



Female Detectives in Modern Detective Novels
An Analysis of Miss Marple and V. I. Warshawski

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since Edgar Allan Poe wrote what is today considered to be the very first detective short story, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”(1841), detective novels have fascinated a lot of people. At first the authors entertained their audience by writing exciting stories where male detectives and spies played the lead part (Berger, 1992, 81). But since then, the murder mystery has evolved and been modified many times. For example, the appearance of the female detectives first emerges in Victorian literature.

In this essay I will discuss two fictive women detectives, Christie’s Miss Marple and Paretsky’s V. I. Warshawski. These two detectives, and writers, belong to different times and cultures, but as readers, we must ask ourselves some basic questions before we start to compare them. Some of these questions I will consider later in section 1.4. but now in the beginning of this study the following two are of importance: Are there differences between female detectives in *Sleeping Murder- Miss Marple’s Last Case* and *Indemnity Only*? If there are, are they tied to the time in which the novels were written and are there other aspects that separate them?

When we begin to read a detective novel or a story, we want to enter a different world and we want to be able to identify ourselves with the cunning detective. According to Todorov (in Berger, 1992, 83) every “whodunit” –or if you like- every classical detective story “contain[s]...two stories — the crime and the investigation.” I agree with Todorov’s theory that a good whodunit should have this mix of the past and the future, the past being the crime and the future being the investigation. In my opinion, every good detective novel should include a watertight puzzle with all clues given, clear structure, the presence of suspense and a touch of humour for me to go on reading it to the end. For this limited analysis I have studied only two works of two women best-selling writers, Agatha Christie, whose woman detective first emerges in the late Victorian period, and Sara Paretsky, whose novels are contemporary

novels. Although they write in different times and cultures, stylistically and linguistically both authors remain true to their own time and culture group. In this short analysis I will attempt to find not only contrasts but also recurring features and patterns that have been used by both writers.

This study is divided into six chapters where, as I have already stated, I will analyse selected material from the detective novels. The choice of material is deliberately limited to two female writers, Agatha Christie, who writes the detective story of the 1940's¹ *Sleeping Murder- Miss Marple's Last Case* and Sara Paretsky, *Indemnity only*, which is the newer material. These writers, just like their protagonists, come from different countries and different times. While A. Christie comes from a small town in the English countryside and is a child of Victorian society, which is visible in her works, S. Paretsky is her opposite. She comes from a big modern city in the USA, where she still lives and works. Although they write in different ways, they do have some similarities. I will take a look at these later on in chapters two and three.

1.1. Background

Agatha Christie (1880 – 1976), also known as the Grand Dame of mysteries, was born September 15, 1880, in Torquay, England and was educated at home in an idyllic country setting similar to those of her novels. She left home to study music in Paris where she met and married Colonel Archibald Christie. She began to write a detective novel, which was to be published under the title *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* in 1920, in response to a challenge from her sister. During her writing career Christie wrote 71 novels, eight dramas, more than 20 short stories, some poetry and travel literature. The two main protagonists in her books are

¹ Since the novel has been published posthumously there is no indication of the exact time Agatha Christie wrote *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple's Last Case*, but according to J. B. Lethbridge we can assume it was written in the 1940's and put in the safe until after her death.

Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple (<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/LitRC>). Although her works have been published in hundreds of languages Christie, according to Sara Paretsky, “often told reporters that she regarded herself as a wife first, a writer second” (*A Woman’s Eye*, xi).

Sara Paretsky (1947 -) was born in Ames, Iowa, but now lives in Chicago, which is also where her detective Warshawski lives and works. She started her career as a writer in 1982 publishing *Indemnity Only* and has since published ten novels. All of her novels focus on the same protagonist, Victoria Iphegenia (V. I.) Warshawski and contain many of the features of the traditional detective genre but she also brings feminist themes to what has traditionally been a field of male writers (<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/LitRC>).

1.2. Summary of the Novels

As we can see from the title of this subchapter, this is where I introduce the two novels with their detectives, brilliant Miss Marple and V. I. Warshawski, and their worlds, Victorian England and the modern USA. For this study, I have chosen to analyse two primary sources: *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple’s Last Case* by Agatha Christie and *Indemnity Only* by Sara Paretsky.

Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple’s Last Case was published posthumously in 1976. Therefore, we cannot be sure of the exact time Christie wrote it, but we can assume she wrote it in the twenties or thirties. It was the last book written about Miss Marple. Christie is here telling the story of a young Gwenda Reed, a newly married girl who has come from New Zealand to search for a home in England for herself and her husband. Upon finding a house in Dillmouth, a small South Coast town, she feels strangely connected to it. More than that, she

actually remembers the house. She remembers the wallpaper in detail in one of the rooms.²

After a while Gwenda goes to visit friends in London and they go to the theatre, where a line from Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* brings to her a terrifying vision of a woman's body lying in the hall. At this time Miss Jane Marple, another member of the theatre party, is brought into the picture. Gwenda confides her distress to Miss Marple and at that point Giles Reed, Gwenda's husband and a big lover of detective stories, arrives. They all become intrigued with the mystery of this woman's death, and with Miss Marple's help, they try to solve the riddle.

As I have mentioned in the background, *Indemnity Only* was Sara Paretsky's first book and was published in 1982. The story is placed in modern times and starts with the vice-president of Chicago's biggest bank who hires V. I. Warshawski, a woman sleuth,³ to find his son. But that is not the man's real identity. In reality he is the head of the International Brotherhood of Knifegrinders, a known syndicate, and he wants V. I. to find his missing daughter. Her investigation, however, leads first to the corpse of her 'client's' murdered son. In investigating the killing and continuing her search for the missing girl, Warshawski unravels a scheme involving a union leader, a gangster and quirky insurance agents along with the surprising discovery about the identity of her client. Everything and everyone is connected, but how they are connected is the mystery. Although facing violence and trigger-happy gunmen in her pursuit, V. I. Warshawski does not give up until the truth is revealed.

² Correspondences between Gwenda's wallpaper and the wallpaper in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* are too obvious to overlook. Although the meanings are opposite, to both of these women the wallpaper is almost tangible and represents a reflection of their lives.

³ The term *sleuth* means private investigator.

1.3. Literature Review

Some of the secondary sources I use in this study are critical essays about the two main protagonists, who are women; others are articles about culture, background, even language.

In *The Dynamic Detective*, Karin Molander Danielsson analyses the narrative voice and the players in detective fiction. She also mentions Freeman's structure of the detective story, which can be applied to detective fiction.

Edward Finegan (1999) talks about morphological information as a part of the word that carries meaning (41). But Arthur Asa Berger (1999) takes this further by analysing the methodology of Vladimir Propp's studies of "sequential nature of narratives" which, Berger states, can be applied to analyse all kinds of text. He states here: "Propp studied the component parts of narratives" and his method defines "morphology" as a "study of the component parts" (1999, 47). He also speaks about the use of colours, pictures and words in different texts in this book (63-7). Some of Propp's functions of characters will be used in analysing Miss Marple and V. I. Warshawsky.

In *Popular Culture Genres, Theories and Texts*, Berger introduces features of a classical detective. He also refers to Todorov's typology of the detective fiction, which David Lodge (1999, 158-65) explains in detail in *Modern Criticism and Theory*. I will see whether these two novels fit his typology.

Fredrik Chr. Brøgger (1992) states the definition of culture and its impact on literature in his *Culture, Language, Texts: Culture Studies within the Study of English as a Foreign Language*. He defines the concept of culture here, and uses it as a component of linguistics. I will analyse this in the two novels.

In *Linguistics for Students of Literature* (1980) Traugott and Pratt state, "Stylistic choice is...regarded as a matter of form or expression"(29). But another researcher, Robin Lakoff (in Tannen, 140) takes this further by introducing the four points of her theoretical system for

understanding communicative style. I will compare the communicative styles of Miss Marple and V. I. Warshawsky.

From a gender perspective of detective fiction I consulted Carolyn G. Heilbron (1991), particularly her discussion on androgynous female detectives in *Hamlet's Mother and Other Women: Feminist Essays on Literature, Gender and Detective Fiction*.

Looking at the style of women's conversations, Jennifer Coates (*Women in Their Speech Communities*, 1988), a British researcher, suggests in her analysis that there are jointly constructed turns between speakers. She sees this kind of interaction as highly co-operative, and suggests that this is more common among female speakers (1988, 94-121). I will consider whether this is evident in the two novels.

Robin Lakoff discusses differences between euphemistic terms⁴ for "woman" and "lady" in *Language and Woman's Place* (1975). I will consider how this is applicable to the language of Miss Marple and V. I. Warshawski. In the same book she analyses woman's swearing, which I will apply to this study.

Taking this further, Deborah Tannen argues in *Gender and Discourse* (1996) the relativity of linguistic strategies. In chapter one, entitled "The Relativity of Linguistic Strategies: Rethinking Power and Solidarity in Gender and Dominance", she claims "each of the linguistic strategies that have been claimed to show dominance can also show solidarity" (19). I will see how two of these strategies, indirectness and interruption, are used in *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple's Last Case* and *Indemnity Only*.

⁴ Robin Lakoff (1975) defines the term *euphemism* in the following way: "When a word acquires a bad connotation by association with something unpleasant or embarrassing, people may search for substitutes that do not have uncomfortable effect that is, euphemisms" (19).

1.4. Research Questions

Barbara Johnstone (2000) states: “The starting point for sociolinguistic research (as for research in any area) is what classical rhetoricians called “invention,” the development of a topic” (25). In other words, to start an analysis of any sort we must first have a clear thesis. In order to develop it, we then must ask questions. Some of the research questions for this study I have already mentioned in the introduction, but all of the following have guided the research.

1. Are there differences between female detectives in these novels? If there are, are they tied to the times in which the novels were written or are there other characteristics that separate them?
2. Are there obvious differences/similarities related to the cultural aspect of the novels? If so, what are they and how are they used?
3. What is the use of language in these books? Do Christie and Paretsky give their protagonists female speech characteristics, or do they differentiate their speech by using both “women’s” and “men’s language”?
4. Are differences in the dialogues related to the gender of the protagonists? How do other factors such as relationships, personality and situation affect the dialogues?
5. How are words, colours and descriptions used in these novels and what do they tell us about the detectives? In what order are they presented?

1.5. Methods

The first step in collecting the data was to choose two detective novels where the detectives are female. The books I have chosen are Christie’s *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple’s Last Case*, published in 1976 but presumably written much earlier (see p.4), and *Indemnity*

Only by Paretsky, published in 1982. This choice was deliberate from my side; I selected these two novels so far apart in time because I wanted to compare an earlier and a later work of detective fiction, both by women.

Secondly, I selected a variety of suitable secondary sources to assist me in my work on the analysis of *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple's Last Case* and *Indemnity Only*. Some have been used in the section on Literature and Culture, and others in the chapter on Language and Culture in my research. The application of their theories I have discussed briefly in section 1.3.

2. LITERATURE AND CULTURE

In this chapter I will analyse how culture is represented in *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple's Last Case* and *Indemnity Only*. Considering that these detectives belong to different time periods, we must bear in mind that they also belong to different cultures.⁵ When reading about Miss Marple, one gets the impression of a typical elderly Victorian spinster who spends her days knitting and working in the garden and not using her brains for anything but gossiping. She comes from a small rural village called St. Mary Mead in the county of Downshire, which she sometimes leaves to go visit many of her friends. This seemingly dull impression of Miss Marple is as far away from the truth as it can get. The first time I read a Miss Marple novel, she reminded me of a snake sleeping in the sun, but ready to strike a deadly blow at any second, which she eventually did in the last chapter of the book.

On the other hand, V. I. Warshawski is portrayed as a modern American woman of Polish-Italian origin who lives and works in the big city of Chicago. Unlike Miss Marple, she must work for a living. Furthermore, the choice of her profession, being a private detective, is a statement in itself. Reading about Warshawski one can wonder why a well-educated woman

(a lawyer) would choose such a profession. Although she lives in the big city, there are some similarities between the neighbourhood she lives in and St. Mary Mead. I compare the two in this study.

There are many different approaches one can use in analysing literature from the cultural aspect, but I have chosen to analyse the women detectives, their working conditions and, last but not least, the murderers and the victims.

2.1. The Women Detectives

As I have mentioned above, Miss Marple is an elderly amateur sleuth (see p.6) who is interested in human nature and everyday problems of her neighbours and friends. She is not really a detective in the proper sense of the word. She just sometimes happens to come across a murder, which she eventually solves using her famous female intuition, usually to everyone's astonishment. According to Knight (in Danielsson, 48) Christie "neither finds nor offers comfort in an active, heroic, male stereotype." Therefore both of her famous detectives, Poirot and Miss Marple, prefer "to observe and order facts, usually through the employment of [their] "little grey cells"." To my mind, Miss Marple is good at solving the murder cases just because of her good observation skills. She often sees things other people miss, like her observation that Gwenda must have been a child when she witnessed the murder of Helen (37). She does not take a leading part in solving the murder in this case but rather plays a role of an advisor: "because I've lived a long time and know how very upsetting human nature can be" (43) says she. In *The Dynamic Detective*, Danielsson (2002, 48) claims that the most important of her features "in placing her as a detective in society is her amateur status." I agree with her. Although, or perhaps because, she is considered to be a harmless gossip, she

⁵ I find it very interesting that food and sex are only hinted at, in the Christie novels, while it is quite the opposite in Paretsky books, where both are detailed.

gets the opportunity to learn a great deal about the people she meets, and she has nothing to gain from the crime, or its investigation.

In *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple's Last Case*, she is first described by her nephew, Raymond West, whose wife is a distant relative of Gwenda's, as a person who "adores problems...any kind of problem", such as "what happened to the Vicar's surplice" referring here to the first Miss Marple novel: *Murder at the Vicarage* (2002, first published in 1930). He introduces Miss Marple to Gwenda by saying, "You'll adore my Aunt Jane...She's...a perfect Period Piece. Victorian to the core. All her dressing tables have their legs swathed in chinz. She lives in a village...where nothing ever happens." He encourages Gwenda to confide in Miss Marple: "if you've any problem in your life, put it to her...She'll tell you the answer," he says. (27).

A few paragraphs later Christie portrays her physically: "Miss Marple was an attractive old lady, tall and thin, with pink cheeks and blue eyes, and a gentle, rather fussy manner. Her blue eyes often had a little twinkle in them" (27). In the progress of the investigation, carried out in part by Gwenda and her husband Giles (her subsleuths), we find out that she is interested in gardening and her knitting needles are ever-present in the novels.

Applying Propp's methodology of syntagmatic analysis⁶ of text (Berger, 1999) to the character of Miss Marple shows some very interesting points in the narrative. Berger advises "Whenever applying Propp to a text, use whichever of the 31 functions are applicable" (49), and that is exactly what I have done. I have simplified matters considerably in the list below, which only deals with some of the functions and shows how they are found in detective fiction. The following chart shows the degree to which Propp's functions can be applied to *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple's Last Case*. According to Berger (1999): "the reason these

⁶ Arthur Asa Berger states in *Signs in Contemporary Culture: An Introduction to Semiotics*: "A syntagm is a chain, so syntagmatic analysis of a text involves looking at the chain or sequence of actions that occur in that text. (The word "text" is a technical term used in critical studies to stand for any creative work that is being analysed.)" (47).

functions can be applied to contemporary texts is that Propp’s functions are some of the primary activities that occur in stories” (49). Let us see what they tell about the heroine.

Proppian Function	Event in <i>Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple’s Last Case</i>
Initial situation	We meet Gwenda, Giles and Miss Marple
Absentation	Miss Marple has gone home to St. Mary Mead
Interdiction	Gwenda, Giles and Miss Marple are warned about pursuing their investigation
Violation	Gwenda, Giles and Miss Marple continue their investigation
Reconnaissance	Dr James Kennedy answers the ad in The Times
Trickery	Dr Kennedy states that he has lost touch with Helen many years ago
Departure	Miss Marple has left St. Mary Mead
Transference	Gwenda and Giles travel all over England to gather information about Helen
Struggle	Gwenda and Miss Marple fight Dr Kennedy
Solution	Miss Marple solves the murder
Exposure	Dr Kennedy is exposed
Punishment	Dr Kennedy has been caught

Proppian Analysis of *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple’s Last Case*

From this chart it is visible that Miss Marple, as a heroine of this novel, is a *seeker hero* and not a *victim hero*. She goes off in a search of the murderer, but also a victim, because Helen’s body has never been found until she finds it.

V. I. Warshawski, on the other hand, can be described as both *victim hero* and *seeker hero*. She directly experiences villainy and then battles with villains (58, 62-3). One thing we learn from *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple’s Last Case* and *Indemnity Only* is that the heroines need friends to help in their investigations and that heroines need to find donors who can give them weapons or valuable information. Todorov (in Lodge, 163-4 and Berger, 1992, 84) claims the same in his analysis of the so-called suspense novel, which he calls “the story of the vulnerable detective.” He states here: “Its chief feature is that the detective loses his immunity, gets beaten up, badly hurt, constantly risks his life, in short, he is integrated into the universe of other characters, instead of being an independent observer.” The following chart indicates that Warshawski is such a detective.

Proppian Function	Event in <i>Indemnity Only</i>
Initial situation	We meet V. I. Warshawski, Thayer and McGraw
Absentation	Warshawski goes looking for Anita McGraw
Interdiction	Warshawski is warned about continuing the investigation
Violation	Warshawski continues to investigate, becomes involved with Earl Smeissen and his thugs
Reconnaissance	Yardley Masters tries to find out how much she knows
Delivery	Warshawski tells McGraw, Thayer, Smeissen and Yardley that young Thayer is dead
Trickery	McGraw, Thayer, Smeissen and Yardley try to deceive Warshawski
Departure	Warshawski goes to find Anita
Receipt	Warshawski receives information about Anita's location
Spatial change	Warshawski finds the claim draft
Struggle	Warshawski and friends join in investigation
Return	Warshawski returns to Chicago
Difficult task	Warshawski has to find out why the claim draft is important
Solution	Warshawski finds out about the insurance fraud
Exposure	McGraw, Thayer, Smeissen and Yardley are exposed
Punishment	McGraw, Thayer, Smeissen and Yardley are sent to prison

Proppian Analysis of *Indemnity Only*

In *Indemnity Only*, V. I. Warshawski is described as a tough, street-smart private investigator. Unlike Miss Marple, she has to work for a living. She does “a lot of industrial cases” (41), but has “started out [her] working life as a lawyer” (177). She turned to detective work for idealistic reasons. Her speciality is financial crimes, but now and then she comes across a murder case. Neither Miss Marple nor V. I. Warshawski actually makes a living by solving murders, although they do happen often in both Miss Marple's and Warshawski's world. However, the reason for the involvement of both in so many murder cases is always explained by mere chance. In *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple's Last Case*, Miss Marple is involved through her desire to be of use to Gwenda and Giles, and in *Indemnity Only*, Warshawski starts to work on a missing-person case but stumbles over a dead body in the process.

Danielsson (2002, 65) claims that “a detective is no longer only a detective. She or he is likely to be a college professor, a caterer...an activist for black, gay, or women's rights.” In

light of this, Warshawski is then a clear image of the new detective. She is a lawyer and an activist for women's rights (177). When asked about her protagonist Paretsky says, in an interview by Monica Hileman: "I wanted to create someone who was a real person, who wasn't a Miss Marple who always behaves herself. And I wanted to create a female character who could be sexual without being evil" (<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/LitRC>). In my opinion, V. I. Warshawski is exactly the character Paretsky wanted to create. She is a real person, because she does get scared, but it does not prevent her from acting. She is an adult who takes responsibility for her actions and does not wait to be rescued. Her statement to Mr. Thayer: "I'm a woman...and I can look out for myself. If I couldn't, I wouldn't be in this kind of business. If things get heavy, I'll figure out a way to handle them - or go down trying" (9) is a clear indication of this.

The readers are, however, not given a physical description of V. I. anywhere in the novel. The only description Paretsky offers is the description of her after she was beaten (66-7) and sometimes a very detailed description of her clothes (66). At one point Warshawski says about herself: "I look my best in the summer. I inherited my Italian mother's olive colouring, and tan beautifully." (14). We must bear in mind that *Indemnity Only* has a first person narrator. That might explain why there are not any physical descriptions of the main protagonist.

In light of the results from the Proppian analyses of *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple's Last Case* and *Indemnity Only* followed by Christie's description of Miss Marple and Paretsky's description of Warshawski's character, I argue that the plot and the characters are more complex in the later novel, at least it seems so from the results from the Application of Propp's method.

2.2. Working Conditions

The working environments in these two novels are somewhat similar. Although Miss Marple, a well-bred and gentle woman, does not actively participate in the pursuit of the murderer, or so it would seem, she has her own ways of gathering information. By playing innocent elderly gossip, she finds friends of the friends and extracts information about life in the little town of Dillmouth eighteen years earlier (82, 91-4). Keeping in mind that Dillmouth is a small town and a very closed society that has not changed much in the past eighteen years, one would assume it would be easy, but people in closed societies are reluctant to talk to strangers, as is shown to a point in *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple's Last Case*. The world of friends, neighbours, and to some extent relatives, becomes a world of strangers, creatures of selfish aggressive drives at variance with the brittle and unconvincing postures of gentility they show in public.

In *Indemnity Only*, Warshawski, in contrast to Miss Marple, solves the murder case by going after the murderers. In doing so she runs all over Chicago, which is a big city and not a confined environment like little Dillmouth. Just like Miss M, she has special ways of gathering information but not as much through gossiping as through methodical and hard work (112, 170-1), - although good connections in the neighbourhood and sometimes friends (159) can be seen as sources of gossip even in this novel.

There are similarities in both of these working environments, but there are also some differences. The seemingly rather safe society in the Christie novel (13) is very different from the more threatening surroundings of Paretsky's Chicago (57). Furthermore, there is significantly less physical danger in *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple's Last Case* than in *Indemnity Only*. As I have mentioned above, although V. I. also relies somewhat on gossip, it is not overtly referred to as gossip, as it is in the Christie novel (44). These differences in the

working conditions show, in a way, how detective fiction has evolved and moved forward in time.

2.3. The Murderers and the Victims

Todorov (in Lodge, 162) summarized the twenty rules of detective fiction S. S. Van Dine wrote in 1928, and according to these summarized rules “the criminal is almost obliged to be a professional and does not kill for personal reasons (‘the hired killer’)...the criminal must still be one of the main characters” (163). Even though I do agree with Todorov on the latter, I do not, however, agree that every criminal is personally detached from his/her victim, although it seems to fit the description of the villain in Paretsky’s novel. I believe we can find the proof for this in *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple’s Last Case* where the killer is highly personally attached to the victim; as a matter of fact he is her brother. Christie introduces her villain by saying: “Dr Kennedy was a grey-haired elderly man with shrewd eyes under tufted brows. His gaze went sharply from one to the other of them” (63). The only thing we can draw from this description is that he is a sharp and intelligent man; there is no indication of evil here. According to Dr Haydock there are several different types of murderers and he describes one type of them in following words: “There’s a type who commits a crime, manages to get away with it, and is darned careful never to stick his neck out again...I take it your killer, whoever he or she is, was one of that kind...But supposing somebody goes poking about, digging into things, turning up stones...what’s your killer going to do about it?” (46-7). Even though he has never met Dr Kennedy, it is a very accurate description. This is proved later in the novel.

Through Gwenda and Giles, we are told that Dr Kennedy is a respected member of society, just like the villains in Paretsky’s *Indemnity Only* (7, 12, 22, 38, and 60). As we find out, the villains in both novels belong to a white, well-educated middle and upper middle-class. They

are referred to as “white-collar criminals”, although they can be as violent as the worst thugs if pushed into a corner (71). In any case, these criminals are more violent in *Indemnity Only*.

The victims are members of white-collar society as well. In Christie’s novel the victim, Helen, is described as “a decent and honourable girl.” Miss Marple states, “she was a perfectly normal young girl who wanted to have fun and a good time and flirt a little and finally settle down with the man of her choice” (217). As we find out early in the novel, Dr Kennedy is her brother. The physical description of Helen that Christie offers is through Gwenda’s memory, but all we are told is that her hair was golden and her face all blue (31). In Paretsky’s novel, young Peter Thayer is referred to only as a “young man” (17) who had been shot in the forehead, but [whose] face wasn’t damaged” (17).

As explained above, both the murderers and the victims belong to the same social class and race. Christie and Paretsky only relay the message that even rich and powerful people can behave as the worst criminals when cornered, and that appearances can be deceiving. But the victims are always people who fight to expose some deception in society, or as in Christie’s novel, is a family member who wants to live her own life.

3. LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

In this chapter I will analyse how culture influences the language in *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple’s Last Case* and *Indemnity Only*. As I have mentioned in Chapter two, these two detectives belong to different cultures as well as countries. Miss Marple is a typical example of English Victorian society, although as a spinster she has more freedom than other contemporary women, while V. I. Warshawski is a product of modern times, a lawyer who wants to make a difference and has therefor changed profession and become a private investigator.

The concept of culture, according to Edward B. Tylor (in Brøgger, 1992, 31) is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” If we exchange *man* in this statement with *woman* and apply it to detective fiction, we see that there is a clear interdependence between language and *cultural* context of the text, or in this case, the novels. In the light of this definition of culture, I argue, using Traugott and Pratt’s claim (1980), “the style concerns the characteristic choices in a given context” (29), that the culture has a great impact on the language of both Miss Marple and V. I. Warshawski. This influence is visible in swearing as well as using indirectness and interruption, especially in V. I.’s language. I will discuss this further in the section on Swearing. Furthermore, Heilbron’s discussion of androgynous detectives (1991) offers some very important points, which I have applied to Miss Marple and Warshawski. I believe culture also influences women’s conversational styles, which according to Jennifer Coates (1988) is highly co-operative.

Some of the issues I address in this chapter are gender and language as well as swearing in both the Christie and the Paretsky novels. In the section on Gender and Language, using Lakoff’s research (1975), I demonstrate the use of the euphemisms in the language of Miss Marple and V. I. Warshawski. I also discuss here Tannen’s ambiguity and polysemy of linguistic strategies, such as power and solidarity (1996). However, in the section on Swearing I apply Lakoff’s research on rough talk and lady’s talk, but also Coates’ analysis on ‘one person at a time’ conversational style. In addition, Tannen’s research on indirectness and interruption (1996) provides relevant results for this section.

3.1. Gender and Language

In her introduction of Miss Marple in *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple's Last Case* (27) Christie uses the euphemism *lady*, which, according to Lakoff (1975), replaces “woman” in a great many contexts. In this case, there is a reason for this “to be found in the context in which the word is uttered” (20). By saying *lady*, Christie is stating that Miss Marple belongs to a certain social class, and that she behaves in a certain way, but at the same time its connotation is also condescending. According to Lakoff, “the organisations of women who have a serious purpose (not merely that of spending time with one another) cannot use the word *lady* in their titles, but less serious ones may” (23), which Christie here does by introducing Miss Marple as a *lady* and not as a *woman*; because she is not really a detective, she just plays one. Further, Lakoff also states in contrast to *woman*, the word *lady* has no traces of sexual connotation present (24) and it also “carries with it overtones recalling the age of chivalry” (25). This implies that Miss Marple, as a lady, is helpless and cannot do things for herself, which in *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple's Last Case* is proved to be wrong beyond any doubt.

Just as Miss Marple, V. I. Warshawski is referred to as a *lady* instead of a *woman* by different men and on different occasions. Mr McGraw says to her: “You’re no softie. I don’t object to a lady with guts” (44). To Ralph Devereux she is at first “a little lady” (24) and “a gorgeous lady” (25), but later in the novel he starts to call her a woman (77), Sherlock Holmes (138) and Miss Marple (215). Mr. Thayer, on the other hand says, “I can see you’re a conscientious girl” (87). And Warshawski refers to herself as “Joan of Arc” (71) at one point.

Using Lakoff’s analysis of the euphemism *lady*, we get a sense that McGraw is conveying reluctant respect for her professional skills, but at the same time he is patronizing her with the use of *lady* in this first case. He recognises her as a strong and independent woman, but lets her know that he will always judge her according to her gender; that her individuality will

never be equivalent to that of her male counterpart. Devereux, on the other hand, uses both *lady* and *woman*. He uses the euphemism *lady* only the first time he meets her, and switches then to *woman* indicating her equality to him. But this equality can be ambiguous depending on what he is signalling by using these words. Tannen (1996) claims in *Gender & Discourse* that “the same symbol...can signal either power or solidarity, depending on, at least, the setting” (23). I argue that this is true, for his use of *woman* can be interpreted in two ways. If used as an admission of equality by women, the expression *woman* then marks solidarity, but this admission also entails power as well. If *woman* is used as a tool of power by men, the expression *woman* then gets the same connotation as the euphemism *lady*; it signals that he is stronger than she.

Devereux’s use of *Sherlock* and *Miss Marple* and Warshawski’s use of *Joan of Arc* also show this fundamental source of ambiguity of power and solidarity (23-4). It can be interpreted in both ways but it also indicates the polysemy of power and solidarity. It can be used as both power and solidarity (24-5). *Sherlock* or *Miss Marple* can be derogatory in their connotation depending on Devereux’s intention of its use (*power*), but at the same time its use can denote his respect for her intellect (*solidarity*), meaning that both interpretations, power and solidarity, exist at once.

Mr. Thayer’s use of *girl* (87), however, indicates no ambiguity. According to Lakoff (1975) *girl* is also a substitute for *woman*. It stresses the idea of immaturity and it also removes the sexual connotation lurking in *woman* (1975, 25). Applying this to Mr. Thayer’s choice of word we can see that *girl* denotes youth and immaturity, and although it can seem flattering by recalling youth it also brings to mind irresponsibility, which is a characteristic V. I. does not have. She shows this by refusing to accept Mr. Thayer’s bribe (87) to leave the investigation.

These are only some of the research methods one can use in analysing detective fiction. Euphemisms denoting *woman*, like *lady* and *girl*, are used a great deal in fiction, as shown,

and they carry several messages within. Considering that women wrote these two detective novels, it is, however, interesting that no euphemisms for *man* have been used here.

3.2. Swearing and Taboo

According to Lakoff (1975), it is not likely that women use “stronger expletives”⁷ (10) than men do, and if we look at the restrictions society puts on women, we find that some expressions just are not acceptable when used by women. In *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple’s Last Case* Christie follows these norms. I cannot find any swearing in the book. The only times a swear word is used is in Dr Haydock’s description of the criminals, “there is a type who commits the crime...and is *darned* careful never to stick his neck out again” (*Ital. Mine*, 46) and Giles’ “Well, I’m damned” (177). But they are men; Miss Marple, however, uses only weak expletives, such as: “very dreadful, my dear” (188). In *Indemnity Only*, on the other hand, Paretsky uses very strong expletives like “goddamn” (49), “bastard” (87), “hell” (152), “screw yourself” (179) and “SOB” (207) and many others. It is almost common practice for Paretsky’s characters, and I mean all her characters, to use these strong expletives. I believe that Paretsky uses these swear words to convey the strength of an emotion her characters feel, but also because we use more of these today. Although both Miss Marple and V. I. can be seen as androgynous detective characters (Heilbron, 1991), I argue that this is more obvious in *Indemnity Only* than it is in *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple’s Last Case*. Paretsky gives Warshawski’s character more so-called male characteristics than female ones. She swears, interrupts others, gets into fights and is very pushy, seemingly always in power, which is even in modern society considered to be a kind of bad language, while Miss Marple is a more

⁷ The term *expletives* can be described, according to Robin Lakoff (1975), as “meaningless particles... They define the social context of an utterance, indicate the relationship the speaker feels between himself and his addressee, between himself and what he is talking about” (*Language*, 9).

cunning, gentle, granny-like woman who keeps her feminine side but still has certain authority over other people.

As I have already stated I believe that culture plays a big role in not just conversational style but in detective fiction in general. We can see this by comparing *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple's Last Case* and *Indemnity Only*. Christie was a product of her own time and culture, just as Paretsky is a product of hers. Using Tannen's research on indirectness and interruption I came to some rather interesting conclusions. Lakoff, according to Tannen (1996), identifies two ramifications of indirectness: defensiveness and report (32). Analysing the context and the conversational styles of participants in these two detective novels, I found that indirectness is more Miss Marple's style and although both detectives use interruption, it is more highlighted in the Paretsky novel. Miss Marple uses both defensiveness and report in *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple's Last Case* depending on the identity of the person she talks with. When speaking to Gwenda and Giles she usually tries to lead them in their investigation by using defensiveness (42-4). Warshawski, on the other hand, rarely uses indirectness as a linguistic strategy. As an American she is more in favour of the direct approach, which is, according to Tannen (1996), "logical and aligned with power whereas indirectness is akin to dishonesty as well as subservience" (33). I agree with the first part of her statement, but not the second. In my opinion, there is nothing dishonest about Miss Marple, who uses indirectness very successfully throughout the novel. It is only a strategy that suits her best as a Victorian spinster just as directness is V. I.'s stronger side.

Interruption as a linguistic strategy, however, is more complex than indirectness. Coates (1989, 94-121) claims that interruptions in the conversation between female speakers are highly co-operative and more common than among men. I do not agree with her on this as applied to these novels. Analysing *Sleeping Murder-Miss Marple's Last Case* and *Indemnity Only* I found no evidence of this being the case. Both Miss Marple and Warshawski tend to use interruption, Miss Marple usually only with people younger than herself, Gwenda and

Giles (43), whereas V. I. uses it as a demonstration of her equality with other characters, thus putting herself in a position of power. She interrupts both villains and police, rich and poor. One piece of evidence of this I find in her storming the meeting between McGraw and Thayer (39), another when she interrupts Masters' secretary in order to gain access to him (23). It has been suggested by Lakoff (in Tannen, 140) that distance, deference, camaraderie and clarity are four points of communicative competence. Distance is described as "the aim to inspire separateness and privacy", deference as "the aim to avoid imposition", camaraderie as "the aim to acknowledge interrelationship" and "clarity is used where the pure expression of factual information is at issue" (140-1). I found that Christie used mostly deference and camaraderie, while Paretsky used mostly clarity.

There are many more aspects one can analyse in detective fiction. I have only scraped the surface in this study with some of the gender issues woman detectives face in fiction. Swearing and interruption are being used more in modern fiction, which in my opinion reflects today's society very accurately.

4. CONCLUSION

In my analysis of the two female detectives from different times and cultures, I have found some striking differences but also similarities as well. As we can with certainty claim that Miss Marple was formed by Victorian society, we can also say that V. I. was a creation of modern society. On the surface these two women may appear to be completely different, but after a closer look it is not so clear anymore. I claim in this study that both Miss Marple and V. I. Warshawski have many things in common; in fact one could say that V. I. is just a modern version of Miss Marple. Both of these detectives have special strategies for solving crimes. These are only seemingly different. Further, authors use some of the words to imply

power, like the use of *woman* and *lady*, and some to relay emotions and strong feelings, like swearing words.

As I have stated earlier, this analysis discussed two detective novels where the detectives are women. It is written in one of the most common genres in which sociolinguists write: the essay, in this case a comparison and contrast essay. I have presented some of the research methods a person can use in analyzing a detective novel, such as Propp's methodology and Todorov's typology. There is, however, one thing we have to keep in mind and that is that no set of methods is perfect or works perfectly in this type of research. There is a limitless potential in this area for further data collection and research. For example, in my analysis I have not analyzed any of the relations with the police, nor conducted a detailed discourse analysis of male-female and all-female language groups, which someone could do in future further studies.

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