

The Same Procedure?

An analysis of conventional characteristics in
contemporary woman detective fiction

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1. INTRODUCTION

Crime fiction is an increasingly popular genre with great variation. Subgenres like the classical Golden Age puzzle mysteries, the hardboiled detective fiction and the police procedural are just a few examples of the variety within the genre. Traditionally the crime novel presents a more or less conservative and stereotypical gender view with a tough male detective hero and only marginal female characters. Today the crime novel has more and more come to represent a feminist ideology where the detective hero is a woman (Vanacker 1997, 62). The American professor (deceased) of English Carolyn Heilbrun (1990) claims, in fact, that it is the woman detective writers with women detectives who have brought about the greatest change in crime fiction, with a move toward androgyny and away from the stereotypical sex roles (248).

One of the more successful women crime novelists is Patricia Cornwell, whose woman detective hero Kay Scarpetta, the Chief Medical Examiner of Virginia as well as consulting forensic pathologist for the FBI is inserted in the police procedural. In my research I will compare the characteristics of Kay Scarpetta in the novel *From Potter's Field* with two of the conventional characteristics of the hardboiled detective hero. My aim is to find out if the change really is as great as claimed by Carolyn Heilbrun or if it is illusory, meaning a transfer of the conventional stereotypical features to the contemporary woman detective.

1.1 Research Question

As I have mentioned above this research will be about the characteristics of the feminist detective in regard to conventional gender assumptions of the crime genre. The subject is broad and to achieve my purpose with this research I will focus on two conventional features of the male detective: individualism and action. My main questions will be in what

form these traits, if they exist, are expressed in the feminist detective character and what effects the occurrence or the absence of these characteristics have from a feminist perspective.

1.2 Methodology

By looking at a few specific characteristics of the traditional hardboiled (male) fiction in one contemporary novel about a woman detective who is the narrator written by a woman detective novelist, I have analyzed the role of individualism and action in Patricia Cornwell's novel *From Potter's Field*.

This work is divided into five major sections. After introducing the subject for the research paper and explaining the methods used to perform the research, I will continue this first section with a brief presentation of the main literature I have used in my work, followed by some information about the author Patricia Cornwell. In the second section I will present the different types of detective fiction and focus on one of them, hardboiled detective fiction. I will describe the background of the genre and take a closer look at the special characteristics focused on in my research. In the third section questions referring to gender will be discussed, such as the presence of sexual stereotyping and/or androgyny in the genre.

Section four contains the analysis of the novel and the presentation of the findings. I will use qualitative discourse analysis in my study and, as I mentioned above, focus on two characteristics of the traditional hardboiled (male) fiction: individualism and action. I will study how these traits are expressed in the novel's protagonist, the detective character Kay Scarpetta, and what effects the occurrence or the absence of these characteristics have from a feminist perspective.

The final section, section five, sums up the essay and concludes the questions and ideas discussed in the paper along with my personal reflections on the result of this research.

1.3 Literature Review

Sally R. Munt's *Murder By the Book?* (1994) has provided very useful information about the background of the different kinds of detective fiction as well as the development in the genre with focus on the female crime novel. Munt studies both British and American fiction by women crime writers in her critical overview of the wave of feminist crime novels which appeared during the 1980s. She examines generic conventions that begin to be noticed during this period. Andrew Pepper's analysis of the hardboiled detective fiction in *The Contemporary American Crime Novel: Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Class* (2000) describes in detail the history and the new trends in hardboiled crime fiction and touches on the increase in female writers and the liberal feminist ideal presented by hardboiled female detectives.

Arthur Asa Berger discusses the three dominant kinds of mysteries and the traits and interests of the different types of detective heroes in *Popular Culture Genres: Theories and Texts* (1992). While Berger distinguishes three basic types of detective stories – the classical detective story; the tough-guy, or private eye, detective story; and the police procedurals – the Bulgarian born critic Tzvetan Todorov divides detective stories into three different categories: the whodunit, the thriller, and the suspense novel. Todorov deals with the three categories of mysteries in the essay “The typology of detective fiction” in David Lodge's *Modern Criticism and Theory* (2000). The classic whodunits contain, Todorov argues, two stories: the crime and the investigation, the latter dominating our interest. The crime gives information about what happened, and the investigation tells how we know about it. The thriller was created in the United States around the time of the Second World

War according to Todorov, and in this kind of detective fiction the two stories are fused: the first story is suppressed and the second story is vitalized. The suspense novel combines the properties of the whodunit and the thriller. It keeps the mystery of the whodunit and the two stories of the past and of the present, without reducing the second story to nothing but a detection of the truth (see section 2.1).

The significance of the environment of a city as a place of action in a crime story is well illustrated by Ralph Willett in *The Naked City* (1996). The city of New York plays an important part both as a crime scene and as a hide-out in Cornwell's novel.

In *The Dynamic Detective* (2002) Karin Molander Danielsson describes in detail not only the background of the different detective characters and detective fiction, but also how the contemporary detective has developed into something more than just a detective, the academic-woman-as-detective with a professional career besides the detective work. Peter Messent discusses the shift from the private-eye novel to the police procedural in contemporary crime fiction and takes a closer look at Patricia Cornwell's work in the latter genre in a chapter of *Criminal Proceedings. The Contemporary American Crime Novel* (1997). In another chapter of the same book Sabine Vanacker describes the creation of feminist heroes in the rising feminist detective novels. Vanacker has chosen the American crime novelists Sara Paretsky, Sue Grafton and Patricia Cornwell for her study. Vanacker's views on feminist crime fiction have proved to be invaluable to my work.

Gender and detective fiction are discussed by Carolyn Heilbrun in *Hamlet's Mother and Other Women. Feminist Essays on Literature* (1990). Heilbrun explains how the term "androgyny," a term also recognized by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* (1965), is of interest in contradistinction to sexual stereotyping in detective fiction. Robin Lakoff discusses the difference between male and female bonding, as well as the use of euphemisms, of titles and of first names in *Language and Woman's Place* (1975), and I

apply her analysis on these subjects to conversations in this novel. Jennifer Coates describes gender and conversational style and stereotypical differences in language in *Women, Men and Language* (1993) and *Women Talk. Conversation between Women Friends* (1996), and her analysis has been useful in my study of the dialogues in the novel.

In *Linguistics for Students of Literature* (1980) Elizabeth Closs Traugott and Mary Louise Pratt talk about fictional discourse and fictional speaker, and describe the term “first person narrator”, which is well illustrated in *From Potter’s Field*. They also discuss the meaning of a shift from title to first name in a conversation, brought up by Cornwell in the novel as an example of the detective character Kay Scarpetta’s experience of being a woman in a man’s world.

The meaning of the term “metaphor” is discussed by Edward Finegan in *Language: Its Structure and Use* (1999) as well as by Berger (1999). Cornwell’s characters Kay Scarpetta and her niece Lucy use metaphors when they refer to male criminals in the novel and when they refer to a computer.

1.4 About the Author

Patricia Cornwell was born in 1956 in Miami, Florida. After graduating from college she started as a reporter for *the Charlotte Observer* in 1979. After a while she became a police reporter and in 1984 she took a job as a technical writer at the morgue in the Virginia medical examiner’s office. Later she worked as a computer analyst at the same office. She also volunteered to be a city cop. Her first book was *A Time for Remembering* (1983), a biography of Ruth Bell Graham, wife of evangelist Billy Graham. Her first three crime novels, written between 1984 and 1986, were all rejected. One of the editors advised her to get rid of the male detective who was the central character and expand Kay Scarpetta, who then only played a minor role. In 1990 her first crime novel, *Postmortem*, was published,

the first novel to win the Edgar, Creasy, Anthony and Macavity awards as well as the French Prix du Roman d'Adventure in a single year. Several of her books are loosely based on real crimes in the Virginia area. In 2006 Cornwell published her 17th crime novel starring Kay Scarpetta, *At Risk* (Nielsen).

Patricia Cornwell's style of writing is described by critic Peter Messent (1997, 2) as closely related to police procedural. The police procedural emerged in the United States. In 1956 Ed McBain published the first three novels in a series about the 87th precinct. His work introduced several features which have become standard in police procedurals, for instance an emphasis on the police collective and on the day-to-day routines and procedures. McBain uses the police collective as protagonist, while contemporary written police procedurals often focus on a single policeman or a pair (Danielsson 2002, 60 – 61). According to Messent (1997) the police procedural supplants the private-eye novel and its rule-bending individualism as realistic crime fiction (12). He claims that Patricia Cornwell's fiction is an example of a crossover between the two genres: the forensic pathologist Scarpetta has the knowledge and skills that give her the superior understanding needed to solve the case, and she works with both the local police force and the FBI (12 – 13).

In the novel *From Potter's Field*, published in 1995, Dr. Kay Scarpetta gets involved in a murder hunt where the killer, Temple Brooks Gault, is known to Scarpetta and her colleagues Peter Marino and Benton Wesley from previous murder cases. This time the crimes affect Scarpetta personally, and as the chase for the murderer escalates, Scarpetta finds herself in a situation where both she and her niece Lucy's life are at risk.

2. DETECTIVE FICTION

2.1 A Genre of Variation

The genre of detective fiction is today one of the most popular genres in the world of literature with a great succession of subgenres. The classic “whodunit,” the hardboiled adventure and the police procedural are just a few examples of versions of a very successful formula that had its origin in 1841, the year when Edgar Allan Poe’s *Murder in the Rue Morgue* was published, introducing the first fictional detective, C. Auguste Dupin (Munt 1994, 2). In this story, followed by two others, several of the modern classic mystery story conventions were established, such as the eccentric detective protagonist (Berger 1992, 81). This trait was even more developed in Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, who appeared in *A Study in Scarlet* over forty years later in 1887 (Munt 1994, 2).

Within the next forty years detective fiction developed and became an established genre with certain characteristics or formulaic elements (Danielsson 2002, 21). One of the conventions of detective fiction is, as mentioned above, the detective character and I will go into detail about this specific element later in this section. Another conventional element, which can still be found in contemporary fiction, is the structure itself (Danielsson 2002, 22). The Bulgarian born critic Tzvetan Todorov uses the paradigm of the double narrative when he describes the detective fiction structure. Todorov bases his argument on the alleged duality found in classic detective fiction, often called the whodunit, which reached its peak in the interwar period or the so-called Golden Age. Todorov (2000) suggests that this type of novel contains two stories, one of the crime and one of the investigation, where the first story tells what happened and the second how the reader knows about it (139 – 140). Todorov’s opinion in this matter is shared by several other critics, and as Arthur Asa Berger (1992) points out, the two stories are differently focused

in different kind of mysteries (85). In the classic detective fiction the narrative of the investigation is used to reconstruct the story of the crime, little by little, giving the reader the illusion of being able to solve the case in parallel with the detective. While the narratives in this way are kept in balance, the situation is different in the hardboiled detective story. In this form of mystery, which had become the more dominant type of detective story in North America in the interwar years, the narrative of investigation is more important than the story of the crime and the revelation of the culprit (Danielsson 2002, 33 – 34). Applied to this research on *From Potter's Field*, the structure used in the novel would be the latter one with focus on the investigation of the murders by a perpetrator whose identity is revealed already in the first chapter.

While the difference in structure between classic detective fiction and hardboiled detective fiction concerns mainly the focus of the crime investigation, the narrative world and social setting are the conventional elements that constitute the most important difference between classic and hardboiled detective fiction (Danielsson 2002, 23).

According to Danielsson (2002) the connection between narrative world, setting and crime is still important in contemporary detective fiction, even if the line between classic and hardboiled is not as well-defined today as it once was (23).

The traditional classic detective fiction peaked, as mentioned earlier, during the Golden Age, a period between the publication of Agatha Christie's first novel in 1920 to the last novel by Dorothy L. Sayers in 1937 (Munt 1994, 7). The two star authors of the classic detective fiction genre were English, as were the settings of their novels. The English detective novel had a setting that was typically Edenic, the Great Good Place, according to W.H. Auden (in Danielsson 2002, 35), and the calm and cozy English country village where Christie's and Sayers' crime scenes were set can well fit that description. The narrative world has been described as a centered world where nothing happens randomly,

where there is always a motive for murder and a rational solution to the crime (Danielsson 2002, 37). The world described is that of the upper or the upper middle class societies, where crime is considered a threat to life, property and even the entire structure which they represent. An example of this is when a wealthy, upper class character, living in the peaceful country village, is murdered by a distant earlier unknown relative of lower class whose plan is to inherit the fortune that was supposed to go to a more appropriate and good relative of the deceased had it not been for the devious intruder. The murder is an attack on the centred world and not until the culprit has been disclosed and apprehended is the threat to the high or upper middle class society gone and everything returns to order (Danielsson 2002, 38 – 39).

While the English formal detective story replicated itself over and over again using the prescribed structure, American detective fiction diverged into a more indigenous product, affected by the spirit of individual achievement in the diverse and entrepreneurial USA (Munt 1994, 2). Crime was not seen as it had been in the classic detective fiction, something atypical in the secure, highly moral and well-ordered genteel English society. Writers of the so-called hardboiled detective stories presented a grim urban world where crime was part of the institutional superstructure of American life. Shady businessmen, conniving politicians, corrupt police departments and morally corrupt judges are common elements in the narrative world of these novels (Pepper 2000, 10). Unlike the classic detective fiction, this is a decentred world where murder often is incidental and not even the motivation for the story (Danielsson 2002, 37). It is, as I mentioned earlier, the investigation of the crime and not the crime itself that is of interest in the hardboiled detective fiction. Death is not significant to society as a whole, crimes are committed against individuals rather than against society (Danielsson 2002, 38). The victims of crime have to rely not on the corrupt authorities but on the detective, the private eye, for help.

While the classic detective, for instance Agatha Christie's Poirot, performs his investigation mainly by questioning people and using his logic to solve the murder puzzle, the work of the hardboiled private eye is usually filled with action. The independent detective's work is not appreciated by the authorities, and certainly not by the criminals who try, in different ways, to put an end to the detective's work and, not seldom, to his life. The tension in hardboiled detective fiction is built up not only through the detective's hunt for the criminals, usually gangsters, but also by the fact that his own life can be at risk. I will come back to the different types of detectives in the section below.

The first hardboiled detective novel was Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest* which came out in 1929. Fifteen years later Hammett published an essay called "The Simple Art of Murder", where he formulates rules and recommendations for the genre (in Danielsson 2002, 26 – 27). He describes a narrative world with a setting far from the English country village where the American-speaking murderers are placed in a world where nations and cities are ruled by gangsters and no one can walk down a dark street in safety because of the lack of law and order. According to Carl D. Malmgren this world undermines order and stability, two of the basic predicates of the classic detective world (in Danielsson 2002, 28). The dark streets imply an urban setting where the detective's role is to reveal whatever the city conceals, like crime and corruption (Willett 1996, 6). The hardboiled detective novel has historically been a mainly urban form (Willett 1996, 9). The criminals have often found refuge in the underground, like the labyrinthlike basement of a house or the subways which offer hide-outs and escape channels (Willett 1996, 71). Their appearance in public spaces like theatres, museums or monuments has been seen as a threat to the middle classes (Willett 1996, 135 – 136).

In today's detective fiction the English country village and the big city can still be found along with other kinds of settings (Danielsson 2002, 42). The world described in *From*

Potter's Field has several traits that can be referred to as hardboiled detective fiction characteristics: the hunt for the murderer Temple Gault takes place in the New York subway system, which he uses as a hide-out and escape channel. Further, Gault takes one of his victims to a museum prior to the killing of her and then, after the murder, places the body against a monument – the criminal's use of “middle class public space”, another characteristic mentioned above. New York, the big city, the metropolis, is perhaps the most significant trait of the conventional settings in *From Potter's Field* as the place where the more spectacular part of the murder hunt takes place. The big city is also the traditional setting for another subgenre that has emerged in later years, a genre that Patricia Cornwell's work is claimed to be closely related to – the police procedural (Messent 1997, 2). Today when the investigation of crime more and more depends on sophisticated scientific techniques and quickly being able to compare information on a large-scale and official basis, the traditional private detective seems almost irrelevant (Messent 1997, 2). The police procedural can claim to show how crimes are investigated in a realistic fashion (Danielsson 2002, 61). The view on the crime-solving detective has changed, and Cornwell's protagonist Kay Scarpetta is one example of the new type of detective in contemporary detective fiction. Scarpetta is a forensic pathologist whose work is often described in detail as a part of the ongoing crime investigation, for instance an autopsy on the killer's victim or the use of scientific techniques in order to discover trace evidence on a victim's body. Scarpetta's profession and the depiction of how it is performed add a realistic touch to the crime investigation described in the novel, and fits the aim of the police procedural. I will develop the role of the detective in the following section.

2.2 Watching the Detective

As I mentioned earlier, one of the conventions of detective fiction established by Edgar Allan Poe in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* is the eccentric detective. Many detectives with various curious personality traits have followed upon Poe's C. Auguste Dupin and these personality traits have contributed to the readers' interest in the detective stories (Berger 1992, 81). A good example of this kind of detective is Arthur Conan Doyle's detective character Sherlock Holmes. Holmes is a man of supreme intellect and cool rationality, a mythical man with a reflective side-kick, Dr. Watson, by his side (Munt 1994, 2). The classic detective is often seen through the eyes of a companion, like Dr. Watson, who also reveals his brave and exciting adventures. The detective is a private citizen with an interest in crime and he has never been a member of a police organization (Berger 1992, 85 – 86), or he has left behind official employment with the police. The classic detective is a rational and scientific gatherer of clues who does not rely on intuition or accident, allowing the reader to solve the mystery together with the detective. The murder investigation is more of an intellectual exercise than a murder hunt packed with action (Danielsson 2002, 26).

The traditional hardboiled detective story, on the other hand, is characterized by action and violence and the detective, the so-called private eye, works outside the social order with his own moral purpose. The detective is always a man and traditionally described as tough, honest, loyal to his own values, and a man who fights his battle against urban chaos on his own (Munt 1994, 2 – 3). He is a hero who reveals whatever the city conceals like crimes and corruptions. His language is terse, laconic and witty and he is often referred to as a wisecrack with no respect for authority and institutional power (Willett 1996, 6 – 7). He may be acquainted, but never friendly, with the local police, and his murder hunt is never sanctioned by the authorities. The gangsters want him because of his work, and so do

the police. He is a complete man, never afraid but isolated, unwilling or unable to form any lasting relationships (Danielsson 2002, 43 – 44). Raymond Chandler's detective hero Marlowe is an example of this "lonely hero", who has many acquaintances but few friends or no family, and where the investigated crime initially does not touch his personal life (Danielsson 2002, 46).

As I mentioned above, the private eye stories, the traditional hardboiled detective fiction, are giving way to the police procedural. In contemporary fiction in this genre the private investigator is replaced by a single policeman or a pair. Collective protagonist police procedurals exist but have not been as successful as these single or pair protagonist novels. Although the police detectives belong to the police collective, they are often not far removed from the classic detective or the hardboiled private investigator (Danielsson 2002, 61). The police procedural engages a bureaucratic machinery, but is not necessarily sceptical about individual agency and the power of the detective. Patricia Cornwell's work is a good example of this as well as of the fact that a detective is no longer only a detective (Messent 1997, 12). Cornwell's heroine Kay Scarpetta is, as mentioned earlier, a forensic pathologist and chief medical examiner of Virginia who also works to solve crimes, using the resources of the local police force and the FBI. Her relationship with the two groups is not always comfortable but definitely closer than the conventional hardboiled detective's relation to the authorities (a relation that changes later, however, as she quits her position as chief medical examiner of Virginia in the novel *The Last Precinct* (2000)). Scarpetta's access to local and national information and surveillance services is crucial for her detective work. Like Poe's detective Dupin, she becomes the one with the superior understanding necessary to solve the crime, using her forensic abilities and knowledge and skill with the high-tech tools of her trade (Messent 1997, 13). In *From Potter's Field*, the autopsy of the main victim, the murderer's sister, performed by Scarpetta and her team

bringing useful information to the investigation is an example of how Scarpetta's expertise is used in the murder hunt. The fact that the detective today often is more than just a detective has resulted in a great variety of styles, settings, and detectives. The detective can be a teacher, a caterer, a Native American or an activist for black, gay, or women's rights.

Contemporary detective fiction has become infused with special interests of many kinds, and the crime novel representing a feminist ideology with a woman hero at centre is one example of special interest in this genre. Cornwell's fiction belongs here, and in the following section I will look into different aspects of gender.

3. GENDER

3.1 A Suitable Genre for a Woman?

The archetypal image of the detective hero is "the man in the mac," a man alone in his mission, a mythic hero – in short, a man (Munt 1994, 1). All meaning in the text is distributed through the male detective, and in these conventional detective stories the few women who appear do not act – they react to the male characters (Munt 1994, 4). The first female crime novel, *The Dead Letter*, was written in 1866 by Seely Register, and the first female detective appeared in 1861. In the early days of female crime fiction structures characteristic for woman emerged, like the coded employment of stereotypes such as the refined white-haired spinster or the naive young virgin (Munt 1994, 6). In the inter-war years greater work and leisure opportunities for women resulted in many new woman writers, among them writers of detective stories (Munt 1994, 11). The canonization of women crime writers began with the earlier mentioned Golden Age period 1920 – 1937. Agatha Christie's women sleuths and feminized heroes were very popular among woman

readers and writers, the woman's social role being the same - putting the pattern together and restoring order in a shaken world between two wars (Munt 1994, 8). Dorothy L. Sayers was interested in stretching the specific cultural limitations imposed upon women by femininity. Her detective character Harriet Vane is considered to be the first strong, independent, and sexually active young heroine, a literary role model for writers like P.D. James, who created the detective character Cordelia Gray thirty years later (Munt 1994, 10).

Where the British "country cozy" often has been located as feminine by critics, the urban nightmare has been seen as masculine (Munt 1994, 13). Hardboiled fiction in America has conventionally had a white, heterosexual, male perspective (Messent 1997, 1). The rise of the feminist detective novel, starting in the 1980s, has redirected the genre from being conservative with sometimes sexist gender views and marginal female characters to representing a feminist ideology with a woman hero at its center. According to critic Sabine Vanacker (1997), writers like Patricia Cornwell have created feminist detectives using those conventional characteristics of the crime genre they see as empowering and liberating for women at the same time as they signal awareness of antifeminist aspects and try to undermine these (62 – 63). Below in section four, I will examine two of these characteristics in Cornwell's heroine Kay Scarpetta, characteristics that some critics have declared as only superficially hardboiled. A hardboiled ideological orientation, according to this opinion, is a particular way of seeing the world which by its nature re-inscribes white, patriarchal values (Pepper 2000, 53). Knowledge and the detective's attitude toward it are other aspects of the genre which are being redefined. The author of meaning is a woman instead of a man, and the signs and clues will be interpreted from a feminist perspective. Knowledge is power, and in feminist detective novels a subjective, involved, and empathic type of knowing is the opposite ideal of the Western male ideal of

unemotional, objective, distanced knowledge. According to Sabine Vanacker (1997), Patricia Cornwell's detective Kay Scarpetta has the desired attitude toward knowledge, she is affected by her research, remembers the faces of every victim's parents, and combines professional impartiality with an imaginative and empathic reconstruction of the murder. Scarpetta typically retraces the murderer's or victim's step, as she does in *From Potter's Field*, to find previously overlooked clues. Cornwell foregrounds the emotional response her detective receives as a pathologist/detective who through her profession allows the victims to be heard (78 – 83).

The genre has developed in many different directions. The representation of the relationship between the individual detective and the existing social order can be used to challenge dominant values and stereotypes, including those about women (Messent 1997, 17).

3.2 The New Woman of the 1980s

The female investigator who appears in the detective novels of the 1980s represents several liberal feminist issues. One of the most important appears to be independence. The female protagonist is not only independent as a detective but also in her social relations. She is sexually independent, and she is often more or less cut off from her family (Munt 1994, 47 – 49). Patricia Cornwell's hero Kay Scarpetta does have a living parent and a sibling, but the relationship with them is uneasy and she keeps them at a distance (Vanacker 1997, 76). Her relation to her niece Lucy, who is neglected by her mother, is very close though. The introduction of children, or other dependants, is a way to show the importance of community and the detective's role in that community (Danielsson 2002, 101), while avoiding the social ideal of mother. Relationships like the one between Kay Scarpetta and her niece are an example of the female detective's independence not being the kind that

isolates her and makes her a complete and separate unit as the conventional male detectives are (Vanacker 1997, 73).

The isolation of the hardboiled male detective becomes the loneliness and vulnerability of a successful woman in a masculine hierarchy, which is another issue thematized in the feminist detective fiction. Patricia Cornwell's hero Kay Scarpetta is an example of a lonely woman in a large male organization, where female solidarity has no significant oppositional power. Her professional status is questioned in almost every novel (Vanacker 1997, 76 – 77).

Describing women characters in detective fiction in terms of independence, strength and power is a break with the conventions of the early hardboiled detective fiction. Carolyn Heilbrun (1990) claims, as I have mentioned earlier, that it is the women detective writers with women detectives who have brought about the greatest change, a change that means moving away from gender stereotypical sex roles toward androgyny (248 – 249). Heilbrun noted that this change had gone further in the United States than elsewhere, but since her analysis this has spread to England, Sweden, Germany, Israel, and many other countries.

One characteristic of the androgynous person is ability to cope. Stereotypical males and females are unable to act when they find themselves in an unprescribed situation (Heilbrun 1990, 245). Patricia Cornwell's protagonist Kay Scarpetta, an independent, brave, successful, and professional woman detective would certainly fit the description of the androgynous person.

4. FINDINGS

In this section I will focus on two specific characteristics of the male detective in the traditional hardboiled detective fiction – individualism and action – and examine how these traits are expressed in the female detective character Kay Scarpetta in the novel *From Potter's Field* by Patricia Cornwell. I will describe and analyse each of the characteristics in separate sections.

In the novel *From Potter's Field* Kay Scarpetta is about to join her family for the Christmas holiday when the discovery of a naked, female body in Central Park in New York leads to an immediate change of plan for the novel's protagonist. The manner of death points to Temple Brooks Gault, a serial killer who Scarpetta has encountered earlier but not, unfortunately, been able to catch. This time Gault encroaches on Scarpetta's personal life, for instance by sending her mail to her unlisted home address, by delivering one of his victims to the morgue where she works and committing another murder while she is in the building, and by sabotaging the FBI's database computer, programmed and run by Scarpetta's niece Lucy. Both Scarpetta and her niece literally risk their lives in pursuit of the killer. With the assistance of colleagues Peter Marino and Benton Wesley, Scarpetta tracks the killer down to his hide-out in the New York underground, where the chase comes to an end.

4.1 Individualism

The term "individualism" can be described as the behaviour or attitude of someone who does things in their own way without being influenced by other people (Longman 2003, 829). Another word that could describe the terms of life for an individualist is

independence. As I have mentioned earlier, the conventional private detective is a man who depends on no one and performs the investigation by himself using his own rules. He is not on friendly terms with the authorities. Apart from occasional relations with women, he has no family ties. His detective colleague Kay Scarpetta is a woman of the 1990s (in *From Potter's Field*), whose social and professional independence does not look quite the same as his.

4.1.1 Professional Independence

It lies in her title – the Chief Medical Examiner of Virginia is most likely allowed quite a lot of independence in performing her work, as long as she keeps herself within the law. It is Kay Scarpetta's role as a consulting forensic pathologist for the FBI that could challenge her professional independence as she needs to have a good relation with the police force to be able to perform her consulting duties. Her relation to Captain Peter Marino is based on mutual respect for the professional ability they both possess, and over the years their relationship has become more than just a professional one, as this passage shows:

“You're the only woman friend I got”, he said. “But you're more like a guy.”

“Why, thank you.”

“I can talk to you like a guy. And you know what you're doing. You didn't get where you are because you're a woman. Goddam it” – he squinted into the rearview mirror, then adjusted it to diminish the glare – “you got where you are in spite of your being one” (157).

What Marino expresses here is not only praise of Scarpetta as a friend and a skilled colleague, but also his understanding of what an effort it has been for her to pursue her career and achieve the positions she has in an obviously male-dominated profession. By the way he describes Scarpetta as his only woman friend, someone he can talk to as if she was

a man, it seems like Scarpetta has become a friend of his in spite of her being a woman.

Marino is part of a male-dominated organization, the police force, and he recognises the difficulties a career woman experiences as he sees it from the other side: he obviously finds women difficult to be friends with, or perhaps to understand properly, himself, and most of his male colleagues probably experience the same towards women in the force.

Scarpetta is more familiar with the situation Marino's female colleagues have to deal with. In one of her conversations with an old colleague, she reminisces "the old days when there were few forensic pathologists and I was the only woman" (49), indicating the picture of a not only independent and focused woman in the early days of her career, but also a lonely woman with no female colleagues to confer with. The circumstances have seemingly not improved later in her career. "You guys can have your little secret. I'm sick and tired of your little secrets," (268) Scarpetta states as she is refused information from FBI officer Benton Wesley because the army – another male-dominated organization – consider it to be a matter of national security. Later in the conversation, Scarpetta exclaims: "I'm tired of boys and their codes of honour. I'm tired of male bonding and secrecy" (270) when she learns that the army wants to hide the fact that the killer, Temple Gault, is related to a Medal of Honour-winning two-star general. Scarpetta experiences what Lakoff (1975) describes as the 20th century reflexes of male bonding in primitive times. This is, according to Lakoff, what enables men to work together in, for instance, the army or the police force, as, she argues, any powerful group, to retain its power, must have some sort of cohesive force underlying it, making its members work as a team (77). Scarpetta obviously finds it hard to be accepted as a member of the team, in spite of her qualifications and skills.

In many situations Scarpetta is the only woman in a male environment, which often makes her have to justify her position or professional role. She is presumed to be a social worker, the assumed role of a woman, when she accompanies Marino on a mission in a

rough part of her hometown, Richmond, and is asked by a member of the media to give way to the press. Marino corrects the prejudiced cameraman in his own way, “if you had half a brain you’d know she ain’t with social services” (6).

Awareness of her profession as Chief Medical Examiner does not always rend her the expected respect though. When Richmond’s chief of police Paul Tucker in their first meeting suggests that she should call him by his first name she continues to address him by his title – “I did not tell him he could call me Kay, because after many years of being a woman in a world such as this, I had learned” (13). To insist on the use of titles is an effective means of achieving distance between the speaker and the addressee (Lakoff 1975, 65). If Scarpetta were to agree on the suggested shift from title to first name, this would, according to Traugott and Pratt (1980), serve as an invitation to redefine a collegueship as a friendship (227). By the words “being a woman in a world such as this, I had learned,” Scarpetta indicates that it is not likely that Tucker is eager to be the friend of someone who because of her sex never could be a member of his team. Scarpetta wants to avoid being defined by anything else but her professional role as long as she does not make the choice herself, as in friend or love relations.

In three-star command officer Frances Penn, Scarpetta finds another ambitious and successful woman making her career in the male-dominated police force. During an informal conversation between the two career women, Commander Penn says that she gets the impression that Scarpetta, like herself, “has always been an overachiever who cannot accept failure” (93) and that she believes that “there are many women like us. Yet we never seem to get together, have you ever noticed that?” (93). The struggle for a successful career on their own terms in a man’s world obviously means that there is no support to be expected either by male or female colleagues or equals. It is, indeed, lonely at the top for Kay Scarpetta.

4.1.2. Social Independence

The conventional hardboiled detective is often described as a lonely hero, a lone wolf, who prefers his own company to the company of others. When Scarpetta introduces herself in the first lines in the very first chapter of *From Potter's Field*, these characteristics seem to fit quite well. Scarpetta is a passenger in Marino's car on a mission and explains how "it was rare I was driven" (3), and that "usually, I was the lone pilot of the blue morgue van I took to scenes of violent and inexplicable death" (3). This is a woman who obviously is prepared to confront the horrors of a crime scene on her own and seems to have no complaint about that. Another example of Scarpetta's almost heroic approach to a situation is when, after having been contacted by the killer through personal mail to her unlisted home address, she refuses to accept protection. She will not leave her home, "this is where I live" (165), or have any kind of body guard: "I am not hiring anybody and I insist on driving my own car" (169). She describes how she keeps guns in her house in places where she can get to them easily. Later, when Scarpetta has agreed to let Marino sleep on the couch, she lowers her guard and reveals how she feels that Temple Gault is trying to take away everything from her: her home, her car, her work – her life. "Little by little I will lose all that I have and all that I've been. Because of him"(170).

When Scarpetta is back at her office, alone, to do some work on the case, she suddenly hears footsteps and is prepared to shoot the intruder she fears is Temple Gault. When instead her niece Lucy appears on the doorstep, Scarpetta collapses from the shock of being so close to killing her beloved niece. She is taken to the hospital, where she heroically declares that nothing is wrong with her, nothing "that a paper bag over my head and a hot bath wouldn't have fixed" (210). A little while later she confesses to Dr. Anna Zenner, who is an elderly psychiatrist and an old friend of hers, how she really feels: "I fear it is finally

getting to me... these cases” (211). After crying and letting herself be comforted by her friend, she says she feels ashamed of herself, and is then told not to feel like that, and instead allow herself to “let it out. You don’t do that enough and I know what you see” (211). Scarpetta is a hero, but not only in her attitude towards crime and the way she refuses to let the horrors of it stop her doing her work. Scarpetta fights for her independence, the life she has created and what she holds dear, and by doing so she is her own hero.

During the conversation with Dr. Zenner at the hospital, Scarpetta reveals another suppressed emotion – guilt. “My mother is very ill and I have not been down to Miami to see her. Not once” (212). Unlike the conventional detective, she does have family ties, her mother and sister in Miami and her niece Lucy at the FBI. At the time of the first killing Scarpetta is about to leave her home in Richmond to spend the Christmas holiday with her family. When she cancels her trip it is, as she explains to Benton Wesley, not for the first time: “Lucy is there, and as usual I’m not. Do you have any idea how many holidays with my family I’ve missed?” (40). On the phone with her sister, Scarpetta experiences how “a dull ache welled in my chest” (62) when the sister, in a sharp voice, describes how she has to spend the Christmas with their mother at hospital and how she feels about her sister in Virginia: “you’ve spent most of your life worrying about dead people...I think all your relationships are with dead” (62). Later Scarpetta reflects on the relation to her mother and sister and how they were unhappy with her because she “had not done what they wanted, and whenever that was the case, I furiously wanted to quit them as if they were a bad job or a vice” (65). The relation with her niece Lucy is different; Scarpetta worries about Lucy, “whom I had always loved as if she were my daughter” (65). When she comforts Lucy in times of trouble, she does it “in the firm tone of a mother” (145). When Scarpetta claims to be “a terrible daughter and a rotten aunt,” (89) Lucy’s answer “you’re not always a rotten

aunt” (89) is as much a comfort as an assurance to Scarpetta that the relation between aunt and niece is close.

Scarpetta has no children and she is not married. Her relation with Benton Wesley, who is married – “a committed husband and father” (66) – is not uncomplicated. Scarpetta explains to Wesley how she feels about their relation: “I feel the same way most people do when they’re having an affair. Guilt, shame, fear, sadness. I get headaches and you lose weight” (66). At the end of the murder hunt in which they both are involved, Scarpetta foreshadows the end of their love relation: “I don’t know what to do, either. I keep wanting someone to tell me. But I don’t want this, Benton. I want what we’ve had and I don’t want it ever” (306).

Scarpetta’s love relations might not be as casual as the conventional hardboiled detective’s – “I don’t think I could be intimate with someone who does not understand what it’s like for me” (41) – but, like his, they do not last. Scarpetta is a sexually independent woman in the meaning that she knows what she wants from a relationship and that she is, as it appears, prepared to end a relation that does not live up to her expectations. The fact that she is involved with a married man seems like a trait of a rather conventional gender role though, albeit usually a man’s, and not the kind of relation that would describe independence. For the conventional male detective this kind of relation would probably not affect the impression of him as an independent man. From a feminist point of view Scarpetta’s love relation could possibly be seen as an example of the danger this kind of relationship is to the woman detective’s – or to any woman’s – independence.

Since Scarpetta is characterized as a woman who claims her independence both professionally and socially, it is convenient that she is the one who tells her own story. Scarpetta is what Traugott and Pratt (1980) refer to as the fictional speaker, or narrator. When the fictional speaker is explicitly identified as a character with a name, and refers to

him or herself as “I”, he or she is a first person narrator (256). Kay Scarpetta refers to herself as “I”, and the story is told from her perspective. She gives us information about her character through the dialogues and through the text. She refers to what, according to her, has been said in the conversations between the characters and what personal reflections she makes. She describes both what happens and what she feels about it: the guilt she feels for not being able to spend the Christmas holiday with her family, the shock she experiences from almost having killed her niece, or the mixed emotions she has about her love affair with a married man. As a first person narrator she has the privilege to decide what to reveal about her character, which suits the true individualist she is.

As I have mentioned earlier Kay Scarpetta would fit the description of an androgynous person who has both male and female parts (Longman 2003, 48), meaning that the picture Cornwell presents of her woman hero is complex. Scarpetta’s character is independent of what society and her family expect from her: she will not be addressed “Kay” instead of “Dr. Scarpetta” and thus be defined by her sex and not her profession, she will not have protection from the murderer because that would be giving up her identity which is formed by her and no one else, and she tries to cope with her mother’s and sister’s reaction when she will not act the good daughter or the good sister they want her to be. She, and she alone, defines the person she is and what she can and can not do. The feminist values she stands for become very clear.

Another character who could be described as a woman with androgynous traits is command officer Frances Penn. From the conversation between her and Kay Scarpetta we learn that Frances Penn, similar to Scarpetta, is a highly qualified and ambitious woman in a profession dominated by men (see section 4.1.1). Scarpetta describes her as “imposing, yet...neither severe nor cold...not...militaristic, but dignified” (81). Her first name, Frances, is very close to the male Francis. She, too, is an independent woman who lives

alone in an elegant, tidy apartment. Kay Scarpetta is impressed by her choice of literature, including Shelby Foote's volumes on the American civil war, which probably is the sort of literature that more often is found on bookshelves in a man's apartment than in a woman's.

Interestingly enough, Cornwell also visualizes androgyny in the meaning "looking both female and male" (Longman 2003, 48). The first murder victim turns out to be Temple Gault's sister, a woman described as poorly muscled, thin, tall, with shaved head and by witnesses mistaken for a man. During the autopsy Scarpetta discovers that she has undergone a hysterectomy that had removed her uterus – a removal of the organ that symbolizes womanhood. Later, Scarpetta learns from Temple Gault's parents that he and his sister were twins and that "people used to confuse them and think she was a boy" (299). Temple Gault's impression of himself was "magical, a god who wore a human body" (1), thus neither a man nor a woman, and appearing in a bad dream Scarpetta perceives him as a figure "with a face like a white balloon" with a "chilly smile" looking "both dead and alive and seemed to have no gender" (168). The Gault twins are two sides of the same coin, male and female so united that any signs of either sex is almost deleted. Scarpetta's character is, obviously, of another kind – a combination of male and female that makes a complexity and not a nullity. Virginia Woolf's (1965) definition of an androgynous person as a person who is not "a man or a woman pure and simply" (102) but rather one who is "womanly or man-womanly" (102) supports a description of Scarpetta's character as androgynous.

Where both meanings of the word androgynous refer to the characteristics of a person, an equivalent definition for an object could be something looking neither male nor female. This description could fit the Crime Artificial Intelligence Network, CAIN, which is the centralized computer system Scarpetta's niece Lucy has developed for the FBI. CAIN is linking police departments and other investigative agencies to one database maintained by

the FBI, and is supposed to alert police that they could be dealing with a violent offender who has committed rapes or murders elsewhere before (86 – 87). Temple Gault sabotages the FBI's database computer, and when Lucy becomes aware of that something is wrong she observes how "CAIN seems to be sending messages that he hasn't been instructed to send...as if he's thinking for himself" (87). Later she notices how "CAIN is not doing what we're telling him to do. He's doing something else, getting his instructions from somewhere else" (122). On one occasion Lucy runs "to the room where CAIN lived" (260). Lucy refers to CAIN as "he" instead of as "it", as if CAIN had been a person instead of a computer system. Lucy's relation to CAIN indicates that CAIN means something more than just a computer system, that it is a metaphor. Finegan defines the word metaphor as "an extension of a word's use beyond its primary meaning to include referents that bear some similarity to the word's primary referent" (592). CAIN is a computer system, which contains information about (male) rapists and killers. This information could be described as a mark of Cain, a mark of evil, for the (male) criminals who are registered in the database. Cain is a character in the Bible, who killed his brother. Temple Gault is a serial killer who, in *From Potter's Field*, kills his own sister. Scarpetta refers to CAIN as "the creation [Lucy] has named after the world's first murderer" (262). Thus, CAIN is connected with crime committed by men, which can explain Lucy's reference to CAIN as "he."

Another metaphor with reference to Temple Gault is Scarpetta's definition of Gault as a computer virus, which also could be described as something that is neither male nor female. Scarpetta describes Gault as "a virus", which had "gotten into our bodies and our buildings and our technology" (125). The computer virus is invisible, and Gault uses the virus to be able to hide his use of CAIN (264), just as he uses the New York subway system as a hide-out. A virus is a metaphoric intruder in a computer system, just like a

medical virus is an intruder in a person's body and Temple Gault is an intruder in people's lives.

4.2 Action

In the conventional hardboiled detective fiction the male detective hero often appears in a lot of exciting scenes. He gets into fights with people, he chases criminals in dark and labyrinthlike streets in the big city, and there are of course killings. Several of these elements of action appear in *From Potter's Field*, in different forms.

4.2.1 A Sense of Action

When the reader first meets Scarpetta in the novel she is accompanying Marino on a mission on Christmas Eve driving through Richmond's housing projects after dark. Marino and Scarpetta are taking part in the town sheriff's annual donation tour among the poor, and during a visit to one of the families there is suddenly the sound of gunshot. Scarpetta, kneeling beside a little boy, describes how she folds her body over the boy, "gunshots exploding in rapid succession as the magazine of a semiautomatic [is] emptied somewhere" and how Marino yells "get down! GET DOWN!" (7). Shortly after this Scarpetta observes how "cameras, microphones crashed and fell as people screamed and fought for the door and got flat on the floor" (8) at the same time as Marino places himself "in combat stance, nine-millimeter drawn" (8). When Scarpetta shortly after this tries to save the victim of the shooting, she experiences an unpleasant situation: "I compressed his chest and blew air into his mouth, blood covered my hands and instantly turned cold on my face. I could not save him" (8).

This opening scene is certainly dramatic and filled with traditional action, although the initial action is not directly created by Scarpetta. It is Marino who has the more

conventional role as the hardboiled heroic male detective who is ready to shoot the bad guys in a violent situation. Scarpetta's contribution to the heroic action consists of her blood-stained life-saving attempt. Not until the last chapter of the novel does a similar and even more dramatic scene of action turn up.

Before then the action takes place in other forms and with Scarpetta in charge. Scarpetta is one of the best pathologists and her skills are used in the hunt for the murderer Temple Gault. This part of the killer chase is not performed in dark alleys or in subways but in the autopsy room at the morgue. Through her work the police get information not only of how the victim has died but also about the victim's identity and what has happened to her/him prior to the murder and if the killer has left any trace evidence on the body. An example of this is Scarpetta's and her colleagues' autopsy on Temple Gault's sister. At first, they are unaware of her identity, but can soon make out how and where she was killed and that the killer had left no trace evidence. It is when her teeth are charted and six unusual gold foil restorations are found that Scarpetta, after using the internet, finds the dentist who once performed the work and who can reveal the identity of the victim.

A more direct form of murder hunt takes place later, in the same morgue. Temple Gault has delivered a body, another of his victims, to the morgue and when Scarpetta and Marino investigate the circumstances, one of the police officers suddenly disappears. Fearing that Temple Gault still might be in the building, Marino and Scarpetta decide to look around. Once again it is Marino who steps into the conventional, and protecting, tough detective role while Scarpetta finds herself in a more supportive position. They take the elevator to Scarpetta's "least favourite area of the building" (186), the crematorium, a "dimly lit windowless space" (186). Scarpetta gets out her gun, ordered by Marino to stay behind him, and observes how Marino is "breathing hard and sweating profusely" (186) – the situation is tense. She realizes that the oven in the crematorium room's door is shut and that

the oven is running. Marino then turns the knob and “[shoves] the door open with his foot. His pistol is combat ready in both hands as if the oven were a brute he might have to shoot” (186). There is no Temple Gault in the room, but instead his latest victim, the police officer, is found inside the oven. Another ruthless killing, and the hunt for the murderer continues.

As I mentioned above the novel ends with the climax of the murder chase. Scarpetta and her colleagues have traced Temple Gault to the subway tunnels of New York and plan to catch him while he is on his way to collect the money his mother provides for him on a regular basis. When Gault plays a trick on them and sends his look-a-like partner to collect the money instead they realize that he has other plans. It turns out that Gault knows about the whole operation through his access to their computer system and that he is heading toward the subway station where Scarpetta, Commander Frances Penn and Scarpetta’s niece Lucy are waiting, watching his moves on the computer screen. When Lucy, convinced that the person they are watching is not Gault but his partner and, as it happens, her ex-girlfriend, suddenly leaves their hide-out armed and set on catching the assumed ex-partner, the real action starts. Scarpetta describes how she runs out after Lucy “not knowing what I would find” and ends up at an empty platform “with the shotgun ready” (335). A train rushes by carrying commuters, “few seemed to notice the woman with a shotgun or even think it odd” (335). Suddenly she hears voices and her niece screams “No! No! Don’t!” (336) and the lights go out. She follows the sound, into the train tunnel “breathing rapid, shallow breaths” (337), barely being able to see. She holds her gun “out in front to shield my head from any projection I might not see” (337). She “[smells] filth and human waste, and flesh burning” (337), the smell of a dead police officer on the tracks. In the light of a train she spots Temple Gault holding Lucy “in a choke hold, a knife at her throat” (337). She pleads to him to let go of Lucy, and as he suddenly shoves Lucy towards the rail

Scarpetta lunges for her, losing her gun in the movement. Gault gets hold of the gun and aims at Lucy, not knowing the gun has a safety. Lucy manages to escape, protected by her aunt who deliberately stays to stop Gault from following Lucy. On her knees Scarpetta reaches the knife Gault has thrown away and plunges it into his thigh, hitting an artery. Gault is in shock with blood spurting between his fingers and falls close to the rail. The chase has come to an end: “a train was coming and I did not move him free of the tracks. I walked away and did not look back” (339). Now, there is an ending that would please any conventional (male) crime reader.

4.2.2 Where the Action Is

A regular chase for criminals in dark alleys does not occur in Cornwell’s novel, but signs of the conventional settings are present. The place of crime is the city, both Richmond – “this violent town” (16) – and New York, with its jungle-like environment where the site for the murder of Temple Gault’s sister, Cherry Hill in Central Park, is described as “a very overgrown, rocky area with twisting footpaths that don’t seem to lead anywhere” (27), and “no matter how often you’ve been, you still get lost” (27). The city is a jungle where the criminals hide in the underground, here in the tunnels of the New York subway system. “Beneath the streets of Manhattan were forty-eight acres of tunnels” (97), a place Temple Gault uses as a hide-out and “a way to move around the city through the tunnels, so he could get his drugs and commit his crimes” (308). Gault has knowledge of the escape hatches in the tunnels, and uses them to escape crime scenes, like the scene of the murder of his sister. Scarpetta’s niece Lucy refers to one particular emergency exit as Gault’s “snake hole” (322), a fitting and conventional description for evil existence in the underground. Scarpetta describes Gault as “a shark swimming through the blackness of the tunnel” (334). Temple Gault is, as Scarpetta becomes aware of in the dramatic final chase

in the subway tunnel, the rat that has learnt its way through the labyrinths of the city, equivalent to the darkest alley in any conventional hardboiled detective story.

5. CONCLUSION

“It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly” (Woolf 1965, 102). A woman detective whose character is nothing but a copy of a conventional male detective in female disguise does not fit Virginia Woolf’s description of an androgynous person. A more complex character is obviously required, and the question is if Patricia Cornwell has used both sides of her mind equally, as Woolf suggests, when she has created her detective hero Kay Scarpetta. In her professional role as a top pathologist Scarpetta is very much her own boss with no one else but the governor of Virginia as supervisor. She is one of very few women in a male organization and she is aware that her sex often affects the way she is treated professionally. She refuses to be patronized and is sometimes too keen on proving her independence and invulnerability, as in situations where her life is actually threatened. Scarpetta is willing to literally risk her life rather than have a life where she would be unable to decide the conditions herself. A true individualist, but not in the sense of not caring for other people. She is not indifferent to her mother and sister, even if their constant disapproval of her life’s choice is difficult for her. The bond between her and her niece is as strong as any parent-child relation. Her love relation is deep but will probably not last, because of the unequal terms for her and her lover. Her friendship with Marino is more permanent, based on mutual respect. Where Scarpetta belongs to the new generation of detectives, the independent academic-woman-as-detective in a man’s world, Marino is her opposite with traits of the conventional tough

detective who is part of the male collective, who takes command in situations of danger, and who acts protecting towards Scarpetta. Nevertheless, their friendship is strong, possibly because their different personalities are complements that combine traditional male and contemporary female characteristics.

Scarpetta creates action both in her professional role and as a detective. Her efforts as a pathologist help the murder investigation to move forward, and as it turns out she is the one who actually puts an end to the murder hunt. Scarpetta acts, and reacts. Kay Scarpetta is a complex character, she is “womanly emotional” and “manly independent” using stereotypical phrases and she is definitely a person with an ability to cope. In reference to Tzvetan Todorov’s typology, described in section 1.3, I suggest that contemporary woman detective writers like Cornwell have brought about a modified typology: the creation of a subcategory that allows crossing over between conventional hardboiled detective fiction and contemporary woman detective fiction. Patricia Cornwell and her detective character Kay Scarpetta are certainly part of a genre in change – crime fiction moving towards androgyny. Virginia Woolf would probably agree.

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