

Lesbian Detective Fiction: the outsider within



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keywords

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Abstract

Lesbian Detective Fiction: the outsider within is a creative writing thesis in two parts: a draft lesbian detective novel, titled *Fatal Development* (75%) and an exegesis containing a critical appraisal of the sub-genre of lesbian detective fiction, and of my own writing process (25%).

Creative work: *Fatal Development*

It wasn't the first time I'd seen a dead body, but it didn't seem to get any easier.

When Dirk and Stacey discover a body in the courtyard of their Brisbane woolstore apartment, it is close friend and neighbour, Kersten Heller, they turn to for support. The police assume Stuart's death was an accident, but when it emerges that he was about to take legal action against the woolstore's developers, Bovine, Kersten decides there must be more to it.

Her own apartment has flooded twice in a month and the builders are still in and out repairing defects. She discovers Stuart was not alone on the roof when he fell to his death and the evidence he had collected for his case against Bovine has gone missing. Armed with this knowledge, and fed up with the developer's ongoing resistance to addressing the building's structural issues, Kersten organises a class action against Bovine.

Kersten draws on her past training as a spy to investigate Stuart's death, hiding her activities, and details of her past, from her partner, Toni. Her actions bring her under increasing threat as her apartment is defaced, searched and bugged, and she is involved in a car chase across New Farm. Forced to fall back on old skills, old habits and memories return to the surface. When Toni discovers that Kersten has broken her promise to leave the investigation to the police, she walks out.

The neighbouring – and heritage-listed – Riverside Coal development site burns to the ground, and Kersten and Dirk uncover evidence of a network of corruption involving developers and local government officials. After she is kidnapped in broad daylight, narrowly escaping from the boot of a moving car, Kersten is confident she is right, but with

Toni not returning her calls, and many of the other residents selling up, including Dirk and Stacey, Kersten begins to question her judgment.

In a desperate attempt to turn things around, Kersten calls on an old Agency contact to help prove Bovine was involved in Stuart's death, her kidnapping, and ongoing corruption. To get the evidence she needs, Kersten plays a dangerous game: letting Bovine know she has uncovered their illegal operations in order to draw them into revealing themselves on tape.

Hiding alone in a hotel room, Kersten is finally forced to confront her past:

When Mirin didn't come home that night, I was ready to go out and find her myself, disappear, and start a new life together somewhere far away. Instead they pulled me in before I could finish making arrangements, questioned me for hours, turned everything around. It was golden child to problem child in the space of a day.

This time, she's determined, things will turn out differently.

Exegesis:

The exegesis traces the development of lesbian detective fiction, including its dual origins in detective and lesbian fiction, to compare the current state of the sub-genre with the early texts and to establish the dominant themes and tropes. I focus particularly on Australian examples of the sub-genre, examining in detail Claire McNab's Denise Cleever series and Jan McKemmish's *A Gap in the Records*, in order to position my own lesbian detective novel between these two works. In drafting *Fatal Development*, I have attempted to include some of the political content and complexity of McKemmish's work, but with a plot-driven narrative.

I examine the dominant tropes and conventions of the sub-genre, such as: lesbian politics; the nature of the crime; method of investigation; sex and romance; and setting.

In the final section, I explain the ways in which I have worked within and against the sub-genre's conventions in drafting a contemporary lesbian detective novel: drawing on tradition and subverting reader expectations.

Throughout the thesis, I explore in detail the tradition of the fictional lesbian detective as an outsider on the margins of society, disrupting notions of power and gender. While the lesbian detective's outsider status grants her moral agency and the capacity to achieve justice and generate change, she is never fully accepted. The lesbian detective remains an outsider within.

For the lesbian detective, working within a system that ultimately discriminates against her involves conflict and compromise, and a sense of double-play in being part of two worlds but belonging to neither. I explore how this double-consciousness can be applied to the lesbian writer in choosing whether to write for a mainstream or lesbian audience.

Contents

Abstract	i
Introduction	1
Literature Review	9
Development	10
Politics – feminist	14
Politics – lesbian	26
Method of investigation	46
Sex and romance	69
Nature of the crime	87
Setting	96
Conclusion	110
Writing Process	112
Introduction	113
Politics	116
Method of investigation	122
Sex and romance	127
Nature of the crime	131
Setting	134
Postscript	136
Bibliography	140

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature:

Date:

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Introduction

Lesbian detective fiction is undoubtedly characterised by a major investment in material that seems little to do with detection and a lot to do with life, love and politics...

(Plain, 2001: 203).

Lesbian detective fiction first appeared in 1977, quickly expanded and diversified – largely through small, independent presses – to peak in the 1990s. Walton and Jones note that the number of fictional lesbian detectives tripled from 14 in 1986 to 43 in 1995 (1999: 41-2). During this period, five of the seven Australian writers of lesbian detective fiction identified as part of this study were first published, including Claire McNab, Dorothy Porter and Jan McKemmish.

Lesbian detective fiction is a development of feminist detective fiction, which itself subverted and parodied the ‘hard-boiled’ detective fiction of the 1930s and 1940s. Early lesbian detective novels, particularly some of the Australian examples such as McKemmish’s *A Gap in the Records*, were alternative in form and content. Heavily political, they subverted and parodied the traditions and tropes of the hard-boiled and feminist detectives. They also experimented with the form itself, for example, by inventing a fragmentary structure or resisting the traditional neat ending.

Early lesbian detective fiction often explored notions of justice in a patriarchal society, particularly in relation to crimes against women. The law, courts, and government were shown to be implicated in ongoing, systematic oppression of women, especially lesbians. These early novels also explored the notion of the lesbian detective as an outsider on the margins of society, working within and against the system to achieve justice.

Lesbian detective fiction also has clear thematic and structural links to lesbian fiction, particularly lesbian pulp fiction and the coming out novel. As a result of this dual heritage, unlike the broader detective genre, in lesbian detective

fiction the investigation of the crime is often equal to, or secondary to, the romantic or coming out plot.

When the sub-genre emerged, it was considered a revolutionary act in itself to be a lesbian, and more so to publish novels featuring a lesbian protagonist. Lesbians today, however, generally enjoy more visible lives, are more accepted as part of mainstream society, and lesbian issues are discussed more openly in the media and other forms of gay and lesbian literature. It is no longer radical to represent lesbians in print. As lesbian politics separated from feminism and feminist politics, the overtly political content of lesbian detective fiction diminished and shifted to issues of identity.

Lesbian detective fiction remains the best selling form of lesbian fiction today with over two hundred authors writing in English, and more than four hundred novels published¹. Despite this, and moves towards mainstream publishing in the 1990s, the sub-genre has largely failed to engage a wider detective fiction readership, with the majority of lesbian detective novels published by specialist lesbian presses and marketed to a specifically lesbian audience. This does not reflect the increasing visibility of lesbians in society, pop culture and literature, or the increasing popularity of detective fiction with a strong female protagonist.

motivation

One of the reasons for commencing this research project was to understand the reasons why the sub-genre seemed to have stopped developing. I also wanted to see if, and how, I could write a lesbian detective novel that could reach a wider audience. As a reader, I was frustrated with the emphasis, in many lesbian detective novels, on romance and lesbian identity, often at the expense of plot, character and innovation. Where was the lesbian Miss Smilla?² Why couldn't Louise Welsh have written a lesbian Rilke?³ Where was the

¹ Ogureck, 2005: 13, Markowitz, 2004: 3, survey of Australian titles, survey of specialist bookstores.

² Peter Hoeg's *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*.

³ Louise Welsh's *The Cutting Room* – featuring the promiscuous gay auctioneer, Rilke – has won literary awards, been translated into eight languages, and optioned for film,

exploration of contemporary issues, more complex relationships, things common to all readers? Why hadn't more lesbian detectives crossed over to a 'mainstream' readership⁴. As a reader, I thought to myself: *surely I could write a better one of these*.

I had also observed that few lesbian detective novels had been published in Australia in recent years, and that none had been set in Brisbane. Indeed, it seemed that very few detective novels in general had been set in Brisbane. I wanted to understand why this was the case.

It was to answer all of these questions that I chose – with little writing experience, and, possibly, with insufficient thought to the consequences – to enrol in a Creative Writing PhD.

My initial research revealed that, to date, there has been limited critical research conducted specific to the sub-genre. The majority of that which has been conducted is somewhat dated, from a feminist perspective, with limited analyses of Australian texts or recent directions in the sub-genre.

As Patricia Ogureck notes in her 2005 doctoral thesis, titled 'Sapphisticated satire and perverted parody: Inversions and subversions of the traditional mystery genre by PIs in feminist press publications from 1969 to 1999', from 1977 to 2004, only six doctoral researchers (all in the US) specifically addressed lesbian detective fiction, with two others containing references to the sub-genre (2005: 4).

One of these, Phyllis M. Betz, went on to publish *Lesbian Detective Fiction: Woman as Author, Subject and Reader*, during the later part of my research, which has provided a contemporary analysis, examining how the sub-genre represents lesbian characters and experience. McNab, however, is the only Australian author included in Betz's text or the dissertations mentioned above.

demonstrating that it is possible to reach a mainstream audience and achieve critical acclaim with a gay male detective.

⁴ Other than Dorothy Porter's *The Monkey's Mask*, and, to a lesser extent, McDermid's Lindsay Gordon series.

This lack of critical work, particularly in relation to Australian lesbian detective fiction, which includes some of the more innovative examples of the sub-genre, and the realisation that little practice-led research had been undertaken within the sub-genre, provided additional motivation for the exegetical component of my PhD.

Devising a research question that adequately covered the questions I wanted to answer through research and the practice of writing proved difficult. The research question I arrived at is:

How can a lesbian detective novel be written that both works within and moves against the traditions of the sub-genre to reach a wider audience, while also maintaining a lesbian readership?

Methodology, structure and scope

I have addressed the research question primarily through the practice of drafting a contemporary lesbian detective novel. The exegesis supplements the creative work and explores the process of its development. My research informed both the novel and exegesis. Similarly, the writing process directed and was directed by, the research.

Creative work:

The creative aspect of the project is the contemporary lesbian detective novel, *Fatal Development*. The novel works within and against the tropes and conventions of the sub-genre in a practical sense, through the choices I make in relation to characters, setting, plot, style, and tone. These choices have been informed by, and are responses to, my analysis of other lesbian detective novels and critical texts. For example, my research indicated that many contemporary lesbian detective novels placed issues of sexual identity at the forefront, potentially limiting accessibility for a non-lesbian audience. Consequently, in drafting *Fatal Development*, I endeavoured to keep romance and issues of sexuality secondary to the crime and its resolution.

Exegesis

The exegesis documents my critical research. It consists of two parts: a literature review, and commentary on my responses to the findings in the literature review in writing my own lesbian detective novel, *Fatal Development*.

Within the literature review, I examine the development of the sub-genre and explore five key aspects of lesbian detective fiction: politics; method of investigation; nature of the crime; sex and romance; and setting.

To an extent, I have combined a feminist and queer literary studies approach, critically appraising selected lesbian detective novels, particularly early texts, Australian examples, and more recent novels, in order to determine the origins and development of the sub-genre, its key themes, and possible future directions or publishing ‘gaps.’ Where possible, I have sourced author interviews and comments relating to their intentions at the time of writing in order to augment analysis of the texts with reflections on praxis: the authors’ aims, creative methodology, and writing choices.

It is, however, from the perspective of a lesbian writer, as well as that of a critical reader, that I have conducted this research, in order to establish how to write my own lesbian detective novel. I explore what it means to ‘write lesbian’; being a lesbian writer as distinct from a writer of lesbian texts.

I took a particular interest in the small number of lesbian detective novels that feature spies or former spies as detectives as this is a theme I have chosen to explore in my own novel, particularly the parallel between the role of spy and that of the homosexual in society. In the later stages of my research, I also examined “classic” examples of the hard-boiled detective and spy genres to gain a deeper understanding of the development of lesbian detective fiction and its departures from and adherence to these traditional forms.

McNab and McKemmish represent two extreme ends of the small body of Australian lesbian detective fiction. *A Gap in the Records* is one of the most experimental and complex in form and content but is not well known, and is currently out of print. In contrast, McNab's Carol Ashton and Denise Cleever series are more formulaic in structure, less complex and contain limited exploration of contemporary political issues. In drafting my own lesbian detective novel, I attempted to position myself between these two writers, including some political content and complexity, but using a traditional, plot-driven narrative with the aim of engaging a wider readership.

Consequently, in the literature review, I selected McKemmish's *A Gap in the Records*, involving a network of feminist spies, and McNab's series featuring ASIO agent Denise Cleever as case studies to analyse in detail.

The outcomes of my research informed my own choices when drafting *Fatal Development*. In the critical Writing Process section, I address the same key features of the sub-genre – politics, method of investigation, sex and romance, nature of the crime, and setting – detailing my responses to the research outcomes and the ways in which my research was directed by the writing process. I also explore some of the issues presented by writing as a lesbian and a first time writer.

scope

Lesbian detective fiction is generally considered to be one of the many sub-genres of detective fiction⁵. Detective fiction is itself part of the broader genre of crime fiction, which also includes legal, forensic and psychological thrillers. Lesbian detective fiction features a detective (or detectives) who identifies as a lesbian – a woman who desires and loves other women rather than men – as protagonist. While the majority of writers of the sub-genre tend also to identify as lesbian, this is not exclusively the case, nor have I attempted to establish this in selecting the works I have included in my research. Similarly, while there are other writers of detective fiction who identify as

⁵ Other examples include: historical detectives, police procedurals, medical detectives, pet detectives, and cooking detectives.

lesbian, or who include lesbian secondary characters in their works, I have not included these in my examination of the sub-genre.

As lesbian detective fiction is predominantly published in novel form rather than in short stories, and my own creative work is a draft novel, I have limited my research to this format.

Lesbian detective fiction is referred to as lesbian mystery fiction in the United States, where the majority of the sub-genre is published. Lesbian detective novels with spies as protagonists are sometimes referred to as lesbian thrillers. While it could be argued that these texts constitute a separate sub-genre, given the relatively small number of examples, and close resemblance to lesbian detective fiction, for the purposes of this study I have considered them to be part of lesbian detective fiction.

outsider within

Lesbian detective fiction combines the literary tradition of the lesbian as outsider and outlaw, and that of the detective as a loner working on the margins of society. The lesbian in the role of detective disrupts traditional notions of power and gender. The lesbian detective works within the system but retains an outsider's perspective, moving between the heterosexual world and the gay world.

Similarly, there is an affinity between the lesbian and the spy or double agent, in concealing her 'real' identity and pretending to work for one political regime, while actually working for another.

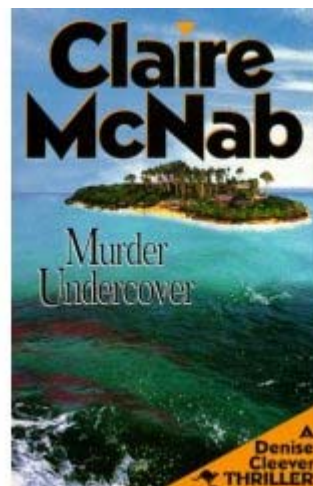
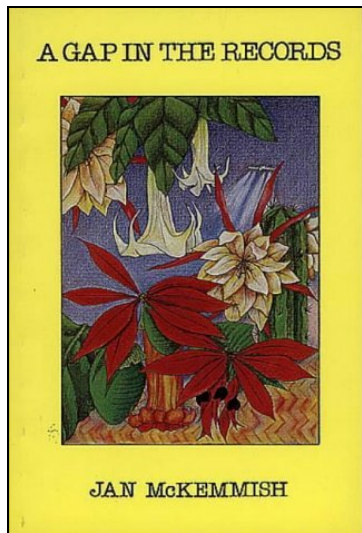
While the lesbian detective or spy's outsider status grants her a moral agency and the capacity to achieve justice and generate change, she is never fully accepted. The lesbian detective remains an outsider within. Working within a system that ultimately discriminates against her involves compromise, and the constant conflict of being part of two worlds but belonging to neither.

While writing the second draft of *Fatal Development*, I developed a backstory that details Kersten's past as a spy for Australia's overseas intelligence service. This allowed me to more fully explore the theme of the lesbian detective as outsider within, in direct response to my research.

The notion of the outsider within can also be applied to the lesbian writer attempting to retain a lesbian identity while entering the mainstream. This double-consciousness, faced by all minority writers, presented particular issues during my writing process. In drafting *Fatal Development*, I was conscious that I was seeking to represent other lesbians as well as drawing on my own experience to speak to a wider, mainstream readership. Writing for two audiences necessarily involved compromises, and I risked appealing to neither.

The double-consciousness of the outsider-within – and the congruence between the lesbian spy as detective and the lesbian writer – brought practice and research, novel and exegesis together. Through this motif I was able to develop the two parts of my doctorate simultaneously, each reflecting and directing the other.

Literature Review



Development: hard-boiled to high-heeled

It was a blonde. A blonde to make a bishop kick a hole in a stained glass window (Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely*, 1995: 834).

Lesbian detective fiction is considered to have developed from feminist detective fiction⁶. Feminist detective fiction⁷ was itself a reaction to the ‘hard-boiled’ detective novel, typified by the 1930s and 1940s novels of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler and made popular by the pulp magazine, *Black Mask*.

Drawing on the traditions of the outlaw of America’s Wild West, the private eye was a lone, moral hero on the ‘mean streets’ of America. Porter argues that the “new urban reality” (2003: 96) of the 1920s gave rise to the hard-boiled detective and a new symbolic landscape for American crime fiction (2003: 102):

The time was ripe for the emergence in a popular literary genre of a disabused, anti-authoritarian, muckraking hero, who, instead of fleeing to Europe, like the sophisticates of lost generation fiction, stayed at home to confront crime and corruption on the increasingly unlovely streets of modern urban America (Porter, 2003: 96).

Hammett’s first crime novel, *Red Harvest* (1929), established a tradition of the first person narrator, with the detective’s voice and moral viewpoint all important. The genre was exclusively and overtly masculine. Chandler famously wrote:

down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a weathered phrase, a man of honor (1995: 991-2).

⁶ For example, Knight, 2004: 175, Walton and Jones, 1999: 21.

⁷ While not all women’s detective fiction is feminist, examples include the novels of Marcia Muller, Sara Paretsky, and Sue Grafton, who began writing in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

As critics have noted, the role of women (and homosexuals) in these hardboiled novels tended to be limited and negative, cast either as victims or femme fatales⁸. In Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, for example, client, love interest and suspect, Brigid O'Shaughnessy is shown to be manipulative and dangerous:

‘I've given you all the money I have,’ tears glistened in her white-ringed eyes. Her voice was hoarse, vibrant. ‘I've thrown myself on your mercy, told you that without your help I'm utterly lost. What else is there?’ She suddenly moved close to him on the settee and cried angrily: ‘Can I buy you with my body?’

Their faces were a few inches apart. Spade took her face between his hands and he kissed her mouth roughly and contemptuously. Then he sat back and said: ‘I'll think it over.’ His face was hard and furious (2002: 55).

The hard-boiled genre was first parodied by writers of gay male detective fiction. Lou Rand's pulp detective novel *The Gay Detective*, published in 1961, is described by Stryker and Meeker in their introduction to the 2003 edition as “hard-boiled camp” (2003: v).

In 1966 George Baxt began his series featuring promiscuous African-American New York police detective, Pharoah Love. In 1970, Joseph Hanson's *Fadeout* began the longest-running gay private eye series. The middle-aged protagonist, Dave Brandstetter, is a death claims investigator; tough, smart and self-assured. Gunn argues that Brandstetter's appeal:

comes in part from his resemblance to the hard-boiled private eyes, even down to his drinking, smoking and enjoying the good life too much. His differences, however, are as significant. His sexuality, of course, but also his fidelity to his mate and his closeness to his father, for whom he works (2004: 33).

The series, running until 1991, was published by a mainstream publisher and reached a mainstream audience. In 2007, it was republished in one volume. As Ogureck observes, these early gay detective novels:

⁸ See for example, Knight, 2004: 112, Betz, 2004: 47-50, Wilson 1995: 148-9.

not only promoted gay males but also forged unique normative disruptions later to be repeated and expounded upon by Lesbian mystery texts (2005: 49).

Feminist writers such as Marcia Muller, Sara Paretsky, and Sue Grafton, who began writing in the late 1970s and early 1980s, continued this appropriation of the hard-boiled form, substituting an empowered woman into the role of the traditional hard-boiled detective. As Walton and Jones note in their introduction to *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard-Boiled Tradition*, this move “strategically redirected the masculinist trajectory of the American hard-boiled detective ... for feminist ends” (1999: 4). Walton and Jones consider the writers of feminist detective fiction to be:

outlaws who, in appropriating powerful linguistic conventions, resituate and redirect power. When they adapt the generic character of the detective hero, for example, they not only recast the role of the outlaw but also destabilize the codes of the genre itself. At the same time, they work to suggest the inadequacy and perhaps even the constructedness of the heroic model they employ (1999: 195).

The early writers of feminist detective fiction transformed the genre, sparking a rapid expansion of women’s crime writing. According to Stephen Knight, American feminist crime writers grew from 40 in 1980 to 400 in 2000 (2004: x).

As Knight notes, however, there is a potential conflict for women writers utilising the form:

[The] violence of language and action of the private eyes, the inherent individualism ... the extensive male chauvinist traditions of description, attitudes and behaviour, as well as the complacent acceptance of a patriarchal social order, all seem contrary to the tenets of late twentieth-century feminism (2004: 161-3).

In ‘The Female Dick and the Crisis of Heterosexuality’, Ann Wilson considers that putting a woman in a hard-boiled detective role is problematic, concluding that female hard-boiled detective fiction “offers a mild challenge to the dominant social order but not a radical assault on it” (1995: 155).

Similarly, Plain, in *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body*, questions the capacity of the heterosexual woman to effectively subvert the hard-boiled genre or challenge “a patriarchal system in which she is also profoundly implicated through structures of desire” (2001: 144):

the desires and needs of a lone pro-active feminist voice remain fundamentally at odds with the demands of hard-boiled narrative, and what begins as a fairy tale of feminist agency is ultimately torn apart by structural contradictions
(Plain, 2001: 93).

Referencing lesbian separatist feminist politics of the 1970s, Knight suggests that, for “many feminist writers the solution to this enigma is, in fiction if not also in life, to take desire out of gender opposition by adopting a lesbian stance” (2004:175). Critics like Knight argue that, because lesbians are not bound to the patriarchal system in the same way, the lesbian detective is able to take the work of the feminist detectives a step further, challenging and subverting traditional images of women, particularly lesbians, in detective fiction, and “constructing newer and more daring narratives than their foremothers” (Ogureck, 2005: 5).

Politics – feminist

To be a woman is to be a revolutionary
(Beal, *Angel Dance*, 1977: 217).

a subversive act

As Anna Wilson observes, lesbian detective fiction emerged amid “the utopian fervour of radical feminist politics” (1996: 271) of the 1970s and early 1980s, when “being a lesbian could in itself seem a revolutionary act” (1996: 253). As a result, publishing a lesbian text was perceived to be a subversive move, and writing a lesbian into the traditionally-male role of a detective doubly so.

In *Sisters in Crime: Feminism and the Crime Novel*, Reddy suggests that the lesbian detective novel “most directly challenges generic conventions by making explicit the social critique that is more covert in most other crime novels” (1988: 16). Similarly, Plain argues that “the introduction of feminist didacticism and lesbian eroticism will inevitably ‘queer the pitch’” (2001: 212).

Reddy argues that lesbian feminist detective fiction “redefines the threat lesbians, and potentially all women, pose to men” (1988: 130). She identifies three components to this threat:

(1) the threat of indifference; (2) the threat of changing the relations of the sexes by placing women at the centre of concern; and (3) the threat of radically altering social power relations (1988: 130).

Walton and Jones apply Foucault’s notion of ‘reverse discourse’ – discourse that repeats and inverts the ideological imperatives of the dominant discourse in order to authorise those marginalised by it – to the lesbian detective, arguing that she reproduces and reverses traditional male roles in the detective genre, providing a critique of the genre and society, challenging previously accepted assumptions regarding gender roles, and redirecting the genre (1999: 91-4, 101-3).

Klein contends that detective fiction is constructed on a system of binaries: criminal/victim, detective/criminal, male/female, and that, whatever the biology, the victim is always female and the detective male (1995:173). The lesbian as detective, however, shifts this binary to create a third term (lesbian). Instead of man/woman there is man/woman/not woman (ibid: 174), subverting the genre, challenging the narrative form and society's patriarchal structure.

Klein's argument builds on Monique Wittig's essays, 'One is Not Born a Woman' (1981) and 'The Straight Mind' (1980), which posit that "man" and "woman" are political and economic categories that serve the reproductive needs of heterosexuality, and that "woman" only exists in binary opposite relationship to "man" (1997: 313). In this system, the lesbian is not a woman but a third term. By refusing heterosexuality, a lesbian is outside the binary and "her very presence destabilizes the heterosexual contract and imperative" (Klein, 1995:174).

On this basis, Plain argues that it is the lesbian detective who:

has pushed the genre to its limits, and who has finally destabilised a formula that otherwise seemed capable of absorbing all. Precisely because, in Wittig's formulation, the lesbian is not a woman, she has undermined the structures of detective rationality (2001: 247).

M.F. Beal's *Angel Dance* has been credited as the first lesbian detective novel, published in the United States in 1977. With references to the figure of the lesbian guerrilla⁹, an icon of 1970s resistance culture, Latina private investigator, Geurrera is a revolutionary. Born of Cuban and Spanish parents, trained in theatre, mechanics and self-defence, she has spent time in prison on an armed robbery charge. Before taking on a job protecting Angel, a controversial feminist, anthropologist and best-selling author, Geurrera is

⁹ The militant lesbian guerrilla, inspired by the myth of the Amazon, was an icon of 1970s lesbian feminism. See, for example, Monique Wittig's novel *Les Guérillères*, Munt; 2002: 2.

thrown out of her radical women's underground group because there are warrants out for her arrest.

Dorothy: 'I think they would like to use that as a pretext to bust us, Kat.'

Kat: 'I agree.'

Val: 'I have to criticize myself for enjoying your out-front political style. I pushed you to be macho because it made me feel safe. I could privately agree with you while you were in the line position without danger to myself' (1977: 12).

Reddy argues that *Angel Dance* was only read by feminists and quickly faded into obscurity (2003: 197). Munt, however, considers it "just about the best" (1994: 122) example of the sub-genre, suggesting that its rejection of the traditional linear narrative and other conventions of the detective genre gives it a complexity the others lack: "by impugning the very structure of investigation, the first lesbian crime novel acts as a coda to the rest" (1994: 124).

experimental structure

Feminist critics consider the structure of detective fiction – with its central hero, single viewpoint, linear narrative and neat conclusion – to be a masculine device¹⁰. A number of early writers of lesbian detective fiction experimented with the structure and form of the detective novel, particularly the ending. Detective novels had traditionally featured a neat or 'closed' resolution, explaining the chain of events, clues, motive, detective's deductive process, and providing some sort of remedy and/or punishment for the crime.

Chandler experimented with flatter endings, shifting the genre away from the mystery element in order to concentrate on atmosphere and character. The ending of his first novel, *The Big Sleep*, for example, focuses on Marlowe and his reflections on death rather than the discovery of the murderer (Hiney, 1997: 101).

What did it matter where you lay once you were dead? In a dirty sump or in a marble tower on top of a high hill? You were dead, you were sleeping the big sleep...On the way downtown

¹⁰ See, for example, Munt, 1994: 199.

I stopped at a bar and had a couple of double scotches. They didn't do me any good (Chandler, 1948: 220).

The feminist writers' perception of the structure of the detective novel as an overtly masculine one, their interest in the broader societal issues beyond individual crimes, and less absolute moral judgements, took this flat ending further, to a refusal of formal closure¹¹. In Grafton's *D is For Deadbeat*, for example, Milhone tries (and fails) to talk the teenager who has killed the murderer of his parents and sister out of suicide, condoning, or at least not condemning him, for his crime (1987: 229).

Similarly, many early lesbian detective novels leave the crime unresolved, or, at least, with more questions remaining than answers. Reddy argues that the more open endings of novels such as those by Wilson and Forrest suggest that "the world can be put right by dismantling exactly the order traditional crime fiction usually seeks to uphold" (1988: 135), and by "speaking the truth about their lives and acting together in support of each other ... they will eventually defeat patriarchal order" (ibid).

In Wilson's *Murder in the Collective*, for example, the ending thwarts the reader's desire for a resolution to the crime and the romance. Hadley leaves to take care of her ex-girlfriend and Pam discovers that the murderer is a woman, and a member of her collective. They do not hand her over to the police, who have been shown to be corrupt, sexist and racist:

'...now maybe I'll spend the rest of my life in prison because of a white woman in America.'

'No,' I said. 'You *can't*.'

'No,' Hadley repeated firmly. 'The weapon's gone, they've got nothing on you other than that you married him. You're going to be trusting a few too many people with your secret, but I swear you're not going to jail. Not for Jeremy Plaice. You've got too many things to do to be spending your life in prison' (1984: 179).

¹¹ See, for example, Walton and Jones, 1999: 215.

Reddy argues that Wilson shows that investigating and solving the crime can undermine the possibility of justice¹², particularly for women working within the system. Pam's discovery of the facts is far less important than her discovery that women, collectively and individually, "are more valuable than abstract ideas of justice, and far more worth protecting" (1988: 139).

Early Australian writers of lesbian detective fiction were some of the most experimental. In McKemmish's *A Gap in the Records*, the 'detectives' are a group of four middle-aged women, who control a world-wide spy ring ('the company') working against cold war espionage. The story is told through postcards, maps and fragments of narrative, in the different styles of each of the characters.

In 'We all Want to Change the World', McKemmish explains that she wrote *A Gap in the Records* "determinedly against the largely masculine models of that genre" (1993: 29) and that she aimed to structure the novel around "female modes of sexuality" (1993: 31) with "multiple voices, shifting narrators, discontinuous narratives, a determined refusal of closure" (ibid).

Moorhead's *Still Murder* has a similarly non-linear structure. National Crime Authority (NCA) detective, Margot Gorman, investigates the murder of Patricia's husband, who raped Patricia's lesbian lover, Cath. The story is revealed through diary entries, police/private notebooks, newspaper articles, records of interview, and psychological reports. The answers are not discovered by the omnipotent detective, but revealed to the reader through a series of documents after Margot has been drugged, taken off the case and sent to stay with her parents.

Moorhead explained that by making the killer and the detective female (and lesbian), she wanted to bring "the margin into the frame and the frame within the text" (quoted in Bird, 1993: 104). Whitlock considers that Moorhead "reverses the traditional progress of detective fiction" (1992: 151) because the novel does not lead to the identification of the criminal and the delivery of

¹² 2003: 201 & 1988: 138-9, 146.

justice, but to “a diffusion of guilt and responsibility” (ibid), as the murder is shown to be part of a chain of violence against women (ibid).

performance

Drawing on Judith Butler’s work on the performative nature of gender¹³, critics have argued that by appropriating a role traditionally filled by a male in hard-boiled detective fiction, the feminist detective *performs* gender, parodying and disrupting established power relations, and showing notions of masculine and feminine to be artificial constructs, or acts¹⁴.

The lesbian detective takes this performance a step further, playing on and parodying the gender roles of the hard-boiled detective and feminist detective, as well as the role(s) of woman and lesbian, showing gender roles to be deliberate constructions “open to challenge and change” (Betz, 2006: 98).

Butler argues that gender parody, particularly through variations on butch/femme identity roles “can shift, invert, and create erotic havoc of various sorts” (1990: 123), undermining and bringing into question notions of gender and sexuality. In lesbian crime fiction, lesbian identity is shown to be complex, a “shifting sign” (Butler, 1990: 138) demonstrating “a fluidity of identities” (ibid).

As Munt observes, this erotic havoc is often achieved with humour:

The interest and pleasure is generated within the *process* of discovering identity (and reconstructing it), not in finding an essential state of being. The lesbian crime novel relies heavily on parody to denaturalize gender and sexual roles (1994: 205-6).

In Mary Wings’ Emma Victor series, for example, the detective’s name and the emphasis on disguise – through the clothing and make-up she chooses for different roles – play with butch/femme codes while suggesting that her

¹³ See for example, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1990 and ‘Imitation and Gender Insubordination’, 1991.

¹⁴ See for example, Walton and Jones, 1999: 102-3; Munt, 1994: 142-3.

identity is maintained whether she dresses as a woman or as a lesbian (Anna Wilson, 1996: 258).

I found some navy wool pants folded flat in a drawer. They had a pleat in the front and a little steam made them fall just right. I had a cream coloured cotton shirt, with little flat white buttons on two breast pockets, and a matching cream knitted tie which I loosely tied and tucked under the collar. I looked in the mirror, and put a foot on a stool and snapped a towel on the top of my black leather boots. They shone. I put on some eye makeup and after a few minutes and several products I changed my mind and washed it all off (1987: 55-56).

Similarly, in her relationships, Emma moves between dominant and submissive roles, parodying the more rigid gender tropes of earlier lesbian detective novels, which often represented stereotypical butch or femme characters¹⁵.

As Innes observes, for the lesbian detective passing as straight is also a performance because society assumes women to be heterosexual (1997: 177). Zaremba's Keremos, for example, uses her middle age and conservative appearance to facilitate her investigations, and extract information from people, most of whom remain oblivious to her sexuality. Only other gays and lesbians, or "outsiders" (1978: 46) as Keremos calls them, are in the know. This knowledge and recognition reverses their position from outsiders to insiders, with the power to hide or reveal their true identity at their discretion.

fantasy of agency

Critics have noted that the feminist detective's appropriation of the hard-boiled genre performs a fantasy of empowerment¹⁶:

The female private detective's confidence on the 'mean streets' is part of a fantasy that negotiates the territory between fear of vulnerability and an ideal of physical integrity and self-protection (Walton and Jones, 1999: 177).

This applies to an even greater extent to the lesbian detective, as a woman and as a lesbian, in what Plain considers a 'fantasy of agency' (2001: 187), a desire

¹⁵ See, for example, Wilson, 1996: 259.

¹⁶ See, for example, Betz, 2004: 99, Plain, 2001: 214, Knight, 1980: 5.

for power and control not necessarily available to lesbians in the real world. The lesbian detective engages with mainstream society to achieve justice for gays, lesbians, women and other minorities, in the hope of reordering the world. Munt and Larcomb view this as a fantasy of control and retribution, inverting the real relations of lesbians to dominant power structures (1990: 32; 1996: 141).

Betz sees representations of the lesbian detective more positively, as acts of affirmation, arguing that solving the crime, despite the limitations placed on her, signifies the lesbian protagonist's "fully realized sense of self and of her agency, and this awareness enables the creation of new relationships and communities that offer the possibility of personal and social change" (2006: 130).

Noting Farwell's view that popular lesbian fiction is "satisfying because writers assign the active narrative role to a self-conscious lesbian who makes her own decisions and decides her own fate" (1996: 137), Betz argues that in lesbian detective fiction, in addition to the resolution of the crime:

for readers, often the more vital resolution is the success of the lesbian in engaging with and triumphing over people and institutions that would deny her existence (2006: 12).

Similarly, Munt argues that "the reader reads to discover 'herself', but also to reconstruct 'herself' as a woman empowered and centred" (1996: 141). For the lesbian reader, lesbian detective fiction offers a fairy-tale of agency not yet available to her in the real world. This notion of agency, then, is part of the appeal of lesbian detective fiction for both the lesbian reader and writer.

Betz considers that the lesbian detective works within the system but develops "a set of moral principles and actions that grant her moral agency" (2006: 138), and that this attainment of agency signifies a movement of the lesbian from margin to centre (2006: 38). Plain, however, while acknowledging that lesbian detectives typically attain a degree of agency, argues that, at least in police detective Kate Delafield's case, "this power is contingent and unstable" (2001: 170). While the fictional lesbian detective is able to occupy a position

of agency, and attain a degree of empowerment, it is temporary and limited. Even within the pages of the lesbian detective novel, the lesbian detective remains an outsider.

ultimate outsider

Reddy argues that lesbian detective fiction tackles social issues more overtly and in a more unified fashion than feminist detective fiction because the lesbian detective is an outsider, able “to see society’s flaws more clearly than those who enjoy that society’s privileges” (1988: 140).

In part, this outsider status follows the tradition of the American hard-boiled detective. Knight notes that the private eye, as typified by Chandler’s Philip Marlowe and Hammett’s Sam Spade “operates alone, judges others by himself, shares no one’s values and mores” (2004: 112) and has “the powers to judge, condemn and even execute the modern world for its corruption” (2004: 121).

Hard-boiled detective fiction draws on the American myth and tradition of the cowboy/outlaw as “an alternative form of justice” (Walton and Jones, 1999: 190). In the absence of any reliable law and order, the outlaw had to take things into his own hands (Walton and Jones, 1999: 190-1). The hard-boiled detective is “not just an eye that sees but a voice that speaks from the margins, a voice originating in a character who both talks and behaves in an insubordinate manner” (1999: 194).

Betz considers that it is the hard-boiled detective’s moral stance that makes him marginal, putting him “at odds with the very systems that provide him with a livelihood and with which he must engage if he wishes to solve the crime” (2006: 124). Cawelti argues that this male detective’s morality “rests primarily on a personal sense of honor and rightness, which is both outside the law and conventional morality” (1997: 187). As Betz observes, however, this sense of responsibility can result in isolation, difficulty forming relationships, and a tendency to addictive behaviour (2006: 125).

Going some way towards explaining the literary affinity of the lesbian with the hard-boiled detective, the lesbian has her own tradition as an outsider. The lesbian's outsider status is partly a result of a tradition of 'invisibility' of the lesbian in literature and society. Betz notes Castle's concept of the "apparitional lesbian" (quoted in Betz, 2006: 9): encroaching but kept invisible or mad. As Betz observes, because the lesbian was not historically acknowledged until the end of the nineteenth century, the lesbian as a fully recognized character does not appear in fictional texts until well into the twentieth century (2006: 23).

In his introduction to *Gay and Lesbian Characters and Themes in Mystery Novels*, Slide notes that in the history of detective fiction prior to the 1970s there were few references to gays and lesbians in mainstream literature and those that did exist tended to be negative, flawed or evil characters reflecting homophobic attitudes (1993: 1). Slide argues that lesbians fared slightly better than gay men, partly due to the lack of pejorative terms available, with vague references such as "sexual perversion" (ibid). This, however, also served to further perpetuate their invisibility.

The lesbian's perspective "is always oblique, because our discourse lies outside the central argument of the world" (Duncker, 1992: 185). Similarly, Betz argues that the lesbian is doubly marginalised as a woman and as a sexual deviant; "not even comprehensible as female" (2006: 109).

As a "transgressor, the lesbian is pushed outside the protection society provides" (Betz, 2006: 90), for example, by institutions of authority. As Anna Wilson points out, prior to the emergence of the lesbian detective in crime fiction, the lesbian character was denied access to positions of power, including the role of detective; "she does not detect, she is detected" as a murderer or deviant (1996: 276).

The already-marginalised lesbian is also caught in a third position between feminist and queer (Dever, 1997: 39), not really included by feminists or gay men. As a result, the lesbian is further subordinated and marginalised. Dever

argues, however, that this marginalised position offers a “useful function within the context of feminist and queer theories alike, acting as the border against which the mainstream can define itself” (1997: 39). Dever considers that the “dyke in the mainstream marks the space of margin and connection, offering at once a point of view that is not of the central flow” (ibid).

The lesbian’s outsider status has made her a detective in life:

the inhabitant of a hidden and self-camouflaging subculture, the lesbian has professed to be able to find others like herself beneath unlikely guises, reading tiny details of body language, subtle pronoun evasions, the gaps in a life story (Wilson, 1996: 277).

Similarly, Zimmerman suggests that every lesbian is a detective, because she “must constantly read ‘clues’ in order to decipher another woman’s sexual identity, and sometimes even [her] own” (1990: 63). The lesbian is, then, a ‘natural’ to appropriate the role of the hard-boiled detective.

The lesbian detective, however, does not enjoy the same privileges as Marlowe or other male detectives (Palmer, 1997: 89). She is seen to be “transgressive and eccentric” (ibid). Or, as Anna Wilson labels her, a “[P]ervert as agent of order” (1996: 272). As a member of an oppressed minority group, the lesbian detective remains “stigmatized and socially marginal” (Palmer, 1991: 70) and this:

solitariness and air of self defensiveness, displayed by Chandler’s Marlowe, can be adapted, in the lesbian thriller, to the feelings of loneliness and sense of alienation which the woman who identifies as lesbian experiences in hetero-patriarchal society (Palmer, 1997: 90).

This ultimate outsider status is a key to the transgressive capacity of the lesbian detective, upsetting the binaries of detective and criminal:

If closeted, she risks exposure and punishment; if out she faces homophobic discrimination. In her essence and merely by her existence, the detective who is lesbian approaches the positional of a criminal to an extent which a heterosexual male detective can only reach if his actions are truly beyond the law (Klein, 1995: 177).

For Ogureck, this ultimate outsider status is positive. The lesbian detective “boldly stands on both sides of the law, performing with privilege, doing as she pleases with her body, out of accordance with socially defined gender implications and genre expectations” (2005:189).

This extreme outsider status gives the lesbian detective the ability to see more clearly, particularly in terms of the effects of patriarchy¹⁷. The detective is, as Munt argues, “at once a representative of society and a critique of it” (Munt, 1994: 120). The lesbian detective plays on this notion and takes it further. The deviant who stays within the mainstream to describe what she sees” (Wilson, 1996: 270) gains considerable power, and the “transgressor who can blend in” (Betz, 2006: 69) poses a threat to larger society. By infiltrating, or passing, in the mainstream, the lesbian detective upsets the status quo and reveals the flaws of the patriarchal system and its values.

¹⁷ See, for example, Wilson, 1996: 277; Betz, 2006: 110.

Politics – lesbian

Tucked safely into the closet or corralled into the margins, the lesbian landscape remains unmapped: invisible not only to the law, but initially also to the detective herself (Plain, 2001: 167).

While a development of detective fiction, lesbian detective fiction also has its origins in lesbian fiction, particularly lesbian pulp fiction of the 1950s and 1960s, and the coming out novel. As Whitlock notes, since the 1980s lesbian detective fiction has been “the main genre in which lesbian writers and readers have situated themselves” (1994: 96-7). As a result, the sub-genre is primarily concerned with issues of lesbian sexuality and identity¹⁸.

Plain considers lesbian detective fiction a fantasy of lesbian fiction, laden with utopian ideals (2001: 187). This is supported by Barbara Wilson’s recollection of the environment in which she and Forrest were first publishing lesbian detective novels:

We had a Messianic feeling. We planned to publish the voices of all those women who hadn’t been able to speak before. We were going to change the world (quoted in Markowitz, 2004: 193).

lesbian pulp fiction – out of the shadows

Just as hard-boiled fiction emerged from the pulp fiction magazines (Plain, 2001: 4-5), lesbian detective fiction owes something of its development to the pulp novel¹⁹. A number of lesbian titles including a lesbian storyline were published as ‘pulp’ paperbacks during the 1940s and 1950s.

In *Queer Pulp*, Stryker argues that paperbacks in the 1940s and 1950s were a site “for exploring and exploiting certain taboo topics disallowed in movies and radio and the pages of reputable hardcover books” (2001: 8). As

¹⁸ See, for example, Munt, 1994: 121

¹⁹ The pulp fiction paperback novel emerged in 1939, supplied to soldiers. They were cheap, fitted in a pocket or bag and were high in sexual content (Stryker, 2001: 5-7). The covers usually featured suggestive illustrations. Stryker suggests that the paperback became a fetish item, “invested with the promise of sexual gratification” (2001, 7).

Zimmerman notes, “more lesbian novels were published in the United States during the 1950s and early 1960s than at any other time in history” (1990: 9).

The majority of these novels were, however, written for a male audience by male writers, contained negative stereotypes, and storylines in which the lesbian(s), after an explicit affair, came to an unhappy end. Zimmerman argues that most pulps:

depicted lesbians as tragic, maimed creatures, trapped in a world of alcohol, violence and meaningless sex. The plots either doomed them to a cycle of unhappy love affairs or redeemed them through heterosexual marriage (1990: 9).

In Vin Packer’s *Spring Fire* (1952), for example, university roommates Leda and Mitch fall in love but keep it secret from their friends:

Leda’s gasp was one of pleasure and desire and it moved Mitch to more violence, pinning Leda’s wrists behind her back and jerking at her skirt.

Neither of them heard the door open behind them.

They turned in time to see Kitten and Casey framed in the doorway, eyes big, mouths dropped, and the sound of feet running down the hall was as loud and fast as the beating of the hearts in that room (In Forrest, 2005: 28).

Leda, unable to cope with being labelled a lesbian, betrays her lover rather than admit how she feels to her sorority, and ends up committed to a mental institution.

Writers had to adhere to a strict formula of 60 000 words, with at least one sex scene per chapter. Zimmerman notes that the pulps written by women (whether lesbian or not):

seldom challenged the insidious conventions and formulas, although occasionally an author revealed an affirmative and subversive subtext beneath the homophobic surface (1990: 9).

In her introduction to *Lesbian Pulp Fiction*, Katherine Forrest notes Patricia Highsmith’s *The Price of Salt* (1952), written under the pseudonym Claire Morgan, as one of the few examples with a happy ending. Therese and Carol end up together, though at a price, as Carol’s son dies (2005, xv). Forrest argues that during the 1960s there were more novels featuring positive endings, such as Joan Ellis’s *In the Shadows* (1962), which concludes with the

main character leaving her husband to pursue her own life (2005: xv). Forrest also views Ann Bannon's novels positively, as they end with the women together or heading out into an open future (ibid).

Zimmerman, too, considers Bannon, along with Frohmann, to be among the better examples of lesbian pulps, noting that whatever their quality, "the pulp novels were read avidly by lesbians and reviewed seriously in *The Ladder*, the one lesbian journal of that era" (1990:9). As critics have noted, the pulps gave representation to lesbian lives and loves when there was little else in print²⁰.

Stryker observes that for:

those willing to work within the restrictive conventions of the new genre, lesbian-oriented paperback originals allowed a significant number of women a somewhat subversive opportunity to represent contemporary lesbian life with an unprecedented degree of sympathy and realism (2001: 54-7).

Munt argues that the best examples of lesbian pulp fiction contain:

a strong sense of self-definition, of a cultural resistance, and of survival in these novels which makes them the precursors of the lesbian crime novels of the 1980s (1994: 122).

the coming out novel

Examples of serious lesbian literature emerged in the 1950s and 1960s "bridging the gap between the great modernist writers of the 1920s and 1930s – Woolf, Barnes, and Stein – and the explicitly feminist literature of the late 1960s and early 1970s" (Zimmerman, 1990: 9-10). Zimmerman includes in this group texts such as Mary McCarthy's *The Group* (1963) and Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart* (1964), along with Highsmith's *The Price of Salt*.

The Stonewall riots²¹ in 1969 and the rise of feminism transformed society and lesbian literature (Zimmerman, 1990: 9-11). The two dominant forms of lesbian texts to emerge as a result were the lesbian utopian novel and the lesbian coming out novel.

²⁰ See, for example, Betz, 2004: 53, Zimmerman, 1990: 9.

²¹ A series of riots between New York police officers and gays and lesbians on June 28, 1969, which galvanised the gay rights movement.

The lesbian utopian novel, drawing on lesbian feminist separatism, built on the speculative fiction utopian genre, expressing a desire for an alternate, exclusively lesbian society, or, 'Lesbian Nation'²².

Early coming out novels, such as Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), and Dorothy Bussy's *Olivia* (1949) featured a lesbian protagonist who discovers her true self within a hostile heterosexual society and "finally accommodates to the outside world by either rejecting her lesbianism ... escaping through death or madness, or enduring a life of loneliness and despair" (Zimmerman, 1990: 35).

Post-feminist coming out novels took a more positive direction, including an affirmation of the lesbian's sexuality and a journey towards empowerment, a relationship, and community²³. Zimmerman sees the coming out story as "one of the fundamental myths of origin" (1993: 34), necessary for the lesbian character to express desire for another woman, to understand negative responses from the dominant culture and to find acceptance of her new identity (1990: 35).

As the dominant form of lesbian fiction during the 1960s and 1970s, the coming out novel had a considerable influence on the development of the lesbian detective novel:

using the process of individuation intrinsic to the thriller mode, the lesbian hero achieves self-determination; second, she becomes integrated into a community. The first phase is often represented by coming out, the second by frequently finding love or discovering the lesbian community, in a movement towards politicized integration (Munt, 2002: Pt 1, 2).

Further explaining the affinity or appeal of the detective novel for the lesbian writer and reader, Wilson notes the parallel between the act of 'detecting' and coming out, suggesting that the sub-genre has two mysteries, "finding a

²² See, for example, Zimmerman. Examples include: Sally Gearheart's *The Wanderground* (1978), Monique Wittig's *Les Guerilleres* (1971), and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915).

²³ See, for example, Zimmerman, 1990: 15, Munt, 1994: 125.

murderer and uncovering the detective's hidden sexual identity" (1996: 257).

Munt argues that lesbian detectives:

deal with fear and paranoia through action, by becoming agents of their own destiny. The formation of identity happens through the solution of a crime, and the central narrative device and locus of readerly pleasure is *discovery* (1994: 125).

Wilson's *Murder in the Collective* (1984), for example, revolves around two printing collectives, one of which is run by a group of lesbians, and is as much amateur investigator Pam Nilsen's coming out story, as the story of a murder investigation. She falls in love with Hadley, and they work together to solve the crime as their romance develops. Pam's twin sister, Penny, appears unsurprised by Pam's shift in orientation. "Look, it's not you getting involved with Hadley that I mind so much as the idea of the two of you running around playing amateur detective" (1990: 120).

In considering the importance of coming out in the gay male detective novel, Gunn suggests that the detective's "cognitive processes function as a paradigm of the stages of self-actualization" (2005: 3), symbolically confronting "the ultimate mystery every gay man must face at some point in his life; his difference from his family and the general society into which he has been born" (2005: 4).

Plain notes that "in the formative years of the subgenre, lesbian identity was as much a subject of investigation as the specific event of the crime" (2001: 207-208), and that many of these early novels were overly didactic (*ibid*). In Wilson's *Sisters of the Road*, for example, many of the exchanges between Pam and the secondary characters read as overt political statements:

'Nobody ever seems to ask the women who pose for the pictures and make the movies what they think. That's a lot harder to ignore when it comes to prostitution. The issue *is* the women. Which is probably why feminists don't take it up.'
'Like they refused to take up lesbian issues until the lesbians themselves stood up and demanded to be recognised?'
'Exactly' (1986: 152).

Plummer considers that the coming out story remains the dominant form of gay and lesbian sexual story-telling (1995: 82). Crawley and Broad go so far as to argue that all lesbian and gay stories are still coming out stories, because this is the formula most widely recognised both within and outside the lesbian community (2004: 64).

In Gerri Hill's *Hunter's Way* (2005), for example, Detective Samantha Kennedy finds herself falling in love with her new work partner, Tori, and must deal with telling her boyfriend and colleagues, while trying to maintain a professional relationship with Tori, and bring down an international drug ring.

Critics such as Crawley and Broad argue that the coming out narrative is formulaic, limiting the potential for diversity and variability (2004: 48-49), reducing its:

discussion about sexuality into 'types' of people (characters = victims and villains) with a limited number of 'truths' (narrative plots) that can be spoken about them (2004: 49).

Similarly, Loeske argues that the coming out story, like any formula story, decreases the variety of experiences that can be narrated (2001: 107). Plain, however, questions whether the genre is necessarily conservative, suggesting it can "open a space of transgressive desire" (2001: 218) within "a safety net of narrative certainty" (ibid). Similarly, Betz, noting McCracken's view that genre conventions offer "an apparatus for negotiating the boundaries that define identity" (1998: 50), suggests that the lesbian detective formula provides a frame of reference through which a range of issues can be considered (2006: 3).

changing politics

While early lesbian detective novels were heavily invested with feminist politics, a diversion of the political interests of feminists and lesbians during the 1980s saw lesbian feminist separatism go out of favour and, to an extent, lesbianism separated from feminism²⁴.

²⁴ See, for example, Anna Wilson, 1996: 252,

Some novels from the time explore the tensions of these conflicting politics and interests. In Zaremba's *Beyond Hope*, for example, after tracking missing person, Sara Ann, to a lesbian separatist collective, Keremos argues the practical implications of the political position of separatists and women's collectives with her more radical friends, suggesting that the "politics work as long as the outside world is kept out" (1987: 151). Zaremba shows the collective to have been a failure. The women are largely powerless against outside events and unwittingly take in a terrorist and murderer, fail to protect the real victims, and the group ultimately disintegrates. Similarly, Barbara Wilson considers that her novels "call into question some of the hypocrisy and rhetoric of the feminist movement" (quoted in Gibbs, 1994: 42).

Anna Wilson argues that it was at this point of diversion in feminist and lesbian politics that the lesbian detective fiction emerged, due to a "fading of belief in the redemptive properties of lesbianism" (1996: 253). The lesbian detective novel replaced the coming out novel, marking a "new model not only for imagining lesbian identity but also for lesbian relations with society" (Wilson, 1996: 255), "abandoning the safety of, and apparently the desire for, lesbian nation" (Wilson, 1996: 270).

Despite the popularity of lesbian detective fiction with lesbian audiences, it attracted criticism from early lesbian/feminist critics as a 'cop-out' to the mainstream, departing from the subversive and utopian ideals of early lesbian literature. Duncker considered that lesbians writing popular or genre fiction were selling out (1992: 193). Similarly, Zimmerman saw lesbian detective fiction as a shift from vision and idealism to a "less vital" place (1990: 208), arguing that experimental style and form were abandoned after the 1970s, leaving flat characters, conventional plots and formulaic romances (1990: 19).

Barbara Wilson observed in the early 1990s that this shift resulted in a reduction in the political content of lesbian detective novels:

There is less boundary-crossing these days and more encouragement (from publishers buoyed by sales and from large and often very appreciative audiences) to keep to what appears to be a winning formula. There's less talk about the

mystery as a subversive form, less talk about how women have changed the genre (in Gibbs, 1994: 218-19).

As lesbians have achieved greater acceptance in society, this trend has continued. The majority of more recent lesbian detective fiction lacks the political content and experimentation with form that were features of the sub-genre as it emerged and developed. As Betz notes, many contemporary lesbian crime novels offer “little innovation in technique, characterization, or storyline” (2006: 18). The majority of today’s writers of lesbian detective fiction appear to be referencing contemporary examples of the sub-genre rather than the broader crime genre, or even early examples of lesbian detective fiction. The identity and love interests of the detective, or the private self, have become more important than the politics of being a lesbian and/or a woman.

writing lesbian

Zimmerman considers that “the nature of lesbian fiction makes it impossible to separate the text from the imagination that engenders it” (1990: 15), suggesting that a writer who is a lesbian is always, unconsciously or consciously, *writing lesbian*. Writing from the position, or consciousness, of a minority writer presents a number of issues for the lesbian author.

Minority authors often have a dual motivation; to tell their personal story, and to deliver a political message. Not all lesbian writers necessarily have an overt political motivation for writing. Nonetheless, as Francesca Polletta argues, the story, or narrative, is central to the mobilisation of social movements²⁵, and the “goal is self-transformation as much as political reform” (2002: 48). Similarly, Duffey suggests that, for minority writers, literature is a means by which they can encourage change and acceptance, as well as “convey a piece of their own unique identity” (2002: 1).

Writers of lesbian detective fiction are, in telling a lesbian story, inevitably speaking for the community, or “conveying meaning through typification”

²⁵ See, for example, *Contending Stories: Narrative in social movements* (1998) and *Plotting Protest: Mobilizing stories in the 1960 student sit-ins* (2002).

(Crawly and Broad, 2004: 56). Brophy notes the sensitivity within a minor literature to:

the political implications of any utterance. In the cramped space of the minority each individual voice takes on a representative value for the others and is heard against the greater noise of the majority as a political act. The awareness of politics can provoke a minor literature's resistance to a repressive status quo (1998: 43).

The lesbian writer is conscious that she is representing not just her own story, but that of other lesbians. This can result in a feeling of responsibility to write against negative stereotypes featuring elsewhere in literature. In 'Toward a theory of Minority Discourse,' JanMahamed and Lloyd argue that because minority groups are forced into a "negative, generic subject position" (2002: 328), the oppressed individual attempts to negate this by "transforming that position into a positive, collective one" (ibid). Lesbian and gay narratives are individual stories often aiming to convey messages about 'real' lives, including the assertion that they are not typical, or do not conform with stereotypes²⁶. Whitlock argues that lesbian texts:

intervene as agents of change, displacing and replacing negative representations of lesbian women with positive ones, appropriated from the dominant culture and transferred in the process (1994: 97).

Zimmerman considers one of the purposes of lesbian fiction to be to map the boundaries of what it is to be lesbian; a process she calls mythmaking (1990: 21). "Myths tell a people who they are, where they come from, and how they are to act. The myths incorporated into lesbian fiction help us construct the meaning of our lives" (1990: 21). She sees this as a "political project aimed at overturning the patriarchal domination of culture and language" (ibid).

Zimmerman also argues that lesbian novels are read by lesbians to "affirm lesbian existence" and membership of a community (1990: 15). For the lesbian reader:

by seeing her life and experience represented in a recognisable fashion in a narrative that asserts the ordinariness of her

²⁶ See, for example, Crawley and Broad, 2004: 51; Zimmerman, 1990: 23.

experience, the lesbian reader can enjoy the luxury of confirmation (Betz, 2006: 24).

Because of these implications, when writing a lesbian novel, the lesbian writer feel the constraints of political correctness, and of speaking for all lesbians (Zimmerman, 1990: 19) because, as Betz argues, “the lesbian reader brings a set of clearly articulated expectations, not only about the type of book being read, but also about the way lesbian life and experience will be represented” (2006: 10).

Forrest considers that as a lesbian writer, “you've still got to fulfil your contract with the reader” (quoted in Walton & Jones: 54). McKemmish, however, argues that:

the lesbian who writes crime fiction should not be supposed to sit at the computer and fulfil your expectations of a lesbian detective. Some will. Some won't. I don't. I want to have the pleasure of the detective genre and change the world (1993: 35).

Writing a lesbian text also raises issues of authenticity. Crawley and Broad note that the audience seems to be more accepting of the ‘truth’ of the lesbian story if the storyteller has the “authority of being one” (2004: 56). This is supported by the degree of interest from readers and critics of lesbian detective fiction in the sexual identity of writers of the sub-genre and debate as to the ‘authenticity’ of non-lesbian authors writing in the sub-genre²⁷.

This emphasis on personal stories and authenticity places expectations for ‘truth’ and authenticity on lesbian writers that heterosexual writers do not necessarily face. A heterosexual writer, having written a heterosexual story, tends not to be asked if he or she is heterosexual. As critics have observed, there is a degree of risk taken by the minority author in telling an individual or personal story publicly, potentially exposing too much of themselves²⁸.

²⁷ See, for example, Markowitz, 2004: 11.

²⁸ See, for example, Crawley and Broad, 2004: 52; Duffey, 2002: 1.

A lesbian story tends to be perceived as a personal one, and draws attention to the writer's own sexuality and personal life. As Bourke notes, the lesbian audience can be an affectionate one (quoted in Sorenson, 2005). This depends, however, on the ways in which lesbians are represented. If portrayed negatively, or counter to current internal politics, the lesbian writer risks that her own story, or her own personal views, may not be well received by a lesbian audience.

Similarly, she is conscious that if read by a mainstream audience, aspects of her own story may be misunderstood, or perpetuate existing negative stereotypes. As a result, the lesbian writer must compromise in balancing fantasy and reality, representing life for the lesbian protagonist as it is, with how she would like it to be.

At the same time, the lesbian writer is trying to have her work published and reach an audience, and can be conscious that, particularly when writing a first novel, she will likely be labelled a 'lesbian writer', which she may or may not be comfortable with. The degree of self-consciousness in writing lesbian, in addition to the existing pressures of the writing and publishing process, could lead some lesbian writers to conclude that it would be easier to choose to 'write straight' in order to be accepted by a mainstream publisher and audience, and not to draw attention to their own personal life.

mainstream vs community

Choices around writing for a lesbian or a mainstream audience²⁹ have been an ongoing issue for authors of lesbian detective fiction. When starting to write the Stoner McTavish novels, Sarah Dreher has explained that she was conscious that if she went mainstream, she would have to tone down the lesbian content and if she went ahead with the lesbian content – she would be labelled a lesbian writer (quoted in Woolfe and Penelope, 1993: 117).

Ellen Hart, author of the Jane Lawless series states:

²⁹ Reaching a wider, non-lesbian audience.

Writing a book that included the landscape of my own life just seemed natural. I figured it might mean the book would never be published, but I wasn't concerned about that ... I didn't want to write myself out of my own book (Lo, 2004: 1).

Val McDermid has said that she wanted her character, Lindsay Gordon, to be an “[E]verydyke” (quoted in Markowitz, 2004: 7), representative and typical of all lesbians. McDermid’s Lindsay Gordon series was initially published by the Women’s Press. Following McDermid’s subsequent success with her (heterosexual) Kate Brannigan series:

People who read Kate Brannigan are going back to the Lindsay Gordon books and that’s great because it’s bringing lesbianism into the mainstream and people will hopefully see it as part of the normal spectrum of life (McDermid, quoted in Brooks, 1993: 13).

Nicola Griffith considers being a lesbian only one facet of her detective, Aud Torvingen (Lo, 2004: 1). Griffith apparently had no qualms about submitting *Blue Place* to a mainstream publisher in the mid-1990s (Avon Books): “I honestly believe there’s very little prejudice in publishing” (Lo, 2004: 2).

With the exception of Porter’s *The Monkey’s Mask*, McDermid’s Lindsay Gordon series is the only one to have reached the mainstream to any great extent. McDermid’s lesbian series, however, does not enjoy the same level of sales that her heterosexual series do³⁰.

Chen notes that lesbian titles are now stocked in mainstream bookstores, such as Barnes and Noble and Borders (2006: 1). These books, however, are usually confined to a small, specialist section of the bookstore and not necessarily embraced by a wider readership. Chen also notes the relative unprofitability of lesbian titles (for publisher and writer) due to a limited market, resulting in average print runs in the United States of 8000 (2006: 3). Notably, in Australia, this would be a relatively large print run for any book.

³⁰ Conversation with specialist bookseller, Ron Serdiuk, November 2007; Hume, 2003: 236.

Not all lesbian fiction writers are necessarily interested in reaching a wider audience. Katherine Forrest, author of the long-running Kate Delafield series, has stated: “I don’t have any confusion in my mind about who my audience is. I’m a lesbian writer and I write for a lesbian audience and I don’t care if anyone else reads my books” (cited in Marchino, 1995: 65). Nevertheless, Forrest’s series was published by Berkely in 1993 for its “crossover potential” (Lo, 2004: 2).

In contrast, in her preface to the 1989 reprint of *A Reason to Kill*, Zaremba explains that she was aiming for a mainstream detective genre readership:

I set out to write a mystery well within the tradition of the genre, with a hard-nosed, apolitical detective/outsider, who happened to be a lesbian. I have never been interested in producing a romantic adventure or a coming out story disguised as a mystery (1989: 5).

A Reason to Kill was, as Zaremba had hoped, first published by a mainstream press. In hindsight, Zaremba observes that this was an “aberration” because the publisher did not realise what they were doing (1993-4: 45), partly because Helen does not really come out until the second novel. In interview, a few years later, she explains:

For most of my life lesbian detectives did not exist and lesbians generally were invisible in genre fiction, except for their rare appearance in character parts of ‘perverts.’ So I wanted to write mysteries about a dyke Private Eye. Period. No overt political messages – lesbian, feminist or otherwise. Just a middle-aged lesbian matter-of-factly going about her job as a P.I. Of course, that simple ambition has turned out to be problematic (1993: 45).

Whatever Zaremba’s intentions, her novels were read within the political context of the time and contributed significantly to the development of the sub-genre. Their impact in the mainstream, however, appears to have been limited, although they were reprinted by Virago in the late 1980s.

With *Darkness More Visible*, Moorhead wanted to prove that a literary novel with a lesbian protagonist could be a best seller (2000: 64). The novel did not,

however, did not gain widespread popularity with a lesbian, detective fiction or literary audience.

Lindy Cameron, author of the Kit O'Malley series states that she:

wanted to create the first Australian lesbian private investigator. When I started (1991) there was only one other fictional Aussie lesbian crime fighter and she was a cop (Claire McNab's Carol Ashton). I also wanted Kit to be totally free of any angst about *being* a lesbian. (Unlike Ashton above)³¹.

Cameron explains that she was aiming for as wide an audience as possible and wanted "Kit O'Malley to be accepted as a ex-cop PI, and hopefully funny and likeable, before anything about her sexuality became part of the story"³². She goes on to state:

in the first book, *Blood Guilt*, the word lesbian was only used twice – and the first time by a straight woman who was embarrassed to even use it. The word dyke never crossed my keyboard³³.

It seems that many writers of lesbian detective fiction, then, desire a wider readership for their lesbian protagonists. This is likely for economic reasons but seems also to be linked to a desire for acceptance of themselves as writers (not just lesbian writers).

Plain suggests the lesbian detective fiction writer is:

subject to a plethora of expectations emerging from both the template of the detective genre and the politics of feminism and, perhaps not surprisingly, she fails to satisfy them all, not least because she is herself undergoing a process of evolution (2001: 202).

It is unrealistic for a lesbian writer, or any other writer, to think that they can satisfy every reader. The sub-genre, however, seems to have stopped evolving and many of the contemporary texts published fall between romance and detective novel, placing lesbian identity before the crime. This self-consciousness and adherence to the formulas of the sub-genre may, however,

³¹ Email to Inga Simpson 14 November 2007.

³² *ibid*

³³ *ibid*

be limiting its development as well as preventing it from reaching a wider audience.

doubled double-consciousness

DuBois' notion of "double consciousness" can be argued to apply to the writer of lesbian detective fiction. DuBois described the situation faced by minorities in which they are representative of, and immersed in, two separate identities, and do not find wholeness in either (quoted in Awkward, 1989: 13).

Drawing on DuBois' notion of double consciousness, Duffey argues that minority authors must write in ways that represent their community, but also appeal to the dominant culture, in order to reach a wider audience (2002: 1-3). If minority texts do not coincide with the dominant culture's ideology, the texts will remain disregarded (2002: 1), and "the minority author's message to society runs the risk of being internalized only by her own minority group" (2002: 2). Similarly, in *Queer Theory and Social Change*, Max Kirsch argues that it is necessary to engage with "the actors of domination" (2000: 73) to force social change.

There is a degree of compromise involved for minority writers in effecting this strategy, as they "must initially sacrifice a piece of their identity in order to reach a wider audience" (Duffey, 2002: 2), in order to have a greater influence on societal change as "'insiders' within the literary establishment" (Duffey, 2002: 1).

JanMahamed and Lloyd note that many minority texts are seen to be inadequate, or underdeveloped, by the dominant culture (2002: 325), suggesting that this is not due to a "scarcity of talent" (ibid) but because of other cultural and political factors (2002: 327). They argue that the dominant culture makes minority texts unavailable both overtly – by not publishing them, not stocking them in libraries – and more subtly, through a perspective that is blind to minority concerns (2002: 325). For the writer of lesbian

detective fiction, reaching a mainstream audience may mean reducing, amending or even removing lesbian content³⁴.

In 'Its too hard to write good – I'd rather write bad', Porter has said that in writing *The Monkey's Mask* she did not compromise:

I decided I would please myself entirely...I wanted ingredients that stank to high heaven of badness. I wanted graphic sex. I wanted explicit perversion. I wanted putrid language. I wanted stenching murder. I wanted to pour out my heart. I wanted to take the piss. I wanted lesbians who weren't nice to other women. I wanted glamorous nasty men who even lesbians want to fuck. I wanted to say that far too much Australian poetry is a dramatic cure for insomnia. But I still wanted to write the book in poetry... I was extremely nervous waiting for its reception. The conservatives will hate it. The lesbians will hate it. Men will hate it. Straight women will hate it. The poets will hate it. And no one will buy it ('Writing Good', Porter, 1999: 2).

The novel went on to become an international best seller. The lesbian content of *The Monkey's Mask*, is, however, comparatively 'palatable' to a mainstream audience. Jill is not a very 'good' lesbian: she sleeps with a man as well as with women. Her love interest, Diana, is a married, bi-sexual predator, who uses the political, sexual and economic safety of her marriage to protect her identity as a criminal and as a queer. Diana and Jill's relationship is shown to be destructive and exploitative. Jill is not an empowered lesbian or detective, but a failure and a victim.

It is not possible to definitively identify the factors which led to *The Monkey's Mask's* popularity. Agents and publishers, too, make decisions based on differing and somewhat subjective perceptions of marketability. It seems clear, however, that for the moment at least, if deciding not to compromise on lesbian content, the writer of lesbian detective fiction risks remaining a minority (and genre) writer, outside the mainstream.

the outsider within

³⁴ While outside the scope of this study, there are examples of lesbian writers and lesbian works that have gained widespread literary and commercial success, such as the works of Jeanette Winterson, Sarah Waters and Louise Welsh.

Traditionally, the detective, in solving the crime, restores order and achieves a degree of justice against the perpetrators, and a sense of reconciliation of the social disorder or conflicts represented. Betz argues that in lesbian detective fiction, as well as solving the case, the detective “will also achieve some kind of accommodation with the dominant heterosexual environment” (2006: 11), resulting in a movement of the detective “from the margin to the centre” (ibid).

Yet, the lesbian detective is never fully accepted. As Betz notes:

even after the crime has been solved and the social order of the dominant community restored, [the lesbian] is not welcome; she is still too perverse to be integrated into it completely (2006: 117).

The lesbian detective may come out, find a lover or a community but she remains separate, outside wider society because her lover is a woman, and her community is made up predominantly of lesbians and gay men (Betz, 2006: 107). She has worked within the system, sometimes ensuring the safety of the wider community, yet she remains an outsider within.

Critics have questioned the capacity of the outsider to effect meaningful change. Plain, for example, argues that:

the detective’s marginality facilitates a romantic detachment from political and economic reality. Irrespective of his or her oppositional stance and tough talking, the figure of the detective must be content with effecting change on a microcosmic level, providing individual solutions to superstructural problems without ever seriously disturbing the ‘deep ideological constants’ of power (2001: 88).

While the fictional lesbian detective is sufficiently empowered to resolve individual crimes and draw attention to society’s flaws, her capacity to generate change on a larger scale, including her own outsider status, remains a fantasy. Further, as Anna Wilson observes, this engagement with the broader society is an expression of the desire for assimilation (1996: 273) and “a capitulation to the values of the mainstream” (1996: 271). By working with or within the system that discriminates against her, the lesbian detective is

inevitably compromised. Plain, too, notes the degree of compromise involved for the lesbian detective in trying to mix it up in the straight world. “In the dialectic of inside/out, can it be other than utopian to imagine that proximity will not lead to contamination?” (2001: 168).

This conflict is not unique to the lesbian detective. As Duncker notes, an important argument within any revolutionary movement is “whether to infiltrate the establishment and to push from within, or whether to settle for confrontation from the outside” (1992: 200). This is a common theme in early lesbian detective novels. In Moorhead’s *Still Murder*, for example, Detective Margot Gorman asks herself where she stands in relation to feminism: “On the fence, collaborating, or with my own sex?” (1991: 86).

McDermid’s Lindsay Gordon is a freelance journalist for the popular press. This creates moral tensions for her, as a lesbian and a feminist, and attracts criticism from her friends. In *Report for Murder* Gordon argues “I’m not a revolutionary. I’m a pragmatist” (1987: 67). She considers that it is better for her to be doing the reporting than someone less reputable who has all the facts wrong (1987: 78-9), and argues that she is still making a difference:

But I think you can only change things from the inside. I know the people I work with and they know me well enough to take me seriously when I have a go at them about writing sexist rubbish about attractive blonde divorcees. What I say might not make them change overnight but I think that, like water dripping on a stone, it’s gradually wearing them down (1987: 65-66).

McKemmish’s *A Gap in the Records* pursues this theme further, exploring the conflict around subverting the status quo; whether it is more effective to work from within the system or from outside. The character of Mary Stevens, comparing her role in taking on the identity of an American agent inside Pine Gap with that of the noisy protesters outside the facility, considers the extent to which she is compromised:

by being a spy, any spy for any cause, you justify all spies. All measures against. By constructing the supra-secret you validate every ordinary security measure, every transgression of individual rights. It is an argument not dissimilar to that applied to bureaucrats; if you are one you

support the system, if you wish to subvert, to challenge or change, your effect is always less than the support you give the system by working for it. If you worked effectively against it you would simply be sacked (1985: 95).

Given the time at which she was writing, this could be interpreted to refer to acts of subversion to achieve feminist ends, suggesting that participating in the system, even for the purpose of subversion, can “actually help support the very institutions and ideologies it seeks to destroy” (Jones, 1989: 70).

The conflict involved in deciding whether to work from outside the dominant system or from within, and the degree of compromise involved for the individual, could also be applied to the act of writing as a lesbian. By writing an ‘alternative’ text – with a lesbian protagonist addressing lesbian issues – there is less compromise in relation to content or format. However, as a result, the writer risks the text not reaching a wider audience, limiting its capacity to achieve political reform or change. Conversely, writing in a way that attempts to reach the mainstream will likely involve some compromise as to lesbian content, style and political message.

McKemmish has explained that she aimed to “locate the lesbian as part of the mainstream, as just there, like heterosexuality is just there” (1993: 34). *A Gap in the Records*, however, contains little overt lesbian content, with no representation of lesbian love, sex, or community. The novel is not included in most critical accounts of the sub-genre. Further, the novel is now out of print, suggesting it failed to appeal to a wider audience.

Writing as a minority writer can also result in the ghettoising or fetishising of the writer’s work. As JanMahamed and Lloyd argue, minorities should be wary of ‘pluralism’ in which difference “is merely an exoticism” (2002: 326), disguising the perpetuation of exclusion (ibid). If lesbian detective fiction is published because of the exotic aspects of its content, either in the mainstream or by specialist lesbian publishers, the work will likely remain marginalised. In other words, as long as the emphasis – by author, publisher, marketer or

bookseller – remains on ‘difference’ or ‘the lesbian’ in the lesbian writer’s work, she will, like the lesbian detective, remain an outsider within.

Methods of investigation

Maybe the collective method doesn't work so well when it comes to solving crimes (Barbara Wilson, *Murder in the Collective*, 1984: 132).

While often exploring gay and lesbian themes, and experimenting with form, lesbian detective fiction, on the whole, adheres to the conventions of the broader detective genre in its investigation methods. The detective must find clues, talk to witnesses and suspects, encounter and discard red herrings, evade potential danger, and reach a resolution (Markowitz, 2004: 25).

The profession or former profession of the lesbian detective (and perhaps the professional experience of the writer) has the largest influence on the methods of investigation she uses. The sub-genre features journalists, lawyers, insurance investigators, and restaurateurs. The majority of fictional lesbian detectives are, however, private eyes or police officers. There are also a number of spies, or ex-spies in the sub-genre, particularly within the Australian examples.

the lesbian private eye

Reflecting the sub-genre's development from the hard-boiled and feminist detective novel, the first fictional lesbian detectives, Beal's Kat Geurrera (*Angel Dance*, 1977) and Zaremba's Helen Keremos (*A Reason to Kill*, 1978) are private investigators: Geurrera an amateur, Keremos a professional. At the time of their publication, a female private eye, let alone a lesbian private eye, was a rarity, even in fiction. As Reddy notes, representations of women in hard-boiled detective fiction "reproduce and explain the very same cultural myths that made female professional private eyes unlikely outside the novel as well" (2003: 193).

Keremos is constantly reminded that detecting isn't a woman's profession:

A female private-eye! What's a broad doing in that business?
And so far from home. Brave for a chick (1989: 45).

While the tradition of the amateur detective working alone, established by the male hard-boiled private eye, persists, the lesbian detective, like the feminist detective, tends to use her network of community contacts to help her solve the crime, as well as for emotional support. In Wilson's *Murder in the Collective*, for example, amateur detective Pam Nilsen works with other members of her collective and her lover, Hadley, to resolve the crime. As Hadley points out: "We're certainly more qualified than any old male detective they'll put on the case. Hell Pam, we know these people don't we?" (1990: 74).

Geurarra relies on her network of friends, who take her in and supply her with information (and sometimes sex). Similarly, Keremos relies on her friend Alex's "extensive stable of contacts" (1986: 40) for most of the behind the scenes research. She also works through the development of a case with Alex: "having someone I trust with whom to talk over the job is very useful, not to mention pleasant" (1986: 40).

The fictional lesbian private eye is, like most detectives, physically capable and assertive, hunting down clues, suspects, and asking lots of questions. Wilson has stated that "the question and answer method of investigation is used extensively, not only to elicit alibis and confessions, but to create a dialectical voice" (1993: 42). In *Murder in the Collective*, the naïve Pam questions Zee, who is ultimately revealed to be the murderer, about her work in the Philippines:

'Have all the people you've helped been political? I mean anti-Marcos?'

'Anti-Marcos, yes, but we mean a lot of different things by that, you know. Lots of people in the Philippines are anti-Marcos now, but not everyone does anything about it'
(1990: 86).

Like most private investigators, Keremos relies a lot on leg work and phone calls. "That afternoon I went about my business, phoned people, called in some I.O.U.s" (1986: 40). Keremos, however, also adopts a very physical style. "I'm not what you might call a cerebral type of investigator. Action is

more my strong point.” (1986: 55). She carries a gun underneath the seat of her four wheel drive and frequently has to use force to defend herself.

‘Piss off,’ I countered elegantly and made to push past him through the door. His shoulder blocked my way, his hand grabbed my arm. It was my bad arm. It hurt. Without a moment’s thought I lashed out my undamaged arm simultaneously kicking his knee. The side of my hand connected with a satisfying thump. He fell backwards holding the side of his face (1986: 111).

Unlike the hard-boiled private eye, the feminist detectives, for example, Paretsky’s V.I Warshawski, tend not to use violence if they can avoid it, and, if they do, experience an ambivalence about it (Reddy, 1988:113). Reddy also notes the frequency of scenes in which the female private detective uses her intelligence and strength to overcome the threat of violence, suggesting this is a deliberate ploy to subvert the stereotype of the woman who is weak under pressure or needs male protection (1988: 113-4).

Betz argues that while the feminist detective tends to focus on fitness and self-defence, she does not lose her femininity (2006: 102). Warshawski, for example, is physically fit and strong, works out regularly at the gym, carries a gun, and defends herself with aggression, when she has to:

I launched myself at Rossy. I whirled, kicking him hard in the stomach, turning again as he lashed out at me to kick him on the kneecap. He was punching at me, but he wasn’t a street fighter (Paretsky, *Total Recall*, 2001: 393).

She remains, however, well spoken, attractive, and well, if practically, dressed: “[T]rouser suit, crepe soled shoes” (*Total Recall*, 2001: 155). Cawelti considers that V.I Warshawski “has all the toughness and independence traditionally associated with men, but has not abandoned the traditional feminine concerns of family and nurturance” (Cawelti, 2004: 280).

the lesbian detective and violence

Betz argues that because the lesbian detective doesn't need to remain attractive to men, or conform to mainstream notions of femininity, and already contravenes accepted cultural notions of what it is to be female, she “drastically realigns these issues of toughness, aggression and violence”

(2006: 103). The lesbian's marginal position gives her a licence to use violence not available to the feminist detective³⁵ because she is already on the margins³⁶:

Inhabiting the margins grants the lesbian detective the freedom to take on the habits of violence without losing its privileges. Being labelled as a deviant, the lesbian can safely determine ways in which violence will play out in her investigation (Betz, 2006: 118).

This is particularly true of the lesbian private investigator who already works outside the system and conventional rules. Keremos works with the police only when it suits her ends, as she does in *Work for a Million*, feeding them information about the criminal to help her client and ensure an arrest. In general, she has little regard for the formal legal and law enforcement system and is prepared to use whatever means necessary to exact justice. In *Reason to Kill*, Keremos' associate, Alex, realises that Keremos is prepared to use violence:

‘I didn't know you carried a gun!’
‘I don't carry it, but I have one in the truck.’
‘The Police Commission would not like that.’
‘Fuck the Police commission.’
(1989: 87)

Many lesbian detectives are depicted as physically tall, strong and capable. For example, in Nicola Griffith's *Blue Place*, Aud Torvingen is six-foot, a black-belt in karate, and capable of violence, having killed a man when she was eighteen. *Deep Cover*'s Kris is “tall, lithe and strikingly attractive” (Paradee, 2004: 9) and a known assassin.

The lesbian detective is, however, more often a victim of violence than other detectives. As Klein notes, violence towards amateur detectives is traditionally low grade and often occurs off stage (1995: 180). Even in the hard-boiled novels of Hammett and Chandler, in which, as Plain notes, the detectives “detect with their bodies” (2001: 26) and take a “constant battering” (2001: 13), there are many near misses, and wounds are usually minor:

³⁵ The lesbian detective's use of violence in the course of investigations is discussed in more detail in the section ‘Methods of Investigation’.

³⁶ See for example, Reddy, 1988: 142, Betz, 2006: 103

He folded over me, wrapping himself around my leg. We both went down. I was underneath, but his head was against my thigh. His cap fell off. I caught his hair with both hands and yanked myself into a sitting position. His teeth went into my leg. I called him disagreeable things and put my thumbs in the hollows of his ears. It didn't take much pressure to teach him that he oughtn't to bite people (Hammett, 'This King Business', in *The Big Knockover*, 2005: 115).

While feminist detectives, such as V.I. Warshawski, are often the victims of violence in their line of work, the lesbian detective's injuries tend to be more serious. In *Work for a Million*, Keremos survives a car explosion (1986: 76-7), waking up in hospital with her head and arm bandaged. In Duffy's *Wavewalker*, Saz suffers serious burns, which leave her badly scarred and require months of medical care. In *Fresh Flesh*, Saz is severely beaten and delirious in hospital, where, as Plain notes, not even her doctor partner, Molly, can help her (2001: 214). In Paradee's *Deep Cover*, undercover agent Kris is beaten by Russian spies and dumped on her girlfriend and colleague, Shelby's, doorstep (2004: 145). Shelby is later shot in the arm by an unknown assailant (2004: 176).

Critics have noted the sub-genre's use of the lesbian detective's body as a site of violence³⁷. Referencing Kristeva's notion of the abject³⁸, Plain argues that serious injury to the lesbian detective destabilises the patterns of agency otherwise established by the narrative, consistent with the tendency of the sub-genre to avoid closure and certainty (2001: 214):

just as the plot prepares to fall into some degree of order, the detective's agency is fundamentally undermined, roles are reversed and agent becomes patient. The flow of power switches and the locus of pleasure shifts from vicarious control to vicarious submission (2001: 214).

Placing the lesbian detective in the role of victim, can, however, be seen as a subversive move, reinforcing negative stereotypes of lesbians as victims, or at

³⁷ See for example, Plain, 2001: 213-214.

³⁸ Crime fiction's vicarious and cathartic confrontation of death allows the horrors of it to be both contained and indulged. See, for example, Plain, 2001: 10-11.

least raises questions as to why lesbian writers often choose this vulnerability for their lesbian protagonist when writers of feminist detective fiction do not.

Lesbian detective fiction also features several examples of the rape of the detective. I deal with this issue in more detail in the section titled Sex and Romance.

lesbian police officers

Lesbian police detectives have greater access to power and, potentially, a greater capacity to effect change. They are, however, more restricted in their investigation methods. Betz notes that while the lesbian private detective “can control the degree and intensity of her interactions with the public” (2006: 29) during her investigations, and negotiate with the legal system on her own terms, the lesbian police officer is restrained by the system (ibid).

Katherine Forrest’s LAPD detective, Kate Delafield, for example, works conscientiously and thoroughly, gathering evidence within the bounds of her responsibility and the limits of the law. Similarly, McNab’s Inspector Carol Ashton works closely with her male partner, Sergeant Bourke, to solve crimes according to police procedure.

Despite operating within the bounds of the law, lesbian police detectives do use violence in their investigations. Reddy points out Kate Delafield’s enjoyment of the use of power:

Sometimes, I *did* enjoy the scaring, breaking, and shooting. Sometimes, seeing a look of abject terror come into some pimple-faced punk’s eyes, and knowing it was I, not he who had power – and that *he knew it* – was enjoyable in itself. And it scared the hell out of me (quoted in Reddy, 1988: 142).

Plain argues that the lesbian police detective is more able to effect change than the private investigator (2001: 93). The police force tends to be male dominated and conservative, and tied to systems of law and government³⁹. A lesbian entering this male domain and “assuming the prerogatives of the

³⁹ See, for example, Betz, 2006: 29-30.

dominant heterosexist culture” (Betz, 2006: 75), is “twice suspect” (ibid), posing a threat to the dominant order:

by inserting herself into the system and demanding the same access to authority and the ability to wield it as her colleagues, the lesbian officer will dramatically and permanently alter the system itself and redefine that authority (ibid).

Betz argues that writing a lesbian into the role of a police officer is an act of affirmation (2006: 75). The lesbian cop “acquires visibility and asserts the right to exist in the police community, not on its margins” (2006: 91), gaining the trust of her colleagues, the public, and the reader (ibid).

Putting herself in the line of fire from within as well as from outside, however, places considerable pressure on the lesbian detective. Although representing one of these institutions of authority and protection, the lesbian cop is nevertheless compromised because she must support the same system (Betz, 2006: 90) which marginalises her, placing her in the position of outsider within. As Larcomb argues, the “price of belonging is compliance” (1993: 33).

This is particularly the case if the detective is not out. As Plain notes, while Forrest’s Delafield does achieve “significant proximity to power” (2001: 94) her agency depends on her denial of her sexuality (ibid). McNab sees Ashton’s sexuality and status as a police officer as providing conflict in the series: “her profession is exposing other people’s lives and revealing their secrets, yet, she, herself has a secret she believes could ruin her career” (quoted in Mitchell, 1992: 22). McNab has explained that Ashton:

operates in a peculiar vacuum, largely surrounded by males, working for them and with them, yet apart – not only because of her gender, but because of her sexuality. Hiding her closeted gayness is yet another necessity in a world where women have to constantly compromise or, at least on the surface, play by the male rules. This conflict between appearance and actuality is one familiar to many women who step outside the roles our society has constructed for them (quoted in Bird, 1993: 68-9).

When the crime being investigated by the lesbian police detective involves the lesbian and gay community, the issues become even more complex. In what

Plain sees as a “dual citizenship” (2001: 93), the detective “must decide if she can or should introduce her own orientation” (Betz, 2006: 106). Betz considers that the lesbian police detective:

must constantly manoeuvre the borderlines between straight and gay communities and establish her credentials not only in her role as detective, but as a member of the larger community (2006: 106).

It is often the lesbian police officer’s knowledge of the gay community that leads to solving the crime⁴⁰, which can earn them respect and increase their colleagues’ awareness (2006: 74-5). Ashton comes out in the fifth book of her series, *Dead Certain*, to help a gay man. As a result of her investigations, the father of the victim threatens to expose her. Ashton is forced to reveal her sexuality to her colleagues. Her partner, Bourke, tells her that the other police will close ranks to protect her, providing a much more positive outcome than she expected (1992: 200-2).

More recent lesbian detective fiction, such as Hill’s *Hunter’s Way*, is more likely to feature out lesbian police officers. While this reduces the degree of compromise, similar tensions remain, with the lesbian police officer subject to internal prejudice and abuse. As Betz notes, however, few lesbian detective novels have explored this dilemma in any great depth. Betz suggests that this issue is either dropped from the story, or the lesbian police detective keeps quiet and does their job better than the men (2006: 75-6).

There is an existing tradition in detective fiction of establishing outlaw status by quitting the law enforcement agency because of corruption or a loss of faith in the system⁴¹. This tradition is continued in lesbian detective fiction. Lindy Cameron’s Kit O’Malley, for example, is an ex-Victorian police officer, and Porter’s Jill Fitzpatrick was in the NSW police before going out on her own.

Despite her proximity to power, the lesbian police detective risks being part of both worlds but a member of neither, leaving her alone and isolated (Plain:

⁴⁰ See, for example, Betz, 2006: 74.

⁴¹ For example, Walton & Jones, 1999: 201.

166). The conflicts and necessary compromises often prove untenable for the lesbian detective, resulting in her leaving the force.

Moorhead's *Still Murder* features police detective Margot Gorman, working for the National Crime Authority (NCA). Margot began studying law but quit and became a cop because "at least they worked on right and wrong" (1991: 198). By the novel's end, Margot realises her colleagues do not work entirely within the law and that the lines between right and wrong are not as clear as she thought. She is not, as she thought, an insider but an outsider within. The sequel, *Darkness Less Visible* (2000) sees Margot attaining outsider or marginal status, working as a private eye and living in a lesbian commune on the NSW Central Coast.

other professions

There are a considerable number of journalists as lesbian detectives, who investigate on the job, using their contacts (including the police) and access to information to resolve the crime while researching a story. Vicki P. McConnell's Nyla Wade series was the first example⁴², beginning with *Mrs Porter's Letter* (1982). McConnell explains that she chose to make Wade an investigative journalist because they "can take risks which can cost them their lives" (quoted in Markowitz. 2004: 134) creating tension within the series. For the journalist as detective, justice is administered by revealing the truth.

In McDermid's *Report for Murder*, for example, Gordon agrees to cover a fundraiser at a girls' school. When one of the performers is found garrotted by a cello string, Gordon investigates, phoning developments into her paper back home. After solving the crime and exposing the murderer, Lindsay's priority is to call in the story:

'Before we get into all that, I need to phone my newsdesk,' said Lindsay apologetically. 'Sorry. Since I've got to go down the cop shop this morning, if I don't put a story over nice and early my life won't be worth living on Wednesday. Can I use the phone?' (2004: 343).

⁴² Markowitz, 2004: 134, Knight, 2004: 175.

Other common professions include lawyers, as is the case in Melissa Chan's three short novels *Too Rich* (1991), *One Too Many* (1993) and *Guilt* (1999) featuring former lawyer, film critic, now independent feminist detective, Francesca Miles, who works with police inspector Joe Barnaby, solving crimes against women, mainly on Sydney's north shore.

Lawyers as detectives use their knowledge of the law and professional contacts in their investigations. The line between law and crime, however, is often shown to be a blurry one. In McKemmish's *Only Lawyers Dancing*, two friends are tied by their connections to the world of crime. Anne Stevens is a lawyer, Frances Smith a criminal. Both are shown to be complicit in, and an instrument of, the crime. Stevens, defending criminal Max Cavanagh, appears to have the law on her side:

I made a neat cross-examination and a thoroughly professional, almost eminent summation based on cases and on law. I liked myself again after that. I had been able to play the game through to its legalistic end (1992: 179).

As a criminal points out to her, however: "We are not in a situation of equal reversal. I can go straight but you can't bend the rules" (1992: 173). Stevens does bend the rules, breaking and entering to obtain information. She successfully defends Max and cashes the resulting cheque, but shortly afterwards finds out that he has been murdered (1992: 185), further calling into question notions of law and justice.

As in the broader crime genre, amateur detectives within the lesbian detective fiction have a range of professions, which often lead them to the crime they investigate – usually for moral or self interested reasons rather than for payment. Wilson's Pam Nilsen is a member of a printing collective. Ellen Hart's Jane Lawless is a restaurateur, Dreher's Stoner McTavish the co owner of a travel agency, and Wilson's Cassandra Reilly a translator.

lesbian spy as detective

There are a number of lesbian detective novels that feature current or former intelligence officers as protagonists. Examples include Zaremba's Helen

Keremos series, Amanda Kyle Williams' *Club Twelve*, C Paradee's *Deep Cover*, I. Christie's *Assignment Sunrise*, and McNab's Denise Cleever series.

A spy as detective blurs the boundaries between detective fiction and spy fiction. Cawelti labels the spy story "a near relative" to the detective story (2004: 286), noting similarities and cross influences (2004: 329). Cawelti and Rosenberg note, for example, that the figure of the cool, detached secret agent owes much to Chandler's Marlowe (1987: 75), and that Le Carré's early novels were influenced by the classical and hard-boiled detective novels (1987: 157).

The broader genre of spy fiction is a predominantly male (and British) one, as established by John Buchan, Graham Greene, John Le Carré and Ian Fleming. Spy fiction has not traditionally been as popular with female writers. While history has featured famous female agents such as Belle Boyd and Mata Hari, and intelligence agency staffs today include a percentage of women⁴³, this is not yet reflected in crime literature.

Although, as Blundell notes, spy fiction is experiencing something of a comeback (2007: 5), the spy novel does not appear to have been embraced by feminist writers to the same extent as the hard-boiled detective novel. Secondary literature on the spy genre almost exclusively covers male writers, referring to the spy as 'he'. Cawelti and Rosenberg's *Spy Fiction* refers to only one female writer and concludes: "[T]he spy is a man for our times" (1987: 217).

Perhaps to an even greater extent than in hard-boiled detective fiction, women have tended to play negative roles in spy fiction. Or, as Jones points out, exist only in order provide an opportunity for the male hero to demonstrate his

⁴³ ASIO's 2005-6 Annual Report, for example, indicates of 1110 staff, 509 were women. While these staff are not all operational, it does indicate a significant proportion of women in the profession today.

prowess (1989: 73): “converting Lesbians, re-awakening the frigid and generally carving his way through single, titled, or married women”⁴⁴.

Hepburn argues that women are traditionally a “point of leakage” (2005:188) in spy fiction. In Le Carré’s *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, for example, it is the naïve Liz, in love with British agent Leamas, who is manipulated to bring about the downfall of an East German agent and, ultimately, Leamas’ death.

Homberger notes that women in Le Carré’s novels:

are observed with increasing acuteness without ever being themselves more than persons who are acted upon. They are, in a sense, operational conveniences for the author (2006: 92).

Like the feminist detectives appropriating the male hard-boiled genre, writing the spy as a woman and a lesbian subverts established traditions of the genre and society, infiltrating one of the most conservative bastions of government. Betz considers “deliberately seeking to be a participant in the public institutions that direct one’s life” to be a form of heroism for the lesbian detective (2006: 171). This could also be argued to be the ultimate fantasy of agency for the lesbian reader, in which lesbians have access to knowledge and power denied to them and the majority others in the real world.

One of the earliest lesbian detective series features a former spy as detective. Zaremba’s Keremos is middle-aged with a background in naval counter-intelligence, where she was tasked with “sniffing out subversives in the McCarthy fifties” (1978: 51). Keremos now utilises her skills, contacts and experience as a licensed private investigator, using guns, force, her wits, friends and contacts, bluff, impersonation, hiding, and listening. Many of the habits learned as a spy remain:

I don’t tell everyone everything. I operate strictly on the principle of ‘need to know’. Learned that much in the Navy. It’s better that way (1978: 85).

⁴⁴ Bruce Merry, *Anatomy of the Spy Thriller* 1977, quoted in Jones, 1989: 73.

In *Reason to Kill*, Alex, her friend and former colleague in industrial espionage (1978: 19), collects background information while Keremos does the 'detecting'. Comparing their roles, Alex points out that the field work is dangerous, "a tough way to make a living" (1978: 87), while Keremos observes that Alex:

is more a researcher, less a participant, than I am. Doesn't get as involved. Perhaps that's what comes of staying in the background, the back room, out of the action. Cause or effect? Doesn't matter. Fact is, she finds out and reports, but doesn't make things happen. And doesn't want to (1978: 114).

In *Beyond Hope*, Keremos comes up against international intelligence forces, quickly recognising the "good, grey agent" (1987: 189) tailing her. She is forced to negotiate and play the different interests off against each other in order to resolve the crime. "I speculated on the amount of time that I spent in this case talking to powerful men hidden behind desks" (1987: 146). The novel explores the limitations of working for government, the politics of intelligence agencies, and tensions between the US and Canada. Keremos's investigation brings her in contact with a former colleague, Walter, who is in Vancouver on 'detached duty' (1987: 69):

which meant that his job was so secret it was undercover from local undercover. Under undercover. That's spook business all over. Not merely that the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing but sometimes even the fingers of any given hand don't know what the thumb ... (1987: 69)

Perhaps influenced by Zaremba's works, and political influences at the time the sub-genre emerged, there are a number of novels and series in which a lesbian protagonist is working for an intelligence agency, real or fictional. In *Club Twelve*, Madison McGuire works for the National Operations Intelligence Service (N.O.I.S), *Deep Cover*'s Kristina Bartley is a CIA field operative, Special Agent Adison an undercover agent for the FBI, and McNab's Denise Cleever works undercover for the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIO).

Seed notes Le Carré's view that the popularity of spy fiction grew out of "a deep public distrust of political life" (2003, 126) in the 1960s and 1970s.

These concerns can be related to those of feminist and lesbian detective fiction writers, particularly concerning the conspiracy of male-dominated institutions that work together to maintain the status quo.

Of the forty Australian examples of lesbian detective fiction that I have identified, seven feature spies or former spies. McKemmish's *A Gap in the Records* features an international spy ring run by a group of middle aged women. In Finola Moorhead's *Still Murder*, Marg is a police officer working with the National Crime Authority (NCA). McNab's Cleever series includes five titles to date.

Knight notes that spy novels were rare in Australia until the 1980s, suggesting a lack of international focus or perceived international threat until that time (1997: 166). In 1980 Peter Corris published *Poker Face*, introducing Ray Crawley, an agent for the Federal Security Agency (FSA). The eighth book in the series, *The Vietnam Volunteer* was published in 2000. Other Australian male writers of spy fiction include Richard Hall (*Costello*: 1989 and *Noumea*: 1990) and Roland Perry (*Blood is a Stranger*: 1988).

In writing *A Gap in the Records*, however, McKemmish's concerns were, however, with disrupting the genre rather than adhering to it:

what would happen to a woman who killed for a cause? Not what would happen to her in terms of the state, but inside her. I wrote *Gap* as a spy fiction because I was fascinated by the issues of espionage, those secret relations between states, nation against nation, the certainty of betrayal (1993: 31).

The network of women in McKemmish's novel is able to gather information undetected because, as middle-aged women, they are largely invisible, their backgrounds atypical for spies and their methods deceptively domestic (Jones, 1989:74):

Women's talk. Women's work. Any city cradles conspirators. Each worked alone travelling the conventional routes, they'd rendezvous and depart, exchange passwords, wear complex badges of identity: Susan's pink socks said all clear, Sarah's beige suit urgent, the brown was for no contact, Joan set pot-plants on the verandah and forgot to take the rubbish in, Amelia

sat in the window at Pelligrini's smoking Gitanes, Grace met her promptly at six in the State Library newspaper room (*Gap in the Records*, 1985: 14-15).

The members do not know each other's real identities, with the exception of the founding four. Mother and daughter, Mary and Joan Stevens, exchange postcards, Joan only realising Mary's identity towards the novel's end, and Mary never made aware that her mother was one of the founders. The capacity to withhold this information catches their (male) counterparts unawares: "[T]hey've got some remarkable form of security these amateurs, these female adventurers" (1985: 106).

spycraft

Although working, in most cases, for a government agency, spies are not restrained in their methods of detection in the same way as police officers. They tend to work alone and outside the system. As Hepburn notes, "[S]pies work alone and outside the law" (2005: 8). Like private detectives they are on the margins of society, moving freely between worlds on an international level, accountable to no one except their private sense of morality (unless they are caught).

Lesbian detectives that are spies or former spies use their high level of skills and training in the course of their investigations, for example utilising surveillance equipment, and surreptitious means of gathering information as well as avoiding detection. A spy's background and training also allows them to read the intentions of others without revealing their own (Cawelti, 2004: 310) when investigating a crime.

In *Murder Undercover*, Cleever's undercover status is her main method of gathering information. Using the name Denise Hunter, she must infiltrate the Ayler family and piece together information she gleans from the players through her false identity. "I recalled my trainer saying, 'you've got to believe you *are* this person, Denise Hunter, twenty-four hours a day'" (1999: 25).

Denise is working alone on the Island. The Aylmers have installed cutting edge electronic surveillance apparatus, limiting her access to support (1999: 25): “I had to be a clean plant: I couldn’t carry any weapons or communications gear, I couldn’t make any contact through the usual channels” (1999: 42).

ASIO is, however, able to communicate with her, passing her briefing material while she is working the bar. She is informed that ASIO has become aware that there is a CIA operative on the island, although their gender and name are not known:

I understood the game: All security organizations kept as much from other agencies as possible, even within their own countries. More, they kept as much secret as they could from the governments who set them up (1999: 93).

Despite this set-up, McNab’s Cleever series and the other lesbian detective novels featuring spies that I considered during this research do not explore the moral, political or personal complexities of such scenarios in any depth or utilise the capacity for subverting the spy-genre⁴⁵.

Betz argues that, within lesbian detective fiction, violence is most likely to be used by current or former government agents, who are trained and prepared to use force (2006: 116-117). Williams’ Madison McGuire tells the reader:

She had killed, she reflected grimly, more times than she wanted to remember. But in self-defence. In desperate protection of her own life and for her country, only for her *country* (1990: 50).

Betz notes that this “willingness to expand the level of violence is even more apparent in the novels that describe the efforts of former agents to put their past behind them” as the plot requires them to draw on their training to complete one more mission (2006: 117), often exaggerating the capabilities of the agent.

⁴⁵ With the exception of Mabel Maney’s parodic Jane Bond (James Bond’s lesbian twin sister) Series for example, *Kiss the Girls and Make Them Spy*(2001) & *The Girl With the Golden Bouffant* (2004)..

As discussed above, the lesbian detective is free to use violence as she is already outside society's rules. The spy is also given a 'licence to kill' by his or her country, in a role where desired outcomes justify any action or consequence. As Le Carré's Leamas observes "[I]ntelligence work has one moral law – it is justified by results" (2006: 20). Cawelti argues that the (male) spy:

is invisible in the sense that his commission as a spy frees him from responsibility and gives him licence to do things he could not ordinarily do without serious consequences (1987: 13).

The lesbian spy, already outside conventional laws and society as a lesbian, and invisible as a lesbian within the masculine world of the spy, is doubly licensed to use whatever means necessary in her investigation.

In *A Gap in the Records*, Mary Stevens, daughter of one of the founders, Joan Stevens, is recruited to carry out various activities, including murdering a capitalist infiltrator in Hong Kong, and eventually infiltrating Pine Gap.

When Mary first kills a man she is changed:

It could be said that Mary Steven's first murder was easy, and yes, the act, the pull of the trigger one two three, and the crumpled soft body was, she decided, quite easy. But then the murder had been dealt slowly. ... Her ambition was havoc, her ideology that of naivety, adventurism, anarchy – the danger and the prize. Mary Stevens too had embraced ambiguity (1985: 59).

Madison's guilt in *Club Twelve* is less convincing:

In the dark of the still of the night when those images run before our eyes, we wonder if what we're doing is right or wrong. I'm not that moral, you understand. I'm just tired, and I'm losing my nerve (1990: 164-5).

When Cleever kills Eddie in *Murder Undercover*, she uses humour to deal with her actions: "I'd never killed anyone before, but I didn't feel anything at all. The one thought that tumbled through my mind was that Eddie Trebonus had ordered his last cocktail" (1999: 164).

When Cleever has an opportunity to kill Red Wolf, however, she hesitates, telling herself "I'm not hero material" (1999: 168):

I'd missed the opportunity that every national security force in the West would have wanted me to take. In those few seconds, I could have executed a mass murderer, a man who had sown terror throughout the world. A rush of shame filled me (1999: 168).

Despite the potential to explore the moral issues inherent in using violent means, or the long term effects of killing on the spy/detective, few novels within the sub-genre do so in any depth.

doubled double agent

As noted earlier, critics have identified an affinity between homosexuality and the spy. Cawelti and Rosenberg argue that spying, or clandestine activity, “begins with a purpose requiring actions that must be kept secret because they transgress conventional moral, or legal boundaries” (1987: 13). This is analogous with the gay or lesbian living in a predominantly heterosexual world. Noretta Koertge considers the spy as an archetype for the (closeted) lesbian:

Being queer is like being on lifetime assignment as a secret agent in some foreign country. No matter how careful you are, no matter how practiced you are at emulating the natives, you know that at any minute you may be uncovered (1981: 232).

Similarly, Palmer argues that because the lesbian lives on the margins of society, concealing her sexuality, she is accustomed to playing the role of observer and spy (1997:90). As a result, she is often compared to the ‘double agent’, a figure who, “while pretending to work for one political regime, in fact works for ‘the enemy’” (1997:102).

Plain describes Delafield, in her role as a lesbian police officer, as:

the enemy within: not only a ghost, but a spy. The spy after all represents the archetypal incidence of the other who is also the same: the enemy (or pervert) within who cannot be distinguished from the ‘true’ nation or righteous heterosexual (2001: 186).

For McKemish, silence is one of the keys to the affinity of the lesbian with the spy:

These are silences that give us an understanding of codes and clues, of readings and dualities, of double or triple lives, of the need to be on watch, on guard, and of a particular sort of powerlessness that experiences class or race of power in its many forms as something to be known, investigated, solved.” (2003: 34).

Referencing Butler’s theories of performance, Hepburn argues that the gay or lesbian is a natural spy because they are already adept at adopting multiple and secret identities, noting that “the spy improvises roles by drawing on one or more of these identities at any given time” and that a “spy’s identity is often an illusion” (2005: xiv).

If all identity is performative, in the sense that actions modify character, then only the sum of actions counts in the making of identity (Hepburn: 217).

Plain suggests that the “enhanced capacity of the homosexual detective to read and interpret sexual signs should come as no surprise” (2001: 107) because lesbians and gays living in a heterosexual society are used to having to interpret sexual signs or clues in recognising other lesbians and gays.

Similarly, lesbian and gay readers are accustomed to reinterpreting heterosexual texts to read as lesbian or gay subtexts (Betz, 2006: 9), a tactic described by Zimmerman as “perverse reading” (quoted in Betz, 2006: 10). As Hepburn argues, as “decoders, readers are recruited into narrative” (2005: 277). Information in spy novels also needs decoding (Seed, 2003:129), creating a natural affinity for gay and lesbian readers accustomed to the interpretive tactics of perverse reading.

Gunn refers to the gay male detective or spy as a “sexual outlaw” (2005: 5) or “doubled double agent” (ibid). He notes that all detectives play a double role; having to think like a criminal but choosing to work on the side of the law/morals. Hepburn, too, notes:

The queer spy has the benefit of being always already double. He conforms and he rebels; he bears secrets and acts clean-cut; he pays his taxes and commits crimes (2005: xiv).

For the gay or lesbian detective, however, there is an additional layer; a choice as to “whether and when to blend into straight society or to merge with the gay community” (2005: 5). Gunn sees this position as an advantage for the gay male detective/spy, who, like a superhero, is used to a double life, deception, and hiding his or her real passions:

though threatened by the agents of lawlessness *and* by homophobic agents of law, the gay sleuth maintains a distinct advantage ... by being able to judge both and even to play one against the other, engaging all the while with his own peculiarly outlawed community (2005: 5).

The lesbian spy is also, then, always engaged in an act of betrayal: surveilling her own community and choosing when to use her sexuality for her own ends or for those of her country or community. This double-play between the lesbian and straight world is present elsewhere in lesbian detective fiction. McDermid’s Lindsay Gordon, for example, sells information or photographs taken within her community in order to make a living (Hume, 2003: 231).

Living this way comes at considerable personal cost. In *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, Leamas contemplates the loneliness and psychological danger of continual deception:

In itself, the practice of deception is not particularly exacting; it is a matter of experience, professional expertise, it is a facility most of us can acquire. But while the confidence trickster, a play-actor or gambler can return from his performance to the ranks of his admirers, the secret agent enjoys no such relief. For him, deception is first a matter for self-defence. He must protect himself not only from without but from within, and against the most natural of impulses; though he earn a fortune, his role may forbid him the purchase of a razor; though he be erudite, it can befall him to mutter nothing but banalities; though he be affectionate husband and father, he must under all circumstances withhold himself from those in whom he should naturally confide (2006: 133).

Cawelti and Rosenberg argue that spies live in “a state of psychological tension” or “double vision” which resembles schizophrenia (1987: 17):

First, there is the ‘reality’ constituted by the secrets shared with other members of the clandestine group. Since these secrets commonly refer to states of affairs that are not known to those outside the group, the clandestine world seems more real. Yet,

since the preservation of the clandestine group requires that these secrets remain hidden from all other persons, a clandestine person must also live as a member of the ordinary world, pretending to share its view of reality (1987: 17).

This double consciousness could be argued to be even more true of the lesbian spy, who is outside society not just by virtue of her profession, but by her identity and sexuality. Even inside, within the intelligence world, she may have to hide her sexual identity, placing her under greater psychological strain. As the ASIS operative recruiting Vincent in Christopher Koch's *The Memory Room* (2007) notes:

'It's not an easy profession,' he said. 'We tend to be loners. It can sometimes be ugly. Marriages don't survive well. Most people despise us. And some of us end up having an identity crisis...A man wakes up one morning,' he said. 'and looks for his inner self – and he finds he's mislaid it. So few people know who he actually is – do you understand? So how can he be sure of himself? What follows can be a nervous breakdown. Sometimes, suicide. Can you be sure you're made of the stuff to avoid that?' (2007: 106).

This potential breakdown is almost inevitable for the lesbian spy. There is no safe house for her true identity: within the conservative intelligence community her sexuality is likely to be unacceptable or suspect and within the lesbian community her profession is likely to be similarly regarded. Through 'don't ask, don't tell' and 'need to know' policies, the lesbian spy/detective is prohibited from speaking of her sexuality or her profession. As a result, the lesbian spy is perhaps the most extreme example of the outsider within.

There is considerable potential for the exploration of this double consciousness and parallels between the spy and lesbian in society in lesbian detective fiction. However, contemporary lesbian detective fiction featuring spies tends to lack the depth or authenticity of, for example, Le Carré's analysis of cold-war politics, the workings of intelligence agencies, and British society⁴⁶. In lesbian detective fiction, the question of authorial authenticity has been relocated in the authenticity of the personal or sexual identity, of being lesbian.

⁴⁶ Enriched by Le Carré's actual experience working for Britain's secret service.

In *Club Twelve*, McQuire is not out to her agency, although Director Andrew McFaye, her mentor and boss, is aware of her orientation and has protected her. Madison did not reveal her sexuality during the clearance process although reacting to the questions:

Oh, she had passed the tests, but there had been an impressive display of temper when the examiner questioned her about her sexual preferences and frequency of masturbation (1990: 8).

McQuire notes that agency policy:

has long been to eject any personnel suspected of engaging in homosexual activities. The theory is that homosexuals are known to have frequent and indiscriminate encounters. That poses a security risk (1990: 9).

It seems most unlikely, however, given the level of scrutiny intelligence personnel are placed under in order to obtain the necessary clearances, that McQuire could hide her orientation from the agency for long. Similarly, if she was caught lying, her clearances would be revoked.

In *Murder Undercover*, when media crew arrive on the island, Cleever worries about being recognised by holiday makers when she is working behind the bar, imagining someone saying “Resigned from ASIO, have you?” (1999: 30). This is unrealistic, as her ASIO colleagues would be trained not to acknowledge each other in public in case they are undercover, and her friends and family would not have been told where she really works.

Even if accepting these scenarios, the complexity of issues McGuire and Cleever face are not explored to their full potential. As Gunn observes in relation to gay (male) spy stories, most are simply escape novels, presenting a fantasy, or “a vision of the world as it should be” (2005: 41), rather than as it is.

Lesbian spy fiction appears to have developed out of lesbian detective fiction rather than the broader spy genre. While the nature of the crime in spy fiction

may be more international⁴⁷, most examples adopt a similar format to the detective novel, in which the protagonist uncovers a crime or conspiracy and reveals and/or resolves it. McNab's Cleever series, for example, (1999-), follows a similar formula to her Ashton series, featuring the same foregrounding of lesbian identity found in lesbian detective fiction. As a result, the lesbian spy novel within lesbian detective fiction, is merely an alternate framework for the lesbian coming out/romance formula.

⁴⁷ Addressed in more detail in the next section, 'the Nature of the Crime'

Sex and romance

There was no way I was falling for this woman, so whatever happened was part of my mission. I was here to seduce her, if necessary – I hoped it would be – and find out what I could (McNab, *Murder Undercover*, 1999: 74).

hard-boiled detectives and women

The traditional hard-boiled detective tended not to form romantic attachments, or if he did, was seldom able to maintain them. Plain notes, for example, Chandler's depiction of women as femme fatales (2001: 60-61), highlighting his description of Carmen, nymphomaniac and murderer, in *The Big Sleep*:

She came over to me and smiled with her mouth and she had little sharp predatory teeth, as white as fresh orange pith and as shiny as porcelain. They glistened between her thin too taut lips. Her face lacked colour and didn't look too healthy (1939: 10).

As Reddy argues, women in hard-boiled novels were represented as either "dangerous, seductive villains or nurturing but essentially insignificant helpmates" (2003: 193). The hard-boiled detective's ethical code rests on these conservative notions about gender roles⁴⁸. Cawelti argues that when these notions come under threat:

[the] only possible resolution to the insecurity caused by the conflict between the need for woman as sexual and social fulfilment and the threat of feminine independence and domination is simultaneous possession and destruction of the female (1978: 155).

As a result, he "leaves the scene in the same isolated state in which he entered it" (Betz, 2006: 48). In the end of *The Maltese Falcon*, for example, despite having fallen for Miss O'Shaughnessy, Spade turns her over to the police for the murder of his partner:

He put a hand on her shoulder. The hand shook and jerked. 'I don't care who loves who. I'm not going to play the sap for you. I won't walk in Thursby's and Christ knows who else's

⁴⁸ See, for example, Betz, 2006: 47.

footsteps. You killed Miles and you're going over for it. I could have helped you by letting the others go and standing off the police the best way I could. It's too late for that now' (2002: 209).

feminist detectives and men

Reddy notes that in feminist detective fiction, only Muller links crime plots with romance plots, and her detective, Sharon McCone, is the only one to actively pursue a heterosexual relationship (2003: 198). She argues that for the others, such as Paretsky's VI Warshawski and Grafton's Kinsey Milhone, "relationships with men are always possible threats to their hard-won autonomy and independence" (2003: 198).

To an extent, this appears to continue the traditions of the hard-boiled detective in relation to romance. The feminist detective's solitariness, however, took on a different, and more positive, meaning (Reddy, 2003: 197). Having been historically defined by their relationships with men, the independent, capable and single female detective allowed for a new feminine self-definition. V.I. Warshawski's solitariness, for example, is offset by the network of friends on whom she relies for emotional and investigative support (Reddy, 2003: 198). Critics such as Irons argue that this rejects the loner model established by male hard-boiled detective fiction (1995: xiii), as her energies are put into developing and maintaining this female community instead of romantic attachments.

Larcomb sees this model less positively; arguing that for V. I Warshawski, romance is largely avoided:

family and quasi-parental relationships are substituted for heterosexual ones. The (heterosexual) female body is repressed and kept in check by rigorous physical training; sexuality is displaced onto clothing, food, domestic apartments. On the few occasions that V.I Warshawski does have sex it's either a one night stand or she's battling to retain control of the situation (1993: 32).

The stereotype of the lone detective continues to dominate detective fiction today. The majority of detectives, male and female, in print and on screen, are

represented as unable or unwilling to sustain relationships, suggesting that a good detective cannot be in a relationship, or that a relationship must be sacrificed for the job. Examples include: Lynda La Plante's DI Jane Tennison, in the *Prime Suspect* series, Henning Mankell's Inspector Wallander, Patricia Cornwell's Chief Medical Examiner, Kay Scarpetta, and Peter Temple's Jack Irish. In some cases, dedication to the point of obsession leaves little room for a relationship. In others, fierce independence, a lack of capacity for commitment, alcohol dependence, or some other form of dysfunction prevents successful relationships. As Plain argues, "[I]f the detective is to be the archetypal loner, then lovers must remain a disposable, or a strictly domestic commodity" (2001: 185).

lesbian detectives do romance

Sex and romance are far more prominent in lesbian detective fiction. Walton and Jones note that the "hard-boiled convention that allows descriptions of sexual encounters is adapted to accommodate the representation of lesbian eroticism" (1999: 163). In the first lesbian detective novel, Beal's *Angel Dance*, Geurrera's investigation is a search for the truth but also an erotic search; "I researched, I examined, I *investigated* Angel Stone" (1977:192). Similarly, Porter's *The Monkey's Mask* is as much an erotic investigation as an investigation of a crime, exploring the relationship between sex and violence.

Betz argues that the lesbian detective "faces two distinct problems during the course of her investigation – solving the crime and resolving a developing passionate relationship" (2006: 25), often running parallel or at least connected (ibid). In Wilson's *Murder in the Collective*, Pam investigates the crime with Hadley, who becomes her lover. When saying goodbye to Hadley at the novel's conclusion, Pam says:

'I guess this means our detective story is kind of at an end, doesn't it?' I was giving her another chance, a way not to break my heart (1984:170).

In many contemporary lesbian detective novels the romance plot overwhelms that of the crime. Munt argues that in novels such as McNab's, for example, the crime serves primarily to thwart the development of the relationship,

frustrating the reader's expectations (1994: 196). In Paradee's *Deep Cover*, CIA operative Kris, and analyst Shelby, are prevented from consummating their relationship until almost the end of the novel – despite sharing a house for some time – by injuries, kidnappings, a series of elaborate double-crosses and agency interrogation.

This emphasis on romance is a result of lesbian detective fiction's development from lesbian fiction, particularly the coming out novel. The coming out narrative is still strongly present in the sub-genre. In Hill's *Hunter's Way*, for example, Samantha must first break up with her boyfriend and accept her feelings for her homicide detective partner Tori before they can get together. This is the driving narrative force, despite terrorist attacks, a serial killer and drug deals gone bad.

Sex and romance are also central to McNab's Carol Ashton series. In *Lessons in Murder* (1988), Sydney Police Inspector Ashton falls in love with her main suspect, Sybil. The progress of this romance dominates the series, both in Ashton's focus and the proportion of scenes in the text. Reviewers' comments reflect this emphasis. Wilkinson, for example, in her review of *Chain Letter* (1997), considers the main intrigue of the novel is whether Ashton and Sybil would get back together (1998: 1).

When considering contemporary lesbian fiction novels as examples of detective fiction, many of their romance scenes do not add a great deal to the crime plot or even character. Munt considers lesbian detective novels like McNab's to be formulaic romances (1994: 139). Similarly, Betz argues that in lesbian detective fiction, "clichés of romantic description dominate the representation of passion", most of which don't advance the plot (2006: 56).

Despite having developed out of feminist detective fiction, the sexual behaviour of many lesbian detectives more closely resembles that of the hard-boiled detectives. Cole notes that lesbian detectives "such as Porter's Jill Fitzpatrick and McNab's Carol Ashton lust after clients and suspects, and as a result get into sexual trouble just like many of their male counterparts" (2004:

144). Porter's Jill is almost an anti-detective, doing little to solve the murder and predictably allowing herself to be seduced by the femme fatale and primary suspect, Diana:

I know Diana's a liar
The plane's wheels bump down
hard
and I know I'm a fool
Mickey's diary will point the finger
at me
for ignoring the evidence (1995: 203)

Porter has said that when writing *The Monkey's Mask* she was too caught up in the "whole femme fatale thing"⁴⁹. Unlike the hard-boiled detectives, however, Jill allows herself to be Diana's victim, and lets her get away with the crime.

Romance and eroticism are not featured in all lesbian detective fiction. In the first two novels in Zaremba's Keremos series, *Reason to Kill* and *Beyond Hope*, there is little mention of Keremos' sexuality and no hint of any romantic attachment. In *Work for a Million*, she has a crush on her client, Sonia, whom she is hired to protect. As Keremos' side-kick, Alex, notes, this is somewhat out of character:

'I'll tell you one thing that's different about this case. You've taken to believing your client. In fact you've fallen for your client. That's not like you, is it?'
'You have a point, definitely a point. I'll take it under advisement. Anything else? No. Then let's wrap it up.' I couldn't handle any more (1986: 144).

The closest physical contact Keremos manages in the course of the story is to brush Sonia's hair. Zaremba keeps the romance very much in the background. At the end of the novel, however, Sonia asks if she can travel with Keremos: "Sure, I said. That would be great.' And it was. But that's another story" (1986: 172).

Similarly, romance is not a feature of McKemmish's *A Gap in the Records*. Agent Mary Stevens moves through a series of unremarkable sexual

⁴⁹ 'The deadliest of the Species', Brisbane Writers Festival, Thursday, 13 September, 2007.

encounters and doomed affairs: “Mary Stevens had got drunk with the journalist and staggered through an uninspiring but pleasantly orchestrated fuck” (1985: 28).

The only substantial romantic relationship featured is an unhappy (and heterosexual) one in Paris, which Mary is forced to enter into as a cover for the organisation’s subversive activity. When Pierre explains that he was hired to seduce her, to protect her, Mary is shocked and upset: “But you liked me, didn’t you? It wasn’t all a game. You can’t lie (laughing or) in bed. You can’t. Or can you? Did you? I feel like such a fool” (1985: 81).

Despite the emphasis on coming out and finding love or sex, few lesbian detective novels explore long-term relationships. Relationships are more likely to be explored in a series. In the later novels of McNab’s Carol Ashton series, for example, Ashton and Sybil move in together, though Sybil becomes increasingly impatient with Ashton’s closeted life. Sybil eventually leaves Ashton in *Chain Letter*. Ashton goes on to have two other relationships, but at the end of the most recent novel of the series, *Fall Guy*, Ashton suggests that she and Sybil each sell their houses and buy one together (2004: 173), although the implications are not explored in any detail. Betz argues that Carol has to learn to “solve the mystery of love” (2006: 66), letting go of her need for control and fear of being out: “Carol must not act like a detective, but like a woman in love” (ibid).

Stella Duffy’s Saz Martin series features one of the sub-genre’s deeper explorations of contemporary lesbian relationships. Martin and Molly meet in *Wavewalker* and the couple face racial issues when they become a couple, as Molly is Indian. At the end of *Fresh Flesh* they decide to have a baby and *Mouths of Babes* explores issues around the arrival of a baby in a relationship. Saz has given up detective work to stay at home while Molly returns to work. Saz struggles with her new role and when an old friend asks Saz to do a job for her, she has a hard time saying no. Her lesbian friends without children also find Saz’s change of focus difficult to understand:

‘Claire, I’m not working. I’m being mummy.’

‘Still?’

Claire didn’t get it. She didn’t want to get it either, she wanted Saz to work for her.

‘Yes, still. Permanently. For a while, for the foreseeable future. She’s only nine months old’ (2005: 46).

The majority of contemporary lesbian detective novels, however, focus primarily on the development of a new romantic relationship, with little reference to ‘real life’ contemporary issues or politics⁵⁰ such as balancing work commitments, rearing children, or access to equal rights.

sex and the lesbian detective

She had my hands clasped over my head with one strong arm and her other hand went further and further pursuing all the boundaries, taking me so far along in the excitement it was nearly pain. And she went on and on, almost methodically except that I heard her own breath rising in response. I fought with the passivity but it was only fun to fight it. I let her go where she wanted. I let her find things I didn’t know were there. I was so wet, with her hand between my legs. Her finger slipped inside me and my body rose. She held me for two minutes or ten minutes. Then it was my turn (*Wings, She Came Too Late*, 1987: 67).

Sex in hard-boiled detective novels mostly takes place off-screen. In lesbian detective fiction it is very much on-screen, perhaps one of the reasons for the popularity of the books. Reviewers’ comments reflect this focus. Thompson and Turnbull, in their review of McNab’s *Under Suspicion*, note that the murder doesn’t happen until the middle of book, just after the first major same-sex bed scene (2000: 44). Similarly, Wilkinson comments on the content of *Chain Letter*:

In earlier books the sex scenes, a maximum of two per story, were adequately arousing. But there has been a drastic fall off in Carol’s sexual activity, and in *Chain Letter* there is one encounter which begins and ends in less than half a page – certainly too brief for my purposes (Wilkinson, 1998: 2)

While sex in hard-boiled and feminist detective novels often has negative implications, Betz argues that the outcome of the lesbian detective’s sexual

⁵⁰ For example, *Midnight Rain* (2005) by Penny Herring, *A Time to Cast Away* (2005) by Pat Welch, and *Hunter’s Way* (2005) by Gerri Hill.

encounters is usually positive (2006: 37). If the love interest is a colleague, it usually allows for an improved, and often shared, crime solving performance (Betz, 2006: 37-8)⁵¹. If the object of her desire is a suspect, it rarely eventuates that she is guilty, subverting the femme fatale tradition of the hard-boiled detective novel (2006: 37). Plain notes that Delafield is:

never betrayed by these women, nor is her investigation jeopardised. Rather, she is replenished and renewed by sexual contact, returning refreshed to the hostile, homophobic environment of the LAPD (2001: 206).

Porter's *The Monkey's Mask*, however, is an exception. Jill's attraction to Diana (and her husband, Nick) is a negative one, distracting her from the case, and her knowledge of their guilt. They get away with murder and Jill takes the cheque from Mickey's parents. At the end of the novel, Jill sells up, returns to Sydney and has a last coffee with Diana:

‘You can't make
the mud stick, Jill,
you open your mouth
we'll sue.’

she's smiling
her eyes
show the black pit
of the old woman
she'll become
you can't save her
I slap down my Galahad fool (1995: 259).

Many lesbian detective novels explore notions of power and gender through sex scenes, subverting the detective genre and traditional societal views. Palmer suggests that writers of lesbian crime fiction “inventively bring together themes of disguise and sexual role-play” (1997: 97). Plain argues that in the Delafield series, sex is “an exchange of power” (2001: 186) and, within the police procedural, has a transgressive function:

the erotic retains the potential to dislocate narrative convention. Kate's tendency to indulge in sex with suspects represents a potentially serious transgression, a ‘procedural irregularity’ that threatens the detective's security at the same time as it challenges the structures of the law (Plain, 2001: 206).

⁵¹ For example, Hill's *Hunter's Way*.

In *Beverly Hills Cop*, Delafield falls for the butch Aimee, forcing her to question her notions of lesbian sexual identity. Munt argues that Forrest's texts show lesbian identities to be fluid and complex (1996: 133):

'Now that we've narrowed this down to your real concern, tell me what you think femme actually is.'
'Not in control,' Kate said tightly.
'Accepting your definition, which I don't, tell me – does Aimee have you running around in lace pinafores?'
Kate couldn't help a grin.
'Are you any less butch on the job? Are you weeping over your corpses.'
'Not yet...' (1989: 204).

Wings' exploration of the butch/femme dynamic is more subtle. In *She Came Too Late*, Emma Victor is disconcerted by Frances but allows herself to enjoy it. "I fought with the passivity but it was only fun to fight it. I let her go where she wanted" (1987: 67).

Munt argues that McNab shows lesbian relationships to be "fraught with negotiation" (1994:139) through the exploration of butch/femme dynamics, dominance and submission, and the dangers of desiring straight women. She argues: "[T]he balance of power shifts between them, and the reader is able safely and vicariously to experience the sadomasochism of romance" (ibid). Larcomb, however, observes that because there is not any "transference of power or knowledge" (1993: 32) Ashton doesn't learn anything, either to assist in the investigation or about herself. The sex scenes merely suspend the main action, without adding anything to the main plot (ibid).

spies, sex, and romance

Traditionally, sex, and particularly romance, have been a point of weakness for fictional spies. Hepburn argues that "the spy represses desires that issue from the body, including sexual desires and the desire to commit to a single purpose" (2005: 14). The necessarily transitory life, hidden true identity and,

potentially, multiple identities, make intimacy difficult and inevitably lead to betrayal, exposure, and sometimes death.

In Le Carré's novels, a spy's relationship with a woman always results in his downfall⁵². In *A Perfect Spy*, Magnus Pym contemplates his (spy) father's death and betrayals alongside his own: "Love is whatever you can still betray, he thought. Betrayal can only happen if you love" (1986: 276). Similarly, in his epigraph to *The Human Factor*, Greene quotes Joseph Conrad: "I only know that he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered into his soul" (quoted in Cawelti and Rosenberg, 1986: 120).

The spy often uses sex to obtain information. Gunn notes that the gay male spy is frequently required to use his sexuality to infiltrate the enemy's defences (2005: 40-41). Seduction is similarly used by lesbian spies to gain access to information during an investigation. McNab's Cleever, for example, is frequently 'required' to form a sexual relationship with suspects. Unlike the male spy, however, the lesbian spy often falls for her target.

In *Death by Death*, Cleever's target is Roanna Aylmer, daughter of the family she has been placed on the Island to gather intelligence on. When she realises Roanna is a lesbian, she considers seducing her in order to get information, reminding herself to be professional:

There was no way I was falling for this woman, so whatever happened was part of my mission. I was here to seduce her, if necessary – I hoped it would be – and find out what I could (1999: 74).

However, when Roanna asks Denise to waitress at a function, Denise is already fantasising about a kiss (1999: 32-3). Their relationship develops into a romantic one rapidly and without complication, Cleever's feelings for Roanna as romantic object rather than potentially dangerous suspect move to the forefront of Denise's thoughts despite a rapidly-developing plot of murder, people smuggling, and the presence on the Island of one of the world's most wanted men, intending to assassinate the visiting United States' President.

⁵² See, for example, Cawelti and Rosenberg, 1987: 166, 217.

Denise and Roanna kiss on page one hundred and, despite Denise declaring she is playing it cool, they organise to meet in Roanna's bed the following night (1999: 101). Although she momentarily reminds herself of her professional self, there is no deeper exploration of the potential conflicts involved or the prospect of betrayal or double cross:

I had to hold fast to the fact that it was Denise Hunter making love to Roanna Aylmer, not me. Then she touched me and all thought melted away. I wanted her, and I wanted her never to stop (1999: 118).

At the conclusion of the novel, when all the criminal proceedings are over, Denise rings Roanna, using her real name, suggesting that they will pursue a relationship (1999: 177).

In Williams' *Club Twelve*, National NOIS agent Madison quickly falls for her target, Terry:

She should be proud of herself. She had pulled off a very difficult recruitment. But she wasn't proud at all. Instead everything inside her wanted to tell Terry to leave, walk out now before she was in too deep. Madison remembered Andrew's words, *Do not get personally involved*, and she reached in her briefcase. 'I have to ask you to sign this affidavit' (1990: 68).

Cawelti notes the similarity between the secret love affair and espionage (1987: 12). Le Carré has also drawn this comparison. In *The Mission Song*, Bruno, who is having an affair and translating a secret conference, both overtly and covertly, for the British Government, reflects: "The life of a secret agent is nothing if not a journey into the unknown, the life of a secret lover no less so" (2007: 54).

The lesbian love affair traditionally had to be kept secret. Similarly, for the spy, any romantic attachment also needs to be kept secret, particularly if with a colleague or target. The lesbian spy is doubly at risk of exposure. Homosexuality may be illegal in the country she is working in. It may also be perceived as a weakness by her own organisation, or individuals within it – as

well as a potential tool to be used – leaving her more vulnerable to betrayal or disavowal.

Gunn notes the exploration of sexual secrecy and role-playing through double agency in gay male spy/detective fiction. These themes have not, however, been explored to the same extent in lesbian detective novels featuring a spy or ex-spy.

representing the lesbian erotic

Plain notes the importance of representing the lesbian erotic: “When what is being depicted has for centuries been invisible or prohibited, the very fact of textual inscription is potentially radical” (2001: 206). While it remains just as important to explore lesbian lives and sexuality in fiction today, merely representing the lesbian erotic in print is not the radical act it was in the 1970s and 1980s. Gays and lesbians enjoy a much greater degree of acceptance and visibility in society. Other mediums, including lesbian literature and film, have made their way into popular culture, and continue to represent and explore lesbian sexuality, for example, in Sarah Waters’ books (and subsequent TV series) and television shows such as: *Buffy*, *Ellen*, *The L Word*, *The OC*, *ER*, and *The Secret Life of Us*.

In ‘Notes on the Mystery Story,’ Chandler argued that romance ruins a mystery:

Love interest nearly always weakens a mystery story because it creates a type of suspense that is antagonistic and not complementary to the detective’s struggle to solve the problem. The kind of love interest that works is the one that complicates the problem by adding to the detective’s troubles but which at the same time you instinctively feel will not survive the story. A really good detective never gets married. He would lose his detachment, and this detachment is part of his charm (1976:1008).

It appears that there is some truth in Chandler’s argument, and the romantic emphasis in lesbian detective fiction, particularly when it overwhelms and/or fails to advance plot or character, has weakened the sub-genre. The emphasis in lesbian detective fiction on sex and romance brings lesbian identity to the

foreground, often at the expense of plot and character development, and preventing it from reaching a wider, detective fiction reading audience. Nicola Griffith notes that much fiction marketed as lesbian detective fiction is:

focused on how the main character feels about being a lesbian. Often they are concerned with the main characters' coming out. This tends to overwhelm nearly every other aspect of the book. They become, in my opinion, unbalanced (quoted in Lo, 2004: 1).

Plain suggests that the strong romantic element in lesbian detective fiction is a replacement for the closed ending present in detective fiction (2001: 204), but not as common in feminist and lesbian detective fiction. This substitution of one formulaic aspect for another suggests that the emphasis on romance, particularly in more recent examples of the sub-genre, represents a depoliticisation of lesbian detective fiction. As the political content has dropped away, the romance element has become more prominent.

rape of the lesbian detective

In several lesbian detective novels, violence against the lesbian detective is taken to the extreme of sexual violence. In Wilson's *Sisters of the Road*, Beal's *Angel Dance*, and Hill's *Hunter's Way*, the detectives are raped. Rape of the detective is much rarer in the broader genre of detective fiction.

In *Angel Dance*, Geurrera stops for something to eat when on the road searching for Angel. When she returns to her car there is a man waiting for her with a gun:

Even as I broke down from the breathing I'd used to avoid pain from the tearing of tissue – he barely skipped rhythm. He said something once, and he came in a series of mounting gasps like a mute, twisting my body into the clay. He made only one mistake which was to use the gun in a way which I cannot forget, which necessitated rolling me onto my back; so I got a good look at his face, which was of a well-tanned white man in his forties, thick skinned and a little heavy in the jaw (1977: 120).

When he is finished he says “tell that to your friends” (1977: 121), suggesting the attack has been organised by those responsible for Angel's disappearance. Geurrera reflects: “I've been hurt worse and it wasn't even my first rape if

your operating definition for rape is forced sexual intercourse” (1977: 122), commenting that most women she knows have been raped in their teens (ibid).

In Wilson’s *Sisters of the Road*, Pam investigates the death of Rosalie and disappearance of Trish. There is a serial killer on the loose, targeting prostitutes. Pam is raped by pimp and suspect, Wayne, and although the police arrive, they are not able to stop him. Pam later contemplates the effects the rape has had on her:

Rape is something you recover from, but at first you don’t ever believe you will. It haunts you like a nightmare that has no waking end. Over and over I saw myself as the patrolmen must have seen me, pants down, bleeding and exposed. Degraded and exposed. One of them, I’m positive, was turned on. I saw it in his eyes. And strangely enough, it’s his expression I remember most. I can’t really remember the hatred on Wayne’s face and the ripping feeling inside. It’s buried too deep. But I remember the secret glint in the officer’s eyes. I can’t seem to forget it.

If it had been *Cagney and Lacey*, the show would have stopped right there. But somehow it didn’t. I had to go on living. And living was hard (1986: 195).

Whitlock argues that the traditional boundaries between detective and victim are blurred as Pam is “gradually subverted through the progression of the narrative” to the point where she is raped in the end and “comforted by a young prostitute she set out to protect” (1994: 102).

Rape violates the traditionally secure physical integrity of the detective figure, and upsets the conventional narrative of the genre. Klein argues that rape destroys the position of the lesbian detective as hero, calling her authority and control into question and placing her in the role of victim (1995: 180). Klein goes so far as to argue that “in the binary division of detective/criminal, the placement of the terms is paralleled with the gender binary of male/female, then the rape to be inferred is male rape” (1995; 180). This argument seems to suggest that the rape of the lesbian detective reverses the creation of a ‘third sex’ or ‘other’ outside this binary and despite all the work of the feminist and lesbian detectives, the detective will always be ‘male’: the female detective merely imitative of the male hard-boiled model.

Given the rape of the lesbian detective places the detective in the role of victim, this would seem to shift the binaries such that the lesbian detective is not male or ‘other’ but female, and vulnerable to attack. The lesbian’s refusal to be heterosexual is the reason for the attack, and, as a result, she is forced into heterosexuality.

Duncker notes that the *Sisters of the Road* rape scene has been criticised for exposing women’s vulnerability and disrupting the utopian text of the super lesbian detective, but concludes that the sub-genre is meant to be feminist fiction, disrupting the traditions of the genre (1992: 99). Klein notes that while rape of the protagonist is rare in detective fiction, it is common in women’s (lesbian or not) narratives generally (1995: 180), suggesting that by introducing the rape of the detective, writers of detective fiction are fully appropriating the form. Similarly, Plain argues that “flawed vulnerability is surely a more secure site for reader identification than superhuman strength” (2001: 217), concluding that the sub-genre has:

succeeded because it represents the highest or furthest point of the genre’s possibility. More than any other appropriation or development of the formula, it has followed narrative possibilities to their extreme (2001: 217).

While rape of the detective in the detective genre is rare, it is not without precedent. The ‘sexpot’ private eyes of the late 1950s and 1960s were written to appeal to the fantasies of the male reader (Reddy, 2003: 195). In Henry Kane’s *Private Eyeful*, Marla Trent (1959) establishes her own private detective firm. Marla, however, tends to distract or seduce suspects while her partner Willie does the real detecting (Klein, 1988: 135). This strategy backfires when her ex-husband, a police inspector, rapes her to teach her a lesson (ibid). While she initially struggles violently, she does not scream and later confesses: ‘In a weird, sick, crazy kind of way, I enjoyed it – I enjoyed every single disgusting second of it’ (quoted in Klein, 1988: 135). As Klein observes, the novel validates rape as a source of pleasure and appropriate punishment for Marla’s open sexuality (ibid).

In D. Lawrence's Dark Angel series, beginning in 1975 with *The Dream Girl Caper*, Angela Harpe is the only black protagonist in a group of detectives. The focus of the novels is on sex and action, and Dark Angel uses sex herself to get information. She is frequently subjected to rape, racial abuse and harassment:

'You want your teeth knocked out, jig?'
'No.'
His fingers fumbled at his fly. 'Then blow me.' He crammed his penis into her mouth.
Angie blew (1975: 69).

Klein argues that Dark Angel participates in her own objectification (1988: 176-7).

Particularly important are the forcible rapes which actually or almost occur; when she can, Dark Angel avoids the violence of rape by quoting the popular cliché about enjoying what cannot be avoided (Klein, 1988: 176).

As Klein points out, although Dark Angel is assertive, and avoids some rapes and harassment, the novels make it clear that women should be sexually available to men (1988: 177).

Rape also features in gay male detective fiction. In *Banged Up* (1999), by Jack Dickson, private eye, Jas, is struggling with issues around active and passive roles (top and bottom), culminating when he is raped in prison (Gunn, 2004: 77). In Mel Keegan's *Ice, Wind and Fire*, investigative journalists and long-term partners, Alex and Greg, discover an aircraft wreck with a skeleton on board while holidaying in Jamaica. Pursuing the story sees them fighting for their lives. Greg is raped while Alex is forced to watch:

He took the pounding as Logan worked himself into a frenzy, growling obscenities. Blinded by lust, getting close, he buggered Greg until it was me who could have screamed. Greg was silent (1999: 208).

In *Angel Dance* and *Sisters of the Road*, rape and its effects on the detective are portrayed realistically, represented from a woman's point of view, and backgrounded by feminist politics. Nevertheless, these rape scenes echo

negative representations of women and lesbians in detective fiction and pulp fiction.

The rape of the lesbian detective successfully extends and subverts the genre, challenging traditional notions of the invincible detective. It can, however, also reinforce the stereotype of the lesbian as victim, and negate the agency and subversive capacity of the lesbian detective.

Given that the rape of the detective occurs almost exclusively in lesbian and gay detective fiction, it may reflect gay and lesbian self-perception, or their vulnerable position in society. Textually, it represents an enforced and violent form of 'passing' insisted upon by the hetero-patriarchy.

Hill's more recent *Hunter's Way* features the rape of one of the lesbian detectives, Sam. Hill does not, however, explore the ramifications of the incident to the same extent as Beal and Wilson. Tori and her fellow officers kick down a door to find Sam, Tori's partner and soon to be lover, naked, tied up and being raped by five men. Tori shoots them all dead and rushes to Sam's side:

"Here, put this on," she said quietly.
Sam reached for the shirt and pulled it over her head.
"Somehow, this isn't how I envisioned you seeing me naked."
Tori watched as the large shirt dropped over Sam's head, covering her small breasts. "Oh? And just what was the occasion?"
Sam blushed. *God, had she just said that?* Her legs ached and she leaned on Tori as she pulled the sweats up (2005: 204).

This scene seems unlikely given Sam has just been gang raped, and there is little exploration of the physical and emotional consequences of the attack. Indeed, three days later, Sam and Tori have sex for the first time (Sam's first time with a woman) (2005: 271).

This superficial depiction of rape, and the inappropriate collapsing of rape and consensual sex – through the emphasis on flirtation and Sam's sexual interest in Tori – effectively illustrate the way in which sexual identity and romance

have overwhelmed political content and plot and character development in contemporary lesbian detective fiction. At the same time, it awkwardly references the sub-genre's more radical past.

Nature of the Crime

'It's a crazy life. I didn't say we were crazy.'
'Then what is it, why can't we escape?'
'I thought you knew, Angel. As Emma Goldman said, "it is organized violence on top which creates individual violence at the bottom"' (Beal. *Angel Dance*, 1977: 52).

Detective fiction, it has been argued, expresses society's anxieties, the crime representing a larger disorder, which, when resolved by the detective, makes the world safe for the reader⁵³.

Hard-boiled detective fiction's crimes, emerging from a new industrial capitalist system and the effects of prohibition⁵⁴, centred around gangsterism, corruption, and the societal effects of urbanisation. Porter argues that the hard-boiled detective worked to right wrongs in:

a fallen urban world in which the traditional institutions and guardians of the law, whether out of incompetence, cynicism or corruption, are no longer up to the task – from the lawmakers themselves and the middle-class citizens who vote them into power to those who execute the law, including the cop on the beat, the local sheriff in his office, and the judge in his courtroom (2003: 97).

The falcon in Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, for example, symbolises falseness and illusion (Nolan, 1983: 96), particularly in the corrupt San Francisco of 1929. As Porter observes:

nothing in Sam Spade's San Francisco is what it appears to be. People appear and disappear or turn up inconveniently dead. Deceit and double-cross in the obsessive pursuit of wealth, or even occasionally of sex, are a way of life (2003: 100).

Hard-boiled crimes are usually resolved by the capable hero, with the culprit beaten up, shot, sent to prison, or sentenced to death. Justice, however, as Chandler notes in *The Long Goodbye*, is not always as straightforward:

The law isn't justice. It's a very imperfect mechanism. If you press exactly the right buttons and are also lucky, justice may

⁵³ See, for example, Plain, 2001: 3, Munt, 1994: 124.

⁵⁴ Between 1920 and 1933, the sale, manufacture and transportation of alcohol were constitutionally banned throughout the United States.

show up in the answer. A mechanism is all the law was ever intended to be (Chandler, 1995: 463).

As Knight and others argue, however, the real threats in hard-boiled detective fiction come from women. In Chandler's novels, for example:

real villainy is simple and consistent: it was a woman who did it. As a rule, the detective will be finally threatened with death, humiliation, identity erasure by a woman whose physical attractions are only matched by the depths of her infidelity and depravity (Knight, 2004: 119-120).

Partly in overt reaction to this tradition of hard-boiled detective fiction, and partly reflecting feminist politics of the time, in early feminist detective fiction, the larger crime was the oppression of women and minorities by government, law, police, business and the whole capitalist system, as the female detective:

embarks on a search for the criminal that ends up uncovering a network of problematic social and institutional mechanisms of which the crime itself is only one manifestation (Tomc, 1995: 47).

As Reddy observes, early lesbian detective fiction continued this theme, with most of the crimes investigated:

committed by men against women as a way of enforcing women's obedience to patriarchal order, with the detective's investigation of the crime working as an exposure of the underpinnings of that order and her solution a triumph of the revolutionary potentiality of lesbian feminism (1988:131).

Similarly, Zimmerman argues that the lesbian detective:

invariably resolves a crime against gays or women, thereby furthering our perception that the patriarchal world is the true criminal world and the lesbian is the purveyor of justice (1990: 63).

Beal's *Angel Dance*, for example, explores "the way race, class, gender and sexuality interface" (Munt, 2002: 1) to uphold patriarchy and capitalism.

Corruption is shown to be so extensive that concepts of justice do not hold (Munt, 1994: 122). Geurrera's power to offer a solution is, however, limited.

Although exposing an international heroin trading ring implicating the CIA,

police and marines, she ultimately leads the killers to Angel. Angel escapes at the novel's end but knows she will eventually be found and killed.

In 'Cop it Sweet', Whitlock argues that in *Still Murder* Moorhead shows the limitations of the "individualist and bourgeois implications of the traditional detective narrative":

violence occurs not in isolated crimes which are solved by a process of rational deduction and formal investigation, but as part of a systemic, institutionalized and gendered oppression of women by men (in which the police are implicated) (1994: 151).

In her more contemporary study of lesbian detective fiction, Betz argues that the larger societal disorder is "realigned to represent the precarious nature of being lesbian or gay in the wider world" (2006:108). Critics have argued that detective fiction is popular with female readers because women, more than men, are at risk of being victims of violence. Blundell, for example, notes arguments that women are attracted to reading and writing crime due to the "undeniable fact that they are simply more used to living with" (2007: 5). For the lesbian reader/writer, this fear or expectation of violence could be argued to be even more significant.

gay and lesbian crimes

Gunn observes that gay male detectives "unmask a wide assortment of criminals, above all they fight the oppression of gays" (2005: 112). Similarly, early lesbian detective fiction featured crimes that directly impacted on the lesbian and gay community, involving, for example, blackmail, gay bashings, and outing. Betz notes that many of the crimes "reflect the bias of the majority culture towards homosexuals, the severity of such crimes ranging from blackmail to murder" (2006: 28).

In *A Reason to Kill*, for example, Zaremba explores homophobia through investigating the disappearance and probable murder of a young gay man, but also a community's fear of the "gay menace" (1986: 75).

As lesbian detective fiction developed, lesbian and gay specific crimes, or themes, became more prominent, including gay hate crimes, murder, and AIDS-related crimes. In McNab's *Cop Out*, for example, the victim's murder is revealed to have been a gay bashing, and, in *Off Key*, the victim is HIV positive and slept around without informing his partners. In Julia Lieber's *There Came Two Angels* (2004), Loy Lombard works to clear former Republican senator Jasper Slade of the murder of a gay hustler found murdered in his bed.

More recently, the sub-genre has moved away from the victim's sexuality as a factor in specific crimes, suggesting that lesbian detectives "need no longer be seen as a specialist" (Betz, 2006: 110). In Duffy's *Wavewalker*, for example, Saz Martin investigates a famous therapist and healer after the apparent suicide of one of his subjects. Special Agent Adison goes undercover to investigate local gang activities in Christie's *Assignment: Sunrise*.

As is the case in detective fiction more generally, however, murder remains the ultimate and most common crime under investigation in lesbian detective fiction⁵⁵. In Porter's *The Monkey's Mask*, for example, Jill is hired to find missing poetry student, Mickey, but ultimately investigates her murder. Similarly, Zaremba's Helen Keremos specialises in missing persons, but this often ends up involving murder. While McNab's Denise Cleever works undercover to counter threats to national security, the novels usually also begin or end in murder.

the enemy within

Crimes in lesbian detective novels that feature a spy or ex-spy as detective vary from those in the rest of the sub-genre. Seed notes that spy fiction "has tended to stay close to the patterns of the detective mystery in foregrounding the search for information which will confirm the suspected conspiracy" (2003: 129). The difference is "that there is no discrete crime involved but

⁵⁵ See, for example, Betz: 2006: 108.

rather a covert action ... which transgresses conventional, moral, or legal boundaries” (2003: 115).

This action is inevitably political because it:

involves national rivalries and constantly veers towards a paranoid vision of ‘violation by *outside* agencies’ and ‘violation of individual autonomy by *internal* agencies’ (Seed, 2003: 115).

Le Carré considers that this paranoia extends to readers, with the spy novel encapsulating a “public wariness about political behaviour and about the setup, the fix of society” (quoted in Seed, 2003: 127).

As Seed argues, the spy is also implicated in the crime he or she is investigating (2003: 115) because his or her methods are likely to be the same as those of the force they are countering. As British agent, Leamas, observes in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, when he discovers that one of his agents has withheld crucial information. “Lied by omission, as they all do, agents the world over. You teach them to cheat, to cover their tracks, and they cheat you as well” (2006: 16).

In *A Gap in the Records*, the connected women work to counter a complex, world-wide conspiracy of capitalism, politics, gender, and class in which they themselves are implicated. In order to fight the system, the women must engage in espionage and even murder in the name of their cause. As a result, they find themselves in:

a duplicitous position, the ambiguous, probably the inevitably conventional position of the opposition that, by its existence, continues to construct the status quo (McKemmish, 1985: 95).

McNab’s Cleever series does not contemplate these complexities. In *Murder Undercover*, ASIO has identified a list of activities by the Aylmer family – a force in Australian politics (1999: 7) – which pose a threat to national security, such as identity fraud, with apparent links to terrorism (1999: 42). The novel opens with an accidental shooting on the resort island, and a guest drowned in a diving ‘accident’ (1999: 19), which arouse Cleever’s suspicions. While

posing as a waitress at a party, Denise also overhears plans to bring illegal fishermen ashore (1999: 60).

The greater threat in the novel comes from 'Red Wolf,' an international terrorist Cleever learns is coming to the island (1999: 135). There is, however, no real exploration of the implications of terrorism or current world events. At the novel's conclusion, Red Wolf is not found (1999: 175), Aylmer is charged, and Roanna goes free and returns to run the Island.

In spy fiction, the real crime often comes from within. There is a tradition of betrayal of the agent, either by an individual operative or the agency itself. Cawelti and Rosenberg note that in the spy novels of Le Carré, the antagonist tends to be corruption and conspiracy within the protagonist's own agency (1987: 54):

decent and well-meaning individual British agents were betrayed, hampered, and compromised by incompetence, treachery, and bureaucratic rivalry at the top level of the espionage establishment. Moreover, they discover that their very involvement in the political and ethical ambiguities of Cold War espionage increasingly forces them into moral compromises that erode the very ideals of patriotism and peace that they originally joined the Secret Service to pursue. Finally, these Le Carré heroes realize that (they) have lost their ability to differentiate between means and ends and have increasingly become a mirror image of the enemy agents they have long opposed (Cawelti, 2004: 321).

As McKemish observes, in the spy business betrayal seems inevitable (1993: 31). When Mary Stevens discovers she has been betrayed, not just by Pierre, but by the company, she "closed her eyes and clung to her fork, stabbed his hand through to the bone" (*A Gap in the Records*, 1985: 81):

'I have been violated, raped by your hatred and contempt, and theirs ... Misogyny is too mild a word... You have committed worse than murder against my flesh. You have betrayed yourself and your own desires, and mine, my god, you have assaulted my history, my psyche, you have made yourself a weapon, you are vile vile vile' (*Gap in the Records*, 1985: 82).

In *Club Twelve* an international spy ring has infiltrated Madison's agency. It emerges that Madison's father and lover were killed by the group and that her mentor, superior and family friend, Andrew, was the person responsible:

Only a few months ago, Madison mused as the sedan lurched forward in traffic, she had wanted to leave the National Operations Intelligence Service, sure that she could contribute no more. Already the business of government intelligence had cost the lives of the two people she loved most in the world (1990: 6).

Although Madison does not discover the true level of the agency's betrayal until late in the novel, the psychological effect of these traumatic events, and the moral issues involved, are not explored in any great depth. In comparison, Le Carré's *The Constant Gardner*, subtly portrays the conflicting emotions British diplomat, Justin, experiences returning home from Nairobi after the rape and murder of his wife (already suspecting involvement by his own agency):

They drove once more in silence, Ham glowering at the belching lorry in front of him, Justin staring in perplexity at the foreign country he had represented half his life (2005: 199).

In *Deep Cover*, Kris, a CIA operative, is approached by a top secret shadow organisation that works directly for the President, which has infiltrated the Russian mole structure in the United States and found Blue's name listed as a sleeper. She is asked to double but refuses, agreeing only to contact them if she is activated and provide details of people who contacted her (2004: 249). Kris is, however, manipulated by the agency and nearly killed. She tells the agents:

'Our deal was that I would notify you when I was activated, and I'd be granted immunity. I did as I'd promised. Instead of honouring your part in our agreement, you left me to catch Michael and fend off the Russians alone' (2004: 242).

These issues do not seem to have had a significant emotional impact on Kris, and are not explored in any depth. Instead, she experiences a mild irritation: "Blue was irritated at having been used, but knew these agents were acting in what they felt were the best interests of the country" (2004: 243).

It is eventually revealed that Kris has been playing her own game and is a Russian mole. When learning of this, Earl does not, as he should, detain Kris, but agrees to her terms of granting a green card for her mother, and Shelby's safety, before she delivers the Russian agents and turns herself in:

'Yes. I don't doubt your loyalty.' He sat back, considering.
'Okay. You call me with the time and place, and I'll have a team there.'

Kris nodded and stood up, inwardly sighing with relief. She paused when Earl spoke again. 'For whatever it's worth – I'll go to bat for you.'

The operative watched in stunned disbelief as Earl rose and walked away. She'd known he didn't have the authority to grant her immunity, but he was willing to risk his reputation and his career on her, and that was more than she'd dared hope for (2004: 225).

Earl's response seems unlikely in the circumstances. Hitz's account of the intelligence world reveals the CIA's anxiety about being penetrated, and while it has not always been quick to discover double agents – for example Aldrich Ames – when it does, they are duly prosecuted. The passage above is also at odds with spy fiction's traditions of individual agents' betrayal at the hands of their agency. The complexities of inter-agency intrigues and personal, professional and patriotic loyalties and betrayals are set up in this novel but not explored to the same depth as in the broader spy genre.

doubled double-cross

The lesbian spy as detective, used to playing double agent, is more likely to betray her country or act out of her own interests, particularly if her country betrays her. To escape the status quo, the lesbian spy must leave the agency, at considerable personal cost. In *Club Twelve*, Madison survives, leaves the service and moves away with her lover, Terry. Leaving had not been an easy proposition for Madison at the start of the novel:

What did one do after performing as a deep cover operative for nearly eighteen years? She had played too many roles over those years. Acted out too many parts. Was she really prepared to become just Madison McGuire? (1990: 6).

Similarly, at the end of *Deep Cover*, Kris is officially retired but wouldn't be surprised if they reactivated her (2004: 250). She leaves to pursue a life with Shelby and set up her own business.

Gunn argues that some gay male detective series suggest "if governments insist on making gays live like double agents, governments should not be surprised when they produce double agents" (2004: 41). All agents are susceptible to betrayal, and, as McKemmish argues, it is an industry in which betrayal is likely, if not inevitable. In the majority of lesbian texts featuring spies or ex-spies that I have surveyed, the lesbian agents are victims of betrayal from their own agencies⁵⁶.

While this is consistent with the traditions of the spy genre, when simply adopted by the lesbian writer, it also reinforces negative stereotypes that lesbians are one of the most powerless groups in society. These fictional betrayals are perhaps also symbolic of the lesbian's position in society: potentially vulnerable to betrayal by the system that doesn't fully recognise or include her. The lesbian spy as detective is the ultimate outsider within: at risk of betrayal and exposure both internally and externally, professionally and personally.

Seed observes that the closed ending, or reassertion of the status quo at the end of spy novels is more pronounced in spy fiction than in detective fiction (2003: 130). Similarly, Hepburn argues that spy fiction is a more conservative genre, in which the "dominant culture asserts itself in the end" (2005: 6). This suggests that it is more difficult for the lesbian spy, or any spy, to change the dominant order. This may go some way toward explaining why, with the exception of McKemmish and Maney, lesbian writers have not successfully subverted and appropriated the spy format to the same extent as they have the hard-boiled private eye genre.

⁵⁶ For example: *Deep Cover*, *Club Twelve*, *Gap in the Records*

Setting

The city is everything and nothing; it has acquired its own geography, seasons; the air is heated by breathing and machines, bringing the climates of the continent and ocean to crash overhead, summer storms, months of rain, winters of bright sunshine and that edge of cold from a clear night sky (McKemmish, *Only Lawyers Dancing*, 1992: 4).

The setting in detective fiction is more than a physical place: it is also a social, political and historical context for the crime, and a terrain the detective must navigate in order to resolve it.

mean streets

Like the broader detective genre, the majority of lesbian detective fiction is set in large cities. This follows the tradition of hard-boiled detective fiction, which situated the detective in the ‘mean streets’ of a hostile urban environment⁵⁷. Cawelti sees the modern city as one of the most important aspects of hard-boiled detective fiction (1976: 140), represented as exciting, decadent and exotic but also as a morally bankrupt wasteland, rife with feminine sexuality and danger (1976: 153, 6).

Hammett’s San Francisco and Chandler’s Los Angeles – with their prohibition-fuelled organised crime and corruption – are more than mere backdrops. Rather, they are socio-political sites, and the source of evil against which the Continental Op, Sam Spade, and his Los Angeles counterpart, Philip Marlowe, battle. Chandler described the hard-boiled detective stories that appeared in *Black Mask*:

Their characters lived in a world gone wrong, a world in which, long before the atom bomb, civilisation had created the machinery for its own destruction... The streets were dark with something more than night (quoted in Hiney, 1997: 90).

Ward and Silver argue that Chandler described Los Angeles as no one else had, “with a style that was at once realistic, cynical, and romantic” (1987: 1). His Los Angeles is a “city no worse than others, a city rich and vigorous and

⁵⁷ See, for example, Plain, 2001:4.

full of pride, a city lost and beaten and full of emptiness” (Chandler, *A Long Goodbye*, in *Later Novels and Other Writings*, 1995: 645).

Chandler placed a great deal of emphasis on atmosphere and style⁵⁸, precisely capturing the detail of a location (Porter, 2003: 104). Knight notes that Chandler’s chapters often begin with an actual Los Angeles address (2004: 120):

Newton street, between Third and Fourth, was a block of cheap clothing stores, pawnshops, arcades of slot machines, mean hotels in front of which furtive-eyed men slid words delicately along their cigarettes, without moving their lips (‘Spanish Blood’ in *Stories and Early Novels*, 1995: 212).

Marlowe is often driving (Knight, 2004: 120). He does much of his thinking in the car, and the outskirts of Los Angeles, with its desert and the ocean, are as much a part of the city setting as its streets, speakeasies, and hotels:

After a while there was a faint smell of ocean. Not very much, but as if they had kept this much to remind people this had once been a clean open beach where the waves came in and creamed and the wind blew and you could smell something besides hot fat and cold sweat (*Farewell My Lovely*, 1949: 39).

Hammett’s Continental Op spends more time walking the streets, demonstrating the skills that Hammett himself learned working for Pinkertons⁵⁹, tailing suspects and following up leads. In ‘The Big Knockover’, The Op receives a tip-off that there is a major bank robbery planned:

Outside, I turned down toward Kearny Street, strolling along, thinking that Larrouy’s joint had been full of crooks this one night, and that there seemed to be more than a sprinkling of prominent visitors in our midst. A shadow in a doorway interrupted my brainwork.

The shadow said, Ps-s-s! (2005; 330-331).

Despite the tip-off the Op does not prevent the robbery of two of San Francisco’s biggest banks, which nets millions for the thieves and leaves

⁵⁸ See, for example, Chandler, ‘Twelve Notes on the Mystery Story’; Hiney, Tom, *Raymond Chandler A Biography*; Porter, *The Private Eye*.

⁵⁹ The Pinkerton National Detective Agency was a private detective and security agency established by Allan Pinkerton in 1850.

sixteen police and twelve civilians dead. The hit was highly organised, involving 150 gangsters from around the country:

The getaway was north on Montgomery to Columbus. Along Columbus the parade melted, a few cars at a time, into side streets. The police ran into an ambush between Washington and Jackson, and by the time they had shot their way through it the bandit cars had scattered all over the city. A lot of 'em have been picked up since then – empty (Hammett, 2005; 330-331).

While Chandler used actual addresses and Los Angeles landmarks, Hammett usually obscured his locations, for example, renaming the Bellevue 'the Belvedere' and the St. Francis 'the St Mark' (Nolan, 1983: 94). Sam Spade's address is never revealed; however, Joe Gores, in his novel *Hammett*, used internal evidence in the novel to show Spade's apartment was one of Hammett's own, and also located his office in the same way (Nolan, 1983: 94).

Just as Hammett disguised his locations, in his fiction San Francisco's fog is alternatively obscuring and revealing the city's truths. For example, in the moments before Spade discovers that his partner has been murdered:

Where Bush Street roofed Stockton before slipping downhill to Chinatown, Spade paid his fare and left the taxicab. San Francisco's night fog, thin, clammy and penetrant, blurred the street. A few yards from where Spade had dismissed the taxicab a small group of men stood looking up an alley (*The Maltese Falcon*, 2002: 11).

lesbian mean streets

Gay male detective fiction writers first appropriated these urban settings. Rand's *The Gay Detective* is set in 'Bay City', a thinly disguised San Francisco (Stryker and Meeker, 2003: vi), at a time when the city was becoming renowned for its gay population. In their introduction to the 2003 reprint of *The Gay Detective*, Stryker and Meeker consider the book a "fascinating guide to a place known since the mid-19th century as a 'Sodom by the Sea'" (2003: vi) and a history as well as a mystery (ibid). Similarly, Hansen's Dave Brandstetter series, beginning with *Fadeout* (1970) is set in Los Angeles, exploring the corruption of the "American Dream" (Plain, 2001: 97).

Palmer argues that lesbian detective fiction appropriated the hard-boiled model partly because the “urban location and psychological focus” (1997: 90) were easily adapted to lesbian interests (ibid). Munt suggests that the “masculinised hero alienated from the urban jungle is turned into a lesbian” (2002: pt 4, p. 1) and that lesbian detective fiction explores gender and sexuality in the city, including the oppression of women, in what she labels an “urban dystopia” (ibid).

The urban location of gay and lesbian detective fiction is unsurprising, given lesbian and gay populations are concentrated within the inner city⁶⁰. Cities have also been where a higher percentage of real-life crime occurs⁶¹ and where large law enforcement agencies are based.

The majority of lesbian detective novels are set in the major cities of the United States and United Kingdom. Of those set in Australia, like Australian crime fiction more generally, most are set in Sydney or Melbourne. McNab’s Carol Ashton series, for example, features Sydney’s well known landmarks, such as the Opera House and Harbour Bridge. Ashton comes from old Sydney money and was married to a prominent Sydney solicitor.

McNab has said that at time of first publishing she was self-consciously exploiting Australianness and conscious of writing for a United States and Australian audience (quoted in Bird, 1993: 64). As Larcomb notes, however, there is no “genuine engagement with local politics and cultural formations. The ‘Australianness’ is a pure backdrop” (1993: 33). Well-known landmarks

⁶⁰ 2000 U.S Census data, for example, places 83.3% of gay, lesbian and bi-sexual population in urban areas (compared to 75.5% of general population). Gary J. Gates Same-sex Couples and the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Population: New Estimates from the American Community Survey. The Williams Institute on Sexual Orientation Law and Public Policy, UCLA School of Law October, 2006 indicates high percentages of gay, lesbian and bi-sexual populations in inner city postcodes.

⁶¹ A 2000 Australian Institute of Criminology report, for example, while observing that rural crime is increasing, illustrates that major urban centres still have a higher rate of crime. Despite this more recent shift, it is likely that a perception remains that most crime occurs in cities.

are listed off, as if in a tourist guide, rather than incorporated into the plot or character voice. For example:

Carol smiled as she caught the first glimpses of the warm ochre of the sandstone cliffs that rose out of the wide valley floors of the Blue Mountains National Park. She turned to Sybil with sudden delighted zest. ‘Darling, let’s go to Echo Point early tomorrow morning, then all the way down the Giant’s Staircase and around the base of the cliffs to the Scenic Railway’ (*Cop Out*, 1991: 81).

Even when some social context is provided, it is diminished by the rushed listing of too many locations at once, as if taken from a guidebook. For example:

Verity Stuart lived in Woolloomooloo, historically a working-class inner city suburb servicing harbourside docks. Now, slowly gentrifying, it sat uneasily between the grassy open expanses of the Domain and the condescending regard of fashionable Potts Point. Nearby, as if to add spice to the mix, was the racy Kings Cross district (*Fall Guy*, 2004: 94).

McKemmish’s *Only Lawyers Dancing* shows a more complex picture of Sydney in the 1980s, where “There is no real world, no society of hearts and minds, only the surface exists” (1992: 3). The city is shown to be shallow, corrupt, incestuous, at times anonymous, and falling apart:

This is one of those high Sydney nights, clear and bright and promising and delivering heat like bathwater on tap. The spray from the ocean seems to go right into the city. Everywhere you can smell the salt, the sea air, the atmosphere of being here. And we are here, in the nightclub of the moment, sweating against the crowd, shouting over the music, turning away, to the next conversation, part of the room (1992: 95).

In Porter’s *The Monkey’s Mask*, although Jill now lives in the Blue Mountains, most of her work is in the western suburbs. In the chapter titled ‘Blue Mountains Recluse’, Jill is missing the city:

I came for the quiet
I don’t mind the cold

But thick mists
thick neighbours

and involuntary celibacy

are as inducive to hard drinking
as diesel, high rent
and corrupt cops

I don't like bush walks
or Devonshire Teas

I can't remember what adrenaline tastes like

I need Sydney
I need a new job (1995: 5).

Porter's *El Dorado* is set in Melbourne, where a child-killer is on the loose. The streets and suburbs are familiar but the characters imagine themselves in a more exotic world (Gorton, 2007: 2):

The air inside
Melbourne Zoo's Reptile House
is warmishly thick

Cath's head
begins to ache
but not unpleasantly
more a kind of surreal
sluggish excitement

as if she's suspended under heavy miles
of dream water
in an Atlantis garden
of unfurling snake-necked
red and white lilies
flowering from a subterranean
volcano (2007: 77).

Porter's detective, Bill, suspects the murderer is from Sydney because of "a certain brazen front" (2007: 187) and his description in a poem of "your filthy Yarra" (2007: 161). Bill still considers Sydney home and thinks of Melbourne as "the daggy little sister trying too hard to keep up" (2007: 187).

Melbourne is also the setting for Shaw's Lenny Aaron novels and Cameron's Kit O'Malley series. O'Malley negotiates the traffic and politics of Melbourne's inner city and suburbs with the ease you would expect from a long-term resident and ex-Victorian policewoman. In *Thicker than Water*, the

city's underworld is shown through O'Malley's investigation of the death of a member of a local mob family.

Blood Guilt features Melbourne's infamous weather, in this case a summer heat wave refusing to break:

The distinctive smell of rain in the air was permeated with the sweat, tension and extreme irritability of an entire population which had had just about enough, thank you very much, but couldn't do a dammed thing to escape (2001: 1).

Dempsey considers that there is too much of Cameron's Melbourne, finding it to be "rushed, crowded and confusing. Kit rarely slows down as she hurtles down freeways, side streets and tawdry nightclubs. This busyness chokes the novel, both in terms of setting and action" (2003: 55).

To date, no published lesbian detective novels have been set in Brisbane. This echoes broader Australian contemporary crime fiction, which also features few novels set in Brisbane.

The predominance of Sydney and Melbourne in Australian lesbian detective fiction reflects general population as well as gay population concentrations⁶². However, as the third largest city it would be reasonable to expect more examples of the sub-genre set in Brisbane. Given the rapid population growth in South-East Queensland, this may begin to change in the near future.

rural lesbian detectives

There are exceptions to the urban model for lesbian detective fiction. Zaremba's Helen Keremos travels around rural Canada in a four wheel drive looking for missing persons, and is much more comfortable in remote areas. "I was eager for the sagebrush desert of Similkameen and Okanagan valleys" (*Beyond Hope*, 1989: 9).

⁶² 2006 Census data indicated 9, 724 self identified same-sex couples in NSW, 6, 354 in Victoria and 4, 142 in QLD, with the highest percentage increase (57%) in QLD. These statistics are considered to be underreported, and increases are considered to reflect a greater preparedness to record data rather than actual population increases (<http://www.coalitionforequality.org.au/2006census.pdf>).

In *Darkness More Visible*, Moorhead's sequel to *Still Murder*, Margot, victim to Sydney's politics and corruption, has left the NCA and the city, to set up as a private eye and professional triathlete on the central coast of NSW:

The Shire of Paradise Coast is between the mountain range and the sea. River valleys and wetlands, lakes and bays, plateaus and escarpments, pockets of old-growth eucalypt and rainforest, koala habitat corridors, dairy farms, banana plantations, fisheries, timber industry rapidly giving way to the encroachment of tar and cement, bigger roads and beautifying palm trees (2000: 27).

Margot's early morning training routine sees many chapters begin with a description of the physical environment and the weather:

The wind was really up today, a snarling southerly. Lightning out to sea. Sand stinging the cheeks. Salt in the eyes. Sea pounding, spray thickening the air with a grainy mist. It made me exhilarated. Lean, hungry, willing to work (2000: 156).

I. Christie's *Assignment Sunrise* is set in and around a small artistic community in the Northern California. Special Agent Adison, undercover in the town for two years, finds herself putting down roots for the first time in her life, buying a cabin in the woods, making strong friendships and falling in love. Despite recent sea-change and tree-change trends, however, the majority of lesbian detective fiction remains set in an urban environment.

the lesbian cosy

Gunn argues that many examples of gay detective fiction take the form of the traditional cosy⁶³, with the gay community providing the closed setting (2005: 12-13). This is also true of many lesbian detective novels, set almost entirely within the gay and lesbian community and featuring predominantly gay and lesbian characters and gay and/or lesbian related crimes. As Betz notes, many lesbian detective novels are situated within a specifically gay environment (2006: 19).

⁶³ Classical form of detective novel, also called the clue-puzzle, in which the crime takes place within an enclosed environment, for example, a small village or large house. The detective is present, or enters the scene to solve the crime, and order is restored. Writers of this genre include Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers.

Consistent with the predominantly urban setting, and adding to the sense of a 'closed' setting, many lesbian detective novels include scenes set in or around sites associated with urban lesbian subculture, such as nightclubs or bars. These settings are typically inner city, where gay and lesbian populations are concentrated. An urban geographic location featuring a high proportion of lesbian and gay population is, particularly in the US, commonly referred to as a gay 'village' or 'ghetto'⁶⁴.

Forrest's Kate Delafield series, for example, features many scenes in the Nightwood Bar, a lesbian pub owned by Kate's friend Maggie, who plays an important mentoring role. The bar is also the scene of the crime in *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* (1987).

Similarly, Cameron's series features scenes at a Melbourne lesbian bar, the Red Room, also the site of the crime in *Thicker than Water*. When arriving on the scene, the senior (male) police officer makes a number of politically incorrect jokes and comments to Kit's former partner, Marek, which aggravate private eye Kit, and draw attention to the contrast between life in the club and life outside:

'You can fill me in, if you wouldn't mind,' Parker said.
'The bar ...' Marek began.
'A lesbian establishment, I believe,' Parker verified.
'Yeah, not that that's relevant right now. The bar is owned by Angie Nichols, who is sitting on the left with those women over there ...'
Parker squinted. 'Are they all women?' (2003: 14).

Many lesbian detective novels feature widely recognised lesbian references (Betz: 164-5), for example: "heterospy" (Cameron, 2003: 60) and "babydyke" (Duffy, 1997: 45). In Forrest's *Beverly Malibu*, neighbour of the murder victim, Paula, has framed prints from lesbian films on her walls:

Kate' glance sped in surprised recognition: Shirley McLaine and Audrey Hepburn in *The Children's Hour*. Candice Bergen as Lakey in *The Group*. Susan Sarandon and Catherine Deneuve in *The Hunger*. Garbo, in sculptured black and white androgyny, in *Queen Christine*. Mariel Hemingway and Patrice

⁶⁴ Derived from New York City's Greenwich Village, where the Stonewall riots took place.

Donnelly soaring over a track hurdle in *Personal Best*. A bar scene with two female stars of *Lianna*. And on the dining room wall, Helen Shaver looking bemusedly into the distance as Patricia Charbonneau leaned back confidently against a Chevy convertible in *Desert Hearts* (1989: 18-19).

References of this nature act as markers of lesbian culture for the (lesbian) reader, creating a comforting, familiar setting. They also serve to provide clues for the lesbian reader, who has the inside information, that the character concerned is a lesbian, which may, or may not, impact on solving the crime. For the non-lesbian reader, however, such references and ‘in-jokes’ may be missed or have an alienating effect.

To an extent, this closed setting may once have been an accurate representation of lesbian culture. As Slide observed in the early 1990s, “most lesbians continue to live and interact amid small enclaves of lesbians and gay men” (1993: 55).

Lesbians and gays today live more openly within society, are represented more frequently and positively in the press, and many assumedly interact more widely with broader sections of the community⁶⁵. Despite this, many contemporary lesbian detective novels still tend to be set largely within the gay community.

This may reflect the perspective and experience of the authors themselves.

Cameron has explained that she wanted Kit O’Malley:

to have gay friends, straight friends, believable friends. I wanted her to exist in a real world – and not just through the ‘strong sense of place’ (in this case Melbourne) that is of the utmost important in crime fiction; but also in an identifiable world – hence all the pop culture references to music, TV, movies ... I wanted Kit to use the lingo that I would use; or other dykes like me might use⁶⁶.

Cameron appears to see the references to popular culture as grounding the setting or making it more realistic. A non-lesbian reader or lesbian reader with

⁶⁵ 2006 Census data, HREOC report.

⁶⁶ Email to Inga Simpson, 14 November 2007.

a different range of experience may not, however, necessarily recognise or feel comfortable in this landscape and lingo, such as “heterospy” may prove alienating.

In contrast, in *A Gap in the Records* and *Only Lawyers Dancing* McKemmish placed her lesbian protagonists as part of the mainstream, with little or no references to lesbian or gay subculture. McKemmish has explained that she aimed to “locate the lesbian as part of the mainstream, as just there, like heterosexuality is just there” (1993: 34) and “went for subtlety and acceptance, not the whole gay scene” (ibid).

A Gap in the Records contains so few references to lesbian relationships, culture and identity, however, that the novel is not easily recognisable as a lesbian text, suggesting McKemmish may have taken this strategy too far to attract a lesbian audience, or to provide a significant contribution to the sub-genre as an authentic or political representation of lesbianism.

spy setting

Spy novels tend to feature a more international setting. As Cawelti notes:

Whether the action all takes place in one country or the agent is sent on a secret mission from one country to another, the background is a conflict of international political interests (1987: 55).

In *Deep Cover*, although the majority of the novel takes place in and around CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, opening scenes in Madagascar and Saudi Arabia, and the presence of Russian agents, create a sense of the CIA’s global reach.

Similarly, *Club Twelve* includes scenes throughout the cities of Europe as Madison pursues a group of multi-national terrorists:

Odd, Madison thought. Operatives rarely risked approaching one another on the streets of any city, especially Zurich which was filled with intelligence types from the KGB to the Mossad. There were a hundred more secure ways to communicate without risking another agency monitoring their activities (1990: 135).

McKemmish's *A Gap in the Records* features a range of international and local settings, the action taking place in countries including Australia, France and Paraguay. There is a mix of urban and rural locations, from Paris to Pine Gap, and remote Guerrilla Bay on the far South coast of New South Wales, where there are:

the tourists, the holiday makers, the innocent bystanders as well as the swarms and surges of Canberra public servants, academics, diplomats and cynics, who pretend for the summer that they are not each and all merely props, or agents of influence (1985: 54).

The obscure location is typical of the operations of McKemmish's female spy ring, meeting in unexpected and ordinary locations. The two women walking the beaches and headlands "are old fashioned of face and demeanour" (198: 53) and their "presentation is ordinary" (ibid). "It is as if they are not watching who goes where, who talks openly or covertly, who fishes in which boats and who, of the women, turns their heads to note" (ibid).

McNab's Denise Cleever series features famous Australian locations, apparently for the benefit of an overseas market. *Murder Undercover* is set on a family owned resort island on the Great Barrier Reef, featuring Great White Sharks and a cyclone. In the final scene, Cleever rings from Cradle Mountain in Tasmania. The Australian vernacular is also overdone for a local audience. For example, when kissing Roanna for the first time, Denise exclaims "Crikey, you can kiss" (1999: 100).

The real terrain in the classic spy novel is, however, an interior and political one. Intrinsic to the setting of many post-World War II spy novels is the agency to which the operative is or was attached and the wider intelligence community⁶⁷. Le Carré's agents, for example, are employed by "The Circus" or British Secret Service. The intrigues, bureaucracy, politics, secrecy and betrayals within the agency are central to the setting and plot. Cawelti and Rosenberg note that as well as a "major espionage bureaucracy with

⁶⁷ Following the creation of the CIA and the strengthening of British intelligence services (Hitz, 2004: 39-40).

worldwide branches and the power to play an important role in shaping history” (1987:180), the Circus is:

a perverted family with siblings constantly squabbling with each other for their father’s attention. Many of the major departments are given code names taken from family life: there are “mothers” or comptrollers. “babysitters” or bodyguards, “housekeepers” or specialists in cover-ups, and the Saratt “nursery” or clandestine training program (1987: 180-181).

In *Deep Cover*, the CIA is a family of sorts for Kris. Her superior, Earl, protects her, tolerates her shortcomings and supports her relationship with Shelby. Kris’ self-reliance, and status as double-agent, makes her less vulnerable to betrayal from within. In *Club Twelve*, Madison trusts her mentor and manager, Andrew, who knew her father and has protected her sexuality. As a result, her betrayal is more complete. Andrew uses his power to manipulate her, getting her back out into the field, where he plans to have her killed and frame her:

‘Can’t you see that we need your hurt and your anger now?’ Andrew demanded. ‘What’s happened to your passion and your outrage? Find it, Madison, and pull yourself back together and carry out your orders. No questions. No mistakes. No bullshit. If you refuse I cannot support your decision or protect you. Do I make myself clear?’ (1990: 189).

Madison is manipulated into doing Andrew’s work for him. The lesbian spy remains an outsider within, relying on the protection of a (usually male) superior to survive in a hostile environment.

The spy’s landscape may be international, but the intelligence community to which she or he belongs is confined. Homberger argues that Le Carré’s *The Looking Glass War* is an examination of a “closed community” (1986: 58) and the consequences of belonging to it (1986: 58). As Hitz notes:

The clandestine world of spies and spy runners is a universe apart. It has its own rules, its own code of behaviour, its own heroes. It is hard for an outsider to penetrate this inner sanctum (2004: 181-2).

The closed community of the intelligence world can be compared to that of the lesbian population. The outside world is not able to see, or accept, either the spy or the lesbian’s ‘true’ identity. Within the intelligence and gay

communities, hidden from plain view, members are skilled at recognising each other, with specific language, codes, sub-cultural references and jokes appreciated only by other 'members'. The lesbian and the spy move from outsider to insider within their own safe community; a space in which their culture can be practiced, supported and made normal.

Parallels between the lesbian community and the spy community as 'cosy' settings offer considerable potential for exploration. There are tensions as a result of belonging to both communities. Moving in and out of these worlds results in a constant double-play and potential risks of isolation and 'exile'. The lesbian detective novels featuring an intelligence setting that I have identified, however, have not taken full advantage of these possibilities.

Conclusion

It is the genre not of the amazonian vanguard, coming out fearlessly into the unknown, but, rather, of those who have stayed where they are, of those who always knew that compromise was their lot (Anna Wilson, 1996: 271).

Despite its background in radical lesbian feminist politics, and taking the genre to extremes with the rape of the detective, lesbian detective fiction is no longer a site of experimentation. As its political edge dropped away, the romantic story line moved to the forefront. It is this aspect of lesbian detective fiction that has become most prominent, setting it apart from the broader genre of detective fiction.

At the same time, despite the potential of lesbian detective fiction to appeal to general crime fiction readers, and the intention of many authors of lesbian detective fiction to reach a wider readership⁶⁸ this has not yet occurred to any significant extent⁶⁹. While the sub-genre is still the most popular form of lesbian fiction, it remains marginal, or ghettoised. As Betz argues, many writers of lesbian detective fiction “have failed to find mainstream popular readers because of this foregrounding of lesbian being and sensibility” (2006: 5). While detective fiction featuring a female protagonist has continued to expand and diversify, and gained increasing popularity, particularly with women readers, lesbian detective fiction has not experienced a comparative growth or development since the 1990s.

While noting the capacity of lesbian detective fiction to engage with the mainstream and generate change, figuratively – through the lesbian detective acting as a fantasy of agency in the wider world – and literally – through lesbian detective texts reaching a wider audience and working to counter negative stereotypes – Anna Wilson argues that the lesbian detective novel has not fully embraced its potential (1996: 270) because it has “not quite come to terms with its own past” (ibid), neither removing nor incorporating the radical

⁶⁸ For example, Morehead, Duffy, Zaremba, Cameron.

⁶⁹ With the exception of Porter, McDermid, and, to a lesser extent, Griffith and Duffy.

revolutionary element (ibid). Larcomb suggests that this “plea for ‘inclusion’” (1993: 33) results in social and political issues being named but not explored.

As a result, lesbian detective fiction is:

entertaining but awkward, politically motivated – but not quite radical enough – and stands outside the mainstream while yet being compromised by it (Plain, 2001: 201).

Early lesbian detective fiction subverted the traditions of gender and genre. As critics and authors of lesbian detective fiction have noted, however, the successes of this subversion relied on readers’ and writers’ knowledge of the genre’s traditions⁷⁰. Zaremba has said of her own writing that she aimed for “a judicious blend of the familiar and the unexpected” (1993: 45), arguing that the conventions of the genre can only be broken by writers who know and understand its history (ibid).

As the sub-genre of lesbian detective fiction developed it became less overtly feminist/political and developed its own conventions, becoming the main vehicle for lesbian storytelling. As a result, more recent writers (and readers) of lesbian detective fiction are not necessarily referencing detective fiction, or feminist detective fiction, but the tropes of the sub-genre itself.

Lesbian detective fiction appears to have been compromised by a partial acceptance by society and the concomitant and often contradictory desires of its writers to be accepted while remaining separate. While finding acceptance and comfort with a lesbian readership, the lesbian detective, and her author, remain the outsiders within: venturing ‘out’ into the wider world but always returning to the safety of the sub-genre’s conventions and their own community.

⁷⁰ For example, Walton and Jones, 1999: 92.

Writing Process

The author has had time to consider her prose, her scenario.

She is self-conscious.

It is not complete.

There is no end.

The characters might speak but in the end there is no end and only she speaks.

To have read this far you have been made

like a work of fiction

a detective

an historian.

There are gaps in every record.

They can be filled

(McKemmish, A Gap in the Records, 111).

Introduction

A story about a girl with two mothers that was screened on the ABC's Play School has sparked a political storm (Marriner, 'Play School's lesbian tale sparks outrage,' June 4, 2004)

My early thinking around writing a lesbian detective novel, particularly given my inexperience as a writer, was from the perspective of a reader. As a keen reader of detective fiction as well as lesbian detective fiction, I wanted to write the sort of detective novel I would like to read: an engaging plot, with an appealing lesbian protagonist, situated in, or at least engaging with, a wider world than the gay community, and exploring a range of contemporary issues.

I was frustrated that, despite the popularity of the lesbian detective genre, it was rare to see a lesbian detective novel on the shelves of a mainstream bookstore, or reviewed in the mainstream press. In addition, many of the lesbian detective novels I had read did not, in my readerly estimation, 'measure up' to the best detective fiction, with weaker characterisation or plotting.

As a lesbian, I was also frustrated that the majority of lesbian detective fiction I had read did not reflect my own experiences as a professional in her thirties: negotiating career choices, buying property, socialising with a wide range of people, reading, thinking and talking about contemporary political issues, and feeling very much a part of 'mainstream' society.

At the time of planning the novel, I was also conscious of a contemporary political climate in which, while on the surface lesbians live visibly and safely in mainstream society, there had been a series of what I saw as regressive moves indicating a lack of real acceptance of gays and lesbians by the mainstream community, for example, public outcry and Government comment following the portrayal of a family consisting of two mothers on Play

School,⁷¹ and the then Federal Government's proposed legislation against lesbian and gay marriage or adoption⁷².

Through my research, I initially hoped to establish whether the apparent lack of lesbian protagonists in contemporary detective fiction, despite the popularity of the genre with women readers, and the popularity of lesbian detective fiction with a lesbian readership, was due to writing choices by lesbians, or broader publishing and political issues.

Similarly, I observed that there was a limited amount of lesbian detective fiction currently being published in Australia, despite an apparently significant local readership (demonstrated through availability and sales of imported works and local authors), indicating a potential market.

I also hoped, through research, to establish some of the reasons for the popularity of lesbian detective fiction with lesbian writers and readers.

I was aware that Porter's *The Monkey's Mask* was the only Australian example of the sub-genre that had gained popularity with a 'mainstream' audience as well as a lesbian audience. McDermid's Lindsay Gordon series was the only other example of the sub-genre that I was aware of that had reached a wider audience and she had established herself as a best selling crime writer before publishing the lesbian series. I hoped to establish some of the reasons why these examples of the sub-genre achieved mainstream success and attempt to adopt some of those characteristics in my own lesbian detective novel.

As part of my initial research, I also read Louise Welsh's *The Cutting Room* (2002), a work of detective fiction featuring a gay male protagonist. The book became a world-wide best seller, award winner, and received literary acclaim.

⁷¹ See, for example, 'Play School's lesbian tale sparks outrage,' by Cosima Marriner, June 4, 2004, accessed at <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/06/03/1086203566949.html>

⁷² See, for example, Bills Digest No. 5 2004–05, Marriage Amendment Bill 2004, accessed at <http://www.apf.gov.au/LIBRARY/pubs/bd/2004-05/05bd005.html>

Through my research, I hoped to establish whether Welsh, a lesbian writer, would have achieved the same success with a lesbian protagonist.

My initial research concentrated on the early and Australian examples of the sub-genre, with the aim of mapping the development of Australian lesbian detective fiction, its tropes and traditions, and ways in which it was consistent with, or departed from, the sub-genre as a whole. I established that there was a relatively small body of existing work, and, currently, little being published locally.

Within this small body of work, I also identified what I perceived to be a gap between works such as McKemmish's *A Gap in the Records*, which were complex, overtly feminist, alternative in form and content, but now out of print, and McNab's less complex, more formulaic Carol Ashton and Denise Cleever series, which remain among the most popular titles of the sub-genre today.

After the first year, I was able to compress these questions into my final research question. In order to direct my own writing choices, I concentrated my research on five key areas of the detective novel: politics, method of investigation, sex and romance, nature of the crime and setting.

Politics

I'm a public servant and sometimes I have unpleasant duties

(Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*, 2005: 471).

My research established that few lesbian detective novels have been embraced by a wider readership, or gained mainstream critical attention. In response to this research, and with the aim of reaching a wider audience while still satisfying a lesbian readership, when first drafting *Fatal Development*, I chose to place my detective, Kersten, in a broader socio-cultural setting. She is very much a part of mainstream society – successful, working as a professional, interacting with a cross-section of society, maintaining friendships with a broad range of people – while also maintaining strong connections to the gay community.

In *Fatal Development*, I focused on contemporary issues such as the impact of rapid development and the conduct of large development companies, and issues common to women generally; for example, the conflict between career and relationships, while also touching on lesbian-specific issues, such as discrimination in the workplace and difficulties being ‘out’ in high profile careers. I tried to avoid lesbian/gay specific terminology or in-jokes, which my research had found to be a feature of many published lesbian detective novels that might alienate a wider audience.

Achieving this balance when writing my own lesbian detective fiction novel, however, proved to be less straightforward than I initially imagined. When close to completing the first draft, I found that I had populated the novel with predominantly lesbian characters, with one of the main male characters, Dirk, partly ‘coming out’ in the course of the story – creating a ‘gay ghetto’ similar to those that I had set out to avoid. When editing the first draft, I rewrote Dirk’s slight infidelity as a heterosexual encounter.

During the writing of the first draft, I was conscious that I was writing as a lesbian, therefore representing other lesbians, particularly if I was also writing for a non-lesbian or detective fiction-reading audience. I struggled with how much of my own experience to incorporate into the novel, and how much of myself to reveal.

My reading of contemporary lesbian detective fiction, when compared with my own personal experiences, suggests it is not necessarily representative of the lives of lesbians today, who enjoy considerably more open and diverse lifestyles than they may have in the 1970s or 1980s, when the sub-genre emerged.

My own lifestyle – through my career, studies, pastimes, friends and family – was much more mainstream. During the first draft, however, I was conscious that this approach might alienate or disappoint readers of lesbian detective fiction. In trying to appeal to both a lesbian and wider audience; I might fail to engage either. This ‘double-consciousness’ created indecision and hesitancy during the initial writing process.

In working on the second draft of my novel, I focused less on the possible audience than on strengthening my plot and characterisation as well as the central themes.

In drafting *Fatal Development*, I was consciously trying to position myself between McKemmish and McNab, working to create a plot-driven novel but also including some complexity and political issues, without being didactic or negatively impacting on the overall pace of the novel.

During the writing of the first draft, however, I realised I had little political content. It was only towards the end of the initial drafting process that I developed the backstory of Kersten’s past as an operative for the Agency – Australia’s overseas intelligence agency – which offered potential as a vehicle for the exploration of more complex themes.

When writing the second draft, I further developed this backstory to parallel the main plot. As Kersten is increasingly forced to draw upon her skills, her past experience as a 'spook' is gradually revealed, including her affair with a source while on a posting in Asia, betraying her partner at home and breaking Agency rules, which results in her own betrayal at the hands of the Agency and the source's death.

The backstory was partly inspired by, and allowed me to further explore, a theme I had identified through my research: the outsider within. Kersten manages to 'infiltrate' the Agency, one of the most conservative areas of government – although she doesn't see it this way at the time – despite her sexuality, participating in the system and gaining access to knowledge and power.

In developing Kersten's background and the background for *Fatal Development*, I was interested in building on McKemmish's notion regarding the conflict faced by *A Gap in the Records'* feminist spies. In buying into the spying game, and succeeding in infiltrating conservative institutions, they are also compromised; participating in the very system they are working against, and committing the same crimes in the name of their cause.

Through the backstory of *Fatal Development*, I reveal that Kersten's integrity was compromised, and she was ultimately betrayed by the Agency. She used her sexuality to recruit potential sources and get information, with the Agency's approval. When she makes an error of judgement, however, by getting personally involved with a source, she is an easy target – just as her lover is a justifiable casualty – to be made scapegoat in a higher-level plan in which she was only a pawn. In taking a financial package in return for remaining quiet, Kersten is doubly compromised. While the money gives her the means to start again, and live a comfortable life, she is silenced; paid off with 'blood money'.

In the second draft, I added a new character, Dave, her former Agency manager and mentor. This provided a means for Kersten to access

surveillance equipment, but also allowed me to show that Kersten had been successful as an agent and had gained the respect of her (mainly heterosexual male) colleagues.

While Kersten's experience is taken to extremes, the backstory allowed me to draw on my own experiences working for government, including intelligence agencies, exploring some of the issues faced working in that environment as a woman and lesbian, as well as more general ethical issues surrounding being a public servant.

In the second draft, I aimed to echo these themes through Toni's experiences at work, through the subtle discrimination she faces and the compromises she must make to succeed. I also tried to show Dirk as being required to make similar compromises in private enterprise, working long hours for his law firm salary, and being called upon to do things that are morally dubious and not strictly about upholding the law or 'justice'.

In drawing on my own experience, however, I initially faced dilemmas as to how much potentially sensitive material to include, weighing up the need for authenticity and credibility against my obligations for reticence, and an awareness that I was also drawing on and representing the experiences of others, some of whom remained employed in the intelligence world.

With Kersten's character already formed, and an investigation in progress, I needed to explain her behaviour, skills and motivation through the backstory. As a result of having to solve these 'problems,' I was somewhat freed or separated from the inclination to adhere to, or represent, reality. The story that emerged references and conflates a number of actual details and experiences, but, in the completed draft, is very much Kersten's own.

When I finished the second draft, Kersten was both spy and detective. My research had identified the affinity of the lesbian with the spy/detective role and the theme of the outsider working within the system and choosing when to reveal her true (lesbian) identity. This also seemed to link into Butler's ideas

in relation to gender performance. With this in mind, when editing the second draft, I tried to develop Kersten's role-playing, taking on different identities, and the level of performance and duplicity involved.

As a spy, deception and performance were Kersten's professional defences – against revealing her true identity to the 'enemy', potential sources and people outside the agency, including her own partner. Years later, she is still using these techniques, playing the roles of lover, friend, investigator, researcher, without necessarily revealing her 'true' identity. When editing the second draft, I also aimed to echo this theme in Toni's work persona, particularly the way she dresses up for work and conducts herself in the workplace.

Establishing Kersten's background as a spy influenced the direction of my research, leading me to focus on other examples of lesbian detective/spy novels and how these relate to the development and traditions of the spy genre.

As a result of this research, and feedback on the second draft, when working on the third draft of *Fatal Development*, I built up the backstory further, adding more detail and more direct scenes, to accentuate the nature of Kersten's work and the sense of double-play. I also worked to parallel the revelation of the backstory with the development and structure of the main plot, to illustrate the impact past events are still having on Kersten's life.

While *A Gap in the Records* explores the ethical issues of being a spy, particularly the degree of personal compromise involved, I felt that the characters are kept distant from the reader, reducing the emotional impact of the novel. In contrast, McNab's Cleever series, while emphasising the personal and romantic aspects, seems to offer little analysis of the conflicts involved, particularly if becoming romantically involved with a source (which Cleever usually does).

With *Fatal Development*, I wanted to explore some of the issues raised by McKemmish, but in a more personal, less overtly political way, and from a contemporary point of view. Exploring some of these conflicts further, for

example, the long-term effects of Kersten's constant multiplicity. These experiences have a direct effect on Kersten's investigation methods, although they were developed relatively late in the writing process.

Method of investigation

*There was truth in what she said. To keep secrets, you needed to tell lies, keep things to yourself, and the 'truth' became elusive. A habit that was hard to let go of. But reality? My reality was that things were mostly not as people saw them (Simpson, *Fatal Development*).*

When I began drafting *Fatal Development*, I struggled to come up with an original background and current career for Kersten to give her the skills, experience and motivation to solve the crime. I wanted her to be an amateur detective, with a relatively ordinary job, so made her a historical researcher, which gave her certain desk-based investigative skills, and useful contacts, but was not sufficient for the type of action-based investigation that emerged from the first draft. I did not, however, want to make her a former law enforcement officer, lawyer or journalist, which were common in the lesbian detective novels I had read.

It wasn't until I had written a scene where Kersten is tailed and has to take evasive action that I began to form the idea of her past as a spy. My early research had established that there were relatively few spies, or former spies, in lesbian detective fiction. Several of the examples I had read, for example, Zaremba's Helen Keremos series featuring a former naval counter-intelligence officer, were among the more interesting and appealing to me as a reader. This background also created different opportunities for the method of investigation – and hence the further development of the story – for example, using surveillance technology.

Following feedback on the second draft, I revealed Kersten's background as a spy earlier in the novel, to explain her actions but also to create greater interest and tension in the early chapters.

I wanted to contrast Kersten's current desk-based research with her previous active field work, drawing on the distinction made by Zaremba in *A Reason to Kill* between the active and passive roles of Keremos and Alex (1989: 114). I aimed to show Kersten's frustration with her more passive role, and welcoming of the opportunity to revert to her previous, more active, role and training to 'solve' the crime. This frustration contributes to her obsession with pursuing Bovine and the investigation of Stuart's death.

I aimed to show how deep in their consciousness a spy's training and mindset can be, through Kersten's reactions under pressure or threat, which are to revert to her old training and living habits.

By contrasting her current and past professions, I was also attempting to explore the ramifications of working for change from the inside. As a spy, Kersten was forced, to an extent, to work within the system but she also had access to resources, knowledge and power. As I try to demonstrate in the backstory, however, she did not have full knowledge or control, and consequently lost her career and her moral/ethical perspective.

As a freelance researcher, Kersten is now her own boss and in control of her destiny, choosing what jobs to take on and on what terms. As an investigator, she is working outside the system, and at times the law, to achieve justice. However, she no longer has the same access to information and equipment. She relies on contacts from her former life (Dave) and local law enforcement (Ally) to fill these gaps.

In many examples of lesbian detective fiction, the detective's connections in the gay community provide her with key information to solve the crime. Consistent with situating Kersten within the mainstream, I did not want her to rely solely on the gay community. While her policewoman friend, Ally, is a lesbian, as is her former colleague, Brigit, who indirectly supplies her with leads, Kersten's main investigative support comes from Dirk, Bruce and Dave.

When interviewing those involved, like many amateur detectives, Kersten hides the true extent of her real interest and knowledge. In later drafts, I developed what I realised was Kersten's main investigative tool: the other characters' ignorance of her past and skills. In her current life, only Dirk and, to an extent, Toni, are aware of her past (although Bruce guesses) and they do not know much detail. I aimed to show Bovine, in particular, as underestimating her skills and abilities, which allows her to escape harm and provide evidence to the police.

My research also directed my interest toward the outsider within and double-agent, which impacted on my thinking around Kersten's behaviour in later drafts, particularly the emotional cost of intelligence work for gays and lesbians. As a result of her sexuality and experiences as a spy, Kersten is accustomed to role-playing and playing a double role. In *Fatal Development*, I aimed to show that Kersten's double-consciousness is habitual. From the outset, she not only hides her past but also the extent of her investigation from those around her.

In the second draft I added Kersten's use of surveillance techniques learned while with the agency, which also allow her to realise she is herself under surveillance. She obtains equipment, superior to that used by her opponents, for counter-surveillance.

My research indicated that fictional lesbian detectives, particularly spies, were more likely to use violence and to be victims of violence themselves than heterosexual female detectives. I do not see this as a positive feature of the sub-genre. As a result, I wanted Kersten to be physically capable, and to have had to use violence in the past, but not to use violence unnecessarily. I did not want her to be a victim of violence but to be able to escape from difficult situations. In *Fatal Development*, Kersten is brought into danger – for example, when she is kidnapped – but is not physically injured. Neither does she use violence in self-defence (with the exception of unsuccessfully kicking her kidnapper in the shin).

When working on the third draft of *Fatal Development*, in refining Kersten's character arc – in particular her response to increasing pressure – I attempted to make it clear that Kersten was capable of violence by making adjustments to scenes in which she is angry. For example, when Toni discovers Kersten has not been honest with her, and attempts to leave, I rewrote the scene so that Kersten physically tries to stop her, grabbing her arm and refusing to let go until Toni tells Kersten she is hurting her. Similarly, when Kersten confronts Bridget and finds she is not the killer, but has withheld vital information, she loses her temper, hitting the arm of the chair. When Kersten confronts the real 'murderer', I added Kersten visualising smashing Stacey's head against the brick wall behind her. I felt that this potential for anger and violence, which she is able to control in most circumstances, was consistent with Kersten's character and training, as well as the repressed anger and frustration resulting from her departure from the Agency, and the more recent breakdown of her relationship with Toni.

In the later stages of my research, I read a number of classic spy novels, for example, by Le Carré and Greene, in order to better understand the development and traditions of the spy genre and ways in which lesbian examples departed from these traditions. This reading led me to think more deeply about the ethics of the intelligence world. In Le Carré's *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, for example, British agent, Leamas, comments that "Intelligence work has one moral law – it is justified by results" (2006: 20).

I was interested in trying to apply ethical questions to my own experiences of the intelligence community, within a contemporary political environment. In *Fatal Development*, I attempt to show that Kersten has learned hard lessons about idealism and political realities; her career and Mirin's life were casualties of the Agency's higher plan. At the time, Kersten was enraged by this methodology. Through her conversation with Toni when away for the weekend, I aimed to show that in retrospect Kersten was aware of compromising her own ethics and integrity.

When working on the third draft, I tried to further draw out Kersten's ethics, and the reasons for them, as they stand now, particularly to try and explain why Kersten does not hand Stacey over to the police. Like law enforcement officers who leave their agency with a degree of disgruntlement or disillusionment, I saw Kersten as carrying considerable bitterness and baggage. I tried to demonstrate that her knowledge of intelligence methods and betrayal at the hands of her own agency, as well as her experiences with Bovine, have left her mistrustful of the system and traditional notions of justice. Despite, and in part because of, her own failings, Kersten has retained faith in her own judgement, and the concept that justice will prevail, though not necessarily through traditional means.

Sex and Romance

Lied by omission, as they all do, agents the world over. You teach them to cheat, to cover their tracks, and they cheat you as well (Le Carré, 2006: 16).

My research indicates that many contemporary lesbian detective novels feature coming out or finding love during the course of the investigation formula. I wanted my lesbian protagonist to be out, in a relationship, and comfortable with her sexuality from the outset.

My survey of lesbian detective fiction established that the majority of fictional lesbian detectives are not in relationships at the beginning of novels (or the first novel in a series). As a reader, I felt frustrated that much contemporary lesbian detective fiction did not seem to explore relationships in any depth, or to reflect contemporary issues. The romantic relationships represented in McNab's Denise Cleever series, for example, develop quickly and without complication. There is rarely any problem or baggage from the past or any practical issues to negotiate, for example, past relationships, living arrangements, or work pressures. Nor is Cleever's sexuality an issue for her employer, ASIO, which does not seem realistic to me, based on my own experiences.

In *Fatal Development*, I chose to place Kersten in a long-term relationship at the outset of the novel, partly to explore issues relevant to a contemporary and wider female audience, but also to explore whether it was possible to create sufficient tension and romantic interest without the traditional pursuit of a potential lover, often someone involved in the investigation as a suspect or victim. Kersten's relationship comes under pressure as a result of her investigation, but also for reasons common to many relationships: poor communication, lack of openness, emotional baggage, and pressures around the commitment of living together.

In the early drafting of *Fatal Development*, this was problematic. As the relationship breaks down half-way through the novel, Kersten is effectively single as her investigation escalates, which replicates the more common loner position.

I intended the relationship storyline to be secondary to the investigation within the plot, and, at the outset, to also appear less important for Kersten. To do so while having her remain sympathetic and convincing as a character was difficult until I developed the backstory about Kersten's past, which includes a traumatic end to a relationship. I intended this to explain her behaviour, and to show how she is forced to deal with these past events in the course of her investigation.

My research indicated that betrayal was a strong theme in spy fiction, and that seduction was often used as a means of gathering information. However, in the examples of lesbian detective fiction featuring spies, I felt that the impact of this had been only lightly addressed. This research informed my backstory, with Kersten using seduction to recruit Mirin. I worked this as a point of weakness, which led to her betrayal and downfall at the hands of her own agency rather than the happily-ever-after endings of the lesbian spy novels included in my research.

Toni's character was also underdeveloped in the first draft, and her motivation for reacting to Kersten's actions unclear. In the second draft, I tried to make Toni more present (at least in Kersten's thoughts) through the second half of the novel. I also focussed on developing Toni's character further, and contrasting her rural upbringing with Kersten's more urban style and experience. By showing Kersten to be less confident in a natural setting – a weekend visit to Maleny – I was aiming to balance their strengths, and shift the balance of power in the scenes where Kersten is out of her comfort zone.

I attempted to accentuate this with the sex scene in this section of the novel, which shows Toni trying to overpower Kersten. I had initially been reluctant to include sex scenes, given their prevalence within the sub-genre, but reader

feedback suggested this seemed an unusual omission in contemporary crime fiction and within Kersten and Toni's story. In response to my research, which provided many examples of sex scenes that added nothing to plot or character, I was determined that any I did include should reveal something about Kersten and Toni.

The spy backstory allowed me to explore the effects of Kersten's past work experience on her relationship and notions of performance. To be successful at her job, Kersten relied on duplicity or deception. She was not able to tell her partner what she really did for a living, she could not reveal her relationship status to the source she ends up becoming involved with, she hid the affair from her partner until she was forced to reveal it, she could not tell the agency she was involved with the source, and she could not tell the source all of the information about the defection process.

In a sense, her job and her relationships were all performances, roles played to survive the situation, bringing into question what is 'true' and her actual identity. Deception is her defence against being found out, and, potentially, against failing or being rejected by a system that is male dominated and inherently homophobic. Ultimately, however, this does not protect her from being made scapegoat and hence rejected by the agency she has been loyal to, showing the government, or system, to be the enemy. She is also left feeling responsible for Mirin's death.

I intended to show that Kersten continues this habit, or performance, in her relationship with Toni years later, not revealing the details about her job, or the events that led to her leaving. This is partly because of her obligations to secrecy but largely to protect herself and avoid rejection, fearing that Toni would leave her if she knew the truth. Kersten has revealed more to her friend Dirk about her past, partly because he has some knowledge of the intelligence world but mainly because she is used to hiding who she is from her partner. When Kersten is under pressure from Toni to drop her investigation, and to commit to the relationship, she reverts to deception. As a result, she loses the relationship. Only then does she face the events of the past, and reach a

position where she is ready to be honest, and some hope of having a successful relationship.

In the writing of the third draft, I worked to parallel more closely Kersten's current relationship with Toni with Kersten's past relationship with Mirin. I attempt to show Kersten as having 'no exit' or tools to deal with her relationship issues with Toni, just as she had little control over Mirin's fate. Kersten's reactions to Toni can also in part be explained by her unresolved feelings about Mirin. For example, I showed Kersten panicking and behaving irrationally when she believes she has brought Toni into danger. In the second draft I had included a scene in which Kersten considers entering Toni's house to try and establish why she has not heard from her and can't contact her, but walks away. In the next draft, I altered this scene so that Kersten uses her key to let herself into Toni's house, kidding herself that she is only doing it to make sure Toni is safe, when in reality she is also worried Toni has met someone else, mirroring her own unfaithfulness with Mirin while in a relationship with Los.

When writing the third draft I also added scenes featuring Kersten and Mirin and Kersten and Los, to make those relationships more real for the reader and to try and heighten the sense of double-play. With the scene with Mirin and Kersten in the bath, in particular, I was attempting to show a more tender side to Kersten that had not been as evident to the reader (or to Toni) to this point.

Nature of the Crime

Hadn't anyone heard of conflict of interest? Embracing development was one thing but, in its rush, this state was placing too much power in the wrong hands (Simpson, *Fatal Development*: 207).

Fatal Development begins with a death, which Kersten suspects is a murder and connected to issues with the building's developer. In my first draft, the plot had developed in such a way as to reveal a lesbian as the murderer, which I had wanted to avoid, so as not to perpetuate existing negative stereotypes. The first step in the next draft was to rework the plot so that the 'killer' was not gay or lesbian.

What I considered the real crime, however, was the level of corruption by developers, in which local and state government are also implicated. In part, this builds on the themes in feminist detective fiction and early lesbian detective fiction, regarding the nature of the systems of business, law and government. I aimed to contemporise this theme by focusing on the topical issue of development; the real estate boom, particularly the growth in inner-city apartments, and the ethical issues that can arise.

I did not intend to represent this as a crime or conspiracy in which women or lesbians in particular were disadvantaged, but all individuals and the environment, with the intention of appealing to a wider audience. I have echoed this theme with some of the discussions around Toni's work, which suggest that government is powerless to stop big business and, despite an elaborate bureaucracy, environmental concerns are not a priority.

Exploring this theme allowed me to draw on my own experiences with developers and builders. This was, however, also problematic. When I began writing the first draft, I was still involved with my own small-scale battles with a developer. Initially, I was keen to represent this experience but by the time I completed the first draft, I struggled to make myself write about it. I

was at times overly concerned with representing actual events accurately, which left it somewhat flat to read. To resolve this, I had to free myself from my own experience and respond more directly to problems within the plot.

In the second draft, I rewrote the developer's actions to be more extreme, including criminal, and linked them to a wider level of corruption. I also tried to further develop individual characters within the development and building companies, to personalise the events.

My research had identified that one characteristic of early lesbian detective fiction novels, for example, Wilson's *Murder in the Collective*, was not to neatly wrap up all details of the crime, and particularly not to turn over the murderer to the police. These open endings tended to raise more complex issues about the nature of justice, which appealed to me as a reader, and seemed to concord with the ambiguous moral issues surrounding Kersten's past as a spy, and her ill treatment at the hands of her employer (and government).

As a result, in *Fatal Development*, while the individuals from within the development company responsible for some of the criminal actions within the novel are arrested, I left the outcome open, suggesting that the company itself was likely to survive. Similarly, when Kersten discovers that Stacey is responsible for Stuart's death, she does not hand her over to the police, or tell Stacey's partner Dirk about her betrayal, but leaves Stacey to tell him herself, satisfied that Stacey's having to live with herself is punishment or justice enough. This moral judgement was one of the more definite parts of my first draft, which I retained, but in response to feedback as to *why* she did this, endeavoured to explain through the backstory.

My research around the outsider within informed the refinement of the backstory, with Kersten's profession and sexuality leaving her more vulnerable than she realised, despite her capabilities. While initially this was an unconscious metaphor for the subtle or perhaps, more accurately, subversive nature of homophobia I still experience as a professional, following

my research, this was far more conscious. To make it more convincing, and entertaining, I attempted to illustrate the effects of this on Kersten rather than providing any didactic comment on the state of the world.

When writing the third draft, I worked to parallel more closely the slipping away of the backstory out of Kersten's control with the anti-climax of the outcome of the crimes. Bovine's comeuppance has little to do with Kersten, is not in her control and takes place while she is hiding in a hotel room.

Similarly, Stuart's death is revealed to be an accident, and Kersten failed to pick that Stacey was the 'culprit'. I attempted to mirror Kersten's powerlessness in the outcome of her investigation to Mirin's death, with her departure from her post and loss of her job, to show that Kersten is forced to face the events of her past and possibly to move on.

Setting

Traffic still roared over the bridge and the CBD was all sparkle, looking on. Brisbane was my city now, but I was not yet hers. I lived here, was comfortable walking her streets, but was not of her, and we both knew it (Simpson, *Fatal Development*: 221).

Most lesbian detective fiction, like detective fiction more generally, features an urban setting. The majority of Australian lesbian detective fiction is set in Sydney or Melbourne. In response to this, I set *Fatal Development* in inner city Brisbane, which also allowed me to incorporate my own experience in moving to Brisbane from interstate, as well as living there during the writing of the novel. My perspective, initially at least, was as an outsider within.

Lesbian detective fiction also tends to include scenes representing lesbian subculture, for example scenes set in lesbian bars or clubs. This can represent a limited, and in my view, unrealistic range of lesbian experience. As discussed above, I wanted to represent Kersten in a broader setting, actively participating outside the lesbian community. As a result, in *Fatal Development*, I placed the scenes outside the apartment building in professional/office situations, or ordinary places such as the supermarket. I attempt to show Kersten's confidence in these settings, asking questions, getting information, and conducting herself as a professional. Whereas many fictional lesbian detectives rely on their contacts within the gay and lesbian community to solve the crime, in *Fatal Development*, Kersten also relies on her past skills and training, and a broader range of connections.

Feedback on the first draft suggested that the novel was almost a cosy, with its closed Woolstore setting. In response, I created more scenes outside the apartment building, including scenes outside Brisbane. I placed two scenes in a rural environment, for contrast to the urban setting and to illustrate the very urbane Kersten's discomfort outside the city, despite her skills, training and experiences living overseas. I also included short scenes set in Asia, as part of

Kersten's backstory, to further broaden the setting, and create a contrast between her past and present lives.

Through Kersten's close friendship with Dirk, as a heterosexual male peer, I attempt to show that Kersten is capable of forming strong positive relationships and that these are not confined to the lesbian and gay community. Through Kersten's relationship with the middle-aged building managers, Bruce and Diane, as well as her former manager from the Agency, Dave, I aimed to show Kersten's capacity to form friendships outside her age group, her wide range of interests, and a more balanced circle of friends and experiences than I had found represented in many other lesbian detective novels. I also aimed to represent these characters' acceptance of Kersten's sexuality as a part of who she is, because she is able to relate to them through commonality and with confidence, reflecting the majority of my own experience in the workplace and the wider community.

In the third draft, following feedback on the first ten thousand words, I worked to include more detail about the woolstore building in which most of the novel is set, with the aim of capturing some of the history of the woolstores, and creating a more industrial and threatening atmosphere, particularly in the opening chapters.

My increasing familiarity with the setting made it more difficult to capture some of the most distinctive features. I struggled, for example, to effectively describe the sawtooth roof line and a scene in which Kersten explores the roof. Reader feedback on the third draft greatly assisted with this process.

By the time I was working on the final edit, I had moved out of the apartment, and out of Brisbane. This distance allowed me to consider the setting more objectively and finesse small details with less interest in representing actual places than with the landscape as setting in the context of the novel.

Postscript

Thank you so much for sending your manuscript, 'Fatal Development', which I really did enjoy reading. Unfortunately, it doesn't fit with our plans for our list at this stage, but it is a very polished piece of work with a strong sense of place and some smashing characters (First rejection letter: May, 2007).

Like many writers of lesbian detective fiction before me, I set out to write a detective novel in which the protagonist *happened* to be a lesbian, hoping to reach a wider audience. I found, however, that this was not as straightforward as I had originally thought.

The lesbian protagonist needed a community, relationships, a past. The sub-genre I was writing in had its own history, traditions, tropes, which came into play. As the writer, my own sexuality, identity, politics and background determined the viewpoint from which I wrote.

My research made me more aware of the traditions, tropes and flaws of the sub-genre and its parent genres, and informed my writing choices, particularly in the later drafts. Despite this, the writing process, and the novel's plot, characters, and structure, created their own directions and problems. The process of following those directions and solving those problems was less self-conscious, and – gauging from reader responses – produced some of the more interesting aspects of the novel.

From the outset, I was conscious of writing as a double-agent or for two audiences – a detective readership and a lesbian readership – and the possibility of reaching no audience at all. I initially considered this risk to be one worth taking: an experiment worth conducting.

In this double consciousness, I saw an affinity between the spy and the writer. As Le Carré notes, the world view of the spy and the writer are similar (Homburger, 1986: 29):

The spy is an artist, a practitioner of deep artifice, stratagem and contrivance. His triumph is ultimately a successful performance. So, too, the artist is a spy, a secret sharer, committed to the discovery and betrayal of our deepest secrets (ibid).

Similarly, Christopher Koch notes the necessity for a writer to live much of his or her life in secret (Sheridan, 2007: 1), and the novelist's tendency for spying:

To become a novelist you eavesdrop on life and you watch life in the manner of a spy. [The difference is] spies are much more expert than novelists (quoted in Steger, 2000: 31).

Given the double-consciousness of lesbian writers, and the affinity of the lesbian with the spy, this is perhaps even more true of the lesbian writer.

My assignment – one I could not confidently verbalise or document – was to shift the sub-genre slightly, to see a lesbian protagonist feature among the titles in the crime fiction stand, rather than be relegated to the gay and lesbian section in the back corner of the shop. The other, and potentially conflicting, assignment was to find a voice, to be published.

Like the double-agents in the genre, I faced many outside factors beyond my control; publishers, readers, booksellers. The risk was not of overt betrayal but of non-visibility, and of being read in ways other than I intended.

In addition, I was writing and researching for another purpose, for my doctorate; knowing that both novel and exegesis would be assessed by a board of examiners. I had to meet various academic and administrative requirements along the way, which at times delayed, hindered and even stopped the writing process for months at a time. I realised that my first experience writing a novel was not a 'normal' process.

When my novel was ready to send out for publication, I became more anxious about the lesbian content. Despite my aim of reaching a wider audience with a lesbian protagonist, I also had a strong desire to be published and establish myself as a writer.

I became more conscious that it was difficult enough to get published as a first time writer and that the lesbian content might make it harder. After I submitted a synopsis and sample of *Fatal Development* to the first publisher, I dreamt that they asked me to write Kersten straight. In my dream, I said no. In my waking life, I wondered for several days whether I would. In the end, I concluded that Kersten would not work as a straight character; that the story would not hold together in the same way.

In my third year, I had had some success with a female short crime story award and publication of that story (non-lesbian) and was now able to imagine a writing life beyond my PhD, and beyond, or in addition to, lesbian detective fiction. As my first novel, I became more aware that, if published, the lesbian content would likely mark me as a lesbian writer.

Fatal Development was not accepted by the first three mainstream Australian publishers I approached. It was not possible to establish if the lesbian content of *Fatal Development* was a factor in these decisions but inevitable that I would wonder if it was. I began to worry that it may not get published at all, or that it may ‘only’ get published by a lesbian specialist publisher, likely in the United States.

In August 2007, two lesbian publishers in the United States requested my manuscript within a few days of each other. The novel is also currently with an Australian agent.

With *Fatal Development* now out there in the world, it is difficult to know what this means for this project or my writing. Even if the novel is published, I will not know for sure what factor the lesbian content, or my research, played.

I am now confident that I have done as well as I could have with *Fatal Development* at the time of writing, and am pleased with the use of the setting – one which I no longer have access to – and the development of the backstory. I have reached a point, however, where I am anxious to move on. I

have started another novel, which, although it covers some of the same issues, is not detective fiction.

Having completed my research, I have obtained a deeper understanding of the development of lesbian detective fiction, as well as hard-boiled and spy fiction. Like many other writers at the end of a long project I feel in a position to write a better novel now, to achieve what I set out to: write a novel more likely to be picked up by a mainstream publisher.

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