cascaded a show handkerchief of the same brilliant yellow as his tie. There were a couple of coloured feathers tucked into the band of his hat, but he didn't really need them. Even on Central Avenue, not the quietest dressed street in the world, he looked about as inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of angel food. (*FML*, p.7)

Significantly this visual excess constrains Marlowe. The focus on appearance can be simplistically read as a forerunner to behavioural expectation, Malloy dresses to excess and he will therefore behave excessively. However, it is this visual stimulation and its impact on Marlowe that establishes the event as 'slapstick': he stops and stares at this man because he 'was worth looking at' thus making the force of slapstick unavoidable. Malloy dominates the scene: he fills the frame and is visually almost too much to quantify. As a consequence Marlowe is drawn to him. The textual slapstick of Malloy at this visual level establishes him as a form of social commentary. His excess can be read as performance, an alternative variant to the detective's performative masculinity, compelling us to see his masculinity as comparative, but also in his own right a statement about what it is to present 'self' through excess. His 'larger than life' clown-like guise forces us to engage with his visual impact, making us aware of Marlowe's emphasis on a surface value and Malloy's own statement of 'look at me'. This man of excess is not 'phony' as with Marriott, nor too does Marlowe deride him to bolster his own sense of self-worth, rather Molloy is the compulsion and propulsion of slapstick.

This clear visual excess removes our focus from Marlowe, providing him with distance and narrative authority, allowing him to assess Malloy, casually judging his coloured feathers as unnecessary. As a consequence we see colour, the excess, the slapstick, and initially not the effect it has on the observer. But Malloy's appearance is reinforced by his physical impact and his interactions. He walks into the bar and 'something sail(s)' out:

Something sailed across the sidewalk and landed in the gutter between two parked cars. It landed on its hands and knees and made a high keening noise like a cornered rat. It got up slowly, retrieved a hat and stepped back on the sidewalk. (*FML*, p.8)

Malloy's physical dynamism is set against the abstract 'something', a 'something' who responds to Malloy's entrance by temporally losing control over 'its' movement and voice. Whilst the visual impact observed by Marlowe allows him to establish himself (as with Chaplin) outside the chaos of excess, the physical impact of Malloy, positions Malloy and not Marlowe as dominant. In this way Malloy operates as a catalyst, for our focus and for the behaviour of others. He stands at the centre of the textual 'slapstick', his excess, both in terms of look and behaviour making him constitutive of the narrative action, rather than Marlowe. What is portrayed as Marlowe's innate inquisitiveness, his simple curiosity, is defined as the thing that physically draws him into the world of Malloy: 'I walked along to the double doors and stood in front of them. They were motionless now. It wasn't any of my business. So I pushed them open and looked in'. (*FML*, p.8) Despite the fact that Marlowe does not have a paying client he continues to let his inquisitiveness determine his involvement. He states 'Nothing made it my business except curiosity': it is delivered as a statement of intent and of personal choice yet the detail here of seeing Malloy, his appearance and his violent physical impact, and then choosing to follow him, can be read differently. Marlowe in response to Malloy's excess loses his will. He stands in front of a motionless door and states 'It wasn't any of my business'. He then opens the doors and looks in. The sequence here does not speak of choices but of involuntary responses that threaten him. His engagement is not a question of 'Will I?' or 'What shall I reveal?' but the loss of resolve in the face of 'a tarantula on a slice of angel food'. (*FML*, p.9)

For the reader, the excess can also work visually to create a specific social reading.

The detail is given as if in cinematographic extreme close up, forcing the reader to focus on the minutiae without its reassuring context. This excess of proximity means the social structuring that underpins the image or behaviour is lost and we are then left without a frame of reference necessary to reassert a social logic. Such a loss has the potential to be liberating, implying a lack of regulation, speaking of an uncertainty, without the governing practices that Judith Butler identifies as rigid. So a 'tarantula on a slice of angle cake' determines our view of the tarantula: it forces us to engage with its visual impact and nothing beyond it. Malloy as a tarantula loses his context, at least temporarily, and the reader cannot step back to create meaning, but rather must allow alternative contexts to take shape. Malloy's potency within the narrative and at times his ascendancy over Marlowe is made apparent through this visual excess. The textual slapstick of Malloy, the tarantula, which is shown in extreme close up, limits the mythological detective who answers the investigative need and completes the formulaic cycle. The loss of control over choice means that this individual and vulnerable man can by extension no longer answer the needs of ordinary men.

Conclusions

In this chapter on Chandler I have considered the ways in which the mythology of the detective breaks down under scrutiny. Whilst the notion of the idealised detective and his concomitant idealised masculinity is seen to be present in some of the most basic of representations, including his response to the criminal act and his environment, there are clearly definable ways in which this mythical man fails to maintain this perfected masculinity. This process of falling short, is key to understanding the way this literary form, through its representation of the detective, opens up to question social practices. In doing so it offers a way of perceiving how the mythology of the detective is maintained as well as the ways in which the detective is vulnerable. The notion of vulnerabilities does not sit comfortably with the mythology, in that the detective must complete the cycle of closure and sustain his 'tough guy' character, or in Butler's terms, risk a failure of identity. Whilst it is arguable that the narrative thrust does not preclude the complexities of a vulnerable detective there is a notional absolutism that is part of the 'tough guy' myth that is at odds with such a suggestion of weakness.

At a textual level it is clear that the myth does not operate in isolation but often reveals ways in which the detective both linguistically and visually falls short of the performance of idealised masculinity. Firstly the social gest of the detective reveals the particularised, individualised, fractured man. Secondly the excess of masculinity is exposed through the chaos of textual slapstick. Both gest and slapstick make known the extent to which masculinity is constructed and performative. The contradictory attributes of the hard-boiled detective allow us to see how gender, as a seemingly naturalised set of behaviours, is in fact part of a surrogate public history, adopted to meet a social need. This uncertain construction of masculinity, despite the academic critical championing of the ‘tough guy’ mythology, might begin to reveal how this form can give entrance to women writers who wish to express a gendered identity and an exploration of agency. Fundamentally this is a literature that foregrounds gender as complex and unstable. As such the hard-boiled novel reveals the regulation of gendered behaviour at the same time as underscoring its construction and its logic, its desirability. As Janice Radway has argued such forms express debates within society and in doing so we recognise the ‘struggle, tension and conflict [...] that is embedded in the social life of the users’.¹¹⁶ Chandler’s representation of 1930s masculinity participated in a surrogate public history that rejected femininity whilst simultaneously exposing the fault lines within the form as well as within the figure of the detective. In my next chapter I will examine the work of Mickey Spillane whose detective, Mike Hammer, offers an alternative way of perceiving gender portrayal within the hard-boiled novel. Spillane’s writing is stylistically very different from Chandler’s; the description is unembellished with little of Chandler’s meticulous detailing. In particular Spillane’s work relies on a heavy handed use of violence directed at those who fail to conform to dominant social expectations and as such is critical to my examination of how the form attempts to expel femininity. However, my analysis of Spillane’s writing, despite its use of graphic and at times misogynistic violence, will paradoxically, open up further ways of challenging the centrality of the ‘tough guy’. I will reinforce, through an explication of Spillane’s 1950s context, the form’s capacity to express the unpredictability of gender identity in response to differing social demands, thus making the hard-boiled novel, as we will later see in Chapter Three, an ideal space

¹¹⁶ Radway, p.4.

for women writers to consider the gender contradictions of the 1980s.

Chapter Two - Masculinity and violence: Mickey Spillane and the excesses of Hammer

Introduction:

In *The Twisted Thing* Mickey Spillane opens his ninth novel featuring detective Mike Hammer, with the image of a beaten man:

His lips were swollen things of lacerated skin, with slow trickles of blood making crooked paths from the corners of his mouth through the stubble of a beard to his chin, dripping onto a stained shirt.¹

The person responsible for the beating is Dilwick, ‘the dirtiest, roughest cop that ever walked a beat’. He is supported by three other willing police officers who take turns beating the man, reducing him to a ‘caricature of a human’. Hammer describes Dilwick as a man who enjoys inflicting violence and one who generates fear: ‘Crude, he was. Crude, hard and dirty, and afraid of nothing. He’d sooner draw blood from a face than eat and everyone knew it’. This combination of graphic violence and corrupt police is typical of Spillane’s work, as is Hammer’s response to the situation. Despite the fact that he is outnumbered and has just witnessed a lacerating beating Hammer taunts Dilwick with ‘thinking what you’d look like the next day if you tried that stuff on me’. This is not, however, foolhardy bravado, rather it is the calculated behaviour of a man who knows himself and of what he is capable. Hammer comments: ‘Nobody spoke to him that way. That is nobody except me. Because I’m the same way myself’, something he proves by kicking Dilwick in the groin with a ‘sickening smash’. (*TTT*, p.2) Such apparent self-aggrandizement is actually little more than stating the facts, Hammer is ‘crude, hard and dirty and afraid of nothing’. This evocation of the hard-boiled detective novel speaks of excess, in behaviour and response. As a consequence Spillane’s writing has variously been described as ‘sadistic’², ‘crude’³ and ‘perverse’⁴, and his detective Mike Hammer as ‘brutal’.⁵ Such a heavy handed representation of masculinity does not generate an obvious site of feminist expression for women detective writers who adopt the terms of the hard-boiled form. However, I turn to Spillane in this chapter not because he constitutes an

¹ Mickey Spillane, *The Twisted Thing* (New York: Signet, 1966), p.1. (All further references cited as *TTT* and page number in the text).

² Knight, p.123.

³ Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p.35.

⁴ Woody Haute, *Pulp Culture and the Cold War* (London: Serpent’s Tale, 1995), p.95.

⁵ Barry Forshaw, *The Rough Guide to Crime Fiction* (London: Penguin, 2007), p.48.

easy critical movement between Chandler and my later analysis of women detective writers; rather it is because Spillane's body of work is pivotal to my examination of how the form can change to express the complexity, variety and unpredictability of gender identity in response to differing social demands. The depiction of Hammer, as shown above, constitutes a very specific form of 'crude, hard' masculinity, one that appears to forcefully express a simplistic binary definition of gender difference in which masculinity is dominant and femininity is sexualised and negated often through visually limiting cropped images in which women are reduced to body parts. The following quotations constitute a typical range of Spillane's output: 'She had million-dollar legs, that girl, and she didn't mind showing them off'.⁶ / 'Her breasts were laughing things that were firmly in place, although I could see no strap marks of a restraining bra'. (*ITJ*, p.86)

They were firm lips, large, ripe, parted slightly over the even lines of her teeth. There was fire there that grew hotter as I came closer. I could see her mouth open even more, the tip of her tongue impatiently waiting, then the impatience broke and it met me before the lips did.⁷

Here femininity is reduced to legs, breasts and an open mouth, suggesting an overt image of sexual availability. However, as I have shown through my analysis of Chandler, this gender separation is based on a refusal to recognise the imperative of femininity within this equation. Marlowe must work to repress any suggestion of weakness, or the negativity that is implicit in 'femininity', in order to maintain his mythology; in doing so he makes femininity constitutive, the difference through which his meaning is defined. In Spillane's work the constitution of femininity is extended to encompass not just sexualised women but all those rejected as 'other', including, as Rzepka comments 'godless communism, and its effete travellers: college educated professionals, homosexuals and sexy, demanding females'.⁸ Hammer's dependence on repetitive acts of brutality as a way of reinforcing his status implies an ever increasing need to expel the feminine in all its forms. His violence progressively becomes the sign of his weakness and not his power. This forcible rejection of femininity on the part of Hammer reflects a gender dichotomy powerfully at work in the culture of the 1950s that Spillane has encompassed in his

⁶ Mickey Spillane, *I the Jury* (New York: Signet, 1952), p.12. (All further references cited as *ITJ* and page number in the text).

⁷ Mickey Spillane, *Kiss Me Deadly* (New York: Penguin, 1951), p.472. (All further references cited as *KMD* and page number in the text).

⁸ Rzepka, pp.219-20.

conceptualisation of the crime form.

Spillane's work, although stylistically different from the careful detail and particularity of Chandler's detective, can be understood as a response to the time in which it was written. His novels answer a particular set of social needs. The early Hammer novels were published and initially read during the 1950s at a time of significant political unrest in the United States. The combined effect of the Cold War paranoia and the demobilization of disillusioned and displaced armed forces returning home after the Second World War fed into the work of Spillane and its delineation of masculine identity. The combined effect of this distrust and displacement created, according to Sean McCann a 'bristling fraternity' offering its largely male demographic a brotherhood in arms against a communist threat.⁹ This was in marked contrast to the Depression era, when much of Chandler's work was written and state responses to the financial crisis made Chandler's detective a champion of the individual.¹⁰ Whilst much of the critical discourse on Spillane's work is dismissive and antagonistic towards his political stance, his work nonetheless offers a bridge between Chandler and the women's texts I explore because it provides ways of understanding the complexity of gender production in the context of a changing social landscape. Spillane's evocation of the detective in 1950s America responds to a specific set of political and cultural coordinates that did not exist in Chandler's pre-war world. Whilst Spillane continued to write until his death in 2006 my focus will largely be the work he produced in the 1950s in order to examine the way post-war politics impacted on the re-visioning of the hard-boiled novel. Spillane's later work maintains his caustic style and continues to offer commentary on the political condition of America but it is his powerful response to the paranoia of the Anti-Communist movement that most forcefully establishes his difference from Chandler and his unique deployment of the form. Spillane's use of the hard-boiled novel confirms McKeon's belief that genres are 'elastic' and that when they change they do so to fulfil 'a need for which no adequate alternative method exists'.¹¹ As such these narratives provide a means of investigating debates within society in a medium that is at once familiar and accessible. Spillane's work,

⁹ McCann, p.147.

¹⁰ Rzepka, p.219.

¹¹ McKeon, p.20.

because of its difference from Chandler's writing and its extremes of violence, forcefully establishes the flexibility of the hard-boiled form in terms of its ability to address the contemporaneous needs of its readers and in doing so contributes to a surrogate public history that responds to the social climate of the 1950s.¹²

In order to consider the social context of Spillane's work and his reliance on violence as a corollary of masculinity, I will expand on the concepts of gest and slapstick. In Chapter One the notion of gest made it possible to consider Chandler's construction of the detective and the 1930s context in which he moved. Brecht argues that a character's physical behaviour or gest offers ways of uncovering historically specific 'social impulses' which establish both the detective's individuality outside the mythology of the form and the gender scripts at work in the text.¹³ In Chapter One I consider what Brecht defines as an alienation effect, such that the familiar, that is the rigid mythology of the 'tough guy', is turned into the 'uncertain and the contradictory'.¹⁴ Here I want to expand on this concept to understand the gest of Hammer's violence. Butler perceives gender as 'a set of repeated acts' which maintain gender coherence.¹⁵ Hammer's repeated acts of violence define and maintain his masculinity. However, by highlighting their repetitive nature these acts of violence can be reduced to what Brecht calls 'the inconsistencies of its various attitudes' or the social impulses that maintain and regulate gender. Thus the examination of gest in relation to Hammer reveals the extent to which he is reliant on a cycle of violence to shore up his masculinity. In connection with this way of characterizing violence I extend the concept of slapstick. In Chapter One I made use of the model of slapstick to assess the impact of the criminal event on the body of the detective. Slapstick then is a representation of force, one that compels the body.¹⁶ The repetitive nature of slapstick offers a further way of comprehending Hammer's violent behaviour. Slapstick, like gest can be read in social terms, in that slapstick is revelatory and has the capacity to expose the detective both as its force impacts on his body and as he attempts to counter this impact. For Hammer, the effect of slapstick is generated by his own violence rather than the criminal event and as such

¹² Davis, p.144.

¹³ Brecht, p.198.

¹⁴ Brecht, p.192.

¹⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.33.

¹⁶ Goldman, p.3.

reveals not only Hammer's reliance on violence but his inherent fear of losing the power that violence can achieve.

I will also make use of Sharon Marcus' theory of the 'grammar of violence' taken from her work 'Fighting Back, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention'. She comments on the usefulness of the term 'grammar' because it 'means the rules and structure which assign people to positions within a script'.¹⁷ Through the work of Marcus I draw out the gendering explicit in an analysis of violence and the way it regulates masculinity and femininity. This chapter also incorporates the work of Jacqueline Rose in *Why War?*, whose exploration of state violence I connect to the 1950s dominant belief that those who stood outside the right-wing hegemony of anti-communism were deemed un-American. Rose focuses on Margaret Thatcher and Ruth Ellis, to consider the contradictory nature of legitimate violence. By examining the premierships of Thatcher and Ellis, the last female to be executed by the state in Britain, Rose draws out the erroneousness of equating legitimate violence with masculinity and by extension illegitimate violence with femininity.¹⁸ These concepts allow me to understand the way Spillane has utilised the hard-boiled form as a response to the 1950s political landscape. It also offers a further example of the form's capacity to express the unpredictability of gender identity in response to specific social demands.

Importantly Spillane's work operates as a key example within the critical argument that the hard-boiled detective novel is, as Glover states, not one that 'allows an easy male/female transposition' and that Spillane's construction of male agency makes a female version of the hard-boiled detective of questionable value.¹⁹ As Knight has commented 'the violence of language and action of the (female) private eye [...] seems contrary to the tenet of feminism'.²⁰ Babener calls the female detective the 'henchmen for patriarchy'.²¹ My analysis of Spillane will show that his adaptation of

¹⁷ Sharon Marcus, 'Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A theory and Politics of Rape Prevention' in *Gender Struggles: Practical Approaches to Contemporary Feminism*, ed. by Constance Mui and Julien Murphy (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), p.392.

¹⁸ Rose, p.49.

¹⁹ Glover, p.78.

²⁰ Knight, p.163.

²¹ Liahna Babener 'Uncloseting Ideology in the Novels of Barbara Wilson', in *Women Times Three*, ed. by Kathleen Gregory Klein (Popular Press, Bowling Green, 1995), p.146.

the hard-boiled novel in the context of post-war America paradoxically works to open up the form to a feminist perspective rather than shut it down: firstly because it establishes the level at which the hard-boiled form can and does change in response to social and cultural pressures; secondly because it offers an opportunity to engage with the production of Spillane's 'brutal' agency and by extension to test what such agency might mean to women writers without reference to Glover's critically simplistic gender substitution. In particular, Spillane's use of violence, both as a means to define masculine prowess and expel or negate the weakness that is connoted by femininity, provides women writers with the opportunity to scrutinise how violence impacts on women's lives. It also offers women the means to revise simplistic definitions of feminine weakness by taking for themselves the constitutive power that violence can bestow on its user.

Chandler's mythology – the detective as a social product

In Chapter One I argue that the hard-boiled detective novel is a form that can illuminate the production of gender, both its processes and its effects. Through Chandler's work I establish the importance of the historical moment of writing and the ways in which the detective embodies contemporaneous gender anxieties. My analysis establishes the figure of the detective and his mythological construction as revelatory, through which we might comprehend the gender 'scripts' that existed at the time of writing. Chandler's work explicates the concept of surrogate public history that is a way of looking at both the construction of accepted public histories and what such a construction might hide or negate.²² Sean McCann sees Marlowe as the fictional answer to the increasingly centralised government power in his delivery of a 'kind of "vernacular" expression, a repository of neglected popular virtues' which were being eroded by a loss of individualism.²³ John Scaggs extends this analysis of Chandler's work to connect Marlowe to the negation of the American dream.²⁴ Charles Rzepka identifies these losses more specifically in terms of the impact of organised crime and growing urbanisation.²⁵ Thus Chandler offered the reading public a fantasy of individual agency through his creation, a surrogate hero who stood up to corporate and government intervention and corruption.

²² Davis, p.37.

²³ McCann, p.147.

²⁴ Scaggs, p.68.

²⁵ Rzepka, p.185.

Spillane's characterisation of the detective incorporates these attributes and then reworks them for a 1950s readership. Spillane extended the politics of the 'common man' espoused by Chandler but one fuelled by an acceptance of the 1950s Anti-Communist doctrine in which 'the American people become a bristling militarist fraternity, invigorated by its own ruthlessness towards internal as well as external enemies'.²⁶ McCann comments 'in Spillane's world the common man comes into his own' and 'victory follows from the sheer popular virility that Hammer represents' such that Hammer 'dismiss(es) every restraint that resists the huge force of this body'.²⁷ Thus Hammer rejects the 'ordinary' of Chandler's detective to present an 'extraordinary' hero who both champions the status quo but is also the lone heroic figure. James Gilbert observes in *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* that there was 'a real conflict between an assumed norm of masculinity and new forms of masculinity based upon notions of companionship and cooperation with the family and workplace'.²⁸ The 'assumed norm' is defined in Susan George's work *Gendering Science Fiction Films: Invaders from the Suburbs* as 'the residual values and ideologies of the frontiersman, of the rugged, individualist of the US myth'.²⁹ Hammer's portrayal embodies the tensions and conflicts of 1950s white men with his depiction of 'brutal' masculinity, contributing to a form of surrogate public history relevant to a time very different from Chandler's 1930s.³⁰ In *My Gun is Quick* Hammer defines his heroic, extraordinary qualities as a man prepared to address the ills of society when others prefer the comfort of home. Spillane opens the novel by asking: 'When you sit at home comfortably folded up in a chair besides a fire, have you ever thought what goes on outside there?' He answers the question with 'Probably not' and then proceeds to outline the horrors that lie beyond the calm of the fireside chair, finally commenting:

They go on right under your very nose and you never know about them.
Oh yes, you can find them alright. All you have to do is look for them.

²⁶ McCann, pp.203-4.

²⁷ McCann, pp.202-203.

²⁸ James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005), p.3.

²⁹ Susan George, *Gendering Science Fiction Films: Invaders from the Suburbs* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), p.13.

³⁰ Davis, p.37.

But I wouldn't if I were you because you won't like what you find. Then again, I'm not you and looking for those things is my job.³¹

His 'I'm not you' defines his separation from the domesticated fireside reader, the fact that he actively seeks out what others 'won't like' because it is his job, gives us Spillane's hard-boiled hero: the extraordinary detective who pursues the criminals despite the threat to his own life.

Woody Haute in his text *Pulp Culture* identifies the cold era of the 1950s and 60s as one of paranoia fuelled by an increase in government control in response to real and imagined threats. Post-war uncertainty was reflected in a number of legal changes: the House Committee on Un-American Activities became a standing (permanent) organization in 1945 and reinforced its authority over the next twenty years investigating alleged disloyalty and subversive activities on the part of private citizens, public employees, and those organizations suspected of having communist ties. This was followed in 1947 by the establishment of the CIA with its emphasis on covert activities, the Federal Loyalty programme, designed to root out communist affiliation amongst government employees, and the Taft-Hartley Act, aimed at reducing union control; all of which generated a culture of surveillance in which private citizens were encouraged to inform on each other.³² This emphasis on the communist threat is epitomised by Hammer: 'I killed more people tonight than I have fingers on my hands. I shot them in cold blood and enjoyed every minute of it [...] They were Commies'.³³ According to Rzepka the 'red menace' was extended to anyone who failed to conform to the prevailing ideological consensus, feeding into the anxieties and suspicion of the working class veterans to whom Spillane's books appealed.³⁴

³¹ Mickey Spillane, *My Gun is Quick* (London: Orion, 1950), p.153. (All further references cited as *MGIQ* and page number in the text).

³² Haute, p.7.

Part of the Taft-Hartley Act was a requirement that union members declared that they were not supporters of the Communist Party and had no relationship with any organization seeking the 'overthrow of the United States government by force or by any illegal or unconstitutional means'. Just over a year after Taft-Hartley was passed, 81,000 union officers from nearly 120 unions had filed the required affidavits. Phillip Nicholson, *Labor's Story in the United States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), p.242.

³³ Spillane, *One Lonely Night* (New York: Penguin, 1951), p.24. (All further references cited as *OLN* and page number in the text).

³⁴ Rzepka, pp.219-20.

Spillane's work clearly offers an alternative way of understanding the figure of the detective. The simplicity and directness of Spillane's writing and Hammer's brutality would seem to leave little room for a nuanced reading of possible masculinities. The depiction of Hammer is an extreme representation of masculine hard-boiled agency and as such delivers a singular and monolithic man, one that arguably works to limit our perception of the form as a possible expression of the complexity, variety and unpredictability of gender identity. If we see the hard-boiled novel in Michael McKeon's terms as one that 'provide(s) a conceptual framework for the mediation (if not the 'solution') of intractable problems' then Hammer's violent expulsion of the weakness that is connoted by femininity, would suggest that his is a masculinity that must resist fracture or risk annihilation in order to 'solve' femininity.³⁵ In effect Spillane's version of the mythology of the detective is a form of masculine exceptionalism, the representation of a man who cannot accept or endure failure. In *My Gun is Quick* Hammer's commentary identifies those who survive the threat of death: 'You have to be quick, and you have to be able, or you become one of the devoured, and if you can kill first, no matter how, and no matter who, you can live'. (*MGIQ*, pp.153-4) The title of the novel asserts his claim as someone who 'lives'. How then do we gain insight into this monolithic man, such that we can both realise the complexity of the 1950s gender scripts and make sense of the form as dynamic and revelatory? McKeon argues that in the process of changing, a genre will 'confront, on the level of the narrative form and content, both intellectual and social crisis'.³⁶ Thus it is the process of recognising the juncture between Hammer's exceptionalism and the crisis of the Cold War that reveals Spillane's position in my argument; that conflict or confrontation is paramount to the construction of the hard-boiled form in that it modifies and develops in response to changes or crises in society. Spillane's work is significant because it shows how the form can contribute to the naturalisation of new ideologies in response to 'crisis' (in this instance 'godless communism and its effete travellers') as well as questioning dominant ideologies.

The 'Hammer of God': the gest of exceptionalism and missionary violence
 Brecht's concept of 'gestus' offers the means to comprehend the connections

³⁵ McKeon, p.20.

³⁶ McKeon, p.20.

between Hammer's monolithic masculinity and 'a set of social relations' which define Hammer as the champion of right-wing fervour.³⁷ Through the textual gest of Chandler's work I identified the degree to which Marlowe falls short of the idealised 'tough guy' that he is expected to fulfil in order to solve the crime and bring about justice.³⁸ In Spillane's work the gest of Hammer reveals a man who sees himself as not simply a representative of the law but the law personified, not answerable to its limitations but its very mouthpiece. Hammer is combative, confrontational; his language is hostile, allowing no room for questions or a suggestion of weakness. In *I, The Jury* Hammer's emotive response to the death of a friend is expressed in an excess of violent imagery that vocalises his intent, that is to move the investigation forward on his terms and control the chaos of the criminal event:

The dead can't speak for themselves [...] How could Jack tell a jury what it was like to have his insides ripped out by a dum dum? Nobody in the box would know how it felt to be dying or have your own killer laugh in your face [...] I'm the law and I'm not going to be cold and impartial [...] I'm going to get the louse that killed you. He won't sit in the chair. He won't hang. He will die exactly like you died, with a .45 slug in the gut. (*ITJ*, pp.4-5)

Hammer's physical engagement with the investigative process is fuelled by an aggressive and personal desire for vicious retribution but it is his reference to the law that defines his social positioning and this version of the mythology of the hard-boiled detective. 'I'm the law and I'm not going to be cold and impartial'. He is at once both the law and above the law, not required to accept the impartiality that the justice system demands. Whilst the title of the novel is *I the Jury*, it is also clear that he will take for himself the role of judge and executioner.

Hammer's excesses earned him the sobriquet the 'Hammer of God' thus defining not just the nature of his physical acts of violence but also attributing a messianic virtue to his behaviour.³⁹ 'Hammer of God' suggests a very particular type of physical gest. In part it presents a man who complies with the ethical 'tough guy' established within the formula by Chandler, but it also suggests a brutality evident in the image of a hammer, repetitively striking an object with force.⁴⁰ Such a graphic image fits

³⁷ Brecht, p.198.

³⁸ Brecht, p.198.

³⁹ George Grella, 'The Hard-boiled Detective Novel', in *Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Robin Winks (New Jersey: Spectrum Books, 1980), p.117.

⁴⁰ Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder*, pp.16-17.

well with the way in which Spillane's detective has been characterized. Knight calls him a 'blunt instrument, an impermeable hero'.⁴¹ As an instrument Hammer fulfils the formulaic construction of the detective, a man dedicated to the righting of wrongs through a personal code of honour.⁴² He becomes then a brutal instrument of justice, standing between the criminal and those threatened with harm. The phrase is also indicative of the recipients of Hammer's violence. 1950s America was a religious country with more than fifty percent of the populace attending church regularly. President Eisenhower urged religious piety as a unifying response to the 'godless' Communism of America's enemies.⁴³ In 1954, Eisenhower signed a bill to add 'one nation under God' to the Pledge of Allegiance. Two years later, Congress made 'In God We Trust' the national motto.⁴⁴ As the 'Hammer of God' Spillane's detective was forcefully part of a belief system that ascribed a god-like virtue to the violent expulsion of those who failed to conform to the dominant principles of anti-communism. This is clearly evident when Hammer encounters a group of Communist sympathisers in *One Lonely Night* he uses Biblical references to describe their behaviour. 'The lump of vomit in the centre was a Judas sheep trying to lead the rest to the axe'. (*OLN*, p.29) The reference to Judas symbolically ascribing the ultimate form of betrayal to those that Hammer distinguishes as unpatriotic.

The label 'Hammer of God' suggests a hero whose logic might evoke an unquestioning form of state-approved justice; as such Hammer constitutes a very specific form of surrogate public history that does not represent an alternative to dominant ideology, but rather implies an exaggeration of already existing political and social consensus. This is a detective whose right to use force complies with the law and its legal regulation of society. He acts in the name of God, which for Spillane is a right-wing God making him according to George Grella an instrument of paternal Law.⁴⁵ Knight extends this by calling Hammer the 'instrument of an angry God' which he connects with not just a 'conservative cold war ideology' but also a 'holier-than-thou' attitude and 'puritanical hypocrisy'.⁴⁶ Thus Hammer is not

⁴¹ Knight, p.165.

⁴² Rzepka, p.203.

⁴³ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.329.

⁴⁴ Patterson, p.329.

⁴⁵ Grella, p.117.

⁴⁶ Knight, p.219.

simply a form of masculine exception, but he embodies the American concept of 'national exceptionalism' which in the 1950s defined the United States as fundamentally different from, and better than, other nation states and importantly anti-Stalinist. Will Herberg in his explanation of exceptionalism comments that it was characterised by a moralistic tone in which issues were seen as 'plain and simple and in black and white' and where, in keeping with the anti-Communist tenor of the times, those who stood outside the right-wing hegemony were deemed un-American.⁴⁷

Spillane's most virulent 1950s texts *I the Jury* and *One Lonely Night* clearly establish these characteristics of national exceptionalism. In *I the Jury* Hammer is judge, jury and executioner, unwilling to wait for or accept, the processes of the 'law' but nonetheless fulfilling state regulation of those identified as un-American by right wing politics. *One Lonely Night* unambiguously engages with the anti-Communist stance of Spillane. Hammer operates as a one man crusader fighting against the perceived threat of the 'reds'. Spillane, through Hammer, has created a form of masculinity that expresses absolutism. In part this is because of the centrality of Hammer's sense of right:

The text never places his authority, moral or physical in any doubt. Hammer is a blunt instrument, an impermeable hero fired with missionary violence in support of an unquestionable right.⁴⁸

When Hammer's 'unquestionable right' is challenged by the 'law' at the opening of *One Lonely Night* his response sets him above the judge who has criticised him and aligns him with a higher order. Hammer says of himself:

I am nothing but a stinking no-good killer but I get there first, Judge. I get there first and live to do it again because I have eyes that see and a hand that works without being told and I don't give a damn what you do to my soul because it is so far gone nothing can be done for it. (*OLN*, p.12)

His tone asserts his right to kill and take justice into his own hands (as the *hammer*) irrespective of the personal consequences. The lack of punctuation here creates pace and passion to the assertion. This is the defining stance of Hammer; his aggression is palpable, ostensibly leaving no room for alternative viewpoints. Knight's reference to

⁴⁷ Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), p.79.

⁴⁸ Knight, p.123.

missionary violence is taken one step further by Hammer. He appropriates through his language, his gest, a self-acclaimed omniscience: 'I have eyes that see and a hand that works without being told'. Hammer's eyes and hand become divine and his 'no-good killer' part of a deific gestural function. Hammer's exceptionalism, his unquestionable sense of right and his role as the brutal instrument of justice, defines his version of the mythology. In this way Spillane's account of the figure of the hard-boiled detective embodies a brand of ruthless omnipotence and nationalistic legitimacy; through which we are given a particular vision of masculine power as an arm of the state.

Mickey Spillane and the evolution of the hard-boiled form

Through the representation of Hammer, Spillane's work clearly endorsed and disseminated dominant political attitudes of the time and as a consequence his writing of the hard-boiled form contributes to the naturalisation of new cold war ideologies emerging in response to crisis. As such Spillane's re-working of this literature to suit his own particular needs, further establishes the form as dynamic and revelatory. This generic fluidity is vital to the achievement of Spillane and his representation of the detective, but perhaps more significantly it is part of the ongoing evolution of the hard-boiled novel that has allowed women writers to enter the field. Stylistically Spillane's version of the form is starkly different from that of Chandler's and whilst Spillane's work retains the fundamentals of the formula inevitably it is the differences that are the focus of much of the critical reception. Few critics are favourable about Spillane's work; some such as Rzepka are dismissive in the strongest terms:

The sadism and voyeurism, the puritanical hypocrisy and the misogyny, and the holier-than-thou disrespect for legal niceties that fill the Mike Hammer books are repugnant,⁴⁹

Commentators such as Woody Haute have identified Spillane's success as a writer within the form as a *direct* product of this violence. Haute says of Spillane that he 'embellished his work with lashings of sadism' but that he remained one of the 'most popular crime writers in the world who by the early 1980s had sold over 150 million books'.⁵⁰ There is a curious irony in the status of Spillane's work. Whilst the critics

⁴⁹ Rzepka, p.219.

⁵⁰ Haute, pp.95-96.

were vitriolic in their dismissal of each new novel, Spillane's work was financially extremely successful. Anthony Boucher writing for the *San Francisco Chronicle* said his work was 'so vicious a glorification of force, cruelty and extra-legal methods that the novel might be made required reading in a Gestapo training school'.⁵¹ However prior to his death in 2006 he had sold over 200 million books globally, far outselling other authors of the form.⁵² Spillane explained his success as writing for a largely ex-military readership that had learnt that strength was a valuable tool and who were angry about not finding a place at home upon their return.⁵³ Barbara Ehrenreich in her work *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* comments that these readers 'escaped into Mickey Spillane mysteries, where naked blondes were routinely perforated in a hail of bullets' and Hammer punished those who failed to conform.⁵⁴ Hammer's legalised brutality fed into reader dissatisfaction about the perceived spread of communism and its apparent weakening effects:

Oh, don't arrest them, don't treat them to the democratic process of court and law [...] do the same thing to them that they'd do to you! Treat 'em to the unglorious taste of sudden death. (*ITJ*, p.11)

The simplicity of this statement determines the certainty that such attitudes would be acceptable. Spillane thus makes murderous intent part of the social gest of Hammer's masculinity. Spillane said of his work 'I am a writer not an author [...] I am writing for the public' arguing that the demobbed soldiers wanted a detective whose force championed a way of life they had fought for in Europe. Spillane saw himself as writing for 'the people, his customers'; he believed that he gave them what they wanted and his success arguably confirms he was correct.⁵⁵

The extent to which Hammer is recognised as a representative of dominant attitudes is evident in a 1954 newspaper article by Christopher La Farge, printed in *The Saturday Review*.

⁵¹ Anthony Boucher, *I The Jury*, (review) *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 August 1947. Quoted in, Jesse Isaac Berrett, *The Secret Lives of Consumer Culture: Masculinity and Consumption in Post-War America* Vol. 1. (Berkeley: University of California, 1996), p.79.

⁵² Haute, p.76.

⁵³ <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/spillane.htm>. [accessed 10 August 2010].

⁵⁴ Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Garden City and New York: Anchor Bay and Doubleday, 2003), p.41.

⁵⁵ Max Allan Collins & James L. Taylor, *One Lonely Knight: Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer* (Bowling Green, OH: Popular Press, 1984), p.24.

Mike Hammer is the logical conclusion, almost a sort of brutal apotheosis, of McCarthyism; when things seem wrong, let one man cure the wrong by whatever means he, as privileged saviour, chooses. [...] He operates, as has Senator McCarthy, on the final philosophy that the end can justify the means; in this Hammerism and McCarthyism are similar.⁵⁶

La Farge's definition of Hammer as 'brutal apotheosis' clearly highlights this particular form of exceptional hard-boiled masculinity and its connection to the political events of the time reinforcing Spillane's writing as socially relevant. In both word and deed he is defined as a solution, a saviour, and also part of American gender relations during the 1950s. In this way Hammer contributes to a form of surrogate public history which arguably forcibly works to expel those that question the dominant belief system of 1950s America. The excesses of Hammer must inevitably imply that such people are a threat and need to be aggressively silenced. La Farge makes a seamless move between McCarthyism and Hammerism and in doing so firstly positions Hammer at the heart of anti-communist affiliation of the time; secondly he attributes to Hammer the rank, authority and intolerance of McCarthy. That Hammer as detective represents a different set of masculinities to that promulgated by Chandler also establishes the way that changing gender constructions substitute versions that no longer have topical relevance, producing alternative surrogate public histories. The representation of Hammer and his levels of unrestrained physical brutality, whilst untenable at the level of social reality is evidence of the symbolic forms of violence that McCarthyism pursued and which Spillane legitimised. Such 'popular' violence, borne out by the financial success of Spillane, reveals the way this fantasy of state endorsed ruthlessness informs social practice. As Walton and Jones comment this literature 'defines and conventionalises the limits of its audience's shifting conceptions of reality' as well as 'mediate, and manage their fantasies and fears about those limits'.⁵⁷ Thus Spillane's pro-McCarthy writing offers solutions and alternatives to the fears and desires generated by communism.

Spillane's success was not just a product of his popular central character or his engagement with the politics of the time but also derived from the cheap production

⁵⁶ Christopher La Farge, 'Mickey Spillane and his Bloody Hammer', *The Saturday Review*, 6 November 1954.

⁵⁷ Walton and Jones, pp.12-13.

of paperback books, both of which establish the adaptability of the form. The paperbacks had a direct link to the pulp stories and novels of the 1900s. These books were, like the pulps, seen as mass market novels with lurid front covers designed to appeal to readers with limited browsing time. Woody Haute, in his analysis of pulp writing during the 1950s, comments that these novels were part of a pulp culture that was dominated by the increase in disposability.⁵⁸ A post war boost in productivity and consumerism meant that the reading public had more expendable cash to buy paperbacks. Wire racks of 25 cent novels were strategically placed in bus stations, cafes and mobile shops.⁵⁹ For Spillane the paperback boom meant that his books sold in the millions rather than the thousands. However, Spillane's connection to the early pulp novels of the 1900s was more than just a matter of the publication processes. Haute takes the concepts of pulp culture and disposability further by using the terms as critical tools. He defines Spillane's work as 'pure pulp to be discarded after, or before, it's read'.⁶⁰ Thus despite the fact that the 1900s pulp literature is fairly uniformly seen as significant to the history of the hard-boiled form and as forerunners to the critically acclaimed 1930s and 40s writers (of which Chandler is central) its status is poor and by association Spillane's achievement is diminished.

One of Spillane's biggest detractors was Chandler himself, who commented 'Pulp fiction at its worse was never as bad as this stuff' and reputedly threw one of Spillane's books in the waste bin before he had read it.⁶¹ Such rejection of both Spillane and pulp is an indication of the contradictory way the hard-boiled novel was critically perceived by the 1950s. As a literary form it had established itself as a successful and popular crime genre with Chandler and Hammett at its core. Whilst its formulaic rubric incorporated violence it did not appear to have room for the excesses of Spillane. The process of defining Spillane's work as 'pure pulp', despite its negative associations, gives us a way of perceiving the standing of Spillane within the field and by extension a way of perceiving the form itself. Spillane's connection to the pulp novels and magazines establishes a notional continuum, one that makes connections between writers but also more interestingly highlights difference. Through Spillane perhaps more than Chandler the hard-boiled form can be seen as

⁵⁸ Haute, p.6.

⁵⁹ Haute, p.6.

⁶⁰ Haute, p.96.

⁶¹ David Geherin, *The American Private Eye* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1986), p.121.

flexible to new ways of reading, and able to express changing desires and fears such that 'ideological investment' is pleasurable for readers.⁶²

The other connection between Spillane's work and original pulp fiction is through the demographics of readership. The early pulps were working-class publications. Rzepka defines them as 'tales of heroic self-determination during an era of industrial and corporate triumphalism'.⁶³ He saw the pulps delivering 'compensatory fictions' in which the individual succeeded despite overwhelming opposition. Chandler created a detective whose knowledge and antagonism towards the realities of corporate greed made him a different kind of hero to the original pulp detective. Marlowe's heroic mythology substituted itself for the more idealistic 1900s heroism and stood against the corporate agenda of the 1930s where 'Bankers are good people. Big business is good business'.⁶⁴ Whilst Marlowe's wisecracks gave expression to a disillusioned American hero, Spillane's re-writing of the original pulps rejected this version of the mythology and gave us a detective who used his excesses in pursuit of the dominant ideology itself. Thus tales of self-determination were combined in Spillane's work with post Second World War anxieties of the so-called ordinary man.⁶⁵ In this way the original pulp stories were re-tooled to incorporate the right-wing tenets of the 1950s. In doing so Spillane's work contributes to a particularly pliant hard-boiled continuum. Hammer becomes part of the public's perception of what masculinity is or can be and hence a form of surrogate public history, one in which consent to existing hegemonic forms of power, law and order is reinforced through permissive acts of brutality.

The language of violence

At the heart of Spillane's texts is a reliance on violence that determines a very specific form of gendered identity. My focus here is not just the degree of violence and who it is directed at but fundamentally what it says about Hammer. My conceptualisation of the use of violence is twofold: firstly it addresses Hammer's state endorsed, gender specific dominance; secondly it reveals his over-dependence

⁶² Walton and Jones, pp.12-13.

⁶³ Rzepka, p.219.

⁶⁴ Gary Hoppenstand, *The Dime Novel Detective* (Bowling Green University Press, Bowling Green, 1982), p.6.

⁶⁵ Rzepka, p.223.

on violent excess arguably making him weak. My analysis of this contradiction opens up to further investigation the complexities of gender identity reinforcing the way the hard-boiled detective novel is a form that generates, and re-generates 'positions of resistance and agency' that women writers and readers have taken advantage of.⁶⁶ Spillane's detective is perceived as the quintessential man of action. Violence is the primary way in which he asserts his reputation as well as his dominance over the criminals:

I got one foot loose and kicked out and up and felt my toe smash onto his groin.⁶⁷

I reached up and smacked her across the mouth as hard as I could. Her head rocked.⁶⁸

I'm not a cat, but I got my shoes under me in a hurry. The billy swung at my head while I was still off balance. The guy was too eager. He missed me. I didn't miss. I was big. He was bigger. I had one bad hand and I didn't want to spoil the other. I leaned back against the wall and kicked out and up with a slashing toe that nearly tore him in half. He tried to scream. All I heard was a bubbling sound. (*VIM*, p.391)

The imagery is visceral and not gender selective, often the detail quantifies Hammer's innate ability to overcome the impact of violence. Hammer's masculinity is defined by both his willingness and his ability to kick and punch those in his way.

Of significance is the means by which Spillane incorporates the formulaic violence into his texts to define this particular form of masculinity. The importance of this lies not simply in the way Spillane's detective is physically aggressive, but in the ways in which Spillane's texts articulate through a grammar of violence a broader and more encompassing conceptualisation of violence. The grammar of violence determines a hierarchical set of relationships within the act of violence. Sharon Marcus, in her examination of rape scripts draws out connections between the constitution of grammar within language and 'the rules [...] which assign people to positions within a script'.⁶⁹ Marcus' focus is on the gendering explicit in an analysis of rape; she

⁶⁶ Walton and Jones, p.93.

⁶⁷ Mickey Spillane, *The Big Kill* (New York: Signet, 1951), p.227. (All further references cited as TBK and page number in the text).

⁶⁸ Mickey Spillane, *Vengeance is Mine* (New York: Penguin, 1950), p.50. (All further references cited as *VIM* and page number in the text).

⁶⁹ Marcus, p.392.

explains that ‘the gendered grammar of violence predicates men as the operators of its tools’ and women as its object.⁷⁰ The word ‘grammar’ then defines a set of rules and can be connected to the social regulation of gender, both reinforcing David Glover’s argument that the form does not ‘allow an easy male/female transposition’ but also drawing attention to the overly simplistic binary that the construction of Hammer relies on.⁷¹ The grammar of violence defines something more fundamental than physical or bodily violence; it establishes the extent to which an excess of violence is evident in Spillane’s drawing of his version of a constructed masculinity. In particular it establishes how Hammer is located in relation to those who endorse such violence and by extension those who are its recipients. As such it feeds into a revised model of the hero whose use of violence confirms Hammer’s participation in a surrogate public history relevant for the 1950s with its intolerance and excess. The degree to which the hard-boiled detective is perceived as engaging with and utilising the grammar of violence, is evident in the way violence is critically read as vital.⁷² Knight classifies him as a ‘certainty, his ethics as vigilantism’.⁷³ Rzepka defines him as ‘avenging’.⁷⁴ Cawelti goes further, perhaps because he clearly has little admiration for Spillane’s skill, and calls Hammer’s violence ‘legitimated sadism’ fulfilling as he does the punishment of those sections of society deemed undesirable through a pleasurable brutality.⁷⁵ This extends the notion of legitimate violence to a further extreme, giving sadism its own validity within masculinity in contrast to Chandler’s work where there is an almost masochistic playing out of power and weakness.

Spillane generates, through this violent excess, a re-consideration of the way the mythology of the detective works and his negotiation of what constitutes the ‘tough guy’. The grammar of violence becomes pre-eminent. The language that describes the act of violence can arguably be read as part of the conventional readerly expectations of hard-boiled rhetoric. Krutnik defines the form’s language as ‘tough’,

⁷⁰ Marcus, p.393.

⁷¹ Glover, p.78.

⁷² Glover comments that for the hard-boiled detective ‘violence serves as a telos of action for the thriller’s hero, that moment when he is tested and comes to know himself most truly,’ emphasising its positive nature. Glover, p.76.

⁷³ Knight, p.122.

⁷⁴ Rzepka, p.219.

⁷⁵ Cawelti, p.186.

always replicating and defining its user; often ‘more a measure of the hero’s prowess than the use of guns and other more tangible aids to violence’.⁷⁶ However Spillane’s delivery of excessive violence constitutes a significant part of his representation of idealised masculinity and not simply part of formulaic convention. In addition Hammer’s violence is a manifestation of the dominant right-wing ideology of the time and therefore state sanctioned, an expression of Hammer’s social standing. The linguistic terms of Hammer’s excess are fundamental to Spillane’s style. Whilst Chandler’s status within the form has often been cited as statesman-like in nature, Spillane’s writing style, because of its very difference to the acclaimed eloquence of Chandler, has achieved a similarly elevated importance.⁷⁷ Knight says Spillane novels ‘are famous, or notorious for their ferocity’ setting up his linguistic style as one in contrast to the ‘norm’ that Chandler represents.⁷⁸ Even detractors of Spillane such as Anthony Boucher argue that he was ‘one of the last great story-tellers in the pulp tradition’.⁷⁹ As such his violence is connected to the original pulp stories in which a lone hero ‘cleans the filth of the modern city’.⁸⁰ Whereas Chandler’s texts have a speculative inquisitive air, what Cawelti defines as ‘figurative and emotionally charged’, Spillane’s works are far more brashly active, delivering a linguistic sense of physical strength.⁸¹ The graphic nature of Spillane is achieved through a combative, confrontational stance, and a brusque, immediacy connecting it to the earliest pulps and a hero who was ‘focussed, illiterate and a crack shot’.⁸²

For laughs I gave him a taste of his own sap on the back of his hand and felt the bones go into splinters. He wasn’t going to be using any tools for a long time. (*TBK*, p.41)

The language is distilled, blunt, and yet the means through which Spillane defines an act of pleasure. The references are physical, almost intimate (‘taste’) with a casual disregard for the pain inflicted. The implied humour Hammer connects to the act of violence is combined here with the tactile. He feels the ‘bones go into splinters’,

⁷⁶ Krutnik, p.43.

⁷⁷ Nolan comments that when Chandler began writing ‘his impact was stunning’ and that ‘among the *Black Mask* boys he had evolved into an all-time master’. Nolan, p.230.

⁷⁸ Knight, p.123.

⁷⁹ Max Collins and James Traylor, *One Lonely Knight: Mickey Spillane’s Mike Hammer* (Bowling Green, OH: Popular Press, 1984), p.27.

⁸⁰ Knight, p.112.

⁸¹ Cawelti, p.174.

⁸² Nolan, p.20.

suggesting a physical sense of the pleasure gained in hurting someone, revealing a gest of sadistic desire in Spillane's use of the grammar of violence.⁸³

Hammer's characterisation suggests that there is no room for deviation or uncertainty in terms of his decisions about and responses to others. His physical violence and his linguistic vocal antagonism imply extreme responses that appear to overwhelm all other readings. However, this constant reference to acts of violence is so strident and heavy handed that it must inevitably invoke an uncertain response on the part of the reader. Whilst Spillane offers us a vision of a hard-boiled detective who is not vulnerable, this reliance on excess might nonetheless be seen to undercut the apparent inviolate representation of Hammer. From a simple textual perspective Spillane's work opens up different ways of considering the male lead of the form. His self-portrait as 'crude, hard and dirty', is very different from the ironic 'I was a swell guy' that Marlowe declares in self-disgust as he manipulates a drunken woman.⁸⁴ Marlowe is a man who chides himself when his hold on masculine assertiveness is tenuous:

"Okey, Marlowe," I said between my teeth. "You're a tough guy. Six feet of iron man [...] You've been sapped down twice, had your throat choked and been beaten half silly on the jaw with a gun barrel [...] And what does all that amount to? Now let's see you do something really tough, like putting your pants on."⁸⁵

The self-directed comedy operates to minimise the impact of violence on Marlowe's body. His self-deprecation establishes at some level his recognition that he is falling short of idealised masculinity. Hammer's language suggests a man proud and in control of his tough guy mythology:

It was the only kind of talk they knew. The little guy stared too long. He should have been watching my face. I snapped the side of the rod across his jaw and laid the flesh open to the bone. (*TBK*, p.41)

In contrast to Marlowe's self-chiding, Hammer's aggression can be read as

⁸³ There is an interesting correlation here between Spillane and James Ellroy. Both writers have been lauded as successful but also generated significant criticism. Mike Davis has made no pretence at disliking Ellroy: 'Now let me tell you who I can't stand, and to top the list I would put that neo-Nazi in American writing who is James Ellroy... And to begin with he's not a good writer. He's a kind of methamphetamine caricature of Raymond Chandler... Each of his books is practically a *Mein Kampf*, it's anti-communistic, it's anti-Mexican, and it's racist'. Mike Davis, 'James Ellroy's harshest critic', *The Venetian Vase*, (2009) <https://venetianvase.co.uk/2009/12/16/mike-davis-james-ellroys-harshest-critic/> [accessed 3 May 2016].

⁸⁴ Chandler, *Farewell My Lovely*, p.33.

⁸⁵ Chandler, *Farewell*, p.149.

calculated assertion; he turns language into physical violence, 'It was the only kind of talk they knew'. Krutnik's description of the hard-boiled novel's language as being 'wielded as a weapon' holds more power in relation to Spillane's texts than it does for Chandler's work.⁸⁶ There is within Hammer's voice a paucity of emotional detail that creates added sensational force to the act of violence. Whereas Marlowe is the recipient of the violence and must engage with a process of self-rebuke as a means of re-channelling his energies and bringing the narrative to its closure, Hammer delivers the violence as an intended statement of his absolute self-control. For Marlowe there is a calling out, a self-interpellation that demands masculine control, suggestive of an uncertain, tenuous gendered status in effect one that plays out and recognises the gap between the man and the 'myth'. Hammer's use of the grammar of violence operates to shore up this gap; as long as there is no implication of uncertainty he can assert this gesture of 'unquestionable right'. However, there is a cost involved in this ever increasing cycle of violence. Hammer appears then to operate in a world where he defines what constitutes legality as part of his masculine right. Arguably we might see such constant assertion of 'right' as a form of self-questioning, a need to repeatedly gain self-validation through physical conflict. Ultimately it cannot be sustained and it becomes self-destructive.

Slapstick as repetition and excess

In Chapter One I considered the concept of slapstick to explore the force of the criminal event on the body of the detective.⁸⁷ Importantly slapstick has the capacity to expose the responses of the detective to those he encounters. Whilst in some areas (theatre and film) slapstick is seen as comedic it nonetheless clearly involves both violence and social commentary.⁸⁸ Thus slapstick operates as an explicit form of gesture in that it is physical and repetitive and reveals its generative social impulses. My argument in relation to Hammer is that the force of slapstick is produced by his own violence rather than the criminal event. As such slapstick offers a way of understanding Hammer's reliance on violence. In relation to Marlowe I considered Jonathan Goldman article 'Double Exposure' in which he observes that 'slapstick

⁸⁶ Krutnik, p.43.

⁸⁷ Goldman, p.3. I am defining slapstick here as a representation of force, one that compels the body, and as such it can be understood as form of physical excess.

⁸⁸ Dymphna Callery, *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre* (London: Nickalis Hernt Books, 2001), p.91.

treats both people and things as objects' and that at the same time, slapstick operates as a form of 'chaos'.⁸⁹ Goldman focusses on Chaplin, arguing that because of his celebrity reputation he can withstand the force of 'slapstick'. This position of strength is one I attribute to Hammer. His repeated acts of physical brutality become a form of 'violent slapstick' with Hammer as the force behind the chaos. Such behaviour suggests that Hammer has a level of control in that his actions are ones of intent or choice and the 'force' is directed away from him towards others. In this way we can notionally connect Hammer to Chaplin, able in some capacity to withstand the effects of slapstick particularly because it is self-generated. Hammer works hard to maintain control and reject any notion of weakness; in effect he cannot allow slapstick, or its force to expose any weakness. His excesses then become hysterical, overtly exaggerated and no longer a product of choice. Paradoxically his need to repeat such excesses becomes a force outside his control. Slapstick ultimately reveals Hammer's vulnerabilities because he fulfils not personal choice but his social compulsion to maintain his place in society as dominant. For Hammer, violent slapstick becomes evident as a gest of exhibition that hysterically portrays the phallic function through exaggeration.⁹⁰ Thus whilst Hammer fulfils the formulaic rules of the form by being a 'tough guy', he is also, through his dependence on the grammar of violence revealing weaknesses; ones that expose the fallacy of Hammer's reliance on brutality to distinguish his masculine superiority.

The exhibition that violent slapstick demands is no more evident than in the masculine spaces where men vie for dominance. Typically, within the city, the haunts of the detective, as with the cowboy, are as David Glover points out predominantly 'male segregated [...] public places, like clubs and bars where men can enter alone and belong, places of camaraderie, but also of danger, networks of knowledge and support where nothing is ever certain'.⁹¹ For Spillane, Glover's reference to 'nothing is certain' has less resonance because of the way he exercises his control. In *I The Jury* the Hi-Ho Club is a bar where Hammer is known and his relationship with the owner Big Sam is one of mutual esteem. Both men have risked

⁸⁹ Goldman, p.3.

⁹⁰ In contemporary vernacular slap-stick has come to mean a penis and associated with violence and potent masculinity. <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=SlapStick> [accessed 15 July 2014]

⁹¹ Glover, p.77.

their lives for each other. The bar is described as ‘a dingy joint and an unhealthy spot for strangers after dark,’ where a few dirty pictures attempt to liven it up ‘but it was a poor try’. (*ITJ*, pp.72&75) When Big Sam greets Hammer by name the other customers respond with due regard for the reputation that Hammer has established for himself, fulfilling in part Glover’s definition of the hard-boiled detective as ‘self-determined, active brutal masculinity’, demonstrating ‘narrow competitive individualism’.⁹² It also establishes what Hammer’s repeated use of this grammar of violence achieves in terms of his validation, in that his violence accords him status, overtly and forcefully making him a desirable hero. Hammer’s reputation here is then bound to his domination of spaces through the gest of violence.

When Hammer is threatened by two men, described by Spillane as ‘the high yellow’ and ‘the coal black’, his response is vicious, excessive and visually caustic. This racist rejection determines Hammer’s standing and adds to the logic of a dominant white ideology. The emphasis here is on the damage inflicted by and to, the body. Hammer’s ‘brutal masculinity’ is violently asserted:

The knife came out again and this time I got the hand in a wristlock and twisted. The tendons stretched, and the bones snapped sickeningly [...] There was no sense to busting my hand on his skull, so I lashed out with my foot and the toe of my shoe caught the guy right in the face [...] His lower teeth were protruding through his lip [...] I took the side of my free hand and smashed it across his nose. The bone shattered and the blood poured out. (*ITJ*, pp.80-81)

To maintain his dominance the two attackers are disfigured. The detail of their damaged bodies - ‘snapped’, ‘smashed’, ‘shattered’ - reveals the way violent slapstick works. Hammer’s prowess is reinforced by an appreciative audience. One witness comments ‘Gee Mike, you’re pretty tough. Wish I was like that’. (*ITJ*, p.82) Big Sam justifies letting the two attackers into the bar by saying ‘It’s been a long time since we had some excitement in here’ thereby reducing the smashed bones and torn flesh to entertainment. (*ITJ*, p.82) Goldman says of slapstick that it creates objects; here Spillane’s physical momentum directs the slapstick and its chaos, establishing *his* prominence and *his* masculinity, which defines *his* subjectivity.⁹³ The commonplace referencing of the violence by the onlookers defines both its normalcy, but also its repetitive nature defining a constant need to exhibit this control.

⁹² Glover, p.77.

⁹³ Goldman, p.3.

The slapstick here is also politically relevant. The men's ethnicity is used as a means to diminish them, fulfilling a social rejection of those perceived as failing to fit in to the social order of white America. The need to violently reject those that do not conform reveals the weaknesses inherent in such a narrow perspective, where violence is the only possible response. The men are bludgeoned because they threaten Hammer, but their humiliation, with racially negative epithets, is part of Spillane's engagement with a Cold War separatism that fuels white male ascendancy. The combined ferocity of Hammer's attack and the negation of these men on the basis of race give an indication of the way this slapstick works. Whereas for Marlowe the revelatory process of slapstick gives us the particularity and vulnerability of the man, for Hammer the process works to reduce the particular. Hammer's singular response to the criminal event is fundamental to the way he is defined. His repetitive act of violence defines a view of the world in which responses are over-simplified in every sense of the phrase.⁹⁴ The limitation of Spillane's version of masculinity is clear: the act of violence gives a semblance of control, but it needs to be constantly repeated to be maintained. As such violence becomes an impossible means of self-definition for Hammer: without it he is not a 'man' within the narrow gender binary that operates in Spillane's work and yet its uses weaken him. Despite the fact that Hammer's violence is perceived as legitimised, that is endorsed by American state apparatus, it does not hide this weakness.

Legitimate violence and the punishment of perverse femininity

The nature of state regulation, which is particularly evident in the 1950s, both expels and punishes those who question dominant ideology. Such regulation is confirmed through forms of actual and symbolic violence. In simple terms this means that Hammer's use of violence, whether it be physical or otherwise, is endorsed by the prevailing Cold War principles because he directs his violence at those who fail to conform to societal expectation. In particular punishment is reserved for those who by standing outside the supposed norms of social acceptability are feminised. The underpinning of this relationship between the detective and his violence and state regulation replicates the relationship identified through psychoanalysis between the

⁹⁴ Herberg, p.79.

paternal and the symbolic on the basis of power relations.

However, as I have discussed in Chapter One this separation between masculinity as the bearer of phallic power and femininity as the 'other' is an over-simplification that breaks down under scrutiny. Thus if we define difference as being dependent on a subject/object divide where the subject has control over the object then it is a relationship that is grounded on the use of power to maintain dominance. This in turn directly connects to Sharon Marcus' conceptualisation of the grammar of violence in that it 'predicates men as the operators of its tools' and women as its object.⁹⁵ If we understand the grammar of violence to be gender specific, with Hammer as its subject, it is possible to further connect the regulatory processes of this grammar to Hammer's need to position the feminine and all those defined as feminine as object, to shore up his position as subject. Within this relationship the detective holds the power in that he dictates the terms of the bond (or the method by which we gain access to him) through the narrative. His control of the narrative is of itself an act of violence, in that the narrative functions as a structural containment and process of expulsion of those who fall outside of state regulation. In this way Hammer's masculinity becomes dependent on the very thing he wishes to reject. Such dependence opens up the form to questions about gender difference and the division between who is subject and who is object such that the basis upon which this separation is predicated becomes blurred.

If the gendered identities of masculinity and femininity are uncertain as is the divide between who inhabits what is designated subject or object, then the power relation that is said to extend from these divisions also becomes insecure. This then reveals the paradox of Hammer, in that whilst he appears to brutally further the governing anti-communist doctrine he cannot seamlessly maintain his dominance because it is born out of a state of uncertainty, of paranoia. Hammer, as the mouth piece of McCarthyism embodies legitimised masculinity whilst repudiating illegitimate, illicit femininity, yet the ambiguities of gender difference means that increasingly femininity (arguably an ever growing community in the 1950s with the inclusion of all those determined as other) must be violently rejected in an attempt to secure the

⁹⁵ Marcus, p.393.

domination of masculinity. Hammer as representative of the state uses legitimised violence against those who refuse to conform and whose 'rebellion' is invalidated through its illegitimacy.

Questions about how the legitimacy of state violence is maintained are outlined by Jacqueline Rose in her book *Why War?*⁹⁶ Rose focuses on Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Ruth Ellis (the last female to be executed by the state in Britain in the 1950s) to consider the contradictory nature of legitimate violence and its gendering. Rose draws out what she sees as the problem of attaching binary gender definitions to legitimate and illegitimate violence. Thatcher as Prime Minister was advocating the reintroduction of capital punishment. Rose's analysis shows how the positioning of Thatcher and Ellis within the nexus of legitimate state violence both reinforces and paradoxically undermines the authority of the state. Rose draws out the gender specific dichotomy in Thatcher's dependence on rationality and the need to equate the institutions of the law and its forms of violence with rational processes. Rationality here is aligned with legitimacy and masculinity, and Thatcher's gender is temporarily occluded so that she can operate as a figurehead for the legitimate state. In order to maintain this standpoint those that question the right of the state through 'illegitimate' violence must be seen as irrational and feminine. Rose makes the connection here with Ruth Ellis, examining the need of the state to punish illegitimate violence. Ellis, as female and murderer constituted a problem that highlighted the untenable dichotomy that is state violence. As female she should have been classifiable as 'insane' and charged with the lesser crime of manslaughter, for which she would not have been hung. As murderer, who premeditated her violent act Ellis was, as Rose put it, a 'woman who knows too much' in that she acted with rational intent.⁹⁷

Ellis failed to fulfil the social expectation of femininity, that is 'femininity, like insanity, is a type of mitigating circumstance' and consequentially had to be punished to the full extent of the state's law.⁹⁸ The punishment of Ellis allowed the 'guilt of the criminal to establish the innocence of society', but it also, because Ellis

⁹⁶ Rose, *Why War?* (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1993).

⁹⁷ Rose, p.49.

⁹⁸ Rose, p.51.

was defined as woman and murderer ‘risk(ed) a potential identification between its basic terms’ making the rationality of Ellis akin to the reason of Thatcher.⁹⁹ The threat that Ellis posed, was both to the law’s right to classify femininity as well as to the law’s ability to remain the arbiter of what constitutes legitimate and rational. The femininity of Thatcher further extends the paradox in that whilst her rank as head of state, gives her legitimate recourse to violence, her gender aligns her with Ellis as a ‘woman who knows too much’. As Rose comments:

Drawing attention to themselves precisely as women, they could serve to gloss over that double paradoxical location of violence; the perversion of the state in relation to violence could be transposed on to the perversity of the woman, its more troubling implications then siphoned off and ignored.¹⁰⁰

The identification between Thatcher and Ellis and their violence as evidence of the perversion of the state, whilst it is negated or ‘siphoned off’ by virtue of their gender, reinforces the unsustainable nature of violence, whatever its form. Thatcher as the head of state should have made this call for capital punishment to be reinstated legitimate, but her gender complicated the division between rational violence and the perversion of femininity.

Thatcher as subject or author of state violence, does not ironically acquire symbolic power, rather it accords her a temporary fantasy of power, which is quickly removed when the perversion of her gender can no longer hide the perversion of state violence. Whilst the femininity of Thatcher works to reveal the paradox of state violence, it does not revise the ‘basic terms’ of the relationship between rational legitimate state accorded violence and the punishment of perverse femininity. Rose comments:

One of the things Margaret Thatcher was doing or that was being done through her, was to make this paradox the basis of a political identity so that subjects could take pleasure in violence as force and legitimacy while locating ‘real’ violence somewhere else – illegitimate violence and illicitness increasingly made subject to the law.¹⁰¹

Rose sees Thatcher in her role as Prime Minister, as a site of fantasy and identification, because she represents through the extremes of the state, despite the

⁹⁹ Rose, p.53.

¹⁰⁰ Rose, p.48.

¹⁰¹ Rose, p.64.

fact that she is a woman, a form of security. Significantly and indeed paradoxically, Thatcher functions as the ‘symbolic legitimization and rationalisation of violence’ by using the violence of the state to contain those who effect violence against the state.¹⁰² Thatcher’s sex draws attention to the logic of where power resides in that as Prime Minister she is not feminine because she directs the legitimate violence of the state. Her perverse femininity is only evident when she fails. If we apply this logic to Hammer, his brutal acts in support of extreme right-wing politics, (which Rose identifies as the furthest reaches to which a state can take its authority to regulate society) can be understood as a response to the illegitimate violence of those who fail to comply with Cold War ideology. The violent excess of Hammer is at once evidence of his legitimacy as well as replicating the anti-communist fervour. Hammer’s excesses are an attempt to maintain the legitimisation of state violence and also to draw a line between the perversion of the state and the perversion of femininity. In effect Hammer’s force determines who the scapegoat or the victim is. At the same time he works to deny any possible identification between his state-endorsed violence and that of the illicit ‘mad’ criminal who is arguably feminine, irrespective of gender. As Rose points out ‘subjects who commit murder might be feminine and/or out of control’.¹⁰³ Thatcher’s resignation in 1990 was seen as an inevitable result of her ‘perverse’ gender. Her implied madness seen in the media commentary of the time meant that she was further aligned with Ellis in that her gender and insanity became ‘a mitigating circumstance’.¹⁰⁴ Hammer’s excess would appear to reinforce his masculinity because his violence and his gender are legitimised by the state, however as Thatcher’s ‘perversion’ reveals, such a separation between what is legal and what is illicit is impossible to maintain.

The punishment of perverse femininity is the central focus of Hammer’s violence. Knight says of Spillane that the Hammer novels ‘create an unproblematic American masculinity’ reinforcing the perspective that Spillane’s characterisation carries the weight of legitimate state violence in the expulsion of those who do not conform to 1950s views. Knight continues: Spillane ‘consistently condenses the corruption theme with personal betrayal (with) the weight of punishment falling on characters

¹⁰² Rose, p.59.

¹⁰³ Rose, p.51.

¹⁰⁴ Rose, p.51.

seen as aberrant to the American way of masculine life'.¹⁰⁵ Cultural interpretations of masculine violence are often perceived as a response to the threat of femininity or the 'other'. In *Vengeance is Mine* Hammer visits a gay bar and Spillane's language determines his aggressive rejection of homosexuality:

There was a pansy down at the other end of the bar trying to make a guy who was too drunk to notice and was about to give it up as a bad job. I got a smile from the guy and he came close to getting knocked on his neck. (VIM, p.411)

The mildly derogatory term 'pansy' is followed up in typical Spillanean style with a threat of violence in 'knocked on his neck'. Robert J. Corber, in *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity*, analyses gender representation in Film Noir. He comments that 'gay male characters are linked iconographically to the femme fatale who lures the hero to his ruin' assigning to homosexuality the same perversion as femininity.¹⁰⁶ In *Vengeance is Mine* the femme fatale (and murderer) who lures Hammer to his almost ruin is doubly othered because she is a transgender, or in Hammer's words 'a queen'. Hammer viciously kills her: 'Juno lived until the last shot ripped through flesh and intestines and kicked the plaster from the wall'. (VIM, p.513) Hammer's violent rejection of Juno's sexuality closes the novel; 'I knew why I'd always had a resentment that was actually a revulsion when I looked at her [...] Juno was a man'. (VIM, p.513) Heather Duerre Humman in her article 'Gender and Genre in Mickey Spillane's *Vengeance is Mine*' comments 'Juno's death solves the mystery of Hammer's uncertain attraction as well as the crime of murder, by policing gender'.¹⁰⁷ By killing Juno Hammer punishes her transgression in keeping with the standards of 1950's society and Spillane thereby contributes to what Corber calls the 'regulatory fictions that governed the production of gender and identity' at that time.¹⁰⁸

This threat of femininity is often condensed into the figure of a single sexually active female character, the femme fatale of Noir writing, who fails to conform to the dictates of social expectation and is punished for her faults. Cawelti suggests:

¹⁰⁵ Knight, p.12.

¹⁰⁶ Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (North Carolina: Duke University, 1997), p.10.

¹⁰⁷ Heather Duerre Humann, 'Gender and Genre in Mickey Spillane's *Vengeance Is Mine!* (1950)', *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, 29.2 (2011), p.70.

¹⁰⁸ Corber, p.5.

The only possible resolution to the insecurity caused by the conflict between the need for women as sexual and social fulfilment and the threat of feminine independence and domination is the simultaneous possession and destruction of the female.¹⁰⁹

Expectations about female behaviour establish an all too viable justification for male aggression. One of the most powerful expressions of this punishment of illegitimate femininity is evident in the closing pages of *I The Jury*. The final conflict between Hammer and the criminal seems to reveal the potent, just detective and the criminal woman. The emotive clash between detective and criminal is further fuelled by the earlier expressions of love and fidelity that these two exchanged. This violent confrontation becomes sexually charged as Charlotte Manning, in tandem with Hammer's revelatory narrative exposure, strips off her clothes. But what the climactic point of the investigation reveals is not the legally defined crime of the woman but her social crime, her failure to accept her designated place and the source of her evil that is her femaleness, her body. The construction of this section of the text defines Hammer's social responses to perverse femininity at the same time as voyeuristically revealing the idealistically perfected body of a woman. The linguistic aggression of Hammer's exposure is matched by the sensuality given to the exhibiting of the female body. The gest of the two acts, exposure and exhibition, establish the revulsion and desire of Hammer.

Whilst the expression of these responses can be understood as part of the conflicting reactions of men to the representation of female agency; the killing of Manning articulates a need for control that again cannot be given credence within social practices. It also reinforces Hammer's status with the symbolic contract aligning him with the paternal Law. Hammer's criticism of Manning is defined socially and establishes the perversity of her gest:

You no longer had the social instinct of a woman - that of being dependent on a man [...] You found a way to increase your bank account and charge it to business. A way in which you'd never be caught, but a dirty way. The dirtiest way there is - almost. (*ITJ*, p.254)

The rejection of Manning is on the basis that she chooses not to be dependent on a man. Her failure to be a socially defined and contained by acceptable female behaviour makes her 'dirty'. Deurre Humman comments that 'Hammer sees

¹⁰⁹ Cawelti, p.159.

Charlotte Manning's behaviour as transgressive - she tests the boundaries of acceptable gender roles because of her occupation'.¹¹⁰ As Gabriele Dietze explains, Manning takes for herself a 'symbolic phallus' which Hammer must take back.¹¹¹

Hammer's act of killing is expressed through a combination of attraction and vengeance:

(She was standing in front of me now. I felt a hot glow go over me as I saw what she was about to do [...] Her fingers fumbled with the buttons of the blouse, but not for long.)

You shot (Jack) and watched him die. And while he tried to pull himself towards his gun you made a psychological study of a man facing death. ([...] she shrugged the blouse from her shoulders [...] She wore no bra. Lovely shoulders. Soft curves of hidden muscle...Breasts that were firm and inviting...)

Beautiful as you are, as much as I almost loved you, I sentence you to death.

(She was completely naked now. A sun-tanned goddess giving herself to her lover [...] She leaned forward to kiss me, her arms going out to encircle my neck.)

The roar of the .45 shook the room. Charlotte staggered back a step. Her eyes were a symphony of incredulity...

'How could you?' she gasped.

I only had a moment before talking to a corpse, but I got it in.

'It was easy,' I said. (*ITJ*, pp.254-7)

The process of sentencing Manning to death and then executing her is something Hammer carries out with ease. The twin satisfaction of watching her strip and then killing her is evident in his language. The gest of his 'almost' love is negated by his 'It was easy' because it expresses Hammer's need to contain Manning through socially acceptable expulsion. Cranny-Francis points out, 'physical violence is all the more virulent for being compounded with attraction and desire', and that women are 'negated through seduction and/or death'.¹¹² Hammer achieves this by shooting his lover, the criminal as she strips for him: possession and destruction reach a simultaneous climax. As Hammer lays bare the criminal act, Manning's response, to offer her body to her accuser, fulfils Hammer's role of subject within social practices of state violence. Hammer's self-control is asserted in his appreciation of her body and his ability to resist it. The climax of the novel is violence as opposed to sex

¹¹⁰ Duerre Humman p.70.

¹¹¹ Gabriele Dietze, 'Gender Topography of the Fifties: Mickey Spillane and the Post-World-War-II Masculinity Crisis', *American Studies*, 43.4 (1998), p.650.

¹¹² Cranny-Francis, p.158.

through which Hammer rejects the 'dirtiness' of Manning and punishes her femaleness because she threatens his security and that of society. Their relationship - that of detective/man and criminal/woman, is consummated with the phallic 'rod'. The crime of female agency is punished with death and Hammer's response to women, his 'kill-lust'/'lust-kill'. The gest of 'It was easy', determines the legitimisation of his violence and the state endorsed expulsion of Manning.

What Spillane achieves through his excess and his violent responses to the failure of women to participate in the maintenance of his mythology, highlights the construction of the myth (of the detective and his masculinity) and its underpinning of social practices. The negation of women by Hammer is an exaggerated form of gest. By focussing on the detail of Hammer's 'manifold utterances', it is possible to see Hammer's responses to women as a further reflection of his masculine limitations. His rejection of women, because they fail to conform to his perception of social regulation, shores up the exceptionalism that is central to his characterisation. Within Chandler's work, gest allows an opportunity to both see the myth and the construction of the myth, but in Spillane's writing the weight of his excessive violence towards women, repositions the myth. Spillane's punishment of those 'aberrant to the American way of life' and all those corralled under the sign of the feminine can be seen within the logic of the 1950s Cold War.¹¹³ The personalised, excessive punishment of women comments profoundly on Hammer's masculinity as well as articulating a social rejection of all that the feminine connotes. The violent punishment of women, because of their failure to conform to social expectations rather than because they are criminal, underlines a very specific expression of gender within Spillane's work.

Conclusions

The characterisation of Hammer is one that comments on power and the limitations of that power. At its most basic level Hammer's masculinity can be read as an expression of 1950s politics, fuelled by the absolutism of American exceptionalism. Within this reading the mythical detective becomes the 'hammer of justice', punishing those who fail to conform to the male hegemony of the period. This

¹¹³ Knight, p.123.

reading of Spillane's detective would appear to offer little opportunity for women writers to enter this field and deploy a female protagonist. However such a reading does not take on board the means by which Hammer's characterisation is dependent on his excesses in order to maintain his particular form of exceptionalism. Whilst Spillane's work clearly demonstrates the evolutionary possibilities of the form it also defines a masculinity that is weakened by its own excesses. Hammer's need to perform ever increasing levels of violence implies a limitation, or a weakness which in turn questions the supposed weight of masculine power. The gest evident in this cycle of violence reveals the overt dependency of Hammer on defining himself in opposition to those he perceives as inferior and illegitimate. As a consequence his exceptionalism is achieved through a repetitive reliance on the grammar of violence and becomes not so much a workable mythology but impossible or empty fantasy. The hard-boiled form is defined as difficult for women writers to enter because of its overt masculinism, yet Spillane's reworking of the hard-boiled form explicitly shows that this masculinism is flawed. What my analysis reveals is that the violence controls Hammer rather than it being the means to his potency. For women writers, the point at which the mythology of the detective is at its strongest and its most antithetical to a female detective, is the paradoxical point at which it offers women a way in. In my next chapter I explore how women writers have occupied this masculinised literary form, adopting both the representation of the detective and the violence of the formula as a means of expressing female agency and empowerment.

Chapter three - Female agency and the 'gestic' hard-boiled detective novel

Introduction:

If I told you I wasn't scared, you would think I was a liar. But the truth is I wasn't. My stomach was, and my heartbeat was, but I wasn't. In my brain I was sharp and alert, ready for whatever was to come. Call it the Scotch, call it impatience, call it the cute little can of mace that I keep tucked away in the bottom of my bag for emergencies. Call it what you will, the fact was I was running on high. Whatever happened here tonight was happening to me. I was still in the plot: it was mine and no one else's.¹

And it is there that the terms of a different construction of gender can be posed [...] in the micro-political practices of daily life and daily resistances that afford both agency and sources of power or empowering investments.²

When private investigator Hannah Wolfe confronts the killer of a teenage girl in *Fatlands* she defines the terms under which she and other feminist hard-boiled writers have occupied the form and made it their own. Foremost it is not as a proxy 'tough guy'. Wolfe acknowledges that she is experiencing the physical effects of fear, but this is not her over-riding emotion. Wolfe's response to the potential of violence is to meet it head-on and accept the consequences of her decision. The 'cute little can of mace' concedes the fact that she cannot win in a physical altercation with a man intent on violence without some means of help. However, the decision is hers and 'no one else's'; her comment, 'whatever happened here tonight was happening to me' identifies her ownership of this choice. Significantly the heavy use of personal pronouns in the last two sentences reiterates her sense of self - at the centre of the narrative, 'the plot' and in control. Sarah Dunant has created a private investigator who through conscious, active participation in the process of self-determination has taken 'agency' and 'sources of power' for herself. As Judith Butler comments:

If there is agency, it is to be found paradoxically in the possibilities opened up in and by that constrained appropriation of the regulatory law, (and that the) signification of (the) sexed body will not be a set of actions performed in compliance with the law, on the contrary, they will be a set of actions mobilised by the law.³

¹ Sarah Dunant, *Fatlands* (London: Penguin, 1993), p.135. (All further references cited as *FL* and page number in the text).

² Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (London: MacMillan, 1987), p.25.

³ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.12.

Despite suggestions to the contrary, agency for women within the hard-boiled detective novel is not constrained by the parameters of the traditional form.⁴ I will argue, the representation of the male detective and the violent formulaic construction that are at the core of this literature are, paradoxically, the very tools that when appropriated, make this a form that is capable of expressing female empowerment. In Judith Butler's terms it is the 'possibilities opened up in and by that constrained appropriation of the regulatory law' that allows women writers the space to negotiate a female agency. Thus feminist occupation of the hard-boiled detective novel has been achieved through the very aspects of the form that would suggest it is antithetical to women, that is the mythology of the male detective and the maintenance of his 'tough guy' status.

In this chapter I want to direct my attention to women writers and their contribution to the hard-boiled form. My focus here is how their entrance into the field has impacted on the form. Thus far I have concentrated on the pivotal work of Raymond Chandler and Mickey Spillane and the way in which these writers used the form to portray forms of masculinity through the figure of the detective. I now want to consider what happens to the form when women enter this male dominated field. One of the most significant questions that must be considered in relation to women entering the field is how they occupy a space that appears to work to expel them. In the traditional masculinist texts the rejection of women and indeed the rejection of femininity as a sign of weakness are seen as an imperative in order to preserve the dominion of hard-boiled masculinity. In part this is then a question about how women writers negotiate what is in effect the attempted negation of the feminine from the original text. The difficulty for women writers is how they work with a gender transition that does not fall into the trap of simple substitution with the female P.I. replacing the male detective, and at the same time engaging with representations of femininity that are meaningful. To enter this literature without an

⁴ Sally Munt, Kathleen Gregory Klein and Gill Plain, perceive the female detective as a 'fantasy figure' whose politicized vision is at odds with the structure and gendering of the form which they perceive as immutable. Sally Munt, *Murder By the Book: Feminism and the Crime Novel* (Routledge, London, 1994).

Kathleen Gregory Klein, *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

Gill Plain, *Twentieth Century Crime Fiction: Gender Sexuality and the Body* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001).

awareness of the gender specificity that is part of its earlier construction can only result in a failure to value its potential. Women writers who deploy the form effectively both understand and challenge the construction of the negative that is femininity within traditional hard-boiled fiction.

In my earlier chapters I have shown that the myth of the ‘tough’ wisecracking male detective is a response to forms of social regulation and that the hard-boiled novel is a literature that scrutinises gender relations and the way such relations are perceived as natural. In addition I have established that in order to maintain his prowess and control his potential for failure, the detective must repress femininity and in doing so he makes it constitutive, the difference through which his meaning is made. This combination of a form of literature that responds to social changes and the representation of a detective, whose masculinity is not secure, opens up the hard-boiled novel to alternative ways of perceiving its apparently rigid parameters. Walton and Jones who argue against a reliance on a limiting ‘masculinist’ conception of the form, define feminist detective fiction as ‘exploring positions of resistance and agency’ suggesting that the hard-boiled detective novel offers women writers a form to investigate, challenge and revise naturalised gender definitions.⁵ In effect this literature highlights how gendered lives are bound by forms of regulation both in terms of social expectation and the law; as such it is a literature that is uniquely situated to explore and express female agency. There is a fundamental correlation between a political movement which has at its centre issues that are particular to women and a form that provokes gender enquiry. Thus when women writers comment on and critique the social mechanisms that regulate them in a form that has the law at its centre, it has a palpable logic, because the investigative methods and the gender focus of this enquiry are already embedded within the hard-boiled text. The fact that many of the women writers who entered the field engaged directly with feminist gender politics to explore how women are socially constructed and defined is possible because of the way questions about gender identity are already situated within the original 1930s form. The coinciding of particular feminist politics in terms of the social and cultural experience of women, with the burgeoning of women’s writing in the hard-boiled form, is fundamental to my conception of the

⁵ Walton and Jones, p.93.

form. In this chapter and in the chapters that follow I want to understand what then made the latter part of the 1970s such a significant moment that resulted in women writers adopting the hard-boiled detective novel with conviction. Further why has such writing from the 1980s onwards given rise to such a prolific use of this form to articulate female agency?

Feminism operates here as both a critical methodology to underpin my argument, but also as a way of understanding the historical specificity of women's entrance into the form. The use of feminism as a term to define a particular phase of women's detective writing is clearly pertinent. Stephen Knight, who has produced a chronology of crime fiction in his historical analysis of the field, consistently links the hard-boiled version rather than for example the police procedural or the clue puzzler with the concept of 'feminist writing'.⁶ Whilst Knight in this chronology cites Metta Fuller, under the pseudonym of Seeley Register, as the first American detective writer in 1867, her detective is male and he solves the crime through his masculine 'higher skills'.⁷ There are clearly many female writers between 1867 and the 1970s who deploy a female protagonist but few are in the mould of Chandler or Spillane and part of the hard-boiled form.⁸ Thus P. D. James who was first published in 1962 with *Cover Her Face*, did not have this feminist status accorded to her until 1972 when she introduced Cordelia Grey, her female private eye.⁹ However, Knight defines this as a 'move towards feminism' as opposed to 'real feminism'.¹⁰ Lisa Cody's Anna Lee in *Dupe* is identified as the 'first British feminist detective' and she did not appear until 1980.¹¹ In the USA a similar pattern is evident: Amanda Cross published *In the Last Analysis* in 1964 and is seen as 'the first American move towards feminist detection' whereas Marcia Muller's *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* of

⁶ Knight, pp.209-214.

⁷ Seeley Register, (Metta Fuller) *The Dead Letter: An American Romance* (New York: Beadle, 1867). Knight, p.44.

⁸ 'At every moment in the history of detective fiction women writers have been found, many of whom were remarkably popular and influential in their period'. Rosalind Coward and Linda Semple, 'Tracking Down The Past: Women and Detective Fiction', in *From My Guy To Sci-Fi: Genre and Women's Writing in the Postmodern World*, ed. by Helen Carr (London: Pandora, 1989), p. 42. For example Mary Roberts Rinehart whose first novel *The Circular Staircase* was published in 1908 and Agatha Christie whose first novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was published in 1926.

⁹ P D James, *Cover Her Face* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962). P D James, *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (London: Sphere Books, 1972).

¹⁰ Knight, p.44.

¹¹ Lisa Cody, *Dupe* (London: Arrow Books, 1980).

1977 is seen as producing the 'first real feminist detective'.¹² From the 1970s onward there has been a massive influx of women writers who have deployed the same basic formulaic components as Chandler and Spillane, and in many cases explicitly claimed them as antecedents.

Writers such as Sarah Dunant explicitly reference the original male writers within the body of their texts, drawing out and commenting on the gender representation. In *Fatlands* Hannah Wolfe observes that her average cliental are not 'glamorous women with skirts slit to the thigh who tell their story through lazy curls of cigarette smoke whilst the light casts film Noir shadows on the wall' and in doing so rejects the representation of femininity that the hard-boiled form has perpetuated. (*FL*, p.43) References to the early male writers establish not just the way the women authors are deploying the generic conventions but how this engagement with the formula can incorporate a feminist gender inquiry into this literature. In *Under My Skin* Dunant includes a conversation between Wolfe and a woman she is interviewing as part of a case. When Wolfe identifies herself as a private investigator the woman comments that she thought detectives only existed in books or were 'Greasy little men snooping round hotel rooms' directly quoting Vivian Sternwood's dismissive retort to Marlowe in *The Big Sleep*.¹³ Wolfe responds with 'For me Raymond Chandler is just part of the myth, the kind of thing P.I.'s read instead of fairy-tales'.¹⁴ Dunant by quoting Chandler situates herself firmly within a hard-boiled continuum; by quoting Sternwood and not Marlowe she does not, however, maintain the myth of Marlowe as the 'tough guy'. Instead we are given Sternwood's negative portrayal of 'little men' and the comparison between fairy-tales and Chandler, the combination of which offers a direct criticism of the hard-boiled form's mythical construction of masculinity.

This process of directly referencing, questioning and undercutting the early male hard-boiled authors is examined by Walton and Jones in their analysis of the female hard-boiled detective. They define this commentary as a 'reverse discourse' which

¹² Amanda Cross, *In the Last Analysis* (New York: MacMillan, 1964). Marcia Muller, *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* (New York: McKay, 1977).

Knight, p.15.

¹³ Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, p.140.

¹⁴ Dunant, *Under My Skin* (London: Penguin, 1995) p.89. (All further references cited as *UMS* and page number in the text).

challenges the gender assumptions of the early texts.¹⁵ The significance of the female deployment of the original model lies in the fact that unless women occupy the existing gendered space of the detective the questions about identity and agency that are generated by the hard-boiled detective novel cannot be addressed. To occupy such a masculinist site must open up the hard-boiled form to examination about what it is that works to reject or expel femininity from that place. The misogyny of the original texts cannot be ignored. Thus when a woman takes on the traditional male role of the hard-boiled detective such a gender transition becomes a process of enquiry into both masculinity and femininity. It also is significantly an enquiry into the public/private dichotomy that the hard-boiled form evokes through its investigative narrative. In the feminist version of the form the private sphere of domesticity and the public sphere of the law and legitimacy are opened up to scrutiny. In the 1970s and 80s questioning the gendering of spaces was a fundamental part of the feminist debate giving the female version of the hard-boiled detective novel and its political analysis at this time, a clear historical context. My account of the public/private divide that these texts address, challenges the locating of women in the private sphere, and in doing so contributes to a feminist surrogate public history which investigates, questions and rejects this gendering of spaces.

My intention here is to argue that the texts that stand out do so without recourse to a process of substitution with the central character operating as a pseudo male detective. Whilst a female hero who solves the crime offers a level of reader satisfaction it is limited by a failure to move beyond the masculine essentialism of the 1930s hard-boiled form and ultimately a recapitulation of the original gender scripts rather than a representation that reflects the reality of women's experience. Understanding these texts through a simplistic notion of substitution does not take on board the complexities of a literature which through its contemporaneous gender investigation has an historical immediacy. The hard-boiled detective novel, as I have shown through my analysis of Chandler and Spillane, offers alternative ways of perceiving gendered identities, in effect participating in the creation of a surrogate public history by exploring the expectations of masculinity and femininity.¹⁶ What I want to open up to consideration is the way the female version of the hard-boiled

¹⁵ Walton and Jones, p.95.

¹⁶ Davis, p.44.

detective novel at this time can be seen to create a surrogate public history that is peculiar to women and which situates itself within the feminist exploration of gender. In this chapter I will concentrate on the detailed particularity of the women's texts and what this reveals about their public and private responses to the criminal event. This will allow me to explore feminist responses to and uses of the violence of the hard-boiled form in my subsequent chapters.

As a means of exploring women's revision of the hard-boiled form and its relation to feminist thought I want to consider my key novels alongside concepts developed by Judith Kristeva in her article 'Women's Time'.¹⁷ Kristeva's work addresses questions about feminism and women's relation to time, which she connects to the conceptualisation of a feminine space. For Kristeva, 'women's time' is cyclical (and linked to reproduction) rather than linear, defining a signifying space, rather than a chronology. She sees linear time as masculine or controlled by men and connected to history and politics. Kristeva's analysis highlights the different feminist responses to this separation of time and whilst she accepts that this difference is predicated on a binary distinction between women and men she also makes it clear that the differences between women are important. Toril Moi identifies Kristeva's focus in terms of the 'multiplicity of female expressions so as not to homogenize "women" while at the same time insisting on the necessary recognition of sexual difference as psychoanalysis sees it'.¹⁸ The value of exploring Kristeva's essay is not just in terms of its contemporaneousness - it was first published in 1979 when many of the authors I examine in this chapter were writing - but it offers a means of examining what are perceived as the generational stages within feminism. In particular I want to consider the correlations between these stages and the different approaches adopted by female authors who have revised the hard-boiled form. Whilst the word 'generational' might seem to imply linear stages, Kristeva sees them as parallel and coextensive and as such not situated with a masculine chronology. Each stage is connected to a particular feminist response to the social contract, which I have previously defined as a form of regulation that is based on a 'gendered binary', one that ascribes an unequal relationship between men and women. Here I want to extend

¹⁷ Judith Kristeva, 'Women's Time' in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

¹⁸ *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p.187.

this conceptualisation to incorporate Kristeva's perception of 'an essentially sacrificial relationship of separation and articulation of difference' which classifies women as the 'casualties, [...] left out of the socio-symbolic bond' and hence without power.¹⁹

In very simple terms these phases of feminist expression can be defined as firstly, equality with men, secondly, separation or difference from men, and thirdly, a phase that acknowledges difference between women, but also attempts to identify a unifying ethics for women through the maternal. Kristeva sees the maternal as a way of defining women through an ethics of difference from men and each other and as well as difference within the self. Kristeva connects this difference with the self to pregnancy, which she calls the 'radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject'.²⁰ In this way the maternal as a concept, can be seen as relational, a space that attempts to reconcile cyclical and linear time and one that signifies an alternative method of identifying femininity that is not contained within the binary of the social contract. As such the relational recognises and values the complexity of women's manifold experiences.²¹ These different stages might be seen to roughly correlate to different agendas by female authors offering a methodology to separately identify the achievements of women crime writers within a framework that has a contextual and conceptual relevance. The first stage can be linked to the idea of substitution in which the female detective is seen to replace her male counterpart, in some sense posited as 'equal' in terms of the way the female detective takes for herself the symbolic power accorded to men; the second, a separatist position, might be typically translated into the lesbian Private Eye who works to revise the figure of the male detective by removing the heterosexual hegemony he maintains; the third, which works to resolve both substitution and separation, does so through an acceptance of the imperative to operate in a world where binary divisions are customary but also recognises the potential for female agency through the process of breaking these binary divisions down through the concept of the relational drawn from the Kristeva's conceiving of the maternal.

¹⁹ Kristeva, p.199.

²⁰ Kristeva, p.206.

²¹ Kristeva, p.206.

By exploring these phases in conjunction with the different approaches of women writers within the hard-boiled form, I hope to show how women have attempted to address the masculinisation of the novel and incorporate aspects of feminist politics. First I will consider the concept of substitution and the work of Sara Paretsky, and explore the criticism directed at what is perceived as her surrogate male P.I. Secondly I will examine the separatist position of the lesbian detective and in particular consider the positive critical responses of Plain and Munt to this version of the hard-boiled novel. Thirdly I will focus on writers who attempt to combine the two phases of equality and separation by using the form to address women's issues and reflect on women's lives and who successfully use the form to explore female agency. This later consideration will constitute the substance of this chapter. For the sake of clarity and in order to separate these third phase women from what is a large body of female contributors I wish to identify these authors as 'gestic' writers, a term I shall both explain and develop through this chapter and beyond. In part this is an identification based on a twenty-year preoccupation with reading the work of women crime writers.²² Whilst I am a serial reader, sometimes re-reading a book multiple times, I have rarely found it necessary to move beyond the form for reading matter, which is perhaps indicative of the number of women within the field.²³ I have however through my reading consistently returned to certain key writers: particularly Sue Grafton, Linda Barnes and Sarah Dunant. I want to suggest that it is the achievement of these writers in articulating a particular form of feminism that makes them both effective and desirable to a female readership because they offer levels of identification rooted in the lived experience of women. This is not to suggest that the

²² I began with P. D. James and quickly moved through what are now cited as the key texts of the 80s and 90s. Foremost within this body of writers are authors such as Lisa Cody, Marcia Muller, Sara Paretsky, Linda Barnes and Sue Grafton; all of whom are included within critical analysis of the hard-boiled novel. Other writers who have tended to escape critical attention but whose contributions are nonetheless part of this influx include in the 1980s Jean Warmbold, Eve Zaremba, Pat Barker and Amanda Cross (all of whom were published by Virago press). In the 1990s Elizabeth Bowers, Annabel Donald, Sara Sheridan, Gillian Slovo, Judith Van Gieson, Janet La Pierre, Anne Wilson, Diane Langford, Deborah Powell and Manda Scott, to name but a few, entered the field. Whilst the central character of these texts have varied enormously, often falling outside the prescripts of the traditional hard-boiled P. I., the focus of these writers has been without interruption women's identity.

²³ Over 3,500 series mysteries have been written by women since 1878. In 1993 and 1994, over 200 new titles with series detective characters were released by women authors. In 1992, 40 percent of all mysteries published were by women. In 1995, titles published in paperback, a segment more sensitive to market demands than hardback sales, were nearly evenly divided between men and women authors. Dabney G Hart 'Women of Mystery' *Cosmos Club Web Journal*, <http://www.cosmosclub.org/web/journals/1999/hart.html> [accessed 5 May 2015].

other writers that I have read and re-read lack significance rather than their expression of feminist politics lacks what I want to call a 'gestic' quality.

Defining a 'gestic' writer

For the purposes of this thesis, gestic describes the way these writers incorporate a level of repeated detail and particularity that expresses the habits and the everyday lives of women, detail that has a resonance, a realism, a truth. The term is a development of Brecht's *gest* which I have used in my earlier chapters on Chandler and Spillane to consider the social detail of the texts.²⁴ Gestic writers can be classified as such because they adhere closely to the original hard-boiled format but also significantly show an acute awareness of the gender scripts that the works of Chandler and Spillane open up. For Marlowe and Hammer the *gest* of the text reveals the gap between the myth of the 'tough guy' and the reality of attempting to live up to this impossible standard. In particular the *gest* that reveals their uncertain masculinity also reveals a corresponding need to contain femininity, where femininity and all those corralled under the sign of 'other', are negated.²⁵ The challenge for women writers is how they inhabit this contradictory space and make it their own. For the female gestic writers, the use of *gest* allows an inquiry into the private, domestic, habitual lives of women and the way this intersects with the more public, legal, criminal investigation. Unlike the male detective there is no corresponding attempt to reject that which diminishes them. Indeed the gestic writer actively seeks the revelation that *gest* offers and in doing so these authors, in Brechtian terms 'free socially-conditioned phenomena from the stamp of familiarity' and produce a reading of femininity that challenges assumptions about what it means to be a woman.²⁶

The work I examine in this chapter, including that of Grafton, Barnes and Dunant, is marked out by their emphasis on the detail and behaviour of their detectives and their incorporation of the politics of this period. They reproduce the original hard-boiled format with a central private investigator and they work to create plausible and realistic representations of women's lives. *Gest* in this chapter develops Brecht's

²⁴ Brecht, p.198.

²⁵ Rzepka, pp.219-20.

²⁶ Brecht, p.192.

alienation theory. With Chandler and Spillane the alienation effect uncovers their private, hidden preoccupations and the weaknesses of the detective; for gestic writers the process of alienating the familiar has a political agenda that reveals the way in which women are located within the private/public dichotomy. A focus on the gest of the text offers a space where Kristeva's concept of maternal time and linear time can be merged and the binary of gendered spaces challenged to produce a new surrogate public history that does not exclude women from the linear time of history. Key to my argument here is a pragmatic and subtle examination of gender and power in relation to the detectives and the crimes they work to solve. Importantly these women writers do not use their texts as a platform to advocate gender politics; rather they offer ways of seeing how women's lives are moulded by social expectation through the experience of their detectives. As a consequence these writers are often criticised for understatement, perhaps suggesting that the inclusion of feminist politics requires a more radical approach. Part of the criticism that has been directed at these texts is their failure to offer strategies to counter 'patriarchy'. Munt comments that writers such as Grafton reflect a 'discourse of individualism' and 'ultimately reinforce the positioning of the traditional male detective'.²⁷ A persistent critical theme is that the detectives of writers such as Grafton do not go far enough in their rejection of the male detective of the original texts. Despite the fact that as Coward and Semple point out many detective writers have inclined towards potentially radical areas of investigation (they cite women's powerlessness and isolation) and that 'women seem to have been at the forefront of pulling detective fiction away from the predictable' it is the process of replacement or substitution that is the focus of much of their critical response.²⁸ Coward and Semple question the 'attempt at feminist reworking of the hard-boiled school', commenting that it is 'highly problematic to replace the tough gun-toting man with a female equivalent with little or no criticism'.²⁹ However, I would argue that the gestic writers, not only criticise the 'gun-toting' original but in doing so open up to examination both the form and its original gender scripts.

²⁷ Munt, p.48.

²⁸ Coward and Semple, p.54.

²⁹ Coward and Semple, p.46.

Sue Grafton, who is a good example of a gestic writer, was first published in 1981 when she started the Alphabet series starting with *A is for Alibi* and published *W is for Wasted* in 2013. Her central character is Kinsey Millhone and is based in the fictional Californian town of Santa Teresa. Grafton has a modest literary heritage in the field, with her father, C. W. Grafton a published detective writer. Grafton's early books often combine commentary on the role of the P.I. and that of a woman. In *A is for Alibi* Millhone shoots and kills a murderer. Whilst this brings about the traditional closure of the text the residual feeling of discomfort at killing a man becomes a focal point in *B is for Burglar*. Henry Pitts, Millhone's landlord and friend advises her to get protection and Millhone responds:

God even my recent brush with death had taken place in a garbage bin...someplace small and cozy (sic) with me sobbing like a kid.

“I was thinking about that stuff today and you want to know the truth? All this talk about women being nurturing is crap. We're being sold a bill of goods so we can be kept in line by the men. If someone came after me today, I'd do it again, only this time I don't think I'd hesitate.”³⁰

Later Millhone says to Pitts, ‘Look, maybe I haven't dealt with that. I just don't want to be a victim anymore. I'm sick of it’. (BIFB, p.83) Whilst the political observations may be somewhat crude Grafton's inclusion of such commentary establishes her engagement with current feminist thinking of the period as well as revising the way women are typically portrayed in the hard-boiled novel. Grafton herself has commented that she is interested in examining the way the form allows private perceptions to impact on public expectations, particularly through the process of understanding the impact rather than the delivery of the formulaic violence.³¹

My other two other gestic authors who equally make use of the original formulaic components with commentary on women's lives are Linda Barnes and Sarah Dunant. Barnes, who rarely makes an entry into critical works in this field, has thus far written twelve novels with Carlotta Carlyle as the protagonist. Like Grafton, Barnes uses her detective to explore gender identity. Her books are set in Boston and replicate some of the sense of urban life that the original hard-boiled detective novels produce. Carlyle's second job as a cab driver gives additional opportunities for Barnes to consider the way spaces are gendered, revising the original texts

³⁰ Sue Grafton, *B is for Burglar* (London: MacMillan, 1985), p.83. (All further references cited as *BIFB* and page number in the text).

³¹ Quoted in Jones and Warner, p. 175.

masculinisation of public arenas. As with Grafton, Barnes references topical gender issues, at times somewhat obliquely:

I hacked part-time while I majored in sociology at U. Mass.-Boston. It taught me how to get around the city without ever being obliged to stop for a red light. It also stopped me from waitressing, which was a good thing because I've never gotten the knack of taking orders.³²

Often the observations on the way gender expectations impact on women's lives are humorously direct:

Someday unescorted women will walk into bars without getting the glad eyeball from every guy who can still lift his face from his beer. But that great day has not yet arrived. Oh I'm not making a fuss - I'm not bitter, don't get me wrong. I just hate feeling like I've got a price tag on my ass. There is no way to stop it. No way to win or get even. Once I spent an entire summer wolf-whistling at construction workers, reaching new heights of hollow achievement when I made some poor jerk blush. (*ATF*, p.26)

The humour here does not diminish the commentary that women are better off 'unescorted' as well as the self-reflexive discomfort of 'giving as good as you get' suggesting that separation from and equality to men (determined through 'unescorted' and 'get even') might be desirable but is a long way off. The tone of voice that these women writers use replicates the original Chandleresque 'wisecrack' and like Marlowe the voice explicates a gendered commentary that is both individualistic as well as participating in a more expansive social commentary. The 'wisecrack' of Marlowe operates as a form of self-interpellation that calls his masculinity out, and is indicative that living up to the myth of masculinity requires effort. For the women detective the 'wisecrack' is less about producing an alternative myth of femininity and much more about identifying what femininity is and the way it is contained within the social contract.

My third gestic author, Dunant, has written four hard-boiled novels with Hannah Wolfe as her central character. Wolfe, like Millhone and Carlyle, operates independently and explores the constraints imposed on women's lives from both an external observational stance and also from a personal perspective. Based in London, Dunant creates an English hard-boiled version that engages with the politics of 1980s Britain. Like Barnes and Grafton she draws on the original hard-boiled text to

³² Linda Barnes, *A Trouble of Fools* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p.14. (All further references cited as *ATF* and page number in the text).

comment on gender assumptions. In *Under My Skin* Carlyle comments on the after effects of an attack on her:

It's a cause of shame to be waking crippled by nightmares so long after the event. Do the boys suffer this, I wonder, finding the hangover from the violence nastier than the one from the booze? Sometimes I think I'm in the wrong job, trying to fit the myth to the reality. But only sometimes. (UMS, p.35)

Adrienne E. Gavin comments in her article 'Feminist Crime Fiction and Female Sleuths' that 'their first person narratives reveal women's experiences in the face of patriarchal systems of both crime and justice, and despite their detective successes their vulnerability is in places acknowledged'.³³ For these three gestic writers there is a fundamental achievement in referencing, commenting on and revising the hard-boiled detective formula. All three writers question gender assumptions both within the form and those shaping the social climate of the 1980s.

First phase feminism and the 'heroic' detective

Before I consider the particular qualities of what I am terming gestic women writers I want to look at how portrayals of the first two phases of feminism - that is equality with and separation from men - have been expressed within the field. Whilst my argument gives value to gestic writers, other contributors to the form offer productive variations of the detective that determine the ability of the hard-boiled novel to reflect alternative political and social attitudes and positions. The very nature of the form is one of variation and difference, a testing of the possibilities of what it will stretch to incorporate. As such the form can be seen as fluid and responsive to external pressure. My objective here is to establish how differing uses of the hard-boiled detective novel reflect alternative responses to the political landscape of the 1980s and beyond.

Kristeva's first 'phase', the call for equality, is part of the second wave of feminism that is given a timeframe of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The first wave of feminism took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, emerging out of an environment of urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics. The goal of this wave

³³ Adrienne E. Gavin 'Feminist Crime Fiction and Female Sleuths' in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p.265.

was to open up opportunities for women, with a focus on suffrage.³⁴ In the second wave, sexuality and reproductive rights were dominant issues and the expression ‘the personal is political’ was coined to identify the combining of the private and the public spheres and questioning of gender specific power relations.³⁵ Charlotte Krolokke and Anne Scott Sorensen in their text *Gender Communication Theories and Analyses: From Silence to Performance* comment that this second wave saw patriarchy as:

A fiasco that was both non-rational and non-profitable and thereby illegitimate [...] Politically this view led to the claim that women and men should be treated as equals and that women should not only be given access to the same resources and positions as men but also be acknowledged for their contributions and competencies.³⁶

Within this call for equality was a demand for equal pay for equal work, a breakdown of the gender division within the educational system and the work place. Liberal feminists worked to influence and gain access to public institutions as a means of effecting change. This phase is marked by a number of legal changes designed to improve the social condition of women. Kenneth Walsh in his analysis of social change in America comments on the impact of feminist action:

By the end of the Sixties, more than 80 percent of wives of childbearing age were using contraception after the federal government in 1960 approved a birth control pill. This freed many women from unwanted pregnancy and gave them many more choices, and freedom, in their personal lives. [...] Gradually, Americans came to accept some of the basic goals of the Sixties feminists: equal pay for equal work, an end to domestic violence, curtailment of severe limits on women in managerial jobs, an end to sexual harassment, and sharing of responsibility for housework and child rearing.³⁷

Despite Walsh’s positive assessment, by the late sixties very few of the ‘basic goals’ that he lists, were achieved. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 in the USA and of 1970 in the UK is a good example of a law that has yet to be fully realised. A recent survey

³⁴ Martha Rampton ‘The Three Waves of Feminism’ (Fall 2008 Pacific). <http://www.pacificu.edu/about-us/news-events/three-waves-feminism> [accessed 12 June 2014].

³⁵ Carol Hanisch’s essay ‘The Personal Is Political’ said that the personal realization of how ‘grim’ the situation was for women was as important as doing political ‘action’ such as protests. Hanisch noted that ‘political’ refers to any power relationships, not just those of government or elected officials.

Carol Hanisch, ‘The Personal is Political’ *Notes From the Second Year: Women’s Liberation* <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html> [accessed 10 May 2013].

³⁶ Charlotte Krolokke and Anne Scott Sorensen, *Gender Communication Theories and Analyses: From Silence to Performance* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), pp.5-6.

³⁷ Kenneth T. Walsh, ‘The 1960s: A Decade of Change for Women’ U.S. News and World Report 12/03/2010 <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2010/03/12/the-1960s-a-decade-of-change-for-women> [accessed 3 December 2010].

of 63 countries by the International Trade Union Confederation showed that women earn an estimated 15% less than men.³⁸ Disapproval of working wives in the 1970s was also strong. A survey in 1972 revealed that only 67.2% of those surveyed agreed that it was acceptable for a married woman to have a job if she had a husband capable of supporting her.³⁹ Thus whilst key legislation was introduced the impact was not immediate and this first phase has tended to be viewed as limited in terms of its measurable progress.

Retrospectively this lack of achievement was perceived as a product of the very nature of the equality that was being sought, in that it demanded that women be seen as the same as men. Within this phase women then became lauded for their ability to do whatever men could do. The translation of this stage of feminist argument into the hard-boiled detective novel is often cited as a representation of liberal socialism, criticised by academics such as Plain and Munt as inadequate because it attempts to assimilate progressive feminist ideas into a conservative ideological framework.⁴⁰

Munt comments:

Implicit within liberal theory is an optimistic belief in reform, a strategy seen as extendable to all areas of social life, including cultural forms such as crime fiction commonsensically held to be a masculine genre.⁴¹

Munt adds ‘these texts strain between ideological allegiances’ and further, that they occupy an ‘unstable positioning between dominant and subordinate cultural locations’.⁴² This criticism is directed at a number of writers working in the 1980s but the analysis of Sara Paretsky’s work is indicative of the issues that have been raised about this substitutive female hero who according to Plain is caught between ‘opposition and infiltration’.⁴³

Paretsky, who has to date produced seventeen hard-boiled novels, was writing against a backdrop of complex gender relations in 1980s America. The ongoing poor status of women in work, an issue that Paretsky consistently broaches, was a source

³⁸ Ada Garcia Isabelle Dumont, ‘Women In Trade Unions: Making The Difference’ http://www.etuc.org/sites/www.etuc.org/files/genre_an_080403.pdf [accessed 14 March 2013].

³⁹ Brett Lamb, ‘Gender in 1980s America’ <http://lessonbucket.com/vce-media/units-3-4/media-texts-and-societys-values/gender-in-1980s-america/> [accessed 21 October 2010].

⁴⁰ Munt, p.31.

⁴¹ Munt, p.30.

⁴² Munt, p.31.

⁴³ Plain, p.153.

of much public disagreement. Susan Faludi writing about the backlash against feminism in the late 1980s and 1990s, comments on the discrepancy between the supposed achievements of women and the reality. She cites the lack of women in high profile jobs by the end of the 1980s, asking: ‘Why in the US are there only three female state governors and two female senators, the same number in the 1930s?’. This scenario that was replicated in Britain with ‘44 members of Parliament in the House of Commons, out of 650 MPs’.⁴⁴ Paretsky’s first novel *Indemnity Only* raises the question of women in the work place through the employment choice of her detective WI Warshawski. When a prospective client comes to her office he asks Warshawski if she has a partner, by inference a male colleague because as he points out: ‘Well, this really isn’t a job for a girl to take on alone’.⁴⁵ Warshawski’s response is anger and she challenges the client’s preconceived notions of what a woman can do. Whilst Paretsky consistently questions such attitudes by asserting her right to be viewed on an equal footing to men, her detective is criticised by Plain for its ‘crude feminist role-reversal’ and her failure to counter the myth-making processes of the original male-authored hard-boiled novel.⁴⁶ Plain devotes an entire chapter to Paretsky and what she calls her ‘feminist fairy tales’.⁴⁷ She says of Paretsky that ‘she creates a series of detective fairy tales that reinstate rather than overthrow the rigid system of rule’.⁴⁸ Plain comments:

Warshawski certainly manifests a powerful investment in the traditional liberal values of justice and the concepts of individual rights and these attitudes tend in the end to prevent Warshawski from offering any radical revision of the structures of otherness that shape contemporary North American society.⁴⁹

Plain goes on to say that Warshawski oscillates between ‘belonging and marginality’, presumably wanting her, if nothing else to be consistent, and adopt a single focus to attack a ‘hetero-patriarchal norm’.⁵⁰ She argues that Warshawski as a ‘substitution’ has an uncomfortable connection to the original masculinist texts,

⁴⁴ Susan Faludi, *Backlash* (London: Chato and Windus, 1992), p.6.

⁴⁵ Sara Paretsky, *Indemnity Only* (New York: Gollanz Press, 1982), p.6.

⁴⁶ Plain, p.144.

⁴⁷ Plain, pp.141-165.

⁴⁸ Plain, p.142.

⁴⁹ Plain, p.147.

⁵⁰ Plain, p.153.

making links to the formalistic gender transfer or the creation of a female detective akin to the horror genre's 'final girl', as suggested by Carol Clover.⁵¹

Thus despite Paretsky's feminist perspective and conscious adoption of the hard-boiled form, she does not fit into the gestic paradigm. The gestic writer does not seek to replace the 'tough guy' myth with a feminised substitute; rather she works to situate her detective in the realities of the everyday. Chandler's 'ordinary man' is extended by the gestic writer as a means of dismissing the mythology of his extraordinary masculinity. Paretsky has created a detective who reformulates the myth through which she draws attention to both her femininity as difference and her appropriateness for the job. In *Deadlock* Warshawski investigates the murder of her cousin and industrial fraud. As the novel opens she attends her cousin's funeral. The family she is surrounded by are portrayed in highly negative terms. She comments on a group of men who are standing apart, talking and eating: 'If their minds had been as full as their stomachs they could have saved America'.⁵² Her female relatives are equally defined as limited by a lack of intelligence and personal aspiration.

Others said it was a pity I had divorced Dick and didn't have a family to keep me busy- just look at Cheryl's and Martha's and Betty's babies. The house was swarming with children: all the Wojciks were appalling prolific. (*DL*, p.13)

The criticism and tone of complaint identifies Warshawski's difference from these ineffectual men and family preoccupied women. In contrast Warshawski defines herself as good at her job: 'I'm a detective and I have a pretty good record'. However, this positive self-promotion is often undermined by stereotypical gendered linguistic markers, such as 'attractive young lady', 'lady detective'. (*DL*, pp.51&66) These diminutives are then countered with details from her lifestyle that firmly connect her to the masculinity of the original hard-boiled texts in an attempt to separate her from the gendered assumptions that seem to taunt her.

I poured myself a solid two fingers of Black Label and ran a bath. [...] I got out of the tub and wrapped myself in a red bath sheet and poured

⁵¹ The final girl is seen as the 'investigating consciousness' of the film moving the narrative forward. Whilst Clover points to this gender fluidity as demonstrating the impact of feminism in popular culture it implies a fairly conventional gender transfer. Carol Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), p.107.

⁵² Sara Paretsky, *Deadlock* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), p.14. (All further references cited as *DL* and page number in the text).

another slug of Scotch [...] I put on a clean pair of jeans and a T-shirt and wandered out into the kitchen. A depressing sight - pans stacked around the sink, crumbs on the table, an old piece of aluminium foil, cheese congealed on the stove [...] Over another Scotch I watch the tail end of a depressing Cubs defeat. (*DL*, pp.55-56)

Malcah Effron in her analysis of Paretsky comments that such 'movements invoke and complicate traditional images of womanhood'.⁵³ However, the overt nature of Paretsky's gender commentary produces what Paula E. Johnson categorises as 'feminist rhetoric' coupled with an imitation of the male model.⁵⁴ Thus whilst Paretsky's detective is clearly separated from the 'traditional images of womanhood' she is also firmly situated within the masculine patterning of the original text.

Second phase feminism and the 'separatist' detective

The second phase within feminism is seen by Kristeva as a process of drawing attention to the differences between women as well as with men. Krolokke and Sorensen define it as the beginning of a 'conflict between integration and separation (which) signalled a basic shift from an equity approach to a separation approach'.⁵⁵ This change of focus was the uncomfortable product of a previously assumed universality of women's experience, and that equality with men was the only reasonable goal. As Caroline Ramazanoglu commented in *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression* this early period of feminist work showed a lack of inclusiveness, and that there was an overemphasis the experience of upper-middle class white women.⁵⁶ Recognition of this imbalance started to be voiced in the 1970s with an increased emphasis on what Juliet Mitchell called in her work *Woman's Estate*, published in 1971, the recognising of 'individual dilemma (as) social predicament'.⁵⁷ Kristeva saw this phase as marked by a desire to give a language to the 'intra-subjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past' giving legitimacy to the private, personal lives of women.⁵⁸ R A Sydnie in her text *Natural Women, Cultured Men* published in 1982 commented that 'feminist research

⁵³ Malcah Effron, 'Sara Paretsky (1942 -)' in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p.525.

⁵⁴ Paula E. Johnson, 'Sex and Betrayal in the Detective Fiction of Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 27.4 (1994) p.97.

⁵⁵ Krolokke and Scott Sorensen, p.12.

⁵⁶ Caroline Ramzanoglu, *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp.vii - ix.

⁵⁷ Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.61.

⁵⁸ Kristeva, p.194.

attempts to assert the validity of women's experience into the naming or the defining of the nature of reality'.⁵⁹ This emphasis on the 'private' and the differences between women gave rise to what Kristeva calls a 'recognition of the irreducible identity, without equal in the opposite sex and as such exploded, plural, fluid, in a certain way non-identical'.⁶⁰ In doing so she identified some of the limitations of the first phase of feminism, because it negated the ways in which women are non-identical and that to fully recognise their potential women needed to be separate from men. As Krollokke and Sorensen comment, this second phase was identifiable by its 'search for authenticity and continuity in women's cultures and [...] an interest in understanding differences amongst women as constitutive'.⁶¹

Kristeva also connects this separation with forms of violence, both literal and symbolic. She distinguishes this second position as a radical demand to remain outside the linear time of history and politics and one that responds to the sacrificial nature of the social bond with 'a revolt'.⁶² Kristeva comments:

A woman may by counter-investing the violence she has endured, make of herself a 'possessed' agent of this violence in order to combat what was experienced as frustration - with arms that may seem disproportional.⁶³

Whilst Kristeva goes on to argue that physical violence or terrorism 'offers as a programme of liberation an order which is even more oppressive, more sacrificial than those it combats' and that 'sacrifice orders violence, binds it, tames it' she recognises the positive nature of a counter-society that refuses to be contained by the 'socio-symbolic contract'.⁶⁴ Kristeva makes it clear that safeguarding one's identity is a struggle that cannot be achieved without some form of counter-investment that rejects the 'value system' that rejects women as foreign.⁶⁵ Bonnie Zimmerman in her article 'What has never been: an overview of lesbian feminist literary criticism' argued in 1981 that many lesbian writers and critics had been influenced by the politics of separatism, which she identifies as a 'radical energy that keeps us moving

⁵⁹ R. A. Sydie, *Natural Women, Cultured Men* (Milton Keynes: Open University, 1982), p.209.

⁶⁰ Kristeva, p.194.

⁶¹ Krollokke and Sorensen, p.13.

⁶² Kristeva, p.194.

⁶³ Kristeva, p.203.

⁶⁴ Kristeva, p.204.

⁶⁵ Kristeva, p.202.

forwards'.⁶⁶ Zimmerman comments on the positive impact of resisting what Kristeva calls 'the centralization of power'.⁶⁷

The value of separatism which, I believe, has always provided the most exciting theoretical developments in lesbian ideology is precisely this marginality: lesbian existence on the periphery of patriarchy.⁶⁸

For Zimmerman lesbian ideology offered 'cutting edge' academic criticism in which 'lesbian' functions as a radical signifier. Tamsin Wilton, in her analysis of lesbian writing, *Lesbian Studies: Setting an Agenda* comments 'Lesbian-ness is perhaps the only way of exposing and challenging the heteropolarity of the master narrative'.⁶⁹ It is perhaps not surprising that the incorporation of this second phase into the hard-boiled detective novel has been most strongly voiced in its reworking by lesbian writers.

During the 1970s and 1980s the hard-boiled novel was rapidly becoming perceived as a form that women had adopted, establishing a solid readership base for lesbian authors. The problematic nature of 'substitution' and the replacement of a male detective with a female suggesting a surrogate male meant that women writers who had attempted to distance themselves from the original male detective were positively received. In this way the lesbian detective more consciously rejected the masculinisation of the form. Feminist lesbian detective novels have been lauded as significant achievements in the re-appropriation of the form largely because the authors tend to work hard at arguing the case for a separatist stance.⁷⁰ Plain goes further and asks if a woman can 'ever really threaten to destabilise a patriarchal system in which she is also profoundly implicated through the structures of desire' reinforcing the notion that the only realistic solution to the male detective is to remove the inclusion of what is designated heterosexual.⁷¹ Certainly this development of the form in the 1980s is favoured by many (Knight, Plain and Munt, to name a few), whereas the heterosexual version is often dismissed as an ineffective

⁶⁶ Bonnie Zimmerman, 'What has never been: an overview of lesbian feminist literary criticism', *Feminist Studies*, 7.3 (1981), p.466.

⁶⁷ Kristeva, p. 202.

⁶⁸ Zimmerman, p.465.

⁶⁹ Tasmin Wilton, *Lesbian Studies: Setting an Agenda* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.134.

⁷⁰ Knight, p.163.

⁷¹ Plain, p.143.

substitute or ‘Marlowe in drag’.⁷² The separatist position that the lesbian novel takes up is certainly a more fundamental one, working as it does to reject comparisons between itself and the male authored versions and their ‘tough’ masculine detective.

In general terms literature that incorporated lesbian characters increased in the 1980s, creating an acceptance if not desire for a sub-genre of lesbian detective fiction. Alwyn Turner in his book *Rejoice! Rejoice! Britain in the 1980s*, comments that lesbian politics were seen as part of the feminist movement and whilst together they consistently received negative representation in the media their politics were given public attention. Turner discusses the ‘women only’ demonstration at Greenham Common in protest against the American cruise missiles which gained much press attention and whilst the language was dismissive, ‘lesbianism, squalor and degradation’ he concedes that the ‘sheer longevity of the peace camp burned it into the public consciousness and into fiction’.⁷³ Munt, in her text *Murder by the Book* devotes a chapter to lesbian crime fiction. She comments ‘the detective hero is an outlaw, and here the parallel with lesbianism is clear. He is alone, isolated, on the edge, an observer, not a participator’. She identifies the male detective as a crusader, which she translates into feminist and lesbian ‘tendencies of evangelistic salvation [...] tempered in the late 1980s with a re-emphasis on discovery of “self” and subjectivity’.⁷⁴ As such, Munt sees the lesbian detective novel as a natural development during this time because of the existing traits of the 1930s original and the political landscape of the 1980s.

Often the lesbian text is as much about becoming a lesbian as solving a crime. In *Mrs Porter’s Letter*, Ryla Wade acknowledges ‘Yes, I’m probably a lesbian’ and is admitted into what Munt calls the ‘secret club of dykedom’.⁷⁵ Wade comments later on this change, ‘As I put my hand out to shake hers, I wondered what kind of sign I was wearing that I didn’t have on before’.⁷⁶ However, the belief that removing heterosexual desire from the text via the detective will ameliorate what it seen as the

⁷² Susan Geason, ‘Ain’t Misbehavin’, in *Killing Women: Rewriting Detective Fiction*, ed. by Delys Bird (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1993), p.116.

⁷³ Alwyn Turner *Rejoice! Rejoice! Britain in the 1980s* (London: Aurum Press, 2010), pp.158-9.

⁷⁴ Munt, p.120.

⁷⁵ Vicki P. McConnell, *Mrs Porter’s Letter* (Tallahassee: Naiad Press, 1982), p.162.

Munt, p.127.

⁷⁶ McConnell, p.181.

misogyny of the original novels is perhaps over simplistic. It fails to address the way the form has always been implicated in the social practices of a historical moment and hence a repository for the contemporaneous gender relations of that time. Indeed lesbian detective novels are through their radical separatist strategies, themselves a part of the cultural and social changes of the 1980s. Munt, who clearly favours the lesbian version of the form herself, concedes that the hard-boiled novel is a 'dynamic paradigm dependent on definitions which change over time and is a cultural code in which meanings are consistently contested' reinforcing the argument that the lesbian detective strategy of 'conversion' (Munt's word) is a representation of a particular 1980s feminist agenda.⁷⁷ A separatist stance that works to reject the hermeneutic of patriarchal control would appear to rework the form in a way that gives plausibility to the female detective. However, to what extent is it possible for a separatist detective to embody a tactic of radical resistance to patriarchy? Plain argues for strategies that reject what she calls 'belonging' and accept something that is part of the 'margins'.⁷⁸ She uses Virginia Woolf's words - 'outsider', 'anonymous' and 'indifferent' to champion the status of the lesbian detective.⁷⁹ If we see the form as one that participates in a collective retelling of a specified history in which identities are presented, questioned and revised for public consumption, then the marginal placement might perhaps lack the political influence that Plain desires. According to Zimmerman 'privileging lesbian-as-radical-sign over other excluded and marginalised positions' is restrictive because it does not address the individual experience within this political discourse. Wilton reinforces this when she comments on the disruptive potential of the lesbian text, but then adds, 'although "real" lesbians do not see this discursive disruption in their *raison d'être*', implying that 'lesbian-as-radical-sign' works well as a political symbol and a literary motif, but does not necessarily reflect the experience or focus of lesbians.⁸⁰ Thus whilst these novels have the capacity to create a surrogate public history through which lesbian politics are given expression, the separatist focus and the lack of what Wilton defines as "real" lesbians, might limit the potential of these texts to formatively enter the public consciousness.

⁷⁷ Munt, p.201.

⁷⁸ Plain, p.153.

⁸⁰ Wilton, p.134.

Third phase feminism and the gestic detective

The third of Kristeva's phases engages with and is arguably complicated by, an emphasis on the maternal as a direct consequence of rejecting the totalising effect of the father and patriarchy. The maternal, says Kristeva offers 'the complexity of the female experience' and is a 'fundamental challenge to identity' perceived through the gendered binary of the social contract.⁸¹ Maternity identifies difference through a process that challenges a woman's sense of her separate self because, as a mother she is no longer one individual. Kristeva comments 'pregnancy causes a splitting of the subject'. And this splitting and separation is important because it establishes what Kristeva sees as an ethic of relation.⁸² Pregnancy and childbirth are also potent realities for many women; painful, pragmatic and entirely personal. This complexity of women's experiences is evident in what I see as gestic hard-boiled detective writers and the way they incorporate detail into their texts. Part of what they examine is the reality of women's domestic lives at its most basic level, but it is also about the way femininity is constructed by social norms. This form of writing is not then about producing a surrogate male or emphasising the separateness within the binary division between the sexes. Nor too is it about assuming either a symbolic or practical solution to patriarchy within a literary format. My argument is that Grafton, Barnes and Dunant *do not* offer a simple female substitution for the male detective and *do* engage with the realities of women's lives. In part this is achieved through a consistent focus on the patterns of women's experience and a refusal to offer a simplistic fantasy of female success, through a repetition of the masculinist historically bound original.

The relational in the gestic text (drawn from Kristeva's concept of the maternal bond) is a recognition of and engagement with the interconnectedness of women's everyday lives. For the gestic writer the relational is made known through the personal at times physical responses to other women or those determined as other. It offers the reader a way of understanding and identifying with the complexity of what it means to be a woman, on the basis of shared circumstances as well as differences. The focus on individual situations, alongside an aggressive politicising of women's

⁸¹ Kristeva, pp.205-6.

⁸² Kristeva, p.206.

issues seen previously as irrelevant to serious politics, such as the division of labour in the household, relations between women and men in the work place and sexuality, gave rise to the potent use of the hard-boiled detective novel by women writers who engaged fully with the politics of female identity. In *Coyote* Linda Barnes pointedly examines perceptions and representations of women, questioning assumptions about female behaviour. The possibility of a serial killer of women and the media's coverage of the deaths is critiqued by Carlyle.

There's practically nothing I hate more than sensational serial-killer headlines. They're so goddam misleading. First of all, the overwhelming number of murder victims are male, mostly young black males killed in gang violence or drug disputes or just because they live and work in the wrong place. Do they wind up on page one? No way. But let some weirdo start killing women and it's everywhere, in eighteen point screamers. And the victims are always described as 'attractive' and 'young' as if the weirdo were auditioning bathing beauties or something, as if women had incited the crimes.

Go ahead, show me an account of a male murder victim that uses the word *handsome*.⁸³

Barnes challenges one-dimensional tabloid representations of femininity based on appearance as well as the presumption that female victims of crime are in some way responsible for their own victimhood. Her reference to the realities of murder and the different ways in which men and women are treated by the press evokes an alternative view to the 'eighteen point screamers' that denote the dominant, simplified image of women. The relational as part of gestic writing offers women writers a space to investigate personal, private issues as public, political concerns, giving readers a surrogate public history in which women's experiences and responses take precedence over, in this instance, disparaging tabloid sensationalism.⁸⁴

By giving value to what were previously seen as private, hidden and non-political areas of women's lives alongside the earlier calls for solidarity and equality within the 'public', visible spaces, the gestic writer attempts to reconcile the first and second phases of feminism and engage with the relational ethics of the maternal. This feminism says Kristeva situates itself outside the linear time of identities, thereby offering a reconceptualising of what it politically means to be a woman. One

⁸³ Linda Barnes, *Coyote* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1990), p.82.

⁸⁴ Kristeva, p.194.

of the ways in which this is expressed is in ‘the words of everyday communication’ and ‘faced with social norms this language reveals a certain knowledge and sometimes the truth itself about an otherwise repressed nocturnal, secret and unconscious universe’.⁸⁵ Accordingly the gestic writers through the revelatory process of gesture and their emphasis on the contradictory patterns of women’s lives offer an alternative way of seeing what constitutes femininity. In doing so they make known a surrogate public history that allows us to see how women are bound by a social contract that divides the public and private spheres along gendered terms. Kristeva comments ‘the language of the everyday, one form of which is literature offers a way of exploring multiplicity’ and understanding what Kristeva sees as the ‘weight of what is sacrificial in the social contract’.⁸⁶ Part of the project of gestic writers is to question or reject the logic of the social bond. For example, in Grafton’s work this extends to her rejection of traditional family units, with a group of friends as her surrogate family and as Munt accepts, thereby ‘refusing the romantic reinstatement of the family at the epicentre of Reagan/Thatcher ideology’.⁸⁷ In Kristeva’s terms literature can both replicate and challenge representations of femininity that are themselves part of, or a version of, reality. Thus, it is possible to see how feminism and its expression within literature can participate in a particular kind of surrogate public history one that exposes the symbolic and at times literal violence that is part of separation and binary difference. This focus on women’s intra-subjective experience determines a way of perceiving femininity as able to operate outside the bounds of normative sex defined behaviour. In effect, women are able to reject restrictive definitions of femininity and ‘lift the weight of what is sacrificial’.⁸⁸ As a result identity that can celebrate difference as well as what is relational, seen through the maternal ethic, becomes a powerful tool, a means of challenging prescribed social definitions and practices. For gestic writers it creates an opportunity to address the question of femininity as a ‘negative’ that the original hard-boiled text propagated.

⁸⁵ Kristeva, p.207.

⁸⁶ Kristeva, p.207.

⁸⁷ Munt, p.49.

⁸⁸ Kristeva, p.207.

The gestic detective's voice

The need to negotiate the possibilities of the traditional text carefully, to avoid the pitfalls of male surrogacy and to achieve an expression of female agency has meant that the primary access to the traditional detective, that is the detective's voice, has had to be cautiously revised. The laconic or acerbic voice that the male detective deploys is developed by female writers as a narrative device to engage with female identity. The traditional formulaic requirements establish a particular pitch of carefully phrased emotive responses. The intensely masculine articulation of the narrative voice within the Chandler and Spillane texts produces a register that is both self-absorbed and self-conscious. This male voice is clearly a product of a particularised time and place, and a means of investigating those who inhabit the criminal event. The behaviours of the people the detective engages with become the focus, the detail, the gest, of the event. For Marlowe this establishes both his investigative responses but also his discomforts and his antipathies. Through this detailing of the 'manifold utterances' (as Brecht defines them) the social responses of masculinity are revealed.⁸⁹ Hammer's engagement with the gest of the criminal event is more sharply focussed, revealing his violent, abusive responses. That both these male detectives express their anxieties makes the detective's voice both a powerful form of gender examination but also a tool to be carefully reworked. If the detective's voice and its gest operate as a process of gender critique then for the female detective this can offer an overt means of examining gender construction and the social practices that maintain such constructs.

This engagement with the voice of the traditional male detective establishes in turn the status of the female private investigator; it determines her social and political stance and the point or level at which she registers her involvement with her surroundings and the investigative process. Where the traditional detective's voice often appears to signify his distance from, and his distaste for, the lives he encounters and ambivalence towards his own personal life, with its solitude and down-at-heel suggestion of failure, the female detective generally chooses not to re-enact such laconic disassociation. The achievement of the female P.I. lies with her

⁸⁹ Brecht, p.198.

willingness to become intrinsically involved with the ongoing issues within the criminal investigation and to address what are at times painful truths. This is achieved through the singular version of the female detective's voice. In *I is for Innocent*, Millhone looks into the death a woman who has been shot. She comments:

The dead are mute, but the living still have voice with which to protest their innocence. Often their objections are noisy and pious, impossible to refute since the one person who could condemn them has been silenced forever. The final testimony from Isabelle Barney was framed in the language of her fatal injury, a devastating portrait of waste and loss.⁹⁰

Millhone accepts the role of 'voice' to the dead and works to discover who killed Isabelle Barney. At the close of the book she is confronted by the killer, David Barney, the husband of the dead woman, and shoots him. Her response to the shooting makes reference to the comic book effect that such violence takes on in film but also to the way that violence cannot but become personalised:

In the movies, you shoot someone and they're either blown back a foot or they keep coming at you, up from the bathtub, up from the floor, sometimes so full of bullet holes their shirts from red polka dots. The truth is, you hit someone and it hurts like hell. I could testify to that. David Barney had to sit down with his back to the wall and think about life. (*IIFI*, pp.282-283)

For Millhone the investigation is about achieving justice for the dead, but equally it is about commenting on the way such behaviour is defined. The voice of the detective determines a fundamental structuring of the female detective. Not just in terms of the way the text intersects with a particular time and place, and its cultural and social determinants, but the way the text forms part of a genre that already has a definitive set of encoded expectations. Interestingly, Grafton's comments on the process of dying references iconic action and thriller films of the 1980s and early 1990s. *Die Hard* (1988) and *Die Hard II* (1990) feature the unbeatable protagonist John McClane who 'gives terrorists a dose of their own medicine'.⁹¹ The bathtub inclusion refers to the 1987 film *Fatal Attraction* in which Glenn Close refuses to die despite being seemingly drowned in a bath.

The popular cinematic portrayal of death is questioned by Millhone both by giving space to the victim of crime and also through recognition that death despite being

⁹⁰ Sue Grafton, *I is for Innocent* (London: MacMillan, 1992), p.16. (All further references cited as *IIFI* and page number in the text).

⁹¹ The *Die Hard* Franchise <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0095016/> [accessed 12 April 2011].

part of the genre is not trivial. Dunant also comments on the personal nature of death and its impact in *Fatlands*:

So, you see, I wasn't prepared. For any of it. I, like everyone else, thought car explosions were the things you saw in movies or on the television, where there is a mass of fire and smoke and then you move onto the next scene. (*FL*, p.35)

Wolfe realises that death, particularly a violent one, has become part of the way she and 'everyone else' views the world. Her next comment, 'It strikes me now that since it's usually the bad guys who get blown to hell, it doesn't matter what happens after' typifies the normal response to such screen representations of death. Wolfe's personal response to the death 'as if someone had taken a piece of me without anaesthetic' sets her apart from the mundane acceptance of popular media portrayal; her responses alienate the familiar and determine her gestic voice. (*FL*, p. 35)

In the original texts the gest of the criminal event opens up a space that allows an expression of the nature of masculinity. Similarly the gestic work of the female detective writer offers an opportunity to explore a voice that expresses aspects of femininity. Marlowe lays claim to his mythology through his assumption that whatever the odds he will remain the hero. At one point in *Farewell My Lovely* he is drugged and imprisoned; when he regains consciousness he assesses his physical state and works to regain his self-control. Despite the fact that he is exhausted he persists until he is well enough to overcome the guard. He maintains a constant dialogue with himself as a means of focussing his mind and encouraging recovery. It is clear that he has been severely affected by the drugs: 'Time passed - an agony of nausea and staggering and dazedness'.⁹² Alongside this assessment of his physical incapacitation is an ongoing humorous reference to his toughness, and his assumption that he will prevail: 'I'm weak. I couldn't knock over a flower vase. I couldn't break a fingernail. Nothing doing. I'm walking out of here. I'm tough. I'm getting out of here'.⁹³ The humour diminishes the pain, the vulnerability he is experiencing and allows the reader to focus on his expected return to 'toughness'. In contrast to this Grafton's depiction of Millhone in a similar situation does not give the reader any such opportunity for relief.

⁹² Chandler, *Farewell My Lovely*, p.149.

⁹³ Chandler, *Farewell My Lovely*, p.151.

I hunched, taking the blow on the shoulder this time. The pain was like a heat licking up my side. I hung on to the stairs for dear life. A bright cloud was reducing my vision to a pinpoint, and I knew once the aperture closed I was dead. (*BIFB*, p.226)

Grafton's language is unrelenting with no suggestion of humour. Millhone talks of herself and her attacker as 'snuffling like wounded animals looking for a way to crawl off and hide'. (*BIFB*, p.227) Whilst Marlowe frees himself and moves on to the next violent physical encounter Millhone identifies the trauma that the violence has caused. 'I hurt just about every place. I look in the mirror and I see someone else's face. [...] I'm feeling some other kind of pain as well and I don't know quite what that is made of. (*BIFB*, p. 220) Grafton rejects the hard-boiled detective's mythology and in doing so revises the expectations of the form. Critical responses to the female private investigator, do not take into consideration the possibilities that the detective's voice opens up and the ways in which it counters the myth of pain. In a genre where the traditional portrayal of femininity is set as a contrast to the central male, his 'other' through which he in part determines his own agency, there is clearly a need to formulate a space for female expression that does not evoke tokenism. Such a space cannot be entered into without recognising the importance of its generic inheritance.

The gestic detective and the familiar

In order to counter the problems inherent in the depiction of the detective as a representation of performative masculinity, or in the characterisation of women as either vulnerable or the victim, women writers have engaged with and developed more fully the ordinary, quotidian qualities of the original detective, central to his sometime fashioning as a 'common man'. In what might be seen as an excess of commonality, the female detective's daily habits and preoccupations are repeatedly given voice. In this way the female detective redefines the gest of the original hard-boiled text. The detail of the social event is filtered through the minutiae of the female detective's life and the 'common man' of the original mythology is undercut. The way that the gest can be read here functions differently from that of the original hard-boiled detective novel: the male authored text offers possible versions of the mythology that the genre expresses in gestic form; the female version works to question both the mythologies of the male detective and by extension the reading of

femininity that the original texts deliver. The gest of the female hard-boiled detective requires an alternative focus, one that re-evaluates the structuring of the mythologies that Chandler and Spillane's texts work to maintain. The female detective does not attempt to shore up the myth of the detective or the gendering process that goes with it. Instead the gest of the female hard-boiled detective novel gains status in its own right. If, for the original text, it is a way of critically gaining insight into the detective's social relations and the way his 'manifold utterances' impact on the event, then for the women's text the focus remains on the gest itself. Thus the detail itself becomes valuable, and whilst it does not always impact upon the whole, that is the 'hetero-patriarchal norm' which Plain wants detective fiction to change, it does, however, change the way we perceive the detective's femininity and thus the way we see her agency and subjectivity.

The end result is a woman whose familiarity is a primary element of her make-up. Like the male counterpart, the female detective is known to the reader, her attributes based on recognition. Unlike the male, whose familiarity, that of the lone, tough hero, feeds into his mythical portrayal, her familiarity needs to counter the fantasy-of-agency that is all too possible within the genre, (a point of contention in Plain's analysis of Paretsky) to give, as it were, another outlet for the female detective's mythology to be expressed. So it is that juxtaposed to this supposed fantasy woman is another kind of woman altogether, one whose private individualism appears to undermine the mythical qualities she gains access to as a female detective. Discussing Dunant's *Fatlands* Nicci Gerard commented:

The pleasure of *Fatlands* - as in so many of these thrillers - is not so much the competent plot but the excavation of an independent woman's domestic life, which is both mundane and in crisis [...] we recognize and identify with her; not superhuman or stunning, but a bungling, touchy, anxious, ageing, not-so-modern modern woman.⁹⁴

The fact that the detectives created by writers such as Dunant are individual women with individual lives and agendas means that they offer the reader an interpretative process that is bound up in the minutiae of their messy, open-ended private selves. By writing to make their central characters 'real' these writers are attempting to undermine any notion of a universal women, thereby creating in these texts a

⁹⁴ Nikki Gerard, 'Sleuth Sayings', *The Observer* 27 June 1993, p.62.

distinctive sense of identity and subjectivity such that the problems and solutions within the formulaic centre of the narrative can be read in conjunction with a lifestyle that is anything but fantasy. Gerard's observations about the 'pleasure of Fatlands', written in 1993 are not that dissimilar to a more current analysis of the Lisbeth Salander character in the *Millennium Trilogy*. Sarah Seltzer defines Salander's appeal on the basis of her originality and because she is 'a fascinating mess'.⁹⁵ Whilst Salander would not fit into the gestic mode because she does not have her own voice (the novels are written in the third person), it is interesting that in 2010 women who fail to fit into designated archetypes (Seltzer lists 'helpless victim, lovelorn and needy single female, karate kicking babe, ferocious tiger mother, or deranged scorned mistress') are championed.

Questions about female representation are central to Millhone's self-introduction which takes place in each novel and are indicative of the structure of these detectives' lives.

I'm female, self-supporting, single now, having been married and divorced twice. I confess I'm sometimes testy, but for the most part I credit myself with an easy going disposition, tempered perhaps by an exaggerated desire for independence.⁹⁶

My hair is dark and I cut it myself with a pair of nail scissors every six weeks. The effect is just about what you would expect - ragged, inexpert.⁹⁷

Whilst Dunant's detective is less inclined to give such a formal character study, the opening page of *Birth Marks* presents a woman whose personal circumstances generates an image that seems at odds with Munt's portrayal of a fantasy-woman.⁹⁸

Mistake number one: I should never have sublet the flat. Mistake number two was letting myself be taken in by appearances. With a job like mine you'd think I would have learnt by now. But she had seemed such a shrinking violet, an anthropology student with so many religious books that she was clearly having problems with Darwin. [...] The kitchen smelt

⁹⁵ Sarah Seltzer, 'The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo: Why We Should Cheer Lisbeth Salander'. *Christian Science Monitor*, 28 July <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2010/0728/The-Girl-with-the-Dragon-Tattoo-Why-we-should-cheer-Lisbeth-Salander> [accessed 3 February 2015].

⁹⁶ Sue Grafton, *D is for Deadbeat* (London: MacMillan, 1987), p.1. (All further references cited as *DIFD* and page number in the text).

⁹⁷ Sue Grafton, *F is for Fugitive* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.12.

⁹⁸ Munt, p.197.

as if a dinosaur had died there and the bed looked as though it had been used to test out the survival of the fittest theory.⁹⁹

These women, through their private lives and their personal responses to the investigations that they undertake, give the reader access to an interpretative process that exposes not just the crimes against the dominant social order, or indeed, the crimes perpetrated by the dominant social order, but the complexities and contradictions that women live with daily.

This emphasis on the private allows an additional level of narrative tension, binding as it does the private concerns with the more public, legal aspects of the investigation. Danae Clark, in her essay on the television police series *Cagney and Lacey* (which aired in the 1980s), comments on the positioning of the viewer/reader within this structure.

The investigative structure can translate personal conflict into public concern and anchor (reader) identification to a specific political stance especially when the (investigative) plot and the drama of the characters' lives are integrally connected.¹⁰⁰

This process of translating 'personal conflict into public concern' through the plot has been commented on by Phyllis Betz in relation to the way the female detective can assign value to the marginalised in society. She remarks 'as the detective searches for the answers to the crime and her own mystery, the reader is encouraged by her success in both of her endeavours'.¹⁰¹ In *Snapshot* written by Barnes, Carlyle becomes involved in a case of medical malpractice when her client Emily Woodrow asks Carlyle to look into the death of her daughter. Carlyle's involvement is intensified by the temporary disappearance of her 'little sister', an eleven year old girl from the Boston projects to whom she acts as role model and friend. The investigation becomes a process of reassurance, for Carlyle and for a grieving mother but this is not reassurance in the traditional sense of knowledge and solution. Woodrow's pain over the loss of her daughter is not lessened by the discovery of the criminal's identity; she says to Carlyle:

⁹⁹ Sarah Dunant, *Birthmarks* (London: MacMillan, 1992), p.1.

¹⁰⁰ Danae Clark, 'Cagney and Lacey: Feminist Strategies of Detection', in *Television and Women's Culture*, ed. by Mary Ellen Brown (London: Sage, 1990), p.127.

¹⁰¹ Phyllis M. Betz, *Lesbian Detective Fiction: Woman as Author, Subject and Reader* (North Carolina: McFarlane, 2006), p.175.

I thought I'd find out what happened and then I'd - I don't know - that it would change things. That if I found out how she died, I'd see things differently. That if someone had to pay for her death, if someone else had to die even, it would make it easier.¹⁰²

Carlyle's response is an attempt to give Woodrow's loss some perspective; to show her that her daughter did not die in vain. 'You marked the doors with the blood of the lamb', she says, linking Woodrow's act with the Passover,

Strangers' doors, the doors of Egyptians and Nigerians and Pakistanis. You made the angel of death pass over their houses. You saved their children, the children of strangers. (SS, p.385)

Although Woodrow has achieved this, it is the painful exposure of a mother's grief that takes precedence and the force of this grief is intimately bound up in Carlyle's own temporary and powerful sense of loss over her adoptive sister/daughter. Carlyle's personal involvement in the death of a child adds outrage over the export of contaminated drugs to developing countries, reinforcing sympathy for mass suffering through an individual, known child. But it is the level at which Carlyle is involved that intensifies this investigative process for without Carlyle's own complicated involvement with her 'little sister', her daughter, the impact of this case would diminish.

The private lives and concerns of detectives such as Carlyle, Wolfe and Millhone bind the investigative process to a narrative that undermines the fantasy of 'hero' and creates a more substantive character. The detail within the gest allows us to focus on the personalised nature of the crime. The formula then has seemingly broken down at the very point that traditionally gives reassurance and safety, that of comforting closure and a return to the status quo. The personal element here does not allow a seamless movement from crime to solution and closure, but recognises that the impact of crime is ongoing. In part the messy, open-ended lives of these women appear to reinvent this very thing that they have undermined: that is the comfort of repetition, identified in these texts through the private lives and responses of the female detective. The seriality of these texts produces at a basic narrative level a sense of familiarity such that we are reassured by the routinized, the trivial. However the trivial, operating as it does to give us access to the female detective, reinforces

¹⁰² Linda Barnes, *Snapshot* (New York: Dell, 1993), p.383. (All further references cited as SS and page number in the text).

the personal impact of the criminal event, creating the possibility of powerful identification for a woman reader. As with Marlowe the gest opens up to us the particularised female detective producing both a level of comfort but also an acute awareness of her humanity. Millhone's self-introduction is a point in case. The wording may vary a little but the mantra of name, employment, age, sex, marital status leaves little room for doubt that this is a woman who is not just known to us but very familiar. Her habits, her friends, her lack of immediate family, her home, her car and so on are elements of Grafton's creation that are as much a part of the investigation as the crime and its solution. For instance, in almost every novel the reader is reassured by the reappearance of Millhone's indestructible all-purpose black dress, like a symbol of comfortable longevity. It operates to challenge the construction of socially acceptable femininity that the 'little black dress' creates, suggesting a counter to the physical objectification of women. The humour that Grafton imbues this dress with does not reduce its basic semiotic necessity as a narrative motif or sign giving to the reader a point of habitual recognition. In *G is for Gumshoe* Millhone is forced off the road during an investigation. Although she suffers numerous bruises and her car is broken beyond repair, her black dress survives. Along with a number of other items, the dress is sent to Millhone's home after the car is towed to a garage.

The articles were packed as I remembered them, my all-purpose dress close to the surface. I pulled it out and inspected it, relieved to find it in better shape than I'd hoped. It was only moderately encrusted with mould, though it did smell of swamp gas, a scent that hovered somewhere between spoiled eggs and old toilet bowls. (*GIFG*, p.180)

The survival of the dress reassures us, the comedy attached to its survival does not diminish the threat of personalised damage inherent in this close proximity to the criminal event. In this way the dress operates to re-establish a code, a formula, to regain access to a predictable, ordered world of known and knowable objects. The fact that in *H is for Homicide* the dress is first mentioned at the beginning of the novel before Millhone becomes embroiled in the chaos of a violent relationship and then resurfaces at the close of the novel reinforcing this sense of an ordered world. It re-appears as the novel closes at a wedding; a familiar, familial social event which furthers this function. Often these motifs are part of the common trivialities of everyday life. In Carlyle's life are Fluffy the budgie, Aunt Bee's rocking chair, Gloria's weight gain and Roz's T-shirt collection; Wolfe's concerns are her sister's

family, her age, her boss. Whilst these elements are a mixture of the banal, the comic and at times, by association, the painful detritus of human relationships, they are fundamentally the means by which we can gain subjective access to the text through an intimate engagement with the personal life of the female detective as well as the more public element of her investigative employment. The gest of the social event at this level exposes the impact of the crime in a very intimate way but perhaps more significantly it reveals the identity of these women.

The gestic detective and her expression of independence

Whilst the actions of the male detective can be seen to function as a set of naturalised behaviours in part adopted into the public consciousness through the depiction of masculinity, these actions cannot unquestionably be taken on by the female detective. If the construction of the hard-boiled detective feeds into a surrogate public history to offer us the potent male then it is clear that such a construction is problematic for the women's hard-boiled text. The need to re-work the mythologies of masculinity must be carefully balanced against the needs of the genre's formulaic determinants. The independence of the traditional detective is part of the means by which he maintains his marginal position, it allows him to recognise the needs of society, but also enter into the criminal act to catch the perpetrators of the crime and carry out the justice which will maintain the social order. It gives him a seemingly objective distance from which to view those connected to the investigation. His solitary habits are part of his mythical signature. His knowledge of a world beyond his own choice of solitude is part of the structuring of the disparate nature of the traditional detective, as a man aware of his locating outside the ordinariness of domesticity, a cultural hero whose social alienation must be maintained.

For the female detective the mythology of the lone private investigator is often a reality generated by employment and social expectation. A desire for solitary independence and a readiness to maintain such independence at the risk of injury or death is fundamental to the role of private detective, although it is rarely seen as acceptable behaviour for women. It is also unlikely that the choice of private investigator as a form of employment would achieve anything other than this lone status. Val McDermid in *A Suitable Job for a Woman: Inside the World of Private Eyes*, examines the occupation of the female investigator in the USA and Britain. For

most of the women she talked to, the job of private detective was experienced as a mixture of freedom and the encounter with social disapproval. The opportunity to be a detective allowed many of the women to work for themselves and to be financially independent, but along with this these women had to face significant disapprobation for actively choosing private investigative work. Criticism ranged from assumptions about being sexually promiscuous to ‘invading privacy’.¹⁰³ As a result many of these female private detectives were wary about admitting what their profession was or vague about the actual thrust of their work. Their sense of achievement tended to be laced with social censure, making them if anything more determined to make a success of such an ‘unsuitable job’.

Their fictional counterparts are similarly motivated by the freedom that a private investigative job allows and pigeon-holed by the disapproval of others. The end result is often to make these female detectives vigorously self-reliant, rarely accepting support of others in their efforts to fulfil investigative closure. Offers of help are met with almost blanket refusal, and whilst those around might respect their desire to live alone and their preference for their own company, their ‘exaggerated desire for independence’, as Millhone puts it, fuels a response to these women that is often negative. (*DIFD*, p.1) The most problematic barrier, in terms of asserting their right to independence at all costs, often comes from those closest to them. Whilst many of the women detectives do not have permanent partners, most of them have intimate relationships at one point or another. These relationships often break down, temporarily, if not permanently, because of the detective’s desire for autonomy is threatened. In *Fatlands*, Wolfe’s lover Nick does not question missed arrangements, forgotten guests and late nights spent ‘chasing leads’. At one point he leaves a note saying, ‘Let me guess. You met a job you liked better than me?’ (*FL*, p.41) But when Wolfe is hurt by the killer she is hunting Nick’s response is to blame himself for his failure to protect her. ‘I should never have left you to make that walk on your own’. Wolfe’s thought, ‘God save me from chivalry’, marks the end of their relationship, with Wolfe unwilling to accept Nick’s desire to perceive her as dependent. (*FL*, p.152)

¹⁰³ Val McDermid, *A Suitable Job for a Woman: Inside the World of Private Eyes* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), p.258.

Such an 'exaggerated desire for independence' and a wish to be 'saved from chivalry' is clearly and repeatedly voiced, countering the traditional expectation of female characters in the traditional hard-boiled detective fiction in need of assistance from the chivalrous knight-detective. At times this refusal to be the object of male protectiveness results in a violent confrontation that risks the life of the female detective. In *G is for Gumshoe* Robert Dietz becomes the focus of Kinsey Millhone's irritation after she is hurt in a car crash and is forced to ask for Dietz's help in pursuing her case. Despite the fact that Dietz is working with Millhone, Millhone's physical dependency, partly the result of the car crash and partly the effects of Dietz's protectiveness, makes her feel confined.

I felt like a teenager, without a car of my own. Dietz insisted on my being with him almost constantly, so I was forced to trail around after him, begging rides, getting stuck where I didn't want to be, unable to pursue the leads that interested me. I doubled my pace, catching him up at the road. "Hey, Dietz? Could you drop me off at the house? I could borrow Henry's car and let you talk to Rochelle on your own."

He let me in on my side. "No."

I stared after him with outrage. "No?" I had to wait till he came around.

"What do you mean, 'No'?"

"I'm not going to have you running around by yourself. It's not safe."

"Would you *quit* that? I've got things to do."

He didn't answer. It was like I hadn't said a word.¹⁰⁴

When Millhone finally frees herself from the suffocating care of Dietz, she is kidnapped by the killer and threatened. There is no sense that this is a result of Millhone's failure to comply with the restrictions put on her by Dietz. Her decision to proceed with the case independently, despite the threat of the killer is part of the conditions of the job. Her thoughts, as she considers the possibility of death, are not of remorse that she didn't stay with Dietz, but relief that Dietz is not with her and therefore more likely to stay alive. This assertion of self-sufficiency is at odds with the expectation of female behaviour, but complies with the formulaic prerequisite of a detective who is solitary and removed from those around him. As such the independent gestic detective generates questions about female autonomy that are not simply about separation but about a willingness to suffer its potential physical cost.

¹⁰⁴ Sue Grafton, *G is for Gumshoe* (London: MacMillan, 1990), p.228.

Conclusions

My focus in this chapter has been the achievement of feminist hard-boiled detective authors who I have defined as gestic. My conceiving of the term gestic, highlights writers whose work engages with identity and the multiplicity of women's lives. The re-writing of the original genre by authors Barnes, Grafton and Dunant, allows an emphasis on the ways in which femininity is socially determined. Such an emphasis is not only a reflection of the 1980s feminist movement but also a way of exploring and challenging social expectation. The role of the female P.I. is not as a simple representational figure. She does not offer resolution to the inequalities that women face. She does however, through her cautious use of the device of the detective's voice, examine these inequalities and question how femininity is defined. The impact of the voice of the female detective is distinctive. It takes the gist of the criminal event and adds to it the expression of the minutiae of the detective's habits, her humorous attention to the personal details of her life, to establish a sense of self. It is at this point that the reader is given access to the detective as she enters into the role of investigator. Her voice determines her appropriateness for the post, her comfort with her choice of employment, her recognition of the demands of the job and the expectations that go with the responsibilities of investigator. It establishes her independent status and her contrariness. The regulation of female behaviour, determined through social expectation and cultural habit, whilst it no longer limits women to the domestic sphere and denies them access to employment, nonetheless controls many aspect of women's lives. For the female detective much of this is experienced through criticisms about her choice of employment and lifestyle, and her failure to fit in with the prescribed norms of female behaviour. The intimacy with which the female detective bears the knowledge of this deviancy from such norms, gives her the ability to operate within the field of social expectation and to understand the potential of rejecting this regulation. I began this chapter with Butler's contention that agency can 'be found paradoxically in the possibilities opened up in and by that constrained appropriation of the regulatory law'.¹⁰⁵ The essence of the gestic detective's voice is signified by her knowledge of the regulatory law and significantly such knowledge will, in de Lauretis' terms, generate 'daily resistances that afford both agency and sources of power or empowering

¹⁰⁵ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p.12.

investments'.¹⁰⁶ Whilst the traditional male detective engages with masculinity as a legally accepted set of behaviours, for the female detective, agency is an articulation of oppositions, that of conforming and refusing to conform, of 'belonging and marginality'. Her knowledge of gender expectations offers the possible freedom of rejecting the law's inhibiting norm, or at the very least exposing the workings of the law, which is what is ultimately investigated by these gestic texts. In my next chapter I extend my analysis of gestic writers to examine one of the key areas that has proved critically thorny, that of the violence of the form. In doing so I broaden my conceptualisation of how women writers break down the regulatory law through the use of their own appropriation of violence.

¹⁰⁶ De Lauretis, p.25.

Chapter Four - Violence and female subjectivity in the hard-boiled detective novel

Introduction:

I heard him yell. And I felt this small, fierce whoop of triumph inside. Don't mess with me, it said, in neon letters lighting up the night sky. I'm not your victim. (*FL*, p.140)

When Hannah Wolfe 'hits back' at her attacker in *Fatlands* she challenges one of the most basic preconceptions about women and violence: firstly that it is men who are violent and secondly that women are its recipients. As a consequence the utilisation of violence by women detectives is the most compelling element of women's revision of the hard-boiled form because it so fundamentally challenges this preconception. Dunant's portrayal of violence by her detective offers an alternative surrogate public history that challenges existing gendered definitions and the regulation of femininity.¹ Wolfe's refusal to accede to societal assumptions about women and violence offers an alternative image of femininity that counters dominant portrayals of women as victims. In *Fatlands* Wolfe does not win the physical fight, she is beaten into unconsciousness and hospitalised, but she comments 'I tell you it didn't knock the adrenalin out of me. And it still didn't make a victim out of me'. (*FL*, p.140) Her sense of triumph is significant because she recognises the possibilities that responding to violence with violence can achieve. Nonetheless the viciousness of the attack leaves her scarred and humiliated. Dunant identifies the degradation involved in such an act: 'Even without the sex, violence is a sexual violation, too intimate and painful to be shared'. (*FL*, p.143) Towards the end of the novel Wolfe meets her attacker again and her response to the threat of violence revises not simply the label of victim but allows her to rework the power dynamic upon which violence is predicated.

And I knew, more than I have ever know anything before, that right at that moment I had as much power as he did. All I had to do was to connect with it and turn it into violence. (*FL*, p.209)

The language that Dunant uses is not tentative or graphically descriptive; rather it is factual and confident. Power here is not just physical force but is intrinsically connected to knowledge. Wolfe asserts her self-knowledge, her capacity for violence and what that will deliver. This incorporation of violence is not simply an adoption

¹ Davis, p.44.

and gender revision of the entrenched brutality of the hard-boiled detective novel typical of Mickey Spillane. Dunant carefully engages with the subject/object binary of violence to re-evaluate the division that situates women as the victim and men as the perpetrators. Her revision of this power relationship ascribes to Wolfe her agency; she challenges assumptions about female behaviour but perhaps more importantly offers us a means to revise the victimisation of women that violence can produce. Dunant, like all the gestic writers I employ, reproduces the particularity of violence. In Brechtian terms, Wolfe's refusal to be made a victim and her willingness to take the potency of violence has the effect of alienation, in that it draws attention to her act and its lack of familiarity.² In doing so Dunant does not allow the reader to withdraw from the particular and personal effects of violence. Instead we must negotiate the unexpectedness of a woman who chooses violence as means of gaining control.

However, the use of such violence by women detective writers has been consistently criticised; not least because it is perceived as failing to recognise and address the violence of the form as an expression of dominant ideologies which reinforce gender difference, as well as the organisation of power on the basis of this difference. Accordingly, this is an area of the hard-boiled novel that has been persistently identified as 'problematic' in relation to feminist writers.³ Critics such as Anne Cranny-Francis see the use of this 'brutality' by women writers as limiting their feminist aim.⁴ More telling perhaps, Babener sees the 'female sleuth as the deputy henchmen for patriarchy'.⁵ The root of the supposed 'problem' lies in the way in which violence has been deployed by the male authored texts both as a form of physical aggression and an expression of symbolic power which can endow subject status. By this I mean that violence is part of the process by which the male detective's agency is established, it is one of the most essential ways in which his authority is defined and maintained. The significance of violence as an expression of agency which is gender specific is plainly evident in the work of Mickey Spillane.

² Bertolt Brecht, p.198.

³ Glover states that the violence of the form does not 'allow an easy male/female transposition'. Glover, p.78.

⁴ Cranny-Francis, p.168.

⁵ Liahna Babener, p.146.

I never really gave him a chance. All I moved was my arm and before he had his gun out I had my .45 in my fist with the safety off and the trigger back. I only gave him a second to realise what it was like to die then I blew the expression clean off his face.⁶

The violence here is explicit and fundamental to the detective Mike Hammer's potent masculinity and his control over others. The phrase 'I blew the expression clean off his face' combines a graphic image of the damage a bullet can do to a face, with an offhand idiom to denote Hammer's casual use of lethal force. This phrase determines the gest of Hammer's violence through these two contradictory uses of 'blew', boastful and excessive. It contrasts strikingly with Wolfe's 'I am not your victim'.⁷ In Chapter Two I used Sharon Marcus' phrase, the 'grammar of violence' to understand the way in which violence has the capacity to organise and define a relationship between the perpetrator and the recipient.⁸ Marcus comments that 'the gendered grammar of violence predicates men as the operators of its tools' and women as its object.⁹ This gendered reading of violence is echoed by Wini Breines and Linda Gordon in their work on family violence in which they propose that violence is the sign of 'a power struggle for the maintenance of a certain kind of social order', one in which women are the object of male coercion.¹⁰ Zoe Brigley Thompson in her examination of rape narratives discusses the disruptive nature of a violent woman. She comments that such gendered representations allow us to explore images that do not fit in with normative assumptions about female behaviour and in doing so permit us to ask troubling questions about the 'use of binaries between victim perpetrator, passivity and agency'.¹¹ In her analysis of representation in Stieg Larsson's *Millennium Trilogy* Yvonne Leffler identifies Lisbeth Salander the female protagonist as a woman 'who fights back and survives because she uses the same weapons as her antagonist, the villain'.¹² Thus the redrawing of this

⁶ Spillane, *One Lonely Night*, p.11.

⁷ Dunant, *Fatlands*, p.140.

⁸ The 'grammar of violence' is a term used by Sharon Marcus in her examination of rape scripts. She comments on the expediency of the term grammar because it 'means the rules and structure which assign people to positions within a script'. Marcus, p.392.

⁹ Marcus, p.393.

¹⁰ Wini Breines and Linda Gordon, 'The New Scholarship on Family Violence', *Signs* 8.3 (1983), p.511.

¹¹ Zoe Brigley Thompson, *Feminism, Literature and Rape Narratives: Violence and Violation*, ed. by Sorcha Gunne and Zoe Brigley Thompson (London: Routledge, 2010), p.11.

¹² Yvonne Leffler, 'Lisbeth Salander as a Melodramatic Heroine: Emotional Conflicts, Split Focalisation, and Changing Roles in Scandinavian Crime Fiction', in *Rape in Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy and Beyond: Contemporary Scandinavian and Anglophone Crime Fiction*, ed. by Berit Åström, Katarina Gregersdotter, and Tanya Horeck (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), p.62.

relationship by women writers is not simply about challenging the bodily violence that is part of the hard-boiled form, or indeed about highlighting the violence that is part of many women's lives; rather it is about seizing the agency that violence generates. This chapter is then an attempt to consider both the basis of the criticism and to offer ways of reading this contentious element of the original texts as an expression of female identity and agency. I will address the controversy of choosing to incorporate physical violence in a feminist text, as well the success achieved by women writers who create female detectives who are the agents of their own self-defining violence.

The representation of violence forcibly draws attention to the damage inflicted on women and what happens when women choose to be violent. It is a representation that has a powerful immediacy that is impossible to ignore. Often the detective details the wounds inflicted on the victim of crime, drawing attention to the actions of the perpetrator. However, whilst this violence is highly visible, presented with uncomfortable visual acuity, it does not represent the entirety of the violence that women encounter. Julia Kristeva identifies the less visible violence as based on the 'sacrificial relationship of separation and articulation of difference' which lies at the heart of the socio-symbolic contract.¹³ Jacqueline Rose, who has examined Kristeva's conceiving of the social contract in relation to women, comments on the exhaustive nature of the contract in that it is 'a contract to which they are subjected, from which they are also excluded, and which they can also embody the worst of its effects'.¹⁴ Thus the physical violence of feminist detective fiction can serve as a sign, a substitution for the more insidious, ingrained violence that permeates gender relations. The battered bodies of the novels become the site of protest against the violence of the social contract; contributing to a surrogate public history that challenges the violence that women suffer. Significantly within the 1980s the level of confrontation within the socio-political arena contributed to an environment in which violence was a form of exchange between both groups and individuals. Increased conservatism in the United States and Britain of the 1980 meant that accentuated gender divisions and the regulation of female behaviour were part of the political and social environment. For women writers who chose to challenge

¹³ Kristeva, p.199.

¹⁴ Rose, p.45.

dominant attitudes about women's powerlessness, the female detective offered a potent symbol of rebellion.

In his book *American Culture in the 1980s* Graham Thompson discusses the impact of right-wing government policies and social attitudes. He comments that the Reagan election of 1980 saw a 'battle over social and cultural power between those on the left and the right' with those on the right gaining the most ground.¹⁵ Thompson examines how the political right blamed the 1960s and more specifically 'the second wave of feminism, black power and gay and lesbian rights movement' for the decline in social values: 'One of the features of the moral conservatism in the 1980s was the frequency with which the sixties served as a spectre of damaging moral, social and cultural promiscuity'.¹⁶ Antagonism towards feminism was strongly voiced by the religious far right which advocated family values that included a 'stay at home mother' and were actively opposed to same sex relationships, abortion and single parenting.¹⁷ This political conservatism was also evident in Britain with Margaret Thatcher's antipathy towards feminism and an all male government cabinet. The 1980s in Britain was also a time of conflict in which violence was part of daily news reportage. Alwyn Turner lists some of the causes of these conflicts as he opens his book *Rejoice! Rejoice! Britain in the 80s*.

The strikes [...] were epic in nature, with both the miners' strike and the Wapping dispute lasting for a year apiece. Riots grew in both frequency and scale, as did demonstrations, some of which - Greenham Common, at RAF Molesworth and outside the South African Embassy in London's Trafalgar Square - became semi-permanent institutions.¹⁸

Turner goes on to identify international causes of conflict involving both Britain and the United States, including the Falklands War, the reign of Saddam Hussein, the rise of political Islam, the fall of the Soviet empire and global warming. The effects of right-wing conservatism, antipathy towards feminism and national and international violence combined to create a decade that saw forms of violence embedded within the social fabric of Britain and the USA.

¹⁵ Graham Thompson, *American Culture in the 1980s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.9.

¹⁶ Thompson, p.9.

¹⁷ Thompson, p.15.

¹⁸ Alwyn Turner, *Rejoice, Rejoice Britain in the 80s* (London: Aurum Press, 2010), p. iv.

Masculinity, violence and subject status

Before I focus on the gestic writers identified in Chapter Three, I want to briefly outline the ways in which violence is incorporated into the original hard-boiled novels. My argument, that it is fundamental for women writers to engage with all aspects of the genre to properly open it up to an exploration of female identity, clearly means that the formulaic violence needs to be addressed, both as a component of the criminal act and as an aspect of the detective. That both Marlowe and Hammer are shown to be comfortable with the use of physical violence is primary to their characterisation, but violence as part of the hard-boiled form is far more significant and far reaching than the eponymous definition of the private investigator 'Have gun, will travel'.¹⁹ The interpretation of the traditional male subject position of the hard-boiled detective is an analysis of the gumshoe, of 'tough guy', 'meeting violence with violence'.²⁰ The detective operates in a milieu that uses violence as a vital form of exchange. It is a process of interaction that has become naturalised through the repetitive nature of the formula. Using violence is not seen as problematical or evidence of a crisis, rather as a necessary component of the job description. The violence of the detective is largely seen as reactive, a response to the violence of the criminal act. There is a clear expectation that the detective will meet this threat of physical injury without reference to its lethal potential.²¹

This violence works at number of levels. Chandler's own analysis establishes that this 'toughness' functions to 'make the world a safe place to live in'.²² Rzepka comments that by combining the use of physical violence with the detective's knightly qualities Marlowe is able to act as a moral defender of the weak.²³ Significantly, the use of violence is also the means by which the detective asserts his subject status. His control within the criminal event is not just dependent on his deductive abilities or his quick thinking, but necessarily on his physical engagement with those who perpetrate the criminal event. Glover defines this as the 'symbolic

¹⁹ The phrase comes from personal advertisements started in the 1900s both the USA and Britain to indicate the advertiser was ready for any eventuality, including violence.

²⁰ Cawelti, p.157.

²¹ Robert Skinner, *The Hard-boiled Explicator: A Guide to the Study of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Ross Macdonald* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1985), p.2.

²² Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder*, p.21.

²³ Rzepka offers a detailed examination of the ways in which Marlowe in particular demonstrates a perceived chivalric code. Rzepka, pp.204-207.

possession of the means of violence' suggesting that as the detective enters the investigation, his control of the event seen through his articulation and the direction of the narrative, establishes his agency.²⁴ Perhaps more importantly this violence, according to Glover, provides the detective with the means by which he gains self-knowledge:

Cut adrift from any code but his own, violence serves as a telos of action for the thriller's hero, that moment when he is tested and comes to know himself most truly.²⁵

Violence here is perceived as a code, or ethic, a means by which the detective is able to be judged and one by which he judges himself. As Glover has said for the detective 'male agency is staged as self-determined, active, brutal' forcibly situating the traditional detective's violence as both fundamental and necessary.²⁶ Whilst it is possible to invoke other interpretations of the male detective as weak and thereby question this unequivocal possession of the 'means of violence', (as I have shown in Chapters One and Two), it is clear that violence is essential to the formula and central to its process of subject formation.

In the Chandler novels violence is represented as a indispensable tool, but often one that is referenced rather than enacted. Marlowe lays claim to the possibility of violence rather than constantly delivering it. The gest of the text acts as the bearer of this violence; it confers on the detective his powerful masculinity. In *Farewell My Lovely* Marlowe threatens violence: "“This thing here -” I waved the blackjack lightly, “It is a persuader.”” (*FML*, p.149) Marlowe challenges his opponent to respond. Frank Krutnik defines the detective's language as 'tough cynical, epigrammatic, controlled – a sign of the hero's potency'.²⁷ He goes on to explain that this is 'often seen in the form of extended verbal sparring' allowing the detective to assert through language his masculine right to the operation or the potency of violence.²⁸ Whereas Marlowe uses the expression of violence, as a corollary of his masculinity, Hammer's delivery of violence is fundamental to his reputation and his expression of dominance, his sparring is not reliant on language: 'He never got

²⁴ Glover, p.77.

²⁵ Glover, p.76.

²⁶ Glover, p.78.

²⁷ Krutnik, p.43.

²⁸ Krutnik, p.43.

another shot out because my fist split his face open'. (*KMD*, p.355) He forcibly maintains his masculinity such that violence defines him and his sense of self.

Critical responses to violence and the feminist hard-boiled novel

One of the central concerns in terms of incorporating violence in the women's texts is the way in which women are categorised in the original hard-boiled literature. The relationship between women and violence within the traditional 1930s or 1950s detective novels is unrelentingly coded: women are designated as the recipients of violence. The female body is often the object of investigation, the primary point of narrative articulation, where the interplay between the investigator and the criminal is played out. Or she is the sexually aggressive seductress, desired and feared, and ultimately destroyed to safeguard the investigator's moral and social superiority. Spillane's work includes frequent images of the bodies of women, firstly sensual and available, and then broken. In *Kiss Me, Deadly* an unnamed woman is tortured and dies in the first chapter, but not before she strips for Hammer:

She had the coat wide open and was smiling at me. The coat, that's all, all the rest was sleekly naked. A Viking in satin skin. An invitation to explore the curves and valleys that lay nestled in the shadows and moved with her breathing.

She had no coat on now and her skin had an unholy whiteness about it, splotted with deeper colours. She was sprawled in the chair, her mouth making uncontrollable mewling sounds. The hand with the pliers did something horrible to her and the mouth opened without screaming. (*KMD*, pp.353 & 355)

Concern over this interplay between the detective, the criminal and the victim continues to be part of the critical agenda. In 2009 Jessica Mann refused to review crime texts that featured misogynistic violence: 'Each psychopath is more sadistic than the last and his victim's sufferings are described in detail that becomes ever more explicit [...] However many more outpourings of sadistic misogyny are crammed on to the bandwagon, no more of them will be reviewed by me'.²⁹ There can be little question that within texts where the central character is either a male private investigator or a male killer, where women are the object of the investigative process or the killer's power lust, that female subjectivity is both fractured and violated.

²⁹ Jessica Mann <http://standpointmag.co.uk/crimes-against-fiction-counterpoints-september-09-crime-fiction> [accessed 4 September 2009].

Critical analysis of crime, both real and fictional, conflates male subjectivity with acts of violence, often murder, reinforcing this gender disparity and designating women as the object. The seemingly acceptable, at times idealised, relationship between men and violence has at its root, a social condoning of masculine violence particularly when in response to female misbehaviour. Research into violent crimes appears to confidently reinforce masculinity as the subject of physical violence and women as the object. There is it seems a statistical truism in ‘men kill, women are killed’ in that compared to men, women commit a very small number of murders and often when women are killed the killer is male.³⁰ Whilst there are more recorded male victims of murder, when women are killed the perpetrator is usually male.³¹ A number of commentators have used high profile cases to support this truism. Many of these analyses written in the 1990s or later establish the ongoing discourse on male violence and its relevance to women writers of the hard-boiled form at this time. Radical feminists Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer in their study of the male sexual killer *The Lust to Kill*, looked at the Yorkshire Ripper, amongst others, to argue this gender bias. Their premise is based on the idea that male violence is fundamentally about male agency and as such is part of the ‘social construction of masculinity as transcendence over others’.³² They claim that such ‘transcendence’ has come to be seen as ‘the project of the masculine and the sign of masculinity’, establishing its cultural specificity. Whilst Cameron and Frazer do not argue that all men are sexually violent they perceive this violence:

(As) a taken-for-granted stereotype of masculinity as intrinsically sadistic, intrinsically desiring to take the other by force. In a culture that thus conflates sex, power and death, the sexual killer is hardly an exile.³³

Cameron and Frazer’s analysis explores how masculinity, as violent subject, is part of a surrogate public history in which masculinity is revealed as dominant,

³⁰ Elicka S L Peterson, ‘Murder as Self-Help: Women and Intimate Partner Homicide’ in *Girls, Women and Crime: Selected Readings*, ed. by Meda Chesney-Lind and Lisa Pasko (London: Sage Publications, 2004), p.147.

³¹ ‘This violence cannot be explained away as a deviant phenomenon that lies outside of the otherwise “harmonious” relationships between men and women. Rather, violence against women is endemic to the social condition of women, across both time and culture’. Neil Websdale and Meda Chesney-Lind ‘Doing Violence to Women’ in *Masculinities and Violence* ed. by Lee H Bowker (London: Sage, 1998), p .55.

³² Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer, ‘Cultural Difference and the Lust to Kill’ in *Sex and Violence: Issues In Representation and Experience*, ed. by Penelope Harvey and Peter Gow (London: Routledge 1994), p.169.

³³ Cameron and Frazer, p.68.

maintained through social practices that are ‘taken-for-granted’.³⁴ Within this binary relationship women are the object upon which male subjectivity is violently ‘sadistically’, built.

This insistent gendering of violence and its connection to male authority is also evident in the sympathetic judicial responses to men who have killed their wives or partners, for apparently little or no reason. Elicka Peterson in her work ‘Murder as Self-Help: Women and Intimate Partner Homicide’ supports this axiom: ‘there is evidence to suggest that women who murder their intimate partner receive harsher punishments than men who murder their intimate partner’.³⁵ Elizabeth Sanko and Anne Scully point out in their analysis of a woman who was repeatedly beaten and raped by her husband, ‘Retelling the Tale: The Emma Humphreys Case’, that women who kill their husbands, despite the fact that they are frequently assaulted, do not elicit the same sympathetic response as men.³⁶ Such an apparent acceptance of male violence further complicates the choice of a feminist writer to enter the hard-boiled literary field because of this genre’s preoccupation with the damaged bodies of women. The fact that Richard Collier comments in his text *Masculinity, Crime, and Criminology* that ‘the terrain of the “masculinity of crime” can be seen to encompass all that might be said about being a man’ defines the normalcy of masculine violence which the female detective works to underscore.³⁷

Cultural interpretations of masculine violence are often perceived as a response to the threat of femininity. Cawelti has suggested that the male authored hard-boiled detective novel is part of a celebration of risk taking and aggression, as well as a male victory over the threat of castration.³⁸ Female misbehaviour is seen as not just the provocative catalyst for male violence, but historically the malfeasant object

³⁴ This argument is complicated by the male serial killer whose object is masculinity. An example of a male serial killer who killed boys is John Wayne Gacy who tortured, mutilated and murdered 32 boys in 1978. Sam L. Amirante and Danny Broderick *John Wayne Gacy: Defending a Monster* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2011).

³⁵ Peterson, p.153.

³⁶ Elizabeth Sanko and Anne Scully, ‘Retelling the Tale: The Emma Humphreys Case’ in *No Angels: Women Who Commit Violence*, ed. by Alice Myers (London: Pandora Press, 1996), p.43.

³⁷ Richard Collier, *Masculinity, Crime, and Criminology* (London: Sage, 1998), p.8.

³⁸ Cawelti, p.15.

through which men receive exoneration from their own bad behaviour.³⁹ In fictional terms the threat of femininity is often condensed into the form of a single sexually active female character who fails to conform to the dictates of social expectation and is, for her faults, punished. An analysis of masculinity and violence in the Chandleresque period of detection has interpreted women as the focus of male hostility, because says Cranny-Francis, during this period they posed a threat to male economic dominance and in order to maintain the social status quo the women are negated through seduction and/or death.⁴⁰ Cawelti states:

The intense masculinity of the hard-boiled detective is in part a symbolic denial and protective coloration against complex sexual and status anxieties focusing on women.⁴¹

Cawelti comments on the ‘threat of feminine independence and domination’ in relation to Spillane’s Mike Hammer, stating that the ‘only possible resolution [...] is the simultaneous possession and destruction of the female’.⁴² Or in Cranny-Francis words ‘possession and destruction reach a simultaneous climax’.⁴³ This point is supported by the analysis of Cameron and Frazer in their investigation of sex murders. Their examination of the ‘Murderer as hero’ considers both the fact that the sex killer is usually male (apart from the controversial Hindley) ‘at the centre of popular discourse whether his exploits are celebrated or reviled (or both at the same time)’ and that ‘the killer, as a potent symbol of free will is also, as a killer, combining free will with erotic transgression such that murder can be seen as a symbol of erotic violence’.⁴⁴ Murder is also perceived as an act that permits the perpetrator to acquire subjectivity because it defies the social and cultural codes that constrain the individual. The act of rejecting social constraints is seen here as a means of furthering masculine agency. For the killer, presumed male, the act of murder endows him with an assumed importance that popular discourses mediate, to become part of a surrogate public history that reinforces the gendering of violence and positioning women as victims.

³⁹ Research into the causes of male violence by Dobash and Dobash suggests that often men blamed the recipient of the violence rather than themselves. Rebecca Emerson Dobash and Russell P. Dobash, ‘Violent Men and Violent Contexts’ in *Rethinking Violence Against Women*, ed. by Rebecca Emerson Dobash and Russell P Dobash (London: Sage, 1998), pp.141-155.

⁴⁰ Cranny Francis, p.158.

⁴¹ Cawelti, p.15.

⁴² Cawelti, p.159.

⁴³ Cranny-Francis, p.158.

⁴⁴ Cameron and Frazer, pp.3 & 6.

Cranny-Francis, in discussing the work of women writers, suggests that ‘women centred writers usually resolve the dilemma by associating violence with evil’ as a means of incorporating violence without engaging with its use by the detective.⁴⁵ Munt, who sees female violence as an expression of justified revenge, comments that ‘crime fiction offers avenues of transference not available in the real, giving an outlet for women’s pain and outrage experienced as a result of male violence’.⁴⁶ From Munt’s perspective, violence is a form of cathartic rehabilitation, a positive fiction, but one that is removed from reality. The following textual examination is a representation of justified revenge but it is also a powerful examination of grief and anger which I would suggest is very real.⁴⁷ The text is Julie Parsons’ *Mary, Mary* and I include it as an example of a novel that explores violence in a way that counters Munt’s conception of ‘transference’. Whilst Parson’s novel does not conform to the hard-boiled conventions of a central detective it nonetheless has an investigative figure portrayed through the representation of a bereaved mother. Despite the fact that *Mary, Mary* fails to move beyond an expression of ‘outrage’ as defined by Munt, it nonetheless engages with the particularity of violence because it is articulated as a personal experience. As such I would argue it mobilises a reader response that is far more real than simply cathartic transference. Mary of the title (the daughter of Margaret Mitchell) is brutally tortured and murdered. Parsons examines the conflict between the law and the justice Mitchell requires once the court case to try the killer has begun. The court becomes the representative of the entirety of the killer’s act and his violation of her daughter. The authority of the law here is established through the right of the court to control and contain the narrative of the violation/killing, or as the police officer, McLoughlin expresses it ‘as far as the law is concerned nothing exists unless it is said in a courtroom’. (*MM*, p.293)

Parsons’ presentation of Mitchell and the gest of the daughter’s death run counter to this legal containment. The mother’s disparate responses, her unrelentingly painful memories that give us the living tactile presence of the daughter cannot be brought under control by this faceless remorseless law. Mitchell wants her own brutalising

⁴⁵ Cranny-Francis, p.168.

⁴⁶ Munt, p.197.

⁴⁷ Julie Parsons, *Mary, Mary* (London: MacMillan, 1998). (All further references cited as *MM* and page number in the text).

act of violation to balance the loss of her child. McLoughlin accuses her wanting something that she cannot get from the law.

What you're talking about is revenge. Retribution. Something that will make you feel better. But the law isn't concerned with that. The law doesn't feel. (*MM*, p.310)

This is exactly what Mitchell wants; she explains that to kill her daughter, the murderer must:

First of all turn her into an object, a shapeless, inhuman creature. That is what he did. And that is how he was able to kill her. And that is what I will do to him. (*MM*, p.356)

The objectification and animalisation of the daughter is witnessed through the Polaroid shots that the killer took of her, his use of photography one of Parsons' parallels. When Mitchell finally corners the killer she uses the photographs to taunt him, symbolically tearing them, 'surrendering its images'. (*MM*, p.369) Mitchell, who is a doctor, details the deterioration of her daughter's body. The photographs show the 'process of transformation' achieved through nine days of torture:

The girl as she had been at the beginning. Her thick curls, her unmarked face. Her cropped hair, her eyes wide with fear and panic. Her body marked. Curled against the wall, her spine turned towards the camera, each of the vertebrae isolated through her fine white skin. Like an anatomical drawing in a text book. (*MM*, p.373)

Mitchell's act of violation also operates as a parallel. Although her violation will have none of the force of the killers (she intends to let him starve to death) her relishing of the sequence of deterioration establishes her agency and her control. 'She watched the shock in his bright blue eyes as she explained to him what it would be like to die of thirst and hunger'. (*MM*, p.370) Her recognition that she is beyond the law does not impact on her intent and she places all the blame firmly at the feet of the killer:

He thinks I'm a civilized person, compassionate, understanding, someone who believes in the rule of law and justice. He never knew with whom he was dealing. He didn't realize what his actions would do to me. The effect they would have. The damage they would wreak. And now it is too late. (*MM*, p.370)

Mitchell rejects the 'rule of law and justice' that civilized people adhere to. She takes for her-self the agency of violence and in doing so forces the reader to experience the unfamiliar hard-boiled trope of personalised pain. Munt's placing of this violence in

the ‘fantasy’ of female independence and strength is here counteracted through the representation of pain.⁴⁸ As Dunant has said, the fact that women are the subjects as well as the objects of violence in women’s texts, makes the gratuitous voyeurism of the traditional texts less permissible.⁴⁹ To develop a response to male violence that considers the way it impacts on women’s lives is the first step in removing such violence. It is also the point at which these texts demand that readers explore the nature of violence in relation to women, both as recipients and perpetrators.

Removing the power of masculine violence

The use of violence as a means of acquiring agency is clearly not an aspect of the hard-boiled form that women writers can simply adopt without reference to its symbolic and cultural meaning. The investigative nexus of the hard-boiled novel and its historical specific gender representations are the necessary elements that offer feminist authors the means of asking questions about how femininity is regulated and throw into sharp relief the details of their lived experience. However, it is the violence of these texts, that more clearly than any other formulaic component, can contribute to a surrogate public history in which women have the tools (if not the weapons) to change the power dynamic upon which masculine subjectivity is grounded. To ignore this literature’s utilisation of violence and the constitutive process that violence generates is to ignore a significant opportunity to address the binary divisions which continue to define women. It is also a way of thinking through what it means for women to stand outside the constraints of social conformity and choose violence as part of the feminist project of claiming the right to self-identity. My contention here is that whilst violence is an integral part of the formula and is therefore common to both male and female authored texts, the gestic writer incorporates forms of violence that reveal gender differences. By this I mean that gestic violence is not meted out as a way of laying claim to subjectivity, as with Hammeresque brutality. Rather gestic violence counters masculine aggression and removes its power, and in doing so the gestic detective gains her own subjectivity.

This ‘transference’ is best illustrated through the concept of slapstick, which I have been developing through this thesis. In Chapter One and Two I used the idea of

⁴⁸ Munt, p.19.

⁴⁹ Sarah Dunant, ‘Rewriting the Detectives’, *The Guardian*, 29 June 1993, p.2.

textual slapstick as a means of understanding the forces or compulsions that impact, often violently, on the body of the detective. Here I want to consider slapstick as a force that can bestow or deny agency. Walter Benjamin defined slapstick as a force that cannot be avoided because it cannot be controlled.⁵⁰ This is how I have explored the term in relation to Chandler's writing. For Marlowe it is an external force that compels him to act and thereby reveals his vulnerabilities, in Goldman's terms it makes him an object.⁵¹ However for Hammer slapstick is a force that he attempts to corral, becoming a symbol of his brutal masculinity and his uninhibited, aggressive responses to those that challenge him. I have defined slapstick in relation to Hammer as an explicit form of social gest in that it is physical and highly repetitive. Hammer's violent compulsions and the pleasure he gains through acts of cruelty define his particular brand of masculinity.⁵² For Hammer slapstick becomes a violent force that objectifies his damaged victims. In *Kiss Me, Deadly* Hammer is held in a car at gun point by two men. He escapes by killing his captors:

It wasn't quite the way I wanted it but it was just as good. [...] I had my hand clamped over his, snapped it back and he screamed the same time the muzzle rocketed a bullet into his eyeball and in the second before he died the other eye that was still there glared at me balefully before it filmed over. (*KMD*, p.436)

The use of the word 'good' identifies Hammer's pleasure in the fight and the image of Hammer staring into the eye of the man he kills is graphic; both suggest a glorification in the violence, rather than an act determined by self-preservation. Despite the fact that the end result is a double bind, Hammer has to repeatedly use excess, he nonetheless takes for himself the force and by extension the subjectivity of slapstick. For the gestic detective slapstick is a force that they too must control, not as a means of violent pleasure but in order to revise its power dynamic. For Marlowe and Hammer slapstick has the capacity to reveal weaknesses; however, for women, who are often the recipients of violence, their responses to slapstick must attempt to re-evaluate its impact, to not simply deflect it but to re-position themselves in relation to its power.

⁵⁰ Benjamin, p.117.

⁵¹ Goldman, p.3.

⁵² Brecht, p.198.

The manner in which the female detective engage with violent slapstick, can displace the site of investigation and in doing so undermine the violent objectification of the victim. Authors such as Grafton, Barnes, and Dunant whose process of examining the crimes enacted against women, allow an exploration and revision of the constitutive possibilities of slapstick. These women writers establish female detectives who are capable of brutality in the defence of themselves and others and in doing so offer a possible expression of the fluid identities that women take on or make for themselves as they fight to survive. In *Fatlands* when Wolfe confronts a killer and her own attacker she does not flinch as she allots punishment. She dismisses him as ‘simply one more man intent on violence’ and having disarmed him with a stun gun she watches as he is trampled by stampeding pigs. (*FL*, p.206) The language of Wolfe removes the force of violent slapstick that previously made her its victim. In doing so she displaces the power of her attacker and takes for herself the agency of violence.

In front of me the doors to the shed were starting to splinter under the frenzied weight of animals behind [...] I bent down and unbolted the bottom of the sliding doors[...]then I reached up and did the same at the top [...] The doors smashed apart and the pigs stampeded in [...] He was right in the middle of their path. I had no option but to watch, as he tried to pull himself up on the shit-stained floor and then as he went under [...] I don't remember feeling anything. Except perhaps a sense of release that something held in was now set free. (*FL*, p.210-211)

The language is measured, Wolfe explains her actions clearly: ‘I bent down’, ‘I reached up’. There are no emotive words ascribed to the killer, rather the language maintains a level of distance that renders the killer powerless. These actions generate agency for the female detective, the choice to accept violence as part of the way to control a killer establishes Wolfe’s willingness to enact the formulaic violence and lay claim to the subjectivity that the slapstick has generated.

In *Snake Tattoo*, Barnes takes this choice to engage with violence a step further when Carlyle pulls the trigger of her gun and is prepared to kill a paedophile who has already killed once, and who has justified killing again. Her motivation is self-preservation and her willingness to act with violent force lies in the fact that she has a gun in her pocket. As she stands facing her prospective killer Carlyle considers her act and its physical impact. The language is starkly factual and unforgiving:

No dramatic confrontation. No high noon. I didn't pull my gun and challenge him. I just shot him. Right through the fabric of my coat [...] The bullet caught him high on the right side of the chest and spun him around. His hands scrabbled at the door frame and he came down heavily.⁵³

There is no Hammeresque slapstick, 'no dramatic confrontation'; rather like Wolfe there is measured control. Carlyle then fires the killer's gun to convincingly argue self-defence, although she points out, 'I didn't think Haslam was going to be able to deny anything'.⁵⁴ She then phones the emergency services and waits. By operating outside the law and judging the acts of Haslam, a child abuser, by her own set of codes, Carlyle fulfils the requirements of the hard-boiled form. By killing the criminal she transgresses a notional code set up for women detectives. Her failure to ignore the fact that she has acted violently and her ability to act like this again does not allow an easy site of identification for the reader, but rather forces them to negotiate the image of women using violence as an as a means of taking control. Through Barnes' depiction of violence the gestic re-working of the hard-boiled form in terms of gender and subjectivity is powerfully revealed. Both Wolfe and Carlyle re-direct the force of slapstick away from themselves and others through a form of gest that is very different to Hammer's excess. The simplicity of the language and the containment of male aggression is undemonstrative; it does not glorify violence as Spillane does, nor too is it full of descriptive self-aggrandizement. Paradoxically through the use of violence these gestic writers challenge the representation of women as passive, emotive and without potency. These images of women as agents of violence contribute to a surrogate public history that refuses to reduce women to objects.

In the novel *Fatlands* Dunant explores the way violence has a personalising effect, one that leaves its mark. However, there is also evidence of a less physical, but nonetheless threatening form of behaviour by men, which is part of the objectifying force of slapstick. At first it is simply the correlation of a dark road and the sound of footsteps.

The night was colder now. I must have been halfway there when I heard the footsteps in front of me. I stopped and turned off the torch, instinctively sliding my hand into my bag, fingers moving over the

⁵³Linda Barnes, *Snake Tattoo* (Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), p.204.

⁵⁴ Barnes, *Snake Tattoo*, p.204.

smooth metal of the canister. You find it corny, no doubt, that I should resort to such girlie aids, that I shouldn't be able to fell a grown man at ten paces with my flying feet? Myself I prefer to see it as the triumph of technology over muscle. (*FL*, p.137)

Dunant recognises the need to reject the surrogate male P.I. and establishes the fear that assumed female vulnerability can generate. She also moves beyond the masculine slapstick that Spillane uses by referencing what he would have done 'fell a grown man at ten paces with my flying feet' and then negating it with humour. However when the threat is revealed as imagined, Dunant does not glibly ignore it, instead she shows how the gender division is physical.

From the darkness ahead I could hear voices. They were moving closer. There was a small humpback bridge in front of me. I moved softly to one side of it. A moment later I saw the flash of a torch and heard laughter. They came roving into view, two dark shapes not all that steady on their feet [...] Interesting how easily men own the space around them, while women just feel like visitors without a permit. (*FL*, pp.137-138)

The slapstick here, the threat of voices 'moving closer' and the 'two shapes not all that steady on their feet' produces a sense of the way women's behaviour is governed by the physicality of men who 'own the space'. Dunant engages with the dynamics of violence, real and implied, and opens up ways of understanding women's experience of violence that is not part of the original hard-boiled novel.

The potential of a text in which women might choose to enter into a violent relationship at a level where their agency, and not that of the criminal's, determines where the subjectivity lies, is significant. Arguably this might lack a certain tangible realism for the reader, as much as the process of systematically undermining the 'crime of masculinity' with these women becoming token gun-slingers. However this is not the achievement here; rather through a process of exposing how violence is constitutive these writers remove it from those that would use its power. It is not then simply a symbolic arming of women to fight men with their own weapons, giving women authority, through self-determined violence. To do so would be to return to Munt's psychological transference as a cathartic and reaffirming process.⁵⁵ Whilst it is difficult to argue that women engaging in violence as a means of self-determination is a construct that allows access to 'the real', there is a powerful image of woman as subject in the form of a female detective. This figure does not function

⁵⁵ Munt, p.197.

as an uncomplicated means of identification: she is powerful, uncomfortable and her revelations are disquieting because she challenges dominant gender assumptions. The female detective disrupts the presumed notions of gender reversal in these texts and fails to present a manageably identifiable image to the reader. Instead the reader is forced to accept that female detectives do not represent a single uniform anatomy but a figure that transgresses boundaries. Grafton has herself commented:

I find it more interesting to see what the constant exposure to violence and death really does to a human being, how an individual incorporates that into their psyche.⁵⁶

Violence becomes then not a process of self-revelation, whereby the male detective is seen to gain insight. Nor too is it a means of simply taking subject status through the utilisation of violence. Rather it is, like the force of slapstick, a way of revealing the details of the criminal event and changing the way agency is achieved.

Returning subjectivity to the victim of violence

This question of subjectivity and its realisation through violence is examined in the work of Teresa de Lauretis. Lauretis explores a number of situations in which the relationship between gender and violence is demonstrated. De Lauretis argues that ‘the representation of violence is inseparable from the notion of gender’.⁵⁷ Her use of sex abuse cases, including that of incest, reveal the way ‘gender-neutral methodology’ is deployed to ‘explain away a reality too uncomfortable or threatening to non-feminists’. These studies, in their attempt to remain unaffected by gender difference distance themselves from the rhetoric of violence but, ‘cannot avoid and indeed purposefully engage with the violence of rhetoric’.⁵⁸ De Lauretis explains that the language of violence is gendered because it is determined by a system of subject/object division that can only posit the act of violence as subject. The terms of this act mark out an object, one that is a recipient and defined as a victim. De Lauretis uses Foucault’s example of rape, which he argued should be desexualized and decriminalised so that it is treated as an act of violence and not a sexual act. His aim as De Lauretis comments was to ‘counter the technology of sex by breaking the bond between sex and crime [...] and so to render the sexual sphere

⁵⁶ Marilyn Stasio, ‘Lady Gumshoes: Boiled Less Hard’, *The New York Times*, 18 April 1985.

⁵⁷ Lauretis, p.33.

⁵⁸ Lauretis, p.34.

free from the intervention of the state'.⁵⁹ De Lauretis counters this 'modest proposal' by arguing that rape is an act of violation, and as such is a gendered act not because it violates a woman but because it violates. The victim of rape is the object and is positioned as a 'woman' even if the victim is a man.⁶⁰ De Lauretis applies this to the representation of violence in literature:

In the mythical text, then, the hero must be male regardless of the gender of the character, because the obstacle, whatever its personification [...] is morphologically female – and indeed simply, the womb, the earth, the space of his movement. As he crosses the boundary and 'penetrates' the other space, the mythical subject is constructed as human being and male.⁶¹

The logic here, if applied to the hard-boiled detective form, determines the detective as masculine, irrespective of gender. The obstacle, or the victim, is female and needs to be 'penetrated' to be understood. The violence inherent in this subject/object division is unequivocal. The male detective has subjectivity and through his act of investigation the victim becomes the object and obstacle, who he violates. For the female detective the need to change this logic is an imperative. However, the use of violence to achieve subjectivity would not, if we apply de Lauretis' own proposal, give the female detective female agency, rather it would confer on her masculine subjectivity. What then needs to be addressed is perhaps the re-writing not just of the role of the detective, but also the victim. If then the subject/object division cannot comfortably be ascribed because such differences have been elided then the 'mythical subject' cannot with certainty be 'constructed as human being and male'.

In Dunant's *Birth Marks* the detective offers the means to recover the victim's subjectivity and deny the negation of this victim through the impact of the criminal event and the burden of narrative resolution. At the opening of the text the victim, Carolyn Hamilton is missing. Her guardian employs Wolfe to locate Hamilton who is supposed to be dancing with a London ballet company. Wolfe talks of missing people as 'factual figments of another person's imagination' and certainly the initial description of Hamilton is limited by others expectation of and responses to, her.⁶²

⁵⁹ Lauretis, p.35.

⁶⁰ Lauretis, p.37.

⁶¹ Lauretis, p.43.

⁶² Sarah Dunant, *Birth Marks* (London: Penguin, 1991), p.19. (All further references cited as *BM* and page number in the text).

Her guardian, an ex-dancer is living vicariously through her protégé, a friend defines her in terms of her downward spiral from the glory of the ballet company to the modest contemporary dance group, to the 'sleaze pit' of a dance school. (*BM*, p.22) The friend's assumption that 'she wouldn't be the first to swop art for entertainment' suggesting failure automatically led to a prostitution of her ideals if not her body, is suggestive of a woman objectified by her absence, such that her lack of subjectivity is as much to do with her failure to be defined by Wolfe other than through or in relation to others. (*BM*, p.29) Hamilton's death a supposed suicide, gives to her substance, if for no other reason than it throws up a series of questions about where she had been and why the silence. When her death is discovered to be murder, her loss of status is complete. She is negated by a corrupt elderly man who 'didn't see why he shouldn't buy anything and everything he couldn't legitimately have' which in this instance is the womb of a young woman to ensure his continued definition, his own subjectivity through a child. (*BM*, p.224) When it becomes apparent that the baby is not his, Hamilton is expendable.

Wolfe's attempts to achieve justice are complicated by the acceptance of the suicide verdict on the part of the police and the would-be-father. In the end Wolfe is compelled to confront the antagonists knowing that she cannot change the legal decision about Hamilton's death. Whilst this tense confrontation is true to the original hard-boiled detective formula, allowing as it does, an understanding of 'the who and the how' of the criminal act, it is the motivation behind this seemingly pointless formulistic act that returns to Hamilton her value as a separate individual, defined ultimately by her own choices. Before the novel closes, Wolfe visits her sister, a mother of two. The sisters discuss the likelihood of a pregnant woman killing herself and of Wolfe ever becoming a mother. Whilst Wolfe insists she might not want a child, her sister tells her to 'give herself the chance to choose', bringing the discussion full circle and the right of Hamilton to choose to live and to have her child, which is what she was trying to do before she was drowned. Spurred on by this sense of duty to Hamilton, Wolfe effectually confronts the killer, uncovers the crime to the reader and returns to Hamilton her subjectivity as a women fighting against overwhelming odds.

In the traditional hard-boiled format the detective acts as a buffer between the violence engendered by the crime, and the order that society requires. For the male detective the role of protector requires that he controls and contains this violence. He is part of the dominant morality and his investigative process reinforces this. His aim is one of exposure but not at the expense of the social order he is part of. The female detective does not further the oppressive nature of the dominant morality but rather sets out to know the source of the violence and its impact. Ultimately she too acts as a buffer between the crime and its victims but her purposes are different in that she attempts to protect and give value to the victim. In *H is for Homicide*, Millhone participates in car insurance fraud after she is kidnapped by the violently abusive, Raymond Maldonado. Her objective is to uncover the insurance crime but much of the novel deals with Maldonado's manipulative violence towards his unwilling girlfriend Bibianna Diaz.

He caught my look. "What are you looking at?" His words were belligerent, but the tone was mild.

"I was just trying to figure out why you're so obsessed with Bibianna. Why insist on marriage when she's clearly not that hot for it?" I held my breath, but he didn't seem to take offence.

"She can't mess with me. No way. People who screw with my head have to learn they can't. She hasn't got the word yet."⁶³

Even though at one stage Millhone has the opportunity to escape she is unwilling to leave Diaz to the mercy of Maldonado's violence, by remaining she acts as a physical buffer between Maldonado's fists and Diaz.

The judgement that the female detective ascribes is specific in terms of its allocation. At the close of the novel, Maldonado is punished for the abuses he has inflicted on Diaz and not those perpetrated against a legal system. Millhone operates here as a judge, deciding which crime is the one for which Maldonado must pay. This is very much in keeping with the traditional format where, as Grimes comments in relation to the archetypal hard-boiled detective, Sam Spade, but is clearly also relevant for Hammer in *I the Jury*, 'he is forced to be judge and jury'.⁶⁴ Women have so often been lauded as the saviour of men, the good angel ministering to their needs; the

⁶³ Sue Grafton, *H is for Homicide* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), p.230. (All further references cited as *HIFH* and page number in the text).

⁶⁴ Larry E Grimes, 'Stepsons of Sam: Re-Visions of the Hard-boiled Detective Formula in Recent American Fiction', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 29.3 (1983), p.537.

female detective acts as the avenging angel. Maldonado tells Millhone that Diaz deserves to be hurt to for failing to be a good and obedient woman. Diaz becomes the means of ‘removing the perversity of violence’.⁶⁵

“Lookit, I could have killed the bitch, but I didn’t, did I? And you know why? Because I’m a good guy. Nobody gives me credit. Bibianna has to learn not to fuck with me, I told you that. You think I like this? She’d done what I said to begin with, we wouldn’t be here.” (*HIFH*, p.25)

Millhone comments on Maldonado’s behaviour:

His view of the world was so skewed there was no reasoning with him. He really seemed to see himself as innocent, the victim of circumstances in which everybody else was responsible for his behaviour except him. (*HIFH*, p. 259-260)

Millhone absolves Diaz of her responsibility for male criminal behaviour and by focusing attention on Maldonado Grafton refuses to fetishise the victim’s damaged body. In the process of exposing the ‘crime of masculinity’ the female detective undercuts the voyeuristic nature that is an intrinsic part of the genre and averts the male gaze. In doing so she ‘removes the obscenity from the bodies of the victims and places it back where it belongs’ in the acts of the criminal.⁶⁶ In this way the female detective can act as a liberating agent; she uncovers male violence and in the purging process she returns to the victim her subjectivity.

Textual readings: narrative organisation as a form of violence

One of the key ways in which women writers have attempted to re-position the gendering of violence is through the narrative organisation of the text. The structuring of the formula has the capacity to limit the means by which women writers might try to change the subject/object division that is part of the criminal act. The narrative movement towards closure defines the victim as part of the conundrum, and therefore a ‘thing’ to be solved. The solution of the criminal event requires the victim to be the site of the investigative process such that the violence is examined in terms of who delivers it rather than its recipient. This has the effect of creating an uncertain sense of justice for the violence enacted against women. Thus the possible re-evaluation of the subject status of women within the text is further complicated by the necessary formulaic responses to this violence. The nature of the

⁶⁵ Rose, p.64.

⁶⁶ Nicole Ward Jouve, ‘*The Street Cleaner*’ *The Yorkshire Ripper Case on Trial* (London: Marion Boyers, 1986), p.37.

traditional hard-boiled detective novel dictates an exploration of the effects of violence and its physical consequence. The investigative imperative forces itself into the intimacies of pain and loss but often does not engage textually with the cost of such pain. Rather the formulaic narrative offers to the reader voyeuristic opportunities to experience the pleasure of sanitised violence through the distancing effect of a negated victim. Thus when Marlowe views the brutalised body of Lindsay Marriott, his language offers a public viewing of the victim. The cataloguing of wounds and the lack of a name sets Marriott apart as other. Whilst the imagery is stark, it is not a personalised response to the beating of a man Marlowe has met before.

His face was a face I had never seen before. His hair was dark with blood, the beautiful blond ledges were tangled with blood, and some thick greyish ooze, like primeval slime. (*FML*, p.54-5)

Marlowe's description reduces Marriott to an object. The use of the simile - 'like primeval slime' - does not evoke an emotive response, nor too does it suggest a personal loss. The exposure of the victim and the binary violation, firstly through violence and secondly through the scrutiny of this violence that the investigation demands, as part of the narrative tension, allowing through the intimate revelations of the detective's gaze the opportunity to re-enact the crime. The details evince a compelling horror but not one that reveals a sense of loss that would return to the victim any subjectivity.

The negation of the victim through the process of scrutiny, such that the operation of violence is given narrative primacy, is clearly evident in the current trend for forensic investigations and is a major fascination on television with BBC dramas such as *Silent Witness* and more recent variations in *The Killing* and *Hannibal*.⁶⁷ These particular versions of the crime drama have created an expectation for the physical dissection of the criminal's action on the body of the victim; such a focus limits the potential for addressing the victim as subject. The vicious cauterising of mind and body is transposed into a careful, and at time linguistically ponderous procedural annotation of death. Patricia Cornwell's novels fit into this forensic trend

⁶⁷ Nigel McCrery *Silent Witness* Produced by the BBC (1996 - 2014).
Sandra Foss and Piv Bernth *The Killing* Produced by DR (2007 - 2012).
Carol Dunn Trussell and Michael Wray *Hannibal* Produced by Dino de Laurentiis Company; Living Dead Guy Productions; AXN Original Productions; Gaumont International Television (2013 - 2015).

and whilst they do not have a private investigator and are thus not in the traditional hard-boiled format, her work does have a central female investigative figure around whom the plot revolves. Cornwell recognises the ongoing sense of violation of the victims of crime. Kay Scarpetta, the Chief Medical Examiner of Cornwell's novels, says at one point 'A violent death is a public event, and it was this facet of my profession that grated against my sensibilities. I did what I could to preserve the dignity of the victim'.⁶⁸ However, this sensibility does little to undercut the objectification of the victim exposed to us through the detailing of the criminal act.

She was nude [...] One cord bound her wrists, which were pinioned at the small of her back. The other cord was [...] looped once around her neck [...] threaded behind her through the cord around her wrists and tightly lashed around her ankles. As long as her knees remained bent, the loop around her neck remained loose. When she straightened her legs, either in a reflex to pain or because of the assailants weight on top of her, the ligature round her neck tightened like a noose.⁶⁹

Once the woman, Lori Peterson is on the autopsy table her exposure continues in order to further the investigation.

Three ribs on the left side were fractured, as were four of her fingers. There were fibres inside her mouth [...] suggesting at some point she was gagged to prevent her from screaming. [...] He must have deliberately broken her fingers one by one after she was bound.⁷⁰

Despite the violation, or indeed because of this violation, Cornwell's novels have continued in their popularity. The blurb on the back of her second book *Body of Evidence* begins with 'Someone is stalking Beryl Madison. Someone who spies on her and makes threatening, obscene phone calls'. It finishes with an extract from the *Sunday Telegraph* review 'Cornwell is one to beat when it comes to slick, speedy chillers'.⁷¹ Suggesting that chilling evisceration of the victim is not simply tolerated but expected giving access to these macabre details without penalty for the reader.⁷² Such a delight in the pain of others is according to Aimee Morgana in her work the *The Sadistic Eye: Violence and Cultural Spectacle*, a 'dominant type of culturally

⁶⁸ Patricia Cornwell, *Post-mortem* (London: Futura, 1990), p.6.

⁶⁹ Cornwell, *Post-mortem*, p.9.

⁷⁰ Cornwell, *Post-mortem*, p.26.

⁷¹ Patricia Cornwell, *Body of Evidence* (London: Sphere Books, 1991).

⁷² Indeed the ongoing desire for such 'evisceration' texts has meant that the bodies of suffering women is used to sell novels which do not even have such bodies as part of their plot line. Jessica Mann commented in an article in *Standpoint*: 'When a female corpse appeared on the jacket of a crime-writing colleague's new book, she pointed out to her publisher that the victim in the story was actually a man. Never mind that, came the reply, dead, brutalised women sell books, dead men don't'. Jessica Mann, *Crimes Against Fiction*.

produced spectacle' and although she is commenting on 'the mediated and sanitized form of violent television shows and movies' she makes it clear that this voyeuristic violence is both ever present and conscience free.⁷³ Thus the central element of traditional detective fiction can offer a form of indulgent fantasy where the reading process allows access to an equation that does not exact a price for the horrors that it portrays. Despite the very real blood, it can represent a world that most readers would perceive as fundamentally removed from their frame of reference if only by virtue of its structural conservatism.

If the relationship between the reader and violence determines the status of the recipient of that violence then it is important to consider how the victim is textually and linguistically located. Laura Tanner in her work *Intimate Violence* agrees that the act of violence is a process that removes from the victim any subjectivity. Her analysis looks at the way the victim is objectified through physical violation, whilst the perpetrator gains access to a source of physical and psychological subjectivity. Through this 'transference' (Munt's term) violence is seen as a means to empowerment, albeit temporarily, although its very transience makes this an act that is frighteningly habit forming. Tanner talks of the victim's body being 'reduced to literary convention,' so that the body 'disappears beneath the force of narrative abstraction through a representation that reinscribe(s) violation within a magical system devoid of human suffering and pain'.⁷⁴ As a counter to this literary 'reduction', a number of female detective writers have redirected this intimacy with the dead. In doing so the reader is forced to realise, to experience, the loss created by the violent acts of the criminal. This painful intimacy is achieved either by recreating the life of the victim, or by giving a personal account of the victim whilst still alive.

In Dunant's *Fatlands*, Wolfe is employed to look after a teenage girl, who becomes, by the end of Chapter Three, the victim of a car bomb. Chapters One to Three reveal to the reader the living, breathing, sulking Mattie Shepherd - apparently deserted by her mother, ignored by her father, wavering between childhood petulance and adult

⁷³ Aimee Morgana, *The Sadistic Eye: Violence and Cultural Spectacle*, <http://www.plexus.org/newobs/112/morgana.html> [accessed 3 September 2014].

⁷⁴ Laura E Tanner, *Intimate Violence* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp.3 & 8.

cynicism. Wolfe's antagonism at this 'baby-sitting' job is broken down by Mattie's sense of rejection.

"I told you. My mother doesn't want me. She's too busy with her lover. It's an excuse. My father's not paying you to protect me. He's paying you to make himself feel better about preferring work to his daughter. Your his guilt money. Just like me." [...] I looked at Mattie and my heart went out to her: to be so alone that she was forced to row with someone who was almost a stranger. (*FL*, p.24)

By the middle of chapter three Wolfe and Mattie call a wary truce, which is broken, as the chapter closes, by a '[...] great wound of red and black as the car, the road, even the streetlamp above, exploded upwards in a fountain of flame'. (*FL*, p.34) Chapter Four, rather than opening with a collected view of Mattie's wounds, gives us the irrevocable and agonising impact of fire and the destructive quality of exploding cement in conjunction with teenage skin and bones is given immediacy.

The black shape in the seat wasn't human flesh [...] It was just a thing, a stump, no real form at all. But that was the point. Because not all of it was there [...] Mattie Shepherd's body had been ripped apart when the petrol tank blew. That was they said at the inquest, and that was what I saw. Of course we know about such things from reports of plane crashes: how the rescuers come across bits of people scattered over an area of miles in the snow, or the woodland or the desert, or wherever it happened to be. Well in this case it happened to be Sutherland Avenue, and in this case it wasn't miles. I saw it as the flames died down and I moved closer to the car. It - a lump of leather jacket and a part of an arm lying in the middle of the road. (*FL*, p.36)

The traumatic nature of this description is achieved through the language of bleak understatement, which charges phrases such as 'a stump'; 'it wasn't miles' and 'part of an arm' with a numb disbelief. There is no distanced analytical cataloguing of damaged body parts, instead a detective feeling the impact of a 14 year old girl dying in front of her. The use of 'Sutherland Avenue' to counter the anonymous 'woodland or the desert, or wherever it happened to be' creates for us the personal intensity of witnessing the explosion and the cauterising images of Mattie's evisceration. Dunant combines impersonal negation 'it was just a thing, a stump, no real form at all' with an excess of personal response, naming the body, to give us the pain that violence causes: 'Mattie Shepherd's body had been ripped apart'.

The need to arrive at a conclusion is a narrative imperative for the genre without which the novels would fail to function at a satisfactory level. Thus the increased

recognition that the victim is more than a starting point of a satisfying puzzle but an individual is an element of the hard-boiled novel that women writers have attempted to engage with. In *E is for Evidence*, the death of Olive, a character the reader has come to know, is more than simply the next stage in the criminal's progress, but many of Millhone's responses must ultimately be centred on the investigation, the who and the why. When she confronts the killer towards the end of the novel, Olive's death is one in a line of deaths that he explains so the reader can understand and move on to the resolution. Grafton does not reject the formulaic process towards closure but she does offer ways of engaging with the criminal event that do not negate the victim as generic convention requires. That we are given the life of Olive, its preoccupations and indulgences, allows us to recognise the impact of her death. Grafton's detective Millhone is caught in the bomb blast that kills Olive and it is through her physical and emotional response to the effect of the explosion that we gain insight into the destructive affects of violence. 'I was bleeding from the nose, bleeding from both ears, where the pain was now excruciating'.⁷⁵ Once Millhone has assessed her own physical state she attempts to work out what has happened to Olive. The process is protracted because of Millhone's own injuries.

And then of course, I understood what I was looking at. The blast had opened her body, exposing tangles of flesh, yellow fat, and jagged bone along her backside. I closed my eyes.⁷⁶

The horror of Olive's death does clearly exact a price and not just the physical battering of Millhone's own body. The 'yellow fat and jagged bone' cannot be seen as part of the investigative process, but has to be recognised as a loss. In this way the death of Olive is not lost within the narrative abstraction, but becomes a focal point that the reader must engage with. This attempt to reposition the victim, to establish a loss, rather than a careful dissection of wounds, is the means by which these women writers undercut the narrative comfort zone of unquestioned violence. Narrative reassurance through an obdurately objective language or as part of the investigative imperative, in a literary form that has violence at the heart of its narrative structure, is an aspect of the hard-boiled novel that gestic writers work to reject. If the reader, through identification with the detective, can move seamlessly from the site of the

⁷⁵ Sue Grafton, *E is for Evidence* (London: Pan Books, 1990), p.129.

⁷⁶ Grafton, *E is for Evidence*, p.129.

crime to its solution, then this literature will fail to deliver any meaningful response to the way violence touches women's lives.

Conclusions

Women writers of the hard-boiled detective novel take on the formulaic violence of the form in a way that comments on the agency inherent in such violence. Criticism directed at this area of feminist texts, is based on the brutality and violation of the original novels, much of which was misogynistic. However, as I have discussed in this chapter women writers work to address this violence by questioning how it has the capacity to bestow subjectivity on its user. The use of violence by the male detective is seen as part of the way he gains masculine agency. When women detectives take on this element of the form they have to engage with both the gendering of violence as well as its faculty to determine who holds power. The achievement for women writers is then two-fold: firstly, as I have discussed in relation to the concept of slapstick, they counter male physical violence by removing its control; secondly, they return to the victim their own subjectivity. In doing so the gestic writer questions the binary process of defining women as the recipients of violence by refusing to allow the formulistic need for resolution to take precedence. Thus women detective writers investigate the status of the victim and do not allow textual abstraction and organisation to subsume the loss of life. By conferring on the female detective the right to question social violence and to answer its ravages through the punishment of the criminal, these detective writers assert a political agenda that demands a different reading process from that required by the traditional male authored novel.

Each of Grafton's novels end with an epilogue where loose ends are tied up and Millhone makes awkward peace with the process of the law. The tone of humorous acceptance, tempered with aggression that Millhone's language relays suggests she is less than happy with the apparent completion of the investigation. Nonetheless, the epilogue marks an end and in *H is for Homicide* Millhone informs the reader that Bibiana Diaz has survived Maldonado's attempt to kill her, and has been reunited with her husband. She goes on to say 'Whether they lived happily ever after or not, I really couldn't say, as all this happened just three weeks ago, implying a possible happy ending in the future, when more than three weeks have elapsed'. (*HIFH*,

p.228) Such a fulfilling of the formulaic requirements of the hard-boiled form, implies token punishment for crimes that are pandemic. However, Millhone's involvement with Diaz operates at a level that is anything but tokenism, she is willing to put herself at risk in order to protect Diaz: 'If Raymond killed Bibiana, he was going to have to kill me, too' and bring Maldonado to justice. (*HIFH*, p.88) Whilst the narrative symmetry of this action does not appear to allow an engagement with the horrors of domestic violence, female detectives such as Millhone and Carlyle offer individual responses to the effects of violence and the objectification of women as victims. These writers do not attempt to replicate the male desire for control. Rather they open up to question the way violence gives and takes away control and as part of a re-visioning of violence remove its potency, and reveal its practices. In this way these texts, 'challenge the beneficence of the social system within which the detective operates' and offer a surrogate public history that does not acquiesce in the objectification and victimisation of women.⁷⁷ In my next chapter I extend this analysis of feminist detective writers through the work of Val McDermid. I consider how exaggeration and parody of the male detective can confront gender assumptions and remove gender specificity. In particular my analysis of McDermid's writing confirms the ability of the hard-boiled form to comment on contemporaneous social and political events such that the multiplicity of gender and its variety of constructions are given voice.

⁷⁷ Cranny-Francis, p.17.

Chapter Five - Performance and parody in the work of Val McDermid

Introduction:

I can't help feeling it wouldn't be such a bad thing if the public schools felt the pinch like everyone else. It seems unreal to be worrying about playing fields when a lot of state schools can't even afford enough books to go round.¹

She looked slightly agitated as she crossed to my desk, an expression about as familiar on her face as genuine compassion is on Baroness Thatcher's.²

In spite of the aggravation, I'd really got into the work. I'd loved the challenge of tracking down people who didn't want to be found. I'd enjoyed outwitting men who thought that because they were bigger and stronger than me they weren't going to accept service. I can't say I took any pleasure slapping some of the debtors with bankruptcy papers when all they were guilty of was believing the propaganda of the Thatcher years, but even that was instructive.³

Just as it took the murders of 'innocent' women rather than prostitutes to make the police pay full attention to the Yorkshire Ripper, it is wrong that a police officer has had to be murdered before Bradford Metropolitan Police takes this Queer Killer seriously.⁴

The epigraphs establish the voice of Val McDermid: they offer a complicated, at time dissonant, conflation of political commentary, gender debate and parody that is forcibly situated in the social landscape of the 1980s and 1990s. Together these quotations are bold uncompromising commentaries on the inequalities that are part of everyday life in Britain at the time McDermid was writing; they question the disparity between state and private education, the political manoeuvrings of Margaret Thatcher and the institutional misogyny and homophobia of the police force. McDermid's novels, perhaps more so than the gestic writers I discuss in Chapter Three and Four, place themselves at the heart of 1980s and 1990s historicity. The tone of McDermid's writing combines overt political references with a clearly dismissive, ironic response to the events and the people she is commenting on. McDermid's voice locates the detective and challenges the reader to adopt a

¹ Val McDermid, *Report for Murder* (London: HarperCollins, 1987), p.12. (All further references cited as *RFM* and page number in the text).

² Val McDermid, *Kick Back*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1993), p.3. (All further references cited as *KB* and page number in the text).

³ Val McDermid, *Blue Genes* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), p.140. (All further references cited as *BG* and page number in the text).

⁴ Val McDermid, *The Mermaids Singing* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), p.94. (All further references cited as *TMS* and page number in the text).

similar response, one that is equally dismissive of private education, Thatcher and institutional misogyny. The phrasing of ‘I’d enjoyed outwitting men who thought that because they were bigger and stronger than me they weren’t going to accept service’ suggests a pleasure in being able to reject assumptions about gendered behaviour. Interestingly McDermid has produced three separate investigative characters that I will notionally align to Kristeva’s phases or what are perceived as the generational stages within feminism that I have discussed in Chapter Three. McDermid’s three versions of detective writing do not conform to a purist’s definition of the hard-boiled detective novel on a number of points; however, her variations reveal the possibilities inherent in the evolution of the hard-boiled form as well the need for a genre to adapt to the society that it reflects. As such her writing offers a useful means of illustrating Michael McKeon’s theory of generic modification in response to social pressures, realising his premise that when genres change ‘it is as part of a change both in the need they exist to fill and in the means that exist for its fulfilment’ thus establishing their necessary flexibility.⁵ The contrasts between McDermid’s writing and the gestic authors identified in Chapter Three means that I can draw out the way this fiction has the capacity to encompass significantly different contemporaneous gendered representations as well as considering both the achievement of McDermid’s work against my account of the gestic detectives.

McDermid is acclaimed as a leading British crime writer with 29 books to her name, although her diverse characterisations and engagement with feminist agendas has meant that her work has been deemed controversial. Tanya Horeck has identified the criticism directed at McDermid’s work citing gender and sexuality as the cause but also recognising the ‘feminist awareness and social and cultural underpinnings’ that frame her writing.⁶ Her most recent publication in 2014 is a nonfiction exploration of forensic analysis in which she charts the historical development and achievement of forensic medicine.⁷ All of her fiction explicitly engages with questions about gender that the hard-boiled form generates. In 2007 she responded to criticism about her depiction of violence in her crime novels, arguing that when she started writing she

⁵ McKeon, p.20.

⁶ Tanya Horeck, ‘Rape and Replay in Stieg Larsson, Liza Marklund, and Val McDermid: On Affect, Ethics, and Feeling Bad’ in *Rape in Stieg Larsson’s Millennium Trilogy and Beyond* p.160.

⁷ Val McDermid, *Forensics: The Anatomy of Crime* (London: Wellcome Collection, 2014).

wanted to address what she called the ‘slew of novels coming out of the US in which hideous violence was meted out to female victims’.⁸

As soon as women – who, after all, are overwhelmingly the victims of sexually motivated brutality and homicide – decide they want to explore the same territory, gender becomes an issue. And not just an issue, but a stick to beat all of us women who dare to want to examine a society.⁹

McDermid’s deployment of the crime novel effectively demonstrates her desire to ‘examine a society’ and address the misogyny of the genre. A simple overview of McDermid’s fiction demonstrates the diversity of her employment of the form as well as possible correlations to Kristeva’s generational phases of feminism. Her first novel features Lindsay Gordon, an investigative journalist rather than a private investigator, whose lesbian sexual orientation and left wing politics dictates much of the textual focus. This version compellingly exemplifies the feminist concept of separation, that is, separation from men, in which the differences between women are given value.¹⁰ McDermid’s second crime form is formalistically hard-boiled with Kate Brannigan as the high-kicking heterosexual sleuth.¹¹ Here, the focus is very different, with an emphasis on Brannigan as a P.I. in the mould of Marlowe. This development is by no means a straight forward transition because of the contrast between Gordon’s separatist feminist responses and Brannigan who exemplifies a substitutional position in that she is a female detective who often replicates the male P. I. Thus the emphasis in the Brannigan novels would appear to be closer to first phase of feminism in that we are being given a female detective who works to match or equal the representation of masculinity. McDermid’s third version with clinical psychologist Tony Hill at its centre develops the gender performativity evident in Chandler’s work and explores more explicitly the breakdown of Marlowe’s self-definition of ‘tough guy’.¹² Whilst this version does not at first reading appear to reference the third phase of feminism or indeed show compatibility with the work of the gestic writers, Hill’s representation nonetheless questions the binary division that the other two phases make use of.

⁸ Val McDermid, ‘Complaints about women writing misogynist crime fiction are a red herring’, *The Guardian*, 29 October 2009.

⁹ McDermid ‘Complaints about women writing misogynist crime fiction are a red herring’.

¹⁰ The first Lindsey Gordon novel was published in 1987. Val McDermid, *Report for Murder* (London: Women’s Press Limited, 1987).

¹¹ The first Kate Brannigan novel was published in 1992. Val McDermid, *Dead Beat* (London: Vista, 1992).

¹² The first Tony Hill novel was published in 1995. Val McDermid, *The Mermaids Singing* (London: HarperCollins, 1995).

In Chapter Three I focussed on the achievement of the gestic writer whose work incorporates a level of detailed particularity that expresses the habits and the everyday lives of women. The gestic writer does not try to undercut the binary of gender difference, rather she works to recognise the impact that such a difference creates if one part of the binary, that of masculinity is presumed to have control. McDermid's work, however, relies on exaggeration and parody to highlight the effects of such difference. The gestic writers deploy a pragmatic and subtle referencing of gender and power in relation to the detectives and the crimes they work to solve.¹³ In contrast McDermid uses the parody of gender performance to explore not just the uncertainty of masculinity and femininity as separate and fixed identities, but to create characters that refuse insistently to offer a comfortable site of identification. In the 1930s formation of the hard-boiled detective novel there is a clear attempt to differentiate a binary gender division, seen particularly in the violent rejection of women. However, as I have shown through my analysis of Chandler such clear cut divisions are impossible to maintain. I argue that Marlowe's failure to sustain his separate, potent masculinity results in a breakdown of what we might see as a symbolic ordering that the literature of the 1930s works to maintain. This collapsing of the symbolic binary establishes a reading of gender within the form that is at once far more complex and multiple, a reading that suggests a fractured masculinity. Yet the locus of the detective's power is central to this literature because it determines who has investigative or cognitive control. McDermid's work offers further ways of understanding how in the 1980s and 1990s this notion of a binary difference continues to be part of the way that women and men are defined and how despite the possibility of multiple gender definitions, this simplistic, restrictive separation continues to be given value. McDermid's writing, through exaggeration, attempts to express an uncertainty about what femininity and masculinity is.

¹³ Brecht, p.198.

Performance and parody

Gender is an ‘act,’ as it were, that opens to splitting, self-parody, self-criticism.¹⁴

Through McDermid’s work I will consider the use of pastiche or parody and its relationship to the concept of gender performance. In Chapter One I have linked this concept to Judith Butler’s examination of identity politics; she argues that gender is performed to comply with or revise a socially inscribed set of behaviours and that ‘gender is produced as a ritualised repetition of conventions’, suggesting that without such a repetition gender specificity, that is femininity or masculinity, might be unclear.¹⁵ My choice of McDermid’s work is because her central investigative characters open up to question the fixity of identity through a form of ‘parodic’ performativity. Butler discusses ‘parodic practices’ as a means to ‘destabilize substantive identity’ arguing that:

As the effects of a subtle and politically enforced performativity, gender is an ‘act,’ as it were, that opens to splitting, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of ‘the natural’ that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status.¹⁶

McDermid’s work, as I will show, engages with the concept of performativity to reveal the illusion of gender or its ‘phantasmatic status’ by effectively failing to produce characters that comply with the ‘ritual of socially compelled gender’. Whereas the gestic authors work to produce investigative figures that challenge both the original gendering of the form and suggest positive articulations of the lives of women, McDermid’s work, through the use of parody, is a more self-conscious examination of the way gender is constructed as replication. As a consequence, McDermid’s characters do not necessarily draw on what we might identify as the experience of ordinary women and men; rather they allow us to recognise what Butler calls the ‘pastiche-effect of parodic practices in which the original, the authentic, and the real are themselves constituted as effects’.¹⁷ In this way an exaggerated reproduction of gender behaviours or parodic gesture reveals the limitations that exist as part of what is understood as a normalised gender identity.

¹⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.146-7.

¹⁵ Judith Butler, ‘Melancholy gender/ Refused identification’, in *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. by Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson (New York: Routledge, 1995), p.31.

¹⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp.146-7.

¹⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.146.

McDermid's work highlights truths evident in the way gender is perceived, not through gestic realism, rather the act of revelation is dependent on exaggeration. Interestingly there are suggestive connections between McDermid and Chandler in terms of the way the performativity of their characters comment on the uncertainty of a fixed gender identity. In Chapter One I discussed how Chandler's representation of Marlowe exposes vulnerabilities as he struggles to live up to the myth. The awareness of the constructedness of gender in Marlowe does not necessarily point to a desire to stand outside of the performance of the 'tough guy'. This too is relevant for McDermid in that her characterizations work to reveal gender difference rather than break down the 'ritualised repetition of conventions (that) is socially compelled'.¹⁸ McDermid's work suggests a playful explication of the constructedness of gender creating characters through which we recognise the limits of supposed gender norms.

McDermid and surrogate public history

McDermid's characters serve to highlight not just the way gender is an act, but the possible parody within this act. Such parody can be read in social terms. McDermid's work directly engages with the social unease of the 1980s and early 1990s and participates in a surrogate public history which situates itself within the feminist exploration of gender.¹⁹ Perhaps the most significant element shaping the culture of this time, not least in gendered terms, was the domination of Margaret Thatcher within the political arena. If we understand a surrogate history as one that can substitute dominant attitudes, McDermid's work is complicated by both her parodic responses to social events and Thatcher's influence. Parody works by drawing attention to a subject and then undermining it, but does not necessarily offer an alternative or surrogate to substitute what is being criticised or broken down through caricature. McDermid's contempt for Thatcher is clearly evident in these texts but she is not presented as a figure of power who is then diminished, rather she symbolises the complexities of the period. Despite her achievements as the first woman prime minister of Great Britain, her commitment to politics did not encompass feminism. In fact Thatcher, arguably, stood in direct opposition to the feminist movement and its attempts to achieve parity for women. Andy McSmith in

¹⁸ Butler 'Melancholy gender/ Refused identification', p.31.

¹⁹ Davis, p.37.

No Such Thing as Society: A History of Britain in the 1980s comments of Thatcher that ‘on the rare occasion that that she mentioned feminists, it was to ridicule them’.²⁰ He goes on to say that Thatcher was voted into Downing Street by people who ‘feared a sickness had overthrown the western democracies, in which individual liberty was being sacrificed to an obsession with social justice’.²¹ Media portrayal of Thatcher depicted her as the Iron Lady (which she embraced) and she took office as Prime Minister with the intention of rewarding those who looked after themselves and who championed ‘individual liberty’. This she achieved by increasing the financial gap between the highest and lowest paid men through a rigorous application of ‘financial discipline, from control over public expenditure, tax cuts, nationalism, (and) “Victorian values”’.²²

Whilst instituting financial monetarism with severity, Thatcher also jealously maintained a hard-line on what she perceived as liberal left wing issues. Her anti-feminist stance was matched by her anti-union and anti-gay view. In her analysis of capital punishment, the state and violence, Jacqueline Rose discusses the paradoxical nature of Thatcher’s power. She comments Thatcher is ‘a woman who embodied some of the worse properties of what feminism has identified as a patriarchal society and state’.²³ At the same time Rose makes it clear Thatcher also embodied a collective fight against ‘complacency’ and the ‘taint of socialism’.²⁴ Thatcher’s femininity, Rose argues, is contradictory:

And Thatcher’s own femininity, the way she presents herself as a woman (or not)? We can only note the contradictions: from denial (‘People are more conscious of me being a woman than I am of being a woman’) through an embracing of the most phallic of self-images (the iron lady), to the insistence on her femininity as utterly banal (the housewife managing the purse-strings of the nation). Predictably these images are mirrored and exceeded by the more or less misogynistic images which she provoked: ‘doubtful whether any male PM would have actually seen that Falklands thing through to the end,’ ‘in practice as sentimental as a Black Widow’. It is nonetheless the case that Margaret Thatcher does deliberately choose to situate herself in the place of such ambiguous sexual fashioning. The paranoid structure which I am describing here no doubt thrives on this ambiguity of a femininity appealed to and denied, a

²⁰ Andy McSmith, *No Such Thing As Society: A History of Britain in the 1980s* (London: Constable, 2010), p.36.

²¹ McSmith, p.4.

²² Nigel Lawson, *The View from No. 11: Memoirs of a Tory Radical* (London: Bantam, 1992), p.64.

²³ Rose, p.42.

²⁴ Rose, pp.61-62.

masculinity parodied and inflated. It is the worst of a phallic economy countered, and rendered permissible, by being presented as masquerade.²⁵

Such ambiguities about femininity and masculinity do not, as Rose points out, lessen the sense that Thatcher is positioned within a 'phallic economy' that is 'rendered permissible' by the very fact of Thatcher's femininity. That Thatcher would appear to lay claim to and reject both femininity and masculinity implies an uncertainty that the dominant image, of the Iron Lady, might seem to contradict. Such contradictions whilst not part of the public consciousness clearly open up ways of perceiving the complexity of gender at a time when behaviour that questioned socially defined norms was publically denounced. An example of rigorous mainstream criticism was the acerbic media ridicule of labour candidate Peter Tatchell who actively supported gay rights. Tatchell, writing in 2012 commented 'The 1980s were a period of intensified homophobia, sanctioned from the top echelons of society: the government, church, police and tabloids. It was open season on queers'.²⁶ McSmith comments: 'Although the Tatchell affair was a festival of homophobia, it was homophobia with a purpose, a means to an end: the real target was the left of the labour party'.²⁷ The contradictory extremes of gender acceptance and rejection by Thatcher against a backdrop of social regulation of what is deemed aberrant behaviour, based on 'Victorian values' opens up to question rigid definitions of masculinity and femininity. As such Thatcher operates ironically as a complex site of gender identification and conflation in that she is at once a woman, but not a woman. Her paradoxical responses to her own femininity when she is clearly female make questions about gender fixity primary. McDermid's work reveals the myth of Thatcher, and whilst this myth is not replaced, it nonetheless offers readers a possible surrogate public history that challenges dominant attitudes about gender. By exploring gender as uncertain and as masquerade, McDermid questions assumptions about femininity and masculinity. Thus McDermid's characters are not socially relevant heroes; rather they are detectives who fail to offer a form of security through behaviours that are knowable and part of gender conformity.

²⁵ Rose, pp.65-66.

²⁶ Peter Tatchell <http://www.petertatchellfoundation.org/lgbt-community/1980s-decade-state-sanctioned-homophobia> [accessed 18 June 2015].

²⁷ McSmith, p.225.

The politics of separatism in the Gordon novels

My initial focus will be the Lindsey Gordon novels as a means of establishing McDermid's employment of the form and to consider the way her earlier work explores gender scripts through an overt explication of political agendas within the late 1980s.²⁸ The Lindsay Gordon texts engage unambiguously with the effects of anti-lesbian attitudes and the conflictual nature of separatism. Feminist lesbian detective novels have been lauded as significant achievements in the re-appropriation of the hard-boiled form. This is largely because the authors tend to work hard at arguing the case for a separatist stance and as such these works stand outside the misogyny and overt masculinisation of the original texts. Knight has commented there is a 'difficulty for writers speaking as women in a form which is deeply implicated with masculinism'.²⁹ Rose makes a similar point in relation to Thatcher in that she was as Prime Minister unable and (significantly) unwilling, to separate herself from the violence of the state, and was part of the instituted, masculinist violent rejection of women which McDermid's work contextualizes and questions. Alwyn Turner in his text *Rejoice! Rejoice! Britain in the 1980s* records the decade as a time of significant protest amongst feminist groups, who often came into direct conflict with legal authority and traditional gender expectations.³⁰

Two significant events that fuelled feminist responses were the troubled enquiry into Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper and the introduction of 160 American cruise missiles onto British soil, both of which McDermid incorporated into her work. The police investigation into Peter Sutcliffe case generated extensive feminist fury, not least because Sutcliffe temporarily gained minor celebrity status amongst a strand of public opinion as a loner who was defying police attempts to apprehend him. Nicole Ward Jouve who wrote about the Ripper in '*The Streetcleaner*': *The Yorkshire Ripper Case On Trial*, records the media and public responses to the Ripper's crime. She comments on the thousands of hoaxers who phoned the West Yorkshire hotline to play practical jokes and 'those who wrote to the papers pleading, leave the Ripper alone, he is doing a good job'.³¹ Equally contentious was the response to some of

²⁸ McDermid's first Lindsay Gordon novel was published in 1987.

²⁹ Knight, p.163.

³⁰ Turner, pp.158-61.

³¹ Nicole Ward Jouve, '*The Streetcleaner*': *The Yorkshire Ripper Case On Trial* (London: Marion Boyars, 1986), p.33.

Sutcliffe's victims who were principally prostitutes. There was a general separation of the women by media and legal bodies into two groups: those who were deemed innocent and those who got what they deserved because they were not respectable. The Attorney General Michael Havers was accused of condoning the killing of prostitutes.³² He described Sutcliffe's victims to the jury: 'Some were prostitutes, but perhaps the saddest part of this case is that some were not. The last six attacks were on totally respectable women'.³³ Feminist reactions to these distinctions claimed that such attitudes meant that Sutcliffe was able to carry on killing women for five years. Jouve compares the Sutcliffe case to another Yorkshire killer, Barry Prudham, whose victims were police men. Jouve talks of the 'vigilante spirit' that overtook the male population. Eventually Prudham was caught and killed by the police in 17 days, despite the fact that he was a 'clever man, an expert in survival'. Jouve asks 'would it have taken five and a half years (to catch Prudham) if he had been killing prostitutes?'³⁴ Whilst the Sutcliffe case did not immediately change public opinion about the status of women, it was the first of a series of legal cases in which violence against women identified the intransigence and gender bias of the legal system, causing a number of high profile legal figures to resign or change their perspective.³⁵

This gender bias is also apparent in the legal responses to the peaceful women's protest against the cruise missiles. Whilst Sutcliffe's murders were seen to highlight obdurate attitudes towards women particularly those working in the sex industry, the protest against nuclear arms by 'women only' groups fuelled anti-lesbian opinion and threw into sharp relief the conflict between feminist and government politics. McDermid's second novel with Lindsay Gordon, *Common Murder*, engages directly with the 1980s politics of nuclear disarmament propounded by the women of Greenham Common. The novel creates a parallel set of protesters and gives free rein to an expression of the politic of 'women only'. Gordon becomes involved with the camp because she is working on an article about an assault. When the assaulted man

³² Ward Jouve, p.169

³³ McSmith, p.38.

³⁴ Ward Jouve, p.26.

³⁵ One such case was that of a nineteen year old Glaswegian woman who was raped and cut with a razor. Her injuries were used as an argument to suggest the victim was suicidal and the case was dropped for the sake of the woman's health. The Scottish Attorney General Sir Nicholas Fairbairn defended this standpoint despite public and political criticism of the handling of a case in which the evidence of rape was overwhelming. Ultimately Fairbairn was forced to accept that his position was untenable and he resigned, although not before he attempted to persuade Parliament that the rapist did not have a case to answer. McSmith p.39.

is murdered Gordon takes on the role of the detective, investigating the death in an attempt to deflect police interest from one of the peace protesters. The murder victim that defines the narrative movement is an opponent of the women's group and his death offers ample opportunity to articulate arguments on police brutality and Thatcher's Britain. At one point the locals organise an attack on the women's tents and despite the damage caused, the women do not call the police. One woman explains their stance:

What's going on here is so radical that they can't afford to treat it seriously on any level. Start accepting that we've got rights and you end up giving validity to the nightmares that have brought us here. Do that and you're half-way to accepting that our views on disarmament are a logical position. Much easier to treat us with total contempt.³⁶

The rejection of the women and by extension the rejection of their protest defines not only McDermid's novel but the experience of the Greenham women. The Women's Peace Camp was a challenge to authority and questioned the British government's decision to allow the Americans to base their missiles in Berkshire. In the mid-1980s when 43 women appeared in the magistrates court to answer charges of breach of the peace there was an unprecedented heavy police presence designed to keep the defendant's and the spectators, largely Greenham women, separate. McSmith comments 'When sentencing began a line of policemen marched into court' suggesting the police were entering the court room en masse working on the basis that force was necessary to demonstrate who had authority.³⁷

Historical analysis and contemporary media commentary reveal the negative responses to the Greenham Common protests. Turner discusses how any media support for the protest was short-lived and that by 1983 the press was awash with stories of 'lesbianism, squalor and degradation'.³⁸ Mark Hollingsworth, in *The Press and Political Dissent* records the tabloid responses to the camps. *The Sun* newspaper wrote, 'whatever idealism first inspired the anti-nuclear sit-in at Greenham Common, it is fast being overwhelmed by rancour, intolerance and, sadly, sheer bitchiness'.³⁹ The Daily Express added its own rejection of the Greenham women: 'this ragtag and

³⁶ McDermid, *Common Murder* (London: Women's Press, 1989) p.17. (All further references cited as *CM* and page number in the text).

³⁷ McSmith, pp.47-8.

³⁸ Turner, p.159.

³⁹ Mark Hollingsworth, *The Press and Political Dissent* (London: Pluto, 1986), p.180.

bobtail of politically motivated harpies'.⁴⁰ McSmith discusses some of the responses to the 'women only' policy of the Greenham women. He establishes that the antagonism towards the women's protest was at times at a personal level. He comments that:

Whilst some of the women were veteran feminists who had lived independently from men for years; others paid a personal price for being there. One had been told by her husband, 'You either stay at home and be a proper wife and mother, or you go to Greenham, but not both'.⁴¹

This rebuttal of women's attempts to achieve political aims is also reflected in McDermid's novel. A critic of the protesters angrily dismisses their efforts by calling into question the appropriateness of such behaviour: 'Those women have no morals. They even bring their children to live in such shocking conditions. No self-respecting mother would do that'. (*CM*, p.57) The rejection of the women on the basis of their failure to be 'good' mothers clearly defines McDermid's engagement with contemporaneous social denunciation of women who fail to conform to dominant expectations of female behaviour. By giving the protesters a voice McDermid offers alternative representations of 'women only' groups. The Gordon novels are heavily dependent on extended descriptive prose that detail Gordon's thought processes through a combination of feminist and socialist ideology:

The women had gathered in the big bender that they used for meeting and talking as a group. Lindsay still couldn't get used to the way they struggled to avoid hierarchies by refusing to run their meetings according to traditional structures. Instead they sat in a big circle and each spoke in turn, supposedly without interruption. (*CM*, p.28)

The level of political commentary gives the text a more formal tone than both the gestic authors' work and other texts by McDermid. Whilst there is no criticism directed at the 'women only' groups, Gordon's position as a friendly outsider means she can objectively explain and also contextualise individual women's situations.

The rest of the day passed quickly for Lindsay who spent her time walking the perimeter fence and picking up on her new friendships with women like Jackie. Lindsay appreciated the different perspectives the women gave her on life in Thatcher's Britain [...] Jackie and her lover Willow, both from Birmingham, explained to Lindsay for the first time how good they felt at the camp because there was none of the constant

⁴⁰ Hollingsworth, p.185.

⁴¹ McSmith, p. 47.

pressure of racial prejudice that had made it so difficult for them to make anything of their lives at home. (*CM*, p.28-9)

By identifying specific examples of women's experience McDermid challenges assumptions based around generalisations apparent in such tabloid denunciation as 'this ragtag and bobtail of politically motivated harpies'.⁴² In doing so the Gordon texts offer to readers a surrogate public history in which a lesbian response to mainstream criticism is given voice.

McDermid's text argues powerfully against what she sets out as the present masculinist violence of the establishment. In Chapter Three I considered the separatist standpoint, stating that if we see the hard-boiled form as one that participates in a collective retelling of a specified history in which identities are presented, questioned and revised for public consumption, then perhaps a separatist detective who attempts to resolve symbolic power by standing outside it can only be seen as a partial simulacrum of women's experience. However what is clear is that McDermid's lesbian representations challenge accepted female behaviour often in a very overt way. Her work also exposes what we might see as the fallacy of a gender binary or its failure, through a process of questioning dominant representations of female behaviour and offering alternative femininities. Gill Plain comments that binary 'displacement and the disruption of the heterosexual matrix undoubtedly suit the lesbian detective novel'.⁴³ Plain also discusses lesbian texts in terms of parody commenting that 'to insert the lesbian into hard-boiled detective fiction is always and inevitably to construct a parody' and that 'the introduction of feminist didacticism and lesbian eroticism will inevitably queer the pitch'.⁴⁴ Such a strategy of radical opposition to patriarchy might suggest a single or over-simplified solution to the problematic of the masculinist hard-boiled original text. However Gordon texts certainly open up to question the feminist lesbian experience within the 1980s; an experience that was marked by intolerance. This is borne out by Turner's assessment of the 1980s and negative public responses to homosexuals because 'they preyed on the young'.⁴⁵ McDermid's deployment of Gordon, as a way of voicing lesbian politics outside of the heterosexual matrix, offers a contradictory place of

⁴² Hollingsworth, p.185.

⁴³ Plain, p.203.

⁴⁴ Plain, p.212.

⁴⁵ Turner, p.161.

identification in that the representation of Gordon is complicated by this knowledge that lesbianism was open to criticism. In an article in *The Independent* in 2010 McDermid comments that her choice to write lesbian genre fictions was a dangerous one in terms of her career. She writes: 'The notion that a commercial house would publish a novel that featured a lesbian protagonist was laughable'. However, she goes on to say:

Back in the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher's Tories passed Section 28, the oppressive legislation that was meant to shut us up. But it had the opposite effect. They wanted to take gay issues off the UK political agenda, but we'd come too far to let that happen to us. Just as happened in the US post-Stonewall, gay people were mobilized; a whole generation politicized. History shows that our determination to be heard overcame their refusal to listen.⁴⁶

McDermid's desire to write the Gordon novels despite the problems inherent in producing a lesbian protagonist establishes her 'determination to be heard'. McDermid, quoting Ali Smith, identifies the necessary inclusion of her politics in her work:

We can't avoid our biographies. I can't avoid where I come from and who I am, and those things are going to accompany me in anything I do, all the way through my life.⁴⁷

An incorporation of the personal further complicates the site of identification within these novels because McDermid's work is not only about the 1980s and Thatcher but also about questioning the impact of choosing to write a lesbian text. After three novels featuring Gordon, McDermid moved on to develop her Kate Brannigan character, and whilst she has continued to write books featuring Gordon, rather ironically it is Brannigan and later Tony Hill who are praised as her more successful characters, reinforcing perhaps the conservatism of both the form and its readers. Evangeline Jennings summed up this dichotomy rather cynically when she identified the reality of publishing, commenting: 'it was only when McDermid began to write about a mainstream man that she became truly successful'.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Val McDermid, 'Niche off the leash: Val McDermid on progress in lesbian fiction', *The Independent*, 12 September 2010.

⁴⁷ McDermid, 'Niche off the leash: Val McDermid on progress in lesbian fiction'.

⁴⁸ Evangeline Jennings, Val McDermid, The Women's Press, and Lesbian Detective Fiction in *Pankhurst* (May 16, 2012) <http://pankhearst.wordpress.com/2012/05/16/val-mcdermid-the-womens-press-and-lesbian-detective-fiction/> [accessed on 25 September 2014].

Gesture as pastiche in the Brannigan novels

The Kate Brannigan texts unlike those that feature Gordon, are more subtle in the way they explore the politics of gender difference. However, this is often achieved through a form of pastiche rather than the realism of the gestic texts. Brannigan is central to McDermid's second version of the crime novel, and whilst she clearly expresses feminist politics, Brannigan is a character who is in essence a female version of Marlowe's 'tough guy'. McDermid's referencing of feminist politics is often undercut with the inclusion of comic insinuation. 'He had that solid muscular build that gives me ideas that nice feminists aren't supposed to even know about, never mind entertain'. (*KB*, p.44) Whilst we might perceive this as revising the objectification of the female body its humorous definition of 'nice' feminists suggests a naive sexual woman. Like the Gordon novels, Brannigan explicitly engages with the political backdrop of the time. McDermid's rejection of Conservative politics is evident in her comic dismissal of Margaret Thatcher:

They all looked as if the very idea of a bail application on a charge like this was the best joke they'd heard since Margaret Thatcher announced the National Health Service was safe in her hands.⁴⁹

I had school friends who lived out on Blackbird Leys when it was the biggest council estate in Western Europe, and it was ok. I don't remember obscene graffiti everywhere, lifts awash with piss and shit, and enough rubbish blowing in the wind between the canyons of flats to mistake the place for the municipal dump. Thank you, Mrs Thatcher. [...]

Eddy was a Para who'd fallen in love with violence long before Cherie ever got a look-in. They'd married in a moment of madness when he was waiting to be shipped to the Falklands to help win Mrs Thatcher's second term. (*CD*, p.122)

Thatcher's name here is synonymous with coldness, urban decay and political warmongering. The specific reference to conservative attitudes to the NHS and the vandalism of council estates that have been allowed to deteriorate are realities of the time. McSmith discusses how the NHS was privatised by 'the back door' under the auspices of John Moore (a favourite of Thatcher) commenting that the number of managers grew three fold at the expense of nurses whose numbers decreased. In terms of urban decay McSmith refers to the Church of England's call for renewal in 'Urban Priority Areas' because 'the dereliction, decay and general hopelessness in the inner part of old cities where traditional industries have withered away had been

⁴⁹ McDermid, *Crack Down* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p. 91.

part of the public discourse from the start of the Thatcher years'.⁵⁰ Thus, whilst the use of the 'wise crack' to ridicule the prime minister overtly politicises McDermid's novels, at the same time, the offhand one-liners arguably diminish these observations.

Brannigan's first appearance is in *Dead Beat* (1992) in which she is employed to discover the whereabouts of a missing song-writer and drug addict, Moira Pollock. McDermid makes unambiguous linguistic reference to Chandler's original versions of the form, taking for herself the language that has been used to determine a particular form of masculinity. Her language is a deliberate echo of Chandler's 'ideal' for his private investigator Philip Marlowe, which I have quoted in my introduction but I will repeat here to establish the connections to McDermid's language:

Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honour.⁵¹

Marlowe does not always live up to this myth and must work to try to maintain the act of 'extraordinary' masculinity.⁵² Whilst Marlowe's failure to match this idealistic representation of the detective might work to negate the myth, the status of the male hero persists as part of the form seen in the way the critical analysis accords him power. A good example of critical response is Sally Munt's work which, although largely about the female contributors to the form, begins by establishing the masculine mythological prototype. She comments:

Through the mists steps the messianic 'man in the mac', dispenser of common-sense justice, alone in his mission. The image is archetypal - the warrior knight, the tough cowboy, the intrepid explorer [...] he is the focus of morality, the mythic hero.⁵³

The depiction of the detective here is one of assertive masculine control with an unquestionable emphasis on his role as the harbinger of truth. In *Dead Beat*

⁵⁰ McSmith, p. 232.

⁵¹ Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder*, pp.16-17.

⁵² This creates interesting echoes around the gender complexities noted earlier in relation to Thatcher. In effect Marlowe's extraordinary masculinity mirrors the phallic economy that Rose comments on in relation to the male dominated Conservative Party; Marlowe's gender uncertainties reveals vulnerabilities but also requires further evidence that he is a man he is 'everything'.

⁵³ Munt, p.1.

McDermid invokes Chandler when she comments on her clothes and her attitude:

If I was going down those mean streets, then I wanted to make damn sure I looked a bit mean myself.⁵⁴

The process of achieving a ‘mean’ look is to wear a ‘pair of jogging pants that were past their best and a green Simply Red road crew sweat shirt’. Clearly it is possible to make connections here between performance in terms of appearance within McDermid’s language and her references to clothing. Firstly there is the implicit linguistic revising of the idealistic detective with the use of the words ‘mean streets’ although here it suggests a cliché, a way to draw attention to the original detective. Chandler used the phrase to identify both the criminal environment that the detective was obliged to move in and also to operate as a contrast to the depiction of the detective as a man of ‘honour’; thus it established Marlowe’s separateness from those he sought to bring to justice. McDermid’s use of the phrase might seem to parody the ‘honour’ of this ‘unusual man’ by suggesting that the heroic image of the detective is little more than a set of clothes. Also in the light of Butler’s comments that Brannigan’s choice to dress ‘mean’ is a process of identifying the constructedness of gender in which a ‘set of meanings [...] are instituted or relinquished according to the purpose at hand’ such that masculinity can be adopted or discarded at will.⁵⁵

McDermid’s engagement with the traditional masculine detective works to undermine the portrayal of Brannigan as an expression of the potential for female agency. The ease with which Brannigan fulfils her role is voiced through her semi-humorous responses. After a trying day following up leads in a case Brannigan comments:

There was nothing more I could do that night to trace Moira Pollock. It had been a hell of a day. All I wanted was to go out and kick the shit out of someone. So I decided to do just that. (*DB*, p.42)

The casual reference to ‘kicking the shit out of someone’ is supposed to both amuse and shock the reader. Its unquestionable reference to the gratuitous violence of male detectives such as Hammer is clear. Yet the words strike a note of doubt, coming as they do from the mouth of a female detective and to add to this sense of ambiguity

⁵⁴ Val McDermid, *Dead Beat* (London: Vista, 1992), p.49. (All further references cited as *DB* and page number in the text).

⁵⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.16.

they are positioned at the close of a chapter, with the opening of the next chapter continuing in the same vein:

I shook my head to clear the sunburst of stars that filled my vision, trying to dodge the next blow. The woman who was bearing down on me was a good three inches taller and twenty pounds heavier than me and there was a mean look in her eyes. I tried to match her glare and circled warily. She feinted a punch at me, but that opened up her defence and I swung my leg up and around in a short, fast arc. It caught her in the ribs. Even through her body protector it winded her. She crashed at my feet, and I felt the last of the day's tensions flow out of me. (*DB*, p.43)

This paragraph is followed by an explanation of how Brannigan was introduced to Thai boxing, as a method of self-protection as well as release. Whilst the language and narrative structure of this information are designed to add humour to the image of a physically powerful female detective, Brannigan later comments that 'It is all I'll need to keep me alive' suggesting that her physical prowess is her primary means of self-preservation, rather than perhaps her investigative skills. (*DB*, p.44) In *Kick Back* when Brannigan is forced off the road and her car is left hanging precariously above the Ship Canal, she comments:

Yes, alright, I admit it, I was shaken up. To hell with the tough guy private eye image. I was trembling, my body felt like a 5' 3'' bruise, and I just wanted to pull the covers over my head. (*KB*, p.69)

Despite the fact that she voices her vulnerability this is very temporary and an ongoing source of humour. The following day, when the damage to her body results in vividly coloured bruises, Brannigan's partner laughs at her appearance, explaining "You look like Half Man, Half Biscuit. One side's flesh coloured, the other side's all brown and purple". (*KB*, p.74) This reference to the 'tough guy' combined as it is with both a Marlowesque suggestion of temporary incapacity, and a humorous disregard for the consequence of violence firmly situates Brannigan as a substitutional detective and limited as a figure of female agency by her proximity to the original male P.I.

In Chapter Three I argued that women in the gestic texts choose which femininities to perform, in contrast Brannigan arguably chooses which masculinities to perform. In *Dead Beat* the androgynous appearance of Brannigan serves to give her the courage to visit 'bedsitterland' in Chapeltown, Leeds and gives her not just a pseudo masculine appearance but interestingly also a pseudo masculine status. Here

Brannigan takes on the social positioning of the original male detective in terms of attitude and response:

Junkies and prostitutes rub shoulders with the chronically poor and students who try to convince themselves there's something glamorous about such bohemian surroundings. (DB, p.49)

This social commentary is typical of Chandler's descriptive realism which Meador defines as a process of 'dissecting a native society [...] with the precision of a cultural historian and anthropologist combined'.⁵⁶ However, the end result is that Brannigan is at a remove from this experience. Brannigan goes on to discover the truth about Pollock's disappearance. Unlike the gestic writers whose aim is to return to the victims of crime their subjectivity, which is by extension an inter-subjectivity commenting on the gestic detective's own uncertain agency, McDermid's focus is the investigation and Pollock remains the 'obstacle' to be climbed over to reach the conclusion of the mystery.⁵⁷ This suggested masculinisation of Brannigan's representation is most obvious in McDermid's language when she is dismissive of both those who are caught up in the cycle of drug use and prostitution and those who try to help such people. Having arrived in Chapeltown Brannigan looks for a former address of Pollock:

I cruised around the dirty street, attracting some equally dirty looks when the whores who were out working moved forward to proposition me, only to discover a woman driver. (DB, p.50)

The use of the term 'whore' is pejorative and flippant. It fails to take on board how the negation of women through language was increasingly addressed during the 1990s both as a way of reclaiming the term and commentating on the sex industry's manipulation of women's bodies.⁵⁸ The combination of this pejorative term in relation to Chapeltown is surprising in that this is what Sutcliffe (killer of prostitutes) called Ripper land. Catherine Liszt, writing at the same time as McDermid, draws on Michel Foucault's reverse discourse as a process of changing value judgements within language. In her interestingly titled work *The Ethical Slut: A Guide to Infinite Sexual Possibilities*, Liszt speaks of words such as 'whore' being 'taken back' to

⁵⁶ Meador, p.146.

⁵⁷ De Lauretis, p.33.

⁵⁸ See Elizabeth Wurtzel, whose successful declaration of the word *bitch*, introduces her philosophy: 'I intend to do what I want to do and be whom I want to be and answer only to myself: that is, quite simply, the bitch philosophy'. *Bitch: In Praise of Difficult Women* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p.30.

express the ‘rejection of the concept that government, society, or religion may judge or control one’s personal liberties, and the right to control one’s own sexuality’.⁵⁹ That McDermid does not give positive voice to this process of reclamation arguably further aligns Brannigan with the traditional male detective and as pseudo-masculine. So whilst Brannigan through her parodic practices offers ways of understanding both femininity and masculinity as a form of performance, it is contained by a gendered identity that is limited by its reliance on a presumed binary division driven by social expectation. As a consequence the Brannigan novels lean towards conservatism evident in the original hard-boiled texts. Although Brannigan is not in Jouve’s terms ‘removing the obscenity from the bodies of the victim’ she nonetheless gives voice to the ways in which women’s lives are contained by what Jouve calls a ‘patriarchal consensus’ and ‘a common vocabulary and iconography of male violence’.⁶⁰ The locating of a female in the place traditionally inhabited by a male detective offers opportunities for McDermid to challenge the mythology of the detective and his potent masculinity yet the process of maintaining the ‘tough guy’ model of the original texts diminishes this endeavour. Accordingly it is possible to argue that the Gordon novels have the potential to more definitively question the social regulation of women. This is because the lesbian text more consciously stands outside the restrictions of the normative binary designation that produces the ‘tough guy’. This process of challenging the ‘tough guy’ representation is furthered in McDermid’s texts featuring Tony Hill, although here again the end result tends towards a textual conservatism, if not a Conservatism, such that Hill as male ‘wins the day’.

Parodic performance and gesture in the Hill novels

In the last sections of this chapter I want to focus on the third variation of the crime novel by McDermid to consider a use of parody that reveals the restrictions that gender norms create. Whilst McDermid’s characterisation of Tony Hill does not necessarily draw on what we might see as the experience of ordinary women and men it does nonetheless, as with the gestic writers, reveal the contradictions and burdens of a binary separation of gender. The representation of Hill is a highly self-

⁵⁹ Catherine Liszt, *The Ethical Slut: A Guide to Infinite Sexual Possibilities* (San Francisco: Greenery Press, 1997), p.4.

⁶⁰ Ward Jouve, p.175.

conscious portrayal of vulnerable masculinity allowing us to recognise in Butler's terms the 'pastiche-effect of parodic practices in which the original, the authentic, and the real are themselves constituted as effects'.⁶¹ Tony Hill appeared in 1995 in *The Mermaids Singing* for which McDermid won The Best Crime Novel of the Year.⁶² Hill is a profiler, a clinical psychologist, brought into an ongoing police investigation to work alongside Detective Constable Carol Jordan. Knight calls the novel 'a sustained piece of powerful writing' as well as part of 'the sub-genre of violent crime fiction'.⁶³ Knight identifies this sub-genre, with its foregrounding of violent crime, as a development that began in the mid-1980s.⁶⁴ He cites P. D. James as an example of this development, whose book *A Taste For Death* 'offers a spectacularly gory start' and a departure from her previous 'bloodless' works.⁶⁵ Knight sees this increase in thematic violence, particularly when embodied in the serial killer narrative, as expressing 'in vivid form a new range of anxiety about personal and by extension, social disorder'.⁶⁶ Gill Plain adds to this by identifying Hill's separation from the police as 'brilliant outsider' who then struggles to confidently maintain his own separation from the killer, thus identifying the complexity of Hill as 'detective'. Plain comments that:

The specialist hunters of police, FBI and psychological profiling are also 'serial killers'. The detective identifies the killer through proximity and similarity rather than from a comfortable analytical or moral distance.⁶⁷

This 'proximity and similarity' has been examined by Ursula Clark in her work 'Thinking the unthinkable: mind-style, lexical priming and the psychological profiler in Thomas Harris' *Silence of the Lambs*'. Clark argues that 'the profilers are themselves disturbed or dysfunctional in some way'.⁶⁸ The figure of the detective, as profiler, becomes in effect more closely aligned with the killer than the police and as a consequence, the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are redrawn. In this way the status of the profiler is already problematised by a double bind, both desired and

⁶¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.146.

⁶² The Hill novels have also been made into a TV programme: *Wire in the Blood*. Created and produced by Coastal Productions for the ITV network it ran from 2002 to 2008.

⁶³ Knight, pp.206-7.

⁶⁴ Knight, p.198.

⁶⁵ Knight, pp.198-99.

⁶⁶ Knight, pp.198-99.

⁶⁷ Plain, pp.226-7.

⁶⁸ Ursula Clark, Thinking the unthinkable: mind-style, lexical priming and the psychological profiler in Thomas Harris' *Silence of the Lambs*, Poetics and Linguistics Association, (2007), p.5. <http://www.pala.ac.uk/uploads/2/5/1/0/25105678/clark2007.pdf> [accessed 12 November 2012]

rejected for his knowledge because of his intimate understanding of the killer's disturbed mind. The representation of Tony Hill, explores gender identity by attempting to revise the 'ritualised repetition of conventions' through the depiction of a troubled man, bound by social regulation to perform an idealised masculinity.⁶⁹ As with Brannigan, McDermid draws on the original 1930s hard-boiled text and its evocation of masculinity. For Hill however the connections are based on strictly defined contrasts that imply Butler's 'hyperbolic exhibitions' through a process of excessive self-criticism, the product of Hill's failure to live up to the potency of the mythical detective.⁷⁰

The Hill series, which is ongoing, changes the emphasis of McDermid's books dramatically. The tone of the texts is often desultory if not negative and her use of graphic violence makes it a stylistic departure from her previous texts. Brannigan's humour, which aligns her with Marlowe's use of the wisecrack, is replaced in the Hill texts with a despondent self-deprecatory tone. Brannigan's humour, like Marlowe's, is often a commentary on her failure to be convincingly tough. After her visit to Chapelton, Brannigan is required to give a verbal report to her employer, making her cut short her trip to the supermarket:

I sighed. 'I'll be there in an hour'. I dropped the phone back in the cradle and stomped back to the car. Unfortunately, the trolley wouldn't go in a straight line, so the effect wasn't quite what I had in mind. Luckily there were no small children around to laugh. That saved me the aggravation of an assault charge. (*DB*, p.64)

The humour here is designed to comment both on the Marlowe's 'tough guy' performative nature as well as Brannigan's failure to live up to this expectation. By using an object that is commonplace such as a supermarket trolley, McDermid establishes Brannigan's representation as ordinary and grounded in reality. The level of detail here operates as a form of gest and whilst it is an expression of the habits and the everyday lives of women as with the gestic writers, its use of comedy alongside the potential for violence changes the emphasis. Brannigan recognises that the appearance of 'toughness' is part of the evocation of the private eye such that the comedic referencing of her failure to perform this role functions as pastiche. Hill, on the other hand, in part because of the third person narrative, is presented as man of

⁶⁹Butler, 'Melancholy gender/ Refused identification', p.31.

⁷⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp.47-7.

infinite weaknesses that are forcefully stated and dissected.

The key question for Tony was whether he was pathetic because he managed to relate to pornographic phone calls from a stranger, or whether he should congratulate himself on being so well adjusted that he understood what he needed and what worked for him [...] Already incapable of sustaining a normal sexual relationship, was he colluding in the worsening of his condition, or was he moving towards recovery? [...] For now, it seemed he'd have to settle for a mysterious stranger who managed to make him feel like a man for long enough to drive the demons underground. (*TMS*, p.53)

The reference here to Hill's pornographic phone calls from a stranger used as an aid to his impotence gives him vulnerabilities that he cannot turn into convincing humour. McDermid's use of the words 'normal' and 'man' identify Hill's apparent failures to fit in with a set of prescribed gender conventions. Unlike Brannigan, parody is not achieved in Hill's case through a comic exaggeration of failure but through an excess of failure. The complexity of Hill's characterisation, in that he is troubled by his lack of conventionality yet willing to solve it through unconventional means, adds another layer to the gender dissonance that McDermid has exposed.

This excess of negativity has generated interesting critical responses to the representation of Hill, particularly from Plain who sees Hill's failures as a way of redefining the masculinised central investigative figure. Plain examines the gendering within McDermid's work *The Mermaids Singing* and argues that Hill is 'othered' in part because he struggles to 'feel like a man' but also through both his non-police role and his eventual relationship with the killer. Whilst Plain's analysis relies heavily on a simplified binary separation, her perspective is provocative. She comments: 'In the public area of the work place, (Hill's) "soft" science is set against the hard masculine edge of old-fashioned policing'; further that 'Hill is a feminised character, and his potential vulnerability is exacerbated by the fact that in *The Mermaids Singing*, the serial killer's victims are men'.⁷¹ Plain sees this breakdown of Hill's status as productive; she believes it has the capacity to destabilise the form, opening up its structures to question: 'The amalgamation of hero and victim [...] has profound implications for the concept of the detective agent'.⁷² Plain's discussion of McDermid's work is from the perspective of the 'serial killer narrative' which she

⁷¹ Plain, pp.225-6.

⁷² Plain, p.225.

connects to Carol Clover's study of the horror genre and the endurance of the 'final-girl'.⁷³ Plain make the connection between Clover's 'final-girl' and Hill, because he is feminised. This is achieved firstly through his role as scientist which makes him 'soft-boiled', that is lacking the prerequisite 'tough' practicality to be a hard-boiled detective. Secondly, Hill is feminised because he is impotent, and unable to prove masculinity through a conventional sense of potency at its most obvious literal level.

This feminisation of Hill, Plain goes on to argue, 'facilitates a decentred and destabilised approach to the detective' which offers productive new readings of gender. Hill's 'condition' sets him apart from 'normality' and masculine potency and he is seen to be 'disabled and "othered."' ⁷⁴ In this way he can be seen as not simply an updated version of the original mythology of the male detective but a challenge to the representation of masculinity as both 'able' and the holder of subjectivity. Whilst I would agree that this way of representing the detective is useful and opens up the form to alternative readings it is a representation that is very dependent on the very binary differences that it purports to destabilise. A feminised male investigator is still determined by what Kristeva calls the 'gendered binary of the social contract' and any destabilisation that is achieved is affected by this limited duality.⁷⁵ Perhaps even more problematic in relation to Plain's argument of the destabilisation of the form is the conservative conclusion of *The Mermaids Singing* which sees Hill 'reconstituted as masculine' by killing the killer.⁷⁶ McDermid's work here can be seen as ultimately conservative, with Hill working alongside the police, supporting the regulative practices that uphold the law. As a consequence I would question the strength of Plain's argument that the feminisation of Hill destabilises the form. Hill's failure to perform 'socially compelled' masculinity is I believe more representative of Knight's analysis of McDermid's work in which he defines Hill's representation as a 'satirical rhapsody on the implications of gender and identity under pressure'.⁷⁷ In effect the act of gender failure on the part of Hill establishes his 'parodic practices' that Butler believes have the potential to 'destabilise substantive

⁷³ Clover, p.107.

⁷⁴ Plain, p.225.

⁷⁵ Kristeva, p.206.

⁷⁶ Plain, p.226.

⁷⁷ Knight, p.207.

identity'.⁷⁸ Consequently Hill fails to be masculine within 'the regulatory practices of gender coherence', and as such he highlights the constraints and expectations of what are perceived as the 'naturalised gender configurations'.⁷⁹ The efforts of Hill to perform his gender then 'appears as derived, phantasmatic, and mimetic - a failed copy as it were' thereby revealing the inadequacies of both the original and its copy.⁸⁰ The conservatism of the narrative however suggests that whilst the text can countenance this gender trouble, it is only to re-inscribe what the form demands even more emphatically.

Troubled masculinity and surrogate public history

If we see a surrogate public history as the public conceptualisation or mythicisation of the prevailing view, in this case of troubled masculinity, then Hill's apparent feminisation could be said to both reflect the gender insecurity of the 1990s as well as draw our attention to an ongoing desire to define masculinity as dominant and separate from femininity. Interestingly the 1990s and early 2000 saw a spate of commentators both scholarly and otherwise, analysing the condition of masculinity with the overwhelming consensus that masculinity was 'in crisis'.⁸¹ Whilst some,

⁷⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.146.

⁷⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.146.

⁸⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.146.

⁸¹ Linda McDowell summed up what was perceived as the 'crisis in masculinity' when she wrote: 'It seems impossible to open a broadsheet newspaper in Britain today without confronting a headline about the latest trouble for men. [...] If these headlines are to be believed, boys are failing at school, in their relationships and in the labour market'. Linda McDowell, 'The Trouble with Men? Young People, Gender Transformations and the Crisis of Masculinity', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 24.1 (2000), p.205.

The preoccupation with 'troubled masculinity' is evident in the titles of the following books, all published in the 1990s: Cynthia Cockburn, *In The Way Of Women: Men's Resistance to Sex Equality in Organizations* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

Male order: unwrapping masculinity, ed. by Rowena Chapman and John Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993).

Stephen Frosh, 'Unpacking masculinity: from rationality to fragmentation', in *Gender, Power and Relationships*, ed. by Charlotte Burck, and Bebe Speed (London: Routledge, 1995).

David Collinson, and Jeff Hearn, 'Men at work: multiple masculinities/multiple workplaces' in *Understanding Masculinities: Social Relations and Cultural Arenas*, ed. by Mairtin Mac an Ghaill (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996).

Jill Kenway, and Sue Willis, with Jane Blackmore, and Leonie Rennie, *Answering Back: Girls, Boys and Feminism in Schools* (London: Routledge, 1998).

Jeff Hearn, 'Troubled masculinities in social policy discourses' in *Men, Gender Divisions and Welfare* ed. by Jennie Popay, Jeff Hearn and Jeanette Edwards (London: Routledge, 1998).

Tim Newburn, and Elizabeth Stanko, eds. *Just Boys Doing Business: Men, Masculinities and Crime* (London: Routledge, 1994).

Estelle Morris, 'Boys Will Be Boys: Closing the Gender Gap' Labour Party Discussion Paper, 1996.

such as James Heartfield in his work 'There is No Masculinity Crisis', saw the problems as the 'cumulative defeats inflicted on the working-class organisations in the 1980s and 1990s' arguing that the crisis 'was not one of masculinity but of the working-class', many cited gender divisions and conflicts as the source of the problems with the work of the feminist movement cited as a major contributor.⁸² Part of the problem was seen as an educational failing, with boys being out performed by girls in public exams. This in turn led to an anxiety about employment prospects for young men and what was defined by Heartfield as the 'collapse of predominantly male employment in industry'.⁸³ In both academic studies and amongst government bodies the rise in violent crime was argued to be a product of male losses in economic dominance. Anthony Clare in *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis* identified the statistical differences between male and female criminal behaviour, including the fact that men are 27 times more likely to kill.⁸⁴ Ed Balls, the then economic advisor to the Chancellor, is quoted as saying that he believed crime to be endemic among men who had become dispossessed.⁸⁵ Alternative perspectives came from writers such as John MacInnes, John Beynon, Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne who saw a breakdown in gender specificity that questioned the dominant view of masculinity in crisis. MacInnes, writing in 1998, argued that masculinity was no longer a term that was biologically predetermined because old masculine privileges had disappeared. Beynon commented 'when people now refer to someone as "masculine" it is far from clear, post-Thatcher, whether they are referring to a man or a woman'.⁸⁶ Cornwall and Lindisfarne add to this by saying 'not "being a male" but "being male" can be interpreted differently in different circumstances' and that 'masculinities are performed or enacted in specific settings'.⁸⁷ However, as Beynon points out:

In thinking of masculinity-as-enactment it must be remembered that those who do not perform their masculinity in a culturally approved

Gaby Weiner, Madeleine Arnot and Mirriam David, 'Is the future female? Female success, male disadvantage and changing gender patterns in education' in *Education, Economy and Society*, ed. by A. Halsey, Amy Wells, Philip Brown, and Hugh Lauder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁸² James Heartfield, 'There is No Masculinity Crisis', *Genders*, 35.2 (2002), p.1.

⁸³ Heartfield, p.2.

⁸⁴ Anthony Clare, *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000), p.33.

⁸⁵ Helen Wilkinson, 'No Turning Back: Generations And The Genderquake', *Demos Papers*, (1994) <http://www.demos.co.uk/files/noturningback.pdf> [accessed 21 October 2013].

⁸⁶ John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture* (Buckingham: OUP, 2002), p.6.

⁸⁷ Andrea Cornwall, and Nancy Lindisfarne, *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.37-8.

manner are liable to be ostracised, even punished.⁸⁸

He goes on to say that ‘most men are still culturally propelled to incorporate dominance’ thus implying that culturally approved masculinity does expect a specific set of behaviours which crudely we might associate with a tough mythical masculinity evident in the early hard-boiled detective novels.⁸⁹

The mythology of the detective, generated by Chandler, is of a man who is powerful and uses his position to reassure and protect. The suggested feminising of Hill within the structures of the hard-boiled detective novel implies a repudiation of the traditional ‘tough guy’ masculinity of the original text. The multiple ‘parodic practices’ evident in McDermid’s work can be seen as indicative of an uncertain, if not unstable way of conceiving gender. The 1990s was a time when institutional and legal differences between men and women were quietly being eroded. For example in 1992 the Women’s Royal Army Corps was disbanded, with its members being fully absorbed into the regular British Army; in 1994 The Church of England ordained its first women priests, and in the same year the age of consent for male homosexual acts was lowered from twenty-one years to eighteen, while setting the age for female homosexual acts at sixteen; and for the first time recognizing the existence of lesbianism in English law.⁹⁰ Whilst none of these changes had the same kind of impact as earlier legal changes such as the Equal Pay Act of 1970 they nonetheless were indicative of the improved acceptance of those previously designated separate and ‘other’. In relation to my analysis of McDermid, what does such a questioning of masculinity offer? I would suggest it implies an uncertainty about what masculinity could or might be which in turn throws into sharp relief the way femininity is perceived.

Gender uncertainty and the detective

If both Marlowe and Hammer’s ‘tough’ guy representation enters the public consciousness to offer us a way of reading masculinity in the 1930s and 1950s then how should we read Hill’s ‘parodic practices’? And what does such an emphasis on

⁸⁸ Beynon, p.11.

⁸⁹ Beynon, p.11.

⁹⁰ Andrew Rosen, *Transformation of British Life 1950-2000: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp.102-4.

failure within the representation of the detective do to the formulaic myth of masculinity? In Chapters One and Two I considered the figure of the detective particularly in relation to his presumed potency. McDermid's characterisation is clearly at odds with the original representation of Marlowe. Chandler defines the 'mythic' detective and his extraordinary qualities: 'He is the hero, he is everything'.⁹¹ The figure of the detective is fundamental to the form and our understanding of the narrative. The detail or the gest of the text is established through the detective's first person narrative. The expectation that the detective will be 'hero' evoking through his masculinity the power of the phallus demands an excess of gender performance that will reveal to those he encounters a man who fulfils a socially idealised masculinity. Thus despite access to a level of vulnerability indicated within the gest of the text, the detective's voice presents at least a simulacrum of the myth of masculinity. McDermid's use of parodic exaggeration means that this myth is undermined and the ambiguity of Hill's masculinity is revealed. This is particularly evident in McDermid's use of the third person which undercuts the detective's access to narrative and linguistic agency; the denial of Hill's 'I' actively works to negate his subjectivity. In effect Hill, by losing his voice, becomes in part the object, and arguably by extension the victim, someone who is observed rather than someone who observes.

On the other side of the city, Tony too lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, tracing imaginary road maps in the cracks in the plaster rose. He knew there was no point in switching out the bedside lamp. Sleep would elude him, and in the darkness he'd start to feel the slow choke of claustrophobia closing in on him. (*TMS*, pp.225-226)

Hill's lack of control over the narrative movement limits the breadth of his influence and he loses the perceived omniscient quality of the detective, achieved through the detective's retrospective voice. The image of Hill lying prone in bed, apparently afraid of the choking effects of the dark reveals a passive detective, unable to overcome his anxiety. Where for the traditional male detective masculinity becomes a ritualised repetition of conventions and a 'sign and symptom of a pervasive disavowal', such that the performative act of masculinity can only work in excess, for Hill, passivity is in effect a form of hysteria.⁹² If we see hysteria as a physical expression of unconscious emotional conflicts which appear as severe mental

⁹¹Quoted in Cawelti, p.150.

⁹² Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p.236.

dissociation or as bodily symptoms, then his failure to fulfil expectations of masculinity can be seen to result in his impotence.

To further add to this set of contradictions McDermid's use of the third person is in part countered by a device that gives us entry to Hill's thoughts. As a clinical psychologist working with the police Hill probes the mind of damaged and violent criminals. One of the methods he uses to follow the logic of the killer is to role play a question and answer therapy session. In this way he questions the criminal, but at the same time we hear Hill's voice.

The road less travelled by. It was the road that his patients walked, the dark path that led into the undergrowth, away from dappled sunshine of the broad path.

‘I need to understand why you chose that road, Andy,’ Tony murmured. ‘This is what I do best, Andy. You see, I know what draws me to that road. But I'm not like you. I can go back when I want to’. (*TMS*, p.184)

Hill's self-reflexive murmurings give us access to his thoughts and responses. But at the same time it also establishes the connections between Hill and those he pursues. Hill's admission that he understands the criminal mind because he is drawn down the same 'dark path' is interesting not only because it gives us a dissonant level of subjectivity for Hill, but because it also makes provocative connections with the original male P.I. and his familiarity with the criminal world. For Marlowe, his involvement with the 'messiness' of the crime, has a cost: he can only move the narrative towards resolution by developing an affinity with those that have committed the offence. The process of investigating the mystery involves the detective in the criminal world; he must engage with the corruption and violence in order to counter it. The final confrontational scene between the detective and the criminal can be read as a powerfully emotive and psychological conflict between two characters whose experiences and influences (because of the detective's engagement with the criminal act) have striking and uncomfortable connections.⁹³ In Chapter One I connected this level of involvement to Marlowe who expresses his discomfort with this proximity by describing himself as 'dirty – very, very dirty'. (*FML*, p.38) Hill's representation embraces this dirtiness when he in effect becomes the criminal

⁹³ Gill Plain discusses this proximity in her analysis of Hannibal Lecter in Thomas Harris' novel *The Silence of the Lambs* (London: Arrow, 1981). She comments 'The serial killer narrative confronts our most basic and horrific taboos. It confronts both our desire for violence and our most violent desires, foregrounding the uncomfortable proximity between hunter and killer, whilst also destabilising the bond between reader and detective'. Plain, p.227.

through self-induced trance state.

He instructed his conscious mind to let go, to allow his higher self to access directly all he knew about Handy Andy and to answer for him. When he spoke, even his voice was different. The timbre was rougher, the tones deeper. (*TMS*, p.185)

Whilst the complexity of this dual voice gives a limited narrative control to Hill it is at the cost of being subsumed by the very person he is attempting to uncover. In this way the mythology of the detective and his extraordinary masculinity is not simply fractured but only expressible through the voice of another, ironically the criminal. As such Hill becomes the object of the killer's subjectivity making it possible to argue that this trance state creates a victim of Hill.

Violence and substituted masculinity

The formulaic violence of the hard-boiled form, which functions as a sign of authority, is presented in McDermid's novel as yet another way in which Hill's hold on his masculinity is diminished. Whereas Marlowe uses violence, or the expression of violence, as part of or a corollary to his masculinity, Hammer's delivery of violence is fundamental to his agency. Violence defines him; it establishes his sense of control. In Chapter Two I explored the gendering of violence in relation to the concept of slapstick to consider the way in which violence has the capacity to create objects. Slapstick or the force of slapstick, establishes how violence can both invest and divest the detective with power. The women's version of the hard-boiled form makes use of the function of slapstick: encouraging its revelatory process, recognising and exposing its ability to create objects.

Hill is removed from the immediate impact of violent slapstick because of his 'soft' intellectual science; nevertheless, he is an observer of the violence and needs to comprehend its impact to catch the killer. Hill, like Marlowe, is limited by the force of slapstick and it exposes his vulnerabilities. However, violent slapstick is part of *The Mermaids Singing* in the acts of the killer, a transsexual who kills men who have spurned her. In Chapter Four I used the work of Teresa de Lauretis to consider the way violence is gendered because it is determined by a subject/object division that can only posit the act of violence as subject. De Lauretis comments 'the hero must be male regardless of the gender of the character because the obstacle, whatever its

personification [...] is morphologically female'.⁹⁴ As such the traditional detective is male because he is the hero and the obstacle is female. The gestic writer works to question this dichotomy by refusing to see the victim as an object of violence to be solved. This in turn changes the female detective's own status as hero through her refusal to fit in with this binary definition. Plain places McDermid's Tony Hill within this dichotomy as the feminised figure, firstly because he is phallically disinvested by failing through his impotence and secondly by becoming the victim of the killer he is pursuing. Plain goes on to argue that once Hill kills his captor he is 'reconstituted as male' but not before he must, as Plain comments make use of 'feminine' skills of persuasion and the offer of his body; in effect he offers to 'fuck for his life' making the slapstick of the text evident in the violence of the killer.⁹⁵

Whilst this supposed 'othering' of Hill appears to create a sharp contrast between the original detective and McDermid's lead investigative character, her depiction of the criminal more fully fits in with the representation of the earlier male detectives such as Hammer. The killer, Angelica, who is given her own voice through the first person narrative, is a transsexual. She kills to punish men who fail to see her worth. Her powerful musculature and height allow her to overpower her victims and bind them. The depiction of a transsexual which would perhaps have offered opportunities to rethink clear gender divides is turned into a parody of femininity in a violent Amazon who dismisses her weaker 'sisters'. She taunts one of her victims, saying:

You didn't have the courage to choose a love that would have exalted us both. No, you ignored your real self and went for a stupid little bimbo, that trashy tart. (*TMS*, p.113)

In an odd reversal of gender identities, the killer becomes further masculinised through her linguistic rejection of other women. Despite the fact that Angelica is at once both male and female, and as such offers ways of thinking gender as multiple, it is as a rejected woman that she is most forcefully defined and as violent killer of men that she is punished.

Such gender complexities are also evident in McDermid's use of violence. Dunant has commented on the achievement of the female hard-boiled detective novel that

⁹⁴ Lauretis, p.33.

⁹⁵ Plain, p.226.

'made the gratuitous voyeurism of the form less permissible' however this is not the case with *The Mermaids Singing*.⁹⁶ McDermid's use of violence appears to reinforce the process of objectification thereby negating the victim. The fact that the traditional gender roles have been reversed to create a male victim is not given any value; it is the sexual violence that takes centre stage. One of the earlier love interests of Angelica is tortured with a barbaric device designed to spear his sphincter with a barbed spike. The man is strapped to a chair with the spike held underneath its non-existent seat. As his muscles tire and fail to hold him above the device, the killer masturbates, excited by the victim's agony. The emphasis here is on the killer's sexual response to the screams of the dying man whose pain is defined as excitement.

I matched the rhythms of our two bodies, the speed and intensity of our mutual excitement keeping perfect pace. I felt my muscles quiver like his as I thrust against my hand. As I came, my body arched in synch with his, my grasps echoed his last agonised cries before unconsciousness came. (*TMS*, p.182)

The use of the first person narrative for the killer and the loss of the victim's value other than as object of the killer's violent lust are both in keeping with Elizabeth Tanner's analysis of textual violence. Tanner argues that the victim's body is 'reduced to literary convention' such that 'it disappears under the force of narrative abstraction'.⁹⁷ The gestic writers return subjectivity to the victim, through a representation of their lives before death but Angelica's object of violence simply reinforces her symbolic potency and there is no re-evaluation of the victim.⁹⁸ The 'parodic practices' of Angelica reveals a contradictory representation of both masculinity and femininity. Her femininity can be read as a parody, fulfilling Butler's conception of the 'hyperbolic exhibitions of 'the natural' that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status'.⁹⁹ Angelica's brutal objectification of the victim's body forcefully aligns her with the excess of Hammer, whose violent slapstick determines his masculine control. Angelica highlights the ritualised gender conventions of both femininity and masculinity but also by

⁹⁶ Sarah Dunant, 'Rewriting the Detectives', *Guardian*, 29 June 1993, p.2.

⁹⁷ Tanner, p.8.

⁹⁸ An example of this process of re-evaluation is in Grafton's *K is for Killer* in which the bulk of Millhone's investigation works to piece together the vibrant and enigmatic life of Lorna Keller, such that the death of her killer seems a fitting punishment. Sue Grafton, *K is for Killer* (London: Macmillan, 1994).

⁹⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble* p.146-7.

performing them simultaneously, like Hill, she ‘destabilises substantive identity’. Whilst McDermid’s representations of Hill do not move significantly beyond the binary division of gender and consequently do not offer a development beyond the achievement of the gestic writers, they do function as forms of revelation. In this way they allow us to understand how gender might be adopted or discarded to suit the purpose at hand. Hill’s supposed ‘othering’ means that he is without status, no longer the hard-boiled detective, but the lesser ‘soft’ version, he has no obvious claim to authority and his intellect is not respected within the police force. Angelica, by comparison is the powerful reconfigured ‘woman’, sexually confident and physically no longer dependent on men. In effect she is Hill’s nemesis and can be perceived as the extraordinary evocation of his uncertainty. However, such gendering does not offer an articulation of masculinity and femininity that removes the binary separation of the social contract in which identities can become fluid; rather it appears to reinforce previously existing constructions of gender along an existing and rigid binary axis.

Conclusions

McDermid’s work clearly engages with gender investigation that is part of the form. Through her characters, she reveals a possible destabilisation of gender and identity through the ‘parodic practices’ of Brannigan, Hill and Angelica, who serve to highlight both the illusion and the artifice of gender. McDermid self-consciously examines the way gender is constructed as replication, achieving what Butler calls the ‘pastiche-effect of parodic practices in which the original, the authentic, and the real are themselves constituted as effects’.¹⁰⁰ As such McDermid’s work gives voice to the social disquiet of the 1980s and early 1990s and contributes to a surrogate public history which locates itself within the feminist examination of gender.¹⁰¹ However, McDermid’s work is inevitably complicated by the very device that challenges normative representations, that is her parodic responses to social events and she does not offer an alternative or surrogate to substitute what is being criticised or broken down through caricature. Whilst these characters open up to question the fixity of identity through ‘parodic’ performativity, their representation does not, as Knight suggests, offer a ‘satirical rhapsody of gender and identity under pressure’

¹⁰⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.146.

¹⁰¹ Davis, p.37.

through which the fixity of the hard-boiled form might be disrupted.¹⁰² Thus her representations of Brannigan and in particular Hill do not substantially destabilise the form as Plain argues. In fact the structural conservatism of the texts reinforces what is in effect a reliance on the same binary separation that is evident in Chandler and Spillane's work. In contrast, my last chapter examines a single text that more effectively disrupts the form with a very different approach - an investigative character who is both a criminal and a detective. This repudiation of legality tests the structures of the form, and transforms the figure of the detective. Such a characterisation offers a more provocative means of questioning how gender is socially regulated by highlighting the constraints that exist within the law and what constitutes illegality.

¹⁰² Knight, p.207.

Chapter Six - De-centring the form: the criminal-detective in Jenny Siler's *Easy Money*

Introduction:

I am in a town of criminals, [...] where neighbors politely pull their shades at the sound of shots, where the cop that comes to arrest you was your high school prom date. No one will call. No one will have heard anything. I am home.¹

This is the voice of Allie Kerry, the accidental detective, self-confessed recovering drug addict and trafficker of Jenny Siler's *Easy Money*. She is part of an extensive drug community and comfortable in her chosen profession. Kerry is forced to go on the run when a disk she is transporting becomes the focus of violent government attention. In order to survive Kerry relies on her drug contacts and her friends in the criminal world. It is this depiction of Kerry that makes *Easy Money* an interesting developmental move beyond the gestic writers and the work of Val McDermid. In particular by questioning one of the most central concepts of the form, that of the honest detective, Siler opens up to question other fundamental areas of the hard-boiled novel. Primarily Siler's work re-evaluates the constitutive processes that the form generates, that is, the means by which subjectivity and power are defined, bestowed or denied. The hard-boiled form explicitly examines the nature of the law and recognises a contradictory relationship between the detective and legality. In previous chapters I have considered this element of the literature as a means of examining the uncertain gendering of the detective, for example in Chapter One I consider Marlowe's loss of control when he encounters Moose Malloy. In *Easy Money*, the rejection of legality, more formatively challenges the construction of the form, particularly the figure of the detective, and in doing so reformulates gendered identities and the 'regulatory practices of gender coherence'.² However, Siler's criminalisation of the detective limits its potential for gestic realism that speaks of the everyday of women's lives. Instead Siler offers an alternative gestus, one that alienates the familiar by removing the normative social and cultural points of reference. In effect the illegitimate in *Easy Money* produces a reality that we might see as a different form of gestic, in that it generates a substitute everyday in a world that has rejected lawfulness and all that the law underpins.

¹ Jenny Siler, *Easy Money* (London: Orion, 1998), p.236. (All further references cited with page number in the text).

² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.146.

Through the positioning of Kerry as criminal and outlaw, Siler, I believe reworks the hard-boiled novel by bringing about firstly what might be understood (in Deleuzian terms) as its de-territorialisation, by resisting or displacing the structural fixity of the form.³ I use the word fixity here to suggest the repetitive formulaic nature of this literature, in that the hard-boiled novel accedes to a largely conservative narrative closure in which the hegemony of state instituted law is a given. Siler then arguably re-territorialises the form through the legitimising of Kerry's outlaw status and in doing so opens up to question what constitutes legality. Frank Prassel, in his chronology *The Great American Outlaw*, argues that the figure of the outlaw is both an integral part of American culture and a 'symbol of power'.⁴ In a decade when the federal state's authority was frequently challenged, Siler's use of the marginal figure draws on a combination of the mythology of heroic rebellion seen in such characters as Jessie James and Billy the Kid but also the domestic paramilitary groups that formed or reformed in the 1990s. Kristen Williams in her work on the gendering of the outlaw "I Fought the Law and the Law Won" cites Timothy McVeigh, the Nichols brothers and Randy Weaver as examples who by defending their right to resist federal intrusion into their lives became quasi-heroes. Williams argues that media vilification and misinformation demonised and 'feminised' these men as hysterical. Williams use of the word 'hysterical' which she connects here with paranoia over government intervention, has interesting resonances with my analysis of Mickey Spillane's character Hammer who relies on excessive violence to assert his masculinity; this excess I suggest, can be read as a form of hystericised slapstick, which through exaggeration, draws attention to the very thing it is attempting to deny, that of femininity. Here Williams' question about the hysteria of these paramilitary 'outlaws' draws attention to their excess.⁵ Siler's characterisation of Kerry as trafficker evokes a contemporary manifestation of the outlaw in a form that

³ Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Œdipus* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), Trans, Robert Hurley.

⁴ Frank Prassel, *The Great American Outlaw* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), p.5.

⁵ According to Kristen Williams 'Contemporary outlaws include individuals such as Timothy McVeigh and the Nichols brothers, Randy Weaver, Waco cult leader David Koresh and the numerous anonymous individuals who belong to local paramilitary groups and state militia across the nation. [...]The 1980s and 1990s saw a significant increase in these kinds of non-hierarchical associations of survivalists and others usually located on the far-right political fringe'. Kristen Williams, 'I Fought the Law and the Law Won' *American Studies Journal*, 50 (2007) <http://www.asjournal.org/50-2007/i-fought-the-law-and-the-law-won/> [accessed 13 September 2014].

typically expels such a figure. Such a contradictory amalgamation both challenges the formulaic structuring of the hard-boiled form but also draws attention to what underpins the regulatory structures that Kerry is rejecting at a time when conceptions of American patriotism were being questioned. Kerry as outlaw powerfully contradicts the original depiction of femininity within the hard-boiled form. Her illegitimacy and connection to a right-wing paramilitary isolationist lifestyle, forces the reader to make sense of a woman who has rejected the familiar and constructed her own contextual framework.

Questions about what constitutes legality are characteristic of Siler's work. Whilst she has only a relatively small output, having only published six books to date, her first four, all of which are in the hard-boiled mould, have strong central female investigators who to varying degrees operate outside the precepts of law and order. Siler has commented that she classifies her work as pulp and whilst this is a term that is synonymous with disposable genre fiction, it also places Siler within a hard-boiled continuum.⁶ Thus simultaneously Siler's work observes many of the precepts of hard-boiled fiction whilst offering alternative ways of reading this literature. It is this elementary reworking of the formula that makes *Easy Money* a useful text to complete my examination of gender and agency and women's appropriation of the hard-boiled novel. By situating Kerry outside the regulatory structures of society Siler is able more comprehensively to examine and question normative gender identities. My contention is that the extreme nature of Kerry's rejection of societal norms offers ways of understanding more clearly what conforming to dominant gender expectations requires of women. Whilst I argue that the gestic writers positively contribute to a surrogate public history that champions women's issues, Siler, like McDermid, offers ways of perceiving what existing public histories perpetuate.

Questioning legitimacy

In order to consider Kerry's portrayal as outlaw, I want to more fully establish the complexity of placing a figure who challenges the concept of legality in a form that has at its heart a compliance with the law. I would define the law here as a set of

⁶ Jenny Siler, 'Confessions of an Idiosyncratic Mind' *Crime Fiction and more*, <http://www.sarahweinman.com/confessions/2007/12/siler-tries-non.html> [accessed 24 June 2015].

principles and regulations established by the state or nation and the controlling, behavioural influence of such rules. In this thesis I argue that the structures of the form, that of the central investigative figure working to solve a mystery and protect those threatened by the actions of the criminal, conforms to an accepted understanding of dominant behaviours based around state defined legal controls. In this way we might see Chandler's text *Farewell, My Lovely* in which felon Moose Malloy is punished for his crimes, as a text that complies with such laws. Malloy, despite developing a rapport with Marlowe, is shot and killed by his ex-girlfriend, who herself is later killed.⁷ Women writers of the hard-boiled form do not completely reject the form's compliance with the law. For example, throughout the work of Sue Grafton there is a consistent punishment of those who break the law, even if the crime seems justified. In *D is for Deadbeat* a teenager kills the man who killed his family but he is still punished for this crime.⁸ This is also the case with Val McDermid. While she attempts to rework the form and challenge its terms, she remains conservatively within its narrative containment.⁹ Thus despite offering alternative feminist representations of the detective these narratives invoke what I would classify as a 'remainder' of the original masculinist form, retaining a clear concept of what constitutes legitimacy. My contention here is that Siler's work achieves this re-territorialisation by replacing the detective with a trafficker and in doing so rejects the authority of state instituted laws. In effect the central structures of the novels, both social and political, primarily understood as the difference between what is legitimate and what is illegitimate, are displaced and what is perceived as criminality inhabits the centre of the form drawing attention to its conservative narrative.

In order to further explain this displacement I want to make use of Judith Butler's work 'Competing Universalities' in which she questions the assumptions and value ascribed to a 'universal norm' and the possibility of understanding a political

⁷ Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely* p.321.

⁸ Grafton, *D is for Deadbeat*.

⁹ I consider this inability or unwillingness to jettison the structural terms of the genre in the work of McDermid in Chapter Five. Despite the fact that McDermid is one of the foremost writers of the genre and has established herself as an author who consistently attempts to rework the genre and challenge its terms, her work maintains a latent conservatism, not however, through the punishment of the criminal but through a failure to question what constitutes legitimacy. So, for example her transgender killer in *The Mermaids Singing* works to criminalise the marginalised.

usefulness in the ‘contingent’ and the ‘local’.¹⁰ My intention is to make a link between this idea of a ‘universal norm’ and the regulatory process of the law, thus ascribing to Siler’s re-territorialisation of the form a political, ‘contingent’ usefulness. Consequently Siler’s use of the outlaw figure reveals this divide between legitimacy and illegitimacy in relation to women’s lives and reveals a surrogate public history that suggests power might be available to women even if they reject the universal norms that govern their lives. Butler’s subject is marriage but I want to extend the concept of the ‘universal norm’ to incorporate a more general notion of ‘state centred forms’ such as inter-familial relationships and education. Her argument addresses a dismantling of primary terms not by ‘occupying the dominant norm in order to produce an internal subversion of its terms’, but by revising the line or the limit of legitimacy, so that what is thought to be the universalising norm is displaced.¹¹ She comments on the effect of the universalising process:

The struggle to think hegemony anew is not quite possible, however, without inhabiting precisely the line where the norms of legitimacy, increasingly adjudicated by state apparatuses of various kinds, breaks down, where liminal social existence emerges in the condition of suspended ontology. Those who should ideally be included within any operation of the universal find themselves not only outside its terms but as the very outside without which the universal could not be formulated, living as the trace, the spectral remainder, which does not have a home in the forward march of the universal.¹²

Her point here about ‘liminal social existence’ is a reference to lesbian, gay and transgender communities, but can be more broadly applied to the social marginalisation of women within patriarchy. The concept of universality has a resonance with the Lacanian Symbolic and the way in which it is structured to suggest a process of inclusion and exclusion. If we see the law and its regulating effects as parallel to the concept of the Symbolic order, we can conclude that masculinity is a universal function founded upon the phallic exception, and woman is excluded, or at least outside its terms. The ‘operation of the universal’ as Butler conceives it might be usefully related to the way we perceive the traditional male detective who is positioned at the heart of the Symbolic order, in that he acts in the-name-of-the-father and furthers the hard-boiled form’s compliance with state

¹⁰ Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000).

¹¹ Butler, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, p.177.

¹² Butler, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, p.178.

instituted laws. The universal norm, like the Symbolic is constitutive and impossible to challenge within its legitimating terms, other than as Butler defines it, an ineffective internal subversion. In this way we might recognise the attempts of female writers of the form to incorporate a woman into the investigative role as a figure of agency as a process of internal subversion; one that seeks to question universality, but is not necessarily able to dismantle it. The conservatism of the form, 'the norms of legitimacy' that women writers have attempted to revise, cannot in Butler's terms, be broken down from within because to be assimilated is to become part of the universal norm, in effect to reinforce the status of the Symbolic.

Butler identifies the difference between those who are marginalised and those 'constituted within the field of the political,' or the unspeakable and the speakable:

Indeed the task will be not to assimilate the unspeakable into the domain of speakability in order to house it there, within the existing norms of dominance, but to shatter the confidence of dominance, to show how equivocal its claims to universality are, and from that equivocation, track the break-up of its regime, an opening towards alternative versions of universality.¹³

If we understand this division between the unspeakable and the domain of the speakability in Lacanian terms in which the male subject is defined as the 'speaking' being, then we can further recognize gender norms in terms of this separation. I am interested here in Butler's proposal that the unspeakable, in my terms, the female hard-boiled detective whose work advocates a feminist perspective that validates women's individual lives, should not be assimilated into the 'domain of speakability'. Rather she should 'shatter the confidence of dominance,' or in other words, reject the validity of the existing universal, that is the form's emphasis on legitimacy, and by 'breaking up its regime' create an alternative. If this concept is applied to Siler's work it becomes relevant not just in terms of the gendering of the detective because Siler incorporates a central female character, but because this character is doubly marginalised and rendered illegitimate by being a criminal. In this way what serves as the 'remainder' or the illegitimate in the hard-boiled detective novel becomes in *Easy Money* central and curiously legitimate. Thus the production of legitimacy is through this paradoxical reversal, a criminal outlaw and not a detective. In order to establish the validity of this argument I want to consider

¹³ Butler, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, p.179.

the ways in which *Easy Money* both conforms to and resists a hard-boiled specificity. The hard-boiled form is, as I have shown, one that has the capacity to change to reflect its historical context. It is also a form that has a number of recognisable consistencies, the central part of which is a central investigative figure who through an emphasis on physical endeavour works to uncover the answer to a mystery. I will show that this is a text that fulfils the hard-boiled criteria of reflecting historical change, maintaining a recognisable central figure of investigative agency whilst at the same time challenging concepts of legitimacy and gender norms. Siler removes the conservative tendency of the form in the process of transformation allowing this novel to embrace a post 1990 society.

Surrogate public history and the American way of life

In previous chapters I have considered the differing responses of the central investigative character to their surrogate public histories and the ways in which they either serve them or test them.¹⁴ In particular I have explored how, in the hard-boiled detective novel, dominant constructions of gender roles are questioned. The criminality of Siler's character demands a very specific way of perceiving fundamental readings of heroism in America during the years preceding the millennium. The 1990s were no less complicated than preceding decades in terms of social change. In the 1930s city life and its multiple anxieties became the backdrop to Chandler's novels; the Cold War paranoia and the demobilization of disillusioned and displaced armed forces returning home after the Second World War was the condition of Spillane's 1950s America; in the 1980s women writers explored identity politics and feminism in an environment of rightwing politics from Reagan or Thatcher. According to Robert M. Collins, America in the 1990s was a country in conflict. In his pro-Republican text *Transforming America: Politic and Culture During the Reagan Years* he charts the increasing division between the political right and the cultural left that occurred during the 1980s and the legacy this left for Clinton in the 1990s. Collins comments on this cultural shift by bemoaning the loss of the 'traditional middle-class moral order' which he identifies as dominating American life prior to the 'cultural reorientation' that began in the 1960s. He lists the virtues that he defines as 'under threat':

¹⁴ Davis, p.37.

The values and habits of work, thrift, delayed gratification, temperance, fidelity, reticence, self-reliance, and self-discipline; (which) rested upon such institutions as the traditional family (two heterosexual parents, with offspring) and the Judeo-Christian religious tradition; and acknowledged the existence of moral authority and standards external to the self.¹⁵

Collins is critical of the ‘competing value system’ that championed ‘diversity and multiculturalism’.¹⁶ Conservative journalist Charles Krauthammer’s article ‘Defining Deviancy Up’ reinforces Collins’ perspective: ‘It is not enough for the deviant to be normalised [...] the normal must be found to be deviant’.¹⁷ Collins describes this conflicting value system as a ‘cultural war’, observing that despite a rightward shift in Reagan’s politics that continued under Clinton resulting for example in the ‘biggest rollback of the federal welfare state apparatus in the modern era,’ the left-wing cultural agenda was dominant.¹⁸ George Gilder, a conservative and a critic of feminism, described the effect of this shift in almost Old Testament language:

Cultural and family life are widely in chaos, cities seethe with venereal plagues, schools and colleges fall to obscurantism and propaganda, the courts are a carnival of pettyfogery.¹⁹

Such imagery suggests a violent decay of Collin’s ‘moral order’ and are the very institutions, of family, school and local government that Butler identifies as part of the universal, the norms of dominance that need to be shattered. Siler’s text, by embracing illegality, scrutinises these norms, and finds them lacking.

The heavy tone of complaint expressed by the above right-wing commentators is indicative of the level of discord experienced at this time. Conflict, which has at its heart violence directed at (or by) established institutions, is also the way Phillip Wegner characterises ‘US culture in the long nineties’ in his book *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989 - 2001*. His analysis identifies key developments within the 1990s that required a new way of envisioning both the present and history. He cites the increase

¹⁵ Robert M Collins, *Transforming America: Politic and Culture During the Reagan Years* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp.245-6.

¹⁶ Collins, p.247.

¹⁷ It is interesting that this is largely what Butler is arguing for - a re-evaluation of universal norms. Charles Krauthammer, ‘Defining Deviancy Up’, *American Enterprise Institute*, Bradley Lecture Series, (1993) Transcript - <http://www.aei.org/publication/defining-deviancy-up/> [accessed 4 June 2015].

¹⁸ Krauthammer, ‘Defining Deviancy Up’.

¹⁹ David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2000), p.196.

of globalisation and the extraordinary growth of the World Wide Web as offering ways to ‘reinvent our concepts and practices of communication, information, literacy, community, property, space and even the subject itself’.²⁰ Aspects perhaps that Butler would see as further marginalising those not part of the ‘forward march of the universal’. Whilst Wegner categorises these developments as positive possibilities in terms of opening up new opportunities he says they were matched by an ‘explosive [...] counter globalisation political movement’ and a ‘focus on sub cultural forms of resistant consumption’.²¹ He cites as an example a punk re-emergence in Seattle, which he identifies as a musical expression of anti-corporation, arguing that this localised resistance was part of an upsurge of a US wide activism. Coupled with this political activity was the increase in anti-federal government groups and individuals. The fact that one result of such anti-government action was the Oklahoma federal building being bombed by McVeigh and Nichols in 1995, with the loss of 168 lives, gives a clear indication of the widespread and complex, often violent conflicts of the 1990s at both an institutional and personal level.

This then is the milieu in which Siler’s text is situated and these critical responses are themselves discursive testimony to the conflict, political and social, that her central character, Kerry inhabits. Interestingly Siler does not comment obliquely on the impact of these perceived social antagonisms. Kerry’s criminal status and her rejection of a normative lifestyle make this decade’s particular dissonance explicit. Siler’s rejection of the ‘existing norms of dominance’ (those that Gilder laments) is evident from the outset of Siler’s novel. Kerry’s environment is defined in opposition to what she terms ‘distressing normality’ represented by the family based leisure institutions of Disney and Howard Johnson, she comments: ‘My father and I never took trips to Disney World. He and Cyrus and I never sat around a plastic table at a Howard Johnson’s. I have always been part of the underworld’. (p.38) The rejection of the ordinary within American life, gives Kerry a very specific perspective, one that rejects dominant notions of domesticity and female identity. As a consequence questions about difference and the social reality of gender regulation become fundamental.

²⁰ Phillip Wegner, *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989 – 2001* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2009), p.33.

²¹ Wegner, p.34.

Thus in the process of defining the family in opposition to her ‘underworld’ Kerry questions the core of the social bond and the paternal economies that contain its vision of justice and order. As part of this project Siler also identifies the state instituted laws that define and uphold legality as complicit in the furthering of criminal activity. At the heart of Siler’s text is the government conspiracy to conceal the realities of American military criminality in the Vietnam War. Consequently the state itself is defined in Siler’s terms as criminal. This overt process of revising what is thought of as legitimate is extended to an alternative way of perceiving the ‘everyday’. Kerry talks of the corruption of ‘a few extra dollars slid across the table, a donation to a police retirement fund’ as commonplace. (p.107) This alternative set of economies is then the central determining factor of Siler’s narrative. Such a criminal lifestyle is clearly at a remove from the everyday world of women’s lives that I discuss in Chapter Three in relation to the gestic writers. However, the repudiation of the law in Siler’s work, creates a compelling starting point through which to explore a de-centred hard-boiled detective text in which Kerry becomes representative of the contradictory conflicts within the 1990s. In Slavoj Zizek’s terms outlined in *The Parallax View*, *Easy Money* can be seen to function as a political myth, and a ‘container of a multitude of inconsistent, even mutually exclusive meanings’.²² A form of surrogate public history then, which does not as such challenge or reveal social practices, rather Kerry is a conflation of this historical moment of crisis, which Siler uncovers at the level of the personal.

Siler’s text explicitly engages with key issues that are foremost in American political and cultural discourses of the 1990s; identified in a title that contradicts Collins’s list of desired virtues, ‘work, thrift, delayed gratification, temperance, fidelity’ in favour of an illusionary trouble-free scheme.²³ At the centre of the text is clearly the concept of the outlaw, but Kerry as trafficker brings into play concepts not just of criminality but geo-political borders and belonging as well as familial relations that demand a reimagining of how we are constituted as citizens. Central to this imagining is the way Siler demonstrates the rejection of domesticity through a character that is clearly dependent on the teaching of her father. The novel starts with

²² Slavoj Zizek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), p.101.

²³ Collins, pp.245-6.

the murder of Callum a government operative who has spent the last thirty years hiding American military crimes in Vietnam. The information of these war crimes are on the disk that Kerry is paid to deliver. When the exchange goes wrong Kerry is pursued by CIA agents intent on destroying the disk. In order to stay one step ahead of the agents Kerry utilises the lessons of her criminal life and keeps moving so she cannot be found. When Kerry's friend Mark is killed she chooses to 'investigate'. Despite the fact that the crimes that initiated this investigation are thirty years old, this is a book that deals with the present, whilst commenting on the effects of America's violent past. Significantly this is seen through the character of Kerry's father, an alcoholic ex-serviceman, who participated in the military crimes during the Vietnam War. Joe Kerry is a substantial presence within the text through remembered events and conversations. As such, Siler's text appears to be complicated by an alternative/substituted masculine figure of power, that of Kerry's father. The fact that Kerry constantly refers to her father as a teacher or mentor confers on him the status of the name-of-the-father. The connection between father and daughter is made clear: 'Allie's my daughter, she'll always be able to take care of herself'. (p.12) Siler does not undermine the name-of-the-father by questioning his law; his wisdom is accepted as valued. Instead, Kerry's father's vulnerabilities are forcibly highlighted. Kerry's opening words give us her father's near death in terms that reveal the pathos of his almost demise.

The first time my father died I was twelve years old. He fell down drunk in the alley behind the bar he and his best friend owned in Key West, Florida, hit his head on a drainpipe, and stopped breathing. (p.11)

Whilst much of the text categorises the lessons learnt and practised from her father, Kerry also unflinchingly catalogues his weaknesses. When she dreams of him towards the end of the novel he is 'as fragile as time-bleached paper'. (p.169) So whilst Kerry's father would appear to operate in the name-of-the-father he is persistently compromised and undermined and in doing so Siler 'shatter(s) the confidence of dominance' represented by this masculine figure of influence. Joe Kerry's role in the Vietnam killings connects him to the deception of the government agencies and separates him from the outlaw world of his daughter. Thus Siler presents us with the paternal law of the original hard-boiled detective novel that is both damaged and lacking in power. Through Joe Kerry this Symbolic power base is one that has corrupted and died, metaphorically and as a real event. His anger and

guilt over government acceded killings is translated into drug smuggling and alcohol abuse. Kerry comments on her father's involvement in the horrors of such actions which resulted in the death of children: 'I hated their weakness, their deception'. (p.170)

The figure of the detective and the law

The figure of the detective is fundamental to the form; it is the position through which the most basic logics of the formula are funnelled. The detective serves to guide us through the complication of the criminal act and solve the 'whodunit'. Of central importance is the proposition that the detective can be trusted such that as readers we can rely on her/his actions to uphold basic precepts of legality and comply with the state defined laws that govern and regulate society. Chandler defined this as a form of chivalry, determined through his character Marlowe's 'knightly code'. Such heraldic attitudes have not been taken on board by feminist hard-boiled writers, with its implication of 'damsels in distress', but the concept of trust is essential. Whilst it is not difficult to conceive of a feminist hard-boiled text in which the central character does not conform to Chandler's definition of honour, there is in the texts I have examined a clearly determined differentiation between 'right and wrong'. In the traditional male version of the hard-boiled novel, despite the detective's subjective involvement in the investigation of the crime and his familiarity with the criminal world, the text upholds a careful line between the virtue of the law and the guilty criminal whose crime attacks the social order that the law protects. Spillane's Mike Hammer is a good example of this. Despite the fact that Hammer must answer in a court of law for his violent excesses he is still firmly identified as part of the dominant order. Spillane's work embraces an acceptance of the 1950s Anti-Communist dogma in which 'the American people become a bristling militarist fraternity, invigorated by its own ruthlessness towards internal as well as external enemies'.²⁴ Gestic detective Kinsey Millhone, who typically works to protect the victim, even if this brings her into conflict with the law, is cautious about not complying with certain legal requirements. In *B is for Burglar* as part of an ongoing investigation, Millhone uses her lock picks to 'do a little breaking and entering number that could land (her) in jail' and despite the knowledge that this

²⁴ McCann, p.125.

could cause her to lose her investigator's license she comments 'I couldn't figure out how else to get in'. (*BIFB*, p.124) However when she discovers a teenager dealing drugs she makes a clear distinction between her activity and his. 'I'm not going to stand here and argue the California penal code with you. You're dealing drugs. The cops aren't going to care what I was up to'. (*BIFB*, p.203-4) In *Easy Money* because the central investigative role is occupied by a drugs trafficker and an ex-cocaine addict this bond of trust is uncertain. Such a displacement offers opportunities to focus on state instituted laws, but it also creates a 'space' to enquire into broader and more important questions of legality, what Butler calls 'legitimizing the liminal'.²⁵

The line between the detective and the criminal has always been unclear within the hard-boiled format. Despite Marlowe's chivalric ethic he struggles to maintain a distance and clear distinction between himself and the criminals he investigates. Cawelti identifies Marlowe's bitter cynicism as a form of self-protection against the criminal act.²⁶ However, Marlowe expresses a physical response to his manipulation of people as he pursues his investigation, 'You find almost anything under your hand in my business. I was beginning to be a little sick at my stomach'. (*FML*, p.167) Cawelti reads this as 'disgust and revulsion at his involvement with this corrupt society'; I would suggest such a response implies more than involvement, rather it is self-disgust at his own questionable behaviour.²⁷ It is not his closeness to the criminals but his 'likeness' that makes him feel sick. Plain quantifies this 'likeness' in her discussion of Val McDermid and Thomas Harris as new to the serial killer narrative of the 1990s. She comments:

The detective identifies the (serial) killer through proximity and similarity, rather than from a comfortable analytical or moral distance. Where once the detective outsider was a figure uncontaminated by the action or value of the community under investigation, now he or she is a socialised killer.²⁸

Harris makes this explicit in *Red Dragon* when Hannibal Lecter, the serial killer says to his captor, FBI agent Will Graham, "The reason you caught me is that WE'RE JUST ALIKE (sic)".²⁹ This correlation between detective and criminal is evident in

²⁵ Butler, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, p.272.

²⁶ Cawelti, p.149.

²⁷ Cawelti, p.181.

²⁸ Plain, p.227.

²⁹ Thomas Harris, *Red Dragon* (London: Arrow, 1981), p.80.

the early forms of the 1930 hard-boiled novel. How then does Siler's text, with a criminal at its centre, rather than a detective with a criminal predisposition, fit in with the form? And how can we as readers, identify with a character who appears to lack a clear ethical standpoint? Plain, in her study of Harris, sees the process of identification with the detective undercut by the proximity of the killer, which is then further contaminated by the taboos that the killer pursues. Siler's character, however, is not cast in the image of a 'monstrous' serial killer like Hannibal Lecter, nor too is she a tainted, world weary Private Eye, the 'ambiguous knight'.³⁰ In effect Siler has created a 'criminal-detective', a happenstance investigator whose own personalised and particular set of ethics reject state instituted laws. Thus a detective-cum-criminal such as Marlowe is employed first and foremost to be a detective and it is the influence of the criminal world that impacts on him. In Siler's work Alison Kerry is *not* affected by the criminal sphere of influence, she is first and foremost employed to be a criminal. We do not witness Kerry tempted and falling foul of the delights of a corrupt society; she is arguably, as a trafficker, someone who delivers the delights to tempt others and makes money crucially from it.

As a consequence it is possible to recognise Siler's criminal-detective as a more fully substantiated deconstruction and decentring of the form than that of Val McDermid's characterisation of criminal profiler, Tony Hill. Whilst Ursula Clark has argued that 'profilers are themselves disturbed or dysfunctional in some way' and that the figure of the detective, as profiler, is closely aligned with the killer, there is still a distinction to be made in terms of their status before the law.³¹ By giving us a criminal-detective Siler has changed the fundamental dichotomy of the criminal and detective and their separation. This in turn changes the relationship between the detective and the reader. Whilst the investigative nexus remains intact the logic behind the main characters narrative movement towards closure is fundamentally different. The formulaic defining of the narrative structure means that we expect a complete unbroken line from crime to solution. Our reliance on the detective to provide a textual logic necessitates a character who we trust to solve the 'whodunit'. Siler negates this reliance and in doing so challenges the conservative nature of the form, creating a dislocation, a splintering away from the formula. Thus by disputing

³⁰ Cawelti, p.177.

³¹ Ursula Clark, 'Thinking the unthinkable', p.5.

the centrality of the law Siler opens up the hard-boiled formula such that other forms of regulation are also questioned.

The criminal-detective

The structuring of the criminal-detective suggests a realignment between the traditional male text as well as current women writers of detective fiction in terms of the way the law and its regulatory demands are addressed. The criminal-detective in Siler's text is not a private investigator or part of a legal firm, but is forced to become an investigator because of an invasive, personalised act of violence, the death of a friend, and her temporary detective role is determined by necessity. The breakdown of the relationship between the law and this pseudo private investigator changes the construction of the female detective in such an absolute way that not only does she fail to fulfil the basic formulaic code of acting as a buffer between the criminal act and social norms, but she also rejects the particular moral stance that the female detective has been associated with, through which her engagement with the politics of feminism is channelled. I am thinking here of the achievement of the gestic writers who in articulating a particular form of feminism allows an inquiry into the private, domestic, habitual lives of women and the way this intersects with the more public, legal, criminal investigation. Siler's criminal-detective is individualistic, capable of extreme violence, removed from the sanitising effect of a moral coercion and is dismissive of the regulatory nature of the law. As a female detective she is closer to the traditional male private investigator than Millhone and Wolfe because she more forcefully operates in the criminal world, but intrinsically she functions beyond the regulating practices of the law that define Marlowe and Hammer's separation from the criminals that they pursue.

Kerry's location outside the law functions to remove comfortable identification with her behaviour and in this way forcibly highlights the expectations of femininity under the law. Gestic writers point out the unequal relations within the social contract, the lack of self-representation and agency that women possess, and in doing so they open out what Teresa de Lauretis calls 'chinks and cracks in the power-knowledge apparati', and allow alternative representations of gender.³² *Easy Money*,

³² De Lauretis, p.25.

calls attention to these ‘cracks’ by decentring the form’s traditional representation of the law, or what Butler calls ‘norms of legitimacy, increasingly adjudicated by state apparatuses of various kinds’.³³ Thus when Kerry kills it merely reinforces an already entrenched position. Her self-belief outside the governance of the law is confirmed as a source of relief. Her all-encompassing rejection of the regulatory demands of the law leads her to make an exile of herself. The close of the novel witnesses Kerry killing her CIA pursuers and fleeing US jurisdiction with the help of Chloe, a pilot whose cargo is typically illegal goods. There is no virtuous claim to the moral high ground on the part of Kerry, but rather a heavy sigh of relief that she is alive and her pursuers are largely dead. Kerry is fundamentally self-serving. She does not engage with the choices about right and wrong that the female detective accepts as part of her championing of those who are socially excluded or silenced by the weight of social convention, but acts to protect herself. By rejecting normative, regulative behaviour, and because she is not dependent on defending a position established through the investigative process, Kerry operates in a separated, unregulated place. Codes of expected behaviour change from a clearly defined acceptance that the law cannot be ignored, to one of self-regulation, determined through rejection and negation of the law and its controls. This self-regulation allows Kerry the freedom to operate without reference to the normative behaviour that the law defines. She has no sense of duty or obligation to society in general terms although she does recognise camaraderie with the criminal world and a familial affection for a small number of like-minded people.

Revising domesticity and the familial bond

By questioning the dominance of the law and its paternal economies, *Easy Money* also revises the basis of the social bond. Kerry’s self-imposed separation from law abiding society allows her to construct a sense of identity that is not defined by convention. Her separation parallels that of the original male detective but its basis, the economy of the criminal-detective, challenges an altogether different set of bonds. In order to fulfil his role, the original male detective remains a solitary and marginal figure, and this positioning gives security to those he protects and knowledge of those he fights to defeat. This marginal status embodies a type of

³³ Butler, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, p.178.

masculinity that challenges the domestic, a space that fundamentally speaks of women and women's preoccupations, a space that in particular appears to limit male power. Whereas the domestic space was seen as limited, feminine and defined by the needs of family responsibility, the masculine public space of the detective established a world that was vast and dangerous and where his responsibilities involved justice, morality and death. The 'monumental city sprawl' that might appear to dwarf the detective is another way in which his extra-ordinary masculinity can be defined. The city's size and power is ultimately no match for the stretch of the detective. I am interested here in Siler's rejection of the traditional concept of the domestic both in terms of space and experience, and in relation to women's lives. The gestic authors that I discuss in Chapter Three consider the domestic space as a form of inquiry in terms of both the criminal investigation and as a way of perceiving social practices that regulate women. Through the female detective we are offered the gest of the everyday: the habitual detail that reveals the preoccupations and the concerns of ordinary women. Siler reconfigures the domestic by changing some of its basic structures through a different type of gest. Siler has dispensed with even the most tenuous of familiar domestic definitions in her outlining of Kerry. Such a rejection of the domestic suggests a repudiation of the feminist project to give political worth to the private. However, I want to connect this rejection, which is at times aggressive in nature, to a more expansive view of denying the universal norm as represented by pro-Republican Collins and the ideal of conservative domesticity.³⁴

Where the female detective is established in a familiar neighbourhood with limited friends and a selection of work contacts, Kerry is part of a broader less clearly defined network of acquaintances, friends, family and co-workers, that is both socially and geographically extensive. The definition of home becomes one of contact, of relation and not determined by the social contract. When Kerry says 'I am home' she is talking about 'a town of criminals' where 'no one will have heard anything'. (p.236) The cohesion that defines these relationships is the shared involvement in crime. Her profession, that of drug trafficker and her family heritage, the daughter of a drug runner, determines her often casual, wary relationships.

³⁴ Collins, pp.245-6.

Where these relationships exhibit stronger bonds they are nonetheless built on a confederacy of drug dealing. When the action of *Easy Money* moves to the Keys of Florida, Siler depicts Kerry's home ground as one where the drugs trade has infiltrated the most basic of familial behaviour. Kerry's initiation into the drugs industry began on her father's boat, transporting bales of cocaine from Nicaragua to American soil. The father-daughter bond is grounded in the currency of drugs and the lifestyle that is part of such employment.

When I was twelve my father started taking me with him on the boat while he worked. The first time I hid in Cyrus's truck and they had no choice in the matter. From then on I think my father figured I would get into more trouble if he left me at home. Later he would teach me how to use a gun and how to fight as well as any of the men we worked with, but in the beginning I just sat quietly next to him drinking Coca-Cola. (p.21)

Siler combines commonplace childhood misbehaviour with drug smuggling and gun use to depict the uncomplicated ordinariness of this criminal activity. The inclusion of the brand name 'Coca-Cola' and its association with notions of childhood and innocence reinforces this depiction. The sense of comfort and familiarity that is expressed in relation to this illegal behaviour is present throughout the text. There is a repeated reference to 'being part of the underworld' and at the same time being 'at home'. (p.38)

We push our way through the grimy glass doors and into the glare of the fluorescent lighting and I know, as I always know entering places like this, that I am home. The Ox is the scene of all late-night drunken activity in Missoula. I've been here many times with Mark in the early hours of the morning to have fried brains and eggs with gravy-smothered hash browns. The saloon houses a bar, twenty-four-hour cafe, strip club, and all-night poker and keno games. It is a self-contained paradise. (p.69)

Here Siler describes a bar that might elsewhere be the scene of a crime or the bolt hole of a suspect, for Kerry this is both 'home' and 'paradise'. Siler redefines the space of the female detective. The living space for Millhone, Carlyle and Wolfe, where they maintain their separation from traditional domesticity and define their individuality becomes comparable in Siler's work to the traditional detective's place of competitive interaction. The unadorned factual description is tempered with Siler's use of qualifying alliterative language: 'the grimy glass doors' open into a space that is known, not as a generalised type but specifically. Kerry has frequented this 'saloon' and eaten there with a friend. The description of 'fried brains and eggs with gravy-smothered hash browns' is detailed, and whilst the list of 'bar, twenty-

four-hour cafe, strip-club, and all night poker and keno games' is removed from the typical pleasures of the female detective, Kerry's sense of being 'at home' is primarily to do with the company and the food, rather than the strip-club and the gambling. It is the environment of her childhood.

The degree to which the normal definitions of behaviour in relation to the both the law and the family has been determined by the drugs trade is established when Kerry confronts the gunmen at her father's house. The expectation that the exchange of gun fire would alert the police is soon dismissed as Kerry realises where she is:

In an instant of wild clarity I realise where I am. There will be no cops, no wailing sirens; I am in a town of criminals, where juries can't be sat for drug cases because no one is impartial [...] No one will call. No one will have heard anything. I am home. (p.236)

This image of home maintains all the normal expectations of somewhere safe, familiar and known, but it reverses the fundamental underpinning of these expectations by replacing a community of notionally law abiding citizens with a 'town of criminals'. The lifestyle that Kerry was born into is now one that she inhabits out of choice. Her marginal status, her criminal heritage, her employment are fundamentally part of her rejection of what she defines as 'wholesomeness' and attributes to the domesticity outside her self-defined existence. Despite the dangers inherent in her lifestyle the thing she finds the most unnerving is the American family.

Of all the shit I have to deal with when I'm working - bungled connections, bad packages, cops - the most difficult thing for me is the American family. Once you leave the coasts and enter the belly of the country, the great blind central states with their barn-sized churches and bland food, it is difficult to escape the ubiquitous maw of their distressing normality. I'm not quite sure why I find these families so unnerving. Perhaps it's simply that I never grew up around such wholesomeness. (p.38)

Siler's depiction of the ordinariness of American family life is coupled with, but subsumed by, a dismissive response to the police. Her reference to the 'shit' of her work, which includes the 'cops' is almost insignificant when compared to the 'ubiquitous maw' of domesticity. This coupling of the representatives of the law and what Siler defines here as, the quintessence of the law, that of the American family, defines the breadth of Kerry's chosen marginalisation. The violence of Kerry's

rejection of domesticity resonates with the representation of the male detective and his repudiation of femininity as a source of weakness. Interestingly it can also be connected to previous manifestations of the outlaw or cowboy and his rejection of the homestead. Here, however, I wish to connect it to Siler's denunciation of the state control of the individual. Her revulsion at the ordinariness of the family is expressed through a dismissal of 'central states' as if by being contained within the 'belly' of the country you become blind and insensible to the insipid, the ugly and the lack of choice. She goes on:

Seeing these little tribes now, with their volvos and their Plymouth Voyagers, I can't help but wonder at the secrets of their lives. Are they happy? Do the men go home at night and lie on top of their quiet wives and not think for a moment of what else is out there? Whenever doubts arise about my profession, I picture myself in a spacious suburban kitchen pulling a tuna casserole out of a clean oven, going to a hateful job, letting a man I don't desire into my body, and I know I have made the right choice. I have learned to glide anonymously among them, invisible (pp.38-9)

Siler's image of family life is of acquiescence, of 'secrets', 'quiet wives' and lack of desire. Kerry reduces all the materialistic trappings of regulated suburban living, and dismisses them as unnecessary, as controls that would mark her out as part of the 'maw' of domestic life. Her desire is to be separate, invisible, and in control. Her comment 'and know I have made the right choice' reinforces what she has comfortably rejected and in doing so, Siler forces us to identify with a character who has discarded the norm of family life.

In order to maintain her anonymity, Kerry removes what she perceives as the illusion of calm domesticity and accepts the imperative of 'keep moving'. In an exaggerated version of the solitariness of the traditional private investigator Kerry lives the advice of her father: 'As long as you don't stay in one place they'll never find you'. (p.73) The security in constant movement is a form of protection not just from the police, but also from the suffocating normality of family life. For her there is no 'possibility of bartering a life of running for one of roots and claims'. (p.86) She lives outside the domestic centre, beyond the marginal world of the traditional P.I., in the criminal other-world of unease, distrust and survival. In this way Kerry is not 'othered' as Hill is by being feminised; Kerry's choice to be separate is a form of 'self-othering', a decisive positioning beyond the regulatory practices of the law and

the social contract that upholds this law. Neither is this separation in keeping with lesbian detective project of rejecting the structures of heterosexual desire to address the imbalance of dominant masculinity, as demonstrated in the critical work of Gill Plain.³⁵ Whilst I examine the political value of separation in my analysis of the gestic authors, Kerry's detachment functions differently. *Easy Money* offers a broader articulation of what it means to be a woman in a patriarchal system by removing Kerry from many of the bonds that regulate us. By this I mean that because Kerry stands outside the restrictions of the law, the normal parameters of behaviour that are defined by the law and the detective's own sense of obligation have effectively been reversed by Siler. This gives Kerry a specific viewpoint, clearly at odds with law abiding counterparts. Where Grafton and Barnes create characters that are comfortable about lying, but awkward about the violation of breaking into a building, Siler's protagonist gains her moral stance from a clearly alternative standpoint where choice is not a question of the division between what is right and what is legal, but rather the claim of self-determined, individualistic interests. Kerry takes responsibility for her own behaviour such that she is focused on a singularly self-orientated goal, not one that is directed towards a victim or an issue. Her failure to engage with claims beyond herself are expressed in the text when she absolves her past life of drug taking and the desperation that cocaine addiction creates by accepting her father's definition of her as being 'someone else' at the time, however she recognises the self-deception that this involves. She comments:

Someone else. It is so easy to believe in the truth of this statement, in our own absolution from responsibility. What's difficult to swallow is that we live the lives we choose. (p.124)

Despite the sense of self recognition, her actions and the completion of the narrative movement towards closure, establish that she ultimately rejects any acceptance of responsibility on the basis of right and wrong because she is working to secure her own survival.

Present tense revisions

A substantial part of Siler's text is written in the present tense and as a consequence rejects one of the basic precepts of the hard-boiled detective novels, that of a retrospectively retelling of the 'story'. Siler's use of the present tense for much of

³⁵ Plain, p.143.

her text offers a alternative way of perceiving the structuring of the form, in that the seemingly simple choice to create greater immediacy with ‘I am’ rather than ‘I was’ undercuts key aspects of the form’s fixity. Typically the hard-boiled detective novel is written to deliver the narrative ‘after the event’ with the investigative conclusion frequently referred to at the start of the novel. This apparently simplistic formulaic logic offers the reader a comfortable ‘get out’ clause, whereby they can bypass the tragedy of the criminal act and enjoy the whodunit. In Chapter One I identified this narrative organisation as one of the means by which the detective contains the disorder of the criminal act and asserts his sway. The starting point is determined by the detective’s engagement and the narrative movement forward by his choices. Narrative closure becomes then according to Zizek the:

Means by which the subject retroactively confers meaning on a series of contingencies and assumes his/her symbolic destiny.³⁶

This textual logic is largely lost in Siler’s work because there is no ‘retroactive conferring of meaning’ instead we are given the events as they happen with no safety net to protect us from the horrors of violent crime. In addition to this loss of meaning through the use of the present tense, Siler also incorporates memories and reflections, which impact on Kerry’s actions. If we see the detective’s retrospective narration as a process of giving us a consistent and comprehensible account of events, what Zizek has called a ‘coherent fable’ then Siler’s narrative rejects the security of a textual logic.³⁷ The use of the word ‘fable’ here is interesting because of its implied moral teachings. Fables are collectively understood and accepted as a way of teaching a social truth, in this instance the detective’s retelling of events allow him to give a social logic as well as a textual one. Thus the detective’s fable, a surrogate public history if you like, delivers to us the criminal contained by the law. In Siler’s text the intrusion of the past into the present, combined with the negation of the law challenges the ‘coherent fables’ and public history of 1990s America.

Throughout the novel Siler makes connections between current events and America’s violent past. In particular the Vietnam War and its after effects are examined as a means of realising the impact of a collectively agreed history. Siler’s focus on the Vietnam War begins with the disk that Kerry has been paid to transport.

³⁶ Zizek, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan*, p.243.

³⁷ Zizek, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan*, p.7.

The disk contains evidence of the murder of American soldiers in Chau Doc. In the process of fighting for her survival Kerry discovers the many ways in which her actions are connected to these deaths and that these deaths cannot be contained within a 'coherent fable' of American intervention and pacification. However, the revelation that the dead soldiers were responsible for unauthorised torture and killing of Vietnamese villagers is not the central crime that Siler details, rather it is the cover up. An ex-soldier tells Kerry:

After the hearings at My Lai, the American government was in a real bad position. Now they've got some soldiers on a backwater jungle base who are terrorising the locals. The last thing the war effort needed was another hearing, so they just went down there real quietly and shut the whole thing down. (p.218)

The killing of these renegade soldiers is established throughout the text as typical state accorded response to threats, Vietnamese and American. Kerry learns that her father was part of a tactical military group trained to eradicate local insurgents. A friend of her father who also fought, comments on the impact of their training:

Suddenly you realise the Lord ain't the only one who giveth and taketh away. We used to leave these calling cards on bigwigs we killed back then [...] We were eighteen or nineteen when we went in, most of us. They told us what we were doing was right, and we didn't ask a whole lot of questions. (p. 121)

Despite the fact that this violence is seen as part of America's past Siler's disjointed temporal narrative means that the consequences of these actions are part of the current threat against Kerry.

Perhaps more significantly in terms of understanding the effect of Siler's use of the present tense, this is a narration that questions the 'fable' of history, in that it allows us to recognise the ways in which a moment in history intervenes into the present. I am thinking here particularly of the way Siler does not allow the Vietnam War to be geographically confined. Instead Siler establishes the way the violence of this past war is part of present American lives and that despite attempts to limit the knowledge of these atrocities the violence continues. By drawing out connections between the past and present and by refusing to concede to the hard-boiled detective novel's retrospective textual logic Siler implies an ongoing future reassessment of events that continues to negate a 'get out' clause. The violence of Siler's text can also be connected to a decade of violence on American soil that changed the way war was

perceived as elsewhere and separate to American daily life. At one point Kerry comments ‘We live lives of violence that we still think are normal’ and it is this normalcy of violent America that I see the present tense giving potency to. (p.53) Kerry’s/America’s violence has become habitual, part of the present and not confined to either the past or a geographical distance.

The economies of the criminal-detective

The rejection of the regulatory practices of the law is reinforced by a new set of economies in *Easy Money*. Here it is possible to make further connections between Siler’s language and my earlier references to Brechtian gest. The gest within the language of Siler establishes the social standing of Kerry, both in terms of relationships and her choices. The defining element of Siler’s world is drugs, but it is the language of guns that determine Kerry as criminal and outlaw. Whilst this emphasis on gun law makes clear connections with anti-federal activity that Prassel identifies as violently part of this decade, this is not how Kerry is defined. This reliance on the drugs trade is not a political statement against government intervention, rather drugs are the currency upon which Kerry’s existence depends and they, rather than the law regulate her life. Her entrance into this lifestyle as a child establishes a familiarity with the attendant trapping of the drugs industry and its impact. Despite the fact that Kerry has been a drug user her relationship with the drugs trade is one of expediency. Her knowledge of the power that cocaine can exercise and her mastery over her own addiction leaves her with a sense of reverence for the drug, but also recognition that the drugs industry is one to be made use of. The smuggling of drugs is presented as endemic in the Keys, a ‘family business, like farming in the Midwest’. (p.82) With such a business come particular lessons:

It was during that summer that my father gave up on protecting me and consciously began to teach me how to survive. Of course by then I’d been watching him for years. I would note the curve of his arm or the shape of his fist when he threw a punch at the boxing bag that hung on the dock behind the bar. From the slight hesitation of speech I had learned who could be trusted, how to spot one of the rare local cops who wasn’t in on the game. (p.83)

The lessons here are grounded in elemental instinctual gestural behaviour: ‘curves’, ‘shapes’, ‘hesitation’ all of which speak of a specific kind of understanding of what is needed to exist in this world. Such lessons communicate a particular form of

survival. Whilst it is possible to make connections with the outlaw figures within American culture or the individualistic anti-federal government groups of the 1990s and Kerry's training, there is a different relationship with the state here, one that rejects the law because it gets in the way of the next drugs deal and not because it intervenes in the private lives of a community.

Guns within this environment operate as a form of currency. The knowledge and use of guns function as a code of normative, legitimating behaviour.

There was an old pineapple plantation that had been turned into a shooting range up on Summerland Key, and we drove up there almost every afternoon that summer and pumped rounds into the paper targets.
(p.82)

Siler presents the lesson in gun law as an intimate, physical engagement in the torque of a colt and the attentive tactile presence of her father.

The first time I fired his old colt revolver he stood behind me, wrapping his arms around my shoulder and clenching his big Irish hands over mine.
[...]

“This is the easy part, Al,” he said into my ear. His calluses rasped against the smooth skin of my knuckles. [...]
I waited for him to stop talking and drew in a deep breath and squeezed the trigger. The colt fired, and the force of the kick threw my whole body back against the weight of my father. My shoulders pressed into his chest and the small of my back curved against the soft pillow of his stomach.
(p.82)

The language here draws on the symbolism of the traditional male detective novel, redolent in sexual imagery that predetermines the masculinity of Marlowe and Hammer. Here, the symbolism is an inversion of the phallic trope that informs the traditional presentation of the detective's gun or 'tool' and becomes an intimate point of contact between a father and daughter. Hammer's 'rod' is transformed into a young girl's lesson in survival and recognition that success is often the result of self-confidence: 'If you ever have to use this thing, it won't be your aim that will screw you, but your nerve'. (p.82) For Kerry it also establishes her relationship with her father, one that is defined (at this point in the text) by physical and emotional trust, and one that is also moulded by the drug trade. This knowledge of guns is instinctual, and Kerry's use of guns habitual. Whilst guns are a symbol of power and control in the original male texts, here the gun becomes part of a process of self-preservation; it is handled with respect. Once Kerry is on the run, her gun, a Walther,

is her permanent companion. Her connection with it is established in her constant references to it, its location is always known:

Keeping the Walther glued to my side [...] the Walther slips from my hand and scuds out of reach [...] twisting my head back to see the outline of my Walther a few feet away. (p.29)

I take a step back from the window and eye the Walther where I left it on the neatly made bed [...] I [...] grab the Walther and head back into the bathroom. (p.92)

Kerry's use of the gun's name, particularly when she confronts the killers of her friend Mark, is suggestive of a mantra to shield her from their power. 'I sight him down the barrel of the Walther', 'Bringing the Walther up to the base of his neck', 'Nudging the nape of his neck with the barrel of the Walther', 'Jabbing the Walther back into the flesh of his neck', 'Switching the Walther to my left hand'. (p.234-5)

The text is punctuated with factual detail about guns and their usage:

There's a gun in his inside pocket, a colt government-model 9 millimetre. (p.28)

It's a small weapon, a berretta jetfire, 25 calibre with a long silencer. Perfect for taking someone out in this filthy little bathroom. (p.29)

There are no hand guns, only rifles and shotguns, each piece marked by a handwritten identifying placard [...] a World War II British army rifle hangs next to a novice hunter's Remington .22. (p.69)

There's a sharp click above me and I recognise the slick mechanical sound of a safety uncatching. (p.229)

The negation of the ordinary in terms of the familiarity of the quotidian life that is a common part of the female author's text is replaced in *Easy Money* by an alternative form of habit. In addition the gest of firearm terminology further links the novel to its historical moment of conception, and the on-going debates about gun culture in America.

Spatial relations and interconnectedness

As well as Kerry's instinctual relationship with her gun, Siler also reveals a community that is different from the gestic writer's conception of neighbourhood. In part this is because of the obvious pre-occupation with drugs and the routine of drug-trafficking, but it is also the engagement with a different kind of commonality, that of movement. Such a focus on motion can be connected to the idea of 'flow',

conceptualised by Manuel Castells in his work *The Rise of the Network Society*. Castells argues that location or space is not determined by the fixity of place but by exchange to create a 'space of flows'. He sees the network society as the dominant means by which space is defined, rather than a locale 'whose form, function and meaning are self-contained within the boundary of physical contiguity'.³⁸ Castells refers to the narcotics network as an example of the interdependency of disparate localities that operate as a unit through an emphasis on exchange, rather than place. Castells defines this emphasis on flows as separate from place. He comments that 'the function and power in our societies are organised in the space of flows' and that the 'structural domination of its logic essentially alters the meaning and dynamic of place'.³⁹ This domination of flow says Castells means that place becomes separated and segmented, in effect it has no logic unless it is part of the process of exchange.⁴⁰ This is evident in Siler's evocation of place and has a clear resonance with the title *Easy Money* and its reference to flows of capital generated by drugs. The destinations she travels to are determined by the logic of exchange and not because the place itself has value. The importance of the space of flows operates as a further example of the economies of Siler's criminal-detective by removing the fixity of place and by extension its symbolic meaning.

In this way the space of flows gives a value to the interconnectedness that is not reliant on economies that are 'contained within the boundary of physical contiguity'.⁴¹ I want to argue that this idea of 'boundary' connects place more forcefully with a paternal economy because it demands a set of meanings that are fixed and regulated. It is also a set of boundaries that contain and regulate domesticity and in Butler's terms describe a universal idealisation of place. Siler's evocation of space can function to question what constitutes legitimacy by removing boundaries. Doreen Massey in her book *For Space* discusses the value of removing symbolic meaning from place and the political impact of this loss of fixity. She comments in her chapter entitled 'The Elusiveness of Place':

Reconceptualising place in this way puts on the agenda a different set of

³⁸ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p.453.

³⁹ Castells, p.458.

⁴⁰ Castells, p.459.

⁴¹ Castells, p.453.

political questions. There can be no assumption of pre-given coherence, or of community or collective identity. Rather the throwntogetherness (sic) of place demands negotiation.⁴²

For Kerry the lack of a 'pre-given coherence' means she is not tied to a Symbolic paternal obligation that binds her to a place and defines her identity; rather she negotiates movement through space on the basis of her interconnectedness. Siler's language is powerfully eloquent as she defines this movement.

The rain is with us all the way down the keys, shrouding the thin chain of islands, sizzling and humming against the calm water of Florida bay. I curl up in a corner with Percy and drift into a fitful sleep, waking occasionally to a twitch or kick from the dog's dreaming muscles. I'm vaguely aware of Charles's soft and constant singing and of our slow passage past the flank of this land that is creased into my memory like a deep scar into broken skin. (pp.204-5)

Her use of the present and past tense and the sense of memory and immediacy this creates are made evocative by a fluent, often emotive description, both in terms of natural landscape that Kerry moves through and the locations where the action of the plot unfolds. The description of the land through which Kerry drives as she searches for answers is personalised by the memories it evokes and the nature of the questions that she is asking.

I shadow the Chevy along the flat two-lane road. Light seeps over the rolling hills. To the west are the low trickle of the Bitterroot River and jagged, saw toothed peaks. Somewhere up in those mountains, Mark once told me, missionaries built a huge cross and named the old Nez Perce land after a catholic saint. We were strangers here once, clumsy in our new boots as the Hmong must have been, as the boys limping through the Southeast Asia in their heavy fatigues. (p.77)

Her sense of responsibility for the mystery that she is attempting to solve, tempers her journey with an obligation, a duty not determined by place. Siler draws connections between the colonisers of America, the battlefields of South Asia and Kerry's habitual journeys across state lines as she delivers her shipments of cocaine. Alongside the almost lyrical descriptions of peaks, springs, forests and rivers are references to the people that inhabit the landscape, who are points of contact for Kerry as she transports her wares. The dual sense of familiarity, with both the geography and the inhabitants imbued with this sense of undefined obligation, combines to create the emotive connection with spaces. Perhaps significantly the

⁴² Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2015), p.141.

movement from, through and towards places, none of which are more than temporary staging posts in the quest to discover the investigative centre, is the substitute for the 'roots' that Kerry sees middle America clinging to, that are part of the social contract. As Massey says:

Space presents us with the social in the widest sense: the challenge of our constitutive interrelatedness - and thus our collective implication in the outcomes of that interrelatedness; the radical contemporaneity of an ongoing multiplicity of others.⁴³

For Siler the space of flows operates as a way of conceptualising the social contract or rather of challenging it, so that Kerry is not bound by the physical or the symbolic meaning of place but rather free to negotiate a different set of relations.

Significantly Siler also highlights the connections between Kerry's trafficking and wider, state orchestrated crime by referencing 'covert war's weapon deals on the nightly news'. (p.107) Kerry comments 'We are somehow part of the whole scheme', and in doing so makes visible one of the deceits of geography, that is separateness. (p.132) The process of connecting seemingly disparate actions and places forces us to recognise the way geography and its definition becomes a source of power. So for example in Siler's text the criminal event begins with thirty year old deaths in the Vietnam War. However, Siler identifies the relationship between Vietnam and the USA as one that is ongoing, not least because of the Vietnamese who live in the States. In the process of identifying the source of the disk, Kerry visits communities that are peopled by immigrants from Vietnam. Siler describes the route to these communities in terms of what it lacks, its separation from the American infrastructure.

The town of Hoyt consists of a few trailers, a tiny post office, and several low ranch houses spread out over the dry bear grass and scrub. After Hoyt, the pavement ends and the road turns to packed dirt and gravel. (p.132)

This separation of the Vietnamese immigrants suggests a difference that cannot be integrated into mainstream society. Massey talks of the way 'difference/heterogeneity is not only neatly packed into its bounded spaces but also dismissed to ('our') past'. She comments on the need to reject the notion of distance, both in terms of place and time so that difference, in this instance the Vietnam

⁴³ Massey, p.195.

War/Vietnamese, can be given value in the present.

Tactile violence and slapstick

Siler's depiction of physical violence is also different from the norm of the gestic text. The most powerful presentation of violence and its abusive processes is seen in the death of her friend, Mark. The feminist detective novel often challenges the norms of violation that the violence of the traditional male text portrays. Often this is achieved through a personal engagement with the victim either through the introduction of the victim before death or through the investigative process of the detective whose research into the habits of the victim reveal a person and not a mystery to be solved. The gestic writers do not fetishize the victim's damaged body, rather they work to return to the victim her subjectivity and negate her positioning as 'scapegoat'.⁴⁴ In the process of exposing the 'crime of masculinity' the gestic female detective undercuts the voyeuristic nature that is an intrinsic part of the form and averts the male gaze.⁴⁵ The death of Mark is handled similarly in that we are given the living Mark to reinforce the loss his death creates, but it is Kerry's responses to his death that establishes her difference.

Like the gestic writers, Siler introduces Mark to the reader before his death, but rather than defining his environment and his habits, we are introduced to his physicality. Siler builds up a sense of intimacy with Mark's body that establishes a norm against which the violence done to him is a shocking violation. This intimacy has a tactile quality that evokes a sense of warm skin and sinuous muscles. There is little to imply a reworking of the male 'gaze' rather we are presented with the beauty and the vulnerability of Mark. When we are first introduced to him 'he is singing along silently to [...] music, and the delicate veins and muscles in his brown neck work with his jaw'. (p.47) Later as they travel to a bar Kerry comments;

I look over at Mark. He's leaning with his forehead pressed against the cool surface of the side window. He's wearing a watch cap over his bald head, and I can see the naked nape of his neck between the

⁴⁴ As Rose says 'the perversion of the State in relation to violence could be transposed on to the perversity of women, its more troubling implications then siphoned off and ignored'. This works to scapegoat the victim, making 'her' the location of this violence. Rose, p.48.

⁴⁵ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford UP, 1975), pp.833-44.

knit fabric of the hat and the collar of his canvas coat. (p.67)

When these ‘delicate veins’, ‘the muscles’ and ‘the nape of his neck’ are later described this sense of intimacy that Siler has developed establishes the impact of the violent act:

Mark’s eyes are wide open and his face is tilted slightly so that his left cheek is pressed into the floor. I rest the Walther on the floor, lean down, and touch the soft hollow at the base of his head. He is shirtless, and the tattooed spider’s spinneret drops down and ends at a bloody hole in his back. Whatever bullet they used passed through the delicate tissues of his chest, through the solid breastbone and the strong red muscles of his heart. Mark’s right hand is twisted under his body. The fingers of his left hand are splayed in strange angles against the rough boards of the floor, a thin line of blood drips from his thumb. (p.84)

The detail has resonances with the televisual forensic images of programmes such as CSI, but the violence is personalised by Kerry’s responses. Whilst the gestic writers open up to consideration the impact of death on those left behind and the searing pain that violence causes, Siler reworks it in an attempt to reduce the power that violence engenders. Kerry’s grief is transformed into revenge; there is little space for tragedy, just anger and cold resolute intent. The purpose that Mark’s death creates is not impeded by the messy, drawn out detritus of mourning.

I try not to remember the slight dip in Mark’s walk, the delicate blue veins like small rivers in his hands and arms. Instead I take the dry seed of pain and plant it deep in the earth of my body, hoping it will bloom someday [...] Already I can feel the husk bursting, the germination of anger, the pale roots sprouting forth. (p.88)

The sense of loss is not limited by Kerry’s refusal to allow herself to dwell on the living Mark. However, the phrase ‘I try not to’ is clearly indicative of the effort that this requires.

In contrast to this intimate tactile response to the violence done to a friend there is a more casual, perfunctory detailing of Kerry’s own violent behaviour and her detached reportage of the violence of others. There is still within this a sense of the tactile nature of physical violence. In Chapter Three I explore the techniques the gestic writer deploys to remove the force of violent slapstick. In Dunant’s *Fatlands* Wolfe fights to stay alive after the man who has already beaten her attacks her again: ‘Now it was his turn to hit the floor, doubled up [...] I saw myself in a dark country lane with my stomach coming up through my throat. And I felt this river rush of

energy'. (*FL*, p.209) Wolfe responds to the killer's aggression with her own violence, but she does not revel in its power, her tone lacks emotion and her language is factual. She goes on 'but as fast as the rush came it went and the compulsion turned to revulsion. I turned'. (*FL*, pp.209-10) Similarly, Siler limits the impact of violent slapstick with a matter of fact tone that rejects notions of gendering and a subject/object division that presumes a masculine power.

Randall reaches out with his good hand and grabs my ankle, pulling my foot out from under me. My knee hits the cool tin and my body reels, listing towards the edge of the roof. His grip is strong; I can feel each finger through the fabric of my jeans. I twist my torso around, trying to keep balance. (p.233)

Siler also records a tactile response to what is happening, 'the cool tin' and 'I can feel each finger through the fabric of my jeans' which displaces the confrontational language of slapstick that 'grab', 'hits', 'reels', and 'twist' can generate. Interspersed amongst this is the physicality, almost romanticised depiction of violence.

We live lives of violence that we still think are normal. The water hits my face and the raw cut on my cheek stings and throbs. Someday, I think, I will touch the smooth tissue of a scar there and remember this distant pain, some fragment of my life's events breaking through the skin of time. I read once that the body doesn't get rid of glass. Our cells grow around it and hold it, just as a heart might hold the three-step of a waltz. (p.54)

Siler changes the way violent slapstick is perceived; for Kerry the impact of violence is internalised and becomes part of the choices she makes, a 'fragment of my life's events'. Whilst the analogy of 'the three-step of a waltz' might suggest a romanticisation of violence, it also renders it familiar, learnt and perpetually remembered. By accepting these choices and recognising the fact that violence can 'break through the skin of time' Siler establishes Kerry's willingness to live a life of violence.

Identity and the criminal-detective

The combined effects of this decentring are to create a space in which questions about identity and agency are fundamental. One of the ways in which Siler opens up to question presumptions about gender definitions is in the depiction of Kerry's friend Miss Darwin, an ex-marine who fought alongside Kerry's father in Asia. Siler does not address Darwin's sexuality but simply describes her:

The trailer's door has been left slightly ajar. Through the crack I can see the back of Darwin's tall body and her hips, swaying and twisting to the music. She's wearing a tight purple miniskirt and shiny violet pumps with stiletto heels. Her legs are bare and the strong muscles of her calves and thighs ripple with each movement [...] Darwin turns towards my voice and her face breaks out in a smile. She's not wearing a shirt, and as she saunters across the front room of the trailer to greet me, the black stubble of her shaved chest hair sticks out above her delicate red lace bra. Her masculine shoulders are broad and defined. (p.111)

The feminine stereotype is quickly followed by detail that establishes Darwin as a transvestite. There is no enquiry into this particular set of choices, nor too Darwin's drug habit or prostitution. Unlike McDermid's depiction of Angelica, Siler presents the characterization of Darwin as routine; a friend of Kerry's who she has known as both Navy SEAL and drag star. The constant use of the pronoun 'she' sets up Darwin's gender specificity, but her knowledge runs counter to the societal expectations of femininity. Siler challenges normative assumptions about identity by making Darwin's gender unexceptional.⁴⁶ The gest of Darwin's behaviour that establishes her social placement, is at odds with her language. When Kerry asks about Darwin's experience of Vietnam, Darwin explains the process while filing her nails:

'Can you imagine a more fucked-up system?' she says, running the buffer back and forth over her nails. 'There we were, "teaching" jungle warfare to people who'd grown up with it'. (p.117)

The visual image is at odds with the spoken words, in as much as Darwin's knowledge that her job was at odds with the situation. Such a discrepancy challenges gender expectations and the way identity is read without offering fully realised substitutions.

Kerry's own sense of identity is clear and confident and a contrast to the uncertainty of Hill. When she changes her appearance to outsmart her pursuers she comments:

Identity is one thing about being a woman that I've always appreciated. We are not bound, like most men are to being one person all our lives. We dye our hair and change our clothes, and suddenly Eva Duarte becomes Evita Peron or Norma Jean becomes Marilyn Monroe. When

⁴⁶ Austin H Johnson comments that 'within much feminist writing transgender identity and experience has continually been called into question regarding origin, implication and motivation in ways that cisgender has not'. 'Beyond Inclusion: Thinking Toward a Transfeminist Methodology' in *At the Centre: Feminism, Social Science and Knowledge*, ed. by Vasilikie Demos and Marcia Texler Segal (Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 2015), p.27.

changing myself like this first became part of my routine, people close to me were surprised. I'd go home to the Keys with a short red bob or blonde curls teased up around my face and no one would recognise me. Now my singularity has become so linked to these transformations that everyone expects them [...] What's mutable about me is no longer important to the people who know who I am. (p.91)

Kerry's capacity to change without changing into something else determines a central core that is fixed as important to those that know her (an interesting correlation to the hard-boiled form). At the close of the novel Kerry is given safe passage to South America by a friend. She sinks her boat to fake her death. Her last comment, 'They think I lost my way. I am certain this could never be possible' sums up her separation from 'they', that is those who are looking for her and represent law and order, as well as her absolute knowledge that she would never lose her sense of self. (p.247)

Conclusions

By setting aside the economy of law and order which determines the most fundamental structures of the hard-boiled detective novel, Siler sets up an alternative economy, one that has the potential to challenge more forcibly the normative structures of the hard-boiled detective novel. Traditionally the form would appear to replicate the Lacanian order that defines the subject and object in gendered terms, establishing the lack of female agency or, in other words, accords power to the traditional male detective. Here Siler's text operates to question this structuring of power. The impact of this change is not simply to make the central character alternative on the basis of her focus, in that she is not intent on upholding the law; rather it introduces into the text what I perceive as a different set of generic economies that have the capacity to decentre this literature. Whilst Siler does not overtly question the presumed binary of gender definition, as McDermid does, in this process of decentring the hard-boiled form her representations of gender and its constituent parts are reconfigured. Identity as difference (from both men and other women) becomes a powerful tool, a means of challenging prescribed social definitions and practices and standing outside the universal norm. For gestic writers it gives an opportunity to address the question of femininity as a 'negative' that the original hard-boiled text propagated. Siler challenges the heart of the social contract by setting aside its paternal economies. Siler's detective is a potent embodiment of

female agency; but her status beyond the law redefines this position. Siler's rejection of the governing processes of the universal norm that establishes the locus of the female detective's agency allows this criminal-detective unqualified free will beyond the expectations of not just the law itself, but the self-imposed constraints that determine the behaviour of the female detective. The decision to move beyond the normalcy of socially defined femininity offers to her a means of taking control beyond the regulation of the everyday.

Clearly Siler's economy has limitations. Unlike the gestic writers her work sits outside the lived experience of women despite the fact that there is still an emphasis on Kerry's daily life. It is also an economy in which violence is a matter of choice and the need for protection is basic. However, there is little doubt that by decentring the form Siler extends the work of the gestic writer to explore the ways in which gender and identity can be fluid. By pushing the bounds of what we perceive as social norms the criminal-detective furthers the means of articulating female agency and explores the restraints that are placed on such an articulation. In this way *Easy Money* also functions to further revise what it is possible for the hard-boiled novel to become, establishing 'its capacity to change without changing into something else'.⁴⁷ Siler's work is, I would suggest, further evidence of the capacity of the form to transform itself and in doing so take the temperature of the social imaginary of the time.

⁴⁷ McKeon, p.xiii.

Conclusion – ‘Talking Back to Chandler and Spillane’

I started this thesis by establishing my personal investment in the hard-boiled novel. My reading of the form has been extensive, but I have consistently remained within the nexus of the feminist version of the literature, particularly that written by women. Whilst the central character of these texts have varied enormously, at times falling outside the prescripts of the traditional hard-boiled P.I., the focus of these writers has been, without interruption, the question of women’s identity. As a serial reader I took pleasure in the sense of familiarity that the reappearance of the detective created, allowing me to develop an ongoing sense of identification with these specific women and their habits. The choice to make my reading pleasure into academic study has been complicated by the lack of critical value accorded to many (if not most) of these authors. Much of the critical concern (Glover, Plain, Munt, Klein) lies in the perceived incompatibility of incorporating feminist politics in a form that as Knight has said is ‘deeply implicated with masculinism’ and which embraces a formulaic, misogynistic violence.¹ This thesis then is an attempt to address this dissonance, to give recognition to these authors and to establish why the hard-boiled novel is a genre that offers women writers not a fantasy figure as Munt has claimed, but a literature that can express female agency and empowerment. Key to my argument, in keeping with Michael McKeon’s proposal about the nature of generic form, is that this is a genre that changes to fulfil a social need.

In order to understand the hard-boiled detective I examined the work of Chandler and Spillane; their fashioning of the detective has allowed me to identify the key attributes of the central character as well as understanding how he comes to be a product of the moment of writing. In particular I wanted to use these authors’ novels to later explore how women can occupy a space that appears to work to expel them. Fundamental to my analysis is the concept of a surrogate public history, through which society promulgates ‘mythological constructs’ to salve or remedy social unease.² Through the work of Chandler I have outlined how the hard-boiled detective novel of the 1930s offered ways of scrutinising gender relations and the way such relations are perceived as natural, in effect revealing how gendered lives are bound by structures of regulation in terms of social expectation as well as the

¹ Knight, p.163.

² Davis, p.44.

law. My proposition is that early hard-boiled texts contributed to a surrogate public history in which the mythology of the detective was embraced as both desirable and necessary; primarily as a counter to the entrance of women into the public world of business. Thus Chandler's representation of 1930s masculinity participated in a surrogate public history that rejected femininity, reinforcing the clear cut gender divisions that have become part of the shaping of hard-boiled detective literature, and in particular its depiction of male agency. However, a surrogate public history also reveals not just the dominant, desired mythology, but also what it displaces and works to hide. Chandler's novels thus also expose the fault lines within the form as well as within the figure of the detective. My analysis clearly demonstrates that the gender uncertainty expressed through Chandler's work establishes this literature as one that articulates debates within society and in doing so makes known the 'struggle, tension and conflict [...] that is embedded in the social life of the users'.³ As such this literature is the perfect arena to consider feminism and the articulation of women-oriented political agendas and to create an alternative surrogate public history in which the lives of women are perceived as vital and central.

A primary consideration throughout my thesis is the representation of violence within the hard-boiled form. The utilisation of violence by women detective writers has been consistently criticised; not least because it is perceived as failing to recognise and address violence as an expression of governing ideologies which reinforce gender difference. Through my analysis of Spillane I have considered the way extremes of violence are used to express a particular kind of exceptional masculinity and the way this violence is given legitimacy through an explication of the political landscape of the 1950s. However, through the work of Jacqueline Rose I have drawn out the fallacy of equating legitimate violence with masculinity and by extension illegitimate violence with femininity.⁴ My analysis of Spillane has shown that his adaptation of the hard-boiled novel in the context of post-war America paradoxically works to open up the form to a feminist perspective rather than shut it down: firstly because it establishes the level at which the hard-boiled form can and does change in response to social and cultural pressures; secondly because it offers an opportunity to engage with the production of Spillane's 'brutal' agency and by

³ Radway, p.4.

⁴ Rose, p.49.

extension to test what such agency might mean to women writers. In particular, Spillane's use of violence, both as a means to define masculine prowess and negate the weakness that is connoted by femininity, provides women writers with the opportunity to scrutinise how violence impacts on women's lives. It also offers women the means to revise simplistic definitions of feminine weakness by taking for themselves the constitutive power that violence can confer on its user.

At the centre of this thesis is an examination of the re-writing of the original genre by authors Barnes, Grafton and Dunant. By directly questioning, undercutting and 'talking back' to the early male hard-boiled authors, their writing functions as a 'reverse discourse' which challenges the gender assumptions of the early texts.⁵ The significance of the female deployment of the original model lies in the fact that when women occupy the existing gendered space of the detective the questions about identity and agency that are generated by the hard-boiled detective novel can be addressed. I developed the term 'gestic' from Brecht to define these authors, who by giving precedence to the minutiae of the everyday open up to inquiry the practices of female regulation. The gestic version of the form stands in contrast to other variations of the hard-boiled novel as one that recognises and expresses the burden of a binary designation of gender difference. My argument is that the gestic female P.I. is representational: she is not a fantasy figure who offers a cathartic release for the pain experienced by women as Munt would suggest. Gestic writing by its very nature examines 'the micro-political practices of daily life and daily resistances that afford both agency and sources of power or empowering investments'.⁶ Thus through a careful deployment of the detective's voice, these authors examine social inequalities and question how femininity is defined. As such the gestic author offers a powerful commentary on the condition of women in the 1980s through a surrogate public history that allows us to see how women are bound by a social contract that divides the public and private spheres in gendered terms.

As part of my analysis of the gestic writers I have explored the ways in which they have incorporated into their work the violence of the hard-boiled form. Criticism directed at this area of feminist texts, is based on the violative nature of the original

⁵ Walton and Jones, p.95.

⁶ De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, p.25.

novels, much of which was misogynistic. However, as I have shown gestic writers work to address this violence by questioning how it has the capacity to bestow subjectivity on its user. The use of violence by the male detective is part of the way he maintains his masculine agency. The achievement for women writers who engage with the gendering of violence is two-fold: firstly, as I have discussed in relation to the concept of slapstick, they counter male physical violence by removing its control; secondly, they return to the victim their own subjectivity. In doing so the gestic writer questions the binary process of defining women as the recipients of violence by refusing to allow a formulistic necessity for resolution to take precedence. Thus women detective writers restore the victim's subjectivity and do not allow textual abstraction and organisation to subsume the loss of life. By conferring on the female detective the right to interrogate social violence and to answer its ravages through the punishment of the criminal, these detective writers assert a political agenda that demands a different reading process from that required by the traditional male-authored novel.

My chapter on Val McDermid draws out the complexity that is possible within the hard-boiled form. Her utilisation of three investigators, offers alternative representations of political concerns at the time of writing in the 1980s and 1990s. Through parody, McDermid's work reveals a possible destabilisation of gender and identity. The 'parodic practices' of Gordon, Brannigan, Hill and Angelica, serve to highlight both the illusion and the artifice of gender. McDermid's work highlights the 'phantasmatic status' of femininity and masculinity by effectively failing to produce characters that comply with the 'ritual of socially compelled gender'.⁷ If we see the representation of McDermid's characters as a 'satirical rhapsody of gender and identity under pressure', then this loss of feminine and masculine separation suggests that such 'pressure' might result in subverting the very thing that these parodies rely on to reformulate the fixity of gender.⁸

The single novel, *Easy Money*, completes my analysis of the female contribution to the hard-boiled form. By setting aside the economy of law and order which determines the most fundamental structures of the hard-boiled detective novel, Siler

⁷ Butler 'Melancholy gender/ Refused identification', p.31.

⁸ Knight, p.207.

sets up an alternative economy, one that has the potential to challenge more forcibly the normative structures of the hard-boiled detective novel. Siler challenges the heart of the social contract by setting aside its paternal economies. Her detective is a potent embodiment of female agency; but her status beyond the law redefines this position. Siler's rejection of the governing processes of the universal norm that establishes the locus of the female detective's agency allows this criminal-detective absolute free will beyond the expectations of not just the law itself, but the self-imposed constraints that determine the behaviour of the female detective. However unlike the gestic writers her detective is removed from the 'real' of women's lived experience despite the fact that there is still an emphasis on Kerry's daily life. It is also an economy in which violence is embraced as a choice and the need for protection is fundamental. Nevertheless, by decentering the form Siler extends the work of the gestic writers to explore the ways in which gender and identity can be fluid. By challenging the limits of what we perceive as social norms the criminal-detective furthers the means of articulating female agency and explores the restraints that are placed on such an articulation. In this way *Easy Money* also revises what it is possible for the form to become, establishing 'its capacity to change without changing into something else'.⁹ Siler's work is confirmation that the hard-boiled novel has the facility to transform itself and as I have argued, take the temperature of the social imaginary of the time.

Post 2000 the hard-boiled detective novel continues to evolve in response to cultural shifts. A recent article by Terence Rafferty in *The Atlantic* sums up some of the current writing within the genre by women authors but also makes a connection to the history of the genre:

Reading these tricky 21st-century thrillers can be like scrolling through an especially heated comments thread on a Web site, or wandering unawares into a Twitter feud. Down these mean tweets a woman must go ...¹⁰

The reference to forms of social media establishes the contemporaneousness of the writing, and Rafferty's use of Chandler quotation reinforces the genre as one that

⁹ McKeon, p.xiii.

¹⁰ Terrance Rafferty, 'Gone Girl and the Rise of Crime Novels by Women' *The Atlantic*, July 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/07/women-are-writing-the-best-crime-novels/485576/>. [accessed 10 August 2016].

maintains an ongoing connection with its past. Rafferty continues:

Crime fiction isn't the worst way of dealing with the too-much-information, too-many-voices overload of the present day. At least it holds out the possibility of a solution, of something approximating truth; that's written into the form's tacit agreement with its audience.¹¹

That this fiction might offer 'something approximating truth' confirms Kristeva's contention that through 'the words of everyday communication' and 'faced with social norms this language reveals a certain knowledge and sometimes the truth'.¹² Thus the crime form written by women continues to contribute to social debate and will continue to transform itself, answering the social needs and enquiries of women readers.

¹¹ Rafferty, *Gone Girl*.

¹² Kristeva, p.207.

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